Elvare Smith Gaskin

Unified Committee for Afro-American Contributions
Oral History Documentation Project

Elvare Smith Gaskin

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Place of Birth:	Scotland, Maryland
Date of Death:	December 10, 1997
Interviewer:	Merideth M. Taylor
Interview dates:	January 28, 1997
Interview location:	Elvare Gaskin's home in Scotland, Maryland
Education:	Elementary, High, Bowie State, Morgan University
Occupation:	Educator, Teacher, Principal, PPW
Spouse:	Robert Gaskin (deceased)
Maternal Grandparents:	Nannie Gough, Alexander Gough
Paternal Grandparents:	Ida Smith, Eugene Smith
Mother:	Mary Bernette Hewlett
Father:	Robert James Smith (deceased), Theodore Hewlett (stepfather)
Siblings:	none
Children:	Robert James Gaskin, John Alonzo Gaskin, Ophelia Bernadette Lewis, Lauraether Marie Smith
Grandchildren:	(Robert) Angela, Robert Jr.; (Alonzo) Katrina, John William Alonzo Jr.; (Ophelia) Owen, Marcus, Marissa; (Lauraetha) Cierra, Eugene Jr.

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UNIFIED COMMITTEE FOR AFRICAN AMERICAN CONTRIBUTIONS
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

RELEASE FORM

I agree to be interviewed and video or tape recorded for the nonprofit Unified Committee for African American Contributions Oral History Project. I understand that the tape will be used only for research, educational, and promotional purposes related to the Unified Committee for African American Contributions and for possible incorporation in a forthcoming book and/or exhibit.

I understand that the resulting video tape(s), audio tape(s), photographs and transcripts will become the property of the Unified Committee for African American Contributions and will be made available to the community for research purposes.

Copies will be placed at the Lexington Park Public Library and other appropriate libraries in the area.

Signed Elvare S. Gaskin

Date January 28, 1997

Please Print

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UNIFIED COMMITTEE FOR AFRO-AMERICAN CONTRIBUTIONS
Oral History Project

ELVARE GASKIN

Interviewer: Merideth Taylor
Recorded: January 28, 1997

[Begin Side 1, Tape 1 of 2]

Merideth Taylor: This is Merideth Taylor and I'm with the Unified Committee for African-American Contributions' Oral History Project, and I'm at Elvare Gaskin's house to interview her. And, this is January 28 and I'm going to start with the first question. What were the times like when you were a child? And, you can start anywhere you like. You can think about how did you and your family live? Basic things. What did you eat? What was your day like?

Elvare Gaskin: I can remember some things as early as three years old, and the most vivid thing in my mind, at that age, is the steamboat: The Dorchester and the–What's the name of the other boat? Anyway, it came in to, they came into to Miller's Wharf. And, I remember these because my mother lived in Baltimore and my grandmother and grandfather raised me because my father died before I was born. He died in February and I was born in March. And, they would put me on the steamboat in care of the chamber maids to go to Baltimore to visit my mother during the summer, and my mother would meet me in Baltimore at the Light Street Wharf. That's where the boat would dock.

I also remember coming back, the chambermaids took very good care of me and I got the best of food on the boat. It was a very beautiful boat, and most of the time I did travel on the Dorchester. The other boat was in North Dunbar. And, I enjoyed those summers, bein' able to stay with my mother.

MT: What was your mother doing in Baltimore?

EG: My mother was working at the Johns Hopkins Hospital and going to school at night at the Dunbar High School in Baltimore.

Then, I would come back and I remember that when I would come back, it would be real early in the mornin' and that's how I got to really like Shredded Wheat. And, they would always have cereal–Shredded Wheat for me–that early in the morning when I came home. After then, times were–To me, it was very good as a child because we had plenty of food. My grandfather always had a garden, always had, raised hogs and chickens, and they would always get their food in for the winter: flour by the barrel, carry the corn up to which is now Charlotte Hall and have it ground for corn meal. And, he also did, worked in, I guess you call it "share gardening" with a man named Jimmy Jones.

And it was, he planted a lot of vegetables which he sold, and my grandfather and some other men, and the children, would help work this, these gardens and also, thin corn and pick tomatoes. And, my grandmother and another lady, Miss Martha Barnes, used to bake. Make cakes and pies and rolls and sell at Scotland Beach and Point Lookout. There were hotels at both places, but there were also people who had summer cottages, and they would sell the baked goods to the people.

MT: Were there other–How many people were working in that particular garden? You said, share gardening. Did it all belong to–

EG: The one person. It belonged to Jones. He was–He paid them for working and then he would give them vegetables also.

MT: Were there a lot of people working there?

EG: Most of the time, it would be two families because one family–It was a very large family–they had about 16, 17 children, and they worked in the garden. I didn't do too much because my grandfather said I was too little, and I stayed home and fixed lunches and carried lunches to them.

MT: You weren't too little for that?

EG: Wasn't too little for that? But not to be in the gardens picking tomatoes and thinning corn and doin' those kinds of things.

MT: How many years are we talking about?

EG: It lasted until–They were doing–It was going on when I had to leave the area to go to high school, they were still doing it, in the summertime. This is what they did. In the wintertime, my grandfather and grandmother shucked oysters. And then in the summer, they had these crops. And, my grandmother also worked at Point Lookout Hotel, Scotland Beach Hotel and for some of the people who had the summer cottages.

MT: Well, do you feel that times were better or worse than they are now and why? You said it was good times and you had good things to eat and felt cared for.

EG: Yes. Always cared for. Always kept clean. My mother, my grandmother did some sewing. She'd make my dresses and clothes for me to wear. And, well not to say, times, to me, were better in this way: There was a more community cohesiveness than there is now. Nobody wanted for food or even clothes for the children because if other people knew–If other people in the community knew that there was family that was in need, they would get together and help this family and see that they had food, see that the children had clothes. And if there was someone ill in the family, they would always sit up, go and sit with this family and let the family have a chance to rest and sleep. At that time, doctors made house calls, and my grandmother was one that always called on to help with the sick. She was also a mid-, midwife and she delivered quite a few babies–black and white. Some of them are still livin'. And, but, the cohesiveness was there because it was a small community. There weren't too many people who came in the community. There would be, like my mother and aunts and uncles that worked away that would come back. There weren't too many strangers that came here. Most of the strangers would come into, like into the hotels and the cottages in the summertime, but then they would leave in the fall.

MT: And were there families in need? You know, you were talking about that. I mean, you were talking about that. Was there a lot of different economic, maybe, between different families or did families, you know, tend to be of similar economic well being?

EG: Well, it was similar, but the larger families–like this family I was saying had 17, 18 children–there were times that they needs helped because the mother didn't work and it was just the father in the home and the most that he did--that was all to do–would be to shuck oysters and work the farms in the spring, and the other occupation was watering: oystering, crabbing, fishing and those kinds of things. They were right here in the area. You know, there weren't jobs that took you, you know, way off.

Now later, they went over in–it's called–Rock Point in Charles County to shuck oysters. And then, some people went to New Jersey to shuck oysters and to drudge on the boats, but most of it was, you know, right here.

MT: Did most families do a combination of those things?

EG: Yes. Yes. Like, the people who oystered, fished in the summer, crabbed: hard crabs and soft crabs, and they sold those. They sold those, those food items to the hotels, to people that were in the cottages at Scotland Beach and Point Lookout.

MT: And were there many midwives like your grandmother or–?

EG: Yes, there were. Let me see. There were–She was the only one in this area. There was one in St. Inigoes. It was a Carroll. Then, I know there was one in, at Lexington Park. She was a Clayton.

MT: Were there white and black midwives or–?

EG: The only ones I knew about were the black ones. I don't know if–There could have been white ones, but I never heard of any because I know my grandmother went to both black and white, and they wanted my grandmother to get her license as a midwife and she wouldn't because: The difference was if you were a licensed

midwife, you had to go whether a doctor came or not, and my grandmother did not want to go, would not go without a doctor.

MT: Without a doctor?

EG: Without a doctor.

MT: Did she, then, tend to stay after the birth and help?

EG: Yes, she went back. She, sometime I went down with her at night and stayed overnight, and then she'd go back and forth every day until, you know, people were well.

MT: Did those people that are still alive that she delivered know she delivered them?

EG: I don't know, but several of them–I think several of them do because I meet–One or two that I used to meet through some of the mothers in the store, you know, when I was much younger and she says, "Do you remember when you used to stay at my house? Your grandmother delivered my baby?"

And, my mother cooked for a couple, a wedding that my grandmother brought into the world.

MT: Wow!

EG: So.

MT: Okay. This question is: What is your earliest memory? You were talking about the steam ship.

EG: Yeah. That's my earliest–three years old. Yeah. At three is the oldest.

MT: Well, how many summers did you do that?

EG: I did it about, let's see–I did that until I was about seven or eight years old. And then after that, I still went to Baltimore with my grandmother because we always had to have a vacation.

MT: Oh!

