

Interview with Minnie Jones and Mary Williams at the Pisgah View Apartments

Interview by Dorothy Joynes

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Dorothy Joynes (DJ): Now Minnie, I didn't know about you. I wasn't able to stay long enough at the civic center to hear you talk because I had to go home and cook dinner.

That was a long meeting. But I heard about you at the Unitarian Church. I came in and told you who I was and that I'd be back. So if you would start out by telling me about your experiences in Asheville when you first came here and your involvement.

Minnie Jones (MJ): Well, I came to Asheville very young. The paper did a history on me as you could see there back in the first of the year. I just got involved in working with people. I joined the NAACP which I thought was a good step to make in the right direction.

DJ: Were you in school at that time?

MJ: I, no I had finished school and had been married and had come here and got started in church and in community work and stuff like that. Some of the people who helped to see me through such as, a lot of them are dead, Mr. Allen, Ms. Dickson, she was Reverend Dickson's widow. And most of the people who kinda kept me on the right track has passed on. But the way I really got started over in here was through the equal rights movement. This was predominantly white and back then they was, the government you know they passed these laws saying (the help the great to get some money and all this stuff so (unintelligible, this part of the tape was extremely hard to understand)). The equal rights people chose me to be that person to come here and so I came here and feel like I've done a fairly good job. I'm sorry to say I don't have a picture before but we do

have pictures of after the remodeling and things of that kind. And it is now 100 % integrated and I mean integrated by all nations and nationalities. This is the only one that's like that in Asheville. So that's just about how things got started and I just went from that on to whatever. That's about all I can say about it.

DJ: What was the NAACP doing at that time?

MJ: NAACP is an organization for black people that helps in equal rights and justice for all.

DJ: And were they very active in the community?

MJ: We are still very active when we're needed.

DJ: And so they were active when you came?

MJ: Yes.

DJ: And you became a member of that organization.

MJ: That's right.

DJ: And you're still a member of that organization.

MJ: That's right. Plan to be when I die.

DJ: Can you tell me what they've done when you've been working with them?

MJ: Well we've done a lot of things. We've made the movement for the city of Asheville and the state and of North Carolina and America. NAACP equal rights and justice for all was during the Martin Luther King Movement and all of that came out of the history of the NAACP.

DJ: And you were involved with the breakfast?

MJ: Yes.

DJ: With Orlene Simmons?

MJ: No, no, no. I'm back before Orlene Simmons ever come into the picture. I started back in the sixties honey. I started back in the sixties and I didn't even know Orlene Simmons. My starting to get involved in equal rights movements was when we had registration drives down in Baton Rouge, LA and Mississippi, Alabama, New Orleans. We were getting black people to vote. You know we couldn't vote honey.

DJ: You went down to Mississippi?

MJ: Yes ma'am.

DJ: And were you going there to study the programs...

MJ: No we wasn't going to study, we was going to fight for our rights! And we did.

DJ: And you left Asheville to go down?

MJ: Yes, um-huh.

DJ: And at that time you became involved in what they were doing and brought it back.

MJ: It was already going on all over the country. Where you from?

DJ: California.

MJ: Well then you probably don't know about the South. But they was times when we couldn't vote, honey. We had to fight for our rights to vote. Then when we got that right to vote they said womens couldn't vote. Then we had to go back and fight some more. And Susan B. Anthony made it possible for us womens to be able to vote. But no black people could vote and the way they were doing it they said you had to be able to read the constitution before you could vote, before you could be able to make an X. We didn't feel that that was right and we won. So that's how I really got started in the equal rights

movement and it just spread from one thing to another like it's still doing now. Like here you is talking about whatever! So that's how it all got started.

DJ: When you came back to Asheville...

MJ: And when I came back to Asheville then the people here in Asheville said that I had done such a good job and was doing such a good job and this came available. This came out of the OEO. Then I was a member of the OEO and all of the movement was going on. I sat on what they called the pack for the OEO program and that is now under the heading of the Opportunity Corporation and I am still with the Opportunity Corporation. I am chairman of function instruction of the Opportunity Corporation. And so then this housing business come along and they just said, well you're the lady to go over there and see what we can do about the situation over at Pisgah View Apartments.

DJ: So the idea was to get it integrated?

