Margie Cobb

Interviewee: Margie Cobb with Nancy Cobb
Interviewer: Mary Cerulli (MC)
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MC: Today is July 7th 2017. I am at the John Heinz National Wildlife Refuge interviewing Margie and Nancy Cobb for the Eastwick Oral History Project. My name is Mary Cerulli and I'm with the Penn program in environmental humanities. So first off I'd like to ask about where you guys grew up and what your childhood was like.

Margie: Okay. My first neighborhood was Holly Street in West Philly. And when I was about six years old my family moved to Elmwood. It wasn't called Eastwick then, it was called Elmwood and the Swamp. And I lived in Elmwood until I was fourteen and going off to high school. So what was so amazing – when I was really small on Holly street there was nothing but streets, no trees, just cement. And coming out to Elmwood- what was so amazing was that you had so much green space. And what I recall is my mom raising chickens and we had a grape vine and she would make wine. And the in the back of us there were empty lots so she had the soil turned over and she planted vegetables every year. So your neighbors – you would really just walk, we didn't have sidewalks, you would walk in the streets, and we had one neighbor who had a horse, and other kinds of farm animals out there. So it was really a very tranquil nice area. But what I found out is that people that lived in the big city would consider us different. And I guess we were. But they always used derogative terms, like, "Oh, you live in the swamp," and we were always at the end of the line. Eastwick is at the end of the line. But I had some great friends, I enjoyed our playtime. Neighbors were truly neighbors then – everybody knew everybody. So. It was great.

MC: So why did you move from Holly Street to Elmwood?

Margie: Well it was a small house. The family was growing. So my Dad was looking for an affordable place for his growing family. Because no sooner than we got out there my oldest sister, Chris, who has since passed on, she moved in with us. And then Nancy came. And then after that my baby brother Bernard [sp?] was born. So we really did need that space.

MC: Can you tell me about your family, what your parents were doing, and give me a run down of who your siblings were and when they were born?

Margie: My Dad – he worked two jobs for most of his adult life, he always amazes me. He worked during the day as a mechanic at Highway Express, I think it was called, and then he would come home, take a nap, and go to his night job.

MC: Wow.

That's what I say. I could never have done that. And then my mom was a homemaker. And how many - six of us all together, four girls and two boys. I'm in the middle, and that's why I feel I'm so even dispositioned! That's my story and I'm sticking to it! [laughs] So, it was just nice.

MC: So what stands out to you when you think about growing up in Eastwick, and Eastwick as a place to be, with your siblings, go to school?

Margie: I always felt that I was happy here. So when the redevelopment moved us out and we moved back into West Philly, we had a nice time, we moved to 61st street, near Cobbs Creek parkway. We had fun galore. But when I wanted to find a home of my own, first place I came was Elmwood. And this was the only section that I looked.

MC: You knew.

Margie: I knew! And when I found my house, that's where I've stayed. 37 years. Never regretted it. It was just very comfortable. So then when my mom wanted to downsize the house on 61rd street we looked for houses out here. And then she moved. And then we got Nancy who decided to buy a home, and we forced her out here too! So it was the three of us. And one of my friends says, "Why do you have three houses? The three of you could live in one house! What, do you have to own all of Elmwood?" And with our independent personalities, no way.

MC: So close, but not too close!

Margie: That's right.

MC: So Nancy, do you remember living in Elmwood, or were you still small?

Nancy: Just the stories they would tell me, yeah I was just a little toddler, was I even in first grade?

Margie: No, I think you went to first grade in West Philly.

Nancy: Yeah, so just whatever they told me, I just accepted it because I was too young to remember.

MC: So did they start telling you stories about it when they were trying to get you to move back?

Nancy: Yeah (laughs) I would hear all these stories, and like, wow I don't remember that. I would tell these stories like it was something that I remembered, but it was just other people telling me stories of what I was up to (laughs)

MC: So what about this neighborhood feels like home?
Margie: I think it's a very neighborhood friendly area. I think you can feel in control. And one of the things – although I resented the fact that the city moved us out – but I do like the way they designed the streets. They're all dead ends, so that makes it more controllable. You get to know

within that environment you're very comfortable with. And I really can't say anything negative – well the airplanes are a pain. I was telling a coworker when I was buying and, "Oh you're going to be near the airport," but then it's just white noise. You get used to it. It's a very comfortable, laid, back, place to live. I think you have a little bit of the city and a little bit of suburbia all in one.

MC: And is it that what makes it feel comfortable, that combination?

Margie: Yes. A very nice combination.

MC: and how do you feel, Nancy?

Nancy: When I moved from 61st, Cobbs Creek, I was in Germantown for a few years, and when I was in Germantown, I said, "Wow, it's really different out here, no planes!" Because you get used to that air traffic and it's different. But I moved back out this way to be closer to family. Because our mom was declining and everything, and we just needed to circle the wagons, make sure she was taken care of.

