

Unified Committee for Afro-American Contributions
Oral History Documentation Project

MARY ELNETTA GEORGE TOON

Interviewed by Brenda Coates

January 30, 1997

At Mrs. Coates home in Lexington Park Maryland
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[Begin Side 1, Tape 1 of 2]

BC: Now she is sitting in my house in Lexington Park. Today's date is the 30th of January, 1997. Mrs. Toon I want to make sure you understand that if you are uncomfortable answering any questions, I will understand if you don't. Okay. The first question is: Where do you live? Where do you live now?

MT: Lexington Park, Maryland.

BC: Okay, exactly where?

MT: I live in Forest Heights which is off of 235.

BC: Okay. That's the area down at --

MT: South of the Base.

BC: South?

MT: Down behind South Hampton.

BC: Oh okay. Further down, down by -- Between South Hampton and Hermansville Road -- Not Hermansville Road. What's that road at the back entrance?

MT: Hermansville?

BC: It's Hermansville Road? Okay. So, you live in the area between South Hampton and Hermansville Road. Is that Forest Heights?

MT: No. Hermansville -- South Hampton is on the main road 235, but you turn in like an avenue there off of 235. We live between George Washington Carver School and the back.

BC: Oh okay! That's Forest Heights.

MT: Yes.

BC: Oh okay. That's by First Baptist Church.

MT: Right. Right.

BC: Okay. Okay. Where were you born?

MT: Columbus County, North Carolina.

BC: Okay. And, what was your -- What were your parents' occupations?

MT: They were I guess you call it piece farmers?

BC: Tenant farmers? Okay. So, about how much land did y'all live on?

MT: That was hard to say because they had land different places. They worked different sharecrops and everything like that.

BC: And, you said you lived -- Where you lived when you were growing up didn't actually have a name? The area didn't have a name.

MT: No. Occasionally we lived in a couple places really -- that kind of had a name. We called it the Old Hammon's Field. That's where we lived a good portion of our life, and then they had another place they called the George's Place. Oh, that was somewhere towards Roseville or somewhere that way. I don't know exactly where.

BC: So, all this was still in Columbus County?

MT: All this was in North Carolina.

BC: Okay. Okay. Give me a name of a town that you lived close to so we'll have some sort of a record.

MT: Okay. Whitesville, North Carolina. Whitesville, North Carolina.

BC: Whitesville, North Carolina. Okay. And, this was in, what? North? South?

MT: North. North -- North Carolina.

BC: Northern end of North Carolina. Okay. What year did you come to St. Mary's?

MT: 1950.

BC: 1950, and for what reason?

MT: [chuckle] that's kind of strange. We just got married and it was my desire to always go to California, but we stopped in here to visit his family and we were only gonna stay for awhile. And after we got here, I found out we had a Hollywood and a California, Maryland here. And then I said, "Oh, we were in Southern California and didn't even know it!" [Chuckle] And, I sit down and wrote my mother and father a letter and I told them I had visited California and Hollywood, and I see all the stars. And, "Oh, Mom and Daddy it's so beautiful here!" But then I had to refrain and write them a letter and tell them the truth because they were gonna come and visit us. And when they got here, I had to take them through California [chuckle] and Hollywood to make sure they know [laughter] that this was the Hollywood and California, Maryland [laughter] that I had been to! [Laughter] So that was really [laughter] what I had to go through [laughter] when I first came here!

BC: [lots of laughter!] Okay. So, you just came for a visit and you decided to stay.

MT: Haven't stayed. Didn't ever go nowhere! [Laughter]

BC: And you said his family was from here?

MT: His family -- He had family here. He was visiting first and then he came back and we got married, then we came by to visit. So, this is what, where we ended up at.

BC: Okay.

MT: Since 1950.

BC: Okay. Now, to go back to when you were growing up: What were things like when you were a child?

MT: Eww! What was things right! That's over a thousand dollar question. Well, when we were a child. We didn't know no more than what was there at that time because we thought we were living a good life. We didn't have a lot of fancy things. We didn't have all the modern things that we have right now. 'Course, we had the outside bathrooms and we had nice -- We had a home, as far as that's concerned. With 15 heavy children, we had a good life because we had a lot of love, and we had a lot of understanding.

BC: Now, you said your father did -- What you said?

MT: They did, like, I guess you call it sharecropping?

BC: Sharecropping. So, most of what y'all ate was from the earth?

MT: Yes.

BC: Didn't really go out and buy --?

MT: Didn't really have to go out to get many things because they raised most and canned a lot.

BC: And your mother was a housewife?

MT: Yes.

BC: Okay. What is your earliest memory, or one of your earliest memories?

MT: I just remember we being little children. That's -- I guess that's about the earliest -- And, I can remember that I was walking good and my sister was always bigger than me and I thought I was supposed to be the biggest because I was the oldest, so we never really got along. And then one day she was trying to do something and I was really upset about it, and I remember I was gonna take the poker and hit her with it and my mom caught me just in time -- because she was bothering me. And, oh my God! I thought about it after I grew up. I said, "Oh my God, I would have killed my sister and wouldn't have known what it was!" You know, it's children.

BC: Children.

MT: So, that -- That kind of taught me not to do things like that.

BC: Okay. What church did your family go to?

MT: We went to Mt Olive Baptist Church.

BC: Baptist Church. Okay. Do you remember your family taking any trips when you were young?

MT: No. My family -- We didn't never take trips no more than going to maybe some other town or some other church. They were never able to take trips or anything like that. They were just mostly at home and go church and things like that.

BC: Were they involved in community activities?

MT: Well, at that time, I guess you would call it community activities because at that time, people always was doing things for other people. They were always, if anything was wrong in the community or whatever, they was there --

BC: To help out.

MT: To help out. They carried -- if they needed food. Whatever they needed, they took there.

When they went through, they was always taking something and doing things for each other and helping people like that. So, I guess that's more or less what you would call, at that time, community service, you know.

BC: Okay. Do you think times were better or worse than they are now?

MT: At that time, they were worse as we thought. But when I look at it now, times were good because you didn't hear tell of all of this. These different things that's going on right now. If there was, we didn't know about it, but now we just really knew what's happening. I guess that makes a difference.

BC: What were your family's health concerns? Now, how did your parents deal with health and illness?

MT: Well, my mom and dad didn't never have health problems, really, while I was at home. Their health problems happened after I left home. And, they were in their later years that they had health problems, but I don't think, at first, my mom could deal with it because she'd never been sick -- no more than having babies. And, I think that was her biggest problem. She could not accept being sick.

BC: When you were growing up, were doctors and hospitals and other medical facilities available to y'all?

MT: Yes, they had doctors and they had hospitals. Well, we were so fortunate we really didn't have to go too much to the doctor. We went to the doctor's occasionally. I had to go, I think, more than any of the rest, but they did have hospitals and they had what they called the little clinics you go to. And, I can remember we used to go to this doctor there. They call him Dr., Dr. Dillard. He was black doctor and he always humming. And I came out of the doctor's office one day and I said, "Why is he always humming when you're in

there?" He's always singing, [Mary sings] "Row, children, row. Children, row. Ought a been dead to see my Lord." And, I just wondered.

My mom said, "Well, that's his way of doing it."

And, he was just -- He would talk to you and he was just really good, as we saw it, because I didn't know nothing about doctors. But that way, he'd sit down and talk to you. And you know, his children, he'd always have something, something to tell the children, and he would still have to sing that little song; but, he was good.

BC: Okay. How -- Did -- Now, did you have--Did the doctor make house calls or you went to him?

MT: We went to him, but they did have doctors that made housing calls.

BC: Okay. Did your mother have any home remedies that she used?

MT: Oh yes!

BC: Like what kind?

MT: [chuckle] as for the girls, she always -- When you have your menstrual period, you had cramps. She always had this little toddy around, and she put about a couple teaspoons full in a little glass half of water and she give that to you; and, that was supposedly to kill your cramps. But -- One day I had them so bad, she gave me my little toddy. I look for her medicine and it took me a time to find it. And when I did find it, I got me a whole glassful and I never, ever dranked anything since. I couldn't hold the bed down. I couldn't get in the bed. I was trying to do my hair. I couldn't do my hair. I couldn't stand up hardly. I was grabbing the bed, trying to hold the bed down. I couldn't -- It just wouldn't let me do it.

And I said, "I want something to eat!" I tried to find some food. I couldn't find

food. I finally found a jar of preserves, all that food. I got a spoon. I can remember: I got a dip full of it. I got to hide the jar so Mom don't see when she come home. I remember she had one of these cabinets--corner cabinets. So I sit it over in the sifter part of the cabinet, and I ran back and try to find the bed again. That was the worst thing in my life. And finally, I did find the bed enough to try to lay my head down. I just couldn't keep it down. And I said, "Oh, Lord! Mom now is coming to the house. I can't let them know that I'm sick."

