

**REV. ELZINE STRONG**

**Interview 179A**

**May 5, 2009, at The History Center, Diboll, Texas**

**Jonathan Gerland, Interviewer**

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**ABSTRACT:** In this interview with Jonathan Gerland, Rev. Elzine Strong reminisces about his life growing up in East Texas, his calling as a minister in the Pentecostal Church, and his life in ministry, particularly in Diboll. Rev. Strong's niece, Debra Buster, is also present.

**Jonathan Gerland (hereafter JG):** Today's date is May 5, 2009 and my name is Jonathan Gerland and I'm with the Reverend Elzine Strong, and we are at the History Center in Diboll and we are going to do an oral history today. We have a couple of guests present, if they wouldn't mind speaking their names so we would know who they are if they speak on the tape.

**Debra Buster (hereafter DB):** I'm Debra Buster, Rev. Elzine Strong's niece.

**Betty Murphy (hereafter BM):** I'm Betty Murphy, his sister.

**JG:** Rev. Strong, if you wouldn't mind we will start off by asking you when and where you were born?

**Elzine Strong (hereafter ES):** I was born in Shelby County, about 20 miles east of Center on what we call the Huxley Bay now. I raised corn and cotton on that before the lake was there. I was born in 1925. I am one of nine children, a great mother and dad, V.C. Strong and Fleta Strong.

**JG:** Where did they grow up, your parents?

**ES:** They grew up in that area too.

**JG:** Okay, what was your mother's maiden name?

**ES:** Fleming, Fleta Fleming. And I finished high school at Huxley, I say Huxley, we finished grade school at Huxley, and high school at Shelbyville.

**JG:** Did you graduate from high school?

**ES:** Yes sir, 1943.

**JG:** 1943, okay.

**ES:** And I have...do you want to go ahead with some education now or not?

**JG:** Well let's see. You mentioned that you farmed is that what...tell us a little bit about your father. What did he do for a living?

**ES:** My dad was a carpenter, he was a blacksmith man and he was a foreman on a road for the C.C. Company, way back then during the Depression.

**JG:** The Civilian Conservation Corp?

**ES:** Yes sir, yes sir.

**JG:** At one of the local camps there?

**ES:** Yes sir. They came to induct me in the army and I was only 13, daddy put my age down as 18 and so they came and induct me and we all had a cry. Then they decided he had the age down and they withdrew that so I didn't have to go.

**JG:** Now you said you were one of nine children, where about were you in the order there, age wise?

**ES:** I am fourth.

**JG:** Fourth, okay.

**ES:** I'm a twin.

**JG:** So by the time the Depression hit you were say, five, six, seven years old?

**ES:** About seven, about seven.

**JG:** So you had some older brothers and sisters?

**ES:** Yes sir, yes sir.

**JG:** Okay. Talk a little bit about the Depression; you mentioned your father worked for the C.C.C.

**ES:** The Depression days were sad days. I remember one time, my daddy would borrow money from the bank, say \$300, to carry the family through for an entire year, to buy feed, clothes and food, what have you. And one time a big eighteen wheeler backed up to our lot. And I said, "Daddy what is that big old truck out there for?" He said, "They've come to get our horses, and mules, and hogs and chickens." I said, "What do you mean, Daddy?" He said, "Well, I borrowed money from them son, and I couldn't pay it back so I asked them to come." I said, "You mean you asked them to come get your stuff?" He said, "Yes." I said, "Daddy that is what we make our living with. You are going to let us all starve to death in a pile." He said, "No son, you will understand later. I'm trying to make a name for you." I said, "A name for me, I won't need a name after I'm dead."

And, anyway they got those and I said, "Okay daddy, I guess this settles the bill." He said "Oh, no, no, that will just pay whatever they get for the animals. That will pay on it, if we lack more we will have to pay that later." I said, "Daddy!" He said, "Son, you don't understand." I said, "I sure don't Dad, I sure don't." Well probably 30 years later I did understand. I went to the bank. I was in evangelistic work by that time and I had an old '48 Studebaker car. The notes were \$25 a month. I couldn't pay it that month, so I went to the banker and I said, "Sir, I want to come in and tell you I'm sorry but I won't be able to make my car payment this time." He said, "Are you worried about it?" I said, "Yes sir," He said, "Quit." "What do you mean quit? It's my debt and I'm worried about it and I want to pay it." He said, "Are you worried about it?" I said, "Yes, sir." He said, "Stop it." I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "Son, I'm not worried about your debt, if you don't pay it your old daddy will." I remembered back when Daddy said, "I'm making a name for you."

On and on, I remember daddy going to the relief and coming in with what we called a tow sack, a crooker sack, bought a hundred pound of corn, shelled corn in that sack for the animals. He had a sack full of clothes from the relief. He poured them out there on the floor. So us kids piled around to get what clothes we could find to fit us. There wasn't any in there small enough for me, but there was one pair that I could kind of tie around the waist. It was about that much too long so I rolled them up quite a few rolls. So that was my britches. We made clothes, under clothes and shirts out of feeds sacks. In fact in those days they had printed feed sacks. And if you buy two sacks at a time, which we could seldom ever do, you could get enough cloth to make several garments. The depression times were very hard. We went to church one time, we went all the time to church, and when we was gone some of the boys in the community came and stole all of our chickens.

**JG:** While you were at church?

**ES:** While we were at church. We came in all of our chickens were gone, so we checked later on, we couldn't find very much. Mother had a cousin that worked at the Sheriffs Department. She told him about it, so they came down and went down the burrows of the house and went down in the woods and found some car tracks. So they went back to the store and matched those car tracks to some tires that had been bought there at Western Auto, at the store. They chased this down to these boys. In the meantime the ice man, by the name of Tracy Lovett, he brought ice two times a day down on a big truck and we'd buy ice and put it back in the chimney. We didn't have an ice box. We'd put it back in the chimney and cover it up with a quilt. So mother went out to get ice that day and she said, "Tracy, where did you get that hen?" He said, "Well, I bought it from some of the boys, they traded something." She said, "That is my hen right there; she laid an egg on my bed every day of the world." She said, "That is my hen and I want her back." He pulled right up and gave it to her. We found the boys and so, one of them came to church one night and he paid his part of it. And another one came one night we were sleeping out on the porch under a mosquito bar. The mosquitos were bad and we didn't have no air conditioning. And so, this boy came riding up on his horse, called Daddy out and paid him his part. So that settled it.

**DB:** Uncle Dean, you were talking about your clothes. Tell him about how you wired your shoes together with cardboard soles.

**ES:** We did, we wired the soles of the shoes to the top with copper wire. Of course, I was not the only one there, the ones like that, some didn't even have any shoes. And some times I didn't have them. It was hard times during the Depression, very, very hard times.

**JG:** Did you go to school regularly all through the time?

**ES:** Yes sir.

**JG:** And all your brothers and sisters as well?

**ES:** My oldest sister, she did not get to graduate because our family took illness and she had to drop out of school to take care of us. Irene, the oldest one had to drop out of school. She never did get a high school education. But she was real smart. We would come in from school and knock cotton stalks and corn stalks with a stick, you know, knock them down so you could plow and make another crop. And so, it was pretty rough time. I had a hard time growing up. But, we had hogs. I remember the last hog. Am I going too long?

