

Unified Committee for Afro-American Contributions
Oral History Documentation Project

LAURICE CHASE WHITE

Interviewed by Merideth Taylor
March 8, 2001

At her home in Lexington Park Maryland
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[Begin Side 1, Tape 1 of 1]

MT: This is Merideth Taylor and its March 8, 2001, and I am interviewing Laurice White at her home in Lexington Park. And, I'm going to ask her a little bit about her early history in St. Mary's County and then also a little bit about her work with the NAACP. Okay. So we're going to start with your childhood. Alright. And also, feel free to if -- you don't have to respond to any of the questions that I ask you if you feel uncomfortable with them. It doesn't matter. So, these are just general questions and they may, sort of, get your mind thinking about those things.

LW: Okay.

MT: Alright? Okay. You were born in --

LW: Lexington Park.

MT: Lexington Park, and when was that, your birth?

LW: August the 20th, 1938.

MT: 1938. Okay. And, so some general questions about what the times were like when you

were a child. How did you and your family live?

LW: Okay. I'm the oldest of 11. I'm the oldest of 11 children, and we were brought up right, as I said, here and matter of fact, my home was on down where the hotel is. That was all family property and land.

MT: Which hotel?

LW: Farm. Where the, on both sides of the road, was where the Hampton Inn and where the --

MT: The one that's across from the Hampton Inn.

LW: Yeah.

MT: Hospitality maybe?

LW: Extended Service?

MT: Oh okay. Extended Stay?

LW: That's where we were living until it was sold. And, we always had farm animals. It was like--It was a farm and cows and all those things. I was raised up there. All that was our land.

I started off at Catholic school. We were all going to Catholic school. And when I got in the 6th Grade, I went to Washington to live with my aunt. So.

MT: Well, what kind of crops did you grow on the farm?

LW: Tobacco and corn and of course, vegetables that Mother maintained. We always had a garden.

MT: So, your own garden.

LW: For the winter, we always canned foods.

MT: What sorts of things did you eat?

LW: Greens and fresh vegetables, mainly. Well, as I said, in the summer we had everything

from the garden. In the winter, we had from the garden because we always canned them. And of course, all winter we ate from the meat house. They had meats that were killed -- the hogs, cows. And as I said, we were --farm life. Everything that we raised was edible and so we saved it. We had meat houses because we cured the meat, canned the vegetables.

And of course, we had wood stoves and lamps because we didn't have electricity back then. And, I was the oldest, so I was my father's boy. I did all the cutting the wood and helping with the animals.

MT: Did you cut the --

LW: Wild game shooting. That's why I'm a sharp shooter.

MT: Oh!

LW: Because we had whatever -- the rabbits, squirrels.

MT: Did you cut the wood off your own land?

LW: Yeah. We always had plenty of property. Had lots of woods. We would go down -- the men would all get together and go and cut down the trees and saw them, and then we get them where they were -- after you saw them --that's where we had to get into cutting them so it would fit the stoves. So as I said, I always worked with my dad. I mostly the outside person because I was the oldest. We didn't have any boys until later.

MT: Did you -- Did that seem to be a limitation or a disappointment at all for your folks, or was he just happy to have you as the son?

LW: Well see, there were six girls before we had one boy, so the girls did what the boys would have done because we didn't have the boys. We didn't know we were going to have any boys! So, the first two children were the boys. We did all the stuff that you would. I

never worked in tobacco because I was scared of the worms.

MT: How did you feel about that, being, sort of taking the place of, it seems like, one of the boys?

LW: Well see, you --Back then, you didn't think about it. It was just part of growing up. That was part of it. You didn't like, but you didn't have too much of a choice. You learned to just do it. My uncle had the boys, but -- Mother had the boys and Uncle, he had the boys. So, it was sort of like --We all lived close on the farm. We all worked together.

MT: You all worked together.

LW: It was a family. Everything was family-style, because the houses was like that. Uncle, cousins.

MT: Right next to each other?

LW: Right along the property. Everybody had an acre of land on the property.

MT: How many people on the --

LW: There were --Okay. There were close -- There were like four houses close, then there was walking distance to the others, but they were all up at the highway. Up 235, but it was all family property. So therefore, like, if we were going to kill the animals, everybody chipped in. Okay, everybody had the time for killing. So everybody worked together. When it was time to crop, everybody did the crop. Everybody come to cut down the tobacco plants. We all -- It was a family thing, and it's still that way today with our family because we have what we call the ranch down Tippet Road, after we sold the place on 235. So, everybody do that today. Aunts and uncles plant. Everybody go down and work because it's a family business.

MT: Did --Were the other families living there related to your father or mother or both?

LW: My mother. My mother. Those are all Thomas's. The Thomas's all lived up 235. The Chases lived south.

MT: So, your father's name was Chase.

LW: Chase. My mother was a Thomas. So, that's why we always had Chase-Thomas Reunions together.

MT: And how many people come to those?

LW: Between 250 to 300. See, there are 46 grandchildren. 16 great-grand's.

MT: What's your earliest memory?

LW: I hated school, so catching the bus. We had so far to go. I think that's the whole thing. I used to cry because we had a long ride to school. We had to go to Catholic, as I said, and it was all the way down Ridge. So, we had to get up early because my uncle drove the bus and he had to make two runs. And you'd be exhausted, but you had to get up. And, of course, being the oldest, we had to braid the children's hair, and get their -- I was just called on all the time. So, that's why, I think, I didn't want any. [Laughter] It was hard work, and it was like six of us because we're a year apart. So, it was, like, all of us in school at once. And, getting the comb. We had a lot of girl's hair to comb and press that was the hardest.

The good memories: We really had a lot of good memories because we were always having big meals, and it's a tradition with us. Like Sunday, nobody work. You know what I'm saying? It was a day for pleasure. We cooked all day long and everybody would come over to eat. We had a big family meal. And like, the canning: We would have all this canning; things like peaches. We would have peach cobbler, apple cobbler, because everybody -- And back in my days, we all had these big, long

tables because we had a large family. That table would stay set up all day long so whoever would come in, they could always come and eat. No matter who was visiting, even if they weren't family, they know on Sunday meal you go there. Everybody would rejoice. And then after the meal, the old folks would play cards and the children would play checkers and Dominos and stuff like that until the sun go down. So, when the sun start going down, everybody know that it's time to go home. We had no lights. We had no -- So, they would go home before it got too dark.

