

“Personal Learning of Older, Rural Adults”

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Abstract

This article is a summary of the findings of a research project that included ten older rural adults from a county in south Georgia. The research focused on self-directed learning. The researcher conducted two interviews with each participant over a two day period. The findings focused around four research questions: what is the nature of learning, what is the process of learning, what are the late life adjustments, and what is the impact of living in a rural environment.

## Personal Learning of Older, Rural Adults

The purpose of the study was to understand how older adults are utilizing self-directed learning in the adjustments and changes in late-life within a rural setting. The following research questions guided the study:

- 1). What is the nature of SDL of these older adults?
- 2). What is the process of SDL of these older adults?
- 3). What are the late life adjustments of these older adults?
- 4). How does the rural context shape the SDL of these older adults?

Self-directed learning takes place throughout one's life when the individual decides to learn more about some specific topic. This study will investigate this complex and simple topic of self-directed learning, especially in the older adult. Education has the power to be an agent of change, both individually and socially (Foley, 2001; Friere, 1970; hooks, 1995; Mezirow, 1991; Moreland, 1999; Rogers, 1969). Similarly, this research can isolate how learning can impact the older person's life.

The United Nation's Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has continually referred to lifelong learning as having the potential to help solve various problems around the world, as well as being instrumental in the personal fulfillment of the individual (Field, 2000). Lifelong learning is the philosophy out of which self-directed learning evolves (Kasworm, 1983).

This study employed a qualitative design. Between May 10, 2002 and November 20, 2002 ten older adults from a county in south Georgia were purposefully selected and interviewed in a face-to-face setting over a two-day period, each interview lasted approximately two hours, for a total of four to five hours with each participant. All

interviews took place in the homes of the participants. The interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed; I alone did the transcription for all of the interviews, resulting in 400 pages of conversation. A handwritten note was sent after each interview expressing thanks for participation in this study. In addition, each participant has been contacted at least once since the two formal interviews for clarification of data.

During the interviews the participants were encouraged to show evidence of their learning. This simple validation of inquiry was to lend more evidence to the learning projects of these older adults.

The criteria required the individuals in the sample to be at least 70 years old, reflect the rural demographic of the state of Georgia, and show evidence of self-directed learning and late life adjustment. This qualitative research primarily focused on interviews but also included documents as well as observation. The interviews were spread over two sessions and reflected a semi-structured format with open-ended and flexible questions. A brief life history of each participant was video recorded, all but two of the participants agreed to be videotaped. The analysis was based on recurring themes as well as the theoretical framework of this study. The researcher conducted this investigation in an ethical manner; the work reflects reliability and validity from an interpretive perspective.

The findings of this chapter are the result of two interviews, phone calls, field notes and general knowledge about the participants and the area. The names of the participants have been changed, an appropriate first name was chosen for each participant. The following chart indicates some of the primary learning activities of each participant. Data were analyzed using the constant comparative method. The analysis was

based on recurring themes from the data as well as the purpose of the study. The findings are the result of two interviews, phone calls, field notes, and general knowledge about the participants and the area.

From Table 2 one can see the extent of learning that was taking place in these participants. These particular learning activities were the backdrop of the discussion during these interviews. As a result of a careful analysis of these interviews I found that the learning was centered on the following findings. The nature of the learning is highly engaging, that each individual has a specific process of learning, that there are a variety of adjustments occurring in each persons life, and that the rural setting seems to provide a positive atmosphere for learning. Table Three is a general summary of the findings. The details of these findings as well as support for the findings continue.

#### *Nature of Learning*

The personal learning of the 10 participants converges on three areas. The nature of the self-directed learning of these older adults who live in rural settings is highly engaging, in a variable structure, and collaborative.

#### *Highly Engaging*

Probably the most pervasive topic in these 400 pages of interview data is that this learning is highly engaging. This is seen by an enjoyment and even fun in this learning, an interest in the topic at hand, an excitement, and a commitment to continue to learn.

#### *Enjoyment.*

Each person in the sample discussed how much he or she enjoyed their personal learning.

Table 2 – Learning Activities.

| Name    | External Learning Activities  | Internal Learning Activities  | Recommended by                            |
|---------|---|---|---|
| Robert  | Civil War Remembrance,<br>Stain Glass Replacement,<br>Fellowship Hall, Travel,<br>Classes | Reading daily paper, Looking<br>up words, Bible Study                 | Senior Circle                             |
| Norman  | Class on computer   | Reading paper on Internet   | Senior Circle, Church Staff,<br>Librarian |
| Sue     | Classes   | Caring for animals, Taking<br>care of health and body                 | Librarian                                 |
| Betty   | Classes   | Search for truth  | Church Staff, Librarian                   |
| Bill    | Help others with elections and<br>various projects  | Helping others in community,<br>Personal Health, Lessons from<br>Past | Member of County Board of<br>Education    |
| Hattie  | Bible classes   | Lessons on job, Read news<br>and magazines, Improve<br>others         | Member of County Board of<br>Education    |
| Dora    | Magazines, Senior Circle,<br>Bible, Television  | Gardening, Work, Spiritual<br>Interest                                | Senior Circle Advisor                     |
| Wilbur  | Various activities and<br>organizations   | Fireman's, Spiritual, Lessons<br>from past                            | Member or County Board of<br>Education    |
| Charlie | How to repair something,<br>Genealogy, Health topics,<br>Voting Chairperson               | Gardening, Papers, Television<br>Shows, Health Topics.                | Probate Judge                             |
| Thelma  | Classes   | Work in yard, decorating<br>flowers, improving the<br>community.      | Senior Circle Advisor                     |

Table Three – Findings.

1. What is the nature of learning? The nature of this learning is that it is highly engaging, has a variable structure, and collaborative.

Highly engaging: enjoyment and fun in learning, excitement in learning, and a commitment to learn.

Variably structured: This learning is variably structured in dichotomies of new and old knowledge, serendipitous and deliberate learning, and simplistic and complex subjects.

Collaborative: This learning involves gaining information from one's community and friends.

2. What is the process of learning? This process is seen in the following process.

Stimulus (internal/external), Interest, Access Resources, Systematic Attention, Adjustments, Catalyst, Resolution.

3. What are the adjustments of these older adults? Adjustments to time, family relations, loss (health and social). This adjustment results in their overall attitude as an older adult.

4. What is the rural context? Positive side of rural is that it is quiet, simple, and peaceful; there is an abundance and proximity to nature, and closeness to people. Negative aspects of rural are that there are fewer resources and not as many opportunities.

For example, Robert and his wife listed many activities of which they enjoy. This enjoyment seems to allow for the emotional energy to pursue learning on a particular topic.

Well I am not a great history buff, as she would tell you, but I do enjoy seeing period equipment, equipment that was used years ago, and she enjoys the houses and I enjoy what they worked with...farming equipment or household equipment...

Norman enjoys his activities on the computer, and in the library he goes everyday that they are open. He states, "I can only go five days a week! (Laughter.) You see they are closed on Saturday and Sunday...Yeah. I haven't been there yet! I am going!"

Betty describes how much she enjoyed learning about the computer. "I started with this wonderful classworks manual to teach a person how to use a word processor, and I learned it! And I enjoyed it, worked with it, and liked so many things..."

Betty also discusses that she enjoys having a scanner with her computer, that she is willing to learn to work it.

And something I am enjoying now is the scanner. Which I don't have a fax, and it more or less takes the place of a fax machine, in that I can scan anything I like and run it through RTF Text rich program and it can send it immediately to this page of text to whoever I want. Robert's son has recently gone into National Guard, that is another story, and he wrote little letters and Robert scanned them and sent them to me, so it is wonderful to have it.

Clarence clearly enjoys the variety of things he can do on the computer.

Oh, I like it, well, you know, you can do so many things, I, one main thing I do is make cards for people. Yeah, and make labels and I can make iron on pictures for shirts. And all that kind of stuff. (Laughter).

Part of enjoyment of learning wants to share it with others. Dora had read an article in a religions magazine for older adults, she felt that it gave her great insight on care giving and wanted to share it with her co-workers.

But it was an article on a daughter and a father, she was the caregiver and this was her uh, account of it. And the other account, the 'you said,' was his account. He had to live with her; she had to take care of him. And it was the struggle, the battle back and forth. Of what he had to do, he didn't feel like she was treating him right and she didn't feel like he was doing right. So it was a real interesting article, and I saved that...I am going to take it to work and let uh, the girls down there read it. But it's just, an older person's uh, account of how he is being treated. Because all your rights are taken away, you can't make an

Similarly Thelma's enjoyment of learning crafts, she teaches a class for crafts at a senior center for free.

...On Tuesday morning I go to crafts, out at the retreat, we make crafts for the, for the uh, people out there, and to begin with we went and we had things that were simple, that, the ones that had, well they are not out there unless they have some type of disability. And so, anyway, we would have things that would do for them, and it last for an hour, and they are always so appreciative. And then we stay at the hospital and we eat lunch.

Dora has a personally crafter and comfortable segments of learning.



Ooh, that chair is my nest! That is where I sit, that is where I just go and nest every night (Laughter)...It's comfortable, I feel at home there. Now, I will tell you something... I, I, I, like Guideposts and Readers Digest, so I have both of those, I have already read both of... Well, it's just comforting, to, to know that these things are there if you, uh, want to, uh, take advantage of them. Now, the cooking magazine like, Taste of Home, its just, relaxing, and its, I get excited reading it...

Clarence enjoys the activity of gardening an activity in which he participates everyday. He says with enthusiasm, "I enjoy every little bit of everything out there! I enjoy the work! I enjoy uh, seeing it cleaned up, seeing if I can keep it clean."

This type of enjoyment even borders on play and fun.

I just got on it, and started playing. I got books back here, you know... 95, because I had my first one was, Microsoft you know, 95, and uh, I just started playing with it, and you can just get on that internet and you can find any subject you want. And that is mostly what I did then. And play games, they got "Textra" you know that game, you don't? I got a bunch of games on there, all kind of games, and uh, now that I got my CD burner, and they play DVD's too! Uh huh, and then just regular CD's. And then I can have my music back there while I am looking up something, and while I am making pictures. I am doing pictures (laughter).

Norman stated that he was willing to learn the computer because it was something that he could enjoy and have fun with. While he is playing games he is also listening to CD's on the computer.

And like I said you just sit there and fool with it. You, you, Ken told me... Yeah. Most of my discs are church hymns. I have some others, some bluegrass, and uh, I have tried one or two of the games that are not in the computer. I play a lot of, just a matter of occupying myself, and taking up time. There are four games in my computer; I play two of them a right smart... Free cell and solitaire. Uh, I bought scrabble and in order that I thought, uh, uh, that might, increase my knowledge, but the program that I bought requires some changing in there to some number like 367 or something. I don't know how to do that, so that is no good. Uh, so... I may stay on there 3 or 4 hours. UH, I just, was on there today primarily today, just finished just before you come a defragmentation process.

This fun aspect of enjoyment, is perhaps even entertainment. In the process of process of pursuing knowledge, there is also an element of fun and entertainment which adds to this process. Norman said, "And like I said you just sit there and fool with it. You, you, Ken told me early on, you can't tear it up (laughter)." These older adults seem to have found something like a toy, something they can play with and fool with, it won't tear up, and in the process they are learning something. In addition, it is a vehicle also for fun. Sending amusing stories, jokes, and interesting items of nostalgia also add to this entertainment. Norman discusses this.

Well, there was one of the last things, I guess, that was sent to me, and I sent it to some other people was there uh, in times past, the price of commodities, uh, born before the days of TV and pantyhose and all kind of stuff like that, we married and lived together, coke was something you drink, (laughter), stuff like that was some of the last ones I guess.

I asked Norman, “Can you describe for me, what does it mean for you to be able to use the computer? To be able to work on it. To be able to operate it like you do?” His reply seems appropriate.

Well, I guess you would call it amusement, or fun thing, I am not into trying to make up programs uh, uh, put together any kind of ads that appear, I am not particularly interested in being a programmer. I don’t understand it that well. I mostly do search. Use the search units for different types of information.

Similarly, when I asked Dora to explain more about these piles of books that surround her chair. She stated how entertaining they were, not only do they learn something, but the sheer fun of it. She has piles of books around this chair, in obvious groupings, one I had not noticed before was a pile of cooking books. She said how entertaining they were.

Uh huh, yeah. One of them is called Taste of Home. And it comes six a year, what I just got was October November. And, I believe, uh, and it is all recipes, no advertisement in it. All cooking hints and recipes. And uh, I just keep, people have....Well, sometimes I use one of the recipes, but if I don’t’ its just entertainment... Because that is what I am interested in. Cooking and eating, cooking and eating (laughter) (Very expressive – claps hands)!

In another situation, Bill discussed how much he enjoyed making a speech on Black History.

That is exactly right, and I enjoyed that the best of anything I have ever seen. And they called me back the next year, and...I mean I would have been glad to have gone back and speak for them again. But uh, I learned a lot about that, whenever, he said, stay in the south and make friends with your white neighbors and learn how to live, that is exactly the statement, have you ever read it, black history?

Thelma is involved with several activities in the community and relays what she learns during this.

Well, you really learn a lot and you learn, I mean, and you meet so many people that you would not have uh, met otherwise, and it is, and working with people makes a big difference...

Thelma discusses what she has learned about working with the storeowners in town.

Well, it takes, your merchants coming in and joining in and you know, for you to show, what the improvement, that it would be in the long run, and we have had a hard time, doing that, but I think then, one, last year, we had the video places on the square you know. And they didn't order one of those things, and then he wanted, at the last minute he wanted one, and I said, so...so anyway I called and asked him if he wanted one, and he said oh I thought yall were just going to bring it to me.

One of her favorite activities is bridge. She has been a member of one bridge club for over 40 years, and currently is playing three times a week. Bridge is one of those recreational pursuits that engage the mind.

Well, bridge is a challenge. I think and each hand is different and how you play it makes a big difference, and how you respond to when somebody bids and it also makes a difference. So you learn that you know, even though your five-card suit or something might not be but 10 high you learn, if you have got enough points that you bid that. Because that tells your partner that you, you know, that that can open it up for her to, help her. But it is a challenge and I thoroughly enjoy it and each hand is, is different. You don't play bridge? (Some discussion about this)... Well, it is certainly something nice you can do when you get older.

Bridge players also are often trying to learn more about the game, especially the dynamics of the initial bet. Thelma will read the bridge column in the paper and will even play the hand that the writer often suggests.

*Excitement.*

Similar to enjoyment and interest but to a greater degree is the excitement involved in the Self-Directed Learning of these older adults.

Robert speaks of something that occurs daily and that he is passionate about.

That is another thing that while I am dwelling on this, I have a bad habit, not a bad habit a good habit (laughter)...if someone uses a word, or if I read a word I am not familiar with I either go into there the world book or to the dictionary and become familiar with that word...and I got kind of a ?passion for that...I don't like to scan over any word that I don't know the meaning of...

Betty discusses the excitement that she felt when she realized all that a computer could do.

I had spent a great part of my life, alphabetizing in library work (laughter). And this was instantaneous, and it was wonderful, and so, uh, having typed on old non-descript typewriters where you had to use white out to, to, and even back in the time when I had to use the four and five carbon copies of everything for legal forms, so, I was very much excited about computers, wanted to learn...

Betty goes on to describe how her friends attempted to question the amount of time she would spend on the computer. And how at times she would be the only one learning some aspect of the computer.

I think I might have been the first older person. Because when I would mention it, my friends would look at it as if they thought I was crazy or something (laughter). (Quoting them) "Well why you want to spend so much time with that computer?" (Laughter) And uh, my friends and I were in a camping club, I remember one, (Quoting her) "Well; what do you do with it?" (Laughter). Well I write, and that didn't answer a thing, that one didn't have anything to write. But, it uh, after, getting on line of course that opened up a world of new possibilities as if, I had never even owned an encyclopedia set, and it was as if I had my own encyclopedia set in my own home.

Betty continues with her description of the computer, and how learning transpired to a pleasure.

And then that became uh, irrelevant very soon, because the search engines kept improving and they came together in their requirements for the way you entered material and so forth. And soon it became a pleasure, and it is still a pleasure. Because uh, of course there is a learning process there, that uh, might deter, I

think does deter a lot of the, friends I have who, want to decide about whether to get connected to buy a computer.

Hattie discusses how she continues to be involved in activities that are important to her even after retirement.

Well since I retired I still see need for help. And that, didn't stop me from helping them after I retired, cause I still see some needs out here, and I am still working on it... Well, different ones ask me, uh, about helping them do this, and I get out there and help them. And they will ask me about getting in touch with social security, or helping them do this, or helping them get a check, I will just jump right on out there and go and do it, cause I can do it.

Dora discusses this excitement in learning. She describes with excitement evening activities. Often she is sitting in a special chair surrounded by piles of books that comfort her and give her something to look forward to:

Well, it's just comforting, to, to know that these things are there if you, uh, want to, uh, taking advantage of them. Now, the cooking magazine like, Taste of Home, it's just, relaxing, and it's, I get excited reading it. (Laughter) And I want to cook this, and I never do... It's just, something, that makes you look forward to accomplishing something, seeing like a new casserole, or a new cake, pie, and maybe it's almost just like what you have done all these years, but they have got a new twist to it. And uh, it's just something to look forward to.

This learning is also something that the person is excited about that they want to be involved in the details of this knowledge. Concerning the reading of the paper, Robert, made sure that I understand that he just did not read the paper. "Well we take the

Valdosta Times, and I don't scan it, I read it, I get criticized for that sometimes about taking the Valdosta Times (laughter between them)..." Each person in this study discussed how the daily paper was one of the main sources of reading and information.

Excitement in these learning arenas is also seen that it is something to return to. Robert's wife states, "Well you never learn everything that is in the Bible, and it is a continuous learning. Sparta, I read about that history, and uh, I have already retained that, but in the Bible you don't retain everything, because it is so much of it." Similarly Betty discusses the joy of retuning to something that you are excited about especially learning how to use the computer.

So I started. And I bought some books, but I never did feel like I had enough money to buy every book I wanted to read. I don't know; if I am talking too long, let me know.... But I wanted to be able to get back to the book I wanted, so I would number the book, and pasted the number, like a library call number on the book. I would take notes from it and then put a reference so I could go back to it. So then I used the computer to organize those notes and databases, and I wanted to know about the authors, the psychologists and I wanted to know about them, and wanted to have them listed.

This excitement is clearly seen in Betty's overall excitement to learn. "My big interest is to find the truth! I think the main things that this world is all about is love, and caring for others, which grows out of love, and learning seeking the truth."

Clarence discusses a similar idea.

Yeah I do puzzles, that is one I do, (pointing to a book on the table of Crossword Puzzles) most of them. And like yesterday, I just finished it while ago, you can



put it down, you will be stumped, but you will be surprised you can put it down.

And you come back (laugh) to it and you can see it. Immediately! So I do that all during the day, and too at night.

This excitement is also evident because it is an activity they look forward to.

Betty said concerning learning more about the computer, "...And I haven't learned it yet, I am still working on it (laughter), there is so much, I have things that I want to write and do and, uh time is running out (spoken with a great deal of enthusiasm and hope and positive attitude). And I can't get the time to do all I want to do."

Dora states a similar idea with her excitement about working in the yard. "I don't know, I don't know, cause I will get out there, and all day, I will be thinking off and on all day, what am I going to do when I get home. I am planning in my mind. And maybe I will walk out there and I will see something and that is where I will start work."

Hattie also discussed her enthusiasm for learning about her work. This was an important job to her, not only did it increase her income, but it increased her esteem in the community, but more important this job reflected her personal desire to help others. Her excitement was translated into a desire to think about it, and reflect on what to do. After returning from a seminar on what the State expected of them she said, "I just aint thought about it, well what kind of shop can we put up here? And I said we don't have nothing that, no furniture refinishing place here, and uh, and when I talked to Vickie and Rene, they said Well do what you want to do...But I had to come up with that idea because they told us we had to come back and set up something."

Sue describes her excitement to learn about organic farming as something that is absorbing. And she was willing to make a priority as to her time.

Well, its been a lifelong, and way back in the 30's there was a, Rodell Publishing company puts out a, they publish "Prevention", and they publish "Organic Gardening". Well, I had taken it so many years I had pretty well absorbed it. I haven't been taking it lately, I had to put my priorities, I couldn't do everything I wanted. So I had to decide to what I wanted to do first, so I had been more into chicken things.

Several of the participants discussed how they loved to learn certain topics. This "love" of certain knowledge translates into a personal excitement to learn. Robert's wife states, "I just love history." After driving through Sparta, Georgia on the way to the mountains, because of her love of history, she decided to learn more about this town. Wilbur stated his love of firefighting, which is seen in an excitement to attend the meetings and to learn everything he can about saving lives.

I love it. I enjoy it because in the later years, uh, I lost two children in the fire. And losing my two children in the fire, every time they would blow a whistle and siren, and then I would get in my old piece of car and follow them, wherever I go. And that is the way, whenever they got ready to put on a black, I was the first black they put on there. And I am always thinking whenever I am going to a fire like that, how to help someone.

Similarly Clarence discusses his love of learning new things and a love of music. "Yeah (laughter). I like to buy new things, yeah (laughter). I love to shop. For clothes, and I buy all the groceries now, I love, I like that. I like to buy groceries. When asked about why he was willing to work so hard to have such a nice entertainment center he stated. "(Laughter) Because I love it! I love music see. And uh...I have always been that

way, it was inbred. Because my Daddy had the first radio in Nashville, he did, and he sold them, he sold Knight radios, made in Cincinnati. And...I just kind of grew up with it, and I just kept going with it, going with it.”

Thelma also discussed a love for all of the projects she is involved in. This motivation to continue to be involved, to continue an enthusiasm to learn about what is important in these organizations, can be seen as a love of these projects. “Which I, like I say, I still love to play. So I guess I love projects, I have always got one going (laughter).”

*Commitment.*

Another interesting dynamic of this personal learning is that there is some commitment to this process. This goes beyond just fascinating hobbies and alluring past times, this learning may involved some activity that requires a great deal of time. For example Robert and his wife discussed the amount of time that they spent on a project where they had to learn about his great grandfather. They both were saying.

No not everyday, but we would spend a lot of time on it, when we would go to Douglas it would be three or four hours of the time, if I had to estimate, I would say it was a good forty hours or more...uh-huh...it takes so long to, to run those tapes and read them, and the print was not very clear...cause a lot of them were old whoever put all of that together I admire them, cause that was a lot of work to put all that information together...for it to be that accessible to us...

In another situation in the interview concerning preparation for studying of the Bible, and the Sunday School Lesson. Robert’s wife said, “I read, over the lesson, and then I go back and read it again, and...we have a Sunday School I book that we use, quarterly, and

I read over that, and then words that I am not familiar with I look those up. And I always write down a lot of information, uh, so as I can have it on hand. I have always done that (laughter).” I was struck by this woman’s commitment to learn, she was just not reading through some material, there was a commitment beyond that to learn what was going on.

Norman stated that he would spend around four hours a day, on the computer; Betty discussed how she would get up and spend about two hours before breakfast doing this search.

I went to see Sue on a very hot day. In August in South Georgia, it is often so hot that you can see the haze. Even a small walk from a car to a house can cause sweat to drop from the forehead. The humidity is so high; you can’t get away from it. Libraries and churches have long been air-conditioned just because of the impact of the humidity on the paper. When I stepped inside Sue’s house, there was no change in the air, although there was a fan. It was hot. I was just going to make a nice comment about the heat, and then I received a lecture about how soft we have become.

D – How much time do you spend out here working on your (referring to all the animals outside).

M – Ooh, in and out, I say that is the reason I don’t have air conditioning. It makes a prisoner out of you. When the day is hot and you step out, and the air-conditioning, ugh, you just I have a fan, and I don’t’ notice it when I step out. Other people come here and they just sweating and dripping, ooh, that doesn’t bother me, I am tropical born and bred. I do think it weakens you terribly when you get used to it. And uh, this time it is kind of warm, I will be glad when it cools off a little bit.

Dora spends about four hours a day, during the summer, or as long as it is light outside. But she seems to even berate herself for not spending more time on certain plants. “I don’t think I give them the attention they need. So...I just, I haven’t sprayed my roses. That takes a lots of dedication and time, and you can’t get up and put it off tomorrow and, and I will do it tomorrow. And they work, it kind of phases out things that require that much dedication.”

One interesting aspect of older adults is that they seemingly do a lot of this learning on their own. Even to the point where Betty stated she thought she was the first older adult in this county to learn how to use the computer, but even more she felt alone in her search.

But I haven’t done any specific uh, study, it would be hard to do in isolation, it would be so much better if there could be discussions of these matters, I would dearly love to have somebody – ‘Well, what do you think about this, and what do you think about that?’ But I can’t do it because of our culture here in Nashville, if I were to spring some of these ideas that I have come to believe are so, definitely bedrock truth on a lot of people, they would think I had gone out of my mine (high voice)! I was a heretic, or I was delusional, you can’t do it. Because uh, most of course I don’t know there might be a lot of people who think along these same lines here in Nashville, but I haven’t found them. My friends are not open to any such discussions. And it has been so hard. If when I am called on to, lead a program in circle, or something like that I can do it well. And they don’t understand, all through these years – ‘Why don’t you teach a Sunday school class? – You got to teach this Sunday school class.’ I can’t. I can be in a Sunday

school class and get a lot of good from it, because I know that what they believe basically is the same thing I believe. But if i were trying to put it into words, I can't do it; I can't go by the formulas. I'd have to say from my heart what I feel about that and I can't do it. Only person I have really talked to is Anne Jones because she could not understand why I couldn't do that much – teach a Sunday School class! And I finally told her that I did not believe the way she did. I did not believe in the literal truth of every word in the Bible and all of this. And she took it pretty well, but I was very serious about it. I got into a group at the church and I was so hoping that that would work, I have stayed out of discussion groups there, all through the years because of the literal interpretation of the Bible which I can't go along with (high voice). And it was a good group, of varied ages, that met Wednesday afternoon study group, and the ladies in there were earnest, they were in prayer about things that mattered, and they are doing good in the church. And I got worlds from it, as long as, but the further it went the more I knew I just had to speak my mind, and I couldn't and so I had to drop out of that, that is pretty sad.

This sad pursuit of knowledge however is still wroth the effort.

In other situations, Wilbur spends a great deal of time involved in his many activities, and also Clarence. In fact, these older and retired folks, was not easy to set up appointments. They had things to do and to go. They are committed to their responsibilities and the things that they want to learn.

*Variably Structured*

The nature of this SDL in rural settings of older adults is also variably structured. This learning is structured in dialectics of learning that are old and new, planned and unplanned, and simple to complex.

*Old and new.*

The participants discussed their personal learning in a variety of episodes that consisted of new information as well as lesson learned long ago.

Robert talked about learning a new word:

Well, in Sunday school lesson, which I taught, talked about “karma”. And I, through my son taking uh karate, he studied a little about karma. And I said I haven’t really ever followed through on karma, so I went and got the dictionary, well I went first to my old blue back Webster’s dictionary from the 30’s and it is not even in there (laughter)...and I, through that I found out that English is made up of Celtic, Greek, Latin, we take words from all those uh languages and come up with English language, well, karma is a new word, and we are adding new words all the time...and changing some of the old ones...so I went after that I found out that it mentioned that uh the man, can’t think of his first name now, that uh, well it was Buddha, and from that I went to reading about Buddhism so that is the way I followed through, it is like karma...

Similarly, Betty discussed learning new aspects of the computer from a class.

... As little as I know about computers; I got a different perspective about a lot of things. From the questions they asked and I learned so much that I didn’t know at all. Because I have just tried to learn what I needed on the computer, there is so little time that you can’t go into other things. So I learned more.

Dora, discusses new topics she learns while attending seminars at a locally run medically program for older adults.

Well, the topics that are discussed at Feeling Alive, are just, uh, they are helpful because its, most of them are topics that are key to our level of living, our way, where we are in life. Being a senior adult, and the things that we have to watch for, high blood pressure, and cholesterol, I fight that all the time.

Hattie discusses how at work every new person that entered this program she had to learn a new way to work with each person.

Okay, when you are working with those type of people, different types (she is working with mental disabled adults), different types, yeah, yeah, and different ailments, and different disabilities. And you have to treat them in a different way at times until they learn you. And then you can have them all in one section. But uh, we have some that come in, you know with, you got to do everything for them, well you got to train them how they got to learn to do for themselves.

She continues this thought of learning a new way to work with each person:

So, it, it, it, it wasn't easy Donny, but when you setting it up you got to lookout for the welfare of the peoples you dealing with. Then you talk to them first, before setting it up, what would you like to do? I let them have a choice of telling me what they would like to do. All right they would tell, and I say, I think you would work good on such a such a thing. I say let me try you on that, and then we would have a trying period and if they do good we let them stay there.



Hattie summarizes new learning with these ideas. “It is just like the job that I was on. I taught myself how to do their job step by step. So that is what I am going to have to do, I am going to have to learn it.”

This new information comes through a variety of mediums such as newspaper, Bible, magazines, television, and speakers. Dora shares these ideas.

That is part of my life; the Bible means a lot to me. I read, what I do every night, we have a, mission magazine, and the name of it is Mosaic, and it has the missionaries for that day, that has birthdays in it and I read them. And the church prayer list, and then this, uh, a foreign mission magazine, Home Mission Board, I get it, and it’s got a uh, uh, most of it has got the people that work in those areas by the days, and most of those I read.

Clarence discussed a nightly ritual in his home, where he watches the History Channel. This new information on an old topic, World War II, provides interesting insight.

Yeah, I love it. Don’t you? You ever watch it? I watch it all the time; I watch it every night sometime... I like a lot of it because it is reminisces about World War Two. It has a lot of World War Two stuff on it. And those early pictures of Hitler and his crowd. And all of that stuff, and then scenery, where I have seen, I have seen in Germany, in Germany. And... I got a TV guide out of the newspaper, and uh, everyday it has got in it. And that is first when I read the paper, that is one of the first things I go to, and find out what is going to be on so I can tell...[my wife] (laughter). And also for my information because I might see some things that I really want to see.

Every morning, every new day, Clarence is motivated and excited to see what is new in the paper and on the television.

Yeah, the first thing I read in the morning is the Valdosta Times. And I go through it and read it. And then during the day I work the crossword puzzle. And then later on in the day I get the constitution, Journal and Constitution, and go straight to the editorials. And, then I go to the, go to the uh, sports, too. I like to read, I like, see, a lot of people can't stand, like the Republicans, they can't stand somebody that disagreeing with them. Democrats same way! They are not as bad as Republicans are though, I don't believe. But, I try to read all sides. And uh, and that is why I enjoy it so much.

However, in the same conversations these participants would refer to some lesson learned in the past that seemed as fresh as the morning paper. One of Bill's favorite activities is to try to instill in the younger generation the lessons that he learned. Bill discusses the difficulties of his past, and the lessons that remain with him.

Well, I missed part of my doings when I was coming up. I missed education. I didn't have a mother and father. And I tried to get it over to them [he is referring to younger generation] that you should be more conscience about trying to obey their mother and father. And the mother and father should be more conscience about trying to get them to do a better job than they done to them. The only way you going to be able to do that. You got to make up your mind, you gonna do without things he wants to get the things he actually needs. And try to lay a penny or two down for a later day.

Bill would often interrupt the questions I was asking about his learning with various stories about his past. These lessons learned seemed to be continually important to this man.

We grew up with seven boys. Weren't no girls in the family. We had to learn how to wash clothes, cook, on their own...see back in them days what we are talking about, they sold fish, groceries, and raised the cows on the farm, raised the hogs on the farm. We butchered on the farm, we made the syrup on the farm, grew the cane, grind it, cook it right there in the batch...we get up in the morning before day and we grind 80 gallons of juice we had one on before this time in the morning! And uh, we was running three boilers a day. One mule run 80 gallons, next mule run 80 gallons, just swap mules see. And keep going. And uh, that is the way they done it...we cooked on the streets. Didn't have no building codes . ...back in them times we didn't even have a high school in Berrien County. Yall had one but we didn't have one. Yall had a bus to take yalls children to school but we didn't have any buses... You still had to walk! If you had to walk 8 or 10 miles, five six miles, you'd get up before daylight. And what little time you had to go to school, you had to walk back and to. I could tell you a lot of stuff that went on, you wouldn't believe it though. That is right you wouldn't believe it (laughter)! You wouldn't believe it! (Clears throat). Over there where the school at now on the Adel highway, we had a one room shack out here, where we went to school, and things got to easing up a little bit better. You know what they would do? They would let us go over there and play ball. We didn't have no building to play ball in. We had to play out in the streets... We had white people,

back when they had midwives, would go to white people's house, the child was born. Mostly be born at the house, because they didn't have, ones to carry them to the hospital. Midwife probably stay a day or two, with them, with the babies when they first come as to help see about them. They used home remedies, not medicine the doctor's home remedy. And they stay right there in the house with them. And white people have black boys that work for them. Would stay in the house, they feed them at the table, things like that, but that was a real [unique thing]...Oh! You got to adjust to the system. You can't beat the system...(Takes a deep breath.) Well, you knew the rules and the regulations. So you had to abide by the rules and regulations. You could try to buck the system if you want to, but it didn't work. I remember back when they was running prisoner camps, not only in this county...but at the same time, if you went to prison, you a white man, I'm a black man, you in the camp, but you's a separate camp. Fed you same food that they feed me, but it's a different area, they didn't feed them together. But that was the system (high voice)! So, nothing to do about it, but join the system.

