

Unified Committee for Afro-American Contributions
Oral History Documentation Project

JOSEPH LEE SOMERVILLE

Interviewed by Ruth Portee
November 16, 1996
At St. Mary's College of Maryland
Logged by Tania Jordon on November 28, 2007
A verbatim transcript is available
Original format is two cassette tapes
1 hour, 17 minutes, 50 seconds

CD 1 of 2 (Tape 1, side 1)

Track 01

0:00 Introduction

0:15 What were the times like when you were a child? "It was different from today. There were family morals in the home. You respected your parents, you did not talk back to you parents. If you did, you got a spanking and a smack. Today people raise their parents. "

1:25 How did you and your family live? They lived on a farm that his grandparents brought through heir property. He lived on farm with his grandparents, mother, two brothers and uncle. They lived off the farm by raising chickens, turkeys, hogs and growing tobacco. They had a large garden. His mother canned vegetables and fruit from the garden for the winter months. They ate well and didn't have a lot of junk food like today.

2:20 Earliest Memory: The crazy things that youngsters did back when he was about 12 years old.

2:40 He has a wonderful relationship with his four sons. They treat him with respect and as one of them. They respect their mother. They always kiss or shake hands before they leave the house after a visit. If other families did this, they wouldn't have the problems they have today.

3:38 He attends St. Joseph's Catholic Church in Morganza, MD.

Track 02

3:47 **Health & Illness:** Doctors use to make house calls. They made house calls to visit his grandmother and aunt when they were too weak to go to the doctor's office. His parents used home remedies to cure aches and pains. The family doctor was Dr. Welch in Chaptico, MD.

5:57 **Activities as a child:** He went to church and played softball with the 20 youngster that lived nearby. They played ball in the cow pasture. He also rode horses, drove cars and drank apple cider. They would watch the Oakville Tigers play softball on his family farm. His favorite thing to do was horseback riding, playing fox and hound, attended the county fair and church festivals.

Track 03

9:28 **Chores:** Hauling and cutting wood. There were no chain saws so the wood would be cut with a cross saw. He and his brothers would get eggs out of the hen house before they froze in the morning. They also milked the cows; feed the horses and other chores.

10:35 **His parents treated them with love and respect. When they did something wrong they corrected them and he appreciates to this today. "Even with my grandparents, there was a lot of love and understanding in the household." His mother would take him to Baltimore on the Greyhound Bus to visit her sister. He always went because he was the youngest.**

Track 04

11:55 **His mother disciplined him with a green peach tree limb or a backhand slap. "First and foremost she got the point across in the worse kind of way, but there was a lot of love behind it" He was disciplined for a lot of things. As a mischievous boy, he hide some matches under the house to play with them later. His mother beat him and he still remembers the beating today.**

14:25 **His mother prepared him for life in the best way she knew how. As a single parent, she made sure he and his two brothers went to school and were clothed. She did the best with what she had.**

Track 05

15:08 **Education:** He attended St. Joseph's School in Morganza for colored students. He graduated in the 8th grade. He went to school in a wooden school bus that had chicken wire around the windows. His father was the bus driver. The classroom had a wood floor with large windows. There was no air conditioning. Heat was initially supplied by wood and then was

converted to oil. There were two large blackboards and electric lights. Bathrooms were outside. There was a wood stove. The upper grades were responsible for bringing in the wood. The principal was Sister Charles who was an elderly firm and sturdy white nun. Other lay black teachers were Mrs. Minette Carter, Mrs. Gertrude Herbert and Mrs. Yorkshire. The Pastor at St. Joseph's would hand out the report cards. If you got a bad grade, he would "fan" you with a white oak cane. The teachers he remembered from high school were Miss Acey (English), Mrs. Moore (Music), Mr. Holmes (History), Mr. David Smith (Agriculture and Carpentry), and Mr. Ryan (Principal). He learned a lot of useful information from Mr. David Smith. He enjoyed working in the agriculture and carpentry shop and driving a tracker. His worse subject in school was Ancient History.

