

Unified Committee for Afro-American Contributions
Oral History Documentation Project

Catherine Delores Thompson

Interviewed by Dorothy Waters
November 15, 1996
At her home in Valley Lee Maryland
Logged by Tania Jordon on November 28, 2007
A verbatim transcript is available
Original format is one cassette tape
1 hours, 3 minutes, 0 seconds

Audio CD 1 of 1

Track 01

- 0:00 Introduction; One of the seven children born to John Robert Shelton and Mary Henrietta Edelen Shelton. She was born in Leonardtown, MD on February 22, 1918. She was the middle child (4th). She had five brothers and one sister. Siblings were:
John Robert Shelton Jr.
John Louis Shelton
Alice Gertrude Shelton
Andrew Leonidas Shelton
Francis Clinton Shelton
James Aloysius Shelton
- 2:00 When we were small we didn't have to worry about the outside world. We were just concerned about our own little group and school.
- 2:32 Family food came from the grocery store. They always raised chickens and had hogs years ago and maybe a garden. Every Sunday dinner was a picnic shoulder, cabbage and white potatoes. They were never hungry they always had food.
- 3:35 I think times were better then because we didn't have the peer pressure we have today. We were satisfied with what we had, we didn't know how other children really lived so we didn't have to keep up with the Jones.
- 4:04 Relationship with siblings: her older sister never wanted to play. She would stay in the house and read. My oldest brother died when he was a baby and second brother John Louis wasn't home much because he went out working early. Leonidas, Francis and I had good times together. We were very small, my

mother couldn't leave Leonidas and I home because we would fight. She would have to take my baby brother Francis and I when she left home.

Track 02

5:14 We didn't go many places. We either attended a funeral or went to church. There weren't many places to go.

5:30 We attended St. Aloysius Church in Leonardtown.

5:36 Trips: Not many black people in those days had cars. Only two black people had cars in Leonardtown. My mother hired Mr. Parran Curtis to take us for a ride to Point Lookout. My father took us for buggy rides in the buggy that was owned by the people he worked for. I loved the sound the horse hooves made on the black top. It was like music. We only did local things. In those days going two or three miles is like going to New York today.

7:14 Illness: Younger brother had problems with his kidneys. My parents would take him to Baltimore every six months to have fluid drawn off his body. He died when he was six. I don't remember any cures that were used at the time. There were two doctors around at the time, Dr. Camilar and Dr. Greenwell. Dr. Greenwell was our family doctor. I remember going to the doctor when I got a hole in my leg from a car accident. There wasn't a lot of sickness then; you didn't go to the doctor for a cold like you do now.

8:56 On Sundays, my mother would take us out to the main highway (Route 5 – Point Lookout Road). We would sit out on the colbert and watch the cars pass. My brothers and I would play with sticks in the water or play in the snow.

Track 03

10:10 Chores: Get wood and kindling, feed chickens, wash dishes and clean.

10:50 Our parents treated use good. I don't ever remember getting a beating.

11:00 Best memories: Watching the cars on the main highway; cherry hunting with my father; and going to the church dinners on the 15th of August.

11:30 Discipline: There wasn't to much discipline because when they told us what to do, we did it.

12:01 I don't think parents prepared me well for life because they keep us so close at home. We weren't allowed to go any place or do anything until we were 18. Once you got 18, you went out and didn't know anything about the world. If you survived, you survived.

Track 04

12:50 Schooling: There were two schools in Leonardtown. One was in a room in the back of St. Aloysius Society Hall, which was for the lower grades (Grades 1st-3rd). The other school was on town hill in the area where Smith's plumbing is located. This school was from 4th to 7th grades. There were no high schools for blacks then. I walk to school. It took ½ hour each way. Classroom was one room with all the grades combined. There was only one teacher. I cried so much in school until I reached the second grade. My favorite teacher was Miss Edna Thompson. My least favorite teacher was Miss Henderson at Banneker. I went there for one year. She would pick on me because I couldn't sing. I didn't have a favorite subject.

Track 05

18:05 I didn't have any dreams of becoming any particular thing.

18:27 Parents did not let me court. We went to a dance once in while at a beer garden or at St. Aloysius Hall. I got married when I was 19

19:37 Work: I did housework and I walked to work. I didn't have a choice to do this type of work. Work was hard but not difficult. I made \$0.50 per day. You would go to work at 7:30 in the morning and you didn't stop until it was too dark to do anything else. I cooked, cleaned and feed chickens.

Track 06

21:43 I met my husband Leroy when he use to drive the school bus for Banneker. "I fell head over heels for him". We were married September 26, 1937. We went to New York to visit my husband's brother for our honeymoon. I enjoyed it. We caught a train from Washington.

23:22 Married life was busy with ups and downs. In those days when you married you stayed married. Your husband was your support. If you were being treated nice, you stayed.

24:11 Children: My children have always been my life. I loved them. I did the best that I could by them and took care of them. My husband was very good to them and made sure that they were taken care of. We ran a business and I worked at the business long hours. I was there for the children when they needed me. I think the world of my grandchildren. You can spoil them and send them home. They have been a joy.

Track 07

- 25:50 Religion: I am a Catholic. God has been a big help in my life. If it hadn't been for him and the Blessed Mother, my married would never have made it. I was pregnant 13 times and all 13 are still living. I know it is through prayers that we have done as well as we have. I attend St. Georges Catholic Church. I do volunteer work for church dinners.
- 27:43 Community Activities: Volunteer at the 2nd District Rescue Squad and the Mary Song soup kitchen. I also help with the dinners at the church hall and help serve lunch at the churches funerals.
- 28:35 Organizations and Certifications: She belongs to the Big Foot Helpers Club. They have cake or chicken raffles to make donations at Christmas to hospitals, soup kitchens or someone in need. Mrs. Thompson spent a lot of time going adult education classes from 1961 to 1983. She received her certificate and high school diploma in 1976. She also received several certificates from volunteering at the nursing home. She also received a certificate from the Christian Caregivers Program.

