

UNIFIED COMMITTEE FOR AFRO-AMERICAN CONTRIBUTIONS  
Oral History Project

Frank Darence Travers

Interviewed by Merideth Taylor and Alma Jordon

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Merideth Taylor: So, we are interviewing for UCAC. Today is January twentieth, two thousand sixteen. And this is Merideth Taylor and Alma Jordon and we are interviewing Mr. Frank Travers. Right? Travers. So, if you could start by-- if you'll just say your name for the record.

Frank Travers: Frank Travers

MT: Okay. Great so, let's see-- we seem to be progressing. [Laughs] All right.

Alma Jordon: Okay, Frank. I am going to start with some questions and I'd like for you to tell me about your people and where you were raised.

FT: My--My--mother . . . My mother name was maiden name was Mary Dyson. And she married James Travers, James William Travers. And they both home was in Drayden, --ever since I known they lived in Drayden. And they had uh 8 head of children and it was two girls, two girls and six boys. And she take in some other children, of our family her name was

Francis Dyson. She live with my mother and father for a while then she went back to her original family. And . . .

AJ: mmm hmm. What-- Can you tell me the name of your siblings?

FT: Yes. Charles Travers, Ester Travers, James Travers, Adelle Travers, Lloyd Travers, William Travers, Frank Travers, and Robert Travers.

AJ: So where did you come in on the Travers family? What member where you?

FT: I was next to the-- I was next to the-- I'm next to the youngest [laughs].

AJ: What ah-- Go ahead.

FT: I'll tell you I named them from the top on down . . . that's what-- that's the way I named them

AJ: okay

FT: The first one is the oldest, then the next one and next one.

AJ: Oh Okay, okay. What is your earliest memory as a -- as a child?

FT: I can remember when I was three -- before I was three years old. No five, I can remember before I was five years old. One, one of the first things I can remember today is the flood of 1933, because our family was in the flood. We lost furniture and everything and that's why I can remember it. And during that flood well, we -- that water I can

remember my father had a boat at the regular place that he tied it up at, at the wharf-- and as the tide come in he'd pull his boat in. Tide come in, he'd pull his boat in. That was one morning, same morning we moved out and after the tide got up in the yard, he pulled his boat up in the yard. That's why tide got up to the house he pulled his boat up to the house. Then he said to my mother "it's time for us to get out of here". And he went up on the hill and got a man named Norman Smith, he owned buses and he carried people places. So Norman come -- come down there and got us and we went up to St. Mark church in Valley Lee. At that time, they had tents sitting all around the place where people went and stayed for the month of August, called it "Camp Meeting" that's why they had church folk that lived up there. And uh we went up there and stayed till the storm was over. And uh when the storm was over, daddy come, he was watching the storm and coming back up there, go down and watch the storm go back up there. The tides of the water, water had to go down so we could move back towards the house weren't completely tore up. Well we didn't move back in the same house and the first thing I could remember momma asking daddy is-- what she say "what about the kittens?" We had a cat that had a bunch of kittens. And uh we saw her fore we left; she took them kittens by the neck and carried them all upstairs. And uh . . . that's what I know happened to those kittens but she was smart, she took them by the neck-- by the mouth, come back and get another one, carried it upstairs she had . . . of that and we saw that just as we were planning on leaving, and that's all I can remember . . . On the way out to get on the bus we had a hog

in a, in a hog pound and daddy would drive and pick the hog pound up and turned it over. Them hogs come [makes hog sounds] right up that hill they went cause it's water all back there, it was something new to them too. And uh when I come back water had ceased and uh we lived in the house for a while but one of the houses down there was destroyed the one we lived in was a- it wasn't destroyed. And uh before that I remember the steamboat when they is running, when people used to carry everything down to Portobello Wharf, horses, wagons and mules, whatever had four legs. If it had steers, they had steers pull the wagon out of there. Everything was shipped by boat at that time, it wasn't no main highways . . . Washington. But there were trails you know? If you know what I'm trying to say, there were trails up there but it wasn't no highways . . . Everybody was using horses . . . they carried freight... anything that had shipped to Baltimore, Washington, they carried it down to Portobello in Drayden. And put it on a steamboat and a steamboat would carry it to Washington, whichever way it was going. And they would sell tobacco and put it in . . . and put it on steamboat and ship it. But sometimes they would -- the people-- my daddy didn't get no money for the tobacco. Most of the time he get a letter that said he owed for floor space in Baltimore where they put it. He owe for floor space. But he never received tobacco- tobacco back. So I -- I didn't understand that, you know? If the tobacco nobody brought, nobody wanted, I guess they just throwed it away. I don't know what they did with it. But I don't think they threw it away. And people who went to Baltimore and Washington they went by steamboat they didn't go by no

bus or car or nothing else cause very few people had cars then in my vicinity and "Piney Point" vicinity. All them-- all them places had lighthouses. Steamboats stop at the lighthouses and pick up people and drop off people and pick 'em up and drop off freight, and pick it up. And it goes to Washington then to Potomac River, and it goes to Baltimore by the Chesapeake Bay and stop in the tributaries to pick up things and go back on the main river. And I remember that because I used to like to hear the steamboat will blow and I was a child. And I used to hear it blow and I run to my momma "The steamboat is coming. Hear it blowing?" It will blow right down the river so people will know the steamboat is coming when the steamboat got there it would cut the motor off out in the river. The tugboat will come along and right aside the steamboat and latch on, the tugboat will bring it in cause the steamboat was so big. If you had brought it in the force from it will force the water out. So that's why they need to stop it out in the river and hook on the tugboat and the tugboat will bring it in real slow and bring it to the wall and they place where they can unload the freight and the people. Then you would separate it out because it was toxic or good (?). (11:21??) We lived right there by the wall almost. I would say we lived, maybe say not a quarter-- . . . nah we lived quarter of a mile...it wouldn't be a quarter mile we lived from. We could see the people . . . from our house. Then sometime we go over there and see the people unload they carried their cattle, their horses, their pigs, their chickens, the ducks and everything down there. And I can remember that still, I remember it well [chuckles]. This ain't no tale nobody

told me I remember it. And I was born in 28' and the flood was in 23'-- 33' I mean. So that means I must have been five years old at that time when the flood came.