EG: And my grandmother's brother, my great-uncle lived in Baltimore. She had two brothers that lived in Baltimore and two sisters that lived in Baltimore, and we would spend the whole summer in Baltimore.

MT: For vacation.

EG: Vacation.

MT: Where was that–You got the shredded wheat on the boat or when you got home?

EG: When I got home.

MT: Alright. Well, describe your relationship with siblings.

EG: Didn't have any.

MT: Didn't have any. Okay.

EG: I didn't have a siblin' until, I guess I was about nine or 10 years old. It wasn't a sibling. My aunt--Nanny Barnes, Maria Barnes–raised my cousin. His mother died at childbirth, and she only had boys. And, the oldest boy was taking care of him and my uncle wanted someone to take him. And, she came from New Jersey and took him and raised him. That was their own child. So, that was the first one I had, you know, anybody to–Yeah.

MT: What church did you go to, your family back then?

EG: Methodist. Well, it's, it's, it's really both because my grandmother was a Methodist. My grandfather was Catholic. At that time, they had to say or promise that their children would be brought up in the Catholic Church. So, my mother and my aunts and uncles were brought up Catholic even though they used to steal down to the Methodist church.

MT: To which church?

EG: St. Luke's. St. Luke's right up here.

MT: And, that was called Scotland?

EG: Um hm. Scotland.

MT: Okay. Okay. Well, what trips did you take? We talked about Baltimore. Were there other trips as a child?

EG: Well, as a child? Baltimore, Anne Arundel County because we had relatives in Anne Arundel County as a child. Mostly, it was Baltimore and Washington because my uncle, my grandmother had a brother in Washington and we used to visit him in Washington. So, Washington, Baltimore because it took, if you went in the car, it took all day to get to Baltimore other than going in the steamboat, it took–You were on the boat all night and got in the morning in Baltimore. So.

MT: The road was different.

EG: Yes. Quite different.

MT: Let's see. How did your parents deal with health and illness? You said that–And, do you remember any special cures? Did your family have a medical doctor? You said the doctor's name. Haskell?

EG: Mr. Haskell. Yeah, Dr. Bean. There's a Dr. Bean and a Dr. Keene (spelling?). Those two doctors, I remember, and they made, they made house calls. Dr. Bean was still making house calls when my first child was born.

MT: And Dr. Bean was white?

EG: Um hm. Both of them were white.

MT: What about any special cures? What about, did you parents, or your family, use any home remedies or special? Did they tend to take care of things themselves and use any home remedies?

EG: I don't know if castor oil is a home remedy! [laughter] Now, but they used that for colds. For fevers, I know they used brown paper dipped in vinegar and put it across the forehead.

MT: Oh! So, you just take brown paper and dip it in vinegar–?

EG: In vinegar and put it across your forehead.

MT: And leave it there for awhile?

EG: Leave it there for awhile. And of course, the fever would dry out the paper, and then they'd keep dippin' and dippin' until, until, until the fever went down. And, Vaseline and sugar for coughs.

MT: What would you do with that: Vaseline and sugar?

EG: Take it. Eat it.

MT: Oh! Another new one!

EG: [laughter]

MT: Vaseline and sugar. They give you spoonfuls of it?

EG: Um hm! And, the spoonful of Vaseline and put the sugar on top of it, coated with sugar. For earaches, you use sweet oil, something like an olive oil. And, they had– My grandfather would go out in the early spring and get sassafrete [sassafras tree], and he'd peal it and make a tea out of it.

MT: The root or bark?

EG: Yeah. The bark.

MT: The bark.

EG: Sassafrete, and make a tea out of it, and it was supposed to be very healthy for you in the spring and ward of, you know, a lot of diseases. Would make you strong.

MT: So, that's some tea!

EG: Yes.

MT: Did they do anything like a mustard plaster?

EG: Yes. Yes, they did mustard plasters and Vicks and, yeah. Yes, the mustard plaster they'd put on your chest and around your waist. Lemon and castor oil and sometime, lemon tea with a little bit of alcohol juice, something in it, and that would make you perspire, and get the fever, get the fever out.

MT: Okay. And, the doctor came when there was something seriously wrong.

EG: Yes, when there was something, you know, very serious, they called for the doctor and he'd come and give you medicine and say you have to stay in or what, like–Let's see. Flu or pneumonia.

MT: Okay. Well, you talked about a couple of things that you did as a child, but what did you like to do the most and why? Activities.

EG: Well really, there wasn't too much to do other than church. I was at Sunday school. We'd had Lawn Fairs. They'd build these–had four posts and would put tires and let the tires burn out on the church grounds, and we'd have booths. And, we would sell lemonade. We had fortune tellin' booths and little arts and crafts that maybe the ladies had made, and we'd sell those. And, there was a May procession, a flag [pause]–We just had it at our church. Wrappin' the Maypole.

MT: Oh. Wrapping the Maypole!

EG: Wrappin' the Maypole, and that was–

MT: For spring.

EG: Yeah.

MT: Now, the posts and the tires: What was the point? You put the tires on the four posts?

EG: Um hm. And they'd light them because that was–

MT: What was the point of burning the tires?

EG: Because that was the light.

MT: Oh, okay!

EG: We didn't have electricity.

MT: That was the light!

EG: That was the light outside for the Lawn Fairs, and they'd sell lemonade and sandwiches, hot dogs and things like that. And then, we used to have Promenades.

MT: And the promenades was described as, a promenade?

EG: Yes. They'd be going. They had that in the hall and it was similar to a, similar to a, similar to a square dance. Two partners, and then they had, basically, a drum,

accordion, and maybe sometime a guitar would be the music for the promenade. And when the set was out, then your partner carried to the table and treated you to lemonade. Five cent a glass, a slice of cake, and those kinds of things, what they had. We used to do that

MT: So, the promenade is a dance with music.

EG: Yes, with music. And then, every year, we had the school was county-sponsored field day, and we would go to one location. All the black children would go to one location and mostly that was Banneker. Where Banneker is now. And, we had dodge ball. There were dodge ball teams, relays, and we would play against, you know, teams, as many teams as there were schools. They would have a dodge ball team, and then we would, you know, whoever was in 1st Place, 2nd Place, 3rd Place.

MT: Pretty much like a modern-day field day that schools have still?

EG: Well, it wasn't exactly because now they have, they do it within their school.

MT: Oh.

EG: Between the–

MT: This was the whole county.

EG: And this was the whole county, and people used to come home for field days as far away as New Jersey

MT: Oh!

EG: For the field day.

MT: It was a big event.

EG: It was a big event. It started in the morning and lasted all day long.

MT: And did you excel at any particular event, yourself?

EG: Dodge ball.

MT: Dodge ball.

EG: And relays. The relay race: We used to have the spoon race. We had the drag race where you put the stick, flag in a Coke bottle and then run back. We had teams for those.

MT: Sounds like fun. What chores did you have to do?

EG: Oh boy!

MT: [laughter] It's a long list.

EG: Well, I had chores to do. As I said, my grandmother and grandfather used to shuck oysters and a lot of times, she'd get up at 3 or 4:00 in the morning, wash her clothes before she went to work, and I would help her. At that time, we had three tubs: the one with the soap and the water on the washboard; then there was the clear water you rinsed 'em in; then there was the blue water. Had bluing that you put in there. That was the last one to make them real, real white. I helped with that. Before I went to school in the morning, I had, I made my bed, I cleaned up, cleaned the livin' room, put oil in the lamps, washed the lampshades. If it looked like it was going to storm, then I picked up chips, brought in wood before I went to school. And of course, always had dishes to wash. At nine years old, I was standing on a box washin' clothes on a washboard.

MT: So, did you ever have–Did you have free time, so to speak?

EG: Oh yes. I had free time. When I came home in the afternoon from school, most of the time, especially in the spring and summer, my grandmother would be home and I used to play to myself. I'd throw the ball up on the house and would be callin' each child's name. I'd be playin' dodge ball and I'd be hitting, but, and, the–And in the springtime, we used to go, my grandmother used to go visiting after we had had dinner and she'd always visit somewhere where there were children, and I'd play with the children while she was visiting, you know, with the adults. So, I had plenty, you know, I had plenty free time even though, you know, I had chores. And, I cleaned.

More older I got, the more chores I had cleanin' the other parts of the house and scrubbing the floors.

MT: How do you feel your parents treated you?

EG: Beautiful. I just had a good time. I enjoyed, I really enjoyed my life.

[End of Side 1, Tape 1 of 2]

[Begin Side 2, Tape 1 of 2]

Sometime, my cousin would come down from Baltimore and spend the summer with us. And of course, they were city children and they knew all the little fancy things to do and I didn't get in trouble until my cousin came down. And one of my cousins came down from Baltimore, and she said that I had done something that I had not done. And my grandfather saw her do it, and my grandmother was goin' to whip me–the little golden rod switch. And then, my grandfather told her that I hadn't done it and then she started after my cousin. And, we had peach trees, pear trees, apple trees, cherry trees in the yard, and she started running all through these trees saying, hollering, "Police. Police." And, my grandmother says, "No police here!" [laughter]

MT: So, did they–If they did discipline you, it would be, you said, a goldenrod?

