

Unified Committee for Afro-American Contributions
Oral History Documentation Project

CLARENCE C. SMITH

Interviewed by Dorothy Waters

May 31, 2002

At Bethesda United Methodist Church Fellowship Hall

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[Begin Side 1, Tape 1 of 2]

Dorothy Waters: ...May 31st, 2002 and I am doing an interview with Clarence C. Smith.

Mr. C. Smith, can you tell us where you were born and the, just about the area in general:
how much land you lived on, the house?

Clarence Smith: Well, I was born in Drayden. I guess it was my grandfather's place. I
guess it was about eight acres of land, three-bedroom house. Done a little bit of farming.
Raised vegetables, hogs and just basically country life.

DW: What kind of -- Did you play games as a child? And if you did, what kind of games did
you play? Did you go to the store and buy games? Did you make up your own?

CS: We had to make up our own. We had no money to buy games. We take old sock and put
rags in it and use it for a baseball. And basically, the same thing for our dodge ball. We
did have any store-bought toys. There was no such thing.

DW: Okay. How did you and your family live? Did they farm? Did they -- Were they water
people?

CS: A little bit of both, more water-related than farm-related. Like I said, we raised a little bit
tobacco at the -- on the place, but most of the living came from crabbing, fishing,
oystering. Seafood was where most of the income came from.

DW: Did your family go to church? And if so, where did they go?

CS: They went to St. Mark United -- Well, St. Mark Methodist Church.

DW: Now, and where is that?

CS: It's in Valley Lee.

DW: What trips did your family take if they took any, like, vacations or--?

CS: None.

DW: Well, where did you go when you left the farm?

CS: What you mean?

DW: Like, the family, if y'all took day trips.

CS: No, we went to some other relative's house or a friend's house. And course, the adults, they had their conversation and the kids, they played different games: tag and ring around the rosies and, like I said, baseball and that type of thing. It was no trips. You -- Back then, we didn't take any trips.

DW: Was the family involved in any community activities? Did you have activities? Family activities? Group activities? Community, religion?

CS: No. Basically, the only community -- I mean, the only activity was involved with was church. Later on when you got to school, we had a few school plays and that type of thing, but the main activity was -- [tape cuts off briefly].

DW: What kind of work did your mom do?

CS: Basically, clean houses for other people.

DW: Do you think that times were better or worse than they are now?

CS: Financially and living conditions is better. Morality and decency is a lot worse. Back then, you respected your elders. You listened to what you were told and anybody would correct you if they saw you doing something wrong. And of course, at the time we thought it was bad; but later on, we found out how great it was. Everybody in the community looked out, basically, for everybody else: children, adults, whatever, and that

part, to me, was a lot better then than it is now. Of course, living conditions and financial conditions are a whole lot better now than they were then. But, born poor, living poor, you didn't realize how poor you were until later years. I mean, you can't miss what you never had.

DW: What were your family's health concerns? How did your parents deal with health and illness?

CS: Basically, home remedies. Every now and then, somebody got real sick, they went over to Dr. PJ Bean which even I can remember when his visits went from 50 cent to a dollar. And, that included medicine. He gave you three or four bottles, boxes of medicine included in that cost. But the majority of sickness, cuts, bruises or whatever, home remedies took care them.

DW: Do you remember any of the home remedies that were used then?

CS: Yeah. Spider webs to help stop the bleeding. If you stick a nail or something in your foot, put a piece of fat-back meat supposedly to help draw the poison out so you didn't get lock-jaw. For colds, there was some remedies that were so nasty that I don't even want to try to describe them. They seem to work, but they sure did taste bad.

DW: Were doctors, hospitals and other medical facilities available to you or your family?

CS: Hospital, no. Doctor -- Like I said, Dr. Bean is the one that I can remember. Like I said, he lived over in Great Mills. And of course, doctors then made house calls if you could get in touch with them. But by not having a car or something, at times, you couldn't even get to the doctor so you had to be able to be took care of at home. Well like I said, when you did get to Dr. Bean, like I said, it went from 50 cent to a dollar but that included probably a bottle of medicine, probably three boxes of pills.

DW: How were senior citizens cared for?

CS: Senior citizens basically looked out for their self. Like I said, back then, neighborhoods looked out for anybody in the neighborhood. It didn't have to be a relative. Not even a

close friend, but somebody in the neighborhood seen something or needed something, somebody seen they got it. So, I guess it was basically everybody looking out for everybody else. The kids were sent to cutting down wood for the older people, get the water from the spring or the well and whatever they need done, some of the younger children were sent to do it. And whatever they wanted done, you did it.

DW: No questions asked.

CS: No. No, you didn't question. You didn't question that because you wouldn't like the answer and you were gonna do it anyway.

DW: What did you use for transportation if you had to get anywhere?

CS: Feet.

DW: Do you remember having -- What did you do for entertainment? Well, let's say, like television, radio?

CS: I had a battery radio, but it was turned on very little bit. Only certain programs. And of course, then the fights because the batteries were expensive and you didn't have the money to buy them so. So, I mean, there was no such thing as kids going in and turning the radio on. You did not touch the radio to begin with. And when the adults turned it on, it usually wasn't on for too long a period of time because you didn't want to kill that battery because that was all you had.

