

Unified Committee for Afro-American Contributions  
Oral History Documentation Project

**MARY AGATHA COATES SOMERVILLE**

Interviewed by Merideth Taylor  
September 24 & 24, and October 16 & 27, 1996  
At her home in Morganza Maryland  
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[Interview begins September 24, 1996]

[Begin Side 1, Tape 1 of 3]

MT: ...and I'm interviewing Mary Somerville. It is September 24, 1996 and we're at Mary's home in Morganza, Maryland. And, let's see. Let's start with some biographical data.

Okay. Mary, you were born in—Do you have the year you were born?

MS: I was born in 1909. February the 9<sup>th</sup>.

MT: February the 9<sup>th</sup>. Okay. And the birthplace?

MS: The birthplace was Mechanicsville.

MT: Mechanicsville, Maryland.

MS: Mechanicsville, Maryland.

MT: And, alright. Do you have a grandparent that you can tell us about?

MS: I didn't know my grandparents. Just what my momma told me. I didn't know them.

MT: Names?

MS: I know the name of my momma's mother. Her name was Jenny Butler.

MT: Okay. Jenny Butler.

MS: Jenny Butler.

MT: And, you might want to talk up a little bit more. Okay? Jenny Butler. And, your father's name.

MS: My father's name was Moses Coates, but I didn't know the middle name of them.

MT: And your mother's name?

MS: Was Margaret Coates.

MT: Do you know—Was her—What was her maiden name?

MS: Her maiden name was Butler. Margaret Butler.

MT: And do you know where they were born?

MS: They was born in Patuxent, Maryland.

MT: In Patuxent.

MS: Patuxent, Patuxent.

MT: What about your grand—Your grandparents: Were they also from Maryland?

MS: They're also from Maryland, too.

MT: Okay.

MS: I was pretty sure they was born in Patuxent, too or all around. All they did live in Patuxent. Place called Trent Hall. That's Patuxent. Old names.

MT: Okay. Do you have brothers or sisters?

MS: Well, yeah. I had brothers and sisters. The oldest sister was named Edna Coates, and my next sister was named Arlington—Jane Arlington Coates.

MT: Okay.

MS: And then me.

MT: And, how many children did you have?

MS: They had four children.

MT: How many children do you have?

MS: Oh, I had ten children.

MT: Ten. Alright. And, let's see. And, how many of those children are still living?

MS: There five living and five deceased.

MT: Okay. And, do you know how many grandchildren you have?

MS: I got about thirty-some.

MT: [chuckle] Thirty-some!

MS: About thirty some grandchildren. Not more.

MT: Well, I won't ask you to name them.

MS: [laughter] Want me to name them? Name some?

MT: No, that's okay! [laughter]

MS: I can name some of them.

MT: That's okay! [chuckle] Maybe we'll come back to that. Okay. So, we're gonna start with these official interview questions that the committee came up with, and the first one is: What were the times like when you were a child?

MS: When I was a child, the time was good. I worked hard all the time. They always had a core [Mary said "core" instead of "chore."] for me to do every day before—I had a core to do in the morning 'fore I went to school. And after I came back from school, my parents kept me busy at all times, except getting my lesson at night.

MT: How did—How did you and your family live?

MS: We lived good. We lived really good.

MT: Can you describe it? What kind of, you know—What was it like? What kind of place did you live in? What did your folks do and what did you do?

MS: Well, my father farmed. Had a little farm he farmed. And then between time, he would go on the river and oyster, catch oysters, manos, fish. He was a waterman when he wasn't doing the farming.

MT: Uh hmm [yes]. He was a waterman.

MS: Yeah.

MT: And, did he do both all year around?

MS: All year around. See, when the Fall time come, he was oystering and during the summer, he'd be farming on the farm.

MT: Okay.

MS: And my momma took in washing and ironing.

MT: Okay. Now, was that your birth momma and daddy or—?

MS: Yeah. That's right. That's right. Yeah.

MT: And, what did you eat and what did they eat? What did you all eat?

MS: What did they eat? Well, they had—We raised our food on the land. Cabbage and hog—raised hogs. Had hog meat, cabbage. All the vegetables: peas, beans. And then, we used to catch rabbits in the old hare gum. In the Fall time of year, my daddy, my father used to make hare gums.

MT: Hare gums?

MS: You hear of that?

MT: No.

MS: That's a little trap to catch the rabbit.

MT: Oh!

MS: About this long. Made like a mailbox.

MT: About how long?

MS: About this long.

MT: About 2 feet long?

MS: Just about that long.

MT: About 2 feet long. 2 feet long.

MS: And made a little door to it, and raised the door up. In the evening time, raised the door up. Some way, he had it propped up, and the rabbit go in the door and come down and catch the rabbit. And then, he would send me out early in the morning, real frosty morning. That's why you could catch the rabbit, in a real heavy frost. And, I got out and take the rabbit out there. At first, I was afraid, but I got used to it. I—Papa showed me how to catch the rabbit. See, we didn't call him Daddy. We called him Pop! [laughter]

MT: Yeah, "Pop."

MS: Yeah. Pop. So, I put my hand in there and grab him by his front legs and pull him out and take him to the house, and Papa would kill him. So, I didn't know how to kill him.

MT: Did your papa always do that or did your mama do it sometimes?

MS: No, Mama didn't do it. Pop had me doing it. I had to do it. 'cause see there wasn't no one there but me. Other children was gone, you know, grown, grown.

MT: They were all older.

MS: Older. Yeah, they older.

MT: So, and—So, did you like—Did you have any favorite things to eat then?

MS: No, I just eat everything that they had raised. And Mama cooked and put on the table, I ate it. I liked chicken, meat, cornbread, and that's about all.

MT: Did you learn to cook when you were real young?

MS: No. She didn't not learn me how to cook. Only thing she learned me was to do was wash, iron and clean. Houseclean. She did all the cooking.

MT: She did all the cooking. Hmm. And, did you always have plenty to eat?

MS: Always had plenty to eat 'cause, see, we raised the food. Didn't buy too much. On our sized good store, Mama would buy tea, sugar and coffee. Postem. Drink called—You ever drink Postem?

MT: Yeah. Where did you go to the store?

MS: It's a Mechanicsville store. The name of the store was Trice. T-R-I-C-E. Trice's store. That was the name of the store in Mechanicville. Eugene Trice. I can remember that!

MT: Was he the—He was the store owner and he operated the—?

MS: Store owner. He was there two years.

MT: Did you go to the store?

MS: And two stores. Another store was CD Sasser. Sasser: S-A-S-S-E-R.

MT: Yeah. I've seen that name.

MS: CD Sasser.

MT: Did they sell food, too?

MS: They sold food. My mama and Pop used to go to both those stores. In Mechanicsville.

MT: Did they go to the store often?

MS: Only round Saturdays.

MT: Okay.

MS: They bought enough food to last for week to week.

MT: For a week, yeah. Okay. Well, would you say times were better or worse than they are now?

MS: I know. Much better than it is now. It wasn't like this. Now, all this drugs.

MT: Why were times better?

MS: They were just better.

MT: Drugs?

MS: Wasn't no drugs in those days. No such things as rape and all that. Nothing like that 'cause I go—My mama could send me anywhere—through the woods, to a neighbor's house to carry a message or pick up a package or something. Nobody bothered me. And then, see, I used to go down in the big woods and keep up my cattle, which was cows. Like four head of cows. Had four heads of cows and a little calf, and I had to drive them up every evening. Milk them in the morning 'fore I went to school. And come back in the evening and go down in this big woods and get them out. See, this big woods called swamp. It was called it a swamp in those days with the water and the grass. That's why all they always went in the swamp where they could—They was cool at and they could eat grass and drink water. And, they stayed down there until I come to get them in the evening. In this big swamp. Big, large swamp.

MT: So, a lot of work. And, you told me that before that you did a lot of work.

MS: A lot of water.

MT: But you still think it was better?

MS: I think it was better. I think that was better to be working. No one was idle. Always had something for me to do. Yes, indeed. And then—She ironed, she fixed them out a little

border over there and showed me how to iron. I had to iron too at nights, you know, to get the ladies' clothes ready when they come in the morning to pick them up. Some came 'bout ten o'clock, twelve o'clock, three o'clock. So, she washed for four or five different white ladies. So.

MT: So, she did laundry.

MS: Laundry.

MT: As well as everything else.

MS: That's right.

MT: And, did she did that for–

MS: Now, that was them. Then in the–Some time, Most time, too–

MT: Let's move your chair a little bit. Just a little bit. Okay.

MS: She went to Asbury Park, New Jersey in the summer to work a few days–not a few days, few months and then come back. See, school opened in October in those days. Never open in September. It was October. But, she used to go to work in Asbury Park for these family people. Caldin White. She worked for Caldin White in Asbury Park and make some money to buy my school clothes, bring home for the Fall.

MT: Did you go with her?

MS: No. I stayed there with my father.

MT: Now, she did–How did that happen that she went to Asbury Park. How did know about that?

MS: She had children out there. Her children was out there. Older ones.

MT: Oh okay. I see.

MS: And then, she had a sister out there. I'm trying to think of her name. I forgot her name

now, but she had a sister.

MT: How did she—Who took care of things when she was gone in the summer?

MS: Myself and my father.

MT: Yeah. So you must have done—Who did the cooking?

MS: My papa cook. He was a cook—good cook. Yeah, he could cook. I didn't cook. He cooked my meal for me. And then when I come to—See, I was close to the school. I didn't have to ride no bus. I was just as far from school as from here to that trailer up there. That's all as far from school.

MT: Just a very short walk.

MS: You go down the road and go round the big turn. I walked to school, see.

MT: So, it just took you a few minutes to walk to school?

MS: A few minutes to walk to school. Then at noontime, I come home and eat my dinner. He was fixing my dinner and leave it there. If he was gone, he would leave my dinner or lunch all fixed and plate—on the plate.

MT: Then, did you do the laundry and the cleaning?

MS: I did the laundry and cleaning just as Mama, she told me.

MT: And then, but the people—She worked for white people and—

MS: In New Jersey.

MT: Here she just did laundry for the whites?

MS: Some white women.

MT: Were they farmers' wives?

MS: Yeah, they was farmers and oystermen, you know. They were working on the river. They were farmers, too, big farmers. They had large farms.

MT: Did your folks–

MS: Yeah!

MT: Did they own their own farm, though? They had their own farm, right?

MS: They owned their little place. They had a little small place that was the size I got–Might be a little larger than this; but now, they had a little home.

MT: How much land do you have here?

MS: Two.

MT: Two acres?

MS: Yeah. I think they had more than that, but it was just a little lot. It was no great, big farm, enough for–Just enough for them to raise tobacco and corn.

MT: Oh, they raised tobacco?

MS: Tobacco and corn. Yeah. And, they have a large orchard. This huge orchard with every kind of fruit: pears, cherries, apples–pears, apples, cherries. And, I had to go up the tree and get a little cherries and gather apples. And, gather these apples so I could–And I had to wrap these apples in paper and put away in the room for Christmas. They're not supposed to touch the ground 'cause they would bruise. So, I had to gather those, then, and put them in this big bucket hanging on the limb of the tree, and I come down the tree with the bucket. And then, take those ones that I gathered, put them separately. Then when–I had to have my mama to wrap them and put them in a big barrel for Christmas and they were good.

MT: For your Christmas or for other people?

MS: For people coming around, you know, to have apples to put on the table for people.

MT: For guests?

MS: It was fun, I think. [chuckle]

MT: That sounds good! [chuckle]

MS: Yeah! Alright!

MT: So—Well, that sounds pretty good. Even though it was a lot of work, you still thought that was a good time.

MS: That was a good time 'cause I was working the whole time. No idle time to—'cause Mom used, “Think grass gals [?],” My mama used to say. [laughter]

MT: Think what?

MS: You think grass calleys! [laughter]

MT: Grassgailities?

MS: Oh, I don't know what they meant by that! [laughter] It was bad!

MT: You know what they meant! [laughter]

MS: [inaudible] It was fun!

MT: What's your earliest memory?

MS: Earliest memory.

MT: What's the first thing you remember? How young—You know, how far back can you remember?

MS: I can't remember back right far. About five? I was five, six? That was during—That's when they started me learning how to work. Seven? I was seven and eight and nine and ten getting up cattle and milking cows and feeding chickens.

MT: You remember anything back before then?

MS: Um hmm [no]. Can't remember back.

MT: I don't know what I'd say to that question myself.

MS: No, I can't remember way back behind that.

MT: Well, if you think about it or you come up with something, we can always–

MS: Yeah. Right, right. That's right.

MT: Well, I guess you didn't have much relationship with–Yeah?

MS: Now, I know I can remember when my father used to go down on the–The boats came from Baltimore. Great big steam boats?

MT: Yeah.

MS: Come down from Baltimore and my father used to hook up the steers to the cart and go down to pick the barrels of clothes and food that the children used to send Mama for Christmas.

MT: Oh!

MS: In barrels and boxes, and come on the steamboat. Papa take me in the buggy with him. Or, it wasn't a buggy, and our horse was named Old Daisy. And, Daisy was a blue and white, spots. I haven't seen–[chuckle] I haven't seen a blue and white horse! [laughter] Little, tiny–Little, tiny horse, but she was fat named Old Daisy. Hook up to the buggy. If he didn't drive the buggy, he hooked the old cart and steers, you know. Steers to the cart. See, he had all that: He had his stairs and cart and horse and buggy. Then, they had a horse and buggy for the ride to church on Sunday. Something like the Amish. They didn't use the horse, the same horse–I can't think of the other horse's name, but I can remember–

MT: So, two horses?

MS: Two horses, yeah. One for the everyday and one for Sunday! Something like that! [laughter] Yeah, that's right.

MT: Well, I guess your brothers and sisters were all a lot older. They were gone so you didn't have much relationship–

MS: Didn't have much. No, see, they was–One of my sisters was teacher. Jane Arlington was a teacher, and my other older sister–She met a sailor. She was traveling around the world. She was sometime in Connecticut, sometime in Philadelphia. All over the place. She was traveling because he was sailor.

MT: Was your sister a teacher in Asbury Park?

MS: Baltimore.

MT: In Baltimore?

MS: This was in Baltimore. Jane Arlington–That's her name. You call her Arly. Used to call her Arly Coates, then she got married to a man in Canada. She married a man from Canada, and his name was Herman Dixon. And, she didn't have any children. See, I think he died first. Yeah, he died first.

MT: Okay. And, what church did you go to then, when you were, at that age? You know, when you were with your parents?

MS: Mechanicsville. We had to walk from Gravel Knoll–That's our school that I went to. See, we live–That school, I was telling you, see, we lived right around the corner: Gravel Knoll School. Walked from there to Mechanicsville church.

MT: Catholic church?

MS: Immaculate Conception.

MT: Immaculate Conception. Okay.

MS: We had to walk–You know, didn't drive. If the horse got sick or something or other, we had to walk. As long as the horse stayed well, hooked the horse up to the buggy, we

drove. And then, we had a wagon, too, so put–Even had a wagon.

MT: Okay. Did you take any trips when you were a child?

MS: When I was a child, my mama give me a trip a year. Once, she took me to Asbury Park one time, and she took me to Baltimore one time. Once a year, she give me a trip. Once a year. And that's all-

MT: Did you ever go anywhere else?

MS: Then Baltimore and Asbury Park, New Jersey. Just them two 'cause she had people, children out there.

MT: Children, yeah.

MS: Older son, Lawrence. That's who I named Pat after–Lawrence. Yeah, Lawrence Jerome Coates.

MT: Okay. What about–How did your parents deal with health and illness? Do you remember any special cures? Did they treat things at home, and did your family have a medical doctor?

