

UNIFIED COMMITTEE FOR AFRO-AMERICAN CONTRIBUTIONS
Oral History Project

Sarah Evelyn Mason Butler

Interviewer: Brenda Coates

Recorded: March 13, 1997

[Begin Side 1, Tape 1 of 2]

BC: In am interviewing Miss Butler in her home in Loveville Maryland. Miss Butler I just want to let you know that if you uncomfortable answering any of these questions please feel free not to answer them.

Miss Butler ok the first question I want to ask you is exactly where do you live?

Where do you live?

SB: Where do I live?

BC: Where do you live?

SB: Right here in Loveville.

BC: Ok and what is the name of this road right out here?

SB: Pincushion Road

BC: Ok you live right out here out of Pin Cushion Road?

SB: Pin Cushion Road right here at the intersection the first house on the right side of Pin Cushion Road.

BC: Ok what's that other road that goes out --

SB: Sunnyside.

BC: So you live right off of Sunnyside and Pin Cushion Roads?

SB: And Pin Cushion right here in Loveville

BC: And where were you born?

SB: I was born in Mechanicsville Maryland.

BC: Ok where in Mechanicsville?

SB: As I can understand my sisters told me that in the -- you know you see a house were DJ's is the Liquor Store what you call it DJ's.

BC: In Mechanicsville right across from the --

SB: I was born in a gray house right straight across from DJ's Store

BC: DJ's is a little bit further up from where the Bingo place is at?

SB: Yeah, up in Mechanicsville.

BC: That great big house almost right there where that --

SB: Great big house it still sitting up there.

BC: On the right side of the road?

SB: On the right side almost right straight in front of it

BC: Okay, okay

SB: And it still sits there.

BC: And you say its still there.

SB: Hum it may have had some remodeling but it is still there.

BC: And that's where you were born?

SB: That's where I was born.

BC: Okay

SB: 76 years ago.

BC: [Laughter] Okay and what year did you move here?

SB: Okay, let me see I got to get straightened out about the year we moved here. A 19 and – now Sugar Pig my youngest child was a one year old. I must have moved here in 19 and a 49 if I am thinking right. 1949 I think I moved here, I am not too sure but I think that was it 1949.

BC: Okay, when you were growing up what were times like? When you were a child?

SB: Oh tuff, tuff, tuff, tuff, tuff, tuff, I must say it was tuff, that is all I can say is it was tuff

BC: What were your parents' occupations? What did your father do?

SB: My father was a share cropper as they say, working for the land and that was the only thing he could do. And my mother was a cook always or a worker for the same firm and that was all her occupation was.

BC: So they share cropper up there where that gray house was

SB: Yeah that's right.

BC: Okay

SB: That's right.

BC: Okay

SB: Back then well see I don't know because I am the young one so I don't hardly know but there's -- my sisters tell me that they shared, they'd go out there on the farm and work and then the white people that they worked for would give them the food for his children to eat of maybe a cow or something like that, that they could us for their children. As far as I know -- see they be telling me this. I

didn't know anything until I grow up to be a little bit older [Police scanner in background].

BC: Okay, okay and so this is the only money that he was making at this time. Was share cropping –

SB: Yeah, um hmm [yes].

BC: He would share crop and getting food from --

SB: Yeah, um hmm and where he got his money from I could not tell you.

BC And your mother cooked for that same family?

SB: That same family yeah, um hmm [yes], she cooked and she did everything for that same family. Alright and she had these girls which were older now I'm the baby now. I'm the baby and she had these daughters and so as soon as they got to the age I think of about 17 or 18 each one of them went away, they left away. They left away and that left – my fathers dead now because I am 3 years old now, my fathers dead now because he died when I was 3 years old and then they all left away and left only three girls there. Because she had seven girl and they left three of them left and that left only three girls. That was me and my sister next to me and one a little older. That's how that was.

BC: Okay

SB: So we all lived in this house as I understand and the sisters helping take care of me. Help my mother take care of me, my father is dead now and they help take care of me. And as we go along, we'd moved to another spot I don't know where. Because then I am only about then I'm getting to be about I guess about 4 years old then back in then when you was 4 years old you didn't know nothing then. A

little child now can tell you more now than we knew when we was ten years old back then and then. Now we're moving around and my sisters are helping the three that's there the others are gone. They decided that they got to go and they got to go and when they got married I don't know about that or when they got married I don't know much about that because see I was young. I don't know much about what they done. Then me and my three -- two sisters alright we are living now we are moving from place to place. We moved from Mechanicsville now we're moving down this away, down here in Loveville.

BC: Okay when you were growing up what church did you all attend?

SB: St. Joseph

BC: You always attended St. Joseph?

SB: But in Mechanicsville we were at Mechanicsville church, a church in Mechanicsville when I was born up there.

BC: Immaculate Conception Uh Hmm [Okay]

SB: But still I was baptized down in St. Joseph's church.

BC: Okay

SB: You see I was -- I don't know why my mother didn't baptize us up there at Mechanicsville church but that's where we were born but we come all the way down to St. Joseph's. I was baptized down in St. Joseph's Church.

BC: When you were young do you remember your family taking any trips?

SB: No my heavens no. My heavens no they didn't know what a trip was like. No we had no way of taking a trip we had no nothing, nothing, nothing, to be honest with you we had nothing.

BC: Okay

SB: When I come up now I can't say what my mother had before I was born but I can say -- I can't say that. [Telephone rings and tape is turned off]

BC: You all didn't take any trips. Okay. Do you remember if your mother was involved with or in any ah or your family was involved in any community activities?

SB: In what?

BC: Community activities?

SB: I tell you again I can not --

BC: From what you can remember?

SB: Not that I can remember. No -- nor was my father, I never know what he could have been involved in nor was my mother not back then when I was three years old. My sisters told me that part. They told me certain things like when and where I was born and where I was christened and when I was a twin sister and all that so then I didn't even know that I didn't have a born certificate until I got ready to get married. When I got ready to get married I had to have something.

BC: Right

SB: And this is what I got right here.

BC: Okay, do you were times better or worse then they are now? When you were coming along?

SB: Oh my lord when I was coming along worse, worse there is no contest then when I was coming along and there never will be. It won't be no worse then the time will ever exist. Ain't no way in the world it could be worse then when I was

coming along. But don't you know that I was happy, happy. My sisters and I -- we was happy and my brothers and all we never complained or nothing we were happy. We didn't have a pair of boots to put on your feet but we was happy. We had to wrap our feet in grass sacks, to go to school and to go out in the snow to get the wood. But we were happy. Happier than I am now, I bet you that. Happier then I am now right now when you got all the convenience in the world.

BC: With all that is in the world.

SB: Umm hmm, yeah.

BC: Let me ask you about your family's health concerns. How did your mother deal with health and illness? Did she have any special home remedies that she used?

SB: Yes indeed, yes ma'am. She had -- When we got sick, it was very seldom that we got sick. Now listen to me very close it was seldom that we got sick walking in that snow and ice and stuff everyday we didn't get sick like the children do now. Nobody got sick like they do now. We went we got this bad cold when we had to get in the snow to get to school and go out and get the wood and down to the spring to get the water back and forth it was snow, ice and hail bad. It wasn't no little tiny like what we have now. We would bundle up some how or another and go down out to the wood pill and get the wood and everything and cut the wood down and saw it down and everything and bring it back to the house and make you own wood stove that was raggedy. We had this old tin heater that was raggedy in one room and the old wood stove that was raggedy in another room and that's what you cook you food on. And we weren't freezing or cold or seem like it is now. She-- when we got these bad colds every once in a while, she

would take a teaspoon of white Vaseline and three drops of kerosene and drop it into the sugar –into the Vaseline, a teaspoon of sugar. Then she would take the teaspoon of sugar and the Vaseline and two drops or three of kerosene and the next day that cold would be all gone. Gone and we would go again then another time we would get another cold and then she would give us that same remedy again. We never went to no doctors and we never took no doctors medicines or nothing. We didn't take no aspirin or nothing. And it got so we didn't even know what that was.

BC: Umm, hmm. Do you remember any other home remedies she had?

It was Vic's Salve – was one special remedy she had to rub you chest in if you got a bad chest cold. Or for a aching or something like that, that was another one.

That and that white Vaseline and she used to buy some kind of liniment. It's called Watkins liniment. She had it for herself really but she was an older woman and she would take it and rub it on her arms and legs for arthritis and that is all we had, nothing else. Or course we had no cough syrup or nothing else like --. Now and then there was some kind or cough syrup she used to get, cause back in those days they had the whopping cough so bad. She would get some kind of cough syrup that I don't remember for the whopping cough.

BC: So you don't remember ever going to the doctor any doctor?

SB: Never, never, if ever I went to a doctor if I do I think I do remember one time no I can't remember myself but I think that after my children were born I did go to the doctor.