MT: Did you have electricity before you left the county?

LW: We got electricity when we got the Base. I left here to go to school in 1952, so then we had lights. Then we had, yeah – that's when the Base came. Everybody got that wanted it. Electricity.

MT: Let's go back to the school for a minute. And, what was the name of the school that you went to?

LW: It was St. Peter's.

MT: St. Peter's.

LW: That was elementary I started. I went to St. Peter's and that was in Ridge. And then, I left there in the 6th Grade and I went to Langley Jr. High in Washington. And then, I -- I went to Martha Washington Vocational High which I became a nurse.

MT: And, was St. Peter's the closest school for you to go to?

LW: Yeah. Everyone, most all the Catholics went to St. Peter's. The non-Catholics went to Jarboesville which is now Carver.

MT: Okay. Do you feel that times were better or worse than they are now when you were coming along when you were in the county?

LW: The work was harder, but I think we were better.

MT: Okay, and in what way do you think its better?

LW: I think -- I still say --People always say, “The good old days.” They were hard; it was a lot of hard work and everything, but everybody was -- It was a togetherness because there was nobody that was higher or had more than the others. Everybody was equal so therefore, everybody enjoyed the same things. We had radios. We had no TV’s.

When we had to go -- Everybody didn’t have cars, so wherever we went we walked together on a road and on the school bus or, -- and we had church dinners. Everybody prepared all year for those church dinners. So, all the families would get together for those church dinners. I think it was better. We didn’t have anything, so it wasn’t that they were more higher than you.

We went to Catholic school. Everybody wore uniforms. They weren’t competing about how the children were dressed. We all had catalogues. Everybody wore catalogue clothes!

MT: What catalogues did you order from?

LW: Sears and Montgomery Wards. Everybody got the catalogues. They ordered the clothes. My mother made everything. My mother was a seamstress. She sewed because she made all our blouses, our uniforms. She sewed all the time. She was really into housekeeping and all, so we always knew we would get two pair of shoes. In the winter, you got the black-and-white Oxfords. That’s what they wore to school. In the summertime, you got the sandals.

MT: And you ordered those from the catalogue?

LW: They were ordered from the catalogue, we -- so you knew that. When those catalogues

come out, you knew what you gonna get. And then, it got to a point where you would get two pair of summer shoes. It would be the sandals and the tennis shoes.

See as times got modern, the Base came. They had more things. And then, they start having more stores: Mom & Pop stores. There were always Mom & Pop stores because of -- but they were walking distance. I remember many times that we had to go to the -- when my dad was in the military and he only got paid once a month, got a check once a month from the military. And, the Mom & Pop store: They would have where everybody got credit and they knew when your checks come in, you would pay your bill.

And so, we would walk. There were only two roads -- only two lanes here. There weren't that many cars. So, we had one to go and come and so, they have gravel roads so you could walk and we would always carry the wagon. And, Mother would send us because we didn't have to get much. We raised everything. So, the things that we used to get: They had, when they used to have stamps, ration stamps, like for the sugar, the butter and flour or stuff like that, so we would go and get the supply for the month. In fact, we would walk there and take the stamps and the fellow would write up what you gonna get. But, we had, like I said, a lot of people didn't raise a lot stuff, but we had farm and that's what we had.

But, I still think they were much better because now everybody's competing, and back then we didn't really compete against each other. Everybody helped everybody.

MT: Did your parents not have a car at all or did they, at some point, get a car?

LW: Oh, Mother and Daddy, we got a car when Dad got into the Navy. We didn't have a car before then. But after my daddy served his three years in the Navy, and he got out, when he came back from the Navy, well that was big times. And then, we bought a car.

MT: Was that during the war? Did he serve in the war?

LW: Yes.

MT: Did your mother work at all, outside the home? I'm sorry.

LW: Mother took in laundry. Took in laundry.

MT: Took in laundry.

LW: She did the military peoples uniforms and she cleaned houses. She used to clean houses, so she did work outside the family. Yeah. A lot of people used to drop the laundry off and she would wash and iron their clothing, and they would come and pick it up.

MT: And, did your father spend his full-time farming until -- before he went into the Navy?

LW: He worked -- Dad used to work doing different things before the Base came here. He used to work on the water. They would work on the water. They would work on the ones that they call the Rocket Boats, farm doing the same crops and stuff like they did. So, whichever person, for seafood and stuff like that. So, he either worked on oyster boats, the fishing boats, then he worked on the farm, as I say, cutting tobacco and stuff like that. Because that's mostly all they had: It was either the seafood, _____ the walk. People raised tobacco and corn and had farm animals.

MT: And, what church did you go to?

LW: Back then, the church was called St. Francis Catholic Church and then, what happened: They had -- the black people had St. Francis church because white and blacks couldn't go to church together, or at the same time. They may use the same church, but they weren't -- didn't go to church the same time. And then, a lady died and donated the church to the black people. So, the church we used to walk to was up, where ADF is up here on 235? The Bingo hall?

MT: Oh, oh yeah.

LW: Okay. Well, that house is --Right across from that is where the church used to be on 235. And then in the 50's, as I said, a lady died and donated the Catholic Church to the black folks and that's when they named it the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

MT: Did you take any trips outside the county as a child?

LW: Just to DC. That's where -- Everybody who left here to go any place either went to DC or Baltimore, but we always had aunts and uncles and cousins in Washington. Most of my relatives was in Washington. And see -- I mean, you didn't get that many trips. It was an all-day-long trip, so you didn't do it --They had a bus that would come later on and you would catch it. Course it was called the Atwood and it was an all-day-long trip because you would go up in that morning and you'd come back in that night.

MT: On the bus? What did you do before the bus? You said, "later on, they brought down a bus."

LW: Yeah. You didn't go.

MT: You didn't go. How did your parents deal with health and illness?