DW: How did black folks get their news in the County when you were growing up? What did they read?

CS: Most of the news was local news and that was word-of-mouth. I really don't remember a newspaper, not a current one anyway. I mean, you might would find a newspaper and look at it that was probably a month or two old, but you didn't -- You didn't get current news. Like I said, I think my grandfather used to turn the radio on to Edward R. Merrill for about a half an hour at a certain time each night. I forget when it was, but it was before we kids had to go to bed and everybody shut up and listened to the news. And

basically, that was it.

DW: How do Countians get their news today?

CS: *Enterprise*, *St. Mary's Today*, some local radio news and of course, you got television stations that cover any major news events even down this far. But, of course, *The Washington Post*. I get -- I subscribe to *The Washington Post*. Their magazine and Metro section covers quite a bit of Southern Maryland.

DW: I can't remember if I asked you this, but what were the chores you had to do, specifically?

CS: Cut and bring in wood, get in water, feed the chickens, feed the hogs, feed the mule, work the garden. And then certain times of the year, of course, you had to pick whatever was in the garden to be canned. You picked blackberries in season and cherries and all these things to be canned also because you didn't can that food when it was available, winter was right rough.

DW: What did you like to do the most of those activities?

CS: I guess picking blackberries and cherries because I would eat a lot of them.

DW: How did your folks treat you? What did they do with you that you remember best? How did they discipline you? What were you disciplined for? And, do you feel like they prepared you for life?

CS: Definitely. Definitely. I -- Back then, people didn't -- They didn't argue with kids. What they said went and like I said, I played hooky one day in school the whole time I was going. I went up there and I made sure I missed the bus and I went home, and my grandfather never mentioned it, but he got the cross-cut saw out and hung me on the cross-cut saw until lunchtime. Well, we went in to eat and I'm gonna eat slow so that I can get a long break. When he got done eating, he said, "Come on , son, let's go."

"Well, I ate finished eating yet."

"Yes, you are."

And then, we went back out and we was on that cross-cut saw until dark. Then, I had all of my regular chores to do after that. And the next morning, I was there half-hour before the bus came. I wanted to make sure I didn't miss the bus because that saw was still waiting. But, this is the way they got their point across. They didn't argue. They didn't do a lot of talking, but you knew they knew.

One other chore I had was pulling baskets of grass for the hogs. Well, honey grass in the field, but you wanted to get by. So, you go out and you pull grass and fluff it up in the basket would look full, and you'd look and he was nowhere in sight. But one of the corners you went around, he was there. He pushed that grass down in the basket and it'd go way down. Well, you didn't get to go back to fill it. You went and dumped that in the pen, then you went and got a full basket. So, it was a lot simpler to fill it the first time, then you wouldn't have to make two trips. And I mean this is the way they got their point across.

You were supposed to get in buckets of water at night. If it was 11 o'clock at night, frost on the ground or whatever, wasn't any water in that bucket, you went in and got the water, even if 11 o'clock at night they got you out of bed, but you still went and got that water because you should of got it that evening. You knew you were supposed to do. And so, they learned you to do what you supposed to do when because you are gonna do it. And it's better to get all these things done while you can still see and get around than going out in the middle of the night to do these things. So, you learned to do what you were told.

DW: I guess that's true. Well, where did you go to school? How did you get there? What was your classroom like?

CS: Well, we went to Drayden School. I did for, I think, until 4th Grade. One-room school with a wood stove and a water bucket, not even a water cooler. And, one teacher for seven grades. And then when we left there, we went to what you call #1 School which

was at Valley Lee and it was – It was, we'd stepped up in life. It was a two-room school. It Carrie -- Carrie Jamison and Mary Kay Mercer. Miss Mercer taught 1st, 2nd, 3rd and I believe 4th. Miss Jamison taught 5th, 6th and 7th. So when I went up there, I was in, evidently, the 5th Grade because I went into Miss Jamison's room when I went up there. And then when we left there, we went to Old Jarboesville High School and I went there until 11th Grade. I had about three more months to graduation, but I got stupid and I left.

DW: Well, how'd you get to school?

CS: To the old Drayden School, we walked. When we started going to Valley Lee and Jarboesville, we got a bus. One bus covered Drayden, Valley Lee, Callaway, St. George's Island and it went up to -- towards Seven Gables and all in that area and down 235. That was when we was going to Jarboesville, and you was on the bus approximately hour and a half to two hours.

DW: Is that before you got to school?

CS: Yeah.

DW: After you left the school, too?

CS: Yeah because – Down in Drayden was the first stop in the morning and it was the last stop in the evening. When we left school, we went up 235 and went to Seven Gables area, then we come on over and went to Mulberry Fields and down through Piney Point, Tall Timbers, St. George's Island. Then, you came back and then he went to Drayden, and that was MacDowell Thomas.

DW: Who was your favorite and your least favorite teacher? Favorite and least favorite subject?

CS: My least favorite subject was English only because of William Shakespeare. I hated it with a passion. That's what made me quit school. For the life of William Shakespeare, and my least favorite teacher was Miss Myers because she was the one that taught this. And, I just didn't -- I didn't care for her and I didn't care for the subject. And, I guess

one of the favorite teachers was her husband, Mr. Myers. He was the principal at Jarboesville at the time and he -- He was okay. I mean, he was strict, but he was fair. And if you'd done what you were supposed to do, you had no problems with him. But with her, you had problems whether you'd done what you were supposed to or not. It didn't matter.

