

Unified Committee for Afro-American Contributions  
Oral History Documentation Project

**JOSEPH LEE SOMERVILLE**

Interviewed by Ruth Portee

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[Begin Side 1, Tape 1 of 2]

Ruth Portee: ...to interview you today...I'd like to...

Joseph Lee Somerville: My name is Joseph Lee Somerville, Sr.

RP: Thank you. Now, the first question I have is: What were the times like when you were a child?

JS: The times when I was a child: Growing up was different than what it was today. First, we had family -- I guess we'd say family morals in the home was respected very well. You respect your parents from what I see today. In some cases back then, if you did not - -You did not talk back to your parents. If so, you got a back-hand smack. Today, people raise the parents. My mother raised me alone. In fact, I had two other brothers, but she raised our family and was supportive and worked with our family back in those days.

RP: Okay. How did you and your family live? What did they eat?

JS: We lived on a farm. It was the home farm. My grandparents bought the property, heir property through the family. My mother, my uncle -- We all lived together there. Back then, we lived off the farm. We raised hogs, chickens, turkeys. We raised tobacco, had a large garden. My mother canned a lot and prepared for the winter: vegetables, fruits. I

would say we ate very well back there then, the main foods. We didn't have a lot of junk food like it is today.

RP: What is your earliest memory?

JS: My earliest memory would go back to about 10 or 12 years old, and some of the crazy things as a youngster, I guess, we did back then.

RP: Describe your relationship with siblings.

JS: My relationship with my four sons is wonderful and I don't believe that there's, in my feeling, there's another family that is more close to siblings than what I am. The boys: They treat me as one of them. However, they do and they honor and they give respect. They know where to stop and we have a wonderful relationship, also with their mother. It's always when they come in the house, whether they be gone for a day, they'll hug. They'll kiss their mom. Shake hands with me, and they never leave the house without kissing or shaking hands without saying, "We'll see you later," and I honor that to the most and that should be. And if it was in a lot of families, you wouldn't have the problems you have.

RP: What church did you go to?

JS: I attend St. Joseph's Church in Morganza, Maryland. St. Joseph's Catholic Church.

RP: How did your parents deal with health and illness?

JS: As I can recall back then, doctors used to make house calls. I recall the doctors coming to my house, to our house to visit my grandmother and my aunt when they were bedridden and they were unable to get to the office. Although when we had the whooping cough, which was very popular back then, some other injuries, we had to go to the doctor's office. And at that time, there was very few doctors and the wait for -- at the doctor's, to see you was a long wait. So, that's why a lot of the times, our parents had home remedies that they used to cure our aches and pains.

RP: Do you remember any special cures?

JS: Back when I was a youngster, I belonged or was a member of the 4H Club. We went on a tour and visited the Capital of the United States in Washington, DC. I remember back then our field director at that time, or county agent, was Mr. Holmes; and, that was my first time that I can remember out of the county to city to a large, I guess, sight-seeing place like that.

RP: Did your family have a medical doctor?

JS: Yes, the doctor we had -- we had was Dr. Welch. His office was in a place called Chaptico. The doctor did make house calls and other than that, we had to go to his office.

RP: What types of things did you do as a child? You said you worked on a farm at that time. So, what types of things did you do as a child?

JS: As a child, on weekends, first and foremost we went to church. Whether we walked, hitched a ride, what have you, we went to church. After that, we came home. We used to -- There was a lot of boys in my neighborhood. I guess somewhere around 20 to 25 youngsters all about in the same age category. And on Sundays, we used to gather together whether be in our farm, the neighbor's farm. We'd always play softball. Back then, we would make our own ball, stuffed with rags and so forth, take an old cart stand off one of the wagons around, use it for a bat, and we would go out in the cow pasture because that -- the animals we had used to keep the grass, ate down low. But, we a wonderful time playing ball on Sundays. That'd just be our hobby.

Horseback riding used to be our hobby. We used to always -- Our parents used to work the horses during the week and we used to ride them to death on Sundays racing up and down the lane. As we grew a little bit older, a couple of the older boys in the group, they bought automobiles that weren't tagged and we used to drive them up and down the farms around.

In the wintertime, we used to -- Well, during the summer, when actually working the farm, used to thrash wheat. Some Sundays, we used to put all our little nickels and

dimes together and go to the store and get apple cider. Lay back in the straw stack on Sunday afternoon drink apple cider.

Then, we used to go to a few ball games. We were fortunate to have the Oakfield Tigers at one point in time to play -- to hold their hardball games right on our farm. So, that was an excitement therefore for eight, 10 years or so. There was numerous other things we did.

RP: What did you like to do the most and why?

JS: Well, back then, I used to do, the most I got the fun out of and I guess that was used to horseback riding, playing fox and hounds chasing each other up and down. We did -- I was not familiar at that time or we couldn't go to big baseball games, other large functions around. Our main amusement was going to our church festival. Then after that, we started back into having -- We started to having our County Fair. The school activities, these were the most exciting times for us as we were coming along. Movie theatres were out because you had to travel to Leonardtown and we were forced down a little alley to go up into the second floor of the building, and we just didn't have the money each time to go to the movies. Now and then, our parents would splurge and send up to the movie theatre.

RP: What chores did you have to do?

