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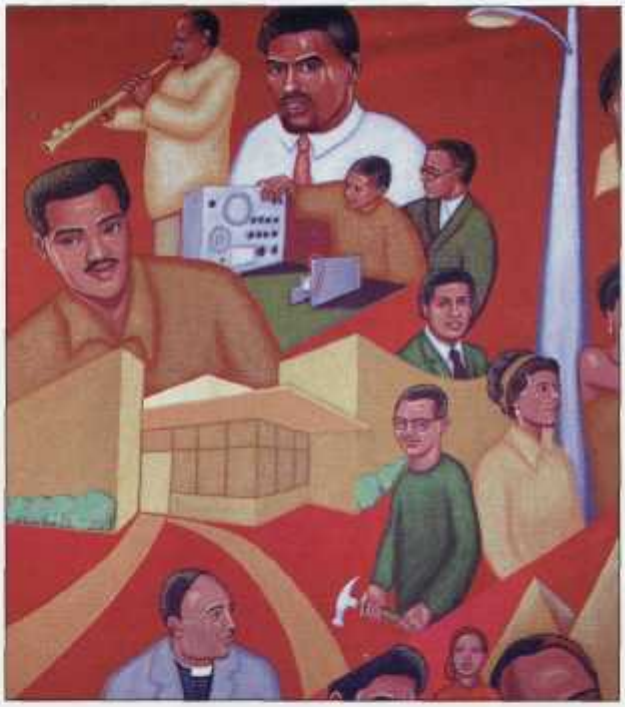
The People's Stories of South Madison

Volume 1

The *Exodus* Mural

The *Prophets* Mural



The People's Stories of South Madison

Volume 1

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Jewell Freeman

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Introduction

The People's Stories of South Madison were told in 20 interviews conducted in community centers, houses, churches, apartments, and a care center over a two-year period beginning in 1998. Averaging about 90 minutes in length, the interviews filled 268 pages after being transcribed onto paper. Most of the accompanying photographs were taken at the time of the interviews.

Modest funding available for this publication made it necessary to greatly abbreviate the length of each story. Highlights were chosen and some of the statements within individual interviews were rearranged to keep a subject in context. But the stories are printed here using the exact words spoken by each person as much as possible.

In an effort to remain faithful to the manner in which the stories were told, it was decided to retain some passages spoken in African-American Vernacular English (AAVE). The ability to speak both standard English and AAVE is shared by many African-American people. It represents an artful and expressive skill in conversation, which highlights certain spoken ideas according to conscious choices made spontaneously by the speaker.

Editing tools which the reader will encounter include the occasional addition of a word or term in parentheses. This was usually done to complete a name or to explain an acronym. Since all the stories were told in the first person, the use of quotation marks was generally eliminated. However, quotation marks will be found within some of the stories to indicate a special saying or a statement in which the story teller quoted the voice of a second or third person.

Deepest gratitude is extended to the people who so generously agreed to tell their stories.

For each story remembered here it is likely that an untold story is drifting somewhere between the lines. The reader is invited to imagine those shadow stories. The reader is also encouraged to listen to the stories as one would hear voices in a choir. Taken together the voices tell us, as one of the people said, that South Madison is America.

David Giffey

How curious a land is this, how full of untold story, of tragedy and laughter, and the rich legacy of human life; shadowed with a tragic past, and big with future promise!

W.E.B. Du Bois (1903)

Betty Banks

I was born and raised in Madison, and growing up in the '50s South Madison certainly wasn't what it is today. I remember when there was the removal and displacement of people from what was known as the Greenbush, and many of those people came to South Madison for housing and other kinds of things. A couple of churches moved out here.

Urban renewal was quite popular throughout the country. And "the powers that be" came in and broke up the Greenbush community, which was made up of African Americans, Jewish people, Italians, and some whites. And they scattered people all over between the west side and the south side.

As a young child, I lived in the Greenbush. My father's family had lived in the Greenbush. My mother's family came here at the turn of the century and settled in the Mifflin Street area, Tenney-Lapham, and old Market Place neighborhood. They came from Kentucky at the request of then-governor LaFollette, because my grandfather was a lawyer and Governor LaFollette wanted him to work with him. The irony of this whole idea of coming to a better place was that my grandfather couldn't practice law and my grandmother couldn't teach school. Both my grandparents could probably have passed for white, and they wouldn't do that. So LaFollette couldn't really hire my grandfather as one of his aides. It wasn't the political thing to do, and Bob LaFollette was very political. My grandparents were both educated and were part of what was called "The Talented Tenth," W.E.B. Du Bois's talented tenth. Du Bois was a good friend of my grandfather's, and often came to Madison to strategize regarding what was going to happen to black people across the country. My grandparents were the contact people.

My grandfather and grandmother, William and Anna Mae Miller, bought two houses here. One was a boarding house, so when people did migrate to Madison they'd have a place to stay. They were sort of a two-person urban league. Both of them were very involved in social justice issues. My grandmother would often speak at the legislature on women's and children's issues also. They were progressives. Those were the years from about 1902. My grandfather also formed the Book Lover's Club, which was the forerunner of the NAACP here.

The South Madison that I grew up knowing felt like that was the heart of the black community. My parents had a restaurant for a little while where Bram Hill Apartments are now. It was called Hilltop Restaurant. Very small, homey-type restaurant. It was American-style food, and the major feature was barbecued ribs.

We were all steeped in our church lives which provided a way for us to network and support each other. At that time there was Mount Zion, Second Baptist, and St. Paul AME church.

In the '50s there were so few of us that the opportunity to really stereotype us wasn't always there because we were more like the majority than we were different. And even though we were fighting the battles...Odell Tagliaferro, Hilton Hanna, Demetra Shivers, my aunt Lucile...me and my brothers and sisters just grew up understanding how you make social change via the political vehicle. We also grew up understanding the issues of race.

I went to Lapham School and there was a movie about Africa, and they showed Africans doing their tribal native dances and some of the women were bare-breasted. I remember watching that and thinking it's a good thing everybody is seeing this, and other children were laughing and snickering and making fun. I went home and told my parents how bad it made me feel because they were making fun of something I thought was beautiful. Those were my people. We know we were from Madagascar.

My mother was very fair-skinned, and people were willing to sell her a house. And when my father came along, who was a dark-skinned man, then the house was sold or they wouldn't sell to them.

South Madison used to be a swamp, so it wasn't the greatest place to build anything.

The whole sense of community really grew out in South Madison, but it touched all of us no matter where we lived. As I was growing up, I watched all the subsidized housing be dumped in South Madison, and watched neglect happen in South Madison. In my opinion things didn't really turn around until probably in the '70s when Mayor Joel Skornicka was the first mayor to really pay attention to the needs of South Madison in terms of recreation and streets and that kind of thing.

My mother and her sisters were also big fans of Eleanor Roosevelt. I always thought Eleanor was a relative because she kind of looked like my aunt and my grandmother. I used to wonder why didn't she ever come and visit?

I published my own newspaper and produced my own TV show. The newspaper was published from '83 to '91. It was *The Wisconsin Free Press* and then it was *The Madison Times*. The TV show went from '89 to '91. It was a show for teens. Our message was about staying off of drugs, getting away from sex before time. We were concerned about teenage smoking. In 1989 we did a story that was called The Glass Saxophone. It was about cocaine, and in 1989 nobody really paid attention to it. Heads were still in the sand.

The Saint Martin House doesn't get the credit that it deserves. It pioneered many things in South Madison. The first headstart was located at Saint Martin House. They had an orphanage. They provided lots of recreation opportunities and worked real hard at the whole idea of diversity before it was the word that I'm sick of now. I used to laugh and say we were honorary Catholics because we went to sewing class. My aunt, Arlene Miller, is a seamstress and she was a part of the Saint Martin House guild and taught the sewing class. My father helped build Saint Martin House. It was the '50s.

South Madison is wherever there's a crime committed. I'm being facetious, but it's true. I heard something happened out in Nakoma. They said it was in South Madison.

I'm no Republican conservative, but we began to depend less on each other. Some of us were thrown some crumbs so we drifted away. This is true of what integration did for black people mainly. It broke up our neighborhoods. You know, doctors and lawyers, teachers, bricklayers, we lived in the same neighborhoods and we were able to see our role models live next door to us. We had a different sense of community. It feels like we paid a price for something that was ours anyway. It feels like we paid a price to be a lawyer. In 1902 we probably had a strong political voice. And as we went through the decades our voice became weaker because our community became more fractured. I think there's a price to pay when you turn your back on who you are. We are torn as a community about that. We label each other out of frustration and being torn by, yeah, I want a house, I want a car, I want my kids to go to college, I want to be an American, I want all these things. And how do you do that? Because it is true that we will pay a price. No matter who we are. We pay a price for becoming that CEO, or becoming whatever we become.

We didn't even have black music here until 1968. They didn't even play it on the radios until 1968. Hard to believe, isn't it? Black people of my generation who lived in Madison probably knew about Randy's Record Shop out of Nashville, Tennessee. They used to play blues and black music.

If something happened, "the powers that be" would just be so aghast. It'd be like, what's wrong with our black people? Why are they mad?

Women who were at home with their kids are no longer at home with their kids. They can't. They are out there doing something. I attribute that to the change in the neighborhood, and also to W-2. They have to either be in some kind of community work experience or they have to be looking for a job or have found a job.

Part of the mission and vision of this Harambee Center is that we connect with the community. People feel good when they walk in the building. They feel important when you ask them to participate in a panel discussion or to sit down and plan something with us.

African Americans are spread out all over. But we still have that need to call some place home. In South Madison historically has been the heart of the black community, and so we come back here. It doesn't matter

if somebody lives wherever they live. When they come to South Madison, they see themselves. It doesn't feel alien.

We have a history as African Americans of being brought over here and literally stripped away from everything we knew. One of the most interesting movies I think is Amistad, because those slaves didn't speak English.

Even if I don't want to celebrate Kwanzaa, or I don't want to go to Juneteenth, there is a reason why we need this, and it's not just a few of us. There are many of us who need that. It goes back to that whole affirmation. We have always struggled to make an important statement. And in a place like Madison, the struggle is harder. They were talking about people who made significant differences in the century. Not one black person. They named Paul Soglin, the county executive, Bob LaFollette, all these people. Here we had a small group of black people who were fighting for social justice in the '40s and '50s and they are not recognized. That says a lot to me. It's insulting.

We as a people, African Americans, we struggle so hard with this whole notion of who we are and how we fit here. We are all so angry about things. The most vocal and angry really get put down. Gene Parks is a good example. Well, Gene Parks is angry and so am I. And so was Velma Hamilton. And we act out our anger in different ways. But who wouldn't be angry? Who wouldn't be angry? Those are the kinds of things that polarize us also, the degree of anger. We want to be a part of "mainstream America." Well, I'm not so sure that's what I want to be. I want to be me, and I don't want to be like white people. I really don't. I have never, a day in my life, ever wanted to be white.

I see what racism, conscious racism, the things that were done over 500 years ago, the things that were done that we are still paying for. We are still paying for slavery and the breaking up of our families, and the snatching away of our history, and a sense of who we are.

Racism is too complicated to think you can have a task force for a year. This whole issue of race, the African-American community needs to take it on. We need to force the issue.

When the board was being formed there were some of us who said we will not sit at a table with just one or two of us. The woman sitting next to me may not be as experienced as you are. But she's gonna sit there because she has something to say and she's a member of this community. We have to insist that we belong everywhere. I won't sit on a board where I am the only person of color. I do not find that an honor.

I think people feel overwhelmed when someone says we need to do something. There are commitments that we can make. There are visions we can share. I am convinced of that no matter how hard the struggle gets. I feel like here in Madison we have become polarized in terms of class and race to the point where it's just uncomfortable.

In America we haven't learned how to normalize race. I said to (an acquaintance), and I don't mean this to be an insult or a putdown, but do you have an *Ebony Magazine* in your house? Do you have any pictures that depict somebody else? The other people? If you are sincere about it, you will do something about it.

My mother was very active in South Madison in issues of the elderly and children. And I feel more like her every day. I feel like I'm earning my wings here. I've sort of had it. I've decided I'm going for broke here. People don't have to agree with me, but I feel like something has to be said and I'd like to say it.

Most of us feel so powerless. I give myself my own power. I don't need the mayor to tell me anything. I don't need the county exec, the supreme court. That's what I try to give my kids, the power to do, to think.

If you don't understand your own history, you don't know where you're going. You don't have to be in denial to have two cars. You don't have to be in denial to be in the chancellor's office. You could achieve those things and still be who you are. We all have the same history. Nobody came over here and didn't have that history who is African American. And they got where they are because somebody walked. ■

Geraldine B. Bernard

I am a native of New Orleans, Louisiana. When I came here I was the first minority female teacher in the Madison school district.

We moved here in 1967. It must have taken us a year to find a place to live. It was very difficult. The one or two homes that we ran into were just not for sale for us. Meaning people of color didn't live in those areas.

Being from Louisiana, we had taken our kids through plantation houses. And my daughter said, oh momma, daddy, that's a shotgun house. And we laughed and said no, not quite. In a shotgun house on the plantations, you can stand in the front door and look through the back door, a straight-shot house. Some of the shacks are still on the plantations. Nobody lives in them now.

I guess the fact that we had gotten this house on the west side was a problem too. We weren't accepted in the neighborhood. The kids couldn't play with the kids in the neighborhood. People would avoid us and shun us and not talk to us and that kind of stuff.

And then I walked that whole morning, and I stopped at every house. Introduced myself to the parents, and met the children whom I'd already met, and just say to the parents, you know, I have wondered why our kids can't play together.

But that's what it took to get 'em to understand that the black doesn't rub off. And that's how we got started with being a part of the neighborhood. Which is what I guess should have been. We're the ones to make the transition because we're the oddballs and we're the newcomers, the new kids on the block.

In any other neighborhoods where blacks were the first ones in the neighborhood they had the same kind of problem. I felt like somebody needs to do something, and they need to know that we're here to stay.

I had the same kind of problems in the school as a teacher, as an educator. I wasn't welcomed in many schools, by the staff, the educators.

My favorite school was Badger, used to be Badger school over there on Rimrock, Silver Spring school, exactly where Rocky Rococo's is over there there on the beltline. Most of the schools did not have children of color. Most of the black kids were on the south side.

I didn't have trouble with the kids. Kids like new things. The educators were the ones who had a problem. So I knew I had to do a lot of teaching to the grown ups as well as the children. I was like the new animal at the zoo. And the little black child in the classroom was always the oddball. They never saw anybody that looked like them, and never come in contact with any such thing as a teacher of color. No.

The word was around that here are these black folk and they have nowhere to live. You know what I'm saying? So that went on for a number of years. And it still goes on.

They were treated differently. Every black child that I saw after my coming in, the first thing they would think of doing was putting this child in a special class. You see, I came here with a "speech impediment." *I black southerner Creole*. And that's broken French and English. At home, for example, we don't sound out i-n-g. I would say walkin', ridin', sittin', talkin', instead of walking, riding, sitting, and talking. So naturally a black kid came into the system with the same problem. But that is not a speech impediment. That's a dialect. In the early years they didn't know the difference between a speech impediment and a dialect. Until I said, hey, wait a minute. That child does not have a speech impediment. He has a dialect. And teachers weren't trained to know the difference.

