

Bennett, Mary Jane

5. Mother's Influence (03:37)

<Video opens with a shot of sweetgrass, then shows M.J. Bennett>

M.J. Bennett: This is the great basket. This is the beginning *<holds up large basket>*. This is the fanner basket. This the basket the slave make when they first came from Africa-from West Africa, when they brought black people over and sold it in America for slave. This basket, was begin making the Boone Hall Plantation. It was a rice factory, planted with rice, they didn't have the factory to hull the rice out. But they-the people make something to hull the rice.

<Camera switches to shot of a man with a homemade mortar and pestle before returning to M.J. Bennett>

They cut a tree and make a hole in it and cut another little tree and make mortar and they put the rice down in the hollow of the center of the tree and they beat it with the mortar. Then they take it out, put it in the fanner, and they begin to fan it...and catch it *<makes fanning motion with fanner basket>*. Throw it up and catch it. Throw it up and catch it. And the husks blow away and the whole grain stay in the fanner, till all is out and you have your rice.

<Camera fades out momentarily>

'Cause see, when we come from school-[when we was] small, I couldn't keep up with-we used to make the flat bottom, cause we didn't know how to style'em and design'em, cause we were small, you know, we just make the bottom. If we make a whole lotta bottom, it be easy for she to build it up, you know, and put the top on what need the top, or just build it up and put the cross handle. That give her a push by making the bottom parts, see, then all she have to do-come up and shape the style they wanted. So that-when-important part we had to do: make th-the beginning part, the bottom part and then she would do the rest. And she would say to me to carry the baskets, so you know, it tie it up and bundle it, you know, and you hold it and you put it on the boat-sometime the water splash up on the boat, you know. It just drop you and you know and that big [whoosh], you know, "Elliot, don't be so scared, 'cause more than you will die if it is 'cause all them cars is on, all them people on there." And when you get there now, you gotta get off sometime, you gotta walk up, sometime you gotta walk down, you know, according what the tide is, you know. They let the wharf, some kind of how they let the wharf – *<makes winding motion with hands>* they wind the

thing and it come down to the boat or it is a wind it and it come up to get to the boat. And you get off and we got to tote it to the shop, eh-tote it to the shop and carry it there to the...He know exactly what to pay for the basket, I didn't have to tell him, you know, cause he give my mother the order and when she done filled the order, then she just send me to go take them to him and I take them to the shop and he tell me take it round in the back and put it there and when he done called it and see if all they-then he just give you the money in an envelope and bring it back home to my mother.

<Camera switches to black and white photographs before returning to M.J. Bennett>

When I was a girl, everybody was making basket 'round here. All the young people were making basket. So see? The children now got so much opportunity. Well we didn't-everybody been making basket then and glad to make basket 'cause they didn't have nothing else to do, didn't have-didn't have a choice. But the children now, they got a choice. And if we didn't make basket, when we come from rugby, I had to go in the field: either had to pick cotton or do something. So see? We didn't have no choice, but young people now, they tell you what they going do.