

UNIFIED COMMITTEE FOR AFRO-AMERICAN CONTRIBUTIONS
Oral History Project
Robert Calvin Brooks

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Interviewed by: Alma Jordon
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- RB: Good morning.
- AJ: Can you give me your full name and age, please?
- RB: Robert Calvin Brooks. Aged 93.
- AJ: Okay. Thank you. And, Mr. Brooks, where were you born?
- Rb: I was born in St. Mary's City.
- AJ: Okay. And being born in St. Mary's city, what is your earliest memory when you were young? What is the earliest thing that you can remember?
- RB: Where we lived, it was -- where the ship came in. Brought cattle. I think I remember then. When the ship went by, ice water then. That's earliest thing I remember.
- AJ: And about how old were you then? Do you remember?
- RB: No, I don't. I guess I was about... I don't know how old I was. I was pretty young.
- AJ: Tell me about your family and growing up there in St. Mary's City.
- RB: I was too young, I guess, to know too much about them. Tell you about it.
- AJ: You remember your household. What was it like? What was your family and playing with your siblings? How was that?
- RB: I don't remember too much about it.
- AJ: Where were you in the line of your siblings? Tell me about the oldest and the youngest and what kind of games you might've played when you were younger.
- RB: When I was younger, the only thing that I wanted to play was ball. Baseball! It wasn't too much to play back then. [laughs]
- AJ: Well, tell me about playing baseball. What did you -- Did you have regular balls and bats or a field to play in?
- RB: No. Homemade.

[03:19]

AJ: Tell me about that.

RB: You had to make your own homemade ball or else you didn't have one. You know a sponge ball.

AJ: Umm hmm. What did you make it out of?

RB: Cloth mostly.

AJ: Okay. Okay. And what other games did you guys play as a family?

RB: Hide and Seek

AJ: Umm hmm

RB: And that's all I remember.

AJ: Do you remember taking any trips as a child? You and your family maybe.

RB: Nothing that. I remember taking trips when I was small to D.C., or something like that, to see some of the family.

AJ: Tell me about your schooling. Where did you go to school?

RB: I started school in Charlotte Hall, in Newmarket.

AJ: Oh, okay.

RB: Which was a log cabin school.

AJ: Okay.

RB: When I was seven years old, I was only there about, I guess, a year or something. That's all I remember. I think-

AJ: Do you remember the name of that school?

RB: No, I don't. It's still there.

[05:20]

AJ: Oh, the school is still there?

RB: That log cabin still there.

AJ: Okay. Okay. And when you were going to school in that log cabin school -- tell me about the school and the teachers.

RB: I don't know too much about the school or teacher's name. It was Green, I think it was. I don't know. I don't remember too much.

AJ: Can you describe your classroom then?

RB: No. There wasn't but one room.

AJ: Oh, okay. Okay.

RB: That's about all.

AJ: How many classes were in that one room?

RB: I think it was two or three. That's what I remember because I didn't go there that long.

AJ: And then where did you go after you left that school?

RB: We moved to Drayden. Yes, that's where it was. It was Drayden. And I went to school there.

AJ: Can you describe that school, the classroom?

RB: The same thing. One room. Went to third grade, I think.

AJ: Do you remember anything about what the classroom looked like, what the desks looked like?

RB: {No, I don't. I really don't.

AJ ([07:22](#)):

And what kind of games did you all play at that school? Did you play games?

RB: Not that I know of. [laughs] Yeah.

[[07:31](#)]

AJ: How about baseball?

RB: Not there.

AJ: Oh, really?

RB: I don't remember ball.

AJ: Do you remember any of your teachers at that school or any of the students?

RB: I remember a lot of the students, but I think... What was his name? Stuckey.

Speaker 1: Stuckey.

RB: Yeah.

AJ: Tell me about your teacher. Was that the only teacher you had, was Stuckey?

RB: It seems to me that there was one before him, but I don't remember his name.

AJ: Tell me about Mr. Stuckey.

RB: I don't know. He was very strict. [laughs] He liked to beat kids.

AJ: Oh, really? [laughs]

RB: Yeah. That's about all I knew about him.

AJ: Okay. And how did you get to school when you lived in Drayden?

RB: Walked. We walked.

AJ: Was it quite a distance to-?

RB: No. It wasn't. Not far.

AJ: Okay. Okay. And what about in the winter time? You still walk?

[09:00]

RB: Still walked.

AJ: Was it a challenge to get to school in the winter?

