

ALGIANON M. JEFFERO

Interview 183A

October 10, 2009 at The History Center, Diboll, Texas

Jonathan Gerland, Interviewer

Patsy Colbert, Transcriber

ABSTRACT: In this interview with Jonathan Gerland, Algianon Jeffero reminisces about his life as a child, a student, an educator, and an employee of the Boy Scouts of America. After growing up in Huntsville, Texas, Mr. Jeffero attended Prairie View A&M University where he played on the National Championship football team. He graduated with a degree in Vocational Agriculture and moved to Littlefield, Texas to teach and coach. After one semester in West Texas, Mr. Jeffero returned to East Texas in 1956 and began teaching AG classes at H.G. Temple School, Diboll's African American school. Mr. Jeffero taught in Diboll and sponsored the New Farmer's of America club until 1967, when he left education to begin working for the Boy Scouts of America. He left Diboll before the schools were fully integrated, but he does remember the beginnings of the process.

Jonathan Gerland (hereafter JG): Today's date is October 10, 2009. My name is Jonathan Gerland and I'm with Mr. Algianon Jeffero. We are at The History Center and we are going to do an oral history. We are going to talk about quite a few things. Mr. Jeffero has a long and distinguished career in public education in Texas. He was in Diboll I believe from '56 to '67. So, we will begin I guess by talking about what brought you to Diboll? How did you come to teach here in Diboll, Texas?

Algianon Jeffero (hereafter AJ): Okay when I'm asked that question I don't know exactly why all of this happened. But when I was coming back from Littlefield, Texas they were going to integrate that September of 1956, they were going to integrate. Seven board members had a meeting with the community and then they explained to us that they didn't want to integrate but they knew they had to and they didn't want to be pushed around so they were going to do it effective September.

JG: Of '56?

AJ: Of '56. And so when they said that well the...

JG: Now you were in Littlefield at the time?

AJ: I was in Littlefield at that time. I just had played that championship game.

JG: For Prairie View?

AG: No, not from Prairie View.

JG: Oh, from Huntsville.

AJ: Interscholastic league, that was our district game and we played the district at Texas, at that college...it's Texas Tech. We always played our games there in Littlefield.

JG: Okay, I tell you what Mr. Jeffero just maybe for the record maybe it would be best if we just started chronologically. I do want to focus on Diboll and your time here. We don't need to go into a whole lot of detail but maybe it would help tell the story if we maybe just started with when and where were you born?

AJ: Okay, I was born in New Willard, Texas.

JG: A sawmill town.

AJ: Sawmill town, in 1933.

JG: 1933.

AJ: Dad was the edger there in which we...he bought us a home in Huntsville, Texas in 19...I was five years old. I can't remember exactly, but I was five years old when we moved to Huntsville, Texas. He bought a home there and that is where I was raised up.

JG: Okay.

AJ: And after I was raised up there, I finished high school in 1957, no 1952. That is when I graduated.

JG: And what school did you go to in Huntsville?

AJ: Sam Houston High School, that is the name, Sam Houston High School.

JG: Now, that was a segregated school?

AJ: A segregated black school. And so it was 1952 and we had seventy because we had our first anniversary for that this summer and we met there in Huntsville. We had never had a class reunion so that was our first class reunion, this past and it was 57 years. So 1952 is when we graduated.

JG: And what did you do after high school?

AJ: Okay after high school I thought I was gonna just kind of chill awhile and then go to college. I always wanted to go to college.

JG: Did your parents encourage you to do that?

AJ: Yes, they encouraged me to go to college and I wanted it and I knew what I wanted to do at that time but I wasn't intended to go there as quick as I did. But, what happened, Mr. J.R. Powell, he was our Ag teacher.

JG: Powell?

AJ: Yes P-O-W-E-L-L. So he encouraged her to tell me 'cause you know, I knew how to cut up meat and everything, matter of fact he taught me how to cut up meat and everything.

JG: In your Vocational Agriculture class at high school?

AJ: Yes, right. So, he taught me how to do that so he knew I really loved to do that. So, he found me a job at Prairie View. I didn't have no scholarship or nothing. I came there without a scholarship. And so, he told my mother to bring me down there that he had found me a job in the kitchen and I would be cutting up meat. So, I really didn't want to go then but I said, "Well, I guess I'll go." So I went on down there. I liked the job because it was real interesting and I liked cutting up meat and everything like that. So I got a chance to meet the football players. I was a walk on and the football players were down there during the time, during the summer, they was down there, you know. I knew I wanted to play football because I played in high school and I thought I was pretty good. So, I talked to some of the players and they told me they said, "Everybody down here is good because all of us is State Champions." I said, "So you got to be better than good." That is what they told me. So, I found out what they were talking about. So, anyway but I thought I was good so I got out there in September and we practiced and everything. So, after practice about a week we had three captains on the team. They told me they said, "Look here, we want you to stay; we need to tell the coach something about you." I didn't know what they were going to do, so I said, "Okay." "Just stay after practice." So, I stayed after practice and so one of the captains said, told the head coach said, "We need this guy on defense, on our team" he said, "because can't nobody block him and can't nobody make no tackles while he is in the game because he makes all the tackles and he do the blocking and everything, so we need him." And so, the other one said, "I can't even block him, nobody can block him." I said "okay." So from then on I didn't miss a game, you know, some people each week that you played well then sometimes each week it would be a different person in a different position. But they always put me in and I ended up playing offense and defense. I always did my best and like I said if a tackle was made if I didn't make it by myself I was in on it. I wasn't really fast but I was so quick.

JG: What position did you play?

AJ: I played left guard.

JG: Okay, on defense?

AJ: On defense and offense. And then on some offense...defense I played nose guard right in front of the center where I could hit the center and knock him over and get the

quarterback. That was my goal to get the quarterback. And I was very successful in doing that so I didn't miss a game. I made all the trips and I made the first team the first year.

JG: So that was in the fall of '52, if you graduated in '52?

AJ: Yes, fall of '52 and we won, we won the...

JG: I think you were the Southwest Conference Champs.

AJ: Yes that is right; we won that in '52.

JG: '51, '52, '53 and '54.

AJ: Now '51 I guess they put that in there because they just had won it the first time in '51.

JG: Yes sir, just before you.

AJ: Just before me, but we won it again and we won it all the other four years including, cause you couldn't win the national championship unless you won the SWAC first because that is the Southwest Conference, they called it the SWAC.

JG: And these were all segregated black teams?

AJ: Yes, okay I got to tell you a thing on that and this is a true thing. Yes, it was segregated but we could have whooped anybody and we tried. We played Fort Hood and they had white and black on the team, mostly white and they had pros.

JG: Now this was the Army team?

AJ: Yes, the Army team. We beat them. We couldn't get nobody else to play us. I'm talking about, you know, the high school. I'm going to tell you. I grew up in Huntsville in Sam Houston. What I did, we were so good, and we were the same way in high school, on our high school team. We were so good until I called, and I couldn't go to Sam Houston. My daughter finished from Sam Houston in business. Okay but I couldn't go to Sam Houston, but I felt like we was so good because we could beat anybody and we did, anybody that played us. We played 14 games and we won 14 including the national championship. So, I called the coach in Huntsville at Sam Houston High.

JG: The coach?

AJ: Yes, the coach, I called him. I'm talking about I'm nothing but a player but I called him because I couldn't get none of our coaches to call him. They said they wasn't going to play us because it was too big of a chance to take you know, 'cause they figured we was going to beat them. Which we would have, but the guy told me, and it didn't make me, you know, feel in any kind of way but I knew if we played them we would beat them.

Because like I said, we beat the Army team. We had a guy on there, had him in the air and he could throw the ball. I am talking about he was Johnny Unitus. He was playing on the army team.

JG: You played against Johnny Unitus?

AJ: I did, I did, yes.

JG: Alright.

AJ: And to me he was, I don't know how much he weighed but he was a little fellow. We held him up in the air like that and he would throw that ball for about 50 yards. I'm talking about, you know, and it connected. He was just that good. He was good.

JG: Now, you are talking about the Baltimore Colt, NFL player?

AJ: Right, right yes, we beat them. So I called the Sam Houston High School, college team, and told them that we were a good team and that nobody had beat us and we would like to play them. Because, you know, we felt like we were national champs and we wanted to play. Well he told me, I guess he was thinking pretty quick there, he said, "We can't play y'all." I said, "I sure would like for you too, 'cause I feel like we can beat y'all." And he said, "Well we just can't do it." So I went back and I told my coach and he said, "Well I knew they wasn't going to play us because it would kind of look bad to them if this black team beat them." You know what I'm talking about.

JG: Now you are talking about Sam Houston [State] University?

AJ: Sam Houston [State] University. Right, right, and we could have beat them but they wouldn't play us.

JG: They wouldn't play.

AJ: They wouldn't play us, but we beat everybody else, including the National Championships that year.

JG: Tell me a little bit about the National Championship teams. That was fall of '53 into '54, right?

AJ: Yes, right.

JG: And you were telling me a little bit earlier that you went to Florida to play the championship.

AJ: Yes, we flew to Florida.

JG: And who did you play?

AJ: We played Florida A&M, and we beat them.

JG: Tell me a little bit about that season. What led you up to going to Florida to play? I assume you had beat everybody in the Southwest Conference.

AJ: We beat everybody in the Southwest Conference, we whooped everybody.

JG: Never lost a game?