DW: So, they were both at Jarboesville?

CS: Yes.

DW: Now, where was Jarboesville School?

CS: The Base has reclaimed it now. It was on 235 before you get -- Well, it used to be Carver Heights. Now, it's what? What do they call that down there?

DW: I thought it was still Carver Heights.

CS: No. It's not Carver Heights anymore. It's something else. But anyway, it -- I say it was three-quarters of a mile up from Carver Heights. Be on the right-hand side coming up the left-hand side going down and it -- It didn't have running water or bathrooms either when we went there. You had outside bathrooms and you got water out of the pump and put it in the water cooler. Because on hot days, you know how long that stayed sitting in the tub. At least, it was better than what we had had up to that point.

DW: So you said Drayden was one room.

CS: Yep.

DW: The #1 School was two rooms.

CS: Right.

DW: Well, how about Jarboesville?

CS: I think Jarboesville was about six, six or seven rooms. I mean, they had -- Over there, you took Home Ec. You had Home Ec. You had Shop. You had all the regular classes, but I know Home Ec and Shop was two of the extra things that we had there at the time.

DW: Okay. The students that went to Jarboesville, what areas did they come from other than

the area you just --?

CS: All over St. Mary's County because that was the only black high school down this way. I'm -- I'm trying to think, at the time, was it any black high school up in the Loveville and all area, and I really -- I'm not sure. But I mean, they -- Jarboesville covered from Point Lookout to I know, like I said, as far up as Seven Gables Road and all of, like I say, Piney Point, Drayden, Valley Lee, Callaway, Ridge, Park Hall, Scotland. Any black students in them areas, that's where they went.

DW: As a child, if you remember, what did you dream of becoming and why? And, did your dream change?

CS: Yeah, it changed. I always decided I was gonna work on the water and make a living there which, for quite a few years, I did. But then, it got to be too much hard work and not enough money so I had to find something else.

DW: As a teenager, where did your folks approve of you going? Did your parents let you court? Where would you go and what types of things did y'all --?

CS: Basically, you still wasn't allowed to go anywhere. You could go to the movie if you could find a ride, and the movies then were at Happyland Club. Ralph Waters, which was Superintendent of the black schools in the County -- He was the one that had the projector and he used to come down either Tuesdays or Wednesday nights and show movies at Happyland. I think it was -- I remember when it was 25¢. It went up from there, but I do remember when it was 25¢. And of course, you would have a movie and then it was a serial thing where you saw a little bit of something every week that would make you come back the following week to see what was going on. And of course, his projector wasn't the best in the world. It broke down a lot and it was a lot of pauses in the movie while he got the projector fixed. Hey! It was something great for us because it was better than anything else we had.

DW: What was it like when you first moved out on your own? Where did you move to?

Why? What did you do?

CS: Well, when I moved out on my own, I got married. And it was alright. Things were still hard. I mean, you still couldn't make any money and you had to inch and pinch and scrape to get by. But if you were willing to work, you could survive. And, that's -- that the first time I left home, like I said, is when I got married.

DW: What kind of work have you done to support yourself?

CS: Dug ditches, oystered, crabbed, carpenter's helper, ran heavy equipment, drove trucks, worked on the farm and installed storm windows, storm doors, ceramic tile, floor tile. And then, 30-some years ago, I went in business for my -- our self and that's where we stayed until we retired.

DW: Okay. Of those jobs that you just mentioned, describe a typical day on either one or a couple of jobs.

CS: Well, oystering -- You went out as early as you possibly could as soon as you could see because you didn't know what your weather was gonna get like before the day was out and you needed to get as many oysters as you could in the boat before the wind made you come in. Oystering -- Like I said, oystering was -- You made -- You made right good money oystering, but it was cold, wet, nasty work.

And now, driving the truck -- It wasn't too bad, but you still wasn't making any money. I drove a truck five and a half days one week, six days the next per week. I ended up making \$50 per week, for driving. You get a half a day off every other Saturday.

And, running heavy equipment was alright, but it was hot, dirty work and I'd come home at night and running heavy equipment cause all that heat coming back on you. Then of course when you take your socks off, skin come off your feet, some of it, with your socks. But, you went back the next day because you had to have that paycheck. You know, you didn't want to go back, but you did what you had to do to keep a roof over

your head and food on the table.

DW: Okay. Now, you said you went in business for yourself. Can you describe that business and just --?

CS: Well, I was working for Bob McGhee and he decided he was going out of business. Which at the time, he was running a tire shop. So, then my wife and I got together and decided that we would try to buy the business as long as we didn't have to get our house involved in it and the business go bad and we be outdoors. So, we ended up getting the business and I guess I ran the tire business about four, five years. And then, I started taking in one or two lawn mowers to have something to work on in between tires and that seemed to have been a lot better business to me than the tire shop. So, we phased out the tire shop and went strictly lawn and garden repair, and that's what we did up until December of 2000. Turned it over to my son and he's running it today.

DW: Now, are you -- You have another business that you're doing on the side of that.

