

Interviewee: Annie Lee Thorpe

Interviewer: Monet Murphy

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Abstract:

Mrs. Annie Lee Thorpe was the seventh of eight children, born in 1923 in Mayport, Florida. Mrs. Thorpe recalls that her family structure changed when she was 12, after the death of her mother. She then moved to Savannah to live with her older sister; however, she was unable to complete her primary education due to her sister's illness. Soon after, Mrs. Thorpe married James Joseph "Joe" Thorpe, one of the few African American shrimp boat captains in Savannah. They began their family in 1953 and had four children. Throughout her career, Mrs. Thorpe cleaned houses, shrimp, and crabs until she retired at the age of 62. After her husband's passing in 1991, Mrs. Thorpe—better known as "Auntie"—continued to be active in her community and church until her passing in 2018.

Mrs. Thorpe recalls that before her husband began working for the two major shrimp factories in Savannah, owned by Joe Ceasroni and Charlie Deshocka, he worked for his cousin Joe Washington. Mrs. Thorpe recalls her first job at the Louis Ambos shrimp factory and the long hours and low pay that she experienced "heading" shrimp and picking crabs. Mrs. Thorpe proudly talks about her travels to Germany and Japan, to celebrate her sons' military achievements. She also recalls the celebrations back at home, where she "always kept a houseful" of neighbors and family. The streets of Thunderbolt, Georgia are now paved with bricks that memorialize Mrs. Thorpe's husband and other family members, who all made historical contributions to the shrimping and crabbing industries.



*African American Fishermen
Oral History Project*

Monet Murphy

Good morning, my name is Monet Murphy and this morning, I'm sitting here with the splendid Mrs. Thorpe. Miss Thorpe and I will be discussing African American history in coastal Georgia. How her family became involved and influenced by this changing lifestyle and her perception on today's African American fishermen. So, let's begin. Can you start by telling us your full name?

Annie Lee Thorpe

My name is Annie Lee Allen Thorpe.

MM

So how are you acquainted with fishing Mrs. Thorpe?

ALT

Well, when I came to Savannah in '37; I came to go to school. After I got here, well I worked for a little while, then after that, in '38 I decided I was going to get me a husband. So, during that time, he was in Florida, fishing and I was here. So, the season in the wintertime, they would go down to St. Augustine in the summertime and they come back home. So, he came back and when he got back—well I don't know exactly what time he got back—around May I think it was. In '38, October 17th we were married. From that, but later on down the line he was fishing, they would get up in the morning time around three and four o'clock, just whenever the time was (inaudible) to go. And they would go and stay sometime for two and three days. And they would come back in and unload—he was fishing for Joe Ceasroni (inaudible). And they would come back and unload and they would stay home by the day and they would go back out again. And they would whatever, how the shrimp run if it was running plentiful, they'd come right back in; if not they stay out a day or two. And that went on for years. And in '55 he was going to Key West they'd found the pink shrimp. So, the company would go down there in the wintertime and you know they'd come back home in the summer. And they would do that catch down there the same way, but they would go and stay for weeks. And they were down there at least about two two weeks. And they would do the same thing down there that they did right here. So, he came back in '55, I decided I was going with him as a vacation.

So, I went on down there and my first child was born—I got pregnant with my first child in '56. Then I came back home and after I started raising children I didn't go back. So, after that he fished same way right off over and over. He was running a boat before he started running the boat though he was fishing with his cousins, Joe Washington. And then after that he started fishing I think with his brother for a while because his brother used to drive the truck. They would take the shrimp from here to New York or wherever they had to carry it. And then after his brother start driving the truck then he was a captain, my husband.

MM

What was your husband's name?

ALT

James Joseph Thorpe. (inaudible) And after that then the next one came along and '58, born. So, I had two to stay home with.

MM

So, you had two boys?

ALT

At that time. So, he went on back when the season was over here they would go back down there to fish. And when the season was up down there they'd come back home. He fished around here long time and I used to head the shrimp as they bring them in. They had the factor down in Thunderbolt, on River front, I think that's what they called it. He fished for, it's like I say, he have fish for Mike Ceasroni and he has fished for...

