

WCLV  
Interview Transcripts  
African American Cultural Garden Society Meeting  
10/17/02

Interview #2, trk. 3

DL: Introduces project, self

FS: My name is Frances Sy, and I'm a member of the AA Cultural Gardens, as well as the federation of Cultural Gardens, and some of my first memories of the Cultural gardens—well, I've lived in the neighborhood for over 40 years. I just remember the gardens being a place where people could go and see the pretty flowers and fountains, and trees, you know. When I found out about the AA garden, I remember I have a girlfriend who had two daughters, and at that time she had a girlfriend who worked for community development. And they were going down to plant perennials in the African American garden. I guess that was about 1983. I would always go by and see the little flowers that they put down; you know, so I remember (name? unclear) put those in there, she and the kids, and I remember changes going on, like sometimes you'd see a sign and say, "oh, there's *our* garden". You know, because you see the Czechoslovakian gardens, and all the different ones... so, recently, I had gotten involved with the Cleveland Greenhouse, and then I found out that... I take that back—I remember seeing different neighborhoods having a garden club. So I did some investigation and found out that Glenville used to have a garden club, and the President is still living, and she lives here by the Cultural Gardens in Ammassa Stone (?), which overlooks kind of the African American Garden. So, getting involved in that, I found out how Mrs. Edge(?) [chair of committee?] had this particular club going for the AA garden. So I said, "oh, good, I want to do that", since we don't have a Glenville garden club any longer. So I started coming to the meetings and getting involved that way.

DL: You said you grew up around the gardens originally?

FS: Yeah, I still live around the neighborhood. I stay on 110<sup>th</sup>, which is relatively close to the gardens. So, it's still in the neighborhood—it's in my ward, you know... (laughs). And I want to see it beautified. I want to see it developed, like it said it was supposed to be developed after I found out all this information about how it got started in 1977. Well, it's been in the city charter since 1977, and yet it still isn't developed.

DL: Why do you think that is?

FS: Well, it's gone through so many different changes with so many different personalities involved... politics. I believe that's the bottom line... (laughs) when I asked about—there's a task force for the AA Cultural Gardens, and I had this opportunity to go on this tour. And the questions were posed; that why did the sign... why did they remove the sign? The mayor wanted it moved, so it's like, "hmm, ok..." because it wasn't developed. That's why they removed the sign. So, I thought that was interesting, you know. So it's different

reasons... basically, I just think that it's participation on the part of people, and funds, and... [shrugs].

DL: I understand it was the mayor White's decision to start fixing the gardens up again...

FS: Fixing the cultural gardens up—yes, it was. To plant a lot of perennials that he has throughout, to make it consistent, yes.

DL: Now, is the AA garden included in that chain...?

FS: Yes, actually, it is. They do have some day lilies that are there that are consistent throughout the other gardens. We're working on developing, you know—we're supposed to get another sign and a flagpole. Very soon. So that's good, that's positive...

DL: When you were growing up, do you remember large community involvement in the gardens then?

FS: Not that I can recall. You know—I just remember basically being around the one garden... that's the one that's nearest Yale and St. Claire. I can't think of who it is... it's not Czechoslovakian... that's the one down the hill...

DL: You said you've lived here 40 years?

FS: Mm Hmm.

DL: What kind of changes have you seen in the gardens, or changes in the people involved in the neighborhoods around...?

FS: Well, in the gardens itself, I do see development, where they put the sidewalks so that people could run, jog walk their dogs... I see the lighting is better, especially near the bridges. It seems to be more emphasis on cleaning it up, especially after it rains and things like that... there used to be a lot of problems with sewers backing up and flooding in that area. That doesn't seem to happen any more, so that's kind of good.

DL: What about changes from the time you were growing up to...

FS: (cuts off) That's what I'm saying... I remember it used to flood like nuts down there, you know.

DL: When you were smaller, or was there a time when it sort of got worse or better...

FS: When I was smaller, I didn't focus on it that much. You know, I didn't go that way all the time. But I just remembered it, going that way, like on Sundays we would drive, go to the lake and go down Martin Luther King—Well, at that time it called East Blvd, Liberty Blvd. at that time... we would drive through, and go and look, and "oh that's pretty", you know. It's still pretty. It's still unique. It's very unique.

DL: Well, thanks a lot, I really appreciate it... wraps up.