CS: Yep. School bus contractor. Thirty-five years which, as of June 11th, 2002, I won't be in that anymore either. I will still have a bus on the road, but I won't be driving one. Right now, we have two buses on the road, but my time runs out on it as of June the 11th, 2002 and I'm not driving anymore. Now, the other bus -- It has three more years on the road. When time runs out on that one, it won't be on the road anymore either. So, we will be fully retired.

DW: Can you talk about some of the experiences that -- funny, strange, unusual things that happened on the bus?

CS: Yeah. One real -- I thought it was funny; the woman didn't think so. We -- It was about four buses at the time going through Norris Road Project over there. The woman had bought children, only about three of them and she would come out and get on the bus and chew the bus driver out. So, she come out to get on mine and I told her. I said, "Lady, I can handle this. When the kids get to the black top, they yours. When they hit the step of

the bus, they're mine." So, she was behind the kids and she was coming on the bus. The last kid come on, I shut the door because I told her, "Anybody getting on here go to school."

Well, the next day she was out again and she caught us, got smart, got in the middle of the kids and she got on the bus. When the last kid got on the bus, I shut the door and went on the Esperanza School. And, this lady was in her house coat, bedroom slippers with curlers in her hair. And when I got to Esperanza School, everybody had to get off and I left her standing in the middle of Esperanza School parking lot and went on home. Well, come on back for the next run, but she never did do that again. I thought -- I don't think she thought it was funny, but I really did. I told her what would happen if she got on the bus and evidently she didn't believe me. I had to prove the fact.

DW: Well, have you have any unusual experiences with the lawn, the mower business?

Anything unusual? Any unusual type repairs? Any unusual equipment?

CS: No, other than every now and then, you'd pull the top off of one and find a dead snake under it that has went under it and I guess stayed in there too long. Got fried, and I guess that's --

[End of Side 1, Tape 1 of 2]

[Begin Side 2, Tape 1 of 2]

DW: How did you meet your spouse? How old were you?

CS: I was 17. Friend of mine got -- ah, Mattie Watts got me to pick her up and bring her to a birthday party that she was having. I think it was a set-up, but I'm really not sure. But anyway [Chuckle], that's how I met her and --.

DW: Well, what do you remember about the wedding? When did you marry? Where? Who was there? Did you go on a honeymoon?

- CS: No. Couldn't afford a honeymoon. We got married at parsonage at St. Mark Church. Reverend Lewis Mayhew was the pastor. Wasn't but -- Nobody there but her and I and I paid with \$5 I borrowed from my father because I was broke. And, that was 50 -- Over 50 years ago. Be married 51 years in October of 2002.
- DW: So, you didn't -- The only ones there were you, your wife, the pastor. You didn't need any other witnesses.
- CS: His wife was there as a witness.
- DW: What has your family life been like? Describe your marriage, your relationship with your spouse, relationship with your children and grandchildren.
- CS: As far as I know, everything is fine. With the grandchildren, some of them is -- but they're nice kids, but they're just weird. But, I mean, as far as I'm concerned, I've had 50, going on 51 happy years.
- DW: What part has religion played in your life? What church do you attend? Do you participate in church activities?
- CS: For the last, I guess, 15 years or better, I've been attending Bethesda United Methodist Church where we are taping this at now and Head of Finance and President of Trustee Board. We, far as I'm concerned, we're doing remarkable works at Bethesda and I enjoy the accomplishments that we're making. We have a supportive pastor that's willing to work. We have members that are willing to work, plus financial support. And for a small church, I just don't see how things could be any better than they are. We have -- In the last 10 years, we have added to the church twice. We put bathrooms in the church. We've added on to the hall, put a kitchen in the hall, bathrooms in the hall. We've got air conditioners in both buildings -- central air. We have two ministries going which is Clothes Closet and Food Pantry and we built an addition onto the hall for the yard sales and Clothes Closet and done a section of that for a food pantry where we give out baskets at Christmas, Thanksgiving. And of course, we are willing to help anybody who needs

help any time of the year, not just at Christmas and Thanksgiving.

DW: Are you involved with other churches or religious organizations?

CS: We -- Me and my wife, I mean, we support all churches that -- Their religion or their faith, really doesn't matter. We support Catholic churches. We support other Methodist churches, Baptist churches. It's just something we have always done. We have supported all religions. I mean, we don't -- I mean we do more support in our own church, of course, but that doesn't stop us from supporting all the other religions also.

DW: What role does religion play in your life?

CS: I would say, way above anything else. It has showed me a lot. I've learned a lot. I've seen that you give and you will constantly get back more than you give. You give more, you get back more. You put in your labor and you are dog-tired when you finish the job, but you then you look at the job that you have accomplished and you're not that tired anymore. And, we have some good people. We have good people at Bethesda and it's more like a family than a congregation, as far as I'm concerned. I mean, everybody knows everybody. We, at times, spend almost as much time out in the yard talking after service as we do during the service. It's just, people don't seem to want to go home. They just like to talk to each other, and I enjoy that.

DW: What community activities do you participate in, both now and in the past? For example, softball, baseball --?

