

UNIFIED COMMITTEE FOR AFRO-AMERICAN CONTRIBUTIONS

Oral History Documentation Project
The St. Joseph Parish Housing Project

MARY ELIZABETH HERBERT

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Interviewed by Michael McCauley
at her home in Leonardtown Maryland
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[Digital recording begins]

Michael McCauley: Okay. I'm talking this morning with Mary E. Herbert. This is Tuesday, January 16, 2007, and we're going to be talking about the St. Joseph Project in Oakville. So, Mrs. Herbert, tell me about your family and where you were living when the St. Joseph Project first came on the scene.

Mary Herbert: Ok, we were living in Morganza on Morganza-Turner, that's what we called it, it was a gravel road then, Morganza-Turner Road and three houses from the highway.

MM: Ok.

MH: My—I was living with my parents then at that time. My mother had worked for the nuns at St. Joseph's convent and the priest there for many years, I think it was about sixteen years that she had worked there. And we had this wonderful priest who came to the parish, and his name was Fr. Kavanaugh, so I guess in conversation with her and talking to her --. Back in those days you were only paid 50 cents a day.

MM: Oh my.

MH: [Laughter] But, anyway, he asked her how long she had been working there with the nuns and she told him and he was very much concerned by the poor people in the community when he first arrived. And he, in the conversation he got the number of years she was working and said, well, I'm going to see what I can do about this to raise this some. So with that I think he went to the Archdiocese and he discussed it, I guess, with the priests or the head ones that were there and later on I think they got together and they tried to get, they tried to get all the back wages that she should have gotten and she hadn't gotten. Yeah, and so he said to her, he asked her what she would she want to do, would she want to take the money or would she want to purchase the land. And so with that she told him that she would rather have the, purchase the land. So with that, that was the starting for us.

MM: How old were you then?

MH: Whew, [laughter] I guess --. [pause] I, I was married I think at the time.

MM: You were?

MH: Yeah, I'm sure I was. Yeah, I was married and I was living with my in-laws, I think, at that time. Because, then we moved from my in-laws and then we moved over, where I was born actually, on Harry Reeder's farm, because there were two tenant houses at that time and we moved over in the bottom, and my husband and I moved there for quite a while.

MM: So you weren't living with your parents.

MH: No, at that time we had moved, we had moved, but the other children were

there. And so I can remember and they start working on the house and they finally got the house up and everything and we were very happy - that's true.

MM: I bet you were.

MH: We were very, very happy.

MM: Was the house one of the barracks houses?

MH: Yeah, see my brothers and a few other men, they all got together and they found out that the barracks at Ft. Meade, over at Ft. Meade, that they could purchase them or get them. I don't think they purchased them, though, but, as far as I can remember. But there was, I don't know, there was about fifty or twenty -- . I know a lot of my brothers went up with them to help to pull them down and then they brought them down and put them up.

MM: Do you think....

MH: A whole lot of them got together, I know Mr. George, Mr. Rustin, and a few others that I can remember put our house together, put my parents' house together. But they all worked together in groups and then they would go up and get someone else's house and bring that down. I know we had one of the houses and the Butler's, Jerry Butler and them had one of the houses, and let's see, who else [unintelligible], Mignonette and Johnny, which are both deceased now, they had one of those homes and I was trying to think who else. It's quite so long ago now [laughter].

MM: There's a list of them in there.

MH: Yeah. OK, yeah.

MM: How many of your brothers and sisters were still at home then when that

happened, do you think?

MH: Mmm. I think most of them was there. My brothers were there. I have five brothers and, not the oldest one, because my oldest brother, because he had left home, but he came back to help. He came back to help. In our family, my father worked on this big farm and he would make all of the kids help and most of the time he was very sickly so, yeah, he would go to Washington for treatments. He had kidney problems until finally one of his kidneys failed so, they, they had to take it out. And so he was very sickly, and my brother, Thomas, he quit school, because he was so tall. He looked like he was in the 7th or 8th grade, but he quit school when he was in the 5th grade and he went out and hired himself as to --. And he was able to help with the bills and stuff around home. He went with my father so he could use him on the farm but he would hire himself out. He would only come home on weekends and he would bring money in and he would go back, you know, to help out.

MM: That was great.

