

FRAZIER SISTERS

Interview 215a

November 30, 2010, at the home of Rose Frazier Corder, Lufkin, Texas

Jonathan Gerland, Interviewer

Richard Donovan, Participant

Patsy Colbert, Transcriber

ABSTRACT: In this interview with Jonathan Gerland and Richard Donovan, sisters Rose Frazier Corder, Wilhelmenia Frazier Hardy, and Arverta Frazier Mosely reminisce about their lives growing up in the southern Angelina County African American settlement of Boykin Settlement in the middle of the 20th century. They all attended the Vernon County Line School (near the Blue Hole) and then went on to have professions and higher education. Mrs. Mosely attended Prairie View College and became a teacher at Camp Nancy and then spent the rest of her career as a County Home Demonstration Agent or County Extension Agent. At first the office was segregated and she only worked with African American women, but in the 1960's and 1970's the offices were racially integrated and she taught all women to can and freeze food and other domestic skills. Mrs. Hardy moved to Houston and then Milwaukee, Wisconsin with her husband, where she attended cosmetology school and real estate school. She talks about the differences in culture and race relations in Milwaukee than in Houston and Boykin Settlement. Mrs. Corder moved to Milwaukee as a teenager to live with her sister Wilhelmenia, where she adapted to life in a school of 3000 students. She continued her education and became a nurse in Milwaukee and California, before returning to Lufkin. The Frazier sisters grew up in this African American community in a family of 13 children that all survived to adulthood. Their ancestors, the Runnels, were former slaves who settled in the area.

Jonathan Gerland (hereafter JG): Today's date is November 30, 2010. My name is Jonathan Gerland, I am with Richard Donovan and we are in the home of Mrs. Rose Frazier Corder. I believe I had that right, in Lufkin. And we are with three of the last surviving Frazier Sisters. We are going to do an oral history recording today and just learn a little bit more about their family and about their experiences growing up. I thought we could begin... maybe we would just have each lady state their name for the recording. Either state when you were born or what age you are, whichever one you wanted to do. Mrs. Corder we will start with you.

Rose Frazier Corder (hereafter RC): I am Rose Frazier Corder. My date of birth is August 23, 1935.

Wilhelmenia Hardy (hereafter WH): My name is Wilhelmenia Hardy. I was born April 17, 1920.

JG: 1920, we will slide it a little closer here.

Arverta Frazier Mosley (hereafter AM): Arverta Frazier Mosley is my name. I am the first child in the Harrison and Mary Frazier family. I was born April 7, 1912.

JG: 1912, so you are 98 is that correct?

AM: I am 98 years old and if I'm blessed to see April 7th in 1911 (2011) I will be 99 years old.

JG: Ninety-nine, well that is great! You are looking very well.

AM: I have seen a lot of changes and felt a lot of changes in my life especially since I've been up in age so much.

JG: Yes ma'am.

AM: And I am so thankful.

JG: What are some of your earliest memories? I'm sorry for interrupting. Where were you born?

AM: Where?

JG: Yes ma'am.

AM: I was born in the Boykin Settlement, that is called Boykin Settlement about ten miles below Zavalla, Texas in the lower part of Angelina County. I was the first child of a family of thirteen children. There were three boys and ten girls. It's kind of interesting to me to even know how we came in this world in pairs. First two girls, and then my first brother was born and his name was Neil Frazier. Then my mother had three girls, a set of twins and a daughter and after these three girls there was another boy born and then here come four girls, and after the four girls were born then another brother came. Then she had her baby child which is Rose Marie Corder. And I used to hear her pray so much that the Lord would spare her to see her children grown. She saw all her children grown and she never did see one buried before she passed away.

JG: That is something; that is pretty remarkable. What, any of you as I'm sure there is a little bit of an age difference here, but what are some of your earliest memories? Were you all born in the same area?

AM: We were all born in the same area.

JG: Just talk a little bit about some of your earliest memories of just what life was like at the time and even in that area. Describe school maybe, some memories you might have of the schools, what was that like, and eventually I would like to get into a little bit of race relations, just what race relations was like at the time.

WH: Are you going to talk?

RC: Okay, I'm number thirteen so things were different when I came along. School as far as school I remember starting school at the age of four.

JG: Now this would be in the Depression years supposedly, the thirties I guess.

RC: Yes, and some days I would walk to school, which was three or four miles. I would walk with my older siblings. My first teacher was Mrs. Collins.

JG: Okay.

RC: And after Mrs. Collins came my cousin who was also my teacher, Helen Patties. The first thing I remember Helen taught me was to add and carry a number. For example eight and eight is sixteen, you write the six down and then you mentally plant a little one in the other column and add. That is what I remember first at school, not writing, but adding.

JG: How many siblings did you have going to school with you at the time? You said you walked to school so I guess everybody walked to school?

RC: Yes, in the spring time. There were five I believe, five siblings and then we would walk home. Now on cold days I didn't go to school because it was too cold for the baby. After that at fifteen, well...each...I went to school in the Vernon County line for...

JG: Say that again.

RC: The Vernon County Line School.

JG: The Vernon County Line School, okay.

RC: Yes, until I reached the...oh, the eleventh grade and then I went to Milwaukee to live with my sister and continue my education.

JG: And that is Milwaukee, Wisconsin?

RC: Wisconsin, yes.

JG: Okay, I want to get to that in a little bit because that is probably another story in itself but tell me a little bit more about the Vernon School.

RC: There were two teachers, Mrs. Collins taught kindergarten through ninth grade and then Mr. Phillips taught...no Mrs. Collins taught through eighth and then Mr. Phillips taught through from nine to twelve. There were about 23 or 24 students in the room, Mrs. Collins' room. Each grade she would...each class would last approximately 20 minutes otherwise she would not be able to get around to all the classes. For example she would

say “second grade arithmetic.” We would jump up on the stage by Mrs. Collins and then we would proceed to go...

JG: Was it one building, was the school one building?

