Interview on the Role of the NAACP in Columbus, Georgia

Interviewee: Mrs. Margaret Belcher
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The following is an interview by Anne Baldwin with Margaret Belcher on June 19, 2002. Mrs. Belcher is a small business owner and has been a member of the Columbus chapter of the NAACP since 1956. The interview took place at her business, 514 First Avenue in Columbus. There is one audiotape of the interview.

Baldwin: Mrs. Belcher, first I would like to thank you for allowing me to come and interview you. As I explained to you, I am doing a project for Columbus State University and we would like to put this in the Archives and we are trying to get some information about the impact and history of the local chapter of the NAACP. I realize you have been a member for awhile and highly recommended for an interview. I’d like to start first with a little bit of background information, if you don’t mind, some personal background information. Are you from Columbus, something about your family, education?

Belcher: Okay. No. I was born in Dallas, Georgia, that’s Paulding County, and I’ve lived in Columbus since 1961. I attended high school, graduated from high school, in Waco, Georgia. I took a course in business education at Carpenter’s Business School, a private school in Columbus, and I’ve had courses in bookkeeping and accounting from LaSalle University in Chicago and some tax preparation classes out at Columbus College.

Baldwin: You said you came here in 1961. Did you come here for education?

Belcher: No. I married very young and came here to be with my husband. Okay. And he passed away in 1986. We have one daughter and we have two grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.

Baldwin: Does your family live here in town?

Belcher: No.

Baldwin: It’s kinda hard when family lives out of town, isn’t it? (laughs)

Belcher: Yes, it is.

Baldwin: I am fortunate; I have some family in town and some family out of town. You said you have taken some business courses and all. Is Carpenter’s School still open?
Belcher: No. It was a private school and the owner, Mrs. Carpenter, passed away some years ago. I think her school probably closed some 10 or 12 years ago.

Baldwin: All right. This is kinda unusual, for a woman, even then, to pursue something in business education. I remember that was probably about the time that I was in college and it was unusual to consider business.

Belcher: Well, at that time, and shortly after the 40s, I guess, as during the 40s, somewhere along there, the legislature passed bills where making it imperative that small business owners would file taxes, pay sales tax, and that sort of thing, and I saw the need for a bookkeeper for those small businesses that did not have an in-house bookkeeper, and that’s how I became interested, and, of course, it took the clerical training and that sort of thing in order to prepare me for that, and I opened my business in 1965.

Baldwin: Was your husband in the same line of work?

Belcher: No. My husband was a barber and he had a barber shop down on First Avenue.

Baldwin: As far as the Columbus community, then, you pretty much call this home?

Belcher: Yes.

Baldwin: I’m that way, too. I’m not from Columbus originally, but I call it home too. I’ve been here since 1971. Under the topic of what I’d like to talk about, when did you become active in the NAACP?

Belcher: 1956.

Baldwin: Was your husband also involved?

Belcher: He held a membership, but he was not actively involved.

Baldwin: I have found it just unbelievably difficult to find information on the local chapter. I’ve looked at microfilm from the Columbus Times and some things from the Columbus Ledger, but it’s impossible to find information from the early days, even back in the 1950s. There’ve been some articles regarding Dr. Brewer and the part he played in the organization. There’s a lot of information in the last 10 years about the direction the organization is taking. But, can you fill me in a little bit on the history of it?

Belcher: Actually, I don’t have a lot of information on the history. I, like you, have read that Dr. Brewer was instrumental in getting it organized. I also know that there were other persons, some of whom…I don’t know the names. There was a Mr. Crawford Marshall, Mr. Ed
Jenkins, Mr. Benjamin Priester, Dr. E. B. Coffee, and I don’t recall any other names, at this point. But I understand that it was organized either in the late 30s or early 40s.

**Baldwin:** I think I had read that it was around 1939 or some period around in there.

**Belcher:** Yes.

**Baldwin:** I had read some information, in fact, a wonderful book, that was written by Jacqueline Harris, on the history and accomplishments of the NAACP nationally, and they were talking around the 1920s that chapters were organized in the South. Do you have any recollection or has anybody said anything about why it took so long for one to come to Columbus or be organized here?

