

History United: Memory Initiative

Interview with Mercer Motley (MM)

Interviewer: Evelyn Riley (ER)

Tuesday March 11, 2014 at 11:00AM at Danville Regional Foundation Offices, Danville, VA

ER: The interview is going to take about 45 minutes to an hour, and I have some questions that I have written down to ask you, but if you think of anything you want to talk about sometimes the interviews go off into tangents sometimes and that's perfectly fine.

MM: Alright.

ER: So, just to get started, so we can have in on the record, can you spell out your name for me?

MM: The first name is Mercer. M-E-R-C-E-R. The last name is Motley. M-O-T-L-E-Y.

ER: And your birthdate?

MM: March 31st, 1924

ER: Ok

MM: I'll be 90 years old the last day of this month.

ER: That's great! My grandmother is 95 now.

MM: Oh really?

ER: Mhmm, still living in the same house she's been at for years.

MM: Wonderful!

ER: So, how long have you lived in the area?

MM: All that time, except when I was in World War II service, three years, and then I was at Virginia Tech three years. And other than those six years I've lived in Danville. Well, at the moment I actually live in Caswell County, but it's just over the line so I tell everyone I'm from Danville.

ER: Yeah, I know I make my way down to Caswell quite often! So, what branch of service were you in?

MM: The old Army Air Force, at that time the Air Force was not a separate branch.

ER: Did you get to travel during that?

MM: I spent two years in Central America; Panama and Guatemala.

ER: Did you go, you said you went to Virginia Tech, was that part of the G.I. Bill?

MM: Mmhmm *-nods head-*

ER: What did you study when you were there?

MM: Horticulture.

ER: Ok, why did you choose horticulture?

MM: Because my parents had a couple of small greenhouses and we sold many plants in the spring of the year, vegetable plants and flowering plants. That was before the days of the discount stores. Everyone and his brother started selling plants. So we grew our own plants and I became interested in it and decided to go into the florist business.

ER: What year did you decide to do that?

MM: Well really before World War II I was interested in doing that, and I went to Averett as a day student in 1942 because I could get my first years work at Averett...and knowing that I would have to go into service. Averett had seven boys; day students.

ER: That's it? *-laughs-*

MM: It was not coeducational at the time. I could give you a lot of history of Averett College.

ER: Yeah? When did they go residential coed, do you know?

MM: I'm not sure, I think it was the...I think it was after World War II.

ER: Middle 50s or so? Probably, that's when a lot of schools started...

MM: I don't know when they actually took males in as boarding students but...

ER: Ok, so you said you've lived here, Danville, the area, all your life what neighborhood or what area did you grow up in?

MM: I grew up on Grace Street which is off of, it ran from Holbrook Avenue to South Main Street. Very close to the hospital.

ER: Do you have any particular memories of that area of town, or how it has changed over time? We can talk about that if you'd like.

MM: Oh yeah. It has changed tremendously. I went old George Washington High School, was on Holbrook avenue, and that was before Forest Hill Elementary School was built and so the first and second grades actually went to the high school building so I went to that building eight years, first and second grade and seventh through the twelfth grades.

[Timestamp: 5:52] **ER:** Which all schools did you attend here? Elementary, middle...

MM: George Washington High School and John L. Berkeley was an elementary school on Grove Street. I was there four years.

ER: What was that like, your experiences there? Were you involved in any clubs or sports or anything?

MM: Well, I enjoyed my school years. It was quite different from what it is now of course, but George Washington then, the high school, had what they called College Preparatory courses. The A, College Preparatory A was for the arts, College Preparatory B was for the science, and College Preparatory C was a combination science and languages. And then they also had for students who did not anticipate going to college; they could take a business courses, which they could take typing and elementary accounting. Just general business topics. And they also had a program in woodworking and metalworking for students who did not anticipate going to college.

ER: So were you close enough to walk to these schools or did you...