EG: Goldenrods. You know these little bushes you see, them with the little golden rod, I mean, those yellow flowers.

MT: Okay. Like a forsythia or something.

EG: Yeah, like that, and she would take all the flowers off of it...I didn't get many of those.

MT: What were you disciplined for? Do you remember anything?

EG: I didn't like to wash dishes, and my grandmother would say, you know, "You have the dishes washed." She'd go to a church meetin', and I'd be there with my grandfather, and she said, "I want these dishes washed when I get back." I hated washin' dishes. I still do. [laughter] And I didn't want to wash, and sometime I'd be, go to bed. I'd be in the bed, and she'd get me out of bed and I'd come out and wash those dishes.

MT: What do you, what did they do with you that you remember best, when you think about things you did with your parents?

EG: [pause] Well really, the vacations and visiting, going to visit people where there were children, I liked doing that. And, my grandmother had a Bible History and on Sunday afternoon, if there wasn't any services in the afternoon or evening, she'd read me the Bible History stories. And as I said, visitin' other families where there children so I could play with them and busy goin' to Baltimore. I enjoyed, excuse me, visitin' my uncles with my grandmother.

MT: Did you say, did your grandparents live in the same house with you?

EG: The house I was born in.

MT: In the house. What were all the adults that were there?

EG: My grandmother and my grandfather.

MT: And you.

EG: And me.

MT: Okay. And your mother was in–?

EG: Either in Washington workin', in Baltimore workin' or in New Jersey.

MT: And what about your father?

EG: My father died–

MT: When?

EG: February, and I was born in March.

MT: So, you never really–

EG: I didn't know my father. My mother got married again when I was nine years old.

MT: And then, did he, did your mother's second husband live down here, or did he–?

EG: They both, they lived away. They worked away until they came and worked at the hotel. In the summertime, he was the headwaiter and she was the head chambermaid at Point Lookout Hotel, and I guess when I was about 11, 12 years old, I worked for Congressman Dyer down at the cottage. Another lady workin' there, Miss Louise Burrell [?] then she was, and she did the cookin' and I did the dustin'.

MT: Was that at a separate cottage?

EG: At a separate cottage, yeah. At a separate cottage. And washed dishes.

MT: So, how old were you when you first worked for a wage?

EG: I was about 12 years old.

MT: Okay. Well, let's talk about your formal schooling. How did you get to school?

EG: Well, I walked to school. [chuckle] It was–I walked to school. I walked to the–In elementary school. I started school when I was five years old because my grandmother boarded teachers, and they would sneak me down to the school and unless the Superintendent or visitor was coming, I went to school every day.

MT: And what was your classroom like?

EG: It was a one-room classroom with the long benches where three could sit in a seat, and had a potbelly stove right in the middle of it. And, it's barber shop that's right up here by St. Luke's Church. That was the elementary school.

MT: Okay. And, that's called the Scotland School.

EG: Um hm. That was called the Scotland School.

MT: Do you remember, who was your favorite and your least favorite teacher and why? [laughter]

EG: My favorite was Narissa Louise Talaferra, and she was just so outgoing and made lessons really come alive. She used a lot of art. Like, she did, she did the layout–We did the layout, for a Geography lesson, of St. Mary's College, St. Mary's Seminary at

that time, in clay and plaster-of-Paris. And, just everything she did was picturesque. You could learn to do by doing, and she's the one that really started me thinking about being a teacher.

MT: Inspired you?

EG: She inspired me that much. The least–

MT: And did you have her, then, for a number of years?

EG: Yes, I had her–I graduated from her in 7th Grade.

MT: So, you had her all that time.

EG: Um hm. Yes. And, the least was a Miss Hall from Ohio.

MT: Just got a visual?

EG: [chuckle] She was–She was alright. She was a good teacher, but she was peculiar, very peculiar. She–My grandmother would fix her lunch, and she'd put it in a brown bag and carry it under her arm. And, she thought it was an old maid, or leaning toward being an old maid. And you know, children were like sticks. You know, she didn't have any humor or anything. Everything was just so straight and you have to– If you want to go to the bathroom, which was outside, if you went in at 9:00 in the morning, you didn't come out until 12. And, she was just–I guess she was strict and it was good, but she was, she had a different personality from Miss Talaferra.

MT: What about your least and most favorite subjects and why?

EG: I loved English. I wanted to be an English teacher. I loved Reading and Math. Geography. History–I liked it alright, but I would say that probably would've been my least at that time.

MT: Did you do a lot of reading? Do you–?

EG: I did a lot of reading.

MT: As far as books. And, did you have easy access to books?

EG: Yes, because the teachers that boarded at my grandmother's house, would bring, would ask me what I wanted for my birthday or what I wanted for Christmas. I'd say,

"Books" and they'd give me books. And then, I'd, had a lot of books in the, had books in the school and I'd read those.

I skipped a grade because at that time, you could hear what was going on in the next grade, and I was there at five years. I never was in 1st Grade. So.

MT: So, you were pretty much surrounded by teachers all the time.

EG: Yes. Most of my life I was.

MT: What were your dreams of becoming as a young adult? Did you think, then, about being a teacher?

EG: Always wanted to be a teacher.

MT: What other–Where there other parts of your dream of what you wanted to be? What you wanted to do?

EG: Well, other than being a teacher, I wanted to be an English–I wanted to be an English teacher. I wanted to have been able to have gone Hampton cause I wanted to be a High School English teacher. And of course, at that time, my mother wasn't able to send me to Hampton, at least, because she paid for my high school from the beginning. When I went to Cardinal Gibbons, she paid for my going there at that time. It wasn't that expensive, but she had to pay for it. But when I went to high school in Pomonkey, the County paid for it because they didn't have any place for me to go to high school here. So, they had–Just like they do now when children transfer from another state or another county, they have to pay a tuition. The parents have to pay a tuition unless they have a county-based address. But when they come in like that, they have to pay tuition.

MT: But, they couldn't charge you?

EG: Not me. They charged the County. But, my mother had to pay for my being-living there in the dorm [unintelligible] thirteen. Because, you know, there was a fee for my being there: food and board, sleeping and, you know, and all that, until I finished high school.

MT: And there wasn't a, after 7th grade, right? There wasn't a public–?

EG: There wasn't a public facility.

MT: Okay. As a teenager, did your parents let you court?

EG: [chuckle] Well, as a teenager, most of the times when I went anywhere, I went with my mother and my aunt when they were, you know, around. And, they had dances at St. Peter Claver. There was a hall, that 4th of July and Labor Day, they would have the dances, festivals and they would take me there. My neighbor and I here, as I mentioned before, it was the activities at the church that the, you know, young people had, and there was some young gentlemen who would come down from Ridge and farther up the road down to the church. And, they would walk us, walk me home, behind my grandmother. And if I got too far behind, she called me: [chuckle] "Elvare? Where are you?" [laughter]

And, they used to tease me. They used to tease me awful about that. I really didn't start courting until I was in college. I mean, really, you know, saying I had a boyfriend, when I was in college.

MT: So, there weren't really any young men that came to your house to, when you were living at home, to visit you?

EG: Well, they would come because–See I was, from 13, I was in and out. I wasn't normally home. I was only home at holidays, and there was some–Yeah, there were some young men who would come, but not when I was 13. They would–That's it. I was finishin' high school.

MT: And, what was it like when you first went out on your own? Well, they sent–You kind of did that early, in some ways, but when you really moved away from home, was that–?

EG: My first job? Well, when I first moved away from home, I was 13 and from high school to college. And, my mother was in Washington then, and on most weekends I'd catch the train from Bowie and go into Washington. They were working at a club

in Bethesda, and my mother was doing the cooking and my dad–Of course, it was my stepfather–was chauffeuring. And, I'd go in to Washington just about every weekend.

MT: What was your money situation like then? You were either at school or pretty much with them? What was your money situation like.

EG: Well, it was sort of slim. I had to really budget and my clothes–My mother got my clothes. I came home in the summer. I worked at Point Lookout Hotel as a chambermaid, and that's where I got me first Social Security card. And, the lady was a German Jew, and she paid my Social Security for me, and my money I saved to help buy my clothes to go back to school. And those that I didn't, wasn't able to get, my mother and dad got for me, and my grandmother helped me. And, my mother saw that I had, you know, as well as could be expected. I had spendin' change. And every time I came home, I carried back a care package with a lot of food, as all the other girls did. And, my roommates did and we had extra food. We had movies and things right there at the school. And holidays, I'd go into Washington and we'd go downtown, my mother, and she'd buy my clothes, buy me clothes and all that. But, things didn't cost like they do now and I was pretty well dressed, you know. As well, there were some who were richer.

MT: Washington.

EG: There were some who were richer, you know, and had more and maybe better clothes, but I was adequately taken care of.

MT: And then, what happened when you graduated?

EG: From Bowie?

MT: Yeah.

