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### Oral History Interview: Charice Mealey

Charice Mealey

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ORAL HISTORY OF APPALACHIA  
 400 Hal Greer Boulevard  
 Huntington, West Virginia 25755-2667  
 304/696-6799

ORAL HISTORY NUMBER: \_\_\_\_\_

MORROW ACCESSION NUMBER: # 538

ORAL HISTORY

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DATE: 12. 12. 94

\_\_\_\_\_  
 (Signature - Interviewee)

Clarice L. Mealey  
 (Address)

6972 Church St

Riversdale Ga. 30274  
 (Phone)

DATE: 12/5/94

Jennifer L. Smith  
 (Signature - Interviewer)

412 10th St. #2; Hunt. WU 25701  
 (Address)

(304) 522-0143  
 (Phone)

Thank You!

OWENS GLASS HISTORY PROJECT

AN ORAL INTERVIEW WITH: MS. CLARICE MEALEY

TELEPHONE INTERVIEW BY: JENNIFER STOCK

DATE OF INTERVIEW: DECEMBER 5, 1994

P 1 9 3 7

Telephone Interview - 12/5/94

Jennifer: Could you state your full name for the record?

Clarice: Beg your pardon?

Jennifer: Could you state your full name, for the record?

Clarice: Clarice, C-l-a-r-i-c-e, and my maiden name is, was Lucas, L-u-c-a-s. (uh-huh) And my married name's Mealey, M-e-a-l-e-y.

Jennifer: And when were you born?

Clarice: Uh...[laughing]...December the 25th, 1911.

Jennifer: Oh, goodness. I was born on the 24th.

Clarice: I grew up with Owens-Illinois.

Jennifer: Mmmh. Are you from here?

Clarice: Yes. My original home's up in Nicholas County, but I...I went to work in the Huntington plant in 19 and August 18th, 1929.

Jennifer: Oh, my. Okay. I'll be taking note, so. Uh, and what made you get a job at Owens?

Clarice: Well, I was, it was during a depression, I guess you'd call it. And we...there wasn't anything else to do. And I couldn't go to school 'cause they was a large family (mmm-hmm), and no schools close. And I went to the, I have my 8th grade diploma hanging here on the wall.

Jennifer: [laughing] My goodness, how old were you? You were, let's see, 29 when...you were 18?

Clarice: About 18, yes.

Jennifer: How many brothers and sisters did you have?

Clarice: I beg your pardon?

Jennifer: How many brothers and sisters did you have?

Clarice: Uh, there was eight in the family; there was six girls and 2 boys. (goodness, gracious) And there's six of us living yet.

Jennifer: Goodness. That's a long family.

Clarice: My oldest sister's 89.

Jennifer: I see. Uh...so, how did you hear about the job at Owens? How did you, how did you get the idea to go down there?

Clarice: Well, I can't remember, but I think some of the neighbors or somebody, moved down there, or their children went to work down there and uh, we uh, my, well, my sister didn't go when I did. But I went down there and we, the way we got a job, we sat out on the street and they just, they needed somebody they came and got us.

Jennifer: Right in front of the plant? You sat out on the street?

Clarice: Uh-huh, right out on the curb, right in front of the plant.

Jennifer: Were there a lot of people there? For work? (uh-huh) Were there a lot of women, or....?

Clarice: Yes, there were a lot of women and a lot of men. And they was all sort of country folks, like myself. (yeah) We all grewed up there. (uh-huh)

Jennifer: Yeah, I imagine the town looked a lot different back then. (mmm-hmm) Was that kind of like in the middle of nowhere then, the plant? Or was it...?

Clarice: Well, no, Huntington's pretty, pretty good size place. (yeah, I guess it was still) But there was little country places out around, you know, like Buffalo (yeah), and we was across the river from Ohio, Ironton and all those places.

Jennifer: Yeah, I interviewed a lot of people up in Spring Valley, and up that a way. It's beautiful place up there.