RC: One building.

JG: How many rooms?

RC: Two.

JG: Two rooms okay.

RC: Well there were two rooms, a library and then a room in the back. Once upon a time I guess the school was let more students than they had when I came along.

JG: Did y’ all go to Vernon as well, the other two sisters here?

WH: I did, yes.

JG: You did.

AM: I did.

JG: Anything different from the way she described it than the memories you had when you went to school?

WH: Well when she went to school she had the opportunity to ride the bus. When we were going to school there was no transportation for the students, none whatsoever. So whether it was three or three and a half miles we walked. I started to school when I was about six. And, you know what we call jogging now?

JG: Jogging?

WH: Yes.

JG: Like running, jogging?

WH: Yes.

JG: Yes ma’am.

WH: Yes, well we didn’t know the word jogging at that time but we ran. We got up in the morning and got ourselves ready. You might not be interested in this but with the ten girls my mother saw that our hair was combed every day, every day your hair was combed. So we went out of the house looking rather lovely even though we had to walk

the three and a half miles we would start running. You know, we could almost run those three miles and we would get there sometime at...

JG: So, you were jogging but you didn't know that is what it was called.

WH: Ugh, ugh...and if I said we ran three miles people wouldn't understand but if you said we jogged three miles they would say, "Really, well I jogged four miles."

JG: What time did class start?

WH: Nine o'clock.

JG: Nine o'clock, okay.

WH: Is that right? Did ya'll start at nine?

RC: No, I think we started at eight.

AM: Eight something before we left.

WH: Well maybe we started at eight, I'm not for sure.

JG: Who was Vernon, how did that name come about? Did you know the name Vernon? Where did that name come from for the school?

WH: I'm not for sure. It might have been...was it named for someone in the community, Vernon?

AM: Vernon lived in the community.

WH: Well the school was named for him.

AM: I guess so.

JG: Was that a black person or a white person?

AM: Vernon was a black person that was Mr. Orange's son, Vernon Smith, Mr. Orange Smith's son.

WH: Well Vernon Smith was related to us wasn't he?

AM: No the other Smith, Marshton and Ivey and Oscar and them.

WH: He was related to them?

AM: Yes.

WH: Well they were related to us, Ivey and Marshton and...

AM: I know it but they came through Uncle Jim.

RP: It was a different Smith.

AM: It was a different Smith. That was Aunt Ella's children and Vernon was...I can't think of his mother's name now.

JG: You referred to the Boykin Settlement. Describe to someone such as myself, younger, and maybe just how did the land look. What are your memories of the land? Maybe when you were walking to school, the roads, were there big trees, little trees, was there pasture land? Describe some of that if you can.

AM: Some of the people had small time farms. We would say they were farming and then just some of them just kind of woodland no, well at first uh...

WH: Kind of forest land.

AM: Oh yes it was forest, big trees and little trees along the road.

JG: Who owned the land, did the people?

AM: We called it company land.

JG: Okay, so lumber companies owned a lot of the land.

AM: I think it was lumber companies, all around...where Vernon County Line School was it was some company land but my people owned the land where we lived.

JG: That is what I was going to ask you. Your parents owned the land that you lived on?

AM: Our parents owned the land where we were.

JG: What about some of your neighbors?

AM: They lived on company land.

JG: They lived on company land, okay.

AM: They lived on company land because I remember that our parents taught us to work. If you want anything in life you had to work for it. Well, we always had better and they always see that we had a little work to do and I'm glad that they taught us to work.

JG: What did your father do for a living?

AM: My father sawed logs mostly, you know, cut timber for companies and they would make logs.

JG: Did he work for one company in particular or was it more of a contract basis?

AM: I guess...I don't remember him signing no contract or nothing.

RC: He would work for anybody that would hire him to cut some logs if they had some to cut.

JG: Oh okay, but he didn't actually...he wasn't like a regular employee for Kirby Lumber Company or someone like that?

RC: No, because he was farming in between.

AM: No, no, no he wasn't.

JG: Right, right. That is what I was going to get to. How much land did you own and did you grow crops and what type of crops did you grow?

AM: It was a small farm. It was sixty acres I believe all together there where we lived. Wasn't that what it was?

JG: Was it all cleared?

AM: Oh no, no, no, no. It all wasn't cleared, it all wasn't fenced. After my parents moved back to where she was from...when they first married. This is kind of random.

JG: That is okay.

AM: They moved to Magnolia Springs, Texas.

JG: In Jasper County.

AM: That is in Jasper County.

JG: Near the river.

AM: And, I don't know how long they lived in Magnolia Springs but, anyway they moved back up to where my grandfather lived.

JG: And who was that?

AM: Jim Runnels.

JG: Jim Runnels, okay.

AM: Jim Runnels was my grandfather. They moved back up there and they bought twenty acres of land then. Of course, I can kind of remember the little house that we lived in at that time. It was unpainted when I remember the house. I don't remember how many rooms but, finally they built where we lived now not far from Grandma and Grandpa's house because that was their land.

JG: Tell me a little bit about your grandparents, Jim Runnels and Emmer Runnels.

AM: They just truly believed in working hard.

WH: I think Jim Runnels was born nine years before the Emancipation that is what I've heard.

JG: Was he born in Texas?

WH: Yes, he was born in Texas. When Negroes gained their freedom I understand that Grandpa had a sister named...what was his sister's name?

RC: Mary.

AM: The one who married Uncle Jim Morgan her name was Mary.

WH: Yes, Mary and then he had one brother was named Dearmon. What was his first name?

AM: Prince.

WH: Prince Dearmon and they were given the opportunity so I understand.

AM: Rose told him about that.

WH: Huh?

AM: Rose told him about that.

RC: I don't think it's recorded.

AM: Oh.

WH: Well we don't have to repeat it.

Richard Donovan (hereafter RD): Go ahead it's not on the tape. Go ahead and say what you were going to say about the Dearmons.