Wilbur, also a Black man, relates similar stories from the past that is important to him. This old information continues to influence him today.

My mother always told me, she said, you always treat people like want to be treated, my Daddy did too (he is talking really fast), my Daddy, was just identical same as I was, he said you treat people like you want to be treated. And he...He toted groceries all over this whole town, and a load of groceries on his back. When Mr... had a store on the square up there. And I would follow him in on Saturdays, and on Saturdays and on Sundays we got a chest there, he'd get him a

site, and they would go through the town there and they would give him meat and any kind of stuff like that. And they were real good to him, and he was good to them. But what he did, just like whenever they come there, he was going to look after them people see. And they all know my Daddy and by them knowing him, well that give me a big picture in life myself. Teaching me how to do people. Treat people like I want to be treated. And I have done my children the same way. Always tell them you do treat people just like you want to be treated. That was a big help to me... I know that some things like that have helped me you know, when I say help me I am talking about learn how to live.

Wilbur would often refer to his past during our conversation and when I would ask a certain question, he would often tell a story from the past.

But do you know what helped me the most, of anything, is coming through some bad things. Uh, my mother and myself, we worked real cheap. Can I tell this? We worked real cheap, we worked for a young couple ...for 50 cents...and I learned how to live...and what we did we went there...and uh, what we did... we had better food on our table than what they had on their table. Cause we raised our chickens we raised our meat, and syrup, and stuff like that. But uh, the most exciting thing that what got me, that couple was honest. We worked two days, ...when we sit down to eat, we all went to the same table, and they had...(he is describing the things they were eating and their table...)...we had plenty of food at home, but they was still honest. And we had a lot of things that they did not have ...and I learned how to live a lot from things like that. And I learned a lot of love and things. You never hear me criticize nobody.

Wilbur related several stories of how he learned to live today from these important yet old lessons from his past.

Well, when I was growing up my Daddy, he didn't have a job like I have today...and uh, but he worked at something. He toted groceries all over this whole town on his ...shoulder. My mother would wash clothes...for different white people all over town. And we would tote the boxes and baskets of clothes and deliver them back to them after she got through washing them. And uh, ...later years, after I grew up and got grown, and got married, uh, I was sitting down thinking about it. And it just come to me, say now, uh, you don't have to be like you is. Because I would wear clothes that I was ashamed of many times...but whenever she and I got married well, that was a big lift and big push to me too by the help of the Lord. And uh, I sit down and I thought about it. And ...I thought it don't make sense for me to have to do these things...and when I did, I worked two or three different jobs. To better the condition of myself. I worked turpentine, I plowed mules, I don't some of all of it, worked the sawmill, and one day I was sitting down. And I got to thinking, I don't have to be like this, and the more that I prayed and studied, the more that I prayed and studied the more that things began to fall in line you know, where I could live. And I did not fault nobody, no black, no white, for me having a hard time living. That is just the way it was. And I still didn't fault nobody...but...and there here come this night school. And I worked every day and went to school at night. Worked every day, go to school at night. And then everything began to fall in line. And then every time something came along, after proving myself, if something come along, like Mr. Carlton Griner,

...he was at the post office one day, and he said, Junior, go put your application in up there...(he is telling the story again about how he joined the fire fighters)...and I went in the door and he said now there hasn't ever been a black guy in here, ...if you hear anything you don't like, you got to learn to throw it back at them. He said, now if they get too rough on you, now what I do, he said I will say it to them. And I been there ever since. And I mean I have enjoyed being on the fire department....

On a lighter note, Dora tells a similar old story from her past.

...I want to tell you one thing about when I was little, growing up, you said, last night start back. When I was about in the second grade, the school was right down the road, it's not there any more of course, but, uh, we always had chores at home, and my mama set me down, and told me I had to church that morning, And I had to church butter before I went to school. And I lollygagged around and didn't do it. So when the rest of them went to school, Dorothy (that is herself) stayed at home and churned! And I had to go in late! And it was embarrassing!... But I had to stay there and churn until I churned the butter. And you know what a churn is, ...it was a glass jug, with a metal screw top, had a wheel on it, that had a handle, and the wheel turned the little cog that turned the paddles down in there. And beat the cream until it separated. The cream would separate and your butter would form and the liquid would be called buttermilk. Then you had to pour it out and blend it together, and get the, (laughter), but I thought I didn't tell him [me] about my butter making...I learned a lesson!

Clarence with laughter and a light in his eyes discusses his past and how these old

situations continue to teach him today. His skill in working with electronics was actually early lessons in his life. “I love music see. And uh...I have always been that way, it was inbred. Because my Daddy had the first radio in Nashville, he did, and he sold them, he sold Knight radios, made in Cincinnati. And...I just kind of grew up with it, and I just kept going with it, going with it.”

Similarly, his love of gardening is something that he started when he was younger. When I asked him how he learned all that he knows about gardening, he quickly told an old story about his past. This man who is known for collard greens and homegrown cauliflower started these lessons early in his life.

How did I learn? I have been doing it all of my life. I helped my dad and mama, and I helped my uncles in Alapaha. And, as soon as I got this place here, oh no, when I was up there, at Ms. Phelps, where that filling station is up there now. Across from the Citizens Bank. Just across from the Citizens Bank, that filling station is, there is a big house there, and she had land on the backside of that, between us and Boyett Sprayer, at that time. And I had me a garden there! And just as soon as I got out here. The first thing I did was plant a garden back out here, back there in the back.

Thelma also relates her comfortableness with making natural flower arrangements because of things she learned in the past. “Well, I just have always had I guess, I grew up on a farm. And that was just growing things, was just, part of me. And I enjoy things I could, uh cut, and you know, arrange, for everybody else to enjoy see.”

*Planned and Unplanned.*



The self-directed learning is variably structured among a dichotomy of various topics, not only is this personal learning old and new, but it is also planned and unplanned. This spontaneity and organized, or structured and reflective, continues to show the dialectic of this personal learning. This learning seems to be based in an active structure yet reflective.

For example, Robert and his wife discussed how much they learned while on a trip of travel in the western part of the United States. They enjoyed the atmosphere of creativity and sometime were not quite sure what would happen next, set by the tour guide, but at the same time he was very organized. For example, Mr. Robert stated the following.

And he asked us to take notes as we went along so that we would be able to remember all these things but he gave us (takes a deep breath) a brief description of the trip that we were going to take and asked us to discover...things instead of just seeing them...he said – don't just see America, learn about it...(laughter)...okay...and...as we were going into the area...but prior to that he gave us a daily tour overview on the outline and on the map...the complete circle that we would make out through the west...and a daily like tour we would travel to like Paducah, Kentucky...Kansas City, Missouri...Sioux, Falls, South Dakota...the Badlands...and each day he would list the place we would be at...and this daily tour, and then he would take on each day, he would outline where we were going...

Reflection also takes place in spiritual dynamics. Prayer, Bible Study, and personal devotion all lend themselves to dynamics of thinking, slice, and reflecting.

Betty states her belief in God and how this has changed. This spiritual element is a part of her life and adds to this reflective aspect of learning.

Well, huh. I, uh, keep changing, in the worldview. Because so much keeps coming up. But basically I, I, I, believe everything began with God. Back the first, I have been sounding like I don't uh, go with the Bible, but I was born, bred and raised on the Bible. And it's a part of me, and I love so much of it, but I don't like to... Anyway, the first, uh, verse of the New Testament, 'In the beginning was God, In the Beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the word was God...' it goes somewhat like that, that is exactly what I believe (high tone)! Think that all of this came from that beginning, that seed. But I think that God is so vast, so incredibly vast, so much more vast than we have anyway of ever hoping to understand. And I think that we get caught in a web of thinking we know so much when we know so little. We are like a fish that's immersed in the water and can't get his head above it to know what else there is! Because we get immersed in our culture and we think that the human race and where it is going is all there is to think about when there are unimaginable worlds out there. Like the difference in a grain of sand on the beach and the greatest galaxy you can imagine. You see. But to God, he is so unimaginably vast that all of that is just part of his world. And it is like a computer, you know, you, you, a human mind can't believe that computers can cover the territory they do instantaneously. And that used to be one of my greatest question, how can God know all of this? I just didn't know how huge God was then. But I believe in systems and I believe that uh, he created all of creation. The universe, everything in it, in the same manner

he created a human body. Which is with an organ here and another organ there. And a different one, and none of them know what is going on with the rest. A cell in my finger has no more idea of what is going on in my head than I have of what is going on in God's universe. And that came from William James way back yonder. He gave an illustration that uh, we can't see around the bend, we can't see behind the curtain. That what we have is as little idea of what is true and real as the cat which is snoozing on my carpet has of what is in my mind. He said something about like that and ooh, I have never forgotten it and it has come more and more true. But I think that, that uh, it's all a process of maturity. That God's plan is for us to grow from ignorance and helplessness as babies are into knowledge and love and an understanding that we are a part of Him. In that His, He has a method of communication which no scientist understands yet. But they are getting on the verge of it (more discussion about God – religion and science are coming together – both had dogma – now there is more of a blend – people are accepting some of these mysteries as scientific...)...but I think His purpose for us is to mature very slowly as a human race, the way a baby grows from infancy into maturity so that he can take part in the events shaping the life around him. And I think that I have a long life, not just my life here, but a long life, that uh, the essence, and that God planned it that way. That all starting out from a seed into a stem into a trunk, just like a tree, and then the branches. And the little leaves that soak up the sun, and the nourishments that he provides each individual could be compared to a little leaf that tries to soak up out there and what God has provided for us. If we can fit and sense it, and feel it. That He understands that

each little organ has a limited view, I don't believe in a God of wrath and vengeance...

Hattie believes she "got a blessing" during a very difficult time in her life.

Because of this she feels that she has learned to trust difficult situations and believe the best.

And uh, mama, said I got to tell you something, I said mama, Lawd, don't tell me you gonna let one of my kids get run over, cause we were living right close to the highway, you know and I was scared. I was so scared. And uh, she said, no, and the nurse was still standing to the door watching. And when they broke the news and told me that he had passed that morning, they come in there and shot me, (slaps her hands), give me a shot and knocked me out...when I did come to, my daughter stayed there with me. Mama came back to see about the kids, and left her there with me...and they left me out the next day to come home. So I could make arrangements...and Mrs. Hunt, I never will forget her, she came and told me, she said, uh, don't get no lawyer...because they will charge you an arm and a leg...and you won't get all your money. Just go, wait, go back over there, and take the death certificate and everything back. And that is what I did. I waited till I got up, and I went back over there, and I carried all that paper work and stuff over back there. They paid me for a whole year back, for six kids, because all of them were under 18, and myself. And that is how I got this house. And that was the blessing.

This reflection is somewhat aligned with the "trial and error" method of learning that several of the participants discussed. While they are involved in this learning project,

they will consider, or think about a particular aspect of their learning. And if they feel it is working they will continue, if not, they will try something else. This trial and error is based on a reflective thinking.

Dora stated how much she enjoys working in the yard, and how much she thinks and reflects while working in the yard.

It's just as peaceful and calm, and I am just as happy as I can be. Thinking about what has happened today, or what is going on at the church, and that's the only thing that I don't do, is what I know I should do at the church. I don't go to visitation; I go to prayer meeting on Wednesday night. But I don't go to visitation and I know I should! But, this is my reason, (laughter) everybody else has somebody to help them in the yard (hearty laughter) and I don't! And this is my time!

I asked her how she decided to do certain activities in her yard and how she learned what worked.

No, that is a rose that's blooming there. Now that is some of my trial and error methods there, I uh, have been able to root roses, but lately I have not been able to do anything. I don't think I give them the attention they need. So...I just, I haven't sprayed my roses. That takes a lots of dedication and time, and you can't get up and put it off tomorrow and and I will do it tomorrow. And they work, it kind of phases out things that require that much dedication.

Thelma discussed how she arranges a lot of her flowers. Rather than organize, they are often spontaneous, on the spot decisions, and trial and error.

Yeah, I did the wedding, for the rehearsal dinner for uh, Houston, Lowry Houston, she wanted something, Mrs. May wanted something different, and so, I fixed lanterns out of uh, and covered them with uh, burlap, and then I used the uh, a big pine cone and drilled a hole in it, and put a candle in there. Which is not a candle, but it is a vial that you can get, that has a wick in it, and you can get that and so therefore you can use, uh, the oil and then I used half pint fruit jars. I mean jelly glasses. See its what I used. But a lot of it was just trial and error.

Bill also enjoys this unorganized type of trial and error, hit and miss method of learning. Rather than being organized, this man who has been retired for several years, enjoys just “tipping it on up” in the car, and just driving and around and see who you are going to see. And if there is a need you see about it.

Wilbur continually referred to the Bible as an important part of his life. Often when one reads the Bible, they will spontaneous turn to certain passages, or they will just think where should they read. During the reading, they may be quiet, and reflecting, thinking about the words and the meaning.

Well, i will sit that and read the Bible even at home. But I am sitting down reading the Bible even at home. But I read that Bible and by reading that Bible because it says study thyself and show thyself approved, and I do that. But the more you study, that Bible there, you will see things happen in the day that’s coming right out of that Bible there. I seen something in there this year, this year, and, referred me back to the Bible, and this was particular thing was, ... Y2K, well a lot of people were worried about that. I wouldn’t say I didn’t prepare for that. But, when Christ was walking around on this earth, people was talking about the

end of times...that is what they were doing, they thought the end of times was coming. And some of them were questioning him, they were saying, Master, when will the end come? He said, he told them all right quick, No one know when the end is coming, he told us the things that the signs of the things that we would look to see like earthquakes. And mothers against daughters, daughters against mothers, Father against sons and all of that stuff. We see a lot of that, that is an everyday thing that we see now. And uh, by doing that, you, you, I have seen, the Bible fulfilled just like the lines in my hand. I have seen a lot of times, and so much of we will never see.

In the same conversation although many of these people will also discuss how organized is their learning, and how much they are planning a certain segment of their learning.

Robert discussed how organized his learning is. Although to an outsider you may think this man is full of random decisions about his life and what he is doing. However a closer look reveals a daily organization. I was summarizing some of the things that he previously had said.

Say you are wanting to learn about something, wow, I can see that stack of newspapers right there (there is a neatly stacked column of newspapers in a corner chair, waiting for crossword puzzles to be done)...that is quite (laughter, and talk about crossword puzzles)...now you would say you do about four hours a day, I am just trying to get this estimate with the newspaper the crossword puzzle, and watching the news, I think that sounds like four hours a day, you could say...

Similarly, Betty, although enjoying retirement, and a seemingly leisurely life, is very busy organizing thought and ideas.

These are notes I have collected over the last two decades actually, and many of them are still in scribble pencil form. But, uh, you know as I told you yesterday, I have uh an outline sort of that I try to organize it under. And it began as a Roman Numeral Outline, with as many branches of knowledge I could come up with. For me to just jot down things I read or heard or learned that I would like to remember that I thought would be important to know. And then it changed form that to, uh, well the Dewey Decimal system category of knowledge. And I have numbers, the 100's, 200's, 300's through the 900's to stand for various things and then sub-categories under them. And...I...

Similarly Sue appears to be a rag tag retiree rather wasting away in the jungle of South Georgia. A closer inspection reveals carefully organized learning and ways to continue what is important to her in personal learning.

...Well, now right here. (She turns to the left of where she is sitting, and opens a rusty file cabinet, and it is newly together with a new pamphlet.) Here is my file on chickens. I belong to the APA; see the little books we get on. That is the American Poultry Association. And then I also belong to the American Bantam Association. See those are good technical books (I am looking at some interesting, scientific oriented books on these animals.) See. And then I have a bought some Osterlof. They are supposed to be good layers. Then I have some buff orkenton, see I have a lot of information on them. ...I have technical books on goats. And here is my book on goat (I am thinking I can not believe this woman, she is an



amateur veterinarian). I like these books. See I have uh...(She is showing me some type of notebook with various things in it. Her herd name, and various information she has collected about sheep.) Shadow wood, and here is a copy on the registration on, this one is on Rosie that is the one that is leased out. And then here is...(looking at various registrations forms that are in this notebook). Here are some other registrations, here are copies, and there is the original. (More discussion about this, then a discussion about a goat that died.) That was heartbreaking, a nice goat, just about ready to be bred. She came with this...fever...died.

Wilbur also discusses how during volunteer activities he learns a lot. One might would think that a volunteer Fire Department was loosely organized at best. However, he disclosed that here is actually a school occurring once a week. J –

Last night, when we did, what we did last night there, we, we sat there and we talked about our, our fireworks that we had done some training on. And uh, whenever we go to a fire meeting what we do we train on what we are going to do in case that we have an accident. Uh, just like if you were to turn over out there, well what we do, we, have Jaws of Life, we got four powers, we got everything it takes to get you out of automobile. And by we training, and knowing what we doing whenever we get there and look at the condition you, then we know exactly which tool, like we pick up to work with. And uh, and then we going to check all of our pressure on our water on our uh, uh, water tanks. (He is referring to all the water they use in fires...some discussion on this.)

Clarence also has a very specific routine during his day. This unorganized looking method of life is actually a carefully crafted way to learning.

Yeah, the first thing I read in the morning is the Valdosta Times. And I go through it and read it. And then during the day I work the crossword puzzle. And then later on in the day I get the constitution, Journal and Constitution, and go straight to the editorials. And, then I go to the, go to the uh, sports, too. I like to read, I like, see, a lot of people can't stand, like the Republicans, they can't stand somebody that disagreeing with them. Democrats same way! They are not as bad as Republicans are though, I don't believe. But, I try to read all sides. And uh, and that is why I enjoy it so much.

*Simple to complex.*

In the same way this learning is structured in dialectical frames of old and new, planned and unplanned, the data suggest simple to complex.

Norman discusses how he is taking "three or four computer classes." He is in a day's time may go from a simple task of playing solitaire on the computer to as complex a situation a defragmenting the system.

Betty talked about how much she enjoyed activities as reading Michener's "Chesapeake." In fact, the book was lying on the table in the sitting room. She said she would pick up the book and read for about twenty minutes. She describes this as enjoyable and relaxing, yet she is learning about important aspect of our history. However, on the same day she may attend to the more difficult tasks of attempting to answer significant and important questions.

Well, Justin was about to graduate and he is about to go away to Stanford and California culture and all of that. And I wanted so much to be able to communicate a little bit of what I had found out. But it is so hard. But in 2000 I, that is about the latest I had done. Put together a list of questions that I think parents and children should talk about. These are issues faced in everyday life that every person needs to have his own opinion about. Of course they will all be opposite in many cases even within the same family. And for that reason many families don't ever bring these subjects up. But I think its important that they should and ...

Interviewer – Can I read some of this? Okay we are looking at – ‘this is dated January 5, 2000, first question: Should parents purposely speak to their children about where they stand on issues of daily living? Such as sexual conduct, minority rights, substance abuse, various moral issues. Should parents give parents a spoken or written explanation of their beliefs? About the nature of God, what is the nature of God, describe it. Do events occur with a purpose following a plan or does all happen by chance? And 5. What is the nature of reality? Is substance solid or just mass energy fields? What is life, when does life begin in a human? What part of a human survives death? Is there life in apparently inanimate matter?’ Wow – these are some pretty deep questions.

Dora discusses how when Readers Digest comes, “I read it front to back.” But she goes to more extent with topics she is especially interested in.

On Sunday nights, right now we are not involved in any Bible Study, we are uh, a study course. But we have been, last year we did two, we did a survey of Old

Testament, and a survey of the New Testament, and those are workbooks where you read and answer questions. And right now we are not, but I know we will get started in something then...It was extremely hard (laughter), because I had to discipline myself to sit down and read all of that. Because it, like you cover, uh, three or four chapters, like in the Old Testament, see if has started with Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, all of that and maybe one section would be over two books. And uh, course it was numbered and, and give it chapters and verses and when you go to read all of that. When you, some of it, you got to reason out what is the best answer for that question over that material.

She continues how she will delve into a topic that is more complex by spending more time with it. Especially topics of a spiritual nature.

That just beats the whatever is, I don't know how to say it, but the need in your life for something that is spiritual. That talking with people can't furnish. I tell you something else I have done, and I guess it, I don't know where I got it, from a magazine or somewhere, and uh, our, denomination, is being on a mission emphasis, and this was a uh, in Seattle, Washington, and it was called embracing Seattle.

And then in the same day she will return to a simpler task such as just reading for fun. For example, she really enjoys reading light material from the library that has a religious theme.

I will go over there and I will say to those girls, I'll says come tell me what to read (Big laughter). And they will, cause I have not been doing this very long. I will come in there, and say, tell me what I haven't read. And they know the kind

of books I like. So they will just go and pull this book out. And I will say, well, I think I have read that one, and she will get me another one, and I will say no, that one looks all right. Sometimes, I don't like them, I take them back, and sometimes I read them in a weekend (laughter).

Several of the participants disclosed that they have learned significant lessons in difficult situations. These situations are hard to describe because they are complex, yet there is something lingering in their life. Hattie discusses a situation at work where she learned about racial issues.

No, no, cause Sylvia Giddens they pushed her out and put Rene in. They pushed her out. And Sylvia told me this about a month before she died, I saw her over there in Wal-Mart, and she just hugged me and cried and hugged me, and said...I love you. She said I want you to know I love you, you stood up for yourself. She said I didn't stand up for myself. I mean they just pushed her out, and put Rene in there. And Rene didn't care. But now, Sylvia had the program going good. And uh, it upset me when she told me that, and then she died right after she told me that. And uh, so, when they put it in the paper, and I, they put me in the paper about my retirement. And when the girl come here and wrote it up, I told her I said, let me tell you, you all never give Sylvia Giddens any credit for this. But I am, if it hadn't been for Sylvia Giddens, that center wouldn't have been set up. She set it up; she called me and wanted me to be involved. She and I set the center up, and Rene came in later by them pushing her out. Because she had a little bit more education, Rene did than Sylvia did. But that aint the point. You know you don't do people like that. And uh...

In addition to this some of the participants discussed the complexity of learning lessons in tragedy. Wilbur described a very painful situation in his life and the influence this had on him. I was asking him why he was so interested in the fire department and all of the learning that takes place in that situation.

I love it. I enjoy it because in the later years, uh, I lost two children in the fire.

And losing my two children in the fire, every time they would blow a whistle and siren, and then I would get in my old piece of car and follow them, wherever I go.

And that is the way, whenever they got ready to put on a black, I was the first black they put on there. And I am always thinking whenever I am going to a fire like that, how to help someone. You know in case you got one pinned in, or something like that, and 90% of the time you don't, but we, last year we had about 6 or 7 fatalities. And we had one, it took, Jeff and myself, just a very few minutes to run from right out here to Lakeland highway when we got there, the minute that we uh opened the doors.

I realize that some of the participants have learned lessons in situations that they could not even speak about. For example, Clarence had a child that died of AIDS; he never referred to this situation. Although I gave him plenty of opportunities. He never even mentioned this particularly child in the interviews.

Adding to the complexity of personal learning seems to be a moral element. For example, some of the participants would discuss things that they would not be willing to learn, and that they had no desire to learn.

Robert discusses a situation that came up in church.

Well I found out, that Buddhism, as far as I can determine is putting mind over matter, and that they believe that you can control your destiny so to speak, and your desire and your fate (he would often look at me and smile), uh, that is kind of in disagreement with how I feel about things, so I didn't feel like I, so far I haven't felt I should go any farther than to know that it is something that uh I didn't actually believe in, and that uh, and if I had to support my belief any further, then I might go more...

There seems to be some limit to which these participants are willing to take their personal learning.

In addition, Normal discussed things that he had learned about living a healthy life that also reflects his moral perspective.

(Laughter). Well, eat right! For one thing, and I mean, a balanced meals, vegetables, fruits, some of the heart – health folks will recommend six fruits a day, uh, your diet, leave tobacco alone, leave liquor alone, leave dope alone, and uh, I think you will find that as a general rule your health will be better. Despite the fact that I see some older folks smoking that don't seem to bother them, I see others who are in pretty bad shape from it. I found myself 40 something years ago beginning, to, have ill affects from smoking, I decided it is time to quit. And the problem improved itself.

Adding to the complexity of this situation, most participants discussed how they had learned through experience. Wilbur also discussed how he learned a variety of things in his personal experiences from being on the city council.

I have learned, number one, no lying to people. Number two, you get out there and you help them. Do everything that you can do for them. And then by doing that you are paying attention to your business, cause see what we do, each one of us is assigned to a department. And my department this year has been the street department. And I assigned to that. Well, I am going to ride these streets. And uh, see, what are the needs of the people. And then, most time, people, I will tell you what they do; they will call me whether it's on my department or what. But my department, I am going to ride my streets every week. Because that is the whole year, that we will have a department. But now if you come to me, and you say, now, Junior, I need to see about my water, I am not going to change worry with that. The reasons I am not going to change worry with that, because I feel you wind up voting for me. By you voting for me, I think I am supposed to serve you too. And 90% of the time we don't have no backlash after by helping one of them like that. I enjoy being on it, telling the truth.

Several of the participants discussed the impact of learning. Especially noted is that the learning the Clarence has gained has resulted in more confidence in his life. For example I asked him what he had learned about the voting situation since he was put in charge of voting for the county.

With the voting? I have to get up everything. Every time I have an election, the probate judge is the chief election official. And I am the chief manager of the Nashville precinct. I have to get up everything for the Nashville precinct. Which is half of the voters of Berrien County you see, in the Nashville precinct. I have to call all my workers, and get them, get them instructed. On the 23<sup>rd</sup> we are going,



we going to instruct them, do you know uh, you know anything much about the new voting thing? (He gets up and leaves the table, I assume for a brochure about this.)

I also asked him how he had learned about the repairs that he makes. He is known around the county as a knowledgeable person that can make a repair on almost anything in the home. His statement reflects the confidence he has gained by mastering these complex subjects.

Well I read the uh, I always read the uh, thing that comes with it, I always read that. A lot of people don't, when they go to put, somebody trying to put something together, most people just rush in there and try to do it, and get things in the wrong places and all that. That tickles me, and then they call on me to come fix it for them. A lot of people can't, don't like to read, and uh; study, uh, schematics and different things, about putting things together. I think that is the way to go, till you get it right.

He states that rather than being afraid of this technology, if you are willing to learn these difficult and complex topics it can give you confidence. "Yeah, they afraid of them, they think they can, they are afraid of failure. That is what it is you know. They are afraid they can't learn it, but they can!"

Adding to the complexity of learning on one's own. Several participants discuss the comparative aspect of learning. Robert learned a great deal about the geography of the United State when he was on a recent trip; this was because he was aware of the differences in the places he was traveling and his home. "Well, coming from the flatlands of south Georgia (laughter by all) and going 12,000 feet up on a mountain pass it shows

you the difference in our country...and uh, and how you can appreciate more than where you live...”

Similarly Betty discussed the value of comparing deep philosophical topics with various authors.

Well, I just catch any quiet time I can, and read the various opinions that appear. In this, and take time to think about them, and absorb them. And to think how does that jive with what my understanding of all of these questions I have is at this particular time? Is this something I want to add, and will this help me grow, mature and know more and be better, and understand how to - what's coming? But I haven't done any specific uh, study, it would be hard to do in isolation; it would be so much better if there could be discussions of these matters....

### *Collaborative nature of learning*

The third main component of the nature of this personal learning is that it is collaborative. Thelma stated that even though she had taken a class, most of her learning was from her neighbors. Stretching beyond the nature of self-directed, this personal learning in every situation was very strongly stationed in other people.

Robert and his wife were very involved as a team in all of their learning. During the first interview she left us, but he said, during the questioning that everything they do, they do it together. I could also sense that it was a little awkward interviewing him with her also in the house. So I invited her to join us the next day. Although she was rather shy, she did add a lot, and I think he was more comfortable.

This dynamic team has tackled numerous projects where they have learned a great deal, but they also have individual interests. But the main essence of their learning occurs together. “Mr. Rowan – well, we worked together like we sat and viewed the uh, different tapes in the library and then researched the different books in the library....”

Norman, although somewhat of an introvert, and reserved, he continually discusses the collaborative nature of his learning. First he discusses things he learned in the interactions with others at professional conferences, however this particularly conference was a group of adults that love to work with miniature trains.

...When my wife was able to travel, we used to attend a regional meets pretty regular, they used to have a fall and spring meet, and uh, you visit whatever your host is, they, uh, some of the guys usually open up their homes or their garages wherever their lay out is, open for visitation. And you get a chance to see what somebody else is doing. Uh, their ideas, put to work, and uh, their, of course there is always trade show hooked to it.

...Made a lot of friends, I take one model publication, I belong to the national model railroad association, they publish a bulletin. I take one model magazine. He also discusses how much the community is a part of his daily life. These are opportunities for learning in every aspect of his day.

...Well, I just thought it was the thing. My brother was into it, the last time I visited him about three years ago. Uh, uh, he kind of showing me the computer and what is there and what it would do. He has been at it about 15 years I believe, something like that. I just sort of got interested in it, and I came back, and started going over to the library and picking up whatever I could from the folks over at

the library. And I, they got a thing here called Senior Circle. And uh, uh, I joined the Senior Circle, and she, got Ken to offer these classes and out of your, part of the funds came to pay Ken for the teaching out of the Senior Circle funds. And of course he has been very kind to help a lot of people and he keeps computers at church in good order there, and the fact of matter is Moody donated a bunch, over once or twice, older equipment that he has redone, and put into the, some of the teacher's, some of the classes there, so.

In addition to this, he discusses the impact of another person in one's learning. Especially someone that you respect and enjoy being around, they can have a great influence in one's learning.

This fellow has been very kind to me, I don't know if you know, the Speers family there in church, Ken is uh, in charge of computer system at Moody (Air force base). That is his job. He has been in computers about 18 years I believe it is. And uh, become good friends with Ken and his family there a lovely family, one of the nicest families I think I have ever met. And Ken has been very helpful, at his classes, and to answer questions, and to come by.

Betty discusses the value of learning from others.

...What I wanted to learn is what it would do. But I was fortunate in that I could use the phone to ask either of my sons little questions and I was even more fortunate in that uh, computer images in Valdosta had an expert on the Apple Computers and later on the McIntosh Computers. Which so many technicians don't want to fool with? But he knew, he'd learned everything there was to learn about that brand, and he was cooperative and good. He just went out of his way to

help me, with any problem that came up. I had the 800 number and if it froze or if it did this or that that I could type another sentence, I'd call Adrian. And he'd talk me through do this and do this, and we were in business again (laughter). So, I think that is one thing that, uh, kept most older adults away from it, they would uh, be afraid that they just could not possibly manage that unknown machine. And they were right. I think that unless I had had Adrian, I don't think I would have been able to manage it. Of course, that was not satisfactory because uh, all the software and so forth was in, not compatible with McIntosh and my children's computers, of course were not McIntosh. So, eventually, I backed my ears, and decided to give up my McIntosh that I loved and understood and could use....

She also discusses how she learns from her family.

Well, she [her sister] got that computer and she took off and she is enjoying it (laughter). She is frustrated over and over and over, and it is hard, but uh, she emails everybody that she wants to, and she uses it, this that and the other, she has bought a scanner and is into doing pictures. Which I didn't mention about myself, uh, all three of my children have digital cameras and we have been working with that. I have the photo deluxe program and I have uh, photo shop, which is pro of all photo working programs and it is not recommended for an amateur such as I am. That is too much to learn (laughter) absolutely too much!

Even though this woman will work on her own, often for two hours a day on various learning subjects, she also enjoys going to classes.

Well, it was very interesting. And I enjoyed it; it was frustrating because the computer set up was not too good. Uh, it was, many of the ones in there had just

purchased or were even didn't have one. But were thinking about it. And uh, it was uh, hard for the librarian to get to what she needed to get to a lot of the time. And there were two different sets of computers and one group worked out front and another group back in the corner. And that made it very harder on the teacher that tried to come and go. But you get as little as I know about computers; I got a different perspective about a lot of things. From the questions they asked and I learned so much that I didn't know at all. Because I have just tried to learn what I needed on the computer, there is so little time that you can't go into other things. So I learned more...It is sponsored by the Senior Circle. And I am a member of the Senior Circle, and they put out newsletters which list the activities and also, they uh, put articles in the Berrien Pres from time to time about what happens, so Senior Circle is a very good organization for this county, I think. And another thing I enjoyed about the class was meeting people that I am not ordinarily thrown with. And talking with them, and seeing how they felt about computers and why they were trying to learn and I would love to have had, I am a teacher at heart, I would love to teach things, but I can't, I am very distractible. And I tell somebody how to do something it goes out of my mind and I don't know how to do it myself....

