

Unified Committee for Afro-American Contributions
Oral History Documentation Project
Jean Elizabeth Lawrence
Interviewed by Alma Jordon
July 23, 2021
at her home in Lexington Park
Transcribed by REV.com on September 17, 2021
Edited by Bob Lewis on November 19, 2024
[this interview is not logged]
Original format is MP3 from digital audio recorder
41 minutes, 6 seconds

Alma Jordon:

Good afternoon. My name is Alma Jordon. Can you give me ... Oh, today is July 23rd, 2021, and we are at the Interpretive Center in Lexington Park, Maryland. And we are doing this interview for the Unified Committee for Afro-American Contributions. Would you mind giving me your name, please? Your full name?

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence.

Alma Jordon:

Thank you. And where were you born, Mrs. Lawrence?

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Valley Lee.

Alma Jordon:

Okay. Can you tell me, uh, or share with me your earliest memory of anything at all?

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Yeah, I remember losing my father at nine years old.

Alma Jordon:

At nine years old?

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Alma Jordon:

Uh-huh (affirmative).

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

And then I went to Leonardtown to have my tonsils taken out.

Alma Jordon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative). What, what age was that when you had your tonsils-

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

I guess I was about nine.

Alma Jordon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

I guess about nine.

Alma Jordon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative). Yeah. You want to share with me more about, uh, losing your father?

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Well, uh, at nine years old, I don't remember too much.

Alma Jordon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

I think he caught the pneumonia.

Alma Jordon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

And the good Lord called him on home.

Alma Jordon:

Oh. Okay.

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Alma Jordon:

Okay. Well, tell me, uh, more about your family, your mom and your siblings and where you lived.

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Well, Mama was, uh-

Alma Jordon:

And, and what was your mom's name? And what was your ... Just tell me your parents' names.

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Lee, Lee, Lee and Haggis-

Alma Jordon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Watts. And she was born on the base, Patuxent.

Alma Jordon:

Right.

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

That's when they had, you know, went in there and took, uh, made there, you- you know, them Patuxent Navy Base.

Alma Jordon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

And all of those colored folks down there had to move.

Alma Jordon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Mm-hmm (affirmative). And from there, Mama, Uncle Bunton, and I- I can't think of Uncle Bunton wife's name.

Alma Jordon:

Ella.

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Yeah. They, uh, took my mama and raised her.

Alma Jordon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Her and, and Uncle Roger.

Alma Jordon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

And they had another brother was Benny, was older than Mama and Roger. But he went to DC to live and had his family up there.

Alma Jordon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Now I can't tell you, you know, nothing about the kids or none of them.

Alma Jordon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Mm-mm (negative).

Alma Jordon:

What was your father's name? Share with us your father's name.

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Leo Cutchember.

Alma Jordon:

Okay. Okay.

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Buck was the brother.

Alma Jordon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

And Lizzy was his sister. It was three boys, one girl.

Alma Jordon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative). You said Buck and Leo-

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Mm-hmm (affirmative). Frances. Frances, had a nickname. Then Buck, his name was Frances Cutchember.

Alma Jordon:

Okay. So, was Frances and Leo-

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

And- and Lindsey.

Alma Jordon:

And Lindsey.

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Yeah.

Alma Jordon:

So it was only three of them.

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Mm-hmm (affirmative), just the three. Because I came up-

Alma Jordon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

... I had 12.

Alma Jordon:

Oh, you had 12 children.

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Mm-hmm (affirmative). I had 12.

Alma Jordon:

Oh. So you want to share their names?

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

I got, I got, uh, four girls and six boys: Joan, Lorraine, and- and Diane. Then I got, uh, Ronnie. I got Allen. And I got James. And I got Colin; six boys and four girls.

Alma Jordon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Speaker 3 (Jean Lawrence's daughter):

You forgot Elaine.

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Oh, Elaine. Yeah.

Speaker 3:

Mm-hmm (affirmative). And Bobby.

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Yeah.

Alma Jordon:

Okay.

Speaker 3:

And the one before him.

