

Alice White

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UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA ASHEVILLE**

Interviewee: Alice White (AW)

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Interviewer: Dorothy Joynes (DJ)

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Begin Tape 1, Side A

DJ: —1993. Dorothy Joynes talking with Alice White and Alice, you're not only a wonderful neighbor but you are a good Christmas decorator. And you're Christmas decorating while we are talking, but I'm delighted to be with you because I want you to first of all to tell me about your coming to Asheville. How you happened to come, what you found and then the jobs that you did.

AW: Well, I moved to Asheville back in 1982 and the reason I moved to Asheville is really because of its scenic beauty. I had lived in cities for fifteen years and had really missed the rural beauty in the mountains and also the great fishing. So I decided that about eleven and a half years ago was a good time for me to relocate to a place that I wanted to bring up my children and live the rest of my days. So I left a career in commercial real estate development to semi-retire, I hoped, in the mountains of Western North Carolina. I was acquainted with the area because of my family. They had vacationed here—well actually before I was even born, they vacationed here. But as a small child I recalled this place as having boundless beauty and a very serene and kind of creative environment, which I thought would be positive for my lifestyle and also if I had children, which I plan to do. So those were two reasons I moved here.

And then when I relocated here I found that many redevelopment efforts had been focused on Asheville. We came here interested in the first one, which was the Pack Square project and at that time, was a

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project that was begun by the Schneider group [Schneider Nine] out in Michigan. So I was very interested to find that actually, after I had made my decision and had talked to them about employment—had planned to do some pre-marketing for them—and at this time, they had some investment problems. They had not fully financed the project and were looking for further financing at that time. I felt the project was pretty slow in developing and at that point, decided not to work with Schneider, simply because I felt they were two or three years before they were going to get their project off the ground and I wanted to get settled and do some fishing.

So I did not end up working for them, although I talked to them at great length when I first arrived. And then later ran into another project which was the Haywood Street redevelopment project which I did then end up working for on a full-time basis for—oh, I think it was about two, two and a half years.

DJ: What were your contacts then?

AW: What do you mean exactly by contacts?

DJ: Well, how did you get involved with them?

AW: Well, I met Robert Armstrong through a mutual friend and had heard that he was doing a development in downtown Asheville, but did not realize that it was going to be historically significant. Nor did I realize that it was going to be the first really significant redevelopment project in Asheville. And when I realized the scope of the project and how important it was to the city, then I talked to him about involving myself. And this was, I believe, in the spring of '90—excuse me, spring of '82. And subsequently did get involved and was general manager for him during the construction phase of the project and on until the completion of the hotel and fifty percent of the atrium was leased.

DJ: You had some guidelines from the Preservation Society [Preservation Society of Asheville & Buncombe County] on the historical aspect of it didn't you?

AW: Well, part of the purpose of the project was to maintain the historical significance of the building, and at that time, it was financially feasible to follow lines that were set by the federal government in renovating a historic project, simply because of the tax advantage. So because of the tax advantage, we did follow the guidelines the federal government put down for historical redevelopment at that time. The Preservation Society here in Asheville did not give us the guidelines, but they were very interested in the fact that we were doing it according to federal guidelines, which of course they approved whole heartedly.

DJ: Tell me about some of the people that were involved in this work.

AW: Ah, well there was a local construction company that was involved. They were from Weaverville and we also had a local architect that was right here from Asheville. We had a local designer from Asheville.

DJ: Who were they?

AW: Well, the local architect was John Rogers. The local designer was Catherine Long and the local contractor was H.M. Rice. So actually we made quite an impact for a couple of years on the construction and related industries, here in Asheville, by way of employing well, close to seventy-five people at one point.

DJ: And you had taken what had been a store, is that right? Ivey's Store?

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AW: Umm, no. There were three buildings. One owned by—well actually was Lipinsky's Department Store and I believe it was something before Ivey's, but it was Ivey's at a later date. But there was a—

DJ: Bon Marché?

AW: —department store—Bon Marché, right. Exactly, Bon Marché was on that corner and Mr. Lipinsky owned and built that building and there was a building next to that called the **Stern's** building and there was a building next to that called the Haywood building. And those three buildings added together to a lot in the back that was purchased from the Blomberg's—made up the project, that Haywood Street redevelopment worked on—renovated. Those three buildings were adjacent to each other and we worked on them as a unit.

DJ: And what was your original concept?