So I laid there and I saw my mom come in, and she says, "Oh, she's asleep. She must be eased off."

I said, "Oh, God! You all get out of here! I can't stand this!" [Chuckle]

So, I remember they finally left the house and I tried to get up again, but I finally went back and laid down again, and I finally went to sleep. And when I did wake up, I was some kind of groggy! But, I promised God and all of them, that that was it and I have never drank since then! [Laughter] But, that was the toddy.

BC: Oh! Oh! Okay! That was -- Okay! I was thinking -- So, it was just whiskey!

MT: [laughter] Yes!

BC: Okay!

MT: [laughter] it was that white whiskey.

BC: That white lightning.

MT: Yes! Yes! It thought it was -- See, I didn't know what it really was and I just wanted really get this pain over with, and I got it over with.

BC: Uh hmm!

MT: Oh my God!

BC: Okay. [Laughter]

MT: That was -- hat was a day! I shall never forget it.

BC: Okay. It took me a long time to catch it! [Laughter]

MT: Yes! [Laughter]

BC: Okay. Well, besides that toddy! [Laughter]

MT: Yeah. They used to give us, like, tea in the wintertime: They call it wormwood tea.

And, they would give us catnip tea. That was good for things, they said. And then, like, in the part of the year, they would start--Mom would always start us on cod liver oil, and you had to take that every day for a time. And on the ladder, they just give you, like, you didn't have to go to the doctor that much because if you got a cold, you know you was getting a dose of the castor oil.

BC: Okay. When you were growing up, how did the community, or how did you family deal with senior citizens?

MT: Well back in those days, we really didn't know what senior citizens was. But, like my mom and dad, they would always pick up people, take them to church or take them to the store, but we didn't know exactly what it was all about. We just knew they did it.

BC: But now, how were they -- I guess the question was: How were they cared for when they got too old to care for themselves? Did they have--

MT: Most -- Some people, you know. The people --As far as I can remember: If people were too to care for themselves, they always went to the house and taking help. You know, different -- The people in the community would keep going, help them out -- help them. Whatever they had to be done, they try to do it for them.

BC: So, they really didn't have any senior citizen homes?

MT: Not that I know of at that time. See, we wasn't in that part of the town to really know about it like that.

BC: Well, how did the black people get news? At that time they didn't have TV, but did y'all have radios and --?

MT: We had the old-time radio. I don't know if we had newspapers. You know, that's something I don't remember. I know we used to have -- excuse me -- We used to have this old-time--I guess you call it, or they called it back in those days, one of them old-time radios they had up in the corner. You had to crank it up.

BC: The phonograph?

MT: And get it cranked up and it would start playing and all that. I don't know what they call that thing now.

BC: The gramophone.

MT: Maybe it was. And, it would play. We get it like that. Whatever that was because I don't really have a newspaper, unless we probably get some, like, if you go out somewhere, there'd be some piled up. They would bring some home some time like that.

BC: Okay. What types of things did you do as a child? What kind of games did you play?

MT: Well, we had hopscotch, jumping ropes. We had, played basketball. We played baseball. We just played most games. But then at that time, we didn't really have too much time to play a lot of games because you were always busy doing things.

BC: Okay.

MT: After the year -- in summer, when school was out, then you had more time than you did anything else. And, we used to -- On Sunday, of course, after we got home from church, we would -- During the week, we wanted to -- if you had a chance -- we would play

church, and we would--We would make, get a lot of buckets, cans, boards and make benches and things, and we had the--At home, they call the Amen Corner and we have a Deacon's Corner. And, we'd put the pulpit and have somebody to preach! And, we [chuckle] whatever we saw them doing in church, that's what we did. And, if we ever thought about a shout-a-care, we'd shout it just like. "We thought we were doing the right thing!" [Laughter] So, we kind of had good times. I would say, it gave me some time to - -You know, we had neighbors come over. We just all get together. Just really enjoy and we played church! [Laughter]

The funniest thing: My father took us --We went to a program on Sunday afternoon. And so, they said, "Do we have anything -- anybody -- Anybody have anything they want to do?"

So my father got up and he said, "Yes." He said, "I want the children to come up and sing a song." He said, "I want my children to come up to sing a song." And of all us was looking, knowing he wasn't talking about us because he never told us nothing about that. [Chuckle] Well, you know you can't sit there because if your father or your mother told you to do something --anybody at that time --you had to move.

BC: Uh hmm!

MT: And, we got up there looking like a bunch of little crazies. "What's we gonna sing?"

Papa said, "Just sing whatever y'all sings when you're out there having church!" [Laughter] Oh! That was the "hurt fullest" thing we ever did, and we --I never forget. We sang, "We are our Heavenly Father's Children." Because somebody --There had been a group to church and they sang that song, and they give us little pamphlets on it. And, we -- We just thought it was a marvelous song and the way they sang. We would

get out there and we would just carry on, but we had no idea that this father was gonna tell us to get up and sing in church. We wanted to hurt him so bad! [Laughter]

And he sit back, and he just laughed and he just laughed, and he thought it was beautiful. And, the church just commend us. What can we do? We said, "We ain't get around there and sing [laughter]...!"

But, it was kind of funny afterwards. But the way he did it, you know! If he had of just let us know. He said, "No. If I'd a had, y'all -- I know that y'all'd want to get up there and make a mess out of it." So, make a mess out of it. See, always be prepared. That's was a hurting thing! Hmm, hmm! And, you know you better get up there and do something.

BC: So let me make sure that I understand this now. Well, let me turn this off because...

Okay. I understand now, but hmm! [Laughter] So at that time, there was how many of you?

MT: Oh, there was about 12 or 14 of us. That was not -- Yeah, that was about three or four years after that before I left home. Yeah.

BC: So, all of y'all got there in front of the church! [Laughter] With no preparation!

MT: [chuckle] No preparation whatsoever!

BC: And he said, "Always be prepared!"

MT: "Always be prepared," but that wasn't prepared like that! [Laughter]

BC: Okay! What kind of chores did y'all have?

MT: Well, everybody had a chore. In fact, we knew before we got home in the afternoon from school, we had to get wood in. We had to get the water in. We had to make sure the yard was cleaned up. We had to make sure, everything, your room was taken care of. You

didn't take your clothes and throw them down on the floor. You had to make sure everything was cleaned up. And before you went to bed, you took your bath and you made sure everything was ready for the next day. And, you get up in the morning and you go and wash your face and hands is the first thing you do. After you go to the bathroom, you wash your face and hands. You get prepared to get your breakfast. Everybody has to be at the table at one time. Everybody had to say Bible verses, then the blessing was said then you eat. Then, you get up and get ready for school or wherever you had to go. That's three times a day. That's breakfast, dinner and lunch or whatever you call it: midday supper, supper is what you call it.

BC: So, you were close enough from the school that you came home for lunch?

MT: We took our lunch.

BC: Oh okay.

MT: Made your lunch and took it to school. That means when you're home, you have breakfast, lunch and dinner -- breakfast, dinner and supper.

BC: Okay. How did -- How did you get along with your brothers and sisters?

MT: We all got along pretty good except me. At times, I wanted to do things on my own.

And when my brother came along, he had a bicycle and we didn't have one. And so, he said, "Girls don't ride bicycles that much."

So we said, "Well, we'll learn how to ride it anyway," but he told us to stay off of the bicycle. But of course, they all left to go to town. I determined to learn how to ride a bicycle while they were going to town. And I was going down the hill with the bicycle, and the bicycle threw me just as far as he could throw me, and the bicycle went one way and I went the other. So I got up and I got up. I finally got his bicycle up on the porch

and I never tried to ride a bicycle again! [Laughter] I figured if a bicycle is gonna make me hurt like that, I don't need to learn how to ride a bicycle. And from that day to this, I never tried to ride a bicycle! So, I guess I paid for my news because my father said don't get on the bicycle; but, I determined to get on the bicycle. But after that, we came along real good.

BC: Okay.

MT: We kind of worked together more or less. Had our little ups and downs, but the normal. They were normal.

BC: How did your parents treat you? Did they have to discipline you? What kind of things -- If they did, what kind of things did they have to discipline you for?

MT: Oh, my mom was the sweetest little person when it comes to discipline. She would tell you, "Now Netta, you know that's not right. Netta don't do that. Okay, Netta. You're gonna get it if you keep on doing what you're doing now."

"Yes, ma'am. Yes, Mama. I'm not gonna do it no more." But then she would tell you so many times, you said, "Oh, she ain't gonna do nothing now because we've got everything all straight." After awhile, I'd go and do something different.

"Netta, didn't I --." She never raised real hard, but she said, "Didn't I tell you not to do that?"

"Yes, ma'am." Well, I know what's coming when she said that little thing in her voice.