Track 06

24:34 **Dreams:** He wanted to become something flashy. He wanted to be a truck driver or farmer. He wanted to do something that would measure his abilities. He never had the desire to attend college because he didn't think his mother could afford to send him.

26:10 **Courting:** They went to school functions and met girls there. They had friendship courting. The youngsters would hang out at the local taverns. They would also go on bus trips to Carr's Beach or Sparrows Beach and Coney Island in New York. The young lady would be able to go with him if his mother went on the trip.

Track 07

28:09 It was great when he first went out on his own because he didn't have to "stay under the arms of his brothers". When he went out he went out to local taverns; play ball; go to skating rink at the St. Joseph's projects; and ride around in their cars. Other parents would always keep an eye on the kids and word would get back to his parents.

30:48 Money was tight; however, your money would buy more then, than it does now. Gas was \$0.15 to \$0.23 per gallon. You could ride all night long on one dollars worth of gas. He and his uncle worked on the farm. He got money from his Uncle. They harvested tomatoes and would take them to a tomato factory in Scotland. They would also sell vegetable on K Street in Washington on Saturday mornings. His mother and older brother would give him money that he earned from doing chores. This older brother worked in the construction field.

Track 08

31:42 **Work Experience:** I am a jack of all trades and master of none. When he was in high school, he worked at Naval Air Station as a water boy on the construction jobs (day laborer). He also sold soda at the construction site for his uncle. His pay rate was \$2.35 per hour (less union dues). He worked in the summer after his junior year and came back after he graduated. He worked in concentrate construction, carpentry helper, steam fitter, truck driver (Charles County Concrete), self employment, law enforcement officer (16 years). He lost the County Sheriff election in 1982 and then went to work for Calvert Cliffs Nuclear Plant where he became a Nuclear Security Systems Operator. His mode of transportation was his uncle's truck.

Track 09

36:10 **Working with family** helped him to better himself and pave a better road for his children. This helped him make extra money to give his children things that he did not have when he was coming along.

37:45 **Day on the Job:** He started work at 6:00 a.m. to 6:30 a.m. He would start filling up water jugs, sell soda from uncle's truck during break time, and sweep out offices. He got the same rate of pay as the men who worked the line. As he got older, he would work with a shovel to grade the lines on the runways.

Track 10

39:19 **Wedding:** It rained on his wedding day. A tropical storm and hurricane all passed on the morning of his wedding. The clerk of the court was not at the courthouse that Friday to sign the marriage license. He knew her (Eleanora Laningham), so he went to her house to get her to sign the license. She told him he had to go to Mr. Greenwell's office to get the license signed. He got married at St. Joseph's Church. It was raining so hard that they could not leave the church. The reception was at St. Joseph's Hall. His wife was late to church due to weather. He met his wife in high school through basketball game rivalries. She went to Jarboesville. He went with his wife for six years before he proposed. She was in college and had a good head on her shoulders. Their honeymoon consisted of taking two days off from work, spending time locally and setting up house.

Track 11

43:15 **Family:** He had mostly all ups in his marriage. He has a lovely wife and family. "You need love and understanding in a marriage". He has that

is his marriage and family. His relationship with his sons is great. They have always fished and crabbed together. Three of his sons have been in the Army at one time. One was in for 12 years and the other 3 years. Two of them have followed his footsteps in law enforcement. The other remains in the Army and is stationed at Fort Bragg, NC. The youngest son is working for a computer firm in Washington, DC. They also ride motorcycles together. He feels like he's one of the boys and they still respect him. He has six loving grandchildren (four girls and two boys).

46:57 **Religion:** Religion has played a tremendous part in his life. It has helped him to understand people. He was taught to know love and to serve God. To him this also applies to family. He attends St. Joseph's Catholic Church in Morganza, MD. He attends church faithfully unless his work schedule interferes. He practices God's commandments. He knows Jesus and loves him.

