

FLOSSIE BRYANT
2702 Main Street, Melbourne, FL

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TAPE ONE (Field Recording #27)

NANCY YASECKO: Tell us when you were born, and where.

FLOSSIE BRYANT: I was born April the ninth, 1907, in Jacksonville, Florida.

Q: And what brought you to Brevard County?

BRYANT: To Brevard County - my father, is a minister, and he was appointed the Paster of the Greater Allen Chapel AME church. At that time they called it Allen Chapel, but now it is the Greater Allen Chapel AME church. And, of course, we all came down here. My mother and all the children came here.

Q: When was that?

BRYANT: I don't know if I can think of the year (giggle) but it was I was about what, fifth or sixth grade.

Q: Well, this was a big change from Jacksonville.

BRYANT: Oh yes. It was a big change, but then we knew we were here to stay. So just made ourselves busy and, of course, I always loved to work in a church, you know. So, I just came around here and got in the Sunday School and just start working in a church.

Q: What were your first impressions of this area?

BRYANT: Really, when I first got here, I wanted to go back to Jacksonville. (laughs) But then, the people in the church were nice, they were very kind, very thoughtful and considerate. Cause when we first got here, you see, we were in the parsonage. Because that is where the ministers have to go. But my father, pretty soon, bought a place for us here. That way we could be right in the ... the place he bought us is still there on Brothers Avenue. Then they sent him to another charge. No, I'm sorry, I apologize. My father died here. That's what happened. And this is why I stayed here. He died here so I just decided to stay.

Q: What was your house like?

BRYANT: The house that we were in? Really, it's, the house we were more on a modern type, than most of the houses around us. Because daddy tried to give us the things that we wanted and need, as long as we act nice. See, this was our incentive to do the right thing. If you act nice, you do right, daddy will try to give you whatever you need, and most of what you say you want. And this was the thing that we really, oh he was just real nice to us. See, because my older sister always wanted a car. And when my older sister finished high school, he got her a six passenger Studebaker. That was a graduation gift. So he really did things to encourage us to want to be good. And thank God all of us turned out to be good. And I was so glad. Glad for him. I'm the only one living though. The others have gone on to the great beyond.

Q: What did your mother think of this place, she's the one who had to really wrestle with a -

BRYANT: Didn't she. Well, I'll tell you what, my mother, at first, we moved in to this place and, of course, she made some changes. My daddy was a carpenter, anyway, so they immediately made some changes in the place. So that we could be, feel comfortable and free. So that's what, the first thing she did. And at first my daddy said, "Let's get in the place first." She said, "No, let's got to fix it up, I want these children to enjoy it." that's what they did. She was a beautiful person. Bless her heart.

Q: Did you all have a garden?

BRYANT: Oh yes, you know what I liked, all of us liked vegetables, so they had greens, we had a garden of different kinds of greens, collard greens, mustard greens, and like that. So they had, it was on the side of a church, there was another lot there. It did not belong to the church. But, they let the church use it. So, they told my father he could plant it so he planted it. So he planted a nice garden there for us. And sugar cane don't think they, I love they kept some sugar cane.
(giggle)

Q: Did you ever grow pineapples? I know some people -

BRYANT: I didn't grow pineapples. No, I don't know if we had - oranges now, there were oranges there. And, we had a peach tree. Cause we liked peaches so we had a peach tree. But now, the plums, he didn't get plums so we had to buy the plums, for us. He kind of spoiled us, though. But then we all were good because of it, you know. Any of us we'd never make him shamed and embarrassed them. And we all worked right in the church right along with him. So this is what the people really appreciated.

Q: Did any of your family like to go hunting? Or fishing?

BRYANT: Yes, yes, go fishing, I could catch something.
(giggle) And my father go hunting, to catch rabbits and things like that. Bring it back home. My daddy liked to go hunting. My brother liked to go hunting. I didn't like to go hunting. I think the things they would catch though, I'd go and get in there and try to help fix and cook them, I didn't care about the hunting.

Q: Well, when you went fishing where would you go fishing? Would you go down to the river, or in the creek, or - ?

BRYANT: We would go down, we'd go to the river, go to the creek and then my daddy used to take us in the car and take us other places, where they had good fishing places because he knew we liked to fish. And I loved to catch the brims, oh, goodness. I'd see them come in and I'd be so happy. I'm a big fish eater now.

Q: I guess there were a few mosquitos, back in those -

BRYANT: Oh, were they. Mosquitos, they were awful. And that _____ you'd go, to park your car to go into a store, or something, and just expect to be wrapped up, actually you had to put something on, keep from it, So most times before we'd leave, my mother and dad would make sure we put something on. they used to be terrible, you wouldn't believe it, the way it is now. but they used to be terrible. You'd go and park, just like you'd, you know how you'd go stand up and talk on a corner or something? (slap, slap) all the time, that's what you'd be doing. (chuckles)

Q: OK. What was the transportation like. You said you had a car.

BRYANT: We had a car, but most people had, see we started off with a horse and buggy in Jacksonville but when my daddy got a car before we left Jacksonville and came here. Then, of course, my older sister finished high school here. So then my father gave her this Studebaker, for her graduation.

Q: How were the roads?

BRYANT: Hah?

Q: How were the roads?

BRYANT: Oh, they were, well, rough and bumpy. They weren't smooth roads like you have now. You'd go through a ditch and you'd have to slow your car to go on by, go around. This is what you had to contend with. Did that for quite a good while. But they got better. I guess I'm glad they did.

Q: Did you ever take a ride on the train?

BRYANT: Oh yes. See, my father, he was presiding elder for a long time. And I was the one wanted to follow him everywhere. Because they said I was the very image of my daddy. So my other sisters looked more like my mother. See, but anytime they'd see me anything, and when he passed, it was sad. I hated to go out anywhere. Because, when he passed, if I shed a tear then all of them would go to hollering and going on because I was so much like my daddy. I was just the image of my daddy. The others took color between my daddy and my mother. But I took color just like my daddy, just like him.

Q: He used to take train trips?

