

**Dr. Oglesby:** October 14<sup>th</sup>, Friday, with Mrs. Melba Paulk-Veazey

**O:** We're just going to cover your life chronologically. We'll veer off, and I'm sure you will go down avenues that aren't planned but that's OK. So my first question is for--is about your childhood. And that is simply what is your first conscious memory?

**MPV:** Well, I was born in Jeff Davis County. Uh, Hazelhurst Georgia and my father worked for the state highway department. And we'd moved two or three times before we got to Occilla and I do have memories that I have thought about many times. Um, one particularly. My dad was a heavy equipment operator and as I said, worked for the state highway department. And we had moved from Jeff Davis County to a little place outside of Savannah, Georgia. And um, I was very young. But we lived in a little town called Riceburrough. And my mother sent my sister and myself up to a little store that was about a block from our house and um, my dad and them had been doing some patchwork on the road, uh, and as we walked to the little store my sister dared me to put my foot in the asphalt where they had, had recently put it down. She knew it had cooled by then, but I did put my foot in the, um, mixture of what they were paving with and um, naturally it stuck to my foot and the farther I walked, the more things stuck to my foot. And I will never forget, even though I was very young, when we got back to the house and mother saw what had happened, she put me on the counter top and began to try to get all the stuff off of my foot that had accumulated while we were walking and she said "you will never be able to wear your Sunday shoes again". And that has stuck with me through the years! But we did, uh, move a couple more times after that. But when we got to Ocilla, uh, my father told the foreman of the state highway department here, that he had one daughter in school and one about to start school and that he had a son who would be starting in a few years, and that he really did not want to move again. So that's how we came to Ocilla, and that's where we remained, I remained the rest of my life.

**O:** Do you remember, roughly how old you were in the story about the asphalt and then how old you were when your family moved to Ocilla?

**MPV:** I probably was about-- 2 to 3 years old because we moved to Ocilla before I started school, and I started when I was five years old. And uh, so uh, we had made another move or two in the meantime, just for a short period of time. And um.

**O:** Two or three, that's a good solid memory to remember back to two or three. That left an impression!

**MPV:** Well it really did.

**O:** Ok, can you describe yourself as a child?

**MPV:** Well, mother said that I was always one that would ask more questions than the others, and she felt like that it was because I was just really more interested in what was going on about us, because I have always been real outgoing. And my sister was one who liked to just get a book and read. And my brother of course wanted to get out in the yard and just play. And I did all of that, I wanted to be outdoors and I wanted to read and I also wanted to find out as much as I could even from early age. About what was going on in the world.

**O:** Ok, so you were curious and outgoing? Would you say those words...

**MPV:** That's right.

**O:** Ok, and um...

**MPV:** And my mother said, that I would argue with a signBoard if it would talk back to me.

**O:** I'm sure that, that there's much in that and maybe we'll get to it. Um, you've told me about your siblings; your sister and your brother. You were older, right?

**MPV:** No, I was the middle child.

**O:** You were the middle child, I'm sorry you were the middle child. Do you think that you have any, do you put any stock in birth order, uh, development, uh, psychology. Do you think that you in any way benefited by being the middle child?

**MPV:** Well I thought growing up that I had problems with it because I always said that my daddy loved my older sister more than he did me. And she was so much like him, I mean in personality and in her features and all she was very much like my dad. And then I always thought that my mother thought more of my brother because he was the only boy and he was the baby. But um, but that was not true. I thought it as I was growing up but, it certainly was not a fact.

**O:** Ok, and you've talked about-- a little bit about your nuclear family growing up but what about your extended family? How big was that and how often did you all gather as an extended family? Your grandparents, your aunts, uncles, cousins and so forth.

**MPV:** Well, I never knew my mother's parents. Uh, they were both deceased, uh, when I was born. But she had older sisters and a younger brother. And um, the time that I was growing up, it was during times that the economy was really bad and we didn't have a car. And, but my mother's oldest sister lived in Hazelhurst, Georgia, and she was like a mother to my mother. And um, we would get people; mother would get people to-- we'd hire them to take us to Douglas, Georgia, to catch the train to go to Hazelhurst. And we spent a good bit of time, particularly in the summer when we were not in school, at my aunts in Hazelhurst. And um, we got together, usually two or three times a year other than our visits with their entire families. Um, one of my aunts lived in Florida, and she and her family would come up and we would all get together in Hazelhurst with the older sister, as I said who really seemed like their mother. And um, we got together as often as we could on my mothers side. Now, on my daddy's side, I never knew my granddaddy Wilkes, but my grandmother who lived until she was 95 years old, and was one of the friskiest little ladies I have ever seen in my life and knew more about the world happenings-- the current events, than I did. She kept up with all the news, and listened to the radio, and just was just one of the people who never slowed down. And um, and she lived in Reidsville, Georgia, and uh, we would go see her as often as we could get somebody to take us but, we didn't get a car until about the time I graduated high school. So we had to depend on, uh, other people getting us to places or them coming to see us which was not very often because they, were not, uh, financially able to do a lot of things.

**O:** Now this, this Grandmother?

**MPV:** My daddy's mother.

**O:** Your grandmother, who was interested in....

**MPV:** World affairs.

**O:** World affairs. How did you feel about that, was that-- did that impress you? Did you...

**MPV:** Oh my goodness yes! I thought she was the smartest person I knew.

**O:** Was your father like that?

**MPV:** My father was very quiet. Um, my mother was very outgoing. And um, they were so funny together because we always said that she did the talking and he did the listening and then we would say 'well, maybe'. But uh, my father was not outgoing like my granny was.

**O:** And how many siblings did he have?

**MPV:** He had, uh, one brother and, three sisters.

**O:** Do you think that you-- Do you ever attribute your own curiosity about life and society to that grandmother?

**MPV:** Possibly, possibly.

**O:** Ok. Alright. So you would say that as much as you could but you were close to your extended family?

**MPV:** That's right.

**O:** Ok, alright. And um, you've said it already but would you say something else about where you spent your childhood. And you've said that you'd moved around two or three times before you settled

**MPV:** In Ocilla.

**O:** But mostly you spent your childhood here then, afterwards.

**MPV:** Oh yes.

**O:** Ok, alright. Um-- what would you say is the most significant thing that happened in your childhood up to age twelve? Roughly, age twelve?

**MPV:** Um, well, during those growing up years, we still had problems financially. I mean, my dad worked for like \$60 a month for the state highway department. And um, we-- he didn't always get a check at the end of the month. But then, during that growing up time, we could go to the grocery store and charge our groceries and pay our grocery bill at the end of the month. And um, if we didn't get paid, Mr. Harris-Dill was the man who had the grocery store, and uh, he understood that when we got paid we'd pay him. So I'd-- since particularly since I've gotten older, I think about how trustworthy people were then with us who had little. Um, a mans word was his bond. And um, I realized that at the time. Because I never will forget how, um, in growing up after the-- before the war started actually, this big Construction Company came through our area and um, they wanted my dad to work for them because he was known as a very good heavy equipment operator. In fact, our local city and county, if they were trying out new equipment to buy they always got my dad to try it out and to see whether it would do what they wanted it to do and so forth. But he started working with McDougal Construction Company. And this was just before the war was declared. And um, we moved to Charleston, South Carolina. And I went to school in the ninth grade in Charleston. An all girls school, my sister had just graduated and she got a job and went to work. And um, uh, I never will forget the first time that we went to the grocery store, after we moved to Charleston. We got a buggy, and we bought more groceries than I had ever seen in my house because my daddy was making really good money then. And then we were there in December when the war was declared. And um, he stayed with McDougal Construction Company for several years but we

came back to Ocilla. And I went and finished my high school days tenth and eleventh-- we only had eleven grades then. And I finished high school here in Ocilla.

**O:** So it sounds to me-- like you're saying that as a child it was very significant to you that you were even aware of at the time of-- of financial struggle. And of course that would have been in the Depression.

**MPV:** That's right.

**O:** Yeah, so--

**MPV:** And the thing that made it, uh, nice if you can call it nice is everybody was in the same boat, with the exception of two or three in my class. Uh, in high school-- I graduated with a class of just thirty three. And I think I was like seventh in the, in the class. But uh, we were very close knit and we all, were in the same boat as far as finances were concerned like I said with the exception of two or three. So I never realized that-- we were poor. Cause I don't remember ever needing something-- and I don't mean I wanted something, I never-- I don't ever remember needing something like a dress or a prom or -- something to wear to a school function. I don't ever remember not ever having those things. My mother sewed, and um, and others in my class were doing the same thing so I realized that there were people who had a lot more than we did, but there were more of us like me so I never felt uncomfortable at all.

**O:** Ok, alright, um-- I want to talk specifically about your adolescence/teenage years, but before we get to that-- do you remember as a child, what you dreamed of doing or being when you grew up? Did you have ambitions for um, you know, a particular career or just something that you wanted as a child that you dreamed of doing or being when you grew up?

**MPV:** Well, really the main thing that I really thought that I would do would be go to college. But there was just no way that we could go to college. I didn't know at the time that you could work your way through college. And because I, I don't know what I had in mind. I guess being a teacher because actually-- When I graduated, we had almost like three choices; we could either be a teacher or a nurse or a secretary. And I wound up being a secretary. So uh, I don't think I ever had high expectations--

**O:** But you did want to go to college, as a child--

**MPV:** Yes, yeah.

**O:** You really hoped that you would go to college?

**MPV:** I really did.

**O:** Do you know where that, you know, if uh, if your expectations for a particular career or professional life were not all that extensive. Do you know where that desire to go to college came from? Was that like, your grandmother?

**MPV:** No, nobody in my family--

**O:** Ok.

**MPV:** That I know of had been to college.

**O:** Mmhm. Did you go at some point?

**MPV:** Other than, the summer after I graduated high school. Our business program was new at the school and um, we didn't have teachers for all the classes so, uh, we just learned on our own pretty much. And it was my senior year so when I graduated, I went over to Douglass to South Georgia College. And took some more business. And when I came back from there, I

got a job at the school and it was not the high school or the middle school or the elementary school back then, it was just the school. And, I worked for the principal and the assistant principal as secretary for one school term. And then I went to work for, uh, what was known then as the welfare office, as secretary. Uh, now it's the department of family and children services but back when I worked with them, there were two of us in the office; the director and myself. And that was all, and we handled all the-- uh cases in the county and so forth and of course we know how that has grown through the years. And I worked for them until after I married and had my first child. And um, after I had my first child, I stayed home until she was about three. And um, our Superior Court Clerk came to me and asked me if I could help him part time at the office because he knew that I was a good typist. And that was before all these, uh, fax machines and copy machines and all that-- we typed everything-- that came in the office so, uh he had a secretary or a deputy clerk we were called, and um, but she left shortly after I started working part time. So he came to my house and spoke to my husband and me and asked me if um, if I would work for him—uh, full time and I told him well I wasn't sure because I had one child and I wanted other children. And so, he left and he tried two or three other people at the office, and he came back one day and he said "I just need you to work. You're a good typist and I need you to work. And you can get off and have all the babies you wanna have and it wont cost you anything." And back then, he worked on what was called the fee system, the clerk did. And he payed me himself, not the county. So, I was-- I always said I had the choice job because I could get off and go to the movie with friends if I wanted to one afternoon, because I knew the work would be there the next day when I got there. So, um, I never was confined to an office from like eight to five or something. So I loved my work. And, uh, in the meantime of course I had married.

**O:** OK. Um, well I do wanna kind of back pedal a little bit and talk about your teenage years. Uh, or as we call them adolescence. Um, but before we do that can I just say-- you've talked about awareness of financial struggle. Would you consider that your most-- the struggle of your childhood that you remember most were there other struggles in childhood that stand out for you, things you recall as struggle?

**MPV:** Not really, not really. And actually, Cathy my parents didn't dwell on that at all; I mean we just didn't talk about it. But uh, with the salary he was making with the state highway department at \$60 a month, we paid rent and lights and water and of course we didn't have any of the modern conveniences cause there weren't a lot of them back then. And uh, and we always had christmas, we always had a gift under the tree. So we never really discussed the finances, but we just knew that it was hard times for our people-- for our parents.

**O:** Right, right. OK about, um your childhood, do you remember having heroes? Anybody, could be somebody you knew; a grandparent, a parent, or movie star, or, anybody.

**MPV:** Well, next to my mother, I guess I loved her older sister: my aunt Bula-- more than anybody-- I wanted to be like her. She is, as I stated earlier lived in Hazelhurst. And um, uh jokingly I would always say that um, my sister was so much-- well she was a really pretty girl growing up. And um, my brother being the baby of course and the only boy-- I always laughed and told the story that um, when we'd go see relatives, that uh, they'd look at my sister and say 'oh isn't she perty'. And I said they'd pat me on the head and say 'bless her heart, isn't

she sweet'. And I said my aunt, my aunt Beulla, loved me the most. And it just, uh, just really-- I admired her very much.

**O:** She made you feel special.

**MPV:** She made me feel special.

**O:** OK. Um, OK. Now, what about-- was there-- can you distinguish in thinking back, from being a child to being a teenager-- was there some kind of marked difference there. Were you, um, was there like a right of passage into being a teenager or was it just kinda a seamless--

**MPV:** I think it was just-- I think I just became a teenager like everyone else and enjoyed, uh all the things that teenagers do. And I was very outgoing, and I loved to dance and, and I had a lot of friends and--

**O:** Your parents didn't mind if you went to dances?

**MPV:** Oh no, oh no. And uh, I know back-- during the war and-- all, uh gasoline was short and so forth and we would all pile into a friends car that had the rumble seat in it. And we'd get as many inside the car as we could and then we'd put as many outside the car as we could. And we would all just do things together. It was just a fun time growing up-- a safe time growing up

**O:** OK, so you didn't-- you weren't afraid when you were off with your friends, and--

**MPV:** Oh no, and my mother worked as a clerk in a department store downtown. And uh, back then-- in Ocilla. And, back then the only time that farmers and all came to town was on Saturday. They didn't come everyday like they do now. And uh, so the stores didn't have any particular hours-- they stayed open until everybody went home and a lot of people would come and uh-- we children would go to the theater and we'd stay all afternoon and watch the movie and the cartoons and the news and all two or three times during the afternoon. And um, then when we'd get out, we'd get in somebody's car that had one and get in the car and listen to the hit parade. But mother, like I said worked until the store closed. And it might be ten or it might be eleven, and um, uh, my daddy would stay downtown with her and walk home with her but many times, Cathy, we didn't live but a couple of blocks from town. I'd walk home sometimes at 9:30-10:00 o'clock to an open house. And um, go to bed without locking the door or anything. And never had a fear-- at all of something-- happening.

**O:** How do you recall that, um-- well maybe you weren't conscious of it but in retrospect you're certainly conscious of having no fear. Uh, how do you think that-- shaped your outlook-- your outlook on life and the world that you grew up without--

**MPV:** Well we just had trust in each other. It never occurred to me that somebody would harm me walking home. And um, uh-- it was just a different world. And then, uh, while I was still in high school we had a place in Ocilla called Mack's Place. And he had sort of a, line of products—uh, like stuff for your hair and all that sorta stuff. But he also had a restaurant. He had a grill, and the grill was up towards the front of the store. The store opening would open all the way across and just leave the front of the store completely open. And I never will forget that-- uh, on that particular Saturday-- any Saturday that we were workin. About three o'clock in the afternoon Mr. Clark McNeil owned the store and he was also the Mayor at the time. Uh, he would put a bunch of cut up onions on the grill and you could smell them all over town. And anybody that had ten or fifteen cents would come buy a hamburger. He was a good business

man. And, uh, we would um, uh stay there till everybody went home. And, I felt real privileged I got to wait on tables and, if I ever made as much as fifty cents in tips for a whole afternoon I thought I had a lot of money. And then I got a promotion; he let me type the menus, and I thought I was really-- I really thought I was somethin.

**O:** So how old were you then?

**MPV:** I was still in high school.

**O:** OK.

**MPV:** And I graduated when I was sixteen, because we only had eleven grades.

**O:** Yeah. How did you get along with your mother during your teen years?

**MPV:** Oh, like most teenagers. I didn't always agree with what she wanted and she didn't always agree with what I wanted. But we never had any real problems with it. I mean it was not-- I was never ugly to my parents; neither one. Because I knew if I did they would-- they would just not have that at all. But it never occurred to me to talk to my parents, like, some parents do. That never occurred to me to do that.

**O:** OK. Um, you've already talked about your perception of your sister being favored by your father, and your brother being favored by your mother. At least that was a perception from you growing up. But was there any awareness when you were at home of-- the brother getting some kind of special treatment because he was a boy? Was there any awareness of gender differences that girls couldn't-- you know, didn't have the same liberty that perhaps your brother would get when-- as a teenager? Even though I know there was an age difference, but was there an awareness of gender roles and expectations when you were growing up as a teenager?

**MPV:** I really don't think so. No. He did boy things, that we didn't do sometimes. In fact, we were living on Irwin Avenue here in Ocilla and, uh if he got upset over something he would say he was going to leave home. And um, so we lived, uh at the end of one block and at the other end of the block-- the way he would say he was gonna leave home-- there was a lady that lived there and she always wore a long black dress. And she had her hair in a bun and my brother would start off like he was really gonna leave home if something didn't please him. And my mother would send my sister and I after him. And the closer he got to that lady's house at the end of the block-- he was afraid of her, cause she didn't dress like most people did. And um, he'd get slower and slower. So we'd get him before he got to the end of the block, bring him back, and we always said 'now mother you would have whipped us if we had done that'. But she probably wouldn't have. I don't think there was ever any difference shown.

**O:** So you don't recall feeling that you were anymore-- you and your sister that you were anymore limited in what you might do with your lives than your brother?

**MPV:** No. No.

**O:** Alright.

**MPV:** And he went into service soon after he graduated high school.

**O:** And would that have been-- would the war have been over by then?

**MPV:** Yes.

**O:** OK, alright. Was there a significant event in your teenage years that you recall with any-- special memory? Good, bad, anything. Did something happen in your teenage years that you

consider a defining event, or circumstance, or...

**MPV:** I don't really-- right off hand recall-- now I graduated when I was sixteen. And as I stated earlier I worked one year at the school for one school term, then went to work for the welfare office. And it was during that time, that Raymond; who later was my husband, came back from service. And uh, his intentions were to go back to Moultrie, Georgia because that's where he was working with Swift and Company when he went into service. And um-- but he had a brother that was in the Air Force and he was killed in World War II. And, um, Raymond was overseas at the time-- I didn't know him in fact growing up-- we lived in the house behind, uh, where he grew up. And um-- but he had left home before I knew him. In fact, it seems quite funny now to think about it but, he graduated high school the year I started school. Because there was about eleven years difference. So I never really knew him. And um--

**O:** Now did you say it was his brother that died in the war?

**MPV:** Uh huh.

**O:** Oh. Do you know where, or what the circumstances were?

**MPV:** He was in the States, I think in Wyoming. And he was in a plane crash. And um, he was in the Air Force. And so, when Raymond came home in '45, not, discharged from the Army, but because they gave his brother's death date as January 1<sup>st</sup> of '45. And um, when Raymond got home, they started discharging, uh, servicemen on the points system. And Raymond had enough points to uh, to be discharged. So he never went back overseas. He really thought he would go back overseas and didn't bring a lot of his mementos and all with him because he was just coming home. And he served under general Patton, in fact. We have a letter of commendation that my son has hanging now in his office, uh, at home. Uh a letter of commendation from General Patton. Signed by him. And um, but he was discharged. And so instead of going back to Moultrie like he thought he would, he stayed in Ocilla because he felt that his parents needed him-- they were getting on up in age. And um, so uh, we lived about a half block from each other and that's when we really met each other in '45.

**O:** So that-- that's really a significant event.

**MPV:** Yeah.

**O:** That he wound up remaining in Ocilla. So your paths begin to cross.

**MPV:** Yeah.

**O:** Well, I'm gonna talk about romance so I'm gonna save that because I want to hear-- especially about that meeting and how that evolved.

