

INTERVIEW OF GENE MADDOX
BY
SALLY CAUSEY
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SC: This is Sally Causey talking with Gene Maddox on the 20th of March in the year 2000. Gene just informed me that it's the Spring Equinox so what a great way to get started. The first question I have for Gene is when and where were you born and where were you raised?

GM: Well, I was born in Cleveland County, North Carolina in the town of Shelby. I lived there for about two years and then we moved here to East Tennessee in Greeneville and it was my mother, my father and myself. I am an only child and for the most part been around Greeneville ever since. There have been times that I lived in other places, but I grew up here and went through school here and basically all my education is in this area and with a few stints in North Carolina I've lived mainly around East Tennessee.

SC: So why did your family move here of all places?

GM: My, well, going back, should I give you just a little background. Should I go back?

SC: Sure!

GM: Okay. My people, both my mother's side of the family and my father's side of the family came out of Northeastern Georgia, around Athens. And they moved out during the 20's and late teens because of the boweevil. They were sharecroppers and depended on cotton so my father's people moved to Cleveland County, North Carolina area where there is cotton grown or used to be at least. And my mother's people for pretty much the same reason, moved into East Tennessee where - now they both were farmers. They both were sharecroppers and worked agriculture and farming and my mother's father came to Greeneville and worked in the tobacco market here. Eventually buying a farm and raising -- becoming a tobacco farmer whereas my father's people remained in North Carolina and stayed at the cotton and that sort of thing. So as far as my mother's and father's family and all grandparents on both sides were farm people and of course you asked me why did I...Well, it seems that my, on my mother's side of the family living here in Greeneville there were I think six in the family, four boys and two girls.

SC: Now these are your mother's siblings?

GM: Yes. These are my uncles on my maternal side of the family and my mother, I think when she was about 14 or 15, a guy came from the North Carolina area, the Cleveand County area and was

looking for people to pick cotton. Well, since my mother's brothers, her siblings, the males, were -- well everybody in the family picked cotton from the youngest to the oldest. I often sat and listened to them talk about how they picked cotton and I picked a bale, which was kind of foreign to me, but anyway this guy came over looking for people to pick cotton over in North Carolina which is where my father was. And I think my, a couple of my uncles and a couple of their friends decided to go. Well, my mother just wanted to go along you know, she was I think about 14 or 15 but she was going to be with her brothers so they let her go. Well it seems that while she was over there she met my father. And then she comes back when they all come back from picking cotton and she's telling the family all about it and her brothers are telling the family all about it and they decide that they couldn't go back into cotton so they move over to Cleveland County, North Carolina. And then that's when they actually get married.

SC: Gotcha.

GM: Actually they eloped. They ran off. She was 16 and he was like 23 and they eloped and ran off to just over the border and well, if you know where Shelby is, it's right on the state line of South Carolina. Blacksburg. I think South Carolina is where they eloped and got married. And stayed married about 15 years before I was born.

SC: Wow!

GM: And about two years after I was born, meanwhile during this time that they were married, my maternal grandfather decided to move back to Greeneville which they did and course it was about 140 miles between here at Greeneville to Shelby so you know we were, they were always going back and forth so in 1946, we moved because my mother wanted to be with her family so they just decided to move back over here so my father came too and that's how we got into Greeneville. Came to be here with my mother's people and I've been here ever since.

SC: Sounds great! That's a great answer to the question. That's perfect. That provides great background for the rest of the interview. The second question is what do you do for a living and do you own or lease a house, land or do you farm yourself?

GM: No. I do own my house here. It's my family home and I am not working right now but I, mainly because of my disability being blind and that's, well, I'm just moving into another career so to speak. I've been involved in business. I've owned two or three businesses and mainly have done that most of my adult life except for about seven or eight years when I worked for the local

institution for the mentally retarded, Greene Valley. I worked there for about seven years and then after that I started to have some visual deterioration and after several things I eventually got into a program that's sponsored by the state to put disabled people into business and that's how I got into business and liked it and pretty much have been in and out of it ever since and right now I'm goin' in - I'm writing a business proposal to go into an on-line business.

SC: Great! Cool and as a follow up to that too, have you ever had a garden or did your family have a garden?

GM: Yes, yes. Oh yes, yes. With the background in farming of course, I mean it was just what you did. It was just a normal everyday thing to have a garden. I mean it was just what you did even though now once we moved to Greeneville, well, going back to Shelby in North Carolina, once my father got married they sort of left the farm and moved into town and both started doing domestic work. My father started to work for a pretty prominent family in North Carolina, the Gardners and I think they were in textiles. And they were politically very strong in North Carolina so by working for them he became pretty proficient in his job. You know he became like cooking, chaufering doing the whole gammit of sort of like a butler but you know not in an English sense but in a more of an American sense of doing, being the man that really takes care of everything, the parties, the cooking and all of this and so that's what he was pretty well, you know, that seems so unusual coming from farming but even though he did that and my mother did some factory work and mostly domestic work because neither of them finished high school. But they could read you know, enough to get by and of course that owes to where they came from, background and you know, life they you know were in when they were growing up. So even though they like lived in town and not on the farm any longer we, having a garden was just something that they brought with them. That was just something you do. A lot of people in this community here in Greeneville and in Shelby and all, you know, this whole region. With backgrounds like that you know it was just second nature to have a garden.

SC: Okay. Let's see the next question is how did you or your family first come to Greene County? But I think you've answered that.

GM: Okay. I sort of got ahead of you didn't I.

SC: That's quite alright!

GM: I tend to go on.

SC: Let's see. It says, if relevant, how did the land contribute

to your family's income in past generations? You've addressed that too but if you want to expand on it, go for it.

