

Interview with Mattie L. Humphrey by Lynette Muse, African American Migration to Philadelphia Oral History Project, Temple University, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, October 10, 1987.

LYNETTE MUSE: I'm Lynette Muse, and I have here with me Mattie L. Humphrey. She's from the Philadelphia area. Mattie has been working here very hard since before the sixties, helping people in the nursing field, helping people in how to grow and develop in their homes, outside their homes, business-wise, and in other occupations. Mattie is an RN, and I want to read something here that she wrote about herself and how she feels being an independent nurse practitioner. [Reads] "I shall be ever mindful, according to my knowledge and experience of the need to avoid violations to the life, bodily functions, and spiritual integrity of those in my environment, especially those who depend upon my services in times of stress, pain, weakness, impotence, or loss."

This is how Mattie normally displays herself in the community, and I'm so grateful that a lot of us can recognize her as Mother Mattie. Mattie will give us some information about how her family migrated here to the city. And we're here, like I said, at WDAS on October 10th. Mattie, you want to tell us how your family first came here, and what kind of work they did at that time?

MATTIE HUMPHREY: All right. Thank you, Lynette. It's really a privilege to be able to say these things, because they are very precious to me, because they connect me, in a way, with the past. My mother was the youngest of several brothers and sisters, and her older sibling had come from Athens, Georgia, to New York, Philadelphia, and Atlantic City. That's three different states. She had a sister,

Parthenia, living in Atlantic City, married to Andrew Clayton, and he worked at a hotel. She had a sister Marian Merriweather, who lived in New York, and she had a husband named Harry, and Aunt Marian worked in a laundry. And Mother had a brother, Leroy. As I can remember he either lived in Philadelphia for a while, or visited there regular.

But he had friends working at the Supplee Milk Dairy, which was in the 4900 block, or 4700 block of Marian Avenue, right across from the Blankenburg Elementary School. And it was Supplee Milk Dairy, and later on, it became Supplee-Wills-Jones, later on I think it's the shopping center now. And my father was next to the youngest in eleven children, and he had come here from Atlanta, Georgia. And his parents had lived in Milledgeville, Barnesville, places like that in Atlanta. And he and his brother worked at this milk dairy, Supplee.

And my father and his brother had brought their father, which would have been my grandfather, Doc R. Milner—Doc Alexander Romeo Milner, I think. They had brought him up to live in Philadelphia. And he had a shoeshine stand on Girard Avenue, right around the corner from Marian Avenue where this milk dairy was. Grandpa originally, as I say, was from that part of Georgia—Milledgeville, Barnesville; at least they came up here with that background.

And so, my father had a sister in Washington DC, and she had been the first to move north from Georgia. She married a Pullman Porter, and she was Aunt Ruth. And she had a sister named—we called her Aunt Dolly; but she was Naomi. They were Ruth and Naomi. And they had an older sister named Mattie Lee, which my

name is Mattie Lee. And all three of them were married to Pullman Porters, and lived in Washington DC. And when my father had come—he and his brother had come to Washington DC, and they came on to Philadelphia. So, my mother and father met through my mother's brother, who worked at the milk dairy.

LM: Okay. Do you know why they decided to come north? Was it because of hard times in the south, or was it just the change?

MH: They never talked to me about hard times in the south, except in like what I call humorous way. Like my father was what you can call light complected, and my uncle was what you call brown skin, or darker complected. And they used to say when the old man got mad at them, he'd stomp one of them in the red clay, and that would be my father, and he'd stomp the other in the black clay, and that would be my uncle. So the hard times they talked about was just the discipline, and punishment, and obedience element of living in a household.

My uncle says that he left home at the age of twelve or thirteen. He ran away from home. This uncle is deceased now. In fact, the only one left is my father. He's 87 now. He's a minister in Washington DC. But my uncle said that—they had a stepmother. There was eleven of them. And they had a step-mother, and she didn't have any children, but she used to cook. And my uncle say that she used to really put these pies and cakes and things out on the windowsill, and they had a habit of snatching them when she wasn't looking. And he said one time they had threatened him so about taking those pies—he said one time they had told him the next time he took a pie, they was going to really beat him. And he said he just took the pie and kept on going. [Laughs]

Whatever it was, that's his story about how he left home. But I do know he went into the military at a very young age. He put his age up, when he was only fifteen or sixteen. And he served in the First World War. That is, he was on the boat that landed in France on the day the war ended, or near that day, so he came back with Veterans Preference. And he went to work in the post office. And he worked there until he retired there, Philadelphia 30th Street Post Office.