BRYANT: Oh yeah, Well at that time they were going to Lake City, His ah, missions taken, the churchs that he had in charge, and I loved to go with him. I used to go with him, I used to

sing like a mockingbird. So, I would always go and sing. A little flippy. (giggle) I sing in the choir now but I sing alto, I can't sing so-. I sang soprano, good soprano voice, I thought alto was the prettiest thing, oh, I just loved alto. they told me that I ruined my voice by singing alto. And then when I got up to lyric soprano, I couldn't sing it anymore. So, today I sing alto in the choir. (laughs)

Q: You would go on the train, up and down?

BRYANT: We would go to Lake City, the places he would have to go. We'd get the train and go up to, didn't go all the way to Miami. That time, I was, I'm trying to think, Vero Beach it was, Vero Beach. It wasn't all the way to Miami, it was Vero Beach. I'd be, they didn't let me go I'd cry so they'd "Let her go". And I'd just follow him around.

Q: Did you ever go out on boats? Or little boats out in the river?

BRYANT: Yes, I went out on the boat also with ah, what this girl? since I've been up some side in that same water, I can't call him, a girl, we got a picture up there we talking about it.

Q: Is that Emma?

BRYANT: No, no, no. No, the picture I gave you of -

Q: Zora?

BRYANT: Un huh, yes, right. We went back to that same water, and went out there one day, went to see her, She used to come to see me and I used to go to see her. And then she started teaching out at our school, I used to go pick her up because she didn't have a way to get there, and go take her back home. So I

went up there one time, she decided that day she wasn't coming to school, she was going to get in the boat. She out there by herself in the boat, reading, she'd have her books back and just be reading. So I ask, I say "Girl, you stay out here in this boat like this?" She say, "I enjoy it out here." she said, 'I can concentrate, I can think." and she'd be out there in that boat. I did have a picture of it. But someone asked for it for some purpose and never did bring it back.

Q: Well, you knew her pretty well.

BRYANT: Yes I did.

Q: What else can you tell us about her.

BRYANT: She was a person, I mean, if you didn't know her you might not really get, you know, but if you really knew her, you would love her. She was a beautiful person. Very understanding and would always try to say something to help you. You'd be talking about something, she'd say, "Maybe why don't you try so and so. That might do some such and such thing, why don't you try that?" So I'd say, "You know, I believe I will". She wouldn't for get it. "Is it working alright?" I would say, "Why yes, just fine." She was really a nice person. but a lot of people didn't understand her, see. But she wasn't a flippy, see, but she was very nice. She wore a hat most of the time. Very seldom you see just her, she'd have that hat on. but she was a very understanding person, to talk with and on most subjects you talk on, she could tell you something about it. Very knowledgeable.

Q; How did you all meet?

BRYANT: What happened, I was trying to get that in my mind. How did we meet? Oh, I met her through, she's dead now, Mrs. um, she lives in Eau Gallie, Mrs. Tucker. And then, she's go see

Mrs. Tucker and come to see me. Come to see me, she'd go see Mrs. Tucker. That was the way she did. Occasionally we would get together. But then Mrs. Tucker got a little jealous, because she started spending a little more time down here. But she said we were talking more of the same language, you know and could converse together. And Mrs. Tucker kind of got hot with both of us.

Q: O.K. lets cut.

Q: Did Zora ever talk to you about her writing?

BRYANT: Oh, yes. And you know what? I'm just so sorry, I had a number of her writings, she gave me some of them. But did you know, I don't know, I guess you know, you tell people you have these things. When they go through your books and things, I had them inside the book where I had her picture and everything. You know I can't even find not one? Not one. And she wrote a little ditty, (laughs) she was in the boat, and I went up there to see her, and she, and I parked the car, I said, "Girl, why don't you come in here? Why you staying out there in that boat, don't you see me standing here?" She said "Why don't you come out here?" I go, "Uh unh, uh unh". I was kind of afraid of the water. So she talked from that day she said "Well, O.K. I'm coming in after a while." She said "But I," I said "How often do you", she said, "I come out here almost every day, and sit in this boat and write, or read things", I said "Really?" She said "Yes", she said "I can think out here". And I had a chance to see her in that boat one time, um hm. Out there by herself.

Q: I understand that her father was a Minister, too.

BRYANT: Yes, she said he was.

Q: Did you ever talk about that?

BRYANT: Yes, she told me about her father, and when we got through talking she said, "You know, maybe that's why I started liking you" she said "because we had about the same background and training." I said, "really?", she said, "Yes", so I said "Well good". I said, "Maybe that is why". (laughs).

But I went to Fort Pierce to see her and to my surprise she had passed. And they didn't, I mean, no one told us about anything. And a young lady there said they were trying to put her in a pauper's grave, and said she told them "no, no, no." She said "why don't you let the people know about it but they didn't. When I knew about it I went out there I saw the grave where she was, I didn't even know that she had passed. And I really hated that because she could have had a nice burial with our help. But some lady said she would not let her be buried like that, and she went to the trouble of putting things away for her. I just hated it, was just a sad thing. I just went down there, when I got there I asked for her. They said "OK, we'll take you to see her". I guess they thought I knew she was dead. They went out to the grave, I said "Wait a minute, what're you doing", I said, I thought they were trying to be funny. I said "What you got me out here to the graveyard", she said "Zora Neal is dead and buried". I said, "What?" I said "All those friends she had and you wouldn't even let us know it?" This lady said "Well one lady, and they were putting her in this paupers grave, she told them, 'no, no. Unh unh, that was too talented, too great a woman for that to happen to her'. And she went and had, paid for the expenses for her to be buried properly. Lord, I...that was a sad thing to happen, I just hated it but we didn't know anything about it 'cause we certainly would have done something about it.

Q: She was part of the community here.

BRYANT: Hm?

Q: She was very much part of your community here.

BRYANT: Yes, what happened is, she lived in Eau Gallie, but when we got to talking I asked her would she like to have, you know, some sub work or anything. So I went out to school to see the principal and told him, "This lady is qualified, she has her degrees, could we give here some help, she needs some money." He said "Oh, yes", he said "bring her in". So I did. I left Eau Gallie and got her. I carried her out to Stone school. At the Stone school is where she started working. And very, oh, she had beautiful ideas, beautiful ideas. She was very talented, very talented.

