

MARJORIE PICKLE DAVIS

Interview 042a

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Megan Lambert & Edythe Weeks, Interviewer

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ABSTRACT: In this interview with Megan Lambert and Edythe Weeks, Marjorie Pickle Davis reminisces about growing up in Diboll at the Star Hotel. Her father worked for the Texas Southeastern Railroad, but her mother, Ruth Estes Pickle, and grandmother, Emily Estes, ran the Star Hotel boarding house. She describes cooking and cleaning for the boarders – mostly Southern Pine Lumber Company workers from the time she was a young child.

Edythe Weeks (hereafter EW): I am Edythe Weeks and I'm with the Diboll Historical Society that is planning to write a book about the early days of Diboll and I've come to interview you. What is your name?

Marjorie Pickle Davis (hereafter MD): What's my name?

EW: Well, give me your full name, then you can give me your play name.

MD: Marjorie Lucille Davis.

EW: It was Estes before, right?

MD: It was Pickle.

EW: Pickle, Pickle, that's right.

MD: Marjorie Lucille Pickle.

EW: And you married?

MD: Foster Davis.

EW: Foster Davis. And your daddy's name was?

MD: James Hamilton Pickle.

EW: What did he do for the mill?

MD: He worked for the TSE [Texas Southeastern Railroad] in the mill shop.

EW: You know pa did that too, and when he retired he had two retirements: social security and railroad retirement.

MD: Daddy didn't. He died too young.

EW: And your mother's name was?

MD: Ruth Olly Estes Pickle.

EW: And, and she did what, in Diboll? She ran the --

MD: She ran the Star Hotel with her mother.

EW: Oh, I didn't know her mother was in it.

MD: Emily Estes, Mrs. Ike Estes.

EW: Mrs. Ike Estes.

Megan Lambert (hereafter ML): Can I stop ya'll for a second? I've been wanting to get in here.

EW: Okay, I want you to tell me about the hotel and how many people came to eat and who cooked in the kitchen and that type of thing about the hotel.

MD: Our cook was named Eula Clark. She did the cooking and her husband, Jim Clark, did the dishwashing. And the stove was about seven feet long.

EW: The stove was seven foot long?

MD: Yes ma'am. And about four feet wide and the dish --

EW: The houses -- the houses were all large weren't they? The hotel -- how large was the hotel?

(A background discussion ensues at this point. It sounds like someone is asking how many rooms the hotel had, among other indiscernible things.)

MD: I'd say there was 25, 20 to 25.

(More background discussion, possibly including an elderly man.)

ML: Was that a wood stove?

MD: Yes ma'am.

EW: Oh yeah.

MD: We had no gas. It was as big as from here to over yonder by that door.

ML: Well, who chopped the wood for it?

MD: My father. And a colored man, Jim Clark. And that's how we got hot water in the hotel. They had coils inside a fire box, and that was how they got hot water.

EW: Oh sure! And all the rooms were full with boarders?

MD: Yes ma'am.

EW: And did more people than that come to eat?

MD: Yes. That was where all of the Temples came. They stayed at the...slept at the library.

ML: Slept at the library?

MD: Yes. But they came over to the house to eat.

EW: Did they have...?

MD: They had a special table.

EW: A bathroom? Did they have bathrooms?

MD: We had two: one upstairs and one downstairs.

EW: And they had hot water for baths?

MD: Yes ma'am.

EW: From the stove?

MD: Yes ma'am.

EW: That's interesting, isn't it? Did they keep the stove going all day?

MD: They were cooking all day.

EW: Yeah, that's right. Three meals a day.

MD: Well they had to get men out to catch the train to go out in the woods at four o'clock. So we got up about two-thirty, quarter-to-three and fixed the lunches so that...

EW: Did you have any brothers and sisters?

MD: I have two brothers and two sisters.

EW: Maggie and?

MD: HY

EW: HY

MD: James.

EW: Oh yeah.

MD: And, um, Clarence.

EW: Clarence. I knew that!

MD: I wanted to call him son.

EW: And did ya'll clean the hotel up? I mean ya'll...?

MD: Yes that was our job.

EW: Job, the kids? Clean the hotel?

MD: Let's say the two oldest.

EW: The two oldest ones cleaned up the hotel.

ML: And the other ones messed it up.

