

Unified Committee for Afro-American Contributions
Oral History Documentation Project

REVEREND DR. RUDY CARNEL BROOKS

Interviewed by Brenda Coates

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At the rectory in Valley Lee Maryland

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BC: ...Carnel Brooks at the Rectory in Valley Lee. Reverend Brooks, I just want to say that if you are uncomfortable answering any of these questions, feel free not to answer them.

Okay. First of all, I'll ask you: Where do you live? Give me an approximate -- not approximate, but some sort of location of where you actually live now.

RB: Valley Lee. Valley Lee, I was told years ago, that it was called Valley Lee Forest, but right now I live right in Valley Lee on Happyland Road and I call it somewhat old, model town of Bethlehem. Lovely place to live.

BC: [Laughter] Okay. Now, tell me where you were born.

RB: Right in Tennille, Georgia on Smith Street in Tennille, Georgia.

BC: Is that a town or a city?

RB: It's a town. It is a city in Tennille, Georgia is the city in Washington County. That's the county where I was born.

BC: Is – I'm trying to get an idea in my mind of how big it was. Was it about as big as Lexington Park? Bigger than Lexington Park?

RB: I would say it's the size of Leonardtown.

BC: Oh, okay.

RB: To me, it reminds me of my hometown when I ride through Leonardtown.

BC: Leonardtown. [Chuckle] Okay. About how much land did your parents have?

RB: Well, my parents had somewhat, around 60 or 70 acres, somewhere in between.

BC: What year did you move here to St. Mary's County, to Valley Lee?

RB: It was 1966, July the 31st. I was sent to Valley Lee in Piney Point by Bishop Ford to pastor. Now, I have broken the record in the Union Church as the length of pastoring.

BC: Oh!

RB: Which the bishop gave me a beautiful citation at last annual conference.

BC: Okay. But, so it's very unusual for someone to stay at a place this long.

RB: Over six years, it is. My reason, I suppose, for establishing churches elsewhere. We have done that. The last one was in Baltimore which is Judd Memorial, and they doing fine over on Lafayette Street.

BC: Okay. Okay. I'll go back and ask you some questions, you know, about when you were growing up.

RB: Alright.

BC: What were times like when you were a child? How did you and your family live?

RB: I came through the rough times. I came through times when we had food stamps, but they were rationed. Food stamps: red, white, blue. My childhood growing up, in the midst of fear every day. I grew up in a place that we did not have opportunities, even for school, just be season to attend school until my mother saw fit to send me elsewhere.

But, I didn't -- Oh, I thought I was very lucky because my grandfather was a sub ,

carpeting contractor. My uncle was a sub painting contractor. Mother was a midwife. We felt pretty good in that sense. So, growing up was very, very hard in my hometown for on weekends, it was nothing for a person never seen -- I hope no one ever live to see what I've seen to wake up on Sunday morning and see someone hanging from a tree. It's an awful sight. It's something I pray that no one else ever see.

But, I feel that we had it pretty good. My sister and I, since we're a lot older than my brother, we had a lot of white people that cared for us. Matter fact, she's the one that sent me to school, until her death. So, I think we fared pretty good in a sense, according to times.

BC: Okay. You -- Now, you lived with your grandfather.

RB: My grandfather: Yes, I did and my mother moved back with us in later years, but mostly with my grandfather and grandmother.

BC: They raised you?

RB: They raised me.

BC: Oh okay. Okay. And, you said your grandfather was a subcontractor carpenter.

RB: Yes.

BC: Okay.

RB: Yes.

BC: And --Did your grandmother -- Your grandmother was a housewife. I mean, or did she go out and work, or --?

RB: Yes, she. Mamma Carrie, I always called her and she loved that name. I -- She did go out and do a lot of housework and that's how she made her part of the living. Yes. So, she was a house woman, housewife and homemaker.

BC: What is your earliest memory?

RB: Oh, my earliest memory: I -- My mother's cousin. I – That's my early memory. Her name was Irene and the government paid her to teach school. And at the time, I had a privilege my sister never had for it lasted two years, and we went to the hall. It was a Community Hall, they call it in those days, and she taught Pre-Primer, something now would be Head Start.

BC: Oh okay.

RB: And she taught Primer, which would be Kindergarten in the days which we live now. So, as my early memory of a great venture for me was starting school -- Head Start and graduating and going to Kindergarten, in a sense, in this day.

BC: Okay. What was -- What church did you and your family attend?

RB: At that time, it was a Methodist church. It was called Africa Methodist Episcopal which they usually call it, in short, now AME --AME. That was our home church right in Tennille, Georgia, St. James AME.

BC: Do you remember any trips that your family took?

RB: Oh yes. We took a trip about once a year, my grandfather and I. Detroit was the first. I never saw anything so beautiful as all those lights coming from a rural area, and we – Detroit -- we --Chicago. We took many trips. Miami. You name it. He had an old Hudson back there that would pass anything but a service station, and he loved to ride and never learned to drive. So, we did travel.

BC: Oh goodness! [Laughter] Okay. Was your family involved in community activities?

RB: Yes, my father: He was a, played in little bands around, and he played guitar. My uncle - - h He was with those fellow's awhile. He was said to be an entertainer. I don't think he

was. He probably was just a label, but he was a piano and organ player. I had one my uncles, the youngest one, he sang quartet and he sang -- my memory of him with the beginning of the Trumpeters for a little while. What was called at that time, CBS Trumpeters out of Decatur, Georgia.

And, that was about all of the -- I suppose, everyone did some singing in the choirs, but they did a lot of community work. My mother did a lot of community work around in town. I --such as she made quilts. She made clothes for persons back in those times, so she did a lot. My grandfather: He was --thought he was a tailor. Didn't turn out too well, he found he was better at carpentry.

BC: [chuckle] Okay. Okay. Now, do you think the times were better or worse than they are now?

RB: I would say they are better now than they were back then when I was a young man coming along up in my teens. We have better job opportunities, better schools. The young people today have an opportunity that we never had. This is a great day for the young AND for the elderly, especially what St. Mary's, in particularly, has to offer on the different committees I was involved and still in some. These days definitely a lot better than those times.

