

**CATHERINE BRYAN MOFFIT**

Born on Spring Island

Left Spring Island in 1941 because Ms. Copp got married again, things had changed a lot and they didn't want anybody that lived there before to live on the island...they want them to leave.

**Had she been friendly before?**

Not too friendly but I didn't work for her, but my brother did and my sister did and my sister-in-law all worked for her.

**So you didn't work for the Copps at all?**

No.

**Did you work for one of the other families on the island?**

The Pinckneys.

**What were they like to work with?**

Very nice people. But when I worked for them, the wife had died, so I just worked for the old man.

**What did you do for him?**

Cook, clean.

**Did you work there every day?**

Yeah, for a while.

**When did you start working...at what age?**

Thirteen. Not full-time...just help out. My mother worked for him and then I just help out. But then I actually start working when I was about 18 or 20, you know, regular.

**You went to school here on the island?**

Uh-huh.

**How far in school did you go?**

I only went to 6th grade there, that's the highest it goes, but then I went to Ridgeland and I went to school there about two terms

**Did you ever live anywhere else on the island besides the house where you grew up?**

No.

**How did you get around the island?**

Walked...wagon...once and a while somebody have a car we get a ride or something like that but nothing regular. There wasn't many cars over here at that time.

**Do you know how many families lived here?**

About 40, something like that.

**Were there a lot of children who lived here?**

Yeah...everybody had children. My brother say there were a lot of cars, but didn't have access to the cars. They had the cars to work, mostly trucks and stuff. Mr. Copp had a car something like that up there and he had a chauffeur to drive him back and forth like that. My father had an old Model T.

**Do you know how he got it to the island?**

Ferry.

**Was there a regular ferry?**

No...not a regular ferry...just something to bring it over.

**Do you remember when he got it?**

No I don't. I remember he had a car when I was about 8 or 9 years old.

**What did you do every day? How did you spend your day?**

In the field, plant crops...Mr. Copp plant crops. You work in the field all day when you not working in the house.

**What did you do in the field?**

Plant corn and tomatoes and pick peas and stuff like that.

**Did you help with harvesting?**

Picking peas and picking tomatoes.

**Did you help in your family's garden as well?**

Yes.

**What did you eat?**

Chicken, pork, beef, oysters, shrimp, crabs, fish, we eat all that stuff.

**Did you raise beef cattle here?**

Yes, Mr. Copp did. They kill it. My father was the butcher.

**So you went out the river quite a bit?**

Oh, Lord yes. My mother did the same thing. She loved the river. I cannot swim up to today, but I love the river. I fish, caught crab, oysters, shrimp. I could cast a net like a champ.

**Did you ever make nets?**

No.

**Did anyone here ever make them?**

Yes. There was a man over there who made them. Reverend Marcus Bryant, he used to make nets.

**How often did you leave Spring Island?**

Sometimes on weekends we'd get together and sometimes during the week we had to get off by boat, little bateau. Then we have a car on the other side. My father had a car and my brother had a car on the other side of the river, then we would go to Ridgeland or we'd go to grocery store and stuff. We didn't have a large grocery store over here.

**Did you ever go to the movies?**

Well, if you go to Ridgeland but there wasn't a movie over here. No movies over here.

**Did you go to Savannah?**

Yeah...not too very often. I went to Beaufort more than I went to Savannah because they had a ferry, a boat, that goes to Beaufort every Friday and I would stay with my aunt so I get a chance to go over there.

**Did you earn a wage working for the Pinckneys?**

Yes.

**How much did you make?**

I'm ashamed to say. Ten dollars a month. Then you could buy a lot with ten dollars. My father fed a whole family of eleven and he was only making fifty a month. See a lot of things you didn't have to buy, you could raise it like chicken and all the seafood you want, kill your hogs and stuff like that.

**What did you spend your money on?**

Clothes.

**Did you sew your own clothes?**

No.