Alma Jordon:

Now, do you have siblings? Did you have siblings? Brothers and sisters? Did you have brothers and sisters?

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Yeah, yeah. I had them. Well, my father had, uh, Kelly, Jeraldine and, um, there- there were four.

Alma Jordon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

And they were in a ... Mama got married again. Out of the four, she had two, she had Laverne and Shelly.

Alma Jordon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

That's five. Yeah. Her second marriage.

Alma Jordon:

Okay. Can you share your relationship with your brothers and sisters? What kind of relationship did you have with your brothers and sisters?

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Oh, we got along fine. You know, wasn't no fussing and fighting all that, you know?

Alma Jordon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Speaker 3:

Yeah.

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

No. We didn't- we didn't have that. We, we got along fine.

Alma Jordon:

What about when you were younger, uh, what kind of games did you play? What did you do at home?

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Well, got up in the morning and we ate breakfast.

Alma Jordon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Clean the house up.

Alma Jordon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

And outside you would go. And then, uh, by me being the oldest, I would have a little school.

Alma Jordon:

Oh.

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Paper and pencil and all that. The- the- the board too, the blackboard too.

Alma Jordon:

Okay.

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Alma Jordon:

Okay.

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Until dinner time.

Alma Jordon:

What-

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Then we go- go in there and get the lunch; clean up and go back outside again. We didn't have no air conditioning now. Gotta go outside and- and- and got that fresh air.

Alma Jordon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Yeah.

Alma Jordon:

Well, tell me about your little school.

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Oh, little school? Well, I said we, uh, I, you know, had the blackboard that I got from, you know, from the school. That's ... I went to, uh, Great Mills for my school. Then I left there, went Great Mills headed from the, uh, the first to the seventh for school.

Alma Jordon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Then, I left there and went down to St. Peters.

Alma Jordon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

That's where I got my education from, down there.

Alma Jordon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative). Well, tell me more about your school at Great Mills. What, what-

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Well, I didn't go to Great Mill. Great Mill was the name of the school.

Alma Jordon:

Right.

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

It Number One or Number Two is what they call it. When I come out from up there, I was trans- I went down to St. Peter, and that's where I got my education, down there.

Alma Jordon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative). Well, tell me, can you tell me more about, um, the Number One school and how it was set up?

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

I had all ... Miss Mercy taught there first to the third, and Miss Jameson took it on from there.

Alma Jordon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Alma Jordon:

How was that school set up? Was it one room, or-

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

It was two room.

Alma Jordon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Alma Jordon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Yeah, two room.

Alma Jordon:

And what was it like going to school there?

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

It was all ... It was alright. It wasn't anything wrong with it-

Alma Jordon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

... because, um, Miss Jameson, who would get up, you know, early in the morning and go to school and see that, uh, we had fire, you know, in that little old stove down there. Yeah. Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Alma Jordon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

And then she would see that ... She, she, she did more-

Alma Jordon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

We would have to wash our hands, and we had outside b- bath- outside bathroom-

Alma Jordon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

... and, uh, toilet paper was here. (laughs) Sears Roebuck. (laughs)

Speaker 3:

(laughs)

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Or another one. (laughs)

Alma Jordon:

(laughs)

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

So, that was it. (laughs)

Alma Jordon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Yeah, ma'am. (laughs)

Alma Jordon:

Okay. What ... Did you play games at school, or did you have a-

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Well, they had ... Yeah. We played baseball and volleyball.

Alma Jordon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Mm-hmm (affirmative). Right up there to the Number One, uh, she used to call it, yeah. Yeah, we had games.

Alma Jordon:

Will ... Where was that school located?

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Right up there where you all ... Down there where you all ... Mmm.

Speaker 3:

The Great- [crosstalk 00:09:37]-

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Right, right in there where the old building at.

Alma Jordon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative). And what city was it, uh, in?

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

It was, it was called Great Mill.

Alma Jordon:

Oh, okay.

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Alma Jordon:

Okay. And those were the recreation activities you had was ball, volleyball, and other things.

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

All of that there through school.