AJ: Never lost a game. We didn't lose any kind of game now. We didn't lose anything. We beat everybody we played. And we couldn't get, you know, nobody other than the team that you know we were scheduled for. We thought at first we were going to play Tennessee State. Everybody was telling us we were going to play Tennessee State. But, I guess somebody beat them because we didn't play Tennessee State.

JG: Who did you play leading up to the Florida State?

AJ: Let me see if I can think of all of it. We played Grambling, you know.

JG: Grambling, okay. I think Walter Peyton was from there wasn't he?

AJ: Yes Walter Peyton, but we had a John Earl Peyton that played with us from Livingston, Texas and he was good. He could, he ran on his heels. They always taught you to run on your toes, but he ran on his heels. Well he run so fast and he could cut so fast until they didn't try to train him. They let him stay, just let him play there. We played in Langston, Oklahoma, and we played...let me see who all else we played.

JG: That is okay. We can look that up later. Tell me how you traveled to the games. I know you flew out to Florida and it looked like a pretty nice airplane. Tell me a little bit about that.

AJ: Well yes, we always traveled on a Continental or Trailways big bus, nice bus and everything like that. We went first class just as we did the same thing in high school.

JG: Now when you say first class, is that just the team only was on the bus?

AJ: Yes.

JG: So he chartered a bus?

AJ: Yes, with the coaches, the team and coaches. When we flew now, we had those ladies on there, you know, they were the...

JG: Stewardesses.

AJ: Yes, the Stewardesses. They were on there and a couple of pilots and us and the coaches and a couple of stewardesses when we flew there and when we flew back.

JG: Now, how many games did you fly to, just the Florida one?

AJ: That was the only one.

JG: The only one okay.

AJ: That was the only National Championship game we flew to because the last National Championship game we won, we won that one at home.

JG: At home, so you played it there.

AJ: Yes, right...so.

JG: So how was that, was that your first time to ever fly on an airplane?

AJ: That was the first time.

JG: It was probably many of your first times I would imagine.

AJ: I believe it was all of them's first time, that is what I believe now. I knew it was my first time. I had never flown before.

JG: What did you think about that?

AJ: Well I'll tell you, I was really excited and really happy. I had never done that before and I was so glad and so happy I wasn't even scared the first time.

JG: You didn't know what to be scared of.

AJ: No, and I was sitting on the wing where I could look out you know and see everything, lightning and everything way down below. It was raining down there and we was way up above the clouds and everything.

JG: Do you remember what airport you flew out of? Was it Houston?

AJ: Yes, Ellington Air Force base, no Ellington Air Force in Houston. That is where we flew from. Then they flew us back there and then a chartered bus brought us there and then it picked us up there in Houston and brought us back to Prairie View. And we had people just lined up waiting on us. And I tell you it was exciting. The first time National Champs and everybody was happy.

JG: And you said you played every single minute of the game?

AJ: Sixty minutes, sixty minutes.

JG: All sixty minutes of the game. Offense, defense, special teams also?

AJ: I played everything; I don't know why.

JG: You never went on the sideline did you?

AJ: No, they never took me out of the game. They never took me out of the game.

JG: And you were still playing left guard on offense and defense?

AJ: Yes, nose guard. Okay, I played nose guard when things got tough. I played nose guard 'cause, the centers I don't care how big they were they didn't have a chance on me, 'cause I could hit them so quick and so hard. I used to tell people, they would be looking at the stars if it was a night game, they would be looking at the stars, 'cause I would have them on their back all the time. (laughter)

JG: How many...a good game for you...sounds like all of them were good games but...

AJ: All of them.

JG: ...but how many sacks would you get you think?

AJ: I tell you, I don't know how I did it. But I used to pray. I told my wife and I told my mother too, to try to get tired. I guess I was just in good shape and I never would get tired.

JG: Tired?

AJ: Yes, right, never did get tired, you know. So, I don't know I can't count them, how many in a game. It was a lot. If I didn't make them by myself and a lot of them I did, but...

JG: You were in on the tackles.

AJ: Yes, I was in on every tackle.

JG: You were like a magnet to that football.

AJ: Yes, I was [snap] just like that. And the same thing in practice, I didn't get tired in practice and so if I shot at a man and missed him I caught up with him in most cases. I caught up with him and tackled him, you know. If I shot by and then I got up and just caught him you know. I usually would catch them before they could get started. Some of them was pretty fast so I used to get them before they got started.

JG: Now in offense did many running plays go behind you? It sounds like you enjoyed defense a little more than offense.

AJ: Well yes I did. But, offense yes, I knew exactly how to block them. I was like about I'll say six feet, I was going to say eight but, if I'm eight foot in front of a guy, and I can't do nothing like that now. I would just sail in the air and make the tackle, you know. You know, I could just jump that far. I was just like a cat. (laughter) Well like I say, it was something that I enjoyed, something that I enjoyed.

JG: Well I'm sure I could ask you a lot more questions about that but I do want to...sounds like we might want to do another interview at one point. But, I do want to move forward and try to get to Diboll. So, let's get to, you graduated from Prairie View. What did you major in, in college?

AJ: I majored in Vocational Agriculture.

JG: Vocational Agriculture.

AJ: And then on my master's I majored in education and administration.

JG: Administration, now that was a little while later.

AJ: Yes, that was after I was in Diboll.

JG: Okay, let's see, you graduated from Prairie View and you got a bachelors from Prairie View.

AJ: I got a Bachelors of Science.

JG: Bachelor of Science in Vocational Agriculture. Talk a little bit about that time. You graduated and now what are you going to do with your life? That was in '54?

AJ: That was in '56 when I graduated.

JG: You graduated in '56, okay.

AJ: Yes right. I hadn't really, 'cause it was in the middle of the year. My class really didn't graduate until that May.

JG: You graduated early in January.

AJ: Early because I went...

JG: Three and a half years.

AH: Yes right. I went to summer school and that is some of the reason why I did graduate early 'cause I went to summer school, you know. And so I graduated...it was around the 8th of January 'cause the teacher was trying to call me in after that bowl game when we played at Texas Southern. They called me in and asked me if I would take a job in Littlefield, Texas which was out...

JG: Out in West Texas.

AJ: Out in West Texas, which was 680 miles from my home in Huntsville.

JG: That is Littlefield, Texas?

AJ: Littlefield, Texas, yes, and they had a school named Dunbar High.

JG: But not the Dunbar in Lufkin.

AJ: Not the Dunbar in Lufkin. But a lot of people they see that and say "he made a mistake, he talking about Lufkin." But no, that wasn't Lufkin. (laughter) And so they needed me so I took my exams early and so...

JG: You went as a Vocational Agriculture teacher?

AJ: Not there, I went as head coach.

JG: Head coach, okay, okay.

AJ: Yes head coach right there in Littlefield. See, I played football and I guess they heard about me or watched me play or something like that. The guy might have been at that game I played.

JG: There you go. So this is a segregated, still just a black school, not an integrated?

AJ: A black school, no not an integrated school, no not yet. And so after I was coming from the district game that we played there and after I got back well that next week they had a town hall meeting. And so, they had seven white board members. There wasn't no black board members.

JG: And this is in Littlefield, Texas?

AJ: Littlefield, Texas. Okay, so they sat down and they talked and they told us about what they was going to do and they said, "We don't want to integrate." And a lot of the black people they didn't want to integrate either, you know, and they said, "We don't want to either." And so they say, "But, we don't like to be pushed around and we know that we are going to have to." That is what they said. And they said, "So since we know we are going to have to do it we want to volunteer and do it and not wait until somebody tells us we got to do it."

JG: Okay.

AJ: So, okay so they talked and everything you know. They didn't want any black people whooping their children and the black people didn't want no white people whooping our children. You understand what I'm trying to say.

JG: Yes sir, yes sir.

AJ: And so I can understand and I'm just sitting up there listening.

JG: Now you were already there at the school at the time.

AJ: Yes, at the school at the time.

JG: So, you are on the faculty?

AJ: Yes, I'm on the faculty now, you know. But, I didn't say a word. I just sit there listening you know, because I hadn't never seen nothing like that before, you know. So one of the board members, I guess he was the president; he looked over there at a black lady sitting over there. She was kind of heavy set and she had wrapped her legs, you know, I guess she had rheumatism or arthritis I don't know because her legs were wrapped. At least one of them was wrapped, you know. And he said, "You see that black lady over there, I'm not smart as she is." I don't know how he knew that, but this is what he said, "I'm not as smart as she is." And he said, "I've got a masters degree." And so that kind of made me feel good then. You know, here is a man acknowledging that somebody of different color is smarter than him. Now, I guess he must have thought it because I had no idea how smart he was.

JG: You didn't know who she was?

AJ: I knew her 'cause she was the English teacher.

JG: Okay, she was a teacher.

AJ: I knew her by name but I didn't know anything about her. I had been there a couple of months then or something like that.

JG: Okay, so I'm just trying to set the stage for the audience. It was teachers of both the white school and the black school there?

AJ: No, just black teachers there but we had people in the community there.

JG: White and black? White and black?

AJ: No, the only white people there was the board members.

JG: The school board, oh okay.

AJ: Seven of them.

JG: So it was the school board, which happened to be all white, and they were discussing with the black school.

AJ: The black schoolteachers. We had all our faculty over there and then anybody in the community that wanted to be there.

JG: But it was the blacks only or the whites?

AJ: Blacks only.

JG: Blacks only.