LM: Okay,

MH: He was Henry Milner.

LM: Henry Milner. Okay. What can you tell me about the oldest family member that you know about, that you had?

MH: Well, my grandfather, and I knew him. I knew he was born in 1865. And he had a sister named Ida, and his name, of course, was Milner. And his mother's name was also Milner. She was Anna Milner. So that would mean, probably that they were raised on a property and in a household belonging to somebody named Milner, because his mother was named the same thing that he was named, Anna Milner, and he was Doc Milner.

I know that he married a Pettigrew, a person, Mattie Pettigrew, who was the mother of the eleven children, my father, and those other children. His second wife was Fanny Webb. And she had a brother, Saul Webb, who lived in New York at the time of his death. And Fanny Webb was 99 when she died here in Philadelphia, Fanny Webb Milner. My grandfather, he lived to his nineties, but he predeceased her, because he was older than her. So I would imagine my grandfather was the oldest relative that I was able to know, and grow up knowing.

LM: Okay. Do you know what year your family came to Philadelphia?

MH: Well, as far as I know, it was in the early twenties. I think my mother and father were married approximately 1924. I don't know the exact date, but I know that my mother was about nineteen—eighteen or nineteen, and I think my father was about twenty-four, twenty-five. My father was born in 1900. So, he's 87 now, so that would mean that they came approximately 1924. He would have been twenty-four—he was about twenty-four, twenty-five when they got married. So. That's as close as I can figure the dates.

LM: Okay. What were the occupations when they came here?

MH: My father had started going to school at Morehouse, and I don't know how far he had gone but he did talk about it. In the summertime, they came up to Connecticut and worked on the plantations—on the tobacco farms in Connecticut. And the students from Morehouse did that in the summer.

And even years later when my cousin Romeo came over from Liberia to go to Morehouse, where his father had gone to Morehouse—and Romeo's my cousin because Romeo's mother was my father's sister. That would be Aura Milner Horton. She was the one who became a missionary in Liberia. And Romeo was her first born. So when he came and went to Morehouse in the forties—yeah, he came—yeah, it was in the late forties. He also went to work in Connecticut during the summer.

LM: Okay. You said your father's a minister.

MH: Yeah, he's a Baptist minister.

LM: What's the religion? Baptist.

MH: In Washington DC, and I think it's Saint Phillips Church at North Capitol and K. Prior to that, like I said, he worked in the milk dairy. And when my aunt in Washington passed in 1942, I think, she left her house to my father. And by him having three children, his decision was to move down there, because it would be more economical. And so he transferred from the Supplee Milk Company, down to the Uline Ice Arena in Washington DC.

So he always did that kind of work. Once he was in Washington DC, he started driving a taxicab, and became his own—in Washington, they have a lot of private cabs. So, he became a cab driver. And my aunt had had a rooming house, and so he operated that, and drove the taxi.

LM: Okay. How many brothers and sisters do you have here in the city?

MH: There are three of us. Well, to be in the city, is my sister. And there are three of us, and she's the older—that's Frances Lloyd. And then I have a younger sister in New York. We were all three born and raised here. I went to Shoemaker, Girls High. And my older sister went to Shoemaker, and Overbrook. And then she transferred to Washington DC, and went to Cordozo High in Washington DC. And my younger sister went to Shoemaker, and then she transferred to Washington, and went to Dunbar.

LM: Okay. What was it like growing up with two other sisters, and no brothers?