Why adjust your schedule to accommodate ebonics? Why do we want to speak that way? We ought to be able to speak good English. I understood right away when I came here that I had a dialect. I knew that. But everybody else thought I had a speech impediment. Eventually that got corrected. But you know I could go home tomorrow, and the next day I'm back in the saddle. It's a part of my growing up. It's easy. When I come back, I'm back where I need to be. But it isn't that easy for a child to make that adjustment. It's very difficult.

You see all the black kids sitting together. Kids don't know that they need to spread out and get with other kids. But they get in this little group because we can all talk and understand each other.

When I went into all those schools, I had questions asked me. Why do you want to be in a situation like this? I said, because the white children need to know that there are people like me in the world who have smarts too. We can offer them some things they never learn about because nobody else can teach it. So if they're going to have a complete education, they need to have exposure to people like me.

They get a couple in here and there, but we don't stay. That is the problem. We don't stay. You see, I came here with a husband and a family. The young blacks who come today, men or women, if they don't have a significant other, then the social life is zero. So they go out to other places that offer better paying jobs. And you can't fault them for that.

I was in an all-black school. In the south that's the way it was. All black. All white. Children, elementary, all schools, everything. The whole gamut. The federal government moved in to say all schools have to be integrated. So what they did where I came from, they didn't integrate the kids. They integrated the teachers. They took the black teachers and put them in the white schools, and white teachers they put in the black schools. So I refused to go to a white school. My reasoning was, the black kids need me. I was a certified teacher. Down home, the white teachers were able to get good jobs, and they weren't necessarily educated. They had high school students who would become teachers, and that kind of foolishness. And here I am a certified teacher. I don't want to go to the white kids. I want to stay with the black kids.

We always got the used schools. We always got the used furniture. We always got the used books. We always got what was thrown away from the white schools.

My husband and the kids were Catholic. I was Baptist. It was interesting. And finally I found the fact that I wanted to be at Mount Zion. Blossom Maiden caught me by the hand one Sunday. She said, you know what, we gonna take care of you at Mount Zion. And she did. She's been holding my hand ever since. Ever since.

We as a people were still havin' excuses about why we didn't have and why we couldn't do. I know we weren't accepted to the schools and the community and a lot of things. But too many of us just stopped with that. A lot of people just don't like controversy. They don't want to get involved in stuff.

The first two years I was here, I recruited for black teachers in southern states at colleges and universities. And the principal at Silver Spring school, Dorothy McLimans, was my white partner. We got to be buddies. They sent white and black combinations out there in the south. We traveled the southern states. She brought me into the Delta Kappa Gamma Society Internationale, which is an educational society for women. I integrated that organization. I met a lot of fine women, and we're still friends.

I love life. Life is wonderful.

We'll never get done so we have to just keep tryin' and keep pluggin' and keep our children focused in the right direction as much as we can because it's really hard. It's very, very hard.

Everything is political nowadays. As an individual I really don't like politics. "Politics are dirty tricks." I really don't like that. "I put your lights out to make mine shine."

Attitudes get in our way. We still have some of us who's sayin', they don't like me because I'm black. Well, that may be true. But that shouldn't stop me from doin' what I want to do or bein' what I want to be. Cuz' we know that's gonna always be there.

Who is to judge about where I'm supposed to be, what I'm supposed to do. Make me accountable just like you make everybody else accountable. But give me the same opportunity.

We grew up on welfare. The black folks used to send their kids to work in the fields. We never went to the fields. When the social worker would come and say, well, why don't you send your kids to work, mother say, they goin' to school. There were seven of us. My mother died in 1985. She lived to be 100. Mom would say, "Be good to yourself. You're wealthy kids." But one day a white man was walking by, and we were all sittin' on the porch around mother. We all learned how to crochet. I had a needle, embroiderin'. We were havin' a class on the porch. And this man passes...he and mother were in a conversation and he said something about some person in the neighborhood. He said, "Oh, you know them. They have all this money. They're very wealthy." And Edgar, my little brother, said: "Well how could they be wealthy? They must be something else if they wealthy and they got a lot a money, cuz' we're wealthy too and we don't have any money." She stopped. She said, "Baby, our wealth has nothin' to do with money. Our wealth has to do with the love we have for each other."

No matter where you go there are goin' to be obstacles. Madison had something we needed. And we had something Madison needed. ■

Melva McShan Bishop

I was originally born in Montgomery, Alabama. Left Montgomery when I was a year and a half. Moved to Milwaukee. We came here in '63.

It was a shock to come to Madison from Milwaukee. I came from an urban setting, and you have to realize at that time South Madison was very rural. It was just like a little country town, and everything for youth revolved around the neighborhood center. It wasn't just a black community center because the neighborhood was very diverse.

When we moved to Madison the people that lived right next to us had hogs and chickens in they yard. We turned the corner, I never forget this here, I saw a outhouse. And then we pulled up in our driveway and I heard that rooster crow. I started crying. And they didn't have any sidewalks, and for somebody who has lived totally in the city and not to see sidewalks!

Originally my stepfather drove me to school every day. I hated it. It was very racist. Coming from a place where there are large numbers of African Americans and feeling very comfortable and respected and wanted. And then coming to an environment where you felt rejected, invisible and unseen, and unheard. I was in my English class at Central high school for six months, and I was never called on once. And growing up being a vocal child, that was really hard for me. Not that I didn't want to participate, but I was never approached to participate. So I hated it. It must have been after my junior year here, I became very vocal in school, very outspoken, and very political.

I remember the neighborhood center director and what I saw at that time, clout and visibility, and how I desired and I wanted that. Seemed like he was the person that kept the neighborhood together...that got blacks and whites to work together. He was like the mayor to me, like the mayor of a little city.

Being sometimes the only African American gave you an opportunity to do something that you may not have had to do before in a more heavily-populated neighborhood. My children don't see or it's hard for them to distinguish discrimination because they have been brought up in a place that's so multicultural. For a person coming from the outside it would be very visible to them. And so some people grew up having the same stigma about people of color as people who are up north and who have never seen African Americans or who have never had an opportunity to walk or talk with them. I felt like God gave me an opportunity to be on both sides of the world, to see what it was like to have less but feel like more, and to have more and feel like less.

In Milwaukee, growing up as a child I think about how well I thought I was doing. Not realizing that I was in a little sort of segregated area. I wasn't opened up to the whole world. I was only opened up to what was allowed for African Americans at that time. This is before civil rights. It wasn't much. Now, we moved here, and I thought that there was a whole world out there that we knew nothing about. There were advantages and opportunities out there that the kids in Milwaukee didn't have a clue existed.

That was more what women in my time did, they went to college to look for an educated man, and you could go to his home or come back here. And if you were dating someone who was in service, if you were lucky they came home from the Vietnam war. Now that is so different, because now you go out there and you get your education and you don't care if you get a man or not. Your total rush now is for independence rather than interdependence.

After I graduated I went off to Whitewater. I thought it was a wonderful school. I had wonderful professors and guidance counselors, but I got expelled from school for inciting a riot. Some of the minority women students there went downtown. Some white residents of the town made those women crawl up and down the street on their knees as they spit and made terrible remarks to them. I was president of the student body. They came back and told, crying...I got involved in the riot. They had national guard up there after us, and we were barricaded in the dorms. Finally they cut off the water and the phone. We wouldn't come out because we

didn't know what was going to happen to us, whether we'd get killed or what. They dismissed the school, let us go home. I received letters from the University of Wisconsin that I was expelled from all universities and colleges in the State of Wisconsin for four years. That was the disgrace for my family because I was the chosen one. I have friends who are doctors, lawyers, ready to retire, and I threw all that away for justice, civil rights, for human rights. But I know that if those events were to happen again, I know that I would do the same thing because it's just part of who I am.

I still don't have a degree. I've had to piecemeal my education together. For every job that I've wanted I've always had to go and get the skills and the education I needed for the root of the job. I always felt that I would prove to the world that I could still be something without having a degree.

The person who recruited me for Upward Bound tried to tell me that I was good college material but I needed to transfer some of those skills that I had in the gang to a more positive life. And the only reason that I accepted the Upward Bound program was because I thought he was cute.

I love reading. I love to learn. I like debate.

You need to have a life outside of what you do. You need to spend time with your family.

I'm studying for chaplain now, and my real work is with bereavement, death, dying. It's hard to talk to somebody about it's okay to die if you ain't never been at death's door.

I look at my experiences in Madison as not only the house but I look at it as the mansion. I've got so many different places in it that I can go and talk about it and live comfortably in. Got a tennis court. Got a game room. That's what Madison has provided for me. It's got a library that's humungous.

There's a lot of story telling or verbal communication that has been done for me. I have not had the chance or opportunity to read a lot of things, but I've been told a lot of things. That has made me a good story teller. So I see myself...I see that woman that I used to see walking up the hill, going up the hill. I realize now that she was a story teller. She was going to tell stories.

I see that South Madison is about to have a new awakening. I think that in the new millenium, we gonna get some movers and shakers politically that are gonna bust South Madison wide open.

I remember people before my generation would go all the way around the block to talk about a subject before they would get to the real point. And people from my generation wouldn't go around the block, but we try to make it as diplomatic and flowery as possible so that we could still be heard. But this new generation, they are just so powerful. They are just straight forward and articulate. These are people who can talk about generations and generations of hardship or successes, and movement, where we didn't have that opportunity.

Mostly all of the people who grew up in South Madison have moved out. So a lot of the real history of the neighborhood has vanished.

I don't mean this in a negative way, probably because of people moving into the neighborhood, the noise, the uncaring about the neighborhood, that we had before is gone. People are leaving. People want to move on different sides of town. There are places where they feel much safer. I'll never forget the few houses that had gates at the door. Now you drive around and its three or four times as many. That's saying something.

I'm hopeful for the community. I think eventually time and people die and pass on. But I hope the newcomers, the people who will make South Madison their home, will learn to love it as much as the people who lived there. A neighborhood center can make that happen. Churches can make that happen. Because that's what made it happen for me. You move to a neighborhood, and besides you living there, what is gonna really make it a neighborhood?

In Milwaukee I was used to curfews. And this was deep to me, in Madison they could call the police department and say the kids are gonna have a dance. And we could stay there all night at the center. Nobody cared because all the parents knew we were there. Very safe place. Somebody look for you, you were at the center.

When you think of all the people here, all the blacks, who they used to work for as maids, seamstress, you name it. These people were doing things for some of the people that most people just hear about. ■

Mary B. Caire

My birthday is October the eighteenth, 1915. I came from Arkansas with my mother up here in 1935.

My father was a very smart man. He was a carpenter. He was a shoemaker, and he could make shingles for houses.

After poppa died we had to wash clothes in Arkansas. We had to go to these people's houses to wash clothes...light the pot outdoors. And we never did get to go in the house.

It was quite bad (in Madison) because they would look at us and almost fall off the street when they'd see us. 'Cause I guess they'd never seen too many black people. Madison was small then. And so they would look at us and see what we were all about, you know. But then we got jobs in the homes. Cleaning floors and washing clothes and cooking dinner and all that. They were nice people.

The Sinaikos were building homes out there and it was all fields of corn and everything, and they cleared all that out and they started building these homes. That's when I bought my house.

When my little girl was a little girl, she was the first little black girl that went to the neighborhood center school (Neighborhood House). She and a little Jewish boy and a little Italian girl. It started there. Mrs. Gray and Miss Braxton, they started this. It was like a nursery school.

I fought for my girls, otherwise they wouldn't have the jobs they have now. They wanted to put her in Title 1 and I say, no she won't. I say she's gonna stay in her regular grade, and she's gonna study and get her grades like everybody else.

When I came up here I was gonna do just like everybody else was doing, white or black. And if they tell me I couldn't do it, I say, you doing it...I'm doing it.

Life is so short. While you're here do the nicest thing you can do, the best you can do 'cause otherwise where are we going? ■

Ines Flores-Grossen

I was born in El Salvador.

This neighborhood is among many hills, and where I'm from, I come from hills in the country. So I liked that, that this is not just a flat place.

I came to Madison because I thought I could get a better education here.

I came March 10, 1980. The Cubans landed March 17, 1980. They sent 125 Cubans to Madison, and they had to teach them English. I had a student visa so they couldn't discriminate. So the government actually paid me $3.35 an hour to go to English classes. And because of that program for the Cubans, a lot of people got in it from different countries. We had Russians. We had people from Chile. We had (Salvador) Allende's secretary in there. It was fun.

It was really good. We could talk about anything in there. We could yell at each other. And of course you have communists and anti-communists, and me, you know. We could say anything as long as it was in English.

I came here in 1980, and the war started in late 1980. I was here when all of a sudden I get a call from my mom, and I could hear the shooting all over on the telephone. And she says, "It's a war here. It's a war here."

The families most hurt in the war were either, you know, somebody bombed your house by mistake, or you have young people in your family and either the government soldiers or the guerrilla soldiers would take the kids to train them. I have cousins that lost their kids like that. The people, some from either side, would come to the house and take whatever you had and the young people.

It's a very interesting neighborhood. We have a lot of all kinds of people in there. My sister and I, of course, Hispanics, and then the next house is a white family. Across from them, two black families live in there. And then on the corner we have had some new people moved in there. They are white. And across from them is some Hmong people, and there is some Chinese people up the hill. There is somebody there from Poland. So it's a lot of people in there from different places.

I think it's cheaper than living in the west side.

I don't think the people in the neighborhood alone cause too much trouble. We have trouble with people that come from other neighborhoods actually. From the trailer park or from the apartments up the hill, or even from out of the neighborhood completely.

We were really well organized last year. We were keeping tracks of every strange car to the neighborhood, you know, and keeping eyes on things so that other people won't come and trash, 'cause we had people that would come and just destroy the park. So this lady lived right on the corner in front of the park. She organized the neighborhood actually. We were doing really well until she left.

They wanted to put us a school where Lyckberg Park is. For one thing, it's peaceful, and you would have a school in there, and there is gonna be a lot of traffic. Then we were gonna have to have sidewalks, and that was a big issue with me. I did not want sidewalks. Then they tried to put a Madison pool in that park. It was the same thing. We went down to city hall, and I think they are still thinking about it, but at least we stalled them for a year so far.

Overall, I like it. But I'm afraid. I'm afraid. We have had too many problems. We had some things going on in the park, you know, where we had called the police. So we got the city to come and cut the bushes that were in the park. And people came there, destroyed all the kids' equipment, you know, the swings and things like that. So now we have a bare park in there. But it's clean. It's frightening for me because things have happened to people...my uncle, a couple guys pointed a gun at him. And also, last summer many of us got our windshields broken because there were people up on the railroad bridge

throwing stones when you were coming by. I was one of them that got nailed. I pretty near crashed my car because of that.

Especially in the past five years, I think, a lot of people from other troubled areas come to live in that neighborhood. They brought their problems with them. Now they are Madison problems. And that attitude that they had over there that they had to defend themselves every day probably, it's with them still. And it's causing problems with people who are not used to that. So if they would educate people, you know, I don't think it's a bad neighborhood.

