Michael Kline: How are you today, Ms. Eva?

Eva Braxton: All right. Fine. Thank you.

MK: Good.

EB: I'm doing okay.

MK: Let us see. What day is it? It is…

Joyce Xennia Long: She doesn't really know.

MK: December 9.

JXL: What day is it? [laughter]

MK: December 9.

EB: I can't keep up with the dates in the week. I forget those. But what is the date?

MK: It is December 9.

EB: 9th?

MK: Today is is it a Tuesday? I do not know myself. [laughter]

EB: Tuesday, the 9th.

MK: I do not know how many shopping days there are left before Christmas either. [laughter]

But why don't we start? Can you say, "My name is," and tell us your full name.

EB: My name is Eva Elizabeth Braxton. Is that what you mean?

MK: Yes. Say it again like you are really proud of that name.

JXL: Louder.

EB: Eva Elizabeth Braxton.

MK: Okay. [laughter]

We never ask people how old they are, but could you tell us your date of birth so we can put things in perspective here?

EB: October 12, 1902.

MK: Oh, my word. Let us see. How does that – that ads up…

JXL: She's 101.

MK: 101 years old. You are? My name is…

JXL: My name is Joyce Xennia Long.

MK: Your relationship to her?

JXL: I am Mrs. Braxton's daughter.

MK: You are going to be helping her a little bit.

JXL: That's right.

MK: Can you start off by – tell us a little bit about your people and where you were raised?

EB: I was raised in Middlesex County, Virginia, Syringa Post Office. I had a father who was very kind and good.

MK: His name?

EB: Was Henry Scott. Henry. My mother's name was Blanche Scott. I had a stepmother who was called Sally Scott. We all lived together there at Syringa with our post office.

MK: Can you describe the place, the house, and the place you grew up? Paint a picture of it so we can just picture it.

EB: It was a two-storey house with a little bay front on the upper part of the house. In the back, we had a kitchen. The dining room was built after the house. Then between those two houses, it was a little porch that you had to come across to get from one house to the other. Well, I can picture it so much in my mind, but…

MK: Tell us what you see in your mind.

EB: Oh, well, I see the home and I see the outside of the home and around in the yards and different races. We had little buildings. My father had what they call a barn for keeping hay for the horses. Then we had a little place on the back of the house, what we would call a dairy. That was the place where we would have to store our milk and fruit after they were canned. Then in the barn, we had what we call a wood house, they would have, and then a little house for the chickens. Oh, I'd go around the whole place some nights here by myself. [laughter] But the house itself was just a two-storey house with four bedrooms and a porch in the back.

MK: Did your mama keep a parlor?

EB: Keep a what?

MK: A parlor?

EB: Well, that was in the house. That was called, yes, the parlor. That was downstairs toward the right. Then we had one bedroom downstairs and a long hall that reached from the front of the house – from the front door to the back door.

MK: So, you would get a pretty good breeze through there, did you?

EB: Oh, yes. It was a lovely breeze. Then upstairs, we had two bedrooms. Well, it was two and a little small one on that bay window. Where that bay window was, there was a little room there. I don't know. That's about all.

MK: Brothers and sisters?

EB: Oh, I had four brothers and I have one sister living and one has passed. Yes. That was what I had. Two sisters, myself made three, and then my four brothers.

MK: Can you name them all?

EB: Yes. Christopher Allen, Clinton Thomas, and Walter Edward, John Ruben. All were scouts. [laughter] Those were all in the family that I had. I had a grandfather who was named Walter Robinson. That was my mother's father. My stepmother was named Susan. I never did remember my real mother, but I know her name was called Blanche. But I never did know her. My sister's name is Emma Scott. The other sister is named Blanche. Well, that's my close family, other than my uncles.

MK: Did your uncles live close by?

EB: This place, where I am now, was once owned by my uncle. They lived just right across the field. But then after he died, the one that built the home, he moved away. But one of my first cousins built their home. I had an aunt who lived right across the field and I had a cousin. She lives across the field now in a little trailer house. She was here yesterday.

MK: Now, when you were a child growing up in this two-storey house with the dairy out back and…

EB: It had a woodhouse.

MK: It had a woodhouse.

EB: A barn [laughter] and all…

MK: Did the family work together on the farm? Can you describe what the family did together

on the farm?

EB: Yes. He raised different products where he would have to, in order to raise extra money. We would have to get out and work in the fields until it's grown enough to be picked. Then after it's picked, it's fixed together and was shipped away on the steamer. We were all old enough to work a little, we helped with all the products on the field. We had…

MK: What were you growing? What were you producing?

EB: Corn, potatoes, tomatoes, strawberries. Did I name potatoes? Yes. Potatoes, corn, strawberries, wheat, and different other vegetables like beans and garden food, and onions and cabbage and kale. All that was raised on the farm. Anything else on the farm that we had had to be done by us and by their horses helping to do the work.

MK: Was that your father's team of horses?

EB: Yes.

MK: What were the names of the horses? Do you remember?

EB: One named Sadie and the other one named Betsy. We didn't have a large team. We only had just two at a time in order to – just enough to work our farm that we had. We didn't have an extra-large farm, but the place was, including the wood line and all that, was much larger. But this was a clearing house. The house that had the land had been cleared off for farming. After we raised it, we would have to gather it in a certain time in the year, like corn. We would have to pluck that off, break that down, and put it in the barn. After that's done, we have to shuck it off and have it there for the horses and for us and sell the corn to the mill to be ground for flour and make some meal. Then we had wheat where we would have to cut that with what they call a sickle by hand. That was dried and after it was thrashed out, carried to the mill, ground for flour.

MK: Thrashed out. What does that mean?

EB: Well, they used to have a thrasher. It was built during my time, some kind of a thrasher. They would put it in and it would separate the seeds from the other part of the wheat. We call it thrashing out. That means thrash out the grain from the other part of the wheat. That was carried to the mill. When we needed flour, we would just carry that right to the mill. The man who had the grinder, he would just thrash it out down there and make flour out of the wheat. Corn made flour, I make a meal out of the corn. So, that was an old mill. It was run by water. That was a water mill.

MK: Where was that located?

