

**Sans Souci Women's Club
Mary Carreathers Interview
Conducted by Lindsay Peterson, Elyse Watson, and James Newberry
October 11, 2016
Transcribed by Lindsay Peterson**

Full Transcription

- PETERSON: Hello we are at Sans Souci Women's Club in Adairsville, GA, and I am Lindsay Peterson [with] my partner Elyse Watson. And we are here today interviewing Mary Carreathers. So...
- NEWBERRY: It's Tuesday.
- PETERSON: It's Tuesday, October 11th.
- NEWBERRY: 2016
- PETERSON: 2016. Yes. So, Mary if uh...if you could please tell us when you were born?
- CARREATHERS: May 8th, 1940.
- PETERSON: So, what was Adairsville like growing up?
- CARREATHERS: Well, it was a quiet little town. Everybody got along. And I'm talking race you know...I guess the only thing I can say that was different is we were not allowed to go up to that school. Blacks...we were segregated so we did not come this way...But everybody got along, and we had quite a few black people who owned businesses downtown. Ahmad Hall's grandfather owned...I think it was a shoe store. There a lot of people who lived, you would say, across the railroad tracks. But we didn't go to school. My church is located on South Main Street. It was moved downtown I think in the early or maybe it was the 1800s, and it was over there somewhere. And then we had it built on South Main the way it is now. But it was a church the district superintendent saw fit to tear it down. There was an order and he just demolished it, and a famous, I like to call a famous person, because people still say Miss Ruth's church. But she worked and her family worked very hard. And we used to laugh and say she sold hot dogs, she sold ice cream to get the church rebuilt. And the church was reopened in 1958. Now, I wasn't a member then. I was a daddy's girl so I was a Baptist. But when I came home from college I moved my membership to Kaigler Chapel United Methodist Church. Well it wasn't a United Methodist Church then. It was a CME church. And I believe that 1968 black congregations and the white congregations became United Methodist Church, and I happened to have been apart of that because that

was the year after on the North Georgia Conference level. But then again growing up my dad, I think I told y'all that my dad worked at the depot. And I used to go down there. He would wave me. And I also said we got to ride the train to Atlanta, and he would take me shopping, and it was just downtown. And the crochet store right over there, my dad had an account, and I could remember as a young girl going to that store, and said I want to charge something on my daddy's bill. Dad didn't give me permission to do that, but I did it with my friends and kept getting away with it and we kept doing it you know just getting snacks and things. And I remember him telling the people who worked in the store that's J.D.'s wife, my mother. He said when she comes in here, whatever she wants, you give it to her. And so we did. My grandmother worked for Miss Topsy, and I'm sure you've heard about Miss. Topsy. In some of her writing, she would talk about Mary, that I'm named for. And Miss Topsy told me, "Would you please remember as much about Adairsville's history as much as you can?" Guess what? I didn't write it down. So I didn't remember a lot of things that my dad [told me]. My dad was very knowledgeable about the city of Adairsville. And I should have written all of this down while he was giving it to me, but I didn't do it, and I regret that now.

WATSON: So what kind of impact did World War II and the Depression have on the community here?

CARREATHERS: Well, you can tell 1940 I was born right in it wasn't I? I can remember my mom saying you know this was a chanille area. And I can remember my mom saying she made spreads or whatever. I think they're beautiful but I can't remember doing it. Well, we had a little black school right across from my family home, and it had three rooms. We had three teachers. I'm trying to think... first, second, and third grade had one teacher. 4th, 5th, and 6th I think [had one teacher]. We had the person who was called the principal. She had 7th and 8th graders. And we got the hand-me-down books. I can remember during the Christmas season they would give us crates of apples, and we also had to buy our own chairs. I can remember now I'd always say, "Oh my mom and dad...they can buy five or six." And my mom and dad were like, "What are you doing? You think we've got all this money?" But guess what. Whatever I said, my mom and dad would get it. Growing up, [Adairsville] also was a cotton town, and my dad would rent land. I guess we'd have three or four cotton patches. But being the baby, the youngest, he didn't let me. He didn't let me pick any cotton. And they always said you're daddy's favorite you get your way, and I did, I did. And then after the 8th grade, we would have our little graduation. And then we would be bused to Cartersville to Summer Hill High School which was the black high school for the county. So there were Kingston, Cassville... They tried to pick up all the little towns... Oh there was Noble Hill. And we were all bused, and it was amazing because the principal's son was a coat who would drive the school bus. And you

can imagine what a trip it would be. We sometimes would have to go through Kingston and pick up the kids who were going to High School in Cartersville. And my graduation class from the 8th grade, there were four of us. Just four. And then we finished. I graduated in 1958. And went off to Fort Valley State, and majored in Vocational Home Economics, and got my vocational degree. Is that enough?

NEWBERRY: I want to go back. So, you talked a little bit about the depot.

CARREATHERS: Yes.