LW: We had one little doctor here that did everything. His name was Dr. Bean, and he did delivery and the coughing and the patching, and he was the doctor that did everything. Something -- but most of the time, your parents did all the remedies and everything, their own old-time remedies. They were in a box. It had to be something real bad for you to go to the doctor. Because like, they had all those old-time remedies: the sheets and things. Clean sheets and stuff. They took care of all those themselves.

MT: Do you remember what some of those remedies were?

LW: Umm hmm, umm hmm, yeah, I remember one that I hated real bad! [Laughter] Like, if

you got a cold, they would use sugar and kerosene. They put drops of the kerosene on the sugar. I remember the --

MT: Like on a sugar cube?

LW: No, the regular. They take up the regular sugar.

MT: Like a spoonful of sugar?

LW: And dropped that on.

MT: And dropped on.

LW: Yeah. They would take a couple drops of kerosene out. See then, they didn't have chemicals and stuff in this stuff. You know, it didn't have all that. The kerosene was just clear water. And then, the other one I would always remember. I will **always** remember this because as I said, I was a boy. I stepped on a nail. Bad, bad, bad, bad. But now, you have to have a tetanus shot. You didn't get them back then. And, my mother took -- after washing it off and what is that stuff that they used? Quinine? Quinine?

MT: Quinine.

LW: Soaked it in hot water and quinine. And then, they put --She went out in the field and she found green plants, little shiny green plant—I'll always remember -- and they took that little shiny green plant, put it on there to soak out the poison. So, they put that on the nail and then they took a sawed-back, flat back from a hog, cut that off, put that on it and wrapped it up in it. And, they did that every day until it drew the soreness. I'll always remember that because I hopped around with my foot like this.

MT: Swollen up big.

LW: I backed up on a plank that had a nail in it. And, they did that. And then, just kept bathing it and bathing it. Two and three times a day, changing the leaves, and the leaf

was real green. Because when you finished, the water would be green. And the kerosene.

Oh yeah, and I remember I had a toothache – I had a toothache bad and they would take this sap called muserow -- mustard roll, and they would burn anybody to death. Right now, they tell you, do not put it in your mouth. We used to do anything to take the pain of a toothache away. And then, as people come to the county from different areas and started learning remedies and pass them on to the county people. So, we had --When they started building the Base, we had a lot of people from the Carolinas. And if you had something wrong with you, they would tell you to try their remedies that they used in the South. So, we did that.

Oh, I'm a tell you another--

MT: Remedy.

LW: Was really, really great was Epsom salts. That was for [laughter] constipation.

MT: How -- You would use it internally and externally?

LW: Constipation. For soreness. People that used to say they had arthritis would soak in it, bathe in it. Epsom salts was a big thing, but it was just -- They did not care how things taste or -- they just. Whatever they thought would cure you.

MT: If it doesn't kill you, it'd cure you!

LW: Well, it almost kill you! But, that kerosene was the worst right to this day. I remember. Tell my children about it.

MT: Well, you've already said a little bit about your relationship with your sisters, with your siblings, but how else do you remember, would you characterize your relationships with your siblings? I mean, they did a lot of work for you in terms of going to school.

LW: Yeah, see. They mainly didn't want to have any! [Laughter] I never wanted kids because I could never be free without them! As I said, we had a lot of babies. And being the oldest, you took care of those babies and I felt I was always going to grow up to be one-sided because I always had a baby on my hip. And I -- But, we're real close. We were born close, like a year apart, and we grew up very close. There was a six-year difference in second group. We always say we got a baby group because there were six older ones. My baby brother that was the sixth, when they had those two boys, he got killed in Vietnam. And then, after he got killed in Vietnam, Mama and Daddy started all over with their second group of kids. So then, they had four more. So, they had four younger -- four others, and they had them close together. And then, she died. She had the -- the last one she had was still-born. So then, that was the end of her having babies.

MT: Do you remember how old she was then, about?

LW: Mother?

MT: I mean, when she had her last baby.

LW: Yeah. She was, I think -- When did the baby die? She was about 37, 38.

MT: And she had had all those children.

LW: Mother was in her 20's when she started having kids. Yes, and she had many. She was in her, yeah, about -- She was in her 30's. 37, 38, something in that. I'm not exactly sure, but I know with that last baby, she felt it was [time to go] back to work...and that was the last one.

MT: Well, what were the things that you liked to do most as a child and why?

LW: What I really liked to do, and I very seldom had a chance to do: I loved working outside.
[Phone rings]

MT: Okay. I was asking you what you liked to do, your favorite things to do.

LW: I used to like to -- I really got a relief and pleasure working in making flowers in gardens. Fixing the yard: I used to always have -- My yard was always nice. I didn't cut the lawn. But as far as putting, planting flowers and having different beds, decorating them and all, I always had people come by and look at my yard because I had all kinds of flowers and all, and that's what I liked to do. All the way around, we had different little patches, and designs with the bricks, and all that because what we had to work is what we had, we would get out of the woods. Take the wheel barrel, go down in the woods, dig down and get all the rocks and things. Some time, I would paint them white. I really enjoyed doing that, but it was a relief from hard work. Mother then would always make sure we do that. Make sure we would not just work, work, work and don't have any pleasure, and she knew what my pleasure was. So then, I loved that.

MT: So, she encouraged you to do that?

LW: Yeah. Well then, see -- I've always -- that's why I went into business with flowers, silk flowers and arrangements and things like that because I've always liked working with flowers, drying flowers. They laughed at me when they, because--I was doing this years ago. I mean, I did this as a child, to dry flowers, but we had the meat houses and stuff like that that I would put a rubber band and put it in hangers and hang out there. So when the people start talking, they said -- it was a big joke for me because I've doing this all my life: drying things.

And like, in the summer I see things that I grew and I say -- "I want to keep those." So what I would do: I would hang them up all winter and let them dry. I didn't have the sprays and stuff like that, the hair spray and all that I use now and everything, so they

dried. And then, all winter, I would just have them in different arrangements, I would have them in, like when Christmas come, I would spray red, white and then make a big bouquet of them, and they would be all my flowers that I had that I dried because I didn't know how to save them now, then. Just as a child -- I was 12 or 13 years old. So, I've been drying flowers for years. I love flower arranging, but now they're all silk. Got to do silks now because of the allergies.

MT: Are you saving these?