GM: Yeah, let me add just this much to it. Now, I said that my father and mother once they were married came off of the farm. My grandfather, who had moved back to Greeneville, went back to farming because that's what he had done all his life and you know that's what he knew. Even though in Georgia he'd been into cotton but now in Tennessee it was tobacco and he was a, I guess he was a pretty good farmer, you know he did well and, relatively speaking. He was able to buy his own farm and buy his own house and course he had a couple of boys around to help with the farm and the girls helped. Everybody helps on a farm. And at the time we came back, they already owned this farm so I used to stay, you know while my mother and father worked, I stayed with them on the farm so that was a large influence on me as far as being around a farm and agriculture and understanding the way of life and learning about farming and which I value that being close to the land. And of course, there were times that everybody pitched in. My mother, my father, you know their -- her siblings and everyone would come and you know we'd get in the tobacco crop and we would do this -- you know all help out. So it did contribute you know especially with my grandparents but it influenced me you know being on the farm but it also did contribute some to our income.

SC: Great. Let's see, how about this, in growing up did you feel you were part of a particular community and if so, share any thoughts about how it felt to live in and be a part of the community.

GM: Okay, I guess I can answer that by saying right here where I am now is pretty much where I grew up. Not this particular house of course but in the same community. This is a small community and I, school here for instance. This was during segregation of course, and we had one city public school here with blacks at that time and it went from grades one through twelve. You know, it was divided up into lower grades, middle school and then high school. And Greeneville has a small black population. I think it's something like three percent and it's pretty much always been that way. And if you lived in the county you were bussed into one school here so all of the African American people in Greene County, during, I started around 1950, yeah, 1950, and if you no matter where you lived in Greene County if you were African American you went to George Clem which is the city school here but because there wasn't enough of a black population in the county to warrant having schools. Now they did have and I did get to go to in 1950 and late 40's they did have these little one room schools and they did have some black schools and one was out at Tusculum at a place called New Hope which is not too far from Tusculum College. Now I did, when I was like four, get to go to that

school because I mean I wasn't really old enough to go to school but it was just, they thought it would be a good idea and things were sort of informal so I got to go to school for a couple of years you know. And of course you know we only had a few students. I can remember the older guys and you know you'd have two or three people like in twelfth grade and two or three would be in the seventh and myself and this other little girl who was niece of the teacher were like four and so it was all scattered but it was good. I enjoyed that experience and you know but that pretty much threw especially the black families together whether they lived in the county, whether they lived in town, we had that connection of going to this one school up here. By the 1950's when they built this public school you know that sort of did away with the one room schools and we were pretty much all together there. And across from the school up on the hill which is, I don't know how to explain it, George Clem, the school is sort of central to the black community of course and it's sitting on the site of I think what they used to call Greeneville College. And it was a wooden structure sponsored by the AME Zion African Methodist Church, and before that everybody in town sort of went to that school up on the hill. Well there was a time, I think around 49 or 50 that was torn down and there was quite a bit of history to that, maybe we can get into that some other time about this Greeneville College. But it was torn down and this new public school was built in the 50's and that's where I started in the first grade and continued on there until twelfth grade and all of my friends and everybody here did the same. And what's so funny about it is I think at any one time there wasn't over two or three hundred students in the whole school from first through twelve. And so you know there was, and as I said this was a small community. Greeneville is roughly about 15,000 people now and I don't know then but as I say the African American population has been about under three percent so you can get an idea of where we were so and it's like if you were African American and for years and if you see anybody on the street, well, you knew that person. You know if he was black, you knew him and they knew you. If you see somebody new you'd think "well, who's he kin to". Well you know if you didn't know him or her you would understand or you would know who they were related to. Course it's a little different now days but that was the sense of the community at that time. And across from the school we have a group here called the Negro Women's Civics Club which is still involved. And they have done a lot of civic community work in this - in Greeneville, from before, I don't know it goes way back. Way back. And they built a swimming pool see because there was a pool here but because things weren't integrated we didn't have any place to swim so they built this, so this became, and this pool was adjacent to the school and it was sort of a little park and everybody gathered there. They had a juke box and to this day when people set and we talk about those times it was very special because of the number

of people, small number, but it was you know, everybody has a special memories about going up, we call it going up on the hill, cause it is like the highest spot in this community and there were very special relationships. People who had moved away like would come back and bring their children to stay with the grandparents and we have special memories of those people coming. I had a cousin that would come in and we would meet up on the hill and you know it was a time for courting and growing up you know, from two or three years on up there was something to do up there and one of the things I'd like to tell you about is the 8th of August celebration here. The 8th of August celebration is sort of Black Independence Day. Course we celebrate the Fourth of course but there was something special, the date of freedom from slavery ended up somehow and I'm not sure, I've tried to find the history of this and it may be around, but they, freedom came to Greeneville for the blacks was on August the 8th. And we had religiously celebrated that ever since I can remember and as I understand it was from the time that it really happened we've always celebrated that. And it's a time that if you had moved away, during the summer, during the summer vacation, you would come and that's always, always been a very special date. We'd get together and there would be special church meetings, there are times we've had parades, we've had dances, we've had all sorts of community function. It was coming back together. And since, as I keep coming back to say that since the population was relatively small but still large enough to really have a good time and it was very special. That's been a very special time here. And as we get older, we sort of treasure that and sort of try to keep it going each year.

SC: That's great! Well, let's see the next question, again, you've already touched on it but please expand if there's more you want to say. The question is what schools did you attend? And how were they important to your community?

GM: Well, course I think I've touched on how much, well, let me say that one of the -- I think one of the most positive things about segregation during that time is that I think black people understood their position in life and I think it was pretty much understood, hammered into our heads by our teachers and our parents that education was the key. And you know I think most people, most students valued that. And I think one of the most positive thing were our teachers. How hard they tried, how they stayed after us and they would tell us "you know integration is coming. We want you to be able to stand up and be proud and be as accomplished as anyone else." And they really pushed us to do it. They made us understand why and they made us realize that there was a thing called black history even though it was not in our books and a lot of times they would bring stuff and they would just tell us stories. And they would tell us for the people who

were not, who were not come from educated people, but this is what you are going to strive for. And the parents, if they didn't have a college background they knew this was the starting point from where you wanted to go and the whole community was behind that input. And some of the teachers I've had really opened my eyes up to a lot of things and opened, you know, raised the horizons to the things that we didn't understand. Because you have to understand being African American you know there were a lot of things we didn't really -- you know we were not exposed to, of course, and that's nothing unique about Greeneville I think that's for the whole, but Greeneville is sort of off the beaten path and it's -- you know so I just really value having those teachers. You know there's one still living, she's about 92.

