

Unified Committee for Afro-American Contributions
Oral History Documentation Project

AGNES GENEVA CHASE BLACKWELL

Interviewed by Joyce Blackwell

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[Begin Side 1, Tape 1 of 2]

[00:00]

Joyce Blackwell: We are with Agnes Geneva Chase Blackwell. She resides [redacted address] in Piney Point, Maryland. The interviewee is Joyce Blackwell of Valley Lee, Maryland. Miss. Blackwell what were times like when you were a child?

Agnes Blackwell: Well we had bad times, hard times, but it was a lot of fun and we survived with what we had.

JB: How did you and your family live?

AB: Well, we lived on a little farm and we always had farm vegetables in the summer and we canned a lot in the winter and that helped us a lot in the winter months.

JB: Do you think times are better or worse then the times are now and why?

AB: Yes, it's better now because we don't have to labor now as hard as we used to. And we make more money and it seems to be much better then what we were then.

JB: What is your earliest memory?

AB: Oh—. I guess when I was about six. Because we a went to elementary school [St. Francis Elementary School] across the field from where we lived, we didn't have far to go to school. And we enjoyed running to school every morning and getting ready to go to school. It made it really nice we didn't have buses or anything to travel on.

JB: Can you describe your relationship with your brothers and sister and name them for us?

AB: My oldest sister is named Alice she stayed with us until she graduated from elementary school then she left because there was no high school here. You had to go to Baltimore to go to school to get a proper education. To be a teacher because at that time they didn't need a high school, I mean a college diploma, to teach—just a high school diploma. And after she did that she got married and came home. From that time on, she stayed with us until she had to go to work in Washington.

JB: And what about you other sisters and brothers?

AB: Lorraine also left. She was the next to the oldest. And she also left and went to Baltimore. But she got married, had two children and finally, she came back with two children. And a Bernard was the third one. He went to elementary school across the street like we did and when he graduated from elementary school he went to St. Peter Claver's to high school. They had a high school there and he went there to high school and he learned to do [inaudible] and he lived in

Washington for the rest of his life. And finally after he got older he came back home also.

JB: And who was after Bernard?

AB: Oh, then Irving, Irving was the next brother. He also graduated from elementary school. But he went in the Army and he stayed in the Army four years—five years—whatever they had to stay. When he came back, he worked at—the Patuxent naval was built then. And he worked on the Base all of his later years as a broiler. The broiler is the person who kept the fires going day and night. So he worked in the days. When he finish—when he stopped work on the Base, he left and went to Washington. And when he left and went there he worked on the railroad. After that he retired and now he's living home with his family. Raymond, Emory, we used to call him Emory, he also so went to school and went in the Army also. And when he came back he worked on the Patuxent Navel Air Station. Until he was taken sick and he couldn't work no more so he retired. He retired and stayed home until his death.

JB: And what about your sister Eunice?

AB: Oh Eunice. After she graduated she went to Washington to live. And she stayed there and she met her husband there and they got married. And they started raising a family. How many children did they have? Six? I think she's got six—[long pause]—and had six children. After her family started growing she came back to live in St. Mary's—she and her husband— and they—he retired and they lived in Hollywood, Maryland until her death.

[06:26]

JB: Now you had an older brother?

AB: Jesse—he died cause of colic at a young age.

JB: So what was your relationship like with your brothers and sisters?

AB: It was great. It was great. We always had fun. We always had good times in the summer and it was wide open. We could go and play and we always had fun outside with one another. And we always visit our cousins and they would be there. And we had good times. Good times in the summer and good times in the winter also. We had to stay in the house but it was still good times.

JB: What kind of trips did you take as a child?

AB: Well we didn't take too many trips. Well, we never went in other country—to other states, we always stayed in St. Mary's. But we had a lot of aunts and uncles. And where the Patuxent is now, we would visit them. We had—. My mother [Edith Estelle Briscoe Chase] had an aunt there. My father [Joseph Arthur Chase] had an aunt and then his grandfather and grandmamma. And our church is also there. And we'd always travel and we'd have to walk. 'Cause we'd walk from St. Francis Hall to St. Nicholas to church. Saturday we'd be going to Sunday school and the whole gang of us would get together and it was fun. And on Sunday morning grandmother would always be there and say, "Get up! It's time to go to church." And we'd walk from St. Francis to church every Sunday morning and we always was there by eight o'clock in the morning.

JB: Now what denomination was this church?

AB: It was Catholic. What they call it? St. Nicholas Church. That's the name of the church. And we would have to go to Sunday School there on Saturday and then we would have to turn around and go back on Sunday morning for the service. And we enjoyed it.

JB: How did your parents deal with health issues or any illness?

AB: Well, there weren't too many doctors around. It was Dr. Bean and Dr. Brown. And we had to travel by horse and buggy we had no car until later years. They would always take us in the buggy. If we had a serious illness, we have to go to Dr. Bean and sometimes they would go to Dr. Brown. Dr. Bean lived on Great Mills Road and Dr. Brown lived up on Route 235. And we'd have to travel there to go see the doctor but it was always remedies that they would think of that there was something they couldn't make then we would have to go to a doctor.

JB: Do you remember any of those special remedies or special cures?

AB: Not off hand I could probably think of some later but not now.

JB: What type of things did you do as a child?

AB: Well, we didn't do too much. We you know we used to have to make our own clothes and she'd always buy material and when my grandmother came in and she would make new dresses or new what ever we needed. They used to make our panties out of flour sacks. She'd cut them and we usually call them bloomers. [giggles] And she'd always bring material when she'd come to visit and she'd bring material and make us two or three dresses so we would have a new dress to go to school in the fall. And we always was happy to see her, grandma would make us a dress.

JB: What chores did you have to do?

AB: What chores? Well, we raised hogs and we'd have to feed the hogs and feed the chickens. We raised chickens and we had a garden in the summer and we have vegetables. We'd have to go pick the vegetables. Dig the potatoes—help to put them in 'cause we have no refrigerators or anything to keep what they had. They had to have a—. They'd put them in a [inaudible]. They'd make a bank like a—what would it be like? It would be like clay. They'd make a big bank like clay and they'd put straw inside. And that's where they would keep there vegetables—their potatoes and if they wanted cabbage, they'd put there too and they'd cover it over with corn stalks to keep them warm so that they wouldn't freeze. So that would be our first vegetables. That's all we'd have in the winter. And all the can food and can vegetables; they would do that also. My mother used to can about two hundred jars of fruit and that was our vegetables through the winter. We had our hogs we had our meat. And then she would raise a lot of chickens and we would have plenty of chicken. So we always had a plenty of food to eat. She always made us happy with our fill of chicken. [laughs]

[11:41]

JB: How did your parents treat you?