**MPV:** Alright.

**O:** Um, do you recall as a child or a teenager disagreeing with your parents' belief system or questioning it or...

**MPV:** No I don't, Cathy and you know one thing-- that uh, we lived, uh, in a house that belonged to the foreman of the state highway department. And uh, we had neighbors that were Afro-American or black. And um, so I grew up with them sorta as a friend. And I've never had any prejudice and my parents didn't have any. So um, we never had any real disagreements about uh, race or friends or anything now. At that time, we didn't socialize with them but uh, they would come across the road to where I lived and we would play together. And I'd go across to their neighborhood and play, and um, and some of them remained even

until they died-- as some of my good friends even though we didn't see each other much.

**O:** Did that seem odd to you because that wasn't really the norm at the time for-- for the races to live in such close proximity and to play together. Did you question that?

**MPV:** No I didn't. And then--they had parts of town they lived in and we did. But uh, that certainly is not true now.

**O:** But it sounds like that in one of your homes, that there was a black family who lived nearby. Like almost a neighbor?

**MPV:** Oh yeah, yeah.

**O:** Ok. So ok that's social values. Did you question any of your parents' religious values at all, when you were growing up?

**MPV:** No, I didn't. Um, my father did not become a Christian or accept Christ until after I'd married. And my mother was a member of the Christian Church. Now, my father is the one that every Sunday, walked us to Sunday school and church. Mother stayed home and cooked lunch. And um--

**O:** Now was this to the Baptist Church?

**MPV:** Mmhm to the- That I still go to today??

**O:** The Ocilla Baptist Church?

**MPV:** The Ocilla Baptist Church. And I became a member of that when I was about twelve years old.

**O:** Was it then where it is now

**MPV:** Yeah it is. It was just the one building, and we've since added two additions to it. But it was that church that I-- grew up in.

**O:** Wow. Um, Ok. When you were a teenager, or-- as a young woman-- do you-- were you conscious of the world outside you? You say you had a grandmother who was. Were you when you were- were you interested in the news? You had-well certainly World War II, people might have been more interested in the news during those years than they might be otherwise. But what--do you recall being in a way, um, was there something besides the war that took your attention away from your immediate life?

**MPV:** Well the one thing that um, that we talked about as a family was Franklin Roosevelt-- was the president at the time. And um, my parents thought that he was just wonderful because of all the programs that he started. And we talked about those a lot. And I don't know but what that didn't have some bearing on my wanting to uh, be involved in the happenings here in Ocilla. And be a part of a movement to make things better. I think that had a lot to do with it.

**O:** OK. Did you ever meet Roosevelt?

**MPV:** No I didn't. But uh, have since met several--[presidents]

**O:** Many, yeah. Right, right. Um, Ok. When you left home, what was that experience like for you?

**MPV:** Well actually, I didn't leave home until I married. And um, I was the only one at home with mother and daddy at the time. And um, I was still working, uh, for the uh, welfare office at the time. And when I left home was really-- I married in the Ocilla Baptist Church, and um-- Raymond's parents had a nice home here in Ocilla. It doesn't look nice now, but it was one

they built and it was very nice. And um, it was large for them so uh, we made-- Raymond made an apartment in their house that we lived in until we built this house in 1950. And uh, then when we moved out, uh, that gave them an apartment to rent. And, my father-in-law's sister lived with them as long as they all lived.

**O:** When you were living at home and working, after you graduated from school-- well just when you were working, did you, um-- were you able to keep your income or did you have to turn some of that or all of that over to your parents.

**MPV:** No I kept my income. And uh, at the um, school when I was workin, I made fifty dollars a month and could eat at the lunch room free because I kept the lunchroom reports. And when I left there I went to work at the welfare office for a hundred and twenty five dollars a month and man, I thought I had enough money to buy anything I wanted to buy. And I was very conservative with it and, and I know I was so proud when uh, when I knew I was gonna marry Raymond-- that I had money to buy my clothes and, you know all that kinda stuff.

**O:** That was a sizeable salary--

**MPV:** Yeah.

**O:** During the depression years for a woman... Okay. Um-- as a young girl living in a region known for it's strong tradition, did you-- did you feel, uh-- you said you wanted to go to college, but did it ever occur to you that you might be happy being something besides one of those you named three, which as everybody knows a teacher, nurse or um--

**MPV:** Secretary.

**O:** Yes. Did you ever think that you might want to do something besides that? Did it ever occur to you?

**MPV:** Not really. Not really. And, and that's what I did, you know. My entire life. Uh, we were not called secretary when I went to work for the Superior Court Clerk. We were made Deputy Clerks, because we had to be officially sworn in as a Deputy Clerk to be able to sign papers and do the work. But it was, um-- and it was work then.

**O:** Yeah. But there was something-- there was some level of prestige to that that was really-- it was in a different category from being a secretary, so it probably had a level of-- a prestige about it.

**MPV:** It did, it did. From the time that I had Carol, my oldest daughter, until I went to work for the Superior Court Clerk, I filled in on one or two jobs for others that-- well, my sister was um, the clerk for the county commissioner. And um, a new county commissioner had been elected. And she had gotten a job with the Georgia Power. So I went to work at the Georgia Power just for a few months, holding the job for her until she could fill out her term with her boss. And then I filled in some with the ordinair, that is now the Probate Judge. I filled in and did some work with him. And all that just made me more interested in politics, and what was going on in the world.

**O:** And you never felt that you were compromising your-- your role as wife/mother-- that was always just some-- just who you were. So your-- your work in county politics sounds like very much a part of your identity. As much a part of your identity as-- as uh, anything else. And very early in your adult life, it seems that that was the case. Am I right about that?

**MPV:** That's right. That's right. Because I really-- uh, the main reason that there was seven

years difference in our children, was uh-- I mentioned earlier that I had told Charles-- the man that I had wanted to go to work for him-- that I wasn't sure that I wanted to go to work because we had one child and we had more-- wanted more children. And of course he said I can get off and have all the babies I wanted to and it wouldn't cost anything because then he was on the fee system and he paid me, not the county. And um, so in the mean time we started building this house. And um, uh you know how two salaries help-- and Raymond was a banker and his was a limited income. So once I went to work, then we got dependent on both salaries. And um, and-- that's why theres a difference in the ages between my children but then, he had said earlier that you can have all the children you want and it wont cost you a dime. But we did get really involved with building the house and all that. So then when I had Marsha, the second child, I knew we wanted one more so we went ahead and had another child then. I was still workingfor him at the time, but I had this wonderful black lady that-- we just were part of it-- she was part of the family.

**O:** Was that Essie--

**MPV:** That was Essie, yeah, yeah.

**O:** Okay well I definitely want to get back to that because-- I have-- I am very interested in how women of the generation you came of age in-- how they mothered and worked at the same time. So I'll come back to that. Um, when you were at home with your parents, did you-- did they know what your ambitions were? I mean, did that—did your parents know that you wanted to go to college?

**MPV:** Yeah.

**O:** They did.

**MPV:** Yeah. And, but they-- you know they had to sacrifice for me to go to South Georgia. For the summer quarter.

**O:** Okay. But were they morally supportive of that-- of that desire on your part?

**MPV:** Oh very much so.

**O:** If there had been unlimited funds, they would have supported you?

**MPV:** Oh, yeah.

**O:** Alright, um. Did you-- did you um, did you have pets growing up?

**MPV:** No, I didn't. And my brother had a little dog and his name was Air raid. That was because of the war-- Air Raid.

**O:** Cute, cute. And, what about friends before we move on to-- sort of the next stage. Were friends a big part of your life-- did you--

**MPV:** Oh yeah.

**O:** Did you remember-- did you have any friends whose friendship you've sustained because you're still in Ocilla-- did you have friends as a child and as a teenager that you still--

**MPV:** I do, I do. And in fact, uh until we had our fiftieth class reunion, uh, several still lived right here in the area. And we just still enjoyed each other and, and I had a lot of friends, Cathy, I really did. In fact we were all friends-- we were like a family when you just have thirty three in the class. And uh, even as we continued to have our class reunions and all we would just be thrilled that those that had left came back. You know, just to be with us all. And um--

**O:** Do you stay in touch with any of them, um, other than just at the reunions?

**MPV:** Well, we quit after our fiftieth. And really and truly there are not any left. A lot of them are deceased now.

**O:** How do you feel about that?

**MPV:** I wonder why I'm left. But really and truly there-- I'm one of, I would say probably there might be ten of us still living.

**O:** Okay. And do you all-- do your paths cross often?

**MPV:** Uh, some do. Because uh-- I know one of em is in the church with me. And one I see on numerous occasions when some of us go out to dinner. Uh, some I see at the sweet potato festival every year that live a way that come back for that.

**O:** And so now we're talking about people you graduated with--

**MPV:** Graduated with, yeah.

**O:** In the same grade. But there were others--

**MPV:** Oh yeah.

**O:** Before and after you that you-- do you-- are there many of those left around?

**MPV:** A good many, and we're still really good friends. And-- we don't really get together on a regular basis. Uh, as old friends-- but uh, right now there's a group of us-- about twelve or thirteen of us-- that um, go out to eat once a month. And um, we play cards-- a lot of em play every Monday night and every Friday but I don't play that often because I play some during the week too, and I just don't want to spend my life playing cards.

**O:** What card games do they--

**MPV:** Bee-- well, uh the group that we play-- on Monday and Friday-- we play Canasta, we play Hands and Foot, we play Chicken Foot and we play Phase Ten. It's just according to how many are there that night as to what we play. If we have an even number we usually play something with partners. But if we don't, we uh, we play singularly. And of course I belong to a bridge club in Tifton and one in Ocilla and one in Fitzgerald. And uh, the one in Tifton meets twice a month and the one here meets once a month. And right now the one in Fitzgerald is not meeting because there has been a lot of sickness and a death, so we haven't gotten started back. But we still consider ourselves a club.

**O:** Okay. Well you've already talked enough-- I had some specific questions about education but since you've already said that enough times-- but if-- if you just sorta in retrospect, knowing what you know about-- cause you know yourself very well at this point. Is there something that you think you might have enjoyed doing? Something-- a career or you know profession other than what you did-- that you think you would have been good at and would have enjoyed and found rewarding?

**MPV:** Cathy, no I-- my children asked me one time-- said 'mom if you had your life to-- to live over what would you change?' and I said nothin. And then I said no, knowing what I know now, I would have gotten more education. Because I really didn't know that you could work your way through college. And my parents didn't know that either.

**O:** So-- so what do you think you'd like to major in if you'd have been able to do that? Do you have a sense of what--

**MPV:** I would hope that I would have took the same avenue that I did. I was so happy in my work-- I looked forward to going to work everyday. I--

**O:** SO you would like to study politics perhaps? Or Business, maybe?

**MPV:** Yeah, I would have-- I don't know that I could have been more involved in politics, though cause I have really enjoyed what I had done on a local level and on a state level and-- and just the fascination of politics. Of course it's not quite the same now, that it was at one time.

**O:** Yeah, okay. Um, the next questions I'd like to ask are about marriage, children and motherhood. Do you feel like goin on? Do you wanna take a little break?

**MPV:** I'm fine if you are.

**O:** Alright. Um, your childhood and your adolescence sound, uh, almost idyllic. I expect your parents had-- and you had certain images of romance and-- and certain-- expectations of what dating would be like. Do you recall that? Was that a big part of yours and-- you had a sister. Um, was that something that was-- that you kind-- that your mother kind of prepared you for what-- and sort of trained you about what was to be expected of you as you got to be a young lady, a young woman for dating and so forth?

**MPV:** Uh, I don't think that we ever really talked about that, it just sort of happened. Now, my sister and I were so different growing up-- she was one that she wanted a book and she would get that book and she'd get in a chair or on the sofa or somewhere and read and I'd be out, seeing what was going on in the world. But we were very close, now. And the older we had gotten the more alike we were in those fields. But uh, I had boyfriends all my life. In fact-- most people wouldn't understand this but back when we were in elementary school-- we put our initials like mine was Melba Dean Wilkes so I put MDW, plus JEV first, so and so and so second, so and so and so third. And we had boyfriends and girlfriends all of our lives. And I always had dates on Friday and--

**O:** Was there an age before you could go out?

**MPV:** Oh yeah, I didn't really get to dating till I was about fifteen. And um--

**O:** Was the same true for your sister?

**MPV:** It was. And, I know when-- I was in the ninth grade-- I probably was late fourteen or somethin-- but we lived near downtown Charleston. And mother would let me-- there was a young man in service that they didn't live on post then-- they lived in apartments downtown. And she would let me-- he didn't have a car-- she'd let me walk to town to go to the movies with him. And uh, so-- I guess you'd call that a date but we never were out, you know in the world and so forth. But then, uh, when I started dating-- I dated several different people. And there was one time that I dated just one boy but mother really didn't like him too much. So I-- I just kept dating others. In fact, this won't-- need to be published but uh-- I was dating Raymond and he was here in the bank. And I was also dating ???? Paulk-- who was Raymond's cousin. And he was in the Navy. And I was also dating a boy from Nashville, Georgia, and he was in the Navy. So one weekend, ???? and the boy-- the other boy from the Navy were coming home for the weekend and the one was going to Nashville and one was coming to Ocilla. They sat by each other on the bus comin home. And they got to talkin. And uh, they asked ???? about Ocilla and he said 'oh my girlfriend lives in Ocilla'. And ???? said 'who is that?' and he said 'Melba Wilkes' and ???? said 'really?' So that wasn't a very good weekend. That was not a very good weekend and then I was dating another boy-- a local boy

that I had liked off and on all during high school. He was in the Navy.

**O:** So you had four boyfriends at one time? Sorta?

**MPV:** Well, these were two at one time and this was two others at another time. One of em was Raymond and he was here, in Ocilla. And Jack ??? was a local boy but he was in the Navy-- stationed at Green Coast Springs. And I would go out with him on Saturday night and then on Sunday afternoon we'd ride around some and then he'd go back on the bus to Green Coast Springs and, and I'd have a date with Raymond that night. Now the date was Raymond would walk from his house down to my house. And we'd sit in the living room or on the porch or whatever the weather was. And talk and visit and-- uh, sometimes mother would cook supper and we'd eat together and you know how that is when you don't have a car and all. So anyhow, one of the times that-- Jack ??? was going back to Green Coast Springs, his mother came by and picked me up and we went down to the bus station and it dawned on me. That the time had changed. So I thought 'oh my goodness. Raymond's gonna get to the house and I'm not gonna be there.' So I made up some excuse that I had to go back to the house for somethin and I wrote Raymond a note and told him that I was gonna be late in about an hour. And left the note with mother. So when I got back from the bus station the second time, Raymond had been and mother had given him the note and I said 'what did he say?' And she said 'well he didn't say anything. He just left'. So I didn't know whether he was comin back or not. But see the time had messed me up-- it had-- the time change of the bus you know, leaving. Raymond was coming before the bus was coming to take him off so. Anyhow, it worked out alright because Raymond did come back, but.

**O:** Did they know about each other? Because obviously the guys-- the um, two on the bus--

**MPV:** The two on the bus did. The other two didn't but I finally-- they knew I was really in love with Raymond so I quit dating the other boy.

**O:** Do you remember when you realized you were in love with Raymond?

**MPV:** You know almost from the beginning and even though there was an age difference, that was never a problem. Never a problem.

**O:** So you felt something-- something special with him from the time you started going out with him?

**MPV:** Yeah, yeah. Yeah.

**O:** Did um-- was there ever any-- uh, would he have been upset if he'd known about the other guys?

**MPV:** I don't think so because Raymond-- because of the age difference-- kept insisting that I go out with other people. He really did up until not long before we married. He just said 'I, you know I just want you to be really sure'

**O:** Now, remind me-- I could look it up on the sheet-- but how old were you when you start-- you married in uh--

**MPV:** I married in '46.

**O:** Okay.

**MPV:** And so I was, nineteen, eighteen, nineteen...

**O:** Okay, yeah yeah... Alright. Um, what-- well, it sounds like you had good times--

**MPV:** I did, I did. And we had a Lake Beatrice, about halfway between here and Fitzgerald.

That we could go out there and dance and we could swim and-- they finally put in a bowling alley. And that's where we all gathered and us and people from Fitzgerald-- and that's where we would go on our dates most of the time.

**O:** I think I remember hearing Sandra talk about that.

**MPV:** Yeah, yeah. And Mrs. Elie Vickers, that ran the place, he didn't put up with any foolishness. If there was anybody out there that was out of order, they got run off.

**O:** So parents didn't mind?

**MPV:** Oh no, no but now we had a place right outside of town. Uh, that was called the log cabin. Now that was one thing that mother didn't want me to go to the log cabin cause she knew they had beer and all that. But I told her one time, I said 'mother, you can misbehave anywhere you go.' And I said it's such a good place to go and dance and all. So we would go out there and dance, and mother knew that. But you know it was so funny; I would not even sit at a table where there was a beer bottle. Because I was afraid it would get back to mother that I was drinkin. But those that came after me, they didn't care they just--

**O:** Now your mother didn't want you to drink. Was that from religious conviction or was she more just--

**MPV:** Just knew it was not the thing to do.

**O:** It just wasn't proper.

**MPV:** Uh uh.

**O:** Okay. Was your mom still-- uh, with the Christian Church?

**MPV:** Yeah but she finally joined the Baptist church. She did. And my daddy did after we-- Raymond and I married. But now my daddy was a good fella all through his life, just-- just a real quiet man who tended to his own business and--

**O:** Well what do you think drew him to the Baptist Church? Cause you were there? Was that part of it do you think?

**MPV:** Well he took us though-- when we first came to Ocilla, we started walking to the Baptist Church. And I guess it was cause it was the nearest to our house.

**O:** So you didn't have Baptist roots--

**MPV:** No.

**O:** You were, observing. Okay. Alright. Um, when you were-- before you were married and had children did you have in your mind that you wanted children and how many children you wanted? Was that something you thought of as you were--

**MPV:** Well of course all girls dream about getting married, I think. And, I don't remember that I thought too much about children, but it just happened-- I was as ignorant as anybody and Raymond was too about how you had children. So on our honeymoon, we had children.

**O:** Oh my! So your daughter was born--

**MPV:** About ten months after we were married.

**O:** Okay, so you didn't have much time to really get to know-- of course-- how long did you date?

**MPV:** Over a year. We started dating in May in '45. And we married in June of '46. And um, uh, I don't know that this needs to go down in history but uh-- I know, my bridal shower-- was in June-- early June and I married the sixteenth of June. And I was on my period when we

had my miscellaneous shower. And, I didn't have another one until after my child was born.

**O:** For goodness sake. Well, you can edit the transcript if you want to take that out--

**MPV:** Well you can take that out, because when I told my mother that I was gonna have a child, uh, her thought was 'oh my goodness, people will think you had to marry' and I didn't even-- That had never occurred to me. Never occurred to me. And uh, but-- we learned pretty quick how you have children.

**O:** And so, then it was seven years before the next one came. So you figured it out.

**MPV:** Yeah. Yeah we can edit that but she was born in March, late March in '47.

**O:** How was that to be, cause you were working-- was it hard?

**MPV:** Well I wasn't working at the time--

**O:** Oh so you weren't--

**MPV:** Well I was working at the welfare office when I married and-- and conceived. And I worked until I had her. And then I did not work after that. And it was a big change for me you know cause I had never expected to have a child, that soon. But you know it worked out for the best because sometimes I think-- that I, maybe deprived Raymond of some of the time of not havin em during that seven year period. But we never thought about it at the time because we were busy like I said, trying to make some money to build this house and all that sorta stuff. And um, uh, Raymond was a wonderful husband and father. And I'm tellin ya. God blessed me-- oh so much in my life with him and with Ralph. They were both-- oh you couldn't have asked anybody to be any better or be-- any morally better or anything than those two were.

**O:** When you had your daughter, how old was she when you went to work at the deputy-- as a deputy clerk?

**MPV:** She was born in '47 and I went to work in '50.

**O:** Yeah, okay. So she was three. What did you do for child care?

**MPV:** Well, until I went to work, I was home with her. Except I would fill in some days in different places if people needed extra help. And my mother in law-- or my mother was not working then-- would keep the child. And oh my daddy loved Carol. She was the first grandchild. And Carol-- I could not nurse her. And back then we did not have all these formulas, we had to mix carnation milk and Karo syrup and if you got to much-- that was not good-- if you didn't get enough-- that wasn't good. So she was not a very happy child, but she also was very spoiled. And being born in march, I would put her playpin out on the porch and my daddy was working after he retired from the Construction Company. He went to work with the city here, and was the street superintendent. And when he'd get off work, he had to walk by our house going to his house. And Carol-- at an early age, I mean early like 6 months-- She could hear my daddy comin. And she'd be out on the pourch in her play pin and her little feet and hands were going like this (Hand motions) and I'd be inside doing this (Hand motions). He would pick her up and carry her with his hand around her like this (shows visual) with her back to his chest. And he would walk her and talk to her and keep her almost every night until it was time to put her to bed. He loved her-- that child, and she loved him too.

