

Unified Committee for Afro-American Contributions
Oral History Documentation Project

MARY ELNETTA GEORGE TOON

Interviewed by Brenda Coates

January 30, 1997

At Mrs. Coates home in Lexington Park Maryland

Logged by Tania Jordon on November 28, 2007

A verbatim transcript is available

Original format is two cassette tapes

1 hour, 48 minutes, 5 seconds

Audio CD 1 of 2

Track 01

0:00 Introduction

0:37 She currently lives in Lexington Park, MD in the Forest Heights Development near the original George Washington Carver School.

1:50 Born in Columbus County North Carolina. She lived in area of Old Hammers Field near Whitesville and Georges Place near Roseville, N.C. The towns were located in the northern part of the state.

3:30 She moved to St. Mary's County in 1950. She stopped to visit her husbands relatives in St. Mary's with the intent of moving to the state of California. She discovered there were towns in St. Mary's County called California and Hollywood. She wrote her mother telling her that she had been to California and Hollywood and had seen all the stars.

Track 02

5:54 Her childhood was a good life with nothing fancy. They had an outside toilet. Her family consisted of 15 children who lived mainly off the land family share cropped. Her mother was a housewife.

7:15 Her earliest memory was being smaller in size than her little sister. She also did not get along with her little sister and almost hit her with the poker because she was bothering her. This experience made taught her never to do things like that again.

8:20 Her family attend Mt. Olive Baptist Church.

Track 03

9:43 She felt times were worse at the time. She thinks times were good because you didn't know all about things that were going on. If things were going on, they just didn't know about it.

10:20 Her parents didn't have health problems while she was at home. They didn't have any problems until their later years. His mother had a difficult time dealing with health problems in later years because she had never been sick except those related to having children.

11:09 Doctors and hospitals were available but because they were so healthy they didn't need to use the service often. There also was a little clinic which Dr. Dillard (a black doctor). Dr. Dillard would always hum the song Old Jordan Road. He would talk to the children and was a good doctor. They went to the doctor but there were doctors who would make house visits.

13:05 Her mothers home remedies were toddy for menstrual cramps. Her mother mixed a small amount of mixture with water. Mrs. Toon had an experience with severe cramps one day when nobody was around and made her own hot toddy without the water. She got so sick from her own mixture that she never drank again in her life. The mixture was actually white lighting. Other remedies included wormwood tea, catnip tea, cod-liver oil and caster oil.

17:00 The elderly were care for by the community. There were no senior citizens homes.

Track 04

18:15 They received their news from old time radio or gramophone.

19:32 She played hop-sotch, jump rope, basketball, baseball and went to church. She didn't have much time to play because of lack of time.

24:20 Their chores included hauling in water and wood, cleaning the yard and rooms.

Track 05

25:58 She got along well with siblings except when she wanted to do things her own way. Her brother told her that girls didn't ride bicycles. She rode his bicycle anyway and was thrown off. She never rode a bike again.

27:42 Her mother was sweet with discipline. She initially would give out a few soft warmings. Eventually she would give me a spanking with a switch.

30:15 She thought her parents prepared her for life in the best way that they could at the time.

Track 06

30:51 She attended Cedar Grove Primer Grade and Mt. Olive School. Mt. Olive was closed shortly after she left the area. Cedar Grove was a converted house with a pot belly stove. She started school late because her she was the oldest and her parents didn't want her to walk to school alone. She started attending school at the age of six or seven. She didn't remember how many students attended school. Her teachers were Miss Rosa, Miss Hankins, Miss Sadie Lee, Mr. Peace and Mr. Barus (principal). Mr. Barus never pronounced her name correctly.

Track 07

37:31 She always dreamed of playing the piano and becoming a teacher. She changed her mind about teaching after spending time with smaller children in class. She later wanted to become a secretary. She became ill and was not able to finish her education.

Track 08

41:52 Her parents didn't allow children to go many places. She was able to go to ball games. Parents allowed boys to come to their house. She was not allowed to date outside of house.

Track 09

48:12 She thought her husband was taking her to the big city, instead he took her "from one set of woods to another".

50:15 She met her husband when he was always standing in a certain spot everyday after school. He finally asked if he could walk her home. He would walk her home from school and ball games. This went on for about five years.

Track 10

54:43 She also said there was a boy who would cry on the school bus because he loved her.

55:50 Mrs. Toon got married at age 19. Her husband was nine years older. He asked her mother for her hand in marriage. Her mother said he needed to ask her father. Her father said, “boy, you better know what you’re doing”. She got pregnant the first time she went out. Mr. Toon left town and wrote her a letter to come to Maryland and marry him. He came home two months later and married her. They were married by the Justice of the Peace.

Audio CD 2 of 2

Track 01

00:00 She did not work initially because she had a baby. Her husband worked at the Roast Restaurant, an asphalt company and then the base. He worked on Patuxent River Naval Base until he retired in 1981. She was a housewife and worked part-time at the Roast while the children were young. Mrs. Toon started working full time after the children were old enough to go to school. She made about \$0.75 per hour at the restaurant and \$4.00 per day doing domestic work. She made \$20-\$30 per week working at the laundry mat. In 1973 she started making approximately \$1.69 per hour.

03:17 She was excited about being able to go out and make money. They didn’t have much money but did the best that they could. They didn’t have a car and would walk to work or catch a ride. She worked at the Gold Coast, Pax River Cafeteria, Rue’s Roast, Pat’s, Hotel on Route 235, baby sitting, domestic work, laundry mats in Great Mills and Leonardtown, Bayside, Office on Aging, and the ARC

06:46 She had a good relationship with husband and children.

Track 02

07:13 Religion played a big part in her life. She didn’t think she would have made it without religion. “You always have to remember who is the head”. Before she left home, she stayed in church all day long. When she moved, she said she would never go to church again. When she left home, her father said, “don’t forget the church”. She didn’t know where the churches were when she arrived in St. Mary’s. She went to Catholic Church and didn’t understand the mass (Editors Note: Mass was performed in Latin during this time period) but knew service was about God. She continued to search for a church until she joined the First Baptist Church.

Track 03

14:57 Church activities: Choir President, works with most of the church ministries, missionary, deaconess in training. She goes to conventions and educational programs. She attends a lot of functions with Catholic Church and other denominations.

18:19 St. Mary's County Life: Remembers when there were only dirt roads, Jarboesville School. St. Mary's County is like a city now compared to the way it use to be. The quality of life is better. There are good things and bad things.

Track 04

20:31 Biggest changes are that black people were not allowed in a lot of places. If you were allowed in, you could touch the items. The clerk would try hats on their heads to let you see how it looked. In the 1970's here cousin was not able to try on a dress in a Leonardtown store. The County has come a long way.

22:26 She thinks that some blacks have changed and some have not. When you go to different places, black people still sit with each other. "I do not call this integration".

25:10 Teenagers are more open now.

25:47 She likes living in the county. She's not sure if there is a difference between outsiders and native born St. Mary's County residence.

Track 05

28:36 There is a difference between people in certain parts of the county. She would not like to elaborate on differences.

29:50 Base (Pax River) growth is complicated. No comment on county growth.

31:14 The most important thing is to have Jesus as you personal savior and then you will be able to do all things.

Track 06

32:58 She has not done everything in life she planned to do. She never finished school. She did get to go to San Diego and Las Vegas. She enjoyed playing the slot machines at the airport.

35:45 She would change a couple of things in life from her past. Not defined.

Track 07

44:07 Biographical Data