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Interview of Lucretia Brown

Interviewed by M. L. Faunce

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[Some static, speaker starts, stops, starts again.]

Interviewer M.L. Faunce: We're here on the West River. Today we have Lucretia Brown who is an ancestor of Capt. Salem Avery; she was born here, and is actually fourth generation. Lucretia, can you tell us a little bit about your parents and tell us a little something about what they did?

Lucretia Brown: Well, my mother was a granddaughter of Capt. Salem Avery, and she was born up around Galesville near Route 468. My daddy was born at Shady Side, and he was a carpenter and he was one of the only carpenters, he and his partner Capt. Bill Appel. And they developed a lot of Avalon Shores and Columbia Beach and Idlewilde and there was small summer homes around here. I was born in July 10, 1922, and I was one of three children and the baby of the family, and I lived across from St. John's Church, going down the road before you take the County Road. And I went to the school on the corner. I could walk to school and it was about a block away, and when the weather would get real bad, some days my Daddy would have to take me to school on his back because I didn't have any boots. And we played on the river. The ice was bad and we had wild, hard winters, lots of snow and lots of ice, and that was our main source of entertainment.

Interviewer M.L. Faunce: You said that you ice-skated on the bay and on the river and you went sledding, for heaven's sake. It's pretty flat area around here. Where did you manage to sled?

Lucretia Brown: We would go about five miles up to the road where there is some hilly country up there and take to the hills up there. We would also attach several sleds to the back of one of the mother's cars or one of the children in the group, and about eight sleds would be in the back of the car. We would just pull up to the Dixon's service station, which is up in the Galesville area, and we would turn around and come home. We would, at the

time, be about the only car on the road. We would build snow forts across the road and throw snowballs. There wasn't anybody to bother us, like a car coming or anything. And, one day when I was young and ice-skating and I fell down Parish Creek and I broke my leg in four places. And as I lay in the ice crying, everybody wondered what I was crying for. So those were the things that we did.

In the summer, we swam. Everybody. Then, we would take a rowboat and leave Parish Creek, five of us girls rowed to the Rhode River and have a picnic and spend the day. And one time we were there and the tide went out, and the boat sat on the sand bar. We couldn't get out. Eventually, one of the fathers came and got us down and brought us home.

Interviewer M.L. Faunce: Well I hear you were a little bit of a tomboy? Is that true?

Lucretia Brown: [Laughing] Well, yes, there was hardly a tree that I didn't climb and I lived across the road from the Leatherbury girl, Lavenia Leatherbury, and there was an apple tree in my yard. And every morning when the weather permitted, I would go out and get up in that apple tree and say "playmate, come out to play with me". And she would come out on the porch and she would answer me, and that went on until 60 years and, well, she's no longer here. It was fun. We probably had one doll baby for Christmas, a stocking with a few oranges in it. My father would go to the woods to get the Christmas tree and bring the mulch back and the tree would be in the living room, and we all hung our stockings on the mantle piece, as we called it. I had a good home life, loving parents, I worshipped my mother and loved my sister and my brother but, anything else? [Laughing]

Interviewer M.L. Faunce: Well you referred to those childhood days as the good days and the fact that in those days children didn't have many toys to play with so you made your way with what you found around the house.

Lucretia Brown: We used to play hopscotch, "run sheep run," a lot of ball. "Annie Over". I don't guess anybody's children today [would] even know how to play "Annie Over." They'd take a ball and throw it over the house and trust the person on the other side when they caught it, they'd say they caught it, and then they would run after you, and you would run so that they couldn't catch you.

Interviewer M.L. Faunce: You grew up in the same house that your father built? Is that right?

Lucretia Brown: No, he didn't build that, no. I grew up in an old house.

Interviewer M.L. Faunce: Did you grow up in the same house that you live in today?

Lucretia Brown: No, I did not. I lived there about three years after I got married in 1950 and I live up on 468 now. And, after we had to sell the house, it took me a year, when I'd go down the road, I couldn't even look over there because it just broke my heart to think I wasn't there any more. But the apple tree is still in the yard. So, I went to Shady Side School. Miss Ethel was one of my teachers; and she was a strong teacher, I can tell you. And from there to Southern High School and I went to work with the National Youth Administration [NYA] for \$14 a month. I worked at the Hall of Records in Annapolis and also at Southern High School.

