

ODYESA WALLACE

Interview 47a

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ABSTRACT: In an interview at a meeting of the Diboll Historical Society, longtime Diboll teacher Odyesa Wallace recalls her 25 years in Diboll schools. She taught in Diboll from 1960 to 1985, starting at black school, Temple, and going through integration and beyond. Mrs. Wallace spent most of her teaching career in the elementary grades and she recalls the black teacher's struggle for books and supplies when she first came to Diboll, the process of integration, and many of her students through the years.

Becky Bailey (hereafter BB): Conversation between Odyesa Wallace and Becky Bailey. February 9, 1985. This is the regular meeting of the Historical Society. I'm Becky Bailey. And Mrs. Bea Burkhalter is here and Mr. Weeks and Mrs. Davis. Miss Wallace, when were you born?

Odyesa Wallace (hereafter OW): I was born the eleventh month, the eighth day, 1922.

BB: Where?

OW: At Long Branch, Texas. This is a small town west of Carthage, Texas, about thirteen miles.

BB: How many were in your family?

OW: There were eight children in this family. Eight children. My mother and father were former school teachers. My mother stopped teaching when she got married so she had to raise her family. But we had a nice farm and were taught to obey everybody that was older than we were. Would you like...okay, we attended a small school about three miles of Long Branch. My father was one of the teachers and until I was ten years old, he taught there and then passed away. But we continued to live there and mother encouraged us to always work for what you get. And we farmed for ourselves after father passed away until we started marrying and going to college and stuff like that.

I was unable to really attend college with all the money that would be needed, so I worked in the kitchen and went to school like that at Brenden College in Tyler, Texas. And after I had attended college two years, I earned a certificate and still didn't have a job, so I went to California, I thought to live. But my mother begged me to come home and teach because she said during defense time work would be good, but it wouldn't be after the wars were over. So I did come back and the first year I worked, I earned sixty dollars a month and I walked to school. I milked before I went to school, cooked breakfast.

BB: Did you come back and live with your mother?

OW: Oh, yes. There in Long Branch, but this is how I got the school. The trustees of that town came over and asked...told mother that they had heard that she had a daughter with a certificate and she said, "Yes." And they said we are going to put her on the teacher list. And so she got me word and asked me to come back home. And I went back home, stayed with my mother and worked at whatever there was to do there at home and I stayed there seven years.

BB: Now this was in the '40s?

OW: This was in the '40s. I began teaching in 1943 and I taught there seven years.....and one of my high school teachers asked me to come to their school which was out to Nigton and teach. I taught out there ten years and then came to Diboll which is very close by. I have been to Diboll. Been in Diboll...eighty-five...since 1960. From 1960 until 1985 which is twenty-five years. I retired in the spring of 1984.

My work at my home was kinda complicated in a way, because the second year that I taught...I didn't understand that you were suppose to get pay for working as a substitute. I was not substituting, but the other three teachers were away from school for six weeks and I had from tenth grade to grade one to teach and to operate, we will say. I operated it with the better students that I knew were capable of doing the good work. Worked six weeks and finally the other teachers came back. I didn't question whether they owed me anything or not. I didn't know any better. But anyway the children were so well disciplined from home that I had no problems, and of course, the parents constantly visited me and asked me to come if I needed them, to send someone after them. That is the thing that we don't have today. The parent will come or will tell you to tell them, but the main thing they want to know is, "How can I get Johnny off," out of this predicament without any punishment. But that was a different day. We see things in different light today as we did then because if you couldn't punish the child, the teacher would come out and the parent would come out and punish their child in your presence. We didn't have very much discipline problems then, but today it is constant.

BB: I know that.

OW: Would you like to ask me?

BB: Yes. Whenever you first came here in 1960, tell us what the school was like. What was the name of it? First...

OW: It was Temple Junior High School. They called it, but all the grade levels were in one building.

BB: First through high school?

OW: From one through twelve. Yes, in one building. One teacher might have two grades or more in their classroom. There were approximately twelve teachers. The Principal taught the math in the high school and I had two grades in my room. Fifth and sixth grade. I also taught one class in high school. Social studies. Government.

BB: Did you have these kids all day or was it departmentalized?

OW: No, I had all of them except one hour. One hour the eleventh grade came for government and the other grade levels went to different places. That was kinda departmentalized, but not sufficiently to class as such. I taught over there for six years. The last two years that I was over there, I taught seventh and eighth grade math and social studies for the high school department. And then I was asked to come to the elementary school for fifth grade. And I have taught fifth grade ever since, until I retired.