AJ: Wasn't anybody there but the black people and the board members. And so he said, "We are going to integrate, we don't want too, like y'all don't want to integrate, but we are going to have to. It's the law of the land and we are going to integrate and we just don't like to be pushed around." Now when I first got there I recognized that school had been condemned for about 10 years. You know, so I'm kind of thinking now, this school was condemned, but the kids were still going. It wasn't leaking rain or nothing in there, I don't know why they condemned it, but they condemned it for some reason. But anyway, so they were letting the people talk and everything. People were mad, they were mad. Like I said, I'm just sitting up there listening you know 'cause I didn't know what the situation was or anything. I'm just listening and seeing how they handle that kind of stuff. So they say, "Well, we don't want to integrate either." And they were so mad when they talked about whooping their kids and stuff, you know what I'm trying to say.

JG: Yes sir, yes, well it was totally different from everything that had been before, that is right.

AJ: And I can understand them, you know.

JG: Oh yes sir.

AJ: Okay, they didn't want anybody whipping their children. And then they made their children the first time because they didn't hire any of them. You understand what I'm trying to say.

JG: Right.

AJ: And so they say "It is going to be effective September. You don't have anything to worry about now, cause it's going to be September and we ain't going to fire anybody."

JG: It was going to be September of '56?

AJ: Yes, September of 56. I was way away from there then.

JG: They said they weren't going to fire any black teachers.

AJ: They didn't, they didn't fire anybody, but they not going to rehire them. You know what I'm trying to say.

JG: Oh, okay.

AJ: See they had contracts. When I first got there they gave me a contract.

JG: For how long?

AJ: Until school was out.

JG: Just for the school year.

AJ: Yes, for the school year see. So they had contracts understand. And everywhere we went they just had contracts for one year.

JG: For that one year.

AJ: Now like the superintendents and stuff, like the superintendent he might have got three or four years. If you wasn't no superintendent...you know. We didn't have no...it was a superintendent for all of the schools I guess. But we didn't have no...

JG: Just a black superintendent.

AJ: So all they had to do is just not rehire. They didn't fire anybody because the contract was going to end when the school was out.

JG: Right.

AJ: Okay, and so I knew that, I realized that but that didn't worry me or anything like that. So, they ask people to let the people talk and some of them was mad and some of them was using profanity and all that 'cause they was mad, you know they were mad, they were mad at everything. But, and so some of the other citizens was trying to stop them from acting like that you know. So the principal said, "Let them talk." And I guess it was a good thing 'cause they got their steam off whatever they wanted to say, you know. So they talked, but when they said they wasn't going to hire any body including the principal, and the principal had been there fourteen years, you know. So I don't think they, they didn't think a whole lot of him and I couldn't understand that you know, he was teaching all those other folks kids and stuff but he wasn't good enough for them to take him, you know what I'm trying to say.

JG: Right, right.

AJ: But they didn't take nobody. Well, actually I didn't want to stay anyway, you know. If they had offered me a job I probably would have been trying to get rid of it.

JG: So basically they integrated the students but not the teachers.

AJ: Right, right, but he asked me this, he asked me would I bring my boys over there to the school.

JG: Now by your boys you mean your students?

AJ: Yes, my football...

JG: Your athletes?

AJ: Yes, my athletes, and they were good. I tell you that was...so I said, "Yeah, I'll bring them over there, but now yours won't have a match with mine." Which I really felt like that, and they didn't. They didn't even win their district, but we won our district in field and track. And, so I said, "Sure I'll bring mine." So I took them over there but I say, "They won't be liked, you know." They say, "Yes, 'cause we want them to practice with ours on the track and field and stuff." But, you know...

JG: But they didn't offer you a job?

AJ: No they didn't offer me a job, no. I'm kind of glad they didn't. You understand what I'm trying to say. Because what happened to me after then, you would be amazed. You know what I'm trying to say and I don't know how the people got the news or if they got the news. I just don't know what happened. Okay so, when school was out, well first before school was out, my team...I wanted them to go to state. Which they went to state and I just didn't...

JG: Now, you're talking about track and field?

AJ: Track and field yes, in [unintelligible].

JG: In the spring of '56?

AJ: Spring of '56, okay. So, but everybody went to Prairie View to the state, that was our Interscholastic League headquarters, Prairie View. So, everybody went down there but we first had to get some money, had to get permission. So now we had hired another because when they said they wasn't going to hire the principal the principal say, well I guess he had jumped ahead and he already had him a job at the Air Force base, which wasn't too far from there. He said, "I'm an airplane mechanic." He said, "I resign on the spot." Now, he resigned on the spot, the principal did. And, but nobody else resigned so we needed another principal. They hired another guy that I knew, well I didn't know a

whole lot about him but I knew he had his masters and everything and he was, you know, I knew him but he wasn't teaching school at Prairie View. I guess he was just waiting to get a chance like this. So they sent him down there, Mr. Taylor, Alexander Taylor that is what his name was. So Mr. Taylor came down there. I knew him and he knew me 'cause I played football so he knew me. And, I knew him too, but I didn't know nothing about him. So, but he seemed to be a nice fellow, I liked him. I said "Mr. Taylor we won the state in field and track in [unintelligible]. And I said, "We want to go to state at Prairie View." We knew where it was at that time. And so he said, "Yes, coach, yes coach, yes, yes." I said, "Well will you go to the superintendent with me?" He said, "yes coach, yes coach." So, he did and we set a time with the superintendent and everything so me and him went down there to the school. So, the superintendent he said, "Can I help you?" I said "Yes." He said, "What can I do for you?" That's what he told me, you know, I been working with people all my years, all my days ever since I was five years old and I can tell you some of that too if you want. And so, I knew people like the back of my hand, I knew them. And so, I told him I said, "Well we want a continental bus to carry our students down to Prairie View" and it was maybe eight or nine hundred miles from Littlefield 'cause I knew it was six hundred eighty one miles from my home and I knew it had to be further from Prairie View. And, he said, "Coach we don't have no money." That is what the superintendent said. There wasn't nobody there but the superintendent, and me and my principal. And he had a long about from here to that back table back there, he had one of these tables look like three of them about that long, might not have been that long but it seemed liked that.

JG: A really long table (laughter).

AJ: Yes, a really long table and it had bills on there and everything. But now he wasn't looking for us I don't guess. But, he had them bills on there you know, just a whole lot of paper and stuff you know, but it was neat. It was neat things. He said, "Now we don't have no money." Now being myself I didn't let nobody, I didn't care who they was, tell me no if I believed in something. So I kept talking, you know, trying to show him the point and finally got down to the point where I actually asked him I said, "Now if it was your other team..."

JG: The white team?

AJ: Yes, I just told him like that, you know. He knew it had to be the white team. I said, "Would you let them go to state?" That started him to thinking then. He was really thinking. I said, "I believe you would." I said, "Now I think my boys deserve" and there was some girls on that team too, "deserve the opportunity to go to state." I said, "They won our district." And so it was kind of a little intermission like that with the thought and everything like that. And then, my principal, now he was an older man, I guess I was about 22 years old then, and I wasn't afraid of nothing or nobody. You understand what I'm trying to say? You know.

JG: Yes sir.

AJ: And I wasn't a violent person or nothing like that you know, but I just believed in the right thing. I always did. And so, my principal said "coach you heard the man, he ain't got no money." And so I didn't have a chance to say nothing before the superintendent spoke up. He said, "Don't give up too quick Mr. Taylor." That is what he said. (laughter) And boy he started arguing then. He was arguing he was...I didn't have to say no more. I just set there and listened to him. He was talking and so when the superintendent got tired of listening to him well, he said "Mr. Jefferro we can't give you no continental, but we will pay for all your boys and girls to go down there and participate in the state and we will make sure you have plenty to eat and everything. And you're assistant" which was an older man, he was a bus driver, and he said, "and H usually drives us different places." I didn't even know that 'cause I just had got there you know. So, I said, "Well I appreciate it, I appreciate you doing this for us, giving us this opportunity." And we got down there.

JG: Do you remember his name, the white superintendent? Do you happen to remember his name by any chance?

AJ: You know I can't.

JG: That's okay if you don't.

AJ: A lot of times, now if you had asked me the Superintendent of Diboll I would have known.

JG: Well don't worry about it, I don't want to interrupt, go ahead.

AJ: Right, right, right, no I couldn't remember the name.

JG: That is all right; go ahead.

AJ: He was a nice person.

JG: Reasonable.

AJ: He was nice, reasonable. That is what I'm saying, you know, he was reasonable. What ever he did the decision he made, well he must have felt like it was in the best interest of everybody. That is the way I feel, you know. So, we got down there and my boys set a record in the 440 relay. Now, they were like...I call them horses. Those guys could run and they could play basketball too. They could have won the district in basketball, they won second place. But, they won second place in the state and they wasn't but two points off of the state championship. So, they could have won that too but they didn't.

JG: In basketball?

AJ: No, this was track, field and track. I'm talking about they were just that good. And they won a lot of first places. But they set a record, a world record.

JG: At Prairie View?

AJ: At Prairie View, and I think it still stands. I don't know that nobody broke it. That was a small school. And so, we got a chance to go and everything. I appreciated that opportunity and all of that learning that I did and everything. But it's a lot of stuff that I had already experienced as a kid and growing up and just watching people, you know if you look at a little kid, he may be four or five years old but he knows what is going on. I can think of a lot of stuff that the old people thought well this boy don't know nothing here. But, they are listening.

JG: So even the racial aspect of it didn't intimidate you either?

