

LEWIS MITCHELL

Interview 201a

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Patsy Colbert, Interviewer

Patsy Colbert, Transcriber

ABSTRACT: In this interview with Patsy Colbert, Diboll native Lewis Mitchell reminisces about growing up in the Red Town section and going to school in Diboll as an African American before integration. A graduate of H.G. Temple School, Mr. Mitchell particularly remembers Mr. Massey, Mr. Bradley, E.A. Gilbert, the Kenyon's, and Coach Ross as having an influence on his life. He also remembers the school integration process as an alumni, keeping in touch with his brother, Mack, and hearing the stories when he returned home from college. Mr. Mitchell also recalls working at the Housing Authority with Mr. Woodrow Woods and Margie Harrell, and was there the day the first Hispanic workers from the Texas Rio Grande Valley arrived in Diboll. He maintains that race relations were usually cordial before, during, and after integration and credits the Temple family and Southern Pine Lumber Company officials with the largely harmonious atmosphere in the town. Mr. Mitchell is active in the H.G. Temple Alumni Association and is an organizer for the Diboll Juneteenth Celebration. His father was one of the celebration's organizers, and he has continued the family tradition after returning to Diboll upon his retirement from the Rusk State Hospital.

Patsy Colbert (hereafter PC): Today's date is June 21, 2010. I'm Patsy Colbert and I'm at the History Center interviewing Mr. Lewis Mitchell today. Mr. Mitchell if we could just begin, if you can tell me when and where you were born.

Lewis Mitchell (hereafter LM): I was born in Diboll, Texas in the old Red Town Section.

PC: And when were you born?

LM: September 3, 1944.

PC: And tell me what the Red Town Section – where that is located.

LM: It was a section of shotgun houses combined with company houses. Our house number was 619, 613.

PC: You still remember that.

LM: I can take you to the spot right today where it is, where the house was.

PC: And using some street reference today, can you give me the location?

LM: Elm Street.

PC: Elm Street, okay. The current Elm Street would be the Red Town section?

LM: Right, as a matter of fact the whole Elm Street, Neil Pickett, all of that is the Red Town section.

PC: Okay, were there a lot of houses in that Red Town Section?

LM: God yes, shotgun houses and what have you.

PC: What about businesses.

LM: The only business they had there was White's Store, Hall's Grocery and Marshall's Grocery. Where White's Store is where the Peterson House is now, Wilkie Peterson, that home. Where the Marshall Store was, was where the Church by Christ Jesus is now, formerly the old Family Affair. Where the Hall's Store was, was right across the street from where the Temple Elementary School.

PC: So these businesses were in the same area, 1944 area as a kid growing up?

LM: Before my time probably.

PC: Okay.

LM: And we had water but the thing about it, when the water would get cut off or get messed up they had a well down by the Marshall's Store everybody from around would come with their jugs and bottles to get water out of that well. It was an old cistern you'd drop the bucket and get the water.

PC: Oh, now did the Red Town Section, those houses were torn down when they built the Housing Authority?

LM: Well some of them were.

PC: Or some of them before that.

LM: A lot of people moved out and moved to what we called the quarters. The houses that were in the quarters section was a little bit larger because families were increasing. And you could rent a house for six dollars a month through the company.

PC: What you consider the quarters would be separate from the Red Town Section?

LM: Yes.

PC: Okay.

LM: Well see they had the Pipe Line, Red Town, and the Quarters. The Quarters section was where the plywood mill sits now. Right next to the Diboll Cemetery was the Pipe Line and from Shiloh Baptist Church, there was one street you could stand at Shiloh and look straight down and both sections.

PC: Wow!

LM: Now, across from there was the Rodgers Café, night club. It had a skating rink in it. Where part of the Temple Elementary Primary playing ground is now is where the ball park was located.

PC: Right, okay. And who were your parents?

LM: Mr. & Mrs. Lewis Mitchell, Sr.

PC: Okay. What did your father do for a living?

LM: My father worked on the separator for Temple Inland, Southern Pine at the time and his foreman was Joe Bob Hendricks.

PC: Okay, did your mother work?

LM: My mother taught school prior to marrying my father. After she married and one child born she never taught again.

PC: Did she teach here at Diboll?

LM: No, no, no.

PC: Okay, and what is your educational background?

LM: I graduated...I should...I'm not going to lie. I graduated high school here in Diboll, I'm a graduate of Prairie View University. I did my graduate work at Texas Tech University, Wayne State University and at S.F.A. [Stephen F. Austin State University]

PC: And what year did you graduate from H. G. Temple?

LM: 1961.

PC: 1961.

LM: As a matter of fact my class was the first class to graduate from the current gymnasium that sits over there now.

PC: When they built the new gym that year in '61, 60 and 61?

LM: I helped build the gym.

PC: Oh, did you?

LM: Because Mr. Massey hired a bunch of young boys at the time to make a little school money during the summer. The poles that sits as a guard around the gym I helped, we helped dig some of the holes for those poles that is out there now.

PC: Well great, wow! So, you would have started to school in about 1949 or so, your first grade year?

LM: I think I started prior to that because, as I was telling you the other day, my nephew who is older than me, my parents reared him, was already in school and I was having a fit to go to school. So, my mom said, "I'm just tired of you, I'm just tired of you and tired." So, she sat down and scribbled this note to Mrs. H. C. Kenyon. I will never forget she took a sheet of Big Chief paper and wrote the note on it and gave it to my nephew who gave it to Mrs. Kenyon when I went to school and I've been in school ever since. I am one of the youngest graduates they had at H. G. Temple.

PC: How old were you when you graduated?

LM: Sixteen.

PC: Wow, so you were just sixteen. How did that happen, to be so young, because you started so young?

LM: I guess so.

PC: Okay. So, you...was Mrs. Kenyon your teacher?

LM: My first grade teacher. The love of my life.

PC: (laughter) Well, tell me something about the Kenyon's. We know they were early educators here in Diboll before Professor Bradley.

LM: The Kenyon's were very community oriented. There was an old joke about Professor Kenyon, instead of saying good morning, he said good money. (laughter) But they stayed right across from the campus of H. G. Temple. Matter of fact, the home, they had a house that was strictly for principals only. That house still stands today right behind the Temple gymnasium over there.

PC: Okay, and the Kenyon's lived there?

LM: The Kenyon's lived there. She was...I put it like this, Mrs. Kenyon was more of a mother figure than a teacher because I think all kids...if Mrs. Kenyon was your teacher you fell in love with Mrs. Kenyon.

PC: Oh!

LM: Now, Mr. Kenyon from what I can understand from the kids, older ones, Mr. Kenyon was a disciplinarian.

PC: Okay.

LM: He was a disciplinarian. And he reminds me so much, or Mr. Massey reminds me so much of Mr. Kenyon. Mr. Kenyon always had a cigar in his mouth but I never saw it lit. Mr. Massey was the same way. Mr. Massey would take a cigar and put a match stem in it, but I never saw it lit.

PC: Now at the time that you started to school around '48 or so and you had Mrs. Kenyon, she would have been your first grade teacher, how many teachers were at the Diboll Colored School at that time? Can you remember?

