

Interview Log

Interviewee: Jean Sisco

Transcribed and Interviewed: Julie Broadbent

Date: 2/23/12

Location: Edesville, Maryland

Topic: Race, picking crabs, picking oysters, working as an African American woman

Comments: There is a TV playing in the background.

of CDs: 2

JB: And 'cause I didn't know that oysters were still being caught?

JS: Mhm [affirmative].

JB: I took this photo of people shucking.

JS: Oh, did you?

JB: Yeah, and I wanted to know if it is something like you did or if it's different.

JS: Oh it, I'll get my glasses. It's a lot of us that shucked oysters and clams.

JB: Was there a lot of you?

JS: Mhm [affirmative].

JB: Where did you shuck them?

JS: Right down there in Rock Hall close to where the hotels are.

JB: Ok like right on the water there?

JS: Back Street right down from Watermen's was the seafood place where we shucked there.

JB: So how many people would work in a plant or two would it be like ten?

JS: Oh, it was more than that.

JB: Was it?

JS: You took this picture?

JB: Yeah, I took that photo.

JS: Who is this?

JB: It was down on Kent Island, so I don't know.

JS: Oh, it was down in Kent Island.

JB: Yeah.

JS: Mhm [affirmative]. I shucked down there too.

JB: So, did you do something like that where they had the oysters come through on these buckets floating in the air?

JS: No, we had ours put right up on the table.

JB: Oh, okay.

JS: Mhm [affirmative].

JB: So, did you have long tables, short tables?

JS: Long tables, great long table there was so many of us you would have both sides.

JB: Okay, so they shoveled it right in the middle.

JS: Mhm we had so many in front of us like our apartment, he was this away and was this way. And there were 4 or 5 bushels up at a time. Oh, my brother used to shuck, my brother Wilkison, he was one of the fastest shuckers and my husband, you couldn't beat him shucking oysters.

JB: No?

JS: No, honey.

JB: Why? I would think ladies they got those delicate hand they would just be like [fast noise].

JS: Oh, honey when we shucked oysters. Oh, it was fast, very fast.

JB: Yeah, how fast could you go?

JS: Oh my God I don't know, 'cause we used to make good.

JB: Yeah?

JS: Oh, yeah.

JB: Where you paid by the pound or the hour?

JS: No, by the weight.

JB: The weight.

JS: They had to weight them up and everything.

JB: Yeah.

JS: Yeah, and sometimes we used make 2-300 hundred dollars a week.

JB: Oh, that's not too bad, not too bad at all.

JS: We shucked clams, I loved shucking. We shuck all the what, you call them? They had a shell to them but they stunk. They had clams, oysters, scallops.

JB: Oh you did scallops too?

JS: We had scallops we had oh, one time like so, I can't think of the name of those, 'cause my grandchildren are crazy about them. We get them

down at Watermen's Seafood and we love them, I can't think now. We used to call clams, magnums.

JB: What did you call them?

JS: Magnums.

JB: Why?

JS: And then I had them raw. I had then my son and I used to eat them raw, hard shell clams. They're good. We ate them right out of the shell, one time we had 48.

JB: Whoa.

JS: Dip them in hot sauce, oh girl, you are talking about good.

JB: And you had these for dinner?

JS: We had mussels. I got mussels right down at Watermen's.

JB: Yeah.

JS: Oh yes, I love them.

JB: Do you eat them raw too?

IS: Sure, everybody steam them you know. They were good.

JB: Yeah.

JS: We used to put our clams and put them in the oven and sometimes put cheese on them and a little bit of bacon and put them in the oven. My son, he loved to do that.

JB: That sounds so good.

JS: Mmm you are talking about good girl.

JB: I could eat that.

JS: They're good, delicious, fried clams are good too.

JB: Yeah, that's true.

JS: Yeah girl I tell you, I guess I have shucked clams, oh Lord, how many years.

JB: When did you get started?

JS: Oh, I was shucking clams when I was in-between because I used to work for the gunners. We used to go down early in the morning make scrapple, my sister- in- law and I, for the gunners before they went out to shoot

geese and then I worked there for 17 years and then I shucked for oysters and clams in-between and I had children.

JB: Did the children come down with you? Were they able come with you?

JS: No, they did nothing like that, they lived in the city, you know.

JB: Yeah.

JS: Yeah, they worked in the water business. My son used to shuck. He still shucks he shucked some last Sunday, oysters, for a party that they had. They had a ball, he and Curtis. Yeah girl, let me tell you they could shuck up some oysters. Oh honey you were too young then, you weren't even born yet I expect.

JB: When did the shucking house close, do you know when the last one closed?

JS: It's been many years. I don't know when they closed but they've been closed a long while.

JB: Yeah.

JS: They closed up when I was around 47 years old.

JB: Oh, so-

JS: Mhm [affirmative].

JB: Okay, so it has been more than 5 years?

JS: Oh, yes Lord, yeah honey.

JB: Oh, you aren't older than 40 now, are you?

JS: I am 82 years old.

JB! You are not. You look great. Oh my God.

JS: My husband is in a nursing home he's 91. You should see him he was the fastest shucker you have ever seen. That's why I couldn't go up there today because it is quarantined.

JB: Oh right sure yeah. How come he was faster than you?

JS: The men, good God, oh, they used to come in, people used to come in and they used to come in and just look at us shuck.

JB: Really? People would come in and just watch you shuck?

JS: Oh yes, honey, you are talking about... and my brother he was one of the fastest shuckers, oyster shuckers around here. My husband and his brother, course he's dead. Oh, honey you should have seen the men shucking. It was beautiful, oh girl, I tell you. And the women used to

try and shuck them better than the men. My sister, Arilee could shuck too.

JB: Yeah, who was the fastest women, who could shuck?

JS: I don't know, we all was, Arilee and I shucked pretty fast, shuck pretty fast.

JB: Could you get into a rhythm?

JS: We used to shuck and sing.

JB: You used to sing?

JS: Oh Lord, oh yes honey.

JB: What did you sing?

JS: Hymns, different hymns and everything.

JB: Okay.

JS: We used to have a ball, God, we had a ball down there, girl. I was standing up there giving beer and drinking. Girl, we had a ball I'm telling you I just sitting by his side there I got nothing but [unintelligible] on me. Oh, girl I'm telling you. We had fun down there and at Thanksgiving they used to give a Thanksgiving dinner for the entire place. We had a whole Thanksgiving meal on great long tables they came around and served us, we had everything.

JB: Nice. Did you get oysters too? Did they do like them fried?

JS: Oh, they would fry them. Now I make my batter, I'd mix up a batter to put my oysters in to fry them. We used to have them on Thanksgiving and everything and two Sundays ago my son brought some up here. Oh girl.

JB: That's why they were shucking them right?

JS: Oh, he was shucking for some people and they gave him some.

JB: Perfect.

JS: Yeah see they shucked for different rich people, these clubs and things he shucks like 2 or 3 Sundays ago.

JB: Did you teach him how to shuck?

JS: No, he taught himself. You had to learn yourself.

JB: Why did he have to learn himself?

