

ETHEL BRYANT BROWN

When did you live here on Spring Island?

Well, I was born here. I live here for 18 years. That was from 1924 to 1942.

What was your relationship to the Cops?

I worked for them from the age of 12 on the weekends. I go to work on Friday, work on Saturday, Sunday and leave again for school on Monday. Just clean up and work in the house.

Why did you leave?

Everybody left at that time. After the death of Mr. Copp and then the island was sold later on and Mrs. Copp got married again and everybody just moved away and she moved away because, when we worked with her, we used to spend the night with her because she didn't want to be alone. She married and moved here to Savannah after that to Coffee Bluff. I know Carters had bought it, and I worked for Carters in Ridgeland after we moved to Ridgeland. I moved to Savannah back in 1943.

Did you marry before you left the island?

No.

Where did you live on the island?

The house that's right over there. This part of the island was called Laurel Point. My father had a truck over there. Most places we just walked. It seems like it's much smaller than it was. I was just looking at the rooms and I was thinking for all that furniture they must have had to make the place smaller because it just doesn't look the same to me. It never was painted. There was a kitchen on the back, but they tore that off. There were four rooms, three bedrooms. I think there about four children sleeping in my room. My oldest sister died before I knew her. She died of water-head where the head grew larger than the body.

Were there any other children living in the house?

There wasn't room!

Did your parents raise you?

Yes.

When did your parents die?

My mother died in 1942 and my father died in 1982.

What did your parents do every day?

My father worked for the Cops as foreman. He took care of the place and look after the place. My mother worked for the Pershay Pinckney. He had a great big house where they have the office now right to the water.

What did you do every day?

I worked for the Cops later on, I worked for them regular. And that's about all. Only my brother and his wife worked for the Cops. The others didn't work. The rest of them, my brother was the other superintendant of the island.

What did you do for fun?

We had all kinds of little things to do for fun, not like the children in these time. They do bad things. There wasn't too much over there to do, but we were happy. It was a joyful place.

How so?

Well, because children would just get together and play. We had plenty to eat. We could go down to the river and fish. We could catch shrimp. We could go crabbing and things like that. We enjoyed those things.

How many children were on the island?

I don't know. My sister would have to tell you how many families were over here. I don't remember just how many families, but every family had children. And they meet together and have a good time. We play ball and that was the best time in the world. Baseball. Boys and girls. We just played together. We just get together and play, ring plays, they don't do that anymore. Here we go round the mulberry trees and different ring plays we used to play, but baseball....that was the thing.

Did you have electricity on the island?

No. We had lamps. But down at the Copps, he had lights, you know, the Delco. They had lights on that end. That was the only house with lights. We had radios. Had big floor model radios. We could take the battery out of the car and run it on that. We had record player, we could play records. My biggest fun was going fishing, playing ball, and I liked to go hunting too. I would go with my brother-in-law at night and we would hunt coons and possum. He had the gun and we had the dogs and we'd go hunting. I loved the water. I still love the water. I can't swim, but I can get in that boat and row across the whole river. I never learned to swim. I nearly got drowned so I didn't try anymore. I never did learn to swim. I'll get out there in the boat alone and it didn't bother me. We crabbed. We lined crabs. Back then, you went pout in the river top get fish, not to look for fish. You'd catch big bass. It was just fun. And whittings and croakers. There was plenty of fish because people wasn't dragging the river like now. People would just go in the river and cast. We could go out and catch shrimp by the tubfull. We never sold to one another. If anybody wanted some they'd just get some. They never sell anything. The people there, whatever they had they share with each other. And the Copps, like at Christmas, they were real good people. Oh, they were good. He was a wonderful man. Because he cared so much about his people what was on this island, he cares about those people, he really did. I never did want to work down there. He said he liked to look at my eyes, I don't know why my eyes looked different, said my eyes were big. They were nice people. At Christmastime they would share out to that whole island, every family on that island. They would buy things and they would bring it round. In the summer time they would make ice cream and come round and share it to the children and give them candies and fruits. He did a lot for his people. We had a lot of fruit trees. We had four orange trees and they used to bear the sweetest orange. And peach trees. We had fig trees. We had four pecan trees. And we could down to the edge of the woods and get all the grapes we want, and the man who my mother worked for, he had tangerine trees, he had pear trees, he grape arbor, scuppernong grapes. We didn't lack for anything. We plant gardens. We plant a little of everything, vegetable lines and watermelons and cucumbers and you name it were there. They had big farms over there and people worked on the farms. The plants a lot of corn. Several things they plant...peas...soybeans.