BC: Okay. Do you think the, the --I'm not sure what the word is --the people are less friendly than they were or less involved with other people than they were?

RB: I would say less involved. Since my coming here, I found out those elderly people were somewhat --They were very close. They were very close each other and if they was in need of anything, they would really rally to that person or persons and they would do what they could. I think the young people now, with the opportunities and maybe it's

because they're so busy. Maybe they have more places to go now. They have more to do now than they had when I came here. The constant growth of this St. Mary's County --I think that's the reason, but I believe the young peoples are concerned about each other because St. Mary's is known to look after their own.

BC: Okay. What were your family's health concerns? How did they deal with health and illness?

RB: Oh my. They had all kind of remedies. Anything that they could make a tea out of: I've known them to go out and just get corn hersh -- husks off corn and I seen them boil it, make a tea. I seen them with whole hine, something that grew in the garden. I've seen them make tea out of it. They would go in the woods and pick up anything from anywhere, and they would make their tea and they claim or thought to heal the body. A person seemed to -- was doing pretty good though after taking it. I just believe now, since I've grown up, it was the faith in what they had.

BC: Um hmm [yes]. Okay. What was, you know, the hospital and doctor care? Did y'all have doctors that you went to or came to your homes or -- How was that situation?

RB: Yeah, we had a --I guess he was everyone's family doctor. Name was Dr. King. I --He was credited to be one of the greatest pneumonia doctors that ever was. He came to the home. They would always call him on. At my home, they had the plantations back then and anyone that under 1500 acres, they call it a small plantation. He would be called from the office. We had no phones back in those times, only the bosses and whoever, and they would call him and he would come and look in on us. So, he was constantly on the road.

The hospital -- Not a beautiful hospital, but we only had the privilege to view it

from the outside, but a little place below. We always call it the sick shack, and that's where our people would go. And once they enter the place, we knew they would never come out. They never went to the last minute to such place, and only had two nurses, aides they called, during the day for any number of persons. At night, they had one nurse, a heater in the hallway and persons had to furnish their own bed pans. So, it was pretty rough times at those hospitals.

And doctor's office: Naturally we had to enter from the back and you may sit all day and never be waited on. So, pretty rough times and that's why I suppose most persons made their own home remedies.

BC: Do you remember them making any other -- You said they made a lot of tea, but do you remember them making any other home remedies or--?

RB: Yes, they had something little, I think a little kind of candy camphor I think they call it back in those times, and they would take a little whiskey and pour on that gum candy, and it was very good for headaches and things. It was strong enough to be and I think they used to make some kind of little bags to wear on our clothes during the winter.

Claimed that we would never catch a cold, some kind of asafetida or something like that, they call it back in those times. So, they had numerous of things. Matter of fact, they went as far as to cut the eye out of shoes. They claimed that would cause the babies to not have pains when they was cutting the teeth. And, they had a lot of remedies.

BC: Oh! Okay. How were senior citizens cared for?

RB: That was a sight to see. They did not have nursing homes. They had what you call Poor House. And I often thought that if I ever had to be taken to the Poor House, I would rather not live. I saw those persons with the torn screen doors all over this place and they

were sleeping on the floor with saw mattress, and it was the Poor House. The food prepared for them, you could see flies all over the place and . It was something to see. Sleeping and flies all over the person. I suppose that's why I run all over the house when I see one flying. But, it was, it was terrible times for the elderly person back there. We -- My grandfather was very blessed. We was able to keep him home until he-- until he passed after he retired. He had a good retirement: \$7.50 per month back in those times, but it was --Elderly was not looked out to. However a person in the community looked after most persons, and everybody was aunt and uncle back then. But, it was, it was not very good -- Not very good for the senior citizens in those days. I have a senior citizen, maybe it was in the late 40's and 50's, but he lived much longer.

BC: Okay. What kind of things did you do as a child? What kind of games did you play?

RB: Oh my! My games, my main game was shooting marbles. Oh, we used to love to shoot marbles, jump ropes and play games such as Sally Go the Round The Moonshine, and so, we had a lot of little games we played. But best of all, for me, was to shoot marbles and wear holes in my pants and get a whipping!

BC: [laughter] Okay. How did you get along with your sister and your brother?

RB: My sister and I got along quite well, quite well. Usually, my mother was around. Some of the neighbors, persons back then, they helped raise each other's children. So you know, back in those times, if one had to give you a whipping, you get home and they notify the parents and you get another whipping. So other words, you become everybody's child in the community. But, we got along quite nice, quite nice. In fact, when my brother came along, 12 years later, I was not around him. He was a little baby when I left home, but my sister and I [got along] quite well.

BC: What kind of chores did you have to do?

RB: Oh my! We had to get in the firewood. We had to get in coals for the heater, and later we had to cut enough wood or saw it enough wood to have enough for ironing. They had those old types, wooden irons and they would get some cedar or pine and to --When they take them from the fireplace, you kind of rub on that cedar or pine and they would always lick their finger to see how hot it was. I don't know how in the world they knew! So, we had to get enough -- We had to draw all our water from open wells. A few -- there were a few springs that we could find once in awhile, but it was nice. It was nice the little chores we had.

My sister and I, we had to wash all of the dishes. On Saturday was the clean-up day. We'd mop. They had some little wooden brush about so with a handle and they would take the corn herse, the husk from the corn and put it in the little holes and they call it scrubbing the kitchen, with a lot of lye, and that wooden floor would -- It would be beautiful when they finish with it. So, those are the chores we had. We didn't have a lawn, so what we had to do: Get what we call dogwood out of the woods and call us sweeping the yards, making that they look beautiful for the weekend when the preacher come.

BC: Um! Okay. How do your parents, your mother and your grandparents -- How did they treat you? What do you remember that they did with you?

RB: One of the things they did for me, after learning to read a little, they gave me a Bible, and that's one of the things I cherish. I'm sorry I lost it somewhere in later years, but I would always try to read that Bible. Thought I was a minister back in those days, but that was my pride and joy: to read the Bible and it would teach me to pray. It always had a bit

where we would sit and have devotion, family devotion, and they would always tell us how we could help ourselves in this world even in the midst of trials, tribulations back then. They used to sing a song so that trouble don't last always and said we could make it. We would make it. It'd be better in our day. So, it gave us a lot of advice, a lot of advice and I remembered it quite well.