AB: They were very good to use. It was eight of us and we survived and always had plenty of everything.

JB: What did they do with you that you remember the best?

AB: Oh, I don't know. They can always think of your mother and father is the best so whatever they did was you know great for us. We played cards. They would play cards with us. They'd take us for a ride on the horse and buggy, whatever and we though that was great.

JB: How did they discipline you?

AB: We got a plenty discipline. We had—. We got beat with switches. We had better do what mom had taught us to do or else they go and get a [inaudible] a switch for you. They never used a belt. They would sting us with switches. And that was our—. That was the way they treat us. They never put us to bed or anything. They always knew we was scared of a switch and they would beat us. They would sting our legs up with those switches - real good. So if you did something real bad you better not do it again. [chuckles]

JB: What types of things did they discipline you for?

AB: Oh, well, the things that we thought that would be bad like lying. We lie to them. And if it was a lie, we had to straighten that out. And we never could get it straight so we had to get a switching for it. If we visit somebody and they told us not to visit, we better be there when they said to be back. She'd send us out on Sunday to play with our neighbor and she'd give us an hour. "You better be back a certain time or else you won't go out again and then you're going to get the switch to." So we had to be back on time. And we were always back. [inaudible] Especially Sunday. We'd get to go out on Sundays but no other days.

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

AB: Well I hope so, yes, yes I do.

JB: Can you describe your formal schooling?

AB: Some of the things that I did when I was in school?

JB: And what schools did you go to?

AB: I went to St. Francis Elementary school. I can't remember too much. I always wanted to get my homework. I always did that. But I never—. I never was punished for anything too bad. I never did things real bad. 'Cause I hated to be punished. And I'd always do my homework. And I always had—'cause I always wanted to be the head of the class. [laughs] And that's about all I can remember about St. Francis. I went—. I went to Banneker after that but that was three or four years after we graduated from elementary school. Because there was no high school for us. So we stayed out of school three or four years before we could go to high school. And our first high school was in Loveville, Maryland and we had to drive there—we had to ride the bus in the morning to go to school. But it was great days. I loved it. We played volleyball. We didn't have basketball. We played dodge ball. And of course you know I had to be on the volley ball team. [laughs] 'Cause I was the tomboy of that house. So, but it was great. And I met a lot of friends, met lot of little girl friends, lot of little boy friends. And when I get on the bus in the morning, there would be a lot of little children in elementary school and they would sit up close to me like I was the mama. And I—you know

how I would do—just baby them, and they always remember. There's a girl, now said, "I just sit on this arm." Every morning that I went to school and that's Lucile Berry. [laughs]

JB: And was there any other school after you went to Banneker?

AB: Yes, I went to Jarboesville for high school after Banneker. They divided it so, up the county and down the county. So we went down the county. We came to Jarboesville to high school. And I went there two years. That was in the third year. I did one year at Banneker and two years at Jarboesville.

[16:40]

JB: What was your classroom like?

AB: It was great. It was real nice. I had a lot of nice class mates. And I enjoyed working with them. I liked my principal and he would always—. I would always sit there sometimes—he would think I'd be playing—I'd have my glasses off. "You put the glasses on, Ms. Chase." [laughs]

JB: So who was your favorite or least favorite teacher? And why?

AB: In all three school?

JB: Yes, in all three schools?

AB: Well my favorite teacher was in elementary was Mrs. Allen. And at Banneker was Mr. Wright, I think Mr. Wright was the teacher there. And then when we come to Jarboesville, Mr. Waters was my teacher. So we had one teacher. That's all we would have in our classroom. We'd have a teacher for each classroom that there was.

JB: Do you remember your least favorite teacher?

AB: Not really, not really.

JB: What about your favorite subject in school? And your least favorite subject in school?

AB: Let me see. What did I really like in school? Oh, I guess arithmetic. I did like that. I was good at that. I didn't like to read too much and stand up in front of the class. [laughs] I was always shy and I never wanted to get in front of the class. But I guess I had to do it so I did it. But I like arithmetic. I learned to do it pretty good.

JB: What were your dreams of becoming as a young adult?

AB: Oh—. I guess a house wife. I always loved children. And I always thought I could manage a house. So that's what I've become. [laughs]

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

AB: Yes, I did most of the cooking after I got to be a teenager. And after I got married, my mother always wanted me to come home. "Still come home and cook my dinner for me." Well I—. Well I can go out if she'll come and cook for me. [giggles] So I'd always go home weekends especially. Or if I didn't go she'd send for me. "Come home cook dinner 'cause I had to go to work."
[laughs]

JB: What about courting? When you were ready to date, did your parents allowed to date?

AB: Not real early. When I started dating I was around seventeen and I had to go with my older sister then. I had to go with her to make sure I came home on time and did the right thing while I was there. But she was always there for me. So I used to go out on dates with her.

JB: Where did you go?

AB: It wasn't too many places to go. We had a recreation center that we go to and Apostle Paul. And I'd go to school programs—school things that they would have. And other than that—the proms and all that sort of stuff. [inaudible sentence]

JB: What was it like when you were first on your own?

AB: Well, I can't remember too much about that. I know that if I went with some body—well my brother used to go also with me. And if I went with him I better come home with him. And I sort of was on my own. We used to go to different places at that time too. We would go to bars and dance and have a good time. Got to be home on time—at a certain time we better be there or they'd be coming looking for us. "I told you to be home a certain time, but you're not here!" [laughs] So we didn't—. They didn't punish us. But—if there was something going on and we wanted to go, we'd always fuss around and then they'd say, "go ahead if you want to. Go ahead." So we'd get ready and go.

Oh, there were church festivals also that we would go to in the summer, but my parents would take us. They would go to the church festival and so they would always make arrangements so that we could go with them. And that was

all—about all the recreation that we had when we were growing up. We didn't have too much—. I mean there wasn't too much transportation. We didn't have much transportation. If, you know, if there was transportation like there is now, I guess we be doing like these other kids are doing.

