Interview with Mary Parker for the YWCA of Asheville 100 Years Oral History Project on June 21, 2007 by Dr. Kathie Garbie and Jewell Gist

GARBIE: I'm a working woman. So a lot of their activities would be considered working women.

PARKER: Well, I was thinking about that. The AAUW started a lot of things. At least it was the people in the AAUW who started the Friends of the Library. And, they started--. And, I'm not even sure exactly--. Well, this is the first beginning of the Friends, as such. But it was during World War II, a program, a bookstore overseas. But, there again, now, I'm completely out of touch with AAUW. And I don't think that, for instance, that the AAUW, as such, personnel now, realize that Friends of the Library is one of their babies. And, I used to use it as a handle on a mailing list for membership. But, now, there again, we've got a wonderful library system. But it's grown up completely differently.

KG: Still, do you think it was not the [inaudible] over there.

GIST: There was actually--. I can't think [inaudible]. I see the window or the light but you guys are not showing up at all.

[Conversation between interviewing staff.]

MP: There's not a top light. And I got rid of the standing lamps because they were halogen lamps and I was scared of them. And, I've got to do something else because even with all of these side lights on--. I had a church meeting here the other night and people were trying to read things and nobody could.

KG: They couldn't. Hard to see. Do you think--? Did you try with the
window behind you. You can [inaudible] a little bit. I'm just curious. Sometimes--

JG: I do have that--

KG: Oh, okay.

MP: How, how much do you need the video thing?

JG: Well, we would like to get, you know, some snapshots of you. And if we can't do it today I might ask to come back.

MP: What I was thinking it was the light out there is better, but--

JG: Okay. Well, maybe at the end we could get a few snapshots of you, if you don't mind.

MP: I do, except that I decided at the party that I was a fraud because I had a lovely time. Everybody was taking pictures. And I've seen some of them and they're terrible. I look toothless. I look as though I have no teeth. And yet I have my mouth open.

JG: Really?

MP: And, that--

JG: Well, anything that we put anywhere we're going to have you approve it. So if we have a picture we'll definitely have your approval.

MP: Well, I've decided that it was false pride so--. I was having such a good time I even enjoyed having my picture taken.

JG: Well, good, good, I like to hear that. Well, one of the reasons we're here, too, is a couple of reasons. One, is that you were involved with the YWCA years ago. And we're interested in finding some history about the YWCA and your perspectives on what was happening during the time. What, if you had a role as a leader or as someone, as a member. You know, what your perspectives were. What, what was
going on? What did you think about the times and what you thought were important?

MP: Right. And I think, also, that there's some other people that would be more helpful than I. My, in my association with the Y, which--. Well, for one thing, even at UNCA--. All of this has been said by me before into your records, but a lot of other people have, too. But, it's a pleasure to talk to you. But, actually, Holly, when they had their big wing-ding, or fundraiser, women had an influence. Women of Influence which started out some years ago as Women in Industry and making recognition of women in architects and building trades and things like that. And that's where it got its names of TWIN, Tribute to Women in Industry. And, it is a wonderful PR event because it means you're in touch with the doers and shakers who are not necessarily YWCA minded particularly. But they are people doing great things.

Well, they kind of gave out on Women in Industry. So they turned it to Women of Influence. And that means--. That's wonderful. They teamed up with the hospital and the medical profession and the banks and the brokers and got all of those people on board as YWCA enthusiasts and sponsors, where fifteen or twenty years ago from the point of view of that part of the establishment the YWCA was people who were pushing immigration and all those things. You know, they were a little far out.

But, Holly Jones, actually has done a brilliant job of turning around the community attitudes towards the Y. And, there were others who worked hard on it building it up between the, the 1970s, when the Y, when the Asheville Y was the first Y to have a black
executive and to move the principle program from the old established Y to the new building which has been built for the branch for the, as--.

See, there were--. And this was true all over the South. They would have black YWCAs, Phyllis Wheatley branches and the main branch. In those days they had two sets of boards of directors and they would have a representative from the big Y who went to those meetings and one representative from the black Phyllis Wheatley board who came to the board meetings. And things were--. And, and that was a pattern. And maybe a lot longer in, in even as close by as Greenville, South Carolina.

But, anyway, the, because the South French Broad building was the newer building--. And that came about because the old Phyllis Wheatley was on the path that was destroyed when they built the tunnel, and maybe when they built the--. No, it was the tunnel, not just [inaudible]. It was the tunnel, through the mountain. Because, see, the expressway, which is much newer, and the tunnel through Bocatcher Mountain and sort of chopped the town in to. And, particularly, broke up what, where the Calvary Presbyterian and--.

See there are three churches there. And, and, the complex, the business complex that's right by the churches was the Northern Presbyterian Church School for Black Girls. And that was--. And the black and white neighborhoods kind of melded before the town was chopped into. And, actually--. And that was a very interesting neighborhood, too, because there was a lot more interplay between neighbors who worked close together.

And a friend of mine--. Actually, she was conservative and rather taken aback by a wonderful black woman whose ward--it wasn't
her son—but, anyway, and his neighborhood kids who all played basketball together on the back of what was the white junior high when official immigration was the law of the land but people could drag their feet and do it in the best local way. Those kids, a little bunch of black boys and white boys, in junior school went to the Board of Education and said, we want to go to school together. And, that—. There, again, street patterns have destroyed that. The extension of Charlotte Street did away with that old school building and, and with a lot of that neighborhood.