MM: Yes, in fact I went home to lunch every day for six years because I was so close to the school that I could go home for lunch. Even though we didn't have but thirty-two minutes for lunch.

ER: Did you fix it yourself or was your mother...

MM: Oh no. Yeah, mother was there. She had it ready and it didn't take long to eat it. *-both laugh-*

ER: Did you have brothers and sisters?

MM: I had one brother and one sister, both were in the city school system, so I decided quite early that I did not want to teach school. *-both laugh-* He was principal of GW from 1970 to 74 and my sister taught English. She taught a number of years in elementary school at Forest Hills and then she taught, I don't know, quite a few years at Robert E. Lee which was the old GW high school on Holbrook Avenue, which is now apartments. They tore down the school.

ER: Ok. So after you attended high school, was there a break before you joined the military or was it almost immediately after?

MM: Well I went to Averett, I graduated from GW in June of 1942 and then I went to Averett from September, 42 until March of 43 and went into service.

ER: So after you finished over at Virginia Tech, what drew you back to Danville?

MM: As I said earlier my family had this little plant business so I came back and we built a flower shop on West Paxton Street and our property, my father's property really, went from Grace Street to West Paxton Street so we built a flower shop on West Paxton and opened up a regular retail florist. Then in 1978...no, 1984, we moved the business from West Paxton over on Mt. Cross Road.

ER: Where it is now...

MM: And it still operates as Motley Florists although I sold it in 1998. I don't have any connection with the flower shop now.

ER: So they just kept the name?

MM: You're right

ER: Because it was an established institution by then. *-laughs-*

MM: Right.

ER: So how have you seen, or over the time you opened it in 1949 until 1998, how did you see business change?

MM: Completely. When we started in 1949, all of our product, flowers, we got were grown in the United States. Now I would say less than two percent are grown in the United States. Most of them come out of Columbia and Ecuador. And now, a florist is able to get any type of flower he wants, any time during the year whereas when we started the flowers were seasonal.

ER: So now just because of transportation and the availability.

MM: Availability and transportation changed, because flowers all now are flown in, whereas when we started they all went by rail and it took five days to get flowers from California to the East Coast. *-laughs-*

ER: How big did your business get? Like how many employees did you have? Who did you serve in the community?

MM: We started with about four employees and I think when I sold it we had nine in all, total, including myself.

ER: So, the florist shop. Who all bought flowers there, the businesses, do you remember anyone in particular or any good stories? *-both laugh-*

MM: Oh, I have lots of stories but they mostly pertain to flower stories. Nothing really in particular. Other than just the business did change completely.

ER: So are most of your childhood friends from the area, did they remain in Danville or did they go out?

MM: Surprisingly quite a few of my classmates came back after the war and settled in Danville. I think more settled in Danville then that do now.

ER: Probably. So what are you currently involved in, like what organizations, what church to you go to, that kind of thing.

MM: I go to West Main Baptist Church. For fifty years I was very active in the Lions Club. I was State District Governor in Lionism, but that all changed too, so three years ago I dropped out of Lions. At the moment I'm more of a caregiver for my wife than anything else because her health isn't good so I look after her.

ER: Is she from Danville originally?

MM: No, she was from Bergenfield New Jersey, just across from the river from New York City and she came down to go to Averett College and of course, you know, back then everyone rode the train. That was before the days of air travel. When she got to Danville and came up Craghead Street she said, "I can't wait to get away from this place."

ER: Oh no!

MM: But she's lived here now, going on seventy years! *-laughs-*

ER: So what did she, what was her profession, what did she do?

MM: Well she went to Averett and she had planned to be a nurse. She graduated from Averett as salutatorian in 1944. Then, that was during the war, and it did not materialize that she was a nurse and then she and I were married in 1947 while I was still at Virginia Tech and she worked over at the Radford arsenal. Personnel work. When we came back to Danville she worked for retail merchants for a while and then she worked for the draft board in the county, and the draft board, the county draft board, at time was in Schoolfield. After our first child came along she stayed at home and then helped me in the flower business. So as the years went by she never took a job other than helping me in the flower business.