Q: What would she tell the students? Do you recall what she would tell her students?

BRYANT: You know, most about, just like they were, if they were talking about, if their lesson was about something, honey she knew something about it. I don't know whether she would go look it up right then, or whether she just had it in her brain, but she could tell them. She was very, very, I thought she was very talented. But now, she didn't go around saying she could do that, now. She would, I can see her now with this, she used to wear this, not two-piece, it was a dress she had a, a belt on, and this hat, had a band around it, and she'd just wear that most of the time. That was, that was what she had. She'd be clean, that's what she had most of the time on.

Q: She worked out at Patrick Air Force Base.

BRYANT: That's right, she worked out there.

Q: What was she doing out there?

BRYANT: That, I really don't know. I know she was out there. Because first to get out there, I had to go out to the base with her, and I waited for her to go in and check _____.

Then she got a, I forgot whether she got her little car herself or what she did, but anyway, I didn't have to. Someone was going, a number of people were going out there. So I found someone that would take her on out. Yeah, she stayed there for a while, then she went to Fort Pierce. And that was it.

Q: Tell me a little but about your education, where did you go to school?

BRYANT: I went to school, first, when we were here in school, when we were here and young my daddy let me go to school here for a while. And he didn't like that so he sent me back to Jacksonville, to it was Wallace college. So I went to Wallace college. I went to New York University. In fact, my Master's degree is from New York University. I went to New York University about two full summers. One full Summer, and a half Summer. And I completed the requirements. You know, a question came up, "how could she get it now," and they told them, "she did the work". And whether or not, said "she will graduate". So they questioned the graduation, as early as it was. But the thing of it was, it was just luck that I knew the stuff that we were, you know, having. It was good for me. And then, my mother made me live in the library, so, (laughs) I knew to go to the library. (Laughs).

Q: But your father didn't like the schools around here?

BRYANT: Well, afterwards it was pretty good, but the thing, see, we were in school in Jacksonville anyway. See, when my father came here, he thought he would try the school here but they sent us on back to Jacksonville.

Q: Thought that would be a better school for you?

BRYANT: Unh hunh. Yes, he sent us on back there.

Q: You went into teaching, for your profession.

BRYANT: Yes I did. I really did. Yes. I taught forty-two years. And I'm not bragging but I don't care when company would come to the school house, right out there, they'd come to my room first. Because it was always ready, it was always clean, it was always pretty. So if, and then they would get ready, the other teachers would get ready. I didn't know it for a long time, so finally one day the Principal told me, that they, said "You know, we're grateful to you, uh, have your place straight all the time". Cause, see sometimes the company comes, and they don't know they're coming. The company, you know, that comes visiting white, black, or what color. They know they could come right on in that room. Because, know what I would do? I'd go out there, I'd tell them "Don't scrub my room", I scrubbed it myself. I'd come home, get my bucket and everything, when they'd leave from out there I'd go out there and scrub. Till the policeman came in there one day, told me, said "Please", one night, and told me, "Please, don't stay out here any more. Says, we have been watching, watching over you", 'cause, see, I caught myself going when everybody was away from out there. But to my surprise it wasn't a wise thing to do. See, 'cause it was dangerous. So they came in and told me, said "Now try to do what you're going to do in the daytime. Or let us know, let us know that you're coming out, so that we can come out here and protect you". But I stopped going at night then. Because it frightened me. (laughs).

Q: What grade level did you teach?

BRYANT: What? My specialty was First Grade. Because I wanted to start children off right. And then they took me, the parents wanted me to go to second with the children. Then they wanted me to take them to Third. Then they complained to take them to Fourth. And I drew the line, I said "I'm not going any further." I told my Principal, he said "Well, we want her to stay, and to start the children off," said "she's a good First

Grade teacher and that's why we wanted her there." I asked, "Could I go back in First Grade?" And I did, and that's where I stayed. I enjoyed that. Where we had our retirement, the school reunion here this year. And that's the first thing one of our first grade students, used to be, told me. She said, "You know one thing?" She said, "You taught me how to write my name." And if you didn't leave first, and if you couldn't do your first, if you couldn't write your name, you didn't leave first grade. I say, 'cause I don't care what you do you've got to know how to write your name. So they say, well after " We sure miss you," said, "Lot of them still can't write their name." I'm sorry about that. But I made, they had to learn to write their name. Because you, you got, spell your name - if you didn't know the alphabet, you knew every letter in your name. And they did that before they left first grade. They had to. So she was talking about every, she came down to retirement this year. She said how glad she was, she said, "You taught me how to spell my name and how to write it. I'm never going to forget it." I said, "If that's all you learn in first grade I'm glad of that." (giggle)

Q: Which was the first school you taught? What was the name of that school?

BRYANT: The first school I taught in? Let's see, what school did I teach in first? Was it Stone school? I'm trying to think. I think -

Q: Was it a vocational school? Melbourne Vocational School? Or was that -

BRYANT: You're right. Lord, I couldn't think. It was ah, right behind yhis here, right over in that area. You know what is there now, they have park there. Little children go out and play and they got the building there for them to play. That's where the old school was. It was there. But in December that school burned down. In December, 'course they didn't put it back

any more after that.

Q: How many teachers were there at that school?

BRYANT: About five, that's starting off.

Q: How many kids?

BRYANT: I have that number down somewhere, it must have been about must have had more teacher. Must approximately, must have been about four hundred children there. Approximately that. But what they did, the first grade, see the first grade wouldn't have the number of children we had, again. 'Cause see you get thirty-five and forty children. And I just stayed on my knees in prayer. God just helped me through, I just asked Him please help me to help those children. But see a lot of them don't think about prayer. So see, they'll run into a lot of problems. They, ah, mine was kind of rather smooth sailing, considering.

Q: OK. Let's cut and go to the next tape.

TAPE TWO (Field Recording #28)

Q: You were going to tell me when you first started.