JB: How did you meet your husband?

AB: Oh, let me see. Well there were house parties also. And my mother used to have a house party sometimes and everybody would come. I think it would be ten cents to come in. And she'd have all this—all these sandwiches and she'd have the music. There was somebody would play music. They'd have a band to come in to play the music. And course we would—. She didn't mind us being there dancing in the house so we would dance around until we found somebody that we liked. [giggle] And that's the way we met all our boyfriend and girlfriends. So I met my husband there at a house party that they were having.

JB: How long did you date?

AB: Oh, how about a couple of years. Something like that.

JB: And what was the date of your marriage?

AB: I it was, ah, April 29. I think it was 1939.

JB: So why did you decide to get married to Mr. Blackwell?

AB: Because he was kind and gentle and I just fell in love with him. That's it. [giggles] And I just thought he would be the one for me.

JB: Did you two get to have a big wedding? And can you describe your wedding for us?

AB: No, we didn't have a big wedding. We kind of decided on the spur of the moment and we didn't have a big wedding. We only had—. We decided we would get married. And we went to see the priest because he was a Baptist. So we had to go see the Catholic [inaudible]. And so we went to see the priest and set our date. And it was he and I, and Christine and Gerald Maddox were our best man [laughs] and maid of honor. And that's all of us that was there. So after the wedding we went home and we fixed our own dinner and they were there and my mother and father and the rest of my family and that was the day our wedding was.

JB: Did you take a honeymoon?

AB: No, we didn't have a honeymoon. We just got married and went home—went on about our business.

[25:00]

JB: So after you were married what was your family life like?

AB: Well, I think I stayed with my mama probably two weeks, three weeks or something. But we moved with his mother and we stayed with them because his only occupation was he'd work on the water. So we had to go back to his mother so he could earn money to live on. And we stayed with them until my first child was born. But weekends I had to go home with my mother because she would send for me to come. Said she's—. "I'm going to work this weekend and you have to come home and cook the kids breakfast and dinner." Although I had, let me see, I had some nieces there that she couldn't leave alone so I had to be there

with them so that she could be at work. So I stayed with them weekend until I had my first baby.

JB: Can you name your children for us and tell us about the kind of relationship you had with them?

AB: My nieces?

JB: No, your children.

AB: My children, of course Junior was the oldest and we enjoyed him while he was living, he died when he was about a year and three months old. He had bronchial pneumonia. There were no doctors around but Dr. Bean and Dr. Soush. Of course we went to see the doctor and they couldn't diagnose what was wrong with him so we carried him home and we tried to nurse him ourselves. And this afternoon we went to my mother and we just thought that he had a cold. And we walked him and we nursed him and tried to make him feel better. And around twelve o'clock that night he died. But he was good and we grieved quite a bit. But three or four years later we had another baby David and he's the oldest. Of course we spoiled him because he was our only baby. Then another year later we had Anthony and they were both almost the same size. And I used to dress them like twins and they thought they were twins. Then after that there was another one—there's Wayne. And seem like it wasn't no end. We just had babies, babies, babies every year. But we enjoyed them and we try to do the best we could for them.

JB: So how many children did you have in total?

AB: I have fourteen children total. And they are, ah—. I got three dead. Lets see, ten— [inaudible] —and three dead. So I have eleven girls.

JB: Do you want to name the rest of them for us?

AB: Umm. Well, there was Ben, called Benjamin, Kenneth, ah—. [long pause] Who came after that? Kenny, Paulette, Cindy, Timmy, Carol, Donna, Dewitt.

JB: Did you mention Pam in there?

AB: Pam.

JB: What was your relationship with your husband like?

AB: Well, we had great times, he was a good husband. He survived and he provided for us. And he made us laugh. He was a funny old man and he made us laugh. And he made us have fun all together. We stayed together. We lived together and we stayed together all the whole family and he—. He was sick for a while but we still had fun. After he'd taken sick he still didn't stop funning and being funny. And we really enjoyed him and we missed him. He's dead now and we miss him.

JB: What year was it that he passed away?

AB: He died in 1987.

JB: And after how many years of marriage was that?

AB: Hmm. I think that was, ah, 49. Yeah, it was forty—no, it wasn't 49, good grief. [pause] I guess it was. I guess it was.

JB: What about any grandchildren? Do you have any grandchildren?

AB: Yes, I do. I have grandchildren. There's—. Let me see. Let me name by—from the oldest on. There's David, he's got two. Patricia and David. There's Anthony. He's got Tony, Jeffery, Mel and—. What's that one? I can't think of it. I can't think of his. It was Leah and—

JB: Jordan.

AB: Jordan

JB: [inaudible]

AB: —and then he has ah—. What's the one's name in California?

JB: That's Carol—

AB: And Carol. There's Carol in California. There might be some more but I don't know about them. Then there's the next one is Wayne. He has Jack, Troy, and Tiffany.

[End of Side 1, Tape I of 2]

[Begin Side 2, Tape 1 of 2]

JB: Okay.

AB: Want me to start now? Okay? There's Ben. Ben has two children: [inaudible] and little Ben. Kenneth has two: little Kenneth and—I can't think.

JB: Kendra.

AB: And Kendra. There's Pam. She has two children: Stevie and Janice? Janet? What's her—? What is that child's name? Uhm. [long pause] I can't think of her name.

JB: [inaudible]

AB: Oh just a little girl. She got another one, a girl. And there's Paulette. Paulette has three: Dwight, Dana, and Delissa. Cindy has three: Tina, Sterling, and—

JB: Tori.

AB: And Tori. Cindy—there's Carol she has two: Joshua and Anitra. Dewitt has one: Shannon. Of course Donna doesn't have any.

JB: [inaudible]

AB: Timmy. Timmy has one little boy: DJ.

[33:31]

JB: Describe what your relationship was like with your grandchildren?

AB: Oh it's great, I love them. They love me I hope. [laughs] I'm sure they do but I just put that in there, but anyway they always come to see grandma. They love to come to grandma's home. I love to see them come. They always look for their hot rolls or what ever grandma has. They're always there. And I try to have what they like—whatever they like—there for them. And what else can I say about them? They just sweet children. I just love them.

