

Interview with Pat Laursen for the YWCA of Asheville 100 Years Oral
History Project by Sarah Judson
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LAURSEN: What drew me to the Y was a job when I was in college. I had a cousin who worked at the Fort Worth YWCA, in Fort Worth, Texas. And she was very active there. And I was living with her and her mother while I went to school and trying to pay my own way. It was a private school, Methodist. And she said--. I was clerking at a dime store, running a cash register. And she said there's a part-time job running the Y if you're interested. So I went for an interview and took the job part-time as Y Teen director. And it was a thirty-hour a week job which was--. And I was carrying a full load in college. So it was a long day. And I took the courses in college that would let me get through it and so I could go to work.

And I liked the Y. I liked my boss who had been working at the Y there for a long, long time. She became a good friend. And when I graduated I decided--. I had really wanted to go into the ministry and to work with people. And, of course, the Methodist church didn't ordain women then. So I decided if I was going to do social work of any sort rather than through the church I would do it through the YW because I knew it and I liked it.

And, so then you sent your papers to the national board in New York City to get a job. You filled out all these papers. They went up there. They looked--. People that needed employees sent their requests there with job descriptions and they matched you. And so they would send then, to the person who was applying for a job, the

places that there might be a fit for them. And they sent my papers to those YWs. And that's the way it was done for years. It's not done that way anymore. They hire locally not out of the national pool.

One of the things I liked about the Y in Forth Worth is that we did an awful lot with the branch Y there, the African American community. There's a lot of interaction because my boss was interested in that.

JUDSON: Do you mind if I ask the years we're talking about?

PL: We're talking about from '49. It started in 1949. And I graduated from college in '53. So those were that, those years.

Then, because of that interest, as I looked at jobs I found one I really liked in Newport News, Virginia, because I would have been the Y Teen director for both branches. They had a foot in both communities. And, I took that job.

And then they wrote me about a month later when I was--you know that's when I graduated and the job wouldn't start till August--and said that the United Way--at that time it was called Community Chest--did not fund the position full-time. It would be a part-time. Well, I had school loans to pay back. I would not take a part-time job. So, I wrote New York and said the job I'd accepted has fallen through, what else is available.

And I'd decided at that time that whoever approached me first would be the job I would take. I didn't care where it was in the United States. So, it was in Asheville, North Carolina. And I'd never heard of Asheville. So, that, mid-July that year I got on a bus with all my worldly possessions and moved to Asheville to start my job as Y Teen director at the Asheville Y.

Eunice Adams was the executive director. Julia Allison was the bookkeeper. Rowana Green was in charge of the swimming program. And her assistant was Betty. And it took me a long time to come up with her name, but it was, I think it was Cocke, C-O-C-K-E. It might have been Locke, but I believe it was C-O-C-K-E. And she was local. Her family had lived in, in Asheville for years.

And, Dorothy Cowden came that same year that I came in '53 as health and recreation director. I don't know who had been there before her. But, Dot came that year. We were the two new kids on the blocks. And, eventually, we both got apartments and, eventually, shared an apartment to cut expenses.

Arnie Johnson was the Y Teen director at the Phyllis Wheatley branch which was there by where the tunnel is, above the tunnel, where the cut is. And it's up on that hill. And Willie, I think--. I don't know what her first name was, whether it was Wilhemina or what, but everybody called her Willie Moore, was the executive director there.

And, we did a lot with--. Arnie and I did a lot of things together. We were able--. We liked each other. We became good friends. And, on my Y Teen committee at that time it was an interesting mix of people.

One was Lee Shandler, whose husband Aaron Shandler, owned a grocery store here. And her brother-in-law, Joe Shandler, was an optometrist in town. And they were, the Shandlers, were very active in the community and into the social work and served on a lot of committees. And it was interesting, because they were of the Jewish

faith and she was on my Y Teen committee at the YWCA. But it was that kind of Y even then.

SJ: Very progressive.

PL: Very progressive. And, the other person that kept coming in and out of my life that was on my committee then was, Joan Day Bebe who taught at Allen School. And I don't know if you know about Allen School. But she was on a [unclear] and she was also on my committee. Where to go from here?

