Unified Committee for Afro-American Contributions
Oral History Documentation Project

ELMER BROWN

Interviewed by Mel Endy and Carol Locke-Endy
February 19, 2000
At his home in Drayden Maryland
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[Begin Side 1, Tape 1 of 2]

Mel Endy: This is an interview in the Oral History Project of the United Committee for African American Contributions. The interview is with Elmer Brown and being conducted by Mel Endy and Carol Locke-Endy.

Coral Locke-Endy: Date?

ME: February 19, 2000.

Elmer, we should where you were born and where you grew up.

Elmer Brown: Born in Drayden on Cherryfield Road, it's called now. 1932, September the 16th. My father and mother owned a small piece of land there. Four-bedroom house: kitchen, living room, sitting room combination or dining room, two bedrooms.

My father was working for a doctor here in St. Mary's and my mother was a housewife. We left here at the age of -- at my age of three and moved to Frederick, Maryland where the doctor that my father was working for here, owned a dairy farm in Frederick, and he gave him a job up there which was more year-round than it was here

because of the seasonal, doing the farming here.

And, I guess we lived in Frederick probably three years. And, another person who my father knew had an apartment house on Wisconsin Avenue and he was looking for a janitor, and my father went to work for him.

ME: You were how old?

EB: That must have been five, probably eight. Somewhere in there, yeah. Very young, I knew that.

ME: So, you moved to Washington then. Is that where you grew up?

EB: I spent a number of years, and this is probably going to be the hardest part of my interview, is putting dates, specifically, and Carol might keep up with that. I have the series of incidents, but the specific dates -- I guess dates didn't mean much to me then.

I stayed there until 19 -- if I can recall, 1942 right after the War started, and my father was --Again, someone knew him and knew of his work and they offered him a job with the National Capital Housing Authority at that time. And, he went to work as a steam engineer which represented throwing coal in a furnace. Big title. And, he worked there until his retirement which was 1970. 1970.

My mother, at a very young age -- eight to be specific. We were in a car accident and she got killed at that point. My father would not let anyone else raise me so we two old guys that stuck around until 1945, '46 when he met now my stepmother, Florence Brown, and they married. She's actually a mother. The only short side of that was that she didn't give birth.

ME: About how old were you when --?

EB: When they got married? 1942, '45 so I'm talking 10, 12 years old. Yeah.

ME: So, you had no brothers or sisters?

EB: No brothers or sisters, but she had one daughter and when they got married, then I had a stepsister at that point. Went to elementary school in Washington on Prospect Avenue which is right off of Wisconsin just before M. Left there and went to Gideon's when my father moved to Southeast which at 4th and G, Southeast. Graduated from there. This was elementary school.

He then moved to Anacostia in public housing and I went to what was called Garfield Middle School. I left Garfield Middle School which only went up to the 8th Grade at that time. They just had stuck that school in and we transferred to Randall Junior High to do my 10th Grade, 9th Grade, and then to Phelps Vocational High School for my 10th, 11th and 12th.

ME: This was all in the city?

EB: This was all in the city, right. Did not attend college. Have had a number of correspondence courses and educated myself from that point forward.

ME: What's your earliest memory as a kid?

EB: Oh boy! Quite young. Where we sitting at now, I would assume five, maybe six years old, playing up on top of that hill and following my grandfather around and my uncle. That was in the Summer because every Summer just as soon as school was out, I came to the country and I spent every Summer, practically, I would think, here in the country with the exception of -- Well, until I became a young teenager. And then, I was involved in baseball and things in Washington. Stuck up there then, but I always came down on Sundays or weekends or whatever the case may be, but not physically to stay the whole summer.

ME: What was it like for you to grow up in Washington? Was it a good experience?

EB: I must say, I guess I'm one of the very fortunate or blessed persons. When I was raised in Washington, I was sort of in a cocoon. Living on the farm up in Frederick, there wasn't no other children around. It was just my family. When we moved to Wisconsin Avenue, I was the only black child within an area of better than a mile and half, two miles square. Really wasn't supposed to be there, but the person liked my father and said, AYou only have one child, you can bring him with you.

So, I used to spend a considerable length of time going back to the grocery store and being a convenience for a lot of the people who lived in the apartment, which I didn't realize at that time. I was able to sit on the counter and eat ice cream at Wisconsin Avenue and Macomb Street which used to be a little drug store there. Lot of the people who lived in the apartment and the next apartment to where we were living used to always pick up clothes and stuff for me for downtown when they went down and done something for them, and I was the biggest benefactor, I guess.

And, so I really didn't have a problem. I was concerned with why they went to school around the corner and I had to catch the streetcar when I was six to go to Kindergarten. I had to catch the streetcar which my father put me on. And at that time, we had safety zones in Washington and there was older children that I would always meet up with and my aunt lived just below us. When I say -- just, she lived on 35th Street, 35th and Wisconsin Avenue, and she was always there to meet me, to see that I got to school and was there to put me back on the streetcar to come back home in the afternoon. And then, I was met by my father.

ME: Did you have friends in that neighborhood?

EB: I would say they were acquaintances. I don't know how friendly we could say, you know. They wanted somebody to play with, and I did, too because there really wasn't that many children. It was very middle to up-class elderly neighborhood it was. Very few children. I would imagine that, right in my immediate area, there wasn't a dozen children. So, it was a pretty quiet life at home. When I got to school is when I had most of my fun.

ME: Any particular important influences on you when you were growing up?

EB: My father. We spend an awful lot of time together. After he was -- Naturally, it was just him and I around and we used to do a lot of talking. He carried me everywhere he went. We were buddies rather than father and son a lot of times, I'd say.

ME: And, you went through high school there.

EB: Yes.

ME: And then what happened?

EB: During that time, it was that regular thing that if you made a mistake, you played the part of a man and you married. So, I did at age 18 and my first son was his way. And, married my wife and then after that, there were others.

ME: When you were growing up, did you go to church?

EB: All the time. That was one of the "musses". That Sunday morning you went to Sunday School, even if I was down here, because my uncle here was a lay preacher, and I went to church every Sunday. There wasn't --I mean, that was one of the things that just automatic happened. The rest of it, you see if it would happen, but that one happened. Yes.

ME: That was in Washington, too?

EB: Yes.

ME: What was the church there for you?

EB: Church in Washington, as well as here. Yeah, both places I went to church.

ME: Was it a Methodist church?

EB: Baptist church in Washington; Methodist church down here.

ME: Any -- You mentioned your mother's death. Any illnesses or special other events in your life as you were growing up?

EB: Oh, broken legs and twisted ankles. Head bust open from climbing trees. The normal stuff that boys go through, I guess. Yeah.

ME: Any particular traumatic experiences?

EB: Well, traumatic experiences. Hit by an automobile and knocked 30 feet. Fortunately, I was small enough and light enough that I sort of skidded along the ground. My back, for a number of years, had ground burns on it. In Washington, they used to have what you call Safety Zones which was actually a platform. So, it was so many people at night and in the day would run up on these platforms, which was about 4 to 6 inches off the ground causing accidents. The city decided to get rid of the platforms and in the street, they drew these yellow lines, and that's where they got the term, "Safety Zone" from. You were not supposed to go through these yellow areas.

Stepped off of the streetcar, lady coming up behind the streetcar became panicky. Evidently, she thought she was going to hit the streetcar because she didn't have time to stop. Swung out from behind the streetcar and through the safety zone and down the road, I guess. I stayed in the hospital for probably two weeks. They were checking for many things. Fortunately, the biggest thing I had happened to me was my back got

scarred up real bad, bruised my legs. I was bruised up all over. Everywhere you looked, I turned blue almost. Other than that, that was probably the major traumatic thing that happened to me in life, as far as injuries are concerned. Yeah.

ME: And, you said you went to school on the trolley.

EB: Yes.

ME: What were your classrooms like? What was your school experience?

EB: We had an old brick schoolhouse which was a hand-me-down. Had wooden floors.

ME: This was elementary school?