MC: Do you feel a similar way about the neighborhood? Does it feel comfortable to you too?

Nancy: Yes, it's okay, yes. I was just so glad to find a house out here. I was happy about that. Because I used to live in apartments, and I had the worst landlords, so so glad I finally get a house!

MC: So what was it like to go to school here? You were in elementary and middle school?

Margie: So that was St. Grayfields. We were raised Catholic, so the good nuns. It was really kind of funny because my older brother and sister would say, "Wait until you get to Sister Sylvia" – that was your right of passes into adulthood – getting through Sister Sylvia, seventh grade. So I went to all eight grades at Saint Grayfield's [sp?] and then it was West Catholic. By that time, I was already in West Philly.

MC: And what did you do after leaving High School?

Margie: After High school? Boy, was I looking for a job. I didn't think I would ever find a job. It was 1960 and the job market was in a dismal state, so I was trying everywhere. And my sister was working at Bell Telephone, this is Barbara, who can't remember anything, so I said, "Barbara, can you give me a recommendation?" "No! I hate this place! You're not coming here!" That was her attitude. But she was right. So anyway, I did land a job at Bell and stayed there for ten years. And she was right, I hated it. It was a terrible place to work. But I did go to school at night, and they paid 75% of it.

MC: and what were you going to school for? What classes were you taking?

Margie: Business. At St Joe's. Went to St. Joe's. My older brother, Aaron, graduated from St. Joe's, and I guess I was working for about two years, just working, buying clothes, so he came in town – he was in the military – and he says, let me take you over to the school and sign you up. And that's all - he signed me up, and I just kept going.

MC: And what did you do after the telephone company?

Margie: Again, looking for a job. But I ended up working at First Pennsylvania Bank. That was a different experience. I enjoyed them. I left them after about seven years. Then I went to Provident National Bank. I finally- I wanted to retire from. But they laid me off after 23 years. Isn't that a bummer? And from there, when you're 58 years old and nowhere near 65… so I was on the board of a nonprofit organization, the North Philadelphia Financial Partnership, and that organization does small business selecting. So one of the board members called me up because the executive director suddenly quit. So they asked me, "do you want to think about it?" and they put me through and interview process and I got that job. Anyway I was there until I retired at 70 at NPFP. And now I'm on their board.

MC: Okay. So where in that scheme of things did you come back to Elmwood?

Margie: When I was working for Provident. That was 1980 I moved back here.

MC: And what was it like to move back?

Margie: I just thought it was wonderful. From the very first time. The only thing that got to me – when I bought my house, interest rates were going through the ceiling, and my monthly mortgage was so high! I was whining to my brother Aaron about it, and he said, "Oh, it will get easier. Just tighten up." He was right. It did get easier. And then you go through your refinancing. But I always did like it. I bought my house because I had a garage. A number of the neighbors who had naturally bigger families – I've always been by myself – turned their garages into extra space in the basement. But I always want my car inside. My Grandmother, when I would take her over to my house, she says, "Oh, you're the house that you drive into" [laughs] That cracks me up, thinking about that.

MC: Was there anything about the neighborhood that had changed?

Margie: Well, yeah, everything had changed. I mean, you don't have chickens. Certainly in the older section people still have some animals and horses and things. But it had changed just because it was developed, that's what made the change. But I think the people very much, even though we had turnover, because folks were moving here, they weren't original Elmwood folks, they would move in and move out, but they kindof blended in with the overall environment here. So I thought that was great.
MC: So what did the development mean? What did that look like?

Margie: Before, everybody had their own individual styled house. So every house, every two houses, were different. We had circumstances where the mother and father (not mine, but) would

live here, the children would get married and build a house next door. So it was that kind of environment. So it was hodge-podge, but unique. And now with the way ewe have it now it's called Eastwick, we're more orderly. With all of the street names and road design.

MC: You mentioned before that there's a sense of control in the neighborhood. So how did the development affect that feeling?

Margie: Well when I was here as a youngster you didn't have any crime. You never had any issues. But I'm just saying is that when I turn down Saturn Place, that's where I feel like I have control. Because it's not like we have streets where cars are just flying through, you don't know who they are. If somebody's coming down Saturn Place, it's to see someone or a neighbor, so that's what I mean by that kind of control. But we did have instances because all of our houses really look alike. So maybe in the early 90s we had issues of – this is when kids grow up and they deal in drugs and then they want to bring that kind of element in. So for a while we did have night watch where we'd take turns walking the street, things like that. So we had our incidents.

MC: The night watch was community organized?

Margie: Just the neighbors in the block. Just to see who was coming in our street, who's doing what.

MC: Anything else that changed when you came back and moved into your own home? Any differences that stood out to you when you moved back?