Did you ever have to go off the island for staples?

Yes we had to go over on the mainland to buy things. But people didn't have to go the store regular. They would go on the weekend to pick up things and just to get away, but you really didn't have to buy a lot of things. The Copps didn't have a big variety of things.

More like a little snack shop. On the mainland, they would go to a place called Lowbottom. They had grocery store over there, and people would row boats over there.

Did they have school here on the island?

Yeah they had school. They had a church and we'd have school in the church. The church was in place they called Reach. There was just one teacher and he teach from first to sixth grade.

Did you go all the way through sixth grade?

Yes, but not all the way either because we had to leave home to go to high school in Ridgeland. I didn't ever want to go. Some of them went, but I never did want to go. I didn't want to leave, not that I didn't want to learn, but I didn't want to leave home. I went through fifth. I learned pretty good. The teacher didn't know too much himself, but he did pretty good, the best he could. My mother teach us a lot. She was educated. Mr. Copp had taught them a lot. He used to teach them at night. He just volunteer and teach them what he know. He taught her a lot and she was real smart. They would only have school from September until March. Joe Bailey from Beaufort, he was a black man.

What denomination was the church?

Methodist.

Did everyone on the island go to church there?

Most of them did. Everybody who went to church went to church there. We walked to church I guess about four or five miles. Ever since I could remember my mother was carrying us to church.. There were different preachers different Sundays. Communion was on the first Sunday.

Can you remember any of the preachers who came here?

No. Not right now.

When did you join the church?

At 12.

What did you do in order to get into the church?

At 12 years old they had taught us that you were supposed to pray and ask the Lord to forgive you for your sins and then would fellowship you into the church.

Have you ever heard of seeking?

Yes.

Did you seek?

No. But you would pray and the Lord would show you dreams and you would have to before the church and tell all the dreams during that week or two weeks or whatever. For some reason you remember every one of them. I don't remember them now, but I did then. But on down the line I learned that that wasn't really the way the Lord had fixed it for us to be a Christian. By getting older and reading the Bible and going to Bible study I learned it was different. It was different because Jesus purchased our salvation on Calvary and he said, "If they confess with mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in thy heart that God have raised from the dead, thou should be saved." I didn't always know that, but after moving to Savannah...I had been sick since 16 years old, and at the age of 16 I had to be operated on for appendix. Up until '62, after my mother died, my heart got bad and nerve and then I began to suffer and my kidney was bad and I suffer with arthritis and in '62 I went to a tent meeting. I was sick during that time. I had five doctors looking after me at that time for all of these things. He told me I would have heart trouble the rest of life