**Where did you go to buy them?**

Savannah or Beaufort. In Beaufort we went to Lipsey and I can't think of the names of the others. In Savannah I remember going to Rose shop, it used to be on King Boulevard, and Lange's and places like that.

**When you moved to Savannah, what did you do there?**

Well, I moved to Savannah first I worked at a restaurant serving. It was a Greek restaurant on 31st and Waters. They called him Nick and he was an old Greek. I worked for the Hendersons, used to be Henderson Funeral Home and I worked at the house.

**What did you do for fun when you lived on the island?**

Go fishing that was fun to me.

**Did you ever go hunting?**

Yeah, with my sister and my brother and hunt rabbits, coon and possum, squirrel too, but you know you can't hunt squirrel; you have to shoot squirrel. I never caught any possum; my brother did but I didn't catch any possum. But we did catch rabbits because you can run them in a hollow and then smoke them out, put smoke to them and they'll drop down. See a rabbit will run up in a tree in a hollow, if there's a hollow in the tree, it'll run in the hollow and you smoke it out. When he come out, he's drunk so we just kill it with a stick. You have to shoot a coon. I have never shot a gun like that, but I just know that's what hunt for with that.

**Did you play baseball with the other kids?**

Um-hum. It was fun too. I can't stand it now but it was fun.

**Did you have games during school?**

Just baseball and play ring games. "Little Sally Water Sitting In a Saucer." We had a lot of fun when we were growing up. You can't have fun now because there's too much to see, too much to do. We made stuffed dolls and my brother made little boats. Get the rubber off an inner tube and somehow or another he fix it and you can put a propeller on it, wind it up, put it in the water and it goes. That was fun! And he makes wagons out of crate wheels off the tomato crate, take the bottom out of it and make wagon and then take tomato crates and make the chassis on it and cross sections of trees to make the wheels.

**What sort of dolls did you make?**

Just rag dolls, tie rag around the head and tie a bow around the neck and stuff it with sawdust or whatever like that.

**You went to the AME church here?**

Yes.

**When did you become a full member?**

In 1934, the fourth Sunday in July. 1934, I remember well.

**Are you still a member of the AME church?**

Yes.

**What was it like to become a member?**

It was good. It was good feeling because you feel the Holy Spirit, the spirit of God within you. Then you learn how to love and love people.

**In order to become a full member of the church, was there anything special you had to do?**

Yes, we had to go out and pray, not like they doing now. You know, today you go up to the altar and give the minister your hand and I guess the devil your heart, but you know

then you had to get out and pray and seek the Lord. That's what you had to do. You just didn't do it like they do now. I call this instant religion; it doesn't last either.

**When you were seeking, was there special place you had to pray or a special time you had to pray?**

Well you pray whenever you feel like it. You have that feeling, certain time of day, certain times at night, you get on your knees and pray.

**Did you have dreams you had to talk about?**

Yes.

**Do you remember any of those dreams?**

Yes, I remember the first dream I had when I was seeking religion. I'm not going to tell you, but I remember. I told it to my spiritual leader.

**Did you have a spiritual mother or father?**

Yes.

**Did you have a vision before you chose that person?**

No. I didn't.

**Was that ever a factor?**

Not particularly. But this was an old man, and he was my spiritual leader, and you tell your dream to him and he interpret it.

**Did you he ever tell you what your dream meant?**

He will tell you you got to go back. When you tell him your dream, he'll say you got to go back. And then you start getting better and better until I was ready. I particularly remember I was walking down the road right by my uncle's house, and I was coming by his house and when I get oh about a few yards from there where I was going straight there was suddenly this high mountain there and I remember when Jesus said peace be still and know that I am God and that mountain went just right on down and I could pass. But other than that, I couldn't pass because it was right in my path. I feel like that was a hindering me. I wanted to go straight, but I couldn't go straight because that hill or whatever it was was in my way. And I just remembered that parable and all of a sudden it disappeared.