BRYANT: When I first started teaching, they said that I was too young to teach, but I went on, they told me I wasn't going to be able to continue working because of that. So my principal and the supervisor got wind of it they went up there and told them, said, "That, you say she's a child. She's not eighteen, which is true," he said, "But she is the best teacher that I've got." He said, "And we don't intend to let her go." So see, I didn't know this. Finally someone that heard them talking, before they - this conversation saying that I had to leave - and I said, "Well that's OK." I said, "I'll just find me a job somewhere." I

said, "I can go, I see a lot of people waiting table. I'll just go wait table." So, they, when they got to me with it they said that they asked me the question again, "How old are you?" I told them. Said ah, "You know you are supposed to be eighteen to start teaching." I said, "No, I didn't know that." (giggle) He said, "They didn't tell you?" "Well, I didn't ask them." So they kept looking at the pencil and look back at me, look at the pencil and look back at me, and he said, "Well, what do you think about teaching." I said, "It's just something that I love to do." I said, "Really, I guess if I don't get pay, I think I'd do it anyway." He said, "Say that again." And I repeated it. He said, "Well, you really like it." I said, "Yes." I said, "No, I love it," I said, "I love to see children unfold." I said, "I can see them when I get - start them off, see when you start a child off it's not like someone else has ruined him, starting him." I said, "But," He said, "I understand you are a good first grade teacher." I said, "Well, I try to be." I said, "And I pray and ask the Lord to help me to be, that's one thing." He said, "You do what?" I said, "I pray and ask the Lord every morning I get up, get on my knees, help me do some good thing to help some child today." I did that all my life through. And it paid off. Because I, everything I went into, looked like God just let it be a success. And I appreciate it. So therefore I was rated one of the outstanding teachers in the community. I appreciated that. And after I got up some size, much older, anything that they were having, of any note for teachers, see I was part of it. So then I said, "Well, I hope that those that I have tried to guide will do -" Come to find here the other day the fellow said, "And I tried to be just like my teacher, I tried to imitate her." Three of them got up to speak, I heard them saying, "I'm trying to be just like she is. And I hope as I grow older I can still be like she was." I said, "Well, Lord, Thank you Lord, thank you." It was kind of amusing though. Two or three of them got up to talk. Said, "Stand up, first grade teacher." They said come to the rostrum and I smiled. They asked me to talk, I said, "See here, my children will talk for

me. I don't need to say I'm happy to be here. I'm thankful to God let me live to see them do the things that they're doing." He said, "Yeah because I'm trying to imitate you 'cause you sure taught us." And the boy told her, "Look a here, (imitates a spanking)" I didn't play like I couldn't see him. He said, "Yes, and she put the rod on us if we were too wrong." He said, "We deserved every lick that she gave us." I looked at him, I said, "You did?" He said, "You know we did." See the thing, he got up in this auditorium, he said, "Now she not, she wasn't a whipping teacher, she didn't use no switch all the time. She's make us stay in after school sometimes. If we had an errand to do that, you know' that - no you going to have to do this and so and so. We were under punishment for things." Said, "It wasn't all spanking all the time." I told him, "No because I didn't think spanking the answer." But if there were other children right out there having a good time playing, and they couldn't go - see, that's the thing. They didn't like that. And I knew that. So, I didn't have very many problems with them getting in trouble (laughs) I sometimes now, I think about it I say, "Lord you were good to me." Because, very seldom, very seldom, if ever, a parent came out there _____ Because I would go the homes, sit down on the step, if they were on the steps, I sat on the steps with them. "Oh can I get you a chair?" I say, "No, I'm here with you." And I'd talk to them. So they say, "She's just a down to earth teacher, that's all" Because I always try to - just because I got a degree, you know, I'm not the biggest shot going. I'd go sit, if they were down like that, I'd sit right down there with them. And they would tell somebody else, "Oh say she's nice, we don't have to go all out to _____ for her. _____ We got to fix her, say, "No you don't either," Say, "If you're out in the yard and she comes right out in the yard with you." and that's what I did all the way through my coming along. I think it paid off in the end.

Q: I'm sure it did. There were a lot of changes in the

years you were teaching.

BRYANT: Oh yes.

Q: It was during the time of integration.

BRYANT: That's right, that's right

Q: Would you tell us about that?

BRYANT: Well, let me tell you about integration. We had a white, we had a black principal, we had a co-ordinator over him. So when I met this doctor he said, "Are you Flossie Byrd?" And I was thinking to myself, I think Lord, I said, "Yes, I am." said, "I heard a lot of talk about you." I said, "Talk about me?" He said, "It was good, it was good, it was good. Don't get upset." (giggle) 'Cause I was about to get upset. And there he told me about, he'd heard about the time I tickled the children, and how I work with them in the community. He said, "That's nice. I wish I could get more teachers to do that." And when the, some people come from the school board, they would have guests coming in, where they'd come in, they say, "There is one teacher we want you to meet." and he say most time, he said most times it would be you. I say, "Really?" I said, "What is wrong?" Wasn't nothing wrong. He said, "Because of some of the good things you've done, children you have taught, are up there now working, and they still can relate some of the things, that you helped them with to get them up there." I said, "Really? Thank you for telling me." At first I thought there was something wrong. (laughs) You always think it's wrong before you think it's right. (laughs)

Q: It must have been a difficult time though.

BRYANT: Oh yes, it was a difficult time because, they felt, black teachers don't know nothing. They don't know nothing. But

they ended up having to come to me for help. That was the one thing. They had to come to me for help. Some of them didn't know. They had degrees, and didn't know. And it was, that was kind of bad. I really wondered how it happened, but then it wasn't left with me. But I helped them, many of them, out. But I was glad to do it. And I didn't do it to boast of it. Because I didn't tell the principal nothing about it. I didn't tell anyone, I just go on, they come in there, "Could you help me do so and so." "What about so and so?" And I'd go on around see what I could do to help them out. There's, lot of them, it's not so many of them, now that I know. There are a few of them still, if you mention my name to them. Oh child, I know her yes. Tell her, she helped us all so and so. So I was glad that I could.

Q: Can you remember any of the particular problems teachers were having?

BRYANT: Uh huh. Yes, well one thing is, when they integrated the schools, they, I don't know this, I just - look like, they say, we going to push you out and we are going to be in. And a lot really were pushed out. I wasn't, but there were any number of them.

