

Interviewee: **Sharon Banks-Brown**
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: **SB=Sharon Banks-Brown, BB=Brenda Taylor Banks-Bail, ED=Ernest Demby, JE=Julie Hawkins Ennis, LG=Linda Moore-Garoute, NW=Noah Waters, RC=Ryan Craun**

[Begin Transcript: 00:05]

ED: I guess we start of by stating your name.

SB: Sharon Banks-Brown

ED: Sharon, thank you for doing this interview and coming out today.

SB: Okay

ED: What was it like to you growing up around here?

SB: What was it alike? I am not sure how to say that. It was... like she said (Brenda Taylor Banks-Bail) it was fun, but it was also restricted a little bit because you couldn't go anywhere without somebody knowing where you were. I personally had a babysitter, and if I wanted to go down across from over there, which was our grandmother's old house at that time, I would go down a cousin's house and the babysitter didn't know where I was of course. By the parents I got, I had a whipping first of all for going down there because I wasn't supposed to go. And then by the time I got home, before I got home, they knew about it. So, it's like, you didn't do anything wrong because everybody in the neighborhood about it before you got back to the house. You definitely try to be on your best behavior which didn't always work.

ED: Like you said, you had a babysitter. Was that mean that your parents are probably somewhere or working on stuff, like that?

SB: Yes... my father worked in the Government and my mother is a school teacher, so they were both working.

ED: Did you get into teaching or in the Government work?

SB: Government, yes. Teaching, no. I started out... I went to Morgan for about a year and a half. And my major was elementary Ed, because I had always say that I was never going to be anybody's secretary, because I wasn't getting anybody's coffee. I wouldn't doing... I wouldn't get nothing, I didn't drink myself, I don't drink coffee so I wouldn't go and get it for you. Or take your laundry downstairs, to the cleaners and do so stuff. To me that wasn't a secretary position. But I ended up in the Federal Government in State Department for thirty-four and a half years, and I ended up as a secretary, but still I didn't go get coffee to nobody though.

JE: Did your parents live in Aquasco?

SB: Yes, I lived in Aquasco all my...

JE: So they travel from Aquasco to DC?

SB: My father, yes. And when I first started working I used to ride with him until he retired, because I lived at home. But my mother, she taught started, I am not exactly sure... when did she started teaching? But she do it on elementary which now Camp Schmidt by the 3-81, and when they closed that she went to Bayne Elementary, which is off Jose road. So my mother didn't have far to travel but still, my dad went to DC every day.

ED: Was your family always from here?

SB: Yes

ED: Did they come through the line and start with you?

SB: No, I've always lived in Aquasco.

ED: Are your grandparents as well?

SB: As far as I know.

ED: What were their names?

SB: My grandmother was Nini Banks-Walls. And my grandfather's name was Delwut Banks. I really didn't know him because he died before I was born. I knew my grandmother died in '75... was that 1975 or younger than that? I mean '65, I'm sorry not '75, '65 I think. I know I was I was young when she passed. But I never knew my grandfather.

ED: What memories do you have that you hold on to the most about this area?

SB: As Brenda stated, we are Catholic's and Fr. Trout was the priest there and they used to have church picnics on my grandmother's property. Because it was a baseball field right there and it's also Knights of St. John's Hall, which was like down the road just a little way, she could walk the distance it wasn't very far. So they were have the baseball games and stuff up there on my grandmother's property and the meal part and the dance down at the St. John's Hall. So, as Brenda said, Fr. Trout came to the house speaking to our grandmother and because of Brenda and my sister Yolanda, as she stated when I supposed to be sitting on the church, decide to sit up in the front of the church and the priest didn't liked it. So he came to the house and tell my grandmother about it and that was the wrong thing to do, she didn't liked that. So she told him where he could go and to leave the property and that was the last of the church picnics being held on that property, because he ended it, that was a done deal. It was no more picnics there.