Clarice: I have a sister that lives up on High Street, above the Nickel Plant (uh-huh, yeah), I think the Nickel Plant's still there. (it is) And I had a sister, that she died oh, 4 or 5 years ago, she lived over there oh, across the river from that. I can't remember what...from Nickel Plant...I can't even remember her address.

Jennifer: Well, mmmh.... So uh, so when they came and got you, to go in the plant, when you got your job, what did you do first?

Clarice: Uh, I made cartons. (make cartons)

Jennifer: So they put you in the corrugated department?

Clarice: Yes, in, on the carton assembly. I worked for uh, they called him Hickory Brumfield...let's see...I can't remember his name now. But he was over the carton assembly.

Jennifer: Uh-huh. What was, oh, I'm sorry....(beg your pardon?)

Go ahead.

Clarice: He was over the carton assembly and I worked there for quite a while, then I worked in selecting some. (uh-huh) And uh, I got married in '34 and uh, uh, after my son was born, uh, I went to the Charleston plant to work. (oh, I see) And I worked up there until it went down in '62, and I was transferred down here. And I retired down here in 1972. (1972)

Jennifer: And uh, what's the name of the plant down there that you're...

Clarice: Uh, Atlanta...Owens-Brockway. Owens-Brock...you see, Brockway bought these, bought out part of the plant. And I belong to the retirees now, and we do a lot of volunteer work. (yeah) I still go out there. I tell 'em that all I need to do is bring my card in, but they won't let me. [laughter]

Jennifer: Tell me about Owens-Brockway down there in Atlanta. So, that's still going? Is that...?

Clarice: Oh, yes, it's still, it's still going and...

Jennifer: How large is that plant, compared to the Huntington plant? Is it smaller?

Clarice: Well, uh, we don't have too many people down here now, because everything's automatic (sure). And that was a large plant up there, but I'm not sure...we used to, when I first came down here, I think there was about a thousand employees; there's not that many now. Because automation has taken over. (mmm-hmm)

Jennifer: Do you produce just glass containers there, or is that a glass, sheet glass, or...?

Clarice: No, it's uh, it's uh, bottles. Uh, we were worked on beer bottles and ketchup bottles...I'm not sure what they're doing now. But uh, oh, used to work on those little pimentos; I loved to work on those. (on the what?) Little tiny pimento jars (oh, yeah) you used to buy in the store. (those little tiny...) Yeah, I loved to work with those.

Jennifer: You liked the little ware?

Clarice: Oh, yeah, I'm only 4'11" (oh). I like, I like the little ware. (the penicillin bottles even?) We had a good group down here. And there's some of those, some of the girls...let's see...one of I know of still down here. She's retired, but she came down here to train the girls when it opened up. But I didn't come down until uh, October of '62 (uh-huh). I came down here and worked when our plant went down a month, and then after the Christmas, they called me back and I've been here ever since.

Jennifer: So, you moved down there with your family. (mmm-hmm) What was that, did you, were there any other workers from the Charleston plant made the move?

Clarice: No, they closed it down completely. (yeah, so it was just you going down to...) And my son, he uh, he worked for the glass plant and he was killed in an accident in May of '72. He drove an Owens-Illinois truck. (uh-huh) And uh, the guy that was driving oh, oh, it was after night and he run into a truck that was broke down, down on 75 going to Florida, and my son was killed. He was the only one I had, Jimmy Dale.

Jennifer: Goodness, that's terrible.

Clarice: And my husband's family were all Owenizer's. (oh, yeah?) Uh-huh.

Jennifer: Did you meet your husband through the plant?

Clarice: Uh-huh. Owens Huntington plant. (what did he do?) He worked in the corrugated department.

Jennifer: So, did he make the move, so he, was he transferred, too?

Clarice: No, he had already retired. He hurt his back and he hadn't worked for a few years. And he'd already retired, so...my son was married and he moved his family down here, and I moved down here. And we just stayed. I love it down here.