NEWBERRY: And your father weighing you at the depot.

CARREATHERS: Yeah but my dad worked at the depot.

NEWBERRY: Tell me about that.

CARREATHERS: Well, I don't know what he did. He was the only black person here that – As I said the only day, I said it was Elnan (?) Raliroad at that time, and I said they put me through college because my dad got his salary from the railroad and that's where I got my college money from. But dad, not only did he work at the depot, he used to – I'm trying to think what you call it – section hands. Because he would work up and down the tracks. He would sometimes work in Tennessee. And so they would leave on a Sunday, and come back on a Friday. Then sometimes he would work toward the Atlanta area, and I guess he just got all the cotton bells. I guess that's what he did.

NEWBERRY: How did he weigh you?

CARREATHERS: That scale that's over there.

NEWBERRY: And how much did you weigh?

CARREATHERS: Probably a little bit of nothing. I was really skinny. Really, really, really skinny. I had a family friend who told me when I was a teenager, "I know what you're gonna be when you grow up. You're gonna be a teacher because you walk on your pencils all day long because my legs were that skinny." Well, that came true! I did become a teacher. I was always skinny, skinny, skinny.

WATSON: So you mentioned your dad a lot. What was his name...?

CARREATHERS: Well, let me tell you! Back in the days, they just gave him initials. So his initials were J.D. Well, somehow, a job that carried him up north, and I'm not sure where. But he had to – they said initials will not do. So guess

what he named himself? James Dewey, like the Dewey system. And one uncle was A.B., and he named himself Alfred Bedford. So, you know, and then my brother is J.D. Jr. Well, my father's passed. There are four of us. Well, there were four – two girls, and two boys. My sister passed in 2008. And then I have a brother. I think he is supposed to be interviewed. Have they said anything about Nelson McConnell?

NEWBERRY: Yes.

CARREATHERS: Ok well that's my brother. That's my big brother. So I asked him the other day and said, "Have you been notified?" He said, "No." I said, "Well, they told me that you were going to be interviewed." So, I guess he will be.

PETERSON: Alright so we talked about your father. What about your mother? What was her name?

CARREATHERS: Her name was Lily May. Stay-at-home mom. Never worked outside the house. A very good cook. One of the things that we did, my dad raised hogs and we had hog killing time, and I just had to be out there when they shot that hog. But then looking at the meat was awful you know, but we ate it. But looking at them cutting them up you know they put them up on a – well you don't know anything about this – they would hang them upside down. And then they would skin them, then cut them all into into pieces. We would have...I'm trying to think what we would have the night of. I can't remember. My mother fried it. I don't...I'm not sure what it was. But then, they would also make something that I think is just gross. I guess it was called Sal's meat where they cook the egg and all these other nasty parts of the hog. And they would press it into a container. And then they were eating something I would never eat. I was a picky eater. By now you know I was my dad's baby don't you? He would tell me if I said, "I don't want that." He would say, "Well, you don't have to eat it." Chores...well washing dishes was one of mine, and if I said, "Well I've got a lot of homework to do." My dad would say, "I'll wash the dishes for you." My brother and sisters kind of didn't like me too much because I always got my way. So they weren't very pleased. And especially my sister. We...we just didn't quite get along. We just didn't get close until after I finished college.

WATSON: So speaking of college. What made you decide to go to college and then come back to Adairsville? Was there something about the community that drew you back after college?

CARREATHERS: Well, let me tell you...I had said, "Oh I want to be a nurse," and there was this hospital was called Berry State in Rome, GA. And that's where a lot of women went to be LPN nurses or assistant. So this was my thing now. Scared to death of blood, but this is what most black women were doing

so I thought that's what I'm going to do. Then, when I got in high school I thought, "No, I think I want to go in the Army." Because my brother was military and he said, "You are not going in the Army. So you can get that out of your head." So, I did. When I got to high school I fell in love with my Home Ec. teacher. I took Home Ec. as a Freshman but I don't think it was offered any other time. Somehow I talked to the principal, and he let me take Home Ec. every year that I was in high school. And as I said, this Home Ec. teacher was my idol. She was just my idol. And she had gone to Fort Valley State, and I said, "I'm going to Fort Valley and I'm going to major in Home Ec. just like you did." And I did. But coming back to Adairsville you know there were no jobs. I didn't get a job the first year... My brother was stationed at Fort Benning, and he said, "Sis, come on down maybe we can get a job for you." So, can you imagine me trying to sell refrigerators on the street? Didn't sell any. It didn't work out. So, I babysat for a year with his children. And then I decided to come back home. Well, when I got back home there still were no jobs. But I applied for one... where does Jimmy Carter live?

NEWBERRY: Plains?

CARREATHERS: What was that?

NEWBERRY: Plains.