**JG:** No, no.

**ES:** We had hogs, big white hogs. They run in the woods behind the house on acorns. And, came Christmas time and my uncle said, "Elzine you better go in the woods today," said, "So and so is in for Christmas and you know what that means." I said "Yes sir, I'll be there." So I got on my horse and got my dog, and let me tell you about my dog. He was a self trained dog, half bird, half cur. Self trained, we lived in the woods, the squirrels eat our corn and feed them around on the edge of the corn field. My dog would go down and tree the squirrels and I'd go down and kill them. And the last squirrel I killed from that dog, we had rail fences like this. His front paws was on this one and the back paws was on this one treed. I said, "Now Red, you've never lied to me, but this time you have, you just got a mistake somewhere. That squirrel went up that tree, but he is not there." He just kept standing there barking, standing on that fence. I walked around that tree and the squirrel was up that tree around the other side. That dog didn't trail a squirrel he wounded him, kept his nose up and sometimes he would see a squirrel and he would leave the trail and go follow it, you know, where it would go through the trees. If it stopped in the trees he would bark.

**JG:** Was he a good hog dog as well?

**ES:** A good hog dog. Let me tell you about that. Fantastic hog dog, I'd go in the woods and tie my horse and my dog would bay the hogs. Had a bunch of pigs you know, well I'd mark the pigs, and I'd get off my horse and I'd say, "Get me a pig." And he'd run the

bunch and the pigs would go everywhere. He'd get one out here and he'd run and root it over with his nose, and put his paw and his nose on it and hold it until I got there. I'd say, "Okay, turn it loose." He'd turn it loose and he'd go back and bark and keep the old sow and the other pigs around in a huddle. I'd turn this pig a loose and I'd say, "Get me another one." He'd flush them again. I don't ever remember him getting the same pig twice because he saw that blood. He wouldn't get that pig no more. But he'd root her on. Now when the pigs got larger when I was going to mark them, he'd have to catch them by the ear and hold them. But he'd do the same thing with them. He'd hold them one way or another if they was too big to hold with his paw and his mouth and his nose, he'd have to catch them with the ear and he'd hold them. He was one fantastic dog. An old gentleman there in the community killed that dog. He was following some of his...one of his gyps. There was about eight dogs following that one and mine got killed. I missed my dog. I rode the countryside around looking for my dog. I stopped by this old man's house, and I said, "Have you seen him?" He said, "No son, I haven't. But if I see him I'll tell you about him." Well it went on. My grandma said, "Son, I'll show you your dog in about three days." I said "what do you mean Maw?" She said, "I'll show him in about three days. The buzzards will show him to you in about three days. He's over there in that scope of woods." Sure enough I saw the buzzards over there. Maw said, "There is your dog." I said, "Come on Daddy we are going to go." He said, "no son, no son, we can't do that. That old man didn't kill my dog." I said "well daddy, at least you can set this boys mind at ease, I need to know something. Come on with me and go over there and let's look and see." I begged and begged him. Finally he said "okay but you're not going to find your dog." We got over there and found my dog. He had been knocked in the head. Had a rope tied to his head, they drug him over there and buzzards got him. I said, "When I get old enough, I'm going to whip that old man." Well, when I got old enough, by that time I had prayed through to the Holy Ghost and I had to forgive him instead of whipping him. I forgave him.

**JG:** Well, let's jump to your education.

**DB:** Well, I was going to say, you left out what your dad did as a minister, your dad being a preacher.

**ES:** Do what now?

**DB:** Your dad being a preacher.

**ES:** Dad was a lay preacher. He never was a fulltime pastor. He did have license to preach. Our community was a small community and we had a small church.

**JG:** Was it multi-denominational?

**ES:** We was Pentecostal, one nest Pentecostal.

**JG:** But no other congregation shared the church building?

**ES:** No sir, there was another church building there in the community. It was Baptist and Methodist that shared that one. But ours was one little building all of its own, it was ours. My grandpa gave us that building.

**JG:** And what was his name?

**ES:** William Penn Fleming. So we had that church and there'd be a pastor, sometimes he'd pastor three or four churches, may come there and preach once a month and, but he was the pastor. Then sometimes we wouldn't have a pastor, well my daddy would preach. And Daddy would walk ten miles to preach at another church down the way that didn't have a pastor. He would walk ten miles down there to preach. He was not a fulltime pastor, but Dad was a real, real Christian. He loved God. It was through him that the big church in Center now was organized. It was a small, small frame church across the tracks and my daddy was a member there and he got some of the men together and said, "Let's get this church in the organization. We'll build another church and we'll have a nice church for the community." They worked with him and they did, they built a big church there. They've had several pastors, Bro. B. H. McCoy, Bro. Harris is there right now. It is a nice, nice church. But my daddy is at the foot of it. He loved the Lord. One night we was coming from church and I was following along with him, he had the lantern. We looked over there and there was a man laying in the ditch. Went over there and looked, it was my uncle. He had his head on a round gallon jug of whiskey for a pillow, flies going in and out of his mouth. And oh mercy, that made an impression on me. As I got older, my uncle was a fantastic man. He loved me and he loved my family, course my mother is his sister. Daddy couldn't find work all the time and so my uncle gave me work. He was working for the government as a surveyor and I was his chain man. He gave me work and me and him would buy a few old scrawny cows and sell them and make a few dollars out of them. So he helped me get a little start of cattle. He helped me buy my first horse.

**JG:** This is your uncle?

**ES:** Yes, he was my uncle.

**JG:** And what is his name again, or did we say?

**ES:** J.E. Fleming. They called him Sweetie Fleming.

**JG:** And what does J. E. stand for?

**ES:** Jessie Everett. And so, he is a good man, but he drank all the time. So, he'd have me to drive him around. He had a pick up. I didn't at the time, so he would have me to drive him around here and there for these cattle and what have you. And he'd have me drive him to the auction sell to sell his cattle. And he'd say, "Come on son, drink some of this stuff. It...it...it'll make you feel like a million dollars." I said, "Yes, Uncle Everett, I see it does, I can tell when you take a drink. I can tell it makes you feel like a million dollars." He said, "Yes son, that is right, this stuff will make a 'FOOL' out of you! Don't never drink this junk." I said, "I won't." Because I remember him in that ditch, you

know. But I had a cousin that was my same age and sometimes he would go with him and he'd drive him. Well he took him up on it and he drank and drank and today he is dead in the grave from cancer from whiskey and drugs. I never used drugs. My mother and dad were bonified Christians. They prayed all the time.

I liked to died one time when I was nine years old. They had the clothes to lay me out in. And, they kept on before that, before I got that serious, they wanted Mother and Dad to let them take me to the doctor. They didn't have the money. And they said, "We will pay the bill." And they said, "No, no God is going to heal him." So they kept walking around outside around the peach orchard, crying and praying and I was in and out of consciousness for about three months. And they had my clothes to lay me out in, long handle underwear. Of course back then they laid you out on a cooling board in the house. Well, the Lord raised me up and here I am today, big as I.

**DB:** Before you tell him about your education, tell him how you came about the Holy Ghost and your baptism.

**ES:** Okay. Well, when I was a little bitty child, they baptized me. They had to break the ice to baptize me. I never did get sick, never did get sick at all. And then when I was nineteen years old we drove twenty miles in the back end of a pick up to a tent revival in Center. And I got the Holy Ghost there and I felt like I needed to be re-baptized. So I was re-baptized. Got wet again but I didn't get sick then either, after driving home in my wet clothes, didn't get sick again either. So, a little while after that I was in the church there in Center.