AJ: No, and I tell you, during that time and I really and I guess you probably never heard this and you might not need to put this on there. I'm just saying we...me and Archie Seals, he was the coach at that time when we got to Diboll, and we had two ladies. The two ladies are deceased. Archie he is still, I guess, in Sealy. After he left he went back there. We went to the Pine Bough that was during the time.

JG: The Pine Bough restaurant?

AJ: The restaurant, we went to the restaurant.

JG: Here in Diboll?

AJ: Here in Diboll, ain't never heard nothing from it. I don't think they knew us or nothing like that, but we ate and you know, they served us and everything. Nobody said nothing about it, they didn't try to stop us from eating. They got our food and everything but, you know, you could tell they...

JG: Now, we kind of jumped forward now.

AJ: Yes, right, right.

JG: Let's come back to that in just a second let's finish up at Littlefield. So your job ended after graduation in '56. How did you get to Diboll? What brought you to Diboll?

AJ: All right. I'm gonna tell you exactly what brought us to Diboll. Okay, in 1956 May the 25th school was out. I caught the bus and rode to Littlefield by myself. Coach picked me up and took me, he had a rent house and my rent was free. He gave me rent free and everything. The rent house was already furnished, didn't have to get no furniture or nothing like that. Then, my wife at that time, she brought my little son which was...now he is a medical doctor now. But he was...wasn't even walking, kind of toddling like. So

she came up, I sent for her and she came up. She rode the bus up there, my oldest son, he's 55 now, so she brought him up there and she came up there.

JG: Came up where?

AJ: To Littlefield.

JG: Littlefield.

AJ: Littlefield, Texas. She stayed up there the whole time and my son did too. And, so she was...my wife she is 71 and I'm 75 now.

JG: Did y'all marry in Huntsville?

AJ: Married in Huntsville.

JG: Was she from Huntsville?

AJ: She was from Huntsville.

JG: What is her name?

AJ: Edrine Jeffero, well she was a Fisher then.

JG: Spell her first name.

AJ: E-d-r-i-n-e.

JG: And she was a Fisher?

AJ: A Fisher right, okay. So, I married her and we had our first child nine months and one day after we got married. (laughter) That is exactly what happened. See he is 54 now and he turned 54 on the 26th of March and we figured it out 'cause we married on the 25th of June 1953. And so you add that up and it comes out to be exactly nine months and one day.

JG: Yes, okay.

AJ: And so after that, she was a sane women. She run her own business and she been working in her own business ever since we moved to Lufkin, ever since we moved to Lufkin. So, what I did, she bought me...things were cheap then. Things were real cheap then. She bought me about six suits and shirts and all that kind of stuff.

JG: Now this is while you're still at Littlefield?

AJ: Still at Littlefield. She bought that with my first pay check, it was about four hundred and something dollars then. You know, people really wasn't making that much money but I guess they paid me for the guy that the boys run off. And I didn't hear about that until after I got there. They said they beat him up real bad, threw rocks and stuff at him.

JG: So the coach you replaced was beat up by the players?

AJ: Now that is what I was told. I don't know that to be a fact but I believe it. So, he didn't come back. That was just before Christmas and he didn't come back so, that is the reason. But I was wondering though why did they need somebody if the guy wasn't dead or nothing why he didn't, you know what I'm saying, why he didn't come back you know. I was wondering about that.

JG: So you got hazardous pay, combat duty.

AJ: Yes, I guess they gave me the money they were going to give him that next month. We usually got paid every month and so I guess they gave me his plus mine for that first time. So my wife went out and she bought me some suits, about five or six suits.

JG: So you had plenty of suits to do job interviews in.

AJ: Right, right. I had plenty of things to do that. I had saved a little money, you know. So, I had a little old thousand dollars I'll say it like that. Or saved up besides that money she spent on that. We didn't have to pay no rent or nothing like that. And so, when we got ready to go I told my wife, I said, "You think we ought to," I said, "I think I ought to go buy me a car." So she said, "Yes." She was young so she thought...

JG: Now you didn't have a job prospect ahead of you?

AJ: I didn't have nothing.

JG: You had nothing, but you knew your job was ending in Littlefield?

AJ: I knew it had ended, yes, you know.

JG: You knew it was going to end but you had a little extra money so you're going to buy a new car.

AJ: Well it wasn't new.

JG: Okay, buy a car.

AJ: But it was close to being new. That was in '56 and I bought a 1953 Bellaire Chevrolet. It was blue and I never will forget that car.

JG: A Bellaire.

AJ: It had air and everything on there; you know what I'm trying to say. So when I went up to Littlefield I walked from my house. The school was right close, right in front of the house. I walked all the way up to town, you know, it was close, you know, to walk up there. It was a little town. It was six thousand and something people. It wasn't no big town it was little town. So I walked up there and went to the car lot and I told...now the older people there, I was just talking to some of them and they said, "You liable to get a lemon; you don't need to get no car."

JG: You were going to get a lemon is what they said?

AJ: Yes, that is what they thought. They call theirselves trying to help me but I said, "Well, I'm going to take a chance." So I went up there and the guy told me he said, "I got just the car you need." So he showed me one. He showed me that Bellaire Chevrolet. He said, "You can't go wrong on this car, it's a one person owned car. This lady..."

JG: Was this a white man or a black man?

AJ: This was a white man, okay. This lady was a white woman that owned that car and she put it up there to be sold because her husband was in the service then and he had a new car when she married so she used his car and put hers for sale. So he said, "This is a one woman owner." And she was a schoolteacher, she was teaching there. Not at our school but the other school, you know. So, I said, "Okay, how much do you want for it?" He said "Eight hundred and fifty dollars." That sound good you know, I had a little over a thousand dollars so I said, "What about can I pay \$350 down?" He said, "Sure." I said, "I'll pay the other out in eighteen months." He said, "Yes." So my notes ran about \$30.00 a month for 18 months. And which that was easy 'cause at the sawmill in Huntsville where my daddy worked, and he didn't even want me to work there, I wasn't nothing but a kid at first. But, I worked there anyway, because my mother...he thought I was going to quit school and so, but I knew I could work there because I knew all the older men and all like that there you know, and I knew if I needed to...

JG: If you needed to you could get a job in Huntsville.

AJ: Yes, right.

JG: At the mill, at the sawmill.

AJ: Yes, I knew that and so I wasn't really worried.

JG: You wasn't really worried, okay.

AJ: No, I wasn't worried but they didn't pay too much but they paid more than teachers made, you understand. So, they didn't make much. At the time the men was making fifty-five cents an hour, the average man was making fifty-five cents an hour. I don't care what color they was. That is all they was making and they paid me the same thing they

was paying those guys. Now my daddy, he worked every day. He worked seven days a week. They paid him a dollar and something. I don't know what the something was, but he was making a dollar and something an hour. And it wasn't too many. The boss, I imagine he was making more than my daddy and the sawyer, which my daddy called him old man Frederick. He was a white guy. They were tight, you know. Dad and him was real good friends. So I'm pretty sure Mr. Frederick was making a dollar and something an hour but the other people were making fifty-five cents an hour, like me if I worked there. So, I came on back and I got back to Huntsville and told my mother that I was going to go out to the mill and get me a little job, temporarily until I could find something. But about that time, a man from Willis, Texas, you ever heard of Willis, Texas?

JG: Yes sir.

AJ: Okay, all right.

JG: Near Conroe, I believe.

AJ: Right, just before you get to Conroe. Okay, so I didn't know this guy. He was a principal and I don't know how he heard about me but he must have heard something about me and it must have been good because he wanted to know if I would take a head-coaching job in Willis. I'm not no head coach, I'm an Ag man, you know. So, I told him I would and that was...school hadn't even started. That was about a week after I had got there and so I told him I would. And this is what he explained to me – he laid everything out. He said, "What we usually do for our coaches is we let them play...be over the little league baseball in the summer but they usually divide the money up for twelve months where they will still be getting a check." So he said, "And we usually pay them \$385 per month for little league baseball and this don't have anything to do with the regular salary and also we let them stay at the Girl Scout camp." Girl Scouts at that time didn't have nothing but women there and they wanted a man to be around where they kind of protect those women, you know. So, he said, "What we do, they pay \$300 a month and rent free and utilities free." Boy, that was sounding good, you know. And he said, "But now you won't start to work until September." I said, "That is fine." School started in September then so I said, "Okay that is fine." Now, about a week after that Willie Massey, and I didn't know him and that guy didn't know Willie Massey from nobody. You know I hadn't never seen Willie Massey before and I didn't see him that day. He came looking for me, I was stacking lumber but I had went to town.

JG: You were stacking lumber at the mill?

AJ: At the mill, okay. But, I had gone, it was lunchtime and I had gone to town.

JG: Okay.

AJ: And so, Willie Massey he didn't wait.

JG: From Diboll, from H. G. Temple School, came to see you.

AJ: Yes, right. So, he went and talked to my mother and talked to my wife.

JG: So you didn't have a chance after that huh? (laughter)

AJ: Yes, so he talked with them, well I knew, well anyway but it was an Ag job. He said, "I need this fellow to open up a new Ag department." They had never had Ag there before. I opened it up, you know. "And if he wants the job he can get it." He said, "Now I done hired me two coaches already." And this fit right in, he said, "So, the thing of it, if he will open up the Ag department and help them with the coaching that will be fine." So, I went up there that Saturday so he told me about the same thing. He said, "All you need to do if you take the job is help them with the coaching." I said, "Okay, if it don't interfere with my Ag job." I wasn't going to let the coaching interfere with my Ag job. You understand what I'm trying to say.

