

Interviewee: Mary Hackley  
Interviewer: Alicia Sell  
Transcriber: Andrew Sterling

AS: My name is Alicia Sell. Today is February 14, 2007 and I am interviewing Miss Mary Divers Hackley and we are at the Gainsboro Library. How are you today Miss Hackley?

MH: I'm fine, thank you.

AS: Thank you for being here.

MH: Thank you.

AS: We're going to start with some background questions about you. Can you tell me when and where you were born?

MH: I was born in Bedford, Virginia, January, 1937.

AS: When did you move to Gainsboro? When did your family move here?

MH: My family moved to Roanoke when I was almost 7. We lived on Downing Street in the house that's now across the street from the School Administration Building. The first house was over the hill from that one and then we moved in to that house, same place, same area.

AS: What did your parents do for a living?

MH: My mother was a mom. She was home. So, her job was raising 7 children. My father worked for the Norfolk and Western Railroad. He was a chef/cook for the railroad for a long, long time. Then when I graduated from high school and went to college, my father was employed by Roanoke City Schools and later on, he was employed by OIC, Opportunity Industrialization Center. Then he went back to the Norfolk and Western and he retired from there.

AS: You said you had 7 brothers and sisters, where do you fall into that?

MH: I'm the oldest.

AS: You're the oldest.

MH: There were really 8 of us but I had a young sister who passed when she was a little over a year old. We were still in Bedford at that time. So, I am the oldest of the group.

AS: Wow. And what were your mother and father's names?

MH: My mother was Mary Rucker and my dad's John W. Divers.

AS: And Rucker is your mother's maiden name?

MH: Yes.

AS: OK. Can you describe your house for us? For instance, was it brick? Did you have a garden?

MH: The first house was 2 story. We had a garden at the first one and it was part brick, part wood. And then the next house in the same area as I told you is still standing, it was brick, completely brick. We had a small garden. That yard was not as large as the others but I can't remember – We had a lot of trees. There were cedar trees along the front and in the back, you had fruit trees, Apple, Apricot – there was never a Pear tree I don't think. There were Apricot and Apple trees. I can remember that.

AS: Would you sell the fruit for profit at all or was it just for your family?

MH: It was just for the family. There were enough of us that (laughing heartily). Everything we had, it was for our survival. We didn't sell them.

AS: Did you have any animals that you had?

MH: No. My mother at one time had a dog she loved. My grandmother and a friend of hers, they – I remember now, they used to raise hogs back over where Lincoln Terrace School and the old cemetery in that area. That used to be a place where people could store – They were what you would call hog pens at that time and people just put their hogs there. They didn't live in that area but they would go over and feed and all that good stuff. And then, when it was hog killing time, it was interesting. I don't care to remember it. (laughing heartily) But my grandmother was involved in that and a friend of hers.

AS: And did they live here in Roanoke?

MH: Mm mm. All in the same area. We were all in the same area. At a time there, we were all in the same house, my grandmother, my mom, my dad, my momma's children and an aunt. It was a huge house. We were family people.

AS: And you said what kind of work your family did. So did your grandmother help take care of all of the children?

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MH: No. My mother did that. My grandmother, believe it or not, she worked. She was a domestic and she worked. My grandmother would catch the bus in the mornings and go downtown and change and go to wherever she was working. At that time, I can remember that my grandmother was working for a family of the Hurt family, Dr. Hurt and their family which was across the bridge which is now the Memorial Bridge, up on that hill. She'd catch the bus and go to work and then she'd come back. She'd catch that bus from there and downtown and then back home. We'd always be waiting for her to get off the bus because no matter how tired she was, she'd always have something good for us in her shopping bags. My grandmother's family descended from the Blackfoot Indian Tribe so you could see that in her. She was very short, long hair. She was a plump little lady but I still have a picture of her getting off the bus with her shopping bags.

AS: And was that your mother's - ?

MH: That was my dad's mom. I never knew my mother's mom. She passed before I got to know her. We say pictures of her. She was a stately lady. She was short too in stature. So was my mom's dad. But we didn't know our grandparents on my mother's side but mom gave us the history. That's why the oral history is so important but she had pictures and she would tell us about them.

AS: Let's talk a little bit about your school life now. Where did you attend school? Elementary, middle and high school.