SJ: Well, you know--. Do you mind if I ask--

PL: No, no. You want to ask some questions now?

SJ: Well, I do because you've just given me so much interesting information. I want to, I want to just go back a little bit in time to your time in college and when you started working at the Y. What kinds of activities did you do?

PL: We had Y Teen Club in the, in the schools. But, mainly, my job was after school events that we did in the, at the Y, in the gym and that sort of thing, recreation. I worked with Saturday program, games, that sort of thing. Teaching classes. Ceramics. I taught ceramics. We made jewelry, copper tooling. These are skills I had to learn, because I didn't have them, so I could teach them. And then we had weekend camps for the Y Teen groups. We had a camp there and we took them out there for the weekends for recreation and hiking and cookouts and that sort of thing. And then we did a summer program for them, what we called day camp, at the Y and then resident camp away from the Y. So that was the sort of programs we did. Educational programs. We did not as much there as Arnie and I did here with mixing the

group but we did enough of it that there was a good rapport between the two branches.

SJ: Well, you know, it's really interesting that you bring that up because, of course, we're really interested in that. But, also, it seems like the Ys in the 1950s and the 1960s really are places where inter-racial activism is taking place.

PL: It was, it was. And, and it was because--. That's another story.

SJ: You can go there if you want.

PL: No, no, that's all right. I'll get there. It was because those of us who were working at the Y had grown up wanting to do social work. And we didn't care, you know, we just liked people. It was a different--. Things were just not as structured or--. I don't know.

And, of course, you see, I was from Texas. I was in the south. You'd have thought there would have been--. And there was a lot of racial overtones. And some way in me it was never there. It was never there in my family. And my family was from Texas and Oklahoma and Indiana. But it just wasn't there. It wasn't--. We didn't see color, you know. And I was blessed because I grew up with that gift.

And therein lies where we need to be raising our children now. But, my children grew up that way. They don't see color. But, then they grew up at Warren Wilson College on campus and we had all colors and sizes and shapes and people from different countries, and African American. And we're just one body, you know, we went to church together. We did everything together. So, I was lucky that way. But those are the kinds of things we did. It's what you do at any Y, after school activities, that sort of thing.

SJ: And, so when you came to Asheville you started to do some of the same work but then made deeper connections in the black community and--

PL: Um-hmm. One of the first doctors I ever went to here was down on Eagle Street. His wife was on the board at the YW, Phyllis Wheatley branch. And I needed a physical because I was taking a group of Y Teens to camp out near Brevard for a week. And, in order to do that I had to have a physical. So, I went to him. So I just, I think that what Arnie Johnson and I did is we were friends and maybe we did things together with our Y Teens probably before other Ys were doing it throughout the state.

SJ: How did the kids, how did the kids get along?

PL: They didn't--. You know--. If we didn't make a big deal out of it, they didn't make a big deal out of it. Now there weren't a lot of things we did together. But there were--. We would get our officers all together, you know--

SJ: [Unclear]

PL: Huh?

SJ: [Unclear]

PL: No, no. We didn't do anything social, nothing social. I did dances, yes, but I did them for my Y Teens and she did them for hers. And, of course, they were right across the school from Allen High School so they had a lot of interaction there. And that was an integrated staff at that time at Allen School. So, they played, those girls played basketball and they played the students from Warren Wilson which was at that time probably all white. So, those things were happening

in the fifties without people publicizing it or making a big deal out of it.

So, she went on from here to Chicago. She's a few years older than I. But she never came back. I never saw her again. We corresponded but I never saw her again after she went up there. But she was from here and I'm sure she probably still has relatives here but I wouldn't know who they were.

SJ: Well, the kind of welfare work that the YWCA did and does is really important for the community. Is there a difference between what the Y was doing in the fifties and sixties and what it does now?

PL: I think so.

SJ: Can you see a difference? What's the difference and what are some of them?

PL: Well, the difference--. Of course, I've not been involved with the Y in recent years. When I left I left, you know. I think it's, our stuff is that I did that when I retired from Warren Wilson, too. I was the alumni director there for thirty-five years. When I left--. I live right on the edge of campus. We overlook the campus. But I rarely ever go on because I don't think it's fair, you know.