LW: This is an arrangement that a-- I did this arrangement for my son. My son built a new home in Waldorf and they had fresh flowers all through the house. So, I knew that they weren't going to keep them, so I dried them all up and made arrangements myself. Over there, the one over there, is the arrangement is: When he was living here, he used to bring me a rose every week. So, I dried and saved all their roses -- his roses.

MT: Okay. And, you've talked a little bit about this. Can you think of any other chores that you had to do as a child? You had a lot of chores you had to do. You had to be the boy.

LW: Babysit for the family, not just for my sisters and brothers. For everybody's children. When they would -- Always, back then, they had clubs. There was a Women's Club, a Quilting Club. Mama and them had a Quilting Club, and the men had their Tobacco Talking Club on Friday nights. So what they would do, they would have a social. So, each night -- Each weekend they'd go to a different family's house and then they would put all the children in one area where I was the oldest because the one next to me, a cousin, was a boy. So, guess who had to take care of all the little rascals?

MT: So, you had to be the boy and the girl?

LW: So I did all the babysitting, and it was Friday nights was the men's night, Saturday night

was the Quilting Club. So, they would all save all the things they made, save the pieces, and they would piece them one time and they would quilt. And, that was their pleasure, see, because that was a social time when everybody got a chance to sit down and have snacks and stuff like that, talk about what they were going to do. Canning and stuff. And then, I did all the babysitting, as I said, for all the young babies. They left them with me, and it was a pleasure for me to be told that -- Okay, "Laurice, it's her time out." So, my time was out. They would let me go to another area across the road to ones that weren't family and they didn't have young kids. And, we would go over there and just play cards, Bingo and Dominos, like that. And then see, they would say, "Can I come over?" And they would walk me back. So, those -- Mother didn't just keep me where I did nothing, have any pleasure.

And, we always had birthdays. On your birthday was the best time of your life because you did nothing. That was your birthday. So, you had a choice of doing things you would like, and I always wanted to go visit someone. So, that would be my time from 9:00 in the morning until sundown. When we would come back, a lot of times, we would have the neighbors over for Mother. There'd be the cake and the homemade ice cream, and everybody would come all around to celebrate.

MT: So, you had big parties?

LW: Big, big, big Sundays. Saturdays, Sundays was -- After, I say after 1:00 on Saturdays was when everybody would take a break. They wouldn't work. Then all day Sunday, they never worked on Sunday. That was religious. You never worked on Sundays. So, the animals got fed; but after you feed them, that was a pleasure day.

MT: What about: Did you ever get disciplined? How did your parents treat discipline? And if

you did get disciplined, what did you get disciplined for?

LW: You got -- You had to do something pretty bad, but did get discipline. You got a nice spanking. Yeah, they didn't play that -- The main thing is not keeping curfew. My father was very strict. You could -- They give you a pleasure day. When they tell you to be home, I mean this, my dear, went up until you were 16 years of age.

When you start talking to the guys and she says you're to be in the house, they did not mean be in the yard. They meant in the house. That was -- You just -- When the things got better in the Base come, they had ball games. People were coming to play ball games, and I was a real good ball player for the women's team. But like after, they had a social hour if you won, and Mother did not like where they held them. So, when the ball game was over, you came home. And if you decided, well, I'm going to go have a pop, I'm not going to go straight home, boy you were in trouble, your were in deep, deep, deep. So, you knew she knew that that game was over because she was sitting in the yard and seeing those people leaving the field and come home.

MT: Where did they have the social hour, the social get-togethers after the games?

LW: In the bars. They were in the bars. Mother didn't allow us to go. We couldn't go in the bars until you were 18, 19 years old, and we started playing ball when we were very young. So when the -- If the coach wasn't talking to you on that field, you come off of that field. You better go home! We got a real strict discipline. I mean seriously, Mother, she really didn't play. She had everything under control.

MT: Do you feel like your parents prepared you for life?

LW: Oh yeah! As I -- my daughters and sons. You know, today, you're blessed if you raised 11 kids and they've never gotten in trouble. That's a blessing in itself, and I'm very

blessed. I raised my children, and I've never had any problems with them. I'm blessed. And, that's because I was real strict on where they went, what they did and the company they kept. But see, when I raised my kids, my kids were always here. Everybody else's kids were here. Not just here, wherever I lived, my kids knew that I was so strict on them, they had their friends come to them. So, there are people who's kids were always here because I didn't allow them to do anything. I didn't! I let them start at 17. Once they come out of high school, they had –that's the privilege: I let them go out, but they still had curfews up until they left.

MT: As long as they were living at home. Okay. Well, you already talked about how you got to school. What was your classroom like at St. Peter's?

LW: Small of course. The classrooms were so very small, but we didn't have a whole bunch of children that went to Catholic school because you had to pay tuition. And see, we went to school because --the Catholic school -- because the parish paid our tuition because everybody had so many children that the church took care of the tuition. And, Mother and Daddy had to pay up, well, like, for instance, we didn't have, like \$200 or \$300 for one child. They went per family, see. So like, I always remember this: Mother and Daddy paid \$50 and the church paid the rest. So for all of us to go to school, it was, I say, it was \$200 for six kids. You know what I mean? That's the way it was. They went by family. So if you have a lot of children per family, they didn't charge for some of them.

And so, my sisters and brothers all went straight through Catholic school until they no longer had a Catholic school. When they closed Cardinal Gibbons, St. Peter's and Cardinal Gibbons, they went to Little Flower. And then after Little Flower, there was not

enough high schools that they could afford. The last group, I was telling you about, they graduated from Great Mills.

MT: So, the schoolroom was small.

LW: Very. They were small. But seriously, when the kids graduated, how many kids graduated? The largest class I ever remember was 12. See what I mean? So in that classroom, you probably had 15 kids. Some of them didn't have that many.

MT: Where they -- Did they, the grades mix together?

LW: Yes. Well, like the 5th and 6th Grades. You know, like that. The 1st Grade was always very large, then we put the 2nd and the 3rd together, then the 4th and 5th, like that. But, they were small because, like I said, it was a very small school. The majority of the black kids went to public school. Majority of them went to public school. As I said, there were a few that went to a Catholic school.

