

Interviewee: **Beverly Jean Wills-Taylor**
Interviewers: **Ernest Demby, Julie Hawkins-Ennis, Linda Moore-Garoute, Noah Waters, Ryan Craun**
Date of Interview: **January 22, 2020**
Location of Interview: **Eagle Harbor Community Center, Eagle Harbor, MD**
List of Acronyms: **BT=Beverly Jean Wills-Taylor, RM=Ray Miller**
ED=Ernest Demby, JE=Julie Hawkins Ennis
LG=Linda Moore-Garoute, NW=Noah Waters, RC=Ryan Craun

[Begin Transcript: 00:55]

ED: Let's start off by stating your name, please?

BT: I'm Beverly Jean Wills-Taylor.

ED: How long have you lived in the area, Beverly?

BT: I've lived in Aquasco practically all of my life. But I've lived down here in Eagle Harbor for about 34 years, I think it is.

ED: So your parents, grandparents... everyone are from this area?

BT: From Aquasco area, yes.

ED: What was your parent's names?

BT: My father was Thomas Nathaniel Wills. My mother was Gertrude Cecilia Pinkney-Wills.

ED: Did they learn from a lot of people... it was a lot of farming and agricultural work around here. Was that what your parents do?

BT: My mother worked for a very wealthy family, by the name of Curtis. They owned the Curtis Brothers Furniture Store in Washington DC. My grandmother worked for them for a while. My mom worked for Ms. Curtis until she died, maybe 20 something years ago. My grandfather was a farmer, and he raised tobacco further up in Aquasco. And that was the joyous time for us because being the oldest girl, I think they expected me to do a lot of things that a boy would do. So when they planted the tobacco, I was afraid of everything. I was telling Julie, I had sent her a little note. And I was afraid of the lizards, frogs, the tobacco worms, everything. So my grandfather said "well you no good to me out of here, so I am going to let you drive the tractor". So I got to drive the tractor with the tobacco loaded on it to the barn but, of course once you got in the barn, there were snakes up in the rafters, so we had to shoot the snakes. So, it was quite an experience, I can say that. And also, we did gardening. my grandparents, I lived with them most of my life. My mom lived in front of us in a smaller house with my other siblings. But we had big gardens. And my grandmother and grandfather raised theses gardens and give the food away to people. Our family is large so they would come, get the vegetables. But anybody came to our house either had a meal or they left with a bag of groceries, vegetables. We had chickens, so I had to feed the chickens as a young girl and collect the eggs – that was how I earned my money, from my little stipend, that was fun. Everybody was friendly – Blacks, Whites, we all knew each other. There was no separation. I ate at a lot of people's homes because I was a wanderer. So I would get up and go to people's houses and eat at their tables. So, this Black and White issue – I didn't see that down here as I was growing up. And it was very safe and secure. Because as a young girl, I love being in the woods. Because there was all kinds of little creeks, you can see these little minnows swim in the creeks, and I would

go out in the woods and stay almost all day long. I would collect blueberries or what we call *huckleberries*. We had wild strawberries, we have fox grapes, *chinquapins*, all kinds of fruits off of the trees, so I would bring that stuff home and my grandmother would make desserts with us. As far as the little grocery store used to be grimes, then it turned into the IGA, so it wasn't bad hitchhiking those days because I hitchhiked a lot and nobody ever bothered me. They had a store call the hardware store; we walked to that to get candy or whatever. Then there was a little shop on Aquasco Road called *Jr. Douglas*. We would go to *Jr. Douglas Shop* and the funny thing about that shop was he would have a big jar of pigs feet, and a big jar of pickles. And he would use the same knife that he was doing whatever else with, to get you the pickles and the pigs feet. So all the kids would always want to go out and see this knife that he had. But he was a nice man – he wasn't violent or anything liked that. Then we had a club called *Cam's Bar*. I don't know if anybody has mentioned that to you, or not?