JB: Can you tell us what part religion has played in your life?

AB: Yes. Well when first got married, I married a Baptist. Okay. I had to divide my religion with his religion so I had to go to church with him part time. Then I had to raise my children Catholics and they went to Catholic school at St. Peters and he never said a word about where I would send them or what I would do with them. Sunday mornings, we get up go to church and he get up fix us to go to

church and he would stay home and fix breakfast. When we got home breakfast would be ready. We'd gone to church. They all made there First Communion. Got confirmed and all of them are Catholics except one. Of course, Carol changed her religion. She went in the Army and she met a gentleman that she liked who's religion is Baptist and so she goes to church with him. And she loves that. But the rest of us are all still Catholic and we love our religion. We go church—we try to go every time the doors get open and if it's impossible sometimes, so we go when we can.

JB: How do you know there is a God?

AB: Form how things are happening. There must be somebody their helping us out. [chuckles] Because if it wasn't, I don't—. How would we survive? What would we do? You've got to pray to Gad to help us out. There must be a God there somewhere.

JB: Can you describe you relationship with Jesus?

AB: Well, I pray to him every night. That's something that we do. We know God—. It must be somebody to pray to us, so we pray to God to help us out and do whatever he can for us. And he does 'cause I have had a pretty healthy life all my life. I've had a lot of Children and it must be a God somewhere to help me to born those children and to help me to raise those children. And if it wasn't a God somewhere, what else would we depend on?

JB: What kind of work have you done to support yourself?

AB: Well, I've been house for a while. I've been cook for a while. When my kids were small I would go to work at night and I was a short order cook. And my

husband would work in the day and I'd go at night. And he'd babysit while I went to work and I'd baby sit when he went to work. And we survived off of that until recent years. I went to social service to work as a social worker once. We were called homemakers and we would go into the homes and help people to do the chores that they couldn't do themselves. They—. Some of them didn't know how to count, they didn't know how to read, they didn't know what a check was, they didn't know how to cash it. We'd have to take them to the store and help them get the house clean and we have to transport them to the doctor. They never knew what a doctor was until we started working there. So we would take them. If they went to the doctors they didn't have transportation. So we made it real easy for them. They would make the appointment and we would take them there. So it was a big help to them. So I worked Social Services 20 years, more than that. But before I went to Social Services though, I worked at a day care center and I prepared meals for 40 children plus they had five teachers. And I had to prepare those meals and I had to make the menus for them and I did that for four years until I decided to go to Social Services to work.

JB: Why did you choose the type of job that you had?

AB: Well, I chose cooking because—short order cook—because I love to cook. That was the only thing that we could do at that time. That the only thing that they hired a housewife for. They either clean or cook. So my profession was to cook. And I liked it and I loved it. So then I decided that I go to the Tri-County to try to find a—make more money if I can, you know, to do it daily. And I did and I worked for them for four years. Then I was done there was an advertising in the

paper for social worker one so I applied for that. And I passed the test and taken that. And then I worked there 19 years. Might have been 20. Could have been more but that's what I've counted anyway.

JB: How were you affected by the Naval Base?

AB: Oh well, the Naval Base was a big help to our family and to us because my husband went to work on the Base. That was a big help. At first he didn't earn much money but then after he was there for years he got in a higher bracket and that made living much easier because we had more money to spend. We had more things that we needed, you know, we could get more things that we needed. And of course we had transportation. Them sort of things. We didn't have much transportation before then but after he went on the Base he was able to buy a car. Go to places we need to go.

JB: Did the Navel Base coming to the county affect you before your husband started working there? The location of the base or anything?

AB: No, it didn't. It didn't bother us.

JB: Can you describe the community activities you've participated in?

AB: What did we do? Umm, so let's come back to that.

JB: [giggles]

AB: Let's come back to that.

JB: For like church activities, holidays, family reunions, fairs, Bingo, things like that?

AB: Umm, we didn't do to much. I didn't participate in to much because I had the children there and they'd taken most of my time. And I could take them and

participate in too much when they were younger. But after they got older—

[pause] Let me think about what I did. Huh. Well, I guess not. I don't know.

JB: Talk a little bit about your husband's gospel group, the Sunlight Gospel Singers, and how you participated in that.

AB: Oh yeah I did, I did help. That was a thing that I was interested in. I help them and I always make sure when they need somebody that my husband and the kids were there—the boys were there to help them out. And they would get a donation but we didn't ask them for donations. We did that to help the community. We did that to help them improve the programs they were having. And it was a lot of fun. And where ever they were asked to go, we made sure they had transportation to get there and do what ever they had to do. We did that for—now I don't know. So many years.

JB: So what special responsibilities did you take on for the group?

AB: Well I did most of the programs. I would find out if they had a program. I'd find—. I'd call the people and find out if they had and program and if they needed them or wanted them. And make sure that they got there. And I'd get the group together and we would have them all together when they would be—when they would have a program. Some of my children lives in Washington. I would call them and find out. Tell them what was going on. And have them to get themselves together and be here on time. And they would be.

[44:02]

JB: Could you give any of the history the Sunlight Gospel Singers?

AB: Ah, the Sunlight Gospel Singers started I'm sure its been fifty years ago now. And a my husband and his cousin's nephew that lived in Piney Point started this group from their uncle—their uncle was a churchgoer and a gospel singer and he loved hymns, he loved gospel. And he decided that he would get his nephews together and have a gospel group. And he named them Sunlight Gospel Singers. And they were only youngsters then. I guess my husband was about, what? 18 or 19? And he had a son and the Diggan's boys and the brothers and they were all cousins and they started singing in the church. And from then the gospel group kept on going.

JB: Can you name the original members of the group?

AB: The original members were William Blackwell, Albert Dickens, Milton Dickens, ah—. Lets see who else there? There was another one. Louie. That was the four. Herman Clayton and Chester Clayton—they were all cousins. And then Uncle Henry got them all together, and he'd have them to practice one night a week at his house so they would be ready on Sunday when they had service so they could be able to sing to help with the service during the time.

JB: What was Uncle Henry's last name?

AB: Uncle Henry Dickens. Then after he died the group kept going. And they had—. I think Albert was the manager at that time. It was still the same group of boys that sang together. Later on years Albert died. Then the got another group some other boys to come in and help them out. That was Albert, Willie, Mickey,

William Thompson. Later in years William died and they got Joe Cobs, Mickey, Willie, and Albert. What was that other man name?