We used to have a policeman in there that walked the neighborhood. He was really good. But then he got in trouble. I think he's in jail now. That was a big shock. He was really good with the kids. He got a few kids out of trouble, but all of a sudden he gets in trouble.

My daughter, she gets along more with black people than with white people. And all her friends except one girl are black girls. You know my son on the other hand, he likes all the Hmong people. He's even learning words. He just loves to know what they come from and what they did. And the kids explain to him how hard they work before they got here.

It's funny because sometimes you talk to the parents through the kids, because 'specially the Hmong people, the ladies, don't speak very much English.

Two of my friends are Cubans. I love 'em dearly, but don't call me a Cuban 'cause I'm not Cuban. You just territorial of what you are. I want people to know that I am Hispanic, yes, and I am proud of that. But I am also Savadorean. I'm more proud of that. Like everybody that speaks Spanish is Mexican.

Why do they have to separate Black History Month? February is gone. Then what happens after that? If you're going to treat somebody special one day, well, why don't you equally the rest of the year?

We should be a little more organized in getting things together. Maybe it's time to get the neighbors ready again. Maybe during the summer when everybody's out.

Get 'em to get people together from the four neighborhoods and introduce each other and let us know that they are there and what we can do to feel safe. Because I was just thinking now, I don't know if the people from the other side of the bridge are afraid of coming to this side. I know I am afraid to go to the other side. But I don't know if they are afraid to come over here. Because we are so separated by one bridge. We are so close together, and we are so separate. ■

Clara M. Franklin

I was born in Alabama on July 11, 1925.

My mother married a coal miner.

I came to Madison, Wisconsin, in 1950. Used to live on Dayton Street, where the old Methodis' Church was, where the old St. Paul AME used to be on Dayton just right down the hill from downtown. Then we moved on Main Street, right near where they cleared out the Triangle. They (urban renewal) took that one side of Main Street. They removed all the houses from there.

Well, I had five children when I came here. That's what I did. I couldn't do anything else. The weather was one thing. It was colder. I just had to learn to wear more clothes.

And I find that people just wasn't all that friendly, the people that was around me at the time. And so it was kinda lonely for a long time, and it didn't seem to be many black people here. You would go up town and not see anybody, and I wasn't used to that because in the city (Birmingham) even though we were segregated you was shoulder to shoulder on the streets with so many people.

I had a few harsh experiences, but nothing really heavy, with the white race because most of the time we had no contact with each other unless you'd get work someplace. Otherwise, they were there in front and we were there in back.

And we would get introduced to their children and told to call them, even though they were our age or younger, this is mister so-and-so, or miss so-and -so. And I would just choke on that 'cuz I would just rather act dumb than say anything.

And of course we were frightened, as kids, to be caught in the dark. We really were frightened because we thought somebody white might come by and do something to us which they could do and wouldn't be anything done about it, you know. So if darkness caught us after my grandma would send us to the store to sell the eggs or something, if dusk caught us, we would hide. If we saw car lights coming we would all hide down beside the road so we couldn't be seen. I guess that was just kind of an element of fear. I guess you become used to it. You learn these different ways to survive and exist and have some kind of control even though you might think you don't have any. You try to express yourself. You rebel in some sense or some way at some time, you know.

When I came here on Dayton Street it was practically all African-American people there, a little community that were all African-American people that lived there, so I didn't see too many white people at first, just when my kids had to go to school. It's just that I wasn't used to being in a social situation with white people. And that was just something that I had to get used to instead of withdrawing myself.

Even though I didn't have anything elaborate down south, at least I had a wringer washing machine there, and a place to myself you know, with my kids. But now I didn't have.

When he found out we were black he didn't sell us the house, and so it was kinda' hard to find anything near town. We never found anything. So then we came out this way. From what you heard about South Madison, it was like out in the country somewhere. We didn't want to move out here. But since this was the only area we could find a house in, we did.

I think people had discrimination because people would just refuse to sell it to you. It's not all that much better now, really. With children and everything, it's still hard to find some place to live.

I remember I applied for a job in a restaurant and they told me they hadn't had no call for black people. No call for black people? I never figured that one out because down south you could get a job as a waitress anytime. And so that's one difference where everyone up here competes for jobs whether you're black or whether you're white. But there, that was what you might specify as a black person's job. Anything like a waitress or a cook or a elevator operator, a domestic. I was just shocked when they said they didn't have a

call. They had to have somebody say, "I want a black for a waitress?"

South Madison wasn't as convenient because it was way out from uptown. The bus didn't go all the way out where it's going now. It came down Park Street and you had to walk over. And then they moved it over to Beld Street. We didn't have any gutters and sidewalks. All the rest that was up the hill was just apple orchards. Where those apartments are was just apple orchards.

They all used the neighborhood center and Saint Martin's House.

I think it was more of a mixture of whites and black people out here then. Every other house was a white person. It was very mixed.

There wasn't any sidewalks. The road out there was dirt sides. And this street that goes by the center (Center Street) was open all the way through from Park Street. There was a great big drainage ditch right in front of the church. They filled it in and put in Quaker Housing. The miniature golf course used to take the whole hill down the street next to Penn Park. It ran all the way up the hill where those apartments are now. That used to be a miniature golf course. They moved out on the beltline.

I moved here because we had to move here. We didn't find any place else to go. I don't know why other people moved out here. There wasn't an awful lot of black people here.

There was a lot of land out here available which I imagine that the black people that was wise enough to buy the land, they knew that and they took advantage of it and bought land, and then they built on it when they could afford it, did the best they could. So that's when all that became the community. Because there was a lot of open land out this way.

My kids started at Lapham school. Then they went to a school on Dayton, I think it was called Washington. They went there for a little while before they closed it. Then they went to Longfellow, which is right across from Madison General. And when we moved over here, then they went to Franklin. Before then I had never really had any problems at those schools. But the majority of black children were at Franklin school because the majority of black people was living out here in South Madison.

Everything is different than when I first moved here. The streets improved. There's more housing. The transportation is better. The bus goes right past my door. You have a daycare center. You have a community center. You have a senior citizens housing. You have the drug store. You have the clinic just in walking distance, at Harambee there. And you have a filling station and restaurants, fast-food places. And you have a grocery store at Kohl's. There's two schools, hospitals. To me, it's much more. Then with the influx of people, there's much more problems than we had. We didn't used to have as many problems as we have now with drugs and things that happen in the neighborhood, the terrible things. But I think everything is better than it was when we moved here.

Most of us would have a hard time selling our property if we wanted to. Not that people find anything wrong with your property. It's the neighborhood. And so we still have this bad stain on the neighborhood which I don't think we're any worse than other neighborhoods. Anything that happens out this way, the media still calls it South Madison. Even if it happens right at Monona's door, it's still South Madison.

We are just like anybody else. We are just here. We live here. So if something happens down the street or over there, we're as shocked as anybody else.

We have our Bram's Addition Neighborhood Association. What we are interested in is trying to get people that own property and rent here to come out and let's all join together so we can fight for our neighborhood. Where we can stand up against all these people that's coming in, and making the whole neighborhood look bad, and making people move out. We want people to move in and stay in.

But if we don't work together, if we don't see it as a blessing, and see it as good, what we have, and realize that what's happened in other cities...that everything leaves and people have to travel for miles to get to the supermarkets and they have to have a car or actually have to haul all their food on the bus or whatever. It's a hardship. That's what happens when you let these things take over in your neighborhood.

You have to fight for everything you get. I don't think we've been political enough. We have a very low

voting average.

The first alderman was Ed Hill. He lived right on the corner there. And he was the first black alderman.

Back then we would gather once a year down at the union hall on Park Street, out on the grounds there, during the Lenten season and beginning of spring for a service outside.

The first thing we want to do is get rid of all the drug activity out there. I think then if we had more activities for the young people to get them off the street...jobs for them. More housing for the families and more training for the young girls on up so we could stop all these children having children.

It's the instruction of Jesus in the bible to love one another. Then we won't harm one another. If we love each other, everyone looks the same. Stop going on this color, the color of the skin. As long as we keep looking at a person's skin color, we are always going to find fault with each other. So that's the desire, to live together in unity and in peace. So see every person as a person, and treat them just the way I would like to be treated. ■

Jewell Freeman

If I can make it until the fourth of October, (2000) I'll be 85.

My father, he was a family of 15 kids. And they was supposed to been sold. They come to South Carolina.

And then we went there, and the stand is still there. Where they sold 'em from. And I asked him, how come they don't tear it down. He said they don't want to. It's history. And so he told me that was where they sold us at.

Madison (1944) was raggedy and prejudiced. You couldn't get a house. It was hard to get a place to live.

Wasn't nothin' out here but mud, weeds, mosquitoes. Raggedy houses. Mud and weeds. And a lot of Italians...liquor joints and woods.

Mount Zion is sittin' on part of the spot that we had there. It was raggedy. Roaches and mouses and big rats, I guess. The kids still laughs about one rat comin' out from somewhere. And their daddy jumped up from bein' scared a the rat, and when he come down he killed the rat.

And where Kohl's is, there was nothin' there. There was nothin' there clean to the creek. They used to pick up snow and then dump it down where Kohl's is.

Early '50s I guess. And before that we lived in a little house, 'bout a inch or two below where we lived when we lived behind where Mount Zion is.

And there used to be a trailer camp, trailers, down where McDonald's and the bus station is. It had dogs, mud, weeds, and everything else.

But the kids had to be in at 9. Not thinkin' of goin' home at 9. But they had to already be home at 9 o'clock. And had no problems out here. None whatsoever.

I worked at St. Mary's Hospital. I cleaned and made beds behind the patients that had babies. I was there 24 years. And then before that though, I worked at different restaurants. And I worked at the Greyhound Bus Station for eight years. Washed dishes there.

And they'd get mad with you if you spoke about it (union), 'cause they did put out cards once. Somebody was callin' a secret...you know. But then they say if they found out you belonged to it you'd get fired.

Black people come here sayin' there wasn't no black teachers and this and that. I got up and I told 'em off. My kids had never had a black teacher. And I said, they got it. They got it cause I told 'em they had to get it. I told 'em that you better get it, and they got it. Ever one of 'em got a high school education.

I used to ride the bus every day in the week. But I don't do it no more cause they messed up the bus ride. Now I hear that they done raised the fare so high that I don't wanna pay that.

I like to sew. I don't count myself a professional, but I think I do a pretty good job there. ■

Jonathan D. Gramling

It's so hard to define what South Madison is. It seems to be pretty much synonymous with the African-American community, and it is almost like a buzz word if you wanted to say "African-American community" without saying it. So back in the late '70s, early '80s, South Madison was pretty much, to me, Burr Oaks, part of the Town of Madison, and then Bram Hill. And then through the years people started referring to South Madison as Broadway-Simpson, as the African-American community there grew pretty large. The same with Allied Drive. So it began to take on the connotation of the entire south beltline corridor. Although they never referred to Arbor Hills as South Madison although Arbor Hills is in between South Madison and Allied Drive, but they kind of skip that part. Or the UW arboretum, those houses in the UW arboretum are part of the Town of Madison, so really are South Madison, but they are not ever really referred to or considered to be South Madison.

I had people tell me I didn't live in South Madison, and I lived like a block or two from Park Street. I always thought you can't get any more South Madison than that. But it's just as a Euro-American that it wasn't possible for me to live in South Madison because of people's stereotypical images of who lived in South Madison.

I think people have always thought of it as having a higher crime rate than it really did have. There were areas in the isthmus, State Street and areas like that that had higher crime rates.

The housing was affordable, and we were also an interracial marriage, and so I felt it was important for my kids to grow up in an area that had many African Americans and multiracial, multicultural areas.

In the late '70s, early '80s, South Madison was very close where everyone knew each other. It wasn't real large so that you go to the South Madison block party, and you would know everybody. Everybody would say hello. As it evolved, as the African-American community experienced a great growth rate during the '80s and into the '90s, it kind of lost some of that cohesiveness in the sense that you didn't know everybody.

A lot of people migrated here from other areas, whether it be down south or Chicago, so South Madison was almost the port of entry for many people who were immigrating to this area. And then there were a lot of long-standing South Madison families during the '80s and '90s who basically moved out. The kids got well-paying jobs and things like that, so that in some ways South Madison really changed. It lost a lot of its anchors. A lot of the cornerstones of the community either died or moved away.

I think it's important to have strong institutions rooted in the community. The Boys and Girls Club has gotten a lot stronger so that it's able to offer a lot of programing. It provides structure for the kids who are coming here.

Back in the mid-to-late '80s, it was almost 82 percent rental properties, 18 percent owner-occupied dwellings in South Madison. A really high percentage of rental units. That creates a lot of transition.

There is a significant number of African-American landlords who have purchased apartment buildings on Magnolia and Badger Road who have a stake, an investment in the community. You need that kind of presence.

I know there was a lot of conflict just being on the South Madison Neighborhood Center board. People always had a problem and there always seemed to be fights and fussing and stuff like that. There was an estrangement from city hall. People had a real skepticism about city hall, and felt that South Madison had been underfunded for years. It wasn't until the early '80s that Park Street evolved from a country road to a four-lane street.

It's interesting how perceptions of public housing evolve over time. During the '50s and '60s and early '70s, it was kind of a boon to have the number of units that were placed in South Madison where you've got Quaker Housing on Bram Hill and some on Baird Street. It was kind of a godsend. And it's like now, well, everything is subsidized housing. Does it hold the community back?

This is something that has been told to me by a guy who has been called "the mayor of Park Street." There were many African-American families who moved here from the Bush area. And there were several African-

American businesses that had been on West Washington Avenue, and when the families moved here, most of the African-American businesses would be on Beld Street, and Gilson. And it's because the property owners here conspired not to sell land or rent on Park Street to any of the African-American businesses. And this guy told us he was proud of what he did..."the mayor of Park Street." So that kind of stultified the development of African-American-owned businesses here.

The South Madison Community Development Corporation funded between six and eight African-American-owned businesses (mid '80s) during the six years they were providing loans. When Paul Soglin was reelected, I think in the late '80s, he wanted to kind of do his own thing, and South Madison Community Development Corporation was looked at as the creation of Joe Sensenbrenner, and so therefore he pretty much let it dissolve.

There are now at least two Latino businesses in the Villager. And so there's a lot of minority-owned enterprises that are really starting to develop here.

I think the hopefulness is based on the neighborhood center here. There are also the things over in the Harambee Center, different services for children including the library. They've got Lincoln elementary school close by.

If things keep developing, I think South Madison will be fine. South Madison has always survived. It's always been a real tough, surviving area no matter what's happened here.

It does have problems of drugs and crime. But there is also strength of tradition here. A lot of the kids who have grown up here in South Madison have gone on to do quite well. I don't see why that shouldn't be the case for the generation coming up.

People have always had to kind of fight the odds who lived here. There are many temptations in South Madison, you could say, if you're talking about drugs and so on. Many kids succeed in spite of that, so you really know you've got someone with character who's grown up around here that still succeeded moving on with their lives. There are so many families here who try to raise their kids the right way and succeed.