I had been at the Y in Asheville and worked hard. Had friends there. A lot of my friends left about the same time or before I did. The staff was changing. Elizabeth Kline, whose husband taught at Warren Wilson, took my job at the, at the YW. So I had that connection. I stayed in touch that way. My mother-in-law used to go there and cook for family night meals. And so there was a tie there. I just didn't go back very often. Joe Dutton, whose husband was on the faculty at Warren Wilson, because the executive director there. So,

you know, I had a connection to her. So there was a connection but I never went back. So, I really don't know--. I know that their programs changed when the, they moved into the new building. And the lady they hired--I can't think of what her name now--had no Y experience. So I think there were some kind of rough times there. They were still big into swimming and exercise and all that end of it.

Their programs--. About that time the Buncombe County Board of Education and City Schools said no more Y Teen clubs, no more clubs in the schools. I mean we could not meet in the school building. So that program changed. So there were just a lot of things happening at that time that caused the YW to change, I think, in their direction and their emphasis. But, as I say, I didn't stay in touch enough to know.

I think that they were still very much into social programs much more than the YM. The YMs had always been health and recreation. And they did have a residence hall as we had on Grove Street. So young men lived at the YM. Young women lived at the YW.

And one of the stipulations of Morehead House which was where the women lived--. The person--. This is my understanding--. I could have it wrong. But it's my understanding that the people who gave the money for that residence, the money was tied up such that we couldn't have an integrated residence there. So it was at that time, I think, they closed the residence and merged the two YWs and built the building on French Broad. That was all--. That all happened after I left.

SJ: About the Grove Street residence hall, who lived there?

PL: Women who worked in Asheville, single women. I couldn't live there because I worked there and they wouldn't let me. I stayed there the first month while I was looking for a place. But I could not live there because it was too close to work. They didn't think that was smart, which was probably right. So people like me doing social work teaching secretaries. There was a dining room in the basement where they could get meals. And, so, so it was a nice, it was a nice thing. A lot of Ys at that time had residences. And a lot of YMs did, too.

But, the Y Teen program was my love here. And I ran the day camp, the summer day camp for kids so they'd have something to do in the summer. Taught classes, sewing and copper tooling and enameling and all that sort of stuff if there was a need and people wanted it.

While I was there they added a staff person to do part-time. Eunice Adams was the director when I came. And when she retired Eileen Murrer came. And at that time, they added a part-time person to do programs for young married women. And that was Adele Holt who's a name you probably know. She's my husband's cousin. Holly Note met her and knew her and interviewed her. She had been--. She had worked for the Y for years in New York and [inaudible] and had been on the national staff of the YW and had--. She and her husband had been in Gotham for the Quaker unit and they had retired back here. Built a little house and wanted to stay here. And then he got he and his father to go to New York to act. And so she went back to New York to--. She went back to New York and took a job at the Y again in New York, so--. But, she worked here with young mothers and that, that group part-time and shared my office.

The--. I was trying to think of what else we added at that time. That was about the only big jump that we made in staffing. And I can't remember when Miss Adams retired and when Miss Murrer came. That would be on the record somewhere I'm sure.

SJ: Yeah. Right.

PL: The other person that--. Well, I have a long list of people that I've kept up with, that I worked with at the Y and I'll give you a copy of that. I gave it to Sallie. Is that her name?

SJ: Yeah.

PL: For her to contact them to talk to them. And you should have it too, I would think. Dot Cowden eventually moved away from here and then moved back here and taught school down here on Maryland Avenue at--. What is that? That's not Newton. It's right there on the corner across from Brooks' House, a big school--

SJ: That's Claxton.

PL: Claxton, yeah. She taught there until she retired. And she was out there. And Chandler Hurst taught swimming with the help of [inaudible]. She now lives in Florida and comes up occasionally. She and I have--. She and I were roommates for awhile. Dot and I were roommates for awhile. Anybody that came we usually were roommates because we couldn't afford to, to not be, you know--

SJ: Right.

PL: Yeah. So, Barbara Scoonover-Pittman lived in Yazoo City. She went on from here to work for--. Well, she worked for the Red Cross and then she went to work for the Y and worked out of New York and worked, was on the national board, YMCA board for awhile.