JB: William?

AB: William Murray. So after William taken sick he had a stroke and he couldn't do it any more. Albert died, William would died, the only one were left were Willie and Mickey so he decided that he would get his son's to help him out.

JB: Willie decided or Mickey decided?

AB: Willie decided that he'd get them to help him out. What's that other man name? What was his name? Spinner. Spinner, Willie, and Mickey, and William Thompson that was the first group. Then after they passed, there was only the two left Willie and Mickey. So then Mickey and Willie got David, Anthony, Wayne, Kenneth, [inaudible] and they had the group until recent years. Well, I guess they would still will do it if they got their self together. And I would still be a Sunlight Gospel because they're still here and they're still willing. So when we get ourself together we still be a Sunlight Gospel group.

JB: How do you feel about your life in general today?

AB: I think it's great because I still have my family. I have my in laws and my sons and my daughters and I still think it's great. And my health is not that bad. And ah, I am—I'm glad to be here.

JB: In what ways is it different from what it used to be?

AB: Oh it's much different, for one thing we don't—we don't have the husband, we don't have the father and that don't make a difference but I still have my children.

And it's great living with them and it's great being with them and they are good to me.

JB: Is the quality of your life better or worse?

AB: It's, well, it's no worse. It's better because I have the things that I didn't have before. And I'm still getting things I never had before. My house was deteriorating so they're building me a new house. That's something that I didn't have. Course if my husband were still living he would have did it anyway but I have them to depend on and they are doing a great job.

JB: Are things different now then what they used to be?

AB: Yes, because it's so much going on in life now. There is so much going on. There's things happening that's never happen. And I never seen things that is happening now that has happen before then.

JB: So are these changes good or bad changes?

AB: They are bad changes. They are bad changes. The changes are bad. But things are better for me. [giggles]

[51:29]

JB: Do you think that the teenagers of St. Mary's County today are different from how they were when you were a teen?

AB: Oh yes, yes, quite a bit. We wouldn't think about doing the things they do now. And other things. The kids drive a car now. We weren't allowed to drive a car. If we went out in a car we better go out with our mama and daddy if we had a car. Now kids gets cars and they gets everything they want. We couldn't get everything we want. We got what they give us and we were satisfied. But now

they never satisfied they always want more, more, more. And they get more and more. 'Cause they—. We didn't have jobs. We couldn't work. They didn't have anything for us to do. We couldn't work like they do now—they work and get what they want. Whatever they want they, well, "I'm going to work and get it. And if I can't go to work and get it, then I just have to get it some other way." So that's what they do.

JB: Are race relations different in the county then they were when you were a child?
How and Why?

JB: Well yes, it's different because the white folks thought we should be slaves. They didn't allow us to go in their kitchen and do what we can do now. And they were—. White people has changed quite a bit. They try to treat you like you were, some of them not all of them. We were—. We lived more or less like slaves, like slavery time, or whatever. We couldn't do the things we do now we didn't have the religion we didn't have—. We didn't have nothing, nothing like what we have now. If we had it we had to work hard for it. And now we work hard but not as hard like we used to. And the educational backgrounds are better. If we wanted money to go to school we had to try to get it together. We never had scholarships. We never had anything that we really needed, you know, to get an education so we couldn't get better jobs or whatever. We had to—. We were always on a totem pole. We were in the last line to get something.

JB: What was segregation like?

AB: Terrible, terrible. We were separated for everything. If we went to church, we had to sit—. They had the pews with white folks' names on them. We had to sit in the back and if you had enough money you could buy your pew. And we would sit in our family pew, grandma and grandpapa had their name on theirs, in the back of the church. Not the front. We couldn't go in the front. We could not go in the front. And if we had a cousin had a name on theirs, when we was children we had to look on the pew to make sure that her name was on there or else they would make you get out and get in the back. And it was like that until the Base come here I guess. Well it had changed a little before that. Because we used to go to St. Nichols Catechism and then I think Father Price was there then and he was loud like Father Matthews. He would scream real loud and tell them what he wanted and they changed. It was—. It was segregation it was bad.

JB: Were you ever afraid of a group or a person practicing hate during segregation?

AB: No, I never—. What I would be kind of shy in what I do or say because if they wanted to do—the white folks want to do something to you, they would do it. And what could you do about it? You could go to the law if you want to but they would be on the white man side. So I was kind of shy of what I say or what I did around them.

JB: How do you feel about living in the county now?

AB: I feel like—. I don't know. It's much better that you feel like your free. You have your freedom to do what you want to, say what you want to, and go where you want to. And things are much better than they were.

JB: Did you ever leave the county for any reason?

AB: Well, before I got married when I was fifteen I went to Washington to work during the winter months. I'd come back in the summer. And I'd live with the white folks. But they—. I guess they were—. I used to sleep in the basement. That was my bedroom. They slept upstairs and I had to have their meals ready and all that when I was there. I didn't like it. And when I found a job back here, I came back here and went to work and didn't go back with them. They were in the Army they were Army people. And I don't know whatever happened to them.

JB: Do you feel that there is a difference between county people and outsiders?

AB: Some, some of them. All of them are not the same.

JB: Do you make a distinction between native countians and people who weren't born and raised in St. Mary's?

AB: Well those born and raised in St. Mary's, most of them you know. But those others you got to make friends with them before you can realize, you know, and make friends and trust them—know where they're coming from. Like the people here, almost all St. Mary's County people, know St. Mary's County people. Because they all went to school together. They been living together for awhile even if they're from a different district, you went to school in a different districts. You know them. And, you know, you know them pretty well.

JB: How do you deal with outsiders who are living in the county?

AB: Well not very good if I don't know them because I don't know the name. I don't know where they came from. And you wonder who they are until they make themselves known. Unless they introduce themselves and tell you who they are you have to be kind of shy about who you talking to?

JB: What do you think about the direction the county is going in today?

AB: I don't know, I don't know , I can't commit on that because I really—. I really can't tell.

JB: How have you contributed to the county through you work or through your family, through your politics, your citizenship?

