

UNIFIED COMMITTEE FOR AFRO-AMERICAN CONTRIBUTIONS
Oral History Documentation Project

JOSEPH MASON CURTIS

April 9, 1997

Interviewed by Brenda Coates
at Ms. Coates home in Lexington Park Maryland

Transcribed by Evelyn Sherriel on May 14, 1998

Logged by unknown

Original format is cassette tape

1 hour, 0 minutes, 15 seconds

[Begin Side 1, Tape 1 of 1]

Brenda Coates: ... at my residence in Lexington Park. Today's date is April 9, 1997. Mr. Curtis I just want to remind you that if you are uncomfortable answering any of these questions, please feel free not to answer them.

BC: Okay, we will start off with asking you where you live. Where were you born and where do you live?

Joseph Curtis: I was born in Medley Neck and I live now in Dameron Maryland.

BC: And Medley's Neck right off of 245 right? Did you live right on 244 or --

JC: Well we lived back there off of 244, we lived on a farm. We used to share cropped.

BC: Okay, back there about where James Louise Mason lives now?

JC: Yes umm hmm.

BC: Back in that area?

JC: Yes, yes umm hmm.

BC: So it was quite a distance off of 244.

JC: Yes, yes it was. We would walk to school maybe eight or ten miles.

BC: Woo

JC: No problem.

BC: No problem back then but now you know okay.

JC: Not a problem.

BC: But now you live in Dameron you live about -- right off of 235?

JC: Right on 235.

BC: Okay, and you told me that you live close to where Barnes and son --

JC: Yes, yes just before you get to where Robinson Barnes. It's on the right going south.

BC: Okay, and you said that you lived on a farm when you were coming along back off of 244, and you said that your father share cropped.

JC: That's correct.

BC: You lived in there for about how long?

JC: I say maybe seven years

BC: And then where did y'all move?

JC: Then we moved over there to California on 235 -- California to a farm over there.

BC: And that was about where?

JC: Where California Post Office used to be. Right across from where California Post Office used to be right where it used to be Abell's Store in California. We lived

back down that road past Abell's Store right across from where the California Post Office used to be.

BC: Oh, okay.

JC: Going down towards a place called Seven Gables, where Seven Gables Hotel used to be.

BC: Oaky, you said where the old Post office used to be across from where the 7-11 is.

JC: No

BC: Oh, there used to be an older post office?

JC: There used to be an older post office. There was one that goes back down there -- oh what is that place called?

BC: Across from Kmart?

JC: Yes, yes, yes back down in that area.

BC: So you used live up Seven Gables Road?

JC: Yes that's where it was right by Seven Gables. Off of Seven Gables Road

BC: Oh okay, okay. See I didn't know that there was a -- I know that the old post office is right there where the 7-11 is, I didn't know about an older post office when I was coming up?

JC: You're quite younger than I am.

BC: Oh, Okay ok and you moved down there when you were about seven and then -- Did your family live any place else?

JC: No, no when we left that area we moved went back to Hollywood, then my parents built a house at this time. My parents built a home in Hollywood ...

BC: Where is that in Hollywood?

JC: It's on Vista Road.

BC: Vista Road in Hollywood, okay.

JC: Vista Road.

BC: Okay, when you when you were a child what were times like?

JC: Well we had a lot of fun when we was growing up. We never got a chance to go many places because we use to share crop and we had to get out there and cut down that tobacco. Gather hay and go up in the loft and it would blow back your face. We had a lot of fun and like I said, there were eleven of us and we just stuck together. We use to crab and sell crabs at the Seven Gables Hotel for \$2 a dozen. We had a time – nice time and a nice family and we just loved one another.

BC: Now you said your father was a share cropper. Now this was all the time even after he moved down to Seven Gables.

JC: That is correct. The only time he quit share cropping was when moved to Hollywood...

BC: Okay, what was your mother's occupation?

JC: She just took care of the house.

BC: What is your earliest memory?

JC: Going to school down in Medley's Neck. I remember that being the largest one in my class there, I had to be the one that went outside to cut the wood to put in the stove to keep everybody else warm. So while they were studying, I'm outside cutting wood. I'll never forget that! The teacher use to tell me, she said, "you better get your work, you have to realize, I have mine, you got yours to get." That's what she used to tell me. That was hard.

BC: Your out cutting wood, how could you get your work?

JC: She didn't care whether I got it or didn't, but I tried. I'll never forget it!

BC: I'm going to ask you more question later about your schooling. What church did your family go to?

JC: Down in Medley's Neck we use to go to – I've forgotten the name, but it was down in Medley's Neck.

BC: The Catholic Church down there?