WH: My grandfather was a Dearmon by birth. Did you say that?

RC: No I didn't.

WH: You think I should say that?

RC: Of course, go right ahead.

WH: Well I was just wondering why you didn't. So, at Emancipation I understand that his owners were fairly good people and they gave him the opportunity, well they didn't have no choice but they also gave him an opportunity if they wanted to stay they could. Well, Grandpa's brother Press Dearmon decided he would leave and his sister I think left also but, he stayed with the people who were his owners before.

JG: Was that the Runnels? Is that where the name Runnels comes from?

WH: Yes, that is where the name Runnels came in...R-u-n-n-e-l-s and...

JG: There is that photograph that we were looking at that I took of his headstone.

WH: That is right.

JG: And then there is Emmer.

WH: That is right. He was born in 1860 and died in 1939, I guess it was.

JG: That is what is on the tombstone, yes ma'am. And then there is Emmer. How did they meet? Do you know much about your grandmother Emmer?

W: No I really don't. I don't know how they met. Her people, the ones we knew, lived in Henderson, Texas. Do you know where Henderson is?

JG: Yes ma'am.

WH: She had a brother. Was a brother and two sisters?

AM: Uncle Oscar was one of her brothers and Uncle West was one of her brothers, one of Grandma's brothers.

WH: So she had two brothers that lived in Henderson. Uncle West and Uncle Oscar both lived there. Did she have any sisters? Did Grandma have any sisters? I don't remember any.

AM: Aunt Judy...

WH: Was that her sister...yes that was her baby sister. Aunt Judy was a Dearman, she married a Dearmon.

RD: Jonathan, the Dearmon is that big mausoleum, granite mausoleum on the other side of the fence over there.

JG: Yes on the other side over there okay, and it's D-e-a-r-m-o-n, Dearmon.

W: Yes.

JG: Okay, I'm sorry go ahead.

RC: I was about to ask why am I thinking Huntington, didn't Grandma come from Huntington or they met in Huntington?

WH: I really don't know.

RC: The word Huntington is in my mind. Do you know anything about Huntington Frazier?

AM: If I had I forgotten it.

JG: But you were telling me they were in Magnolia Springs and then how did they get to the Boykin area?

WH: My father's home was in Magnolia Springs. His father was a minister and his father was pasturing where my mother lived. We call it the Boykin Community and that is where he met my mother.

RD: Would he ride a horse back and forth every Sunday or something like that?

WH: He didn't come every Sunday it was too strenuous but he did ride a horse.

RC: Once a month.

WH: About once a month.

JG: How many other black families were in the area that owned their land? You mentioned that some of your neighbors lived on company lands, but how many other families owned the land that they lived on? Not an exact number but, was this rare or common?

WH: Two or three?

AM: No because Grandpa, after Grandpa got old in age then he divided what land he had.

RC: You misunderstood his question I think. You asking how many blacks in the community during those years?

JG: Yes ma'am.

AM: I know the Frazier's and the offspring of Runnels and the Boykin's.

JG: I guess the Boykin's would have owned...were they the dominant...well not dominant but own more land than most other people in the area?

RD: They own a lot down there now so I would suspect so.

JG: Okay.

RD: But then you get over there on the county line road and we used to call it the highway I think, there were a lot of black families lived along that road.

RC: But do they own their properties?

AM: I am not too sure, well Uncle Mac was a Boykin anyway.

JG: Okay well, let's see there is so many other questions I'm sure.

RC: Uncle Mac didn't own his land did he? The Petty's owned some land.

JG: The Blue Hole, which today is...

AM: I was down in that area...down in that area...down the Blue Hole.

JG: What can you tell me about the Blue Hole? Did y'all swim there?

AM: Oh yes, we used to blunder in there and we learned to swim some. But, the blue hole my grandfather helped to blast rock out of that area.

JG: Okay, yes ma'am.

RD: That is Helen Dardin's daddy.

AM: Yes, Helen's mother was my mother's sister. But, he blasted rocks when they wanted to build the walls back in Galveston and that is how that blue hole came in was where rocks had been blasted out so we were told. But that land I think it belonged to some company or something. But, anyway I don't think the blacks owned none of that right there, right around in there.

RC: Frazier didn't Aunt Della own twenty acres but not the blue hole, but in that area, the Petty's?

AM: Now the Petty's lived in there but I don't know if they really owned that land or not. I don't know. They might have because when we came into being the Petty's was living there.

JG: Now how far was your parents' property...well you mentioned you walked about three and a half miles to school so that answers that question. I was going to ask how far away from like the blue hole did you live, but the school was right near where the blue hole is.

RC: Right, yes.

JG: So, I guess my question is just how common was that? Was that something you did after school on the hot days or not?

AM: We didn't live close we lived a good ways as she said because we walked down there but we had an Aunt who lived right close to the blue hole.

RD: Is that Helen?

AM: Helen's people lived real close to the blue hole because when I started school I didn't start at the Vernon County Line. I went to a one teacher school.

JG: Where was that?

AM: That was up near our...not far from our house. It was between where we lived and where that land was donated down there kind of on a little hill.

JG: Was it a county school?

AM: Let me see, I was trying to think.

JG: That would have been about 1910 if you were born in 1912.

AM: I was born in 12.

JG: Now did you not go to Vernon School at all or just not in your early years?

AM: Yes I went to the Vernon School.

JG: But later in your school.

AM: This was the only school in that community. The Vernon School wasn't even built.

JG: It wasn't there yet, okay.

AM: Wasn't even built down there. The Vernon School was not far from the blue hole.

JG: Yes ma'am.

AM: And we were big children then when we went down there. I remember we were good sized children when we stole those eggs and got a whipping about them.

RD: Stole what?

AM: Stole eggs.

RD: Oh eggs, yes I have heard that story.

JG: Well how many children went to this early school? Was it about the same size classrooms as, I mean as far as number of children's as what became Vernon?

AM: Classrooms! This little school where I first started to school it was a one room and...