MH: Uh huh. And so, finally, he was the oldest one to leave home and he got married and he moved in Leonardtown. So it left four of my other brothers at home, and I think it was Louis and Joseph, and James Albert, who we used to call "Mute" [laughter]. It's so strange how in your family everybody gets called by nicknames. They were the three that was left there, but gradually, things didn't work out on the farm for us. My husband was young. And so we just said after a while, we'll go on and move home because we only had two kids at that time. That was Raymond and Michael.

MM: So you moved back home after they got the barracks house?

MH: Mm hmm. Yeah, we moved back home then, my husband and I and the children, the two oldest kids, because my Mom was still working and after my Daddy got sickly, you know, there was nobody there, because she would go up in the morning early and fix breakfast for the nuns — go to Mass first, and then fix breakfast. And in the meantime she used to come down the hill, of course it wasn't too far, walk down the hill, fix up our father's breakfast and get everything straightened out when he was sick and go back and fix their lunch, for the nuns, and then come home and put, try to put dinner on, so it was kind of hard for her and so that's why --.

MM: Yeah, there was a lot of stress on her.

MH: Oh yes. So it relieved a lot of stress when we, by my moving there to help her.

MM: The property, was it originally owned by the church?

MH: The property was originally owned by the, no, it, that's where she purchased her home, no, she bought, purchased the land, I'm sorry. But then there was another house there before we built ours and that house really belonged to the church. Right. Because that's where the sexton lived, the person that works right in the --. Yeah. His family lived there, but gradually they tore that house down. You know that property is still there?

MM: Yeah?

MH: Since I moved, it's still there but you tell the priests and they don't want to --. I guess it's been there so long nobody don't want to --. So I don't know what's happened, what's, what's with that.

MM: Well, the house that Jerome [her son] lives in now, is that the house, is that the barracks house?

MH No.

MM: No?

MH: No, when I moved out with my children, ok, after everybody left home, married and gone, [laughter] --. So, I said to my husband, well, all my kids are gone, so we just got an apartment up at Chase's apartments, which, actually, the apartment that we moved in, was part of the St. Joseph's colored school.

MM: Yeah, I know that's what those apartments were.

MH: Right. So they were owned by Mr. and Mrs. Chase and we moved there and Pain she stayed there, because she and her friend stayed in the house for quite a while. I really didn't want the house to be there by itself or whatever. Everybody else had children and everybody else had their homes. And so, I think Jerome had four, he was the oldest one that had the most kids, so I kept continuing to pay the taxes on the house until, you know, my husband and I said what are we going to do, we're not going to be living there. So, since he was the only one with the largest family, we just signed it over to him. So that's why he's living there today, living there today.

MM: Well, what happened to the barrack's house? MH: The barracks house was gradually torn down. MM: Oh, Ok.

MH: The barracks house and, as I say, the property is still there and, as I say, when we were living there we used to go out and sit in that area because it was still there. Oh, I'm sorry, I've got to back back a little bit.

MM: Ok.

MH: That parish house was moved and, if I'm not mistaken, I think William Holt got it. You know how it was put down? So they just took it up one by one and it went up on the hill where, that's my understanding of that part of it. That's strange that we never talked about it that much, but it was moved and like I say the land is still there, the little plot of land or whatever you call it is still there. Jerome is having a little problem now with that because the people who moved over, over to build that big house behind him, they want to sort of move in, try to keep moving in, Yeah, pretty soon they think they're going to take the whole thing, but I think they [laughter] have to deal with Jerome.

MM: He'll I stand up to them.

MH: He'll stand his own ground. If you notice when you go by have they built a building, ok, where we used to sit out, because they had said that --. But really what happened, because I remember my Mom putting a stake in, this was an iron post, to show that, where her, where her property was. I don't know whether Jerome moved that post or not and then down the hill was this great big, I mean, stone [with emphasis] right down below the hill, to show the property, where the property divided into

MM: Well, was it, do you remember it being a hard process when they were getting the house put up or did things go along pretty smoothly?

MH: To tell you, everything went along so beautifully [animatedly], because people worked together back in those days. There was more closeness and people

reaching out to help one another, actually you don't see that much now-a-days, but, my Mom, she was, my mother and father neither one was able, they were --. One was raised by two white ladies in this big huge house which, used to be in Helen, Maryland, right across from Mother Catherine Spaulding school, the house is still standing, but they remodeled it. That's where she was raised. She was given to the whites when she was five years old, and my father was raised in Oraville by two ladies, they were called Dixons, and they used to come to the parish.

MM: They were white too?

MH: They were white, um hmm.

MM: So both of your parents?