JC: Yes, the Catholic Church down there. We used to walk about ten miles to get to church.

BC: Was it Our Lady of the Wayside or something like that.

JC: Yes, Our Lady something like that, I can't remember.

BC: The Catholic Church that was down there.

JC: Yes, the Catholic Church that sits up on a hill ... that's were we used to go to church. We had to go to church. Mom believed in going to church. Sometimes we didn't have the clothes for me and my brother Vincent. He would go one Sunday and I'd got the next Sunday and wear them. We were a poor child, that's the way we grew up.

BC: What trips did your family take? Oh Okay [Laughter] you didn't take trips.

JC: We went to the store maybe once a month. That was a largest trip.

BC: And that was the store at the end of the –

JC: That was down when we were at Medley's Neck. Dad had a car and whenever he got it started, we used to go to the store. The store was called Woodburn's Store – General Store.

BC: Is that the one that was still on 244?

JC: Yes

BC: As you were coming around by the post office –

JC: There were two of them. One by the named Buck Weiser's General Store and another named Woodburn's. But there were two general stores maybe a ½ mile apart.

BC: Was your family involved in any community activities?

JC: No not very much. Mom used to go to parents teachers meeting when there was one. But other then that community activities – I mean we used to – the only thing families used to come together to this house. This weekend Mom and Dad would play cards or whatever they did. That's the way they amused themselves back then. Then we had one radio that we used to stay up to listen to at 12 or 1:00. Those hillbillies were kicking back then. [Laughter}

BC: Were times better or worse back then, then they are now?

JC: We grow up as a very tight family. Toys and things like that we never had very much of that. I'm sure my parents were doing the best that they could. But whatever we had, we shared. I was the tightest one of all. When I got my toys, I

wouldn't let anyone touch my toys! But I remember one time when it snowed. It snowed so hard that it went right up to the window sills. We had to go to school over the fences because it had frozen so hard that we could walk right over top the fence to go to school. Now this is that eight miles I was telling you about. Now that was hard too. But however we used to go to school and come back home in that snow. I got a toy that you used to wind up. I put on top of the snow and that thing took off and went down in the snow and I didn't even see it when spring came. I don't know what happened to it. It really upset me because that was my only toy.

BC: How did you parent deal with health and illness? Do you remember any home remedies that your parents had?

JC: Well yes, we used to have these sores that would come. My mother she used to have us to – back then they had these old refrigerators that you would put a block of ice into. I don't know if you remember that, but anyway. She had what the called Epson Salts. It was the nastiest thing you ever did taste in my life! We had to take a tablespoon of that every morning for the cure. For colds we used to have to take sugar in a spoon and put a little kerosene into it. [Laughter] I know you don't remember that.

BC: I heard about it quite often, yeah.

JC: But it would take care of a cold. We used to have some bad ones. And then back then like I said we were poor people. We used to get so cold at night; we used to have to put coats on the bed. In the morning it seemed like we'd never been to bed wrestling those heavy coats all night long trying to keep warm. There rolling

off the bed on the floor and things like that. And we had to get up and make that fire and it was so cold. Oh Lord that floor would crack! But we had to get those chips in and kindling to make sure we had suitable stuff to make a fire in the morning.

BC: Now do you ever remember going to the doctors? Did the doctors make house calls or what?

JC: The doctor would make house calls once in a while. But that -- you taking about once every five or six years, and then it would have to be something bad. Old doctor Bean, he would come. My mother had children ... midwife. I do remember that. Other than that doctors, we didn't even know what that was.

BC: Okay, and you never had to go to the hospital?

JC: No, never I wasn't even born in a hospital.

BC: Now you were telling me about the radio and staying up half the night listening to it. Is that -- what other way did the black folks in the county get their news?

JC: What you didn't get off that radio, you got from word of mouth when company came. Of course when company came back there then they always ate first. We had to wait until the company ate, then they talked amongst -- but other than news -- back then, we didn't pay any attention to news. Like I said, as long as we could listen to that radio and like I said, that radio, that thing would play from -- anything from 11:00 until two or three in the morning. Those hillbillies really got off. We used to -- I mean as long as our parents would let us set up, we'd sit up and watch it. Daddy he used to sit up until 12 o'clock or maybe one listening to it. He just enjoy it. That was our enjoyment.

BC: What types of things did you do as a child? What kinds of games did y'all play?

JC: We used to put puzzles together. Mostly puzzles, like I said we didn't have many toys or anything. The people that my dad used to share crop with, they would put out there old clothes. Most of the time there would be toys in the boxes that they wanted to get rid of and they gave them to us. To us it was just like heaven. It was really, really nice. We were glad to get them, we really were.

