

Unified Committee for Afro-American Contributions
Oral History Documentation Project

GRACE CECELIA LAWRENCE BLACKWELL

Interviewed by Brenda Coates

April 21, 1997

At her home in Piney Point

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BC: ...Blackwell in her home in Piney Point. Today's date is April 21, 1997. Miss Grace, I want to remind you that if you are uncomfortable answering any of these questions, please feel free not to [chuckle] answer. Okay. We'll start off by asking you where do you live? You know, where do you live now, you know?

GB: Okay. Okay. I live in Piney Point, Maryland, and I moved down here in October of 1958 after we married. We were married and we moved down her in October '58.

BC: Now, give me some landmarks about—

GB: Okay. Okay. Exactly where I live. When I first moved down here, I lived in the little white house, bungalow down about a mile from here and it's right across, now, from the movie, from the movie distribution, little store down on the corner, down the highway. It's a trailer there now, but I lived with an elderly couple. We lived with an elderly couple because they were old and they wanted somebody young to live in the house with them. So, that's where we lived for a year.

BC: Now, that's down—

GB: In Piney Point.

BC: Right outside of the school, the Seamen's School.

GB: No. It's just not even—. It's across from the Seamen's School and away, but it's right across from Robertson property, you know, where Maolin live now?

BC: Yes.

GB: Uh huh. It's the house, right up. It was the white house right across from the Robertson property.

BC: Okay.

GB: Okay. And, it was a five-room bungalow, and it was really nice. And, we stayed with the couple until the lady got old and cranky and old and she couldn't live there anymore. So then, guess where I moved? So, I can go on?

BC: [laughter] Go ahead!

GB: We moved up to the Piney Point Elementary School which was in the yard of St. Luke's Church up here, St. Luke's Methodist Episcopal Church. One room, and we lived in that until after Eleanor was born. So, we must have moved up there in '39. Eleanor was born in '44. Well in the meantime, I had a second child. We petitioned it off, petitioned a large room into the two rooms so we could have a separate bedroom from the kitchen and living area. And in 1944 was Eleanor was born—. Keep going?

BC: [laughter] Go ahead!

GB: When Eleanor was six months old, we moved up to Valley Lee 'cause my Morris went in Service. He was in Service. He went in September '44 and came out in October of '45. So, I moved back home with my father, my sisters and brothers 'cause my mother had died the year before, and we lived there. Went up there in '44 and then when he came out, we lived about six months after he came out and he built this house where we living

now, this four-room house, and we moved back down to Piney Point then in March of '46. And so, this is where I've been living ever since.

BC: Now, you're about how far from the main entrance to the Stewart property, you know, where the call—

GB: TV Services, ST Services now.

BC: About how far?

GB: About quarter of a mile, would you say?

BC: You're about a quarter of a mile?

GB: Below.

BC: South of that, going towards to St. George Island.

GB: St. George Island. That's correct.

BC: And, what is this little road called? It doesn't have a road?

GB: It's Blackwell Court now.

BC: Blackwell Court.

GB: It was old 247.

BC: Old 247.

GB: Now called Blackwell Court.

BC: Okay. I just wanted to, you know, get a good idea of where you live. Now, where you born?

GB: I was born off of 246 in Great Mills right across from the—. What was the central house there? That's where the telephone company was back in those woods long time ago, but

now it's an apartment house there. And, it's right across...Press or something of that sort, back in the woods on the, going, coming, coming into Great Mills Road—246. When you come in 246, it's on the right-hand side, back in the woods there. Some place back in those woods. We used them to cut blackberries back there all the time.

BC: Okay. Off of Great Mills Road.

GB: Off of Great Mills Road.

BC: It's on the right side.

GB: It's on the right side, back in the woods on the right side. And, that's about how far from the intersection you think?

BC: Oh. So, it's past where that first little trailer park is on Great Mills Road.

GB: Uh hmm [no]. Yes, it is! Yes, it is! It's just past where the first trailer park is.

BC: Little trailer park which is almost across from, which is a little past the Great Mills Elementary School.

GB: That's right. Right, right. No, no. It's further up.

BC: Yeah.

GB: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Past Great Mills Elementary. Past the trailer park there. That's right. Back in there.

BC: So, it's the area between the two trailer parks.