MT: That's--That's a wonderful description.

AJ: It certainly is. Now you talked about your dad and tobacco, so how did your family live? What was their livelihood?

FT: Our livelihood was, in my first memory, our livelihood was daddy always farmed and at that time there was a business going called "Bootlegging". They go in the swamp and make them money out of swamp water [laughs]. And I can probably imagine practically every family-- every family, mostly could get in that was in it, because they got their liquor free. They didn't get paid a whole lot of money. They give them a gallon of liquor or-- wasn't a whole lot of money in it. It was more like taking care like slavery was, they take care of your thirst [laughs]. Is what I got but you work-- because a lot of people back in those days, they stole after they closed it down they would go back to the ol' place they worked and they would need some liquor and get it. And that went on all the time with mostly everybody. So that's the reason why they made a lot of it so the rest of would get sold and they could have enough to sell it all. And by the way when I was in school I had a brother William that's older as I was and I had a first cousin, Thomas Dyson, he was older as I was. And I don't know where they learned it but one day evening they carried-- and I was going to school with them, they went to the, to the still. And they told me don't drink

no liquor; they were older than I was. And I didn't drink any but they told me I could drink some of the mash and that's the same thing you make the liquor out of. So I got to feelin' good on my way home, and what I did I got me my lunch bucket-- we had tin lunch buckets back then, or you use a molasses can with a top on it, it wasn't nothing but that high (indicates 5-6 in.) The children carried their lunch in, if they didn't carry a paper bag, they carried it in that. So I filled my bucket up with sugar and what I did with the sugar--what we three younger brothers did, we used to like to mock and imitate the older folks. We get--there were a whole lot of bottles laying around everywhere, so we got the half pint bottle, went down to the spring, filled it up with water and take the sugar and sweeten the water. And sweeten the water. Then we get up; we had three people that were related to them, daddy, my mother's brother, and George Whalen. They travel around in the sailboat up and down the water together and they got drink-- they always come by the house. So we get our bottles, we finally get our bottles filled up - One had to be daddy, one had to be uncle Frank the other had to be George Whalen. One of us had (incomprehensible 16:30) and we mock them (noise). Turn that bottle upside our head and children like those playing in the yard. And I'm up . . We thought we was talking like them and say what we heard them say. So that went on for a long time, I mean for years. I don't know how many it might be one or might be two. But we got caught and in them days you weren't supposed to imitate or mock or make fun of no older person. You were supposed to respect your--don't mock them-- you

couldn't walk like they walk if they was lame. You got caught mocking them lame person, you got beat, that's the way I was trained. So, momma was in the kitchen we was outdoors right behind the house next to the kitchen. She had the window open listening to everything we said and watched us mocked our daddy's and our uncle's and our cousins. She didn't say a word to us about it, she waited till we done something else. Then we-- Then that something else whatever it was, well we got a beating for that first. Then she stopped beating you and tell you for every beat she gave you. 'You remember that day you all were on the side of the house I had the window up and you all were mocking your father and my brother and your cousins?' Then she whipped me for that. That's what I got a beating for. Well we had a lot of fun in doing that and I'll tell you something else that used to be. My youngest brother and the brother older than I, I was in the middle, them two were . . . (18:25) just a like. They carried on a few things. So when momma come in from wherever she been through they would way up the field side and tell her whatever had happened. They had broken up or dropped or . . . (18:46). They were having it-- school momma on walking back. I don't-- I don't go with them, I stay at the house. I didn't know they were telling her everything, putting everything on me. So when mom gets home and she finds out this and she sits down. Didn't bother nobody, but she looking, looking at everything that they told her to see what was done and what was not, and I didn't know what she was doing. And she call me around front to see and she asked me I said "momma I didn't do that, William or Robert did that I didn't do it." "Well they said you, you



one and that's two, that's two against you." You know how it is majority wins, majority ain't right all the time but it still win.

[laughs] But any how I got the beating for it. And we went on playing we were talking about holding no grudge, we got a beating we would come out in the yard and we played together. Then you would get some more beating if you didn't play together. We was taught to play together and soon forget what your brother or sister done for you --against you. So that's what we did, we were all playing again and next time momma go somewhere or daddy was always gone, everyday. Cause if he couldn't work in the fields he would go in the swamp. [laughs] And that's where he was, anyhow the same thing happened again, momma was at the windows and Robert and William around the house talking about how they got-- At that time they called me "Darence?" how they got me in trouble and I got a beating and they got by. They didn't know momma was sitting there with the window up, listening to everything they were saying. And for years I got beating for (incomprehensible 20:56) mom didn't say nothing about it she just wait till they did something wrong. Same way she did me, she beat them for what they did wrong then she (speaking as mother) "Remember all them times I beat Frank or Darence whatever you called him. And he told me he didn't do it and uh y'all said he did do it and I said two up against one. But I heard y'all say that y'all did it." Yeah she beat them and said after the beating "I'm not finished with you yet you gon' get some more beatings for that." [laughs]

MT: I hate to interrupt you but if we could, could you take your watch off cause that sounds clicking on the table.

FT: Oh yes, I didn't know that.

MT: That would be great, thank you.

FT: Is alright like that?

MT: Yes, cause this is wonderful.