JG: Right.

AJ: Right then, you could tell I knew people. I knew people...

JG: They were wanting two for one, huh?

AJ: Yes, and I wasn't too much thinking about him but the people that I was going to be working with, you understand, because, if they thought I had to do that...

JG: You had to know what their expectations were.

AJ: Right and then if I knew that, you know, and if they knew that was the way I signed my contract that if it wouldn't interfere with my job I would do it. Which, I was glad to do it but...

JG: Because that is what your degree was in was agriculture.

AJ: Agriculture, right.

JG: And that was what you wanted to do really.

AJ: And that is what I wanted to do and that is what I did, and I went out there and helped them. You probably got a picture of me with them.

JG: With the football team, yes sir. So, what was the pay in comparison to that other job offer that you had waiting for you at Willis?

AJ: It wasn't too much difference because I moved out to Willie Massey's, he had a house out there in Nigton.

JG: Willie Massey did?

AJ: Yes, but he was living in Diboll but he had a house out there and wasn't nobody in it.

JG: In Trinity County?

AJ: Trinity County right, and I think that house is still out there. It's probably real old because it was old at that time. So, anyway he said "I got a house that you don't have to stay in it if you don't want to but all you have to do is pay the utilities."

JG: Free rent huh?

AJ: Free rent, you know, I said "okay." They didn't have...Fairbanks Deason was another guy, he was a preacher then and he had running water at his house because he had one of them deep wells. Everybody at Nigton then they didn't have no water they would go down to Fairbanks and get water. And Fairbanks he was a nice fellow and he had some kids going to school and everything. And his kids were going to school at Diboll at the time. Willie Massey was hauling the people from Nigton to Diboll to school. They couldn't go to Diboll High School, you understand.

JG: The white school?

AJ: Yes, they couldn't go there and they couldn't go to Apple Springs white school, so he was able to get them and haul them to Diboll. You understand?

JG: The black students from Nigton?

AJ: Right, 'cause something happened that school was out of commission at that time. I think it got burned up or something like that. But they wasn't about to let them go to Apple Springs, understand.

JG: There just wasn't a black school available is what you are saying.

AJ: There wasn't a black school available at that time.

JG: So, the nearest one, or they were going to Diboll at that time.

AJ: Yes, okay he was hauling them. Now, Willie Massey owned his buses, he owned the bus.

JG: Personally?

AJ: Personally.

JG: Okay.

AJ: Understand? So he would go to these places where they had these auctions and things and he bought his bus. You know what I'm trying to tell you. And so he hauled them in his bus.

JG: Now did he have drivers or did he drive it?

AJ: Sometime I ended up...sometime I drove it.

JG: You drove it. So you were Ag teacher, coach and bus driver.

AJ: I drove the bus sometime but not all the time, you know. Not all the time but very little but I was willing to do that 'cause he was, to me he was a nice person, you know. I believe he believed in doing what was right so I would drive it sometime. All he had to do was ask me. I would drive my car every day, you know, to there. But if he needed me to drive the bus, most of the time he would drive his own bus. He was the principal and would drive his own bus and sometime he would get somebody. Now my brother was going to school in Diboll and he was younger than me, my brother. He married early and I think he was about maybe 16 years old or something like that, so he worked at Temple at night and went to school during the daytime. He is deceased now, that brother is. And...but he would drive the bus sometime for him. He would work all night and he would...those guys, they could do that. We had other kids working all night at the plant and they went to school during the day, but they would work at night. They had 24-hour shift, you know. And I also, I'll kick this in a little bit. I was also working at the mill at night. I was moonlighting.

JG: In Diboll here?

AJ: In Diboll here.

JG: Okay.

AJ: I worked there and you know, I'd get off about one o'clock and I'd be at school the next day at eight o'clock when school started, you know. So, I called that moonlighting. Well I would moonlight and Willie Massey at that time he taught drivers education. The state would give him a new car every year to teach driver's education. And I didn't know whether no school in Diboll or no black schools in East Texas or white school either that I knew of had driver's education. But, he was teaching at that time. He was a businessman, you know. And so...

JG: Tell me a little bit Mr. Jeffero, if you would, about getting the Ag program started since they didn't have one. Tell me a little bit about what that was about and talk a little bit about the students. And then, I want to get in also with race relations in Diboll. How you experienced it? You were talking a little bit earlier about the Pine Bough restaurant and so if we could we've gone a little over an hour already and we just now have gotten to Diboll. If we could lets try to focus on that and help us out with that.

AJ: Okay, all right.

JG: And you can do it either way, if you want to talk about the racial relations. What did you think of Diboll when you came to town?

AJ: I tell you what I used to tell people, it was the biggest little town I ever seen, because they had so much industry, you understand. And the people they were good people, white people and the black people. And it seemed like to me they all got along, you know. We worked together to get these houses and stuff and that was during Mr. Massey's administration and stuff.

JG: The public housing you are talking about?

AJ: Yes, the public housing. We worked on that, as a matter of fact, when our students, when Mr. Woods left, Mr. Woods was the head guy over the housing. Margie Harrell is the head person. When he left he recommended her and she is still over the housing.

JG: The Housing Authority.

AJ: And she was in my first class that I sponsored. She was an eighth grader when I got here. He gave me her class, Lewis Mitchell and all that bunch. Bennie Scott and all that bunch, Effie Goldman and all that bunch. Effie was kind of behind them. The race relations was good to me. Now, that is what I thought. When you look at it...

JG: So you had lived in Huntsville, you had lived in Littlefield and now in Diboll, so in that context it...

AJ: Yes, in that context it was good. Now Huntsville was good too. And I'm going to tell you some things I did in Huntsville. It was good. When I was 12 years old I borrowed money from the bank. And some men, white or black couldn't borrow money from the bank. And, I was about 12 years old; the guy looked kind of funny when I came in there wanting to see the President of the bank. President of the bank, they looked at me, boy you talking about wanting to see the President of the bank, so I had it all planned out. I told him that I wanted to borrow, at that time \$300 was a lot of money.

JG: Especially for a 12 year-old boy. (laughter)

AJ: For anybody during that time, shoot. I can look at, I was always able to borrow money and stuff from the bank and then when I got to be an adult well that is all you needed was about \$300. You know what I'm trying to say? Because you wasn't making that much money, when you really look at it, you wasn't making that much money, you know. So, I told him...what I wanted the money for – I had bought a hog. I was with the 4-H Club then, I bought a hog and I had to feed him to take to the Houston Livestock Show. And I had figured out how much it was going to cost for food and how much the hog was going to cost and approximately what I was going to get for him. And I told him I said "as soon" and I borrowed it for three months. And I said, "As soon as I get through

selling my hog, when the Livestock show gets over I'll pay you your money." So he said, "Well, you are going to need a co-signer." I said, "Look here, I don't want no co-signer." I don't know if my daddy would have done it anyway. He probably wouldn't because I hadn't never known him to borrow no money from the bank. He had good credit and everything but I ain't never known him to borrow any money. So, that guy said, "I'm going to try you this time." So I paid it back and from then on I always borrowed money and I always paid it back and I never had no trouble getting it. When I got ready to go to Littlefield I think I borrowed \$500 and I bought a refrigerator, it wasn't no washers and things then, and a little freezer for my wife. We didn't use it until after I got back and we moved in the house and everything. So, after that...

JG: Who took Ag classes with you? How many students did you have? How many classes?

AJ: Okay, I think I had about...believe it or not and that was sweet. I had one class 'cause everybody was first year.

JG: Yes, it's just getting started.

AJ: And we got all of them in there.

JG: In one class?

AJ: Yes, forty kids.

JG: Met for what, about an hour or little over an hour?

AJ: Yes maybe an hour and a half, something like that, yes. So, that stayed for four years and then after four years I had two classes.

JG: So what did you do when you weren't in class?

AJ: Okay now, let me tell you about that. Now you know Pop Rich was over the finance for the other schools in the district you know, and everything, you know.

JG: The white schools?

AJ: Right, right, Mr. Pop Rich. You've probably heard somebody called Pop Rich.

JG: Yes sir.

AJ: Okay, so Mr. Massey had made me over the little money that we had. We raised a little money and we sold dinners and stuff like that you know from the games and stuff like that. So I was the businessman at our school, Pop Rich was businessman at their school.

JG: Anybody who could get a \$300 loan, a black boy at 12 years old who could get a \$300 loan needed to be a business manager huh? (laughter)

AJ: Well, Willie Massey didn't even know that but I guess he saw something in me, the reason why he wanted to hire me. It might have been my football ability or what I don't know what it was.

JG: Driving that Bellaire. (laughter)

AJ: Driving that Bellaire, okay well it could have been that. But anyway I went on and got...

JG: I'm sorry I interrupted you.

AJ: That's all right, I kind of lost my thought there.

JG: Pop Rich made you the business manager.

AJ: Willie Massey made me business manager at his school. So I'd go up to Lufkin and little places around in Diboll you know, that would take out an ad out of our souvenir booklet.

JG: Okay, okay.

AJ: We had a souvenir booklet, they'd take out ads so I did that. So that is the way we got money and stuff in and then we would have the kids to sell lunches and stuff. We had some girls that could cook pretty good and we'd let them cook. Just about every day we would sell lunches, you know.

JG: Who would buy the lunches, people in the community?

AJ: People in the community.

JG: Black and white?

