

Margo Mound Drucker Interview Summary

Interviewee: Margo Mound Drucker

Interviewers: Katherine Sizemore and Jamie Harbold

Interview date: October 18, 2014

Location: 210 McMurrin Hall, Christopher Newport University, Newport News, Virginia

Length: One audio file, WAV format, 62:45

THE INTERVIEWEE: Margo Mound Drucker was born in New York City, New York in 1934 and while living there saw race relations as a white woman. She attended Horace Mann School and the Dalton School, a college preparatory school, in New York. At the Dalton School, she found a passion for community service. After her first three years at Skidmore College, she met her husband, Stanley. They moved down to Virginia and Mrs. Drucker attended the University of Virginia in order to finish her degree. She became a teacher before she had her three daughters. As a family, they moved down to Newport News to be near her husband's family. After her daughters were born, she became a stay-at-home mother but she never stopped being active. She became involved with the National Council of Jewish Women and helped to set up the first integrated daycare center on the Peninsula. When her daughters went off to college, she resumed her teaching career. She became a teacher at Denbigh High School in the late 1970s and worked there for nearly twenty years. She still serves the Newport News community today with her therapy dog, Morgan.

THE INTERVIEWERS: Jamie Harbold is an undergraduate student at Christopher Newport University studying History with a focus in elementary education. Katherine Sizemore is an undergraduate student at Christopher Newport University studying History and Spanish. Both students are in Dr. Laura Puaca's History 341 class titled The Long Civil Rights Movement.

DESCRIPTION OF THE INTERVIEW: The interview was conducted at Christopher Newport University as a service-learning requirement for History 341. The purpose was to capture memories of the Long Civil Rights Movement. This interview took a life history approach, starting with Mrs. Drucker talking about her early life and what led her to become so committed to the civil rights movement and community service. She is still active as a volunteer with her therapy dog, Morgan, who was also in the interview room. She also discusses her daughters' experience with busing, beginning in 1971. She talks about the importance of public schools and her desire for her children to attend such institutions. Additionally, she talks about her experience as a teacher of integrated schools.

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START OF INTERVIEW

Katherine Sizemore: So, today is October 18th, 2014 and we are with Ms. Margo Ducker. So we would like to use what we would call a life history approach, so we'll begin with some questions about your childhood. Can you please state where and when you were born?

Margo Drucker: I was born in New York City on March 22nd, 1934.

Jamie Harbold: Alright, and what was the community like where you grew up?

MD: I first grew up on Broadway, which was not a very good neighborhood, 90th Street, until I was ten, and then my parents moved to Park Avenue. My father must have made more money, I imagine. And I lived there until I left for college at age eighteen. I went to high school in that neighborhood.

KS: Alright. Do you have any siblings?

MD: I had a sister, three years older than I, who is deceased now.

JH: Okay, and what did your parents do?

MD: My father was an attorney, practiced law. My mother was a stay-at-home mom.

KS: Were your parents involved in any community organizations?

MD: My mother was a gray lady at the hospital. She helped--. She worked in the gift shop and did stuff to help nurses. My father was a patrolman during World War II. He was in the National

Guard and I remember when we had air raids, he was walking around the block. I don't remember a whole lot about it.

JH: Okay, and what was it like attending Horace Mann and Dalton School?

MD: Horace Mann School was the laboratory school for Columbia University's Teachers College and that is where the teachers, the teachers in training, got their practical experience by being aides--student teachers--in the classrooms at the school that was K through, I think, seventh. And it was a very nice school. I liked it. Very progressive, and I mean really progressive. When I see what my grandchildren are learning in kindergarten now--. All we did was--. I have pictures--. Playing with blocks and we had doll corners and, you know, it was no academics whatsoever, and everything was very progressive in their philosophy. It was a fine school but it closed and I had to go another school, which was not that way at all. It was very stressful, the Dalton School. Much too competitive for my disposition. All the kids were talking about was where they were going to go to college and studying for the SATs. And I only applied to two colleges, neither of which required the SATs, because I didn't want to get involved with any of that. Now both of those schools now require the SATs; I looked them up in the *Insider's Guide* recently, and I think most of the colleges do require them or ACTs.

JH: What did you enjoy studying, and what activities did you like in school?

MD: I liked being required to do community service. I really enjoyed that and I worked in several different places. And we also had something very unusual at the Dalton School. We had a baby nursery and there was a nurse in there. And several of the teachers, when they had newborn babies, would bring them to the baby nursery, and the students would have six weeks of their ninth grade year in that nursery, all day long, taking care of the babies. It was really neat.

JH: Do you remember any teachers being particularly influential?

MD: Mmhmm, one woman by the name of Mrs. Strauss. She was a terrific teacher. She taught me how to do a research paper. And all the teachers were very liberal. There wasn't a Republican in the school. And actually, in those days, when you had the communist scare--. And a lot of the teachers were communists and we knew it. They were open about it.

KS: Oh wow.

MD: Yeah, and so we were exposed to a very liberal [education], I was exposed to a very liberal education, and my classmates were, too.