EB: Elementary school had wooden floors which was linseed oiled every Friday to keep the dust down, keep them fresh. And, we had a little wooden desk, as usual, and we hung our coats up in a cloak room, not a room. Was just a space that was petitioned off and had coat hangers on it. You kept your lunch in your desk. Had a teacher that I often remembered.

And, I guess I could go back and say she had some influence on me. Her name was Miss Sedrick. Never will forget her -- a 3rd Grade kid, teacher who wore dresses that was right at shoe top. She reminded me so much of Hope Swan other than the fact that she was black. And, I don't know if either of you all knew Hope. Wore the tweed dresses and the tweed suits. If there was matter of correcting, you corrected yourself. She would give you a ruler and command three or four licks on the knuckles. You laid them on the desk and you had to hit them. You didn't hit it hard enough to satisfy her, and then you hit it again. Lady had a lot on the ball. She gave good guidance and I remembered a lot of that, and I guess you could say role model. Or, you wouldn't say role model, great influence in my life I guess I'd say.

ME: Any other teachers later on? For better or for worse?

EB: Had a lot of for-worse. [laughter] I just cannot say that I had a real pleasant experience going through school. And I think one of the reasons which really gave me a hard time was when I started Middle School, a teacher named Mrs. Paschell, English teacher, used to give me one terrible time. And from that point on, I really blocked English out and English wasn't of an interest to me. But, she destroyed my interest in English. And as I got older, I never could figure out why we had to spell right and write, naturally. Know and no, you know -- They just didn't fit in real good. And, exceptionally good in Math. Was then, have been since. Didn't nobody have to push me with that. History, I enjoyed. They were my main subjects, naturally, by going to a voca (vocational) school. And then after that, I went into my trade which was aircraft mechanics and who, how, no way in the world I needed it at that point.

ME: This was in high school?

EB: This was in high school. I wanted to get in automotives. Being in a black school that was all kids wanted to get into because they didn't know of other trades, really, that was available to us. So, we were working under a school system that had a quite curriculum. So at Wilson High School, they had aircraft mechanics and carpentry trades, a lot of those. In our school, we had shoe cobbler, metal work--surprisingly, aircraft mechanic, brick layering and pipe fitting.

And as you think of that, like I said, we had a --Washington was under one curriculum at that time and lot of those trades were geared more towards whites than they were blacks. And, I think that they arranged to have -- and this is probably bad to say, but it's my belief -- that they put shoe cobbler in Phelps because that was expected what

we would do and naturally, automotive mechanics. And, I believe they were designed for us. And again, I'll say and I want to emphasize the fact that I can't swear to that, but it just appears to me, as I got older, that that was the case.

So, I couldn't get in automotives and I went in aircraft mechanics. And going into aircraft mechanic, the only thing I could learn out of that was, that would be of a benefit to me, that as a gasoline combustion engine, I learned what made it work. But far as to use that trade somewhere or another, I couldn't do it in '47, '48. No.

ME: Any particular racial experiences that you remember or attitudes?

EB: The racial experiences that I can identify at a very young age -- Naturally, when I got older, I had oodles of them, but when I was very young, the only ones that I could identify as -- I couldn't understand why some people went some places and some people had to go to the other. And then, as we begin to travel up and down the road from Washington down here for visits, where we could go for a sandwich and where we could not go, where we could even have gasoline served to us rather than us pumping it ourselves which, at that time, was a normal thing to have a gas attendant to come out and pump gas. Check oil. They were always asked, would you like to have your oil checked? They'd take a look at your tires while the gas tank was filling up. Those things, I noticed, did not particularly happen to us. In fact, there was one station that just refused to pump gas for blacks. You had to get out and pump your own gas. So, they weren't very popular, naturally, with Afro-Americans.

TB which was a bus station, was a transfer between the Greyhound and Trailways going to Virginia from Baltimore/Washington was one of the inner hubs. You had to go around back to get your sandwich, and most of the time you got it through a porthole out

of the kitchen. I found it amusing that back there you had a long bench that reminds you of a picnic bench, wooden seats on both sides of it, and you could sit there. And if you went to get your ticket exchanged or to purchase in the front, these people were sitting on leather cushions. And at the bar, in booths, and that wasn't necessarily true in the rear.

But, I guess being young, I noticed those things, but they didn't have that great of an effect on me because the joke I always tell was that at the back door, when you bought a chicken breast, you got two instead of one because it was done by the cook. The food was served by the cook. So, I guess there was one advantage rather than a disadvantage to that.

As I got older and moved to Anacostia, then there was a distinct prejudices that you could identify because we lived in between two predominantly low to middle-class white communities which was Ft. Drum, Bellview, Congress Height, Livingston and Anacostia down at the bridge. And, we had to ride the bus going to school and get on in between both of those communities. So in the morning when we try to get on the bus, they were already on the bus and had loaded it up and then in the afternoon, the kids came from Anacostia High were on the bus before we got on it at Morris Road coming from our school, Garfield. So, we never had the privilege of being the first on the bus or the majority on the bus, and there used to become some pretty, pretty heated scraps during that time. Yeah. Pretty heated scraps.

ME: Did you have any thoughts about what you'd like to do when you grow up? Any dreams when you were growing up?

CLE: Now Elmer, did you talk about race and segregation within the family? Did you talk to your father about it?

EB: No. I guess it was one of them things: You knew what you were supposed to do and where you can go and what you can do. And, my father, really being raised under bondage, in a sense, if he said anything, it would be, like, if we were coming to the country and I said, "Darn, Daddy! There's an ice cream store. Let's stop and get some ice cream."

"We can't go in there," and that'd be the end of that, and so I'd accept that as we couldn't go in there.

When race -- I guess when race really made a real impact on me was after I got married at 18 and had to go out and find a job to work, and looking at what options I had. Because at that time, a high school education was reasonably decent to get a job. There wasn't many opportunities open for me. So, I found myself, at that age18, usually having to work two jobs to have a reasonable income for my household, and I became independent quite early and quite quick because I moved out from home, again, with what my father had impressed upon me that when you become a man and have children and get married, then there's obligations that belong to you. And, you need to work on making them happen. Yeah.

ME: So, that must have been in 1940, about, when you got married.

EB: Oh no. That was 19 --

CLE: It was 1950.

EB: That was the 50s, 1950.

ME: So, it was all during -- Okay.

CLE: Do you have military questions later?

ME: Not necessarily. We could talk about, sort of move ahead with -- You were working two

jobs.

EB: Yes. Working two jobs and I married. I then joined the DC National Guard--1951. I was activated during the Korean War. I guess I could relate back to school a little bit there. It gave me some heavy equipment knowledge. So when we were activated, my first post was Ft. Belvoir. And at Ft. Belvoir, with the 92nd Engineers, I begin to learn how to work on cranes, bulldozes, shovels. While there, I was fortunate enough to become a Sergeant and before I left there, I was one of the instructors in Mason … And, what we were doing was preparing engineering equipment to go overseas to Korea for the engineers. And, that way I made several trips over carrying equipment and would come back.

Then after that, which was '53 then -- After that period was over, I came back, went to work again and stayed in the National Guard for my 10 years which then qualified you where you wouldn't be qualified for the draft any longer. So, I stayed there for my 10 years. But, I always worked, for 23 years, I worked two jobs other than for those two and a half years that I was activated.

ME: You married and were living in Washington.

EB: Yes.

ME: And what did you do?

EB: My job history becomes one that becomes a little bit confusing, and I guess recording it is the only way that you could really get it accurate. I always had a primary job. My second jobs, a lot of them were six months, one year, seasonal. There was a lot of fill-ins which gave me some experience on them, but I always -- For an example, I worked for OEO in Community Service which was one. They changed the name during the Reagan

years. Had almost 17 years there.

ME: Wow.

EB: During that time, being in the government, I worked five days a week, eight and 10 hours a day sometimes, when necessary, to do overtime work. But, I hauled gasoline for Central Fuel.

