

MARGIE HARRELL

Interview 173a

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ABSTRACT: In this interview with Jonathan Gerland, Margie Harrell reminisces about her life in Diboll. Mrs. Harrell was born in Renova, south of Diboll, but moved into Diboll when she was a child. She graduated from H.G. Temple High School and soon after completing business school in Houston she started working for Mr. Massey at Diboll's black school. Mrs. Harrell began working for the Diboll Housing Authority after integration, when she lost her job at the school. She was hired by Woodrow Wood and learned the ropes at the Housing Authority, eventually becoming the director. She has worked at the Housing Authority for over 40 years. Mrs. Harrell also discusses her work in the community, with Christian Outreach and the senior citizens lunches.

Jonathan Gerland (hereafter JG): Ok...today's date is Friday, October the 17th, 2008. My name is Jonathan Gerland. And we're at the History Center with Margie Harrell...and we're going to do an oral history interview with her today. Thank you for coming today. Margie, if you would, maybe just start with telling us when and where you were born, a little bit about your family life...mention, you know, who your parents were and your maiden name.

Margie Harrell (hereafter MH): Ok...I was born January the 1st, 1943 to Era and Sylvester Watts, in a little town kind of south of Diboll, well it...just not a town a little place south of Diboll and they called it Renova. It was...the Southern Pacific Railroad where my dad worked had some little boxcars that people lived in. And the people who worked on the railroad lived in those little sections of houses.

JG: Ok. And I believe the spelling of that is R-E-N-O-V-A.

MH: That's what I think is correct.

JG: Ok. And as I think I recall it was a...more like a station on the railroad.

MH: Uh huh.

JG: I guess like you said where the workers and their families lived. Can you tell us a little bit about what type of work your father did for the railroad?

MH: He worked on the...the work that they did...the labor on the tracks, repairing the tracks.

JG: Ok. And, course you were born there, about how long did you live there?

MH: I don't think we lived there very long before we moved into Diboll...and we moved up where the Poland's is located now. It was kind of behind there...where they had again the box cars that they took off of the, you know...

JG: Off the tracks.

MH: Took off of the tracks. And then they made, you know, little units for us to live in...and they moved those to that location.

JG: Ok...and again Renova was south of Diboll but it was in Angelina County just north of the river.

MH: Uh huh...yes. It was in...you know they called it Renova and I guess that was just a little rail, you know...

JG: Siding or something maybe.

MH: I guess that was, yeah, the little siding for the rail 'cause I don't think it was a town. They got their mail and stuff in Diboll I think.

JG: Yeah.

MH: But it was just that little section was where the rail, the railroad employees lived.

JG: Yeah, I think it was just purely a railroad company station...it really was like you said maybe a town.

MH: Yes, uh huh.

JG: So you were young when you moved and probably don't remember anything about that?

MH: No, I don't remember anything about Renova.

JG: Ok.

MH: I just know that we were born there. I...all three of us were born there.

JG: Ok, who were your siblings?

MH: My oldest sister is Doris Delco, and my younger sister Esther Hunt.

JG: Ok.

MH: And we were all born there and we were all born on holidays. (laughing)

JG: Yeah, you were January 1st right?

MH: Yes, I was New Year's Day, and course my older sister, it was Labor Day the day she was born. And my younger sister Ester, it was Thanksgiving the day she was born.

JG: Ok.

MH: So we were all three born on holidays.

JG: Ok. So you moved to Diboll and what do you remember...let's talk a little bit about your dad I guess working for the railroad? What can you remember?

MH: Uh huh...well he was a hard worker, my dad was a...you know, I mean extremely hard worker for the railroad. But he, even when he was at the railroad, my dad had a drinking problem, which did not affect his working. You know, he worked hard every...all during the week but like a lot of people I guess they...the way they relaxed on the weekend was, you know, sometimes drinking, you know. And my dad did but my mother never, you know, she didn't do it and taught us against it, you know. But...

JG: Did he retire from the railroad?

MH: No, he retired from Temple.

JG: Ok.

MH: He left the railroad and came to work for Temple. Uh huh, yeah, he was as best I can remember and course my mother talked a lot about some of the things after we were older, you know. But as best I can remember my mother worked for Jack Sweeney, the old...the older man.

JG: Ok.

MH: Jack Sweeney.

JG: W. Sweeney, I think.

MH: Yes, Jack uh huh. He, she worked for them. And my dad was working on the railroad and seemed like it was something he...the union dues was not paid on time or something and he lost his job.

JG: Ok.

MH: And he was fixing to move back to Nacogdoches because he had worked in Nacogdoches for some guy that had a pecan orchard and he just, this was before we were born, they stayed on that place.

JG: Ok.

MH: And worked for this guy and I can't think of his name. But anyway, the man always wanted my dad to come back to Nacogdoches. So my dad when he lost his job at the railroad he was going to go back to Nacogdoches. But my mother worked for the Sweeney's, the older man.

JG: Now what did she do?

MH: Just domestic work.

JG: Ok.

MH: And she worked for them and different people. You know, she'd do days where she'd work for them a day and somebody else a day, you know, domestic work. But anyway, when he didn't have a job she told her that it's possible that we were going to go back to Nacogdoches. And so, she went to, she was married to Jack's dad, they were together and they lived here in Diboll...and she went to him, and he worked for Temple and...Mr. Sweeney was with Temple, and told him that, you know, if it's possible could they try to get my dad a job because they didn't want, you know, they didn't want us to move.

JG: To move to Nacogdoches, yeah.

MH: So they, he did, my dad went and he got a job for Temple, and that's where he retired from.

JG: Ok.

MH: He worked for Temple. Uh huh.

JG: Ok, tell me a little bit about you and your sisters growing up in Diboll. What are some of your memories of as a child?

MH: Well, ok...I remember living at what we called the, you know, at the section houses...we lived in the section houses. That's what they were called up near where Poulard's is now. And...

JG: On this side of the tracks the east side...the west side the mill side of the tracks.

MH: On the other side of the tracks...it's where the, uh huh, it's just about where those little apartments are now.

JG: Ok.

MH: We lived pretty close to the tracks I remember living so close...the box cars were so close to the tracks until my mother would, I mean, she would just caution us daily almost about ever getting on the tracks. You know, we could never play on the tracks, we could never cross the tracks or anything we lived so close until I'm sure she was, you know, concerned about, you know...

JG: Yeah.

MH: About that. That's where they were and...

JG: Imagine the trains woke you up at night for a while, did you get used to it?

MH: Well, you know what...we got used to it. And the first time it did, I had never been in a tornado or anything, but the first time it did I just felt like a tornado was coming. It sounded like something was coming right through that house. So I guess that was the first time it really, you know, bothered me. But, we lived there and we came to school, you know, here, and back then they called it the quarters. We would come to school, come here to school. But my dad, when we lived there, there was another family that lived next to us. There was several families during the course of our time up there...

JG: And these were other railroad families.

MH: Other railroad families. But there was one family that had children, they had boys...they had girls but they were grown and gone. But they had boys...they had all boys. And we had all, you know, it was all girls. But my dad would not let us walk. He didn't want us walking all the way down to school, you know, he didn't...I mean, I don't guess it was so much and maybe it was with the boys too but he just didn't want...he just thought it was not safe for us to do that. So there was a teacher, in fact she just passed away she was probably ninety something, she taught school here in Diboll but lived in Lufkin. So they gave her a little bit, you know, I guess for gas for her to pick us up every day and bring us home.

JG: Hmm...what was her name?

MH: You know she...uh...E. A. Gilbert.

JG: Gilbert...ok.

MH: Uh huh.