JS: My chores was many, along with the other brothers. First off, we had to make sure we had plenty of wood in the house. Back then, we heat our homes with wood and that meant helping to go in the woods with horses and wagons to haul the wood out. Did not have any chainsaw. That meant cutting wood down with an ax or using a cross-cut saw to cut it up to stove length. We had to make sure, in the morning before going to school, that we had wood in the house so my mother would have -- My aunt would have wood for the day. Other chores was getting up and make sure we got the eggs up, especially in the wintertime because they would freeze in the hen house. You had to feed the hogs.

We had cows we had to milk, horses to feed. Just a host of chores we had to do morning and night.

RP: Okay. How did your parents treat you?

JS: My parents treated us with love and respect. When we did wrong, they corrected us and I appreciate that today. Other than that, even back when my grandparents: There was a lot of love and understanding in the household.

RP: What did they do with you that you remember most?

JS: Well, I would say we -- I can't really put my finger on, at this time, anything in particular that they did because we were always doing something. Whether it be going -- My mother used -- She would go to Baltimore quite often to visit her sister and quite naturally, by me being the youngest kid, I would always go with her. And going to Baltimore, riding the Greyhound bus, then getting on the streetcars in Baltimore, that was exciting, you know, happening's back at that time.

RP: Very good situation.

JS: Learned, right, very much.

RP: How did they discipline you?

JS: Mother disciplined me with a green peach tree limb--That was -- and that was to the extreme. Some things that happened or come along. But other than that, she would talk. You'd always -- If you got smart of something, she would give you a back-hand smack and make nothing of it, but then she would turn around and love you behind that. But first and foremost, she got the point across in the worst kind of way, then there was love and everything behind it.

RP: What were you disciplined for?

JS: A lot of things coming along.

RP: Like what?

JS: One thing that stick out in my mind, and I mentioned the peach tree limb: Back then, they had those hard-stem matches. What you call strike anywhere? You could take a pair of

blue jeans and wrap them across your hips and strike them, and which maybe a mischievous boy coming along them, I took a handful of those and took them under the corner of the house outside to hide them so I could go outside and strike them. My uncle came over and he was standing in the yard, and he saw them under the corner of the house. And believe you me, when he got them out and gave them to my mother, she immediately marched me out and asked me if I had them. Quite naturally, I wouldn't dare lie to my parents. I told her, "Yes." She marched me right up to the peach tree, had me to break the limb off and give her the switch and that was one beating that would stick with me forever.

RP: Was it a small switch or --?

JS: No. I tried to get a small switch, but it seemed like a big club because that was one beating that she gave me and which, rightfully so, now looking back, I was dead wrong because matches could strike anywhere. Anything could have set the house on fire, and I think that that was the point that she was trying to drive, to drive into me through my pants and also through, in my cheeks in my mouth in talking; and, she did get her point across.

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

JS: With the education that she had by my parent being one parent, I would think that she did prepare me the best she knew how for life. That is, she saw to it that I went to school everyday. At that time, clothing was -- She did her best with clothing, with clothing me. Quite naturally, I had two other brothers she had to look out for also. And I would say with her income, the way the economy was back then, she did the best for me with what she had.

RP: Describe your formal schooling.

JS: My formal schooling: Grammar school: I attended St. Joseph School in Morganza. This was the colored school. Back then, they had a white St. Joseph School which was behind

the church and the colored school was about a quarter of a mile south of St. Joseph's Church. That was the one that I went to and graduated in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade from that school.

RP: How did you get to school at that time?

JS: At that time, we had a school bus and I'm going way back in time. The bus was -- had chicken wire around the inside. There was a wood bus and chicken wire around the windows and it putty-putt up the road at that time. And, my father was the school bus driver [chuckle], so I remember so well, you know, about it.

RP: What was your classroom like?

JS: There, our classroom was a wood floor, large windows because we had no air condition. We had heat. At that time, we used wood. And soon after I started to school, we changed over to oil furnace. I'm talking about the Grammar school. And, it had two large blackboards in the wall. They had electric lights into it but not as many as you would have in a school nowadays. Our classroom was of many -- down a long, dark, wood hallway. Bathrooms were outside.

RP: Did you have a wood stove there?

JS: Yes, I had a wood stove there. We, as students in the upper grades, used to get wood. Nuns had wood delivered and we used to make sure that the wood was in the classrooms for the next morning to start fires with.

RP: Well, in your -- while you were in the elementary part, elementary section in school, who was your favorite teacher and your least favorite teacher, and why?

JS: [chuckle] Well, I recall the principal at St. Joseph's School: Sister Charles. She was a white nun. She was firm and studied with the children. We also had a lot of lay teachers that was, that taught at the school: Ms. Minette Carter, Miss Gertrude Herbert, and Mrs. Yorkshire. There was a couple more ladies that had education through the public school system in the county that were able to teach, and these ladies were black ladies that helped to teach at the St. Joseph's Colored School.

RP: Did you like them?

JS: My favorite one: It's hard to think back on to say which was the favorite and which was not.

RP: Well, did you like Sister Charles because she was firm?