MH: Well, I don't know—I don't know how to compare it, because I didn't have any realization that there would be a difference until I got grown, and met males my age. Now when I was growing up, I wasn't that involved in the households where there were males, so I didn't see

that they didn't wash dishes, or iron, or scrub or cook, or anything like that. Far as I thought, all children did those things. You went down to the basement and you shoveled the coal. You put out the ashes. You scrubbed the floors, you washed the dishes, you helped with the clothes, you helped with the sweeping, ironing, and whatever. And in my opinion, all children did that. So I would think that if there had been a brother in the house, I would imagine him doing those things. So I don't have a sensation of, you know, what it would have been like with or without a brother. I just had two sisters, and we all did the same thing.

LM: Okay. What would you see different that your father did during the days that—before he migrated here, that people might do today? For instance, maybe within the black communities, with the politicians and things like that. I mean, for example, the living standards of people—how different would you say that we live now from the way they lived during those days.

MH: You mean like in the thirties and forties when they were here in Philadelphia?

LM: Before they moved to Philadelphia, and maybe how some of those living standards changed as they came here.

MH: I have no idea what they lived like before they came to Philadelphia. I went to visit in later years to Atlanta, and also to Athens, but the circumstances under which I visited there was like thirty or forty years after my parents had left. So I really didn't have a concept of what they experienced when they were—both of them, when they were in the south.

LM: Okay. How would you say the black community has changed from the time which you were a little girl here? I mean, the black community and also the family homes.

MH: Right. Well, when I was growing up, and it was just not too far from here, on Marian Avenue in West Philadelphia. We knew neighbors, you know, door-to-door, and we interacted with each other. I mean, in terms of the children on the street, any adult knew and corrected any child on the street. And if children misbehaved at school or someplace like that, they would be very anxious until they got home, to find out whether somebody had told their parents, because if their parents knew that they misbehaved, they knew they would be punished for misbehaving, whether they were right or wrong. They would just be punished for misbehaving.

We had—at Blankenburg School where I went, we had all different races and colors there. We had Filipino people living on our block. We had Italian people living in our block. We had a Jewish store in our block. The first—I knew that my father helped work in politics, something called Forty-Fourth Ward Civic League. He used to get with other people. I guess they would be his age and his associates. We lived in three different houses on that block, and my father always had a business. He liked to have a store, and he would have a candy store, and he would have a store that sold notions and things like that. And in addition to going to his job at the milk dairy, he would have the store.

My grandfather, like I say, he would have a store at a bootblack, or some little businesses. And my uncle would always be helping my grandfather and my father with these stores. So they just

had this attitude about business. It was just there; it was natural. And we always had to participate in the business. And those houses that we lived in on Marian Avenue, they were—first two houses I can remember were both three story houses, with a storefront. And the last house we lived in on Marian Avenue was 4843; that was a regular house with just two stories.

My mother's education had been—she had started in nursing school. She had gone to Spellman in Atlanta, and something about Grady Hospital, which had a nursing school there that she was going to be a nurse. But that summer she came to Philadelphia and New York to visit her older brothers and sisters, and she never went back home. She didn't want to go back home, I guess. The lifestyle then, she said that she used to have to be home when the streetlights went off. The streetlights would go on about dusk. And she said—by her being the baby, and her other sisters and brothers being grown up—in fact, she was the same age as her sister's children.

And she said her mother would always wait in the window for her to come home, because her mother would be very apprehensive when she wasn't home and those lights went on. And she told me that one time she was really late getting home; it was dark. And when she went upstairs her mother was still sitting in that window, and it was dark. She hadn't put the light on. And she said, "Well, what are you sitting there for? Mama, why you sitting there crying at the window?" And her mother said, "Every tear I'm going to shed, you're probably going to shed a hundred."

She said her mother was so unhappy, because she was nervous and anxious about her. And she would tell us that—to tell us that as a

mother, when she would be trying to do things, or expect things of us, that maybe we didn't like, like what time to get home, and that kind of thing. She said, "I'm not doing this to hurt you. I'm doing this because I'm your mother, and it will hurt me if anything goes wrong with you. And I want you to do this, so that you don't stand a chance doing something wrong." She was always anxious to let us know the reason she would do and say those things, because I guess she would always remember that it had hurt her mother, because she had disregarded and stayed out late.

LM: Okay. Since your family have come here to Philadelphia, seems like your family have done a lot here, in terms of your father being a minister, you being a nurse, and your sisters and what have you, and your cousins that are into the theater business. Maybe you could tell us a little bit about what the contributions that you feel your family have made to this city, and because of the move to the city.

