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Gullah Project
Victoria Major Hurton
Damien Johnson, Hope Perry, Dave Catchadorian
July 19, 2012
Penn Center, St. Helena Island, South Carolina

Summary: Ms. Victoria Major Hurton is a native of St. Helena Island. She discusses her experience living on the island in regards to everyday life such as schooling, jobs and employment, holiday traditions with family and raising a family. She also discusses differentiating life from South Carolina to life in New York. She is a strong believer that education may not always guarantee success, but respect, effort and hard work will make a great difference.

Keywords: family, Beaufort High School, Penn Center, employment, holiday traditions, food and cuisine, farming, community, manners and respect

HP: So this is... are you filming? This is Thursday July, 19th. We are at Benezet House at Penn Center. This is Hope Perry and David and Damien. And we are filming Ms. Victoria...

VH: Major Hurton.

HP: Major Hurton. Is there anything else?

DC: Did you say the team?

HP: I did. Yes. So I guess that's about it. Alright. Well good morning!

VH: Good morning.

HP: We are a group that's just looking for stories and for people to talk about their lives here on the island and their experiences. So just starting out, what can you tell us about yourself?

VH: Well, I was born and raised here. I went to school. Mother of four. Two boys, two girls. Six grand. And I'm working at Penn, cook in the kitchen.

HP (offscreen): You said you were born here?

VH: Huh?

HP (offscreen): You were born here?

VH: Yeah, I was born here, raised here, everything. I went away for maybe five years and came back. (Phone rings). Went to New York for five years and came back. (On phone). Oh, I'll call you back, okay? (Hangs up phone). Yeah, that's my baby calling.

HP (offscreen): Do you have... what are your earliest memories here?

VH: Woo, maybe when I was. I think I was, maybe what five, or three or five. When we was livin in Mary Jenkins before we moved to Croft. We had this four-room house, where you could look through from the front to the back. And my great-grandmomma used to live there. And my other grand-aunts used to live next door. Then we moved to Croft. We built a house and then we moved to Croft in the '50s.

HP (offscreen): What did your parents do?

VH: My father worked on Parris Island as a maintenance. And my mother worked at the coastal seafood crab factory.

HP (offscreen): Crab factory? Does that mean she was picking crab?

VH: Picking crab. Mm hm. Yup.

HP (offscreen): And where'd you go to school?

VH: I went to school at St. Helena and I finished at Beaufort High. In the year 1971, when they inaugurate. The black and white came together. In '71. I finished in 1971.

HP (offscreen): What was that like?

VH: It was okay. I only went half a day for one year. It was pretty nice. And we had our fiftieth anniversary last year. And everybody came together. We had a nice time.

DC (offscreen): Before you went to Beaufort High, where did you go?

VH: I went to St. Helena. School right down there (points).

DC (offscreen): It went all the way up through high school?

VH: Yeah, St. Helena went up to twelfth grade, but when they inaugurate to Beaufort High, I went there to eleventh grade. And then they make it a middle school.

DC (offscreen): Okay.

VH: After that. And then now they got it just a elementary school. They tore down the old building and build a new building.

DC (offscreen): Was that year difficult? To mix those two groups together?

VH: (Nods head). A little. But you had to... we got to be friends after.

HP (offscreen): What about the teachers? Were the teachers also mixed?

VH: Mm hm. Yeah, some of the teachers leave St. Helena and went to Beaufort High too.

DC (offscreen): I mean, that was something that went on all over the country at that time. It seems to me like it might be harder here. It's not just black and white, but it's also island, mainland, and...

VH: Yeah, but over we went north... (Phone rings). When we lived over there, we didn't have all those little fightin and stuff like that when we went there. Everybody got along when we went to Beaufort High. It wasn't like up in the city. Country people a little different. Everybody got along. Well I guess at first, we had to get used to the people. And then after that, you meet a lot of friends. Yup.

DC (offscreen): Did you have school dances?

VH: School? Yeah, we had school dances. (Nods head). But I didn't never participate. I never went to the school dances and stuff like that cause that's the year. My mother had died the year I graduate from school so... I never really went nowhere too much.

HP (offscreen): How many children are in your family?

VH: My mother had eleven. But only were eight living. Eight living.

HP (offscreen): And where did you fall in that?

VH: I was the tenth child. I was tenth and then there's eleventh.

DC (offscreen): You were on of the babies?

VH: Yes. I'm the baby girl and I got a baby brother behind me. And then there were uh... six older than me.

DC (offscreen): Did you get spoiled?

VH: Yeah, I was the... they spoiled me. Cause I was the baby girl and I had a baby brother. He's farer, he's worser than me. (Everyone laughs). Yeah, we two were the spoiledest ones. Yup.

DJ (offscreen): So Ms. Victoria, you said when you went to Beaufort High School, you only went for half a day. How come you only went for half a day?

VH: That's how they had it set up. You had half go in the morning and half go in the afternoon.

DJ (offscreen): Wow. And what'd you study when you were at Beaufort?