SC: Wow! Who's that?

GM: Her name is Lottie Henry. She was like the librarian. And you know she was, I mean you know the stories that they would tell us about going to college it would just like make you want to go and things and being a librarian she loved to read, just really -- she just really exposed me to a lot of things. Because that's not to say, you know, I did learn things other places but this is especially significant in that it was in school and I just value those teachers. You know, we had one coach, we had one coach, J.J. Jones, and I don't know if you've heard of him but he -- when integration came, he, of course, went over the high school as assistant coach, but he coached at George Clem when integration came in 65 and that's of course when things started to change, but before that he was the only coach. He probably got an assistant, a math teacher, but you know he was the basketball coach, he was the football coach and any other kind of sport activity, he did it all and at one time he was our Boy Scout leader and you know a lot of kids. I've often talked to a lot of my buddies about this and coach Jones got a lot of awards after he retired because he had done so much for the community before integration and after integration. He was outstanding at Greeneville High School and he was just everything. He was a role model to a lot of kids who didn't have role models. And you know, he was really rough on us in football. I mean it was rough, it was rough! But you know, now that I think about that maybe it wasn't so cool. But you know the goals, and ideas and the stories he would tell. He would just take us guys around the school and he would just do things that were extraordinary. He'd tell us things. He would tell us army stories. He'd tell us -- but there was always a moral of some value to what he was doing. He really did, you know, and that was something special for this community. I can't speak about other communities but that's what some of the things the instructors and teachers were special and then of course there were other people in the community and of course I think about the book "It Takes a Village" and I get that sense of thinking back about Greeneville

College. Everyone knew everybody and if this kid was in trouble all it would take was for anybody's mom or dad to see him, you know and this kid's got double trouble, you know and so that's one of things and I don't know to what degree that's been lost but I know often I hear people in this community saying "Gosh, I wish it was like it used to be and if my momma saw me, your momma saw me doing something wrong she would whip me and then I'd get home and momma's going to whip me." And you know it was sort of like everybody was responsible for everybody else. So I understand that's an African thing but I think that also existed in the black community too to a certain extent in this community. And I'm pretty much focusing upon the African American community because even though from the time that I was, actually, living in a white community and not have to come over here but I grew up in a white community and I did have some white friends but I had very strong connections with my black community.

SC: Sure. Sure. Okay. Let me just interject this question. I know you've told me before that you had an experience going to Greeneville High School that you wanted to tell me about.

GM: Oh! Okay! Like I said integration came in 1965 but in '64 they had said look if anybody wants to come over to Greeneville High they can. And there were three people in my grade, we were, I think I was in the 11th grade and there were like three people who decided they were going to go to Greeneville High next year. And I hadn't really made up my mind whether I wanted to go or not and I was coming into the 12th grade and that summer. See I mentioned that I've had some visual problems, I also had some in high school and I had lost a couple of grades because of eye problems you know visual problems and I wanted to go ahead and graduate and I didn't have to but it would have been easier to go to summer school. I wanted to go to summer school and the only choice was Greeneville High. Well this is '64, the summer of '64, I think and -- of course the following school year would have been when the other three people decided they were going to go. I just wanted to go to summer school. So they said they were going to go to summer school too. So I went over to Greeneville High first day and as far as I know this would have been the first time that any African American person went to sit in on class at Greeneville High School but when I got up there they were not there. I was the only one! And I was really, really nervous because you see we watched the civil rights struggle on t.v. and we had seen the integration of schools and the problems in Little Rock and a place near here called Clinton, Tennessee which is just out of Knoxville. There were riots, there was violence. And here in Greeneville, you know, when I got there there wasn't any of that. I was just shocked at everything. I was accepted. You know there were a lot of people spoke and you know I made great friends there you know and there wasn't one minute of trouble.

SC: Good!

GM: And course this was summer school and not the whole, you know, this was a very small segment. It was just the kids who were in summer school but it was an experience for me and I suppose and experience for everyone else there too. But I have fond memories of that. It wasn't traumatic.

SC: Good. Okay, if you were raised in a church community, how has that influenced your life?

GM: My grandfather, my mother's father was a minister. He was an old Baptist preacher, fire and brimstone thing. And he would get up and preach at a church here called Macedonia Baptist Church. I can remember my grandmother was really religious and she was always you know talking about the Bible and religion. And my grandfather I can remember following him, you know, he plowed with a plow and a horse and mule and all this and I can remember he used to practice his sermons while he was plowing in the field. He'd be out there just preaching and I'd be running along with the cloth (?) following along behind him! That was so great! You know, I really loved him. He was quite a person! Really. I'm really thankful that I got to know him. I didn't get to know my father's father because he died before I was born and his mother died right after I was born so I didn't get to know them, but I did get to know my maternal grandparents. And I'm ever grateful for that.

SC: Now, what's your grandfather's name? What was his name?

GM: His name was Arthur Coclough. C-o-c-l-o-u-g-h. My granfather he died in 1970 I believe at the age of 94.

SC: Wow!

GM: Now, I'll get into religion but let me just give you a little background on here. He was born in 1878, I believe. I'd have to sit down and check again. And I'm thinking, God - ~~that's~~ like just a few years after slavery. And 'bout the time of the telephone! And he was a great story teller. Oh, the stories that he would tell about being down in Georgia growing up and his experiences, which were many. And he had, being a minister, he had a knack for telling stories. He really influenced my life in a lot of ways and the stories he told were so rich and he had this homey folksy way of putting it and telling it. You would just be engrossed. I can remember, you know he would cross his legs and I'd sit on his shoe and he'd tell me the stories and being a farmer and being rather poor I can remember him making a lot of tools that he used like axe handles and carving stuff out so it

was really. But he was a minister and of course he pastored this church, this Baptist church and we would go and I can remember being small, maybe only like 3 or something and he'd be setting up in the pulpit you know, and I would go up and you know everybody would tell me to come back and he'd say "let that boy alone" and I'd go up and get to set with him up in the pulpit, it was really cool. But I can remember him preaching and getting spirited and my grandmother sometimes getting up and shouting and you know, so that was how I, during my younger years what I remember as far as religion, I mean as far as my religious background.