JS: Sister Charles used to get out and get on us quite a bit. She was an elderly nun and one thing that I didn't like too much is that when report card time rolled around, the pastor at St. Joseph's Church would come down and hand out report cards through the whole school. I do recall Father Devani, a couple times in the school year -- And if you got a bad report card, he would fan you with his cane. He had a white oak cane that he would really, literally bend you over in the hallway and paddle you. And then when you got home, you got another paddling when you got home for having a bad report card. I did fall in that category, I know, a couple of times. I did, you know, put my head down and focus on my work and quite naturally got out of the rut that I was in.

In high school, I do recall having a Miss Acey who was our homeroom teacher. She taught English. I got along with her very well. Mrs. Moore: I -- She was the music teacher for, I think, through my whole four years of high school. I got along very, very well.

Mr. Holmes was our ancient or what you call History teacher, and his, he taught us about Macbeth, a lot of ancient history which today in time, it's nice to know, but it really is not helping me out with the world today.

Mr. Smith, David Smith: He taught me quite a bit. And at that time, we were living on the farm, farming. He taught us about planting crops, extra things to do, how to get more yield out of what you plant. He also taught me carpentry work and which I attribute a lot of that to what I'm able to do today. We built furniture; we've talked about building homes. General repairs around the farming house which was remarkable for me. Planting garden: That helped out.

Mr. Ryan was the principal down there and quite naturally, I remember him very well also, especially when he got on his tangent and used to call all of us "silly boys."

RP: What was your favorite and least favorite subject?

JS: My favorite subjects or time at school was working in the agricultural shop. Over there, it allowed us to get out from behind the desk, do hands-on work, work in the carpentry shop, build chairs, lawn furniture we would and sell as a project for the school. We planted sweet potato plants and were able to draw sweet potato plants to sell to the farmers and the people around. We were able to get out while we were at school to drive the school tractor around, and I would say that was exciting times for the economy and the jobs and the way the, everything was at that time. That was the now thing: being prepared to go into farming because I knew nothing about the cities, desk jobs or government itself. So at that point in time, that was the thing. Nowadays, the thing is computers. Kids in school: They have the opportunity to go to work in the projects and work with computers, hands-on things. Back then, it was farming.

My -- I guess the worst subject of all [chuckle] back there then that we were, we had to have in order for us to graduate was Ancient History, which we talked about Macbeth, and that type of thing, which was not in our culture at that time. And even going back to my grammar school days, as far as the activity and so forth there, the nuns had us all out there as a group doing square dancing and the grapevine twist. I don't square dance today, but these were the things that you had to do back in those days coming along.

RP: Okay. As a young boy, I'm sure you enjoyed working in the agricultural department.

JS: Yes, I did.

RP: Okay. What were your dreams of becoming as a young adult?

JS: Well, back then [chuckle], my dream was of becoming something flashy. As youngsters, even today, what do you want to be? I'd like to be a farmer. Well, then not realizing that farming were volunteer work here in our community, I certainly didn't want -- I wanted to do a good job with what I had, what I would select, but I guess truck driver, farming, you know, any of those flashy things that would keep me on the move was my dream,

coming along. I felt, at that time, and each person through life ought to be able to measure his or her ability. And back there then, I felt that I did not have, even though coming out of high school, enough education to go continue on to college, not only that, I don't believe that my mother, at that time, could afford to send me to college.

RP: As a teenager, did your parents let you court?

JS: Back then, what we would consider courting is when we went to a school function. We met a girl there. We talked, danced and that type of thing then. It wasn't any of this using the car, going to pick her up. But yes, we did what we could back there then, and we call it back then: It was friendship courting. Today in time, it's -- You have a different idea in this day and time.

RP: Where would you go? Did you have a chance to take the girl to a movie?

JS: If we did, we -- back there then, we only had a -- Movie theatres were far and few between: one in Leonardtown and one in Lexington Park. We would go to school functions. Quite naturally, we weren't supposed to, at that time, but a lot of the youngsters and all used to hang out at the local taverns. In daytime, we used to go to catch bus trips and go to Carl's Beach. Back years ago when I was a kid coming along that used to be an exciting time. Always go to Carl's and Sparrow's Beach. And once or twice during the summer, we also had a bus excursion that would go to Coney Island up in New York, and my mother was very fond of cooking fried chicken, potato salad, a basket -- a picnic basket and always going on these trips. And, that was her -- Should have mentioned back earlier, that was, you know, exciting times also. And yes, with the okay of the young ladies parents, knowing that their daughter would be with my mother and with us, they would give the okay for them to go, along. We could go together.

RP: What was it like when you first went out on your own?

JS: Well, it was great because then I felt as though I was growing up and becoming a young man, where I didn't have to stay under the arms of my brothers to, you know, watch over me.

RP: Where did you go after you started on your own? Where did you go and why?

JS: Well, I just -- It was just a continuation of what I was doing as a youngster going to school. We would go out to local taverns. There weren't any or many other places during the week, on weekends to attend other than your local tavern and the ball games on the Sunday evening. That was the amusement we had around here. Other than your own neighborhood youngsters, playing ball and that type of thing.

You got cars. We used to ride around different places. Activity: Oh, we had a skating rink over in the St. Joseph's project. That used to be a hangout place for us during the week on Wednesday nights and then on weekends. Friday nights, we all used to gather there and skate. It just weren't those many places to go and things to do back then.

