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Mr. Al Dobbins Interview
January 24, 1990

LOCAL HISTORY

This is January 24, 1990.

This is Robert Williams sitting at a table in the Decatur Public Library.

This is Al Dobbins, a local resident, who consented to be interviewed for the oral history program.

Q. Can you tell us how long you have lived in Decatur?

A. Have lived here since 1953. Came here on June 17, 1953 and have lived here ever since, in the same house that I lived in. I still reside there.

Q. Where do you reside?

A. Eight hundred and six W. King Street, it's a nice neighborhood, I like it. I know many people, have had a chance to work with lots of people, both young and adult. I've seen a lot of young grow up in this community. Some have done real good; others not so good. But they still respect you from their childhood days. You remember thinking what might have happened to them. They say to people they knew as family when they were small: I know what you did, you will not admit it but I know what you did. These kinds of things are rewarding, to hear people say good things about you. Just did it because you wanted to do it but it is still good when you come back.

Q. Do you have a family? Do you have children?

A. I have four children, three grandchildren, well, four and one deceased. I have one great grandchild. Two daughters and two sons. They all live out of state. One in California; the oldest son. The youngest son and two daughters live in Tyler, Texas. Oldest daughter is an instrument teacher in the school system and the youngest daughter is in child care.

Q. Where did you come from in 1953? What brought you to this community at that time?

A. This is fascinating. I came to Decatur because I passed through Decatur. Passed through Decatur in March 1953 and I met a lady at 855 W. King Street. I brought her cousins from St. Louis to Springfield for that big day-- Memorial Day; big day in Springfield. All go out to cemeteries; all from all over the world and back, have picnics and family reunions. All this happened on that day and they gathered at cemeteries, and talk about their loved ones. They visit with each other, then go to different homes for picnics which have been

arranged. This is what I did, I drove two older people up from St. Louis to Springfield. I had nothing else to do that day. They asked me if I would drive them up. Met some real fine people in Springfield and then we came across to visit her cousin in Decatur. I found out that Staley was hiring so I applied for a job, on Saturday, at Staley's. They hired me. I knew that I was going to change jobs in St. Louis. I was Boys dorm work director at Neighborhood House, which is similar to the Boys Club. Used to be Neighborhood Houses but now Boys Clubs have taken them all over. Located in low income areas, deprived areas, and housing authority property. I wasn't wanting to work with the city because they were taking over the jobs. So I applied as a chemist at Staley's and they hired me. I never worked as a chemist at Staley's because it was five years later they built the research building and I was way out of chemistry. I had gotten into, I guess you might call it social work in the school system, doing something else and that I liked that much better. I took a couple of courses at Millikin to improve myself on speech, and I got into drama out there. I was the first person of color to be in Town and Gown Fraternity. Dr. Michel and the late Edith McNabb were there then. They were very fine people. I had a chance to meet a lot of good people. I got a chance to be in plays, and show my ability as to what I had learned in dramatics in years gone by. I had been in Dramatic Clubs throughout my college career. Oh, I had a chance to be here with Town and Gown. It was a lot of fun. Dr. Michel was a good director.

They transferred my records from St. Louis to Red Cross, I didn't know Red Cross Chapter even had my records until they came and told me I was to work Motor Services. They were going to have their first bloodmobile for 3 days at the Stanley Co. I was there early in the morning at 5:00 a.m. and stayed until 2:00 p.m., then came back to work all shifts. It was kind of nice to do that. Everybody was surprised and I was surprised that the Red Cross Chapter here had my records from St. Louis where I had started in Red Cross. They made me Chairman of Motor Services of Red Cross. From that, we went out and I got 40 drivers, and organized driving and helped set up Progress Day School. At its beginning we furnished transportation for 3 years through the Red Cross to Progress Day School, and that was until they said, that is, the community saw what Progress Day School really meant because there were so many retarded children behind closed doors that nobody knew about. The fascinating thing was that the people that helped to start Progress Day School were from Texas and we did not live too far from each other, and this lady worked in a department store. I worked for the people who owned the store in their house as a house boy. We learned about each other after we got started and finally she said, "are you Alphonso"? And I said, "that's me". She said, "I remember you," and we began to talk and remember back then.