Q: A lot of black teachers lost their jobs?

BRYANT: Sure did. They really did. That's true.

Q: There was a move away from the black schools. Left some of those schools vacant.

BRYANT: Un huh. That's true. This is true. And, but there were some good white ones. That they tried to, you know, make - and they turn out to be your best friend. Just as sweet as they could be. They were as helpful as they could be. I guess their mothers had trained them differently. But then we had some nasty ones. (laughs) Being honest about it. Oh yes. But, I came

back home and told my mother and father about it. My mother told me, she said, "Did you get on your knees and pray before you went to school?" I said, "Yes I did." She said, "Well, you do that every morning. And you won't have no trouble." And that's true. I didn't. I didn't have any trouble. I just thanked the good Lord for it. I was able to work with any of them. And then there was a time, they say, "Well, I don't want to work Miss so and so," They didn't ever tell them that about me. My Principal would tell me that's one thing. You got good rapport with them. See, because nobody said they didn't want to work with you. I said "Well, thank you." He said, "Whatever you're doing, just keep doing it." I said, "Well, I'll try - and I tried".

Q: Did the kids have trouble? or, were the adults having more trouble...

BRYANT: Well, the kids, I tell you what, the kids were mostly making trouble with themselves. I think parents had talked at home to them. And I just, I don't know, for some reason they kind of looked up to me. And therefore I would go in their rooms and talk to them. Their teachers told me, said, "Well child, please come here and help us out some." And I'd go in there and tell them, "We're all human beings, the color of our skin is a little different, but our hearts are the same." I said, "So, you're supposed to be nice to them, you're supposed to have respect for them, because they are your superiors." "We re-, got respect for you". I say "You must - if you've got it for me, I don't want it if you don't have it for them." And I went to each one of those rooms out there. And I would talk with them. And when I got through, one, somebody asked the other one, "Miss Byrd come to your room?" "Yeah, what she say?" "She told us the same thing." (giggle) I, somebody told me, said, everybody know what you told them cause they all told the other ones. (laughs) Oh dear, children are something else, I love them.

Q: Let's talk a little bit about the church. What kinds of

activities besides the usual church services.

BRYANT: Well, the church back in then, you know, the children were allowed to play games. And we got, they did hop scotch and like that, see I'd hop scotch right along with them. I guess that's why I got along with them as well as I did. Because I was always active. I don't know. Still too active. So I got to slow it some. But then, the children were really. They wanted to get out, they wanted to be out in the open and enjoy some of it. Because see, some of the schools they had the children had to stay in the classroom too long. And they didn't want the, they, but when we would take them out to a game or two and play some. Oh they enjoyed that. Some pictures in the book back there now, where we went out playing oh, hide and. Oh, they were so happy over it. So then the teachers found out that this is what the children enjoyed. And see and some of the white teachers came, they had some beautiful ideas too. To bring them out, so they would come out with the children. We'd take our children out for a little while and let them play a little bit, then go back in. And do, they find that they'd do a much better job. Much better job. 'Cause see they sit there the whole length of time that they have to be in school. They need some kind of little outlet. So I got some games from some other children. So they could play games, the time they'd have to stand there, We'd get our lesson out first and I tell you what. They will get their lesson much better because in order to play those games, they're going to get their lesson. So they said, what, so the principal wanted to check on it. I told him come any time you want to. I say we get our lesson first, if the lesson isn't a good lesson, they don't have, they can't play. So they always got their lesson 'cause they want to play. If they had a lazy person in there, boy, they'd get on them. I didn't have to.

Q: Oh boy, well thinking back to when you first came here, and the first impressions - Which were the first businesses that you all used to get your staples and your different kinds of

things, milk and eggs -

BRYANT: Ah - we had our own chickens for our eggs. And, I'm trying to think, the milk, they used to sell, used to come around and bring it. Bring it and set it on the porch for you. You get it. Of course you'd pay them, you know, after a certain - at the end of the week. But what they did, they'd just bring it and put it there. I think of it now, I say, it's a good thing you go out there and get it because it would spoil on you now. If you do that. But this is what, bring it to you every morning at a certain time they would bring it. And then you take it and put it in your box so you have it. At the end of the week you pay for the week's milk that they would bring to you. That went on for quite a while. Then finally they decided to go into the stores and, getting it.

Q: And drug stores - were there - did you go into town?

BRYANT: Eckerd's was there. Now Walgreen was not there. But Eckerd's was there. And ah, who was this fellow had a - We had a doctor here. I was trying to think of his name. Been trying to think of it during the day, before you got here because I wanted to tell you about him. He when had to go to the hospital, so we went to his hospital. It was right on University, ah, University near - What's there now? What do they have in that place now? It's something they have in there now but the same building is still there. It was there. It's there, but they're using it for something else. But this doctor took all of his patients out there to his hospital. And you were well taken care of. 'Cause I went there and I know. I was pretty sick. Then, I had, I took a child there, I had here. And he did such a beautiful job. He was so nice and kind and the help was so nice and kind. Until they jwwere about to ruin the other hospital, because everybody was going out there to him.

Q: Was he black or white?

BRYANT: No he was white. He was white but you didn't know it. He made no difference. And he had one person that was helping him there that act nasty, he got rid of her. He told them they had to treat everybody right. And this is what happened. I was trying to think of his name, cause I really wanted to. He left here, I think he went to Georgia. And he started business in Georgia. I can't think of his name. It might come to me.

Q: Was there a dentist here in town?

BRYANT: Who?

Q: A dentist?

BRYANT: I don't remember 'cause I didn't have to go to any of them. I just had my first time going to a dentist was last year.

Q: Wow.

BRYANT: That's right, didn't have to go but I had to go last year. (giggle) And I have to go back again too. (laughs) I know that.

Q: And where was your post office?

BRYANT: The post office. They didn't have any down this side at all.

Q: Did you have to go downtown?

BRYANT: You had to go, oh yeah, you had to go to town. You didn't have any out here. See that one's a little nearer there, see that wasn't there. That one hasn't been there too terribly long now. But we, the one up town, now, it was there. And you

had to go there. Get your stamps, everything. If you just want one stamp you had to go there to get it. They didn't have any place around to have any stamps.