She said, "Will you go get me a switch?" So -- "And don't bring me the littlest switch you can find."

"Yes, ma'am," and I couldn't find nothing that I could really bring.

She said, "Bring me a switch."

Well, I had to go get that switch and bring it back, and she would stand there and -
- Every time, she'd hit, she'd say, "Remember I told this and I asked you not to do it
again? And you remember I told you this?"

I said, "Yes, ma'am! Yes, ma'am! Yes, ma'am! Yes, ma'am!" I figured out it
was gonna help.

She finished -- and she took her time and whipped me good. Then, I'd have to go
over and pout about. She said, "Do you want me to come over and help you pout some?"

I said, "No, ma'am." [Laughter] But, I thought that was so cruel. She never
really, really -- She would never yell hard, but she would just really talk so soft. And,
you wouldn't think she was gonna really get a hold of you! [Laughter]

BC: But she warned you!

MT: Oh yes! She warned you real good! Real good! [Laughter]

BC: Okay.

MT: Those were some exciting days. And when I look at children now, a lot of people say,
"Well now, I know I didn't do that." I say, "You know what? These children are doing
the same what I used to do." I said, "But we was undercover when I was, but they're out
in the open" because now --.

BC: Do you feel that your parents prepared you well for life?

MT: In some instances because you know, back in those days, I don't think parents knew too
much about preparing us because most parents didn't have a education like we are today,
and they didn't have -- They had, more or less, the mother and the father with. They
didn't know all about these modern things that happen here at this day and time. They

prepared you best they knew how.

BC: Okay.

[End Side 1, Tape 1 of 2]

[Begin Side 2, Tape 1 of 2]

BC: Would you describe your formal schooling? You said you went to Cedar --

MT: Cedar Grove.

BC: Grove Elementary School.

MT: At that time, they called it primer grade. That was the first grade in your life: primer grade. After you left primer grade, then you went to Grade 1, 2 and right on up. Then, you --We moved from Cedar Grove up to Mt. Olive, so then we started going to Mt. Olive School, and that's where I finished my time. But now, after I left home, that was a different story because the other children, they went to different schools because they had changed the schools around after that. So, I don't know which way they went after that because not too long after that, they closed that school down because of difficulties. I don't know what the difficulties was.

BC: That's Cedar Grove?

MT: The Mt. Olive.

BC: Oh, the Mt. Olive.

MT: After about 12 years, they closed it down.

BC: Now, describe the Cedar Grove Elementary School. Was it one of those one-room

schoolhouses?

MT: It was a little, built-up house come straight up, come straight down, and it was one room with the -- What you call those stoves?

BC: The potbelly stove?

MT: Potbelly, round stove and it had the pipe going up, and we had little chairs and things around in that room; and, the teacher always sit up at the front and we stop right there. And, that's what it was. It was exciting. Now that I look back at it, it was very exciting. We didn't realize it at that time, but we were all in one room and that's the way we were taught at that time.

BC: And that went up to Grade 6 or --?

MT: I'm not sure because I left before whatever their turn-in was because we moved from that place and went to somewhere else. So, I didn't to get there that long. So, because I had to wait to go there because I was the oldest and my other sister was almost three years under me. So in order for me to go, I could even go to school in my first years because I had no one to take me -- to go with me. And at that time, they didn't let you go by yourself. You had to have somebody to go along, like more than one to go along.

BC: What? Your parents didn't let you go or the school system didn't let you go?

MT: It was my mother and father didn't let me go.

BC: Oh!

MT: Because they wanted us to be together, somebody to be together when we went somewhere like that. We would have to walk a distance.

BC: About how far?

MT: Probably a mile, a half a mile or something like that. So, he would be out in the field

working at that time and so therefore, there wouldn't be nobody. So, they wanted to make sure that more than just one walking together.

BC: Okay.

MT: And so, I had to wait.

BC: So, about how old were you when you first went to school?

MT: I was probably about six or seven. Six years -- six or seven.

BC: And so, your sister was three?

MT: Uh hmm [yes]. See, I had to wait till she become big enough to go to primer grade so that I could have somebody to walk with me.

BC: Oh! Okay. Hmm! So from what you can remember, about how many kids were in the classroom at one time?

MT: You know, that's kind of hard to say because I know there was quite a few in there, but I don't remember just how -- You know, I was little at that time. I don't remember how many was in it, but I know it looked like it was about as big as this room come across here. Like up and then you had this space out. And then, you had chairs and things sitting around. The teacher: I know she used to sit at a little desk up here. And so, I don't really know exactly how many or approximately how many was in there, but I know it was quite a few.

BC: Do you remember any of the names of your teachers?

MT: I can remember I had one Mrs. Rose or something. Then, I know I had a Miss Hankins, Miss Sadie Lee, and then I had another one named Mrs. -- Ew. What was her name? She had a hard name to call. And then, I had this teacher named Mr. Peace. I had this Principal. His name was Mr. Byers. He was the one NEVER called your name right, and

I had trouble with him and he had trouble with me because each day he would come in -- because he taught us History. And, he would come in and when he come him, he would called everybody -- He called role, and he would get to my name and says, "Mary Elarada Netta." I raised my hand. He said, "What's wrong?"

I said, "You did not call my name right." I said, "My name is Mary ElNetta Lennon."

"Mary Elarada!" Oh, that man would bug me to death!

I said, "Sir, that's not my name!" He never, ever called that name right and I would hate for him to call the roll every day. And he would look at me, and he just the biggest thing out of that. I don't know why he didn't call my name, and I'd go home and tell my mom. Say, "Well, maybe he doesn't know how to pronounce it."

I said, "But that's not the point, Mom. He's gone to school for that kind of stuff." But, he never called it right, [laughter] and I would have to stop him every day. It looked like he would a got tired of me stopping him, but he didn't. [Laughter] And you know today, if I can't call somebody's name, I do not call it.

BC: [chuckle] Don't call it, yeah.

MT: I do not call it. [Laughter]

BC: So that made his day every day?

MT: That made his day

BC: Okay. As a child, what did you dream of becoming?

MT: I always wanted to play the piano, and I wanted to be a teacher for awhile until one day they called me to go and stay with the little people. And after I went to stay with the little people, everything was so beautiful for about 10 minutes. After 10 minutes, they knew

my name, they must have already studied me out and they knew what they could do to get to me. They knew what they could get by with. And I said, "Oh my God! No. I don't think I want to be a teacher."

And I stayed there with them that day, and I just -- They wanted director to go. They just loved me to death. I said, "Oh my God." I said, "Maybe I do want to be a teacher!" [Chuckle] But then, I walked out and I said, "Lord, I don't think I want to be a teacher." But, it was exciting, but then I changed my mind again. I said, "I really just think I want to go to school and be a secretary or something like that." And -- But I never got to finish it up due to my sickness, and that hurt, too. But, and -- I don't think -- I think I probably would a went back to school; but at that time I was really sick and I heard my mom say to my pop--Well, you see. You can misunderstand sometimes. You can get the tail-end of things that don't get to copying. And, they were talking, but I didn't get the whole thing, and I did hear the part that said Mom, Pop said, "Well, I don't think we should go ahead and buy her a ring because of the way, that her sickness. Now she may not be able to finish school.

But, Mom didn't answer that. I took it my way, and I said, "You don't want to buy my ring because it's all I always wanted to go to school. I wanted to wear my class ring. I wanted to graduate." I was just -- I was just on top. And, my classmates were disgusted with me because -- I don't know. I was always a person, when I did my work, I was always kind of not letting everybody look on it and they would get upset with me. And, this one girl told me I thought I was cute because I did it like that. I didn't realize I was doing it. It was just my way of doing it.

BC: Um hmm.

MT: And, I always made pretty good grade and I always wanted to be the top. And so, when I heard my pop say that; well, that killed me. I didn't hear the good part. I just hear what--

BC: About the ring?

MT: About him not saying he don't think -- know whether we should get the ring or not, but I didn't hear the other part. And then, I heard one day, him was talking, "Mom," say, "Well, you know, you might a made the biggest mistake by not gonna ahead and getting her ring" or whatever. "I wish you'd a talk to her about it."

But you know, I still didn't let it be known. And up until today, they may not have know I ever heard them say it, but I just -- I just didn't want to go back to school anymore. And, I often tell children today when they start talking about not going to school or still not -- Don't do it. That's a motto for me: Don't do it because has been the worstest part of my life. I've really had some problems with it because I didn't go back and finish my -- the rest of my school. And, it really does something to me, and that's why I do urge any child to please get 12 years if you don't get anything else, because that was a wonderful thing.

BC: So, you never got your GED either?

MT: I started with that, but then I stopped with that also. I got kind of disgusted with that. So, I was just knocked down each way. I can't say it was anybody but me. It was just something that I saw that I couldn't take at that time.