GB: Yes, that's it. Now you go it.

BC: And, it's a house up there?

GB: It was.

BC: With a lot of—. No, that has a, sort of a big house up there. There's a lot of trucks and stuff or whatever.

GB: Yeah! Yeah. Yeah. 'Cause it's Hill's Trailer Park.

BC: Okay.

GB: And, the trucks and things belong to the Hills, I think, and it's right—. That's right. The next turn from there, from the trailer park, it's back in there where I was born.

BC: That's where you were born and you lived there until you were?

GB: I don't know when we moved from there 'cause the first, the thing that I remember—. The first remembrance that I have is: We were living in a three-room—. They used to call them "shanties," but in a little three-room bungalow-type thing on Scott Callaway's property below, below 246 going down, going down 5.

BC: 5. Oh, okay.

GB: And, we lived there. I remember the three-room bungalow because when we moved from there, I was about three, and we moved back in the woods on Callaway's land. You know that house up on the hill that has a cross up in, going down, on the left-hand side going down 5?

BC: Okay.

GB: We lived—. That's where they built a house for us, for, two-room, two-story house back in there, back on that road.

BC: Okay.

GB: And we lived there from the time I was—I remember when we moved. I remember I was

three years old when me moved. That's was the first thing in my virtual memory. And—

BC: Okay. So, you were born on, on Great Mills Road?

GB: Yeah.

BC: And you don't remember when you left there?

GB: No.

BC: And then, you moved to Scott Callaway's property.

GB: Property, uh huh [yes].

BC: And then, you moved to this other place.

GB: Yeah. It was still Callaway's property, still Scott Callaway's property, but it was back off the highway.

BC: Off of 240? Off of Westside?

GB: Off of Westside.

BC: Okay.

GB: This was right on—the little bungalow—was right on Route 5, more or less, 'cause it was at the end of the large field there going in _____.

BC: Okay. And then at three, you remember?

GB: Moving. I remember moving.

BC: Then you moved further back.

GB: Further back in the woods. Right. They built a brand-new, two-story house. It was two bedrooms upstairs and the dining room down, and the kitchen downstairs. And, that's where all of us were born. All the rest of them 'cause Louise—I was born over at Great

Mills. Louise and Ann were born in the little bungalow, and then from Sony on down were in the two-story house back in the woods.

BC: Now, what kind of work did your father do?

GB: He was a saw miller. He was a laborer.

BC: Okay.

GB: Worked in the saw mill most of his life, and he did farming, too. Did a little bit of—
What do you call it?

BC: What, tenant farming?

GB: Tenant farming. Did a little tenant farming.

BC: Okay.

GB: And all this was done for Calloway. He worked for Calloway that whole time.

BC: That's why Calloway built the house.

GB: Calloway built the house for him—

BC: Because you're father was doing—

GB: He was rent-free and all that because my father worked for him until we moved over here.

BC: What kind of work did your mother do?

GB: She did housework when she did any. She was a good seamstress and she used to sew for people. And, she, when the Base opened up, she did a little housework, like housework and stuff before we left Great Mills. When we moved from Great Mills over to the home place which is just below, just before you get to Clarence Smith on the left-

hand side, back in there, on the farm, but that was '50—. Let me think. I was 16. Had to be '56.

BC: '36?

GB: '36. Yeah. '36. Yeah. '36. Yeah.

BC: So, when you were 16, they moved where? On Route 249?

GB: On 249.

BC: Across from where Clarence Smith's place is.

GB: Yes. Just a little way across, you know, catty-corner.

BC: Okay. And, that was back off the road, too.

GB: Back off the road, too. Uh huh, uh huh [yes], but it was my grandfather's farm and it had gotten away from him. And when Papa got his bonus—I think he got a bonus in '35 or something, he bought the farm back...No good things, anything on it, and then we moved there.

BC: Okay.

GB: You won't even want to know how many people in the house when we moved?

BC: [laughter]

GB: Do you want to know?

BC: But, all of the family.

GB: All of, Papa, eight of us, Mama and Papa, then Edward. Grandfather Lawrence lived there. We had to give him a room. Grandpa Lawrence lived there. And Edward Lawrence couldn't stand his father's wife, his stepmother, so he was there most of the

time; and, he was a year older than me, but he was there in and out, you know. So, it was 12 people, lot of time. [laughter] A four-room house, but it did have two halls!
[laughter]

BC: But back then, that was acceptable 'cause that was the family staying together.