MJ: Yes

DJ: And you were the first. So what did you do?

MJ: I just moved here with the work.

DJ: And then what happened?

MJ: What you see. What you see is what happened.

DJ: It was an uphill fight.

MJ: I know. It wasn't easy.

DJ: How did you approach the people?

MJ: Well, in the mean time I was employed with the Orthopedic Hospital which was a handicapped place for childrens. That was my main job. So with being employed there I knew a lot of people all over this district.

DJ: What hospital was that?

MJ: That's Thoms. I knew people here because when I first started there I was a bus monitor and I worked in therapy. They just didn't have no special job for me; it was a job where I did a lot of different things to put in eight hours. You rode the bus in the morning to pick up the children then you do things during that time, you help get childrens up and you help feed lunch and you do all this stuff. Then bus time again you go back on the bus and when the bus through that time you go home. You have you're hours in. So I knew a lot of people and I knew a lot of people here because there was some handicapped people here. In fact, I moved into the apartment that one of my little patients had just died in. Matthew was his name and they lived in 15 B, Pisgah View Apartments. He had passed away and Mrs. Matthew had gone all off some which a way, I don't know which a way. Never the less, I moved into the apartment. I was familiar with that apartment cause I'd come every morning and pick him up. So I moved in there which was right down the street from here. And of course there was a guard; they had security guards here to protect me. There was a Mr. Moore, who has passed on, he lived in 14 A. Mrs. Robinson was the social worker and she lived in 13 F. Then they had another security man further up on the street and he lived...

DJ: And that was because you were moving in?

MJ: That's right.

DJ: You were well taken care of.

MJ: Yeah, that's right.

DJ: I don't think you've ever met a stranger have you?

MJ: No, I don't meet strangers. I just get a talking to people and if they don't wanna talk they just have to walk away. No, I don't meet strangers. Nowhere I go I don't meet strangers.

DJ: So they had the right person for the job.

MJ: Well, that's what they said. You know, *they* said that. And, of course, as I said most of those people has gone on. Now Jessie Ray is one of the people who are still function. There are still a few of the older NAACP people living but they are not function, like Brother Cook. He was like a father to me but he's in a nursing home now. Really, I think about the only person who is living is Jessie Ray. He helped me to really get my feet to where they needed to be and not get strayed off being young. Cause I was young and *kinda* nice looking. And you know I was a little fresh widow and I could have gotten tangled up with the little boys. But that didn't happen.

DJ: And they needed you here.

MJ: And I feel like I went the right way.

DJ: They needed you. And you have done a lot with children too. Can you tell me about that?

MJ: Well, I have like I said; I've worked with handicapped childrens all my days. I started off with (speaking with some one else: go up stairs, on the dresser there is a blue picture book...)

DJ: Do you have some pictures? Maybe I could take some and Xerox them and bring them back...

MJ: No, I just wanna tell you about my story of my childrens. You can't take my pictures! I don't have but that one. I started off over with the childrens with a fellow by

the name, oh I forgot his name. But he had a handicapped son. I lived in an apartment house and a lady downstairs was working for the man. She, the lady, said to me about this little handicapped boy and I was telling them about my childhood and I'm going way back now honey, I'm going back to my childhood. (Do you see it Crystal? It's a purple book, a picture book. Look on the dresser in a box, don't you see a purple like photo book. It has to be cause it's not here).

DJ: Tell me about your childhood.

MJ: Do you see it in that box? A box sitting on the dresser a pasteboard box. Well, ok, baby.

DJ: Can you tell me about your childhood?

MJ: Well, this is a... well, it's up there but she just can't find it. Let me go, cut your thing off and let me run up there and get it. I just have to reach in the box and get it.

DJ: She's looking for the book upstairs. Tell me about your being here, you said that you had to go and pick up your kids but don't you have more to say then that?

Mary Williams (MW): What do you want me to say?

DJ: Well were you born in Asheville?

MW: Yes. I'm, my name is Mary Crystal Williams, born 12/24/70. I'm a single parent of three. I've been in Asheville all my life. I'm a resident of public housing authority. I live in authority 1 B Pisgah View Apartments. I first moved here when I was at the age of fifteen, going to school. I graduated in 1990. Then pretty much I'm here and Miss Minnie Jones she's a good friend of mine. I just came out to visit and see how she is and she's helped me a lot. She's done a lot for us and we appreciate her.

