

KK-CD-012-062

Rev. Charlie S. Miles interviewed by Michael Kline at his home in Winsett  
May 5, 2008

This physically active preacher in his mid-sixties was born in Pleasant Grove in the community surrounding Martin's Chapel, which was founded by his great, great uncle Willie Wilson. His dad was a trustee and encouraged all the family to join. His mother's side of the family was white, while his father was an Indian. He is light-skinned like a white man, but, "It's not a problem: color's not important anyway." Miles cherishes the memories of his youth, and is thankful to have been blessed all his life. He owns two trucks and three convenience stores and has been manager of Allied Foods. He has made good money over his working life, been married to Carolyn for 45 years and preaching for 25 years. "A man dependent of God can go a long way." Pleasant Grove is the most cherished place he has ever been. Today Miles is an associate pastor at Martin's Chapel, but has served at a number of other churches over the years.

He was born into a family of ten children of Frank and Liza Miles, tobacco farmers, land owners, who raised their crops with traditional methods. The close-knit community helped each other with wood choppings and corn shuckings. The house was lighted with oil lamps until Piedmont Electrification came along in the fifties. They carried their grain to be ground at the Mebane Flour and Feed Mill. Miles's father had a share cropper whom he treated "Just like one of us." The father raised his children to farm and allowed them to learn from their mistakes. He prayed openly three times a day. He was a praying man. The family walked to church until he bought a pickup truck in the late forties; then they rode in the back of the truck.

He curried his mules three times a day until he bought his first tractor in 1948. He bought the farm for a dollar from his in laws and he farmed that farm! "Farm work was our education, daddy showed us how to do everything. He was a humble man, but meant what he said." Miles launches into a log discussion of race and skin color. The light-skinned blacks were called "issues," and descended from the Suponi Indians. Miles often uses black and Indian interchangeably in ways that are hard to follow. "Little Texas" refers to "light-bright" people, farming people who worked hard for what they got. Miles performed marriages there for mixed couples who couldn't get married any where else, "'cause color don't make no difference to God. God ain't got no color." More discussion of racism (colored drinking fountains, back door restaurant service, etc.) follows.

Discusses membership in Masonic Lodge. Remembers old-style worship at Martin's Chapel, including foot-washing, homecomings. At the end of the interview Miles is joined by his wife, Carolyn, who gives a stirring testimonial of child rearing and discipline.