BC: For the children or for yourself?

SB: For my children yes no, no not for myself. When we were growing up we didn't know what a doctor looked like really. When I was home my mother had all of us in the room or in the hall in one way or another, and then a midwife would come in and deliver the children, that it. You didn't go to not hospital or nothing like that

BC: Okay back when you were coming along how do you remember the people getting the news?

SB: What?

BC: How did the people get the news?

SB: They didn't get any news no news papers no nothing but really my mother used to work for the lady right up the hill and she used to get her news paper, which was a Washington Post on Sunday She would give my mother that paper. And you know the funnies was all inside of the paper, Dick Tracy and all that mess. We would go to church on Sunday morning and then my sister that's the three one she would it was three of us living there then and my mother would take and the lady would give my mother the paper and we would bring it home. when we would go to church and we would go by that store there that little store there up by that Sky's Tavern and that's were --mama used to work and my sister which was the oldest one of us children she would come home and after we had ate our breakfast, after we had been to church. We'd sit all around the table with benches, not chairs. She would read the funny papers to us. And that was all of the news that we got we didn't get any other news

BC: So a lot of what you knew was by word of mouth? Your mom would tell you things and --

SB: They would tell me things and we ain't have no news paper or nothing, no radios, and we for a long time didn't know what a newspaper was. But the only thing we had back in those days was a catalogue. You know how they would send you a Montgomery Wards or Ladies, or Sears and Roebuck or thing stupid-- an old magazine or something or a catalogue that people would --that don't exist now. We would sit and look in -- would sit and look at old time dress and hats and things. We would sit and look at -- that was so nice for us to watch -- look at. And after that we would have to take it out to the outhouse and -- for to use -- for our toilet.

BC: To use to go to the bathroom.

SB: Yeah, umm hmm. We didn't keep it in the house all the time. We never knew what -- we cherished a newspaper. That lady used to give my mother the news papers on Sunday. Oh we cherished that.

BC: Ok what kind of things did you do as a child? Like what kind of games did you all play?

SB: Oh well you know how we would the game hitch cock or something, where you go out on the lawn and roll --

BC: Hop scotch

SB: Hip scotch or something like that, that's all. And we also played dodge ball but we make our own ball. See we would have to take old socks and old rags and make up a nice little round ball. We would just wrap it and wrap it and wrap it

and wrap it and wrap until we made a great big one and we would make it kind of heavy. We would go out and play dodge ball. It was just the two of us, my sister and then my brothers -- my other brother and we would go out I the yard and we would throw the ball. An old rag ball back and fourth and that was all we had. That was all the recreation we really had. We had no swings no nothing -- no nothing. And then after we would get tired out there, because we were already we tired because we had to walk for -- so many miles. We was already tired and so we would come home and just sit, all you did was sit. Sit and get your lesson on the floor or on a bench. When night come, you'd go to bed. The next morning you would get up and go to the spring and get your water and come back from the spring and then go to the school. You'd get your self together and you would go to school. Then you walk from school, then you go back to the spring again and then you had to go out to the woods and get the wood and bring it back to the house again. And you did all the way around, that's was what you did.

BC: Okay

SB: And that was what you did there was never no pleasure, never no places to go nothing to go to nothing to do but still there was no frustration, we just seemed to be happy sitting with ourselves.

BC: Now besides a going in the woods and getting wood for the cook stoves and going to the spring what other kind of chores did y'all have?

SB: Well we had to we had to clean the floors and make the beds. And we had to get down on our knees and take a big rag and scrub the floors.

BC: Scrub the floors

SB: On both knees we had no mops or nothing. We had to get down on our knees and we had this old brown soap called Octagon soap. You ever heard of it?

BC: I think so, yeah

SB: Yeah Octagon soap and that was a brown soap that was made from old grease that people used to have and that's how it was made. My mother used to make it sometimes. When she went out to work sometimes the people use to give her the old grease that they didn't want and she would come home and make a great long thing of soap. And then she would take and cut it into block and --

BC: Into bars.

SB: Umm, hmm [yes]. And we would take it and we wash our hair with it and we wash the dishes with it and wash clothes with it. Now we did know what a box of soap powder looked like. What was soap powder in those days. That's the truth; I'm telling you the honest truth.

BC: Okay

SB: And then when we come home from school cause see we had to come home from school every day and ever evening I'm gonna tell you what we did my sister and I alright. We went to St. Joseph's school because see we going to school now we had to pay tuition but it was just a little slight tuition now we paid \$15 a month and maybe not that much. And we would work for the nuns and what we would do is we would when everybody else was gone home we would work for the nun's. What we would do is we would take -- go over to the nun's chapel for the nuns. The nun's chapel is right there by the church one or the other of us would take and go and clean all the pews off in the church with that old brown soap and

there wasn't many of them there then. We washed all the church pews today day, but we wouldn't have to do it the next day. The next day we had to do it was the third day. And while my sister was doing that, I would be over at the nun's house washing and cleaning the chapel, dusting and everything for the nun's. Helping the cook over there and maybe I had to peel some potatoes or maybe I had to cut some vegetables or I had to do something to help the cook over. Then after we finish that we go home, but that was to pay our tuition so we could finish going to school up there. And that's how we paid our tuition.

BC: About how far did you have to walk to get to school?

SB: From here now how many miles do you think it is from here to get to the --? I think it he said, he don't think it four miles but I think it four miles it think.

BC: So now -- now I am confused okay. When left from up in Mechanicsville you say you was about four years old?

SB: Umm, hmm [yes], about three or four but I think I was about four.

BC: So you moved down into this area?

SB: Yeah, umm hmm [yes].

BC: Right here on this road?

SB: Yeah, umm hmm [yes] in this area not right down here but up to a place in the back of -- back of -- behind that ... shop over there. Back in those woods way over in those woods that's were I lived.

BC: Oh, Okay

SB: But I couldn't tell you what it would ever be called.

BC: Okay I understand.

SB: See the Amish people over there now.

BC: Yeah, so almost across from route 247?

SB: Yeah, umm hmm [yes], right up across that field -- right up across that field. We lived in a little small house with three rooms in it. A little old small house with three rooms and maybe I'll say three windows. I can't say it was four windows now because it has been so long I can't hardly remember. That's where we moved.

BC: Okay

SB: We gonna stay there -- we gonna stay there because see my father is dead now we gonna stay there. But see after my father had died in two years time my mother had remarried. She got married again so then she gonna bring a son down with her too. Well before we left there, she got married before we left from up there.

BC: From Mechanicsville?

SB: Yeah, and she gonna bring the son down too. See I was about I was about two years older then he was because see she had the son right after I was -- Well I was about four I recon, then he was born.

BC: And then were did you live then? You went over there to --

SB: Yeah that's when we went over there.

BC: Right

SB: That's what I'm talking about. We lived there for -- I swear I can't remember how long we lived there. Then we moved again and we moved further down in Leonardtown somewhere. We lived in a place right in front of the Sunoco station.

There was a little house way back over in that field. We lived there. They called it Green Hill or Greens Farm or something.

BC: Okay

SB: Alright we lived there. Then we left there and we moved to another place with my uncle John Somerville. He takes us -- my mother and me. All my sisters are gone now. Even that one that was home with me she a she went to St. Peters. My cousin came down and took her to St. Peters and she went to High School up there, and that leaves no body at home but me and my brothers so we moved we lived down there way back in the woods or something or other somewhere I can't even remember. I wouldn't never know now what it looked like then. Anyways, we moved out of there, we didn't do nothing but move, move, move, from house to house, house to house, that's all we did.

And then we -- my uncle Johnny Somerville down here, he had a little house that sits on top the hill down there so he takes us all down to that house down there.

BC: That's still in Loveville?

SB: Yeah that's still in Loveville see right there between them ... up at that little white house sitting on the hill when you come up the road. When we there was a big yellow house there and he put us there

BC: Right

SB: We lived there. My mother goes to take care of her sister. Her sister was sick, Vincenia's mother. My mother goes to take care of her most of the day. Now she's not working so much now with the white people because I guess she done

worked so much that I guess that she done got tired. And we lived there and we leave there and [Telephone rings and tape is cut off] we go we go back again where we come from on that side. We goes back again and we lived in another little house back over there.

BC: That's back behind that ...

SB: We go right there where we were at first. Then we go back to another house and we lived there. Now this is me and my mother and my brothers. My five brothers we all traveling now all my sisters gone every body is gone.

BC: Okay

SB: Then we -- after that then we --h after that after we done got all that straightened. Next thing that happen I said "Lord have mercy". I said, "I don't know what I am going to do." I said, "if I ever get to be the age of eighteen", I was even eighteen then. I said, "if I ever get to the age of eighteen I am gonna just go and get married or something to change something." But I did not at eighteen because my stepfather was living and he said you are not gonna get married you gonna be bout thirty years old before you gonna get married. So I said "there ain't nothing that I can do". Then I leave my mothers house and go live with my grandmother.