BC: You mention earlier that your family was really tight knit.

JC: Oh, yes.

BC: All of y'all got along together.

JC: Yes, because we used to haul water along for about a mile when Mama got ready to wash. Because were we lived, we didn't have a well. We used to go over to the share cropper's house and haul water from his house to our house about a mile and a half. We used to do it in wagons. Wagons, we used to build – put wheels on it, axels some how or another. Of course the wheels would run off and turn the water over. You had to go back to the house again and get more water and come back again. Because Mom would not let you come back in that house until you bought that water. [Laughter] And she washed with it. If it ever rained, we prayed for rain because we'd catch it off the roof of the house. My mother used to wash.

BC: So besides getting the water, cutting the wood and you helped your father fields cutting tobacco.

JC: Yes

BC: Those were your regular chores.

JC: Yeah, well I had to come out of school early because with 11 head of children, my dad – we had no one to help him. So I pretty much came out in the 6th grade and helped to raise the rest of the other kids. I never got a lot of education, but I'm happy with what I had.

BC: You told me you couldn't remember the name of that elementary school that was down in Medley's Neck.

JC: No, I really can't remember, I really can't remember that –

BC: Was that one of those one room school houses?

JC: Once room school house – stove right in the middle of the floor. I shall never forget it. I used to keep that thing jumping all the time. Like I said I really didn't get a lot of education because I had to come out of school at an early age.

BC: And you said one of your teachers was Miss Arlene Haywood?

JC: Miss Arlene Haywood was my first teacher. [Laughter] She really –

BC: And then when you moved to California – then you said you went to Banneker Elementary.

JC: See, then the school down at Medley's Neck had closed.

BC: Oh, Okay. They finally got a bus to come down a little ways to put us up. We still had to walk about three miles because it always picked up at a central location. For everybody, all the kids in the neighborhood would come to this location. That's where the bus would pick us up and take us to Banneker School.

BC: Ok, Okay.

JC: I only did that maybe about a year or so before we moved down to California.

BC: California and then you went to Jarboesville Elementary. Do you remember the names of any of your other teachers?

JC: No I don't, I'm sorry. I remember the teachers used to have pets. I never would forget that. If you wasn't really, really smart, you wasn't the teachers pet. You know where I was. [Laughter]

BC: Okay, another question is how did your parents treat you?

JC: Fine, we got along just fine. I used to be – I thought I was the “badest boy” on the block. I remember one time I got a spanking. I -- we used to take pillows on the top of the house, and slide on these pillows down on house on the porch area then got back up and slide again. That was an amusement for us but we tore up so many pillows. They were feather pillows back then. Lord we tore up so many pillows – they were Mom's pillows. Boy I tell you, my Dad lit up on me, I never did think he would turn me a loose! [Laughter] We were wrong and I realize now that we were wrong. But as children, children will try mostly –

BC: Do you think they prepared you well for life?

JC: I think they did. Especially with my mother. She – she did everything that a mother could ever do to prepare us for life. She used to say “do as you wish to be done by.” If you wished for someone to treat you mean, you do the same – I mean don't do the same. She wanted you to be nice to people. Right today I have a little bit of a problem with that because I use to always tell them “Sir.” I was taught to say that when I was coming along. A lot of the people after I got into business, they used to say, “you don't have to say that to me.” But I was bought up that way and I told them I'm sorry sometimes. I was just bought up that way.

It's something that just flies right out of my mouth, "sir." It's just one of those things.

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

JC: I always dreamed that on day I would have a business of some type of my own. I struggle very, very hard for that goal. I'll never forget, way back when we were coming along, my brother Vince – we were always close. We crabbed together, we oystered together and had gill nest. We used to catch fish together, we were always together at all times. Right until today, but I told him – I went into business at the Chevron Station and he was working on the Base. So I said, "I know you're working and everything and I hope and pray that you retire from what you're doing, but what else are you going to do with your life?" I said to him, "in order to get along or gain ground out here, you're going to have to purchase land, a house or building or something that you will be able to rent out and somebody will have to give you some money. Whether you have to work ... So he took me up on that and that's when he started the trash smashers business church – I mean picking up trash. He started out with pickup trucks first. He eventually got the larger trucks and everything and he went on from that. I went – I always wanted two buildings, my dream which I have today. I always wanted two nice looking buildings facing the highway. And I'll be darned if that didn't work out. [Laughter] It really did. I was just so happy to all mighty God that he was able to help me to accomplish my dream. He did a fantastic job.

