Transcript of OH-00140

Pearl Thompson Furey

Interviewed by

John Wearmouth

on

February 29, 1988

Accession #: 2006.031; OH-00140

Transcribed by Shannon Neal on October 6, 2020

Southern Maryland Studies Center

College of Southern Maryland
8730 Mitchell Road, P.O. Box 910
La Plata, MD 20646

Phone: (301) 934-7626
E-mail: SMSC@csmd.edu
Website: csmd.edu/smsc

The Stories of Southern Maryland Oral History Transcription Project has been made possible in part by a major grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH): Stories of Southern Maryland. https://www.neh.gov/

NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE HUMANITIES

Any views, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this transcription, do not necessarily represent those of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Format

Interview available as MP3 file or WAV: ssoh00140 (1:35:55)

Content Disclaimer

The Southern Maryland Studies Center offers public access to transcripts of oral histories and other archival materials that provide historical evidence and are products of their particular times. These may contain offensive language, negative stereotypes or graphic descriptions of past events that do not represent the opinions of the College of Southern Maryland or the Southern Maryland Studies Center.

Typographic Note

- [Inaudible] is used when a word cannot be understood.
- Brackets are used when the transcriber is not sure about a word or part of a word, to add a note indicating a non-verbal sound and to add clarifying information.
- Em Dash — is used to indicate an interruption or false start.
- Ellipses … is used to indicate a natural extended pause in speech

Subjects

African American teachers
Education
Rural conditions
Rural schools
School discipline
School integration
Segregation
Segregation in education

Tags

One room school house

Transcript

John Wearmouth [J]: This is John Wearmouth interviewing Mrs. Furey, Pearl T. Furey, at her home here in Bryans Road, Maryland. We're on Metropolitan Church Road just a few yards away from Indian Head Highway which is Maryland Route 210. The date is February 29th and this is leap year 1988. The interview is part of the Charles County Community College Oral History Program and we will concentrate in this interview on education. Primarily black education in Charles County. We will go back as far as we can with Mrs. Furey who was born Pearl Thompson?

Pearl Thompson Furey [P]: That's right.

J: Right and her father was William H. Thompson and interestingly enough he apparently was born about five years before the outbreak of the Civil War which means he was born into servitude here in Southern Maryland. He was born at Pomonkey roughly where we are now.

P: That's right.

J: We're in part of Pomonkey near the old Pomonkey which has been here much longer than Bryans Road. Okay how far—how many children were there in the family at home and where did you fall into the birth pattern? How many children?

P: There were 14 children. I was the third oldest. I had one sister older than me and one brother younger. I was the third oldest.

J: And you were born in 1906. It's interesting that your older sister is in this house today.

P: She is.

J: Watching TV in another room. Maybe we'll talk to her at some later date. And Roberta Wearmouth's present too and I want to say the both of us have known this lady, not intimately, but we have known her now for about 20 years. Our son Peter enrolled in Port Tobacco Elementary school at the beginning of the very first year of integration in Charles County and Mrs. Furey was his teacher I believe in first grade that year. So she's a significant person to us and we kind of feel that we know her in spite of the fact that we sort of lost track of her in recent years. Exactly where was your family home located in terms of today's neighborhood? Were you close to Fenwick?

P: No you know where the store is that was Key's Store?

J: Yes, yes.

P: We lived across from Key's Store. We had—my father had an old house on the next lot but then he built that white house that's across from Key's Store and that's where he—

J: The house still stands?

P: It's still there. It's white.

J: That's what about half way between Bryans Road and Marshall Hall?

P: Right. Oh it's not half way.

J: Closer to what point?

P: No it's closer to Bryans Road.

J: Oh okay. Anyway I do know where it is. Okay now what was your father doing to support the family during those early years let's say until about 1910 or so when you children were really very young? How did he keep the family going?

P: He worked on the farm. Somebody's farm.

J: Okay as a wage earner?

P: Very small wage.

J: Was his father a farmer too do you remember?

P: Yes he was.

J: So I would say judging from the birthdate of your father his father probably was born about roughly 25 years earlier which takes us way, way back into the early 19th century. Did your father ever voluntarily offer much information to you about his early years? His boyhood, very early boyhood? What do you think life was like for him and his family?

P: Occasionally he would tell us about his boyhood and we knew all of our grandparents. We had his father and mother and my mother's father and mother. We knew them.

J: So you had the privilege of meeting these people?

P: We did. I did.

J: When they were still alive and in good health.

P: Right.

J: So his—were your father's parents well along in years when you knew them? I suppose they had to be.

P: Yes they were older than he was but I don't know exactly how much older.

J: I would think so yeah. But were they still alive during World War I do you recall roughly when they passed?

P: Yes they were alive in World War I.

J: Okay they lived long lives. And your father-in-law was a farmer?

P: My father-in-law I never knew him. I'm married or so from the Virgin Islands.

J: Oh so the Furey's are not from here. Oh I see.

P: Here no. He was from St. Thomas, Virgin Islands.

J: Yeah because there aren't many Furey's in the phone book.

P: There's some in Marshall Hall.

J: Okay what sort of chores were the girls given at home? Who sort of controlled your time? Your father or your mother?

P: My mother. My father wasn't home much.

J: Were the boys assigned to outdoor chores most of the time?

P: Oh yes they had to get the wood, the water, we didn't have water in the house. We had a horse they had to feed the horse and pigs, chickens, things like that.

J: Did the girls also from time to time do that sort of thing?

P: We helped my mother with the other children. I was one that liked to sew so I helped her to sew, make clothes.

J: Did she spend some time teaching you sewing?

P: Well she did. When I didn't do it right she made me take it out and fix it over.

J: Was the fussy and particular?

P: A little bit.

J: And was she a good seamstress herself?

P: Pretty good. She made the clothes I wore to high school.

J: Did you save any of them?

P: No.

J: That's too bad.

P: No I didn't save any. When I looked around and found out what was happening I didn't even want to see them anymore.

J: Why is that?

P: You know we didn't want to be home made. We wanted factory made clothes.

J: Oh I see yes you're right. We can remember those things. The cast offs. Who wanted to wear your older sister's clothes?

P: No one. They didn't want those.

J: Okay have you continued sewing from time to time in all of your life?

P: Until about the last six years. I don't see like I used to to thread the needle and things like that so I don't sew anymore like I used to.

J: In this neighborhood where you were born and raised what was the color break down? Half and half would you say? Black families half? White families?

P: Most of them were—most in the neighborhood direct neighborhood most of them were black. Be all friends and relatives right close together in a cluster. A little farther down would be all the white.

J: Pockets.

P: Yeah in their own neighborhood. But we all knew each other.

J: Do you feel that this type of large extended family relationship or grouping had any impact at all on discipline within the family? Respect, good manners? Knowing there were a lot of people out there keeping an eye on you?

P: No I think the parents made that clear.

J: The immediate family?

P: The immediate family made that clear that you got to behave yourself.

J: Did your mother and father have an average size family in that neighborhood?

P: Yeah because nearly everybody had from nine to 13 or 14 children. They had quite a few children. Nearly everybody. Eight, nine, and on up.

J: What are we talking about, about a dozen families that you feel you knew quite well where you could walk to their homes and they could walk to yours? Was it that large a community? A dozen?

P: Oh yes we could walk to see each other.

J: What were the names of some of these other families?

P: The Key's, the Butler's, you've heard of the Butler's I'm sure. Our cousins the Marbury's. But they lived about a mile or two from where we lived.

J: Toward the river?