SC: Sure.

GM: When I got older and started courting as they used to say, I met my former wife. She was a Presbyterian so I ended up starting to go to the local Presbyterian church here and I guess even though I'd come from a different sort of more fundamentalist background there was something that appealed to me about the soberness and the seriousness of the Presbyterian principles of worship I'd guess I'd say. And I stayed. And I pretty much been involved since that time in a Presbyterian church. I don't know exactly what all appealed to me other than my wife (laugh) but you know the things that made me stay. Course, I'm divorced now and we both still go to the same church but I'm still there and, I don't know, one thing I suppose was how the church governed itself was pretty much patterned after American government. You know that and some of the doxology and just various things appealed to me, as I stayed there with her I got more involved in the church myself became an elder and holding other various positions in the church. So church has always been a part of my life.

SC: And just for the record, tell us the name of the Presbyterian church.

GM: Tabernacle Presbyterian Church.

SC: And where is it located?

GM: It is at the corner of Henry and Wesley Streets in Greeneville.

SC: And where is Macedonia Baptist?

GM: It is down on Davis Street right about two blocks from the Presbyterian church. In this community we have like seven churches within two or three blocks and there's AME Zion -- African Methodist Episcopal Church, there is a Methodist Church across from my church. There is a Seventh Day Adventist Church, there's a Friendship Baptist Church which is the largest congregation in this community and a couple of other smaller

churches that are more of a fundamentalist type services.

SC: How does, again I'm going to deviate from the questions, now your grandfather you said he lived and farmed in the county?

GM: Yes. Yes.

SC: So was he typical of African American people in the county? Did they come in to the town for church as well as school?

GM: No, for the most part each little community kinda had their own churches. And doesn't particularly work but there are two communities who have churches still in the county and instead of having people come into town you some of the people who grew up in the county and live in the city go back to the county to those churches. One is Pruitt Hill and it's associated with the Methodist Church in town and I think sometimes they'll have church in town then they'll go out and have it out there because there's still a lot of people who live in the county who attend that church and I you know, I think since they are in the same association they work together.

SC: Sure.

GM: And the other one is at Baileyton. Miller's Chapel. So you have some people who will go out there but for the most part, now I think Pruitt Hill really is the only church that you'll find that's really still flourishing in the county. That's in of course the African American community is because now they have, all churches have white and black members now so that's one good thing. But that wasn't too typical coming into town. Some people did but a number of people had churches in their own community.

SC: Gotcha. Okay, let's see. Does the sense of community with which you grew up still exist today and in any case, what community or communities do you consider yourself a part of today?

GM: What was the first part of the question again, I'm sorry?

SC: Does the sense of community with which you grew up still exist today?

GM: Yes. Yes it does for me and I think for a number of people here it does and that's one good thing about Greeneville and I think it stems from the fact that there were - with the small population - a number of people, nevertheless stay here and you know I still, my buddies are the guys I went to school with here. So a lot of us stayed here and we have the same sense of community because we're in the same community. Yeah, it still does exist and I think for the most part younger people coming up

within that cause it's a little different with them but we still have the same sense of community. We still go up to the school and hang out a lot of times. Different but yet same in a lot of different ways but there's still that same sense of community. Yes.

SC: Okay, and let's see, how do you, your family and neighbors feel about the land, the place, the farms, the woodlands, the streams?

GM: Well, we, okay, let me start off with the farm first. Of course we loved that. It was home for me. It was home for my parents, well for my mother's side of the family anyway and my father felt at home there because he was used to farming so farmland, having the farm meant a lot to me because it was our's, it was a part of, it was our part of the land, it was what you get from being on the farm. I stayed there enough to get that. The sense of loving the land and knowing that this land provides for you but you must take care of it. And from that sense of knowing that you have to take care of the land, I started to appreciate the whole entire environment here. The whole of the mountains, the beauty of this land, I mean I don't think you can live here and not appreciate this land. Now, even though I'm blind right now, I grew up seeing and cherished the land and I still love being outside and my sense of the ecology here is that we must work to preserve it because I think if we loose the land we loose ourselves. It's just so part of this community and you know it's just that simple for me. I love the land. I love being outdoors and this is such a beautiful place and it sort of bothers me to see, well, I can't say urban sprawl here but you know we do tend to misuse the land. I think there is the need for a conscienceness and I'm not sure how everyone else in this community feels about that but I think all my friends that love to hunt, they love to fish, they love to hike or camp out so I know throughout this community, black or white, and you know I must add, I keep saying this community, there is no community I think, well especially in this area because this is totally mixed now, you know. I think that's a wonderful thing. Because I think you know, we're in this all together and we should be together. So I think there is for the most part, I feel and I know I certainly do for myself, but I think for the most part what I see people in this area because of this background, this rural, people are used to getting out and hunting, fishing, making or creating their own survival whether it was agriculture, animal husbandry or hunting and fishing, trapping or whatever, that tradition goes back I think that basically's still with a lot of people.

SC: Now let me build on what you're saying there, did you do any of that and if so did you have a favorite spot?

GM: Fishing? Oh, sure! Love fishing still do! Used to love to go down to Douglas, I love to go out to the ponds on the farm which people do a lot here because you know they're stocked, there are creeks, Lick Creek is a special place north of the county to go and would love to go down to the river. The Nolichuckey out at Kinser park and different places, we'd get boats and we'd go out. I don't get to do that as much as I'd like to anymore and then I got a buddy that loves to go camping. I love camping. And you know, I love the outdoors. Especially in the spring or summer. I hate cold weather so I'm not a skier.