MM

You said Joe Ceasroni and Mike Ceasroni?

ALT

Yeah, they was brothers. And then he fished for another man. I can't think of his name. Charlie Desaocka! And he fished for him until he retired. And just before he retired, I had another son—that was four that was in '63. And after he came along and then we moved from where we were staying, right here. Well, we was building that house before the baby come along, but we didn't move—we moved before the baby came out (inaudible). We moved here in '59. Then in '63 the last son came along. Then after that, we just settled down. I was working he was retired. I was heading shrimp and picking crabs and and after I stopped doing that I started doing housework and I worked, you know, from one place to another no special place. One or two days here and one or two days there. And I did that for years. And then as I got older when I think I retired round, I think I was 62, when I retired. Because I wanted to get my Social Security (laughing). He was getting his and I wanted to mine and I thought—somebody told me said 62 I could get it. Well, I went down and they told me no ma'am, 65! But anyway, I didn't get it then. And then after that I just started working over on Skidaway Island. A lady named Claire Warrick and I worked there until I got where I couldn't work, I got down with my back. So that's when I retired. So, him and I were together until 1991, when he passed. And I've been here ever since. So, I have three boys, three daughters-in-law, 10 grandchildren, and one great grand on the way and two grandson-in laws. Lot of nieces, nephews, and cousins and well to the whole community I'm they antie (inaudible). I just love children.

MM

So, you were telling me about your husband. He fished for shrimp, did he fish or anything else or was it mainly shrimp?

ALT

Oh no. Whatever got into net like crab would get in there. They would sell the shrimp and fish most. The crab sometime they would sell ‘em, but mostly they would bring ‘em home to different people who wanted ‘em.

MM

Okay, so you shared them with the community?

ALT

Oh, anybody all the boats used to come in down there to the dock. Whatever they brought in—what they didn't want know they would put it on the dock because we used to head shrimp, not me only now, just a group of people. I think he had about two table; about two tables, about 20 people would be at each table.

MM

Now did you sell ‘em? How much did you sell ‘em for?

ALT

The shrimp, when we head ‘em?

MM

Yeah!

ALT

Oh yeah! When I first started heading shrimp down there for Louis Ambos. I think they had those big old five-gallon bucket, bout that big. We were hardly getting 15 cent a bucket.

MM

Oh wow.

ALT

Then finally went up to 20, then after that I stopped heading down there. And I started picking crabs and I picked crabs in between, but I started heading shrimp at the dock where my husband was. They were payng 25 cent a bucket. And then they went up 35 cent a bucket, but they were smaller buckets.

MM

Okay. So about round what time this was, 19?

ALT

What year?

MM

Yeah.

ALT

Oh Lord.

MM

(laughing) I don't mean to make you think that far back, I understand. (laughing).

ALT

I used to do that when—well, I was doing that all the time before my (inaudible). Well, it wasn't me only, all us we all get together. If they kne—whenever the boats came in and they needed us to come down there to head, we would go. We would go to work some time and come back and then go down there and head to two and three o'clock in the morning. That's when shrimp was plentiful. But as they began to kind of slacken up, we would only go. Whatever time the boats would come in. If they come in 10, 11, 12 o'clock in the day, we'd go down and all us of would get in what was coming and we'd finish up the shrimp with them. Then if another dock was down there and boat was coming in and we'd go down there too and head. So, we just had good—it was more fun going! Because, just like I say, I wasn't by myself. It was always a gang of everybody.

MM

Okay, so did your husband just fish? Did he do anything else?

ALT

No, no, no. That's all he did.

MM

Life was fishing, alright.

ALT

That was in his blood, fishing.

MM

So, did his father teach him? Did he learn it or was it just came to him?

ALT

I don't know. Because when I come here, just like I say, he was fishing. He was down in Florida. So, his parents was here, but his parents were more of a famer. He didn't do no fishing, not his father and his mother she just did work around the house.