Any kind of blanket statement about South Madison does it a disservice because it is so diverse. Some areas are very stable. Some are unstable.

There is some degree of segregation in South Madison, but not as segregated as the rest of the city. I think the city of Madison is real tenuous in its relationship with its communities of color. People don't know how to feel at home with communities of color. In terms of community interaction, Madison's just got a long ways to go.

I know that it was easy for Madison to cope when the communities of color were relatively small, maybe kind of scattered. There wasn't anything threatening.

I went to a primarily black university. Back then there were about 2,500 students, and I was one of five Euro-American students. It really made me appreciate what it meant to be different, how people can sometimes have attitudes about you, yet what great relationships that I developed there.

When I moved here there was the Eagle grocery store, and there was the Burr Oaks Shopping Center. There was Borman's and a lot of other stores. On the other side you had the Golden Pheasant, kind of like a restaurant-bar, and the service station at the corner of Badger and Park. McDonald's was there. Kmart was there. There was also Save U Foods. The Red Cross was the other side of Kmart. And then people just started moving out of the Burr Oaks shopping center. The Eagle closed. The Save U Foods closed down. Kmart left. The business district just started getting drained in the early '80s. That's when the economic decay started. So it's nice to see some of the businesses springing up. I hope the Genesis Development Corporation is very successful in growing businesses.

Part of that was the overall trend in terms of Main Street to the malls in suburbia. But it was more noticeable here, I think, than other parts of the city. And part of that I think was race played a factor as well as relatively small household incomes.

In spite of everything that happens or has happened to people, they have an optimism, a belief, and a hope in the future. I think part of that springs from the Baptist tradition, that springs all the way back to slavery and perhaps before that, that sense of optimism in spite of the reality of the situation you might find yourself in. Hope springs eternal because what choice do you have but to be optimistic? People survive and succeed in spite of those odds. ■

Richard H. Harris, Ph.D.

I was born in Madison April 14, 1937, and raised at 405 Bram Street. My parents bought the property in 1924. To me at that time my world consisted of Baird Street, Bram Street, Fisher Street, the old Park Street which is now Beld Street, and across Park Street to what was a golf course called Burr Oaks Golf Course. That was my world, and that area was inhabited predominantly by blacks who had all moved to South Madison and purchased their homes. I never realized until I got older that we were in a very distinct minority, that except for pockets of blacks, the city was totally white. My immediate surrounding was 80 to 90 percent black.

All my friends lived in homes. There were no apartments. All of our friends had fathers in the homes. I don't recall anyone living or growing up fatherless. And all the men seemed to be about six-foot-eight. They were all working in unskilled areas because job discrimination was tremendously rampant.

The other thing that I recall is everyone had a small family garden where they raised cabbage, greens, string beans, tomatoes, and practically every house had an apple tree in the back. There was always enough food on the table. We were clothed sufficiently. Life consisted of going to school and then going to church.

My dad only had a second grade education. My mother was a very strong person. She was the one who would really make the key decisions about the house.

Her family had a run-in with a white person. It was over parking, in those days horse and buggies. This fellow pulled out a long pistol and shot at my cousin. He missed him, but my cousin, who had a rifle under his seat board, he shot him and he blew his shoulder off. So it was felt that the family should get out of Georgia because of night riders and what have you.

They said it was the most...they didn't use "racist" as that time...but bigotry to them was just as rampant here as it was in the south. And it wasn't sophisticated.

They went to apply for a loan. The first thing the banker said was we don't have any problem making a loan to you, but the house has to be built in one of three areas: South Madison, the Bush, or the near east side, nowhere else. And we found out that's what they told a lot of other people.

We had outhouses. We had cold water. We had to pump the water to put in a big galvanized tub, make the fire. We had to take a bath every night.

Bus service was tremendously poor. The Park Street bus ran once an hour. Whereas to Nakoma and everywhere else it was every 15 minutes.

An admissions person said to get into the University of Wisconsin there were 10 criteria. This is why I get so upset when people argue against affirmative action. If you were a former 4-H student you got in. If you were a former Future Farmers of America. If your parents were members of what they called the Sons and Daughters of Norway. Even if your grades weren't good, they would accept you on probation. But just when the issue of race was raised, they said no, no, no. In other words, they changed the rules of the game because it would have benefited minorities.

When I graduated from university I worked part-time at the South Madison Neighborhood Center.

My mother and a man by the name of George Gerard and another person named Kenneth Newville, the three of them alternated having children over for social recreational activities. It got so popular that they began to have 30 and 40 children each night. They approached Chester Zmudzinski, who was the director of the Madison Neighborhood Center and the Madison Neighborhood House on West Washington Avenue. That must have been about 1945. They then talked to a congressman from Wisconsin, his name was Glen Davis. He began to look at old military barracks at Truax, and they told him they had a surplus of military barracks. They said you just have to move them. So they began to talk...to move both buildings up East Washington Avenue, around the square, down West Washington Avenue, down off Park Street to the present site where the South Madison Neighborhood Center is.

At that time in the '50s, it was just coming into what we know now as soul music, black music by black artists. And the black music was entirely different than white music. White music was very slow, restrained such as Patti Page and those people...Tennessee Waltz type music. Whereas ours was more emotional. I remember Hank Ballard and the Midnighters, the Drifters, Johnny Ace. It was the original rhythm and blues...Ruth Brown, James Brown. We went to Chicago to see him at a place called the Regal Theatre on 47th Street. You could see James Brown and the Famous Flames and a movie for 50 cents. Jimmy Reed and Joe Turner.

The churches didn't move out here until 1960.

The future of South Madison was pretty bleak. First, they wanted to have a waste dump out here, and the other was to have it as an industrial site. Then they built the community center. The city planners said we don't know what is going to be here in the next 10 or 15 years. You may be making a mistake. That whole area which is called Burr Oaks was a golf course where Lincoln school is. The Villager Mall was the beginning of the golf course. Whoever owned that golf course really made a tremendous mistake. As I understand it, they just panicked and almost gave it away.

In Madison, it's always been felt that the city used urban renewal to replace primarily blacks, Italians, and Jews who were low income...because that was considered really prime property, only about a mile or two from the capitol. In effect they had indicated that the people could move back, but they really had no intention. They sold it to a developer. The apartments were out of sight as far as cost. The city realized they made a mistake, so to compensate for it they had that little area called Bayview, which was the only area left, which was very small compared to the area that was originally there. They sort of changed the traffic patterns in South Madison. That started about 1955. The best thing was putting in curbs and gutters, encouraging Mount Zion Baptist Church, Reverend Joe Dawson, to move from Johnson Street, encouraging Dane County with city monies to put in Madison's first day care, and refurbishing the center. It was a much different look to South Madison.

In my world, when I was a child, to me I thought all of Madison was black because all I saw were black people. I would see whites, but they seemed to be in the minority.

I think the changes in demographics began to come around in the early '60s and in the '70s there was a tremendous change. Whites had moved out. More blacks had moved in. Not too many Hispanic, Southeast Asians, or American Indians. What struck me was the fact that there was an increase of professional blacks who moved into the broader South Madison area. Blacks began to build and buy homes up in the Ardmore Drive area, all over in Burr Oaks, and then others began to build on the west side. Very few black people moved to the east side, which was considered blue collar, ethnic, rigid, conservative types of people.

A lot of people think that the Greenbush area was the port of entry for black people when they came to Madison. I've disputed that because I thought that the port of entry was South Madison. There was no more room in the Bush. When urban renewal came up, a lot of blacks moved out here. They were just forced out. That's where discrimination kicked in because they couldn't purchase homes in other areas of the city, so the only area left was South Madison. The change in demographics came about in the 1940s, '50s, but you really saw it dramatically in the '60s.

I can recall a case in Mississippi of the brutal lynching murder of a 13-year-old from Chicago whose name was Emmett Till, who had gone to Mississippi to be with his relatives. He was in this little country store, and this white woman clerk accused him of whistling at her. He talked with a lisp. And he also didn't say "yes ma'am." When he got outside the other kids said you should have said "yes ma'am," and you shouldn't whistle. He said I wasn't whistling. That night she told her husband, he told his uncle, and about 10 of them came. So they beat him to death. They beat him with ball peen hammers, and threw him in the river. They brought his body back, and his mother said I want the city of Chicago to see what they did to my boy. So we went down to Chicago, myself and about 10 or 12 students during the summer, really hot, maybe like 1955. We stood in the sun for hours waiting to go to the mortuary. We got into the funeral home and here in this casket, a little casket, and this boy, he was small for his age, he looked like he was about seven or eight years of age, a very small kid, and his face was like a mask. The trial lasted about two days and the men were acquitted because the jury realized that they did it, but no white man had been convicted of lynching a black person in Mississippi, and they didn't want to be the first jury.

We were all exposed to discrimination. No one challenged it. In the south it was written statutes. In the north it was unwritten practices. But you knew them. And still there was no one who challenged it up until the civil rights movement.

We knew what we could do and what we couldn't do. It was sort of a given that the white community had fostered on blacks, that this was your role in life. It wasn't a matter of being idyllic, which is more of a pleasant good time. It wasn't that they were pleasant good times. It was more that these were the only times that were affordable to us.

When you think about Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and these black ministers, whether they be Baptist, or Methodist, or Apostolic, how they had to change the whole mentality of the south for two things...one to get black people to stand together united, and to stand up to the fear and intimidation of white society. Once the civil rights movement began, it impacted people in the north. People in the north said we don't have to take this either. These are unwritten laws. We began to challenge them. Then whites began to say black people are uppity. Why don't we turn back to the good old days? Well, the good old days to white America up until 1950 were not good for us black people. It was the acceptance days. They weren't good, but you had to accept them. If we'd had our druthers, we would have wanted freedom and equality like anyone else. And South Madison was no different than any other community. I think we were all brought up with the feeling that this was life until Dr. King came along to challenge it, not only in the south but also to challenge discrimination in the north, east, and west.

You had to begin then to suspect the moves of any white person. The first question that came up in our minds was what's their agenda?

People have said Madison has been a liberal community. I never thought Madison was a liberal community. I don't know where they ever got that idea. They say it's because of the university. I can tell you, the university is probably the most rigid institution to come down the pike in relation to policies. Madison itself is filled with rigid people. So where that liberal title came from I don't know.

South Madison has been able to maintain its stability through it all. Other people may label South Madison as a substandard area. It's come a long way. The descendants of the original South Madison settlers, relatives of those people, have stayed in South Madison and have given it stability.

I think South Madison has been left behind economically. The decision to build was made on studies that these research people have conducted. And that was that you've got a lot of black people living here. *Ergo*, you have low income, you have crime, you have violence. These are myths, because South Madison's police call rate is no larger than it is on the east side, the campus area, what have you.

Sooner or later the city is going to have to develop a good economic plan for South Madison. If you don't have an economic plan for South Madison, the east, west, and north sides of Madison will go down. You cannot have a section of town this large being out of the economic mainstream and maintain a viable community. It just won't happen.

South Madison back in the '30s and '40s was considered a vast swamp and wasteland by the city fathers, not worth putting that much into. That myth is carried on today, that South Madison is still not worthy of east, west, and north.

If you go to the schools right now, you see many more non-whites. That's really the future of Madison. If they're not included in the economic planning, the city will destroy itself. It will be destroyed.

I don't see anything from the city planners which would lead me to believe that they seriously have given some thought to bringing South Madison into the economic loop. That means that decisions are still made with the thought of how can we benefit whites rather than how can we help South Madison. If it reaches that point and the city does not make any plans, I don't think the problems can be reversed. I think it will be just too late.

That's how decisions are made. Not the fair way. The fair way would be to say, if you don't want to have the school in Allied Drive, and we don't want it in Country Day, then let's find the happy medium and bus both groups in.

I remember Eddie Withers because he was the first black to play football at the University of Wisconsin to make All American. I recall he would make it a point to meet with as many black boys, to encourage us to finish high school and go to some college. At first we didn't understand what he was talking about. ■

Gerald Herr

I was born in Laos in Southeast Asia. I came to the United States in the year 1984. I lived in Appleton for one year. In '85 I moved to Madison.

The United States joined South Vietnam in the fight for the North Vietnam. So the American people come to Laos and they asked Hmong leaders to help them cut the Ho Chi Minh trail. So we joined the United States CIA (Central Intelligence Agency) to cut the Ho Chi Minh trail. I think that the leaders, they have a negotiation. If we could not win the war, they gonna take us to the United States. After the U.S. withdraw from South Vietnam, we could not stay in Laos either, so we escaped to Thailand. In a camp in Thailand then we started to interview to come to the United States.

I joined the United States in 1971. I was a soldier. I got shot, and I got a broken arm. And in 1975 the government escaped from Laos to Thailand or to other countries. At that time we tried to stay in Laos, but the communists took over Laos. They tried to search for the people who helped the CIA. And they take them to jail or they just kill them, so in 1975 in October we started to fight again. We used the old supplies of the United States the CIA left for us, and we start fighting again until '82. And we could not win. We are out of supplies. So at that time I escaped to Thailand. In 1982.

In Thailand, you pass the interview so you have the right to come to United States. So the United States government provide a ESL (English as a second language) program in Bangkok, Thailand, to train you how to speak a little bit and how to use the things in the United States.

I have two brothers in Madison. I have some friends. So that's why I decide to move to Madison. It's a good decision because I have friend, my old friend, we used to live together in Laos.

I went to MATC (Madison Area Technical College) to start my ESL 4. We go to ESL 5 and 6, and then you go to pre-GED (general equivalency diploma), and then you got your GED. And I went to two years in the technical college, and then in 1990 I got my job in the school district of Madison. My position they call the bilingual resource specialist. Mostly I work with the Southeast Asian children.

According to myself or my friends, when we first came to Madison we live in public housing, low-income housing. Now each of us got a job, and we buy around this area.

I think most of the Hmong people we are living in South Madison around here and Badger Road. Because we are the poor people. We cannot make enough money to go to the west or east or wherever the many whites are living. Because those houses are very expensive. So we can't afford that.

I have a cousin that just bought a duplex at the Sun Prairie area. So I think some neighbors they don't like them, and they just come out to throw the eggs. They keep throwing eggs toward them.

This is not a problem for me. Myself I don't have any problem with the people, the neighbors. We have very good neighbors, white or black or Spanish or whatever. We get along. Myself, I have no problem with them. And they seem to like me too.

I compare because I grew up in my country. Many differences. The modern country and the very poor country, you know. Sometimes you don't quite understand the very modern country like United States. Sometimes make you depressed too.

It used to be that society, and then you move to the other society. A grown-up person like me, is very difficult for me to change my person to one society to the other society. But in my country I was an educator too. But most people don't have the education in Laos. So when they came to the United States they could not help themselves. And their kids always be an American way, and most the parents they get depressed. They think about suicide. They think about some bad thing like kill themselves. In this country it is very difficult for the older Hmong people.

In Laos most of our people are just farmers. Mostly live in the high lands. So it's very difficult. Very

tough time. I have a older brother. He has eight children. All the children not listen to him. They just do whatever they want to do. And he is very depressed. He was a soldier for the CIA in Laos, and he shoot a lot the bazooka. So his ear is deaf.