SC: Today is the first day of Spring!

GM: Yeah, I love it. I really love it and you know my whole demeanor changes when spring comes and it's warm and I can get out it's just like I'm refreshed and new, just like a new person and I love it! And yeah, we have special spots we like to go and I used to hunt a little bit but I'm not into that anymore. Course being blind I'm not but I think I got out of hunting.

SC: Yeah. Just not into it.

GM: Not anymore. But I like fishing and I like hiking and I just like getting out and swimming and all that -- the summer stuff. This is a great place!

SC: Sure.

GM: And one place that I spend with some of my friends is we ride up into the mountains and picnic you know. That's one of our very favorite things to do.

SC: That's great. Okay, now if you and or your family are still connected to your family land what does that mean to you?

GM: We're not. One of the sad things I think is that once my grandfather passed and nobody wanted to farm. Everybody was involved in their own jobs in town and whatever, they sold the farm. Which my mother and myself were really against but it was sold. So you know it was just a real loss, you know, and of course my parents passed on and left this house and the garden spot you know there's quite a spot for a garden in back here and I appreciate that and try to take care of it. But anyhow, and I must say that I haven't been able because we don't have a farm anymore, been able to pass that on to my grandkids and kids and you know, that's one thing I wish I could have done.

SC: Yeah, that's one of the things that happens.

GM: I do feel that's one of the, well, I'm going to say tragic

parts of, you know, my facts of life. I mean I suppose the younger cousins they don't feel it because they were not there but I feel it. And you know I think some of my best memories when I think back are those times out there on the farm with my grandfather or walking and picking blackberries or you know doing stuff that you did on the farm.

SC: Sure. Okay. Now, it's time to move to the second part of the interview and this is, this part, the questions are classified as present into future. And the first question is and again, you already touched on this, what is it about the landscape of our county that makes it a special place?

GM: Well, as I said these mountains called Unaka, Appalachian whatever, I think really, I can remember where we lived in town was back on a hill and it had a lovely, excellent view of the mountains. And I grew up looking at those mountains and just marveling at them and how they fit in with the scenery. I mean, you know the whole landscape and it makes Greeneville unique. The foothills here as far as the just the landscape itself. The layout, it's what I grew up with and grew to love. And I don't know. It's just you know - it's just something that's just a part of me. I've been away and I keep coming back to this area so I guess that's part of it. The mountains were special and you know when I was small we would go often go back over to Shelby. Often, you know maybe two or three times a year and we would drive through the mountains and I just loved -- you know it was just great driving through the mountains. And you'd look around a curve and my mother would go "Ohhh, I cant' stand the curve!" and I'm going "Wow! This is exciting!" I just loved it. You know there's something about the mountains and of course walking through the fields on the farm hunting and just enjoying nature the birds and the wildlife, it's just always been something I love. You know it's fascinating to me, and even now that I'm blind just walking out with someone is really a wonderful experience.

SC: Okay. In what sense is Greeneville, Greene County a farm community and how important is the rural character of the place today?

GM: Well, I'm not sure I can answer that. My opinion is that Greeneville, of course you know as far as tobacco, is probably the biggest producer in the state and of course that makes it very important economically to this area. Of course I think, you know, I suppose a lot of people around here have mixed feelings about that because tobacco is pretty bad for you just to put it simply and I don't know about the future of Greene County and tobacco. I've always had the feeling that I wish there was something else that they could do agriculturally here other than tobacco. And dairy farming, I understand, is big here. So agriculture to

Greeneville, I think at one time was basically, the farther you go back, course we're moving into a more industrial area here in Greeneville and I guess as tobacco decreases that might have some influence. I don't know, I really can't speak to that but I know that farming and agriculture is very important to Greene County because it was a chief income here for many people for many years. Now that's changing with the advent of the factories and the information age, things are changing. But I think to a certain extent the size of Greene County, it's one of the largest counties in Tennessee, there's a lot of farmland here so there's a future for agriculture here I'm just not sure how they are going to do it but I know that dairy farming is big here and oh, I guess, and one thing when I go to the fair and especially when I could see, one of the first places I would head is to the agriculture exhibits and the animals. I was gonna see that before I'd go along the midway, check everything out. There's a lot of pride here, you know with 4-H and just the whole agricultural scene. It's just wonderful and that's something I love about Greeneville and I think it's going to be a part of the future. I'm not sure just how but I think as far as cattle and things, that's here, you know that's going to be here a while and I think tobacco will be here a while. Even though you know there's the negative things about it. I think it's going to be here and I think it's in the people here, it's in the psyche and I think it's going to be here for a while.

SC: Okay. In what way do you feel that Greene County is changing and how do you feel about these changes? What do you believe might be gained and lost from them?

GM: Well I think there's some things to be gained. Industry is coming in and it does provide income and I guess you know you have disadvantages and advantages with everything and with that too. Greeneville seems to have a bright future as far as the economy I suppose although I don't follow that as close as I should. But I believe the future of Greeneville is good. I think we have, as far as, I think as far as education, especially in the city schools, I'm not going to say too much about county schools but I don't want to, but I think especially in the system we have, a really good education system. I think there are gaps and let's face it things to be done, but as far as Greene County, I think the future, I don't think things are going to drastically change one way or the other in the future.

SC: Okay. In your opinion, how do members of your community here view farming and agriculture and commercial and industrial development and do you feel the same or differently?

GM: I probably feel a little differently. I think most people here, most of the people in this community, are interested in

getting jobs in factories and in town. And farming is not that appealing to a lot of people I run into it's just really is not. And I think people are more interested in getting a job at this plant or factory or working at the bank or wherever. Working for the city. You know, I think here I've noticed, maybe I should have touched upon this a little earlier that a lot of people who work at factories here in town, also are farmers, they do both. I think that will continue, that will continue for a long time because I think those people have a pride in the land and they depend upon the land and even though they need another job or that they do, I know a lot of people here have farms and I suppose it gives substantial income. As far as my peers right here, I don't hear much talk about well, I want to get a farm and become a farmer.