Alma Jordon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Yes.

Alma Jordon:

Okay.

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Until you father open up. There was recreation down at, back down the back room. We used to go down there at night and play games, your daddy.

Alma Jordon:

Who was that?

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Leroy, had, called the Recreation Center. We used to go down there to play at night.

Alma Jordon:

Tell me more about the Recreation Center. Where was that located?

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Down there where the car was at. Down the back road. Off from the church.

Alma Jordon:

Oh.

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Next to the, to the church. Just where the Cardinal's living.

Alma Jordon:

Oh, okay. Okay.

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Like-

Alma Jordon:

So, it was, it was a building there and everything.

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Alma Jordon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Pole.

Alma Jordon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Yes, indeed.

Alma Jordon:

So, who helped run the, the Recreation Center down there, and what type of recreation did you have at that center?

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Oh, your, your dad was the head of that. Cousin Leroy.

Alma Jordon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

You played basketball and, you know, at night inside.

Alma Jordon:

Inside?

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Alma Jordon:

Oh, it was large enough to play basketball inside?

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Oh, yeah. Yeah.

Alma Jordon:

Oh.

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Yes, ma'am.

Alma Jordon:

Okay. Okay. And, um, how many children did you usually have at this facility play in it?

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Oh, it was, it was quite a few. You had all of, you know, all ... You had, had all, Florence and, uh, and Clariden, Cora and them would, you know, to -ticipated.

Alma Jordon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Alma Jordon:

Okay. Okay. Was there anything else you wanna share about your childhood growing up? What about, uh, religion and church? What-

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

I went to St. George's.

Alma Jordon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Every year there, Catholic-

Alma Jordon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

... and I, I started down there at ... called myself- I was helping out, you know? (laughs)

Speaker 3:

(laughs)

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

But since (laughs) I guess I as about, ah. I'd say about 12, I guess.

Alma Jordon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

'Cause my, my grandmama and my mama was down there at that time.

Alma Jordon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative). Who ... Uh, you mentioned your grandmother. Who was your grandmother?

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Mary.

Alma Jordon:

Mary?

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

She was a Brown. She married a Cutchember, married Frank Cutchember. That's where the Cutchembers come from.

Alma Jordon:

Oh, okay.

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Yeah.

Alma Jordon:

Okay.

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Yeah.

Alma Jordon:

And you said you and your, uh, your mother-

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Alma Jordon:

... and your grandmother-

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Uh-huh (affirmative), worked down there. With them. (laughs) But I joins them in the kitchen. I worked down there, you know, helped them-

Alma Jordon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

... see what they was doing-

Alma Jordon:

Oh.

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

... cooking line.

Alma Jordon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Yes, ma'am.

Alma Jordon:

So, what was, what was church like in those days? Uh-

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Well, you, uh ... Did you ever ... Yeah. I know you've probably heard it all here. I think he was all ... What that man name? Uh, he was Adams. He was Adam, and his wife was Myrna. He would, uh, go to the church in the morning, make sure that we had fire. Church would be going when we got there.

Alma Jordon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

He did that-

Alma Jordon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

... Mr. Adams.

Alma Jordon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Alma Jordon:

Okay.

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Alma Jordon:

And what about, um, church in those days? Uh-

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

We walked.

Alma Jordon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative). Okay.

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

We had no car sitting outside.

Alma Jordon:

Oh, okay.

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

We walked there. We walked back.

Alma Jordon:

And, and about how far did you have to walk to church?

Speaker 3:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

It was about ... We, uh, we, uh ... We [sucks teeth in short clicks] where San- where Sandra's at now, built her house.

Alma Jordon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

We had to go from house was there down to the church.

Alma Jordon:

So, what's that about-

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

It was a nine o'clock mass then.

Alma Jordon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Yeah.

Alma Jordon:

And what time did you have to leave home for a nine o'clock mass, to walk?

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

(laughs) Oh, I guess we left about ... I'd say about 8:30.

Alma Jordon:

Oh, okay.

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Speaker 3:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

It was nice and warm when we got there.