Sue even shows the value of local learning from others over the value of learning from a book or pamphlet.

Well, its been a lifelong, and way back in the 30's there was a, Rodell Publishing company puts out a, they publish "Prevention", and they publish "Organic Gardening". Well, I had taken it so many years I had pretty well absorbed it. I

haven't been taking it lately, I had to put my priorities, I couldn't do everything I wanted. So I had to decide to what I wanted to do first, so I had been more into chicken things. But now as far as the source of learning is concerned, I had found my neighbors. Cause I am not a native here. So I talked to them about the seasons and the weather, and the "does it always get this cold", you know we have had some real cold. And then they mentioned years ago it was real cold and it had snowed, things like that. And "when do you think it is safe to plant outside in the garden?" "I learned a lot of things just talking with my neighbors, friends, and people in business. Down at the feed store. He is a good source of information on what is available here, this country for feeding and caring for all my livestock. ...Sometimes we will be talking and about something, and he will tell me something, and I am all ears, my ears go up (she acts out again how an animal raises their ears – I am laughing), and then sometime I am puzzling about a subject and I will ask. Now the fellow with the zigzag fences, that fellow always has a big garden. And we kind of swap, I give them eggs, and they give me vegetables. And uh, I had some, you wouldn't know it, but I have some fruit trees back there in that jungle over on that side. I have several persimmons and I don't think I am going to get a crop this year because I wasn't able to take care of it. The trees are still there, I go to visit them every once in a while. And uh, I got plums several plums tree.

Bill also discusses how he learns about the community.

All right, I been (pause) going (pause) different homes, over the courthouse, and talk with the probate judge, or the, talk with the uh, sheriff, police department,

you got boys in the community always into some misdemeanor. Talk to them, some parents you can talk to, some you can't. Tell them that your child needs improve their attitude in the community. And they need to stay out of trouble. Don't mess with drugs. They get stone mad with you, and some of them won't. But you can size them up and see which one you can talk to and can't talk.

He even tells us how he becomes a self-appointed teacher in this community.

D – So what have you been trying to talk to these parents about? Or these boys about? What have you been trying to tell them? B – Need to try to do something, manifest something in him keep him in school. Try to get him away from the drug situation. Drug related, you don't have to be a drug, uh, dealer, you don't have to be a drug user. You can be a drug peddler. Or you can be a drug peddler and not a drug user. But, if you get into something. If they can find out it is drug related they don't pay much attention to you. Been trying to get away from that drug situation. And that is one of the things that I try to get over to them. D – What have you learned about uh, I don't know helping people? B – All right, I have learned this. Some people you can help and some you can't help. Because they will punch your eyeballs out. They will do anything or say anything to try to get you to do what they want you to do.

Bill discusses how much he has learned by simply going around and talking with others.

So, I have learned a lot by having some extra time that I can go sit down and talk to these different people and listen at what they had to tell, help me in thinking which is the best thing to try to do.



Similarly, Hattie, shares with us how she learns at seminars and conferences about topics that she is really interested in.

And the last one we went to, was over in Brunswick, and uh, that was when I sat up the English workshop. When I came back. They told us to come back, that was what we had to do, we had to come back and do something, and uh, not just the people to sit there and look at the wall. And I was glad they said that because I don't like for them to do that. So when they told us, and I asked different one there, and the workshop, I was having them in every area. I said, "What are you all doing at your workshop?" Some was making traps, to catch deer, ...and other area they said had workshops had apple boxes, all this kind of stuff you know.

And uh, I said, Well, then didn't, I was just asking questions, alright, when I came back, that is how I set up with the workshop here. And I just hadn't thought about it.

Dora is involved in a great number of learning activities with others people. Interestingly she talks about the meal, that these meetings have meals and that is often where she will go. Many others have also mentioned eating during these seminars and talks. Especially those who live alone. As I walked in her house I could see a wreath hanging on the door.

Uh, most of the things I go to are the supper meetings. And they have lots of things; they have been having a craft workday, once a week, before September. And I have not participated in that because I am at work. But some of the things, if it is a one time, one time they had like a workday, and they made wreaths. And I went to that. And that is like from 10 to 12, on a regular basis; because I am at

work I don't do that. D – Well tell us about that class you went to, the one on wreaths. Dr – Okay, they furnished, we had to buy them, but they furnished with basis, grapevine basis, base, that is the one on the door (laughter). The one on the door, that is my creation (laughter). But uh, that is what it is, like that. Something for, uh, pleasure, and uh, challenge, it's a challenge to you to do things like that. And then, they have trips planned, like you go out to different places they have been to, right now I can't think of where they have been, I don't go on those because I am working. But now, sometime, we have been out to supper. And to a movie, and I participate in that.

Dora adds to the significance of this collaborative learning, by adding how much fun it is, especially in communities where you know many of the people.

Its just something you look forward to, its gathering with people your own, and its for seniors, its for people your own age, you see people you haven't seen, you enjoy being with, and uh, just talk with.... See she has got two or three things going now, they got a computer class going, and got a trip, couple of trips planned I believe. That they are sponsoring.

Similar to Robert, Wilbur's wife is a large part of his learning. She was a part of both interviews. Different from Roberts wife who excused herself, Wilbur's wife, let me know from the beginning by her body language that she wasn't going anywhere. Similar they have done many things together and share learning and beliefs.

Wilbur mentioned probably the fire department more than any other topic. He discussed other things, but the fire department and the city council and reading "that Bible" all have basis of learning with others.

D – What about the uh, the other guys in the fire department, how do you feel about them? J – Real good (he is smiling real big). I feel good enough to uh, I would trust most any of them anywhere you know, trying to protect me, just like something happen to me, I feel good enough that I would trust them you know. I believe they would do anything they could to.... D – How do yall help each other out learning different things? J – Well, what we do, we have a training every Monday night. And what we do we put maybe three on your porta-power, maybe three or four on your, on your jaws of life, and then we got three or four maybe be checking your pressure on your tanks. And whenever, whenever we go to a fire see, we know that everything has been done.

Similar to this is his involvement with the City Council.

D – What has it been like to be the first black, in this area; you know to be on the city council? And on the fireman? J – I felt just as easy with it, as I feel right now sitting at this table right here. I mean, you run up with some rough spots in it, and its no use saying you won't. But 99% of the time since I been on there things are working real good for me. We got a good bunch of people to work with and uh, uh, we helps one another. Every once in a while you get a new comer in there. And most of the time we help one another, whatever we need. Now just like, if you had come to me, street department, is my department. If you had come to me, and said, Junior, my water is rusty, or I need to do something to see about my water. I am going to see about that water. Because, I figure that you are one of the voters and you are going to put me in there. And I am looking for you to help

keep me in there, see, and by me doing that you are going to help keep me in there. And that's, I just enjoy being on it, tell you the truth.

Clarence was one of the more private people in the study, he is extremely motivated, is often works best alone. If he needs to find something he will experiment with something until he can find the answers. Yet, this independent man still collaborates with others when he needs some advice. I asked him how he could continue to keep up with the continually changing electronic markets. "Because I read, I read about them. I study them, I go to Sam's (department store) and see what they got, and go to, uh Rex, down there in Valdosta and see what they got. See if they got something new...yeah, I ask them questions." As mentioned before, this man loves to garden. If there is some need he will quickly go to an expert for advice. "W – Well, yeah, compost pile, I got a place built for it, it makes compost. That is rich stuff see. D – Now how did you learn about compost? W – (Laughter) Read about it! (He thinks I am totally stupid!) D – Where did you read about it? W – I read about it in magazines and go to the county agents office and they got pamphlets on it."

Thelma also discusses how she learned from others just by driving by their homes and yards. This outdoors and natural enthusiast is looking and watching for something interesting and new in each house and yard she passes. "I think nature is wonderful and you, you can see, there is some man between Douglas and Waycross that has a, he's just got a, it's just a log but he has put, put uh, looks like tennis balls, on them for eyes, and he just looks like a (laughter) swan or something out there." She also enjoys going to exhibits and shows and is again looking for some new ideas of her interests.

Well, sometimes it is just trial and error, and then I go to, you know at Christmas time, I have been to tour of homes over at St. Simons. And, and they would have a whole tree that was just decorated with nature. You know, just, sweet gum balls. And you know, I have a, a, believe it or not, a magnolia pod, you know where the bloom is like that, that is jut like a piece of wood. And you, I have taken those and cut them into, I have made napkin rings and stuff out of that. But anyway, it is trial and error. And also I did some the same things with pinecones....

One of the dominant activities she discusses is the local Woman's Club. This is more than an activity; this is a way for her to channel her time and energy to help to improve the looks of her community. In this process of interacting with people she has learned a lot about the community.

Well I get up and give my report like I have always done, you know. And Ruby will say, Well, Margie you are the only one that gets up and gives a report. Well they will just pass out papers for you to sign. Well, that is just not an organization to me. If you, I mean if you are going there and, I am head of the conservation, then I should have had my stuff mapped out. Not the president pass out something, and say, will you help Margie with adopt a highway Saturday? And you know stuff, I already have my people uh, committed, I mean you do that the first of the year. But anyway that was one of the, one of the things, and I guess I will still just go till I can't go anymore. And I pick up Teeny and Ruby both and it enables them to go otherwise neither one of them could go, because Teeny doesn't drive at night and Ruby doesn't either. And Ruby is on a walker. You know, so. But she enjoys going and I enjoy you know, she is very good company

and I enjoy, we work for flowers and through the woman's' club all these years. And like I said, but, and I will still go and I will still have my, you know, I will still have my interests, because I am going to still sell dogwood trees. And still going to pick up the adopt a highway.

Similar to this is her activities in the Better Home Town. This local organization has many volunteers, which Thelma is one. However, she has contributed a great deal of time to this organization that seeks to improve the community.

...Well there is a marketing committee which we don't have anything, ours is the design committee. And we have gotten those, if you will notice those, in the at Christmas time, that are fitted all around the square on those uh light poles. And so, we hope to get enough uh snowflakes or something to go up and down US 129 and would like to have them out the other streets but all that stuff, one of those snowflakes cost 250 dollars. And you would not think that that little thing that is sitting out there was lighted would cost that much money. But we have worked through that. But there are about 7 of us...and so the rest of them, we have all just worked real well together, (a discussion about all that are on this)...and so we published our own cookbook and put it together last year, so.

... to improve Nashville. Is the overall goal, ... and last year we had maybe four or five thousand people, its just, you got to get interested, and then we would have other meetings and we would send out letters and call and stuff, and you would think oh I want to do anything, and we will do anything, but it boils right back down to the one's that's there. You know that. But anyway, that is what it is, to bring the people together.

Sever of the participants discuss the important of giving something back to your community. This seems to also be an important aspect of collaboration, that each person sees the role of their individual giving and teaching to others.

(Laughter) Okay. Let me see I want to start on a...I will start on Tuesday morning, on Tuesday morning I go to crafts, out at the retreat, we make crafts for the, for the uh, people out there, and to begin with we went and we had things that were simple, that, the ones that had, well they are not out there unless they have some type of disability. And so, anyway, we would have things that would do for them, and it last for an hour, and they are always so appreciative. And then we stay at the hospital and we eat lunch.

*Research Question Two – What is the process of this learning of older adults?*

The process of personal learning of these older adults can be represented by the following graph. (Graph).

### *Stimulus*

The process of learning begins with a stimulus. This stimulus is some type of motivation to learn. The stimulus can be identified as internal or external. The internal motivation is usually something the person wants to do on his or her own; the externally motivated is something that others ask the person to do.

### *Internal.*

Internal motivation for personal learning is something the individual wants to do on his or her own. There seems to be something internal within the person that motivates them to learn. They want to learn and often this is something that involves a great deal of their time. Robert's wife explained why she is so motivated to learn about homes:

I don't know it is just that I like (laughter) homes...they fascinate me (emphasis) the architecture inside of them, you know there are some beautiful homes built out of some beautiful wood...I love wood, you notice my home has a lot of wood in it, I like the patterns of the wood and all so like how they used to furnish their homes out of their different types of wood they built their furniture out of...

Similarly, Robert states that he never has to be told to look up unknown words.

He is motivated internally to do this.

That is another thing that while I am dwelling on this, I have a bad habit, not a bad habit, a good habit (laughter)...if someone uses a word, or if I read a word I am not familiar with, I either go into there, the World Book or to the dictionary, and become familiar with that word. And I got kind of a passion for that...I don't like to scan over any word that I don't know the meaning of...so, and then from that we go by the library like I said yesterday, and we pull up a lot of information that we are also interested in...that we hear through the news and from other sources...on the internet...well, books, she gets two or three from there, and I pull most of mine up on the internet,

In a similar way, Betty discusses how much she wants to learn about religion and psychology. No one is telling her to do this, she does not have to take a class to learn, and she is inwardly driven to pursue these topics.

And I was especially interested in religions comparative religions (I am thinking okay this is her real learning project), and, and uh, forms of learning, like the, the divisions, like psychology and sociology, and literature, imaginative and factual and, but especially psychology. I like to learn about uh, how it has developed.



You see I had to do this completely on my own, I did not have, I got very much interested in it when I was going back to VSC to get those courses [classes for required certification], because I found a place in the library upstairs there, that had all of the psychologists. And all of the different views and they were so different and there were so many different books that I just longed to read and I would bring four, five, and six at home at a time with me. Trying to scan those things and get something from them while I was also trying to get something from them while I was also trying to do everything that had to be done to pass the course (laughter).

Bill also discusses how he is motivated to learn how to help others. This learning often does not involve printed material. Rather, there is an internal drive to talk to people.

It's just that simple (laughter). So, I have learned a lot by having some extra time that I can go sit down and talk to these different people and listen at what they had to tell, help me in thinking which is the best thing to try to do.

Bill also discusses the internal motivation of pain. Perhaps not as comfortable as the desire to learn, when pain occurs, the individual is similarly motivated to learn what it takes to alleviate the pain. This is an important concern with older adults. The doctor is trying to get Bill to walk at least two miles a day for his health. But when I came to his house I noticed he had cut the leather out of the top part of his shoes where his toes are.

D – What happens if you do two miles? B – I get to hurting so bad I can't make it. Feet so bad I swells up, I have athletic feet, and I miss my schedule last month to trim my toenails, you see that white stuff in there (I am looking at his feet, his shoes have the tops cut out, and you can see large toes with large toenails needing

attention!)... At the VA home. I had muscles spasms. Something happened to your, your, not your joints, something happened to the, ah, I can't tell you the name of the stuff, but you get to hurting and swell up. You get to where you can't walk. I got to where I couldn't walk, but I learned how to walk again down there in the VA hospital. They drill you over there just like you are in the service... B – I learned how to care for yourself. Learned how to follow instructions. Build up will power... That's right, it is a different thing all together. You want to do, you learn to do if you want to do, but if you don't want to learn to do anything, or don't want to do anything you aint gonna do nothing (laughter, big grin).

In the conversation with Dora, I asked her how she learned about working in the nursing home. She stated she felt like she needed to do something; there was an internal motivation seeking something to do. She expressed how important it is to enjoy what you are doing, and to do it from your "heart." Dora states, "Lots of people are stingy with their time. You have got to have a lot of feeling in your heart. You have got to want to look out, instead of in. And if you don't look out, you can't see what needs doing."

No one had to tell Clarence to learn about the computer. He stated, "Well, I thought the world was passing me by, if I didn't learn it, something about the computer (laughter). So, I got..." He continues to describe how he learned all there is to know about the computer. The key is that he was motivated to learn. He was internally motivated and stimulated to pursue this knowledge.

*External.*

In addition to internal motivation the participants also discussed an external motivation. Robert had earlier discussed an internal drive to look up words he does not

know. In addition, he went into great detail about a learning activity concerning a great grandfather. He was asked to do this by others, a cousin had called him to do the research.

Well, I have a first cousin that even though, or we are not that, uh, interested in it, he is a Confederate War buff, and he goes to these big Cotillion Balls and all of that...well, he also encouraged us...to uh, get this information, because he had gotten a certain amount through his work and his travels and so he more or less helped to motivate us to work up this information and then a few other people called and wanted us to do it...but anyway...uh...we uh...started in it...and got interested...

This activity may not have occurred unless the cousin and others had approached him to do this.

Similarly, Norman discusses how he began to use the computer. First, he was shown while on a trip to visit his brother, and then on returning home, there were classes offered.

Well, I just thought it was the thing. My brother was into it, the last time I visited him about three years ago. Uh, uh, he was kind of showing me the computer and what is there and what it would do. He has been at it about 15 years I believe, something like that. I just sort of got interested in it, and I came back, and started going over to the library and picking up whatever I could from the folks over at the library. And I, they got a thing here called Senior Circle. And uh, uh, I joined the Senior Circle, and she, got [my friend] to offer these classes and out of your, part of the funds came to pay Ken for the teaching out of the Senior Circle funds.

And of course he has been very kind to help a lot of people and he keeps computers at church in good order there, and the fact of matter is Moody donated a bunch, over once or twice, older equipment that he has redone, and put into the, some of the teacher's, some of the classes there, so.

This example seems to suggest the influence of this external motivation. And we should consider, as demonstrated here, the stronger the relationship (cousin, brother, or friend) perhaps the stronger this external influence.

Hattie also discussed that work or career often require one to continue to learn and to attend seminars and classes.

Okay, Okay, all right now, we had to, in working with the state; we had to have so many hours. And, okay, we had to put in 40 hours at VSU, and we had to put in hours at where you at (UGA), because see we had to go all over the state. And take up different things, and that way they was training us, how to come back and set up...(Phone rings third time in this interview)...we went to so many because we had to go like Atlanta, Macon, (Athens), Valdosta, and we also we out to Brunswick area. And each one of those areas we went, that was where some of those people from those universities and colleges would come in and give a lecture of what to take back, and they would train us, on different things... So you have to jot down everything you have to do for them. And we get so many hours for each unit.

Wilbur discussed the influence of someone you know, perhaps outside of your family that asks you to do something that involves learning.

Mr. Joe Sizemore, he wanted me to speak on Black history. In Ray City, you probably know Mr. Joe don't you? But uh, I am sitting there wondering, what am I going to say? I don't know what I am going to say. And I got to studying it and I got a right smart uh, ...and then I looked around and she and the youngings were following me. And I went by the library and I picked up me, two or three books and I read them books on black history. There. And I learned on black history there, I can't think of which one it was. But he advised the Black people, he say, stay in the south, make friends with your white neighbors, and learn how to live. Which one was that honey? ... Yeah, I believe it was, and by doing that. That gave most everybody a picture of it, well it give me a picture, another picture of it, and I already had a good picture but it give me another... That is exactly right, and i enjoyed that the best of anything I have ever seen. And they called me back the next year, and... I mean I would have been glad to have gone back and speak for them again. But uh, I learned a lot about that, whenever, he said, stay in the south and make friends with your white neighbors and learn how to live, that is exactly the statement, have you ever read it, black history?

Thelma discussed how many times she agrees to do something that she just does not want to do. But she does it anyway. And perhaps it gets done.

Well, I don't know, the adopt-a-highway, I really didn't want to take it, and they just said, well, you will, you know, you will, uh, we will help you, if you will.

And so I had to call the Department of Transportation and then you have to, the man who was responsible for putting up the sign, met us in Douglas. You know it took some phone calls and stuff, but I guess they know that I will, you know, if they ask me to do it, I am going to, I am not going to just pass it by.

In summary, personal learning begins with some type of stimulus. Those that are externally motivated are often short-term projects and may serve the needs of others. The internally motivated projects often turn into topics of lifelong learning and may even result in the person developing an expertise. These people do not have to be motivated to learn about these topics. They are internally driven to learn.

### *Interest*

One of the most common used words by participants was “interest.” “This is interesting to me” was continually repeated in reference to learning and reasons behind learning. In order for the process of personal learning to continue, there had to be some internal interest of the person, otherwise, the project would simply stop. Interest assumes some psychological hook in the topic at hand. Similar to Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, perhaps the older adult considers this topic as something that will help to meet their needs or improve their life.

Robert’s wife stated, “Well, it was interesting to me, uh, learn of the background since I am (laughing) married into the family, I did not have any knowledge of that background, so it helped me to acquire the knowledge that I lacked.” This is in reference to a learning project that she and Robert spent two months on, three to four hours a day, researching an ancestor who was a Civil War Veteran.

Norman said, “I take some interest in the uh, NASCAR things, its not been a major thing.” Norman has enjoyed learning what he can do over the computer through EBAY. He has one hallway that is entirely lined in small toy Nascar reproductions. This type of interest provided the initiative to learn how to use the computer. During one part of our conversation, I was somewhat surprised at how much Norman knew about the

events around the world. I simply asked him where he got his information. Norman discussed his interest in reading the newspaper.

Well, some of it is in the newspapers uh, uh, I read it, weekly and daily north Carolina paper, and this daily paper has a long list of, of, news articles of all kinds of subjects. And it gets some of that from that... Yeah, And then the local paper in my home county has a weekly paper they publish a very nice weekly paper, and uh, uh, then I most every day read the Valdosta and the Tifton paper, sometime I glance at headlines in the Atlanta Journal, or I believe it is the Constitution down here. Don't think they send the journal here any more.

He states that everyday he will go to the library to read these papers. He has also learned how to use the computer to look up information on these newspapers. Each participant spoke about reading the paper, and some went into detail on the importance of the paper in their daily lives.

This interest is what drives Betty's search for truth.

Well, my main interest is to learn how things work, and why they work. What the meaning is of this world. And that has been my main interest since I quit teaching back in the 80's. Uh, and (with great thought) in doing that, I learned, databases, and how to manage them and enjoy them so much (emotion). Are you familiar with databases?

Sue states that she has a great deal of interests and some of these she will pursue in detail. Many of these interests seem like common threads that have run throughout her life, especially her interest in organic gardening and animals.

S – I have been in dogs so long, I don't pick up too much new on dogs, but...I have been in dogs all my life...(showing me more books on dogs, some on goats, other books on animals...). I am *interested* [emphasis added] in all types of animals and nature. When I was just a child my aunt got me "Nature" magazine.

D – Let me ask you about this archeology. What is, how do you go about learning about this archeology?

S – That is mostly in newspapers. I am not so seriously *interested* that I have books.

D – Is it more like a hobby? A recreation?

S – Anytime I run across anything, I have a wide variety of *interests* – archeology, the sea, sea life, cause we lived so long on the sea. Anything on the Keys, my ears go right up (She acted this out). I used to get awfully home sick for the Keys, but I am too busy now to be homesick.

D – How would you describe your busy life now? What all....

S – Well, I spend a lot of time reading. I sometime spend too much reading, ought to be doing more outside stuff. But I really couldn't do too much more with the cast, the last four months. So I am trying to get that more active.

D – So you have been in a good study hall the last four months!

S – Yeah, I have been doing a lot of reading. But most, sometimes, well, I will do a lot of health reading about alternative medicine. The doctor really can't believe me anymore when I say I no longer have arthritis. In 99, at Christmas, my right shoulder was so frozen up with arthritis that when I sat down to write my Christmas cards it hurt too much and I didn't even get my cards out that year. But



it happened only once - (pause) goat milk. My daughter brings me up enough so that I can stay in goat milk. Milk and cheese. So I know that, I am quite *interested* in that.

Some of these interests became complicated projects of their own. This would often involve magazines, bulletins, seminars, readings, and projects.

S – Well, I do take, down under here, just pull that out...(a filing cabinet near me), that is Poultry Press, I take that magazine. That tells me where the shows are, what is going on. I am getting involved now in the Giants, Jersey Giants, my husband and I got a lot of Jersey Giants, big (high voice) old chickens, very gentle, good layers have big, nice, brown eggs and....

D – Where did you get all this information from?

S - This right there (pointing to the magazine). And then also the state market bulletin. That is a good one.

D – What about are there any other people in this area.

S – Oh yeah, everybody around here takes the state market bulletin. (She is looking for something, in this huge stack of periodicals that is next to the sofa).

That has all sorts of things in it (hands me a magazine called “Farmers and Consumers – Market Bulletin”). Now that had ads for goats, chickens, they don’t have ads for dogs. Goats, chickens, for cattle...

Across the county, Dora discusses her evening activities. Something on the television has to hold her ‘interest’ or she resorts to the word puzzles. For her there seems to be various levels of interest, some activities are mere curiosity, and some have a hold

on someone's life. Dora is involved in a variety of activities; I asked her, which one is more interesting.

Well, I think what I read from all my literature, in the Bible and all, the denominational literature that I read and have, it is more lasting. And it brings, uh, I guess comfort and joy of knowing that you are related, that you are involved in something that the Lord is pleased with.

One aspect of this "interest" is that of new information. This desire to gain new information about topics that one has an interest in was mentioned by each participant.

Robert and his wife experienced this during travel by gaining first hand knowledge of new places.

(Deep Breath) Well, I had a perceived notion about what Boston, Massachusetts was...and the people there ...and I learned that it was different than what I had perceived...Well, I thought it was a snooty, snobbish, place, just talking to people down here that were from Boston, but uh, I found out that it was a lot of history there and a lot of good people just like everywhere else...

Robert's wife: I liked Jamestown...the visit there because the visit there, because they went back in history, and everybody was dressed in the uh, original type of dress that they wore then. And they [said very loud] spoke the original type of language, English, because they had been trained in that...

Norman is often taking computer classes to gain new information about the computer. He also bought a new computer game in order that he may gain new knowledge. "Uh, I bought scrabble. And in order that, I thought, uh, uh, that might, increase my knowledge." Plus he discusses how much he enjoys learning something new.

And I didn't realize, I went to a little, heart seminar down here last night, at health plus, or whatever it is. I believe if I remember right that guy said, that there are about 1200 people dying a day in this country from heart attacks.

Betty discusses new information that she has gained about her family. This started as an interest primarily in genealogy.

All right, that was another great interest, uh, of my Macintosh, was genealogy.

And after having worked with it several years without a computer and then to buy the Reunion Program, which just, revolutionized the way, you go about making charts, and storing information and so forth. Uh, that was just incredible, so I had been doing that. And through that, with the e-mail, met a cousin that uh, I had never met, from North Carolina, who had been part of the family, who had stayed there when my part of the family moved south. And learned so much from him, and I think I have my first picture over the Internet from him and it was a picture of all of the Smith family. Uh, who had moved down here, had gathered for a reunion about a big table and, outside, and it was so interesting. But it was huge! (Laughter).

Dora discusses how much she enjoys new things she hears in various organizations. She discussed a variety of activities from health to making a wreath.

Well, the topics that are discussed at "Feeling Alive," are just, uh, they are helpful because its, most of them are topics that are key to our level of living, our way, where we are in life. Being a senior adult, and the things that we have to watch for, high blood pressure, and cholesterol, I fight that all the time.

Clarence is always looking for something new in the arena that he has an interest in, especially that of electronics.

D – ...How do you keep all of these organized and learn about all of these things right here? (I am looking at a stack of remote controls and a room full of electronic equipment that has been well assembled by him.)

C – Because I read, I read about them. I study them, I go to Sam's (department store) and see what they got, and go to, uh Rex, down there in Valdosta and see what they got. See if they got something new...yeah, I ask them questions.

He continues this discussion of how he goes this process for new information.

I got a TV guide out of the newspaper, and uh, everyday it has got it in it. And that is first when I read the paper, that is one of the first things I go to, and find out what is going to be on so I can tell [my wife] (laughter). And also for my information because I might see some things that I really want to see. I don't really care too much about Egyptian history for some reason, or another. They had a lot of that on recently, and I just, really don't care about that too much. I am not that interested in it.

Thelma said, "Well, I, uh, I enjoy learning and if I see something in the paper I think would be of interest or if it would broaden my, uh, you know, knowledge of something, then I will just see if I can make arrangements to, you know, to take it."

Thelma seems to summarize what the participants are all saying. The initial motivation for involvement is a personal interest, and this personal interest is usually related to the change and adjustment of one's life. But Thelma also mentions an important aspect of this interest in learning. Some of the topics are interesting but the person may never

continue this activity. For example, someone may take a class in stain glass, but they will not pursue it. Or they will watch an informative program on travel in Europe yet never go. They are doing these things; rather they seem to be stored for future use.

In summary, interest is a crucial part of the process of personal learning. Unless there is a personal interest the individual will not pursue the stimulus to learn.

### *Access Resources*

The older adult will access resources in their personal pursuit of learning. This use of resources seems to be as unique and independent as the individual. However, there are many similarities among these ten individuals. For example, as described earlier the learner is consistently pursuing information about topics they are interested in. Often these will dominate topics of conversation with others but it also is seen in the diligent pursuit of information in other ways. The following chart is an attempt to display the tools these older adults are using to pursue knowledge.

#### Chart/Diagram.

Robert and his wife discussed how they would use the library, dictionary, newspapers, television, Internet, Bible and various inspirational books, as well as attending seminars of interest.

I have about gotten down to where just current happenings is what I try to keep up with...through the newspaper through TV and through what travels we make...and then one thing she forgot to tell you that we get a lot of information on is Georgia Public Television. We watch Channel 8 a lot and she don't miss a program on the European Countries, she follows all of those tours....

Robert and his wife enjoy traveling. He stated that travel is a source of learning. Two trips they discussed was a recent one out west, and a trip to Boston. When we began to discuss this trip, they quickly discussed how they would access available resources in order to enhance the learning.

Like I say, I enjoy learning more about the United States, in fact, we had visited all the states except about ten, which are real far western states...I like to read up on the states before I visit them and get information. We used the encyclopedias...and go to the library and bring it up on the computer....

Norman accesses an assortment of material and places in his pursuit of knowledge. This includes the computer/Internet, library, newspapers, lectures and church.

I asked Norman how he gains information about the many things he was telling me. "Well, like I said mostly through the news media, uh, and of course the preacher cites you to a good many things in a lot of their sermons... I go to Sunday school and two services early morning service and the evening service."

During the interview Norman also discussed how he gained information for one of his hobbies. I was surprised to realize the means this man went to, in order to garner information about trains. Not only did he belong to a national organization, but attended conferences and seminars. This self-directed learning, in the context of leisure is a powerful context for learning.

Well, no, I used to, we attended a lots of, well, you got a National Model Railroad Association. Then the association is split up into regions, and uh, then divisions, and uh, used to, attend uh, lot of the regional meets, and a few national meets, they would scatter the national meets. It is all over the United States and

sometimes Canada. I believe, I think next year it is in Toronto, or Ontario, I believe Canada next year. This month, it may have already been, I forgot, I couldn't go, didn't want to go in that part of Florida anyway, it was in Ft. Lauderdale. Ah, but, used to, when my wife was able to travel, we used to attend a regional meet pretty regular, they used to have a fall and spring meet, and uh, you visit whatever your host is, they, uh, some of the guys usually open up their homes or their garages wherever their lay out is, open for visitation. And you get a chance to see what somebody else is doing. Uh, their ideas, put to work, and uh, their, of course there is always trade show hooked to it.

He also discussed this format in his work. He belonged to a national organization; receiving bulletins, magazines, and attends conferences.

I might attend a seminar, to the Jewelers convention when one was available, some fellow in the know how, uh, and uh, I uh, later on joined the national association of watch and clock collectors and uh, they published a bulletin which some guy usually had a, a how to do it article, which I read....

Continuing these ideas, Betty states her most obvious resource is that of the Internet. She is continually looking up information on the topics of her interest, and accessing and utilizing all of the resources of the World Wide Web. But she not only accesses the Internet, but also the library, newspaper, and various classes.

...But I have gone to several, uh, classes. Which Ken Speers has taught. And you know, and they have been very helpful in learning various things that I didn't know. And there is so much to learn, you just can't operate nearly as efficiently if

you have somebody that knows what he is talking about that can quickly get to the heart of the problem and explain it to you.

Betty also, similar to Norman, brings up the impact of publications and pamphlets that one receives especially in areas of interest.

That was another that I didn't tell you about, I made little miniature furniture for a long time. That is one of the things I did when I retired and got all of the little publications about doll furniture and so forth.

Sue discusses how she will read the newspaper every day for information. In addition to this she contacts neighbors, reads books, pamphlets, goes to libraries, and attends seminars.

Oh well, I wanted to, computer, they have this "Learning in Retirement," and they, uh, it's through the university and I have been down there for several courses. I would really like to go more often. But it is quite a good drive and the traffic. And I uh, stay so busy here. I am, and of course with that back brace, I wasn't driving. So, there was no question about taking chances with that. I have taken computer and then I had classes on different things they have the, just a classes on books, now, let me see, some books on Georgia, it was uh, uh, I think Peachtree Road. Some of those that we were studying, and of course just "Gone with the Wind" and all of those.