Q: Did they deliver the mail to the houses around here or did they, did you have to go downtown to get your mail.

BRYANT: No, they delivered the mail when they got ready. You might be one or two days getting it but you got it. And like mail you should have gotten, maybe Monday, you'd get it about Thursday. Just one of those things. There wasn't nothing you could do about it. Unless you wanted to go to the post office and ask for it, before. You could go there before the mailman left, and you could pick up what you wanted. You can still do that now. So that's the thing we did do. Have that special mail, you know, we'd get up early and go over there, get it.

Q: When you all first moved here that was getting in toward the depression years. Those must have been some pretty hard times.

BRYANT: Yeah, things were kind of rough. But see, my oldest sister was teaching school and my father was presiding elder, and my mother started teaching school with my daughter. No, that's my oldest sister, I keep saying daughter. It's my older sister. And, therefore, pretty good money was coming in. You know, you didn't get the big money like you get now, you know that. But then this is how we managed the way we did.

Q: Not everybody had jobs in those days.

BRYANT: Jobs were kind of hard to get. But my sister went down, she got a job as teacher, she wasn't the Principal there, she got a job teaching. Between here and Fort Pierce. Was it? Mm hmm, yes. And then, they needed another teacher and she said, "Well, my mother can teach." So, you didn't have to have one of

those degrees then, you know. So then, my mother went down and taught with her. And she carried some other, there was another person went with her down there, to this, to the school. They did have some type of qualification, but see, some people didn't have any at all. I remember my mother had helped them at the kindergarten schools up here. Then she was able to go down there and work down there.

Q: There was a time there just before the Depression Era, where land around here was booming. A lot of Northerners were coming down...

BRYANT: Yeah, they were buying property...

Q: ...they were going sky high, and then...

BRYANT: ...then all of a sudden...

Q: ...it busted.

BRYANT: Yeah, 'cause I bought uh, I bought this property here. And I was then around to, to my mothers, we were living on Brother's Avenue. And that, then they fixed this house into a big two story house, that two story house is still there. And then, when I, they called and told me about, they were selling the land out here, and how they were selling it. My sister and I came out, and I checked on it, and I checked on the, they were trying to cut the lot smaller. I said "Well just put this", and I showed them what I wanted. I said "Put that in one lot, for me." And I started paying on it so I could, when I finally came out here, build a house on it. And here I am. (laughs).

Q: You've been right here in this neighborhood for some time, you knew the Brothers family?

BRYANT: Oh, yes. Real well.

Q: Well I understand they had a lot to do with the very early settlement. What can you tell us about that?

BRYANT: The, I'll tell you about the Brothers. One of - the father and the mother were members of our church. The oldest son was, joined, our church. His - there's only one boy left now, and that's the youngest boy but he is, he's in bad shape. I mean he's... I haven't been to see him because I just didn't want to see him like that. But his aunt, his brothers wife, was telling me just how bad a shape he is in. He's in real bad shape. I hated to hear it, but I think he brought it on himself by not taking care of himself like he should. He was too in love with money to go to the doctor like he should. And she tried to get him to go, and he didn't. But now I don't think he'll ever be the same, I don't think he will. I don't think he's going to even enjoy his money, I think the wife's going to get a chance to enjoy it. From the way it's looking, uh hunh.

Q: The first Brothers family came here a long time ago.

BRYANT: Yes.

Q: And, I guess they settled right along in...

BRYANT: They did. On that picture with me, right there, under there, that's one of the Brothers' wife. Uh huh. And she is still living, he's dead but she's still living. She's in the hospital, down there. She's not doing the best, now, but uh, she could sing, oh that girl could sing, oh, she could sing.

So when I was in Miami, I taught there in Miami eleven years. When I was in Miami, we decided to come back, here. So I said, "Let's go back uh, let's go back up there and help them with the choir". She said, "That's a good project for us to take." So we moved on back here, see, 'cause I had the place here, all she had to do was come on, she moved in here with me. And she, that girl could sing. Oh, she could sing. She had a

beautiful voice. Beautiful voice. So, she would sing, and, well I was the, told you I went to alto. She would sing soprano, we'd sing duets together, sometime. Once she decided she said she was going to help train a choir. The first choir, my mother started it. That was the first choir started down in the bottom down there. And uh, 'cause they didn't have a choir for the, the church didn't have a choir at all, they didn't, they didn't know nothing about no choir yet there, see. So my mother asked my father if she could organize a choir and, uh, let them start. Well there's this one lady still living that was with us then. She's in over in one of those towers over there, she's Mamie Reddick. She joined with my mother and they got busy, honey, got the choir going. Oh we had some good music there. It was a fact.

Q: Can you remember some of those early songs? Do you remember any of the early favorite hymns?

BRYANT: "Amazing Grace" was one they always used, they liked "Nearer My God to Thee" I remember that, I happened to be looking at one of the programs in there - here recently. They liked "Nearer my God to Thee", they like "Amazing Grace" I remember that. And they used to sing "This little Light of Mine, I'm Going to Let it Shine", everywhere I go, I'm going to let it shine. And those people are still using that now. Way back in there we did used to sing that. And they used to tell us, Everybody who's going to let their light shine stand up. Oh. them people would get up, clapping their hands, (chuckles) it was an interesting thing.

Q: Would you give us a little taste of the song? Would you sing it? A little bit of the song?

BRYANT: My voice isn't good enough have me sing that. (laugh) Now see, ah, cause I used to lead it, that's right, "This Little Light" we used to sing that (SINGS THE SONG) um hm. And, believe it or not, that's the best thing, that they're

singing it now. "This Little Light of Mine, I'm Going to Let it Shine" They're still singing it. Praise the Lord for that.

Q: And cut.

TAPE THREE (Field Recording #29)

Q: Let's talk about family life, how you celebrated the holidays.