AW: The original concept was to have an indoor atrium anchored by a luxury business hotel at one end and be able to hold under one roof, a large array of different interests so that a shopper or business traveler could possibly utilize the downtown area in total and not have to go to an outlying mall. What we wanted to do was present an idea because at this time, of course our downtown was—they were leaving in droves. We were not having success with our marketing effort of downtown Asheville. And we hoped that a project that would kind of include a full scope of interests, both business and pleasure, would entice people to come downtown, not only for convenience, but also because of the history of the buildings and the beauty of the scenery and the streets. We also hoped that it would encourage other developers to follow suit and also to update and to do some redevelopment on adjacent buildings, which were then available. We had many open storefronts along Haywood and Battery Park at that time. [Phone ringing.] [Whispering.] Just let it ring.

DJ: Were you hoping to have this become again what it had been before the malls drew people out of the city?

AW: Well, in a way. You know, the people here that were in their sixties remember before the crash and Asheville was always the center of Western North Carolina. And these people who then were in their fifties and sixties often shopped here with their parents and had really memorable occasions in downtown Asheville, attached to not only the business community, but the shopping community. And these people has seen downtown become a series of vacant buildings with streets needing repair and vagrants populating. And they felt that it could again go back to being a vital part—or even the center of Western North Carolina. And yes, I think it was—it was a lot of people who believed in its resurgence as an important center. Although they all had a different idea of what that was. [Laughing.]

DJ: Did they hope to have stores comparable to the ones in the then active Asheville Mall and then of course we have the one in the Biltmore Mall since then. Did they hope to have women's clothing as Bon Marché had and men's haberdashery? Were they going to try to have the same sort of a thing that they had had in the past?

AW: No, I don't think they ever thought of really competing with the mall head on. What they perceived was that there was a more sophisticated type of person who was possibly doing business in Asheville or coming to Asheville to visit, who perceived the malls as sort of—how shall I say—umm, not very interesting because they were so homogeneous. They felt that the downtown area would not have the same stores as the mall. They would have very different stores and perhaps they would be owner operated and also perhaps they would have maybe some higher-end retail items and also some items that you might find in a more cosmopolitan city.

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DJ: Is that like Elizabeth's?

AW: I think like the Gilded Lily and like Elizabeth's and like the Chocolate Fetish. Yes, I think those are good examples of what they did have in mind. They even had a spa in mind, which came in and stayed for several years, which was also a bonus to business people downtown. Which I'm sorry to say is no longer in the Haywood Street project. But they wanted a vast variety in a small space.

DJ: And also the community wanted the arts and crafts, which they have.

SW: Right. After the building was complete—the three buildings were complete—and they were partially leased, the crafters from the other side of Haywood Street, leased part of the bottom of the Haywood building which I think has been very successful for them and for us, since the craft business is such an important part of Asheville's heritage. It just seemed right to have them in the building.

DJ: How did the hotel [Haywood Park Hotel & Promenade] make out?

AW: Well, the hotel basically was designed to be a businessman's hotel and to be located centrally for the business trade and also to have an excellent restaurant, which I believe it does have an excellent restaurant. It was slow to begin because our marketing started out very slow. That was for many different reasons,. The hotel was completed before most of the atrium was completed and we kind of wanted to wait until everything was finished to advertise it widely, but I think it has been successful. It has had a lot of competition with places like Richmond Hill [Richmond Hill Inn], which I don't think was expected at the beginning of the project, but which has influenced its marketing greatly.

DJ: You feel that Richmond Hill is pulling the same people that you're looking for?

AW: Well, it's the high-end business and leisure trade. However, their location is less suited to someone who is business minded. So I don't think it's identical, but I think there is quite a bit of overlap as far as the type of traveler who would stay at Richmond Hill or at the Haywood Park Hotel.

DJ: What kind of—number of people stay in the hotel now? What percentage of full rooms do they have?

AW: Oh I have no idea. I have not been associated with the development now in, oh, eight years. I hired a company, a management company, to come in and run it, while I was still associated with it.—while we were completing the construction. And at that time, I kept close tabs on that but at this point, I have no idea.

DJ: Tell me what was your function? How did you—how did you go about what you were doing?

AW: I'm not sure what—I'm not sure what [unintelligible]—

DJ: Well, I'm not sure that I understand exactly how you functioned with these people. Did you go out and find people who were interested in renting these areas after it was built?

AW: Right, oh yes. Leasing retail space was definitely part of my job. I leased the first lease in the atrium. It was to a fitness center, which was there for three years and very successful. I leased to the Gilded Lily, which has been there for seven years and is still doing well in that spot. We also had commercial real estate agents perspective [*sic*; means prospective] lessees, but I also combed Western North Carolina and even went into the Atlanta and Charlotte markets looking for suitable tenants. However, it's interesting who is drawn to a project like that. Because of the pink marble floors and the

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elevated **troft** ceiling with the indirect lighting, we got a lot of interest from people who were positively affected by the visuals. However understanding the marketing in Asheville was very different than marketing the same product in Atlanta or Charlotte. So although we had the physical amenities, without the market area, you know, there were many businesses that could not compete in Asheville, which would have been very successful in a larger metropolitan shopping area.