LM: We were all in two buildings, Mrs. Kenyon, Mrs. Sibley, Mrs. Ruby Simmons, Mr. Court, I would say about six.

PC: How large was the school then student wise, do you have any guess or any remembrance?

LM: I would say they had about seventy five or eighty kids at that time.

PC: Okay, so you actually attended school in the old Diboll Colored School?

LM: Yes.

PC: Can you describe the school for me?

LM: Yes, it was a big white building and they had two rooms where you could take the partition out and they would make an auditorium. So whenever the bell would ring, they used the old fashioned clinger, for assembly the partition would go down so everybody would be sitting in those two rooms to hear whatever it was they had going on, whether it was a play, whether someone was giving an orientation, whether Mr. Kenyon was talking. The playground was adjacent to all of this swings, slide. As a matter of fact I remember I was running under the swings one day and Arnette Williams came over and I got hit right in the back of my head. They had a water fountain was layed up like a trough but it was faucets to it. We didn't have to pull the water; we had running water for faucets.

PC: Was that inside the school or outside?

LM: Outside.

PC: Like on the playground?

LM: Yes, like on the playground. We also had...we didn't have a cafeteria but people could bring their lunches or what have you. But one of the things they did they made sure we had recess, schools don't do that no more, and picnics and field trips.

PC: Now, did you go home for lunch?

LM: Yes.

PC: Okay.

LM: As a matter of fact we lived within shouting distance of the school. I've never ridden a school bus in my life while I was in school.

PC: Did you go home at the same time that the mill workers would have went home for lunch from the whistle being blown?

LM: Yes, sometimes I would meet my daddy going home, yes.

PC: Did they ring the bell for the kids to be dismissed, do you remember?

LM: Yes.

PC: And what equipment did you have on the school grounds, then? Is that all y'all had?

LM: A swing, a slide and a see-saw, jump ropes, and God...marbles, jack playing.

PC: All those fun things. What activities did you participate in school as far as sports, on up into your later years of school, high school?

LM: I played basketball, football, I tried my hand at baseball but I never could get it right.

PC: Well you're so tall I just assumed that you played basketball and were on that famous Temple Tiger team.

LM: No, no that was after my time.

PC: Oh, okay.

LM: When we played basketball we didn't have a gym. We played on the ground.

PC: Right.

LM: When they would have a basketball game or tournament they would get brown, you might call it butcher paper, and wrap it around the playing field so if you didn't pay to get in you couldn't see.

PC: What do you mean the playing field? How did they do that?

LM: The ground...the basketball ground, they would wrap paper around it.

PC: Oh, they would wrap paper around it so that if you didn't pay you couldn't see.

LM: No, you couldn't see but they had bleachers there. A matter of fact when we wasn't playing basketball, which was a lot of things we did on recess time, we would be up on the bleachers running them and all that stuff.

PC: Okay, and how much did you have to pay to get in the game?

LM: Probably about that time about a dime or a nickel.

PC: Now are you talking about your high school days or you talking about when you were a younger child? When they wrapped the court?

LM: I was younger when they did that. We didn't start...before we got a gymnasium at H. G. Temple all the basketball games were played at the Diboll gymnasium which was on the campus of the Primary School then.

PC: Okay, so if ya'll had tournaments or games y'all played over there?

LM: Yes, and Coach Ross would run us to death running up and down those bleachers.

PC: Now, you said you graduated in 1961, how many classmates did you have in your graduating class? Can you recall their names in your class?

LM: Yes I can.

PC: Okay.

LM: There were eighteen of us in the class. Out of eighteen, twelve of us went to the same college basically at the same time.

PC: Oh that is wonderful.

LM: As a matter of fact Margie Harrell is one of my classmates.

PC: Okay, Mrs. Margie.

LM: I was the youngest in the class and they still don't let me...when we get together at affairs, and say our class is going to get together, somebody inevitably is going to bring that up.

PC: About your age?

LM: About me being the youngest. They always say that I had my way, yes I did! (laughter) When we went to junior high, Mr. Jeffero became our sponsor, our home room teacher so to speak. That is another thing, see after you reached a certain age at H. G. Temple you had a homeroom teacher.

PC: Okay, would that be more like high school?

LM: Junior high.

PC: Junior high age, okay. First it was Diboll Colored School and then we know at some point they began the accreditation process in 1942. We are not for sure exactly how long that took, but we are assuming a couple of years because we do know the first graduating class was in around 1944. Can you remember in your elementary grades, did the school before accreditation if it just went or did you hear your parents speak about the school before accreditation?

LM: Yes, I heard my mom talk about some of the younger people of high school age had gone to Dunbar in order to finish.

PC: Okay, so did the Diboll Colored School just go to eight grades or nine grades?

LM: Eight grades yes, and in the interim there no one ever mentioned...Diboll at one time had a female principal.

PC: Oh really, who was that?

LM: Mrs. Daisy Mark, she is now deceased.

PC: Daisy Mark, M-a-r-k?

LM: Daisy Mark, M-a-r-k.

PC: When was she at the school?

LM: '38 or '39, somewhere along in there. And I found a report card that my sister had and it was signed by Mrs. Daisy Mark and that was in 1938 or '39 or something.

PC: Well we would like to see that. I have not heard of that name before. We are aware of Professor J. W. Hogg who was the early teacher. Then Mr. Hurdle and the Hurdle family, Mr. Kenyon and then there was a Mr. Davis just for a couple of years.

LM: That is Billy Davis's father. He called someone the other day, I said good grief.

PC: Is he still living?

LM: His son is.

PC: Oh the son, yes. So, now you're saying there was a Mrs. Mark that was a principal for just a short time.

LM: Uh-huh.

PC: And, then we know Professor Bradley came around 1938-39 somewhere along there, after Professor Davis.

LM: Now from what I can understand about...while I did have the opportunity to meet Mr. Bradley.

PC: You did meet him?

LM: I was in Prairie View at the time and I was working in the department of education and Mr. Bradley...well see, Mr. Bradley came out of family of educators. You know where he was from don't you?

PC: Someone told me his wife was from Corrigan, but I'm not sure about him where he was from.

LM: Alto.

PC: Alto, okay.

LM: One of them is still living in Alto. He had a sister. One day I didn't realize I was going to have to deal with this sister. She was Mrs. Frankie B. Ledbetter, she taught English at Prairie View. I was in the education office one day doing some filing and this gentleman came in and he said, "I would like to see Mrs. Frankie Ledbetter." So Mrs. Craig said, "Mitch is she up there?" I said, "Yes, she is up there." I looked at him, I said, "Sir may I tell her who is calling?" He said, "Yes, my name is C.O. Bradley." I looked at him, I said, "I've heard of you before." He said, "Where have you heard of me from?" I said, "You used to be a principal where I came from." He said, "Where you'd come from?" I said, "I'm from Diboll." And, pardon my French, he said, "I be damned." (laughter) He said, "What is your name?" I told him and he said, "You're not Big Lewis's son?" I said, "I'm his son," he used the same word again. (laughter) I said, "Well they told me you were very outspoken." But, everyone spoke so highly of that man.