In this country it's very difficult for you to discipline your kids. You have to follow the law or the rules of the United States here. And your kids are going around, and they are not going to school. They blame you. They say, why don't you take care of your kids? And when you discipline them, they say, that's not right for you to discipline like that.

I don't see "South Madison." This is America.

I'm the clan leader of the Her family in Madison. So of course when we have some occasion like New Year's celebration, I go if they need a speech to say something.

I like the city to provide more policemen to work around this area. So to eliminate the people who try to sell some bad thing like drugs in this area. I like this area to be valuable in the future.

Last two years they kill black men on the corner there. So this make me very scared. In this country, since you live peaceful, something like this happens and it makes you very scared. I still don't understand why they say they work with the law and they control people. But they are not going to do what they say. They are not really working like the law say. They are not working hard. According to my country, they have the police work harder than this country.

We don't talk about the good people. We just talk about the bad people. Even my people. We have some good people, we have some bad people. Any kind of people, we have some good ones and bad ones. I don't blame every white people. I don't blame everybody. Just some.

My name is Ger. And when I become a United States citizen, I add a-l-d.

I worked in the office of a group of soldiers. Each group of us had one American. The person I worked with, when I got to the United States I asked for him. I met one of his friends. He told me that he was killed at Angola, Africa. I think he was still working CIA.

He was white. They didn't send any black CIA to my country. No. All white. No black people there. ■

Peaches Lacey

I came here when I was 10 years old. I had come from Chicago.

I had not really been used to seeing as many non-people of color 'til I came here actually. I had never been on a farm. It was actually an apple orchard in Verona. Very pretty, you know, but strange.

I went to Franklin school that was on Lakeside. And then when Lincoln opened up as a middle school I went to Lincoln. And then when I went to high school I went to Central. My mother graduated from there too, in 1938.

When I first came here they couldn't pronounce my name. It was really different because all my teachers at the time in Chicago were either black or Puerto Rican. So that's all you knew. My principals were black.

Had to really come up to Beld Street, then you got to Beld Street, then a lot of African Americans like on Baird and Fisher and Taft. Those were basically where a lot of the African Americans lived.

The South Madison Neighborhood Center was the height of all of our growin' up. Which is now the Boys and Girls Club. We just basically grew up here. The center was basically our focus. This was where we came to teen night on Friday nights, and had our little record spins. This was where we had sleep overs, pajama parties, things like that.

In fact my mom could have got me to do almost anything just as long as they didn't take Teen Night away from me. I think I really could of stood havin' a whuppin' as long as I could come to the center on teen night.

Typical teen night. Sometimes we would have a talent night. Some of the teens and kids from the neighborhood would put on a little show. They'd sing and dance to music or whatever. We first started out we had a juke box here.

I think there became less and less African-American students coming to the university or being recruited. As the years went on, there seemed to be a separation between the community and the university. The community didn't include the university as much, or the university didn't include the community as much with the togetherness like it had been.

Things just don't happen like they used to. I've noticed in the last 8 or 10 years that the people in certain forms of leadership, it seems like they have to wade through so much stuff in order to help people. It's like they have a lot to lose now. And because of that they have to really weigh when somebody brings some kind of issue to them. If they are gonna put themselves out there to help the people or not. To help people sometimes may be restricting or may come from the fact that they been burned a couple a times, and you get burned enough you learn that that's the fire and you don't want any part of it.

I don't know where this tunnel vision comes from. There used to be a time when people would pick up on anybody who wanted to serve. Now, it's like, do you have enough education? Or should we listen to what that person says? Or I saw this person in a compromising place, so I don't know if I want them to do something else over here. That to me is really a difficult situation.

Harvey Scales and the Seven Sounds used to come here on a real regular basis...used to play down on campus all the time, out of Milwaukee.

So if "Baby Love" by the Supremes was number one, it was hard for them not to play that here because it was number one. It still wasn't a thing where you could hear them all the time. To this day it's still not. Which is one of the reasons why it's so good that we have WORT-FM here. Because it gives us a chance to kind of let people know what may be going on with the different music.

And then of course, Madison did things a little later than anybody else. It could have been played two years ahead in Chicago, and then it came here two years later.

Etta James, she wasn't as popular as the Supremes. But she got some really beautiful music. She went through a lotta struggles. The things that women would get involved in, when you start comin' into a male-dominated industry like the entertainment industry. Barbara Acklin did some beautiful stuff, and people don't even know who she is. Billboard didn't start tracking R & B music until '64 or '65, so there's no record before then. Only the collectors would have this actual music.

A lot of the early artists, they just wanted to sing. They didn't know anything about the business itself, and a lot of things were lost in respect to rights, copyrights and stuff like that.

There was a song done by a new artist, LL Cool J or someone like that, who said don't bring up Little Richard because he will die and he will still be broke.

We always have to go a little bit further than the next person. And that's really kinda' hard sometimes, 'cause you can only fight for so long before you get tired.

There's been a lot of different agencies that have socials, fairs, programing, and all of us dibbin' and dabbin' for the same amount of money really started putting the cramp on people's initiatives to do things. But the block party was just too fun. You'd plan all year for it, and then one day you see it come together. It's good to see stuff come together.

I think there is definitely a gap between the haves and the have nots. I could say 10 years ago, maybe 12, I could still consider myself in the middle class. But I'm definitely not there now. A lot of people that had just one job before are now working a job and a half.

They're not gonna put that in the papers. It's kind of contradictory because mainstream world says that you should be doing things as honest as possible and all that kind of thing. But they're not really giving the real story about stuff. We can put up a new maximum security prison. That makes absolutely no sense to me. Nobody can tell me that they can see better (need) for a prison than they can see giving more money for a more comfortable wage for people who are working in nursing homes and hospitals and home health care.

You've got one percent that's making a lot of the rules and policies and procedures. And they wouldn't know what it would be like to make less than what they are making. It's just not logical to me, if somebody has to go through these changes and work two or three part-time jobs just because they cannot make ends meet. And we're talking about people that don't have any debt really.

Just because I can't afford to have someplace really expensive doesn't mean I won't take care of a place and try to be productive in the community. Madison is a big town with big degrees. If you're just not way up there and you're single, you're gonna be strugglin'. And it really shouldn't have to be like that. People should at least be able to have a decent place to stay. ■

Blossom Maiden (Feb. 19, 1904-Jan. 3, 2000)

I was born in 1904 in Clarendon, Arkansas. I went one year to Rockford (Illinois) College. Then my parents sent me to Arkansas Baptist College that's located in Little Rock. I didn't finish college. I got married. In 1926 we came to Madison.

Because I took home economics, I had the experience of doing large quantities of food. So I got a job with the YMCA because that was large crowd, and I prepared the meals and made the menus up there.

I'm one of the mothers of the church. That mean that any young person that will join Mount Zion, if there's anything that we know to help them out to get active in the church, the mothers will do that. We see that the linen is always kept clean. And baptizing, we see that the downs ready for those that come in to be baptized. Lots of responsibilities.

Reverend Washington was the first one, and then Reverend Dawson, and Reverend Wright was the next one that I know of because really I was Methodist until I married. And for a while after we were married I continued to go to St. Paul's but it doesn't work out when you're divided like that so I finally came to Mount Zion.

I sew. I have my machine in the bedroom. I'm not an expert, but if someone wants something simple, I'll do it. I finished the skirt. I'm on the blouse now. That's for my daughter.

I like to read, oh yes. I read mostly books that contains life. Real life stories. I wouldn't be without the paper. And last night's paper made me very, very sad...that boy that killed that baby. And then one of our firemen...

I didn't really know my mother. It was a stepmother that brought me up. They said my mother passed when I was three. But a very good stepmother.

My father had a strawberry farm. After he found out the lizards were so bad, they run so fast, he made me stay at the weigh station where they bring their strawberries in. Sure I was afraid of them. They be runnin' so fast.

Treat others like you'd like to be treated. That's my motto. ■

Ben Parks

I came to Madison in 1953. I was born and raised in Georgia.

The white kids had a brick school. But ours was wood frame, but it was a nice school. It didn't have any runnin' water, you know, back then. The white school, they had it I'm sure. Course I never saw jus' the outside, you know.

When I come to Madison they were sayin' it was about 300 black people. You could walk around the square pretty much three or four hours and never meet a black person.

I lived on Fisher Street, Baird Street, Koster Street underneath the viaduct over there. Capitol View Heights I think they call it now.

Everybody seemed to be happy back during the Greenbush days. It was better than where I came from, that's for sure. But it was prejudiced here, just like it is now, back then. You couldn't find a place to live. That was my main concern.

A white person had a house, had an apartment for rent. And they wouldn't rent it to us. You'd call 'em, and when you go to 'em they see black, and that's when most of the time you'd have a problem.

If people can get away with it they still won't rent even today. I've come in contact with guys who say they had to get their white friend to go and get it because, you know, they say it's just been taken if it were a black person.

They were scattered. Some of 'em lived on the east side. Some of 'em lived in the Bush. And Mr. John Hill had a store over there on Dayton and Blount. Him and his son and some black people in that area. And South Madison was the main area for black people. It seemed to have been. But it was still mixed.

The barber shop I worked in got moved out of the Greenbush area. He had to close it down. And then Reverend James Wright come along, and he was building a shop, so I decided to work for him.

Reverend Wright was a good man to work for. I learned a lot from him. I've seen him give his coat almost off the back to people. I was around him more when he was a barber then. You know he was the equal opportunity commission too. He was a good man. Madison miss somebody like him.

They were going to develop it, the Bush, I guess. And people didn't want to move. The Jewish people, the Italian people didn't want to move either. It was kinda' rough on 'em cause we was set in our old ways, you know, wasn't ready for changes...that type a change. But when I first come to Madison I recall that it's still a few outhouses in '53. And the streets wasn't paved out here in South Madison. Lot of 'em wasn't.

Penn Park was here. That's the first thing I saw when I come to Madison. I was on the train, and it passed Penn Park.

I liked to play sports, basketball and baseball. Hardball. I thought I played fairly decent hardball. When I come up here we had a team (1953). We used to play against the white guys. All our team was black. And there was prejudice in that because the guys that was umpirin' the game, they would deliberately be doin' cheatin' for no good reason. We used to play in Black Earth, all around, Dodgeville. After a while I stopped playin' because when I was going to my apprenticeship in school they didn't want barbers to play baseball. I caught a bad ball. It hit my fingers and I couldn't use my shears.

I loved to play baseball, I did. I pitched. I caught. When I quit I was pitchin'. I pitched right handed. Penn Park, there was a big diamond there before they put that shelter house there. We played in Breese Stevens Field. I used to love to play in that field. Easy to hit home runs there for a left hander.

You could say it was integrated. The Bush was integrated, and I guess you could go to any bar and feel comfortable. I was a non-drinker so I didn't go to the bar hardly ever. I've heard guys tell stories though that some bars that you went to and order a drink, they'd pour it in the glass and when they'd finish it, they'd break the glass. I've heard that story quite a few times.

The community underneath the viaduct wasn't there, and then they built that up because I built the house underneath the viaduct there myself. Quite a few black people lived underneath the viaduct.

You know the truth about it right today probably be it is a problem. I don't know whether it's because the people payin'...or don't have the money to pay properly, but it's still a lot of problem with people findin' housin'. I don't know the reason why it is.

I've heard stories about when entertainers like Count Basie used to come to Madison to play. They couldn't live in the hotels. They had to go in the community and somebody would give them a room.

The oldest child, she's in the Army. She's in Korea right now. And she loved it here. Loved it on the south side. They didn't want me to move. They wanted to live out here. It was an advantage. Kids wanted to stay around some black kids.

I tell 'em I ain't sendin' 'em to school to act the fool. I used to have a sayin': I'm not sendin' you to school to teach the teacher. I says, teacher got her education. You get yours. You go and pick her brains and get your education. And they are smart. Not a disappointment to me. They go to church. Well, the young daughter don't go as regular, but she go.

I went to school for welding for one semester. I was doin' real good. My instructor would never come by and check me to where I could go ahead. And I got angry and I quit. And I said to myself that I did just what the instructor wanted me to do. And that's to quit. And I said, the next trade I take up I'm not gonna quit. And I took up barberin', and my teacher here in Madison, when they be assignin' heads to cut, there was 28 guys in the class and I was the only black person. And the instructor, he assigned the white guys to each other. When he get to me, well, "We don't know what we'll do with you. You can have somebody come and show us what you can do anytime." I thought that was very cold. I called that playing God over people. Maybe he didn't mean no harm. Maybe he just didn't know any better. Hadn't thought about it. Hadn't put hisself in my boots. I know one a the barbers in the class matter of fact would have loved to cut my hair. All he had to do was just assign him. Sometimes grown ups, the people in charge, is the big problem. I never found out the reason why he didn't assign me. Only the color of my skin. I say you easily lay that to that. It had to be that.

But I'm never forgetting that, how cold people can be, and maybe just wasn't doin' no thinkin'. You know, the onlyest thing I wanted to do is learn how to cut hair where I could make a livin' for my family. Just as an opportunity, and they were trying to deny me.

You can ignore it. You could curse somebody out. Hit him in the mouth. If I hit you in the mouth it ain't gonna do but make you hate me more.

And I always wanted, in my heart, always wanted to be the person that wanted to own something. Own it, you know. And I was wantin' to get a GI loan to put down payment. And so I went to the office and the guy were working back on his desk. He finally looked up and saw me. He say can I help you? I said I want to apply for a GI loan. He said we don't have any money available. Went on back to work. Never came up to talk to me. Those are the kind a things that happen to black people that shouldn't happen. At that time they was up on Gilman Street I believe.

You got to know how to do something. And if you don't learn how to do something, then you gonna be one a the problems. You got to make sure that you get in there and don't let nobody throw you off. You gotta put representation in the area of everything. If you got barbering they should of had a black person up there as an instructor. It's just normal. ■

Roger L. Parks

I was born in a little town in Georgia called Concord, and the county was Pike County.

I grew up on a farm, what they call sharecroppin' farm. What it was that you did the work. The owner of the land, he furnished a place for you to live. He furnished everything and you did the work. And at the end a the year, when you gather your crop, then you divide what you had comin'. Most of the time you didn't have anything comin'.

The people that my dad sharecropped from had their own store. Matter of fact they had the largest store in town. So you went there. Naturally you was ripped off but that was the best you could do.

Lincoln called himself freein' the slaves, but he freed 'em with nothin' to do. They didn't have no skills. So what they did was, when the Civil War was over and the blue coats moved out, the blacks was right back where they started from. They had to go back and do the same work. Matter of fact they was worst off than they was before the Civil War because now the white man is mad because I supposed to have been freed. So now I'm workin' for you and you gonna take it out on me.

My dad, I was told, had 17 brothers and four sisters.

They went through the records in Georgia. You can't even find a record of me. No birth certificate. Nothin' like that.

We was all born with midwife. We call 'em midwife but they were women that had taken it upon themselves that they was goin' to make a little cash by goin' around deliverin' babies. They had no license and didn't have any schoolin'. It was just something they decided to do.