**Belcher:** I have no knowledge of that. In fact, I don’t know if I’ve read when the first chapters were formed in the South, but during those days, blacks did not have the freedoms that they experience today, and perhaps it was for fear, and, this is just a personal feeling. It was perhaps fear that harm would come to them or their families if they were identified with an organization such as the NAACP. I also know that, at one time, I was told, that teachers in Muscogee County would lose their jobs if they were identified as a member of the NAACP.

**Baldwin:** That’s interesting. That’s very interesting.

**Belcher:** I think that is recorded somewhere.

**Baldwin:** I read another thing in this book by Ms. Harris, that when they organized the national organization, they were so interested in having the word “advancement” in there because, of course, at that time, around 1910, as you said, there was nothing as far as blacks were concerned – organizations, publications- - and they said one of the main problems was communication.

**Belcher:** Yes.

**Baldwin:** Because there were no magazines or newspapers that would even carry any articles? So they have come a long way.

**Belcher:** Yes.

**Baldwin:** What was the organization like when you first joined? How many members did you have? Do you remember? Or what was the purpose? Why did you get interested in it?

**Belcher:** Actually, I was approached by the then-President of the local branch, Mr. Priester, and asked me to become a member and that he needed someone to serve as secretary. (laugh) And, I guess, it was for that reason I joined, because I did see a need for-- to carry out the
purposes. And, of course, the purpose in 1940 was the same it is today, to bring about equality for all people.

Baldwin: When you say equality for all people.…

Belcher: Opportunities.

Baldwin: Opportunities. I remember also reading that the founding organization had members that were both black and white. In fact, a large number of white philanthropists.…

Belcher: That’s true.

Baldwin: Throughout the North.…

Belcher: Yes.

Baldwin: Supported it. What type of membership does the organization today have?

Belcher: It’s a biracial organization.

Baldwin: It is?

Belcher: Yes. In fact, we have members right here in Columbus, whites who are members of the NAACP.

Baldwin: Could you elaborate? Are they from the business community or.…

Belcher: I would not like to identify those persons because, if they wanted their names in print, they wouldn’t mind coming forth.

Baldwin: Right.

Belcher: No, they’re not all business people. They’re just people. And we have complaints from both blacks and whites, complaints of discrimination or they feel there’s discrimination. And, of course, that’s the area that the NAACP works in, to identify the existing discrimination and areas, and the most charges are in the area of employment.

Baldwin: Oh.

Belcher: There are some about police brutality—not quite as many as years ago.

Baldwin: So, the local chapter is not so much involved in legal cases regarding voting rights or anything like that anymore?
Belcher: No. There seems to be, and this is the only one I’m familiar with, that voting rights are not denied now based on race. I think that all persons who are registered and go to vote are permitted to vote.

Baldwin: I read in the paper that you were having a campaign for registration to vote.

Belcher: That’s one of the areas the NAACP continues to work in. And, I think, in the material you gave me, you mentioned about the membership, the appeal for members, and the appeal for registration. And, as the community grows, all member organizations reach out to try to attract more members, and that includes churches.

Baldwin: Right.

Belcher: And it’s not confined to the NAACP—not necessarily that there is a decline in membership. There’s a need for more volunteers in every area of our community, whether it’s civil rights or in the health area, or whatever the area is. There’s a need for more, and the more members that you have and the more people you have involved, it makes it easier on the others.

Baldwin: That’s true. I guess that stems from the fact that people are so busy working today….

Belcher: Yes.

Baldwin: And their time is so stretched….

Belcher: Right.

Baldwin: I’ve read about some campaigns from some churches and other organizations to attract members. Back to the voting rights, I do know about the famous case of Primus King, that repealed the white primary here, and, of course, all the cases regarding education. I would like to touch a little bit on education as far as the role of the NAACP, because I’m very interested in that, since I am a teacher.

Belcher: Yes.

Baldwin: Does the NAACP take any role whatsoever, as far as the schools here in town? Are they pretty much satisfied?

Belcher: We have an Education Committee and members of that committee attend meetings of the Board. The organization serves more as a “watchdog” and monitors whatever’s happening in our community. Now, one thing that I think is the greatest problem, which has caused some opposition to the NAACP, is that people don’t know that much about it.