RP: When you were on your own out there, did some of the other adults in the community ever check you out every once in awhile, and did they go back and talk to your parents?

JS: Oh yeah. There's a funny things. It's a phenomenon, I guess. No matter where you go, what you do out here, somebody is watching. That was true back then when I was a youngster. And as -- after I became a parent and my sons started going out, they would often wonder, "Daddy and Mama, who told you? How did y'all find out?" It was a phenomenon that I guess the parents would always have a slight idea. Ask one question and someone would always come back and say, "Your son did this," and I can attribute a lot of it because not only negative things came back; positive things came back about my sons and I hope positive things came back to my parents when I was out there.

RP: What was your money situation like?

JS: Money was tight; and quite naturally, the dollar would buy more then than what it do now. I remember gasoline being at 18, 23¢ a gallon. We could put in a dollar's worth of gas and ride all night long. Today, you cannot. I worked on the farm of my uncle and over the years, he would give me money off and on for working. We raised a truck

garden in which we harvest tomatoes and we carried them down to Scotland to a tomato factory down there. You remember that?

RP: Yes.

JS: We used to haul tomatoes down there. Also, as a youngster coming up --

[End of Side 1, Tape 1 of 2]

[Begin Side 2, Tape 1 of 2]

JS: --we stand on the streets in Washington on -- I think it was K Street. Now, we used to raise vegetables here on the farm and he would carry them up on Saturday mornings and sell them on the street. And quite naturally, I got money from that to keep me going.

My brothers: Now and then at that time, they were working out. My older brother, working at construction work: He would give me extra money. My mother would give me money for doing chores around the house. It was money that I earned, not money that they voluntarily gave. I had to earn it.

RP: [inaudible]...when you get so much money today--

JS: Very true.

RP: They don't know how to handle it.

JS: Very true.

RP: Okay. What kind of work have you done to support yourself?

JS: To support myself? I -- Go back, I guess, being jack of all trades and master of none, I guess. But as I can recall starting out from my high school days, was working at the Naval Air Station, and I can recall in my last year of high school, during the summer before my 12<sup>th</sup> Grade, I worked as a -- My job title was a laborer, but what I would do would be a water boy on construction jobs. I would keep the water coolers for building runways -- filled up with cool water. Had -- My uncle used to sell sodas off the truck, and that was what I used to do every day: Fill the water jars up, put ice into it, sell sodas

off the truck. And that construction job, I was making \$2.35 an hour as I started out in construction working there then.

I worked the summer and in the fall, I went back to school and got my diploma and graduated, then I went back into the construction field and I worked mostly in concrete construction. I used to drive to Washington and a contractor out of Virginia had motor buggies which was a buggy that you would ride on. Had a motor that you would haul concrete on the job, pouring floors. I did that for about six years. I finished concrete for about a couple years finishing out. I worked as a carpentry helper. I worked as a steam fitter. I worked as a truck driver for Charles County Concrete, the regular mixers. I tried self-employment coming along.

Then, I got excited when I was approached to become a law enforcement officer. I went into that. Was in that for 16 years. I lost the election in '82 and now I'm working at Calvert Cliffs Nuclear Power Plant as a Nuclear Security Systems Operator.

RP: Excellent. You have a lot of experience. How did you get to work? How did you get to your work? Now, you worked on the Base for awhile, you said. How did you get there?

JS: Well, I would catch my uncle down because I was working with him. He was the shop steward on the construction job down there. Quite naturally, I would ride down with him everyday. Everyday we'd go to the ice plant, pick ice up, then load up the sodas, and he had the truck, had the regular truck to deliver sodas right to his house, and I rode to work with him.

RP: So, how did you choose this work or was it chosen for you?

JS: It was more or less chosen for me. I had to do something. I wanted to do something, and this was the first line I worked, again, working with your family, and that's how he helped to get me started, to get me where I am today.

RP: ...learning situation.

JS: Yes, it was.

RP: What did it mean to you? Your working -- riding to work with your uncle, and he probably gave you a bit of information. What did all this mean to you?

JS: It meant that -- As I look back, it meant that you want to better yourself. It meant that you would want to pave a better road for your children, and I think with me, having the experiences of work -- a lot of the experiences that's not mentioned here -- would be: It was, I was able to pave the way for my children coming along and to make extra money to make sure that they had some of the things in life that I did not have coming along and some of the entertainment that I did not have.

RP: How much money did you make?

JS: At that time, like I mentioned, starting out, made \$2.35 an hour and that was doing the construction job. Quite naturally, I had Union dues to pay. And quite naturally, back then, that was a lot of money.

RP: Describe a day on the job.

JS: My very first job, you mean, when I first started out?

RP: Yes.

JS: Well, we, quite naturally, we'd always get there. We start to work maybe 6, 6:30, depends upon the time of the year. Over at the Base there, I would start off filling up water jugs, putting ice into the jugs and making sure that the other workmen around had plenty of water to drink. At break time, we would have -- make sure they would come to the truck for sodas. And then after I finished my work, I would generally sweep the office out, whether it be the Superintendent of the job on down, clean the office up. By me being young, inexperienced out there, these were some of the chores that I could do that the other older workmen did not have to do. Their experience was to stay on the job with me. I would do these things: dump the trash cans, just things in general. Work around the office, clean, make sure things were tidied up. However, I got the same pay for doing this as the guys out in the field did. Until older, then I would grab a shovel, go

out and help to grade the lines on the runways to make them smooth for the rest of the fellows.

