Grays Ferry Oral Histories

Interviewee: Melissa Toby (MT)
Interviewer: Maggie McNulty (MM)
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Transcribed by: Maggie McNulty

MM: It's Maggie McNulty. I'm a student of PPEH Penn Program in Environmental Humanities and today I'm speaking with Melissa, Melissa, can I ask you to state your name and then also spell it?

MT: Hello, my name is Melissa Toby. It's spelled MELISSA TOBY.

MM: Perfect. Thank you so much for being here, Melissa.

MT: No problem.

MM: I first want to ask you how long you've lived in Philadelphia.

MT: Almost 39 years end of the month.

MM: That's great. And where in Philadelphia have you lived?

MT: South Philly is predominantly where my home base is. I mean, I've lived all over. I've lived in Kensington, and I've lived in West, Southwest but predominantly South Philly.

MM: Okay. And how have those neighborhoods changed since you've lived there or in the time that you've lived there?

MT: Oh, my goodness. The safety factor. I look at it I have three children. And I look at the safety and we I was at a strategic planning meeting last night with my elementary school I work with and when they talk about walkability, it may be a neighborhood school but it's just not safe to a lot of kids to walk by themselves. So the fact of you saying over to your walking area, oh, everything will be fine. It's just not anymore. When the young lady got killed other day, I'm getting off the 33 like my heart cringed, to think that your child is is practically home getting off the bus about to walk into the door, and that their life was cut short. So just to think about how it used to be safe. I remember sitting on the step playing with my girlfriends and not have to worry my parents were right inside. Now is like you're constantly coming to the door. You're peaking. You're constantly calling cell phones. I have teenagers so constantly calling their cell phones and if they don't answer I'm like flipping out because I'm like, it's too dangerous for you not to answer my phone call. So just the fact of fear more than anything with these kids nowadays because they could possibly just not be doing anything and get their life cut short.

MM: Do you think that the safety factor has changed in South, in Southwest, in West Philly and in Kensington? Those are the neighborhoods you mentioned having lived in.

MT: I, I always felt comfortable in South Philly because just felt like home everybody knows somebody that you're related or connected to. In those other areas, I just basically lived there but I didn't really see a lot of safety. There were drugs, there they were shooting it was different things. And like I said, predominantly, me living in South Philly it definitely has changed, like neighbors necessarily aren't neighbors anymore, there's always a conflict or some type of argument or something going on hearing or seeing shooting and having to run in a house. So things have definitely changed to where you you had neighbors now as I got a fear people kind of keep to themselves even when they know things aren't right.

MM: Okay, I'm also curious about how you heard about the work we're doing with PPEH and what your relationship to Mr. Reeves is?

MT: So Mr. Reeves and my father are very close friends. So he knew me before I knew myself. And it's so funny that I end up meeting people who are related to or in some type of friends with my relatives, and I end up working with them or doing some work with them. So what I am is, is a secretary, I kind of do all the paperwork and talking to people making the connections with the community for Mr. Reeves, answering emails, writing notes when it comes up to our SAC meetings, so the ins and outs of the business. So with me, meeting him and knowing him, and we always try to make the best out of the neighborhood because he's from the same neighborhood I'm from. So I'm kind of making the best of out of a bad situation. So people may see bad now, but we lived in it. We played in it, we raised our families in it. So where you may think, oh, that's just a bad area. It's not as bad as you think. Because there are families here there are roots here there are so many memories that we cherish from me being much younger than him. But me actually appreciating the older people because they kind of get forgotten when it comes to embracing the neighborhood but just embrace embracing the values actually they did the neighborhood held that they might not have now, but we're trying to raise kids, grandkids, nieces and nephews in the same neighborhood that embraced us.

MM: And what do you hope this project with PPEH will produce?

MT: Questions or inquiry of why we still live here. Like I said, you may say, oh, it's bad. Why don't you move out? Why don't you go and I'm like, this, this is what I've known this is home. So where you might not feel comfortable at home living in the neighborhood, I live in my house, where my family is where, like I said, we play cards, we sell water ices, we went to the Penny Candy Store we played in the park, we had the best food whether it was cheesesteaks, or even like I said the different the different arenas you talk about the Veteran Stadium, you talking about Wells Fargo now, you talking about all those different places that you can embrace all the different food places, the Italian market. I always like to tell people when I'm introducing them to Philly to know what the real historical places were, or are, that when they go out of business it’s a heartbreak because it's like you embrace those moments that you have and how you felt when you got there.