MH: Well, I started in Bedford because at that time, we didn't have kindergarten for us. You can notice my age, I'm 70, so I didn't start like early. So, you went directly to the 1<sup>st</sup> grade. I went to 1<sup>st</sup> grade when I was 6. Then, we moved and I was due to go into the 2<sup>nd</sup> grade. When I came to Roanoke, they put me back a grade. I couldn't go to 2<sup>nd</sup> grade because they said, "No, you go to the 1<sup>st</sup> grade." But that was the best thing that happened to me. And I went to Gainsboro. That was a wonderful thing that happened for me. I was upset because I was put back but when my father took me to the school, its still quite new in my mind, I was sitting in the hall with my dad and this very tall, stately lady came out and she asked my name. And I told her my name was Mary. I was an unhappy kid. I can still feel that. She asked me, she said, "Do you like school?". And I said, "No." I didn't like school at all. I would make any kind of excuse in Bedford not to go. She went into the principal's office and she came back out and she told dad, she said, "I want your daughter in my room." Her name was Mrs. Marie Lashly. I found out later that the principal was her sister, Miss Queen Williams. That started my successful school year. I loved Miss Lashly. She told me later that she just saw something in me and she just wanted to have a part of that. At the time, I couldn't see anything in me except being a scared little girl. I loved school. I was in Gainsboro up until 6<sup>th</sup> grade. No, 4<sup>th</sup> grade, I'm sorry. And that's when they closed Gainsboro and we went to Loudon School. Its interesting because there was no such thing as an attendance zone that everybody holds so sacred now. No one really watched where we were going to school. So, I loved the teachers and so forth in school. My parents allowed me and my brother to go to Loudon, to move with the school. And we walked from, if you can imagine where the School Administration Building is now, we walked over to Loudon Avenue to school everyday, snow, rain, sleet, did not matter 'cause nobody closed schools. Some days mom would give us a dime and we'd ride the city bus, but most of the time, we would walk. We'd get to school on time and I was at Loudon up until time to go to 7<sup>th</sup> grade and then everybody from Loudon had to go to Harrison. And I went to Harrison 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade and then my 9<sup>th</sup> grade here. I was the 1<sup>st</sup> – Our class was the first freshman class to move into the new Lucy Addison High School that's now the Magnate School.

AS: Wow. That's wonderful. Did you go to college after that?

MH: After high school? Yes. I went to Virginia State. At that time it was Virginia State College in Petersburg. I went there – I graduated from high school in 1956 and in the fall of '56, I went to State.

AS: And what was your degree in?

MH: My degree at State was Elementary Education.

AS: Did anyone else in your family attend college or was it just you?

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MH: After me, I was the beginning for my family. I can understand from my dad, on his side, there were some aunts who had gone to school but I think I was the initiator of that trend and, being the oldest in my family, which of course set the stage for the rest of my sisters and brothers. My parents – My mom was the disciplinarian. She was the one that set the values. My dad was always for education. He'd push us for that. He would work many-a-job so that we could go. All of us, all 7 of us, in some form had advanced education. My brothers went to trade school, vocation school, culinary school and my sisters, we all have college degrees.

AS: That's wonderful.

MH: It is when you think of it. And my dad, he worked in people's yards. He cleaned the windows at GE and whatever he had to do to send us to school. Because, at the time, there were not many scholarships available for African-American young people.

AS: Let's talk about your life at home. Did you gather around the radio in the evening or do you remember when you got your first telephone or refrigerator or did you always have those items in your house.

MH: We did not always have those. (laughing) When I lived in Bedford, we did not. We had a radio. My mother would always allow us to listen to "Let's Pretend". We loved that show 'cause that's where our imagination was in – Plus, my mother was a great story teller. And even when we moved, we always had good times with mom because dad was always working. With mom, we would always have story time. My mother would always play "Jack rocks" with us. That's when she would keep us up with our own family history to let us know about our families because we didn't know many of our aunts or uncles on mom's side either. It was a time when we had our bible readings. We had to learn bible verses. Mom would always tell us about her belief system even though she couldn't go to church all the time. She was working at home with all the kids but she had a strong belief system and she instilled that in us. Being the oldest, there were certain expectations of me as far as my younger sisters and brothers were concerned but nobody was ever treated differently. We still are not. That was equatable. But mom and dad always looked at us as individuals. My mother would always say, she said, "I have a child for everything that I need." Our home was great. When dad would travel on the railroad, whenever he was home, we were always the center of attention. And my mother dedicated her life to us. And we thrived on that. We never worried about what was segregated and what was not because in our existence at home, we were taught just how significant and important as individuals, as people. And we knew there was that barrier. We knew there was that separation but our parents never allowed that to become a limitation to us because they didn't themselves.