MS: Medical doctor. Doctor's name was Dr. Seldon from Mechanicsville. That was the family doctor. And course, Mom and them used to buy, like, medicine from the doctors, too. Sometimes they buy medicine from the store. Trying to think the name of it. Some kind of liniment, I forget the name of it. Yeager's Liniment? Used to buy that. That was strong if had pain in legs or something 'cause I didn't have pain in my legs. They rubbing their legs. I didn't have no pains when I was a child! Yeager's Liniment they used to buy from the store, rub their limbs. Yeah, I think he had–They call it rheumatism. Nowadays, they call it arthritis. So, he's rub down in there. And, he used to buy castor oil for me in case my bowels–I got constipated. Buy this black castor oil.

Then, they bought the white castor oil!

MT: Oh! Yes!

MS: I had to take it! I bet myself, I couldn't! [chuckle]

MT: It must have taste terrible!

MS: [chuckle] Hmm hmm! Then when I had a chest cold, in my chest, they took red flannel—  
cut a piece of red flannel and rubbed, mixed up some mustard, mutton taller—You ever  
heard of mutton taller? That's something from the lambs.

MT: Oh yeah. That's from the lambs.

MS: From the lambs, and mix it together and put it on this red flannel and put to my chest, and  
I wore that all the winter. It was wrapped--Couldn't take it off during the winter 'cause  
catch another bad cold. When the spring come, it'll drop off. Take it off.

MT: You wore that all the time?

MS: In the wintertime, that's right, to keep that—break that cold and keep that cold out of me.  
Had to wear it all the time. It had to be red flannel. Not only me—all the children.

MT: How did they—Did they put the mutton tallow on the flannel?

MS: On the red flannel.

MT: How did you attach it?

MS: Attach to my arms. See, I wore long underwear, long shirt. Long-sleeved—two-piece,  
you know? They pin it to that there on the inside. I had to keep it on, even at Sunday  
time when I go to church. I put on my fine clothes, I still had to keep that red flannel.

MT: In the summer?

MS: No, in the winter.

MT: In the winter. Okay.

MS: In the summertime, take it off.

MT: And then, how did you–Did you bathe? Did you keep that–How did you keep that–?

MS: When I take--I took my bath, took it off and put it right back on.

MT: Okay.

MS: See, they had a big old washing tub. We didn't have no running water. Great, big, huge washing tub. Round, galvanized tub, you know?

MT: And heat up the–

MS: Heat up the water. Take our bath and did that 'cause we had two of them.

MT: So, that's be a lot work to heat up all that water.

MS: Then, I had to pull this water out of the well. See, we had a big, deep well and I used to have–My father said that well was 65 feet deep. It had two buckets. When you pull up one bucket, the other bucket go down and fill up. Pull this one up like that. I had to do that. Then I would hold my head over the well and say, “Hey!” and my echo come back, “Hey!” [laughter] Mama better not a saw me doing though. I'd do that when nobody was around! That was fun to me! See, my echo asked me that. That was dangerous, too, wasn't it?! [laughter]

MT: She wouldn't like that because you might fall in the well?

MS: Yeah, might fall in the well. I'd do that before I brought them home. And, I used to do it when they were somewhere I know they didn't see me! I liked to have my echo holler back to me.

MT: Yeah!

MS: They used to call me “Sister.” I would say, “Sister,” and the echo would say, “Sister!” [laughter] See, they call me Sister. They don't call me Mary.

MT: Yeah. That's good. I'm glad you mentioned that. Yeah. So, you called yourself Sister, too.

MS: Yeah. [laughter] Yes indeed-y.

MT: Well, do you remember any other home cures or anything like that? Did you ever have any toothaches or did they have any health problems or did you have any health problems that you had to find a cure for?

MS: No, they had no bad health problems. Just kept that cold away from me. You know, when I caught a cold, they put this flannel on me.

MT: Did they do the red flannel for themselves? Did they wear that?

MS: They wore it, too, if they caught a cold. Yes, indeed-y. They wore it, too. She put it on the other children, too. The older ones, you know.

MT: Did they use anything like garlic or any herbs or anything like that?

MS: Yeah, they did. Mama used to have some kind of herbs, too, they'd take for tea. I used to know the name of that herbs. They go in the woods and get this herbs off the tree and it smelled real good-spicy. Oh, I used to know the name of it.

MT: Well, if you think of it, you could tell me. And, she made tea out of it.

MS: She used to make tea-hot tea. It taste good! It really taste good! When you had a cold, drink some of that hot-Oh, can't think of the name. I'm looking right at the name how to call this tea. And, the little leaves looked just like a-looked like little flower leaves. Not wide as a rose bush leave but a little narrow. They used to grow in the woods. I used to know the name of it. Indeed we did. A lot of people used to get.

MT: Probably a lot of-

MS: Dry it. Used to dry it out, you know, on the board like you dry apples. Used to dry these leaves out for the tea for the wintertime. Used to gather it in bags and hang it up in the out, in the shade.

MT: Well, if you think of it, we'll add it.

MS: I wish I could—

MT: Do you know—Were you born in a hospital or were you born at home?

MS: Right at home in the house. Like all my children. Never went to the hospital in my life. All ten was right home in the bed. Old family doctor, Dr. Pomell was my family doctor.

MT: Okay. Well, we'll get more into that, too. Well, let's see. I already asked you some of these questions about what chores you had to do. We already talked about that.

MS: Yeah, yeah. That's right. The poultry. Did I tell you about the chicken and the hogs? I take care of them, and the cows.

MT: What did you like to do the most? What was—

MS: I liked to do it all 'cause I know I had to do, so I didn't care.

MT: What about besides chores, what did you like to do?

MS: Huh?

MT: What did you do—What did you do that you enjoyed, besides your chores?

MS: I just kept working all the time. I didn't have nothing--

MT: You worked all the time?

MS: All the time. They kept us, keep you working.

MT: What about when you went to church?

MS: I went to church every Sunday, yeah.

MT: What else did you do on Sunday?

MS: Nothing. I might play with my toys. See—I played. I used to play. Played by myself 'cause she didn't let me go nobody's house to play. Children could come play with me, but she wouldn't let me go nobody's houses and stay all night or day, she let the children come and play with me at home. Played with my dolls and my toys. Had all kinds of toys.

MT: What kind of toys?

MS: Well, I had the wooden toys. You have seen them. I know you have. The little men with the long legs. The wooden toys. There was wooden toys, and I can remember she had a tall basket to put them in. Used to call it 'banana basket.' In those days, banana come in those tall, but these baskets now we have is short and round. This was tall and slim, and she'd put my toys in that basket. And when I played with them, I had to put them right back. Not to leave ne'er a one on the floor. And, I had dolls and cellar dishes. So I used to play with the cellar dishes and the dolls and I named the dolls. And, I'd sit down at a table with my dolls—set the doll up on that side of the table and I sit on this side, and I would say, "Behave yourself, Jennie" or something, "Sally." "Behave yourself now. You're talking," talking to myself! [laughter]

MT: To your doll.

MS: Yeah, talking to my doll. And I said, "Say your Grace now." [laughter]...I guess everybody thought I was going off that day! [laughter] But, I didn't have anybody to play—

MT: Yeah. That's what little girls do.

MS: I play with myself!

MT: So you went—So, you played with your toys and you did your chores.

MS: I did my chores.

MT: And you went to church.

MS: Went to church.

MT: Did you do anything else you can think of?

MS: That's all! That's all. Washing all. Working all the time.

MT: Did you have homework?

MS: I'd be glad when Sunday come to, so I could play awhile and rest, you know. [chuckle]

MT: Did you spend much time outdoors?

MS: I stayed outdoors, stayed outdoors. Yeah. My–You know, when I was in the house washing and all. And see, I'm trying to think, do I scrub floors? See, I scrubbed floors, and floors didn't have no carpet, just this wood. I had to scrub that floor almost as white as this cover.

MT: To get it almost white?

MS: Um hmm [yes]. 'Cause she made this homemade soap. Put lye into it. Mama made this soap and I scrubbed with that. She made lye soap. That was a grease, you know?

MT: Did you help with that?

MS: No, I didn't. She did that. I just used it to scrub. Scrubbed tables. Didn't have no tablecloths on. When company come, then she have a big white tablecloth and the linen, but we always eat off that table so clean and scrub that table, just like scrub that floor.

MT: Did you ever go–Did you play outside at all or did you go fishing or anything like?

MS: Oh no. I didn't go no fishing. Oh no.

MT: No? No, never did.

MS: Papa did all that, and I didn't go fishing.

MT: Did you ever climb trees or anything like that?

MS: Yeah, I used to climb a tree. Yeah, I used to climb a tree 'cause see, I was—had to gather those apples.

MT: Orchard, yeah. Did you ever do it for fun? That's right. You had to do it for work.

MS: Yeah, I did it for fun, too. Yes, indeed. I did it for fun! [laughter] I used to like climbing trees, just like a boy 'cause I was used to it, see.

MT: Would you mom think that wasn't lady-like?

MS: I don't know. She had me up that tree gathering pears.

MT: Well, yeah.

MS: I'll tell you: pears and apples. See once they gathered, too, you had to wrap them up for the winter. And the speckled ones had hit the ground, well, she would preserve and can.

[End of Side 1, Tape 1 of 3]

[Begin Side 2, Tape 1 of 3]

[0:31:40]

MT: Side 2—Interview with Mary Somerville on September 24, 1996.

Okay. We were talking about the pears and your mom preserving and—

MS: I told that, didn't I?

MT: Yeah.

MS: Now I want to talk about the hog meat.

MT: The hog meat? Okay.

MS: I had to cut the hog meat to make lard. Cut the fat off from the lean. Take the lean and

made sausages out the lean part. We had to cut that up small, then had to grind that. I turned the grinder. Mama put it in or whoever could help us put it in. And some time, I put it in the grinder. Then, I had to scrape hog chitlins. Scrape them on the board. Scrape all that stuff off.

MT: Out of the intestines?

MS: That's right.

MT: Scrape the intestines.

MS: Scrape the—white as snow. And then, Mama turned. She turned, did the turn, but it'd stick [if] she turned them on the wrong side, then wash them. Then, I had to scrape all that off.

MT: Oh, so you turned it inside out. I wondered how you did that.

MS: Put us a long stick.

MT: Hooked it on the end and just like a sleeve, turned it—like turning a sleeve inside out.

MS: Yes! Right! Yeah. Just like that. Then, had to scrape them good. Now, those was the hog casing's for the stuff the sausages with, and we had to stuff it. I had to help stuff the sausages. Put the sausages in the—in the sausages mill, I call it. And then, somebody turned in and would go right in that intestine 'cause it'd be all clean and white and nice. But, they—That intestine was setting, like, two nights and two days in salt and water to clear—

MT: Oh!

MS: Get them pretty and clear. Get all that off and wash them. It was very clear.

MT: Did they cooked it off?

MS: Huh?

MT: Were they cooked or just scraped out and then soaked in salt water?

MS: Salt water. No, it wasn't cooked. Raw. Then, they stuffed the sausages with that, and she would link them. I don't know—I never could do that: put them in links.

MT: Did she do—Is it like sewing it?

MS: Yeah.

MT: Or knotting it?

MS: Knotting it. Yeah.

MT: Okay.

MS: Make it real pretty. Alright. Now, we go to the meat house and hang them up, hang those up. I hand them to my father and my papa—We'd hang them up there in the meat house. And when Christmas morning comes, besides it was good to eat. All seasoned out nice. Kill hogs in November.

MT: And you wouldn't eat it until Christmas.

MS: Christmas.

MT: And those were hogs that you grew yourself.

MS: That we grow'd ourselves.

MT: Yeah. I mean, raised. Yeah.

MS: Raised. Yeah! [chuckle]

MT: Yeah. Did you have a lot—Was it just enough sausage for your family?

MS: Oh my. Papa raised about seven hogs, seven or eight hogs. Had four or five men to come at, you know, to do butchering.

MT: Butchering? And so, was your mom involved in the butchering?

MS: Yeah. That's what—She would do it and she had a couple ladies to come. She used to get

two or three ladies to come and help her with the hogs, too.

MT: Did she do some of the butchering or did the men did that?

MS: The men did the butchering. She just took care of—

MT: Once they were butchered.

MS: The sausage meat and then lard. And then, she made—She cooked the lard. She didn't have me around the lard. She'd cook that: outdoors on the wood pile in a great, big, round iron pot. There was two bricks. Had two bricks to set this big, round pot on top of. And, Papa—

MT: Was that the wood fire? Not a stove, but a wood fire?

MS: Yes. Had a wood fire, yeah, outside. Then if it happen to be raining, do it in the kitchen 'cause didn't want no water to get in that oil, get in that lard 'cause it would start the fire.

MT: Yeah. Wow. Well, that was really interesting. Let's see—How did your—Okay. Then, I guess the next question is: How did your parents treat you?

MS: Treat me good.

MT: Yeah. I mean, did—

MS: They treat me—

MT: Yeah. What did they do with you? What did they do with you that you remember best?

What did you do together?

MS: Well, Papa used to read the Bible and books to me. When Mom would be gone, he would sit down and read fairy tales to me.

MT: Oh. They read fairy tales?

MS: Fairy tales, the Bible.

MT: Did you remember—

MS: When Mom was gone.

MT: What kind of fairy tales?

MS: They used to tell me some scary tales and I'd be scared to go to sleep. They'd make up—I think they was making them up, though.

MT: You don't think it was out of the book.

MS: No, no. You know, fairy tales and then they would tell old jokes.

MT: And he would read the fairy tales, but then he'd tell you—

MS: Read the fairy tales, but then he'd tell some more fairy tales.

MT: And old jokes?

MS: And jokes, you know. [chuckle]

MT: That must—Maybe that was where you developed some of your feeling for drama.

MS: Yeah, yeah. He certainly used to do that 'cause like I was telling you, he taught me how to read before I went to school. Started school at five years old, and he taught, and I could say—know'd my alphabets 'cause he taught me that off Quaker oatmeal box. He taught me my alphabets. A, B, C and numbers. He taught me all that 'fore I went to school. When I went to school, I know'd my alphabets. [chuckle]

MT: So, do you remember anything else you read besides the Bible? Fairy tales?

MS: Well, that's all I know.

MT: Yeah. You remember any of those, those fairy tales?

MS: No, I can't remember now what. I've forgotten all that. Some of them used to have ghosts in them and scary, and make you scared. And nighttime comes, scared to go upstairs to go to bed. [chuckle] He was up late at night and telling me these tales. Mom would be working in New Jersey then.

MT: Sounds like you had a pretty good relationship with your papa.

MS: I sure, sure did. I sure did. He was old. Old fellow, had rheumatism, and I used to had take–put his shoes on, put his socks on in the morning. He couldn't bend over to put his shoes on. Tie them up, take them off at nighttime. He was good to me. Then when Mama get ready to whoop me, he'd get between the switch and me and he caught some of the licks. He said, "Don't hit her no more, Mama." He used to call Mama 'Mama.' "Don't hit her no more, Mama." [chuckle] I don't know what I did. I don't even know what it was. Maybe 'cause I didn't do something. I forgot and didn't do it.

MT: So, he defended you.

MS: Uh hmm. He defend me.

MT: And, did you read you–I'm just wondering. Did he read you fairy tales, like with princes and princesses and kings and all that kind, too?

MS: Yeah. Like that, yeah. I can't remember how he read now, but that's what he used to read to me.

MT: Like "Sleeping Beauty."

MS: Yeah. Things like that. Yeah. Storybooks, yeah.

MT: So, did you get whippings from your mama very often?