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

JC: They never really approved of us going anywhere. I was maybe 17 or 18 years of age before I got to leave home and my Dad, he always like to play cards. The only way that me and my brother Vince could get out of the house to get to go to Leonardtown was to give him some money so he could play cards. So we would work, or he would work – I stay home on the farm with Dad and he would bring his money home and he would split his money with me. Then me and him would take and give Dad \$5 a piece and he would go to Leonardtown. He'd go to Leonardtown and then take us. That's the only way we got out of the house. We had to trick him, but he just loved to play. So we went up there and everything. He used to come home 10 or 11 o'clock at night. But at least we got an opportunity to get out there. That's how we started to get out the house. After we 20 or 21 years of age, we got our own vehicles ... after that. Of course The Alley was a popular place back then.

BC: Yeah, I remember that. So that was the only – Did y'all go to church activities and whatever?

JC: Oh, yeah what do you call them?

BC: Church festivals.

JC: We used to go to church festivals, we used to do that. My parents used to go every year there was a festival. That's the only time the family really got together to go anyplace was to church festivals. There was always a church festival here and there and everything. Of course my mother used to gather use together at night and we would say our prayers. She was very strict on that.

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

JC: I was on top of the world! I had my own car. Of course then they hardly had any wax to put on the cars. If they had any, I didn't have the money to get it anyway. So we used to take burnt oil, and I used to shine that thing, I tell you! You take oil and rub it long enough and it won't be sticky any more but it will leave a glaze. [Laughter] Boy I tell you, I used to – I was so proud of that thing! I used to part it so no one else was around it so it wouldn't get ...

BC: About how old were you when you first went out on your own?

JC: I'd say about 20 years of age.

BC: And where did you go? Where you still in the county or what?

JC: In the county, I stayed right there. Vince he went in the Service and I was home alone. I used to run around while he was there. I had a lot of fun!

BC: You used to run around.

JC: We used to go to car races and things like that. A guy by the name of George Somerville, we used to go up in Waldorf. There used to be a dirt racetrack there and we used to go up there all the time on Sunday. I never was a drinker. I had a lot of friends that did. I never drank but I used to take my friends and we used to ... and everything. I was working and we – everybody wanted a drink and nobody had any money to get it with. So I used to buy the bottle and sit it on the table. Everybody would drink until it was gone. I figured it would be somebody else's turn. It seemed like they never came that way, and so I did it again and I had to get out of that.

BC: You said you were working. Where were you working when you first went out?

JC: Oh, I used to work construction.

BC: What was your money situation like then?

JC: Oh, I made good money when I was working construction then. If you made \$70 a week you were really doing good back then. I used to make that, my Lord – but my mother she would tell me, “Okay, you’re making good money right. Now give it all here.” I used to give it to her and she’d give me \$25 and she’d take the rest. I mean that was right on up until I got 25 or 30. No, I take that back because I got married when I was 23.

BC: Okay, and then your wife did it. [Laughter]

JC: That’s right, that’s the reason why I don’t have nothing today.

BC: Okay, so you lived at home until you got married.

JC: Yes I did.

BC: Okay, so when you went out on your own – I mean when you went out, you were working construction, and you had your own car. Why did you choose construction? Was it any –

JC: You know the bible says you get your money by the sweat of your brow and I figured the dirtier I got the more money I’d make. Construction was the dirtiest work that I’ve ever been into in my life. [Laughter] Dust and dirt, Oh God, I never will forget that. I went into construction because I was pretty good. I was a water boy, that’s all I had to do was to tote that bucket. The guys they would holler to me to come over here when they wanted water. They’d holler to me and I’d go over there and that’s all I did until they built that whole site. I did that for three years or four years ... I was there the whole time. That was it, I just had a ball.

BC: How did you meet your wife?

JC: I used to work on the base and she used to work at the Navy Exchange Laundry and I used to work there too. You know how you'd walk up and down the laundry. I used to have to clean the lent and stuff behind the machines and all that kind of stuff daily. Plus help wash the clothes and rinse them and stuff like that. She used to do socks, the thing that you'd pull socks down over top of – and it would dry the socks and it would take them off and fold them up. It was a small area no larger then this. I used to go over and talk to her and I just met her through keep go back throughout the day. Sometimes I'd buy lunch for her and everything. So I said, "one of these days, I'm going to have to take you to a movie or something." So anyway we decided to do that. I had wrecked my car had to use my Dad's car. Dad, he really didn't like to loan his car to nobody! [Laughter] I was the only that could get it, Vince couldn't get it because he'd run in them ditches. [Laughter] So won't let him have the car. She lived way down to next to Point Lookout – Scotland down there. That was a long way and then they had that old road going down there – down there it was just being bumpy. All the way down there I used to go back and forth.

BC: [Laughter] How old were you when y'all decided to get married?