BC: Okay.

MT: I just had a problem with it.

BC: Okay.

MT: I was, just left it alone.

BC: Okay. As a teenager, where did your parents approve of you going?

MT: Not much of anywhere. [Laughter] Not much of anywhere. We used to go to ball games. But now, the only way we could go to ball games or things like that unless -- If it was on a school night, well, you don't go nowhere, but I would always -- Those were the only little lies I told so bad. I always said to my mom and dad, "Oh, we got a test coming up and I need to go stay with my cousin so she can -- she and I can help with out getting to study for our test."

Now anything for education, my mom and dad was ready for it, and she would say, "You gotta get your chores and get your things done before you go." "Yes, ma'am

Oh, I'd rush and get my work done. I was, knew I was going to the ball game. [Chuckle] My uncle was the referee so he was in charge of us. If he said we could go, we could go. But, I had to tell a little lie first to get to Grandma's house, then Grandma -- Then my uncle would say, "Yes, you can let the girls come along if they behave." So we could go as long as we had somebody walk us there so we could be there and he would take, make sure we get back home. But I said, "Oh my goodness. If Mom and Dad ever know'd I was telling a lie, they get out ch'ere [here] to this ball game. They would knot us up! [Laughter] But, that was our really go. We used to go, loved to go to ball games and things like that. And then, my uncle was ... We just loved him. It was a lot of fun. At that time, we didn't know no better. It was really nice.

BC: Okay. Did your parents let you date, later on?

MT: In the later years, they would let little guys come to the house. And back in those days, you didn't know how -- You didn't get nowhere from they used -- [laughter] We had to stay at the house until you got almost grown because -- to get out. So that was it.

[Laughter]

BC: Okay. Okay. What was it like when you first went out on your own?

MT: Hm. I don't even know how to say that one! [Laughter] It was an experience, I tell you. A very exciting and kind of --Hm! -- experience that you don't really know how to explain. [Laughter]

BC: Did you move to the city or, or where did you move to? How far from home or --?

MT: From North Carolina to St. Mary's County.

BC: Oh, that was the first time you left home.

MT: That was the first time I left home.

BC: Oh, okay.

MT: And it was just like woods. [Laughter]

BC: What, you moved from one woods to the next woods?! [Laughter]

MT: Well, I tell you where it was at so you might know where I'm talking about. You know where the Flat Tops is?

BC: Um hmm [yes].

MT: Y'all know where the Copelings? Know where the Copelings? You know where this big white house is sitting up there, off 235 right after there where those two little buildings are right here on 235, right over there, coming down from the gate, where those two big buildings there on the side of 235?

BC: Yeah.

MT: Before you get down to Southampton. Well, we lived way back in --

BC: Back in there. Okay.

MT: So that was in the woods. There was no house there at that time. Well, I guess they call

it the city. [Laughter]

BC: Okay. Let me see.

MT: My husband told me, he says, "Now, Honey," he says when we got to Washington. He says, "Look." He said, "You make sure you look at the city," but he didn't tell me what I was gonna be looking at to whenever I got out of the city. And when I got to coming down the road, I look out back. There wasn't nobody as far back up there. I thought, "Oh, thank God, I'm gonna back home!" You see, it had it -- Like, Baltimore was a beautiful city, historical city. That's what I had in mind. He didn't tell me nothing. And then, I got home and I know I'm gonna somewhere popular. All I saw was woods, tobacco beds. I said, "Oh my God. I'm going home." Then when we got to Lexington Park, because the -- Right there where the -- Right over there where y'all put up this --

BC: The monument?

MT: The monument? You know, back there was a build-tall building right back there? When I first came here, that was the post office. They tore it down. The post office, the library -- I mean, not the library. The post office, the bus station and everything was right there on that corner right there. Right where -- You know where the library is now?

BC: Yeah.

MT: There was a building right, sitting just before you get to there. That was the post office, the bus station and all in that building.

BC: Uh hmm [yes].

MT: So we got out and walked and I just knew we were living in the flat tops. So I said, "Oh, we can walk," and we walked all the way back in the woods.

MT: ...walked and I just knew we were living in the flat tops. So I said, "Oh, we can walked,"

and we walked all the way back in the woods. [Laughter] I said, "Oh, my gosh!" [Laughter] So, that's where we went [laughter] until we moved out, oh, about a year we moved out. We bought us a trailer and moved out on 235. And, we stayed in the trailer for 17 years, and we moved back into Forest Heights. So.

BC: But now, okay. When you came up here, the first time you came to St. Mary's was to visit, right?

MT: No. Well, we supposing to be visiting.

BC: Yeah. Some of his relatives.

MT: Relatives. Uh hmm [yes].

BC: And they lived back in those woods.

MT: Yes, they did.

BC: Okay. Okay. Okay. But, when you left North Carolina --When you and your husband left North Carolina to come to St. Mary's for the visit, you went to Washington first.

MT: See, well, you had to come to Washington because you come to the bus. We was on the bus.

BC: Oh, you were on the bus. Okay. So you got to Washington and you think, "Oh -- "

MT: "Oh, I'm in the city! Oh gosh!" [Laughter]

BC: So you thought where you were going was closer to like that?

MT: To the city! Yes!

BC: And to leave out of Washington to start coming down here--

MT: [spoken simultaneously] Coming down here.

BC: You thought you were on your way back home.

MT: Because "Lord," I did. I said, "Oh God. This is home. I just left home!" [Laughter] I

said, "How did we get back home so fast!" [Laughter] I didn't say nothing to nobody. I didn't want to think I was so dumb, you know! [Laughter] I said, "How are we getting back home so soon?" I said, "You got to that dump there -- in the woods!" And, he didn't look at my face, I don't think. [Laughter] I mean, I had -- I know I had to have some frowns on my face because I kept looking out the window, and I couldn't see nothing but woods out there. Oh my God! I think I want to go back home! [Laughter] Oh, that was a fear.

BC: Okay. Okay. Okay. Okay. So, the first time you left from home was after you got married and -- So, when you first -- When you first got married, you were still -- You still stayed with your parents?

MT: Well, we got -- We got married and then the next day, we left coming here.

BC: Oh okay.

MT: So we didn't-- He stayed --We didn't stay at either one of the other's house.

BC: Okay.

MT: I stayed at home. He stayed with his sister.

BC: Okay.

MT: Then we came here.

BC: Okay. Let me jump to this question. How did you meet your husband?

MT: Well, I was going to school and every day when I'd come by this certain place, this man would be standing out there. And I said, "Wait a minute." So I got to thinking. I said, "Wonder why is he always standing out there whenever we come back here," and I really never -- never paid it no attention. And so, I really don't know. One day, he's standing there and he says, he comes out. It was a long time. He just kept standing and staring.

And every time I get by there, I try to run by there real fast. I don't know why. And then

--

So this one day, he says, "Can I walk you home?"

I said, "I don't know." But listen, someone tell me -- I never shall forget it, and it was in the wintertime. In '48, you know, when the bugs start coming out and the caterpillars start following, and I'm scared to death of worms. He was walking along the road with me and he said, "There's a worm on you." And man, I had a... off my books. I throw'd the book.

He said, "Hold it! Hold it!" And, he had his arm trying to hold me! [Laughter] And when he said "worm," I was coming out of clothes! [Laughter] I couldn't stand that thing! [Laughter] And he grabbed, and he just held me still and he said, "The worm is off. I got the worm off. I got the worm off."

I said, "Whew!" And, I -- You know, I just felt like the worm was really crawling here.

He said, "The worm is not on you. He's off!" Whew! I couldn't stand that. I said, "Lord," he felt like he was crawling on my shoulder. I was running and he said, "You okay?" He said, "The worm is off you. There is it over there. I killed him, okay?"

I said, "Okay." Oh, I was so shaky. And then, he helped me pick my books up and put on my arm and we walked on home.

He said, "You really scare of a worm?" [Laughter] I said, "yes I am". You know, he's just as nice, you know. Every day, he'd be out there to walk me home. And then, we'd be at to store, like we'd go to the ball games, he wanted to walk me home. And you know, little crazy girl like me: I don't care about nobody, and he was kind of getting -- I

guess he was getting serious. He said -- He just kept walking me home and he wanted to pay my way to the ball game. And, we just played it like that, I thought.

Well, he was getting serious, but I wasn't. I don't think I was. [Chuckle] And, we probably were together about five years, and [chuckle] we just kind of broke up two times in between. But then, we'd always get back together. And then finally, we got married. I used to -- I'd look at him walking -- He and another guy: They were real close friends, and they were really neat guys I thought because their shirts: They were creased to the T. Their pants were creased to the T, and they always wore their pants one rolled up a little bit higher than the other; and, they were so neat. And, their shoes were shined to a T. And, they looked like when they walked, how somebody walked and I looked. I said, "God, I can't stand the men folk! Why are they so active like that?" And this one's walking, throw their feet, and the other one just walking. I said, "Look how they always keep in step." I said, "I wonder do they know what they're doing?"