BC: Now, you were talking about playing marbles and getting holes in your pants and being, disciplined, but what did they -- how did they discipline you and what would they discipline you for?

RB: Well, my grandfather always had a saying that "Jesus -- that the good Lord gave you a pad for whipping on each hip, and he went out and made himself something like -- oh, out on a boat and it was smaller, thank the Lord, and he called it -- he wrote on that really [inaudible] and called it the board of education.

BC: [laughter]

RB: And believe me, when he used it, we learned!

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

RB: I believe so because before I undertake to do anything now, always pause a moment and wonder how would my grandfather go about this task? And, I know that he --I don't believe he's speaking directly to me, but in my thought and mind I can remember many things that he said how to go about doing things. And, I think he prepared me in life because I think about him quite often, no matter what I do. Every day, he's not on my mind all day but some portion of the day, I think of his sayings and it helps me.

BC: Describe your formal schooling.

RB: Oh my! I thought -- I thought we had the greatest school it was because most of the

schools was one-room. We had eight or nine rooms there at our school, Tennille High, which the students, we students did not change rooms as they do today. The teachers changed rooms so they didn't have what I suppose they have now in the hallways. And of course, in the classrooms were more ... somewhat, but I thought it one of the greatest schools and teachers was very concerned about us, and they gave me a harder time than they did others simply because most of the teachers was my family [laughter] some way or another! Unfortunately, but I thought we had one of the greatest schools, some of the greatest opportunities. I remember when they employed persons to cook our lunch. It was quite expensive. It was 5¢, a penny a day. So, it was quite expensive, but we ate enough and we was treated rather nice. But, they were determined a child to learn. We didn't get many assignments. What we had to do was right there in the school. They had time to teach us. It wasn't that many in class. Matter fact, when I graduated, we had the largest graduation class of that year. We had a total of six. So, they had plenty time, more than the great number they have today.

BC: Okay. Now, when you went to elementary school, how big was that school?

RB: Oh, that school: I believe it had about five rooms. Yes, elementary school, we had about five rooms. And in that school, we had to meet every morning in the largest room. We called it the chapel and we had devotion before class. I long remember Professor Jordan, one of the teachers. I was fearful of him. I think everyone else was. But looking back now, he was one of the greatest professors I ever known.

BC: Now, how far did you have to travel to get to school?

RB: I would say a mile round-trip.

BC: And you walked?

RB: We had to walk in those days as we saw our, some of the kids we played with riding the yellow bus and we often wonder what it was like. After I became a man, I made it my business to get board of a yellow bus.

BC: [laughter] Okay. Now, do you remember what was your favorite subject?

RB: Oh, my favorite subject was English, History because at that time, we had to -- that was part of our curriculum. We had to study Black History, as well. We had to study Black History along with all other History. We had --We didn't call it ... It was called the Health Book and I particularly was interested in the subject, animal husbandry, back in those times. So, that was some of my favorite subject, but I didn't like Math. Whew!

BC: Didn't like Math at all.

RB: None whatsoever.

BC: Okay. Hold on. [Pause]

Now as a child, what did you dream of becoming and why?

RB: An actor. It was Hollywood or Heaven in my day, and I chose Hollywood. I wanted to be an actor, but like I said, Miss Jeanie Kelly sent me off. She had the hope that I would, along with her nephew go to different schools, of course that we would go on and be medical doctors. But, she died before that time, but I definitely wanted to be an actor. I'm glad now. That was my, that was my dream. That was my thoughts back in those days. I wanted to be a cowboy in Hollywood. Didn't make it.

BC: You still have plenty of time. [laughter]

RB: Well, too old now!

BC: Okay. And, did that dream change because you grew up or, or what?

RB: I believe it did because quite a few -- It was about, matter fact, it was five of us had

planned our life and what we planned to do back in those times. We knew Martin Luther King before he became so famous. Back in that time, we sang at his father's church, Daddy King, and after we was in school, the minister's school, we used to practice preaching at Daddy King's church. So, I think everything went quite well until I felt a call. I heard Dr. King and mentioned that when he was a small boy about a couple years older than I talking about a call to the ministry. And never thought that it would happen to me, but we was on the road--as I said we sing what just we were riding ... We couldn't stay at the motels but always in a community where a lot of good folks was. We would have the privilege to stay there, and I did feel it, was encouraged somewhere. I would rather call it by Divine guidance and supernatural communication sending beyond me to the ministry. It was very strong, so I followed through.

BC: Okay. So, knowing Dr. King and his father and the church helped you to make that decision.

RB: Helped me. Definite so. Helped me to make that decision and his mother, one of the sweetest persons I've ever known. She was.

BC: Okay. Now as a teenager, where did your parents approve of you going?

RB: Well, sometime to the movie. They finally built one in my teen years, area theatre, and they did approve my going to the theatre. So many things they, all the people back then did not approve. I won the contest, one, artists, and they wanted me to come to New York, but all the persons back then would never let you leave. But, she did approve me going to the movie. And on Saturday, because we were colored then, and that was our day in town, they say, in Tennille. We walked the streets all day long until the close at night somewhere around 11:00. So, she did approve my being around town a lot. But as

I said, the older people would keep a watchful eye on young people back in those days.

Those are about the only time that she -- they approved.

BC: Okay. Let me make sure that I understood: You said, Saturday was the day for --

RB: The colored folks to go to town. That's when they did all of their shopping that day, gave the, all day Saturday, all day Saturday. The stores didn't open until 8:00 during the summer, but we was there at sun up. We was there and didn't leave until the stores was closed. Up and down the street, all day long all over the place.

BC: Okay.

RB: But that was our day.

BC: So, the other days, if you went to town, you were sort of frowned on.

RB: Or put in jail simply because they wanted you at -- on the plantation, and that was the time, the swimming pool was closed down on Saturday. It was for the other folks naturally. I -- many a person I know -- I knew that was arrested. And back in those days, they called it irate if you looked towards the swimming pool. So, they did not have the swimming pool in operation until -- during the week, and we was all out of town on the plantation. And then, they would close it down on Saturday. So, they were rough times.