JG: She taught at Temple, H. G. Temple School.

MH: She taught at Temple...uh huh, uh huh. And she would bring us, you know, to school. And I think maybe one time maybe the principal might have brought us some, you know. But we would have to, and the boys walked, the other family, they walked. I remember one time my dad let us walk. And we just thought we, I mean, we were just so

happy we didn't know what to do. But we didn't realize that you were not supposed to be on campus until a certain time, I can't even remember the time, you know, 'cause I think I was in about...I guess I must have been in about the first or second grade and I know you...it's just amazing that I can remember back to some of that stuff. But, we went on and we got on campus and we got in trouble, because we were on campus too early, you know. And we...didn't see anybody on campus that much, you know, I mean didn't even think about it. But we were just kind of milling around trying to see what was going on, you know. And, course we got a spanking for it, you know, the principal called us in...

JG: (laughs) Coming to school to early huh?

MH: Got on campus...and you're just not supposed to. And back then, you know, everything was really strict, you know. If you were not supposed to be in the hall, you didn't go in the hall and you didn't do these, you know, it was pretty strict. But I remember and so we, my oldest sister Doris, we went in the principal's office and he had on a brown suit...I never will forget it.

JG: Do you remember who the principal was?

HM: Kenyon.

JG: Ok.

HM: I can't think of his first name, but Kenyon. And his wife was my teacher. But I...and he...and I guess he wasn't spanking us that hard but, you know, my sister was first and she was just, I mean, she was just screaming. And I was just furious. So when I got in there I was so mad at that principal. And I didn't know what else was going to happen. I knew he was going to get me, (laughing) but I was pretty tough. I just wet all over him. (laughing) And I got up and I could just see the spot on the, on the suit. 'Cause I was mad 'cause he...you know, not that he was getting me but he, you know, he was beating my sister, you know. So anyway, he, you know, he got up and he got me out of there and he took me to his wife. And of course then, you know, they couldn't bring me all the way back home. And I remember her saying "You'll just have to sit out here on the porch, you know, in the sun until your clothes dry." You know, and when I kind of dried I guess they brought me back in, you know. But...(laughing)...horrible story and I shouldn't, you know, but that's the truth. And I remember that, but we, you know, we would go back and forth to, you know, to school and the kids would kind of tease us because we were, you know, they called us section house kids, you know. And kind of laugh because...and not that it was that they had anything much better to live in because the houses were, you know, they were the old company houses. And there was a...

JG: And this is in the days of segregation. So I mean this was still black...yeah, just...

MH: Yes, and it was, yeah, that's right. Now the only thing about at the tracks, I guess you would say, we were not segregated because I remember the family that lived here, the black family, then us and then on up, but still in this section, there was a man that

worked on the railroad, a white man. But he wasn't married...he lived in one. And then the foreman for the railroad lived in the last one. But we all lived right down the road.

JG: Uh huh.

MH: You know.

JG: Well, I was meaning the school. It was still...

MH: The school was segregated yes, but, where we lived it was just the railroad employees and we were a little bit more integrated then...

JG: Yeah, right...the railroad was more integrated then...

MG: You know I guess you would say. And the difference, yeah, in...down in the other section of town, you know, we had, there were outdoor toilets. And we had outdoor toilets at the section house, but they were flush toilets.

JG: Hmmm.

MH: They were outdoor, but, they were flush toilets. And see, anywhere else in town they were the old outdoor type toilet, you know, it was a...

JG: And the railroad, the railroad supplied that.

MH: The railroad supplied that, you know. And that was, it was just...it was, oh, I guess it was three or four of them out there. They were not, it wasn't like we had one specifically for us.

JG: Yeah.

MH: It was just out there available to...you know.

JG: The workers.

MH: To the workers, uh huh.

JG: Ok...let's look more about school maybe. I'm assuming those were elementary age...

MH: Elementary...uh huh.

JG: ...memories there. Anything specific you'd like to talk about? So I guess you were going to school in the late '40's through...anything else you care to share about the school there at H. G. Temple?

MH: I graduated in '61. Well, the school, you know...it was...until I graduated it was at one school. You know, right there, because I graduated in '61 and it was segregated the whole entire time.

JG: The whole time.

MH: And the school was the first grade through the twelfth grade. And we all went to school in that same building. You know, the first grade was down this end of the hall and, you know, the higher grades were, you know. But we had football and we had...I can remember when we were...I played basketball and when we were in probably seventh, eighth grade we played basketball on the ground. I mean on the ground.

JG: Outside.

MH: Outside on the ground...it wasn't any...

JG: Right...no, no court really just the ground.

MH: No court. It was just an area...a goal on this end and one on this end and you kind of, you know you kind of move where the...

JG: Boys and girls...there were...

MH: Boys and girls...uh huh.

JG: Girls had their own teams...ok.

MH: Boys and girls. And we played other schools. You know, we went out of town and played and we played on the ground. I remember the first time we played in the gym. I believe, it seemed like it snowed.

JG: Is that the gym in Diboll or another gym?

MH: The gym in Diboll...we didn't have a gym, you know, but we played at the elementary gym...see this was still segregation...the white school.

JG: The white school, the white school.

MH: And it snowed that...we had a tournament and it snowed. And we didn't know if we were going to be able to play that day or not. But anyway, somehow we ended up in the gym. And we ended up playing in the gym that day. I guess 'cause the teams were coming and, you know, we went ahead and played, you know, before we got a gym. You know...

JG: Any of the other black schools that you played...did any of those schools have a gym?

MH: No, no.

JG: Or...how did the facilities relate as you could see them? Were they about equal?

MH: Pretty much like ours...yeah, uh huh.

JG: Ok.

MH: You know, we played Chester and we played Apple Springs well it was Nigton. You know, we played Nigton.

JG: Uh huh.

MH: And we played a little team...I think we played Lovelady and I'm trying to think...we played Lovelady, Chester, Livingston...we played Livingston. And it was pretty much the same, you know...

JG: Yeah.

MH: They didn't have...the facilities were about the same.

JG: Ok...any particular teachers or administrators that stand out?

MH: Well the lady who passed away, Mrs. Gilbert.

JG: Ok.

MH: She was pretty much...from early on she was more like a mother figure for us, you know. She taught us things that, I mean, she just made sure respect and, you know, how to dress...she just didn't let you come looking any kind of way. You know, she would say, "You can always be clean and neat, you don't have to have the best of things." And she just stayed real close to us and really, you know, taught us a lot of things about life. She was very strict...I was...she one time, she was getting on to the boys. And every time she would get on to the boys they'd run to the boys restroom. You know, so I guess she planned to stop that. She said, "Now the next time you do that I'm coming right in behind you." So the next time she went right in. You know, and you couldn't do that now but she went right in the restroom behind 'em...and, you know, to correct the boys, you know. But she was just a...she was, and she stayed close to us even after we graduated. You know, she wanted to find out what you were doing and to help you any way that she could, you know. But she really...and I think if you talked to anybody that is from that school you would probably hear the same thing, you know, she was one that...she lived in Lufkin. And her mother and dad lived there. And her dad worked for Lufkin Industries...and her husband did too and retired but, she always...

JG: And that's Mrs. Gilbert again...

MH: Mrs. Gilbert, uh huh, yeah. She always, you know, was real eager to help and do whatever she could, you know. And I think that she made a difference in the lives of a lot of those, a lot of the students, you know. I know she didn't mind.

JG: Uh huh. What came of her when the schools integrated?

MH: Well, when the schools integrated she just retired, you know...

JG: Ok.