But, anyway, the, the building, the Phyllis Wheatley branch of the Y, disappeared at that time. So Phyllis Wheatley and—. I don't know exactly how long, but it wasn't too many years, they moved to an old kind of a warehouse building down off of—again, streets that are quite different now—Ashland Avenue. But, then, they were to have a new building on South French Broad. And South French Broad was the black—. Well, no, it was the high school in town at one point, I think. But, anyway, again, it was a neighborhood thing.

So the Y had the newer building down there but it didn't have a swimming pool. And the old building, which was up on Rose Street had a terrible swimming pool, smelled of chlorine and it was awful. But it had it. So a swim program stayed at that building and the integrated program moved to the other building. And I was not on the board. But that board did a fantastic job.

And, when they—. And Thelma Caldwell came as the executive [inaudible] for the Phyllis Wheatley branch. And I think she was instrumental. She was here when the building was being planned and built and everything so she was really a big part of it. But, also, when
the time came for integration she was obviously the person--. And, and she was right on-site there. She was the person best equipped and, became the executive for the whole Y.

JG: Oh, the integrated Y.

MP: And, that was not a hundred percent even on the board, the board itself. But the thing that really got me about it that was so really ridiculous was that where you could go to the newspaper with positive news or just plain ordinary boredom kind of news and get little screeny notices if you got it at all. The newspaper decided that this was an interesting controversy, the, the hassle within the board. And it got a lot more attention. So that people in the community that never though about the Y would call up and express their opinion. Usually, the ones that called were people who thought it was bad. Anyway, the leadership was stalwart and wonderful and it happened. And, however, it did--.

Well, oh, then the next thing that happened was, also, after--. And I don't know exactly how long. It was several years. But Thelma was offered a job by the National Y to develop a Y program in Papua, New Guinea. And, she had wonderful stories about that when she came back. But Thelma was gone for a year, leave of absence. And that, also--. And, some of the professional leadership which was stalwart and fine was abrasive and, and a little too much of, well, if you don't agree with this, you're not a Christian woman or, you know, and, not as diplomatic.

However, a wonderful person who was--. Actually, I'm not even sure what her job was. But Phyllis Cheryl was on the staff. And was absolutely--. Phyllis was from a local well respected, but not
particularly--. Well, her mother was a domestic servant. And I don't even know what Phyllis's education background was, but she was absolutely wonderful. And she graduated from the Y and went to work for the Hunan Relations Council. And, finally, did get the kind of recognition she deserved. But, she got her trials by fire working and handling because the--.

At the same time that the integration battles were being fought there were the first drug busts in North Asheville where there were children of the YWCA and YWCA's friends families and what not. So there were a couple of summers when the Y was the place where disaffected kids and--. They started a program called Communications Workshops. And everybody from the preachers to the mayors to pharmacists, they'd have Monday night programs and kids and their parents. And, it was a thing to do on Monday nights was to go to the Y and say terrible things to each other because you just don't understand. You don't like loud music. That's the way it is, and all.

But, it started because--. And, and this is also--. There's a video about the history of the Presbyterian Church in North Asheville. What's the name of it? Anyway, the one out beyond McDonald's on the corner. It's on the corner of Maryland and Gracer--. Not Gracer, I guess it's Gracer. Anyway, it's right across from the Asheville Savings Bank and near McDonald's. They sponsored down at Wolsey Dip which is now all closed up because the building fell in, right near the entrance to the, to the university. They have a coffee shop. And to their amazement, disappointment, too, it turns out kids were
abusing the coffee shop. And my brother went and he thought it was wonderful. He said it's just like a Halloween party.

Next thing we hear, the police have busted Pardo Plain which was going big and sponsored. And that was an excellent video that's been done of the history of Grace Cutler is the name of the church. And, including--. The thing about the portrayal of the young people who in Emerson--. That was the first time that the town had come face-to-face with the fact that who smokes pot is not the kids down the street. And, anyway, the Y stepped in with a whole series of workshops.

And, one time--. And, and, you get so put out with people. And people they, they would set up a program and have somebody like a pharmacist and some clergyman that could get along with kids. Or they'd--. One time had [unclear]. And another time they'd have somebody from the police department. But the thing was--. And they were pretty well moderated by young people, not the actual kids, but there was somebody who was in their early twenties. And they'd start out with a big program and cover program. And then break up into small groups. And no holds barred. You said whatever. And, and that actually also led to spin-offs.

And, unfortunately--. This, this may be kind of new material because records in the period fairly soon after that a lot of the Y records got cleaned out. So, I've never even really talked a lot to Holly. But, following the traumas of integration, the next board faced is the one with all of this kind of thing which, again--. And, and that, most of that went on--. That started about the time Thelma took her
leave of absence. And, a whole, whole bunch of people worked very hard on all that program. And a spin-off from that Phyllis Cheryl--.

And I had a nephew who had just returned from the Peace Corps in Somalia and was full of missionary zeal, and, a number of--. Curiously enough, from my point of view, one of the big support groups was the Republican Women. And that was because they had had a talk by this nephew of mine who got involved. And a number of them came to take part in these free for all Monday night conversations.

JG: Now, those talks, were they basically only on drugs and pot. Was it on integration?

MP: It was both. It was, it was why old folks [inaudible] sticky attitudes, integration, in that, in particular. And, but there were black kids and white kids in that. And from, from that they got a grant for something called Project Aware.

