

Interview with Carol McClain

E. Susan Sheiner: My name is Susan Sheiner, I am a student at Wayne State University, and I have the pleasure to interview Carol McClain today for an oral history archive. We are doing a study of various individuals who have lived and participated in life in the Cass Corridor at various times. I have in my notes 1970 to present.

ESS: Today is November 18, 2015. Welcome Carol.

Carol McClain: Thank you.

ESS: I have some questions, and I know you supplied me with an interesting background of what spring was like on Canfield Street in 1974.

CM: Well I don't know. There is not date on it, but it had to be before the streetscape went in. It was the mid 1970's sometime.

ESS: OK. Well do you want to just give me a little idea of it or do you want to read it out loud. Or neither? (laughs)

CM: Well, why don't I read it out loud?

ESS: I am sharing this with the researcher because Carol shared it with me and I think it gives a nice image of what life was like at that moment in time.

CM: This was an excerpt of a letter that I wrote to friends that were on sabbatical in Europe during the spring, mid seventies from out old Victorian house in the mid-1970's...still a very blighted street, deteriorated neighborhood.

CM: Spring has arrived in Detroit, leaving us awash in a sea of mud, garbage, broken glass, and dog turds. We've abandoned the little sled that transported the girls all winter and, now just wade ankle deep through winos and broken glass (cause/effect) to school.

CM: The city noises are changing too; no more engines straining to get over the ice. Now the sound of large trucks bouncing and clanking in the ruts of our torn up street. (The street was under construction because they were about to put in the cobblestones that make our street so beautiful, but at that time, the street was still very torn up) From above come the wails of kitty—not ours—high up on the tree next to our house. The city will rescue an animal or (human) only if the tree is located on the sidewalk and not on private property.

CM: We are happy to have any spring at all. Good old March came in like a Lion and went out like a Dragon. (We had terribly cold weather in those days. It seems to have gotten much better; well maybe because we do get away for part of the winter now,) We had an ice storm at Easter...little Peter Cottontail came skiing down the Bunny Trail. This is a marvelous climate for cross country skiing, although the terrain isn't very scenic. It wasn't then.

CM: The Cass Corridor flowers are in full bloom. They are called "honeys". Then in the letter I had a sketch of a smiling curly haired the lady of the night, with a shoulder bag, short skirt and

and tee shirt with a giant bee emblazoned on it. The caption on the tee shirt reads: "Bee sweet. Eat your honey."

CM: We charter members of the Concerned Citizens of the Cass Corridor march from our Restore the Block meeting to our Save the Downtown meeting to our Reform the Schools meeting. And sometimes we stop to relax on our front stoop and admire the crocuses growing around the edge of the crater which used to be our flower bed before the dogs got to it. Martin and I sit on our stoop and play at remembering what it was like not living across the street from a 24 hour gas station (which is gone, thank goodness) ; when mail was delivered every day(which it is now); when we didn't live in such an ecologically balanced environment (our mice keep down the roaches; the cats get the mice; the dogs get the cats—and an occasional mailman or meter reader; and the cars get the dogs). Happiness, we are sure, is a car that works in January.

CM: And we are proud of ourselves. How many people do you know who could have achieved this unique life style by age forty? That is what it was like. (laughter)

ESS: Well, I think that was definitely worth sharing. It gives me a sense of what was going on in that moment in time.

CM: And how much has improved since then, thanks to very good hard work of our neighbors and community that sank their own time and money into the neighborhood. Each person that came in and that moved in put their own efforts into improving their property. Now we have tour buses that come through to look at the houses, photographers, etc. It is quite amazing, the change.

ESS: It gives one a perspective on things. I didn't realize the cobblestone, or brick stone, wasn't in at that time.

CM: It is cobblestone. They were stones that were stored at a fort in Detroit. Maybe you know the name better than I do. There was a lady that lived across the street, her name was Beulah Growen, who was the guru of our block and of the whole revival restoration process, and she knew about these stones, and she arranged to have them brought to our street. They are historic. I can't remember where they came from. Perhaps the person who interviews my husband will find out. I'll ask him if he remembers.

ESS: OK. So, we are talking about Canfield, and it is right near Wayne State University.

CM: Four blocks south.