MH: She didn't, you know, she just didn't...she might have subbed a little bit but she just went ahead and retired. I think she was very hurt that, you know she, and I don't know that she wasn't offered some other position I guess not because they were gonna have, you know, just one...one home economics teacher I guess at that particular time, you know. And so she just retired and, you know. But, you know she never, she stayed close to the students and whatever was going on in Diboll and the...

JG: Yeah.

MH: ...you know, and her students as she would call us, you know, she wanted to make sure that, you know, you continued on. And she just took up a lot of the slack where your parents didn't know and didn't understand. And our parents trusted her and the school. You know, back then, they didn't know but they would listen to the...you know, they would let the teachers help us, you know, as opposed to now...it's kind of...sometimes it's difficult to help because parents don't really want you, you know, intervening. You know, but back then, it was...our parents were, you know, really appreciative of the help. And it really meant a lot, I mean, I know it did in my life, you know, with Mrs. Gilbert kind of bridging the gap between you and your parents. And some of it your parents didn't understand. And she would always, you know, even go to your house and explain things to your parents, you know. So...I think she meant a lot.

JG: Uh huh. You said you graduated in '61 and I do want to eventually get to your work with the Housing Authority...but, and then maybe even specifically between that time and when you went to work for Housing Authority...but maybe just in general about the community as a whole in these years and maybe start with Diboll Day. I know we've done a little bit of research through the newspapers and a lot of people today, even last week, were sharing that information with some people. And they had forgotten or couldn't remember that in at least the early to mid '60's, before integration of the schools, they had separate black and white, you could say, queen candidates. And separate competitions and fundraising communities...I mean drives. What do you remember about that? Can you give any insight to...

MH: Well, you know I remember a few...I remember there was, at the school, there was always a kind of...some kind of fundraiser between the grades, you know.

JG: Uh huh.

MH: I kind of remember back that there were some fundraisers and seemed like the queen might be the...it was one through twelve. And the queen might be the first grade and course at times when Mr. and Mrs. Massey were there...Mrs. Massey was really a go getter. I mean she was a... I mean a hard working person in whatever she put her mind to. It was just...she just went way out. So at times, the first graders would raise the most money, you know, (laughing) because she was such, I mean, she was really a hard worker. But, I don't remember too much about the other, you know, I know there's been talk that...

JG: Well, I know you've been very involved in Diboll Day's in recent years, but I'm just saying can you remember much about...

MH: Yeah, and but back there I don't know where it came from that, you know, I really don't know that we set out and had fundraisers for a separate Diboll Day queen...

JG: Ok...don't remember.

MH: You know, I just don't really don't remember that. Now, you know, there was queens and maybe at some point and time, you know, we might have said, "Well we'll have a queen." Because you don't have and you kind of feel, you know, left out. You know, because we were really not part, you were part of Diboll Day, I guess, you attended but you were not a part of the queen. So, I guess at some point in time we had something and maybe raised money or selected some queens or some kind of form or fashion.

JG: Ok.

MH: I don't really remember how it took place, you know. And I don't remember a lot about I think it's just the, you know, probably like the grades raising money and then you end up and whoever that queen is might have just been the Diboll Day queen. I don't really...know. I don't really...

JG: Just don't remember...ok. Ok...do you remember many of those pre-integration Diboll Day parades and things like that...do you remember? Or any comments on maybe the black communities involvement or participation in parades or...?

MH: No, I really...you know, I really don't. I don't really...you know...I just remember it being or not being, you know. (laughing) And not really, you know, I just don't really...

JG: Ok.

MH: You know, I don't...can't say I remember people fussing or, you know, or saying, you know. We...I'm sure there were some comments about not having, you know, but it wasn't like people were in a uproar about it.

JG: Right.

MH: You know, and people participated, you know, I mean people would attend the parades and... 'cause I can remember the parades. 'Cause we, and I still do, we would always go near the... where the old commissary, 'cause we were coming from that side of town.

JG: And the old railroad depot before it was torn down too.

MH: That's right, then the old railroad depot and I remember the old railroad depot. Because when my dad worked for the railroad we could ride the train free. So I remember that depot because we would...we went to Lufkin on the train. You know, I didn't ride the bus until I was grown. I never had been on a bus until I was grown because we could ride...we could go to Houston, we could go to Nacogdoches on the railroad. And because my dad, the years that he did work for the railroad...

JG: Uh huh.

MH: You know, we could do that free, you know. So...

JG: Yeah.

MH: We, you know, rode the, you know, I like I said didn't ride a bus but...

JG: Yeah, since you mentioned that can you comment on, specifically with the railroads, maybe how things were segregated? And where did you ride and just how did that work?

MH: Uh huh...I remember...yeah we...it was separate quarters, you know, for blacks. We got on there...I never will forget it was, there was a conductor named Bowman. And he was just so mean. He was just...

JG: Bowman?

MH: Bowman...

JG: B-O-W-M-A-N?

MH: Yeah, big guy named Bowman. And I don't know where he was from because, you know, the trains would go from...but I never will forget when we would get on there, and get on the train. And my mother was very protective, you know, she didn't want us to say anything or do anything to 'cause any problems. And she was always...

JG: Didn't want you wetting on anybody. (laughing)

MH: And...yeah, didn't want me wetting on anybody (laughing)...got in trouble for that. But anyway...she would make sure she never wanted us to go...she was afraid we would

go past where we were supposed to go. And she make sure we sat right there near her. And when we got on the train, you know, he would snatch the pass, you know, the Mr. Bowman would. He would snatch it and I guess, maybe, because we were riding free, you know, I don't know...

JG: Hmmm.

MH: But anyway, but anyway...he was very, very mean. Well, we would get on and we would get in our little seats and we would stay there but you didn't go to the other...you know there was a section that blacks rode in.

JG: So you just had one car. Or was it a partitioned car?

MH: It was a partitioned car...

JG: So whites and blacks were both in the same car but...

MH: They were in the same car, I think, but you didn't...

JG: You just had a spot, yeah...

MH: A section. And we might not have been in the same car, you know...

JG: Ok.

MH: I just can't remember. But I know we were not, she didn't let us move around, you know.

JG: Yeah.

MH: And, I remember one Easter, my grandparents lived in Nacogdoches and I had eggs that I was gonna, my mother had dyed. And I wanted to take some to my granddaddy, my granddaddy was blind. And I wanted to take him some. But then...

JG: How old were you when your mother died?

MH: I was...well my...I'm trying to think how old I was...my mother died in '73. And I was grown, you know, I mean...let's see my son was nine years old so I had to have been if he was nine...

JG: Oh ok...I didn't mean to interrupt your story but...

MH: I can't remember yeah, no that's ok. But...

JG: Well, I was just thinking, 'cause passenger service ended in '54.

MH: Yeah, well we rode the train and I can't remember how old I was but...

JG: Ok.

MH: ...we were little but we rode the train. And I had eggs.

JG: So this was before '54? Or not...yeah. Well...

MH: Yeah...well, I can't remember. But...

JG: You mean your grandmother died?

MH: My...my mother died in '73 my...

JG: Ok, ok.

MH: My grandmother was still living. My grandparents lived in Nacogdoches, they still lived. And we would ride the train and I had eggs I can remember having baskets of eggs to take to my grandparents in Nacogdoches, my granddaddy...he was blind.

JG: Ok.

MH: And I...but I wanted to make friends with this, I remember, you know trying to give this old man so mean, some eggs, you know. (laughing)

JG: Trying to be nice to him. Make him not be so mean.

MH: I was just, yeah, not be so mean. So I gave him the eggs that I had for my granddaddy, you know, and he took 'em. You know, I gave him the eggs.