BC: Ok and how old were you then?

SB: And I was I think I must have been about thirteen – fourteen, I know it was something like that. See each year we would move and each year I was just a year older, that's all.

BC: Right

So I went to live with my grandmother right across here and so I am still in Loveville I ain't move no where but Loveville. I moved with my grandmother for about a year. Then next thing my sister that had already been left home long years ago she took sick so my mother says – always call me a nick name says “Tom you got to go and stay with your sister and help her out.” So there I go. I didn't want to leave my mother there with the five boys because she was getting old -- and she would say you got to go she lived right down here right down by Hurds Store.

BC: Your sister?

SB: In a house way back up in the woods, old house with two rooms to it and she said “you got to go now and live with your sister and help your sister take care of her children.” And see her husband was gone and you know how they were in those days they were gone and no body know where they were or nothing. So then anyway then I bagged up my little bit of clothes and I goes down and help to take care of my sister. She was very sick she had what they called -- see they had tuberculosis in those days and no body never know really what it was back in them days. So that's what they say that she had tuberculosis. So then she had one girl and two boys, well I stayed there, and stayed there, and stayed there with her. I can't remember how many months I stayed there with her helping her out and helping to cook while she was sick in the bed. She couldn't work then or nothing because she was sick she had worked all along.

BC: And you would go—

SB: But she had got sick and at that time your parents could make you go and help and in those days if your sisters or anybody in your family got sick they would come to your parents house. See like if your husband was to leave you or your husband would go a stray and we had you had to pick up and leave your household and come and live with your mother and them. That is how that went along for days and days. That's how it worked in my family. I say I don't know nothing about nobody else's. So then my sister -- so then she -- she got real sick that we -- nobody couldn't take care of her. She had this daughter her daughter is nine years old. I'm about three years older than her daughter and -- it was Christmas time. And the white folks the Guys they lived right down here right down the dirt road right there they give her a lot of little things that spin around here at Christmas time. A lot of oranges and apples and they give them to her. And so she and I were in there fixing Christmas dinner, which wasn't nothing but a turkey. I doubt if we had any vegetable to go with it. I really don't honest I don't think we had a vegetable to go with, really being honest. I don't think we had a vegetable to go with int. Just a turkey, the turkey wasn't a big thing you go to the store and get turkey. No you had to pick that turkey. We pick that turkey and pull all the feathers off it and everything. So we had -- we were in this little room and her daughter and the boys they were in the other side. They were so enthused about the Christmas thing that spun around. Oh they were so enthused about that. She said "don't touch near one of them thing there until Christmas day. Tomorrow is Christmas day. She was making biscuit or something or

other. Anyway she had flour all over her hand and I forget what I was doing, I forget what I was trying to do. I might have been trying to wash the turkey or something, I can't remember exactly what I was doing. You had to go out doors before you could get into the next room. You couldn't walk right out here so you could go into the next room you had to go outside.

BC: Oh, okay.

SB: You had to go outdoors then go into the next room. So she -- the next thing we heard this scream so both of us want to run to the door at the same time and go out the door and in the room there. And her daughter was in full blaze she stuck the thing up her dress because she thought she heard her mother coming. She told her not to touch it. So she stuck the thing up the front of her dress and she burned unmerciful. Oh, my Lord! The meat was just almost hanging off of her! And we take -- here we are we was just standing there don't know what to do. She had all this flour all over her hands and what we gonna do we way back in the woods. So she said to me she says, "Tom run quick run back over there to Miss Agnes Sky." That was right over here, this place down there. "And call Miss Agnes Sky that's who she used to work for. And tell her, "come quick the child is burn up". She went to get the blanket and wraps the child in a blanket and that's what made it worse.

BC: Right

SB: Burnt her unmercifully! Burned all of her hair off all burned but ... Burnt all of her hair off, eye brows, all her breast, everything! She was night years old. Stomach burned, everything all down her legs everything! So I am running. I

know I must had to run a mile, I know I did. I goes over and get the woman Mrs. Sky and she come -- and she sends her son over in a truck, real quick. She says, "Go my God and take that child to Leonardtown Hospital!" -- That old hospital down there. So she comes over in the truck and she takes her -- her -- and picks the child up, the child was just as raw as you would see a raw potato. And picked her up and put her in the truck and put the blanket around her and carried her to Leonardtown Hospital, they kept her for two days.

Now okay, my sister has got to move out of that house. She no longer can stay there. She's gonna move with my mother and my mother lived right down there on top the hill by Vincenia and them. That's when we lived in the little yellow house, you know.

[End of Side 1, Tape 1 of 2]

[Begin Side 2, Tape 1 of 2]

So then now we all gonna move all of us are gonna move on over and see my sister she thought she was coming home with the child and both of her hands caught fire. This is the honest truth. And fired on her hands was just like you would fry a piece of meat. Oh lord there it was again! So we finally got to were the people get to take her to the truck to my mother's house. We all going -- her she is with her hands look like a fried potato. So then -- they takes her back down to the doctor -- to the hospital and the put -- little sticks between her fingers like

this, all the way through her fingers. Her fingers were just like this like this, but they didn't put any gloves or nothing like that.

Anyway and then after that she gonna live with my mother, then all of us lived right there together. All of us piled up there together now. So the next two days they send the child home. They sent her home from old Leonardtown Hospital. When they sent her home they sent a little bed about big as that rug there then they had boards. They had boards all the way down on the bed because they couldn't put nothing over her. She was just burned right up like a crisp. I mean burned up like a crisp!. They laid her on the -- on this board. Now she's living with my mother now. The doctor said, the old doctor -- lets see I think it was old doctor oh lord I forget what doctor it was now. It was doctor Camalier and Dr. Bean, them old doctors. They said "well she will never-- she'll survive but she will never have a child, she had no stomach." She will never grow up to have no child and she will never ever have a child! So anyway that goes. So what we use to do. This is the truth I am telling. We went to the store in those days and we got a big bucket of Linseed oil. Linseed oil I don't know what it look like now linseed oil. And we went outside out where we had picked turkeys for Christmas and stuff like that. And turkey feathers -- and me and my sister had to sit beside that bed mostly everyday. Not all day long but everyday and saturate that child's body with linseed oil. And that's what cured her. And then after a long time, I can't remember how long. She got a great big scab over her whole body, all the way down! Then the doctors called her mother and father and they takes all the skin from both of themes arms and put -- place it on this child. She had no skin

on her at all. No skin her arms and everything just burned right up! And so they took the skin from the mother and father and they ah placed it on the child so that it would cover at least part of the arm. But not this part of her body. See they never did -- right today she walks around with a complete white body all the way down except her arms and things it's the prettiest skin you ever want to look at. And then we used to have to sit and put that linseed oil on her and then she got a great big ole scab over her body and then after that the scab -- I can't remember but it went away. I don't know what we did, whether we bath it or what we done. And right to this day before God, I tried to figure out how did the child go to the bathroom, because she was laying flat on her back on a board, I don't remember. I can't remember now because it's been to long. But I remember when the child healed, the child got up and walked around then her father -- her mother died so then her father comes and he decided to take the children. First -- no they didn't take her right away. First she stayed with my mother then she stayed with my aunt down there and then she stayed with my other aunt over. The children -- the girl and two boys. My aunts would take them first one then the other would take them a little while. And then my grandmother would take them for a little while. Everybody would take them and keep them a while because the father wasn't no where to be seen. One day he walked out the clear blue sky and comes and gets his children I think one of them was at my aunt's houses. He gets the children the three children he takes them way up. He lived in Mechanicsville too and he had an aunt up there and he took the children to his aunt's house. And that's were he kept them until they was -- until the -- her name was Gladys I guess

until she grew up to be oh around about I guess about sixteen I recon or something like that. But he went off and left the child sitting there with his aunt and her two brothers and they never seen him anymore for a long time. So she raised those two little children herself. His daughter, the one that was burnt!

The doctor said “well she will never have a child”. So then she decided that after the children had grown up to be big boys like that, then she went to school. She went to school up there in Brandywine up there some where or another because he moved up there close somewhere with some of his aunts or somebody. So he sent the three of them to school. She went to school and a she met this man which they say was a distant cousin of hers. All right she married him and you know how many children she had, seven!

And the doctor said “she --

BC: Said she would never have any--

SB: And she had seven children.

BC: So now – to get back, okay. They could not keep her in the hospital because they couldn’t do anything for her?