EG: When I graduated from Bowie, I graduated from a three-year–It was a Normal School, and they were putting on the fourth year. The next year was going to be a college, but my mother had–I mean, she had really worked–Even though I had a nice

stepfather who really helped, she sort of felt that, you know, I was her responsibility and I just felt I wanted to go to work and try to help her and then go back to school after I had gone to work. And, that's what I did. I got a job the first year I came out of school and I taught. It was on the–It was in Oraville. It was at the Gravely Hills [?] School, one of them schools just like I had gone to in the elementary school.

MT: And what year was that?

EG: 1939.

MT: How did you get to your work?

EG: Walked. I didn't have a car and where I was boarding, I paid--I got $65 a month. I paid $20 for room and board, and I would have to–It was way back on the farm, and I would have to have come out to what is now Route 235 in a car to get around to Oraville, but I didn't have a car. So, I walked about two miles and a half to school. And sometimes when it was snowing and that they couldn't see–When I got to the first barn, they couldn't see the top of my head.

MT: How long did that take you then, especially if it wasn't very good weather out?

EG: It took me about an hour. And then, as it became more frequent to me, I could make a little better time.

MT: Well, we've already talked about why you chose that work. Was it difficult?

EG: Yeah. I had seven. I had one-room classroom: 1st to 7th Grades, and I wouldn't call it difficult because I loved it. And, some of the students, 7th Grade students, stood over top of me, especially the boys.

MT: How tall are you?

EG: I'm about 4 foot 11 and a half, and some of the 7th Grade boys were 5 and a half and almost 6 foot tall. And, some of them were kind of hard to handle and I only had to have one child expelled the whole six years I taught at that school. And, he had brought a knife to school and had the knife out and, you know, saying, "Miss Smith, Stanley has a knife." And, he was sitting in the middle, the same long seats with

three in a seat and I asked the boy on the end to get out, to move out, and I just grabbed him by his collar and backed him out the door. And after I'd done it, I was scared to death! [laughter]

And, I called the–Then, they were called truant officers; now they're pupil personnel workers–and I called her and told her what had happened. And she said, "I'll be there in the morning." And, she came in the mornin' and she expelled him.

MT: Have we talked about all the different kinds of work that you did before teaching?

EG: Let's see, because I was down at the–I worked at the cottage for Congressman Dyer and I did chambermaid work before I started teaching, while I was still going to school. After I taught, after I started teaching, in the summertime, I'd come down and help my aunt who was working for John Bean at the restaurant on the water. And, I'd come and wait tables.

MT: Is there anything you'd like to say about what teaching's meant to you?

EG: Oh, it's just, it has meant so very much. The fact that I loved doin' what I was doing and to see children really grasp information and go on, you know, go on with it. And, I think the most rewarding–all of it has been rewarding. The most rewarding has been the years I spent, especially at–

MT: And why is that?

EG: To see those children that were limited be able to grasp enough information to be able to work on their own, to get a job and to work. And, also what's gratifying is that several of my students taught in the same buildin' with me while I was still teaching there. I had several of the children that had graduated, had gone to Bowie, graduated, come back, came back in the county and taught. And that was–I just was so happy that I had had a part of their lives.

MT: Well, you talked about–which, I'm amazed, you remembered how much you made that first--

EG: Oh yeah!

MT: That first job, and what about–The question is, How much money did you make? It might be interesting to compare what you were making when you started and when you finished, if you want to.

EG: Oh gez.

MT: But, that's not necessary. So, what were you making there at that first–?

EG: $65 a month. And by the time they took out, I got $62.50 by the time they took out retirement and all that, and I paid $20 to the lady I was boardin' with, a month. So, it left me $42. [chuckle]

MT: Okay. What do you remember about your wedding? Changing subjects.

EG: Okay.

MT: When did you marry?

EG: I've been married twice.

MT: Oh!

EG: I married in '41, 1941 was my first marriage. It was the lady that I was boarding with–It was her son. He seemed to have wanted a marriage of convenience, and I was too young to know the difference. I stayed married six years, and then we separated and eventually got a divorce, and then I remarried. And, this is where my children were born.

MT: And, how did you meet your–How did you meet your–Well, we know you met your first husband. What about, how did you meet your second husband?

EG: On the Greyhound bus. I was going to Washington. At that time, there weren't, there were no beauticians here, so I was going to Washington to get my hair done, and this young man was on the bus. And, we started talking. He knew my aunt. He knew my mother. My mother had moved home then. She was living here, and he knew–He knew all of my family. And, we started talking and then he said, "Maybe when you get back in the county, maybe I could take you to a movie?"

And I said, "Maybe."

MT: [laughter]

EG: I didn't see him anymore for about three weeks and then I was staying with my–I had moved back home and was staying with my grandmother. And, a knock came on the door and this young man was–It was this young man, and we went out together, I guess, about a year and a half and then we married. He was here from Florida on the Base, workin' on the Base as a cement finisher.

MT: How had he gotten to know your family?

EG: Because see, he was–He came here when the Base first started and I wasn't living here then, so he got to know my aunt and my mother and my dad and all of them.

MT: Did the people who came to work on the Base, then, mix a lot with the community, and was the usual thing–that they got to know the people?

[End of Side 2, Tape 1 of 2]

[Begin Side 1, Tape 2 of 2]

MT: Maybe people in the community.

EG: Okay. They had a bar and they also boarded several of the men who moved into the area to work on the Base, and a lot of them, you know, stayed other places because there wasn't any place on the Base for them to stay. And at that time, my husband was livin' in Washington and rather than travel back and forth to Washington, they boarded at different, you know, different homes.

MT: Okay. Why did you decide to get married?

EG: He was just a nice, young man and I was still young and I didn't want to be alone. He just a nice, nice person. He was older than me, but he was very, very protective and very loving.

MT: What was your honeymoon like?

EG: Which one? [laughter]

MT: Oh, well. Either one! [laughter] What were your honeymoons like? [laughter]

EG: Okay. My honeymoon: We went to New Jersey and Delaware is where we spent our honeymoon, and it was very nice.

MT: Sort of the traditional–

EG: Yeah. Yeah. Um hm.

MT: Okay. Big question: What has your family life been like: your marriage, your relationship with your spouse, relationship with your children and your grandchildren? How would you describe your family life?

EG: Well, it's, it's–My relationship with my husband was **very** good. We–Of course, we didn't see eye-to-eye to everything, but we always worked things out. Everything was always worked out. Even with the children, when the children came, there was the punishment or what have you, if there had to be one, a punishment. If I said, "No," then it was no if they wanted to do something. If he said, "No," then it was no. We were always on the same wavelengths, as far as the children were concerned, and they–Later one, they respected that. Of course, there were children and they tried to play one against the other, but they found out that they couldn't get anywhere doin' that. And, we really had a very good relationship. Very good relationship as a family.

My oldest boy went to–Now they call it UMES, but at that time was Maryland State–University of Maryland, Eastern Shore. He went there and he graduated from there. And, Alonzo went to electronics school in Baltimore and he graduated from there. And, Bernadette was at Morgan when my husband died. She hadn't graduated. And, they have been, the children have been protective of me. Not because they're my children, but I couldn't want any better children anywhere. They–

MT: When was that when your husband passed away?

EG: '73.

MT: And she was at–

EG: She was at Morgan.

MT: And, your oldest son's name?

EG: Robert James.

MT: And what does he do?

EG: He's the Personnel Supervisor at the Board of Education in Prince George's County.

MT: And, Bernadette and Alonzo both live in St. Mary's County?

EG: Yes, and Liza, my baby girl. Yeah. They all live in St. Mary's.

MT: Okay. And, what does she do? She and Bernadette.

EG: Well, Bernadette–oh boy. What does she do? Bernadette is in Personnel at Southern Maryland Electric-SMECO-but that's not the name of her job. She's in–I know she's in Personnel there...And my baby girl, she is not as smart–I said, she was my [pause]–[sigh]–I don't know what I call, but she, she doesn't grasp as–She didn't grasp as fast as the others, and she finished high school and she worked on Base for quite a few years. And then, she married. She has two children. Her husband walked off and left her.

I bought a home in South Hampton because it was close to the church, and there was a lady who lived there who was very closed to her, and she's livin' there. She's now looking for work.

MT: But really, the relationship with all of your children is good.

EG: Oh yes, yes. Very, just very good. Alonzo didn't want me to go to Israel.

MT: He was worried?

EG: So, he said, "Mom, they're doin' this over there and they're doin' that over there," and I said, "Well, let's leave it in the Lord's hands."

MT: Okay. And, what about your grandchildren? Do you want to say anything about your grandchildren? Do you see them all?

EG: Oh yes. I have nine grandchildren. One grandchild, his daughter is teaching in Prince George's, and she's getting her Masters in the spring in Counseling, in a few months, to be a counselor. And, Alonzo's daughter is graduating from Bowie in the spring, and she has a computer. She wants to work with that.