RB: No. No. It wasn't.

Speaker 2: Hello.

AJ: Okay. When you were at home with your brothers and sisters, I'm sure that you all had chores to do. Do you remember any of your chores around the house?

RB: Yeah. Getting -- Cutting wood, getting -- bringing wood in.

AJ: Was that your specific chore?

RB: No. It switched around from one to the other. You know.

AJ: Did you have any favorite types of little jobs that you liked to help do at the house?

RB: No, not really. I did anything, you know.

AJ: What was your dad's occupation?

RB: He was a farmer. He was farming [inaudible 00:10:17]. A sharecropper.

AJ: Oh, okay.

RB: Yeah.

AJ: Okay. Can you tell us about that work?

RB: Yes. Planting tobacco, cutting tobacco. Corn. Things like that.

AJ: So did your family grow your own garden?

RB: Right. Garden.

AJ: What types of vegetables did you grow?

[10:53]

RB: All types. String beans, cabbage, things like that.

AJ: And how did they preserve them? Did they do any canning?

RB: Yes, you canned. I don't know how but you canned.

AJ: Oh, you didn't help with that chore, huh? [laughs]

RB: No.

AJ: Okay. Now tell me about when you were children, if any member of your family got sick, how did you get treated? Did you go to the doctor or how were you treated?

RB: You go to the doctor, wherever we'd be.

AJ: So you had doctors then?

RB: Yes.

AJ: Did they come to your house or what?

RB: No. I don't remember them coming to the house. They'd go to the doctor.

AJ: What about home remedies? Did you have any home remedies that you remember?

RB: I think we did, but I don't remember what it is.

AJ: Okay. What was the relationship between you and your siblings as far as, did you all get along pretty well or how did your family, your parents, discipline you?

RB: Yeah, we all got along very well.

AJ: How did your parents discipline members of the family back then?

RB: They whipped you if they had to – if they needed. [laughs] Our mother did.

AJ: Your mother whipped you if you needed it?

RB: If you needed it.

AJ: So she was the one that disciplined you mostly.

RB: Mostly, yeah.

AJ: How do you feel that your parents prepared you for life as you grew up?

RB: I feel fine because they started that early.

AJ: So how old were you when you first started going out?

RB: I was 15. I went to Happyland. [both laugh]

AJ: Can you tell me about that?

RB: Not too much to tell about. Go then mostly to play. And then certain times you go home. You go and play, play hide and seek with your parents. I mean, your mother. [laughs]

AJ: Oh really? With my- [laughs]

RB: Yeah.

AJ: Oh.

RB: She played hid and seek with us. And at certain time you walk back home.

AJ: Oh, okay.

RB: Yeah. Walked that five miles back home.

AJ: Oh, it was five miles that you-

RB: About five miles from over there back to Great Mills. That's where I started.

AJ: Oh, so you moved from Drayden to-

RB: Great Mills.

[15:00]

AJ: Great Mills. And were you still in school when you moved to Great Mills?

RB: Yeah, I moved. Then we started going to Great Mills schools. I went to... you know near Happyland.

AJ: Oh, okay. Okay. And that school, what was the name of that school?

RB: Can't remember. It was Great Mills, wasn't it? No, it wasn't. What was the name of that school? You was right by it. [laughs]

AJ: Do you remember any of your teachers there?

RB: Ms. Mercer was when I first went third grade. Then it was Ms. Jameson.

AJ: Now was that a one-room schoolhouse also?

RB: It was two rooms, I think. Yeah. Two rooms.

AJ: Do you remember the set-up of that particular school? The blackboard, the desk?

RB: No, I don't. No. That's a long time ago.

AJ: How did you get to school then?

RB: Walked.

AJ: Okay. And what about the heat in the building and the lighting? Tell me about that.

RB: I don't remember. Can't remember. It's been quite a while.

AJ: So you don't remember who made the fires back in those days?

RB: No, I don't. But I know it was wood. I know.

AJ: You don't remember where you got the wood from?

RB: It had to be cut.

[17:06]

AJ: You talked about Mr. Stuffy – Mr. Stuckey. Do you remember anything specifically about Ms. Mercy or Ms. Jameson, your teachers at Great Mills?

RB: No. I didn't expect to-

AJ: Did you like them?

RB: Yes. Both of them, I liked.

AJ: What subjects did you like best in school when you were going?

RB: I think it was... Arithmetic. I think that was the best.

AJ: How was it when you first went out on your own? When you had to -- when left home and started out on your own? Tell me about that.