GB: Together. The family staying together. Um hm [yes].

BC: Okay.

GB: I think it was pretty nice. [laughter]

BC: Yeah. Now, what church did your family go to?

GB: We went to Holy Faith and it was, wasn't called Holy Faith 'cause it was where Old Mill is now. Old Cecil Mill? It was a miller's church right on the corner. Holy Angel, some kind of angle, little angels or something. And, they have a replica of the church if ever you go through there, ever go through there. Sitting out on the edge of the field, but it's not in the exact place the church was. It was just past Cecil's house there, and it was just a one-room church. Pot-belly stove in the middle of the floor.

But anyway, and then they built Holy Faith up on the hill in '49, I think. '49? '50? '49? I think that's what they put up over the church, but when he built that, but then we went up the hill to the church.

BC: To the church?

GB: And that's where we always went to church, and we'd go camping after she was, my grandmother came off, we'd go to the cabin...Nothing else because this was the only church... [laughter]

BC: Okay. What trips did your family take?

GB: Not any. Oh yes, we did. We would go to circuses 'cause I remember the circus sometime would come down in the field in Great Mills, one or two years when we were little, when we were six and seven, like that. I was six or seven, so the other children had to be younger than that. And the last one they had, a lion clawed a woman and they never did have it back anymore, and that was ever frightful. I remember that. Uh huh!

But, we never went on any way-out trips, but we did a lot of family visiting. On Sundays, we would go from one aunt to the other to the grandmother and then everybody would eat at our house. Like that. Christmas, we'd go to my grandmother's house when she lived down, when they lived down on Blake Creek Valley. And, it was interesting. And, Papa took us around in horse-and-buggy to see everybody and we'd go into Jarboesville and visit Uncle Jon Woods who was my grandmother's brother and Thompson. Cousin Harriman's father and mother and Aunt _____ Francis. And so, I knew my mother's people even though they lived in the 8th District 'cause we were in the 8th. We were in Great Mills and they were over in Jarboesville area. So, I knew more people in the Jarboesville area than any place else.

Because anything that was going on special, we went to St. Nicholas. We made our first holy communion—. I did—with Miss Kerns at St. Nicholas. And my younger brothers and sisters, I guess: Rosie, Chapman and Andrew and Jess and Geneva went to, they call it summer school. They didn't have—call it vacation school. In the summertime, they have about a month [of] religion teaching, and they went to St. Nicholas for that. And when we were growing, when I was growing up, we had a little

bit of catechism at the Rectory. The Rectory was built in '27 up on the hill and sometimes Father would get somebody to teach the black children there 'cause my younger sisters and brothers having Saturday catechism. They went to vacation school over at St. Nicholas. St. Nicholas is in the Base, now.

BC: Okay. That's what I was going to ask. Okay. So, it's at the same place where it is now.

GB: Yeah. The church was on the same place it is now, and they had an old hall there where they used to have the classes. [inaudible]

BC: Was your family involved in community activities?

GB: Yeah, my mother was. They attended—. They had to walk from Great Mills 'cause—. At Great Mills, we were little—at elementary school to Great Mills #1 to school, to the PTA meetings there—. What you call them things...Attended mostly the plays. You know, we had plays and spelling bees and things like that, and they tried to attend those. But, that's all. But anyway, yes. They attended things like that.

And of course, Mom was active in the church as much as she could be at that time. I mean, she made all the masses. We had, they had, at St. Francis they had two masses on a Sunday, and some of us would go to the early mass and the other half would go to the later mass because there was always a baby home or a younger child, that they couldn't take to mass, to take care of. So, we divided our time up like that. Father never went to church much growing up! [laughter]

And then, she belonged to the St. Francis Society which was at St. Francis Hall up in California. And, they had a big day—the 4th of July. Sell dinners and have marching

bands. [laughter] I remember Mr. Temp beating the drums! [laughter] And stuff like that. Things like that. And, she, we went to those.

BC: Now, St. Francis Hall: Was that at where the Bingo place is?