Then, I have–What's the next one? Bernadette's children, I think, are the next. And of course, she has the son that speaks–He's a junior: Great Mills High School. Marcus–7th Grade–Spring Ridge. Marisa is 3rd Grade at Ridge School, and my daughter up in Lexington Park has two children. They go to Carver. One's in the 3rd Grade and one's in the 5th Grade. And, it's a beautiful relationship, you know, between all of the grandchildren and basically, just the whole family. Marisa thinks she owns me, but [laughter]--

MT: What's the 3rd Grader's name at Carver?

EG: Sierra Smith.

MT: Okay. Let's see. Where are we? What part has religion played in your life? What church do you attend? And, we'll just start from there.

EG: Okay. I now attend Zion United Methodist Church, and religion plays a major part of my life. I was the lay member to the Annual Conference for several years and now I'm an alternate lay member to the conference. I'm a President of the adult choir. I'm chairman of our Worship Committee. I'm a lay speaker and a lay member, lay leader of the church, and I just go and–I belong to the United Methodist Women's Group, and I just go all over with them--Missouri, Kansas–to different conventions. And, I just–Without the Lord in my life, I don't know what would happen. I don't know what would have happened when I lost, when my husband died in '73 with a daughter still in college. Our daughter still in school, elementary and grade school. Granddad wanted to stop school and go to work, and I said, "No, because the Lord was going to–He would make a way for us."

And so, I came home on Sunday morning from church--and the porch was not closed in then, and I sat right on the cement steps and asked the Lord, you know, "Show me the way. What's goin' to happen? How 'my goin' do it?" And, I just asked him, you know, I said, "Whatever you revealed to me, this is the way I'll go."

So, that Monday morning, I call Morgan and–Well, they knew what had happened, and I said, you know, asked them if they didn't have any kinds of scholarships or anything, you know, that could help my daughter finish school. And they say, "No, but I tell you. You have a bank in your area that will give, will help you, will help your daughter."

And, you know, I thanked them very much, and I got on the phone and started calling. I called First National in Lexington Park first,. And they told me they did have a program, but it wasn't in Lexington Park. It was in Leonardtown. So then, I called Leonardtown and they told me, indeed, they did have a program, and I, you know, told them what had happened. And, I wanted my daughter to finish school. She wanted to finish school, and he said, "When will she be home again?" I don't– Right now, I don't remember when the next holiday was coming up, but I told him, and he said, "When she comes home, have her call."

And I said, "Do I need to come with her?"

She said, "No. Have her come." And, she went up there and they approved money for her to finish school, you know, for that year; and then the next fall, she went back, and they told her that she did not have to start paying the money back until she had gotten a job in which she graduated for.

And of course, that didn't happen right away. She substituted at Green Holly. She was long-term substitute at Green Holly for a good while. And then, she went into SMECO and she applied. And, they were rebuilding or redoing something to the offices, and she met with the lady, and she told her that she had a job and not to get discouraged because they were renovating and had to do some things. And just about

every two weeks, she would call and say, "Is she alright? What is she doing? Tell her we, she still, she will still be hired." And eventually, she was hired. She's been there ever since.

So, I knew, I know that it was my faith and God's help that made this come about. And everything that I have tried since my husband died, it has always come out alright. I'm not saying I always did it all. My children helped me, you know, quite a bit. And whatever I wanted to do, I talk it over with them and they say, "Well, Momma. We can do it." And without the Lord, I wouldn't be anything. I don't know where I'd be or what I'd do. And, I had that faith that with Him, all things are possible.

MT: Well, what communities do you participate in? [chuckle]

EG: [laughter]

MT: Well, are there any you don't? Well, church activities, I think you've talked about. What other club activities and special organizations like that?

EG: Well, I'm a member of the Hospital Auxiliary. I'm the Membership Chairman of the Hospital Auxiliary. I am a LINK. I can't remember.

MT: How about retired teacher?

EG: Retired Teachers Association. Past President of the Retired Teachers Association. I'm a member of SALT: Seniors–It's an organization that helps, helps seniors become aware of their surroundings and how they can be helped. It's under the Aging, under Aging, and the Sheriff's Department is a part of it also. Triad, another Triad is SALT: Seniors [pause]. Can't remember those names. But anyway, I am a member of that. As I said, the church activities. I'm a member of the activities in the church. I'm always going. Where am I always going?

MT: What about NAACP?

EG: NAACP.

MT: Could I ask you a question about that?

EG: Um hm.

MT: I've heard that NAACP used to be more active as a group here in the County than right now. Do you have any comments on that?

EG: Well, same in the–I don't know. Most of the younger people or what the NAACP was started in this county by a minister, Reverend Richard Johnson, and it seems all the church people joined the NAACP. And now, it seems that even if they joined, even if they had joined, they don't participate as they should until something happens. I don't know why. I have no idea why they don't.

I'm past Matron of the Eastern Star. And, most of my activities, really, are around the church area, and–

MT: And family.

EG: Yeah, and family, doin' that.

MT: How do you feel about life, in general, today? In what ways is it different from the way it used to be? Is the quality of life better or worse now? Why? Whatever comes to your mind in that area.

EG: In some instances, life is better where there's been much improvement in the way of life. Yet, I don't see the closeness of communities as they used to be. Maybe it's because the communities have grown so much larger and many people moving in the different areas, but it doesn't seem to be the caring in the communities that it used to be. Everybody's on, going on their own little turf. I'm goin' this way, and it's–I'm here in need. Well, you know, I'm sort of still going. It doesn't seem to be that closeness.

MT: What are some of the improvements you're talking about, the ways things are better?

EG: Well, for instance, jobs. There are better jobs. Improvement in the area: building, living, living quarters, you know. More people have homes, buying homes. Lot of times, then, people lived on people's farms, had a home, a house on the farm. They didn't own their own homes, and this–And see, a lot of young people, younger

people, you know, are becoming homeowners. And, but, I just, you know, sometimes wonder why, you know, they just seem to get so far apart, as far as caring for one another.

MT: Are you thinking about people, in general, you know, American society, or thinking specifically in terms of a part of society, or this community, or African Americans?

EG: I'm thinking about American society. Afro-Americans and this community–St. Mary's County.

MT: Are people–So, one of the questions is: Are people different from the way they used to be? And so, you see definitely that difference in that people don't seem to connect.

EG: Just don't feel connected, you know, as they did. Like somebody's sick: "Oh, you know so-and-so's sick and in the hospital," or they're sick. "Oh, are they? How long have they been sick? Oh, I'm sorry," but they go on their merry way. Like, one time, if somebody was sick, "Oh, who's home with those children? Who's doin' for those children? How they bein' taken care of? What can I do to help them?"

MT: Especially, concern for the children.

EG: Yes.

MT: Do you think that the gains of the Civil Rights Movement, or the Civil Rights Movement have had an effect on the cohesiveness–the kind of thing you're talking about–in the African American community? Or, has that impacted it? And if so, how?

EG: It has. It has somewhat. In some areas, it has brought them closer together even if it's just by talkin' about it.

MT: Talking about it.

EG: Just by talkin' about it, but–and it has, in some instances, it has–It has brought them closer but got a long ways to go.

MT: I guess I should back up and say, I mean, do you think that those, that there are gains.

EG: There are some gains.

MT: From Civil Rights?

EG: Yeah. There are some gains, but there's room for a lot more.

MT: And what do you see as some of those, what you consider some of those gains, and what do you see as the most needed to be done?

EG: Well, back to the caring and sharing and being more close like a close-knit family. I'm not talkin' just about Afro-Americans. I'm talkin' 'bout all people. I'm talkin' 'bout all people. I dread to think that the Afro-Americans that they would, oh, they would all come together and they would share and leave everybody else out. I'd like to see people getting along together as people regardless of color. Sharing with one another, regardless of color. Doing things together, you know, regardless of color.

I know Father–I don't think you were here. I don't know whether you know or not. Father–Oh, I can see him so plain. Well anyway, his name will probably come to me. He tried a 1st District Community Organization for Caring & Sharing, and it was, you know, it was going rather nicely, but it seemed to be going down the path of, you know, "I'll share with you." It was not spreading out to the community. The–Alright. They said, "Sure! Come to my house for coffee at Christmastime. Come to my house for coffee." And of course, she didn't think I was going to come to her house for coffee, but I went there Christmas mornin' for coffee, but she never returned. She never came to my house. And, it seems as though they were, they were saying–Well, at least one lady said, "I don't think white and black should marry." It wasn't for that! It was for comin' together, learnin' more about each other because I feel that the race relations bit is because of no communication. You don't know how I am, what I feel until you can talk to me; I can talk to you, and we can see that maybe we have the same, common ideas, the same things. We're still striving for the same things.

MT: Well, that was–Okay. That was the dream and the goal with integration of the schools is one of the main, right?

EG: Yes, right.

MT: I thought one was parity, I mean, central equality.

EG: Yes.

MT: But the other one was that the white children and black children would go to the same schools–

EG: Yes.

MT: And they would get to know each other.

EG: Know each other.

MT: Out of that, integration.

EG: Integration. Yes.

MT: Well, a lot of people feel very–A lot of African Americans feel, especially I think, that that hasn't happened and in fact, that African American students are being– There's a disservice to them because they're not getting the kind of nurturing and support that they did from their black teachers at schools.

