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Mitchell D. Meadows
(Agent of the Oral History of Appalachia Program)

Margaret V. Lynch
(Donor)

July 5, 1997
(Date)

AN ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

WITH: MARGARET LYNCH

CONDUCTED BY: MICHELLE MEADOWS

DATE OF INTERVIEW: JULY 5TH, 1997

SUBJECT: CAMP WASHINGTON CARVER

INTERVIEW WITH MARGARET LYNCH BY MICHELLE MEADOWS

ML: ...from the steps, because we had to ride, there weren't any seats for.... We'd start down in this end. [inaudible]...South Charleston, and the west side and we'd pick up the children and go on up, get to Montgomery, cross the bridge, and they'd be waiting for us when we got there. Then we'd go on to Clifftop. And Miss Jones and I were the counselors from down this way. Miss [redacted] had already gone to pave the way, because we had to get groceries in. They didn't have any cooks or anybody. So, we had to go be the counselors, we had to be the cooks, we had to be the dishwashers. We worked by tribes. We had Seneca Tribe, oh, Mingo Tribe, and I've forgotten the other. But uh, adults were big feet, big foot, we'd call 'em big foot. We had five tribes, and we had to do everything. But the children were wonderful. If they didn't do things, they knew points would be taken off of it. One who was head of the tribe, "you know better than that. You weren't supposed to do that. You gonna make us get points off it." But they were willing to clean the tables, to do all they could. The barracks had to be cleaned. Of course, that was one big room. The boys barracks had to be cleaned. We had uh, then we had tribal meetings at night. We had to have contests to see who could [redacted] Then sometimes they would challenge the big feet. So, we had to do what they did. Sometime-, one time I went to camp they had me standing on my head. [laughter] But it was fun. We would also, I have a sing, sing a song, you know.

The song, one song we sang, "We want to wake up in the morning where the rhododendrons grow, where the sun comes a peeping into where I'm sleeping, and the songbird says hello." And it was really wonderful. And then we all, they would make up poems, they would make up songs to sing at the tribal meeting. We had to go 'round the big fire. And uh, so we did that for many year. And then, finally we got a cook. The counselors were elevated. Then we didn't have to do it. But the children were really willing, because they wanted the points. They'd get upset if somebody would do something wrong. If you got out there and do something wrong, that point was taken from you. Then they would report to you and tell them which one was doing wrong. But I enjoyed it, the years that I went. Then finally, after we left from-, I stopped in '64, because I got a job with the state and I couldn't go any more. But the children were really, they could do anything. They paid attention, they didn't sass you then. They didn't talk back to you. And usually, some parents would get together and raise the money for the children, in order to pay their way on the bus to get there. And uh, then the kitchen had-, buy the food, cook the food, make sure the children had everything that they needed. And uh, when we had, when they had, they had the swimming, they had the craft class. And they had the music department. We would sing. And so, it was, it was really, really interesting. As I said, I was sorry I had to stop when I started working for the state. But after we stopped going and we got integrated down here, we started somewhere, that was a sad occasion. I mean, I don't know why they kept us out of Durbar, because it was such a sad, sad 4-H camp. And uh, then finally, we went to Virgil Tate. And we went up to Virgil Tate, I still went to camp, 4-H camp. We went

to Virgil Tate. We did cook in there, because Miss Anderson, Miss Lowery, and uh, women from Vandalia and all, we would all join in. But we still had to be a counselor and stay in the dorms with 'em at night. And then we have a great big campfire at night, which was really interesting. You could see how talented those children were. And uh, and the children want to play, and we wanted to stay up and we were cracking, trying to make it. "All right, if you don't sit down there, you're gonna have points taken off you. Go to sleep. You're have points taken off." And so, they finally settled down. And the last time I went to camp, we were integrated then. Then after we were integrated, I stayed about two years. And after two years, I had to give it up. But I enjoyed it. We had to give our hand, our heart, my head and health. That was the 4-H. So, it was, for me, it was beautiful at that time. Of course, I had my daughter to go, Marsha, went to town with us, and all the little ones around.

The first thing that we did, and I go back, I'm digressing now to our first, the first thing I did in our 4-H club, was to teach them how to make an apron. I had one of two girls' mothers come and tell me, stick out that apron that they made. And then [inaudible]....we would go to out and have picnics. I would take 'em up in the woods, hiking and everything. And take us lunch, and different things that we would do in our 4-H meetings and all. So, I [inaudible]...grandchildren. [chuckles] But we enjoyed it, what we were doing. And I enjoyed it, after fooling with 4-H for 14 years. I had to. And uh, parents seem like don't have time now to work with children. And I wished they did. They said, "Well, why don't you come on?" and I say, "I did my part when I was younger. You young folks have to take over now." So, as the 4-H leader

and 4-H counselor, I enjoyed my many years with the 4-H club.