BB: Let's go back to right at first. Can you tell me how large the classes were?

OW: The first year that I was in Diboll the class was thirty-seven. There were thirty-seven students in the classes. Fifth and sixth grades.

BB: Was this combined?

OW: Yes...oh no, no. Not combined. There were twenty-two sixth graders and fifteen fifth graders.

BB: And they were all in one room?

OW: No, there was another teacher who carried about twelve fifth graders. I am sure it was because of the lack of having enough personnel and enough rooms available for the children. That year they built a gym...a gymnasium and a lunch room and a library. That was the first time they had had a library. And of course, along with that I coached basketball.

BB: In the afternoons?

OW: Yes, after school.

BB: Are any of those building still there?

OW: All the buildings are there.

BB: So this is the same one as...

OW: That is the same one. The basic building that was there when I came here.

Bea Burkhalter (hereafter BEA): Odyesa, what year did they build that new building?

OW: 1954. I believe. When the Massey's first came over as teachers there was a frame building right up that little hill from where the other buildings are.

BB: Okay. On the same piece of ground?

OW: On the spot of ground.

BB: Where the practice field is?

OW: Yes, that is right.

BB: So all these things were already in place when you came?

OW: Yes. We did have a homemaking teacher and a science teacher. Those were the only specialties. But now the science teacher was the coach, but the homemaking teacher just did that. She didn't have any other classes. I believe Mrs. Massey was the first grade teacher and Mrs. Ross was the second grade teacher and third grade teacher. I don't remember the third grade teacher, but the fourth grade was Ruby Simmons and she is the one who had part of the fifth grade that I shared with her.

BB: Yes.

OW: Funny things happened. I had taught Johnny Mae Gamble in the high school department in the government class for half of the year. I didn't know that her brother in the fifth grade was named Johnny Gamble, too. And finally it came to me. Who is Johnny? I had been leaving all this time off for Johnny and I had to go to the office to ask, "Who is Johnny Gamble. I have two Johnny Gambles in my classroom" and then I was explained that they were sisters and brothers. But "Mae" changed the other Johnny. One was a girl and the other Johnny was a boy. I believe he was called "Junior," so that made the difference. Many situations like that have come up in my life. While I was working out to Apple Springs, these children were coming to school and one little boy threw and hit the other one with a rock and I was trying to get to the bottom to it. Why did you hit him with that rock? The boy's face was bleeding and he was crying and all. The other little boy said, "I didn't throw and hit him with the rock. I threw the rock and he ran into the rock."

BB: It's never their fault, is it?

OW: No. No. He didn't hit him, he ran into the rock. So many little things like that happens to us as teachers.

BB: How many students were there in the whole school? Do you remember that?

OW: There were something like...approximately three hundred students there.

BB: That is from first through twelve.

OW: Yes. Because I believe when integration came, we didn't have enough students there to maintain a high school. I think I'm right.

BB: You think that is right?

OW: Yes. The boys were sent to the high school that year.

BEA: Before we were forced to integrate our high school, your high school came over to ours because you didn't have enough students.

OW: Yes, that's right. It was before integration, really.

BEA: Before integration and I had in grade school, I had this one little girl, I can't think of what her name is now.

OW: Valerie.

BEA: Valerie. She came over before integration.

OW: Yes. Valeria and Ricky Johnson.

BEA: I had this one little girl.

OW: Yes.

BB: Yes. Tell me what sort of extra curricular things the kids did when you first came? Did they have a basketball team and baseball? Well, you said basketball.

OW: Oh, basketball.

BEA: They had the best football team in...

OW: Football. They had thirteen students in the football department and they won the semi-district. They went to the state....

BB: Oh.

OW: They went to Dallas and there they had something like about sixty-five boys over on their side and we had thirteen. And one of our boys had the flu. And it was just pouring down rain and this child just demanded that he could play in it. And he played and, of course, they beat us something like about forty-five, seven. But just think that was Dallas and we had driven to Dallas. What I mean, the boys went on just a regular school bus. They were worn out when they got to Dallas on this school bus. They didn't feel like playing. But anyway this was in 1960.

BB: What about band? Did they have band?