ER: How many kids did you have?

MM: We had two children. Two girls. Our daughter is still in Danville and she's retired from the school system and then our youngest daughter graduated from Emory & Henry College and she was working with the visually impaired. She met a young man in Richmond who was studying at the medical college of Virginia and they were married and had a little girl and then in 1986 they were in Knoxville, Tennessee, and he was resident at the university hospital and she and the little girl were killed in an automobile accident. So...we lost her. But our other daughter still lives in Danville.

ER: What kept her in Danville do you think?

MM: I don't know...she would have to answer that. She graduated from Davis & Elkins College in Elkins, West Virginia. Well I guess the main thing at the time, right after she finished school, she married Dr. Hoffman.

ER: Ok.

MM: And he was teaching at GW. Then she taught a year at the old Sutherlin Academy, which was a private school in Danville, and then next year she got a job at GW and she stayed there until the Galileo School opened and then she taught at Galileo.

ER: Ok.

MM: But she and David were divorced in, oh gosh time flies...seven or eight years ago I guess. And of course he remarried several years ago and then she remarried, my daughter remarried, this past Christmas. That was one of the things that was going on when you called! *-both laugh-*

ER: You said you were a part of the Lions Club, and could you talk a little bit about what they do in the community.

MM: Uh huh! I'm sorry to say they're not nearly as active as they once were. We had a host club here which was organized in 1922, I think it was. And then my club, I was a charter member of the evening club, which was chartered in 1959. And then a few years ago the two clubs combined but their main work was working with the blind. We gave glasses to indigent people, especially children, and we did a lot of work testing the children in school for sight problems and we participated in other community activities, but our main emphasis was on sight and then a few years ago we started working with people with hearing difficulties and we give hearing aids to people who are not able to buy them.

ER: So, do you wanna backtrack a little bit, did you work any odd jobs or anything when you were a kid in high school?

MM: No, I kind of worked in the family business all my life.

ER: Alright. So what would you say, what historical event that happened in the region had the most impact on you? Whether it was...a lot of people say the closing of the mills or a lot of people say Bloody Monday or something like that. Is there any event that you remember having a strong impact on you?

MM: Well I guess the loss of the mills and the tobacco industry. My father was a bookkeeper in the tobacco warehouse. And what the bookkeeper did, of course he kept the books, but he also paid the farmers. See the farmers brought the tobacco into the warehouse and it was put on the floor and sold at auction and then the farmer paid the warehouse a certain percentage of that as a commission and so, my father was the one who wrote checks to the farmers for their tobacco after it was sold. Motley was a very common name in Pittsylvania County and there were a lot of Motleys in the tobacco business, some who were auctioneers and some who worked in the offices and so forth and tobacco was a very integral part of old Danville. As much, or more so,

than the mills. And of course the mill was very much a part of Danville and employed a large labor force and so many students would drop out of school and go to work in the mill. Then I guess we didn't really realize at the time that Bloody Monday was going on, that it really had the significance that it turned out to be. But that was...well I don't know how other people felt but you know I never had any feeling of insecurity during that period of time. It was a very orderly process. I think that...well maybe I shouldn't say this, but I felt like at the time Chief of Police let things get out of hand.

ER: Yeah...so, did you ever attend any of the tobacco auctions?

MM: Oh yes!

ER: Could you talk a little bit about the experience?

MM: Yes, you want me to tell a little bit about how they sold it?

ER: Either that or your experience going; a lot of people talk about how loud the auctioneer was and everything.