P: Right. Then there were the Johnson's and the Raymond's, let me see and in Prince George's County right around the bend were the Dyson's. But most of those have passed away.

J: Can descendants of most of those families still be found in this neighborhood?

P: Yes you can find them. Then there was a family of Bland's right across the road from where we lived were Bland's.

J: Who were some of your white neighbors along that road between Bryans Road and Marshall Hall?

P: Well the Thomas's lived across where the Safeway is that was the Thomas's home. Then there were the Barclay's. The Barclay's lived where the cabin on the corner is. Then let's see, the Jenkin's lived right here where you see that two story house. And the Bryan's lived—

J: Right here close to 210?

P: Yeah. The Jenkin's lived there. The Bryan's lived where the store is. There's a little road that's not so good, muddy road. The Bryan's lived in that muddy road. Bryans Road was named after Mr. Bryan.

J: Was that Strawberry Hill over there?

P: Yeah that's right, Strawberry Hill.

J: [Knew the Hop's] I suppose—

P: Yeah I knew the [Hop's]. My brother worked for them a little while.

J: Did you ever walk from your home to Marshall Hall?

P: Oh yes. When my grandmother would go down sometimes to Marshall Hall to sell vegetables or berries or plants, whatever she had to sell, we would walk along behind her wagon. [It was a] string wagon. But we still—

J: She road in the wagon with her vegetables?

P: She did right. We soon grew too big for her to want us to keep following her around. We were small we'd run along behind the wagon to Marshall Hall. So I did walk that far.

J: What was the road like? The surface of the road in the summer let's say?

P: In the summer it was dust and dirt but in the winter they had a hill between my grandmother and us that was nothing but clay. The clay was just like this you'd make pots out of and the buggy's—you didn't have any cars much at that time—they'd always get stuck in the clay.

J: I think we've heard people describe having to get out and push their Ford's up that hill. I forget who it was.

P: That was terrible. That's where—it's a good hill there now. Right by...after you pass Strawberry Hill you come to a hill that we called the Simms Hill. And Simms Hill was terrible when I was a little girl but it's much better now.

J: And the ruts were deep in the winter?

P: The ruts were deep. That's right.

J: What sort of work did your mother do in the way of producing and preserving food? She was in charge of this? Was this usually her domain?

P: Oh yeah she canned and we would dry apples.

J: Where?

P: We would dry them on the rooftop.

J: Good okay that's what I was wondering.

P: And can tomatoes. We didn't can many beans or corn. They were hard to keep. If you canned them on a wood stove and that's what we had.

J: Was this a hot pack or a cold pack type?

P: We could hot pack usually but see if you had a wood stove you don't do much cooking—not much canning.

J: Especially when the weather's a little warmer.

P: Right.

J: This was the main reason it was simply too uncomfortable?

P: It would be very uncomfortable.

J: What were things like on laundry day? Was this a once a week affair for the Thompson family?

P: It was once a week the main affair but Momma had to wash in between quite often. She had someone to come in and help her once a week.

J: Was the water heated right there on the wood burning stove?

P: On the wood burning stove.

J: And no washing machine as we know it today? These were hand rubbed, hand scrubbed?

P: No. They were hand scrubbed when I was a little girl.

J: What kind of tubs do you remember?

P: She had a wooden tub and she had metal tubs. She had several tubs. With all of us she had to have.

J: How far did that water have to be carried for the tubs?

P: Not too far. We would—the well was in the front yard. So you go to the well, get your water, put it on, heat it.

J: And most of the girls turned to that day and?

P: Right and helped out.

J: Stoking the stove and then ironing was the day after?

P: Usually.

J: What sort of things did your mother try to reduce the ironing work load as much as possible?

P: By folding—

J: What things?

P: Folding the clothes down when you take the clothes off the line, fold them down, you don't have to iron as much.

J: You know anybody that does that today?

P: No. Today if you go to the laundromat you fold your clothes don't you. We do that.

J: Okay I've never asked this before and we should, what did she use for soap and where did she get it?

P: Oh we bought the soap at the store.

J: Okay regular prepared bar soap?

P: Yes, yes bar soap [octagon] and star was real rough on the hands.

J: Had a lot of lye in it?

P: It was.

J: Did she shave the soap do you recall?

P: No just rub them on the clothes and rub the clothes on the board. That is the way back there. Of course before my mother died she had a washing machine and everything. Electric and refrigerator and everything.

J: By about when? By about 1930 would you say?

P: 1930, I guess it was about 1930.

J: Okay now where did the electricity come from at that time?

P: They had men to put poles down and put your wires on. We had electric, we had radios and—

J: Where did that electricity come from at that time?

P: I don't know La Plata I guess.

J: May have came in from...

R: Pope's Creek.

P: Pope's Creek.

J: In the early 1930's?

P: Yeah I think you're right. I think that's where these did came from. I think I remember hearing that.

J: About how old were you when your mother began to get these comforts of the kitchen? A decent stove, a good icebox, and a modern sewing machine?

P: I guess I was about 16. Just about.

J: So this was very good. A lot of folks waited longer than that. At what point did your father leave farming as the major source of income and what did he do after that?

P: He worked at Indian Head. I can't remember exactly what year he started but he went to work in the powder factory in Indian Head.

J: Was it during World War I by any chance when they began to get a need for more powder?

P: I think it was. Maybe a little before World War I.

J: And that was the beginning of better times would you say for the family?

P: Better times right.

J: Okay at least you knew what was coming in every week or month and could plan.

P: That's right.

J: Who sort of held onto the purse strings for the family? Was it a joint effort?

P: Oh my mother took care of the money matters. My father brought it in and my mother took care of it and saw that it wasn't wasted.

J: Okay he accepted this? Wasn't too uncomfortable?

P: Oh no.

J: Were they thrifty people? They made their pennies count would you say?

P: They must have to have 14 kids. They sent my oldest sister to Bowie but she didn't stay. Part of it burned down and she came home and she didn't go back. Four years later I went to Bowie and I stayed. My daddy offered to send my other sisters and brothers if they wanted to go but they didn't want to go to school anymore so they didn't go.

J: So you went farther than anyone else in education?

P: Yes. I guess I'm kind of old fashioned and I stick to everything. You knw I don't change.

J: Were they proud of you?

P: I don't know.

J: Did they ever show?

P: I don't know.

J: They never demonstrated it.

P: I never tried to find out if they were proud of me or not.

J: But anyways as long as you wanted to go they were behind you all the way?

P: They were behind me all the way.

J: They knew it was a good investment.

P: They took me and they brought me back and looked after me.

J: Oh that's great. Were you in these years did you feel that the Thompson family was really better off and a cut above other black families in the neighborhood?

P: No.

J: Did you ever feel that?

P: No I never felt that way. I felt that we were just struggling like everybody else and trying to make it.

J: Well apparently you did remarkable. When did you—let's see was Pomonkey a relatively new high school when you were there?

P: You want me to tell you the truth about it?

J: Yeah. Sure this is it.

P: We had our first education in the church annex. They built the school two stories high with a basement under it and the basement filled up with water. And the school wasn't very good. That was the first Pomonkey school. Finally it burned down then we got one that was more modern like a school should be.

J: And that was just down the road here from us what a quarter of a mile next to the church?

P: Right, right, right. Right next to the undertaker parlor is where it was. You know you—

J: Next to [Inaudible].

P: Yeah you see they have another building there where the old one was but this is the better building. I had gone through and finished before they built that. I was one of the first in 1925. We didn't have that.