MH: Um hmm, were raised by different, but yeah, by whites, unh hunk. And he used to tell me he had seventeen in his family. He had seventeen people in his family and of course when they were born and raised and everything --. With them there was only the two of them, where the sisters were at. So, I, we, they never talked on the why, because I was, really --. I said to my Mom one time, why, and she said, "I don't know, they just gave me to the whites" They were Johnsons, Mattingly's, and Johnsons. Um hmm. I think it was because, when, I guess her father died and her mother moved to Washington --. Well, she had back in those days --. And she had these kids. You know she had brothers and sisters. But that's why I couldn't understand, hey, why, and they were all together but they were all raised by their aunts down here and so my grandma when she went to Washington, and back in those days they had to work a long time there. And she

was able to get an apartment or house, then she came back and picked the children up and I used to say: "Why didn't she come and pick you up?" [laughter] You know - anything --. It worked out ok.

MM: Was she like a servant to these white people?

MH: Yes, she, she worked. She worked and she didn't have the opportunity to go to school. Maybe I think she say she remembered one time she went to school, but that was the only time because --. My father said he never went to school, so they never had any education. So anyway, my Mom, she worked that many years for the sisters, so when I was going to school then she would always say to me — she never called me Elizabeth, she always called me Sis, because we were more like sisters than she was --. She was my Mom, but she was my sister, you know, because we were that close. She said: "Don't forget to come by the convent," she say, on your way home, because I went to the colored, St. Joseph's colored school up on the hill, and I said ok and so I would come down the hill and go in the convent and see what she wanted. So she would say to me, she would always say: "This is what I want to cook." She said --. She had the cookbook. And she said: "Find me a good desert that I can cook - something simple--." Or something, and I said, "Ok,", and so she said: "All you need to do is read it off to me one time, and I'll know." But I would read it off to her once and she would get it, and it would turn out so nice and they would say: "Oh Rose [name not fully intelligible], how did you get this, where did you get this from?"

MM: So you were her reader.

MH: I was her reader, I was her writer. And she would just laugh, my Mom would just laugh, and sometimes, when I would come early in the evenings and she would be down in the basement washing clothes - she had to wash for them, too, in between time, and then cook and then come home and take care of my parents, I mean take care of my father, when he was sick until he was able to get up and move around. But, as far as, we used to, my Mom and Dad, he did most of the cooking, yes, and so he would cook. And he really was a good cook and I guess this is probably something he had to do when he was raised by whites, I don't know. But he really, he showed us, in fact he showed me how to do a lot of cooking. At seven years old, I was standing up on a milk carton and he would show me how to make biscuits. [Laughter] So, but as our family progressed, then the boys, you know they got --. They used to work on the farm with my father because....

MM: Which farm was it?

MH: Harry Reeder's farm.

MM: Reeder?

MH: Harry Reeder, the old building is still--. You go past the church [St. Joseph's Church at Morganza] and that big farm out there and that old house is still there....

MM: With all the chimneys?

MH: On the right.

MM: On the right?

MH: Yeah. Ok, you go past the church, ok, and there's a road, you go down the road, and there's a, of course right now there's a lot of trees covering the house, but the

old house is still there, up on the hill. Somebody bought the faun. Gradually they sold the farm, but that's where we

MM: So it was walking distance?

MH: Yes, very walking distance, Yeah, uh hmm, walking distance.

MM: Was it an exciting thing when your parents got the house?

MH: Oh my goodness, yes it was. It really was, very exciting. Everybody was happy, Mom was, oh boy, she would say, and Dad, you know, it was --. To actually live in a house, and I remember, Father, before the house was built, Fr. Kavanaugh was the type of priest that, even though he had a big parish, he didn't spend much time in the church, I mean, he would say Mass and do whatever the other priests do, but he would come out and visit us. And so this particular time he came out, and this was before the house was built now, he would come out and sit around with us and talk, and one time he came out, we had this big old iron top, bottom stove, and he come and we would be sitting around and talking and he would look at the house and look outdoors, some of the cracks, because --. He would come to talk with us and he would sit around and eat with us, whatever we had, but he never --. And he was very much like me when I was working for Tri-County [Southern Maryland Tri-County Community Action Committee, Inc.], teaching preschool [Head Start], because I had to go in the house, in the home and visit and talk at the same time, and you had to look around and see, and this was, this was, now I can see what Father was doing [laughter], but he did it in a very nice way. He, he was just a lovely person; he would sit back and talk and talk with the children and with Mom and Dad and ask us, what we would like to do and