AJ: I imagine, you know I don't know exactly but I know white people donated and stuff. But I don't know whether they ate the lunches but I believe they probably did. We had some girls like Margie she was working for some white people and she was doing ironing and stuff and they paid her. So, I'm pretty sure they knew them and they, I'm pretty sure they bought but I don't know exactly. I didn't actually do the selling but I took care of...

JG: The money part

AJ: I managed the money and got it and turned it over to Mr. Massey 'cause he was the one taking care of all the bills. We had to have money to pay the bills so he took care of

all that you know. He had to buy gas. Even though gas was cheap then he had to buy gas to drive the bus and stuff.

JG: Tell about some of the Ag projects that you had. I know eventually tell how you got into forestry. Tell about the first time you met Mr. Arthur Temple. Did you ever meet him personally?

AJ: Yes, I met him and Ward Burke – he was the lawyer.

JG: Ward Burke, okay, yes sir.

AJ: Mr. Burke, I tell you he was really a nice fellow and Mr. Arthur Temple was too because see what I was doing too, I was volunteering for Boy Scouts of America at that time. Like a scout leader, Mr. E.V. Cade was a scout leader and we were mostly on the committee at the school. Mr. Massey talked us into.

JG: And the scouts, they were segregated also at this time?

AJ: Yes, the scouts. Well they were saying they wasn't but when you look at it they was, you know what I'm trying to say? Now, we had the men, okay but now the districts, I was in a district.

JG: The Boy Scout district?

AJ: The Boy Scout district, okay I was in...

JG: Were those tied in with the schools in any ways or not?

AJ: Well in a way they was tied in with the school because everybody wanted their kid to be successful and scouting was one of the ways that they could help be successful.

JG: Okay.

AJ: The leadership, the school would sponsor them, you understand. And I was the teacher and so forth you would pick some teachers and things that you felt like would be inspirational to the kids and things like that. Well E.V. Cade, he usually would be the main scoutmaster and he was really active.

JG: Now was E. V. Cade, was he an instructor at the school also?

AJ: No I think he sawed logs.

JG: Okay, he worked at the mill.

AJ: Yes right, Mr. Cade.

JG: C-A-D-E?

AJ: C-A-D-E right. And he had a wife and she worked in private homes and stuff.

JG: How many...this is boy scouts right, not girl scouts?

AJ: No this is boy scouts.

JG: Now, how many boys in the black community were involved in scouting, say proportion wise?

AJ: Okay now that is during the time I was there?

JG: During the time you were there, yes sir.

AJ: Well during the time I was there we had about maybe 30 or 40, 30 or 40 kids that were actually involved and they would go to camps and all like that you know. And we would make sure they had the money. We would be the ones to go to Mr. Arthur Temple and those kids didn't have to need for nothing. He would take care of all their expense. You know what I'm trying to say, to camp and so forth and even buy their uniforms and stuff if they needed them. And some of them did need uniforms. They wasn't able to buy them so he would take care of all of that. So that is where they would go, "We are going to Mr. Temple, he'll help us do this or help us do that." And he would send them to camp. He'd pay their way to camp if they didn't have no other way. He would pay...and to the jamboree he would pay some of them's way to the jamboree if they wanted to go. So, race relations was good and I don't know no place in Diboll you didn't see no people marching and that kind of stuff. You know what I'm trying to say? So when we went to the Pine Bough...

JG: The Pine Bough Restaurant.

AJ: Restaurant, nobody tried to stop us.

JG: Was this early on when you came here?

AJ: Yes, that was early on.

JG: So this would have been what '56, '57?

AJ: Yes, about '56 or '57.

JG: It opened about '56. It opened about that time.

AJ: Well it was open when I got here, but anyway...

JG: It was well before the Civil Rights Act and things like that.

AJ: Yes, okay, it was like...

JG: “64 was the Civil Rights Act, so before that?

AJ: Yes it was before that. I’m going to say, let’s say maybe, I think it was ’58, so I had been here about two years.

JG: And you are actually remembering the first time that y’all did it, right?

AJ: I remember the first time, you couldn’t help but remember ‘cause that was unusual because hadn’t nobody else done it before.

JG: Yes, right. How did you feel about doing that? Was it something that y’all talked about doing or just decided to do it?

AJ: We really didn’t discuss it.

JG: But again, there still had to be...since you say nobody had done it before, any thoughts or concerns?

AJ: No not really. I felt like, now that was me, that is the way I felt. I don’t know how they felt but I guess they...

JG: But they didn’t share anything with you or nobody told you, “Hey, we don’t need to be doing that” or any thing like that?

AJ: No, nobody said that. If they had said that we might have not have done it, if they had said that. But really we didn’t tell nobody other than it was two ladies and they were sisters and Coach Seales and myself, okay. I don’t think they had time to tell nobody. They just said, “Let’s go to the Pine Bough and eat.”

JG: Okay, so ya’ll just decided to go.

AJ: So they just went to the Pine Bough.

JG: Now who is this again? You mentioned some names. I want to make sure we get those names.

AJ: Okay let me see if I can think. Archie Seales.

JG: Archie Seales, okay.

AJ: I’ll think of them.

JG: Well that is okay if you don't remember I was thinking you were saying some names.

AJ: It was two...I might have and it slipped my memory. I'll probably think of them in a minute.

JG: I just wanted to clarify if I missed something. Okay, so you went to the Pine Bough. Tell us about that.

AJ: Okay, we ordered our food and everything. We sat down...

JG: And people waited on you?

AJ: People waited on us and everything like that. You could tell they were a little afraid, but they did, you know. And...

JG: Now this is during the week, a weekday?

AJ: A school day.

JG: During the middle of school.

AJ: Okay, but it was lunchtime, it was during lunchtime.

JG: Were you wearing a suit? Were you wearing your suit? Do you remember? I noticed in a lot of the school pictures you're wearing a suit.

AJ: I know during that time we had...

JG: Or did you have your Ag teaching uniform on, blue jeans or anything?

AJ: I think I had...during that time the black school they mostly went dressed up every day. You know what I'm trying to say?

JG: Right, right. I think that was...

AJ: So I'm pretty sure I had a suit on, okay.

JG: All of you had on coats and ties and the ladies were dressed nice.

AJ: That is the way we generally dressed. We felt like we needed to dress like that.

JG: I guess I was thinking what the white...the staff as well as the customers might have thought. Like you say it was new, new for everybody.

AJ: Right.

JG: Do you think some of the people in the community knew that you all were teachers?

AJ: They should have 'cause I knew the bankers and things. The first thing I did when I got there was see Mr. Hanks.

JG: So the people in the white community would have known who you were?

AJ: I believe they would but if they did they didn't say anything to us, or discourage us or anything. It was during lunchtime; we were out for lunch.

JG: Pretty busy, a lot of people in and out.

AJ: A lot of people in and out. Nobody tried to discourage us. Sometimes you would hear some of them say well...

JG: So it was uneventful is what you are saying.

AJ: It was uneventful. Later on I went back, I had a guy from Huntsville, he was a member of the AFL-CIO Union and he would come through here all the time. I went several times, me and him went in there and we had no trouble.

JG: He was black man too?

AJ: Yes a black guy.

JG: A union organizer?

AJ: Yes, a union organizer.

JG: There may not be trouble along racial lines, but there might have been trouble along labor lines.

AJ: I don't know whether, he just looked like a common person so nobody probably really thought...I don't know if people realized...

JG: Now, did he try to organize in Diboll?

AJ: No, he had nothing to do with that. He really didn't have nothing to do with it.

JG: That is what I was getting at.

AJ: I don't know of nobody else trying to organize.

JG: That is what I'm saying, white or black they probably wouldn't have wanted ALF-CIO.

AJ: No, because you know sometimes you hear people talking, they say “Arthur Temple ain’t going to let, you know, the people would be sitting down and the police be getting them and dragging them and all.” They say this wouldn’t happen in Diboll. We felt like Arthur Temple [would] tell them if they come in to eat, let ‘em eat. And he might have told them that, I don’t know. But that is what they felt like, they felt like if somebody come in there like that there wasn’t going to be no trouble ‘cause he had done told them to let them in. And he probably did, like I say, I don’t know.

JG: So was it just this one time y’all went there? Did you make it a regular thing? Did you try to go back?

AJ: No, it’s wasn’t regular. I never did go back with them. But like I said, this other guy, this union guy, me and him went a couple of times together. He would pass through going somewhere, well then he would always stop by. I knew him.

JG: You just knew him because y’all lived in Huntsville?

AJ: Yes, right he had his own business, a Venetian blind business. So I knew him and I knew where his business was and everything. Sometimes he would be going through and going somewhere else during lunchtime.

JG: Talk a little bit about the New Farmers of America. What was that?

AJ: New Farmers of America, okay. Now to me the N was for Negro Farmers and the Future Farmers was for the white group, ‘cause they were the FFA. I can’t remember what year, I had my boys to buy some jackets which they had FFA on them. That was before we integrated. I don’t know how that changed or how I found out about it. They were available and we had...

JG: So they were the blue corduroy jackets with the yellow writing and Future Farmers of America.

AJ: Yes that is right. My kids got to be, I call them my kids, my Ag boys got to be the Future Farmers of America.

JG: We have a photograph here from ’64 and there is a sign, and this is the forestry, the demonstration farm y’all had and it says NFA, but you are saying the jackets actually said FFA.

AJ: Yes, that is the forestry. No, well I know when we built this sign and when these boys did it, I know they were NFA then. Can you see that?

JG: No sir, I really can’t make it out. I was just curious.