CARREATHERS: Yeah... well it was in the county. I applied for a job. Went back on the bus, applied for the job, and was almost assured that I was going to get the job. Well, I got a letter telling me that I didn't get it. And I found out some years later a very... we became very close. And we started talking about where we had worked, and she said, "Oh I got this job...", and she told me where, and I said, "I applied for that job, and was almost told I was going to get it." She said, "Well, I had children, and my husband had left me and they just felt sorry for me so they gave me the job." I said, "Ok, ok, alright. Well, that's the way life goes." Because if we had not become friends, and had not gone to college grad school together, I never would have known that she stole my job. And then I got a job at Hill High School in LaFayette, and stayed there almost two years. And I had done my student teaching at P. B. G. Atman in Macon, GA, and got a letter from the Home Ec. teacher that I had done my student teaching with. She said, "I'm retiring. Apply for the job." So I did, and I got it. And I guess I stayed there two or three years. And this was back in the old days, where you did not have a maternity leave. So they told me they would just have to release me because they couldn't hold the job for nine months or however long the pregnancy would be. So I came home. The only black school, elementary school, that was in the country was Bartow Elementary. And I talked to the principal because I had known him and his family, and I said, "I'd like to sub for you." He said, "Sub?" I said, "Yeah

I don't have a job." He said, "You got one now. Would you be my Kindergarten teacher?" I said, "I'm gonna be there!" I spent that year being his Kindergarten teacher, but that was the year that the schools at Bartow County integrated. So they had to – well I guess they assured if we black teachers were going to find a job for us in this county. So I was moved up here in Adairsville High School – it was 1-12 then – I taught 4th grade for ten years because Judy James who did the refreshment the other week was the Home Ec. teacher. So I taught 4th grade for ten years. Had to go to school and get certified in Elementary Ed. And then after the ten years, they going to offer Home Ec. for the Middle School. So then my principal said, "That's what I'm gonna put you in." So I did Middle School Home Ec. for awhile. So, then Judy got a promotion to be Assistant Principal and I became the Home Ec. teacher. I came in 1968 and retired in 2004 for a total of forty years that I spent in the classroom. Girls, that's a long time.

WATSON: So what was desegregation like for you the teacher and for your students?

CARREATHERS: Oh gosh I hadn't heard a question like that. As I said I taught 4th grade for ten years. And there's one little student, and I like him. When I see him now, he just loves Ms. Carreathers. He said one day, this was after school in my room, and he said, "Teacher, look at all those little niggers down there!" And I thought, "Had you not looked at me? Have you not seen that I am not white?" But he just saw me as the teacher not as being the black teacher or the nigger teacher. It was just teacher. But I got along with the kids. Now, I can see some of them, and they'll say, "Oh Ms. Carreathers tell me how to make peanut butter cookies", "Ms. Carreathers taught me how to cook", "Ms. Carreathers you know I cook all the time." Then I had one guy the other week say, "You know we made pillows in your classroom," he said, "I use mine as a weapon," he said, "My friend and I would just hit each other with the pillows." And I would see folks, I think I may have told y'all this. I was at Kroger, and my great-great granddaughter was with me. She said, "Grandma, can have some bubblegum?" And I said, I didn't allow anybody to chew gum in my class. That's something that a principal said to us, and you chew gum I will be in the bedroom with you under the bed. So I – well I hate it now. So nobody chewed gum. So I was in Kroger, I guess a couple years ago, and she was asking if she could get bubblegum. And somebody behind me said, "Ms. Carreathers does not allow you to chew gum in the classroom." And I looked back and it was one of my former students and his mom, and I just said, "That's right! I did not allow it!" And I'd go around church with my paper at Sunday school. I'd just hold it out, and the kids would give it up because I don't like it. Don't like it.

PETERSON: Alright so...I guess keep going on about the school you worked at. So...how...I actually think we covered that question. So what was

desegregation like in the town of Adairsville and the school you worked at. I'm kind of curious since we covered the students, I was wondering how the staff and administration maybe was affected by it?

CARREATHERS: Ok. For a long time, there were only two of us. We both were local. But there never was. I think the total of black teachers, and I'm talking Bartow County, maybe five or six in a school... we were just the minority. But I became active in the local education association and became the Chair I guess for ten years or more. And you know it was pleasant we got along. I mean, you could tell there were some people who had this chip still on their shoulder. And I can tell you another thing that I did that my mother was not very pleased with me. Do you remember? I'm really getting a little senile. We had the march on a city in Fayette County. What was the name of it?

NEWBERRY: Cumming? Was it Cumming, GA?