what our hopes were and my Mom, he would know she could - didn't have any education, but my father would sit back and laugh and he said: "For nobody, for a person to not have education," and he would sit back and fold his anus and say, "Would you listen at my wife up there using all those big words and putting them right in the right place." He said, "I know being around them nuns, she done picked up a whole lot of devilishness." And he [Fr. Kavanaugh] would look around, and we would be cooking on this wood stove and have a big old pot on it. It was a cold house, a very, very, very cold house, and so I guess he felt [unintelligible] and then he would ask how we felt about different things, like that. And then he'd leave our house and just move and go on down and visit somebody else, visit other people, which was nice. Back in those days you got to know one person or the other, you know.

MM: He must have been a very special person.

MH: Oh, to be, to do what he did for us, he was. He was [with animation]. He was a very beautiful person. He left, he was there for ten years. He left, he told us he was leaving, everybody in church cried, I know we did, the blacks anyway was pushed that way. I used to write to him.

MM: Did you?

MH: Um hmm. Write to him. Then, I was married then, and I used to write to him.

MM: That was when he went to India?

MH: Right.

MM: Did you save any of the letters he sent to you?

MH: Oh, I did not. Oh, I did not. When I got ready to move and stuff, wooh. We left a lot of stuff there and then when we came back and somebody else was in your room and you said, "Hey, where's my stuff at, or my --. Because he helped us to get a choir in our church and it was beautiful, and, of course, most of the choir were of my children and myself. Yeah!

MM: You had enough to make a choir.

MH: Oh yes! [laughter] and some people in the community. Oh, it was wonderful. And then Father had the young people in the community to --. In fact my brother was the first one that he taught to become an altar boy and another friend of his. So he started the segregation being changed in the church and all. That pleased a lot of the colored people. Then he had a special Mass and I guess maybe, I'm not sure, but that was beautiful, to us it was nice.

MM: A special Mass for what?

MH: We would have the altar boys and we would have the choir, the black choir. MM: So it was like a Mass for the Black people in the parish?

MH: The colored people, yes. Yeah, but anybody could come. It wasn't like we couldn't, no we couldn't.

MM: It was special.

MH: It was special, because the organ, I can remember my brothers now sitting up there on the altar, turning around and looking at people and grinning [laughter].

MM: Was that the oldest brother, the one that went out to work when your father got sick? MH: No that was the youngest one.

MM: Joe?

MH: No, James, we used to call Mutt, James Albert.

MM: He was the youngest?

MH: Yeah, James Albert was the youngest. Joseph was the next. I think Joseph became an altar boy too. But, Father used to, when he used to go traveling a lot, he used to get my brothers and they used to call him, I forgot his name, Josh Stuart, those were the two that traveled with him and he would just, where he had to go, wherever it was, he would go and take them, I guess because they hadn't been anywhere or seen anything. But he would take care of what he had to do. So they gradually --. My oldest brother he finally moved. He worked so many years here after he got married, and they moved to Washington. So that gave us an opportunity to go to Washington, when my kids were coming up, to visit him. And he would always tell me, said, "You know, I've got to slow down [laughter]."

MM: Is he the one that became a deacon?

MH: Yes, right there [pointing to a picture].

MM: And he's the one who quit school to work for the family.

MH: Right, he came home to me one day, he was down, and he said to me, "Sis," and I said, "What," they all called me Sis, he said, "I want to do something," because I think he had a couple of heart attacks, right, and he had gotten over them. And he said, "I just want to give my life to the Lord." I said, "You do?" He said, "Yes," he said, "Would you, you are a big prayer, would you pray for me?" Really [with animation], he was serious, and I said yes I would pray. The first thing they had to do was to get the consent of their wives. That was the very thing, to get referral of the wives, that was the main thing, so he finally got consent for

her, and then, of course, he was illiterate, and so he had to, being in the fifth grade, they, they finally, in that community too, a black community. The church of Incarnation was more than --. They had whites, a few here and there, but and he had talked to the priest, and so they got a retired elementary teacher, they got a retired high school or college teacher, and so they got together and they taught him. First they had to get him learning English all over again, learning all of that. He was pleased about that and so was I. They got a picture of him, someone teaching him and showing him the program that he had gone through before.

MM: I heard him speak once, at someone's funeral, I think, and he kind of recounted that experience of his.

MH: Yes,

MM: It was very inspiring. He was a great speaker.