Margie: I was telling this to Barbara last night. That when I was a kid, me and my girlfriends, just because we were bored, would walk to the airport. And it was very accessible. And they had the nerve to have an observation deck. And I think they'd charge a quarter, a dime, but we didn't pay, we would slip though. And I was telling Barbara, that's what we spent our time telling grown-ups, how to slip through without paying! To get on the observation deck. I was telling this story – I went with some of the airport administration for lunch – and I said, I don't even know how to handle that airport now, it's so huge. I got a friend to drop me off because I could just see myself wandering… So that is a major, major change. Having that huge international airport as a neighbor.

MC: What could you see from the observation deck?

Margie: The only thing to see was planes taking off and landing! Back then that was "Wow!"

MC: Could you see the neighborhood as well, or was it too far a walk?

Margie: It was too far - not too much to see of the neighborhood, we were up there to see the planes.

MC: When you were young, living here the first time, were there places that were especially important to you? Places that felt especially like home?

Margie: One of the things we would talk about – Barbara and I did last night – about going to school. We went up a block, where they had homes, and then we'd go to a vacant field. There was so much vacant space out here in the earlier years. And I'd tell her, "Barbara, do you remember the American Store?" "Oh, no, I don't remember that" it was one of these stores where you had to go through a vacant lot to get to. But it was my job on Fridays to go to the store and get the fish. I had so many jobs. One story I remember: My mother was definitely afraid of caterpillars. So she and I were going to the American store one day in the spring, and the caterpillars break out of their cocoons. And she went running. I was startled! She went running and screaming in the field. She had a phobia. No caterpillars! It was something else.

MC: What was the field like? In addition to the caterpillars, tall grass, or what?

Margie: Well I don't know who would mow the grass, but somebody would, and there was always a footpath, from people treading. So you always had a footpath going through.

MC: And what was the – was it called the American Store?

Margie: Yeah.

MC: What did they sell there?

Margie: All kinds of groceries. You could get your meats and your fresh fish and all of your other fresh vegetables that you'd want, it's at the American Store. In fact, I think they were bought out by some other grocery store, but I can't recall. But for me that was my ShopRite. For the neighborhood, that was my ShopRite.

MC: Any other places that jump to mind, or that you would want people listening to know about or think about the neighborhood?

Margie: I can't think of any other, besides the airport and the American store. Well it's not about Elmwood, but we would hop the trolley - it seemed like two buses- to go down to the Italian market. That was a Saturday morning junket. That would be my mother and another neighbor and kids, we'd all go because we had to help carry. So that was always an adventure for Saturday.

MC: And then how about when you moved back, as an independent woman, are there places that are important to you?
Margie: You know my mom and I loved Clover Store. Until unfortunately, they closed it down. But we were always in there. And it's odd that that's something you'd cherish. But the prices were good, they always had what we needed in the Clover Store. So we enjoyed that.

MC: and where in the neighborhood was the Clover store?

Margie: Oh, that was up at Pennrose Plaza. And of course we have Acme. It was just so convenient to not have to go so far to get everything you needed.

MC: and what did the clover store have?

Margie: They were closer to Kmart. So they had clothes and pots and pans and things like that, but always at a nice price. So I was sad when they closed it down.

MC: When did they close?

Margie: That's a good point. I guess they must have closed somewhere in the 90s because they've been gone for a while.

MC: Are there places in the neighborhood that you feel are important community spaces?

Margie: Yes! My most important community space is the rec center. I got familiar with the rec center because of my mom. Because she would do ceramics, she would have ParaTransit take her there and I would pick her up. So that's when I got to know a lot of the ladies in there – don't we have a lot of Mom's ceramic work! And she just loved being there. Boy, what a lovely place. And right now my dream is that we get a brand new rec center. That rec center is old and worn out.

MC: What kinds of other things happen at the rec center?

Margie: In my younger days I played tennis there with my girlfriends. I'm not that big on block parties but I remember one year where we had the block party on the rec center grounds. And we had two streets that joined in and we had a basketball game. So that gave it a very nice community spirit. So I think the rec center can be a focal point for the whole neighborhood. I just wish that – see some people say to me they don't even know that it's there – I wish there was some way that we could change the access so that people know that it's there. Because if you don't live in that immediate area, I've heard people say, "Oh I got lost, where is this place?"

MC: Any other places community focal points? Or places that people value, maybe not something that everybody knows about, but something that feels special to community members?

Margie: No, I can't think of anything else. Not special. Now, this is on the dark side, but just trying to get rid of that dump – that superfund site – that's one of the things I really feel that the community had joined together to make this place even more better.

MC: Can you tell me a little bit about that, what that was like?