JE: So the picnics included everybody in the church, black and white?

SB: Not the white's, just the black's.

JE: So they had... I guess separate picnics.

SB: They had separate picnics. I'm not exactly sure where the white's had theirs, I really don't remember, but I know the black's was always there on the property and at the Knights of St. John's Hall.

JE: Sounds like she had a pretty big property. Was it a farm or just a lot of property?

SB: I don't remember ever been on a farm, just land. It was a baseball field which every child in the neighborhood probably has played ball in that field at some point in their life. And Sand Lot Baseball, they played their different teams in the areas, and stuff where played there.

LG: Did the any type of [06:17] were played on that Diamond?

SB: Negro leagues?

LG: Baseball leagues.

SB: Like I said, the Baseball teams, they were all black. They weren't really, not like the Pro Nig Pro Lead, is that what you're talking about, like that?

LG: I don't think they were pro's back at that time, but there were leagues.

BB: There was Aquasco, there was Baton.

SB: Yes... Malcom. They were all black's that played ball there.

LG: So that area is like a historic are for Baseball, right?

SB: I would say, yes. That field, yes.

ED: And that happen through schools, I guess?

SB: And it's now called the "Banks Field", because of my uncle Walter who got that property when my grandmother passed, he let the Baton Little League have their games there, and they named it the "Banks Field" in honor of the family. That is why it was called the "Banks Field", but at that time back then it was only black's. So like I remember I've ever seen black's playing there, of course now, it's everybody.

LG: What is now happening to St. John's School?

SB: The Knights of St. John's Hall? What do you mean what's happening to it?

LG: This is vacant, right?

SB: It was under renovation and it hasn't been completed.

LG: So, who owns that?

SB: The Knights of St. John?

LG: Under the same St. Dominic's Church?

SB: Yes. The church is their... the knights have organization of their self, but it has a church as their... what do you call it? Not really a sponsor, but it's... most organization belong to a church. They have a church as their... I don't know what you will call it. I am not exactly sure what you will call it.

LG: But wasn't there time set aside for Black Catholics, females or whatever they wanted to?

SB: Not just females, you have the knights. As by said, "Knights of St. John's Hall". But you also had the ladies Auxiliary, and you have the Juniors Auxiliary.

LG: Okay

SB: Yes, the youth.

LG: You are a member?

SB: I am a member of that, yes. I started out youth as a junior, and now I'm in the ladies. The Auxiliary, which I am right now, the President of that Auxiliary.

ED: That's brings me to a question. Like politically, did politics and things like that have affect life down here when you are growing up? I am sure it had some kind of...

SB: I think it has effect on life everywhere.

ED: I mean, like as far as civil rights movement and things like that. Did that changed anything for anybody around here?

SB: I guess it brought the white's and black's a little closer. Because as she stated they were some whites that... I guess, under the influence of Fr. Trout. But then you have the other white's that went to church that were truly nice people. They got along with... because you were black didn't mean a things to them. The color didn't mean anything, it was just friends.

ED: It's interesting to hear how much it have effect Fr. Trout had on certain people.

SB: Yes

ED: It seems like everybody didn't have the same opinion and view point as he did. Do you think that he stayed around here or did he eventually move on?

SB: I believe he got transferred out.

ED: Right. So you think that was the people?

SB: I can't say it was the people, because priest only stayed at churches for certain length of time before they transferred or moved to another church. So I am not sure if it was his tome to meet moving on, or.

ED: Did that changed the religious tone around here after he left? Was there more freedom?

SB: I think it was. Because at that time, partly by the time he left, it was really becoming integrated more, and like I said, the white's basically went to St. Dominic's, majority of them. You had a few that were, but the majority were very nice people. So everybody set anywhere in church as they do now.

ED: That's good. Did you have any like.. we asked a lot of Aquasco questions but what about Cedar Haven. Was there any interaction with folks from there?