Track 12

48:29 **Activities:** He attends church functions (Saint Holidays, Lent and other holy days of obligation), Christmas and Easter. He also attends reunions with close members of the family at least once a year and the County Fair.

50:15 **Life in General:** He feels great about life. You must love yourself and love what you're doing. Know and love God, your wife and family.

51:02 **Differences now versus the old days:** Money is the root of all evil. Today you can buy now and pay later. The quality of life is about the same today. However, for the baby boomers didn't have a lot of rapes and abortions. The baby boomers have taken a vacation from keeping harmony and morals in the home. If they bring the morals and respect back then the teen pregnancies, drugs and other problems would be reduced. People are not different today, the way they look at life now is different. Things come easy now, back in the old days things were hard. They had to work hard and appreciated what they had. People look for hand outs now.

Track 13

53:58 **Teenagers:** Teenagers are about the same today. However teenagers have more avenues now. Today kids go out and get the most expensive items now and their parents would have to scramble to pay for it. Materialism has destroyed teenagers today. The changes have been caused by parents always trying to give the best to their kids and trying to keep up with the Jones'.

Track 14

57:03 **Race Relations:** Race relations have come a long way. There were stores where you could not try clothes on, or shop in certain sections. You could not sit at the counters in the lunch rooms. You had to order your food to go from a hole in the wall. At church, the priest had two collections, one for whites and one for blacks. During communion, the whites would go before the blacks. "Blacks were always treated as second." Now they do everything together, but there are still isolated incidences of racism. He may have had a different outlook on life today if he had been able to go to school with white people when he was younger.

1:00:41 He has never been afraid of any groups practicing hate.

1:01:00 He thinks it's great to live in the County. He has lived in Loveville all of his life. "You can take the boy out of the country, but you can't take the country out of the boy". He's never live in the city and prefers open country.

1:02:00 **Difference between county and outsiders:** Yes, 85% of the families in the county own their own homes. During the riots, none of the property destruction that went on in the cities happened in the county because people owned their own property and took pride in ownership. People in the city that didn't own anything didn't care what happened to other people's property.

CD 2 of 2 (Tape 2, side 1)

Track 01

1:03:28 He has travelled outside the county a lot.

1:04:05 He thinks the county is trying to head in a right direction. The Naval Base has played a major role by bringing in jobs and development. The County needs to look out for the county residences who contribute as taxpayers.

1:05:45 **Contribution to the County:** In 1966 he became a Deputy Sheriff and was appointed Sheriff by the Governor as well as elected by the people. He has two sons who are Deputy Sheriffs and his wife was a school teacher for the County.

1:06:35 **Politics:** Was elected Sheriff for the County. He also involves himself with other candidates.

Track 02

1:07:15 Values: He holds his values to the highest esteem. He enjoys life and respects people and their property.

1:07:35 Recognition and Awards: Highest recognition was being appointed Sheriff by Governor Marvin Mandel. He was appointed after the vacancy due to suicide of Sheriff George Sanger. He received a lot of certificates from county organization, other police organizations and Calvert Cliffs.

1:09:00 Most valuable thing he had in his life would be his mother and wife.

1:10:00 He wishes that he could have done a lot more in his lifetime. He would like to work more with the youth in the county. He feels that the children of single parents need a helping hand.

1:11:35 If he could live his life over, he wouldn't change anything except selecting a job in his youth that would have brought more income to his family.

Track 03

1:12:07 Biggest changes in the County: The increase in population and geographic contour of the County.

1:13:40 Life for his parents: Life was rough because of living conditions. He parents did own their own home. There weren't many jobs at the time. Most of the jobs were day jobs. His uncle help raise him. He would have had a harder life if it wasn't for him.

1:15:35 News: They received their news from sitting around at the old country store about an hour before closing time. News was also received through newspapers like the Afro-American from Baltimore and the county paper.