MH: Yes, for somebody --. And he studied and I remember his very first Mass that he served and we, everybody went up, my brothers and I. They went up because it was the very first Mass that he served at Incarnation. And then when I got there he called me and he said, "Sis," I said "What?" Yes! He said: "Come down here," because they were down in the basement. You know how they all get ready to serve Mass and whatever, and he said, "I want you to read." And my stomach dropped [laughter]. I said, "What?" I said--. I taught, I was teaching CCD [Sunday School] but, I had read the Bible for the kids, getting them ready. And, wow, so I said, "Oh, yes." He said, "Come on." And they all get in a circle before they say Mass, the priests, so we all got in a circle and we prayed and

then we went up. Because I [unintelligible] on the spot.

MM: Do you remember was any reaction of other people in the community when Fr. Kavanaugh started helping people getting houses? Was everybody ok with that?

MH: AH:, I guess we were so busy we didn't pay them any mind, any mind, I mean, it was, I'm sure they were, you know, I'm sure that they were, but even if so, Father had decided what he was going to do with prayers and the community and he had visited everybody's house and it was --. The way they were living, and such small houses with so many children into one house and, he just kept on praying, just praying the community would just go its merry way, you know. I'm sure they were, but, we were too busy then. [laughter] We really didn't pay it attention in that area. But everybody was so happy to be in a home, it was just like, I don't know, feeling the wan-nth when you move in there, instead of so cold, the wind blowing, you know it was just

MM: Did the houses have water at first? MH: No.

MM: That came later.

MH: They had no water, no running water. They just had outside johns and later on, Father, I don't know how, we got the well, so -- got the well. They got together and dug the well. That was nice, cold water. It really was. [laughter].

MM: Where had you gotten the water before?

MH: We had walked from our house the house that there now all the way down at the end. There was a lady named Miss Ching, and Miss Ching had a pump in her yard. So what we would do is walk down and get first a bucket of water and we used that water for drinking and cooking. And, of course, the swamp, there were

--. You know how the water runs, we used to go down there and take the tub and fill those great big tubs up to wash clothes, or leave that tub out when the rain come. That's how we --. But this white lady, she was the sweetest thing, because there were only, I think in that area we were the only black family, black, and so we got along pretty well with the whites that were there. I know one guy he was a very service, he worked on base, was a service guy, and somehow he got to liking my brother McKinley and he would take McKinley on the base, he would take him this place and just show him that. And so he got, and, when he moved, he wanted to take my brother with him.

MM: My gosh!

MH: He liked him that well, yeah. And my father said, oh no, no, no, no [laughter]. Oh no, no, he can't go. They were kind people, we got to know those people, and, of course, the --. We had the Tennyson's store in the community, so we got to know --. My father used to go there and my father got to know --. And back in those days, ok, when you raised tobacco, the landlord got half, we got a third. You know you have to wait a whole year till you sell the tobacco till you can get money.

MM: You had to manage well. MH: Very well.

MM: Did you see much of the other laymen that Fr. Kavanaugh had helping him, like Scanlon Herbert and those people?

MH: Yes, I got to meet most of those, yeah, I was pretty young, but I got to meet Mr. Rustin, I knew Mr. Scanlon Herbert because we were kin. All the Herberts and my parents were kin, Mr. Sommerville, what was the other guy, Thomas, Thomas,

Thomas

MM: [Referring to a booklet about the St. Joseph Project] I think their pictures are in there toward the back. Maybe they're not. There are, like individual pictures of the different board members.

MH: Of the different board members?

MM: There they are.

MH: I see them, yeah. Mr. Sommerville looks [unintelligible], doesn't he? Mr. John T. Sommerville, and then I know these very well, Mrs. Alice Marshall, because she used to come visit us when we were living beside the road, and Mr. Scanlon, we're kin to him and Miss Alice and Wilson, but there was still another guy, Gorman Thomas. I know he used to help out too. Over at St. Joseph, that's been many, many, many years ago, whew! Mr. Harry Fenwick - knew him well, because he was kin to us [laughter]. Of course, Mr. McKinley Herbert and Scanlon Herbert were brothers, um hum, and Mr. Lee Price, he was our cousin on my mother's side [laughter] and Mr. Fenwick, and this was --. Mr. Harry was the father and Alfonzo was the son. Yeah, I remember him. Alfonzo is still living and I think he has another brother in Washington, DC.

MM: Does he live in Washington, Alfonzo, or down here?