ESS: And it is part of the neighborhood called the Cass Corridor, and our project is designed to encompass life and the history of the Cass Corridor. So physically, you saw changes, and they came about through the contributions and dedication of the residents.

CM: The neighbors in the communities, that is right. What I find interesting, is that it used to be going north of Canfield, towards Wayne State was not too bad, but going south towards
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downtown, was just awful. But that's changed. People have invested in restaurants and new apartments. Now we hear there is a shortage living space in the Cass Corridor. We are now

called, "Mid-town" by the way. Those of who have lived here forever will always think of it as the Cass Corridor, but now we are referred to as "Mid-town." (laughs) think Dan Gilbert had a lot to do with that. We have a lot of young people moving in now.

ESS: Yes.

CM: So, it is a changing neighborhood, and we know that 'gentrification' is a pejorative word in the vocabulary of a lot of people, but we wear it as a badge of honor. We've waited so long for these changes.

ESS: It helps to get a perspective. I know I have used that word earlier, but it is true.

ESS: Well, I have a list of questions here, so what I'll do is use them as a guide and open up to whatever you feel as important. I've already gotten a sense that some of my questions are fine but not as wonderful as what you brought in. You mentioned that you came to the Cass Corridor in 1974. What brought you here?

CM: Yes. The fact that neither of us liked to drive, Martin is a professor at Wayne State University, and he could walk to work from there. And the fact that I love cities; having spent my teenage years in a Long Island suburb, I developed a visceral hatred of suburbia. So I preferred to be in a city where there is more diversity, and I think over all a better value system. (laughs)

ESS: Well put. So you came with your husband, Martin? He was a professor at Wayne State University?

CM: Yes.

ESS: What is his field?

CM: Chemistry. He was a professor of Chemistry.

ESS: Where did you meet?

CM: We met in California at UC Berkley through a mutual friend. He's from Texas, I'm from New York, we met in California and lived happily every after in Detroit. (laughs)

ESS: It is a good story. So you mentioned that you have a degree from the University of California Berkley.

CM: In English

ESS: And then later when you came to Detroit you studied Spanish?

CM: That's right.

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ESS: Well tell me a little bit about your educational experience both in Berkley and here in Detroit.

CM: Actually, I really enjoyed my educational experience at Wayne State. It seemed to be much more personal. I had wonderful professors, you know I loved them. And I was so much more ready to learn as a 30 - 40 year old than I was at Berkley, when I was younger. Berkley was much larger, more impersonal, there were all kinds of crazy things going on. It was a year where we all got tear-gassed. (laughs) "Psychedelia" was happening, the Vietnam war was happening. War protests were going on, a whole bunch of stuff. It was almost hard to concentrate on what you were doing in school.

CM: In Detroit, it was a wonderful experience. I really enjoyed Wayne State. I got to know my professors, I liked my classmates and I was much more open to learning.

ESS: So you studied Spanish.

CM: I studied Spanish.

ESS: You received a master's degree in Spanish?

CM: Yes. I did.

ESS: So, what was it like in the Cass Corridor during that time while you were a student at Wayne State which was about the 70's, 80's?

CM: I was raising children at the time so it was still a bit scary, I'll put it that way. The neighborhoods weren't that great and you were very often going to run into pan handlers and derelicts. I don't mean to be looking down my nose at them. It was more of a poor neighborhood where crime was more rampant. We got broken into, I guess several times. So we had to be on our guard, most of the time. You know when you were just out on the streets. And I had two children I was raising. I couldn't send them outside just to play. They had to have arranged play dates so that they would be safe. I think the first time I let go out alone it was to a neighborhood store, two blocks away where I knew the people in the store, it was a family run store, I would look after them when they were there.

ESS: So you were appropriately cautious.

CM: Yeah. We did. It is not pleasant to have burglaries in your house.

ESS: No, no.

CM: So we were cautious. I used to tease the kids, that while they grew up with burglars at the back door and building inspectors at the front door. (laughter). And so many holes in the house that the animals wouldn't come in the winter unless we built a fire for them in the fireplace. (laughter) We have a beautiful mahogany fireplace. The house was beautiful... and we
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underwent a lot of construction while they were growing up. So it was a unique experience. I'm pleased at how they turned out.

ESS: Tell me a little about your children and how they turned out.