DJ: Can you give me an example?

AW: Oh yeah. Umm, an example would be something like Sharon Luggage. They have beautiful stores all over Charlotte and up until six months ago had no shop in all of Western North Carolina. And the reason they said that could not move into the atrium is because the statistics given to them—which shows how many people buy what in a square mile—weren't sufficient for them to make their bottom line. In other words, every single town has a ratio of sales per square foot. And because of Asheville's downtown area not having a high amount of housing and because many people who shop in downtown Asheville, live farther than ten miles away, our statistics as far as what numbers of people you need to come through your store to sell X amount of goods is quite high. And people who are used to marketing in a large metropolitan area like Atlanta or Charlotte would look at the numbers our chamber of commerce would give them and would say absolutely not. No way could we make a living in Asheville. But at the same time, we have such a different type of tourist trade that I think that there are many specialty shops that despite those rather low numbers, do very well.

Examples of them exist up and down Wall Street for example. Those type stores traditionally need to be in a market of one hundred and fifty to two hundred and fifty thousand people and yet they do quite well in Asheville, simply because they are so unique that they pull from an area much larger than they would say, in Atlanta. There's a shop called Rare Finds and quite often you'll run into people in Rare Finds that drive in from Marshall or from Bryson City or from Waynesville to pick up a gift. If that shop was in Atlanta, they probably wouldn't come farther than ten blocks. So those kinds of numbers are deceiving when you're looking at Asheville.

DJ: The chamber of commerce gives you this information so that you can further the business opportunities in the community?

AW: Well, anybody looking for a store, would go to the—anybody who was thinking about relocating here would go to the chamber of commerce and look at the numbers of people who buy here and what our sales are per month here and fit that into an equation that would determine whether or not, you know, they could relocate here. And that's just a common way of deciding if you're in the retail business.

DJ: How do they get their numbers?

AW: Well, there are several ways. I believe there is some sort of a retail census taken where you report via your sales tax, what your sales are. And this is added up, just the city retail, and city and country together. And it's also divided into different types of retail. Say soft goods would be separated from hard goods. These give you numbers and show you what sales are in Asheville, and it's per so many people. You know, I don't remember what the name of the division that actually does this, but I'm sure the chamber could give you that information. But it is really important to have done and have done well, if you're marketing retail space in a town like Asheville. It's crucial.

DJ: And you worked closely with the chamber of commerce?

AW: Oh yes. We worked closely with the chamber. The chamber used the hotel facilities quite a bit when it was brand new and I think even before it was completely finished. They often brought people into

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downtown who were looking at manufacturing space out in the county. Because they felt that it was a plus for relocating a factory or manufacturing plant to have a cultural center close by, just as it's important to have an airport nearby. People who are thinking about relocating—executives don't want to relocate them to a place where their top people will be unhappy. So selling downtown Asheville was important in the whole picture of improving our economic development picture.

DJ: Was there a marked population shift from the time you came in to today? Have you noticed?

AW: Well, umm, I'm not sure it's quite as significant as a shift. I think there are a few more people living downtown, which I like to see. There's more residential living space that is finished downtown. In the last ten years, there are some lofts that are available for rent and there are condominiums you can buy downtown and that was not the case twelve years ago. I think the Battery Park Hotel was about it twelve years ago. And it wasn't for your average middle class person; it was for retirees. So yes, the shift of people wanting to live downtown and young people wanting to live downtown, I think is a real positive one. But the shift that I think is not so positive is our workforce tending to prefer to live in the outlying areas of Asheville, rather than our neighborhoods that are close to downtown. I myself live in a neighborhood within five miles of the city center and it's very convenient to me, but I know many neighbors who have relocated in Fairview or Weaverville in the last ten years because they seem to prefer being farther from Asheville. And I just don't agree. I think it's great to be part of the community and part of the neighborhood.

DJ: Is this partly for tax purposes?

AW: It could be possibly be partially tax purposes. That certainly would lessen your tax burden to move to the county. And they say we'll lose some services if we do.

DJ: Many things happened after you finished your project. Can you tell some more about some things that were going on when you were working? You mentioned Pack Place not getting off the ground at that time.