And the girls said, "You are so nose!"

I said, "No, but they just urks me!" [Laughter] And we used to sit there and laugh at them and look at them, but I think they were the two of the town because they walked and they almost had this -- They were dressed. They weren't dressed, but what they -- Whatever they wore, they were just so -- It was neat.

BC: Yeah. Right. Okay.

MT: And, we used to look at them and they said, "But you know, he's crazy about you."

I said, "From what?" And you know, little children. You know, you don't think about nothing! [Laughter] We used to have one. He used to cry on the bus about me every year, and my cousin would tease him and she'd tease me. And, he would cry every

day, every year after school to let out for the year. He would just cry like a baby. And, I laughed just like a fool. And my cousin would say--Ida Prairie, she'd say to me, "Netta, don't laugh."

I said, "Well, what's he crying for?"

She said, "He loves you!" [Laughter]

I said, "What he love me for?!" [Laughter] But, I guess it was just fun. Children, you know. You just had a good time. I'll tell you. I never thought I'd end up marrying this man that I thought I hated! [Laughter]

BC: So, now how -- Okay. You were--How old were you when you got married?

MT: I was 19.

BC: Okay. And, he was -- How much older was he?

MT: He was about nine years older than me.

BC: Okay. Okay. So, you just decided to just go ahead and get married. I mean, it wasn't --

MT: Well, we kind of thought about it a long time, but then I'd say -- He'd always say, "I'm gonna ask your Mom and Dad for you." But you know, I knew he wasn't gonna do it. I never paid much attention. [Chuckle]

So, just one night he walked in the house and my mom was sitting there and he said, "Miss Elnetta." But the only thing about it: My mom and dad loved him, but I thought they loved him, but they loved me. So, he said, "Miss Elnetta, I'm asking you for your daughter's hand in marriage."

She said, my mom said, "Hee hee."

And I said, "Oh Lord!" [Laughter] I said, "You might as well be talking to that floater!" [Laughter]

Then she said, "Well, it's up to you and Pop. Now, you and Pop have to talk about that one."

He said, "I wanted to ask you first." So, I knew he wouldn't go to Papa because he couldn't -- He didn't know how to take Papa. I don't know when he asked Pop. But one day, he caught Pop out. He was out there talking to him and he asked Pop. He said, "Boy, you better know what you're doing now." [Laughter]

He said, "Well, your daddy said [laughter] as long as I know what I'm doing!" [Laughter}

I said, "Well." I looked at him. I said, "I know he ain't never gonna marry me. You know, I asked if he ain't never gonna do nothing. So." We made a little mistake and had -- The first time we ever went out, we got a baby! [Laughter]

BC: Oh!

MT: So, he left. I said, "Well, I know he ain't never gonna come back." He kept up. He wrote me a letter every day he was gone because you know at that time, we didn't have telephones. And, he's writing every day, and so he wrote me this letter. He says, "I would like for you to ask your mom and dad if you can come up here and we get married."

Well, I got that letter. After that, I wrote him a letter back. I didn't say nothing to my mom and dad. I said, "No, my mom and dad will not listen to me asking can I come up there to marry you because that would be a no-no." So he wrote me back, "Why?" I don't know why. Well, I do know why because I was the last one, so I did not ask them.

It wasn't two months after that, he came home. Well, he wrote and told me he's coming home and we gonna get married when he get home, but I still didn't think he was

coming home. Just to marry me? So, but I told him. I said, "Well, if you don't come home by the time, after tobacco season, after I get my money from tobacco—" "We worked during the summer and made money because I was kind of grown then. I'm getting my money and I'm going. Me and my baby's going somewhere. I don't know where we're going, but we gonna be going somewhere.

And so, he said, "Where do you think your going?"

I said, "Doesn't really matter as long as I take care of my baby."

So he came home and he says, "Do you know you're not taking the baby nowhere? Do you know that you're not going nowhere without me?"

And I looked at him, I said, "Oh!" [Laughter] So, we finally -- We went down and got married. We got married by the Justice of Peace, and then we came home that night. And then, he went to his sister's house and I went to my mama's house. He had to let Mom and them know we were married because we didn't tell them that day we were -- They didn't know -- They figured something because I left home early that morning, and we showed them the marriage certificate. And then, "Okay." He said, "But there's but one thing I ask you. Don't never mistreat her." He said, "And I want y'all to make the best out of it." Oh boy! So, that was it.

BC: So, okay. Where did -- You came to St. Mary's for just a visit. So, you were gonna go back home?

MT: Um hmm [no].

BC: Oh, you didn't know where you wanted to go.

MT: I know where we wanted to. I wanted to go to California.

BC: California. Okay. Okay.

MT: But we didn't go nowhere.

[End Side 2, Tape 1 of 2]

[Begin Side 1, Tape 2 of 2]

BC: Once you got to St. Mary's, what kind of work did you do to support yourself?

MT: I didn't work for awhile because we had children. I mean, I had my youngest child. My husband worked. When we first came here, he like, worked in the restaurant at Roost's. Then, he went to work for an asphalt company up in Hollywood. Then after that, he heard about this job -- these jobs opening up on the Base and he went out there and get hired right away. So therefore, he worked for government until '81. He retired then he was home until he was deceased.

BC: Okay. So, you were a housewife.

MT: Until the last one got ready to go to school.

BC: Okay.

MT: I worked in between, but only like, maybe, in the afternoons, part-time. Whenever he was at home. Like, he would be getting home then I would go and work with the, to the restaurant or something like that. Like Roost's or some place like that. And -- But then after the last one went off to school, I started working full-time.

BC: Okay. Do you remember how much money you made when you first went out to work?

MT: A dollar and something an hour. No, 75 cent or something like that. Anyhow, you might draw a check of \$6 [chuckle] or something at the end of a week! And then, you finally got up to -- I went to do house -- domestic work. I got \$4 for a day.

BC: Okay.

MT: And then, I finally went to work for the laundromat in the early 70's, early – No, late 60's and I was making around 20-some dollars a week and it went up to 30-some dollars a week. And, that was it until about '73 I started making, say, \$1.69 an hour or something like that. So, that's where we come from!

BC: [chuckle] Okay.

MT: That's where we come from.

BC: What did it mean to you to go out and work and make money?

MT: It was really an exciting thing because I'd never been able to do that. With the children, you see, we couldn't afford babysitters. In fact, we didn't have that much money, so we preferred to stay home. He preferred that I stay home with the children. And at that time, there wasn't that much going on. We -- We just did the best we could with what we had.

BC: Now, how did you get to work? Did -- Y'all had a car?

MT: No, we didn't have a car. We just -- I would walk a lot of times.

BC: Okay. This was when you were still -- You were living in the Flat Tops.

MT: No. I was living on 235 in trailer right there.

BC: Okay.

MT: I would walk from -- they call it Shady Oak. That road like you go down to John Lee's house. They would call that -- It's called Shady Oak. I'd walk from Shady Oak to Lexington Park, and I'd go from Lexington Park. I'd go on the Base and I would walk all the way down to Gold Coast unless somebody picked me up. And, I'd work, then I'd come back home in the afternoon. Then, I --

BC: That's about five miles? Seven miles?

MT: I don't know whether it was five miles or not! [Chuckle] I could -- I'd get out and walk it and lot of times, they would have a bus. If I can get there in time to catch the bus, he would go around there. If not, I just -- I just played it by ear and, most of the time, I'd get a ride. And, I worked on the Gold Coast for a good while. And then, I went to the cafeteria on Base and worked. And from that, I came out and I worked for Rue's Roost quite a bit off and on. Then, I went to I think it was Pat's. They used to be up on Great Mills Road. I worked there for awhile. I worked at the hotel right there in Lexington Park before they tore it down.

BC: Oh, the one on Tullagee.

MT: Yeah. Right there at '52. That was before I started out working really. I worked there and the gentleman that was in charge made me feel great. They always wanted me to be manager, but I refused. And after that, I did babysitting, domestic work. I -- After I started in the laundromat, I didn't do too much of that, but I worked eight years in the laundromat here on Great Mills Road. Francis by the cleaner that time. Then, I went over to Leonardtown and I worked eight years over there. That was in '70.

BC: Okay. At the laundromat there?

MT: Um hmm [yes]. The one as you come right over the hill?

BC: Okay.

MT: After I left there, that's when I went to Bayside.

BC: Okay.

MT: That was in '81. I was there for about a year. And, I left there and I went to The Office On Aging. The Office On Aging and Hospice Care were all the same at that time, and

then I left there and that was -- In the meantime, at the end of the Office On Aging, I was working with the ARC. And so, I've been with the ARC since '84.