CM: Well, they don't live in Detroit. I was happy for them when they went to college to experience other places. They went to Cass Tech here. They went to Burton International School, and Golightly, each in each school. Then they went to Cass Tech for high school which was a very interesting experience for them. Then when they went to college, one went to New York and went to the Parson's School of Design, and the other who was an avid dog sledder, went to the University of Minnesota. So the one that went to New York, is now living in Chicago with her husband, and the one I sent to Minnesota is still there, basically, but they love coming home. They really feel an attachment with this neighborhood and the community and they stay in touch with their friends on Facebook, and they want to visit everything when they are here and they enjoy seeing the changes.

ESS: It sounds like they had a very good upbringing, in a lot of respects.

CM: We hope so. (Laughter) We hope so. They had, what I consider diversity of race of class in their upbringing., which is important to me. They got to know all kinds of people The Cass Corridor and Burton School especially, was kind of a residential area for foreign exchange students, for Chinese who had restaurants there, it was the old Chinatown basically. They had every possible kind of nationality represented in the school of Burton, which I thought was very interesting.

ESS: Well I do have a question here about Burton. So your children, you have two daughters?

CM: Yes.

ESS: They attended school there. And did you teach there at any time?

CM: No, but I was an active parent. I did at times go in at times and provide special activities for the kids, I would take them to the Art Institute or arrange for the Audubon Society to speak in the assembly. I was active until I was going to school heavily, and then I needed the time to pursue my own studies at that point.

ESS: I see. So tell me about your career. After you pursued your studies, did you teach in the Detroit Public Schools?

CM: I did. I was an inner city high school teacher for about five years and then I retired. What I did basically, was work to get my girls through college. We needed the extra money. So I did that and it is a whole other topic to talk about the Detroit Public Schools.

ESS: I understand.

CM: The kind of serious mess that was going on at the time. And I am not talking about the kids, I am talking about the administration of the school. I think it was a feeling our way situation
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at that point, in the 70's and 80's and I was not happy there, particularly, but it was an interesting experience, what can I say? (pause)

ESS: Well, what were the highlights, I know you were not happy but did you get any special recognition while you were there? Was the highlight completing the five years.

CM: The recognition was from the kids telling me I was the best teacher they ever had. That kind of thing was very rewarding. But it was very exhausting. I thought it would be best to leave it to the younger generation that was coming up then. They had a lot more energy that I did at that time. OK. That was an exhausting job. There were teachers falling like flies, when I was teaching.

ESS: Ok. Well, I think you've covered a lot about that. It sounds like the Burton International School was a wonderful environment for the community and enriched the lives of the residents of the Cass Corridor. Is it still open now?

CM: I think what happened, and it happened long after we left, the building was torn down. It was found to have asbestos coverings of some kind, which got all over the property so the school was closed, so I am really heartsick about this. It was going to be our legacy to the community to have this wonderful school that was still operating. So, Burton still exists but not in our community. It was moved somewhere else.

ESS: I see. I see. I guess, I did a little research on it, but I didn't know the whole story. Well let's switch the topic a minute. I hear you have a famous uncle.

CM: (Laughter) Well, Detroit famous.

ESS: Detroit famous. Irving Bluestone was a leader in the labor movement.

CM: Yes. Yes. He was Walter Reuther's administrative assistant for a while and then became the vice president of the General Motors division for the United Auto Workers, wonderful, wonderful man.

ESS: It is wonderful to have that connection.

CM: It was. He was the only family in the area and we really loved having him and his wife live, I guess they were down in Lafayette Park for a while. She was somebody who volunteered reading for the blind. They were very service oriented people.

ESS: They sound like people I would have liked to have met.

CM: I think so. Everybody loved them.

ESS: Well, do you have any stories, in addition to what you've told me about your uncle, that you'd like to share?

CM: I'm sorry, I didn't come prepared to do that. I have a blurry memory.

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ESS: Well, that's fine.

CM: At this age...

ESS: Well, I think that the idea that he was service oriented.

CM: Community minded, he loved Detroit, and he was just a wonderful human being in general. We were very fortunate to have him in the family. Then he opened his arms to us when we moved to Detroit. We enjoyed visiting with them. I'm sure there are lots of stories.

ESS: It at some point, we stumble back to it, I am open minded. It does play a role. It ties into the theme of neighborhoods and families.