JS: Because he had these oysters knives and gloves and things on and then you had to stab the oysters. Sometimes you had to hit them to open them up a little.

JB: You had to what? Hit them like on...

JS: With like a hammer or something like that and then after frost hits you they got easy to open. Oh yeah shuck some, girl, we had a ball I'm telling you. Yeah, I used to love to shuck oysters and clams.

JB: Yeah?

JS: Clams are smaller, you know.

JB: Yeah, sure.

JS: It was nice.

JB: Did you work with all your friends and family?

JS: Oh yeah, not my family, just friends, my brothers, and different girls and boys and things around. It was a good time then. They cut that thing out, everything just seemed to fall apart.

JB: Did a lot of people around here in Edesville shuck?

JS: Oh yeah, the ones that living.

JB: Yeah.

JS: You know some of them that's dead, they shucked too. You got my sister, she used to live there but somebody else bought that property and put that house up. Oh, he shucks oysters, he can shuck Curtis. He was just out there shucking last week down at one of the restaurants, he and my son, Curtis.

JB: Yeah, did you guys work from like a 9 to 5 or?

JS: Oh, we could when we wanted.

JB: You could come and go whenever you wanted to?

JS: Like you go in the morning sometimes we go in around 4- 5 o'clock.

JB: In the morning?

JS: Maybe shucks to around 1 or 2 or whenever we felt like quitting.

JB: Okay, whenever you got enough poundage or whatever.

JS: Mhm [affirmative].

JB: Did they pay you daily?

JS: No, we got paid by the week.

JB: Okay.

JS: We used to make a whole lot of money.

JB: Did they pay you in cash?

JS: In check or cash.

JB: Okay.

JS: But they always had an envelope, you know. Girl, we made some money, I miss those places. I'm too old now to shuck.

JB: Your hands or?

JS: Yeah, you know.

JB: Yeah.

JS: Girl, I'll tell you, the men could shuck some oysters and woo and this lady... that is Curtis right there.

JB: Oh yeah there he is.

JS: He shucked two Sundays ago with my son, Curtis could shucks some oysters. Oh, Arilee, my sister who lives down the lane, she can shuck too, she shucks them. I got a call a few minutes ago, she won't even answer the phone. She gets like that, I don't pay her no mind. Crazy shoot.

JB: Because she is stubborn?

JS: She is ornery. She is ornery and she could be nicer than a set of stairs and I know how they are 'cause I got one but through it all we still, you know.

JB: Did you and Arilee shuck at the same houses?

JS: Mhm [affirmative].

JB: Did you stay at one house for like the entire time or?

JS: Oh yeah.

JB: Which house was that?

JS: And then after they torn the old oyster house down. We moved down further from where Watermen's restaurant is, we were down on side of the building down there where the hotels are.

JB: Okay.

JS: And shucked there for a long time and then after it closed.

JB: Have you seen the oyster house that's still there?

JS: No, one of it torn down, they tore it down. There are lots of boats and things down there now but they go around to different places, Curtis and them, and shuck, like they have parties.

JB: Oh, so now you have to like...

JS: And they eat them, eat around them around shell with hot sauces on them, that's how people eat them. Fried oysters are good. My husband he used stand up and to eat them raw, take them right out of the shell and eat them girl and those saltwater oysters and they are good.

JB: Where they... yeah.

JS: They had a salty taste to them. Whoa swallow them things make me sick. We had some for Thanksgiving, my daughter brought up some from Virginia but they were already shucked.

JB: Yeah.

JS: I had the battered all made and put them oysters in the batter then fried them on the stove. Good Lord, they were good eating. They were good, they were good.

JB: Yeah. Does your daughter live in Virginia?

JS: She lives in Virginia now, Bowling Green, east of Bowling Green. They got a lot of snow down there.

JB: Did they?

JS: Last week, last Sunday it started snowing at 2 o'clock there in Virginia.

JB: Good thing it missed us.

JS: It missed us but we are going to get some though.

JB: Don't say that. It is spring.

JS: It is March coming here. It ain't spring yet we had some cold weather this weekend that is why so many people are sick.

JB: Yeah.

JS: So, I had in Chestertown, months ago you know I always get my flu shot every time for my checkup.

JB: Yeah, that's important.

1S: Oh yeah, I go for that honey.

JB: Yeah.

JS: Yeah.

JB: Otherwise I feel alright.

JB: Yeah, that's good. Do you remember any winters like this? Or is this a normal winter?

JS: No, I have never seen winter like this. When we were children coming up, oh, it started snowing in September all right straight on through. Mama used to give us big sleds and things we used to go bellywobbling you know. This was all dirt roads and everything. It was fun. And my father used to oyster.

JB: Yeah.

JS: He go out and catch oysters.

JB: He did hand tonging?

JS: Yeah.

JB: Was he a good oysterman?

JS: Oh yes, honey, it's all them old people, dead and gone now.

JB: Did your mom pick the oysters?

JS: No, no too many children to take care off, but oh my God she could cook.

JB: Did your dad bring some oysters home for your mom to cook up?

JS: Oh yes, oh yes, honey, the preachers and things would come to that house. She would say, "Clifton, don't bring those children home, don't bring those preachers home here eating up this food. I have too many children to feed." Mom had 13 kids.

JB: Oh wow.

JS: I got 6. My oldest daughter is 62 but my oldest son is 61. I got one 60, 57, 51, she is the baby girl and our son, he'd be 50 this year. He is a preacher.

JB: Okay.

JS: And his wife is too.

JB: Are a lot of them still living?

JS: They never shucked oysters or anything.

JB: Why not?

JS: Because they were in school. They had to go to school.

JB: Yeah.

JS: They went to college and everything. He went into the service and that's how he could finish his education, entered into the service and college and all. No, they never did nothing like that.

JB: They didn't have as much fun as you did though.

JS: They thought they did but they didn't. We had a ball girl, I'll tell you the truth. Me and Arilee, then we had a ball girl you are talking about some oyster shucking people. There's some pictures down to the municipal building down in Rock Hall. You see on the wall. You look at them pictures on the wall?

JB: Yeah, I've seen them.

JS: We were shucking oysters and everything, we were singing.

JB: You were singing hymns right?

JS: Mhm [affirmative].

JB: Did you have a favorite hymn?

JS: All of them.

JB: All of them.

JS: All are my favorite hymns, honey. I go to church every Sunday. I hate to stay at home. I go to different places to sing and choir, preacher preaches, girl it is nice. We've always had fun, we have more fun now than we did back then. Of course we were young, you know. We had joints all around here. I'd go dancing, go to the armory, see all them big singers and things. Those days are gone.

JB: Yeah.

JS: Haven't been forgotten but they are gone.

JB: What was your favorite thing to do growing up?

JS: I didn't really have no favorite, you know.

JB: You liked everything.

JS: Yeah, girl, we used to go out and we used to have a ball, go different places. I've seen, the men used to play ball around here. They had a regular ball team.

JB: Baseball?