BC: Okay. What has your family life been like? Your -- your relationship with your husband and with your children?

MT: I think it's been very good.

BC: Okay. Sort of the normal.

MT: Yes.

BC: Ups and downs.

MT: You have your ups and downs...the way you go with. We always seemed to be able to iron them out and come out, with them.

BC: Okay. What part has religion played in your life?

MT: Religion has played a big part of my life. I don't think if we had no religion, I don't think I could have made it like we did because you have to always remember that who's the head. And after I learned that, things seemed to come more easier to you. Until I did, I wasn't aware because, see, when I left home, I knew I was in the church. I didn't know how I was in the church. And as I left home, I said, "Oh. I'm never going to church again."

BC: When you left home, you said that?

MT: Yes, because we were in church. On Sunday when you go to church, you stay all day long. You don't come back home until after everything is over with. They would dinner, take baskets of food. All you stayed all day long, you know, if they had church morning services, Sunday School, and then they have regular service. In the afternoon, they have a service and then they have BTU which is bible training. Well, then if they have a

program, you're there. So, when you stay so far, you don't go back home. And they carried food, and everybody just feast all day long. And, I said, "Lord, if I ever leave home, I'm never going to church again."

And when I left, got ready to go out the door, my father and mother hugged and kissed me and when I got to door, I knew what my father was going say. He said, "Netta?"

I said, "Yes, Father."

"Don't forget the church."

Deep down in my heart I was saying, "No, Pop." Deep down in my heart I said, "No. I'm not going back to church." But that was the worstest thing I could have said and done because when I got here, I didn't know where the churches were. And, I didn't want to find a church right then, but I had a miserable feeling. I really had a feeling. I couldn't explain it, and I didn't know what it was. So I was sitting there one day and I said, "Lord, you know, maybe it's what Pop told me. 'Don't forget the church.'" Oh, I was sitting in all these Bible classes. On the radio, I'd hear the Bible classes. I was taking that. I was reading my Bible, but it wasn't like going to church.

So, as I got here, I didn't see anything. I was looking for Baptist churches. I was looking for all kinds. I think the only church I saw was the one up on 235 which was Immaculate Heart of Mary. I said, "Well, that's a Catholic church. I don't know anything about Catholics. What did they do?" And, I was, so terrified I didn't know what was asking about, but people were nice around where I lived at.

So this one day, I was sitting around here Easter time, and they were sitting there talking. They was going to something that night at church. And I said to the lady, I says,

“Miss Agnes, can I go with your to church tonight?”

She said, “Yes!”

I said, “What --“ So I think they went at 11 o’clock. 11 till something.

Something gonna be at 12 or something. Oh my goodness, I’ve never been to church this time of night. I don’t know what to do. I got dressed and I said, “I’m gonna to church.”

I went to church and I’d really never been to a Catholic church. But, I got there and he was reading. I said, ‘Oh, I don’t know what they’re saying, but,’ I said, “whatever it is, it’s about God.” You know, you could understand part of it. You couldn’t understand lots of it.

So I went back home and I said to my husband, I said, “Honey, I went to church.”

I said, “I don’t know what they were saying, but I know it was about God.” I said, “But you know, I feel so good! I feel like a, a, a bird that is lifted.” And then, I went back again and I said, “Oh, this feels good.” So then, I begin to kind of searching around and see if I could find some churches.

So, we happen to be walking one day. The ladies: We all used to get on the road and take walks. And they was having --The USO: They was having...just going on and people were just singing. I said, “Whew! What are they having in there?” So we decided to -- You know how you go to the door [chuckle] and they were having a good time in there. So, we decided to go in and they were having their Bible meeting. And so, we walked on in and we stood there and listening. We sit there and listening. We weren’t dressed, you know, but they said, “Come on in.” So, we went on in and we had a nice time. We went back again.

So we went back again, and they were still going on. This particular time, we

were enjoying the church and then that's where we started. And I said, "Oh, my God, I told my father [laughter] I said I will never say that I'm not going to church again!" [Laughter] So when the children would start saying that, I'd say, "Honey, don't say it. Don't say it. Don't say it because you'll be missing a blessing if you ever stay away from the church. You don't know! You don't know!"

And see, my oldest two children: They were going to school to be Catholic. In fact, they was getting ready to make their first --

BC: First communion?

MT: First holy communion. And then, they -- I don't know what went on. I -- I didn't -- They were 12 years old and I didn't push them because when you're 12 years, I feel like--I tell them you have to do it on your own. I don't want you to say, "Momma pushed me in it. Daddy pushed me in it." It's yours. And if you feel like that's where you should be, fine, but I'm willing to be out here with you in whatever you need to -- 100% with you. So, I don't know what went on. I like the Priest said something to him that he didn't really care for. But, we had conferences with the Priest and everything to make sure everything, but I don't know what went on because I had started working at night by that time and my husband had took him that night. And I don't know what went on, but they didn't -- They're Catholic. They still loved it and they went once in awhile, and I was happy about that. But, we have nothing because I did with all of that because we don't have but one God. One God. And so, I learned to deal with it all. It was experience for me.

BC: Okay. So, the revival that you went to was First Baptist?

MT: Yeah. Well, at that time it was called -- I guess they called it First Baptist at that time

because they didn't have a church at that time. They just went down to the USO is all.

BC: Oh okay!

MT: See, the church wasn't built at that time.

BC: Okay, because when you were saying that you didn't know of any church --

MT: Yeah. They didn't have a church.

BC: So Zion wasn't there either?

MT: Zion was back on the other side of the road back here. Zion used -- Zion used to be a little church, I think, on --

BC: Hermansville?

MT: Hermansville Road, I think.

BC: Oh, okay.

MT: Then they have a little place up here that I think they started with. I think that's the way it was because I don't remember any church. So, they built this church later.

BC: Okay. So really, Immaculate Heart was the only church --

MT: The only church, as I could see, and I didn't know whether that was a church really or not because, see, it was that house that's right out on the front of the road at the time. And they know, they don't -- They didn't have churches designed like they have of now, you know. So, I didn't really know what that whether that -- what it was or what was going on.

BC: Okay. How do you participate in -- Okay. You go -- Your church is First Baptist.

MT: Um hmm [yes].

BC: Okay. How do you participate in your church's activities? You know, are you a member of any of the church's committees?

MT: Yes. I am Choir President. I deal with most all the ministries in the church. I'm also a Missionary and I'm now in training as a Deaconess in the church. And, we go to conventions. We go to different educational parts of the church when they have them, such as we belong to the Potomac River Baptist Association in that they have a lot of things that's going pertaining to church and the ministries that you are involved into. That gives you all you put on how to be a part of these ministries. So.

BC: Are you involved with any other churches or religious organizations? Because you were saying your two older children were practicing to become Catholics. So are you involved, like I said, in any of the Methodist church organizations or Catholic organizations or anything?

MT: What you mean do we -- ?

BC: I guess what -- I guess what I'm trying to say is -- Okay. You are a practicing Baptist, but you may go to a lot of the --

MT: Oh yeah.

BC: Methodist services.

MT: We go to a lot of the functions. We -- In fact, we, at times, we be on their program down there and they come to our church and be on the program. In fact, we've had the Catholics at our church and we've been to their church. And, I thank God for that because we have become, partners and coming together as far as Christ always wanted us to do, coming together. Yeah, we participate in other churches. We're not just selfish people.

BC: Selfish. [chuckle]

MT: No, we're not selfish and our door is always open.

BC: What community activities do you participate in, you know, both now and in the past?

MT: I just go out -- I don't really -- Whatever is -- I like to go out amongst the community. If there's anything going on, I like to be over at it.

BC: Okay. As far as any -- You're not with any organized organizations --

MT: No, no.

BC: That does --

MT: No, but I just participate in whatever's going on.

BC: Okay. How do you feel about life in general today in St. Mary's County?

MT: Hmm.

BC: And in what ways has it changed, in the 45 years that you've been here?

MT: Oh!

BC: You know, how has it changed?

MT: Oh my God, it's changed so much. When I came here, there was nothing here, and now it's like a city. I can remember there was nothing but dirt roads. There were no homes; there were no stores. Oh, it was just St. Mary's County! [Laughter] I can remember there was nothing cross the road. They had a school there, but they tore it down right after I got here. They called it Jarboesville. It was right in front of where my trailer was sitting, and they called it the old Jarboesville School. I never forget when they were tearing it down, I got one of these silver pans that they had over there. And, I cherished that pan until a little while ago, somebody came to my house and used it and then never bring it back.

BC: Oh, you mean in their cafeteria?

MT: Uh hmm. They used these great big silver pans to do things, I guess cooking mush or

things. Well, they was getting rid of them all so I happen to be there to get one of them. So, they called it the old -- And, I didn't know what it was. It was the old Jarboesville School because they had the name written up on the front of it. So that -- So my trailer was really on the opposite side of the road.

