

Interviewee: **DeSales Farmer**  
Interviewers: **Ernest Demby, Ward Bucher, Julie Hawkins-Ennis, Linda Moore-Garoute, Noah Waters  
Ryan Craun**  
Date of Interview: **January 14, 2020**  
Location of Interview: **Eagle Harbor Community Center, Eagle Harbor, MD**  
List of Acronyms: **DF=DeSales Farmer, ED=Ernest Demby, WB=Ward Bucher, JE=Julie Hawkins Ennis,  
LG=Linda Moore-Garoute, NW=Noah Waters, RC=Ryan Craun**

[Begin Transcript: 01:04]

ED: How long have you lived around here?

DF: 63 years.

ED: Wow, cool. Who are your parents?

DF: George and Elfa Farmer.

ED: Were you the only child?

DF: No. Actually, I have 2 brothers and 7 sisters.

ED: Do you remember any fun memories of growing up as a child around here?

DF: Just the peacefulness.

ED: Really. Growing up, did you end up working around here and all that?

DF: I did. First, I did odd jobs for neighbor's and stuff and then I ended up working at the IGA in Aquasco for the Grimes Family. I spent 45 years working there.

ED: Is the area different now or is it similar to the way it was then?

DF: It's similar but different too. We have a few more communities now. Building developments now, and not as much farming as it used to be. Everybody used to farm when I was a child.

ED: Was that a part of your daily routine growing-up? Being a part of farming and everything?

DF: Yes.

ED: What do you mainly remember doing?

DF: We did tobacco and corn of course.

ED: Wow. Did it fill your days? Those kinds of activities like that?

DF: Not like year-round but when you did it, you have to do it. Pretty much all at once. Plant tobacco that maybe could you two weeks for that, and then you got to cut it. That's a couple of hard weeks and then later on stripping it, but that was like leisurely.

ED: Was that work that you were doing for you, or were you working with somebody?

DF: Oh, my parents.

ED: Oh, okay. That's cool. What's the mode of your transportation?

DF: Walking. Yeah!

ED: What was school like around here?

DF: School was good. We went to Orme Elementary which is now the Schmidt Center. That was our elementary school. When I first started school it was still, um, segregated. I think when I was in the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, maybe before when I went to the 4<sup>th</sup> grade, that's when they integrated schools here.

ED: Really, what did that do around here at that time? What was the environment like?

DF: It was good. I mean, as far as I knew it wasn't bad. I didn't have any bad experiences. You know!

ED: Interesting, interesting.

DF: A lot of, well mainly the bars they was still segregated, some had a "Black" side and a "White" side. You know, so at least 3 of those were in our community at that time.

ED: What kind of house did you live in?

DF: Um, just an old farm house.

ED: Really, still there?

DF: Oh yeah, that's where I actually live there now.

ED: You still live there to this day? Cool. How much of property do you have?

DF: Um, Five and a quarter acres. Something like that.

ED: Nice and peaceful. Are you a part of religious groups around here or anything?

DF: I'm Catholic. Right at St. Dominic's right in the middle of Aquasco.

ED: What about your grandparents? Were they in this area as well?

DF: My father's parents lived in Brinetown. Probably about 2 miles from Dr. Mudd's house. Have you heard of Dr. Mudd house? And my mother's parents, she was actually born in Rugerville, but her parents are from this area. Some of her family was like in Benedict and some on Waldorf.

ED: So that's how you ended up in this area?

DF: Yeah, pretty much.

ED: Do you know what life was like for them?

DF: I don't think it was extra bad.

ED: Do you remember anybody important. Any significant people that helped you along the way or made an impact on you around here?

DF: Everybody seemed to help everybody back then, so it's pretty much a community effort.

ED: So, was everybody involved with the tobacco?

DF: Not everybody but quite a few people were, you know, farmers.

ED: What was the community do you have? Did you have a doctor, or anything like that?

DF: Actually, when I was, probably my early years I'd say maybe up to 10 years old, we actually had a doctor that lived in the community. It was Dr. Seron. And if you know where that little store is, that little building, the little house on this side, that was the doctor's office. And he actually lived in that brick house right behind that. His name was Dr. Seron. And I think Dr. Lappen used to lived down there at first, but that was before my time.

WB: How would you spell Dr. Seron's name?

DF: I have no idea. Seron. I am not sure.

ED: I keep going back to childhood for some reason. What were the children like around here? It seems to have this kind of up-bringing at the young age. It's probably seemed like a lot of benefits or what, just to be outside of everything but in your own space.

DF: As far as I know everybody was, for the most probably we have few mischievous kids everywhere. But everybody was good, it was pretty close community.

ED: What was your parent's occupation?

DF: Farm. My father was a farmer and my mother was a homemaker. She had 10 kids.