The Urban League, when the major carriers -- AAMCO, Exxon, Gulf -- were claiming they could not find qualified Afro-American drivers, and that's why they hadn't hired any. With me having the experience with Central Fuel, the Urban League asked me if I would go try out for Exxon. So, I did and I was hired. I worked at Exxon. Really wasn't happy or satisfied there. A little better money, but a whole lot more mess to go through. I worked there long enough to prove that there was somebody out there capable

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[Begin Side 2, Tape 1 of 2]

And, a club which they used to have, which was a promotion program: If you delivered 600 gallons of fuel oil an hour, averaged, you were one of the good old boys. You could really put the oil out well. I got in that competition and three consecutive months, I won it. But, it was amazing and surprising to them for the reason: I had downtown Washington to deliver fuel oil which meant I had to deal with the traffic, being blocked in, can't get in. Those types of things.

So, we had the option of starting quite early in the morning: 5:00 to be exact, and I rearranged my route so that I'd done everything downtown before traffic got started.

And then, I would do my out-of-town stuff -- Well, when I say out-of-town, but out of downtown, usually from about 9:30 until 2:00. And then, I'd got back downtown because it's beginning to slow down now. I'd got back downtown and deliver the rest of my oil. And, I had averaged almost 800 gallons an hour by doing that. It was an advantage and a disadvantage. One of the advantages I had was that most of the commercials downtown had two tanks. You know, they had two 275s and one 550-gallon tank or whatever the case may be. And, that was strictly because it was commercial, but you had all these other hang-ups you had to go through in order to deliver to them. So, it was a matter of just scheduling myself around them where I could take the advantage of it, and I begin to pump 800 gallons a minute. And, I'd done that for a couple of months, and the boss wanted to know, "How could I do that? What were I doing?" Other people seemed to have had a problem with that, and I don't know. I never would tell them what I'd done.

And then, I went on tractor and trailer. I begin to haul gas then to commercial sites. Like, if you had 12, 14 dump trucks and you ordered gas for your private place, I was carrying to that. They wouldn't let me go to gas stations. I couldn't do that. So while I was there, there was another fellow who also was black that delivered or drove a tanker in the Air Force. He hauled jet fuel to the airplanes and gas to the airplanes. So, he has the full knowledge of it and he was hired. And then, we became transport drivers which meant that at that time, we hauled oil from, like, Exxon in Baltimore and Dundalk back to one of the relay stations where one of the little trucks loaded up. So, we could do that, but we still -- I never dropped no gas in no gas stations, but I could always haul to these satellite places and it didn't really make a lot of different.

Then, there's an exchange system that most oil companies have. If its Colonial Fuel and Exxon's truck is down there, they can get gas from them and then vice versa, and it stops you from running all over town to get back to your port. And, they keep a balanced score there: who's doing what and how much. Then in the summer when it slowed down on fuel oil, we could drive the tankers if it become unbalanced, say, that Exxon used 200,000 gallons more than Colonial used, then we had to repay them. So, we would haul oil to them to balance the system out. So, I could do all that, but I still couldn't haul nothing to no stations.

So, that give me a good handle on what takes place with the gas and oil and how it works.

ME: Were you working two jobs during the summer?

EB: Oh yeah, yeah, yeah. Most of it. The other advantage I was telling you about: Exxon, by being able to start real early in the morning, I used to work from 5-1 with them and I drove a tractor trailer for Crusty Pie Company who used to deliver pies to Richmond for their Richmond distribution. So, I would leave over there at 1:00 and go to Crusty Pie and pick up a trailer, and go to Richmond and get back home 12:30, 1:00 at night. Get three, four hours sleep and start all over again.

ME: You didn't have too much time for family life.

EB: Family life was a very short thing. Now, one of the advantages, and the only thing that I had as an advantage was that I had -- if I recall, I'm sure I did -- I had Tuesdays and Wednesdays off at Exxon. That was my five days and Tuesday and Wednesday I was off, and I was off hauling pies Saturday and Sunday. So, I actually had four evenings that I could get a break. But the other ones, I had to live on five hours, six hours sleep a

night. Just stop, lay your head on the steering wheel, get back up and go again.

ME: What was your family life like?

EB: Family life was very good. My kids and I, on each of those four days, I made sure that I spent all of my time with them, all of it, and I explained to them. And, they knew what I was doing. In fact, they were benefactors of some of the goodies because all of the day old pastry that I had to bring back up the road from Richmond that wasn't used, when they picked it up, we who worked there could have whatever we wanted of it. And, so I always brought a nice, big bag home.

And then after being around Crusty Pie and finding out about the doughnuts -- because they made doughnuts, too. Krispy Kreme at that time was part of Crusty Pie--I started buying fresh doughnuts. I would get 50, 60 dozen. I'd carry home and my kids could sell them in the community and that was how they made their own little change, and they became their own entrepreneurs.

ME: Was this still at Anacostia?

EB: In Anacostia, yeah, because I lived in the government project and then there was a couple private housing developments on the other side. So, the kids went out and they made them some money off the doughnuts, and they got steady customers. They didn't have to worry. They knew they could get rid of 50 dozen on Tuesdays or Fridays, whatever the case may be.

ME: Now, how many kids did you have?

EB: I had four during that time.

ME: Was their experience growing up in Washington different from yours?

EB: I would think that the older ones made out pretty well. It would have been the younger

ones because the older ones -- They were very active in sports and they spent a good bit of time in school. And, their community was a closed community, basically. What I mean by closed, is it was all blacks around them. So, they didn't have a lot of interference and they were able to enjoy themselves, what they were doing.

ME: Were the schools beginning to be integrated at all?

EB: In '65, they begin to integrated, and I'm not sure that the children was as interested in integration as we were.

ME: Um hmm [yes].

EB: Because they soon found out that they had a problem at school. Teachers weren't agreeable with them and other children weren't agreeable. I would think the first four, five years of children's desegregation period was equally as hard on the kids. I mean, they had to go through a training period, too. Yeah.

ME: And, how does that happen?

EB: What the integration program? In Anacostia, it didn't really affect that much because what they tried to do is make kids who lived in similar areas begin to cross-mix with schools. For an example, people who lived on E Street, N.E., 700 block, 800 block, 900 block. All of them were white at that time and was going to Stewart. The children who lived north of H Street were predominantly black. So rather than them going all the way down to Brown, they sort of crossed up there who was the closest.

In high schools, a number of black kids who used to go across to Dunbar and Shaw and all those places, they ended up going to Anacostia, and a lot of the white kids who lived in Anacostia begin to go to Dunbar, whatever. In Washington, the mixture of desegregation of schools was a very gradual thing because that's when they came in with

community busting which meant that, for instance, the first house I bought, Mr. Lofledder paid $8,020 I think it was for the house because I could go back to the deed and see it. Sold it to me for 13, and he lived there for 12 years. And, that's how the migration started to the suburbs for many of the whites. They made money off of those old houses and lived there all that time. And, I don't know if the capital -- I hadn't looked at the tax structure, so I don't know whether capital gains played in an effect that much then or not or whether it was increase since that period. But, then blacks started moving in. And as they moved in, they moved in where all the whites hadn't moved out so the schools begin to gel a little bit. Desegregation in Washington, as a whole, was a slow progress, and it was caused by neighborhood changes rather than the bussing theory that you had in a lot of places.

ME: Later on in your life, you became very concerned about racial relations --.

EB: Um hmm [yes].

ME: And took a lot of initiative as a leader. Were you beginning to operate in that way through that period or was that later on?

EB: I think what I found out, what made me really begin to become interested in race relations was I seen where it was hurting both people. Everybody lost. It wasn't a winner in that game, and I could not be too bull-headed and too belligerent without cutting my own throat. And as I begin to talk to people and associate some, I found out that all people wasn't bad. Well by this time, television was beginning to play the South up real good. Radio's playing it up real good. Begin to read much more.