KS: And they were both private schools?

MD: They were both private schools in New York City. I don't know if it's true today but, in those days, your parents sacrificed everything to send you to private school. The public school system was deplorable.

JH: Alright.

KS: Why did you decide to attend Skidmore College?

MD: They didn't require SATs! [laughter]

KS: Understandable, understandable!

MD: And it was a nice, a very nice school, and a nice campus, and the students were so friendly. They would never--. You could not pass somebody on the walkway without a "Hi." Everybody said, "Hello." And the kind of school--. The kids that it attracted were very down-to-earth kind of students. They weren't the least bit pretentious or [wore] very little makeup. I mean, I don't think anybody--. Maybe a couple of kids wore makeup but, basically speaking, it was strictly earthy kind of students, and I fit in fine. Everybody had bicycles, and we toured around campus and I was very glad. It was the right school for me.

KS: And that was in New York?

MD: It was in Saratoga Springs, New York.

KS: What did you study there?

MD: I was a major in sociology because I was planning on becoming a social worker, and that had been influenced by my community service work that I had done in high school.

KS: What kind of activities were you involved in?

MD: Well, I was elected to the judicial board, which I liked a lot. And I was a class officer and we had to plan the junior--some kind of junior-senior prom. I remember being very excited. We were going to get this big band to come to play and, you know, those big bands were the thing. We're talking the early '50s, the big band era. I remember being on the phone a lot with that and trying to get a good band. I was active in the leadership of the class.

JH: And when did you attend the University of Virginia?

MD: Well, my husband--. We met after my sophomore year in high school, I mean in college. He was only three years older than I, but very, very smart. He graduated from Newport News High School when he was sixteen, and he went to UVA [the University of Virginia], and when he finished his junior year, he was nineteen. In those days at UVA, you could finish your last year at UVA as your first year in law school. So he went to law school. And, when he was twenty-one, he had finished his second year of law school and he decided that he would take the bar exam just to practice. Well, he passed it! Just for practice! He was twenty-one. Anyway, he finished his third year of law school. We met. I had finished my sophomore year in high school, [sic college] he's already out of law school. Three years difference, that's all in our ages. And we fell in love, and when--. And he had to go--. It was mandatory, going into the service: conscription And he went into the JAG Corp, which was the Judge Advocate General for lawyers. And he was told that--I mean all of them were told that--those JAG Corp members who

were not married would be sent to Korea, and the JAG Corp people who were married would stay stateside. So it seemed ridiculous for us not to get married after my junior year.

KS: Yeah.

MD: You know, no-brainer. So we got married after my junior year and he was stationed in Charlottesville, where he had just spent seven years in college and law school. And he was stationed there with--. The Judge Advocate General school is still in Charlottesville at UVA. And so I took my transcript over to the admissions office at UVA and said, "I want to transfer here. I want to finish my senior year." And they said, "Well, we'd like to have you, but you can't be a sociology major. We only admit women in the School of Education or the School of Nursing." Okay. [laughter] Well, I made a very quick decision. I said, "Okay, I'll be in the School of Education." So that year, my senior year, I had to take every education course, because I had not taken any, and did my practice teaching, and I got pregnant. So, it was a busy year.

JH: Oh my goodness!

KS: Sounds like it.

MD: And, yeah. And I got my--. Well, I went to summer school. We were married in June. I went to summer school and that year, because I needed more than thirty credits to make up for the fact that I had never taken an education course. And so I got my teaching certification.

JH: Alright.

KS: Alright, so we would like to turn to your experiences here in Newport News. When and why did you move to Newport News?

MD: Well, we finished out in Charlottesville until he finished his four-year commitment to the army.

KS: Okay.

MD: And we moved to Newport News because this was his hometown and his father had a very good business. I don't know if you've heard of it, it's called Drucker and Falk Realty Company. It's in Newport News. You probably wouldn't hear of it, but it's been around a long time.

KS: Is it still around today?

MD: It is.

KS: Okay.

MD: And he had planned, even though he was a lawyer, to go into his father's business, which he did. And we bought the house that I still live in today, right over here. And he didn't like his father's business. He didn't like it at all. And so his father said to him, "You don't have to stay in. It's perfectly okay. You can go to practice law." So he did and he practiced for fifty years until he passed away four years ago.

JH: And he--.

MD: He practiced law in Newport News.

JH: Okay. And what was Newport News like in terms of race relations?

MD: It was terrible. I was shocked because I had grown up in the North and gone to school--. It was a very diverse population. And I came here and there was, you know, total segregation in everything. UVA at that time was [segregated], not only didn't they let women [in], but no African Americans at all. And it was very difficult for me because of the attitude. And the language the people used referring to African Americans was shocking to me. I got involved in some organizations that were geared toward integration. And I moved here in 1957. 1964 was the civil rights legislation, and so we were starting to move forward. And 1971 is when the Newport News schools actually did integrate and my children at that time were ages--in 1971-- were ages ten, thirteen, and sixteen.

