

Interviewee: **Brenda Taylor Banks-Bail**
Interviewers: **Ernest Demby, Julie Hawkins-Ennis, Linda Moore-Garoute, Noah Waters, Ryan Craun**
Date of Interview: **January 21, 2020**
Location of Interview: **Eagle Harbor Community Center, Eagle Harbor, MD**
List of Acronyms: **BB=Brenda Taylor Banks-Bail, ED=Ernest Demby, JE=Julie Hawkins Ennis, LG=Linda Moore-Garoute, NW=Noah Waters, RC=Ryan Craun**

[Begin Transcript: 01:16]

ED: Can we start off by stating your name?

BB: Brenda Taylor Banks-Bail

ED: Thank you for doing this, appreciate you come in.

BB: You're welcome.

ED: Let's start. When did you originally come around here?

BB: When I was a little child and we won't go that far but, I was born here in Aquasco at my grandmother's house in that area. My mother was born in Washington, so she relocated to Aquasco. I don't know because it has been so long. That's where I started out from.

ED: Did your family come here through marriage?

BB: No, she was not married at that time when she had me.

ED: Okay. What was it like for you growing up around here?

BB: Very interesting. After living in Aquasco for short period of time, my mother did get married and relocated to Pomonkey, off of Indian Head Highway. I went to school and graduated at Pomonkey. Every summer I was in DC, at my aunt's house, which was Karen's grandmother. I call her mama because I used to stay with her every summer before they were born. I used to babysit Karen and her relatives, her brothers and sisters. Then after that, I graduated from Pomonkey and I went overseas, in the Peace Corps and I stayed two years. So I came back, actually before that I was at State Department for a while and then I went to Peace Corps.

ED: What was the most fondest memories that you have of this area?

BB: The fondest moment that I can recall, not thought about this sometime, didn't mentioned to Karen but it's when my grandmother gave me a 16th birthday party. I was so elated because I never had any parties, I never went to any parties, but she gave me a birthday party. It was a lot of fun and there were certain people at that time that she just liked, but anyway, it was a good party.

ED: Okay. What were the relationships with the people around here like at that time, were they really tight bonded or was everybody staying to their self?

BB: No, we were a lively group. Very lively. My grandmother had a shop and everybody would say, it was a pool shop. And everybody would say “ Oh, we’re going to the shop” or “down to the shop” they would say or the pool hall. It was various names they would call it. We had so much fun in that pool hall. And then my aunt used to play poker, we used to play poker every Friday, Saturday and that was a lot of fun. So we are very lively bunch here. And then there were was a restaurant or club or beer garden, we are trying to figure out the name of that beer garden was, which is by the Adam’s home on Aquasco Road, but we used to stayed there a lot. And also during that time when my cousin was alive, Yolanda, which is Sharon’s sister, we used to go to a teen club and my grandmother would take us and we would have so much fun. And then Yolanda and I would try to duck her, because we weren’t ready to leave the teen club because it was so many young guys there, but they weren’t really, I guess because I was younger, but there were much more matured girls there at that time. We used to have a good time at the teen club, that’s how we call it. We looked forward to that.

ED: Speaking of being a teen, what was popular amongst teen at that period of time? Was there certain trends or music or anything like that?

BB: Well, the only time that I can relate to at that time was going to the teen club. We look forward to that because I was at outing at that time. And then they had, I think that was basically it, or Owens High School would have some dances that something we might go to, or Douglas would have some club dances we would go to. But there wasn’t too much other than going to the shop. That was it, that was our thing, going to the shop.

JE: Where was the teen club located?

BB: What was that, that school was closed. Orme, which closed and the name was changed.

JE: And that’s located in Aquasco, correct?

BB: No, that was not in Aquasco, but that’s where everybody went. I think Friday’s we used to go up there.

ED: Were there any places in Aquasco where people would gather in groups?

BB: The shop.

ED: It seems like a comfort zone.

BB: It was nothing but in Aquasco during that time.