RP: What do you remember about your wedding?

JS: My wedding: I remember the day vividly because we had -- It rained. It was hurricane, tropical storm all in one pass through there the morning of my wedding. First off, that day, you know you have to have your marriage license. I -- The Clerk of Court was not into the Courthouse on that Friday to sign my marriage license, so I had -- I knew the Clerk Recorder. It was Eleanora Laningham at that time. I went down to her house to get my marriage license early that Saturday morning. She said that the Clerk was not in and I had to go down to the Clerk's office and have Mr. Greenwell to sign my marriage license before I could get married.

That was almost to me a catastrophe because when I got there, he was in bed, and he was forever getting out of bed just to come downstairs to sign the license. And after he signed it, he said, "Well, Eleanora could have did this." And now, I was getting married at 11:00 and we looking at almost 10 o'clock that morning, I'm still running around trying to get my marriage license signed.

So anyhow, it was raining, nasty, terrible morning. Went back home, got dressed, went up to St. Joseph's Church where we got married. Went in the church and it was raining and blowing so hard, we could not even leave the church after the wedding.

The reception followed immediately after in the church hall at Morganza there. So, that was a typical day. That day, my wife, in addition to being, running around to get the marriage license signed, the priest had told her that on the night before he would give her 20 minutes floating time to be late. She was about another 45 minutes late because on their way to church, it rained so hard they had to stop on the side of the road because they couldn't see how to drive and that delayed the wedding.

RP: How did you meet your spouse?

JS: I met my spouse through high school, through our basketball games and rivalry and so forth where she went to the old Jarboesville High School and I was going to Banneker High School. That's how I first saw her and met her, yeah.

RP: Why did you decide to get married?

JS: Well, I went with my wife for -- Well, during high school, not counting those days. But afterwards, my wife and I went together for six years before I asked her hand in marriage, and she had finished school. She was in college at the time. That's when I -- knowing that she had a head on her shoulders and was heading the right direction I decided to, go ahead and ask her to marriage. We dated for the last, strongly for about the last five years and I thought I was ready to select her as my wife.

RP: What was your honeymoon like?

JS: Back then, quite naturally, money was tight. We did not go out of the County or anywhere like that for a honeymoon. Just went and spent our time locally. Took two days off from work and just spend it locally being together and setting up house and so forth.

RP: Okay. You do have a lovely family. What has your family life been like?

JS: Since marriage, like in any marriage, you have ups and downs, but I would say in my marriage I've had mostly all ups. I have a lovely wife, lovely family; and right today, I can't ever remember arguing or fussing with my wife. All that's a knock-down-drag-out fight: No way. It has not happened. My wife would vouch for me on that, and what you need in a marriage is love and understanding. I think we have that, and I attribute that to our four sons and growing up together.

RP: You had spoken a little bit about your relationship with your wife. Would you describe your relationship with your children and your grandchildren?

JS: My relationship with my sons is great. We do things together as -- When they young, coming up along, I used -- We boated. They loved the water. They loved to fish and crab a lot, and I can remember when they were very young, going out fishing and

crabbing on the weekends and Sundays, and that holds true right today as we speak. They're together, ready to go fishing today.

My -- Three of my sons have been to the military. I had three in the Army at one time. And since then, right today, I have one still in the military. One spent 12 years; the other spent three years and got out and both of them have sought employment. Like my oldest son say, "Following in your footsteps" and they're in law enforcement today. My other son: He is still in the Army, stationed at Ft. Bragg down in North Carolina. My youngest son: I tried to coax him into going into military to get a start in life, but he elect not to although he is working for a computer firm in Washington, DC contracting. My sons like I say, we, like I say, we do things together. This past summer -- last summer, we ride motorcycles. All four of us have our own motorcycles. We ride motorcycles together. They are with me -- I feel good with them because I'm one of the boys, but they still respect me. [Chuckle]

RP: That's really wonderful. ...have any grandchildren?

JS: Yes, I have six grandchildren.

RP: My word!

JS: Yeah. My grandchildren, all of them are loving as they can be. Quite naturally, everything is Grand pop this, Grand pop that and they -- I can see the lovingness that I and my wife and I instilled into our sons. They, in turn, are instilling that into their children and they are close-knit families.

RP: How many girls?

JS: Two. I meant two -- I said, four. Four grand girls and two boys.

RP: Oh, okay! That's really wonderful. What part has religion played in your life?

JS: I would say religion has played a tremendous part in my life. Religious -- religion has helped me to understand people. And as I was taught as a kid coming along, to know love and to serve God. And to me, that applies to family, as well.

RP: What church do you attend?

JS: I attend St. Joseph's Church in Morganza.

[End of Side 1, Tape 1 of 1]

[Begin Side 2, Tape 1 of 1]

RP: What church do you attend?

JS: I attend St. Joseph's Church in Morganza, Maryland. A Catholic church.

RP: How do you know there is a God?