Margie: Well when I was a little kid I knew it was there. I played with friends near the dump. And you just see big trucks coming in, you don't think anything about it. But moving back, especially with my mom, my mom got interested in being with the community, and that's when

they started complaining that something's wrong with this dump. And I think you'll be talking to Leo Brundage. He was one of the ones jumping up and down. Earl Wilson, too. So with their activism, the EPA came in and named it. So we've been working now for two years, probably another five years – isn't it amazing how long it's going to take to transform it? But EPA with Josh Barber has been wonderful, and we're working through it.

MC: How did people get involved in that? What did the jumping up and down look like? What sort of activism happened?

Margie: Well there were a lot of community meetings at the rec center. That's how everybody began to know this is really a serious problem and we've got to make people understand that it's serious. So that's how. That good old rec center.

MC: Are there are particular events that you think are important to understanding Eastwick? Elmwood and Eastwick?

Margie: You know they don't have it any longer, but they carried it on for a number of years, every year there was a picnic, for all of the oldest, current and older Elmwood residents. And I didn't go but my mom and my brother Bernard went, and they said they had such a great time. But I guess it got harder and harder for people to pull it off, every year, so.

MC: And how about historical events? Are there certain events in the neighborhood history that are important to understanding the neighborhood?

Margie: Well it's an odd kind of thing, but the historical thing that put us on the news was Hurricane Floyd in 1999. So many of our residences were flooded. That was major. The floodwater went all the way up to Pennrose Plaza. So that is major.

MC: Can you tell me a little more about that?

Margie: Nancy and I were working, and we were let go early because it was so dark and it was raining heavy. So I dropped her off at her house and I came home, and I saw water at the entrance of Saturn. So I parked my car and I went through the back way. And everybody was telling me, "We're flooding! Get inside! Turn off your electricity and then get out!" So that's what I did. And when I was heading out my front door I could hear all of my furniture in the basement hitting because the water was coming in from the back of the house and the front of the house. So I made it to my car just as the floodwater was coming up 78th street. And then I headed to Mom, she's on Vermeer Place, so she's at 82nd and Vermeer. So I thought it couldn't get any farther. And I just happened to look out the door and it was on her street. So I said, "Mom, we have to get out of here." Another neighbor said, "Where are you going?" I said, "I don't know, but we're getting out of here." I saw the floodwaters on Lindbergh Avenue. I was working for PNC Bank, so I headed in that direction. So I ended up at the bank, gave Nancy a scare, I told her I'm at the bank. because I was an employee, thank heavens, they had a cafeteria so me and mom could eat, we figured we'd just wait it out. I called Nancy and I was on the cell phone and I said I'm not using up my power, so I'll be checking back in with you, but we're safe, we're at

the bank. It was maybe around 11 o clock we said this is enough time so I went to go to the guard and he said, no, go on back, you can't get out there tonight. So it was something! So the next day the water had receded. We went to Nancy's and then we went to see our houses. Mom's living area was on the first floor there, ground level. It was completely destroyed. And my basement was gone. That's the reason why we all moved out. We stayed with Nancy while we tried to get our lives together.

Nancy: I dodged the bullet. I just had a damp basement. No major work on it.

MC: Do you remember getting that phone call?

Nancy: Yeah, that was pretty scary. Wow. I couldn't believe the water was coming in like that. It just made me thankful that I moved out there, and at least they had a place to stay for a few days.

MC: And what was it like after the flood?

Margie: One of the things you don't appreciate is the Salvation Army and the American Red Cross. They were just trying to bring some normalcy into your life. We got some family together for mom, to help clear out her place. And then we got contractors to do her out. But nothing happens smoothly, it all took a little time. So when they we were working on her house, she refuses to leave, so my oldest sister Chris would stay a week, my sister Barbara would stay a week. And when I would come to them, me and Nancy, every evening, we would see the refrigerator in a different place every evening. It was weird.

Nancy: Yeah, it was weird. Well everything had to go! Had to tear everything out. All that construction. And you had to go through that more than once.

Margie: Yeah, I did. I was flooded in 2004 again. So that's the other reason for making flooding such an issue. Everything else is really nice, if we can control that flooding.

MC: What was the flood in 2004? What was going on?

Margie: You know, that gets to me. It was just – I shouldn't say just – it was a tropical storm with heavy rain. And when that creek overflows, it just has no place to go. So it heads towards the houses.
You know, we've had some scary times. Like Sandy. And Mayor Nutter said, "You better make plans! Especially you people in Eastwick! You better make plans!" So Nancy and I, we go to a hotel. We go to University City, tell everyone where we are, and then hope for the best. Sandy was rough on the coast, but everything was fine in Eastwick.

Nancy: But you did get water, right? Remember you got an inch or so? And we had to squeegee it out.

Margie: I do, but that was another storm. That wasn't Sandy.

Nancy: Okay. Because we had to make a run for it twice.

Margie: Oh, yeah, we did it more than once.