JS: Mhm [affirmative], my husband has the picture up in the nursing home where he was showing different people. Could nobody beat that team

playing ball, called the Rock Hall Tigers. Girl, my husband was a catcher. He was real tall and my brother, second base, and I got a brother that lived in Texas after he came out of the service. You couldn't beat him pitching and short stop they couldn't top him. Nobody around here could beat that team. Girl, we went everywhere. We girls had our fun. We went everywhere playing ball, all over the place.

JB: All over the county?

JS: Different places.

JB: Wow, how far, like did you go down to Texas?

JS: No, not that far.

JB: Oh, okay, but like all over the Eastern Shore like Salisbury.

JS: Yeah, New Jersey and Glass, all around Delaware and everything, New Jersey, Philadelphia... yeah, they had terrible teams. We used to play right out here. You see where the pavilion is?

JB: Yeah.

JS: That's where the ball field.

JB: Oh okay.

JS: We used to play there, they used to play there. Of course I was always pregnant. It was so bad.

JB: Six children that is a lot of children, nowadays at least.

JS: Yeah they are grown, I have grandchildren and everything. They are so nice though. They respect me, thank the Lord.

JB: Do a lot...

JS: Hey Curtis, he can't hear nothing.

JB: Do a lot of your children and grandchildren live around here?

JS: No, they don't live around here.

JB: Why not?

JS: They live away with their parents. They just moved from Philadelphia over on the down here, over near the Western Shore.

JB: Okay, near...

JS: The jobs from Philadelphia continued down to Washington. Yeah, that's where they stayed. They work for lawyers and my son he travels different place he just came back from New York. He was supposed to go to New York two weeks before the World Trade event, you know.

JB: Yeah?

JS: He was supposed to go there and I forgot how many floors he said he went up on.

JB: Ah, he is lucky.

JS: He is born on a down. Yeah, he's been to Ohio, he goes different places for work. He is going to come down next week and go with me to carry my husband down to the ER to have his ears taken care of he can't hear since he had pneumonia. So, I live a happy life.

JB: Yeah.

JS: 'Cause I stay by myself.

JB: Yeah, sure.

JS: Mhm [affirmative], I love it.

JB: Do you?

JS: I do, I don't nobody running in the house. I don't like you know, having those tails and unless my children call me on the phone and they come home and they come they right over here now from Maryland.

JB: Oh, that's nice.

JS: Yeah, they moved from Philly. My two girls, one in Virginia and I got a, that's Jeffery, Cynthia, and Juanita, and Bessie. They are all older, Bessie lives in Glen Verde and Cynthia is in Long Island so is Juanita. They catch the train and go to Washington for the job. My son just came from New York.

JB: Yeah, it's, the city is beautiful.

JS: Yeah, he loves it up there in New York.

JB: I think I like the bay better though.

JS: Huh?

JB: I think I like the bay better though.

JS: Yes honey, oh we go down there during the summer and watch the boats and things. It's not pretty like it used to be down there.

JB: It's not?

JS: No.

JB: What's changed?

JB: That big tour of double down and everything and some of the restaurants and all the boats there and all.

JB: Do you ever go out on the water? Go boating?

JS: Oh yeah, I've been out on the water. I like that fishing.

JB: Did you ever out with your dad when he oystered?

JS: No, I was too little.

JB: Yeah, but you could go out on the boat with him.

JS: No, I was in school, elementary school.

JB: Not even during the summer, did you get soft crabs, did you ever dip for soft crabs or anything like that?

JS: No, but you know my husband used to bring soft crab home. They were good.

JB: Did he buy them or catch the soft crabs?

JS: Some of the men would catch them and give them to him. It was so hot but they were delicious. I once saw a crab going for 3 or 4 dollars.

JB: Really?

JS: Sure, you go down there and get a soft crab dinner. God that was around 15, or 16 dollars.

JB: That is expensive for a soft crab.

JS: They are enormous but you get everything that goes with it, you know.

JB: Yeah.

JS: But I like the scallops, lots of scallops around...

JB: The mussels?

JS: Oh, I loved them, and my children from the city they just had plates of mussels, they loved them. That's where we go for mother's day, down to Watermen's, they take me out to dinner.

JB: Oh, that's nice.

JS: Mhm [affirmative].

JB: And you always get scallops? I mean you always get mussels?

JS: Oh yeah, because the grandchildren love them. They live over up there where Wal-Mart is. You know where the big Wal-Mart is in, I can't think too much now.

JB: Isn't there a Wal-Mart over by Centreville?

JS: Centreville, Easton?

JB: There is a Target in Easton. Is there a Wal-Mart in Easton?

JS: I have been to that Target. I like that Target store.

JB: Me too.

JS: I go to that Target where my son lives too. So, my husband, I guess he gets some kind of, I don't know, but I am going there with the girls on the weekends. I need to get away.

JB: Yeah, how did you meet your husband?

JS: Man's ten years older than me, and my fussy behind self. Lord I was in love, God help me. It was all good.

JB: Did you meet him at school or did you meet him at work?

JS: How did I meet that man? I don't know, at one of the beer garden things or something, I don't know. He was a nice looking fellow.

JB: I bet he still is.

JS: He is. I got a picture that he just gave me that he had taken. I had this knee operated on three times.

JB: Are you okay? Do you need a hand?

JS: No, baby, I can make it [unintelligible] to the nursing home where he is.

JB: Oh, he is a good looking man.

JS: He is 91.

JB: He looks fantastic.

JS: He is 91, he was better looking than that, tall.

JB: Tall, dark, and handsome.

JS: That's why he had so many women, he had so many of them. He just had this taken, they had a American Legion up their a few weeks ago.

JB: Was he in the military?

JS: Oh, yes, he was in air force.

JB: Oh wow.

JS: So was my son.

JB: Okay, did he fly planes for the air force?

JS: Huh?

JB: Did he fly planes for the air force?

JS: Yeah, he was all over the place, California, all over the place he was.

JB: Did you follow him?

JS: No, I didn't know him then, I was in high school. I was getting ready to graduate when he came out of the service.

JB: Okay, so you met him when he moved back?

JS: I did. I knew the town but I never know his parents. So, I just fooled around there with him with my fussy behind self with that old man. Excuse my teeth 'cause I'm having them fixed. I broke them right eating candy. I did.

JB: Candy.

JS: Came home from church one Sunday, so my son is having them fixed for me.

JB: That's nice.

JS: They are good to me, both of them are. My other son, I wish he would come up here. He gave this to me for Valentine's Day.

JB: The watch. It is a very cool watch.

JS: He is always giving me something. He is good to me. He's been sick, he's been sick with the flu.

JB: Has he?

JS: He is feeling better today, he said "Mother I am feel a little better today."

JB: That's good.

JS: He lives a little down from me. He is the only one who lives at home, all the rest of them live away.

JB: What does he do?

JS: He doesn't do anything he has a bad back.

JB: Oh, he doesn't work?

JS: He has to get his knees and his back [unintelligible] he just got the last set.

JB: Okay, how did he hurt his back?

JS: Mmm?

JB: How did he hurt his back?

JS: Working in construction he fell from the first floor, up to the hospital where they were working, from the top down to the last floor and hurt his back.