JC: I figured if I didn't grow up and get married, I'd never get married. [Laughter] Oh, Lord if I knew what I know now, I'd been 50!

BC: Now! What do you – do you remember your wedding day?

JC: Yeah, yes, yes I do. I got married at the pastor's home in St. Indigoes. We prepared – we had to get that gown you know and everything. Of course back

then that stuff was quit expensive and everything. So we had to go to Waldorf and that was a long ways then to get the gown. So we just keep paying on it until we got the gown paid for and everything. Got the rings and everything and the pastor married us right at his house.

BC: Okay

[End of Side 1, Tape 1 of 1]

[Begin Side 2, Tape 1 of 1]

BC: You said you got married at the pastor's house at the Catholic Church?

JC: No it was Methodist. When I got married I changed over to a Methodist church.

BC: Oh, Okay.

JC: After I changed over to a Methodist church, I went to Methodist church with my wife. She used to have Sunday School – she used to teach Sunday School every Sunday and go to the Methodist church down there. So I said, “it no since in me going to one church and her going to another.” So I joined a Methodist Church and boy, I've never been sorry. I really enjoy it, I really enjoy it. Before I got married I used to run around just like and other young men. I used to go with a girl up in Mechanicsville, and my wife Betty she could go out during the week to the movies or what ever. But she couldn't go on weekends. The reason was because she was always in church. And the other girl she could go out on the weekends but she couldn't go out during the week. [Laughter] So I'd go up there during the week and -- and the vice versa and then they had – Richard Portee used

to be on the radio and put out request for this one and this one and that's how they found it out. [Laughter]

BC: Oh my goodness. [Laughter]

JC: So anyway I had to cut that out. So that was all over with

BC: So who was y'all -- do you remember who stood up for y'all at the wedding?

JC: I know that it has been along time but -- mostly my wives parents and like ah Sidney Hewitt and all of those guys. My parents they came I think it was my brother that stood up for me.

BC: Vincent? Okay and then you married Carolyn four years ago?

JC: Three years ago.

BC: You got married at Zion?

JC: No I got married over at Reverend Diggs church over at --

BC: Bethesda that's right and who were you're -- who stood up for you this time?

JC: I think it was -- I forget now who it was I am sorry I can not answer that.

BC: Okay

JC: We had a nice wedding over there and had pictures taken and we jumped over the broom and all of this everything but it was quite nice.

BC: Oh, umm hmm, Okay.

JC: We had quite a few people there and so --

BC: What has your family life been like, your relations with your wives and all your children and grandchildren?

JC: I have always had a close relationship with both of my wives and thank God I never had any problems. If we had any -- I mean any I am talking about

arguments and anything like. We never had anything like that, we have a discussion. Anytime there was something to say that either one of us didn't care for we'd sit down and discuss it and worked it out.

BC: Umm hmm.

JC: Either one of them, the one that I have now, or my first wife. We've never had –

BC: Arguments, none of that.

JC: So give a little take a little situation. You can't go one side, it has to be both sides or not at all.

BC: Umm hmm. What part has religion played in your life? You told me that you were a Catholic up until the time that you got married and you changed over because of --

JC: My wife was a Methodist.

BC: Umm, hmm.

JC: But not only that because – even back when I used to run around with the young men and everything. I always admired the Methodist people, they used to go and visit different churches. I used to see Mr. Kent and different people pulling out from old Mount Zion – Old Zion ... they used to be on that old back road. By the back gate, there used to be another church before this Zion new church.

BC: Oh, okay.

JC: And they used to travel a lot. I used to like to travel and drive a lot. They used to travel and they went from church to church. Not every Sunday. They used to go to churches and they would sing over here. They'd go to these churches and sing.

I always did love to sing, so I said, “Maybe if I join this Methodist church, one of these days maybe I can get a chance to sing the gospel.” Anyway, I used to watch them all the time. Every Sunday they would go from one place to another. Of course I’m out in the street then. I used to say to myself, “Lord, one of these days I hope I can get a chance to go with those people.” After I got married, I got an opportunity to do that. I joined the choir there. I joined the Methodist Men they used to have a Methodist Men group down in Scotland. I know that I’ve been singing with that group for over 30 years. And I enjoy it. I wouldn’t take ... I just enjoy it so much.

BC: Let me – you wife belonged to the Methodist church down in Scotland, but you were talking about Mr. Gant with the –

JC: Wait a minute, Mr. Gant

BC: You were saying that he used to pull out –

JC: Mr. Kent, Mr. Kent down at Zion. They used to leave Zion down there and they would go places. I would see them go up 235 four or five cars going to different places. Then I really didn’t know what church they were going to and really didn’t care, I just wanted to be a part of it.