**JG:** So is this after you graduated from high school?

**ES:** Yes sir, no sir. That was before.

**DB:** I was thinking you were a little younger than 19.

**ES:** I was younger than...yes, it was before I graduated from high school.

**DB:** I was thinking he was in his teens.

**JG:** Okay, early forties, huh?

**ES:** Yes. Anyway, I got the Holy Ghost that night; it was just a church gathering. I had graduated because I come from Orange. I was working down there in the bag factory. I came from Orange up to my mom and dad's and I went to the church that night. No revival just regular service on Saturday night, wasn't but about 12 people there. I had promised God before that time, that every time I had a chance I would go to the altar. Well, that night the preacher just preached to the saints. And he said, "Well if anybody here wants to come pray you can." The devil said, "That is not an altar call." I said, "It's too close for an altar call, I promised God and I'm going. I might not pray long, but I'm going." And he tried to talk me out but I went on. I get down to the altar and I start

praying a little bit and the longer I prayed the better I felt. I got the Holy Ghost that night. There was no air conditioning; I sweated everywhere – I sloshed sweat in my shoes. But I got the Holy Ghost that night and I talked in tongues. The preacher said, “We may as well go home; he may talk in tongues till daylight.” I heard what he said but I just thought to myself, “If you must you may go home, but I’ll feel good right where I am.” So that was my some of my religious start.

**JG:** Okay, I guess in the context of all that, if we can go back to that question about some of your formal education after high school.

**ES:** My education, I finished grade school at Huxley. I had a teacher, Mr. Chester Holt; he didn’t have any fingers at all. They were all like this. He didn’t have fingers at all. He was a marksman. He was a real sharp shooter. He shot a .22 manly and he shot a shot gun. He was a bird hunter. He was my schoolteacher. He would keep me and my first cousin and two other kids out of class and we would sing at recess. He would take us off to his church and other places to sing quartet for him. That was in high school. He made chairs and put them in a bottle. Have you ever seen one of them?

**JG:** The little bitty, like a little nick-nack?

**DB:** Yes, like the ship in a bottle.

**JG:** Yes, like the ship in a bottle, kind of thing? Yes.

**ES:** I got the last one he made.

**JG:** Or like a penny in a small bottle or something?

**ES:** It is a chair in a whiskey bottle. He let us see him at school; he let us see him do everything. And I helped him put this post in there and weave the bottom, but when it come time for the stopper he made the stopper and had a cross bar inside on that stopper. He wouldn’t let us see him do that. But, we could watch him do the other. So, he was my favorite schoolteacher, very, very, good. I could tell you some wooly stories about school.

**JG:** Well, that might be something to follow up on. If you can, let’s bring it up more to the present day and then we will get to Diboll.

**ES:** Okay, I finished grade school at Huxley. I finished high school at Shelbyville.

**JG:** And you lived at home all the while, right, with your mom and dad?

**ES:** Yes sir, right. We drove 30 miles one way back and forth to high school to Shelbyville from Huxley. Later on we moved to Center. Then from there I have my education, I’ll continue that, I have a ThB at Texas Bible College, and I have an associate’s degree from Angelina College.

**JG:** What is ThB?

**ES:** That is a degree in Theology, Bachelor of Theology.

**JG:** Oh, okay, T small h, okay.

**ES:** Yes, I have a four-year course in that. I have a two-year course at Angelina College. I have an associate's degree from there.

**JG:** And where was your bachelor in theology?

**ES:** In Houston Texas.

**JG:** Houston, okay. What was the name of the school?

**ES:** Texas Bible College.

**JG:** Texas Bible College in Houston.

**DB:** It is now here in Lufkin.

**JG:** In Lufkin.

**ES:** It's now here at the campground.

**JG:** Okay, we will get to that. Or, I hope to anyways. But, okay and then you went to Angelina College you said. Now that would have been much later, right?

**ES:** Yes sir, yes sir. I went there and Mr. Wilton Kellam, you may know him.

**JG:** Yes sir.

**ES:** He was my sociology teacher, and I teased him later on. I said, "Man this is a great college, I came in and it took me exactly 20 years to get a degree." He said, "Man this is a great college." He snickered and laughed, he said "Now Bro. Strong go back and tell me a little bit about that." I said, "Well you see, when I first came to Diboll when this college opened up, the first day it opened up, I came here. I took a Bible course. Then I took some courses in speech, English, sociology, and history, and what have you, that I thought would help me with my ministry." I said, "But I had to drop out." In the meantime went to Texas Bible College and I got a ThB down there and I came back then to Angelina College and asked him I said, "Can you give me some credits on my credits from ThB?" He said, "Bring your transcript up." At that time I was renting their college dorms in the summer time for our camp meetings in Lufkin. I was making them money, so he kind of liked me because I was making money for the college you know. So he said, "Bring them up." He looked at them and he went to the board and he said "I know we don't normally do this, but let's do it for him."

**JG:** Of course, Angelina College was '68, right? I think that is when it opened.

**ES:** '62.

**JG:** Before, if we could let's back up. You came to Diboll in 1954 is that correct?

**ES:** Right.

**JG:** Okay, you already had your Bachelors in Theology before then?

**ES:** Well, before I went to Angelina College I did.

**JG:** But not before you came to Diboll?

**ES:** No sir, no sir.

**JG:** Okay, just before you came to Diboll, what were you doing and how did you come to Diboll?

**ES:** Well, before I came to Diboll I was pastoring a church in Tallulah, Louisiana. I had evangelized for six years.

**JG:** In what town?

**ES:** Tallulah, Louisiana.

**JG:** Tallulah. Okay.

**DB:** Tell him about Oklahoma. Start with Oklahoma.

**ES:** Well, we preached revival for a year in Oklahoma.

**JG:** Now, you said we?

**ES:** Me and my wife.

**JG:** Okay.

**ES:** Now we started off me and my brother-in-law, he was my friend at that time, but he finally married my sister. We evangelized for a year. I evangelized for a year by myself. Me and my wife evangelized then for three years. And, so we was in Oklahoma. I was preaching in Erath, Louisiana

**JG:** When did you get married?

**ES:** In 1948.

**JG:** And what was your wife's name?

**ES:** Doris Strong, Doris Farbes Strong.

**JG:** And where did you meet her?

**ES:** In Orange.

**JG:** In Orange.

**ES:** In Orange, Texas. I was working down there in the shipyard and a bag factory.

**JG:** During the war?

**ES:** During the war.

**JG:** World War II, okay.

**ES:** And her and her family moved down there and...

**JG:** Tell us a little bit about Orange during World War II. It jumped 5 times larger from what it was before the war, population wise. Can you tell us a little bit about what you did? Did you work in the shipyards?

**ES:** Yes sir. I worked at two shipyards. I worked at one shipyard as a ventilator man. I worked in another shipyard as a ship fitter helper. Then I worked at a paper mill there in Orange and I got my hand in a bag mill and I had to lay off from work about six weeks. So, while I was off I preached a revival out from Center there. I went on back to work; I worked there for a while and then I began to feel my call to preach. So I went to my superintendent and told him that I was going to quit and start evangelizing. He said, "You got a good job here, you gonna get out there and you not going to make a living." I said, "I will, I'll make some of a living, but my benefits will be eternal." He said, "Are you not sure it will be infernal?" (laughter) I said, "Well, I don't know, but I just feel the call of God so I'm going to make the leap." So I left, went on to evangelistic field. The first new car I ever bought was a 1950 model ford. I paid nineteen hundred and something dollars for it.