And Project Aware was specifically a thing about how you--. And it was young people. But it was how you felt. We had a couple of meetings in Lee William Walker Heights. Because people would say I wouldn't go in there and that kind of thing. That, however, was also a passing fancy. And, contributed to a really lack of financial support for the Y.

JG: Really?

MP: So that--. And, the, the new building had a nice gym, but it did not have a swimming pool, swimming program, which went on at the other building with people who worked very, very hard. But they weren't enthusiastic about integration. And the, the building on Grove Street where the swimming pool was and the building next door
which was a, had been built as a residence for the YWCA--. I, I do not know exactly when the Y gave up or sold those properties. There was late a school in them. And I'm not sure. The building's still there. And the one next door I think became for a while just a rooming house. But that, those were the buildings on Grove Street close to Patton Avenue which had been since certainly since the thirties had been the home of the Y.

JG: Well, at this time are they both being integrated?

MP: Hmm?

JG: At this time were they both kind of being integrated?

MP: Well, the swimming program I really don't know. I always hated it when I went there when I was little. And I did not--. There, there's a, somebody here who could tell me about that but I don't want to ask her because she was one of them who--. Actually, she did a great deal that was positive but she was so against integration that I'm too chicken to, to, to clutter up my infrequent contacts with her--

JG: Right.

MP: --with, with negative things, things that--

JG: Do you think it would be helpful for us to talk to her just to get her perspective?

MP: Actually, she's quite wonderful and has been given far too little credit. And she came to the, the Saturday morning where they took the big picture and had, well the big day. And, and she did really--. She, she was so disapproving of what was going on at the other Y. And, since then has become a good friend of mine because I--. And, and her husband used to be a teacher at UNCA.
It's Grace Walker whose husband, Dr. Phil Walker, has retired. And, Grace Walker and Jane Craig who is, seems older than she should. Anyway, she's at Deerfield now. Were--. Now this is a little bit--. This is something you need to handle with understanding and tact. They are very fine women. And, and since all this is now almost forty years ago Grace has had a really, she's, lots of drive. And, she, for a long time, put on bus tours to here, there and everywhere including some that, when the YWCA boosters all got together that was one of the boosters fundraisers was to get Grace to take a busload to Abingdon to the play. And, and she, and she was great about it. But, and, she and in, in the time and I regret to say I'm a little foggy about--.

But anyway, in the seventies they had their program with the swimming but they also were responsible for a number of things that were a great financial boost. They did not--. Thelma's--. The pinch hitter while Thelma was Jo Dutton. And, and Phyllis was just actually, Phyllis Cheryl was just somebody else of the desk but, but was part of the real glue that made it work and all. And, and then Phyllis herself did develop as a, and was given recognition during her lifetime for her work with the Human Relations Council and all. But, there was at cross-purposes because Jo Dutton who was a very, very fine woman used the rabbit down your throat. If you were resisting integration, you know, it's because you're bad. Well, not really, but holier than thou kind of thing. Now, is this being taped?

JG: Yes.

MP: Okay. It'll take a while before anybody gets there and says have you heard what Mary Parker said.
JG: We can edit.

MP: Well, that--. It--. All of this is true. And all of these people were sincere hardworking, dedicated people. But, I mean, they happened to not agree with me so, obviously, they want to [unclear]. Other than that--. But I think it might--. I think it--. Grace, very definitely, has a point of view that has not been pursued and, and she did, she was at that breakfast. And I didn't have too much chance to speak with her. But I felt--. I've always been a little awestruck by Grace because she can get so much done. But I felt sorry that there weren't more people around at that point that knew to say, hey, and Grace, you sure helped keep the show on the road, too, because they did. It was just in a different way.

And, also, I was not on the board during that time. I was--. I came on the board a little after all of that so I was not part of the group like Julie Raye and Ellen Perry. And, and probably somewhere there are plenty of scrapbooks that, that--. Well, those groups have been [inaudible].

JG: Right. I know that one of the things that I wanted to ask you was, were you involved in, when Eleanor Roosevelt came? Were you involved with that?

MP: No. I, I really wasn't. I, I had been on the board in the fifties but, but it was very different then. First place, the board was kind of made up of--. It, it would--. They'd approach a church or they'd say you should have somebody from Central Methodist. We should have somebody from [unclear], but anyway. And that was part of the approach.
And I was working and so my assignment was to be, was to
work with the three working girls' clubs at night. And, it, it was a
completely--. And that was when we had Lucille Burton who was a
schoolteacher was the representative to our board to Phyllis Wheatley.
And Lucille happened to be smashingly good-looking. And we all
came to board meetings in hats and gloves and, and what not. And
Lucille always, I thought, looked the best of anybody. But they--.
And Eleanor Roosevelt's visit would have been after that. And I was
not part of the board.

Well, Eleanor Roosevelt's visit was after the South French
Broad building was built. And my earliest days of board service it
wasn't. Then I wasn't, wasn't on the board again until the seventies.
So, it was in that hiatus that, you know. But that was true of all public
meetings.

To my great chagrin in 1948 when we had a new Episcopal
bishop. I can't remember. But there was a black archdeacon who was
the clergyman for Episcopalians in the western part of the state and
for him to come to the banquet on the top of the Battery Park
Building. Somebody escorted him in through the freight elevator.
Now that's--. That has nothing to do with the Y but that shows how--.
And that's 1948, and that's Asheville, which, theoretically, wasn't
traditionally Deep South.