Track 08

- 30:56 Holidays & Family Affairs: She goes to different children's homes for the holidays. Darlene has Mother's Day and Easter at her house. Dee has Thanksgiving and 4th of July at her home. Joyce has Christmas Breakfast and Christmas Dinner is at home. Nieces and nephews have different events that the family attends.
- 32:57 Life in general today: "I think that we expect to much. Now there is to much commercialism. Everybody is for the buck. Before Halloween is over, people have Christmas lights are up. Nobody has time to think about the real meaning of things. It just about what you can buy or what you can have. We never think about Christmas as Christ's Birthday. It always how much we can buy for our children, or where we can go or what we can do."
- 34:30 Quality of Life: "The quality of life is worse because we are not thinking for ourselves. We are letting everybody else do our thinking for use."
- 35:01 Are people different from what they use to be? : "Some of them are. In the old days people didn't have to pretend. If whites didn't like you and they didn't have to pretend that they did. Now I think there are a lot of people pretending."
- 35:35 Teenagers: When we were teens, we didn't get out and know what was going on. Now the teens have so much peer pressure. They can't be teens anymore.

They go from babies to adults. They don't have time to enjoy, there is too much that they don't have time to be children.

Track 09

- 36:45 Race relations: Yes it is different. There is still a lot of pretending. You can go where you want to go now and do what you want to do, but you can't tell what is real and what is make believe.
- 37:28 Segregation: I have no fear of certain groups. We stayed very close to home. When we were little and walked to church, the white children would come out and call us Niggers. We would chase them to their doors, but of course we couldn't go into their houses. We didn't have to deal with being beat up by police or anything like that.
- 38:34 I love St. Mary's County. I think I'd rather live where I live than in other communities. Most people who live in Valley Lee came from different states. We don't have too many natives in Valley Lee. If the wife is from Valley Lee, then their husband was probably in the services and has dealt with integration and therefore respecting you for how you are.
- 40:00 I have never lived in a city. I don't think there is a difference between city people and county people. Once they get to the county, they are country. I have traveled to Ohio, New York, Massachusetts, California, Louisiana, Virginia, West Virginia, and Florida.
- 41:11 Direction of the County Today: She thinks that those who are working to try to change the county are doing a good job.

Track 10

- 42:02 I don't think I have anything in my life that I couldn't do without.
- 42:30 Have you done everything in your life you planned to do? I had no plans and live life as it comes. We have raised our 13 children. They all have jobs, own their homes. My ambition is to see that the grandchildren grow up and do as well as the children have done.
- 43:40 Biggest changes in the county: Being able to go anywhere that you want to and not having signs that say black or white. We have schools that all children can attend. Not just schools for white children. Our children can stay in St. Mary's County and get decent jobs.
- 44:50 Life in County for my parents: My mother took in washing and ironing to earn money. My father worked as a janitor in the banks of Leonardtown. He would have to get up early in the morning (4 or 5 o'clock) regardless of snow to go and

build the fires in time for the white people to come to work. They were difficult times. I never felt that I missed anything. I think we lived a good life. We had what we needed not what we wanted.

Track 11

46:22 News: We got our news from the radio by the time I was 13 years old. There wasn't any news for black folks. You may get some information when you went to events at the St. Aloysius Society Dinner. Older folks would sit around and talk, but children were not allowed to listen.

48:35 How many places have you lived? I have lived in about five different homes. Three were on Hollywood Leonardtown Road in Leonardtown and two in Valley Lee. We lived with Leroy's mother and father the first four years we were married. Then we moved to Happyland Club. Then we moved to our home place on Happyland Road.

Track 12

49:48 Mother: Mary Henrietta Edelen was from Hollywood, MD (DOB 8/21/1886). She was a teacher. She got her formal education in Rock Castle Virginia. I think she taught in California, MD. My mother lived to be 100 year old (died 8/26/1986).

Father: John Robert Shelton was from Abell, MD (8/11/1884). His parents came here from Virginia. His mother was an Indian Maiden. My grandfather bought her to Maryland from Virginia.

Husband: Leroy Joseph Thompson, Sr. from Valley Lee, MD. He lived in Valley Lee his entire life except when he was away at school. He graduated from Armstrong High School in Washington DC and attended Bowie Normal School. He was studying to be a teacher but stopped attending Bowie when he decided to go into business. He ran Happyland Club. It was first started in 1934. I worked with him at the business and raised the children.

Track 13

53:47 I enjoyed working there. You knew almost everyone that came there. People would go to bars in their own communities. They were people you knew, trusted and loved. We had juke boxes, that you could get music for a nickel or dime. We had slot machines. Most weekends there was a square dance or somebody would come in and play a fiddle. The old people use to come out at that time. Leroy's mother would come to the club every weekend. The young would treat them to soda's and candy bars. People would respect older people then. I always respected the younger people because they always treated me nice.

Track 14

58:16 Hobbies: I love crafts and working outside in the spring and fall. I started out doing quilts for my children, grandchildren, nieces and nephews when my blankets or clothes worn out.

1:00:41 Collections: I started out collecting salt and pepper shakes but got rid of them. I now collect tea pots, mugs and dolls

1:02:57 My favorite crafts were some of the quilts.