FT: That's where I come up to my seventies. Now when it come up to obeying (incomprehensible 21:59) . . . and get a beating. But when it come down to the oldest Ester my first eldest sister and my eldest brother. They was the one that we were left in care of if we weren't in school or something. Had to give them another chore. WE had to obey them and they could beat us and nothing we could do about it and tell momma when she come home. Ester will tell momma what we done wrong and then we get another beating. Now we had respect them as a mother and father but you couldn't call them Charlie and Ester, Charles and Ester cause that was their name. You call them brother and sister, just like you call your momma, momma. When you say go to a person and say "momma" what pops in your mind-- if you thinking right, you saluting momma your mother. So you only gonna say or do certain things around cause it reminds you every time you say momma or mother or whatever you might

call her, it pops in your mind cause you know how she trained you. But when we had people of today tell children "Don't call me momma or daddy because it makes me sound old. I don't want to be out there with them." So they call them by their name I know families that did it and children stopped calling them momma and right up today they call them by their name. And when they go up there and say "Mary or Joe" they don't have the same mindset as you do when you say momma. So anyhow, that's-that's-that's that's everybody don't go through that. They don't have the training to do that, to --when you say daddy you talking about the one bringing you bread. Then you poppa- I ain't gonna cut off my arm to bring you food so you gon' give him respect. Cause if you want to go somewhere they the one give you the "okay" and one buy your food, your clothes, fix your meals and everything. (incomprehensible 24:16) toddler I ain't talking about growing up either being. Anyhow you got to- that's how it was with us we had to--we had to respect our- my older sister and brother. That's another thing that's been dropped off from the families now. You leave your older sister and brother to take care the rest children and you get back his eyes black, his lip is tore up that thick and everything. They don't respect them because they didn't get it from the beginning but we got it from the beginning. I'm not the only one the Dysons down there, Leslie and Isabel all of them came up the same way I did. They had to call the oldest people brothers and sister, if they had brothers and sisters, if they had one. But whoever you-- if it was a girl you had to call them sister cause that was your sister. You couldn't call them by their name. And if it's a

man they call him brother. You couldn't call them by their name. And that drilled more respect in you for there they know they could beat you and if you didn't obey them, they'll tell your mother when come home you'll get another beating. And then when daddy come in the house half loaded, momma will get on him and he got a beating. [laughs] Yeah he had a beating if he wanted to stay there that night. Women in that day they had a lot more power in the house then women today. Yes. They taking care of the children, taking care of the house. When a man went in the house he want to be (incomprehensible 26:05). If he didn't (incomprehensible 26:10) it will be so hot in there he got to unbutton-unbutton his collar and take off a jacket and shirt. Then sometimes he had got up on the wood pile, sit up on the wood pile and try to cool off. It weren't no licks passed. That I know anything about--in my face, but I see a lot of licks passed-- in this day and time. But they know how-- have you heard the saying "if you can't stand the heat get out the kitchen?" [laughs] That's where they come up . . . they made it so hot, they tried staying in there. [laughs] So is there another question?

AJ: So you talk a lot about your siblings now did you have any chores you were responsible for? Anything you had to do?

FT: Oh yes. All --well we always had-- we always had chickens, pigs or something we had on the farm. We had one of them or a few of them. We always had to shell the corn, the corn--corn on the cob you didn't buy

it shelled. You had to shell the corn, you had to feed the chickens in the morning and feed them at night. You had to back prop the doors up at night so the foxes and stuff, there were a lot of foxes, you put the prop up your door, all the people I know had a prop. And you had to push it down the bottom so they wouldn't fly out. Them small animals they got so they could trip the prop open, they soon learned. And you had to do it in a way, cause some people had locks and key. But the poorest people couldn't buy locks, [laughs] you may not believe that but it's true. Cause- most the stuff that I sold, not every family, you trade. You trade your eggs to the store, if it was five cents a dozen you had ten dozen that's five times ten that's fifty cents. They give you an I.O.U paper with fifty cents on it. Now you can come back to the store and get fifty cents worth of something for you, you know. IF you had something balanced, it had the balance on there. And that's where they did the trade everything, most everything. You didn't get a whole lot of money for what you had. And that's the way with that part.

AJ: Do you feel times were better or worse in those days then they are now?

FT: Well, I would say the time - I didn't come along when they beat you. I mean I come along when the parents did it not the people you work for. I didn't have none, but I do know some in my day if I got grown. I saw them taken right behind and beat to. I look at it, seen it, they worked for people. And that was long time after people were

supposed to be freed. Well we still have slavery right now. But you know we so busy looking and going places so we don't see, only certain people sees it and they afraid to talk about it. But there's a lot of people in slavery, a lot of people get beat if they don't do. I mean stomped on, carried to the hospital. Just like they did back then, when they were beating people. Whip them give them so many lashes for what they did wrong on the job. But I didn't coming along-- I didn't see much of that when I was coming along but I've seen it since I've been grown. And I see a lot of slavery now. Because I got the time now. Once when I was so busy I didn't see. You know, it might sound like a-- a funny story. If we want to go to the store and get something and get back here and go to work. We had to get our stuff to go to work. We rush to the store and rush back here and rush to work to get there on time. When we get in that position you don't see a whole lot. And sometimes we see things we don't know what it was. But you said-- somebody tell you say-- that had a bad accident and this amount was killed. You say "Oh yeah I come along going and coming and saw that accident" but you didn't take the time to find out. So we are so busy we don't see things. [laughs] Those things are still happening.

AJ: Mhmm

FT: Those things are still happening. Everything that you know-- bootlegging is still going on. [laughs] Everything. . . One thing about

it, I'm just talking to y'all but, if I'd go to certain people and say these things they want me to prove it.

AJ: Mhmm.

FT: Then if I want to prove it and could prove it I go to the people and tell them and say "oh man I ain't gettin' in that I ain't gettin' in that" But that don't mean no witness [laughs] cause he ain't gonna get in it. So people don't stick to the right thing they give up the right for the wrong.