ED: A bar came up. I can't remember the name. he said he wanted to find out what the name of the bar was.

JE: Yes, in the woods.

BT: Well, *Cam's Bar* was right up here on 3-81. And the proprietors we knew, because I babysat as I got older for their little children. And that was the hotspot, where all the parents would go. And after they had a picnic in our yard and danced in our yard, then they would all live and got to *Cam's Bar*. So we knew the parents were all down there. The family structure was different. Because I come from a very large family, and there was nothing for us to have 40 and 50 people in our homes on weekends. And the food and party started on Friday – Friday through Sunday. There were always pots of foods being cooked and lots of people coming. As far as education, I went to *ORM School*. We knew the majority of the teachers, because everybody knew everybody. My grandmother worked there at the cafeteria, but she also worked at the nurses' office. And I was a rebel, but at school I wasn't, because I knew I was going to get it, at school and our home. So I was well behaved when I was at school. As far as Eagle Harbor goes, we would come down here for our picnics – we would have family picnics down here and gatherings. We learned to swim out here in this river, and they weren't lying when they said you was thrown off at that pier, you'd better know how to swim or you'd learn really quick. As I have brought up, *River Front Inn* was a place over here in Cedar Haven on the left. When you go in on the left, there's a little house there, and down on the point – I guess that's where the hotel was. It's coming back to me now. Seems like I remember seeing that. But I do remember the *River Front Inn* because that was a place where our family gathered – my older aunts and uncles. And it seems that they have slots in there. And I know there was a lot of dancing, bands and singing – it was a joyous time.

ED: Like if you could pick out a memory that you have from this area when you were younger or, present time, is there anything that strikes you? Like I remember when this happened...

BT: Well, I can say that I remember few years ago when this place was flooded down here. When the water would come up here in the road, it was almost over to where those trees were, across from the center. But, I also remember years ago, when we would come from top of the hill, we could see the water up here. All these houses and these stuff wasn't here. So we had more of the river than what we have now. The river has really reseeded a lot – it's very different than it was when I was a child.

ED: Think a lot of your story... It seems like you were explaining like there are a lot of places that you could go where you didn't have to leave the area. Is that something that you would like to see come back to this community, to this area? Were you don't have to go out of town, to go the hardware store.

BT: We used to have a little store here that we were going and get food. At one point when I was down here for a meeting, that was one of the things that the Mayor and the Commissioners were trying to... were talking about having come back to the community. Do you want my personal opinion on this?

ED: Yes

BT: I like it quiet. I'm much older now I don't like a whole lot of traffic coming in and out of here. And that's what I'm afraid of. That... I can remember when the community center was we gather for \$30, now it's up to \$300. And I'm thinking, if nobody was coming here for \$300, what is the point of having these – if the community can't enjoy it. Because a lot of people don't have \$300 lying around just to have a gathering down here. And this is a nice place because we use this extensively. But now that it's getting up to like \$300, were like – what for? We just won't. But my fondest memory of being down here is when I had my children. And we were bring out our children down here to fish and to swim.

ED: How did your children like it?

BT: They loved it. They enjoyed it. Because they didn't know... we got water. Lot of people don't have these.

ED: Yes. Were there important people in the community that everybody kind of went to as a leader?

BT: Yes. It was Harriot Hunter, who was one of the Mayors. And I can't think of the other lady... But when they were in charge of this place, this place didn't look like this, trust me. They would come to your house and tell you – you better get this done and get that done so that this place can really look like a paradise. Those were two women, I can't think of the second one but I know Harriot Hunter. They were driven to keep this place a beautiful place. And they talked a lot about the history of being down here – that's not done anymore. We hardly even know this... I don't know my neighbors. I don't know this people down here.

ED: Seems like from the other interviews we had, it seems to be counter the community that I'm hearing about. Seems like there was a time when people were closer. To say it loosely – like and extended family.