JS: Well, I can only go on what I was taught. I went to the Catholic school, and I graduated from there eight years. And doing that whole tenure at the school, we were taught to know love and to serve God, so following my instincts of what I was taught.

RP: Okay. What is your relationship with Jesus?

JS: My relationship with Jesus is great. I feel as though -- I do attend church faithfully as often as I can almost every Sunday unless my work schedule lead me otherwise. I do practice his commandments, the commandments that was handed down. And I would say that to know Jesus is to love him, and I love him.

RP: Okay. What community activities do you participate in? Describe the club activities, church activities, holidays, family reunions, fairs, Bingo.

JS: Well, as far as church activities: Quite naturally, it's attending the church. Church functions, which they are, like the special Saint Holidays, attend the church. During Lenten season, I try to attend church during the week each Friday night. Other holy days, I practice my religion and attend the church. I say your holidays: Christmas, Easter. Always go to church on that. Along with my family, we do attend.

The reunions: We have, tried to get together with the basic, close members of our family at least once a year during the summer: cookouts and so forth. Bingo: I really don't practice to go to Bingo for my own reasons. As far as fairs, I attend, like, our County Fair which we have here. I attend that. There aren't many other activities, that's

carried on in this general area, that, you know, where we go. But, in other words, I just can't think of any off hand.

RP: Okay. How do you feel about life in general today?

JS: I feel great about life. First of all, you must love yourself, love what you're doing, and I feel that I'm in fair health. I -- The main happiness of one is knowing and loving God, knowing and loving his wife and family. And, I consider myself being a family man. That really give me an outlook on life. I'm employed, [chuckle] and it's a lot different than some others I've seen out here, but I can say I have a wonderful life.

RP: In what way is it different from the way it used to be?

JS: I would say money is the root of all evil. It used to be we didn't have much money, and you were happy. Today, I can do things, go places, and I'm still happy, but it used to be that you would sit and want and wonder and wish. Today, you can go out and get. And even though, get now and pay later -- It's a lot easier, and that has attributed to, you know, a lot of happiness and a lot of outlook on life being good.

RP: Is the quality of life better or worse now?

JS: I would say that the quality of life is about the same. However, back when -- They say today that the baby boomers, which you're talking about the people that's about 50 years old and what they're doing nowadays. The quality of life, I would say, was better back there then because you didn't have abortions and a lot of the rapes and murders and so forth that's going on. Today, you have this, and I think that the breakdown --my feeling of -- that the baby boomers took a vacation. They took a vacation on, for instance, keeping harmony and morals in the home.

Today, the young girls out here: A lot of them are getting pregnant. Teenagers: Babies raising babies. And I think when the baby boomers took vacation on that, they did their thing then. The young ladies went out and entice men, youngsters. You know, back in that time, and today, they're wondering what's happening; and, they're trying to get respect and morals back in the home. If they can do that, they can kinda sort of bring

down the teen pregnancy problems that we have with teenagers on drugs and abuse today.

RP: Are people different from what they used to be?

JS: People are no different. It's just that their ways are different. The way they look on life is different. Things come easy now. Back there then, things were hard. They appreciated it. They have to work for what they had. Nowadays, people look for hand-outs.

RP: How are the teenagers in St. Mary's County today different from when you were a teen?

JS: I think the teenagers themselves: They're still about the same. It is just that the teenagers today have more avenues. They have more to be given to them. Like when I was a teenager coming along, I -- my parents couldn't go out and buy me a brand-new bicycle. They couldn't afford it. What I got for Christmas was a good used bicycle. Today, kids will go out and they'll get the most expensive bike that they can, the parents will still have to scuffle to pay for it. So, the teenagers today: They can go out and get stereos and different other Nintendo games and all that stuff. They can sit down hours on end and set and play. When I was coming along, we had a little portable AM radio. We walked around with a little, small, twice the size of a pack of cigarettes. The things are different. It's the material things that has ruined a lot of the kids today versus back when I was a youngster coming along.

RP: Just as an example, I discovered this little boy whose tennis shoes cost \$82 and his mother didn't hardly have money to pay for his lunch at school.

JS: And they, those type kids, they want to keep up with the styles.

RP: Yes.

JS: Back when I was a kid, I got a pair of what we called fish heads, and they were tennis shoes that cost about \$3. Three to five dollars and I was just as happy. I could run just as fast with those as this kid could with \$80 shoes on.

RP: What has caused these changes?

JS: I think -- The changes, I think, has come about from the parent in the home always trying to give the best to the kids. And in turn, they try to do more. I think what they call is, "Keeping up with the Jones." I think that if your neighbor bought his son a dirt bike, my son, a bicycle, he's not going to want to ride the bike. He's going to want to ride the dirt bike. Same thing with young ladies: The mother will go out and have her hair cut a certain style; whereas in the household, if I had girls, they would probably get just a regular hairdo. The clothes, the same way, and I think it's the have and have-nots what make the difference.

RP: Are race relations different today in the county?

JS: Yes, race relation has come a long way since I was a youngster in St. Mary's here. Going back, I very vividly remember some establishments that you could go into, you could not try the clothes on. You had a certain section in the store where you could only buy from. Lunch rooms: You could not sit at the counter. You had to always order your food to go out. The little convenience stores on the corner: Black men, women had to go to a little one-foot hole in the wall to purchase any beverages that they would want.