BC: Oh, okay. Okay. Did your parents let you date?

RB: Yes, my mother, she encouraged it. My grandfather was -- wanted me to take my time. Mainly, I didn't get out as much as some of the young fellows simply because so many school teachers in my family, they would always keep me near a book. Back in those days, there was aggravated, but I'm happy now they did. But back in those days, dating - - We could only stay till 9:00. And when we hear a little noise, we knew it was time to go. Yes, and we could walk the girl to church on Saturday night and walk them back

home with the adults in back of us with a lantern, but two or three lanterns, you see. So, dating back then was really, really something.

BC: Okay. So, the only place --Okay. When you dated, the only place you could go was to the movies or just to church.

RB: The church along with another adult. Hhh, sad!

BC: [chuckle] Okay. What was it like when you first went out on your own?

RB: Now that was education in itself. When I first went out on my own, I really didn't think I could make it. Everything then was on me. It was a new experience, new experience. I had to buy everything. I had to pay the rent on a room. I went to Florida, Jacksonville, Florida. Got a room and I -- with my aunt, but I had to pay rent. I had to pay for utilities, everything I had to pay for, but she helped me, as I said, get a very good job. I was at the shipyard and we was making big money in those times. I -- 95¢ per hour. Oh, we was making big money then. That was big money. And, it was quite a challenge.

Quite a challenge. What I learned to managed, somehow, again with the help of my grandfather. He would always, somehow just to think of him, that was always a way out. A way of getting things done. He always said to me, "Save the pennies. The dollars will take care of themselves. And, be careful how you spend." Told me "never to try to balance my budget, the budget to balance." I knew what my budget would be, but what remained I had to spend it carefully, and that was the words he used. And, that helped me quite a bit. It was quite an experience.

BC: Now, when you moved, when you were in Florida, how long were you there?

RB: Oh, I suppose I was there about seven or eight years, somewhere between; and when I started the different schools, then I started moving around then, but I stayed there about

seven, eight years.

BC: What kind of things did you do for entertainment while you were there?

RB: Oh, I was great. Jacksonville, I tried to sing in a band. Tried to sing in a band. Didn't work too well, then I went back to the quartet. I had a stepbrother and he used to write little plays and we used to, on the weekend, kind of act them out there for the other folks and they seem to have gotten a kick out of it.

But, I remember trying to sing for them. They wanted me to sing Country music. Course in those days, they called it Hillbillies, and they would pay me a dollar for each song I would sing. So, we could make a little money on the weekend. But, entertainment was kinda great, but...have so much to offer. I would go to the bowling alley and we had to set up the pins. They didn't have the electrical contraptions they have now. So, we would set up the pins as they knocked down and they paid us pretty good. Worked all night or almost half of the night: 50¢. So, I --We --That was fun. That was fun for us.

Meet at someone's house and someone would always have a one-string guitar whether they could play it or not and you see that he play the one string. All had to do is just make the sounds on it and that was the most entertainment we had. Just together at people house. They call it the hoe down. That's what it was.

BC: Okay. Now when you were in Jacksonville you -- well, did you have a car? You walked to work or streetcar or --?

RB: Well, I rode the buses for a while and then I was able to get a car and my license, so I drove a lot around Jacksonville. I -- in between times, I did drive taxi a while after I got my license. That's when I was able to get my car in between. So, I knew the city pretty well in those days. So, I drove.

BC: And, now you said all during the time that you were going to college, you were doing these types of jobs to pay for your education.

RB: That is correct, and I -- like I said, went to school there. School office and like that. Wherever I could make the money for going through school, that's what I did. I had a lot of principals what have you that helped me. A lot of presidents of the colleges and the assistants always very encouraging. Matter fact, if I couldn't get a job right away, they would let me do chores around their places and get their neighbors to let me do things, and I always had the money when time to go back to school. I said, It's a blessing for children to have parents to finance their schooling, but I believe somehow that learned a little bit more about management by having to work my way through, which I'm very indebted to those persons now.

BC: How did you meet your wife?

RB: How? Oh. I was in college at the time and I think it was a party. They had one Saturday night. Yes, a party they had one Saturday night, and I'll use the word remote development and old folks back in those days wanted you to take responsibilities, and we met and seeing each other about a year. After that we got married, and I believe I don't know the date and the month, and we always --

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RB: Well, she always have a little, a few word for the old guy.

BC: [laughter] You don't remember when you got married. Okay. Okay. How old were you?

RB: When I got married, I was somewhat around 21, 22 or something.

BC: Okay. Now, this was where? Where did you meet her?

RB: I met her in Tennille, in Tennille, Georgia. I was coming down from Atlanta every once in a while, and so I met her in between times. Yes.

BC: So, she was from your hometown?

RB: She's from my hometown.

BC: Oh, okay.

RB: Now, they had moved there. They was from another city, a place called Davisburg, Georgia, about 30 miles from my hometown, but they had moved there because a lot of her relatives was employed by my uncle and my grandfather.

BC: Oh, okay. What do you remember about your wedding? Do you remember who your best man and maid of honor and all of that?

RB: Yes, she chose my sister, unfortunately...keep that for her, the maid of honor. I had my brother-in-law for the groom's man and that was quite a day. Rainy day and all of the fixings the person had gotten together, and I --The bride usually be late for the wedding, but I couldn't find my shoes to save my life. So, I was about 20 minutes late and the person looking for me, and we had to wait when I arrived for those persons to get back. And so, we was about two hours late with our wedding, and --but I thought it was a nice wedding. The ministers would take time and talk to the young man, what he had to do and his responsibility. They never told the young ladies, but it was as nice. It was a nice gathering. Somewhat I was nervous going through the spirits, I don't think I would make it through again.

BC: [laughter] Did you have a honeymoon?