SC: Right, right.

GM: Just don't hear that.

SC: Well, let me ask you this. This is another interjection or deviation from the questions, do a lot of people of this community still have gardens? Even though they do factory work or is that kind of disappearing?

GM: Yes. I think as the older people, my parents and people my age, still have gardens, but as the younger people come on I don't see that as much anymore. Now there's one friend of mine who's, a lot of us, my cousins all have gardens, and I noticed that, even people who live in town you know right on the busiest public street would have a garden but I'm, okay I have this friend and he's about 36 or 37, late 30's, and he's moved out into the well, off of Jones Bridge Road which is kind of like the suburbs and he put out a garden and his, it was sort of funny hearing him telling about how he wanted to get his kids out and his teenage daughter is going "Oh, God, no! No! No! I don't want to do this!" You know so you get younger people now. I don't whether those kids will come up to have a garden but because he exposed them to it they may but I think it's sort of going away. Having a garden. I don't have a garden right now but I intend to get someone help me with it.

SC: Great! Okay, have you or members of your family either come to Greene County or left Greene County for work or educational opportunities?

GM: I have. Course I went to ETSU for about three years and then I some difficulties and dropped out and went into the state training program to get a business license and work for the state as I mentioned earlier. I also, well, Johnson City is I don't want to say really a part of -- this community so I can't say that

was a part. You know, I believe I said part of this community in the proper sense. I left and went to North Carolina to work with my uncle. I worked at Asheville, I've worked at - lived in -- the Raleigh, Durham area which I really liked for a while and that was because of some visual, I've had a lot of visual problems and I went over to be near Duke for surgery and while I was there I got involved in the state training program where I took some more fitness training courses and finished the program over there earning, well I call it a certificate, it's not really a degree.

And I've done that here in Tennessee, I've had to go back to Nashville to do that recently but I did do that and then in the Raleigh, Durham area and so I guess I spent about three years out of the state working and going to school.

SC: And how about other members of your family?

GM: I took my mother with me when I went to stay in North Carolina, my father passed away back in 80 and this was in 90, well I left in 88 and came back in like 91 and she went with me. We just closed the house up and went over there and worked around basically and she wanted to come back so we came back. But I also, I was divorced at the time but I did have the kids over in the summer and as often as possible and when I lived in Nashville they just came and lived with me. They said "Well, come back to Greeneville" so we all came back.

SC: Let's see, describe a good life. What would you need to have a quality life? You may want to think in terms of land, work, family, church, community and anything else of importance to you.

GM: Well, yeah, good life. I'm living a pretty good life now. I'd just like to have more money and a better job and that's what I'm working on, but to live here and have a really, income you know that I could be fairly comfortable and just able to enjoy my friends here. Being able to travel a little bit. I love travel. Now getting, you know we focused on the mountains and this area but I love, I just love the outdoors. I love nature and I love going to the beach. I love this, whether it's in the tropics or going to Alaska in the summer, which I've never been but I would love to do that and would like to be able to travel. So that's one thing. But I'd like to live here, be able to travel and be with my friends here you know that I've had since before history. And my church, that's important to me. I'm here with it so that's what I want it to be. I'd like to live right here, be able to travel a lot, maybe work at a job I'd like, which is the travel industry which is what I'm trying to get in on. So that's what would be meaningful and that's what I'm striving to do right now.

SC: So do you think you have a quality life now?

GM: Yeah, I do! Yes. Just by being here with friends and family, my grandkids you they just mean everything to me. Children are here. And certainly my church and all those things put together, so yeah! Definitely I think -- believe it's a quality life and I'm pretty happy about it here.

SC: Great! What kind of life do you envision yourself and your family having in two years, in twenty years, is this the kind of life that you want?

GM: Yeah, you know I've noticed that a lot of people who have moved away, come back to Greeneville and they bring their children, I want them to grow up here and I don't want them to grow up in a city. I want them to be here. Where I grew up and where things better in their words. They say it's too fast. Life is just too fast I want to come back here and that's what I would like. You know now, I suppose some of my kids may move away but growing up here I think is important and I noticed that even though I -when you asked me about moving away before, I forgot to mention that I had my daughter move to Indiana and stayed for a couple years and I went with her. But we wanted to come back to Greeneville. I envision being here and I suppose they will too. But in ten years I would like it to be more of the same. I'd like to be near my church and doing the things in the community that I like to do. I like to get involved in civic affairs in the community especially with youth. I would like to stay and continue to do that and make some kind of difference in the future here in Greeneville and just more of it like I mentioned earlier staying here in Greeneville.

Tape change: tape 2

SC: Okay, you touched on this again too. Are your children planning to stay here do you think?

GM: I think as far as I know they are. I think my daughter has three children, the oldest is 11?

SC: Wow!

GM: Yeah, gosh! And 8 and 6 and I'm pretty sure she wants them to be right here. That's one of the reasons we came back to Greeneville from Indiana. I think she felt they would grow up better here with more relatives here and more of the institutions she was familiar with and more of the community life she was familiar with and what she likes. You know, now I'm going to tell you that people, especially young people here, oh God, this is nothing, this is just dead, it's just dull here, I just want to go

somewhere. But as I said a lot of times they do and some don't come back but a lot do. I think you have to get out and see what's over the mountain and a lot of them come back to the things that were important and I think this is really significant. I think, it's my opinion -- an observation, but I think quite a few people...

SC: Okay. And the next question, again you touched on this too, do you see your children and grandchildren continuing the connection that you've had to the land or to any traditions that are important to you or your family?

GM: Well, you know I mentioned earlier when we were talking about the farm that I felt it tragic that I didn't have that connection to make them with the farm and what it provided. You know. And I can't, we don't have that connection anymore but I do hope they pick up and I think they will appreciate, like my granddaughter loves to go fishing and her daddy loves to fish and they all go, the whole family goes fishing. And they like to cook out a lot and course I guess you can do that anywhere but it's especially significant in Greeneville and I think that as they grow older I hope that that will be important to them.