JH: Okay. Do you remember parts of town that were distinctly white and distinctly African American?

MD: Oh yes. It was totally segregated. The whole East End was totally black and this area was totally white. The only area that was not totally segregated was up near Fort Eustis. And that was because the army was integrated and so their families were living next to each other. That was the only part of Newport News that was integrated. Was around Fort Eustis.

JH: Okay.

KS: How did race relations in Newport News compare to race relations in New York and Charlottesville?

MD: Charlottesville and Newport News [were] exactly the same. The only thing you had in Charlottesville that was a little bit of help was that students were progressive, more liberal. And they were--. I remember that there was an African American student in the medical school and they were going to have their annual dance. And *The Cavalier Daily*, which was the newspaper at UVA, had all these articles about [how] they could not get a place to hold the dance. They used to have it at Keswick Country Club or someplace like that. And they would not let the med school students have it if this African American student came to the dance. And all these articles, you know, protesting this, "We're not ever going to that country club again," and all this stuff. Finally, I think, they ended up having the dance in one of the gyms at UVA because they couldn't get a nicer place to hold it. But these students were very angry. Newport News didn't have a student group. I think you need a student group in a city to advocate for social change that needs to happen. But both were totally segregated, Charlottesville, Virginia. New York, it was segregated. You had Harlem and then you had the rest of Manhattan. But in the schools--. See, I went to private school and the private schools reached out to make the schools diversified

ethnically. So I went to school with African Americans and Asians and Hispanics. They gave scholarships to anybody that was not a Caucasian to get them to come. And you had a lot of university people: you had NYU, you had Columbia, and those professors' kids would want to go to the private schools. And they were thrilled. So I was exposed to diversification.

KS: So this was in the '40s that they were bringing people in?

MD: Yeah, but I'll tell you something. I had a sweet sixteen party at my apartment and there were two boys: Madison Jones--. What was the name of that other boy? I can't remember.

[Monroe Downing] Both African Americans, who were invited to my party. My father had to go downstairs to tell the doorman that, when these two African American kids came to come up to my apartment, that he was not to say one thing, they were supposed to come up because, otherwise, they'd have to use the back door. All of the apartment buildings had back entrances and they didn't--. And they were very strict about letting them come in and that was in the late '40s. Yeah, I would say--. I was born in '34. 1940--. Yeah, 1946. No, no, '48. I think I was sixteen.

JH: And--. [laughter]

MD: Maybe it was 1950. Yeah, probably 1950. I was sixteen. Yeah, that's right because I graduated in 1951.

JH: Okay, so that was the late '40s then. And we saw in your survey that, when your children were young, you were involved in different community organizations here [in Newport News], like the National Council of Jewish Women?

MD: Mmhmm.

JH: And what lead you to get involved in that?

MD: They were very liberal, very, very. Well, see I was programmed as a child. And I think all of our political and religious and all these beliefs that we have, we're programmed as children, really. And they were in favor of everything. We actually--this organization that you're talking about--opened the first preschool for disadvantaged children that was integrated on the whole Peninsula. And it was on a sliding scale basis. The kids who came--. The parents paid whatever, depending on what their income was. And we had it integrated--. It was quite [a] pioneering effort. I enjoyed working on that a lot.

JH: So what kind of work did you carry out with the National Council of Jewish Women?

MD: Well, I headed this preschool, and then I was involved with some fundraisers that we had to get the money to open the preschool. That was--. Took a lot of time. Then I was on the board of Head Start, which was the public way to go that we were going in with our private endeavor.

And I also worked on the board of directors of the Cerebral Palsy Training Center. In those days, there was no Disabilities Act so any child who had any kind of disability was not allowed in the public schools. And so they opened this facility called Cerebral Palsy Training Center and I was a teacher there--I mean a volunteer teacher because all my work was volunteer after my children were born. I didn't go back to work until my youngest child was a junior in high school and she went right here to Ferguson High School, which is now the--. What do you call it? The [Ferguson] Center [for the Arts].

KS: Yeah.

MD: Oh my goodness.

JH: So this Cerebral Palsy Center, was that open for a bunch of students with different disabilities?

MD: Only those children who suffered from cerebral palsy.

JH: Ok, ok.

KS: Was it through that group that you established what was called, in your survey, the Peninsula's first subsidized integrated preschool for disabled children?

MD: Yeah, that's what I was referring to.

KS: When was it established?

MD: 1960--. Let me say 1964.

JH: Okay, so that was right along [with the Civil Rights Act]. Alright. And you got your connections to the Head Start Program through the national program. Okay, and when did that come about?

MD: Later in--. Maybe 1968, 1969. I have to look that up, when Head Start started. This was the beginning of it.

KS: That was like the national program right?

MD: The national program. They got one to open here.

KS: Okay.

MD: Exactly. They still have Head Start here.

JH: Right, right. And how many students attended the preschool, the integrated preschool?

MD: Thirty. That was our max. That's what we were licensed for, thirty children.

JH: Okay and how old were they?

MD: We took the children at three--. At ages three, four, and five. There was no public kindergarten in those days.