ED: Busy.

ED: So you basically learned how to farm from your dad?

DF: Pretty much, yes.

ED: Those days start pretty early I would think, right?

DF: Yes. It probably would be up around like five o'clock, but I didn't get up that early.

ED: You get the call from them. Time to get up!

WB: Tell us a little bit about the tobacco farming, like you said you plant for couple weeks. But then what happened for the rest of the year? How did that work?

DF: You plant probably may, 1<sup>st</sup> of may, or last. Okay, lets go back to the beginning. You'd probably start your seed bed like in February March, get everything ready, and then you sew it a little later. And back then we had what they would call you "tobacco bed cotton", it's a white cotton that you would put all over your bed and that would keep it warm, keep the frost off your plants and all. So, by the end of April or the beginning of May your tobacco plants would be ready to put in the field. You plant them in the field, the tobacco plant of course. Well, the older people before that, they used a stick. They walked down on the row and plant a stick for each plant. But then it got the tobacco planter, so we used that.

WB: I am sorry but I'm not understanding was there like nursery where you grow the plants and then you transplanted them?

DF: Right, in the tobacco bed, that was your nursery. Then you put this cover over it and then you transplanted them when it's time to put them in the field. So then they take like probably 60 to 70 days to grow your plant to time of harvest, and in the meantime you had cultivated or sometime get in there with the hoe, and keep the weeds and the grass out. And in cutting time you cut it and hang it in the barn and it dries and then you strip it, and of course you take it to the market and sell.

WB: And did you do all those things when you are a kid?

DF: I helped, yes.

WB: And how did you sow it? Does it like put the hole and put the seed in?

DF: To put in the field, or in the seed bed? Seed bed?

WB: Yes.

DF: Just by hand. Hand full of seed sprinkle it out on the ground.

RC: Where was the market that you sold it?

DF: There was market in Hughesville, there's one in Waldorf and the last is in Wilsons Corner. And in Upper Marlboro we also had market.

ED: Did the area were you are growing differ from other areas? Did you produce a different product than say somebody that was down the road from you? Was there any of that kind of competition going on? Where ours is better or anything like that.

DF: No. Everybody had the same. You would alternate your fields. Like one year you put tobacco maybe and the next year you plant corn or something else.

ED: So it changes yearly.

DF: Yes, sometimes.

ED: What do you think you would like to see happen around here as far as the history that this place holds and the future? Would you want things to change or would you want things to stay the same or just that history exposed and brought to light so that more people know about it?

DF: That might be a good thing. As long as you don't change the culture a whole lot, and the scenery.

ED: There's a lot of rich history around here so that's what we're aiming to do. But that's the important thing, I'd like to know. What Aquasco means to you? Woodville, Eagle Harbor?

DF: Its home. It just means home.

ED: Yeah. I don't think you could say it better

DF: Sanctuary you know.

ED: Even better word, yes. It kind of put you in that mode were you just want to be, you know, peaceful. I understand that.

WB: So, did you interact with the Speedway?

DF: I went. Aquasco was actually closing up about the time I that was old enough to start going out on my own, so they had actually closed. But it did open for a couple more years after that. I thought it was good thing but then, I don't know.

WB: So was it dragsters or stock cars?

DF: Dragsters. Drag racing.

WB: And did the church have festivals?

DF: We used to have annual picnic or church dinners and all.

WB: Was that at the church, or?

DF: Actually at the Knight of St. John's Hall. Remember, up straight a little further. I think we had our picnics there most of the time. And a lot of time we would have church dinner from there also.

ED: Majority of people were religious in this community?

DF: I think most of them are. We had the Catholic Church, the Episcopal Church and the Christ Church, the Methodist Church. Back then they call it John Wesley Church.

ED: Interesting that you brought that up. Because we're doing a survey of historic sites around here and we were looking for the parsonage, the John Wesley parsonage. Which was supposed to be on Eagle Harbor road?

DF: Hmmm,

ED: I've been told it's a was by the Samuel Gray house by Samuel Gray.

DF: Ok. That's like the first little house coming in the Eagle Harbor road. But I don't remember the parsonage being there.

ED: OK.

DF: They build the house up the road further, you know where St. Thomas church is? That house is what they would have used for the parsonage.

ED: Really? OK.

DF: But of course, that was probably built in the '70s. I don't know what they had before then. Mr. Brooks he'd be able to tell you. No, he don't go there, he goes to St. Phillips. He belongs to St. Phillips. But I know some of his family belonged to John Wesley.

ED: Really? We were trying to search for that location and just can't seem to find anything concrete. Are you familiar with Wilmer's Park?

DF: Just a little. I know where it is and all.

ED: It seems like a lot of people around here know about that area.