RB: Yes, we went away for about a week. We went away for about a week. Believe me, we -
- Well, it was a five-day week and arrived at this, these person's home. And I said, those
persons back then...had to go those times, watch for I call them "newsy" and we forgot to
take a copy of our license with us. So, they questioned us. Everything was nice until
bedtime and they questioned us, and then, the lady said, "Well, you have to prove that
you married by" -- No phone at that time. We couldn't call anyone. So, for three nights
my wife slept with her and I slept with her husband. [laughter] That was our honeymoon!
That was our honeymoon!

BC: [laughter]

RB: So, I had it hard.

BC: [laughter] Okay. What has your family life been like? Your relationship with your wife
and your children?

RB: We're still learning. We're still learning. My kids, they seem to learn faster than my
wife. We have a great challenge. I -- Still learning to be friends, still learning to give
each other the highest respect and so we are still learning. I think it is a lifetime of
learning. Marriage, at its best, we found, that it's constantly something that we must
work towards, but I feel that we have a good relationship. Certainly willing to share and
not be secretive, with each other. I think we have a wonderful relationship, from what I
see.

BC: Now, what part has religion played in your life?

RB: Now, that is my life. Religion and as your uncle and I would --- used to discuss being a
form of belief and any time that I face with problems of any sort, if it was not for
religion, belief, I don't know how I would make it. I forgot, Father John knew the school

quite well. I think the name of it in Clayton, Delaware. That's where I first met Father John because it is a Catholic school for ministers there. I had to attend that school. One school I had to attend in Clayton, Delaware for Standard World Religion at that time. So, religion means everything to me. It is life itself to me. Without it, I don't know what I would do. And, this religion have taught me love deeper than I ever thought. I -- through this religion, I learned to love and I can combat hate on every side. This religion keeps me alive. I couldn't live without it. It means all to me.

BC: Are you involved with other churches or religious organizations, in addition to St. Mark's and St. Luke's Church?

RB: Oh yes! I, like I said, for 14 years, I was the President of Ministry until last year, and I had to teach, instruct them in pastoral homiletics, Hermeneutics. We had to instruct them in Philosophy and all of that for 14 years. Now around here, we are involved with all religions. We meet every Wednesday over here to Ascension Episcopal Church. Go to Lexington Park, over there by the Rescue Squad. I can't think of the name of it. Reverend Harding is the pastor, and we meet there Wednesday. We're trying to see what we can do about racial relations. We meets there every Wednesday with all these different denominations.

So, I think that's working out pretty good, and we have a great relationship. I have the privilege with many involvements. We do many things together. Easter because we are, ourselves, Methodist Episcopal. That is Methodist by doctrine and Episcopal by practice, you see, and that was what Father John and I used to talk about. Anything that we do or anything that's planned is with, together with a diocese in Washington, you see. So, I --We work pretty good. Things are going pretty well, and I am involved with many

things here. I think first down to Ridge.

BC: St. Peter's.

RB: Yeah, St. Peter's.

BC: Father Pat.

RB: That's right. He's always there and I love him seeing, and many of the priests over here, too, like the Heart of Mary. And so, all around, even Lady of Wayside. So, we have all of these ministers, and I'm so involved with the ministers now since I went for dinner or for lunch, rather at the St. Mary's Nursing Home, Home for the Elderly, rather, and I wind up being on the Board there.

BC: Oh, you're on Cedar Lane.

RB: Yes, I don't know how, and we have quite a few meetings on that board. So, we have a great relationship with the ministers. I was at a funeral not long ago and the priest had me in one of his robes. I forgot to take mine over here. I leave it at the Lady by the Wayside...and I assist in that funeral over there. So, I've been called even in Washington, Baltimore and all those places with the priests and clergy, many of the bishops, and so it's a great relationship. That's why now, I'm on the road so much I've been nominated which I had to concede because I didn't want to be bishop. Course, my people around here, they gets after me, but I, I never wanted to be a bishop. I'd rather be a pastor. But, we have a great relationship near and far.

BC: Okay. You seem very involved. Well, besides all of that, what other community activities do you participate in, if you have time?

RB: Well, we have served as, under Advisory Board at the Health Department and Social Services. As I say, we served on the Advisory Board of the County Commissioners and

as of last year, I got advice for teaching again, I think, for the Women's Task Force.

Yeah--

BC: Women's Commission.

RB: Yeah, Commission. That's it. Yes, they gave me a nice teaching there. Last year, we stayed with them. So, we always involved. I thought I was getting out of it, but, like I said, they invited me for lunch and got me now on St. Mary's Home for the Elderly. But, I enjoy it, being involved in all of these different activities around the county. You name it and we mostly get involved somehow in it. I believe St. Mary's owe nothing. I owe St. Mary's everything because of the privilege they have given me.

BC: Okay.

[Cassette shuts off briefly]

RB: They know what's going on, and I like to be of service. And the first thing I do, I make myself known, I --to these places. All the schools, I usually

[Cassette shuts off again]

...offer my assistance, if I can...the Great Mills, I went over there and talk with the Principal from a pledge's view. What could I do to help combat the problem over there from where I stand with the youth that we have here? And, we had a nice talk then. So, that was a great help. I believe in getting involved and trying to help work out things to make things better.

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

RB: I feel that, to me, St. Mary's County is one of the greatest places I've been, certainly a land of opportunity. A person, anyone, if you can't live in St. Mary's County, I always said that you can't live anywhere because there's always something for a person to do.

You can establish some kind of trade or exercise your skills as mostly skills for people any kind. A person can do anything they want to do. It is a land of opportunity. I see met, many good persons in St. Mary's County, persons who encourage you to do things. I don't think I would want to live anywhere else though I've had opportunities to move out of St. Mary's to other places to pastor.

But, I always begged that I would stay right here. I hoped to retire in St. Mary's. I would love to live the rest of my life. St. Mary's County has been good to me, has been good to me. I think, my view, that I have met the best people in the world, and I certainly feel that I'm pastoring the best churches that upon this earth right here. A great group of people. I like the fairness of the people around here. We may have some trouble, but I find, I find that the most trouble started, used to be-- Well, I guess I've been here long enough now to claim, to call others outsiders who come in and start trouble. But even with the little trials and tribulations, I would prefer to call them in St. Mary's, still it's one of the best places, I feel that a person could live, especially to raise up children. I'm glad mine were raised right here in St. Mary's. They've had great opportunities. Some are working out of the County, but they living in the County. Young people can buy homes. I first to come in here, over here, oh, from the realtor, they comes in and let them know they can buy homes if the, if they have a job. So, it's no reason they cannot have homes now. So, everything arranged right here in St. Mary's County and they do look after their own. No place on earth I believe I'd rather live than here. That is the truth.