Progress Day School is a very valuable tool to this community and it went out and it grew, and it grew, and it grew. It started at the Third United Brethren Church on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays. Then it moved to North College and then went to West Wagoner, and from West Wagoner moved to its present location now at North Maple. That is where they built the school and improved it.

Mrs. Salzman was director for many, many years and she did a beautiful job. That was rewarding to be able to do that; to schedule and had other people working with me in scheduling the drivers for Red Cross, Mrs. Shelley Hieland and Juanita Hieland, as we know handled the bloodmobile--also the late Myrna Ventress and late Mrs. Virginia Evans--they were part of the team and then instead of one person doing it, there was a lot of us doing it but we got it done. It was needful.

Along with being chairman of Motor Services I went to Danville every Tuesday. We used to go to Macon Acres Nursing Home which was out where Adolph Meyer Mental Clinic is now. These ladies would order things, and the Red Cross ladies would shop and then bring back what they ordered.

The Junior Red Cross used to go to Chanute Field on Sunday and entertain the soldiers there in the hospital. We went all around with Junior Red Cross doing a lot of shows in small communities; Argenta, Blue Mound, and at community centers. These places were good promotion for the Red Cross by letting people know about Red Cross and encouraging young people. These were high school students, they had a lot of talent and we encouraged them to grow up and be a part of an agency like Red Cross or other agencies, which are needed in all communities. This was a real background, to help encourage them to help people.

From chairman of Motor Services in Red Cross, they made me Chairman of Community Services. This was a new program and out of this grew a "Good Grooming Program," where you talked to young people about how to take a bath, brush their teeth, and put clean linen on beds in a thirty minute skit called, "Good Grooming." We wore Red Cross uniforms and we did it for over 10,000 kids, and we followed the school schedule. We went from school to school every day doing this in the mornings. The whole program lasted about 27 minutes, three minutes were taken for classes to come in and others to go out. It worked real good. Then we had a conflict with keeping up with the schedules of the schools. The schools started busing and we couldn't make our schedule meet the school schedule so the program wasn't done on a regular basis. But there were still groups that called for it because they thought it was good. Some of the people who had started working with kids thought this was an opportunity to teach them responsibility, and they wanted young people to see this because they were working in this area, about keeping clean.

We set up demonstrations at the Red Cross Office and then some of the former principals called for the service again anyway. They thought it was good and just wanted to see it and let their children and classes see it. It was a serious program but it had a lot of laughter in it which made it funny. Things like newspapers could be a doormat, place boots on this and then throw the paper away. You could have a real newspaper for a trash basket, put it in the trash and then throw it out in the garbage. If someone got sick on a beautiful bedspread on the bed, if they messed up the newspaper you could just throw it away. We gave them the basics of cleanliness. We talked about; a nice clean mattress, nice clean mattress cover, nice clean bottom sheet, nice clean top sheet, nice clean blankets, nice clean bedspread, nice clean pillow, and nice clean pillowcase. Many of the youngsters did not know all of that went on a bed. They thought that a quilt, and a mattress without a sheet was fine as long as you were covered up. Many of them slept on mattresses. We told them they could take a bath without a shower or a bathtub. They could bathe from a pan and we demonstrated for them. We poured water in a pan, took a wash rag and soap and go wash, wash, wash. You were talking to elementary children and you had to talk their language. They laughed about that--we brought laughter into it.

When you see people you had worked with they remember it. The other day at Sears, I saw a young man who told me that I had taught him how to brush his teeth, at Oglesby School, and I had to laugh. I couldn't believe that, and he said, "yes you did, you gave a demonstration." He is a nice young man, and is doing real good, has a good job. He told me what he was doing and he still remembered me after all these years.