JG: Let me ask you something back on working with the, the girls, the
Working Girls' Club.

MP: Oh, the Working Girls' Clubs were interesting because there were
three of them. There was the Y's and other Y's. And they were more
mature. They tended to be secretaries in the banks and, and--. Dog
gone, I can't--. There was another one that was much younger. And they did it all--.

During World War II [unclear] had--. It was still a tuberculosis hospital. But there were a lot of recuperating soldiers at Otean. And that other group was really good about having, doing nice things for the soldiers at Otean. And there were romances that sprang from that. But they were younger than the--. And, I'm not sure--.

There was a third group but I can't remember it and I can't remember--. There was also--. This was not the Working Girls'. But one of the really useful things that the Y did, they have a group called the YW Wives. And at that time American, Inc. Office turned into Axeover was being industrial payroll. And they had a regular--. They regularly fed--. It was owned in Holland. And they would send young, well, just young technicians over here for a year. There'd be young men with wives and young families. And the YW Wives proved a wonderful thing for the--.

The backbone of the YW Wives during that period were these little Dutch families that had what was known as stay at home moms and, and the girls were glad to have somewhere to, you know, be able to ask dumb questions and what not.

**JG:** Now when you were working with these, these clubs, the Working Girls' Clubs, back in the fifties women were really just beginning to work, going into--

**MP:** Well, these were--. The jobs that most people had were, were not the kinds that--. When, when you are--. It's almost hard to remember.

My father who was born in 1864 and in spite of that had a very forward-looking outlook. And had four perfectly intelligent
daughters. His office was over the Wachovia Bank and he worked with the bank. He was a lawyer but he--. He came home one day during the war and there were women on tellers and what not. And before that the only women working in the banks had been the secretaries. And he said, you know, he had been talking about some of the girls working in the bank. And this particularly, was the vice president in charge, I guess. And Kip says they're doing a real good job. Well, they were counting out money. [Laughter] And yet--. And we jumped in on that.

But, but, my sister was a social worker. I worked in a department store. And I worked in a department store where the man who had the immediately comparable job across the street made twice as much as did. And who did a better job. But that was just taken for granted.

JG: Well, what, what caused you to have that kind of courage?

MP: Hmm?

JG: What caused you to have that kind of courage that for women to really go out and, and be involved and get a job and, and earn a living for themselves?

MP: Well, one of the great things about my job was that I worked for Mr. Lewis Lipinsky. It was a locally owned department store. And he's the one for whom the Lipinsky Building was named. He, he was--. Well, the family were wonderful people in town. But, Mr. Lewis very, very, very public-spirited minded. And you could--. As long as I got my job done I could go to board meetings.

And he liked for people to be involved in things. It might mean that you brought your work home to do with, you know, or you're
always pushing deadlines at the last minute. But, that, that was something else about the town. I think business people like felt a responsibility for, for social causes. They might not always--.

I took an extended leave of absence from that job. Well, actually, before the time we were talking about, at the end of World War II I had been away and came back and worked on a lot of temporary jobs keeping office for fundraisers. And, one of the local merchants preferred to do his public service by leading all the war bond things because he--. Rather than the Red Cross or the United Way or the War Fund or what not, he, he thought he could, he could sell--. You were telling people to do something for themselves, which was valid, too, because that, that, that was part of the drill.

JG: So, you would say males really helped support women in this area?
MP: I'm sorry.
JG: The males, men, really helped to support women to go off to get jobs and take action in their community or did--
MP: I don't think he meant--. Well, thinking about my own boss, not necessarily take action in the community. Get out and do what had to be done was status quo because--. Now, I'm making this up, but there was support for good causes but not necessarily for changing things. Another problem is, I've jumped around several different decades so--.
JG: I guess, going back to the Y. And, you, you were involved with several decades.
MP: I was. Any my sister was on the board in the thirties. And that really was a very different thing. The chairman of the board was Lady Bountiful. And it was her father who gave the house, the residence house, on Grove Street that was built next to the big old building with
the terrible swimming pool. And when Mrs. Brown had the board and
the staff to lunch at her house, the staff ate at a separate table. I mean
that's, that's how big the, the difference in the point of view.

And Mrs. Brown was wonderful. She did many things and had
money to do it. But, in 1934 that was the mindset. So, so they really
had come a long way. But--. And, at that point--. Well, my earliest
recollections of the Y, my personally, were a decade before that in the
early twenties, even mid-twenties. I don't think my mother was on the
board, but she--

[end of tape 1, side A]

MP: --people that were working long hours. And then by the--. So, so you
get all of these. And, and, in, in the 1930s I worked with someone
who was, had come to town from [unclear] to take a job in town. And
she could stay because there was a lot of steady residents. And that
was the first Y.

KG: Tell me what you would consider the YWCA's greatest achievement,
maybe the first or second one that comes to mind. What have they
done for Asheville that you think is the greatest contribution?

MP: Well, I think that it's hard to say the greatest contribution. It's hard to
put my umbrella over it all. I think as in being a leader in being
supportive of the changing role with women through, through the
decades. And, as a part of that, too, the fact that there's--. Well, that
was true--.