EG: Black teachers.

MT: And that I think a lot of people feel, basically, that what was hoped for was integration and the students being together has not, in fact, paid off. So now, it seems like we're at this point where people are thinking, "Well, segregation obviously was not good. Integration has not worked. Okay." So, what do you think about that?

EG: I think, I think one of the major problems is that we don't have enough black teachers in the schools. I don't know for what reason, but some of the white teachers are afraid of the Afro-American students.

MT: The students.

EG: They seem to be afraid. And then, some of them teach and they are not getting to the black students. One thing is the curriculum. There's not enough, especially in the History and the Sciences, about black people that have really made it, and some of these, some of the black students get: "All we do is talk about the white people," you

know, "having only one month out of a year, we talk about the black people and their achievements." And, that's the month of February. So, I don't–I mean, I see it that you can't point your finger and say, "Well, this is the problem right here." The problem is sort of multiplied that more–There's more than one thing that has to happen to be integrated and the curriculum, with the teachers, and with the students because–I mean, these things that are happening in February that has happened, the things that are continually happening with both black and white. Same with the athletes. Major things are happening. The Colonel Davis–the stamp: They're, you know, coming out with a stamp for him. Brigadier General stamp. Why isn't this in the books?

MT: So, there's still a lot that needs to be done.

EG: A lot needs to be done. A whole lot needs to be done, and I think this will make the children feel more comfortable. The children are more comfortable; the teachers will be more comfortable and feel that they can, you know, can really teach and reach the students.

MT: Of course, a lot of the schools really are kind of de-facto segregated right now, too, because of the housing patterns.

EG: And the redistricting, like Hollywood Elementary. Very few black students in that school.

MT: Oh, around here.

EG: Very few. Very few in the classes, and it's really not pure integration. And, they keep, every once in awhile, they redistrict. And the more they redistrict, the more they segregate.

MT: What do you think are the biggest obstacles to the kinds of things that need to be done, like the curriculum revision?

EG: Money, I guess. The finances. You know, they have a priority. I mean, they have something. This is what will be done and then, they don't have the say like they used

to have the say. The school, the superintendent, and the Board of Education–They sort of have to do what the commissioners dictate to them to do, where to spend their money, and so, it's just a vicious cycle.

MT: And there's less and less money.

EG: And less and less money.

MT: Do you know what the proportion of black teachers is in St. Mary's County to white teachers?

EG: No, I don't know, but I know it's a poor ratio. Very poor ratio.

MT: Okay. We were talking about if people are different than they used to be, and we've talked, you've talked about that quite a bit. What about teenagers, specifically? It says: How are the teenagers in St. Mary's County today different from when you were a teenager?

EG: Oh boy! [laughter]

MT: And what do you think are the cause of these changes?

EG: They are quite different. One thing is because there are so many one-parent families, and I really think that is one of the major, you know, causes. And even in the two-parent families, they both have to work to make it. And then, the children are sort of left on–the latchkey children. Wherein when I was comin' up, when I came home, my grandmother and grandfather was home. A lot of these children let themselves in and then they're there, maybe, two hours, maybe three hours before the parents come. Discipline is another.

MT: Lack of?

EG: Lack of discipline because the children know now, I mean, unless it started from a cradle with the discipline–Not harsh discipline. I don't mean beating or anything, but to, you know, when I say, "No," that means no. And, they, and now they've come out with this, You can't touch them. You can't look at them real hard, and then they've gotten to know that if the mother–Now, the mother–"If you hit me, I'm goin'

to report me," or "If you don't let me do this, I'm goin' report you." And, I think that has been the, really, failing of our young people in the society–the discipline issue and the one-parent families.

MT: Or, the parents are away.

EG: And the parents are away. The latchkey children: They just come in. They do what they want to do. Now, I'm not saying all of them are like that, but the majority of them that, you know, have this freedom and it's–And, I think the, taking the discipline away from the teachers and the principals and even from the parents because some of 'em have maybe there's been a father in the home and the father has gone off. And now, the mother's left there with this discipline to do. And if they're boys, and even if they're girls, you know, some of them tell them what they can do and what they won't do and, I mean, you know. It's just, I think–And when I was comin' along, you did it. There was no ifs, ands, and buts about it. You did what you were told to do.

MT: Do you have any ideas about why that's changed so much? I mean, in terms of just, are the parents just not there to do the disciplining or did they choose not to do it for some reason?

EG: Well, some of them choose not to do it. Some of them are weak, 'specially mothers with boys. Some of them are afraid, and–

MT: Maybe there's something in the children themselves that's really different.

EG: Yes, that's different. The way they being brought up–I mean, little children. When I was taking a counseling course at Bowie, we went over to–One of our assignments was to go over to Crofton and talk to parents, and some of the parents would say they had two year-old children that they couldn't do anything with! And, I just got my mouth open and I said, "I don't believe what I'm hearing." Two years old. I thought it was bad enough for Kindergarten children to be expelled, but they talkin' about two year-old children and see, that's–This is where it's starting. Down so young.

MT: I mean, was that recently? When was that?

EG: Oh, that was back in there. When was that when I come to student personnel? That was back in the 70's.

MT: Okay. So, it's was then.

EG: It was back in the 70's. And then, at, was it Lisa this morning? If she was talking about children bullying, being bullied at school and children are afraid to go to school, the real little, and the little ones, and here was a little 1st Grader that was being expelled! And now, there's something wrong somewhere.

When we came along, discipline was handled in the home. A child wasn't sent to school for the teacher to discipline. This was done in the home and I think there's been a fallacy in upbringing and the way children are taught in the home now. There's so many things–They're allowed to do so many things. They have too much freedom. Number one, starting with the TV. And when it's just one-parent family, they don't know what the children are looking at. They don't know what they're seeing. And, they have to work. So, I think it's the home. It's in the home. It's the home situation. It's out of the cradle, out of the crib. It's: Now, I'll wait until you're three or four, but you can't wait that long anymore. You can't wait. Didn't wait with us.

MT: That's part of the lack of time spent with them.

EG: Yes. Could be that. And then when they go to school, if I went–If we went to school and we came back and say we were punished at school, when we got home we were punished again. And, don't come back–Don't say, "I didn't do this." But now, they come to school and say, "My mom said you better not hit me. My mom said this. My mom said the other." And then, this is what is frightening teachers. This is what is frightening.

MT: ...the parents and the teachers are on opposite sides.

EG: Opposite sides. Opposite sides. There isn't any working relationship between the parents-

[End of Side 1, Tape 2 of 2]

[Begin Side 2, Tape 2 of 2]

EG: They'll be there when your children get out of school because she visited the school. She had, she asked for conferences with them. You know, "Explain this to me. Why isn't this happening? What can I do to make it happen?" And, once the parents used to go to the PTA meetings. The PTA meetings has taken–Once the PTA meetings was for the parents, you know: "What can we do to make the school better?" The teachers would tell them. You know, "We'd like this happen in our classrooms," but now they're gone off on psychology and philosophical things. Parents don't understand what they're talking about, so they don't go because elementary–The PTA's in elementary schools used to be packed. They used to be packed in the high schools. Parents came to find out what was going on and what they could do to help. They built schools like that. The first Jarboesville School was built. It was done by the parents. Children bought bricks. They had a brick contest, and they said some of the students were taking bricks out of their parents' chimneys [laughter] to build this first Jarboesville High School! Parents and teachers worked together.

One thing that it seemed sort of harsh, a lot of work at that time, but I still, I said, you know, I don't think that should have been taken out. We had, the teachers had this register that–We used to keep the old register, we had to visit each child's home twice a year, and we had to check that we had visited that home. Times–Things are better now that they have breakfast for some of the children, but some of those

children came to school with nothing to eat. So, how were they going to learn? If you can get in that home and see what's going on, get a feel for what's happening in their home, then you can better teach that child.

MT: It's almost like, again, that lack of connection.

EG: Yes. Yes. It's, you know, it's just no communication between the parents and the teachers. And, I'm not saying it's all the teachers' fault because parents have to, you know, you have to know what's going on. I want to know what's goin' on with my child. I have to know. And when the report cards come home, it's the same thing. They don't, you know, try to get a conference with the teachers to find out what this child has a C or a D or an, especially an E...When school closes, when the time's for the last report card, then that's when they get anxious. It's, "My child not goin' to pass? Why isn't my child going to pass?" From September to June, they haven't been concerned about it at all.

MT: Almost like our students today. [laughter]

EG: [laughter] I mean, it's, it's, you know, it's just–And then, when Bernadette didn't get any _answers, she went to the Superintendent or to the Supervisor, those in high school. But–

MT: There aren't many parents like that?

EG: There aren't. I don't know if they, but you can't be too busy for your children. You can't get too busy for them. They can't raise themselves. Many of them are.

MT: We're not taking care of our children.

EG: No. No.

MT: Okay. Are race relations different today in the county? How and why? The other question is: What was segregation like? Were you ever afraid of a person or group practicing hate?