ED: Seems like a comfort zone for everybody, I guess.

BB: Yes. I mean, the Aquasco Speedway was also here and every car that came down to Aquasco Speedway will stop at the shop. We saw so many beautiful cars and we stayed down at the Speedway a lot too. So that was really interesting at that time.

ED: What was your mean of travel? Like, by foot?

BB: My grandmother had a car, and then my aunt, Marian, who lived in the farm, I stayed with her a lot which is in Aquasco. And she used to have this red car, this red car was faster than she was. We used to be scared riding with her because she didn't really drive that well, but we had a good time. And that was the means of transportation to me other than Sharon's mother, would take us to teen club sometime when our grandmother couldn't make it to take us to the teen club. But basically Sharon's mom took us to the teen club and that was our means.

ED: Did you have any responsibility being around the farm? Or, did you have kind of work?

BB: Yes. My uncle had us to the tobacco field. Bright and shiny, every morning we would go to the farm, plant tobacco, and then we would come down to where my other uncle lived, where Walter Bank's live, James was across, my other uncle on the field. We would be in the barn like six o'clock in the morning doing tobacco in the barn. But it was fun. We enjoyed each other, we talked, we had to put the tobacco together and then we would take it over to Waldorf and to the barn. And then we would hair them and blow, they would say in fast words trying to seal in the tobacco.

ED: How did you benefit from collecting all those tobaccos?

BB: We took it to Waldorf and we went to this big warehouse that they had where they hanged the tobacco. And then they would come around and they would go around and start bidding on how much are they going to pay for the tobacco, so that he could get his money. That's how he survived a lot, by selling his tobacco. Planting it and selling it and have us out there every morning.

ED: Was your family religious?

BB: Very much of. My aunt, Marian, if you went out partying you had to make sure you got up and go to church the next day. She did not play at all. My grandmother was also religious but she was one that, she was very religious but she could be something like an evil person, not evil, evil is not a good word but she was demanding. And she would also make Yalonda and I dance a lot, because we're bad. She had a black belt went out and got a switch. We used to dance a lot.

ED: I can relate. Was your church experience, was it like a predominantly black church all black or was it mixed?

BB: It was predominantly whites. I can recall us going to the church we were always sit in the back of the church. We werent allowed to sit in front of the church at one time. But I did make it to communions, graduated and then eventually I moved.

JE: So you are Catholic?

BB: Yes, I was a Catholic.

ED: Do you remember the reverend or the priest that was over the church?

BB: Yes, I do. At St. Dominic's was a church. What was his name? Father Trout was the preacher. Very prejudice. He was very prejudice.

ED: Really?

BB: Yes, he was.

ED: My next question was, what was the relationship between the blacks and the whites?

BB: There were some whites that were friendly. But basically, I think because of him, it made things worst. Because of his prejudice.

ED: Right.

BB: Yes.

ED: What kinds of effects did that have on the black people around here?

BB: I can't... I just know how it did affected me.

ED: Really? Would you mind speaking on this? Does it bother you?

BB: Well, I mean, it affected me because of how we had to be in church. We had to sit at a certain spot in church which was always at the back. And then eventually, things sort of changed, but it was still very obvious that he was prejudice. He was very prejudice to the point that he came up to my grandmother's house and for some react, I don't know the whole conversation was all about, but I knew one thing that my grandmother did not particularly care for it. And she really got belligerent and asked him to leave. And he turned red and he left.

ED: That brings up a good question. It seems like you are speaking your grandmother like she's a strong-willed woman, sounds like.

BB: She was a willed-strong woman. She spoke her mind, she didn't mind cursing and she would tell you just how she felt. That's how you could look back at a person that you can admire, because she did speak her mind. She didn't let anyone just walked all over her, and that I thought and I think where I learned my strength from, because I lived there for so long as a child.

ED: Do you think that most people from the area share that kind of spirit or do you think it was just particular to her?