BC: Do you think it's changed a lot in the 30 years that you've been here?

RB: Yes. When I first came here, it was mostly in the process of growing. I sat in on the County Commission -- County Commission Advisory Board. They had things on the

book 20 years ahead, and I've seen those things materialize. I prefer to call it, a dream, and a vision still being transformed into reality. St. Mary's County has grown. It has grown, has grown. I've seen many changes. I've seen children born, them grew up, and I've seen the wonderful things they're doing for this county. I've seen where the woods would be, now the shopping centers, employment for the young people. I see whole branch of colleges over back here in St. Mary's County. So, it is the land of opportunity. A person want to get anywhere, do anything and they take care the elderly. This is a great place. I visit quite often and I see how well we're doing. May not be everything to our liking, but we certainly agree with the many wonderful things they are doing right here in St. Mary's County.

BC: What do you think has been the biggest change in the County since you've been here?

RB: Now, one of the biggest changes in this County since I've been here: Some of the -- Well, a person who was a good friend of mine was a poor baby that did not want any -- he called it "heavy construction" and all of the thing that's being done in the County. He wanted it over his dead body, course it went on before his dead body, but I have seen the attitude of many persons change right here in St. Mary's County.

I had the privilege of seeing the first hired black County Commissioners. I see that the doctors were any race. I've had the privilege now of seeing a young lady doing quite well as a mortician here in the County, and I've seen many changes take place, even in the stores where we had to go to Citizen Bank and talk with the president in getting one of the Dickens girls in, working in that bank. And so, anywhere we go now, we can see our people doing great things. And what make me happy: The young people taking advantage of the young men over there in the square with his barber shop. And, I see

other persons with some shop or another, a store, and what's happening over there. I see many managers of our people, and it has been a great change here in St. Mary's County for which I'm grateful, and it's still changing and still growing.

BC: Okay. Now, this is a question that I'm not sure, I'm not sure how to word it so that it would fit you since you are not from the County, but the question is: Are people different from what they used to be? But, like I said, that would be a little difficult for you to answer. So maybe, I'll just go ahead to the next part of that and ask you --

RB: Well, I feel they are different. Like I said, again, those older people, when I came around here, they were somewhat babysitter for me. I was 34 years old, just fresh out the Theological Seminary. I knew everything and I wanted person to ask me something, tell me nothing, but the only philosophy I studied, I found that it did not fit with those persons. They had a love for each other and a keen sense of direction in everything they did.

Talking about building a church: Your uncle came down and gave us the layout. He was just happy, just happy and we know that what he charged us was dirt-cheap, but he was just happy to be a part. He went out and got, suggested a lawyer and said those persons. It was --I don't know what. I think they was bind to each other and I would hear them often say about this person, that person. I was at the hospital and we was having a meeting. I came in...and they was there. I walked in. I said, "Isn't it sad that Milton Thompson passed while I was the hospital?" That was in the meeting. Being left at Happyland. So, the concern they had with each other, which, as I said, here the young people today do not have that closeness. They don't really know each other. They don't really understand each other by dealing with the young people. And, it is a change. It is

a big change. They have so much more now to do. Even around here, it's a big change in the operation of things. So, I think that what keeps the young folks, in this day. They was on the verge of going out when I came in, but I had a privilege to witness that love, concern and help they would give to each other. And, they took me as one of their own.

BC: Okay. Now, looking at the teenagers today and thinking about when you were a teenager, what kind of difference do you see there?

RB: They're wiser. They're a lot wiser than I was when I was a teenager. I would say, to comparison, I was somewhat like an eight year old to the teenagers to day. Like the teenagers today, they mature earlier. I sit and I talk with some 12 and 13 or 14 and 15 years old kids, but they're not kids. They talk like adults. I listen to the plans. In my day, only adults would have those kinds of plans. So, I think today, the young especially the girls. The girls mature a lot faster than the young men's, and I've learned a lot from the young people. As we sit, we talk. We discuss their plans, their views, their ideas, and they got great ideas. They got great plans and that helps me, but they are far wiser and exposed to much more than when I was a teenager, and it's for the good.

BC: But sometimes you may wonder, though! [laughter]

RB: They works it out.

BC: Okay. Now, since you've been in the County, have you seen a change in race relations?

RB: Yes, I have. I have seen a change there in race relations, working with a lot of persons.

When I first came here, we used to meet at Breton Bay or the Wharf --whatever you call it --in Leonardtown near the water. We would meet once a week. I think it was on a Friday or Thursday or whatever, trying to get persons to sit together, to bring about this change. And it didn't work so, too well in the beginning, but it finally caught on, and I

see people nowadays come out. We have persons come here, and we have, persons constantly asking to come and I seen a great change in the relationships. And, I believe it's getting better, not as rapidly as we would like to see it, but I do believe it is getting better.

BC: Okay. Now, you've lived in cities and you've lived in St. Mary's in the country and rural area. Which do you like the best and why?

RB: I like the rural area better. I thought once I could live nowhere but in the cities, but St. Mary's County really opened my eyes of where we are living now: where we're living, how we're being treated by persons. So, St. Mary's County, like I said all over, I traveled all around through the county to different places involved with persons, groups and what have you, and I would prefer to live just where I'm living. The big cities: They can have it. My fear --I'm certainly not fearful for anything can happen anywhere, but I --I'll say it again. Watch the way. Watching the way all the people carry themselves and the many things they taught me by watching their movement. They had --They may not have the academic training, but they have that mother will. Was not match for the that mother that they had, and I watched them and I saw how they treated person. We would--We said we would talk, and they asked me to stay longer than I was intending to stay. I was to set to stay four months, and it turned out over 30 years, which I'm grateful for! But, I would rather live where I'm living.