**O:** Did they stay close?

**MPV:** Yeah. Yeah.

**O:** Wow. So when you did go to work in the clerks office...

**MPV:** I had--

**O:** Did you parents keep her-- your mother?

**MPV:** No. When I went to work, that's when Essie came.

**O:** Oh that's when Essie came.

**MPV:** That's when Essie came to work for me and she worked for me until my children got out of school.

**O:** Hmm. Wow. That's...

**MPV:** And she-- when the children were small, I would pick her up before I went to work and take her home when I got off work. As they got into school-- all three of em got into school-- I would pick her up when I started back after lunch. And she would work until after we had our evening meal. And I always prepared enough-- bought enough, and prepared enough-- for she and her husband. And for her and her husband. And--

**O:** She didn't have children?

**MPV:** They were grown.

**O:** Oh her children were grown.

**MPV:** Mmhm. And she would take home their food for supper. And it was exactly what we had for supper. And it was still hot. Cause all we did was finish the dishes and I would take her home, and she and Mr. Willie would have their evening meal together.

**O:** Was she a good cook?

**MPV:** Ohh (Expressive agreement). She was a good cook. In fact, I would not attempt to guess how many potatoes-- Irish potatoes-- I bought while my children were growing up. They loved her french fries. And they'd come home from school, and she'd fry them some french fries. Well pretty soon, they started bringing their friends.

**O:** Uh oh. (laughs)

**MPV:** And she'd fry french fries. And I'd buy more potatoes-- they thought I was doing something illegal with em I think because I bought so many potatoes. But Essie was frying for my children and their friends and-- and their friends' friends. Essie was frying for potatoes for em.

**O:** She was peeling and --

**MPV:** Oh uh huh. Home made french fries.

**O:** Wow. So Essie took care of your house work.

**MPV:** She did.

**O:** So you didn't have to worry about--

**MPV:** She did the wash and the ironing and the cleaning, the cookin--

**O:** Did you every wonder what it would have been like if you hadn't had that domestic help?

**MPV:** Oh I couldn't have done it.

**O:** Yeah, yeah. It's what academics call the 'double burden'-- had to work and do the house work at the same time.

**MPV:** Well I say I couldn't have done it-- I couldn't have done it and done all the volunteer stuff that I did.

**O:** So that's what you did with whatever time that allowed--

**MPV:** Uh huh. Yeah.

**O:** What kind of volunteer work did you do?

**MPV:** Well, I've been on the chamber Directors forever. And on the Board out at Sunnydale forever. And like I said with the Pilot club but of course that was in '93 that we did that. All this other-that came about before then, I was active in PTA when they were in school and took on a lot of the projects and that sorta thing. And real active in the Church, taught Sunbeams and all that that-- now I understand why a lot of the younger couples don't-- aren't as active as we were cause they don't have the help like we had.

**O:** Yeah. So it really-- were you aware at the time that it was making a difference for you to be able to do those things?

**MPV:** Well, you know I never thought much about it because we just-- I just always had help. And I know when Raymond had to retire from the bank in 19-- well he was diagnosed in 1980 with Parkinson's. And he kept working for a year or two and when his speech and all began to-- to not be very good, he retired from the bank but he was director at the back and he stayed on as a director as long as he lived. But um-- when it got where he was sorta confined to the house, I had this black gentleman that used to be a tenant farmer for us. We have a little farm out-- on Fitzgerald highway. In fact, it's almost in town. And Dub would come when I'd go to work, and at night-- Essie was not helping me then and I fixed our dinner. And then I fixed Raymond and Dub a plate for lunch the next day. And um--

**O:** So he stayed with him..

**MPV:** He stayed with him and if I had a meeting out of town, he would spend the night here-- stay with him at night. And-- so I really-- I can truly say I had a wonderful life. I loved my work, and I was able to do the things outside that I enjoyed and I enjoyed my children-- I helped them with their homework, and we did all the things parents do. I just didn't have to do the cleaning and the washing and the ironing and the cooking.

**O:** yeah.

**MPV:** So that gave me time to enjoy them when I got home, and it just worked out really good.

**O:** Okay. When you were-- I've already asked you this about your own relationship with your parents and your siblings. But when you had two daughters and a son, did you have different expectations from your son than you did for your daughters or from your daughters than you did from your son? Because the daughters were girls and you had a boy? Were you equally as encouraging for your daughters to pursue a professional life if they wanted to?

**MPV:** Well I wanted them to get an education and they did. And Carol and I had a little bit of a personality conflict. And I think what happened there, Cathy, was the fact that she was-- like I said seven years older than Marsha. And she was part of the generation that-- she never was ugly to us, I don't mean that by any stretch of the imagination. But she would get frustrated with me because-- well for instance--

CD #2 Phone rings

-----Last Part Inserted in Interview-----

-  
**O:** Okay.

**MPV:** They all finished college and I'm proud of that, and we laughed and said we didn't know – Raymond said 'I hope I live long enough to get all this paid back'. We were too poor to not have to borrow money and made too much to get any kind of help.

**O:** Yeah, right. Well you were talking about – we had to take a break and use the telephone, but you were talking about your daughter Carol and how she – you and she had a little conflict when she was a teenager? And so you were telling me about that when the phone rang.

**MPV:** Well, it was just so different from when I grew up. You know, if our parents said 'no you can't do that', then that was the end of it. But Carol wanted to do some things that – for instance was that I was gonna tell you about – bikini bathing suits came into being while she was growing up. And she wanted a bikini and I said, "you can't have a bikini. That's just not possible. It's just too revealing." Well, she was working some at the jewelry store and had saved some money, and without me knowing she had bought a bikini. She would leave home with her bathing suit – that I bought – with her bikini in her bag. And then of course, Mamas sense things like that. And so when I confronted her about it, course she just still couldn't understand why I thought she should not have a bikini. So we had some conflicts there personality wise, but I think it was because it was just the beginning of the time when young people were going to – sorta do their own thing. I know she went straight to the University of Georgia from high school, and we all took her – the family – we all went together to take her to school. And Cathy, I'll never forget how uncomfortable I was when I left. Because she was staying in Creswell Dorm, and there were boys and girls there in the lobby, just pressed up against each other in the lobby – hugging and kissing and carrying on. And I thought my goodness alive, what in the world is going on?

**O:** Now this would have been – let's recall – this would have been early '60s because Carol was born in '47?

**MPV:** Yep. And –

**O:** So... About '64. Mid '60s, would it have been?

**MVP:** Probably about that time.

**O:** When she was at UGA. Okay, so that explains a lot of that.

**MPV:** Yeah and see it was just so different from what I had thought that it would be. Because it was so different – as I said, if our parents spoke, we listened. And it wasn't that she did anything wrong, it was just that it was so different.

**O:** Did you – did you regard that conflict between your older daughter and you as a more of a sign of the times than you did on an individual personality conflict?

**MPV:** Oh yeah, I think it was a sign of the times. Just so different.

**O:** Okay. Now how did that – how did you think about that? Was that more disturbing than if you had – could've dismissed it as a – you know dismissed it as a difference between your personality and hers? Was it more threatening to you because it was? You know the times were just influencing her?

**MPV:** Well I just came away feeling "what in the world has our world turned into?" You know, because people were not so forward in their relationships and all and I thought "how am I

leaving my daughter up here in all this”, you know. And I know before she went, The Villager line of clothing was the thing. You had to have a Villager skirt and sweater to match and all that. And just in no time, after she got there, the dress code went down and all. And I just kept thinking 'I just don't know what's going on at this university'. But it was not just the University, it was the country as a whole. And parents were concerned.

**O:** Now your – your older daughter, seven years older than her –

**MPV:** Now that's the one we're talking about. Is Carol, yeah.

**O:** Right. And so you still had two children at home, were you sort of trying – how was it with those two younger children? Did you feel like you had more influence on them than you felt like you'd had on your older daughter because she was – were you hoping that they would be less independent minded, maybe as young adults?

**MPV:** Well I don't know that I thought that much about it, except that I did realize that they saw what was going on too, you know. And that with them being children who have respect, and so forth, I just assumed that things would even out and that everything would be back to normal.

**O:** Did they? Did they with the two left at home? Was there less tension and – did they respond to their sister being gone? Was it a relief that the tension was not there?

**MVP:** No, they missed her terribly and I did too. And felt proud too that we were able to send her to college, and we wanted them to know that we would do the same for them.

**O:** What did she major in?

**MVP:** She majored to begin with in Music. But she said that it took away all the pleasure that she had known through the years of playing because she played sorta from the heart and they wanted her to play for the music (Laughs) And so she changed to Education. She taught first grade and – here and anywhere they lived in the – after she married, she taught first grade and she's just recently fully retired. She retired several years ago, but she was out of the classroom teaching ESOL – the. And she loved that, and they wanted her to go back so she did. And she was co-teaching with somebody the last couple of years that she taught but she's fully retired now.

**O:** Well now she graduated before either – Marsha was –

**MPV:** They were still in school. In high school.

**O:** Okay. So was there ever any question about whether or not they would go to college or was it just where would they go? Is that how, sort of...

**MPV:** It was just where they would go, and Marsha and Ray both went to Middle Georgia College at Cochran, their first two years. And then transferred to the University.

**O:** Did that make you...

**MPV:** And that was by choice. Well actually, that was just their choice. They didn't wanna go straight into the University.

**O:** Yeah, yeah. Okay. Did you – Okay – When I asked you if there was a difference between your relationship with your daughters and that with your son, you singled out the older daughter – that that was the most marked difference with your children. So you didn't really – you don't recall having a different expectation for your son because he was a boy?

**MPV:** Oh no.

**O:** No. Okay. You didn't have different curfew times for him, or anything?

**MPV:** No.

**O:** Okay, alright. How about grandchildren? How many grandchildren do you have?

**MPV:** I have 7. I have 7 great grandchildren.

**O:** 7 grandchildren and 7 great grandchildren? Wow.

**MPV:** I think that's right, the last count. (Laughs).

**O:** How different is grand mothering than mothering was?

**MPV:** Well, it's different because they – the way they handle their children is different from the way we handled ours. We spanked ours if they misbehaved, but now they sit in the corner if they misbehave.

**O:** They do Timeout?

**MPV:** Yeah, Timeout. And so for instance, when I knew they were all – after they had married and had children – When they were all coming home – and they all like to come home at the same time, you know after they married and so forth. And had children. And I would prepare food two weeks in advance, put it in the freezer and all because when they came, I didn't want to be in the kitchen all the time and I wanted to help with the children so they could enjoy each other. And so I worked getting ready for them to come for about two weeks, and then they would come and we would have the week-end, and I would help them with the children and enjoy all of it really much. But on Sunday evenings, when they would leave, Raymond would be sitting in his chair and we'd watch 'em leave, and he's say 'I sure do hate to see them leave.' And I said 'glitters(?) I don't?' I said (laughs) I like to see 'em come, but I like to see 'em go too. (Laughs)

**O:** Well now did you ever have help getting ready for your kids coming home? Was Essie too old by then to help?

**MPV:** Yeah. Now when Carol was in college, Essie was still working. And when she knew "Cal," that's what she called Carol. When "Cal" was coming home, we had to have a certain menu because that was what "Cal" liked. And then that went through the next two.

**O:** So they had to have special things when they came home?

**MPV:** Whatever they wanted when they came home, Essie saw that they got it.

**O:** Well what about their children then? Did she – did their children know her? Essie?

**MPV:** No. Well now Carol's might have known Essie – just known who she was. But they didn't spend a lot of time with her.

**O:** But how many children did Essie have?

**MPV:** Essie had several. And some by different husbands, and so forth. But they were grown.

**O:** They were grown. Before she started working here. So she was in middle age then?

**MPV:** Yeah.

**O:** Is she still living?

**MPV:** No, shes...

**O:** Oh, you said you used to visit her in the nursing home.

**MPV:** Yeah.

**O:** How much of a role do you think mothering – the experience of mothering – played in shaping you into the mature person that you became? I mean obviously you've had an

identity apart from your home life all of your adult life because you worked before you were ever – and you were sort of career minded from a very early age. But how much do you think that mothering – that role, that responsibility, played in shaping you into the person you are today?

**MPV:** It played a big part in my life, because I always felt like that I was a pretty good girl, and woman. And Raymond and I had a good marriage. But it made me more determined to try to do things just exactly like they should be done in so far as morals and all, for myself. I wanted to set a pattern for them. And so I know back when my children were growing up, probably until they were out of college – they probably never saw us drink a glass of wine. I mean it was – we didn't drink, but we would on occasion have a glass of wine or somethin'. But they never saw us take a drink until they were grown and out of the house, really.

**O:** So you and your husband both had that sense of –

**MPV:** Knowing that we needed to live our lives so that they would live theirs accordingly.

**O:** You wanted to be ... morally . . .

**MPV:** An example.

**O:** Okay. And for both of you – so drinking was a moral issue? Would you say that, that it was more of a moral issue than it was a health issue? That's how you regarded it?

**MPV:** Yeah.

**O:** And it was not – it wasn't, it sounds like it wasn't especially related to religion?

**MPV:** No.

**O:** Do you have a sense about where that came from? Where the notion of...

**MPV:** Well I think it probably was because when I was growing up, drinking was wrong.

**O:** Okay.

**MPV:** And but I--

**O:** But not necessarily connected directly to a religion, it was just wrong.

**MPV:** No, it was just wrong. And see the generation I grew up in, we didn't smoke. I never smoked. I'm not bragging about that, I'm just glad I didn't. But we didn't smoke, we just – and we didn't drink. So.

**O:** And did you ever have the desire to smoke or drink?

**MPV:** I think I tried – One of my friends mother smoked, and I think we got one of her cigarettes out of an ashtray one time. And I knew that immediately I didn't want to smoke.

**O:** And the same thing with drinking? Did you have that...

**MPV:** Yeah. Well I don't think – I don't think I ever drank until – a glass of wine until they were grown.

**O:** But you know – is that something that you're okay with now? A glass of wine occasionally if you...

**MPV:** I – it is.

**O:** So you don't feel that same kind of ...

**MPV:** Uh uh. I don't feel like I'm committing a sin when I...

**O:** But do you think that's got somethin to do with the fact that your mothering is – you're not so concerned now about being a particular role model because your children are grown, their children are grown. Do you think that that's got anything to do with it? Or do you just feel that

socially it's more acceptable now?

**MPV:** Well, it definitely is more acceptable now. But you know, it's very rare that – that I even have a glass of wine now. And it's not that I feel like it's morally wrong, I just – well during the time I was a widow, I just knew that some people did sorta turn to things like that and I didn't and I didn't want to just because I just didn't want to. And – but now, like I say, I'll drink a cocktail or I'll drink some wine – a glass or one mixed drink or somethin. But I laughed – I used to laugh and say I didn't even do that when I went to the clerks meetings and all that because I said I hadn't got much sense when I'm sober and I didn't want (laughs) I sure don't want to get intoxicated. So it's just that I don't – I just wanna be me.

**O:** Right, yeah. And did Mr. Veazey have – when you met him – did he have a strong feeling about drinking?

**MPV:** Well he would take a drink, and he didn't like wine – he would just take a drink. And I didn't even know he did that until we'd been married a year or so. In fact, one night, it was – maybe an anniversary we'd been going together for somethin – and I said 'I'm gonna fix dinner for us tonight, or would you like for me to just fix us a picnic lunch and lets go out to my farm and sit on the pier and have our picnic.' And he said 'well let's do that'. So I packed chicken and sandwiches and all that and I put in a bottle of wine. And we never opened the bottle of wine, because he didn't drink wine (laughs). But he would take a drink, but he was not – as far as I knew, he didn't – when I knew him he never – he was not an abuser.

**O:** Yeah. Okay. If you could go back to the years when you were mothering – when the children were at home – and do something a different way, would you and if so what might that be?

**MPV:** I don't know right off hand that there was – would be somethin that I would change because I took an active part in – my girls were in the band, and I took an active part in supporting them in their activities. And then Ray played football, and I took an active role and Raymond did the booster club and all that. So – and we took them on a lot of vacations, course we had some by ourselves too. But I don't – right off hand – I don't know that I would change much.

**O:** Okay. Alright. What – you just, a few minutes ago, remarked on how different your children and your grand children are at parenting than you and your generation. If you could pass on lessons that you learned from mothering, what would they be? How would you – what would you say to people parenting today?

**MPV:** Well, I think one of the things that I would say is don't just tell them some things to do, but set an example for them to do. And I know back when mine were growing up, we used to read some stories but we didn't read a story every night – I wish I had done that. I would tell them now to always have that bedtime story, and –

**O:** And what do you think is important about that?

**MPV:** Well, I think that the togetherness of it is good and I think it would teach them to love reading. And in fact, one of my little great grandsons the other day, he was – he's in pre-K – and he asked his uncle – his daddy's brother, who is very good at freehand art – drawing – and so forth, and he said 'uncle Macky' he said 'can you draw Darth Vader?' And Uncle Macky

said, 'I probably can.' And so he was sketching Darth Vader and then they got to talking about some of these books and programs that I don't even know anything about and I said, 'do parents ever read *Green Eggs and Ham* and all those children's stories anymore? And they looked at me kinda funny and said 'well, yeah. Sometimes' (Laughs) So I, you know, it's just different.

**O:** Did you enjoy children's stories? Children's books?

**MPV:** Oh yeah, I really did. And in fact, Marsha, my second daughter, her major was Journalism and Public Relations, and I've tried – she's a great writer, she writes a Christmas letter that you feel like you've just read a story. And I've encouraged her to write some children's books, because I thought she could do that. And Carol could illustrate 'em – she can draw. And but I never have been able to get them to do that.

**O:** So Carol became a teacher, Marsha became a Journalist, and what did –

**MPV:** Well actually, Marsha, when she got out, her major was Journalism but she went to work for an insurance company. And worked her way up and then when she started having children – they were living in Jacksonville, and they lived across town from where her office was so she just didn't work then when they were growing up. It was just too hard to leave them and be happy with it and the distance was far. And so when she went back to work, she went to work as the book keeper at their church. And I still try to get – and she's written some articles for papers, but that has not been her work – her line of work.

**O:** And your son, what did he major in and –

**MPV:** Ag/Econ.

**O:** Okay.

**MPV:** And he's worked-- He worked in timber for awhile, and then he went to work for Fleetwood and he's been in the mobile home business ever since.

**O:** Okay, alright. This is an occasion of where you're gonna say 'I think I've already answered that' and if you feel like you have that's fine. What to you does it mean to be a good mother? You just said that you would, you know, you'd love to just read to children every night. But if you had to describe a good mother, or point to somebody you know besides yourself, that was or is a good mother – an exemplary mother, does anybody come to mind and could you describe what a good mother is?

**MPV:** Well, of course a good mother first has to love her children. And then I think teaching them about morals and how important it is to educate yourself and all. I think the reward that you get from being a good mother, or trying to be a good mother, is that you have good children. Now, I know that there are a lot of mothers who've had children who disappointed them. But I think that's the world we live in today. And –

**O:** There's more social influences –

**MPV:** I think so. Peer pressure.

**O:** Okay, alright. When you talk about part of being a good mother is teaching moral values., what would you say that the highest moral value that you can teach a child? Highest two or three moral values that you could teach – or are important for a child to know?

**MPV:** Well, my thought is, and my thought was with my children, I wanted them to be Christians – I wanted them to accept Christ as their savior. And I felt like that if they did that,

that their morals would be set for them. And that's what I strived for and that's what Raymond strived for, was to set an example that they would want to do that in their own lives.

**O:** Okay, alright. And you've already said this I know, but mothering today is very different from what it was in your generation. Do you think it's gotten easier or has it gotten harder?

**MPV:** I would think it's gotten harder because there's so many more temptations in the world today. And I just know from the work that I was in that the kind of cases that we have in court now are so different from the cases that we had back years ago.