JG: Uh huh.

MH: And but I, you know, I can't remember the dates. But, I can remember that we did, you know, we would catch the train here in Diboll and then we would ride to Nacogdoches and then we would ride to Houston. That's as far as we would go, you know.

JG: Yeah, and it was all free because of the railroad employees and their families got free passes...yeah.

MH: Free, because he was...uh huh, that's right. Uh huh.

JG: That was one of the biggest oppositions that the railroads got when they discontinued passenger service, was from the railroad employees. Because they, that was a pretty good benefit to the employees.

MH: Uh huh...employees yeah 'cause they, yeah, we got to ride...uh huh...got to ride the train free.

JG: Ok, after you got out of high school and, like I said, eventually I want to get and talk a little bit in depth about your work with the Housing Authority and everything and...when did you begin working for the Housing Authority? '68 or...?

MH: Uh huh. Well, yeah in '68 I worked at the school...

JG: Ok.

MH: When I graduated from high school I went to Hugh's Business College in Houston I wanted to go...

JG: Ok.

MH: ...to a four year college. But, my younger sister was behind me and she wanted to go to college and they didn't have a nickel to send either one of us, you know. But I had gotten some little scholarship from this business college...that they would pay the first semester, it was a one year business college, they would pay the first semester but I had to pay the second semester, you know. So, I went to the...I attended that business college and times were really tough, you know. It didn't cost that much but, the second...I got their first semester free and the second semester they, my parents had not gotten my money together. And then they put me out of the...put me out of the school, you know...because I didn't, you had to have your money. And so I stayed with a cousin for a maybe, I guess...

JG: In Houston?

MH: ...in Houston...two or three days because they were getting my money together and they got my money, you know, they got my money together. And then, you know, 'cause I was hoping that maybe I could get out and work and, you know, help my...help my sister whenever she came out. But then I...now I got married in...got to get that in somewhere...I got married in 19 and...let's see I got married 1963 and then...I came back to Diboll and I...

JG: You married in Houston?

MH: Uh huh.

JG: Ok.

MH: I got married in...I think it was '63...yeah, in '63. And I stayed in Houston for a while looking for a job and working different places. And finally came back here and then I went to work at the school. I went to work, I went to work at the school...

JG: Did you finish the business college?

MH: I finished the business college...and I came back here and went to work at the school, my son was born. I got married in '63 and my son was born in December of '64.

JG: And who did you marry?

MH: Ornett Harrell.

JG: Ok.

MH: And he was from Houston. But he had moved to Diboll a year, his senior year of high school. His parents, I mean, his parents were deceased but his uncle lived in Diboll and Lufkin and moved to Lufkin. But anyway, he came to live with them and that's where I met him. But I went, I came back here and I went to work at the school. I went to work every summer I worked the, at the...let's see, I went to work in '65 I guess it was. I went to work at the school in '65 and I worked during the summer at the Head, there was a little Head Start program. I'd work there in the summer and then I went to work for the principal of my high school, Mr. Massey, at this time, you know, it was still, you know, still not integrated yet. So I went there in the office for him in '65 and worked there until '68 when integration, you know, when the schools integrated. And when the schools integrated in '68 well, then I really didn't have a job, you know, 'cause when they took over, you know, they took over some of the teachers and some people didn't get, you know, were...

JG: Yeah.

MH: Not hired I guess. And I really didn't have a job, you know. They said they might would find me something or I might could work part time and, you know. And my husband worked, he was working for the railroad, you know. And so I thought well, I'll... I don't know what I'll do, you know, at that particular time. But, you know, do something and I thought well, I might go back to school, you know...do. But my high school principal was on the board at the Housing Authority and I didn't know...

JG: And who was that?

MH: Willie Massey.

JG: Willie Massey.

MH: Massey...great man.

JG: Yeah.

MH: I didn't know...I had worked for him three years. And course he had, you know, came and offered me a job at the school. And I worked there till '68, you know. And then

he told me one day he said, "They have a opening at the Housing Authority" said "You need to go and apply." You know, and I thought...the Housing Authority, you know, that, this was right at the beginning of integration at the school and I thought he not looking for a black secretary I'm sure, you know. And so I thought no need a going, you know, what's Mr. Massey thinking about? So I didn't even go, you know. And Mr. Massey told me again he said, "I really think you'd be good for that job," said, "He's looking for somebody that gets along well with people." And you know...

JG: Now who's he?

MH: Mr. Wood. Mr. Wood...Woodrow Wood.

JG: Mr. Wood...Woodrow Wood. Ok. Woodrow Wood...ok.

MH: Yeah Woodrow Wood. Say, "He's looking for somebody that, you know, that would be good with people." And I just...

JG: And he was the executive director?

MH: Mr. Wood was the executive director.

JG: Yeah, and I think he came in '68 didn't he? Now he was fairly...

MH: He came in '68, he came in April of '68...in April of '68.

JG: Ok.

MH: So I finally...it was a little room, kind of off the community building where they had a typewriter and stuff set up. And I had...doing some community work, they were doing...I forgotten what it was, might have been some kind of...album...I can't think of what it was. But anyway, I had gone over there to type something for Mr. Massey...it was where the community could use that little room for stuff. And Mr. Wood just happened to be over there that day and he introduced himself and I told him who I was and what I was doing...because I had never gone to apply for that job. And he told me he wanted to talk to me and so I wasn't dressed that day, you know, I was just in there...so I went back and talked to him and he told me that, you know, he was really interested in...you know, he wanted to offer me the job. I told him I didn't know anything about housing but I was willing to, you know, to learn. And I really liked working with people, you know, and I thought I could...and he, Mr. Wood's wife, was at Gladewater. The HUD [Housing and Urban Development] office had recommended Mr. Wood to Diboll, you know, they were, they had built the first units and they were trying to get the other units off the ground. And Mr. Wood and his wife worked in Gladewater. He was executive director of Gladewater and she was a bookkeeper. And back then you had a lot of husband and wife teams, worked for housing authorities, you know, that's kind of...

JG: I think his daughter, even their daughter ended up working up at Diboll...yeah.

MH: Their daughter worked...yes she did...and so Mr. Wood came, Mr. Wood came in April and he hired me and I went to work in August of '68. And his wife came in September of '68. And then the three of us worked, we worked together there for...oh, I don't know how long. And then, Mr. Wood hired another lady that came to work there. Lavern Johnson. It was Geneva Ard's sister. And she came to work there for a while. And then Jimmy Woodard came to work there, no, yeah Jimmy and then Queen King, another lady, came to work there.

JG: Tell about the early days...you mentioned about being inexperienced and going into something totally new...a little bit about Mr. Wood, how was he to work for and really in the bigger context of, you know, how you learned about what a Housing Authority is, what it does and...?

MH: Well, Mr. Wood was just a great person and I guess, at that particular time, he knew all that there was to know about housing. Even the HUD office would call and....yeah.

JG: I think when he left in '75 the newspapers said that he was already doing the books or some type of oversight on eleven or twelve other housing authorities.

MH: Oh yeah...he did that when he came. (laughing) See, when he came to work there he worked part time. He was probably on the...at first, he probably worked full time but then he was on the books part time. Because he did bookkeeping for other housing authorities...

JG: Yeah.

MH: In kind of consulting work for...so he only got paid half time at the Housing Authority 'cause he spent some of that time going to the other housing authorities.

JG: So you tutored under a....pretty good manager huh?