SJ: So, what was it like being a young, single woman in Asheville? Was it a fun town? Did you have a nice time?

PL: It was a nice town. There were a lot of young people. We started at the YW. One of the things we started--. And I have a list of those people, too. If y'all--. Whatever you do for your hundredth I'll try to get a hold of them. They still live here.

We started what we called a co-ed club. And we started it with the YMCA with their guys who lived in their residence and gals who lived in ours, and those of us who were single. And we met on Wednesday nights. And we danced and we played ping-pong and we played cards and we shot basketball and, you know. And then occasionally we'd have a picnic. And I did not keep a list of those people. But Charlie Grimes, who is the [inaudible] evidently did.

And this is the deviation. You'll probably want to delete this from your tape. My husband had a heart attack last July. And he's doing great. And he's going to Heart Path. He's the person who--. I was the one who should have because I eat wrong and I'm overweight. He exercised. And, you know, genetics have a lot to do with it.

But anyway, he started going to Heart Path and one of the first people--. I went with him. I drove him at first. And one of the first people I saw there was Charles Grimes. And we recognized each other. And he had known Ernst through the Cattleman's Association because he owns cows and that sort of thing. And they had played ball against each other at Christ School.

I got to talking to him and he said, you know, I was sorting out stuff the other day and I found a list of people that you gave me of names and phone numbers of the co-ed club so that I could call them

to remind them about things we were doing. So he made me a copy. So I have that. So I'll get a copy of that to y'all, too. It's a little piece of history that's probably not filed anywhere except in his, you know, box. And, but I thought it was strange that he had found it about the time that we saw each other again at Heart Path, you know, in Asheville. So that's a group of people.

And it was a large group, a large group. And we had some fun times and we raised money and did things for, you know, that sort of thing, too. The YM sort of pulled out. It was not their thing. So, those of us at the YW sort of ran it. It was still going when I left. How long it survived I don't know.

There were a lot of--. There are a lot of people that were single at the time that stayed here and married and lived here. And some of the people met their spouses through that group. Interesting. So, but that was the sort of thing we did then. It was strictly for the health and well being of the social person that you are.

SJ: Did y'all operate any kind of special services to poor women or working women?

PL: I'm sure they did but it wasn't in my department.

SJ: It was a different department.

PL: Different department. We never--. Well, I started to say, yeah, we had daycare.

SJ: Well, that's important.

PL: Yeah. And, you know, that sort of thing. We had--. We didn't call it daycare. We called it after school programs, you know. But it was for those women whose kids got out of school and didn't have a place to go until mom got off work. So, but that was, a lot of that was done

through the [unclear] director rather than the Y Teen director. My job was really to work with teenagers.

SJ: Well, now, did you see a difference in the teenagers in the 1960s and early seventies? Like, from when you began--

PL: Yes. Yeah, I'll say this--. And then I went over here to work at a college. You know I worked in the public schools for awhile and then I worked in the--. So, yes. The teenagers were more mature then than they are now. And that's hard to explain. But they had more responsibilities at home. They were expected to participate in family things and, and, and work, you know. Now, you don't even have to take out the garbage. You just put it down a garbage disposal. So there--. That's just an example.

And when I say they were more mature, they were more mature in their attitudes toward life, I think, because they hadn't had everything given to them. Now, they weren't as knowledgeable about the world and a lot of things because I think of the teenagers today and t. v. and, and everybody's got their own telephone, own cell phone, you know, computers, the whole nine yards. So their information-wise, world-wise there's more acceptable to them. But they don't know as much about history.

SJ: That's true. Well, I have a question about the Y Teens. And this might be an inappropriate question, so you'll have to slap me if it is. But, did y'all have any issues with teen pregnancy and dealing with issues of birth control and things like that. Did that ever come up?

PL: No. We never did that. I never--. We had programs. We had people to come and speak to them about, you know, their, what we would call now, their sexuality, and what was proper and what was improper,

but we didn't do an awful lot of work with--. Now, we would refer them. There were agencies in town that did that so we would refer them if there was a need. But, you know, by and large, as I remember back, I don't think I ever had but one or two Y Teens that came to me and said I have a problem. Mainly, at that stage, at that age, and that era, if they got pregnant they had the baby and somebody in the family took care of it.