Interviewer M.L. Faunce: Now that was during Roosevelt's administration?

Lucretia Brown: That was the Roosevelt administration. Yeah, and the CCC, yeah, FDR, the NYA, and a lot of programs, too. And, eventually, I went to work for the government in D.C. during the War.

Interviewer M.L. Faunce: They were lucky; they were needing secretaries.

Lucretia Brown: It was really easy to get a job. I ran into a Mr. Frank White that came down to the Rural Home Hotel, every summer, he and his wife, and he worked with the Department of Agriculture and I just talked to him one day and he said "come on over" and I took the test, and I went to work right away.

Interviewer M.L. Faunce: Well, transportation was a little different in those days, and I guess the roads into Washington from Shady Side were a little different. How did you get to work?

Lucretia Brown: I would take a ride with anybody that was going over that way, which wasn't that easy for me, believe me. It was long. You'd go to Upper Marlboro, and go over one bridge, 14th Street Bridge, and then on to the Department of Agriculture. Many evenings, I would stand out on the sidewalk and wait for my ride to come, and he would just be an hour or two hours late, and I'd be standing out there waiting for him, but then it was safe those days to stand in the street. And then also I had a lot of friends over there, and quite often I stayed and they had a house and there were about eight girls in there, and some nights, I just didn't even want to come home. [Laughing]

Interviewer M.L. Faunce: In that period, during the War, would there have been many people who would've come from this area who went into Washington to work and Baltimore to work from that distance? It was a bit of a distance in those days.

Lucretia Brown: Yes. Actually, there weren't a whole lot of people down here at that time, and there was a lot of commuting. The thing that was hard was getting somebody who could work the hours that I did.

Interviewer M.L. Faunce: Tell me something about your husband and how you met him and the family that you came to have with him.

Lucretia Brown: I met my husband through a girlfriend of mine; she was a friend of his. And, he came down one summer with her, and I met him, and he never missed a weekend coming back to Shady Side again because he came from Catonsville, and he just thought he was in heaven when he was down here. So we went together for three years and married. I have two sons. One now is 44 and one is 41 and I have 6 grandchildren.

Interviewer M.L. Faunce: Your husband's name was Howard?

Lucretia Brown: Yeah, Howard Brown, and my sons, Mark Brown and Curtis Brown.

Interviewer M.L. Faunce: And your grandchildren? [Laughing]

Lucretia Brown: Wow! [Laughing]. Yeah, I have one named Jeremy, who is 18 or 19. 19! And Ricky, who's 16, and Jimmy who's 14, and Kelly, who's 13 and Leanna who's 6 and Leif Brown, who is 3 years old. Any age you want, just come up and see me. And they are the delight of my life. They've been very, very good to me. When I was widowed, I had the family there, and it took care of me and it helped me. Sustained me - let's put it that way.

Interviewer M.L. Faunce: So your husband liked Shady Side so much he decided he'd make his life here with you?

Lucretia Brown: That's right. And, then across from the Rural Home Hotel, there was a dance hall, and it had a post office in it and rooms upstairs. And he used to stay, if you saw Miss Mary, and she would have been Miss Ethel's sister-in-law, and he used to have a room there and stayed there. We went on a lot of boat regattas, and we went fishing, and we just had a lot of fun together.

Interviewer M.L. Faunce: You have another family connection and that's in this home that we're sitting in today, the Capt. Salem Avery Museum, and you didn't know too much about Capt. Salem Avery when you were growing up but you certainly have found out a lot about him today. Tell us a little something about how this whole project here and the starting of this museum happened?

Lucretia Brown: Well, to be honest with you, I really feel great about this place. I'm proud to be a part of it. I'm proud to work in it, and the people down here are just wonderful. I've never had to research this part of the family because all I've had to do is go back and read one of those books back there and it's all there for me.

Interviewer M.L. Faunce: You're the Health Manager here. What does that mean?

Lucretia Brown: Well it means most Sundays I come down here, and I'm also Jesse Creager's kin. And the Health Manager just makes sure that there's supplies here, and well, I did pretty good here today by cleaning all these windows.