MH: Yes, under the...I mean, the best, the best, the best. The HUD office had so much...they would recommend other housing authorities if you had a problem call Woodrow Wood, you know. He was just a...he was excellent to work for, you know, and his wife they both were great teachers, you know. They were, you know, they knew...and it wasn't as...well I guess it wasn't as much red tape as it is now, you know, they had time to train and...they both cared about people. You know, he was just...and I could see how Mr. Wood probably felt like we were a good match, you know. Because he...he cared about people in...he, regardless of your skin color, you know, he treated everybody the same. You know, he never, I never even saw any...anything other than true and fair in him...a genuine good person. You know, never saw anything. And they were great teachers. Like I said, I didn't know anything about housing. I was real eager to learn and I always felt like it was just a blessing, because the Lord placed me in a place where I could really help people and get paid. (laughing) You know, I mean you get paid to do what you really and truly like to do. You know, it was just really a blessing. I couldn't wait to get started and, you know, it was...you were under sometimes stress, you know,

because you were always kind of, you know, reviewed by the HUD office, you know, it was always somebody coming, you know. Sometimes you didn't know...

JG: That's Housing and Urban Development. Ok.

MH: Housing, Department of Housing and Urban Development...they would always have somebody coming. They were checking one thing or another, you know. And so, it was, you know...and then times change and things change....you know, you...we would go from one program to another where you had to change a lot of stuff, you know. And that's the only thing that I don't like...you know, you just by the time you learn one thing you got to go to something else, you know. But other than that...when Mr. Wood did retire he was always around to, you know, he was always there to help us. And...

JG: So he left in '75 as the director?

MH: He left as the director but he stayed on as a consultant.

JG: A consultant...ok. And you became...

MH: Uh huh...and his wife stayed on and I became director. And his wife stayed on and worked...and you know, I worked with her for I forgotten when she retired but...

JG: And they, he continued to reside in Diboll even after...? 'Cause I think he was on the road a good bit after that.

MH: Yes, they lived here. He was on the road...not a lot, because a lot of the work he could do, you know in house. He didn't have to go...

JG: Ok.

MH: ...and just actually go to those places, you know. 'Cause a lot of them mailed their books to him and he would do the books and then mail them back to them, you know.

JG: Ok.

MH: And that kind of thing but...it was, you know, it was always...it was always easy to work for him, you know...it was really, you know 'cause he was, like I said, he was a great teacher. He had patience. Now, the only thing, if I saw any weakness in him...it was, he didn't as far as day to day people...he didn't...he wasn't really good with working with people. And he didn't do that. You know, right away he let me do all the interviewing, you know, renting to the, you know because...

JG: For tenants?

MH: For tenants...yeah because he didn't...

JG: Ok...he didn't interview

MH: ...really, yeah...that was one of the things he didn't, you know, he just...I won't say he wasn't good with people, but, he just didn't have the patience for that, you know, for doing that. And...

JG: So, how would an interview go? Uh...how...

MH: You know, we would have to ask people about, you know, their income and who lived...who's gonna live in the apartment, and background history about them.

JG: Basically an application.

MH: Yeah, an application, uh huh. And we would have to, you know...

JG: So you handled most, if not all, of those...

MH: Most of that in the beginning and his wife did some, yeah...

JG: Sort of like the first round and then y'all would review all that basically...

MH: Yeah, and then we would, you know, we would figure the rent, we would have to figure the rent based on their income. And, you know, we would figure the rent if I took the application I'd figure the rent and then his wife would refigure the rent. We always double-checked the rent. And she would do that part of it, you know, once I did the application and the interview. And she would do the lease agreement and we kind of just worked together, but all of the information and all of the contact with the applicant pretty much I did from the beginning.

JG: If you were to, again this is as much for the...

MH: Uh huh, uh huh.

JG: ...purpose of the interview...the recording...if you would just tell a layperson or a...the general public, how would you describe what it is that you do or specifically the...or more generally the Housing Authority? What is a Housing Authority, what does it do?

MH: Ok, the Housing Authority is...an entity set up to provide housing for low-income families. In the beginning it was, it was totally families and we couldn't rent to single people, you know, unless a single person was disabled, handicapped, or elderly. But now, we can rent to a single person. So it's basically housing for low-income families. And there is an income limit to move in, you know. But it's decent, safe, and sanitary housing. You know, at one time we didn't have air condition, central heat...but we have that now and it's basically like any other housing development. You know, it's just low-income families.

JG: Ok...so it's low-income rent. Is that what it is?

MH: Yes, uh huh...you have to have low, your income is low in order to move in there. Now, and the rent's gonna be based on your income. You know, so the rent could be, you know, this year the rent could be ten dollars. And if your income goes up next year, your rent could be two hundred dollars. 'Cause it's gonna be based on your income...

JG: Uh huh.

MH: And if something happened during the course of that year, you could come back in and your rent could be refigured and back down to ten dollars.

JG: Uh...how many units are you working right now?

MH: We have three hundred and thirty three units.

JG: Three hundred and thirty three units. And are they all low rent?

MH: All of them...uh huh...all of them.

JG: All of them low rent...ok.

MH: We had...

JG: What is the average stay a rent?

MH: It just...elderly people, you know, the stay could be as long as they live, you know. But for regular families, sometimes it could be almost like a motel. You know, 'cause people come and go. And one of the things is, we have three hundred and thirty three units...we used to have four hundred and forty four, until we made some handicapped units. But, when these units were built back in the sixties everything was booming, you know, everything was...the company, you know, the plants were just booming and people were coming from the valley and everywhere else. They were getting jobs. And the first units were built in '66...one hundred and seventy four units were built in '66. And they were just, when I went to work there in '68 there was one vacancy, you know. Because it was just people coming in. And then they built the eighty units in...that was built around '68. In fact that was already in the making when I came to work.

JG: When you came...

MH: But, you know, in the '80's when everything...the plant starts shutting down and the economy was bad, well then, and everybody else outside of here, started building housing. And then DETCOG program came in where, that's a program where you...

JG: And that's the Deep East Texas Council of Governments...

MH: Council of Government...uh huh. And that's a program that what they call the Section Eight Program. You apply, and then they negotiate...you find a private rental if you had a house that you wanted to rent then you could go into a lease agreement with me and the money is going to come from HUD. HUD is going to pay you for your private rental house.

JG: It didn't have to be a project under like the Housing Authority...it could be in...

MH: No, it does not. Like that...no apartments...it could be a house next door to your house.

JG: Yeah.

MH: So if they could...if that landlord would lease to someone on that Section Eight Program then that person could rent and HUD subsidizes that rent. So, most people when that program got bigger and bigger, they ended up with more vouchers. Then that takes away people who...people who live there. Some of our people right now are on their waiting list, and once they receive those vouchers then, you know, those people move out. Now some of them move out and they come back because that program is not...is not for everybody, because a lot of people have real limited income. And then when you go out there you're gonna have to pay, even though they're going to base it on rent, but you're still gonna have to pay electricity, gas, and water.

JG: Your utilities.

MH: And...that's right. And you don't pay water in the apartments. Plus you're gonna have to keep your, you know, you're gonna have to keep your own yard up and you're gonna have to do some of those things that you wouldn't have to do in housing. You know, if your commode stops up you're gonna have to call a plumber, you know. Not Joe the plumber, but, you'll have to call somebody that's really a plumber. (laughing) And then you're gonna have to pay, you know to...you're gonna have to pay what we pay. You know...

JG: Uh huh.

MH: If we call the plumber out today that's going to be fifty dollars. And they're gonna have that. So sometimes they're not really...and the utilities in a house most the time is gonna be higher than in an apartment. So sometimes those residents are really not...cannot afford to be out...they want to, and it's a good thing, you know, you'd rather live in a house...you know, in a community than in a group of apartments. But some of them end up coming back because they really can't afford that, you know. So that's...