BC: Okay. Now, do you see a difference between outsiders and the people that were born in the County?

RB: Yes, there is a difference. There is a difference. I say, again, that persons in the County have been knowing each other all their lives and they use to -- custom or way of doing

things, like I said. A person from the outside come in here, then you got to learn all over again. So when I came here, I had to learn all over again. I would stand and listen Brother Statesman talk and talk with his son, Warren Statesman, and I'm standing, and I'm looking from one to the other. And when they finished, I didn't know what they was talking about, but we do have to get used to because things are done different here than any place I ever been. But this difference, I believe it is good for the County. And once a person come in here and do learn the people, again, because St. Mary County people, whether it's right or wrong, whether he's right or wrong, he said or she said, they gonna help each other. And, that's something you don't find, very seldom from the outsiders. They each kind of stands alone.

BC: Okay. Okay. But now, do you think that --I'm thinking that --Would any --If someone from here went to your hometown, would that, could that be said of them?

RB: Yes. Yes. I met a young fella from a place called Crematon, Crempton or some place up here, above Leonardtown.

BC: Compton.

RB: Compton. That's the name of the place. A young fella, and he married a girl, and I think they met in Washington. And for the last 20 years, he been living at, 3 miles from our hometown, a place they call Sandy Field. And when I go, I always see him. Matter fact, I saw him last week. I --How are things? He said, "Well, I not really not a Georgiatonian." I don't know where in the world he made up that name from. You see? He had learned --He had to learn all over again. And the same thing would be said: He saw the difference. Didn't have togetherness they have in St. Mary's County here, and he found out how a person eats -- kind of stand. That all goes to family members, as well.

And goes to family members, as well. They not as close.

After my mother passed, my sister and I became closer than we had ever been and so forth, she and I always were that close now. That's why she came to visit me Christmas, but outsiders and they usually not close. And, I've traveled all over, and people in St. Mary's County, and I tried to find a reason. I bought a history to find out about the people in St. Mary's County, and I did learn a lot. It's the only County where I know the people help each other, hold together. Regards of what, they will hold together. During the elections of, what I really noticed it more than ever, of George Aud, which is a good friend of mine. And when the outsiders, they was going around and they came to me to sign we wouldn't vote for him and whatever, when I listened to a lot of St. Mary persons talking, "He's one of ours." I thought -- Well, I've been here long enough. "He's one of mine."

BC: Okay. And because of your -- You travel and interact with people in the different sections of the County.

RB: That's true.

BC: Do you notice any difference in somebody from Ridge as opposed to somebody from the 7th District?

RB: Oh yes! That is a difference! A major, a major, a major difference! Matter fact, I see quite a difference from persons on St. Georges Island in Piney Point. It's a --It's a major difference, and I've noticed it very carefully. You would think when they leave St. Georges Island, they was going to Washington or Baltimore. It's just that difference, and it is a different. Even from Piney Point to Valley Lee, there's a difference in the people: the difference attitudes, the different way of seeing and doing things is all together

different down in Ridge. And I know a lot of persons there and associate a lot of persons, even down to Scotland is quite a difference. All around in different areas, it's a difference. Big difference.

BC: Maybe it's -I've interviewed quite a few people, and no one has ever said it like that.

Some people said, Well, they didn't think it was a difference.

RB: It's quite a difference!

BC: Okay. What are your feelings about the Navy Base? About -- and especially about the new roads on the Base.

RB: There's one thing that I think they should always remain in St. Mary's County, but they got a lot of cleaning up to do on that Base, a lot of cleaning up to do. Opportunities not as plentiful as it is outside the gates. A lot of thing goes on that Base, and they keep it kind of quiet. After I came here a while, I had to take a job that was a night supervisor for all of the fuel that was delivered out there. And a lot of things that was never told, never printed that is -- and it's a lot of work. A lot of things to be done out on that Base. I wish my good friends could pull teeth and could just turn lose on that Base, and frontal gasket. Cut them lose out there awhile on that Base. It's a lot of work to be done. It's better, and it's getting better because we have person that really doing things, but it's not being known. It's not being made known. But, they're trying to contract everything out and it's certainly unfair the way the contract goes and privileges not given to persons that should be given.

Mrs., ah, oh, Somerville: She had to fight hard for a position out there as supervisor because they got some others out there.

BC: Elizabeth Somerville.

RB: Yes.

BC: Okay.

RB: So, other word, at the Naval Testing Center. You've got to fit in their plans to get anywhere on that Base, and they will make it plain. I've been with the chaplains and still, made the association with the chaplains out there. Chaplain Lindsey, were often out there. He know there's a lot to be done. I've seen chaplains that have got very close with us. Minister Association here in St. Mary's County, like Chaplain Davis, and they were not given his promotion. We thought we was feeding some information on things we wanted him to do, look into. So, he didn't get his promotion and he just retired and went on back home. These are the kind of things that --.

BC: Things that most people don't hear about.

RB: Don't, don't hear about. That's true.

BC: Oh, okay. What do you think about the direction that the County is going in today?

RB: I -- I think we --and I can pluralize it now heading in the right direction course I was run up against oppositions and the different areas. But I think for the most part, it is going in the right direction. I, as I said, on this board here, planning now sometime this year to be a 62 more units for the elderly, home for the elderly, and they are constantly working out ways to lower the rent for the persons.

And, I think it's heading in the right direction. We have some trials and tribulations in some portion and I suppose that's everywhere; but out of it all, I think St. Mary's heading for great things.

BC: Okay. Do you think the County may become an urban rather than a rural county?

RB: Definite so. I -- for the next ten years, it will be. That's the plans.

BC: And, I mean, you can't do anything to change it, but what do you think about that, becoming a city rather than a county, or rather than a country setting down here?

RB: Well, it's gonna hurt a lot of the retirees and persons who thinking to retire, those many who has already retired, special the Naval Testing Center. That's what I said, I talked to Mr. ... Bailey and those persons back there and they had hoped to keep it like it were, and I don't think the young people today will tolerate it. They getting young peoples in different positions around the County and they got greater ideas. They're looking to have a great city here in St. Mary's, and the plans on the books now, and they say they leave them that way. But, I believe it will be good because most of them have to travel out of the County to get jobs and what have you -- My daughter's being transferred now since that closed. Some being transferred other places like Crystal City, Naval Testing Center here. So those kids, mostly, when they finish high school, and some go to college, but they getting jobs out of the county. They're living in the cities. I think that would encourage more of them to return home, given back to the county. So, I believe it'd be great.