AJ: They had some with the other but when they took this picture it was NFA.

JG: Yes, New Farmers of America.

AJ: Yes, New Farmers of America. But these same boys had eventually got FFA but it was sanctioned.

JG: We got Jim Ligon, president; Johnny Jones, vice-president; Charles Spencer secretary; Maurice Jones, treasurer; and Godfrey Mark, reporter. Those were your students in '64. How did that demonstration forest come about? How did that project come about?

AJ: Okay let me see. Oh that is FFA on there.

JG: Well that is a caption that I had wrote, and pretty much NFA was the segregated, the black FFA.

AJ: Yes, right. But that did change before...

JG: I think in '65 it integrated.

AJ: And then they bought...you're probably right, I can't remember that. But I know they did change jackets but they still wore these too sometimes.

JG: Right. Tell about that forestry project. You mentioned that earlier.

AJ: Mr. Arthur Temple, okay, he gave that to us not literally, to use.

JG: Allowed you to use this land?

AJ: Allowed us to use that land for a forestry plot.

JG: Do you remember how many acres it might have been?

AJ: I might have that somewhere, if I do...

JG: Well that is okay if you don't. But are we talking about 10 acres, 20 acres, 30 acres?

AJ: Maybe, I'm going to say close to 10 acres 'cause it was close to the road. It could have been more. I really don't know exactly how much it was, but we knew where it started and where it stopped. We had the forestry service come in and try to find lanes and stuff like that. I got some pictures right here.

JG: So what did y'all do, did y'all plant trees? Was it a vacant piece of land and ya'll planted or did it already have trees on it?

AJ: Okay this had trees on there but we did plant some trees.

JG: You planted some too.

AJ: Yes, we had a tractor and everything you know. I guess Mr. Massey was furnishing that. We had to drive and everything like that. They would work; we had a certain part of the day we would work on that. The first time they won the first place in the district, you know. The other groups had forestry plots and everything, but we won first place. I started to take that thing with me, but I said no I'll leave it here.

JG: You mean the award?

AJ: The award, the plaque. I started to take it and I said, "No I'll go ahead and leave it. It will be here with the school and they may have something they want to do with it so, I just leave it." I didn't take it with me.

JG: I just wanted to ask you a little bit more again about the race relations. I know, basically the town and the schools certainly were still segregated even though race relations might have been pretty good considering everything. But, I know for instance in the late '50's and even into the early '60's there were separate Diboll Day parades. You know, Diboll Day was a pretty big deal and still is in a way. But, you know in these newspapers articles it talks about the black community having a separate parade even and a separate queen contestants. Do you remember any of that?

AJ: Okay, the queens – I remember when they integrated...

JG: The school sponsored the queen candidates I think.

AJ: Yes, right, okay and I remember one girl that was our queen one year became the queen when they got integrated, that was a Washington girl.

JG: Right, Debra Washington, that was more recent.

AJ: Yes, Debra Washington. Yes that was more recent. That was after they got integration.

JG: Yes, well I'm talking about before integration.

AJ: Before the school integrated, well no their queens was strictly black at the black school. Their queen yes, we just ran them like that, you know. And, like I say it worked you know we did probably about the same thing they did the other ones, but the only thing they was picked...

JG: I know what you were talking about Littlefield when that subject came up about Diboll Day it was kind of the black community wanted to have their own parade at least that is the way the newspaper reported it. The white newspaper reported it that way.

AJ: Well I think, it was people wanting to change and then there was some people wanting it to stay.

JG: Here is an article from 1960, October of '60 and the headline is "Colored Activities slated for October 29th." And that is what it's talking about. It mentions Mr. Rhone who was the chairman of the steering committee for Diboll Day activities at Walter Allen Park.

AJ: I know James Rhone.

JG: Members of the community Willie Massey, Norris Blount, Floyd Bell, Jimmie Hall, Willie Ross, Herbert Allen and V. Bussey. But anyway I was just wondering if you could remember any of that and were you involved?

AJ: I knew all of them. Well if they don't have my name there well I probably wasn't involved. But now I was involved in the housing.

JG: Okay, later.

AJ: Yes, right. And then when they did this now, it may not necessary say I wasn't involved in it, but they might have not could locate me when the people did it. This is what I'm saying, that could have happened. Yes, that could have happened. That might have been the only ones that they could...now Herbert Allen he was a pressing from, he grew up in Diboll.

JG: One of Walter Allen's sons.

AJ: Yes. Walter Allen's son, and Willie Ross, me and Herbert Allen and Willie Ross we started at the same time. The only thing I had two paychecks before they got one because I started to work on July 1st. I got a check July 1st and August 1st and then they got their first check in September.

JG: Were these the two coaches Willie Massey was mentioning when he said, "I've already got my two coaches but if you'll help a little bit we've got you an Ag job?"

AJ: Right, yes right. That was it.

JG: Because I want to ask you about this a little bit. This is a 1962 article, and it says, "Temple coaches..."and again for the record for the recording the segregated black school in Diboll is known at the H.G. Temple High School. But according to this article as I recall Herbert Allen was leaving. He was resigning because he wanted a raise. He hadn't gotten a raise in several years and they told him they would consider it at the next meeting or the next school year. He said, "No, I want you to consider it now." And they didn't, so he left. And I think Mr. Ross, Coach Ross, left at the same time. Do you remember anything about that? Or, do you care to share anything about that?

AJ: Yes, I was with the impression that...well I knew Coach Allen left before I did, but I didn't know he left the same year. But I think they probably did. The reason why I'm saying that is probably right because he told me...of course Coach Ross, I see Coach Ross just about every day now, he told me that they left at the same time. So, you got it right.

JG: Well that is what the newspaper was saying.

AJ: Well that is what he said he left at the same time. But, I was thinking he left the year after. Now, I don't know why I was thinking like that. He could have, but he said the same thing the paper is saying though.

JG: Well, again you know how newspapers are. They tell about what's going to happen and sometimes it doesn't happen, but it's just reporting that Ross resigned at this meeting. We don't know exactly what happened after that. But, I'd be curious to know what your thoughts are on this. The article starts off says "Herbert Allen, the man who couldn't get a raise in salary despite five district championships in six years, has announced his resignation as head coach at H.G. Temple High School." Do you remember that? Did Coach Allen talk to you about that?

AJ: Well he just told me he was leaving. He didn't discuss nothing, he just told me he was leaving. I knew he was a local boy, Coach Allen was. He told me about he was fixing to leave, but you know, I just said, "Okay." So, one of our players that played at Prairie View like Overstreet and then Archie Seals came behind him and he brought a guy and then Overstreet brought somebody with him and then I think we had Chris and he brought somebody with him a little later on. I can't remember the sequence but he let me know he was leaving but....

JG: Let's talk a little bit about...I know you eventually left in '67.

AJ: Yes, in '67, it was in the fall of the year. Okay I'll tell you about that.

JG: Things had started to be integrated right before you left. Tell about that, I know, in fact I think the football boys or the athletics program was integrated in the fall of '66. Now did that affect your Ag program?

AJ: No.

JG: So you still taught Ag?

AJ: Yes, I still taught Ag, no, 'cause I don't think they...well, I think they...what I thought when I heard that was going on, I just think they let them play and that was it. That eased to make it more acceptable, you know, with everybody, now that is what I thought in my mind. You know what I'm trying to say because I didn't have no idea. Now, I was asked way before they integrated if I would, 'cause I was teaching woodworking, welding and a little minor electricity. You know, we'd build projects and

everything and work on a few cars and that kind of stuff 'cause we had a little ramp and stuff made, you know, and all that kind of stuff. So, I didn't...no we didn't have no lure in ours 'cause it was '67 'cause when I got back from Minden, New Jersey, went to boy scout training. When I got back...

JG: Now you're jumping ahead a little bit aren't you?

AJ: Yes right, right. No, what I'm saying when I got back 'cause it was like...

JG: I think the athletic program many if not most of the boys, you correct me if I'm wrong, integrated in the fall of '66.

AJ: In the fall of '66?

JG: They integrated and came to the white high school and played football. I mean, I don't know if it just happened to be that way or what, but a lot of the way its interpreted is that the athletics program was integrated, the senior boys.

AJ: Just the senior boys?

JG: I think so. I was wondering did that impact your Ag program by some of the boys, or a good many of them leaving your school coming to the white school. How did that impact? And also in the context of that and maybe this will just set the stage a little better, but this is an April 6, 1967 newspaper article and it's talking about their plans to fully integrate the high school. Not just the senior athletes. It says, "In other business Tuesday night the board accepted the resignation of Algianon M. Jeffero..."

AJ: April the 2nd is when I gave it.

JG: "...Vocational Agriculture at Temple High School the past 11 years. Jeffero met with the board and outlined difficulties and obstacles he said he had encountered in trying to do his job at Temple High." Do you remember anything about that?

AJ: No, I don't remember that. I don't remember that. I sure don't.

JG: I didn't want to...

AJ: Well that is okay, you just write what you need to write. Now, it's a funny thing.

JG: Now, newspapers get things wrong. We see it all the time.

AJ: Okay, I'm just going to be truthful, now I don't remember meeting with the board. Now, and I'm exactly honest, I don't even remember meeting with them.

JG: Okay.

AJ: Okay, but this about my resignation what I knew they were going to accept it because I did it. That is the reason why I did it a long time before, April the 2nd or April 3rd, that is when I actually did it, and I made it effective July 1st 'cause the new year would start. So that following, I worked at the State School a couple of months and then I resigned that to go with the Boy Scouts, but I was already employed by the Boy Scouts after July 1st.