10/17/02

African American Cultural Garden Society Meeting

Trk. 4

PM: My name is Patricia Matthew...

DL: Ms, Matthew, did you grow up around the gardens, in the area?

PM: Oh, yes, I've lived in Cleveland from the age of 6 years old to the age I am now, 56. I grew up in the Glenville area, presently I live on east 95<sup>th</sup>, off of Ansel(?). So I really live very close to the gardens.

DL: what do you remember about the gardens from the time you were growing up until now, and the changes they've gone through?

PM: Well, I know of one move of the garden, from one site to another, because when I was a little girl, it used to be... I think it was on east 98<sup>th</sup>? And then they used to have the red, green, and black flag. And then after some years went by, I didn't see it any more, and I wondered why is it that we weren't represented as a people anymore in that garden.

DL: Why was that?

PM: I don't know; I just questioned it. I didn't have any idea that there was a garden group until Nov. of 2001.

DL: Is that when you noticed that it was no longer there, or...

PM: No, it was years before that. I would say at least 10 years ago I would say I noticed that there was no representation that was clear that there was a garden for African Americans there.

DL: How did you find out about it? You said you found out in 2001...

PM: Well, I have a friend who's a friend of the lady that started the garden project. And she's the one that told me that there was going to be a meeting, and asked me if I would like to be part of it. And I said yes, I would.

DL: so... how do you feel about those [gardens] as something to represent the different cultural groups? Do people put a lot of community effort into them?

PM: Well, there's some of the gardens I see that that's true, and some of the gardens I see that it isn't true. And the AA Cultural gardens... we don't have monuments there or anything yet, but we did plant flowers on the land that was designated to us.

DL: What do you do when you come to these meetings? What kinds of things are you personally concerned with?

PM: Personally, when I come to the meetings... I still give petitions from my co-workers and wherever I go, saying that they want the cultural gardens, and that goes across many of the ethnicities I ask, and they all sign... we make plans about what we're going to do with the gardens, how we're going to do it, perhaps fundraisers to help pay for the monuments or whatever we're going to put on that land... so, that's basically what I do,

DL: Do you remember when the cultural garden first came into existence in the late 1970's?

PM: I don't remember it then, but I do know that in 1981 as far as I know in regards to history (?) And then about 10 years before that, Booker Tall really started it...

DL: Could you tell me anything about Booker Tall?

PM: No, I can't I don't know anything at all about him because I'm fairly new to this.

DL: Could you describe the neighborhood you grew up in a little bit?

PM: Ok—I grew up in the Glenville area... When I first—at age six it was mostly Jewish, I think they called it the Jewish gold coast(?) or something like that... and on 105<sup>th</sup> they had a lot of store fronts and things of that nature. To me, I think 185<sup>th</sup> street sort of looks how the old Glenville used to look, as far as 105 goes. But then after some years went by, it looks like it does today. But most of the Glenville area as far as I can see... the people who own their homes keep them up very well. Ok?

DL: Ok. What kinds changes have you seen through the neighborhoods and through the gardens from the time you first moved here to now?

PM: Well, the changes that I've seen... It seems as though they're trying to keep—the upkeep of the gardens are better now. I see more flowers, more plants in many of the gardens, whereas before there was a lot of upheaval, and weeds, and that kind of thing.

DL: Was there a community involvement from the Glennville area in the gardens when you were growing up?

PM: If it was, I don't know anything about it. But according to the history, which I read there was, in the 70s and the 80s... but at that time I was too young, so I didn't really... I had other interests and didn't really know about it.

DL: You said it was a mostly Jewish neighborhood you grew up in...

PM: In the beginning.

DL: In the beginning?

PM: Yes, like at age six, that's been many, many years ago. I'm 56 now, so that was like, 50 years ago,

DL: Did the neighborhood change while you were living there at all?

PM: Well, of course; my parents still live in the same house... so definitely there's a big change in the neighborhood. The storefronts aren't there anymore the same as they were, It seems as though the neighborhood went down somewhat as far as 105 goes... and then you know, presently, there's the same problems that other Black communities have of drugs, and that kind of thing. But in spite of all that, there's a big still in the cultural gardens being there. Because everyone feels that we show we are part of—would you say—the different cultures of the city, and that we should have a representation there, and then that would complete the whole thing with the world being represented. So, that's basically it.

DL: Ok, well, thank you so much... [wraps up].