JH: Right.

MD: So we prepared these children [for first grade]. They were all from disadvantaged homes. Gave them breakfast and lunch. There weren't daycare centers, really, in those days even. And

we got the mothers jobs. The mothers had never worked. And we also got them scholarships. There used to be a beauty school up over here on Warwick Boulevard. A lot of them wanted to be beauticians. We got them scholarships. I can remember they loved going to cosmetology school, whatever you call it, and they had a profession and they got out of being on welfare to being able to support their family. I kept up with some of those families through the years. I haven't recently. I mean we are talking fifty years ago.

JH: What was the racial composition like there at the school?

MD: We made a very big effort to have as many white children as possible because it was predominantly black.

JH: Okay.

MD: And we got our referrals from social services. They referred their clients who needed daycare for their children and most of them were the black children. But we had--. I would say maybe twenty-five percent white, seventy-five percent black, I would say.

KS: Did you get the money from the national government or was it like a donation kind of based?

MD: Well, we raised money through these fundraisers that I was telling you about to subsidize the program, but the city of Hampton contributed a lot to our budget. We got free food. And in those days--. Have you heard about the free food programs that the government used to give out? [The government gave out] cheese and butter to organizations such as ours so that a lot of the lunch ingredients [were free]. We got flour, sugar. And we got donations. You know, people were very generous. And then some of the parents who could pay something, even if they only paid twenty dollars a week, they--. So it was a good program. And the woman who was the

director, I still am in touch with. She is a kindergarten teacher at the Hidenwood Elementary School.

JH: Good. And how was it first received by the community?

MD: We got a lot of publicity, very good publicity for it, because it was innovative. And *The Daily Press* was very different in those days. It was much--. Do you ever see the local newspaper, *The Daily Press*, here? Probably not.

JH: Not *The Daily Press*, no.

MD: No. Okay. And you could call them up and say "You want to do an interesting story? Come out here." We got a lot of good publicity. And the community responded with generous contributions to keep the program going. They saw the need for it because what we were doing was taking these children and trying to break the cycle of poverty. Their parents had never graduated from high school and, you know, they didn't even have books at home for their children and the children would have entered first grade way behind a middle-class child. And here we were offering them a very good, much better start, just like Head Start does. It was very much the same philosophy.

JH: Did you receive any opposition?

MD: None at all.

JH: None. And so how did the public respond to Head Start then?

MD: Very favorably, yeah.

JH: As well?

MD: It was hard to argue with the education of preschool children.

JH: Oh yeah. And Head Start is still running?

MD: It is.

JH: Okay. Do you still--?

MD: Am I still connected?

JH: Yeah.

MD: Not really, no. I have kind of gotten away from those original interests of mine. I have different things I am involved with now.

KS: You also mentioned that you served on the Head Start Board. When was this?

MD: That's what I was talking about, the end of--. Late '60s, early '70s, yeah.

KS: Did you do any, kind of, [other] work with that? Or just the preschools? Or--

MD: That's all Head Start was.

KS: Okay, okay. What did you see as the most important accomplishments with that organization?

MD: That they gave an opportunity for these impoverished, disadvantaged families to get their children off on a better start than they had gotten off to.

JH: Definitely. Okay. So now we want to talk about a more general civil rights movement in this area. And what was the process of school desegregation like?

MD: It was rough. My children had six cousins the same ages. Six first cousins. I am first cousins with the parents so they would be second cousins. So all the same ages between--at the time, 1971--between fifth grade and eleventh grade. And every single one of my cousins pulled their children out of public school and sent them to private school when integration happened. And this happened with, I would say, I can't tell you the percentage. But anybody who could afford it mostly did not support the public schools. They did not want their children to be social experiments.

JH: Where did these cousins live?

MD: Right here in Newport News, yeah. We all lived in this Hidenwood area. And they all went to private school, except my kids. I am a big believer in public education. I am dogmatic about it, actually. And there were problems because Huntington High School, which was the black high school, had to integrate with Ferguson High School and Menchville High School. So you had the cheerleading girls from Huntington and the football players and all these kids who, in the spring, knew they were going to be hot shots and they have to come to this white school and it was very, very difficult. They had to do cheerleading tryouts all over again. They had to--. Everything had to be redone. They had new class presidents because we didn't know the spring before that this was actually going to happen in the fall.

JH: Right.

MD: So it was quite the turmoil and then you had the parents who totally objected to busing. My kids were bused from right here at CNU downtown to Sixteenth Street. Have you ever been downtown to Sixteenth Street?

JH: Mmhmm.