**O:** Can you give me an example? Like what would be a case that you had more recently before you retired that you just wouldn't have seen twenty or thirty years before.

**MPV:** Well, the worst thing that we dealt with when I first started workin in the clerk's office was moonshine liquor. People making moonshine liquor. And back then, it was very similar to when we had divorces in court. And now, hard drugs, child molestation, things like that are what you see on the court calendars now. And to me, that is just so, so horrible for children to be involved in things like that.

**O:** Okay. Can you tell me what you admire most about each of your three children?

**MPV:** Now, ask me that again?

**O:** What – your three children – what do you admire most about each one of them? (Phone rings)

**O:** You were about to tell me the things that you admire most about each of your children.

**MPV:** Okay. Well, first and foremost, all three of em, have wonderful marriages, and they're good husbands and wives to their spouses. And I admire them for that. And they're all Christians, they all – Carol and Jimmy are not as active in Church right now as they have been, but since they retired, they – sort of like somebody that's been turned loose, you know. But Ray and Phyllis are both active, and Ray's just been ordained as a Deacon. And Marsha and Ken are very active in their Church and um...

**O:** All three of them in Baptist Churches?

**MPV:** No, um – well, Carol is still a Baptist, but they've been going to a Presbyterian Church. And Ray and Phyllis are Baptist. And Marsha and Ken go to the Church of Christ. And –

**O:** Does that bother you, that they have different –

**MPV:** No. Just so they believe, and no that doesn't bother me. And I just admire the way that they respect me as their mother. And that they love each other. And –

**O:** Did they ever have any problems getting along at home? Other than just regular sibling...

**MPV:** No, just regular – that's all. Nothing ever between them. In fact, Cathy, you wouldn't believe this. But Raymond had two sisters and he had three brothers. The oldest one was not really his real brother, but his parents raised him because his – his name was Horace – and his mother died in – Horace's mother died in child birth. And she was Raymond's daddy's sister. So Mr. and Mrs. Paulk took Horace in and they had two girls and then they had Raymond and then they had Harold. And when both of them died, there was the two girls and Raymond. Harold was killed in the war, and Horace had died of a heart attack. And he was not legally theirs, but was raised by them. But anyhow, the parents had this little farm out on the edge of town. And they had left the farm to the boys. And had left the house in town to the

girls. And because Raymond was the only one of the boys that were left, and Harold was not married and he didn't have a family and of course Horace was not legally theirs. Raymond was the only boy. And he went to his grave trying to pay his two sisters some money because the house in town was not worth as much as the farm. And those girls said 'there's no way you'll ever pay us any money because our parents wanted you to have the farm, and us to have the house.' And we've had pretty much that same within our family because – of course the farm is mine, and in doing my will, I had some things set out for each of em. And the farm, I put in an estate because I thought Ray is the only one that lives here, he's the only one that will ever get anything from the farm. And so I told the girls when I put it in an estate in a trust fund – put it in a trust fund. And they would all share and share alike and all that sorta thing. And the girls said. 'we dont' care who gets the farm, we just don't want anything to happen to the farm because once you're gone, if we're still living, we just want a place to get together.' And that's, that's just the kind of relationship – and I admire that so much about them. They – they love each other and –

**O:** So you don't have to worry about – that's not something that –

**MPV:** No. Un uh.

**O:** Okay. So you admire about them that they are – they love each other, and they – there's just a lot of – lot of –

**MPV:** Connection in their families, that they're fine Christian young people, and –

**O:** And their children – their cousins get along?

**MPV:** Uh huh, very well. Real good.

**O:** Do they still come here for Christmas and –

**MPV:** They do.

**O:** So that must be a big – a big holiday together. Do you all get together other than Christmas?

**MPV:** Uh yeah, Easter. We have a big gathering out at the farm at Easter. And – now the Veazey....My children get together the weekend before Christmas – but the Veazey children, we all get together Christmas weekend and we get together in the Veazey family on thanksgiving. But my children, we don't get together on thanksgiving now – we did in times past, but since we meet – get together for Christmas the week before Christmas, there's just very little time between that thanksgiving and that time. So we – Easter is a family time, and Christmas.

**O:** Do your children and their children have a relationship with your – Mr. Veazey's family?

**MPV:** Uh, they all like each other. We don't get together a lot as a family, but you can't get that many together – he had five boys. And they're all married and they have children and he has grandchildren. And there's just no way that you can get 'em all together. Now I did last year – tried to get them together and as many as could come. And we had a big family when we all get together.

**O:** But they get along, and they enjoy each other?

**MPV:** Yeah, mmhm.

**O:** Well, can you tell me about how you met Mr. Veazey and how that – how that kind of –

**MPV:** Well, I knew his oldest son, Johnny, and his – Johnny's wife's mother worked for me the last several years I was in the office. And Ralph's wife died in 2000. And they kept saying they wanted me to meet Johnny's daddy, but that he was seeing somebody right then. I said 'that's okay, that's fine with me.' But anyhow, Johnny called me one Sunday afternoon and he said 'Mrs. Melba, what are you gonna do tomorrow?' And – this was in December of '04 – and I said 'not anything Johnny, whatcha want?' He said 'well my daddy and I want to come over there and take you to lunch.' And I said 'well that sounds good.' So the next morning, Ralph went to the office and – Ralph does row farming but he also has fifteen greenhouses that he does plant farming and ships plants all over the United States to big business. And he went out to the office and Johnny said 'daddy go get dressed, now, we're going to Ocilla.' Ralph said 'for what?' He said 'we gonna take Melba to lunch.' He said 'I aint goin over there.' Johnny said 'yes you are, cause I've already made the arrangements.' And Ralph says 'Well let's go and let's get it over with.' And so they came, and took me to lunch and Johnny had also invited his wife's parents to eat with us. And also a friend of his that works for the farm credit hear to eat with us. So we went to lunch, and Ralph was not very talkative. And they brought me home and I thanked em for lunch and told em I had a good time. And Ralph called me that night and he said 'I just wanted to tell you how much I enjoyed lunch and some friends of mine over here, we get together every New Years.' And this was right after Christmas that we went to lunch. And he said 'we get together at new years and have the regular black eyed peas and turnip greens and I'd like for you to go with me to the New Years dinner.' And I said 'well, I'd love to.' And so he came and picked me up. We went to his friends' couples' house and there were four of those couples that always got together. And we had diner and we had a good time. It was the first time that I'd ever met them, you know. And so when we started to leave that night, we got outside the house and he said 'well I thought the others were coming out too.' And I said 'oh, no Ralph, they're in there discussing me.' He said 'I don't think so.' And I said 'oh yeah they are too. They're in there talking about me.' So he called me the next – oh and funniest thing happened. We had not been at the couples' house ten minutes when their phone rang. And it was Johnny wanting to know if his daddy had got there and was I with him (Laughs).

**O:** Checking up on his daddy... (Laughs)

**MPV:** And so the next morning he called me and he said 'well you were right, they were discussing you but I wanna tell you, you made a hundred.' So we dated, right on after that. And he and I both knew really toward the first that it was meant to be. It really was, it was meant to be.

**O:** Was he the first person you were serious about after your husband?

**MPV:** No, not really. I had been serious about a man that lived in North Carolina. And he wanted us to get married so bad, in fact he gave me this ring. And I never wore it as an engagement ring, cause I told him I just know that wouldn't work because your children are in North Carolina, my children are here, and his children really liked me to start with cause they said they saw their daddy happy for the first time in a long time. But after he – they realized that we were going to see each other and were serious about each other, they decided they didn't like me too good. Cause there are too many women who are out trying to get what

men's got, you know and I certainly didn't want that. But he was killed in an automobile accident. He had had the flu one week and – his daughter is a nurse and she'd stayed with him. And she went home on Saturday, and I was supposed to go to North Carolina on Thursday. And when he told me she went home I said, 'well I'll just come on up then.' And he said 'well, that'd be fine but I'm fine now if you want to wait until Thursday.' And I said 'well that's what I'll do then cause that's what I had planned to do.' And I was still workin, then. And he walked over to McDonalds – which was somethin he did every morning at breakfast which was about two blocks from his house. And he walked a lot. And he called me that Sunday afternoon and he said 'I'm gonna walk over to McDonalds and get me a sandwich' he said. 'I've been in all the week.' And I said 'Well honey the weather's not good here.' I said – he said 'well it's a little bit misty here, but I'll bundle up real good'. And he walked over there and he was walking back home and a car struck him. Killed him instantly. And I really – I really had a time with that. And –

**O:** Do you remember what year that was?

**MPV:** That was in '94. No, no. That was in '97, because I retired in '96. And that was in '97. And I didn't see anybody after that that I – I dated –

**O:** How did you meet the man in North Carolina? How did you all?

**MPV:** Well I directed weddings, and I directed his granddaughter's wedding who lived here and was a good friend of my granddaughter. And – in fact I directed two of his daughter— granddaughters' weddings. The first one, his wife was living and Raymond was living, so we just – I just knew him as the grandfather. But then when the second granddaughter married and my – children were still friends with his granddaughter, and Paige – was my granddaughter – was still friends with his granddaughter. And I directed that wedding and in the mean time, his wife had died and my husband had died – both in '93 and this wedding was in '94 I guess. And so anyhow when he started leave the reception, that night he said 'I want to tell you how much I appreciate what you've done for my girls and I wish if you were ever in Kings Mountain, North Carolina, you would give me a call.' And I said 'well, that's not my usual route but thank you.' And I enjoyed meeting you and so forth. Well that Christmas, I got a Christmas card from him and he put that he hoped I was gonna have a good Christmas. He was gonna be at his sons, and that his telephone number was – well I don't remember now what it was. So I just sent him a Christmas card and told him what my number was, and he called me. And we telephone dated over the phone probably six months. And he called me one day and he said friends and – two couples of his and him were coming to Atlanta to a ball game and wondered if I would meet them in Atlanta. I said 'I don't know, Ned.' I didn't know what his intentions were and I said 'I don't know, I'll have to think about it and see what my court schedule is.' And all that, and he said 'well we're going on a golfing trip, us men and when I get back I'll call you. When I get back.' And I said 'okay' and so I made up my mind that I was going, but that I was just gonna say 'tell me where you all are gonna be and I'll make my reservation.' And so when he got back from his golfing trip, he called me and I said 'Ned, I've decided I can work it out. I can come, but tell me where you'll be and I will make my reservation and you make yours.' And he said 'well we're gonna be at the Embassy Suites.' But he laughed and he said 'but I've already made the reservation.' And I said 'uhh' and he

laughed – he had this little chuckle that was just so funny. He said 'two rooms!!' I said 'okay, thank you.' (Laughs) So we dated until he was killed.

**O:** How in the world did it feel to date in your sixties compared with how it felt in your teens?

**MPV:** Very comfortable. Very comfortable. It was just entirely different. Just entirely different.

**O:** But it felt like more natural?

**MPV:** I was just as natural, it was just as much at ease with him as it could be. And it was the same way with Ralph. We just knew God had put us together. He told me many times that he had prayed that – and he had dated. He was dating somebody to start with when they first wanted us to meet. But they had broken up, and he just told me he said 'I know God put us together.' And I felt that way too. We had a wonderful marriage, and he was a wonderful man. And he and Raymond were so much alike in so many ways and –

**O:** Was the man from North Carolina – if there hadn't been the distance, do you think that you and he would have been happy together? If –

**MPV:** Oh we would've been happy together. I think if it had not been for the distance. And that way he could have seen his children all the time and I could have seen mine all the time, you know that sorta thing. But that just wasn't meant to be – I'd always said I would never marry again. I really had – in fact, when I first started dating Ralph, I knew that I cared about him, but I did not plan to marry. But it just became evident that we just – we needed to be together.

**O:** So you were married five years before he died.

**MPV:** Uh huh. And see we dated two years before we married.

**O:** Oh my goodness. And how was – well, I'll talk to you about some – the experience of grief and loss and that kinda thing. So there'll be a chance to talk about that but you certainly had that experience enough to be able to –

**MPV:** And you know, it might seem strange to hear me say this, but my grief for Raymond's death was not the same as the grief that I felt when Ned died and the grief that I felt when Ralph died. Raymond had Parkinson's, and I had kept him at home as long as I could. And one night I had gotten him back to bed for about the third time and I said – and he had gotten up and he had fallen and sometimes I could get him up and sometimes I couldn't – I just had to put a pillow under his head and he was just dead weight. Later I could go in and pick him up and he could help me a little bit. And so I took him to the VA hospital with the help of our VA representative that I knew real well cause he came to our office for visits. And he went with me up there to look over the facility at the VA hospital to get him evaluated and so forth and we went up there, and I took him and – one of the black men that stayed with him while I worked went with me up there because I couldn't handle him by myself. After they examined him and all they said 'what did you expect from this visit?' and I said 'I expect him to be admitted to the hospital.' And they said 'well, why'd you think that? We don't have room.' And I said 'well I was told that he would be admitted.' He said 'by whom?' And I told him the doctor's name. And so he called the doctor, and the doctor said 'he is to be admitted today.' And that was on efforts of our VA representative, that he had arranged that. And so he was in the VA Hospital for about three months, and they told me that they were gonna have to move him to a nursing home. And what was my choice? I said 'here.' And they said 'well, his condition is not related to his service in the Army.' And I said 'well, who's to determine that?' I said 'it very

easily could be.' But he had dementia – he had developed dementia real bad. And again, the VA representative got him admitted to the nursing home there at the VA Hospital. And I would spend Wednesdays and weekends with him up there at the hospital. And –

**O:** Now remind me where was it again?

**MPV:** In Dublin. In Dublin. And he had gotten to where he could not swallow, and they had put a feeding tube in his mouth. And on Sunday afternoon – the last Sunday I visited with him – He – we couldn't communicate, that tube was there, they were having to feed him with IV's, and tears were running down his cheeks and I prayed all the way home – Lord, it is time to take him home. He died the next morning. And it was an answer to prayer – it was a blessing. So I really was relieved when he died. I really was.

**O:** So that was roughly three months after he left here.

**MPV:** Six months.

**O:** Okay. Three months in the hospital and then three months in the nursing home?

**MPV:** Uh huh. Uh huh. And it was a relief. It really was –

**O:** Now he lived with Parkinson's for over a decade, didn't he?

**MPV:** Thirteen years. Thirteen years. And so, of course when Ned died, I grieved but I couldn't let myself grieve too much over that because his children were not nice to me at the funeral at all – they just ignored I was there, you know. And had his daddy known – if Ned had known that, he would have cut them out of everything he had and owned and everything else because he loved me, and I loved him. But I didn't want anything he had, and in fact he tried to put an insurance policy in my name and I wouldn't let him. And – but then when Ralph died, see, he was diagnosed with cancer the same year that my daughter in law was diagnosed and they both were diagnosed – daughter in law – was diagnosed and both of em were diagnosed with stage four cancer, at the time they were diagnosed. And Ralph went through Chemo twice, and Radiation. And he was still up and able to not be in the bed and it had not spread to his brain like lung cancer does sometimes and all. And he died just – one Hospice had come in, but Hospice is not like it used to be. It now is more like a home health service. And they had come in and they had brought a Hospice bed that there – cause he had spent two nights in his recliner. And I asked him, I said 'honey, would you like to get in that bed tonight and see if it sleeps alright?' And he said 'I don't know' – he was up in the den – and he said 'I don't know' and I said 'well, I promise you one thing, if you get in there and you don't like it, I'll bring you back up here. We want you to be comfortable.' He said okay, so when we were going down the hall to go to the bedroom, I said 'honey would you like to go to the bathroom before you go to bed? You might save you having to get up to go.' And he said okay, so we went to the bathroom and – I had night help then, not Hospice but somebody the boys had hired. And I was in front of his walker and she was behind it and he was walking on his own. We got him on the john and when we got him on the john his head fell over on my chest. And for all practical purposes, he died that minute. But she got him off the john while I ran to call 911, and she had just been re-certified with her CPR. And so she started giving him CPR – Artificial respiration and all that stuff. And of course I called the boys – I called 911 and I called the boys 'come quick, come quick.' And we took him to the hospital but he died the next night. And he didn't know anything after he got to the hospital.

**O:** What kind of cancer was he-- ?

**MPV:** Lung cancer. And it was near the main artery to the heart, and it was not operable and he had stage four anyhow. And my daughter in law – Ray's wife – was diagnosed in – he was diagnosed in August, and she was diagnosed in October. And she had gotten mammograms regularly, never showed up. But it was in the lymph node, and she still has cancer. But she fights it every day, and her last pet scan was good, and she said – asked the doctor-- she goes to Emory and says 'you gonna tell me I'm cancer free?' And she said 'no, Phyllis, I'm gonna tell you that you had a wonderful pet scan, and I'll see you in six months.' But she said 'I cannot tell you that you're cancer free.' And then in January, of the next year, my grandson's wife who was twenty three years old was diagnosed with Gardener's – which is a genetic disorder that had never showed up in her family before. And her body makes polyps and tumors. And they will go into cancer if they are not removed – she's had her colon removed, she's had part of her small intestines removed, and now she's facing having her rectum removed.

**O:** She's twenty three?

**MPV:** Well she's probably twenty six now.

**O:** Heavens... Wow. You've had a struggle with cancer.

**MPV:** It's... It's been a struggle. I don't know why it couldn't be me instead of them. But I grieved over Ralph's death more than I did Raymond's death, because I was not expecting it when it happened. And I had prayed for Ralph – for Raymond's the day before all the way home from Dublin. Cause I knew that there was just no better for him. And I knew that with Ralph, but I didn't expect his death when he died. I – that was just not –

**O:** And was the – was the grieving experience afterwards different because of the difference in the ways –

**MPV:** Uh huh. I still haven't gotten over Ralph's death – I miss him every day. I miss him every day. And that's why I'm still in Tifton part of the time. Just haven't been able to turn him loose. But I'm sure with Phyllis's condition and Sarah's condition – that's been part of the problem too. But those are day by day things, we take 'em and go with 'em and be thankful for every day.

**O:** Do you think you've had enough for today?

**MPV:** If we could finish...

**O:** There's no way we could finish. The next thing I want to talk to you about specifically is religion, and – do you want –

**MPV:** Well if we got to start back, can we do it tomorrow?

**O:** Sure.

**MPV:** Well I'll just spend the night here tonight, and then we could --

-----End of Last part inserted in Interview-----

**O:** Okay, it's Saturday, October the fifteenth. And we're back at Mrs. Melba's house and we're gonna start-- pickup sorta where we left off yesterday. And Mrs. Melba has shown me some plaques and awards that she's received in her work over the years. So, we'll try to be explicit,

Mrs. Melba, about-- so they can get on the recording-- dates and that sorta thing.

**MPV:** Okay. Uh, Cathy I started with one in 1988. Now I became our Superior Court Clerk in 1981, and we were divided-- the clerks are divided into different districts all over the state. And I was very active in my district with the clerks of Association. And in 1988, I was given this plaque which was the 'Clerk of the Year' award. And I was very pleased with that because I had only been clerk for just a few years. And--

**O:** And again, I just want to reiterate-- the clerk of the court in Georgia counties is elected.

**MPV:** That's right.

**O:** Is an elected official.

**MPV:** That's right. And as far as I know, I was the first female elected in our county.

**O:** That's-- I wanted to also reiterate that. Because-- how did you feel about that? Did you think about the fact that you were?

**MPV:** No. Not really. It just, you know, things just fall into place sometimes by the grace of God and I just-- I was just in the right place at the right time.

**O:** So you -- then the newspaper didn't make anything out of the first woman elected to the clerk?

**MPV:** As best I remember not.

**O:** Oh my. Okay.

**MPV:** Uh uh. There was one lady who worked for her father who was the school superintendent, that she finished out his term. Because of his death, but as far as I can remember and others remember, she never ran for the office. And she finished out his term, but that was only maybe-- I don't remember whether it was a year or two or whatever. And then another one in 1988 was what we called the 'Stetson Bennett' award, and that's one that's given to a clerk throughout the state. Stetson Bennett is the clerk and still is the clerk -- Superior Court Clerk-- in Wayne County. Which is Jessup Georgia. And he's been there probably since the 1960's. And he probably is not physically able now to work, but his daughter runs the office. But he's been a great help and influence in the Superior Court Clerk's association. So every year an award is given to someone and -- I received that also in 1988.