MS: No, not that often. No, didn't get them very often. But when she whooped me, she whooped me, now, I'll tell you.

MT: With a switch.

MS: Oh yeah. Yeah.

MT: You remember that, huh?

MS: I can remember that alright! Yeah.

MT: Were you pretty much—Do you remember anything that you did that was—that you were naughty?

MS: I don't know. Maybe some—I just think if I didn't do—If she told me to do something and I didn't get it done, I might as well forgot it. 'Cause I had so much to do, some things I forget. Something I forget 'cause she was very strict alright. Papa wasn't strict. He would tell her, “Don't hit her no more mama.” She used to tear my backside up!  
[chuckle]

MT: Eew! So, it would probably be for something that you forgot—a chore that you forgot to do?

MS: Yeah. Something like that 'cause nothing—'cause I wasn't bad. Couldn't be bad by myself.

MT: [laughter] Ha, ha! I see! You didn't have anybody to be bad with!

MS: Somebody to be bad with—indeed I didn't! [chuckle] That's right. That's true.  
[chuckle] Now, I thought went off to school, showed off a school and had the teacher's meeting and the teacher would say, “Well, Sister talks—“ That's me, now. “Sister talked in school today. She laughed loud,” or some of the children made me laugh loud and the teacher makes me stand in the corner. Went and had the teachers told Mama. Mama come home give me a whipping for that. “Why you talking in school? Why you laughing loud in school?” [three sounds to indicate three whips]

MT: Do you feel that your parents prepared you well for life?

MS: I certainly do. They did. The lick they gave me was worth it. It made a lady out of me, I know that. [chuckle]

MT: You feel like you got good qualities--

MS: Indeed I do. I sure do. Right through them. They sure lead good examples for me. They never curse. Never heard Mama curse, not even D-A-M. Never heard her said that.

And, I better not do it.

MT: Did you ever feel like there was anything that you wished that they had done differently?

MS: Well, yeah, I'll tell you: I wished I could be with all the children. Now, when I walk to church—During the lent: that's the 40 days, some of the girls would say, "We're going to church tonight." They used to call—Some said Mary; some said Sister. "You going to church?"

I said, "No. If I go, my mama won't carry me in the buggy," but I used to love—I used to wish I could walk with them, you know, like they walked to church. They walked to church with their mother and big sisters and all, but Mama wouldn't let me walk. She carried me, brought me, but I wanted to be with them walking sometime; but, couldn't do it. Couldn't do it.

MT: Why do you think that was?

MS: I don't know. Maybe she didn't want me to be out there with them by myself. Thought something might have happened to me, in which it might a would. I might a got bad out there! [laughter] Might have! [laughter] Lordy day!

MT: Trying to protect you, huh?

MS: That's right.

MT: Yeah. Now, how long—Did you live with your blood parents all of your childhood?

MS: Until they died, uh huh [yes].

MT: Until they died. And when was that? How old were you?

MS: When they died, I was about twelve.

MT: Did they both die then?

MS: Not–Mama went first and then my big sister I was telling you about–Arly? She was a teacher? Well, she took me up there and then took care of me. So, I'm at St. Peter's Clavers School.

MT: In Baltimore?

MS: In Baltimore.

MT: St. Peters Clavers School in Baltimore when you were 12, but you just stayed there for a short time.

MS: I stayed there until I came and then my cousin up at the house, from down–lived down in Chaptico–came up to visit my sister, Arly, where I was staying with and she want–She brought me back that summer down with her. See, and Sister Arly want her to bring me back in October to go to school. So now, I did that, then I came down again and spent awhile–I think it was Christmas holiday–with, still with my cousin, Namy. Her name was Namy. She's dead now. Lived in Chaptico, so that's where we did like that. And shortly after that, I got married. Met my husband and got married.

MT: Okay. Well, we're going to get to that. Okay. Let's talk about your formal schooling. So, well, we know how you got to school 'cause you just walked down the same road.

MS: Right.

MT: And the name of that school was, again?

MS: Gravel Knolls. Gravel Knolls School.

MT: Do you know how to spell that? I don't.

MS: Got something in your eye?

MT: Yeah, my eye's just itching.

MS: Gravel Knoll School. A one-room school.

MT: How do you spell that?

MS: G-R-A-V-E-L K-N-O-L-L.

MT: Okay.

MS: Gravel Knoll.

MT: Huh. And, it was a one-room schoolhouse.

MS: One-room school.

MT: And, was that a segregated school?

MS: That was all segregated. That's right.

MT: Okay. And, what was your classroom like? Well, it's was one-room.

MS: One room. Everybody in that one room.

MT: Remember back—What do you remember about that classroom?

MS: I can remember when they'd have spelling contests, and I was a good speller. I never went to the foot. I could out-spell a whole lot of them. I just loved to spell. The biggest was—I know I can't do it now. I don't think I could do it.

MT: Do you remember—?

MS: But, I tried to keep in patches of these big words. Now, just like somebody—There's a woman over there—going to the—go to the site now, she moved here from somewhere. I tried to think of her. I'm gonna ask her name again. I try to keep that in my mind, and I forgot it now. I always like these big words. I always try to, you know, pronounce them not to forget how to spell them 'cause I used to love to spell big words, long words, 'cause see, then the teachers had spelling contests. Used to take us to Laurel? Laurel, Maryland?

MT: Oh, Laurel, Maryland.

MS: Or Bowie. If I won the contest at Gravel Knoll, need someone—another girl or boy, they carried us up to Bowie School or—What I just said, Laurel, Maryland or somewhere up there to another school.

MT: Did you have a—?

MS: Then we had a—Then, we got us a certificate. Spelling. Spelling Certificate. Spelling class.

MT: Did you have—You know, what was the school like? You had a stove? You had a wood stove?

MS: Yeah. You had a wood stove right in the middle of the floor.

MT: In the middle? What kind of—?

MS: That's be potbelly stove. Used to call them potbelly. [laughter]

MT: Potbelly was the name for your stove?

MS: Name of the stove! [laughter] Great, big on top and bottom, and all the children got around that stove—Course I wasn't cold. I didn't walk a long way. See, I wasn't cold. I used to live around the corner.

MT: That's great. And, let's see. Who was your favorite and least favorite teacher? Do you remember your teachers?

MS: No. I remember my first teacher: Marie Stevenson—1st Grade. She's right at where the Loveville. Right over there in Loveville. Now, I'm wrong. St. Jones. Hollywood, from there.

MT: Was she a young woman?

MS: Young woman, yes. Just about your size. Cute, little woman.

MT: Small.

MS: Uh huh [yes]. Small. Miss Marie Stevenson. I still go to church with some of her people right now.

MT: And–

MS: And the next one was Agnes Walton. Next was Lillibeth Shackelford. Next one was Gertrude Butler. They all from around here, but Agnes Walton came here and my mom used to–used to board the teachers. She ... little coat to school.

MT: Oh. Yeah!

MS: She'd board Agnes Walton. She got married from our house. She boarded us. Elizabeth Shackelford, Lillibeth Shackelford. Right down this road here. You go–After you go out here–After you go here by the statue and go round the road a little ways, past King Kennedy, and three [intelligible] lanes, then you turn into the right. That's where Shackelford live at right now. But, that's the daughter of them–Maggie. Maggie Shackelford. The rest of them dead.

MT: Were they all–Were any of them married?

MS: Janie Bowie. I can remember everyone of my sisters.

MT: My goodness!

MS: Janie Bowie was this tall. Legs real bowed. She wasn't tall as me and the legs were like pot hooks, but she was just nice as she could be! [laughter] You know, legs were so bowed–

MT: Big.

MS: No, bowed.

MT: Bowed. Okay. I see.

MS: They looked like pot hooks.

MT: Bowed. Okay. Bow legs.

MS: But as tall as Janie Bush. She was from Charlotte Hall.

MT: Well, you say, “Sisters.” Were they nuns? You said they were Sisters.

MS: Not nuns no. Now, the nuns taught me in catechism at Mechanicsville Church at Immaculate Conception.

MT: But your teachers were–

MS: Teachers was at school were not nuns.

MT: Were any of them married? Were married women allowed to teach?

MS: Yeah.

MT: Some of them were married?

MS: They were married. Yeah. But–’cause this one particular lady–Agnes Walton: She met her boy right from around Loveville. No, he’s from Mechanicsville. She came here from another state. I don’t know where she came from, but my mama boarded her. Board her two straight years. Elizabeth Shackelford, Janie Bowie and–What’d I just say? Butler. Miss Gertie, Miss Gertrude Butler.

MT: And, I forgot what I was going to say. Were all your teachers African American?

MS: Yeah. That’s right.

MT: Yeah. Do you know–Where was the closest school for the white children?

MS: Well, next door...Next school right down from us at Old Patuxent. That’s still on Patuxent. Gravel Knoll is on Patuxent. And then, just up–It wasn’t but half a mile the white school was down called Old Snowhill. The white school was built on a hill called Snowhill. That’s the name of the hill.

MT: But not that Snowhill that's down by, south of Park Hall? Not that one.

MS: No, uh uh.

MT: Yeah.

MS: This was a little hill, just a little hill and this one-room school, too, just like ours. Called Snowhill.

MT: Did you like school?

MS: Yeah, I loved school.

MT: You loved—

MS: I loved to get into school. I get away from some work 'cause I was in school. Course, I was working in there, too, doing my work.

MT: What were your favorite subjects besides spelling?

MS: Spelling. I loved to read. I loved to—What you call it? 'Rithmetic. And, I like History, too, and I also like Geography. You know, I would like to have one of them geographies back in them days. You think that I'd really got them. That was back in 20's? That was back in the 20's? Isn't that right?

MT: Um hmm [yes].

MS: I would love to have one of those geographies. I used to love Geography and History.

MT: Did you read books at home?

MS: Read. I read a lot. I took time.

MT: Was there a library?

MS: Huh?

MT: Was there a library then?

MS: I don't know. There must a was there used to be a man coming 'round and bringing our

books to school. Brand new books. I know he must a got them at the library. You know, like a school principal. He'd bring all the–

MT: Well, it might not have been–It might have been from the library. It might not have been.

MS: Oh, it might not have been. See, I don't know, but I know they brought us new books.

Mr.–I'm a tell you his name! His name was Mr. Calendar. He's the white bread, big fat man. Mr.–People used to call him Old Man Calendar.

MT: Old Man Calendar.

MS: He used to come around and bring these books to us. The great big stump of a mister.

MT: Were they new? Were they new books?

MS: Yes. Brand new books. Uh huh [yes].

MT: Brand new books.

MS: I don't know where they got them. There might a been a library somewhere else 'cause we didn't know.

MT: Now, if there were library books, they might not be new though. They probably wouldn't be new.

MS: Oh! These were new books.

MT: They were probably bought by the school system.

MS: Maybe so. Yeah.

MT: Yeah. Do you remember any of those–Did you especially like or dislike those teachers?

MS: No, I liked all of them.

MT: You liked them all.

MS: I liked all my teachers. They all–seemed like they all liked me. I was the littlest one in school, you know. Even all them them big girls used to like to get around me and play

with me. Nobody never fight me or act ugly to me. They just all liked me.

MT: You were kind of the school pet.

MS: That's right! [laughter] That's what it was! Yeah. See, I used to like to be with them big girls. They used to tell me things. See, they told me who Santa Claus was!

[laughter] Yeah. Then, I went home and told my cousin, the same cousin I tell you where came down and stayed with her until I got mine. I got married down here. Well, I told her. "There ain't no Santa Claus 'cause Rosa told me so. Roxi told me so." Rox and Rose was girlfriends. Roxiann and Rosie Gonner. Roxiann Hawkins. Them two told me. They use–We used to go down the edge of the woods and sit on the edge of the woods during the recess and they'd tell me a whole lot of stuff. And, I liked that–those big girls! [chuckle] Very few little girls I played. I liked big ones. They'd tell me something! [chuckle]

MT: Were you the teacher's favorite sometimes, too?

MS: Yeah, I certainly was! I certainly was. That's right.

MT: Well, when you were–Let's see. How far did you go in school?

MS: I tell you–the 8<sup>th</sup>.

MT: 8<sup>th</sup> Grade.

MS: 8<sup>th</sup>.

MT: How old were you then? 13?

MS: I had to be about–

MT: Do you remember how old you were?

MS: See, 8<sup>th</sup> Grade: Now, that would a been 12, 13? 14? Something like that?

MT: Was there–Was there a school after 8<sup>th</sup> Grade to go to?

MS: No, you had to go down Cardinal Gibbons Institute. Cardinal Gibbons down at Ridge, down there. Now, my mom was gonna send me down there, but--when I graduated from that school, but she died that very--See, my big sister took me to Baltimore and I finished school up there, and--But see, I got married. That's right.

MT: Well, so Cardinal Gibbons were there when you were 12.

MS: That's right. Now, this lady used to see--Anna Curtis and them: They went down there.

MT: Yeah, I know quite a few people.

MS: Yeah, they went down there.

MT: Well, when you were a young adult, what did you dream of becoming?

MS: I don't know.

MT: Did you think about what you were going to be?

MS: I always said I want to be a teacher. That's right what I said I would like to be. Maybe 'cause I liked to go to school and I liked my teachers. I always said I want to be a teacher. I did.

MT: Well, you know, I know another thing that you did that's not on the, you know, on the list of questions, but I know you did it. Be in all those plays, those pageants.

MS: Yeah. Yeah.

MT: So, what--Tell us. Tell us about those.

MS: See, Mama Coates and all the society ladies--there were a bunch of them--always give a Christmas play. Three plays a year. Christmas, I know, and then during the Summer, too at church, in the church hall, and they had me in every one of them. That's how I come out like to be up on that stage.

MT: And, that was from when you were old? How young were you when that started?

MS: I had to be about 10 or 9? 8? 7?

MT: And, you loved doing that.

MS: And, I did. I did!

MT: You know–

MS: Me and a whole lot them–big girls and little girls–into the play.

MT: Thyris Miles was telling me that her, her–Was it her mother or her grandmother used to come around and pick you up, and she was involved in that, in the pageants?

MS: Right. Right.

MT: Do you remember that? What did she–Do you remember her name or what she did? She went to your church, and she had something to do with those pageants.

MS: Oh yeah! Oh yeah! That was her mother–her grandmother.

MT: Her grandmother.

MS: That was her grandmother, yeah.

MT: Yeah, must have been.

MS: And her mother, too. Thyris's mother, too, had all a her–Mary Jane and Theresa.

Theresa was Thyris's mother. Had them in the play. Well, now call these pageants plays. But, that was her mother and her mother's sister and brother and child. That was a cousin of ours. We call him Cousin: Cousin Charlie Butler. That's Anna Curtis. All of them is related Anna Curtis' uncle and father, too. Abram Butler. Abraham Butler. Cousin Charles and Abraham. All of them was head of these plays that had us in.

And one play–The last play that had me into at the Cath–at the Mechanicsville Hall was this song. I can remember this song. [She sings:] “Can you show me the way to the city?” Now, my father and some other men made crosses, made a whole lot of

crosses. So, we had to kneel down at these crosses. That was a Christmas play. [She sings:] “Can you show me the way to the city? To the city where the angels dwell? And the prince that we see on the mountain steep, he strayed to a cross of God.”

And we all was kneeling at these crosses. That was a beautiful play. The cross was white and red—some red and some white. We all had a cross to kneel at. That was a Christmas play. The last one I was at before Mama died. And yes, [she sings:] “We show the way to the city. To the city where the angels dwell. And the prince with his feet on the”—That was Jesus. [She sings:] “On a mountain steep, please stray to the house of God.” Real pretty.

MT: Real pretty. So then, you didn’t get a chance to act again until 1992 or ’93.