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EB: Horrible pictures of hangings, tar and feathering, little kid getting blown up in First Baptist Church in Birmingham. And looking back then at what I had to live through and discovered that I was a mascot, a lot of times, on Wisconsin Avenue when I thought everything was alright. Naturally, the pat on the head and, "You're a good boy," and all that stuff. It begin to take effect on me a little bit, and I became quite militant. I thought Rap Brown had everything going on. I really did. I thought he --

ME: When was this?

EB: This is the middle 60s, middle 60s, right after desegregation because that's when you found Little Rock trying to be desegregation. You read the books and damn, you don't want me to even go to school. You know, I'm not interested in you or your ladies, but I just want an education. Give me a change. And I, I had that feeling that people then begin to deprive me of opportunities that I was entitled to. And, that relates all back to --I mean, you begin to then put the whole picture together: when I couldn't get jobs and why I couldn't get jobs and how I was treated in the area, Wisconsin Avenue, and the things that happened to my father then. All of that begin to build in and it built to a boiling point in my life. And, I can't say that I told my kids not to become involved, but be prepared and do what you got to do to survive. Whatever that means is. And then, I discovered that, hey, don't nobody win by this. It's much easier to do it together than it is to fight about it. And, I guess that's when I started working for the betterment of mankind rather than anything else.

ME: Did that begin before you moved back to the County?

EB: Oh yeah, yeah. Before I left Washington, like I said, the Urban League. And, we had to

go through classes. Be prepared to be called out of your name. Be prepared to even take a licking every now and then. Be prepared, very closely. For instance, me: I'm driving a truck, tractor trailer. When I go out, don't take for granted that my truck is still hooked up. Check the pin on it and make sure somebody hasn't pulled the pin so when I get in it and drive off, I drop the trailer. Check your tires good and make sure somebody haven't stuck nails. You begin to watch for those types of things and begin to make you much more conscious. You rotated trucks all the time. So the guy who had the truck before I did on the night shift, and I'm picking it up in the day shift, to make sure he gassed up because a lot times -- We were supposed to gas up for the next shift -- that he'd done that. Check your oil, for sure. Make sure he didn't drive with low oil in it. When you blow a motor, then you get blamed for blowing the motor. You know, all of those types of things was what we were taught during that time.

ME: Contacts, as you were moving into new areas, new jobs, for example, the backlash might lead to this kind of thing.

EB: That's right. That's right. So, you had to become really recognizant of what's around you. I mean, so many things. We had one guy one time – That's when I owned my own tractor. Guy had pulled up on the lot and put a died cat in another guy's truck. Like I said, you always look for pins to be pulled. Loads: When I was hauling freight, you all but didn't want nobody to load your truck until you were there because you wanted to see what went on the truck. Quite frequently, there's two boxes that's missing and that didn't get onto the truck. You get to the stop and there's two boxes missing.

"Well, where are they?"

"I don't have the slightest idea. They weren't on there when I got to the stop."

"You sure of that?"

You know, that type of thing. It was oodles of stuff that went on during my life span that was like that.

It was things that was done very covert to try to make things hard for you. Had a television one time that was stolen off of a hand-truck, and all I had done was loaded another one. I was putting portables. I come back, one of them was gone. Now, I'm on the platform and I had it. Where can it go? It was obvious somebody picked it up. So, I wouldn't load the one that was left. I went right away and got the dispatcher. You know, "I had two televisions in here. One of them is gone. I'm not leaving until you understand that. Now, I don't care what they do with it now. They can keep it, but you know that I didn't leave here to get somewhere and I'm another television short." You know, things, things like that. You just had to prepared and keep your eye up.

ME: When did you come back to the County to live?

EB: 1968 September. 1968 September.

ME: And why was that?

EB: My first wife and I had problems, and I want to talk about this very candidly. She drank a little more than I wanted, and it wasn't a good example for my children, and it was hindering me. So, I had to confront her face-up that I'm leaving. The children will never want for nothing. The house is yours, and my children said, "Well, if you leave, I'm leaving," because they understood what the situation was. Well, had planned on leaving and just moving in Washington. But if I was leaving and carrying them, I knew there had be harassments and uncomfortable to, so I moved down here and had to commute down to Washington to work. And, I'd done that for a number of years.

Johnnie and I met--because we'd been having problems for a good little while -- but her and I met about a year before I left Washington. So when I went by to say that, "I'm moving to the country; it's been a good relationship. See you later," she said, "Uh uh. We're going together."

So then, I had to find two places down here and that's when she brought little Tony with us. And, we were here probably six months and all of the sudden, I needed a housekeeper for some reason. I didn't know why, but --

CLE: This house?

EB: No. Another house. So, she moved in to be my housekeeper, take care of my children while I worked. And, my mother -- bless her, she told me one day, "Elmer, that's enough of that." And, this is my stepmother. She said, "Marriage or break it up." Yeah, I'm listening to Mama at this point, so I did. Well, my first wife, she has passed then. She had sugar and her pancreas busted from, naturally. Alcohol is nothing but sugar. And, that's the way it went. Was never mad at her. Always gave her whatever she needed. Done everything I could to help her. Was the second one at the hospital after she had to go to the hospital, but I just could not have anybody holding me back.

I did not understand alcoholism at that time. It was new to me. I hadn't been around it. My father, mother -- none of them really were alcoholics and never heard of no ALANON or none of those things. To me, that was a plague. I needed to get rid of the plague. And after I had left her and she'd passed, I begin to find out then what alcoholism was about. And if I had of knew, I probably would have never left. I'd a dealt with it. Probably would have dealt with it, but didn't know. So, done the next best thing.

ME: You continued working in Washington for several years.

EB: Oh yeah. Yeah, yeah. I came here in August of 1980 when I came to the Housing Authority.

CLE: Not until 1980?

EB: 1980.

ME: But you were living here --

EB: Oh, I was living here from ’68.

ME: ’68.

EB: And, the County Commissioners asked me -- They heard somehow or another something about me. I don’t know what they heard, but they asked me if I wanted to come here and set up a management program for public housing working with Bill Mitchell, and that’s what I done.

ME: What had you been doing from ’68 to ’80 in Washington?

EB: Oh, I’ve -- two jobs, on many cases, but my main job was with Community Service Administration. I was in housing, and what we were doing were monitoring migrants and Indians living qualities. And, I traveled a good bit, and then I started working mostly Eastern Shore where they had a awful lot of migrant workers in Eastern Shore during that time. And, I guess that’s where they found out about me and my housing experience.

ME: So, you came back to the County in ’68. Had it changed very much from--

EB: Oh yes. It changed tremendous. It had changed tremendously. I mean, the growth pattern had begun. The Navy Base had begun to take its effect on the County. There were a number of things that had taken place. The same inadequacies were here then that was here for a number of years, and job opportunities and things of that nature. Exposure

to money and banks: Unless you were one of the good old boys, just didn't work. You know, those type of things. Still a lot of farming. Still a lot of water that was still going on.

ME: When you were working in Washington and living here.

EB: Um hmm.

ME: Interacting mostly with the black community?

EB: Here?

ME: Yes.

EB: Yes. Yeah. I guess that's what I was brought here for: the black community which was Tubman Douglas. But, as I begin to request and ask for and request again things that they needed is when I found out there's still plenty barriers.

CLE: Even in 1980?

EB: Even in 1980. One of the things that I immediately recognized was that there had to be some mind changes to a lot of the people who were living in Tubman Douglas and in the County. And, that's when I became involved, basically, trying to re-train a lot of thoughts. And hearing that word "re-train", it makes it sound that people were out of control or something, but that's true. If you hadn't been exposed to something, you didn't know how to use it, and that was a the case a lot around the houses. Number of things.

They were trying in '68 when I came back home –Mattingly's IGA in Leonardtown was then where the old telephone company was which is now where Planning & Zoning is located. They didn't have any black employees at all. None. I don't know they got that many now, but they didn't have any then. And, the NAACP

was trying to approach them to hire some blacks, or a black or something.

CLE: The telephone company?

EB: At IGA.

ME: IGA.

CLE: IGA.

EB: Right. I went to one of their meetings and had told them that I thought they were going about it wrong.

"How do you mean?"