JG: Was it a building just for school or was it also a church?

AM: It was yes, they would have church up there too.

JG: Okay.

WH: You know about schools being used for churches?

JG: Yes ma'am. That is why I was asking just trying to get as much information as we can.

AM: I think my father was the first person to start talking about trying to get up a little building. Of course we would go to school, I mean church at this one school and then we had school and church at Vernon County Line School until they built a little church on the side of the road.

JG: Rockwall?

AM: Rockwall, Rockwall Union Church because there was more than one denomination that went there at that time.

JG: And was it just only blacks went to church there?

AM: Yes, only blacks.

JG: Now that cemetery is also called Rockwall Cemetery. Was it always called Rockwall Cemetery or did it have another name early on?

AM: They just said the cemetery I think, so forth as I remember.

JG: Just the cemetery, okay.

AM: It used to be they called that whole area out in there where we lived and where the cemetery is and all we called it down in the Lower Community. But see we lived...

JG: Well the cemetery is up on some pretty high ground.

AM: But it was kind of...that place used to be a lot of people lived out there.

JG: Okay, near the cemetery?

AM: Down in that area it was quite a few people because the Boykin's, and the McNeil's 'cause you remember Shuk and Barlow and then when that turpentine camp came in there it was some people that lived out in that area you know, when...

WH: Were they cutting logs in there at that time or getting turpentine?

AM: When Mr. Boren and all them moved out then.

JG: You mentioned turpentine camp; would that be Camp Nancy or another one?

AM: You remember Camp Nancy?

JG: Well only through history, only reading about it. What turpentine camp were you referring too?

AM: Camp Nancy.

JG: Camp Nancy.

AM: Up in that area. Camp Nancy is where I first started to work some.

JG: Now you mean by work you mean working for pay?

AM: They had a little school up there.

JG: Okay what kind of little school?

AM: A little one teacher school because that is where I first went trying to teach.

RD: Did you know I grew up in Camp Nancy? That is where I grew up.

AM: Huh?

WH: It's a small world.

JG: He was probably that troublesome child.

AM: (Laughing)

WH: You didn't know she taught at Camp Nancy?

RD: I sure didn't.

AM: That was my first job.

RC: How much money were you making?

AM: My salary was sixty dollars a month and I paid room and board.

JG: You paid room and board to the Angelina County Lumber Company?

AM: No, I paid it to a family who lived there.

JG: Oh, you paid another family, okay.

AM: I would live up there on my work days.

JG: Did you have a teaching certificate?

AM: Yes, back in those days you didn't finish college before you went to work. I was about seventeen and I went to Prairie View and I finished...an academy...I can't think.

JG: Like an institute like a teacher's institute or something?

AM: Yes, you know where Prairie View is now?

JG: Yes ma'am.

AM: Okay well you see it's all together a different school. I guess this was kind of like the later part of your high school learning and you could get a certificate and start working. I started working and would teach and work during school term and the summer I would go back to Prairie View.

JG: Yes ma'am.

AM: I'd go back to Prairie View.

JG: So, how long did you teach?

AM: Oh, I taught a number of years because I taught in Angelina County, Jasper County, Newton County and one year in Harris County.

JG: Harris County, okay.

AM: And that was Channelview.

JG: Channelview, okay. Was Howard Walker, was he the county school superintendent during any of your teaching in Angelina County? Do you know that name?

AM: That Walker sounds familiar.

JG: Howard Walker.

AM: It sounds familiar, it sounds familiar.

JG: Okay, so you taught at Camp Nancy around '29, 1930 or sometime along in there. You said you were seventeen. How many children did you have that first year? Do you remember anything about that first year? I know that was a long time ago.

AM: I don't remember the number.

WH: She had about a dozen.

JG: About a dozen.

RC: Is that where those boys were that you whipped for not doing what you told them to do, those big boys? Was that Camp Nancy?

AM: I guess one thing that I remember about Camp Nancy, I been trying to think of that boy's name. I don't remember what he did but my daddy had told me he said, "Now when you are working don't promise something you not going to do. If you say something you are going to do, do it or be caught trying."

JG: Who told you that, your dad?

AM: My daddy.

JG: That is good advice.

AM: And, he said, "So many people say I'm going to kill you if you do such and such a thing." He said, "Don't promise them." And, "I'm going to whip you if you do such and such a thing." He said, "If you promise one you are going to whip him whip him or be caught trying." And, "If you fight back, fight him just like he's grown." But I never did have nobody to even fight back at me and I was slim, small.

JG: Now, you being the eldest child, was your father fairly supportive of you going into being a school teacher?

AM: Oh Lord, you just had to go to school and you see it was so many of us in the family he couldn't just send us all together and keep the others in school at home. But he was very, very, supportive for education so that is the reason I guess that I felt like that I was kind of responsible for helping with the family as much as I could in my growing up and getting away from home and working because the others were coming along too.

JG: Were you always paid on time?

AM: I guess so.

JG: Nothing that you recall about how you were paid or when you were paid? Did they mail the check or did the superintendent come down to see you?

AM: I got my check from...I guess the superintendent would come from Lufkin I guess.

JG: Okay, okay.

AM: I guess that is where he would come from.

JG: And was that a white person?

AM: Yes sir.

JG: We actually have some of those county school records. I'm interested now to go back and look and see if we have the years in which you taught. But that was another question we had, just you know the black schools are very rarely mentioned in the records. And, even when they were it was only because they were segregated that they were mentioned because they would write in parenthesis generally either colored or Negro.

AM: That is right.

JG: So, we have a lot of questions, you know, all we have is the written record. It's kind of neat to talk to someone that actually lived that. Anything about teaching that you could remember that is worth sharing, we would be interested to hear it. What about books, did you have plenty of books?

AM: A lot of times the books would be used mostly and...

JG: Were they hand me downs from the white school?

AM: Most of them were. That is why I say they'd been used. Some of them were kind of raggedy.