BT: It was. We could... my house was the neighborhood house for children to come to, because we have two sons. So anybody that had children, on Saturdays they would allow their children to come to our house. Because I was the one that always would have stuff for them to make pigs in a blanket, pizzas, hotdogs, whatever they wanted to do. Because there was nothing else for them to do down here, so I always make our home available to the neighborhood children. And it used to be a lot of fun down here because we used to have big heavy snows, and then the snows would be deep. So they would go out there on tires, cardboard boxes, my husband would make a big fire in a drum, and they would snow-slit off on the hills, and then they come back to the house, get warm. I would be cooking, my neighbor Ernest [13:23], my mother lived down the hills so they had three houses to go to children to get something to eat. So they would eat something at my house, then we find out they went to the next house, then they went to my mother's house – so it was a happy time down here. And that was the time when all of us knew each other. If somebody ran out of a toilet paper – then somebody gave a toilet paper. If somebody needed a chicken – then somebody got a chicken. That's how it used to be.

ED: Do you think you learned that from... You think that instill on you from how you came up?

BT: Yes, because... I could tell you a funny story, can I?

ED: Go

BT: One evening I came from work, and I went down to my mom's house, who's up on the hill here. She's deceased now. And when I open the door, she had these three guys sitting at the table. Well, the guys I know are drunks. So I walked in and I said "what are they doing here?" and my mother just gave me a look. I said "hi " to the guys. She says to me "excuse me, it's Mr to you, these are my guests". And I'm thinking – okay. But when my mother died, those three guys who didn't have jobs and who are alcoholics, drank most of the time – gave my mother three of the most beautiful sprays of flowers out of all the flowers. We had the funeral at *Adams Funeral Home*. On the back wall, the whole wall was covered from the beginning to the end of the flowers, and theirs stood out the most. That's how we are raised – to treat people with respect and dignity and to feed them. My mother instilled that in all of us.

ED: She was like a strong willed woman.

BT: She was. My mother raised the six of us with no father. I did have a father biological, sperm donor. But anyway, she raised all of us. And in my house, we lived on St. Mary's Church road, and that's my baby brother over there. And I lived on their farm – that was the happiest time in my life. I want to cry when I think about it because it was my aunt and my mother, an extended family of children. My family always talked about that one house on St. Mary's Church road – were everybody could come, congregate, parties all the time, everybody brought friends from everywhere. I was very popular, so I knew all the football players, all the basketball players – so they all came to our house and was fed. And that was instilled to all of us – you feed people, you take care of people. Don't care who it is. If you see them on the street and they need something, if you can provide it give it to them.

ED: Right. Do you remember the house? If you think about it can you visualize?

BT: The house, it was the best house that I ever lived in, and it was on top of the hill, with big windows. It was a brown shingled house. His uncle was our landlord; we paid \$75 a month for the rent of the house. It was huge; it was a two-story farm house. And it had running water, it had everything. And they raised pigs, and we were just... I mean there was deer all the time, foxes and we had a good life there – a very good life.

ED: What do you think about the relationship between Cedar Haven and Eagle Harbor right now? Was it always that...

BT: It's divided.

ED: Was it always divided?

BT: From my memory, no. It wasn't always like that. Because we knew everybody on that side, as well as on this side at one point. But it's not like that now.

ED: Do you think that unity is a deciding factor in the future of Aquasco as a whole?

BT: Yes, I think that if they don't come together... All of us are getting older. And if they're not doing it now, as we transitioned on, what's going to happen? The younger ones don't know anything about this. They don't want to know about it. They could care less about this. So how would you bridge that gap if we don't start now at some point?

JE: Do you have any suggestions on how we can do that?