BC: Just wanted to be part of it.

JC: I just wanted to be part of it. They use to go different places. I know that was where they were going. Then after I married my wife Betty, then I found out where they were going. Then I began to go with them. Then I used to buy transportation just to make sure – I bought a van so that everybody could go with

- me. Rather than to drive four or five cars. Back then I always took them to Baltimore or wherever they had to go, I always did it.
- BC: So, she belonged to the Methodist church in Scotland but then y'all transferred to the one up in Lexington Park.
- JC: Yes, transferred to the one in Lexington Park. I liked that church and we moved up here to Lexington Park, that's our church home now – Lexington Park.
- BC: Okay, that's what was getting me confused. Do you participate in the other church committees or anything.
- JC: Committee, no. They have programs – we go from church to church to church. Yes we do. I'm not on any committees on at any other church ... just one church.
- BC: Are you in involved with any other church or religious organizations?
- JC: No
- BC: What community activities do you participate in?
- JC: I try to participate in a little bit of everything. You know in my 32 years before I retired, I worked from sun up to sun down. I never had time to go and participate in anything. Now I participate in different things – bowling, I love bowling. I bowl now every Wednesday night at Esperanza. That's the sports that I do. Other than ball games, I love ball games. But if my wife is working, then I don't go. I go visit my parents or something like that.
- BC: How do you feel about life in general today in St. Mary's County?
- JC: St. Mary's County hasn't been what they call bad to me. I can not say – you know business wise and everything it was a struggle. Like I said we had our share of ups and downs. It wasn't always roses, but I made it through. It just

seems like you be nice to people and people will be nice to you and you can get along anywhere, St. Mary's County or anywhere.

BC: Is the – do you think the quality of life is better or worse then it used to be?

JC: I think it's a little bit better. To be frank with you, when Martin Luther King kind of opened up a few things for us, it really made life a lot better. I mean I still think that we have this modern way of – these other people have given to us. But other then – I've heard a lot of people say, "these white people this and these white people that", but if it wasn't for them, I would have never have made it for the 32 years that I was there. So I can not say that everybody is bad. They are not, absolutely not, some of the nicest white people out there that you have ever met.

BC: Are people different from what they used to be?

JC: The only thing that I see different now is the children. They don't hold back nothing. I mean they just say whatever's on their mind. It's not like it used to be. You think when I came along, you curse out in the public or something like that, No! I mean to tell you, absolutely not! Not if you got your mouth bust open by your mother and father neighbor or you went home and told him what you did. Then he go back and kill you again. So what I'm saying is now it is just no comparison with the youngsters! I mean people – the grown ups now they just don't pay no attention to child and they are just running wild! And that school bus, I have never in my life heard such terrible language as those kids use on the bus!

BC: Because you driving – you been driving the school now for –

JC: I've been driving the school bus since November. Let me see –

BC: Oh, so you haven't been on it that long. Okay

JC: Yeah, but they scared me. I just couldn't believe this after I got on there. Then I had to cut that out. I had a hard time there for a while, because they had believed that this is the way of life. They had curse or say those F-words in order to get attention from who ever they were speaking to, but that's not the way. And I told them that that's not the way. Now I tell you, I don't hardly have any problem, they are not going to do it on my bus at all. They make noise, kids are going to make noise so I turn the music up for them and I let them bop their heads, but they got to sit.

BC: Now this next question doesn't really pertain to you because you've never lived in any other place besides down in St. Mary's County. The question was how do you feel about living in the county as opposed to living in the city? Like I said –

JC: Just leave me down here. I love it here. [Laughter]

BC: Okay, do you think there's a difference between the natives of this county and people who have moved here from outside? Not just these recent people but maybe somebody that's been here like 10 year or whatever.

JC: Well, I have found that throughout the years, the natives or people who have been here for quite some time, they get to know you and you get to know them and they will speak and talk to you. I just love the people that's been here a long time. Now mixing in with them in order to learn their ways with yours. So once you learn their ways with your ways, then you know what their looking for and you know what your looking for and you get along just fine. I get along fine with

people, I really do. That school teacher yesterday, I don't really think that she thought that I was telling the truth when that boy broke the glass out of my bus. But she had to get on there and said, "Well, he said that he didn't do it." I said, "If you were him, wouldn't you say the same." Because when you go home, you know the parents are going to have to pay for it and everything. She said, "Well now, he's only six years old." I said, "Yeah that's fine." She said, "Are you sure." I said, "Mamma he stood out on the ground and I heard this thump noise and I looked and he was moving from the back of the bus. The kids were saying awwh he broke that window." I really didn't know that's boys name, but those kids scream out that boys name like you wouldn't believe and I wrote him up.