Sue also discusses the number of catalogues and periodicals that come in the mail today. Many times they are trying to sell something, but they often have useful information. I asked her how she gained all the information she has about raising animals. She discusses talking to the veterinarian and use of the magazines she receives.



Well, talk to the vet! And then, uh, I do take, they have some magazines that come in. Through that, uh, I get a lot of these free magazines, companies put out advertising a product, so I can, I can read them and still not have to buy a product.... Just general, dogs in general, there is a (looking in this huge pile of periodicals)...sometime catalogues, I learn a lot from catalogues. Here is somebody who is wanting to sell (she picks up a health magazine), what do you call, they put out nice looking catalogues and some of the information in there. That they, I, they are teasers, they tell you about, uh, they know, they send out a newsletter every week. And they also have the headquarters so you can buy your things, they put a little information in there, about this and that, about uh, people don't get near enough calcium. Calcium alone, for osteoporosis. I do have some osteoporosis...I had fallen before...and so when bones get fractured, I got osteoporosis. So I read what they have on this, milk alone is not enough. You have also got to have magnesium, and before you put it in the bone you have got to have magnesium, zinc, and possibly zanium. So I make sure the vitamins I have, have zinc. At least 15-30 micrograms of zinc. So I, I, hear what they have to say....

The primary way Bill gains information is through talking with others. However, his kitchen table was piled with pamphlets from doctors and information. The following is the discussion we had about the value of these pamphlets that many older adults receive from doctors.

B – Well, I don't take this here [holding up a prescription] on a schedule ever day. And I would pay attention if my blood gets to balancing off like it should. I skip

some medication right on, right on. You pay attention, you check it anytime you want during the day, and then you can adjust yourself to your medication use.

That is how you learn to take care of yourself by paying attention to this, checking your pressure on time, getting your medicine on time, and then you can see how far it is going.

D – What about, what other stuff have you learned about like food or cooking or the way you eat?

B – Well we got this here right here, that's that cancer research deal there, tell you about the different uh, ...

D – And did you read this? (I am holding a small pamphlet with simple and specific information about importance of nutrition). What you think about all of this?

B – It is good! I don't do it all the way up like I should. You eat more vegetables and uh, you don't eat much fried food more boiled food. You bake your fish.

D – And are you doing all that or not?

B – I do most of it, I don't do all of it (laughter). I eat a lot of okra and tomatoes and carrots. I try not to eat much pork meat; I eat beef once in a while.

The primary way Bill wants to learn is through conversation with others. He enjoys going around the town and his community and talking with people. I asked him what he did during the day.

B – Just get out and walk, I go to eat dinner at the Senior Citizens hut over there by the health department on uh, Hazel Avenue. That is where we go eat dinner at. I go over to somebody's house and sit down and talk with them. I walk down the

road. You sit around you get to eating too much, you go to sleep. If you stay active you do much better. I got more weight now than I should have. Not too bad. D – What is one of the things you enjoy doing the most when you get out and walk around? B – Talking with people. D – Just visiting with them, or just talking. B – Just visiting, sit down and talk with them. Some of them sick like myself, some of them don't get out they stay home.

Rather than books or searching written information Bill prefers sitting down and talking. Within this context if Bill needed to know something he would ask.

Hattie discussed how she utilizes televising to gain information. In addition, she discussed how she attended required seminars at work, she reads the newspaper, talks with people, and attends Church and Bible Study.

Uh huh, I read my paper every day. I read my daily paper, every day... Valdosta Times, I read it every morning before I get out of the bed... Well, I do that, and uh, and then I uh, look at TV a lot... I like the news. And uh, then after that, I like these, programs like, uh, (her granddaughter comes in) and uh, I like the news, and then I like this court program. I enjoy that, I enjoy that! I love that now. And you learn a lots, you learn a lots... Yeah, well now, I tell you what I like, my magazines, I like magazines. And I like to lay down at night. I like the Time, and uh, I gets the Ebony magazine. And I love them... Uh huh, everyday I am reading something like that. And I read my paper every day. Yeah, .... Oh yeah! And I go to Bible study every Monday night. Our church at Zion Free Baptist Church... and I am the clerk of my church, the secretary.

Hattie discusses how some of these resources are used in different ways.

H – Well, Ebony magazine is all Black magazine, you know. And it gives you good ideas on how the other part of the world is going on. And that way, a lot of times it gives you some ideas what you can bring home. Understand? You read about what is happening out, and then you say, well maybe we can use some of that here. Uh huh. And that is why I keep up with it.

D – So you feel like as a Black woman, wanting to have some influence here, that that magazine really does give you some...

H – It gives you some good ideas.

D – Can you tell us one specific thing that has stood out to you from the magazine? Or any particular idea you have gotten?

H – Well, now, no, but I have learned by reading it that uh, not only mens can do things, womens can too.

In addition to insight gained by reading Ebony Magazine, she spends a great deal of time studying the Bible.

Now, we, we, go chapter by chapter in our Bible Study. And what we do, we go, each chapter we discuss it, and then our preacher be with us. And we have like a...every Monday night for Bible study, for an hour... I learn a lots from it, I learns how to be a true Christian, how to deal with peoples, it tells you, you got to love one another. You don't go in hating nobody and it tells you how you supposed to act with peoples. And you learn all of that, but you got to read it, and understand what you are reading. That is right. And we have a little quiz on it. Different things, on our Bible Study, like at the end of the month, we might have a little quiz on it.

Similar to other participants, Hattie discusses the importance of these periodical and pamphlets that one receives in the mail. It is an interesting concept, although a lot of this is advertisement, yet the participant would sift through this recycled material to determine what they would like to access. Although most of it is thrown away, sometime there is something that is interesting and helpful. Hattie continues this thought.

Well, a lot of that came from my health book. Uh huh, and you know how you can pick up health books, and then I get some of that through mail. Just like now, where I get my medicine, vitamins, from, I get a little book like that every month or something. And it tell you, what different vitamins are for.

Dora also discusses the importance of learning from pamphlets and magazines, church activities, as well as related inspirational literature. She also attends a number of seminars. In this particular discussion she relates how she enjoys reading novels.

I read a series, and it was all fiction. But it was about, the person was about a little boy, it was in the Midwest. And the person was being raised by his grandfather, his uncle, and his Mama's sister. And she was young and they seemed almost the same age. And uh, it was, the hard life they lived. It was before electric lights and all of that. And it took him from the little boy, about nine years old. Until he was a preacher with a family. How all the stages of his life through there. But they were little books, and just about that big. And, it was so interesting, but it was how uh, real Christ centered. And how He lived his life, he wanted to, uh, be a missionary, I believe was it was. But his grandpa and his uncle were old. So he couldn't leave them with the farm to look after, so he gave up his idea of being a

missionary to stay on the farm. But it was real interesting to read, and then he grew up and made a preacher.

Dora also relates how many people have begun to utilize the television as a source of information. Many of these older adults seem to control the television. They watch specific shows that access information they are interested in. Dora speaks about two television shows that she watches regularly. One an in-depth news report and the other the shopping channel.

Most of the time I watch the news MSNBC, uh, do you know what Ashley Banfield is? She is a newsperson, and she has an hour, at night, and this fall line has messed me up. She had a show from 9 – 10, every night from Wednesday to Thursday. And she has been a lot on location, she has been a lot in Afghanistan ...and Saudi Arabia, and uh...Pakistan...all around...so I will watch that... but, the fall line up has pushed her to 10. Messed me up. And they have Donahue on now, I don't like, don't care nothing about him. But she is on from 10 to 11, and I watch that. Do you know what QVC is? No, it is a home, a home shopping channel, and I watch that a lot. And "I don't care nothing about that" (voice real high) people say. I say, "Well, you know what, (voice high) its got some pretty clothes on it, some pretty jewelry, and aint nobody hopping in bed with anybody (laughter), talking ugly!" ... I said, I don't have to go outside, it comes to post office. So, let me show you something...(she goes and gets something she bought on this channel)...when you got great grandchildren you do some extra shopping...That is the cutest thing to me, I got a little great granddaughter that

was three in April, and last year I bought her a doll that talked. (This is a doll with the alphabet on the front and you touch a letter and the doll sings a song.)

Dora also discussed a lecture she attended that was on portable oxygen. I asked her to tell me more about this and why she would attend something that she obviously did not need.

...We had a lady from one of the home care agencies that the other day was explaining to uh, people the uh, the process of people that have to have oxygen. They have a new little tank just a little thing about like that (holds hands up) and they wear it on their hip. Where if you have one that is stationary, one of those big cylinders like that, and you have to move it around, but this one is a new little thing. And she said you could refill it on the nurse tank, and it would be long enough for you to give you time to take a trip. Just a little light thing that you could wear on your hip, so those new innovations and news like that is what they are trying to bring to the. Because most of us are at that point... Well, it is just information at this point, but if I need it, then I know where to go back to look for it. Hopefully, I won't ever need it, but you don't ever know when you will.

Like a warrior preparing for future battle, information can become set aside until it is needed.

Wilbur takes advantage of a variety of resources, these include reading the Bible, going to church, learning at work, library, television, but the primary way he learns seems to be dialogue and extended conversation with his wife. They have a close relationship and work together in many different areas. This continual discussion and conversation is also a powerful mode for learning promoting further discussion.

For example, Wilbur discusses how he was asked to speak on Black History. After going to the library and getting a book, he read it, but during this time, he and his wife had many conversations about the book as well as their lives as Blacks.

W – Well, I, they told me one time, [this man] he wanted me to speak on Black history. In Ray City, you probably know Mr. Joe don't you? But uh, I am sitting there wondering, what am I going to say? I don't know what I am going to say. And I got to studying it and I got a right smart uh, ...and then I looked around and she and the youngings were following me. And I went by the library and I picked up me, two or three books and I read them books on Black history. There. And I learned on Black history there, I can't think of which one it was. But he advised the Black people, he say, stay in the south, make friends with your white neighbors, and learn how to live. Which one was that honey? (Wife) – Uh, I believe it was...Booker T. Washington. W – Yeah, I believe it was, and by doing that. That gave most everybody a picture of it, well it give me a picture, another picture of it, and I already had a good picture but it give me another. Wife – I was fixing to say, it enlightened, what you, the way, you had already lived in your way.

In addition to these episodes of learning, Wilbur also discusses how much he learns in work settings especially in the volunteer fire department. Every week at the fire meeting there is instruction and practice occurring in which he learns about a topic in which he is very interested.

Well, we have been trained in how your...how to take care of people, just like if one pinned in, or if one dead, or uh, one dead or wounded. We have been trained



in that. And then we have been trained in uh, our pressure on our tanks. So just like, we go up to your house, we don't want to have no pressure to fight no fires...but we train on that, and I am learning a lot about that. And we be able to whenever we go to a house to determine, you know, what pressure it's going to take to put out that fire.

Clarence accesses a variety of resources. He is especially attentive to the newspaper and television.

Yeah, the first thing I read in the morning, is the Valdosta Times. And I go through it and read it. And then during the day I work the crossword puzzle. And then later on in the day I get the constitution, Journal and Constitution, and go straight to the editorials. And, then I go to the, go to the uh, sports, too. I like to read, I like, see... But, I try to read all sides. And uh, and that is why I enjoy it so much.

Clarence also discusses the importance of reading pamphlets and materials that come with various products. These small fine printed materials become miniature lessons in working with various products. Clarence feels these are important in learning.

Well I read the uh, I always read the uh, thing that comes with it, I always read that. A lot of people don't, when they go to put, somebody trying to put something together, most people just rush in there and try to do it, and get things in the wrong places and all that. That tickles me, and then they call on me to come fix it for them. A lot of people can't, don't like to read, and uh; study, uh, schematics and different things, about putting things together. I think that is the way to go, till you get it right.

Also concerning his need to learn more about the computer, he states, “Yeah, I have taken a few classes. Down there in Valdosta, with your mother. Some of them I took with your mother.”

During the conversation with Clarence, I noticed on the eating table in the living room where we were sitting was an assortment of pamphlets. Interestingly, as I was talking with him about his personal learning, I began to think to myself, what are all these brochures and pamphlets underneath this tape recorder. I would try to read the topic or title sideways, and finally asked him about them.

D – What about this?

C – Oh, health stuff?

D – Do you read this stuff?

C – Oh God yeah, I got so much stuff, I subscribe to everything out there.

“Bottom line health,” I read that, I am not like, uh. There is “Focus on Health Aging”.

D – Are these things good, do you recommend these; do you read all of these?

C – Oh yeah. I read all of that. I got all kinds of medical books. I don’t, I don’t dwell on it, but I just read it, you know. Like one thing, when you got a cramp, have you ever had a cramp Donny?

D – Oh, many times.

C – Well, if you want to cure it you know how to do it? You take your thumb put it right there and squeeze just as hard as you can (he is inserting his thumb into his mouth, under his upper lip) and in 30 seconds it begins to ease off. Just keep holding it and it will go away. And squeeze that as hard as you can.

D – Ooh. (I am trying to do it.)

C – It don't hurt, it feels a lot better than that cramp. I don't have them much.

D – Well how did you learn how to do that?

C – Reading through the books, these books.

Similar to the nine participants before her, Thelma also discusses the importance of accessing a variety of resources. As mentioned before, almost each person discussed the priority of television, newspaper, and the library. Thelma also discussed attending some classes, going to exhibits, and reading some magazines.

She tells me about a class she took on flowers and plants.

Well...it was about growing bulbs and flowers. Well, I learned one thing, that if you use this time-release fertilizer that it doesn't work in the wintertime, it has to be above 55 degrees, so that, I didn't know that! And the different kinds of bulbs that grow sometime I will just struggle with stuff, and think, well gosh, I will just know those ought to grow; they grow in somebody else's yard. And some of the things you don't do. Or I didn't have them in the sun, or I watered them too much.

Perhaps more personal for her, is the learning that occurs while serving on various committees. Thelma continually referred to one other individual who also is on these committees. The two work together and are friends. They will have an ongoing dialogue and discuss what is working and what needs to be improved.

Oh yeah, well, and uh, you know there would be committees for food committees and flower committees and gift committees and all, and usually I was on the flower committee, and of course it is not just something that you can do in a little while. You have to go and gather up your, your things from the, you know the day

before or the morning before, and get your things together. And people have been nice to share them. But anyway, and [my friend] and I have uh, we have shared a you know a lot of time, and she and I work well together because I can put a flower in and she'd put one in and we could say, well that doesn't look, that needs moving over a little bit. Or something, you know, which is, but that is, that is how through the years that we have worked together.

### *Systematic Attention*

Participants discussed the systematic attention given to these activities. Robert and his wife told how they read and study the Bible:

Mr. – I always try to relate it [the Bible] to current events, uh, like last night, it [the Bible] talks about, uh, anti-Christ. Well, how do you recognize anti-Christ today? Some of them are real adept at covering up their true beliefs, and uh, so I try to relate the Bible to current times, rather than just using it just as a history. I know Bible is a history; I try to relate it to current times, and current events.

Mrs. – I have been to the library, and pulled a lot of information up on the computer, that goes along with the Sunday school lesson. And, run printouts on it, so as I can have that accessible for the class.

At home there is daily attention given to newspaper and purposeful television watching. They are systematically interested and involved in learning about world events. During the interviews they shared how much time they had spent on some of their projects. They also shared about spending approximately 40 hours on the project to learn more about a distant relative.

Norman stated that he spends consistent amounts of time every day on the computer. Some of the things he enjoys, such as playing games, but some of the things he has to study and focus, such as defragmenting his computer. Regardless, he knows that he must spend daily time on this important activity in his life. He states, "I may stay on there three or four hours. Uh, I just, was on there today, primarily today, just finished just before you come a defragmentation process." It was difficult to reach Norman by phone, later I realized he was on the computer.

Betty also expressed this concept of focused attention to successful personal learning.

Well, don't ask me about the last month or so, for many years, I would spend an average of two hours before [my husband] got up and we had breakfast. Nothing else came ahead of that. I would read the books, read the articles, work with my list, and so forth. And it was my spiritual practice, I was seeking.

As discussed earlier, learning to use the computer was simply a tool for Betty to access information about important topics. Her spiritual quest of knowledge was given daily systematic attention. "Nothing else came ahead of that."

In addition, Sue also relates this continual attention to important topics. Not only does information about her interests grab her attention, but also she is also systematically organizing this information for future use.

Anytime you find something in the paper, I cut them out, and have a file. Quite a big filing cabinet...with clippings, I have it divided into history, art, archeology, ...newspaper are a good source of learning...Well, I am interested in archeology.

When they find these bones of mammals and, things like, and anytime I find a

good article on it. Why I will just clip it out. I have a file. I am interested in history...I don't try to make a scrapbook, I just keep files. And of course I have always been interested in dogs, since time I was a child. I never could be happy without at least one dog. But now...Oh yeah, well, I have a whole, (she is getting up and walking, which is very difficult for her, I try to help her, and she says "no, I want to do it by myself"). I got a whole bag of dog books here. Starting about here, Datsuns, how to show your own dog, this side is goats and that side is dogs, and then lets see I have...this is my dogs record book.

### *Adjustments in learning*

Participants in the study often discussed difficulty, obstacles, and adjustments that took place during their process of learning.

Robert and his wife discussed how the pursuit of this knowledge was time consuming, detailed, and difficult. Some of these projects would involve travel to different counties and libraries. In addition, the pursuit of these interests would also require that the individual adjust to a variety of new situations.

No not everyday, but we would spend a lot of time on it, when we would go to Douglas it would be three or four hours of the time, if I had to estimate, I would say it was a good forty hours or more...it takes so long to, to run those tapes and read them, and the print was not very clear...cause a lot of them were old whoever put all of that together I admire them, cause that was a lot of work to put all that information together...for it to be that accessible to us...We found out that Macon has even a greater, more information along those lines...and her being in social studies and history and geography teacher, it was real meaningful to her...

Norman discusses how while learning to use the computer he encountered difficulty; he also said this new learning was somewhat uncomfortable. During these situations he needed to contact another person for help.

Well, I would try to contact somebody that might tell me what to do. Of course if you have a, let's say a mechanical failure then you got a keep somebody that can repair computers. So far, I have not had, very much trouble with the computer, I think I have had to take the tower in one time. I have had it a little over two years... (Laughter) Well, I am still, I wouldn't say, comfortable; cause there is still a lot of things I don't know what to do. Of course you have to learn to open it up and uh, have a knowledge of, what will do what for you, and uh, you can uh, there is a search unit that you can type in some subject you are looking for, and usually find it with some answer, be it right or wrong.

In addition to contacting others, Norman fine-tuned his computer in order to maximize the time. Incorporating music created a more enjoyable environment. "And uh, of course I have the best of the, uh, reproduction system on my computer, and I listen to uh, uh, uh, a lot of discs while I am working with the computer." He states he enjoys listening to gospel and country music while spending time on the computer.

Betty's desire to learn about the computer also was fraught with difficulty. She explained how she reluctantly went from using a McIntosh to a Personal Computer. She also explained how in learning about the computer there were various difficulties that she had to call on family as well as an expert.

...I would (laughter) run into a hole, and I knew nothing at all about the technical mechanical end of the computers and didn't want to learn. What I wanted to learn

is what it would do. But I was fortunate in that I could use the phone to ask either of my sons little questions. And I was even more fortunate in that, uh, “Computer Images” ... had an expert on the Apple Computers and later on the McIntosh Computers, which so many technicians don’t want to fool with. But he knew, he’d learned everything there was to learn about that brand, and he was cooperative and good. He just went out of his way to help me, with any problem that came up. I had the 800 number and if it froze or if it did this or that that I could type another sentence, I’d call Adrian. And he’d talk me through do this and do this, and we were in business again (laughter)... I think that unless I had had Adrian, I don’t think I would have been able to manage it. Of course, that was not satisfactory because uh, all the software and so forth was in, not compatible with McIntosh and my children’s computers, of course were not McIntosh. So, eventually, I backed my ears, and decided to give up my McIntosh that I loved and understood and could use, and it’s uh, uh, makes graphics easy. And I sold it, bought a PC, and lost many things that I had on the other one, because it takes a process to transfer from one format to another. And uh, David taught me how to do that, but it is, uh, it’s time consuming, and there are many things at this time I am still using the McIntosh...Because I never moved all those forms over. But that was another learning process with the new software, the Word, uh, brand, Word Processor. And I didn’t do as well with that because I didn’t have a manual that was as easy to understand and that you would find exactly what you wanted in. It is not easy to go on line and to find things you have to print it out....



Sue discusses that during learning activities the older adult can encounter difficulty.

...So you sit down and start the computer and here is what you do...and the follow through, and they had some sheets...and you met once a week...and this is on the third floor...that time I made it a point to walk the stairs. The last. I have been several times, the last time I noticed I said, uh –oh, feel like taking the elevator. I said this; I had had a fall, and had a little back trouble way back there.

Sue discussed one way she has adjusted to the intense heat of south Georgia is to simply live without the air-conditioning. Sue's main interest is that of animals and being outdoors. Having air-conditioning she says makes you want to stay inside. She has a fan and stays inside during the hottest hours.

Ooh, in and out, I say that is the reason I don't have air conditioning. It makes a prisoner out of you. When the day is hot and you step out, and the air-conditioning, ugh, you just, I have a fan, and I don't notice it when I step out. Other people come here and they just sweating and dripping. Ooh, that doesn't bother me, I am tropical born and bred. I do think it weakens you terribly when you get used to it. And uh, this time it is kind of warm, I will be glad when it cools off a little bit.

Hattie's desire to learn involved her work. Her job was allowing her to help people, and she wanted to do a good job. She wanted to learn as much as she could about her job. However, she felt the obstacle for her came in the way people at work, especially those over, were handling her.

He said you going to be promoted up, it might be sooner than what you expect. And he said, uh, I gave your report, they pulled up your other report. And said you got a good one, and he said don't worry about nothing...so that next few weeks, it was... I went to New York, and that was when [my boss] got that letter saying I must be moved up... Then I told [my boss] I had to go to Valdosta... I went to the office in Valdosta, and saw somebody I know...and I said...I want my file...she said okay, so she went and got it, and she pulled it out, she said...if there anything in there you don't want you pull it out. I said okay, that probation thing, they had it in my file...I snatched all that junk out, I cleaned it out...and she said, just take it out...and that was when they came down there and promoted me up, and said I didn't even have to work out there.

In another situation where she is attempting to help her community, she felt she had obstacles standing in the way of accomplishing what she believed was important.

I told them that I would like to see sidewalks down on the east side of McPherson and Marion. That was one of my projects. So [someone I know] wife, she was on the same committee with me. And she had a project to do. And she was going to work with me on my project. That project it took us I bet three or four years to get it across and then it aint done right. [This man] he was the mayor then, he said Hattie, this is the state highway department, and we don't have anything to do with it. I said...okay, okay, let me check it out. Okay, I came back home next week; I called the state highway department...what getting me going? I's just want to see something happen. ...Some of the things that we really want, and then I feel like, the money is allotted to us. We can get it. The next two or three weeks,

what did he do? He got some more money in here, he curbed and gutted on the west side. Right over there by the Baptist church, you know, going down to...I went down there. See I drive the bus all over town. And, uh, that was when I was working...And I went to that council meeting, and you said you didn't have no money! ...Why can't you put curb and gutter down here? ...So it's these things that really got me, really got me wanting to see a difference.

In both of these situations Hattie wanted to learn more at work and in her community. To complete these goals she had to make personal adjustments to these difficulties.

Dora continually used the word "trial and error." These adjustments in one's daily life can be somewhat hectic or hazard. To do this you have to be willing to make an error. "It's just been more trial and error. Trial and error. And you just get in there and, and do it." Later she discussed this in more detail on some of the specifics of work in the yard.

Just by trial and error. Just by trial and error. Lots of it don't work, some of it don't work.... In uh, trying to spray weeds, or something like that, buying herbicides or fungicides and trying them and they don't work. Most of them, the best thing is Roundup. But it is expensive, and get it on and it don't rain it will work...

I thought she had probably learned a lot about her yard. Since people in south Georgia have difficulty with fire ants, I asked what she does about fire ants. Without hesitation she quickly began a practical seminar of getting rid of fire ants.

Now, fire ants, is another story. (Laughter). I have fought that for all these years. And you buy these granules, and then you got to water it in. And I got to using, Malathion, it is a liquid. And I got to using that, and I just put that in the water

and go pour it on, and it is your death. It might not be right for the environment, but that is what I use instead of the granules....

Thelma discusses how she continually makes adjustments when she is creating a decoration. This trial and error is an attempt to finish what you are doing despite the obstacles.

Yeah, I did the wedding, for the rehearsal dinner for uh, [someone in town] she wanted something...wanted something different, and so, I fixed lanterns out of uh, and covered them with uh, burlap, and then I used the uh, a big pine cone and drilled a hole in it, and put a candle in there. Which is not a candle, but it is a vial that you can get, that has a wick in it, and you can get that and so therefore you can use, uh, the oil and then I used half pint fruit jars. I mean jelly glasses. See its what I used. But a lot of it was just trial and error.

Thelma discussed how she encountered difficulty when attempting to make various decorations or flower arrangements. She discusses how in the middle of making some project you don't give up when you encounter a difficulty or obstacle, rather you have to forge ahead.

Yeah, I went out there and helped your mother and, uh...well that was, uh, I just told [her], I'd help her do what she wanted. And I said you have got all these hydrangeas let's just use those on the table, and I had the fern in the yard. And so I went out there and fixed all the tables. I could cut some of the ones (that were in her backyard)...and I have some here that I could cut. And put them in water, and but, when I cut them, and I thought I had left them in the water long enough, but the sun was so hot until I came home for something, and went ...and in the

meantime while I was out there they wilted. So I called my neighbor over there, [to my neighbor], and asked her, if I could, she had those gloriosa uh lilies, that were blooming, they look like, well they are those red things with the yellow on them. Anyhow they grew on a vine, they come from a bulb. And so I asked her if she could cut me some of those because my flowers had wilted, and this was about 4:30 in the afternoon (laughter – cause the reception was in about an hour). So when I came home, I came home to change clothes and I changed clothes and went by over there, and she had, she and her husband had cut them and they had put them, they were about five or six to each you know stem, would have several on them. And they had separated those and had them each in those Harvey's bags; they had separated them so I could move them. So, it was just amazing that all of that came about; I guess the Lord just takes care of you sometime, that is just all I can say. Because I came home, and went back then, I exchanged them while yall were at the church.

In summary, these participants continue to pursue personal learning throughout their lives. Within this pursuit they encounter obstacles. These obstacles demand for adjustments in this process of learning. This in turn creates a practical knowledge and a confidence of what to do. Dora said, “Yeah...well, mostly most just, just what I have known. You try what you know through the years...” If the learner gives up and does not continue past the difficulty, they will stop in the learning process.

### *Catalyst*

During this process of learning, the participants discuss the impact of some event that often speeds this process or perhaps motivates them to learn to a deeper level. This

may be some person, something internal, or some event in their life. Regardless, this is rarely something the learner can plan or predict, it seems to be entirely spontaneous and out of their control. However, this serendipitous event often becomes integral in their learning process. I call this a catalyst to learning. Interestingly, this seems to be something that helps the person move through the adjustments and obstacles that we just discussed. This spontaneous situation also helps to create a greater motivation to learn.

Robert and his wife discuss going on a trip out west. They were eager to go on this trip and they knew they would learn about the American west. But they were surprised at the ability and the energy the tour director brought to this program.

Okay, when we started on the tour of the Rocky Mountains, the tour organizer and guide, gave us a packet that included our daily travels. And where we were going and the attractions that we would see. And on each attraction, he gave us descriptions of what we were going to see that day...Along like I told you yesterday, tapes that he had played on the bus prior to us reaching these attractions... And he asked us to take notes as we went along so that we would be able to remember all these things. But he gave us (takes a deep breath) a brief description of the trip that we were going to take and asked us to discover...things instead of just seeing them...He said – don't just see America, learn about it...(laughter)...Okay...and ...as we were going into the area...but prior to that he gave us a daily tour overview on the outline and on the map...and each day he would list the place we would be at...and this daily tour, and then he would take on each day, he would outline where we were going.

I asked him what did they do to encourage such an interest among the participants in the trip?

Well to me, in the first place was the organization and the time and the thought that these people put into it...And then on the trip...they followed through, with briefings and videos before we get to a place. We knew considerably about the history and how it was organized and it came into being. And I thought - that way we could view the things and understand them.

Robert also discusses the impact of seeing a contrast. Seeing contrasts of important topics helped to make something stand out in his mind. Going from his hometown to another town with the same name for lunch was interesting. "I thought it was quite interesting to note that us being from Nashville, Georgia, we had lunch in Nashville, Illinois." Also going from a flat land to a snowy mountain is something one will never forget. Often passed off as great memories, these are actually deep episodes of learning. "Well, coming from the flatlands of south Georgia (laughter by all) and going 12,000 feet up on a mountain pass it shows you the difference in our country...and uh, and how you can appreciate more than where you live...."

Norman discusses the impact of one particular person and how he became a catalyst to his learning. Norman feels he can call on this man when he needs help with the computer. However, Norman also feels he is his friend. This man has become something like a computer coach to Norman. During the interview I asked Norman if he could single out what has really helped him to learn how to use the computer.

This fellow has been very kind to me, I don't know if you know, the ... family there in church, [he] is uh, in charge of computer system at Moody (Air force

base). That is his job. He has been in computers about 18 years I believe it is. And uh, become good friends with [he] and his family there. A lovely family, one of the nicest families I think I have ever met. And [he] has been very helpful, at his classes, and to answer questions, and to come by.

Betty also discusses the value of another person in answering a difficult question. Especially someone that can quickly answer a specific problem. “And there is so much to learn, you just can’t operate nearly as efficiently if you have somebody that knows what he is talking about, that can quickly get to the heart of the problem and explain it to you.” But more than this, for Betty the main catalyst has been the computer in general. To be able to search libraries from her home has enabled her to search for answers and collate material from the ease and comfort of her home.

Sue was the only person that discussed the terrorist attacks on the United States on September 11, 2001. This was a catalyst for her to continue to be prepared to live independently. “And, chickens are a very practical hobby for me, particular this war on terrorism that we had. And when they hit the World Trade Center, I was expecting another strike. I really was.” Another incident seemed to motivate her to want to learn more about natural food and to understand more about how goat milk can improve health.

But most, sometimes, well, I will do a lot of health reading about alternative medicine. The doctor really can’t believe me anymore when I say I no longer have arthritis. In 99, at Christmas, my right shoulder was so frozen up with arthritis that when I sat down to write my Christmas cards it hurt too much and I didn’t even get my cards out that year. But it happened only once, goat milk. My



daughter brings me up enough so that I can stay in goat milk. Milk and cheese. So I know that, I am quite interested in that....

Hattie needed some encouragement in her work. When she received it from some of the visiting people from the State Department this provided the main catalyst she needed to continue her work.

And I, when I went back in, I had to work on a table, and uh, this man came in, and he walked around for a day or two looking...see I know why he was there and I didn't tell anybody...and he came in there to me. Cause I was always the one that left late in the afternoon...he said, "Hattie, why you working on a table, when all the rest of them got desks?"...He said, "There is one up there on the wall, I am going to put it together, and if they get a desk in here, and that one will be yours."...And I know what he was doing, he was trying me out to see how my record was in Berrien County was, see. I was sizing him up too. So he, the next day, he asked, the boss, "I got to have somebody to go out with me, uh, over [the county], because I don't know, the place. And we got to raise some money for recreation." And so she told him he could take [another worker] with him. He said, "No, I want Hattie, to go with me." So I went, me and him, for a whole week, we went all over [this county]... Every where we went peoples gave us money, and people telling that we was going to give it to Hattie, but Hattie know what to do with it.

She tells a story about the process of getting a sidewalk built on her side of town. [The reader should understand that she lives in what is called the Black part of town, earlier it was called "the quarters."] She had been somewhat discouraged because she had

not seen much happen. Spontaneously, another lady in a meeting encouraged her to continue her fight for a sidewalk. This became the “means for me to come back and stress myself.”

No. No, I had been asking for a long time and you know I go to council meeting and I ask.. [I ask the people in charge and this is what they say.] Well we can't do it, we can't do it. Okay, I just kept dwelling on that. So this lady came in and she had a meeting with us, I was asked to go to this meeting...a sidewalk committee...And she wanted us to meet them in Atlanta, she wanted us to come to Atlanta. And she come to me while we was in the meeting in Atlanta. She says, “...Hattie you still stick to what you want, cause you gonna get it, and you can get it...” I said, “Okay, thank you.” *And that gave me the go, you see, when she said that. That means for me to come back and stress myself... And that is what I did.* [Emphasis added]. I came back and I told them, the mayor, that was what we wanted. With the sidewalk on East Marion and McPherson, I said a lot of times, you know you just want to get out and walk. You don't want to ride all the time. And so, why can't we have a sidewalk, we have to walk out there in the ditch and the grass. (Phone rings).