JG: Now you said they end up coming back and I guess that's 'cause of the cycle you said that some of them are more like a hotel as far as in and out.

MH: They come back and rent again. Yeah, that's right they...people move and they, you know. And then a lot of times people, you know, they think they can afford to...if they have a job they move in, but, if something happened we're gonna reduce the rent but if something happened that you don't have a job, you know, you can't pay...you can't stay there 'cause you still got utilities that you're gonna have to pay and that kind of stuff...so then they'll go live with somebody else until they get a job or do something else and then sometimes they come back. Now as long as they've paid their rent and they have not damaged the unit they can come back. You know, it's no limit to how many times you stay there. We've had well...they don't live there now, but we've had a couple of elderly...well, we do have one right now...a couple of elderly people that have just they've gone and they've come back. We have a lady right now that, I bet she's lived there six different times. Excellent resident, but she'll leave and go to the...she goes to Plainview. She'll go to Plainview...

JG: Wow, that's way out in the panhandle.

MH: Way out. (laughing) And she married this guy...

JG: That's a whole day's trip.

MH: And they come back and she's an older lady. And this time they come back and, they live in separate apartments because they can't live together. And that's up to them...they're married...

JG: Their married but they can't live toge...

MH: They live in separate apartments. And then, now they left and they come back and we rent to them...now, she's probably lived here six times like I say. And this time he didn't come back but he's been calling but I don't think his kids will let him come back because he's so old now. But she's back here because her kids are here. So sometimes it's things, even with the elderly people, you know, they go somewhere else they'll move back with their kids then they come back. I just can't do that...and especially if their health is still...you know.

JG: Yeah.

MH: Still good...so sometimes that's, you know, that's why I say...just like a motel. And because we have so many units. You know, where we had four hundred and forty four units and a town that's lasted...we got them when we were five thousand probably. Which, that's too many units...everybody go, "You got that many units, that's too many units for a town this size." But in the beginning, it wasn't. Because we housed everybody, you know, we housed...Lufkin's never had public housing. So we housed people from Lufkin that worked at Lufkin Industries, Texas Foundry, the poultry, the Atkinson Candy. We had people that, the first plant in Corrigan...I think it was oh, Georgia Pacific. We had people from Corrigan. 'Cause Corrigan just had a few units. We housed people from Livingston. And then, since then, like I say, some of the...

JG: That be in the '60's you're talking about.

MH: Yes, uh huh, when I first came to work there.

JG: And how's that compared to today?

MH: Well today all of those people have housing. Plus the DETCOG covers so many counties.

JG: Ok.

MH: You know, those people can apply...

JG: So all the residents in the Housing Authority today are mostly...?

MH: They're still from other places.

JG: I mean, they're...ok.

MH: They're still from...they come from different places. They still do come from different places, you know.

JG: Ok.

MH: Uh huh...but that's why...

JG: But those who are working and have a job are there...does that tie to Diboll or they're still going to jobs in Lufkin, Corrigan, that's where...?

MH: They're still, they're in every other places. But, that's still why if we didn't have that many units it wouldn't be such a turnover...like a motel. 'Cause we wouldn't have the units, you know, you couldn't turn over that fast.

JG: Now, you mentioned you have a lower total number because you had converted some to handicap...

MH: To handicap units, uh huh. We did ten.

JG: Is that just...is that just because you need more space or...?

MH: No, we needed to have some units available for handicap people.

JG: Ok.

MH: 'Cause see we didn't have any units back in...when they were built. None were actually built to accommodate handicap.

JG: So you converted existing ones to...?

MH: Existing units to handicap units.

JG: Ok, but why did the number go down to a lower total?

MH: Well, 'cause we had to take like...we had like two little small one bedroom units...

JG: Right.

MH: We had to take those two to make one handicap...

JG: Ok...yeah that's what I meant you had to convert it...ok.

MH: 'Cause you gotta...yes, to convert it because, you know, to make it big enough to get a wheelchair in and the bathroom bigger we had to take a couple of those smaller units.

JG: Yeah, so you just took your existing facilities and then some of them you had to take two to make or something like that. Yeah...ok.

MH: To make it...that's right, to convert...to make one that's right...to convert them into handicap units...so that reduced those units.

JG: In the context of your forty years with the Housing Authority, you know, you talked about some changes with the DETCOG Section Eight Program and things. But, any other changes that...or not necessarily changes, but just events that stand out in your mind...significant in that forty years time? You know, we talked about the handicaps, things like that. Anything different than when those first few years that you worked there? You mentioned the paper work too is a little more...

MH: Yeah, that's more but that's everybody. (laughing) Faced with that...but that's not anything. No, I guess we've always done pretty much the...we've always had programs for the youngsters, you know, we've always done that. We probably have a little bit...we probably have a little bigger program now in later years. We'd have something in the summer for the kids, but we have our summer program now that is not...we're not in competition with the Boys and Girls Club. But we have some kids that can't afford to go to the Boys and Girls Club. Some families, even though I think it's forty dollars for the summer. That's very cheap for your kid to go the whole summer, but, it's not real cheap if you have three kids that you say you're talking about coming up with one hundred and twenty dollars for the summer. And we started a program and it's been existence for several years, many years, where we try to pick up the slack of those kids. And we hire a youth director and we want...we hire young kids to work, you know, with those kids. And it helps our young kids... 'cause it gives them a job and then it helps our kids. And we try to hire the kids that we feel are real good role models for our kids. And it gives them a job and plus it helps our kids. We won't make it a babysitting thing, you know,

'cause some of the parents might not work. But, we, the program is from...like nine till twelve and we, even though we feed them, you know, we feed them through the school program. And then they go home when they finish and they come back at one because we don't want them to make us the babysitter. So we let them go home at twelve and they, 'cause parents have to be there and accept them and then they come back. But, that's pretty neat program, you know.

JG: And is there a name for it? Do you have a title?

MH: We just call it the Summer Youth Enrichment Program.

JG: Summer Youth Enrichment Program.

MH: Enrichment Program...and we...this past...we took them to the Children's Museum in Houston. And we were able to do that, and we take them to the zoo. You know, try to take them places that they wouldn't normally go. We take them on bus rides, which, you know, you think that's not much. But we...some of our little kids didn't even know where the high school was. They had never been over there. You know, they didn't know. And we'd take them around town...

JG: What ages are they?

MH: It's five till twelve. I think we take them...

JG: Five to twelve years old...?

MH: Five to twelve years old...uh huh.

JG: Ok.

MH: And I really wanted to do something for the...try to do something...and next year probably I'm gonna try to do something for the older kids...at least a couple of days. We, they go swimming, you know, 'cause most of them don't have money to go swimming and this is paid for by through our program. We are able to take them swimming. And to the movies sometime, we've gone to the movie before. But the big thing this summer was the Children's Museum and we...

JG: Yeah.

MH: You know...and that was really neat I mean that was really good for them. But we, like I say, we take them on rides, you know to the prison and stuff and...places you just wouldn't think. You know, around. We took them South Meadows we took them through Crown Colony and they all claimed, "That's my house, that's my house." (laughing) I remember doing that. "That's my house, that's my car." You know, I remember that but we try to, you know, do something that educational for them and get 'em, you know, out of...

JG: Have you brought them to the History Center?

MH: No, and I, you know I was just thinking about that...we, we could have.

JG: I was trying to think if we...

MH: No, we didn't. We carried them to City Hall and I don't know why I haven't thought to do that. We'll do that next time.

JG: Yeah, yeah give us a call what...how large a group is it?