MT: What kind of jobs did you see people get beaten or you know kicked...?

FT: On the farm

MT: On the farm

FT: On the farm

MT: Yeah

FT: I can name a name you might-might-might-might remember. But I don't want to do that cause [laughs] the one who did it, they dead. But yeah

people are still getting beat. All these things they just slowed down some but it's still going on.

AJ: You talked about your family and your times together at home. Did your family take any trips together?

FT: Well I-- I would say those who went to school would leave. Three brothers-- two brothers and me, three of us went to school together. And we take a trip--only trip we take and coming up was Banneker High School. Once a year, they called it fields day, everybody up there play games. And whatever school one and they got the trophy or piece of paper or whatever they were giving out. For when the relay's, bottle relay, egg in the spoon all that. I guess you all heard about that . . . We-- I played that stuff too cause I was in school and if you was in school . . . persuasion that was part of your class. That day you sat home-- unless you were sick or something you ought to pass your test and have a good grade in school you went up there too, whether you lost. They know, the teachers know and that's the only place I know Banneker School, besides the church and the store is up there once a year right from school. Never went to Washington, never went to Baltimore none of them places. Till I got' so I could go myself and that was just we three youngest boys. The older boys, well my oldest brother was maybe said-- my older sister were 10 or 11 years old. When I got ten; they grown. I was born in 28' and my oldest brother was born in 1917. I was born in 28' and my oldest sister was born in 1918. See



what I'm saying? So I didn't-- I didn't-- they--they-- They were the ones I minded [laughs] they the ones that taught me to behave myself when daddy get off. [laughs] So that's the way it was. That what it was.

### Drayden recollections.

AJ: And you're talking about little bit about your schooling now, you talked about your field day, that you went on a field trip with your school. Can you tell us more about your school and where did you go to school and what was it like at your school?

FT: Well I went to school in Drayden. I went to Drayden for seven years. And I got along with my teachers and it was-- and the children too. But we had a lot of bad children but they treated me nice [laughs] they treated me nice. I had . . . (36:12-36:16) You know people always-- some of the worst children down there always treat me the best. And I put that on my mother's training to me, I did unto others the way they want -- that I want them to do unto me. I was nice to them and they was nice to me, that's what I put it to. But I didn't think I was no better than nobody . . . didn't bother me I didn't bother them with the wrong thing. I was taught right from wrong, I didn't call them no kinda names. But other people call them, call 'em out call them names and they fought. [laughs] See? I got along good in the school, but my teachers too. My--

AJ: Do you remember any of the names of your teachers?

FT: Yeah, I remember my first teacher's name was Mr. Stucky and Mr. Stucky, as far as I know of, we got along good. I was one of his boys. [laughs] He brought me lunch to school, cause we were right poor. He'll bring an extra sandwich and give it to me and everything. His wife and my mother was likely share and he appreciated that. And meeting the family and all his children we got along and . . . we had no trouble. And my second teacher was Mrs. Tilghman, she married a Statesman. And I got five cracks out of her one time and in-- but three or four years she was there I was there, I graduate while she was there. At that time you graduate in seventh grade from that school. When you start your first year of High that's the eighth grade. So, I got along right good with the people in going to school. I didn't have any trouble with other people. But I did have one-- I had trouble with one person, that my school mate and we are the same age but all of this never happened in school. It always happened when momma-- when their parents go to work and my parents go to work and we would go to his house and he would go to his house-- and he would come to our house . . . we got along just as good till the time to go home. When the time to break up he always want to do something evil during breaking up time. [laughs] And-- I don't want to go all into what he'd done but that's the only person I had any trouble with at school but that didn't happen at school. But we were school mates we were same age people with the same school and all with the same teachers, but at school we were good. We

boys got by ourselves he was rough when he wasn't at school. And whatever happened smart boys don't tell momma and daddy what goes on because if a child beats you and you in a fight and a child beats you, that's one beating. Then when momma and daddy find out momma gonna beat you. If daddy come home-- my daddy come home half high, he gots to beat you. So you done got three whoopings for one thing. So I learned not to tell momma and daddy when things gone wrong, but a lot of children soon they get home "momma this, momma that" [imitates whining noise]. Not that I was the smartest but I taught my two brothers the same thing. Now one of the brothers was older than I was and I taught him and I taught the youngest one. "Don't be talkin bout' what happened or you'll get too many beatings unless you like 'em." [laughs] And we stopped it, we stopped telling them. [speaking as mother] "How things are going?" [speaking as self] "Oh good momma". Now if that teacher hadn't wrote a note by us by somebody else and momma caught us in a lie [speaking as mother] "thought you told me you were doing good, you didn't tell me y'all were fighting, the teacher beat ya to it". Uh oh boy you had something coming then. You can feel the force before she even touch you. [ laughs]

AJ: Tell me a little bit more about your school at Drayden, how the situation, how it was set up and your teacher. Your favorite subjects. And did you have to have chores at school? You know things like that.

FT: Yes, we had chores at school we had to get wood and bring it in the school so we can stay warm in the winter time. We had to go a quarter mile, I'll say a quarter mile down next to the river down the hill to the spring and bring the water back at school. So you had a water bucket in the school and you had to dip it with a long handle, you had to go to the spring and get it. Wasn't no water in the school, nothing in the yard. So the children did that and I did it too when I was going. Some of the most time was the boys, the girls didn't have to do it but the boys they-- they liked to get away from that school.