BRYANT: We had beautiful holidays. What we'd do - most times we'd take all the family, I love the beach, we'd go to the beach. And we'd take our picnic basket, and we'd eat right out there. And we looked forward to that. That's what I told you the things he would do to make us be good. And we'd say, "We want to go to the beach," We wanted _____ and things like that. My mother would fix a big basket, fix it for us, we'd go out there and have a good time. I look at the little children now, I see how they flippin' around and I say that's just the way we used to do. (giggle)

Q: It was a pretty wild ride, getting over to the beach. Back in the twenties.

BRYANT: That's right, that's right.

Q: Tell us how you'd go.

BRYANT: Well, the only thing, I'd be in the car riding, and I (giggle) 'cause see, the, the bridges and things, you know, weren't like, you had to go around about, but then we would get there. And then, sometimes we would leave, just leave this area altogether, and go. 'Cause see we knew about those beaches up to Jacksonville. And we used to go back up there, because we knew about them. We asked daddy, could he take us back up there. Mom'd fix this big basket, then we'd go on up there.

Q: What about holidays like Halloween? Did you celebrate Halloween?

BRYANT: Halloween, you'd have to go out early, because my mother would make us these little, 'cause my mother is a seamstress, she's make us out little Halloween costumes, but we could not stay out. You see, late. We had to go, and however we would go we they to be just in that block where they could see us. And they'd come slow enough behind us, so that after a certain length of time, they'd pick us up and bring us back home. Actually I never did hang out too much on halloween.

Q: Kind of a dangerous night to be out.

BRYANT: That's right. So I would be in here looking out. (giggle) And to this day, I don't go out. huh uh.

Q: And Thanksgiving?

BRYANT: Well Thanksgiving we always, we knew that was a time for us to pray. And, of course, the turkey, we had it. We'd have the turkey, they'd have all the food fixed for you. And, what we would do, my mother left, you know after, she left us, but all the while when she was there, she would have that turkey baked, have that dressing, oh, that dressing, that would be the best dressing, oh goodness. I'd rather have dressing than have the turkey. I'd say, "I don't want anything but the wing of the turkey." that's the part I wanted. So they always made sure I got a wing. When you had that big wing you had something.

Q: I imagine Christmas was tied up with things at the church.

BRYANT: Well yes. At Christmas time, you see we'd always have, ah, go out, you have to go out to get, to go out and get this big tree, for the church house. But we still had to get one

for our house. Mine is out there in the garage right now. All covered over. All decorated, all I have to do is put it back down. (laughs) So we always, we always _____ and everybody would help fix the Christmas tree. One would be fixing their's this way, and this other would fix their's this way. And that's the way, and if it's not the right way, she wouldn't say don't. "Is that the way you want yours to go?" You stand off, "No ma'am, I don't want it to go like that, I want it to go the other way. See, some are this way and some are that way. And that's the way she got us to straighten it out, without complaining. Which I thought was good. I'll tell you, I don't know. I told them, I don't know, I just, think about my mother, sometimes I caught myself talking to her. Thanking her for what she done for me, during those years. When I see so many others have gone so, you know, strayed so far away, 'cause she was a beautiful - She lived a life before us. So therefore, to follow in her foot-steps, we wouldn't go wrong. Of course my father was the same way. And I was so happy because I even see ministers today are not doing what they are supposed to do. So, it makes me appreciate them more and more. I really appreciate my mother and father more. 'Cause it's just luck both of them were Christ like people. Could have been just the opposite. Um hu, really could have.

Q: Well you knew the whole community, you even got involved in politics.

BRYANT: Sure did. Oh goodness yes.

Q: How did that start?

BRYANT: Well when they, we had a democratic club, and we started off with the democratic club worker. Well, I was the secretary. And all the ministers and things would come around here, would talk about the different things like that. And I told, I said, "Let's go get in there too". I was just a person

just, uh huh. And we went over to the meeting, I'm trying to think, who was.... she worked for the county a long time, for the city a long time. Kay Herschel! Kay Herschel was working with them way back in those days. The same lady that wrote that article for me, she was working with them. So we just all, we just got together, and I just said, "Well, I'm going to be a part of it, I'm going to have an office in it, and that's the way I felt. And when I started talking with them, and different ones, they'd say, "She can work, let her work, she'll work." And this is how I got started into it. And then when I went to the meetings, well I was, I was always, I wouldn't sit there and you know, say nothing. If it was something that was good, I never was a negative person. If there was something I could say that was good, that would help somebody, I would do it. I never would argue, because my daddy done didn't allow us, you don't argue about church things. So I never would argue over anything an organization or anything. So we would go to these meetings and then they would say, "We don't want so and so and so." I'd just sit there and smile, I wouldn't say nothing. Then if they say give reasons for it, then if they give a good reason, then I kind of go along with them. But I never take a negative attitude. I don't take a debate. (laughs). I'd just rather stay out of it, don't say nothing at all, than to be negative about things. Sometimes they'd be negative, you would hurt somebody. Then again, you won't. But then, you don't know who you might hurt. You might hurt somebody that's a dear friend of yours, you hate to hurt them. You don't want to hurt people just to be hurting them. Though some people enjoyed that but I didn't. I didn't enjoy that at all.

Q: I'm curious, was this the general Democratic party group here in Melbourne, or was it just in your community.

BRYANT: Well, no, the Democratic group here in Melbourne and in the county. See the ones from the county would come down and meet with us, we'd go up there and meet with them. We'd

exchange ideas. So then, after a period of time we had a large group here. So, all we had to do was just work with our group, we'd always invite them, or we, if they wanted us to help with anything we would always do that. But then we started work with our group here and I've always been a part of it. I was always actively involved in it. Then they made me a delegate to go to the national convention. And they'd said, they told me, "She's given service all this time and she's never asked to go and she's not asking now, but we certainly hope that you will send her", and they did, they unanimously voted to send me to the national convention. And I enjoyed it. It was nice.

Q: Which one was that?

BRYANT: In New York, it was in New York. That was, which convention was it? I got the records over there, I can show it to you, I can't think of it right now. I won't think of it today. But it was our National convention, and it was beautiful. I just enjoyed it.

Q: Who was running for President?