Jennifer: My fiance's parents moved down there about (my fiance's parents) did they? About 10 years, from Charleston. (oh) Looking for a job, and they just love it. They live on the outskirts. (what's their name?) Oh, their names are, they're Lloyds and they live in I can't remember the name...it's not in Atlanta, it's out, it's south of Atlanta.

Clarice: I lived in Charleston from '30...(Oh, that's right, yeah, from '34 to...) from '35 until '62. (yes, you did)

Jennifer: Uh, yeah, the Lloyds. (I don't remember) No, they kind of like lived in....

Clarice: Thirty years and eighty-some years old you forget some things. (why sure)

Jennifer: Why sure. Mmmh....

Clarice: Have you got your...whatever you're gonna do about done?

Jennifer: Our study? Yeah, well, we've completed about 50 interviews and uh, we're in the process of transcribing them and

putting them in archive form in the library. And we're in the process of making a radio production out of the interviews.

Clarice: Oh, let me know about that. (oh, we will) A lot of, a lot of the people that I worked with uh, was interested in uh, you know, me being interviewed. (mmm-hmm) We have a fellow that works in recycling, and he's in Florida, and he's from Lewisburg, West Virginia. (uh-huh) And uh, we to a con-, a meeting and got up and told 'em, said...my name's Nubbin', maybe you want to...well, I'll go ahead and tell this one first. (okay) He got up in the meeting, said that I went to work up there in sixteen hundred and eight [laughter]...he's a, he's a case, name's Dave Baker. (yeah) But uh, when I went to work there, I was, I worked in the re-pack some. That's where they re-pack bottles, you know, that's been packed and bad ware in 'em (mmm-hmm), we resorted and packed 'em. (mmm-hmm) And the fellow that, our crew leader out there, his name was Frazier Nunley, but they called him Shorty (mm-hmm), so uh, after that.... When I, I went down there, they called me, started calling me Shorty, so.... He was Kentucky and he changed my name to Nubbin. That name has been with me ever since. [laughs] And when I came down here, I thought, "Well, I'll leave Nubbin up in Charleston." Nubbin's got here before I did. (oh, really) [laughing]

Jennifer: Oh, isn't that the way, you know.

Clarice: But I've enjoyed every bit of it. (yeah, yeah) Owens-Illinois is my life. (really?) Yeah.

Jennifer: So, most of your friends, you've made through working at the plants and...I mean, you socialized a great deal with....

Clarice: Oh, yes. We uh, we still, we had this uh, uh, retirees club and we have a meeting tomorrow, no, Tuesday, (mmm-hmm), and we've been working on this Cancer fund. We pledged \$5,000 so, we have the money and then the company put \$5,000 with it. They're gonna put a wing on the hospital down here. And the money goes to furnish that cancer, one of the rooms, I think what they said. (well, that's always a good thing) But we have the money ready now, to turn it in. (uh-huh) But we've been having bake sales and rummage sales and all kinds of things to do that.

Jennifer: How involved is the Owens management with your retirees association? I mean, is it common, that kind of thing?

Clarice: I can't understand you.

Jennifer: I'm sorry. Uh, how involved is like upper Owens management with, how involved are they with like your retirees association, like this charity thing you're talking about? Is that often this kind of....?



Clarice: This volunteer work?

Jennifer: Is there a lot of cooperation between uh...?

Clarice: Oh, yes, mmm-hmm. Yes, ma'am. Yes, we uh, we get along, we do things together, you know. They always approved things, you know, for us to do. (mm-hmm) And we had a lot of...oh, I don't know, we...we're just like a big family (yeah).

Jennifer: I know uh, at the Huntington plant there was a lot of people, there was a lot of extra work activities, like sports events and camping trips and everything, and, and....

Clarice: Well, now, we don't have any, we used to have those camping trips and everything like that, but they have ballgames now, and we go, we go to these big ballgames that they have down here at the stadium. (mmmh) And things like that that they sponsor.... And I'm gettin' too old to run around like that.

Jennifer: Atlanta's so tough, all those lanes of traffic and oh, it's scary. [laughing]

Clarice: I know, I know. But you see, one of the girls that came, there was four of came down here together and I was roomin' with two of 'em, and one of 'em went out, she worked out, we just worked a month and then uh, we was off then. But she went out sightseeing and she got killed. (oh, my gosh, you're kidding? that's awful) I was roomin' with her. She was Juanita Summers, uh-huh, from Charleston.

Jennifer: What happened? How did she...?

Clarice: The car, she run in front of truck, is what they said. (oh, my goodness, that's terrible) And then there was another girl with her, Geneva somebody, but I can't, I can't remember her name to save my life. But, we roomed together. And I worked a different shift, or I'd been with 'em. (mmmh, goodness, yeah, wow, that's scary, I bet you wanted to....) see, that scares me going out on the express, on the expressway. (sure) I drive. I still drive (do you really?) uh-huh, I have my own car. I still drive, you know, around these little towns, East Point and Forest Park, all these places. Fayetteville and places (uh-huh) like that. But to go out on the main expressway I don't, and I don't drive after night. (yeah) I quit doing that.

Jennifer: Yeah, goodness, I, that's more than I could do.

Clarice: After I retired I told my husband, I said, "I can't drive after night (yeah)," so I run out of buttermilk one night to make bread and it was gettin' dark, I went out the street to the milk jug to get some buttermilk, and they kept blowing their horn at me and flashing their lights, and I said, "I'm not doing nothing."

And I went on and got my milk, and come back this back street. There wasn't any lights down there, and I didn't have any lights. [laughter] I came home and I told him, I said, "Forest," I said, "I didn't think I could drive without lights after night, but I can drive without lights." [laughter] (you knew the roads so well) I can see without lights.

Jennifer: No wonder she was beeping at you.

Clarice: But we've had a lot of fun down here. (mmmh)

Jennifer: Do you ever come back and visit uh, West Virginia or...?

Clarice: Well, now my family's up there, and since I don't drive, and there's so many airplane wrecks, I haven't been up there since last March. (mmm-hmm) But my family's all up in Nicholas County. (mmmh) And uh, I haven't been up there since last March. But they keep telling me they're getting old and they're all gonna die. (mmmh, yeah, I know) I know that. And still, I can't get up there. (yeah)

Jennifer: I know it's hard, I know how you feel. Uh...when you went from, when you went from the plant in Huntington to the plant in Charleston, uh, what differences did you see between those two plants?

Clarice: Not too much. (not too much?) Unh-huh. I...I can't remember...

Jennifer: 'Cause I haven't talked to anyone that worked at the Charleston plant.

Clarice: You know, I had a picture here of when we, when I first went to Huntington, the ware came out on big old things like uh, cross ties or something (mmm-hmm), and I don't know whether I can find that or not. But Mr. Kramus was our, our, our foreman. I mean, supervisor, there in the plant. (mmm-hmm) Hugh Kramus. And that, and they had a man down at the end of the lehr...was you ever in the plant?

Jennifer: I've seen a lot of pictures, no I haven't been in the plant.

Clarice: Well, these came out like cross ties. And somebody would put 'em on a belt and they'd go back to the machine floor and they'd come out full of bottles again. (yeah) And now everything's changed.

Jennifer: Yeah, I wonder what it's like, I mean...when was the Atlanta plant built? Is it as old as the Huntington one, or...? (is it what?) Is it, the Atlanta plant, as old as the Huntington one?

Clarice: Oh, no, it just opened up in '57. (ahhh) It's a new, a new plant. And I think about all the old plants have closed. The one in Huntington, Fairmont and Charleston and there's one in Indiana, I don't remember what, what town it was in...and one in, up in New Jersey, I can't what...I can't think of it. (yeah) But uh, I had a choice to go up there from down here, so uh, I came down here where it was warm.