MD: The other ones were really young.

ML: What year was the Star Hotel built?

MD: I have no idea.

ML: No idea?

MD: Sure don't.

ML: How long did it run?

MD: They tore it down...they must have torn it down in thirty-nine or forty...right in there...cause my son was about two years old, two years old, when they tore it down.

ML: So it was in operation 20 or 30 years, at least.

MD: Longer.

ML: Longer than that?

EW: It was the first hotel. It was a dollar a day, three meals a day, and your lunch and you slept.

ML: It was a dollar a day for all that?

MD: Yes ma'am. We took care of 'em.

EW: You know, do you know how much they made?

MD: Oh no, but it wasn't anything.

EW: A dollar a day was a big amount to pay then.

MD: Because the house rent then was nine dollars a month and your lights, water, and ...was furnished. You had to buy your wood.

EW: And there weren't any paved streets.

MD: No, very muddy.

EW: Muddy streets. Do you have any pictures of the hotel?

MD: No, but I have a picture ya'll might use when ever you get on with somebody else.

EW: Okay. Let's us keep talking so our tape will be going along.

ML: It's okay, ya'll can let it go. Yeah, any old pictures...

MD: Well now, this one, here it is. No I don't have it my aunt has some. They are going to interview her this afternoon.

EW: Diboll High School in 1925 and '26. Who is the teacher?

EW: Erma Bateman.

MD: This is the first kindergarten that was ever here. And it was in the building right behind my house there.

EW: They have, uh, Mr. Crim is taking pictures.

MD: Well that one's never been in the paper.

EW: Well that's what they're trying to find out.

MD: Wesley's going through their pictures.

EW: Well, they have interviewed him and they said...Wes Ashworth – did you go?

ML: Yes, uh-huh.

EW: They said it was good, it was really a good interview...this Mrs. Bateman is his sister-in-law?

MD: That's his wife.

EW: His wife? Well I was thinking it was his sister-in-law. Okay. This is Wesley's wife and this is the first kindergarten.

ML: It's a darling picture.

EW: Will you let me take it down to Mike so that I can...?

MD: I want that picture.

EW: Oh, I'll bring it back.

MD: I don't mean that. You just tell Mike I want it back.

EW: Oh I know. I'll bring it back myself. I'll take it down and bring it back myself. You don't know who any of the children are?

MD: Oh yes.

EW: Oh, let's get a pencil!

MD: This is Junior Cook.

EW: Okay, Junior Cook.

MD: That's Jack Chandler.

EW: Jack Chandler.

MD: That's Bob Agee.

EW: Bob Agee.

MD: His daddy was a druggist. This is Laura Durham.

ML: Slow down ya'll. Bob Agee?

EW: They're not, they're not all in order.

ML: Laura....?

MD: Laura Durham. Her daddy was president of the T. S. E. Railroad.

EW: What was that Paul's aunt?

MD: No. They're no kin.

EW: No, okay.

MD: This was Jewell Stringer. This is Jimmy Porter. Pauline Kelly.

ML: Can you imagine her remembering all these names?

MD: This is me.

(Howls of laughter)

MD: Can't you tell? I'm the largest. Look at my legs. We didn't have shoes then.

EW: Okay, that's good to know, too. Let's see, there's a lot of 'em didn't have shoes on.

MD: That was how you could tell the rich from the poor. Look at our pants.

(More laughter.)

EW: Their pants are down below their dresses. How cute!

MD: Now this is Marjorie O'Hara. This is Mildred Griffith. This is Reginald Kelly, James Willy, poor Joe Cook, don't know the boy's name.

ML: Joe Cook?

MD: Uh-uh. Walter Stevens.

EW: Oh sure enough?

MD: David Kenley.

EW: That Mrs. Kenley that you interviewed; this is her son?

MD: Yes, her oldest child. This is the oldest Morgan boy.

EW: Shorty's family?

MD: Uhm, Dopey Morgan's. This is Swallow's boy. Verin Swallows.

ML: Verin?

EW: Verin.

MD: Yes ma'am.

ML: Swallows?

MD: Yes ma'am. And that one's...I can't remember. Junior Cook knows all of 'em.

EW: And the teacher was, the teacher was who?

MD: Erma Bateman.

EW: Erma Bateman. Ashworth now, but she was Bateman then.