MM

Yeah. How about you? I know, you sound like you have a talent for shrimp (laughing). Did your mother or father teach you or you just learned it?

ALT

Noooooo. When I was, when I was at home—I was born in Mayport, Florida. And my mother and father, I was the seventh child out of eight. And so I didn't really have to do nothing, but rake the yard or sweep the porch. Because I had all the sisters than me and one brother was older than me. The others had passed (inaudible) and my other three sisters were older than me. They would always, you know, do the work. So, me and my brother, which was under me—Allen—we didn't have all that to do until my mother passed in '35. I was going on 12 and who's going on 10. And my sister after my mother's death, my sister she left and she went to Beaufort. Her husband was a reverend. And after she left there, they came back here for the season. So...

MM

So they used to fish too?

ALT

Yes, everybody was fishing.

MM

Everybody was fishing. (laughing)

ALT

Then after that, I just thought I finished school down in Mayport, didn't go no further than sixth grade down there. And I was going to Stanton High in Jacksonville, but after nobody else wasn't going but me at that time. Because I was the only one to graduate from class (laughing). So, I decided I didn't want to—they wanted me to go back to the sixth grade again and I wouldn't. Because the teacher who was teaching, sixth grade, I went back to it, but she was teaching seventh grade along with the sixth grade. Her niece, you know, had finished the seventh-grade books. So, I was using those. So, then I decided I wanted to come here to go to school and come and stay with my oldest sister. So, that's how I got here. So, when I came here they wanted me to go to Powell, used to be Powell Laboratory, at the college.

MM

Yes! It's still there.

ALT

Alright. I went there. I guess for about a month. They wanted me to go back through the sixth grade too and I told 'em no three times.

MM

Once was enough.

ALT

So, then my sister took me from there. And she sent me to the Catholic school over here on East Broad Street. And I went there until I was in the eighth grade then. Because I was in the seventh, as far as the teachers was concerned and then after I went there they put me right along in the eighth grade. But I didn't finish; I went there for a while. And then after that my sister got sick and I had to take care of her. Start working to help her. And when she got well, 'bout two months I (inaudible). So that's when met Mr. Thorpe, that's when I came to be Mrs. Thorpe. But um, anyhow my sister she was here ever since—she left home in '35, just like I say, because my mother died January 23, 1935. And she left and then my sister I was next to, the middle sister that was next to her, she stayed. Before I came here though, I used to take care of my brother. This mean my brother, and my father had to work to take care of us. So, I had to do all the cleaning, the cooking, the washing, the ironing whatever until I left to come here in '37. I left him down there. So, by the time I got here good, my sister had done sent me to school and I got out. So, when I got married to my husband, he came up—my brother came up to see us. One brother had already been up here a long time ago, but he died in '42. And then on this one, which was Allen, Freddy Allen. You heard me talking about him. He came up and he started—he came up on a visit. So, when he got up here, the sister that I was next to her and her husband had come up here and he was running the boat. So, he brought the boat up here and they was fishing out of Thunderbolt.

MM

Okay, so they fished out of their own boat? They didn't...

ALT

It wasn't his boat. He was running the boat for some...(part 1 ends; part 2 begins) (inaudible) ...decorate for the best and you get a prize and it was just it was just nice, but now I don't hardly go down to Thunderbolt. They got a memorial thing down there; I don't know if you've seen this thing.

MM

Yeah, I've walked past it.

ALT

Well, they got a brick that most everybody's name on it and I bought one from my husband, my brother named down there and his son. His son is not dead, but his son name down there. I think I think all the fisherman's got one of those bricks put down and did the memorial for the fisherman.

MM

So, most of the back in that time it was just all African Americans fishing up and down?

ALT

Fish, fish, fish.

MM

So, let me ask you, what was your favorite fish or were you just shrimp?

ALT

My favorite fish to eat?

MM

Yeah!

ALT

Whitings and spot.

MM

Where those plentiful?