MM: Of course there was no such thing of using a sound system. They had what they called a sales manager and he was usually the owner of the warehouse or one of the owners or somebody high up in the echelon. The tobacco was put out on the floor in baskets in rows with enough room to walk between the rows and the sales manager was the first one at the head of the row and the auctioneer was right by him and he was start the bid on the tobacco. He would look at the tobacco and say, maybe, \$20. And then the auctioneer would start crying twenty and then the buyers--there were buyers on both sides of the row of tobacco--and they would buy by signs. You know if he said 20 and this man wanted to bid 20 and a half he would just raise his finger. The auctioneer knew what the different buyers signs were. And maybe he wouldn't spend but thirty seconds on a pile of tobacco and then he would, the way the expressed it, "knock it out" to a buyer. Then behind the buyers were what they called clerks. They were employees of the warehouse, one on each side. And they would write down the ticket number--each pile on the back had a ticket on it--and he would right the ticket number and the price. And he had to, no such thing as a computer or calculators, he had to figure in his head that this pile of tobacco weighed 193 pounds and sold for \$20.50 a pound he had to figure in his head how much that was and write it down on the paper as he walked along. So they were excellent mathematicians. And my father would never use an adding machine. That was pre-calculator time but they had an old adding machine that had a handle on it *-motions with his hand the action of pulling the handle-* but he would never do that because he could add a list of figures faster than he could put it in the machine and pull the handle.

ER: Oh really?

MM: If he had a column of figures that long *-motions with his hand a distance of approximately a foot long-* he would just go down the list and add them as he went.

ER: Was math your strong suit in school too?

MM: Was who in school?

ER: Was math your strong suit in school?

MM: Yes, yes. Yeah, math was always about my best subject and latin was my worst.

ER: Oh, Latin.

-both laugh-

ER: So if you had to describe your line of work, I guess running the florist shop, what words would you use to describe it?

MM: Thoroughly enjoying! If I were a young man and had to go back into business, I wouldn't mind going back into that business. Although it has changed completely. The main thing I liked about it, it was never boring. I would go in in the morning and I would think well now today I need to do this, and this, and this and when evening came I hadn't done a thing I'd planned to do. But I'd been busy all day long.

ER: That's the way it goes!

MM: I have a little story I'd like to tell you. Years ago when our girls were small we went to Hershey, Pennsylvania and went through the old Hershey chocolate plant. Then you could go right through the main factory. I never will forget, how you know--I don't know what they do now--but then they put Hershey bars in a box, 24 bars to a box. And this man was standing there taking Hershey bars off of a conveyor belt and putting them in a box. And he would fill a box, put the top on, put it over here, and start with another box. And I thought, man, if I had to do that all day long, I'd go crazy! *-laughs-*

ER: So, let's see...

MM: But I've seen so many changes in Danville. In fact when I was a youngster we had trolleys. Then we went to buses. And of course the railroad station was very, very busy. On Sunday night,

a northbound train and a southbound train that usually came into the station at the same time. One would be on one side of the platform, one on the other. And the train station would be full of people, about like the Raleigh-Durham Airport is now. It's interesting to, in fact coming here today I came by the train station--of course everything now is very quite--but it was a busy place back then.

ER: So you would've been a kid during prohibition? Correct?

MM: Yeah.

ER: Do you remember anything about that? I study that time period so I just like to ask people if they remember anything about the repeal or during it.

MM: The only thing I remember about that was hearing on the radio that Dillinger was killed in Chicago *-laughs-* I don't remember... Well I remember there was a little place just over the Caswell County line like you're going to Greensboro--it's on the old road now—that they sold alcoholic beverages. Or maybe... I don't know... well, they couldn't have sold them legally. I don't know.

ER: Bootlegging?

MM: Yeah, bootlegging was... my mother's people grew up in Callands. And between Callands and Martinsville off Route 57 is a little community, Mountain Valley. And Mountain Valley was noted for its bootleggers! *-laughs-* And then I remember when they opened up the ABC stores. The state took those over. Oh! I'll tell you one thing that's rather interesting. You probably studied about the blue laws?

ER: Could you explain a little about those?