[laughs] Yeah, we had chores to do in school and sometime if it was something out in the yard we had to pick it up, we had to keep the school yard looking presentable. And maybe see somebody eating lunch outdoors and throw the bag in the yard or whatever, we did that. We didn't have nobody come in or paid to keep the yard clean and get the wood in. The only thing that paid was the man that brought the wood there. Saw the wood up put it on top of his truck and brought it there, he gets paid by the state or county. But all the other stuff the children did it. All the things the children did it and they didn't get any pay. Now they might got some pay-- they may got some favoritism out of the teachers. I can say they didn't get any money, they wasn't paid for that, but they might give them an apple or a banana and that was a lot in that day. Somebody give you a bb-bat. [laughs]

MT: What was a typical day like? Like how did it start off or, you know, when you imagine - when you think back-- like back to one day at school. What was a day like? How did it start?

FT: When I first start going to school I didn't want to go to school. And momma told me go to school and I went along with the children a certain distance and stayed in the bushes for a while. I didn't know momma was going to work or if she was at home. But I would come on back home, be walking real slow and everything. And the next thing I know there goes momma sitting up in the house. [speaking as mother] "Boy what you doing back here?!" I couldn't give her no answer. But she know and she put something on me and sometimes I got back time in the morning that she walked me a certain distance to school and after-- she turn around go back to the house. She wouldn't go straight back to the house, she figured I had the same stuff in me. She go on back a certain way and get behind a tree, a bush and here come me walking back real slow, thinking momma had gone home. She catch me again and break her boots right there and wear me out. And I finally got to school that day but after a while I got tired of that you know. You know sometimes you get so sore you can't sit down the way you like to sit down. And you get tired of them sore places, sitting on them sore places and they hurt. She decided you going to school and I said "Momma I'm going to school" I had no more problem after. She made up her mind and I made up my mind that I'm going to school and that's what it is, ain't no more trouble. But back then I was very stubborn, I was the only one of the

children I know that momma had to follow out in the morning and hide in bushes to get them to go to school. Now it might have happened to some of the older ones but I never heard it talked. I been around them talking but never heard that, only by me I was the only one.

AJ: So typically though when you got to school what was your day like?

FT: Well one thing you had to tell the teacher what you doing late. And I told them what I--what I doing late. And by me being in with the teachers as far as treating them nice and them treating me nice bringing me sandwiches and everything I got by with that. But as far as them punishing me it-- telling the truth means a lot with some people. IF you honest and tell the truth, I was taught the truth will set you free. You know. Once at first I didn't believe it at first, and as I got older I started learning the truth will set you free. A lot of people may not believe it but it will. So I went on and telling truthful things and they let me go. IF Frank said it that's what it was, that's what they believed, they had much dependence in me. But I will tell them the truth.

Second side of tape:

AJ: So, did you start when you went to school. Your school did the day start off with a prayer or your first class or . . . ?

FT: Yes, yes it start off with a prayer, we had a prayer. We had to say a little prayer. Yep, it did. But that was when—oh we had to sing a song too and we had to, we had to say the pledge of the allegiance to the flag, United States of America. Put our hands up this way or that way when you said that. Yeah we sang a song too, “Oh beautiful spacious skies” and the —the —Pay attention to me now, that sometime that anthem we sang and yeah we would sing. We had to stand up, get up and salute the flag and all of that. One nation individual under God or something. [laughs] Yeah boy (Note: “Under God” was added in 1954, long after the school closed.)

AJ: So did in your class or in your school did you have classes together with the higher grade - higher kids or did you share the classes and what about your books and all that?

FT: All the books were hand-me-down. All the books the pages were torn up one page tore out another page tore out but there were —we would get a box of books but there were one or two books that were good. But most of them was, children had them and tore the pages out, half a page gone a whole page gone part of —a quarter of the page gone and all. But the teacher always kept the good book, she had the full book, the book that didn’t have anything tore out and that way she would teach us out of that book but she kept that book. And she’d ask you what page you got missing, then if necessary she would go on—she’ll write the whole thing on the board and we will copy it down on a piece

of paper then she'll erase it and put something else on the board she wants to put on there. She'll put it on there long enough to write it down. But we had one-room school, we had seven grades, and she know how to go from one grade to another. how to handle it excepting that everybody will listen while she was with the seventh grade, everybody else was doing their work she had put on the board. Copy this down and sometimes she would sometimes leave it on the board and you go up there and look at the board and turn the page find that and study it, study it. But one class didn't interfere with another now the first grades, the second grade that was done cooperatively. You had a sharp ear to pick up what the teacher was talking, but the children would hear, she would be right beside you. She was in the seat with them and right by them she would whisper to them tell like that cause' what they would doing - they were learning how to count, how to draw. Like a kindergarten now, or preschool, get them in shape so they can learn that's what they would do your first year in school. They done-- some children already know when they go to school they know all that stuff but some children don't know A's and B's. Some children go to school they already know the alphabet, they know how to count to 100, and some don't. She pushed, she didn't hold them back because they were smart, backwards or ones that didn't learn, she worked with both of them. She worked with both of them. And he did too. But the first teacher Mr. Stucky, he was a tough man and I'm not saying its contradicting what I'm saying, but get to school on time he was tough on that. He get coming in the morning and nobody wasn't saying nothing or do nothing,



he'd get up and say "We gonna have lessons today and if we don't have lessons today we gonna break bones, split joints and draw blood and water." [laughs] And that's always said anytime and we said nothing back. [laughs] But that's the way he introduces himself cause other maybe say the day before they had a lot of problem a lot of stuff went on and children went off, but today we gonna have class. And everybody knew it and they settled down. [laughs]

MT: wow

FT: I never forget his saying, I won't say never but I haven't forgotten it. [laughs] "Break bones, split joints, draw blood and water." [laughs]

AJ: Well, now you...