Interviewer M.L. Faunce: No wonder I can see outside, so nice on this beautiful day.

Lucretia Brown: I'm so grateful to have this place. Everybody loved George and Mavis [Daly] and they have done so much, and everybody has done so much. [Background doorbell distraction – “somebody’s trying to get in.”]

Interviewer M.L. Faunce: As this museum has gotten started and it's well on its way now and getting to be quite well known now in the area, you've learned more about your family?

Lucretia Brown: Yes. The Family Bible that's in the living room back there, all I have to do is open it up, and I can see all my aunts and uncles and cousins and the day they were born and the day they left this world and it really means a lot to me.

Interviewer M.L. Faunce: Capt. Salem Avery was, of course, a waterman. Is that a tradition that continued in your family or some of the ancestors who stayed here and lived here in Shady Side?

Lucretia Brown: I really don't know, I really don't know. I know that there were some watermen in the family but they were from my father's side.

[Slight pause in the tape.]

Interviewer M.L. Faunce: Lucretia, I know you've always believed in having fun, having a good time, and you've shared your personality of enjoying that with everybody you've ever come in contact with, so I know that you had a lot of fun on the evening of your 75th Birthday when you had a party right in this same room in the Capt. Salem Avery Museum. Tell us a little something about that evening. Was it a surprise?

Lucretia Brown: It was one of the biggest surprises of my life. And, it took place right under, as the old expression goes, right under my nose and I knew nothing about it. And when I eventually came down here, they held it here, and the kitchen was busy, and I looked in the door and I saw my grandchildren and I saw my sister and I said "what's my family doing down there?" It didn't dawn on me what it was, and all of a sudden, it did hit me, what it was, and I had old, everyday shorts on and my son had tried to make me change my clothes before I left home, and I wouldn't do it. I just wanted to get down here because Mavis Daly wanted me to come down and check something out. So I went down to do that. But there were, I think, 75 people here and a lovely dinner, and a really, really, really great evening. I'll never, ever forget it.

Interviewer M.L. Faunce: Well, I guess you're going for your 100th because that was a few years ago and you're active and you're busy and you enjoy just about everything you do.

Lucretia Brown: I may not go for my 100th because I don't want to be the only one down here. [Laughing]

Interviewer M.L. Faunce: Well I think you'll have company.

Lucretia Brown: It was an excellent evening. At one time in the community, we had the first doctor in the community was Dr. Grant and Ann, and they lived next door to me where I live now. And they've been gone for these many, many years, and they came down to my birthday party. Of course, I've been friends with them all these years. But they were here and family and it was quite, quite a nice gathering. All my friends from the Heritage were here. And I didn't get any birthday presents, though, but I really didn't want any. [Laughing.] It was fun, it was great fun.

Interviewer M.L. Faunce: It just seems like whether you're looking back or whether you're enjoying today, that there were so many nice memories. We talked a little bit about the fact that there were children in your era who really didn't have a lot of toys and entertainment was a little bit limited, but you did have some things that you could do, and what about the steamboat that would come and dock here? Tell us where that is.

Lucretia Brown: The Steamboat came, and it went to Galesville and Chalk Point and to Shady Side and went down to Steamboat Road. I do not know if I really remember ever seeing it, but I think I've heard so many stories about it that I probably, in my mind, have seen it. But, not living here on the water, everybody else saw it, but being out where I was, I guess I just never came down.

Interviewer M.L. Faunce: Well, you were just a little ways down the road?

Lucretia Brown: I was just a little ways down because I know from friends of mine who lived on the water that everybody would yell "Steamboat's coming, steamboat's coming," and everybody would run to the banks. I can remember going down Steamboat Road with Mr. Andrews, who had the Rural Home Hotel, when he went down to pick his boarders up. So I also imagine that I was in the boat but I sincerely can't remember ever seeing it down there.

Interviewer M.L. Faunce: The boarding home gave some life and interest to the community that everyone seemed to enjoy.

Lucretia Brown: If you lived next to the Rural Home Hotel, in the summertime you did not need to do anything else for entertainment. They took the boarders in everyday at 2 o'clock for swimming, and in the evening after dinner they took them for a boat ride to watch the sunset. And I was on every trip. I had meals, I spent the night at the hotel, had friends there, and I never had to pay. [Laughing.]