**O:** Do you have any idea -- when you worked, were first elected how many woman clerks there were in this state?

**MPV:** Very few. They were mostly men. And now it's mostly women. I would almost guess that now over half are ladies-- women.

**O:** Do you have any idea why that is? I mean has there been-- have the salaries continued to be consistent with raises.

**MPV:** Yeah.

**O:** So there's no real explanation? Or have you ever thought about it?

**MPV:** I just hadn't thought about it. But I would suppose that it's because women have become more in the limelight than they used to be. And to a lot of them, I would think, probably was like I was-- had worked in the clerks office for years and when the chance became available, then they would seek out the office. You didn't see many men deputy clerks, they were all clerks. And we as deputy clerks took the advantage of their retirement.

So that we could become clerks. And I would imagine that would have had the biggest play in why there are so many now. In 1991, I received the award for 'Outstanding Director of the Chamber of Commerce'. I've been on the Board for the Chamber of Commerce for many years. And several years ago when I don't have the exact number of the years-- I could get that out of the chamber office. I've been secretary of the Board of directors for the Chamber of Commerce. So I don't ever come up for reelection, they just want me to rule that I would be secretary and I would be secretary to the directors. And my term would not end after a period of time like most of the directors do. So I still am actively involved in the Chamber of Commerce. And still the secretary for the Board of directors, and I enjoy that too. In 1993, I received the plaque, and that year, the entire sweet potato festival was dedicated to me. And I was thrilled, I certainly never expected that. If I accept a job as a volunteer, I don't want my name on the list just as somebody that's been appointed or voted on or elected to be on the Board. I want to be an active part of the Board, and I've been connected with the sweet potato festival almost from it's beginning and have done nearly every job. For years I worked with just the beauty pageant, then I worked a couple of years with the cooking contest-- just being responsible for getting people to enter and –

**O:** So do you remember when it began, roughly?

**MPV:** Well we just had-- we're on our 51<sup>st</sup> year. This year. With the sweet potato festival. So it was in 1993 that I got to ride in the parade, as, something special. And would you believe that's one of the few times that it rained in all the times that we've had the festival. But that was okay with me. And then in 2003, I received another award from the Chamber of Commerce. And of course this award connected to the sweet potato festival-- was also an award from the Chamber of Commerce because they sponsor the sweet potato festival. In 2004, I was given this award (shows award) from AARP of the state Georgia. Says in recognition of outstanding leadership and commitment of AARP issues. But I did serve as an advocate specialist from my area for several years. With AARP. And it's still affiliated with the AARP, but not as an active participant because it was during that time that I also was appointed to the Georgia Council on Aging. Now the Georgia Council on Aging is a 20 member committee. 8 are appointed by the governor, 4 by the lieutenant governor, 4 by the speaker of the house and 4 by DHR. And I was appointed by the lieutenant governor. And have since been-- they're two year terms-- and have since been reappointed to the Council and I still serve.

**O:** Since what year-- did you say that already? What year you started?

**MPV:** You know I looked that up last night and I'm not really positive of the year but it had to be somewhere in the late 1999, '98, '99. Somethin like that. And I received several awards for that. This on our 25<sup>th</sup> year. And then the one-- back up just a minute-- The one that I got from the chamber in 2003 other than the sweet potato thing, was the humanitarian award for our area. And that was from the Chamber of Commerce also. In 2006, I was awarded the John Maulden-- John Tyler Maulden Award. And this was from the Gerontology society of Georgia. The organization of that. And that is in recognition as an individual who exemplifies a positive role model for outstanding achievement in Gerontology. And that was a total surprise, to me. But most appreciated. I guess one of the outstanding things-- well, and let me, before I do

this-- last year I think it was. In 2010, I received the Liberty Bell award-- which was a real shock to me. It's from attorneys in my area. And they awarded me that for-- and it has to be a non-lawyer, just someone who has been actively involved and I received that award in Tifton at a bar association meeting. And was really, really pleased. Then back in 1997, I got these things (shows awards). It was our centennial-- bicentennial. I'm trying to think whether it was the bicentennial or the centennial. I-- they had done this resolution for me up at the state legislature. And the city gave me a key to the city and then recognized me for work that I'd done on a volunteer basis through the years with the city and county. And they sort of unofficially named me the ambassador of our area, so I still get teased when we're in a group. They'll say 'she's our ambassador' and I know they're wondering what in the world what kind of ambassador I am. (Laughs). But I have been real actively involved as a volunteer through many organizations and I think I mentioned to you yesterday that I have been on the Board at Sunny dale-- which is a school that we have here in our area for the mentally challenged. And I still serve on that Board.

**O:** Where is that place?

**MPV:** It's on highway 90 out going past the school. The elementary school, you going on down the road just, two city blocks. It's a school on the right. And um--

**O:** I'm sure I've seen it, I just didn't realize what it was.

**MPV:** And they do an extremely good job with people who really need somethin. And I've been on that Board many years too.

**O:** Are most of the residents there from the county-- Irwin County?

**MPV:** Most of em are. And other than the school, now, we have some apartments that some-- and we have a house mother -- that some who are really capable of living in an apartment live there rather than just being transported from their parents' home or from some other place. And then we have a place just right around the corner from me, called Camelot. And these-- there are just four, bedrooms. There's two on each side of a living area and a kitchen area. And they have a house mother, and there is one client in each one of those rooms. And they feel like they have their own homes-- they're living in their own homes, you know. And it's just wonderful. It's wonderful to see the progress that they've made.

**O:** So are these people who have-- who are not able to function normally...

**MPV:** On their own...

**O:** But they can live. They're physically okay. They're just..

**MPV:** Yeah. That's right. And some of em work. They work outside of the facility. They maybe bag groceries at the grocery store, or work at one of the short order places. And they earn a little salary and...

**O:** Yeah.

**MPV:** So a lot of progress has been made, with people who need to be challenged. And they love it. The first time I went to a function that they had, my mother was quite ill. And I really didn't want to go to the function because I knew my mother was very ill but my sister insisted that I go on, cause she was with mother. And I did. And when I went, I was so glad because for the first time, I saw just how much they enjoyed being with peers. And it was just (Expressive) Oh, so heartwarming. To see the way that if one got an award, they all stood up

and clapped and there was no envy or jealousy or anything. They were so thrilled to see each one get an award that they'd gotten. So it's been a real-- it's been a real delight for me to be able to serve on that Board. So I think that pretty much covers everything, I've worked under several different governors, who I've gotten to know quite well. And--

**O:** With pictures here to prove it...

**MPV:** Yeah (laughs). One funny thing-- and of course I always ran as a Democrat, but you know all that has changed so much. We still have the party system but I vote for the person who I think is most qualified for the job. And back-- the first time that Roy Barnes ran for governor, he had a really large case in our courts. I had never met him, but our office they say were different than any other clerks office in the state of Georgia because we always had something to eat on the table with the coffee pot. And even our attorneys would come down to see what we had on the table but during court, we had a feast. We had a lady here in town that would always do ham biscuit's, and cake, and that sorta thing when she knew the judge was coming. And so I went up into the courtroom and introduced myself to Roy Barnes and his partner, and told them that we had food on the table and at break time we'd like them to come down and enjoy some fellowship with us. And so every time I was in a gathering that he was at, and he was speaking, if he saw me in the crowd, he would say 'wait. I would be amiss if I didn't stop and tell you all that Melba Paulk is in this group and she is the only Superior Court Clerk in the state of Georgia that fed me when I was in her courts'. So he and I had a good bond together. But he was just one of many because I've had that same dealing even with the present governor. So--

**O:** Roy Barnes swore me in on the Board I served on for over 10 years and Owen-- We got a picture of Owen with him. But he was quite preoccupied on that day.

**MPV:** But being on the Council on Aging has really enhanced my love of politics. And I feel like it's a committee that I feel like I'm doing good for everybody because we advocate for seniors. And have gotten a lot of good bills passed. And the Council on Aging, after they were organized, saw the need of having more than those twenty people advocating for them. And they started a group as an arm of the Council called Co-age. Coalition of Advocates for senior citizens. And in 1992-- oh, 2002, I was asked to serve as the chairman of Co-Age. And have done that for nine years and you're only supposed to serve two years and you can serve two more years. But four years is all you're supposed to serve. But I've served nine years, but now I am not doing that anymore, I'll just be a member of the Co-Age group like the others. And in a way it's gonna really be a relief because I had to preside at the meetings and at this Co-Age meeting -- at our Council meeting it was just our twenty member committee. But Co-Age meeting, we had providers and servers and also people who received the help from the programs that are set up for the seniors. Present at those meetings and we would have anywhere from 75-250 people at some of the meetings and I chaired that committee. And it brought me in touch with a lot of people that I know now and that I've made friends with that I would never have known had I not served with the Council and with Co-Age. But it also gives me the feeling that somewhere along the way that I've had a part in helping some people who cannot help themselves.

**O:** Do you feel confident that, as a society, we're doing enough for our very vulnerable, Aging

population?

**MPV:** Oh, I don't know that we can ever do enough. But we're making remarkable strides in helping. And I mean it is a joint effort. It's not an I or a me it's all of us working together and we have wonderful advocates during the legislative session there everyday from the beginning of the day until night, if it's midnight when they adjourn. We still have advocates there everyday at the capital.

**O:** Now, where did these advocates come from?

**MPV:** Well those, all over the state really. But those who were there every day lived in the Atlanta area. Because it would not be feasible for all of us to go but now there is a week in February-- toward the end of the-- well about the middle of the session that we call senior week. And all of us on the committee try to go and stay as much as we can that one week to advocate and all of the agencies throughout the state like the Triple A and all that, they take some of their clients on buses up there, and they call out their legislators and ask them to vote. Some have never been to the capital before and this gives them an opportunity to go and speak with their legislator.

**O:** When you're there, I mean obviously they have a respect for you because you're such a high profile person. But do you think that they are generally committed to this category of people-- to aging--

**MPV:** Oh are you talking about our legislators?

**O:** Right, right.

**MPV:** Some are very committed to it. Some we have to really explain more than once just what the purpose of the bill is. And we always-- July is the big meeting for the Council in ?????, that's when we select our priorities and we usually select like two legislative and two budget items. And we immediately get those once we select those in July. We get that information to the legislators, so that they will be familiar when we start contacting them. And we start immediately. What we're talking about-- what the bill is and what it will do for our area and what it has done for other states. And how it's worked in other states. So most of the time, legislators are interested in all that we do in the Council has made a name for itself among the legislators. 'Course there are a lot of time they can't help us because they don't have the funds to do it. But they tell us why they can't-- if they can't help us with our issues.

**O:** Well this is sort of, I think maybe a natural segway into asking what you've talked about-- the variety of jobs you've had over your lifetime. Which one do you think of as most rewarding? I know that might be hard to pick one so you can do more than one but what is the most rewarding work you've ever done?

**MPV:** Well I guess my permanent job as Deputy Clerk of the Superior Court and then being elected as the Superior Court Clerk because I had the opportunity to help people who needed help. And in some areas, I could sort of talk to people who were in court. Particularly young people cause we handled the juvenile court through our office also. Talked to them about accepting responsibilities also. My main focus would be on my work, but other than that I guess working with Sunnysdale and being apart of the Georgia Council on Aging has been my most rewarding things I've done.

**O:** Okay. Was there one you just wouldn't care to do over again in any aspect--

**MPV:** No, I would do the same thing again because I love the chamber and I see how effective it works in our county and how it-- even though some people think we don't actually function real well, we can look at accomplishments and be so proud of what's gone on. And I still want to be apart of that, and all of its activities. And with these outside of my county, I would love to do that all over again. So I would definitely, if I had to do over and had to make a choice, I'd chose all of these same ones again.

**O:** Alright. If you could go back and train for any other job, I don't know how you'd fit it in, but if you-- has there been any work that you sorta wished you could do, but didn't have the lifetimes to train for it? Is there anything you would like to have done other than what you did? Not even instead of, but just in addition to what you did.

**MPV:** Not that I know of, but I-- might would have considered running for a state office or legislative office. But that never occurred to me when I was working because I was so happy in what I was doing. Probably couldn't have been elected, but I just love the things that they do. Now some of em I don't know, it's different now from what it was years ago.

**O:** But you felt like your impulse to help and give could have been met in politics?

**MPV:** Yeah. I do.

**O:** Alright. Are there any jobs that you think women ought not to do?

**MPV:** I would hate to be a judge of that, but sometimes now-- I wouldn't have thought this in times past-- but now I think it's a little bit dangerous for women to be so involved in the field of crime and there's so many drugs now, and so many things that people are not themselves and they do things under the influence of things that may be an endangerment to women. I--

**O:** So you would discourage any women that you had influence on from going into criminal justice and the law enforcement realm of that?

**MPV:** Well, more being on the streets as undercover agents or police or somethin. But now there's a need for people in the field of law to do with criminal justice. I mean a lot of times women need women if they're in trouble, they need women to talk to and confide in. I would not want them not to do that, but I just wouldn't want to see em out trying to do undercover work and work that deals directly with criminals.

**O:** Alright. Even if the criminals are women?

**MPV:** According to what there crime was, maybe. And whether they are confined or whether they are still on the streets.

**O:** Okay. Alright. When you had-- when your children were at home, you've already talked about them and their chosen professions. Was it just sort of implicitly a part of their upbringing that they would be able to take care of themselves-- your daughters? And not rely on a husband to do that. Or was that ever even discussed?

**MPV:** I don't think we ever discussed that. Cathy, I don't remember that we did.

**O:** Okay, alright. But they did have a sense that they would go to college. It was not a --

**MPV:** We didn't make them go to college, that was their choice. We wanted them to go, but --

**O:** They knew that you valued education.

**MPV:** Yeah, yeah.

**O:** And so-- and do you think your daughters had any -- that they wanted to be or do something that they thought as women maybe they shouldn't? Do you think they felt free to do

that? Or do you think they felt free to do whatever...

**MPV:** I think they felt free to make their choice.

**O:** Okay. Alright. Is there some significant accomplishment that took more sacrifice on your part than it was worth?

**MPV:** I don't really think so because I feel like that my husband and I both on a limited income, we did sacrifice some for our children to be able to go to college. But I wouldn't take anything for that. (Laughs). I mean that was just, that was just-- I felt that was what we should do and what we wanted to do.

**O:** Yeah. Do you think-- you've already said this but do you think that having Essie here--

**MPV:** Oh it was a big part. I enjoyed my work as much as I did even because I felt comfortable with her being here when they were small, and then as I had mentioned to you earlier, I was free if some of my friends were going to Atlanta for a couple of days, I could go with them. Knowing that their dad was here and that Essie was here for after school and all.

**O:** Okay. Alright. What was retiring from work like? I mean it sounds like you never retired (laughs) because you still do so much, but there is a definite before and after retirement. What was that like for you?

**MPV:** I had really thought that when I walked out of the courthouse that last day, that I would be so sad because I had been in the courthouse for forty six years. But you know, I have not-- I've never looked back. I never look back. And then, you know, they asked if I would serve as a bailiff, and I said if you mean every time the judge is here, no I don't want to do that because I don't want to be tied down. And they said 'well would you serve when we have a jury' and I said yeah I'll do that. So I'm still back at the courthouse (Laughs). In fact, I'll be there tomorrow.

**O:** Remind me what year you retired.

**MPV:** The end of '96.

**O:** Okay, Alright. And was the courthouse still-- because it's been under construction-- it was under construction for some time. Are people back in...

**MPV:** Oh yeah. Yeah, and the entire time that I was the clerk and the deputy clerk, I kept trying to go before the commissioners and say 'please, we need to do something. The courthouse is deteriorating, we need to do something'. And they would just say that we just don't have the money. But finally, enough people got interested in it, and at the same time there were those who said 'push it down', you know. But those of us who believed in it never gave up, and that's a beautifully restored building and has all the conveniences and it's primarily now a courthouse that serves practically just the courts. Because the tax commissioner and the chairman of commissioners and all they moved in the other facilities.

**O:** Yeah. Okay. How do you feel about life now that you've retired? Your life, is it still as rewarding as it was when you were fully employed?

**MPV:** Yeah, it really is. In fact my friends can't understand why I'm still involved in things as I am, and truly when my husband got sick, I told him I was gonna let some things go and he just insisted that I not do that. That he did not want me to do that. And then after I married Ralph-- after I realized-- well really in fact before I realized he was-- had cancer, I mentioned that I was gonna give up some of the things that I was doing. And he said 'now Hon, don't do

that'. He said 'you love what you're doing and you're good at it'. And he said 'but now remember, I love to fish. And I'm good at it, so don't ask me not to fish'. And I said 'but Hon, I'm going fishing with you'. And he said 'well I am not going politicking with you'. (Laughs) So we kept both doing our own thing.

**O:** And what's the best part about being retired?

**MPV:** Doing things that I want to do rather than doing some things that I have to do.

**O:** And so what's the hardest part about it?

**MPV:** I don't know that there is a hard part about it (laughs).

**O:** That's what I want to hear (Laughs). I want a model to have ahead of me. Ms. Melba, I'm gonna stop for just a minute, to be sure that we're okay here and then we're gonna talk about religion.

**MPV:** Alright.

Part 3

**O:** Okay, we are moving to the subject of religion. And we've talked a little bit about your Baptist roots, but not so much about spiritual values so if you can sort of shift there. And you've told me that your-- when you were a child, your father took you to church, right?

**MPV:** That's right. He walked us to Sunday school and Church.

**O:** Yeah. Okay. So it wasn't necessarily that important-- the participation in the Church-- but you did talk about having strong values --your parents did. Where do you think those strong values came from if they weren't-- if they weren't practicing religion-- or involved in any particular Church. Where do you think those strong values came from?

**MPV:** You know, Cathy, I've thought about that-- not when I was younger, but I thought about that when I was older because-- I think I mentioned to you that I did not know my mother's parents at all. And I knew my dad's mother and her husband, who was my step-grandfather. But not being able to be with them a lot because of not having a car and access to visiting as often as I wish we could have. I really don't know whether any of them were really involved in Church activities or not. And I really-- as I mentioned earlier, my father-- did not accept Christ until after I married. But he-- they just-- I guess just because they believed in Jesus, even though had not made a confession, they wanted us to grow up in a Christian environment. And so they made it possible to do that. Now where that came from, I have no idea other than that they were good people.

**O:** Alright. Could you either enumerate or just simply talk about what your spiritual values-- your religious faith is, what are your beliefs?

**MPV:** Well, I believe that Jesus is the son of God. Born of the Virgin Mary. And I believe that we are assured if we accept him, that we have an eternal home. And even though my mother was a member of the Christian Church and my dad confessed to Christ later, we were really involved in-- my mother was a Sunbeam leader and worked with the GA's which was a Girls' Auxiliary in the Baptist Church. And I worked with Sunbeams After I married.

**O:** So your mother worked with Sunbeams even though they weren't... Churchgoers.

**MPV:** Mmhm. Mmhm. And like I say she was a professing Christian; she was a member of the Christian Church. And she always helped with the functions of the young people in the Church when I was growing up-- when I was very small. And then two, my daddy was very active in

the Brotherhood organization and Sunday school, and mother always participated in activities that they had. So we grew up going to Sunday school and Church and being active in the Church. In fact, I started singing in the Adult Choir in 1945. And back then we wore hats and gloves in the Choir. And (laughs) we didn't even know there was such things as choir robes. And until just the-- well when Ralph really became ill with cancer was when I quit singing in the choir. So I sang in the choir about sixty five years. And-- so we've always known that what our destiny was in so far as being a Christian, and we tried to live accordingly we are like all human beings-- we've made mistakes. But thank God we've been forgiven for mistakes. And we have an example before us everyday with our Bible and daily Bible readings and our attendance and I'm one that I try my best to be the same all the week, not just Sunday Christian. Like I say I make mistakes, but then I know that I can be forgiven of those mistakes.

**O:** Has that ever been difficult for you except in that forgiveness if you felt like you did something-- well what to you would be a mistake? And for you when you say mistake does that imply the quote 'sin' or is it just that you did something wrong but unknowingly? When you say that you know if you make a mistake-- because forgiveness is so hard for some people, to feel forgiving or to forgive. I've just been reading about the subject of forgiveness and so when you said that it just made me wonder what that means to you?