**JG:** Where were you living then, in Oklahoma?

**ES:** No, in Orange then.

**JG:** Still in Orange in '50, okay.

**ES:** Yes. Well then we started...I saw my wife and I thought she was about 13 years old. I thought she was a pretty 13 year old, but she's too young for me. And so, later on I learned that she was older so I kinda got a little closer to her, you know. So, we started eyeing each other and finally wound up marrying. I tell it joking sometime, but she finally talked me into marrying her.

**JG:** So, you did evangelistic work in Oklahoma?

**ES:** Louisiana, Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas, but mainly in Oklahoma. There is a little unique story about Oklahoma. I was preaching a revival in Erath, Louisiana. And a man from Oklahoma came and he was preaching revival in another place there. Well on their off night, he came to visit our revival. And he came after church he said "Bro. Strong, do you want to go to Oklahoma and preach." I said, "Well yes, I would like to get out of Texas my home state for a little bit, but I don't know anybody in Oklahoma." He said, "Well I do." I said, "Well you don't even know me." He said, "Yes I do know you. I've been investigating you. I've been asking about you. If you want to go to Oklahoma, I'll send you to Oklahoma and you can stay there for a solid year if you want to." I said, "Really?" He said, "Yes." I said, "Okay, good." He made one call, 500 miles. I got there and the pastor, I preached one night. The pastor got up the next morning and the preacher said, "Bro. Strong you are going to pastor the church here for three weeks, I'm leaving to get married. You can live in my house here. I have got a cup here in the cabinet with fifty dollars in it. That is for change and things you might need. I've got an open grocery account here at the store close by. You can get any kind of groceries you want. I'll be back in three weeks." Lord, I thought. But we did, we preached revival, had a good revival and baptized people. And we left, and he told me before I left, he said, "You'll leave before I get here for your next revival." And so sure enough I did. I left and went and preached for the superintendent up there. So, we left and he came in and I stayed a year in Oklahoma preaching. Now, I got plenty to say, you just ask me what you want.

**JG:** Well, I would like to get to Diboll if we could. Were you in Oklahoma immediately prior or Louisiana?

**DB:** No, no, Louisiana. Tell him about the church you built in Louisiana.

**ES:** At where?

**DB:** Tell him about the church you built in Louisiana.

**ES:** I went to Tallulah Louisiana, I preached revival there and it was just a hand full of people, but they fell in love with me and I felt sorry for them. They didn't have a pastor and they begged me to come pastor them. I said, "I'll come and we will build a church but it won't be a long term. I'll just come because I feel sorry for you and I believe I can." I was about 28 years old. So we built a church there.

**DB:** Tell them where you started in the barn, the barn church. Ya'll started services in the barn.

**ES:** We first started there, before we built the church in a hay barn out in the country. It was quite a deal. I played the accordion. We went there and one night I saw the front door, some boys outside catching bugs and poking them through the window. They was flying all around there, people scared of bugs you know. So, I eased out the side door and caught them on the front porch. (laughter) Anyway, I went back and they didn't give me no more trouble. But, later on, I was going to build a church there. And some of the old Dads said, "There will never be a Pentecostal church in this town, never, never, never." Well, I had a plumber in my church that was working for this man in the city and I knew he had some lots in the city. So I went and called on the house and talked to my plumber and we got friends and I would go sit on the front porch with these old people, eat ice cream with them and made friends with them. And, I said, "Mr. Shicker don't you have some property here?" He said, "Yes, I have got some lots here." I said, "Will you sell me a couple of lots for church?" He said, "Sure will." And I said, "Now I've got everything ready. How quick can you do it?" I said, "Well let's go, let's do it tomorrow." Well when he got the deeds signed, some of the old city slickers came and said, "Mr. Shicker we don't want that man here in town, he's Pentecostal, we don't want him here in town." He said, "Listen, that is a good man, and this community needs a church and that is my land, he got a deed to it, he paid the down payment on it and he can build one there." We started building. We had to start from the ground up. I had to get a cement mixer. The men would get together and we would mix the concrete. We was working on the sewer for the bathroom. Well, the neighbors that lived next to it there, they were boogers. Our cement mixer was making havoc with his TV. So it made them mad. I didn't know about it at the time, but they made it up between themselves, him and another man or two around there. He said, "We are going over there and mop that world up with that little guy." So they came over, and when they got over there, I had a couple of my men down in that hole working. They were big robust men, they looked down in that hole and saw them and they turned and walked away. So we built that church. I was on the roof one morning, one frosty morning. I had a big long tall black man working with me. We had sawed some of the ends of the roofing off. We didn't trim it off real smooth at first we just let them go wild until we got through. Well, that morning I got up on the comb of that church and I started sliding down. I thought, my God, at the end of this place is all kind of nails and boards and if I fall down there that will kill me for sure. So I reached out with my leg and stopped myself with one of those boards and I reached my hand way back up and this black man caught my hand. You talk about angel's hand, when that black man pulled me back up, you know. I said, "Let's get down from here until this frost gets off." So we built that church. I stayed there for a year and a half, got the church going real good. It's burned now, that one burned but they bought another one, it's going real, real well. Then, I came to Diboll.

**JG:** What brought you to Diboll?

**ES:** Okay, I preached revival here for Brother O.R. Fauss in Diboll in 1951.

**JG:** What was that last name?

**DB:** Fauss.

**ES:** Fauss F-A-U-S-S. Everybody knows him around here. He is a speed demon, and a hunter and a fisherman, outlaw hunter and fisherman.

**JG:** Go ahead.

**ES:** I'm going to tell all this because if he is still alive and read this he wouldn't like it. (laughter)

**JG:** But you had preached a revival in 1951 and...

**ES:** Right. And there was an elderly lady here that was in that revival. There was a man here in the church that was going on vacation and she told him said, "I want you to go by and see if Bro. Strong will come be our pastor." He said, "Well, I'll go by and see him. I'm going through there anyway." So he came by and he called me out to the curb and he started talking to me and tried to make a financial bargain with me to be the pastor. I said, "I won't work under those situations." And so we talked and he still tried to dicker with me and I said, "No, I won't work under those conditions." He said, "Well you know, all I have to do is go back and say nothing and you won't go." I said, "That is okay with me." I said, "I don't know where I'm going, I'm not going to be here much longer, but I'm going somewhere. I don't have to go to Diboll. It doesn't matter to me. God has a place for me somewhere." So he went back and sure enough later on I got a postcard from him. And, well it just worked out till I come and talk to the church board. Well, at that time the church changed pastors about every year and a half. And, so when I came I learned that and I told the church board I said, "Now I won't work under these circumstances. You can vote on me in six months if necessary but you are not going to set a certain time every time they have a business meeting to elect our church officers, you are not going to vote on me. I won't have that." They said, "We don't want that." Well he was sitting there and he didn't say nothing. So they elected me as pastor here. In about a year and a half after that he came to me and said, "In our business meeting we are going to have an election on you." I said, "No you are not." "Yes we are." "No you are not." "Yes we are." "No, you are not." "What you gonna do about it?" I said, "Give me a few days and I'll get back with you." Later on, he said, "What are you going to do?" I said "I'm going to have a church business meeting before we have the annual church officers meeting and I'm going to tell the church that it has come to me that the church is going to practice an annual pastoral election and that they want to vote on me this year. And I'm going to tell you what I'm going to do, if the church decides they are going to do that, I'm resigning that night. You won't vote on me, I'll resign that night, but if they say they don't want to have a church election every year, I'm going to have...I'm going to tell you what I'm going to do so you can start working on it. If you can block it okay. I'm going to have the church to pass a resolution in their business meeting that they put it in the minutes that this church will not practice an annual pastoral election." After it was over he said, "That was just as smooth as it could be, that was done fair." Three weeks later, he said that was a quick as a barrel of snakes. Well, I had trouble with him all the time. About every three months he would call me up, I was making too much money. I got a blackboard in the