AW: Yes, Pack Place had a **mired at a financial** woes back then. They have since of course done very well, and have had good leadership and I think excellent leasing. I think they turned that project to definite success now. It's certainly has helped anchor downtown, I think there have been several small spin-off projects that the Haywood project and Pack Place have also helped. These are smaller, sometime singly financed projects. But there are several of them downtown that seem to be doing well. The S & W, I understand, is supposed to be renovated. That was started once seven or eight years ago and then was abandoned. But it is a building well worth working on and utilizing fully again. It is very beautiful and has a lot of architectural significance for our town. Another one is the old Penny's building. I understand it's scheduled to go under redevelopment also. And the Flat Iron building has had somewhat of a facelift. And I think once someone has some success, it really—there's a very positive domino effect that can affect all of downtown and hopefully is going in that direction.

DJ: I'm glad you mentioned Wall Street, because I know they had a very difficult time, particularly right after their renovation—was disappointing to people. Can you talk about that?

AW: Well I think it was disappointing. There were a group of investors from Winston-Salem that had not done any project development and who were feeling their way along. I think there were many problems at the beginning, but I think they are beginning to be ironed out. And I find myself, it's a very attractive inviting shopping area now and seems to be well utilized. The parking lot there is certainly always full and that seems to me to be a good indication.

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DJ: Were you involved in any of the discussion about parking lot and parking space?

AW: A lot of that was happening while I was downtown. I owned a small shop and leased space from Wall Street for two years and at that time the parking lot on Wall Street was under construction. Both of the parking lots were pushed through really because of the city having the vision to realize that new businesses were going to be needing additional parking and that there was very little expansion space for any further parking lots without the addition of those two lots. Many people said that it would never work; people would never park in them. Well, of course now they are full all the time. But it is too hard to change people's patterns of driving and parking. And it has happened slowly, but I would say that the city—the city council that was in in the early—mid 80s—really pushed ahead with that as an important part of the redevelopment of downtown and, you know, I for one am glad they did because I think it is helping and definitely making a positive impact on the businesses that we have downtown now. Without those I don't think we would have the traffic and the increased leasing of the retail spaces that we have seen in the last three years. So, yes, that was a hard tax burden to bear, but I think it was well worth it.

DJ: You say you had a shop?

AW: I had a small shop, yes. I was a partner in a company that manufactured chocolates and we leased a space on Wall Street. In fact, I believe we were the second shop to open on Wall Street and that was in 1986.

DJ: There weren't many people coming down Wall Street at that time.

AW: Well, most people couldn't come down there because of the construction on the street. Also the street went the opposite way, which didn't help because it made it very difficult for people to find Wall Street. And during the two years that the street went the other direction, we were there and, you know, floundered because of lack of pedestrian traffic and no—virtually no vehicular traffic.

DJ: Tell me about the advertising. I've been very interested in what Biltmore is doing in advertising their area. Was there a push—I asked you before we got on tape about Leslie Anderson and you said that this was a new project after you finished. Can you tell me anything about the downtown coordinator and how this development—planning development—took place—

AW: Well, there was a new group, umm, called the downtown development association [Asheville Downtown Association], of which I was on the original board and our main thrust was to market Asheville more successfully. And Leslie Anderson was a very important part of that push. She was also on the board of the downtown association and I believe had also been involved with the downtown commission prior to that—who were basically store owners. And who tried to have the city understand the retailers' point of view basically. And Leslie's new position as downtown development coordinator was very helpful to the retailers and I believe she has done an excellent job in helping to market all of the downtown Asheville area.

DJ: She was doing parks and recreation up to '86.

AW: I believe that's correct. I don't believe there was a downtown development coordinator position until maybe '86 or even '87—sometime in there.

DJ: And so what—I see that Light Up Your Holiday Festival and then that you had the Belle Chere—does that Belle Chere come under that also?

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AW: Yes, uh-huh. Downtown development has several regular holiday functions that they coordinate and—

DJ: How about the Oktoberfest?

AW: Oktoberfest is another one. I believe there are four now. You mentioned three of them Dottie and—

DJ: All I can think of is—

AW: —I'm not sure I can think of the fourth one.

DJ: —is the gumbo, but I think that's the—

AW: I don't—

DJ: —black community.

AW: Yes, I don't believe that's under the auspices of downtown development, but I believe there are four—

DJ: [Unintelligible.] parade.

AW: They have the Santa Claus parade, but I'm not sure that counts. [Laughing.] But we've hit on three of them, the Oktoberfest is definitely one, Bele Chere is one and Light Up Your Holidays. And those three have been designed to bring people downtown and to help the retailers. And I believe that they are successful and I think we need to keep doing them. I don't believe we are there yet. I think we've just begun.

