

NANNIE BREAZEALE

Interview 150b

March 23, 2000, at the home Nannie & Ernest Breazeale in Diboll, Texas

Jonathan Gerland, Interviewer

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ABSTRACT: In this interview with Jonathan Gerland, Nannie Breazeale reminisces about Mrs. Fannie Farrington, the Diboll commissary, living at the Alcedo logging camp, swimming in the Neches River, picking cotton in West Texas, and working at the Diboll box factory. Mrs. Breazeale remembers the 1946 box factory fire and the speculation that it was related to union activities.

Jonathan Gerland (hereafter JG): This is Jonathan Gerland and today's date is March 23, 2000. Still seems funny saying that. I'm at the home of Nannie & Ernest Breazeale and I'm just gonna ask Mrs. Breazeale a few questions. Clara Breazeale, her daughter-in-law, had already interviewed her earlier and we are just gonna follow up on a few questions related to that. Mrs. Breazeale you were telling me before about your remembrances of Mrs. Fannie Farrington. Could you tell us a little bit about that?

Nannie Breazeale (hereafter NB): Yes uh, I went to work at the box factory, almost every day I would go over there. I had a boyfriend (laughing) that I would go over there and meet. And I bought all my clothes over there. And she pieced quilts all the time. They were the most beautiful quilts I ever saw, which gave me my inspiration for making quilts. And I won about 12 or 13 medals, or ribbons for them. She was the one that I bought my first pair of nylon hose from. Back then you could only get just so many pair. Each store could just get so many pair. I think they were making parachutes or something out of the nylon at that time. You'd have to put your name down on the list and when your name came up for your hose she would let you know. Or you could go over and ask and she would let you have your nylon hose. And I bought my first pair of nylon hose from her. And she was always such a sweet person. Every time you'd go in there she was so nice and so pretty. I just loved her and I loved to talk to her because she always had something funny to tell you or something. And I just really loved her; she was such a sweet woman. And I've got one of the pictures of her in one of the newsletters. And I wouldn't take nothing for it (laughing) because she was such a sweet person. And she worked at that commissary for...I don't know how many years she worked there. Then she worked for a sewing room. I know my sister-in-law worked with her in a sewing room there somewhere at Diboll too. And ...

JG: Who was that, your sister-in-law?

NB: Lois Brown. Lois Brown. And she loved her too. She said she was such a nice person. You couldn't help but love her I'll tell you.

JG: And that is when she was...was she over the ladies clothing department in the commissary?

NB: Yes she was over the ladies clothing and material, lingerie and things like that, in that part. And at that time Rat Johnson and Jim Fuller was working over in the grocery department. I remember them very well. Jim Fuller married my teacher, that was my teacher while I was going to school in Diboll. Marion, I don't know what her last name was but it was Marion. But she would come by there every day and see him. And he'd go over to the school and see her. And Mrs. O.H. Weise was one of my teachers there. And everybody loved her. I tell you she was just like a mother to me. And so I just loved her to death. Bear Miller – he was the principal there. And I started to school there... I started at, I believe at age, I guess it must have been...I was about 9 when I started to school there.

JG: And tell us again what year you were born?

NB: I was born August 28, 1916.

JG: '16, so this would have been about 1925 that you started to school in Diboll?

NB: Just about.

JG: And you moved from Alcedo is that right?

NB: We moved to Alcedo from Diboll.

JG: To Alcedo from Diboll. Ok so when you started to school in Diboll that was before you moved to Alcedo?

NB: Yes.

JG: And how long did you go to school in Diboll before?

NB: I think I went to school maybe a couple of years. And then we moved to Alcedo and we lived out there for about 7 years. And someone said it was the largest camp that was out there. But it must have grown a lot larger because there was four or five hundred people at that time lived there. But when we left there I don't think there were that many.

JG: The camp that is called Fastrill in Cherokee County started up in the early 20's. And I had understood that some of the people that were at the Alcedo camp moved to the new camp of Fastrill. Do you remember growing up there in Alcedo, do you remember any talk about the other camp at Fastrill? Any mentions?

NB: No but one of my...Ernest's brother and his wife lived there. That was Clifford Breazeale and his wife Bertha. They lived at Alcedo...not Alcedo, Fastrill. So then we moved to Alcedo and we lived there for about, I don't know I think I started to school

there when I was about 8. I went to school two years in Diboll. I think I was about 8 when I started to school at Alcedo. And we had just a one-room school for the children. If they had any church I never saw it. When we had church we had to go to the schoolhouse. They had it in the schoolhouse. And once in a while one of these circuit riders, they called them back then, would come by and hold a revival. If it was too cold to sit outside, well we would have it in the church. But if it was warm...