DF: Yes, supposed to be historic sight. All the big names used to come they say back in the early '50s and '60s. Fats Domino and all them. It was on what they call it "Chitlin' Circuit", as what they say.

ED: Do you ever go to any events there or anything like that?

DF: A couple. I wasn't allowed to go when I was young, but when I was old enough after 18 whatever I went a couple of times.

ED: Do you remember who you got to see?

DF: No, just some local people by then.

ED: I understand.

DF: No big names are coming by then. Just was pretty much ran-down.

WB: Because I guess they had baseball or different kind of things.

DF: Yes, back in the old days. By then all the older people had died. Mr. Wilmer had died, and I think his daughter was there for a while and maybe his son, but it wasn't the same.

ED: It was a family owned place?

DF: It was.

ED: Did you know any of them?

DF: I knew Mr. Wilmer's daughter. I've seen him a few times with his daughter.

ED: That's good.

WB: So how did this area change? If it did during the civil rights movement.

DF: That was actually before I was old enough to know. But I don't think it changed a whole lot. Like I said it wasn't, I don't think it was bad here.

ED: Right.

DF: At least not to me. I was still a child then. I was born 1956 so most of what going on before I was 10 years old. Or 10 to 12 years old. You don't really pay attention like you should at that age.

ED: You payed attention to different things.

DF: Right.

ED: That's been general story to everybody. It basically seems like that wasn't a real big issue in this area. Do you think it was the location of where it is that helped with that?

DF: I'm not sure of the location or just general attitude.

ED: Seems like because it's by the water you get a lot of people that would be transient. Just come through and not stay too long but make their way through, and just go about.

DF: Over the years I guess I've seem quite few people come and go. But for the most part the original families, most of them are still in the area.

WB: So, Were you in the military?

DF: No actually. When I graduated, I think they've stopped the draft at that time. So I didn't get drafted. I, on career day, we had the guys come out so I actually talked to one of recruitment guys and actually I agreed to go in the army. And he was going to pick me up one Saturday morning and take me out for a test and all but he never showed and then, (hand gesture) took that as a sign.

ED: At that time what was it that pushed you to want go to the army?

DF: Just, my older brother have been. He spent time in Germany and all.

ED: Just wanted to change something different.

DF: Change something different, yes.

ED: I understand.

WB: So did you stop growing tobacco at some point?

DF: Yes. I never did. I helped my father. But I think he raised his last crop in 1980 I want to say. I think it was 1980.

And by then he was too old to continue, and the market wasn't as good as it used to be. By then you all had the local markets were closed and the last two or three times we sold we had to go to Wilson's Corner. It's not a long way but still, not as close as Hughesville or Waldorf.

RC: Right.

ED: Were there a lot people besides you and your dad that were, I mean the areas was rich with Tobacco farming but was it a lot of people in this area besides you and your father?

DF: Oh yes.

ED: Did that affect what you brought home to the family as far as money?

DF: No, I don't think so. They wanted all they could get.

ED: Right. Is there anything you would like to say? Anything on your mind that you think is important that we know?

DF: No. Other than try to talk to some of the older people in the community.

ED: Right.

DF: I mean I'm old by some standards but there are people a lot older than me.

ED: Right. Ok.

RC: I have a couple basic questions. Where were families go to provide food and things like grocery stores when you were growing up?

DF: We had the IGA in Aquasco or Grimes Market or whichever. And there was stores in Hughesville or Waldorf. Hughesville was like six miles from us and Waldorf like 12.

RC: And would families get food from the stores or would they be growing their own food? How would they provide for their families?

DF: Some they grow own food like my father. We raised hogs so we had pork. You know you kill your hogs in the fall. Usually it was Thanksgiving when everybody killed the hogs. And you salt the meat and you put it in the meat house and you had meat all winter. And then you raise your vegetables in the garden every year. And my mother used to can stuff, tomatoes, beans, apple sauce all that good stuff.

RC: What were the kids doing for fun around here?

DF: Out in the yard running around, whenever they could.

RC: Tanning or swimming or?

DF: A lot of them did swim but I don't swim. But tag, hide and go seek, kickball, dodge ball, baseball.

ED: Were you going house to house? Each other's house.

DF: If they're close, yes. If people are not too far away.

ED: Right.

RC: Was there a meeting place or anything like that? That adults go to, to hang out and enjoy each other's company?

DF: Not right here in town other than church gatherings and stuff like that. But there's nothing right here in Aquasco, no big social halls.

ED: As far as church, was there like a certain position you held within the church? I know growing up that a lot of times I was made to be in church. I didn't want to be there, but you are going to church, and you are going to participate in church. Was that a thing that you had to deal with growing up?

DF: Not really, I was an alter server when I was I kid.