AS: Did you ever get to travel with your father on the railroad?

MH: No. That was not a - When I went to State, I rode the train to State other than the first time my father would take me at the opening, like in the fall, daddy would drive me to State but when I would come home for Thanksgiving and Christmas, I would ride the train. I would always be on the train that some other crew was on that worked with my dad. So, I always had the treat – They would always come back and find me and take me to the dining car and I'd always get dinner and whatever.

(laughing) And when I was at State, the gentlemen from the train when they would have a run through Petersburg and that was a stop for them, they'd come up on the campus and bring me fruit and a sandwich. Yeah.

AS: That's very nice.

MH: People took care of other people's children and they had an interest in you. They knew that my family had great expectations of us and people who knew my family bought into those expectations. They were supportive.

AS: Do you remember sitting on the porch? Did your house have a porch and if it did, did you sit on the porch in the evening to talk with your neighbors?

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MH: Both our houses had porches. Yes. That was the fun of it all. We didn't have many neighbors around us but we could always go from one house to the next house. Mom limited our visitation but there were certain places that we could go and talk to people. Every neighbor had an interest in everybody else's child. I couldn't misbehave at Mrs. Max's house or Mrs. O'Neil's home any more than I could in my own. That was the way across the community though. When you say neighbors and neighborhood, one thing about Gainsboro, the entire area was your neighborhood. It wasn't just the house next door or across the street. My neighborhood to me was all the way across this hill, down over to Henry Street because everybody knew everybody else's family or some parts of their family. And everybody knew which family the children belonged to. (laughing heartily) I hope I answered your question on that. (chuckling)

AS: Yes, you did. What chores did you have to do around the house or in your neighborhood?

MH: Well, we always had to keep our own room. Mom would assign us things like dishes. There were dishes to do. Sweep the sidewalk, make sure trash wasn't there. Our main thing was that we had to look after each other. And with 7 sisters and brothers, until I went to college, that was our main chore. Helping with homework. Making sure that everybody did what they were supposed to do but most of us did. We had those things. It's just like any chores that children should have today, many of them don't. (chuckle)

AS: You talked a lot about how your mom was a good story teller. What kind of stories were passed down through your generations? For instance, did your mother tell you stories about the Civil War or slavery or did you have a favorite family recipe that she passed down.

MH: My mom did not talk in those areas. My mother's stories were mostly wonderful fairy tales, yarns of what would be, make believe, possibilities. She would tell us about her family. My mother had a sister. We didn't know her but we saw a picture of her and her name was Minnie. Minnie was a beautiful woman and had long black hair down her back. She ran away and joined the circus. And my mother would tell us about her. We never met her but mom would tell us that she ran away one year when the circus came to Bedford – Ringling Brothers by the way. They'd hear from her for a while but after a while they didn't hear from her anymore. She would tell us about so many other things with the family. Mostly, mom loved poetry. She loved nursery rhymes. That's how we learned our nursery rhymes. Like I said before, our bible stories, we got them from mom early on. As far as a recipe, it wasn't necessarily so much a recipe because we were a poor family but we didn't know it. My mother could take nothing and make marvelous stuff. Til this day, I have not tasted a cake like my mother would make. I would often wonder how she did it because it wasn't really a cake, it was a pudding but you could slice it and it was just wonderful. We laughed. We said possibly because mom didn't have much to put in it so she just came up with her own. And we would all look forward to what she would call "Ash Cakes" where you would fix your cornbread, corn pones or your regular bread over the ashes of the coal. And she would make what you would call "ho cakes" and biscuits. I'm not a biscuit eater. I don't care much for the inside of a biscuit. So where you would cut your biscuit out, that little part that's left, my mother would flatten that down and bake that for me. That would be my bread because she knew I didn't care much for biscuits. I still don't to this day. But as far as handing down recipes from mom, mom just cooked everything well. That's all I can say. (laughing)

AS: Did you have to help her in the kitchen?