I said, "I don't think that today's time you can just walk into an establishment and ask a man to hire some blacks. You got give him a reason why he should hire some blacks."

Said, "Well, how you mean give them some reasons?"

I said, "Well, what I would do is look at his store and monitor it two weekends a month for two months and take some head counts, and you want to catch government paydays which is the Base and Social Service check days, and just get an idea of how many blacks go through the door. Then, you can go and tell him that, 10, 15, 20% of your business is Afro Americans, therefore I feel that you should at least honor us by a percentage of your employment."

And, they had never thought of doing anything. They just wanted to blatantly go up and give him nothing in turn. So, you give him nothing, you get nothing. And, they done that, and now go up there's three or four people in the kitchen area back there, and there was a stockman. Wait, there's two stockman, couple bag boys. Haven't seen any cashiers yet, but he begin to change. But, he got a reason to change because he could

identify a certain amount of his capital came from the Afro American community.

Then, they begin to use that approach on other places in the County, and there was a few people beginning to get hired then. Millie Gross went to Safeway. When she got to Safeway, she got Mary Robinson there and between the two of them, they got Johnnie there, and it was a networking system that was working, slowly, to bring people in. The Safeway didn't have but two black stockmen. Alton Thomas and Ralph Thomas were stockmen. Nobody up front at all. None.

ME: Were you working at the NAACP at that time?

EB: I can't say I ever worked the NAACP and it wasn't because I had any problems with them. It was just that I was doing some things on my own. I supported it wherever I could, but I never, I never held a office there and I wasn't regular and paid dues and kept on going. Now, I worked with the youth some. The NAACP youth, I worked with them some. But the older folks, you know--

ME: What did you do with the youth?

EB: We done some training, some traveling, some talks. When they got together, I would give them some of my experiences and they'd look at some of theirs, what they see here in the County and different things like that. Yeah.

ME: Tell us your experience at Tubman Douglas.

EB: It was a very fruitful one for me, I think.

ME: You did it for how long?

EB: I was there from 1980 until '95, through '95. In fact I retired December of '95. I found that there was one -- awful lot of people who had not lived in units that had good facilities; meaning, running water, inside bathrooms, sinks. Done a lot of washing in the

old time dishpan and throw the water out the back door, the foot tubs. There was a number of those people because we had a lot of inadequate housing in St. Mary's, after I had started.

[End of Side 2, Tape 1 of 2]

[Begin Side 1, Tape 2 of 2]

EB: I mean, it was just a whole conglomerate of stuff that I have done a little bit of.

ME: When you think back at the work at Tubman Douglass, what do you think you accomplished?

EB: Well, I, what I accomplished is identifiable today. There were people who, as I said, never had facilities that now have them, own the homes that they're in, taking good care of them. Have changed their whole lifestyle. They are, have bank accounts, two cars. All of the things that is highly important for lifestyle. Got married -- A number of people who were common-law, I gave them a reason for being married. One, if you're buying property together, you need to have names on property and Mary Sue can't buy it and John just live there, and John shouldn't buy it and Mary Sue lives there. And, there should be some kind of involvement that recognizes both people are contributors. Your children will feel much more better about you by knowing that you're a husband and wife rather than Joe Blow who happened to stop by and spend a week.

Something as simple as doors. When the wind blow, how many people there is that lose storm doors out in this big general public. Take notice to which way the wind's blowing. Lock the storm door so children can't come in the front door; they got to come

in the backdoor. Lock the back door so they got to come in the front door. All of those type of things were things that they begin to listen at. I tell them that, "If you listen at your house, your house will talk to you." People don't believe that.

If you're sitting somewhere in a room and you can hear water running through water. And if water's running through a pipe, it means either a pipe is broke, a toilet's stuck or you didn't turn the water off in the kitchen sink. You listen at your house. If you sitting in the house and the lights start going dim and bright again and dim, somewhere you got a short or something is pulling too much electric on that line.

When you turn water on in the morning, something people don't usually think of, and 90% of the affluent people do it. Not only just there, but you turn on the hot water and you let all the cold come out that comes out first and then you stop the sink up, put your hot water in and then you turn cold water back on to dilute it. Nine out of 10 times, if you stop it up when you first start, the cold water that comes first, then the hot water will come and it will automatically dilute it down to temperature and you don't ever have to touch the cold water in the morning because you paying your own water bill now. So, you got to begin to conserve that.

Check your windows. Make sure that the windows are up and not left down. One of the kids hollered out the window and there go your oil out the window. Make sure all the windows are down. If you find that you have a breeze through it, stick a piece of plastic up to it. Call Tri-County Community Action Agency and have them to come out and do storm protection on your house, insulation on it.

If you find -- Look under your sinks on a regular basis to make sure that water's not dripping because it'll rot out your cabinets and then you got to buy -- Just listen at

your house. And if you deal with your house, it'll take care of you. Those things, they never been exposed to utilizing them, so they didn't have any concept of how to use it.

Social Service -- They would go to Leonardtown when ever they could get to Leonardtown because they didn't have transportation. Okay. So, I provided a house and a room where Social Service could come there. Let their problems be identified. Once their problems were identified, then you could call in other people. I had the police department to come down, and let them know that you could call Crime Solvers and you don't have to necessarily give your name. You get a number. When you see things going on in your community that now you're going to become a homeowner, if people keep tearing up and destroying stuff in the neighborhood, then you're investment goes down. So, it's your responsibility to keep your property up, as well as talk to your neighbor. The street in front of your house: Don't worry about sweeping Mary Sue's. If you walk out and sweep yours and everybody in the community do theirs, then the whole project's clean. You know, stuff like that.

ME: That was as a manager, you were?

EB: Yes.

ME: Not only running it physically but helping people adapt to very different standards of living.

EB: That's right. Exactly.

ME: Social worker, it sounds like. Family counselor.

EB: Some of all of that.

CLE: Educator.

EB: Some of all that.

ME: Intermediary between these folks and the rest of the community.

EB: Tell people: There's no way in the world you can sit in the house and tell me you don't know your son's selling drugs if he walks in the house with a $150 sweat suit on and you don't have money for bread. There's a problem there. So, don't even try to go there and tell me that one. You tell me something new. You see him come home wearing $100 tennis shoes. You either benefitting from his selling dope or you blind enough that you afraid to say anything to him. Now what happens is that the Federal government has told me that I can put you out if I prove that you selling drugs, so I think you pretty crazy to allow your son to get you put in the street. So, you deal with it from that point.

I, we done all that kind of stuff and worked out well. Worked out well.

ME: I know you talked about going back late at night.

EB: Oh yeah.

ME: And see who was hanging around out there.

EB: Definitely. Definitely.

CLE: Elmer, one of the big things that happened there was the under your watch, it converted from rental to ownership.

EB: True.

CLE: How did that come about?

EB: The Federal government had said that, "We want to sell a certain amount of property" because somebody has said, "If you own it, you take better care of it then when you're renting." So, what you need to do is bring to our Attorney General and to our legal counsel how you would go about selling property to people who can't buy property. And, you have to come up with your own scheme how to do that.

So, we spend some time thinking about it. Joe Mitchell and I, we sit down and we tossed around some ideas, and we begin to data program together to put on the table. And, the program worked like, "I'll sell you a house knowing you don't have no money, but I'm going to give you five years to pay $10,000 off. Very simple. A pack of cigarettes a day pays for your house. Now, once you get in that house, you've got to stay for 15 years to have a fee-simple deed. If you decide you want to leave before that, then there's some deductions that have to be made. On paper and on your deed and on the price of the contract, you're 4-bedroom house sells for $35,000, and that's what's going to be obligated to you. After you pay the first $10,000 in the first five years, then we will make a deduction of 10% from Year 5 through Year 15 of what your balance is. If you decide you want to sell between Year 1 and Year 5, your getting nothing back. If you wait until Year 6, then you will get your $10,000; you're going to get a 10% reduction of your $25,000 that's left and then you sell it at market rate. And, you can keep the rest of it, but you got to stop and remember that your house, your house becomes automatically or revert to the Housing Authority unless you stay and get the benefit of it, which is our $35,000 and your house from then on."