MS: Right...And then some more, she had another—Can’t think of them I’m in. She had another where we was in, too, and I just wish I had the books. They must—We call them dialogues. I’m calling it right?

MT: Yeah.

MS: The dialogue we had to say. Now, I don’t know where they got them at the library. We had to study these dialogues, speeches, you know. Really—

MT: Were all the people involved in that in your church?

MS: No, no. Just certain. Just certain ones. They picked out certain ones. More like school girls. More like a—

MT: But it was just the people on your church, some of the people in your church.

MS: Gravel Knoll School. Charlotte Hall School. White Marsh School. Gravel Knoll School. Schoolchildren.

MT: But they weren’t all in the church?

MS: No, not the whole church. No. Just the children and a few old people. Just maybe two or three would be involved, too, but not the whole church.

MT: Did you spend a lot of time working on those?

MS: I certainly did. That's right. I had to get right 'cause Mama made me say those pieces over and over, and she would walk down to school with me some, when she—and you know, taught me so I wouldn't forget it. I said my part, whatever I had to say—I forgot now what it was—all the way to school. I had to say—I didn't live far from school. She right behind me. Now, when I ring that school door, I said the last piece before I got to school and step to ring the school door. Come back at night, same thing. I had to get it right. I had to get it right. And then, when I was pract—When rehearsal and Mama sat up, right up at the front. Right on the front seat and was—She had real big, full eyes, and I mean they could throw them on me—[laughter] “Speak up there, Sister!” They say, “Speak up there. Speak up there, Sister.” They meant...just...speak a black.

MT: When she said that, you probably were on stage.

MS: I was on stage! [chuckle] I just cracked! [laughter] I got surprised. “Speak up there, Sister.” I mean, she wasn't smiling. [laughter]

MT: Pretty strange.

MS: Yeah!

MT: She was a strong woman.

MS: Indeed she was. Little, short, fat woman was strong! She was short and fat. [chuckle] Yeah, it was fun. 'Deed it was.

MT: Well, we're almost done with this tape. We're just getting up to when you were a teenager! [chuckle] Did your parents let your court?

MS: No!

MT: No.

MS: No indeed! One gentleman come to see me and we had one of those big old potbelly stoves, too, I just told you about. Like it was in the school?

MT: This was at home?

MS: At home. Now see, we had a dance. Mama came into the dance, brought me from the dance. There was no farm wagon at that time. So, when I got—So this fellow danced with me. Mama watched me. She was behind the table selling cakes and selling 'fectionary— [tape cuts off abruptly]

[Interview is ended for the day – at 1:03:21]

**UNIFIED COMMITTEE FOR AFRO-AMERICAN CONTRIBUTIONS**

Oral History Project

**MARY AGATHA COATES SOMERVILLE (#2)**

Interviewer: M. Taylor  
Recorded: September 25, 1996

[interview begins the next day—September, 25, 1996]

[Continue Side 2, Tape 1 of 3 ]

[1:03:21]

MT: ...interview with Mary Somerville, 9/25, and we're talking about—Just started talking about courting. And, you were talking about your being at the dance and your mother keeping her eye on you. Okay. Go ahead.

MS: See, we was dancing.

MT: You were dancing with a gentleman.

MS: With this gentleman, and he asked my mama could he come to see me the next—See, it was on a Saturday night, the dance. Next day. She said, “Oh yeah. Come on over.” So, he came and so she met him at the door. Oh, he was a tall, handsome fellow. I stood on this side the potbelly stove; he stood on that side the potbelly stove. Mama sat here!

[laughter]

MT: In the middle! [laughter] So, you talked over the stove and your mama!

MS: [laughter] Yeah! People 'round stove talk.

MT: People 'round the stove. So how'd that go?

MS: That didn't go so very--[laughter] for he soon got up and got his overcoat and went on home. Didn't allow me to go out none and date.

MT: So, they didn't allow you to out?

MS: Um hmm [no]. See, when—I still hadn't gone out when I got married 'cept my sister, Arly—I was saying Jane Arly called 'Arly.' —Well, she was just as strict on me as Mama— That was in Baltimore—which I was glad. I'm very glad that they were.

MT: Well, you were only like, 12 or 13?

MS: I'd say so, yeah.

MT: So you didn't go out with anyone—?

MS: 14. Something like that. I was 14. See, I got married when I was 16.

MT: So—So, where—You didn't go out on dates?

MS: No.

MT: Go courting and all?

MS: No. Gracious no.

MT: Would people come and ask, ask you mom, your mother if they could—?

MS: That was a lonely time then 'cause Mama didn't live too long after that.

MT: Oh yeah.

MS: It was just Arly in Baltimore. She took me up there and I had to be in, sit on those steps. Certain hours, come on in. There's some more nice girls used to come around and sit on the steps with me. That's in Baltimore. Got dark, come inside. No running the streets.

Now, the little girlfriend used to come see me and I would walk back—She didn't live too far up the—Druid Hill Avenue. That's what this place was in Baltimore. You ever heard of Druid—Druid: D-R-U-I-D H-I-L-L. Druid Hill Avenue.

MT: Oh, Druid Hill.

MS: Druid Hill Avenue. That was a beautiful place that my sister lived. Beautiful green grass and even water. That was the first part of Baltimore. So now, she didn't live too—My girlfriend was named Glundeen Mack. She didn't—Her aunt raised her and her aunt was strict on her just as Arly was on me and my mama. So, I could walk up to the corner 'til she go in her house and I had to come on back and get up on those steps and get in there.

MT: So, she wasn't allowed to court either.

MS: Um hmm [no].

MT: Were most of your friends—?

MS: Whatever happened—See, when I got out and met my husband. Was my cousin, when I got married.

MT: So, okay. When you—You came back down here. So, you were with—Were you there until you were 16, in Baltimore?

MS: 16. That's right. Then, I come down here with my cousin. That's where I got married—from my cousin's house.

MT: Okay, so, was he the first—Was your husband the first person that you courted?

MS: First, first, first. Yes, indeed. First. First one. Only one, first one.

MT: And so, you never went out on your own.

MS: Oh, never did go out on my own! If I look around, I'm glad I didn't. After I seen a lot of things went on with some girls, you know, that I knew well, went to school with me, had

children and all. See, my first-born was Mary Green, and I was married. I had her, thank God.

MT: Well, when—When you were here with your aunt—I mean, with your older sister too, what was the money situation like, and with your cousin? Did they—Did you always have enough to—

MS: My sister always sent money down—

MT: To your cousin.

MS: To Mae—Her name was Mamie. Sent money down through the mail to take care of me 'til I come back.

MT: Did you always have pretty much what you wanted?

MS: Always have everything I wanted. I never was lacking nothing. And, I used to lend my girlfriend—She's dead now. I got a picture of her. She was born to a large family and she didn't have real nice clothes. I had nice clothes. She made all hers. She told me this store called Trice? In Mechanicsville? Eugene Trice? Well, she used to go up there and get her material, and she was a good sewer. And, she had a old make of a sewing machine, and she'd make her dresses. And see, I had the dresses ready-made. Mama's coats were the seamstress. Mama used to make the prettiest dresses, too, and then she used to buy me some clothes, buy us clothes ready-made. And, she used to take big dresses where the white folks gave her there—great big, beautiful dresses—and she'd cut them down and make me two dresses 'cause I was little. She could make me two or three dresses out of that dress!

MT: Oh!

MS: And then, I would give my girlfriend my dresses. If she asked me to lend them to her

'cause I don't tell her. I tell her, "Keep them. I wouldn't wear them no more." I'm like that today. I wouldn't wear so you can keep them.

MT: Well, what did you do, you know, after you were out of school? What did you do? Did you try to work?

MS: Oh yeah! Not ev–Mrs. Sheckles: I don't know where she's from, but you've heard of Maddox. Maddox, Maryland down there?

MT: Okay.

MS: You leave Clements, like you–You ever hear of Clements?

MT: Um hmm [yes].

MS: Well, you turn left and go on to Maddox. After you get out of Maddox, it's a great big farm down in there. Oh, a huge farm. Well, these people came here and bought this farm: Mr. and Mrs. Sheckle, rich white folks, and they bought this farm. First, they bought the old Rectory House in Chaptico. You ever heard of the old Rectory? Old Rectory.

MT: Um hmm [yes].

MS: That's what they used to call them all...Rectory. Well, belonged to the church: we called it Rectory. They bought that first. Now, I'm living–Now, I'm at my–I'm at Mamie's now. Well, she had me to come down and taught me how to do some work. Worked for her.

MT: Okay.

MS: and, Mrs. Sheckle. She's dead now. Mr. Sheckle is dead, too.

MT: Is that when you were 14 or 15?

MS: No, 'cause that's 16.

MT: That's when you were 16.

MS: Had to be 15 'cause I hadn't gotten married.

MT: Right. 15.

MS: Got married at 16. So then—

MT: So you did that cleaning and domestic work then.

MS: That's when I was younger. Yeah, I used to clean for Mrs. Sheckle, too. I used to clean 'cause I know'd how to clean 'cause Mama had taught me that, but a lot more things that she taught me how to do that I hadn't did.

MT: Did you do any other kind of work, then, before you got married?

MS: Nothing. Nothing but cleaning.

MT: Okay.

MS: Only homes. Worked homes. That was the first time I had worked. That was when Mrs. Sheckle and Mr. Sheckle. Mr. Shackle and Mrs. Shackle.

MT: I don't suppose you remember how much you were paid way back then? Did you remember?

MS: 50¢.

MT: 50¢ a day?

MS: A day.

MT: Do you think that was before you got married?

MS: That's right.

MT: 50¢ a day.

MS: 50¢ a day. [laughter]

MT: And, you worked all day for this?

MS: I worked all day!

MT: Okay.

MS: I didn't mind. It wasn't hard. [chuckle]

MT: You didn't mind doing that?

MS: Didn't mind.

MT: Did you enjoy the work?

MS: I certainly did. I enjoyed it, and they were good to me. Gave me nice clothes and nice things, you know. Nice presents. Just like you doing: They went on a vacation. They brought me something back.

MT: Souvenirs?

MS: Souvenirs. Clothes, too, sometimes. Pretty sweaters, a dress.

MT: So, okay. So, how did you meet your husband?

MS: Met him at—Come to Mamie's to visit me. Come to my cousin Mamie. Her name was Mamie Broom: B-r-o-o-m, and she was a Spair. She married a Broom from Chaptico. So he came right there to see me.

MT: Well, how did he know you were there?

MS: See, he had knowed I was there by Mamie be going to church. See, I was at church, you know? Like that.

MT: So—

MS: Mamie and John used to take me everywhere they went. I didn't—They didn't even—They didn't stop it, but I didn't want to. They would go out. Where they went, they would carry me with them, brought me back, and I met James like that. See, by seeing him out like that at the party. Used to have a lot of house dances. Cake raffles, things like that.

Chicken raffles. People used to have at their homes, and Mamie and John would go—and carry me, and at the hall called Old Crossroad Hall, they'd go down to the hall. They'd carry me and bring me. I never got out there and walk up the road with nobody or got in the car, somebody and go home. They carried me and they brought me. So, James would walk to see me.

MT: So he would—Okay. He came to call on you.

MS: When they first come see me, on horseback. [Mary made the sounds of the horse, like clippetty clop, clippetty clop.] And, the horse was named Stella. [laughter]

MT: Sorry?

MS: Black Stella.

MT: Oh, Stella.

MS: The horse's name Stella: S-T-E-L-L-A, and it was the white folks' horse. He worked for these white folks and they used to let him ride—drive that horse; and, that's when he come see me, on that black Stella horse.

MT: How old was he?

MS: I'm 16. He's 17.

MT: So—And then, how long—So what—How did it progress then? So, he came to see you and he kept coming to see you?

MS: Until we got married.

MT: Yeah. How long—Do you know how long that was?

MS: About two years.

MT: Oh! So, did he start seeing you when you were 14?

MS: Well, just—

MT: And you got married when you were 16?

MS: That's what I told you.

MT: That's when you got married?

MS: Yeah. That's when Mamie went up...let me come down Mamie. Yeah.

MT: So, he start—He was seeing you for about two years before you got married?

MS: Yeah. Like this.

MT: So—

MS: He was the hired worker guy \_\_\_\_\_. His mother and mother used to hire him out and they worked; and then, he had to take his money home to them and then they'll let him have a certain amount to spend on.

MT: And he was from St. Mary's County, too?

MS: [unintelligible] Right from Clements. Loveville, too. His parents was from Loveville, right here Loveville.

MT: And, yeah. So, his full name was James—

MS: James Marcella Somerville.

MT: Marcella Somerville. Do you remember—Do you know his parents names?

MS: Oh yes! Miss Maggie Cecelia Somerville and his father was William Joe Somerville.

And, she was a Hill before she was married. Hill: H-I-L-L.

MT: So, you met when you were around 14 and you saw him—You courted for a couple of years. So, was that love at first sight?

MS: Yes, sir. That's right! [laughter] Got Magdalene: my first-born.

MT: So—And then, you got married at 16 and you had a baby, and the first baby was Magdalene. And, did you continue to work then after you got married?

MS: No, I didn't work. Not till later years and my children were in school. I'd go out and work some day's work to help James 'cause he was farming. See, when he was farming, he couldn't go to work and I'd go to work and wash and iron for people; take clothes home and wash them and iron them, carry them back to the white folks. Like that, you know, to help out with the children for school clothes until we sold tobacco. Then when we sold tobacco, then we go to the store and buy clothes for the children.

MT: When you first got married, then, did you move out on—into a house of your own?

MS: We lived with our parents, with his parents. We lived with his parents for about five years, and then we—And then after that, he started renting land. We didn't own—See, they owned—My mother—My mother in-law and father in-law owned their home. So, we stayed there five years and then James start working farms for the white folks for shares, you know: like a half or a third or whatever you get paid.

MT: Sharecropper.

MS: Sharecrop, right. Then, we moved in the house. Some white folks built us a new house. We live in some new house. They built us a new house, and then we lived in some old, run-down houses, too, a lot of times.

MT: And, was that work on a, basically, a tobacco farm?

MS: That's right.

MT: Okay. Tell me about sharecropping. Is that when they would go to sell the crop, he would get a certain percentage of what was made.

MS: Right.

MT: Was there anything he got paid other than that? It just depended on—

MS: No, no. See, the only time he got paid if he did a little day's work between times. 'Cause

when he was doing his farm work, he has to stay around that farm. On Sunday, he would go and do jobs for somebody to make a little extra money. That's when I went to work then. He didn't want me to go to work, but I wanted to work. The children was in school and I wanted to go to work. When I worked, I helped with the children. I enjoyed being out there working. 'Cause I was used to at home. Mama, you know, had already broke me into working. [chuckle]

MT: So, your kids came pretty, pretty much—Was there much time spaced in between them?  
Your children: Were they born pretty close together?

MS: Oh, they were. They certainly was close together. Certainly were.

MT: And, you did—But, you sometimes did some laundry and sometimes domestic and you were cleaning houses.

MS: I did. They bring clothes to me, and—Some of the white folks brought me clothes, brought clothes that needed washing and ironing. I used to the houses of some of them.

MT: And did your—Did you children help you with the chores at home?

MS: Oh yes! They had—Magdaline: See, she was the oldest. Magdalene, she was the oldest girl, see.

MT: And she helped you with the cooking?

MS: Yes. Yes, I learned her how to make biscuits at five years old.

MT: At five!

MS: She'd stand up on the chair at the table and she watched me make those biscuits. I was making biscuits then, and she could cook. You know, I had that—You know, I tell you what I had in my time and Miss Scott come along? Did I tell you? Yeah!