RC: No one complained about them; you were glad to get them.

AM: Yes and during all of my working years and I worked a lot of years. I just retired in...was it '76 when I retired?

WH: But you were not in the classroom all those years.

AM: Oh no, I worked in extension work. I went into extension work in '43. I went to Livingston.

JG: Tell us a little bit about what you mean by extension work. Is that through like the county Ag program, agriculture extension?

AM: That is right. I was kind of on...when I first went to Livingston I was Negro County Home Demonstration Agent, that was my title.

JG: Say that one more time. Negro County Home...

AM: County Negro Home Demonstration Agent. That was my title.

JG: Well what did that do? What did that job do?

AM: Well it was to help...the work was segregated then and it was to work with black families, Negro families in the home economics area, management and cooking and sewing.

JG: Was it a state job or for the county?

AM: The County paid you a little bit of the salary and the state paid you the other little.

JG: Now why did you go into that? How did that come about?

AM: Well that was I guess a year round job.

JG: And you were teaching school up to that point?

AM: No I retired, resigned from teaching and went into that field.

JG: So your background, your education, was in education.

AM: My major was in home economics.

JG: Okay, okay so that was a good fit then.

AM: Right and we had a black county agent that was working and of course with the encouragement and all I went in...

JG: Now this was just for Polk County?

WH: No, all the counties, Angelina, Polk, Jasper. They had a male and a female.

AM: Do you know Floyd Yancy here?

JG: No ma'am.

RD: I did.

AM: Well see Floyd worked in, he was the county agriculture, county extension agent.

RD: He worked with Gina some. Floyd worked with my daughter Gina some.

AM: Really, as a 4-H Club girl?

RD: Yes ma'am.

AM: Well see I worked with 4-H Club boys and girls in Polk County but my beginning was there came an opening in Smith County that is in Tyler. They needed somebody. A black agent was going out on maternity leave and they found out they needed somebody and Mr. Rutledge, that was a black...Mr. Rutledge used to be here I believe.

JG: In Angelina County?

RC: County Agent in Angelina County.

AM: But anyway, I was recommended to fill this girl's place. Well then that would give me the chance the beginning to work in that field. So, I resigned in Newton County and went to Smith County. I couldn't drive and you had to know how to drive and all but I had had a very, very little experience in trying to learn. And when I went my daddy drove his truck and the first car I owned my daddy paid the down payment and all and he got me a Chevrolet. I forgotten what model it was but anyway, I went to Tyler and I hit the back of his truck right on the courthouse square. Of course naturally the police came out and my daddy told them that was all right, that was all right. My preacher could drive and my baby brother could drive. Of course naturally I was nervous. But anyway...

RD: Did it tear your car up?

AM: No it didn't hit it hard enough.

RD: It had a big bumper on it didn't it.

AM: It had a bumper on the car.

WH: The preacher probably fixed it.

JG: Nowadays cars don't have bumpers do they?

AM: The preacher was in the car with me and I was...went to kind of go up an incline when you went up towards the court house and that is where I hit his car.

RD: And your office was in the courthouse.

AM: My office was in the courthouse.

WH: But this was on a Sunday.

RD: Oh.

AM: I was going to where I was going to live for the time being. I worked there I guess about two months and then they opened Polk County for blacks. There was a white agent that had been there all the while. I went from Smith County to Polk County for this particular job. I think, I don't remember just what my salary was there but I remember the county, I think it was \$17 a month that they put up. See the county would put up a little bit and then the state paid the rest of it, the civil service.

JG: What was...I think I have a little idea of some of the work you did but what was probably the most...anything remarkable that stands out in your memory as to people that you helped, what type of...just something memorable from your experiences of doing that. I don't guess...do they have that today?

RD: Yes, but not nearly like that.

JG: I know they have an Ag Extension Agent but anything that stands out in your memory that someone of my generation...I don't even know what question to ask. You can probably get an idea of where I'm coming from.

WH: He wants to know what you did, like teaching them to can, canning beef.

JG: Yes, tell me about the canning, the canning kitchens.

AM: Okay, well let me tell you about where my office was. When I went there my office was on the third floor of the courthouse in Livingston.

JG: Did people come to you or did you okay people and have them come see you?

AM: Well see, I had to get acquainted and all. They had white agents there. Mrs. Prentice was working there then and she seemed to be a very nice person. Okay, my experience one day I was in the office and (chuckle) two or three white men came upstairs. Of course they put a black county agent there too, Sloan. And he came in and he looked at me and I looked at them and he asked me said, "What office is this?" I said, "This is the Negro County Home Demonstration Agent's office" and he turned and said, "You mean nigger office?" So they went on back down the steps and one day...that was

Mr. Windham and one day I was standing at the window looking out, of course, you know I didn't like that no way, of course it didn't hurt me but I just didn't like the idea. I wasn't wishing him no good at all, just no good, and he went across the track and his car the train was passing and it lightly hit his car. It kind of knocked it to one side. It didn't tear it up and in my ignorant self I laughed.

WH: You said 'oh goody goody' huh?

JG: Well that railroad track still goes right through there today doesn't it?

AM: It goes right through there.

JG: Right through the middle of town.

AM: All I had to do was look out the window and the track was right there. But anyway I didn't have any trouble.

JG: Did people come to your office, is that what they did a lot or was part of your job going out into the community?

AM: Yes and learning more. Our office was there and then learning some of the help they could get from the office. And, I set up clubs in the county and worked with people in their community. When I went, when the change came the whites would come and go. They would get a better job but I had been there for a good long time and then the Commissioner's Court was going just not hire another agent, County Home Demonstration Agent. Finally our title when they integrated it they changed from County Negro Home Demonstration Agent to just County Extension Agent.

JG: Do you remember the Future Farmers of America, which was the Ag program through the public schools, but there was a segregated black program called New Farmers of America?

AM: Right.

JG: You remember that then?

AM: Right.