MH: Alfonzo is down here, he works down here, yeah, his wife passed --. He lives next door to the tavern that used to be there on 247 [Loveville Road].

MM: Yeah?

MH: Um Hmm, he still lives up there, last time I saw him. Yeah, [unintelligible] as a five cent bar of soap, but he's alright.

MM: Was Alfonzo one of the board members, or just his father was?

MH: I think he helped out too. I see in here he was a board member. Mr. Lee Price. I got to know all of these. I know all of them. Miss Alice was just as sweet as she could be. I sort of grew up with Wilson Marshall. I used to go over there a lot, when my father was sick or my mom was sick, and, by me being the only girl --. She spent time in Washington with him and then I would go to live with them and go to school, because they had daughters, right, and it was fun going to visit somebody else. [laughter] I remember Ms. Marshall, she was very strict. She had two daughters, very strict. Used to go to visit her house, ok, and we have to tote the wood in, and then we had to go out the back, down the hill to get water, spring water, because they had a spring, and, by the way, we had a spring, too, but I guess it dried up. No it didn't dry up, because I remember one time that my brothers, I'm going to call, James Albert, I better call him James Albert [laughter] - we used to call him Mutt - and Joseph, and Louis, and a few other of their friends, they got back there where we used to get spring water and they enlarged the hole. They dug it out, until, I don't know, it was a big space, [pointing] from here to there, and used to go swimming.

MM: No [laughter]

MH: [laughter] Boys, I tell you! They used to go swimming in there, so we didn't have any spring after that. But it was nice going to other peoples' homes and staying all night and whatever, but ewes [drawn out and with emphasis] didn't you freeze, the houses were cold, because it was so open. Those old houses was open and all you had was a cook stove in the kitchen. But in our house we had, even after we

got the house built, we had a wood stove I mean a cook stove and you could put water in the tank, heat the water right there because you were cooking and use it --

.

MM: Use it for bathing, like?

MH: Um hmm, used to keep it filled up to the top and, of course, in the summertime we didn't worry about it because they used to set a couple of tubs out there, I mean a couple of big tubs, out there in the morning and by the time evening, when everybody got off from work, the water was warm and so the kids took a bath. It was those fun days, you know, those really fun days. My family, the Chases family, and my family, and the Holts used to all, once a year, get a truck to haul everybody and we used to go to a place called Queen Tree over near the water.

MM: Um hmm, I know where it is.

MH: Yeah, that's where we used to go picnic, and, boy, we thought we was --
Whewww!

MM: That was a real outing, wasn't it?

MH: Yes [with emphasis], it was, oh, everybody would cook their food and just go out and let the kids just run around. So we used to run around and get in the water and I never liked water, I was afraid, and George Chase came along and picked me up and throwed me in that water one day and, whew, I was angry with him. [laughter] But that was fun, that's how families used to do, families got together. And my mother, even though she works, she would get off at one o'clock, and come home and see if dinner was ready for us and she would jump in and help my father get dinner. We used to eat dinner and every --. Almost every

week we'd get a treat. He called it a treat, he would buy this beef roast. It was pretty, about that big [gesturing with her hands] and he used to put it in the oven, put it on the stove in water a little bit, and then he used to put it in the oven to bake it with onions around. Oh, that was, whew--. With cabbage, and we used to have potatoes, sweet potatoes, and my Mom used to come home and whip up a cake that quick and we used to have ice cream, homemade ice cream. So we used to take an ice cream maker and, ok, put a layer of ice and a layer of salt and a layer of ice all the way up. We used to do that before we finished eating, right, and then we'd have those things. We didn't know what a ball was, get a hold of one of Mama's stockings and fill it up with rags and go down out in the yard and play ball. And my father used to go out in the yard and play ball and my Momma, as big as she was, and tall as she was, she used to get out in the yard and used to play ball. And I always knew when my father got tired, because he would hit the ball way over in the swamp, ok, and we would have to go look for it and find it and when we'd come back he'd be sitting on the porch. Then I'd know he was tired. Ok, and it's time for us to eat and so that would be our desert, ice cream and cake, and that was every Sunday.

MM: Really?

MH: Yeah, even after they work hard --. And then then in the evenings, and, even though he worked on a farm and didn't get in till late --. I had to call, when I got old enough to cook. He used to come in and set back, and he used to tell us stories, tell us stories and we used to sit around.

MM: Stories about ...