And, it followed all the way through in religion, our church. The priests had two collections: one for the black, one for the white. The white would have to go to communion first, then, before the black. Had separate confession stalls. It seemed, though, that the black was always second and treated second coming along then.

Now, things has changed. We all go to church together. We all go out to the same establishment. We sit down to the same counter; we eat together, but there are some isolated things that still is -- that still make a difference between the black and white.

RP: What was segregation like? I mean, you just said something that you all go different places now than then. What was it like when you were in high school or after getting out of high school and you went to work?

JS: Well actually, for my generation coming along, I believe that it is a little bit harder for us to understand segregation. I'm saying that because I did not have the opportunity to go to school with white folk. I went to parochial school --St. Joseph which was all black. They had their all-white school. I went to -- In high school, I went to Banneker High School and they had Margaret Brent High School. So, and these, that was public school. So, it wasn't until in the early '60's when you had, when the schools and all were mixed and we all could go together. And I -- had I had went to school, been able to socialize with some of the white folk, been able to understand the culture one-on-one, talking, it may well have given me a little different outlook on life today.

RP: Were you ever afraid of a group or a person practicing hate?

JS: No, I was not. I can say that I read about a lot of these things happening. Some happened right here in the County, even my community. But as an individual myself, I was not afraid of any practicing hate type of things, you know, that do happens.

RP: Okay. How do you feel about living in the county now?

JS: I feel great by living in St. Mary's County. I was born and raised right in Loveville, and I have been out of the county, other places, but always be happy to get back home. They say that you cannot take the country out of a boy, but you can --

RP: The boy out of the country. [Chuckle]

JS: Right.

RP: If you have lived in the city, which do you like best?

JS: I -- Well, never had the opportunity, really, to live in the city. I visited the city, worked in the city, but I found out really just by doing that and seeing what happens in the city, uh uh [no]. I prefer the open country for me.

RP: Do you feel like there is a difference between country people and outsiders?

JS: Yes, in a sense. In a sense, I would say that there is. Take down in the county here, I would say there about 85% of the families here own their own homes, and this was prime picture came through when the riots started in DC back in the 60's. Down here, the

filtration of what happened in the city did not filter down in the country, in the county here because people down here, property owners, could own what they have. They take pride in it. They paid for it. They're not going to tear up their own stuff that they own. Whereas in the city, you have people that rent up there in the city, and the ones that own in the city was caught up in the same situation. Where the people up there didn't own anything, they could care less what happened to their neighbor or even to the property that they had. So, I would say that's being and -- I would consider --I would call them outsiders, being, you know, if you live in the city, you don't own a house, the roof over your head. That would make a difference.

RP: Have you--How do you interact with outsiders living in the County?

[End of Side 2, Tape 1 of 2]

[Begin Side 1, Tape 2 of 2]

I would like to ask you: Have you traveled or lived outside the County?

JS: I've traveled outside the County a lot. As far as living elsewhere, no. It's only been St. Mary's County and Loveville.

RP: Okay. What do you think of the direction that the County is going in today: ...buildings and such?

JS: I think that the County is heading into, or trying to head into the right direction. As today, our Navy Base is playing a major role to development of the County by bringing in jobs, people. There are some things that I would say that the County need to, is to look out for the County people, the people, the major taxpayers of the County itself. There are some things that the County Commissioners can do to help them.

RP: Have you contributed to the County through your work, paid and volunteered?

JS: Yes, I have contributed to the County as far as through my work. Back in 1966, I became a Deputy Sheriff here in St. Mary's County. I contributed, and from 1966 until 1982.

During those years, I was a Deputy Sheriff, the appointed Sheriff by the Governor and the elected Sheriff of the people of the County. And during those years, I feel still that I have contributed a good deal to the County itself.

RP: Okay. What about your family?

JS: Yes, my family has contributed, or is still contributing to the County. At the present time, I have two sons that is Deputy Sheriff's with the St. Mary's County Sheriff's Department here in the County. My wife, she used to be, was a school teacher, teaching Head Start program here in St. Mary's County. And even today, a lot of the kids that she taught still remember her and still they talk about the days when they were in Head Start with her. They come up; they grab her; hug her. "How you doing, Ms. Somerville?" Etcetera, etcetera.

RP: Okay. And your citizenship.

JS: My citizenship is: I'm a US citizen and a native born St. Mary's Countian.

RP: Okay. Politics?

JS: Politics: I mentioned before. Politics: I did get into politics as an elected official for the County, being elected to the office of Sheriff. I since has left the political arena. I do follow a lot of the other elected officials here in the County. I do get involved with elections it self, talking with other candidates. A lot of people I know, by me being tied in with politics, do ask questions about a particular candidate that is running for an office here in the County.

RP: Your values.

JS: My values: I hold my values to the highest esteem. I enjoy life. I respect people, respect their property and most of all, respect other people.

RP: Okay. What recognition, awards, and certificates have you achieved?