BT: The one thing I used to... We used to come to meetings down here, and I stopped coming. Because I just felt like it was a bunch of *hullabaloo*. People just getting together just running their mouths but I never saw a real results. And so you come, you listen, you give your input – but for me, that’s what about it. So I said you know, they’re not trying to draw us together. So I just decided I wasn’t get involved in the community anymore. I just feel like 34 years being down here and I’m still complaining about seeing the river – are you kidding me? So you think they’re going over there and get those people and bring those people over here and would have come together all of a sudden? I don’t see it happening. I mean it’s very sad that it’s not happening. But I just don’t... I mean unless we, why can’t we draw letters and write welcoming letters and invite them in. And I don’t know of that’s happened. It’s like us against them. And it’s very sad because we’re all down here. What happens if an emergency happens? Just one way in and one way out. A few years ago there was a bomb down here, did you all know that?

ED: No

JE: No

ED: If you can elaborate on that more that would be nice.

BT: Yes, because the FBI ran me out of the house. So there was a guy, his house is around this corner. And my sister and I was walking out there on Eagle Harbor road. It was PEPCO. So we heard all these commotion, police men, we saw Rock Newman. You know who Rock Newman is?

ED: No

BT: Our university television show. Well I went school with him from first to 12th grade. He was driving by and I said “well I know darn well they don’t have all them cops”. He is not that important. So he went on back. So anyway, here comes the cops. They pulled up, they were going by as really fast then we saw these Black SUV’s. And there was a bomb thing, black van. So the cops stopped. My sister and I said “Who are you?” they said “do you have any identification on you”, we were like no. We’re just out walking. And we said “What’s going on?” He said “Did you leave your area because you call the police?”. I said “no, I don’t even know what you’re talking about”. So he said “I think it would be better if you stay out here than to try to go back home”. Then I said “I can’t do that, that’s impossible. What’s going on?” And he said “we got a call that there’s a bomb in your area where do you live”. So he let me go, he let us go, we started walking then we got to the... right to our drive way almost, and another cops stooped us. And they wanted to know who we were, etc. So by that time, all these stuff was out of here at this man’s house. So I went out and stood on the hill and look. And I kept saying “what’s going on?” and they’re like “lady, go back in your house”. And I said no until I find what’s going on”. So anyway, it was a real bomb – never reported on the news. We had every kind of FBI agents, we had police officers down here in black SWAT team like boots, black t-shirts and pants. Cops all over the place and it never made the news. How about that? That was alike about maybe six or seven years ago that took place here. That did happen.

JE: Did they know where it came from?

BT: Yes, they blew it up. They put it on this canister thing. And the stench was unbelievable. And he has said that he was going to murder his family. They said that he was just been released from Afghanistan or Iraq, he had PTSD. And they had him in a facility, but when he got out of the facility, he called his girlfriend and told her what he was going to do. And they said that he had several bombs in the garage. And they diffused the bombs that day.

NW: What is name of street?

BT: I know what street that is. That little house is over here on the left. There were you on that day or do you know about it?

NW: I walked up to the front, I didn't see stuff, I didn't see the whole activity.

BT: I did. I witnessed the whole thing. So that's one of the most exciting things that have happened down here in Eagle Harbor – a real bomb that never made television. That's the thing.

NW: You know what the Thomas's?

BT: Yes

NW: So was it the house like when you look at the front door of the Thomas's?

BT: Yes. The little house in front of them. Ms. Thomas can tell you about it, she was here.

JE: Do you know any history of Eagle Harbor, Aquasco?

BT: The only thing I know is what I've been told, this was a place where slaves brought in. And that's about as much as I know.

JE: Like a port or...

BT: Here, on this point down here.

NW: You mentioned St. Mary's Church road...

BT: Yes

NW: My first cousin Doretha, they called her Kyra, she's my mother's brother's daughter in Washington.

BT: Wait a minute.

NW: Mary is her mom.

RM: Yes

BT: I am related to them.

NW: Okay, she's my first cousin.

BT: Her father and my father were first cousins.

NW: Wow

BT: I'm related to Washington, Sevoigh's, Pinkinie's, Curtis's, Green's, Coles, Jonas's, we have a very large family.