MD: Okay. On a school bus there and back. Parents objected strenuously to this busing. My kids thought it was the most fun part of the day. Loved it! [laughter] First of all, they weren't in class. They were on the bus, they were socializing with all their friends. And, of course, it was all white because it was coming from the white neighborhoods. There were no conflicts on the bus. Also-- and that's where two of them went--the middle school student and the elementary school student both went downtown. My high school student stayed here. She was a junior at Ferguson. But all these, you know, became completely integrated. It was fifty-fifty, just about. They had a fabulous principal at Ferguson High School. Her name was Mary Passage. I think she was the first female principal and the school up in Denbigh is named after her. She realized she was not

going to be able to handle integration with all these huge black guys coming into the school. So they got a new principal who was very good. And, interestingly enough, all of the worry about how terrible it was going to be--. There were problems, but not nearly what anybody expected. It was--. The kids did much better than the parents. And the kids found it kind of challenging. I mean, my kids loved it. They made new friends. Karen, who was in the band at Ferguson--. I get the biggest kick out of [the fact that] the CNU band practices on the same lawn that the Ferguson High School band practiced every Friday before the games, right there on the lawn. Did their formations, and here is CNU band out on the same lawn! The band was so much better with this input of these terrific Huntington musicians [coming] into the band. She was just thrilled about that. And they had problems, I am not going to minimize that. But one thing that--. My daughter was at the mall one day with her cousin who went to HRA, Hampton Roads Academy, which is the only private non-religious school in Newport News, and always has been. All the other schools are affiliated with some kind of a church. They were at the mall one day and Lisa, Ann's cousin, had gone to HRA. Ann had gone, you know, into the public school system. And Ann said they were walking and Ann said, "Let's go into this stop," and Lisa [said], "I am not going in there! Look all those black guys! I am not going in." She was petrified, and she [Ann] came home and she said, "I can't thank you enough for keeping us in the public schools because I know that there is absolutely nothing to be afraid of." And Lisa, you know, never got that experience.

JH: So the kids responded better than the parents?

MD: They certainly did. Absolutely.

JH: Wow. And did you have any interactions with the organization, Save Our Neighborhood Schools? Or SONS?

MD: Yeah. Well, do you know where the Health Trail is on Warwick Boulevard?

JH: Mmhmm.

MD: Okay, well there was a store that was empty there and they set up a storefront against Save Our Neighborhood Schools that summer after we knew integration--“Come in, let us answer your questions about how the Newport News school system is going to respond to this, what we are doing to prevent problems”--so that parents who had a lot of stress over it could come in. So that’s what I was involved in. It was counteractive to the Save Our Neighborhood School movement. Because I don’t know if you know how they did integration, but it was brilliant, I thought. They kept you in your neighborhood school wherever you were, K through second grade. They didn’t bus any kids at all. Third, fourth, and fifth grades, the downtown kids were bused up to the white schools. Okay? What did I say? Third, fourth and fifth? Ok. Sixth and seventh and eighth grade, all of our kids were bused all the way downtown to schools. That’s what my kids, the two younger ones, were involved in those first years. Alright. So, and then the high schools were all uptown and that was basically because the high schools uptown were in much better condition than the ones downtown. But it was very fair. The kids all had equal amount of busing out of their neighborhoods. And there were a lot of problems. I’ll give you an example. One of my friends was the principal at Riverside Elementary School and, [for] PTA meetings, she could not get any of the black parents to come to any meetings. There were no black parents at all. So she decided that it must be a problem with transportation, getting here. They didn’t have cars. So she sent notices home that the Newport News school buses were going to come downtown and bring them to PTA meetings. They still didn’t come. Very uncomfortable, out of their comfort zone. So that kind of problem lasted for many years until I would say--. See now, a lot of the neighborhoods are more naturally integrated. Also, the

generation of children who went through that period are now parents themselves, and so they are much more comfortable in the integrated society.

JH: But do you think the organization Save Our Neighborhood Schools was very effective?

MD: It wasn't because the neighborhood schools were not saved! [laughter] You can't--. What's the point of having an organization that's against the law? That's fighting the law. It's like now trying to do something about same-sex marriage. What is the point of being a member of an organization that is going to try to save heterosexual marriage only? I mean, you're wasting your time.

JH: Sure.

MD: The Supreme Court has spoken!

JH: Do you remember any specific activities that they were involved in, though? Any direct opposition you faced from them or that anyone did?

MD: No, because I did not associate with people who were--. If they didn't want their kids in the public school, they simply took them out and sent them to private schools. That was their way of opposing what happened.

KS: Were there more private schools that started to come up because of the--?

MD: Oh, yeah.

KS: Okay.

MD: They opened for that purpose. Definitely, uh huh.

KS: So you said your cousins took their--?

MD: All cousins, every one of them.

KS: Did you have any friends that did that as well?

MD: Oh yeah. A lot of friends absolutely, my kids' friends.

JH: Can you tell us about the criticism that you received?

MD: I didn't receive any criticism.

JH: You didn't?

MD: Nobody would dare criticize me. [laughter]

KS: That's the way to be! [laughter]

MD: I felt--. I was too opinionated. They wouldn't pick a fight with me.

JH: Alright.

MD: And my husband felt exactly the same way. We were a team of advocates for public school, public education, I feel.

KS: Were your in-laws kind of like your parents in a way that was kind of liberal? Like, in with the whole new kind of movement that was happening?