And, out of the 50 units, we had two to lose and one of them was because of separation of family and she didn't want to be involved with it, and he's somewhere else and become a benefactor, so it's cheaper for her to pull out at about $4,000 investment, which she lived there that time and then just walk away from it. The other one: There was some problems that he had. He ended up going to jail. And while he was in jail, the rest of the family just went berserk, and I told them, "You'll just have to relinquish it." So, they gave it back.

All of the rest of them made it past the probation period, the other two, made it past the probation period and got well into their years. So, they sold it for $35,000 and it's supposed to be -- Well, one of them was $65,000. $35,000 of it came back to the Housing Authority and they had the benefit of the balance.

So, we presented that program to HUD, and they could see that it wasn't a windfall for the people, and they said, "Go ahead. Let's see what happens." And so, that became the model for the East Coast just about.

CLE: That's wonderful.

EB: And, they end up homeowners now. And, these were people who were earning, some of them were earning as little as $6,000 a year.

CLE: Wow!

EB: And they became homeowners on a quarter acre land. Can't beat that.

CLE: Wow!

EB: Can't beat that.

ME: And while you were doing this, you began to move out into other community activities, like the Small Business Association.

EB: Yes.

CLE: Minority Business.

EB: Minority Business Alliance. I became part of the National Business League in Prince Georges because what I had found while I was doing Section 8 inspections here that many landlords had a problem. Because when a tenant moved out, they had to go get an electrician to do the wiring, and they had to go get a painter to paint the unit, and they had to go get a plasterer to repair the sheet rock and put in new windows, and it was dis-

encouraging a lot of realtors from becoming involved in a Section 8 program. So, that's when I decided to put together BMS and tell them I'll be the general contractor. When it moves out, you just tell me to put it back in rental condition and I'll do that. And, some of the young people who lived at Tubman Douglass who had decided to come out of school, didn't want to go to school, beating around. I said "I'll enter you into a training program with me and I'll show you what to do and how to do it."

Meanwhile with me joining the National Business League, I joined that for, actually, a network because the National Business League is country-wide. Started by Booker T. Washington in 1900 at Tuskegee and I said, "This gives me a good feel of who's around me." And after being in it a year, I started a branch here with Ray Hazeburg who used to own Park Sausages and Senator Douglass from the Maryland General Assembly. They were my mentors because each organization, as it started, they had to have mentors, and these guys were already part of it. And, that was the beginning of the Minority Business Alliance here.

CLE: About when was that?

EB: This is our 13th, no, our 16th year, so 16 from 2000.

CLE: '84.

EB: '84.

ME: Tell us about the origins of the Salt & Pepper activity.

EB: Origin of Salt & Pepper. Strange outfit. I'm rather a debater or challenger. If I don't believe something, I might have to talk to you about it. I think each of us have an opportunity to have our own opinions.

I went to Ed and told Ed that, "Ed, across the country, local agencies in the

federal government has set aside programming. I think St. Mary's County are at the point where we may want to look at that."

ME: This is Ed --?

EB: Cox.

ME: Cox.

EB: County Administrator.

ME: Country Administrator.

EB: "Oh no. We can't do that."

"Well, why is it that you can't? You getting federal funds in the County which makes that a covenant to you."

Well, it was true in the fact that what is says is that you must make procurement opportunities fair and equal so that anybody can bid on it. So, that was the route he chose to get at that time, and he worked hard to make the system fair and equal. But, what he didn't see was bids that may go by county government were bids that a lot of Afro-Americans, or most could not bid on. You didn't have the small business this year, and you going bid on plowing the road during the snow, most blacks here only had one truck, and he wasn't qualified to be a general contractor for snow removal. So, that automatically put it in the ball park of people like Buddy Knot, a guy who used to work for Ed up in Leonardtown. Anyhow, he had four, five trucks. Just a number of people who had vehicles that could become the general and they could tell the County that, "I will take care of it," so they could go hire one or two trucks. Well, the one or two trucks they hired were friends of theirs and people who'd worked with them, so minorities are still out, and they didn't have a chance to get in.

If you talked about cleaning the Governmental Center and places of that nature, there was always those two and three man businesses around the County that blacks had that didn't have staff, money, no credit enough to go into doing what the County wanted which was supply toilet paper and supply hand towels and supply soap. Needed a propane buffer and all this stuff to do what the County's requirements were. So, who automatically becomes qualified for that? The Baileys, B&B. What one didn't have, the other one had. The system was fair, but it was not equal in order to get people in. So, Ed and I started back and forth about that, and I started making some examples of how it has worked in some places. And those who have not made an effort, it still don't work.

And he said, "Okay, I'll tell you what. Let's have lunch because we want to get off of public property and not making a debate of it over government issues, and let's just you and I talk about it."

So, we did, and we started meeting every month, sometimes even sooner, because what I begin to do then was make examples and write them down and give him exacts that wouldn't happen and haven't happened. And, I'd meet him and I'd give him a copy of it, and he'd look at it. And he said, "Well, couldn't this have been done this way."

I said, "Could have? But it's not being done. And if you take certain spots around the County and I can name some of them for you, like down at the bottom of the hill --The Brass Rail, Friendly Tavern – That's where all the white contractors met in the morning and had coffee together. "Hey man, I got two houses over here to do, and I can get to but one of them right now."

"Well, I'll do some of it for you."

They shared their work. Blacks didn't have that opportunity to do that. So then,

we begin to look at things that was country-wide, and he said, "Well, why don't you bring seven blacks and I'll bring seven white, and we'll sit down and start a little group." And, that's how Salt & Pepper got started. Been going good ever since. And, there's no holds barred. When you come in, talk about anything that's on your mind. The only requirement is not to go away mad. It was just --

ME: What happened to the set-asides?

EB: Never have taken place. Never did take place because it was viewed, because County Commissioners had to approve it, and it was viewed by them who was dense in the same area that he was, that everything's alright because this is a perfect system. You come up with a price and you bring it in, can't lose. So. That's not a fair field. As much as they try to say it's fair, it's not a fair field. You got to have, somebody's got to give up something to get it fair.

ME: And Salt & Pepper, is it fair to say that's the only group that meets to deal with issues across the --

EB: That I know of here in the County. I don't know of any other. There are some cities which I, we found later on, him and I. We wrote to Poverty Law Center and gave him a schedule of what we were doing here with the expectations of saying, "That's a pretty good thing. Maybe we ought to do that a number of places," and help us to promote it. And, come to find out that there are places that's doing something like that. There's a church group that does it. There are several other groups around the country that does it. They're doing it in Atlanta. So, we are not, not the first nor the cream of the crop probably, but we're the only ones that I know of here: Prince Georges, Calvert, Charles, and I've talked about it in all those places. So, there's nobody else doing it that I know of.

ME: What other areas of your activity here come to mind when you think of your major contributions in the County?

EB: My major?

ME: Yeah!

EB: I don't have no majors. I just dibble with a lot of things and try to do what I can do wherever I can do it.

ME: And, Christmas in April.

EB: Yeah. Christmas in April, the Minority Business Alliance. I was in the Masonic's. We got a withdrawal card because what they were doing were very centered at that time, just pertaining to them. The church -- I went on the Trustee Board. When I first joined the church, as it had been from my childhood and as early as I can remember, you had to go outdoors to go to the bathroom, one of the outside houses. And I said, "This is just not going to work."

So, I got a few people together and we ended up with inside toilets and a complete kitchen addition, a well. Nice church now. Nice church.

ME: This is the --

EB: Bethesda.

ME: Bethesda Methodist Church.

EB: Right. I found myself doing more with individuals more so than organizations. There's a number of people that I've run across that needed a hand and just didn't know where to turn. If I couldn't do it, I'd try to find somebody to do it as time went on.

CLE: Particularly old folks.