[Timestamp: 29:45] **MM:** Yeah, stores could not be open on Sunday and movies could not be open on Sunday. And this must have been in the 30s, I'm sure it was. And one of the theaters opened on a Sunday and of course, I guess he was served a warrant by the city but then he began to go through the courts and all of the churches had petitions that the members have to sign on Sunday to prevent Sunday openings of churches, I mean of theaters. Of course, no business could open on a Sunday.

ER: When did that get changed?

MM: Well, completely I would say probably somewhere in the late 70s. I don't remember exactly.

ER: Right. So, when you came back from Virginia Tech, did you live in the same neighborhood as your family, or did you kind of move around to a different part of town?

MM: Just one street over.

ER: One street over?

MM: Yeah, I would say about a block.

ER: When did you say you moved to Caswell? Or right over the line?

MM: 1978

ER: Ok, any particular reason?

MM: Yes, our daughter and her husband were living in the area and then Margaret, my wife and I, were anxious to move from where we were living and I wanted some property--some land--and we looked at different places and nothing really interested us and our daughter found this place that had a nice home and ten acres of land so that's where we moved. Then the interesting thing was, as I said earlier she had two daughters, and they were born and when they got school-aged she and David decided to go back to Danville so the children would have the advantage of the city schools. So, I said to my wife, "Well...I guess you wanna move back to town?" and she said, "Why?" I said, "Well I guess you wanted to, since Lynn's not living out here you wanna move back to town." "No! I like it out here." So we've been there ever since. *-laughs-*

ER: How is it different or how is it the same in, more rural I assume?

MM: It was seven miles from our flower shop on Mt. Cross Road, and yet after a busy frustrating day at work I would go home at night and feel like I was way out in the country even though it's as the crow flies about a mile from the city limit. *-laughs-* We have nice neighbors but they're not close by. By close by, I mean where you can look from one window to another. *-laughs-*

ER: They're not close by, yeah.

MM: On West Paxton Street we had nice neighbors but they were always checking on what we were doing. *-laughs-* So I always said I wanted to be out where the neighbors didn't check up on me. *-laughs-*

ER: Do you remember anybody that lived, you said Paxton Street, that old neighborhood, any particular characters?

MM: Not really. The interesting thing, when our children were growing up there were a lot of children on that street. They used to thoroughly enjoy it. It was a nice neighborhood but, so many of those neighborhoods now--and it's sad for someone like me who's lived so long to see some of those neighborhoods deteriorate like they are.

ER: So, how would you describe the Dan River Region--living here, working here, growing up here--to somebody?

MM: Well, it's interesting to me now to see the transition that's trying to take place. Of course, I've always been one to see, to try to see the glass half-full rather than half-empty, but still I wonder a lot of times what will take place because there are a lot of hurdles that have to be jumped over. The thing that concerns me the most is the educational situation in Danville. I don't think that young people are taking advantage of their opportunities and I really don't know how we overcome that. It all goes back to, I think, family breakups and some way or another we could get back to the basic family unit. I remember when my girls were doing their work - *unintelligable*- at the school, I was president of the PTA and there was a teacher there at that time that had taught me so I knew her very well. We had a program one night about how parents should react when their children come home and tell what happened at school. So after the program was over I got up and I said, "Well you know it doesn't really bother me too much about what the children come home and tell that happened at school, what really concerns me is when the children come to school and tell what happened at home." And this teacher, *-laughs-* this teacher really broke up, I wondered what--I teased our girls--what have you been telling her?

ER: Telling fibs? *-both laugh-* That's great! So if you had to tell someone advice who was going to come live here, what would you say?

MM: I would say that Danville is a good place to live. That the, even though people complain about taxes all the time, taxes are not that exorbitant in Danville I don't think, and really what concerns me is young people saying, "There's nothing to do in Danville!" Well there's plenty to do! There's plenty to do in Danville if you just look for it. And I think Danville has a wonderful climate. Some people might not agree with me with the winter we went through, but winter hasn't been that severe. And Danville is a good place to live. I've always said that, this is just one of our idiosyncrasies, I've always said that Danville's so far from Richmond that Virginia didn't really have much to do with us and North Carolina, since we are just over the line, North Carolina doesn't have anything to do with us, so we're kind of orphans down here. In fact...I'm taking your time.