FT: Well, well, well, now they had programs for they scared children, they had programs to put children to put bad boys and girls in its trying to scare them straight. Well I'll say since I learned that, they doing it now but Mr. Stucky wasn't wrong he just, he just trying to scare them straight. Just as long as they get straight if you can scare somebody, like you tell your child and say "You don't rake that yard, you going to be with no supper and you gonna stay up there by yourself and none of the children will go up there and play with ya until it's time to go to bed." Well when you think of that, no supper I better get

straight and do that stuff. Going upstairs by myself staying up there 'til children, rest of the children, go to bed and they can't come up and say something to me like I come downstairs. And I hear them down there playing and laughing and I'm up here scared of boogeyman.

[laughs] Boogeyman, they taught you that boogeyman gon' get you if you didn't do right, they taught you that. They taught you ghost stories, boys that you know that want to steal some gold. They'll tell you about some ghost old dog running around the nighttime different one saw a drag a long chain then he disappears right before your eyes. Now, we wouldn't, William, Robert and I wouldn't go outdoors . . . to prop the door of the chickens unless somebody was with us cause they scared us that bad. That we wouldn't go out there, neither one of us would go out there by ourselves with two . . . it didn't take but one to put that prop up there (7:14) Keep the foxes and stuff, the dogs, like that out. And they scared you straight.

AJ: Mhmm. You mention when you had the flood the bus took you up to church. Now what part did religion play in your life growing up?

FT: Well it played a great part because I was the only one of the three children, the youngest children, the other children had left out or go on and live with somebody or gone away to live or coming in to stay a night long as long as they want to but we stayed, we had to come home every night and every day. And momma, she was my main teacher, when I went to school to bible study at church I remember now she had

me I could walk but I wasn't walking fast enough. "Come on here child let me . . ." And she almost dragged me by the top of my tongue top of the shoe tops if I had any on, if I didn't have any on or didn't have any it was my toes that was dragged in the dirt. A lot of times I went to church barefoot. I went to school barefooted, all the children went to school barefooted, cause' we didn't have no shoes and there were odd shoes. You might have a six on one foot and 8 on the other, one low top one high top. Nobody made fun of you because everybody was doing the same thing. Something you may not know, they put the girls, they used feed sacks. They caught it (the string/thread on the sack) you were . . . you started right and you rip it on out easy. And they take a feed sack and make dresses and skirts and shirts and blouses and stuff for the girls. You take the chord string (off the feed sack?) and put it on a pot, black pot, you put it on top so it won't fall off, rub it across-- the chord string was white. That was the color of your hair now when they plait your hair they would take it, they would tie it up with that cord string black. And it sits in real good, but some people didn't have the pot, the smutted pot or they done cleaned the pot. They put the white cord string in black hair and it'll look different than other peoples' children but they didn't make fun of them. Listen, it was out at lunch, most of our lunch was in a paper bag and we had fatback, bacon or anything, that bag was just as greasy as I want. We carried our breakfast to school and put it on the shelf where you put your lunch at and there some families that had a molasses can with a top on it with a little handle where you carry your molasses. Molasses

can just bout that high and some people had a really before you brought it out the store a lunch box. But everybody had what they had and nobody made fun of nobody.

MT: Do you remember whether anybody didn't have shoes when it was cold?

FT: Oh yes!

MT: There were kids that had to go in the winter without any?

FT: I know children without-- excuse me. I know children went outdoors in the snow and played in the snow and made snowman, made snowman. They played snowball and they didn't get sick. And the one that had shoes and boots on, they were sneezing, nose running, coughing about. That's right. Since I've been grown, I know grown people outdoors barefoot in the snow, they used to it they like it.

AJ: Now we talked a little bit about school and a little bit about you growing up and I'm wondering, what did you dream about becoming when you became an adult, an adult?

FT: I didn't dream about becoming anything, but my momma instilled something in me I was trying to carry out the dream that she dreamt of me and told me. She had kept telling me all the while she was well and

the night before she died, when we were at her bedside - she died the next day morning. And she told it over again, she called me up by myself, cause I was the only one that stuck right by momma. I mean I stayed there with her. All three of us could be upstairs and got put on some clean clothes and we wasn't going no further than the store and then Drayden. And she would say "I don't feel good, I don't want to be left here alone. I want one of y'all. That's when we come downstairs. William and Robert would keep going, I would stop and I stayed there with momma. And she always would tell me, she say, "Frank, Lord gon' bless you. But you may have a lot of trials and tribulations" I say "What do you mean momma?" "Because when you doing good she said 'the devil don't like it if you doing good. He always trying to get you tied up in something, get you do something, say something wrong. But them ones that are doing bad he already got them." That's what she taught me. And whether she's right or wrong I believed her. And she always told me, whatever I did, do unto other ones, look after the sick, cause I look after her. I was the only one in the house. I would cook - she would lay in bed and told me how to, taught me how to can. She laid in bed and taught me how to do everything because I was waiting on her, and you know she wasn't supposed to eat no salt on the food. So when I fixed my food, we sat at the table, I didn't have no salt there to make her feel guilty because she liked salt. I didn't-- I ate the same she ate and the same thing she did. So that made her, I can't say what it made her, but it didn't maker her-- well it wasn't temptation, let's put it that way. I didn't tempt her by me shaking salt and sat it right

here before her and she ain't supposed to use it. So I ate my food the same way, but in the years come now I'm not supposed to eat no salt but it don't bother me cause I don't use no salt. Never did after momma got sick and died, I never used it, I didn't go back to the salt. If you fixed something for me right now, whatever you put in it, I'm not going to add no salt to it no matter how fresh it is. But I'll tell you one thing, I do like salt on my eggs and fish but I can eat it without it. I can eat it without it. But that's-- she taught me those kind of things and that's why I--well-- I try to carry-- I try... You know all my life I've been doing for people. I'm not boasting now, I've been carrying, bringing people far as Baltimore and Washington Harbor all my life till I got down so I couldn't do it that's when it was. Now I'm still carrying them and bringing them and carrying them and I got people bringing and carrying me too and cause I don't drive the long distance. People carry me to up Holy Cross that's up there in Silver Spring. People carry me up there, people carry me Charlotte Hall, people carry me across the bridge to Prince Frederick. But I drive myself a lot of times to Leonard, Loveville, and around to Lexington Park here because I have many doctors and I have always sometimes other people in the family got these doctors. And that's as far as I drive. But I got people to look after me for a long distant trip. I'm still being blessed, blessings. Like my Momma told me, she told me and I believed her. And that what far often led and trying to stay out of debt but its ah hard job to do. And when you getting an "x amount" of dollars a month and your bills are more than what you get. Now if you