ALT

Oh yes! You could get 'em—my husband used to get. See that freezer in there? When my husband was getting get ready to go to Florida for the winter that box would be stack up to the top with seafood. Fish, shrimp, crab, and oysters. I used to cook the crabs and pick the meat and put in the freezer. And I'd have to walk around with the key in my pocket because they would come in and help they self (inaudible). That's what we bought and live off because chicken and pork chop and steak and all like that. When they got that that was something big. We all ate fish and seafood every day, at least every day. Because if I didn't have fish in the morning and grits, I'll have crab or either oysters stew. Then in the daytime, you know, later on I'll make deviled crab. I tell you though, the gang would always come here. I always kept a houseful. They call me

right now. That's why I got so much from nieces and nephews and cousins. People don't know my regular family because they think everybody calls me Auntie. "She's your auntie?" "Yeah that's my auntie." "I didn't know that!" The neighborhood ask me, "Is so and so your nephew?" Yes! "Your niece?" Yes! "Well how ya'll get to be that?" I say now look, the Thorpe's, the Redman's, the Harris', and the Jones' those are the real families and Thunderbolt is mostly Thorpe's. You might find them somewhere anywhere. Not too much Redmond's, but Thorpe's from Harris Neck. You know where that it is? Down by Darien, Georgia. Brunswick all down there you might find the families. And there's a place they call Townsend out of out of Darien. And that was my husband mother's family. Harris Nick was right cross the highway, see. That was his daddy's home and they family. That's where all the Thorpe's.

See now my family—my dad was originally from North Carolina and my mother was from (inaudible). My mother was from Athens, Georgia. That was her home, but I never been to her home. I used to go to my daddy, but I didn't go exactly to his home I went to the town, like Savannah. They was out like from Thunderbolt from Savannah. I didn't get a chance to go there, but they had all moved up to the city—Wilmington, North Carolina. That's where most of my family at, on my daddy's side.

MM

Okay, so did your father, you said he was a farmer. Did he fish?

ALT

Oh, my father did some of everything. He was a chef cook on the beach at Atlantic Beach, Florida. But in the summertime, he would cook in his restaurant and winter they would close the restaurant and him and the man who owned it, they would go shad fishing.

MM

Where was that?

ALT

That was in Florida.

MM

Okay, what was shad fishing, I guess?

ALT

Oh, that's fish! That was the name of the fish, shad. And they would go and put these nets. They didn't have a boat. They would just go out in the ocean.

MM

And just stand out there?

ALT

No, they would go out in the ocean and put the nets out and then they would let the nets stay out about a day or two. And then they would go and pick ‘em up and the fish would be in there.

MM

Oh wow.

ALT

And the ones that the shark kind of cut—all the whole ones they'd tak to market and all the other ones would come to us. We used to go down there to the beach and watch them sometime pulling the nets in and whatever. I was just seafood family all around. And my daddy used to cook and we would be up at night when everybody was home. He'd be down there to open up for everybody, nine o'clock in the morning and closed 10 at night. And he had to be the one to cook and he could cook! And every night he's gonna bring this box home for us, the French fries, fish, chicken, and shrimp hot rolls. And all children around in our community down there, they would be to our house waiting on him to come. We would be there playing cards; he didn't allow us to play card but we would sneak and play (laughing). When we know it was getting on time for him to come home, we would do away with the cards. When we'd hear that truck come up here if we'd be playing cards, you ought to see the scrambling to get those cards (laughing). One time he come and caught us playing cards and just as I was—me, I always used to tell ‘em. I say, “Here come daddy y'all”. They'd jumped up and throw the cards in the stove. We had one of those wooden stoves, you know. I often (inaudible), but there wasn't no fire it. So, when he come in and saw all us around the table, he know something was wrong. He say, “Where's the cards?” We say, “Daddy, we wasn't playing cards!” “Why all ya'll around a table?” Waiting on you to come with the food!” (laughing) He put the box on the table and everybody start to eating, he went right to the stove (laughing). That was fun! But after that, he let us play as long as we weren't playing for money.

MM

Just for fun?