In another story Hattie discusses how much it meant for her to be recognized in front of their peers. This particular incident was a major catalyst in her learning. She knew the inspector was coming to their work site; she relates the story of preparing the students for the inspector.

I said I don't want you acting silly when you come in. I want you to act kind of real intelligent and don't jump up and gaze at the man when he come in. Sure

enough, when everybody come in, everybody was real busy working. And uh, this guy came in. And he told me, he said, “Hattie, he said you got the best program there is on this side of Savannah.” He said, “Everyone I been in to today, you all got the best one.” I said, “Well thank you.” (Laughter, proud). He said these people right here now, if this program closed down, they could put up their own business. And uh, so he just had to stand in there, he was just amazed.

Dora speaks about the impact of involvement in various organizations. At times it provides a way for older adults to be involved in activities that they may not normally participate in. These organizations often provide the initiative for adults to continue a task or a learning project.

Okay, they furnished, we had to buy them, but they furnished with basis, grapevine basis, base, that is the one on the door (laughter). The one on the door, that is my creation (laughter). But uh, that is what it is, like that. Something for, uh, pleasure, and uh, challenge. It’s a challenge to you to do things like that. And then, they have trips planned, like you go out to different places...But now, sometime, we have been out to supper and to a movie, and I participate in that.

As discussed earlier, one of Dora’s main learning projects is the long-term trial and error method of working in her yard. She explains with detail the way she feels about working in her yard. This particular incident involved another person complementing her is a catalyst to continue this learning. “...And it looked so pretty. (Spoken very deliberately, drawn out, and thoughtful). Yeah, when that man got through mowing, time before last, not this time, time before last, it had rained that afternoon, and it quit, and he finished.

And me and him were standing out there talking, and he said, he said, ‘It is so pretty, it is so pretty’.”

Wilbur discusses the value and help that one’s family can be in this process of learning. He had been asked to give a presentation on African-Americans. His family went with him to the library when he gave the talk. This helped to motivate him to pursue this to a greater degree.

That was a big help to me. But whenever I read that book and then I had my whole family, I sent my whole family, my wife and two or three youngins wasn’t it honey? They went and was right there with me. And uh, library, was about full almost. And uh, it was just easy for me to speak on that, and I wasn’t reading out of the book neither. I had done studied it. And I, it was just easy for me to speak on that. On that, because I know that some things like that have helped me you know, when I say help me, I am talking about learn how to live.

Similarly, many of the participants are involved in many learning activities because of the motivation that has come from a family member. This seemed to be especially true of learning to work a computer.

Wilbur’s wife describes how a friend gave them a book about Martin Luther King and how much this meant to them. These spontaneous gifts can be catalysts for learning. “He brought this book, uh, Daddy King, not Martin Luther King, you know his struggles with life, and other stuff, and he, you know [he] brought that book to him. And uh, he wanted Wilbur to have it. He brought it one afternoon.”

*Resolution.*

This loosely woven and somewhat erratic process is eventually resolved. One part of this resolution is when a particular learning episode is over. Perhaps notes and materials have been sorted in a box in the way that Norman and his wife put away the information collected on church buildings. Betty stated she has collected and stored materials from assorted learning projects, but they have been boxed up and put away. In other words, this project is over. The participants discussed an interesting array of these short term learning episodes from Dora's wreath, to Norman's class, to Sue's book, to Bill's two month hospital experience, to Wilbur's work with rural development center, to Clarence's attempt to put lights in a warehouse, to Thelma's luncheon on cultural activity in south Georgia.

These are interesting, well meaning projects; they have taken place, and they are essentially over. What remains of this learning? Perhaps some new knowledge or new facts that they can share or use if needed. What was this activity? Maybe this was time taken up in some sort of entertainment or an activity based on some personal need.

Robert and his wife expressed these ideas. They had been asked to provide information for a new building in their church. This took a great deal of time and effort. In this process they learned a lot, but this learning activity is over.

So we kept visiting and went to a church over in, out from Douglas. And the contractor that finally, eventually built our fellowship hall, went to that church... From that we learned how we wanted our fellowship hall to go. So, we patterned it after that church and used the contractor... We visited a lot of churches on those stained glass windows. Not just the one up toward Enigma, that what was the

name of it (a discussion about the various churches). *We were relieved when that project was over* (laughter), that was a lot of work, searching all around.

However, each participant not only expressed various short-term projects, but more interesting are their lifelong pursuits of learning. These may have begun in a similar situation as described above, but the learner somehow never got tired or stopped. They never put everything in a box to be stored somewhere. In this situation there is a resolve to continue to learn on this particular topic. This cycle of learning has been continual and is active and deeper.

Sue discusses how she attended a computer class. Although she was learning details of the working of a computer, her main concern was to be able to have some place to put the stories that she is writing and wants to write. This lifelong pursuit was discussed during the interviews. Although this information is somewhere in the back of the house, she returns to these stories and will write additional information. She will then put them on the computer.

Well, I am writing some stories. I have some stories written down. I do them in long hand. And then I go put them in the computer. And uh, back, in the things I have known, I got one I call "Wheels". The whole, coming on the computer is Wheels, for it's called "Wheels are for free". And this would go back naturally to the time when, I was in school at Stetson. And it was about that time that I saw a piece in the paper about that hunters had found four skeletons in the woods.

Similarly each participant demonstrated various lifelong learning projects. Robert continues to learn more about the Bible as well as world events. Norman's desire is to learn more about use of the computer, but also keeps up with news events. Betty desires

to learn more about religion and psychology and wants to make it interesting for her offspring. Sue has a lifelong interest in natural foods, health, and raising animals. Bill has a desire to learn how to survive and be successful as a minority. Hattie's intent is to learn how to influence her community as a woman. Dora's desire is to learn more about working in the yard and spiritual growth. Clarence's desire is to learn how to live an enjoyable, long, and healthy life. And Thelma's intention is to learn more about community involvement and natural decoration. All of these lifelong pursuits are sought with endless energy and leads to specific information and knowledge. Every participant also discussed health, children, grandchildren, television, and newspapers (local and regional) as important lifelong learning concerns.

One must concede that as a result of this process there is somewhat of an impact on the learner. Perhaps it is simple head knowledge, or just the simple desire to continue to learn. But one must also concede that one may change as the result of this lifelong pursuit of knowledge. Many of these individuals have developed an expertise in many of these areas. This expertise not only involves these personal learning activities, but also includes knowledge they have gained from their life experiences as well as work.

Robert has expertise in crossword puzzles, world events, the Bible, gardening, and history. His wife has expertise in gardening, education, and historical houses. Norman has expertise in toy trains, the computer, and birding. Betty has expertise in music, doll furniture, collecting information, legal issues, and topics of spirituality and psychology. Sue has expertise in raising Datsuns, goats, and chickens. And she has read a great deal about natural food and products. Bill has expertise in starting a small business and in cooking. He also has expertise in how to survive as a minority. Hattie has expertise

motivating others to get involved in a program and in working with adults who have mental disabilities. She also has expertise on how to survive as a minority. Dora has expertise in working with children and older adults. She knows about how to work in yards and in cooking. Wilbur knows about his community and how to take action for improvement. He also has expertise on how to survive as a minority. Clarence has expertise in home repair and gardening. He is knowledgeable about World War II and especially the Western Front. He is also knowledgeable about movies and music.

In summary, Thelma has an expertise in decorating. She knows how to garner natural products for flower arrangements. She knows how to organize her environment for decorating. When I asked her specifically about this, I was surprised at the depth of information.

You have to go and gather up your, your things from the, you know the day before or the morning before, and get your things together. And people have been nice to share them. But anyway, and [my friend] and I have uh, we have shared a, you know a lot of time, and she and I work well together, because I can put a flower in and she'd put one in and we could say, well that doesn't look, that needs moving over a little bit. Or something, you know, which is, but that is, that is how through the years that we have worked together.

She knows exactly where to go to get the flowers and other material to use in these displays.

Well most of the time, they would, you know, ask, would ask, or I would say I have got so and so blooming I can fix some flowers, or I know somebody else that has got it blooming that I can fix some. And I have grown fern in my yard, that



fern that the florist use, so I have got that out there, so I can go out there at any time and, and if you have got fern, then you can arrange other things with that.

She knows how to come up with almost any object for a decoration.

...[I] worked up something, worked up these lanterns and stuff. And [my friend] and I met her in Cordele, and we talked about it, and I had taken a bird cage that I had, had fixed, but that wasn't what she liked...and carried my lamps, and my little lanterns I had made and little baskets that I was going to fix it in. And then I went to uh, working on it and I went down...[to a place where I am familiar] to the farm down there and got these dead branches that had this lichen growing on them, see. And so I used those in every arrangement, was a big, uh, uh, well you put a tall piece down the middle, and down at the bottom, I, azaleas were blooming and so I fixed that and covered it up with some, with some moss. And I had all of that for, for each table.

If there are bugs in the plants or flowers taken from a yard she knows how to get rid of them.

Oh in the moss, I take it and put it in a sink or in a pan or tub, and then I take it and put some dishwashing soap and some vinegar. So I feel like the vinegar takes care of killing the bugs. I would not think that they could take all that vinegar. (Laughter). That was my thought I don't if that was it or not, or probably the soap...But anyway I washed it and then I air-dried it. I don't know if that was it, some dry it in the microwave...and some people just take it and put it in the microwave...and that kills the bugs...But I don't think...also if you wash it you

get all the dust and stuff out of it, see. And so, and the kind that you buy that is already processed, it is brittle or something. It doesn't last very long...

Thelma has learned what to save from one event to the next.

...When I was through with her party I brought those things home and took the oil out of them and washed all those jars. And then I packed them back in the boxes.

...And also the napkin rings and stuff, which were 150 of those. And I took those and, and uh packed those in a big plastic box and then the decoration that I put on the table. Which was that uh, log, and she wanted that, so I had fixed a frame for that so that I, so that she could just lift it up, so you could carry it... So anyway, that was how that, uh, that came about. And since then I have had to make some more in order to do the other parties that I have done.

As is common with all of these participants these projects are not something they do for money, it is pure pleasure and enjoyment.

Oh, I don't know that I am a businesswoman too much (laughter). But I really hadn't, I do it for my enjoyment, and enjoyment of the people. And I don't always, like I said, I, ...and they just could not believe that you could create something like that. So it really made me feel proud, so anyway...

When something goes wrong with her plans, she has learned where to go and what to do to fix the situation.

I had left them in the water long enough, but the sun was so hot until I came home for something...And in the meantime while I was out there they wilted. So I called my neighbor over there... and asked her, if I could, she had those, gloriosa, uh lilies, that were blooming ...And so I asked her if she could cut me some of

those because my flowers had wilted, and this was about 4:30 in the afternoon (laughter because the reception was in about an hour). So when I came home, I came home to change clothes and I changed clothes and went by over there, and she had, she and her husband had cut them ...So, it was just amazing that all of that came about.

*Research question three: What are the late-life adjustments of the participants?*

*More time for activities*

The topic of the research questions has changed dramatically. Rather than thinking through various aspects of learning and their activities. The individual could easily reflect on their life and share current things that were going on in their lives. It was important to consider what are the actual late life adjustments of these older adults.

One dominant aspect of life for these older adults is that there is more time. Perhaps this has come about because of retirement, or that one's children have left home. There is the sense that these participants now have time to do what they want. Some have chosen to be at home and some have chosen to work. Regardless one of the adjustments is this new expanse of time to pursue what they want.

Robert has been retired for fourteen years. He has greatly enjoyed this extra time in his life.

Well, older adults, I find that, like on retirement, look at it in different perspective. Some people are never ready to retire and some people are ready to retire early. I had a job at [a nearby air force base] that was fairly pressurized the last 10 years of my life. And when I retired 14 years ago, I was ready to retire. And uh, I felt like all my life I had dealt with figures and finance and accounting

and so forth like that. And it was just time that I relaxed and enjoyed, uh, retirement. And I do. I feel like that I get to do a lot of things that I never would have, had I continued working. And we had some retirement briefings, prior to retirement. And this doctor really impressed on me, that uh, not only, after you retire should you keep busy physically, but you should keep busy mentally. Because he said your mind is the same age as the rest of you. And if it is going down hill your mind will go down to a certain degree. And we all understand that. But you don't have to let it, go excessively, downhill, *so to me retirement is a really a chance to learn more and to enjoy what you learn* [emphasis added]. While you are working you don't have but certain amount of time to enjoy anything. But I enjoy what we do, and traveling, in fact, she, uh, tries to say sometime that I should have been a gypsy (big, hearty laughter). But, I enjoy retirement, and I enjoy, I don't want to get old and incapable of things but I enjoy my life. What age I am now.

Robert does not really want to have idle time. He enjoys being busy, and likes knowing that there are things to be done. Laughing, Robert's wife said that he feels you should never get caught up. "If you get caught up then that means you are at the end."

Norman was an early retiree. He retired at age 62; he has been retired for almost 22 years. This somewhat lengthy retirement takes on a career of its own. He discusses the importance of staying busy and the possibilities of various activities.

Well, I keep doing something, whether it is accomplishing, whether I am accomplishing anything or not. You just, some people like to read books. Uh, I, like I say, some people turn the TV on and sit in front of it for lengthy periods of

time. Uh, some people like to work in their yards, some people that have the ground, like to garden. Uh, some people like to draw, some people like to paint, uh, there are many things you can find to do if you want to, and uh, that is my thinking, if you sit around, you will, downgrade your system.

Betty's voice seems a little more urgent. Although she has been retired for a while, she seems to realize that there is a limit to this time.

And I haven't learned it yet, I am still working on it (laughter). There is so much, I have things that I want to write and do and uh time is running out (spoken with a great deal of enthusiasm and hope and positive attitude). And I can't get the time to do all I want to do.

Sue shares this excitement about life and one's time. She is the oldest participant in the study. Even with a recent fall and a four-month cast, she stays very active. I asked her about her life and what she has learned. She stated slowly and thoughtfully, "Well, satisfaction, interest, I am never bored. Never time to be bored."

Hattie tells how she continues to be involved in her previous job. This work was enjoyable and meant a lot to her. Now she volunteers on a regular basis at the adult mental health clinic.

Well since I retired I still see need for help. And that, didn't stop me from helping them after I retired, cause I still see some needs out here, and I am still working on it... Well, different ones ask me, uh, about helping them do this, and I get out there and help them. And they will ask me about getting in touch with social security, or helping them do this, or helping them get a check. I will just jump right on out there and go and do it, cause I can do it.

When I first drove to Hattie's house she told me I had to come back. She was taking one of her former students to the grocery store.

Clarence, similar to Norman has also been retired for over 20 years from regular paying jobs. This lengthy retirement, which is longer than the lifespan of a younger person, is pregnant with the possibilities for various activities. Clarence is a busy man filling this long awaited time with a variety of pursuits. He discusses one activity he has gotten a lot out of.

Well, [my friend], he was the Chief Judge, uh, he appointed me Chief Registrar. But before that though, I had been working the election, I have been working the election since I retired. And uh, I have been a bailiff since I have retired. I go to court; we had court this past week. And uh, ...and how I got with this voting stuff, [another friend] was at that, and then he got Alzheimer's. So, I was doing all the work, at the time he was holding it, and still Alzheimer's was coming on and I did all the work. Just signed the papers and just gave them to him. So I just naturally came into it, and now they are counting on me, more than anybody. They used to have only two workers, and I got 12. I do more than all the rest of them put together, I guess.

With detail Thelma discusses the many activities in which she is a part. She is similar to many women who raised children during the 1950's. They worked mainly at home and rarely held normal paying jobs. When her children were grown and left the home this was similar to being retired. She discusses the variety of activities she has been a part of such as bridge clubs, the Woman's Club, Church, and various committees. She

describes this life, a life so busy that she needs a day off from all of her volunteer activities.

And then we stay at the hospital and we eat lunch. And by then I think I am going to sit down on the couch and (laugh) and then on Tuesday night, I don't do, I am not a very good housekeeper, that does not interest me, in the least. But maybe I will do something in the yard, and then usually on Tuesday night, usually this Better Home Town thing meets, so that takes my Tuesday. And then on Wednesday every other week, I play bridge on Wednesday. So, but, I guess I get up and the first thing I do is read the newspaper, I have to have that newspaper. The Valdosta Times, and [my neighbor], they put it [the newspaper] up at the road, and she will pick it up some mornings and some mornings I will. It is according to who wakes up first (that is her neighbor), we just put it on each other's steps. So, so, uh, so if I get up and wake up and it is not there, and then maybe I will have my coffee and stuff, and then I will go get it. And put it on her steps; so there is no set rule about who goes and gets it. But I have to read that newspaper from cover to cover. And this morning my page I usually read was blank, something happened to the print. But I read the front page. And I read the obituaries, to see if it is somebody, my friends. And then I go on over and read whatever else is in there. And, what is happening in the communities, and then I go over and read some of the comics and read my horoscope. And then I read the bridge thing (laughter), so that takes care of about an hour every morning. But I can't get maneuvering until I have read that newspaper. I don't know if it is a habit, I guess. But I uh, and so it is nice, it used to didn't come till the afternoon,

but I am glad it comes in the morning. So we have it, it is there by 6:30 in the morning, if we wake up at 6:30. And then I usually get uh, dressed, and if there is any excuse to go to town I go to town (laughter)! So, ...well today I didn't get dressed, but I will always get dressed, I'll put on my make up and stuff like I am going somewhere (laughter). Well, it just makes you feel so much better if you, and so I thought well if somebody calls me to go and do something, then I will be ready (laughter). Oh, and then Thursday, well every other Thursday we had a bridge club. There is not but four of us anyhow, and I play bridge on Thursday. Then Friday is usually a free day.

Another interesting dynamic of retirement is that of leisure. Many of these participants have filled their life with various activities that become something like a job. Classes, volunteer activities, or learning to work a computer is different from an activity like golf or fishing. Clarence freely chooses all of his time, yet has many responsibilities to others. Leisure seems to be something the person does for himself. Clarence often speaks of one of his favorite activities during retirement is that of fishing.

Whenever the mood hits me, I can't talk about fishing now, but I got two secret places (laughter), people let me fish see, and uh, ...Well, they asked me, a lot of times they just ask me. They just say come on fishing. You know, so...or they say the river is fine, or the pond is fine, or something like that, I take that as a hint. (Laughter) So I take my grandchildren when they come. And I take them fishing, and...my son in law, and he likes to fish better than my boys. My boys are not really crazy about it. They like it, but they are not crazy about it, but he is crazy about it. So, I always fix him a place to fish.



Dora describes the enjoyment of leisure amidst of life of freely chosen activities. I had asked Dora, “What do you enjoy about it, what do you enjoy about your life now, would you say?” She responded, “Coming home in the afternoon, changing my clothes, and going into the yard. See you are interrupting my routine (laughter)! You are messing up my routine! And working until dark.” As mentioned earlier, Thelma is so busy, that she looks forward to a free day, a day where she can do what she wants, away from her volunteer activities. However, Dora also discusses there may be too much time.

Dr - Oh yeah, that is when I do my reading, and the Bible, prayer time, my night Bible Studying, uh, and uh, there is something called a...I sit right there in that gold chair. D – (I am looking at this chair, it looks like you have placed it inside a library, it is surrounded by stacks and piles of magazines, books, and crossword puzzles.) Okay, boy, that is set up for some.... Dr - I got it all the way around, that is my file cabinet all the way around...but I do number puzzles, “Search A Word,” I do mine with numbers, I do mine with numbers, and sometimes they will about get your hair pulled out. But I do those. D – Why do you do those things? Dr – Just to past the time. No, they are challenging, they are challenging, and relaxing. And lots of night, I can’t sleep. If I ever turn over more than two times at night, and don’t go to sleep, I will get up and come back in here. Either read or do that number puzzle, and stay a while, and go back to bed. And I can go to sleep then. But I can’t find the way out the bed...if you.... D – So if you can’t sleep you will just come back here and pick it right back up. [She nods affirmatively.]

Wilbur and Dora are the only two participants that continue to work for income. Although neither of them has to do this, they have chosen as their retirement to continue to work. They like to work, they want to work, and they continue to do a good job. This is retirement for them.

*Family Relations.*

Each participant discussed their family and their various family members. The participants especially spoke about their parents, children, and grandchildren.

Robert's wife was answering a question concerning health. She is very motivated to be physically active through walking and aerobics, I asked her about this. She seemed to hesitate, and think about the past, and stated the following.

D – Okay, well what is your motivation to keep going? Mrs. – Cause I want to be as young as I can, and as active and alert as I can, as long as I live. Because my mother, I base it on my mother, she sat in a chair for years and when she got up into her 80's she got where she was just walking with a little shuffle (holds hands in front with little motions back and forth like a shuffle). I said I don't ever want that to happen to me (high voice). So the longer you stay active, and keep your mind active, the better off you are. (Silence.)

Sue is an expert in raising Datsuns. This has occupied a major part of her life; she has raised several champion dogs and won various awards. Interestingly, early in the conversation she mentioned her Father, who also raised dogs.

My father was an Englishman, half English, his father was English and he married a New Englander, and English are known for being crazy about dogs...They just like their animals, dogs, horses, fine cattle, things like that, and he was a dog man.

So we always had a dog when I was growing up. And one dog was good and one dog was better, so when I got on my own, why I had several dogs, and I used to raise a few. Enjoy raising puppies. And I, I, have raised different kinds and I never was a commercial breeder but I have been a breeder for a long time. I registered with the AKC and I am still raising a few Datsuns. I said I got a mama back in the ...with seven babies, I will show them to you. Datsuns are a nice breed I used to have some big ones too, but they are real...Well, clients are different people, are sort of slow about getting big dogs because they do eat more and a datsun is not too small. Big enough to be used, intelligent, adaptable, and I sort of settled on them.

Dora talked about the “chair” in her den, and the role this plays in learning activity. But she also, discussed how much the way this chair was similar to a chair her mother had.

D – And how is it like your mom? (She had said something about the chair and her mother while we were outside.) Dr – Oh, she did the same thing, she just sat with all her stuff around her chair. Yes, and I thought, I will never do that. And here I go in the car, and poke paper towels down in the side of the seat like that. And save them, and that is just like she did, and I thought, I can’t, well that won’t do. But here I am, I do it too.

Early in the conversation, we were discussing the land that surrounds her house. She lives on a farm that was inherited from her parents. She could live comfortably if she sold the land, I asked her about this.

My mother she asked us, when she gave us the land, she said, all I ask you is not sell it, just keep it in the family. So, I feel obligated, bound, by that, I do. But now, like, working at the nursing home, its gotten to be a way of life for me. Right now I think I could make it, I could make it all right, it wouldn't be easy, I wouldn't have any frills, but, uh, I could make it. And uh, but, what am I going to do tomorrow? I would get up and come up in here and sit down. And uh, after eat breakfast, go back to sleep. And then tonight, when I go to bed, I couldn't go to sleep. So, that is what I told somebody the other day. As long as they will have me up there, I am going to work.

Wilbur spoke of the influence of his parents. "My mother always told me, she said, you always treat people like want to be treated, my Daddy did too (he is talking really fast), my Daddy, was just identical same as I was, he said you treat people like you want to be treated." Later in the interview Wilbur's wife also discussed her parents.

[You] come from your grandparents as well as your parents. And what have you. My Daddy couldn't read and write, but he was determined, and he [Wilbur] can tell you. My Daddy did die in 81, my Daddy could read anything anybody else could read. Read the Bible and everything else. Anything, nobody else had to do it for him...But my mother could do, she could, she could do! Uh, manage read and write very well and she taught him. Because my Father was much older than my mother.

All of the participant's parents have been deceased for many years. Yet, it was interesting that these older adults were speaking of their parents as if they were very much alive. Many of the references to their parent's life were for a much earlier time.

One must consider the continuing impact of a parent on a child, even if the child is now 75 and the parent has been dead for 30 years.

One of the most intriguing aspects of human existence is that of a parent helping their child. This is also an interesting dynamic as the parent becomes older and when the child is an adult. One interesting issue is when the child, who is now an adult, continues to do something the parent disapproves. These older adults have had to reconsider and adjust to the relationship with their adult child. Robert shares a personal story.

I can give you a prime example, right in our family, our son has been taught conservative practices. And she, his wife, has lived in the other world...Her life, and I don't know whether you can reach her or not, because she feels her way of life, if you make it you spend it...(a little discussion about this)... (Robert's wife is nodding and agreeing). They moved into a new home three years ago and I will give you one example, a year later, they decided they did not like the paint in the room, so they repainted it. To me, a paint job is good for a few years (emotional), and uh, I am not criticizing her, I am just saying that is her way of life.

Norman referred to the sacrifice that parents are often willing to make, not just when their children are young, but also even as they are adults.

[I am] shortchanged 20% of your social security check period ends right there. So I took my social security early; my son (first mention of him) came back here to work with me. I took my social security at 62 in order that I might turn a little more money to him. That took another 20%. So I should be, uh, if I hadn't taken my early retirement which was choice, the other 20% I have no choice and they have never done anything about it, so I uh, if I had not taken it early, and, and,

and, not been denied 20%. I would be drawing between close to between 1100 instead of 730 dollars.

Betty discussed how she handles a situation where she and one of her children do not have the same worldview.

Yes. Have one daughter in law I can talk with about it. And uh, for a long time I didn't tell [my daughter], how I felt. I just didn't tell her much of anything. Because she was doing so well. You know. She uh, people are so different Donny; they have what is in them. And it is not going to be changed. Now my two sons, are different from [my daughter], their grandmother had a habit of inviting each one alone to spend the night with her, and to teach them specifics about the Bible and God, and so forth. And my sons had already read so much science fiction and this and everything else and it, they got to where they didn't want to spend the night with Grandma (laughter). But [my daughter], just loved it. And she and her Grandmama were on the same wavelength. And she caught that spirit of real, you know, communion with God, and it stayed with her, and she had another experience when she was a teenager which was wonderful with [a lady in town] and a little group of girls that she had. And its led her and I didn't want to disturb that and so I did not voice my views. But I meant the last several years I think she has gotten mature enough that I could and now I am telling her about all of these things. So that is good, but it is not often you can get together and have such a conversation with the family.

Hattie discusses how close she feels with her family.

Ooh, if it was left up to them, they would all be here (laughter), grandchildren, they love to come. And uh, I enjoy them when they do come. Well my kids tell me I give the grands more attention than I did them. Or do them now, I said, well you must remember, you know, they are younger, yall are older now, so yall on your own. So I have to kind of give in to them when they come. They all give me that name that I do more for them, than I did for them...Oh, they my heart, and I am their heart, we just love each other (laughter). Ah, we's just all mingles right in there together. And, if anything goes wrong with me, they are here. And if anything goes wrong with one of them, I am there. That is just the way it goes. We all real close. Real close. Although they say I give my son that lives here more attention, than I do them, but its not that, because he will come in, and he will come in, and uh, he will say, Mama fix me such a such a thing. And I go in there and fix him what he wants (laughter). And they say I give him more attention than I do the rest of them. But it's not that, if my yard need mowing, he do all of that, if they something go wrong here in the house, he do all of that, if something go wrong in the house here, he will come right in and go to fixing it, and so you have to kind of give him a little more, cause he is, he try to be the husband, the Daddy, and the all, you know.

Hattie discloses an important topic in her conversation. Even in small town, rural America, families are spread all over the world.

No, honey, they are not all here. See I got a son that live in New York, and I don't see his children, they all up there. And then I got a daughter that live in Miami, and her childrens down there. And my daughter live here, I got a daughter that

live in Atlanta, she got two, and uh, one finish college last year at Ft. Valley, and the other one will finish in December. And uh, at Ft. Valley, this year. And so she didn't have but two kids...

One of the adjustments to family as an older adult is the separation from one's adult children and grandchildren. Our country is extremely mobile, one can move to various parts of the country for work with ease. However, often this leaves behind parents of adult children who never get used to this separation from their children.

Dora seems to summarize the relationship between adult children and an older parent. One of the changes and adjustments of being an older adult is the change in responsibility of one's children, especially seeing them begin to care for you.

Well, uh, you just don't have the responsibility now that you had when they were at home or younger. And uh, you still have lots of heartaches with them. But uh, you just have to trust the Lord to take care of it. And take care of them, take care of you, take care of the problems (laughter). Oh yeah! And they, they are a lots of comfort. They look after me; they are always wanting to be sure that I have eaten right. And that I have done things that I am supposed – [Talking in their voice.] Take my medicine! Get my blood pressure checked!

Wilbur discusses how misfortune and difficulty concerning one's children can affect you all of your life.

...In the later years, uh, I lost two children in the fire. And losing my two children in the fire, every time they would blow a whistle and siren, and then I would get in my old piece of car and follow them, wherever I go. And that is the way, whenever they got ready to put on a Black, I was the first Black they put on there



[discusses the fire department]. And I am always thinking whenever I am going to a fire like that, how to help someone.

His wife stated that it was almost 20 years before she could even speak about it.

Thelma discusses how the busyness of life often can keep one from being involved with one's children.

Yeah, yeah. Well, it would be nice, and of course, I have a large family, and you know, of course, they not but Tim lives here. Both of them works, so I really don't get to see them, that much. Unless I call and say lets go to lunch somewhere. And then in the afternoon when they get home the, you know, the children are tired, and they have their homework to do, and their supper to get and the baths to get. And so, I try not to interfere in that too much.

I thought it was interesting that there was not that much discussion about one's children. Grandchildren seemed to be an easier topic. And three of the participants would not have said anything about their children, unless I had asked them. All of the participants have grandchildren. All of them discussed their grandchildren in one way or another. Some to a great degree, others merely alluding to them. For example Norman, who never discussed only grandchild, had a portrait of her in the room where we sat. Regardless, grandchildren are a significant factor in the lives of older adults. One of the changes in their lives includes the incorporation and planning for this offspring.

Because one of Betty's grandchildren was about to go to college, this motivated her to prepare a synopsis of her search for knowledge and to include a list of questions she feels are important.

S – Well, Justin was about to graduate and he is about to go away to Stanford and California culture and all of that. And I wanted so much to be able to communicate a little bit of what I had found out. But it is so hard. But in 2000 I, that is about the latest I had done. Put together a list of questions that I think parents and children should talk about. These are issues faced in everyday life that every person needs to have his own opinion about. Of course they will all be opposite in many cases even within the same family. And for that reason many families don't ever bring these subjects up. But I think it's important that they should and ...D – Can I read some of this? Okay we are looking at – ‘This is dated January 5, 2000. First question: Should parents purposely speak to their children about where they stand on issues of daily living? Such as sexual conduct, minority rights, substance abuse, various moral issues. Should parents give children a spoken or written explanation of their beliefs? About the nature of God, what is the nature of God, describe it. Do events occur with a purpose following a plan or does all happen by chance? And 5. What is the nature of reality? Is substance solid or just mass energy fields? What is life, when does life begin in a human? What part of a human survives death? Is there life in apparently inanimate matter?’ Wow – these are some pretty deep questions. [I am sitting there shocked that this woman seems to be shaking the philosophical foundation of one's thinking!]

Betty continues to discuss her grandchildren especially those that don't live nearby. Similar to many of the other participants, children and grandchildren live in larger towns. She talks about living with the distance.

The biggest difference of course is the proximity. They were with me. My grandchildren are separated from me. They come on a guest basis. For a short, very short period of time, weekends. The only grandchildren we had for an extended period are [my son's] two, because he went through a divorce. And his two sons lived in Minnesota, which.... But they would come every summer and stay a few weeks with us, and they seemed like my own children. They were just so close, and loved them so dearly. Uh, the others, have uh, come and stayed for a week at a time, maybe, Not [my daughter]. [My daughter's] husband (laughter – with high pitch voice) 'don't want to let those boys out of his sight.' It is a sight, but he was afraid something would happen to them! And it might have, there are many things that could have happened at Bellwood. But that is the biggest thing that is different about having, uh, you don't uh, deal with them on a daily basis, on the same footing you do your own children. You are of course what everybody says, the parents have to discipline and the grandparents spoil them. But that is not so, because I tried as hard to not spoil my grandchildren as I did my others. I tried to see that they went by the rules and so forth. And they always obeyed me, the grandchildren.

During the interview with Bill, he made it clear that the important things to him now are his grandchildren. I asked him what is most important to him.

What is important to me now? I think now, I am not telling you I am right, I think, ...I done have...three grandchildren...I am going to show you something here.