I was going to bring in the fact that black women and white
women actually in the segregated days of Phyllis Wheatley, the
secretary of an executive at that Y was a one-woman employment
agency. She trained girls and people. However, what she was
training them for was domestic service. She didn't train them for that. She trained for character. But, people knew when they called her, she, she was a wonderful, one-woman--. And I, I don't know. Probably there were--. But she was leadership in that area in that area.

KG: Now who--. Was that Phyllis--?

MP: No. Phyllis is, is my generation. And this is terrible because this person is wonderful. And right now her, her name escapes me. And, and it shouldn't because--. Just like right now, I couldn't tell you your name. But, and, I never knew her personally, but she was--. And, and actually, I think in a way, somehow or other, I think that maybe [unclear] Mrs. Bryan was that person's undoing somehow. But, I don't know exactly.

KG: So people would call her.

MP: Hmm?

KG: People would actually call her if they needed--

MP: Yeah--

KG: --girls for work.

MP: People--. She, she was--. She, she would have a position in the community of respect, which a lot of people did. It wasn't that--. Black schoolteachers and black--. She was like--. That was leadership in the community because those were the black women that were able to do, get something.

This is really digressing, but when you think about it, which I've had occasion to recently, the public school system isn't that old. It was turn of the century. And it wasn't very strong up through World War I. And so it wasn't entirely just a matter of segregation schools not being so good.
The, the theory of public schools came about pretty late in the--. I'm not even sure about, about the history of public schools in Asheville, but I know it wasn't that old. So, the fact that the, the black schools were struggling were, and, and were undernourished and under-supported but it wasn't that different. Country schools were, county schools were not consolidated until in the twenties.

And this has nothing to do with black versus white but we had a farm in Swannanoa. And when my dad and his brother-in-law bought in the farm in about 1910 there were five tenant families living on there. The adults in those families did not read and write. These are white mountaineers. And during the twenties there's a whole nother thing that I wish somebody would get on. But there was thing called moonlight schools. And I think probably that World War I had made evident the fact that there were lots of perfectly intelligent strong grown people who were illiterate, white people, as well as black people. So that--.

Well, now that I've said all that I really also remember actually Isaac Dixon for whom the school is named. Somehow or other in 1890 contributed to the--. Actually, I think tipping the scales somehow or other on votes and things. However, that, that's simply background of what the Y was working in.

KG: I have another question. We're both in the field of health and wellness promotion, prevention, fitness, nutrition. When do you view the Y beginning to get into that kind of programming?

MP: Of health are we talking?

KG: Yeah, health, fitness and exercise.

MP: Oh, that was always there.
KG: It was. Okay.
MP: But, you know, very contemporary framework.
KG: Like when you--
MP: I think as of its time it was about--. It wouldn't have been, you know, at least locally terribly formal looking or anything. But it would have been a feature of it. There was that swimming pool and there was a gym at the original Y. Well, and, and the--. I think it's a YWCA picture of--. And they were--. It's a wonder it survived because we wore great big pleated bloomers and midi blouses. And I, I don't know, maybe a city Y, big city Ys were more. But I, I think that women's health was always a consideration.
KG: Okay. Were there any differences--
MP: But not as in the point of yoga or--
KG: Oh, no, no. Were there any differences between programming at the Phyllis Wheatley part of the Y versus the main?
MP: Physical things?
KG: Yeah.
MP: That would be a good question. And there's not a soul around to answer about how much or whether that was part of the--. Well, but it must have been because what else would there be for people to do. I mean you could have, you could have sewing clubs or you could have--.

But, and I do remember the school that was in that same neighborhood had boarding pupils and it was run by the Northern Presbyterian Church. And it was a very good prep school for black girls. And I can remember them walking out in groups and so when--.
I don't think they were going anywhere. I think it was okay. They were not jogging but it would be a group of them.

KG: Is this area that you're talking about--. Didn't the Phyllis Wheatley branch end up in an area called Five Points or Six Points? Wasn't that where McDowell, the McDowell Street was?

MP: Yeah.

KG: Seems like, seems like that's where the location may have been. Wasn't there an area--

MP: McDowell Street?

KG: Yeah. Wasn't there an area where Six Points--

MP: I think it was where Ashland came into McDowell, maybe, or, or the foot of Cox Street. Anyway, it was right down there, now populated largely by doctors' palaces.

KG: What do you think the Y can do for women in the future?

MP: You don't think they've already done it?

KG: Done it all? Is there anything left? What would you say?

MP: Keep on keeping on. I don't know. It strikes me that they--. Well, I don't know. I think it's--. I, I would think the Y can--. Not all of these wonderfully empowered women know how well off they are. So, the Y can keep on making sure people are educated to realize that it hasn't always been that way.

KG: I think that's a really good point.

MP: Because I think we, we now kind of take it for granted. I mean--. And, also, we take it for granted. I know a lot of people in Asheville that--. Well, you know those [unclear] have always been kind of far out, you know. [Laughter] And, and I, I am sure--. I just don't
happen to--. Well, I don't see that many people that I haven't seen. I don't see that many new people now anyway.

But, for instance, what about attitudes of the people who come to school at UNCA? How, how do most folks on campus--? Is everybody what you would consider enlightened and sensible or, or are there a lot of reactionary kids that--? And how do you know--

KG: Yeah. You know it's interesting--

MP: And, and, and what, what's politically acceptable. So maybe it isn't all done already, you know.

KG: That's true. That's true. I think there's a long way to go when it comes to discrimination of any kind.