OW: No, we didn't have band. We had had a band, but it was just a get-together band. We had a music teacher during that time and this music teacher got a few instruments and had the children marching and so forth. We also had a drill team that was very good. I might have a picture of that, but anyway this drill team would perform during half time. And the band wouldn't march, but they would stand on the side because the music teacher really wasn't equipped for band directory really.

BB: Yes.

OW: Many things we did, even though we might not have a degree to that point. I didn't have a PE education, but my basketball girls could do seventy-five points per game. I had one girl that could run out the clock. Minnie Faye Jones.

BB: Yes.

OW: Yes, she was very good and the others cooperated well. Nobody thought anything about the other one having a job and, of course, they were high school girls and I didn't have direct contact with them, so I had to have a way of disciplining them when they didn't perform well on the court. If you didn't do your part, you sat on the bench with me, so if you didn't like to sit on the bench; therefore, you would work the best that you could.

BB: Yes.

OW: We had quite a few girls, but many times the boys would drop out of school early to work.

BB: Did you have basketball? Oh, I have said that. Baseball or track?

OW: Baseball. Yes, track. All phases of athletics. We had it and, of course, at fifteen minutes in the morning and at fifteen minutes in the evening, all the children had what we called a recess. Not a break. A recess and they would have chances to use the swings and would have some kind of little basketball court on the campus that they could play with something to entertain them while they were out there. We also had snack machines.

Money was a hard thing to come by. In the fall in order that we would be able to finance the physical education activities, we had a queen contest.

BB: Oh?

OW: Each class from one through twelve had a queen in his department and the one who raised the largest amount of money would be presented at the homecoming game. Many times...this was the first time that I had ever done this when I came here....I had the fifth and sixth grade children to work with and those children taught me how to make money. They ask me to fix plates one Friday and, of course, I lived very close to the school. So I made up my dressing and chicken for the next day and the next night. And I got up at

four o'clock and baked this chicken and dressing and, of course, we cooked string beans and we had creamed, not creamed potatoes, but candied potatoes and some had cake and we also had carrots. And the boys....Johnny Carr, you remember when he was killed? Johnny Carr, Harold Phipps, Odis Scott, oh many others, Sibley and the Smith boys, I can't remember all of them. But they sold eighty-nine plates that one day. That was \$89.00.

BB: Where would they sell them?

OW: They would take them to the mill.

BB: Oh, just...

OW: Uh-huh. Yes, they just carried them out and they would sell them. The next week, they asked me to make dinners. They said to make more than one hundred.

BB: Oh!

OW: We did the same thing. We sold \$150.00 and then I decided we must plan how much money we were going to make each week. We had four weeks to do this.

BB: Kinda like Diboll Day, only it was right there in that school?

OW: Yes. So we started making flowers from coke cans. Take the can and cut it up into strips and put a flower at the end of it. We were selling those for fifty cents and the girls would sit in class and make about ten of these per day. They enjoyed it.

BB: They didn't have essential elements back then, did they?

OW: Well, no, we didn't. Now this was the only money that we were going to use for our athletic department.

BB: Oh.

OW: And then in the spring, something like February....March, we would have a tournament. This tournament....all the children would bring food for the kitchen and someone would sit at the door and charge a fee and the coaches were the only teachers that were free to operate their team. About one hour...that would be about all the time that you would have. And sometimes these tournaments would last until twelve o'clock at night. They would bring in something like about six or seven hundred dollars that one day. And the Queen contest would probably.....each class would make more than three hundred dollars.

BB: Oh!

OW: Yes, that is right.

BB: How long had they been doing that before you came?

OW: I really don't know. I really don't know when they started it. But anyway that was the way they operated this. Now I was over here the first Diboll Day. I came to the first Diboll Day, but I really didn't understand what it was about. But we just came over just to see while I worked at Nigton.

When I first went out there they had no adopted copies of books and, of course, I asked the Superintendent about it and he didn't have any. Then I went to the County Superintendent and he let me borrow some books out there and at the end of the school I would have to carry them back to him but...

BEA: That is the way we had to do when I taught in the country. We always went in to the County Superintendent and got our books for the year and we were charged for those and then at the end of the year we had to take them back.

OW: Oh, that wasn't new to him, but it was new to me. But anyway we didn't operate on a large scale like we do today. I don't now all the details of how we get books, but I know every six years, I believe, we make a change for new copies.

BB: Well, did the Temple School operate as part of the Diboll Independent School District or did you have a district of your own, or how did it work?