because there wasn't any cure for it. A white minister, he was running a tent meeting and we went and they had on the tent to bring the sick, bring the cripple, bring the blind and God would heal. And people began to testify on how the Lord healed from different things, and I sit in the meeting and I was in that meeting for 28 nights and afternoon services and I made up my mind that if God can heal these people he can heal me. And he prayed for me and God deliver me from all of those things. I was under doctor's treatment for 25 years and God healed me from arthritis, heart trouble, bad nerve, bad kidney, nervous condition, sinus trouble, tonsil trouble. The doctor was treating me for all of those things and tell me that I would have to take heart pills for the rest of my life. So when I got prayer and went back home and told my husband, and I had a cabinet full of medicine, I tell my husband I'm not taking any more medicine. I found out from the word of God that we don't have to take medicine, that he would heal us. He said, "Well, it's up to you." So I put all those medicines in the garbage. And I was healed from that day until this day, the doctors can't find nothing wrong in my body. 1962 up until this date. I had hurt myself a couple time and the Lord gave me a miracle. I had my hip knocked out of place for four and a half days and I refused to go to the doctor. I was burning up with fever and I was hurting so bad because I couldn't stand nobody to touch the bed. And that Saturday night, I felt that leg just picked up in the bed and put back into place. And I was in a car accident and my car was a total loss and I had the left side of back thrown out of place and I had a broken bone in my neck so when I went to the Candler Hospital and they x-ray me and couldn't find anything wrong and the pain was killing me. I went to a chiropractor doctor and he x-ray me and found where the problem was. When he showed me the x-ray, this part of the back was leaning to the side like a tree and then showed me where a small bone in my neck was cracked. I took a few treatment and he tried to press my back in place and I told him, "I'm not coming back. If the Lord can heal me from all those things I was suffering for 25 years, he can straighten my back and fix this bone in my neck." And in two weeks, I was back on my job and not a hurt. You don't get that in the AME church. You have to be saved and Holy Ghost filled. I'm a member of the Pentecostal Church. I gave my life to the Lord, got saved and He filled me with the Holy Spirit, and I feel good, good, good. If I live to see this coming November, I'll be 70. God give me a miracle three Sundays ago. I'd torn a ligament in my foot and I was going to a bone and joint specialist and he really wasn't doing anything for it. Three Sundays ago in church, the Lord give me a miracle in my foot, so I didn't have that pain and swelling up. It feels so good to feel good. And God is real. You can't receive something you don't know about. I didn't know about the Holy Spirit would come a dwell on the inside during that time. We hadn't been taught that. But now I know. the Lord have done a lot for me and I dedicate my life to the Lord. It's no pleasure bother my mind. I want to be in church. My baby son is my pastor. I have three sons and one daughter and my baby son is my pastor.

What did they teach you in church here?

All they would say, you join the church, you pray and join the church. That's all they would tell us. They wouldn't even tell we had to live right. So when people went and joined the church they would go back and do the same things they had done before. It's not supposed to be that way. He wants us to separate our lives from the wicked things. They would do the same thing as the sinner man did. Once you get in the church you go

back and do the same things you done before, but now I know you don't do that. You read the Bible, and find out what the Lord wants you to do. I teach Bible class every Wednesday.

What does the Bible tell you to do?

Well, it tells you to confess your sins and ask for forgiveness, and then you just try to live better. You don't drink. You don't get out and party. You do the things that are pleasing in the Lord's sight.

Were you ever told stories as a child?

I had people used to say things. If you break a mirror you get seven years bad trouble. They'd always point out the bad luck.

When someone died in your family, what happened?

They would sit up overnight with the body. There wasn't embalming during that time so they'd sit up over night with the body. When someone passed, they would wash them and dress them. During that, someone would be making the box, the casket to put them in. And then we'd have the wake, and then bury them the next day.

Did anyone die violently on the island?

Not as I could remember now.

Did anyone ever commit a crime on the island?

It had been, but I was small then.

Were there any doctors on the island?

No doctors. Children would hurt and cut up and they would just work on those things themselves. I seen some terrible things and there was no doctor. They would have to go over the river if it was serious. They had one lady over there, but they would bring a midwife over when it was time to deliver the baby. I was so afraid when I was young because I could see things. I would be sitting here and I just see things, natural form of a person. It scared me to death. They couldn't send me from one room to the other even during the daytime. After I got grown, I couldn't see stuff like that. I could look at it as I am looking at you, but I never knew what they were. They didn't look like familiar people.

Could anyone else see them?

No. I could point to some of them and they won't see it and that would scare me. Have you heard of people seeing things like that? It was terrifying to me. Mostly if I'm home alone. I told people, and they said it must be a ghost. They won't talk but they come and stand by me. They never would dress like ordinary people. They dress like these people we see in bibles and something like that. They would have on robe and about three different color, looked it just wrapped around them and it would be over their head. I could always remember beige and blue wrap all around. She was so tall. She looked like she was in the form of a woman. So tall, she looked like she was taller than the ceiling. And I saw her over and over. Never did anything. The woman just walked by me or stand by me. Her face was mostly all covered up, just a little of her face was out. She was more fair looking, more red looking. And I could see different things walk in the house during the daytime and go in the room.

What did you do when you saw them?

Go to pieces. I would tell my mother.