- Q. One never knows how you touch the lives of young people when you are working with them that way.
- A. This is very important and it makes you think more and more when they come back to you, and when you say this to people today who are working with young children. They must be very careful of what they do and what they say, because they can turn their lives around and you can still touch their lives, so you really have to keep this in mind. This is a young child, am I doing for him or am I tearing him down, which is a big question in today's world. What are they doing? What are we doing for young people? When you look 29 years back and somebody says anything good about you it is a rewarding thing because that isn't said about many people, and you have to be grateful that whatever you said is still there.
- Q. Even something as simple as teaching someone how to brush his or her teeth. Quite important and fundamental. Let me ask a couple of questions, Mr. Dobbins, that just might clarify a couple of things. Where did you have training, in Texas or

Missouri, for social work in college that qualified you to work with Boys Club or predecessors of Boys Clubs?

A. Yes, I was an Agriculture Major. I graduated from Tennessee A&I at Nashville, Tennessee or Tennessee State. Being an Agriculture Major, I had a background of all of it; Sociology, Economics, Accounting, Bookkeeping, Vets work, Poetry you name it. You go out as an Agriculture teacher, you work in the community with the young people or I'll say to the boys, they have to have projects, growing hogs or whatever. You have to work with adults also, this gave you a chance to get into the community to meet people, to help people, to see people change, to see them be happy about their change. One of the places I worked, I was on the job training with veteran teachers. I had the veterans and I taught them how to plow.

Q. Was this in Tennessee?

A. This was in Texas.

Q. In Texas?

A. This was where you till the soil, easy because of the type of soil. You only need a mule and a plow. You raised cash crops: watermelon, peas, sweet potatoes, sweet corn or whatever cash crop they wanted. Along with the cash crops this veteran had to have a milk cow, chickens, and a hog. When he did this he did not go out and buy all these things. This made his household. He had to have all of these things so that he would know that you didn't go buy milk on the farm when you had a milk cow. You didn't go buy chickens when you could grow them on the farm. So you raised corn to feed your chickens, and lots of times the chickens ran out in the yard. This is a self-sufficient thing where even with the crops that they grew, they wouldn't have to spend the money for the cash crops. This turned out to be a good program in the area where I worked. I went back a few years later and I went out to see some of the young people, some of the veterans I worked with. They had beautiful homes, nice cars, and they called me Fessier. This is a kind of southern slang, Fessier. Some of them didn't recognize me so we had fun with them until they recognized me, and I asked them if they had their record book and they said "Fessier." This is 25 years later and they had their hat on and we really got to know each other again. There was some comment that you haven't changed at all - just look at you, you haven't grown older at all - which is good and you encourage them. You know working with people if you have ever worked with people in any capacity you respect them whatever you have done good for them, even if they live better than you.

Q. Would you see any value for that type of thing in our community today?

A. We need it right now, of course when you talk to me about this, you get into what I call my Green Thumb. That's what we're doing in Green Thumb today.

Q. Tell me about that.

A. Green Thumb Operation is a program of the Macon County Chapter of the American Red Cross. It started in 1970 with 19 families and a trash pile on South Broadway. They appointed me as chairman of the project.

Q. Is that where the water works is located now?

A. Where the south water works is now. We worked there about 4 years on a spot of land where we could find all the raccoons and possums and whatever else was running around down there. When we set it up, we said, "if you could clean this part of the city, people riding down 51 highway would take a look and they would see Mueller Park", which is a beautiful park. Maybe this would encourage them to set a business up here. Well, we said that at the beginning and we went down one day and a man said to us, "What is the Green Thumb Project?" Naturally, when we don't know people we don't know how we should receive them and you come along with something like, "Municipal Gardens and you won." Then the second contact with this individual he was very plain in saying, "what is your goal in Green Thumb"? This, of course, was a whole book. When asked that, we said, "we wanted to clean the area, we wanted it landscaped, wanted at least 100 families in the project to participate because we knew this was something good." We were talking about families with ten kids and down the line. This would certainly help them in their homes and help them to have nutritious foods, especially the fresh vegetables from the garden. So we told him this, and he said, "I like your idea, would you get a bid?" "Let me see what I can do," so we did. We sent a bid to him and he accepted the bid. It went up into the thousands of dollars but he accepted the bid and he remained anonymous. We explained to him why we would like him to remain anonymous, "because if you give this much money here, some one is going to come up and say, why don't you give us some money?" But what they're doing might not be something that you can see through. He finally agreed that, that was a lot of money and perhaps he shouldn't talk about it. Then he came back and said, "no, don't say a word about who gave it to you," so we didn't.

