

ARDINY LEE WILLIAMS
Interview 116b
April 8, 1988
Jim Ligon, Interviewer
Retyped by Courtney Lawrence

ABSTRACT: In this interview with Jim Ligon, Ardiny Lee Williams reminisces about life in the African American community in Diboll. Mrs. Williams remembers her church, her school, her parents, Easter and Christmas celebrations, and other community members. She also comments on her son E.C. Williams' club and his works within the community.

This is an interview given by A. Lee Williams, being interviewed by Jim Ligon. Mrs. Williams is the wife of Robert Williams – both longtime residents of Diboll black community. Mrs. Williams is the mother of E.C. Williams, who established the “Family Affair” Club. She is the grandmother of Cheryl Bell, the first black valedictorian of Diboll High School.

Jim Ligon (hereafter JL): Ardiny L. Williams, what is your address?

A. Lee Williams (hereafter LW): 712 Willie Jones Street.

JL: 712 Willie Jones Street and today is April 8, 1988. Now I am going to ask Mrs. Williams some questions, and we are going to go back to old times and just let her bring us up to date with some of her memories of Diboll – the places and things that she has done. Mrs. Williams what was your birthplace and date?

LW: My birthplace was in Weldon, Texas, Houston County in 1908.

JL: 1908. What year did you come to Diboll?

LW: When I came I was a girl about 5 years old with my Auntie, Maggie Bradley.

JL: Maggie Bradley. What were your parent's names, Mrs. Lee?

LW: Henry Hubbard was my father and Sarah Hubbard was my mother.

JL: Did they have any sisters and brothers?

LW: No, they both died before I – well my mother died when I was sixteen days old and my daddy died when I was about a year old. So I don't know much about them.

JL: I see. Well, did you have any other sisters and brothers?

LW: I have some half sisters in Houston. I have two half sisters in Houston.

JL: When you came here as a little girl, what church did you join?

LW: I joined CME Methodist Church under Rev. Perry.

JL: Rev. Perry.

LW: Yes, and our head steward was Brother Covington, Brother O'Neal and Brother Goldman, W. H. Goldman.

JL: Where was the church located at that time?

LW: It was by the – the cemetery was behind the church. It was near where our cemetery was. It has been moved since that time to where it is now.

JL: During that time did you have very many active members in the church?

LW: Yes, well, it never was as large as the Baptist Church. Our church had at least 50 or 60 members and about 20 or 30 maybe were children.

JL: I see, how long did this pastor stay – your first? Who was the next pastor – do you recall who he was?

LW: I can't recall the next one but I know we had one name Rev. Landrum. There were so many, I can't think of the others.

JL: I see.

LW: I was nine years old when I joined the church.

JL: You were nine years old when you joined the church?

LW: And I stayed in there all my life.

JL: Mrs. Lee, would you like to tell us just a little bit about some of the things that went on during your time here growing up as a child? I know there were lots of hard times and, I guess, good times too. But could you tell us some of the interesting things that we would like to know about. A few things that might even be funny or could even be sad. But it is all history and we are just trying to compile as much information as we can about things that used to happen.

LW: I'll tell you one thing that was enjoyable to me. A few years ago we would have so much fun fixing Easter. We would all go out in the woods, the teachers and the children, and get these white flowers. Oh, I can't think of the name but they grow in the woods and they are white. They grow on trees. We would break the branches and decorate the

church with them during that time. Then we would hide eggs right near the church. The children would have such a lovely time looking for eggs. They just enjoyed everything like that.

JL: Did they color their eggs in those days?

LW: Yes, we would color them. We would get so many eggs and take them to one home and dye them and bring them back to the church. Then they would hide them. They would have dialogue – not just speeches – and we would have a wonderful time.

JL: Well, that's really nice on Easter, but it brings up another point that I just happened to think about while you were talking. What did you do during the Christmas holidays? Did you have programs like the children do today?

LW: Yes, we did. We would have special programs and then just for elderly people, we would always see that they would have some kind of present. It might not be very expensive – a towel or any little thing – decorated pretty just for enjoyment. We would really have a nice time.

JL: Well that is wonderful. I know during the time I grew up, we had a Christmas tree in the church.

LW: During that time we made Christmas. It wasn't very expensive. We would get something, maybe a can of corn and wrap it in Christmas paper and make sure all the elderly people had something. It wasn't anything very expensive, but they joy was there. On watch night we would all go out there and maybe stay until 12 o'clock. And we would just enjoy ourselves.

JL: Seeing that times were so hard as they were, how did you manage to get along as well with hardly no money at all. How did you get food?