MH: About the old times and he used to talk about his parents a lot. Yeah, and everything and [Mrs. Herbert says "Ok, going to work? See you, bye" to a grandchild who comes into the house briefly.] It was just --. We used to sit back and talk and then from there it's time to go to bed. "Ok, get down and let's say the rosary." Momma would say the rosary. My father he used to turn around and look at us or make a face or something while we were saying the rosary and we just couldn't hold it in [laughter] and my Mom would turn around and he'd straighten his face up just as nice. [laughter] And she would say when we were finished, she'd say, "Dick, I knew that was you, do you know when you pray you don't--." My Dad, it was just him, you know, it was just funny, joking, lively. [unintelligible] We would never know if they had any difference. They wouldn't talk before us, in front of us, they never, never, never. He'd say: "Oh, Rose let's go for a walk," and they'd go walking up the road. There was not, none of that. And if anybody was sick in the family, they used to go, I don't care if --. After they got off from work, they would go and set up with the sick two or three o'clock in the morning and then come back for her to get ready to take a nap and go to work. So we don't have that, don't have people going to visit the sick.

MM: Yeah, looking out for each other.

MH: No.

MM: How old were your parents when they died?

MH: I was married. They, my father died in March of '67 and my mother died in November, the 27th of '67. So it was both had --. When she finished at St.

Joseph's --. She was sick for quite a while because she had an operation on one of her veins and she was out and by the time she went back, the nuns had hired somebody else. Yep.

MM: Uhm, after all that time.

MH: Yes. Yes [firmly and then a pause]. And so, she said that's ok and so she got well and she worked at St. Mary's Hospital house cleaning for a long, long time. My father, he got a job there too, and, until he got sick. And so my brother decided he was going to take them up with him. I said, "Ok, fine." And they had to leave the country because he started to begin to have asthma. And so they went to live with him. And so the house, my husband and I had the kids, had the house.

MM: And that was the same house that was built.

MH: Right. The same house that was built, and so we stayed there and kept house and he was working, and we paid the taxes, and that's when I got a job and I started paying the taxes every year, kept the taxes up every year so there was never no--

MM: Right.

MH: --problem about taxes, so when she, when my father died in March, then Mom, she decided she had enough of Washington [soft laughter]. "I want to be back home," but they didn't want her to come, they fussed, and they did everything --. "I'm going back home with Sis. I'm going back home." And so she came and lived with me until she died So I said to myself, I was always a prayer.

MM: Always said what?

MH: I was always so close to the Lord. I brought my kids up. I don't know what

they are now.

MM: I feel the same way about mine.

MH: Yeah, I think back and I say, oh dear God, I remember when I had the set of twins. Then, my baby was two years old and, thank God my Mom was living, because I don't think I would have ever made it. I guess I would have made it too, but, having three babies, you might as well, in the house --. And you sit back and wonder through these things and you thank God for bringing you this far, and then I had said when my last two kids were in school, then I was going to go back and go to school. So, after I got my two kids in school, and I had two children in school, and I said, and he was working construction, and, shucks, that was enough. So then I got out and that's when I started working for Tri County Community Action, surprisingly enough. I would get home — we had the older kids got home before the younger ones did. Because right the time I would get home in the evening, it would be, well, would be five o'clock. But they were all home, doing their chores. As I say, when I raised my kids, you know I looked at all of them, they start, "Well I did this yesterday, well I did this this time, well I did this --." And I said ok, so I made myself a schedule on the wall, had that old big schedule on that wall, and I did. And I had chores for each child and when I got home I want this done. But normally I tell them, if you have homework, I'd rather for you to do it and take your time and do it and then, after you do your homework, you do your chores, ok, and by the time I got home I'd fix dinner. But they would have their chores done by the time I got home. That eliminate a whole lot by putting that schedule up, because they would see what they had to do and go

and do it.

MM: There was no doubt about it.

MH: There was no doubt. And all these boys I had, six before I had any girls --. What am I going to do with all these boys? [laughter] But they were around in the kitchen and they love cooking. And I showed them how, you know, how to cook different things, and how to wash, iron. They got so, with the kids, I would sit down and look through the books and I would make out a menu for each day and I said, "Ok, this is yours now." I had a menu for every day. "And now I'm going to give you the money to go to the store." Yes, and so they went. This is how they taught, I taught them, right, they would get groceries for it. And I said --. Now I look at them and they got wives and whatever. They do the cooking [hearty laughter]. Except some of them, they, they know --. They don't know how to do cooking, and they said, "They don't cook supper, they don't know I said well, just do the best You guys get together and enjoy it. And I says you know I taught you and maybe So they do that, and they crack me up and the wives get so strange, because they don't know, they, she don't, would like, "I don't want to do none of this." "This is what we did at home. We washed, we ironed, and we did this."