MT: Tell us that story. Tell that story again.

MS: Well, I taught Maggie how to make biscuits, and I taught her how—while I was working, I taught her to work just like they taught me how to work. So, Maggie could cook biscuits. She could cook. She could cook a pot of cabbage and meat. Wash that meat and put in the pot just like I would do. When I was pregnant, she did cook. She did cook. I got pregnant and feel like that, now, she was real smart. She was real smart. That's that. Miss Scott come by and eat some of the biscuits and came home some to Freeman. And, I told her she want to carry her baby a biscuit in her apron pocket. [laughter] He was 40 years old!

MT: For her baby?

MS: Yeah, Freeman. Man, he was a 40 year old man. Carry her baby a biscuit. "I carry my baby a biscuit here! ..."

"Yes, Ma'am!" [laughter] That's the way that went.

MT: Did you make the same things you mother did? Did you cook pretty much the same way your mother did?

MS: Yeah, just like she did.

MT: And eat the same sorts of things?

MS: Same. Pot of cabbage and meat—meat and cabbage, kale, and fried chicken, baked chicken, whatever. Bake ham. I used to know how to bake ham. You know, I used to put spice. Have you ever made like—

MT: Stuffed ham?

MS: No, not stuffed. Brown sugar.

MT: Oh. The baked ham.

MS: On this ham, and then stick the stick spice—

MT: Cloves?

MS: Cloves! Into it, put it in. Come out so pretty. Yeah! The long process--

MT: Score the fat and then you stirred it with the cloves.

MS: Right! That's right. I used to do that when the children was growing up. Now, I bet I can do it now.

MT: Did you make sausages like your mother?

MS: Make sausages like my ma--like Mama. Yes, they did. Had old lady come around here. We raised hogs, too we did--James and I. We raised hogs like Mama and Papa did, and I used to have a couple old ladies come and help me.

MT: Did you have your girls scraping the intestines?

MS: No. No, had them doing it. See, these two old ladies used to help. I had two nice old lady friends. Old ladies! I tell you, I like them old people. Older girls 'cause they could do something, tell me something. Yeah, they come and help me with hogs. Dried the lard up for me.

MT: Well, I wanted to ask you one more thing about your--You know, when you first met your husband and in the early years, and that's about your wedding.

MS: Then, the wedding! Yeah!

MT: What do you remember about your wedding?

MS: What a wedding. Was nice. Oh, I got me--

MT: Do you remember when--

MS: We walked to church. Now, we didn't have a car to carry us like limousine, nothing like that. We walked to church, and we walked across a swamp and we had--Like I used to go in the swamp to catch these cows, bring me cows out. Well, had a big, old tree that fell

down–blowed down for years–’cross the swamp. I had to walk ’cross this–walk on this tree to cross this deep stream of water. I had on a blue satin dress. Dark, blue sa–Not dark blue. You might call it kind of light satin dress. And, blue hat, blue shoes. Walk ’cross this–I almost slipped in the water! [laughter] But, we walked–my sister in-law, my two sister in-laws. I had two sister in-laws: Rosellen Mary. That was another Mary. James’ oldest sister named Mary. The other sister was–He’s–He’s from family of four, too: two girls and two boys. So, that’s how we walked off to the church and got married. And then, the best man met us there: Joe Winters. He’s living right today. He live up here at Oakville.

Now, when we had the 50 year anniversary, we thought that we’s gonna have Joe Winters for our best man, for James best man, again, but my sister in-law waited on me at the 50<sup>th</sup>. The best man got drunk! [laughter]

MT: Oh no! [laughter] Ooh!

MS: Didn’t make it [laughter] till the last minute! Now, had to get–Oh, I tell.. that now.

MT: But he wasn’t drunk for the first one.

MS: No, no, no, uh uh. He was alright. Yeah, alright. Joe Winters and my sister in-law waited on us.

MT: Were there a lot of people?

MS: A right good bunch of people at the first wedding, but there–Oh my goodness! ’Bout five or six hundred at the 50 anniversary.

MT: When was your first marriage?

MS: 1912?

MT: No.

MS: 1912. I don't whether that is right.

MT: No. Remember we went—Yeah, 'cause you were born in 1909. 1931?

MS: I was born—I mean, I was married in—

MT: You were 16. So, 1928. Yeah, so if you were 16, it was 1925.

MS: 12<sup>th</sup> of November. It was on the 12<sup>th</sup> of November, 1927?

MT: 1927. Somewhere in there.

MS: 1927.

MT: Okay.

MS: I think I'm right. I don't want to get it wrong.

MT: 1925.

MS: That's it. 1927 I was married.

MT: That's what you said.

MS: Uh huh [yes]. That's right. On the 12<sup>th</sup> of November.

MT: Okay. And then, you're going for a couple of years. Why did you decide to get married?

MS: [inaudible]

MT: 'Cause you wanted it, huh? [laughter]

MS: Yeah.

MT: Did you go on a honeymoon?

MS: No, my goodness. Went on home and went to bed. [laughter] Went home and went to bed. [laughter]

MT: Wee you in a hurry?

MS: [laughter] Home, went to bed. And, my mother in-law: She baked a cake. She baked a cake for us. Baked our wedding cake. She was a nice mother in-law. I certain did love

her, and my father in-law was nice, too. He dead; but, he liked his little bottle, but he was still nice to me. Nice to me. See, they had to sign for him 'cause he was under age.

MT: Oh, that's right! He was—You had to be 18.

MS: Did.

MT: And your cousin signed for you?

MS: No.

MT: Oh, you didn't have to be—You weren't under age?

MS: I was under age. But see, Sister Arly was in Baltimore and I didn't even tell her I was getting married 'cause she wouldn't want me got married. She would have come down here and gotten me smack me on the back bone.

MT: Oh!

MS: I used to only got mad 'cause she was strict on me up there. [chuckle]

MT: Oh! So you didn't tell her. Was she upset when she found out?

MS: No, she—"That's alright," she said. "Just as well. It's said and done then." Then, we went—I went back to see her that very week. Not that same week, but the next following week, my cousin and I went up. She said, "Well, I see you got married. You got married."

I said, "Yes, ma'am." [laughter] That's all I could say: "Yes, ma'am."

MT: So, you had—You had a 50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary.

MS: Yeah, I had a 50 anniversary.

MT: So how many years were you married?

MS: 50 years.

MT: Did he die after—

MS: He lived three years after.

MT: Fifty-three years you were married.

MS: Yeah, for two more years. Right.

MT: So, that's a good, long-good, long while--

MS: That was a good long while.

MT: Yeah. Did you have a happy marriage?

MS: Yeah. I certainly did. Certainly did. I got along real nice and good.

MT: Did you ever regret getting married that young?

MS: No. Um umm [no]. 'Cause I got who I want, see? That's why. Now, I think he got who he want.

MT: It sounds like it.

MS: Yeah. Alright.

MT: What did you wear to your 50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary?

MS: Gold lace.

MT: Eew!

MS: My Magdalene lady--My Maggie made my wedding dress for 50 year anniversary.

Golden lace with the satin underneath it. I got it here. Yeah. She made it and she made the little crown and veil--white veil. She made all that. She was living in Washington then. Yeah.

MT: Yeah, that sounds nice. So you had--Okay. And, then you had 10 children together.

MS: I had 10 children. Yeah.

MT: So, how would you describe your relationship with your husband?

MS: Well, he was a man like this. He was--Whatever I wanted, he sure try to get it for me. I

could get just about anything I wanted, and I could go where I want. If I want to take a trip, it was alright. And towards last, I kind of pulled him in to come on go on trips with me. He–All he wanted do was work. See, he used to work for different people out there. He wasn't farming. He farmed for awhile and then after awhile, he retired and went–just do a little part-time work. And, I used to tell him, “Come on. Let's go. Let's go on a trip.” He didn't want to go for nothing; but after he went, he enjoyed it 'cause he used to work all the time. He's another man work all the time. All he want to do is work.

MT: What about your relationship with your children? How would you describe that?

MS: Oh, they was alright, too. They was very nice with me. They were–I taught them how to respect their father and everybody and myself, so they did it. So they did. Did what I told them to do. I used to put a little switch on them, too, like Mama did me! [laughter]

MT: What were their names?

MS: What were their names? Magdalene, that's the oldest. Magdalene Cecelia. Next one was James Alexander. That was the next oldest boy. First oldest boy. He died at six years old.

MT: Okay.

[tape cuts off and then on again]

MT: And Magdalene's still living.

MS: Yeah, she's still living.

MT: And then after James Alexander?

MS: William Joseph [long pause] after my father in-law. Lawrence Jerome after my older

brother. Johnie, which you had me talk about. Johnie. Used to called Johnie  
[unintelligible] Somerville. That was next. Dot—Dot—Dot. Dorothy Elizabeth.

MT: And so, Lawrence is—

MS: Ernestine. That's the baby girl. And then, I had one named Leo between Ernestine. He  
died at 18 months old, and he died.

MT: What did he die from?

MS: I don't know! But, he had—But when he first took that Sunday night, I don't know. He  
was eating grapes. We had a grape arbor 'cause I love grapes myself. And at once, he  
just screamed out and cried, and then he was chewing his tongue. I didn't know to do. I  
call for the old Dr. Palmer and Dr. Palmer said he was having convulsions. So then,  
picked him up and take him and to over to St. Mary's Hospital, and he lived a day and a  
night. 'Cause, I never did know—See, the doctors ain't like it is with now. Dr. Palmer  
said he had convulsions. I don't know. By him chewing his tongue, I didn't know what  
to do. And someone say if I had a spoon to put in his mouth—I was young. I didn't know  
what to do. And we had to carry him—Jame had to carry him 'bout a half a mile to the  
road to get in the car. The road was so bad and muddy, and we had to walk. Had to  
leave the car at the road 'bout a half mile. He said when he—. By the time he got to the  
car with him, he caught pneumonia. By carrying him—'cause he had a high fever. Just  
carried him to the car to take him to St. Mary's Hospital, and he lived that night and the  
next day. His names James—His name was James Leo.

MT: James Leo. And then, that's only eight though. That's eight children.

MS: Eight? Well, wait a minute.

MT: Okay. So, that's Magdalene, James Alexander, William Joseph, Lawrence Jerome, John

Lee, Dorothy, Mary Ernestine, Leo.

MS: I had 10 children now.

MT: Are you counting Linda?

MS: No. No. Robert Sylvester.

MT: Robert?

MS: Robert Sylvester. Well, how many is that?

MT: Nine.

MS: Nine. That's another one in there. Did I say William?

MT: Yeah.

MS: Leo. I certainly had 10.

MT: Well, you'll probably remember—Let's see. Who's—Okay. Who's still living?

Magdalene.

MS: Yes, Mag.

MT: And Lawrence Jerome...

MS: Lawrence Jerome. Um hmm [yes].

MT: And who's—

MS: And Book Book.

MT: Which one's Book Book? William?

MS: Book Book is the one that—He's the youngest living now.

MT: Is that Robert?

MS: That's Robert.

MT: Okay. And Ernestine.

MS: Ernestine. Yeah.

MT: She's still living. Let's see. That's only four. Are there just four children living now?

MS: Five.

MT: Who's the fifth one?

MS: Pat. Mag. Book. Dorothy.

MT: Dorothy. Oh, I'm sorry.

MS: And Chim.

MT: That's it. Dorothy. Okay.

[End of Side 1, Tape 2 ]

[Begin Side 2, Tape 2]

MT: We were talking about your children and you'd forgotten to mention Francis.

MS: Francis Linwood. That was a baby. Baby boy.

MT: And how old was he when he died?

MS: 24. He had been to the Service–Vietnam. He had a car accident.

MT: Okay. And what happened to James–James Alexander?

MS: Alexander–A large, big boy struck him in the stomach and killed him. He was six years old. He could write 1, 2, 3 and his name. In those days, see, I couldn't do nothing about it 'cause they wouldn't have children on the stand. Big boy showing off. He was a big, fat boy anyway and this was a teenager showing off and struck him in the stomach, and held him upside down...The children told me. Mag told me this. And Mag said, "I was afraid–'cause I was afraid he would hurt me," 'Cause they used to walk to school

together. This old big boy and his sister used to walk to school with Magdalene and James Alexander. We used to call him Big Boy 'cause he was so big. So, that's what happened to him. He was killed at school by a big boy, and the boy was named Matthews Bowman.

MT: Did you take him to the hospital?

MS: No, we didn't. Didn't go in the hospital in those days. Well, carried—Just had the doctor come to the house. Old Dr. Palmer, and he said his stomach was infected, and he didn't live two, three days after he was hurt.

MT: Did—Why didn't the doctor take him to the hospital?

MS: Didn't carry him to the hospital? There wasn't a hospital then—old St. Mary's Hospital, but Doc Palmer's coming to the house.

MT: And why didn't he take him to the hospital?

MS: I don't know. He didn't carry him. He just come to the house and tend him. Old Doctor Palmer.

MT: Did he tell you that he was going to die?

MS: No. He was a quiet child. He didn't say nothing.

MT: I mean, did the doctor tell you?

MS: No, he didn't—The doctor didn't even tell me he thought he was—The doctor thought he was going to get alright. The doctor was coming just about every other day to see him and tend him, you know. Give him some medicine. He didn't live very long. No, the doctor didn't tell me he was going to die.

MT: So, we don't know why he didn't take him to the hospital?

MS: 'Deed I don't.

MT: Okay. And then, you also raised your children.

MS: Linda.

MT: Grandchild Linda.

MS: Linda, the oldest. Donny's son, Donny.

MT: So, it's really 12.

MS: Tanya. Dorothy's two girls—I raised them. Dot got two girls. I raised them, too.

MT: So, that's 15.

MS: Huh?

MT: That's 15 children that you raised.

MS: Yeah. Yeah, well. That's right. That's all. Grandchildren.

MT: That's all? That's a lot!

MS: Yeah.

MT: Okay. And, you still see your children—the children that are living now, you still see pretty often?

MS: Yeah. I see them. Now, they comes around. They carries me.

MT: They all live in this area.

MS: They all live in this area. You know, one lived in Valley Lee. One live Red Gates. You know where Red Gates is?

MT: Yeah.

MS: And one lived in North Valley Lee—Mag and Chump live Valley Lee. Book Book lived Red Gates, too.

MT: Well, I think we'll stop for today. And when we start again, we'll start talking about what part religion has played in your life.

MS: Alright.

MT: Okay?

MS: Okay.

MT: So, we'll call it a day! [laughter] Okay.

MS: Yeah. I'll tell you.

[Interview ends for the day - today's interview length is 0:36:21]

[Ended on Side 2, Tape 2 of 3]

**UNIFIED COMMITTEE FOR AFRO-AMERICAN CONTRIBUTIONS**

Oral History Project

**MARY AGATHA COATES SOMERVILLE (#3)**

Interviewer: M. Taylor  
Recorded: October 16, 1996

[Continue Side 2, Tape 2 of 3]

MT: Okay. This is Merideth Taylor interviewing Mary Somerville, and it is October 16. We're in Mary's home and we're continuing the interview that we started last month. And we're going to start off with the question about religion. And I'd like you talk a little bit about what part religion has played in your life. You could tell us—I know you told us a little bit about church when you were growing up, but what about now? What church do you attend? What does your church mean to you now?

MS: Just the same as it always has been.

MT: Okay. If you could just talk a little louder—

MS: Talk a little louder?

MT: A little bit. Yeah, well what has it always been? What is the part that religion has played in your life? How would you talk about that? What does it mean to you? What has it meant to you?

MS: [big breathe and long pause] It should—

MT: Could you tell me—

MS: —it seemed like the Lord has blessed me in lots of ways. Anything I prayed for, I might not get it right there, there and then, but along the way I gets what I asked the Lord for.