getting nothing but a hundred dollars a month and your bills are (\$120) one-hundred-twenty dollars a month, how can you catch up? You don't catch up! But see you pray and ask God, he say he'll give you want you want and what you need if you ask him. So I ask him and he makes the way for me and I believed it. God makes a way because he's a heart fixer and a mind regulator. And you can bring me something right here with no charge, no price on it, when the next one come here he wants money from the start of his house to here. And to go back and he wants that money for both ways and you gonna bring me something for nothing. See God always has a lamb in the bush for you. If-- if you don't treat me right, she might treat me right. If you don't do what God say to do, she might do what God said to do, but this is our job. Am I getting off course?

AJ: (makes noise of disagreement) mmmm

FT: This is our job to look out for each other. Now man wants us to be independent, that's what he teaches you. Go to work and do this and you'll be independent. You can't be independent and live on this earth. You depend on anything you get, you depend on somebody to make it, to being your chair for you, get it like your papers. You don't go to Washington and pick up your paper everyday, you depend on people to bring your papers wherever you get them from, even put it in your box. And some of them throw it in your yard. [laughs] See, if you want some apples and oranges you don't go down a Florida every morning you want a

half a dozen of oranges and buy them. Somebody done picked them oranges, shipped them up here and then somebody-- maybe to Washington, then somebody will bring them to the store in your vicinity. You can't live independent. Now I don't care how much you try, you need somebody. If you don't ever need somebody, you gone need somebody before you leave this world. Put that in your pipe and smoke it. [laughs] She told me that. Man will lie to you and fool you. God say what he will do, he'll do it, but you got to do what he say for him to do it.

AJ: That's true.

FT: You got to obey him then you will be without wanting anything, if you do what is right. You don't worry 'bout having no food, tomorrow you don't have no money, somebody is going to bring you some food. Or you going somewhere and get some money, somebody gonna give you some money. Somewhere or another it's a way made for you and he said he was the way, the truth and the life. So if you want to find the way, follow him. If you want the truth, listen at him. And you want to live a life obey his word.

AJ: That's true

FT: Mhmm.



AJ: Well we, before I forget, I wanted to know what type of work Frank, did you do? Were you in the service or?

FT: No. But I'm going to tell you about that too. Now six--six of us all male six brothers. Five of them went to service and I didn't go. I was the only that didn't pass none of the tests. My health was bad and everything else. At that time, they give you a full "F" for not passing that's the name of the card they give you. Walk around with a 4-F card in your pocket. And anybody who been there before know what that card mean, that you wasn't qualified to go in service. So I went along with that and the people used to tell me "oh yep, you weren't no . . . (?)" you wasn't no good" I used to smile at them and I didn't know what I was smiling for but I just don't let nobody get me down. See I acted like it was fun but it wasn't fun. That's the way I acted towards them and they eventually laid off, cause they couldn't tease me about it, but they wanted to. The only one in the family that was no good. Well I look at it another way now, I'm not boasting. But out of my eight head of people, I'm next to the youngest, and I'm the only one living out of eight other children. Now while I'm here this morning, and I'm 87 years old and if I make it to, which I believe I will, to May, I'll be 88 and that's in five months. But I can go right today. I know that. I can go tomorrow. But it's a blessing somewhere cause I taken care of my mother, that's what I believe. When the rest of them kept right on going, I sat down. Kept my clothes clean - wasn't nothing fancy not expensive, because we had all our school clothes on. *We come home from*

*school dirty and we washed them and ironed them. And wear them back to school the next day.*

MT: Everyday?

FT: Well we didn't get them that dirty everyday. [laughs] But when they got dirty, we would take them off, wash them that evening, iron them, or that night or some time. But we had them one pair of pants 'til it was gone. One pair of shoes 'til it was gone. They were lucky to get them if the parents didn't get no money. You know what they got? In my time, you know what I got for sun up 'til sun down? One dollar for sun up 'til sun down, doesn't mean sun getting up, that means sun up 'til sundown in the field. Then when the sun go down you take the horses or mules in, then you got to take them down to the spring and give them water. You got to feed them, you got to feed the chickens and the hogs on the farm. All that before you can go home. I did that. My father and... spent a period of sharecropping and he didn't get any money. All he got was a shed and something ( . . .?) (23:49). Now for our bread, we were getting so many bushels of flour and so many bushels of corn. We took it to Valley Lee at George Cecil's, that corn and wheat up there, and he grind it and he already measure it out so you know. A bushel of wheat was so many pounds of flour and the price of the flour was there already for you. If you carried two bushels, two bushels of wheat, so much flour. All you do is carry it in and sit down and put it down and sit down he'll go and get the flour and put it in

the bag measure it up and give it to you. You can go on home or the barn and get drunk. I couldn't because I was nothing but a child but my father would go in the mill. I couldn't but they did it and you couldn't go in the barn with them. Catch you in the barn they'll put a foot in you. [laughs]

AJ: So your father was a sharecropper and did you do that work too? Were you a sharecropper?