(He gets up and goes somewhere in the back of the house and gets a plaque.) We are going to get off the subject now. Here is a picture of my granddaughter...here in Statesboro...that is where [my son] just took his son to get him quarters...he is to start the 4<sup>th</sup> of this month, now this girl (looking at the picture) she is

finished...she work with the athletic department and wildlife...She got two majors she worked on, she is working up there now...Now this girl here, [my son] got her mother pregnant before he married, now he didn't marry her mother. He married another girl. All right now, that brought about a conflict. Now this girl here (pointing to the girl in the picture) all the aid I did for her, help her get through school. Her mother had a stroke. Now you didn't ask me all this, but we gonna spend some extra time together. And I hope this girl, that car right there, (pointing to car outside his house) that is my wife car. She (granddaughter) kept it three and a half years, till she got out of college. The first six months she didn't keep the car, and after that I let her kept it. And she completed the four years, I got the car back. Now what I contribute as far as her going to school, I couldn't get any credit for that. That is just money gone, not money thrown away, that is well spent money. But what I am saying is this, as a grandparent, I couldn't get any credit because her mother and father was living, I didn't have any house, if I had her in the house with me I could have claimed her as my dependent, and I could have got some (tax refund). But see I didn't get anything for that. That is just money I donated, and I proud of, I was able to do it. But at the same time, she got a future in front of her, because she is in shape now to get a job to take care of her self. Now this boy that, he is going up there where she went to school at. Now here is another child, which is a boy, which is as old as she is, by another lady, in Austin, Texas. Them boys will tell them girls anything, they don't think about the responsibility behind what they tell them, or what they created for somebody else, only thing they is concerned about is getting their relief over (Laughter). I mean I

am just giving it to you like it is. And uh, it's a bad situation, but there is nothing you can do about it.

Dora discusses how at one time her grandchildren were very important to her, and that she wanted them around her. Now it is a different matter. "...And people bother me; I don't want nobody around (laughter). I have had grandchildren in and out for all the years now; they are all now kind of on their own now and out. I enjoyed them...I enjoy my independence. Like what I said, they bother me now."

I asked her what was the difference in being a parent and a grandparent?

There is not as much responsibility being a grandparent. Cause you can, their parents take care of them...You try to set the right example in front of them, and encourage them to, to do the things they know is right, and you know is right. And they don't exactly want you telling them what to do. But sometimes you have to.

Wilbur and his wife discussed the close relationship they had with their grandchildren. They all had nicknames and she especially wanted to be able to greet them when they got off of the school bus.

I wanted them in the afternoon to (her voice is getting really loud) come home, and I meet the bus, and get them off and bring them with me. You know, I could care less about ...what [my daughter and her husband] were doing. But I wanted the three of them to be where I could, I could meet the bus and get them off. You know that was...a dream of mine, I just wanted this thing to happen! Because I was their grandmother and I wanted to be the one, not her, but to be the one that got them off. Well, instead [my daughter and her husband] I feel like, I never have

just say, questioned her. But it must have been the Lord that told me I was wrong. You know. You are wrong. Let them, as their parents, let them, say what they want to do, and I never did say it to them. And I never did say it to them, never did!...Wilbur - You said what was one of the most things, you know, I set them up when they was just very little, and I gave them money and I call that their Sunday money. And I give them all the same amount each, each Sunday or Saturday whenever they come around. And I still do it. And uh, if they miss, their Sunday money I would call them up, or carry it to them. And you know, last year, uh, I told [my grandson]...(something like you better come and get your money)...He said, I don't need no money! He said, I am going to school, he said. And I am...and he was working there at school and making more than I was making...but he uh, but now, if he always needs something he is going to come and tell Papa. If he goes and tells his Daddy what he is doing. And he is just as solid as ...and he has never given us a minute's trouble...nor [their parents]. My grand youngins is something....

Wilbur goes on to describe how much joy and pride his grandchildren give him today.

Well, a lot of times, I went in stores and somebody going to tell me, you know Junior...somebody over there will say, you know his grandchildren they are going to Harvard, one at Southern Tech, and one at VSU, ...and then they go to joking me then you know, but I feel real good about that.

Thelma discusses how she will plan weekends so that she can visit her grandchildren who live on St. Simons Island.

You know on the weekends sometimes I will go to St. Simons...(my daughter has a place there), but her two daughters are living over there now, so anyway. So I will call and if they don't call me back then I know they got something to do (laughter). But we, [my granddaughter] and I we have a real close association, with my granddaughter. And if I can find it I will show you the thing that she had written me about being a grandmother, all the things. (She did show me this, and I have a copy of it, basically about their friendship, and what her grandmother means to her.)...She is 27, but she is written me...so, anyway, I go over there, and I don't even get to the beach, I will help her doing something, fixing her yard or the house or something. Or we will go to garage sales or we will go to a tour of homes, and so, so I enjoy doing that.

Sue was very clear about teaching responsibility to her adult grandchildren. My eldest daughter has had her son, well, let's see, her son, married, and they had three children, she already had a child...And apparently he made a very bad choice, so they broke up and he got custody of the children. She took them off up to Indiana, somewhere. And so, when he got custody he went up and got them...and said when he went to the police station...(they helped him...)...they were so glad to have a father of these 3 children who wanted to support them...Brought them back to Florida. So, he came up here, stayed a few days. I took him to...[a local] mechanic, and I sat in the car about an hour or two. He came out and he said, "Well report to work Monday morning." I said all right now [my grandson], I said I will help you with the children. But I said I can't take full responsibility. I, it hasn't been long since [my husband] died. And I said, I got

things I still got to straight out. I said I am just not up to taking care, cooking for three children. I said, I will help, especially in an emergency. That wasn't what he was looking for. Monday morning, he was down at his brothers. His brother's wife was handicapped...and it was a perfect solution, they had 3 boys about the same age...well, that didn't work, so he took them to his mother...they were there about 8 years. And he just pretty well dumped them on her to raise...he had a weekend girlfriend...But my eldest daughter, I said, Bessie, that is not good for Lonnie, I said, you and your husband have raised four children. I said you don't need to take on three more. I said Lonnie should stand on his own feet. And I didn't think. The girl he was involved with, he is not offering her marriage, and she is not offering to raise his children...I said that is a dead end road...He ought to find somebody interested in the children...And the older children, you know, they don't pay too much attention to us...so I been at her for years...I said, you need to get him out on his own...I keep preaching get him out, get him out...So you know you can preach to them...But, they, you have to be careful that you don't overdo it...You get tired of it and it gets sort of frustrating when your kids are grown...and you can see something so clearly...now like my youngest daughter she is working with the post office...she is working where she doesn't have any sick leave...

Several of the participants discuss having great-grandchildren. I think Sue summarizes this additional factor. She says with excitement, "I got great grandchildren too! Well, you worry about them, but you can't do anything about it."



However, Dora states seeing her great-grandchildren remind her how short life is and that she will not get to see most of their life.

Now, I will tell you something. I said, “Now I got two great grandchildren.”

(There seems to be two or three conversations going on here, she is answering my question, but it is obviously something she has thought about, at times she will carry on a conversation that she has already answered in her mind.) One’s a little girl and one’s a little boy. And the little girl is three, and I am 80 years old. And I said, one day I said, “Well, You know it bothers me, and it makes me sad, I won’t get to see her be a teenager.” And things like that, if you let it play on your mind, it would be depressing and it would upset you, but you have to live for the moment. And enjoy exactly what you got right now.

The participant often has different levels of involvement with their children and grandchildren. Some of the participants talked a lot of their offspring but some never mentioned it. The sample made it clear through the dialogue that some of them they were much more involved with than others. Perhaps this was because of proximity. I asked Hattie about someone I saw that obviously lived in her house with her.

That is my sons’ daughter, and she in school, and she aint never liked to live, her mother live in [a nearby town] and she aint never liked to live in [a nearby town]. So she, from baby, she been right here with me. Cause she finished school...They are not all here. See I got a son that live in New York, and I don’t see his children, they all up there. And then I got a daughter that live in Miami, and her childrens down there. And my daughter live here, I got a daughter that live in Atlanta, she got two, and uh, one finish college last year

at Ft. Valley, and the other one will finish in December. And uh, at Ft. Valley, this year. And so she didn't have but two kids....

In summary I would like to close this section with two quotes that summarizes the relationships with children and grandchildren. Betty states the main reason for learning revolves around her parents, children, and grandchildren. She showed me a notebook that was full of information she had collected.

Well it's my own personal library. And to be honest nobody has ever looked at that Donny. This is something that I don't talk about, because it is just a groping, and a trying to find out what is real and what is true and I especially wanted to know that. Because I was so confused after the rural upbringing that I had (All of this is said with a great deal of emotion, and slow and deliberate speech.) All of the strong faith of my mother and my father and the only uh. Well now, I don't know if you want to go into depth into this right now, or not. But that pertains as to why I am trying to get this together and why this was important to me. Well, I wanted to know, what was of value to teach my children (high tone)! I'd realized you know as they had left babyhood and started reading voraciously everything and anything that there were certain values that I should make explicit, not just expect them to pick it up. But to teach them, and I did not know what my own values were. I was going back and forth between what is so and what isn't (laughter). And I did not have time to find out in those early years. And not until, actually, two of them had graduated and other one was way up there, did I really have a time to try to sort out what I believed and how I felt. And uh, of course, it was too late and they were already grown. *But then they would have children and*

*so I went at it, and it was very, very absorbing* (emphasis added). That was the one thing I wanted to do above all others, learn all of this and put it together. And the thing about it is, my, ideas keep changing, but, uh.

Similarly, Robert discusses what enjoyment he had in the culmination of one of his learning projects because all of his family participated.

All of our family and all of the connecting family which was real big because there was 14 kids in one family and nine in another. And they spread out over everywhere...That was a great big family and they all gathered there plus any interested people, it was always publicized in the paper...Well, it made me kind of proud to present something in his memory, cause like I said yesterday in a lot of places it is kind of tainted...for as they, like they were dedicated people doing what they thought was right...so, it was good to meet him, and to present something good about it...

### *Health.*

The most pervasive topic of discussion with each participant and in each interview was the topic of health. Robert's wife discussed the importance of using your mind. "...From the standpoint of keeping your mind active, I believe that if you quit using it, altogether it's going to be just like anything else, you won't have as good use of it as you should have." I asked what other things she is doing to remain healthy?

Oh, exercise!...I am doing aerobics twice a week, and then walk in-between times...on Monday's and Fridays we go out to the Retreat...or I do, and uh, and [a lady] teaches the aerobics 30 minutes, and uh, then in between I walk, like 30 minutes...The two aerobics classes...Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, I walk 30

minutes. I walk out near the hospital; we usually go in to [town]. The reason I used to do that, we used to walk on the dirt road, but the mosquitoes, and we walked more then, than we do now, we walked like two miles. Now I just do a mile...I started having a problem, a sciatic nerve problem...Yes, doctor told me to cut back on it. Exercise brings more oxygen to your brain (emphasis), keeps it functioning.

Robert talked about his health.

Well, I had a bit of a heart problem in 92, and had angioplasty. He told us to walk two miles in less than 40 minutes, and we usually did it for 38 minutes...everyday...And then she started having the sciatic nerve problem. And we felt like the slant of the grade in the road was maybe contributing to that, but anyway, we got away from that. And uh, I feel like now, that pushing a mower, and seeing after the lawn, and trash and everything else, that, I really get enough physical exercise. [Robert's wife]. We went to line dancing class, and that was on Tuesday nights. And I talked him into going and, he said, "I am not going back to that, that is not my thing, I just don't like line dancing." But that is good exercise too. It takes me, like cleaning house; it takes me longer to do that. But I can tell that I Just don't have that energy, I used to have. Have to do, work so long and then go back and start again (very quiet).

Norman discusses his health. His rather pessimistic tone sets the standard for the way most older adults view their health and aging. "And uh, I, uh, last couple of years I did a little mentoring work at school, but, uh, I have difficulty with a lot of children. So I gave that up. Hearing, their voices just don't carry, I can't uh, completely correspond

with them. Cause the hearing aids just don't get it there." He discusses how hearing problems can limit one's social world and the loss of agility.

I used to enter a model contest rather regularly when I was younger. As I have gotten older I, it doesn't show very much, but it shows enough that my tremors, that I can't, it takes me a lot longer. And sometimes it is frustrating because I cannot fit it right where I want it to be without shifting it around, but in earlier years I entered a lot of contests. Model contests, and I won a lot of ribbons. He made one statement that each participant said in various ways. "Well, the problem with me is that (laughter) my memory loss (laughter), lot of it gets away from me. Can't recall it (tone changes)."

I asked Norman about exercise to see if this was of an interest for him.

I, I, I, probably don't exercise as much as I should. But I take most of mine out in walking. Uh, when I go to, well, the grocery store, I park in the longest part of the parking lot to walk. Uh, if I go, well, to Wal Mart, uh, I part about as far away, as, uh, the parking lot is and walk to and from. And sometimes, I, I, realize that, you may not, walk fast enough, to really get your heart all revved up there. But, uh, condition of my heart would not allow me to get all revved up there. Because you start getting angina there and it will take care of itself. And so, uh, I do a good bit of my walking in that fashion, which I, uh, realize is not the best kind of exercise, but there again, it is better than none at all.

Betty discusses her health. First, she talks about the impact of not remembering as well as you used to.

When you get as old as I am, that, as everybody knows the remembering doesn't happen. You forget, you learn it and then tomorrow you won't know it. So that slows down, slows you down. So the earlier older people can begin to use the computer and get processes automatic, the better it is. But, they, my sister, Frieda, uh, had always wanted a computer, and she had never, it had never been available to her until she was nearly 80. Well, she got that computer and she took off and she is enjoying it (laughter). She is frustrated over and over and over, and it is hard, but uh, she emails everybody that she wants to. And she uses it, this that and the other, she has bought a scanner and is into doing pictures.

Betty discusses a specific degenerative disorder she has.

Well, it is a limitation. Because you are limited physically in what you can actually do and there is much fatigue that goes along with it. And what, that is a disorder in which a person's immune system uh, the, antibodies which are produced to attack a disease. The body perceives, they don't attack the diseased cells, they attack the body itself. And that is what an autoimmune disease is. And all rheumatic diseases are, autoimmune diseases. And that is uh, has been hard. Actually, uh, because it, limits me so physically that I don't get things done. And uh, it being tired and having to make yourself do something. It takes ten times as long to do it, as when you say 'oh let me get into this', when you have the zest and the energy. So that makes a great big difference. The physical things, and you can't find, there are very few people like your mother that know, knew how to manage her health, and plan and do and will power to stick with it. Ride two miles on a bicycle a day, there are very few.

During the interview with Sue I asked her what was motivating her to learn. She said, “Good health! Good health and activity. Or, more strengthened in getting myself back on track. For four months, I have lost a lot of strength. Because there were so many things I couldn’t do. But it’s coming back.” Sue also described what it was to live with an illness.

Well, I had difficulties trying to live (laughter)! I am a cancer survivor. Just after my husband died, I found out I had lymphoma. And uh, that was pretty rough, the chemotherapy. Man, it knocks the socks off of you. But I survived it, I was very fortunate, and had to get it every year, the cancer check. And back in 80 I had a case of pneumonia and was in intensive care for a few days. But I was fortunate enough to survive. So I said I am living on borrowed time, I appreciate it. But uh, as far as learning is concerned, there is always something to learn.

She continues these thoughts with a description of being an older adult.

Well, like I said, people are awfully nice, I got lovely neighbors. I am irritated at being slowed up. I have noticed at times seems to go much faster. And uh, start the day, and before it’s well started its noon time (laughter), and before I get done what I want to do its nighttime. Time goes awful fast, when you are young it seems like Christmas is years and years away. I said, Christmas, I better start thinking about Christmas cards already. (Laughter) It will be here before I know it...Because you are moving slower; I decided that is what it is. You don’t walk as fast. Cause I use to practically run. Well, I am afraid to run now, because that is how I fell and hurt my back, I said no more running. I have to go cautiously. And my balance isn’t real good. I have some handicaps, being slowed up. Outside of

being slowed up, and I don't have the strength I used to have physically it is irritating. Physically I am doing pretty well for my age. A lot of my patients, when I was at the nursing home were 10 years younger than I. They were in their 70's and I was in my early 80's at that time. They uh... Well, just I don't have the strength I used to have. My hearing is not as good. I am slowed a little bit but you compensate for it. Be glad for what you got. Hope that you keep that much.

Bill discusses life as an older adult.

B – Thinking, thinking. You can't think as well. You cannot uh, do the things you used to do with your family. Because the things you used to do for your family. You can't think well enough, times roll ahead, that you can see as you could. You see the mistakes but you can't correct them. D – How do you know you are not thinking as well? B – How can I tell? Well, answer right now. I got two walking sticks. That is a cane. Sometime you can put it at the door. Cause you are putting it where you know it's at. I just missed this door and put it another place, and you will forget where it is at. Or you can go to the refrigerator and get something, and somebody call you on the telephone or somebody speak to you, before you can take care of this here, and get back before what you started to do, you done forgot what you are supposed to do. That is where you can tell you are slipping. A man 35-40 years old, this here is old service strategy now, a man got 35-40 years old, the service today, you is in there, they will maintain with you, but if you try to get there at that age, they don't need you cause you don't think well enough to be there. D – What about other physical changes, you mentioned about your kidneys and all. What other, like, do you have any other specific, do you have, what does



the doctor say you have that is not right? B – Prostate cancer, high blood pressure, all right. Not a diabetic. All right now, high blood pressure, it’s a colon cancer, prostate cancer comes down through your penis in the bladder, colon cancer work through your rectum. D – You have colon cancer too? B – No. You can have mental problems, mental problems do with your thinking, so if you have a mental condition. Now if you take. Use me as an example. I am a classified as a hypertension person. Hypertension person easily get mad. Can’t think well, if you get rattled in a conversation. You get him upset quick and he can’t think what he is doing. He is not responsible for what he is doing. That is what you call a mental condition. D – And you think you have this? B – That is how they classify me. Hypertension...D – How do you feel about having those things? B – I am not upset about it, cause I realize the older a person get the weaker he get. He less farmos. D – Farmos? B – Yeah that means he can’t do things like he used to. (I am not sure if I am misunderstanding him, or not hearing him well, everyone once in a while he will use a word like this that I totally miss, so this one I decided to ask him what it is.) I used to get out and walk downtown. And come back, I can’t do that any more. All right, I used to go to work all day. If I feel like going out at night, still passing that, I’d be ready to go to work in the morning, I can’t do that anymore, I got to have more rest, and less performance. D – Performance? (Ah, that is the word – farmos!!!). B - *That means that activity whatever you are doing, you can’t do as much of that as you used to do* [emphasis added]. Then some people hold up better than other people. They tell you “All men is created equal.” Yeah, you got five cents its true, but some people can handle theirs better than

others. Just like, some people can manage their business better than others. D – Do you feel like people look at you differently that you are an older man? B – Yeah. D – Can you tell me a story about that? B – Well, the reason they look at you different, because, I can't tell you them scripture in the Bible, that is probably based I believe on, your Bible, history, I think Job say, by me not getting enough schooling I can't get them scripture and them numbers where they are found at... *But at the same time, I realize that the older a person get the weaker he get* [emphasis added]. That is what make me be able - to protect, I am slipping. (I am wondering, is he saying he is slipping - now, or just talking about it?) When I say I am slipping, I can't think as well. I can't do as much as I used to do, far as, you got failure in sex activity, that is something you can't help. You got failure in sleeping, older a man get the less he sleep. He will sleep, go to sleep quicker, but he won't sleep as long. And if he wakes up, it take him longer to go back to sleep than it used to. D – What do you do in those times? B – What I do? Just lay down and stay quiet for a few minutes and you will go on back to sleep. You don't get up and go, and come back and go to sleep, it wouldn't bother you (reference to when you were younger you may wake up and go do something), but now you can't do that. Because if you get up and go, and don't get your proper rest, that is your trouble that is the advice your doctor give you about this cancer situation. You got to have more rest. And relaxing. You say if you lay down at twelve o'clock, or four o'clock, if you can get 10 or 15 minutes sleep.

Bill was quite candid about the changes and of being an older adult.

Well, it's good! I think, to be old man. *But it's a lot of inconvenient to be an old man* [emphasis added]. Now what I am fixing to tell you, I have problems getting by, not getting by, getting about. As far as living, than I used to, but my health is going bad on me. Have to get up regular at night for urination, uh, I get to the point now, when I feel that water need to go, if I don't get to the place right there, it's going to seep on you anyway. You get wet, and there is nothing you can do about it. All right now, you can't control it; the muscle in your body...that is what controls your bowel movement your urination is your muscle. I can't tell if the muscle gets weak or they get stiffer, you can't control, but that is what happens when you can't control yourself. So when the time comes you got to get someplace or another. You may not be in the right place, but if you don't, you either get your b.m. gonna come. It aint like it was when you were a younger man, you could go maybe five or six hours, but now you can't do that. So that is what, the reason I say, is inconvenient, because of that. *And I have learned that you have got to adjust to your own condition. I learned that* [emphasis added].

Some of the participants discussed that they do not feel any different now, than when they were younger. Hattie stated the following:

Well, you know, it is not too much different (laughter). Because I am doing about the same thing that I was doing when I was younger. Uh, my health is good, and so, the same thing I was doing 10 or 12 years ago I am still doing it. I am not a person that lives in the doctor's office; I don't do that, so I just keep my appointments. Like my physicals and so forth, and ... Well, right now, to me, I can get out there and do just about what I did then... Uh huh, cause I don't have no

problems. And just like I told you, I have my physical every year I do as I am supposed to do and I think when you go and keep up with your doctor's appointments and stay on top you don't have. And I tell you another thing; I takes my vitamins every day. I take uh... Well, yes because I read a lot, like I was telling you yesterday. I read a lots, *and it tells as you get older, your body do not function like it used to* [emphasis added]. Because you are not getting like, just like for instance, I probably used to eat three meals a day. But when you get older like to me you just don't want to eat too much. And, but I do, I try to make myself eat. And a lot of that, I probably don't eat as much as I did then. That is why I take my vitamins. Well,...my doctor in Valdosta, and he told the lady that worked with me, he said, "Thelma is such a healthy (with emphasis) woman." And this lady told him, well she do double the work we do on the job...(more about this doctor, what he says about her, and vitamins)... *Well, you just keep up with, you know, how life change. And what you are supposed to do is to keep yourself going. And I kind of stay within that* [emphasis added]. And I also read that now, to take a vitamin E tablet and that will keep you from having heart attack, and that is another thing I take every day, every day... Well, a lot of that came from my health book. Uh huh, and you know how you can pick up health books, and then I get some of that through mail. Just like now, where I get my medicine, vitamins, from, I get a little book like that every month or something. And it tell you, what different vitamins are for.

One of the changes that many older adults make is to begin to take a lot of medicine. Dora describes this.

I have never been to an arthritis doctor. As such, like a clinic. But I take (some medicine) now that is supposed to be. Now two months ago, I believe, in “Readers Digest” there was an article on the fact finding, that the doctors, research people have done on that. And how they have proven that this is something that helps, it is slow, and it is not something that happens overnight. And uh, so I have been taking that for about two or three years. And it’s not expensive and it’s something you just do. I take two a day, and I feel like it helps. And I take Celebrex, right now, I have taken Vioxx too.

She also describes what it is like to live with mild discomfort and pain.

No, it [pain from arthritis] bothers me, but you just go on, you don’t pay any attention to it (laughter)... You know what, if I was not doing that, if I didn’t do what I do, and I sat down and come in and sit down like this all the evening, when I come in from work and when I go to bed or till I go to sleep, I would be, I am so stiff. And sore when I am in and sit down for a while. It is hard to get going. So, I just, just as long as I can push and go like this. I might as well.

She also describes one of the most common physician changes in older adults, that of hearing and of sight.

No, my hearing is not good, and my eyes are not as good as I would like for them to be. I just got my glasses changed and I thought, figured, when I went this time, he would say, well, you know, we need to do these cataracts or something, but he said, little change but not much. So, I said, okay. [Similar to other participants she would carry on a conversation with me and with the other people that she was describing.]

And she stated probably the most common statement that I heard. That the main change for older adults is that everything just slows down.

*Well, you begin to slow down* [emphasis added]. And you realize you are not physically, able to do what you been, even a few years ago. And I will give you an example. After [my husband] first died; now he has been gone 14 years, and I was not working at the nursing home. I could get out there and work all day long. I mean all day! I might come in the house and eat lunch at three o'clock... Sometime I would come in and take me a bath and eat and go back out! I mean that was refreshing see. And uh, but I can't do it now. *The body slows down, it just can't hold out* [emphasis added]... Well, not really, any that would be significant. Just, just the body is slowing down. And it's the durability of it is not there. You just have to give into them. That is what I am saying, you can't. Like on the weekend, when I am home all the day. Used to, I might get up, and go out at eight o'clock and work all day. But I am usually in; come in about twelve or one o'clock whatever time I come. And I might stay in till three or four. So there is that, but otherwise, I eat and was right back out, *but I can't do it now* [emphasis added].

Wilbur discusses how decisions he made earlier about various health habits have paid off for him today.

I tell you another thing I never taken no liquor, no beer, no wine...I never did want to smoke, and I told you I wouldn't drink liquor because he [he is describing someone he saw in a bar] couldn't find his mouth [vividly showing how the man was putting the bottle all over his face]. He done got one too many...I never

played any of that [the lottery]. Well, if I don't put my money in the bank, I will spend it. I just never wanted to play that...I have one credit card and I have that for the simple reason, I go to a lot of meetings. And I things like that, I put my motel on it. And it varies so that, I don't spend any more...but when I go to meetings...I have this card in here and I don't have to bother with money.... And we try not to throw nothing away, because we try to live just like we are supposed to live.

I also asked Wilbur about his current activities, and what he is doing to keep healthy.

Well, I figure when I get out there and work every day I exercise (laughter). My job requires it all the time. I feel like I get enough exercise out there...Well, right now, I am on a low fat diet because of blood pressure. (Some discussion about this, the doctor told him.)... D - Have you read anything about that or are you just taking his word for it? W - No we read about it, we keep up with it. We read about it, and well, she is the boss (laughing). Cause, I will say, look here when I try to get by without taking one every now and then...V – No, he has a cataroid artery problem too. And that is the big reason for the low fat diet, you can't have a, the fat in the food. D – How did yall learn about that? Did you read some things about it? V – Oh yes, in other words, cholesterol, hypertension, uh, any type of artery, or heart trouble. You are given literature by the doctor, and then a lot of your medication come with a lot of literature, *so we study all of this stuff* [emphasis added]. But this, is what, uh I have, went to college, and a certificate from the University of Florida in food services. So this is a big help. So I have to

see to it, if I want him around, I have to see to it, that he, you know. D – How did you change your, uh, the way you would fix food? V – Well, beforehand I never have used anything like, if you ever been around any older people that love to eat, use the word lard, comes from the pig himself. I never did prepare food with that, but I would use just something as long as it was oil I would use it. But then after he came down with this problem, I started studying more. You know with the labels on the bottles of oil, and using a lot of olive oil instead of just regular cooking oil...But I prefer the olive oil. So I use a lot of food preparation with that. I try to see to it, that he has his fruit, he eats a lot of fruit and vegetables right all along. J – I will skip on that medicine every once in a while (laughing) and boy she will jack me up pretty strong about that! V – And this is what has kept him going, and he hasn't been ill in about three years. He had a pretty bad bout, when they really thought he had had a TIA, but that it was discovered that he hadn't. But see he have, once you have cataroid artery trouble, either you get surgery which he never have, or you do it with the diet. And you know, the instructions from your doctor, whomever. So, he has gotten along real well. He hasn't no more than maybe two or three times a year, to let them do blood work on him, other than that he hasn't been ill. And to be 75 years old and to be able to work. And do the other things that he do, I still say he is fairly healthy. I still say he is relatively healthy. Far as having any kind of serious disease of any kind, he has never known anything like that. [He interrupts] Wait honey, in fact, he hasn't been sick in our 47 years of marriage. Other than, uh, I believe it was...he had a



hemorrhoid, in the late 50's, and he hadn't never been sick until in the 90's. . I would still have to say he is what you would term a fairly healthy person.

Clarence discusses the changes that have taken place in his health. "Here, mostly inside the house in hot weather. I can't take the heat anymore like I used to. Used to it didn't bother me." Another common ailment and change is that of arthritis. "Well everybody has a little bit of arthritis. Uh, you know, a little bit, so, I, can, you can feel it. But it doesn't uh, it doesn't prevent you from going or doing see. But you can feel it...that is the only thing that I know of."

Clarence has done many things to try to improve his health. "Oh I get up, we walk sometime in the afternoon. We do our, walking, and now that it is turned real cool, we will do a lot more walking...Well, in the hot summertime, but when it gets cool we walk three miles." He continues this dialogue with a focus on healthy eating habits.

The first thing is uh, you are what you eat. Your diet over the long haul. You should have a good diet, and leave off so many sweets and fats, I have a weakness for chocolate, so I have to use my will power to...Uh, fruits. I eat an apple, I have eaten a banana every day I know for 30 years, and even when I was a boy I eat bananas. (Laughter) I don't know if that has anything to do with it or not. But it does have food value in it, potassium and different things, and uh, you got to have potassium. So, uh, ...I grow my own vegetables, and uh, for the most part they are free from pesticides, I try to use as little as I can, and uh, and I am never sick. See I never have colds (I am sitting there with one of the worst colds of my life, and feeling horrible!) or anything like that. I have only had one cold since I was in Germany during World War Two. (This is really an amazing statement.)

Many in this generation of depression era co-horts were cigarette smokers. Clarence like most everyone else was a smoker; his decision to quit earlier has probably extended his life.

Well, I smoked until I found out it was, uh, it was unhealthy. In 1955 they came out, "Reader's Digest" came out with an article in it. Scientists had begun to think that smoking affected your cardio-vascular system and was also cause of lung cancer. That was 1955. Well as soon as I read that article I put them down and never touched them. Never had another one in my mouth since 1955. Course I didn't smoke regular. When I was in school I never did smoke then, I smoked a little bit in the service, because it looked like a waste when you could buy a carton of cigarettes for fifty cents. Seemed like a waste, seemed like a waste not to smoke (laughing)! Ten cents a pack! Ten cents a pack (laughing)! Overseas you know. I smoked then, I smoked Camels, and then uh, came home, I never did smoke as much as a pack a day. But in 1955 I quit. How long ago has that been Donny?

Continuing this idea of giving up detrimental habits, he says he limits alcohol. "Not to drink hard liquor at night. Some people they have to have two or three drinks every night, before they eat you know. Well that is all right to start with but when you get up in age it tells on you. Yes sir, it will tell on you."

Thelma discusses how she can no longer do the things that she used to do, especially working in the yard. "I used to, I could work till dark and I would have everything just manicured, but I can't, *I am not physically able to do that anymore* [emphasis added]. But I still like it and I still, like I would love to have cut flowers. I used

to have something blooming all the time.” Also, similar to some of the other participants, this 75-year-old states that she has yet to really be sick. However, she does have high blood pressure. “Well, I don’t know, I have been very fortunate in my life, I have never been sick. And, if I ever, I have high blood pressure....” She feels that the main exercise in her life took place over the years of working in the yard.

Well, I don’t do exercise, daily, as you know. If I work in the yard and stuff like that, and I did go to the gym up here. When they first opened I went for about three months. And then I, you know, something came up, and I had never gotten back. So I think I am going to start again since it is on this side of town. Cause I, cause every morning, well, course you can go any time of the day...Uh huh, just work in the yard, mowing the yard, or the uh, whatever daily walking you have to do, but I have never had one of those. [Her husband] used to walk all the time. He wanted me to walk but I felt like that was the biggest waste of time (laugh). But if I felt like I got my exercise pushing that lawn mower that was okay. And I don’t push it anymore, and I don’t have and I should have, I know that.

*Losses.*

Each participant discussed the losses in their life. Robert discusses how one of the things he misses is the physical agility he felt as a younger man. “Physically, of course there is things that you miss that you could do when you were younger. Uh, in sports, a lot of things that you are just going to miss. Uh, mentally, I, there’s not a big change, in some things, you can be my age, and still feel like about things like you did...”

Norman discussed how he had to give up an important volunteer service.

Because of a loss of hearing. “And uh, I, uh, last couple of years I did a little mentoring work at school, but, uh, I have difficulty with a lot of children. So I gave that up. Hearing, their voices just don’t carry. I can’t uh, completely correspond with them. Cause they hearing aids just don’t get it there.

One of the common aspects of older adults is the continual loss of friends and family. Norman shared with me the advice he gives others when facing a loss.

Well, first of all, that you have to, have to remember that it is an act of God, it is done, you miss them, you loved them, but there is nothing you can do about it!

(First phrases, were emphatic and strong, last one was very high and emotional).

And you, I, I, tell some of these people that I visit at the funeral home, I say, things are all fell apart for you, and the only thing you can do is put back together those pieces that will fit, and carry on. Those that won’t fit, you will have to drop them. Quit trying to live with them. If your spouse is gone, they are gone. You can’t do anything about it. You can’t bring them back. And you just have to make up your mind to carry on as best you can. About the only answer I can give you, your question.

One of the significant losses for older adults is that of their friends and especially their partner. No longer having a social partner is something greatly loss. Thelma describes this. “...Now I will go out and eat by myself. I will go to [a local restaurant], and I will sit back there in the bar area, cause, people come in and out, that I know back there. You can see better back there and all the people that come by speak to you so.”