That's what it means to me in my religion. When I buy—asked God—when I pray, I gets it even if I don't get it in the same way, I get it in another way. But it's always the best.

The other way that I asks Him— for things.

MT: So how do you—

MS: — for things, you know. Ask Him for things, for better living. And I pray to Him for my friends and my family that they will have good blessings like I have—like He has blessed me. And it seems like it turns out alright. God answers my prayer. That's why I do believe in my religion.

MT: How would you describe your relationship with Jesus?

MS: Oh \_\_\_\_\_[whispers] Well I know I love Jesus. I know that. 'Cause He spoke good and kind, merciful to me. And he protects me night and day. If I be here alone, nobody bothers me, harms me. And I pray to God take care of me and he takes care of me every day and night. Then I thanks Him in the morning for letting me wake in the morning to see another new day that I haven't saw before. And I thanks Him for the nights and the days.

MT: How do you know there is a God?

MS: Well I just believe in God. I've been believing in God as since I was a child up 'til now.

MT: So you feel like your church and your relationship with Jesus, with God, has been important to you all your life?

MS: All my life. Important to me all my life, yes.

MT: And has it changed any?

MS: No, it has not changed. It seems like it gets better and better. I'm just blessed by the Lord.

MT: Are you happy with your church?

MS: Yes, yes—

MT: How did you choose your church?

MS: Uhm? [what?]

MT: How did you choose your church?

MS: How did I choose it?

MT: Your church?

MS: Oh, my parents just brought me right up in church, you know. They go to catechism every week. They used—

MT: And you chose the church that you are going to, St. Joseph's, because it's closest?

MS: No, I just—I just believe in the Catholic Church 'cause I was raised that way. My parents raised me Catholic. They were Catholic. Of course I like other religions too. I like to go to the other religions. They are nice. I enjoy going to other religions 'cause they praise the Lord wonderful—they does.

MT: And would you go to whatever Catholic Church was nearest you?

MS: Yes, I would go to any of them, Catholic Church that's nearest to me.

MT: Okay. Okay. This is a biggie. How do you feel in general about life today in St. Mary's County? In what way is it different? In what ways is it the same? And is the quality of life better or worse, and why? So what do you feel about life in St. Mary's County

today?

MS: I think that it's alright with me. I has—I don't have any trouble.

MT: How's it different than it used to be?

MS: Well it's different than what it used to be. Seem like we has more now than we used to have in days back, you know. More conveniences than they used to have in days years back when I was—like twenty years ago or thirty years ago. Everything is very convenient.

MT: How's it more convenient?

MS: You know, like years back we didn't have running water and bath tubs in the house. We had to take old big washing tubs and fill it full of water, set it in the hot sun, let it get warm to take our bath. So that's the different than what it is now—you go in the bathroom turn the spigots on and take your bath. But years back we could heat our water right in the hot sun. [giggles]

MT: In the sun?

MS: Uhm hmm. [yes]

MT: Do you heat it over the—

MS: Uhm hmm. And then we—if it's cold, then we would heat it on the big wood stove. But in the summertime, we just warm that water in the hot sun.

MT: What did you warm it in?

MS: In a big washing tub. A great large washing tub that you wash clothes in.

MT: How else is it different today, you know, here in the county?

MS: [softly] I don't know.

MT: Just the quality of life?

MS: [softly] I don't know. It's just different.

MT: What are some ways that it's ah—are there any ways that it's better? Besides the convenience of running water and plumbing—

MS: Yes, it's convenient.

MT: Are there ways in which it's—

MS: And we don't walk a long ways like we used to walk—

MT: Okay.

MS: —to church and all. Most now have a close walk to school or right around the— [large crash in background]

MT: Oh no.

[voice in background "Excuse me." And then the tape cuts off.]

MT: Are there any ways—

MS: And then seemed like people now a days is more friendly.

MT: More friendly?

MS: That's right, they're very friendly. 'Course they were friendly in my days too. But seemed like they more and more friendly. I done met more friendly people now than I have met in my life before, and in these later years. [whispers] Uh hun.

MT: Do you have any idea why?

MS: I don't know. I don't know why.

MT: Uh hun. What about— Are the— Oh yeah, the next question is, are people different than they used to be in St. Mary's County? And in what ways are they different?

MS: Yeah, they're different. Some of them is very friendly and loveable and nice to each

other—each other. [sighs] Yes, friendly and nice.

MT: So think that they are more friendly?

MS: Yes to me, I think they is more friendly than they used to be years back.

MT: Do they spend as much time visiting?

MS: No. Like years back? Oh, years back—. Now the visiting, they visited—I mean—.

They visited a lot. Nowadays they don't visit much. But they just seems, I don't know, more friendly than—. I don't know what to say. More friendly.

MT: They don't seem more hurried. They seem more—. Let's see. So you haven't thought of any changes that are anything but good, huh? You haven't thought of any bad changes?

MS: No, not with me no bad changes.

MT: In the people in St. Mary's County?

MS: No, not too bad.

MT: You don't think, yeah, you were talking about people being more violent one time.

MS: Yeah.

MT: You don't think they are?

MS: Oh yeah. They are more violent nowadays some people is, you know. Not all.

MT: Do you think that is true in St. Mary's County as well as in the rest of the county? Or not?

MS: Seems like it like all over the places to me.

MT: More guns?

MS: Uh hmm. That's what I say, more shooting and guns. See we just heard one a while ago.

MT: Yeah. What about the teenagers? Are they different than you were a teenager?

MS: Yes, see they has been going to get their own way. We teenagers coming along, we couldn't go place when we wanted to go. They didn't let us go like the young people can go now like they want to. But we couldn't do that nowadays. And later day—older days that we couldn't do that, go when we got ready. And places you want to go out, parents wouldn't let us go—dances or something—or something.

[tape shuts off then is turned back on]

MS: [inaudible] \_\_\_\_\_ would carry you and bring you. Now that they—my parents was came and brought me. They didn't let me go by myself out there. See nowadays children go by themselves nowadays—teenagers do. Go and come when they get ready.

MT: You say that more of them have cars? Have transportation?

MS: Yeah, more and more they got transportation. When we were teenagers we didn't have no cars of our own.

MT: Do they seem to have more money or less money?

MS: Now they have more money—less money in my days. Less money, we didn't have much money.

MT: Did they spend their time doing different things? I mean, we know that people spend a lot of time watching television. That's a change, isn't it?

MS: Yeah, that's a change. Watching television there's a lot of change. We didn't have no television in those days. You just had an old Victrola. Wind up and put that record on. Wind that record. We wind that record until the spring break in the old Victrola. Then we had to go and get the money enough to buy another spring that go in the Victrola. See there's Victrolas then.

MT: Did you have one when you were married?

MS: Yeah, I had a Victrola when I was married.

MT: With your husband?

MS: Yeah, I had a Victrola and records, you know.

MT: So the children, the teenage children spend more time watching television now.

MS: Now they spend more time watching television, that's right. We didn't have any.

MT: And what did you do—what did they do in the past instead of watch television?

MS: Oh, they had to work. Work all the time, yeah. Always have a task of work every day.

Whoever be here. And then go to school. Some couldn't go to school. They had to work all the time with their parents when they had large families. The older ones had to stay home and go to work, have to mother and father their little ones. Work, you know, work out by the day, make some money. They have to little—brothers and sisters.

MT: Did the teenagers—are the children seem like they treat their elders in the same way—like they treat you in the same way that you treated all the people when you were young?

MS: Some of them do right now. Yeah, a lot of—lot of teenagers treat their parents real nice. Far as I know, you know.

MT: Well what you think of—what do you think is responsible for the changes?

MS: I don't know.

MT: Well, I guess from what we said television is one thing.

MS: Yeah, that's right. [inaudible]

MT: 'Cause people spend their time differently. What about computers? Have you notice people in St. Mary's County have computers?

MS: A lot of people have computers. We didn't have nothing like that in those days back there. Didn't know what they were. Didn't know what they looked like. [chuckles then sighs] See that's a big difference. The computers are a big difference.

MT: Do you think that is good?

MS: Yeah, I think it's alright to me. It's alright with me. I wouldn't care if I had one.  
[laughs]

MT: Yeah, would you like to learn to use one?

MS: And I would surely like to use one—learn to use one. I would.

MT: [giggles] Good.

MS: Well see my grandchildren has them, so.

MT: You could talk to each other through e-mail. You could write your grandchildren on the computer and they could write you.

MS: Yeah, indeed. I didn't know that. Yeah.

MT: So when did you get a television? Do you remember?

MS: Let's see, I got a television back in 1930.

MT: 1930? That seem awful early.

MS: About 1935?

MT: 1935?

MS: [inaudible whisper]

MT: And then what was—. How old were your kids?

MS: I'm thinking.

MT: I doubt that it was that early.

MS: It don't sound right.

MT: Well I don't know. We got, let's see. We got ours in 1956.

MS: Oh 1956.

MT: But we were late. [laughs] We were one of the last people to I knew to get one and that was 1956.

MS: Well I guess that's the time I got my first one in '56.

MT: See, it seems like you have had it forever, huh?

MS: Uh hmm. Yeah. [both laugh] In the fifties. And Dorothy—Dorothy was a baby when I got the first television. And now she is sixty. How would that work?

MT: Really? She was a baby and now she's sixty. Wow.

MS: I'm trying to think if one of my children—

MT: Sixty years ago. Wow, well maybe.

MS: It wasn't Dorothy. It wasn't Dorothy. It was Chumps. The first TV I got Chumps was about nine or ten years old. She the youngest—youngest girl.

MT: Okay, that makes sense.

MS: 'Cause I know that when we first got the TV the children was so glad. Dorothy and Chumps was glad. "Here come the man with the TV." And this—Chumps—Dorothy was so glad she struck Chumps. She didn't mean it. You know, struck her out of being glad she did. But hurt Chumps. Hurt her on her back. You know, "Here come the tonight—here come the—here come the man with TV."

MT: And she wrapped her? [giggles]

MS: [laughs]—in the back. And made her back hurt. "Ahhh," she said, "my back hurt." Yeah. But she didn't [inaudible]. And then Dorothy said, "I'm sorry. I mean to hit you. I didn't know I hit you that hard. But I'm so glad momma got a TV for us." It was

gladness that made her hit her. She hit her harder than she thought. See Dorothy  
[inaudible]. Just glad.

MT: Huh. [laughs] So that was excitement for the whole family huh?

MS: Ah hmm. [yes]

MT: Did you and your husband make that decision to get a—to buy one together?

MS: Yes, we sure did. We always made decisions together.

MT: Okay. Well, what about race relations—race relationships in the county? How are they different than they used to be? How are they different today in the county than they used to be? Because—how and why are they different?

MS: Well in years back I can tell you this. The black people couldn't go up in the front yard, on to the front porch to go into a white families yard. They had to go around to the back and then go in. See nowadays they don't do that anymore. You go up front to go in. We always had to go around the back to go in the white people's home.

MT: What if you had a white friend? Would that be the same thing?

MS: In those days. Not now.

MT: Everybody?

MS: Long ways different now. I can go in the front door now. Used to be the back door you had to go in around the back yard. Oh yeah.

MT: And it wouldn't matter who the white person was?

MS: It didn't make no difference who it was.

MT: Or who the black person was?

MS: Uh hmm. [yes]

MT: Okay. How else was it different?

MS: And some of us couldn't sit at the table and eat with the white. They had a little table out on the porch or a little table out in the yard. The blacks had their table out in the yard or on the back porch. Couldn't sit at the table at dinner with them in the kitchen. Or if they ate in the living room, then they let the blacks to eat in the kitchen. They ate in the living room. Couldn't eat together. I don't know why.

MT: Did you wonder about why?

MS: No, I never—it never made no attention—it paid no atten—I didn't pay no attention to it. It didn't make me any different. I just hear all the folks talking about it, you know.

Older people would be talking.

MT: What would they be saying?

MS: Saying? We all talking about that like, why can't we sit together to eat because when we go away from this world we're all going to be together in heaven. That's what we got taught that the Lord don't have no difference in colors or—all in heaven are going to be alike. They're all going to be together. But now they are white and colors together now. And that just started in later years. I don't know when that started now. I can't remember when that happened—got started. What you call segregation, I don't know.

MT: So segregation was for you just the way things were? I mean—. You said you didn't pay it no mind.

MS: No, I didn't pay it no mind when I was a child.

MT: And like in church? You know you were telling me about in church?

MS: Yeah. Now in church, we had to sit in the back. Just like when you got on a bus to go to Washington or Baltimore, blacks in the back – whites in the front. That's the difference from nowadays. Now you sit anywhere. You all sit together on the buses and planes and

whatever you're traveling in.

MT: Uh huh. What else? Did you ever go to restaurants?

MS: In all the restaurants, we couldn't go in and sit in the restaurants. We couldn't go in white restaurants in the older days. That the way. It's true. You couldn't go in there. Went in there and ask—not me but ask a black guy—'cause I didn't go in any and sit.

MT: You didn't?

MS: My parents used to go in there and they asked them out. And friends of my parents. They asked them out.

MT: But you never did that?

MS: No, I have never been asked out. I've never been in there.

MT: Have you ever been afraid or felt threatened by a group or a person?

MS: No, I have not.

MT: You know, on the basis of race, like a hate group or a person who is being hateful?

MS: No, I have not.

MT: You never have?

MS: Uh uhn. [no] I haven't.

MT: Thank goodness. How did you feel about that, you know, about segregation, about sitting in the back of the church and the back of the bus.

MS: It didn't make me a bit of difference. I haven't paid no mind. As long as I was in church. Yeah. It didn't made a difference to me.

MT: And you didn't really talk about it?

MS: No, I never about it.

MT: You and your husband didn't talk about it?

MS: No. [inaudible whisper]

MT: I'm running out of questions here. I need to get my sheet. Okay. So it seems like for you things are—you feel like things are mostly better and yet when we started off—yeah, do you want to say something about that?

MS: Yeah, I think better. Things are better now—

MT: 'Cause when we started—

MS: —now late time.

MT: Yeah, when we started off talking, I think if I remember correctly, you were asking about the times—you know, were the times better then way back in the old days or is it better now. And I think you said that you felt like times were better in the older days. [laughs] In some ways they are?

MS: In some ways they are, you know. In the older days there was no shooting and cutting and killing one another. That was the best of life. Now it's dangerous to go out here. It's—

MT: Do you think there's more to be afraid of?

MS: Ah, 'cause—seem like me it don't bother me one way or the other. 'Cause no body's has never been after me or bother me. I just see how to do each other.

MT: Yeah, yeah.

MS: Alright.

MT: Do you feel like St. Mary's County is any different than the rest of the country?

MS: See I don't know about the other country other than St. Mary's County—

MT: Compared to what you see on—

MS: —it's better. Seems like it's better times in St. Mary's County seems like to me. It's

better times in St. Mary's County than it was in years back. Now to me it seems like.

MT: Do you think that race relations—do you think that black people and white people are getting along better?

MS: It does. It seems like we gets along better now—

MT: And there are more other—

MS: —than it was in years back. Uh huh.

MT: There're more other groups. There're more Asian-American, and Hispanic-Americans, Latino-Americans. There are more people. There are more different kinds of people in St. Mary's County now it seems.