MP: Well, both discrimination and just plain deeply embedded prejudices.

KG: Yeah. That's true.

JG: You know, it's interesting. When we were talking about the pay difference between you doing your job really hard and this man across the street doing the same job for more money.

MP: Yeah.

JG: That's still going on.

MP: Oh, I'm sure it is.

JG: At the University I, I have the same number of years as one of my colleagues and I make twenty, thirty thousand less than he does.

MP: Well, I--. That--. Now, I don't know--. That, that's a biggie. But, that, that one is--. That's just a hard one to crack, but it's there. But, I do--. I think--. Again, I think the things that the Y's doing maybe erodes that a little bit. And, one would hope that it's going on at other institutions, too. But, that, I don't know. Now, how long have you been in Asheville?
JG: I'm actually from Morganton.

MP: Oh, you are.

JG: I'm from Morganton. And we--. I've been familiar with Asheville all my life. I'm a non-traditional student there. I'm in my forties.

MP: Well, now, for instance, Morganton is a small town. It's smaller and it has suffered a lot of job losses and things like that. But, how, what kind of attitudes did you grow up around you as far as just folks in general, the community. Well, you are young, so you probably always went to integrated schools.

JG: Yeah. I did. My brother, whose three years older, I think that's kind of when the integration started.

MP: And how did Morganton handle integration?

JG: Well, not very well. To some extents, but I think the interesting thing about my family was they lived in a pretty much mixed neighborhood of farmers anyway. So these people were poor together. They grew up together. And so since we were in a rural setting it was a little bit easier. So it wasn't exactly like the city of Morganton but it was a little bit easier because everybody was--

MP: Well, you already knew the folks.

JG: Exactly.

MP: Yeah. Yeah. And, and, okay, so now this is the way they're saying we do it.

JG: Yeah.

MP: And, and I think that is an important thing. I think it was the thing of people who had never had an opportunity to get used to each other. You know people are kind of hard to put [unclear] regardless of what color they are. [Laughter]
KG: Exactly. I agree with you.

MP: There's little difference. So, okay.

KG: You know, one thing that is interesting to me, because I'm from the north, and I came here just a couple years ago. What I found interesting is why more black students don't come to UNCA. And, yet there's opportunities and there's money but that's something that we're still struggling with. Why not?

MP: Well, do you--. I don't know. Do you have many local day people from Asheville?

KG: Probably we have, gosh, I would say about thirty percent are from Asheville? Wouldn't you say about--

JG: I would say so.

MP: And they don't have to be in a dorm or, or--

JG: Yeah. Those are mostly commuters.

MP: Paying room and board and stuff like that.

KG: Yeah. They live with their families here and they go to school there. But it's been interesting, because, you know, it's like, why not? Well, number one, Asheville High School has a really poor graduation rate for black students.

MP: Poor.

KG: Poor. Yeah. Not many are graduating. And so, if they don't graduate they really just don't have the opportunity to go there. So it's a dilemma we're really trying to struggle with. Why not, you know.

MP: There's another thing about that, too. I wonder whether AV Tech has any difference experience.

KG: Well, you go to school there.
JG: I would say probably, yes, because a lot of students are planning on doing the two-year program now that high schools have the tracks where you're stuck in, you know, one or other, either vocationally or--

MP: I think maybe that is one of the things because, because you can kind of see, well, how am I going to earn a living, whereas a liberal arts education, wonderful as it is--. And I can certainly understand that from either a kid of a family's point of view, that the way to go is get into one of those health programs at AV Tech and you've got--.

I had an experience. I had surgery this month. And I had an absolutely wonderful night nurse, a young man, black man, who had completed the first portion of the nurse program. And he was faced with going back for some exams and so forth in order to get into the rest of the program. But he was wonderfully adapted, I thought, to that kind of kind and supportive without being--. It just happened. He was there whenever I needed him. I didn't even have to ring for him. He showed up and that was--. But, and, he was looking forward to getting further into that.

Well now that young man's got a wonderful opportunity in that field. And it seems to me that it's probably also true in a lot of other areas. But there a lot of them that maybe--thinking about things like then---. The health thing is one enormous area. The culinary ting, too.

And if people--. I don't know whether people would associate those are being service-oriented things now. I happened to have occasion to be baffled and impressed with how many food places there are in Asheville and the opportunities. And even Asheville High
has a really good, for several years, a good culinary program which
when I was in high school domestic science. [Laughter]

JG: Home ec.

MP: So--. But that, that is interesting. And I never thought--. Who
knows?

JG: Now, through all your years, just kind of talk about how Asheville
itself has changed? Do you think it's changed at all?

MP: I really don't know. The last few years--. I have been involved in a
lot of different things but the last few years I have not been active in
any of them. So it's hard--.

In general, I like a lot of things about Asheville now I think are
wonderful. And yet, I read letters to the editor and I think, well, gosh,
if it's like that. For instance, I love downtown now. And I love
downtown at night. I don't get there very often. But I happen to like
to go to Jack in the Woods if anybody will take me. [Laughter] And,
and, I--. Okay. So people look different. I have never encountered
the distressing things like the panhandlers in any degree or people
defecating in Prichard Park or bad behavior.

I have my best friends, all those my very best friends, a group
called the Firecracker Jazz Band. And one time last year they played
in Pritchard Park and I went along and sat with the four-year old child
of the trumpeter and tried to watch him. But I thought the downtown
scene was wonderful.