JG: Did you work...what can you tell me other than knowing it existed? Diboll had a NFA program for awhile. Mr. Jeffero was over that. What can you remember about the New Farmers of America? Did you work with that in any?

AM: No, no, no.

JG: Okay, that was just through the schools.

AM: It was different because in Livingston through the schools they had New Farmers of America and through our line of work it...the men worked I guess similar with like what the man agent would do. They both worked similar but it was a different organization all together.

JG: So when, you mentioned integration, when the County Ag program was integrated were you still working then?

AM: Yes.

JG: You were.

AM: I worked until around '76.

JG: '76, okay.

RC: Frazier I think you were headed there awhile ago, when you were county agent along toward the last there was a lady that...

AM: Yes the ladies changed then of course I was well known by that time, you know, around the courthouse and in the county too. They knew me pretty well. They decided they weren't going to hire another white woman to work and I would be the only agent to work with the women and girls.

JG: Regardless of race.

AM: Race.

JG: Okay, so now you are working with whites as well.

AM: Yes, it was already integrated.

JG: Okay, whites as well, okay.

AM: And, when they did that I wondered how was I going to...how would I make it working with just both races at the same time. But if a black wanted to enter a white club I couldn't work with them if the whites objected to a black coming in. For instance, if a black lady lived in this community and they didn't have a club but they had a white club and if she goes and she wants to join their club if they object of her coming then they couldn't get the service from our organization. It had to be integrated if they wanted to. Am I making myself clear?

JG: I think so. I think so. It's kind of like when the schools first started integrating a lot of them went to the so called "Freedom of Choice. And often times when it was announced in the newspapers it was 'a child or the parents of a child can enroll their child in any school they want to if there is room.' So, there was always that. So technically I

guess a white child could go to a formally all black school if they wanted to and a black child could go to a formerly all white school if they wanted to but they always put “if there was room” you know.

WH: And sometimes there wouldn't be room.

JG: Maybe so.

RD: But there was one lady there in Livingston as I recall that there is something that she wouldn't come.

AM: No, she was just as nice to me as anybody you want to see.

JG: Now who are we talking about, a white woman?

AM: This is a white lady.

JG: Okay.

AM: Well her club members let me know that she wasn't particular about blacks. And even her maid had to go around to the back, couldn't come in the front. And so they told me that I might have problems with her. But she was real nice to me but they said she wasn't going to let me in her house, in which I didn't try to go. She did something for me and she told me she was through with it and I told her that I would come over and I'd come pick it up and she told me, “No she would bring it over to my house.” So when she came...Is that the one?

RD: I guess Frazier it's been a long time since you told me but it was something.

AM: She came in and had a nice time in my house but I never did go in her house.

WH: Did she come in at the front or the back of your house?

AM: She came in at the front door but she was nice to me.

JG: Well they say back door guests are best anyway. (laughter)

WH: Near the kitchen.

AM: That was Mrs. Claimon.

JG: Well I followed Mr. Donovan when we came in and he said, “Let's go in the garage.” (laughter)

WH: Yes, we won't let him come in through the front door here. He has to come through the garage. (laughter)

AM: But really I had some of the nicest people to work with. No one ever checked it of blacks coming after, you know, maybe in one community they would want to set up a club. Well when I go out and talk with them I would just let them know that anybody can join this club black or white, or whatever, Mexicans, whatever. Otherwise it's a different story and I had no problems what so ever.

RC: Now didn't you teach those ladies how to preserve foods and show them to quilt?

AM: Yes, now from headquarters from the state they would have sessions where they teach the agents different areas and then the agents went back to the community and these clubs they had, you suppose to have these clubs and you go out and teach these ladies that would be leaders in the community and then those leaders teach the other people if they wanted too. But, I was quite successful in going out in the community and whatever the club members, whoever the club members or whatever they could come. I would give a demonstration of how it's done and then we worked together and do it. And if they had to do with a lot of it I would go out and work with them. We will do such and such a thing and I never told them you got to do this or you got to do this. "Let's do such and such a thing" or "what do you think about such and such a thing." When we first started canning, just an instance, I mean using a freezer, freezing food, you know, you blanching it. Some of them would tell me you don't have to blanch it you can just get it prepared and wash it and put it in the freezer and that is it. But I could easily tell them, "But this is the way that we are taught to do it and this is the way I'm paid to do it. It might work your way but this is what I'm paid to do." And if I had any enemies...I mean those white people worked with me just as good. I mean, we worked together. We would get out there and "we are going to do this and we are going to do that." I wouldn't just sit down and give orders, "you do this and you do that." Black and white, we, and we just get together and do whatever we had to do.

JG: Say your first name again, I don't know if I caught that.

AM: Arverta.

JG: Arverta. How do you spell that?

AM: A-r-v-e-r-t-a.

JG: Okay.

AM: M-o-s-l-e-y.

JG: And that is your married name?

AM: Mosley was my married name.

JG: What did your husband do?

AM: My husband worked for Exxon and he retired from Exxon. He lived in one house down in Baytown and I lived in Livingston until weekends and then one of us would move a lot of times, you know.

JG: And what was his first name?

AM: Melvin James, he was better known by Bud. They called him Bud Mosely but his name was Melvin James Mosely.

JG: Well we've concentrated on...oh I'm sorry.

RD: Before you leave there was something about New York. I can't remember what it was about New York.

AM: In my line of work...I should have gotten...because I might not can put my hand on it now, for the work I was doing in Polk County I was chosen to receive the Distinguished Service Award. So we went to New York to one of our national meetings to receive that award.

JG: Was this before or after the integration?

AM: This was after the integration.

JG: Okay, this was for like a lifetime of service distinguished award? Was that what it was?

AM: Yes.

JG: Went all the way to New York City.

AM: Right.

WH: Did you go to Albany?

AM: And then we went from New York...I believe that is the time we went to Canada on a trip. Seems like that is the time we went to Canada.

RD: I just didn't want you to get off from Mrs. Mosley without bringing that up.