**Do you feel that's what religion does?**

I really do. I always pray to the Lord *Don't move the mountain, just give me the strength to climb*. It's several visions I had make me know I was on the right road.

**Do you think you're still on the right road?**

I hope so. I just try to treat everybody right as I wish them to treat me. And I get along good with everybody. That's true. I don't see a person that I don't like or I dislike and I don't have no problem with people. I get along good with everybody, and God has been so good to me. I'm 73 years old and I have never so far had any serious hurt, harm or danger to befall me, although I have been in wrecks and stuff like that, but God's always brought me through.

**What is the first time you remember being in church and feeling a part of it?**

Well, I feel like that a lot of times when I go to church but I just wasn't ready to join the church. I used to hate when time they used to call us to come up because I knew I wasn't ready to go up but I felt bad sitting down and knowing I wasn't ready. But when I made up my mind, I just went up and that was in May when I start paying more attention and getting closer and closer until the right time came.

**What made you decide to join?**

I just made up my mind. You've got to make up your mind to do something. My mind wasn't made up. My mind wasn't ready for that yet, I wants to play the field. I never was a bad girl, now, never was bad girl, but I still wanted to be out there.

**Did you feel grown up when you joined the church?**

I was 15, and I've been going to church ever since. And we had to walk to church, you had walk 2 1/2 miles to church. You didn't have a car or anything. Every once in a while you might get a buggy ride or somebody going that way. My mother and father made sure we get and go

**What time did church call in?**

Eleven.

**Was there any sort of Sunday school?**

Yeah, you go to Sunday school first, but Sunday school was in the same building.

**About how long did the service last?**

Oh, about an hour and a half or something like that. Let me see when have Communion. I don't remember exactly when we have communion. I know we had it once a month, But whether it was the first or second Sunday I don't remember.

**Do you remember you pastor's name?**

The one I joined the church under? Rev. James Talbot.

**Where was he from?**

He wasn't from Spring Island. I really don't know. I don't remember where he was from. It was on the mainland.

**Both your brother and your sister mentioned seeing visions or ghosts...did they ever tell you about that?**

Um-hmm.

**Did you ever see anything?**

Once. I don't know what it was but it seemed like somebody with no head and it was very high off the ground. It looked like a person but with no head. It had something tied on his head, but that could be something I just visualize in my head, I don't remember, but I know I could see this thing and I really got scared. It was coming across the field near my house. See, just before then my first cousin who got shot and killed and I saw him lying on the ground and maybe I was thinking about that and probably got frightened. I don't know what it was, but he got shot.

**Was he shot by accident?**

No.

**Was he murdered?**

I guess you can call it that.

**Was it here on the island?**

Uh huh.

**When was that?**

I don't remember what year. It would have to be in the 30s.

**What was his name?**

Nathan Hamilton.

**Did anybody know who shot him?**

Um hm.

**Who was it?**

It was a man named Kent Bryan. Black man.

**Why did he shoot him?**

I don't know.

**But you saw the body?**

Yes. I didn't see him shot, but I saw the body lying on the ground. You see then there wasn't any policemen or nothing over here, so he had to lie there until we could get the Colonel to come and the sheriff to come over to check it out. It was scary.

**Did this person get arrested and put in jail?**

Um hm.

**How long did it take before the sheriff able to come over?**

The next day. You had to go across the river, get in touch with him. There was no telephone or anything. He was shot at night.

**Did the killer hide?**

No. He didn't hide. I think they got in an argument or something. He was sorry after it happened.

**Did anything else like that ever happen here?**

Oh, people got cut and stuff like that.

**Was there a lot of fighting going on?**

Not too many. Everybody was pretty friendly.

**I heard there was still on the island...**

A still! I didn't know about that.

**Did people drink on the island?**

Oh yes. They did. I haven't been around people drinking.

**If you ever did something bad, were you punished?**

Yes, but I was good girl.