MM: You made them self-sufficient.

MH: Right! [laughter]

MM: What more can you ask for, you know?

MH: They go and they appreciate it, you know. They get together in --. It's so strange that the youngest one will always say, "Ok, everybody, you all, what about getting

together and having a meeting?" So he's the one that gets and he gets everybody and they have those phones now and whatever.

MM: Oh, yes.

MH: And he will get everybody together.

MM: What's the youngest one's name?

MH: Robert. See what, I'm going to tell you how he got his name. Ok. Well I went to St. Joseph's school, my teacher was Sister Robert Vincent and Sister Jane Anthony. Ok. Those two teachers taught, one teacher taught the first, second, third, and fourth grades. The other one taught fifth, sixth, seventh, and eighth grades.

MM: Wow!

MH: Right, and so they were there, when I used to have all my kids and I used to go up and meet at the church, or, they knew us --. Well, they knew me well, they know all of our family, because of where they grew up. So Sister Robert Vincent say, Elizabeth, what you going to, what you going to name this one? And she said, well name her after me because it's going to be a girl. [hearty laughter] So, so I said, well, when Robert was born, he wasn't saying, you know, he was a boy, so we named him Robert Vincent and she was tickled,--

MM: I bet.

MH: --because she had a brother whose name was Robert, so that's how, and they said, "Where did you go to get all your kids names? I said go to the Bible [laughter] because those names that those, these young people are giving these young kids now days is something. [with emphasis]

MM: You won't find them in the Bible, will you?

MH: No, no, you find them on TV, these actors, or whatever. I always tell my kids, I say, "Ok, I don't care what you put on there, but please put a saint's name.

[recorder turned off]

[Recorder turned on again. Mary Herbert is speaking on the telephone in the background. Her husband Augustus "Gussie" Herbert speaks while Mary Herbert is on the telephone]

Augustus Herbert: [unintelligible]

MM: So the men got together and went up there?

AH: And brought down --. And got the houses --. We went up there and taken saws and cut them up in sections and brought them down here, like that. And brought them down here and start building them, start building them but they didn't have no water so my father was a well digger, used to dig wells.

MM: Yeah?

AH: So we dug a well over there. See that was free we didn't charge them anything.

MM: It was what?

AH: That was free, we didn't charge, we didn't charge the church nothing for that.

MM: Oh, ok, it was free? Did any of the men who went up to get the houses, did they get paid or was that all ... ?

AH: No, they didn't get paid.

MH: They did all that on their own. AH: It was self-help.

MM: Self-help?

MH: They just enjoyed that, going up with Father. Father would take them up and buy them a little something there, sandwiches or whatever. They were just --. Like I say, back in those days, it was like --. [MH: shifts the conversation abruptly to the St. Joseph Community Center on Kavanaugh Rd.] I remember very well when we went down to, before the County Commissioners [with emphasis] to see if we could put a building on the property that we had here. And they turned us down about two, three times.

MM: Really?

MH: Yes, they did. [pause] But we never gave up. And it was like one person was supposed to go, but, when you go you go with twenty-one [laughter]. I'm serious. And Patty, we called her Patty Scriber, she used to live where Helen, down from Helen Scriber, down the hill from Helen, and she would, I tell you, she, she used to carry on, not, not hateful, or whatever, but she wanted to know: "We got the land, why can't we, why can't we put the center, why can't we put a recreation center for the kids?" So it took us that long, I know it took us for over a month or more, but we didn't give up. We went down and the last time we went down, of course, they told us, what type of activity were we going to have in the center and all of this. They went on and on so we had to write all this. So finally I guess they thought we weren't going to give up [laughter].

MM: So they finally gave permission?

MH: So they finally gave permission to go. And I didn't go down the last time, but I know Mr. Wooten, James Wooten.

MM: John Wooten.

MH: John Wooten, John, good old John.

MM: He was a good man.

MH: Oh, he was a lovely person. He mortgaged his house for to help the center, and, you know what, we paid him back within a couple of years.

MM: That has been an important facility for the community.

MH: Oh Yes. And now they're thinking about building—they building—I think they're building a community center or something else over there some where?

[the session continues with MH discussing the current status of the community center and problems with leadership in the organization.]

[Digital recording ends]