GB: Straight up the highway. It's just before—. It's back off the road before you get to Kelly's Place, Kelly Cutchember. Back in there, behind Kelly Cutchember's place. It was back there.

BC: Yeah. Rue Purchase Road.

GB: No, no. Not that far as Rue Purchase. I don't know the name. I don't even know if they have the road or not, but it's just before you get to Kelly's, if you remember where Kelly is, down at the bottom. Well, this was back behind him. It was just before you get to his house.

BC: Down at the bottom?

GB: Well, his is down at the bottom, according think it's a little hill that you go in to get to the hall. It was.

BC: Oh! Okay. Okay 'cause Kelly lives right on the corner.

GB: Yeah! Kelly lives right on the corner.

BC: And, the hall was back over that road. Yeah.

GB: Back behind there. Uh huh, uh huh [yes].

BC: Okay. And they had—

GB: And, there wasn't any house then; it was just a hall like that.

BC: Okay. And so, that was one of the society halls.

GB: Yes. Uh huh.

BC: They had a big 4th of July celebration.

GB: Big 4th of July celebration. And, my mother worked there 'cause she belonged to the Society. She would have been more active than she was if she had had a way to get around 'cause she loved being out and helping people.

And, another thing she belonged to when they—. Who was it? Started mattress making and stuff like that, years ago, down at St. Peter's. Some of those stories about that in some of the books that people have been writing out there now, and they had—. They used to have mattress making contest—I mean, not contests, but mattress making. They made—. They had—. The people would often give them the picking and the—what's the name—and the cotton to put in it. And of course, they had the [inaudible] and stuff, and she made several mattresses like that.

She liked sewing of any kind. And anything like that that came up, she, you know, if she could get there. She liked that.

BC: And they had contests?

GB: No, no. They weren't contests.

BC: Oh!

GB: They made the mattresses.

BC: Like the quilting?

GB: Yeah! Like a quilting group, and they taught them to make the mattresses. And then, of course, you could make as many as you wanted to. She made several. I even have one of

them that's my mattress.

BC: And, that was down in?

GB: Down in—I don't know if it was St. James Hall or St. Jerome's Hall.

BC: St. Jerome's.

GB: St. Jerome's Hall or some place down, but I can't think of the group. You know, people used to come from Washington, some place and go down there and start things. And, maybe because it was mostly a black community, I don't know, but they would start things. And, I can't—I don't know the name of the group. But anyway.

BC: Okay. Do you think times were better or worse then than they are now?

GB: They were better in some ways because families stuck together, neighbors helped one another, and they weren't as diverse. I mean, you know, they were the father and the mother and the grandparents on both sides and the great-grandparents on both sides, if they were still living. And, they were just a close-knit people, and they helped one another out. When my Aunt Maddie's husband was killed and she was—. She had two children and she was pregnant with her third child, and she went back home to Blake Creek which I was telling you about where my parents and grandparents lived. They lived on this great, big farm on this creek. It was so nice. And, it was a good farm.

She went back home with her two children, had the third child, and my Aunt Catherine took the third one, who was Priscilla. It was Priscilla. And then, Grandfather and Grandmother kept Paul and Violet for awhile. I'd go down in the summer, a couple summers I think I went down, to be with the children, to help take care of the children

while Aunt Maddie was working. And then, Aunt Maddie got married again. And then, she took the children. And then when George was born, she died. So then, the children had to be scattered again, and Aunt Catherine took Mindell; she had Priscilla. She took Priscilla as the soft baby because Aunt Maddie had to go to work and she took Priscilla as a soft baby, then she took Mindell when Aunt Maddie died. Aunt Blanche raised George. That was another one of Aunt Maddie's sisters, another one of my aunts, raised George. And, Paul and Violet went with their aunt on their father's side for awhile. And then, Violet went several other places before she got settled. And, all of them ended up at Aunt Bertie's. [laughter] Yeah. All of them ended up at Aunt Bertie's. Paul came. Paul lived with us for about a year when he was in high school and then, Aunt Bertie wanted someone to go to school in Randall 'cause Randall was going out in _____, so Paul went over there. And then, Aunt Catherine became such an alcoholic and Priscilla and Violet were teenagers. They went with Aunt Bertie. And, Violet went with Aunt Bertie somewhere along the way. So, it was a family thing. That was the worst case, your worst scenario, because they were the only ones that were just broken. For some reason, they couldn't stay with their parents and so whatever, you know. To me, I often think of that. That was marvelous thing for them to just pass the children around within the family. And, they all knew who they were and whatever and you know, and all. And, things like that were good. I think that was very good.