Alma Jordon:

Oh, okay.

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Yeah.

Alma Jordon:

And I'm just curious, uh, where did, did you, uh ... How was the church set up when you went? Did you sit anywhere you wanted to or, uh-

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Oh, no, no, no, honey, no, no, no. You can back that thing up. We didn't. Oh, no. Mm-mm (negative). No. The whites was all one side. Of course, they had two parts to it. One sat on that side, and one on this side-

Alma Jordon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

... and then it was two in the back. All the white went first. You were the last one to go up.

Alma Jordon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative). And was that for communion, as well?

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Yes, ma'ams. You sit down. They stand up, make sure that you didn't go up there yet or down.

Alma Jordon:

Oh, okay.

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

I'm telling it like it is.

Alma Jordon:

So, how did, how did everybody feel about that?

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Well, at that, back then, you know, you know how they felt. (laughs) Yeah. You had to sit back and let all them go up and get communion. Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Alma Jordon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative). Oh, okay.

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

May- maybe had just with two, I'd say, on each side for their colored to sit in it, in them two back seats-

Alma Jordon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

... and all the rest of it was white.

Alma Jordon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative). Okay. You mentioned that you were born in Valley Lee?

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Mm-hmm (affirmative). Midwife, you had then.

Alma Jordon:

Oh, okay.

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Yeah.

Alma Jordon:

Okay. S- Did you ... Have you lived, ever lived anywhere else?

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

No, no. Mm-mm (negative). Right in Valley Lee.

Alma Jordon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative). Okay. How would you describe your family's financial situation when you were growing up?

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Well, back then, my grandma couldn't do much because she had arthritis in her hand.

Alma Jordon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Yeah. You know, I had to, uh, help, you know, my grandmother while M- while Mama went out there and went to work in Tall Timbers. She worked down there, would catch 'til ... Cecil had a truck running down there every day, and they would catch that truck to go to, down to Tall Timbers, food truck. He would deliver food down there.

Alma Jordon:

Who had a truck? Who was that?

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Cecil. Paul Cecil, George Cecil-

Alma Jordon:

Uh-huh (affirmative).

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

... Margaret and all of them. They was Cecil.

Alma Jordon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

And where they got their, uh, that big house there now, all on the other side-

Alma Jordon:

Where?

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Down there, right across the, from the Post Office.

Alma Jordon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Our voting poll was there where they, where they are, where the house is at.

Alma Jordon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

And the store was on the other side, and back there, then, I think it was quite a few of them sold all [inaudible 00:18:25] down there, you know? Adams had to go their store and then all 'cause most of them had a table down there, all Florence's sister, Ceal.

Alma Jordon:

So, this was for voting?

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Mm-hmm (affirmative). It had the little voting and all of that, right where the man done put that great big house across that.

Alma Jordon:

This is in Valley Lee?

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Yeah, one, one room, uh, voting poll.

Alma Jordon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative). And at the voting station, they sold d- dinners?

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Yeah, and all across you go to the store.

Alma Jordon:

Oh, okay.

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Adams store.

Alma Jordon:

Okay. Okay. So, when you were a child, did you and your family ever take trips anywhere? Um, you know, for education or anything?

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

No, not then, back then anyhow, no, no, no. No, and there was ... What that was, a vacation? (laughs)

Speaker 3:

(laughs)

Alma Jordon:

(laughs)

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Sh- sh- Didn't know what that was. Uh-uh (negative).

Alma Jordon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative). So, you mentioned helping with, helping your grandmother. So, did you have many chores at home? Can you share with us-

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Well, I had to cook.

Alma Jordon:

... your chores? Okay.

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Yeah. Charlene push and show, you know, how to fix and all.

Alma Jordon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

I got my cooking from her.

Alma Jordon:

Oh, okay.

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

See, 'cause Mama, she had to go down and bring a little bread so we could get some milk, eggs, and supper.

Alma Jordon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Mm-hmm (affirmative). Yep.

Alma Jordon:

So, are you, are you saying that you lived with your grandmother?