EB: It was located in Middlesex, but it was down near a pond that you go across – do you know where that school up there they call Freeshade?

MK: Yes. We know where that is.

EB: Well, then you keep right down beside that road and then you turn left when you come to a pond. That pond was the water that they used to run the mill. That was where we used to go. It wasn't so far from the main highway.

MK: How far was it from your home where you grew up? How far did you have to travel to the mill?

EB: Oh, I guess we had to travel about four miles. Yes. I guess it was about four miles.

MK: How did you travel? How did you take it?

EB: Well, we used the horses because they had a wagon that they had. We would hook the horses to the wagon. They would carry it. Sometimes, if it wasn't heavy, we would just carry it ourselves. But most times, it was carried by the horse and a wagon. That was about, just as I can say, about three miles or something – three or four miles, but we made it wonderful. My father, with what we had, he had a good farm and well provider. In the wintertime, he would go oystering out in the river and bring in the oysters with a tong, bring them in with a tong from the bottom of where they grow.

MK: A tong? What is that?

EB: What?

MK: What is a tong?

EB: Tongs. Things that you put down in the water and then you clam them together like that – call yourself raking up the oysters if it was down there. Sometimes, they'd bring up about five or six oysters at a time or something like that and they were sold by the bushel. So, sometimes they would maybe catch twenty bushels or maybe less than that. Then they were sold for thirty-five cents a bushel. So, that shows you just how much we got for them. [laughter] You didn't get much out of them sometimes because you didn't catch many at a time. So, they were sold for thirty-five cents. Sometimes, you may get forty.

MK: Is this when you were a girl?

EB: What?

MK: Was this when you were a little girl?

EB: That's when I was a young girl. I was I guess about eight, nine years old. That was their way of living. They had to do any little thing they could like that to make a living because when slavery was abolished, they didn't have no money. They did have this little piece of land where they were able to get a little piece of farm. But that was taken. It was bought from someone that joined and had more than what they needed and they would sell off a piece of farm by the acre. So, papa bought a certain amount of it in order – that's how he had enough to do a little farming.

That's where he raised a lot of the stuff and was shipped to Maryland on the steamboat. They would ship strawberries and peas. I think that was the main thing they would ship.

MK: Excuse us just a minute here. Now, you mentioned the steamboat?

EB: Oh, yes.

MK: Yes. Tell us how far it was. Was there a wharf nearby where you lived?

EB: That got to be eight miles. It was down to the waterline. You had to go as far as down to the waterline on – did you know where Wake Road is? Now, I can't tell you the name of the places, but I know you had to go down a certain distance to get to the steamboat and for that water. That wasn't over here like livestock. Nothing like that. You had to go down the county to get on this steamboat that we had. It was two of them, but one of them didn't have much work as the other and they went down. That's where we would have to carry the things that we want to go to Maryland because that's where we would get the pay from it. When you send it to this company, the company would tell you how much you would get and they would send the money or check back to us. Everything was numbered, who it was and what it was for. So, then after that, I guess that was about fifteen miles from us. Fifteen miles, I guess.

MK: Did you ever go to the wharf yourself when you were a little girl? To the steamboat wharf?

EB: No. I didn't have to go work with a steamboat. We used to go down what we call a tomato and a potato factory. We would have to go down to the water, but the water was the same river, but it was down a little different direction. We'd go down there early in the morning, sometimes getting up before light to try to get down to this factory to peel tomatoes or potatoes, whatever they had. One season was for tomatoes and one season was for potatoes. We'd go down there and peel by the bucket. They had about an eighth quarter bucket and you had to peel that full. Sometimes, you make four cents.

MK: Now, say that again? [laughter]

EB: You had to peel that full of tomatoes. Then they put a little something like a check, a tin check in there, drop it in your bucket when you carried it up to the place to be packed. It's called a little check. I don't know what they call it. But anyhow, that's your money. That's what you have gotten for peeling that bucket. Well, then, at that time, it was about five cents a bucket for peeling a tomato. Well, peeling tomatoes, water, juice, and everything, you're going to take quite a little while to peel a bucket. So, then after that, we would have to carry them up to the store someplace like that. They didn't have a one little bank there then – and carry it up to the store. The storekeeper would cash them for you if you need to cash them.

MK: These little chips?

EB: Little round chips. Something like tin. You hear them falling…

Carrie Kline: [sneezing]

EB: What?

CK: Excuse me.

EB: Yes. When you get to the store, if you want to cash them there at the store, he will count them out and then you get your cash money.

MK: Did he charge you for cashing them?

EB: No. They weren't nothing for cashing them in the store. But let me see. You cash them – no. He didn't charge nothing for cash. But you always bought something in his store because they had a grocery store. You bought something there and they know they get what they want. But I don't know whether the man that gave us these chips would've had to pay something or not to get them back. I don't know about that.

MK: When you were working in the cannery, how many other women were working there with you?

EB: Over seven, eight, or more. Yes. They had a long table and they had what they call a little stand. Everybody would know their stand every day if they're there. Sometimes, it's about ten or more because there was a lot of them that went down to this factory, had to walk down there. We had to walk down there. We'd get together, a bunch of us. After you get them peeled and get your bucket full, you just holler out, "Bucket full." Well, the man that was carrying them up to the place to be packed, he would come and get your bucket. Then when they come back, you had this little round chip in there. You have to take that out in order to know how many you are making. So, then…

MK: Did the women ever sing to pass the time?

EB: No. They laughed and talked, but they never do no singing much.

MK: They did not sing.

EB: No. But then the packers, they came up to this long table up there and pulled them out on the packer and then the bucket was brought back to you with this little chip. They had women up there for packing them in the cans. If they pick out any spots that they thought wasn't so good, they were picked out and others were put in the can. That's the way it was. It had a scalder then you scald them in. It had something with a big thing with water, but it was kept hot and scalding. It had a man that would come and put them in there when they're ready to scald. He'd drop it down in that boiling water, maybe two, three minutes. Then he'd bring them out and put them on the table – had them poured on the table. Oh, it's so much about the factory that, I mean, I can hardly remember now.

JXL: How old were you then, mom?

EB: What?