J: Now Pomonkey was the first high school built in this county specifically for black students?

P: Right.

J: Is that correct?

P: That's correct.

J: And again it opened what year?

P: I don't know exactly what year it opened.

J: Do you remember which year was the first graduating class of Pomonkey?

P: 24. 1924.

J: 24. And again you graduated what year?

P: 1925.

J: So you were in the first group?

P: Second group. I was the second group.

J: What was the size of the student body the year you graduated your senior year?

P: Not very many.

J: 25 or so?

P: Just about that.

J: And how many teachers?

P: Two.

J: And who were they?

P: I can't remember. Ms. Morris was one teacher and let me see. We had Ms. Morris, Mr. Young, Mr. Dowling, and that's about it. By that time I was gone. I went to Bowie and our class at Bowie was only 27 and we came out in 1927.

J: When did you enroll at Bowie now? The fall of?

P: Came out in 25, it was the fall of 25. And I came out of Bowie in 27.

J: And you say your mother and dad drove you up there?

P: Yeah my dad would take me and sometimes my brother.

J: Quite a drive from here—

P: Oh it took a long time then but it doesn't now. I have a great grandson in Bowie now and we can go to see him and get there in about 30 minutes.

J: That's amazing.

P: It's really amazing.

J: Did you ever take the train up to Bowie from La Plata? Did you?

P: Yes sir. We did.

J: What sort of an experience was that for a young lady?

P: Well I'll tell you—

J: Exciting?

P: No. You want me to tell you the truth?

J: Yes that's all we want on this tape.

P: Bowie [the Store in La Plata] had a lunch room and they had ice cream in there and while we were waiting for the train we thought we wanted to go in and get some ice cream. We went to the front door to go in we had been used to going in the back door. We lived with friendly neighbors. They told us, "Get around!"

J: What town are we in now?

P: In La Plata. "Get around to the back door." We didn't go in the back door. We went back and got on the train to Bowie and we didn't ever go there to buy ice cream again.

J: We know what store it was.

P: Yeah Bowie's.

J: Long gone. Right by the railroad tracks.

P: Right by the railroad tracks. That was the first place we ever found or felt you know that we weren't anything but black people.

J: That's amazing, that's incredible, I've never heard of this before.

P: It is. In the neighborhood where we lived we had our own store. My uncle was, he ran the store.

J: What was your uncle's name?

P: Wesley Key. J. Wesley Key. Then we had everything. My father could cut hair, mend shoes, and we didn't have to go out of the neighborhood to find anything. We didn't have anything much so it was all right there for us. And we didn't know what it would be like, we had heard of Jim Crow but we didn't know what Jim Crow was.

J: We're talking now about what 1926, 27?

P: Yeah 26 and 27.

J: What about the seating arrangements on the train now?

P: Oh we sat back there anywhere we could. They didn't have many cars on it. Most of it was freight. We could sit anywhere.

J: How many cars do you remember on the average?

P: Oh for the freight they had a whole lot. Oh about 20 I guess or more.

J: Oh really? How many passenger cars?

P: About two. They put us off at Jericho Park and we walked on up to the school.

J: Close nearby?

P: Yeah Bowie.

J: How long did it take roughly to get from La Plata to Bowie?

P: Let's see they kept stopping at all the little junctions. It took us about two hours I guess to get there.

J: Who went with you?

P: Oh let's see the Butler girl and my cousin Alcena Key. She's a Clark now. And a girl named Dorothy Davis. She came from Ironsides.

J: Were they students also?

P: We were all in the same class. We decided we were going to Bowie and that's what we did.

J: Were there any other young black youngsters going to Bowie at this time from other neighborhoods?

P: No just a few from La Plata and they went from La Plata.

J: It's amazing that way over here you have this group that stuck together and studied together.

P: We stuck together and studied together and came out together. Then we went over through the county to work but some of them refused to stay and work because conditions were bad.

J: Were they glad in later years that they left?

P: I don't know.

J: It's hard to tell.

P: I never did ask them.

J: It was hard to foresee the changes that were coming.

P: Yeah I didn't ask them if they were happy about leaving or not.

J: Now what—and I've never asked this question before—what special preparation were you given at Bowie to become a teacher? There were core subjects you had to take?

P: Yes.

J: What instruction in techniques of teaching were taught?

P: Oh we had to—we were taught that rural children were a little different from city children. And we were getting rural education and we were getting prepared to teach in the country you know.

J: In what way did they say they were different?

P: They didn't tell us what ways but we could understand. You know the city kids didn't have to go out and cut down the corn and things like that. And some days our kids wouldn't come to school because they were going to work on the farm. Then we had to go around in the country and find them. Only one time I felt that there were more children in the woods and I was sorry after I said it because I was told to go find them if there were some more out in the woods. I couldn't find more than about two. I said from now I'll never tell anybody there's some more that we don't have. You know because you have to go find them.

J: You did try though?

P: I did I tried.

J: How do you feel now looking back with some perspective about the quality of teacher education that you received? You and your friends from the Bryans Road area.

P: Well I feel that they didn't have much money. They couldn't buy a lot of materials. We had to get what we could.

J: This is at Bowie now?

P: Yeah. At Bowie—they didn't—and they told us to use what we could because we were going to be out on the farm and the schools were poor. I think I taught at Charlotte Hall my first year and they had a pretty good building there. A Rosenwald.

J: Where have I heard that name before?

P: Yeah they had put some money in to help build the building and I was in what was considered a pretty good one. No water, outdoor toilet, and by the cord wood. It would be put on the grounds and we'd have to cut it up, put it in the stove and make the fire. But all of the boys would help and some of the parents were real nice too. They'd come and help too. You really had parent cooperation.

J: But this is very interesting.

P: That was a long time ago.

J: Very revealing that the people in college who themselves were so remote from these conditions new enough about country living to shape your course so you wouldn't be shocked.

P: When you met it.

J: You know this is a problem today with a lot of these youngsters coming out of college. They're not teaching [it]—

P: They leave and they go back. No they won't teach but if you are going to try to work with children you try to teach them as much as you can because pretty soon they're going to have to come out and go to work themselves. And if you sat there and didn't do anything. I think it'd be a pretty hard job too to just sit there and don't do anything. With a lot of children and the children are interested in learning. Now this old fellow you saw a few minutes ago he's interested in learning and he wanted me to buy some applejacks and he doesn't spell so this is applejacks. This is the way he wrote it. So if you get used to children and you know they want to learn you go on and teach them. That's what we were trained for.

J: What were the academic subjects that you concentrated on at Bowie?

P: English, History, Geography, Mathematics because we didn't get so terribly much where we were, and things like that. When we went to college we had to have six or eight different courses in English.

J: When you went on to was it called Morgan State in those days?

P: Morgan State.

J: Morgan State.

P: Right.

J: Was there any notable difference in depth or quality or sophistication of instruction?

P: Oh yes it was a little harder.

J: This was definitely very close to University level?

P: It was.

J: And what—did you get into the same fundamental core subjects there?

P: Yes but it would have another name like English two and English three and English four.

J: That's the difference between junior college and University.

P: Yeah that's right. You keep going up all the time you're learning more all the time.

J: What gave you the greatest satisfaction among all of the studies?

P: I don't know.

J: Where was your strength? Communication?

P: I don't know.

J: Literature? Did you enjoy literature?

P: I liked Literature but I enjoyed more Social Studies. Social Studies that taught you all about living and things like that. I think I liked that more.

J: To what extent in your opinion did that college education affect the quality of your speech, your speech patterns, your diction, your enunciation?