But now, there's, there is a diversity in where, the parents and the children and their grandmothers, and their grandparents live, and that makes a difference. The families aren't as close. They may have reunions or visits twice a year or something like

that, but that closeness isn't there. And, I thought that was, you know, that's one of the things that kind—. And, everybody had interest in what the children was doing.

My grandfather thought I was the smartest, but I had two—I guess I was, I was, I was the oldest on both sides. No, Edward was older on the grand, but I was the oldest girl on both sides of my parents, see, and I thought I was somebody, but I didn't think about that until I was growing up. How they treated me. Grandmother, like, she used to call me, "Gracie," and Grandfather makes me, teased me about her calling me Gracie [laughter], and it was just, just the closeness. You know. And, I was close to all my aunts and uncles. But when I was about six or seven and eight, we call ourselves going on vacation. So, everybody went to the different family homes. So, for instance, we'd go up to Aunt Bertie's and stay a week, and then we go up to Aunt Helen's and stay a week and like that, before the war. That was before World War II.

And, I was a home-body [chuckle] and I'd go down and break down a couple of days. They'd bring me back home...I remember Aunt Catherine saying, "Here she is. She don't want to stay no place. Just homesick. Bring her back home." But then when I became a teenager, as I was saying, I helped to take care of the children and all, and I didn't mind. I go up there...when she had her baby. I think I went there when Nathan was born...just, you know, to help with the younger children and all. So, we did a lot of intermingling as family and that, you didn't have any place to go or nothing else to do.

And then when I was older, as I was saying, if anybody needed anything I remember Aunt Blanche got sick one time and I went up to her house when I was 16 or

17 and stayed with her children. She was over at Johns Hopkins. Stayed there to help Uncle William with the two, with Jeannette and Nelson, with the children. And anybody who needed anything, when I became a teenager, I didn't mind being away from home. But, we were close as family.

But nowadays with the families spread out like that, I think that's, that's, that's the—

BC: Biggest change?

GB: The biggest change. Yeah, I think that's the biggest change.

BC: How did your parents deal with health and illnesses?

GB: Oh, they believed in doctors, thank God. Dr. Bean—you know where Dr. Bean's place is on—

BC: Great Mills Road.

GB: Great Mills Road. Dr. Bean was the main doctor, and Mama never had a midwife. She had a doctor for all of us, and I had midwives for all of mine because mine were born too early in the morning. You couldn't get a doctor! And, we—. If you had to go to the doctor, Papa would take us on our backs, when we were little, and he'd take us on over there to Dr. Bean. Of course, right across the woods and up the road from where we were living. I tell you we were living in Great Mills? And, Dr. Brown lived in, on Route 5, where Brown's—. Where the sheet metal is now?

BC: My goodness! All the way out there?

GB: We never went there, but the doctors would come to your house.

BC: Oh, okay.

GB: But, I don't know how you let them know. I think somebody had to go, go to him. He had a horse-and-buggy that was available. I mean, Callaway's horse-and-buggy would be available if you needed something, and they would come to your house. The doctors visited you home. And of course, all the babies were born at home, you know. But, they believed, they believed in doctors. There's no midwives, no nurses, no nothing. They believed in doctors. When we got sick, we always went to the doctor.

BC: Did your mother have any home remedies that you used?

GB: Oh yeah! [laughter] Yeah. For instance in the Spring, she'd give us castor oil to clean us out. Sassaroot tea which was good. It tasted good. But that dag on castor oil [laughter]...that's all I remember. I remember something when I was little. And then, you had softener for, you know, all these sores and things you get from mosquito bites and things, and you'd _____ oil and put that on to dry it up, and that was home remedy. And of course, we got some kind of king salve. We had certain things that, you know, and those kind of things. I can't—. Right now, I can't think of anything else.

BC: Do you remember ever having to go to the hospital and how?

GB: Um mm [no]. I never had to go to the hospital, and I guess, if we had to go, we wouldn't have been able to get in at that time. First time I was in the hospital, I guess it was '47 when I had my last _____. '48 or something..., but we never went to the hospital as small children.