No one lived there other than the blacks that was workin' for the whites. They had jobs workin' as house maids and yard boys.

You didn't get sick that much. In the country like that you very seldom saw someone overweight. Everything you ate, except sugar, coffee, cheese, everything else that I can imagine, we grew.

What you did with the vegetables, like potatoes, you take your corn stalks and build a pyramid and you put dirt on it. Dirt all the way around it, all the way up to the top. You leave a openin'. You take your potatoes and you throw 'em in there. You put your vegetables and things in there. And they are goin' to keep. Now like eggs, you take eggs. You get your cotton seeds. You put your eggs in there. Put the cotton seeds over the eggs if you want to preserve 'em. My mom, she did all our cannin'. Peaches, berries, watermelon rind, you name it, she canned. You had to because you had no money.

My mom like the preacher to come to the house. She cooked for the preacher. Now, we couldn't eat until they ate. The kids couldn't eat at the table with the grownups. And I said, I don't care if the president come to my house. My kids gonna eat when we eat.

The little town where I grew up, they had a tent. They showed movies. The white over here and the black over there. And when the cowboy would go to kiss the woman, they'd pull a curtain on us. They pulled a curtain 'til that was over and then they'd raise it.

Lotsa times a white woman would be walkin' down the street in the summer. And she have on shorts. If she was comin' towards us, we would put our hands over our eyes. We'd have to do that or turn our back.

I never saw a lynching, not at the time it happened. My cousin, she was pregnant. I wasn't there. I know that she got shot. The story was 12 white guys, they all had shotguns and they were lookin' for her husband. And she didn't have any lights, only a lamp in the house. And they wasn't waitin' to see who came to the door. They had dogs. When she opened the door they just cut loose. You can imagine, 12 shotguns. At close range too.

In those days when you left the south and came north they always set you back. Say if I would've come here in the fourth grade, they'd put me back probably in the second grade. They didn't give 'em a test or anything. They just automatically drop 'em back.

I volunteered in the service (1943) to get away from Georgia. During those days you had two services, black service and white service. When I got out of service (1946) I came here. My sister was here. I came to visit her. I didn't come to stay.

It was no different when I came here than it was in Georgia. In some ways it was worse. Number one, I couldn't get a place to stay. I have to live in attics, live in basements. I go into places and they have job applications in the paper. I'd go in to ask for the job and they'd turn their back on me. One day the lady told me right out. She said: "We don't hire niggers."

I went out to Oscar Mayer's and they only had one department that you could work in. They called it inedible department. All the scrap meat and blood and stuff came over to that department and then you cooked it, made hog feed out of it. Then you mix this meat and blood and the water that came off the cooked meat and all, take that and cook it down into a substance that looked like tar. And you mixed it with these ingredients and cooked that together. Then you bagged it and the farmers buy it. Very high in protein.

Oscar Mayer's was very prejudiced when I went there. You tell 'em your name but they'd come around and: "Hey nigger, go do such-and-such." I got to be shop steward. I was the first one. I was shop steward for nine years and I gave it up in about 1973. It was years afterwards before they had another one.

Oscar Mayer's at that time had over 3,000 employees. And out of that 3,000, I would say maybe 30 were black. It was our department here, and here was a department they called the lard department. Because the lard department had about 75 percent women in there, white women, we wasn't allowed to go through there while they were workin'. The white guys could go through but we couldn't. We had to go out the back gate or go underneath the tunnel. But I was used to being kicked around. I didn't want my blood pressure to go up for something that I couldn't do anything about. I couldn't go to the union. I couldn't go to the company.

But I couldn't get the black guys to fight with me at that time. They were satisfied with whatever they dished 'em. Naturally at that time most of the blacks was what you call Uncle Toms. They was satisfied. This was better than what they had back where they came from.

The only difference I found in here and Georgia in those days, I didn't have to sit in the back of the bus, and I didn't have to say "yes ma'am" and "no ma'am" and "yes sir."

I had two jobs for 40 years. My wife didn't work.

Some guys came by one day. Two white guys. They knew my name and everything. I never seen 'em before in my life. First they asked me, how would I like to move out there to Blooming Grove. He said he wanted to break the segregation barrier. This was in 1956. I figured I had nothing to lose, and we moved out there. I stayed out there eight years. I didn't know the guy. I never saw him after that. They treated my family all right. The people didn't bother me. Not the neighbors. It was the police that I went through the hell with. I didn't even own a gun, but they didn't know that. Everytime I'd walk two blocks from my house the police was there. They'd want to see my driver's license.

I used to, with my family, just to do something...this was back in the late '40s, early '50s, maybe even the '60s. A day off or something, or a Sunday, I drive through different neighborhoods. Some people hadn't never even seen blacks. And I would slowly drive through. I guess what I was doin' I was dreamin'. I was dreamin' of livin' in some of those neighborhoods is what I was really doin'. I did this for years. I would drive through Middleton, Sun Prairie, and Madison I'd drive the east side. I used to drive up and down Whitney Way. I always loved that street.

Ninty percent of the blacks that was here, lived out here or either on West Washington Avenue in the Bush. A few lived on Dayton Street. But most of the blacks lived out here. Madison was very prejudiced. You can't imagine how prejudiced. You'd have to be me in those days to realize how prejudiced Madison was.

He said, I'm going to get on the police force. He said, come go with me. I said, I ain't gonna be able to get on that police force. We go up there and the guy, I forget what that chief was in the 50s, and he says, who you gonna arrest? I says whoever's breaking the law. He says, you can't go after no white folks. He said, "On top a that, do you see any niggers anywhere on this force?" That was the end of that.

I can't see any difference in Wisconsin than it was in Georgia. A guy couldn't be caught with a white woman. Whoo! You were goin' to jail if you were caught with a white woman. I knew a guy that was married to a white woman at that time (1950s). They'd go in the store, and this I saw with my own eyes, and they'd act like they didn't know each other.

Another place was very prejudiced was Beloit, and Milwaukee. They were worse than Madison. That's the reason why I organized a baseball team...the Madison Eagles. So that I would have something to keep r in the summer time. Keep my family. We'd have something to do. We went around different places over the state and played baseball. By we being black, they thought we was the Kansas City Monarchs. There were lot of times we'd go to play some team and they would have guys from the minor leagues.

I bought the suits. I bought the balls. I bought the whole thing. It was all mine. And when I'd have team to come here, then I would sell hot dogs and pop and stuff like that. I played Racine, Beloit. I played the gu that was my foreman. He had a team out at Westport. I played Lone Rock. Quite a few towns I can't even think of. I played Penn Park and here on Olin Avenue.

Livin' in the south, you do something, they might hang you. I never saw a hangin' here or anything like that.

I'd get the paper everyday, and I'd go in. "We don't hire niggers." You couldn't even get the elevator job

I know a case. His wife was working. They didn't know she was black. And how they found out one da he went out and he was as dark as your satchel there, and he went out to pick her up one day. And that was the end of her.

I wish I would have had the opportunities they have today. There's so many things that I couldn't do. Yo couldn't be a policeman. You couldn't drive a bus. You couldn't work for the city. You couldn't work for the state. You couldn't work for the federal. You couldn't work for the county. County don't have too many nov Your hands were tied.

I taught myself. Plus mistakes, you learn from your mistakes. I had no business experience, but I was determined.

If I would've known that Madison was the way it was, I probably would've stayed in the south. When I came here I was on my way to New York. That's where I was goin' to make my home. New York. I came here, and I got stuck. I made Madison, in a way, be good to me.

I said to 'em when you go to school and the teacher asks you a question, put your hand up. Even if you don't know the answer, put your hand up and give something. Now you are the first one. The other one got to be better than you. And that's the way I was. First when I got in to be shop steward, first meeting I went to, I got there and I sat down in the front seat. Everybody got in the back. I'm up there by myself. After about two meetings, I couldn't get my front seat. I had to get there early to get my seat. The guys became very friendly to me.

I had lived a hard life and grew up in a hard life in the south. So I just decided to make the best of what Madison would offer me.

I read the bible. A lot that people went through in the bible, I experienced it. I was shot. I was shot at four times. I was hit three times. With a .38. A guy came to the door and he started shootin'. Shot me here. Broke my arm. Shot me in this arm. And I saw an angel. Angel appeared by my side. When I saw this ange this guy turned around, walked out the door. It was a white angel, with wings just like I read and heard and seen pictures of 'em. And I always feel that angel looks over me.

I walked out to the paramedics and got in. And he said, you was shot and it doesn't seem to bother you. said, no, I got to live my life. You can't weep over what have happened. You got to go on with you life.

You're gonna spend a whole lotta money goin' to the psychiatrist when you can do this for yourself.

Right now if I get feelin' down and out which I very rarely do, I just get and read me a couple passages and it tells you there what to do. I don't need to go to a psychiatrist when it tells me right there in the book what I can do.

We as a people are very easy to brainwash. What you do is you take me, put me up front, promise me a whole lot in order to satisfy the whole community. How does he know what my needs are here on Beld Street? He don't know what my needs are, but as soon as something happens, there he is, he or she. What they after is to get recognition for themselves. They want to be on TV so that people will get to know them in case they want to run for something.

If I got somethin' against you, I'm gonna write the mayor, or I will try to get a group together and go down on Tuesday night to the meeting and voice my opinion against you. If you got an opinion, go down Tuesday night and voice your opinion to the council. If you got enough they'll hear you. Don't go down there with no one or two, now. I mean, they ain't gonna let you in. But if you got 20 or 30 people, or 100, they gonna listen to you. You'll get somethin' done.

If you don't have high school, you expect to wash dishes. You expect to scrub the floors. That's all you know how to do.

It's one thousand time better than what it was when I came here. A change I guess came during the time of Martin Luther King when he started his march. When I came to Madison I never had anyone refuse me other than jobs. I've never had no refusement in goin' into places to eat or to drink. I didn't go in to make love. I went in to be served. I had refusement of jobs. I went because I thought that actually these jobs were more for minorities, sweepin' the streets, runnin' the elevators, haulin' the garbage. I couldn't believe it when they say we don't hire you to haul garbage. I couldn't get a job sweepin' the streets. I said what kinda place is this? Even where I came from I could of gone and got a job sweepin' the streets.

Plus you got the law now. You don't give me a job for a good reason, for a reasonable reason you have to give me that job if I'm qualified. When I came here so much was against you. I could go on and on what was against you. ■

Jeanne M. Pien

Where I grew up was behind the Oregon School for Girls. Now it's Oakhill Prison Farm. In 1975, after I graduated and turned 18, I moved to Fiedler Lane in South Madison with some girls from Oregon and some girls from West High School. Fiedler Lane and Fontaine Circle were college kids. Then I moved over to Magnolia Lane in an apartment. And I used to work at the Treasure Island, and I worked at the Borman's on Park Street when I was in high school, and Villager Mall.

At that time if you said to people where do you live, I live in South Madison. They knew a lot of college kids lived out this way. Sometimes there'd be so many college students going downtown, there'd be a couple people left to take the next bus, because there were so many people.

My daughter's great grandfather was Johnny Cordio. He used to deliver milk and ice and stuff like that, and then he owned a store called Johnny's on the corner of Beld Street, and rumor has it that Al Capone hung out in his back yard. He was famous for an olive tree that he had. He was an immigrant from Italy. He could not speak English when he came here. If you ask people they remember about Johnny's, and they say it always smelled like spaghetti. And then they talk about a really nice candy counter too.

I remember when people used to eat in Rennebohm's. There was a lunch counter. The Borman's store was there for years. Lots of people from South Madison shopped in the Borman's store because it was the closest clothing store.

If I think about that time it was still like a community, a neighborhood where you could walk to the store. Their church was here. Their store, their school, and you didn't have to go outside of South Madison. Everything was here. It was a time in the '70s when everything was still here.

I think what I see now when I think about the '80s, a lot of stuff moved out. You had to take a car to go somewhere. And I think what happened, people over on Magnolia Lane and Badger Road, they didn't know we had a center over here. People got so where they were real isolated. I think there came a time where people didn't really know their neighbors. The community's changing a lot in that there's more Latino people coming into the community. It's going to be a different neighborhood.

We were the biggest neighborhood center in Dane County. In 1989, when I came here, I was gonna work with the summer youth recreation program. I think we went that year from like three activities going on to like 40 different agencies or programs that were in here. It was great.

The community was concerned about gangs then. We had a gang task force meeting. They were concerned about what was going on in Penn Park. The early '80s was the start of cocaine coming into the city so that was really a concern of the neighborhood.

We had the African-American kids here after school, and they'd be playing their boom boxes with MC Hammer, and the Cambodian kids would come here with their families on Saturday for a celebration in their culture, and they'd be dancing to the same music. It was unfortunate that somehow we could never get that together. I worked with a lot of kids who did youth restitution. They got to do things that by the time they left, doing their hours, they came back and said, hey, do you mind if I come back next week and help with after school day care. We had very few kids that didn't finish out their hours here. I also remember we had people from first offenders deferred prosecution, a lot of people that were in that program did their community service here. And it worked out well. People continued to stay on, helped out with our boards, helped out with the block party.

People watched out for each other. The older kids watched out for the younger kids because that was their friend's little brother or sister or cousin. The people that I knew in South Madison that came to the center watched out for each other.

I've never been not hopeful about South Madison. One of the gifts of working here was I got to bring my daughter here, who is white. I remember a newspaper reporter coming in once and asking how many white people work here. I think there was like three of us, but I never thought of it like that. Because I brought her here she has learned many gifts about different cultures. That's really a gift because it's made her a more well-rounded young woman.

This was a place where people knew if they had a concern about a kid or something in the community, that we would be willing to help out or at least try to work things out. Anywhere you have a neighborhood center, anywhere you provide service to the community, it's a real asset and it makes it better for the kids. ■

Regina Rhyne

I've lived most of my life in South Madison. I participated at the neighborhood center, went to school with a lot of the kids that lived on the south side. I remember when we had the first block party right out here outside the center. There used to be a lot of cooking in the old center. There was always something to do at the center.

I first got on the neighborhood center board not long after I graduated in '75. I was probably 17 or 18. (One of the board members) used to shake a stick at me because I was so rambunctious. I really appreciate that to this day. Now I understand why she was shaking her stick at me.

My dad used to play in a band. He was a jazz musician. The old beauty parlor used to be right here on Park Street. They'd go up there and have jam sessions.

As I was coming up in South Madison we were more like family. Now it's very hard because a lot of these moms out here they're ready to snap. You don't have the comaraderie, the closeness. It just seems like we've moved farther apart. A lot of our old South Madisonians have moved out. I love it over here. I don't intend to move.

When I was a kid I didn't really realize what politics was. I know we had a hard time getting money. We were always behind. I know that people were set in their ways, and they didn't want no young person telling them, and I was always telling them that I could speak for young people about the kind of activities we needed. We had a club called the Ebony Angels. I just got rid of my T-shirt. It was too small. We learned a lot about being young women, almost a rights of passage kind of thing, when I was coming up in the center.

I see a lot more Hispanic people in our neighborhood. I like the mix. There are whites, Hmongs, and they are home owners. Back in the younger days a lot of the homes were owned primarily by white and African American, but now you see Hispanic people, Hmong people, and I think that's good for the kids to play together around here. It's good for the neighborhood. What is sad though is that it always appeared to me that we get the short end of the stick from the city and the county.

