

Michael Kline: Can you start out by saying "My name is" and tell us your name?

Gazelle Hudgins Moore: My name is Gazelle Moore – Hudgins Moore.

MK: Gazelle Hudgins Moore.

GHM: Yes.

MK: We never ask people their age. But would you give us your date of birth so we could put this in some kind of perspective?

GHM: Yes, sir, I will. February the 5th, 1909.

MK: That puts it in perspective, does it not?

GHM: Ninety-four.

MK: Why do you not start out telling us a little bit about your people and where you were raised?

GHM: On Gwynn's Island, a snowy Friday night, and you had to go pick up the doctor with a horse and buggy. My brother went, who was still at home, not in college yet. He went to pick up the doctor. As they were coming back, Dr. White says, "Give me those lines. We'll never get to Lizzy tonight at the rate you're driving. You're afraid you're going to go in the ditch or something. She's going to go in the ditch if you don't get me there." So, they came, and I was one of eight children. I was from a mixed-up family. My mother and father both had been married. My mother had two children, a boy and a girl. Her spouse died. My father was married – I mean, married to Lizzy Respass. He had four children. Then seven years after they died, my mother and father were married. Then there were two of us. I had one whole brother. But we were never taught at home that this was my child and this was your child. It was, "These are our children." We had a wonderful life together. My youngest brother and I scrapped and fussed a lot because we were the last two left at home. My oldest brother went to Massey Business College in Richmond, later became postmaster in Claremont, Virginia, and then funeral director until his death in 1965.

MK: His name?

GHM: Calvin Hudgins. The other one, the one that went to get the doctor when I was born, was Richard Henry Respass, my mother's son. He went to Massey Business College when he was old enough to go. From there, went to Baltimore to work with the Stearns Tobacco Company. Then he was an agent for Sun Life of America until – well, when it was time to retire, they asked him if he would stay longer and set up a new program with them. He said, "Yes. I'll stay if you give me money enough to buy a yacht." So, for two years he stayed, and they gave him money enough to buy a yacht. He lived in Baltimore until he died. He had two girls, and they lived in Baltimore. Do you want to know this much about my family?

MK: Well, let us get back to the place you were born.

GHM: I was born on Gwynn's Island.

MK: Tell us about what Gwynn's Island was like when you were growing up. As said, your earliest childhood memories of it. How did people travel, for example, or how did they –

GHM: Well, they traveled in a wagon with that – if you had that many children, you had a wagon and a horse that took you most of the places. We were close enough to walk to church. Close enough for some of our pastors, if we sat on a porch, we could hear them preach. But the roads were full of what they called – dear, I forgot – rooks. That meant deep holes. This is the way we traveled if we went any distance. If we went to Mathews Charters, we had a horse and buggy. So, we went with horse and buggy.

MK: How would you get off the island then?

GHM: Well, when I first remember, we got off of the island on a boat.

MK: Could you say that again?

GHM: When I first remember, we did not have a ferry or a bridge. We went in a boat, got off on the Cricket Hill side, where our bridge ends now. If we were lucky, somebody on land would take us up to the courthouse. But that was a rare occasion that you go to the courthouse. Later on, we had a man that had a surrey and a horse. Every Saturday afternoon, he would take us in the surrey of four people. We paid 25 cents a fare to go. He would go on very afternoon about – it was around lunchtime that we would go and come back before dark. They were the first ways that I remember that we traveled except by foot. We did a lot of walking, which maybe helped me live longer. So, this is the way I remember our travel in the very beginning. I started school in this building in 1916. Then we built the new building that we'd just been seeing pictures of and stayed until we had a junior high school. The last year that we were here, and I think Henry – I know his brother was in the group – there were ten children that did not want to ride a bus, or the parents that did not want their children to ride a bus to Cobbs Creek, which is where we went, just they went to school. In the beginning, they boarded up there, but then they had a bus to meet them on the other side. So, the parents paid for the extra teacher so that ten of us could finish school on Gwynn's Island.

MK: Tell us about the school itself. Tell us about a day at the school.