ER: Oh no! We still have plenty of time!

MM: When I was traveling as District Governor of Lionism, I had to travel from Danville to North of Richmond's (down to Emporia and you go east), club--we had fifty-two clubs at that time—and I'd go, I'd leave here about 3:30 and drive to Richmond and meet with the club and have dinner and I'd have to make a short talk and then we'd have to meet with the board and then I would head home about 11:00. And I've been to Richmond any number of times when I would be visiting with some fellows I didn't know and they'd say, "Now where are you from?" I'd say, "I'm from Danville." "Danville? Yeah, I've heard of Danville, I've never been to Danville. Well you're not going back tonight are you?" I thought, "How far do you think it is from here to Danville?" *-laughs-* So I think that a lot of people from Richmond and all of Virginia that really know nothing about Danville. And my wife's health isn't good and we have to go to Duke occasionally and when we're meeting with people down there they'll say, "Oh you're from Danville? Well, I've never been to Danville." *-laughs-*

ER: Probably driven through but...

MM: Yeah I would think all the interstates, with Greensboro...

ER: Right. Well your point earlier reminded me, kind of segues into the next question that I was going to ask, what do you remember doing for fun when you were younger, whether it was like going to the drive in or walking downtown or...

MM: Yeah, we, my wife and I, when we first came down to Danville on Sunday afternoon we walked down Main Street and we didn't have a car and we'd walk down to the shops. Just enjoy the scenery. And then we did a lot of picnicking. And when our children were small. And I think, well I can't say because I don't know how young families interact now, but we did a lot of things, family activities. There was Dan River on the...that lake down near Java...the name doesn't come to me now but Dan River owned it then but they would sell memberships and we would go down there every Wednesday--we would close the flower shop every Wednesday at noon--and we'd go down there every Wednesday afternoon and every Sunday afternoon and swim, picnic, and then play ball. And we would usually take some of the neighborhood kids with us and just have a good time. And we went to a lot of movies because that was before the days of the internet and television.

[Timestamp: 42:09] **ER:** Do you, how do you remember downtown and how has it changed through the years too?

MM: Well of course downtown has changed completely. All of the...well you see, up until the 50s, I can't remember the exact dates, but Danville's corporate limits was at the end of Ballou Park went from there, and Schoolfield's in the county so the corporate limits went from there

over to Third Avenue—you know where Third Avenue is off of North Main? Well that was Danville.

ER: Right.

MM: And...what did you ask me?

ER: How downtown has changed.

MM: Oh! How downtown...Ok. So, downtown was the center of Danville and all of the businesses were downtown and I fully expected downtown to progress on up Main Street hill toward the post office but then in 19...well the middle 1980s, was when John Daniel built the mall and that completely changed the commercial businesses in Danville. That became the center of town. If you look on a city map, that area is just about the center of the city now. And then Danville did that large annexation.

ER: Of Schoolfield.

MM: Yeah, well it took in Schoolfield and on out 41 [Note: Route 41], well not too far out 41, but took in a large area over there. And I think the biggest mistake Danville ever made was not remodeling the airport. In 1949 and 50, was before the jet-age, and old Piedmont Airline had commercial flights in here and the old Eastern Airline, which you may have heard of, had a direct flight from Newark, New Jersey to Danville and from Danville to Newark. Then...they were prop planes [Note: Propeller plans] and then the jets took over and the airport was not able to handle jets. But when I was a youngster the Danville airport was a better airport than Greensboro.

ER: Really?

MM: We just did not keep up with the times. I heard a man say today that he didn't think that Danville would ever have a commuter line--airline--because FFA now doesn't like to have airports less than fifty miles from one another. And as the crow flies Greensboro forty-eight miles from us and Raleigh/Durham is forty-nine.