**MPV:** Well I think, you know, growing up you tell stories. A lie or somethin. And of course learning that was wrong, I tried to not do that but I still made the-- probably stretched the truth some times. And I think-- I really think one of the worst things is the tongue. And I think maybe gossip is a bad sin. And we're all guilty of that. In fact I read an article the other day-- well it was in my daily Bible readings. That the tongue is the only organ in the body that's not attached at both ends. (laughs) And that's true, and we get into trouble with our tongue a lot of times. And-- but you know, from way back, my policy was that I felt like if I had done wrong towards someone, or offended someone, I would go to that person and say 'we have a problem, lets talk it out'. And I know one year I was president of the band organization, and a good friend of mine-- he was the head of the booster program for the football. And we all had to do different things to raise money for the organization and the band particularly. The people would give you money for sports then wouldn't give you anything for the band. And I went one day to a person here in town, and we were selling cushions to sit on at the ball game. And he said 'I'm gonna buy cushions this year and not give to the football' he said 'cause I feel like y'all need the money'. Well, when they went to sell him his football stuff, he said 'no I've bought with the band this time' and that man called me up and he did everything under the sun to me accept beat me up-- almost with his tongue, you know. Because I had interfered with what he was doin. And I went to him and I talked to him and, and he never softened at all. Took him a couple of years, but finally he came around and we became real good friends again. And then I had a misunderstanding with someone in the Church one time, and it was an honest mistake. It was really somethin that was so small that was blown up into somethin big, and I asked the pastor to go with me to the person and that, that I wanted to talk to him-- wanted him to hear the conversation. And the man never would get with me and the pastor. So I tried-- so I just had to forget that too. And if I made an effort, and went to him and we worked it out it was fine, and if we didn't I forgot about it because I knew I had done all I could

to straiten out a problem. But the older I've gotten, the more careful I've tried to be about-- I try to think before I speak, and it's gotten real easy lately cause I-- I see the good in people more than I see the bad. So...

**O:** How'd you do that? (Laughs)

**MPV:** Well, age and maturity I think.

**O:** So you think that's part of Wisdom? Is the ability to see the good in people?

**MPV:** Uh huh. Uh huh.

**O:** Okay. And so you-- it sounds like you've already answered how your spiritual values affect how you live your life. That's really-- they are how you live your life.

**MPV:** Yeah, or try to.

**O:** Alright. Can you talk about the most profound, spiritual moment or experience of your life. Is this something that you recall as being--

**MPV:** When I accepted Christ. I was about twelve years old, and I had told my mother that I was gonna do that and she said 'now do you know what you're doing? Are you sure?' And I said I'm just as sure as I can be. And I'll never forget when I walked down that isle, my knees were shakin! And I was trembling all over. And I know that it was a real thing in my life. And that was the most traumatic--

**O:** So you planned to do that?

**MPV:** Uh huh. It was just not on sudden impulse, I knew when I-- well we were having revival, but I knew when I went to church that night, that I was going down and accept Christ as my savior.

**O:** Okay. And you've never doubted that.

**MPV:** No, never.

**O:** Alright. Do you feel the presence within? Of that indwelling, Christ in you--

**MPV:** Oh, I really do. Cathy if I didn't, some days I couldn't get through it with all the sickness and hardships that we've had physically, mentally lately.

**O:** So that's helped you, that presence?

**MPV:** Oh yeah, oh yeah. In fact I say I don't know how people-- I really don't know how people face everyday without God in their life.

**O:** Yeah, yeah. Okay. And when you feel drained-- not just physically drained-- but when you feel spiritually drained, how do you renew yourself?

**MPV:** Well, since I've gotten older now, I do that with daily Bible readings everyday. And I read the daily Bible reading from a booklet we have, and then I read the scripture that it's referred to and as a rule, if it gives you just a few chapters-- or verses out of a chapter-- of course I read the entire chapter. And then I pray. And I pray a lot during the day.

**O:** Yeah. So that's a -- now is that something you've done all of your life is pray without ceasing something or is that something that has come with age?

**MPV:** It's come with age. I prayed when I was younger, but not like I pray now.

**O:** Okay. Does it feel more natural now?

**MPV:** Oh yeah.

**O:** And has that kind of come with retirement?

**MPV:** Comes with age, I think. (Laughs)

**O:** Alright. Have you experienced something that you would consider a miracle? Something beyond explanation by empirical or logical means.

**MPV:** Well, you know, I consider the fact that Raymond lived as long as he did as a miracle. I consider Ralph's death and the fact that he was able to be up until the moment he died was a miracle. I believe my life is a miracle because I'm eighty four years old now, and I'm still able to jump in my car and go to Atlanta. All that to me is a miracle.

**O:** Have your religious values changed over time? It sounds like not. Seems solid.

**MPV:** It has not. It's grown stronger.

**O:** Alright. Well I know this is gonna sound like a crazy question-- based on everything you've said, but I'm gonna ask you anyway. Do you believe in an afterlife?

**MPV:** Yes I do, very much so.

**O:** Okay, alright. What do you think it will be like?

**MPV:** Oh I just think sometimes what is it? That Ralph and I talked about it before he died and Raymond and I did too. And Ralph was so funny, he'd say 'well how do you think there's gonna be enough room for all of us?' (laughs) But you know just recently some of us were talking about that, and we have about decided that we'll be in younger form when we all get to heaven. That Jesus died when he was thirty three, and we think that we'll-- we won't be old and have these aches and pains and that sorta thing. That it's just gonna be a glorious time.

**O:** Okay. This is not on my list of questions, but I just wondered what you think about how will relate if Ralph and Raymond would both be there, what it's gonna be like?

**MPV:** (Laughs) You know I've thought about that, but the Bible tells us we'll-- you know we'll know our loved ones but there will be no anger or no jealousy or-- I think we'll just all be children of God.

**O:** You think those two would have liked each other?

**MPV:** Oh, very much so. Very much so.

**O:** Okay. Alright, what experience has given you the most joy in your life?

**MPV:** Well I'm sure I would say my children first. Even though we had some downs and sickness and sorrow, you know. That plus -- I say all the time, God blessed me with two wonderful men in my life. And they were a joy.

**O:** Okay, alright. Do you feel a peace in yourself now?

**MPV:** I do, except that I wish I did not have the sickness in my family that I do. If it were not for that, I don't know that I would have a thing in the world that would bother me or worry me but-- and I know we're not to worry. But you can't help but be concerned. And--

**O:** Especially when it's so close.

**MPV:** Yeah.

**O:** Okay. I know the silly question in light of everything you've said, but I'm just gonna get-- let you have the opportunity to say again. Are you certain of anything?

**MPV:** I'm certain of my life now in this Earth and the hereafter.

**O:** Okay, alright.

**MPV:** And you know, my daughter in law-- Phyllis-- if anyone says 'what do you want us to pray for'. She says 'peace'.

**O:** When you meet God, what do you want to say to God?

**MPV:** I want him to say to me 'well done, my good and faithful servant'.

**O:** Okay. That was the next question (laughs).

**MPV:** I want to say to you 'here I am, God, just use me'.

**O:** Okay, alright. Lastly, if you were to have some advice for young people-- or anybody-- what to you are the most important, most vital spiritual values to observe in your life?

**MPV:** Well I would want young people to walk daily with God. Because if they do that, they'll do things that are right.

**O:** Okay. So that's the litmus test-- if you walk in light with God, you'll be doing things right.

**MPV:** That's right.

**O:** Do you want to say anything else about religion? Cause that's been such a profound part of your life-- singin in the choir for however many years (laughs)

**MPV:** And I didn't have that good a voice either it was just that we needed to fill a chair (laughs). I did tell em the other day that, when they started the Christmas music, that I was gonna try to get back up there but-- of course I never did have a beautiful voice, but it blended well with others. And now I'm not sure that it would, age takes care of a lot of things (laughs) and that's one of them I think. Because you don't have the same strength of breath that you had when you were younger, but I'm gonna try that.

And see, because I don't ever want to quit. I don't ever want to just say 'I'm just gonna sit in this chair and read, or watch TV'. I wanna be doing something-- somethin worth while.

**O:** You've talked about how Tifton really feels like your home there-- it feels like home. Did you ever consider, once you found friends there and made that home, did you ever consider changing Church and moving to a Church over there?

**MPV:** No, because I still consider this my home here in Ocilla. But I feel Ralph's presence in Tifton so much, and with the friends I've made over there. And I probably will eventually get back over here all together but I just haven't been able to turn loose of that yet.

**O:** Can you tell me what that-- when you say you still feel Ralph's presence, can you tell me what-- how that feels? I mean how-- it sounds like it's powerful.

**MPV:** Well, the thing about it is, in our den-- we have two lounge chairs like most people do. And his office was in our back yard. And it's a very active place because-- I told you he farms, they do real farmin-- And they also had green houses that they seeded and once they were hydrated or whatever you call it, they put em in the greenhouse and they shipped all over the United States. But there are a lot of people who still come and go and pick up their collards, or turnips, or watermelon or whatever they're growing. And Ralph, after he got where he was not as active at the office, he could sit in his chair and look out that window and he could tell you more that was going on outside at the office than those in the office knew. And I still now with this it has been. Now we're about, right now we're in the process of growing more plants -- we're out completely now except for those we're growing now. And I can still just feel his presence looking out there saying 'now look there, there's old so and so coming to get his plants and he's gonna try to grow some cabbage and he don't know a thing about cabbage'. (Laughs) I mean I can just-- I can still just hear him with-- Cathy he got a full scholarship to the University of Florida to play football. He was the quarterback for Tifton High School. He told me he didn't want to go to college, he wanted to farm. He was gonna farm and get rich.

(Laughs). And he never looked back on that, and in fact-- I think I told you that I interviewed him even before he got sick-- I went out on the porch with my tape recorder one time and said 'I'm gonna interview you' and he said 'I aint gonna do that' and I said 'yes you are'. And we started with his life and how they came from Alabama to Georgia and he told about his growing up. And that sorta thing, and when he got to the part about them trying to get him to go to school, he said 'y'all would be wasting my time and your money'. He said 'I am not going to college'. He said 'I want to farm'. And that's what he did, and he was very successful.

**O:** What about his sons?

**MPV:** (Laughs). Oh, Johnny, the oldest one, is the only one that likes farming. The others, Todd the middle son said after he moved irrigation all one day he made up his mind that he didn't want to be a farmer. And so hes an anesthetist now at the Tifton hospital. And his second son, Monty, is a very successful-- I'll think of it in a minute, the word-- advocate, or-- for so many companies.

**O:** Consultant?

**MPV:** Well, no, that's not the word-- I'll think of it in a minute. And Scott, next to the youngest son, builds golf courses. And he's built them all over the United States and outside of the United States. He's built some in Russia. And so forth, and Drew, the youngest one. He went to turf school and he grew the turf. Lobbyist is what Monte is. And he worked sort of hand in hand with Scott that built the golf course-- he grew the turf. And so now all of em are sorta -- they bought farms-- all of em have bought farms. And they sort of farm together some now. But Johnny is the one that, that will continue with the farming and the greenhouses. But Monte is a very successful Lobbyist. And...

**O:** Did they all go to college?

**MPV:** No, not really. I don't know-- I don't know whether any of them graduated from college or not. Now I-- Johnny didn't, he went into the service and Monte, (laughs). Ralph told me this story many times. Oh he wanted to go to North Georgia College to Dahlonega. Ralph said he paid all this money for him to go to Dahlonega and he never spent the first night there-- he got there and decided he didn't like it and got in his car and came home. Ralph said he stayed with his grandmother for a few weeks before he knew he was home. Because he knew he was gonna get a breakin' over the coals. And Ralph said 'I could have torn him up. Cause I never got any of my money back'. And I know that Scott went to ABAC, now whether he-- probably graduated from ABAC but now whether he went-- I don't think he went on to anywhere else. And Todd, now he went to college. Todd, their anesthetist. And then he went on up north somewhere to school. And Drew, he went to college but Ralph said he was out partying more than he was going to college. And said one year, Drew came home from college for Thanksgiving, and Thanksgiving day he said 'well I got to go back' said 'I got to go back up there with my family'. And he was with his family in Tifton. (Laughs). So those five boys are like a three ring cir-- a five ring circus when they get together. They are the funniest things. And--

**O:** And then successful though without a college education which is rare. The kind of success that it sounds like they've had.

**MPV:** And they have, they've all done extremely well.

**O:** Wow. Are you ready to move on?

**MPV:** Uh huh.

**O:** Okay. Money is just a subject that you know you can, sort of the elephant in the living room for some people. Would you say that you've achieved financial ambitions that you had as a young person?

**MPV:** You know I don't know that I ever had any real thoughts about finances much other than, you know, I was conservative with my money while I was working and all because it was really the first time that I'd had money to just spend. In fact my mother told me one time that my daddy said that I had never asked him for any money. And I said 'well I knew he didn't have any'. And – but when she told me that, I began to ask him along for a little bit of money and he said he made a mistake telling her that. (Laughs). But, through the years and through my work, and through some insurance policies, and with my retirement and social security and all, I don't have a lot of money, but I've been blessed to have enough that I didn't have to worry about where my meal was coming from, you know, that sorta thing. And I still have the little farm, and you know, I don't rent it out for a lot but I do rent it out for a little bit. And it is small. And so I'm comfortable.

**O:** Now are you talking about the farm from Ralph?

**MPV:** No, from my side of the family.

**O:** Okay. Alright. Near Fitzgerald? Did you just say?

**MPV:** Well, no. It's practically in the city limits of Ocilla. At one time they were city lots, and my father-in-law was the chairman of the county commissioners on and off for many years. And when there would be a sale and nobody would buy the lots, he would buy em. And so the city limits go beyond our farm but it was never taken into the city limits.

**O:** Alright. Do you think money has had a role in shaping you into the person you are today?

**MPV:** I don't think so.

**O:** Okay. So you just said-- I was going to ask if you felt like you'd had enough. And you really essentially just said that, that you haven't...

**MPV:** I have enough, I'm comfortable with. We don't get any interest on any money we've saved or-- bought CD's and all with. But I didn't really use that, I let it sorta go back. Because right now I'm comfortable-- I still don't-- I'm not one just to spend money to spend money. And uh...

**O:** So your level of security, you're fine with that?

**MPV:** Right now I'm comfortable with that.

**O:** Okay, alright. Let me say a few things about aging. You should know plenty about that serving on this Council for all these years. What has been-- personally though for you-- what has been the most difficult part of aging?

**MPV:** Well now you probably are not going to believe this, but I don't have any problems with it. I have been blessed with good health as far as I know. I've had some surgeries, but I've always been one that I had a lot of energy and in fact, several years ago, I went to our local doctor Dr. McMahan because I had something in my foot that I told him I said 'it feels like when I used to go barefooted and have a stone bruise'. And I said 'that's sorta the way it feels like in my foot'. So he sent me over to the hospital to get an x-ray. And so when I went in they

said 'come on Miss Melba, we're gonna do some bloodwork' And I said 'no, he sent me over here to get an x-ray'. Said 'but he called and told us to do some bloodwork'. So I said okay, and he found that my level of B12 was low. So he started me on a B12 regimen and I took a B12 shot every day for two or three weeks and then I did it once a week and then I still take a B12 once a month now. And he said 'you're gonna feel like you've got so much energy' and I said 'well if I do I'll be climbing on top of the house cause I got plenty of energy'. And when I told my friends I was going to take B12 energy they just hooted. They said 'good gracious alive'. (Laughs). But I'm sure in a lot of ways I probably have slowed down, but I don't think I have.

**O:** (Laughs) Not that anybody would notice.

**MPV:** And so aging has not been a factor with me.

**O:** Okay. Alright. So then whats the most rewarding part of it if it hasn't had a down side yet?

**MPV:** The fact that I still have my mental capabilities and every morning, when I get up, I am so thankful that I know who I am and where I am.

**O:** Okay.

**MPV:** In fact I have a lady that helps me sometimes in Tifton, and nearly every time she'll say 'well I've got to go to the doctor this afternoon' and I asked her the other day, I said – she is diabetic-- and I said 'it seems that you go to the doctor a lot' I said 'do you have to pay when you go?' And she said 'well my husband has insurance at his job, but I have to pay a co-pay'. And I said 'you know I was thinking about the other day when you mentioned you were going to the doctor?' I said knock on wood, I go to mayo clinic once a year for my checkup-- I haven't even made an appointment this year cause I usually go in the fall. But I've had these others in my family that I felt like needed more attention than I did. And I said 'I haven't even been to the doctor this year. At all, for anything'. Well I did go to the ophthalmologist back in the spring cause I go and I've had one cataract removed and another ones ready but I haven't had that done yet. I've been to the dentist. But as far as going to a medical doctor, I haven't even been to a medical doctor this year. And I -- say that and hope that I don't come down tomorrow with some terrible something but if I do I'm old enough to – handle it I think.

**O:** Well I think you've already answered what you like about being the age you are now. You want to respond to that?

**MPV:** Well, it's that if I want to do something, I can do it – and if I don't want to, I can say no I don't wanna do that (Laughs).

**O:** And you feel free to say no?

**MPV:** Oh yeah. Yeah.

**O:** Okay. What advice would you give other people about the best way to age, besides taking b-12 shots. (Laughs)

**MPV:** (Laughs) And I didn't start that until I was old enough in age. I think if you just treat your body like it's a holy sacrifice, and – leave off alcohol and drugs – and when I say drugs, you know a lot of times people take – you go to the doctor, they're gonna give you a prescription and you take medicine and so forth. And, to eat wisely – now I'm not one that I try to eat a fruit every day, and I'm not bragging about this, or to drink eight glasses of water a day and all that. I just try to be sensible.

**O:** Mhmm.

**MPV:** With what I eat. There was a time I overate, but I – dont feel like I do now. I eat french fries though sometimes and I love them. (Laughs)

**O:** And I'm sure you probably recall when Essie made home-made french fries.

**MPV:** And home- made biscuit.

**O:** (Laughs) Okay.

**MPV:** She did that mostly for the friends, we didn't have a lot of home-made french fries at meal time because they had already had them during the day.

**O:** What age do you recall most nostalgically, or most favorably?

**MPV:** I guess – as a teenager.

**O:** Okay.

**MPV:** I guess as a teenager - because we always wondered if we were going to have a date and where we were going and what we were gonna do and if we'd have a date for the prom, and I always was lucky and did, so...

**O:** So if you had to chose an age at which to remain, what would that be?

**MPV:** Uh, now. (laughs).

**O:** Okay. Alright.

**MPV:** I sure don't want to go back. (Laughs).

**O:** Right, right. You've already talked about losing your husbands through death, and if you don't want to go back over that thats fine, but I just got a few things about how you've experienced it and handled loss through death and otherwise. So, can we revisit that or would you rather not?

**MPV:** No, it's fine. And I – lost a grandson too. Ray and Phyllis lost their first child when he was five months old. And that was so traumatic. Because he just was a perfectly healthy, normal baby until she found – bathing him one day – a spot up in the chest area. And the pediatician thought it was cancer, but it was not. It was a himangelma and I know you know that that's one of those red raised birthmarks. But it was on his liver. And he went to a specialist in Augusta and he told them the normal course of that was to grow for about a year and then begin to sluff off. And if it did that without rupturing then he would be fine, but if it ruptured, that there would be nothin they could do. And it ruptured when he was five months old. So, um...

**O:** When was that?

**MPV:** Uh, he would probably be-- goodness – uh, they married in '81 and he was not born for two or three years, so he'd probably be nearly thirty years old now. And since then – at the time she said 'I'll never have another child'. But they have two boys, and they're both married.

**O:** So that-- that loss was before either of your husbands.

**MPV:** Oh yeah. My husband was not well at the time, but I-- he was in Augusta and I was right there when he died – in the room – in the – with him.

**O:** Okay so...

**MPV:** But my husband – I think I told you this – that I prayed all one Sunday afternoon comin home from the veterans hospital. That God would take Raymond home because he could not live with that tube in his throat and couldn't speak and – he was always the type that he did

not want to have to be waited on. He was very independent in so far as he didn't want to be any trouble to anybody, you know. He wanted to do for himself. And Ralph was that way. I'd say 'honey, what – to Ralph – I'd say 'what you want to have for supper tonight?' Maybe we'd had a big lunch. And he'd say 'well you know what I'd like if it's not too much trouble?' And I'd say 'what is that?' He'd say 'I'd really like some potato soup, if it's not too much trouble.'