OW: No, it was all the same.

BB: It was all the same.

BEA: Mr. Pate, or whoever was superintendent.

OW: Mr. Pate was superintendent of both schools.

BEA: Superintendent of both schools.

BB: Okay, I just wondered. Then Mr. Massey was Principal?

OW: Yes, Mr. Massey was Principal. And, of course, people starting moving away and many people moved away. And that kept making the school smaller because they didn't have very many students.

BB: What....were the jobs just not available here or they felt like they could do better elsewhere?

OW: Many felt like they could do better other places. Say in the '40s, the black population in Panola County was 52 % and now it is about 20% because people had no way of making a decent living. And even now all the youngsters that grow up in that

county moves to another town that is larger where jobs are available. But at least here they are jobs available, you know, if you can maintain one.

BB: Do you see many of the young Black people moving away now? Or not....

OW: Most of them move away.

BB: Even now?

OW: Generally. Well, very few work here. Quite a few of them work in Corrigan. They live here.

BB: At that Champion Plant?

OW: They live here over in the project. Well, many of the people from Corrigan and Lufkin too, live here, but they don't work here.

BB: Just because of the housing?

OW: Yes, the available housing department.

BB: What was it like whenever they first started...like...they started with freedom of choice as far as integrating? Is that right?

OW: I believe...I believe...

BB: Isn't that right...you could choose which high school or which school you wanted to go to?

OW: Yes, I believe.

BB: What were the feelings at that time? Was it a hard choice to make to stay or to go over to the White school? Or what was said about it?

OW: No, it was not discussed. I believe Minnie Faye did come over here before any of the other children. I believe she went to the high school. I don't remember, but about three students who came over to the high school department and three or four came over to the elementary.

BB: Did others? Did they just feel like they were getting adequate education where they were?

OW: They just wanted to move. There was no educational question, no educational part of it discussed.

BB: They felt like they were getting the same advantages. The majority of the children felt like they were getting an adequate education or the same?

OW: Yes. Yes, they were. They felt that way. I don't know, but I tell you like this. In the Black school....just like we have...special ed. We had students then that were incompetent, but everybody sat in on the same class level as your age. You were told to get your lessons whether you could or not. But then you were emphasized in a way because everyone were expected to produce something. You were expected to respond sometime.

BB: Somehow.

OW: Yes. That's right. Because I remember one kid that really didn't learn to read and to write well, but he could produce drawings and things like that. And when we got ready to make a display, he could do that. And we called on him to do that. He was sent from room to room to put up pictures. That was a great help to him. That was letting him know that he was a part of the school. Many times students feel left out....is the reason they don't....

BB: Like they can't accomplish at all.

OW: Yes. They just feel left out. I was talking with a kid in December about how he felt about the school. Of course, he said that Mrs. Massey made him feel afraid and that just made him clam up. Which could be so, but I remember that kid staying down to the trash pile.

BEA: I don't know how anybody could think Mrs. Massey would ever make them clam up. She was one of the kindest persons...

OW: I know.

BEA: And one of the better teachers that I ever knew.

OW: That's right. That's right.

BEA: Because he surely didn't want to go to school.

OW: As I said, he rambled the streets. He rambled the streets. I didn't correct him on it. I said, "Well, I am sorry." He ask me, did I ever teach him and I said no. I never came in contact with him any. I was never in contact with him. But many of the kids feel that way because sometimes it is your home environment that causes you to not attend school like you should or to do the best job that you could do.

BB: Just to value your education.

OW: Yes.

BB: When you integrated, was it hard on you?

OW: No, it was not really hard on me, even though it might have been hard on some of the other teachers because they were not used to Blacks and they wouldn't speak to me in the morning, but it didn't matter with me. I was always....well, a person that was easy to adjust. I was easy to adjust. You know, whatever the problem is, I tried to work it out.

BB: I know here they integrated before it came down from on high. Before the federal government said that you had to. Did that make a difference in your opinion? As far as the children adjusting and everyone?

OW: Well...no, I don't think so. I tell you what made a difference with the Blacks. When Superintendent Foster told the teachers that they couldn't discipline the children. Couldn't paddle them. They would not be paddled unless their parents said they could. That was really a change for them. Really it was. You might not believe it, but it was.

BB: Do you remember that?

BEA: That was after I left. See, I just stayed one year with Mr. Foster.