SC: Now, in the same vein focusing back on the community here you talked about growing up and going up to "the hill", the swimming pool, the school and all that and of course there's been integration but how do you see your children, your grandchildren continuing some of those traditions of furthering life here in this community or how have things changed?

GM: Well, you know, I don't know as my grandchildren grow up and my son is over 22 and he seems to get ready to go back to school so I don't know what his plans will be but I think he will always be connected. I have that sense or feeling. I don't know exactly why I'm saying that. But you know -- if they stay here, if they stay here in this community they will develop those connections because that's just part of this community and I think they'll sort of just -- they'll think. Because we try to make those things important to them. And for instance, right now, when integration, and I don't know, I may be getting on a tangent here, but I'll just throw this out...

SC: Go for it, we have a whole other tape yet.

GM: Okay. Sense of community up on the hill and all that, what it meant to us and, when integration came in the Johnson City, Kingsport all the other communities around, the public black school, was given -- sort of turned over to the community for a community center so the people could have a community. And at that same time here when we integrated I think the board of education

decided to sell George Clem to ETSU. And they were going to have a ETSU center here. Up there. I'm going well, I'll never get off this hill, I'm going to ETSU and I'll be going right here and I've been here for twelve years! So but, however they decided to turn that deal down or bagged it up and decided to keep the school for the central offices. Well at the time, the black people in the community were wanting this school as a community center for the kids here. We worked in a couple of local organizations to try to make that possible but the board of education would not go for it, they wanted their own and they got it cause it belonged to them. Now, last Saturday, there was a local group got together here because the Board of Education is getting to vacate the school. So there's a movement afoot now to get the school back as a community center and this goes back to the people remembering what was going on up there up back in the 40's, 50's and you know, early 60's. And they are trying to get this back for a community center and I think they may be successful. I'm sorry I missed the meeting, forgot about it, but you know, I support that and that's where the young people come up here and that support trying to continue that tradition of this community. I'm hoping that's going to be successful. And I think it will be important. Not only, this community is pretty much integrated, and it would be for everybody here. But you know I see you know, I think that's the future here. I think those traditions, those things will continue and I think it will continue in a broader scope and we have more different people. I think that is always good. I'm hoping, I pray that it will -- things will continue and as long as we've got people working toward that end I hope that it will be successful -- continue the things that we do - the good things -- the traditions.

SC: Okay, that's great. What represents the biggest technological or social change during your lifetime? How does this change relate to life in Greene County or to your own life?

GM: That's a hard one. I'm not aware of any big changes in Greeneville. You know, of course I think that as I mentioned earlier with the growing industrialization here in Greeneville with the factories, Magnavox is a big influence here in electronics. They've gone and Five Rivers is moving in their parts so you're always going to have that, I guess the Internet is changing everything including Greeneville too. And of course that influences everything else in our lives it's going to influence Greene County in the same way because we're very much connected to the rest of the world now. We're not this isolated little agricultural community any more. So you know, so goes Greeneville there goes the world so you know what's good or bad about that, I think, we're going to experience also, I can't say, I can't think of, well TVA was a big influence to this whole region and that was a change and the advances that TVA brought, how it affected

agriculture, how it affected the ecology and everything that's important to Greeneville cause we need TVA power to be here. And even though some of the larger projects were not in Greeneville we were highly influenced by what happened, you know in the Tennessee Valley which we are a part of. Other than industrialization, TVA, Internet I think that's pretty much it.

SC: Okay, let's see, one hundred years ago the majority of Americans lived on farms. Since then the trend has changed so that now only a small percentage of Americans live on farms. How do you feel about this?

GM: It's just changing. Well, I guess I sort of felt like Thomas Jefferson felt in a way, you know. "Oh no! This is terrible!" But you know, that's a part of the future that you know the tragic thing about it or the bad thing is that it seems that this small community farm which we had romantic ideas about which I still do, you know living on a farm and providing your own food, your own everything like they did a hundred years ago, well virtually commercialism has changed all that the big companies have taken over the farms, you know the small farm is out, I think and I think that's you know to my way of thinking I don't think that's the best thing. When you get big commercial interests and run the farms, things are going to change and then of course, the community farm, the farmer, the business farm, you know the backbone of America as they used to call it, well that's changing. And I'm not sure that's necessarily a good thing.

SC: And what things do you believe our leaders need to consider in county and city planning? Do you believe at present these things are being considered?

GM: Well I hear a lot of talk but it just depends on -- I suppose on who you have elected and who they're listening to and who their constituents are. Yes, I think we should be very careful how we use the land by what we put what where, and all this and I sort of listen to the county commission and all the boys downtown they sort of look over these things and sometimes, and there are fights about annexation of different properties and what's going to be commercial and what's not and all I can simply say is I know these things must come but I think we should be very careful and that we should preserve some of the land for our enjoyment and I think we should be very careful about that and I think we should elect officials who are going to act in our behalf and how they approach using the land.

SC: Do you feel that's a concern of elected officials now?

GM: Probably not as much as it should be because I know some officials, especially in the state legislature of the general

assembly you know you, if you look at what's going on somebody hasn't been watching. Somebody hasn't been keeping the best interest of the use of the land, the ecology, and you know I think our elected officials could have and should be doing a better job.

SC: Okay, and what role if any do you see yourself and/or your friends, family or community having in determining the future of our place and people?

GM: Well course, they say talk to your congressman, talk to your state legislature when they are running I think we should let them know if you want to be elected then I think you need to understand what we feel and of course, I for one will try to impress upon them the importance of the ecology. As far as our use of the land, I think we should be very careful about dumping and chemicals, household chemicals, I mean even to what we are doing in even our own individual households is very important. To keep in mind we should teach our children to be mindful of the ecology of the environment, how easily it is to upset the balance and our philosophy. I think you know conservation, I think we should start right with our own children and ourselves, impress that upon our legislators and when we're out in the car to sort of do, be mindful of what God put us here to be stewards of the land and that's what we should be about and doing that in the best way that we can.