CM: He was very instrumental in getting the Reuther Library started here. I think it was his baby, his idea. So that sort of hooks into Wayne State University and the job you are doing today, probably.

ESS: Really, it ties in a nice way.

CM: He's the one who would have all of the stories of the early growth of the labor union movement, and the goons that attacked them. He was very close to Victor Reuther who had acid thrown in his face, by I think Ford people when they first started to form this union. (pause) I'm glad that he didn't live long enough to see how it's been denigrated like it is not with "Right to Work" movements all over the country. It was very strong when he was a member.

ESS: I hear what you are saying. OK. We talked a little bit, when you read your letter, about some of the issues, some of the causes in the neighborhood.

CM: Alright, now my husband is going to be able to give you a much better perspective on that. He was much more active and he did... I am not a meetings person. I'm sorry I belong to the old school, that believes that meetings are events where minutes are kept and hours are lost. (laughter)

ESS: (Laughter)

CM: So, I did a little bit of it, but he really has a much better political and historical perspective on what was going on at that time.

ESS: So...

CM: I was just sort of the mad housewife, (laughter), trying to keep up with my kids and my schoolwork.

ESS: Well, it sounds like you had a nice blend of things going on at the time.

CM: It was very interesting. You know, I love Detroit in that there seemed to be nothing superficial about it or phony or cutesy or touristy; there was all real people trying to better their
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lives and the community. I really enjoyed that and being around them. We were all sort of sisters and brothers in sweat. (laughter) I mean one of the things we had to do when my kids went to school was to pick up glass and garbage on the school ground. You know, that everyone wanted to see these schools a success. You mentioned Burton, but actually one of my children went to Golightly, which was another school we were instrumental in founding. It got started, I guess, right after my kids were in nursery school, and my husband was very active in getting that off the ground too, with the Education Department at Wayne State. They were involved. We shared quarters with the Detroit Public Schools, and we parents just went out and cleaned up the school grounds, which we had to do in our own yards anyway to try to make it

safe for kids to play out there. So it was a joint community effort, I think to try to get things moving here.

ESS: So the Golightly School was through Wayne State?

CM: Yes.

ESS: Was it through Montieth College?

CM: Not Montieth. It was through the Wayne State College of Education. Sharon Elliot and Helen Zuckara I think were very active in getting that school going, and it moved from our community to one just slightly to the north of us, I guess. It's a Balsh School when it got to the junior high school stage. I think Golightly still exists as a matter of fact.

ESS: Good. I have some notes here, knowing that historical preservation was a big part of your neighborhood and you reinforced that. There are some other movements we didn't about, The art scene that was happening and became widely recognized, civil rights movement, and women's movement. What other of those things do you recall that you like to talk about?

CM: Cass Corridor always had artisans. We had a few living on the block when we moved there, they have since left. But we always enjoyed the galleries, makeshift or whatever, that have gone up We have beautiful graffiti, still, if anyone wants to see. Of course, the Center for Creative Studies was near the house, also. One of the things I found recently I walked into one of the new coffee shops that have popped up near the art institute and I saw sketches of our houses on the walls and there were many more for sale, and I was able to buy some for our neighbors. Apparently the man who did them was an Australian who was head of transportation design at CCS. And he loved our street and he came and drew the houses and it was a legacy for us.

ESS: Lovely.

CM: The women's movement was something I knew more about in Berkeley. I guess it was well on its way by the time I got to the Cass Corridor. But, as I said, we lived in Berkeley at a time, when the Civil Rights movement and the Anti-war movement and the Women's movement were going on at the same time. It was a crazy time. That is why it was hard to concentrate on classes. Here we kind of subsided into "let's do something for the city." We got a little be more localized in what, what we were involved in. There was so much that we needed to do. You know where Canfield Street is?

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ESS: Yes.

CM: My husband was told, with regret by one of the faculty, "We used to very often go to Mario's for lunch," he said, "but you just can't walk there anymore." It was literally across the street. So this is the kind of thing that we needed to fix. And now, we've got a ton new restaurants, galleries, shops going up all around us, which is very interesting. It's about time. I'm glad it's happening. Come down and enjoy the neighborhood.

ESS: I have and now I know you and that you live there. For the purposes of the archive, let's talk about some of those galleries, shops, restaurants that are new or newer. Mario's has been there all along.