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MH: Sometimes we did, sometimes not. Sometimes not. My mother – There were special things that we did. As I said before, our jobs were to take care of each other and keep each other out of her way when she was in the kitchen. But most of the time, we were around her in the kitchen. She'd have us to husk corn, stuff like that. She'd send us to pick blackberries. That was down from where the School Administration Building is, if you can imagine, all the way down there, there was nothing but woods and there were blackberry bushes in there. We'd go down and get pans of blackberries and bring those back, wash those, make sure we didn't eat more than we had in the pan. She would do blackberry pies for us. Sometimes, she would let us roll the dough and that kind of thing. We'd keep the dishes done. Mom was self-sufficient. She felt that she had her role and those were the things that she held us responsible for. We were not just bound to the kitchen.

AS: Because you were the oldest, did you have to help a lot with your younger brothers and sisters just making sure that they were not getting into trouble or getting them ready in the morning?

MH: Yeah. Safety reasons. I had to look after them. We always helped each other as far as getting dressed and so forth. I was responsible for my brother when we would walk to school. My brother used to call me “sister”. And he would get into trouble in school. The principal would call me, “Mary, come see me because your brother Ronnie, he's so and so.”. He'd always beg me, he'd say, “Sister please don't tell momma. Please don't tell momma.”. I said, “I have to tell momma 'cause momma will find out.”. (laughing) Yeah, that was my job. To this day, I still take it as mine even though they have grown. My baby sister is in her 50s but I still feel responsible for them.

AS: Did you or a spouse or any of your siblings or children ever serve in the military?

MH: My husband. My husband was in the service. He was in the service during the Korean Conflict. When he graduated from high school, he went to Howard University for maybe a year. Then he left there to join the service. He was in the service for 4 years I think.

AS: So were you married after his service time then?

MH: When my husband was in the service, I was in high school.

AS: Oh, OK.

MH: Yeah.

AS: So you were not married yet then?

MH: Not yet.

AS: What businesses or shops around town did your family go to? Did you use the market downtown?

MH: Used the market, yes. The drug store.

AS: Do you remember the name of the drug store?

MH: Brooks Drug Store on Henry Street. We also went to Davis Drug Store over here. I was allowed to go there after a while. We went mostly to the market downtown. We also had stores along our street. We'd walk to like Weebee's, Monseurs Grocery, Gilly Hollins Store, a store where there were wonderful hot dogs Mr. Chili Bean, all along that street. Parents used Johnson's Realtor because that's where we rented our house from. There was a Clark's Photo where our pictures would get made, have it done there. Mr. Sunny Hale had his own little business of photography. He would take pictures especially of us at senior prom and graduation, that kind of thing. I'm trying to think. We would go to the Virginia Theater, the Kaiser Record Shop we would frequent sometimes. Green's Shoe Store. I'm sure I'm missing a lot but those were some.

AS: OK. Do you have a favorite childhood memory? For example, like a favorite holiday event, or a favorite trip that you took as a family or a favorite gift that you ever received?

MH: I could give you something in all of those categories that would be favorites. (laughing)

AS: That would be fine.

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MH: Christmas is always my favorite and has always been my favorite. The magic of Christmas for