EG: I think race relations has come a long way, and I think the reason is because of the people coming in. They have helped change race relations. I know some people have

been changed. And you know, some people cover a lot. I never knew the difference between white and black. I came from a community or a state or a county where we all just, you know, was one–We didn't see color. And, I know that there's some people that had moved in the county that are like that.

And, segregation was–It was really tough. It was. It was, and the fact that it went from the churches where it shouldn't have been. I went to a funeral at a Catholic church and my grandmother always–Well, we were made to, I guess, cause if I could have, I would have sat in the back, but she made up come up front. We could not turn around in church. You know, if the door opened, we focused on what was in front of us and what was going on in front of us. When they came to the–Well, I didn't have any better sense, I walked on up front in church and I sat down. And, they just kept lookin' at me. "Where is this animal come from? Where is she goin'? What is she doin' there?" And, a nun, when we went to give the peace offering, I put out my hand, she would not take it. She was a nun. She would not take it.

And, there was the movies was segregated. Had to go up the back steps. I didn't go up it but once though. I had come home from high school and this young man wanted to take me to a movie. My grandmother said I could go, and we went in Leonardtown right on the corner. And, he was going around the side. I said, "What are we goin' round here for?"

He said, "This is the way we have to get to the movie."

I said, "Why can't we go in that front door?"

He said, "We can't go in the front door." Well, he had come all the way to Leonardtown, down here, to take me back to Leonardtown to the movies. So, I went. I went up these long steps. I said,--I can't say I enjoyed the movie cause I was–I was tight. I was so tight up in my chest. And I said, "But I appreciate, you know, you

takin' me, but don't ask me to come here again to a movie. I will not climb those steps."

The hospitals.

MT: Well, had you been to the movies before and gone in the front way or–?

EG: No. I'd never been there.

MT: You'd just never been there.

EG: I just never been to that movie cause I always went in Washington to the movies.

MT: Oh okay. They were not segregated?

EG: They were not, but they were–Well, the Howard Theater, mostly the black people went to it. Very seldom saw any white people in there, but I always went to a movie in, in Washington when I, when I went to a movie, or Baltimore.

And, the hospitals: You had to go up the back steps to go into the hospitals. The stores. And right up here to Raley's. It's not where it is now. It's where the True Value is. That was the store. Before they built that new store, it was another store there, and they had over the door–They had a little bar, a little room that was a barn over there said, "White only." And one day, I was curious. I said, "I'm going to see what's in here," and I went in there. It was so dark. You could hardly see a person in the bar. It was so dark. And then, I came out and the person who owned it–It wasn't the people who are here now. It was his brother in-law that owned it, and he said, "May I help you?"

I said, "No." I said, "I just wanted to know what was in there that only the white people could have."

And he said, "You want something?"

I said, "Oh no. I don't want anything out there, " and I said, "I just wanted to see for myself."

And, you know, things were just–They were segregated and just in those instances that I mentioned because I could go into a home when I was little girl with

my grandmother and play with the white children, slept with the white children when she went to deliver a baby. And, but, I knew it was here. I knew segregation was here.

MT: But that was, that changed when you got to a certain age or–?

EG: Well.

MT: I mean, was that something that was okay because you were a kid, because you were a child?"

EG: Well, I guess it was okay cause I was a child. Yes, it changed when I got older. It changed when I got older. And when back into the county to teach, it was good here.

MT: Let me ask one thing. When you said that you went to the Catholic Church and you said that you went down front and you couldn't turn around and look. Did–?

EG: No, no. When I was in my church, my mother, my grandmother taught us. When I said "taught us" would be whatever children were there. You didn't turn around in church.

MT: Okay.

EG: Okay. But when I went to this Catholic church to this funeral, I went on down front and they looked at me as if to say, "What is she doin' goin' down front?" And then, when they give the peace sign and I turned to give my hand to the nuns, she wouldn't take it.

MT: Well, when did those, when did things really start changing in the county?

EG: Oh, I was in the–In some places, it hasn't changed. Over in the 7th District hasn't changed too much.

MT: Like where?

EG: Clements and, what else is over there? Clements and [pause]. Not Longview because that is mostly a black community.

MT: You mean like the restaurants and things like that?

EG: Well, the restaurants is changed. The restaurants have changed.

MT: ...changed much.

EG: The people. Some of the people. Did you go to the forums that they had at Leonardtown High School? Well, there was a red, several rednecks in a group that I was in, and they are the same. I went to a home to get children to be vaccinated because they had not been vaccinated and they'd been comin' to school. And, the time was out. They had to be vaccinated. And, I went over there and I had been talkin' to the mother about the children had to be vaccinated before they came back to school. And if they didn't hurry and be vaccinated, then I'd have to take them to court. And, these are little children. And this day I went over there, the father was home. Very tall man. And when I drove up, he came to the car. And I said, "Mr. So-and-so," I said, "I came to see if you had appointments for your children to be inoculated."

And he said, "No, and they're not going to be."

Then I said, "Are you ready to go to court?" I said, "Because they've been out of school too long. The time is up. They either have to be inoculated or we go to court."

"No nigger, so-and-so nigger's goin' to carry me to court!"

And I said, "Alright. I'll give you until Monday. If those children are not in Dynard School on Monday, we go to court." I started the car up. He was still swearin' and I started the car up, and I just left. I went back to Dynard and I told them what I had happened. I said, "I'm calling over here Monday. If the children are not in school, then we go to court."

And the little lady, she seemed to be, she tried to nice, but she was scared. She was scared of that man, and I said–She calls me. I don't know where she was, but she calls me, and she said, "Miss Gaskin?"

I said, "Yes."

She said, "My sister's going to have them inoculated."

I said, “When is it going to happen?”

“She’s going to carry them to the doctor Monday.”

I said, “Alright.” I said, “Alright. I’m waiting until Monday’s over.”

I called Dynard on Monday and the sister had had them inoculated and brought ‘em into school. And, you know, it’s still–You can see them. And I said, I’m sure there’s some in the other areas of the county, but I know that there’s some, there’s still some in the 7th District. I had one call me at the office and said, “My child needs shoes.”

I said, “Alright.” I said, “When can the mother go with me?” I said, “I’ll gladly pick up the child and carry him.”

She said, “What color are you?”

I say, “Green.”

MT: [laughter]

EG: I mean, you know. It’s still–It’s still in the county. They’re trying. Some of them are really, really trying. Now, I know, like the store [Buzzy's]up here: They were–No-No-Raley's. They were really, the older, the parents, but those boys have brought them around. They have brought them around, and as my grandmother used to say, “It’s just as much different between them as chalk and cheese for what they used to be.”

And see, that was the thing: If you get the children together, because it was coming from the parents to the children. Those children, those little children in 1st Grade. Now, what do they know about color? Children are children. And–

MT: So...that’s Buzzy's store that still has a colored flag in there.

EG: Oh yes. I don’t even go to Buzzy’s cause a number of years–

MT: I went in there once.

EG: [laughter] Off the record!

MT: Off the record, yeah.

EG: They just, I mean–No. And, we have his daughter on the Board of Education.

MT: Oh really?

EG: God, what's her name? One of the new ones elected to the Board. Lila, her husband teaches at Esperanza.

MT: Don't remember the name. Well, it's said, "You can change the locks, but it's hard to change the keys. But, that's good. You feel there are people who really have changed.

EG: Have changed. Yeah, there are people that have changed because, you know, you go into the hospital–Bernadette was in the hospital being operated–She had been operated on, and Dr. Bean was with another patient. They had the curtain drawn and I could hear him say, "Well, she has a right to be here. Color has nothing to do with it. She has the right to be here."

I said, "Oh, she doesn't want to be in here with my daughter." So, the next day I came, she was sitting in the chair and I said, "Lord, please forgive me," but I went over to her and I said, "How are you feeling? Are you feeling alright?" She said–I said, "Or are you feeling better?"

She didn't say anything. And, I put my hand down, what-you-call-them, I said, "Now if you goin' away from here because of my hand on you, you goin' right me a day." And, I put my hand on her, and she said, "I feel much better. I feel much better."

And I said, "Lord, I hope she isn't havin' a heart attack." [laughter]

Now, when I went to Israel, the same thing happened. We were sitting–We were in El, El El flight. There were three in a seat: There was a white lady sitting here, I had the middle seat and a white man over here, and the white lady tried to get the stewardess to move her, and they wouldn't move her. They kept saying, "No." Then, she got to one of the men and she asked him to move her, and they didn't move her. They said, "No, you have to sit there. That's your seat." And so, we went on,

during the night, and you know, the tray that comes down in front of you? She had pulled that down and she was–[moaning sound] I said, "I hope she's alright." I took my hand and put it around her neck. I said, "Are you feeling alright? [laughter}

"Oh, yes, yes, yes. I'm just–I'm just tired."

I said, "Oh, I thought maybe you weren't feeling well."

MT: Did she pull away?

EG: She pulled away first, and I talked to her just as softly. I said, "I thought maybe you weren't feeling well."