And my other, my second very best friend, who, like the mother
of the four-year old child, has a job as coordinator of the holiday
parade. And so she's very much in to trying to figure all sorts of
things about downtown. And to me they all sound great. The Gilcrest
High Steppers and the, you know--. We worry about all these things like that. So there's that.

And, yet, this is a big change. She's sponsored by the downtown Merchants' Association. Well, the downtown Merchants' Association there's no resemblance to the kind of merchants' association that worked with the Chamber of Commerce with when with the [unclear] and when I was in business on Nabert Street when we had Inez Department Store on one side and [unclear] on the other, and Belk and Epert's around the corner and they had the big movie house in between. And, of course, the big movie houses disappeared before integration, didn't they?

JG: I think so.

MP: They were already gone. But, and, the, Imperial didn't even have a balcony. The one up on the square had a balcony with a separate entrance for black people. And, but--

JG: I always wondered about that because I always thought the balcony was the better seat.

MP: Was what?

JG: I always thought the balcony was the best seat.

MP: Well, you know they would be. You'd be able to see the thing. And, and if a more civilized territory they would have charged extra. But they were so anxious not to sit down by somebody. That's a good point. But on the other hand, I think, I think the way, the way I feel it's changed is there is less centralized personality leadership than even when I--. I retired thirty-two years ago.

KG: Wow.
MP: Well, I'm just terribly, terribly lucky. And, but when I retired even there was a fairly definite power structure even if it was at odds. You, you--. There were certain people that you talked to to get things done. Yeah. And I guess they were leaving that kind of era. But there--. They're just plain bigger.

And I think the big thing, of course, is the internet and all the people that can move here and bring their business with them. And it used to be a great place to visit. But there wasn't all that opportunity for various big brains and what not. But, the worst thing I think is all the terrible, terrible real estate stuff that's being done which is terrible.

JG: You mean like cutting in the mountainside?

MP: Well, all of the development on the slopes and--. Since--. My, my favorite t. v. program, however--I even watch reruns--is the City Council. [Laughter] So I watch the reruns because I never quite believe what I hear the first time.

But in my, in our neighborhood--. See, we're--. We've always been a mixed neighborhood. All my life there was a grocery store across the street. Long before--. When this house was built--maybe not. But, before that there was a brickyard around the corner. And there were black people who lived on Washington Road. There were black people who lived up on the mountainside who we knew. And we were mixed in that way. There were mom and pop grocery stores where the tunnel is. And, and there were all kinds--.

Oh, and, and by the time, I think from way, way, way back, from probably, well, from World War I on, there had been great big houses. This was not the biggest house. There were a lot of others. And they had already become boarding houses. And they were--.
They predated the retirement homes. And there were a number of them. And, because they had domestic servants and no minimum wage, no social security, they set wonderful tables.

And those boarding houses, that was one way that a woman who had to earn a living who had no training for anything else could know how to run a house. And, and it was dependent on good domestic servants. And, as jobs went those were not bad, domestic servants. And they were all up and down the line as far as putting on the style.

The lady up the street who had people who waited on tables, the men wore white gloves and that kind of business. And she, also, was the lady that had a church meeting at her house. My mother came home very amused because Mrs. Charles Malcolm Flatt had started her prayer to the Almighty about we do not know why you have made this mistake. And then she told about directing the good Lord on how to improve his ways. [Laughter]

But, anyway, there were people retired and gave up their homes and moved in. It was a great big one next door here. And, they would bring favorite pieces of furniture with them so that when that house was torn down in the attic upstairs there were all sorts of things that had been moved out so people could bring in their own little desks or their own--. And, but, the neighborhood was full of that. And--

JG: So this is nothing new to Asheville?

MP: Oh, no. But now the level of--. Then, on the other hand, I cannot understand how it is economically viable, but Asheville has fascinating eating places. And that's all new. There used to be the S
& W. And, and I guess it disappeared before integration almost, didn't it?

JG: I don't know. I know that there's another cafeteria that's kind of out near--. What's the road that you live off of?

KG: Fairview?

JG: Fairview.

MP: Now, that--

JG: Isn't that an S & W or S &--?

MP: Yeah, but that's much, much--. That's newer than what I'm talking about.

JG: Oh, you're talking about the one that was down on Patton.

MP: I'm talking about the one down on Patton.

JG: Yeah, yeah.

MP: There was the S & W and next door it was identical, same food and everything, called the Downtowner. It was just a little smaller area. But, then there were the drugstore counters. And this was one.

Now, here I didn't--. I was very privileged. I came home for lunch. And, partly because there were usually household things. We had made an apartment there, and an apartment there after my dad's death. And, frequently, I had things I needed to do to take care. But I could do that because, again, I had a flexible lunch hour. I was a lunch hour. But it didn't have to be this date. Nobody else was involved except me, and getting the job done and so forth. But, the eating places, strictly, were drugstore counters, or, the first on the highway was Buck's and that was a drive-in. And I'd be interested in knowing whether as a drive-in it was patronized by black people. I guess--. I doubt it.
KG: Interesting.
JG: Well, if there wasn't a place to sit it possibly--
MP: Well, that--. It might have been--
JG: --you could have walked to the door.
MP: Yeah. And, and I don't know whether I was unconscious or whether I was just preoccupied, but I was not conscious. My sister, who was working in Greensboro, was part of the ones that went down to those, now, their historic site, the lunch counters in the Greensboro lunch counter integration thing. And that was the YW that was participating in that in Greensboro. But, to my knowledge, we were not involved in that.