me was back when I was a child living in Bedford. We lived in what was known as a "Shotgun House". It was just a straight house. You may have 2 rooms on this side and 2 rooms on that side and a small kitchen, about 4 rooms if that many. And I can remember on Christmas Eve, this room was right off from our kitchen, momma would keep a whole of stuff in there. It was always cluttered. But I can remember on Christmas Eve, our going to that and, at that time, it was my brother. It was just the 2 of us, me and my two brothers. We just knew that our parents would do the best that they could for us. Momma would always say, "We don't know what Santa Claus will bring but whatever it is, we know you will enjoy it.". We were thinking, "Whatever you do is fine for us.". We didn't expect a lot but I can remember waking up that morning, this room was full of toys. There was a swing set assembled in this room, an outdoor swing set. And hanging off that swing set, there were clothes, bags of apples and oranges and nuts. I still have that picture, everything was to the right in this room. A tricycle and a wagon. And the magic of it all. And after I got grown and understood what Santa Claus was which I still believe in, the spirit of it is magnificent, to think that my father could do that all alone. (pause) I'm sorry. (spoken softly) Christmas is a favorite for me because of the story of why we celebrate. And I'm a Christian, I'm a believer. So, I believe we had a Christ child. But just seeing what all of that meant in your family and how your family could love you and care for you so much that in spite of the fact that you knew that you did not have what other people had as far as material things were concerned. We were rich as far as a love of people and that always stands out for me every time I celebrate Christmas I think about that. You asked about a favorite gift. I think of a favorite gift as far as what my dad gave me when I was in high school was a watch. And at the time, everybody was buying Luton (??) coats for their kids and I knew my father and trying to support all of us, he couldn't do that. My girlfriends had 'em. But my dad gave me one one Christmas while I was in high school. My husband, my favorite gift from his was when he was in Korea and – No, he was in Panama, he was in Panama, and he sent me this album with these paintings. It was a painted album on the front and a jewelry box. And in the jewelry box, he had put a small heart in it and he had sent that back to me. They're still favorites. I don't know. There are so many good things in my life that its just hard for me to separate certain things but those stand out.

AS: Those are wonderful stories.

MH: They stand out with me. (clearing throat softly)

AS: What kind of work have you done throughout your life? You had your education and you got a degree in teaching. Were you a teacher?

MH: Mm mm. I taught for 22 years. But long before that, while I was working to go through school, I worked for the Parks and Rec Department at Summer Camps. I worked with Miss Nettie Trainam (??) and Bernard Robinson in the Summer Camps. Then, when I came home from – When I graduated from college and waiting for my job to start with Roanoke City, I worked at Hotel Roanoke in the dining room. That was a wonderful experience for me even though I was a college grad. I was a sheltered person. So to be out in that world was really a shocker for me. When I started working for Roanoke City, I worked as a classroom teacher for 22 years. Then, after that, I was a principal of schools – a couple of schools. I went to Central Office as a supervisor. One year, I was brought out of Central Office to open a school, Hurt Park Elementary School. The principal had retired or taken a leave of absence at the last minute so I had two jobs. I was the elementary supervisor in the afternoons and I was principal of this school during the day for a year and then I went back to central as supervisor. Then, I was promoted to director and then later as Executive of Elementary Programs. I was with the city schools for 42 years. Loved every moment. I left that job loving it. I still love it. Its a highlight of my life that I could do that.

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AS: Do you still volunteer with the schools at all?

MH: Yes. I volunteer some and then I have what we call the Early Retirement Program which allows

me 20 days where I can work in schools and you can get a supplement. I do that but I also do extra things. I still conference with principals a lot when they call and ask my advice on some things. I spend my time reading. The library at the new Roanoke Academy for Math and Science, that was a highlight for me of my last year because I had great input into the design of that school. The community and with the architects. And to see that come to light and to go by there now, its just a joy for me to know that I had anything to do with it and in that school. The community and the staff named the library after me in that school. So, I read in that school a lot in the library. I love it.

AS: That's wonderful. Did you use the Gainsboro Library?

MH: Oh yes. When I was in high school, I was a volunteer here my freshman year, my 9<sup>th</sup> grade year. Miss Lee and a lady named Beatrice Mitchell but we called her "Sugar". They were such wonderful people. I would come here after school and shelve books. Sometimes when new books would come in, I would unpack those books. I had to get my homework done before I could do any of it though. At that time, I was courting Mr. Hackley. He was a senior in high school. My parents did not allow me to have company very much but they did allow him to come to see me some. But he would come by the library here and Miss Lee and Sugar would tell us, "OK. You can have 10 minutes and that's all. You will not go in those shelves. You will sit right out here where we can see you.". He would come by and we would talk for a little while. Sometimes, he'd bring me milkshakes and they would tell me – You couldn't eat out there so they let us go back in their office and she'd let me drink my milkshake and talk to William for a little while and then she'd tell him, "Its time for you to go young man. She's working.". We courted in this library. This library represents, I don't know, just giving a stability to us and so forth. So I would come to work looking forward to his coming by (laughing) to see me. And surprisingly now, its amazing how things – If you're facing the library on the right hand side, there used to be a huge evergreen tree. I found out later my son, he courted his wife in junior high school at that time. And we would allow him to ride his bike down to her house which is over here on MacDowell Avenue. He'd ride his bike. He'd stop at the Church's Chicken, pick up 2 pieces of chicken, ride his bike. She'd get her bike. They'd ride down here, sit under this tree for a picnic beside this library and look at the old Claytor House and dream about how they could get married and redo that house, remodel that house. The library represents a lot for me and my family. But William Hackley and I, it makes me smile. (laughing)

AS: That's a wonderful story. Its a wonderful Valentine's story.