LW: Well, you see we made ourselves happy over whatever. It was just the thought of giving. It wasn't expensive, because all of us were poor. But we just take whatever we had and share it with someone else. And people didn't expect expensive gifts – just the thought of you remembering them. Sometime it would be just like a nice washcloth wrapped in pretty paper. People were just happy with whatever they had--just the fact that they were loved.

JL: That is one thing we need a lot of today. Well, Mrs. Lee, again, where was the school located? Do you recall where the school was located that you went to and who was the teacher?

LW: Well, it was a two-room school. And it was over here where we used to call the "Pipeline" not far from the Assembly of God Church. The teacher was a lady by the name of Miss Pitts and Professor Smith and then Professor Hurley and we didn't have but 2 teachers during that time. And they didn't go any further than the 9th grade. We would

have a very nice time at the end of the term. We would always have nice programs. And we would enjoy it.

JL: Well, that is wonderful. I knew there was another school over there near the Pipeline. That makes another question for me – do you know why they called it the “Pipeline”?

LW: No sir, I don’t. We had a café here called “The Red Stand” and after you crossed the road from the Red Stand going back that way, it was called the Pipeline.

JL: Okay, that is the street. I remember, that is the street that divided the Pipeline from the south side.

LW: Yes sir.

JL: We were looking for that street earlier and now I know which one it was. Unfortunately, they didn’t have any names.

LW: No, they didn’t have any names but every body knew the Pipeline.

JL: I remember that so well because the Red Stand was on this corner and Mr. Dave O’Neal lived right up on the corner just across from there but on the same street. And then I believe the old lumberyard was the next thing you run into up there. Well, that clears up that Pipeline mystery. I have always known it to be that, but I never even questioned the reason why it was called the Pipeline. I always felt like maybe it was just theory, but the area where the sawmill and the industrial park was taking place like on the Pipeline. But on the south side and the black community that is where you found all the activities going on – the school was there, and the stores were over that way and all the commercial type buildings on our side of the track were on the south side. Let’s see, Mr. Robert Williams, I understand he used to umpire baseball.

LW: He was manager of the baseball club for a while.

JL: I remember when I grew up, he would be at the baseball games all the time or he would be an umpire, managing or whatever. Diboll had quite a nice baseball club when we were small. Of course I did not realize how good they were, being just a kid. All the old timers that I have talked to say it was just a wonderful thing and they had ball games every Sunday.

LW: I would be sitting in the chair and hear them hollering out there. (Laughing)

JL: I would be at home and you would hear all that yelling, and you would say, oh, Diboll just knocked a home run. You could hear them for miles and miles, it seemed like miles and miles but it was quite a long ways. It was so peaceful and quite on Sundays you could just hear so good. Whenever some one would hit a long ball, you just knew that Diboll is winning that game today.

LW: Tet Pearson was one of the famous pitchers. (unintelligible) He was a famous first baseman. Yes oh my Lord.

JL: Just one group after another just came on, until of course I understand after the war in 1941 that sort of broke it up.

JL: Well Mrs. Lee, back in those days that you were growing up, I know that the doctor's were not too available every time you got sick and your parents and the people who were raising you up at the time, knowing how sick kids can be and themselves would be sick, what did they use for old time remedies? Do you remember?

LW: Yes sir, a lots of time instead of going to the doctor we would take black draught. We would take black draught. Well, I will tell you what my parents did. Like when school was to open up in September, the last of August they would get me a through of purgative and work my system out good before school started. And I don't know that I ever had to lose a day out of school. Now that wasn't one year – that was every year. I never did get sick, maybe accidents, but somehow I was a pretty healthy child. But no matter how healthy you were, the week before school started, and be sure you took it until you were cleaned out. Maybe we would go through a whole term without losing a day out of school.

JL: I can remember at Easter, we would eat all those Easter eggs, and mother would always give us a big dose of medicine right after Easter and that would take care of all those eggs.

LW: And I don't like lemonade now, because I had to drink that. Well, you know some children would get sick, but I was really blessed. I was not a sickly child. But we had to do that before school.

JL: They cleaned you out real good.

LW: That is right.

JL: Now I know why my mother was giving me medicine when I wasn't sick.

LW: Of course as time went on and I grew up to be a woman, you would become pregnant, you wouldn't see a doctor every month. You wouldn't see a doctor until that child was born. But he would come to your house and he would make himself just as satisfied and drink coffee until it was over. You didn't go to the hospital like they do now. And we didn't go to the doctor every month like they do now. I guess the Lord just took care of us.

JL: Well, I imagine so. And again, too, I imagine you had some pretty good midwives didn't you?

LW: Yes. We had midwives, but they weren't as busy like they are now. But if you stood very good with the company – if you were a working man you could get doctor's service when you wanted it, in case of emergency or something like that. We didn't have but one, but we were blessed. He would come to us. These pregnant women now, they have to go every month. We wouldn't see a doctor unless something went wrong, until it was time for the birth. It has been many changes.