CM: Traffic Jam, also, although it's expanded. And it has another sort of branch across the street in its parking lot called, The Motor City Brewery. And there are new little galleries that have opened up on Canfield Street, call The Bird's Nest, and I can't remember the name of the other one, the city... I can't think of the other one right now, I'm sorry.

ESS: But they are right next to The Motor City Brewery.

CM: Yes. Then Shinola has moved in, The Jolly Pumpkin, the restaurant, Sheldon Standin, which I think used to be an old gas station, which is a few blocks away. There are many restaurants that have come and gone, right by the art institute. The latest one is Chartreuse, which features a Detroit cocktail, manufactured at the Detroit Athletic Club, called "The Last Word." Let's see if I can get all of the ingredients. It's gin and chartreuse and lime juice and Maraschino liqueur, and you pass out after you have had a few sips.

ESS: (Chuckles) The Last Word. OK.

CM: (Laughs) That's what it's called. Yes. And we've seen a lot of things sort of start up and leave. But these seem to be doing pretty well now, which is why it is wonderful. A number of kitchen shops have opened up on Cass Corridor, beauty salons, it's amazing.

ESS: And this is within the last...

CM: Five years. There have been other things that have started and then left when things didn't take off. There is a new sports bar that is doing a gangbusters business. I'm sorry, I can't think of the name of it, but it used to be The Agave and before that it was Gregory's, it's turned hands a number of times. Before that it was Teddy's.

ESS: Is it on Canfield?

CM: It is on Canfield, and Woodward.

ESS: On Woodward.

CM: Yes. If you are going to a ballgame, by all means, stop by. It's got entertainment on

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Saturday nights. We're seeing a whole new revival. The Bronx Bar is something that's been there forever, and yet it's become more upscale. It used to be somewhat dingy, but we loved it in the neighborhood. Now, it's got outdoor seating...

ESS: So, you never thought you would hear this questions, but has it become too gentrified?

CM: Some people might say so, but I don't think so. You know I don't think so. We still have garbage on the street and pan handlers. Poor people living in the neighborhood, haven't been forced out. There are people that sort of miss the way things used to be, but they forget that it was somewhat dangerous, and I don't miss that at all. I really don't mind, if I've forgotten to lock my back door, that nothing happens.

CM: I am very happy the way things are going. I think we are still very representative Detroit neighborhood. I'd like to see the city come back because it's more tax money and things start to get better and better. Have you seen this new book called, "Once in a Great City"? I think his

name is Maraniss and he's written a book that takes place in '62, '63 and he talks about what a great city Detroit used to be. And we think it's going to come back.

ESS: I know the book, but I'm trying to recall the author. He's been promoting the book.

CM: Maraniss...He was born here. I'd like to see a new book come out that says, "Once Again in a Great City." (Laughter) It's a source of pride for us to see the changes, and to see people want to live in our area. A lot of young people are moving in. What we need to see happen is for the schools to get better, because once these young people have children, and they have to be sent to school, that becomes a problem. I think Kim might have told you herself, that she had to hunt for the right school to send her daughter. And I think Rachael is in a parochial school now. I'd like to see the public schools step in again, whether they are alternative schools, or magnet schools, or public schools come to come in and be able to come in and educate the children here. My uncle's children went to school in Detroit. They went to Mumzy, I guess, and felt that they had a great education. So we want to see that come back again.

ESS: Well, I think that is a valid point, because..

CM: We want you to come down and move in. (Laughter)

ESS: Well thank you for the invitation. I might take you up on it.

CM: It's more interesting than wherever you live. (Laughter) Plus you want a good education for your kids and you want to feel safe on the streets.

ESS: So I guess it sounds like those were issues for you then, when your children were growing up and that you were able to navigate that.

CM: Yes, that is a very good word for it. We navigated a lot and found that the pluses outweighed the minuses. As I say we really hate to keep returning to this word but we loved the diversity and the effort and just the good will that the people felt toward the neighborhood

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and in the neighborhood, to try to better the situation. It was already. It already had a lot of fine points as you say, artists and professors and people that you just wanted to know...

ESS: And are many of....

CM: ...that were not escaping racial and economic groups that they did not be a part of. So that there was a lot of good feeling around where we were and I like that.