BRYANT: Wait a minute, I'll tell you, ...Carter! Carter. Was running for President. I have a letter in my book now from him, thanking me. I got one from Lawton Chiles. Telling me how he appreciates my helping him. I just, I just, In fact I really didn't know I had kept the thing, I thought I had thrown them away. I had to take these books out trying to get some material for you, I said, "Lord, here all this stuff's been in here."
(Laughs).

Q: Are you involved with politics even today?

BRYANT: A little. Not as much as I was because see it required you to go a whole lot. You went at night and everything, and I, I'm not going out at night now. But they call.

They ask my advice and I'll share it. And, I meet with them, I meet with them sometimes. But, not as much as I used to. So, oft times now they'll come to our Democratic meetings, and uh, I think there's one supposed to be pretty, I think it's the 26th, I think. I think the 26th. And all the people who are running for office why now they will come there. And they'll talk with you there.

Q: Were you ever tempted to run for office yourself?

BRYANT: I didn't want to. I just wanted to be a helper. And they thought that when after being a delegate to a national convention, I think they thought I was going to come back and run for office, un huh, I said, I want to do what I can do right here. Help where I can help and let them go on up there. A lot of them wanted that, but I didn't.

Q: Now let's see, on whole new subject, the Space Program. came in while you were here. Changed things a little bit,

BRYANT: That's when they're telling about that teflon. The space program. (Laughs) Hey, that's what that was, the teflon.

.....

Q: Did you ever watch any of the rocket launches?

BRYANT: Yes, I did. Yes I did watch some of them. They asked me, "Would you like to go up in one?" I said, "No thank you." (Laughs) No thank you. Not me. Don't want to go up in one.

Q: On a different subject. Were you ever here when a hurricane came close? Or storms were pretty bad?

BRYANT: Yes, I was right here. We thought this one was going to be bad. See that's why I have two of those shutters I

have up there. So I can pull them down and lock them and then the wind won't hardly take them away. I got them all around my house. But I didn't take them down this time because I just felt, I don't think it's going to hit us that hard. I'm glad I didn't because I had a job to put them back up. But I didn't take them down. And we didn't get it you know. Boy it got Miami though. But you know it didn't get my granddaughter. She's at Cooper City, The only thing happened to her was that they, the limbs on the trees fell off. But didn't do anything to her house, not to the windows or anything. So, I felt that they were blessed. They were really blessed. Really blessed. You see, she's right on 100. And they have a row of trees just as you come off 100, still when you go right around the curve, it's still 100. And the row of trees are there. That's the only thing that divides them from the highway, is that row of trees, 'cause they run the same thing. And they say the wind got with them, but didn't none of it hurt them. I was glad of it. But I needed to call to find out and my son-in-law did the sam thing. They said no, they weren't hurt, I was glad. And my daughter left her house and went up to Cooper City. But the reason she left home was because her lights and telephone were off. She couldn't get to anyone. So she went on up to Cooper City and stayed till it was over. Then she went on back home when they told her lights were on. She went on back home.

Q: Remember hurricane Donna? Came through here.

BRYANT: Yes, I sure do. Yeah, I remember hurricane Donna, Do I! (laughs) Hurricane Donna gave us a fright. Really. We were really afraid that they were going to, well we kind of thought they were going to sweep us out of the way. But then, the winds changed. But you know we've been lucky. Looks like when they get here they always change and go around. I say, "Lord, leave me with these praying people." God is good to us. And this time I say, "Well Lord," they say, "You going to leave home?" I say, "uh uh I'm going to get on my knees and tell the

Lord to take care of me in my house." And that's what I did. I stayed here. I was here by myself too. But it was all right. But I wasn't by myself because God was here with me. But I mean, you know for other people, right here. But I got along alright.

Q: OK. I think that about does it.

PICTURES BEGIN

Q: Tell us about your mother, when she was born and what her name was.

BRYANT: When she was born?

Q: When was your mother born?

BRYANT: Ah, Wait a minute. It's in there. I thought I knew that. I've got it down but I can't remember now. That's awful, isn't it.

Q: Just the year would be good. If you can recall about when she was born.

BRYANT: Isn't that a shame? It's terrible.

Q: Maybe I should ask you an easier question. What was her full name?

BRYANT: My mother?

Q: Yes.

BRYANT: Ettie Jane Byrd. Whitehead, Ettie Jane Whitehead Byrd. She was a Whitehead. Ettie Jane Whitehead Byrd. That was her name. See Her father was a big something in Baldwin Florida.

He was a big fellow there. I forgot about her mother. I knew the father pretty well, but I didn't know the mother so well.

Q: Looks like she's going to church there.

PAUSE

Q: How did it happen that he came down here from Jacksonville? Did he want to come down this way?

BRYANT: No, remember, I told you that the Presiding Elder, remember, I told you the Presiding Elder, no, not ah, I told you the Bishop. See, he was in Jacksonville. The Bishop lives in Jacksonville, see. So the Bishop wanted him, something he wanted him to do for him, that he said "uh uh", which was wrong, but whatever it was he would, if he would do it he'd be sinning. He told him no. So he got angry with him and gave him - this is the smallest charge he had, so he gave him the smallest charge. So my daddy came here and made good. They went up there after, say, "Oh, the Bishop sent Byrd down there to kill him, look Byrd coming with a fine car, so and so. Different ministers, you know. They call this getting back at the Bishop. But it was alright. He told him God was with him. He said God was with him wherever he was going, so I don't have to worry.

Q: Tell us about this picture here.

BRYANT: This is when I was to that convention. And we went to, as a delegates, and this, what they were doing, they were trying to make changes in things, you know, that they didn't need to make. And certain, I stood up and told them what I thought. And look like all the hands went up and things. They said "You follow them but you caused the rest to go over too.

Q: You're a leader, not a follower.

BRYANT: I'm a leader. But now you know, I told them in order to be a good leader I had to be a good follower. So I had

to learn to be a good follower first. Then that's what I tell them. In order to lead something you make sure you are a good follower. If you can be a good follower, then you can make a good leader. Some of them don't want to be a good follower, they want to jump right in to leadership. President Carter. Oh boy.

Q: It's been a long time since we've had a Democrat in the White house.

BRYANT: Um hm, That's right. They're trying to get Clinton now. So I don't know. Maybe yes, maybe no.