GHM: A day in school? Well, we had to go – be there by 9:00 a.m. when the bell rang. I was usually the last one at the end of the line, running across the field to get there by 9:00 a.m. Then we got in lines by rooms because there were two classes in each room. We got in line by rooms and went to our room. The first thing we did was have the roll call. Then we had a Bible verse. Once a week, we had devotional time in the auditorium. We always felt later, as we grew older, that we built the auditorium in the wrong place. It was upstairs, and it was condemned. So, that was one of the reasons that we – as I remember it, that we got the new school.

MK: Tell me more about people on the island. How did they live? What did they do?

GHM: They were mostly watermen. I don't know of anybody that had any jobs away, unless like people who went to college and got jobs somewhere else. I don't remember them going away to work often. My father came to Gwynn's Island to that family right up there, that picture, when he was fourteen years old to work with the older Mr. Callis in his fish business. He remained on. He was in labor in Virginia – I mean, in Mathews County, but he lived here the rest of his life. At first, he was a waterman, and then he had a store that sold everything from a horse collar to a toothpick. [laughter]

GHM: Just one of those.

MK: I come from off from here and I do not – there are a lot of things I do not know. Can you explain to me what a waterman is? What exactly is a waterman?

GHM: A waterman is – was a man who oystered, fished, clammed. I'm not sure that we had many clams in those days, but we did have oysters and crabs. There's a book just been written with some of the pictures of men who had boats that ran to us past in Norfolk. Teenie and her father bought it, as she can tell you more about that, had one. They would go on Monday, come back Tuesday; go on Wednesday, come back Thursday; go on Friday and come back Saturday, and take the seafood that was available for the season. Now, I'm telling you what I remember. Maybe somebody else might remember it different. [laughter] But I went to Norfolk. We traveled to Norfolk on that boat many times.

MK: On which you have?

GHM: On those boats, those three or four boats, it was that went to Norfolk and carried produce. That was their livelihood. But the men went, and the young boys learned to do that, too. They fished at different times of the year, depending upon what fish were running. Oysters when they were ready, and crabs when they were ready. Did it all on a trout line. These men can tell you more about the trout line than I can. But you put bait on a piece of string, as I remember it, and threw it overboard. When the crabs got them, the dip net picked them up.

MK: This is wonderful. You are making it come to life.

GHM: Well...

MK: Did your dad have his own boat then?

GHM: Yes. There were usually about three men on each one of the workboats. My father was on a boat with two other men. When he left this wharf down here, where he worked, he went fishing with two other men. He worked until he bought this store. He owned the store, which was a post office now. But the one he had in early years was an old building that he rented. When he got older, he decided he couldn't handle that much, so he built the building that is now the post office and worked there for a while.

MK: Can you describe his boat?

GHM: No. I guess I don't remember that too much. He was in the store all of my life.

MK: Where exactly was the store located?

GHM: Where Gwynn Post Office is now, on the corner lot, which is now the parking lot, is where the big store was that was torn down.

MK: They had everything from toothpicks to horse harness.

GHM: To horse collar.

MK: Horse collar.

GHM: They had food and shoes and yard material, fabric, we call it now. They had overalls and boots and rakes and hoes and just everything. Then we had a milliner place upstairs with a milliner who made the hats. Also, at Christmas time, had Santa Claus, but they bought them at – went to Baltimore about the 10th of December of the year and bought Christmas things. They came on the 11th, and that's the time they had for Christmas things, Christmas decorations and what have you. A piece of tinsel or something to say it's Christmas.

MK: The stock that you had in the store, where did that all – how did that all get to you?

GHM: Came from Baltimore. We had a steamer. The old Piankatank is the one that I remember, came to the wharf, Callis Wharf, down here at this place. They came in on Monday, went on up to Fitchett's Wharf, up the creek away, spent the night, left Tuesday morning, and they took everything. They took crates of hens and crates of chickens and crates of eggs and whatever anybody had to sell in Baltimore. They would take it. Of course, the calves, they would bellow all night. The chickens would crow and they – well, not all of them crowed, but the roosters crowed. You couldn't hardly sleep on it, but that's the way we traveled by boat. The ferry, these men, they're part of this ferry business. There were eighteen men on Gwynn's Island in later life that decided that Gwynn's Island ought to have a ferry. So, they bought a lighter and they pulled it by cable with an apparatus that had a hole in it that they pulled it over the other side. You went all the way in the water as the ferry came as high as the water, and then the horses just rode out there. But then we had shell piles. They put oyster shells on both sides and let the ferry come as far as it would. We have a picture of that here, that ferry, right there.