SB: They couldn’t do anything for her in the hospital. I think they kept her three days and I am not sure it was three days. They brought her home and they brought her this little bed with little boards on it. And that’s why she laid on the boards. They had lie a little old white sheet over her cause they never had no colored sheets in those days. The white sheet -- and laid the white sheet up over her body. But it was covered up. You had to sit by her everyday and put the linseed oil with a

turkey feather. All up -- and saturate the body all day long -- saturate the body.

And it healed just as pretty as you ever wanted to see. But of course this part of her body was pure white.

That part never changed but her arms and everything – she’s got the prettiest skin and face. Her face was all burned up now she got the prettiest skin on her face.

BC: Because they took patches from her parents?

SB: Yes from her parents. But you would never know that she was ever burnt unless she take and pull her clothes up and show you.

But she was burned unmercifully, oh Lord!. It was the worse thing I ever seen in my life.

But then after that went on and we went through that ordeal so that went on through my life. I said, “oh, Lord and I swear” I said, I hope nothing else to go through no more. Which I didn’t, I had to much more to go through. Then me and my mother ah we just survived and we worked hard everyday. I went to work. I started working then, and my mama worked every day everyday she was a cook in the lunch room. And she cooked everyday and I used to go and help her on weekends. That’s how we did. Boy I tell you when I was coming along I don’t know how anybody in the world ever survived it.

BC: Survived, okay.

SB: I used to walk from Chaptico mostly oh I don’t know Chaptico must be about seven miles from here I think.

BC: Okay

SB: And once a month the white people would give my mother a bag of wheat and a bag of corn. Whether they would keep that corn in a bag or what they did with it. But see only certain times of the year that you -- that you harvest the wheat and stuff, but I can't remember. But I know that once a month they would give my mother a bag of wheat -- a bag of wheat and a bag of corn. And me and my sister used to take and put it on our back and walk from here. I'm still here in Loveville and walk to right back there to where that ... shop and walk from there to Chaptico to get it ground up into flour and meal.

BC: How big was the bag?

SB: The bag -- Oh my goodness, I forgot how much it weighted! It was a great big bag!

BC: Was it a twenty five pound bag?

SB: It must have been twenty five pounds or more.

BC: And y'all would walk with it on your back?

SB: Walked with it on our back and we would stop a little while and sit down, and we would put it up under our arm and stop a little while and go to the mill. We'd sit at the mill on the bench -- all the way down and wait for them to grind it up for us. See they had so many big -- big orders that they would take our and grind it up for us and we didn't pay a penny for it. My sister would take the flour and I would take the meal and we would come on back to my mother and she had two little barrels sitting down in the corner of her kitchen. One over there and one over there. She put the flour in one and the meal in the other. And that's what we ate. You know that we didn't eat nothing but biscuits and cornbread we didn't eat --

never knew what a piece of no kind of bread looked like. That's what we ate and we lived -- we lived and we just seemed to be happy and we never got sick and nothing like -- That's what I can not understand.

BC: Did y'all have any chickens and stuff like that?

SB: No, no.

BC: So where did you get your--

SB: We had a chicken at first as I can understand my father. See I am talking about my father, I'm too young to know. My sisters told me my father had chickens and he had cows. Because that's what white men would give him. You see he didn't -- he didn't own nothing. They would give him that because he was working for them.

BC: Right

SB: That's where we got all the chickens and things that we had after my father died was hand me downs. See people used to give us chickens. People used to give my mother chickens they used to give her almost anything. And she worked all the day -- years it seem like in hog worked. You understand me now. She worked for people killing hogs. This would be about ten or fifteen or twenty of them or what not. Then they would take and give her -- take and give her like the hog head or the hog feet or the hog something other else. And she would come home and grind all that up and make herself a whole great big thing of lard. And that's what we made our biscuits with.

BC: Okay

SB: That's what we made our biscuits with. We weren't hungry we never did get what you would call hungry. But we never had nothing we just ate the ordinary stuff. We would eat -- on Friday she would cook a big pot of beans -- those lima beans, a great big pot full. Then we'd make biscuits and that's what we ate for Friday. We ate plenty of chicken because we had a plenty of chicken. People would give us plenty of chicken, we had plenty of chicken. Yeah we always eat chicken.

BC: Okay

SB: Yes sire, I tell you [Male voice: What are you talking about ma? Tape cuts off] -- coming back to a little normal situation now. After that in the 30's now that was kind of normal. Back to the thirties that would be probably about '35 about '39. I remember I was about I must have been about fifteen by then now. About, I guess I must have been about fourteen or fifteen now, now me and my mother now -- I am the only one there but my mother with her five boys. I am the only girl there every one of them done left all them done left and left me there. But I am still struggling from one sister to the other. From one to the other but I'm always doing something. Then I went to work after I was about nine years old. I use to walk through the woods -- right here from where I am living at now. Walk through the woods and help the ladies and they gave me fifty cents a day.

BC: Cooking?

SB: Cooking I would cook first and then I would help scrub the floors. Then I would wash clothes and all of that was combined and I got fifty cents a day. Then -- then I would come back home and I would have to help my mother again. I got to

go back and help my mother because she getting old and she can't do much. I got to come back from over there and work with my mother too because the boys couldn't cook. I'd come back home and cook for my mother.

BC: And you were about nine then?.

SB: I was about nine or ten or something like that. I wasn't much older then that, I tell you.

BC: Okay

Then when -- after a while my mother -- one of her sisters gave her around about six little chickens. You know how those little tiny chickens -- give her about six little chickens and she put them in a little box that I can remember. She raised them I can remember. She -- after a while when she had a whole bunch. I say around -- about ten chickens, got to be hens. So then she would sit -- take them out in the little out house we had -- that little ragged out house we had sitting out there. She would sit those chickens out there so that she could maybe get some more. Maybe eggs would hatch and give her some more chickens. We use to go out there -- this is nothing to laugh at. Me and my sister then we were still in Loveville, right over there in Loveville. Me and my sister use to go and still the eggs from under the chickens. And take them to the store and get candy for them and that is how you got your candy then.

BC: Okay [Laughter]

SB: Exchange eggs for candy. Didn't your father ever tell you anything about that? I know you're a lot older then --

BC: Okay

SB: That what I say about people. Just like I told these children. Everybody don't live a life back in those days. There were some people that lived altogether differently from what I did. We would take the chicken -- the chickens were getting ready to hatch. We would take the chicken and the old chicken would pluck you all over your hand. We wanted some candy, so we take the eggs from under the chicken. If you had six eggs, oh man you'd get a big of candy like that! [Laughter] Then we -- then we -- a lot of people don't believe that. Then we -- I mean I tell you the Gods -- it was something in those days. We use to be so happy when we at that bag of candy.

BC: Now how old were you when you first went out on your own, when you left home?

SB: I never did leave home. I never did.

BC: Okay

SB: Only thing [time] I left was to live with my sisters and my grandmother. But see I never did leave home. I never did leave my mother. I'm the only one that never did leave my mother. I stayed with her always. But she would send me to help my sister over there if she was sick. I would have to leave home and go and help her. But then I come back in a couple of months or so; or two months or three months. Then she would send me to live with my grandmother and then I would stay there for maybe three months or so. Then I would leave there and come back home again. I'm always coming back home.

BC: Coming back home. Okay

SB: And she would just sit in there with her five boys, that's all. She and her five boys, that's all.

BC: Okay. Now, Okay – Now – so you said when you first sort of started working, you were making 50¢ a day doing cooking and cleaning and whatever. That's the kind of work you've always done?

SB: That's what I've always done, umm hmm [yes]. Until I got – I cooked all the way around. Then when I got married, I still was a cook. Still was a cook.

BC: Okay

SB: I never did stop cooking.

BC: How did you meet your husband?

SB: One day my mother was working at the lunchroom. At the lunch room I'm tell you about up there. Well then, she had a girl working for her -- working with her. So this girl had a friend in the 7th District where my husband is from. So one Sunday when I went to asked her -- we finished cooking and all – the lunchroom was closed for the evening. We used to have to pick the chickens right then and there. Put them on the tables – the mayors and everything use to come there and eat. The famous lunchroom called "Loves Lunchroom". I know you done heard about that.

BC: Now where was that?

SB: Loves, right up here in Loveville.

BC: Where was it?

SB: Right here Loves Lunchroom.

BC: Where the Tavern is?

SB: Umm hmm [yes]

BC: It was right on that corner where Loveville Tavern is?

SB: Not on that corner, on this corner. See on this corner where they tore it down.

All these tree and that's where – she use to work there too. That was a store there.

BC: Loveville Tavern use to be a store.

SB: It use to be a store, she use to work there.

BC: Across the road there use to be a lunchroom?