back of a Sunday school room. I asked him, "How many hours do you work a week?" He said, "It's none of your business." I said, "How much do you make an hour?" He said, "It's none of your business." I said, "Okay, I'll put up here about how many hours you work and I know about how much you make an hour. And I'll put up here and we'll see." So I finished and I put up there how many hours I worked, me and my wife worked close to seventy hours every week. She did and I did. I put up there my salary compared to his. He looks at it and he says "You are not going to tell this on me are you?" And so I said, "Now, I want to tell you now, this is the last time I'm going through this with you, if there is anything else comes up, your craw gets full, come to me anytime, two times a week if you want to, but not on this subject, not on money. I've showed you that I'm not making too much money. I'm not making near as much as you do. I'm not making enough money but you such a tight wad – you think anything I make is too much. It is not too much. I don't want this coming up no more." I said, "You can bring anything else up to me you want to and I'll talk with you about it, but not this." So he never did bother me with it no more.

**JG:** Where was the church located when you came? And, if we can let's talk a little bit about...

**ES:** It was located right across from the high school.

**JG:** Just right over here.

**DB:** Where the Temple building stands.

**JG:** Okay. And...

**ES:** In a little pine grove, a beautiful, beautiful place.

**JG:** About how many members of the church did you have, in regular attendance?

**ES:** Back then?

**JG:** Yes, in the beginning when you first came.

**ES:** Probably a hundred and fifteen.

**JG:** Is that members or regulars?

**ES:** Regular Sunday school members and we built it up and we had as high as two hundred and thirty something.

**JG:** About what year was that?

**ES:** Pardon?

**JG:** You said you built it up, doubled it, what year approximately?

**ES:** That was about 1960, close to there. And, when I first came here the church had toilets outside, men's and women's toilets outside. No air-condition at all. The new educational building was under new construction. So, when we first came I finished that construction, paid it off, made a loan. And I borrowed a ditch-digging machine from the company and I got on that machine and dug a ditch for the sewer line and the water line. And, we installed restrooms in the church and put running water in, city water, city sewer, and finished that construction work there. And then we've just been progressing since then. In 1964, I moved in 1965, '64 Clyde Thompson, did you know him?

**JG:** Not personally no, I know who he was.

**ES:** Well, he was vice-president of the company and Arthur Temple had him to come down and talk to me. They wanted the land there where we were. I said "Mr. Thompson don't you park your car in my drive way no more. If you want to talk to me, you call me, and I'll meet you in Lufkin somewhere and we will talk." "Why?" I said, "I know what you want and when they see your car, they know your car, they know you, and they are going to know what you want." I said, "It's going to freeze things." I said, "Now, if you'll work with me, I'll work with you. I want to move the church, but the church...I know the sentiments of a church. They don't want to move the church at all. I want to move it." The sewer line ran in front of it. Had to go to the Gulf Station, go around and come to the back of the church and come in. Had to go down to the Okay Food and come around to the back. We had a bridge cross the front there and the sewer line run right under it. I said, "I would like to move away from here, but I know the church has been here all their life. I'm not going to try to move them without some incentive to move them. I've got to dangle something in front of them that they will want to move instead of me trying to make them move." I said, "Don't you park your car here any more." And he didn't, we met several times in Lufkin to talk. I said, "Now, Mr. Temple, Mr. Thompson, that is good property. I have to have something to help these people want to move." He said, "We can work something out." I said, "Okay, when we move I want to build another church. I need a bigger church and I want to build a brick church, a nice church." He said, "I can understand that." I said, "Well the company can help me do it. They can let me buy material at cost and get me some more property." He said, "We will be glad to do that." So that worked out. Mr. Temple himself come down and got me in his Cadillac, we started around here and there and he started out of the city limits. I said, "Wait a minute, wait a minute. I am not going out of the city limits. I said I'm in the city limits here and I don't want out of the city limits."

**JG:** Of course the city had just incorporated, just prior to that.

**ES:** Yes sir. He said "Bro. Strong if there is a building on the property you like, don't worry about that, we will just pick it up and move it." So we was coming down Hwy 59 and I said, "There it is right there." He said, "My God Brother Strong, that is expensive property." I said, "It is not too expensive for God." I said, "That is the property I want right there." He said, "Okay, okay, we will do it, we will do it." So he made me a deed to

the property and we were going to start moving it, moving the church. Well, when we started to move the church the builders said, "we can't move that church in one move like we thought we could. We are going to have to cut it into." It had a big tee on it, the education building. They said, "It's going to cost \$1500 more to move it." So I went to Mr. Temple and I said "Mr. Temple, I made the deal with you and I'll stick with it. But if you could, you could help me with this because it's going to cost \$1500 more to move the church than me and you thought at first." He said, "How much is that?" I said, "\$750 your part." He said "Wilbur, what do you think about that?" He was in the next office. He said, "what ever you say Arthur." He said, "Betty, write Bro. Strong a check for \$750." So we started moving it, when we did, you can put as much of this in there or take it out if you want to, Assembly of God raised up and said "we don't want you up here. They said, "You want to build a nice church and we got a small church here and it is very small and we don't want a big church here to dwarf us." I said, "Look what is going to happen is, and you can do it, your church is larger than mine right now." I said, "I'm going to build a church and your men are going to get jealous and you are going to build a church too. You are going to build a nice church." "We are not going to do it." I bickered with them for quite a while. Arthur Temple said, "Bro. Strong we are getting ready to move that church." I said, "We can't do it Mr. Temple, we can't do it." He said, "Why?" I said, "Assembly of God people is raising a ruckus." He said, "What do we care?" I said, "You care and I care." He said, "I don't care." I said, "Yes you do." "How do I care?" I said, "Mr. Temple, you don't want these men, their men and my men, at your company working together over there and them mad at one another." "Well, I didn't think about it that way." I said, "Well, that is the way it will be. Now, if you will give me time, I'll work at this and I'll work it peaceably to move in here. Our men and your men will work together over there side by side and be friends." Well, we worked at it a while longer and they still wouldn't budge. Mr. Temple come back and chomped on his cigar and cursed and said, "What is that preacher going to preach about Sunday." I said, "I don't know but I'm sure it will be something good." He said, "Let's move that church." I said, "No sir, no sir, we are not going to move it." I said, "Now look, you've got an acre of land between them and me. Give me that acre of land; I'll split it with them. They don't have a deed to their property. They've only got a 99-year contract. They pay something like a dollar a year for that, but they don't have a clear deed to it. You give me that acre of land, I'll split that acre of land with them and you give them a clear title to their church and we will settle." "Bro. Strong that is..." I said, "Mr. Temple one acre of land is not worth nothing to you between the two churches. It's not big enough to build no kind of a plant and you can't build a housing project out of it." I said, "That will settle it." "Okay, okay we will do it, get to work on it." I went back to the pastor and I said "Brother Hood, I'll do this, this, this and this. You'll get a half-acre of land right here on the highway, extremely expensive land. You'll get a clear deed to your church that you have never had a clear deed to. If you will talk to your men and you'll be peaceable and tell them to be peaceable and we will get along together. Me and you have never had any problems." But I said, "Now this has come up and there is problems, I want you to help me." He said "I'll meet with my board; I think we can work it out." He came back and said, "We are going to do it; we are going to do it." Before all that happened, Mr. Thompson said, "Bro. Strong that is your acre of land, you go ahead and take that acre of land and tell them to kiss your foot and we are going to move that church in." I said, "No, we are not Mr.