PC: Yes, he did a lot for H. G. Temple School, especially getting it accredited, the accreditation so they could actually have a graduating class. He really improved the school from what we hear.

LM: Well back in the day they had girl basketball and boy basketball. They had segregation then.

PC: Right.

LM: No, I'm not talking about race wise. I'm talking about when the kids go off and play or something "boys get on this side, girls on this side" with him walking out on the bus. They had a bus and he would drop the boys off, he didn't care where he dropped them off but, girls he would pull up to your door and wait until someone opened that door either with that lamp on or like this.

PC: Oh, that is neat. So, you had the opportunity to meet him actually.

LM: I had the opportunity to meet Mr. C. O. Bradley. Then I didn't realize I was going to have to take his sister in college. I was in a class she taught, Literature.

PC: Now who was...so you went first through eighth grade there and you named some of your teachers earlier. Mr. Kenyon taught you and Mrs. Sibley.

LM: Mrs. Sibley, lord!

PC: Who else were some of your elementary teachers?

LM: Mrs. Ruby Simmons, a lady by the name of Mrs. Ballard and another lady Mrs. Johnson, Mrs. Henderson, was my elementary teachers.

PC: And then when you got to the junior high years you still went to...by that time it was H. G. Temple.

LM: I still had Ruby Simmons, Inez Sibley. Then I had E.A. - Mrs. Gilbert.

PC: So you still had the same teachers.

LM: George Crain, Mr. Lacey taught health to our class, a Mrs. Webb and another Mrs. Bradley. She was a music teacher.

PC: So some of them taught multiple classes.

LM: Yes, oh yes.

PC: So in your high school years in '61 your principal was Mr. Massey.

LM: Mr. Massey.

PC: Okay, tell me about Mr. Massey. What do you remember about him?

LM: Where should I start? Mr. Massey was a dynamic mathematician. Although the principal you would have math but when you became a junior or senior Mr. Massey taught you math. And he was so good that he could be sitting up there and you would be working on and telling him what your equation was. He'd be saying, "That is wrong" and he wouldn't even be looking at it. He told us once he said, "You know what, you all are the worst students I ever had in my life. I'll be so glad when ya'll graduate." Which he wasn't lying we were, we were bad. But the thing about it we were smart enough that when it came time to pick the valedictorian and the salutatorian they had to put half of us in the class to figure out who is was going to be.

PC: How did they figure that out?

LM: By testing.

PC: Okay, and who was the valedictorian?

LM: Barbara Moses and Linny Hunt. Barbara Moses is now a retired military person living in San Antonio, Texas. Linny Hunt is now in Bristol, Virginia

PC: And who was the salutatorian? Did they have a salutatorian?

LM: Linny was the salutatorian.

PC: Oh, okay.

LM: See Barbara's family and my family are just like...well Barbara and I refer to each other as brothers and sisters.

PC: Now, when you graduated you said y'all were the first graduating class in the new gym.

LM: In the new gym there.

PC: Did they have the ceremony in the new gym?

LM: God yes, with Dr. James Ward from Tyler, Texas.

PC: (laughter) You haven't forgotten that have you?

LM: How could you, you sit there, "Where oh where the dear old seniors out in the cold corral" he was just repetitive, repetitive. (laughter) We not going to be anywhere if this man don't stop talking. (laughter) I tell you another comical thing about that, now days,

you know, they have project graduation and the seniors go...when we graduated a lot of our parents say, "Don't let twelve o'clock catch you out of the house." Now they weren't playing. But one thing about it the teachers and the parents worked cohesively. When the parents would let you leave home and go to school the teachers took over as disciplinarians and I never forget this teacher Mrs. Webb, we stayed right next to the school. She stopped by every day to give a report. Mrs. Ruby Simmons would catch the men coming from the mill, they had to pass right by her house, she'd be standing at the gate.

PC: Wow!

LM: Now don't say that teacher lied on you. Don't ever say that because it's going to be worse. See the black community held the teachers in the highest of esteem because besides being teachers they were parents.

PC: That is right. And, you were taught to respect them then too.

LM: A lot more than some of these kids are today, God almighty.

PC: Now, we spoke of this just a little bit ago, about when H. G. Temple acquired their accreditation and we know that Professor Bradley started on that around 1942. Did you ever hear any stories or talk about how he went through that process and how long it took?

LM: Yes, it took him awhile because Professor Bradley went out and made up classes, like kids...I said made up, that sounds wrong. Like young men that quit school and what have you, Mr. Bradley set out and went and got these kids and enrolled them in school and made them stay in school.

PC: He went out and recruited?

LM: Yes, kids that were still school age but they refused to go to school. So, Bradley went out and made them go to school, build up the school census.

PC: Was that for them to get the numbers that was required?

LM: Well, not only to get the numbers but these kids weren't doing anything. They were too young to go to work at the sawmill and hauling logs so he made sure those he got stayed in school and got an education.

PC: How did he do that and keep them interested there, do you know?

LM: Well from what I hear, Mr. Bradley was very persuasive in a number of ways. Like, he would get with the fathers of the children. A lot of the fathers worked at the saw mill, on Friday night and Saturday nights they would go out and Mr. Bradley was right there with them. Just used psychology on them I guess.

PC: Yes, so he became their friend I guess.

LM: Yes, he and my daddy were real good friends, real good friends and convinced them, "Get these kids in school." Education is going to be the only thing to get them into society so to speak, as far as learning. Well under Mr. Bradley's leadership they had a school for veterans.

PC: Okay.

LM: Veterans that had returned to Diboll after World War II or Korean War. They had a teacher for that. That was Mrs. Bradley.

PC: Mrs. Bradley. So, after they went off to the service and came back they could go back to school and he had a special program for them to graduate?

LM: That is right, that is right.

PC: Like I said, we know that possibly '44 or '45 was the first graduating class so it took him a couple of years to get the accreditation and just wondered if you had any knowledge of that and how he went about it.

LM: No, just that he would go out and conscript kids.

PC: Just recruit children?

LM: Yes, you know, you going to school.

PC: Well that is great.

LM: And a lot of kids that can remember Mr. Bradley they are so thankful that he did what he did.

PC: Right, it really turned their life around I'm sure.

LM: Because they never would have become the men and women that they are today. They are older than I am but they are still thankful.

PC: Did you hear any stories that you remember of how they chose the name H. G. Temple for the school?

LM: Because of when they were building the school Arthur was nowhere in the picture.

PC: Right, this was before he came as general manager.

LM: Henry Temple was the guy in charge.

PC: Right.

LM: And, they named the school after him because he had donated so much, the land, building the school and buildings there on campus.

PC: Okay, there is a newspaper article that goes along with that. I just wondered if you heard anything.

LM: Matter of fact, the church I belong to today, I've been there for over fifty years, Henry Temple donated the lumber to build that church.

PC: And which church is that?

LM: Church of the Living God, although it's no longer even there. It's a brick church, but we stayed in it for years and years and that church at one time sit next to the cemetery.