ESS: I spoke too soon. You said something very important. That it was a group of people that had a lot of interests, artists, professors and values that matched yours ...

CM: Yes. That is exactly, right.

ESS: and they wanted to pursue a life that had value but not to escape from something that they didn't like.

CM: That's right. There you go. I think you said it better than could. That's why I brought you here. (Laughter)

ESS: Well, I am glad I can be helpful. You're very helpful in describing your experience there and how it's changed. Now what do you wish to convey to future generations of the city of Detroit? I know that you encouraged me to consider moving. I hear that as an open invitation to many others.

CM: Yes. I think so. I think the more people that want to re-occupy Detroit the better for the city, better for the schools, better for the housing, better for the economy. We'd like to see that happen. We got tired of sitting on the roof with our shotgun waiting for the renaissance, which is happening now. (laughter) There were always vital neighborhoods like Greektown, Lafayette Park area, people that wanted to be here. We want more people to want to be here. City life is wonderful. Homogeneity was never my thing. I always liked lots of different people.

ESS: Wonderful. Let me see. So, I hear you saying that education is a really important component and that is interesting because, you were a teacher in the Detroit Public School System.

CM: I did not have a solution for the problems that were happening in education. I think part of the problem was people wanted to gloss over the problems and pretend they didn't have any. If you call a school an education center, that makes everything very smooth and polished and it really wasn't. We had kids with serious problems, (long pause) that weren't being felt with. That made it hard for other kids in the same environment to learn. I don't have the solution to the problems. I think that education is the most important way in escaping poverty. There were always some that rose above their immediate environment to succeed. I would have liked to have see more of that and didn't really know how to make that happen. All you can do is work with the ones you've got.

ESS: Right. And as you said earlier that is another subject that can be addressed.

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CM: And it is country wide. It's not just Detroit. I think people are trying to solve it in different ways. Nobody's come up with a solution of how you can really educate an underclass that has no privileges at home. Where they are living with maybe with a parent one week, and a grandparent the next or in foster care or they just don't have the support that they need to get a really good education, which you have to have. It can't all be done in the school.

ESS: Right. So it sounds like there is an educational aspect to the environment.

CM: Well, I am a great believer in public education and we did everything we could to make our girls successful within the public schools, it's true, they were alternative schools and magnet schools, although Cass Tech has been there for a long time. But with good parents and a good parent group you can really make things succeed. My daughters got the same scores on their SATs as my niece who lives in very rich suburban Long Island neighborhood. We were proud of that. So much comes with working with teachers and parents. And I would like to see an upgrade in Detroit's education system, but I just really have any answer I can give to you of how to make that happen.

ESS: I think that's valid. It's in part the answer to my question, what do you wish to convey to future generations, one part about the city of Detroit and the other part, specifically the Cass Corridor. I think what I hear you say is 'Move to Detroit' and that will help the educational system.

CM: Absolutely.

ESS: Ant the second part is, once you do make an effort, or expect, or address,

CM: Work with others....

ESS: To make the the educational system better.

CM: I think the one of the things that is so nice is that housing in Detroit is so cheap, it's attracting the whole artist community from New York City and Chicago. They find these cheaper rents here. So they want to come and refurbish these buildings. and I just want them to stay after they have children, that's all.

ESS: I think that is an important insight because, you were part of that experience, your children were part of the experience and were able to succeed. But you see it as a greater process.

CM: Yes, and it is an answer for any city that is suffering in the Rust Belt. I think Cleveland has been through the same thing. Minnesota not so much. But, Ohio, Indiana, Michigan all have these cities that have suffered from the deindustrialization of America and we would like to see all these cities come back.

ESS: It was nice hearing your experiences, your views, your insights. Is there something else that I didn't mention?

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CM: You are a wonderful interviewer. Very accessible, and very approachable. I didn't think I was going to have anything to say at all. Because at this age, my memory is so fuzzy, couldn't remember what would remember. But you made things very comfortable and very easy to express.

ESS: Well, I'm glad to hear that. I find you are very articulate and relaxed and insightful and I enjoy hearing your perspective.

CM: Thank you. Thank you.

ESS: Well I am quiet now, because I don't want to end, but it seems as though the conversation has come to a natural end.