ALT

Fun, he let us play. He was strict now. He was a Methodist. He has a strict (inaudible). And I think that's what they call them (inaudible).

MM

How about your mother? What did she do?

ALT

Well, my mother was a house lady. She had all of us to—well, when I born when I could remember there was six of us, but it's eight all together. I don't know about those other two, but she was the mother of eight. So, it was six of us. And so she had to take care of us getting us to school and cooking and keeping us clean and. And she would take in laundry they used to do laundry at the house and she would different people you know would bring in laundry and she would do that. Washing and ironing; we'd go and carrying people clothes. Get the money for the clothes and then they'd give us a chip, you know. And we'd will stop by the store and get us Mr. Goodbar was the first candy and start coming and Pepsi Cola. Boy that was our dish! You'd go and carry the clothes to people and they'd give us enough money to stop to the store to get us a big old Mr. Goodbar during that time. You'd get back home mother say, "Did Mrs. Colman, no, what did Mrs. Colman say?" We'd say, "She looked at the clothes and she say they looked good!" "Here's your money." "What did she give ya'll?" "Nothing!" (laughing) She say, "She didn't give—she had a stroke—she didn't give ya'll nothing?" I say, "Mother, she gave us—I know we was going to get a beating—mother, she gave us a Pepsi Cola and a Mr. Goodbar!" Boy, I was the devil! (laughing) "Imma tell!" But when—sometimes we'd be there and wouldn't know tell on one another, you know, if we do something. She'd say, "Now, who did so and so?" Everybody would look at one another. But we know we gonna get it. So, they look at me because they know Imma be the first one to squeal. I say, "Mother, we did it!" "Get my switch!" She had one of these paddles, like the, you remember the ball that used to bounce? She had one of those things. Man! She put us cross her lap, pull our pants down and work on our butts. I always be the last. I know I'm gonna get it, but I'd be the last. I'd be running. When she would come at me, I would run out the door and get to the porch. I'll always remember this; I'd make two stomps and I'd look back (smacking sound) and off the porch I'd go! She sent my sister, she said, "You go this way, and I'm going this way." She'd come behind me and when I'd get behind the house, my sister stand there with her arms open. And when I run into her arms, I just start screaming (laughing). She say, "Now you're gonna get two beatings. One for running and one for telling a lie." Man, but it didn't bother me. That was that was some good old days.

MM

How about your children, did any of them go into fishing?

ALT

No! They didn't like fishing, but my oldest son, he went into the Navy—no he went into the, we he got out of Johnson he went into the Airforce. He got out of school, like this week, the next week, he was coming for me to sign for him to go into the Airforce. I say, "When did all this happen?" "Mama, all my classmates had signed up and you got to." I say, "Well I can't let you go, your Daddy got to sign it." "Mama, he don't have to sign it!" I say, "Your daddy got to sign it!" "Mama!" I say, "Ok, Imma sign." So, I signed and they sent him to Jackson. That weekend when I look who coming back home. I say, "What happened?" "Daddy got to sign too." I say, "I

told you." Happened so that his daddy came up from Key West on a trip and he signed. That Monday morning, I had to take him down to wherever they had to go. And had him down to the bus station at a certain time. Other crews already in Jacksonville. So, he went long with the other schools that was going, they all went together. So, from there, I think the first place they sent him was Lakeland Air Force. That's where he took his training at. Then he was in the Air Force for four years; he came out. Then he decide he was going back in; he didn't like it after he got out. So, he got out in October. He wants to go back before October. So, they told him say that he only way he could go back in, would have been the same month like you know he did the first time. He couldn't wait. He went up there on Wheaton Street and joined the Navy. So, he left and went to the Navy and he made 24 years. That's him right there (points to picture). He retired out there in Texas.