DJ: And you indicated it took a long time to have people turn their thinking around, so you've seen that change since you've been here.

AW: Well, I don't believe the majority of people who live in Biltmore Forest shop downtown in Asheville. I still believe that people are going to the malls more than they're coming downtown. But I believe there is a group of visitors—tourists—as well as people who live right here in Asheville, that prefer to have something a little different and prefer to have a little more personal treatment when they shop. And I believe those types of consumers will always head to the downtown in spite of the convenience and all of the different items that are offered at the mall.

DJ: One thing we didn't touch on is the antique appeal. Where on Lexington Street the—one shop after the other specializing in antiques. That draws a group too doesn't it?

AW: Well, do you know, I think they do. I think they have probably antique hunters that stop in Asheville solely because of our Lexington Avenue shops. And apparently they have had much success marketing their shops together, which I think is wonderful. I feel like that is an important aspect to downtown shopping and one that we really should be proud of because I feel like they have done a lot to market themselves and probably have, you know, [break in tape unintelligible] much success due to their marketing themselves on their own as a group.

DJ: Do you feel that the sports interest is a focal point in the city?

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AW: Well, I'm not sure. I love going to McCormick Field and I really loved it when it was old and looked like it did for years and years. I have to say I don't think our civic center [Asheville Civic Center] is a large enough facility to make a huge impact long-term on Asheville, so I'm not sure that basketball actually helps the tourism that much except for one weekend a year. But I believe that that's an aspect of Asheville that we can develop and should develop.

DJ: There are a number of fairs that are held there. There was a gun fair last week and then there are the fairs for crafts, various craft groups have fairs—the—is it homeowner's fair where people come and show their ware, well like **Paydes**?

AW: There's a big home show—

DJ: A home show.

SW: —that's there. And I know lots of people who come from all of Western North Carolina to go to that. I feel like there are lots of different offerings that the civic center does that can be tied in more closely with downtown Asheville. I think the merchants could play off of these types of events and possibly hold people who had planned to come in for one day, over for a weekend or two or three days. But we need to work on coordinating the events at the civic center with what's going on downtown.

DJ: How would that be done, through Leslie Anderson's office?

AW: Well, perhaps. It just—it seems like when the hotel was getting up and running, quite often we'd find out something was going to happen and didn't have time to coordinate our efforts so to appeal to those groups. I just feel like there is a market there that comes only to the civic center. And when the guild fair is in town or when the circus is in town, I just think that the whole town itself could employ some marketing so to take those people to more places than just the civic center and then back on the interstate home.

DJ: We haven't talked about the dancing and music. That's always been a big factor in the South. Do you feel that that's been something that's drawn people here?

SW: Oh yes, for its size, Asheville is quite a cultural center. Towns like Bryson City and Maggie Valley and Waynesville—I think they really depend on the Asheville art connection to introduce some culture into their lives. Because although Asheville is small, we do have many ballets. We do have an excellent symphony. We do have an excellent choral society and you know, in my travels, there aren't many cities this size that have all the cultural offerings that we have. I think we are very fortunate.

[Break in tape.]

DJ: Alice, you and I have had a lot of fun talking, but you've got to get back to work, so while you're doing your wreath, I want to hear about fishing, which is the way you started at the very beginning. You wanted to come here to fish.

AW: Right. Right. Asheville represented to me the place where I could do it all. I would have beautiful clean water to fish in and lots of brookies that were waiting for me under overhangs. So I came to Asheville thinking I was going to fish every stream in Western North Carolina. And after the Haywood Street project, unfortunately I got involved right away with another business venture. But when that wound down, I did fish quite a bit. I started looking for wild brook trout and I traveled around Western North Carolina fishing all size streams and rivers and creeks. And going up to the headwaters, or as far as

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I could go through the tangle of underbrush, trying to locate the wild elusive brook trout, which is my favorite thing to catch.