JL: Miss Lee, do you have anything in your mind that you always wanted to tell about. Do you have any memories or anything special that might be even funny or whatever? Do you have anything you want to tell us? I know that used to ever chance I got, I would steal plums out of your plum orchard. You had the best plum orchard in Diboll.

LW: Yes we did. I will tell you what I enjoyed so much. My husband (Robert Williams) like the nineteenth of June, he would always be interested in preparing and fixing things nice for the people. One year my son did it. That just brought memories back. Yes sir, I was really proud of it. (She is talking about her son E.C.)

JL: That is really wonderful.

LW: Life has been very good to me.

JL: That is good. You know I can see, Mrs. Lee, that you have been blessed to be with us all and I hope we can all live as long as you have an have memories that you can pass on to other people. Our history is very important. For a long time we have neglected to keep up with it in a small way and in that way we should have been documenting a lot of things. It should have been put on paper. It should have been documented some place.

I know you were very close to Mr. Fred Lewis and you know he wrote an article in the "Buzz Saw" for many years. He was my Boy Scout master, Troop No. 275 when I was just a little boy here. I believe we had 5, 6, or maybe 7 Boy Scouts in the whole thing. We had a lot of fun. Mr. Fred was very instrumental in helping me get a secret clearance when I worked for the government because I didn't know anyone that I could write to from Washington, D. C. in order to give them my life history. I knew he knew me, and my parents as well, and I had to get someone who wasn't kin to me and he was the man. I was sure glad to see him go to bat for me at that time.

I would like to ask you, did he leave any of those old "Buzz Saws." You know Mr. Fred died rather suddenly. I wasn't here, but he must have kept something. Did he have anything that would be of any value to us at this date?

LW: Well, no sir, at least I didn't get them. His lady friend was Miss (unintelligible)? and whatever it was, she took care of it. I will tell you another thing about my family. Mr. Robert was a Baptist and I was Methodist. And at that time, the Baptist had services 1st and 3rd Sundays, and we had 2nd and 4th Sundays. And we never upset the children by going to a special church, but they had to go to church. If you are too sick to go to Sunday school, you are too sick to play. Wherever you want to go you go, on the 1st

Sunday, and I would go to the Baptist and on the 2nd and 4th, I would go to my own and Mr. Robert would do the same. We worked together, and we never did have a conflict on where they wanted to go – but you got to go somewhere! A man asked me about E. C. He asked me where was E. C. one day – one Sunday. Well, I said he told me he was going to Corrigan to home at his church. He said, ‘you mean, he run the club and he still goes to church.’ And I said, “Yeah.”

JL: You know that is another thing. It is so good that E.C. was able to do so many things for so many people here. A lot of people are not aware of some of the things that E. C. has done. E. C. has done a lot of good things, and I know that since the time that I have come back here from California he was supportive of Diboll.

LW: He loves Diboll.

JL: Oh, yes, he has always told me that. He always loved it here and he always wanted to do something for this area. He told me that was one of his big dreams. I can certainly say that he did make that dream come true. It is nice that he has done so many things for so many people. I am happy for him.

LW: I am too. He told me, “Mother, my health is getting bad. My wife’s health is not too good. I don’t feel like working a whole week and then come up here. I am going to get rid of the club while I am able to. My children have all finished and have jobs. And Faye and I are going to take it easy.” I told him, “E.C., you are blessed.” He has a nice home and his children are able to stand on their own. He had the club and no one lost their life there. That is wonderful.

JL: That is wonderful.

LW: It made me happy.

JL: You know that is something, I never thought about it. But all the time he had that, no one ever lost their life there.

LW: On weekends, every time I would hear a gun fire or a loud noise, or an ambulance, I wondered, “Lord, has anyone got hurt up there at the club” I didn’t want him to be the cause of any one losing their life. I said, “Honey, you are wonderfully blessed.” His children have good jobs, married off nice and decent, what more do you want?

JL: You can’t ask for too much more. That is nice, Mrs. Lee. Mrs. Lee, it has been nice talking with you. I have been really glad that I could make this interview with you. As I said, this information will be available to your access in the library when it is compiled. They will do whatever they see fit. I hope it will be a better historical coverage of our community since Diboll first started. And I understand that not in the too distant future, we will be looking at the first 100 years since Diboll became Diboll. Maybe during that time there will be some kind of special celebration and I hope that we will all be remembered for our achievements. I am sure there will be a lot unsaid that apparently we

didn't know about. As I said in the first place history should be written down and recorded and you will never lost that. At times like this you can compile it and it will be a matter of record and any one can see it. And I thank you so much.

LW: I was glad to do it. Diboll has improved so much, and I am proud of it.

END OF INTERVIEW