EB: Yes, and that's been one of my -- Johnnie often laughs at it. She says, "I've never seen a

man with as many old women as you got!" [Laughter] But that -- that I found very amusing. I really, older people have been sort of my pets. I guess it's because I know I'm heading that way. A little faster than might expect, but I find older people --

ME: Does your knowledge of folks living out in the country, hither and yonder, extend to the whole county or do you work in more the southern part?

EB: Anywhere. I've dealt with people from Charlotte Hall to Point Lookout, and I found myself getting stretched over to Calvert. A lot of times, Mike Moore, who was Commissioner over there, tried to get a networking going for helping senior citizens and couldn't find enough people, other than the government agencies, but I mean just people that had interest.

I mean, I do things like: I used to keep a lot of wood here one time. I run across somebody who didn't have some wood, I'd maybe take them a pick-up load or something and that'd be the end of it. Couldn't say, "Well, you know, you could let people know that you're doing that."

"Well, I don't need to let nobody know. The person I carried it to knows this...I guess."

Transportation: We've got people hooked up with different ones to go to Washington, to go to work. We have found people here in the County to connect with for food when you find people that needs food. Directed a number of people like that and things. You know, you just plugging along a little bit at a time.

I've got one thing that I cannot solve yet. John Lancaster now was talking about it this morning. I cannot find out how to get young people in one cluster so you can talk to them.

CLE: Oh boy.

EB: And that's not just black, that's cross-spectrum. You cannot get young people today -- The one's between 18 and 24. You have got a real major problem of trying to -- Hey. Who's going to take up after us? You just can't find people this young doing it. And, volunteerism in this county, again black or white and a whole lot more white are part of volunteer system than it is black, and I can't tell why unless they think somebody own something. But anyhow, you can go to 10 meetings in a week and 80% of the people that you see at all of the meetings are the same people.

CLE: Same people.

EB: Same people. So when somebody recognized, from the President's office to the Governor's office, that each year they may give out an award for extensive volunteerism to somebody or some people, they have recognized that -- That must be pretty well true across the country if they going to pick on -- or find a category and say, "Here's a group of people that deserve." So, I think it's recognizable, but I mean, gosh, the wealth that we could share.

The other thing is churches. It's unbelievable how churches have just shut down, and they very limited on their participation. We don't have a priest, preacher or that's active know in Christmas in April, do we?

CLE: Not one.

EB: I can't think -- Of all the churches, of Christmas April, not one preacher is part of Christmas April. Now, you know that's surprising.

ME: Have the churches played more of a role in the past?

EB: Oh yeah. In the older days. Yeah. I mean, that was the base. If you had a problem, you

went to church and somebody solved it. You go to church now, you may come out with a bigger problem. [Laughter]

ME: Really?

EB: Yeah man!

CLE: In what sense, for example?

EB: You go to church and say, "I really am in need of this, that or the other," and the first thing that you going to get is a third-degree on why you are in trouble. And nine out of 10 times, they going turn you away. And if they turn you away, they're not going to try to inquire to find out whether your problem was legit at all. I don't think they have a follow-up system. And, practically every church has a certain segment of women who are elderly and not relieving men of the responsibility, but it seems like it's a natural for women to become very concerned about persons who are having problems. And, every church has gotten plenty 60, 65 year-old women that's there that can pick up the telephone and follow-up and something like that. We just, we just not that kind of society anymore. We're really not.

ME: We haven't talked about the Base much and people talk what major influence the Base has had in terms of things, and we've been here since you were born, coming back every summer. What kind of an influence has the Base had?

EB: I think it's quite obvious. The Base has made St. Mary's County recently. Whether it's a good change or bad change is another thing. The Base, when it first came here, it consumed a lot of property, a lot of property. It changed the life of a lot of people. A lot of people who used to be farmers became laborers or supervisors on the Base, so that meant the farm went down. And when the farm went down, then that meant all the

people that worked on the farm went along with it. Watermen: We used to have a number of shucking houses, crab houses in St. Mary's. Now, I grant you that there's less product in the river now, too, than it used to be. But it just seemed surprising to me that with what we do catch here, there's not one processing house in St. Mary's County.

CLE: That's right.

EB: Everything comes and goes right up the railroad. Nobody processes it. That's a little bit surprising. That looks like an industry that could be profitable here for somebody. I don't say that you could have one on every corner. But if you had a collecting point here and people did get a fair return—

[End of Side 1, Tape 2 of 2]

[Begin Side 2, Tape 2 of 2]

EB: Seems like if they had a collecting point somewhere or another and then a processing plant to go with it, it could make a tremendous difference. It could make a tremendous difference, but they just don't have it.

ME: Sort of sucking off people from what they used to do, and the Navy jobs means that you don't have some initiatives in these areas. Obviously, the Navy, the Base has had a major economic impact. Do you think it's had any other impact that's helped race relations or leadership in the county or in any other way?

EB: We have had people who came on the Base as Commanders that had a community interest. The military have always been, and not to St. Mary's but country-wide, they have been a group of people who are: "We'll take care of our own." How much they

reach out is another thing. Whether or not they do that, it's a whole different ball game.

One thing you may want to do is on that wall, there's a number of certificates my children have earned, a few things I've gotten, and a few things Johnnie has got.

ME: We really haven't talked much about your family life once you moved down to the County.

EB: Oh, it's been terrific. Been terrific. Been terrific. Absolutely. I can't think of nothing that I would have done different.

ME: There were four kids that you brought down--

EB: All of them ended up here. No, my oldest daughter, she was grown when I moved down. She had left home before we were -- In fact, she was married before I even -- Her mother and I had a problem, but there's nothing different I would have done. Not a thing in the world. I can't identify one thing that I'd a done different.

ME: Johnnie had a --

EB: One son. Yeah.

ME: She brought into the relationship.

CLE: How old is he?

EB: Yeah, Tony. Right. Nope. I couldn't -- If I tried to, I couldn't think of one thing that I would have done different. I've been blessed. That's the only thing I can say.

ME: Some of the certificates you referred to, there's won by the children.

EB: Won by the children. They've always been an involved group of kids. I often tell people, you know, now I have seven kids. I've never had to go to jail a day or one to get one out. There's five of them who don't smoke. One of them smokes regular, one of them who just barely every now and then takes a cigarette. Far as I know, there's none of them ever

been involved in dope. I don't remember if one of my kids ever in my life drew unemployment except for one who came out of the Service, two of them that came out of the Service who got mustered out. You know, they got -- When you come out the Service, you could get unemployment for x amount of weeks until you -- They got that. But once they started work, I never, never, not one of them have I known to draw unemployment.

The oldest girl is a registered nurse at Southern Maryland Hospital. The oldest boy is a carpenter now through the apprenticeship program and run commuter vans back and forth to Washington. The next oldest one is Mike who is a Ranger down the park. The next oldest one is a registered plumber and HVAC mechanic who has his own company in Washington, TLC. The next one would be Kevin who has his own DJ business. The next one would be little Tony who manages hours and worked with me. And, the next one would be the baby girl who's going back in the Service to complete her career.

CLE: Michelle.

EB: Yeah. Yeah. So, they're all gainful employed. I don't have none of them hanging around the house. But, I told them early, I told them in the 10th Grade that you need to start thinking about your career in life or what you want to do. That Daddy don't run a hotel. I don't want to work and pay me to stay here. And I think with that in mind, five of them now own or are buying their own home. And, Tony lives over near Michelle in the Service.

ME: Have any grandchildren?

EB: 14.

ME: 14.

EB: Johnnie tells me 16 sometime, and I have to go back and count. It's somewhere between 14 and 16. Who's keeping count at this point? [Laughter]

CLE: So, Tony's the youngest boy then, going backwards, Kevin.

EB: Um hm.

CLE: And Mike?

EB: Right.

CLE: Mike was born in '56.

EB: Yeah. Now, it's Tony. I'm sorry. Tony, little Tony first.

CLE: Yeah.

EB: Then Kevin.

CLE: Yeah.

EB: Then big Tony.

CLE: Yeah.

EB: Then Mike.