OW: Yes. Mr. Greer came.

BEA: So then Mr. Greer came in my job. Mr. Foster never told me that I couldn't....you know...couldn't paddle the kids.

BB: Couldn't paddle the kids.

BEA: Couldn't paddle the kid if discipline was needed and I think that maybe that is why integration went so smoothly because I depended upon Odyesa and Mrs. Massey to help me, you know, when we had problems with one of the Black children. They were always right there to help me with it. To tell me how and if they had problems with the Whites, I was there to help them. But I think that is why our integration went so smoothly. And, of course, she had a sister, Etta, teaching there with us. They were just....I didn't see any real problems.

BB: We are talking elementary school.

BEA: Yes, we are talking elementary school.

BB: Did you have any....well, let me rephrase this. Whenever...whenever they integrated...did they lose any teachers? Did some teachers just say this isn't for me and left? White or Black?

BEA: I don't know of any of the White ones. Now do you know of any of the Black ones?

OW: Now the Black ones. Two retired. Two retired, I believe.

BB: Did they take early retirement or was it just time anyway?

OW: I think it was time, I think...do you remember Lillie Simmons?

BEA: Yes, I remember her.

OW: You remember, she retired and...

BEA: I think it was just time for her.

OW: I think it was and for Osterine Gilbert, who was homemaking teacher. She retired but Bevela is still living.

BB: Did they have any problems with assignments? I mean were there enough teachers to cover all the assignments or did they....?

OW: Oh, yes. Yes, there were enough teachers because they...before the integration they sent, they had sent White teachers over to Temple Junior School and, of course, Blacks over here.

BB: Really?

OW: Yes.

BB: Oh, I didn't know that.

OW: It was a long time before forced integration was...yes. Sure....

BB: So whenever they integrated...how were the schools broken up then at that time?

OW: We only had...we had three.

BB: Right, then you had the three campuses. Like it is now sorta...so when...

OW: Yes.

BB: Four...through the fourth grade was in the elementary. Just like now?

OW: Just like now.

BB: Then fifth through eighth...just like now and high school. Just the same?

BEA: Yes. That is the way they broke it up and so some of the White teachers went over there to teach fifth, sixth and seventh and eighth. And some of the Black teachers stayed and some of 'em came to elementary and some to high school.

BB: So it was just a nice mixture?

BEA: And Mr. Massey went as Co-Principal over there with Mr. Greer, he was then high school Principal.

BB: Who was Principal at junior high?

OW: Mr. Gartman.

BB: Oh, really? At junior high and then he went to elementary and later.....

BEA: Before we completely integrated that way...you...you sixth grade...I had you over there with me. How long did that go on?

OW: That lasted from '66 until '71. I came over here in the fall of '66 and in 1971 they had added another group of rooms. Something like about ten more class rooms over at Temple and....

BB: Is that the new wing?

OW: Yes.

BB: That is there now?

BEA: Oh, first....just the seventh and eighth grade were over there.

OW: Were over there.

BEA: 'Cause I know I had the sixth grade there until I retired.

OW: That's right.

BEA: And you were there with me until I retired. That's right.

OW: That's right.

BB: That's right, we had the seventh and eighth grade over there.

OW: That's right.

BEA: Then they took the fifth and sixth grades. The year I retired or the year after.

OW: After you retired.

BB: Did the class sizes stay about the same or did you have more kids in the classroom at that time or not?

BEA: They stayed about the same, but we added more teachers. You see, we tried to keep around twenty-five students per teacher, but some would have more and some would have a few less, you know. But we tried to keep them around twenty-five.

OW: Each year the classes grow a little bit. Yes, they do.

BEA: They are having more children, I guess.

OW: Well, you know, in 1968, no, in 1968 we started having the Spanish come in.

BEA: Yes.

OW: And they brought in quite a few children.

BB: It made a big difference in population.

OW: Yes, and the school population, yes.

BB: I have heard rumors that there was more trouble in high school than in elementary or junior high.

BEA: Well, I wouldn't know because we never heard.

BB: You just never heard.

OW: Well, I don't know either. Not really. They are always problems. Even today. I am sure there are problems at the high school, but they managed to work them out, somehow. Wherever they are a group of children, you will find dissension.

BB: It doesn't seem to matter much what color they are either.

OW: No. It doesn't matter. It is not always conflicts between colors.