P: Well I don't know exactly. I'm not sure but we had English quite a bit.

J: Well it must have. It comes through. It's evident. How did your brothers and sisters feel about the amount of education you were getting? Were they pleased for you?

P: Well they didn't care. They were happy for me.

J: If that's what you want you can go ahead and do it?

P: Yeah they were happy for me. They did what they wanted to do and they were happy that I did what I wanted to do.

J: Very good.

P: And I enjoyed it. And New York University they were teaching us more about how to deal with children, different children, and I enjoyed that too.

J: Was this University in New York City?

P: Yes it was. New York University. We went in on the bus and we got off at the station, the train station. Then we got on another bus and went on to the University. We had the address written down and knew where to go. The teachers were all very nice. I met students from Italy and many other countries they were there too.

J: How many months of residence study did you put in?

P: Oh I put in enough to do about a year and a half I guess. No residence. I didn't stay there. I went in on the bus from the greyhound bus from Washington to New York. We slept riding on the bus—

J: Every day?

P: No. Every weekend and we had a Saturday class. It was interesting though.

J: Were any of the people from down here going with you?

P: Yes there were. Six [inaudible]. Then I met some from Washington that were going too.

J: This in itself was an education I'm sure.

P: It was. Just meeting people, enjoying it—

J: Rubbing shoulders and minds with these others whose lives were shaped differently by different forces. Okay so when you came out let me go back a little bit, what was your grade average in high school?

P: In high school?

J: Out of a possible four point all A.

P: I couldn't make A's, some C's and B's. And I hated D's because D's stood for dumb and I didn't want to be dumb.

J: So you had either C's or B's.

P: C's or B's. And New York University—I've got to put this in—I showed my grades to my great grandson, I had nothing but A's and B's. And it was easier there than it was in other places. I couldn't make as much in Morgan as I did. And Howard University I made—I was racing—you might have met Bertha Key? You gonna see her. She lives down here too in Bryans Road. Bertha felt that—she was born and reared in New York and Ohio. She felt that she was smarter than I was and I felt that I wasn't gonna let her beat me. So she and Mayme Ransome and I went to Howard University together and we studied. We took English there and we took other subjects too. Bertha would always bring me my papers because she wanted to see what I made on them. And I made good marks because I worked.

J: Now she was a teacher too?

P: Yes she teaches. And she was a teacher then. I wasn't gonna let her beat me see. I was a little bit jealous of her I guess. And we still are of each other.

J: I think that's good. It's good to have that little bit of extra motivation.

P: I wasn't gonna let her beat me.

J: That's what life's all about.

P: But we had fun. I like her and all.

J: Where is she living now?

P: She lives up here in Bryans Road. You gonna see a house that house a brick house in front and a lovely little house behind it real close together like this. It's on the right hand side of the road and that's where Bertha lives.

J: Of 210?

P: No you go up 210 and turn by the Burger King. And go on the Marshal Hall Road.

R: Near Mrs. Neal?

P: No. She and I went to New York together. She's still living Mrs. Neal. She's up there too but you get to Bertha's house before you get to the Neal's house.

J: Is it on the same side?

P: Yes it is.

J: We're going to have to stop and see her too. Okay now we've got you to school. What was going on at home while you were at school? Your father was still working for the government? And the children and everything was normal back here in Bryans Road? Nothing for you to worry about? You were able to pursue your studies?

P: No I didn't have to worry about anything.

J: Relatively free of—

P: I only had one child and she bore me 12 grandchildren. After I got married to her father I left and went on about my business and I didn't have to worry about him anymore. So I had nothing to worry about.

J: So your first teaching assignment was at Charlotte Hall?

P: Charlotte Hall.

J: And that was in St. Mary's County?

P: It's at the borderline of St. Mary's and Charles.

J: Who hired you in the location? Who made the decision?

P: Joseph C. Parks.

J: So Charles County was administering?

P: Right.

R: Is that school still standing?

P: No.

R: Is it on Route 6?

P: I think it Route 6.

R: Was on Route 6, it was on Route 6?

P: Yes. It's down—I think it's down now.

J: This was the fall of what year now?

P: 1927. Fall of 27.

J: And you'd had your four years in. Your degree?

P: Right. It wasn't a degree I had a teaching certificate. Bowie didn't give degrees at that time. But you can get your masters there now. There's a lot of improvement.

J: What grade did they assign you that first year? Or did you have a whole school?

P: I had the whole school. It was fun. Seven grades.

J: How long did it take you to realize that they didn't know everything at college that you might run into in school?

P: Well I guess I knew that when I started off you know. And as you come out and you meet children you learn a lot from children too. That's why we call this little fellow grandpa because we learn, you know, as we go. We learn a lot from him. And if you talk to him long he'd soon say I'm not stupid. He'll tell you that. I feel good about him knowing he's not stupid.

J: How many students were there this first year?

P: The first year we had about 32 I guess.

J: All yours?

P: They were all mine, different grades.

J: Body and soul while you were in school.

P: It wasn't too bad. The kids were nice.

J: Was discipline, did discipline come easy? Were you able to keep the law and order without taking too much away.

P: Yes until I met up with one little family and they were a little bit tough to deal with. They had a little boy. I guess he was about 12 or 13. He wouldn't behave but I didn't have any trouble out of him. No trouble to speak of. Discipline was pretty good.

J: Were you, were the teachers allowed in those days to spank a child?

P: They were but I didn't. And one grandpa used to come and say, "You haven't whipped anybody yet no?" I said, "I didn't come to beat the children. I came to teach the children." And he used to fuss because I didn't whip them. I didn't want to hurt the children.

J: Well, figure there was no other way to teach them.

P: They had already been beaten, you know. When I first got there they were already whipped. So I didn't need to do anything to them. And they do nearly anything you want them to do if they love you. They would study with you real good and they could learn too. Some would surprise you they could learn so fast. Then there were others you'd have to work on a lot time.

J: What was economic situation in the Charlotte Hall area when you arrived? As far as jobs are concerned.

P: There weren't any jobs, only farms.

J: Living, standards of living?

P: It was on the farm.

J: Uniformly poor would you say?

P: Yes it was poor.

J: Did the children come to school normally fed and decently clothed? In your opinion?

P: They would be decently clothed, they'd be fairly clean, and they would be well fed. They had plenty of food you know. They lived on the farm. They'd have chickens and pigs and things like that.

J: No malnutrition to speak of?

P: No. No they were fairly healthy.

R: Did you discipline the child? Would the parents back you up, would they?

P: Yes they would. But I didn't have much of that to deal with. The kids were pretty good and I had learned long time ago that if you gain the love of the child that child will do anything in the world for you. You want them to learn so there you've got the child. But if they don't like you they won't learn very well.

J: I don't know how good my book work is here but as I figure things you taught in segregated public schools in Charles County. Segregated schools for nearly 40 years.

P: Yes that's right. It was nearly 40 years.

J: How did you feel about this, this matter of segregation as a young teacher? What were some of the initial drawbacks that you were able to observe early?

P: Well I knew we got much smaller pay for what we did and we did more. We had to clean our own buildings, get our own firewood and everything ready for the next day. We got 65 dollars a month for the first three years. 75 dollars a month the next three years and after a while it went up and we were getting a little better but I realized we weren't getting much. But if you were very careful with that small amount you could soon have as much as the person with the bigger amount if they didn't use it right. So I would be very, very careful with everything. With the material we used and everything. We didn't have material. If we got a box of blackboard chalk we couldn't afford to waste that chalk. We had to use as best you could. Save as much as possible and make it go.