BB: No, I think so. Eventually... I know Esteleen was very strong-willed too, she spoke her mind. James and Walter spoke their mind, but she was the strongest of the family.

ED: I can't help but notice like the tight in it group that everyone from around here is, do you think that is why that strength was speaking of, do you think that's why this place has still the cultural integrity that it has?

BB: No. I don't think it has a bearing on it. I think people sort of learned or experienced their way of thinking and allow themselves to see what was going on in Aquasco. And they pull from that strength, but not from her, only at that shop, if they came in to the shop, they got to know her, then I feel so they did learned a lot from her.

JE: I have a question. I grew up Catholic as well and I've heard similar stories from my mother about being Catholic, and going to Catholic church at that time, and have sit at the back. Did your family ever think about leaving the church because of that? Or leaving the Catholic religion because of that?

BB: No... I did no. Because that was the only church there at that time were everybody was going for blacks, and that's where it went. St. Peter's came along but that was years after. Am I correct?

LG: St. Michael's

BB: St. Michael's I mean. St. Peter's was way over. But until then, St. Dominic's was basically the church we went to. But eventually I left the Catholic. Because I didn't really learn of anything, because it was something like a blockage coming from Father Trout.

JE: That is coming, because that is happening. My family and other family too, but I just found and amazing that as African American's, our religious trust was so much stronger to put at the back. That it could be the reason for not going to church. And I've noticed that about our community that back then, when those restrictions were put on us, we still went to church. Because I need to go to a Godly place and I always asked "How..", I just went to church. Believe in our thing.

BB: And my aunt was very religious, aunt Marian. And she made sure we went to church. Made sure. If you can party, you can go to church, that's what she used to say.

ED: Seems like your faith helped you through a lot of things.

BB: It definitely did. It gave me an insight on life. I turned me around to the person that I want to be in life. And my most experience was going overseas which gave me the environment of affecting and seeing everybody differently. Because I did not go to college, I only graduated from high school, but I went to a business school for a while. But I catered everything around my experience overseas, because I was affected by a lot of different personalities, religions, all of that. Basically, from my grandmother, I could see myself in those positions.

ED: I like it. What would you like to see happen with this area?

BB: I tell you, I really missed the Speedway. Because the Speedway was where everyone, all over the country, I could possibly say. All over the place would go to Speedway. And we just had so much fun, it was just lively. And I missed the shop. Play pool, we play cards, she had a little place we could get something to eat. And it was just lively and of course all the old men at that time would sit around and watch the girls come in. So it was really nice.

JE: Where exactly it was located, the shop?

BB: Right there of Aquasco, by Sharon's house. Where she lives.

JE: Aquasco road?

BB: Aquasco road.

Unknown: I remember all the vehicles. They did fix some cars off it now. Before you get to the baseball feild. The baseball field right up in Aquasco.

Unknown: Right beside St. John's Hall.

BB: If you are coming from DC, you pass it way down on the left hand side.

JE: I know, I probably missed to pay attention to it..

BB: It's not the same anymore.

ED: This is my final question. Was there anything that important to you that we didn't speak on that you would like to say?

BB: Not really. I can't think of anything else. I think that's it.

ED: Okay, that concludes our interview.

BB: Okay.

JE: He have a question.

NW: So my question is, was history past down regarding slavery or treatment, family involvement in slavery?

BB: No. If it was, it didn't affect me. I can't recall.

NW: As far as whippings or people escaping.

BB: Whippings of other black?

NW: Yes. Of slave owners.

BB: No.

NW: Were relationships? Were they like...

BB: The relationship that I had as far as whippings was my grandmother. But other than that, no. I don't know.

NW: Romantic relationship between slave owner and slave.

BB: No. I can't recall of any of that. I don't know. I can't go back that far before my period of time.

LG: But did you hear any conversations about that?

BB: No.

LG: Was it never mentioned in your household? Anything about slave masters relationships with slaves?

BB: No.

JE: Thank you.

ED: Thank you very much. That was excellent.

[End Transcript: 21:11]