BEA: No. Not always. I don't know anything about how the high school went on except Bessie was over there. You know, she graduated in '68 and she was over there two or three years before and she said that they were just all good friends.

OW: I always question the children after they get to the high school seeing if they are maintaining their...maintaining their class work. Oh, they will always tell me that they are. I don't know what maintaining is. Maybe when they are making. They are not on the honor roll.

BEA: Well, if...some of them did think that if they made a “C,” but I understand now they can’t make that “C” and pass. Has to be a “B.”

OW: Yes. Oh, they just make more than the “C.”

BEA: They must make more than the seventy.

OW: Yes.

BEA: They have to make more than the seventy.

OW: In order to pass.

BB: Seventy is passing. That...if you make 69, you are failing.

OW: Well, it has been a change.....our building set up. We need some main buildings. We have so many portables around our schools. I had better not say this, but they are beginning to look junky.

BB: Well. They are.

BEA: They are beginning to look junky.

BB: They are beginning to look junky.

OW: Yes.

BB: And I agree. And as a teacher in one of those portables, I don’t like them.

OW: Well, that is true. They just...they are not equipped for you to be comfortable in them.

BB: They are noisy. You know, you have just a little bit of noise going on and it is a lot of noise. It is not like where you taught in the main building. Let’s see. Would it be too personal to ask about what kind of salary you were making when you first came here in ’60?

OW: When I first came here I was making \$234.00 a month.

BB: Oh, that is quite a change, isn’t it.

OW: Oh, yes, and I had my Master’s Degree.

BB: Yes, and you had fifteen years experience by that time, too.

OW: Yes, I had my Master's Degree, too.

BB: I would like to ask you some about going to college whenever you first went off to college. What was it like? Was it real hard for you to be able to go? How did your parents or your mother by then...

OW: My mother sold a calf and a pig and got my first year of schooling because I worked at the same time. Oh, it might embarrass me to tell you how I went to school. The first...the day that I was leaving to go to school, my oldest sister told me I would not go any place with those rags that you have in that box. Well, I really wasn't going for the rags in the box because I wanted to teach school. I just dearly enjoyed my dad and his work because he would take us to Interscholastic League. We had a "T" Model Ford. I would ride on the bucket. The water bucket in the car in the back seat and the others would...he would have many other folk's children in this car, too. And he would carry us all to the Interscholastic League and I believe I was in the Interscholastic League one year before he had passed.

Otherwise my financial status in college was deplorable. It was...when I paid my first tuition, I had \$1.00 left. And I bought pencil and twenty-five cents worth of paper and I had a quarter left, I think. I bought a pen, a pencil and twenty-five cents worth of paper which was a lot of paper at that time. And I had twenty-five cents left. I bought a pair of stockings.

BB: Then you started....did you live in a dorm?

OW: I lived in a dorm. This dorm had no kind of air-conditioning; you froze to death in the winter time. And, of course, this is something that you don't see now. Chinchies. I had never been around chinchies really. That's right. You don't know what they are.

BB: I don't know what they are? What are you talking about?

OW: Bed bugs.

BB: Bed bugs? Oh, no.

OW: Oh yes. Mother always...our house was sealed with lumber and she would heat that pot of water and scald those walls twice a year. Didn't have such thing as hot shot and all that kind of stuff. But she would maybe put a little lye or something in there. And, of course, she gave me soap and as many things as she could hand out to me like toothpaste and all that. And then in about a month she let me come home with a person that was passing through. And I had to walk four miles to get the bus to go back to Tyler...to carry my suitcase. And she had fixed me a box of food and I carried that and I walked four miles.

BB: What kind of work did you do at college?

OW: I worked in the kitchen. I washed dishes.

BB: Washed dishes. Did they have scholarships and that sort of things?

OW: Well, they had scholarships from our association, from our church department. But you had to go through certain people and many times you never know what people think about you unless they express it. And, of course, it was expressed to me that they knew what capabilities and that they were afraid....she said....excell over her children.

BB: Oh.

OW: Yes.

BB: So you didn't get a scholarship?

OW: I didn't get a scholarship. Sure didn't. I had to scratch.

BB: But you went for two years and then you got a teaching certificate?

OW: I went for two years. Yes.

BB: What was it worked on the same way that you had to teach and then go back.

OW: Go to school in the summer or any time I could go.

BEA: What year did you go or start to college.

OW: I started to college in 1941.