MD: She's deceased now.

ML: Erma Bateman Ashworth, she was the teacher.

EW: She was Bateman, then.

MD: She was the teacher.

EW: That's just really cute. 1925 to '26. That's about the time my mother and daddy moved to Lufkin. I was in kindergarten. We must be about the same age.

MD: I think we are. But, I finished school a year before any of them. When I got up in sixth grade I got real smart and they put me up a grade.

EW: Well, I skipped a grade in school.

MD: So I graduated before my brother.

EW: I didn't go to the second grade.

MD: He couldn't go to...that was when they had the seven year ...

EW: I'll take this down to Mike and then I'll bring it right back to you.

MD: Age, and his birthday was in January. So he started the first grade. Mine was the next year in April.

EW: What did the people...

MD: So they just put me in.

EW: What did the people do at night for entertainment...or were they too tired from working?

MD: You went to work, bed, because you got up so early the next morning.

EW: On the weekends...I noticed this said "Dancehall" did they have dances, big dances? Like community dances or was it just a few people--?

MD: I don't remember.

EW: You don't remember?

MD: Not that one. Now they had a community center later, up here by the school. It's called K.P. Hall. That's what they called it.

EW: And did they have...?

MD: They had dances there. They had everything in town.

EW: It was a community center for all kinds of parties.

MD: It was. And a lady from New York, when I was in school, would come and she would put on plays.

ML: Oh really?

MD: She'd be here about six weeks.

ML: Every summer?

MD: Well, it happened for three or four. And we had a chorus line.

ML: A chorus line. Were you in it?

MD: Yes.

EW: Are there any pictures of it? That you know of?

MD: I don't know whether there are or not. And then we'd put on the play.

ML: How did it come to be that this lady from New York came down here?

MD: I really don't know now. She came and met with the school, and all, and they paid her.

EW: Probably the Temple people that went up to New York on business.

MD: But, they would show it three nights and it would be a sell-out.

ML: How much was a sell-out?

MD: Ten and twenty-five cents. And uh, but it was good, it was very good.

EW: What kind of plays did they have? How many? Do you remember any of the names of any of the plays?

MD: No.

EW: It was really dramatic though?

MD: But now it must have been...

EW: Was it drama? Comedy?

MD: It was not comedy, it was drama. It must have been more or less for the area or something, because San Augustine had them.

ML: Oh, I see.

MD: My husband was in them.

ML: Oh, okay.

MD: And he can tell you all of his. I can't.

ML: Yeah.

MD: Cause I wasn't paying that much attention.

(Laughter and muffled conversation about the chorus line.)

EW: "What did do?" She said.

MD: In the play?

EW: No. What did you do besides the play?

MD: Well, really, I worked.

EW: But did you have a part in the drama?

MD: Sure. Well there weren't enough of us. There were only 13 when we graduated, so everybody had to participate. It wasn't just seniors, it was the whole school.

EW: High school. How many were in high school?

MD: I don't know that either, but there were 13 that graduated.

EW: There must have been four times 13, probably about 50, about 52?

MD: Or 3, something like that. I don't even remember. But, uh, we played tennis. We had no gymnasium. They played basketball on the school grounds. And they did have some lights. There'd be about...not very many. And uh, we'd build fires, try to stay warm. And we had pep squad. And uh, my daddy forbid it, but my mother won, because we had to wear short skirts. We were not allowed to wear shorts nor short skirts.

EW: Yeah.

MD: Unto this day!

EW: How long were your skirts?

MD: That length. And pleated all the way around.

EW: That was the pep squad?

MD: Yeah.

EW: How long were your skirts everyday? They were about 4 inches above the knee for the pep squad. Were they 4 inches below the knees for everyday?

MD: I guess it could've been. Because we had red pants to match the pleated skirts. So if they came up you couldn't get--

ML: Oh, like bloomers?

MD: Yes.

EW: Red bloomers? Colors are red and white? Always have been?

MD: Yeah. My grandmother made all of ours.

EW: Yeah, always have been red and white.

MD: And my grandmother made all of them.

ML: She did?

MD: Yeah.

ML: What was your grandmother's name?

MD: Mrs. Ike Estes. Everybody called her Big Mama.

EW: Big Mama.

ML: Big Mama.