BC: Do you remember how the elderly were taken care of when you were growing up?

GB: They stay with one child or the other. I lived with my—I told you I went to school for my aunt and uncle for a year and her mother was there, and that was Grandma Macy's mother. She...and she, my great-grandmother. She was the sweetest little thing. She didn't die until I was eight, so they took care of one another. They still took care of one another. And, I don't remember anybody ever having Alzheimer's or anything that they couldn't take care of. So, they called—. What did they call it? Old lady's ill, something like that. [chuckle] But, she was, she was great up until her, until she died, she was just the best cabbage! [laughter] And so...Margay Thompson was there, too. Aunt Catherine was raising her.

BC: Do you remember how black folks got their news back then?

GB: They went, at the stores and post offices. See, my father was illiterate. He couldn't read. Mama went to, as far as 5th Grade, so she could help us with our reading and all, but very seldom they got a newspaper or anything like that. Mostly in Hollywood. But, don't you remember my grandfather and grandfather Mason: *Working Enterprise*? Way back then and read that. Kept up with *The Beacon* and *The Enterprise*, but Mama never did. She'd get the, whatever the paper--

BC: *The Grit*?

GB: Uh huh [yes]. Those kinds of papers. And, but my father would pick up a lot of stuff from the store and from working with people and he had a good memory, working with people and all. And, the people, the neighbors visited them a lot. They went from house

to house and, one at a time, they would have card parties and Pound Parties, they call them. Bring a pound cake and sit around and play cards.

BC: Oh!

GB: ... [chuckle] and we'd have a Pound Party. [laughter] Every two weeks, and then they—Mama and Papa would go to other houses, you know, in the neighborhood. I didn't go nowhere in the snow playing no cards. [laughter] And, we played games and things at home like that, and he taught us to play cards. He taught me to waltz. And you know, he just—

BC: Did you all have a radio?

GB: Uh hm. I never had a radio until '42. I had a batter radio when I moved up in the house.

BC: What types of things did you do as a child? What kind of games did you play?

GB: We played cards and played house and all the kids would play doll babies. We would have a mother and a father with doll babies. Some younger children would be the children. [laughter] Did we have checkers? ...Me and Lena always played checkers. We played checkers. And, what did we do when we were older? We played games. We played I Spy, dodge ball, baseball. And in the wintertime, my sisters and brothers did a lot of sliding down. We lived on top of a hill, and they would slide down the hill in the snow. I never went outdoors to play 'cause I afraid to hurt myself, for one thing. I'd go out in the summertime and I'd watch them play, and they'd climb trees and crazy things. And, they managed because there was enough of us to keep one another company. And then when anybody came, you'd get together with all of them.

BC: How did you get along with your sisters and brothers?

GB: I was bossy, they said. They still say I'm bossy. I thought—I guess I thought I was the oldest and I always caught myself telling them what to do 'cause I didn't want them to worry Mama 'cause I thought the sun rose and set for my mother. But [laughter]: "Grace tell me what to do. She's so bossy."... [laughter] She'd ask me something and I'd go along great instructions and things. "Grace is so bossy!" So, all of them thought I was bossy, but I really got along with them okay. I had patience. I remember Sonny saying, and I had never even given it a thought. He said, when he learned to tie his shoes—he was about four years old—and Mom would say to Louise, "Louise, aren't you going to tie your shoes up before you go to school this morning."

So, she'd come in all rough and ready and fussing, and she'd say, "Grace, will you please tie Sonny's shoes?" She said, "You'd come in just as nice and quiet and tie my shoes up and go on back to bed." You see, things like that I didn't even realize. I did have a lot of patience, though. I love children and I did have a lot of patience, but I tried to get my...

I remember the first time I went to Baltimore, 'cause I went to Baltimore twice. First time I went to Baltimore, I went to—. This was in '33...When I left home, Catherine was—she was born in 1930. She was about three years old. So, she said, "Grace, you going to leave us? Where you going?" [laughter] Yeah, I remember that when I get up. I said, "I'm going to Baltimore, but Ill be back." But, I really got along with them okay. And of course, after my mother died, I was the mama more or less.