RB: It was all right. I mean, it was good.

AJ: What did you do?

RB: When I first went out on my own, I was in... I went to CC Camp. That was the...

AJ: What was CC Camp?

RB: When I was 17, 18. 17, I think it was.

AJ: What was CC Camp?

RB: Huh?

AJ: What was CC camp?

RB: Soil Conservation Camp. It was worked, that's what we did. That's the first time when I went out on my own.

AJ: Where did you go then? For CC Camp?

RB: Chestertown, Maryland and way up in the upper [inaudible 00:19:18].

[19:22]

AJ: And how long did you do that? Do you remember?

RB: I was... Yeah, about months.

AJ: And after that? What was your work life after that?

RB: After that I... Don't remember what I did after that. I think that's when I moved going to D.C. [inaudible 00:19:54]. Yeah, I think I did. And stayed a year and then I signed up for the Army.

AJ: Signed up for what?

RB: Army.

AJ: Oh, okay.

RB: Yeah. When I was 18.

AJ: You want to tell us a little bit about that? In the Army, where you went?

RB: No. Went -- When I went to D.C. I went to Fort Meade and I went to... I took my training in Louisiana. That's Louisiana. When I left Louisiana, I was all the way overseas. Went to California, from California to... Forgotten where it was now.

AJ: Somewhere overseas, huh?

RB: Yeah, right. Yeah. With jungle. I can't think of the name of it.

AJ: Did you enjoy your time in service?

RB: Huh?

AJ: Did you-

RB: Yeah. It was all right. After you got used to it because I worked all the time and heavy equipment, so it passed. And I left there and left out of the jungle and went to the Philippines. I spent most of the time in the Philippines. So it was all right.

AJ: Do you remember anything specific about the Philippines? Did you like it there?

[22:19]

RB: Yeah. It was all right in the Philippines.

AJ: And after you left the Philippines?

RB: I came home. That's when my time was up.

AJ: Okay. Okay. So you actually retired-

RB: Came out.

AJ: Came out of the military then. And then what did you do after that? Do you remember?

RB: I was working in D.C. I lived in D.C. after that.

AJ: One thing I forgot to ask you: When you were younger, what did your family do? Were you religious people? Did you go to church?

RB: Yes. We had to go to church.

AJ: Can you tell me about that?

RB: Yeah, in Drayden, we had walk from Drayden to St. Georges to church.

AJ: Okay.

RB: Yeah.

AJ: So you were Catholic?

RB: Oh yeah.

AJ: Was there anything special about belonging to St. George's that you remember?

RB: No. It wasn't nothing special only, I could say.

AJ: Now, after you came out of service, you mentioned you settled in Washington D.C. and what happened after that? What type of work did you do?

[24:35]

RB: I think I came home to stay the year, I believe. Then I went back to D.C. Stayed in D.C.

AJ: When you were growing up or in your adult life, were you or your family involved in the community at all? Any community activities? I know there are church dinners and things like that.

RB: Yeah. We would.

AJ: Okay. As you were deciding or as you were getting involved in Washington D.C., what types of things did you do or did you enjoy doing? Or did you start a family or get married or...?

RB: No, not really. Worked. I went home every weekend.

Speaker 1: [inaudible 00:25:59].

AJ: You went home every weekend?

RB: [inaudible 00:26:00]. Yeah.

AJ: Oh, down to Drayden?

RB: No.

AJ: Oh, Great Mills?

RB: That's the one. Great Mills. That's where it was happening every weekend. You know it!
[laughter]

AJ: Oh. Okay. And in your adult life, did you get married or start a family or anything like that?

RB: I got married later, yes. Got married in D.C.

AJ: You have children?

RB: Right. Yeah, one is [inaudible 00:26:54]. Yeah, that's where it started. In D.C. [AJ laughs]

AJ: And you have children though?

[27:010]

RB: Hmm?

AJ: You have children?

RB: Oh, yeah.

AJ: How many children do you have?

RB: Now?

AJ: Yes. Uh-huh.

RB: Five I think.

AJ: And they all live in D.C.?

RB: No. Not all of them.

AJ: Okay. Do you remember how race relations were when you were growing up?

RB: It was kind of rough. You know how race was back then.

AJ: Right. Was there anything specific that you remember back then or now?

RB: No, not really. All we had to do was join a club and go along with it like you were supposed to.

AJ: So it didn't bother you?

RB: Not really. No.

AJ ([28:28](#)):

Do you think times are different now than they were back then?