EW: Did she sew for a living? Or did that...?

MD: No, she ran the hotel. And she just kept us in clothes.

ML: Can you imagine running a hotel and keeping people in clothes?

MD: And getting up at two o'clock in the morning?

ML: No, I can't imagine that.

MD: And uh, well it was something. I'm not joking there. You'd get up in the mornings and make rice sausage, pan sausage, and uh, they always had desserts. We'd make a sweet sandwich, a sausage sandwich, and an egg sandwich.

ML: One for each man?

MD: Yes.

ML: What kind of desserts?

MD: Apricots--um--apple--

EW: They bought them, they didn't make them.

MD: You'd cook 'em.

EW: Oh, you bought the dried apples.

MD: You bought the dried ones and made them.

EW: Oh. I see.

MD: And, um, there was always that on the table. And, uh--

EW: You can't hardly afford to buy apricots, dried apricots now to make preserves!

MD: Well, but really they made them for breakfast. You had to have it all on the table.

EW: Well, they worked. I mean, like, with that kind of work you'd really have to.

MD: They did work, but those men were trained to pull out at four. And uh—you had to have it ready and let 'em go.

ML: They had to be fed breakfast and had their lunch in a bag?

MD: Right.

ML: Why don't you just go through and describe a whole day of what went on in that hotel starting with two o'clock in the morning and all the chores.

EW: There won't be anything else like that.

ML: Yeah.

MD: All right. You got up, about two o'clock and started the fires in the wood stoves.

ML: Who woke up people at two o'clock?

MD: My mother.

ML: Your mother woke everybody up?

MD: They had alarm clocks.

ML: Alarm clocks.

MD: They didn't need 'em.

ML: People just naturally woke up at that time.

MD: Yeah. And uh--our skillets were about --I'd say--24 inches.

ML: How'd you pick 'em up?

MD: They were heavy. You'd use two hands. But we had cooks that were pretty strong too. And uh, instead of hiring them helpers, we had to help them. And Eula lived--the first cook I remember was named Eula Clark. And then we had a--what they called a servant house over there. And she and her husband lived in that servant house...and their kids. And they'd all get to going--(someone makes a indiscernible comment)--yeah, had to be. And you would cook their breakfast, serve them, and have their lunch ready.

ML: This would be for 20 or 25 men? Something like that?

MD: Every bit of it. Yeah cause most of the people worked in the woods. And uh, the cook's husband washed the dishes. And the bin that the dishes was in...I'd say it was eight foot long.

ML: Gosh.

MD: It was made, um, it was made with tin, to keep the water in. And it was divided in the middle. One was for soapy water and one was for rinsing. And the water was piping hot.

ML: Did the water have to be carried or was it piped in?

MD: It was piped in when I remember it. I don't know what they did earlier, but when I remember it, it was piped in. And they had an old safe.

ML: That was like a pie safe, you mean?

MD: Yes. It was an old timey safe with a screen on it. And used to, we didn't have a refrigerator, so you'd put your food in that and even milk.

ML: How long would you say food, other than milk and stuff, would, would last, like cooked food? Would it last one day or two days?

MD: I'd say it would last two days, every bit of it.

EW: You had an icebox? I didn't hear you.

MD: No.

ML: Didn't have iceboxes.

EW: Didn't have iceboxes.

MD: Had one later, but not--

ML: When would you say iceboxes came in?

(After a long pause.)

ML: That's okay.

MD: I have no idea, really. Because we had iceboxes--we didn't have refrigerators.

EW: Yeah, iceboxes I can remember.

MD: A man brought our ice.

EW: Did you have a square thing you put in the window--how many pounds you wanted--the ice man come by and bring the ice in?

MD: They just did what they call "fill up the hotel."

EW: Oh, they'd fill up the hotel.

MD: And it would be big hunks.

ML: Like 25 pound blocks?

EW: We had one that could hold 75 pounds.

MD: It was just a huge thing. (Weeks interrupts here and continues holding an unintelligible conversation in the background.) It would be a lot larger than that and see there was only--that came out of the hotel by the way. Only the upper part would be where they put the ice--but, uh—

EW: They were lined with tin.

MD: Yeah.

EW: And they had a little drain--

MD: Wooden.

EW: --Hole and you had to have a hole in the floor.

MD: You cleaned it out every morning.