MD: Well, my parents I'd like to leave out of this. They were very difficult. My father insulted me by offering to pay to send my children to private school. And he felt that they were going to get an inferior education staying in public school. [To Morgan, therapy dog] What is it honey? You've had your sleep and now you want to play?

JH: And what did your children say their experiences were like?

MD: They loved it.

JH: Besides the busing.

MD: They loved the busing. They had--. All the teachers were the same. The teachers who had been at their schools went with them to whatever schools, and they had some really good African American teachers who came into Ferguson High School where they went. And, of course, all high schools have the tracks. You know, the college prep classes and then the vocational classes, and they did in those days too. So that hasn't changed much. When you were in high school,

wasn't that the case? That you were in college prep classes? Well, they didn't have advanced placement in those days, but it was still honors classes or whatever. And so the students who really wanted to learn and wanted to go on were in a class [together]. And it wasn't a problem for students who weren't there for an education but were there because it was the law and they had to be there.

KS: And those classes, like the advanced classes, were also mixed?

MD: They were. Not very much mixed, but there were always African American students in all of those classes. There were always some bright students but not as many as the---. But now they are. You go over here to the IB [International Baccalaureate] program at Warwick High School, a lot of African Americans kids [are] in that and in the [AP/advanced placement] classes. And a lot of Asian, the Asian students are brilliant here. We have some smart kids.

JH: Yeah. Do you remember if Karen shared any particular memories about her first year at Ferguson?

MD: She was a junior when integration---. She loved it. She thought it was great. She was in the band and we participated in something called the American Field Service. Did you ever have AFS in your school?

KS and JH: No.

MD: Alright, well that was the student exchange program and it was very integrated. And we sent an African American student on an exchange program and he became a teacher. Nice guy. And we had--visiting our school, Ferguson High School--mixed groups. It was a very, very good experience to get that cultural diversity.

KS: So your two younger daughters, Laurie and Ann, were bused? That's correct right?

MD: That's correct. They were the ones who were bused.

KS: What did they think about busing?

MD: They loved it. Yeah, they had good teachers. Newport News Intermediate School was for seventh and eighth graders and it was located on 32nd Street and Huntington Avenue, which used to be Newport News High School. They closed Newport News High School and they made it into an intermediate school but they--. Newport News High School was an open school, the high school. By open, I mean you had an open campus. The kids, when it was lunch time, they could go anyplace downtown for lunch. Well, she just thought that was the greatest. She'd walk to her father's office. You know, there were just a lot of things that were fun. And they taught--. They treated the children much more maturely than they do today. Everything is locked down and what have you. In those days it was much more open.

KS: And this was a middle school then?

MD: It was, but it was called intermediate school in those days.

KS: So what else was their experience like within school and classes?

MD: They liked their teachers. They had friends. They did sports. You know, just very normal. I don't remember any problems that my children had with integration at all. The main thing is the quality of the teachers, didn't you find that? I mean, you go into--.

JH: Yeah, absolutely.

MD: You've got a good teacher, that's really the key.

KS: It makes class better.

MD: Absolutely.

JH: And were you involved in the PTA at this time?

MD: Yeah, I was in PTA at three schools.

JH: Oh my gosh.

MD: Three schools.

JH: And how were they affected by integration?

MD: Only the downtown schools did we have African American participation. But Ferguson High School, I don't remember--. Very few times seeing any non-whites.

KS: Is it just because they were uncomfortable to come up here?

MD: I think so. I do.

KS: When did that change? You said that changed.

MD: Well, when did that change? I really don't know because it didn't change. Ann graduated from Ferguson in 1977, so it was only six years later. It really hadn't changed much then. So once she was out of school. I think it probably took mostly till this next generation of kids.

KS: Okay.

MD: I would guess.

KS: And what other ways, if any, did integration of Newport News public school affect the community?

MD: Well, it became this--. The community became kind of polarized. A lot of things changed. For instance, before integration, the local newspaper, there was never anybody except for somebody white who died. It was never in the newspaper. You know, everything was completely segregated your whole life. What you now have at Patrick Henry Mall used to be downtown, all the shops. They had lunch counters there and they were all closed to blacks. It was white only. Well, there was one store who--progressive people owned it--who realized that half of their customers were black and so they opened their lunch counter. Another store was in the process of being built in the early '70s and they chose to build it without a lunch counter so they wouldn't have the problem.

KS: Oh.

MD: So you couldn't have lunch in that store.

JH: And how did they do?

MD: They did very well. The store did fine, but if you wanted to have lunch you just weren't going to eat lunch in that new store. They didn't have--. They avoided the problem. So that's the kind of thing that--. [Morgan's collar rustles] Oh my goodness.

KS: Morgan wants to be a part of the interview now.

MD: That went on, you know, as far as how the community responded. But gradually, over the years, we did have a sit-in at Woolworths downtown and we--. But gradually, over the years, people, you know, get over it and they got over it.

KS: Yeah, I was gonna ask you about [that] because we just learned about the lunch counter sit-ins. So there was one in Newport News?