BC: Where those two big buildings are?

MT: Where those two big buildings are. My trailer was sitting right across there and Mr. Mears lived right opposite there.

BC: Okay. Did you think that the quality of life is better now than it was when you first came here?

MT: In some ways, yes. Much better because when we first came, we didn't have all these. But then again, you don't know. It's a--[chuckle] It's a kind of--

BC: You have good things and bad things.

MT: Yes! Yes. Yes.

BC: Okay. Since you've been here, what do you feel has been the biggest changes in the County?

MT: Ew. One big change I see is when I came here, black people weren't allowed in a lot of places. The minute they went in there, they weren't allowed to touch things. But if the woman went into to try a hat on, she couldn't try a hat on. They wanted to try the hat on for you.

BC: They would put it on their head --

MT: Their head for me.

BC: Oh! Hmm.

MT: And I looked at her when she said that to me, I said, "Ma'am, your head is not my head.

Your face is not my face. So if I can't try this hat on, I don't need your hat."

She said, "Well, we're afraid you might soil it."

I said, "Well, I'm afraid I might soil it if you put it on your head, too!" [Laughter]

So, and you know, those are just some of the things that you run into. And then, you weren't allowed to try on dresses. A lot of -- In some of the stores, you weren't allowed to try on their dresses because that was just happening in the late 70's. Because when I was working over in Leonardtown, a cousin of mine went in to try a dress on. They would -- They would not let her try the dress on, but she went and left and came back. When she came back, her husband was with her. When her husband walked in with her, they were pleased to have her the dresses to try on. Why?

BC: He was white.

MT: No.

BC: Oh.

MT: He was a serviceman.

BC: Oh. Okay.

MT: And he was one of the commanders, one of the chiefs. But had she not walked in with him, she would never been able to try the dress on. So she let them take down all the dresses and she made her like she was gonna try them on. After she got -- After they'd finished, laying out the dresses for her to try on, she said, "Well, I don't choose to buy one of them because you couldn't sell me one this morning when I was in. And just because you saw my husband come in and he's a chief, then you're gonna be happy to let me..." So, these are some of the things we were up against and all. It was a lot of more things, but we have come a long way since I've been here. Yeah.

BC: Now in the 40-some years that you've been here, do you think that people are different from what they used to be? I know you just said about the segregation and whatever, but I guess what I'm looking at are the black folks. Do you think they have changed?

MT: Some have. In some instances, yes. In some instances, no because we asked for segregation, but I don't think we know what segregation is. Some of us do. We know, but--You know, because to me, segregation is a thing you want to mingle together. And some time when you go places, you see--

BC: You mean integration.

MT: Yeah.

BC: Okay.

MT: I mean -- I'm sorry. I didn't mean to say it like that. Anyway, I feel that some time you go places and you see all of us --

BC: You see us over here and them over there?

MT: Yes! I don't call that -- Now, I don't call that integration.

BC: Um hmm [yes].

MT: Then they say to me, a lot of times, why are you going? I said, "Look I have the authority now to sit anywhere I want to sit and I'm gonna sit, and I'm gonna be who I am." I said, "because God made us all in his image and ain't but one God; and, we should be as one people." And I said, "We have ... Why not use it?" So -- And in a sense, yes. It's better, but it's -- we still have some flaws.

BC: Flaws.

MT: Yeah.

BC: Okay. Do you think the teenagers are different from what they used to be when they

were young?

MT: Oh yes!

BC: How?

MT: [laughter] In so many ways! Well, maybe I --I'm a little old-fashioned, maybe. But -- they're good children, but they're just -- They're just really open with everything. And -- [laughter] It's kind of hard to explain that.

BC: Yeah. I --

MT: It's kind of hard. It really is.

BC: Okay. How do you feel about living in the County?

MT: For me, I think it's fine. It's very settled, to me, and it's very quiet, really. Going with the flow. It's a little louder now because why? Because it's -- the population is growing, you know. But up until a few years ago, it was very nice and I still -- I still life right on. It's no problem.

BC: Now, you've never lived in the city.

MT: Until I came here.

BC: But you still don't live in the city! [Laughter]

MT: Huh?

BC: But you never--

MT: Oh, no. I never lived in the city. Oh no.

BC: Oh okay. Yeah.

MT: I've been to the city but never lived there. Oh, oh, okay! I didn't that at first.

BC: Now --Okay. You are an outsider. Okay. Do you feel that there is a difference between natives and outsiders? Did you ever see that there was a difference?

MT: Oh, you mean people coming in and going out or --?

BC: Between, like, you and like my Aunt Jeanette. She was a native. You are an outsider.
You weren't born here.

MT: Oh, okay!

BC: Do you feel that was a difference?

MT: Well, I'm not sure.

BC: Okay.

MT: I'm not sure.

BC: Okay. That makes it a little harder for me to ask some of these other questions. Okay.

Now, do you travel and interact with people from the different sections of the County, like people from the 1st District and the 7th District and from up the County and Charlotte Hall and places like that? Do you interact with people like that?

MT: Yeah. You mean meet them and talk to them?

BC: Yeah, rather than, you know, you sort of just deal with people from the 8th District. And, I guess what I'm trying to say is: Do you travel about the County and do you associate with people from the other areas?

MT: Yes! If I'm in that county, yes!

BC: No, in this county.

MT: In this county.

BC: Yeah.

MT: Well, let's say if I meet them, sure. I don't partake from nobody. I'm a –

[End Side 1, Tape 2 of 2]

[Begin Side 2, Tape 2 of 2]

BC: Okay. Do you feel that there is a difference between the people in the different sections of the County?

MT: Yes. You can tell in some parts of the County. Yes.

BC: Give me an example.

MT: [laughter]

BC: I did -- I don't want to put you on the spot, but I talked to someone else and they were telling me: Yes, there is a big difference.

MT: There's a difference in a lot of the parts, but, no, I don't think I want to answer that!

[Laughter] I can --

BC: [laughter] Okay.

MT: You can see the difference in some areas of the County. But you know, I can deal -- I am a normal person. I can deal with it and so far. It don't bother me.

BC: Okay. What are your feelings about the Navy Base? I know you didn't come here until after the Base was there. But now, all of these new growth was happening on the Base. What do you feel about that? Or, does it affect you in any way?

MT: I think that would more or less be for the younger group, people that are more in that. I'm not into --

BC: It doesn't -- You're not working on the Base, so it's not affecting you that much.

MT: It's not affecting me. I worked on there earlier age, but you know, that part --

BC: Okay. But, how about all the new people that are coming into the County because of the Base?

MT: Yes. Well, that --

BC: Okay.

MT: Is kind of -- is kind of complicated. Very complicated -- What it's gonna be like, you know. It's always been here.

BC: Okay. What do you think about the direction the County's in today? Do you believe that St. Mary's may become an urban rather than a rural county, become more citified?

MT: Well -- [laughter] I don't know whether I want to comment on that or not. [Laughter]

BC: Okay. Okay. What do you consider to be the most valuable you have ever had, something that you feel that you could not have done without? I know. I get that reaction from everyone on this question. Okay. What's the -- What do you feel is the most important thing you have?

MT: My life. You're talking about that?

BC: Yeah. Yeah. You may -- When you say, "my good health"--

MT: Yeah.

BC: Or "my children" or, you know, "my parents -- their attitude" or you know.

MT: The most valuable thing that I've -- I would think, in a way, if you're speaking of things like that -- it would probably be that is to have Jesus as your personal savior, and then other things would come in and you will be able to dwell things and to utilize yourself into doing these things that's coming to pass and you're gonna be up against.

BC: Okay. So, it's your understanding and your ability to --

MT: Oh Lord! [Chuckle]

BC: Well, I understand what you're saying. Some of us sometimes don't understand that -- We think that everything that happens is us doing things rather than --

MT: That's right.

BC: Yeah.

MT: Well, we have to understand that --

BC: We only do it because He allows us.

MT: Yeah. Allows us. That's right.

BC: Okay. Have you done everything in your life that you ever wanted or planned to do?

MT: No.

BC: Okay. I know you had something -- You had said earlier about finishing school. Okay. Is it anything else that you ever wanted or planned to do that you haven't done that you can say, tell me about?

MT: Well, I have -- I'd always wanted to go to California.

BC: That's right! [Chuckle]

MT: So I finally go to San Diego, California. I finally got to go to Las Vegas. And so, my wish and my dreams [laughter] came true! [Laughter] I didn't get to see all the things that I wanted to see because we was in a convention up there for a whole week. And of course, we got to see some things and at least we got to stop back through Las Vegas.