They come to me, all of them. Not all of them, but problems that they had. Papa was—. They couldn't do him wrong. He didn't, he wasn't really a father-oriented person with patience. He didn't have much patience. Mark and I filled in as their parents when Mama died, and she died when she was 46. I was 21 years old and I thought I would die, too.

BC: But by then you had—

GB: I had two children and was carrying Eleanor, was carrying the third one.

BC: What kind of chores did you all have to do?

GB: Oh my! We had to—. When we were little, we had to pick up chips, bring in candle mass for kindling, bring in the wood, wash the dishes, bring in the water from the spring. Go down the hill to the spring and get the water and bring it up the hill. That was for everything: washing and cooking and drinking and the whole bit. And then as we got older, each of us had to take turns with cooking and cleaning. That's the way we learned to do things.

And, my sister, Ann, was so darn trifling, bless her heart. That was one thing that we used to have a time with because we were in our teens getting ready to leave home, and Ann was the next in line to help Mama. And, Louise would say to me, [laughter] "Ann's going to wear Mama to death 'cause she's not going to do anything." And come find she wasn't doing anything because when we were there, we were doing it for it. I was doing it for her so Mama wouldn't have to fuss when she came home from wherever she had been. She was out shopping and visiting neighbors and stuff and we were at

home, so we were doing. And when we left home, Ann started working and she hadn't stopped to this day. Starting doing whatever came up to be done and when she got a job, she went to work and she worked like a Trojan. And, I had never seen nothing like it in my life. But Bea, she was just like Ann. Trifling, my goodness! [laughter] But, it was something else to be home.

But, we had all those country chores to do. And when I got older, I got some wood and make the fires and learned how to make fires, fires in the wood stove and all. I had to cook. I never did learn, just what was there...It wasn't much. But whatever was there, we had to take turns doing it.

BC: How did your parents treat you? What do you remember that they did with you?

GB: As I said, Papa wasn't too patient and he left everything up to Mama. Now, she was patient to an extent, and she taught us mostly what we knew. I mean, she even helped us with our homework and made sure we got it. She made our clothes from the underwear right straight out to our dresses and things. She made the little ones and the slips out of meal sack and dresses out of them bulk material because she would have chicken raffles and cake raffles in the Fall to buy material in the bulk 'cause she had all these girls. And, she'd buy all the material, you know, three or four bulks of it and make us dresses out of that so we'd have dresses to wear to school. We were always dressed pretty good.

[laughter]

BC: So, she'd have these chicken and cake raffles at her house.

GB: At her house, uh huh, in the Fall to raise money. She tried to raise turkeys and them things never turned out right. Weasels would get them, every one, but she was—. She

loved farming. When we moved on the farm, she thought she was going to farm and be like my Grandfather and Grandma Mason. They were parcel farmers...So, she had chicken and cake raffles and sold stuff like that to get money enough to make our Fall clothes.

And as I said, you bought your flour and sugar in bags, 100-pound bags, mostly. Well, not the sugar. Sugar being 25-pound bags. But, they'd soak them in cold water, get all the letters and boil them in lye water. Get all the letters out of them, and they would be just as white as any material you bought. So, that's what our underclothes were made out of, and she did that. She said she could make everything but boy's pants. She never could make nothing for Sonny. [laughter] But anything else. Even when I was 17, she ripped up her own green coat, turned it on the wrong side—. You know, the wrong side was new—and put it back together again in a coat again. It was amazing what she could do, sewing, and I never learned to do nothing but patch. I hated sewing. Lord, have mercy!

And, she'd make her own patterns. She'd look in the catalogues and get the front. You know, most of the time, catalogues at that time had the front and the back sample to show how it looked both ways, and she'd make her own pattern out of newspaper and could make anything she sewing just like it was. She was amazing. Now, she could do that and Catherine could do that, my sister, Catherine. And, Meredith could do that. That was Priscilla's mother. Now, Aunt Helen, who's Mason's mother and Aunt Bertie, like I am, they did a lot of patching and all. Aunt Helen did make quilts, though. She

could make quilts.