MM: Okay. I've just got a couple more things to ask then. (ML: I thought I was through!) No, not yet. [laughing] yeah, we've just got...you covered a lot. About what time did you start when you were a counselor? Do you remember? Were you like...?

ML: Let' see, I started in 1964 or so, 14 years. It must have been about...I don't know, it must have been about 1950..... It must have been 1950 I started working with them.

MM: So, you were probably about-, what age were you? Do you remember?

ML: Well, I imagine I was about...in my late '30's.

MM: Okay, okay. And how many, how many uh, were you there? Fourteen summers, is that what you said?

ML: Fourteen summers. [inaudible]...then I worked with them about 2 summers, up to Camp Virgil Tate.

MM: Okay. How did you become a counselor? Was there....?

ML: Well, we had a homemakers club, which Miss Laura was the head of, and she wanted somebody to volunteer to come. So, I started because my daughter-, you know, I didn't have but one, and I was interested in getting her started into something.

MM: Okay, let's see. Were there anybody that you remembered from the camp that really struck you as in like kids, or even counselors, that you kind of stay in contact with or....?

ML: Well, my only one, I see the girls from Vandalia, and we always, they always say, "Hey, Miss Lynch, I remember Miss Lynch. You used to get after me all the time."

Yeah. And I've got a couple of girls who live in Rand, they always come and hug me, they say, "Miss Lynch, I remember you from the 4-H camp, you know, 4-H club." So, and uh, I see a man we're always talking about what we used to do at the 4-H camp.

MM: Okay, let's see here..... Do you remember, can you talk about some of the camp experiences after the whites came into.....

ML: Yeah, [inaudible]....I didn't go back to Camp Washington. But when I came to Virgil Tate, they were very good. Although one night I got very upset. I was counseling the girls dormitory. And what was happening, somebody had pulled the screen off the, off the bathroom window, and one the girls came and told me that the girl was going out the window. So I had to go and get the head counselor So, she had to speak to her, tell her that it was wrong, we don't have that, [inaudible]...we sent her home the next day. So, that's the only experience that I had. Or something like that.

MM: uh, do you think that African American kids today are missing something by being sent to an integrated camp?

ML: They are missing a whole lot. Because they don't have that contact to do, things, you know, like sewing or cooking , or some kind of craft. They do not have that contact any more. And they definitely need that. They don't even know how-, well, you teach them how to set the table. They don't even know how to set the table, nor serve a table. We always had instructions for that. And they would do that. Sometimes they would have a little dinner party and invite the parents in.

MM: Okay. Were-, what were some of the roles that you had as a counselor? What

were some of the things that you had to do?

ML: Trying to keep them straight! [laugh] Trying to keep them straight. I mean that to say that they, they did their work and uh, and see that they had to get their bed made up before they go to breakfast, and to see that they kept their clothes so that they, especially the bath towels. Don't put 'em in with their dry clothes, because they were too wet. And they had to be sure and hang the towel up and keep their clothes straight. We had a problem with the children. They would lose a towel. They would lose a shoe, they would lose the top and wouldn't claim it. [laughing] We would have boxes of clothes before camp [inaudible].... Well, we know someone lost a shoe. Who's shoe is this? Don't know nothing about it. But you'd be surprised how many towels, how many shirts, how many blouses, that those children would not claim. So, they would go home without them. So later on I think they would give 'em to the mission or the Salvation Army. They wouldn't claim anything, the towels, maybe they'd just leave 'em lay.

MM: Okay, did you have any contact with co-ed camps, or were you just strictly with the girl camp?

ML: Just strict-, oh, it was co-ed. The boys and the girls.

MM: Did you say...I'm sorry, go ahead. Okay. I wanted to ask you if you saw a difference in the activities between the boys and the girls.

ML: No, no, I didn't see any differences.

MM: Okay. And uh, let's see, one more question. I want you to go into detail about how you felt that the camp was important to you.

ML: Well, to me the camp was very important. Because it was something that I, I didn't have when I was growing up. And so, I figure that if I got in camp, I could have somebody. Since I didn't have the experience, I was getting experience, as well as the child. And I think that uh, finally joining with Mrs. Lowery and all the camps there, that I did, I enjoyed it myself, because I was learning as I went along. And we had this 4-H book and we would sing songs. Don't ask me to sing one now, because I couldn't even remember which one we were singing. But it was, it was really a, really an experience that I loved. And my husband knew that one week out of the year I was not going to be at home. And then uh, I was in charge, a lot of times, of doing things for the camp-, for the state fair or the county fair--I did that. We always had something on for the county fair, and the state fair. Because I used to go, me and Mrs. Lowery, up to Greenbriar County and put something on for our 4-H. And then we used to have county fairs, for Shawnee. [inaudible]

MM: Thank you, we're done.

END OF INTERVIEW

NOTE: The two interviews were with Margaret Lynch and Doris Peaks, conducted by Michelle Meadows at the Simmons High School reunion at the Marriott in Charleston, WV, on July 5th, 1997.