JB: That does hurt your back.

JS: Yes indeed, he get disability.

JB: Okay, good, okay.

JS: But you wouldn't think any is wrong with his back. He came up here now because I doubt he is taking his show. His sickness and his back hurts, girl, he stays to himself. He has a nice girlfriend, they are going to get married.

JB: Are they? How exciting.

JS: He wants he brother to marry him.

JB: Sure, the reverend. How were you when you had your children?

JS: I was 20, when I had my first child, I was 23.

JB: How old where you when you got married? How old where you when you got married?

JS: I was 23.

JB: Oh, okay. That's perfect, good age.

JS: Yes, indeed so I didn't want to get married either. My father never wanted me to get married. He did not want me to marry that man.

JB: Why not?

JS: Because he was a devil. He went through many women, that was the main thing and I said Miffy you can't pick nobody for her. I was his favorite.

JB: Where you close with your dad?

JS: Yeah, I was close to my father and mother. I had issues at home. I am going to call her.

[Part 2]

JS: She makes ceramics.

JB: Oh, she makes ceramics.

JS: I do to. I got a Christmas tree that I made her for Christmas, ceramic.

JB: Oh cool.

JS: It sat right there and I made barbers and give them to my brother and different ones. I figure I made around two or three.

JB: Oh.

JS: Yeah, beautiful.

JB: Where is the center?

JS: Chestertown. Aberline Ferris, right across from the nursing home where my husband is.

JB: Oh, okay.

JS: I can walk over there.

JB: That's nice.

JS: Yeah, she is cooking there.

JB: She's not cooking in seafood, is she?

JS: No she isn't cooking no seafood. I'll tell you one thing [unintelligible] and I have two little fish.

JB: You can just call people for fish?

JS: That's for my brother-in-law, my Curtis is cooking some fish for my brother-in-law. He is so damn tight you don't like giving nobody nothing.

[Part 3]

JB: Yeah, you can get fish you might as well, right?

JS: Yeah, he just cleaned some for Earl Manquarter. He won't give me nothing. My brother- in- law, he is money crazy.

JB: Does he go out and catch them himself?

JS: No, some man catches and gives them to him.

JB: Does anybody around here in Edesville go out like as a waterman or anything?

JS: Not like they used to.

JB: No.

JS: The waterman is just going down. When Connie come up, she brings crabs up from Virginia.

JB: Does she really?

JS: Already steamed and everything.

JB: Wow.

JS: Yeah.

JB: Were there a lot of African-American watermen out on the water? No?

JS: Not in years, no.

JB: Why not?

JS: Not for six, eight years. No, they can't come here and stay unless they have a, you know, they got to have an ID and all that kind of stuff. Julie, they just had that house put there.

JB: Did they? It is brand new?

JS: Sort of they got that house for, I think it is \$29,000. This woman and this old furniture, you know furniture this woman had.

JB: Has the community changed a lot? Have there been a lot of people moving in here?

JS: This all used to be dirt roads and everything.

JB: Yeah, so more and more people have been moving in here?

JS: Yes, this man he redone that house over there, this white man. He's nice, he cut, all them, his trees were on my roof and everything and he cut them. He had to do it because if they didn't I was going to call [unintelligible].

JB: Okay.

JS: 'Cause he was ruining my roof and he got to go up there and fix the chimney because it was all crooked like but he is nice. When he had these fish fries over there, with people there and all, he always come over and get Barney and I.

JB: Oh, that's nice.

JS: Go over there and have a ball. He had one every year. He built that building there. He fixes boats and everything.

JB: Are there a lot of...

JS: He is really nice.

JB: Is he? Good. Are there a lot of like white guys who live in Edesville?

JS: Different places.

JB: Different places.

[Pause]

JS: Counted every last one of them.

JB: Counted all those fish?

JS: Yeah, he like that, he is money crazy.

JB: Yeah.

JS: Yeah. He give no fish away. He ate them all for supper, she cursed him, my sisters be getting, I can't swear like that.

JB: No.

JS: No, girl, I go to church and everything. The way my children are, no they respect me. I have two grandchildren. She don't care, she's been hard, she's always been hard. Shuck more oysters, clams then you could shake a stick at.

JB: Did she work longer hours?

JS: She worked right along with us.

JB: Yeah, yeah.

JS: We all did. Yeah.

JB: You all carpool down there and work for the day then come back?

JS: They picked us up. They had a regular van come and picked us up and everything.

JB: Oh, why did they pick you up?

JS: To drive us to work.

JB: Okay. How many people from the community went down there?

JS: Oh, there was a lot of us work down there. See they came from different places, Piney Neck and all around, different places they came.

JB: Was it a big bus? Was it like a school bus?

JS: No, it was like a big van, no, you know.

JB: Like a big minivan with a couple of extra rows?

JS: Yeah.

JB: Did you have good friends that shucked with you?

JS: Oh yeah, we got along wonderful. We sing, oh honey, we had a ball down there.

JB: Did you have competitions on who could go the fastest?

JS: Yeah we had competitions. Oh yes, honey, my brother used to do all of them and get the money. Oh, that boy could shuck some oyster, oh my God. And my husband and his brother and then women tried to compete with him, oh, honey.

JB: Did you win a trophy? No?

JS: We did when we shucked we went down to that other restaurant, my sister and I, and we had to shuck some clams and they gave us a trophy. She came in first place and I came in second.

JB: Congratulations.

JS: Shucking clams.

JB: Yeah.

JS: Not oysters, clams.

JB: Which one was easier shucking oysters or shucking clams?

JS: Clams were easier than oysters. You'll stab yourself if you didn't know what you were doing and you had to keep your eyes right on what you were doing. We were younger then, we didn't care.

JB: You would stab your hands?

JS: You had gloves, we wore gloves.

JB: What kind of gloves?

JS: Rubber gloves.

JB: You can stab through rubber gloves, can't you?

JS: See you had the plain gloves in this hand and then rubber gloves in this hand right there holding the oyster.

JB: So, you had a rubber glove where you held the oyster?

JS: No, had rubber gloves on this hand where we held the oyster and a plain glove. We had to shuck in gloves.

JB: Why?

JS: On a count of the knives and things and to hold the oysters, they were so cold.

JB: That makes sense. Were the oysters like wet from the water?

JS: Mhm [affirmative], they would put them in different contains.

JS: Yeah, boys.

Neighbor: Police coming in. Hey, how are you doing?

JS: That boy shucked oysters too.

[Part 4]

JB: That's your nephew?

JS: Well, he called me Aunt Jean, we are all related. His mother is a nursing home now, she is 97. We are old people around here girl, 97 years. Aunt Pansy, is Firnell he had some mess in 80, 87 and his mother was 108 when she died. My mother was 102 and she died 1996.

JB: Wow, that is a long living mother.

JS: And she had 13 children, two kids she couldn't born. It was too big, back then in those days they had to pull them by the legs and everything like that my mother used to midwife.

JB: Your mom was a midwife?

JS: She used to plow through the snow, to get out all the babies and everything. Oh yes honey, she loved the work. I was working. My father was too. You should have seen my family, course we older now, musical family.