CARREATHERS: I think it was. It had this big rally and this white couple, he talked science and she talked social studies, and we still are good friends now. They said, "Well, we're going, Mary, come on!" Because you know we really were in this thing about – My mom told me when I went to college that I better not be down there. Sure I got to see anything as far as race relations were concerned, but I did do one thing. I went out to the water foundation and it said "colored only" and "white only" and I drank from the white and I said, "That's the nastiest water I ever put in my mouth." But that's about as much as I did I was cool but we did we went down. Here I am sitting in this car with two white people, and as we are going there are police cars, there are people on the sides of the road. And we got there, and we parked the car. And that's when I saw the hate. I saw it from kids this high looking at me and I actually saw the hate that they had for black people, I mean my friend, he could a big ol' rock that they were throwing because they were after us. All of us. But I was defiant then. I went. I didn't tell my mother where I was going but I was determined I was going to go that day and I did. But – and then the only other really bad thing that happened to me when I was on the City Council, and Klan came and wanted to rally in Adairsville. I know they have their rights because we were fighting for our rights on that First Amendment. But I didn't vote for it, but in that same meeting we named the street, Martin Luther King Jr Boulevard. And then I got the hate letter. Oh it was a long, long letter. I mean talking about me and Martin Luther King and I mean it was a hate letter. And I showed it to the Council people. They got a chance to look at it. But then I've had nothing else as far as race. I've had some phone calls when I was on council from some people right here in Adairsville who you know talk kind of nasty to me. They call me early like one o' clock, two o' clock in the morning and tell me you're a nigger you blah, blah, blah, have no business being on the Council, blah, blah, blah, but I ignored it.

WATSON: So...since you mentioned being on the City Council. What made you decide to step out of just the classroom and into a more active role in your community as a community leader?

CARREATHERS: That's just my personality. I want to do things for my city. I want to be a part of the government, apart of helping to make decisions for the city. Well, I ran twice, and lost. Had [someone say] , "Well you ought to know that you weren't going to win. You probably did, but they fixed the ballots so that you didn't win." Well, you know I said all well and good and the guy I had run against had moved out of the city and that's when the Mayor called me and asked if I would be willing to serve if he appointed me as a Council member. And I said, "Well let me talk to my two children." And they said, "Well do it." And so I did. And so I was appointed in 1990 to fulfill his term because it was not over. But I'm thinking it was August, maybe November. And I ran against Bob James who had been the City Manager. And I think I won by seven votes maybe. It upset him so bad. He stormed out of that courthouse that night. Wooh it was something! So as far as today I'm the only black female who has served on the City Council in the City of Adairsville.

NEWBERRY: Can you tell about your campaign to run. How did you get the word out? How did you try to get people's votes?

CARREATHERS: Well, I walked...I walked the streets. I put an announcement in the paper. I bought signs and put them you know in black folks yards. But I had a lot of whites who said, "We're behind you, we're behind you." And they contributed money. And I guess I had just – because I was kind of active in the community, and there were whites who knew me...and so they'd say we're for you. And I think it was two times I ran unopposed. And I've been trying to think. I started to call Pam and said, "Pam, do you tell me when, and what years because I'm trying to think. Somebody defeated me, and I'm not sure who it was." And I said, "Just like MacArthur, I will be back." And I did! I came back, and I was re-elected. So maybe I was on Post 1, Post 2, and Post 4, because they stagger the posts...Because we did not have – Ok we did not say that all the black community was in a district. Everybody could vote wherever. We were not like district 1, district 2, district 3, district 4. No, whoever voted, we just voted for whoever was running. But you know like now you've got your districts. You've got your if you're living in this area you can only vote for the person who's running for that district. This was just an open.

WATSON: So what was the first year that you were...what was it like that first year being a member of the City Council. How did they react?

CARREATHERS: It was pleasant. I didn't have any...I might could say there was a few people who would call me. But these were people who would not come to the meeting. You know they would get their beverages then get a little high and then want to just call me and just harass me and I usually would just hang up. But I knew who the people were. Because you know there are some who would just openly dislike you because of your color. But we got along just fine.

WATSON: What kind of initiatives did you bring to the city as a City Counsel member?

CARREATHERS: God I wish I'd brought my little list of things. You've got them somewhere because...no that was Dr. Dicky who got them. Well, helped with the industrial park out there. We got some of those companies that are down there, those Japanese companies, that are right there in the boulevard. And helped to bring...helped to get that light out there, that red light. That was one of the things because I said something's going to happen to somebody could die, get killed before we can start all this traffic. If you come it's there where McDonald's and Burger King and Hardy's...it's right there. That was a dangerous thing. And so we helped – I helped to get that here. Also, we got some grants...that was a part of my initiative to help to get these grants. And I can remember...I can't think of who presented me with this big, big, big check because I was Mayor protib and the Mayor was not there. So ran a car sale, and he presented a check to me. Also, you know we were – this used to be the library. And we got the new library, and – because Adairsville pays their part of it. And now we have friends in the library. We got the Cartersville – we got the Bartow friends in the library. They only got the Adairsville friends in the library. I let them a couple or three months ago talk me into being President. So we presented them with a \$2500 check. And I had a copy of it but I don't know what I did with it because we all are holding the big check. It's all about books. We had a fun time. And one of the things that the friends do is that we have BINGO and we're going to have BINGO next – we have it four times a year. We're going to have it month, November. And it's open to the public. We try not – we've had some children. But I guess it was – this was in the summer because they were not in school because it starts at like one o' clock so they would not be able to participate when school had started.