And then the other one, the one over there on this side. He was the first one in the service because he went to, he was in the Army. No! Richard was in there first, but he graduated from Johnson too. So, he went—he was an ROTC. So, then he left from there and he went to Tuskegee to (inaudible) college that's where he finished college. So, he left from Tuskegee; they sent him to Kansas. And he came home once or twice; when they got ready to send him to Germany that's when he came home. So, when he left there he went on over to a place they call Flensburg, right out of Hamburg and then Flensburg that's where he was stationed. So, one year he—I think he was only about three years, but anyway the parents they had something over there and they wanted the parents who could come to come over. So, he sent me and his father. Daddy say, "I'm not flying, if the Lord wanted me to have wings He would have give 'em to me. (laughing) "I'm not going on no airplanes!" So, the same girl right there now (pointing to picture), was his girlfriend. So, I told him what his daddy's say. He say, "Well mama ask Carmen do she wanna come?" When spring break—she would come here like I was her mama. So, she was going to leave without telling her parents (sound made for no). You get permission from your parents before you can go or not. So, she did and her and I went together. So, we left from here and went to Atlanta and from Atlanta, we went to Frankfurt, from Frankfurt, Hamburg and from Hamburg to Flensburg. So, I stayed over there—it was in November, December, coming up to Christmas. I stayed over there with him a week. The oldest one was coming home from a trip—it was the first time seeing him after he went, you know back. So, they wanted me to stay another week. I say, "No, I gotta go see the other one, now I done been over here a week with you I got to see him before he go back. So anyway, I came on back and I left her over there. After Christmas, she came when she time for her to go back to school. So, when I—his four years was up, he done come home and she was pregnant (laughing)! And so they had to get married before they—in fact he wanted to get married before he went back. Then she but before that she she went and joined the Marines at Parris Island. And she was getting ready to go wherever they was gonna send her. And he made a trip home and that's must be when she got pregnant. And he wasn't gone have that. (laughing) So he say, " I'm getting ready to come home and you're getting ready to go into the service!" (sound made for no)

So, anyway that's how that came up and they got married. And then he got married after he—no he hadn't retired, but he got married to the wife. He's standing up there now. She was from right here. He came home on a furlough; during the time I think and he was (inaudible) for a period of time, (inaudible) from sending him overseas. He got married and carried her with him. So, they stayed in Japan a long time and he left from there. I don't know where all he went. He done been everywhere. So, then they gave—when his first son was born, he gave me a trip over there. This the first (pointing to picture). He gave me a trip to Texas to see the baby. So then when he got ready to retire, I went back over there. I mean, I went back. I stayed a week with him. For his first day and his retirement. So, I gave him a birthday party. No! It was Thanksgiving. It was Thanksgiving and then his birthday. Because his birthday was on the 25th of November. And I think Thanksgiving fell on his birthday. I just give him a good time. And oh my Lord! Where they were staying out on the base. So many retired um Navy men, was living around him and all them was just like this. They thought wasn't nobody but him and when I cooked the dinner that day, we set the table and put all the food on a table. He done went and tell everybody. "My mama here and she cooking up some food, y'all come on over and eat." Some of the people who lived next door come in and say, "In here smell like Thanksgiving!" "Yeah, man, my mom!" I had all the pies laid out—banana pudding. And we had brought him a cake for his birthday, but he didn't know. And I cooked them a pot of greens, cornbread, baked chicken, tater salad, red rice and we had plenty drinks.

MM

You sound like you were a good cook!

ALT

I don't know about the good, but they always put me in the kitchen!

MM

I might be back over here sometime!

ALT

Yeah you welcome! They always put me in kitchen.

MM

So now do you do any fishing?

ALT

No! I don't do nothing now, but just run the streets. Whenever they catch—whoever catch me and ask me take them somewhere I'll do that, but other than that. They don't want me to work and I don't to work because I'm 87 years old now.

MM

I understand. A beautiful 87!

ALT

I'm not fixing to work; you not cuttin' off my check, my pension. Yeah, I turned 37 (means 87) Sunday.

MM

Oh wow. Still lovely.

ALT

That's what everybody tell me. They don't believe it; I say just count it I was born in '23 that's all I can tell y'all. I hope you can go from that.

MM

You got a better memory than I do.