PC: Okay. And, we know they got a new school was built in 1953 and you would have been in school then. Tell me something about the new school when you got to go to school there.

LM: Well it was so funny. Being in the black school, how should I put this delicately, it was such an exciting thing to see an inside bathroom.

PC: Okay. So, the Diboll Colored School had outhouses and the new school had indoor restrooms?

LM: Right.

PC: Well that was a big change wasn't it?

LM: Yes! Not only that, but another change, the system of bell ringing was all electronic. It didn't have any more of the hand clinking bell and what have you. You could press a button and that bell would ring and what have you. The only clock in my elementary days, maybe the teacher had a clock on the desk, but in this school it was a big clock sitting right in the hallway. Now Mr. Massey every morning would be standing right under that clock.

PC: Make sure you were there on time. (laughter)

LM: Well not only that but, he had some of his teachers, Mrs. Gilbert, Mrs. Simmons and them, they would be monitoring that clock as well!

PC: He expected you to be there didn't he? (laughter)

LM: Yes ma'am. Another thing, a lot of the teachers they had when we went to the new school they took on the role of being hall monitors and all of this stuff. And now days you couldn't pay a teacher to do it. Don't say when you get in a fight or something don't run into the bathroom, that wasn't nothing. Mrs. Gilbert would probably be in there and Mrs. Sibley would be in there. Now days you can't do things like that.

PC: Right, that is right. Now do you remember if H. G. Temple School had yearbooks?

LM: Yes, as a matter of fact Saturday I had called Mattie Blount Friday and asked her about some books. She said, "Yes I got some." I asked her, "May I look at them, look through them?" I said "Margie" when I sat there Saturday I said "history, history, history." I saw pictures of me I think when I was in the fifth grade.

PC: So did she bring them Saturday to the Juneteenth Celebration?

LM: She brought them to me at the center there. I went through them and gave them back to her. But, I was so surprised in '52, '53, somewhere they had the rhythm bands, the little kids with the xylophones, playing.

PC: Right.

LM: I kept looking and I saidm "Yhis is Charles Hardy, Solomon Moses." I said, "Good grief."

PC: Now, what years were these yearbooks she had?

LM: '67 or something, but I don't know where they had pictures in there from '53 and what have you.

PC: Right, some older pictures.

LM: Yes.

PC: Yes sir. Well the only two we have ever seen is a 1955 and a 1967. The 1967 is more like just memories and there are older pictures in there too.

LM: I saw a picture of me when I was in college in that book.

PC: Were there more than just those two that she had?

LM: She brought me three of them.

PC: Well maybe we can borrow those from her sometimes. That would be great. What about the trophies from H. G. Temple School?

LM: I'm still working on that.

PC: Okay, we know there were lots of trophies.

LM: Oh God, were there ever!

PC: But, we've never found any of them.

LM: The last account I had of those trophies they were in the attic part of the community building.

PC: Okay, maybe you can track those down.

LM: Well see when I talked to Margie Saturday, I said, "Margie you don't ever stay here." I call and call but Margie's husband has been real ill.

PC: Yes, that is what we understand.

LM: But, I'm going to have to go down there, I think I still know how to go up in that attic.

PC: Well, good maybe you can go and find that out for us. Is there anyone in your school days that made a lasting impression?

LM: Yes, there were a young man and a young lady. In high school, in school this fellow he and I were always competitive. We both graduated together. We went through kindergarten and first grade all the way...went off to college. He went to Prairie View and I went to Prairie View. He joined the military, I didn't but, we joined different organizations at college. And, if Alton joined I had to join too. We became scouts together. When graduation came we knew we had to part. Alton ended up in New York and I ended up in the classroom at Navasota, Texas. I think from the time of graduation I laid eyes on Alton in '83 or '84. I think that is when he came back. His mom had passed away and she was our den mother in the first scout troop I ever belonged to. The other young lady was a girl named Jo Evelyn Jordan. She was a daughter to Mrs. Lillie Odom, the Odom family. I never forget she was such a discipline problem and Mrs. Kenyon got word from her mom to come out there. Well instead of taking Jo Evelyn to another part of the room to discipline, she didn't. She did it right there in the classroom. But, Jo Evelyn is one of the most high powered lawyers in Milwaukee right today.

PC: Wow that is wonderful.

LM: There is another lady that had it real hard, Mrs. Fannie Lee Butler. For some reason I was under the impression that Fannie Lee had passed away until earlier this year. I was talking to someone. They said, "Fannie Lee is not dead." I said, "What?" They said, "No, she is not dead." So her cousin said, "I have her number." I said, "Give it to me, give it to me right now." I went home, sit down and called this number. No telling who was going to answer. Well, this lady answered, I said, "I need to speak with a Fannie Lee Butler."

She said, "What did you say?" I said, "Fannie Lee Butler." she said, "I'm Fannie Lee Butler, where you from?" I said, "From Diboll." She said, "You had to be from Diboll if you know me by Fannie Lee Butler." It had been over fifty years since I had seen her.

PC: And she was a student that you went to school with, a classmate?

LM: She was reared by her grandmother, who Lord have mercy, but she turned out to be a remarkable young lady, remarkable.

PC: Well that is wonderful. We know from the Free Press articles that in 1962 Coach Herbert Allen and Coach Willie Ross resigned from H. G. Temple School. Do you know of any details about that why they resigned?

LM: Well I think they knew integration was impending and Coach Allen had just about got burned out plus rumor had it that there was some animosity between he and the principal as to why he left. And Ross left because where Ross's high school coach was director of athletics at Lufkin Dunbar, Elmer Redd. And Ross being the outstanding football player that he was in Arp, then at Texas Southern the door was opened so he walked on in.

PC: So he left H. G. Temple? Where did he go then, Dunbar?

LM: Dunbar where he is still....still not at Dunbar at Lufkin.

PC: At Lufkin?

LM: Yes.

PC: What race relations did you experience in Diboll?

LM: Basically none, now I'm serious. I have never lived in a segregated neighborhood. Now that sounds strange coming from me here in Diboll doesn't it? As long as I can remember from the time I got up and run around until I got ready to go off to school we've always had white neighbors.

PC: Okay, so this Red Town Section was more of an integrated section?

LM: Yes, see the Havard's, the Capp's, I know all of those kids. As a matter of fact I see them right today, the Moses's, they moved on to Lufkin, but the Moses family stayed right on the corner of Neil Pickett and Beech I think. They were white.

PC: Okay.

LM: Right down the street from my house the Noris's lived there, which was Marshall Grace's parents. On down the Havard's lived down there. Tommy Havard, Sr., we used to play out in the woods, shooting guns and all that stuff. In fact I ran into him last

Sunday morning. He said, "What you doing now?" I said, "I'm retired now," He said, "Me too."

PC: So you grew up around the white community.

LM: Yes.

PC: Did you ever experience any problems?

LM: None whatsoever. I never went to school with them. When my mom asked my father and then they moved into the public housing project there was a family of Mitchell's stayed right down the street. These Mitchell's are white. And a matter of fact, Mrs. Mitchell, I love her dearly. She lives there in Lufkin. And when my brother began to play ball and talking about going to college and was getting all these letters, they would go down to Mrs. Mitchell's house, pass my mom's house, go down there. So she'd come up there bringing the mail and she and my mom had this thing they was just going to share him.