CS: I have never been much sports. I had kids that was in Pee Wee Football. Now, I was with Boy Scouts, I guess, over 20 years. Cub Scouts and the Boy Scouts. I mean, we -- camp outs, field trips, ball games. That I enjoyed, but I never -- I never been, personally, that much into sports. I played some football in high school, but sports, to me, is just too easy a way to get hurt. So, I just never did -- I never did participate that much.

DW: Are you a member of any organizations?

CS: I guess basically the Minority Business Alliance is about the only one other than the

church. Now, I don't join too many organizations because you join an organization, to me, you should be willing and ready and have the time to work at it. Just to join to say, "I belong to this, that and the other" which seems like me a lot of people do -- It never was for me. And about the only time I had to spare, I spent around the church. And, to join any of these other organizations and just pay your dues and you never show up to work or you don't attend the meetings and you -- I don't see the point in belonging.

DW: How do you feel about life, in general, today in St. Mary's County?

CS: It -- Life in St. Mary's County, in general, has improved. It still has a long ways to go. We still have prejudice. We have -- I started to say it's sort a two-tiered system, but it's really a three-tiered system, but -- Like, back farther in the interview, I talked about running heavy equipment. Well, I worked with White operators and I was as good a operator as they were, but they were making \$2 an hour more than I was, which -- Today, that's not a lot of money, but back 35 years ago, you working 10-hour days -- that's \$20 a day, and \$20 a day was good money. And I mean, I was doing the same job and doing it as well as they were. But like I said, they made \$12 an hour; I made 10. And to me, some of that is still going on. It's not as obvious as it used to be, but it's still here and the financial institutions still see you as Black being a risk, no matter your credit rating or your job. You get a loan and if you're not careful, you're paying 2% more interest than their white customers in the same category. And, I know this to be a fact based on -- They will say it's not true, but it is true.

First house me and my wife built, that was a long time ago. We built a three-bedroom house. The house was completely finished outside. The chimneys were red inside, part of the petition we in, on two acres of land, free and clear. We went to the bank to try to borrow \$500 to finish that house and we couldn't borrow it. And to me, we couldn't borrow it because we were Black. Both of us were working at the time, I mean, and the house on two acres you know was worth a lot more than \$500, but we could not borrow

\$500 to finish the house inside. And, I still remember that when I go to the banks today, and I guess maybe I shouldn't. But if they say anything out of the way, then I'll let them know that I remember this and they're not doing me a favor. That that's their business to loan me money because it's how they -- It's how they survive is loaning money and interest. You know, you've got part of the time, as much money in the time as you want to borrow. So, they gonna loan you your money back and charge you interest and they doing you a favor? I don't think so. But the way they seen it, they see it as, "Well, I'm doing you a great favor to loan you money." They're not doing me a favor to loan me money. I'm gotta pay them back that money plus interest, so --

DW: Now, do you know of instances like that where that's happened to people recently, and I mean, recently within the last, let's say, five years?

CS: Yes. All the banks we deal with, we send them a financial statement every January 1 and was getting ready to buy a piece of rental property. And, we applied for a loan at the bank. You wait and you call. "Well, we've got to check this." Call back: "We gotta check that." What's to check? So after about four weeks of this run-around, I told them forget it. She went to Leonardtown to the bank and had the check in the account in less than an hour with the same credit information. And before she got back home, the other bank had found out -- I don't know how they did. So, they called to find out, "Well, we were gonna let you have the loan." Yeah? When?

"Well, can you turn this money back, we'll let you have the loan with no closing costs, no points, no nothing."

I said, "No. We don't do business that way." I said, "But maybe next time somebody applies for a loan, you will remember this," I said, "because you lost a good interest on this loan because you dragging your feet." I said, "And, it was no reason for you to drag your feet because you have all the information you need in the computer. All of our financial statements, the properties that we own, the accounts we had." I said,

“You had all that and all you had to do was punch a button on the computer and it would come right up.” I said, “And, it took you four weeks and you still didn’t get the loan.” I said, “And within one hour, she went to the other bank. They pushed the button; it came up; the check was wrote out and deposited in our check.” I said, “Now, you’ve got to see something wrong with this picture: that y’all couldn’t get it done in four weeks and they could get it done in one hour.”

But that’s—It’s still—It’s still happening today. Like I said, it’s not as obvious as it used to be, but it’s still there. People see Blacks as a financial risk. No matter what credit you have; no matter what property you own; no matter how your payment record is: Being Black makes you a risk. And like I said, the institutions can say, “Well, we don’t do it anymore,” but they’re lying. They still do it and like I said, two people -- a black and a White -- can go to the same bank to borrow \$50,000 and the white’s gonna get it quicker. And if he’s not careful, he’s gonna get it at anywhere from a half to a point and a half, percentage points, cheaper than the Black man, and I know this to be a fact.

DW: Do you notice that --You say that’s in finance. Do you notice that in, let’s housing, in the County, different housing that’s available or --?

CS: Yes.

DW: Or other?

CS: It’s -- It’s in every part of society. Like I said, some of its more obvious than others. Some of it is worse than others. But as long as you black, you have a image problem. Like I said, you, you go into the store and -- A black and white person go into the store together and a department store -- and they go different ways. If anybody’s gonna be followed, it’s gonna be the black because you are supposed to steal something before you leave. That’s their thinking; that’s their attitude that you black, you’re a thief. And, it -- There’s very people that’s gonna -- that’s living this day and time that’s gonna ever see that change totally, if it ever does. I don’t think it ever will. I think it’ll always be there.