Now, I will take a rainbow [trout] but I won't take him on a barbed hook because I always want to turn him back in because I feel like a rainbow in North Carolina is almost surely a hatchery fish and catching fish that were raised in a hatchery is a little like killing a cow in a field and calling it sport, to me. So although I'll hook an occasional rainbow, they usually go directly back in. Now, wild brookies, sometimes I turn them back in, but sometimes I have to keep them, of course, only if they're legal limit. But they're such fun to catch because they're so smart. And most of the fun isn't in pulling them out of the water. It's in trying to outsmart them before they get hooked. But pulling them in, that can be a lot of fun too. A friend of mine asked me the other night, she said, "Why would you go to such trouble and such extent,"—cause a lot of time I have to hike five miles in to get to a stream with wild trout in it—she said, "Why would you do that for something that's eight inches long?" And I laughed, cause I guess it does sound crazy to a lot of people, because eight inches, well, to some people's way of thinking, that's not a very big fish. But, in the brookies, it is a big fish and it really is just as exciting as pulling in a sailfish out in the ocean. And the reason it's so exciting is that you use such light tackle that it's just as likely that an eight inch brook trout will get away from as it would be to have a sailfish get away from you in the ocean. So landing a little brook trout on a light fly rod and a dry fly, takes just as much skill and really gives you just as much excitement as a sailfish, I think. But then I have to confess I've never landed a sailfish, but I can't imagine it being any more exciting than a brook trout. A lot of the natives around here have funny ways of going about catching brook trout and I have absorbed some of their knowledge in the past ten years. But a lot of the things I started out doing, I still do.

And the snowbird area is one of my very favorites. If I want to go fishing and not run into one other fisherman on the whole trip, that's where I head. Sometimes up to Big Snowbird, but more than likely, I go to Little Snowbird. There are several places closer to Asheville I fish too. But of course I wouldn't want to tell you those, cause you might find your way over there.

DJ: And how is the water?

AW: Oooh, up on Snowbird, it's always cold and clear. Different times of year, it's a little different as far as how strong the current is or how deep the holes are or how the eddies kind of come out on the sides. That depends on the time of year and also how much rain we've had. I prefer a small stream with nice overhang and lots of holes in it. I don't even mind brush around the sides because hiding from trout is an important aspect of trout fishing and some of those creeks I fished out west, well they don't have any brush to hide in, so that really hurts your ability to sneak when trout are looking up. And they do look out of that creek and they see you coming. So part of fishing around here is keeping your head low and staying behind the bushes.

DJ: Have you found the water has changed?

AW: Well, where I fish, it really hasn't. Now it's gotten lower this year and I have seen years when it's been just about as low as this year. But if you mean pollution, oh no, not where I go. There's not any more pollution up where I go. But now Davidson River, that's an area that's changed a lot. You get all kinds of fisherman in there now, Twelve years ago, I could go to the Davidson River and not see but one fisherman all day. But I think that's more to do with the popularity of trout fishing rather than the pollutants that go in.

DJ: Is there a club? Do you have friends that do the same thing?

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AW: Oh yeah. There are lots of clubs. Mostly they are not called fishing clubs. One that I encourage everybody to enjoy is Trout Unlimited. Of course that's a national organization. In fact now I think it's even an international organization. But that supports clean water and keeping our streams in good condition so that they can support the trout that everybody enjoy fishing. There are a lot other groups that help keep the streams clean, but I think Trout Unlimited probably does the best job in this area.

DJ: Do you ever meet?

AW: Well, I haven't been to a Trout Unlimited meeting lately, but I went for years. Every town I lived in, I always found a Trout Unlimited club and usually joined and supported their activities. They're fun because they keep you abreast of the new laws and they help in preventing pollution. They also help educate our youth to the fun of trout fishing, so there's always somebody that's coming up that's going to protect our water resources.

DJ: Is there some group here that you know about?

AW: There's a good Trout Unlimited group in Asheville. And they're five or six different chapters throughout Western North Carolina.

DJ: You won't tell anybody where your favorite hole is?

AW: No, I told you I fish the Little Snowbird River. You can go look that up on any Forest Service map.

DJ: I'm going to turn the tape over, just one second.

End Side A, Tape 1
Begin Side B, Tape 1

AW: —what I fix right now. I understand now we're buying water from Hendersonville and I thought at one time, we had much better water resources than Hendersonville, but apparently that's the not the case any longer. I am just concerned that the amount of industry that has moved into Asheville in the last ten years has really utilized more of our city water than we have been told or had planned for and as a result, it seems that both of our water sources are very, very low at this time. And I would just like to see them holding off on development that would use our water for industry until our household water gets the help it needs. I feel like improving our water system should have the end result of bringing in more industry. The bleacheries and the dyeing companies say that the water that we have now is not suitable or their operations. Well it's also not even suitable for home needs right now. So I feel like we need to just hold off on letting any more companies in who use city water until we can get an adequate supply for the residents.

DJ: How is the chamber of commerce handling this?

AW: Do you know, I have no idea. In fact I don't know that the chamber has any input into our water sources. You know, I believe that this was something totally separate from our economic development but yet probably should have been tied in with our economic development ten or fifteen years ago.

DJ: Well, the chamber of commerce is still trying to bring in more industry.