MD: Oh yeah. Uh huh. Yeah.

KS: Did that change at all? Did that help the change, like to make it more--?

MD: Sure! Absolutely there is nothing like peaceful protest.

JH: Right. Did you by any chance participate?

MD: No, no, uh uh.

KS: Okay. Did you just see it in the newspaper then or--?

MD: Yes.

KS: Okay.

MD: I did not participate.

JH: When did you start working at Denbigh High School?

MD: 1978.

JH: 1978. So your kids were all graduated?

MD: No.

JH: Except for one.

MD: Ann graduated in 1979. She was a--. It was in the spring. Well, what happened was we thought we had spaced our children very well. Karen had graduated from UVA and she was in graduate school. And Laurie was at Goucher [Goucher College, Baltimore, Maryland], and she tells us she is going to graduate school. And Ann is getting ready to go to college. So we were going to have two in graduate school and one in college and Stanley said to me, "Guess what? You're going back to work. [laughter] We cannot afford three at one time." We thought we'd have, at the most, we'd have two overlapping one year. That would be it. One a senior and one a freshman. So that's when I went back to work, which I was very glad to do because Ann was almost finished school and I had almost twenty years, I think it was maybe nineteen years.

KS: So you were a teacher?

MD: Yeah, I taught English at Denbigh High School.

KS: And you were a teacher before [you had] children, correct?

MD: Well, what happened was I was a teacher, but I had Karen so I couldn't teach with a baby. But when we moved back here, I did some substitute teaching and then I got pregnant with Laurie so then we had two kids. I had three children, five and under.

KS: You had your hands full.

MD: Uh huh. So I really didn't teach while they were growing up. I was a stay-at-home mom working in the community and doing volunteer work.

JH: What were your experiences like working at Denbigh?

MD: Well, Denbigh was naturally integrated. They never did any busing at Denbigh High School and that's because it was located in proximity to Fort Eustis.

KS: Oh, okay.

MD: Okay. And the kids there, a lot of them were army kids, and they were used to integration. I don't remember any problems with racial problems at all.

JH: So you've got these military kids that were used to traveling and they're used to [integration].

MD: Exactly. And they are used to living on base and in an integrated housing situation or in the neighborhood.

KS: So there weren't problems at all like--?

MD: I don't remember any racial problems. We had an African American principal. He was the best principal you would ever want to have. That was just the best, and that set the tone.

JH: Right.

KS: Was the faculty integrated as well?

MD: Oh totally. Mmhmm.

JH: And so they pretty much had the same mindset you did then, the integrated faculty?

MD: Absolutely, yeah.

JH: What was the composition like? Was it fifty-fifty or was it?

MD: Pretty close at Denbigh. Uh huh.

JH: Okay. And so diversity has been a particular commitment of yours.

MD: Absolutely, I would say that.

JH: A little bit. [laughter] So what was that like in the context of your teaching and community activities? Did you pretty much revolve everything around [diversity]?

MD: Well, I was really color-blind, if you want to know the truth. I would come home and I would tell Stanley about some experience I had with a student and he might ask me if the student was black and I would say, "Let me see, is he black? Let me see, wait just a minute, just a minute, I am going to think about it." Then I would think of the seat that the student sat in because I always had a seating chart and, picturing him in the seat, I could determine what color the student was. But, just outside of that, I had no problem because it just didn't register with me.

JH: Sure.

MD: Yeah.

KS: So we have talked about the impact of the civil rights movement on education, but we would like to ask you a few questions about other aspects of [the] civil rights movement affecting Hampton Roads. Do you remember any protests taking place here? I know we talked about the lunch counters but was there anything else that you remember?

MD: I don't remember any of it.

KS: Were you involved in any yourself at all, any protests or just kind of activities?

MD: Just activities, I did not do any protesting at all.

KD: Okay.

JH: What do you recall about later race events like Martin Luther King's assassination and race riots and the Black Power Movement?

MD: Well--what was his name? [Jesse Jackson]--came to speak and I went downtown with one of my cousins to hear him. He used to be terrific, but he is not so great anymore. Well, I meant--. Hmm, awful. He was the guy who said to the blacks all the time, "You have got to get an education. That is the key to getting out of this pit that we are in. You must get an education. It is number one priority for all of us." Anyway, I went down to hear him speak. He was terrific. But,

other than that, I really didn't do much. I was sort of a believer in my personal life being a role model for my kids. Do it instead of talking about it.

JH: What year was that, you were talking about that speaker?

MD: Well, it was before I went back to teaching. It was in probably the early '70s, right after integration, because he is still around.

JH: Yeah.

MD: And he is still--.

KS: I can't think of anybody.

MD: Very prominent. [Jesse Jackson]

KS: How did the civil rights movement affect this area more generally?

MD: It changed it completely, totally. You know it's--. The interesting thing to me, it took time, there is no question about it. From 1964 until, you know, I'd say forty years, into the beginning of the 21st century. It took time for people not to look at intermarried couples and to just accept things and to see that we are a community. And there are still people who don't. All the old-timers, but they are dying off. Whereas the social change, for instance, among the gay community has happened so fast I can hardly catch my breath, to see how quickly that came about. It was such a secret if you were gay 25 years ago.