CLE: Then Mike.

EB: Then Sheila, Junie. Junie and then Sheila. And Michelle is the baby.

CLE: Junie is Junior?

EB: Junior, yeah. He's next to -- He's the --

CLE: Then the oldest girl is Sheila.

EB: Sheila, yeah.

CLE: Alright. That's a good number.

EB: Yes, it is. They're all gone now, so it's a perfect number! [Chuckle]

CLE: And, was Mae your stepmother.

EB: Now, Mae was my mother. Florence is my stepmother.

CLE: Her name again?

EB: Florence.

CLE: Florence.

EB: Florence.

CLE: Do you want me to put her on here?

EB: I don't care. She can get on there. Just say, "Stepmother."

CLE: And, the grandparents that you came down here to visit were named?

EB: I lived with them all, both sides.

CLE: Okay.

EB: So, I just came to country. Dora & Arthur was my father's parents.

CLE: So, that would be Dora & Arthur Brown.

EB: And Arthur Brown. Right. And Amanda & Jeff was my mother's parents.

CLE: Amanda --

EB: And Jeff.

CLE: And Jim, and that was --

EB: Jeff.

CLE: Jeff.

EB: Um hmm. Jeff

CLE: And that last name was?

EB: Smith.

CLE: Smith. And, you didn't put down an occupation, but it wouldn't be fair to say you were

retired.

EB: Well, that's what it asked. It said, "Are you retired?" and I said, "Yes."

CLE: No, you didn't say -- You said you had a spouse.

EB: Boy, I thought I was seeing retired down there! I guess I better go get my eyeglasses, hadn't I? Good gracious me!

ME: We've got one more area that we need to pursue before you, tire you out, and that is --

EB: How in the world did I see --?

ME: United Committee for African American Contributions.

EB: Right.

ME: Where did you get that idea? Tell us about it. How did it develop into that project?

EB: At the Minority Alliance's Anniversary, five, six years ago, I was supposed to making my President's speech, and I thought of all of the people in this county that the rest of us who was standing out there and sitting in the audience was standing on their shoulders. And, much of this County's history that I had heard, I knew and had become involved with. As to why nobody was doing anything about it, and I guess Andrea brought me attention to. And, what she had was all stuff, basically, recorded by the Farm Bureau and all in the south end of the County and very little background to it. For so many of the people that I knew had done tremendous other work. So, I thought it would be a good idea to just start taking some oral history and put up a stone somewhere or another say that there's a number of people -- Why, I wanted to put names to it -- a number of people who had contributed to the growth of St. Mary's. They made a big difference in St. Mary's, and that's how I brought it up.

I didn't want to head it because I was working with the government and I thought

that I could do more things utilizing government facilities if I wasn't in charge of it or wasn't named for it. So then, I got thinking about organizations. Donald Moore was President of the Jolly Gents had 25 guys who were all getting middle to older age who had a worth of information. The Jolly Gents were probably the most wealthiest minority organization that it was in the County. I just thought it'd be a natural to get Donald Moore involved which brings in 25 people. And if they get their spouse, we up to 50 people working right away to bring in Reggie who was the Worshipful Master of the Prince Hall at large up here that had 45 up here, 50 people in it, which also had Eastern Star group to it. So I said, "Well, heck. With two guys, if these two guys get their people involved, we got a hundred people to start with just like that."

Unfortunately, that didn't happen. They procrastinated and played with the thing for three years. And I just felt that if it was my idea, I just need to go to work at it and make something different happen, whether I was successful or not. And, that's what brought me to that point. What brought me to that point. I guess I could say -- and I hate talking about stuff like this because it sounds like it's bragging, but there has been a very few things, very few things in life that I ever attempted to do that I didn't succeed at. Again, like I was talking about the bathrooms at church, we end up with a kitchen and bathrooms and a nice looking building.

The Jolly Gents was meeting in old St. Joseph's School over on Rt. 5 when I first became President. We ended up only owning a nice piece of property on 235. I started with the Minority Business Alliance and it was -- before I came out -- it was nationally known. I mean, the Minority Business Alliance is named in Oakland, California. It was just as prevalent as it was here almost.

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

EB: We started with Salt & Pepper, and I think Salt & Pepper has ended up to be a premier organization today because it deals with so many of the issues that's necessary.

I started with housing. We ended up selling people houses. One of the worst blight areas in the County which was Macintosh: I was part responsible for getting rid of that and getting people into nice houses. Tubman Douglass was a conversion. If I go through and just pick out a few things like I can say my life hasn't been a waste. Might not have been the best in the world, but it hadn't been a waste.

I started a Boy Scout Troup in Washington, which I got an award over there for -- that became the second highest rating Scout group that it was, at that time, predominantly black community. We ended up with three Eagle Scouts coming out our group. I only had 15 boys.

CLE: Wow!

EB: And got three Eagle Scouts out of it. A lot of Scout troops go for years and don't get one Eagle Scout out of it. If you notice, the Enterprise: One of the boys that come down here many a time and I sit him right out on that hill and we talk. He signed with University of Michigan the other day. Him and his mother, Gloria Duke, sitting there with him. Gloria had become one of the most distressed mothers that I'd ever seen, and she'd almost given up, but she had a lot of religion. She was very religious. So, I convinced her that God has always said, "You do something for yourself and I'll help you. Don't sit there and wait for him to do it all." And, she end up, now she's the assistant manager of the

Cosmetic Department in Wal-Mart, real healthy young lady. Her son now is ended up going to college. Her daughter is a cashier at Wal-Mart.

Joe Holly, who works with me now, was up the road, was a bricklayer. His goal was to get off on Friday and stay drunk until Sunday night. His wife was the same. Pete will tell you today that dealing with her, got her into Alcoholics Anonymous. That was what I say after you understand what it is. Got her into it. Pete now owns her automobile, and Joe's got a car and a truck. They own their own house. Both of them has got a bank account.

I mean, I could go back and look at a few incidents around, like, at where I can see people have been successful. So, I couldn't say that I was going to let the monument go to the defeat. That was just simple as that. It just couldn't do it. We might a looked for a Taj Mahal and we end up with something less. [Laughter] But at least, we're going to have something there.

CLE: We're going to have something.

EB: We're going to have something. That's right. So, something -- And with where it starts, it can always be added on it.

CLE: Yes.

EB: If money comes along, you can make it more -- And, that's been my idea: Start wherever you can and then build on it. And, people will become more involved when they something than seeing nothing.

CLE: Yes.

EB: Well, I think we're going fly real good. In that same vain, the person that I was talking about that was going to contribute some money called me Wednesday and told me by

next Friday, I should be able to pick up the $2,000.

CLE: That was not a bad check you had your picture in the paper for.

EB: That was pretty nice, wasn't it? That was pretty nice. That's right.

CLE: Good looking folks.

EB: Yup. That was pretty nice. I tell you. It all looks good. The -- Spencer has got some of the black stone lined up. We're going pick up a couple pick-up loads of that. The natural stone is going to be given to us. We got to pay for the black stone, but that's going to be given to us. We know what the PSI is now for the space that's there. Figuring on about 12 tons. 24,000 pounds for the monument, so we going to do it at around 30/32,000 pounds when we pour it. Those things are pretty well lining up now. I think we're going be alright. Definitely. But, that's what I said: If you get a goal in mind, might take you a long time. But if you don't give up, you just keep chunking at it a little bit of the time, it'll work. It'll work.

I often talk about McDonald's. He made every child it is in the world know what the golden arch is made off of french fries. So if we keep plugging along a little bit, [laughter] we can get mostly anything else. I mean, he didn't stop here. He went overseas: Russia and everywhere else. Was in China. The golden arches. A child could see that a million miles away and know it's french fry time.

ME: The human spark plug in addition to the insignia, the logos.

EB: Yeah. Yeah.

ME: That's what this has all been about.

EB: That's what it is. Johnnie has coffee and cookies. Want me to have her bring them up?

ME: Thank you.

[End of Side 2, Tape 2 of 2]