SJ: And then weren't there also a lot of homes for unwed mothers in Asheville then?

PL: Yes. That's what I started to say. There were not a lot but there were some.

SJ: Quite a few.

PL: Where they could go and have their baby and, and if they wanted to keep it then that was fine. But, a lot of them--. I think we had more people giving them up for adoption at that point.

SJ: This doesn't really have anything to do with the Y. But it's a question that I've wondered about. I was wondering why there were quite a few homes for unwed mothers in Asheville. It seems like there were at least three or four. Is that something that you know anything about? Were they just for the just--

PL: I just think it's because they were small. And they had--. I started to say we had them in Texas, too, when I was there when I was in college. And I know that my, my boss's, my boss had a friend who worked at one in San Antone. And so I used to go down there occasionally and was there sometime when one of the couples came to pick up a baby. And what a joyous occasion that was, you know. But, I just, I don't know why at that time. I started to say I think that--

I think the thing that concerns me the most now is that I think kids are getting pregnant younger.

SJ: I think so, too.

PL: And when I was working at the Y if I had a girl come to me she was usually a junior or a senior, sixteen, seventeen. But, as I--. My daughter works, has worked in the WIC program for about nine years and works with a lot of single mothers that are very young.

SJ: So did your daughter inherit your interest in social work and--

PL: No. She's a nutritionist, dietician and a chef.

SJ: Oh, good for her.

PL: Yeah. And is really into epidemiology and medicine and that sort of thing. She became a chef first and then went back and got her nutritionist. Her son works and teaches in medicine athletic training, physical therapy, that sort of thing at Boston University. [Unclear] job there in South Carolina [unclear].

SJ: Oh, that's really nice. He'll be close. Well, now, Helen Wykle has mentioned to me a couple of times that you were at the Y when Eleanor Roosevelt came to visit.

PL: Yeah. I was.

SJ: And, we're dying to hear about that.

PL: Well, you know that was a time I probably was doing sixteen other things at the time with the Y Teens and that sort of thing. But I remember she came. We had a big, big event United Nations' Day. That's what it was.

SJ: United Nations' Day. Okay.

PL: And--

SJ: What year was this?

PL: Gosh, I don't know. I went up there--. I got married in '58. So it was before '58.

SJ: Okay.

PL: And after '54. I may have been for, would it have been fiftieth anniversary of the Y?

SJ: Oh.

PL: Would that be the year we did it? I don't know.

SJ: Could it be seventy?

PL: Could be, could be because it was near the--. It seems to me it was near the time I left but I'm not positive. Yes, she came. She stayed out on Montford at, what's the name of that place now. It's apartments there as you come--. Not Montford, Charlotte Street.

SJ: Oh, the Manor.

PL: The Manor. She stayed at the Manor.

SJ: I lived there.

PL: Do you live there?

SJ: I did at one time, yeah.

PL: Did you? She stayed at the Manor. And they had a press conference out there. And, I was at that. I don't know. Eileen Murr was the executive director at the time. And how we got her here I don't know. She was also at Warren Wilson years before that in the forties. So, she was in, she knew this area.

SJ: Oh, that's interesting.

PL: So--

SJ: What did she do here?

[Telephone rings]

PL: Oh, I'm sorry.

SJ: That's okay. Do you want me to turn this off?

PL: Yeah, just turn it off.

[Tape is paused.]

PL: When I lived in Fort Worth I met a lady who now lives in Asheville. And she had graduated from Scaret. And she was a deaconess in the Methodist church. And she ran, she was the executive director at the Bethlehem Center in Fort Worth, Texas, which was the center that the Methodist church ran that worked with the African American community. And then she came to Charlotte and worked as the executive director there. Then she went to New York and now she's retired and lives at Brooks House here in Asheville. So we both wound up here. And I've known her since 1950. So she's a neat lady.

SJ: Interesting.

PL: Yeah. Yeah. But, anyway, that's, that's kind of a little aside. She is very active in Church Women's United. And she's eighty-two.

SJ: Well, I'm--

PL: She was quite a bit older than me.

SJ: You know, I, I, it really strikes me doing twentieth century women's history how progressive church women of, of your age--

PL: Our age were.