MH: With the drug store being across the street. He would stop by there with the football team 'cause he was the quarterback on the football team. He would stop over there and I'd know – I'd be working at the desk and I'd see 'em all get out and I knew he'd be coming pretty soon. (laughing)

AS: Who were some of the strong community leaders in Gainsboro that you can remember?

MH: That I can remember. I would say our ministers in our churches. I'm thinking back to Reverend James who was at First Baptist. Reverend Fredrick Sampson at High Street when I was young. I adored him. He was one of the patrons for the library who would come in that I would see. Mr. Holland.

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AS: Is that Alfonzo Holland?

MH: Yes. His generation – I know I'm getting up but his generation, you look at him and my dad – Those men were always in a shirt and tie and always dressed. Every time you see them, no matter what. When my father would get off from work and he'd walk home up the back alley. He'd be dressed in a shirt and a tie and hat and shined shoes. That was just part of them. I was thinking that when I think about Mr. Holland. Of course when you say Gainsboro, you would – Dr. Harry Penn, I just think was everywhere. I'm pulling a blank because there's a child. The minister in my church which was right beside Gainsboro School, Mount Zion African Methodist Episcopal Church which we're celebrating our 125<sup>th</sup> year this year. The minister up there, Reverend Paul Calwell. Miss Lee,

Sugar. The neighbors.

AS: Was Miss Lee a role model for you?

MH: Oh, indeed. She and Sugar. Miss Lee was so – such a stately lady but she was so warm and caring and she set examples for you. She was always in the mode of preparation. She always wanted you to be ready for no matter what. I remember when I graduated from high school and I was to be one of the speakers for graduation and I had written my speech and my teacher, Miss Hattie Austin, had critiqued and critiqued and critiqued it. She was wonderful. I can remember walking in here to work and Miss Lee asked me, she said, “Have you gotten your speech ready?”. And I said, “Yes.”. She said, “That's good.”. And then a little bit later, she came and she said, “Mary, come back.”. She had set up this area and she said, “I want you to deliver it now.”. I had to do that for her. (laughing) She and Sugar were my audience, you know. Everybody cared that you did things well. Even though you had families that were the families that stood out in the community, there were no insignificant people as far as I was concerned and growing up because people just took time for you. I can still see Miss Lee smile. She was. One of many. (laughing) One of many.

AS: What kind of cultural events happened in Gainsboro? Do you remember entertainers who came to the Dumas? Did you ever go see entertainers?

MH: I didn't. I was a child then but my father would tell me, in learning my history, I knew that Duke Ellington would come. I knew that. Louis Armstrong, I knew that. We couldn't go. I mean, children just did not but we knew that our parents and adults did and later on, as we found out how famous these people were and then we would talk with Mr. and Mrs. Barlow after we had gotten grown. Sometimes, my husband and I would go by and they would let us eat in the dining room or someone at the table where either Louis Armstrong sat to eat or somebody. It was always that kinda – We would hear about all the number of people who would come through.

AS: Did your mom and dad, did they ever go to performances?

MH: My father did. My mother was not a goer. Was not. And when my father was in town, he and some of his friends would but my mom was not much – My mother was a home body until we were up, up – I mean, I was good and grown and then when my sisters, my younger sisters, 3 younger sisters were in school. Momma became very active with the PTA but before that, my mother was right at home. (laughing)

AS: How has Gainsboro changed over the years?

MH: Drastically. (pause)

AS: Has it gotten better? Has it gotten worse? Are there some things that you miss about it?