FT: I--the way they did on the farm then every boy that got to work, he worked to help his father he didn't get paid. The father was the one that sharecropper the farm, your children help you and make it easy on you. I know one time I asked daddy something what-- something out of the gutter "I said daddy where's mine, my share?" Just -- not-- not. Cause I could play with daddy, daddy was a man you could joke along with. So I just asked him, I know I wasn't going to get nothing, I said "Where's my share?" he said "You eating now." [laughs] Sitting at the table, he said "You eating right now, that's all you gonna get" that's all he got. I know one time we raised around 35 to 40 head of pigs, 'l they got big enough. The man that owned the farm, he come in one day daddy wasn't there and he wanted to gather up all his pigs. We three children, we chased them pigs, we got fun running them things down, the ones that could get up on the truck some of them gets away, we were tickled to death, we thought we were doing something. And let them pigs on there, you know how many pigs they give us for the winter? Two!

That's all we had but we didn't have to feed them, we could use the same corn and feeding stuff we use on the farm. The calf, we got the milk, the butter, the buttermilk, everything that was left but we never got a calf. He got all the calves. Well the chickens he didn't bother with. The ducks he didn't bother with. The turkeys he didn't bother with, but we didn't have a lot of them we were too busy. And as the boys got older they left the farm and then left home, and that left only the three youngest ones. We learned how to hook up horses and mule. We had horses and mules we learned how to hook them up to the chain and put the collar and everything on them and learned how to unhook them. And we went out the field with our father and pulled weeds out the corn, out the whatever it was in we were doing it. And then we become helpers to daddy and after all daddy moved off the farm. And another man, white man, came along and started sharecropping.

AJ: So is -- what did you do when you grew up? What was your work and your livelihood?

FT: When I grew up and started working I worked on the water, I worked on the farm, I worked at sawmills and I worked six months at a cemetery. That was temporarily but see out there they only give you-- if they didn't want to make you permanent they give you six months and lay you off. Then they come back and hire you again and then they lay you off again So you never come permanent out there only certain people that they want. That's what all the government jobs did back then,

they'll give you temporarily six months' job. Well I did all right I made a good living, as far as taking care of my mother and myself, like that there.

AJ: Well how do you feel that life is to-- how is life different today than it was back then?

FT: Well I find it to me, this me personally. I find it better back then because I said before I wasn't the one to be beat or kicked on by nobody I worked for. But I've seen other people be kicked and beat on. But since I wasn't kicked back then those days is not the idea of somebody give you something, but it's a good thing because people have heart to look after each other when they sick, when they get burned out, when the snow is on the ground, when you lift this window up here snow falls down on the floor. Every fence rail you saw around the farm; you didn't see them no more when it snowed. They were covered up that high, snow, . . . (30:01) I say 'bout that high 'bout four feet high, that isn't four feet but four feet of. You didn't even see them, and when it snowed in November you didn't see the ground no more till spring of year or whenever it turned warm. The (incomprehensible 30:22) tidal rivers. I've seen people come down from Piney Point (incomprehensible 30:29) skate all the way around Drayden too. Skate all around there and go on skate on to Virginia and skate back. From St. George Island and in St. Mary's river go across the-- I know people go to Broome's Wharf, just go across the water I don't know whether

you've that but a lot of bootlegging going on at that time and they would skate across there before they walk and skate back home. And they carried a pole along with them a long pole it might be from here to that window that pole would be. And then if you hold that pole right, that pole would hit the ice, thawed ice, your body would go down the hole but you can pull yourself up by the pole cause each end of the pole is on ice. Just like my hand my body here, my body going down the hole but right here on out is ice, and right here on out is thawed ice, but you run on hard ice that you could drive a wagon across and if there's wood on it and oysters on it you run into soft space. There's a soft spot, anything like that-- you get a brand new tire you hear 'bout them soft spots in tires? You get a brand new tire and it ain't no good, it's got a soft spot in it, and that where rivers and waters are, it's always where ponds are. Like you had a pond down Great Mills school #1, and there used to be a pond down there and school children used to skate on it and a whole lot of 'em broke through. It had soft spots, didn't freeze all the way. And that's what you called good and evil. [laughs] See good and evil is everything-- is what's going on now, it's good and evil. Evil and good can't get along in the same place, evil is fighting this good, good is fighting this evil, that's where our war is.

AJ: So what do you think is the biggest change you've seen in our country in your lifetime?

FT: Biggest change.

AJ: In your lifetime.

FT: Well in my lifetime the biggest change that I saw is people is-- when somebody is trying to change the hearts of people. And trying to change their thinking and trying to change the ways that's for all of us to get along together, that was Mr. Martin Luther King. Well to me now preachers always preach it, mothers taught it but it never went worldwide 'til he got in it and some more people, some other people. Somebody in Africa or was it? He went there to school to learn from them, I don't know about the names of them but we had some more people. Malcom X was in it. But you know he was a little different than Martin Luther King. Martin Luther King wanted to do it the way God said do it. Malcom X wanted to do it the way God said do and the way man wanted it done and man and God don't think alike. The rules are different. Man rules if you rich, I mean really rich and got something, you can beat anybody that got less than what you got. That's man's rule. But God rule is if you obey me you have more than man than the rich man but you are looking at material things God looking at special things, the things you don't see with your natural eye and don't feel with your natural touch. It's a whole lot of that. And I call them, what I call them is forces, these forces in life-- What makes you smile? You don't see what makes you smile; you can't touch it with your hand. What makes you hate? You don't see it with your eyes. We supposed to be kind, God

give the fruits that we bear. What we get from God is kindness, peace, joy, happiness, self-control and all that stuff. But man is-- Let me put it this way man tell you. Everyman is for himself and the Lord is for us all. [laughs] That what man said, every man is for himself and the good lord is for us all. That's what man said.

AJ: Very good. Thank you.

FT: Mhmm

AJ: I enjoyed that. Boy you really told us something. [laughs]