ER: Oh, so kind of puts you out of the running there. *-laughs-* So did you ever think about leaving Danville at all or the area, no?

MM: Never gave it any consideration.

ER: So, are there any other memories that we haven't talked about that you would like to share? A lot of the times people would want to talk about things that I don't even think of to write down to ask questions about *-both laugh-* so...

MM: I don't know of anything in particular. Of course I've seen a lot of changes in the city over the years. And of course one thing that really harms us is that, and what made me think of it I just saw a yellow bus go by there, the federal government has so many requirements now that the city really can't help itself, it has to do...you know, like to me, seeing all these buses is ridiculous but yet I know why they have them. They have to have them. But you see when, as I said earlier I went on Holbrook Avenue, well we had a lot of students who lived in North Danville well they would walk from the old high school up to North Main Street there in front of the museum, catch the bus and ride it over to North Main and then they would get off and walk to wherever they lived on some of the side streets. I mean people did so much walking, whereas now someone doesn't want to walk from here to Main Street. So, that's...

ER: So where do you see the future of the region going?

MM: I wish I knew. A lot of emphasis is being put on technology and that is certainly the future, is technology. I hope it will materialize. I don't...I have problems seeing industry coming back to the United States like it was because, because having been in business labor really is your biggest cost and I think that's what industry is looking at and labor is so much cheaper...for instance in the flower business we used so many of these artificial flower, well all of those are made in China. None made in the US.

ER: Wow. Do you have a favorite flower?

MM: Um, I have a least favorite flower and that's the red rose.

ER: Really?

Timestamp: **MM:** Because we had to use so many of them at Valentine's I got tired of them. I like yellow. In fact my father then, he helped then in the flower business some after he retired, and yellow was not his favorite color and he said, "Just because you like yellow, nobody else doesn't like yellow," and I said, "Well there are a lot of yellow flowers." And then I had a lady call me one day, and I said, I've always made a habit to say, "Do you have a color preference?" and she said no, just something pretty. So in a few minutes the phone rang again and it was the same lady and she said, "You asked me about color preference," she said, "Anything but yellow, I don't like yellow." *-laughs-*

ER: Oh no!

MM: That's the biggest area of why the flower business has changed. When we went in business back in early 50s, funeral work was eighty percent of the florist business. The average funeral would have maybe sixty or seventy floral tributes. And then, "Please omit flowers," came along and that changed that part of the business completely.

ER: Did you see another group pick up the slack where the, where that kind of fell through or did more people kind of come in individually to buy for other things?

MM: Yeah, most of the business now is more for sentimental reasons. Thank you bouquets or something like that whereas the bulk of the business when I started was hospital and funeral work. But, very few flowers are bought on either one of those occasions now.

ER: Right, because the hospitals have their own, you know of the ground floor where they sell flowers and a gift shop...and everything.

MM: Right. Yeah.

ER: So, do you have a favorite childhood memory or story that you like to tell people.

MM: Not really. As I've said earlier, my childhood memories are more with family. I had my...I remember by grandparents, I did not know my paternal grandparents, they...my grandfather died before I was born and my grandmother died when I was four years old, but they lived in the Chatham area. But I well remember my mother's parents, when I was quite small they lived on a farm up in Callands and then my aunt was a librarian at Lynchburg College so they moved to Lynchburg to live with her and I used to go up with my mother and visit them. My grandfather loved to walk so he and I would walk maybe three or four hours in the morning. And family was a main part of our activities.

ER: Yeah, I do think that I covered most of the things that I had to talk about today and I thank you for your time in stopping by.

MM: You're most welcome.

ER: We've got, we've spent about fifty minutes or so, we have ten minutes left so I can either, we can keep talking or we can call it a day. Whichever you feel comfortable with really. Have you been down here, doing all the renovations in the warehouses and stuff?