SB: Right up there was a lunchroom called “Loves Tea Room”. That's what it was called back in those years. Then my mother – we had to got there every weekend, like on a Saturday and Sunday and help her to get – pick the chickens already. They used to have chicken dinners and they use to have soft crabs in the summer. Big lunchroom, big lunch room. So then this particular day, this girl I tell you -- she got help her because I had to stay home with the children. I lived right across there back of the ... shop. I'm still there taking care of the boy. So my mother -- So one day this girl said to her, said “Miss Lynn why don't you let Sarah go down to the dance hall with me”. I know I was about – let me see 16, 18, 19 20. I know I was 16 then. “Let her go down to the lunch room – down to the dance hall with me. My mother said, “well I can not tell you anything right now”, she said, “I'll have to ask my husband”. That was my stepfather. She said, “I ask him first before I can let her go. So she goes home that night and I'm still with her. She asked him, she said, “Walker” his name was Walker. “Walker”, she said, “can this child go to the dance hall with Catherina”? Her name was Catherina. He said, “well, how long are they going to stay?” So she said, “Oh they'll be back

early”. He said, “well, she can go this time and she better be back here by 11:00.” So then I was kind of scared. I wasn’t too anxious about going, but then I wanted to go.

So I go home and put this little zoot suit on. The dress thing with the long thing [laughter]. I puts this old zoot suit on and I go to – she comes over -- she had a friend down there. The friend comes over in an old Model T car, I never will forget. He comes and picks her up and they comes back in the woods and picks me up. Old road is so bad. They come all back in the woods to pick me up. So they go all down – I half way scared to death because I haven’t been used to going out. I gonna sit up in the corner scared right to death. So we went on down --. The band was named Johnny Herbert. Not Johnny Herbert – Johnny Herbert or somebody were playing. Old zoot suit, they had the board, ... board and a harmonica and that’s the band they had. No, no, no saxophones or nothing like that. Oh, boy you could have yourself a ball there! [Laughter]

So then this boy come up to me and said – Catherina called him over there and said, “this is Sarah I want you to meet her”. She already knew him. So he come over there and said, “do you want to dance?” “No, no, no”, I said. I folded my arms and said, “no I don’t want to dance. He said, “come on and dance.” I could dance then. Oh I could dance – with anybody old or young, I could dance! No, I wouldn’t dance, I wouldn’t dance. So he kept on asking me two or three times. The last time when he asked me, went out there and danced. I met him that night. So the next Sunday, here he comes over to my house – to my mother’s house over there. I was living over there in the woods. So he said, “won’t you come on and

go with us again, we're going back down to the dance hall again." So my stepfather said, "yeah, well you bought her home that time --11:00, I was looking at the clock." He said, "Now she can go again, you better, but you better have her here at 11:00!" He said, "I'm going to have her here at 11:00." So I went again. I went with him for four years before I married him. Four long years – and I didn't have another boyfriend. Never had none, none, none what-so-ever. I just went along with him and he'd come up every other day or so – he'd come ever week or so. No every week. He'd come and pick me up and I go to the dance hall. That's all we could go to, dance hall and sit up in a corner.

BC: Now where was that? Where was the dance hall?

SB: Down in the 7th District called Bushwood – Bushwood, Maryland. It was a little dance hall that sat right on the top of a hill. Right down on the water. That's were we used to go. No place else, no place else.

BC: Okay

SB: Brenda, I want to tell you this. So then I went with him for four years. Then I got married in 1940. Then we was going down to a movie – going down to the movie down in Leonardtown. I know you don't know nothing about it. We had to go – black people had to go up the back steps.

BC: I remember.

SB: And the white people sit down. We used to go to the movie. That's were I used to go a lot. Go up the back steps, climb all the way up and sit in the back. White people were down at the bottom. That's were I used to go to the movie – I used to

go to the movie every Sunday. After that I didn't bother with the dance hall, I used to go to the movie. And you know –

BC: So you had to walk down there?

SB: Yeah, no he had a car.

BC: Oh, Okay.

SB: He finally got a care. First I had to walk. See I did all the walking when I was – Oh, my Lord, I did all the walking when I was about six years old. I was walking from that until I was about 18 almost. I did all the walking. We never had no car, no nothing, just walking, walk, walk, walk all the time. But he had an old Model T car. He would come and get us and take – rumble seat way back, on the back part of it. When had to sit there on the back part. And we would go to the movie, but you had to go up them back steps. Black people went up the back steps and white people sit down. And that's what we used do. But we used to go to the movie every Sunday then and come on back home.

BC: Okay, so you went to movies and you went to the dance hall.

SB: No, we'd leave the movies and come home. No—we didn't go to the dance hall.

BC: No I don't mean – I didn't mean the same night, but I mean when your were—

SB: Those were the only two places we went.

BC: Right, Okay.

SB: The dance hall – I wasn't a what-you-ma-call-it, a little, little tiny place up at the corner and then we went to the movie. That's the only two – the only recreation – the only, the only, only, only recreation we had.

BC: Okay, and church functions?

SB: Yes, that's right church – the festivals. The festivals use to come, that was a big –

BC: A big –

SB: A big thing when you go to the festivals. That was the biggest thing that ever was. You would look forward to that every year. We use to go to the festivals, man I would – I had hand me downs, but I would call myself dressed up. People use to give me their clothes. My mother use to work for Dr. Cameleer. Old Dr. Cameleer had died long years ago. My mother use to work for him and his wife. They had an adopted daughter, and she left and went in the nun-hood – she went to be a nun. They gave us all the clothes that she had because she could no longer wear them because she was a nun. Man we use to go up to that festival dressed so pretty! Oh, Lord they would sit and look at use and say “where in the world did them children get them clothes”! “Where did they get them clothes from!” Because we knew that our mother wasn't able to buy them. We had all kind of fancy dresses and everything. No shoes because our feet were to big to wear her shoes. [laughter].

BC: Okay

SB: We use to have – we use to – it was fun, it was fun. Nobody fussed and got made with one another and it wasn't nothing. We just had fun, old plan fun with nothing. With nothing, I mean tell you with nothing. We used to along just as fine. Me and my sisters – the one that stayed home, we got along just as fine. I'm telling you the truth, she' been dead not about four years, five years now. We use to get along just fine. I mean to tell you, that's the like I lead until I got married. After I got married, things got better, after I got married.

BC: Do you remember, tell me something about your wedding. You got married in 1940.

SB: Umm hmm [yes]

BC: Where in St. Joseph's?

SB: Umm hmm [yes]

BC: Do you remember who your --.

SB: My sister and Philip Fenwick, Clara Fenwick's sons. There were the maid of honor and --

BC: Best Man

SB: Yeah, I got married in 1940. I got married 2:00 in the afternoon. So I went up to -- all you had to do was go over night to talk to the priest. One little time, you did it. You had to go for him to see who you are. So I -- I went to the priest and said one day I said to my mother, "I'm gonna married." And she said "I know your not gonna get married!" And I said, "yes I am, I'm getting married". She liked to die. Because I'm the only girl there and I'm the only one helping her out. Oh she liked to die! She though I wasn't going to get married. She cried and carried on terrible. She got sick and everything.

So I went up to the priest that night. The priest called Father Murphy, little old tall priest. He said let me tell you something, "if your not here at 2:00, I'm not going to marry you." So I said, "oh, I'll be there." I was so shy and everything. I didn't know if I wanted to get married or -- But in my mind I thought that I better get married. That would help my mother. She my mother was all alone with those boys and nobody to help her. To my idea -- I says, "Well, if I get married,

now I'll know I'll have husband that will help her. Me and my husband together will help her to do different things that she wanted.

So I got up that morning and said, "I not gonna get married, ain't no way."

[Laughter] I said, "now what am I doing", I said to myself. I was sitting on the side of the bed waiting for my sisters to come down. My sister was always slow as molasses anyway. So she didn't show up and here it was about 10 minutes to two. About 10 minutes to two, that's the truth. I said, "oh Lord." I sat down and started to cry because my sister hadn't showed up. Then around five minutes to, here she comes poking in. I could – said, "didn't I tell you that the priest told me that if were not there at 2:00 we will not – he will not marry me. "Well I had to do this, and I had to do this." I said, 'come on, come on lets go.'" She wasn't married but she had a boyfriend Hazel that she married. "Come on, come on" – they had some kind of old Ford car. So we goes out there to St. Joseph just as hard as we could go. Got out and the church was packed with people! Oh, Lord the church was packed! I was so shamed in what the priest said – did. He walked off the alter and walked to back door were you come into St. Joseph's Church. He said, didn't I tell you that I wasn't going to marry you because you are late?" He said, "I told you if you wasn't there at 2:00 you wasn't gonna get married." Of course then I broke down. I started crying and everything. "Don't, stop crying I going to"-- He was a sassy priest. "Stop crying I'm gonna marry you". "I told you last night" -- [Laughter] It was so funny. And my sister, she wanted to cry herself. Of course she's the one that made me late. So we goes on up and walk on up to the alter. The brides maid and what you call it – the – walk on up to the

alter. We get on up the alter and – “Step up here, step up her!” He was a hollering and everybody was a sniggling and giggling. Got up there and he couldn’t find the ring, and there it was again. I swear were laughed under our – we laughed at the priest. “Stop laughing!” Everybody sitting in the church and he’s hollering. “What are you laughing at, he can’t find the ring. You know he’s nervous.” And I know it was ½ hour before that man found the ring. [Laughter] You know were he had the ring, where men use to wear watch pocket. He had this little suit and coat. He forgot that he had put it in the watch pocket. [Laughter] Then we all – when I got married, it must have been three o’clock, I reckon. It must have been 3:00. But anyway, I got married and that was that.