SJ: Were. I mean, just really--

PL: We were. And we didn't think about it. We just did it.

SJ: Right.

PL: Because it was the right thing to do or because we cared, you know. I don't know. But, anyway, we're still good friends. She, she had a Church Women's United meeting and she's calling to tell me she's

ready to go for coffee when I'm ready so--. But, anyway, now, what else?

SJ: Well, Eleanor Roosevelt. Do you remember what she did when she was here? Like what did, did she give talks or--

PL: She gave just one talk. She came strictly to do this United Nations' Day for the Y as far as I know. Okay. I don't think--. There should be newspaper articles about that. There should be. And I clipped a lot of those and I have them. And when I find all of those--. My house is kind of turned upside right down. And my husband and I are both keepers.

SJ: That's good and bad.

PL: As far as papers. And I found some stuff and some pictures. But I didn't find the newspaper clippings and that sort of thing that I kept. I may have given them to Adele, my husband's cousin who lives next door. And she may have given them to Holly. So they may already be in the mix. I really need to go to the library and the archives and look and see if they're there. And if they're not, then I'll make a concerted effort to find them.

SJ: Well, we appreciate that.

PL: Yeah. Yeah. Because my children won't want them.

SJ: Did you meet Eleanor Roosevelt? Did you guys--

PL: Yeah. Uh-huh. Yeah. Talked to her.

SJ: What was she like?

PL: Standing almost as close as from me to you. She was just a very warm, open person, intelligent. I don't remember that much. I can still see her, you know. But, I don't know what we talked about. We didn't talk about world politics, that's for sure. We probably talked

about the YW and how she had been here before and how I got here. But, she was here a short time. I mean she wasn't here a week. It was just a couple of days if I'm right about that. But it was, it was an interesting time. It was fun. We had a big United Nations' dinner in the gym at the Grove Street YWCA.

SJ: Okay. Now--

PL I work there now.

SJ: A United Nations' Day. What would be going on at a UN Day during the Cold War? I'm just curious.

PL: I don't know.

SJ: In the 1950s.

PL: I don't know. I'm sure it was the United Nations. Maybe it was something else.

SJ: No. I'm just wondering what kinds of activities would take place or--

PL: Well, we had speakers like her. And invited everybody from the community. I don't know. It was just the day we observed because we have United Nations' then even though it was the Cold War. And probably did more then than we do now as far as United Nations' Day is concerned because it was a big deal. It was just--. It was after the war and things were not really, you know--. And there was the Korean War going on then.

SJ: [Unclear]

PL: [Unclear], yeah. And, so the YW always just celebrated it as far as I knew. We always did something. And, normally, didn't have this kind of speaker or this kind of crowd. But we always had an event. I was trying to think. I think the YW here has always had an impact on the community, a different kind of impact than the YM.

SJ: Can you say a little bit about that?

PL: About why it was different?

SJ: Or how.

PL: Well, how was that the YW was always in the social programs and, and supportive of things like Meals on Wheels and Church Women's United and that sort of thing, you know. Where--. And not as--. And although we had health and recreation, that wasn't our focus. That was a part of it.

Everything sort of--. I worked with Y Teens for a year. I've worked with young mothers. I've worked with recreation and I've worked with social programs. They were all sort of equal. And, and I just think that if we emphasized anything we emphasized our work with teenagers and the social programs. They made sure that I served on the committee that had to do with social work in Asheville. I don't know how to explain it.

I went to work for the YM when I retired from the YW and was secretary to the executive director for--. My husband coached basketball and was [unclear] manager at Warren Wilson. And we got married. Our schedules never met, you know. He was off with the basketball team. I was off doing programs on the weekends for Y Teens. And that was his time off, so, I decided that, that I would look for something else to do. And they were looking for an executive, a secretary to do the, the executive director at the YM. And [unclear] I know the Y and I'll give that a shot.

So I went to work over there and worked there from August, September, October, three months, probably three months. And, one of the volunteers at the YW whose husband was a doctor, whose sons

were doctors and they ran Appalachian Hall--I'll think of her name in a minute--called me and said they're looking for a recreation director and slash social worker at Appalachian Hall. And why don't you go apply for the job? So I did and got it.