Nancy: And remember, the basement had an inch or so of water...

Margie: We did get an inch, and when the guy was helping me he got the hose and I said "What are you doing!?" and he said, "We've got to wash it out"

Nancy: Was that after Floyd?

Margie: No, I think it was the one after that that got the hose. It was something.

MC: Any other events that you can think of that are important for the neighborhood? I know you mentioned the redevelopment a couple times. Something like that?

Margie: Oh God- that was really something. Because it displaced a whole community. I just think that that was unbelievable.

MC: Can you tell me what happened?

Margie: Well the City of Philadelphia came in, and imminent domain, and they took charge, and we all had to go. Some people refused. That's why you still have that older section the way it used to be. You have to go around there and look sometime, to see that original section.

Nancy: So there's still some original houses around here?

Margie: Yeah! There's still some original housing. Especially if you go down Mario Lanzo avenue, on the right.

Nancy: What are they, like 100 year-old homes?
Margie: I don't know, but they're pretty old. So it that's the other thing about Elmwood people, they're not going anywhere.

MC: So the city declared the imminent domain, and

Margie: They declared imminent domain. And they gave us a price for it, but they took the property, and that's how Korman became the developer. And it was going to be "a city within a city," and the other thing that happened was, it wasn't intended for black people to move back there. That was the other thing that was, I think, unique for Elmwood: we were pretty diverse. It wasn't as segregated. Everybody was splattered through it. Nancy when she was little – which she doesn't remember– she would run across the street because she wanted candy, it was the John's store. Because they were Polish and I couldn't pronounce their last name, so we called them Mister and Misses Johns. She would go in there and take candy. She would point and Ms.

John would say, where's your money? So whenever she went into the store, Ms. Johns said where's your money?

Nancy: Wherever I went people just gave me what I wanted! What's this thing with money?

Margie: That's her claim to fame, she got whatever she wanted. She's running across the street to get to John's store… so when it was redeveloped it was emphasized that anybody could buy out here. So that's how it worked out.

MC: When you think of the environment in Elmwood and Eastwick, what comes to mind?

Margie: What comes to mind is the noise from the planes and pollution.

Nancy: And these odors. These different [industrial] plants around here, they're killing us softly.

Margie: Yeah, we always have that.

MC: And is that something you can smell?

Nancy: Oh yeah, the refineries, the water treatment plant, it's always fumes in the air.

Margie: They let loose. Fumes. And again, like I was saying about the superfund site. We've got issues out here. When I first moved out here, I'm talking about the airport, they would come in and out over the river. So, we had some noise. But now it's just so much traffic. They're right over the houses. And what gets to me, I found this out later on, you have the jumbo jets and you hear them straining to get airborne and think, "Oh my god, is this it for me tonight?"

Nancy: You wonder when they're going to land on your roof.

Margie: You really do! When they're taking off, trying to power up. But I understand from the airport, this is from that luncheon, they're going to put in a longer runway. So that should help.

Nancy: Remember the only time it was quiet? After 9/11 when they shut down all the airports. And it was so eerie! You couldn't hear a plane. That was so eerie. We didn't have flights. That was so bizarre.

MC: How about when you think of the natural environment, when you think about green space in Elmwood or Eastwick, what was that like?

Margie: Like I mentioned, when I was a kid there was nothing but green space, we had plenty of green spaces for the kids to play, it was phenomenally green. For now I do think we need more green space. I think it's great that Heinz is here. But it's such a well- kept secret, I don't even think that neighbors know.

Nancy: This is my first time here! All the years I've been here and this is my first time here. Because I remember my sister talking about Heinz, I thought, what's that? So that's why I wanted to come along, because I've never been out here.

Margie: So this is a well kept secret really. So I think we need more spaces for activities and for exercise.

MC: So what has your experience with Heinz - with the refuge - been?

Margie: Oh it's been really good! This was when I was exercising my little heart out, my neighbor and I would come here and walk. But it gets so eerie in certain sections. We did that one time and said, "Oh the killer might come out and get us!"

Nancy: We watch the ID channel so you always think the worst

Margie: And at one time, the same time that we were walking, they said that there was a mountain lion or some kind of animal roaming around.

Nancy: Wasn't that a myth?

Margie: I don't know, they never found - But people are funny, they want to feed that animal, they would put out meat and something was eating that meat. So there was something around, but. They think that the animal follows I-95 and went south. [laughs]

Nancy: To think you'd be walking around here and be jumped by a mountain lion or something!

Margie: Anyway, it's always nice to have more.

MC: So you came here to walk? You'd walk around the trails? Was that a normal part of your routine? Something you did a lot?

Margie: It was normal. Yeah, we did. We enjoyed it. It was very nice visually, to look at, very peaceful. And it amazes me with all the bird watchers. I never knew that those people were so enthusiastic! We had to walk around them.