J: So even though you were earning less than the white teachers if you managed very carefully in the end you could live comfortably?

P: As well as they did.

J: Okay now what did you have to put out per month for room and board and what sort of room and board conditions did you face?

P: 15 dollars a month for room and board. It was together combined.

J: Now we're talking about one room?

P: Yeah one room and you would eat with the family. They would ask you—

R: What about your lunch?

P: Well I carried my lunch.

R: But would they prepare it for you?

P: They'd prepare one sandwich. That's all I needed. One sandwich.

J: How modern were these houses though?

P: My daddy—oh you got it on?

J: It's on absolutely.

P: Well they weren't too modern. Some didn't have any screens in the windows.

J: Typical country?

P: Country.

J: Pre electricity type houses?

P: No we had lamps when I first started teaching. They had lamps.

J: Outdoor bathroom facilities?

P: Right.

J: Do you remember some of the—how did you find out about the difference in salary? Was it generally known?

P: No it wasn't generally known. It was supposed to be kept a little bit from us so that we wouldn't be knowing too much.

J: They really thought that they could keep it a secret?

R: How much difference?

J: What difference was there now in a monthly salary? Of a starter black student or black teacher and a starter white teacher?

P: Paid 65...Between 65 and a 100 difference.

J: That's a pretty big...so you got roughly two thirds?

P: We got just about two thirds.

J: How long did it take in your teaching career before you began to see that gap close a little bit?

R: Did it ever?

P: Yes it did. It closed before we were integrated. I don't know exactly how many years. Somebody else may have it you know better than I have. But then we began to get more.

J: So this would be a matter of a rather serious concern and something a real legitimate reason to feel unhappy.

R: Who would have gone to bat for you for you to get more? How were they pressured into giving the black teachers the equal salary to whites?

P: Well one time—

R: Was Mr. Parks?

P: We had a strike. We were white teachers and black teachers all together we had a strike.

R: When was this?

P: That was a good while ago. I can't remember exactly. I didn't pay too much attention to the time.

R: You struck for what reason?

P: For more money.

R: Both? The white and blacks?

P: The both of us yeah. That's when we got our pays together. We had a strike.

J: Before World War II do you think?

P: No it was after. Long after World War II.

R: How long did it last the strike?

P: About a week. That's right. You didn't ever hear about it?

R: Did you walk the picket line?

P: We better had. You better not stay at home. Then everybody was out there working for you. We all had to be out there. It was more like meetings. We would meet and somebody would talk for us. Then we'd have another meeting and somebody would talk for us. I can't remember exactly when it was, the exact year. Because you know it didn't darn on me too much that I'd ever have to think about it.

J: When did teachers begin to think seriously about unionizing?

P: Around the time they had the strike. That was just about near the time I was ready to come out. I came out in 71.

J: Oh so it's fairly recently?

R: Now I do remember. I remember when Peter and Anne were at Port Tobacco Elementary School there was some sort of a strike because I remember hearing Elise Bowling say she would not be a party to that.

P: Yeah well you got it about right. It was around that time.

R: I think it must have been 65, 67, 68.

P: I can't remember it.

R: Because I do remember now that you mention it I remember her saying that.

P: Yeah we did. We had a strike.

J: Well in addition to this salary difference what were some of the other legitimate concerns of black teachers with respect to unequal opportunities and facilities for black students? What other things caused you grief and frustration?

P: The tiny buildings. We didn't like them.

J: The quality of the school building itself?

P: The school building itself. It was terrible.

J: Cold in the winter?

P: Yes they were cold.

J: Outdoor facilities, bathroom facilities?

P: Right.

J: No electricity?

P: No, no electricity.

R: When the Supreme Court rendered the decision in 1954 that there would be no longer segregation did you feel that maybe conditions here would change as a result of that?

P: [Laughs] No.

R: Well were you hopeful that they would?

P: I knew that conditions were gonna change because the white children were going to have everything that was needed. Well if they had it we would be in [honor] too wouldn't we. So I felt pretty good about it. But somebody told me when they integrate that's gonna make it hard for black teachers to get a job. You know that was the only thing that you'd think about.

J: Who was saying that sort of thing?

P: I'm not gonna tell you.

J: Anybody we knew?

P: No but that was the only thing that came out you know that would make you not want integration because we wanted jobs.

R: So you—they were hoping that you wouldn't push for integration because of that?

P: Because of that to save myself a job. You get the idea?

J: Yes, yes of course. Well now how long were you at Charlotte Hall?

P: I was there a year and a half and then I left and I had my baby. I came back the next year and brought my baby with me. But after that I gave my baby to my mother and went on my own.

J: Okay where did you meet Mr. Furey?

P: Oh I met Mr. Furey at our church right out here. I hadn't seen him before. But he wasn't the father of my child. I had been married once before to a fellow named Mason but I left. I took my baby and left him.

J: So with your baby now taken care of and you're able to go back to full time teaching what was the first school after Charlotte Hall?

P: Charlotte Hall let me see. Then I went to Pomfret. Pomfret's right out here not too far.

J: Right.

P: Then I went to Oak Grove. Oak Grove's at Riverside. Do you know where that is?

J: I know where Riverside is.

P: The school's gone now. It's torn down.

J: Was it close to the river there?

P: Well not far. About two miles from the river.

J: Would it have been on what is now Route 6? The main road?

P: I don't know exactly the name of the, the number of the Route. But you know where Riverside is? Well the school was right on the road not far from Gaine's Store. It's a little store. I taught there about 10 years without missing a day.

J: Who did you live with there?

P: I lived with Mrs. Gaines and Mrs. Slater and that's all. Then when things were better I can drive from home wherever I was going.

J: Well this brings us up to almost 1940 doesn't it?

P: Yeah then I taught in La Plata about three years right on the railroad track. When the train went by and made a lot of noise and tooted the horn. We were in a little shack. A two room shack and part of it was in the Willing Helper's Hall.

J: Do you know where that is?

R: Sure.

P: Yeah well we taught there before we came to Port Tobacco. It was terrible. Every time the train went through we lost minutes.

J: That's true and a long train would upset the class maybe a quarter of an hour.

P: I wouldn't say quite that much but it was enough for you to know.

J: Did soot come into the?

P: No the noise. The noise came.

J: About how many feet from the track was the building?

P: Not far. Very close. We had a little—

J: The width of this house?

P: Yeah about twice the width of the house.

J: Maybe a 100 feet away.

P: Just about. It wasn't far.

J: Okay what La Plata road would this be near now?

P: The old Washington Avenue. Yeah right on Washington Avenue.

R: Washington Avenue. It's all grown up around that building now that you don't realize that the track was so close.

P: That it was so close.

J: Out beyond the state roads?

R: No not that far. Just beyond the limits of La Plata.

J: Who were some of your students here at the La Plata school? Again were you teaching all grades?

P: No I had first and second. Somebody else had third and fourth and somebody else had fifth and sixth.

J: Well that was a little improvement for you right there?

P: It was right.

J: Who were some of those youngsters? Do you remember any of the names?

P: Oh yeah. Gloria Higgs. She's Gloria Branton. She teaches now. Then they're scattered about in Bowling's Store and Eli's Store some of the kids that we taught. They're all around. They're grown up they had children. Finishing high school or finished high school of their own. See that's been a long time ago. Then we left there we came to Port Tobacco and that was the best place I'd ever been. I stayed there 19 years.

J: What year did you arrive at Port Tobacco?

P: Let me see now you've got me again.