**When you were punished, what did your parents do?**

Spanked. But you know, the only thing I got a whipping for was for eating green fruits. I love green fruits. I used to get up in our orange tree with a box of salt, eat the green oranges, green peaches, green plum, with salt...I love it. That's the only time I got a whipping. We didn't get much whipping. We were good children. There were so many of us, we got along pretty good.

**Did your parents ever talk about what it was like when they were growing up?**

Yes my mother did. Her mother died when she was eleven so she had to take care of her younger sister. When her mother died, her mother and her baby brother died about 12 hours apart and when her father died, her father and his oldest daughter died about 24 hours apart, so it was a double funeral both ways.

**When a family member died, what did you do?**

Well, we had funeral, a wake. And then people gather together and sing spirituals. Just sing all night, sit up all night and drink coffee and I guess other things too if they had it.

**Were there any superstitions about things that were considered bad luck?**

Walking under ladder. Black cat run to the left. If you walking down the road and a black cat ran to the left it was bad luck. Friday the 13th.

**Did you have pets?**

Um hm. Cats and dogs.

**Did you like that?**

No. I liked Truly, our dog, and Spot. I liked those two dogs. We had cats.

**What did they give you for a cold?**

Syrup and soda. Just cane syrup and soda mix together. My father would mix it up, and if one person had a cold and mix it up then everybody coughing so that they could get some syrup and soda. Coughing all over the house. But my sister, she's passed, she fell one night on the glass in the cabinet and cut her throat, cut her chin and stabbed her in throat, and we didn't have doctor. I mean she was bleeding like a hog. My mother got some cobweb and sugar and stopped the blood. But she was bleeding profusely. She had a scar. For puncture wounds, you'd spank it with a piece of wood and make it bleed as much as possible and then put cobweb and sugar on it. But you didn't go to the doctor for that, you'd be dead and gone before you got there. Nobody had been bitten by a snake. Lotta snakes. Chicken snake, king snake, moccasin, rattlesnakes. If you had a toothache, you pull it out. For stomach ache, soda and water.

**Was there a midwife?**

We'd bring somebody over. There was a midwife over there, but she wasn't licensed, so we'd get a midwife on the mainland. But you know it's a funny thing, my mother had 9 children and when she was pregnant with the tenth child she didn't know she was pregnant. You see the midwife came because I was pregnant, but I was staying at my mother's until after the baby, and that particular night the midwife came for me and she my mother usually stayed up and talked half the night and she developed a stomach ache and she said, "Let me see what's wrong with you." And here came my baby sister. The doctor told her she had a tumor, and he was going to do surgery in September and my baby sister Louise came in June. And my baby was born six days later. She didn't know she was pregnant. She didn't show. Louise was only a year and a half younger than Jean. After having nine children she didn't know she was pregnant. That was my first baby. I heard the baby crying and thought it was my baby. Nobody was supposed to be pregnant except me. I was still big as a cow.

**Did they give you anything for the pain of childbirth?**

No! You had any children? Don't! The first time, I was in labor from Wednesday through Saturday. I think they was over cautious with me. They said I wasn't ready to have the baby. My father and my brother went to get the doctor and while they were gone, but just before day I dreamt my daddy had on a white cap and he had two pieces of board over his shoulder, one long and one short, and he look at me and smile and said, "Good luck. Everything is going to be fine." And that baby came right after that. I don't think they ever find the doctor. I think he was somewhere drunk. That was my first one, and I didn't have another for 4 years. I had two girls and that's it. I have 7 grandchildren and I got 12 great-grandchildren, age 15 on down. Three of my grands live in New York and 4 of my great-grands live in New York and the rest live in Savannah.

**Did you help mother with cooking at home?**

Yes. She started cooking about 7. My father had to have his breakfast before he go to work. Three meals a day of a woodstove. Food taste better then than it does now. Everything is in such a hurry. Food don't even taste now like it did then. My cousin used to cook the best cabbage in the world, all brown, but now it just burns.