JB: Musical family, could you all sing?

JS: We could all sing and the nephew, he plays the piano for the choir.

JB: Does he?

JS: Yes he does across there, he does.

JB: What church...

JS: We sang for 32 years, Rochester singers.

JB: The Rochester singers.

JS: Sang for 32 years.

JB: That's a long time.

JS: Yes sir, we used to have a man come up, just sit down and come up in the house and mother would play the piano. We would all get around and sing. He plays the accordion and he was white and we used to get in there and sing. See you couldn't play no cards or nothing at our house. The only game you could play was like dominoes or rooks.

JB: But you couldn't play cards?

JS: No, she didn't allow that.

JB: Why not?

JS: It was just like that.

JB: Okay.

JS: That's the way we come up.

JB: What games did you play than?

JS: Well. we played dominoes or something like that but there wasn't no liqueur around here. We didn't have no television.

JB: They threw you outside, huh?

JS: We used to go outside and play hide and go seek, up to the butcher shop and different little games like that we used to play. Mama would sit right there on the road and watch us. We didn't have no electricity around here, television or nothing, all we had was a radio, tall radio. All we heard was some of them old western thing. I've come up a long ways honey.

JB: When you were singing with the man who played the accordion, did you sing hymns then too?

JS: Oh yes, we sang nothing but hymns.

JB: Nothing like hymns.

JS: That's all.

JB: None of the popular stuff you heard on the radio?

JS: We didn't have no radio except like mix and western and stuff like that. We sang hymns from the book and everything, we knew them. We had a singing group. You should hear our choir at the church right over here.

JB: What church is that?

JS: Holy Trinity up right across over here.

JB: Oh okay, yeah.

JS: Had a big doing over there Saturday night had around 6 or 7 groups.

JB: Wow.

JS: Mhm [affirmative].

JB: Where were the groups from?

JS: Different places.

JB: Okay.

JS: West side.

JB: All over Maryland?

JS: All around.

JB: Fun.

JS: Girl, we have a good time.

JB: I used to sing in the choir but I'm not very good though.

JS: Well, you did what you could do.

JB: It's true, I can carry a tune.

JS: That's right.

JS: But I can't do any of that fancy stuff.

JS: You did what you could do. What's the name of that girl that just died?

JB: Whitney Houston.

JS: Yeah, girl that thing got to me so. She was doing them drugs herself and so was Michael Jackson.

JB: Yep they had some demons.

JS: Sure they did, that's why they did programs and all, all over the world and all. Bobbie, didn't he, she had been in rehab I don't know how many times. She was a pretty girl. She could sing couldn't she?

JB: She could definitely sing.

JS: So, somebody else used to sing for the church got themselves the same way, don't fool with drugs. One thing this medication thing doctors give you is drugs. Blood pressure pills and all that kind of stuff because I had to take it myself, you know, you have to take them by prescription, like you have a prescript.

JB: Right, yeah.

JS: Just didn't sit up and just get pills and take them like that you know.

JB: Did when you were younger actually whenever, did a lot of, actually I was told that Edesville was an African American community. Is that true when you were growing up?

JS: Yes.

JB: Did any people, did any African Americans live in Rock Hall?

JS: No.

JB: Why not?

JS: They live there now, they have apartment and things down there now a lot of them.

JB: Do you know why they didn't live down here when you were growing up?

JS: This place and down in Eastern Neck Island and Chestertown was a slavery place.

JB: Yeah.

JS: I didn't know anything about it, you know, I don't [unintelligible] Eastern Neck Island, slavery honey. I don't know what I ever did with my history book that I had, I don't know where I put it. When you move you lose a lot stuff, you know.

JB: Yeah.

JS: We bought this old house, [unintelligible] cost 1500 dollars.

JB: That's a good deal.

JS: Had it fixed up and everything. At least I did, he did some himself. He used to drink a lot.

JB: Why did he do that?

JS: That's why he is where he is now. He didn't stop drinking, he had congestion heart failure, fluid buildup.

JB: Where would he drink?

JS: Hm?

JB: Where would he drink?

JS: He would drink anywhere, give him the fellows and all he would sit right there with his buddies and drink all day long. Like you would go to church come home and get as drunk as I don't know. He fell down the steps I don't know how many times.

JB: It must have hurt.

JS: It did. I had to fly him over to Baltimore I don't know how many times. He had cut himself right down through there, hurt real badly. Girl, I remember this I asked God for peace. I would lay in that spot right there I prayed, I prayed. The good Lord knows when you had enough.

JB: Sure does.

JS: Yes, he does. You know I had these kids. I haven't been perfect and I always said there are ways to stop the man from running he needs some competition and I found a man, I wasn't in love with him. I thought I was but I wasn't. That stopped him, it didn't stop him either coming out of women's houses. We lived right in here we were married.

JB: Did you catch him coming out of women's houses after you were married?

JS: Yeah, my own cousin. I used to, down to the carry there we used to skin tomatoes.

JB: There was a tomato packing plant?

JS: Yeah, right down where you around go through Rock Hall.

JB: Yeah, you worked there too?

JS: Yeah, used to do corn, corn husking early in the morning, 4 o'clock in the morning. We used to do corn.

JB: Why did you have to get up so early to do that?

JS: You did it for the trucks come and get them and take them. That's where we found a new born baby in the corn husks went down the chute. The girl had put the baby in the bottom of the basket and the corn was put over top of it. The baby was just born.

JB: Was it alive?

JS: It was live and bawling when it went down that chute. They were from down South. A lot of those people are crazy.

JB: It sounds crazy to put a baby in a...

JS: They didn't do anything, they are South, down in Virginia and North Carolina, different places down there they are down around there now. Those people will hurt you but we used to work there all morning.

JB: Where you able to sing when you were at the tomato packing plant too?

JS: No.

JB: Was it as fun as working in the oyster house?

JS: No, it wasn't as much fun as working in the oyster house. We did that during the day, early in the morning and we get off early. I did all kinds of work, honey.

JB: Could you leave the packing plant and then go shuck oysters?

JS: No, we didn't shuck oysters then.

JB: Why not?

JS: We were out shucking oysters then we were too young.

JB: Oh, so you went to the tomato packing plant first?

JS: I went to that place first.

JB: Oh, okay.

JS: I have been all over the place working.

JB: How old where you when you started working?

JS: Oh my God, I guess I was around 14, 13, 14 years old. I had to help my mother, Mama, the children. See I taught my kids, now the boys had to do their own clothes, press their clothes, and iron their clothes, and they had to keep their rooms clean and they would put a sign on the door, keep out. My two boys.

JB: That's funny.

JS: I said you had to do your own clothes girl too 'cause I had to work out, I couldn't do everything. But my husband, he was lazy as shit. Excuse me for saying it to you.

JB: Yeah.

JS: When he come home after work all he wanted to do was sit on his ass and drink but that's alright, brother see I'm stopped up I'm sitting by his side. I'm stopped up at the nursing home the other day there are pills I have to take.