SJ: Oh, congratulations.

PL: And, mainly, there was recreation, keeping those patients that were not confined to their rooms. It's a psychiatric hospital.

SJ: Oh, okay.

PL: And, I'd take them on walks, play croquet with them, baseball, pool, [unclear], bowled, do crafts, sat in on staff meetings, and shopped for, or took them on, get a bus, take them on a tour up on the Parkway, that sort of thing. That's what I did there. And I worked there for a little over a year until my son was born and then I retired from there. That was a good experience, too.

But she was active and on the board at the YW. And, so it, its focus has probably changed somewhat. I don't know what they do now. I've not--. You know I've not been there. And I had a meeting with Holly last year and we didn't even talk that much about it. I met with her in August and I really expected to hear from somebody, you know, before you all called me.

SJ: Oh really?

PL: Because I don't know what the plans are for this hundred year, when they're going to do it.

SJ: So you need to be informed.

PL: Well, it doesn't matter. I just would like to write some people and say, you know, if you want to come for this. This is a good chance to come see me if you want to come to Asheville for the Y's hundredth.

SJ: It seems to me that the Y--. And I'm a member, a Y member. I'm not, I'm not on the board or anything like that. But I use the Y constantly. It seems that they are doing really similar things, the social programs, the recreation, the Y Teens--. It does seem like the Y in Asheville really has been a, like an important organization for women and family throughout its whole history.

PL: Yeah. They had family night there. And we had family night at the one at Grove Street and when it moved down to French Broad. My mother-in-law went in and cooked that she, through Mrs. Dutton who was the executive director then. She got mother involved and she--. My mother-in-law had been a dietician and cook out at Warren Wilson for years until she retired. And she would go in there and cook on family night.

SJ: So it sounds like you had retired by the time the Y desegregated. Is that true or were you part of that experience?

PL: Yeah. I--. Arnie and I were doing things together, but it wasn't official.

SJ: Right, right. Oh yeah, right. Yeah.

PL: So, it--. I think we, Eileen Murr laid the groundwork really.

SJ: Well, it sounds like you had laid a foundation though.

PL: But she is executive director. She was an amazing, amazing person. She really was. And she's deceased and I'm sorry because she was--. And then I think they went through sort of a time, kind of a tough time there. And then Joe Dutton was the executive director. And when she retired Thelma Caldwell who was [unclear] a Methodist.

SJ: Yeah.

PL: And, he just died last year.

SJ: Oh, gosh.

PL: Just recently. And I know this because I'm in there a lot. I know several other people that live in there that my life has touched through the years. And, but she died last year. And she was amazing, an amazing lady.

But so was Willie Moore who was the executive when they--. As far as I know she was the executive when they merged. So, but she could have been gone and I don't know who came after her. But she was there in '57, I know that. And Grove Street didn't close until in the sixties, mid-sixties probably, or a little later, maybe '67. I don't know what, what year it was. I kind of--. As I say I was home with the children--

[End of tape 1, side A]

PL: We don't do as much with teenagers as we did then because we had Y Teen clubs in all the schools, all the county schools and all the city schools. And, they were into social programs. And, I mean, that's why we had the club, you know, to give them education and to teach them about life and to help them.

And, I think the Y has always had an impact on the community. I don't think it's as much in the forefront now [unclear] open. I don't hear as much about it now as I did twenty years ago. We had visitors from overseas. And I can't, I can't remember what YW workers came to the Y from overseas.

And see, that's the newspaper article I was looking for and I couldn't find it. But I think the Ys made very strong contributions to this community as far as social programs and integration is concerned.

SJ: It seems like the forties and the fifties are really kind of, I mean, excuse me if I'm wrong or speaking sort of like a historian, but sort of the golden years.

PL: They were. They were. They really were.

SJ: There's like an international perspective that I think you just don't get anymore that you mentioned, kind of concerned with the world.

PL: That's right. That's right. And there were those of us who were not afraid to try something new, to dare, so to speak, you know. Maybe we were young and dumb and we just did it, you know. But, when I look at my committee, which was made up of people of all faiths, you know, Catholic, Jewish and it, it just wasn't happening other places.