Baldwin: Right.
Belcher: They have one opinion and it’s really another opinion. For instance, the word that “to ambulance cases” was used by a former regional director who has passed away now, but she always said you don’t “ambulance cases.” In other words, you don’t go out looking for the problem. Problems come to you. People come and you have a complaint—you want to file a complaint of discrimination where you work, you would fill out a form, sign it, then the Legal Redress Committee takes a look at it and they investigate it. And if they find evidence that your complaint is valid, then they go to your employer and attempt to clear up whatever the problem is.

Baldwin: Oh.

Belcher: And, if there’s no success there, and it’s a case, according to the attorneys, that this lady has a case—she’s being discriminated against by this X,Y,Z corporation—and we’re going to see that she gets justice. So, it’s then that the cases are filed. But, after you file a complaint. They don’t go out and say “well, now, look, you’re being mistreated, we want you to file a complaint, we want to represent you.” That’s not the way it’s done.

Baldwin: When you say a complaint…. (phone rings)

Belcher: Ann, will you hold my calls? (Mrs. Belcher calls to her secretary in adjoining room)

Baldwin: You said you’ve got people from all races in the organization. Anyone who is in the community could come to you….

Belcher: Oh, sure.

Baldwin: Or do they have to be a member?

Belcher: No.

Baldwin: Anyone in the community could?

Belcher: The majority, the great majority of persons, who file a complaint are not members.

Baldwin: Oh really?

Belcher: And they do not pay a fee. They’re encouraged to become members, but, otherwise, regardless to who they are….

Baldwin: Talking about complaints, and also getting back to this about the school district, I know there was a time—I trying to think of the date— regarding the situation about the 1971 court ruling when the local chapter felt like the schools had not followed through on the ruling
from that particular court case. I remember that the court case was dropped, or the appeal rather, was dropped. What were the reasons behind that? This was the biggest thing I found in my research.

**Belcher:** I’m not sure, unless it was on the advice of counsel. I’m not sure.

**Baldwin:** Do you get many complaints now, about the schools?

**Belcher:** Not as many as we did, say five years ago.

**Baldwin:** You know why that might be? I mean, to me...(phone rings) being in a school in South Columbus, I know that schools are not proportionately desegregated or integrated and certainly not the faculties. And I was just wondering if the NAACP has been interested in that?

**Belcher:** They’re concerned, yes….

**Baldwin:** Of course, we talked about the movement to get people to register to vote, and the desegregation cases. What do you feel, overall, has the NAACP been able to accomplish in the community? You talked about the fact that the people are not educated, really, as to what it is all about. Looking back at the years you’ve been a member, what do you think has been its impact or it has been able to accomplish?

**Belcher:** It has assisted in the peaceful desegregation of public facilities here in Columbus. We did not have the riots that they had in some other cities of this size, freedom riders that came through here were not beaten like they were in other Southern cities, and, when the theaters were desegregated and the lunch counters downtown were desegregated, it was done peacefully….

**Baldwin:** Okay.

**Belcher:** Through negotiations with the business world, the community, and the cooperation of the police department. And I think that has been one of the greatest accomplishments that we’ve had.

**Baldwin:** In other words, you’re saying, it’s almost like an organization which has mediated in bringing about….

**Belcher:** Yes.

**Baldwin:** In bringing about, I guess you’d say, adherence to the law.

**Belcher:** Yes.

**Baldwin:** The goal has certainly changed—the purposes seem to be changing - -it looks that the NAACP is looking now at a lot more of the social issues in the community. Certainly I’ve
read about the programs that you have with the youth in the community. What are some of the most pressing issues that you are addressing at this time?

Belcher: I think perhaps to educate the public. That’s number one. To take a proactive rather than a reactive approach-- these were the areas you had mentioned we might discuss.

Baldwin: Right.

Belcher: And to monitor the activities of our leaders in government and in education.

Baldwin: Do you feel the NAACP has a good working relationship with the business community?

Belcher: Oh, yes.

Baldwin: What about the media?

Belcher: Yes…(phone rings). I haven’t heard any complaints. Of course, as you know, there are individuals in every walk of life, in every business, in every profession, and there’s a multiplicity of personalities added to, and, some times it’s an individual who maybe doesn’t come across just right….

Baldwin: Right.

Belcher: And, unintentionally, might cause a misunderstanding. But, overall, the media…we have a good working relationship with them.

Baldwin: When you have chapter meetings, are they open to the public and to the media?