ALT

That's what my children tell me. "Mama, how you can remember all those things from way back then, and can hardly remember something right here?" I say, "Because ya'll get on my nerves, that's why." The one that got the youngest, that's him right there with his daughter with the little bow on. He got that one girl and four boys. The one in the Navy, he got two boys. That one over there, he got two girls and a boy. So that makes it ten. And she, the little one, I mean the baby now she's the oldest when she'd grown now and she fixing to have one. So that's the family.

MM

Big family. You're very blessed.

ALT

Oh yes! I have a big family. I got them all in Florida still. I got two sisters, half-sisters, but they my sisters my daddy was married again. They down in—they got children oh Lord don't ask me how many. One sister, she died about two years ago now. She was my stepsister and she had 15 children.

MM

Oh wow!

ALT

And when I went to see her just before while she was sick just before she knows she passed. I say, "Bell, her name was Isabelle, but we call her Bell; I say, Bell how many grandchildren you

got?" She say, "Let me see, the last time I counted I had 59." I say, "Oh Lord, no!" I say, "Well, how many great grand?" "I don't know, I think I had round got round bout 24." I said, "Child hush!" Y'all just have all the children y'all want down there. Yes sir. And the other one, I done forgot how many she had, but she didn't have no 15. And the other one, I don't know how many she had, but they all got grands and great grands. And the one that had the 15, All the children was living! I think they still living, cause I—they was up here to see me just before Christmas, one of them. And I ask was all of them still living and they said as far as they know they all still living.

MM

Oh wow!

ALT

I say, "Well y'all just keep all that big family down there. And they on my back about coming down there to stay. Those three, well that one he right over in Parker right behind Savannah State. I see him all the time. Those two there, they arguing about who Imma come see next. I say well—and then he here too talk about, "Well she can't go and leave us like that!" I say, "Well I'm not but one person." I don't know what part y'all want, just go ahead cut me up! (laughing)

MM

Everybody gets a part. (laughing)

ALT

So anyway, we have fun when we all gets together we have a good time. And Saturday we did, they really gave me a surprise party. I was—they sent a limo to pick me up.

MM

Oh, wow!

ALT

And you know I almost fainted. Because I was looking for that. My niece over there, and she is my niece. Her and one of my church members told me to come home and change my clothes because we'd been to a meeting. And I had on, you know, something like this. So, they told me to come home and get out of the heat, stay in the house. I say, "I'm not gonna stay in no house all day; y'all know I don't stay in no house all day!" "Yes, but it's too hot out here and you need to stay before you fall out." I say, "You don't tell me what to do, you stay in the house, you go in there and stay." So, when I put them out, the last thing they say, "You go home now and get out of this heat." I say, "Yes ma'am!" So, when I got right there coming in—I know you came from Cheryl didn't you? Well right there, my niece, she met—I met her and I gave her some mail. So, she's supposed to be going to pick up the church member, the one that told me to come home.

They was going out to do something, that's what the church member told me. "Charlene got to go and do something and I see you tomorrow." I say, "OK." So, I met her going out. So about 30 minutes after I got in here good the phone ring. "Hello, Mrs. Annie Lee?" I say, "Yeah." "You got on your clothes?" I say, "Didn't I have on clothes when I was to church?" "Yeah, but I mean do you have on a dress?" "No!" "Will you go put on a dress?" I said, "For what?" "Charlene and Jane gone come and take you to dinner." I say, "I can go like this." She say, "Oh no, you don't want to go with no pants on, put on a dress" I say, "Ok, so I run in the room and put on a dress and I say now it's hot, but where they going might be kind of cool." So, I put that on and I didn't like that; I went back in a dress I hadn't wore in a long time and it had thin sleeves. So, I come on back and put it on and got dressed in the room there. Fixing my face and everything. So, I put on white shoes and I say now that's too much white. So, I put on the blue shoes and I say let me hurry up and get out of here because I don't want them waiting on me. Because I don't like to wait on nobody either.