JXL: How old were you when you worked in the tomato factory?

EB: Oh, I guess I was about nine years old, I guess. You start walking down to the factory to peel tomatoes and well, it was two or three more girls anyhow, walking. We'd get up and – I guess I was about eleven. Emma was about nine. So…

MK: This was all through the summer or was this during the school year?

EB: No. This was during the time when tomatoes get ripe. I don't know –

MK: So, late summer.

EB: – what time it is. Then in the fall, when the potatoes were dug – sweet potatoes. It wasn't white potatoes. They were sweet potatoes. They were the ones that you'd have to go down there in the fall for them.

JXL: This was at Mills Creek Landing, right, mom, where I like to go now?

EB: What?

JXL: That was at Mills Creek Landing that I like to go to?

EB: Yes.

JXL: Down there by the water?

EB: Yes. Down at Mills Creek Landing.

JXL: Yes.

EB: It was about two factories down there at that time and what you call Grinler. His name was G-R-I-N-L-E-R, Grinler. That was his name. He had one of the factories. He was tomato factory. Then there was another one called (B. Fleet 00:30:07?). Well, he had tomatoes and potatoes. Both of them had tomatoes and potatoes that the season come in because fall season was potatoes and the earlier season was tomatoes.

MK: So, the sweet potato harvest, you worked through all that?

EB: Yes. We went to the factory trying to – but you didn't get no more on one of them than you did the other. I think most or all of them, prices were just about the same.

MK: How much did you make in a day working in the tomato factory and potatoes? How much could you make as an eleven-year-old girl?

EB: Let's see, we would make about forty cents a day. Then we were [laughter] so glad when you get through to come past the store. We sell out what we call one check and bought something to eat. [laughter] The other checks, we would come home – sometimes, we had to give my father one or two because he needed something at the grocery store for the supply of the table at home. Things were so tight at that time. You didn't get nothing for your work. Everything was just for the white man at that time. He got it all.

JXL: How long did you work every day, mom? Eight hours?

EB: Oh, yes. Well, I'll tell you how we worked. We worked down there. Sometimes, we worked less than that because they would work sometimes by the way the tomatoes come in. Now, if the tomatoes didn't last all day, you wouldn't have to work all day because you see there wasn't nothing to stay there for. The same way with the potatoes. But the farmers that bring these tomatoes and things down, you see, maybe some days, he may have two loads. Next day he may not have a load. It all depended on how the tomatoes were ripening. Yes. Oh, it was a tough time during that time, but we were happy. Yes. It wasn't nothing for us to do but be happy. [laughter]

JXL: Right. Your dad was a slave, right, mom?

EB: What?

JXL: Your daddy was a slave?

EB: He was a what?

JXL: A slave.

EB: Yes.

JXL: Then he was freed?

EB: What?

JXL: He was freed.

MK: Tell me talk about your dad. Was he born in slavery?

EB: Oh, born in slavery. Oh, yes. He was born in slavery, but when slavery ended, he was just a little boy around about eight years old. After that, the people didn't get no money or nothing to do anything. What they had, a little piece strip of land or something like that. So, he may give them a little strip of land to go do something. That wasn't large enough for nothing at that time. He would go and live with them all the women that became out of slavery and worked there with them for a while until he got able to go out to then to try to do something better than that. Some white people that had something, they would take him. After they took him, well, he just was

still in slavery. That's all. He had to do what they say to do. Sometimes, they would beat on him if things wasn't right. Because papa say they mistreated him a lot at these places, but what could he do? He couldn't do nothing and nobody had nothing. One lady took him in and was very fond of him and everything, but she passed. After she passed, well, he was left, in a way, alone. But he finally survived and by surviving, a neighbor had quite a bit of land, and he bought enough to build a house. Well, no. The first one he got was down in – going toward Lancaster over there on that end. After he went there, the white people were just so mean and nasty, they burned him out. So, when they burned him out, he had to get this little piece of land I was telling you where we were raised on. After that, it was a struggle. I know and I can realize now, more than I did then, how much struggle he had to go through in order to get as far as he did. But he raised all his children on that little strip of land – that amount of land that he had and different ones doing things for because he had enough land there for the boys to help around on the farm.

JXL: Tell him about this house, mom. How did you get to this house?

EB: What?

JXL: How did you get this house?

MK: She told us about this came from her uncle?

JXL: That was chased away?

EB: Oh, the place that we got now?

JXL: Yes.

EB: That was my uncle's place. Also, the place that Carlton had, that was his…

JXL: Yes. But what happened to the man who built this house?

EB: Oh, I don't know. Something happened that he – anyhow, he had to leave here. The white folks got behind him about something, something he said, or…

JXL: While he was in the middle of building it, right?

EB: Yes. So, he didn't quite finish building it. So, Mac and I, we finished building it as far as it was gone.

JXL: He was chased away because he said something? The man that was building the house, he was chased away because he said something?

EB: Oh, yes. See, because he said something to the white man and the white man didn't like it. Of course, back there that time, you weren't supposed to say no more and so much to him. So, he [laughter] ran away because if he hadn't, they most likely would've killed him.

JXL: Was that the Ku Klux Klan, mom, back in the day or just people? Was it the Ku Klux Klan that was going to kill him?

EB: No. I don't know why they call them, but anyhow, it was considered that they just didn't take nothing from colored people that they didn't want here. They would get rid of them. Now, one boy – I don't know, but one fellow, a white girl got so thick with him and everything, they killed him and things like that. But so much of my life, I guess I could [laughter] make something out of it better what it is remembering, but I can remember your name. Since I've been here doing nothing and sitting around, I have gone to my birthplace place and been all around the whole farm, thinking about where everything was and where would this, where that wasn't, what that was called, and the railings, and all around the yard, and all those things, and how we used to play out in the yard. My stepmother used to get out there and help us, play with us after my father got married a second time. So, much has come back to me of what it was.

JXL: How about school? How did you become a teacher at the school? Tell them what school you were at.

EB: The first school that I can remember was up there right on the side where my sister Emma lived. Now, that used to be a school –

JXL: Freeshade.

EB: – right on that end. Yes. It used to be what they call primary schools, I guess. Yes, primary school. After that, the…

MK: Well, tell us about that school. Is that where you started out?