NEWBERRY: May I ask a question? Ms. Carreathers, could you tell us...backtrack a little bit? Go back to the 40s and 50s. Could you tell us what this stretch of stores here looked like when you would come along and remember specific shops and stores?

CARREATHERS: Oh yes. There was like I said McHutchins, and I think it's – it may be the trading store then. There was a drug store. There was a 5 and 10 cent store

that was right – I guess it was right where the police department is. What else was down here? And then on down a little further, there was another store that was big store. It was called Worlington Store. And they sold a little bit of everything. Then, I'm trying to think of what the lady's store that was right there on the corner. I think she might have sold fabric. And then we had a lady who had a store down on 41 and she sold fabric. And I was the sewer. I made and outfit for every Sunday. Made clothes for my – for my daughter. I don't sew anymore. I gave my sewing machine away. I had a former student, no, she's not a former student, some of her family members were, Facebooked me last week. She's an RN and she wanted to know if I could make – if I still sewed them. And I make her those – one of those surgical caps that they – and I just got back to them, "No, I don't sew anymore. I don't have a sewing machine." And during Easter, I got so tired of having to hem men's pants. They were just, "Can you hem my pants? Can you hem my pants?" I don't like doing that kind of work. I don't like that. I like the sewing machine. But I'm still trying to think.

NEWBERRY: Did the stores take black and white customers? Was there any segregation along this line of stores?

CARREATHERS: No, just couldn't sit down at the drug store. Drink a soda you know. We couldn't do that. And we used to have a movie place that was right down there on that end. Black and whites could go, but blacks had to sit up and the whites sat down.

NEWBERRY: Was there are sign that said that or was it just known?

CARREATHERS: I'm not even sure. Probably was a sign.

NEWBERRY: And you mentioned at the beginning of the interview that you couldn't go over to this school.

CARREATHERS: No.

NEWBERRY: Right so...were these things more unspoken? Were people telling you that?

CARREATHERS: I guess it was just unspoken that you just didn't cross over and think about going to that school.

NEWBERRY: And what about the depot?

CARREATHERS: See, Dr. Dicky asks me, and I...who did I ask? I asked my brother. He said, "I think, Sis, that blacks had to stand outside." But I'm going to ask, because she asked me that question. I'm going to get back on it. I'm going to try to see some of the older people who were here. Because we've got a

lot of newcomers who wouldn't know anything about it. But I'm going to try to ask some of the old folks if they actual knew. Because...you see...we worked the depot. And I can remember when – a few weeks ago, and I was telling folks the little roadway coming in on the far side this side...And I was saying, "This is where the people got their tickets." And I never thought about maybe you didn't go there. Your kind didn't stand out there and get a ticket you know. So when she asked me that I got to thinking where did the black people go? Because you know we couldn't ride – we had to ride in the back. When I went to college, my parents never owned a car. So we would – my dad would get somebody to drive me to Cartersville, and I would get on the bus and it was you know. I had to go strait to the back. I don't care if there were fifty seats in the front. Blacks were in the back. Then when I got to Macon, because that's as far as I could go on Greyhound, then I had to walk from the Greyhound to the Trailway Station to the Trailway bus that would take me to Fort Valley. And then we had to...I'm trying to think of what I got to do when I got to Fort Valley with my luggage, but usually that was holidays because when it was time to go back in the Fall my dad hired somebody to take me by car. Around Christmas holidays, this is what I would have to do. And I guess maybe I got cabs in.

WATSON: So was that after the train depot had shut down? I know that it stopped continuing. What was it – when was that?

CARREATHERS: I can't remember. But we used to catch the bus out there on 41 because we didn't have a bus station in Adairsville. So that was a certain where stood and the bus saw you standing there and the bus would stop. Or there was one in Calhoun and if you could go to Calhoun or to Cartersville then there was a station. But not in Adairsville. It was like a drop off.

WATSON: Do you have any memories of riding the train and the train for other reason I guess before buses?

CARREATHERS: I just remember my dad taking me to Atlanta to buy Christmas gifts and clothes. Because that was the time that we would go. And there was always a friend of his who lived in Dalton who had two daughters, and it seemed like we would go at the same time. And it was during the holidays.

PETERSON: Alright so I guess...let's go back to I guess family? So...I guess we're moving on to current family and like your husband and your children and your...and about your son...?

CARREATHERS: You see...I guess you saw it the expression on my face when she said, "Your husband." Divorced. Divorced for a long long time. It's my son's dad...

WATSON: The one that was featured on the show?