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Alma Jordon:

Oh.

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

That's where we stayed at.

Alma Jordon:

Oh, okay.

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Yeah.

Alma Jordon:

Okay.

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Alma Jordon:

Okay. Uh, what was your favorite, like, recreational activities when you were growing up?

Speaker 3:

Dancing.

Alma Jordon:

(laughs)

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

(laughs)

Speaker 3:

Oh, my God. (laughs)

Alma Jordon:

(laughs)

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Yeah, I loved to dance.

Alma Jordon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Yeah, loved to dance.

Alma Jordon:

Any other favorite activities?

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Mm-mm (negative). Just give me dance. (laughs)

Alma Jordon:

(laughs)

Speaker 3:

(laughs)

Alma Jordon:

Now, you mentioned that, um, your mom, uh, worked, uh-

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Down at Tall Timbers.

Alma Jordon:

... down at Tall Timbers.

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Alma Jordon:

What type of work did she do?

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Went down in, in the, you, you know, cleaning the white folks' house.

Alma Jordon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative). Okay.

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Washing, ironing all day.

Alma Jordon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Down there.

Alma Jordon:

And, and your dad passed away when you were young. Do you remember what his occupation, what kind of work he did?

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

No, I really don't know too much about that. All I knew he was ... Uh, I was nine years old when he passed.

Alma Jordon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Or, what, you know, 'cause I had nobody tell me what, what his oc- what he did.

Alma Jordon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative). So, you mentioned you had siblings. Were they older or younger? Can you, uh, give me an idea of what their ages were?

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

What, my siblings, sisters and brothers?

Alma Jordon:

Yes.

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

I'm the oldest of the four.

Alma Jordon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

And, and Mama got married again, like I said, to James Brown-

Alma Jordon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

... and she had two girls, Laverne and Charlene.

Alma Jordon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative). Okay. So, it sounds like, uh, you had a responsibility for your younger siblings then. You wanna share information about that?

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Well, I did the best I could.

Alma Jordon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Yeah. Best I could.

Alma Jordon:

And you enjoyed teaching them with your blackboard.

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Oh, yeah, I did that, too, yeah.

Alma Jordon:

(laughs)

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Did that, too. Yeah. I did that, too. Yep.

Alma Jordon:

Okay. So, you were talking about what you did when you were younger and you enjoyed dancing. Tell me about when you s- the first time you went out on your own, uh, when you started dating.

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Well-

Alma Jordon:

Can you share with me?

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

(laughs) I had ...

Speaker 3:

(laughs)

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

(laughs) Ah. Married the man, should say, married my school sweethearts. Uh, that was Dad, and then he went into the service-

Alma Jordon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

... and when he got out, we got married. I was 18.

Alma Jordon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

He was 22, four ... He was fours years older than I was.

Alma Jordon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Yeah.

Alma Jordon:

And what was his name?

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Carl Cornelius Lawrence.

Alma Jordon:

Oh, okay.

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Alma Jordon:

And where you all ... Where did you all meet?

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

We met at school.

Alma Jordon:

Oh, okay.

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Yeah.

Alma Jordon:

Okay.

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

He was in my own school, carry my books home.

Alma Jordon:

Hmm. Okay. (laughs)

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

(laughs)

Speaker 3:

(laughs)

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Yeah. He carried my books home for me.

Alma Jordon:

Uh-huh (affirmative).

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Alma Jordon:

And, um, so, share with me a little bit about when you got married and where you got married.

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

I got ... Oh, well, I gotta get, gotta get the license first, you know?

Alma Jordon:

Oh, yeah.

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

I had to, we had, I had to go there to, uh, up to Leonardtown. Is it courthouse? To get your license?

Alma Jordon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

I think back then, then, it was either five dollars-

Speaker 3:

(laughs)

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

I think that's what they were, you know? So, they were, uh ... And then Carl got drafted for the service, and we got married when he came out in June-

Alma Jordon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

... the 22nd, the June birthday, I got married on his birthday, and the reception, I mean, uh, when we got married, you didn't ... wasn't married, by him being one religion, and I was the other. We got married back in the What you call it? The, uh ... What do you call it?