EB: That primary school?

MK: Yes. Tell us about a day at that school. What was it like to go there as a little kid?

EB: Well, everybody that went to school anywhere near would go to that school. They didn't have any new facilities or anything. You had to be outside or go back in the woods from the school to do what you had to do. It didn't even have a thing for the bathroom out at that time. Then different children would come from quite a distance. But they used to have a lot of the little primary schools up and down the highway. But this one was just nothing but benches and the teacher, a little teacher stand where she would stand up in front of them in time to bring them in. There was one room, just one room. Then outside, they had a place where the children could throw balls and things like that. That wasn't too far from the road – couldn't do much throwing because the schoolhouse was built near the road. It had one teacher and she had to teach the whole school of the children coming in. So many of them, I guess, some in one class and some in another. I don't know how it was.

MK: Do you remember her name?

EB: One was Julia. Julia Jackson. Oh, Jesus. I think it's Robinson. Julia Robinson.

MK: Was she a good teacher?

EB: She was the teacher. She was one of the first teachers that I ever knew.

MK: Was she good?

EB: Yes. She was nice. She was very nice. She wasn't mean. She was in that primary school, but I never knew of her going anywhere else. That was the only – oh, yes, another one named Helen Harris. She used to teach there too. But they only have them – like, if one couldn't come, the other one would come. That's the way that was arranged.

JXL: So, how did you come to be a teacher, mom?

EB: Oh, by just staying in the primary school. You see, we had a school built down right in front of our home place. That was called training school. When I went to the training school, and that was for the – carry you to the class until you got to the sixth grade, seventh, or eighth grade. Then they needed teachers at that time, I guess. After you come out of that training school, then if you can get a class in one of these primary schools somewhere, from – that's how I ever began to know of Northumberland and Lancaster and Kilmarnock. [These] places are the only places that I knew of because at that time, and then in the upper part of the county, there was Church View School. I got to those schools, but you had to be placed by the supervisor of the school – of the community and not the school – of the county. If you wrote in for a school, they would place you because I don't think I ever went over to Lancaster side. But Emma used to teach in Manassas. She even placed her in Manassas. Two other girls were placed in Lancaster County, somewhere over there.

JXL: But you only taught…

EB: What?

JXL: But you only taught here in Middlesex?

EB: I was right in the Middlesex. It was a school right up there at Harmony Village.

JXL: Harmony Village.

EB: Yes. I think it's gone now though. A girl bought the school and then built a place there. But I don't know whether she's still living there now. No. That's the first school that I had, was right there in the county, up there at Harmony Village.

MK: Harmony Village.

EB: Harmony Village, Virginia.

JXL: How many students did you have?

EB: How many teachers?

JXL: How many students did you have?

MK: How many kids came to the…

EB: Let's see. Oh, I guess they had about fifty that came in round in the neighborhood and all because that took in the neighborhood of a large place. That took place in a large place.

MK: You had fifty students coming?

EB: Off and on.

MK: Off and on.

EB: I wouldn't say they come every day.

JXL: What did you teach them, mom?

EB: Some would come one day and all would come maybe one day and next day, you wouldn't have too many.

JXL: What were you teaching them?

EB: Well, teaching them grammar, arithmetic, and history. I think that's about all. No. I didn't have any young children like were learning the ABCs. I didn't have any of that, but I don't know.

JXL: Was the superintendent white?

EB: Oh, yes. Of course. That's why they place you in these little old things. But you are lucky to get those because sometimes, the place where you want to go, they wouldn't send you. They'd send me – I guess some white children wanted it, if they wanted. I don't know whether they did or not. I hadn't heard about that.

JXL: How much did you get paid for that job?

EB: I got $25 a month. The first school I had. I had two. I had one at upper part of Church View, and then this one. I didn't have, but two schools I never had, but two. The one down here at Locust Hill, I think I got $25.

JXL: A month?

EB: $25 a month. The other one, I think it was around $30.

JXL: $30 a month?

EB: Yes.

JXL: When did you first take the steamboat?

EB: I don't know what year it was, but I was a little kid then helping my mother and my father in the farm around eleven years old. Oh, you mean take it to go away?

JXL: Go somewhere. Yes.

EB: Oh, I was around about sixteen or eighteen, something like that. I guess about eighteen. I was around about when I went to take the steamboat. But I used to go down to the wharf where they had the steamboat because my father and them used to send all of his vegetables and things away to the market. It was sent to this steamboat. One was named *Potomac* and the other steamboat was named *Middlesex*.

MK: Excuse me just a second. Questions are great, but the mm-hmm, mm-hmm. It just picks up. It picks up everything and it means later, you have to edit it out. No, that is fine. No, it is good to let her know that she is being heard. So, the questions are fine. So, could you talk about the first steamboat you ever remember seeing? What did it look like? What did it sound like?

EB: It's a huge boat. When I first seen it to know, it had two storeys. It had a deck storey where all the products and the cattle, or if you send the cattle away or you send anything like that, would come down right on the first deck as you go off the wharf. See, they had a long wharf that would come to that wharf. That's where the steamboat would be anchored until people get what they're sending away on that boat. That was right on the walk off the wharf. They had a [unintelligible 00:50:07]. So, you walk right on the steamboat. It's a huge thing. It seemed to me it had two decks. I don't think it was three decks. But decks for the passengers and then they share decks for cattle and vegetables and different things that was sent away. But I don't know. Then they had – it looked like a whole lot of windows right around on the edge of it. So, I guess that was the way it was made up then. I don't know any other way.

MK: How did you know it was coming before you could see it?

EB: Oh, you know what? We, at that time, knew what time the steamboat would come to a certain wharf. I would've had wharves from down here in Deltaville, all the way. I think down that way in Deltaville was the only wharf I think that that boat would go. I don't know. Maybe even further than that. Then you know what day the boats were coming. I can't remember whether they came up every day or every other day or something. But anyhow, I would hear him say, "We got to meet the steamer. We got to meet the steamer at a certain time," because otherwise, they don't wait for your products if you are not there with them. Then they go on up the river further. Up the river further is another wharf where the boat stops to pick up passengers or whatever, and all the way up the line until they get a certain distance up there. I don't know whether they have anything after they left Middlesex. No. I don't know. But I know there was wharves all the way up the line, up there in Essex County and places up there. But you know

what day they come into your wharf. You would know because it had been mapped out to you. That's how we knew it. You knew the time that the boat would be leaving and what time she would be getting to your wharf and what time she'd be leaving it.