RB: No. It's going back to the same thing. It's going back just like it was.

AJ: Oh, really? And how is that?

RB: It's just getting that way. You notice how things are changing, especially in D.C.

[29:00]

AJ: How do you see D.C.?

RB: The Blacks don't have jobs. I mean, they're losing their jobs. They're losing their homes. That's the way it's getting because going back – back in. Worse than it was, I guess.

AJ: Or you think it's getting to be worse than it was?

RB: It's going to be, they keep going the way it's going. They don't have the business no more. They don't have anything. It's going where they take the business. Foreigners taking over. So it's going back like it was.

AJ: And so that was sort of the way it was way back then?

RB: That's right. People... Especially the Blacks had business. Had different things at home and had jobs. A lot of them don't have jobs and they can't get jobs, but they got jobs then because they wasn't paying them as much.

AJ: Back when you were growing up and your family lived in Great Mills and Drayden, do you remember how you got news? I mean, how you heard about activities around the world and anywhere?

RB: Yeah, radio. They had radios then and batteries.

AJ: What is the first thing that you remember hearing on the radio? Or what did you enjoy listening to on the radio?

RB: I don't know. First song I listened to on the radio, I wasn't even the [inaudible 00:31:00].

AJ: Oh, okay.

RB: Or country music and things like that. That was all-

AJ: Right. Right. Did you get any news from the newspaper or anything like that?

RB: I didn't even... Back then I didn't even care about the news. You know?

AJ: Yeah. So there were no newspapers that you know of?

RB: Probably... Yeah. There was newspapers.

[31:45]

AJ: Do you remember what it was called?

RB: No, I don't. I had -- helped delivered newspapers. That's a long time ago, but I don't know what paper it was.

AJ: How old were you when you were delivering papers? About?

RB: I know when I was 14 -- this guy teaching me how to drive. I used to drive and help deliver newspapers.

AJ: Oh, really? And where did you deliver papers to?

RB: In Great Mills.

AJ: So did -- now that we've talked about you as a child and you growing up, do you feel that your life has turned out the way that you planned for it to turn out?

RB: Yes, it did. Only one thing that I didn't do, I didn't have a chance to do that I wanted to do... That's the only thing. That was play baseball.

AJ: You wanted to play professional baseball?

RB: I did. Yeah.

AJ: Did you play baseball when you were younger?

RB: Did I?

Speaker 1: Yeah.

AJ: What was it called? What was the team?

Speaker 1: Piney Point Eagles [laughs]

RB: Huh? [laughs]

AJ: What was the team call that you played with?

[33:30]

RB: Piney Point Eagles.

AJ: Oh. And what position did you play?

RB: Short stop.

AJ: Oh, okay. And was the team pretty good?

RB: Well, they was best one.

AJ: Do you remember other people that were on the team? Can you tell me who was on the team?
[RB and Speaker 1 laughs] We can't see him on the camera, you have to say his name.

RB: Tiny. I'm going to call him Tiny. Herman. He played - we played neck-to-neck, didn't we? Side-by-side.

AJ: And who else was on the team?

RB: Chester, his brother. And Bobby – Bobby Robinson. Who else? There were some other ones but I can't name some of them.

AJ: Who was the pitcher?

RB: Roy Cutchember, that was the main one.

AJ: And who was the catcher?

RB: Your brother.

Speaker 1: Fletcher.

RB: Fletcher.

Speaker 1: Alvin Diggins.

RB: Yeah, Alvin Diggins was the main.

AJ: And who played first base?

[35:05]

RB: Bobby Robinson. Carl Rustin.

AJ: And what -- who were some of the teams that you played?

RB: Oakville, Leonardtown, Patuxent Sluggers and we went to Eastern Shore and other places.

AJ: And you would've liked to play professional baseball, is that right?

RB: I really would have. But I did most of my time and that was during that time I was in Army at the time that I really wanted to do it. And when we wasn't that easy for us to [inaudible 00:36:12] during the time that the color was broken. What was his name? Robinson?

AJ: Jackie Robinson?

RB: Jackie Robinson. At the time, that was known.

AJ: Okay. Well, that's very interesting. Is there anything else about your life that you'd like to share with us today?

RB: Yeah. I wish I went away and went to school. Went to school and got more educated. Maybe I would have got in the big leagues then. That's the thing I missed.

AJ: Okay. Well, thank you very much, Mr. Brooks. [dog barks and clapping]

RB: Very welcome.