SB: I knew people that lived down here in Cedar Haven, but me personally I didn't come down to sway too much. It was a couple... I know at least one lady that lived over Cedar Haven that belongs to the [12:21]. I knew her and her kids, but other than that, I really wasn't down to this area that much. Like I said, I know the kids, the people and stuff because we all went to school together and stuff like that. But I really didn't come down to hang out or come down on a daily basis and go play, nothing like that.

BB: Can I interrupt something about Cedar Haven?

ED: Sure

BB: My relatives, hey still do. As a matter of fact, the last of the Taylor's, the elderly Taylor's just passed. But I still have relatives like my brother that lives in Cedar Haven now, and we have property there. So it's still popular as far as they are living there, but as far as having fun down like we used to have, we used to party down there. There's a place in Cedar Haven which my relatives including Karen's mother and her sisters and all, we used to call it "On top of the Hill", which is a bar, and that was like every Saturday, we would meet there at the bar and call it "On top of the Hill".

ED: Thank you.

SB: She's a little older than I am so I don't know that bar. I didn't go to that bar.

ED: What was school like for you?

SB: School?

ED: Like when you did your elementary in and high school, did you go through that perception?.

SB: Right. I went to **ORM** Elementary, like I was telling Julie. **ORM** is now called Camp Schmidt with the kids go for Science, I think it is, or fifth grade. Most of the time when you are in fifth grade you go to Camp Schmidt or on the other school, one of the other sites, but before that it was **ORM** Elementary School. And then when they closed that, everybody went to Bayne Elementary. I never went Bayne. I left **ORM** and went to Gwynn Park, I didn't go to Douglas because by that time, integration has started. We had to go up to road to Gwynn Park and not over the road to Douglas. So, I went to Gwynn Park High School and then by the time I got the ninth grade, they had just built what is now Gwynn Park Middle School. At that time it wasn't called the middle school, it was junior high which most schools were junior high schools, but now they are called middle schools. So, I went to the new school for one year and back to the high school for the 10th, 11th and 12th grades. So, and then, like I said, I graduated from Gywnn Park High, I went to Morgan for a year and a half. Then I got married, didn't go back to school which was a mistake probably should have, but never did. Had kids, so you know, that was ended school. I started working in Federal Government, like I said for 34 and a half years.

ED: You made your way... we all made our way.

SB: Yes...

ED: Everybody has a road. What do you think you would like to see happen? What would like the future of this area to be?

SB: The way it is now? Undeveloped... a lot if it is undeveloped. Some developments that have come in like on... what is that road? By the IGA, St. Phillips Church road has development back then.

LG: [Muffled] or something.

SB: The development it is?

LG: Beautiful homes, right?

SB: I have (haven't) seen it, I haven't been back there, I had no reason to back there and just want to be nosy but, so I really had never been back there. I know the houses are there, but I hadn't been back there to look at them.

ED: What about the history around here and all these places that have a lot of significance? Would you like to see those places maintain that element, the historical element of these areas? Would you like to keep that thing?

SB: Sure. The Knights of St. John's Hall is historical landmark now. Because it was the first Black school in the area. And they have... trying to think when did, soon into Mike Mill and delegate proctor before he passed, came down, and dedicated, put the sign up and everything, I can't remember how many years ago that was. But it was a historical site.

ED: Was there anything you want to add?

SB: Can't think of anything.

ED: Anybody else have question?

JE: I have a question, do you know anything about the Plant? When it came and how the people felt about it?

SB: The Plant of Pear?

JE: Yes

SB: That has been a long time. So all I can tell you... it was there, I don't know. It has been forever. I really don't know when it came.... Pepco, on Charlie Point. I don't know. Provided jobs so people down here in this area, that I do know but, when it came? I am not sure.

ED: Anybody else have questions? I think that's it. Appreciated. Thank you very much.

ED: You're welcome.

[End Transcript: 18:41]