PC: Oh that is neat.

LM: I run into her sons every now and then. I always ask, "How is your mother?" "How is Mrs. Mitchell doing?"

PC: That is neat. Now, were you still living here in Diboll during the integration years of the school system?

LM: No, I was in school at the time but I stayed abreast of it because see I had a younger brother that was in school here, Mack.

PC: Okay, Mack Mitchell?

LM: Yes, and I was staying in touch with him.

PC: How did you come to know about integration?

LM: See I used to work for housing here in Diboll.

PC: For the Diboll Housing Authority?

LM: I was the first social director they had, director of recreation what have you.

PC: Director of Recreation, okay.

LM: Yes, under Woodrow Woods.

PC: Under Woodrow Woods, okay.

LM: See, when Margie Harrell...I had gone down there and got hired so he asked me one day, said, "Lewis, I need a secretary." I said, "You do." He said, "You know of anyone?" I said, "Yes I do. This young lady worked for the school system and I don't know whether she is going to work." He said, "You think you can get her to come in?" I said, "Let me see." So I went up to Margie's house and we laugh about it right today. I went to Margie's door and Margie was mopping her floor and she said, "Lord, I don't believe it. Here come Lewis Mitchell to my house." I said, "Yes and I'm coming to the back door." I said, "Margie that gentleman from the Housing Authority, Mr. Woods, wanted to know if you would be interested in the job as secretary. I know you have got secretarial skills and I know where you went to school and I know what you've done." She said, "When does he want to see me?" I said, "Whenever you can." She said, "Give me about ten minutes." Margie came, I think Margie's interview lasted five minutes. Forty years later she is still around.

PC: Now, what year were you recreation director under Mr. Woods?

LM: I think I came there in '66, '67, somewhere along in there. I did it for three summers. I would do it during my time away from my school.

PC: Okay, so you graduated from H.G. Temple in '61, you left here and went to Prairie View and you came back in the summers and did the recreation program.

LM: I enjoyed it and I still see kids right today that can remember me. We used to have dances down there.

PC: Okay, well 1965 was the first year of Freedom of Choice for the Diboll School system and then full integration was the fall of '68. What were your feelings about integration?

LM: I was all for it.

PC: And how did your brother feel about it knowing he was in the school system and going to be changing schools? Did you remember him sharing anything with you?

LM: As long as his buddies were going...see in my church, my church had a lot to do with this. Families were told for the betterment of the community and the betterment for your kids send them on. So, a bunch of those women in that mission society got together, those kids were going to that school. You going to be the best you can, you might not be the best dressed but you won't look like you poor, so you going. And nothing was said.

PC: So it was actually emphasized through the church about integration and preparing those students for that?

LM: Yes, because Diboll had always been a community where people got along white or black. Now, one thing I can say about Diboll in this respect, if you got down sick or hurt,

Diboll rallied to you. I can say that because my father died when I was fourteen. He worked for Temple and if it had not been for Diboll people I wouldn't be where I am right today.

PC: Oh, that is wonderful.

LM: The late Jimmy Ferguson, Rhoda Faye Chandler, yes, when my dad died Rhoda Faye Chandler handled all the arrangements and everything else. Getting the body brought back, yes.

PC: Well that would have been around 1958 or so if you were fourteen. What did your mother do after that, I mean did she work for the company then?

LM: No, no, no, she had five kids to raise.

PC: Oh okay.

LM: I never will forget one year after we all got up we were working and gone through college and all this type stuff, we decided to give Mom a vacation. She had a sister in California that she hadn't seen. I said, "Mom we will send you to California." She said, "Yea, I might bring ya'll back that..." I said, "Hold it, hold it, you better make sure he got a round trip ticket." (Laughter)

PC: That is neat. So, the company and the community has always been good to your family.

LM: Diboll has been that way for everybody. When Diboll brought the first group of Mexicans I was working at the housing then.

PC: Okay, that was in the sixties.

LM: As a matter of fact we were told that we were going to get this group of people. Don't ask any questions, don't fill out any forms, give them an apartment number and a key. This was supposed to transpire on a Tuesday, we were sitting around waiting for five o'clock and no one showed up. Wednesday we was going to leave early, somebody said, "No you can't, look out in the parking lot." There were these fifty foot trailers out there and Hispanic people. Oh good God almighty! And good ole Jessie Malanders was the interpreter for us. We brought them in the offices, as a matter of fact I see some of the kids now, Hispanic kids, and I say, "I remember when your people moved here."

PC: Is that the first group that they brought up out of the valley? I believe...I don't have the exact date right here in front of me but it was in the late sixties. I believe there were thirteen or fourteen families.

LM: There were a lot of them, I'll put it like that.

PC: So you were actually working at the Housing Authority then?

LM: Yes.

PC: So, you remember they brought them all to Diboll and ya'll assigned them a house number?

LM: Yes, pretty much. And, you know what, they fit right in. There wasn't no animosity, no racial, none of that stuff.

PC: Well, that is great.

LM: Everybody got along. I still see some of these kids right today, although they are adults and what have you. "I remember you," I say. "You do, somebody as old and ugly as I am." But when we...I say, "Never mind don't go that far back."

PC: Did you ever know of any incidents that took place that were race related?

LM: Well, they said one time at Diboll High School when the movie Roots came out or something, they had some turmoil over there. But, thanks to McGilvra and some of the athletes, Coach Wyatt, all that was contained right there in that school.

PC: Okay, but in the early years of integration in '68 that full integration year it was a smooth process then?

LM: Yes.

PC: This incident you are speaking of would have been later on?

LM: Yes later on. Now, there were some incidents where kids are going to be kids, but it didn't result in no major turmoil or anything of that nature.

PC: Right. What about within the community, were there any incidents race related in the community at the time of integration?

LM: No, not to my knowledge.

PC: Everyone got along fine?

LM: Everyone got along fine.

PC: Okay. What about shopping at the commissary, did you ever go to the commissary store?

LM: God yes!

PC: Tell me about that.

LM: You would go in the commissary store and buy anything from a pair of shoes to furniture. They had a meat market in there, a grocery store.

PC: Now, do you remember going there as a small child?

LM: Yes.

PC: Did they have...was it set up, you know...

LM: It was segregated.

PC: It was segregated. So, did you have to go into a separate area or something?

LM: Yes, they had a guy named Lefty Vaughn who ran that store and Hines and the postmaster's name...Zetty Kelly was the postmaster. Hines worked in the post office and the drug store. He was a druggist.

PC: Were you treated well when you went there?

LM: Yes, most definitely!

PC: Okay.

LM: If your dad worked for Southern Pine at the time you didn't have to worry about nobody mistreating you. Because, now this I will say, they might have had some player haters at Southern Pine, but they kept it to themselves, because if you mistreated a Southern Pine employee's child you had hell to pay.

PC: Okay, so the company officials didn't put up with anything apparently.