(Laughs) And you know there's nothin to peeling a potato and making potato soup (Laughs). But I mean they were both just that kind of people. And so much alike in so many ways.

**O:** So if I ask the most-- whats the most difficult loss you've experienced through death, do you want to-- you don't have to answer that question.

**MPV:** No, because they were all just horrible in their own way.

**O:** Right. Clearly though, that experience – you learned something about grieving and bereavement and the process of loss. Can you – could you articulate that? What you've learned about that process? Of losing, grieving, mourning...

**MPV:** Well, I think that the main thing that I realized from little Casin's death, was that I just wished and prayed so hard that he could live. And it was not God's will – well, I don't say it wasn't God's will. It just – that he allowed that to happen and there was a reason. It could have for years later that there was a reason. But, with Raymond's death I realized that he was far better off than he was on this Earth. That he was better off than we were that were left behind. And with Ralph, I think I had already mentioned to you that he was able to be up until his last breath – until he was in the hospital that last day. But, his cancer had not spread to other parts of his body as far as we know. It could have but he was able to be up and about. And the thing that I realized from that was that probably even though we weren't ready to give him up, it was a good time to give him up because he did not get confined to bed or have to be looked after twenty-four hours a day and turned over in the bed and – you know all of that sorta thing. So, I think the thing I learned was that God in his timing is better than what we have on our time plate. You know...

**O:** So you learned something about acceptance?

**MPV:** Uh huh.

**O:** Okay. Did the experience of losing a loved one in each of these cases have a silver lining?

**MPV:** Yeah. With Casin I can't say that I realized – that I found the reason for that, but with Raymond and with Ralph, to me not allowing me to lay there not knowing who they were, who we were – now Ralph was not at that point, but Raymond was. And the silver lining was that God took him on – and like I said put him in a better place. With Ralph, the silver lining was that we knew him and he knew us as long as he lived and then he was taken before he got to the point that he was suffering physically – so I think that as I said – God knows best.

**O:** Yeah okay. Alright. Besides death, losing a person through death, can you recall other significant losses that caused a similar kind of grief?

**MPV:** Well, with Ned when he was killed.

**O:** But that was a death

**MPV:** Uh huh

**O:** So, besides death have you lost a job you know – someone moved – you know just...

**MPV:** Well the – loss – friends too – well I'll tell you I had something that just really upset me

and that was several Christmases ago – ten or twelve years ago. I went with a friend to Florida and while I was there Ray, my son, called and said, 'momma your house has been broken into..' And he said, "but as far as I can tell, I don't miss anything." Well, I had had my jewelry, other than that that I wore, which I didn't have a whole lot of jewelry, but I had things that had a lot of meaning in it to me – my mother's engagement ring and Raymond's wedding band. And I said well – I had had it sort of hidden and I had gotten it out during Christmas and had worn some of it and some rings that I didn't normally wear because I normally wore these – well not this one because I didn't have that one at the time – but my wedding band, all from Raymond – or rather my engagement ring, I don't think I was still wearing my wedding band at the time. But, someone came in and somehow found that jewelry, it was not hid I had put it in a chest by my bed. So, I asked Ray to go check that drawer and he said 'well mom it doesn't look like this drawer has been fooled with at all.' And I said 'well if you will, take out anything that looks like nice jewelry and take it to your house and I'll get it when I get back.' Well, what he had taken was some costume jewelry that looked like it might be valuable, but it wasn't. But, I had lost my mother's engagement ring, my first engagement ring, my birthstone ring that I had liked very much, Raymond's wedding band. Raymond had a gold ring with a diamond in it and it was gone, and a diamond pendant, and some things that I really valued. So Ray had told the detective that lived not in this house, but across the street from this house behind me here. So when Ray walked my stuff back and I realized that was gone, I called the detective and told him what was missin. And we made a list of things and he posted it on store windows downtown that there was a reward for it. And one night about twelve o'clock my telephone rang and this man said, "are you the lady that has lost some – that had some jewelry stolen?" And I said "yes I am." And he said, 'well I may have two of your rings.' And I said, " well you need to call the detective, and talk to him." So the next morning John David, the detective, called me and said 'Miss Melba, did you get any rings last night – anything last night in the way of your jewelry?' And I said "no but I got a telephone call but I told him to call you because I sure didn't want anybody coming into my house." So he called the person and the person said "describe the rings". And he said, "I think it's your engagement ring and your mother's engagement ring." And he mailed it back to the detective and he brought it to me and it was. The man said he had bought them off the streets in Ocilla. But, the man told John David, 'I don't want a reward, I just don't want to have anything to do with it. I just want to give back what I've got.' And what we determined was that he brought drugs to Ocilla. And he swapped drugs for jewelry and that's why he didn't want anything to do with it. But I did get those two pieces back, but that was all that I got back. Of course they wanted my insurance policy but that wasn't the point, the money was not important, it was the value of them to me of where they came from and that sort of thing. So that was real traumatic in my life.

**O:** A robbery?

**MPV:** A burglary.

**O:** Yeah. So, you haven't like had to part company with friends through moving or that sort of thing?

**MPV:** No, I made more friends with in moving to Ocilla. (Laughs)

**O:** Okay, this is changing the subject pretty dramatically, but – and maybe you don't think consciously about this, so if you don't have any response to it, that's fine. But, this is about regional identity, and it is kind of for southerners it's kind of in the water we drink and in the air we breathe. If you had to explain to somebody from another country, something about regional differences in this country, how would you describe the south? How would you describe southerners to somebody who just didn't know that there is a difference? Different culture? How would you describe it?

**MPV:** Well, I'm glad you asked me that question. I was on a panel discussion in Atlanta one time, and you know we told a little about ourselves, where we lived, and a little bit about the area that we lived in and so forth. And one of the gentlemen in the audience, when time came for questions, he said 'I want to ask the lady from Ocilla, What do you do in Ocilla?' And I said, " Well, we do the same thing you do in the Atlanta area, except it doesn't cost us much, it doesn't take us any time to get where were going, to a performance, or anything that we are involved in. We only meet a few cars going and coming, and we know our next door neighbor." And he said 'Uh, do you all have any vacancies in Ocilla? (Laughs) I think I'd like to live there?' But I do think that when you live in a small town in the south, and Ocilla is a small town, that the advantages are so great, because you know everybody, and everybody knows you. You have respect for people, when there is a need, whether it's having a new baby or whether it's a death in the family, or whether it's a newcomer to Ocilla; you do something special to let them know you care. I think that that's not true in so many areas.

**O:** Okay. So, for you, southern identity is really tied up in small-town identity, it's more about being in a small rural area than like Atlanta. I mean you don't think of Atlanta as being part of southern culture?

**MPV:** No.

**O:** They would probably beg to differ with you on that (Laughs)

**MPV:** I'm sure they would, and I'm sure that those who live in the Atlanta areas would. But, I know that with my oldest daughter and her children all living – and her husband – all living in the Atlanta area, those who live out – like Carol and them live in Douglassville, and of course Jimmy was a golf superintendent up there and he met a lot of people, and they made a lot of friends. But, that's not true with everybody in Atlanta. But, to prove a point- Cathy - when Marsha married and moved to Jacksonville, her husband was associated with Ford motor company and he was sent out for some training out in – I don't know whether it was Kansas or somewhere – and she was going to see him one time, and when they left Jacksonville, she sat on the plane by this older gentleman and he asked where she was from and she said 'well I live in Jacksonville now, but my home is Ocilla, Georgia.' And he said 'well I've never heard of that.' And she said 'well I'm really surprised because a lot of people you meet know someone who lived there or has lived there or something.' So they continued on the plane together until they had to change planes in some state before they got to their destination. And as they walked in the airport together to get their flight, this voice boomed out 'Marsha Polk' and the man looked at her and said "I ain't believing this." But it was scary Bill from here in Ocilla. And another thing was that just recently, Henry Tison, who is a director of music at one of the churches in Fitzgerald called me and he said, 'Miss Melba' he said 'wife and I have

been to' I think he said Wyoming. And he said 'come in back' – we sat on the plane with a really nice lady from up around Lake Sinclair. And said, we told her we were from Fitzgerald, and she said 'well that's near Ocilla, isn't it?' He said 'yeah', and she said 'I have a friend in Ocilla.' Said 'do you know Melba Paulk?' and he said 'yeah, everybody knows Melba Paulk' (laughs). And then the very next Wednesday night, at prayer meeting, Kermit Elliot came up to me and he said 'Melba' – he said 'some of us seniors went to Youfall, Alabama last week to play golf' and said this man that was sitting at a table, eating, heard us talking about Ocilla. And he walked over to our table and he said 'have a good friend in Ocilla. Do ya'll know Melba Paulk?' And they said 'well everybody knows Melba Paulk'. (Laughs). And so, you know being from a small town doesn't mean that you don't know other people. But it sure gets around when you – and that was all through my years as clerk and serving on these committees that I serve on.

**O:** Have you traveled a lot yourself, either in or outside the country?

**MVP:** Yeah, I've been to Italy and I've been to Switzerland and I've been to Budapest. And...

**O:** What was that like?

**MPV:** Just wonderful, because I went with friends and we just-- we had wonderful experiences and to Hawaii. We had wonderful experiences everytime we went somewhere. Had a lot of good memories, about those visits. And..

**O:** And what about in the country itself. When you travel outside the country, are you aware that people – I mean when you're in Atlanta, you're aware that people notice your small town identity. But when you're outside the south itself, does your southern identity – do you think about that...

**MPV:** It comes through. In fact when we were in Rome, there were three of us women that went to Rome, Italy. And Delta planned our trip for us and got our hotel for us and it was a small hotel, but it was adequate. And in a good section. And we hit the road runnin in so far as walkin tours and that sorta thing. And we asked where we may be able to find some American coffee, and they referred us to a hotel that was a couple of blocks from the hotel where we were staying. And so after one day – the first day we were there, we had been shopping and we had walked miles and looked and looked at architect and all that sorta stuff. And we came in, we showered, we dressed, and we walked up to that hotel and there was a big lighted lounge and it was similar to a Ritz Carlton or somethin like that. And we were sitting at a table drinking our coffee and we realized that others in the lobby were tourists, so we began to gather around and talk to different ones. And there was this baby grand piano, in...

**O:** Now were all these people speaking English?

**MPV:** Uh huh, but some were from France, and some-- different countries. And there was a baby grand piano, and this little gentleman was sitting there by the piano and the pianist said 'do you all have any request? If you do, come tell me what you'd like to hear me play'. So I walked up to the piano and said 'do you know Georgia on my – do you know Georgia?' And he said 'Georgia on my Mind?' And I said 'yeah'. And he's already playing it, and the little gentleman is sitting there. He was smiling, you know. And I said 'come on over and join us at the table'. We were all visiting and so forth. And it was in February, and it was the day before Valentines. And after we had visited a while, he said 'come go with me up the street, I sing at

intermission in a lounge'. And we said 'no we can't do that, but thank you for asking us'. So when we started to leave, he said 'you all come back here tomorrow night?' And we said 'probably'. So when we got there, he had each of us a box of Italian Chocolates, and that night we did walk up the street with him and we went in this lounge which was very nice. And when we went in, the owner greeted us at the door. 'Antonio, Antonio, come in, come in. Bring your friends, best table Antonio'. (Laughs). So Antonio just took us over while we were in Rome. He put us in his little BMW, and the boy that was at the bar at the hotel had told us he said 'when I get off, I'm coming up there to meet you all'. Which he did. So the three of us and Antonio and the young man from – was gonna come to Atlanta to work in a Ritz Carlton. We all went in the gentleman's car, and rode all over Rome at night. And so he brought us back to our hotel, and then he invited us the next night – he wanted to take us to a restaurant for a real Italian diner. So after we got back the next night, we dressed and he picked us up and we went – had a Italian diner and he – when we got to the place that – before we went to the place, we went to a place where there's a gathering place – a park in downtown Rome. And he was sitting in a table with this woman – that's right, he didn't pick us up that night. That was the night that we met at a park and told him we couldn't do anything with him that night because we wanted to do something on our own. So we went down to this park and Antonio evidently anticipated we would be there. And he was sitting in a table with this really nice looking young lady. And he introduced us to her, and she said that every year she traveled by herself over some country and she was in Rome and she always stayed at the Monastery. That's where she would spend the night, with the nuns. And so that night, he asked us if we would have dinner with him the next evening and he wanted to treat us all including the young lady that he had just met – he didn't know her. To a real Italian diner. So she asked him if he had a card, and he said 'yeah' and he gave her a card and then he gave me one. Cause he had sorta taken a liking to me, and he was about my age. And um...

**O:** And when was this?

**MPV:** In Rome, Italy, and it was in – it had to be in probably '98.

**O:** So between Raymond and Ralph.

**MPV:** No, no, no, un uh. It was before – it was after Ralph died. I mean after Raymond died –

**O:** That's what I meant

**MPV:** Oh yeah, it was between – it was between them. Yeah, it was between them. And so he asked us if we were going when he gave us those cards, she looked at the card and she said 'hmm'. And said um, said 'you – are' – oh let me think what the word was that she used. Um – anyhow, I ask her; I said 'what does that mean?' And she said 'well, he's the head of his family'. And – oh what is the word I'm tryin to think of? Anyhow, when I got back and was tellin Sandra and them at the office about it, she said – I said 'and that meant he was the head of his family' and said – Sandra said 'shoot, I thought it meant he couldn't have children'. (laughs) Now what is that word I'm lookin for?

**O:** Sterile?

**MPV:** No, no, no. No, un uh. It wasn't matriarch –

**O:** Patriarch?

**MPV:** No. Anyhow, they all thought that was so funny – Sandra said 'I thought that meant he

couldn't have children'. But would you believe when I got back home, I had a telephone call waiting for me from him? In Rome, and...

**O:** Were you attracted to him?

**MPV:** Not attracted – physically, but just attracted as a friend because – well, as a friend because he was so nice to us! And it just was –

**O:** And you think he was charmed by your southern identity?

**MPV:** Uh huh. Uh huh, I really do. I really do.

**O:** So when they sang 'Georgia on my mind', he knew what – he knew what the song was referring to. He knew that Georgia was southern, US.

**MPV:** Yeah, yeah. And when we went to Hawaii, Joy – one of the friends, met a man from Germany. And he – we didn't go places with him but he met us every morning for breakfast. Joy went to dinner with him one night, but we didn't. And after we came back, from Hawaii, they stayed in touch with each other and he and two of his friends came to visit – she lived in Valdalia. And they came to visit, and she had us all come up for dinner one night. And we did, and they stayed in contact with each other. And he would say to me, his – his name was Manfred. And he would say to me 'Melba, you are a very nice lady. You are a very nice lady'. And even after he and Joy quit seeing each other, and I have never told Joy this. I started out the door to prayer meeting one night and my phone rang and most of the time I would just leave – let it ring, but for some unknown reason, I answered the phone. And it was Manfred. And he said 'Melba' he said 'I was at dinner tonight' – and he was in the Ukraine. And he said 'there was beautiful music, and I thought about you and I just wanted to call and see how you were doing'. And I said 'Manfred, I'm doing extremely well and I'm staying busy'. He said 'I would like for you to come back to Germany to visit'. And I was still workin, and I said 'oh Manfred, that's not possible'. I said 'we have so much going on in the office and we have' – I wasn't about to go to Germany, you know. But he wanted me to come back to Germany and he was younger than I was. But he just – I think he just really liked me, you know.

**O:** And you would attribute that to being a southern lady?

**MPV:** I think so, I think so. And I think also that when we were in Budapest, we went to Switzerland. And Gale went with us – she was the third one in the party – went with us to Switzerland. And we had been out walking – touring all day and we stopped, in this lounge about a block from our hotel. And we were sitting up front around a table having a glass of wine. And there was a table back in another room but it was open to where we were. And it had several men sitting there and we could tell they were talking about us because they would motion, you know. And talk about us and then in a few minutes, in walks this really good looking man with this long coat on and a felt hat on. Walked directly back to where those men were. And what we found out later was that it was his soccer team. And they were telling him about us out there and he came up to the table where we were and he said 'my team back here is interested in you ladies, and we'd like to ask you all to join us'. So we went back there and sat with the team and talked and had...

**O:** And when was this?

**MPV:** It was – after we went to Italy, and after we went to Hawaii. It was during that period of time when I was still workin that –

**O:** Senior aged women are being hit on by a soccer team?

**MPV:** Yeah. (Laughs). And his – and the owner, he sorta paid attention to Gale. Well see Joy had attracted this man from Germany and Hawaii and I had in Italy, and here she was. We were there, and Manfred, the man from Germany and his friends, had asked Joy to come to Budapest. And to bring Melba, but he didn't ask Gale. And so Gale came back home after that trip but demanded Mark – that she met in Switzerland – invited us and picked us up and he took us to his place and fixed diner for us one night. And none of us ever left eachother, except now – Joy went to diner one night with Manfred and Gale stayed in the lounge one night after Joy and I went up to our room with Mark talking. I – but the three of us never went anywhere without eachother. We were three together. And Mark called Gale after we got home. But in Budapest, he said 'tell Melba it will not cost her anything except her flight'. And sure enough, they highly entertained us, took us to diner, rented a little cafe lounge thing for the day one day and we had music and food and danced in the place they had rented. And just had wonderful times, and nothing – nothing out of the way. Nothing wrong at all, we were never in fear that we had done the wrong thing, or anything. It was just wonderful. We just – and I think it was all because we were from the south.

**O:** I – that's what I wanted to go back to that. You – and reiterate...

**MPV:** I definitely feel like it was because we were from the south. And we were friendly and some of em attracted. And so we just had a really – really good experience from being a southern girl.

**O:** Okay, wow. Well there's just about no way to top that. Do you feel up to answering some questions about history or do you want to take a little break?

**MPV:** I'm fine unless you want to.

**O:** Okay, alright. So we're shifting gears a little bit here. What is the most important historical event that you either participated in or lived through?

**MPV:** World War II.

**O:** Okay, alright.

**MPV:** I well remember when war was declared, and I well remember when – when the war was over. And it was a trying time for all of us. And my brother was in service, and Raymond was in service, but I did not know him at that time. And my sister's husband was in service.

**O:** Okay, so you would've been – a teenager then.

**MPV:** It was in '45 – so yeah. Yeah.

**O:** It started in '41, so you would've been when it started –

**MPV:** It was over in '45, and that's when I met Raymond. But we were in Charleston, South Carolina when war was declared and I was in the ninth grade.

**O:** Okay, you said a little bit about that yesterday. So really the war – is that your prominent memory of the 1940's? The wars?

**MPV:** Yeah, and the fact that daddy was making more money than he'd ever made because he was workin with the construction company and – we had access to doing more things than we had ever done before.

**O:** So the war was on the home front for you personally – led to prosperity.

**MPV:** That's right.

**O:** Okay, alright so-- so the '40's were somewhat financially speaking, a better decade than the '30's personally because –

**MPV:** Yeah, yeah.

**O:** Okay. What about the 1950's? What do you recall about the '50's?

**MPV:** Well see that – I married in '46 and I had Carol – a child. And I started to work in the courthouse. And the other two children in the '50's. And – so it was just homelife.

**O:** Okay. So the '50's were – the '50's classically – historically are seen as a decade of a sort of consensus in the country. Did you feel that way here? Did it feel like a time of – do you recall it favorably?

**MPV:** Yeah, because we were just a happy family together. And Raymond was workin, I was workin...

**O:** So it's really kinda – your family – it sounds like your family almost – is almost Norman Rockwell exemplary 1950's. You really were living that dream. The American Dream.

**MPV:** Yeah. See Marsha was born in '54 and Ray in '58. And so I had Carol, who was up 7 years old, and then I had two babies.

**O:** Okay, alright. Now, okay. The war's over in '45, shortly after we have a cold war. And do you recall those events? Do you recall the late '40s and the '50s being a time of – fallout shelters and the way the cold war affected us culturally. Do you remember – I'm sure you remember fallout shelters and –

**MPV:** Yeah I do because we had one at the courthouse – everybody considered the basement of the courthouse a fallout shelter. And of course, we didn't know it at the time – about the security they had fixed for our national leaders at the Greenbrier Hotel in West Virginia. We didn't know about that then, but we know about it now (laughs).