Betty discusses some of the things that have been lost, important aspects of her life that can never be replaced. They felt they had to leave their carefully designed home. In addition, they have to give up camping and square dancing.

Well being an older adult, it is much worse in, uh, terms of health and not being able to, uh, be agile. And do the things you have been accustomed to doing. We of course had to give up our, we enjoyed square dancing, Fred and I both loved that for many years... We camped with a group that square danced, so we would camp at places with big dances. And people from all over Georgia and other states and we would go down to, uh, where is it, Lakeland, Florida. And that was so much fun, so enjoyable; we had to give that up! Because we couldn't do all that went along with it, and that is the disadvantage of and the bad part of old age. And I think that unless you are in a bridge group, or some group that does this or that together. When you are older you are, become even more isolated than you have been before. Of course that is a draw back in so many cases. But uh, I, we have been so fortunate in that, the second biggest interest in my life was gardening. I have always loved plants and growing things and, trees, and I just loved the wilderness at [our previous home] and to just go out and wander in pure wilderness. And even since we have moved here you see, we have almost have a wilderness right... it was when we got here; it was so overrun you couldn't see anything, it keeps coming down. I am trying to prune and to fit in with places around me, but I am not able to hold out to work physically. Like I used to be, and that is a downer of old age. And of course you lose your hearing you lose your eyesight and uh, loose your interest. A lot of times... we don't even, and we would

go on trips, and on a lot trips that didn't have anything to do with camping or square dancing and we don't now. [My husband] has, he, he, can't drive out of town any more. His responses are so slow that he mustn't drive in traffic. And he always did all of the driving and I have taken that over. And it hurts him when he goes on a trip when he knows he can do it better than I can (laughter). So, uh, we don't go. And also, my health got so bad that it was hard to drive even 60 miles and, I'd be so exhausted. *So our trips have been cut out, and there is nothing that replaces that* [emphasis added].

Sue discusses the vulnerability to accidents when someone becomes older. She had to recently wear a body cast for four months. This not only was an inconvenience but it was also a difficulty.

March third, it was, see I have a gas heater, and I haven't checked mine. It is just outside, and I hadn't checked it. I said, they are warning us we are going to have a real bad cold that night, and so I said I better go around and check for. And it was already kind of grown up, so I hustled around caught my foot in the vine and I went down hard. Cause I was walking fast. And I hit in a twist, it hurt. I was able to get up, got back in the house. Fed the babies [her animals] that night somehow, and uh, so it was a whole month, before they realized. After about month I was on pain pills every four hours. I was...I told the doctor I am getting worse, I am not getting better... He had a young man and his wife come out and measure me for the brace, and fit me with the brace; the pain was immediately, I should say under control. In two weeks I weaned myself off of the pain pills completely. I still have some back pain, but. He said don't be too fast, and went, he took the brace off. He

said don't try to get back into full activities too soon. So I have been trying to ease into it, and I notice if I try to get too frisky my back starts hurting. It is not anything to lightly shove off.

Hattie discusses how as she has become older she has lost the ability to function as she normally did.

Well, yes, because I read a lot, like I was telling you yesterday. I read a lots, and it tells as you get older, your body do not function like it used to. Because you are not getting like, just like for instance, I probably used to eat three meals a day. But when you get older like to me you just don't want to eat too much. And, but I do, I try to make myself eat. And a lot of that, I probably don't eat as much as I did then. That is why I take my vitamins.

Similarly, Thelma discussed how she could no longer push the lawn mower. This was something she had done all of her life, an enjoyable activity, but one she had to give up. Dora also discusses, like Thelma, she can no longer work as much, or as long as she used to. This loss of time in the yard is actually the result of a loss of physical strength and durability of the body.

Well, not really, any that would be significant. Just, just the body is slowing down. And it's the durability of it is not there...you just have to give into them. That is what I am saying, you can't, like on the weekend, when I am home all the day. Used to, I might get up, and go out at eight o'clock and work all day, but I am usually in, come in about twelve or one o'clock whatever time I come, and I might stay in till three or four. So there is that, but otherwise, I eat and was right back out, but I can't do it now.

Dora discusses the loss of a future. Somehow for the older adult, who is 80, they know that there is a definite limit to their life. Perhaps though they will live for 5 more years, but they know they will not live for 25 more years. This loss of future and other things associated with one's future is an important consideration.

Now, I will tell you something I said; now I got two great grandchildren. One's a little girl and one's a little boy. And the little girl is three, and I am 80 years old. And I said, one day I said, well, You know it bothers me, and it makes me sad, I won't get to see her be a teenager. And things like that, if you let it play on your mind, it would be depressing and it would upset you, but you have to live for the moment. And enjoy exactly what you got right now.

All of the participants have been married and half have been widowed. This is certainly a large loss that can hardly be described. Many of these participants discuss the difficulty of this time, yet they seem to be psychologically healthy.

Norman was sitting in the chair facing the tape recorder. He was in front of a window; I could see tall Georgia pine trees outlining the blue sky. Looking straight ahead and hardly moving he talked with dignity and meaning about his wife.

Well, I don't think, if you don't have a computer, or you are not going to get a computer, I don't see the point in taking classes. I do know one couple here and they can afford a computer, uh, who have taken classes who use the library all the time. But of course it is a man and wife. *For me there is nobody here* [emphasis added]. Uh, and I am not going to sit around and procrastinate what may happen or how I feel and uh, get sorry for myself, I don't intend to do that.

He continues with this thought of being widowed and being alone.



Well, I guess for me it is uh, it is one of those things, like I said a while ago, that keeps me from sitting around here and wondering what is going to happen next, what may befall me there, there is nobody here to talk to. And uh, of course I have the best of the, uh, reproduction system on my computer, and I listen to uh, uh, uh, a lot of discs while I am working with the computer.

Sue was very happy in her second marriage; they had lived together 20 years and had one child. She moved to south Georgia because of him and now she is here to stay. Since he died she described her life as a “lonely freedom.” Similar to other participants, this seems to be a loss that stays with the person. This man has been dead for 10 years. She describes what it is like with this loss:

It is awfully lonesome. Evening comes on and you are sitting here and you hear a sound and for a second you are thinking, he moved the chair...Hard to realize that he is gone. You know. He may be watching over me. I sort of feel that. But, in the flesh no, ...And it's awfully lonesome, it's an adjustment. I say, well, look at all the things I do have; everywhere I look at things he started. I'm fortunate that I have my home, got paid for. I think eventually, if my eldest daughter, if her husband dies (she had said before her daughter's husband is alcoholic and she thinks he is about to die) she is going to sell that place in Miami...She likes it up here, with her own mobile home, I got a spot picked out here...on the front corner. She can put it on the front corner...I like to always be out, I always wanted plenty of room for trees...I got a lot of trees planted here...everything is so grown up now, I am going to have to get in there and make a little circle around everything [this is to help the plant grow].

Bill has been widowed since his wife died in 1986. It was obvious his home no longer had his wife's touch. In fact he has even moved into a smaller home. He gave the previous home to his son. Although he is a happy and positive man, he described to me, what it is like to be without her.

It's been quite difficult, quite difficult. I adjust to it, and I am still working on it...What do I miss? Housekeeping, advice, how to manage my little money. I had help to do that, so after her leaving, me and the children was able to communicate we got along. We did everything on an agreeable basis, we didn't have no differences. So, it worked out good. And I don't' think I will ever marry anybody else.

Dora has been widowed for fourteen years. She is a busy woman, active in the community, and has a very positive attitude. Our conversation turned to her husband.

Well, I guess, I really don't know how to explain it. It's, it's, because it's [takes a deep breath] I think I have used a way of life expression too much. But it is, and it is just my life and just me alone. And uh, you make yourself satisfied with it. You don't let the emptiness bother you. And you talk about me going out in the yard. And people saying, "You know I go in the house, at five o'clock and we have supper and all this." And I say, "*There is nothing in the house to go in the house for!*" *There is nobody there to talk to!* [emphasis added]. Might as well be outside listening to the birds! So...Oh, it was a long hard, uh, process of grief and being alone. And uh, letting your heart heal where things didn't make you sad. You know somebody saying something to you or going to a funeral or uh, things like that....Well, you just have to, uh, trust in the Lord, and let, let Him be your

healing power, it's just a process, that's a feeling. You can't, it's not something that you can doctor nor a medicine you can take or anything. It's just a healing process that takes time and some people takes longer than others. I wouldn't uh; I guess working at the nursing home was the best medicine for me. For the simple reason, that I have seen so many people down there, that have not been able to, walk, and do things like that, and after [he] was, died...[my doctor] talked to me, and he said, well Dora, he said, you know if [he] had lived he would never have been able to do anything. Because it was so severe, you know, he uh.... And uh, but I just couldn't, it took me a while to accept that fact. Until I started working at the nursing home, and uh, I could see all these people and, and then, I was able to say, "Thank you Lord." You know there is a Scripture in all things give Thanks! And it took me a long time to accept that. But I can, because, his eyes were bad already. He had that macular degeneration. And then he...He would have been 65 in July, died in March.... He got since in March, and died March 22. But uh, we had already talked about dropping his insurance because it was so expensive. It had gone up, they allowed him to keep his, hospitalization when he left the [gas] station...They allowed him to, to keep it, but he had to pay it. Like it had been in the business. And just that month that he got sick, it went up. And we had already talked about dropping it, and just taking the chance from then to July, when he would be 65 where he would go on Medicare...But that month that he got sick, when it came due, he looked at me and said – You better go pay it. That was about a Tuesday, I think he was in the hospital and he died the next Tuesday. So, I did go pay it, and it was the Lord's blessing, because it paid it, everything.

(Silence, I am wishing she would go a little deeper, and share a few more personal issues...but she is quiet....)

Earlier in the conversation Dora discussed that living alone was perhaps the motivation for her many activities. “Well, it’s just uh, you need to be with people. And, see I am alone out here at night, and, and, then I look forward to Sunday morning, getting up and going to Sunday School and Church, Sunday night, and Wednesday night I go. And that is my contact with people that mean a lots to me – Christian people, my church family.”

Two of the participants talked about being caregivers, Sue and Thelma; also Clarence is currently a caregiver for his wife. This difficult role represents a loss of freedom, time, as well as the person you are taking care of. For Thelma it seemed to be a difficult task.

Of course I slept down here on the couch and he had to have a light burning all the time for six months while he was, uh sick. And we had a hospital bed in here. But he didn’t want me to leave the room to go upstairs, and he had the preachers out here one day. And he was having prayer, but instead of having prayer just for prayer, he was telling the preachers all of my shortcomings...And I thought, gosh bum! (Loud). And he said, well he is going to have the one from camp Tygart and our preacher and stuff. And I said, well you can have them out here tomorrow if you want to. Or whenever you would like to, you just invite, but I said, my presence will not be here. I think that is awful...Well, he was able to get up in a wheelchair, but he was not confined in the bed all the time. He was confined in the house. And here I would take him to ride every afternoon and stuff, and you know, the caregiver has, you know, I don’t know. And my children came and

relieved me. [One daughter] came and stayed a lot and then [another daughter] came, so it was not that I was confined here in this room all day long.

Clarence was discussing some of the difficulty of becoming caregiver with his wife in the early stages of Alzheimer's. "Yeah! The house, I can't keep it up and do everything else."

C – Well, main thing I do, I pray that the Lord will give me the strength you know. To stay in it for the long haul you know. To look after her, to give me the health. And right attitude and patience, that is the number one thing, is patience. Give me the patience to look after her, and so far, I have made it good. Do it good. D – Well, how would you describe [her] now? What would you say about her, how her situation is. C – She, no way she could live by herself, uh, she just couldn't function, uh...D – I mean when I have a conversation with her, it is like it is almost saying, old times. C – She puts on a good front...D – Yeah, but I can't tell uh, what, uh, I can't see it, but I don't know what are the obvious signs to you or what do you think is going on with her, have you read anything or looked up anything...C - Oh yeah, I get Alzheimer's bulletin every week. And uh, she is just gradually going, see I can tell it, last two months she has really, she can't remember anything. Not anything. See every morning, she will ask me 50 times a day what day it is (He goes into the kitchen and gets a small bulletin board where he writes on it the date, then erases it the next day.) So I got this out there, and I fix it every morning for her...Well of course she was diagnosed two or three years ago...C – Well, they say the only way you can do it is by uh, eliminating everything else. But uh, the doctors, they have been studying it so much now, that

they can tell. That it is not just plain dementia it is uh, Alzheimer's. Where your brain gets all clogged up (Soft laughter). I wish I could find something, because I have been given, Arasap, is a, one of the two pills that are supposed to be good for the memory. And I have been giving her that three or four years. And she has done good, because she started before [her friend] did. That repeating and asking phase. She started before [her friend] did [and she has been dead for two years]. But she walks, that is one of the best things for it is walking and exercising. And she loves me, ooh, she loves me. (Laughter) She just overdoes it, she just, "What can I do for you", all the time. "You want a glass of water?" "You want a fruit juice?" And that is all day long. I'll be gone see, I might be gone for an hour and she thinks, when I come in, that I have been gone for half a day. It's things like that see. (Laughter – a real soft and polite laughter). Yeah, but we are making it. D – That is a lot on you Clarence, that is a lot on you. C – Yeah, but I would be so lonesome without her. You know (laughter).

*Attitude.*

Each of the participants expressed a positive attitude. They all seemed to enjoy their lives. For example I was asking Norman about being an older adult, he said, "Well, that depends on your health, and of course, uh, aging process, that works more on some people as they get older than others. Uh, uh, you have to kind of keep a positive attitude. And, uh, not let some things kind of get you down, so to speak." This realistic perspective allows for difficulty and the challenge of being positive, or keeping a good attitude. Yet the participants also spoke of depression and the difficulties of aging. Some shared some very difficult topics such as becoming widowed or losing one's children.

Sue, who at the age of 84 took a class and went back to work as a nurse assistant is an example of this contagious optimism.

Well, I saw it advertised, as an opportunity. I said well, I can work part time. And then, I was fast enough for them, and so they, I worked most of the year. They didn't fire me. They didn't let me go. They just quit scheduling me. In other words that way, I went into private duty nursing. And I was, I worked at the [assisted living house] quite a bit.

Most of the participants are looking for opportunities to learn more about the activities they are interested in. Sue discussed how she is never bored, and if she is "stuck" somewhere she is looking for something to do.

And like I said, I am never bored, cause I got so many things. If I am stuck somewhere that I have, if I go to a doctor's office there will be something to read. I will look up, there will be a "Southern Life" or something like that. Always something to read. If I have to wait an hour or two. And sometimes I borrow the magazines to take home with me to finish the story that I was reading. But I if am absolutely stuck, and there is nothing to do, nothing at all to read, there is nothing, just stuck, why then I can think back and remember poetry I used to like. Think back on some picture in the keys or something like that.

Sue's enjoyment of life is also evident in small things such as talking to her car. Outside her home there is a 1960 Volkswagen Van.

But I said sitting there, I think she ought to have a grease job, and oil change, and he said that is a good idea. So I took my key out, and I said "Lady" – I talk to her. Her name is Mazy, cause she is maize colored. And I said well ole mazy, I said,

you going to run for me? As usually I put my foot on the accelerator (goes into how to crank her car! how she got it cranked, drove it to the garage, and waited for it...).

Dora honestly discussed how easy it is to worry. Even though this woman is very positive and has a good attitude, she discusses the aspects of aging that bother her.

And that is my biggest concern, is, right now. In all this time I have been independent and I have made my own decisions. And I have been my own boss, but I cringe to think what will happen. And it just be, [my daughter's] mother in law, lives alone too. And she is not quite as old as I am and [my daughter] called me the other day. And she said...[her mother in law] fell, cranking her lawn mower. Out, taking care of herself, taking care of her yard, was filling her gas tank. On the front lawn, with gas, said she fell. Got overbalanced, with the jug up with the gas in, and fell. On her wrist, and dislocated her shoulder, and...in just a split second...I try to be careful. But, anything can happen, in just a blink of an eye. It worries me, I don't dwell on it, but it worries me. That is what I am just talking about. My independence, it worries me. But I try not to dwell on it. Like, I am almost 80 years old, and I don't see how an 80-year-old lady can ...(laughter).

I asked Dora about the difficulty of aging for her personally:

(Silence) Well, if you dwell on it, it would be depressing. But, if you accept it as a challenge, and a way of life, it's exciting. Because you have been there and done that. I think that most people the age between, the middle, middle now, they have respect for older adults. And that makes you feel good. The respect, not authority, but the uh, the things you have done, they feel like they honor you by uh,



knowing you have done these things and it's okay... Well, uh, you are going to reach a level when you are not needed. And if you reach a level where you can't do these things. Uh, just step aside and let everybody go on. But, so far, I have been able to stay with the mainstream. But I know it's not going to keep lasting; it's not going to keep lasting. And so many people are younger than I am, have difficulties and disabilities... Well, just thank the lord that you are able to do what you can and just look, look forward, look ahead, instead of letting today, say, "Well, you know I won't be able to do that right on."

Wilbur also discusses his views on being an older adult. He seems to have developed a good attitude from his relationship with God, with his community, and with his grandchildren.

But, the Lord have blessed me, for everything to be fixed for everything fall in line with that with that too, the slowness, I mean. Nobody you know worry me about that. A lot of people tell me say, "You need to get somebody to retire don't you?" I said, "What do I want to retire for? I don't want to stop."... And uh, I have had two or three men that stay out here in the county, and if they come by here and don't see my truck (he has told this episode several times) not more than one or two days at least. They will turn around in here and say, "Wilbur, what is wrong with you?" ... They want to know what is wrong; do you need anything from town now? And uh, they will stop themselves, because they know that I am a busy body, I like to stay busy, and she don't like it, but I like to stay busy all the time. And that is what I do, I stay busy. If I am around here, I am, I am messing with the flowers (The second day of the interviews when I arrived he was outside

spraying flowers), Uh...I like to do things like that. And...I am thinking about keeping a good attitude and not trying to feel sorry for yourself. That is the worst thing in the world that a person can do is to feel sorry himself or herself. And they get up and get depressed. And I found that out the hard way by getting depressed and I try to keep all the pressure away from me. Because I do have somebody or after I got to say it, to keep that pressure off of me...And I do that pretty regular all the time. I will be sitting down here 11 or 12 o'clock at night studying the Bible. And, it's got to have big letters in it because uh...I enjoy studying the Bible. And one more thing I do, I enjoy my grand youngings. Whenever they come around me I enjoy them.

After the previous interview, Wilbur's wife wrote a statement about his life, about his positive attitude. I asked him to read it. "Oh, okay...the main reason that I keep studying and trying to learn more is that I am trying to leave a legacy for my own children and grandchildren. And anyone else that will take a look at the way that I live and try to pattern themselves after me. This will make me very happy, and make me know that my...." He stopped reading and had a big grin on his face and looked at her and looked at me. She said, "Wilbur, you didn't even finish the statement I wrote!"

One of the most positive people I interviewed was Clarence. He related a recent incident where he was helping another person install some light fixtures. He fell and developed a back problem.

I have been walking; I had a battle with sciatica. The last couple of months, cause I was up working at a persons' house, putting in fluorescent fixtures and bulbs. And I got up on that ladder, I twisted it someway or another. So I have been ailing

about two months. I am well now. I am doing good! [Voice very strong]. So, now I will get back, have been walking 7/10 of a mile last week. Get back in it.

I asked him to tell more about his positive attitude, and how he feels about being an older adult.

C - Well, I tell you, if you got your health, I don't see why it is, I don't feel old, you know. And I don't try, I try not to act old. It is never been a fact that I am old has never bothered me one bit! D - It doesn't bother you to say your age or? C - No, no (loud and laughing!) It's on my tombstone up there! Cemetery, I don't care. No, I am proud to be, I am proud, I have outlived all of my, my uh, grandfather and great grandfathers. And my father and all of the male, men, people in my family going way back. And uh, I think I have lived the longest of any of them, all of my cousins, first cousin are all dead. All of the males. They are all dead.

Clarence's attitude seemed almost unreal; I asked him to explain more. He stated with optimism and hope his thoughts about the future.

Yeah, thinking about what I am going to do tomorrow. And not, just thinking about what I am going to do tomorrow. I like, I have always been that way you know... Yeah, uh huh (voice real high), yeah, something to look forward to, always something to look forward to.

I asked him what was he looking forward to. He started talking about going to a university [his alma mater] football game with his family.

Oh, in the immediate future, you talking about? Or in the next five years? I am going to Georgia-Florida; I am mean Georgia- Auburn Football game. I am

looking forward to that. Yeah (laughing) I am going to be wearing my red sock and black pants, and uh, black jacket, red shirt. I mean black shirt with a red tie (laughter). And I go over there and embarrass [my two sons] (laughter).

During the interviews, we were seated near a window, it had been cloudy; eventually the sun broke through. Clarence looked outside and said, “Uh huh, it’s going to be sunshine the rest of the week. And the high’s in the 72’s and 3’s something like that. It’s a good time to get out there and work. I got to get out there in this yard and trim this shrubbery. And I got a lot to do, I was in court all last week (He is one of the appointed bailiffs for the local court).” This is a busy man, with a lot of activity planned and an affirmative attitude about his life.

Similarly, Thelma discussed her attitude on aging.

You just give out, and I try to know my limitations, cause I know you can, you can over do it. But I guess life in a sense has, uh, I think life is sort of what you make it Donny. Now you can be sad, and you can stay at home. And you know, and I could have done like a lot of other people when they lost their husbands. Just you know, go into a, a shell, but there is not a thing you can do. You can’t make them come back. And you just have to make the best of it. Your mother has done a wonderful job, but I see, some people, I see that uh, [a lady]...Well, she just went into a shell, you know. And, now she and [another lady] live together and they have somebody to live with them. They live around there...Well, ...[they] have one person that stays there with them all the time see. Which is uh, uh a good arrangement...And I don’t know that I, you know, I would hate to say, (laughter) that I have to go live with somebody that...at this age. Well I can go to

bed when I want to and get up and if I wake up at 2 or 3 o'clock in the morning. I can turn on TV and watch TV. And you know and that doesn't work if you have a roommate or somebody. And so, like I said, I think it is a good arrangement, but it is not for me (laughter). Yeah, so as long as I can, you know, and I, sometimes, it, you, just have to make yourself get up and get up and go. And I could lay there on the couch all day and watch TV, but I know that is not the way I want to be...And I do hope that I am able to drive. And even it might not be on a long trip, but anyway, *I think your attitude has a lot to do with it* [emphasis added]...Well, I hope that I can have an attitude, I have always been a happy (high voice) person. And I have always liked to do things for other people. And for my, you know community because I believe that no community is no better than the people in it, you know. If they don't help to make this community then you know you. But you can sit there all day and say oh, so and so and so and so. But you know if you don't get out there, and you know, and help, make your community come true everybody else just passes it by too. But part of your time is due to your community. I mean a percentage of it is due for your place in the community. Cause you can't always just reap the benefits of, of, something.

An important consideration for this sample of ten participants is their religious involvement. The south is traditionally known for a conservative and Christian perspective. This sample talked a lot about their personal faith; each person during the interviews discussed religion.

Robert, Norman, Dora, Hattie, and Wilbur seem to be the most focused on following the traditional Christian perspective of religion. They were very involved in

church, church activities, and in personal devotion and reading of the Bible. It was also obvious that their faith has greatly influenced their attitude. Most of their attitude and thoughts center on ideas from the Bible. Their ideas followed a conservative perspective on Christianity and Protestant.

Betty is a churchgoer, but she is more open to other ideas and philosophies. Sue also a churchgoer, but mainly sees God in nature. And Thelma similarly, is usually every week at church, but her focus of religion is on doing for others. Although Clarence plays the organ for his church, he never really discussed his faith. He was the only non-protestant in this group being Catholic. No one in the sample was outside of the Christian religion. Interestingly Bill, who has been involved in a mortician business for 40 years, never really discussed anything about church or God.

Robert continually referred to his religious beliefs. During the conversation, it became obvious he and his wife devote a lot of time to reading and thinking about the bible. Their faith gives them a reason to live and a reason to continue to learn.

It gives reason to your being a Christian, as far as I am concerned, the Bible does. And it has the way you should live, and how you should live, and the reason for life. As far as I am concerned I don't think that people are just put here for the temporary time that we live and that is all we ever have. Uh, I guess you might say, I believe in the hereafter. And so, uh, *I am studying for a permanent reason, rather than a temporal one* [emphasis added]. That is the way I feel about it. It is obvious, this man's attitude about his life is also influence by what he reads and understands from the Bible.

Norman also discussed his religious activities. When we discussed changes in his life, especially that of being widowed he referred to his views of God. “Well, first of all, that you have to, have to remember that it is an act of God, it is done, you miss them, you loved them, but there is nothing you can do about it!” Similarly, Betty describes her relationship with God as something that keeps her steady in a world that is continually changing. “So I am blessed along that way, and I think that I have come to an understanding of my worldview that serves for me and holds me up. I know, I never had, uh, religious experience like I always thought I would, you know, when I was young. But I have come to know that God is there in everything. And that He is just, the whole world is Him. And I have got that plumb line that keeps me straight in whatever comes up.”

Sue describes her future death as hopefully something like her husband’s passing. But her attitude also is focused on the reality of God. “Well, I was just fortunate. I have been a fortunate person. I still thank the Lord for letting me be here. Be active. When I am not longer active, I hope He will take me up, like my husband. Before he really lost mobility, the Lord took him up. He died right here, in the back bedroom.” Candidly she discussed how she misses her husband and how the Lord works in all of this. “Well, I wouldn’t say enjoy the freedom, when the Lord takes something away from you, He gives you something else. Shut one door, and he’ll open another one, just look for it.” She concludes with a positive note. “You got to look for it. I said well, it’s a lonesome life, I miss him very much, but, the independence I have, I said, if I don’t want to cook meals, I don’t have to cook them. But I do most of my cooking with (laughing) the microwave.”

Similar to other participants, Sue seemed to have a positive attitude. This woman has had some recent difficulty with a four-month cast. I specifically asked her about her upbeat attitude; she related her attitude to her past and her faith in God.

D – How do you get to have a good attitude? S – You are born with it! It is just a case of looking at it. Look I got so much to be thankful for! You can look at the glass, ah, the glass is half empty, or you can say, aha (high tone), the glass is half full! It's all in how you look at it, I think. Now, religion, uh, I am not a real good churchgoer. To me the church is too small. Their outlook is too small. I look at this whole beautiful world. This is God's world. I am deeply religious; you can never use the name of the Lord in vain. When I speak to the Lord, I am hoping he is listening! So I can't use His name lightly. And, uh, when I sit down to eat, my husband, were both children of the depression. And we remember that lots of people all over, his family and my family, both went through the depression fairly well. You know we were never really up against it, we knew people that were. Sue continues to describe how close she sees and feels to God through nature. Well, I guess because I like nature. And to me, nature is manifested; it is God's hand. Its God's footprints. You can, uh, take a little seed, get a little moisture, and it swells and opens and the inside of it is a tiny little tree. Already planned and made. And if you plant it, it will grow. That is some divine planning, believe me! You pull a blade of grass out, a blade of grass, inside it, coiled up, another one getting ready to grow. With mama dogs, I always sit with my mothers when they are going to have their puppies. Cause every once in a while you would save a puppy, that was born a little slow, you could get it breathing. And I, I don't



interfere and I have seen them with the first baby comes, a new mother, “What in the world is this? But I need to clean off its head! Clean off its head. Get it dry. I better get it dry. Better get it dry, better get it dry.” She worries about what you are supposed to do. And when she gets it all dry she cuddles up to them. So who is telling them, who is whispering in her ear. I am just sitting there watching. So that is what you call nature. And it is God’s way of working things. And uh, storms, I like storms; I don’t like it when lighting hits too close. When, have, I jump! And I am a nature girl, and I said well, to me, all nature is God’s handiwork. See it everywhere around us. My favorite hymn is “How Great Thou Art.” And I, now I don’t believe in funerals. I am sort of an odd ball. My husband and I both agree, give our bodies to science.

Hattie’s religious experience also adds substance to her attitude.

All my life I have been in the church. And I am a clerk in my church. And uh, I have been in the church ever since my parents brought me up in church. And I brought my kids up in church. I got children singing in the choir, and I got one sons that is a deacon. And uh, so they was raised up in the church. I was raised up in the church. And I uh, believe in the Lord. And uh, you can not do nothing without Him. Uh uh. And if yous sit down and you want something to happen, you talk to God about it first. And He will show you, He will show you things. And uh, but you got to be able to understand what is going on. Because before my husband died, I am going to give you this little sketch right here. And what really made me, look into this, was an old, my husband used to drink, drink bad.

What is particularly interesting is this last sentence. Although Hattie has been going to church, it took this personal difficulty to cause a dependence on her faith. Hattie had a confident attitude about her life; there is a connection between this faith and her attitude.

Similarly, Dora discusses how God helped her with difficulty.

Well, if you believe what the Lord says, you have to trust Him. And if you know you are a child of His, He is not going to allow anything to happen to you that He doesn't will. No matter whether it is good or bad. But, it's, you just have to really be, grit your teeth and believe. Because sometimes bad things can happen. But, He will - will it, He allows it to happen. And I think that is our, He is trying us, and to see if we truly are real believe, that we do trust Him... Well, lots of people, when something, something bad happens to them, they have a backset. They want to blame God for it. They turn their back on Him and just keep blaming God.

Well, that is not right. Because God has allowed that to happen. But uh, bad things come to good people; I think that is a good expression (laughter). And that is just a part of life, that is the way it happens... I think He is pleased with it, I think God is pleased when you are happy, and you feel like things are going good with you. And it, I feel like it hurts him when you hurt. When something happens and you are sad, I think that God is sad with you. That is the only way your heart can be comforted.

During the second interview with Wilbur, he held his Bible in his hands. I had just videotaped him explaining what the Bible meant to him. He states that God helps him with depression and that the Bible can forecast the future. After the first interview, they

had not discussed religion. I knew that they were a religious family so I asked him about his religious views.

D – Okay, let me ask you this, you are involved, in a lot of different things, uh; I assume you go to church, too. W – You better believe I go to church (smiling real big)! D – Well you haven't said anything about going to church. So yall go to church a lot. You go to, well, okay, tell me about that, what do you do at church? Where you do any learning, are you reading any books, reading the Bible? Or do you sit there and just listen to the.... Wife – At church its, its, uh, D – How do you go about learning spiritual topics? (I could tell I touched on a topic they are both very interested in.) W – You read that bible! D – Okay tell me about that. W – Well, I will sit there and read the Bible even at home. But I am sitting down reading the Bible even at home. But I read that Bible and by reading that Bible because it says study thyself and show thyself approved, and I do that. But the more you study, that Bible there, you will see things happen in the day that's coming right out of that Bible there. I seen something in there this year, this year, and, referred me back to the Bible, and this was particular thing was ...Y2K. Well a lot of people were worried about that. I wouldn't say I didn't prepare for that. But, when Christ was walking around on this earth, people was talking about the end of times...That is what they were doing, they thought the end of times was coming. And some of them were questioning him, they were saying, Master, when will the end come? He said, he told them all right quick. No one know when the end is coming. He told us the things that the signs of the things that we would look to see like earthquakes. And mothers against daughters, daughters against

mothers, Father against sons and all of that stuff. We see a lot of that. That is an everyday thing that we see now. And uh, by doing that, you, you, I have seen, the Bible fulfilled just like the lines in my hand. I have seen a lot of times, and so much of we will never see. D – No just tell me in general, on a weekly basis, how much time will you spend reading the Bible? W – Reading the Bible? Well, depends on what I get tied up in, but I read that Bible (I am intrigued by his choice of word ‘that Bible’). Oh, regular, real regular during the week. Sometime, I don’t get to read but very little of it.

Thelma is more of a traditional churchgoer. Attending church has always been part of her life. Yet, her spiritual focus does not seem to focus so much on Christian tradition, rather she is more interested in how you take care of others. This for her is religion. She refers to how the Lord helps her get out of difficult situations. “I guess the Lord just takes care of you sometime, that is just all I can say.” She mentioned how God has blessed her and that you have to be accountable to God. “I really enjoy people and I think you have to have a, a, I think that you have to have a fear of God. I don’t know that you can go around and (laugh) just do what you want to. And I think God has blessed me in a lot of ways, that you can see.” During a difficult situation with a flat tire, she said, “I just felt like that an angel was just right there. Because I had not even seen a patrol from St. Simons you know over there, and she just kind of appeared. And I think the Lord has ways of, you know, of, of doing things, like that, it’s just, but anyway.” She gave an example that really explains her religions beliefs.

Well, I go, you know, like I said, I go to church. I am not real good at going every Sunday morning. And then I go to Wednesday night suppers. But then the other

day...my neighbor was over there. And she is 78; anyway, she was mowing and picking up things out there at the front gate. And so, I had, uh come to town. I mean I came home and it was about 12 o'clock. And so I came home and fixed her a roast beef sandwich and carried her some water and stuff back over there. And she said, well you don't have to go to church (laughter) on Sunday now that you have done your good deed. Well, I, you know, that is just my nature to do something for somebody else. And I think that spiritually that is what life is all about, is to do things for other people.