LM: By no means. And plus they had a lawman here at the time, he got real old, Jay Boren and he did not play.

PC: He was the constable here.

LM: He did not play.

PC: So everybody got along and everybody knew what was tolerated and what wasn't tolerated?

LM: Most definitely.

PC: Okay, is there anything else concerning integration or race relations you would like to share with me before we move on.

LM: Well there is one thing I can say about that is, for a town like Diboll it went real smooth. This is because people had already started getting along before this came together like they are in that time. They had that philosophy if one person is down, people came to their rescue. It didn't matter what color they were, they did it. I can remember the time when my dad was down sick prior to his death, Joe Bob, Chester somebody, and these are whites, would come by the house and I often laugh about this. Men always wore their caps, and they respected your house. The first thing that cap was going off but within that cap would be money. "Mrs. Mitchell, we brought this for you and those children."

PC: Oh, how nice.

LM: And you know what Patsy, I can't get that out of my head because anytime someone is down and in need...we had a young man in my church that graduated this year and my sister said he was sitting up there crying. I said...she said, "No, they didn't buy him no invitations and all that." I said, "Do what?" So the church was going to give a little appreciation for the graduates and they said, "Well he doesn't belong here." I said, "What the hell does that have to do with it?" I said, "Is he going to school?" They say "yes." I called a few people. I did a little arm twisting and Sunday before last when they had the appreciation thing for the graduates I said, "Excuse me I got to go to the trunk of my car." I had one envelope in my suit pocket. I went to the trunk of my car and got a five piece set of American Tourister luggage out of the trunk of my car.

PC: Oh, that is nice. Well, you just never forgotten those things that people did for you and your family so, you just continued to do that when you see a need.

LM: I have never forgotten it. My brother and I were talking about it last night, I just can't forget that.

PC: Well Diboll is a very unique little place, little community in its own way and everybody has their own unique experiences so that is what makes it a great place to live even now.

LM: Now they tell me they don't have a Diboll Day now, do they still have those things?

PC: Yes, we have Diboll Day. Well, let's talk about Juneteenth Celebrations. I know you are very involved with that and you just had a big celebration on Saturday. (laughter)

LM: Oh god yes!

PC: You probably haven't recuperated yet but, tell me how you became involved with the Juneteenth Celebrations?

LM: How far you want me to go back?

PC: In the beginning. When did you get started helping with that?

LM: As a little boy I can remember on a Friday night when the men would get off from work at the mill the hole would be dug. They would put the meat on and cook all night long, all night long.

PC: Who do you remember did that cooking? Can you remember?

LM: Yes, Albert Mitchell, my father Lewis Mitchell, Kiddo Phillips, Charlie Billy, Joe Carr, that is a number of old men. They would get everything and the women in the community would make the salads and the breads and the cakes and what have you. But, whenever they would get together about midday Saturday they never would do anything until First Shiloh's Choir would sing under the direction of the late Professor W. Jackson.

PC: Okay, well we know he was a great musician.

LM: He was and he had that choir would sing.

PC: So, that was kind of like the kick off of the event.

LM: That is right. Dave O'Neal would have lemonade and all this type of stuff. People were coming and be there all day. Sometimes they would have the baseball game in the baseball park. Then, that Saturday night at Rodgers Café they would probably have a little sock hop or something. A dance or what have you.

PC: Okay, and this is while you were a child?

LM: Yes, now we couldn't go.

PC: You couldn't go to the sock hop huh?

LM: My dad was very, very finicky. My dad, if he told you, you could go somewhere at another neighbors or something, you better leave when he told you to go. Don't give him a chance to change his mind.

PC: And then as an adult you've become involved with the actual coordinating of this event.

LM: Coordinating the thing.

PC: When did that start, since you've been living here and when you became an adult?

LM: When I became actually involved twenty something years ago when I became the president of the ex-student association here. We became involved in the nineteenth of June thing. I wasn't doing the actual stuff I'm doing now, but we made sure we were involved in it.

PC: All right and tell me about the H. G. Temple Alumni Association how that was formed and when.

LM: On a rainy night in January 1988 when we became an official organization.

PC: How did that come about, whose idea was it, or how did that happen?

LM: A group of us had got together because most other schools were having reunions and what have you. I always make sure I go back to my college homecoming, the alumni association. It was nice, you see people you haven't seen. It was nice so we got together and decided to have a reunion. And, the first reunion we had at Diboll for H. G. Temple took place the second Saturday in August in 1988 and my God almighty the people, the people, the people.

PC: I believe we have a book from that 1988 that ya'll put together.

LM: Yes we put it together.

PC: So, that was the first one in 1988?

LM: The first one, and the late Paul Durham, oh my God, he was wonderful. He was wonderful by helping Mr. Ligon and the committee getting everything together. I can even tell you the first song that was played the night of the dance. We went...we couldn't find a place because...we didn't have the civic center. We went to the Our Lady of Guadalupe Church. At the time the church had a big recreation thing and Earnest Juizar said, "Yes, y'all can have it." So we tried to get all the records of H. G. Temple we had and the late Mattie McCoy had a paper mache tiger and Delores Richard, those women got it and that tiger looked so darn real. There was a tiger on that stage. Our speaker was a graduate of Diboll, Ruthie Lee Taylor, she is now a retired principal of some school in New Mexico. So, we had our little thing and naturally Mr. Jeffero was right there.

PC: Now who was on that first committee, the alumni association committee, the first members?

LM: Delores Richard, James Rhone, Jim Ligon, Loreen Rodgers, myself of course. That is five, Earline Vinson, Mary Helen Bray, Joyce Phipps or Joyce Bray. That is eight, seems like there was another one in it. We were the ones that put it together.

PC: Do y'all still meet every year?

LM: As a matter of fact I'm calling an alumni meeting for sometime this week because we got to go through everything that just transpired this past week. See, we do a lot of things community wide besides or reunion.

PC: Okay, that is what I was going to ask you. What else do y'all participate in?

LM: We give scholarships to students that pass the criteria at Diboll High School and want to apply for a scholarship. This is the criteria. You must write an essay of why you want the scholarship. It has to be in your own writing, can't no one help you. You must get a letter of reference, preferable two from someone who can vouch for you, and above all I must see that transcript.

PC: I had the privilege of helping with that a couple of years ago for Mrs. Gordon.

LM: You did?

PC: Yes, she asked me to help on the selection committee. And so, are they also involved with the Juneteenth Celebration? Do y'all help with that too?

LM: Yes, if they hadn't shown up Saturday it would have been hell to tell the captain. But I was there from the time they started cutting all those cakes Saturday until they said Lewis all the plates are gone. I said, "Good."

PC: Who does the cooking now? Do y'all still have barbecue and stuff?

LM: Yes, the New Breed, which I cannot give them enough credit. The New Breed did a wonderful job.

PC: Now what is that?

LM: That New Breed Western Riders group.

PC: A group, Western Riders group, okay.

LM: They did the barbecuing, they furnished the DJ and all that stuff.

PC: Now do they do that free or do you pay them to do that?