MC: So how do you think the refuge is connected to the community or not connected to the community?

Margie: It's not. Both sides need to do more to connect. Now I know that Lamar is running programs and that he has the young kids, trying to get them involved, which I think is great. But I don't even know whether those kids come from Eastwick or are they coming from West Philly, you know? So it would be nice to get just a little bit more involved. And then one of the things I'm thinking about is that if the children get involved maybe the parents will get more involved. And I think it would help the both of us.

MC: Why do you think there is that disconnect? Since it is so close to Eastwick?

Margie: Yeah, I don't know! I think it's, who comes this way? Everybody is going the other way.

Nancy: That's what I was thinking, how many people are like me and never been out here?

Margie: Right, I think there's quite a few like you. And I noted they have their newsletter. I'm on their email list. But I think I'm just a few. And I guess people think, "I'd rather go to the movies, why do I want to go out here and commune with nature?" but it really would be nice if more people would be motivated to come here.

MC: Has the refuge changed at all since you've been living here?

Margie: Oh yes, the structure. When we were walking here, me and Mildred, they only just had a little room, a little building. So yes it's grown quite a bit.

MC: Changing gears a little bit, thinking about what kind of information or knowledge or facts do you think are important to understanding this part of Philadelphia? Like, what would you want people to know? It's a big question, take your time.

Margie: It is. We're a good neighborhood.

Nancy: It's a nice place to raise a family.

Margie: Thank you. It is a nice place to raise a family.

Nancy: That's deep.

Margie: It is deep, because I'm just thinking, I just like it here, I love it here. There is no other section of Philadelphia that I'd like to live in. I'd always have negative things about them, like Mt. Airy, oh it's so far.

Nancy: Does it feel like it's more suburban out here?

Margie: It does. But even in center city, where all the excitement is, there's too much traffic. Too many cars, I wouldn't want to live there. South Philly, same thing, too congested. So here you do feel like you have a little bit of space. And we have pretty much all we need. We have our ShopRite, our shopping centers on both sides.

MC: And then, sort of in the other direction, is there any information, or data, or information broadly that you wish you had but don't have about the neighborhood or the environment in the neighborhood?

Margie: I wish that we could be better informed about how those odors from either Sunoco or the Water Treatment Plant, how can we control that a little better as a community? It just seems like they release it and nobody says anything. They feel free, there's no retribution for what they're doing. So from that end I wish we had more ways to input and find out how we can alleviate it. It really is a pain in the tuckus.

MC: So speaking of the refinery and the river, and the water treatment plant, how is Eastwick connected to the Schuylkill? Or what role does the Schuylkill play?

Margie: That's an interesting point. The only time I hear about the Schuylkill and the Delaware is how they relate to flooding. So it's very negative. But it would be nice if - when you were talking about things we could have - if it could be more accessible for recreation purposes. That would be lovely.

MC: So it doesn't feel like a resource now, it feels like a source of danger, basically?

Margie: Right. And I know it doesn't have to be like that. But it would be nice if we could open that avenue a little bit more. When we came in there was a young man with a kayak on the top his car! I said, "Where is he going with his kayak?"

MC: You can kayak here. You can kayak out of Heinz, they have a boating program.

Margie: No kidding! What waterway are they using?

MC: The creek I think, you can go all the way down. I'm just learning about it too, but I know Lamar- there's a little dock, they're getting ready for boating.

Margie: Well I'll be darned, that's good to know! Because this is how fanatic I am, on Monday, on Hook Rd, 84th St, you go over this little bridge and you can look down. I always look to see what that creek is doing. If it's flowing high I get worried, especially with rain. But when we went by on Monday it was virtually dry. That's why I'm saying, "Where are they going?" But that's interesting to know. And that's something that we can work with Josh about with EPA because they can't do anything for us as it relates to the flood, but they have to make sure whatever they do it doesn't increase flooding. So there might be little things that they can do to make it very attractive- more attractive- for the kayakers, for just enjoying the river.

MC: So are there certain kinds of information or certain types of access to information that have been important in that community activism that you were talking about? Especially around the superfund site and the landfill?

Margie: Well you know, for the superfund site I'm on the actual committee, so I do get access to information. And we try to roll it out to the overall community. That's kind of hard, too. Because we hold meetings and no body shows. But as soon as something goes wrong… you know, I don't know how to get people out of their own little cocoons to be excited or intereuusted.

MC: So what kinds of information would you want to share with people? What does that information look like?

Margie: We'd like to tell them that for two years we're moving along and we're getting close to the 90% design on how we're going to handle that superfund site. That success is right there in front of us.

MC: How did people learn how bad that site is? Were people talking about the soil, were people talking about the air? What kinds of information were people focusing on?