BC: You loved that though! [Laughter]

MT: I didn't know that's what was happening. And we got off of the plane, and just as we walked out of the rear, here was all these slot machines. I said, "Oh my God!" [Laughter] And, the other people were ahead of me and they said, "Are you gonna play slot machines?"

I said, "Yes, I am!" [Laughter] So, we just had a good time. You know.

MT: ...time, you know. So I was going to go to the bathroom first. But then, someone comes and says, "Come on. Let's go. Let's go back over here," and they gave me some quarters to put in the slot machine. I went right back there and I did that game, put them in. I kept getting just enough to keep playing with...So after awhile of playing, so I said, "Well, I'm stopping." I went on down because it was near time for the plane, they call us out and said the plane would be another half-hour. I said, "Oh!" I go back! [Chuckle] We -- So we really got there about two hours or more.

BC: Um hmm [yes].

MT: And, Las Vegas is beautiful. The lights, the lightening is -- Oh, it's so pretty. I didn't get to see the city, but the lights. You know at night because we got there just about night, dark, and just the lights were so beautiful. I said, "Well, I can at least tell them I've been to Las Vegas." [Chuckle] But, it was nice.

I had my dreams of -- The only one I didn't finish, really, is my schooling. So, I regret that very much. Yes.

BC: So now, if you could back and live your life over again, what would you change, if you would change anything at all?

MT: I don't know. I think I would only go forward. I don't want to really -- I don't know. There might be a couple things I'd want to change. [Chuckle]

BC: Okay. I think -- I sort of skipped over a couple and I went back to them, and I think I have asked you everything. Especially part, I really enjoyed the part when you said that you had wanted to go to California and you ended up here because it had a Hollywood and a California. And, you know --

MT: [laughter] I didn't know it! And, my pastor told us -- he was having a Sunday school

class -- and so each one had to get up and tell something. I said, "Well." I said, "I want y'all to know that I'm Mary Toon. My mother and father's Mr. and Mrs. Rochester Lennon and 17 head of children. And, there's 15 of us still living. I'm the oldest of the 15." I said, "And my dream was always to go to California when I left home," and I said, "I never got there. Maryland's as far as I got. But as soon, I found out that there was a California here and a Hollywood here, so that's when I wrote my mom and dad to let them know I had been to California and Hollywood. And, all these beautiful stars were there." I said, "But the funniest part I had to write back and tell them that there was no California and no Hollywood! [Laughter] That there was a Hollywood, Maryland and a California, Maryland." [Laughter] I said, "So I want y'all to come here --" because they were getting ready to come here. "I didn't want y'all to come here..." [Laughter]

And my pastor, Reverend Chambers, got up and he says, "now ... , nobody would have thought that here!" [Laughter]

I said, "Well." I said, "Your ads." I said, "So, I tried to say." And I told him, "I have six children: three boys and three girls. Very proud of them." And then one day, we [laughter] -- so that's my life.

BC: So, did you parents ever come up here?

MT: Oh yeah. They came up several times. They enjoyed it. They just enjoyed coming here. Yes, indeed. They really did. That's the first time my mother got sick. Well, she'd been here. I think that was in the late 70's. She'd been here and she was the picture of health and got back home. That next weekend, found out she had blood sugar. Went up to 800 and Pop -- Well, they had to rush her to the hospital. That's the first time she knew she was, you know...anything.

BC: So where you live is about how far from here?

MT: From here?

BC: Uh huh [yes]. About how many hours driving time?

MT: Usually take us about eight hours or more to get there. You can go there, maybe quicker, but we never rush going. We always take our time. Well, we go for the sight seeing and we stop and go. But normally, it's about an eight-hour drive.

BC: So, your sister, Nelly, is the only one here.

MT: Only one.

BC: Okay. And she came here because of you?

MT: Well, we never got along.

BC: Is that the sister that you said you were --?

MT: That's the sister, we never got along! [Laughter] And so, when she finished school in '53, I was getting ready to have my third child and I said, I said, "I need somebody to stay with me, for me to have a little support." And she was coming out of school, and I said, "Wonder, would she want to come up here?" So we sit down and talked about it, my husband and I. I said, "I'm gonna write her a letter and see if she want to come."

So, she wrote me a letter back. She doesn't want to come. Well, she had got a lot of scholarships and things and I didn't want her to, not lose, and use them. She said, "Well, she wouldn't be able to use them anyway because she didn't have anything to put with the scholarships because they only give you so much," so she said.

I told her, "Well maybe if you come up here, you can do something different." So, she came up. So she decided to come up. My husband and all they went down and picked her up, brought her back, [doorbell rings] and I just prayed that –

[tape cuts off briefly, and then begins again]

BC: So, she came up to stay with you and she's been up here ever since.

MT: She's been up here ever since! [Laughter] And, we learned to get along. We really -- We just really just like two peas in a pod. And, we fuss and we fight. And, people thought we was really gonna get into it. And then if I didn't like something she said when she'd go home at night, she'd call me back, "Is you alright?"

I said, "Sure I'm alright."

And if she left and I was mad, I said, "Is you alright?" We made sure we didn't go to bed mad with each other, discussed with each other. [Laughter] And, we kind of thought that was cute. But as much as the stay here, she kind of progressed a lot and she went through -- She was hesitant of going to get something done. So, she finally started on the Base. I said, "Go on the Base. Get your little 71¢. Start building up."

She said, "Netta, I failed."

I said, "So what? That's no problem! Go back again, and keep going back. Don't stop. Keep going back." So, I pushed her. She finally got in and she just went on, and she just going higher.

She says, "They want me to be Supervisor."

I said, "Oh girl, that's great!" I said, "Go ahead!"

She said, "Oh, I don't think I want it."

I said, "Don't think nothing about it." I said, "That's what's wrong with us black folks. We don't want to put ourselves in the shoe." I said, "Go ahead. If you see that it's too hard for you, then try it." I said, "But always try." So, she kept on and she tried. She

got in there. She just loves it. She just retired: 25 years of it. They come with --They come out with ...

I said, "Now you see what's in here. What, you got to go to school and all?" I think she has -- She can go one more time, and I think she can get her Bachelor's, whatever that is and all. Yes, she was.

BC: So, she's gonna finish doing that?

MT: I don't know whether she's gonna finish it or not. She's been kind of sick here for the last month, so I don't what she's gonna do now. But, she's really been proud of it. She raised -- She just looked after so many children since she's been here. So, a couple, four years ago, we decide -- I told them -- I told my children. I said, "We got to do something for Aunt Nell. I don't want to wait until she die to do it." So, we -- I told them. I said, "What I really want to do Mother's Day is to give her a dozen roses." And I said, "I would like to get a plaque and they put all the children that we know that she's worked with since she's been here."

So, my daughter in Delaware, she said, "Well, tell me what --."

I said, "No, y'all decide what you want to put on there."

So, the little devils were so furious when I said that. They had two plaques made. So they had one made for her; and of course, one made for me. What they did: The roses they took --give her 6. A bunch of roses for her and a bunch of roses for me and we dedicated to her at church. I asked the Pastor if I could stop the service just long enough to do that, and he said, "That's real good."

BC: We'll go ahead and end this interview, and I thank you very much.

MT: Oh, you're quite welcome.

BC: Okay.

[tape cuts off briefly, and then begins again]

BC: Biographical Data Information on Mary Elnetta George Toon.

47320 Thurman Davis Lane, Lexington Park, Maryland 20653

Telephone Number: 301-863-9639

She was born on February 22, 1930 in Columbus County, North Carolina.

She went to Cedar Grove Elementary School and Mt. Olive High School until the 12th Grade. These were in North Carolina.

She is a community living assistant working for the Arc of St. Mary's County.

Her husband name was Patrick Toon.

Her mother's father was Johnny George and she doesn't remember the name of her mother's mother.

Her father's parents were Shady French Lennon and Bulla Lennon.

Her mother's name was Carrie Levater George Lennon and her father's name was Archester Lennon.

Her sisters and brothers are: herself: Mary Toon, Carrie K. Lewis, Nellie R. Winston, Shirley T. Jones, Lillian R.V. McEchin, William H. Lennon, Betty J. Edwards, Geraldine M. Lennon, Herman O. Lennon, James L. Lennon, Shady F. Lennon, Thomas A. Lennon, John W. Lennon, Jean C. Lennon, Sylvia J. Duncan, and Alice Perry.

Mrs. Toon's children are: Mary L. Hall, Patrick L. Toon, James W. Toon, Sr., ReDahlia M. Curtis, Maurice O. Toon, and Benita Fenwick.

Her grandchildren are: Mary's child is named Sonia; Patrick's children are Dion and Renetta; James' children are Jocelyn and James Jr.; ReDahlia's children are Lamar Curtis and Kyle Toon; Maurice's children are Lakita and Shawn. Benita doesn't have children.

That's the end of the biographical information.

[End of Side 2, Tape 2 of 2]