ED: I understand. Did a little bit ushering myself, I know things are being different when it comes to being raised in a church and how you navigate that. I think that's all I had unless anybody else has something to ask.

WB: Well, I am just curious, are people still doing farming? Is that dying out? I know some of the properties had been developed.

DF: The farming that they do now is mostly beans, maybe soy beans. Sorghum I think they call it. That's what they used for birds seed. But there's not really much tobacco left. I think some of the Amish down there still raise the tobacco. Some guys still raise corn. It just depends on what's good in the market right now, I think, but no tobacco. Or very little tobacco.

WB: Are the younger people still doing farming?

DF: Some of the families are farming all the time. Some of the younger ones are still doing it. Probably some of the guys my age, a little younger are still farming but I don't think the kids. Not really interested. There's no real money there.

WB: What are the younger people doing? Are they leaving, or?

DF: They are still in the community. Some of them probably got their high-tech jobs now. The power plant employs a lot of people. I don't know how many younger ones are down there but a lot of people are there. That's probably the only real business around here. Hughesville. SMECO, they employ a lot of people also.

WB: What kind of work is that?

DF: Electric. Power company in Hughesville.

ED: How did people feel about the power plant? When they found out that it was coming around here?

DF: It was already here when I got here. I don't think they objected a whole lot.

JE: The families around here, are they still close and connected and how did they gather to be with each other in the community?

DF: I'm not positive. My family. I think we're pretty close. But we don't gather like we used to like when my parents were living. Everybody would gather on Sunday with grandma's house, but my grandma is not living anymore.

ED: Right. It changes things.

DF: My sisters and brothers they have families of their own. So, they gather at each one's house.

LG: But what do you think is still holding the community together.

DF: You and I?

JE: It's not it is used to be with how I remember.

LG: The people who are families been around forever were still holding the community together?

DF: I think so. There's a few names in the community like the Brook's, we had the Butler's, the Pinkney's, Brown's, Ford's, the Adam's. My family didn't come here until 1951 or 1952 or something like that. We were always considered new comers.

LG: Really?

DF: Yes.

LG: What about your location? You of course found the..

DF: PA Barn, and the farmstead.

LG: Could you tell us your experience growing up next to that particular area?

DF: Back then it was just a farm owned by a guy named Colonel Elliot. And my father actually sharecropped for him, so we just grew up on the farm. I think it was 260 some acres all together.

LG: And so your parents was able to purchase the property? Is that correct?

DF: Pretty much, yes.

LG: Because the hard work, I mean how were you guys able to do hard work?

DF: My father is hardworking.

LG: And families sticking together, right? How many brothers did you had?

DF: Two brothers and seven sisters.

LG: And they also helped other family members?

DF: Oh yeah. Everybody helped.

LG: Helped to harvest the crops?

DF: Right.

LG: Did you still see this? That's not so prevalent now right?

DF: If you have a family farm, I think everybody helps out, but there's just not that many. There's not enough farming, not enough money here in farming to say you can raise your family in farming.

LG: Or small family farms, but do you think they come and back in this area? Because we are leaning towards organic or healthy food?

DF: I wouldn't think so.

LG: That's interesting.

DF: I mean, that's just my opinion, but I wouldn't think so, unless you get a new miracle crop or something that's going to sell. It's not there anymore.

LG: So farming is pretty much dead?

DF: I'm not going to say its dead, but it's not thriving like it used to. You got some hobbyist maybe. Some people do it as a hobby but I don't see it as a way of life. It's a way of life but not making a living. I don't think you can make a living on the farm.

LG: And if I recall you were the butcher, right?

DF: I was meat cutter, not butcher.

LG: So how did you pick-up that particular profession?

DF: Just watching. I went one day to get our mail, like I was 17 and Mr. Grimes offered me a job. So, I took it.

LG: Wow. And you became a very..

ED: How long did you worked there?

DF: 45 years.

RC: Why did you correct her? Instead of butcher, you called it the meat cutter, why is that?

DF: I think the butcher actually slaughters. I mean, that's my opinion.

RC: And you carve up the meat based on?

DF: We'll buy commercial cut meat.

RC: And why did he give you that job?

DF: He needed help. And, I guess he heard that I was a dependable person.

LG: Everything is on reputation pretty much. What type of reputation your family had, whether you're not dependable or so forth.

DF: Right.

JE: And coming from the family..

ED: Sounds like you were structured really well.

DF: Our parents told us right from wrong. They give you the basic tools and you have to go from there.

ED: Well, I don't have any more questions for you Sir. We do appreciate your coming out. Anything you want to ask?

WB: Ok, that's a wrap! Thank you so much for coming in with us.

ED: Thank you very much, sir.

DF: You're very welcome.

[End Transcript: 33:40]