AB: I contributed quite a bit because I have helped a lot of people to do some of the things they weren't able to do. And to help them and give them my own opinion what things or how things should be or whatever. And I think as long as you can help somebody, and I have, I think that is a pretty good contribution. And I always contribute to donations or whatever when there is a need. When they're having something and I can donate, I donate whatever I have to give.

JB: Do you do any kind of volunteer services?

AB: Yes, I volunteer to help with the commission on aging. I deliver meals. And it makes me happy to see them want them. When I take them in there's always a smile. I always give them a hot meal. And it makes me feel good when I take them a meal in there and they have it because I'm bringing it and it's on time. One couple always meets me at the door. "Oh here come my hot meal." and "I'm glad its here." [laughs] And they have a big conversation. They want to hold you and talk to you. But really you don't have time because you have other hot meals you've got to deliver. So I think that's a—that is my goal and I like to do it. It doesn't hurt me.

[End of Side 2, Tape I of 2]

[Begin Side 1, Tape 2 of 2]

[1:01:23]

JB: Have you received or any kind of rewards, certificates or anything of that kind of nature?

AB: Lord I've got—. Ah well, the Sunlight Gospel is my group, they would give a certificate for me. I got certificates for best performance and getting these programs together. Let me see what did you all [inaudible] get these certificates for? I got all them. I got a certificate for—. I went to college; I got a certificate for that. And at college, I got a certificate for—. [pause] I got certificate, Homemaker Service. Ah, [inaudible] see what other awards I got. [inaudible] to name some. [laughs] I got all kind of certificates. Oh, I got an award at First Baptist Church for helping them with something they did at the church. My Mother's Day certificate for being a mother, and I got a, you know, I got a Social Services. I got one there. Oh, I don't know. So many more I just can't name because I was about—. I started to throw them away. I had so many. [chuckles] I couldn't frame them because it would have taken up too much room. So I put them in the Bible and I said one day I probably will need these. [chuckles] But—. I can't name them all right now. So, so I got about twelve or thirteen.

JB: What do you consider to be the most valuable thing that you have ever had? Something you could not have done without?

AB: Uhm, my house. [laughs]

JB: Why is that?

AB: Because it will be a place—it will be a place you're living in with all the equipment that will be in there and all the things that they've given me that I didn't have and I probably would never get that will be in my house than I won't have to worry about. I won't have to go outside. I won't have to do anything. Just stay right in that house—

JB: So you are referring to the house that is being built now?

AB: Yes, enjoy it enjoy it. The only thing I will have to go out for to get food. [laughs] That be the most valuable thing that I—. Of course I had a house before but it wasn't equipped with all the things that they're putting in this one. So that be—that's the most valuable thing to me right now.

JB: Have you done everything in your life that you have wanted to do or planned to do?

AB: Well, it probably would have been a lot of things I'd wanted to do but after I started raising a family, I just forgot all about it and went on to just take care of them.

JB: What kinds of things are you referring to?

AB: Well, I probably could have been something different than a housewife. If I had went out in the world and looked for something different, something that I really would enjoy doing, I probably could have did it. But after I had my—after I started raising a family you give up a lot of things for your children. So that's what I did. And it didn't bother me. Whatever was—would have been my mind, I forgot all about it.

JB: If you could go back and live your life over again is there anything that you would change?

AB: Uhm, what could I change? I don't know what I could change. I don't know what I would want to change. Because I have a pretty good life. And my husband provided a pretty good life for me after I got married. My mother and father was good for me. And I probably would have, if they were living, I probably would still been there with them doing whatever I could. So I don't know what I could have changed. And I did a—. Since he'd been gone, I did a lot of traveling out to places I have never been before. And I enjoyed that. So I don't know what else I could do.

JB: What places have you traveled to?

AB: Well I been to Las Vegas. I had never been to—. I had never been to Atlantic City what other place did I go. I'd never been to Ohio. Ah, been so many places. Those are—

JB: Did you take a trip to Florida?

AB: Yes, I went to Florida. Had never been there. Uh huh. And where else did I go? And ah, I hope someday I'll go to some other—some of the other places, you know, that—. I don't know where I would like to go because—unless it's something interesting that I would like to go there for. But I—. Oh I had never been to West Virginia, I hadn't never been to Virginia. So, with the family you couldn't travel only so many places so after they grown, I've been able to do a lot of things that I couldn't do then. I don't think there's any place I would want to

go unless there is some kind of scenery or something or other that's happening or something that's happening that I'd want to go see it. Or want to go be there when it's happening. [chuckles]

JB: What do you think are the biggest changes in the county in your life time?

AB: Oh my goodness. It is a big change. It is a big change. One thing the county has grown. It really has grown. It's so many people here. It's more or less like a city now instead of a country. You know the people are close together and they're living together. We got the Base there. We got Webster Field down the road. Things that we never had before. And it's some lot of things that's happening. You've got Wildewood a great—. All these stores. We used to have one little store that we would shop for clothing in the lower part of the county. And that was—. What was the name of that store in Leonardtown?

JB: [inaudible]

AB: The store in Leonardtown? That's the only clothing store that we had for a while. I forgot the name of that store, right there where [inaudible] is. What was the name of that store?

JB: Oh, you mean the Hub?

AB: No, the Hub wasn't there then.

JB: [inaudible]

AB: It was another store. That only clothing store that we could get clothes here in Leonardtown. Oh, we had Millicents on the Base before the Base come here. But we didn't have any clothes that women could buy—men and women could buy clothes in. They had to send out catalogs. They had old Walterfield Catalogs that

they'd sent out and had to get clothes off. I guess Sears was on the map. Montgomery Ward probably. But it's been in progress for long time. But we didn't have—didn't have many clothing stores here. So the county has really grown. We didn't have all these things we have now. All these lunch rooms. We were—. Where would they—. I was wondering if they had a lunch room that they could go to. I don't think they even had a lunch room they could go to. Jarboesville Store was on the corner. That was a grocery store. Millicents was way down where the Base is. Mill Stone Landing it was called. And we had a store down there and they called it Millicents Store that they sell clothes. But we had to travel along way to even buy decent clothes. And then when you get there you couldn't buy it because sometimes it would didn't have the money to buy it. [laughs] But it was a—. It really has grown. Its more like a city than it is, you know, than it is country now. Which makes it real good. Now we can go out to eat when we get ready. There's some place where you can stop to eat. You couldn't—. Where would it be to go and eat a sandwich or whatever? You couldn't do that. You couldn't do it.