JB: Did you were you working when you were pregnant with your children?

JS: Yeah.

JB: Where you working at the tomato plant or were you shucking at that point?

JS: I was shucking oysters. I didn't work there when I was real big but I used to get someone to watch my children, send them to school. See they went to school right around here. That house, cross over there, that is where I went to school at.

JB: Really, that house right over there?

JS: No right cross over here, you can't see it. You have to get up and see it, the white house right across over there across from that [unintelligible]. Yes indeed honey, we didn't have buses or nothing we had to walk to school.

JB: Did your children go to the same school?

JS: No.

JB: What school did your children go to?

JS: Elementary, Sharptown.

JB: Sharptown.

JS: Mhm [affirmative].

JB: Okay, so why did you, why did you...

JS: Then we used to catch the bus to go to the high school in Chestertown.

JB: Okay. That's great. Why didn't you go to Rock Hall high school?

JS: I don't know, not too many blacks when down there, it's a white.

JB: Why not?

JS: I don't know. Things were a mess around here once.

JB: In Chestertown were there blacks and whites?

JS: That's a Negro imagery place in Chestertown, that's the historical place the slavery place. They used to keep the slaves down in the basement. You can still see the places down there where they had them chained.

JB: What place is that?

JS: In some of the building there in Chestertown where you see the holes and things. We go past that place every day to catch the bus when I go to the study to pick up people. A whole lot of things have changed, honey.

JB: Did a lot of people talk about slavery when you were growing up?

JS: No, the old people didn't let us hear, you know, but we took history yeah history [unintelligible].

JB: Did your grandparents ever talk about it?

JS: They didn't talk too much around us, you know, but we heard about it when we were in school and everything.

JB: What about segregation? Did you ever talk about that?

JS: Yeah, yeah, every one of these places around these schools was segregated.

JB: Were they? What types of things...

JS: They didn't want the black people to mix with the white.

JB: No.

JS: And now the boys around here now with the drugs and things, they run the white gals. Sure, they go with them.

JB: What type of things in Chestertown was segregated?

JS: Oh, Chestertown wasn't, good Lord, it wasn't. It was a historical place.

JB: How about Rock Hall?

JS: Same thing.

JB: Same thing. Could you go to the movie theater in Rock Hall or?

JS: No, tore down now, always had a hall but it is torn down now that we used to go to the movies and everything.

JB: How about like the bars?

JS: At the bars were right here, right here in Edesville.

JB: In Edesville?

JS: We had two of them, Sisco tavern and Jarlson Tavern.

JB: Sisco that is your last name.

JS: I married a Sisco. My maiden name is Rochester.

JB: Just like the choir, Rochester choir. Did your husband's family own that bar?

JS: No, it's a cousin.

JB: Oh.

JS: My cousin owned the Jarlson tavern.

JB: Got it.

JS: We used to have a ball. Girl, we used to have fun. Oh, that was when we were young, you know.

JB: Yeah.

JS: And then our children, crazy I couldn't get nowhere no how around town, having these kids. My mother would call you in a minute, come on give the baby the bottle, she wouldn't [unintelligible].

JB: Was she?

JS: Remember I had my own kids but she'd help us you know, she was down here helping me more than once with my children that's a [unintelligible]. I was on leave for a long time. Yes I did. I didn't have to beat my children, my mama would tear them up.

JB: Your mother would beat your children?

JS: Doggone right she would beat them, tore up their behind. If you wouldn't go to church mama said, you come to church, go to Sunday school get over there, classes. You walk all the way around the block. Mama said I don't care where you're walking if you don't go to church today your behind is mine. And she meant it and old people are tough, they are tough.

JB: I bet you went to church.

JS: Woo we had no other choice. You come in their house mama's house it is torn down now. You go into though their house you had prayers on Sunday morning. If you were in that house you were going, got be on your knees, oh yes. They think they had fun, they didn't had no fun. These boys that go over there with drugs and all. We didn't have no drugs and nothing around here then. She was around those old people. See my grandfather used to own a farm. He had sheep, cattle, horses, and we used to milk the cows and things. We used to have these, like what you put the milk in.

JB: Like the big canisters?

JS: Uh-uh [negative], there used to be store right up there, where they had the place where they used to set the milk cans for the truck come up and get it and then there was cream on top the milk. Those cows, I mean that was good milk and then she would, and then mom would, she had a butter churn, she churned butter.

JB: She would churn her own butter?

JS: She would churn her own butter.

JB: And it would be one of those...

JS: Yeah.

JB: Where you bring the stick up and down.

JS: Mhm [affirmative].

JB: I bet that was good.

JS: Oh girl, it was, no chemicals. I was brought up with no chemicals.

JB: Yeah.

JS: In nothing, have your own gardens, put up your own preserves I used to do the same thing, hog kills there were [unintelligible] and everything.

JB: Was there like a hog killing day?

JS: Yeah, I used to do it 'cause it is a lot and you put on this place here. When I first come here this was just a room and a door. It wasn't like this.

JB: What did you do during hog killing day?

JS: Well, we did the hogs and everything. They kill them and everything and hang them on gallows for three or four days because it was cold back then them days. And then I used to have a fellow called Handsome, a nice old man, used to help me cut out little holes and make sausage, homemade sausage and everything. And carry them up to the store and this old lady would season them up and everything. Used to put the sausage grounds [unintelligible] Sausage lining right on the on the side on the table and all. The lean fat, the lean meat and everything in there and grind it down and everything and carry it up to the store and season it and put in the cases that the chitlings and things come out of, scrap those cases, good and clean, like you see these sausages in the store with the case and all, did all that my own stuff.

JB: Yeah, did you have a lot of other animals, chickens or cows?

JS: We had chickens. The boys used to ring the necks off of chickens, we girls had to pick them and mama pick them and everything, we clean them. Chicken feet, we made many a stew, mom did, me too.

JB: Did you fry the chicken feet or just put them in a stew?

JS: No put them in a bowl to make a stew. We had homemade shortbread every night, homemade rolls. She was the best roll maker around here.

JB: Was she?

JS: That is how us girls learned how to make homemade rolls, me and my sisters.

JB: Was your dad a good cook too?

JS: He didn't cook, he just worked.

JB: Out on the water?

JS: Out on the water and then he worked for Vita Food where they did cannery and everything.

JB: Is that the same place where you did the tomato packing?

JS: No.

JB: Different?

JS: It was down in Rock Hall, right before you get to Rock Hall

.

JB: Where was the place he worked? Where was Vita Foods?

JS: In Chestertown.

JB: Okay, got it.

JS: Where you see all the, there is factory in Chestertown called, you see all them cars there? That's where Vita Foods was but it is another factory now and then they had a Wild one place. I have been in there, where there are different doctors and things there, where they treat you for arthritis and different things.

JB: When your dad was oystering, did he work with anybody?

JS: Oh yeah, he worked with different ones.

JB: But he had his own boat?

JS: Yeah, you know they shared, they shared boats and things I expect.

JB: Did he have a bateau?

JS: Yeah.

JB: You would think someone would cull for him right 'cause he was tonging?