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MH: There are some things that I miss. When you start tearing down buildings and those kind of things. In your young life, you're not quite sure what it all means but I can remember the demolition of Gainsboro School. I can remember when my church was torn down. We left it before it was torn down but it was in order for all this. I can remember some of my friends out of Northeast, their homes, losing their homes. My aunt who lived in the area where the civic center is now, them losing their homes. I believe in improvement. I do not believe in the displacement of people or misleading of people which is what happened. People were told one thing and other things happened for them. I miss – Its a beautiful area now but I have to really stop and think where my childhood is in all of this and the only thing that I can use as a gauge is this library and St. Andrew's Church and then I try to see how did I walk around the curve to go to my church. Where were the stores when I would come across the hill? Where Orange Avenue is now, I have to stop and think how the high school yard came all the way down to the park and then you had the creek that is now under the highway that you could throw rocks in that creek going past there. You have to really, really get in your head where all of this is because before my husband started paying any attention to me, I was at Harrison and I would walk from Harrison home but I would time it because I had noticed him at my church. He was a church member



but he never paid any attention to me 'cause I mean he was in high school and I was a kid. But I would wait and slow my steps so that I made sure that he was coming across the hill about the same time I was. (laughing) At the corner at Mr. Guinea's Store \_\_\_\_\_ so I could go home \_\_\_\_\_. (laughing) I have to stop sometimes to think of where that is, where my childhood is, where the courting of my husband is and that's why this library is the central place for me to get my bearing when I come across here.

AS: The physical portion of what Gainsboro was is very different from what it was.

MH: Very much so but if you listen to people, the people who are still here, and people who have been here, Gainsboro is still Gainsboro. I mean, in my mind, I see all of these places. I listen to "Looking Back" on channel 9 the other night with interviews being done with Helen Davis and her sister Miss Bethel and all of the people talking about what happened in this area. Gainsboro is alive to me. I know the physical pieces that we had, no. But to me, Gainsboro will always be in existence as long – The Gainsboro then will always be as long as we have people who can recall, who can bring up just a little bit. I know I have missed a lot in thinking because its so much that was chalked into that. Because see this is where we lived. This is where we shopped. This is where we went to school. This is where we got our encouragement and so you can't really say that Gainsboro is gone. It isn't. So that when I look at signs that say Historical Gainsboro, that's me. That's a whole lot of people. Its people, its not the facilities. Not to me.

AS: Is the sense of community the same as it was?

MH: By my not living here, but I would think that it is as I worked in the school system and talked with people here. Yes, there is still that caring piece. I think so. You listen to Miss Bethel and Miss Davis as they are talking and they're still living around – I mean there's that love and respect for the people who lived here. For the families of people who lived here. I could call them on the phone right now and the greeting would be to me would be as though I was still a child because they'll call me Mary Elizabeth and it would go on as though I have not grown up at all. I think there's still that closeness. I do. I think you have some people who live in the area now who don't know the history and would not have the same respect I would say. And I don't know if I want to say respect or not. Would not have that same caring for the area as somebody who grew up in it. But I think that that sense of closeness is fostered because as we look at the houses that have come up since then, I see people who care about their property and in the summer, I see people out talking to each other. Its not as much comradery that we used to have but its still there. Its still there.

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AS: How was your life or the life of Gainsboro, how was the community affected by segregation and the Civil Rights Movement?

MH: We know there was a separation and we knew the Henry Street Bridge was the separation for us as far as downtown. But I think we were self-sufficient people. We relied upon each other. We knew there were inequities. There are still are in some situations. I don't know if it – As far as the Civil Rights Movement is concerned, to me and I was young then and in school, but I think growing up was one of the quietest places for desegregation to occur but I do know that there were many-a-meeting and there were people coming to the table. I know it was gradual. I was in the schools. As I said I was teaching and taught in a segregated school and I was part of committees as far as when it got time for schools to desegregate. We had to go to meetings together with our Caucasian counterparts at Jefferson in order to establish this relationship.

AS: Was that difficult?