Margie: Early on, this gets back to the 90's, I'm giving this to you from hearsay, Leo and Earl can tell you even more, but people were concerned about getting sick. And children getting sick. And they wondered what was going on in back of them. So that was how it all got started.

MC: So it started with people's health. That's what people were noticing. That was the touchstone.

Margie: Yes. That was the touchstone. And then, "What is going on?" and "Are we all going to get sick?" And that really gets people out.

MC: So today what are the challenges facing the neighborhood in your opinion?

Margie: Nancy and I are on this other committee, and one of the things that we came up with is that we're cut off. That can be a positive, being cut off, in other ways it's not so good for community. Like we were saying that Island Rd is a barrier. Lindbergh Blvd is truly a barrier. So is 84th St. It just curtains off communities. So we were trying to figure out, how can we lessen the burdens of these barriers so that we can interface better with each other? I've had people that work in Southwest Philly, I mean, we're right there with them, and they say, "we don't like you people," because they don't know us, they have no reason to come down here right? So it would be nice if we could interface a little better.

MC: Are there any other challenges? It can be in any kind of category?

Margie: Now that I ride Septa for free, I just wish that they would really do something with that 36 and link it. They're saying that it's in their game plan to make the 36th run to where the Eastwick train station is. That is such a blight, that is awful. So I wish Septa would move along a little bit more. I think that would help our neighborhood. It would help Heinz, because we were talking about if we had a presentable train station, people would take the train in and maybe there would be a shuttle bus to get folks to Heinz. We're trying.

MC: Any other challenges? Nancy?

Nancy: I can't think of anything.

MC: So thinking about Eastwick's future, hopes and worries for the future, what are the things that are on your minds looking forward?

Margie: I am really optimistic because for once the City of Philadelphia is opening up the new plan for Eastwick. So that's very encouraging. We are working again with the redevelopment authority, with all of this open space, and they're allowing the community to have input. So boy is that encouraging. They're talking about things, you have that bicycle path by the art museum to swing all the way to us and to Heinz. That makes damn good sense. And then we're going to take care of the superfund site. Now one of the things that's so nice about the superfund site is that we might be able to use it for recreation. So that could be a lovely open area. And it would also help the bird watchers, too, at Heinz, with more space. So we're working with Josh and with folks here at Heinz about what trees you plant to attract the birds. So that's really great. We want to continue to work with the airport because the airport is not going anywhere. So we're trying to become good neighbors and hopefully trying to get them to understand that "We are your neighbors, are you hiring?" Not that the airport administration themselves hire that many, but introducing us to the airlines and try to get more employment from folks who live right there. So those kinds of things. So on the bad side, it's always going to be flooding. You worry about your own property value, your own life. And then your home is your most valuable possession. Whether you're going to hold that value, if we get this resolved. But its positive. And we have a new developer at Pennrose. He's very excited, he's bringing in more and more retailers, so that is really good. In fact, when we leave here we're going to check out plant fitness. [laughs]

Nancy: We need to join!

Margie: No, we're going to start with checking out.

MC: What has the input process been like with that new development? What have those meetings been like?

Margie: Oh they've been very exciting I have to admit, haven't we had a lot of fun? We've talked about our goals and everybody has something to say. So it's moving very nicely. And it's unbelievable when you get a group of about 30 – 40 people in a room and you find that we're all on the same wavelength. It's really amazing. I'm enjoying that process. I'm hoping that we have something worthwhile on the end.

MC: Yeah, it's coming up right, the drafting is what's next?

Margie: Yes. It's what's next.

MC: So one of my last questions is, because there's a lot of research happening in this neighborhood now, this is one piece of new research to understand what's going on in the environment and the superfund site, the landfills, the refinery, trying to understand the lower Schuylkill river a little bit more, and this whole area of Southwest Philly, there's sortof a lack of information, a lack of data on

Margie: A lack of interest!

MC: Yeah! So trying to make up for that and really understand better this part of the city, and the history, and the environment, and the pollution, everything all together. So what would you want researchers to know, like what do you know that you'd want to make sure researchers know about Eastwick, what do you think are the important things they investigate, like what would you hope that research could do for Eastwick?

Margie: Run that question to me again. What was the first question?

MC: Yeah, that was a lot of questions. So the first part is, what do you think is important for researchers to understand, and then the second part is what would you want them to do with that research, where would you want that research to go? Because it's one thing to find out the numbers or whatever the output of that research is, but then what would you hope the researchers did with that- next steps.

Margie: Well I think that Eastwick is a very unique jewel as a part of the City of Philadelphia. So I'm hoping that researchers can highlight that aspect of it. Because again, I know I'm repeating myself, but all the emphasis is on Center City and I just want folks to realize that it is a jewel here. And where does it get put out? Everywhere. And also I think it would be great for the community itself to have this information. So I don't know how, unless we do it by email or something like that, but yeah. I just want to spread the word.