BC: Okay

[End of Side 2, Tape 1 of 2]

[Begin Side 1, Tape 2 of 2]

SB: ... a little dinner. Not nothing like what people have now. Nothing like that. But anyway, we were suppose to have a little dinner. I had bought chicken, what else was it – chicken and mashed potatoes and it must have been kale or green beans because it was in October. I forgot what it was. Now I only had three things, only three things. So then I had my friend Minnette Fenwick, she’s cooking the chicken while were at church. And low and behold when we come back from the church. We’re going back to my Mama’s right across from the Fenwick’s Tavern. That’s were we lived in a house over there. We come back from the

church – she had fell asleep and burnt every piece of the chicken! [Laughter]
Now here we come walking in the house and nothing to eat, not one thing. They hadn't mashed the potatoes and burnt the chicken up and therefore nobody had nothing to eat. [Laughter] Now were going to sit there and look stupid. Then I begin to cry again because I don't know what in the world had happened. But she – that's what she died with some kind of disease. How people sleep, fall asleep over something. I don't know what you call it. She had fell asleep and burnt all the chicken up. We didn't have no more that we could put on there. So everybody just sat and looked at one another, but there wasn't that many that came to the house. We just sat and looked at eat other with nothing to eat.
Nothing –

BC: But all the people that were at church, were there –

SB: No, not all them didn't come see –

BC: But the people – all the people that were in the church, were there for your wedding?

SB: Yeah, but just the people in my community came to the house. Like my next door neighbor, and the one across the street and down the street a little ways. They were the only ones that came to the house. There was nothing to eat. We had no food. We just sat there and looked stupid. Oh, boy I've had some experiences in my like. So that just went on and we went on, just like that.

BC: What has your family life been like? Your relationship with your husband and your children --

SB: Oh, yeah, just lovely. Very, very good – Oh, you know he was a husband sometime. He would get evil something, but nothing violent. Nothing like that -- he stayed away from home all the time. He stayed in the river. He only come home on weekends. He never stayed there permanently. He stayed in the river down there with the people he worked for. He had to stay down there. He would come home every weekend.

BC: So he was a waterman?

SB: Yeah, umm hmm [yes] he didn't stay home with me. Only one year – one year he was -- After I was married for three years, he was called in the Service – in the Navy. That's what he wanted anyway because he loved the water. So they called him in the Navy, then I was home alone [me and my mother] without him at all. For only one whole year, because they discharged the married men. That was in 1940, about 1944 or 1945 or something like that. Then they discharged all the married men. So he come on back home and went in the water again. He only stayed home – he only came home on the weekends, only weekend! Once in a while, he might would come home in the middle of the week. But he stayed with the people he worked with – all the – the whole time. But he did that ever since he was seven years old.

BC: Worked down there in water –

SB: Umm hmm [yes], every since he was seven years old. So that went on – so then after he had to come out of the water. He got sick and he retired. But he worked several places. They took him off the water, but he worked all up there in Calvert Cliffs and all those places way up the road and down in Lexington Park. He

worked around everywhere. He always would worked and then when he got this trouble, he died with cancer. When he got real sick, that was the end of that.

October I'd be married if he was living 67 years. I got along fine with him, but you know a husband, he was evil sometime.

BC: Just the normal stuff?

SB: Just as he could be, but he was good to his children, very good to his children.

That was all to that, he was just like any other ordinary man at times.

BC: Okay, let me go to the next question and ask you what part has religion played in your life?

SB: To tell you the truth, I've been catholic all my life. I've been – I have been next to everything in the catholic religion that they had. I was suppose to be a nun you know at one time. When I was going to school, I had the nuns order a big truck that they gave to the nuns in those days, a big truck. I was suppose to be a nun. Then something come to me that I don't want to leave my mother. Something come to me in my mind, where am I going. "Where am I going, I'm going to leave my mother and go way over there somewhere or another and I don't know were I'm going. I said, "No". They got my truck and everything all ready for me.

BC: So, how old were you then?

SB: I was – then I was, let me see how old I was – 14 ,15 in those days the took you real early. I must have been about 14, I can't these ages straight, about 14 I think. I always did – I went to catholic school. I was Baptist and married at the catholic church – all and that. And I was a very, very, very good catholic. Because I never missed a day going to church -- a Sunday going to church for

about 10 years. I never missed a day going to school for about 10 years. In all the snow and ice, I never missed a day. And no boots, nothing but a pair of old shoes that wasn't worth nothing.

BC: But you went to every day.

SB: Yeah, went to school and didn't miss no days. Then worked after school for the catholic church. I worked for the priest and I worked for the nuns all up until I was around, I don't know—

BC: So you worked for the nuns just for your tuition or you worked for them --

SB: Regular, and see for my tuition. After I graduated in the 8th grade, I still worked for them, the nuns and the priest.

BC: Do you remember how much money you made then?

SB: When I worked for the priest?

BC: Umm hmm [yes].

SB: I don't think anything. I think if they were able to give me some fruit or something like that. I don't think I made a dollar. If it wasn't for the catholic organization – no not a dollar. No when I was working for the nuns when I graduated out of the 8th grade, it paid my tuition. I don't think they paid me anything. I think they gave me fruit on a Saturday. They would give something like canned goods and I would bring it home to my mother. But I never got no money, never!

BC: Okay, Now did you ever belong to any of the church organizations, the committees or anything?

SB: No

BC: Do you participate in any of the committee activities?

SB: Church?

BC: No, any organizations –

SB: No because I really never had the opportunity to do community – do nothing like that. I've always – like the a – like the PTA's and stuff like that, I never did – able to do that, if seemed like to me it was always work or something that I could never get to the people. No, I would have loved to, but never.

BC: How do you feel about life in general in St. Mary's County? In what ways is it different from what it use to be?

SB: Oh, my Lord, yes it's so much different. Just think now in St. Mary's County, like I sit sometime and talk with my children. Just think of what they have now and what we went through and we survived! That can't survive now! They can not survive! My children – not only my children, but a lot of other children I've spoken with. "You crazy, I don't believe, I'm not going to believe it, I'm not going to believe it". Like I told – I talked to ... this morning and I said, "do you believe that I walked all my life until I was a grown woman. Just walked, and didn't know what it was get in a car." You didn't have car. In the road there was a horse and buggy, old cart and once in a while an old car. Like the Amish people have now. The Amish people is no excitement to me because I used to ride in an old buggy – an old wagon. But that was on occasion. But I walked every single day. I walked to church on Sunday, I walked to school every single day. I never did get in a car. The only time I got in a car was if it was pouring down and raining so hard that you couldn't even see. Sometime I walked in that rain. My

uncle John T. Somerville would come up to pick his children up and he would like all of use pile up in there together. That's when I got in a car. That's the only time I rode in car. That's true, I never rode in a car until I got married. That's the only time I could get in a car and that was very seldom. You walked everywhere you walked, you walked. That's why a say today, I don't have to much trouble, the only thing I have is arthritis so bad I guess from walking so much. [Laughter] It had to come down on you one time or another. You get old, you got to get something. Like I say now, look at these children and everything that they have in lifetime now. Everything, nice hot running water, and nice this and nice cars and nice this. The don't seem to be satisfied. We had to do all that old walking in the cold and never complained. We were satisfied. Not at all, we didn't complain, because we knew we couldn't do no better.

BC: Better, right.

SB: That's right, we couldn't do no better, but I'll tell you.

BC: When you were coming along what were race relation like, segregation?

SB: You always come around the back door. You never come in the front door at nobody's house. When I worked for all those white people, that my mother and I worked for, we had to go in the back door. It was a couple of the white people, like the Loves up there where we were working in the lunchroom. They were very nice people, you could come in her front door and pay it no mind. But on average, mostly everywhere you went, you had to go in the back down.