CARREATHERS: That's the only son yeah. My baby. But his dad and I separated when I was five months pregnant with Ramon and we just never got back together until maybe 2010. He started coming to see my son. And then when my son moved to the nursing home in Chattanooga, he tried to get back in our lives. The reason I'm smiling is because when we were at the nursing home the doctor would come in and I would say, "Ok this is what it's gonna be." And he looked at me and said, "You just don't let me say anything." And I said, "Where were you honey when he was growing up? No you have no say so on any of this. None whatsoever." But my son and him got really really close. He was – he served in the Vietnam War and as a result he had Asian Orange and had cancer at the throat. And when he got cancer at the throat he got cancer through the brain. So he – I could never understand it. Because if wasn't looking right in his face I wouldn't know what he was saying. Then, I would say when he used to call and ask about Ramon, "I can't understand a word you're saying." And I know that really kind of made him angry. But he and my son were just like this to the end.

WATSON: So what was it like being featured on the "That's Incredible"...? What was that like as a parent and how that affected the community knowing that their town was also kind of featured?

CARREATHERS: Everybody was just ecstatic. It was just something else. And my niece just kept saying, "Aunt Mary, 'That's Incredible' just keeps calling your number." And so I said well give me the number. And she gave me the number and I would call it and some man would just curse me out because it was the wrong number. She was giving me the wrong number. So I had this friend. And he said, "Let's just call 'That's Incredible'." So we did. And they said, "Oh we've been trying to get in touch with you for months." You know so that's how it started. And they said, "We're gonna send somebody to see you." So this woman came, and we had dinner and we spent a lot of time together and then they found out about the doctors at Edison and it just went on from there. Because we had been going ever since I guess he was a little over a year. Now, New Year's Eve, before his first birthday, he was born January 11th, and before his first birthday we had to rush into Floyd. While we were there, I think I may have mentioned this, the nurses came and one took his signs, and she said, "You take it." And so...they were taking it and they said it was...they wanted you to go get the door. Well I knew something was wrong then. And then that's when they didn't holler code blue, but they sent to get the doctor and they were sending to get an ear, nose, throat specialist so he could do a trach...It was New Year's Eve and everybody in Rome was partying so he could not get to the hospital so my pediatrician had to do his first trach. He had never done one. So he did it. And we were able to get it out. But then

they realized that something was wrong with his heart. So we said, “What we need to do is get him to Grady.” So we go to Grady. And because my son’s head compared to his body was big they thought he had some kind of disease that was going to be fatal. So they were going to do a cardiac cath. Well somebody was not there to work the machine, but they had already given him the injections. Well he didn’t wake up, and I kept telling them, “He won’t wake up.” They said, “Put ice on his face” you know. And so I kept doing it and about seven o’ clock an LPN came in and she started giving the sign and she flew out of the room and called a code blue. So they came in and got him and they took him to the ICU. And he stayed there and I thought things were getting better. I got up to go see him and one of the mothers, she said, “I’m gonna go with you.” Because we were all just sitting there in the waiting room...because they already knew without me speaking that there was something wrong with my child. So we got down there and knock on the door and...they say, “Can you wait a few minutes?” And I said, “Yes.” And then the next thing I know, they’re taking him to surgery and...one of the doctors had tried to put a trach back in and it messed up his trachea. So...that’s when the trachea was messed up and that’s when he never he just...that’s how he talked. It was just a quacking sound because he had the trach. And I would have to remove it. It scared me to death. And they told me, “You can do it.” They were going to put it in a special place where it was special. The nurses and doctors couldn’t take care of him so I became the brave little mom but it scared me every time I had to take to take it out and put a new one in. And so he did not go to school. Then we had homeschool. And I stayed with – I lived with my mom and dad. My mom would tell me, “Go to bed. I’ll stay up all night with.” Because he had asthma. And he was you know, he was having asthma attacks and asthma attacks and asthma attacks. And so she would say, “You go to bed. I’ll stay up with him. You need to go to work in the morning.” So my mom was my all...And...so things went on and on and on. And we got too... Well, something happened, and they would not accept us back at Grady. Forgot what it was, but there was something. So then the doctor said, “Ok so we’re going to Eddison.” So that’s where we went and as I like to tell folks, I’m sure I paid for at least two wounds down there because of how long he...he was just in and out. It was just in and out and in and out. And then we had the doctor who said, “Well, I think I know a doctor who can help him.” So they got the Dr. McConnell, got the linings out of his tongue and somewhere else. And reconstructed his trachea. And he said, “Momma.” And somehow, “That’s Incredible” got a hold of it. And it became history.

NEWBERRY: So you don’t know how the producers of the show found out about your son?

CARREATHERS: No, no.

NEWBERRY: They just reached out to you.

CARREATHERS: Uh huh.

NEWBERRY: Do you remember about when that was?