Thompson, we are not, I'm going to have peace here at any cost." So we finally worked it out and so Mr. Temple moved us in there. We started construction on it and we started, we put it back together, the two buildings, we put them back together. We had church in that for a year and we started building on the auditorium in 1966. And we built on that for about a year before we got into it. We men worked on it and we hired some craftsmen to help us with it, but we men did most of it ourselves. And that is where we are.

**JG:** Let's talk a little bit about some of the broader community things. You mentioned city limits while ago, of course the city of Diboll didn't incorporate until '62 as a city. The late '60's I guess when the company started bringing in Hispanic families. And of course during the '60's the company started growing, and expanding and growing in different avenues, went public in '69, so maybe just talk in the context of that, the community as a whole in the 1960's.

**ES:** Okay, Mr. Thompson came to me again and said "Bro. Strong I want you to meet with me and Vernon Burkhalter. We are going to get a few of the pastors here in town to meet together to form a welcome committee for the Spanish people that are coming here." We did, we met in the old scout house. I can go back through my diary. I have had a diary for about 60 years, but I don't remember right now what year it was. But, we met in the old scout house and we formed a committee to welcome them in here. So they came. Before they came, the town, the wage scale here was pretty low. When my kids graduated from school they left and went to Houston, Dallas, Fort Worth, places like that, so they would have better employment. They had some family there. My kids didn't stay here and raise their families, because they moved where they would have better jobs. They raised their families off from here. So that began to dwindle my church some. When the Hispanics come in they were clannish, like normal, like I would be. They didn't want to go to an English speaking church. I couldn't speak Spanish. They didn't want to go to that church, so they went to another church. And so, they come here and they worked and they made good employees for the church and so during the school years then I preached two of the Baccalaureate services, the graduation exercises. I went to Mr. Wilbur Pate – did you ever know him?

**JG:** I know of him.

**ES:** He is good man. He was Superintendent here then. I went to him and I said, "Mr. Pate, why can't my church have a graduation exercise?" He said, "Bro. Strong, they could. None of the preachers ever wanted one. I didn't think you wanted to have them." I said, "Well, this is a new preacher here and I want one." And I said, "Just as quick as you can." He called me up later and said, "It will be this year, I got it through, and we are going to have it this year." We had it at our church. So he and Mr. Ramsey and some of the singers from the school and my choir sang the songs that year, 'I can not find my way alone.' And, I preached the Baccalaureate service and I preached another one at the Methodist church. And when I first came to Diboll the pastors here would go to the school every morning and have morning devotion over the loud speaker, over the public address system for the school. And so, that went on until they finally closed the prayer in the school down, finally closed it down. A lady came to me not very long ago, and said,

“You don’t know me, but I know you. I came up as a child in the school. I remember you praying for us every morning at school.” Said, “I remember it was always refreshing to me because it seemed like you loved us all and wanted us to study hard and be good. I remember that very well.” So I had a great part in the community service here.

**JG:** What about a couple of other things that come to mind in the ‘60’s, school integration and the Vietnam War? Just, from your perspective, as someone who, not just as a minister but as a member of the community, can you talk a little bit what stand out as far as integration and the war?

**ES:** The integration was very slow here, very slow. Mr. Arthur Temple can have much, much credit for that. The colored people were good workers and they were a lot of employees here at the place. And the...it was pretty rough for a while, but Mr. Temple was a real community man himself and he worked with all people. He would have meetings and talk to them about trying to get along one with another and about the importance of education. We ought to be fair to our fellow man, so forth. And he worked, and it worked well. So, he was able to integrate the school system and work it out real good. And so, it’s worked real well. We had some men that went to the Vietnam War from this community. Not many from my church, but a few from this area. But we were all patriotic, everybody. We had prayer constantly for the boys, for the soldiers and they was a part of our church program to pray for them.

**JG:** You mentioned Mr. Temple, Arthur Temple, Jr. of course; I understand you lived near him for a while. How was it being his neighbor?

**ES:** It was great, fantastic.

**JG:** Did he have a lot of loud parties? (laughter)

**ES:** He had some.

**JG:** I was just teasing of course. Did you see him out and about a good bit, around the house?

**ES:** Yes sir, not a whole lot, some. Now, I went and hunted on the Boggy Slough deal, which is owned by the company. I went and hunted up there some with Mr. Thompson, who was the vice president and Mr. Temple. There was a mayor here at that time. I hunted with him up there some in Boggy Slough. I enjoyed that.

**JG:** Deer hunting?

**ES:** Yes sir.

**JG:** Did you duck hunt any?

**ES:** I didn't duck hunt. I fished and deer hunted. Mr. Temple was a great sportsman, outdoorsman; he was very clever. He built that clubhouse which cost much, much, much money. He furnished the food, bedding, lodging, and have these congressmen come in and hunt a week at a time. He would put them up and feed them and send them with one of his jeeps to their stand and if they killed anything he would go out to the stand with his jeep and bring the deer in and have his men to skin it and pack it up for them and take it back home. And when a bill came up in congress he'd call these guys up.

**JG:** I wanted to go back.

**ES:** Does that make some sense to you?

**JG:** Well yes, somewhat. It was public relations.

**ES:** This Charlie Wilson, do you know anything about him?

**JG:** A little bit, it was public and governmental relations.

**ES:** He came up in Arthur Temple's pocket.

**DB:** Tell him about some of the people.

**ES:** Arthur Temple was able to get a lot done for the company through him.

**JG:** Yes. Let's talk, a couple of things, I don't want to spend too much time on one or the other. But I want to get ultimately to the Texas Bible College that we mentioned earlier, the new big campground in Lufkin. Let's just go with that for right now. Tell a little bit about that, and again from the context from your perspective, someone who has been in Angelina County for so long. What is the Texas Bible College?

**ES:** Texas Bible College had its beginning, we bought property in Houston to start Texas Bible College.

**JG:** We being who, the United Pentecostal Church?

**ES:** Yes sir, yes sir. We bought property there and started a church. We found a church that, a building there that was already there. It was run down quite a bit, but we started college in that. I carried a chart around over the entire Texas District, me and two more men, we carried charts around from church to church raising funds for Texas Bible College. We raised the funds, built the Texas Bible College, and the meantime it grew, the people around it grew up and it was mainly citizens that were not really upstanding and the parents in the district and all over Texas they didn't want their kids to come there because of that. So we had to do something. So, we bought, sold that and bought property here in Lufkin and brought the college here to Lufkin.