Belcher: Yes; they’re open to anyone.

Baldwin: How often do you meet?

Belcher: Each first Saturday at 10:00 in the morning—each second Saturday, I’m sorry, at 10:00 in the morning, at St. John’s AME Church on Steam Mill Road.

Baldwin: And they are open meetings, you say?

Belcher: Yes.

Baldwin: What is the membership now? Is it a large membership? I had read somewhere it’s around 500.
Belcher: I would think it’s a little more than that.

Baldwin: If you don’t mind, I want to elaborate a little on the programs for young people, for, of course, that’s where my heart is since I teach. What do you have that’s really active as far as programs that you support in the community now?

Belcher: All right. Unfortunately, for health reasons, for other reasons, our youth advisor has not been as active in the last year as she was before, and that is an appointive position by the state. And, so we have not had as active a group as we had at one time. However, we try to...(phone rings) instill into the minds of our young people the importance of good citizenship, clean minds and clean bodies, encouraging them. And in cooperation with churches, to become active in their churches, and youth groups in the churches, and schools, wherever, to keep them busy. And, of course, a busy child doesn’t have time to get in trouble. These are the kinds of programs we do through workshops, seminars, and sometimes bring in persons who are active in sports.

Baldwin: Something like a role model?

Belcher: Yes. And have those persons to address them. And we do have some meet with them, and it encourages them to let them know that, look, you can so somebody. These are the kinds of things that we try to instill in their minds. Also, that, when they become of age, 18, to register and to vote and to listen to, not so much the person, but the platform, so that they can vote intelligently.

Baldwin: I know it was said in one of the articles I read that young people really don’t know a lot about the organization and their past achievements. What would you tell them? If you were speaking to a group of my students, in the 8th grade, what would you tell them?

Belcher: Perhaps I would let them know that when I was in the 8th grade...all the schools in the state of Georgia were segregated, you had black schools and white schools, and black teachers for the black students and white teachers for the white students. There were no ballgames that both groups participated in or attended. There were no swimming pools that were open to all races, no playgrounds, golf courses...everything...they didn’t have an opportunity to know each other as people. And that, there were some leaders who saw that there needed to be a change. And that, as a result of some of the persons within and without the NAACP, but perhaps under the umbrella of the NAACP, have made it so that today, conditions do not exist, and that, even though there were some lives shed, during this struggle—some people died, I think unnecessarily, but, in this city, we were fortunate enough not to have deaths that we had in other parts—no riots and such.

Baldwin: I have a feeling that my students know very little about the organization itself. In doing local history, don’t you think this should be incorporated?

Belcher: Sure.
Baldwin: I know we put a lot of emphasis on Black History Month but we try so hard to put a lot more multiculturalism throughout the year, and that’s why I was saying I don’t know that mine know that much about the organization.

Belcher: And, I may be wrong, but I think that perhaps they brought about Black History Week and then the month was because there was so little recorded….

Baldwin: Right.

Belcher: About the contributions of blacks in America.

Baldwin: We have a growing community here in Columbus of Hispanics, particular in South Columbus. Is there anything an organization like the NAACP could offer to a group like this? I mean, this is just asking for your opinion…

Belcher: Well, it would be no different from any other group. If they have concerns and would like to come participate, ask advice, they would be welcomed.

Baldwin: Does the NAACP offer any mentoring program on an ongoing basis? Do they work with the Organized Communities of South Columbus as far as enrichment, reading …

Belcher: Very little, to my knowledge. Now there’s some individuals who perhaps work in all these areas, as an individual, because I work with a lot of organizations.

Baldwin: Okay.

Belcher: So, what I would do in my church or with the Urban League doesn’t necessarily mean that I’m representing the NAACP. But I’m doing it as a volunteer, under the umbrella of that organization. So I know that there are many members that are members of the NAACP, active members of the NAACP, who are involved in these other activities.

Baldwin: I’m glad you mentioned the Urban League. What is the difference in the goals of the Urban League and the goals of the NAACP?

Belcher: The Urban League works in the area of health, education, housing. And in the area of employment. They assist persons in finding work to do, preparing them, increasing their skills to qualify for certain jobs.

Baldwin: Training programs?

Belcher: Right. The NAACP does not do that. The NAACP strives to see that each one has an equal opportunity.