*What is the rural dynamic of these older adults?*

*Positive*

Overall these participants expressed a positive outlook of living in this area. Essentially if they were talking about the town, they referred to it as "small town." They never used the word "rural" rather they would say "country." All of the participants except for Sue have lived in this county for most of their lives. Sue lives in a very remote part of the county for 16 years. The overall common attitude is that each person likes living here and many used the word "love" to describe it. Thelma seems to summarize in one statement what many of the participants feel. "Cause you know it was fortunate to live in a small community, because you have access to everything. If I lived in a city, probably I would have never done all of this. Well, one, this you wouldn't have had the space. And too, you wouldn't have the close community here like we have here...." This

feeling of being fortunate, the access to all people, the space, and the close community are ideas that were repeated throughout the interviews.

Clarence seems to be unusually excited about living in this small town. He has lived here all of his life. When we were speaking about life in this town, he was completely positive, from nature, to people, to raising children.

I think it is the greatest place to raise children and the greatest place to live. And you still have days of the automobile, you still have, they have, you can still go to concerts and things like that if you want to. They have the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra coming to Tifton you see. And I try to always go to that. And the Valdosta Arts, we used to have it here. You can do that if you want, you know, you can do that, but the air and water. Our water comes out of the, that is one of our biggest assets in south Georgia, is that Floridian Aquifer, down there and that water comes out... Yeah, and it is pure water. Of course, it goes, down there in the water works, they put fluoride in it, I know that, and I believe they put a little bit of chlorine in it too. But, it's clean, good, good water to me. And the air we breathe! It's fresh, don't have any lines, like this morning I went up and got a haircut and I was back home in 30 minutes from the time I left here... Went to the barbershop and just went in and sat down and the girl started cutting my hair. I come out and I wasn't gone but 30 minutes I don't think. And you can't do that in an urban area. And I don't like to be closed in.

*Quiet and simple atmosphere*

Many participants responded they are glad to live here because it is a quiet place and it is simple. Small towns are known to be quiet, perhaps driving teenagers crazy; it is

also the melody of life for others. Neighborhoods can be so quiet, one can tell who is driving by your house by the sound of the car. With quiet, the noises of nature can also be heard. It was surprising how many participants discussed how they enjoy hearing the birds.

Robert and his wife have lived on this plot of land all of his life. It is 12 miles from the county seat, and there is nothing but trees and field around it. I asked them to describe what it is like to live here.

Mrs. – Oh, you just at, uh, relaxed, relaxed atmosphere. No pressures, and you hear the sounds of the birds singing, and you have the peaceful scenery. Mr. - And course like you said yesterday, I wouldn't mind a mountain to look at (laughter). I can give you a good example of her, when we go to Atlanta, when we get back out to about Jonesboro, she says, "Whew, I am glad I don't live up here!" (Laughter). We like the quiet and the peace, away from the hustle and bustle, and being under tension ever time you get out, and ride a little ways. It's to me, though, its home, it's all I have ever known for any period of time. Mrs. – We like to travel, but we like to come back to our little peaceful abode.

Many of the participants would contrast and compare living in this small town to living in a large town.

Hattie discussed how much she enjoyed living in this small town.

H – Well, I walk. I walk somewhere everyday, just get out and walk. Like go down to visit my children's. Just like instead of driving to visit them, I walk.

Cause see, I got a daughter live down there and my son live over in...over there by the school. D – Tell me what is like to live, in a rural small town, what's it like

for you to live in Nashville? H – I love it here. It’s a small town, and you know everybody, everybody know you, and what I mean, I just like it. I just don’t like a big town. I really don’t...When I can just get up and go, in a big town like this, you got to wonder which way you gonna go to get to that place and all that kind of stuff. *I know this place* [emphasis added]. Cause I have went to Atlanta and stayed with my daughter there...And I been to New York and stayed up there, for two and three months at a time, Jamaica, Long Island. And I always said, that I wouldn’t drive up there, and you don’t never say what you gonna do...D – What did you sense is the big difference in up there than here? (A huge truck just drove by)...H – I just don’t like it. It was just scary to me, because every time you go outside, you got to lock yourself out. Go to the garbage can to take out the garbage, you got to lock the door behind you. Uh uh. And when you get ready to go grocery shopping you got to watch your side, watch your back, uh uh.

This simplicity is evident by seeing familiar objects – people, roads, and landmarks.

Usually everything someone sees is recognizable, if not you can stop and ask somebody.

Thelma explains again why she enjoys living in this small town.

Well, I like living in [this town] because I can go to the store, the store is only five minutes away, or 10 minutes away, if I need something from the store. And if you lived in a city, then you know it might be miles before you can find a “Jiffy Store”, and here we got one on every corner, or a grocery store. But that, you know, and if you lived out in a neighborhood then you don’t have all those stores. I know I go to [my daughter] and you just can’t go to the you know, 10 minutes to find you a loaf of bread or something, you have to travel quite a way to go. So I



like that, and I like the people, and of course some of the people I like and some of them I don't. But that's (laughter), I don't have to like everybody.

She discusses the simplicity of knowing where to go in this town. And if you go somewhere alone there is usually someone there you know. "It really makes me feel great that I can go out there and, and in that atmosphere and everybody knows you and stops at the table and talks to you, and you know, it is a merry time."

*Nature.*

Living in a small town and rural area places the individual closer to nature. Farmland and extensive pine forests surround this rural county. Participants discussed the impact of living in this agrarian area. Interestingly, many participants discussed how much they enjoyed hearing birds singing. During the discussion with Betty, you could see bird feeders, bushes, and shrubs. During the conversation various birds and squirrels interrupted us.

Yeah, we have doves and sparrows and oh several kinds of red birds...But we have a great problem in that our squirrels insist on getting to that bird feeder and somehow they are smarter than we are. Jump right up there all the way over to that! (Discussion about the activity of squirrels). But we enjoy watching them...They will eat and eat from the ground. They will get up there and throw it out and then eat until their hearts content. Then they will go over and get a sip of water.

Sue describes what it is like to live in the country:

Well, you can hear the birds singing in the morning. I don't hear my neighbor's radios. I don't hear their quarrels. I, sometimes, I hear these kids over here.

Whooping and hollering that is fine, unless they are hollering like a pig. Sounds like a scream of pain and my aerials go up. And I listen a little bit, and then somebody calls out...I just like being in the country all this nature around me. Woods back here getting so thick, I am going to put my goats back there, and they will clean it out gradually.

She continues the description of her area and describes the impact of being close to nature.

Well...all nature teaches you! The birds with their little babies and how they faithfully carry through until they are...By the time they are through raising a little nest...And I think there are some hummingbirds...Cause I have some of these ...hibiscus...I see the hummingbirds, they are coming up...Garlic blooms are good for bringing in the hummingbirds...But one of my neighbors used to have cats...And they would catch my birds.

She feels close to nature and even depends on nature. She often gets food from the back yard.

I generally have two eggs every morning for breakfast, because I have nice fresh eggs. I got my own here. And milk, I like milk. I will drink tea, but I got allergic to coffee. Coffee started bothering me, so I drink tea...I can't kill a chicken with it looking at me, I can dress him. But I get somebody else to...Usually we share a chicken. I got good neighbors. Yeah, I get somebody else to.... So I get somebody else to chop! And once they quit fluttering why they are good.... You can see my place is rich soil here. Man it grows, you can see it grow. And I have never bought fertilizer, but, I feed my animals and when I clean the kennels I put that

round the ornamentals. And when I clean the goat pen I can put that round the plants in the garden. But chicken manure has to be, has to be, uh, composted because it is hot it will burn. It's like horse and chicken manure it will burn. So you compost it until you get all that heat out of it. And then it is wonderful food for plants, and man it makes things grow. In fact (laughter) your biggest job is to try to cut them back. This place is overgrown it is a jungle.

Dora describes what it is like for her to live in this rural area. "Wide open spaces, clean air. And uh, get outside, and especially early in the morning. The birds are singing and the air is cool and pure. And it's, it's just, it's just a feeling you can't have anywhere else (laughter)."

Similarly, Thelma describes what it has been like to live in this area. She continually dwells on how she grew up. "Well, I just have always had I guess, I grew up on a farm. And that was just growing things, was just, part of me." She continues these thoughts later in the conversation.

So I have, I think living in a small town, in a rural place, and of course since we, uh, we lived on a farm, we worked on a farm. And we didn't have uh, uh, and of course Daddy never thought about paying us any, ...So anyway that is just the way it was. And of course people didn't make much either you know... You know you pick cotton, but that is something that Daddy never did make us do. Because he didn't pick cotton and he wouldn't make us. But shoot, I couldn't pick 50 pounds a day, and you didn't get but a half a cent a pound (laughter). So, but we picked cucumbers, and I would ride around and look at the cotton. And I thought, gosh, they, I thought how in the world would they have this much cotton...But if

you had to pick all of that by hand, you couldn't afford to pay people anyway. But I just, but, that, and we used to, we called it swapping work, you know if we filled a barn today then tomorrow if your neighbor needed filling a barn then they would come help you and then you would go help them. Of course our barn filling day was on Tuesday see, and you would have different days of the week that you filled the barns cause you used the same help...And then we had a peach orchard. We lived out there on this side of [a lady] in that house...And it had a well on the back porch and a grapevine out there, cause I can remember playing on that grapevine... And of course you had medicine bottles and stuff like that that you used for cars and stuff. And you know and then you used to make spools and you would wind them up with a rubber band and you know they would crawl along. But anyway that, I think it is wonderful to have experienced that...it just makes a difference.

This lady, also known as the "Dogwood Lady" is very familiar with her rural and agrarian surroundings. She has developed a working knowledge of the outdoors. I asked her to show me what plants she uses for decoration.

Well, I like this wax myrtle. Which I have had it all the way around my uh, backyard because in the fall it has a berry, which you do not see. And you...it's, see this out here is wax myrtle, it looks like oak tree leaves. But it forms little berries under there, and you can take those and take the leaves off and it makes a...They are kind of gray looking once they dry, see. And they will last for years, and, I like the eucalyptus tree, of course it is not native, but it grows here. Because you can take it, and cut it, and it doesn't wilt immediately. Like now in the fall, I

can cut it because it doesn't have tender growth on it. And I can just put it in an arrangement. And it would, it wouldn't stay indefinitely but I mean it would last a while and then it is a filler. And then I have the fern growing and it's a filler. So those are what I like. And I like the maple trees, because in the spring they have these, red, I don't know if they are blooms or seeds, I guess they are more or less seeds, so. But anyway, those trees I like...and I don't know, now magnolias are pretty to me, but they are, the leaves to me are hard to arrange. I mean I can't make them stay where I want them to stay.

Dora, Robert, and Sue live on a farm. Dora, Clarence, and Sue are active gardeners. Norman, Betty, Clarence, Bill, Wilbur, and Hattie lived in a neighborhood in the city limits. Yet, even these homes had large lots, views of trees, and fields. Perhaps only Hattie's house seemed to be in an urban and crowded area. Robert, Sue, Betty, Bill, Clarence, Thelma, Dora, and Wilbur have all been gardeners in the past. Only two of the ten participants did not discuss either growing up on a farm or living on a farm during their life, Norman and Hattie.

*People a sense of community.*

Earlier in this discussion, the participants discussed how their neighbors, acquaintances, and friends in this rural area were a source for learning. Going beyond this point, is that these people also form an integral part of the rural way of life. More than just a resource for knowledge, people are part of this dynamic community. Although not as crowded as urban areas, people in rural areas may be closer in other ways. This closeness, this sense of familiarity with others, helps to create as Clarence says, "A great place to live." The participants brought up several topics. They feel closeness and a sense

of community because they know they can get help from one another, they feel close to one another, and you know many people.

One of the main issues concerning people is the notion that help is always available from others. I asked Robert and his wife to describe what it was like to live in this area, and what would they miss if they moved into town.

Mrs. - We would miss all the people in the neighborhood. You are like one big family; here in this community... We all go to the same church right here in this community. Mr. - You have a closer relationship, even though you live further apart. People in the country tend to more or less, bind together. And uh, just, they are a different... You were talking about people in Atlanta; I have heard people say, I don't even know my neighbors next door. So, I think you would miss the close relationships you have with your friends and neighbors, and stuff like that.

D – Can you give me some example of how; tell me some story about that, that would help me understand this relationship. Mrs. – What about when we have sickness in the family, or.... uh... Mr. – In our church, I guess a lot of churches do, before each service we give a invitation for prayer. And in that, they will bring up a certain family that is having problems, and that we need to help in some way, so, nowadays, its changed a lot. It used to, if a man got sick, and he couldn't start his crop, all his neighbors would go in and plow his fields and plant his crops for him. That has changed over the years, somewhat. Now then, like a lot of people, we depend on the monetary side. And it's so easy to take up an offering, and to help 'em out that way. So that is one of the things that have changed over the years. But there is still a desire to help your neighbor, and to help out the people

in the community. I think more so, than there is in the urban areas, because they just don't know as much about each other. As we do, and, it's just a closer relationship, really. (Silence).

Norman feels comfortable in his neighborhood and knows that he can get help if he needs something.

Mostly the people are friendly, and uh, I live in a very nice neighborhood. And I have some neighbors that are really neighbors. And uh, ...Well, they kind of keep up with how I am a doing. And if there is something wrong they would be willing to feel like to help me out. And in fact they have, one time or another (most of his phrases within the sentences start low, and end up on a high tone)...And things like driving me when I had to have some medication uh, like, well, hernia repair. Bring me food, fresh produce, and things like that.

Sue has really living in this area of Georgia. Having grown up in a crowded town in Florida, she is very noticeable of the differences.

Oh, like I told you, if you are going to be old, Georgia is the place to be. Because everybody is so nice. You got into the stores and ...(she said this yesterday). Oh my yes; Florida is...uh, too much like a big city. This is like the open country. You go in the grocery store (I am thinking she is going to get this in!!!), and uh, well one time I was in the, for an example, I stopped in one of the dollar stores, and I had some rather bulky packages in there. And a young lady, she had a wagon, she came out about the time I did. She saw me starting to put them in the car, she stopped her wagon, and she said, "Let me help you" (high voice). And, uh, usually young women are not so quick; it's usually the young men. And older

women will sometimes help...but I have found people so helpful, and the children. Even the little black children will open the door for me. When they see me coming, heavy doors. And I got such nice neighbors here. They help me out. I found a great deal of friendship, course you got to be a friend in return. Now that is why I like the chickens, cause I got plenty of eggs. And I can do something in return for vegetables, and the fellow on this side is a carpenter. He built the ramp for me, course I paid him. He charged me very reasonable and helped me get made up. And built the steep, it's a little bit steep, somebody who is not so strong, should be a little more shallow...or way further out. But I didn't want to take up the whole yard. So, I decided I could run up that, and I can.

Thelma states that she enjoys doing things for others. "And if somebody calls and wants me to take them somewhere then I am, [my friend] says, I see how you, you would just let everything go if somebody needs you to take them somewhere. And I said, "Well yeah, I do." If I had to wait till I got through with everything, and had it, I would never do anything... I carried [a friend] to Gainesville, I have carried her two or three times..."

Many of the participants discussed that they felt close to people in this community. A variety of small organizations and clubs within these communities also promote these feelings of closeness. Dora describes one of the activities she is involved in. "...Well, we meet once a month. And, well, we don't meet July and August. Two months I think we don't meet. But it's a fellowship. And you gain strength from people." Dora describes this get together of older adults that is sponsored by her church. "It's, it brings a lots of joy! And uh, uh, pass and repass, speaking to people and seeing."



Dora continues to describe her close feelings to the people in this community. These people include family, church, and activities with others. She describes the depth of relationships one can have within some of these organizations, such as the “ladies in the church” or one’s family.

Dr – Well, it’s having your family around you, and, and like I am saying we eat lunch every Sunday together and see them, in between, or talk on the phone. But, sometimes I see them; I go by and get Grayson on Wednesday nights. And we go to church, and uh, that is just fun to me. D – Besides family is there other people that you feel real close to? Dr – People at church, my ladies at church. My ladies at church (said in a completely different tone, than previous). My ladies at church. D – Okay, describe those people, what is that, what kind of group of people is that? Dr – They are people that have uh, the same beliefs, and way of life that you have. And you feel comfortable being around them. And uh, if you were in trouble, I think they would come to your aid. I would go to theirs...D – Can you tell us anything, any kind of, something that uh, explains that friendship with any of them? Things you may do with them, or. Dr – Well, just uh, we have the Senior Adult group at the church. And then, that we are real close group. And uh, but, uh, if any of them have family problems, or death in the family, why, uh, we all, everybody goes to their aid. Uh, the other day, one of my friends, her mother in law died. Her husband is already deceased and her mother in law died. And she was in Camilla, and uh, so I knew they would be coming home that night. So I fixed supper and took around there. And, and she said, Dora, “That was better than anything you could have done.” So, just, having that meal there for them,

after they had been gone all day. And come back. So there is lots of them like that, that I help do. If somebody has been sick.

Clarence describes the people in the community. Similar to others, he is very excited about the people that live in this area. Interestingly, four of the participants enthusiastically stated that they “love” the people and the community here! I asked Clarence to describe what it is like to live here. He states, “They are the greatest people in the world... the natives of [this county], they are as solid as the earth.” However, he says some things are changing in this county. “There have been a lot of blue-collar workers that have moved into town and when I go to the grocery store, there is a lot of people I don’t know.” Clarence likes to reminisce about a time when he felt closer to everyone.

Dance every Saturday night. We used to go to somebody’s house every Saturday night. We did that for years. We had a group...and there was about five couples I believe it was. Had a couple from Homerville I believe it was. And every Saturday night we would go to somebody’s house and dance and eat! That was fun. (Laughter). But uh, it is just not that way any more. So I just go to other things and do other things. Ask me another question.

Social clubs provide further platform for even deeper relations. Thelma is currently in three bridge clubs and one of these has lasted for 40 years.

Oh, it’s just, our bridge club is very close. And you know, when they have a death or something, we always fix the meal, that night. And then if their some of them, we used to, when some of them’s children got married, of course now it is grandchildren, but anyway we would all have a party and go together. And just, you know, it has been a real influence to me to know that you can, you know. And

then you can go there, and it [bridge] is some type of recreation that you can do, and you can go and do that and then you are not on a committee. Or something you feel like that you know, are doing that for your own enjoyment. Which I, like I say, I still love to play.

Another interesting dynamic of the rural community is that “everyone knows you.” Each participant discussed how nice it was that people recognized you and that people knew you. This familiarity becomes a comfortable atmosphere. Hattie states:

I love it here. It’s a small town and you know everybody, everybody know you. And what I mean, I just like it. I just don’t like a big town. I really don’t, I just like... When I can just get up and go, in a big town like this, you got to wonder which way you gonna go to get to that place and all that kind of stuff. I know this place.

She feels safe in this town even though there is some difficulty and trouble.

Oh, the atmosphere of the people, I love them, and you know, cause if I feel like I need somebody. Cause one night I was laying up in my bed...And I heard them running on that side, and I got on the telephone. And I called (the cops) and told them that somebody was running around my house in the yard. And I told them gave him my number. And they came right on out, and they caught the man...and took him on down. I am going to be honest with you, I haven’t had no trouble. And I try to carry myself a way that if I need help I can get it. The cops I always stayed in real good connection with them, with the sheriff department. Because when I call them, when I am working with these outside peoples, and I had to have to go in a lot of homes that was kind of dangerous. But I do, I go by. If it is

in the city limits, I go by and get me a cop to ride over that way, and sit in the area. So if I need him, he right there. And uh, because, I have had some dangerous places I went in. And peoples you know threaten this that and the other. And but they have been real security to me. They come and they will follow me. And that is just like [the sheriff] I can ask him, for any kind of help, and he is right there to help.

Wilbur discusses how a trip to the local gas station turned into a prayer meeting at the cash register.

Yeah, I attend church every Sunday, and then what I do, I will help a lot of people. That seem like to me that they cannot help their self. And I do have some that have a lot of trust in me, uh, and [directed toward wife] can I tell this? I walked in a place about two or three months ago, and I bought gas. And when I bought this gas, this lady, she said, she was way down, and she said, Wilbur, I am going to ask you something, will you pray for me? I stopped right then, and it was, five or six of us in there. And we held hands and we prayed for her. And later on in that afternoon, when I went home, she called, and asked me to pray for her again.

Wilbur discusses that he feels close to many people in his community. Some of these expect him to visit them and to see about them. This is especially true because Wilbur has been on the City Council for many years.

I do that regular, and just like one called me and said, Wilbur, I got something I want to show you. And if I am in town, I will be around there right quick to see what they want. I have had a lot of people call me twelve o'clock at night, one

o'clock at night. And that make no difference. And I get up and go and see what they need. And they, and most of them really had a need. And I got a few old ladies over here right now. And if I don't go and see them every so often...they will say, you haven't been seeing about me...And the minute I walk up in that house, they are going to pull up a stool sit there and talk about. "Come on and sit down here, you haven't been seeing about me."

Wilbur tells more about this life in a small community. He describes how others make it their business to see about you. Wilbur told the following story about four times:

I have had two or three men that stay out here in the county. And if they come by here and don't see my truck (I am thinking, I can't believe he is going to tell this story again) not more than one or two days at least. They will turn around in here and say, Wilbur, "What is wrong with you?"...They want to know what is wrong. "Do you need anything from town now?" And uh, they will stop themselves, because they know that I am a busy body. I like to stay busy and she [my wife] don't like it. But I like to stay busy all the time. And that is what I do, I stay busy. If I am around here, I am, I am messing with the flowers (the second day of the interviews when I arrived he was outside spraying flowers), and uh I like to do things like that.

Thelma describes another perspective of life in a rural community. Because there are fewer people, you can get to know many people. Even the local grocery stores can become places of interaction. This is especially true in this county because there is really just one large grocery store. This closeness helps to promote an atmosphere where all classes and races intermingle.

Well, I think it [living here] is wonderful. It gives you great opportunities that you would not have if [you] lived in a city. Because you would be in an area, I guess, you would not, you would live in an area that the same, uh, type folks of you, middle class or whatever lived. And here you have contacts with all different kinds. And I think that makes a difference

*Negative.*

Although most of the comments from the participants were clearly positive, there were some negative comments about living in a rural and small town community. Most of these comments centered on lack of opportunities. For the African-Americans in the study they discussed negative aspects of being a minority, especially when they were younger.

Betty enjoys studying topics that others may have difficulty comprehending. In her search for knowledge she has continually used the Internet. Here she discusses the lack of access to services that larger areas may have.

So, uh, we need help! Smaller towns desperately need technicians who will come to their homes for a reasonable fee and help them with a minor problem. We don't have that in [this town], we have [a person] who will come and won't let you pay him. You don't feel free to ask him to come again, if he has taken his valuable time. And we have Computer Design, who, work on institutional machines. Big machines here and there; their time is so full. They don't have time to make house calls, you have to undo all those wires and pick up the heavy computer. Which it is hard for [my husband] and me. And it would be hard for many people to get it physically moved. Maybe the printer also if it is a print problem over to their

place. And maybe in five minutes they discover why it isn't working. I lost my Adrian when I switched from McIntosh to PC and I don't have access to computer, uh, images in Valdosta anymore to cure minor problems like that. So that is something we need in [this town] very much!

But more than this, Betty states that she cannot really discuss the topics that she is learning. She says that she feels alone in this pursuit of knowledge. In a small town, this isolated thinker feels there is no one to talk with. Or, if she did really express her mind, there would be social reprisals.

It would be hard to do in isolation; it would be so much better if there could be discussions of these matters. I would dearly love to have somebody, "Well, what do you think about this, and what do you think about that?" But I can't do it because of our culture here in [this town]. If I were to spring some of these ideas that I have come to believe are so definitely bedrock truth, on a lot of people, they would think I had gone out of my mind (high voice)! [That] I was a heretic or I was delusional. You can't do it. Because, uh, most of course I don't know there might be a lot of people who think along these same lines here in [this town], but I haven't found them. My friends are not open to any such discussions. And it has been so hard. If when I am called on to, lead a program in "circle" [this is a church organization with women] or something like that I can do it well. And they don't understand, all through these years, "Why don't you teach a Sunday school class? You got to teach this Sunday school class." I can't. I can be in a Sunday school class and get a lot of good from it, because I know that what they believe basically is the same thing I believe. But if I were trying to put it into words, I

can't do it; I can't go by the formulas. I'd have to say from my heart what I feel about that and I can't do it. Only person I have really talked to is [a friend] because she could not understand why I couldn't do that much – teach a Sunday School class! And I finally told her that I did not believe the way she did. I did not believe in the literal truth of every word in the Bible and all of this. And she took it pretty well, but I was very serious about it. I got into a group at the church and I was so hoping that that would work, I have stayed out of discussion groups there. All through the years because of the literal interpretation of the Bible which I can't go along with (high voice). And it was a good group, of varied ages, that met Wednesday afternoon, study group. And the ladies in there were earnest; they were in prayer about things that mattered. [She is speaking slowly and carefully.] And they are doing good in the church. And I got worlds from it, as long as, but the further it went the more I knew I just had to speak my mind and I couldn't. And so I had to drop out of that, that is pretty sad.

Betty summarizes the way she feels, “I don't know, I don't get into any groups. *You said you wanted to talk about rural life, well, that is the consequence of rural life. You become isolated, and I am one of them*” [emphasis added].

The extremely positive Clarence mentioned one negative aspect of living in this small town. “...See we have, two big employers here, three...And uh, it's brought in a lot of, lot of people...Some of them are nice, and some of them are just trailer trash. And I don't know anybody when I go in [the grocery store] too much. I can go in there and not see a soul I know except some of the clerks...But the natives of [this] county, they are as



solid as the earth.” Seeing change in someone’s small town is often difficult because change rarely occurs.

The three participants that are African-American tell a different story about life in this rural community. In many small towns the railroad tracks often divide White and Black citizens. All three participants lived “across the tracks.” And this is where most African-Americans in this county live. Even Bill called it the “quarters.” All three discussed positive and negative aspects of living as a minority. In this particular town the racial mix is 89-90% White and 10-11% Black. However, all three of these participants own their own home. They have many White and Black friends as well as large families. All three are well respected in the community. They discuss the difficulty of being a Black especially in the past and how some of the negative memories linger. They talked about missed opportunities that a larger town would have provided. And they discussed how their part of town is often overlooked. Yet they were very clear to state that overall they enjoy living here.

Hattie feels many in her community do not get their fair share of the tax base. She feels they are promised a lot, but it rarely happens.

Well, no, now, let me give it to you. The cops is fine, cause they treat this area like they treat the other areas. They constantly coming through like they are supposed to. And I feel like they are given a fair shake. But now, like, what I am stressing on, it is a lot of times the mayors have tried to do things. But, they haven’t been pushing, and they stopped. But we had somebody in there to be firm with it, and to tell us that we gonna do such a such a thing on [my street]...And it don’t never come through...And they said they asked the mayor about putting,

you know, paved streets up there for them. And he promised, but he aint got there yet (laughter). But that is the kind of thing, when you ask for things, you know, give them a good reason why they can't do it you know. Don't tell them we will do it and then don't never get there.

Bill talked a lot about repression in the past and that his people had a difficult time getting ahead in this county.

B – Well, I wanted to send my children to school. Back then you couldn't borrow no money to send children to school. We had to go to Ft. Valley or Savannah State. We couldn't go to school like in Valdosta, Val Tech, ABAC, Albany. It wasn't nothing like that. We had to go to Savannah or Ft. Valley, Ft. Valley was closest...Back in them times we didn't even have a high school in Berrien County. Yall had one but we didn't have one. Yall had a bus to take yalls children to school but we didn't have any buses. D – How did they get to school then? B – Had to walk! D – What if you lived way out in...B – You still had to walk! If you had to walk 8 or 10 miles, five six miles, you'd get up before daylight. And what little time you had to go to school, you had to walk back and to. I could tell you a lot of stuff that went on, you wouldn't believe it though. (I am silent hoping he will continue). That is right you wouldn't believe it (laughter)! You wouldn't believe it! (Clears throat). Over there where the school at now on the Adel highway, we had a one room shack out here. Where we went to school and things got to easing up a little bit better. You know what they would do? They would let us go over there and play ball. We didn't have no building to play ball in. We had to play out in the streets. They would let us go over there. But they had special

nights at night when we played, yall couldn't play. We couldn't play together. But the, all group of them play together now. That didn't happen. Black taught black, white taught white (Laughter). (I am looking at him and thinking I cannot believe this. It sounds so unbelievable and stupid!) D – Amazing. B - ... Yeah, that is what it was. That is what it was, hatred. What could you do about it? Well, the system, see you had to live with the system. D – Sounds like you learned to survive it though, you learned to get through it somehow (I am thinking I don't know what to ask. And I am so surprised by the seeming compliance in his statement. I am thinking what would bell hooks think or W. B. Dubois?) B – Oh! You got to adjust to the system. You can't beat the system. D – How did you do that? B – (Takes a deep breath.) Well, you knew the rules and the regulations. So you had to abide by the rules and regulations. You could try to buck the system if you want to, but it didn't work...But that was the system (high voice)! So, nothing to do about it, but join the system.

Was this man compliant by going with the system, or was this evidence of brilliance on his part? He had learned how to survive as a minority in a small community.

Similar to Betty, Wilbur's wife discusses that there have not been as many opportunities for her in this small town. These missed opportunities of life in a rural area are discussed by several of the participants.

So having lived here all of my life it has been its been fairly good, you know, considering. I know and realize the fact that uh, if I had been, been born in a town where I would have, that I would have been fortunate enough to have gone to a college...To me, I could have maybe bettered myself in that way. But even, being

born there and ...coming to a small town like this it has been fairly good, I would say.

### Chapter Summary

The ten participants in this study discussed the nature and process of self-directed learning. They also spoke of their late life adjustments as well as the rural context of their lives. An interesting aspect of these findings was the variety and the amount of time each participant engaged in learning activities.

The people in this study stated that the nature of learning is highly engaging, variably structured, collaborative, and goal-directed. The learning for these participants was enjoyable, fun, and exciting. The structure of the learning was characterized by a dialectical genre of new and old information, deliberate and serendipitous events, and simple and complex topics. These people discussed how they have learned as a result of conversations with friends, family, and acquaintances.

Each person described in detail various processes they undertake to pursue SDL. This process begins with an impetus to learn, sometimes internal such as an urge to learn about nutrition, and sometimes external, such as a grandchild asking for help with

homework. The person decides if he or she is interested in the topic, and if so, they will then begin to access resources. The learner will devote systematic attention to the activity, and eventually there will be a resolution. Either the learning activity comes to a close or they continue this process. Interspersed in this progression is an unpredictable catalyst that speeds the process along. The catalyst may occur at anytime during the course of learning and often involves another person encouraging the older adult to continue.

Another interesting finding is that a variety of SDL activities were occurring at the same time. This created somewhat of a whirlwind of activity within the life of the older adult; in addition, these adventures of personal learning were at various stages in this process. For example, while Robert and his wife were in the resolution of a project for his church, they were also accessing resources for a trip out west.

Late life adjustments were stated as time, family, and loss. Retirement has occurred for each participant, yet two of them have continued to work. Nevertheless, all found they had to adjust to having more time than when working or raising a family. The main activity to fill this time is a myriad of projects where SDL is taking place. The influence of one's family has a marked bearing on one's learning activity, especially adjusting to new situations concerning children and grandchildren. All of the participants have experienced a significant amount of loss. These difficult losses have included personal health and social connections.

The older adults in this study discussed the positive aspects of living in a rural area. This was apparent by their commentary on the simple and peaceful atmosphere, the closeness to nature, and a community of fellow learners. Some of the participants stated

there are negative aspects of living in a rural area. These comments revolved around the difficulty of the lack of resources and of being a minority.

These ten participants portray a different view of life in rural south Georgia. Defying stereotypes of older adults, these participants portray positive images of active, self-directed learners even in late life. The various adjustments that occur in the life of the older adult become the impetus to personally learn an assortment of significant topics. The rural setting was found to be a predominantly positive environment for SDL.

Older adults have an extra amount of time usually because of retirement. This new time, allows for the pursuit of self-directed learning. Many times the desire to learn is initiated by the changes in the older adult's life – especially changes in health and in one's family. The process of learning is enjoyable; structured in various forms, has a goal, and involves other people. During the process an event may occur that spurs the older adult to continue with this learning; this catalyst is usually another person or some event. One of the reasons this learning is so enjoyable is because of the richness of life in rural areas. There seems to be time for learning in this quiet and simple area, and if the older adult needs to ask a question there is a community available to help. Because of the social change in being an older adult, they may feel limited or frustrated in this search for knowledge. If the activity is enjoyable, they may decide to continue.

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