NW: So they understand learning from Linda the wood plantation.

LG: What's the name of the plantation we have to go?

RM: Eastview farm?

ED: Eastview of the same plantation?

RM: So when you get to the end of St. Mary's Church road, it's from the split. And to the right, was a plantation called Eastview. Eastview at some point time turned into an orphanage. And to the left was my family's farm that Beverly [Beverly Jean Wills-Taylor] lived on. There's a yellow house right there, at the end of the, where the paved road, there's a yellow house. That was grandparent's house built in the 20's. On the left, that whole left side was my great grandparent's farm. And there was my grandfather and his sister, and when my great grandparents passed, they left it to the two children My great aunt sold her part of the farm to a gentleman named Smith, and then Harry cats.

BT: AA Smith. They owned AA Smith.

RM: He bought it hoping that there would be ground on it. And there wasn't as much as he hoped. So he sold it or gave it, I don't which. I say sold – to his daughter and son in law. And so Hericats has sensed... bought what was my grandfather side of the farm and Eastview. So he has everything of the land at the end of St. Mary's Church road, except for my parent's house and my brother's house – which is my grandparent's house.

LG: What did PEPCO have some type of...

RM: PEPCO bought, I'm sorry, let Beverly finished.

ED: Well, Beverly is there anything else that you would like to add? Closing statement if you will?

BT: I just think that Aquasco, even if there are few glitches in Eagle Harbor is one of the safest places. I feel very secure here in my home. It bothers me that we would... I know that we have to progress and move ahead and that there's a future for this town. But it just bothers me having strangers coming in and out of here not even knowing what their motives may be – if we start developing and bringing it back. I think everybody would be concerned about their neighborhood if that would happen. But I would like to see it built up and see it become a better place. I would like to see us trying to get to know one another, even if it's just for short period of time. I would look forward that.

ED: I agree.

NW: Could you see Eagle Harbor, Aquasco and Cedar Haven becoming like a mini Williamsburg? Williamsburg they preserved history. It has that look if you go back in time – to preserve the identity. Could you mention something like that?

BT: Yes, because there are a lot of historical spots. We have a historical spot in front of my house. It has a plaque on a tree, it's a well. But now, it's like caving in and nobody's attending to it. My husband tries to keep that area clean but he's sick. And I don't want him to go over there and fall down [30:13]. So I'm constantly telling him – we have to let the town take care of that. So where there are historical sites, it would be nice if they would be cleaned up. And maybe fence off. A little fence or something to show what that is, and I think that's possible.

JE: What specifically is that?

BT: Supposed to be a well, a pump out there. And across that street from my house, there's a chimney for that's been there for about 34 years. The chimney is still standing – we look at it every day. It's beautiful. Who lived there? Why is the chimney existing and nothing else? And there's a barrel that's been laying in front of that chimney for 30 something years – we've not touched it. And little things like this like – who lived there? What was that person like? What was their history?

ED: Monday, I went to some Archeologist, the *John Wesley Parsonage* site where that parsonage was. And there's also a well there. So I mean, there are people looking at these things and trying to...

BT: And that's good to know because I did have no idea.

ED: Yes. We've been trying to find people to get on to that farm. Because allegedly, there are slaves there or somewhere down there.

JE: You know the Browser?

BT: I don't know a lot about them.

JE: Mayor Browser... her family is...

BT: Yes, but I don't know a lot about her family or anything. But I know who that is.

JE: Okay. The Mayor of Washington DC.

BT: And then, there's a radio announcer... Philips, the Phillips used to be on WHR – one of those old time. He has a down here. Then there's a family that owns a house that used to own a funeral home in DC.

LG/JE: Stewart's

BT: Stewart's, yes. So, there have been people here.

ED: Well, thank you very much for your time.

BT: Thank you, all.

[End Transcript: 32:37]