MM: How do you see the collaborative work that we're doing between students and residents to help people kind of understand what you want them to about the neighborhood?

MT: I think as students, you you might not have come from here. So you don't understand again, why we're here. What has kept us here. Why we would bring up our families. And I had a teacher asked me that recently, she said, why would you want to bring your daughter up in these type of schools, we don’t you try to homeschool her or do different things. And I'm saying, we have some awesome teachers. We have some, like I said, awesome history coming from Philadelphia. And it doesn't get validated all the time. So I think as students when you sit down and you interview with us, and you can we take you on that journey of the different places and the food and the different things that we had to do, back in the day, the memories, the running up and down the street and playing jump rope, or just having family over the weekend, just because those moments make it so much homey to make you want to be interested in why we're here. Maybe you want to come and visit here even possibly live here.

MM: That’s great. Are you involved in any community organizations in your neighborhood?

MT: A lot. All over the tri state area. So first starting with I have two daughters that are in school, my son graduated out of school in May. So I just have the two girls left, one in 11th grade, one in third grade, so I'm involved in the SACs at their schools. I'm involved in any type of fundraising, I do detentions. Like I said, I was at strategic planning meeting last night because they're trying to close the elementary school. So we had two buildings now we just have one. So me being like the parent liaison, the mouthpiece between the parents, the school, and the district is very important because it may seem like one voice so being in it I just said wow, just one person willing to come out. But that one person can be heard and it

might give you division that says wait a minute, let me let me investigate more into this situation before we just kind of quit on the school. So getting the ins and out of understanding that when they're making different ideas or thoughts for schools, why they closed them, why they may combine them, why they making different arrangements for them, not to just completely say that they don't matter because you might have to travel a ways away in reference to traveling for your school. Or you might say you know what, their school has made a lot of things impact, they might have fell off for whatever reason people moved out or people moved in, or different situations have changed. But it doesn't mean that you should embrace every area because it's there for a reason.

MM: Have you been involved with the school as long as your children have been there?

MT: Yes. So my son went to Universal school as well. He went to Vare and Creighton. So I was involved in those schools as well. I've been involved with it was a fast program that allow families and parents to eat one day a week, a dinner, they didn't have to fix one person out of the eight families that we had would cook dinner. And we would eat, we would play games, parents will get opportunity to speak with other parents because a lot of times we spend a lot of times with our kids but really don't get a chance to see other parents that have like common likeness matter. So those are some great programs. I'm also involved in a community agency called the COAS, as well as Be Strong Families. So I travel for them. And I've gone to Chicago last year. I went to Cleveland this year. And yes, I left my family but I left my family for a good cause. Because while I'm impacting my family, we have these things called protective factors that help us to give like key thoughts or cues in reference to fixing issues on our families. So a lot of times things happen, life happens, I always say. So you say you, you deal with resilience, you have to be resilient have to be strong. Sometimes life beat you up and you fall down. But you bend but you don't break. So then it also teaches us to understand that. I say because I have teenagers, sometimes they don't get hurt. Young people don't get hurt. They say, Oh, shut up, just sit down. No, they have an idea to have thoughts too. And I always tell my children as long as it's respectful, speak your mind whenever something is going on. Say your part in it so that you don't feel like somebody's just making decisions for you. So we also help with community outreach, work with doing community service. We also have fun too. We go to basketball games, again, the football games together, we just did the circus the other day with them. We do a lot of impacting in the community. And that's also to say that I can't impact my community without impacting my family first. So while I'm having my family right beside me, as I'm doing community work, I'm also impacting other peoples families. And then when they see us in the neighborhood, it makes it a little easier because like I said, situations and things happen that sometimes people feel like they're ashamed. They don't want to reach out to people, but I think that my face is friendly enough, and I'm always willing to help somebody. So with me doing all these different community agencies, and work and at times it's tiring, it's a lot of energy, that sometimes you just don't have, but you just can't quit because it always takes that one person to say that somebody needs somebody there and I'm that type of person. I always think about that, that if I can be the voice of somebody not having to be alone, because I know what it felt like being alone. Then it all matters. It all helps out at the end. So dealing with all these different community agencies in the school, outside of the school, within my family, I'm in a drama program at Universal right now for my daughter, they're doing a play, that will air in February. So we're doing a lot of flipping and running and going and practicing songs and lyrics and scenes. But like I said it all works out. And then it feels so good to do positive things and be able to impact just not only like I say your family, but also the community. So it is some value still left here that people might not see him I hear about when they do hear about it, it's I want to know more. So we're going to try to you know, publicize them much more because we did some talent shows and some things in the past. She's been in there since ninth grade. And like I said, time went by so fast. She's about to go to 12th grade. So a lot of time has been put in but I feel good that the fact that I have three children and it's a lot to juggle in between those three, but it's all worth it. Because when they're gone, they're gone.