So, when I come across the room in here, to cut the TV off; I cut the tv off and I saw this white thing backing up in front of the window. I say, "Oh no!" I thought them two had went and got take me in the limo. I say, "No, no, don't tell me these children doing this!" So, finally the screen door open; I was going to the window—my son bust in the door. "Happy birthday mama!" No! "Mama I love you!" I say, "I love you too!" Hugging me. "Mama!" I say, "What?" "Come on!" I say, "Where we going?" "I come to take you to dinner!" I say, "Oh, let me get my pocket book." "You don't need no pocket book." I say, "Let me my keys." "You don't need no keys, you know how get back in your house; come on now, we got to go!" So, I goes on out there; he go on and got in the car. I'm taking my time, when I got out there the man opened the door for me. When I look up in the corner, my niece from across the road she sitting in the corner. I say, "You too!" She say, "Yes ma'am, we going out to dinner with you." I say, "Oh, I tell you what!" She say, "What?" "Have you ever rode in a limo before? She say, "No!" I say, "Me either, but I'm riding in style today!" (laughing) The music playing; she in one corner and I'm in the other. We just talking, they up in the front. The bar with all the glasses and everything. Seats on the side, dim lights, all of it was just cozy just like bar. So, we went on up Victory Drive and we got to Abercrombie, he made a turn on Abercrombie. And I say to myself, I say, "Oh we must be going out on 17 to this seafood place, where they took me for one Mother's Day." So, we went on a detour and come back into the Bowls Street. So, then he took Bowls Street on out to Eisenhower. I say, "We must be going to Bonds." I didn't say nothing to nobody, but just thinking we must be going to barns. So, we got on Eisenhower, the man made a left turn. I look up and see this Japanese place, a place I ain't never been before. So, we he pulled up in the yard, I was looking for the other niece who was supposed to take me out. I looked for her car and I didn't see it. So, then I look again and I saw another niece, grandniece; she got out the car and her mama got out, her daddy got out. They making it in the building. (phone rings and interview is paused)

So, anyway I was the last one. He came around, he got her out she went on in. So, he didn't come around to get me, he say, "Can you slide over?" I say, "Yeah, I guess they want to prolog the time." So, I got out and I went on, I was the last one to go in, nobody else but me. When I got in the door, it was kind of dark in there see. "Surprise, Happy Birthday Granny!" When I look, all these, so the one from North Carolina, I hadn't seen her in a year, she run track for Appalachian University; she graduated this year. So, when I saw her, I didn't say nothing and I looked to my left there was the other one and her husband. Then I look around and saw him, the daddy, then everybody else started coming. I couldn't do anything, but stand up there and cry. The one with the little girl right there now, she married too now. She married in March gone. She run up to me, she always call me mama cause she mostly raised right here. "Hey mama, happy birthday!" I say, "You too!" Then her husband—I say, "I'm mad with all of y'all!" "Don't be mad! I say, "I don't mean mad mad, but ya'll know and wouldn't tell me." "Well, it wouldn't have been a surprise if we'd a told you!?" I say, "Well, I guess not." So, anyway we all got seated and then they cooking the food you know right in front of those. I'm sitting there and I say, "Lord, if this happen to be (inaudible). So, when they got through everybody's singing happy birthday and everybody got to come around and bring card and see they little piece. And we stayed there till about, I guess about 5:00, 5:30. So when we come out he say, "Mama?" I say, "What?" "You going back with Ronny and them, because you ain't riding back in no limo now!" (laughing) I say, "I don't care, long as I get back home." So anyway, Ronny, that's the one right over there. His name is Tyrone, but we call him Ronny. And that one in the middle name, his name is James Jr.; I call him Butchy. And one right there with the daughter, his name is Reginald; I call him Reggie. So that's the history.

MM

Thank you so much for sharing all of this good stuff.

ALT

All right. Everybody say I can really talk.

MM

I loved it! I love it.

ALT

I get started.

-----END OF INTERVIEW-----

Reviewed by Michelle Duncan 11/5/2022

Reviewed by Molly Graham