JG: You mean the school?

NB: Huh?

JG: In the school, have church in the school?

NB: Have church in the school, yeah. And then when it was warm enough they would make one of these brush arbors and we would have it out there when you could stand the mosquitoes. (laughter) There was so many mosquitoes. Every year my mother had to give us a brew of quinine because we would have malaria from those mosquitoes.

JG: Alcedo was right on the river wasn't it?

NB: It was right on the river, yea.

JG: Did ya'll swim and play in the river?

NB: Oh we waded and went in and fished in it a lot. But we didn't...we was always scared to get in too deep.

JG: People that lived at the Fastrill Camp... 'course the river, the channel might have been different in Fastrill. But people that lived at Fastrill talked about swimming there. So I'm sure there must have been some sandbars or something. But there wasn't that at Alcedo huh?

NB: Well they were...I don't know I think it was too swift or something. But we found little puddles here and yonder to take a swim in every now and then. One of the farms that we bought eggs and things from they had a place and it was a spring and it was about 10 foot in diameter. It was kinda round like. And it was just as cold as it could be. And we would sneak off down there and go swimming in that pond 'cause it wasn't but about neck deep. We would slip off down there and go swimming but we didn't let Mama know. They would have stopped us mighty quick.

JG: Now this isn't Eason Lake you're talking about is it? You've heard of Eason Lake?

NB: Oh yes I've heard of Eason Lake but I don't know it was called Eason Lake then.

JG: Where you lived at Alcedo how far would that be from Eason Lake?

NB: Well I really don't know. I don't have any idea.

JG: There is a hunting club that is there today. A lot of people say that club, or old Alcedo is now on lands that the club claims as their hunting club. So I was just wondering. I was talking with your husband outside earlier and he said that was a natural lake. So I guess it would have been formed maybe by the river. The river might have gotten up high and filled in.

NB: Yes it could have.

JG: But you don't remember anyone talking about Eason Lake or a lake?

NB: Well I've heard of Eason Lake all my life but I never knew it was there. And when we first moved there why, they had just built a new boarding house. So the camp must not have been there too long before we moved there. 'Cause they had just built a new boarding house for men that came in there that didn't have family. So they would sleep in that boarding house. And Mrs. Bonner, she is the one that kept the boarding house. And she would fix their breakfast and lunch and at night when they came in she'd fix their supper. They boarded there. But there was no one in it when we first moved there. So we moved in that boarding house until...I think we lived there maybe a year. And then the men without families started coming in and we had to move out of the boarding house. That is when we moved into the boxcar. We lived in boxcars for about, I guess about 3 or 4 years and they began to build little houses up and down there you know. And it was one incident there was kinda funny to me because the cars was up on a kind of a hill, a sloping hill you know. And they...it sloped down toward the creek or river what ever it was. But anyway we didn't have inside plumbing at that time. We just had outside plumbing. And you'd have to go down this hill to the outhouse. And one of our neighbors went down there one day and the wind was blowing really hard. She got in there and the wind blew it over with her. (laughing) And she screamed and yelled 'till she got somebody to hear her. The wind was blowing so hard. I don't know how long the poor woman stayed in there before someone heard her screaming. And they come down there and help lift it up so she could get out. And I thought that was funny. I know it wasn't funny to her but it was funny to me. (laughing)

JG: So the wind blew it over, no mischievous boys went up there and pushed it over?

NB: No she was just...it was just the wind that was blowing real hard you know. She was a pretty good-sized woman too and I imagine when she sat down and leaned back the wind blew it over with her. And it was kinda funny to us. There weren't many colored people lived...one bunch one family of colored people that we knew there and their name was Muckleroy.

JG: Muckleroy?

NB: Uh-huh. Her name...we called her Aunt Mat because she was so good and anybody that needed...was sick or anything that needed help she was always ready to go help them.

JG: Did Mr. Muckleroy work in the logging crews?

NB: Yes he worked in the logging, with the logging crew.

JG: And that is what your father did?

NB: Uh-huh. And they had a grown son and he worked in the woods. I'm not sure if he worked with logging crew or what he was doing. But he worked in the woods with the rest of them. And they worked quite a few colored people there at that time. I know me and my sister we carried...they brought, I guess it was the Houston Chronicle, it was a paper anyway, out there. And we carried papers every morning before school time. We would deliver these papers all up and down the camp. So that didn't last very long.

JG: Now what kind of papers?

NB: I believe it was the Houston Chronicle at that time.

JG: That was in the '20's?

NB: It was hard to collect from some of them so I give that up pretty quick. I didn't carry papers very long. I didn't like to ask people for money even if they did owe it to me.