AM: My...let me see...my county superintendent paid my way. I mean you know the county.

JG: Yes ma'am. That is pretty good.

WH: That was pretty and good.

JG: Well how did ya'll get to Milwaukee?

WH: Well my husband was working at the Vocational School in Houston, Texas as a welding instructor.

JG: And what was his name?

WH: Johnny, J-o-h-n-n-y, Johnny Hark. And that was during the war.

JG: World War II?

AM: Yes, we were rushed into building ships and whatever so the government sent for him to come to Milwaukee to work. So we married in forty and he went to Milwaukee in '44 and I moved there in '45.

JG: Okay, so you were born and raised in southern Angelina County in Texas, part of the south and you moved to Milwaukee, Wisconsin. I imagine that was a little different or was it? (laughing)

WH: A little difference (laughing) it was a total new life. Here we have two seasons. Milwaukee will have definitely four seasons.

JG: Four distinct seasons, huh?

WH: So I ended up there with him.

JG: I bet you had colder winters too.

WH: Oh the winters are severe. I've seen it get down 25 below zero, 28.

JG: What was society like just social aspects, race relations?

WH: Well race relations were good. There were not a lot of blacks in Milwaukee. The first time I went there was in '42. My husband had a cousin that lived there and he had been after Johnny to come ever since whenever, but he didn't go but he sent me. I liked it. It was a German town, as you know. And the population was so very small, you know, a lot of blacks moved to Chicago because of race difference before then. But there were very, very few blacks in Milwaukee. When we moved there people had migrated there a little because of work.

JG: Now you had lived in the Houston area for a little while too though right?

WH: Yes.

JG: Okay. How was...I guess from the perspective of whether its race relations or any other thing, you know, social experience is just where you are. So having grown up in Angelina County and then you move away somewhere what did you notice? Were there

any differences say from where you lived in Houston even with Milwaukee from where you lived before?

WH: Yes, it was a new experience for the people that resided there and also for the people that came in but there was no problem ever.

JG: I guess where I'm coming from too I've talked to a lot of people both white and black like during the Depression and of course, you know, the old story if you never had anything to start with the Depression wasn't necessarily as noticeable because you didn't have anything to lose so to speak. And so you know where I'm coming from don't you Mr. Donovan? Where I've talked to a lot of poor people who lived in poor sawmill towns and they would say, "We didn't really know there was a Depression because they were always poor." So I guess that is what I'm saying, was there any differences in other regional areas among race relations from your experiences before?

WH: Well it was a new experience for the people that moved there because of having lived in the South and move there.

RD: Was it better Wilhelmenia, was it better living in Milwaukee than it was in Houston?

WH: Yes it was. You were free to go wherever you wanted to go, when you wanted to go.

JG: There weren't separate public facilities for instance.

WH: No, they didn't have anything separate.

JG: Separate drinking fountains, restrooms, doors, front doors, back doors.

WH: No, nothing. Whatever was open to one person was open to all.

JG: Not like in movie theaters where the balcony was for one race?

WH: No, no.

JG: So there was no racial segregation then?

WH: No.

JG: That is ultimately where I was going.

WH: But you know there was no racial segregation but there were people that didn't really accept.

JG: Okay, there was racism but not official.

WH: Yes, kind of hidden.

RD: Kind of overt.

JG: Right, yes.

AM: When we moved there we were there six months and then we decided we would buy and we purchased our own home and a large lot and there was a front building and in the back of the lot there was a cottage. So when we first bought the property the cottage was vacant so we moved in it. Our neighbor to the north, well north and south were white and the kids enjoyed coming over, which was okay. I didn't have any children then and don't have any now. But they liked to come around so one day the little boy said, "Mrs. Hardy" I said "Yes" he said, "You know what my daddy said?" I said, "No I don't know what your daddy said, what did your daddy say?" He said, "My daddy said you all were niggers." And I said, "Well you know what I want you to tell your daddy? I said" "yes ma'am" I said "well you tell your daddy he told you a damn lie."(laughter) And after then well the kid's attitude was okay but after then the father was so friendly and nice. "Good morning Mrs. Hardy how are you today," you know. So that was the beginning and the ending of that story, but that was the only time I encountered anybody.

JG: And you said you went up there for a time as well Mrs. Rose. Now how much younger are you?

RC: About 15 years?

WH: 15 years.

JG: So you went up there after school?

RC: No, I went up there to go to school.

JG: To go to school, okay.

RC: What problems did I have? Just all the people. Wilhelmina lived in Houston but I went from the woods where you were directly to Milwaukee, North Division High School.

JG: Okay, you didn't have Houston in between just straight from the Boykin Settlement to Milwaukee.

RD: Hey Rose like this.

RC: I see a building what is that. (laughter)

JG: A building not a wooden structure, huh?

RC: From a two room classroom to I don't know how many. I think it was about 1600 graduated with me from high school.

RD: Sixteen hundred!

RC: So, you can imagine.

JG: Wow.

RC: Wasn't it about 1600?

WH: From the high school in Milwaukee?

RC: Yes.

WH: Something like that.

JG: So you went to Vernon School and then went straight from there...

RC: To Milwaukee and keep on strutting.

RD: Culture shock they call that Jonathan.

JG: You probably talked about the blue hole up there and they thought, "What in the world are you talking about?" They probably didn't have a blue hole up there did they?

RC: No, we had Lake Michigan.

JG: Lake Michigan yeah, big hole!

RC: I didn't have a problem...I didn't know any better so I just went for it, I mean from a two-room school to 1800, 1600.

RD: She was a Frazier, Jonathan that is what it was. She was a Frazier.

JG: Now I asked your older sister about your father and he encouraged your education. How did he feel about you...

RC: My mother worked hard, hard, believed in hard labor. My father – education. His family comes from...

WH: Our father worked hard too, long hours.

RC: Yes. Well what I'm saying he believed in family education. His siblings were educated. His brother promised to...when he finished college for him to go to help him through college. Is that true? Yes.