CARREATHERS: Ok it had to be September October because they went down – In September of '82 they went to Eddison, and taped down there because you could see the picture up. As your mom calls him Big Foot. He was a big big doctor. Big man. And so they did the taping down there because we weren't there – the taping. And then, they said, "Ok we are going to get to Adairsville." So that was – it would've aired on "That's Incredible" on March 28th of '83. Because the news got a hold of it and said they didn't know when the air time was going to be. Then they called and said the crew's coming. So they came. They came to the school first and they said, "Ms. Careathers, Ms. Careathers" and my principal said, "You just take the day off because you can't teach, you just take the day off." So I took the day off because I I had to take them all around the school. And then we went to my house, and filmed there. And – people- it was so fun. They said, "How much did they pay you?" I said, "Pay us? They got him a jacket and a bicycle. Pay us? They didn't pay us anything! Nothing!" And then they made the constitution and that's when Wallace Francis came and gave him the football and then we got to go to the Hawk's game. And all the players would come and say, "Well where is this Ramon Careathers?" And they all shake his hand you know. I was in awe just like he was. And I always took a little friend with us. And this little boy had never been out of Adairsville and his eyes were like...looking at all the tall buildings in Atlanta. He was just like, "Wow. I didn't realize this was happening. Didn't know it." But that was it. And then I had a group of kids come over and cook spaghetti for the crew. But oh it was something. As I told y'all we would be in and "There's the boy that was on 'That's Incredible'!" "Weren't you on 'That's Incredible'?" And he would say, "Yes., yes"

NEWBERRY: Ms. Carreathers, can you tell us are there distinguishing qualities about Adairsville that you can name? Things that make it stand out as a community?

CARREATHERS: Why don't you give me some homework? Well, we're a friendly town, and races basically we kind of always just got along. I can remember whites coming out to our house playing with my brothers you know. And it's just like...just a peaceful little town where everybody got along. And you know it was – I guess if somebody was having some problems it didn't matter what color you were you know somebody might come and give you a helping hand...It's unique.

NEWBERRY: How do you think the community's changed since you were a child?

CARREATHERS: Quite a bit of racial stuff going on. It started before Hillary and Trump. You know it's been just moving on up. And it's the younger generation. But the older people, black and whites, just seem to get along. It's just this younger generation.

NEWBERRY: What do you mean the younger generation?

CARREATHERS: Well the Confederate flags you know and running them around and wanting to drive out the black community. You know...and younger blacks get intimidated by this. But now that we've talked about this I can remember there was a family that lived up the street from my house and they had the KKK's to come from Chattanooga and they got off of 41 and they drove out by you know. The people...I'm talking about lived right up the street from where we lived. All these KKK's came and they went up in their yard and they burned a cross. And you know, don't know why but they did it. But now we have had one instant when I was a girl where there might've been some hate going on. There was a black man who was having an affair with a white woman. And they killed this white man, and put him in the attic. And I don't know how...I don't know how they found him but the police found him and the black guy and a few others went to prison for it. But I was a little girl at that time. But I'm trying to think. I'm trying to get my story together. I'm trying to think that maybe after they put him in the attic and the blood started coming that they moved him and put him in somebody's well. I'm thinking that's what happened. But other than that you know.

NEWBERRY: Do you remember where that was?

CARREATHERS: Well...I live on Copper Springs Road, and it's...it would've been further than because I'm talking about my house, but my daddy's house was right there and my house is here. Then you go up the road that's Steel Bell...Less than a half a mile from where we lived. Less than a half a mile.

NEWBERRY: Do you live next door to your childhood home?

CARREATHERS: My dad, oh you didn't hear me. When I graduated college, there's a strip of land that's right next to where I live. And my dad one day said, "Give me a dollar." And I have him a dollar. He said, "This is the deeds to your property right there." So I'm just a skip, hop, and a jump where I was raised.

WATSON: Do you still live on that property now?

CARREATHERS: Yes. And when I got it built, I was teaching. And every day I come home and we'd make this little path and it was so crooked. And now my brother cuts the grass you can no longer see the path. He just cuts the grass like it's one big family you know. And I'm so proud of him because he cuts. He cuts all the grass at the big house and at my house. I just call him a workaholic because he'll be out mowing that lawn early in the morning. And I told my sister and she said, "Why is he out there? Doesn't he know he don't need to be there?" And you can't tell him anything. He's going to be out there cutting that grass.

NEWBERRY: Do you remember specific community events, gatherings, maybe a fair or something when you were young?

CARREATHERS: I'm trying to think did we have fairs here? I don't think so. We had to go to Calhoun or Cartersville.

NEWBERRY: Was there a school bus system when you were young?

CARREATHERS: The one that the principal's son drove. Just that one bus and he would go to all the schools in the area. He would pick us up and then we'd go to Kingston, and I'm not sure about New Harley. I'm not sure that they were getting black folks in New Harley....There was no bus system over here either.

NEWBERRY: So this one bus went to pick up all the black students?

CARREATHERS: Um hmm.

NEWBERRY: Ok.

CARREATHERS: The bus to Summer Hill.