MT: What was your favorite subject?

LW: [laughter} I didn't have any. [Laughter] I'm not joking. I did not care for school.

MT: What was your least favorite?

LW: Math.

MT: Math.

LW: My least favorite was Math. I liked Social Studies, but I did not --I wasn't a good student. I wasn't a good student because I was always tired.

MT: Tired?

LW: Yes.

MT: You were always tired.

MT: I was exhausted, and I lose concentration. I couldn't think about what they were doing in

school. I was just saying --I wanted to go to bed! I was just really tired because as I said, I got up so early and I had to help braid the children's hair and iron their clothes. I just wore out. I have to admit. I never really learned to like school until I left home and that was because I was the only children there and I was with adult. I was just really, really tired.

MT: What did you --Do you remember any of the teachers? Did you like any of the teachers?

LW: I had nuns when I went to Catholic school. They were all nuns. I didn't care for the nuns. When I went to Sojourner High School in the District, I had one favorite teacher. Her name was Geraldine Pinchback.

MT: Oh!

LW: Her name was Geraldine Pinchback, and she was the Home Economic teacher so she taught sewing. She taught sewing and cooking. Geraldine Pinchback. Big, big lady, and she taught me a lot. She taught me a lot because I was from the country. Country girl going to city school, so she just took me in and just really taught me a lot of things. A lot of street-smart things. Things to do and don't do in the city and all, so she really taught me a lot.

MT: Were the nuns --Were the nuns all white or were there African American nuns?

LW: Black.

MT: Were they are all black?

LW: They were black nuns. They were black nuns and they were religious recently. They were the Oblate Sisters, and they were from the Baltimore area, and they were always placed down here in St. Peter's.

MT: Let me see. As a young adult, what did you dream of becoming?

LW: What I did? I was a nurse.

MT: What was the dream?

LW: Always wanted to be a nurse and take care of older people and that's what I did. I graduated as a nurse, LPN, and I went to work in a nursing home, convalescent home. I always loved old people. To this day, I do. I always like being around them. You learn so much from them. That's why I stay down at the ranch because my uncle is down there. He's 86 and the other's 80 and I'm always around them. And then, all my family that's living, they're up in the 80's and 90's.

MT: Where was your first --Where did you first work as a --What nursing home?

LW: I was a child's nurse. I worked for these rich people out in Bethesda, Maryland and I was their children's --They adopted two children and I lived in on the job as their nurse, and that's what I did: just took care of their children for them. And, there was Dr. and Mrs. Frawley, James Frawley and I worked with them. And, no one thought I would stay because I started at 18. The job was very confining, so I lived in as their nurse.

MT: And then you went to a nursing home after that?

LW: I left there. And right after I left the Frawley's, I left the area. I moved to Florida.

MT: To Florida.

LW: And then, I came back here...I met my husband and I took off and...

MT: So when you first left your parents house, was that when you were going to school or when you started working?

LW: I went to school in 1951 in DC to live with my aunt, and I went --I stayed there from 1951 and I graduated from high school -- vocational high in 1957. I left the end -- it was like August of 1957, I went to live with the Frawley's. I stayed there for 18 months, and

it did get confining because I had nothing to do, but I'd saved the money I wanted to save. And then, I went to New York for awhile. After the Frawley's, I went to New York, then I came down here and lived for a year with Mama and Dad, and then I met my husband...I went to New York with a cousin in New York. Once I started jumping around, I jumped around until the 80's before I really settled down to move back home.

MT: And in the 80's, you came back to St. Mary's County.

LW: To live.

MT: Did you leave, when you in 6th Grade, primarily for better educational opportunities, or why did you move to live with your aunt?

LW: Yes. I didn't care for the nuns.

MT: So, it was for school.

LW: Because I went to school there. I really didn't care for Catholic school. Really.

MT: Okay.

LW: Are you cold there?

MT: No.

LW: Okay.

MT: Thank you. Thank you. So, we talked –I'm thinking about some of these things that we've already talked about. Have you done other kinds of work to support yourself besides the nursing and, private nursing and working in nursing homes?

LW: Library, after 28 years. I worked exactly 10 years doing nursing because every place was a station I worked as a nurse. And then, I came back to St. Mary's County and the whole system was just so blah, after jumping around different states, come back. I couldn't take St. Mary's nursing. So, I worked --

MT: What system: the hospital system? The whole system?

LW: I worked in the nursing home. It was St. Mary's Nursing Home I worked. I always worked in nursing homes and I only worked one time in Children's Hospital and I couldn't take it after that one baby died. So then, I start working with the older people, but I worked at St. Mary's Nursing Home for 5 years. And then, I quit and I was out of work exactly one week when I realized they needed someone to work at the library, and that's when I went to the library: in 1972, and I stayed 1972 until 2000 when I retired.

MT: Well, tell me about your experiences -- [Phone rings and interrupts question.]

[End of Side 1, Tape 1 of 1]

[Begin Side 2, Tape 1 of 1]

MT: Alright. This is Side 2 with Laurice White.

So, when you came back from the county first, you did the nursing and then took the job at the library in 1972. And, what was it like working in the library in 1972.

LW: It was hard. Of course in '72, there weren't any black librarians, and I was the first at Lexington Park. And, the ladies that I worked with were always nice. They were supportive, but the patrons were -- They did a lot of things that were not nice to me. They said a lot of ugly things, and of course, you had to grin and bear it, and I did. Sometimes, they really irritated me or really hurt my feelings, but I always made it come back. It was prejudice times. Prejudice never leaves, but this was very, very rough. But as I said, I was so determined that no one was going to run me away. They weren't going to run me away. [Child comes in house] So, they weren't going to run me away so

I just really stuck it out -- out there because people come to the desk and you try to wait on them, and they pretend that I didn't try to wait on them. And then, they just stand there. "May I help you?" and they refuse to respond.

MT: They would just not respond at all?

LW: No. They would not say anything, and somebody would come out and say, "Have you been helped?" And they would lie and said, "No." So, it looked like I deliberately refused to wait on them.

And then, one incident happened that, that, -- that I hate to be called "You," and that's the word they use. "You do this" and "You do that." It was mainly just some people.