MS: Yeah, more. That's right. More different people in St. Mary's County. It seems like the people that move here from other countries, they soon make friends with us in St. Mary's County. This, you know, that what I'm—this's what I'm trying to say. Them more friendly and do, and kind to us. Seem like they kinder. Always got something to say nice. Something to give you. Year's back they didn't give you a whole lot. You had to work hard for it. Now year's back I going to tell you what I had to do. If I wanted—. If I wasn't able to buy a new dress, a new coat, anew pair of pants for my children, I had to go out and work by the day for somebody's daughter's dress, some's pants. Work all that day to pay for that dress. They didn't give it to me. I had to wash—

[tape cuts off abruptly]

[End of Side 2, Tape 2]

[Begin Side 1, Tape 3 of 3]

MT: This is tape #3–Mary Somerville and it’s still 10/16. Okay. I skipped one question about community activities so we’re going back. What community activities do you participate in: clubs, church organizations, that kind of thing? I know you belong to quite a few organizations. Could you tell us?

MS: Well, I belong to the Ladies Auxiliary of Bushwood Sacred Heart. I belong to the Women’s Aglow over in Solomon’s Island. That’s more religious. Oh, both is religious though. We study Bible and read the prayer book.

MT: Are there some other organizations?

MS: No, only the Bible.

MT: I mean other organizations that you belong to?

MS: No, only that. Only–

MT: Those two?

MS: Only the religious.

MT: Well, that’s alright. Are there any other religious organizations?

MS: Only the Women’s Aglow, Auxiliary.

MT: Okay.

MS: Ladies Auxiliary.

MT: Okay.

MS: Full Gospel Businessmen–

MT: Oh!

MS: Fellowship International. That's three.

MT: Okay. Full Gospel?

MS: Yeah. Full Gospel. I joined in NAACP.

MT: Oh, NAACP!

MS: Uh huh [yes]. I joined some years ago, but I haven't been. How many years that could have been? Maybe eight years ago. I didn't get back down there. Got my aunt—My cousin died that used to take me to the meetings. She died, then I didn't have any way of getting back.

MT: Oh. Where were the meetings?

MS: Down Lexington Park.

MT: Lexington Park?

MS: Uh huh [yes]. It wasn't the same building that we was in that Sunday. Not that building, but it was in Lexington Park. It might a been the same building. I don't know.

MT: And, are there other church activities? Any church activities that you regularly go to?

MS: No, only the—

MT: Well, what about the Senior Citizens? The site. What's that? Tell us about what you do with that.

MS: Well, I do that. Oh, we had, like, drawing and painting. You know, painting. Coloring, like—What you call it? Like kindergartners: color. Do coloring and drawing and making things like the hat there.

MT: The hat with the flowers.

MS: Like that.

MT: Do you do crafts and art projects?

MS: Crafts, we call it.

MT: And they have exercise classes?

MS: Then we have exercise. Have exercise twice a week on Monday and Friday.

MT: And they take you–You said you went to some, on some–They took you some places recently?

MS: Then we go on trips to places: to dinner–dinner, but that’s all we do.

MT: And, you go a couple of times a week usually?

MS: Yeah. A couple of times a week. But here lately, I’ve–Last week, I went three, four days a week. I went four days week before last and three days last week and two days this week! More than I have been going.

MT: What other social activities? Do you have family reunions?

MS: Yeah. We have family reunions. Sure do have family reunions.

MT: How often?

MS: Every summer we have family reunion.

MT: For which family or families?

MS: My family.

MT: Your own immediate family?

MS: Yeah. My family and friends and all that. Family and friends.

MT: Is there a Somerville Family Reunion for all the Somervilles?

MS: Yeah. Yeah. That’s right. It has that–all Somerville, but they have friends–invite friends to come, too, see now.

MT: And, do you go to Bingo or anything like that?

MS: I go to Bingo sometimes.

MT: Do you?

MS: But now often. Once in awhile.

MT: Go to fairs or anything like that?

MS: Hmm?

MT: Any fairs?

MS: Yeah, we go to fairs. Sometimes we go to County Fair. I used to go to County Fair often 'bout five years. I had children on that.

MT: Yeah. When you had—

MS: More days. Might a been 10 years ago. See, I had children in the fair. Grandchildren.

MT: And, I know that you—

MS: And they played—That was Linda. She played trombone in the parade.

MT: Oh! And, she plays softball.

MS: Softball. She plays softball. As of now. Still do.

MT: I know sometimes you go to some plays or concerts when some friends take you.

MS: Yeah! I sure do. Go to some concerts.

MT: You go to the college and somebody takes you.

MS: That's right.

MT: Plays, or perform in them.

MS: Yeah. That's right.

MT: We could mention that that's another community activity.

MS: That's right.

MT: That you've acted in two plays at the college.

MS: In two plays at the college.

MT: Yeah. That's–Not everybody can say that!

MS: That's true! Everybody can't say that.

MT: Yeah.

MS: And I've traveled a lot.

MT: Yeah!

MS: I have traveled different places.

MT: Actually, that's what I'm gonna ask you.

MS: And we be \_\_\_\_\_. That's what we doing' when we traveling: Bible study. Like in Israel and Canada.

MT: Yeah. Let's talk about your travel and your trips.

MS: Detroit, Michigan. We were still Bible studying when we went there.

MT: So, you've been to Detroit.

MS: Right.

MT: You've been to Jerusalem.

MS: Yes.

MT: Where did you say–Where did you go in Canada?

MS: Toronto?

MT: Toronto. Okay. And then, you most recently went to–

MS: We went to Detroit, Michigan. That's was Bible study, too.

MT: Most recently, you went to Florida.

MS: Florida, yeah.

MT: And where was that? Miami?

MS: Miami, Florida.

MT: Miami, Florida. Okay. And, all of those trips have been—have had to do with Bible study or religious organizations?

MS: That's right. For Gospel. When we went—Convention—when we went to Miami, for Gospel Businessmen International Fellowship.

MT: And, let's see, is that everywhere you've traveled?

MS: Yeah.

MT: Outside the state?

MS: That's only where I traveled.

MT: And then within the state, you've been to Baltimore?

MS: Yeah, been Baltimore.

MT: And Washington, DC.

MS: Oh yeah. Washington. Baltimore.

MT: How frequently do you travel to Washington, DC or Baltimore?

MS: About every other year. Maybe two years we go to something up there.

MT: You go to visit family?

MS: Yeah, go to visit families.

MT: And you lived in Baltimore for a little while.

MS: I lived in Baltimore.

MT: Oh, and New Jersey.

MS: That was Baltimore. I used to travel New Jersey. Asbury Park, New Jersey because my brother—oldest brother—lived there and my sister Arly lived there. They both passed now. And Baltimore.

MT: How did you feel about the cities? Would you rather live in the country or the city?

MS: I'd rather live in the country. I like go to the city and visit two, three days and I'm ready to come back to the country! [chuckle]

MT: Why is that?

MS: I don't know. I like the country best, I guess! I like the country the best.

MT: What do you like about it?

MS: I can find my way around better than I can the city.

MT: Anything else you like about it?

MS: That's all.

MT: Do you–But you like traveling?

MS: I love traveling, yes. Love travel.

MT: Do you feel like you've traveled as much as you would like to?

MS: I would like to travel more than I do if I had the money to travel with or someone to travel with. I don't worry about the money 'cause seem like it always–Like I said, and I pray to the Lord that I can go to this trip. I may not have money, but seem like money comes from somewhere. The Lord makes the way and I find that money to go for these trips. The family helps me with money and the people–the white folks I worked with: They gave me money to go with. Donation, you know. So, I always found money to go on my trips.

MT: Well, another question that I skipped a little bit was about people in different parts of the county. Do you think there's a difference between people, like, living in one part of the county or another part of the county? Do you travel around and notice that people are different from, you know, that live down in Ridge versus people that live up in Charlotte Hall? Is there a difference?

MS: No. All acts nice to me. Seems like everybody's real fond of me. Everywhere I go I meet nice friends, then they wants me to come to visit them and come to visit me.

Everywhere I travel. I don't have no trouble with nobody.

MT: And, people that are just moving in, you know, outsiders?

MS: Yeah.

MT: People that weren't born here, 'cause you were born here.

MS: I was born here. Now, these people that come here—I guess I'm getting ready to tell you.

They—When they come here, seem like they kind. They always give me something.

You's the one always giving me something nice. You're one of them.

MT: An outsider? You mean people that come into the county?

MS: Uh huh, uh huh. That's right. And I have lots a more friends comes and gives me.

MT: So, they seem—Do they seem any different than people who grew up here? Do the outsiders like me: Do they seem any different than the people who grew up here?

MS: I think they kinder. I think [chuckle] they are kinder, more sociable, like each other better, I think.

MT: Well, that's interesting. Well, uhmm—

[Tape cuts off briefly.]

[Interview ends for the day]

**UNIFIED COMMITTEE FOR AFRO-AMERICAN CONTRIBUTIONS**

Oral History Project

**MARY AGATHA COATES SOMERVILLE (#4)**

Interviewer: M. Taylor  
Recorded: October 27, 1996

[Continue Side 1, Tape 3 of 3]

MT: And, this is October 27<sup>th</sup> and continuing—This is Mary Taylor—continuing the interview with Mary Somerville, and this is our third session.

[tape shuts off and then comes back on]

MT: Okay, let's start with a question, it's here 17. How have you contributed to the county through your work, paid or volunteer, your family, your citizenship, you politics, your values; and, have you received any recognition, any awards or certificates or anything like that?

MS: No, I haven't received nothing like that.

MT: Okay. So, what about—You can speak up there.

MS: No, I haven't received nothing like that.

MT: What about ways that you've contributed to the county and to the quality of life here?

MS: Well, we just farmed, raised tobacco. Raised tobacco.

MT: Raised your children.

MS: And raised—raised tobacco and raised my children. That's right. And, we have my children into the County Fair, and I would can goods and take down to the County Fairs and get the 1<sup>st</sup> Prize, 2<sup>nd</sup> Prize. And, I had Linda into the parade. I bought horns for her to blow, trombone horns so she could blow them.

MT: What kind of things did you get 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> prize for? What cans?

MS: I got Blue Ribbon.

MT: For your peaches? Your tomatoes? For what?

MS: Peaches. They were peaches. I got the 1<sup>st</sup> prize, and the second prize was a different color ribbon. I think it was gold 'cause it was—First prize was blue ribbon for what I canned and carried down into the County Fair.

MT: Been a good citizen?

MS: And I been a good citizen.

MT: Paid your taxes?

MS: Paid my taxes every year.

MT: Tried to live right?

MS: Sure live right!

MT: Bring up your children—tried to bring up your children—

MS: Bring up my children nice and good.

MT: Yeah, you said contributed through my values.

MS: Yes. I contributed my values.

MT: And belonged to some community organizations—church groups.

MS: I belonged to—What'd you call them?

MT: Your church groups.

MS: Church groups. I belong to the church groups.

MT: You know, something I—You don't have to tell me, but I was curious whether you been vo—whether you vote?

MS: What am I supposed to say? I don't like it. I registered but never did get to vote.

MT: Oh, you never got to vote.

MS: No, I never got to vote, but I registered.

MT: But you what?

MS: I registered it, but I never did vote. Didn't have no way of getting to the voting.

MT: You didn't have any way to get there, huh? That's too bad. Yeah, there's another election coming up.

MS: Yeah. Yeah.

MT: Yeah. Probably somebody'd be—Actually, I don't know if you can still register. Did you register before, you said?

MS: Long years ago, I registered; but you see, that wasn't too good. I had to register over again. Didn't know when the registering day came? So, I didn't get to register.

MT: That's too bad. Sometimes it is hard to get there. You need, maybe, some help. Okay. Well, here's a hard question, I think: What do you consider to be the most valuable thing you've ever had, something you could not have done without in your lifetime and why would that be? Maybe I already asked you this, but I don't think so. If you had to choose, what—If you had to choose something in your life that you just couldn't have

done without, what's that thing or those things? It could be something—a possession or it could be something, like, more—It could be your faith or, you know, your family I think it could be, too. Your husband. I mean, it could be a possession or a home. It could be a possession or something else. When you think about what are the most valuable things in your life, what do you think of? Could be friends. Could be--

MS: [inaudible]

MT: You don't know, huh? When you think of losing things, what do you think of?

MS: A lot—Love to clean.

MT: Work.

MS: Work. I love to work. I love to work.

MT: That's something! Yeah!

MS: That's right. I love to work. I love to wash and iron. Always did like housecleaning.

MT: And so, you can't imagine your life without working.

MS: That's right. I cannot imagine my life—I have to be doing something all the time.

MT: That's a great answer.

MS: And when I go to places and see other people working, I always want to volunteer and help them. And they would say, “No. We just want you to sit down and rest.”

And I say, “No. I'm not gonna sit down and rest. I'm gonna help to do something,” and I get up and help to do something. And then, they like me. [chuckle]

They like that!

MT: But you like to work!

MS: I do like to work!

MT: But, that's what you value that you couldn't imagine doing without.

MS: That's what I like: work. I love to work. Always did.

MT: Anything else you couldn't do without?

MS: No.

MT: That's great. Okay. That is something valuable.

MS: That is something valuable. 'Deed it is.

MT: Okay. Have you done everything in your life that you wanted to do or that you planned to do? And if not, you know, what were you not able to do and why? Is there anything that you wanted to do really badly?

MS: Seemed like everything I want to do, I did; and any place I want to go, I went.

MT: That's great.

MS: With money or no money. I had nice friends to help me there. That's like traveling.

MT: You said one time you sort of thought you'd like to be a teacher, but that's something you haven't regretted a whole lot, huh?

MS: No. Yeah, I loved to be a teacher. When I was going to school, I said, "When I grow up, I want to be a teacher," but I didn't get chance to be a teacher.

MT: If you could go back and live your life over, would you change anything? What would you change?

MS: No. I would still say I like to be a teacher. [chuckle]

MT: But there's nothing--If you had to do your life over again, what would you change?

MS: If I had to do my life over again, I still would like to be a teacher.

MT: Okay.

MS: I don't think nothing else I'd like to be but a teacher. Always loved to be a teacher.

MT: Is there anything else about your life that you would change if you had to do it all over

again? If you had it to do all over again?

MS: No. I don't think so. I don't.

MT: Pretty happy. Pretty happy with things as they went.

MS: Yeah.

MT: That's great. I think that's a hard question. Okay. Well, this one: I don't know. I think we sort of asked it, but what do you think have been the biggest changes in the County in your lifetime? Maybe I asked you that? What do you think the biggest change is in the County? Thinking about what it was like, you know, 80 years ago. What it's like now.

MS: It's more. When you work, you gets more money for your work I did years back. And, people is more—Can't recall that word.

MT: Friendly? No. Busy? Friendly?

MS: Can't recall that word. What's the word I want to call? People are more sociable now than they was years back.

MT: Okay. Sociable.

MS: More sociable. Yeah.

MT: Except that you said that they had more time for visiting then, but they're more sociable now.

MS: Yeah, they're sociable now, but they don't visit like they used to in years back.

MT: What about physical changes in the County, like the way the County looks?

MS: The County looks beautiful it used to look years back.

MT: It looks more beautiful or less beautiful?

MS: They made it look more beautiful. Seems like people's yards looks more beautiful and pretty, and the land looks beautiful.

MT: Why is that, do you know? I mean, how is it more beautiful?

MS: I don't know. Just beautiful to me.

MT: More lawns?

MS: More lawns—yes.

MT: Less wild?

MS: And less wild—yes. More lawns.

MT: The roads are paved.

MS: And roads—Roads are larger. Yeah. 'Cause years back when we used to have little wheelbarrow roads! [laughter]

MT: Wheelbarrow roads! [laughter]

MS: See, one car couldn't meet pass the other; but now they have the three-way, four-way drive roads now, you can—

MT: And what happened when it was wet and rainy, those roads?