DJ: Do you ever go into the YMCA? YWCA Women's House?

MW: Oh I used to go to a meeting on Tuesday nights for the Mother Love program they had. I used to volunteer.

DJ: Do they still have it?

MW: They do still have it some Tuesday nights. But I haven't been to the women's program over there now.

DJ: I interviewed some people over there. Can you tell me about that, was it helpful to you?

MW: Yes, it was for teenage mothers. I attended that class when I was like sixteen. There were a lot of counselors who counseled us for parenting classes, helped figure out our bills and things. They wanted us to finish our education and family planning. They had different people come and talk to us and see what we needed help in. It was a good organization, but I haven't been in awhile.

DJ: Do you have family in town?

MW: Yes, my mother and my two half-sisters and some relatives.

DJ: And how are your children taken care of? What are they doing right now?

MW: I have my oldest little girl, she's six, and she's a Haw Fletcher Elementary School. And I have a four year old and she's in kindergarten at Haw Fletcher too. And I have a seventeen month old little boy; he's at home with me.

DJ: And you're able to get out when they're...

MW: When they're in school. I'm able to get out and go pay the bills and go take care of doctor's appointments and ...

DJ: Is this a summer program that you're talking about? Cause school hasn't started yet.

MJ: No, the kids have year round school, baby, year round school.

DJ: Oh, I didn't know about that.

MW: You didn't? Yeah, the Haw Fletcher offers a year round school. The kids go from nine weeks out three weeks, which is good, it teaches them a lot.

DJ: I should think.

MW: It's 60 Ledgelawn Street and the principal is, um, William McDaniels. It's a good school, they learn, it educates them well.

DJ: How did you get to know Minnie?

MW: Miss Minnie has helped me a lot. She helped me get the apartment when I first moved out here, when I was at the age of fifteen. I was the first young parent to get an apartment and I'm still here, thanks to Miss Minnie, she helps me a lot. She's a good lady and we need her in this community and we don't know what we'd do without her. She counsels us and lets us know that if we ever need anything we can always come and talk to her anytime.

DJ: Do most of the people come to see her here or do they go to the community center? How do you...

MW: I guess they come here. She's welcomes her doors for us to come and visit her at home. It don't matter what time of day when we need her we can always come to Miss Minnie to get your help. She's a sweet lady.

DJ: You've got a big family don't you Minnie?

MJ: Yes, I really do. I just know childrens everywhere, I can go places and I think I don't know anybody there. Just this past week I was in Durham and the people there said "Oh I would love for you to go to a meeting with me down at Chapel Hill." And they

started telling me about this lady down at Chapel Hill and they really was giving the lady a hard time and I didn't know who they were talking about. I said "I'd really like to go and meet this lady." And when I get to Chapel Hill to the meeting it's a lady that I've known for 15 years, that I've took classes with and she was so excited to see me. Then on Friday when the class was over she wanted me to come back down and spend the day with her. So everywhere I go, in fact when I walked into the city hall, this is in Chapel Hill now, and they said "Oh, here's Minnie Jones from Asheville NC!" So you know, I just kinda thought jeez woo-wee kinda. I just know a lot of people.

DJ: And you went to a three day sleep out with Beth Mascots.

MJ: Yeah.

DJ: And tell me about that. Where'd you go for that?

MJ: We went to Raleigh and we toured the capital. She had never been to the capital, she's a sweet young girl but she's new to North Carolina. She's new to Asheville and she had never been to the capital. We went and we just went all in the capital and I was just visiting everybody in there and she was just having a fit. She says, "Oh we can't go in there." And I says "I don't see why not." So we went to see all the legislatures, we set in the meetings and they welcomed us. I told them last night how proud of them I was. They were here last night. Mr. Campbell was in Asheville last night, lobbying for Mrs. Magadiari. He was down at the mountain barbeque place down there they had a little reception for him. Him and all the legislatures were here and I really told him how much I appreciated them being nice to my friend in Raleigh. They made us very welcome.

DJ: Now did you have a chance to go to all of the various places that the homeless were living?