**JG:** From Houston to Lufkin.

**ES:** From Houston to Lufkin, that is right.

**JG:** Were there any churches in Lufkin that were instrumental in helping with that?

**ES:** Yes sir, yes sir.

**JG:** Can you name some of those?

**ES:** Well about all the churches were instrumental in helping.

**JG:** Everybody, okay. Any individuals stand out?

**ES:** Well, what happened, we built it with free labor from ministers all over the district. Bro. Guidroz, our district superintendent would set a certain week here at the camp and he would have some cooks to come and we'd buy them food and they would fix us meals and us ministers would come and work and build the tabernacle. So, I was close by here and I was close to Bro. Guidroz and he was a good friend of mine and so we worked quite a bit together. But quite a few of the men from the Lufkin area here from my church and their church came to work on the church, on the tabernacle. And we got plaques there; my name is on the plaque as the President. I was President here in the area for 20 years and I was the Home Mission Director for two years, Section Secretary for two years, on the Texas Bible College Board for 4 years, president for 20 years. So, I had quite a bit to do with it. I had one of the men that worked in my church was a foreman for the commissioner that worked, he is from Zavalla. I asked him if he could help us oil our roads there. At that time it was just dirt and mud. And so we did, we oiled our roads there at the campground. Of course, now they got most of the main roads they got them concreted now, but back then they were dirt and mud. We oiled them and that was like coming to town.

**JG:** Well it certainly, I think in size has grown a good bit in recent years. Can you comment a little bit on that?

**ES:** We have now normally around 5,000 people to come to camp meeting.

**JG:** Which generally last how long?

**ES:** It lasts a week.

**JG:** A week, okay.

**ES:** We have three youth camps a year. We have an annual men's fellowship a year. We have an annual ladies meeting a year. We have an annual youth convention a year. We have an annual Spanish camp meeting a year, and odd and ends there and the camp was used during Hurricane Ike. That was a central location for a lot of people; they stayed there. One of our pastors, Brother Scoggins, was over that department. He was there day

and night almost to take care of the cooking and getting things together and housing people.

**JG:** Is it still a designated shelter area?

**ES:** Pardon?

**JG:** Is it still a designated shelter area in the county for disasters?

**ES:** Yes sir, if the storm came and they needed a place it would be a designated place for them.

**JG:** Of course, you mentioned earlier that the church in Diboll had every year and a half review. You've done quite a few year and a half terms since then.

**ES:** Somebody asked me one time how in the world did you stay there that long? I said, "It's one of two things, or one of three things." I said "One is, the church has never wanted me to leave, number two is that God has never told me to leave, and number three is it might be that I am so mean they couldn't run me off." (laughter) So I don't know which, but I've never had the church to vote against me. I had one time, this same man I mentioned to back yonder, that was very, very, very rough. A good man, but he was the voice of authority in his family all of his life, and I knew I would have problems with him when I came, but anyway, he was going to run me off. He said, "It's time for you to leave and you are going. I'm here now and you are going to leave here." I said, "Well I may but I'll be it to leaving." I said, "You are not just going to run me off because you and a member or two of your family is against me. The rest of the church is not. I am not running off from trouble. I'm not afraid of trouble. I don't want any trouble, but I'm not going to run from it either. I feel like I'm here in God's will." He said, "I'll cut your financial strings." I said, "Okay, that is okay, I don't mind working. My hands have been in dirt many times; I'll work. If I feel like God is here that doesn't matter to me." So he said, "We are going to vote on you this year." I said, "No you are not."

**DB:** Uncle Dean, tell him a little bit about the people who have come up through your church. The years that you had the Baccalaureate, some of those were top honor students from your church. Year after year, students out of his church made valedictorian, Don Grigsby.

**ES:** They came back and worked and two of them was Mr. Thompson's office secretary, worked there in the company

**JG:** Who was that? Do you recall the names?

**ES:** Yes sir, Billy Merle Howard and Bettie Ann Wilkerson. They worked for Mr. Clyde Thompson in his office. They had good jobs, they like them real, real well.

**JG:** Now Debra mentioned Don Grigsby.

**DB:** Don Grigsby went on to be a pastor.

**ES:** He graduated here and was in my church. I raised him from a small child. He is now over a prison ministry. He preaches in about five different prisons every week. He has baptized over 10,000 men over the period of time he has been there. There is been probably 5,000 to receive the Holy Ghost.

**JG:** What area?

**ES:** In Huntsville.

**JG:** In the Huntsville area.

**DB:** He is the Texas Department of Criminal Justice Chaplain and he pastors the Madisonville church, the new Pentecostal Church in Madisonville. Tell him how many pastors have come from your church. I think that is remarkable.

**ES:** Well Brother Don Grigsby came from my church. Brother Kelsey Griffith, he is now a world evangelist. He evangelizes in all the United States and goes overseas. In fact the headquarters has him occupied now for home missions work. When they have a home missions meeting they want him to go and preach that conference. He is a minister trainer.

**DB:** He grew up at your church.

**ES:** Yes he is a scriptorium. He taught in Texas Bible College for years down there. He taught in Texas Bible College in Minnesota and then he has evangelized all over. He pastored a church in, up north someplace, I forget.

**DB:** He is the son of Earl and Mary Jane Griffin, from the rock house.

**ES:** Yes, he is a chip off the prayers of the rock house here in Diboll.

**JG:** What about in 54 years of some of the church services, any one or two that stand in your memory, any weddings, church services, funerals, anything like that.

**ES:** Yes sir. I have conducted many, many, many weddings, many, many, many funerals. We have had fantastic revivals where people prayed through and received the Holy Ghost baptized in Jesus name. I was official baptizer at the camp meeting there for several years. We bought a horse trough, so Bro. Guidroz had me to do the baptizing. I had waders that I would get in the water with them and baptize them. I would stand outside sometime and baptize them. We had baptismal service up there real often. We have had a lot of outstanding services here in Diboll. Bro. Don Grigsby and Bro. Kelsey Griffith preached for us here, and Bro. Mangus preached for us here, Bro. Dettart, just a lot of our officials here now have preached for us here at Diboll.

**DB:** Before you leave that, there were a total of 18 children that grew up in that church that went into ministry. Whether foreign missions or home missions, or pastor their own church.

**ES:** Or pastor's wives.

**DB:** And pastor's wife's. And I think the story about the Ward girls is phenomenal. Tell him a little about the Ward girls.

**ES:** Do what now?

**DB:** The Ward girls, tell him about the Ward girls.

**ES:** Jill has...she grew up here in this church. She married a man from Bible College and they have been in the mission field now for like 10 years. They have pastored in Germany, they've pastored in...

**DB:** Romania.

**ES:** ...Romania now. They build churches over there and pastored them and started from scratch. They recently had to have a chip put in them to travel.

**DB:** To come back to the states. The Ward girls all married and are in the ministry.

**ES:** Nancy graduated from my church and she married a pastor and they are pastoring now at Canton. They pastored also before then. They are doing real good. They got a son that is a preacher and he is doing good.

**DB:** There is Amy and Doug.

**ES:** Amy married a man who is a minister. He is not real active right now. He is in air conditioning work right now. Betty Ann Wilkerson graduated out of the church here. She married and married a preacher and they have pastored churches, built churches. We have got quite a number of other people here that came out that was preacher's wives and preachers that came out of the church here. They are just scattered all over doing work.

**JG:** Yes. One other question, outside of the ministry, what are your hobbies, do you have any hobbies? What do you enjoy doing?