MH: Okay. Well, on the block that we grew up on, my mother was very active, and she was very outgoing, very funny. My mother's deceased for quite some time now, but she had a club of the housewives on the block, and it was called the Glad Hearts. And they would have a little pin; I remember it had two hearts, one with a G and one with an H. And heart was like a pearl, and the "G" and the "H" were like in gold. And she was always interacting with the women and doing things.

They did what you called then days work, domestic work.

Later on, when the war started, or when she went down to Washington DC she worked in the government services, but most of the work that she did when we were in Philadelphia was labor and domestic work. And she would always work. She always valued working. And it was

never a question in our house about women don't work—all this dumb stuff that you hear now about women's lib, and whatnot. The world I lived in, women always worked. You didn't have anything to eat or anyplace to sleep if you didn't work. She was that way with the women in the block.

My father was always active in, like I said, politics and civic organizations. Like, he used to talk about how he worked when they—I remember when they first got this recorder of deeds, Reverend Marshall Shepard, which is the father of Reverend Lorenzo Shepard. And I remember my father talking about how they fought to get Mr. Nix as a congressman. And of course, he would be the first African American congressman from here. And he was always trying to do things in the neighborhood, in the community.

In fact, a lot of times my mother and father would break up, or they would have fights. Or my uncle from Atlantic City would come and take us to Atlantic City because of some disagreement, but my father was always out there with that community stuff. He was always into it. So I guess you might say we get it natural, because my oldest sister is very, very active with Eastern Star. She always used to do things. Even when we were growing up, she was organizing and doing things. And my little sister, my younger sister, the same thing—always been very active in community organization.

And my younger sister is in show business, and she has a theater in New York, and both her children have been involved in show business. They've done productions. Lorraine Hansberry is one of their favorites. And her son has written a couple of musicals that have been produced, and they were well acclaimed by people like

Harry Belafonte, Sidney Poitier. She was formally married to Lonnie Sattin; he's the father of her children. So that's a show business family.

I guess that it's been like always—always trying to do something. It's just always been there.

LM: Mm-hm. Mattie, what is your outlook on the black community in the next few years, and then let's say, the next century?

MH: Okay. I feel that the Africans in America are in a sense a message to America, because America is made up of the Anglicans, and the Europeans, and the Africans, and to some extent, those Indians who were here. And I think that in those days, the western people thought it was alright to run roughshod over other people. And they did it on the continent of Africa, and they did it on this continent.

I think we're here, really, as a reminder that it really hasn't been a very human society, that it's been a materialistic society that has used human beings as things and objects. Chattel—people are property. And I think that idea is always in the background of the American mind, and we as African people whose ancestors were property, were chattel; were bought and sold on the marketplace—I think we haven't yet confronted some kind of reckoning. We haven't confronted—we haven't exercised that. We haven't looked at that for what it is, and turned it into something else. We either deny it, or we glorify it.

There are those of us who feel that because our ancestors were mistreated so unjustly, that we're supposed to get extra benefits and privileges here. Then there are others who think that because our ancestors were so mistreated unjustly, we're supposed to do the same

thing to other people. Both of those positions dehumanize us. And I think our biggest problem here is self-dehumanization. That racism had fed that, and nurtures it, but racism doesn't cause it.

I'd take the position that when I dehumanize, it is because I dehumanize myself. It is because I misuse my humanity. If anyone else mis-approaches my humanity, that's not on me. So I don't feel that we suffer, or are mistreated, because we are Africans or because we are black. I feel that if injustice operates, it's because someone else is less than human. I don't think the injustice is really caused by the blackness or the difference. I think the injustice is caused by an arrested development in the mind of the European and the Anglican, so I will not take on that responsibility even objectively. I will not say that they mistreat me, or treat me unjustly because I am black. I say, they will treat me or anybody else unjustly because they are undeveloped on a human level. They have an arrested development when it comes to the human being.