JG: You were employed by the Boy Scouts to do what?

AJ: To be a Boy Scout executive.

JG: Boy Scout executive.

AJ: I worked seven counties of East Texas for the boy scouts.

JG: And that was a paid job?

AJ: Yes, I was getting paid. A lot of folks, the bankers and stuff like that they thought I wasn't getting paid. I don't know I couldn't...I didn't argue with them. You understand what I'm saying. I say people giving you money, giving the Boy Scouts money you don't argue with them. Let me tell you what happened one day. Okay, you know the top guy in the council would come down ever so often and work with me, go to different places, especially these people that helped finance the program and everything. And so we went to one of our banquets, and now this wasn't in Diboll, this was in Lufkin. We went to one of our banquets and so time he met the head guy he said, "This is the best volunteer we've ever had." Now this is what he was telling the head man of the council. And so, the headman kind of looked strange at me. I spoke right then, I said, "Look here." I said, "I've been trying to tell this guy that I was a professional and that I was paid." They thought I was a scoutmaster. They couldn't get it in, a lot of folks like that, they didn't think nobody work for the Boy Scouts was getting paid. So I said, "Well I been telling him that but he don't believe me." And he was listening right there. He probably didn't even comprehend that. Because he didn't want to hear that I don't think. But, then he might have been thinking 'cause sometimes people do more than they really need to do or they suppose to do. You understand what I'm trying to say, you know. And so he might have thought since I was always busy doing stuff and helping people and all that kind of stuff. So, he might have used that to say that 'cause I never would have told him that I wasn't...I told all of them. When I asked them to do a job I told them there was no pay in this. I had a lot of people. I think I had a little over 3,000 volunteers in my whole business and then all of them worked with me, white and black. I had schools that after they integrated I had white schools that nobody could serve but me. Them other guys, I don't know I guess they were a little too pushy or something, people didn't like them. But they would work with me. Now you take down here, down below Apple Springs I had a scouting program down there and down below Apple Springs. Let's see what is the name of that school down there?

JG: Centerville?

AJ: Yes, Centerville. We had all three programs at that school.

JG: Now were you still living in Nigton all this time?

AJ: No, now. When did I leave Nigton? I know exactly when I moved.

JG: Well, the whole time you were in Diboll teaching were you living at Nigton at the time or did you eventually move to Diboll?

AJ: Okay let me tell you. I never did move to Diboll. I guess I need to tell you about that.

JG: Okay.

AJ: Okay, I stayed in Nigton until I moved into the house I am in now.

JG: Oh okay, in Lufkin.

AJ: In Lufkin. Okay, I've been there ever since '58. Coach Ross helped me to move. I had my truck and he helped me move and I never will forget in August of '58.

JG: August of '58.

AJ: I'm still right there in the same house. It don't look like it's an old house but...

JG: You've been there 51 years huh?

AJ: Fifty-one years.

JG: So, you lived in Nigton and Lufkin.

AJ: Yes in Lufkin, now the only reason...I bought some land, eventually bought some land in Diboll. I bought two lots in Diboll and then I bought one lot from...Mr. Ward Burke was over Temple's stuff so he sold me one after that, after I bought them two lots. They were right together. Then, I bought that lot from Temple over here, which Ward Burke sold me that. Then I sold that later on to somebody living in Diboll. But at the time I got that house they wasn't selling no land in Diboll. What they were doing they would give you a hundred year lease. That wasn't acceptable to me, not no hundred year lease, you understand.

JG: You wanted to own it.

AJ: I wanted to own it. Okay, so what I did when I found out the Dodson Brothers sold that land and that house to me, they had just built that house in Lufkin. So, they sold that house to me. I think I was 22 years old. Okay, they sold that house to me and they told

me, said, "Look here, we need proof that you got a job." He said, "Everybody else pass, will you go and get us some proof that you do have a job." So I told him I would, so I went to Mr. Massey first, Willie Massey. And I would like to say this about Willie Massey. He ran the black school. I wouldn't tell you no...if he told you to do something it worked because he had good race relations too. He had real good race relations. Everybody seemed to like him and he could do just about what he wanted to do as long as it was right. So, I went to him first, they said don't go over your head so I went to him. He was my principal and I said, "Mr. Massey," I say, "I've been given the opportunity to buy a house and the guy told me I passed everything but I need to make sure that I have a contract." And I said, "I just wanted to mention it to you and if it's alright with you I wanted to talk with Mr. Pate."

JG: He was the superintendent of all the schools, white and black.

AJ: Right, white and black. And so I say "I didn't want to go behind your back but I want to go talk to Mr. Pate and see what he say." And he said, "Go ahead on." So I went down and talked to Mr. Pate. I said, "Mr. Pate," I say, "I've been okayed to buy a house in Lufkin and they want to know in writing that I am working in Diboll." So he thought, he kind of dropped his head and he's thinking and he said, "Mr. Jeffero I'm not trying to run your business but if I was you I would build in Diboll." Just like that. And I said "Well Mr. Pate" I say "I was going to try to build in Diboll but they say they not selling no land in Diboll and all you get is a hundred year lease and I don't want no hundred year lease. But all I want you to do is to say that I'm working in Diboll 'cause I already done signed the contract." So he started typing then. He was a good man and he typed everything up and handed it to me. I said, "Well thank you." Now, when integration time come, that was before they integrated, that may have been like '65 or something like that, but he did offer. He gave me an offer before integration. He told me if I wanted to sanction my job I would change my job to woodworking. He said, "You won't be making no less money, you'll be making the same amount of money." That is what he told me. And I said, "Well I don't want to change." So I didn't change and that might have had something to do with...

JG: With what was in the paper or something. Well I just wanted to clarify that the boys, basically I guess what I'm getting at is the beginning of integration did that affect the timing of you leaving, maybe not the timing but just all of it?

AJ: Now, that I don't know. You can't tell what's going on in people's mind.

JG: It's not that simple.

AJ: No, it's not that simple. I tell you this, I do know this around in that area now all of a sudden the Boy Scouts of America wanted to know would I take the next executive job, Boy Scout executive job, now why I don't know.

JG: Just chain of events.

AJ: They was calling me I'm talking about. They was calling me and I was wondering why they were calling me. I didn't even know they paid scout executives. I didn't even know that, a lot of other people didn't know that. A lot of people don't know that now. I had some guys I went to school with and they asked me what kind of work I was doing, and I told them and they said, "Man you better get you a job."

JG: Right, right, well I guess that is the way I would think too. Most scouting is volunteer stuff, but you were an executive.

AJ: I was the executive. I was over the whole area.

JG: A whole area, a district, okay.

AJ: Matter of fact, what I did was, I organized...I was the only one in the council that did that, I don't know whether they realized that or not, but I was the only one in the council that organized a new district. I already had a district now but I organized a new district.

JG: Where was that?

AJ: In Crockett, Texas.

JG: Crocket, okay.

AJ: That was my headquarters.

JG: Okay.

AJ: I was working out of my house, understand. Why I did it and how I did it I don't know. But now it was a lot of them, black and white, trying to do the same thing but none of them were successful. And they were wondering why they wasn't successful. I don't know. And wondering why I was successful. What I think, I think I got the right people...

JG: At the right time.

AJ: At the right time. I think I got the right people 'cause when I picked my district chairman I believe that was the key. I believe that was the key. I picked the right district chairman that everybody liked and everybody knew and everybody liked. Now that is what I believe, that really happened. So I didn't have any trouble. So my district when I ended up it was the Davy Crockett District. When I first started out we was Pine Forest, no Green Forest, that is what it was. When I got into scouting it was Green Forest. Then we got with our district chairmen and stuff and we changed it to Pine Forest. Then I changed mine again to Davy Crockett. I think each time I had the right people I worked with the right people. And like I said they were volunteers.

JG: I'm sorry, Mr. Jeffero I see we're already at two hours. Can you believe we've talked that long? I'm really going to have to stop here because we are going to run out of recording. I appreciate it very much, you visiting. We still have a lot more to cover.

AJ: And you ain't gonna believe this, my wife, she cautioned me. She said, "Look here." I told her I said, "No it ain't going to take long because the place close at one o'clock." She said, "Don't get up there talking too much, you'll be there all day."

JG: Well it's probably best to...it's not good to talk about so many things in a short period of time.

AJ: Short period of time, yes right.

JG: What we will do, we can give us some time to listen back to this and try to absorb it all and then we can follow up with another near interview perhaps, because, what you are saying about scouting is interesting too because we don't really have a lot of that. We are still in the sixties I think. So, I tell you what, let's just end this interview today and we will just save it for another time. Will that be all right?

AJ: Let me just tell you a couple more things. She'll say, "I told you." The thing is I was working out of my house. I worked out of my house for thirty years. They didn't even believe I was working because I worked out of my house. And so my wife began, she know she couldn't...confidentially she said...well she run her own business. She was a beautician. I guess some of them accepted that, you know. With the Boy Scouts they furnished me a car. Every two years they would give me the opportunity to get me a new car. It was their car. They paid for the transportation; they paid for the guys to fix it and all that. I have been a blessed person. That is they way I look at it. I try to treat everybody right, and I try to do what is right.

JG: Well you've led a very interesting life and like I said it's very, very interesting. I hope we can sit down another time and hear the rest of it. Thank you very much.

AJ: Okay.

END OF INTERVIEW