BC: She was going to go along with the kid rather than you.

JC: Absolutely.

BC: Okay. Do you travel and interact with people from the different sections of the county?

JC: Oh, yes, yes all the time. You go – first we do a lot of traveling and like I said, you're going to have your ups and downs regardless of wherever you go. I just get along with people. I just get along, I don't have hardly – I guess I'm just lucky. I just knock on wood. I get along nice with people.

BC: Do you think there is a difference in people in the different sections of this county? Have you noticed any difference.

JC: No

BC: What do you think have been the biggest changes in the county in your lifetime?

JC: The Base has grown a tremendous amount over the period of time that I've been here. I've seen quite a few changes. The Navy used to be on the base at one time for security and everything. They changed over to Marines and then they changed back. Just back and forth. Just different things have happened in the county. The Base – plus the fact that St. Mary's County really has grown and it's still growing. I', talking about by leaps and bounds and it just seems like to me more people come here and they find out about where they can get the best deal and Curtis Tires is one of the best.

BC: [Laughter] Okay. What do you think of the direction the county is going into today. Do you believe that St. Mary's will become an urban rather than a rural county?

JC: I think it's becoming an urban situation, I really do. But the traffic out here is really filling up. In the afternoon, it seems like to me it hard to get out to 235 north. Anything from 4:00 on, you're just going to have a hard time getting on the road. It's like – traffic has just really grown terrible. Like I said I was here when there was only one light in Lexington Park. You see know you got five or six or seven lights from here to get up as far as California. The lights – you got to wait. The county has really grown.

BC: Unfortunately, you sort of wonder if it's for the –

JC: Yeah, I wonder, I hope and pray that it's for good. I really do. Because it seems to me, when they come to St. Mary's, it's always St. Mary's County, they never want to leave. They come here and want to stay because the water and everything around here and they find out that people down here are not as bad as they

thought it was going to be. And when they come, they never leave. Even when they come in the Navy, whatever when their time is up they don't want to leave St. Mary's County, their here for good. This is it.

BC: Have you done everything in your lifetime that you wanted or planned to do.

JC: I would say yes. Only one thing that I have never done is to fly. I've never flown in commercial plane. I've never flown. Now the skies are not as friendly as they used to be. Now I don't know if I will ever have the opportunity to fly.

[Laughter]

BC: That's just strange – y'all just like to drive every place.

JC: Yeah, well we getting ready to go on this cruise and we had an opportunity to fly down to Florida to get on the ship or to drive down to Florida to get on the ship. We're going to drive! It's about four families of us and we're all going together so were just going to get a U-Haul to pull all of our clothes and baggage and stuff in the U-Haul, and pull the U-Haul to Florida.

BC: Your brother Vince and his wife? Adele, Pat

JC: No, their not going. Adele, James, Carolyn and me and her son are coming here. He's coming here and he's going to go with us to meet another family up the road. All four families are going to go together. We plan on having a real nice time.

BC: So you have never flown, but you don't know if you want to.

JC: Like I say, it's not as friendly as it used to be. My wife doesn't like flying, so I don't know if we ever get to go. It depends on were we've got to go. We just love to travel to different places. Most of the time we travel --

BC: Can you share any old story or a story about how life was like in the County for your parents?

JC: Well, I know they share cropped and they really never had activities to go out to different places. I don't exactly how they faired. They acted like they were getting along just fine. I'm talking about my parents. The only thing I didn't care that much for was when you worked 12 months out of the year and you cut this tobacco and you bailed it. You'd carry it to the market and pray to Almighty God that you'd get some money out of this tobacco to pay your fertilizer bill from one year to the next month and all this. When they got through paying their fertilizer bill and all that, if we had \$40 left, we were lucky. You're talking 12 months, I didn't like that at all! I think that part there hurt my parents, especially my mother because she worked so hard. With 11 head of children and raising us hard heads like she did, I know it was hard on her. When we got through, like I said to you, you hardly had enough money to do anything with. My brother and I, we used to sell crabs and everything for \$2 a dozen to make our money to buy our clothes and stuff like that for school and for church and stuff like that. But I think it pretty hard on them, but they acted like they were getting along just fine. So I can't say anything, they loved their children and we just had a lot of fun together.

BC: When you first went into business you said you had Curtis Tire and Chevron and that was across the street from where you are now.

JC: That's correct.

BC: What – Why did you just go back to the tire center.