It's better now than it was 10 years ago. Ten years ago was better than it was 20 years ago, but it's still got a long ways to go to put the black man on equal footing.

As a black, I've never wanted any extra help. Just give me the same breaks that every -- that you give to the white person. I'll settle for that, then it's up to me to make it or not make it on that. I don't want nobody giving me anything. Just give me the chance and the choice to do what I need to do. And, it is still hard this day and time to get that chance. I mean, you go out here today and look at highway construction and see who is on the equipment and see who is on the shovel. And, don't tell me it's not plenty of black operators out here. Good ones. I know of plenty of them. Like I said, I was one of them. But if you look, 80 to 90% of the operators is gonna be white. You might see the blacks driving trucks, but the 90%, 80 to 90% of the equipment is gonna be ran by whites. But if you look at the rakes and shovels that type of equipment, then 90% of them is gonna be black. And as a black to go out here and start a job, you have got to be good already. The white one, person, if they know a little bit about it, they can -- They will help them along. But if you black, you're almost got to be an expert from the beginning, and I know this, again, to be a fact. It's not something I think or something somebody told me. It's something that I know for a fact.

DW: Are people different from what they used to be in St. Mary's County, just in general?

CS: Yes, and part of that's due to the fact that we have so many people in St. Mary's County today from other areas. The farmer because like I said, back in the -- Back years ago, basically the black men were watermen and the white men were farmers because they had farms. They -- They could get farms. Black man -- He might get eight, 10 acres, but it wasn't enough for him to make a living off. So, he used that as a part-time thing and he went to the river to make a living. Of course, now that farming's about dead, river is basically about dead, it's a different ball game today. But -- But, people has changed in the County. And in some areas, there's change for the better. Other areas I'm not so

sure.

DW: And, where do you mean?

CS: Well see, if you don't like me, I'm better off knowing right up front and then I can watch out for you. It's the smile in the face, stab you in the back that people that I can't stand. And, there's a lot of people like that out here today. They will laugh and smile at you good, but basically they really don't care for you. And a lot of times, I don't care for them either. But if I don't care for you, you'll know it. I'll let you know. It's not, you know, and I really don't care. But like I said, the, of course, the, like I said, the County has changed a lot because -- We have people from everywhere here now where 50 years ago, if you live in an area, you knew everybody in that area. Now, you don't really know who lives next door.

DW: How are the teenagers different from when you were a teen?

CS: Well, no respect, no pride in their parents or their self; their attitude now -- Let me back that up. That's not all teenagers. You have teenagers out here today that is good people. They are mannerly; they have respect for their self; they have respect for other people, but that's the way their parents raise them. And to me, a lot of the teenage problems today go back home. They have no home training and that would really tee some people off. But like I said, I've been driving a bus, school bus 35 years. I'm hauling grandchildren of some of the first students that I hauled. Not their children, their grandchildren. And, it's just as much difference in the kids that I'm hauling today and the kids I hauled 30 years ago. It's just night and day. They are loud; they're abusive. A lot of them have nasty mouths and the parents -- Well, they're not like that at home. Kids are not be an angel at home and a devil when they step out the door. It just don't work that way, but it's just the teenager of today, or a big portion of them, has no resemblance of the teenager 35, 40 years ago. I mean, they just -- They're different.

DW: What was segregation like?

CS: Well, I guess you didn't realize how bad it was because you always had been in the segregated society, but I can remember me and my wife and daughter baby -- daughter catching the bus to Baltimore and come back and stopped at the bus stop in Waldorf. The white passengers would go in and get food. We couldn't. You go around the back and they shoot you something out the window. Well, damn. You gonna take my money, you can treat me better than that. So when you went on the bus or something, you got a sandwich or you carried some cookies or you carried something like that, but --And, you went to the movie. Blacks and whites could not sit in the same area.

The black schools were pitiful because we got all of the cast-offs, the junk, the broken -- down desks, the bench -- I mean, the books with pages tore out. You got no sports equipment. You got blackboards that was chipped. You got erasers that was wore out. You just -- You did not get any new equipment in black schools. The only thing new there was if you bought a tablet or a pencil your own. Everything else was hand-me-downs and stuff that a lot of it should have been thrown in the dump. But here again, it was better than what we had because without that we had nothing. But, you start reading a story or trying to study and you get to a certain page in a book and it's not there. So then, you hope you can find another student that's got a book that a page is tore out some where's else and they got the page you need, and you got the page you need. But I mean, that's -- That's, to me, is a hell of a way to have to try to get a education, but you done what you had to do.

But, it was bad, but I don't guess it was as bad here as it was in some other places that you read out or heard on the news because people knew where to go and who to bother with, and you went your own way and left other people. You didn't bother nobody else and you hoped nobody didn't bother you. But like I said, in later years when I had baseball team, County baseball team and if a black team beat a white team or a white team beat a black team and then, part-time there was words said and one thing lead to a

other that could end up being a fight.

And course, if -- A lot of the white establishments, they didn't even want you to pull up in the yard. I mean, they just didn't want you on the property period. So, if you did, I guess I'll put it just like it was: Well, you had a bunch of red necks that wanted to start trouble and it wasn't just whites that would start trouble. If a white went to a black establishment or a couple whites, then the blacks would be just as bad. So I mean, it wasn't totally one-sided that it was only the whites that was looking to start trouble. It was blacks that wanted to start problems also. And, my attitude's always been live and let live. You don't bother me and I won't bother you.

DW: How do you feel about living in the County? Are you a native? Have you ever lived in the city? Do you feel there's a difference between County people and outsiders?

CS: Yeah. I've lived in the County all my life. I've never lived in the city. I've been there to visit and I really didn't like it. And, one of the things, like I said, in the later years that has changed a lot, but in the County: The County people looked out for each other. If a neighbor needed some help, you got it. It wasn't -- You didn't even think about it. It was just something you went and done or it's something they came and done for you. You insulted them if you offered to pay. In the city, everybody seemed to basically live their own life. Like I said, you lived in apartments and they didn't know who was living on either side of them in the apartment. You went your door and you might nod your head or speak if they happened to be there, but that was it. I mean, some areas of the city I heard they used to have block parties, whatever, get together and have these things. But to me, country living has always been about, up until the later years, you didn't even have a lock on your door. You didn't lock your car. When you put something down, it stayed there. You didn't have to worry about where it was going.

[End of Side 2, Tape 1 of 2]

[Begin Side 1, Tape 2 of 2]

CS: No, in the country -- First place, I've always liked space and even if you didn't own a farm or something, you usually had a lot that was big enough that you could have a little garden if you wanted to plant some flowers or bushes or -- You had a little bit of privacy. Somebody else wasn't living wall-to-wall with you and I just -- I never -- I just don't think I could live like that and enjoy it. And of course, people in the cities feel the same about country. They don't -- They don't like country living. But to me, it -- The fresh vegetables and the fresh seafood and that type of thing, I've always loved it. And like I said, I've been in the country all my life and I have no desire to go to the city.

DW: Do you travel to or interact with people in the different sections of the County? And if you do, basically, what are your reasons? I mean, you don't have to get specific.

CS: Well, you attend some churches in different parts of the County. You know people in different parts of the County. And you go to any kind of, basically, a social function and you gonna find people there from, basically, throughout the County. So, it's kinda hard not to interact with people from other parts of the County because almost on a daily basis, you're gonna run into somebody from some other part of the County other than what you in.

DW: Do you think people are different in different sections of the County?

CS: Yeah. They are. I'm really not sure that I can explain the difference, but it just seems to be a slightly different lifestyle say in the lower part of the County to the upper part of the County or the middle part of the County. It's nothing that you can really tie down and say, "That's this or that's that." But, it's a slightly different lifestyle in different parts of the County.

DW: What do you think have been the biggest changes in St. Mary's County in your lifetime?

CS: I guess Patuxent Naval Air Station coming in and giving people jobs other than on the

farm and on the water. And then of course, by the Base being here, people come here. I mean, they -- The growth has been unbelievable and it's -- The way it's going, it's still unbelievable. So, I guess -- I mean, anywhere you go now you see new houses going up. You see new businesses opening up and it's just that 50 years ago, you would have never even -- You couldn't dream of what St. Mary's County would be today. It just -- It just -- Your imagination wouldn't let you imagine what's say, Lexington Park, 235. And, all of the subdivisions in areas: Drayden, Valley Lee. I mean, down in Drayden, there's subdivisions going up down there. And I mean, that was one of the rural, outlying areas that you knew did think -- Oh well, I never did think would build up. But now, they building three, four, five hundred thousand dollar homes down there. So, it tells you how much I know.

DW: Were County people hostile toward the government taking their land to build the Base?

CS: Not really. The biggest portion of them no because by today's standards, they gave it away. But by the standards then, it -- They made out alright. They got more, a lot of them, I think than they thought it was actually worth. And of course, at the time, nobody -- like I said -- couldn't believe that it would ever be the way it is today, I mean, with the size and what's going on and the money that's put in circulation. But, I don't think anybody really got greatly upset that they took the land to put in the Base, not according to what I've heard and read over the years anyway.

DW: So, did any of your family have to move off the land?

CS: No. Well, my aunt -- I had a uncle that, I think, that was still working on a farm over there at the time when the government took it and -- But here again, he moved off of there and a year later, he was back over there working with the contractors and he ended up with Civil Service and he retired. So, he left one job and went back with a better job to basically the same place with a retirement in it. So.

DW: What are your feelings about the changes in the County because of the new growth of the

Base? I don't know if we specifically covered that.

CS: I think the Base is great. I think what it's doing for the County is great, but I just—I have nightmares thinking about what if that Base ever closes which say can't close. That's what they said about all the others and theirs closed. But I mean, it's --It's not that big a work base in St. Mary's County that's not tied to the Base. Yeah, you got construction, home construction. You got road building. You got automobile sales, but all that money is still basically coming off the Base. And with all of the office space that's built, all of the stores that is opened and all, I mean, everything is still basically tied to the Base. Our county income is tied to Patuxent River Naval Air Station. If that ever closes, I see bad things for St. Mary's County.