MK: Do you remember the name of the boat?

EB: One was named *Middlesex* and the other one was named *Potomac*.

MK: Which was your favorite of the two?

EB: *Middlesex*. She was the largest. She was the largest boat. *Potomac* was a little smaller than the other one – than *Middlesex* was. But my favorite boat always was *Middlesex*. When I did have to go, I went up on *Middlesex*. But I had been to the wharf where I could see it a lot because we took vegetables and different things down there.

MK: What happened when you arrived with a wagon load of vegetables? Who loaded it? What did you do with it? How did you get it on the boat?

EB: As I told you, there was a long wharf that comes out in the water. We call it wharf; I don't know. But anyhow, it was a bridge-like. It would come so that boat can dock right outside it. When she come in, she can come right inside that wharf with a little entry place out so wide, I guess, so that you can walk from the boat to the steamer. Then you used whatever you have and everything and carried it on that boat yourself. But when you get in there, it's checked what you have and what you don't have. Then all of this thing that is being sent always have a name to where it's going because we – I'll never forget how we had the company that we called Davis & Davis. You put that on your boat, on whatever you're sending and it goes in on the boat. After that, you don't have anything else to do with it until Davis receives it. But they'll send you a bill about what they are giving you for it. But the boat comes right close up to what we call a wharf. It's a long thing built out in the water so that the boat, when it come in, wouldn't get grounded. The water would be deep enough to support that boat.

JXL: When you got on the boat, mom, was there a certain area you had to stay in?

EB: I don't think there was, but one area. I don't know, maybe even two.

JXL: Were you separated from the white people?

EB: Oh, yes, you were separated, especially if you want a state room. They had rooms there where you could get if you want them. But I think walking up and down the boat, you didn't have to be sitting near the chair you wanted. But as a rule, colored people knew where they weren't supposed to sit. [laughter]

MK: Where was that?

EB: On the left-hand side or the right hand – let me see. Going up. It was always on the left-hand side of that boat. I think that's where it was. But you weren't in with them. You weren’t

mingled with them.

JXL: No. You were only with black people on the boat?

EB: Yes.

JXL: How much did they charge you to get on it?

EB: They didn't. I don't know. I can't remember. I can't remember what they charged because I was so young. I didn't pay much attention to it back then.

JXL: You did not take it much when you got older then?

EB: What?

JXL: You did not take the boat much when you got older?

EB: No, because after I first went away on the boat, I don't think I went away on that boat but once. When I first went away, I never did come back on steamers no more.

MK: You ran away?

EB: No. Went away to work.

MK: Oh, went away?

EB: Yes.

MK: I thought you said you ran away.

JXL: You went away when you were how old?

EB: I guess, I was nineteen or twenty, something like that. In my twenties. I wasn't much older. I knew I wasn't older than nineteen or twenties, but I wasn't very far in them twenties.

JXL: Who did you go with? Did you go with Daddy Mac?

EB: No. I didn't go with him.

JXL: Were you married?

EB: No. I wasn't married then.

JXL: Where did you take the boat? Where did you take it and why did you go?

EB: I went away to work for the white people because up there, you were making a few more

pennies. But you see, you couldn't make nothing down here like a girl made in a factory. You didn't make nothing out of them worthwhile. When we went away, they weren't paying much. They paid you around about $7 and $8.

JXL: A week?

EB: A week. That's what you got? The first job I got was $7. Next one, I did get for $8.

MK: Where was that?

EB: Baltimore, Maryland.

MK: What part of town?

EB: What part of the town?

MK: Did you live in and what part of town did you work in?

EB: [laughter] I don't know. It's been so long. I don't know. I worked in the white folks' neighborhood. I know that because all of them people up there where you usually worked was in the white folk neighborhood. But I can't remember just what part it was.

JXL: What did you do? What was your job?

EB: Everything you could do. [laughter] Wash, iron, cook, clean. If they had children, you had to help watch them. Yes. But all that then was in a day's work and the money that you got was in a week's work.

JXL: When you worked for them, where did you live? Did you live with them?

EB: No, I never did live with any of them in Baltimore.

MK: Let's hold up here a second. Edward, change tapes.

CK: Yours should be okay.

JXL: Do the whole material.

Dianne Jordan: Oh, Lord. No.

CK: Oh, I'm sorry.

DJ: If she could see, she would probably run it. [laughter] We have tried to collect some information about the stores because they are so connected to the steamers.

MK: Can we go back to when you were a child again? This is take two and we're shooting from

camera A this time. Can we go back to your childhood and ask you what the steamboats sounded like as they were coming up the river? Could you tell them they were coming before you could see them?

EB: Oh, yes. Certain distance, you could see them. You could hear, but…

MK: You could hear what?

EB: Hear the sound.

MK: What did you hear?

EB: [inaudible] [laughter]

I don't know what sound it was. Then after that, it would come in view after we could hear. I'd say, "Here she come. Here she come." [laughter] Or something like that. I said, "Here comes the boat."

MK: Was everybody saying that on the wharf? Everybody excited about it?

EB: No. Everybody wasn't saying it. Some of them would say it. Some didn't. For instance, we would go down on the boat with my brothers who had whatever they were going to put on the steamer. I said, "Oh, here comes the boat. Here comes the boat." But he didn't say anything because you could see it in view.

MK: Could you hear it? Did it have a whistle or a horn or a…

EB: Yes. It had some kind of a whistle that would blow. It sounded more like a horn, I think, more like a horn than it did a whistle.

JXL: How did it sound, mom?

EB: [Bellowing sound 01:02:30]. It'll do that around three or four times. Then you could hear and they know that they were near the wharf – near that long pier. I call it – it's a pier – near that long pier. They know that the boat then isn't very far from there when you hear that sound. It sounded more like a cow sound, I don't know, when they bellow or something.