VH: English, math, English, reading, whatever they had for you to do, that's what we did. So. And we graduate. We graduate 300 somethin or 400 somethin students.

DJ (offscreen): Nice!

HP (offscreen): Did many people after graduation remain here on the island or did people leave?

VH: Well, some left and some stayed. Some went away, came back and some went. Some still up there and some still come back down.

HP (offscreen): Did all your brothers and sisters stay here?

VH: Well, my oldest sister stayed in Charleston. But yeah, all the rest live here in Beaufort. I have one brother now, he live in Walterboro. My two older sisters die, so I'm the only girl living. And I got a baby brother, he live down there in Mary Jenkins Circle. Got one live in Cedar Grove, one live in Chawfort, one live in Port Royal.

DJ (offscreen): So all pretty close?

VH: Mm hm.

HP (offscreen): How do you think your life was different, growing up here on the island versus being on the other side?

VH: (Chuckles). It was hard at first, but then you get the cope of the situation. Whatever goes on. It still is, but you still gotta cope with what goin on.

DJ (offscreen): What made it hard?

VH: Mmm, just the jobs. You know, gettin jobs. Gettin the jobs you want and gettin around, gettin to the jobs. Some people that will let you work for em when you need a job and some people won't hire you anyway. You go put your interview in, not interview but application in. So

then you get a interview and you get there. They say, "We'll call you." And then when they call you, they tell you, "Oh, I hired the other person. He had a little bit more experience than you." Or somethin like that. Then there's one that won't even hire you. And they won't tell you why.

DJ (offscreen): Yeah, at least they could tell you why they didn't hire you so you can be better for the next situation.

VH: No, they wouldn't tell me. And it's right here (points). Right here on this campus.

DJ (offscreen): So how long you been working here?

VH: I've been workin here... I work for work experience now for three years. Next year, it'll be four years. And they put me here to be hired, but... (Shrugs shoulders). He said he's not gone hire me but he won't tell me why.

HP (offscreen): So, you're doing work experience now?

VH: So, I'm workin on. I need work experience. No, I'm not workin for Penn but you know the work experience. You come here to train and they expect you to be hired. I don't need these people. But he said no. So the lady said he shoulda let her know cause maybe last year or somethin like that. She coulda place me somewhere else. (Shrugs shoulders). But I come do my work and I go home.

DC (offscreen): Now you said...

VH: And if I don't wanna do it, I go about my business too.

DC (offscreen): You said you went away and then came back.

VH: I went to New York in '74. I got married in '75 and I came back here in '80. I stayed there bout five years.

DC (offscreen): Uh huh. So you left about two years after you graduated? (VH nods). Why'd you go off to New York?

VH: (Laughs). Husband. I went up there and got married. But it didn't work so I came back home.

DC (offscreen): Where'd you live in New York?

VH: I started off in the Por la Ground project and Edenwald. And then I moved to Edenwald projects in the Bronx.

DC (offscreen): And did you like it up there? What was it like?

VH: It was okay. Yeah, I like it. (Shakes head). It just didn't work out. Well I came back home for two weeks and I never went back. (DC laughs).

HP (offscreen): Did your family support you going to New York? How did they feel when you said you wanted to go to New York at first?

VH: Well, they didn't mind I was goin. When I came back, they all support me when I came back. Cause the problem I was havin up there.

DC (offscreen): Did you have your kids up there?

VH: No, well yeah no. I had all my kids down here. I had the two boys down here in '73 and '74. Then that's when I went to New York. And then they came back with their grandmother first and then I came behind. And then I had two more, two girls, after that. Yup, '73 and '74. And I had one in 1980 and '88. My baby just graduated from college.

HP (offscreen): Oh yeah?

VH: Yup, as an RN.

DC (offscreen): Excellent. Congratulations!

HP (offscreen): What school?

VH: South Carolina State.

DJ (offscreen): SCSU!

HP (offscreen): What do you see as what's changed in your life as you've been here on the island?

VH: Um... people ain't like they used to be.

HP (offscreen): How's that so?

VH: Everybody used to get together, have a good time. Christmas, Thanksgiving and whatever. Now people don't do that no more.

DJ (offscreen): Why do you think that's so, Ms. Victoria? Cause that's like... that's everywhere.

VH: Well, down here it wasn't like that. Cause when we was growin up, we could go leave here and go there (points). We have our ice cream, I mean Christmas run, Christmas kick whatever. Go to the stable, do that. And if you do something bad, you can beat me (points at DJ), you can beat me (points at HP). Go back home, I get another beatin.

DJ (offscreen): (Laughs). Gettin beat.

VH: It's whatever you did. And then you can't tell the next one they did this to you cause you gone get another beatin. Now the kids, they stopped beatin them and they gettin ruined. They can tell you what to do but you can't tell them.

DJ (offscreen): Right.

DC (offscreen): Can you describe for me what Thanksgiving was like when you talk about...?