Jennifer: Definitely, definitely. Well, it's certainly a growing area down there. You've got...you've got people moving down there from everywhere. (yeah...) Lot of jobs.

Clarice: A lot of people from West Virginia are down here. (yeah, that's what I hear, that's what I hear)

Jennifer: We came down about two summers ago visiting.

Clarice: Were you supposed to come down here...were you the lady, was you the lady that I talked to?

Jennifer: No, no, she's my boss. I'm one of her graduate assistants. (oh)

Clarice: Well, she told me at that time when I was up there that she was coming down here in September. That's the reason...you got the machine on the machine, didn't you, where the personnel man called up there? (I think so) Well, that's where, well, that's the reason...I went over and talked to him and I said, "Now, should I call 'em or should I write to 'em or what?" I said, "I'm interested in all of this." (yeah) And he called up there and left the message. And I asked him not too long if he'd heard from anybody and he said no, he hadn't. So I'll sure tell him tomorrow that I talked to you.

Jennifer: Do we have well, do we have like the address of your retirees association down there, 'cause we, we could send you some information and you know, we could send a tape of the radio show when it airs, after we get it done.

Clarice: Well, you, I don't know...(or could we send it via you?) you can send it to me.

Jennifer: Okay. I'm gonna need your address anyway. (mmm-hmm)

Clarice: And I'd like to have all, I have some of all of it. I'll be kind of proud, it'll make me proud. (well, sure)

Jennifer: Yes, so what's your address there?

Clarice: 6972 Church Street (Church Street, okay) and Riverdale, Georgia (Is that north or east or?), well, it's south, (south of Atlanta?) uh-huh, it's about, I'm about 10, 12 miles from my plant.

(ah, okay) And the zip code's 30274 (30274, okay).

Jennifer: I'm going to send a release form to you because uh, our discussion is being taped and we'll transcribe this and put it in, if that's okay with you (okay). And...

Clarice: You can take out any part of it that you don't want. [laughter] my name. Now, everybody knows me by that name. If you say Clarice, they probably wouldn't know me.

Jennifer: Well, maybe we should put that on your, the name of the tape.

Clarice: Yeah, just put it on there, I don't care. [laughing] And Everett, you see, when our plant went down, the, the employees was transferred every place, and they still get a little paper, a union paper and some, I don't know what else they do. But they'll probably see it. They probably think I'm dead and gone by this time.

Jennifer: Well, you're gonna be in there with all the rest of the retired Huntington uh, workers, your transcript, the other 50 people we talked to. And uh, and we'll send you, you know, I have to send you this release form, so you can sign it and send it back to me so I can put this in the library. (okay) Because you own your words and you got to give them to me. (I sure appreciate your calling) No problem. If you, if you uh...can I give you my phone number and address? (beg your pardon?) Can I give you my phone number and address (if I can find a pencil)....

Clarice: You know, wait just a minute 'til I see if I can find one. (okay) Okay.

Jennifer: Okay, my name is Jennifer, (Jennifer, J-e-?) J-e-n-n-f-e-r, (okay) Stock, S-t-o-c-k. (I got two stiff fingers and I can't write very fast, that Arthritis) yeah. (S-t- what?) S-t-o-c-k. (okay) And I'm at 304 (304) 522 (522) 01 (01) 43 (43). So if you, you think of anything else you want to talk about or you know, or whenever you can give me a call, we can do this again (okay). But I'll be sending stuff your way for you and your association down there. (okay) And let you know what we're up to here. (okay, thanks a lot) Thank you for your interest (okay, I'm really interested) take care. Have a good...(I'm all excited)...[laughter] well, you have a good evening, now, okay? (okay, thanks a lot) Mmmm-hmm, bye-bye (bye-bye).

END OF INTERVIEW