DW: What do you think of the direction that the County is going in today? County government? Just the whole St. Mary's County thing.

CS: I'm not happy with it at all. To me, it does not seem to be enough planning being done. And to me, you can't see but so far down the line of what is gonna happen, but some of the things we have done in this county that has cost a lot of money to do, taxpayers' money, by the time they were finished, they really weren't what they were supposed to be. And, we need better accountability of the money that the government, the Board of Education, all of the county is spending. I don't think we getting a dollar's worth of value for the dollars we spend. I told the County Commissioners once at a meeting: "I knew all of you all before you were County Commissioners and when you spend a dollar, you wanted a dollar and 10 cents worth for it." I said, "But then, you got to be County Commissioners and if you could get 60¢ for a dollar, you say you'd be happy. I don't understand what happened?"

I mean, taxes is a way of life. You're gonna forever pay tax. You got to pay it to run the county. That's -- But, when they have money to do anything with, things that shouldn't be done, and after you pay your taxes, you got to inch and pinch to survive, that, that

doesn't really make you happy. Or, it doesn't make me happy.

DW: Is there anything, specifically, that you're talking about or instances--?

CS: Well --

DW: That you care to mention?

CS: I guess not. I better leave that alone, but it's a lot of things out here that I could mention, but maybe I shouldn't.

DW: Okay. How about: Do you believe that St. Mary's may become an urban rather than a rural county or stay a rural county?

CS: It's fast heading away from rural. It's --Well for instance, 20 years ago, I left my shop on the bus heading down the road in the morning. Between my shop and the fire house, if I met 10 cars coming up, I had met a lot of cars. Now, it's nothing to meet 50-55 cars in the same distance. So, that tells you what has changed in the County. It's -- The County is growing and I don't think our political leaders is keeping up with the growth of the County. And, Band-Aids don't work. Quick, quick fixes don't work, and all agencies are never gonna be happy with the money that is allotted to them. But as individuals, we not always happy with our paycheck, but we have to make do with it, and we have to learn how to survive with the paycheck we getting. We wished it was twice as much, it's not. So, you, you, you learn how to spend what you got and get the most out of it and survive on that. Well, the County can't seem to do that. You know, if you gotta make some tough decisions and make some cuts, then you got to do what you got to do.

DW: How have you contributed to the County through your work--paid, volunteer, family, citizenship, values?

CS: Well, I guess we -- Me and my wife have always tried to help the elderly, sick. I said we support what we consider worthy causes because I have never been one to giving much to the big charities. I'm not sure how much money is going to help what it's supposed to help and how much of it is going to support other things. So, I mean, if you got \$20 to

give and you go out here and buy \$20 worth of groceries for a family that needs it, then you know that they got your \$20. You give it to an organization, does \$5 go to help the victim or 10 or any? There's no way for you to know. And since it's your money, I would say you can handle it better than anybody else. And like I said, I've never belonged to a lot of organizations and I never will because it's just not my thing. But I mean, far as giving a helping hand to people, groups, churches, whatever, always have. And as long as I'm able, always will.

DW: What awards or certificates have you received?

CS: Let's see. I've got a whole drawer full of plaques and awards from the Lions Club and the Optimist Club and Boys Scouts of America and Bethesda Church and Minority Business Alliance and -- But to me, plaques and certificates are great. When people give them to me, I appreciate them, but that's not what I work for. I work or do things for the satisfaction that I get out of it. My self satisfaction, to me, is a lot better than a plaque. But I mean, somebody gives you a plaque or a certificate, I think it's great. I appreciate it, but that wasn't the reason I done it. You have people out here that do things because they are going get an award. To me, that is not a charitable type of thing if you doing it for the awards you gonna get because you're doing it for pay-back.

DW: What do you consider to be the most valuable thing you have ever had? Something you could not have done without in your lifetime and why.

CS: Religion.

DW: Why?

CS: It has -- It has learnt me how to deal with life's problems, daily problems, how to not get upset when things go wrong, how to work with other people, appreciate other people, not see faults in other people, just see things that a lot of times they don't even realize that you don't care for. But, you overlook these things and move on. And to me, I guess, like I say, religion has done more for me than anything else other than my health in my

lifetime. Course like I said, we were brought up in my grandmother and grandfather's Baptist church when we were kids and you was at church almost all the time. And of course in a few years there, I kind of drifted a way and church was just something in my past and looked at it and went by and didn't realize how much a part of my life it was until I started going back when I found out I had been missing a awful lot by not being there.

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

CS: I have --Yeah -- and I have done more and accomplished more than I ever thought was humanly possible. I just didn't, couldn't see, I guess, far enough ahead to realize what can be accomplished. So yeah, no, I -- I can't think of anything that I would have done different. I can't think of anything that I would change. I've had a loving wife for, like I said, 50, going on 51 years. I'm proud of the children and grandchildren, and life has been great.

DW: Well, unless you have anything to share, any stories that you have thought about while we've been sitting here --Anything you can think of?

CS: I think I have rambled enough.

DW: Well, thank you, Mr. Smith. I really appreciate you having this -- doing this interview.

CS: Well, you asked me and I'm --I'm was willing and we did it.

DW: This is the end of the tape.

[End of Side 1, Tape 2 of 2]