J: It was a brand new school?

R: Built in 54.

P: Yes it was. Brand new school. It was built in 54.

R: I think so.

P: 54. And I had been at La Plata about three or four years. Let's see now. I left there—I stayed there 19 years.... I came out in 71. I retired in 71.

J: Okay and that experience was a good one there at the Port Tobacco School?

P: It was. That was the best place, the only place that really seemed like a school to me.

J: Who was your principal there when you started?

P: When I started Mary Neal.

J: Okay Pennsylvania girl huh?

P: Pennsylvania right. You've seen her already haven't you?

J: Yes. Well we've got to interview her. We just met her today.

P: You did?

J: She's not feeling well today.

P: Oh my.

J: Arthritis bad. So was she a fine person to be with? Did you enjoy—

P: Yeah she was alright. I used to sass her once in a while. Did you get that on your tape? It isn't true.

J: [Inaudible] some of those northern girls [inaudible]. Who were the teachers during your first three or four years at Port Tobacco?

P: Oh my goodness. I could get my book and show you.

J: Okay well what are some of your recollections of going into the spanking new Port Tobacco School after all these poor frame structures that you had?

P: It was nice but the stuff that they had taught us that we could do if we had the space we couldn't.

J: For example?

P: Oh they said, "If you're going to teach family life you know or about the family and social status you should fix a little house and you should do this, that." But if we tried to fix a little house they'd make us get it out of there.

J: Who would object to something like that?

P: The Supervisor and the Principal. But they would tell you to do that. You know make it as natural as possible. But then when you got to the place where you could make things as natural as possible, had plenty of space and all, you couldn't. And then you had to get permission to do everything that you were gonna do.

J: What advantages were there in this new plan for the teachers? What could they do that they hadn't been able to do?

P: Well it was more comfortable and you could teach them more you know. More convenience and more conducive to learning.

J: And the kids could spend full time at learning?

P: At school time, at learning.

J: Nobody had to start the fires in the morning and carry water.

P: Right. That's right.

J: Had these children gone to school elsewhere many of them?

P: Not the ones I had. They were fresh from home.

J: So those kids didn't know what it was to put up with the miserable conditions that their older brothers and sisters—

P: Knew about it no they didn't.

J: So when at about what point did you and the other teachers there at Port Tobacco begin to feel that integration might just come about after all in the near future?

P: Oh well when we had Mr. Barnhart. Did you know Mr. Barnhart?

J: Yes.

P: Mr. Barnhart told us and we would have meetings. They had one in the Masonic Temple out here. We had Mr. Barnhart to talk with us and he told us he was going to build this high school out there and he told us it was going to be integrated. There was no school there at all when he told us that. The school came up and it was very pretty but I don't know what happened. It was all black at first and then they integrated. I don't know what happened. They closed the windows up you know. It's not pretty now like it was.

J: Is that where Rick went to school? In that building?

P: Might have been. But I don't know why they closed it up. Now they're building them with no windows and the mold is coming in. See it's awful. I don't know why people got the idea of doing that? I don't know.

R: Well I think they did away with windows so they couldn't break in.

P: Is that what it was?

R: I think so. And if you notice the new La Plata High School they have windows but they're really high.

P: Way up high.

R: Way high so nobody can get in through the windows.

J: Was there any point in your teaching career Mrs. Furey that you began to see a break down in discipline on the student body?

P: No I always had the babies so they didn't.

J: So you were spared some of that.

P: Quite a bit of it.

J: What did the county do to prepare teachers for the coming of integration? Both black and white.

P: They would tell us it was coming and it was up to us to get ready for it. You know plan what we were gonna do. But I was going to forget what color the kids were and go on teach them anyway wherever they were and what I thought or felt they needed according to the way we taught. Whatever they needed I was gonna teach them anyway. And I was gonna do the best I could by all of them or any of them.

J: Did you have any special concerns or reservations about getting into a fully integrated school system?

P: No it didn't worry me.

J: Didn't worry you were ready for it?

P: I wondered why others were worried.

J: Were some of the younger black teachers not nearly as experienced as you a little bit on pins and needles so to speak wondering what it might be, what it might mean for their careers?

P: I don't know they didn't tell me about that.

J: Well how did it turn out?

P: I [heard it] turned out—

J: As expected? Were you pleased with the way things went?

P: Well with me—

J: What should have been done that wasn't done?

P: With me things went alright. I didn't have a lot of trouble with a parent or anything. There was only one lady that didn't like me much. What she did, she put a block you know in my hat for me. While she was criticizing me she made it a little bit better. So it wasn't too bad.

J: Did you attend the—did you have a PTA at Port Tobacco School before integration?

P: Yes we did.

J: Was it a good active one?

P: It was active, very active.

J: How did that change after integration?

P: Well I didn't—

J: Was there any problem there?

P: I didn't notice any problem. I thought that people you know understood and were pretty good.

J: I think that's where we met. It must have been at a PTA meeting.

P: It could have been. Well I didn't notice any difference and I had to work with the PTA committee. But I enjoyed the people. I thought they were nice you know, pretty good.

J: Well that neighborhood has changed so much today.

P: Yeah.

R: There was a man who was the—

P: President?

R: President of PTA.

P: Mr. Cooper. Frank Cooper.

R: Cecil? There was somebody—

P: Oh Cecil McPherson.

R: Yes where is he?

P: I don't know where Cecil is.

R: He became, he was president when we were first there.

P: Yeah he was. I thought he was a very nice person and Mr. Cooper was very nice, he was the President for a long time.

J: And then Mr. Foreman came along a little later.

P: I didn't know Mr. Foreman. I guess I was gone by 71 I left.

R: No, no that was Sue Foreman's father and she was in Anne's class.

P: Oh she was?

R: Anne was right after Peter.

P: Oh yes she was.

J: How did your young black and white students get along the first couple three years?

P: They got along as far as I could see very well. They seemed to like each other. See they were little children. And little children don't pay much attention to—

R: They didn't know any difference really.

P: No. They don't pay much attention to race. They loved each other anyway. They'd play together and have a good time.

J: Who were some of your all time teacher friends in Charles County school system?

P: I don't know. I'm not sure. I was more with Bertha, Bertha Key, than anybody else. She and I were a long time together.

J: You still with her once in a while?

P: Yeah. I see her at church.

J: Tell her about [inaudible]. See if she'd like to have us do this. How old is she now?

P: She's 10 years younger than I am. If I'm 82 she's 72. No 72.

J: And she's from outside Charles County?

P: Yeah she's from Ohio.

J: Do you know any retired black school teachers who are older than you still in pretty good health? Should be you know—

P: Mrs. Simmons is in Ironsides and Mrs. Davis is somewhere in Pomfret. I don't know exactly where. The others, quite a few of them are dead.

J: If you can help us locate a couple of the oldest living black school teachers? We did an interview with Mrs. Ransome fortunately. We had a good time.

P: Yeah because she's gone now.

J: Yeah it was a very inspiring—

P: Do you know Mrs. Edna Simmons? Edna W. Simmons. You'll find it in the telephone directory. I changed my number. My number isn't what it used to be but hers is about the same. And her name and number is in the book. I don't know what it is. I don't call her much.

R: Is she about your age?

P: She's about 96.

R: 96?

J: And where do you think she lives?

P: She lives in Ironsides. You know where the church is?

R: Durham?

P: No Bishop Johnson's church.

R: Oh just before you get to the intersection yes.

P: Well she lives on the other side of that. Going through Pisgah you get to the church then you get to her house. Her house is a green shingles. She has green shingles on her house.