JS: Daddy's a tonger.

JB: Yeah it's hard work. He must have been a big man up top, big strong muscles.

JS: He wasn't big.

JB: No?

JS: Papa wasn't big. He was tall, you know, muscles and things. Sing he'd go over had miss dated at different churches and things. They called him to come to different churches and sing songs. We are a singing family. We are a singing family. I love it, still sing.

JB: Singing is fun.

JS: Cornell could set that piano on fire. He lives across over there. He is married. And he is in church every Sunday morning. That's where Papa led him at when he was a little boy, get home from church sit at that piano and he used to play the old piano. Of course, some of the preachers, we had the devils, they drive off cord and everything. Girl I will tell you, we got a history girl, I'll tell you, beautiful.

JB: Where there any bad parts when you working?

JS: Mm?

JB: Where there any bad parts when you were working?

JS: What you mean?

JB: Like when you were oystering, did you ever cut your hand or were there any accidents?

JS: Oh yeah, you could stab your hand but, you know, you didn't go to the hospital or nothing, just put something on them because we used gloves and all but you shucked with your bare hands.

JB: The people you worked for were they fair?

JS: Yeah.

JB: They were good people?

JS: They were nice.

JB: Did the live around here?

JS: Someplace they lived around here some couple [unintelligible].

JB: So why did you decide to leave the food packing plant where you were doing the corn and go shuck oysters?

JS: It shut down.

JB: Oh.

JS: It shut down.

JB: Okay.

JS: All of it did.

JB: Did it shut down before you were married?

JS: No, it was still going when I was married.

JB: Was it?

JS: Oh yeah, honey, it didn't shut down till a few years ago.

JB: The shucking shut down a few years ago?

JS: Mhm [affirmative].

JB: Oh, I thought it was gone longer than that.

JS: No, I wish it was still going but I wouldn't be able to stand on my feet and things to long now, you know, I'm stopping up everything.

JB: Yeah, do you know any ladies that I could talk to that shucked oysters and clams and that type of thing other than your sister Arilee?

JS: Some of them are dead and gone. A lot of them are forest and everything. That you can't. There is a lady out in Pinny Neck she is the only one left. She is 97 years old. She shucked hard, Sadie did.

JB: She used to shuck hard?

JS: Yeah, she tried to shuck harder than the men and me. A lot of them are dead and gone now.

JB: Where the workers mostly female or male?

JS: Mm?

JB: Were the workers, the shuckers?

JS: Both.

JB: They were both.

JS: Male and female. We had a ball.

JB: Did you have like a timecard that you had to run through while you were working?

JS: No.

JB: It was purely weight.

JS: Yeah, we picked the one.

JB: Did you ever know anybody who worked at Watermen's and shucked there? How about crab picking, did you ever pick crabs?

JS: I never picked crabs, I never liked picking crabs.

JB: No?

JS: My daughter did. She used to pick crabs. At that man, he came down he killed himself but he used to pick crabs down there by the water. Yeah.

JB: Did a lot of guys pick crabs too?

JS: Yeah.

JB: Girls and guys?

JS: Just the women.

JB: Why didn't guys pick crabs?

JS: They didn't have to. They put them up, you know, you steam them and everything but they shucked clams.

JB: Did your daughter like picking crabs?

JS: Yeah, Naomi could pick crabs and she would anyways.

JB: Was she also paid by the pound?

JS: Yeah, they were paid by the pound. They could pick some crabs. There were a lot of girls from Virginia used to come and pick crabs here.

JB: They used to come up here?

JS: Yeah, pick crabs around by the water and everything, they did that. They lived down Kent Island and places. Those people down there were ornery and that Crisfield place, that place where you got that. Yeah, they would throw you overboard in a minute. [unintelligible]

JB: I'm just lucky they were able...

JS: I never shucked down there, no ways.

JB: No?

JS: No, they had their own people, southerners, they worked down there.

JB: Did you like growing up around here working?

JS: I had no other choice, it's where my parents, you know. I worked hard in my days girl, cleaning for different people and I had children. So many people keep my children for me. When I go get my boy, she didn't want me to have him. I'm like keep him all night long. I said you can have that ornery boy. He was fat surely. He was so cute. Yeah.

JB: Who watched your children?

JS: Different ones, older people who weren't working.

JB: And this is until they were old enough to go to school?

JS: Yes.

JB: And then did you say they turned 13, 14 it was time for you to get a job and work?

JS: Nu-huh [negative], they were going high school and everything, you know.

JB: Did you go to high school?

JS: Yes, I graduated from high school, 1947.

JB: Congratulations.

JS: 1947, that's when he came out of the service. When he came out of the service I didn't know a damn thing about him. Why he was in service, I didn't even know his name. No, I was like running around acting crazy. Mama told me I didn't know what I was doing. Thank God for the kids I had, they were well brought up.

JB: Yeah.

JS: All of them have jobs.

JB: That's good.

JS: My grandchildren got jobs. My granddaughter gave me fur coat and hat last Christmas, I hung it up.

Had her over twice and my other daughter gave me a shirt, the oldest one gave me a shirt for Christmas and I was up there. I was waiting till 5 am for my knee. They are good to me. They all got their jobs, their cars. See I got one grandson that was shot.

JB: He was shot?

JS: Mhm [affirmative], two years ago.

JB: Was he okay?

JS: No, he died.

JB: Who shot him?

JS: I don't know. He was in the house there, sitting in the house there, he got a girl in and he went to pull the curtains back and they shot him right through the window.

JB: They never found out who did it, the police?

JS: Not yet. I think, you know, she don't talk about it. Nice boys, the other boy's working. I got two boys.

JB: So when you were 13 and 14, how did you find your job over at the-

JS: Oh, I used to, I just do a little bit of housework for some white people down in Rock Hall. That's all, I never shucked oysters or nothing.

JB: Okay.

JS: I was too young.

JB: Yeah.

JS: To go to go in the oyster house.

JB: How old did you have to be to go in the oyster house?

JS: Well, see you had to be grown on account of using knives and things. See I had a teenager when I started shucking oysters.

JB: Yeah did they have...

JS: I used to work in the cannery, at the tomatoes and everything.

JB: Did you see...

JS: 'Cause I got married when I was 23.

JB: Right, did you see an ad in the newspaper saying that they had a job opening and you had to apply for it or did you just walk up there and say hey?

JS: Oh, just go on in there and go to work. There was no job in the newspaper just used to go on in there and go to work.

JB: You didn't have to tell them, you just like, yeah, I'm here?

JS: Oh yeah you told them but they said go ahead and work, you go on in there down there. He'll let you go. They did put no ad.

JB: Same thing in the oyster shucking house there wasn't like a help wanted sign or anything?

JS: Just go in there and get a job. Ask the boss man if you could shuck oysters, you could shucker oysters.

JB: Was the boss always a man?

JS: Huh?

JB: Was the boss always a man?

JS: Mhm [affirmative].

JB: Is the boss the guy who weights the oyster?

JS: Well there was another fellow that worked in the skimming room with him and he put them on the skimmer and then weight them up and then put your score on the board.