MK: Well, that was just what you sounded like when you were imitating it.

EB: Well, then that's it then. Then we would know then that it's just about ready to land. Then you everybody getting ready. So, when it does come up near the land, people on the boat, you see them throwing out lines and different things and maybe an anchor or something to slow the boat so that it will come right in place where they want it to be.

MK: That is wonderful. Keep talking. [laughter]

JXL: Mom, did you take the boat much when you were little?

EB: No. I never did go to the boat. I don't think I went on the boat over once.

JXL: Just the one time?

EB: Just the one time.

MK: The crew on the lower deck, were they black men or white men or women or who worked on the boat?

EB: Black men. I can tell you that. [laughter] They worked on the boat all the time. Oh, you mean just walk from the pier to the boat?

MK: No. The crew on the boat.

EB: Oh, I think they stayed there. They had a job. Whatever had to be done on that job when that boat lined up to that pier, they had to take care of it. I don't know how much they were paying them, no, but they had a job to stay on the boat. They were on the boat all the time because whenever they get to one of the wharves where they go ship and stuff, they would have to be ready to help unload.

MK: What do they call those men?

EB: I don't know. Seamen or anything. I don't know because I…

MK: But anyway, they were the ones who had to take care of the loading?

EB: Yes. Now, after you get your products down to where they're going to put them on the boat, they will come and take right from that pier over until they come to the next wharf and did the same thing at each wharf. Whatever's supposed to go on that boat at each one of those wharves, well, they take care of it. See, that's their job until they decide they want to resign.

MK: They must have been very strong men. There were some heavy loads to pick up and put on. Were they?

EB: Well, you see, at that time, a lot of things, they would walk on the wharves because if they're cattle or things, they had a certain place where they would have for the cattle to be shipped. Then a certain place where they had chickens and coops where they would have to come and all that kind of stuff like that. They would have to take care of it. But I don't know if they had to be extra strong. I don't know that.

MK: Everybody was strong in those days. [laughter]

EB: [laughter] Yes.

JXL: Mom, when you came back, after you left when you were in your teens or twenties?

EB: Yes.

JXL: You left when you were in your teens and twenties and you took the steamboat?

EB: Yes. When I took the steamboat after I got up to – Maryland, you mean?

JXL: Yes. Then how did you come back and when did you come back to Middlesex?

EB: Let me see. I don't remember ever coming back on the steamer.

JXL: How did you come…

EB: Maybe I did once when my – but I didn't come to Mill Creek Wharf, I don't think. I think I went to Tampa, to West Point, and they had someone there to bring me down the road because it looked like one of the brothers died and I came home. But I think I landed in West Point because that's where the steamers – I don't know if *Middlesex* steamer was running at that time because I don't know if you heard of that terrible storm that they tore up everything along the waterline.

MK: No. What was that? What year was that?

EB: [laughter] I don't know. [laughter]

MK: Was that [19]33? 1933?

EB: I guess it was.

MK: Tell me about that.

EB: They had this terrible storm. I don't even know the name of the storm. It had such a storm that every wharf along the line from there to Baltimore was torn up. Therefore, they couldn't use that line no more because I guess the boats and all were demolished. People start coming down on the line toward West Point, on that water line. But I wasn't here at the time it happened. I was away working. I knew that the storm – they said every wharf was destroyed on the line. I knew it was a terrible storm, but I can't tell you what day. It's been so long. My memory isn't good as it was when I was a child. But I knew I was away. I was away when it happened. I think at that time, I was in Jersey. I think that's where I was when that happened because I left Baltimore and went to Jersey.

JXL: So, then when you came back to Middlesex, how did you come? By car or train?

EB: By car.

JXL: By car?

EB: Yes. Now, when I went to West Point to come home, I don't know, I think I must've got the train because I don't know whether the boats were coming on that line or not. I didn't know. It's so much I can't remember about that area as I did when I was a child. But

CK: What about the trips on the steamer?

EB: Any more questions?

MK: Well, when you went on the steamer, when you left to go up and work, tell us everything you can remember about that trip on the boat and which pier you landed at in Baltimore. Tell us about that whole trip, everything you can remember about it. Because that must have been a special trip for you. That was the only one you ever took, I guess.

EB: I paid no mind. I was so glad, I guess. [laughter]

MK: So glad to get away?

EB: [laughter] Yes.

MK: From the tomato factories?

EB: Right. I don't know, but…

MK: Which boat did you go on?

EB: *Middlesex*. I know the *Middlesex*.

JXL: What job were you doing when you left here, mom?

EB: What was I doing?

JXL: Yes. What job were you doing when you left? What was your last job here?

EB: Teaching. Because I wasn't getting anything worthwhile, I said, "I know I can do better than that in Jersey." I'm going to say in…

JXL: Baltimore.

EB: Yes. But when I first left here, I went to Baltimore. When I left Baltimore, I went over to Jersey. I didn't stop in Philadelphia. I stopped there, but I didn't like it. I didn't like Philadelphia. I didn't stay there, I don't think, more than about a week. Emma and I went together in Philadelphia because at that time, Emma was in Baltimore too and we went over to Philadelphia. But far as the boat is concerned, I never paid much attention. I know that it had two aisles. It had something built in the center of the boat that would separate one side from the other, and over there – let me see. I don't know. That's all I can remember.

JXL: It separated the black side from the white side?

EB: I guess so. [laughter] I don't know. That's all I can remember there. But after I got on the boat to go to Baltimore, I lost track. I don't know much about that. I know when we got to Baltimore, we get off the boat, just like they would put off everything else, walk right on down on that lower deck and then walk right on off over on the street from the pier.

JXL: When you got to Baltimore, did you know someone there?

EB: My brother was there. Walter was there – Wal and Sal. They had a little apartment. So, I went to be with them. Well, they were little, small houses then. But anyhow, he had a place.

JXL: Was it close to the water?

EB: Yes, quite a little distance. If I had a guess, four, five miles, three or four miles or something like that. Well, it was up in town from the water. So, it was quite a distance.

MK: What was it like for a country girl like yourself to come to the big city?