Q. Has your work with the Red Cross been volunteer work or have you been a paid employee of the Red Cross, Mr. Dobbins?

A. Forty years of volunteer information. There is no pay in Red Cross.

Q. All of this in addition to your full time job at Staley's, when you worked at Staley's. When did you retire at Staley's?

A. I retired in 1986, my last day of work was November 10, 1986. I didn't retire until March of 1987 but I didn't work any more after the 10th of November 1986. In those years I worked at Staley's from 1962-1974. I worked for Decatur Public School System being nutritional supervisor and playground supervisor when the program was in its first days, to see whether or not they should have it. This was at Washington School where they watched the program very closely.

Q. I remember that.

A. While at Washington School a few days after I was there, I said to the principal of Washington School, "you need a home visitor," and he said, "what are you talking about?" "You need someone to go out there and tell the families that they should send their children to school, that everyday they are absent the school system is losing money." If John Doe is sick at 7:45 and at 8:00 he is walking in the street across in front of the school he wasn't sick at 7:45. When this was presented to downtown Keil Building, it wasn't accepted at first by the administrative staff. As the superintendent Mr. Lester Grant, at that time, the late Mr. Norman Gore, Miss Charlotte Meyer said, "that you can go to Black homes but if you go the White homes you will cause a disturbance." When the principal, Mr. Ralph Boxell, told me this he was hesitant in telling me, but I laughed when he said it because I grew up next to a plantation in Texas so that was nothing new about things you were told you couldn't do. I said, "fine, I'll just go where they want me to go." It was only just a few weeks later when Mr. Boxell went to a White home and they wouldn't let him in.

So when I got to school, he wanted me to go over there so I did. I brought the little boy back to school. It was a situation where the shades were down, the doors were closed, and all kinds of not a nice thing. Anyway, I brought him back to school. This is when they said I should visit all the homes, so I did. I gained a lot of friends. At that time I also worked with special education kids from Cantrell Hall. We worked with all the girls out of Webster Hall that had been placed there from broken families and we worked with all the families in cultural deprived areas, on Water Street, Main Street, South Main Street, Broadway, you name them all down there, Jackson, the whole shebang.

Q. You moved to Decatur in 1953, I believe you said, Mr. Dobbins, and at that time the civil rights laws had not been enacted by the Congress, and I rather suspect that you must have encountered, as you indicated, having grown up next to a plantation and evidence of discrimination in dealing with the school administration in the school district here for a while in your volunteer work. And you must have encountered a number of other times and occasions when you were a victim of discrimination both overt and subtle in those early years of

work in Decatur. Do you recall any of those? What was it like?

- A. Yes, our family increased and we looked at several homes and we couldn't buy any of the houses because of who we were. We played some games with calling on the phone because our voices are different on the phone. We asked the person about the home and they would say yes, but when you get there they would say no when they saw you. I saw them turn veterans down for homes. They wouldn't let them buy. I was told that I could when I went in alone, after a few months and I wanted to buy they told me I had to go to a certain real estate to buy my home. I thanked them for it, then I went on. They recommended how a minority was good just as long as they worked with certain persons, but I had an opportunity to meet other people because my community involvement in Red Cross and Boy Scouts and other things. I knew other people I could go to also to get a loan to buy a home. I went to J. D. Johnson and Mr. Johnson said to me, "I'm going to try, you look like a nice person," and he did. I had only been here a few months. That is the way we bought our home then. We lived there, we paid our bills, and we paid for our home, and met our obligations. And maybe by doing that we could take a look at other people and at least we proved that colored people could be trusted. I think that is what they called us at that time, and negroes or whatever other names they called us, but that proved that you could depend on colored people, that all people are not the same. That some people paid their debts, they said that then, but a lot of people that don't pay their debts of all races and all walks of life of people. As the years go on, you find this out but sometimes when you get shoved here in this corner you're the only one, you don't look any further. You think this is it but that is not true. We get to play it, so there's a world of people in that neighborhood, there's a lot of children in that neighborhood and our house became the place where they came to play, sleep, and eat. We used to play ball with them and all of those kinds of things. So, we sort of grew up with them. We all had a good time. You encounter things on your job. You uplift the other person you never down them. That was all of the things you had to work with.