And, Grandma Mason was a cook and a good seamstress. And so, we made off okay. We didn't...And, she could make a meal out of nothing. Make a meal out of nothing, bless her heart. She was a good cook if she had anything to cook with. Whatever she had, she'd make it taste good and she spread it. And, we had big dish pig pies and stuff like that. She'd put it in a deep dish, put that crust in there and the crust on top and man, we had some huckleberry rollerboller. She'd put those huckleberries in the roll of dough, you know, in the dough and roll it over. Put it in the cloth and boil it and make a sauce for it. And, you cut it; you slice it. [laughter] You know, make a sauce like that. And, I mean, she could really make something out of everything. We stayed in huckleberry and blackberries bushes. That was what we did in the summertime! [laughter] And from the time they came out until the time they were gone, and she made jelly and preserves and mush and canned all the apples and peaches.

BC: Nobody does that now.

GB: Uh uh [no]. I wouldn't do it for nothing in this world if the freezer would hold it!

[laughter] But, it was a lot of hard work. I got my spanking one day. I was about eight. I must have been seven. But anyway, she found out she wasn't going to have me sassing her like that, like Marie did Aunt Catherine.

So anyway, we were outdoors, out back peeling apples...And, she said, "Grace, I'm going in here now and wash these apples and put them on. So, you come on and bring yours." So, I was finishing the apple that I was peeling and she yelled like the women, "Grace, are you coming?"

I said, "Can't you wait?"

Boy, did she bust me! I didn't realize I was sassing her. I really didn't, but I bet I didn't ask her, "Could you wait?" anymore when she got through with me! [laughter]

"You not going to be sassing me like Marie does Aunt Catherine!"

But, they did some interesting things. But, she made use of everything and the only thing that I never had enough of during the Depression was shoes. People gave shoes. You know how they gave shoes to children and all, and my feet were always too slender and too long for any of them, so that's why I love shoes today. I buy shoes and I don't buy nothing else! [laughter] So, that was—. She couldn't make shoes, so that's what I didn't have.

BC: But, the only thing you remember your mother disciplining you for was sassing her?

GB: No, uh uh. She disciplined me for other things 'cause I was a cry-baby, too. Brenda, she'd leave home when I was about 10, and I was old enough to stay with children when I was 10 years old. I was about 10 and she'd go to store. She'd probably be gone 15 minutes, and if she wasn't back at the time I thought she'd be back, I'd start crying. Well then, I'd have all the children under me crying and Sonny was the baby, and he'd be crying when she got home, everybody! [laughter] But then, she told me, "If you don't shut that foolishness up, Grace, I'm going to beat you when I come in here next time you cry and got all these children crying."

So then if I cried, I went to myself and I didn't get everybody crying, but I worried about her. Every time she got out of my sight, I worried about her. I really did.

[laughter] So, I can sympathize with anybody who is upset about their mother of being away.

Now for instance, I don't know if should put this in here right now or not, but I guess I will. I was taking care of Cynthia's little boy, Tory...Geneva's sister.

BC: Oh, okay.

BG: Geneva's grandson. When Willie was sick, she was up and down the road in Washington all. So, Cynthia would bring him up to me about 5:00 in the morning so I could put him on the bus and put him—I did that one Spring, I think. And, he could tell time. He must have been about seven. He could tell time and she wasn't here at 7:00, he'd start, "Aunt Grace, you know where my mom is? Aunt Grace, you think...Aunt Grace, where's momma? Do you think she's going some place?"

I said, "No, Tory. She's not late.

And Morris used to say, "Why you talking to him like that? He ain't no baby!"

[laughter]

I said, "I know how he feels if his mother's not here," I say, "because that's the way I felt all the time about my mother." And so, I told Cynthia after he did it several times, I said, "He worries his self sick about you. When you not coming home in the morning, let him know and/or if you find out during the day, call and let me know you're going to be late, and I can tell him that and he's satisfied." If he knew she was going to be late, but he was like that. He worried about his mother. And, a few children are. And, people think they're just putting on airs, but they're not. That really is the way they

feel about it 'cause I felt like that about mine. And every time she got sick, and she was sick quite a bit, I'd be so upset. My goodness. But anyway.

BC: Okay. So after she told you that—you didn't cry.

GB: I didn't cry so they could see me and get them upset, so they could see me. And of course, there were other times that I guess I did something to her 'cause she spanked me once in awhile. She didn't spank me—

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

[This is about the first third of this interview. The rest has not been transcribed]