One thing that happened as I was growing up is they gerrymandered this district. They split it right up Park Street. There's a lot of black folks that live over there, and a lot of poor average families, and it split our votes.

I read a lot and I took a lot of women's history courses, because I grew up in a city that told me if you put this in the pot and you put that in the pot, it should turn out like this. Unfortunately, it hasn't quite turned out for me. I'm stuck financially because nobody will hire me because I'm so politically out there. I got a hell of a education at West High School. I graduated in the top half of my class.

I would love to be the first black person from Dane County, from the capital city to go to the capitol as a state representative or senator. We never had a person of color out of Dane County or the capital city. There's something wrong with that to me. People feel like I can say things and I can stand up for them when they don't have the gumption. They call me a person with fire in my belly. And I say yeah, sometime literally and figuratively because sometimes I have to take Maalox.

When I first ran, one of my constituents gave me a card that has Fannie Lou Hamer on it. And I read that sometimes when I'm in the county board meetings and they are trying to dog me. I have to go back and remember something Shirley Chisholm said. I have to go back and find something Barbara Jordan said. I have to remember Martin.

I don't build myself up. I'm not better than anybody. I get out here and play ball with the kids if I have some wind and my nails aren't too long.

I'm disappointed that in all the years I've been on the county board I can count on two hands how many people of color I've seen at those meetings. It's an atrocity. We can't get anything done unless we support each other.

From the first time I moved to Madison I like to pick up the newspaper. Ann Landers, I learned a lot from her, and Dear Abby. It's hard for me not to read the news. I have to get my daily dose. And now I'm starting to read the Milwaukee Journal. As I was growing up I started to realize the distance between South Madison and the rest of the city.

Being that my father wanted boys and I was girl, I was a little rough around the edges. I was always a tomboy, always athletic, always competing. And I think that helped fuel the fire to make me into a politician.

As I was coming up, I believed Madison was one of the most liberal places in the world. I believed the hype. Today I will tell you I believe Madison is one of the most subtly racist towns in the world. There's a lot of racism here I think we need to uncover. Some of the policies...the antiloitering policy. And this whole thing with the drug traffic and the police stopping people and putting handcuffs on 'em, pulling guns on my sons and making them walk backwards on their knees and things, and you go to complain and don't nobody do nothing. I don't like it when people come in and take the money off the backs of the poor that is supposed to be affecting a change, and nothing happens. Nobody's measuring. We got 360 contracts within Dane County human services area, and less than 10 go to people of color. I want to throw up both my hands. But I can't. I sit in there sometimes and I have to rub my cross. I have to bite my tongue.

One of the things that I'm looking at right now is the way "the powers that be" react to situations. They put a chain up here on the park. I've never in my life seen anything like that. Instead of saying okay, how can we sit down and be creative and come up with something that will stop these kids from selling drugs and throwing dice. The jails are overfull with the wrong people. They ought to be out here taking care of their family.

These babies need to be taken care of. A lot of these people need role models. The boys need the men. Women can't raise boys. I did the best I could by mine. But I know they needed their dad. I'm afraid for the future. I'm afraid something is going to blow up. We've got to have a place for the 18- to 21-year-olds to go. If we don't hurry up and do something, the bullet is going to hit the wrong one. There is going to be a fight. Or they are going to jump a police officer or whatever. Why are we sitting on our hands? There is too much money in this community for us not to go and open some spots for these kids. It's a time bomb waiting to happen.

We've always had people from the outside coming in, telling us what we need to do. I got black people who wish I'd go somewhere hide under a rock.

There is a lot of inconsistency in the way we deliver services around here. And there is a lot of inconsistency in the way we apply the law.

They would never endorse me. They can't deal with me. I'm too loud for 'em, that's what they say. I walk around. I move my hands.

We need to educate our people. We need to have sessions where we talk about civil rights, where we talk about legal rights, where we talk about the constitution, where we talk about the forefathers, where we talk about how this place was built and about South Madison. And educate those are coming in from all over just to have a home here. We need to get together with these families. There is strength in numbers. The people want to be educated. You can't just walk around here and say, well, the white man did this to me. No. Get up and do something. Empowerment! You don't hardly hear that word no more. They took the "p" out of it.

You've got to keep going because I can always think of a situation that's worse than mine.

It's just pitiful that we won't stand for something together. You don't have to like me or my politics, but you know that my heart is there. And it's good that I'm trying to work for the people. ■

Mathew Sloan

South Madison has been ignored for so long for whatever reason. Either because we have been expanding at the edges and our resources have been focused on putting roads in and stuff out there, or we've been focused on downtown.

In city government, my sense is that the squeaky wheel really gets the grease. And at the very simplest level, if the street department doesn't know there is a pothole they don't come out and fix it. Clearly there are bigger issues on the south side. But I can't call "streets" and have them come out and put in businesses or take care of some of these problems. And your average citizen doesn't know. Do they call the streets, do they call traffic, do they call the city engineer, do they call the mayor, do they call their alder? The system we have, the alder is mainly an ombudsman, a person to funnel information.

I grew up in rural California in a dying logging town. I spent most of my youth on welfare as did everyone in town. I grew up during the Reagan years when I heard a lot of talk about welfare queens and those sorts of things. Growing up in a town where everyone was on welfare, I didn't see any welfare queens. All I saw was a bunch of poor, white, rural folk who didn't have jobs. It seemed very normal.

One of the things that's interesting is the ward we are sitting in right now is the only ward in the city which didn't go for the mayor, the only one in the city.

We don't often see people turn out to go to meetings. Frankly, I don't blame them. I think there is a different way of doing politics here, and probably one that's more successful for folks here because they are probably not able to access city government in the way my constituents over in Vilas do, get on their e-mail and bing something off to the mayor and she'll respond.

My district is roughly, the boundaries are Monroe Street, Regent Street, John Nolen Drive, and Town of Madison down here to about Buick Street. It includes the Triangle, it includes the Brittingham neighborhood, Bayview.

I tend to think of South Madison as anything south of Monona Bay. I think it's somewhat more problematic when we look east or west because Arbor Hills for example, they don't call themselves southsiders. And Broadway-Simpson, for all intents and purposes you need a boat to get over there. In the city's geography, that's further problematic because we're a city that only thinks east-west. South Towne isn't even actually in the city, it's in the Town of Blooming Grove.

We are a society intent on drawing lines. So I looked at the Isthmus 2020 plan. Now, we all joke that we can see the isthmus across the lake, but we have no idea why we are being included in this plan because we really see our interests allied more with the south side. We don't have much in common with downtown. Take the Town of Madison. One of the key difficulties to get anyone to pay attention to South Park Street is the fact that the Town of Madison has an entire block of Park Street, and you know it because the speed limit changes. So I think we have on the south side in some sense kind of a fractured identity.

One of the things we learn in sociology is you can't talk about race without talking about class. Likewise, you can't talk about class without talking about race. But by virtue of our housing policy, where we accept Section 8 and where we don't, where we put public housing and where we don't, we tend to concentrate people. And maybe we are not concentrating them based on race. We are doing it on class.

There are 20 alders in this city. Each of us has one-twentieth of the city, or about 10,000 people. My district has half of the public housing, over half. One-twentieth of the city has over half of the public housing in terms of about 400 units. And then we are somewhat surprised about the problems which ensue?

Bram's addition and Capitol View next to it are about 60 to 65 percent minority. Bay Creek,

Greenbush, and the Vilas neighborhood are all about 80 to 90 percent white.

Down in the Broadway-Simpson neighborhood where the city has put $14 million into Monona Shores essentially to move people out to put up nice condos, apartments. That was rape economic renewal for the people who live there. I would really like to see economic development which invests in place as well as people.

Genesis Development Corporation is a good example of marrying places and people. They want a business incubator on the south side. Take over private property, improve it, bring in local folks who want to be entrepreneurs. Teach them what it means to build and run a business.

People are complaining about drug trade occurring in the open, or speeding, or people littering. And they always follow that comment with, if this were happening in University Heights the city would come in and do something about it. And it's true. The Vilas neighborhood is well organized. I can tell you, get a pothole, get a branch down, a liquor license application, I get calls. Those people are organized and they will not tolerate certain things. I don't get that so much from here. I think in some sense that folks here have been let down because they have called and nothing has happened. I really see as one of my jobs to convince them that they don't have to tolerate it. They were talking about not wanting to let their kids go out and play in their front yard because of what's happening on the streets, and I said we really need to call the cops whenever that happens. We really need to call the cops. And they said, they just don't come.

In the last race, I raised $6,000. My opponent raised I think $9,000. We were by no means the top either. There was a lot of money spent. That creates another problem for democracy.

There are probably 6,000 people in my district of voting age. Of that, probably 4,000 are registered, and of those about 1,800 to 2,000 vote. And it's a district that has one of the highest turnouts in the city.

I'm very interested in seeing businesses that serve neighborhoods. The city is actually very fortunate in the amount of economic development tools it has, but it takes a rocket scientist sometimes to access them, and then to find people who want to start businesses and hook them up with this money.

They are taking East Washington Avenue, which is in essence Park Street, it's the same highway, but they've got a plan because East Washington is "a gateway to the city." I don't know about anyone else, but when I drove to Madison I drove down Park Street. I think the key is the squeaky wheel, to make sure the city knows that Park Street deserves the same sort of planning expertise that other streets get.

The key really has to be that we don't want to raze things and put up strip malls. That's the complete anathema to what I think we want in this city, or this neighborhood. Every eight or nine years the city says let's do another plan for South Madison. The last one was a vision of strip malls. And it's just horrific. Fortunately, like all plans before it, it just got put on the shelf and no one did anything with it.

Following the census in 2000 we'll redistrict again in 2003. I'm very concerned with the way the districts are growing. The downtown districts are going to start looking very strange, pushing out. I would like to see this district include more of South Madison.

When you drive between the Beltline and West Washington, you're in Alderman Bruer's district until you get to Buick, and then you're in the Town of Madison until you get to Wingra Creek and then you're in my district. So I can't work too much on South Park below Wingra Creek despite the fact that I've got all these people here who are a lot more interested in the Villager Mall than they are in the Jiffy Lube.

There's a lot of passion out there, and I think there's a lot of vision. But the key point is getting people to invest in that vision and see it as possible. ■

David A. Smith

I was born here on the south side of Madison. I am the youngest of eight kids. My parents came from down south back in the '50s and lived on different sides of town starting on the east side, then moving down toward the triangle area, and then finally residing here in South Madison. All my siblings were born here except for my oldest sister who was born down in Lexington, Mississippi, where my parents are from.

Out of all the places that I've heard about, Madison is certainly one of the tops for growing up. Back in the '60s and '70s when I was a kid, families were very strong then. Adults looked out for all the neighborhood kids no matter who you were, what color you were. The cohesiveness we had back in the '70s is just gone. What has replaced it is a lot of isolation, a lot of fear, a lot of self-centeredness.

I started out at Head Start right here at the South Madison Neighborhood Center which is now the Boys and Girls Club.

I had good middle and elementary experiences. From there I went to Madison West high school where my education experience began to get very rocky. High school was a different world for me. I didn't want to go to school. So my high school experience was very bad. After going to high school and not going to class and and not getting good grades and everything, and twelfth grade I decided to drop out of high school. So after dropping out, I had time to think, got a job, decided I needed to go back and get my GED (general equivalency diploma). So I did that still having a very bad taste of education in my mouth. But I did decide to take some classes at MATC (Madison Area Technical College) and ended up being on the dean's list four semesters at MATC. Then transferred to UW for a semester and got a good job at the South Madison Neighborhood Center, and put my education on hold from there.

Playing in the sandbox. Swinging on the swings. Climbing the monkey bars. Running from winos. Just spending many nights in the gymnasium playing pool, playing basketball. Doing arts and crafts. Talent shows. Cooking classes. Being close to your friends, families that you grew up with right in the vicinity of everyone. I really miss that.

Before, you knew everybody just about. Now, there's a lot of people I've never seen in my life and don't know who they are.

That's the biggest difference that you see right now. Drugs. People on the corners selling drugs, and things like that. And gangs. When we were growing up, that wasn't even heard of. The neighbors would run gangs out.

Probably this is one of the more diverse communities, South Madison is. But when we were growing up it wasn't as diverse. You were either black or you were white.

I became a serious Christian in middle school even though I had my struggles with school and everything. I became a licensed minister in 1983. I wasn't yet 20. I was ordained in '87 and from there I began to do more ministry stuff.

Parties, dances, roller skating, sleep overs. Oh, man. The Ohio Players, Roller Coaster, Jackson 5, ABC and Dancing Machine. Good clean music. MoTown, Stevie Wonder, Marvin Gaye, they were in. Clean music. Gospel music, good wholesome music.

I always remember the cake walk. That was my favorite thing, the cake walk. Where they put numbers on the floor and turn on music, almost like musical chairs. And you walk around the numbers and when the music stops you get on a number. And they pull a number out of a hat, and whatever number it is, there's like 20 cakes on the table and you get to pick what cake you want. I used to win three or four cakes.

I think that's what happened with the block party. It used to be just so nice and innocent, and very easy. Then as times changed we started saying, well, we gotta change the block party. And then it became very frustrating and began to draw a different kind of people, and it wasn't no longer a community party. It was more like a city and beyond. Not that we don't want people from Beloit and Milwaukee coming, but people in the community didn't know a lot of people who were there and it really lost its touch. I think we do that too many times to things that are nice. Just keep 'em simple. Simple stupid, you know.

There's a lot of apathy in South Madison. So the politics have been, I think, not a big factor in the area. I think people just kind of roll with punches. You got a handful of people that are vocal, but they get drowned out by everybody else.

My dad was drawn here by another relative that had a job here, and said come on up here. So he didn't get into Oscar Mayer's right away, but he worked like cleaning hotels and things like that at first, and then got into Oscar Mayer's and then retired from there. Was there over 30 years.

Saturdays was always our day of having pancakes. And dad would get up and cook pancakes and fry some bacon, and we'd have our breakfast. And we'd watch cartoons, and my mother was doing house stuff. And then we'd go outside and gather our friends. It was like you just knew when everybody was coming out. We'd meet here at the center or we'd meet out on the corner or up at Penn Park. We always gathered to play hot wheels, marbles, those little tracks, electric football. We were so creative in the things we did. Build castles in the sand box. Swinging. Playing tag all through the community. We were safe. We weren't worried about getting hit by cars. We weren't worried about a stranger trying to pick us up. We knew that by the time the street light came on we better be heading toward home.

And when summertime came we would go to Mississippi for about two weeks. They were farmers. We would run in the corn fields. We would feed the pigs. It was fun. Go take out the slop to the pigs and ride horses. And the cow. They lived in the Mississippi fields, shack houses. We stayed with them. We loved it. Good food. Just to see fresh food. They get their corn and their greens and all that from the garden. So we spent two weeks down there in Mississippi, and we'd come back rejuvenated and all pumped up, and mosquito bites and suntanned and all that kind of stuff.