EB: [laughter] It was good. Only one thing, you had to work. [laughter] When I was home, I had gotten so used to little work I had to do at home. But when you got up there, you've got to go up there every day if you want to keep your job and you want to work. But it was all right. I got along fine. At times, you had to go out and look for a job, but it wasn't too hard to find because people weren't paying nothing. They were glad to get you.

JXL: Is that when you met Daddy?

EB: No. I met him later. I don't know just what year it was.

JXL: In Baltimore, you met him?

EB: What? Yes.

JXL: You met him in Baltimore?

EB: Yes. Then I left Baltimore and, as I said, I went to Philadelphia. I didn't like Philadelphia. So, I left there. Emma and I left there and went to Plainfield, New Jersey. A woman that was there, she was from our home. She was an elderly woman and she kept places for people that would come up there like that, that [were] just leaving home and different. So, I know that my cousin asked my father and said, "Why don't you let your daughter –" Because papa didn't let us go away until late. "Why don't you let your daughter go? I'll see you get everything. Ms. Sue Powell, she will take care of you." She had a place up there. We all stayed together. So, he consented. It was all right because he knew Ms. Powell. We went to Jersey and got up there and that's where I stayed. I liked that place better than any other city I had been to.

JXL: That is where you and daddy got married?

EB: Yes.

JXL: In Plainfield?

EB: Yes.

JXL: You met in Plainfield or you met in Baltimore and then went to…

EB: No. I met him in Plainfield then got married in Baltimore.

MK: What did you like so much about Plainfield?

EB: I don't know. It looked like it was more of a homey place and I always did like home. It was nice. This woman, as I said, took us in. She was very nice. We had been knowing her for a long time. Ever since we were children, I've been knowing her. She got another girl up there, met some girls from other counties and we got along fine. It was what, I guess, you call a children home, [laughter] or what Ms. Powell would call it. But we were so mindful. Anything that she suggested, we were always willing to go along with it because we knew about her. So, after that…

JXL: Is that when you met me?

EB: Yes.

JXL: Tell them about how you met me.

EB: Oh, when I met you?

JXL: Tell them about how you met me, mommy.

EB: Oh, that was a long time. I had been in Plainfield for a long time. Mac and I had gotten married then. Then we went and we were couples and all that. So, I must say, after we were couples and different things, I never even thought of no child would ever be offered to me. So, we just enjoyed ourselves.

JXL: So, how did you meet me? Tell them about the card game?

EB: How I got you?

JXL: Yes.

EB: Well, one day, I was staying at a woman called Mrs. Griffin. She came in and she said, "Would you like to have a little girl?" I said, "Yes. Why?" I always said I wanted to, but after having these operations in Plainfield, they told me I would never bear a child. So, I said, "Yes."

She was brought around to me by your aunt.

JXL: How? Were you playing cards?

EB: What?

JXL: You used to play cards with my aunt?

EB: No. I never played cards because I never did bother about cards much. I may have played with her once or twice, something like that, but I can't remember that. But anyhow, how I met her, I don't know. Let me see. I don't know how I met her. But Elizabeth came – oh, I know. We met her through running buses to Plainfield. She was on one of the buses. That's how I really met her. After we got back to Plainfield, she asked me about, did I want to little girl. I said, "Yes." So, I accepted. After I accepted, she brought her around to where I was. I lived at Sarah Griffins then. I know just where I was living and showed her to me and everything. She said, "Well, her mother's going to give her away. So, if you want her, you can have her." I said, "Yes." Well, I didn't bother about getting no special papers or nothing like that. So, anyhow, she brought you around and I accepted. She fell in love with me all at once. [laughter] I was petting her up and playing [laughter] with her. So, after I took her, I think we were working on a couple jobs then, I remember. But we used to come around and get you every weekday. We all for Thursday, we'll come and get you and we all for Sundays, we'll come and get you. After we came, we were then ready to take her back home and she would just start crying. You'd start crying, "Boo, boo, boo, boo." But anyhow…

JXL: I didn't want to go back home when you…

EB: Didn't want to go back.

JXL: When you would keep me for the weekend, I wouldn't want to go back home?

EB: Yes. Well, you were willing to stay with us anywhere as long as you were with us. It didn't matter.

JXL: So, then you moved back down here with me?

EB: No. I never did go back down there with you.

JXL: I mean, you moved back to Middlesex with me.

EB: Oh, yes. When I brought you back to Middlesex, then that was all right. I thought everything was fine. I couldn't see why Elizabeth would want to take you away from me when she was the one that gave you to me.

JXL: Okay. Well, let's go back. You were working up in Plainfield, right?

EB: Yes.

JXL: You and daddy?

EB: Yes.

JXL: So, you decided that in order to keep me, you would stop working and come back down here in Middlesex with me?

EB: Yes. They tried – I don't know what – it was such a mix up. Well, anyhow, I was planning to come back home. I decided to come back home.

JXL: That's when you started doing hair? You learned how to do hair?

EB: Yes. But you had been there a long time. I think they'd taken you before – no. I started doing hair then while you were down. I remember her coming one day [laughter] – you coming in one day, "Ms. Braxton, may I have an appointment?" I thought it was somebody that really wanted an appointment to come find it was her. You had been outside playing. So, anyhow, that was the time that I came home and started doing hair. Yes. Around that time.

JXL: We lived here and then what happened? We were living together and what happened?

EB: Yes. We were living together, and then after what happened, after a long while, things were getting along so nicely and everything and we were so happy.

JXL: Then what happened one day?

EB: So, one day I was at home. Wasn't anybody there but me. I do remember my brother was there when your brother came in. But he couldn't stand a whole lot of talking and misunderstanding. He jumped up from his car and ran out. Now, where he went, I don't really remember him going away. But anyhow…

JXL: Who came? My mother?

EB: Your mother, your aunt, and your…

JXL: Uncle.