There was some people that was fabulous. And, you always run across nasty people that you can't control. And as I said, I'm the type of person: I have an answer for everything you say. I do have an answer, and I can take it for awhile and then I cannot.

One particular lady I thought was being real sweet to me. She approached the desk and she said to me, "You really have nice teeth." Right, and I smiled and I said, "Well, thank you." She says, "Where did you buy them?" And I said, "Well, I'm not even allowed to have my own teeth. How sad."

MT: Ah!

LW: So, I got in trouble for that because I wasn't supposed to respond to her. I was supposed to ignore her. And then, the other thing was -- that happened there -- This was in '72. We used to call on overdues. We had three ways of doing it. First, you call them and tell them they had an overdue book. The next time you had a letter written, and then you always follow it up with another call, and someone would always do that in the back. I didn't do. That wasn't my job to do it. It was always the supervisor's assistant that did.

So therefore, if they got nasty with the person, guess who got the problem. I'm the one that was at the firing squad. I always go it. And, one man walked in and threw the book at me. So, that was the straw that broke the camel's back. So when they did that, I threw the book back and hit him in the back of the head.

MT: So then what happened?

LW: Of course, I got scold for it. You're not supposed to hit him, but I felt that I had taken all the mistreating I had planned to take. I took the abuse of them saying nasty things, but I felt that I wasn't on the firing squad to be thrown at. I just -- he threw it at me. I caught it and got him back. And after that, it was so strange. Everything turned nice after that. Word must have been passed around of a fight or something because I never got mistreated after that. It was just really weird, but it was all just 1972 when I went through this.

MT: Was that pretty much the first year?

LW: First year, and after that they got used to seeing me, so. But, it was rough. In 1972, I started February '72, and that was a rough year, rough for me. It really was bad times.

MT: How did the -- And how did things change over the years that you were at the library?

LW: Well, I have always been very outgoing. I'm outgoing. I approach people. I can feel it. I can feel when someone really don't want to be bothered with me, so you just learn. You learned who to approach, who not to approach, and it was a great lesson. I really knew the people that really hate blacks. I knew them. You could feel it in their face. I learned to read their faces. So, that's why I stayed about 28 years because body language was a big thing with me. I learned people's body language so I just stayed wary of that, those type of people. And then, I got the ones that were really, really disrespectful. I

knew those people. Those were the people that I didn't approach because I would say to my coworkers, "Mrs. Somebody's coming in and she's all yours." And, see I learned to deal with them, and I think that's why I hung in there that long.

MT: Do you feel that you had encountered more overt discrimination and racism at the library than other places?

LW: Yes, Oh yes! Oh yes! It's a thing about working as a nurse. It's all hard work no matter what color you are. So, you're gonna be out there. You got – see, everybody's doing the dirty work. See, no matter what, if you have a patient that messes up, it don't matter what color you are, kid, you're gonna do it anyway. But then, it was harder at the library than as a nurse because I worked as a nurse down South and everybody fit in, you see, because we all did the same type of work: hard work. But with the books, it was different. It was just really, truly different. I was more uncomfortable. And another thing: As a nurse, they always had blacks and whites mixed, just almost many nurses -- black nurses as white nurses. But at the library, I was the only black librarian so I was out there by myself. See, I was out there by myself.

See by me not looking for black and white, I don't see people as color. I see people as people, and it was hard for me to understand another person being nasty to you just because of your color. They did not know you, so this is why it was hard for me because if – if I think a person is being mean to you, I've done something to you. But just to walk up to me just because I have a black face, that you get an attitude with me: I didn't know how to deal with that. That's why it was hard. We don't like you because of your teeth. Don't like you because of your body language. One lady says, "I do not want her to wait on me because I do not like her body language." See what I'm saying? So,

it's a difference for somebody to say, "I really don't like her because she messed with my clothes" or something like that. Walk up there and say that...To walk up and say that.

You want something? A Coke or something to drink?

MT: Okay. So, we're talking about your experiences at the library. How do you think that -- I mean, things changed for you at the library in the way that you retreated over the years. Do you think that things have changed in the same way in terms of race relations or in terms of attitudes in the county over, at that time, as well?

LW: Yes. Well, just like I said, I think it actually starting changing when we got more people from the Base, when you start having more different people coming in from different areas and then you just wasn't dealing with the locals. The Base brought in a lot of different races, so things starting changing then here in the Lexington Park area. Because if you would go Ridge or out in Leonardtown or that district, you would find the same thing. But right here in the Lexington Park area, people weren't accepting things the way they were. But if you go down to Ridge, there still was a lot of prejudices.

MT: Is that true now? Do you think things have changed less in those areas?

LW: It's better, but then there are certain places you know not to go in this area. Still in this area, there are certain little stores and things, when you go to Ridge, you are uncomfortable to go in. They make you feel uncomfortable. Because just last summer, there was a little area down Point Lookout that they weren't very nice.

MT: What was that? Where was that?

LW: I don't -- I don't know the name of the little store. It's the store on sort of like when you go to go down to Point Lookout. I can't exactly --

MT: Past Ridge, you mean.

LW: No. Closer to Point Lookout. It's a little, like you make a circle to go around like you're going to Point Lookout and it's right on that curve as you go.

MT: Buzzy's?

LW: That's the store.

MT: At Buzzy's. What happened there?

LW: My son in-law was lost. He came here and he was lost. He kept going Route 5. We gave him directions and he kept going Route 5. He end up all the way down there. So when he got there, and of course they had his own phone in the car, he went in to ask directions back to the Park and people weren't nice to him. But it wasn't the people that run the store, it was customers that were in the store. And, he just – he panicked and he said, "I'm a long ways a way" and he asked if someone would come to meet him because he was upset by this time because he was lost and all he saw was water. So, we had to drive down there. He said that they were saying really mean things to him, but they weren't, as I said, they weren't the owners. They just happened to be the customers, but they knew he was lost. They didn't give him directions to the Park, and he -- They kept saying ugly things.

MT: So, he was afraid.

LW: Yes, he was and he just -- He drove back off from there and he come back --I told him to come back up as far, when you see St. Michael's Church and sit on that parking lot so he would feel better. Just leave and drive back and come and told him how to turn and get back on St. Michael's and we would lead him from there.