I really want them growing up in a safe environment, and many people feel South Madison is not safe. I don't feel threatened by it because I know the streets. I know where to go, where not to go. But I am not as free with my kids as our parents were. We keep a very close tab on our kids, which is different from 20 years ago.

I think the city has been very good to South Madison. I think South Madison is sort of like the apple of their eye. For some reason, South Madison just has that appeal to city officials.

Back then we thought pretty much the directors owned the center. The times have changed so much. There's a lot of political battles and a lot more fund-raising and things that are more involved than just kind of having fun and things like that.

And we kids from South Madison, Smiths, the Roses, the Barlowes, Quarles, these families...we used to catch the bus. We'd ride the bus out to East Towne 'cuz that's the furthest the bus went. Got off the bus, in the summertime now, hot, walk that highway 151. The farm was right before you turn off to Sun Prairie. We used to walk, hitchhike, just to ride horses. All the way in the hot sun just to ride horses. And then walk back to East Towne and get on the bus. It took us all day. We were starving when we'd get back to East Towne. And our parents let us do it. But today that's unthinkable. The highway wasn't as robust and busy as it is now. Still, we were determined. We were determined to get out there and ride some horses. ■

Jacqueline T. Wright

I was born in Forest City, Arkansas, and came to Milwaukee, Wisconsin at the age of four. I grew up on the north side of Milwaukee. I was brought up AME Methodist which means African Methodist Episcopal church. My mother spoke to our pastor to see if I could go to one of the black colleges that belonged to the AME Methodist church. So I chose Wilberforce which is in Ohio. There I met my husband. He decided to go to that school although he was Baptist. So my grandmother often would tease me, and said that I sent my granddaughter to a Methodist college for her to meet a Baptist minister.

And he went back home to Camden, South Carolina, where he was born. His father owned a barber shop. And it was an unusual barber shop. It was white trade only. It was a segregated community. They only worked on white trade only. That was the law.

We met in 1949. And Dr. Martin Luther King was being a forerunner for civil rights at that time. And NAACP meetings were being held at Mount Moriah Baptist Church in Camden, and churches began to burn at that time. Our church burned along with so many churches in South Carolina. It was arson from the Ku Klux Klan. I think it happened about 1952 or '53 when that church burned.

So my mother had been a beautician. She had three beauty shops in Milwaukee. And she opened up one here in Madison because the people didn't have a beauty shop at that time. She shared a building with Taylor Smith, who was a barber on Mound Street. She gave me the beauty shop because I was also a beautician. Had received my license from Poro College. That's an old African-American beauty school that started in Chicago.

Then he decided that he would build a barbershop. That was during the time when the Greenbush area was relocating people. They moved the people out and the businesses had to leave also. Mrs. Trotter bought the place on Beld Street at the present Mr. P's, and we happened to find property across the street from there.

Housing was very bad. We had difficulty finding a place to buy. When we would get in touch with a real estate broker, he would take us in the South Madison area only. And we asked him why. He said, well, you wouldn't want to live in a place where people wouldn't treat you kindly. And that was during the time when Mr. Gulley and his wife had cross burning. Carson Gulley. Just before we moved here in '58 they had cross burning in their yard.

They didn't start moving in other areas until after the Equal Opportunities Commission began to file suits.

The houses were what they used to call Sinaiko homes. They didn't have basements. And in Wisconsin you really need a basement. They were very nice homes, but they didn't have basements. Sinaiko was a builder at that time.

They had quite a few white neighbors when we were living there. Why they decided that it was supposed to be a mostly black area I don't know. Because it wasn't that many African-American people here. They had fear tactics that they would give white people, that, oh you don't want to live over there because it's mostly all African Americans. But it really wasn't.

And Reverend Dawson built out in South Madison on Fisher Street because our church at that time was on Johnson Street where the campus is now.

Our alderman wanted more segregation of things I believe. A lot of things he would vote against. And then he began to see that we all should live together. He came around later in his life.

We still need to encourage some of our African-American children to go into the trades. The unions are supposed to reach out because you have to have equal opportunity, equal employment, but they are not

exercising it like they should.

Some of the white young people are seeing that it's a need to integrate as a neighborhood. Some of them deliberately move into the neighborhood to get their children to grow up with African-American children so they can feel like they are normal children. Cause when you go into the work field, you're going to have to work beside all races. So you might as well live beside them or around them, and get to know minorities.

I don't think there is a need for a high school just yet, but it may be in the future. The Wright middle school is wonderful, named after my husband.

You should always remember to turn around and help another person get where you are in life.

It's just like mowing your lawn in the center of the yard and forgetting the edges. You have to do the entire lawn.

I think they've always had a book review club in South Madison. And garden clubs because people used to compete with getting their yards pretty with flowers. And we had more teas at that time too. That was during the era when people would get out their fine dishes and their silverware and show them off. Now we're into paper plates and styrofoam cups. But we used to polish up the silver.

Definitely we encouraged the children to take piano. We had teachers from the university come and give lessons at the South Madison Neighborhood Center. And ballet and tap dancing too.

We need a swimming pool. We definitely need a swimming pool in the South Madison area.

He would go all over the United States recruiting black teachers to come here. I think they don't do that anymore. They need more of that. They verbally say it, but they don't have the action of doing it.

If we see that a majority of African-American people are being suppressed, we should speak out.

I think so many people are feeling threatened because jobs are being given to minorities, and they feel affirmative action is the cause of it. But there has to be a catch up. We have been behind for so many years, and I don't think we'll ever catch up with the white race of receiving what is needed equally. I don't think we'll ever catch up because there is always going to be white people first, and then maybe we'll get something.

Our thinking is that because you are African American, you don't have the same intelligence. You don't have the same incentive, and it's the way parents are talking to their children at home. And then the children pick up this information that they are not the same as we are. And it's almost why women are fighting for their rights because they feel they weren't treated equally. So it's a catch up that will never be caught up, I don't think.

If my child finished high school and finished college along with your child, why would your child be more qualified than my child? They finished from the University of Wisconsin, but they had to go away to get jobs. That was before affirmative action. It should never be cut off. No. It's needed.

If you want to be lazy, that's your business. But you shouldn't label people. I am political. And I feel that we should lobby the politicians and let them know where the feelings are among the people. We need to push the politicians more for equal rights. Let them know we demand it.

We're not having enough of our African-American people voting. Some feel that they have lost hope. But we should teach them there is hope. That's what Jesse Jackson is trying to let the people know. Do not give up hope. Continue the fight.

We're in the age of hip-hop language too, which is not even ebonics. It's just their hip-hop talk of slang. Be knowledgeable of it, but don't use it in your business world of pursuing work. We were taught to use the correct English. You're not giving people knowledge if you're not teaching correct English.

I'm so sorry that so many people feel they have to go to religious schools for their children to be educated. That says a bad thing for our public schools. If the public schools are not doing their job, the school district better get busy. They are not supposed to be running from the system.

If you feel your public school is not teaching you correctly, and you're going to go to a private school, yes, it's all right for the government to give you money to assist you. But it means there is some inadequacy

there someplace. People should have freedom of choice. You can't take that right from people.

I think people should not have guns laying around. If they want to do hunting and something like that, they may have to build a building to house the guns. Lock them up. Go into the gun building like you have a safety deposit box. So we have to have a building to store the guns, and we have to see how many guns you're taking out of the building. I feel we need legislation for guns.

I think it's in all races. The anger and disturbance of people's minds is a spiritual disturbance among the people. Overanxiousness. The bible says be anxious for nothing. Do not fret what evil people do to you. Be blameless. If someone does you harm, make sure you didn't really cause that for them to feel that way. Be blameless for them thinking that way. Be innocent. We need more people to have less fear. Trust people. That spirit of trust has left us. In this whole entire world.

And then we have people eating wrong foods causing high blood pressure and hypertension. There's a lot of things causing it. Too much sugar in the blood. That'll cause you to be irritated. And not forgiving. That causes illness in your own brain. Just forgive and go on. Black people have shown that we can do all right even being suppressed. We are examples that we can do with a dime what you can do with a million.

My father, he was a construction worker, and he would come home and say, you know, the white man is a funny thing. And he would give this long story about this co-worker did something to him. And then the next day he would come...do you know, the black...he would say the Negro is a funny thing. And he would go on this long story about what this Negro person had done to him. At that time it was Negro or colored or something. And then sometimes there would be Polish people in Milwaukee. You know, this Polish man did this. So I grew up thinking there was something wrong with all of us. Every night it was somebody else different that had irritated him. I say, all of us are wrong. So that's why I didn't get that prejudice. ■

Chester Zmudzinski

I came to Madison in September of 1949. I was hired to start a neighborhood center movement in Madison. In the beginning there were only two, the Neighborhood House and the East Side Youth Activities Council. Then we grew to three in 1950 by starting the South Madison Neighborhood Center. We found four empty lots on Taft and Fisher streets. We got a grant from the Community Fund to purchase those four lots. Involved in that purchase was George Gerard, the carpenter foreman for the Findorff Company. The people of South Madison got in touch with the city manager, and he made it possible for us to get a surplus building in Truax Field. We made arrangements by taking that building, which was really a hospital unit, and we had it cut in half. George Gerard did that with a saw, and had it placed on dollies, big-sized dollies, and it traveled through the city from Truax Field down East Washington Avenue to West Washington Avenue onto Park Street and onto the site that we had prepared.

The people prepared it. They dug it, and they put a foundation in there. And George Gerard made sure that things were set on properly.

It was available for use in June of 1950. Later the Rennebohm Foundation built the second half of the building which was the gym.

It was an interesting neighborhood in 1950. It wasn't anything to shout about. It was really largely made up of Italians with a few black people, and they lived near the railroad track. Then slowly it became increasingly more black. When I left the Madison Neighborhood Center agency it was pretty much like half and half. I left the agency in 1967.

It was a rather poor neighborhood, economically speaking. A big company wanted to build a plant, an industrial plant, on the nine-hole golf course. And we said no. We didn't think that was a good idea. That what they ought to do is to use it to build up the population of the neighborhood so they could warrant the kind of services that other neighborhoods took for granted. That is, they wanted to have a church. They wanted to have a school, wanted a business center like a strip mall I guess you would call it. And we really made that possible. It became really a neighborhood in the sense that it had many of the amenities that other neighborhoods took for granted which they didn't have at that time. So the population grew. It changed.

Most of the people that moved into the new houses that were built on the golf course were white. That changed the nature of the neighborhood in the sense that it was now more white than black again. So the neighborhood keeps changing as the times change.

There was only one paved street, that was Fisher. All the rest were gravel streets. And the people sometimes had to go to the post office to get their mail because the streets were so deeply rutted that the post office wouldn't bring the mail out there.

Mrs. (Willie Lou) Harris was a woman who I admired really. She worked for Madison General Hospital as a nurse's aide. As old as she was, she would come in and take the wood that was surplus that came with the building, and pounded the nails out of it so we used that wood to make the front.

I can't think of any neighborhood that I had anything to do with that was like South Madison.

When they redeveloped the Triangle, that's when Mayor Henry Reynolds became aware that there was a need for public housing for the elderly people, and that's when the Braxton apartments were born.

In South Madison we didn't have urban renewal. What we had was redevelopment. South Madison was redeveloped. When the rehabilitation took place, the streets became paved. A park was built and a playground, and some people came in there, Quakers I think, and built a building that was for the elderly.

The thing I felt was taking place since I left is that the city is taking over some of the financing of the

neighborhood centers. And that means public acceptance. That I think is a real great step toward the establishment of the neighborhood centers as a means to helping people. A private agency starts it, and a public agency takes over.

I think the whole idea of having a neighborhood association or council was born out of South Madison.

In order to help the people, you've got to involve the people to be helped. If you don't do that you are not going to succeed. The only reason I think the neighborhood center movement succeeded is because, from the board of directors all the way down, it was the people who made the decisions that needed to be made for their own benefit. ■

She often spoke to falling seeds and said,
"Ah hope you fall on soft ground,"
because she had heard seeds saying that to each other as they passed.

Zora Neale Hurston (1937)

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Decades Mural Project notes

Front cover: *Exodus* mural and details, 1992.
Inside front cover: *Prophets* mural and details, 1995.
Inside back cover: *Community Life* mural and details, 1997.
Back cover: *Tree of Life* mural and details, 2000.

The Decades Mural Project by artist David Giffey includes four murals, 9 feet X 24 feet each, which are installed in the gym at the Boys and Girls Club. Each mural describes a decade of history beginning with 1950 when the first neighborhood center was built at 2001 Taft Street. The murals, painted with acrylic on canvas, depict local, national, and international events and personalities related to African-American history.

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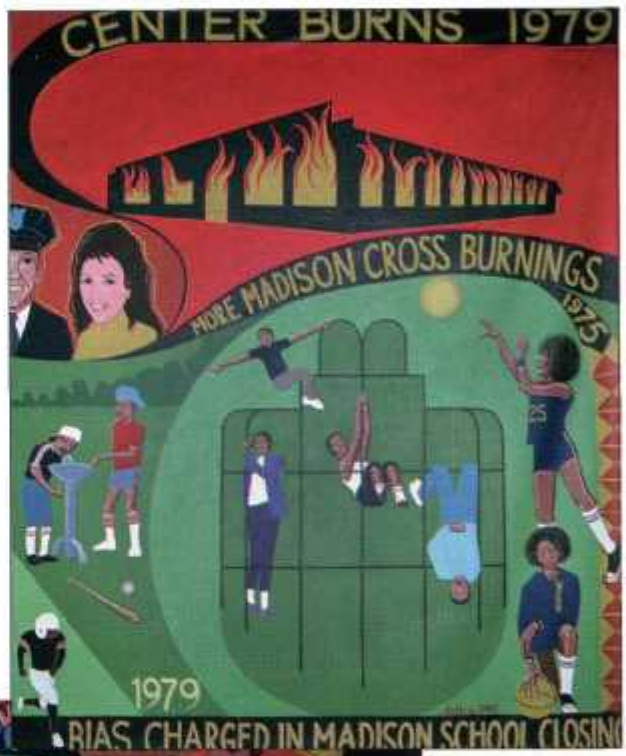
The *Community Life* Mural



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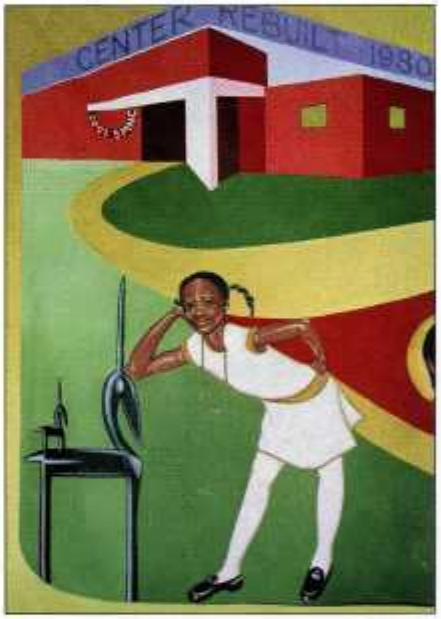
The People's Stories of South Madison

Volume 1



The *Tree of Life* Mural