BEA: That is the year that I came to Diboll to teach.

OW: 1941, but I had been out of school for two years. I finished high school at sixteen. But that was because mother taught the other children. She had four children older than I. And she checked to see if they had their lessons done before they went to bed or before they could listen to the radio or the phonograph. That was all we had. And well, I persuaded her to get me a book and, of course, daddy brought books home and I was never in the first and second grade.

BB: 'Cause you just?

OW: I already know all those books because he had brought them home for me and they placed me in the third grade when I started to school.

BB: That is young to go to college, though?

OW: No. I didn't go.

BB: You waited till you were eighteen?

OW: No, she wouldn't let me go.

BB: It was too young.

OW: I guess it was because I had sent a letter to Prairie View and asked for a student's job. And they told me that I could get one, but I would have to come down and stay until they could place me. Well, she just didn't let me go.

BEA: She was looking after you and I don't blame her.

OW: Well, I understand at sixteen. Well, one thing they were very protective and there were so many things that I know now that I had never heard of then. In fact, there are things existing now that I heard of two years before I quit teaching. A student told me. You know, we just were not exposed to it...the things that people are exposed to now.

BEA: That's right.

OW: Just openly exposed. I flinch many times just looking at the TV. I flinch because of the language, actions...

BB: And the subject matter.

OW: And the subject matter as such. That's right. That is very true.

BREAK IN THE INTERVIEW

BB: Can I put that on tape?

OW: I don't mind.

BB: Okay. Good. Okay, we are talking about the books. You said the school....

OW: When I first came to Diboll....Diboll was not equipped with good books, the equipment was not bad. They had one projector. If you got a film, you had to pay for the expense of getting it. If you had any place to get one. You had to pay for the expense of getting it. Pay for the expense of borrowing it and using it. If you had a machine that would work. The machine was very, very old and dilapidated. And maybe you might get mid-way a film and it would break or something like that. But I was given one ream of paper at the beginning of the year and you could not use the run-off machines, but so often....the Principal just didn't allow you to use it and if you made anything...I have used many chances...used to use a hectograph machine. Did you ever know what a hectograph? Hectograph?

BEA: Yes, but I never used it.

OW: I made a hectograph when I first came over here. I made one or two out at Nigton and I would used the hectograph. But I still had to buy my paper.

BB: You had to buy your own paper for the kids?

OW: Yes, and I had to buy the more of a cotton type paper. It was not cotton, but it was a rougher type paper than typing paper. Now we had a typing class and the children had to pay for their typing lessons.

Mrs. Davis (hereafter MD): Had to pay a certain fee?

OW: Yes, that is right. I believe they paid two dollars for a month.

MD: Yes, they did that it was suppose to up keep the typewriters.

BB: You were talking about the hectograph. I guess back then all the teachers used the hectograph. That is all I ever knew until I came to Diboll. Then we got...well, after I had been here awhile, I was still using that old hectograph. Had to make a new one every once in a while.

OW: That's right. That's right.

BEA: The old one would wear out, but you could run off. But you had to buy your own paper. We always bought our own paper.

BB: I bet you wrote a lot on the board, didn't you?

BEA: Yes, we wrote a lot on the board.

BB: Everything was on the board, instead of handed to them.

OW: And then, say for instance, we didn't have the books. We had to give them some type class every day.

BB: And you didn't have books for every class?

OW: No, we didn't have books for every child. So what you would do, you would allow maybe two children to use one book and, therefore, you couldn't....you had to keep down problems there.

BB: I know how that goes.

OW: But I do remember the geography class the first year that I came here, we had two geography books for the sixth grade and I sent the Principal over for some books and he came over and the Superintendent brought a stack of sixth grade geography that were just black. Half the pages torn out...just anything...they were just not fit for a classroom.

BB: In other words they were all over at the White school being used over there and there weren't enough for both?

OW: They didn't have any over there.

BEA: They just didn't have any over there to give them.

BB: They didn't have any either. Nobody had any books?

OW: But these were just dilapidated books. I don't know where they got those things. These were just dilapidated books.

MD: But they weren't equally distributed, were they?

OW: No. I don't know. I know out at Apple Springs there were not distributed at all.

MD: No, when I taught in another school, the Blacks...after we got through with our books, well, they got them.

OW: That is right. That is very true. Well, when I was out at Apple Springs the auditors checked out there so often that they had to start buying books for the children.