Most--. One, one thing about, also those days, though, the ladies who had to figure out how to support themselves and their families by taking in boarders--whether it was a big scale or a small scale--were the stay at home wage earners. The others went to work in department stores because that's somewhere else you could work with no training, and, theoretically, have on the spot training. And, but the main thing was you knew how to be polite and people would come maybe because they knew you. And, and that, again, the Bon Marche had absolutely wonderful black employees, but they were maids and porters. And, one of them put four children through college.

And, one of my best friends, who unfortunately is ill now, Jean Walker Bowman, ended up as a respiration, respiratory therapist at Memorial Mission. And, and, I think she went to a segregated high school. But, anyway, Ed Walker on, on probably minimum wage--although he had a very responsible job at the Bon Marche--had four
kids that came out with college degrees and ended up in professions.

So--

KG: Now do you have a degree?

MP: Me?

KG: Yes.

MP: I, I barely have a bachelor's degree. I was the only person in my family to ever flunk an exam. [Laughter] Well, I--. And, this was hard to do because I had taken the easiest thing I knew at Chapel Hill, which was English literature. And I managed to flunk that exam and I was so chagrined that I couldn't bear to tell my father. And I made my sister tell dad. And, then--.

Well, the thing was I would've kept it a secret but I had made such a big fuss about that when I had to take it over again I had to really buckle down and I couldn't do. And I had to say I'm sorry I've got to work on that. But, the only--.

And I made myself very unpopular by somebody who later turned out to be an internationally respected brain. He flunked it, too. So--. But he didn't tell anybody and that was terrible because, I said, but [unclear] flunk this exam, too. And, anyway, when I passed I, again, long time, I sent a telegram. And I said, pernicious pedagogues perpetrate unprecedented past. Comprehensive conquered. [Laughter]

KG: I love it.

MP: I have now in a permanent envelope the reply from my father which was, progeny, progeny, promptly passing, pompously puffs proud parent. And that wire is addressed to Mary Parker on Hillsborough Street, Chapel Hill and I got it. A boy came on a bicycle and handed
me that. Now talk about how times have changed. But, everybody else in my family were Phi Beta Kappas by the time, well, not quite by the time they were ten-years old but by junior year. And they got all advanced degrees so that was--

JG: Now, did you grow up in this house?

MP: Um-hmm.

JG: So, this house was built by your parents.

MP: Actually, it--. I, I never thought about it enough to ever inquire. But I think my father was a wonderful man because his, his--. My mother had--. My mother was born in this house. And she--. And, when they were married her father said that would be fine but they should live together. I think dad always dreamed of both them of having their own house. But then my grandfather died soon after.

Well, what happened was, my grandfather who had been a very responsible character, once he--. Well, earlier he had taken to going to Florida--this is the olden times--for the winter. He was sort of retired. And so he [unclear] and he was Josie's husband. And he would, could, literally inherited a lot of grandfather's public responsibilities which ended up, some of them, to be a pain in the neck.

Riverside Cemetery was a holding company into which people had put their money. And it had a board of directors and so forth and that was fine. Again, you had slave labor to do the grounds' work. And it went a long time until the banks all failed. And there was no money. The perpetual care funds were all lost. And, by that time my father and two other people whose grandparents had been part of the
original board then had to pitch in and look after Riverside Cemetery with no money. The same thing with--.

Actually, dad was--even before he and mother were married--with the Asheville Reading Society which retained the library was dependent on citizen help. And they had fundraisers, you know, pot luck suppers and all that sort of thing. And that's the way that grew. And, so the town functioned on that sort of thing.

And my father having come from somewhere else but had been around here for quite a while. And he married into a family that had been--. Well, when he and mother were married my grandfather died shortly after. But my grandmother was here and my grandfather's sister. And she was the one who with three other ladies started the library. She's also memorialized in the new history of Memorial Mission because the girls of the Flower Mission started the first Mission hospital. And that was Miss Fannie Patton. And so the Y and our church, the first Women's Auxiliary in the state was here and it was--.

So dad married into a whole lot of responsibilities. And Holly at the Y event this spring, they, they were real nice and they gave me an award and what not. And Holly came up and she said the YWCA was in Mary's DNA and that's true.

JG: Oh, you're the one they were talking about.

MP: And [unclear] was just as much there. And the same way--. I, I--. Early on it was obvious that Mission Hospital didn't need. But, even that actually I got back involved with the library because after I retired I started doing--I wasn't even good at it--but I started being a Mission Hospital volunteer. And my friends on the library Board said, get
Mary out of that quick. And that got me back in to Friends of the library. But, anyway, that's how I landed in all those things.

And then being moderately bossy, my temperament. And when it's obvious that you can tell them to do it better than they're doing it themselves. And, and you get by with that after a point.

KG: How long have you lived here alone?

MP: Hmm?

KG: How long have you lived in this house alone?

MP: Oh, actually, I'm not. My, the, the century with 2000 has been very rough. My two, my two sisters and--one of whom did not live in the house--but Josie died in 2002. And, unfortunately, then my younger brother had a terrible accident. He was not living here, but his family does live in town. And, so--. And since 2000--

[Tape ends]

END OF INTERVIEW