MC: And emphasis on sharing. So the information that is being collected as understanding or interest in this part of Philly increases- making sure that's shared with the city but also with the people that live here.

Margie: And I think the airport definitely should know us better. And the city planning commission should know us better. And then our councilperson should know us better. Sometimes they see us as a mass of people at a meeting, but either they don't take the time or they don't have the time to do that in-depth. So that's what I'm looking for from this kind of research, too. To highlight what we're all about, the good and the bad.

MC: So is there a way that you would want either your story but also the story of this community to be preserved or to be showcased and then shared?

Margie: Yeah, I like it in our libraries, that could be good. But if there could be a way to have an event that announces the completion to the community, to say, hey, this is all about you, don't you want this information for yourself?

MC: So I'm at the end of my questions. Is there anything else that you want to talk about, is there anything you think is important for this project?

Margie: Is there anything that I missed? I don't think so. I like it here, that's the part I was getting across. One of the things about the project I have a question about, how long is it going to take you, to really get a final document?

MC: My goal and my timeline, just me, I'm doing this full time for my summer research job. But I'm staying in Philly and I won't be far, so I'm going to be connected to the project through the fall. But in the fall my supervisor is going to be working with her graduate students to develop an exhibit for Heinz. So not just oral histories, that would be one component of that exhibit. So I'm trying to do the interviews and generate some content for that exhibit. Also an idea for this project is to have these stories accessible online as data. That's one of the main goals of the project. But the infrastructure is there, so we have an online archive that we can upload these stories to. And one way it's set up is that anybody can ask to submit something. So maybe students are doing interviews for school, they can put their interviews on the archive. Maybe from community meetings, you could put community minutes online. And the idea is that there would be lots of kinds of information all in the same place, so you could get EPA data right next to an interview with someone who lives next to that site. So that's the potential of the archive and that will take some time to fully be ready, but it's there. I can upload things and it might take a little time for it to be accessible just from typing in the website, but it's ready.

Margie: that's exciting.

MC: Yeah, I really like the idea of different types of data being accessible in one place. And I think we will be using maps, so you can zoom in on a neighborhood and be able click on different things.

Margie: I like that too, that is great.

MC: So that can be around forever, that's exciting about that. It's an online library, it's an online library.

Margie: As far as I know, no one has ever done any research on Eastwick, you know, the real kind, like you're doing. I was thinking about Southwest CDC in the Globe Times and Ted Bear. He is one of the reporters, and bless his heart, in his 80s still going strong. And talking about history, I was wondering what he might have in the Globe Times archives. And what I can do is email you his email address. He might be a wonderful resource, looking at it from a reporter's point of view, and over time.

MC: Any other questions for me, about the project at large?

Margie: This is nosy of me, but how many more people do you have set up?

MC: I'm trying to confirm with both Earl and Leo, they're hard men to pin down, but I'm meeting with Terry on Tuesday.

Margie: Good, Terry is very good.

MC: And then I just heard back from a lady named Wanda, who was at our table at one of the meetings, so she seems interested in talking to me and may have some ideas.

Margie: Yes, I remember Wanda.

MC: So a couple, but anybody you think of that might be interested, I can reach out to them, or you're talking to people about the project, and want to send people, anybody interested in the project can feel free to get in touch with me, it's very exciting when I hear that someone may want to talk to me, so don't hesitate to pass my info along.

Margie: I certainly will as I run into people.

MC: And I'm also working with a couple of middle school students who are at Bartram's Garden and they're doing a bunch of work on the river, it's their summer job, I'm mentoring them to interview a couple of the people who fish on the river. So that's like a side project. But same sort of idea, of getting people to tell their stories and adding information.

Margie: That's nice! I like that. Because I didn't know people were still fishing around here.

MC: Do you want to talk about any next steps? The next step for me is to save this, I'm going to put it on my computer, and start transcribing, it takes a little while, it's a slow, slow process. Do you want me to send that transcription to you- to both of you- when it's finished?
Margie: Fine, yes, I'll send you Nancy's email.

MC: And then, how do you want to share your interview? You can change your mind, too. But for now would it be alright if I stored it in that archive?

Margie: Yes, I can tell you that now.

MC: So it's okay if I upload the audio and transcript and audio and the photo, which I'm going to take in a minute, onto that online archive?

Margie: Yes.

MC: And for the exhibition and things like that, do you want me to check in with you about how you might want your interview shared?

Margie: Oh yeah, I would like that, check in with me. I think I'm going to be very amenable.

MC: And with that exhibit we'll probably be using clips, so you'll get a preview of what people are thinking about.

Margie: That's fine. That's reasonable to me.

MC: And I'll be in touch, I'm not going anywhere.

Margie: And I've got your email, and your cell phone number

MC: So you can track me down, too. Alright, I'm going to turn this off.