So our presence here, in this country, is an indication that there is some level of development that is deficient in the Anglican and the European. And to the extent that they have written as if the African is their burden, to justify treating the African as property and chattel, it's clear to me that they are our burden! Because we have to treat them as human beings, because we want them to learn that we are human beings. Now, some people think that we only treat them as human beings so they will treat us like human beings. Yeah, I'm not so sure that I see these people worshipping the golden rule. I see them worshipping a "get what you can at any price-" type rule. I mean, you know I see the American mind as very feeling, that it has a right to be

over there in the Persian Gulf blowing up Iranian ships, but that the Iranians don't have a right to be over here in the Gulf of Mexico, blowing up any American ships.

LM: So what you're saying is that most of us that have migrated here, that if we look at ourselves and realize that we have a place here, and they have to understand that our place is here in America, and we are doctors and lawyers, and all those things that they tend to think that we're not, or don't respect us for, you think that it's important—how would you say that some people would—?

MH: Well, I think that their respect is a reflection of their capacity to respect. Again, I think that what's important is our learning to value and respect one another, that we were doctors and lawyers and artisans before we left Africa.

LM: Yes.

MH: And a lot of the Anglicans and Europeans who came here were coming out of monarchies where there had been courts and aristocrats and a class society, a feudal society—F-E-U-D-A-L—for generations and generations, where it was common place for them to think of themselves as inferior because they were ruled by a royalty. And they were, according to the social system, inferior, for generations back. We didn't have that orientation. We had more of a village orientation, where we had a cultural worship of our ancestors and the deities that had guided our ancestors.

They would call this primitive, but I'm saying that it operated such that the ancestors were the repository of the truth of our people. And so we respected elders. We didn't necessarily respect royalty and monarchy. They had their place, but they would be like leaders. They

would like politicians. They would be like decision-makers. But we had no more reverence for a politician or a leader than we did for any other elder. And when it came time to make judgments, the elders and the leaders introduced their notions, but they got input from everybody involved. And so we came out of a orientation of human—not humanism, but of the value of individual human beings, and the value of collective groups of human beings.

Whereas, these Anglicans and Europeans had built into their worship system, property, as much more important than human beings. Human beings can be sacrificed for property. Human beings can be bought and sold in exchange for property. Human beings can be exploited to gain property. And so our presence here, in my opinion, for me, can't be compared on the basis of what somebody thinks of us, but rather what we think of ourselves. Can we put property in a perspective where we respect it and use it in the marketplace without making it greater than us as human beings?

LM: Seems like today we put a lot of faith in trying to get the black politicians into office, but from listening to you, I get the idea that if we as human beings, our ancestors that are still here, and people like that, if we put our faith lies in working together as human beings, and not worrying about having a black politician into office.

MH: Well, our idea of leadership, to the extent that we allow media coverage of a person to make them popular, and to convince us that they are leaders because they are popular, to me that's celebrity status. And that's no different than a good singer, or a good musician who gets popularized in the media. If you have a good politician or a good orator who gets popularized in the media, or a good minister, who is

popularized in the media, that doesn't necessarily make them a leader for the people. That makes them a celebrity.

I think that the leader is the principles that the people believe in and follow. And since our culture was disrupted, our basic introduction to this country is in terms of being property, therefore having an owner, and having a supervisor or a foreman that the owner appoints. I think we carry over that kind of hierarchy into our political life, since the political context is still under the Anglicans and the Europeans. We conceded to them, as theirs.

And so therefore whatever kind of relationship we have to it is a delegated relationship, rather than a natural relationship, and so that we permit or even ask them to identify leaders that they feel can win political elections. And when the power structure of the business community or the Anglican European leadership identifies someone among us as capable of winning an election, making a touchdown, or whatever, then we say we have to choose to go along with that. Because that's our leadership. But to me, that's not necessarily good leadership.

LM: Okay. There seems to be a lot of stress and a lot of talk sometimes about power being within the black family, as opposed to some of these political officials. And maybe you can talk about that, because I know you talk about that.

MH: Yeah. I think that what we're dealing with is the battle of the bureaucracy; you've heard me say that. A generation or so ago, if you had—say, like the streets when I grew up, if there was a family that maybe had children that they couldn't take care of all their children, the child might go live with another family that could take care of it.