VH: Thanksgiving? I enjoyed Christmas and Thanksgiving cause I had a sister that live in Charleston and she would always come home during the holiday. I had aunts that live in New York and they would come home for the holiday.

DJ (offscreen): What type of meal did you all have, Ms. Victoria? What did you all eat for Thanksgiving?

VH: We had the usual. Like the potato pie, apple pie...

[End Clip 1]

[Begin Clip 2]

VH: ... homemade at that.

DJ (offscreen): Oh yeah! For sure. Turkey?

VH: Turkey. Mm hm.

DJ (offscreen): Chitterlings?

VH: Oh yeah. We used to kill a hog. We used to, everybody would go to this one house and would kill maybe four or five hog and we would take the chotten bone and cook it all day long. Then cook the chotten bone and everybody gather around and eat.

DJ (offscreen): And what's the chotten bone?

VH: It's like the neck bone, but they call it the chotten bone. And they would cook it. First thing, they would cut up the hog and wives would go in the house and put that pot on that stove while they cut up the hog. They roasted liver and roasted kidney in the fire.

DJ (offscreen): Some good eatin.

VH: Yeah, good eatin.

DJ (offscreen): So you had that, turkey, stuffing (VH nods). Collards?

VH: Yeah, that collard greens.

DK (offscreen): Now, how'd you all make your collards?

VH: Well... how you mean made it? I cook it out.

DJ (offscreen): Yeah.

VH: You mean cook it or made it? Well, we would have pigtail, neck bones, hamhock, whatever you put in the pot. And cook it.

DJ (offscreen): Yeah, you put onions in it?

VH: Yes. Peppers.

DC (offscreen): And after the people would butcher the hogs, how would they keep them?

VH: At a little smoke house. Well, they kill one, put it in a little smoke house with salt into it. And the fresh one we just, they put it maybe in a little... well at that time, they had those other kind of ice. Not the real ice but the um...

HP (offscreen): Like an icebox?

VH: No. We had a little icebox but it carried the ice that stay a long time.

HP (offscreen): Oh, ice cubes?

VH: Yeah, the ice cubes. And you put it there and...

DJ (offscreen): Oh like the dry ice?

VH: The dry ice, yeah. When they had the dry ice...

DC (offscreen): Okay, you're not getting any sound.

HP (offscreen): Yeah, Dave you might wanna stop so we can... We're gonna have to.

DC (offscreen): Talk into the thing (to HP).

HP (offscreen): (Testing microphone) Uh, hello.

VH: Oh, me? Oh yeah, we woulda had um... wait, where we at?

DJ (offscreen): So we're talkin about the dry ice. How you all...

VH: Yeah, they woulda packed the meat with dry ice. It'll last longer. Then we had like, different people that'd kill hogs and we would share it up with among the neighbors.

DJ (offscreen): That whole idea of community again?

VH: Mm hm. The community.

DC (offscreen): Now, did you live on a farm?

VH: No.

DC (offscreen): But did you keep live stuff?

VH: Yes. My father and mother had goats, hogs, cows [Note: unclear]. Tomatoes, cucumbers.

HP (offscreen): Are there recipes that your family makes that you've learned and passed down?

VH: No, I didn't pass it down. I just... whatever my mother learn me, I didn't pass it down. My brothers and they ask me how to cook it and I'll tell 'em.

HP (offscreen): Anything special that she taught you in the kitchen?

VH: Um, no. My mother never really taught me. I just watch her. To see how she cook. And then I learn on my own. Because she was sick and... She got sick maybe bout three years and she went livin in Charleston with my sister. Then I had to learn to cook my own. And my brothers. They used to cook and I used to watch them cook too. Yup, so that's all we did. My time is about up. I need to go back over there.

DC (offscreen): Okay.

DJ (offscreen): What we have to do Ms. Victoria is share this with our students. So if there is something that you could tell our students, some wisdom that you can give them since you've had kids and you've had a kid. You've raised a child who's gone through college and successful. As a mom, seeing this young woman from a girl become a woman, what could you tell our young people as far as education is concerned?

VH: Well I guess it is important but it's still hard because my daughter is still trying to find a job. And my oldest daughter, she went in the army. She came out and now she work at the Navy hospital as a lobotomist. My second oldest son, he work at Wal-Mart. And my oldest one, he in the army base working the computer. All them doing good. But I guess you just gotta work hard at whatever you wanna be or whatever you wanna do. And listen to the older folks. Listen to your elders. Don't disrespect them. When they tell you something, they don't tell you nothing really wrong. They tell you something really right. Because they say manners'll take you a long ways than money gone take you. (DJ and HP laugh). Yup. Cause sometime you gone have to have nothing but if they tell you how you treat them, people'll say, "Come on. I'll take you." And don't charge you a dime. I still do that too now.

DJ (offscreen): Well thank you Ms. Victoria. Appreciate your time.

VH: Okay. Yeah, but you just gotta listen to your elders and what people tell you, you gotta take it in here (points to head) sometime.

DC (offscreen): Thank you very much.

VH: Okay.