LM: No, they did it free. They contribute that much out of their treasure where we contribute so much out of our treasure. We make this a combined effort.

PC: Okay. And then the community when they come to eat is it free?

LM: It's free, it's free.

PC: That is wonderful.

LM: And see my job is to make sure that the senior citizens or those people that are shut in get something to eat. That is how I by-passed Joy Mae.

PC: Okay, all right, well that is great. And we know that some of the early Juneteenth coordinators were like Mr. Kenyon, and Mr. Mitchell, I believe you mentioned your dad I guess.

LM: Albert Mitchell, whose...that statue over there in front of Temple's main office, that is the statue of Albert Mitchell.

PC: Right, he was involved with different ones. Okay, that is great. Now, we want to get to Dibbon Day real quick. We know there were segregated Dibbon Day events and we have photographs of 1962 and 1964 black queen candidates for Dibbon Day. Those are the only two years that we have found actual photographs but, did you have any dealings with Dibbon Day events before segregation? (integration)

LM: I was a student at high school so I was a member of the high school marching band from H. G. Temple. We would practice, oh my god, Newell J. Cox, we would practice how we were going to march in that parade.

PC: Now, was he the band director?

LM: The band director.

PC: For H. G. Temple?

LM: Yes, prior to Mr. Cox we had a lady named Mary Bradley.

PC: Was she kin to Professor Bradley?

LM: No, another set of Bradley's.

PC: Now, they were the band teachers?

LM: Band directors.

PC: Band directors, okay. What were the Temple High School colors when you were there?

LM: Well I was under the two colors.

PC: So you were under both colors, purple and white and then...

LM: Purple and gold, purple and white I'm sorry, you are right, and then green and white.

PC: Okay.

LM: I graduated under green and white but I also had purple and white as well.

PC: Do you recall how the colors changed?

LM: Yes, it was under Mr. Bradley was the purple. Mr. Massey dealt with it for a little while when he came then he changed it to the green and white.

PC: To green and white. So you were in the band and you participated in the Diboll Day parade?

LM: Right.

PC: Okay, so when y'all participated in the parade was it one big parade for Diboll Day?

LM: Yes.

PC: Okay, so were y'all involved...how did they do the parade?

LM: Well naturally Diboll High, all the bands were together. But, we would go and get in line and what have you. All the black bands were on the rear but they knew we were there.

PC: But the white bands went first and then the black bands, I mean bands from the black school?

LM: Right, and then the queens and all that stuff.

PC: Were the participants from the black community at the end of the parade or were they mingled in?

LM: They were mingled in.

PC: Oh, mingled in, okay.

LM: Then we would go back to the campus of the school that is where we would do our celebrating as opposed to whatever they did across the tracks so to speak. But when they had the Saturday night up there everybody could come all though it was still segregated. Because, my mom and dad they couldn't wait to see Curly Fox and Texas Ruby. I never will forget that.

PC: That was one of the early Diboll Day events and they had the early ones at the Whispering Pines Park which is now the current location of the Temple Inland office. So, you are saying your parents came over here to see the Curly Fox show?

LM: Yes!

PC: Okay, so the black community was welcome to come over?

LM: Yes.

PC: And they did.

LM: Yes, they did.

PC: Okay. Now you said y'all had your activities at the school, was that before the Walter Allen Park was built?

LM: Yes, Walter Allen Park during that time was under water, it was Conn's pond.

PC: Oh okay, so that was the Conn's pond location?

LM: Where the Housing Authority and Civic Center was Conn's Pond, yes.

PC: Okay, and after the park was built they had the Diboll Day segregated events at Walter Allen?

LM: Well, I wouldn't call them segregated events now Pat because everybody shows up.

PC: Now, how did they select the queens? Do you remember anything about the queen selection for the black community?

LM: Classes within the school would select the queen, who would be the queen and all that type stuff.

PC: You know we raise money, did it have anything to do with money raising?

LM: Money raising, as a matter of fact, one year I was asked to go up to Willie Davis for a Diboll Day thing. My God what year was that? I don't know.

PC: I was going to ask you if you know when the segregated Diboll Day events stopped and it just became one integrated? I'm wondering if it went along with the integration of the schools which was '68.

LM: I think it did. Well one of the things you have to keep in mind who was in charge of Diboll then. If they spoke like E. F. Hutton, this is the way blank, blank, blank, it's going to be and no one argues with it. Now, you know who I'm talking about, Cousin Arthur.

PC: All right. (laughter) And, we also know that part of the big Diboll Day events for the black community was the big Sunday afternoon baseball games during the weekend. So, what do you remember about the baseball games and the baseball teams?

LM: Oh God! As a matter of fact one of those early black players I still know where he lives right today.

PC: And who is that?

LM: His name, they call him Jelly. (laughter)

PC: I know Mr. Jelly.

LM: He is 92 years old. He did not want to believe I was who I said I was when I walked up to him one day. Now Jellies kids we grew up together, we played together. They left after the boy's mother and Jelly separated. It had been sixty years since we saw each other. I saw him last year when his aunt or someone passed away. He lives in Chicago, he is a pharmacist. I told him I said, "When Junior comes, call me." So she called me and said, "He is on his way now." She said, "He is here, are you coming?" I said, "I am on my way." I got up, put on my clothes and when...this is no lie, when I pulled up and got out of my car he said, "I don't believe it." I said, "I don't either." Do you know how long it had been? I said, "Don't stop at fifty, we better go on to sixty."

PC: Now, do you remember watching the ballgames when you were a little kid, the Diboll Dragons? Watching Mr. Jelly play ball and the others?

LM: Yes, yes.

PC: What do you remember about the baseball games then that you want to share with me?

LM: How Big Jim Hall would be out there playing ball and they would be talking loud and all that. But those guys could play. Big Jim Hall, Jelly, Manchie Lee Overstreet, Sonny Boy Rodgers. All those guys, uh-huh.

PC: Now where was the location of the ball park that you remember?

LM: Over there right adjacent to where Shiloh Baptist church sits right now.

PC: Okay, on that same side of the street or across the street?

LM: Across the street.

PC: That is what I understand, I just want to make sure.

LM: As a matter of fact where Rhone Street and Cosey Circle is was part of the ball park.

PC: Okay. Did it cost to go to those games?

LM: Maybe a nickel or a dime. If you caught a ball you go in free.

PC: Okay. (laughter) Now, it had a plank fence and bleachers, but if you caught a ball you could get in free huh?

LM: Yes.

PC: What other businesses do you remember in the black community as a child growing up?

LM: Mitchell's Café, Joe Diamonds Café, Rodgers Café, the Deberry's Café, let me see and the No. 2 Store.

PC: Where was it located, the No. 2 Store?

LM: Right adjacent where Shiloh sits here, there is a rail type object right across from Shiloh. The No. 2 Store set right in front of it.

PC: Across the street from Shiloh?

LM: No, on the same side.

PC: Same side of the street, so it set beside Shiloh Church. Kind of more on that corner?

LM: Yes, that is where everybody would gather.

PC: How big was the No. 2 Store?

LM: It was large, it was large.