I help Washington School with Title I program to get money. Both the teachers and the workers and everybody--guinea pigs--who ever was working with it because they didn't know whether it was going to work. I was a part of the program when the state people came here (27 of them). They brought the car here one morning to Decatur and I was on the program that day. It was invocation, and I guess I was a part of it that day.

Frontiers is a service club which I am a member of. We do special projects for Head Start. In 1963 we did a special project, we made biscuits and worked at a program then at Washington. In 1964 we went out and worked with schools that

were basically summer schools. They had slow learners and each member of the club was assigned a school. The teacher would call when the student wasn't there and the club member would make a visit with the parents. Those children would go back to school and the parents would go to the program. That summer they had the program at Durfee School and those parents had the auditorium full. Out of the Head Start Program we made house visits. We had little booklets and lesson plans. We would read to the children to start with and we would leave a booklet and lesson plan with them so that their parents or an older brother or sister could help them. Many times you would return and they would be on the same page because nobody helped them. We found out that a lot of parents couldn't read. This was confidential information that was given to the teachers and they worked with the children in a different way. There were a lot of special programs in Washington School working with children. Out of this came the Self-Start Program because we saw the little children in the homes. The Self-Start Program that started with Frontiers helped with it, and the 6th Christian Church helped with it once. It went back and forth and now it is with Family Services. Where most people look at Head Start is DMCOC or Self-Start under Family Services, they don't know that a service club had a lot to do with it. One of the classes at Self-Start is the Frontier Meeting house in Mueller Park which we developed. We have added all new lights, plumbing, heating, and a all new building on the inside. The family that lived across the street from Mueller Park 50 or 55 years ago came back for a reunion one year. These people worked for Love Unlimited. I wanted to go but I missed that, that was my old stomping ground.

Q. You have been very active in that over the years?

A. I am a charter member of Frontiers International and what we do is we started buying clothes and feeding children way back in the '60's. We were feeding kids in high schools. We had a basketball team at Eisenhower and had good times. Most of those team members came from families where they couldn't have hot lunches so we started paying for schools to have cereal in the principal's office so that when a child hadn't had breakfast he might get naughty in the classroom, he could go to the principal's office and have a bowl of cereal, and they might be able to work with him there. When we got to Washington School, I was a home visitor there and when a child didn't act quite right they would send him down to me. I would talk to them, take them for a ride and tried to find out what had happened. They told you a lot of things and you'd make a home visit and see a lot of things, see dirty dishes and a lot of things, so you would know that child's home. When you are hungry and don't eat you don't feel good, so that was normal. It was a normal thing to do. Out of that program, home visitor program, they have home visits now. Each class has a real program with its leaders, and just all

kinds of things. They broke the program up because I was home visitor, reading to the kids, doing the whole thing as well as taking attendance. Now they have attendance officers in the school system and that has changed. But it started at Washington School. Also at Washington School they have a bath tub. They put a bath tub there. It stood out and it was important.

Q. There was not one there when I was a student back in the '30's.

A. Well, there's one there now. Right off the auditorium. You go down the hall and go past the room and there is the tub. Now they have put in a washer and dryer. The lady in charge of that program at Washington School was a student there when I was there and she said, we are still using the bath tub. I still don't think it is a bad idea. Frontier put shower stalls in Mueller Park hoping that eventually they'd get a kind of supervisor and have insurance that would cover the liability, so that after participating in an activity the children could take a bath. It added to their feeling better and all. We realize that trying to get insurance and supervision is a real pain but we hope that someday in the near future we will be able to have this, so these can be used.

Q. It is obvious a person like you has an ability to open doors and get people to open their doors to you, Mr. Dobbins, from what you said. But getting back, you indicated that you did have some problem earlier in getting a loan to buy a home. Were there other places in Decatur where you found doors were not opened to you because of your race?

A. Oh yes, you couldn't go any place to eat. Even the "Y" wasn't really opened to you then. They used to have teenage dances but those teenage dances were only for the white kids. The black kids didn't go there. I furnished transportation to retarded children so they could swim at Southside Country Club, and I had to schedule the drivers to get the children there because the Red Cross took them. But in the summer there were no black retarded kids, there were just white retarded kids. I did ask the question why there were just white retarded kids in the summer time?

Q. In the summer time?

A. But, I went out I took my kids with me many times to ride in the wagon. We sat there and watched kids swim, we would take them back home. But those were things you actually saw happening at that time. The other part of the Red Cross a lot of their people were members of both country clubs. One of the things you just say, there was discrimination, even still discrimination today but you just can't sit still and beat on it. There are things that need to be done but tell people the

truth. There is discrimination, there is a way of getting by, sliding under, moving things. One of the things that I found in Decatur is that people will take your ideas and advance them. They go places but they take your foundation and build on it. Everything has to have a foundation so someone's got to build the foundation. In Frontier Club, Frontiers was a catalyst. We set up all these things we have talked about in the past. We set up the program in summer of '63 that Head Start came from. We set up a program of '64 that was what Self-Start came from. In '68 we got the building down there and we talked about programs.

Q. Is the building in Mueller Park there on Cantrell Street?

A. No, the building is in Mueller Park. This is where we started talking about boys. We got Boys Club. "You need a health program for low income people," we said, "you need somebody to really take care of older people so you get programs to help." Where else can you go in being a catalyst for setting up programs? We do the shoe fund for junior welfare, everybody has shoe funds. Love Unlimited is giving away all those good things now. We gave away furnishings and clothing at Mueller Park. We don't have a place to store furniture so we don't have furniture. We started that back in the '60's. In 1975, Frontier remodeled the first house in Decatur in the 800 block of W. Marietta. Now Community Development is doing it all the time and reaching more people. In Green Thumb we developed the land down there where the south water treatment plant is and everybody in Decatur benefits from it, because the land was there and it was productive for this kind of thing. It was unfortunate that I was chairman of all of those things.

Q. It was not unfortunate at all.

A. I had something to do with it but, I did not do it all. The group that I worked with, everybody in the group did something. This is where a lot of people make mistakes. They think that if you are chairman and you have all to do, but they shouldn't take all the credit. Everybody in the group did something to help make it go.

Q. I think the community is the beneficiary of much of your insight and wisdom over the years, Mr. Dobbins. I know the community appreciated it even though you have indicated that other people have taken it and ran. You have been a great innovator and you have found a great many ideas. It's obvious that you have had an influence on the lives of a great deal of other people from what you have said today. What people do you have in mind or what kinds of people do you have in mind that have been role models for you in the period of time that you have been here in Decatur?

A. Ministers have been a great role model. We had ministers when I came to Decatur. I grew up with the ministers that were role models. This is coming through the years from Texas to St. Louis, then on to Decatur. Ministers are great leaders in the community. We respected them, they had real leadership and they exemplified this kind of leadership. They had the know-how and they worked in the community and built the communities. Teachers were great. I remember my first history teacher had two suits, a black suit and a brown suit, so, you changed suits every other day. He had a brown pair of shoes, a black pair of shoes and he kept them shiny. His mother took in ironing from white families and kept his shirts perfect. He was a real robot. We couldn't go to his class without a tie around our necks. We had on a T-shirt or something else we'd put a tie on around our necks. We thought it was funny then, but we found out it had a lot of meaning. I learned then how to go and apply for a job. I learned that if your shoes were shiny, your hair was combed that was important. If you had on a million dollar suit but your shoes did not shine, it didn't go, it isn't effective. I learned that you have to smile, you go into a place and wait to be invited to sit down. If nobody invited you to sit down then you'd stand up. These are some of the things that have helped me. My parents are all role models. You work for anything you get.

Q. In all of your volunteer efforts here in this community you have added a good background to many of these programs you have been involved in. What one would you single out as being the most gratifying to you as far as your own goals in life are concerned? Is there any that you could focus on?

A. I'm not sure. They all tie in together. I'm not sure about picking any specific program. The ongoing program of Green Thumb at this point is a program of necessity. We are working on a program of Green Thumb now for 1990 and it should expand. We were working on a cannery here a couple of years ago but it didn't come through. We didn't have the means and things at the cannery cost a lot of money. So since we didn't get the cannery we had a brace of cookers so we did some food preservation. This year we hope to do more preservation with the cooperation of the extension office. As we throw away our peanut butter jars and mayonnaise jars and all those, we can buy some tops for them and put a lot of stuff in them. We can reach up on the shelf and get some fresh fruit. You can be sure it is fresh, this is something you do not have to worry about buying and not have to worry about money to buy it. You can take \$1.50 and grow some green beans and have enough green beans to last all year because you had a garden. This would be a good program for Decatur right now if more groups would come in and give expansion to the program and work with the food preservation artists and motivate our young people. We can see how many programs we can get to help young people with their lives. To show vegetables don't just grow next door.

They do grow and can be grown and be enjoyed. We can show that instead of planting all flowers that are beautiful, we can grow in flower beds about 4 tomato plants to make enough tomatoes all year. Cauliflower plants, pepper plants, a few heads of cabbage, green beans, sweet corn, that can be harvested and frozen. Then you can have them late in the year. All of this can be grown in small plots, mini-gardens and can be used today. We have noticed the category of retired or people on a fixed income. Tomorrow it turns out you get \$2.00 less, all of these kinds of things, and perhaps off work for a month and not able to have anything. How are you going to buy food if you have no money? As you look at this kind of thing it would be great to develop a program so that people can say if I don't have a pay check I can still live. I have this to eat so I can live while I wait for a pay check. This is a garden practice program where if people are in this way, and don't have a lot of education they know how to work with families, know how to help families to grow vegetables. They work and keep it clean and families see this person keeping the garden clean and this is motivating. You have a committee of people that everybody comes together during growing season and everybody is out there helping with the planting. Doing work on a committee whether it is all of us or a few, it is the committee that has people there, sometimes girls too, for the last few years, that have children. Whether it is 100 families or as currently 50,424 families. This doesn't include, getting it around to other families from time to time, so you are talking a lot of people. This is a large project.

Q. Your background, your education, your training in agriculture and your love of the land certainly are reflected in your work in Green Thumb and your problems show you are a very fine teacher. We have only about 5 minutes left, perhaps not quite that much. What recommendation would you make that you feel might improve the quality of life in Decatur? That would improve it going into the next century? You will be around, I know.

A. I hope I'm around. The quality of life can be started in the home. With the parents working more closely with the children. We have children and grandchildren trying to find their way, we have to show children how to rear their children. We want to motivate people to be self-sufficient and not just live on public assistance, doing nothing just waiting for a check. If the check doesn't come they get upset, yell at the mailman and everybody else. We need to have people realize along with medical people, that drugs and alcohol are effecting babies from the beginning. That's if they want children to stay off of alcohol and drugs. We also know that our parents before us went to church and worked for what they got. Everybody should find a church to go to whether it is near us, or a service in the park, or out on the corner. Having to know the Lord is the one thing that has

given all of us what we have. We have to go to church and have the knowledge that the Lord is responsible for us. I ask this question; if we as people do not believe in the Lord, what are we doing here? That man could not do this. We have to realize that he gives us the sunshine, the rain that gives us crops.

The rain that is affecting crops and everything else that man has made. So we have to look for God. We must do more work than what we are doing today, not just going to service and going home. We need to go on the highways and byways and that is what the Book says, get out on the corner.

I hate to cut this short, Mr. Dobbins, because what you have to say is very important. I certainly have enjoyed this opportunity to share with you these thoughts on these subjects.