MT: Are there other places -- That would be an example of some places that you said you wouldn't go. Are there other places that you sort of know not to go?

LW: I would never go back. I would never go back in there, in that particular store. And of course, there are stores in Leonardtown I wouldn't go. Seriously, I – Didn't ever do anything nasty to me. It just that I don't like their reaction. I mean like, not in the shopping center, in the Leonardtown area where the old courthouse is.

MT: The whole area there?

LW: That whole area. Where I'm saying, like Bell's Motor's, I wouldn't feel --I don't feel comfortable in there because when I was invited to go there: Marianne Chason was having something political thing there, and I would not go. I said, "I'm not going to be there by myself."

MT: At Bell's Motors?

LW: No, the stores along that line.

MT: Generally, it was that area.

LW: I think it was an ice cream parlor --

MT: It's where the old theater used to be.

LW: Yeah. I will never go in there unless I know that its gonna be a group of us. I would never go alone. I went there one particular time, and I was not happy. I was not comfortable there.

MT: So, they made you feel uncomfortable?

LW: Very! And, I just came out, . I just made a u-turn because I always go early places and I thought that there were going to be people that were going to be there. It was for Barbara Thompson. That's who it was for, something for Barbara, and I really felt very uncomfortable so I didn't stay and she wondered why because I had said I was coming. By the time they all came, I was gone.

MT: Are there other places in the County that you think where the people -- that people, black people kind of think, “Well, that’s not an area that I feel comfortable in or that I don’t?”

LW: Well, there are some people -- Like for instance, when I talk about the 7th District because I found a lot of it in the 7th District, but there are people that live in the 7th District that worked for these people, that know these people so therefore, they feel comfortable around these people. But, I had gone and didn’t feel comfortable because I didn’t like the way they were treated, but they then thought it was nothing because this is the way they used to do. But see, I don’t rock the boat. If they feel comfortable with it, I’m only visiting. But, if someone talked down to me, I will not accept it so therefore, I don’t go around those people because I can’t stand to be talked down to. But, they are used to being talked down to because that’s all they know.

And, there are a lot of places over -- When I’m talking about 7th District, I’m talking to Clements, Chaptico, Bushwood, Compton. Those areas. But, it’s better. It has changed since they had that little shopping center in that area. On Route 5, they got a little shopping center in there now: Food Lion.

MT: Oh yes.

LW: You have seen the changes. You see what I’m saying? There is a change in the way the white folks act and the way the black people act. But when they used to just have those little line of stores in the Leonardtown area around the courthouse area, the vibes were so bad. But I went over to that area -- a doctor in that area, and the attitude in there since they built that building -- the Belair Building and all that over in that area -- it has changed. Oh! 100%! That is because they have more stuff there that is not just owned by families, other things that come in. They don’t take all that closeness. Like, one

person owned everything so therefore you had to put up with that person because he owns everything. You know what I'm saying? Now, they got other chains and things is coming in and the atmosphere has to change. The people that live around there can tell you that.

MT: Do you -- Have you ever been to Harry's?

LW: Oh, I have gone into Harry's. I cannot stand Harry's. [laughter]

MT: Because?

LW: Because all the ignorant black people go to Harry's and stay in that little, teeny place and they're not allowed on that place that if the drunks and everybody --I can't believe that they do that. You see, I cannot accept that. So therefore when I was invited to go in, I told them, "You are kidding me, right?"

"Oh, it's nice in here."

"No. You do not put me in one little spot." So, no way, no way, but there are a lot of those people over there go there, but not me...Can't accept that.

MT: I think they give you credit, too, maybe.

LW: See, they know when they're checks are coming. They give you credit and you get your food and your drinks all in one little place and you go back when you get your check and pay, but they're not treated nice. I mean, they don't even have a place for them to sit, but they sell them the liquor. You know what I'm saying?

MT: They just sort of --

LW: They don't have any heat in there.

MT: Sit on the --

LW: Little benches. Degrading. It's gross. So, you winding down?

MT: Well. Okay. I mean, we have other big subjects, but I'm thinking about how much, like, we want to talk about your marriage and your children and all that because --but, so much of that was outside of the County.

LW: Yes. I married a military man, but we've been divorced 22 years, so I raised my children by myself.

MT: And you had how many children?

LW: Three. Two girls and a boy.

MT: Well, let me ask you a couple, sort of, big, general questions. Well, what do you think of the direction that the County is going in today? Take that any way you want.

LW: I don't particularly care for the 301 area. I think that's what they trying to do to that County. 235: Make it 301, and I liked it when it was quieter, more residential area. I don't -- definitely against cutting down all the trees because the trees, the beauty. I don't like all the commercial stuff. I lived on 235, had a residential home, disliked the idea that they changed from residential to commercial. Did not like that. Do not like that. I cannot stand all the growth because we just aren't prepared for the growth that they're expecting by putting all this commercial stuff. We don't have the roads for it. We don't have the outlet for the traffic. It's going to always be a backup because we are they going to go? So, I really hate that.

I'm not sorry that we are off of 235. The farmers, my uncle and all them: They made more money on 235, but, because of their, because they had their little stands and all to sell the veggies and things like that, but it's safer for them not to be on 235 because there's no way they could handle the traffic with the farm equipment and stuff. But, no, I'm being a St. Mary's Countian. I really -- I hate the growth, but I hate the idea of

cutting the trees and all the beauty away.

MT: What do you think have been the biggest changes in your lifetime in the County?

LW: When we sold the property. That was --It took me a year to actually go back to Immaculate Heart of Mary which was on 235. I went for a year, I went to Holy Face for mass. I did not like the whole idea of them tearing down everything: all the home place and buildings. I didn't like it, so therefore I wouldn't go 235. I went, did all my going Route 5. I go out Great Mills Road, hit Route 5, and I did that for about a year, and I went Holy Face for a year. I didn't like to see my -- the old members suffer because they grieved over it. Even though they sold it and they didn't lose it, but they'd been there all their lives. So, they really, really grieved and we lost a member. So, it was a lot of hurt there when we first got rid of the place.