J: What road would she be on?

P: In Ironsides. I don't know the number of the road.

R: I guess Route 6. Route 6 would go past the church.

J: Well we'll right down her name.

P: Well she's pretty old and she's on this picture. She's a little old. Here she is right there.

J: What schools did she teach at besides Port Tobacco?

P: Port Tobacco, McConchie. Yeah that's it. She taught at McConchie.

R: She looks familiar.

P: Yeah I'm sure you saw her when you came to see about—

J: We'll get in touch with her because I like to go back as far as possible.

R: How is her health?

P: Well she walks with a cane most of the time or you know.

R: But she's up and around? She's not [invalid or anything?]

P: But she's up and around. Oh she loves to talk and her voice is good. It is. Her voice is strong.

J: What were some of the happiest days of your teaching career? Where were they spent?

P: The happiest days? I don't know. Port Tobacco I guess.

J: In part because of the much better facilities or some of the people that you worked with?

P: Better facilities.

R: She was there a while.

J: It is. It is. Did you ever have a desire to leave Port Tobacco?

P: No. I had a desire to change grades. I wanted the upper grades and they wouldn't give me the upper grades. They said you are good with the little ones. You stay in the first grade. And I ended up in the first grade.

J: I suspect people underestimate a little bit the importance of that first year?

R: No it's not that all because you have to have additional training to teach those very young children.

P: The little children. You do.

R: So it's more difficult to teach those first and second graders.

J: You can make or break a child as a student.

P: You could.

J: That introduction to school.

P: But I never tried to disgust one or discourage one. I had a father he came, you might have known him. I can't remember his name now. He came to school and he stayed the first day of school he stayed almost all day with his little boy to make sure he was treated right and taught right. And I told him when I get him busy you may walk out and go home if you want to. Don't tell him goodbye, just go. He stayed and so I went on as usual you know teaching the way I was going to do.

J: Well with the brand new building now did you have any shortage of equipment or supplies?

P: No we had lovely supplies and equipment.

J: What black administrative person did more for the cause of black education than anyone else during your teaching years?

P: J. C. Parks.

J: Okay. That seems to be the universal. He must have gotten along very well with the white administrative people.

P: I think he did.

J: They must have respected him a great deal. And he worked under what school superintendents now?

P: Mr. Gwynn. F. B. Gwynn. You met him I'm sure.

J: No, no before our time in Charles County.

P: You didn't? F. B. Gwynn.

J: Okay and who followed him?

P: I can't remember. Martin yes and then Mr. Barnhart.

J: Okay so that's when we pick up Charles County with Mr. Barnhart.

P: He was good.

J: There's still his wife and children are still friends. I hear from time to time certain names mentioned in connection with black education and not all of them are of black people. There was a Bowie a woman? Jenny Bowie?

P: Oh yeah. Ms. Bowie.

J: That Mrs. Ransome thought a lot of.

P: She was real good. She came to see us two, at least once a year in the spring and in the fall.

J: Did she come before Mr. Parks? What was her job.

P: No. I knew him long before I knew her. Mr. Parks was here when I was in high school. He had been here a long time.

J: What was his background? He wasn't a native of—

P: No he came from Kentucky.

J: So what did—was she a Ms. Bowie?

P: Ms. Bowie.

J: What was her contribution? What made her outstanding?

P: Oh she could understand you know what was going on, what should be going on. And she would tell you in a way that wouldn't hurt your feelings. And she'd help to make you feel good about yourself.

J: Had she taught herself?

P: Yes she had taught.

J: Were there any surprises in working alongside white teachers? Anything you hadn't anticipated?

P: No I'd say not.

J: Any tensions or impressions—

P: See when they integrated they gave each teacher two aides. They'd give you if you had to work with a white teachers they gave you a black aide. If you worked with a black teacher they gave you a white aide.

J: How'd you like that idea.

P: I thought they did that to make sure things went right.

J: Did it help you think? Was it worthwhile?

P: Yeah. Sure. Because you could see what was going on whether it was you know right and fair. And the other person could see. And if you thought it wasn't right and it wasn't fair then you could talk about it.

J: I wonder who's idea that was. I think it was [interesting].

P: I don't know but they did it.

J: Who took his place? Jenkins?

R: A Mr. Brown. Fred Brown for a short time.

P: But he didn't stay long.

R: No he did not stay very long. And then Jenkins? No Jenkins...I think Starkey came after him.

P: I didn't even remember Jenkins.

J: Bruce Jenkins was before Starkey.

P: Starkey.

R: He was—Jenkins was the dean of the college, the president of the college. I don't think he—I don't know if he was in the school system.

J: When did you get your first automobile?

P: 19—let's see. After I had walked home from the Pomfret school. I can't remember exactly when. Somebody was supposed to pick me up and I walked home. I don't know exactly when I got my first automobile. I can't remember.

J: How many years had you been teaching at that time?

P: Not long.

J: Five or so?

P: Five or six.

J: So we're talking about 1932 or 33.

P: And I got a brand new Chevrolet for 600 dollars.

J: Who'd you buy that from?

P: McWilliams in Indian Head.

J: Oh he was a Chevrolet dealer?

P: His father.

J: Oh his father. Was that a six cylinder Chevrolet do you remember?

P: I guess it yes it was six cylinder. And it lasted a long time. Nobody drove it but me.

J: Well that's why it lasted a long time. Where did you get your driver's license?

P: Let me see. It wasn't at Waldorf. We had to go somewhere else.

R: Glen Burnie maybe?

P: Glen Burnie. I think that's where it was because we had to go far to get the driver's license.

J: Did you have a license when you bought this car? Which came first the car or the license.

P: No the car came first and then the license. We went to La Plata and policemen would take you for a ride see.

J: Near the courthouse?

P: Yeah near the courthouse and all of the sudden he'd say turn here. Well you're supposed to make your signal like this then and like that. He said, "Turn here," and if you didn't make your signal and you turned you wouldn't get your permit. I knew that see. So all of a sudden he'd holler, "Turn here!" Then you'd be riding along and he says, "Stop!" And if you stop real short and jerk him all about see you know that wasn't good either. So you had to think.

J: So you've been a licensed driver now since roughly 1932, 33 how many years does that make?

P: It's been quite a few years. I can't remember.

J: Have you had any serious accidents at all in all that time?

P: I better touch wood I'm superstitious. No. And the insurance people sent me some for driving without an accident.

J: Isn't that wonderful.

P: Sent me 40 dollars.

J: Can you imagine that. I can't believe it.

P: Now if you were afraid of accidents you know that you don't know how you're going to come out of an accident you're going to try to avoid one. So that's my case.

J: So what kind of a car are you driving today and what year is it?

P: It's Pontiac. There it is up there.

J: Looks like a rather new one.

P: On the calendar that's me and my grandson buying it year before last. It's almost—it's not quite a year old. It's out here.

J: You still drive your own car just about anywhere you want to go?

P: Oh yes. But I'm too smart to go some places that I know I can't go. At my age you can't go anywhere like you used to. And I don't drive after dark because I can't see like I used to.

R: Somebody told us that you're still bowling.

P: I do. I've gotten my score up to 100. I had 126. That was the high score last. Who told you I go bowling?

R: You bowl weekly?

P: Every Thursday.

R: Every Thursday?

J: In the Indian Head area?

P: No Waldorf. [Fair lane]. We have a lot of fun.

R: It's a league?

P: It's a league. It's about a little more than 50 in the league and everybody comes every Thursday.