Interviewer M.L. Faunce: And it was fun?

Lucretia Brown: And it was fun! It was wonderful growing up down here then. We used to play ball in the field between the hotel and my house. There was a ditch between the two places, and I always had the board there. All I had to do was step on that board and across the field, and then I was at the hotel. We played croquet and tennis and went

crabbing a lot. Crabbing had a lot to do with our growing up. And the hotel always had rowboats there. We never needed a boat 'cause the hotel had them there. We would swim out near Parish Creek, used to climb up the buoys out there and get to the top of them, wait for a boat to come by, wait for the wake to go by, and as soon as that boat would go by, into that wake we would jump. Now, if you went out there, you'd get run over by the boats, there's so many.

Interviewer M.L. Faunce: Did somebody teach you how to swim and crab, or is that something you just kind of learned yourself?

Lucretia Brown: Just something we kind of learned. When the sea nettles would get bad, the boarding boats would go over to Beverly Beach. I think it cost us a quarter to get in. And as we started growing up as teenagers, Beverly Beach was the place to go because, of course, it was on the water and they had music and everybody gathered there. If my mother would let me go....

Interviewer M.L. Faunce: Would you mostly go by water and not by car?

Lucretia Brown: No, we would go by car, then.

Interviewer M.L. Faunce: And that took you about how long?

Lucretia Brown: About a half an hour. And Sunday traffic, you tried not to go near Annapolis on Sunday on account of Beverly Beach traffic. Of course, no stoplights were available. It would probably be the sum of about 30 cars coming out of Beverly Beach on Sunday evening. We thought that was a traffic jam.

Interviewer M.L. Faunce: Where were they going?

Lucretia Brown: Going back toward Washington and Annapolis, going home. It was quite a place. Because they had a net all around it for the sea nettles. And a lot of times we, as kids, we would row over there and see if we could cut a hole in the net and go through that way. But we didn't do it very often 'cause they would watch and not let us in.

Interviewer M.L. Faunce: And they had some entertainment there and a pavilion, I believe?

Lucretia Brown: Yeah. They had a pavilion there and, of course, in the water they had sliding boards and things any child would like, and sand and picnics.

Interviewer M.L. Faunce: Well, there were a number of those communities that had entertainment or a public beach along the bay, close to here. Could you name some of the others that were nearby that people might have gone to?

Lucretia Brown: Well, there was Triton Beach and Mayo Beach which were up in that area, but the main one, when we were growing up, was Beverly Beach. I don't think I'd ever been to Triton and Mayo, but I know they were there.

Interviewer M.L. Faunce: They were public beaches but they really were private beaches?

Lucretia Brown: They were private, yes.

Interviewer M.L. Faunce: You had to pay admission to get in?

Lucretia Brown: That's right. Beverly Beach, all had big signs out there with "For Gentiles Only" on them.

Interviewer M.L. Faunce: They were residential beaches, too.

Lucretia Brown: Yes. Bay Ridge was always a good beach, but we couldn't ever get up there because of transportation. As we got older then and we had children, then we took them up there. We also went to Chesapeake Beach. Chesapeake Beach was a great source of entertainment for us, at least once a summer. They would have the Farmers' Picnic down there, and all big families then. My mother was one of ten children, and everybody would get together with their picnic baskets and their fried chickens for supper and meet down at Chesapeake Beach around the 4th of July. And then the train would come down and we could see that coming. So, anyway, it was great growing up here.

Interviewer M.L. Faunce: They were all private beaches, of course, and they did have a policy that not everybody agreed with, but the owners enforced a certain policy about admission, and, actually that, because of that, I understand the house, the home itself is now the Capt. Salem Avery Museum, was owned initially by Jewish families, small groups of people, who had a fishing lodge, or something like that here. Is that a little bit of the heritage of this particular building we're in today?