[1:12:00]

JB: Can you share some old stories about what life was like here in the county for your parents?

AB: Well, when I was a—I don't know how old I was, my father used to cut timber in the woods. And he had some oxen and a old cart. And the California store was the only store there where we lived in California. And he'd have to walk up there and get the oxen and the cart from George Able and bring it down the road and go

through the woods all day long and haul the logs to the mill. Of course they had a old mill close by and he'd haul—he'd haul the logs to the mill. And I can remember him bringing the oxen and parking in front of the door and then he would tell us not to go there because he didn't know whether they would bother us or not. And he'd park them there in front the door while he'd come in and eat lunch. He'd come in and eat lunch and take that old oxen cart and go on out to the woods and get the lumber and carry it on up to the mill. And then he had a old horse and buggy that he'd—. We had a road from our house. You know where Hewitt's Road is now? We'd go from the back of our house, there used to be a road through the woods that he would go through with the horse and buggy and go out through there and help them to kill hogs and do all that stuff that they had to do. And go—. Those people had farms and they had all kinds of hogs, cows, and all that stuff and 'cause they knew him and he was a good worker and everybody wanted him. And he help with the hogs and bring back liver. I couldn't stand it. He'd bring that liver back and that's what we would have for dinner a lot of times. 'Cause he bring a liver home from the hogs and we'd have liver and onions for dinner. And then he used to—he used to do a lot of hunting in the woods. He had traps set in the woods. And he would catch these animals - muskrats and fox and coons, or whatever would get in—whatever would get in his traps. He'd bring it home and he had a chop board like this that he would kill the animal and turn them on the wrong side and skin them. Turn the skin on the wrong side and put them on this board and he would hang it up to dry. And when

it dried he would ship it out so he could make money off it. They would—. He would get paid good money for muskrat tails and fox tails and coon tails. And this is what is on your coat sometimes that you see a fox tail? If it was a fox tail, this would be dried animals that these people hunted in the woods years ago. You'd have always put it down in the swamp. And he'd say, "I'm going to set my traps, Dell, I be going to set my traps." He would get this muskrat tail, but he would skin the muskrat and soak it in water and my mother used to cook it. And it tasted like chicken to us because we didn't know the difference. And that's what we had dinner a lot of times. Didn't go out and get these old turtles. Not terrapins now, they were turtles, snapping turtles. He'd bring the snapping turtle home. He'd put him in a barrel and he'd let him stay there two or three weeks, or a month or so. And then he'd kill this turtle. That would be our dinner. She would—. He would skin that turtle and soak it. And mama would cook it. She would fry it. And we thought we had chicken. And it would be a good meal – a good dinner. Oh, he did a lot of things, you know, to help the family with the food and stuff that we had to eat. And what else did he do? Well first of all, my mother—she worked summertime. She didn't work in the winter. And we had all these vegetables that she would can so we had our dinner right there.

JB: How did black folks get their news in the county when you were growing up?

AB: I don't remember the paper. I guess by listening to one another. Because they didn't have telephones. I don't remember the newspaper. I don't remember reading a newspaper. But they would get together in a horse and buggy or whatever they had until cars came out and they would visit. That's the only way

they got the news. Because I can remember them coming all the way over here in a horse and buggy. Course they would leave in the evening and I guess when they'd get there it would be almost midnight 'cause they had to travel through mud roads. We didn't have—we didn't have State roads. We didn't have nothing but mud back roads and they had a horse and buggy. And that was the only way of traveling until cars came out. And I can't remember—. Well when they first got a car, it was a Model T. He had an old Model T and it had Brinsburger's [??] on the side. And he bought that from a lady that lived in Baltimore. She used to come home in the summer time and she wanted to sell that car. So he bought that car from her. And we thought we were something. We had a Model T. We were riding in that Model T— [laughs] We thought we were somebody. He needed to take us to church. He'd take us everywhere. Mr. Steven Mark had one too. He and—. Him and Steven Mark was the only two had cars. Old Model Ts. And I guess you can see pictures of some old Model Ts now, you know? Way back yonder? But if we had been thinking, we could have saved some of that stuff and, you know, it'd been worth money now. It sure would.

JB: Did you all listen to the radio or did you have radio when you were growing up?

AB: No, it was later in years they had radios. No telephones. I can remember my mama getting her first telephone. It was one of these things and you hook it in like that. That was the first telephone. And if you had three rings it meant it was yours. If it's two rings, it's somebody else on. You know, they go by the rings on the phone. And I think that old phone was still in there when we moved over

there, but I don't know what they did with it. Now that was when we first got phones. And that was quite a few years back.

JB: What about radios and television?

AB: No.

JB: How old were you when you got to experience those?

AB: Well, they didn't get televisions until, let me see, we was grown before we got television. Radio. We had a radio. I can't remember her first radio but—. We had little radios. And I can't remember how many years it was either.

JB: What kind of information did you get from the radio?

AB: Well they could get the news. They could get some kind of news. Whatever. I can remember her playing the numbers—and getting the numbers. She'd stand by that radio and get the numbers. [laughs] I can remember her doing that. And if they did have a telephone, they wouldn't have but one because they couldn't afford them. And there was a few of them. We didn't have—. They didn't—. Everybody didn't have them. Everybody couldn't afford them. And I guess because that was—. Times were kind of hard if you couldn't talk to somebody. But we were there and she had friends that would visit her, so that was all the communication that they could had until they went to church on Sunday. Met people or seen people or whatever.