Or if there was an older relative who needed a younger person around, they didn't have their own children, you send the child over there. Or if someone—family had a daughter or someone that had a baby and they couldn't take care of it or support, someone would adopt the baby. Those to me are natural ways of dealing, so that you come out able to manage your resources based on what your needs happen to be.

That same situation today, you would have so much bureaucracy to deal with before—say an unmarried mother is going to surrender her baby to somebody because she may be getting a welfare check, and so she will not turn that baby over to somebody else to raise, because then she won't get that welfare check. I mean, this may not be weighed in the balance, but I'm saying the lifestyle is so different now that the options we used to exercise don't even come to mind today. Because now we have a lot of people living separate individual lives.

We have families that are smaller, and therefore when people get older, or when people have more than they can handle, it causes a breakdown, either in the economics or the mental health, or the structure of that unit. And those breakdowns are really taken care of by professional bureaucracies, so that our lifestyle today represents a great deal of dependency on professional—

[End of Part 1/Begin Part 2]

MH: —ourselves as people that we minimize dependency on this professional bureaucracy. Much of what we learned from the professional bureaucracy, we could learn it from one another in the old days.

LM: Okay. Sit around, talk with our grandparents.

MH: Sure.

LM: We'd get a lot more information.

MH: So now that the politicians become the leaders, we no longer really recognize the leadership in one another, and so we let politicians make decisions about how our basic professional services are going to be handled, and then they parcel it out in the marketplace, either on patronage or profit-making options, and so we—we're living in this world, but not of it, to some extent, when you talk about politics.

LM: Tell me about the nursing field a little more, because that seems to bring out the humanness in people, and because a lot of us haven't had that experience, we can't relate to that.

MH: Yeah, yeah. Relate to that.

LM: But, do need that kind of information.

MH: I feel very fortunate in that as a teenager, I wanted to go into the field of nursing. I didn't have too much ideas about professions and things at that time, but my mother had talked about it, and she had wanted to be a nurse, and it may be vicariously that this was a way of pleasing her. But I do feel if I hadn't gone into the field of nursing, I would probably be either mentally ill, the victim of some violent crime, or very strung out on some kind of arrested development at this point. Because having a basic orientation of service is very appropriate to being African and female in this culture. It's not inappropriate anywhere, but in this culture, the aggressive, developmental thing to do is to not be a servant.

We, in our African experience here, subconsciously equate service to slavery. And so, if I want to rise above that horrible

condition, I will not be a servant—meaning a slave. To me, there is no greater pleasure than to do something pleasing to someone I care about. Again, think of anything more pleasing than that—to serve someone that I care about with love. And in learning to serve, it is easy, especially as an adolescent. And when I went into nursing, because it was a caring, serving profession, it came naturally to me.

LM: Yeah. A lot of us think in those terms, because being a midwife was not exactly what someone did because they were forced to do it. But those people did it because they wanted to provide their service.

MH: That's right.

LM: For women, a lot of times, and to get the glory out of seeing a baby born to this world.

MH: Sure, a real pleasure.

LM: Holding the baby in their arms once it first comes out.

MH: And that's the way all of nursing is to me. Is an opportunity to make the difference between pain and relieving pain, between suffering and relieving suffering. Like, a lot of people say, "Well, I couldn't do that because I don't want to see the blood. I don't want to see the this and that." No, but the whole point of being able to make the difference between the fact that someone is bleeding and being able to stop that bleeding. That's where the pleasure of it comes. Is not because you enjoy seeing the brokenness, and the real trauma, and pain and the suffering, but because you learn how to be of service in that situation.

LM: Mattie, your services have also brought you here to WDAS as the executive producer of the Sunday public affairs programs, and you've been working in the forefront since, like I said earlier, before the

sixties. And maybe you can sort of briefly tell us about that period, and then until now, because I know a lot has changed.

MH: Yeah. Mm-hm. Well, again, having that service mentality enabled me to get the profession of nursing. And there were times when my other mentalities got in the way, like arrogance and stuff like that. But I thank my classmates, I thank my neighbors, I thank God that I did manage to get a professional background early in life. That was in 1948 at the Bellevue Hospital in New York, at the School of Nursing.