JC: Because the location where I was – the place where the Chevron Station used to be it was sold. The place was going to be sold. By the place being sold and I had to pay rent to another man. The people that bought it was Aldridge Ford, and the rent just keep going up and up. So I said to myself, “I gotta do something.” So I went up across the street and I asked Mr. ... I heard he was interested in selling it... He told me yes and he told me what he wanted for the place and everything. I went to the bank and told them what I was doing. At that time another man was in business down the street. Mac’s used cars. I don’t know if you remember that across from Aldridge Ford there. Before I purchased the place, he came down there to me. He found out that I was going to purchase it and he said to me, “Mason what you getting ready to do?” I said, I was “getting ready to buy Mr. Katren out across the street.” So he said to me, “would you like to have some money.” I said what do you mean.” He said, “ I will give you \$7,000 to back out and let me have it.” I said, “Really, you’re going to have to give me some time to think about it.” He said, “Yeah, I’ll come down some time tomorrow and talk it over.” He said, “This is good money, all cash money. If you back out and let me have it.” Back there then \$7,000 was really good money. I said to myself, “When the \$7,000 is gone I’ll probably be right back to where I was when I began. Paying rent and fighting and struggling.” So I said, “I better leave that man’s money alone and he can have it and go on across the street and buy this place.” So I went across the street and I bought the place. Over there, there wasn’t no asphalt, nothing but dirt and dust was always over there. They’re old buildings and everything. I remodeled the building and put asphalt and stuff in there.

I said to myself, "I've got to get something in here to pay for this place. That's when I put up that apartment building in the back. I went back there and dug all the foundation by hand. I wasn't able to hire nobody to dig out by hand. The trucks would come in and pour my foundation and I built the apartment building. That was in 1974. Of course, then I didn't know who I was going to rent it to. I had to furnish it out, all of them from steam to stern. Oak and kitchen cabinets, I mean I put everything in there to really make it nice. I started renting back there then. The rent I was getting really wasn't taking care of the mortgage but as you go along, you'll be able to raise your rent enough to be able to take care of the situation. So that's how I –

BC: So now you had three building. You had the apartment and –

JC: The commercial building out front and Curtis Tire Center.

BC: So you have three, because earlier you said you had two.

JC: No, until I built the apartment building I had two.

BC: Oh, okay.

JC: When I built the apartment building then there were three.

BC: Let me ask you this and this will be my last one. You said the place wanted you – was going to offer you \$7,000 not to buy this piece of property.

JC: That's correct.

BC: He wanted it. Why didn't he go to the person that was selling?

JC: Because he went to the guy that was selling it, he told him. The guy that was selling the property, told the man that was going to give me the money that you knew that this place was here for sale all this time. So just as soon as you found

out that Mr. Curtis wants this – wanted this property, now here you come running.
He said, “I wouldn’t sell it to you for nothing.”

BC: Oh, Okay.

JC: “Mr. Curtis wants it and I’m going to see that he gets it.” So he thought maybe
he’d go around the back door to me and offer me some money.

BC: Okay

Biographical Data on Joseph Mason Curtis:

Address: P.O. Box 175
Route 235
Dameron MD 20628

Telephone #: 872-5442

Date of Birth: July 9, 1933

Born: Medleys Neck in Leonardtown, MD

He attended elementary school in Medleys Neck. He does remember the name of it.

That closed down then he went to Banneker Elementary then to Jarboesville Elementary.

He only attended until the 6th grade.

He was a business owner first at Curtis Chevron and Tire Center and then later Curtis
Tire Center. He retired in 1993.

1st Wife – Betty Hawkins Curtis

Present Wife – Carolyn M. Chase Curtis

He doesn’t remember the names of his mother’s parents.

Paternal Grandfather – Martin I. Curtis (Born: 8/15/1878 in Loveville, MD)

Paternal Grandmother – Mary Nelly Thomas Curtis (Born: 5/12/1883 in St. Mary’s County)

Mother – Helen Mason Curtis (Born: 6/6/1909)

Father – John Henry Curtis, Sr. (Born: 3/8/1909)

They were married on 11/18/1929

Brother and Sisters

Mary H. Holly

John Vincent Curtis

Joseph Mason Curtis (self)

Helen R. Wilson

John H. Curtis Jr. (deceased)

Paul L. Curtis (deceased)

Alice M. Allen

Frances A. Diggs

Margaret A. Rufus

Mary L. Allen-Rochester

John C. (Buzz) Curtis

Children (Grandchildren)

Herman Hawkins [stepson] - (Herman Jr. and Tameka Langley) – great grandson Herman

III

Xavier Curtis (Kendra Curtis and Latisha Curtis)

Pandora Franks (Bruce)

BC: Further information about Mr. Curtis is that his mother Helen Rebecca Mason Curtis had a book published in 1983. The title is "My Book of Precious Memories."

[End of Side 2, Tape 1 of 1]