EW: (From the background)...puddle to let it wash through the floor. As the ice melts, the water runs—

MD: If you didn't, it would run out on your floor.

EW: Yeah, it would run out on the floor if you didn't have a hole in your floor...or a pan.

MD: You didn't have roaches then.

ML: Well why not!!

MD: I do not know, but you didn't.

ML: Well did ya'll maybe keep things so spic and span that you didn't have anything for roaches to eat? Was that a possibility? Or--

MD: I have no idea, but we didn't have roaches.

EW: Well it doesn't matter how clean you keep things now, cause they come from next door. You know they come in your house regardless.

MD: The thing is you didn't have to worry.

EW: No.

ML: Well, I'll be. That's amazing.

EW: Maybe it's kinda like the fire ants. Maybe they came in from some other country at a certain time.

MD: I don't know but we never had to worry about them. I mean, we could leave food out.

ML: What about ants?

MD: I never did see any in there, in our house. They were outside, but I never did see any outside, I mean inside.

ML: Going back to breakfast?

MD: And, well when you fed the men, you didn't give the individual service. You'd cook like three platters of eggs and put them on the table and then they got their own eggs. In other words, you couldn't have 'em scrambled...

EW: To me, that's the way to fix eggs.

MD: ...Sunnyside up, or this, that, and the other. Everything went on the table.

ML: Boardinghouse style.

MD: That's right. That's where it got its name.

ML: Did they make biscuits that early in the morning?

MD: Yes ma'am. All sandwiches were made out of biscuits – that went on the train. No light bread.

ML: You wouldn't have time to let it rise.

MD: And, uh...

EW: Could you buy light bread at the store?

MD: I guess you could, Edythe. I don't know.

EW: I remember back then, in Lufkin.

MD: I guess you could.

EW: They had bakeries in Lufkin, I remember. Now, none of the bread was sliced.

MD: The men preferred, the men preferred, biscuits...

EW: I said none of the bread was sliced.

MD: ...On their sandwiches. And you got the eggs to put in 'em.

ML: How about cornbread?

MD: Oh, we made a lot of cornbread. And, um, then...

EW: At supper, did they have...?

MD: They would, um, get their...we would put their lunch by their plate as we would go in.

ML: In a paper bag?

MD: Yes ma'am, got it from the commissary. And, um...

EW: Did they pay the men in cash or in tokens?

MD: Used to be it was in, uh...

EW: Token?

MD: Yes, paper. I called it wax paper coupons. And, um...

EW: I've heard them talk about them.

MD: I believe Virginia Nelson has one that the company took and encrusted it with gold and gave to her when her husband retired.

ML: Ohhh!

MD: It was one of those coupons. I'm surprised she didn't show it to you.

EW: We didn't talk about early history. We just wanted to know about the map.

MD: And when you...our dining room was about the size of these four rooms. I don't know what you would call it. It was very long. I would say it was the length of this house, but it was about this wide.

EW: Then when you got 'em off to breakfast, you weren't through cause you had to cook lunch for the people at the mill?

MD: Then that's when the office crew came in to eat breakfast.

EW: Oh, they came in too to eat breakfast?

ML: Oh!

MD: Yeah. They had to eat breakfast. And then a lot of the families ate breakfast there...let's say the better jobs.

EW: The white collar jobs.

MD: Oh, they would eat breakfast, and then you wash dishes all day.

ML: What about linens?

MD: Same thing. We'd wash 'em with a rub board and a tub.

ML: Who did most of the washing?

MD: Well, between my grandmother and my mother, and uh, the kids, and the colored woman's kids...

EW: How many times did you change the beds in the room? Every Monday? Or did you change 'em during the week, different days?

MD: Not unless something happened. Once a week, unless there was an accident. There were no commodes, we carried slop jars.

ML: Really!?

MD: And uh, restrooms or bathrooms. well, they had bathrooms, they had bathtubs in 'em.

ML: In the house?

MD: Yes, but no commodes. And uh, you'd have to go up and empty the commodes – I mean get 'em and carry 'em downstairs way out to the back. And cuss 'em all the way back in.

ML: (With laughter) And cuss 'em all the way back in!

MD: I guarantee you. They were scalded; put in a line. They had a number on 'em, so you'd know what room they went in.