But just to backtrack, in our lifestyle with our mother and the women in our neighborhood, I was not aggressive. I did not want to go to Girls High, which you know is a very special academic school in Philadelphia. And I wanted to go where everybody else went—Overbrook. And when my teacher wrote a note home telling my mother that I should go to Girls High, well, everybody was really proud.

LM: Yes.

MH: We're going to send her to Girls High. And I thought I didn't want to go. I thought of all kinds of reasons why I shouldn't go, because I didn't want to be different. But I was bright; I was intelligent. The teacher recommended me. I got all A's in junior high school. Everybody on the block was going to be proud of this. And I said, "Well, look, I don't have clothes like those toasties," the kids from up—whose families were professionals. And the neighbors say, "Well, I'm going to make your clothes. You're going to have clothes,"—my girlfriend's mother.

And I said, well, you know, you have to have lunch, because you're not around home. I was used to being able to carry my lunch

or come home for lunch, and I had all these visions of going where you had to have carfare. And all my neighbors, my mother's neighbors, would overcome every argument that I put up as to why I shouldn't go to that school. So her neighbors were going to see that I had lunch. They were going to see that I had clothes. They are going to see that I had carfare, everything. And so I went to Girls High.

[Laughs]

If I hadn't had that good educational background, with women, that reinforced me, and gave me strength, and gave me ways of seeing myself very positively developing—that's what I'm saying—I didn't have this idea of the difference between male and female. I had a very strong, positive development for myself. And then from Girls High going into nursing school, again, with women, able to develop and able to see those before me who had developed. I was able to take this idea of a service and be proud of it, and be strong in it, and use it as a foundation.

And it has enabled me to have the kind of relationships that for me have been rewarding. Being able to, as you say, recognize in the sixties that I was part of a community that was not only underserved, but was very good at service. So if you're in a community that is underserved and is very good at service, there is no justification for that community being underserved. Except that there's some people in that community who were hung up on the fact that they don't want to be servants. And so the underservice is not because the government doesn't care about us, or because somebody won't do this for us, or because we can't afford to buy this or that. The

underservice is because we're unwilling to serve ourselves and one another.

And I found as a nurse that in the sixties, I could easily volunteer my services—that would help myself and other people, in the lifestyle that we seemed to be in, where we didn't have enough service. So that's how I got to WDAS. It was like at a point when I decided that there wasn't enough information available to people, and here was a radio station. And I ran into the general manager of the station on one of the community boards I was serving, on the Bureau for Childcare. And Mr. Bob Klein was on that board, and I knew his father-in-law owned a radio station. And I told him, I said, "Some of the things that are happening to us in the cities is real bad, and the people don't have that information. Can I come on your radio station and talk about it?" And that's how I started.

ML: And you've been working here at WDAS and helping a lot of volunteers.

MH: I've been at the radio station ever since, that was 1968, and I was a volunteer until 1976. They offered me a salary if I would help the other volunteers to produce their programs.

LM: Well, tell me about some of the volunteers that you know that are in service positions now.

MH: Well, of course, right on the top of my head, I have to mention Pat Tobin, because she was here last week. Pat Tobin is a public relations specialist. She has a firm in LA, and she started the Black Public Relations Society along with some of her peers. And the first chapter of that is in Chicago, and they have since set up a chapter in Atlanta,

and they are in the process of setting up a chapter in New York, Washington DC, and now Philadelphia.

We have a volunteer, a young man who came to us when he was in the high school; it was Wissahickon High School. He wrote a letter in saying he wanted to volunteer, because I used to always say that these are volunteer programs, and if you want to work with us just write a letter. And his name was Robert Jefferson. And he worked with us on the breakfast show, and he also worked with Brahin. And in fact, he went away to the Marines, and he's the one who introduced Kevin Dickson to us.

Kevin was a younger person, and he was at Jefferson's school, and he asked me if Kevin could come on. And I said, "If he does what you did, write a letter in here saying he's interested, then he can come." Meanwhile, Robert Jefferson, I understand now, is broadcasting in Tokyo. And of course, Kevin is in Ohio. And Kevin says that—he came to us right out of high school; he was going to college his first year. And he brought me the paper his college advisor—dean—wrote when he finished college. I think it was Millersville.