SC: Sure, you talked a little bit too about how there's a movement afoot to maybe make the George Clem School a community center, what role are people here in the community playing to better the future of the community? What other things are going on? What is it that you're involved in?

GM: Well the things that I think are important for myself is that I have been involved in education for the NAACP, I've been pretty active on the education committee, on the youth committees and workign with the schools in order to find ways to better education for everyone involved. I'm particularly interested in and concerned about some of the problems that African American students have, some have lower grades and lower expectations and in some of the civic programs and things that we worked in the NAACP and other civic organizations we try to address raising expectations and finding ways to nourish education in the community, one of the things that I'm involved with and I guess you're getting at the drama thing that I was talking about. Well, I've always been concerned that one of the things that and I think in the African American community is that we are very much aware that one of the things that's been missing as far as its feeling pride and accomplishment is that historically you have to know where you've been to go farther to understand your directions and of course, it's no secret that pretty much in American education,

public education system is pretty much been pro-Euro-centric and pretty much as far as by Eurocentric I mean they don't recognize any contributions of half a century or other contributions to civilization. That's one thing and of course simply America black history, black contributions has been virtually ignored as far as history especially when I was in school because I think the amount of black history that we were exposed to in school was George Washington Carver, Booker T. Washington and that was about it. And of course there's just volumes has just been left out and you know significant contributions by African American citizens and other minorities here. Native American cul—you know, it's just been pretty much left out and when it's been told it's been told not in equal terms, it's been one sided. And of course that's part of this goes back I think to slavery in order to enslave a people you sort of have to and keep them enslaved you sort of have to, oh, how can I say it, have them, instill a mindset in the slaver and in the slavee of you know "you're less than human". And you know I think I (?) the day somebody said "Hey, slavery was years ago. I didn't have anything to do with that. This is a new day and time." But you can't separate the two because that mindset that enables slavery to exist so long -- it's inherent. It's in our institutions and this is something that is really hard to get rid of and one of the ways you start doing that is going back and taking another look at things and saying well it really wasn't that way and you know I think our black youth out there right now who have no idea what accomplishments what, I think they have some distorted sense because of t.v., movies and popular press and all this, they have some distorted sense of what black history is all about what our accomplishments were all about and this is something I think that is very important in raising the expectations of our youth in getting them and letting them know they do have some things that the African American minority contributions have been significant, much more significant than they would understand and that they're standing on the shoulders of some giants who they'd not been able to see before you know, heretofore because they've been consistently covered up and until we can make that connection I think we'll continue to have these problems. So I was reading a book on, you know I like to read a lot of things, I read anything I can get on black history because I didn't get it in school and when I was at State they had a course but didn't have anyone to teach it so I kind of missed out and maybe I'll go back and take it one summer but I did a lot of reading on my own and I was reading a book for high school students and it was about ten famous black Americans. Martin Luther King being one, one was a guy called Oscar Micheaux and he was the first I guess viable or significant black movie producer back in the 20's and he had, I used to hear my mother talk about these black movies you know, black westerns and all this and I said I will never see these. Well on BET a few years ago they showed these movies they ran for a while, but this guy was the

first big time movie director and producer. Madame C.J. Walker first black female to be a nurse, was the cosmetics, cosmetology things that she produced for black women. There's a guy, his name is Morris, right now I can't recall his first name who's credited for traffic safety and a number of people, ten in all, and what struck me was at the end of each one of these stories in the book was a little skit you know that young kids could put on and portray this person's life and learn something about that person's life and it struck me wouldn't it be great if we could start a little community theater group with some of the African American kids, well all kids, they don't just have to be African American but this would give them an opportunity to learn something about the people that they don't find out about in public schools and also being in drama or theater itself is an expressive, expressive discipline that would also be a good thing to get into theatre and learn artistic way or in some way a meaningful way of expressing themselves in a type of communications with the world. I mean you know this course, this is a potential thing that could be done with that I mean you know so there are a number of positive things that we can do with a group like this and this is something I'm exploring. It's significant to me that the folks who assist me here in Greeneville, as far as I know, I'm pretty sure does not emphasize that century of black history. At one time in NAACP we petitioned the city system to set up a black history course, which they did. But after a couple of years, I think, they dropped it because they said there were more white students in it than black. Well, at the time I didn't think too much about it but now that I think in retrospect you know, I think, well, there are many more white students, you know we did a survey at Greeneville High School. There were 66 black students and 1000 whites so it's not unusual to have more white students in any class than blacks. I think you know I think they were looking at it that black history is only for blacks. Yeah it's great for blacks they need that but we all need to understand the contributions of African Americans in last century history because it's all connected and that's our part in it and in order to be a part of this society we have to understand that so we can feel comfortable in it and feel that we belong there because a lot of black youths I think are alienated in the public system because they feel they're not a part of it and they feel that that's them and this is us and you know before we can change the society we got to change that. That's what I'm working on and you know other ways. There are other groups, we had one group that started here that we don't have any more -- it was called George Clem Scholarship Fund and that was a group who raised funds to aid the African American college students and we've done other various youth projects in NAACP, the Negro Women's Civics Club have done things to encourage the youth, there are a number of programs in the community and we want to work, and I think with the, if we get George Clem facility as a community center, we'll have a place. Of course now we have other places in

town but we want a place sort of close, within walking distance for a lot of kids, and like I say it's not just going to be for the African American kids its going to be for all the children in the community. And I think what's good for one is good for the other so I think that's going to, I think once we have a facility there I think it will encourage people to get up and work on these programs and perhaps generate more. Of course there are people in the community who are really wanting to do something and hopefully we can get all that hooked up and have a better community.

SC: Last question Gene, is there anything else that you want to tell us?

GM: No, I've told you everything I know. No, I just enjoyed the opportunity of talking to you, some of the things that I've talked about I feel pretty strongly about, the environment, the youths in the community, what's going to happen to this particular community because I love it and I'm just going to try to do all the things that I can to try and preserve it and make it a place I want my children to be in.

SC: Gene, you're an amazing person. Thank you.

GM: Thank you! I enjoyed it.