Speaker 3:

Rectory.

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Yeah, back, back in there.

Alma Jordon:

In the rectory?

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Yeah. Back there. And then, uh, he spent, I think, what? Three, three years, four years in the service. So, when he came out, he, we got married, and I was 18, and he was 23. So, he decided, we decided either, went to, to, uh, DC to work with his uncle, Uncle Jesse. He had a contract.

Alma Jordon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

So, we got married. He wanted, went up, up there, and I would go on, uh, I'd see him weekends-

Alma Jordon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

... and come back home.

Alma Jordon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

But I told him I was going back home, wasn't no city for me.

Alma Jordon:

(laughs)

Speaker 3:

(laughs)

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

So, that's where I, I came back home and had my family.

Alma Jordon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative). Can you tell me, um, how do you feel things are different? Do you feel that times are different now than they were?

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Oh, yeah, honey. Yes, ma'am. Whole lot of difference.

Alma Jordon:

In what way? Would you like to share some of the ways that you feel that things are different?

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Yeah, it is, yes, ma'am. You know they're different. Like I told you, w- w-, uh, we went to church, how it was all, how it was set up.

Alma Jordon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Yeah. You didn't go up there, like I said, to communion before 'fore the white folks did. Now, they had row on each side of the church, but the left, um, four in the back for the color.

Alma Jordon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

So, I don't see now, like I say, I don't see much difference between the church and the hospitals.

Alma Jordon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

You see, it's a hurting thing. I lost my brother, and I could not go see him.

Alma Jordon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

'til after he died, which I don't think is right. Uh, what you build a hospital? That's what the hospitals are built for. Sick folks.

Alma Jordon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

That's what I thought. They still do think that.

Alma Jordon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

But everybody might not, well, you know, go along with what I have to say, but this is what I feel like.

Alma Jordon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

I went to Leonardtown on ... I think it was either Monday or Tuesday, to see my sister-in-law. She had been up there. They hadn't made the bed, hadn't give her a bath. Now, that's not right.

Alma Jordon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

And if you sick, that's gonna be the hospitals, and that's what's going on.

Alma Jordon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

At, do you, at, uh, this one here in Leonardtown, anyhow.

Alma Jordon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

So, I think all the rest of them is like that, too.

Alma Jordon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

What did they build the hospitals for? You sick and you can't go there, that's not right.

Alma Jordon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative). So, in what other ways do you feel that things are different now than they used to be when you were growing up?

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Mmm-mmm-mmm. Uh, uh, don't know.

Alma Jordon:

When do you remember ... How about when you went to the grocery stores and, you know, you did your shopping? Do you think any of that-

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

We didn't have no problem back there then.

Alma Jordon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

No, no.

Alma Jordon:

Oh, okay.

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

You get a little can of milk. That was three cents.

Alma Jordon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

The lard then was, was five.

Alma Jordon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

You catch, you could carry your all-, cut your molasses and sugar and all that stuff.

Alma Jordon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

That was measured out.

Alma Jordon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

And it's outrageous now what you pay for that stuff. Yes, indeed.

Alma Jordon:

So, that's different now.

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Yeah. You see, back in then, you had your own, you had your own hogs, chickens, all that stuff.

Alma Jordon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

So, they helped.

Alma Jordon:

Oh, yeah. So, is there anything else you would like to share with me, uh, regarding growing up or where you lived or your, your relationship with your family or anything like that?

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Mm-mm (negative). Didn't have no problems like that.

Alma Jordon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

We was a loving family.

Alma Jordon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative). Well, Miss Cutchember, we have several of our committee members here today, and, um, I'm wondering if any of them would like to ask you anything, and if they would, they will mention their name-

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

All right.

Alma Jordon:

... so that it would be on the-

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

[crosstalk 00:31:18]-

Alma Jordon:

... on the tape.

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Yes, ma'am.

Alma Jordon:

But I appreciate you sharing with me, uh, things about growing up in Valley Lee-

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Alma Jordon:

... St. Mary's County. Thank you.