It was so hard for the farmers. It was hard for them and all them. I really didn't care for that and all. I mean, everything went up so fast. When we sold everything, the first thing at the big park there was -- The Chrysler place was built first. Then after that - that was first on the property. Then after the Chrysler, then two hotels coming up back to back: the Hampton Inn and Extended Stay back to back. And now, where my mother and daddy's house were, they got that ManTech, that big building that's right on my mother and daddy's place. That's where our home was where it stands between the -- Tina Lancaster and John Lancaster lived next door to us and they got ManTech where our houses were. So, it was just hard. It's hard, and I'm younger. I'm the youngest one in the crew, so it's harder on the older fellows. So.

But I don't care for it because when you have -- When you start having such a big change and bringing all the commercial stuff in, you bring in crime. And, this has always been a

laid-back area: Very quiet people selling their places and moving to a quieter place, and now they're building it all up just like 301. So when you bring -- build up a small town and have a military area and you build it up, you get crime. So therefore, you don't feel safe in your own home and stuff. So, I put in an alarm system. I had that put in my place.

MT: Well, I guess I have one question about NAACP and hopefully, maybe we'll talk again. You know, in your experience, you were involved --When was your first involvement in NAACP?

LW: I joined NAACP in 1958 in Washington, DC.

MT: So as far as involvement here in the County, what's your -- How long have you been involved?

LW: Well, it really started in the 80's because the first time I became President was '85. This is my fourth time President. In 1985, I was the President and that's when I started getting involved with the St. Mary's branch, and it was Birdie Bowman that got me involved in this branch because I had a large branch and I was --a very active branch in Washington, DC, but it was mostly with classmates and all that I went to school with that I kept going back to their meetings and things and all because they were--I felt good with the surroundings, and she started begging me back then to join, to get involved in St. Mary's County branch. Bring your ideas to this branch. This is how I got involved, because of Birdie..

MT: Over that time, the 80's, 90's and today, what do you think has been the most active -- When has the branch been the most active or, sort of the healthiest?

LW: Well, back in the 60's, of course or back in there, they tell me that we were really very

strong branch, naturally because they were trying to, integrate everything, everything because they were breaking the ice for everything. So naturally, they had more members that were involved. Half of them are dead. They were very, very strong branch. But to tell you the truth now, I feel that this time back that I've got a very strong branch because we're doing things now that -- and active in more activities than we were before. Because right after the 60's, I say up until the 70's, then they got laid-back there. They laid-back and kind of felt comfortable because things were mixing and they got comfortable. Then, they started back all over again. There was a shot there where it like going into the 60's. We had a lot of prejudice things happen. It always happens, but we had more things that were going on the Base, more prejudice on that surrounding Base area, and it seemed like I've seen the ice break because what used to really irritate me was going to pay my taxes and never see a black face in there. That hurt me more than, I guess, paying my taxes. And right to this day, to this day, they still do not have a minority. I don't care if it's --It doesn't have to be black. It could be Filipino. It could be Indian. It could be anybody. [telephone rings]

MT: What office was that you're talking about where you go to pay your taxes?

LW: Where you pay your taxes is the Treasury Department.

MT: St. Mary's County Treasurer?

LW: Yes. Down stairs in the governmental building. Down on the bottom floor of the governmental building where you pay your property taxes, used to be able to get your tags, anything like that.

MT: And it's all white?

LW: And it's been and it has -- It's been that way, and that has been on thing that irritated me

so much until I have asked the question: Why, why is it all that way? Why can't -- I even suggested to McClintock -- McClintock to have a, to have a, to open up, in order to get kids to come in there and do like a internship. To have kids running or working, doing something just to let -- Because I'm not the only one that feels that way. It' is ridiculous to go and take you --I pay \$700-some taxes for this sub-division lot, and to walk in and give \$700-some dollars always to those same elderly that should have been retired before I did ladies, it just --

MT: Their all women, too?

LW: All old ladies that should've retired before I did because they're getting a little snap pity. They so sure. They been there so long until -- and I told -- I remember telling them: "Can't y'all get.-- I said, "I know there's got to be an Indian or a Filipino or African American or somebody that can go in there, if they shuffling papers," to give people a good feeling about this. It's ridiculous. It's a County building. So, then I asked Joe Anderson – I've been at this a long time, talking about it --and all I get is the same thing: Nobody's applying. So I told them, "I'm not talking about having someone that they have to pay. Put students in there and let them then train." Like we do at the library: We have students that come there studying to be librarians. They do internships in the library. That's the type of thing that I'm talking about just so at least one part of the day, there, the word it'd get around that there are students in there. And just like I said, I'm not a person that everything has to be a black-and-white thing. I don't care what minority. That's all I say. Just put somebody in there. I've already paid my taxes for this year, but --

MT: So, do you think there's still a need for the NAACP?

LW: Oh yes! We need the NAACP in St. Mary's County. We really do. Mainly, some of the things --Well really, we need the NAACP for that Education Committee about the Board of Education because I don't understand some of the things they're doing. Do not understand them and really intend to get in the middle of them and see what it's all about. That's one big issue with education because every child should be educated.

The other thing is that the police brutality. Sheriff -- Let me change that. Not police, not State Troopers, but the Sheriff's brutality. That is really getting to be a problem. We're getting quite a few complaints about that. And of course, they're denying it. So, those are two issues that we are involved in with the legal redress. And as I said about the Education Committee, I really -- I must go and talk to Patricia one-on-one sometime to see what is all, what's going on.

I was talking about the names of the schools that were automatically removed without -- Like George Washington Carver, Benjamin Banneker. Why they did not ask the public before they just took it upon themselves to remove those names that's been there for years. So, she told me that she would see that the schools get the names back. George Washington Carver should keep it's name as George Washington, not Carver Elementary and Banneker: Benjamin Banneker should not have been Loveville Banneker. It should have stayed Benjamin Banneker. Those were some of the sore thumbs with us. Those things, but I really think that we've come a long way since NAACP. That's why when I took office last time, I really wanted the public to know that we exist and some of the things that we do other than battle. There are other things that we are involved in that are important. It's not just solving white things, white issues. We are doing other things for the community.

MT: Okay. Well, thank you very much.

[End of Side 2, Tape 1 of 1]