JB: There was a board?

JS: Yeah, it has names and things, our names. The board had everything.

JB: So then every time you weighted your oysters it told you how much they weighted?

JS: Take our score down, every day.

JB: So you had to write it down and keep track of what?

JS: Mhm [affirmative].

JB: And at the end of the week you just handed them the sheet of paper that said how many?

JS: No, they take the sheet of paper and carry it up the office. Take them down when we finished for the day, carry them up to the office.

JB: How fast could you shuck, like how many pounds an hour?

JS: An hour? Just put them on the skimmer and he'd weight them up.

JB: How many pounds could you shuck a day?

JS: I don't know to tell you the truth because we had buckets. You had buckets that I get, like firing buckets.

JB: Could you do a bucket a day?

JS: A bucket a day. How many buckets did I do a day, good Lord have mercy. Oh God, oh honey, we did I don't know how many buckets a day. God sometimes we did it 7 hours a day.

JB: That's good money.

JS: Oh it was good money back then. It was honey. Clams that we had little pans we used to put them in to weight them up and everything, on the skimmer to write it down. Then when we got out the scores off the board and carry the sheet up to the office to the secretaries.

JB: Did you shuck oysters and clams on the same table?

JS: [negative].

JB: Different tables?

JS: Yeah, when you shuck oysters, the clam shuckers used to have a table over on the other side, the ones that shuck oysters. We couldn't shuck clams and oysters at the same time, couldn't.

JB: Why not?

JS: You couldn't mix that stuff up together.

JB: Oh.

JS: The clams one time and then oysters another. You mostly shuck oysters in fall and winter. What you want? Who is that?

[Part 5]

JB: What did it look like?

JS: Well, I don't know, I can't tell now. It's just a corn factory where they had belts and everything, corn come out to you. When you husk it and the husks would go down the belts, in the chutes and everything, tomatoes the same way.

JB: You would peel the tomato?

JS: Yeah, it's so long time now. You used to have a little knife, a tomato knife to cut the core and everything out of it. They would steam them, the skin would pop right off. It was good tomatoes[unintelligible].

JB: Yeah.

JS: Yeah honey, I worked hard.

JB: Did a lot of people from Edesville work in the factory, the tomato packing plant?

JS: Only a few, you know, 'cause there weren't that many grown-ups then, you know.

JB: Yeah.

JS: To work there, no men.

JB: No men worked at the tomato packing plant?

JS: No, honey, just steaming tomatoes or something like that. They always get their people from the South. They were Southerners; North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia places like that. Yeah, you had to watch what you were doing around them or they would kill you.

1B: They would kill you?

JS: Sure, we never bothered them, you know. We shut the house down then we came on home.

JB: The white people would kill you for doing?

JS: No, they weren't white, they were black.

JB: The black people would kill you for doing something wrong?

JS: Yeah, because they were ornery. They didn't mingle with us they had their own shanties. They stayed down at their own shanties down there and everything. That's all torn down, the houses and things all down in there now.

JB: Did they stay here year round or did they go back and forth between the South and here?

JS: They stayed here year round until after the factory closed down then they moved back home

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JB: Okay, did you sit by a table to do this or did you sit by a belt?

JS: They would come down the belt and you would pull a can off it, you know, tomatoes they would send them down to you and they put them in a bucket and go down the belt.

JB: So, you had like your own table to work on?

JS: It was all women mostly, you know, all us black women. Didn't mean anything.

JB: Did any white women work there?

JS: Huh?

JB: Did any white women work there?

JS: Very few, they would bring in their own people. Like they would bring people up from the south, come up here on buses. They were all black.

JB: I wonder why no one white worked there.

JS: We used to have a strawberry factory too.

JB: Strawberry, now you are talking my type of food.

JS: Down there by, oh it is way down, down there where the hotels are down there by the water. The place is still there where we used to do the strawberries. They were frozen strawberries, we used to cap them and put them in the thing. It has been so long, it back then in the 40s. Yeah, girl, I worked, I worked. I worked in high school worked all the time had no choice. Yeah, the tomato factory, strawberry factory, oysters, clams. I worked we had to 'cause I didn't have no kids when I worked the strawberry factory. I was young.

JB: What would have happened if you didn't work?

JS: Nothing, Mama would say you didn't have no boyfriends or nothing. And I had no other choice I had to work if I wanted to finish school.

JB: Did you keep your earnings and spend it on fun things?

JS: I had to give it to Mama.

JB: You gave it your mother?

JS: I lived and worked, see back then them days nobody would make fun at you. We never wore pants. We never wore pants. All we would wear is skirts. We would go down to Rock Hall a man named Mandy Miller and we used to get our material and we used to make bluesy skirts and we had our blouses to match and we made those skirts and then we would wash them and starch them and let them sit out and everything. Wear them with a belt or something like that. I would wear anything, satins.

JB: Did you wear a skirt to work?

JS: No we had on old pants or something like that oh mostly we had jumpers in later years but we never wore pants back when I was coming up. We never wore pants. I didn't even wear pants to school.

113: Not even to school?

JS: We wore skirts and we used to, our skirt and we would wear that skirt for a whole week. All we would change is our top or sweaters and we had on socks and shoes. You would wash your socks every night and sometimes you would put too much bleach in and the heel would come out. Girl, I'll tell you nobody knows how we came up and everybody is the same way. We never wore no pants until the later years and everything.

JB: Yeah?

JS: We never wore no pants. We used to walk to school I mean it was cold, cold back in those days. We had snow and ice and stuff. I fell on ice so many times. I almost busted my behind, God knows, but I was well-padded. Yeah, I wore no pants coming up.

JB: Did you have tights for your legs to keep your knees warm?

JS: Stockings that she would buy and pull them up you know, plain wool stockings.

JB: Something between your legs and the air.

JS: Well, that's how I always dressed, in school and all. Nobody made fun of one another because we were all dressed just alike, you know, you ever saw no pants. Stockings, pants, mom never like to see no girls in pants. Now that's all you see, see more pants than dresses.

JB: Yeah.

JS: Some of them wear pantsuits to church. I have pantsuits that I wear to church once in a while, you know.

JB: Well, thank you for your time, I appreciate you speaking to me.

JS: Oh, yeah.

JB: This was wonderful.

JS: Nobody knows how we come up and I know I tell you, we didn't have no, mom used to make all the bread. We used to have feed bags, there was a place in Chestertown call Brooks Mill, as you get right into Chestertown where the railroad are. And there was a little place there that sold flour and everything and mama has the flour bags to sew and then she used to make our panties out of them and she used make our shirts and when you bend over, all you would see is Brooks Best on the back of our draws. Girl I am telling you the truth, she sewed. It everything I wore. That's how all the old people were, and my mama's mother, we never seen her legs.

JB: Never saw her legs.

JS: She wore these boots that buckled up and clamped up here and a long skirt with a long apron. You've seen pictures of her like that. She was short, yes siree, honey. They would laugh at them now but girl, it is just like you see the pictures in the book. It was long skirts and the boots and the long aprons all the way down.

JB: Very cool.