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Yes, ma'am.

Merideth:

I have a, a question. This is Merideth. Um, do you, did your family pass down stories from way back, uh, you know, to the family by, back before your grandfather or grandmother's time? Were they here in St. Mary's County?

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Pip, the olden one, yeah, yeah.

Merideth:

Pip? Yeah. What about ... Did, did your family pass down stories from, you know, from way back?

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Well, I would say no. You know, they didn't sit down in here.

Merideth:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Have a conversation with me here.

Merideth:

(laughs)

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

I really don't.

Merideth:

Okay. So, pretty much just that, the times that, you know, from the time that you, that you were born-

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Merideth:

... and they didn't talk about before then.

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Mm-mm (negative).

Merideth:

Okay. Thank you.

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

You're welcome.

Janice:

Well, I have a question, Jean. I'm Janice.

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Yes.

Janice:

And, uh, you were talking about voting. Uh, did ... Who ... Did your mom vote, or who, who voted?

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Oh, yeah, yeah. Back then, they did, yeah.

Janice:

[crosstalk 00:32:48].

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Yeah, they all went there, and then they, you know, vote. Course, it, it ... I think it still is six o'clock or seven o'clock in the morning until that time that evening.

Janice:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Janice:

Did people campaign with, with you all? Did they come to your homes, knock on doors and all that?

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Oh, no, no, they didn't. No, no, no, no, there wasn't none of that. You, you knocked on their, on their door. (laughs)

Janice:

(laughs)

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

No, no, no, no. Uh-uh (negative). Mm-mm (negative).

Janice:

Do you remember when you first voted?

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Mm-hmm (affirmative). Yeah. Yes, indeed. I was, uh ... Course, back there then, they say, you know, uh, Republican, but, uh, your daddy, Leroy, mentioned "Democrat," and I've been Demo- Democratic ever since. Yeah.

Janice:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Alma Jordon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Janice:

Uh, just to back up a little about the church, St. George's and the people in the, you know, black folks in the back.

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Yeah, yeah, yeah. Okay.

Janice:

Uh, uh, how did you feel about it?

[Jet noise in the background]

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Oh, honey, there wasn't much I could do, you know? Being young like that, you know, going to church, like, there wasn't anything I could do. Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Janice:

Did it make you angry or sad or wanting to say-?

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Well, at that time, there wasn't a whole lot of, you know, a whole lot that they did. We went along with it, see?

Janice:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Mm-hmm (affirmative). Ain't gonna do that now to me.

Janice:

(laughs)

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Uh-uh (negative).

Janice:

All right.

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

'Cause I'm gonna tell you just what I think. Mm-mm (negative). No, ma'am.

Janice:

Thank you.

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

You're welcome.

Alma Jordon:

Um, Miss Lawrence, I have another question. Uh, you mentioned that your parents lived where the Base used to be. How did they come to live in Valley Lee?

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

See, Mama came on the eighth ... Mama, uh ... Uncle Bunton and, uh, Aunt Ella took Mama, like I told you. All them people on that Base at that time, they had to move them, all the color folks down there, when they decided to come to Patuxent. All of those people, like color people down in there, and they had to move, and they just split it, you know, like everybody else. Some went DC. Some went Balti- Oh, they just all over the place, you know?

Alma Jordon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

To find a home.

Alma Jordon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative). So, were your parents still living, I mean, her parents still living there, or-

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Whose parents, parents, Mama's?

Alma Jordon:

Your mother's parents.

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Mm-mm (negative). Mm-mm (negative). Mama and, and, um ... Wait, Mama and her brother, like I told you, uh, down in St. Peters, [inaudible 00:36:07]. down there.

Alma Jordon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

And my mama, my, my, see, my grandmother, they, uh, they raised her, you know?

Alma Jordon:

They raised your mother?

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

They, they, they, uh, uh, uh, Uncle Bunton and, uh-

Alma Jordon:

Aunt Ella.

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Yeah. They raised her. They raised Mama, and I told you the other, the other brother that they had. Uh, he went to DC.