Baldwin: So, really, the NAACP takes more of a legal stand.
Belcher: That’s it.

Baldwin: I had also read about a particular program, a “Stay-In-School” program that the NAACP sponsors. What can you tell me about that? Are you familiar with that one?

Belcher: Not really, other than, our group meets with the young people and encourages them in addition to the areas I spoke about. It’s important and imperative to stay in school and get a good education, then you can qualify for the top positions, jobs you want. And, I was talking with my secretary this morning and we mentioned about a young man, Jackson, that was the actor of the year. He was a student at Morehouse College, in Atlanta, and when he was asked what he wanted to do, he said he wanted to be an actor. And, of course, he was laughed at because others wanted to be doctors, lawyers, and teachers.

Baldwin: Okay.

Belcher: But this year he won the Academy Award.

Baldwin: How about that?

Belcher: But he had a goal in mind and he sought to meet that goal. And, of course, he did.

Baldwin: I think that’s something that is important to instill in any young person. No matter what your background, you’ve got to have a goal.

Belcher: Yes. Yes. And then, if you work hard, and that’s the whole idea, that’s the accomplishments that have been made thus far…that every person has an opportunity. And that’s all we ask for.

Baldwin: Yes.

Belcher: Just give us the opportunity.

Baldwin: Well, there certainly have been a lot of changes. I know that everybody, in general, from what I’ve read, enjoys a much freer life.

Belcher: Yes.

Baldwin: A much more comfortable life with each other, because of the actions of the NAACP, and other organizations, too. Do you think there will always be a need for the organization?

Belcher: Well, perhaps in my lifetime. But, when there is peace in the world and understanding among all people, there won’t be a need for it, because all of these inadequacies will be erased. But, here again, we are blessed. What’s happening in Israel right now…
Baldwin: Oh, yes.

Belcher: And, just-- I shutter to think what it would be like, to get on the city bus during the rush hour and you’re going to work and suddenly the bus blows up.

Baldwin: That’s right.

Belcher: So, we are blessed.

Baldwin: I have been real impressed. I’m not from Columbus either, but, with how little demonstrations there have been throughout the years as far as the fully integrated facilities and schools. But I still think there is a future for the organization, especially if they are addressing the needs of anyone who is discriminated against.

Belcher: I think so, and my reason for saying that—I hope that one day there won’t be a need. But I don’t see it in my lifetime.

Baldwin: I was wondering if you look at discrimination based on anything besides race?

Belcher: Yes. You and I are both in the minorities. Women are going up the ladder now, but it hasn’t been too long that we had to fight for the right to vote.

Baldwin: That’s right.

Belcher: And we continuously read about it, and hear about it, where discrimination…take, for instance, when Barbara Walters was made anchor woman, and—who was it- -anyway, the man she was supposed to co-anchor with…resigned his job, for they were paying this woman too much money.

Baldwin: I didn’t remember that.

Belcher: And that’s been 27 years ago. They ruled in her favor, and she’s one of the tops. So women have had to struggle for everything, regardless to where she’s black, white, yellow, whatever.

Baldwin: One thing I have tried to point out with my classes is that the civil rights movement was not for just one minority group.

Belcher: Absolutely.

Baldwin: And I’ve tried to point out to them that women have probably been discriminated against more than any other group.

Belcher: I think so too. I agree. And, as I said, there have been some changes. And you
look in the political world, I doubt if there will ever be a majority of women in the Senate….

**Baldwin:** Right.

**Belcher:** You can count the mayors, female mayors, in major cities on one hand, and have some fingers left….

**Baldwin:** Probably so.

**Belcher:** And, in the medical world, we have outstanding female doctors—in fact, I have a niece who is a doctor in Birmingham- - but the majority of us, and I guess it’s not limited to any particular group, if you have to have surgery, you want a man to do it (laugh)

**Baldwin:** I hadn’t thought about that; you might be right (laugh)

**Belcher:** And it’s the same thing with an attorney—the majority of us want a man to represent us.

**Baldwin:** Comparing that, then, to race, do the majority of people want a white person?

**Belcher:** Perhaps the majority. On the other hand, there are those who said no, this black doctor—black physician - - surgeon had to be better to get his credentials than the white doctor, so they choose him.