NEWBERRY: Do y'all have some finishing questions?

PETERSON: I mean, I guess...we had a question about...your involvement in the church in Adairsville? I know you're very much involved even today.

CARREATHERS: Oh I am. I am the lay leader of the church. I was a lay speaker but I changed it to lay servant and I just feel too old to be traveling going to these classes. So we've got a person and she has taken over going to the classes. Our pastor had a serious illness problem. We have, there are three of us. We just rotate. One of us speaking every third Sunday. I'm not as active in the district as I used to be. And I've always been the lay person to go to annual conference. I haven't been in a couple of years because this age has kind of gotten to me. And the parts. In Athens you always have the parts so far away to get to [the conference]. So I've just not gone

in a couple of years. I've slowed down but I'm still active in Tallatoona which is community action partnership. It's a non-profit and we serve eight counties: Bartow, Gordon, Harrison, Douglas, Floyd – did I say Harrison?

WATSON: Yes you did.

CARREATHERS: Ok and we do a bit...in Cobb County. And we have the head start programs in the different counties. And right now well I served as Chair for three years a few years. Well now on the Finance Committee, and on the Program Committee...And I said Friends of the Library. I did go out here but I dropped it, my membership a few months ago. First...there were two blacks. I think we joined at the same time of this club. The other person. But now there's a new [member] who's come to town and she's been appointed to the Etowah Housing Authorities Board and I think she joined. So there's still one black.

NEWBERRY: Why did you drop?

CARREATHERS: Do I have to tell you because it's a personal thing.

NEWBERRY: You don't have to.

CARREATHERS: Ok because I like it and then a personal thing just came up and I just said ok.

WATSON: That makes sense.

CARREATHERS: Oh and I used to be very active with the voting. I used to work the voting precincts 'til about three years ago. I got tired of getting up at four o' clock in the morning. God and then you can't leave until after the poll is closed and then you have to do all of that making sure it's equal. And then you've got to transport it to Cartersville. And we would always bring food and I can remember the last time that I was bringing food. I said I've got this big pot of chili that I'm bringing. And they said, "Oh we're so glad." I stepped out of the house...and the crock pot dropped right out of my hands, broke into pieces, and I just left it there...got in my car and went to work. ...They used to really get me. "Don't we love your chili Ms. Carreathers." I just walked out the door and it just broke.

WATSON: Do we have anything else?

CARREATHERS: Did we spend an hour? Well this is Miss Talkie over here.

NEWBERRY: Thank you very much Ms. Carreathers, and we'll go ahead and end there.

END OF TRANSCRIPT

Name: Mary Carreathers

Date: October 11th, 2016

Project: Adairsville, GA Exhibit

Location: Sans Souci Women's Club

Interviewers: Elyse Watson, Lindsay Peterson, and James Newberry

Transcriber: Lindsay Peterson

Mary Carreathers

Born in the 1930s, Mary Carreathers has lived in Adairsville, GA her entire life, and has been an active member in the community. For many years, Carreathers was a home economics teacher who also served two terms on the City Council.

Video 1

00:00:00 Opening Statement.

00:00:40 Carreathers begins to talk about her experience growing up in Adairsville. Mentions race relations within the town.

00:01:40 Carreathers talks about the church she went to in town.

00:02:50 Carreathers begins to talk about another church she went to after college.

00:03:30 Carreathers says her father used to work at the train depot, and begins to talk about her experiences there. She also mentions how she would go to the store with friends.

00:05:18 Watson asks Carreathers how Adairsville was affected by World World II and the Great Depression. Since Carreathers was still a child at the time, she begins to recollect memories of her childhood.

00:08:40 Carreathers explains more in depth about her family. She goes more in-depth with her father's job at the train depot as well.

00:14:27 Carreathers talks about her college education, what led her to become a teacher, and describes the beginning of her teaching career.

00:20:55 Carreathers shares her experience teaching when the schools became desegregated.

Video 2

00:00:00 Picking up where the previous video left off, Carreathers elaborates more on desegregation, and her experiences with race relations in general.

- 00:04:50 Carreathers talks about her experience on the City Council from why she decided to participate in local politics to her campaign and her two terms serving in City Council.
- 00:12:35 Newberry asks Carreathers about certain buildings in downtown Adairsville when she was growing up in the 1940s and 1950s.
- 00:19:30 Peterson asks Carreathers about her immediate family members.

Video 3

- 00:00:00 Carreathers continues to talk about her son, and his health issues as well as their experience on “That’s Incredible”.
- 00:06:56 Newberry asks Carreathers to describe the Adairsville community. She also describes how the community has changed.
- 00:11:50 Carreathers begins to talk about her home. She lives next door to her childhood home.
- 00:13:15 Carreathers further describes what the school bus system was like when she went to school.
- 00:14:38 Carreathers talks about her current church involvement, and her current involvement in the Adairsville community.