MK: Tell me about the steamboat, the one that you remember, the old –

GHM: The Piankatank.

MK: Piankatank.

GHM: Yes. It's the only one I remember, and that was my lifetime here. We thought it was a big, big boat, a mansion almost floating on water. But they brought in the produce from

Baltimore. People brought furniture and everything. Of course, we had a lot of horses and calves and that kind of thing in that day. Shipped them, just tied them with a piece of rope on the boat, shipped them. That was a pastime for us in later life, even after I was married. We came home for the summertime for a month's vacation. We would all dress up and go to Callis Wharf to get an ice cream cone when the boat came in. That was a real place of entertainment. We'd dress up our children and just make it a real festive time.

MK: What do you mean it was a place of real entertainment?

GHM: Well, there were several stores there. There were three stores in my lifetime that I remember that were down there. They would have ice cream and popcorn and things to eat. We would go down there to just have a festive time. That was our time. Then the boat came in again on Thursday and went back Friday. Still stayed over at Fitchett's Wharf.

MK: Can you recall the names of those three stores? Can you paint us a picture of what – would you call it a village or a community?

GHM: The first one I remember was owned by Elwood Callis. Mr. Lewis Powell was another owner. Leonard Callis, that we've always called Scrooge, was the third one. But then over some rods – I mean, there was a man, Leslie Callis, that we called Hard Times. He had one over the water on poles. Uncle Will Callis had another one on poles on the water.

MK: What did they sell?

GHM: Well, some salt and pepper and flour and oatmeal. We did have oatmeal in those days. It would be more like a faster – just a place you stop and get something as you're going home today, a small store, the two – those two. But the other woman's had an apartment upstairs that Erwin Callis and his wife lived in. Then the fish factory then was a big place, not as big as it is now. But that big house out there that you see, which has been fixed – I mean, they made it bigger much later – is where they took the freight that was going away and the freight that was coming back. It was fun to have. A part of the festivity was you – they let you run up the gang plank and you went over both space water about this big. Of course, every mother thought the child was going to fall in, but it was fun. Gwynn's Island was not a dreary place ever. I always remember that. The same wonderful place in another way that we have today.

MK: Bustling or people moving around?

GHM: Yes. I go to church, and I didn't know half of the people that are there. But I've lived for a lot of years. They died and moved away and what have you. New people coming in all the time.

MK: So, I am picturing you now down on the wharf for ice cream.

GHM: Yes, sir.

MK: How do you know when the boat is coming?

GHM: A lot of times, it was dark when it came.

Carrie Kline: When what came?

GHM: But then sometimes, it would come about 2:00 p.m., depended on...

CK: When what came?

GHM: Pardon?

CK: When what came?

GHM: It was the hour that it would come. Sometimes it would be in the late afternoon, and sometimes it would be dark when it got here. It depended upon how much freight they had to put off at other wharves. See, they served a number of wharves on down the river and Chesapeake Bay.

MK: So, did it make any noise? I mean, I have never seen such a thing. Tell me, what did it sound like? What did it smell like? What did it –

GHM: What? The boat?

MK: Everything. Tell me everything about it.

GHM: Everything. It smelled good. [laughter]

GHM: We've always had a lot of fruit trees, a lot of flowers, just natural flowers, trees, and all that we just love. If you went down to the fish factory, you'll smell fish. But we didn't mind that because we were part of it.

MK: Did the big steamboat make any sounds as it came in?

GHM: Yes.

MK: Tell me about that.

GHM: We would come all the way up here to the corner at Scrooge's store to watch it come from there to Callis Wharf just to go around the bay.

MK: Did it whistle or did it...

GHM: When it was coming in, like our boat where the ferry is now, on the bridge is now, it would whistle when it was coming in. It would whistle when it left because if you were still on there when they pulled out, you went with it. You paid a dime to get to the next wharf. Somebody had to come and get you.

MK: Well, let us move around here. You want to pass the...

GHM: The gavel.

MK: The gavel here.

GHM: Teenie, it's your turn. That's just to hit somebody if they talk when you do.

[end of transcript]