MM: That's really nice. It sounds like you have a lot of fun between going to the circus and the drama club with these organizations. So you spoke about this a little bit, but I want to know what are some important places and/or our memories that you have of growing up in Southwest.

MT: I'm not in Southwest I'm more in South Philly.

MM: Okay.

MT: Southwest, I have family in southwest. So that's, that's where my memories there, having fun over family's house. Going to the supermarket and, and kind of everybody kind of picks a meal or something that we all kind of go home cooking and bring it over and we all have played cards or something to that extent. South Philly my memories are always like I said the Penny Candy. I think back in the day you always had like those penny candy jars, where you have all these pennies stacked and then "Mommy, Can I go to the store?" And at that time it was fine to just walk down the street and go to the stores I'm go to the store and we'll come home and I was still have changed left over I have all this stuff all this sugar and, and all the all these different things. I remember also going to the park. I remember also my fonder memories are like I said family just coming over just because and I remember my mom always took here the older family members in the house. So I was had access to my uncle who was 105 my great uncle who was 105 when I was five, so my mom was always taking care of somebody. So seeing somebody sick in a bed was never something that scared me. It honestly gave me an eye opening and saying I want to be able to do that I want to be able to help somebody and give back and do different things. So those memories of families coming over that crazy cousin is always telling jokes or us eating crabs or like I said, cheese steaks or whatever it was that family did I remember playing family feud or, like I said, my parents playing cards, those finer memories, I'm sorry fonder memories, are beautiful because as we got older people forgot about all those memories. That's what built families up because we always were together. And then as family got older, and everybody kind of branched off and made their own families, they kind of drifted away from that. Like I said, going to the park being able to sit on the step without hearing gunshots, being able to play in a park on a swings, or run or jump or just being able to get down on the floor when the music comes on and dance. Those are the fonder memories that I see in South Philly that we had besides going to the Italian markets and smelling all of those different cheeses and meats and just embracing like I said those finer moments from when you were a kid when there was no stress but just having those good qualities living in South Philly.

MM: When in your lifetime did you feel that the safety concerns kind of switched and became less safe?

MT: Okay, five years ago. My, my sister was engaged to a young guy and we were planning like a little mini family reunion because my uncle was an entertainer and he was coming into town. And we were, we went up to the hotel and we were reserving two rooms. And for some odd reason, my cousin brought her daughter's father with her. And we didn't know the type of lifestyle this guy was in, we just heard about the time that they were her but we didn't pay it any mind. We didn't think No, no, there was no danger coming. My family and I left and we went to Bible Study. My husband was at work that day and my phone kept on going off while I was at Bible Study and I was like this phone looks familiar, why does it look familiar. And I was like it keeps up blowing up my phone. I don't know why. And when I finally did go to the bathroom to listen to the voicemail was my aunt. And she sounds so wary, so hurt. She was like, baby, I'm so sorry. But I'm calling to tell you that Wally's been shot. I said "how?" The last phone call or conversation that I had with Wally I just left the hotel. And he said he said, "Sis, when you get back we going to get in the swimming pool. And we're gonna rock it out tonight." And I was like yeah, yeah, yeah. He was like I love you sis. I love you bro. And mind you he was the middle child of four boys. So he never had a sister so when he met me and getting to know our family he was you're the little sis I never had. So I always remember him saying I love you, sis. I was like, I love you, bro and I heard it for the first three years after that, and I just screamed to the top of my lungs and I dropped my phone. And when I went to get my phone I was like, we have to go, we have to go now. And everything was playing out on news. It was just so crazy. And all I thought it was I have to get to my sister. I had to get to my sister. And when I got to the hotel I mean blood was all over the hotel floor. I didn't understand what was going on. And I just wanted to get to my sister when I did get to the hotel to get to my sister. But first, my cousin who whose whose daughter's father had shot my brother-in-law. She was standing outside and I said what happened? Tell me what happened now why would you allow and she she just shrugged me off and I was like, I can't deal with her right now. And just to see my sister with a blood drenched sheet all over her and

she was like, they won't give me any information because they weren't married yet. And they wouldn't give her any information. He's not from here. He was from Maryland, and having to call his family and making that phone call and seeing the hurt and pain on my sister's face. It was like it was just overwhelming. And I had called my husband on my way to the hotel, and I was like, babe, you have to get to the hotel now. He says, bey, I just got off of work. He said, I'm on my way there. He said, I'm gonna run to the house. I said, you can't go out. You gotta go to the hotel. Something happened with Wally. And to make a long story short, we get to the hotel finally when his family gets here to Philly, from Maryland. And it was tubes just everywhere. And I don't like touch on anybody's feet. But whenever I get anxious or weary, I begin to sing, it doesn't matter where I'm at, and I started to sing and I was touching the bottom of his feet and I'm singing I'm like bro, I know you ain't gonna let me see my myself and I kept on messing with him. And mind you I have three babies at home. So having to think about them in the back of my mind to tell him that he might not make it. Being by his bedside there was about 15 of us by his bedside and the ICU and they couldn't believe how much and I'm like, you know, it was blood coming from his nose because the bullet had went through his nose. They said it ricocheted through his brain. So the whole time we're thinking that he's going to recover from this because his skin just came out with a beautiful hue. It never looked like he was hurt. We were crying but we like I said we just had faith that he was going get out of the bed. And the more and more to come will come in and around checking on him. There was nothing that they could do because the bullet had already done enough damage to his brain. So when they turned the machines off and they said he is gone it was the worst ever because I'm saying I couldn't believe this is like a bad, a bad movie that I'm watching. You can't believe that somebody who didn't mean no harm. These two men had bad words in this man just took his life without any type of remorse. And just to think it could have been all of us that it happened to. It took me forever to get home. My mom was watching my children. And it took me forever to get home. And when I got home, I sat in a car with my husband for for a good two hours. And I said, how do we go home and tell these kids, he's not coming home? And they said "where's uncle Wally, he's still in the hospital?" I was I was like yeah and when I finally had the conversation with them, the hurt, the hurt. And it still hurt because it's a missing void. At that time we didn't know we didn't find out to six weeks later my sister was pregnant and she was pregnant and about to give birth, cuz she was grieving so much that she just did not. She just didn't know she just slept in a bed. She just she didn't want to get up. I was trying to help her organize bills and things of that sort and it was just it was just overwhelming. So now is one thing to grieve and have to let somebody go. I've never had to plan somebody's funeral and things like that. So having to do that was a lot because you're not one to cry outright but it hurt it, hurt to grieve and have to live life without somebody that you were supposed to that was supposed to be there for you. Was a lot. So that's when I understood that safety wasn't that, not only because of my family and that's why I'm so close with my kids working in their schools and being so close to them because it's so dangerous right now, if you don't embrace the family that you have, dysfunctional they may be. And there are moments where you're like I just don't like them today. But those moments when you have to pick each other up when you want to fall, and just not be here anymore, is those moments where you, you should be grateful that you have the family that you have, so that was when I realize that life was not the same anymore. My niece is now four, she'll be five next month. And I love her because she's so feisty. He would have eat her, he would've ate her up, because she is she's just that she's that lovable type. And every time she tries to give me that feistiness back I say, "I'm going home auntie don't have to deal with this." "No, no, I sorry, I sorry, auntie, I didn't mean it." And she's just, she's the life of the party. She definitely is so and I worry about because my sister was doing my daughter's hair one day, and they were shooting and every time I said to hear gunshots, she's replaying them over and over again, because she saw when my brother-in-law got shot and killed, everything kind of replayed in front of you. And it's like, I felt guilty all these years because I felt like I walked him into his death. I had no idea of knowing, but it's just a guilt of saying that my niece has to live without her dad and my sister has to live without her husband and the families in a big void. So understanding that fear is something that we live with now. And it's not, it's not safe or, or fair. For this generation that's coming on. My son is 18, my oldest daughter 16 and my baby girl who just turned nine yesterday. It's not fair to have to live with life like this.

MM: I’m so sorry for your loss. And thank you so much for sharing your stories. I want to steer the conversation towards the refinery and that's something that we've talked about before. I'd like to know what some of your earlier memories are that include the refinery.

MT: That smell, That smell. I remember being around in that area because like I said, I'm born and raised around the neighborhood so we were always going to the supermarket or something around there and like I said, I have family that’s right there in Southwest over 65th Street so riding past and seeing the smoke coming from there or the fire coming from those pipes and that smell. That nasty, eerie smell. It just smells the worst. So just living that close. My mom always saying, I don't know why people live around here. It's always an eerie smell. Or, like the, it just smells like stifling it’s too strong or it just it just uncomfortable, just uncomfortable feeling like we're breathing in terrible air into our lungs.

MM: And when did you begin to associate that smell with the refinery?

MT: Just from like I said, riding and driving around in that area. I'm like, What is that smell like? Sometimes the air in that in the neighborhood just doesn't smell clear. And I'm like, they must be either doing something in that area with the pipes, changing up the oil or something to that extent, like certain smells, you know the difference between tar or it's like I said, it's just something that it's in the air. So you know the difference when it's some type of smoke or some type of gas that just doesn't smell good.

MM: And how do you feel that the climate has changed in your lifetime.

MT: Climate in reference to…

MM: Can be how the weather has changed, how the seasons have changed, in comparison to when you were younger.

MT: I am completely confused even though we're in December now and I know that it should be wintertime. I think we've done every season already. We've done winter, spring, summer, fall, but not simultaneously like in January, we've had 90 degree weather and I’m like why. Some, I remember last couple winters we had, it was still sun outside, it was no snow down. So it's like being confused about the different climate changes, not knowing what to put on what to take off. Like I said, it's just completely confusing. Honestly, it makes you sick because I deal with arthritis. And a lot of times if it's too cold, I suffer if it's too hot, I suffer. But then on top of that, sometimes like I say you just really don't know what it is. It could be the dust or the air coming in from outside, you don't know what you're tracking in the house on your shoes. That's why it's good when you go into house to change your clothes don't wear the outside clothes inside. They get it on your furniture to get it on your bed. I learn that from an allergist so to keep out all those different scents from either the trees or the grass or whatever type of elements are outside so that you keep the inside, inside and outside, outside.

MM: So you just mentioned an allergist, do you or anyone in your family experience allergies or

MT: I have chronic asthma and allergies. I developed that in my later 30’s, I’m gonna say 32. And that was because I kept on having problems, I kept on having like my nose was always clogged up, I would constantly have migraines so when I went to the allergist, the doctor checked me and said, “Actually you shouldn’t even live here” and I said, “Why do you say that?” and she was like, “You have so many allergies. I've never seen anyone like you.” So she sent me for my strip test and she was like, you have an allergy to trees, grass, wheat. She was like most common things that are here in the States you have allergy to. And I was like, Well, how do I, you know, combat that? I remember one day my mom was making spaghetti in the house and I walked in her house and all of a sudden I was like, oh, and she was like, what's wrong with you? And I was like, I don't know. I was like, but I can't breathe right. And I caught hives. So what happened was she was making the fresh tomato sauce and the spores were in the air in the house. And you think, Oh, that's a good smell, no, it’s pasta that’s fine. No, everything in my body got engulfed as if I was bathing in this tomato sauce. So that's how bad my allergies is even just being

exposed to be near the spores is what caused me to get sick. So learning what I can and what I can't have, like inflammatory disease, I honestly feel like as time goes on mind you I was not a sickly child at all. I was a very energetic child, not until I turned 18 going on 19 that I found out that I have arthritis. And then as time went on the diabetes and the asthma, all these different things that developed and it probably is the air quality, I'm sure that edged on all these different conditions because like I said, I didn't have any type of conditions when I was a kid. No headaches, no migraines, no diabetes. My family wasn't sickly. They're like my family has like high blood pressure and diabetes in it. I don't have any high blood pressure. But a lot of my conditions are affected by the air quality because I was just congested. When we first were talking about this interview before and now it's like, I felt like it's coming on again because my migraines have come back. And like I said, that's because the weather keeps on changing up so much but like I said, we don't know exactly what's in the air quality? And what's going on or what they're distributing into the water or to the food? So definitely things have changed a lot.

MM:What about your kids? Do they experience any allergies or asthma?

MT: So my son has, he has an allergy to dust mites, but for the most part, he has like seasonal allergies and stuff like that. I'm grateful that none of them of them are bad, as bad as me. And now my ex, he has chronic allergies and asthma, and he has high blood pressure and diabetes, all those different things. So I'm grateful that none of the kids are as sick as we are. But like I said, I didn't get them until later in years. My husband developed them when he was a real teeny baby. So I think it has to do also with for whatever reason, when you do get sick, how it's treated. If it's not properly treated, then things go from bad to worse. And I think I monitor a lot of my conditions a lot by doing the positive work that I do. Because then you don't have time to be down on your conditions, you got time to think about the positive things, and qualities, but there are times where I have to tell myself, go home and rest. So I'm definitely gonna do that tonight. But I really don't get a chance to get that in. And I don't feel bad about that. Because, like I said, family comes first. So if I'm spending time with them, it'll be time to rest once they're all away.

MM: And have you ever experienced any flooding or mold in your house living in Philadelphia?

MT: So I was living in a house was 2013, 2014 and my face swole up real bad. And I went to the doctor and he was like, you have, like not to gross anybody, well, it was like, blood in my ears. That's how like dry and congested everything was. Why is it? Why am I suffering? I didn't take anything I didn't have anything bad and come to find out the landlord never told me about the conditions in the house. So whenever you want to see a house go see it when it's raining. The reason why I say go see when it's rainy day you'll know rather they have a bad issues in the house. Rather it'd be mold, mildew, water problems. If there's a water problem in a house with a walls always getting moist or wet. That's a bad problem. Because when you turn on the heat in the winter like this, and, you have to worry about all that those spores or whatever that that dirt and debris, the water all those spores, getting into the heating ducts, and then you're breathing it in constantly. So that's that's when I found out I started having these different conditions. And it was the worst and that's when I got on all these medications. Now I have all these asthma pumps, I have three pages worth of medication that I have to take on a daily basis. I'm a little disobedient, I don't take them all the time. Because I would never be out, I would never enjoy life I would be sleep all the time. But this is the different conditions as a kid, I think it's miserable when babies have to take all this medication but as an adult it's miserable too, because how can you enjoy life for real for real? If you have to take all this medication, all these inhalers you have to remember like I'll always have something in my bag or, or have to make sure I'm near the doctor's office so that I can pick up my medicine quick, fast, in a hurry so that I can so, that I and I even taught my eight year old, well my one my nine year old now, I have to learn to say that and teach her how to give me treatments and stuff like that. And I always make my children aware of my condition so that they aren't caught off guard in an event where I have to go to the hospital or something like that so that they're aware of what's going on and knowing how to help and treat me the best way possible or get me to the hospital as fast as possible.

MM: So I want to circle back to talking about the refinery. When the refinery exploded in June, did you hear it?

MT: I heard it. But like I said, so much is going on nowadays. You didn't know until the news happened if that was what it really was. Because we have like those big train, freight trains that go across the bridge. So it could have been there. It could have been a house collapse. It could have been anything. So we didn't know and so after the news came want to find out that's what it was.

MM: Did the air smell differently after the explosion?

MT: Yeah, it was um, it was a funky smell. I can't even put it into words how it smelled but, no. I don't remember the last time that the air really smelled good. How it smell but now, I remember the last time that you're really smell good. So, yeah, it was, it was a, it was a strong smell. Yeah.

MM: So when you found out that that's what the noise was. What was your reaction? And did you have any concerns in learning this?

MT: Yeah, what was going to happen next? Like, will we have to move out of the area? Was the explosion something like you, you always think of like mass destruction or some type of, some type of, some type of mass destruction or some type of situation has gone on in the area you talk about like third world countries that have issues but like that's a that's a big part because it's been a big staple in the neighborhood forever. So that explosion did leave to wonder like, what's our next move or how will they service us?

MM: Is there any information about the refinery that you wish you had?

MT: I guess to understand more importantly, why it's still really needed. Is it really of use or is it just something that they just keep going on because they don't have anywhere to go. I think better understanding why things are the way they are is a better way to understand why they why they have to stay or why they should go. And if it's going to affect my air quality, I suffer enough I don't want it.

MM: Yeah, that's understandable. What have you learned in the past 5, 10, or so years about the seasons changing in Philadelphia, or the weather, or the climate?

MT: When I talked about the warmer weather in the in the winter months, or those fall months, they always go like an Indian summer or something like to that extent. And like I said, I really don't know much more than than that. That different things change. Things are different and when you really don't understand and you really don't have the proper knowledge then I think there should be more understanding about the weather and how things are navigating in order for us to better understand why things seem not normal. Like I said, I remember the year I graduated in 2000 it was snowing. Why was it snowing in June? It's not supposed to snow in June it's supposed to be sun and fun. But then there's sometimes where it's so extremely hot, like I feel like we don't even live in the regular states. I feel like we're we're like, we're on a cusp of the world completely changing. So you never never really know what the season is that how to and what to wear.

MM: What are some of your concerns for the future of your neighborhood, this could be climate related, it could be related to the refinery, really anything.

MT: My concern, of course, is safety. My concern definitely is knowing I'm in a process of wanting to buy my first home, and I want to stay in that same neighborhood. There's so much of influx now with the regentrification and all of that coming about. But I want to stay where I feel comfortable where I can say yes is dangerous. Yes, it might not seem like something for somebody, but when you have an opportunity to buy a home or do something you want to be what feels good for you. So, living way out Northeast, I didn't like it. Living out anywhere else I didn't see fit. My girlfriend also said to me, she says as much as you travel, you should consider somewhere out of Philly, I'm like I'll cross that bridge when I get there. But my like I said, my big concern is I'm always near the schools where my children go for safety. And

for us to be you know, accessible to get into the school, rain, sleet, hail, snow because I do perfect attendance and all of those things with my children, but I just want to definitely safety and making sure that we are if not near our home near family or somewhere we can run to in case of danger and different things go on because you never know what's going on one day.

MM: And what are some of your hopes for the future, both of the neighborhood and also of the refinery space?

MT: I think it should be better used for, since it was a lot of cause of grief all this time with people dying or causing problems for the air quality then we need to find a better, better space for that area. Something that would bring people in to say, Okay, let's close this up. Let's get all these issues out of the way. And then possibly if they'd not build jobs, something there in that area, or like I said, just completely shut it down to make it better for those trying to still live in the neighborhood. I think utilizing something good, the good for the bad.

MM: And if you were to design how to use this space, what would you want to see happen to the current refinery complex?

MT: I don't necessarily know whether living, a living area would be good in an area like I said until they got all of it and who's the know what needs to be taken out in order for it to be safe around that neighborhood. I don't know that's a thought I never thought about that if they'd completely took it out what we can utilize in that space because they're building everywhere so who knows what what's the next idea. 'Like I said, possibly considering I don't know whether a park something something to bring some type of good into the neighborhood to combat all the negative that transpired with the bad that came out of that area, because it might have been of some use back in a day, but I just don't they just look like something new like you. You see, okay, that's a park over here. Well, that's this or that. So just not really understanding what was the use of it. I hear what what I was told with the use of it is now but is it really needed now? Is it mandatory that it needs to stay in that area? I'm not sure about that. Because like I said, all these different problems and things that they developed let's find something positive to do with that area. So that we could possibly bring some type of good that happens in the neighborhood.'

MM: Yeah, definitely. So next week during our symposium, you're one of our tour guides, and I was hoping you could speak a little about the place in which you're going to give your your talk on the tour.

MT: No problem. No problem. Okay, that's fine. Thank you. No problem at all. So are we referring to the places I was talking about in the tour? Oh, in the park where the penny candy was, because I used to live right down the street from there when I was a little girl.

MM: So just to be clear, we're talking about the Lanier playground.

MT: Lanier playground, of course, because they redid it over. We played baseball in it recently. And it's a really good area. I love they have a little dog park area, and I have two dogs. I'm, I have fur babies. So I have two dogs and a cat. So the fact that you can bring your animal there and I just really enjoy the neighborhood. It's some good sites, you can get some good hoagies on other side, from triple seven down here, so yep, no problem. No problem. I'll take them on an adventure and make them hungry.

MM: That's great. You've answered all my questions. Do you have any questions for me or anything further?

MT: No, no, no, no, no. We'll talk about our next move after this.

MM: That sounds great. Well, thank you so much again, Melissa, for coming and for interviewing.

MT: No problem, I had a good time.