Lucretia Brown: I think a lot of the good things have happened here, and the one thing I will never forget, one Sunday I was here and this lady, I guess around 50 years old came in, and she was the granddaughter of one of the ladies that belonged to the lodge. And she used to come down here with her grandmother. And, when she came in and knew that she could get back in this building, she was very emotional. And when she went on the tour, she cried the whole time because she was so happy. To me, that was really, really, really, really rewarding. [lots of static and noise in the tape at this point]. In fact, we've had several people come in. And back where the gift shop is where her grandmother's kitchen was and where she got her food from her back there.

Interviewer M.L. Faunce: So you've had continual visits by people who have known something particular about this house or something about the area?

Lucretia Brown: Well, I have found that having lived here all my life, there have been people that have come back here and the fact that I have been here, I have been able to help them, or direct them to who they're hunting for. Lots of times I'll go make a phone call and say "hey, somebody's coming up to see you", and I like doing that. That makes me happy. And I have been known to, rather than point it out to them, where they're going, I'll say "follow me and I'll take you there". And then, of course, you wouldn't be too far away and you'd come back here.

Interviewer M.L. Faunce: Well, at one time, I guess you felt like you knew everybody in Shady Side?

Lucretia Brown: Yes, I did. So few. Like when I graduated from high school, this is bringing all the kids in from Linthicum and Harwood and all those areas, there were 28 in my class. And probably, in Miss Ethel's school, there were about 60 children in the 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 grades, if that many, really. So you knew all the families. As the old saying goes, everybody was related to everybody. You tried not to tell on your cousin, I guess. So anyway, but it was fun. I love the fact that I grew up here. Didn't have any electricity in that house. One of our sources of entertainment, a girlfriend would come up and spend maybe a Friday night with us. One of the things we did for entertainment was that we'd get a glass, a white handkerchief and a nickel. And we would do magic tricks with it. I was talking to her about that the other day, [laughing] and I said "what kind of tricks do you think we really did, wrap that old nickel up in that handkerchief and do something with it anyway?" But that's what we did.

Interviewer M.L. Faunce: Well, you later worked for the high school, so you kept in touch with some of your teachers and with some of the people you worked with at the school for many years?

Lucretia Brown: As of two years ago, I had three teachers, now I have one. And she lives in Montgomery, Alabama, and I'm still in touch with her and I have been out of school since 1939, so I think that's a pretty good record, isn't it? That's pretty good.

Interviewer M.L. Faunce: Yes it is.

Lucretia Brown: At my age to have had three teachers. I went to Montgomery, Alabama to see her one time, during the War and I was talking about that today. I drove down there at 50 or 40 miles per hour I think. It took almost three days to get down there because gas was rationed, I think it was 35 miles an hour, the speed limit, so anyway....

Interviewer M.L. Faunce: Well, you had a nice relationship with the school and you later worked for Southern High School. You were kind of a - I think you used this - kind of a "cut-up" - used it as your 'modus operandi', kind of keep things going and lively, and tell us what you would do to your poor principal who you were supporting there.

Lucretia Brown: You mean like when I worked as a cashier, or with the secretary at Locust Elementary School?

Interviewer M.L. Faunce: Yes, at the Elementary School.

Lucretia Brown: Well, Betty Morrill was the Principal and was also a very good friend of mine, and still is, and I would pull tricks on her. Like, if somebody would come in there and she would be talking, and I would write some silly little note and put it in front of her and she couldn't keep from laughing.

Interviewer M.L. Faunce: Well you would put something in front of her and you would say "Pardon me please. Would you sign this at your convenience?" You were just trying to keep her perspective when things were a little tough; you would try to have a little joke for her, maybe to get her through things?

Lucretia Brown: If somebody came in and I knew they were salesmen or something and they wanted to speak to her, she was younger than I, and I would say "well, that's another secretary, Mrs. Morrill isn't here today." Of course, that would be the principal, sitting over there. We just did a lot of things. We had an excellent school, excellent principal, and it was 24 years of pleasure working there. So now that I'm getting old.....

Interviewer M.L. Faunce: Well, I don't believe that! But, if you don't have any tricks for us today, I'll just say what a pleasure, Lucretia, to spend a few minutes with you talking about Shady Side, talking about the Capt. Salem Avery Museum, and you've given all of us some good memories to remember. Thank you very much.

Lucretia Brown: Thank you, very much, and thank you, cameraman, and please...[tape stops].

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