BC: How have you contributed to the County? You know, have you --What kind of recognitions and awards have you received?

RB: Well, like I said, I received quite a few, I -- from the Social Services Department, from the Health Department. And matter fact, the staff give me a nice citation. I can't think of the name now. The one that --

BC: The Sheriff of Voorhaar?

RB: Yes.

BC: Okay.

RB: Yes. I was trying to think of his name, and so we have got a lot of citations from persons around the County. The last one was last year from the task force, and what have you. So, we've got a lot of citations. We have served in many places. Once I would have application here from Mr. Carter when he was Director over at the Social Services. And I was for years I fill out papers person late -- birth certificates, and those things, Mrs. -- Is it Mrs. Shue --?

BC: Sherbrook's.

RB: Sherbrook's. I, used to meet different places. They help get places for persons. When I was Kendall Barnes, I think the last time we getting a place for him to live. So, we been in, constantly involved with a person helping. Matter fact, Christmas --

BC: Christmas In April?

RB: Other times, we get involved with giving the baskets, and we get names from Social Services. And, Christmas In April: Right now, we're on the books. We attend the meetings whenever. For breakfast or lunch, we always do that each year, whichever one they desires to work. So, we always try to get involved somewhere, somehow.

[End of Side 2, Tape 1 of 2, Copy 2]

BC: Okay. What do you consider to be the most valuable thing you have ever had?

RB: Now, the most value thing that I ever had, and I often tell the youth here about it: That's the privilege of the education that I had and especially, which little bit, but the most valuable thing about the education was, your uncle, Mr. Brent. That did not encourage me, in a sense. He told me I had to go back to my doctorate, and some of those classes I

had to take cost money. He had to sign the paper for me, I -- before the school would recognize it. But, I think that's one of the most valuable things I have that helped me in many ways to do many things. Not only for my family, but for the people in general. Be able to come up with different ideas from what we have learned that will contribute to us. Getting them involved in saving some things of the sort. Other words, to trying to help themselves.

So with that, and I'm still in school. Matter fact, we're studying Greek now [chuckle] and I have to drive to Delaware every Thursday for that for awhile longer. So, all that helps. I think that's one of the most valuable things that I could have gotten from the areas I came from, and I cherish it very highly and persons who helped me to learn. That's when I look at person like Miss Gaskin and other person in the County, those educators. I learn a lot from them. I watch how they conduct themselves. And I often said, if I continue to keep on -- to keep on, I, that's a great weapon what he call it sometimes that you have that you can always depend on. No one can take it away from you.

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

RB: I believe I've accomplished, mostly, what I would like to have done, but I think about a poem that was written by one of our bishops, a great friend of mine and the President of Boulder Theological Seminary in Wilmington, Delaware: a Bishop Friedel. I never want to finish. I don't think I would want to complete anything that I had in mind, but I would like to do a portion what he said "I want to, how I want to die morally. I want to die from the middle of my road, both hands on my hoe, raising it up, bringing down. Driving it deeply in the ground. And, he said that he want composition on his desk: some

completed, others to be considered." That's the way he want to die morally. And said, and he voiced my sentiment.

BC: Okay. With some tasks done and some to be done.

RB: I want some completed, and I want yet to be considered. So when someone come in, they would take up the battle plan, but I keep my sword and shield.

BC: Now, if you could back and change something or live your life over again, what would you change, or if you change anything?

RB: Yes, I think -- I think the first thing I would -- I would change, I think I would have waited a little while for my family. And with this group of persons we was with, the things that we wanted to establish and I would have to like to seen, in this ...plans. Nursing homes, medical centers and all of these things we had in mind, we wanted to establish, and we wanted to go all over the United State doing this. So, I believe I would have waited a little while on my family if I could go back over it again because I would want the same family, but I would have put it on hold until those things was accomplished. Something helping our people.

BC: Okay.

RB: One of those things that I think I would change.

BC: Plus, be a cowboy.

RB: [laughter] Be a cowboy. I done got older than the horses, so.

BC: Okay. Well, Reverend Brooks, I really appreciate this interview and it was, it was --

RB: I enjoyed it. It helped me, and the idea of just being considered a person to be interviewed be a highlight of my life. Seeing I reached the mountain.

BC: [laughter] Okay.

RB: Yes. Mean a lot to me.

[End of interview]

BC: Biographical Data Information on Reverend Dr. Rudy Carnel Brooks

PO Box 142, Valley Lee, Maryland
994-0273 or 994-2090

Born: February 27, 1931 in Tennille, Georgia

He went to Tennille Elementary and High School, Morris Brown College, Moorhead College which was connected to Morehouse College, Pineline College, Miller College, Bowden Academy & Seminary, and Liberty College and University.

His occupation is Pastor.

His wife's name is Luella Duggans Brooks.

His mother's parents were John William Brooks and Amanda Brooks. He doesn't know the name of his father's parents.

His mother's name was Pearl Lee Brooks Haynes. His father's --He believes his father's name was Emery Davis.

His brothers and sisters are: He was the oldest, then Helen Brooks Hilson and Eddie William London.

His children are Jimmy Lee, Johnny Lee, Pearl Lee Brooks, Rena May Smith, Mary Helen Brooks, Ozzie Mae Shade, Sarah Luella Brooks, And Ruby Lee Thompson.

Jimmy Lee has no children. Johnny Lee's children are Angela, Johnny Jr., Amanda and Oslo. Pearl Lee's children are Timothy Wayne, Carnel, Jamal and Larisa. Rena Mae's

children are Kimberly Rose and Junior. Mary Helen has no children. Ozzie's children are Clorice, James Jr. and he doesn't remember the third child's name. Sarah has no children and Ruby has no children.

That's the end of the biographical data information.

[End of Side 1, Tape 2 of 2, Copy 2]