MS: Wet and rainy, you had to pull aside. Sometimes people get stuck when they pull aside and let the other one pass. They would get stuck. Somebody would have to come and pull them out this mud! [chuckle] I guess that was it.

MT: Yeah. Okay. Well, I know the answer to this one: Can you share old stories about what life was like in the County for your parents? That's a long way back.

MS: Yeah. A long way back.

MT: Did they talk about—Do you have a picture of what it was like for them?

MS: No.

MT: For your parents?

MS: No. I don't.

MT: That was–Gee. That was, like, in another century.

MS: That’s right!

MT: Okay. But, you sure have a lot of stories about when you were growing up. Oh, here’s a question: How did black folks get their news in the County when you were growing up? How did you get news? Did they read? Where there newspapers or radio? Television stations?

MS: There wasn’t any television, but was newspaper. Always had newspaper.

MT: Even when you were just growing up?

MS: When I was growing up–Yeah. They had newspaper.

MT: Do you know where it came from? Where it was printed? Think it was in the County?

MS: I’m trying to think, now, the name of the paper. I’m trying to think, now, the name of the paper. They had a name for them papers alright.

MT: Did your parents get the paper regularly?

MS: Yes, they got the paper regular. *The Afro*. I know one was *The Afro*. That was more the black paper.

MT: Did that–Do you know how often that came?

MS: Used to get that every week. Used to get *The Afro* every week. That’s another paper. I can’t remember the name of it.

MT: Wonder if that’s in Baltimore?

MS: I believe it did come from Baltimore. I think it did.

MT: So, that’s interesting. So, they got that every week. So they got some kind of, yeah, but *The Afro*...Hmm.

MS: Oh shucks! I can’t think of the name of the other paper. There’s another paper we used

to—that Mama used to get. Oh my.

MT: Okay. Well, that's alright. That's good that you remember that one 'cause I didn't know that. Yeah. So there were a couple of newspapers?

MS: There was a couple of newspapers. There was a couple, but I just can't think of the other.

MT: And, was the other one—Was the other one also for African Americans—?

MS: No, the other one—tell you what goes on the news were going—

MT: Around here?

MS: Around here.

MT: What about the radio? Did your folks have a radio?

MS: Yeah. We had a radio. No, they did not have a radio. They had a Victrola.

MT: So, you didn't get the news over the radio.

MS: No, we didn't get the radio. We didn't have a radio. Nothing but a Victrola.

MT: And word of mouth? The people—I mean, the news traveled by word of mouth?

MS: Word of mouth—That's right. There used to be a old lady go 'round the neighborhood and tell the news.

MT: Oh...That was sort of her duty? [chuckle] Well, tell me more about that!

MS: No, it wan't not her duty, but she made it her business to! [laughter]

MT: Okay.

MS: Early in the morning, this old lady would get 'fore sun—before sun was up to go from house to house and tell the news: what happened last night, early the morning, or yesterday.

MT: Well, that's interesting. And, what? She'd go around from house to house? She'd walk.

MS: Yeah, she would walk it. [laughter]

MT: My goodness. I guess she wasn't too busy. So, what about today: How do Countians get their news today?

MS: Now, they get it through the TV and the radio.

MT: Do you ever look at the newspapers around here?

MS: I look at newspapers sometimes. Very seldom though.

MT: Okay. What do are your feelings about the Navy Base? Do you have any? Like, okay. They say: Were Countians hostile toward the government for taking their land to build the Navy Base? Do you remember about that?

MS: No.

MT: When the Navy came in?

MS: No, I don't know about that.

MT: 'Cause that was--You were pretty far north here. Do you remember hearing people complain?

MS: ...didn't pay much attention to it. Busy working.

MT: And, none of your family had to move off their land because of the Base, did they?

MS: No, no. They didn't have to.

MT: Okay. Well, do you have any feelings about the Navy Base?

MS: No, I didn't.

MT: You don't have any now?

MS: No. I didn't know nothing 'bout. I worked on the Base. That's all.

MT: Oh, you did work on the Base?

MS: I did work on the Base for five years.

MT: Oh! And, what did you do there?

MS: Housecleaning. Same thing: housecleaning.

MT: I didn't know you worked on the Base.

MS: Yeah. I worked—I hadn't never told you before.

MT: What did you clean?

MS: Cleaned those big building's. Wash the walls, wash the windows and scrub floors and wash and iron. Wash and iron.

MT: How did that compare to working for a family, you know, the other people you worked for?

MS: It was just a little more money. It was the same thing, just a little more money.

MT: Did you like doing that?

MS: Yeah, I liked it 'cause see I like housecleaning.

MT: Yeah. So why didn't you keep doing that?

MS: Well, I did kept doing that.

MT: For five years? And why did you quit after five years?

MS: And then, I come on in and help my husband on the farm and take care of the children.

MT: Is that why you quit?

MS: Um hmm [yes].

MT: I see.

MS: I mean, some people moved away that I worked for and then I had to come on home. I didn't have no other place to work at.

MT: So that was—Basically, it was a good experience?

MS: Yeah. That's right. Worked for the Lieutenant and his wife; but when they moved—'cause they shipped him somewhere else, I didn't have no job on it then.

MT: Okay. That provided—The Base coming here provided a lot of jobs for the people.

MS: It did. It did.

MT: Well, it says: What are your feelings about changes in the County because of the new growth of the Base? You know, as more and more people are coming in, the Base is growing. Do you have any feelings about that?

MS: No, I don't. No, I don't have any feeling about that.

MT: Okay.

[End of Side 1, Tape 3 of 3]

[Begin Side 2, Tape 3 of 3]

MT: How were senior citizens treated, and I think—in the past versus today? When you think— Now, you are a senior citizen; but you know, when your parents were senior citizens, for example. What happened when they were too old to care for themselves and what type of nursing facilities were available then, in the past?

MS: There wasn't any. My parents waited on themselves. They didn't have no nurses. Just go to the doctor when they felt bad.

MT: Did they have any—Were there any nursing homes?

MS: Wasn't no nursing homes. There was none of those nursing homes. They used to take the old people that couldn't wait on themselves, they would put them in a place called Poor's House.

MT: Paul's?

MS: Poor?

MT: Oh, Poor House?

MS: We had a Poor's House down here in St. Mary's County.

MT: P-O-O-R-S?

MS: Yes. That's what they called it. You put them there. Now, they call it nursing homes.

MT: Where was that? Do you remember?

MS: In Leonardtown.

MT: In Leonardtown?

MS: A little below Leonardtown.

MT: Was it all—Was it all older people?

MS: Older people. Most older people and, you know, kind a retarded people.

MT: And then, that was before the nursing homes?

MS: Yeah, that was before the nursing homes started.

MT: Gee! So, what happened—What happened to all the older people, then, if there weren't nursing homes?

MS: Some nursing homes was—There wasn't nursing homes. Poor's House they called it.

MT: Right.

MS: But, they were treated bad and some of them—I don't know. I just heard them say—Some of them was beaten. Beat some of them.

MT: I wonder when that was.

MS: In the 60's? Back in the 60's? In the 50's?

MT: That's pretty interesting. I'd like to know more about that.

MS: They sure did—used to beat them. Beat the—We went to visit the Poor's House. It wasn't a nursing—Poor's House—one time. And this old lady was so sick, and she couldn't wait

on herself. She had—and this woman made her get down, clean behind her, you know.

MT: Clean. Yeah, clean yourself up. Oh gee! Well—And that was right in down—right in Leonardtown?

MS: Right. No, that was around here in this—in what you call this?

MT: In Park Hall? The Poor's House was in Park Hall?

MS: Yeah. Used to be a Poor's House in—It wasn't a Poor's House. It was a lady that took care of the old people in her home when they wasn't treated good. Yeah, so—So, I was told that they was beaten.

MT: So—Wait a minute. So, the Poor's House was in Leonardtown.

MS: Up in Leonardtown. Below Leonardtown like near the Fairground.

MT: And that's gone now? Is that building gone now?

MS: I think that building's down now. I don't see it. I think it's gone down here.

MT: And that was the only one that was up in the County?

MS: Only one. That was the only one in the County.

MT: For people who didn't have any money?

MS: That's right.

MT: And couldn't—and there was no one to take care of them?

MS: Yes. Yes.

MT: But then, this other—You're talking about this other, about this woman that took in people?

MS: Took in people and they wasn't treated nice. Uh uh [no].

MT: Well, what about—And so, what happened to the rest of the old people? Their family must—Their families took care of them.

MS: No, they died there. They died in these homes in Poor's House. They died there.

MT: But what about the people—Like now, all the people that are in nursing homes now? All the older people? How so many of them are in nursing homes?

MS: Do I know—?

MT: No. I'm saying, you know how—You know how, today, there are many, many people—

MS: Yeah. Now, but they're treated nice.

MT: But if they didn't have those nursing homes back then, where did all the older people go?

MS: People would take them—People would take—Different ones would take them. Volunteer and take people like that.

MT: In their homes?

MS: In their homes. Yeah, that's right.

MT: Oh! So, you—Not necessarily your family. Would be like this woman where she would take somebody in for an amount of money?

MS: They paid her.

MT: So you could pay someone to—So if you had an older parent who couldn't take care of themselves, you might pay someone to take them into their home—?

MS: Yeah. That's right.

MT: And take care of them.

MS: That's why it is.

MT: Okay. I see. And then, it would just depend on the person how good the care was.

MS: That's right.

MT: Yeah, I mean, that's a big change because there are a lot of nursing home now.

MS: And that is better, too. I glad to hear of the nursing homes. When they first start the

nursing homes, I was glad of it.

MT: Yeah. So, the medical—There's a lot more medical facilities now.

MS: More medicine yeah. They didn't have much medicine in those days.

MT: And the hospital—The hospital—Okay. What doctors and hospitals and other medical facilities were available to you, like when you were growing up or when you were a young, married woman?

MS: What doctor?

MT: What doctors? What hospitals, medical facilities?

MS: We went—Yeah, we went to the doctor's office, you know.

MT: And what about the hospital?

MS: We went to the hospital. I never went there. I've never been to the hospital in my life until late year.

MT: And—

MS: And my parents didn't go to the hospital. They just went to the doctor's office. Had a family doctor.

MT: Was the hospital available to you if you needed to go or wanted to go?

MS: Yeah, it was available. Didn't go. Seemed like I never had to go to the hospital.

MT: Not to have your babies?

MS: No. Had all the babies at home.

MT: Hmm. Okay. And we already talked about that—relying on home remedies, didn't we?

Didn't we talk about how in the winter, you had to wear a—

MS: Oh yeah!

MT: Was it—

MS: Yeah. Red flannel on your chest. All the winter with some kind of salve that they rubbed on this. I'm trying to think name of it. Mustard—They mix it up with mustard.

MT: Mustard plaster?

MS: Mutton taller. Mutton taller come from beef. That come from a beef or lamb?

MT: Lamb. Yeah.

MS: But that mixed together and rub it on us. Red flannel and pin it there. Then, told us—In the summertime come, they'll take it off if it didn't fall itself. Wear it all the winter and it stopped the cold. Stopped it being sick.

MT: And there was some tea, you said.

MS: Yeah, I never did round to that tea. I never did find—I forget to ax Annie Curtis. She told me. I forgot to ask her what the name of that tea our parents used to gather off the trees in the woods and make tea. Some kind of herb tea.

MT: Remember any other home remedies?

MS: No. That's all I know. They used to rub with turpentine.

MT: For what?

MS: Old people. For rheumatism.

MT: For rheumatism?

MS: Turpentine. Smelled real strong.

MT: Okay. Well, that's—That's the last question. Let's see. Is there anything else you can think of that you'd like to talk about? Let's see: We talked a lot about when you were a child and what times were like, and what sorts of things you did, and how your parents treated you, and your schooling. And, let's see: courting and your work.

MS: Oh yeah, work.

MT: Except we didn't—Just found out that you worked at the Base, too.

MS: Oh yeah. I hadn't told you that. Yeah, I worked on the Base five years. Not for the same lady though, but different people.

MT: Did you work in the big buildings there, too?

MS: In the big buildings.

MT: Right. We talked about your wedding. That was nice. I remember that. And your family life, religion, community activities. It seems like—

MS: Did I tell you about putting up fish?

MT: No, tell us about that.

MS: My father and my mother used to go down to the wharf and buy barrels of fish called herring. Did you ever hear of herring?

MT: Oh herring!

MS: And salt them down in barrels for the winter. And then when the hard weather come, they would take these fish out and put them in soak overnight—Had me to do that up. Take them and they were good after a soak, you know, with nice, old hot cornbread.

MT: So, you soak them in water first?

MS: Soak them in water first.

MT: To take the salt out?

MS: Take some of the salt—soak them overnight. Next morning, you can fry them. Nice and hard. Roll them in meal and fry them hard and nice. That and cornbread was good.

[laughter]

MT: Sounds good! Sounds great. Well—

MS: I forgot to tell you the other day. I thought about it after you left.

MT: Yeah. That's interesting. I didn't know about that. Well, is there anything else you'd like to tell: Like, if you could tell the young people in the County and give them some advice or tell them what you—you know, how you think things are today and how things used to be—If you were going to give young people any advice, what would it be?

MS: Just like I'm telling you. Tell them like that. Tell them like I'm telling here. I would tell them the same that I'm telling.

MT: Like what, in particular?

MS: Ain't nothing else. Just like that.

MT: What would you repeat for advice? Do you think we're going in the right direction with our society?

MS: Yeah. I could tell them they're going in the right direction, yeah.

MT: And the county? County folks?

MS: Yeah. Seem like you can't tell the young folks nothing now. They don't believe what you say.

MT: Oh!

MS: Some of them don't believe what you say.

MT: Why do you think that is?

MS: I don't know.

MT: They don't have the respect for elders.

MS: No, they don't. No, they don't have respect for elders like they did in those days when we came along. When we come along, we had to respect everybody and they taught the boys to tip their hats to the ladies—white or black, but they doesn't do that now. And the girls had to speak, and we had garden mothers. Wherever we met our garden mother, we

had to get on our knees and say, “Godmother, please forgive us. Please give me blessings.” That’s what we had to say to them. Don’t care if it was muddy or what, you had to get down on your knees and say, “Godmother. Bless me, Godmother,” and the Godmother would say, “God bless you, child.”

MT: Every time that you met your godmother?

MS: Godmother, uh huh [yes].

MT: Did you have–

MS: I didn’t have a godfather. Nowadays, they has godfather. But my days when I come along, just Godmother and my godmother was named Nettie Gonner. At church, don’t care where it’s out. Coming out church, right down your knees, “Bless me, Godmother.” That’s a different days now.

MT: Well, do you think this is a good thing that the black folks are doing–the black community is doing to do this oral history project? Do you think history is important for people to know?

MS: Yeah, I think so. It’s nice for the younger folks to know the different–the times I came along than they are coming along now. We didn’t do suit ourselves. We had to do as the older people say, our parents say, or even other–Didn’t have to be your parents. Other older people could come and tell you child or my child do right and better not sass them back. If you sassed them back, you got a whooping when you got home. Nowadays, see, not allowed to hit nobody, no child. That’s the difference again.

MT: Yeah, that’s true. Okay. Well, I guess we’ve done it. So, signing off.

[Tape cuts off, and then is turned on again briefly]

MS: *Times Herald*. That's what it was. *Times Herald*.

MT: So, the newspapers were the *Times Herald*—

MS: That was the name of that newspaper. *Times Herald*: H-E-R-A-L-D.

MT: And then, *The Beacon*?

MS: *The Beacon* is last. B-E-A-C-O-N.

MT: And *The Afro*. Okay. Great.

[Tape cuts off]

[End of interview]

[End of Side 2, Tape 3 of 3]