MH: Yeah because...it's probably...it's not any more than thirty kids and we can break them up, you know.

JG: Ok...oh yeah, yeah.

MH: We had the fire department to come over, and the police department to come over. But that...I was just sitting here thinking we could have done this.

JG: Yeah.

MH: 'Cause we try to take 'em places that they wouldn't normally...you know, the parents wouldn't normally be able to take them.

JG: Yeah, it be a good little morning...

MH: It would...yeah, uh huh.

JG: ...or afternoon trip and expose them...you know, we could adapt it to their interest and...education levels and stuff, so yeah, that be good.

MH: Uh huh.

JG: Let's talk a little bit more...I told you I trying to keep it to an hour we've got about four minutes left...(laughs)

MH: Ok...that's ok it's no problem.

JG: I don't want to take too much of your time.

MH: No problem.

JG: But I want to talk oh...about your involvement in the community as a whole but, you know, you specifically mentioned a few things already. But, yeah I think you served on the board of the Boys and Girls Club. But, you might want to talk a little bit about that as well but I was...also wanted to ask you about the work with the senior's program...

MH: Ok.

JG: Specifically the luncheon, the picnics that you do. Just tell me...and Christian Outreach and all those things...just tell us a little bit about that.

MH: That's yeah...you know, it's just...the Lord has just blessed me, 'course all my life. And He's just put good people in my path, you know, just all of my life. From growing up until, you know...I mean always. And we started with the Christian Outreach I guess about twenty years ago...whenever they first got started. I've always tried to stay connected with, you know, I wanna give back, you know, to the people who help our people. You know, I don't...I've always said, and my mother taught me, you know, she said, "You can always give something." You know, and I and growing up and I'd say, "Well, how can you give when you don't have money," you know, and she would always say, "Service." You know, she would always, and this is going back to her, she would work for people and when they would give her...they would give us clothes and they would give her food and she would always wanna go back and do something extra for them. Because she said, "You can always do something even if you're poor. You can always do something." So she'd go back and clean out a closet or clean out a deep freezer or something. And she refused to let them pay her for that because, you know, you need to give back. And I guess that's kind of where I got it from but, I don't, I never wanted the Housing Authority to always have a handout but never give back anything to the community...you know. And if our residents can't do it, then I feel like I can, you know...I should. So we got...I just, one day I thought about I wanted...I always wanted to do something for the residents and the senior citizens and the kids...course the regular families too. But I wanted to do a luncheon, you know, for the senior citizens. And this is how the, that luncheon got started. And so, somebody had donated a turkey and somebody else had given something else...given us something else, you know. And I thought about doing something for the employees and I said, "No, I think I'm going to do it for the senior citizens." So, I cooked a big Thanksgiving dinner for the...no, Christmas...big Christmas dinner, for the senior citizens. And the first time we had one turkey and just very little stuff, but, we had invited our senior citizens...the Housing Authority senior citizens...at Fair Acres. And then, the next year I thought, well, I'd like to invite some of the other people in, you know, some of the other senior citizens, not just, whatever we have I never wanted it...

JG: Uh huh.

MH: ...to just be just a Housing Authority because everybody included us in everything else so we don't want to take our little marbles and run home. So, then I thought about getting it for something, you know, getting something for the other people in town. So we had...we invited people outside of town, you know, and we didn't...we had one turkey I think then. We had more dressing than turkey, you know. (laughing) But, and then I solicited the day care center, Shirley White, I said, "Maybe you can help me some." So she, you know had a little bit of stuff. She could, you know, had and Moye's Catering, you know, I called them up...I always beg them. But I always try to help them too so I

ended up with, boy, we had a crowd, we had a crowd. This might have been the second or third one I can't remember. But anyway, it was so tight in there you couldn't even wiggle. But I had...I invited the town's people...

JG: And where was it held?

MH: Fair Acres Community Center.

JG: Ok.

MH: That would probably hold seventy-five people but you...no wiggle room. But I thought well it would be good for the town's people...the mayor and the city manager and those people to come and mingle with our little people. So, the city manager was there. So he said, "Margie this is really nice but, you don't have enough room." I said, "I know, but we don't have any money to go to the civic center, you know, we don't have any money, I mean, for this." And so, he said, "Well, why don't you come to the civic center," he said, "I'll work that out." So anyway, that's how we ended up going to the civic center. And then, we teamed up with...I talked to An and I said, "Why don't y'all come in with us and let's just make this..."

JG: And...An was representing the...

MH: An Sweeney...An was with the Christian Outreach.

JG: Ok.

MH: "...and come in with us and let's just do it, you know, for the senior citizens all over town."

JG: As a whole.

MH: And so, that's how we ended up with the outreach in doing that. So then the first time we, when we started out we had a Christmas luncheon. And then I thought, you know, twice a year if we could do something twice a year for the seniors. Maybe we could have an indoor picnic. And so we started out with a little sandwich in a bag for an indoor picnic. We had a sandwich, a chip, and a drink. And it was an indoor picnic...and of course I...we probably had two hundred people at first. We always had a good crowd, you know. But, it grew and grew and grew and got bigger. And we, we started out...well then we started going to the Booster Club for money. And then, for years the Booster Club sponsored it and then we...Jack Sweeney with Diboll Housing Foundation said that they would, they would fund the Christmas luncheon. You know, 'cause so many, I mean we had everybody from all over town and it...and I guess Temple had been doing a luncheon a couple of times a year but then they didn't do a Christmas luncheon so...the foundation started funding it. And then, Christian outreach...

JG: That's the Diboll Housing Foundation...

MH: Housing Foundation...uh huh.

JG: And how is that different from the Housing Authority...is that...what is the Housing Foundation?

MH: Well the Housing... well the Housing Foundation is real...there was...the Housing Foundation was started really before the Housing Authority.

JG: I think it was late '50's I believe.

MH: Uh...well, probably, no, it would have been...the Housing Authority was formed in '66 so this was '64...so it would have been the early '60's.

JG: Ok.

MH: 'Cause it was first. And they had forty-two units of housing...that was the first housing, low income housing in Diboll. And...

JG: Is that the Walter Allen addition?

MH: That's the Walter Allen addition. And I don't know how much time you have but I want to tell you this...

JG: Ok...yeah, sure go ahead.

MH: Unlike most...unlike most towns, you know, we talk about integration and how things started here in Diboll. But, when the forty-two units of...the first forty-two units of housing was built, and built in that section of town...now what the town people did, you know, they formed the housing foundation and they looked at the most substandard housing in Diboll. And that's where the first forty-two units were built. Now, you know, if, and that's why I say, this town is just totally different and unique. Because in most towns if people were so prejudiced and...you know, they would have just built forty-two units in the white section of town. And put forty-two people from the white section of town in those units. But Diboll was totally different. They looked at the most substandard housing and that's where they put the first units even though it was still segregated. But that's where the first housing was...the first low-income housing was built. The first forty-two units...was the Walter Allen.

JG: Ok...and I think I got you off track from what you were talking about with the...

MH: Yeah, no I probably got off track I'm good at that.

JG: No, well I interrupted you to define the foundation but yeah, you were talking about the foundation.

MH: Ok. But I was talking about the foundation...yeah, the Housing Foundation and that's how the foundation got started. The foundation started then, and they built those first forty two units. That's what I got off telling you.

JG: Right, ok.

MH: Yeah, that's how the foundation got started. Now the foundation built those forty-two units and it was...they were not actually government units but they were government...they got a low interest rate loan from the government to build 'em. And they were not tied to the government like the Housing Authority...

JG: Yeah.