**ES:** Yes sir, yes sir, I deer hunt and fish when I can.

**JG:** What kind of fishing?

**ES:** Any kind, I like to catch bass. I like to eat crappie and catfish.

**JG:** Where do you fish?

**ES:** Well Sister Chance, a lady in my church, she has a membership in Silver Leaf Club, over out from Flint. Well in fact, she has a club all over. She has one in Tennessee, Arkansas, Missouri, California, she has got a membership in different places and so she lets us go with her. Her husband is dead. I said, "Lorene, it is dangerous for you to go off you just a woman, you better let me and Sister Strong go with you." I said, "You need a big man along to protect you."

**JG:** Now where is this you are going? I am not really familiar with where you are going.

**ES:** It is about 10 miles south of Tyler, Flint, Silver Leaf...

**DB:** It is time-share club.

**JG:** Oh, okay. Is it on a body of water?

**ES:** Lake Palestine.

**JG:** Lake Palestine, okay. Now, did you always enjoy bass fishing? And what I'm getting at is, were you into fishing when Sam Rayburn was put in?

**ES:** Yes sir. Yes sir.

**JG:** Tell us a little bit about early bass fishing at Sam Rayburn.

**ES:** Early bass fishing, I'll be glad too. I always have a lot of good friends. I kind of pick friends. I pick friends that like me and likes what I like to do. Bro. Rogers is a good friend of mine. He pastored a little church at Lufkin. We would go fishing together on Sam Rayburn and he found a honey hole over there. And me and him went over there and fished quite often. He told me one time, he said, "Brother Strong there is one place" the hole wasn't any bigger than this entire building here. He said, "Preachers that I've sent here, I've asked them to keep a count of how many they've caught, there has been over 500 bass caught in this one honey hole here." So I've fished with him.

**JG:** Now where was the honey hole? (laughter) Do you still fish it?

**DB:** Can you still fish it?

**JG:** Do you still fish it?

**ES:** I'm not going to tell you. (laughter)

**JG:** Oh boy! (laughter)

**ES:** Well, it is not there anymore. The trees that were there that made the honey hole they are dead and gone. I suppose all the fish has been all caught out of there. I don't know I haven't been there in years. But, it was one more good fishing place.

**JG:** Now, how many fish would y'all catch say, in a good day?

**ES:** We would catch the limit.

**JG:** Which was what at that time?

**ES:** Twenty-five, and sometime we would go home and put them in the freezer and go back and catch twenty-five more. You were only allowed twenty-five in your possession out on the lake.

**JG:** And now it is just five.

**ES:** Yes, yes.

**DB:** Really!

**ES:** Yes, in a certain size.

**JG:** Yes. Well at Rayburn it has to be over fourteen.

**ES:** I went fishing one time, out from Crockett. Me and Brother Rogers walked up and this man said, "Hey y'all come here. I'm going to have to leave and I'll show you a place here that is a honey hole." And he said, "I'm going to tell you how to do it too." He said, "Now don't throw it out there and let your line drop on the ground. No sir, you throw it out there and as soon as it hits, you start reeling it in as fast as you can. The white perch will hit it." We caught over 100 one day and 80 the next day. I went over there one time by myself and there was two ladies standing there fishing. But they didn't know how and they didn't know where. They didn't get out far enough and they didn't know how to do it. And I stood there and it hurt me so much and I didn't know where no other place was that was good. And I said, "Ladies if you will let me fish right here between you, I'll fix your rig up and I'll cast out and catch the first fish for you and we will all catch fish." I said, "Now, they are out there, but you are not getting them." "No we are not, we are not getting any at all." I said, "Well I'll show you." They looked at one another and thought what about this guy. Finally they said, "Okay, okay." I said, "Okay, let me get right here between you. Give me your rigs. I'm going to fix it for you and I'm going to put the first shiner on. I'm going to cast it out there and catch the first fish for you. I'm going to tell you how to do it. You throw it out there at a certain place and when you get it out there you start reeling as quick as you get it out there. Don't let it hit the bottom if you can help it, you reel real fast and you will catch fish. If you let it hit the bottom a little old mud cat about like that will get your bait. They are not good to eat and they will just eat your bait up. But this place is swarming with white perch. It is a big old brick embankment here and they come up here to spawn. They can't get over it; they are in there by the

thousands.” So me and Brother Rogers went one day, I was over there and I caught a bunch of fish and I started up the bank with them. I had two stringers of fish. And a black man sitting on the bank said, “Sir, sir, white man, don’t try to come up this bank with them fish. Man you can’t do that. It’s too hard; you can’t do that. Put half of them fish back” And he said, “I’ll sit here and watch them for you. Nobody will get them I’ll watch them for you. Sure enough man, sure enough, I’m telling you the truth.” So I did, I put half of them back and man when I got up that bank with those fish, you had to go through sand, and I’d make a step and loose half of it. I finally got up there, and he said, “Now let me have them fish and you go back down there and get the rest of them fish. And I did. Man I caught fish, fish, fish. Now I haven’t had many of them good times.

**BM:** No, but you and Bill McDuffie used to catch a lot of fish.

**ES:** Yes.

**JG:** Now did you fish out of a boat any, did you have a boat, or bank fishing?

**ES:** Well, yes we fished in a boat some. But mainly now, on a big lake we fished in a boat. Bass fishing we fished in a boat.

**JG:** Did you use artificial lures?

**ES:** Artificial lures, for cat fishing we used stink bait, bait we made our self out of ruined cheese and blood and what have you.

**JG:** Did you ever get into any of the early tournaments? You know when Rayburn first started that was big.

**ES:** No, I don’t fish tournaments.

**JG:** Yes, okay. All right, well, that is about what I had. I see we are well over an hour and a half. Like I said before, you can’t get a person’s life into an interview. But that is I think a good overall coverage. I appreciate it Brother Strong.

**ES:** Did I put in there about when I first came to Diboll about the old commissary?

**JG:** No, okay we have got a little bit more time. What did you want to tell us about the commissary?

**ES:** The commissary was over here, it was called Southern Pine Lumber Company.

**JG:** Now it was shut down when you got here wasn’t it?

**ES:** No sir, no sir. When I first preached revival here it was wide open. They used wooden tokens for money.

**JG:** Not if '54 though were they?

**ES:** In '51.

**JG:** Oh you mean when you did the revival.

**ES:** When I was in revival in '51.

**JG:** Because it closed down in '54. But I think they had long outlawed those tokens.

**ES:** Yes, they had started using it for offices and what have you then. But before then the commissary used wooden tokens. You bought your clothes, your food, the caskets, drug store, barbershop...

**JG:** Fiddle strings.

**ES:** ...harness for the mules, yes fiddle strings. Anything you bought, anything, it was the community store.

**JG:** It was the super Wal-Mart of its day.

**ES:** Super Wal-Mart of its day. That is right. They had the...

**JG:** You could go to the post office, and the bank and the barbershop, and the doctor's office were all there too.

**ES:** Yes sir.

**DB:** All in the same place.

**JG:** So they had stuff that super Wal-Mart doesn't even have. Wal-Mart can't get banks; they have tried to. But you remember it from '51 huh?

**ES:** Oh yes, oh yes. Well see, a lot of that was still going on in '54 when I came here. It had been some but not a whole lot.

**JG:** Now the Village was being built about that time wasn't it? The shopping center, do you remember that?

**ES:** Yes see, after I came here the company began to tear these old buildings down and build new ones after I came here. These new additions, LBJ and...

**JG:** Right, Walter Allen I think was the first one, the projects, talking about the government housing. All right, well I sure appreciate it.

**END OF INTERVIEW**