**Baldwin:** That’s interesting.

**Belcher:** I have heard persons make that statement. Well, if I’m going to have it, let’s have a black surgeon because they didn’t give him his, he earned it…because he was rich or somebody and they let him pass the test. Whatever they had to do. I guess it’s all in the minds of the persons who undergo this.

**Baldwin:** True. As far as businesses and education, well, society in general, here in Columbus…what are the overall benefits that they are enjoying now, besides what we said? They are more comfortable with each other, but what other things, due to the work of the NAACP?

**Belcher:** Probably, in the business world, they’ve been able to have more qualified people identified. And, maybe more minorities seeking positions that at one time they did not do. Therefore the businesses—they didn’t search for that person; they didn’t know they existed.

**Baldwin:** Does the organization support, for instance, any kind of scholarship fund?

**Belcher:** Yes. Yes.
Baldwin: So you help to target people who might be qualified? I’ve kinda jumped around, a lot, from the questions I sent you. Were there any of the questions you wanted to comment on or talk about that we haven’t specifically look at?

Belcher: I don’t think so, even though we’ve jumped around a lot. But I think that we’ve touched on just about all the things you talked about. Back to our youth, I think it’s very important that we channel their energies and their talents in the right directions, in positive roles, in an effort to correct some of the wrongs they feel exist.

Baldwin: Yes.

Belcher: A better job of that. It disturbs me when you read about—I think that is was in the morning paper—this lady on Milgen Road?

Baldwin: This morning’s paper? I don’t believe I read it.

Belcher: There was identified….

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[side two]

an assailant as being 15 or 16 years old. But she was taking some items out of the van, or putting in the van, and it was early, I think, yesterday morning, and she said usually she’s not there at this time. But this person—you know—gun on her and asked for the money, and she gave him the bank bags and he left. But a 14, 15, or 16 year old boy should have been in school. Correct?

Baldwin: Maybe she identified….

Belcher: Out of school now, but he should not have been carrying a gun in the first place.

Baldwin: Right. Did she identify this young person as black or white? Did she make any distinction in that?

Belcher: I think it was black; I’m not sure. But it’s in the morning paper.

Baldwin: You know, this is one of the arguments for year-round schools. It would keep the kids off the streets and, of course, the retention value of what they’ve learned….

Belcher: Yes. Well, there’s still a lot of things that can be done, even if they don’t have the schools. The Parks and Recreation, I think, offer a lot of activities for young people. There are many organizations that are in the Lower Chattahoochee valley’s news programs where they give young people work to do during the summer months, and they’re paid to do that. If more
people, and—it appears- - that those who get in trouble, at least, they’ve the most visibility in the media.

**Baldwin:** Oh, yes.

**Belcher:** They come from lower income families. This may or may be true, but, at any rate, if, in fact, they do come from low income families, then, there should be opportunities for them to get the jobs because they would qualify for the subsidy that a person in the middle income and higher income bracket—that child would not qualify. So there’s still a lot of work. There’s a lot being offered, if people take advantage of it.

**Baldwin:** And, again, we get back to—do people know about this?

**Belcher:** Yes.

**Baldwin:** When you were talking about that robbery, I think there was one article I read about the instance of vandalism at Blanchard a couple of summers ago. Mr. DuBose, who’s the President of the NAACP, had been very concerned about the….

**Belcher:** Yes.

**Baldwin:** He never came out and said, specifically, that the treatment that they received, preferential treatment, but he indicated that, because of the economic background, the area of town, and the race….

**Belcher:** Well. I guess one would wonder…. 

**Baldwin:** Certainly. Well, I do agree with you that I think young people do really get bad press. We hesitate to publicize the good things they do.

**Belcher:** That’s true.

**Baldwin:** We really do. And, I think, in general, society has a very negative idea about high school and middle school. I know when people ask me what grade do you teach and I tell them, they say "on, my goodness, I wouldn't teach that grade." And, given the 100 or so students I teach, I might have one you might call a “bad apple." The rest of them are just great.