AW: Well, do you know, I'm not so sure that industry that needs large quantities of water are being approached now because our water system is so overused and in such short supply. I certainly hope, at

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any rate, that they're not enticing industry that will need lots of water until we can figure out this problem. Because we certainly have not planned ahead for our needs.

DJ: But the water problem goes back to the Depression period. When, I understand, Asheville was financing its running on the water resources from the residents.

AW: Well, I'm not aware of that. That probably was before my time, but I had not heard that. But I am not surprised.

DJ: And therefore, they didn't have the money to put back into adequate piping and maintenance.

AW: Well, that sounds right because the percent of leakage is tremendous in this town. That's basically the money has not been spent on new pipes or on developing new water sources. And it—that's understandable. This is something we've neglected. It's again a problem with the infrastructure that our city is now dealing with after years of neglect. I hope they get it fixed.

DJ: What are people doing to protect themselves as householders?

AW: Well, I used filtered water now. I don't buy it because I think that's environmentally unsound to have all these plastic containers. So I filter my own water in my own home and I know several other people who live in my neighborhood, now use water filters, if not for bathing and cooking, at least for drinking. And I would recommend that highly. But of course our water bills are high enough so that we should not have to be doing that, I don't feel. But that's the only alternative we have right now, where it's drinking muddy water.

DJ: And the filters are put in commercially and changed periodically?

AW: I think there are several different kinds. Some companies will do it for you, but there are some you can buy off the shelf and hook up as an individual, just so you don't have to try drink muddy water. But I think the best kind are probably commercially installed in your home.

DJ: We distill ours.

AW: Well, that's interesting. I would like to find out more about distilling it. Because of course—

DJ: Sears for a hundred dollars and what it does is to give you steam in your heat—in your house in the winter time so that you also have a softening of the air.

AW: Well that sounds like a good alternative. I'll look into that. I do have a humidifier in my house that uses water, but it's stopped up so often because of the sediment in our city water that I find not only is my drinking water dirty, but also the humidifier is not working properly in my house.

DJ: Well, this acts both ways.

AW: Sounds like a good alternative. I'll look into that.

DJ: And we had also talked a bit about the discussion about enlarging Broadway.

AW: Right.

DJ: You have some observations and comments about that that are very important.

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AW: Well I just feel like we're allowing DOT [Department of Transportation] to decide the fate of our neighborhoods and by that I mean, Broadway is in a residential area. There are a lot of people who use Broadway to walk to town. We need a corridor. We don't need to only cater to cars. We also need to cater to people. And I feel like Merrimon is a mess because we have speeding cars. We have no walkways in many places on Merrimon and no bicycle paths. If they four lane Broadway, we're going to have another problem exactly like Merrimon, just four blocks away. Not only is it not serving our pedestrian traffic and our bicycle traffic, but it's encouraging people to get in their cars to make short trips. One of the advantages of living in a small town is to be able to get to a local business or to walk to the post office or to mail a letter or to see a friend without having to use a car. But that's not the case in most neighborhoods surrounding Asheville. Because of no sidewalks or very poor sidewalks or no bicycle paths, we are forced to use our cars. So we might as well live out in the county, if we're not able to use our neighborhood sidewalks. And there are no sidewalks planned as DOT has Broadway drawn and I am very much against it.

DJ: You told me about a meeting that you went to and you put yellow ribbons around the trees. Can you tell me about that?

AW: Oh yes. We have a Broadway task force that is asking DOT and the city council to take another look at Broadway. By another look, we mean that we feel an alternative plan to four laning Broadway with a big median strip, as DOT has it planned, would be much to everyone's advantage. Not only just to the neighborhood folks, but also to the downtown merchants who would benefit from having a corridor that would link UNCA [University of North Carolina Asheville] to downtown.

AW: And UNCA [**unintelligible**].

AW: Well, I'm not sure. I'm not UNCA, but I believe the board of trustees for UNCA have elected to back DOT's particular plan. And I think because they feel like four laning Broadway, they'll have a cleaner corridor into down—from downtown into campus. Which means doing away with many of the older dilapidated residences along Broadway. And I just think there is a better way to deal with those problems than buying them with taxpayer's money and then cementing over them. Just as I feel there is a better way to handle the trees than cutting them down. And according to this plan the DOT has, we would have to cut down seven acres of mature trees along Broadway, which I am equally against as much as the four laning itself.

DJ: There was some discussion of having a park there. Have you been involved in that?

