Introduction

*The People’s Stories of South Madison* were told in 20 interviews conducted in community centers, houses, churches, apartments, and a care center over a two-year period beginning in 1998. Averaging about 90 minutes in length, the interviews filled 268 pages after being transcribed onto paper. Most of the accompanying photographs were taken at the time of the interviews.

Modest funding available for this publication made it necessary to greatly abbreviate the length of each story. Highlights were chosen and some of the statements within individual interviews were rearranged to keep a subject in context. But the stories are printed here using the exact words spoken by each person as much as possible.

In an effort to remain faithful to the manner in which the stories were told, it was decided to retain some passages spoken in African-American Vernacular English (AAVE). The ability to speak both standard English and AAVE is shared by many African-American people. It represents an artful and expressive skill in conversation, which highlights certain spoken ideas according to conscious choices made spontaneously by the speaker.

Editing tools which the reader will encounter include the occasional addition of a word or term in parentheses. This was usually done to complete a name or to explain an acronym. Since all the stories were told in the first person, the use of quotation marks was generally eliminated. However, quotation marks will be found within some of the stories to indicate a special saying or a statement in which the story teller quoted the voice of a second or third person.

Deepest gratitude is extended to the people who so generously agreed to tell their stories.

For each story remembered here it is likely that an untold story is drifting somewhere between the lines. The reader is invited to imagine those shadow stories. The reader is also encouraged to listen to the stories as one would hear voices in a choir. Taken together the voices tell us, as one of the people said, that South Madison is America.

David Giffey

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*How curious a land is this, how full of untold story, of tragedy and laughter, and the rich legacy of human life; shadowed with a tragic past, and big with future promise!*

W.E.B. Du Bois (1903)