[1:20:36]

And where we went we had to walk. I can remember many a day that we would walk from where we—where mama's old house was? Out there where we

used to live? —through the woods and go across the swamp and go down on the beach where she used to work. She used to walk that every morning and every evening. And I can remember the time that she would come home. Eunice and Irving and Emory and I would walk through the woods to meet her to see what she would bring for us. [laughs] Like little children with candy. [still laughing] She'd always bring something home. She would make the best biscuits. We'd be the first one there to get that biscuit that she was bringing home. [laughing] I can remember that just as well. And then too, you know, they used to make a lot of their clothes. When Miss Mast would come in the summer, she'd come early in the summer and stay until fall. And she lived in the city. She would bring a big bundle of materials, two or three bundles. And she would get a lady, Ms. Goddard, to make her dresses. She'd get up—. Ms. Goddard wouldn't go by a pattern. She would just make mama's dresses. We used to think it looked so pretty on her. She'd bring her all kinds of material for mama to make dresses out of. And we looked forward to her having that dress. And she and Miss Goddard would take that material up there and get Miss Goddard to make her clothes. And I don't know how—where they bought 'cause grandma, when she left home she lived in Baldwin. [??] She would send us clothes, you know. She worked for a white lady that had kinds of clothes. And she would—grandma would pack all these clothes in a box, the things that she thought that we could wear, and she'd send them to mama. And mama would make them more. So we would have clothes to wear to school. Like children get clothes now? Do you think we had little clothes? We didn't know what those clothes were. We got new shoes and

we've got to take care of them or else we wouldn't have no shoes. [children's voices in the background] If we wore shoes—. [long pause] If we wore shoes to school, and then either we had to put on some old shoes to go outdoors and play or else we wouldn't had no shoes to wear to school. Because that's how [inaudible] they were and that's how hard it was to get to. 'Cause had to walk five hundred miles to get shoes or whatever you needed. If you needed—. If we needed shoes you'd better take care of them. I'll tell you. I guess that's why I save so much stuff now. [laughs] 'Cause we had to save our stuff.

JB: What kind of health issues for yourself have you been concerned about throughout your life?

AB: Well, I've had—. I've had three operations that I had to be—. Well my tooth was the first thing. I had bad teeth. And the doctors just said that I had so many kids and they took all the calcium out of my teeth. 'Cause you've got to have calcium when you're raising the children probably. And I didn't take time to do what I was supposed to do I was so busy raising—taking care of them. So I had bad teeth. I had all my teeth out for—'cause I've been wearing glasses since I was fifteen. And I had a gall stone operation. I've had a lung operation. And now I've got an eye operation. [laughs] But it's all taken care of. So, other than that I don't have any other health problems so far. Thank goodness. And I think that's enough. But I'm not afraid. When the doctor says I need something, I'm not afraid to have it done because I think he's telling me right. I don't, you know, stay there and wait until it gets so bad and then go have it done and it's too late. I try to do it when they say it needs to be done. I've had all those things done and

now I'm not really concerned about anything else but something else might happen. But I don't have any ideas of anything ever happening because you never know what your health problems will do next. I think I'm worried about cancer because nobody ever said that I had any kind of growth or anything, you know, growing or anything. 'Cause that would be the only things that I'd be concerned about now.

JB: Do you have any final words in this interview? Some information that you think you haven't had a chance to share?

AB: Not really. Only I had a thyroid operation too. I had a thyroid taken out. My husband said, "Don't do that. Don't do that. You won't ever talk again. I know a teacher had that done and she didn't talk." I said, "You just let me alone. I'm going away from here [inaudible]. [laughs] And he said, "I don't want you to do that." And he walked behind me crying and he said you're never going to talk when you come back. I went to the hospital on Friday. Monday morning the doctor called him and said, "You can come pick your wife up." Because he called me and I couldn't talk because they had done put a drain tube in between my—I guess my larynx and whatever it is there and my little tube that goes up in there, and I couldn't talk. And he got so upset. Here he comes. Well, when he got there the doctor, "she's all right, you can take her home on Monday." He was so glad he didn't know what—. [laughs] 'Cause I proved him to be wrong, you know. He kind of be afraid of something. I said, "I'm not." I'm not afraid of it. [inaudible] Certain things are going to happen—are going to happen. I'm more

afraid of what's not happening to something else than having this operation. And it didn't take him long to do it either.

No, I don't have anything unless there's something else final that you want to ask me? And if I can answer, I will.

JB: I don't think we mentioned anywhere in the interview your age and your birth date?

AB: Oh, my goodness. I didn't. I am seventy-eight years old. I was seventy-eight July 25, 1918. Well, here's another—. Oh wait, are you ready?

JB: Uh hm. [yes]

AB: Here's another story I want to tell you about. And this is a lot of fun because we had some cousins lived up the line from us. Every night my father would play the violin and the kids would do square dancing. Cousin Albert used to call the numbers while he played the violin. We used to stay until three o'clock in the morning. Oh, you should have seen us. [laughs] And my mother and Theresa would get in there too and they'd have a little [inaudible]. Course we'd have our little brothers. We'd swing partners and dancing until about eleven or twelve o'clock at night. And then they would go home. But it was so much fun. It was so much fun. I would—wish they had something like that now for the early people to go to. But they don't. It would be nice, wouldn't it?

JB: Uh hm. [yes] How are the elders treated differently now than when you were growing up?

AB: Well, they didn't have any place to go, so the families would get together, you know, and the kids would be there and that was the only [inaudible] that they

could have, really. Unless they had entertainment or a dinner or something. Like they would have a dinner—they had societies. St Francis Society, St. Nicholas Society, and I think there was one in St. Georges. And they would have that once a year in the summer. I think ours was in July. And St. Nicholas's was in August. I forgotten them all – St. Jerome and St. Georges. And I've forgotten when theirs would be but in the summer time. That would be the only way that the elder people could get together and, you know, have a nice time. But I guess that did like these old people now, they get together and do what they wanted together. But the kids wouldn't be there. The kids have to stay home where ever and the older people would get together and have their fun.

JB: What do you think of health care issue now and how they were when you were growing up as to how people took care of their elderly parents?

AB: Well, they did with what they had. They didn't have too many doctors around. They couldn't get them to the doctor. They would give them their own remedies. And if somebody was sick, the older—their mother or the father would stay home or—. Course the kids didn't know too much. But somebody would go in and stay with them, you know, some of the relatives went and stayed with them if they were so sick that the doctor couldn't get there. But the doctor would have to come in a horse and buggy. They couldn't come—they didn't have a car until cars started. So they had to ride around in a horse and buggy. I remember Dr. Brown coming over mama's house one time. I don't know who was sick. But anyway, now he had to come there and he was in a horse and buggy. So, that's

the way it used to be. Terrible. But it's much better now. Things are much better.

JB: Thank you very much, Mrs. Blackwell, for the interview.

AB: Okay.

[End of Side 1, Tape 2 of 2]