ML: And you'd put 'em back?

MD: Yes, ma'am. And when the men came in at night, they were in the rooms. But...

EW: You made all those beds?

MD: The family.

ML: The family.

EW: The family. The family worked at...

ML: She says with a funny look on her face.

EW: (Laughing) Yeah!

MD: No, the slop jars were my job.

ML: Oh boy! That's a shame!

MD: It was pretty bad.

EW: They were pretty bad even for one family! Much less for...

ML: Would you go to wash the linens in the back yard, or where would...?

MD: Yes, they had a wash shed.

ML: Oh.

EW: A shed? Well you'd have to cause...

MD: And as things progressed, you got to go to the laundry in Lufkin, if you ever could get down there.

EW: Well, uh, when it rained and everything, when it rained, when it rained, how'd you ever get 'em dry?

ML: That's what I would wonder about.

MD: Well, I remember one time, we took the servant house, it had three rooms and daddy strung a line all on the back porch. And uh, it was a two story building--and the upper story--he strung lines, and we'd hang 'em on that. Hon, we had to wash their clothes!

ML: Clothes too?!

MD: That went with...

EW: For the dollar?

MD: That went with the dollar.

EW: Gosh!

ML: Wow!

MD: Then things improved naturally.

EW: Yeah, but this is what, you know, really.

MD: But, uh...

EW: That you're trying to get is a picture of early Diboll and then move it on up, you know. But this is back, back at the beginning, that you remember. 'Bout how old were you when you can begin to remember helping at the hotel?

MD: I would say I was four or five, Edythe. I don't know because you can empty slop jars, I don't care how old you are. And wash 'em.

ML: What's your very earliest memory, either of the hotel or anything else?

MD: I would say it was about then. I must have been about four or five years old.

EW: That's about when I began to remember. When they came to Lufkin I must have been about four or five years old. I was in kindergarten in the first year they were there.

MD: Now, I remember the kindy-garten real good. So that had to be...

EW: That's about four or five.

MD: Six years old, see?

EW: I remember one thing before I was that old, you know. I guess that's about – when did you start remembering?

ML: About then.

EW: About then, yeah, I guess that's about when memory begins.

ML: Well, when you were growing up, what did you think you'd like to be when you grew up?

MD: I had no idea.

ML: No idea. Wasn't that important, then?

MD: It really wasn't.

ML: It was really.

MD: I was just a kid.

ML: Well, tell us about your schooling. You started to school...

MD: When I was six, in the kindy-garten. Finished in '36.

ML: And you had real small classes, the whole time?

MD: There was around 20, well, 20 to 25. Sometimes, you see, they would combine them.

EW: When they dropped out. By the time you graduated, there were about 13.

MD: That's right. That's what it was when I finished.

EW: Started about 20 or 25, dropped out.

MD: But you see, so many of the people that lived out in the country had to drop out. They had to make a living – pick the crops and...they had a bus that ran from here to Beulah, no paved roads, and just be a push and shove to get in one. No glasses, they had a canvas drop on them.

EW: Oh, we had a driving glass in our car.

ML: Heh!!

EW: Snapped on.

ML: That must have been a big deal.

MD: And uh, we were very active in school.

EW: Who was your first grade teacher?

MD: Erma Bateman

EW: She was?

MD: And uh, Miss Adams was my second grade teacher, Lois Adams.

EW: Lois Adams? I remember Lois Adams.

ML: Do you remember all your teachers?

MD: No ma'am.

ML: Just those two?

MD: No, I know some more, but...

ML: Mention the names of the others.

MD: Well, there was Miss Munzingo, from Nacogdoches. They had to live here if they taught. And they had to live – had to attend church. They were two of the musts. And um..

EW: They couldn't be, uh, they couldn't, uh, be married, could they?

MD: No.

EW: I remember Ossie Thompson talk about that she couldn't tell that she got married cause then she couldn't teach school.

MD: Have ya'll been over there?

EW: No I haven't, someone's going to see Clyde. He keeps having a wreck. Uh, they said they had an interview with him and then, Saturday, ran into that culvert up there by

the arts and crafts place. Eighteen-wheeler like to have gotten him. So they didn't know whether they'd be able to get him or not.

MD: They'd better get him pretty quick because, uh, you know--

END OF INTERVIEW