BB: Has integration helped as far as accomplishments for the Blacks as far as opportunities?

OW: Accomplishments. Not quite so many Blacks have accomplished anything since integration because most of the young boys in Diboll just drop out of school for reasons. I really don't know. They turn sour on the job. Many of them have turned sour, but then there are those who have accomplished much. We have football stars in the major leagues and we have teachers in other places of the world and we have engineers and many things like that.

BB: That were educated here?

OW: That were educated here in Diboll. High school education was here.

BEA: We don't have a teacher.....a colored teacher that has gone from Diboll High School and that has come back here to teach.

OW: Oh, yes, you have.

BEA: Who?

OW: Zenovia Scott.

BEA: Oh, yes. I had forgotten about Zenovia.

OW: Oh, yes. She is teaching in Kansas City.

BEA: She didn't come back here to teach in Diboll.

OW: Oh, yes she did. She taught here two years. Yes, she taught here two years. She finished high school after they were integrated.

BB: Okay.

OW: Many of our students who have not accomplished professional goals. I think it stems from home. The parents really don't emphasize their educational status very highly. Those who emphasize their children have made it like Zenovia, as a teacher and Mack Mitchell as a famous star, or was at least, and Butch didn't attend high school over at the integrated section but he did attend Temple Junior. He played pro football and he is an engineer. He finished as an engineer at Prairie View and....

BEA: Who is the man at A & M that plays?

OW: Oh, yes. Jimmy Teal. He is playing now. He is playing now.

BEA: Yes, Jimmy Teal. He had his education here.

OW: And what is Big John's name?

BB: Mitchell?

OW: Yes. Big John. His name is what Edward Mitchell.

BB: Yes, Edward Mitchell.

OW: Edward Mitchell is playing basketball and going to college. I can't think of anyone else who has, but we had quite a few professional youngsters before integration. And many times, as I said, a child who is capable of doing well is not encouraged by the parents, you know, to become professionalized and then students are able to get jobs now without becoming professionalized in many cases.

BB: And make an adequate living. It may not be...

OW: Yes. I said...you know...the minimum.

BB: Have there been a lot of changes in the Black community since the Mexican population has moved in here, because I know a lot of them live in that area of town.

OW: Okay, the first thing is...when I came here, they had poor housing conditions and then in 1963 they developed a nice unit of apartment houses and many people come from many places to stay here, but I think they invited the Mexicans first to work and then after they came...oh, they just came by the carloads and the truck loads and stuff like that and the only thing that has changed over there. There are just many over there. There are no conflicts.

BB: Is there a fair mixing back and forth or does everybody kinda stay in their own little groups.

OW: Not necessarily groups because in the housing department you live where you can get a house. But now if you are already living in an area where there are no Mexicans you are all right. But they have houses most any place down there because many of them are buying houses. Many more than the Blacks.

BB: Why aren't the Blacks buying their houses?

OW: Some of them might not be working. I really don't...I remember back in '69 or '68. I believe they offered up those first forty-two houses. Didn't they offer them up for sale?

BB: Yes.

OW: I don't know why they took them off, but no one bought any.

BB: I wonder why?

OW: I don't know. I really don't know.

BB: Because you own your home, don't you?

OW: Oh, yes.

BEA: I guess they didn't want to have the up-keep, you know, so many people have lived in these company houses and the company did the up-keep and all and I feel like maybe that was one reason why people did not want to buy them. They didn't want to have the up-keep on them.

OW: They had these houses up for sale a certain length of time and I don't know exactly why...didn't enough of them buy for that length of time. Something like that. Maybe I don't know, but anyway....

BEA: That could be one of the reasons why...they had always had a company house and they didn't want to have the up-keep on it.

OW: Yes. They paid eight dollars a month rent and two dollars for water.

BB: So you just get used to that and that is the way you like it.

OW: There are quite a few Blacks who own homes.

BB: Yes. Up there where...

OW: Cosey's Circle.

BB: Yes...the Moses....

OW: Oh yes, down there and where I was talking about if where Judy Coleman lived. Do you know Judy Coleman...back in that Circle. They call it Cosey's Circle.

BEA: Emma Moses is one more girl.

OW: Yes.

BEA: Emma...that was a long time before you come here.

OW: Oh, yes. She lived here when I came.

BEA: She was a card.

OW: Yes.

BEA: She was one of my very best.

END OF INTERVIEW