JG: Even if they owed it to you. (laughing) Now you mentioned school. Did you go to school there in Alcedo?

NB: Yes they had a schoolhouse. It was a...I don't know how big it was. I guess it would be 22 foot wide. It would have been about a 30x40 I guess. But it was just one room and they taught every year.

JG: Was it all grades?

NB: All grades.

JG: Up until what, 8 or 9th grade?

NB: Until they got out of the high school.

JG: It went through high school?

NB: Because they had to...to graduate they had to go to Lufkin or somewhere else to go to school.

JG: They did have to go to Lufkin?

NB: Yes or somewhere. They went off somewhere. 'Cause Mrs. Bonner had a daughter that was going to school and she had to go every morning to school and then she'd come back at night. So it could have been somewhere else.

JG: Might some of them gone to Hudson, to Hudson school?

NB: Could have because it would have been closer to Hudson than Lufkin I feel sure.

JG: When did you leave Alcedo?

NB: Oh let's see.

JG: Were you still in school?

NB: Yes I was still in school and we moved back to Diboll. Mama got tired of staying out there. She didn't like it out there.

JG: What was your dad doing before ya'll moved to Alcedo? Ya'll were living in Diboll then.

NB: We came back to Diboll from Kent County, West Texas. He was a farmer out there. And uh, so he had worked as a sharecropper for quite a while and saved up enough money to buy a little piece of land. And so we made it pretty good for two or three years and then the crops failed. There was so many different things, you know the boll weevils, the grasshoppers, sometimes hail storms and things like that would beat the cotton off. So a couple of years our crops failed some way or another and he decided he would move back out here to Angelina County. His mother was still living and most of his brothers and sisters lived here. Just one brother is all he had and I think he went out there and called Uncle Tom and (unintelligible). So his crops failed and of course to farm you had to keep ...he didn't want to try to start again out there. We came back and Grandma was getting pretty old at that time and he wanted to be home closer to her.

JG: So he worked at the mill, the sawmill?

NB: Yes he worked at the sawmill until he got a job out in the woods.

JG: So when y'all came back he went back to working for the mill.

NB: Yes he worked the rest of his life at the mill and the box factory. He was working at the box factory when he died.

JG: And tell us your father's name again.

NB: William...

JG: William Stanaland.

NB: William Stanaland. And he was foreman over the loading and unloading lumber from the cars. He was foreman over there. He took sick and he died two days after his 50th birthday. At that time I had quit school and went to work. I had to tell a little story to get to go to work. They wouldn't let you go to work until you were sixteen. And...

JG: And when did you start working?

NB: I started working when I was fifteen.

JG: Fifteen, at the box factory?

NB: Uh-huh.

JG: And that was the Temple Manufacturing...

NB: That was the one that burned.

JG: The one that burned.

NB: And I worked there until...well every year Papa would take us after he come back to Angelina County he would take us and all the kids, and there was eleven of us, and one of us had married. My older sister had married while we were at Alcedo camp. And he would take all of us in a little old car and we'd go back to West Texas and pick cotton. From the time it got ready to pick until everything was picked and then we would come back. And we would go back to the box factory 'cause that was where...so that is where we was working when the box factory burned.

JG: And that was in '46. The Temple Manufacturing Box Factory.

NB: Yes. I was looking at that original piece again this morning. Wes Ashworth hit it right I'll tell you, because it burned between twelve and one o'clock. Because they never did know for sure what set it. My husband and a bunch of them got the water hoses and turned them on and tried to put it out but it was just too much oil and grease and stuff that had filtered down through those cracks under the box factory till it just, when it took off why it just took off.

JG: Do you remember anything about the labor union organizers coming around?

NB: Yes some seem to think that was what happened with the fire. That the labor union was trying to get started there you know. Some didn't want it and some did want it. And I've heard several say that is what happened. Someone had fired it, you know to set the fire, had done it on their own. It wasn't going their way.

JG: They never really determined what caused it?

NB: No they never did exactly know. That was just a guess.

JG: I know the Lufkin newspaper reported on it and said that it had burned and made reference that the workers had just recently joined the CIO, The Congress of Industrial Organizations. Did everyone pretty much join the union?

NB: No I don't think so 'cause I never did hear any of my folks that was working there, I had quite a few sister-in-laws and brother-in-laws working there. And they never did even mention anything about it. I don't know how many was for it and how many was against it.

JG: I brought some more pictures of the box factory. If you want to we'll just go ahead and turn off the tape machine and get some of those pictures out. If you start telling any more good stories I'm going to hit the record button again.

NB: Alright. (laughing)

JG: Ok.

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END OF INTERVIEW