MT: Do you think that–Is it more of a challenge or is it more because you think that will really help, somehow? I mean, is it a challenge to them to touch them or is it because you think that touching them will really–? Even if it is a challenge, it's helpful, but I mean–Or, do you think that's because they'll feel differently just by doing that?

EG: I, I, I really think that if you can touch them and they know, feel that you are a caring person or that you care, that it changes, it changes them. Because when they brought us breakfast, she said, "Do you like everything you have on there?"

I said, "Not exactly."

She said, "Would you want them to get you something else?"

I said, "No. Thank you just the same."

MT: Okay. When you said–I couldn't hear the word. When you said, you know, in the hospital, that you touched them and you said, "I hope you don't–?

EG: No. I said, "I hope you're feeling better. Are you feeling better?"

MT: Kind of interesting why the words–

EG: Well, you know, because, I said, "I hope this doesn't give her a heart attack."

MT: [laughter] That's great. Okay. Well, how do you feel about living in the county? You obviously chose to live here. If you lived in a city, which do you like best and why?

EG: I like the country. I never liked the city because I always was afraid in the city. It's quiet and you get to know people. There's a little bit of closeness although it's not as close as it used to be, but I just feel a little freer in the country. I never did even want to live in the city even though I went there for vacations. But when that was over, I was ready to come home. I didn't even want to go to Lexington Park. I don't want to live in Lexington Park. [laughter]

MT: [laughter] Okay. Well, that's important. Okay. So, you like the differences between–Do you think the people are different?

EG: I think they live a faster life.

MT: I mean, in terms of in the county or in the country versus in--?

EG: I think there's a difference. There's a difference in cities. Like, you can see the difference in people, especially in the children that come from the city, you know, that move in the area. If they stay here long enough, you know, they get used to being in the country, but there's a difference between city people. And country mouse and city mouse. [laughter]

MT: What do you think of the direction the county is going in today?

EG: I don't-I think people, people don't have much to say about what's going on as they used to. Like, for, but they seem to be coming back to it somewhat as to rules and regulations, government. You know, people are not informed. Things have been done before they been informed about it. Things have happened that, you know, weren't aware of it. Could be our fault, the people's fault, as well, but, excuse me, there are some things that, you know, is being done. And I guess, they can't wait to inform you about everything because of the size, you know, the way the county's growing. But, there's, there's not as much cohesiveness as there used to be.

MT: How have you contributed to the county through your work, paid and volunteer? Your family, your citizenship, your politics, your values?

EG: Oh, I belong to a Democratic Party, too. I forgot all about the Democratic Club. I knew there was another meeting I was going to.

MT: I also asked what recognitions, awards and certificates have you achieved?

EG: Oh boy!

MT: It could take the rest of the tape here.

EG: [chuckle] I--Oh, I think I've made a difference in the county by my working with the children, with families. I've taught quite a few children in the county. I work with quite a few families. I worked in Juvenile Court for 10 years. I was the link between the Court, Juvenile Court and Board of Education. I went every Friday to Juvenile Court and worked with the children that had problems with Juvenile Court. And, I think I've helped to make a difference.

MT: And, you are responsible for Green Holly School.

EG: Yes, Green Holly School was the first state, first all-State funded school built in the State of Maryland and that took the children out of the buildings that had been discarded, and they had a full program there at Green Holly. I hope I've made a difference anyway cause for the years that I've involved, had been involved with 'em–46 years. And, I hope I've made a difference.

MT: Are there awards and certificates and recognitions that you received that you haven't talked about?

EG: Whew. I've, I received the–I received so many awards. Saw them the other day. Some I didn't even know I had.

MT: [chuckle] What were some of the most meaningful ones?

EG: I received an award from the Governor for Achievement and working with the handicapped. I received awards for community service from the Masons. I received an award, community award from the Eastern Stars from the State of Maryland. I received an award–that was from the Masons. It was over in Calvert County for my community work, volunteer. I received awards for volunteerism.

MT: Did you belong to organizations like, I think it's Citizens For Progress or community, community–? I can't think of the exact name. Community associations, and you've been with community associations or citizens groups that were more politically inclined?

EG: Like the Democratic Club?

MT: Or, okay. The Democratic Club. I'm trying to think of the name of–They put out the cookbook: "300 Years of Black Cooking in Southern Maryland."

EG: That doesn't ring a bell.

MT: I was thinking about some of the groups that were really active in the Civil Rights, in integrating the theater.

EG: Theater. Well, I worked, you know, with them and helped with that. I belonged to the Citizens, the Scholarship, Citizens Scholarship. I was once a member of that, but I have so many of them. I have piles of them, but I [chuckle]–I can't think about them now.

MT: You may have to write them down.

EG: I had to write them down cause I had to put them, and I don't have nowhere to put them.

MT: Okay. What do you consider the most valuable thing you ever had, something you could not have done without in your lifetime?

EG: Something I could not have done without? [pause] I don't know.

MT: That was kind of a hard–There are different ways you could interpret it.

EG: Yeah.

MT: I mean, one of the things you actually said about, that you put that way was with your relationship with Jesus, with your relationship with God. You were rich.

EG: Yeah. I couldn't. That's one thing I couldn't have done without.

MT: Or you couldn't live without it. Something that you–Or a more material way of looking at it, or you could look at it as your work or your family. But, I think if something doesn't just, you know, pop out.

EG: Well, you know, as you said, if I couldn't–I couldn't have done–I don't know what I would have done without having the opportunity to teach and to work with people. I'm a people person, and I just like being with people and I like working with people. You know, regardless of what I'm doin'. Nothin's too small, too low for me to do as long as I'm with people and helping people.

MT: I guess you couldn't have done without people. [laughter]

EG: Not without people! [laughter] And couldn't done without the Lord and my work as a teacher and helper.

MT: Have you done everything in your life that you wanted or planned to?

EG: Not everything. I want to go to Alaska!

MT: [chuckle] Okay.

EG: And I want to go to Hawaii. I don't know if I'll get there, but I'd like to go there.

MT: If you could go back and live your life over, what would you change?

EG: You didn't want me to answer that! [laughter] Okay. I wouldn't have gotten married so young. I wouldn't have done that. But, otherwise, I don't think there's anything in my life that I would have changed. I wanted to do all the things that I've done. I mean, I've never been forced to do something that I didn't want to do, and I don't know anything that I, that I would change. My life has been a success. It's been a happy one, and there's nothing I would change.

MT: Okay. You may have already answered this. What do you think have been the biggest changes in your lifetime?

EG: The county, the county area, physical area of the county. The highways, the developments. The Base, of course, brought many changes, but the highway and all these people and the changes in the schools. Facilities, I'm talking about now. The

school facilities, and even the churches. There's so many more churches. Once it was a Protestant/Catholic communities per county, but now there are quite a variety of religions and just, the physical makeup of the county has changed tremendously.

MT: This is: Can you share old stories about what life was like in the county for your parents? And, I would add: How far back could you talk about life in the county? Can you talk about what it was like for your grandparents? Did you hear stories in passing, like even back further than that?

EG: Well, I remember two great-grandfathers, two great-grandmothers and then my grandmother's. There's–Let's see. Yeah, great-grandfather. And, they mainly traveled on horse and buggy. They lived in homes that had wood, the wood stoves for heating, oil lamps and–

MT: Do you know if you had–Did your ancestors go back when there were any that you know were slaves in St. Mary's County?

EG: I know my one great-grandfather was part slave. It seems as though it was the ending of slavery that he became a slave, not very long. He used to tell me the tales of how the, you know, master would, you know, put them up in, like it's a hut he called it. This is where they lived, and they had–The slave holder was sort of good or lenient with him. I don't know if it was because this was becoming the end of it or what, but he talked about having to get up in the nighttime and cut wood and do all this so that there would be heat.

MT: And did your grandparents talk about their parents and grandparents and tell the stories of their lifetime? You could talk about all that if you have the opportunity.

EG: Yes, well, I mean, somewhat. They, you know, they talked about having to work on the farms and live on people's farms and what they had to, what they had to do, the work and all that. And the children, how they had to take care of the people's children. How when they started, they were married and their children were born that they had to live in these close quarters, you know, with their children. And then, their

children became helpers. As they grew older, they worked on the farm and in the houses and like that.

MT: Okay. How did black folks get their news in the county when you were growing up?

EG: Battery radio. It was about like that and had a battery in it, and we'd hear the news from out of the county. There wasn't a station in the county, but this would be far away that you would hear the news on the battery radio.

MT: Did they, were there newspapers? Did they read newspapers?

EG: Very seldom. I think they came out about once a week. Once a month, we'd get a paper. What was prevalent was *The Afro* and it would be sent down from Baltimore to one or two people that would distribute. You'd buy *The Afro* and for most of us, that was the paper.

MT: How do Countians get their news today?

EG: Oh my! Telephone. [laughter] They get it over the television, from the radio, from the newspapers.

MT: But, the telephone?

EG: The telephone! That's the fastest way! [laughter] That seems to be the fastest.

MT: Okay.

[End of Side 2, Tape 2 of 2]