JS: Awards? Awards. I achieve awards each day I live! [Chuckle] Going back -- I can say the highest point of my recognition was being -- and I consider that as a recognition being appointed by the Governor of Maryland at that time, which was Governor Marvin Mandel. That was--He recognized me out of many other people, and also through the Central Committee, but he chose me to fill the vacancy in the Sheriff's office created by the Sheriff at that time, George Sanger, who committed suicide in office. And, that was a good feeling, out of all the people around, to be chosen to carry out the honor which is: Being the Sheriff is the highest office in the County itself. Chief Law Enforcement Officer.

RP: Certificates, I'm sure you have many.

JS: Many of those I did accomplishments; certificates from other organizations of the Police Organizations itself; certificates from some of the schools that I attended in the line of law enforcement; and also in my present job, which being a Nuclear Security Officer/System Operator at Calvert Cliffs.

RP: Good. What do you consider to be the most valuable thing you have ever had, something you could not have done without in your lifetime?

JS: I believe that the most valuable consideration I've had in my lifetime, first and foremost, would be my mother and then my wife as being the most valuable people or person in my life. And, I think dealing down, or getting back to being appointed for the job of Sheriff of St. Mary's County by the Governor and then furthermore, by the citizens and the people of St. Mary's County selecting me as to be their Chief Law Enforcement Officer in the County. I think it has to go back to be the most valuable moments and so forth in my lifetime.

RP: Who was the Governor at that time?

JS: At that time, the governor was Marvin Mandel.

RP: Alright. How have you done everything in your life that you wanted or planned to? How have you done everything in your life that you wanted or planned to?

JS: I feel as though that [chuckle] it's, answering the question is a little hard to say that I did everything in my life. I have not. I have a lot more that I wish that I could do in my lifetime here. But, there other plans that I would like to see and that is the, working with some of the youth in the County itself. Unfortunately, we have a lot of single parents here and I feel that their kids need a guiding hand, a helping hand, and that would be one area which I would, like to spend some energy, you know, in that direction.

RP: Okay. Another part of this: If you could go back and live your life over, what would you change?

JS: If I could go back and live my life over, the way I see it today, I don't believe that I would change anything other than in the earlier years, I would try to, to probably have made a little -- selected a job that had a little more income which would better suit my family. But changing things, I don't believe I'd want it any different.

RP: Okay. What do you think have the biggest changes in the County in your lifetime?

JS: The biggest changes I would feel that in this County has been probably the population has been one that has been a big difference. I think we are now somewhere, in a ballpark figure, close to 80,000 people here in St. Mary's County compared to when I was back in the Sheriff's office at that time, we had a population of about 52,000 or so people. That has changed.

The contour and the geographic area of the County has changed. We have a lot of -- It has changed to more or less home community. We have a lot of apartments being built, different communities. The growth of factories and job-seeking industry has not really gone gung-ho in St. Mary's County. A lot of the people in the County itself have to go outside of the County for employment.

RP: Okay. Can you state old stories about what life was like in the County for your parents?

JS: Only I can say that life here in the County for my parents was, was rough as they started out. Primarily, the living conditions, for many, in my case, my parents did own their own property, owned their own home. Jobs back there then, there wasn't many jobs. Most of

them were day jobs. And then for the black folk, it was terrible. Most they had was day jobs: cleaning and so forth, etc., working on farms, etc.

My parents -- I say, my parents. I had an uncle that really, we grew up -- my other two brothers and I grew up with. He taught us values. He taught us, was the same to us as a father would be. He -- We farmed on his farm. He gave us money out of the crops that was raised on the farm. He did wonderful by us and we were only nephews to him, and I would say that without him, hard to say, we would have had a much harder life, you know, coming up, my mother would have had.

RP: In those days, also, people were making like 50¢ to a dollar per day for work all day.

JS: Very true. I can speak with one of my uncles who talked about many a time only making 25¢ a day or 35¢ a day for cutting wood, working in the corn field, tobacco field, day, from sun up to sun down; and, that was good money back there then, or so they say.

RP: Okay. How did black folks get their news in the County when you were growing up?

JS: They got their news from the old country store, general store on the corner. That's when they would sit around in the evening. Everybody would make it to the store about an hour before closing time and they would gather up on the best part of the news, at that given time. At that time, there weren't any radio stations down in the County; so other than that and newspapers, that's how they got the message.

RP: They didn't have papers down here at that time, did you?

JS: Yes, we had newspapers here. They had the old *Afro American* paper from out of Baltimore used to come through there once a week.

RP: Okay.

JS: Then, I don't know what year the County paper started at that time.

RP: How do Countians get their news today?

JS: Oh! County get their news through electronic media, through the newspapers, through the Internet. It's a number of ways they get the news today.

RP: Okay. Well, this is the end of our questions. How do you feel about this whole thing that we've just gone through?

JS: Well, I feel great about it! It's just that I hope that answering these questions here that whoever the disseminator of this information, they can make, heads and tails out of it. There are things that happen. There are some other things that happen in the County that I really have to think back on before I could speak about it. These are just some of the things that come to me off the top of my head while I'm sitting here being interviewed.

RP: Well, I certainly have enjoyed conversing with you on these questions, and I'm sure that the people who will check these out, or check the tapes, will understand, have a wonderful understanding of what has gone on today and will be able to use much of this information to recall the history. Thank you so much.

JS: Alright. Thank you.

[End of Side 1, Tape 2 of 2]