Alma Jordon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Benny, they called him.

Alma Jordon:

Oh, okay.

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Now, he had, they say he did, I don't know, he had quite a few of his children, but if they came through that door, I wouldn't know, I wouldn't know any of them.

Alma Jordon:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Mm-mm (negative).

Alma Jordon:

Okay.

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Mm-mm (negative).

Alma Jordon:

Okay. And so this ... Just, did you have any more that you wanted to share?

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

No.

Dorothy:

Thank you. Um, I have a question. My name is Dorothy. [inaudible 00:37:23]. Uh, and my question is, the church activities that took place, what were they like back then, you from St. George's, the different activities that took place? Were they separate activities, and what were they like?

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Well, color? Like-

Dorothy:

I mean, like, fun activities.

Speaker 3:

Okay. Give her just a minute.

Dorothy:

Okay.

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

'Cause back there then, they didn't have no, um-

Speaker 3:

You can come in. Sandra, you can come in.

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Bring it to me again, honey.

Dorothy:

Like, the fairs, did they have different fairs?

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Well, they had anything, it really be the, the white had theirs, and the colored had theirs.

Dorothy:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

'Cause, you know, we didn't have, we, we didn't have that many.

Dorothy:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Till later in the year. They decide to get together and had the church done and all that together, but, at first, they had theirs. Like, they had their, their, their dinners, and we had ours. Mm-hmm (affirmative).

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[Jet noise in background]

Speaker 3:

Are we concluding? Thank you.

Jeanette Kelly:

Thank you very much. I'm stepping in for Alma.

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

All right.

Jeanette Kelly:

This is Jeanette Kelly, and we'd like to thank you very much for coming and giving us such a fantastic interview. (laughs)

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Oh, you are.

Jeanette Kelly:

And we hope that things go well for you and that you're able to come back perhaps [crosstalk 00:39:05] and give us another one if you'd like to.

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Oh, yeah. [crosstalk 00:39:07]-

Jeanette Kelly:

If you think of anything else you want to tell us.

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Yes, sure. [crosstalk 00:39:13].

Alma Jordon:

I forgot to ask her her age and date of birth.

Jeanette Kelly:

(laughs)

Merideth:

Yeah, I mean, [inaudible 00:39:16]-

Jeanette Kelly:

One of the things that we do need to know is your age [crosstalk 00:39:24] and your date of birth.

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Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Oh, J- June the 6th. No, June the 17th, and I was born 1926, 17th.

Jeanette Kelly:

Okay. 19-

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

19-

Jeanette Kelly:

You were June 26-

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jeanette Kelly:

... 1917.

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

No, 1920.

Jeanette Kelly:

1920, I'm sorry.

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Yes.

Jeanette Kelly:

1920,

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

1928.

Alma Jordon:

June 17th.

Jeanette Kelly:

June 17th, 1928?

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Jeanette Kelly:

Is that what she said?

Female:

So-

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

I just had a birthday.

Merideth:

We need to get a smiling photo. (laughs) So, uh, yeah, for our, for our records, and, and so you can have one if you would like.

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

All right.

Merideth:

And how about one with your daughter?

Dorothy:

You have to get those hats in there.

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Yep. (laughs)

Speaker 3:

I didn't get a handcuff. Remember, I wasn't here. (laughs)

Dorothy: There was quite a crowd. (laughs)

Jeanette Kelly:

That's what I heard. (laughs)

Merideth:

Yeah. Hats are, hats are wonderful. Aren't they? (laughs) All right. You kept hiding behind her hat, though.

Female:

[inaudible 00:40:45].

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Yeah. (laughs)

Jeanette Kelly:

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Thank you.

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

Mm-hmm (affirmative). (laughs)

Alma Jordon:

Again, thank you, Mrs. Lawrence, very much.

Jean Elizabeth Lawrence:

You're welcome. Oh, you're welcome. I'm glad I could help you.

Janice:

[lots of crosstalk 00:41:07].

It was very nice. Thank you.

Dorothy:

Thank you. Very nice.