JG: And what was his brother's name?

WH: George.

JG: And your father's name again?

RC: Harrison.

WH: But you know what we did when we were growing up, one helped the other one. When Frazier was going to school, she went to school and we worked that she could go to school.

RD: I think I see a little bit of that still going on today don't I? Don't I see a little bit of that still going on today?

WH: Yes, helping. And then when my sister Dessie was going to school all of us helped her to get through Prairie View and you know, and then going to Galveston. And Valeria you know, well when she came to Milwaukee then we helped her to get...if you didn't have an academic education you had to have a trade. And I didn't go to college per say. I finished high school and went from here from Vernon County Line to Jasper. I finished high school in Jasper. Then I went to Houston and I enrolled in the Franklin School of Beauty Culture and I finished there. When I went to Milwaukee when I worked a while then I enrolled in what is called MATC, Milwaukee Area Technical College. I went to school there and I got my license for the State of Wisconsin. I worked awhile and then I went to school again and got my certificate for teaching Beauty College. I went to Spencerian College of Real Estate and I got my broker's license from there. And I went to school in Paris, France for six weeks.

JG: Paris, France.

WH: Yeah, and I went to school at Bethune Cookman College in Florida at Daytona Beach.

JG: Now what did you do in Paris, France? What kind of school was that?

WH: Cosmetology.

JG: Okay.

WH: So but then when Rose came I was in a position to help her and before she came Valeria came and I was in a position to help her. Valeria was in a position to help Rose. You know, you just help.

JG: And that is another sister you are mentioning, Valeria?

RC: This one.

RD: She just died about a month ago, two or three months ago.

JG: Oh okay.

WH: That is what we were taught to do, you know.

JG: Going back to you Mrs. Rose, well I'm now intrigued about you were saying you went straight to Vernon School, an all black school I'm assuming. And now you are in a school, so how was that? I don't want to lead you on, but what was your impression of going to school with white people?

RC: I didn't know the difference. I mean I know black when I see it and I know white when I see it. I never thought you were any better than me or whatever and what I wanted to know I'd go up to anybody and ask her.

JG: So the school was probably different in more ways than just race, I mean you know, geographically, the culture and everything the number of students and the types of clubs...

RC: Yes, and the curriculum.

JG: The number of students and the types of clubs.

RC: Yes, and the curriculum, yes, but I made it through.

JG: Yes, I guess that would be a question too is how did your earlier education prepare you or not prepare you for it?

RC: My earlier education did not prepare me for a school with 3,000 children. So I had a schedule there and I followed the schedule.

JG: What grade were you in at that time?

RC: Tenth.

JG: Tenth grade, okay. So you are about fifteen, sixteen years old?

RC: Yes, about fifteen, yes. I didn't know anything about eighth hour, seventh hour, fourth hour, and fifth hour is lunch or one of the two. I didn't know anything about that. But if I got my schedule then I was able to figure that out.

JG: So, you actually had different rooms for every class whereas before you just had a teacher would go around to the students.

RC: Yes, go to assembly, yes, yes.

JG: You actually went to different teachers for the classes.

RC: Yes but I got to know the teachers and... but it was okay. And my brother talked about it more than I did, my brother who passed away in April. He went from Vernon County Line, he went to college I think for two years or whatever but he ended up going into the military, the Air Force. And he did very, very, well. He was successful in life and the Air Force retired. He said he looked at other military guys going to the big shot schools and everything and he came from Vernon County Line and his success, compared to the other guys almost a failure. So, it doesn't matter where you go you just want to do it. Did he ever tell you that Richard?

RD: Yes something like that. They knew how to work, they were good honest people. They had no hidden agendas; this whole family is like that.

RC: So you can go from Vernon County Line to any college, university. If we didn't have the prerequisites at Vernon County Line then our principal knew how to fudge to make sure we had four units of literature to graduate and everything was there.

WH: He prepared you to be accepted to the next level.

RC: Yes, of course I didn't know what was going on with my transcript but that is really what happened.

RD: Rose went on and became a doctor. (laughter)

RC: I am a nurse, a registered nurse.

JG: All right. Did you serve as a nurse in Milwaukee or did you move around?

RC: Milwaukee, California.

JG: Oh, you went to California.

RC: East Texas and here I am; I came to Lufkin.

JG: All right.

RC: And interestingly enough, I never thought about it or how that happened in my life but I had worked with very few blacks until I came to Lufkin. Well there weren't that many blacks in Milwaukee, right Wilhelmina? How did I end up being...working with white being around white whether or not they were Jewish, German or Lutheran, Italian

because there was a lot of prejudices there within the religion? I've seen the Catholic for example disinherit one of the family members because they married a Lutheran boy and so forth.

JG: Well it was a big concern when John F. Kennedy was going to be President because he was catholic.

RC: Yes, he was Catholic, yes, yes.

JG: I know there was some concern about that.

RC: Yes, yes. Now, what did you ask me? I've forgotten.

JG: I think that was it. And of course the Frazier family is the one who donated the land beside the cemetery.

RD: That is right. It was Mrs. Dessie's land but it took all of these people working together to make that work.

JG: Now who is Mrs. Dessie?

RC: I'll show you her picture.

JG: She was a Frazier sister also?

RC: Yes.

JG: Now was this part of the land that y'all grew up on?

RC: No, not that part.

RD: It was a Runnels land, some of the Runnels land, that man...

JG: The man that was on the tombstone?

RD: Yes.

JG: Okay.

AM: Grandpa had about, I think around 160 acres wasn't it to begin with? When he started dividing it after he got up in age.

JG: Well I certainly appreciate...I see we have recorded for about an hour and a half now.

RC: That is enough.

JG: I don't want to take up any more of your time but I would certainly...I've certainly enjoyed it. I know I'm going to have more questions when we go back and listen to this. But again I thank you and I'll go ahead and turn it off now.

RC: Very good, thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW