

# Fuquay-Varina Capturing Wisdoms Project

## Long-term Resident, Mamie Richardson

*Interviewed by David Kirk Dirlam on June 25, 2020*

*Fuquay-Varina's Capturing Wisdoms Project decided to do stories on long-term residents of Fuquay-Varina. I asked Maureen Daly, Director of the Fuquay-Varina Arts Center for recommendations and she suggested I reach out to the current President of the Cultural Arts Society of Fuquay Varina, Marion Tucker. Maureen added, "It's a group that has been around for quite a while. They put together the annual MLK day walk and program, and they led putting together the International Festival last spring at the Arts Center."*

*Ms. Tucker followed up with "Let me suggest that you contact Mamie Richardson, who has lived in Fuquay much longer than I. She agreed for me to give you her contact information.... Ms. Richardson was one of the original committee members of the Cultural Arts Society, she was born and raised in Fuquay receiving her early education at the Fuquay Consolidate High school, She is an active member of the New Providence Missionary Baptist Church on Hilltop-Needmore Road. She attended Shaw University. [I went back in 1992 Shaw University Adult Degree Program CAPE Center for Alternative Program in Education]. She has also been an activity member of the Fuquay-Varina Community."*

*My comments and questions are in italics.*

*What aspects of your life have you grown in the most over the years?*

Wisdom and Knowledge.

*Where did you learn the most?*

In my jobs. I worked for Fidelity Bank in Cary as a bookkeeper. Joe Veasey hired me. He took me on based on my ability to want to learn. That was 1972. We had an old machine to do accounts with. I worked along-side of Mayor John Byrne for 2 years.

My real love was teaching and later in life, I got the chance to be a teaching assistant. I did that for fifteen years, ten at Lincoln Heights, and then at Lufkin Road Middle School. I worked in the Cross-Categorical Resource team, most of the years with BED children. That stands for behavior and emotionally disturbed.

*That's a difficult assignment.*

I worked with a very effective teacher. It was very challenging and very rewarding. Each had something



different to bring to the table. You have to have love and compassion for every one of the children.

*How did you teach discipline?*

I tried to treat the children the way I wanted to be treated with respect and love. They just needed love and somebody to talk to them. If the child became uncontrollable, the teacher who was trained to place them in a therapeutic hold took over. When you love and show them love and they don't get it at home, they learn to respect you. Some of them never forget. I have books of pictures of the children that I taught. When I went to Lufkin Road Middle school, I had a reading group with Spanish students. They taught me so many words. When Ms. Marge Runco hired me she told me "I want you here because you know the community."

*How have things changed since you were in the classroom?*

There have been a lot of changes in Lincoln Heights these days. I still help "Heroes Read" with two little girls. I see the structure and learning environment is much different. I was surprised to see how well the students were reading. My daughter teaches school in Charlotte and Mecklenburg County. Now they are doing things on a computer.

I get on my computer email, newspaper, and banking. I wouldn't even get a cell phone. My daughter insisted and took me to the store to get a cell phone. Our Deacon at church sent his two daughters over to teach me how to text. My computer is old. My son graduated from Shaw University in Computer Science.

*Do you have an email account?*

Yes. It's [mzchurchlady@outlook.com](mailto:mzchurchlady@outlook.com). I love to write. I do it all the time. I do bible study on the phone, Sunday school on my phone.

*How did Lincoln Heights change over the years?*

Lincoln Heights was totally different from working at We Care Day Care Center at the Fuquay-Varina Baptist Church. My first day at Lincoln Heights, my thoughts were, "What have I got myself into?" The students were bouncing and jumping all over the place and the teacher would say "Would you make a better choice please?" I thought, "What choice do they need other than to do what I tell them to do?" I told the pupils that "You don't have but 25 minutes to eat. You don't have time to do anything but eat. If you're hungry, get your food and sit down and eat. It's not like home." They were so quiet I could have sat down and eaten with them.

I also worked with another teacher. There was a boy who would get off the school bus and hit students with his book bag. When I had my lunchtime I had him. They got him on Ritalin. He was a totally different child – he cried and wouldn't eat. The more love you give a child, the more difference it makes. He would tell me stuff about crack cocaine that I didn't know. As a teacher, you don't know what their lifestyle is all about.

There was this one little black girl who would come to school on a cold winter's day wearing only a jeans jacket. One of my nieces had a nice coat, so I gave it to her. Two days later, she was

wearing a jeans jacket again. “Where is your new coat?” I asked. She answered, “My Momma sold it for some drugs.”

When I started at Lincoln Heights, they had staggering entry. I didn’t understand the concept too well. If you taught your child not to talk to strangers, they would get misunderstood. Some of them hadn’t been to daycare. When my daughter was little, we put her in daycare so that she would get ahead. She got used to being around children and learned how to share so that she was ready for school.

*How did church affect your life?*

I was born and reared in church. I was going to church, but I wasn’t IN it. I learned to be IN the word. God has been my backbone, confidant, adviser. I’ve learned so much under Rev. Wood. I’ve left those worldly things behind. I greet people on Sunday morning. I go to bible study and church. God is my shield, protector, guide. He’s going to see me through everything.

A high-school classmate of mine had a stroke. His Mom died when he was in the hospital. I wrote a paper to be read at his mother’s service. I take him a plate every Sunday. Everybody is somebody in the eyes of the Lord. A nurse comes in each afternoon. A barber has come over. I try to treat everybody well.

Every generation is different. My mother didn’t have money to give, but she would feed them. My father was a sharecropper and my mother a homemaker. My father was president of the PTA when I was in High School. If we had to plant tobacco, we had to get out of school at 12:00 o’clock noon and he would come to pick us up. When I was in the ninth grade, we would love to get a new teacher. I told one new teacher “I can’t run around the track because I have asthma.” When my Dad heard this, he told her “She runs around the house all the time.” In my house, you couldn’t tell a lie and get away with it.

I wanted to go to Shaw University. When I applied, my Dad and Mom went with me. He put on his suit. Everybody was supposed to stay on campus in their first year. I couldn’t afford to stay in the dorm. So they said I could stay with my sister in Raleigh. I completed the first year.

When my son started, I went back to the night program. He told me they would give me credit for life experience. Opportunities are better now. My son is 50 now. He works for Copy Pro (they work on printers and other office equipment). He’s married, his wife teaches ESL. He was diagnosed with MS at age 44.

I would tell my children when they come home for school. “You don’t have wood to cut, water to bring in. Therefore, I don’t expect you to have failing grades at school.” That was what I had to do before I could start my homework. Both my children graduated. My daughter graduated from St. Augustin’s and is doing graduate studies online now. My son graduated from Shaw University.

*How has Fuquay-Varina influenced your growth in each?*

Some years ago I was on the Town of Fuquay-Varina Revitalization Board with Linda Johnson and Marilyn Gardner. I had an opportunity to go to a Main Street Conference. I rode down with

Naomi and Marilyn and I roomed together. She's a wonderful person and a good friend. I was on her team when she was running for Commissioner of the Town of Fuquay-Varina.

*How has Fuquay-Varina changed?*

I've seen a lot of growth in Fuquay. There was an article in the *Independent* newspaper called "The other side of Fuquay." There has been growth over here. We have sidewalks now. The police have been patrolling more. Chief Laura Fahnestock came to Saint Augusta Baptist Church. It was very productive.

We don't have many black-owned businesses. As far as downtown is concerned, we now have the Stick Boy Bakery and the pizza place. My brother lives in Garner but still comes to Elmo's Clothing Store here to get his suits. I still bank with Fidelity.

*Do you know Shirley Simmons?*

I called her a while ago. She had a yearbook of the Consolidated School. I wanted to talk to her. I was living in Raleigh and moved back in Fuquay in '83-84.

*What was it like to get a job in those days?*

Many employers were beginning to hire African-Americans. Companies were opening their doors to African Americans who had graduated high school and were willing to work and be trained. Cornell-Dublier and the Kendall plant hired a lot African Americans, who had graduated from high school. My sister was working there, while I was in high school.

*Has it changed?*

In this generation some of them are not willing to go to school to get trained for a position. When I went to Fidelity, I had qualifications. You have to carry yourself well. You don't need to discriminate the color of a person, but you can discriminate how they carry themselves. When I went to work, I looked like I was going to Sunday morning worship. Some of them today, come to church like they are going to a Saturday afternoon picnic.

You have got to sell yourself, no matter what color you are. If you want to spend the rest of your life at your burger place, that's what you'll do. Their goals have changed. I wanted to get out of the tobacco field. Today their parents give them cars and cell phones, but don't make them accountable.

My sister died of a massive heart attack and I told my children, "Life is not promised to you. Learn to cook, clean, and get an education. You can get things for yourself. They are in the "I want" generation. Opportunities are great. I told my son, "If you get stopped with drugs in my car, I'm coming to get my car and I'll leave you in jail."

It's better [*in Fuquay-Varina*] than what it was 5-10 years ago. I couldn't go out on my street. You knew where they were. When that police lady [*Chief Fahnestock*] came here, she made some remarkable changes. Now, I feel secure and protected by the police. We cannot defund the police department. You've got to take the rotten apple out of the bag, but don't take the whole bag.

I haven't seen any rotten apples. I haven't heard any bad words. I have known people who have done coffee with a cop. We have more businesses now.

*What are the most important ways that Fuquay-Varina has changed?*

We have more traffic.

*How would you like to see Fuquay-Varina change in the future?*

I would like to see the traffic improve. There's not much change you can do downtown. I'd like to see a movie theatre. I'd like to see more businesses—restaurants. Holly Springs has Texas Roadhouse and Olive Garden. We don't even have a Kentucky Fried Chicken. It takes time.

“Rome wasn't built in a day”

I'm on a dead-end street and they have cleared out the drugs. We don't have sidewalks, but not sure if we need them.

We used to have them out on Bridge Street. I told them, “Go to school, get something in your head, you don't have to stay, you can have more opportunities.” Daughter is not married and is a “clothesaholic.” She gives her students her phone number. She was upset this school term: two of her students, Mexican boys, got in a fight. One cut the other and hospitalized him. At her school they don't they have a metal detector. When they rebuilt Lincoln Heights, that made it so that you can't get in with pressing the button. When I was up there, it was wide open.

*How do you know Marion Tucker and the Cultural Arts Society?*

Marion and I both graduated from Fuquay Consolidated High School. She and I worked on the Consolidate Alumni Association as well.

MLK day had good speakers and singers from Campbell University. White people have been attending more. We had a poem competition for children. There was recital from the essay competition that was won by two males, one was African American, and the other was Caucasian. The Fuquay Consolidated Alumni Association was there too.

George Floyd took me back. It does something to you. Nobody should be treated that way. I got my cousin to take me to Raeford for the viewing. We got a shuttle, got up to the church, got off, and friend of mine let me in line. It was awesome to witness that. I had to wear a mask. I was glad to be part of that. I love God, I love my church and my church family. You are never too old to learn. You should know if you make a friend you have a friend.