When I worked on the Base – I worked on the Base quite a few years and I had to go in the back door, not the front! The back door on the Base! You do not go in

the front door! One day when I was going in the back door like I usually do, this great big dog, somebody's dog next door – across the hall had got up into the door where I go in and just wouldn't let me come in. I was so frighten I went running all the way around the building and went to the front door. I was working for this colonel – for a colonel then. I went running around the front door and rang the doorbell, because that dog had just scared me to death! The dog was just showing his teeth. He wouldn't let me in the door because he didn't know who I was. The woman had just let him out of her apartment over on that side. The apartments were right across from each other. The colonel came to the door and he said to me, "why did you ring that doorbell?" I said to him, "I rang the doorbell because it's a dog in the back there at the door that I come in, and he wouldn't let me." He said, "oh that dog, he'd never hurt you". I said, "that's what you think because you're in here and I'm out there." He said, "I don't want you to come to that door anymore and disturb my wife, my wife is sleeping now." That's what the colonel told me, "my wife is sleep and you rang that doorbell so loud, you disturbed my wife." I said, "Ok, I got to get in the house." He said, "I let you in this time," that's what he said. I'm working for him now and let me in the house. So I went on in and done the work I had to do, taking care of his old baby. Everything is so nice and everything. Cooking the meals and [doing] everything for them. So that evening, I got my rags and got my jacket and what not and come on up the road home. I was still living over there in Loveville -- in that house over there in Oakville. I said, "he'll never see me no more." So they went to public works and they called and they called and they called. The man called and wanted to know

what happened to me. I said, “He’ll never see me know more.” I never did go back there no more. He told me, “don’t you never come to that door and disturb my wife while she’s sleeping.” I couldn’t even get in the house and I’m working for him. That’s the truth.

Another – other ones I worked on the Base for, they were very nice. I worked for the major and a couple of more and I had to go in that back door. You don’t go in that front door!

BC: But they didn’t treat you like he did?

SB: No, no. Oh boy, he jumped up -- oh boy, he wanted to knock me back out that door I guess. Yes sir, but the major and all of them, they were very nice. They wanted you to work, that’s all you worked. They didn’t treat me like that. I think if I had to go to the front door, they would have let me in with a different attitude then he had. I use to make \$3.00 a day. I made more then the average girl down there. \$18.00 a week, boy I could do something with the \$18.00 too. [Laughter] I used to come home and buy myself shoes and everything with \$18.00. I made \$18.00 a week.

BC: And back then that was a whole lot of money.

SB: It was a whole lot of money. You know when I first went to work down here at Ryken. I worked at Ryken for 40 years. Down here at Ryken High School.

BC: That’s where you retired from?

SB: Yeah, down here at Ryken High School. I worked there for 40 years and I didn’t make but \$19.00 a week when I first started there. A long time before I made anymore -- \$19.00 a week. But see, when you leave Ryken, no retirement, no

retirement. I got a little bit of retirement when a – they claimed they didn't put in retirement for people at Ryken in those days. When I got to be about, I say about 68. When – when I became 68 years old they put in retirement, when I become 70, no more retirement. That was only two years. I done worked there 40 years a got no retirement. I can't get none. So that's how that goes. I don't know.

BC: Yeah, they get you coming and going.

SB: I'm telling you. I survive though, I survived though, I'm still sitting her. I tell these children I'm still sitting her.

BC: Okay

SB: Believe that.

BC: You could have had plenty of money and you be dead.

SB: That's what I say.

BC: Okay, do you feel there is a difference from people who were born in the county and people who came from outside to live in the county? Do you feel that there is a difference?

SB: I think so, I feel there is a difference. You mean the foreigners and those people?

BC: I not going to say foreigners. Like somebody who was born and raised in Washington and New York or whatever and just move down to the county?

SB: Oh yeah, I think – I think they feel that they are different from -- I feel there is a little difference there. "Oh, what are you talking about" – everybody didn't have the same thing they had in New York. Before they went to New York, they probably had the same thing that I did. But you don't take back, you tell the truth about things. They say, "Oh I had this and I had that", but they didn't back in

those days. Everybody had a little difficulty. I might have had worse then what the next one had, but everybody had difficulty back in those days. But some people were fortunate enough to have a piece of land over there and some were fortunate to have a little house sitting over there. But I wasn't, my parents, they weren't fortunate enough. I do not know. You know I had seven sisters – because the twin to me died when I was a little baby. Seven sisters and five brothers -- six brothers and my mother, father and my stepfather. Not one, not one not either one of them – my mother never owned a house as long as she lived. She never owned a piece of land as long as she lived. See my father was share cropper they say. He never owned nothing, the white man would give him what he wanted. He would not give him a piece of land to build a house of his own or what not. Not near a one of my sisters had a house. Not one, not one, not one except my sister that left home and went down to Texas. She finally got a home – that's the third oldest sister after I say about forty something years. Then she got a home. She got married and got a home. I was the only one in my family that had a home and I didn't get that until after I was married – until I married a certain time.

But I did get a home and it was due to. Honest to God, it was due to my uncle right down there, John Somerville. He came up to me one day and said to me when I was living up there, over there in the woods. I'm always living in the woods. He came to me and said, "you know one thing about you, you're a hard working girl." He said, "I got a little piece of land up there and I want you to talk to your husband and ask him to build you a little house. If he builds one room or

two, he had build on it as he goes along.” I says, “I don’t know if I talk to him, he might be just like the rest of them and don’t never want a home. So he said, “you talk with him and ask him to build you – try to – I give you the piece of land if he will help you – will build you a house. You need a house girl.” He said, “all these years, you been roaming from house to house, to house and been working hard. Now you don’t have a place of your own, you got to rent from this man. Take what this man has to say or that man has to say.” He said, get a hold of him and come down to the courthouse with me.

So one day I sat and talked to him, “I – I ain’t got no money to buy no land!” That’s what he said to me. I said, “you don’t have to buy it.” I said, “my uncle said he’ll give it to me and we can pay him later.” So talk with him about, I know two weeks or more. I talked with him. So then finally – and he was making good money. He was making money, he could have bought four acres of land if necessary. He was making good money in that water. I’d talk to him, I’d talk to him. Everyday I’d bring it up. Every time he’d come home on the weekend, I’d bring it up. He got tired of me bringing it up. So one day he said, “well come on let’s go down there and see what’s going on. So we went to the courthouse with John Somerville and wrote up the deed – had the deed wrote up – the rights to the deed all wrote up. He said, “I want this girl to have one acre and a half land up here on Pin Cushion Road.” Woods was so thick here honey – so thick you couldn’t even put a pin between them, they were so thick! So we goes down – anyway I think it was Mr. Mattingly. One of them old Mattingly’s, I think was the which you ma call it then. The judge or something. So we wrote that deed up

and he gave me this acre and a half of land and I said, “I know I got some money in my pocket, I want to pay.” He say, “you don’t have to pay me one penny,” but he wrote on there that he charged me \$50.00 for it. He had to do that in order to – you know to make things right. He gave me this piece of land and that man came home on weekends. Every weekend he came home, he would get some of them fellas to order him some lumber. Just piling lumber up. We built one room, then next weekend he’d come home and build another room. And the next two or three weeks he’d build another room and kept right on just building until he built the house.

This is an old house now. They didn’t build it like people build house now. Flat down and all that stuff. But anyway, we got the house. I went and bought furniture and everything, because my mother only had a little bit of furniture. I bought furniture and stuff to put in the house – there were four rooms at that time. Then the next – I say by the next year, we built two more big rooms on and finally we had a house and that was it. Then he was happy as a lark. He would give nothing for his -- .

BC: For his house.

SB: He would come home every weekend – he come home more then every weekend then because he had a house. But you see at first he didn’t agree, he didn’t agree. I kept after him, I kept after him and then he built a house.

BC: Because you were living with you mother then?

SB: Living with mother, yeah. I was living with my mother, but see my mother was renting. That was all the same thing, still renting. Rent the house – we had to pay

\$30.00 a month for the house we were living in. You had one, two, three, four rooms. We were renting there at \$30.00 a month.

BC: So now - he would build a little each –

SB: Each week or each month.

BC: Every time he got some money to buy the supplies so he could build?

SB: Umm hmm [yes], he made good money out there in the river.

BC: So once he finished building his house, he didn't owe anything on it?

SB: No, he built it from scratch and he use to pay the carpenters on the weekends when he came up. That was Mr. Harry Fenwick over there. He built it, you know how those old time carpenters, they had old rusty nails and everything else.

[Laughter] But they built it. So that's how he built it. That's how he built it.

Yes indeed.

BC: Okay, what are the biggest changes in the county in your lifetime. What have been the biggest changes in the county? Everything, it seems like everything done changed, the stores, the people to my idea. I mean everything I look at some time and wonder. I know it's gonna change in a way. Just like a child – grandchildren of mine, they go to the store this week and buy a brand new pair of shoes that cost \$95.00 and then their go right back next week and buy another pair that's another \$95.00. Their not satisfied with one pair. I try to tell them, I say, “wait, you've got shoes – if you've got four pairs of shoes, you don't need another pair just to be keeping up with the Joneses.” We had to go with one old piece of shoe that was coming off – that cost about \$1.50. That's a big change.