SJ: Well, this is something that I've kind of picked up on when I've read memoirs of women who were involved in the Y and later get involved in the civil rights movement or who are involved in other activism and activities. Is that for a lot of white southern women that the YWCA is one of the few places where they can go be successful and express themselves and have a career that's meaningful in the fifties.

PL: That was true. That was true. And the Girl Scouts, the Girl Scouts in this community was very strong. Nancy Campbell was executive director at that time. She still is. Lives in Atlanta. I'm still in touch with her. But they were very progressive and, and were very much an impact on the community, too, at that time in the fifties and sixties. It's interesting, isn't it?

SJ: It is.

PL: What happened to it?

SJ: I don't know. That's my mom's story. She was a Girl Scout and boarding--not boarding, but girls' schools and--

PL: Well, you know, other things have stepped in. And the world has changed. I used to say this to alumni who would come back to Warren Wilson. And, having been there thirty-five years you know you know some of the children.

But, anyway, older alumni would come back and say it's not the same on campus anymore, and things are not the same. And I said, the world isn't the same. How can we continue to be the way we were when the world out there is different.

So the people we get here are different. They're not going to be into church and into community service that--. We're trying to teach that. We're requiring it. We're trying to give them that but they don't come knowing that. Because they don't come from small communities in the mountains like we did where the church and community--.

If you weren't a church member you still were in a community where there were lots of churches. And that was the focus. That's where everything took place. Where you went to date, where you went on hayrides, where you went for fun, you know. And so we, we lost that out there so we don't have that at the Y in here. Because the people that come are different because the world's changing.

SJ: That's true.

PL: So, I don't know if that makes any sense at all but--

SJ: Absolutely. Do you feel like the Methodism, the Methodist church, has been really--

PL: Strong?

SJ: --a good community--. For women?

PL: Yes, very much so, and certainly in this community. There was Weaver College which was at Weaverville. There was Allen School. Who was--? Those girls came from all over. So, yeah, I think the Methodist church has been very strong in this community. The Baptist church was very progressive, too. They were one of the first churches to do a lot, I think, with daycare. Yeah. And they still do. I have a friend who works there.

SJ: First Baptist, right?

PL: First Baptist. And the guy who was--. When I was active in Citizens for Better Schools and of that back to my other youth--. After the YW I got involved in other things.

Cecil Sherman was a very, very much into community and doing for the community and active in the community. And, you see, now, I don't even know who the minister at the First Methodist was because he wasn't as actively involved. But there are a lot of Methodist churches in this area. That's why Brookstown [unclear].

SJ: Well, I want to ask you one more question and then, you know, if you'd like to stop chatting you can. But, I was reading the history of a woman named Dorothy Burlege who's also from Texas and got involved in the Y in college at Austin during the early fifties and later went on to be part of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee. She talks about going to a Y camp retreat in Hendersonville in like 1946 that that Klan heard about. And it was an inter-racial overnight. And they--

PL: Yeah. I had not heard anything about that. I know that we--. When I came here in '53 we were going to camp in, in Brevard, the music camp. That's where we took them. And those were--. I'm trying to

think. I think they were integrated. Se I don't know. I can't--. You know, I can't remember. It was so much a part of who I was--

SJ: Right, right. You didn't make the distinction.

PL: --that I just didn't see it in that context. But I think they were. I think Arnie went, too.

SJ: That's so interesting.

PL: But I'm not positive. You see?

SJ: Yeah.

PL: Before she left here. I just don't know. But I do know that we've always been--. I think the Ys always been on the forefront of integration.

SJ: Now, did the Y get any flack for that? Were there any--?

PL: Not while I was there.

SJ: Great.

PL: And I don't know what happened afterwards. But at the time that they integrated and built the French Broad facility that was beginning to happen other places. There were some places where the YW and the YM merged. And that didn't work too well. Those Ys suffered some. Greensboro was one of them, I think. And I think they finally went their own way. But they shared a building and shared physical education facilities which made sense.

SJ: Right.

PL: But they were so differently focused in the rest of their programs.

SJ: Yeah, interesting. I can see how that would happen.

PL: So, this doesn't need to be on the tape, but I brought--

SJ: Okay. Well, I'll turn this off.

END OF INTERVIEW