**Belcher:** But those are the ones who need good teachers.

**Baldwin:** You’re right. They’re the ones who need to know about these programs and they need to be involved in them. Their parents need to know. This is something I have found at Baker—that the parents are not very familiar with the things that are available in town.
Belcher: But, then again, and I don’t attend the town meetings—perhaps I should to become a more informed citizen - but, being busy with other things, and not having… I was active with PTA when my daughter was growing up. But when there are town meetings, it’s sad when you read there were 10 people, 11 people…. Yet, when the city fathers make a decision and every Tuesday morning—Wednesday- -when I come to work, I hear them blasting the council for what they didn’t do this and they didn’t do that, and they’re misusing our money, but, when they have a town meeting, and invite the public for your input, nobody goes.

Baldwin: Correct. You know, that’s true with some PTAs.

Belcher: I know.

Baldwin: I know we have, at Baker, a difficult time with parents. And I know some parents are having to work two jobs or work the second shift. Again, what I have run into at Baker is that, not necessarily with the PTA, but I will call a parent and say you are welcome to come to school and have lunch or you’re welcome to come sit in class, and they will say I didn’t know I could do that.

Belcher: Yes.

Baldwin: And I’ve been amazed at that. Again, I don’t know if the doors have been closed in the past or what…. 

Belcher: Perhaps, as you said, nobody told them, and they didn’t ask. We assume….

Baldwin: Right. We assume a lot, don’t we?

Belcher: And the assumption that, okay, they won’t let me come in, so I won’t go, won’t bother my time.

Baldwin: Speaking of assuming, what do you think people assume about the NAACP in town today? Do people even know it exists any more?

Belcher: If they’re concerned, they do. We still get crank calls.

Baldwin: You do?

Belcher: The leadership, from time to time, has gotten threatening calls. They’re at a minimal at this time, but…. We have a very relaxed community. And I think sometimes there has to be an uprising, somebody has to be killed, something has to happen, before people realize that it can happen. And, with that in mind, it’s the NAACP or any other group—they don’t know- - it didn’t concern them, and the people who come with their complaints never thought about going to a meeting, never thought about getting a membership, and, when they get in trouble, they come. They know where it is. So, it’s just, I think, it’s that relaxed community.
Baldwin: I think you’ll find a lot of that in churches also. People don’t necessarily—or they have gotten away from church—until there is a need, some kind of a personal need, to identify….

Belcher: Yes.

Baldwin: Is there any other thing that you would like to comment on, about the organization? I will say I do share with you the great respect for our community. We’ve got faults, but I do think it’s one of the best communities….

Belcher: It is one of the best communities. And I have—going back to the very beginning—I was the first woman to operate a bookkeeping service.

Baldwin: Really?

Belcher: And, I’ve been asked the question about problems that existed, but I’ve had excellent cooperation from the business community and all my work has been here since—for 37 years— as a business woman. And my relationship with the community has been good.

Baldwin: Would you say that’s with both the black and white communities?

Belcher: Black and white.

Baldwin: Wonderful. When you say how long you’ve been in business, that does go back through those troubled times.

Belcher: We do have a very good community. We have an excellent school district…there are still some rough edges that need to—addressing, but, not an educator, I don’t know the answers. But I don’t think it’s confined to Columbus. I think that we have the same problems they have everywhere else in the country.

Baldwin: I think so too. I don’t think anybody is going to find a perfect community, but you have to find one that is the most, I guess, tolerant and also one that offers the most opportunities.


Baldwin: Really? Does she live there now?

Belcher: No, she lives in Monroe, Georgia. She’s retired and she moved back to Georgia in 1997.

Baldwin: I know you’re glad to have her closer to home.
Belcher: I surely am (laugh)

Baldwin: Not quite like going to New York, is it?

Belcher: No.

Baldwin: Well, I thank you so much. I surely do. Like I said, I think we’ve jumped around, but we’ve pretty much covered a lot of what I wanted to know about. From what I’ve read, and compared to what’s happened in other parts of the country, I also had gotten the impression that we certainly had not gone through all the riots and the ordeals and even lynchings that you’d find in other parts of the country.

Belcher: That’s true. That’s true.

Baldwin: I still think we’ve been fairly open about the integration of facilities here.

Belcher: Yes. Yes.

Baldwin: So, I do thank you. Like I said, if there is anything, after reading over all this, or after getting the transcript, that you would like to add to it, you can certainly get in touch with me.

Belcher: I’ll do that.

Baldwin: Thank you.

Belcher: I appreciate the opportunity for sharing this time with you.

Baldwin: Thank you.