PC: Is that mostly where the black people shopped, the community shopped rather than coming to the big Commissary?

LM: The man that ran it was named Mr. Ben Bivens. As a matter of fact his daughter graduated from school but I don't know what year she graduated.

PC: Now, do you remember going there and did you just charge on a ticket or do you remember?

LM: Yes.

PC: Do you remember anything about the company checks or anything?

LM: A lot of these stores had charge tickets. I remember the company checks.

PC: Do you remember those? What did they look like? What do you remember about them?

LM: They were long and they had a time sheet attached to them.

PC: Okay, like a regular pay check?

LM: It had all the tax things on there that had been taken out and what have you. Then the little few cents money they gave you. That was it. You could take it into any of these little old stores because see, we didn't have no bank then.

PC: Now, what did you do here...you said you came back here in the sixties as director of recreation and worked for the Housing Authority. What was your career, mostly your career life? What did you do?

LM: Teaching.

PC: Teaching, okay where did you teach?

LM: I taught in Navasota, Texas, I taught in Lufkin and I taught in Center, Texas.

PC: Okay, so you're a retired teacher?

LM: Well I'm a retired Psychological Assistant from Rusk State Hospital. See I left teaching after only five years then I went into the field of mental health due to a family and I spent thirty one years in that field.

PC: Okay, and where did you retire from?

LM: Rusk State Hospital.

PC: Okay, well that is wonderful.

LM: I was in charge of all the psychological examinations for the psychology department. I would tell people, "I'll tell you one thing if you get in here you'll see me before you get out."

PC: Well that is great, that is great. What is one of your most memorable experiences growing up in Diboll? Something you want to share with us?

LM: The Sunday evenings, the Sunday evenings. My dad, he'd work, he might go out on Friday night, but on Sunday afternoons that was family time. Whether he was out in the yard playing ball with us and mother would go visit. Daddy even taught us how to dance. Then, listening to the radio, back in the days listening to Shadow Nose and all that stuff.

PC: On the radio, didn't have TV growing up.

LM: We didn't get TV until 1950 something.

PC: Sunday afternoon was family time with church and a lot of special memories. That is great.

LM: Now, not only that but my father had a habit that my brother and I, we still carry on. My dad [has] been dead fifty something years. No matter where dad went or what he did, come Christmas Eve, Daddy didn't go nowhere, nowhere. You couldn't put a chain on him and drag him out of the house. That was for his family.

PC: That is wonderful.

LM: Right today, when my brother and I went off to college we would come home at Christmas time but, Christmas Eve we wouldn't go nowhere. We would be in the kitchen around Mama.

PC: That is good, that is some good memories isn't it?

LM: They will be with me indefinitely.

PC: That is wonderful. Is there anything that I haven't asked you about that you particularly want to share with us about the history of the H. G. Temple School, the history of the black community, a particular person or something that I haven't asked you about today that you want to be sure and mention?

LM: There were so many people that were instrumental in my life. But one of the things I would like Diboll, even the black community, Diboll was an ideal place to rear a family. Diboll is very steeped in religion, where they always stress the Bible and what have you. And there have been so many people instrumental in my life I couldn't mention them all, I couldn't mention them all. But I got something from every one of them. I remember when I worked for Temple prior to going off to college, there was a group of men worked out there at Temple. E. P. Ramsey, he was my foreman, he had me on that dry chain or whatever they call it out there, and Fox Smith, Horace Warren, Howard Flannigan, they told me, said, "What are you doing out here?" And I said, "I'm trying to go to school." They said, "You better go to school, you have no business out here. You have too much brains." They said, "Go make something out of yourself."

PC: That was my next question. Even though you mentioned that, I was just sitting here and wanting to ask you who was instrumental in seeing that you went to Prairie View?

LM: Well wait a minute let me tell you something. It goes back farther than that. Besides them, the late E. A. Gilbert, she was my teacher at Temple. I was up for a scholarship that night of graduation and somehow it got all miscombobulated, I don't know. We had to take our robes back the next day and she said, "Lewis what you doing?" I said, "Well Mrs. Gilbert I was hoping I would go to college, but I don't know." She said, "Lewis if it's meant for you to go to college you are going." And she left it just like that. Well I went on to work and one day I was at work and here comes Mr. Ramsey walking real fast. "Mrs. Temple wants to see you." I said, "Who?" "Mrs. Temple." I said, "Okay, what

does she want to see me for?" He say, "You don't know?" I said, "No, I don't." So, I went down there and went in and Lottie Temple, she said, "Have a seat Lewis, I understand you want to go to school." I said, "Yes, but I'm trying to save a little money." She said, "Well, how much would it take for you to go to school?" I said, "Mrs. Temple I don't know but I've got the paper work." She said, "Well bring it back by my office when you come back by." I said, "Okay." Well, in the interim Clyde Thompson was in the same office upstairs. I had to go see him. Now what does this man want with me. At the time Clyde Thompson was on the board of directors at Texas A&M, okay, big deal. I took the paperwork back to Mrs. Temple like I said I would and I told my mother "I don't know what's going on." She said, "Well maybe they are going to help you." At the time you could only apply for a student loan of \$300, but back in '61 that was a lot of money. I took it all up there and I visited with Clyde Thompson. The next thing I knew, "Dr. Evans wants you to come to Prairie View." I said, "Who is Dr. Evans?" "The president of the college." "How does he know?" "Just don't ask no questions." We had to get busy and get ready to go to school. It was forty some years later when I found out what happened. Talking to Mrs. E. A. Gilbert one day, she was coming down for our reunion. She said, "When you got ready to go to school I talked to some people." I said...when she started talking...I said, "Who did you talk to?" She said, "I talked to my sister." I said, "You talking about Mrs. Deamae Hunt?" which they were very, very tight. Mrs. Hunt was very close to the president at the time of the college. I said, "Wait a minute." She said, "I'm just now telling you." That was after forty something years, and when she passed away I was asked to give her rites and that is one thing I told people about her.

PC: She helped you get to college.

LM: She helped me get to college. And she would come down while we were in college. There was about eight or ten of us then and we would always be hungry.

PC: Well we know there are a lot of H. G. Temple graduates that went to college to Prairie View and that is real admirable, you know, so, I didn't know if Mr. Massey was strong towards the college and helped the students or the parents.

LM: See Mr. Massey was a graduate of Prairie View.

PC: Right, right. So, that is wonderful that you were really encouraged to go.

LM: The person that encouraged me the most to go was Algianon Moses Jeffero.

PC: Yes sir, we have interviewed him as well.

LM: Oh my God!

PC: Is there anything else you'd like to share with me today that I haven't asked you about?

LM: No, I know I've sat here and talked too much.

PC: No, that is wonderful. You've given us a lot of good information and I really appreciate you spending time with me today for this interview.

LM: Well, I'm glad I did. I had to work today and I said, "Now what time did I tell Patsy?" I said, "I hope she won't be too mad if I'm late because I'm going to go get me some coffee before I go for that interview."

PC: No, that was fine. Well thank you Mr. Mitchell.

LM: You are more than welcome.

END OF INTERVIEW