MM: You know, one thing that has bothered me, in some of your work you can resurrect that. A number of years ago, I don't know who instigated it, but there was a museum over here on Lynn

Street in the Old Virginia Tobacco Company building and they had a lot of, I think they had an old loom set up, but it was more geared to the tobacco industry and Dan River Mills although the newspaper, that was before it all moved to Lynchburg but they had a lot of old newspaper issues there. And I've talked to different ones there, and I've talked to different ones about it and I've been told, "Well it's in storage." But it seems to me that wherever that is, and I hope it was kept, it needs to be reclaimed and put somewhere for tobacco-textile display.

ER: Was that the Danville Bee kind of old newspaper issues?

MM: Yeah, but it was also a lot of replicas of the old tobacco business and the old textile business. And I've been told, Gary... what's Gary's last name.

ER: Oh I should know this...

MM: He told me it was all in storage somewhere, and I said, "Well, it seems to me that..."

ER: Grant! Gary Grant

MM: Yeah! Grant.

ER: Sorry, I knew it was going to come to me

MM: Yeah, Gary Grant.

ER: So it's all in storage. Like at the museum or the historical association?

MM: I have no idea.

ER: Ok.

MM: And I haven't been able to find out. But you know that old building I think was sold, I don't know whether Davis bought it or what happened to it, but that building was sold and that was moved but it was a nice museum at one time.

ER: Do you know about what time it was taken down, what year?

MM: Oh, I would say in the 60s, I don't remember exactly.

ER: Ok. I'll have to ask.

MM: I'd say it was in the 60s. And you know something else, I've read where these old tobacco barns are gradually deteriorating and going...we ought to have a tobacco barn set up in this area.

ER: Preservation Virginia, have you heard of their group? They are actually working on a tobacco trail where they're kind of using the barns as heritage tourism to trace the way down from Virginia to North Carolina and everything and these barns are stops along the way because various people have renovated some of the barns into businesses, like they have their own little shop inside the old renovated barn or they are just there as a historic landmark itself.

MM: Oh, good! Yeah. Well you know Yanceyville had a tobacco barn, you remember that?

ER: Mmhmm.

MM: And a storm took the roof off, then they tore the barn down.

ER: Right...*-both laugh-*

MM: Well I hate to see a lot of these, you know Danville lost some of its most beautiful homes before the historical society ever became an entity within itself. There was an old home across from the museum on the corner of Chambers Street and Main Street and it had a beautiful old fence around and it and the back of it was cobblestone and it had a hitching post, beautiful little home and then that was torn down and that office building built and now that's about to fall down and... *-laughs-*

ER: Yeah...have you been on the tour that they give, about the? [Note: A Historical Society walking architecture tour]

MM: Never been.

ER: It's pretty good, I've been and it was really interesting. You know, I like architecture and everything so it was neat to hear some of the back-stories behind the houses.

MM: The home, I think now it's a bed and breakfast, across from the old home on the corner of Jefferson and Main across from the Episcopal Church there was an old [*Unintelligible*] and their son grew orchids and we used to get orchids from him for our flower business.

ER: So did most of your flowers come from Virginia or was it mostly country-wide for the most part when you shipped?

MM: Well back then it was countrywide, now there are very few, practically no...then there were large ranges of greenhouses, there was one in Indiana, there was one in a New England state--I think Massachusetts, it grew a lot of roses—but none of those are grown in the United States anymore, they all come out of South America.

ER: Were you, when you established business were you the only floral shop in town? Or were there already a couple?

MM: At one time there were, I think fourteen florists in Danville, but now I don't know of but five. What I call legitimate florists because Wal-Mart and all these places sell bunches of flowers.

ER: Right, but they're not legitimate florists.

MM: I don't think so. *-both laugh-*

ER: Well, I guess that we can wrap it up on that note and looks like we have everything.

MM: Alright, I don't know exactly what you were looking for but I hope I helped a little bit.

ER: Oh that's perfect. We just like to hear stories, I just like to chat. *-both laugh-*

[End of transcription]