CM: That's fine. I wasn't sure what your timeline was for the interview. I think we have covered pretty much what I would have to say about things in that era of the Cass Corridor. We saw some wonderful things happen. We've seen a transformation in our own home. When we moved in we didn't have wall to wall floors or floor to ceiling walls. We had quite a ways to come and we are still working on it. These are forever projects.

ESS: You say you are in a Victorian home?

CM: Yes.

ESS: French Victorian home?

CM: No, it's American Victorian, English Victorian. It has beautiful mahogany woodwork and two fireplaces and high ceilings. It was in total ruin when we moved in, so we gradually brought around. We went from primitive to comfortable and we are trying to move it from comfortable to beautiful.

ESS: What year was it built?

CM: 1879, so we passed our 100th anniversary and we are moving on. You take one of these houses and it is kind of a lifetime project because there is always something you can do to it.

CM: We are working on our attic right now. We have a bunch of construction going on. It was a floor we never touched all the time while living there. It became full of all of our old stuff that we didn't want to deal with like attics tend to be. The walls were falling down, ceilings. It's a beautiful space. Now We've cleared it out and we are creating a space for our grandchildren. It will be a dormitory for our grandchildren if they all want to visit us at once and with each other.

ESS: It sounds like it will be magical for them.

CM: We are putting in a bathroom.

ESS: So tell me about your grandchildren. How many grandchildren do you have?

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CM: We have four. And of course, they are all wonderful. I'm perfectly objective about that.

ESS: I'm certain you are. What are their ages of your grandchildren?

CM: They are 12, two of them are 10 and one is 8. Lovely ages.

ESS: Oh, very nice. So you probably enjoy them. Of course you do. You are you are making your big space for them.

CM: Yes. and they enjoy each other. That would be nice, we'd love to have them all together.

ESS: And they must love the home where their mothers grew up.

CM: Yes. I think their mothers enjoy it too. Going back and seeing all of the improvements and the changes. They really do. They have roots in Detroit, which is really nice. I get to follow them on Facebook and they always follow the Detroit news. They publish something that they've seen that has to do with Detroit, something's that happening downtown or an event that is happening here. Did you grow up in this area?

ESS: I did, but I am happy to share more after the interview. I will ask you to read...Well, you read this already, Is there one line that you want to finish with from your original piece?

CM: I think I finished, just that that was then and now is now. We enjoyed it even though my tone was slightly tongue and cheek when I was writing, but we wouldn't have stayed if we didn't think it was a wonderful project and didn't like being where we were.

ESS: Well, thank you very much.

CM: You are welcome.

Oral History Description

Carol McClain Oral History

- a. **Cass Corridor Oral History Project**
- b. **Identifier:**UP002659
- c. **Resource Type:** Oral History
- d. **Language:** English
- e. **Restrictions:** None

Description

Interviewer: E. Susan Sheiner, Student, Wayne State University

Interviewee: Carol McClain, Forty- year resident of the Cass Corridor, Detroit, MI.

Digital file: 47 minutes

Transcript: 14 pages.

Date of Interview: November 18, 2015

Abstract

Carol McClain, long time resident and advocate for the city of Detroit and the neighborhood referred to as the Cass Corridor, and Midtown, speaks of her experiences living and raising a family with her husband, Wayne State University professor, W. Martin McClain. Both of them served on neighborhood committees and were dedicated to make the historic area where they still live, beautiful. Canfield street, where their children grew up is four blocks south of Wayne State University, where they both had active roles, he as a professor and she as a graduate student. Their daughters both attended Cass Tech high school as well as Burton International Elementary and Golightly, both magnet schools in their neighborhood. McClain reflects on the positive changes as well as challenges of raising a family during the 1970's and 80's in the Cass Corridor in Detroit. She reflected briefly of her "Detroit famous" uncle, Irving Bluestone a labor leader of that era as well.

Key Word Descriptors

Carol McClain, Cass Corridor Resident, Advocate, Parent, Teacher
W. Marin McClain, Cass Corridor Resident, Advocate, Professor, Parent
Cass Corridor, 1970's
Cass Corridor, 1980's
Irving Bluestone, UAW labor leader
Detroit neighborhoods
Concerned Citizens of the Cass Corridor
Canfield Street
Urban Renewal
Historic Preservation, Detroit
Midtown Detroit
Detroit Public Schools
Burton International Elementary School
Golightly School
Wayne State University

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