AW: Yes I have. There is a plan afoot to offer an alternative plan to DOT that would include a greenway. Many cities have found that development along a greenway is financially profitable and also scenic and creates a very livable environment for residents. If the North Carolina state planning department finishes their plan for Broadway—which is an alternate to the DOT's plan—I believe they have in their plan, a small greenway or strip park which would act like a cohesive element of the neighborhood. A place where people could get out and ride their bikes and push baby carriages and walk their dogs and help in the feeling of a neighborhood, rather than a place where it is not safe to get outside of your car.

DJ: You indicated too that this would be one more division for Montford—

AW: Yes.

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DJ: —having a rushing traffic go by. Are you at all involved with Montford? Do you have any background on Montford experiences?

AW: Well I lived in Montford when I first moved here and I feel like the historical aspect is going to be important to Asheville over the long run. They've already suffered so many setbacks. Nineteen twenty-three [U.S. Route 19 and U.S. Route 23] somewhat isolated the neighborhood from the west. It kept them from the river. You obviously can't walk or bicycle across nineteen twenty-three and then Interstate 240 cut them off again, which made them very separate from downtown. Made it impossible to get from their neighborhood to downtown. Again, it's hard to bicycle or walk your dog or push a baby carriage downtown from Montford because of 240. Now if we isolate them again with a big four-lane corridor, I really think we've just about killed off that neighborhood.

DJ: The neighborhood seems to be in a new transition. Are you familiar with what's going on there?

AW: Well, I think people have liked to—have thought of Montford as being in transition for fifteen years. And I do think that there are more people who are trying to rehabilitate the older homes and the architecturally significant homes in the area. And I'm glad to see it but I feel like it's going to need more help than just a sprinkling of architecturally sensitive homeowners. It's going to need some help from our city planning department. And by that I mean ways to make the streets more walkable, the lighting more attractive and also help in granting low-income folks with loans so that they can fix up the existing houses.

DJ: And perhaps a few stores so that they can feel it was a neighborhood?

AW: Right, Oh yeah, yeah. If people are going to live there, they certainly would like it if there were some commercial business establishments that they could walk to. Yeah. The problems there are deep and won't be taken care of in one or two years. But I feel like there is an interest in keeping Montford livable and I really think the neighborhood councils, which have been very strong in other areas, will join in on this greenway idea and help us with alternate plan for Broadway.

DJ: What overall feeling do you have having lived in Asheville now, with the experiences you had before you came here, of the direction that's being taken and the progress that's been made of things that you would like to see in the future?

AW: Well I like the idea that the downtown area has banded together and is offering interesting events that bring in people from outside the area. I think that's going to be important to the health of the downtown businesses. But I think the most important thing that has been helping is to help the individual neighborhoods. Because after all, even though we are a small town, first we're in neighborhoods. And I am one of those people who would like to patronize the people who do business right where I live. And I myself would gladly walk down to Merrimon and have a sandwich at Dennis's Deli and do my banking and my post office visits right here in my own neighborhood if access were available. I think many other people would do it too if access were available. So I think we need to quit walling off our neighborhoods and turning them into places for cars and start treating them like places for people.

DJ: Do you think that Pack Square will ever become people-compatible?

AW: Oh yes, I hope so. I heard someone in their 70s talk to me yesterday and they said the beginning of the end for Asheville was when they made that huge road around Pack Square. And I never thought of it because they've thought that by three-laning or four-laning and one waying College and Patton Street to make the roads around Pack Square and city-county plaza wider and more accessible to more vehicles was such a positive thing. And this person laughed and said, "No. People used to congregate down there

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and walk before they made those roads so wide.” So it’s funny that the same thing that she said ruined our downtown area thirty-five years ago is basically still taking place today. So either we haven’t learned very much or we have very divergent ideas about what make a livable downtown.

DJ: What about the I.M. Pei building?

AW: Well, I think it’s absolutely beautiful. I thrive on “vive la différence” and it certainly is different. But I think it’s very fitting and I don’t think that we should stay in the past and I don’t believe there’s only one kind of architecture that is suited to Asheville. I like to see different types of architecture and I really don’t mind really the difference between the large buildings that are facing Pack Square. I think it adds actually to the ambience of downtown Asheville and shows that we’re not only a city with roots in the 20s but also a city with roots in the 70s and 80s.

DJ: [Unintelligible.] What haven’t I asked you?

AW: I don’t know, I think everything! Maybe my mother’s maiden name?

DJ: She was a lovely lady.

AW: That’s right, you knew her didn’t you?

DJ: Yes, I did indeed.

AW: I had forgotten you had met her.

DJ: And you are very special lady. Thank you. I know your time is short but I’ve enjoyed every minute of it—

AW: Yes.

DJ: —and I will give you one of these tapes.

END OF TAPE