JH: Sure.

KS: Yeah.

MD: And now it's--. Who doesn't know anybody [who is gay?]--. Everybody knows someone who is gay now. It's just totally accepted. So you--. So what?

JH: Right.

KS: Yeah.

JH: Right.

MD: I think it's like you have brown eyes, you have blue eyes. I mean, so what? [laughter]

JH: What do you feel the most important accomplishments of the civil rights movement are?

MD: Well, we had--. You know, there is still a lot to do but--.

JH: Absolutely.

MD: But we had come from such an atrocious history, the treatment of the African Americans is so embarrassing.

KS: Yeah.

MD: It's just, just horrific. We have started to repay, you know, to pay, to give them some dignity and to give them opportunities. If you haven't read the Sotomayor biography, you need to read it. She's Puerto Rican.

JH: She's amazing.

KS: Yeah.

MD: That biography is just wonderful. Loved it. But, you know, to see how far we've come. It's very good to have lived in these times and to have seen it. And people, you know, human rights is--. You know, why some people think that they should have human rights but other people shouldn't have human rights. It just boggles my mind how they come to these conclusions. Yeah.

JH: Yeah.

KS: What do you regard as the unfinished legacies of this movement?

MD: Well, there is--. We have a long way to go. People have to become color blind and not see that there is any difference, just because somebody walks up to you with one color skin rather than another, that makes that individual any different as an individual human being. And it's going to take generations of retraining.

JH: You mentioned that you are not involved in the preschool or the Head Start Program now. You said you took up other interests. What are the other interests you took up? Oh, I see your therapy dog.

MD: I am involved in quite a few commitments as a volunteer. With Morgan, she is a therapy dog. We work at three nursing--assisted-living--homes where we are committed to go every other week. One is Mennowood, one is Commonwealth, and one is James River. We are committed to go to the Grissom Library to hear children read. And the fifth one we are committed to--. Hmm. Oh! The school PEEP [Program for Educating Exceptional Preschoolers, Newport News Public Schools], it's across the street here.

JH: Oh yeah!

KS: Oh yeah.

MD: You know PEEP?

JH: I've volunteered there.

MD: You do? Okay, Morgan was there yesterday.

JH: Okay.

MD: Were you in the afternoon or the morning program?

JH: It was last year--.

MD: It was last year?

JH: I volunteered there.

MD: Okay. Well, I mean, those children are the most adorable things I have ever seen and they adore the dogs. We have about four dogs come and they take the leash and, with their braces on, they walk them down the hall and back. You know that long hall they have there?

JH: Yeah.

MD: Okay, so we have five commitments. I am getting rid of one of them because I've got a new commitment with York-Poquoson Social Services. They want me to come with Morgan and to have Morgan in the room when they do forensic questioning with children that they think that--. The child will be more honest about telling what happened. And, also, they want me to tutor the children who are back in school. So we go every Tuesday from 4:30 to 5:30 for that time. So that takes care of Morgan. Then, I go to Norfolk every other week to read on the radio for the blind. There's a station for the blind that all volunteers read. They read the Norfolk newspaper, the Newport News newspaper, they read books for the blind, they read [the] Sunday [newspaper], you know, all kinds of stuff so that the blind who can't read can listen on the radio to the stuff. And I read there. Morgan gets to come too. Then, I'm still working with the National Council of Jewish Women and we have a program I work with called Mini-Grants for Teachers. And teachers in the Newport News and Hampton school system[s] can apply for a mini-grant for materials they want to teach something innovative that they cannot get through the school system. And they apply and we go over their applications and give them some money so that they can implement this program. And, let's see. What else am I doing?

KS: You are so involved!

MD: Well, yeah, my husband died and it's a--. I like to keep active. Well, I am at a blank right now but there are some other things that I am doing. [I deliver Meals on Wheels.] I do a lot of proofreading for publications because I am a retired English teacher. [laughter] So before they go to press, their bulletins or whatever, they send them by me.

KS: Now do you think your interest in service, was that sparked by your college experience?

MD: High school.

KS: High school? Okay, high school experience.

MD: When we did community service. Yeah, definitely.

JH: So is there anything else that you want to contribute or anything you feel like we might have missed?

MD: I don't think so. [laughter] Certainly covered the whole thing! My goodness.

JH: We sure did!

MD: Almost two, no one hour.

JH: One hour.

MD: It seemed longer. It's okay.

JH: Oh goodness!

MD: Well I was, you know, answering a lot of questions.

JH: Yeah, definitely. Well, we appreciate it.

KS: Yeah.

MD: How many more people are you going to interview?

JH: You're our one.

KS: Yeah.

MD: Oh! Each team only has one person. Well, I hope I made it [and] gave you enough material.

KS: Oh, I think you did. Yeah, you covered a lot of stuff. Thank you so much, we really appreciate it.

END OF INTERVIEW

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