Why has it changed that much, that's what I'd like to know. [Laughter] Why has it change that much.

People are different too. People are different now a days. Some people – they are not like they use to be. We used to be such good friend. Everybody would come in and sit down and talk and play cars and then you'd go home. Now then want to come in and knock you head off, they don't want to talk. They don't listen at nothing that you say, you try to talk to them. Children and grown ups are almost the same. You try to talk to them and you know things have changed, everybody knows that. But why do these people act to different. Lord knows, I just can't understand it. What's going to happen in the next 10 years, I wonder?

BC: Now living up here where you do, are you effected by the changes at the Navy Base? Are you aware of the changes the Navy Base has made in the county?

SB: No

BC: It doesn't effect you that much?

SB: No, not at all.

BC: Okay, have you done everything in your life that you ever wanted or planned to do?

SB: Umm, umm [no], never.

BC: Okay, what?

SB: No, never. What I always wanted back in my lifetime, I always wanted – one thing I wanted I say before I got to be 16 years. I always prayer that – before my mother would die, I wanted my mother to have a home of her own. I wanted her to be happy at one time. But when my father was alive I don't know if she was

happy or not. I can't tell you, but I know the second time she got married, she wasn't that happy. I know, I know what I'm taking about, she wasn't happy. I always wanted my mother – let her sit down one time and not have to worry about getting out there and getting some bread and this and that and everything. I always wanted her to just sit back and relax. I tried and begged and pleaded for her to come and live with me.

When I got this house down here, but no she wouldn't do it. She said, "no, I not going to leave my boys." She had her boys up there were I moved from. I moved from down her. I said, "well the boys are old enough to take care of themselves. Let the boys take care of themselves and you come and live with me." I wanted her to be happy and come live with me. But no, umm hmm[no] she never would do it. That's one thing I would have loved to see in life before she died. But – I just hope and pray that all my children and everything will be happy. And everything else like that. I would like to be – I really am happy and not happy. I'm happy and not happy. Because now I don't have to really worry to much. But it does worry me. It worries me – my children worries me. I worry everyday – but I think I should – I worry everyday, everyday of my life. I worry and that's what I've done all of my life is worry. I wish I could one day get of this don't think no more about worry.

BC: Let things happen.

SB: Live as long as I can and be satisfied. I'm not satisfied at all.

[End of Side 1, Tape 2 of 2]

[Begin Side 2, Tape 2 of 2]

- This is 1994, that's the first time I hadn't worked since I was 9 years old. 1994
- BC: That's a long time.
- SB: Isn't that a long time. It really is. In 1994 I retired from down at Ryken. Then I still worked for a lady down in Breton Bay until she went into a nursing home. That has been to long. I say about six months ago. And now I'm sitting her, I've got plenty to do. If you're at the house, you've got plenty to do. But still I'm still not satisfied and I know I can't work all my life. I'm getting to old to work. I like to have peace of mind. One peace of mind, just sit and get up and go to Bingo and places when I feel like it. Come home when I don't like it. Sit down and rest my nerves. But I'm still not that satisfied. No, I'm not. It's so much I'd like to get done. I'd like to do a lot of things that I can't do. Really there is no sense in me sitting and worrying about something like that. I'm getting to old.
- BC: Okay, one of the last questions, I'm going to ask you. Can you share one of the old stories about what life was like for your parents in the county?
- SB: Well, really the only thing I can say is that my mother was such a hard worker. She was never happy and she worked so hard. She worked until she died. The woman worked to much. I had nothing against my stepfather, but I think that he alone did not treat her like she was suppose to treated. That's the only thing I can say. My mother worked so hard, all of her life. I don't know how she worked when I was a little girl, or baby at three or four years old. I can not say that because I was to young. But after I grew up, I knew what she went through. I

- knew, I knew what she went through because I was always there with her. A lot of my sisters – all of my sisters had gone and they didn't know like I did. I'm the one that knew what my mother went through. She never was, never was, never was happy as far as I can see. Maybe to her, she was happy but I don't know.
- BC: But it just didn't seem that way.
- SB: But I know she was happy because I could feel it, see it. In the nighttime she'd come home in the snow and stuff and then had to cook on an old wood stove that wouldn't even burn. Nobody's happy like that. I can't see how they could be happy. I know I wasn't happy in all that snow and stuff. Oh, boy didn't I walk in that snow and stuff. [Laughter] Oh, Lord!
- BC: Okay, let me go back and ask you one more question about the school. Now you went to St. Joseph's Elementary School. You said you had to walk about four miles.
- SB: Yeah, about four miles.
- BC: Everyday.
- SB: Yeah, every single day then after I left school – every other day I would have to work for the nuns. But still I would come back from the nuns and cleaning the church, it'd be ... Every other day from that, I'd have to walk to Mechanicville to take care of my sick sister. Me and my sister used to walk and take care of my sister. Like I said when people were sick in those days the mother and them helped their children out.
- BC: So this sister lived about where you were born?
- SB: Yeah, where I was born, little further back there in the woods.

BC: So that was how far?

SB: God knows, I know it's about eight miles from here to Mechanicville. I imagine it is. You had to eight miles up there and then walk all the eight miles back.

BC: After you went to school?

SB: Four or five miles up to St. Joseph's school and five miles back. My God that ends up a whole lot of miles. It really do and when we get home at nighttime, it would be 11:00 at night.

We feared nothing. Nobody bother us. Nobody. My sister and I sometime we use to sing and sometime we use to pray. We came on down the road walking together, nobody never bothered – no men, nothing, no nothing.

BC: So when you sisters to help her out in Mechanicville, both of you went?

SB: Both of us.

BC: Okay, so you never walked alone.

SB: No, I never went by myself. My sister always went with me. But she left earlier, after my sister died. Then we no longer had to go. Then I started – she left and went to high school. Then I went working for my sister that lived down here. She was sick and I use to walk down there by myself though. From here down to Clements by myself. I use to walk down there by myself. My own self. Nobody with me. No boys no nothing. I use to walk and would come back and it was dark sometime and then I had to stay all night and come back early in the morning and all like that. I had no problem. Nobody didn't bother me or nothing. But boy, would you walk outside this door now!

BC: Right, but nobody walked. People don't walk.

SB: No, I'm telling you.

BC: You get in your car and drive to the next house right here.

SB: That's what I say. How about that. Then we had to walk to school and down to Banneker too. From here down to Banneker, I think that's about a mile from her down to Banneker.

BC: Yeah, that wasn't to bad.

SB: That wasn't to bad but just think in the rain. We had no school buses or nothing. After long, long years we had a school bus. One school bus would take us all around this universe. [Laughter] One school bus, but then we was so happy to get in that school bus. Oh my goodness, didn't we ride up and down the place! We road all the way up to Charlotte Hall and all the way around. Girl, people use to come all the way from Charlotte Hall down to Banneker. All the way down the county and all the way around. And we would have a ball. We rode all the way around on the school bus. That was because Ben Simmons brother use to drive the school bus. We all use to live right up her together. We use to ride around with him. It was fun then. But boy I tell you back in them 30's, I hope and pray that God that nobody in their lifetime –

BC: Would have to go through that again.

SB: Go through that like I went through the 30's. I don't guess it will happen again. But we were just poor people, simple as that. We had no way of making no money.

BC: Okay, I'm going to end on that.

Biographical Information on Sarah Evelyn Mason Butler
P.O. Box 24400, Leonardtown, MD
Telephone number 301-475-8540
Born on April 7, 1920 in Mechanicville, MD
She attended St. Joseph's Elementary School and Banneker High School
Her occupation was cook and she retired in 1994.
Her husbands name was James Edward Butler
Her mother's parents were Joseph Woodley Somerville and Mary Somerville.
She doesn't remember the name of her father's parents.
Her mother's name was Helena Pauline Somerville Mason
Her father's name was Joseph Mason
Her brother and sisters are:
 Josephine Handley
 Elizabeth Hensley
 Mildred Duke
 Helen Fenwick
 Agnes Hazel
 Sarah Butler (self)
 Sandra (Sarah's twin who died at birth)
 Her youngest brother was Leonard Mason
She also had stepbrothers. There names were:
 Joseph Edward Berry
 James Berry
 John Berry
 Paul Berry
 Joseph Walker Berry
Children (grandchildren)
 Mildred Gross (Stephanie, Leslie and Jerry)
 James E. Butler, Jr. (William, John, Marvin and Joe)
 David Butler (... and David)
 Rudolph (deceased)
 Francis Butler (Craig)
 Agnes Mason (Kimberly and Angie)

[End of Side 2, Tape 2 of 2]

[End of recording]