LM: Millersville.

MH: He had said that when Kevin first came into the college program, he was not an enthusiastic student, not an aggressive student. But then, he understood that Kevin was doing some work with the local radio station, he said, and it made all the difference in the world. Because once he came back and was doing this radio work, he just—he just really got enthusiastic and very, very dedicated to his college work.

And Kevin attributes that change in motivation to the fact of actually being in a real-life broadcast situation.

We have a number of people—we have two or three of our volunteers who are down in Atlanta. I understand they are working with a radio station down there. We have you over there at the Blockson Collection. And we have Andrew Carn, who is a state representative in Philadelphia. Roxanne Jones was a volunteer of ours for a while, and she's a state senator from Pennsylvania. There are any number of people out there who have been our volunteers.

Foremost, I guess, is Vera Gunn, because she's a public relations specialist. She pioneered a lot of the models, the black models, the African American models, in the Philadelphia area, plus she did radio back there in the sixties and fifties. And she's now a candidate for councilperson, and has always done a lot of service work. She's a Girls High graduate. And Vera is still a volunteer with us. And there's Maya Barnes, who used to volunteer with us. I think she was doing a column for the paper, the last I heard. So it's been a very good opportunity to have motivated people to provide service to one another.

LM: Okay. Mattie, I want to wrap this interview up by asking you to give us a little information that we can offer to youngsters that may one day listen to this tape, to sit down, and hopefully they will, about education, health, welfare, and life in general.

MH: Okay, I think education is what you learn. And you start learning long before you get exposed to the public education system. You start learning actually before you get born, because your mother and father are putting something into you when they conceive you, and that's the

story that all parents should tell their children. And because that conception is a very tiny little cell, and it grows into a body within the mother's body, it picks up a lot of information while it's doing all of that growing. You just imagine rolling a snowball down the hill for five or ten minutes, and all that picks up in becoming a snowball.

And here, you have a little cell operating inside of a body with a whole bunch of ideas, attitudes, vitamins, minerals, everything, going into it to nurture it and make it into something. And it winds up from one little microscopic cell and comes out a five or six pound being, with all that information already in it before it's even born. And then all of that learning has taken place as a foundation, and then you start learning out here on the planet. And so education is all of that.

And how you get nurtured while you're in your mother's womb, and what kind of thoughts and ideas she experiences while she's carrying you even before she knows she's conceived you, all of that starts making your health happen. And if your health doesn't begin to happen right then, from then on, you try to do remedial work with yourself. And then you have to learn. You have to learn after the fact that you're a human being, and what kind of attitudes and relationships and opportunities and things you should have in order to grow into a proper human being.

LM: Okay. Last but not least, I want you to talk about ancestors and how you feel as though your ancestors have helped you to get where you are today.

MH: Ancestors, the immediate parents and their siblings, and then the remote ancestors. I think they're all the same. I just feel that my aunt

that I knew, my grandfather that I knew, aunts and uncles that I've known have been the forefathers. When I think of the ancestors from remote times, those are the people I think of. And I just think that they don't necessarily have to be reincarnations of the same souls and spirits, but they're the same kind of beings. And they were there all the way back to the beginning when God said let there be light. And so they're me, too.

And so how I respond to the thought and the potential of light is going to be the message that goes out for generations into the future. And so I feel that we're in one continuum of life, from the creator all the way to the creator is back in charge. And that to me is the message of life, and I don't feel that I have to have enemies. And I don't feel that I have to have oppositions and conflicts in order to live that life fully and well.

I think if I keep my eye on the leadership and the principle, which as I say, comes from God and some higher realizations that I grow into, every day I grow and I realize, and I wake up, and I thank God that we have this going for us. And we have a lot of things going against us that are manmade. And we just have to choose where to spend our energy struggling against the manmade obstacles, or struggling to understand the unfolding of God's bounty.

LM: Thank you. I've been speaking with Mattie Humphrey, and we're here at WDAS. Mattie L. Humphrey is known by her family as Mattie. Thank you, Mattie.

MH: Okay, well, thank you.

[End of Interview]