EB: – uncle. Yes. They came and took you right out of my arms because I said, "I can't see why you would come to a place and offer me to have a child and then turn around and come back and take her," like he did. I can't see. Well, at that time, I called your mother upstairs and I said to her, "Why are you taking her?" I said, "Didn't you remember that you came to me when I didn't even know the child nor hardly knew you? Now, you want to –" She said, "You don't know how much they've been harassing me to come and get you because otherwise, I wouldn't have come and got her." So, I said, "Well, can't you leave her?" She said, "I don't know whether they're going to let her stay or not." So, when I went downstairs with Joyce in my arms, your uncle came and – well, uncle or brother? Uncle. I kind of forgot now – came and took her right

out of my arms and ran out to the car and gave her to her mother. They jumped in the car, all of them, she, and another friend of theirs and swished her away. Just carried her right away and gave me no explanation at all.

JXL: I'd lived here for about three years, right, with you?

EB: Yes. Every bit. Every bit, two years. I said, "I couldn't understand why the one that came and offered her to me and then turned around to be the one to come and take her from me." That was Elizabeth. So, I said, "Well." Anyhow, I gave up. I said I wasn't going to bother no more because I tried to get you once more through a lawyer, but they said at all nothing they could do. Said, "It was the mother." See, now, the mother's the only one that can come and do anything about it.

JXL: So, how did you find me again?

EB: What?

JXL: How did you find me again, mommy?

EB: Louise. Louise Sherman.

JXL: Sherman.

EB: Sherman. She came and brought you down to the house. After that, things got better and things continued to have been better.

JXL: But did you not go to Plainfield, you, and daddy, and look for me where I lived with my grandmother a lot and did you not see me playing outside?

EB: Oh, that was…

JXL: When I was little?

EB: She came to your grandmother.

JXL: Remember when you would come up to Plainfield –

EB: Oh, yes.

JXL: – and you saw me playing at my grandmother's?

EB: No. I was up to Plainfield. You mean when she used to stay with your grandmother?

JXL: Yes.

EB: No. I was in Plainfield then, but when we were ready to take you back home because by

having a job, I had to take you backwards and forward to my job and my days off like that and to Sarah Griffin. Then when I had to take you back home after – because I had to go back on job to stay at nights. When you got there, near where your grandmother lived, there was a train track. When she got there, she just started booing. [laughter] I said, "What are you crying for?" She did just cry, cry, cry. So, she knew the place that I was going to leave her that day and she just cried and cried and cried until I left. I don't know how long she cried there because I had to go back to work because I wasn't keeping her on the job.

JXL: So, after they took me, then you met me again when I was nine, right?

EB: Yes. I met you that time when I was – Louise brought you down when you were nine. Is that what you're talking…

JXL: I think I was about nine or ten.

EB: Yes. Louise brought you down.

JXL: Yes, but you had met me. Remember you came up to Plainfield and you saw me on the street? You and Daddy Mac?

EB: Maybe I did. I can't remember that. I don't know. That really has slipped my mind. I can't remember that. But it was true. I'm sure. But the only time that I can remember when I brought you back. I remember when you came back down here was when Louise brought you. I can't remember on the street in Plainfield.

MK: Fascinating story. The stolen child. Diane, do you have any?

DJ: I think if we stay too much longer, we're going to wear her out.

MK: Yes.

CK: Yes.

DJ: We'll be able to come back. [laughter]

CK: Right.

DJ: So, before we completely tire her out…

MK: Do you want to take a turn in – how much time do you have?

CK: A lot of time.

MK: What?

CK: I have a lot of time on this tape.

MK: You have a lot of time?

CK: I have some time.

MK: Okay. Maybe we could get you to read something.

JXL: Read one of the…

MK: Yes.

JXL: Read *Freeshade* or [unintelligible 01:31:18]?

MK: Yes. Whatever. But can we get you in the hot seat here?

JXL: Sure.

MK: Get you in the chair.

JXL: I have one about her and Daddy Mac too. Mommy?

EB: Yes.

JXL: Come on. I'm going to take you in your room now. They're finished with you.

EB: Okay.

JXL: You want to say goodbye to them for today?

EB: Yes.

DJ: Thank you so much.

EB: You are welcome.

DJ: We will be back.

MK: We have loved talking with you and we will be back to see you again. We want to hear you talk more about the schools.

EB: Thanks. [laughter]

JXL: They like talking to you, mom. They're going to come back.

EB: Yes. [laughter]

CK: You remember so much.

EB: Yes. Okay. Thank you for coming.

MK: Is this still running?

CK: Thank you.

DJ: It is still running.

JXL: I think I'd like to…

MK: Read to her because this camera is on.

JXL: I'd like to talk about daddy Mac and my mommy, Eva, since you just met her. This is out of my book, *One Drop: To be the Color Black.*

CK: Will you introduce yourself please?

JXL: I'm Joyce Xennia Gittoes-Singh Long. [laughter] Lots of names. My maiden name is Gittoes-Singh and I use that in my writing. My name is Joyce Xennia. Some people know me as Joyce and others know me as Xennia.

CK: What is your date of birth?

JXL: I was born February 8, 1948. Interestingly enough, I moved down here three years ago and I was the age that my mother was when she adopted me when I first came here. I worked that all out in my mind. So, she was in her fifties when she adopted me.

CK: You were how old?

JXL: I was about two years old.

CK: You had seven years apart. Is that correct?

JXL: Yes. About, yes. The thing was, I was so young. I had memories of my mom down here and I really enjoyed being with them. But because I was with other family members or other people, they would say, "No. That didn't happen. That didn't happen." It was like I was crazy. I'd say, "Well, remember when I almost drowned in the water?" "You never swam." [laughter] So, I had a lot of problems with trying to put things together about where I was or what happened in certain things because they tried to pretend that that part never happened for me and a lot of other parts. But one of these stories that I wrote in my book is about Daddy Mac and Mommy Eva. It was a hot country day and I had decided that today, this very day, I would go to the movies. I was twelve years old and I'd never been to the movies and that was ridiculous. Today, all of that would change. My campaign to see a movie began. I approached Daddy Mac as soon as his old pickup truck pulled into the yard. "I want to go to the movies, daddy," I pleaded. "We

went to the drive-in last week," daddy said. "I never go to the movies here." "What?" I said. "The drive-in is not the same. A movie's different. I want to go." I begged and I pleaded for me what seemed to be like hours. You see this would…

[end of transcript]