J: How do you feel about having taught here during those years?

P: Oh I [liked it alright]—

J: Would you trade that for any other experience?

P: No I enjoyed it. I enjoyed the children. I always like children and you'd be surprised with what you learn from children.

J: With this feedback—

P: You teach them but you'd be surprised with how they progress and then they can teach you something too while you're teaching them. If it is no more than how to do it better, whatever it was you were teaching them. They can teach you something too.

J: What's the secret? What would you pass along to youngsters in college today who would like to be teachers? How to keep law and order? What was your philosophy? How did you do it and do you think they could do it?

P: First you got to gain their love for you. If you don't gain their love gain their confidence and you got it made. If they believe in you and they trust you and they love you, you haven't got to do anything more to them only teach them. It goes on.

J: And you think that applies to the youngsters today as well as the youngsters of 50 years ago?

P: Right.

J: Okay the kids haven't changed.

P: The kids haven't changed. We old folks changed. The don't change much. They still stay the same. They want to be treated kindly and they want to be treated fairly. I know that. If they find that you are cheating them or doing something to them that you shouldn't they won't like you. And if they don't like you they're not going to do what you say and you're going to have problems.

J: What were the most difficult subjects for you to teach in the early years let's say the first 10 or 15 years when you had to teach just about everything?

P: Geography. Geography was the hardest. We didn't have good maps and globes. And we had no idea as to where places were you know on a map even. You get mixed up trying to find it. Geography's really hard. Then we went to the library and we got stories out about Mexico and we made our stories up and we studied in books and found out about Mexico. I went to Mexico and it wasn't near like anything we had found out in those books and I'm not kidding. I went to Mexico and stayed a week.

J: Did you ever go back?

P: No. We went by plane I didn't care to ride by plane anymore.

J: Was it fun to come back and tell these first hand stories?

P: No I had finished teaching when I found out you know that it was so different. So if you want to teach something now you should go to the place look it over then read about it then put your ideas together.

J: How important is language in teaching?

P: Language is very important. We should have foreign language in our country. According to where the children may be going they should study that language. I notice that all over the world they're learning English because they're hoping someday to come to America. Then we should teach our children some foreign language. I wouldn't say French because they may not go to France. They may go to some other country and they should know so they can understand. We didn't know—when we went to Mexico we didn't know if we were being cheated or not with our money because we couldn't count their money and we didn't know what it was but we made out. We got back home.

J: How would you—what would you do to convince young black students today that this command of the English language is perhaps the most important single thing they can acquire at school as far as their future is concerned? Think they would believe it?

P: I think they would.

J: Okay. I'm just wondering if teachers realize?

P: That English is important?

J: How important it is in today's world.

P: Well it's very important. English is.

J: Even in this country where it's supposed to be our native tongue so many of us handle it very poorly. Even on the radio. Roberta and I more and more are listening to radio announcers who really don't speak English well. They don't pronounce place names properly. We just have to laugh sometimes and I'm just wondering if—I just hope the kids don't listen too much to the radio.

P: Well English is important, very important.

J: We don't hear the Southern Maryland country style of speech much anymore. I think the generation of children in school now are losing it or have lost it. I'm sure that your parents and you would speak English differently and probably you and your brothers and sisters. Each one of you would have your own little bit of a different style. Did you ever notice that?

P: No I hadn't paid attention to it.

J: Yeah you're so close to them you might not.

P: As long as I understood what they were talking about that was it.

J: So the communication was the big thing.

P: Right.

J: Did you have to teach math all the way through?

P: Oh yes I liked it.

J: Okay up through what level of difficulty?

P: Well I had taught through percentage, fractions, percentage, and up to the seventh grade. And problems and things like that. But when I ended up, the last 19 years I only taught primary mathematics. Adding, subtracting, and fractions and sizes and shapes and things like that.

J: These youngsters right off the farm that you were teaching during the early years, what in general were some of the easier subjects for them? Very few of them had libraries at home that they could use.

P: That's right.

J: And how many public libraries were available to them in the 20's and 30's?

P: None. There wasn't a public library that I knew of that I could go and get information if I wanted it other than Washington. And I couldn't—I wasn't going to Washington to get it so there were a lot of things we wanted but we didn't get because they weren't available to us.

J: So the only public library in Charles County for many years the one in the jail there at La Plata.

P: Yeah right next to the courthouse.

J: Could black teachers go in there?

P: Yeah they would let us go in if we wanted.

J: And black students were free to use that library?

P: They were.

J: And that was it wasn't it?

P: That was it.

J: And how many black students never saw a book until they got to school?

P: Quite a few.

J: Or white for that matter?

P: Yeah some of them didn't see any either.

J: Did there seem to be a greater appreciation on the part of some of them when they first got ahold of a book do you think they had a greater respect for books having never seen them or had them in the home?

P: I don't know. I know everybody wanted their own if you had books to pass out. They didn't want you to put the books in a pile and you let me take this one today and tomorrow I get that one. No they wanted their own. That was one thing that almost tripped me one day. We had all the books and I covered the books and we kept the books clean. They took care of it if you let them have ownership. Someone was coming to see me teach reading. Took all the covers off the books and gave them the clean books. When they got there to get their book let them go pick it out there that's where we had trouble. Because each one knew his own book even with the cover off and he didn't want somebody else's. And I decided then I'd never do that again. It was terrible.

J: Who was buying the books in those early days, the 20's and—

P: In the early day Mr. Parks would order the books and bring them to us.

J: And each school had its own allotment?

P: Its own books right.

J: Depending on the size of the student body?

P: Right.

R: Did you have enough to go around?

P: No we didn't have enough to go around. We'd have to use this set of books for this class then take the same set of books and use it again with another class. But when we got to Port Tobacco everybody could have his or her own book. That's where I found that they would take care of the book if they had ownership. Let them use it the whole term until we finished.

J: And ultimately what disposition was made of those books? Were they allowed to keep them?

P: No they turned them in. You saw that with another group with the same books the next year.

J: Okay that's interesting. What developments did you note in the general welfare of youngsters during all of these years that you taught as far as health conditions are concerned? Was there any remarkable changes at all from 1930 to 19 say 65 at all?

P: No I didn't notice any changes. All of them had to have their shots and everything. Their vaccinations. They seemed fairly well. Would you excuse me while I?

J: Are you reasonably satisfied with the progress that's been made in your lifetime in the cause of black education?

P: Yes I'm reasonably satisfied.

J: Okay could have been faster?

P: It could have and should have been faster.

J: How about the quality of it today? For all of the youngsters.

P: Yeah it's improving. I can see the improvement in the children.

J: You can?

P: Yes.

J: In what way does it manifest itself?

P: They have a wider range of experience educationally.

J: Maybe a little more social poise?

P: Yes there is.

J: So anyways as far as you're concerned you made the right decisions when you were young to devote yourself to the cause of education?

P: I think I did.

J: It's been for the most part rewarding would you say?

P: I'd say quite rewarding.

J: And the other rewards now that you're retired? Is the pension enough to keep you?

P: No it isn't enough but I'm going to stretch it as far as I can and try to make it enough.

J: Roberta and I were admiring your comfortable home here.

P: Oh thank you.

J: Have you lived here very long?

P: Oh I've been here for more than 20 years.

J: Oh so you're [inaudible phrase]—

P: We got the first part the kitchen and this was our living room and there's two or three bedrooms down there. Then I have a grandson that's with me when I was buying the car. We built two more rooms on the back. We got a grand new heater with air conditioning.

[End of Tape]