MH: Well it was difficult. There was that separatism when you would go to the meetings. You'd have your African-American teachers and administration and you'd have your Caucasian ones. There were activities that would bring people together but there was still that hesitancy on both parts. The dislike on one part and on the other, the lack of trust on another. The desegregation of schools was done

gradually. I think that was a wise thing. My husband was a part of that. He was moved from Addison to Lee Junior for that purpose because we had African-American students in that school. But then as it gradually moved on and people began to work more and more together. I think it took a long time for people to want to send their children to a different place out of the community. Our schools suffered because we lost many of our schools in the process. As we look around us now, you don't see a school, other than the newer ones, Lincoln Terrace that's in the neighborhood and Addison. The old Addison is the Administration Building but you don't see any other place that we can point to for our children and say, "Hey this is a historical site." or "This is what happened with it." and I think there will always be scars from that. I'm not sure that I'm answering your question. The only thing that I can say was it was a difficult time for everyone. And it was a difficult time for everyone because, 1, we had lived separately. We knew that by law we had to live separately. We knew that people had formed their opinions of us just as we had formed our opinions. But still, I feel there was a strain no matter how minute it was because of certain leaders in the city wanting things to go well. There was still that strain of, very thin but it was there, of respect of person and I think as people worked together, it became more and more evident. Now you may find some, if somebody else was sitting at this table with me, they would disagree. But I think it depends upon what you are looking for. Are we where we would like to be in this city as far as \_\_\_\_? No. We're not there. There are still things that we look at and I look at Northwest Roanoke. I don't feel that the city pays as much attention to what is happening in that area. But its a good area of the city. But then I can't say that I think part of that is our fault because we have to be careful who we put in office in city government so that we will know that we are putting people in office who care about the total city and not just lip service for certain parts. Articulation and operation are two different things to me. And I think going back to the Civil Rights and segregation piece, I think there will always be a mark on that and I think it all stems from what happened with Gainsboro. People liked Gainsboro. They wanted the best. Why couldn't renovation come in with folks who had worked so hard for their homes but it didn't. So if it didn't then why weren't we honest with people. So you're still in the city to me. You still have a trust issue. And I think we will always have that trust issue. I'm not quite sure I answered your question because its very – I'm at a different place on this. I know how protected I was as a child. I know how my values, the values that are a part of me and I was taught to accept people as human beings but some of us have not gotten to the place where we get where we can do that. We still see a color and we still see situations. But as far as Roanoke is concerned, if there ever was a place, ever a place, with opportunity to become a model as to how a city can meld and become one, this is it.

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AS: That's wonderful.

MH: This is it. But we're nowhere near that but I think it is.

AS: You think we can achieve that?

MH: I do. I think we're believers and people who will be above board and honest. It doesn't mean that you always have to agree because you will always have naysayers but if there is ever a place with that opportunity, I feel this city – I always felt this city is the place to do it. Just go, if we go out to any of our social events. Let's say you go to the market on a Saturday or a Friday evening and you're there and people are there for dinner and whatever. I'm just as comfortable stopping and speaking to people at another table. I don't know them, they don't know me. People will take – if somebody breaks the barrier, they will take time to talk and I think that's where it is. I just don't think people want to step over that line 'cause it takes everybody to do that. I have to do it. Sometimes, you have to do it and we can't fear it. Am I thinking that segregation still does not exist in the hearts of some people? Yes, it does. Yes it does. But we can't change that. The only thing we can do is change the situation so that their hearts can change. But as far as desegregating the area and trying not to have the black/white thing, Roanoke is a prime place. Twenty years from now, somebody may disagree with me. (laughing)

AS: Well, we're actually pretty much at the end of the interview but I wanted to close you by asking you, is there anything else that we didn't cover that you would like to share with us?

MH: I don't think so. I'm just – I'm delighted to be a part of this city. I'm so grateful to be an African-American female who had my upbringing here with a cadre of people who just cared. Schools where you had teachers, churches where you had people who cared what happened to you. They helped you develop that talent no matter what it was. To have experienced families and being a part of a family where there was so much love and understanding and nurturing and then to have, to seek to be a part of that in other families, my friends and so forth. To have people like Miss Lee and Sugar and this library to just ground me and to look back on just my life and looking back on the life that my husband and I had as young people and to just be able to feel good about it. And when I stop to think about the good things, it makes me smile. It makes me feel so good. My memories are great. Everything that happened, was it all wonderful? No. I had my bouts with the segregation piece. I've run up into some terrible things but I think my parents and my church just instilled in me that you get stronger because of that.

AS: That's wonderful. I just want to thank you for participating.

MH: Thank you. Thank you. I'm so glad you all had me. (lilting laughter)