**O:** Have you been there?

**MPV:** No. Well, I've been to the Greenbrier but it was in the middle of the night – us and some friends had been on a trip up into Canada and we wanted to come back by the Greenbarrow to see it and we thought we'd get there early morning. And we were gonna see if we could have breakfast there, but we had not calculated the right time and got there about three o'clock in the morning (laughs). So we didn't wait, but we did see the Greenbarrow but I haven't been there.

**O:** Did the cold war or the threat of nuclear war – was that – did you discuss that at home? Was that something that – do you recall that very...

**MPV:** No, but what I do recall – and I don't remember what era it was right now unless I stop and thought. But I remember when we began to do missiles and all – not missiles but spacecraft to the moon, and all. And my daddy, he was from the old school, and he said 'now I'm tellin you children, I'm tellin you this. If God had wanted us on the moon, he would have put us there'. And he said 'they're messin with something now that they don't need to be messing with'. (laughs)

**O:** He did not support the – space travel to the moon.

**MPV:** No. No.

**O:** Okay, alright. I think many of us can recall somebody in the family like that (laughs). Okay, what about the 1960's? You recall the '50s as a sort of domestic, almost – domestic harmony.

I mean the home life, with you raising children and um...

**MPV:** Well in the late '60s, Carol went to college.

**O:** So the '60s now, become a different time. If I name some – if I bring up some names from the '50s and early '60s, could you just tell me if they resonate – if they mean anything to you. Have you ever heard of Emmett Till?

**MPV:** I've heard of Emmett Till, but I –

**O:** Don't recall why?

**MPV:** Un uh.

**O:** The little rock nine?

**MPV:** No.

**O:** The Montgomery Bus Boycott?

**MPV:** Um, if that's what I'm thinking it is. To do with race.

**O:** Mmhm. Civil rights.

**MPV:** Yeah, yeah I remember that.

**O:** Okay. Lester Maddox?

**MPV:** Oh yeah. He wrote a bicycle backwards and he made it axehandles...

**O:** So you recall that pretty – what were – well you were in the courthouse then.

**MPV:** Oh yeah, he came and visited with us.

**O:** What was the general impression of him by people?

**MPV:** In our area, it was very good.

**O:** Okay, alright. So civil rights movement occupies a good bit of '50s and '60s. What do you recall about the civil rights movement?

**MPV:** Well, I've never been biased or prejudiced in my thinkin and I just thought that they were mistreated. And that it was horrible what was happening to them.

**O:** Okay. So how did – do you recall how the civil rights movement as a movement was experienced here in Ocilla?

**MPV:** Well I well remember when they – desegregated the schools and places like bus stations and things like that. And for a lot of people in our area, that did not suit with them very well.

**O:** Yeah. And so – it didn't suit them –

**MPV:** Because they just didn't think that that was the place for em.

**O:** yeah, yeah. It was – okay. How do you think that has played out? I mean it's many years hence. How do you think race relations are regarded here in Ocilla?

**MPV:** Well, as a whole I don't know that I can speak for it as a whole. But my feeling is, with reference to that, is I believe that we all should be treated equally and that goes on to say I don't think that because you are a certain race, that you should be given something that somebody more qualified should have been given, but they were given that because of race. I don't think that – I don't think that that should be a factor.

**O:** So you have – you got, told me affirmative action. That you had problems with affirmative action.

**MPV:** Yeah.

**O:** Okay, alright. Do you remember other things about the things that would make headlines,

like the sit ins, the freedom rides, the murders and freedom riders in 1964. Do you remember that? Do you remember that surfacing?

**MPV:** I remember that, but you know I didn't keep up with that as much as I should have. Because –

**O:** Did you feel isolated from it because it wasn't really –

**MPV:** It wasn't happening right here, and I didn't keep up with it as much and like I said I just felt like it – that things like that should not be happening. That we just – we were too chaotic with things like that. Just –

**O:** Okay. Do you remember the assassinations and things that took place in the '60s? JFK...

**MPV:** Oh yeah. I watched that religiously and...

**O:** How did your family feel about that? How was that?

**MPV:** Oh we thought it was horrible. It was horrible. And we just couldn't believe what we saw on the television and what we heard, you know through the media and so forth.

**O:** Do you remember Malcolm X from the – and that assassination?

**MPV:** Uh, no but I remember – whatever his name was, I can't even think of his name now being shot.

**O:** Martin Luther King?

**MPV:** No, no. Uh, the one who they said killed Kennedy.

**O:** Oh, yeah. Oswald.

**MPV:** Oswald, yeah. Should have remembered that cause we called Raymond Oswald a lot and (laughs).

**O:** So, yeah those are really vivid memories I think for people who –

**MPV:** Who saw all of that. And I certainly remember when Martin Luther King was killed.

**O:** Okay. And shortly after Robert Kennedy.

**MPV:** Yeah.

**O:** So how does that experience, because that was – I mean if you look back at it historically it was a very tumultuous event –

**MPV:** It was and I just kept thinking 'what is this world coming to?' I mean, when people just innocently in a parade get shot or a man stands on a balcony and get shot, a man is killed because he's a Kennedy and – I mean to me all that was just – Oh I just felt like that was just. And I think it was – part of the beginning of our downfall.

**O:** So you see the '60s as a –

**MPV:** Turning point.

**O:** Okay. That's a national trend as you see it.

**MPV:** Uh huh.

**O:** Okay. And so you just used the word as – so you see it negatively? You see the '60s as a negative turning point?

**MPV:** I do.

**O:** Okay, alright. And you said something a few minutes ago about desegregation. How was that experienced here in Ocilla?

**MPV:** Well, you know they began – the Afro-American began to be able to – well to go to school together. To sit in the same hospital waiting room, and not the back door. And that sort

of thing.

**O:** And how did that feel at the time and does it feel differently for you now? Was it – did you question it at the time that it was happening or did you – how did you feel about it?

**MPV:** I didn't question it, I just thought it was good that they could come in the same way I did (laughs). And so forth, I – the only reservation or anything that I ever had about it was – don't do this just because they're black. Given opportunity – some opportunities, or somethin. I know that because they were black they were denied opportunities, but as time came about, I thought – we should all be given the same opportunities.

**O:** Okay. So you were – at least in principle, supporting Martin Luthor King's people should be – the content of their character not color of their skin – should be...

**MPV:** Yeah.

**O:** Okay. Did you –

**MPV:** And their qualifications. And I think it did encourage a lot of em in the long run to be more educated, get more education and –

**O:** Do you think a lot of – African Americans here in Ocilla – did they leave Ocilla and go off to college? Did they – and if they did, did they come back? Is there a community here in Ocilla that had, you know, gone back?

**MPV:** We did have several that went to college and came back. And some of em are still here today – they're retired now of course. But I know I think of one gentleman in particular, Alphonso Owens who has been such a tremendous leader in that community. Encouraging them to –

**O:** So did he leave and go to college and come back?

**MPV:** And came back, mmhm. He was principle of the school, and has always been really involved in what's happening in Ocilla and has been honored in a Chamber banquet.

**O:** I think I saw those pictures. Do you know him personally?

**MPV:** Yes.

**O:** Okay, alright.

**MPV:** And his – one of his daughters, Janelle was a good friend to my daughter Marsha.

**O:** Did you children – how'd your children experience that?

**MPV:** They accepted it very well. In fact, I well remember we had a science teacher who was very strong in chemistry and biology and all, and we participated in the fairs – in competition with projects that we would do and so forth. And I know one of my trips to Athens to a state meet – a state fair. On their projects they had done, they had won on local levels and up on a state level. And I had my children and their friends, white and black, in the vehicle I was in.

**O:** So you didn't – your kids didn't have a hard time with the transition?

**MPV:** No, un uh.

**O:** Do you think that over time your ideas about race relations have changed?

**MPV:** Not except what I said before. I have seen times when I thought they should have earned a position rather than getting the position because they were black.

**O:** Okay. So you really kind of supported the end of Affirmative Action?

**MPV:** Yeah.

**O:** Okay. Alright. Do you remember other movements in the '60s like the – well, really it's the

'70s – the native American movement – the movement for Native American rights, the movement for Woman's rights. How'd you feel about the Women's movement?

**MPV:** I thought it was great. (Laughs).

**O:** So do you remember at all – now this was '60s, but do you remember the book "The Feminine Mystique" from 1963?

**MPV:** No I don't.

**O:** Betty Friedan? Okay. Kinda launched the Woman's Rights movement but it took it a little while cause the Civil Rights movement was really kind of dominating in the '60s but then the Woman's rights movement explodes in the '70s. How was that experienced here?

**MPV:** Um, I'm not really sure that I can comment on that. I was just sittin here thinking about when some of us went to Atlanta, and Jane Fonda was there. And she asked us the question about how long have we been advocates for things that pertain to issues that were going on in the time. And we told her we'd been advocates for what was good for a long time.

**O:** (laughs) What did she say to that?

**MPV:** She said 'well, you know, everybody – everybody has opinions' and I said 'and that's good, I'm glad we're not all alike'. And...

**O:** But as far as the Woman's Movement, you didn't have a problem – an issue with that? Did you think Women were going too far? Did you think they were pressing too hard for?

**MPV:** I thought that for awhile, and then I think it just sort of leveled itself off to the fact that I thought well, maybe it took that to get where we are today.

**O:** Yeah. Did – have you – did you ever have any reservations about equal pay for equal work?

**MPV:** Uh yeah, cause I think that a woman should have equal pay for what she does and according to what pay is given to a man.

**O:** So you really promoted the idea of equal pay for equal work?

**MPV:** Uh huh. Uh huh.

**O:** Okay. Okay. What about the war in Vietnam? Did you – was anybody in your family ever –

**MPV:** A nephew; my sister in laws son, was in Vietnam.

**O:** How did that affect – what was the family's position on the war? Or did you have a position?

**MPV:** Um, well we didn't think we needed to be in that war. (Laughs).

**O:** Seriously?

**MPV:** Yeah.

**O:** Did you take strong stands when you felt that way?

**MPV:** No, not really because like I said we had Jimmy Floyd from Fitzgerald – was in the war. And we knew we weren't happy –

**O:** What did you think about the protesters? Because there were plenty of those?

**MPV:** Well I just don't like protesters. (Laughs)

**O:** So you just don't like protesters (Laughs). Okay. Alright.

**MPV:** I think there's a better way to do things.

**O:** Okay, alright.

**MPV:** I think a lot of times that's just for show.

**O:** Okay. Would you comment – you've already kind of said this, but – what do you think is the legacy of the Woman's Movement of the '70s?

**MPV:** Well, I think that women were able to accomplish a lot of things that they would not have accomplished had we not had a movement that women could speak up and speak out. And so I think that in the end result, it was a good movement.

**O:** Okay. Alright. You did though – you expressed something in – I'm not even sure how to ask about it. But you said in effect, you just don't like protest. And some of that's got – I'm sure to do with being a southern woman.

**MPV:** Well I just think that, a lot of times, people get involved in that just because that's something they can be involved in. (Laughs). I mean I just think there's better ways to solve problems than protest.

**O:** Okay –

**MPV:** Now I think it's good if you voice your opinion about things, but do it in a civilized way. (Laughs). I mean I just think that – just like when farmers have to go to Washington on issues, they don't do it in a loud, boisterous, protest way. They go in an interested way to show support for what they need. And I think there's better ways to do things than to shout and holler and march around and all that sorta stuff.

**O:** Okay, alright. Okay, what historical or political event would you say has had the greatest impact, either directly or indirectly, on your life personally?

**MPV:** Hmm. I don't really know what I would put that – where I would put – that. I think – I think I would say, whether it was my life or the life of other peoples was, when Franklin Roosevelt was our president.

**O:** Okay. Alright. So FDR was your? Okay.

**MPV:** Uh huh.

**O:** And do you think there are many – as some people would refer to them as old FDR Democrats – Do you think there are many of them left?

**MPV:** There are a lot of old died in the wool Democrats, but they don't measure up to Franklin Roosevelt. (Laughs).

**O:** Did your family have pictures of Roosevelt in the house?

**MPV:** Uh I think we might have had one.

**O:** Yeah. There's some great photographs with a – in peoples homes – with FDR in the background. It seemed very – you don't find people with pictures of presidents in their homes anymore.

**MPV:** Not anymore.

**O:** Okay. If there – is there a period of time, and place, other than where you are right now, that you would go back to? What would it be?

**MPV:** Well, I don't know that I'd want to go back anywhere, but I would like to be able to go back to the time when we did not have all the drugs and all that we have now. Because, you know now they just – oh my goodness, I just can't get over what all some of these people know how to make stuff and to use stuff that is harmful and will kill em and so forth. I wish we could go back – or I could go back to a time when the world was sorta at peace.

**O:** So you see drugs as, it sounds like, a number one social problem?

**MPV:** Oh it is because 9 out of 10 cases that we have in court is a result of some kind of drug.

**O:** And why do you think that is? What explains that to you?

**MPV:** It's just that our morals have just changed so much.

**O:** So it's more about Morals than it is the money involved in drugs...

**MPV:** I think so. I think so.

**O:** Okay, alright. Alright. Mrs. Melba, we got one category left, are you up for that?

**MPV:** Yeah.

**O:** Okay. It's really just kind of a – it's kinda encapsulating, so they're sort of comprehensive questions. And I think I started out talking about this, and – what do you see as the most important turning points in your life? You've talked about – you had many turning points, but what would you identify as those that really, you know, made a fundamental difference in the before and the after?

**MPV:** Well getting married was definitely one. My opportunities to serve has been a turning point for me because I certainly see people, as I mentioned earlier, who have mental disabilities and so forth. I've seen how they've been helped in ways they were never helped. And of course with my job I loved every minute of it and it was a turning point in my life because I never anticipated being clerk, because I thought that my boss that I worked for for thirty two years would eventually get beat, and that that would beat me also because I had been loyal to him. And when he chose to retire, that was a turning point in my life because I saw my opportunity to be the clerk and took advantage of it. Of course I think the loss of your parents is a turning point in your life because you take time then to stop and think 'I wish I had asked them this' or 'I wish I had told them this' or, you know, that sorta thing. So there are many directions you turn through your years, that you wouldn't want to go back to but you wish you'd looked into better.

**O:** Yeah. Are you satisfied with the life choices you've made?

**MPV:** I am very satisfied.

**O:** And – I've already asked this question, but have there been mistakes in your life?

**MPV:** Well yeah I've made mistakes. I would never say I hadn't made mistakes. None that really affected the outcome of my life I don't think.

**O:** Okay, alright. So if you could do things over again – I think you already said –

**MPV:** I would do the very same thing.

**O:** Okay, alright. Has your life been better or not as good as you envisioned it when you were younger?

**MPV:** Probably better than I envisioned it because – I think I mentioned earlier that I had never had any life long desire to be a movie star or a great celebrity or somethin. And I think just the way my life has turned out, that I've been as happy as any individual could be. You know, accepting all the deaths and sickness and so forth, but other than that, my life has just been really good. Really good.

**O:** Okay. Would you say you've had a privileged life?

**MPV:** Very much so.

**O:** Okay. How have you overcome or learned from the difficulties – difficulties for you being loss of people that you love, or whatever you identify as a difficulty. How do you overcome

that? How have you overcome in all these years?

**MPV:** Well, I think we gain a strength through each thing we go through whether it's good or bad. And I definitely think that strength comes from God, and I think that with him we can do all things and without him we are nothing. And so –

**O:** Okay, alright. What about the greatest disappointments, not mistakes, but disappointments in your life. What have those been?

**MPV:** Oh... Disappointments... Well I guess disappointments that, uh – I'm trying to think. I don't know that there's ever been major things that were disappointments that didn't turn out well.

**O:** So you have this way of turning things turning to the positive. A different way of seeing things--

**MPV:** Things that might not have been exactly what you wanted, but it turned out to be the best thing.

**O:** Okay, alright. What do you consider the most valuable lesson you've learned in life?

**MPV:** Well now you'll think that I've just gone crazy and so forth when I say – but I think that the greatest value in life is to do unto others as you would have them do unto you and – and when we do that, we can be happy with our lives and hopefully make somebody else happy.

**O:** Okay, alright. And what was – in looking back over your life, what was the happiest time and what was the most challenging time?

**MPV:** Well I guess the happiest times were when we were a family all together and the world was not so chaotic on the outside, and –

**O:** Would that have been the '50s like you were saying –

**MPV:** Well, yeah. And if we had not had some financial difficulties – and they were just because we weren't making a lot of money and so forth. We didn't have any problems among our family, you know. We probably were the last ones to get a television or the last ones to get some air conditioning – we had a window fan. But those were not really problems but if we ever had any, it probably was because I would spend some money that Raymond didn't think I needed to. Like buying a chair or something like that (Laughs). But he would say 'we got a chair'. But it was because – it wasn't that he didn't want to do those things. So and – what was the other question? And what was...

**O:** The happiest time and the least – the most challenging time.

**MPV:** The most challenging times were some of the most happy times because we were confronted with problems and it was a challenge, but we came through it and we were happy as we could be.

**O:** So there's something about coming through it in itself...

**MPV:** Yeah.

**O:** Okay. Has there ever been a single individual or even more than one – or individuals who have really changed your life?

**MPV:** Well, yeah. (Phone rings)

**O:** I'm sorry say that again, Raymond?

**MPV:** Raymond, uh huh. Raymond and I were the very opposite in so far as I loved to get out

and go and do things – just something all the time. And he was pretty much the opposite, and I think that, in a way, it settled me down – and I don't mean that I was wild or anything, but it was just that – I think that his influence on me made me realize that there was more to life than partying, fun and games, you know – that sorta thing.

**O:** So he offered a balance for you?

**MPV:** Yeah, I think so.

**O:** Okay, alright. Do you have a worry now? What's your biggest worry now?

**MPV:** The health of my family.

**O:** Okay. Alright. In what way do you want to be remembered or what do you want to be your legacy? Miss Melba's legacy, what do you want that to be?

**MPV:** Well, I would like for it to be that she loved her family, and she loved her friends, but that most of all she loved God. And wanted to try to help people in being influence to others.

**O:** Okay. And what do you think has been the greatest source of either inspiration or motivation for you in your life? What inspires you?

**MPV:** Well, my family.

**O:** Okay, alright. And what are you proudest of in your life –

**MPV:** My family (laughs).

**O:** Alright. Is there anything that you would like for your children, your grandchildren, your friends, your family – anybody who's close to you knows you, to know about you that they don't already know? Is there anything you would like to –

**MPV:** I don't think so.

**O:** Okay, alright. Is there anything we've left out or not covered adequately that you would like to revisit or talk about?

**MPV:** I don't really think so, Cathy. I think we've pretty much covered who I am and what I am.

**O:** Okay. Two last questions. How has the experience of revisiting your life – what's that been like?

**MPV:** Well you know it's made me think about some things I hadn't thought about in years (Laughs).

**O:** In a good way?

**MPV:** Yeah, yeah.

**O:** Alright. And finally, if you could give this – your life story – a title, what would it be?

**MPV:** Oh my goodness. Let me think on that a minute – my life's story...

**O:** If somebody was gonna write a biography on you, what would the title – if you could title it – what would it be?

**MPV:** Maybe "One who thought she could, and did." You know, just –

**O:** Melba Paulk-Veazy, One Who Thought She Could, and Did. Okay.

**MPV:** Because, you know, I wanted to be a good mother and I think I was. I wanted to be a good wife and I think I was. Wanted to be a good Christian and I think I am. One who was happy in her work and I was. And what more could you ask? (Laughs)

**O:** I like that title.

**MPV:** That's just – that's just me.

**O:** Okay. Well I think we'll stop here.

**MPV:** But it's just been a really good experience, now I just – like I said I thought about things I haven't thought about in years. And made me reflect more and made me realize too just how fortunate I've been for 84 years.

**O:** Well you are a dynamic – a very very young 84 years old (Laughs).

**MPV:** Well, I'm sure my time will come, but I hope when it does that I'll just – I told my children one time I said 'now if I get killed on the road going to Atlanta just say she was on the road again.' (Laughs)

**O:** (Laughs) Well that's a good place to end.