MH: They just got a low interest rate. They paid their note, paid their note off and, you know, they just got a low interest rate. They didn't, they didn't receive funds from HUD for those units. They just got a low interest rate loan. So that's the difference in, you know.

JG: Are those...as a program is that done away with or are those now part of the, what you do?

MH: Those are...the Housing Foundation still own those...

JG: Oh ok.

MH: But they paid it. And now the Housing Foundation built another type of housing that was called leased housing. And they built them down on the...in the Jackson Wood Addition. Down on Cypress, Lynn and Willie Massey. Those units were built, let's see '66, '68, they were built about '70...1970. And the Housing Foundation built sixty units in that section...that section of town. Sixty units of what they were called Section 23 Leased Housing Program. The Housing Foundation built those units and leased them to the Housing Authority. And we turned them around and leased them to residents based on their income. So we, we leased from the Housing Foundation those sixty units. Now they since, tore those units down and they built ten units on the, on the...end of Cypress. About ten units. And they were gonna try to start a little housing program where they built ten, then built ten more, but it took them a while to do those ten so they...people start buying and building their own. But, the Housing Foundation built those units, they built the forty two Walter Allen, then the Section 23 Leased Housing Program. So that's what the foundation is...you know, and of course it's still in existence, you know, now.

JG: Ok, the...going back to the Housing Authority...

MH: Ok.

JG: That you're director of...where does it stand today, say the employees that you have, the staff...as far as numbers?

MH: Ok...we, right now, we have, let's see, three office staff. We have Sherry, Angie, and Cindy...three office staff. And we have our maintenance supervisor and four full time maintenance staff. Now, we have part time employees and at times we have had a pretty large modernization crew. Where, that we, we do force account...rather than hire a big contractor to come in and remodel twenty units. We hire people by the hour, people around in the city, by the hour, to come in and work on our modernization program. And we call, that's called force account where we hire by the hour rather than a big contractor to come in. And when we do that we might have...

JG: So you supervise the work rather than a contractor...ok.

MH: And we...rather than a contractor, uh huh. And we...

JG: Who does that? Is that you? I mean you're the supervisor...

MH: No, the...we hire...we'll have someone from our maintenance staff or hire a supervisor to supervise that work.

JG: Oh ok...ok.

MH: It's just not a contractor that comes in, you know. And that works better for us because we have to move people out and remodel their units and we kind of want to give them time to, you know, if you got a contractor he'll say, "I want these ten units by next week." And you gotta make sure...and some of the elderly people, you know, it...they might not want to go right now and we try to let them go as, you know, so it works better for us. And we probably get more for our dollar when you do that. But right now we don't have that big crew and we have had.

JG: Yeah...ok, so you have had a bigger crew in the past.

MH: We have had a bigger crew because of that modernization program. Uh huh.

JG: Because of that...right ok...tell me a little bit about your children and...

MH: Ok...my oldest child is Demetrius; he's...will be forty four in December. And he works here for Temple, at the mill. And he's married to Demetres. And they're Demetrius and Demetres and their nickname is Meche and Deche. (laughing) And when he told me that I thought it was a joke. Said, "I met this real nice girl at the college," and he met her at Angelina College. Said, "Her name is Demetres, and her nickname Deche." I said, "Yeah, right." 'Cause he's always pulling my leg. I said, "Quit lying." So when I met her I said, "So you're Demetres and your nickname Deche." She said, "Yes, ma'am." And of course I thought it was a joke, you know, but anyway, they're married and they don't have any kids. And my daughter Tamra, I always prayed that I wanted a son and a daughter, but I didn't tell the Lord when. So they're seventeen years apart. And Tamra graduated from Diboll High School here, and went to Angelina College and graduated, and went to A & M and graduated, went to University of Texas in Arlington and

graduated. And she has a degree from A & M in psychology and one from UT in social work. And she's working at a hospital there in Arlington as a social worker. And, of course, she doesn't have any kids and she just recently just got a little dog, named Macy. So, she has a little puppy but she's not, she's not married and not, you know, not really interested...so I have no grandchildren.

JG: Oh (laughing)

MH: But, you know, the Lord has blessed me again, I'm real proud of both of them. They both went to school here in Diboll. We live in Lufkin, but I transferred both of them twelve years to Diboll School and real proud that I did.

JG: And your daughter-in-law is the Director of Hospice in the Pines.

MH: Of Hospice that's right. That's right, yeah.

JG: And we were talking earlier about how good a program that's been to people, well, like I said myself included, and others that we know.

MH: Yes, and she takes it...you know, I mean, she's real serious about her job and real passionate, you know, and I think sometimes...course I never mention to them about children or anything, but...you know, I feel like the Lord has things for us to do and sometimes children are in the plan and sometime not, you know. 'Cause if they did I don't know how she could do what she does, you know, with Hospice and, you know, I'm just real proud that she's in a position that I feel like that they help so many people. You know, and I know how she feels about it so, you know, I'm just real...you know.

JG: That's your mother's legacy of service.

MH: That's right...that's exactly right.

JG: Through your children...and even through your daughter-in-law.

MH: Yeah, that's right...that's exactly right. Yeah, Mr. Temple always thought she was my daughter.

JG: I was always confused myself. (laughing)

MH: He told her one day he said...we, he and...I mean he just couldn't and when Mrs. Temple lived...he said, "I talked to your daughter the other day," and I said, "No, that was my daughter-in-law." And he said, "No, your daughter." So, Mrs. Temple told him one day...and he would always, he'd just "Your daughter," and I quit even telling him (laughing) and so one day she said...

JG: You knew who he was talking about.

MH: Yeah...one day Mrs. Temple told him, she said, "Arthur, she ought to know if that's her daughter or daughter-in-law." He just, you know, he just felt like that was my daughter, you know. And of course we kind of...pretty much in the same line of work, you know, kind of, so it's...

JG: Well you know, and the name, your son and her having the...that's what I was meaning I was confused about.

MH: You know...yeah, I know it...and the same name. Yeah, I know it, I know it. Yeah, and then my daughter go into social work. I said, "You sure that's what you want to do." And she said, "Yeah." And the hospital where she worked is a mental hospital. She did an intern there and they asked her to go to work there and, you know, and she does and, you know, and it's...and then people say, "Mental hospital." But, you know, somebody has to do it and I thank God that people who really care and want to do that, 'cause the works with adolescent. I'm so thankful that, you know, that she does, you know, and that we do have people. You know, if I had children or, you know, I certainly would want somebody like her to be there, you know, with my children. And to hear my daughter talk about her work and some of the stuff that goes on there and how concerned she is...it's just...you know, I'm just really, you know, I'm really thankful. I think, you know, and I think back I said, "My mother would be so proud." You know, to know that, you know, 'cause she constantly...now my dad never said much about that. But she was strong in her belief that, you know, if you given back and just doing, you know, for the community, you know...and for people, you know, just for people period, you know. And even now it's not hardly...just the other day a lady was telling me, and we had nothing, how she helped her when we would leave home. My mother would call her and give her food from the freezer. And we didn't have anything, you know. But...I wanted to get on that.

JG: Ok. Well, again I really appreciate it. Is there any closing thoughts or anything you'd like to share in addition? There's so many other things I know I could ask you and I know you have got much to tell...I did promise you I'd try to keep it to an hour so...

MH: No, that's fine. And the only thing I would like to say is that I just feel blessed and fortunate that I was able to be raised in a town like Diboll...and be able to spend my life here and be a part of, you know, so many...so many good people. You know, it's just...I just feel blessed. And able to do some of the things that we've been able to do here in Diboll, you know, it's just...it's a blessing.

JG: Well again I thank you very much.

MH: Ok...thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW