

HELEN DARDEN

Interview 223a

May 13, 2011, at her home, Camden, Texas

Jonathan Gerland, Interviewer

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ABSTRACT: In this interview with Jonathan Gerland and Richard Donovan, East Texas native Helen Darden reminisces about growing up as an African American girl in Deep East Texas before integration and the civil rights movement. Mrs. Darden grew up in an African American community that spanned the Angelina and Jasper County lines, centered around the Blue Hole and the Vernon County Line School. She recalls swimming in the Blue Hole, the mining efforts that took place there, and the nearby turpentine camp and community. She also discusses her relatives the Runnels family and her experiences finishing school in Houston in order to get a high school diploma.

Jonathan Gerland (hereafter JG): Okay, today's date is May 13th, Friday the 13th actually, 2011.

Helen Darden (hereafter HD): Bad luck day.

JG: Well maybe good luck day. My name is Jonathan Gerland and I'm in the home with Mrs. Helen Darden and we are in Camden, or just outside of Camden, and with me is Richard Donovan. We are going to do an oral history recording today and we sure appreciate you being willing to do this with us Mrs. Darden.

Helen Darden (hereafter HD): Well I'll do what I can.

JG: Okay, well thank you. I guess maybe we will just start by telling us when and where you were born.

HD: I was born in Jasper County, March 27, 1918.

JG: 1918, that was during the middle of World War I, I guess.

HD: Yes.

JG: Who were your parents?

HD: Beg your pardon.

JG: Who were your parents, your mom and dad?

HD: My father was Walter Pettis and my mother was Della Runnels Pettis.

JG: Runnels Pettis, okay. And had they lived...are they old Jasper County families?

HD: Well my mother was born in Angelina County and see we lived in what you called the county line. It's not far from one county to the other where we lived and where the school is. That is why it's called Vernon County Line.

JG: Yes ma'am.

HD: Children come from Angelina County and from Jasper County to the same school.

JG: And that is the old Vernon County Line School?

HD: Yes, Vernon County Line School.

JG: Okay, did you go to school there?

HD: I sure did.

JG: What are some of your memories of going to school there?

HD: Oh, there are so many memories of playing ball and basketball and winning out and one of the things I most remember, or like to remember, is a lady came to our school one night from Dallas. She was going to put on a show and what she did was acrobat stunts and she showed all her stuff and all and we went home my father was dead and my brothers and my mother and my sister was a baby, we went home I said, "I can do what that woman did." And they said, "I bet you can't." I said, "I bet I can." And I just got out in the floor and put my hands on my hips and stand up and go back to the floor and pick a handkerchief up in my mouth and stand back up.

JG: Just did it without hardly trying, huh?

HD: And another one, I didn't know I could do it until I saw somebody doing it. I could lay down and cross my leg like that, put my hands through them and throw both of them behind my neck and lay down with both my legs behind my neck. I could get up and stretch both legs straight out this way and sit down on the floor, everything she done, I done.

Richard Donovan (hereafter RD): Helen how tall were you? How tall were you?

HD: Now?

RD: No ma'am at your maximum height.

Glenn Darden (hereafter GD): About five eight.

HD: To tell you the truth I don't know and they have took my height and I didn't think nothing about it, you know.

JG: How many children were in the school when you were going to school there approximately?

HD: Approximately?

JG: Yes, how many school mates did you have?

HD: Oh in the graduating classes?

GD: No, the whole school.

HD: Well I'm trying to think about some of them. The graduating class there was four of us.

JG: Four, and what year did you graduate?

HD: Let me see, I wasn't even thinking about the answer to that, what year I graduated.

JG: It would be in the early mid-thirties I guess.

HD: Well we just went to the eleventh grade.

JG: Eleventh grade. It went all the way to eleventh grade then? Because a lot of schools didn't do that, even some of the smaller schools around.

HD: Yes, we went through the eleventh grade and then you know they put the twelfth grade on so I went to Houston to live with my brother. He had got married, my oldest brother and I finished high school in Houston.

JG: In Houston, okay. So, you went to twelfth grade there.

HD: Phillis Wheatley High School.

JG: Phillis Wheatley High School.

HD: 219 in my class.

JG: Wow, from four to two nineteen.

HD: Right. That was quite a change I tell you.

JG: Well talk a little bit about that.

HD: My sister in law told me, say the first day I went to school in Houston, she said, "Now you go down there if they find out you are from the country they will run over

you.” I said, “I don’t think there is none born down there that will run over me.” And I just had that in mind that they was going to be rough you know and try to run over me. Well I went in and the lady that Physical Ed teacher, she was in the gym and it was down the hall it was double doors you could go in the gym or go around the back and come in a smaller door and she said, “I’m going to close these doors and you stand here and don’t let nobody come in; If they just have to come in to go around to the back door.” Okay, I’m standing up t here after a while here come three ladies down the hall. They was hugged up walking, looked like they were so happy and they started in the door and I said, “Oh no you can’t come in here. If you want to see Mrs. Marjorie you go around to the back door and go in the back door.” “I’m coming in here.” When she said that I went into that girl and I carried her to the other side of that hall thing. I thought...she hit so hard she bounced off. She said, “You didn’t have to shove me like that.” And I said, “You don’t have to try to run over me, now if you want to go in you go in at the back door.” They went on around and went in the back door.

JG: What about your learning, how was it different than Vernon County Line and Phillis Wheatley, any differences?

HD: Yes, it was a lot of differences. It was a lot different. Children, teachers at the school, the children to me they were just sassing them. If they said something they had a big word to give them back and all that. I’m sitting up there just as quiet so, finally the boy in the desk ahead of me he touched me in the back. He wanted to know where was I from. And I was telling him, well Mr. Bryant was the teacher and he walked in the door and he stood there. He saw me talking and he came on in and he said, “Miss. Darden, she is a wild cat just like all the rest.” He said, “She was so nice but now she is a wild cat.” I say, “Mr. Bryant...

JG: Oh wow, when was this? (looking at a picture)

GD: Where was that taken?

HD: Oh, that is that great swimmer that swam in Galveston for the first time and swam out there to where the line was drawn and you couldn’t come across it and different people were taking my picture when I came back.

GD: When did they take that?

HD: That is taken in my drive way.

GD: I know, but about how old were you when that picture was taken?

HD: Oh Jesus, you know I was grown and married and all.

GD: Mid-twenties, late twenties.

RD: I’m trying to figure out what model car that is. It looks like an Oldsmobile but I can’t tell what model it is.

JG: That is pretty neat. We were...just for the recording we were looking at a picture that Mr. Glenn Darden was showing us and Mrs. Darden is wearing her bathing suit there and got some sunshades on, looks like. (laughter)

HD: And, oh and back to the school, well the kids would talk back to the teacher but I wasn't used to that, you know. That was different for me, talking back to the teacher. When they say something to you, you are suppose to take it and go on and shut up. That is how you do it at home you know.

JG: Yes ma'am.

HD: But those children they talk back to the teacher. And I told him "Mr. Bryant he just ask me a question and I turned around to answer his question." Well I guess I was so quiet and so different from the others he wanted to know where I was from and I told him. It was one boy in the class I found out he just liked to ask questions. This same teacher, they was teaching black history. He went over to Wiergate and talked to the graduates as the speaker. He came back he was telling us, "How many of y'all been to a sawmill town?" Several of us held up our little hands and this boy, "Mr. Bryant how would you like to live there?" "Oh no, I couldn't live there. People over there they got nice homes that are nice and clean but you go out the back door and the outhouse is out there. They got a hog pen on this side and they keep their chickens on that side, and you got to go out there." He said, "No, I just couldn't live like that." He said, "Mr. Bryant you remind me of an old peckerwood been poor all his days and got a hold of some money and then they make out like they couldn't stand this and couldn't stand that." He said, "what I like about Mr. he just speaks, he just let you know how he feels about things."

JG: Try if you would to tell us a little bit more about the Vernon School, the old school that you went to there.

HD: Well that school, Rosenwald was the one that gave the money to build us a new school because my mother and them had to go a long way to school. Where it started out where we live it was a mason building and downstairs is where they kept the children and the teacher, you know, taught school. We didn't even have, well my brothers didn't, I wasn't old enough, they would use a tall can and put planks across them for their seats.

JG: Cans and planks for the seats?

HD: Yes, that is what they sat on in the first school that I know of because I wasn't old enough to go. I was just following my brothers. That is the first school. This man, he donated the money to build us a new school. Well, the parents and the community they furnished the labor; he just furnished the money. And the one that was going to teach that year, be the principal, he happened to be a preacher and he knew a lot about carpentry and he was the one that was guiding them as to what to do this and how to do this and that and the other and all at once he used a Mexican word and my daddy say, "Why Reverend Bryant I didn't know you used that kind of language." He said, "What did I say

Mr. Pettis, what did I say?" He said, "You used a cuss word." Oh he was so, he said, "I'll never speak another word I don't know what I'm saying." But, anyway that is the first nice school we got.

JG: Is that when it became known as Vernon? When did it get that name? Who was that, where did the name Vernon come from?

HD: It was two young men in the community. One was a Boykin which was the youngest of about fifteen children, grown up then. They all grown and the grandson was named Vernon, one of them named Douglas, Douglas Boykin and the other one was named Vernon Smith. So, they submitted these two names to the people there which one would you pick for the name of your school. So, they picked Vernon the grandson and that is why it's called Vernon County Line because these two counties go to the same school.

JG: So Vernon was a Boykin?

HD: No Vernon was a Smith.

JG: A Smith.

HD: He is a grandchild.

JG: Of a Boykin?

HD: On the Boykin side.

JG: On the Boykin side, okay.

HD: His mother was a Boykin and his father was a Smith. So, he was Vernon Smith and the other one Douglas Boykin. We had a school reunion and I asked the group, I say, "How many of y'all know how we got the name Vernon County Line?" Nobody knew and so then I explained to them how that name came about. I said most of them picked Vernon Smith and that is why it's called Vernon County Line instead of Douglas County Line.

JG: Right, right. Tell me a little bit more about your father Mr. Pettis. What did he do for a living?

HD: My father wasn't raised in the community. My mother did not know him until the rock quarry come in there.

JG: The rock quarry, okay.

HD: That is when...

JG: Did he work there in the quarry?

HD: Yes.

JG: Okay, what did he do?

HD: Now he didn't really work in the quarry. What happened my grandfather, Jim Runnels...

JG: Jim Runnels.

HD: ...was the powder monkey they called him. He handled all the explosives.

JG: Jim Runnels and he was the powder monkey. Is that what they called him?

HD: That is what they referred him to because he handled all the explosives blasting these rocks out to get the kind of rock they needed. See what happened years ago Galveston was flooded and they didn't want it to be flooded no more. They decided they was going to build a seawall but they needed a certain kind of rock to do this and that is where they found the kind of rock that they wanted right down below our house.

JG: So how far away did you live from the quarry?

HD: From the blasting?

JG: Yes ma'am.

HD: Oh it was about a quarter of a mile, it wasn't far.

JG: And the school wasn't too far away from the quarry either was it?

HD: On the other side of us. We lived between the blue hole and the school.

JG: You lived between the blue hole and the school, okay.

HD: My father came I think following these people looking for the rock but now my mother was born and raised in Angelina County. Now, my father, the job that he did at the blue hole was he went and bought a brand new wagon and he bought two mules to pull this wagon and as they blasted the rock out it was dirt came out too. And, he was the one that hauled all the dirt off and if you go there to this day you will find mounds out there where he threw this dirt out and it built up mounds you know...

JG: Yes ma'am.

HD: ...on the back of the blue hole. And, after they blasted they had a machine sitting in there pumping the water out so they could get the kind of rock they wanted. There was a certain kind of rock they wanted.

JG: Right, so you remember when it was flooded then?

HD: Oh yes, I remember when it was full of water, the blue hole.

JG: And, then they would just pump it out?

HD: Well, so much came in there until it covered over this thing they got that was keeping it pumped out. It come in all at once. My father dived and put a chain on their pump so they wouldn't lose it and they drug it out. They built a railroad on the lower side of the blue hole. They built a railroad where a train could come in, just the engine with flat cars and they would load these rocks on that and it would take it out to a mainline going to Galveston.

JG: Take it to Rockland, I guess.

RD: Yes.

JG: Now, you said your father died working at the blue hole? Did I misunderstand that?

GD: Dived down and put a chain.

JG: Dived down, okay, I'm sorry. He dove down.

HD: He dived down and put a chain on the pump to pull it out to keep from losing it.

JG: Oh okay so, if I understand right maybe there was a little bit of water coming in from time to time and the pump would pump it out but, there came a time when so much water came that the pump couldn't keep up. Is that right?

GD: Right.

HD: Right.

JG: So, he had to dive down to get a chain on it so they could haul it up.

HD: Yes, that is right.

JG: Okay. So, did they return to quarry operations shortly after that or was that the end of it?

HD: To get more rock?

JG: Yes ma'am, were they ever able to get more rock out during the time that you remember?

HD: I don't remember but I guess they did. You could see where they moved down a little further and started blasting.

JG: About how old were you when your father would have dove down there? Do you remember about what time that was? Was it in the thirties or still in the twenties?

HD: That was still in the twenties.

JG: The twenties, okay.

RD: Helen what were those horses names?

HD: Huh?

RD: What were the horses names?

HD: That he bought to pull his wagons?

RD: Yes ma'am.

HD: He got two mules.

RD: What were their names?

HD: Net and Till. (laughter)

GD: When her house burnt she still had the original receipt from her daddy buying the wagon and the mules and she lost them when her house burnt.

JG: Oh no!

HD: My dad didn't know nothing about farming. He was raised in Harrisburg and in Wharton. That is where he was from. He just came to where we lived and met my mother at this rock quarry doing.

JG: Is the rock quarry what brought him up here?

GD: Yes.

JG: The job then, okay. And, that is where he met your mother.

HD: No, but anyway it was plenty of rock there but it was just certain kind they wanted and that is where they found the kind they wanted. I went over there after I got married.

Some years I would go visit my mother and we would go visit the blue hole and go in. So, I went over one day and she didn't feel like going to the blue hole with me. I said, "I hate to go by myself, but I will." She said, "I don't like for you to go by yourself." I said, "Oh I'll be all right." I went on and went in swimming and there was a man drove up on the high side. There was a high side and you could walk around to a low side you could go in. People couldn't swim would always go to the low side and go in, but the high side it was a...we had a spring board up on a rock way up high and, I saw this man drive up over there and he got out and come sit down. He was looking and so finally...

JG: In an automobile, drive up in an automobile?

HD: Yes.

JG: Okay.

HD: And he had on a uniform. I said well if he got a uniform he must be working for something. I found out he was working for the county, for the Forest Service. When I swam over there and going to talking to him he said, "You know I have enjoyed sitting here watching you swim and I said people couldn't swim like that, that was just something on television people showing, but I got to change that because I've actually seen it done in person."

JG: So you were a pretty good swimmer?

HD: I had to swim. I brought over three brothers older than I am and I had to swim.

JG: So did your brothers swim there as well?

HD: All my brothers were excellent swimmers.

JG: Because of the blue hole?

HD: My mother swim, my father swim, the whole family swim. My sister she is six years younger than I am and when she was a baby something broke out all on her body like hives or something like that. Momma carried her to Dr. Clemmons in Lufkin and he gave her some medication to use on her and she did but it didn't do any good. Momma say, "I'm taking her in the blue hole." So every day we would go to the blue hole take her and everything just cleared off so pretty. If you had some kind of sore on you or something that blue hole water was good for it. It was an old man from Rockland, old man Montoy, he would come to the blue hole in the evening and have my brother, my youngest one I am next to, my oldest brothers, three brothers older than I am. I wasn't nothing but a tom boy because whatever they done I did it, but anyway this old man would pay my brother to take him in swimming and he would take him in swimming ever so often maybe two or three times a week. He said he felt so much better when he would go in that blue hole. My brother didn't care how often he come because he was paying him.

RD: Helen do you remember a guy named B. Boy Barnes?

HD: I sure do. He lived right across the road from us.

RD: He was a good swimmer too wasn't he?

HD: Yes, Mrs. Gussie was his mother, Gussie Barnes was his mother.

JG: So did everybody that lived around there then swim?

HD: Around blue hole?

JG: Yes ma'am.

HD: Yes!

JG: Just kind of a community swimming hole then.

HD: It was a lot of them couldn't swim. Now my first cousin the same age as my younger brother he couldn't swim.

JG: Couldn't swim you are saying, could not swim?

HD: No.

JG: Or could swim?

GD: No, he could not.

HD: He could not swim.

JG: Okay.

HD: He was afraid to go in there but what my brothers would do he would come around on the lower side where this engine would come in and they would slip up on him and grab him and throw him in that blue hole and tell him to swim or drown. (laughter) Boy you would see him fighting the water and he soon learned to be an excellent swimmer. But his mother would tell him, "Don't you go in that blue hole till you learn to swim." "Aunt Mary how he gonna learn to swim on the ground, he got to go in the water." And, this diving board it was up high and my mother told me, "You better not dive off that board" because all my brothers would dive off. After church and Sunday school they would follow us down to blue hole to see us swim. I told my youngest brother, I say, "I'm going to go off that diving board I don't care what mamma say. I'm not going to drown." I said, "But I tell you what you just grab me and throw me like you throwing me off of it." So, we did. We run out on the board and I was standing up there and my

brother grabbed me and dove off in there and my mother hollered “You better not” and by that time I was gone down in the water.

JG: Was the water always real clear?

HD: No, it’s not clear. You dip you some out, I mean its blue looking at it, but when you dip it up it’s clear, but to stand up there and look at it its blue.

RD: Helen, somebody, I don’t know if it was you or not but someone told me that later on, much, much later on that the color changed in the old blue hole. Do you recall that?

HD: Yes, and I tell you why.

RD: It clouded up.

HD: See the creek ran right behind this dump between the creek and the blue hole.

JG: Chalk creek? Is that what you called it, chalk creek?

HD: No.

JG: Or Big Creek?

HD: Big Creek.

JG: Big Creek.

HD: And in latter years the creek started going out, running out you know, and it run off in the blue hole. But there was times if you saw a fish in there a little while you would see him die. It was no snakes lived in there.

JG: A lot of alkaline in there.

RD: It’s that kaolin clay.

HD: And no fish lived in there. It was nothing but the little brown, red and black bugs, we called them milk [unintelligible] bugs. They would be on top of the water.

RD: Whirlygigs.

HD: Now you could hear a frog croaking but it would be way at the end. And I haven’t heard of but one person getting drowned in there and that was some boys that stayed with their grandmother and they came to my mothers to borrow the cultivator. She wanted some ground broke up, she wanted to plant her a garden. And it was her grand boys and she told them to bring the team back and the cultivator. She say, “Whatever ya’ll do don’t go in that blue hole. Take these mules on to Mrs. Della’s house and don’t go in the blue

hole.” “Yes ma’am.” Well, they did just the opposite what she told them not to do. They went down and went in the blue hole before they bring the horses and one of them drowned. He couldn’t get out. Well the other one ran up to the house telling about this boy was in the blue hole and he couldn’t find him. So we all went down there but we didn’t find him, so Momma had somebody to call for the officers to come out, somebody to come out, somebody was in the blue hole drowned and they all came on out. Well it wasn’t far from the bank where he drowned. They found him. That was the only person I ever know of that drowned in the blue hole.

JG: Was there mining activity going on while you were, I mean while it had enough water in it to swim or once it filled with water that was the end of the quarry operations?

HD: What is your question now?

JG: You were talking about everybody swimming in the blue hole and of course I just know it from what I’ve seen with my own eyes, you know, it’s just a big hole full of water.

HD: You been to the blue hole down there?

JG: Yes ma’am but I meant once y’all started swimming in it and it was kind of a regular routine was there ever any more mining activity that you know of while you lived there?

HD: No.

JG: Okay.

HD: Now Boy Scouts come in to camp at the blue hole.

JG: So, once it filled up with water so high that was the end of the quarry operations?

HD: Yes.

JG: Okay. Now talk about some of the, you said the boy scouts came down. Was...I guess what I’m getting at, because we had talked to some other people about race relations, did blacks and whites swim together at the same time?

HD: Yes.

JG: Tell me about the boy scouts when they visited. Anything you remember about that?

HD: Yes, they would go down there a week at the time because they had a black man that cooked for them and all. A lot of times he would tell my brothers to come, they had a lot of food left, come take it home so y’all can eat it and, they would. And boy scouts came and some other groups came. We had a family reunion once on the blue hole. There

were some people there from Beaumont. My mother carried me to see them when I was a baby and these people were there so they asked Momma, said, "Is Helen here today?" Momma said, "Yes, she is here." They would say, "Oh that was a pretty baby, she was so pretty." There was another man from Camden, he was standing there he said, "Well she is still a baby." We would go and have family reunions there and my uncle from Houston had the big barbecue place and he would barbecue and bring a lot of barbecue down there and different ones would bring the cakes and pies and all. We would just have a time.

JG: Would that be from your father's side of the family?

HD: My mother's.

JG: Your mother's side so, your mother had a brother that had a barbecue place in Houston?

HD: No, her brother in law. Her younger sister was married to him.

JG: Okay.

HD: He was from Beaumont.

JG: Is that why you went to Houston? You said you finished school in Houston. What was the connection to go to Houston?

HD: Why I went to Houston? Because I had gone as far as I could at home.

JG: Who did you live with in Houston?

HD: I lived with my oldest brother.

JG: Okay.

HD: He had gotten married and I lived with him and went to school in Houston.

JG: How many brothers and sisters did you have?

HD: I had three brothers all older and I'm the first little girl. I told my mother, I said, "Momma I bet you were sure happy when I was born." She said, "What makes you think I was so much happier with you than I was with the rest of the children?" I say, "Because I was your first little girl." She said, "I sure was happy."

GD: She has got one sister younger than her.

JG: Okay.

HD: And when my sister was born all the people in the community say, "I'm so glad." See she is six years younger than I am. "I am so glad Della got another baby, you ain't the baby no more." My father say, "Yes she is, she will forever be my baby." (laughter) My daddy had a big gray mare and he liked to butcher. People would get him if they going to kill a beef, come and want him to butcher it and cut it up for them and all. He liked to do things like that. Killing hogs he would go and help him and all and put me up behind that old grey mare and I would ride behind, sitting in the saddle with my daddy wherever he'd go. So, I was the daddy's baby.

JG: Tell a little bit more about the Boykin Settlement area and just life in general. Someone, say my generation or even younger, you know just what life was like, the social side of it, churches, community activities, that kind of thing. You mentioned the hog killings and things.

HD: Well now years ago we had church in the school building.

JG: Okay.

HD: And finally we got a church. So, it's called the Rockwall Union Church because there were some Baptists went there, some Church of God and some Sanctified. Different members but we all worshipped in the same building. So that is why it was called Rockwall Union Church.

JG: And it's still an active congregation there isn't it?

GD: Yes.

JG: Yes, it's a nice pretty building right outside the entrance there to blue hole.

HD: You been over to the blue hole?

JG: I haven't swam, but I've been there. So you remember when that church was built? You said it was a separate, its own church building right?

HD: Yes.

JG: Okay. So, that was during your lifetime when that was built?

HD: Oh yes!

JG: Okay.

HD: I was grown when that was built. I was married and living in Camden when they finally built the church.

JG: Well what was the church called before that, or did you have a name? You said you met in the school. Was it still called Rockwall then or did ya'll have a name for the church or just church?

HD: That was the name of the church Rockwall.

JG: Okay and I guess that came from the rock quarry that name?

HD: I don't know where it come from, but that is what they called it.

JG: Did the whole community go to church or just some of the community?

HD: Most of them go to church. Like I say different denominations but they all worship together.

JG: And was Sunday afternoon kind of the favorite day for swimming? You mentioned earlier something about Sunday after church the parents watching the kids swim.

HD: Oh yes, it was the afternoon for them because they just come down them that lived about three or four miles from the school. Well and from the church too because they had to come to the school to have church. Well, then they would follow us down there just to see them swim.

JG: What do you remember most of the people, especially the men, what did they do for a living? Farmers? Did any of them work for the lumber companies?

HD: Well mostly farmers but another enterprise come in there which was the turpentine camp.

JG: Turpentine.

HD: Yes, they picked a spot and they built houses for these guys to stay in that worked for the turpentine and my mother married one of them so that made me have a stepfather.

JG: Yes, you mentioned earlier that your dad had died. How old were you when your father died?

HD: Oh, I was about five years old I guess when my father died.

JG: Okay. So, she remarried and married someone who worked at the turpentine camp?

HD: Right.

JG: Okay.

HD: Well mother would take my brothers at the turpentine. Those trees see it was what they called virgin pine around then it was big pine trees. And, they would have to rake the straw away from the trees because if a fire would get out it would interfere with these...they hacked the trees and they put some cups under there and this rosin would run out it would run into the cups. Then they would pick them up and carry them to the distillery to make turpentine. Well that is where my mother made money to help keep us going, take my brothers and rake trees.

JG: Scrape them, scrape those faces huh?

RD: No, rake the straw back.

JG: Oh rake the straw back.

HD: To keep the forest fires from interfering with the cups they got and that is where we made money. And, then my youngest brother, he worked for the county on the roads and that is where he made money. But after he got a teenager he was always a tall big guy and he told my mother, "I'm going to join the army."

GD: Got to be Uncle Vance.

HD: And Momma said, "I wish you would." And so, he did it come one Sunday morning. Mother is not easy to cry. I am the same way but my sister, oh Lord she will cry at anything. But anyway, he came and told Momma, "Well I'm going into the service; I've signed up already in Lufkin." So she said, "Well good, go ahead." And so, he left and she turned her head and she shed a tear but she didn't want us to see it. Well he went in the service and he wasn't old enough to go in no service. They didn't ask for birth certificates you just sign and tell them your age and they accepted that because he was big enough man to be that old. And he went in the service and his first stop was Fort Huachuca, Arizona and he stayed in the service about twenty five years. He came out when World War I [Mrs. Darden means World War II] was over, they discharged him. He was stationed in Oklahoma. Well he run to Houston because most of his relatives lived and his brother lived in Houston and cousins and all. He run down there. He bought a brand new car and he went to sleep and his buddy drove his car and hit a cow and tore it up and he traded it off and he got that car right there.

JG: This one in the photograph, huh?

HD: Yes, and when he...when the Korean War broke out "I'm going back in the service." So me and my husband drove him to California, no Washington, and he went back in the service. Well when he went back he was an old soldier so they wanted him to stay in the rear and he went AWOL. They went and got him about three times and brought him back. They said, "So you want to go on the front line." "That is what I ask for." "Alright we going to send you on the front line." They sent him on the front line and his commanding officer got killed and when he got killed all the soldiers, "We are going to retreat, we are going to retreat." He said, "Hell no nobody going to retreat, we are

going to take this hill; that is what we come here for, so keep fighting.” And after while he got a bullet in the shoulder and they carried him out on a tank to the hospital so he could get to the hospital. Then he wrote me a letter and told me he was in the hospital. He had a bullet in his shoulder and he was just waiting for them to take it out but if they give me a knife I cut it out myself. He said, “I’m not doing nothing but laying up here bull corning these nurses.” But he finally got out after so long. He finally decided to get out of the fighting business. That is what he wanted to be in.

JG: I’m sorry, go ahead.

HD: He lived in Tacoma.

JG: Tacoma, Washington.

HD: Yes.

JG: You were talking about turpentine operations awhile ago. Did you ever visit a turpentine camp? Did you ever go into a camp?

HD: Yes, we visited me and my brothers.

JG: Was that near the old Aldridge mill?

HD: No it wasn’t in that direction.

JG: Okay.

HD: It was just the opposite of that direction, the Aldridge business, the turpentine camp.

GD: Where was it at?

HD: It was, you know where the blue hole?

GD: Yes.

HD: It was in the lower settlement we called it going into the little settlement, the turpentine camp.

JG: East of the blue hole?

RD: Going back towards the highway I think.

GD: Going back toward the highway back towards 69.

HD: Yes, the way we go to Rockland.

JG: West then of the blue hole.

GD: Yes, west of the blue hole.

JG: West of blue hole, okay. I've just always heard that turpentine camps were pretty rough places to be. Would that be true of the one you visited?

HD: Well no, the one we visited didn't seem so rough. Of course we didn't go over there so often after my mother married one of them. (laughter) He left after the turpentine camp left from there and went to Waynesville, Georgia. And my step-daddy, he wanted to go with them, so momma told him to go ahead and he left with his son. His son is the same age I am. I'm from March until October older than he is. Well he and his son left and when he didn't find it like he thought he was going to find it and as quick as he got enough money he came back home and I asked Momma I said, "Why did you take that man back after he came back here?" She said, "Well he said he was going to kill my children if I didn't" and so she said, "I didn't want my children dead and I was afraid he would because he looked like that type of person." So she let him come on back and he stayed until he died.

JG: Do you care to share his name? Do you care to tell us his name?

GD: Talking about Mr. John Henry.

HD: Did he carry the Pettis name?

GD: No, he said do you mind telling him his name.

HD: No.

GD: John Henry Williams is what it was. He just wanted to know his name.

HD: Yes, it was John Henry Williams.

JG: Can you think of any questions Mr. Donovan to ask?

RD: Did you know Wilhelmenia and Dessie and Frazier and those kids? Did you know them?

HD: I reckon I did. You know Mrs. Mosely turned 99.

RD: Last month.

GD: Yes.

HD: Well my mother's first child was born January 1, 1912. Mrs. Mosely was born April 7, 1912 on a Easter, my brother New Years and her Easter, two first cousins. Their mother and my mother were sisters. Yes, I know them. You know what they call themselves now? There ain't but three of them up there now, the Golden Girls! (laughter)

RD: Well they are, they are pretty golden.

JG: So, ya'll went to school together then and grew up together.

HD: Oh yes, the twins and I finished because there is three days difference in the twins and me. My Aunt Mary would have to go to Magnolia Springs to see Uncle Harrison, her husband's people. Well it was hard for her to take two babies along and riding in a buggy. They borrowed my uncle's buggy and his horse to make the trip. Well, she would bring one of the babies down to my mother's and leave one of the babies with mother until she got back. Well you see what that meant? I had to share a tittie. (laughter) The other baby had to suck on one and I sucked the other one 'cause they didn't fix no bottles for them.

RD: What about when you went to Mrs. Mary's house?

HD: Oh, I stayed with Aunt Mary and them awhile.

RD: But did you get some tittie there is what I mean?

HD: Well when I stayed with them I was a good size kid. I was weaned and all when I stayed with them. (laughter) I tell you Uncle Harrison tore our butts up one time, me and them twins and Wilhelmenia, she followed us wherever we would go. He would buy matches by the case because he didn't go to town too often. He was the only one that had a car to travel and he would ask the people on Sunday, "What y'all need from town? I'm going to town." So everybody would give him a list and he would bring their groceries back. So he would buy matches by the case and he bought a case of matches and me and them twins and Wilhelmenia crawling and followed us, crawled under the house and we made us a garden and struck matches, stuck the stems down until we got a fence around our garden. Boy, when Uncle Harrison come home and found out what had happened to his matches you talking about tearing butts up, he tore us up.

JG: Did he make y'all crawl under there and get those matches out? (laughter)

HD: No, we had stems everywhere. We was striking them, you know, strike them matches and stick them down and make us a garden.

GD: Now, when you went to the blue hole, I haven't been down there in a long time, my understanding they had done some more blasting so that cliff is not there anymore right.

RD: Well there is cliff but that old cliff is gone, the one that she knows.

GD: Oh okay, the one I used to dive off of?

RD: Yes.

JG: I just was there about three or four years ago.

GD: Okay.

RD: It's all changed. It's a lot bigger than it was when she remembers it.

GD: Yes, I knew that.

JG: It is kind of shaped like that. The road that goes down to Bouton Lake goes this way so you come off and there is a little road like that and then the Vernon School house is over there. This right here is a cliff. (Jonathan drawing a map)

GD: Yes, well that has always been the high side.

JG: Oh okay.

GD: And when she talks about the low side there used to be a trail went around here and you could come in here and that was the low side. You could actually walk, but here this cliff used to be anywhere from fifteen to twenty feet tall.

JG: I would say it's about that high now.

RD: It's pretty well the same thing.

JG: It's pretty good.

GD: There used to be a pine tree that stood right here. I know the pine tree is gone and there was an old pillar, concrete pillar, that was left from where they had one of the cranes that picked rocks up and we had a rope tied to that pine tree, out of the top of that pine tree and we would pull back and get on top of that pillar and swing out.

JG: Where would the diving board that she was talking about?

GD: On top of that cliff.

JG: On top of that cliff, okay. And it was just like an oil derrick type, wooden structure with a board on it?

HD: Yes, well some of them said blue hole didn't have no bottom to it. I said that is a lie. I've been to the bottom too many times. (laughter)

JG: You went all the way down there huh?

HD: It's about thirty feet deep.

JG: Thirty feet deep.

RD: Helen do you remember them hauling rocks away from the blue hole in wagons or was there always a railroad there when you remember?

HD: No I don't remember them hauling the rocks now. All I remember they put a rail inside of the lower side of the blue hole over there and they brung that engine pulling flat cars.

RD: I read something the other day talking about hauling rocks away in a wagon. I think that was what your dad used to do was hauling that debris out of there.

HD: Well he was hauling the dirt out.

RD: Yes, yes ma'am.

JG: The chirt or whatever they called that, that powdery stuff. Did you ever ride the train?

HD: Oh, the one that was pulling the...

JG: Well no not necessarily the blue hole train but, did you ever go to Rockland and ride the train to Beaumont or anything?

HD: We would ride...they had a train come in down below from where we lived coming from Aldridge.

JG: From Aldridge okay. Tell me about that.

HD: It would go as far as Rockland. Well, when Momma needed some sugar or some coffee she would have us go down and flag this train and they would stop and pick us up at a certain place by the tracks there they got built for us to come there and flag the train if we wanted to go somewhere. And we would know the time it was going towards Rockland and my brothers and I would go down and they would flag the train and it would stop and we would get on it and ride to Rockland and get whatever Momma wanted from the store and then we would walk back.

JG: Would y'all walk back the railroad tracks?

HD: No, we walked back home.

JG: Yes, but I meant did you walk down the tracks to get back home?

HD: No, we would go the road. It was a road we could turn off and go.

JG: Okay, because Rockland is on the other side of the river. How did you get across the river going back home?

HD: Well, you know they built a big bridge across that river.

JG: At Rockland?

HD: Yes.

JG: Okay so, the highway 40 bridge.

HD: On the highway.

JG: The highway 40 bridge, okay.

HD: Yes, and that is the way we would come and hit that bridge and come on across there and we would cut across the woods.

JG: Would that be the county line road now?

RD: Yes, that was a long walk too.

JG: That was a long walk.

HD: Yes.

JG: That would have been the old Burrs, Ferry, Browndell and Chester that you were talking about. But by that time I think the Southern Pacific was leasing it. So, was it a...I'm real curious about the train that you rode, was it a passenger train?

HD: They just carried one car.

JG: One car okay. Did they carry any freight cars in the train as well or just the engine and the passenger car or were there other cars in it?

HD: They would sometimes have some pulpwood or something on there.

JG: Pulpwood okay.

RD: Probably wasn't pulpwood, probably logs.

JG: Just logs?

HD: Yes.

JG: Any lumber, was there any mills operating in the area?

HD: In the what?

JG: The main Aldridge mill I guess would have been burned by that time, but were there any sawmills around?

HD: No, just going to Aldridge. Well, going from where we lived you could go by the school and instead of turning left going up to where the Frazier's lived we would keep straight on across a branch called Mill C Branch.

JG: Mill Seed?

RD: Mill Creek Branch.

HD: Mill C Branch. Well if we were going to Aldridge that is the way we would take a road that goes there. Well you could go to Aldridge and momma would send sometime and we would go in the wagon when we go there.

JG: Was there still a community at Aldridge? Were there still a few people that lived in Aldridge or had they all moved out?

HD: I hadn't been there in a long time.

GD: No, he talking about when you was a child.

HD: Yes, it was still...

JG: The mill wasn't running but there were still some houses and some people living there. Is that right?

HD: Yes.

JG: Okay.

HD: Some of them come over and worked around the rock quarry. They had a couple, a girl and a boy, and they would come visit my mother pretty regular. They were staying out there at the rock quarry, okay because I think their parents were working out there, their daddy, but anyway the boy told Momma, his sister was named Kate, he said "Della, Ma and Pa sent Kate to Aldridge to go to school. They wouldn't send me. I wanted to go to school at Aldridge and they wouldn't send me. Kate's asshole stink worse than mine; they ought to send me too."

JG: So Aldridge had a school?

HD: Yes.

JG: Okay. Now you mentioned playing basketball and sports earlier when you went to school, did Aldridge have a team or anything?

HD: I don't think so.

JG: Okay, was it a white school or a black school at Aldridge?

HD: It was a white school. But it was a guy from Aldridge he went in the service too but he and my youngest brother, my youngest brother was tough. He slipped up to this guy...what was his name...behind he jumped on my brother and my brother whooped the you know what out of him and so he decided he was going to get even with my brother, Vance the younger brother. He slipped up on him with a gun and he put the gun to his head and called him. He looked around and there was gun barrel right in his face. He said, "Don't you believe I'll blow your damn brains out?" Vance said the man had the gum barrel pointed right in my face he said, "Yes, Cecil" his name was Cecil Dubose, "Yes Cecil I believe you'll blow my brains out." Well he didn't bother him; he left him alone. So when Vance went in the service and he came back home for the first time visiting momma he say "Momma is old Cecil Dubose still living?" Momma said, "Yes, Vance he is still living." I hope I lay eyes on him that is the one I want to whoop the hell out of. Momma said, "No don't do that because he's been in the army and he's all broke up. He's in bad shape so don't bother him, don't whoop him."

JG: Did your brothers hunt and fish? Did y'all hunt and fish any?

HD: My step daddy did. My father didn't but my step daddy, he loved to fish and he fished some ways we didn't know how. We would go to Boyton Lake. You been there?

JG: Yes ma'am.

HD: Well we would go to the Boyton Lake. You know fish sleep near the bank. He would get some fat lighter pine and break some long strips and make a big light and take it over there and he got the rim off of a buggy and straightened it out where it would be just a long rod like only flat and he would light those splinters we had. They make a big light. The fish sleep close to the bank and he would take this bucket thing and his light he would see them, hit him, reach down catch them, put them in the sack and we'd go back home with a sack full of fish and hadn't put a hook nowhere.

JG: Would those be catfish?

HD: No, scale fish.

JG: Scale fish, okay.

RD: I've never heard that.

JG: We learned a new fishing technique today. I'll have to try that Saturday.

RD: Helen do you remember people having hogs and cattle in the woods?

GD: Oh I remember that.

HD: Oh Lord yes! My mother had I don't know how many cattle in the woods. My brothers and my husband would go up there and go cattle hunting to brand them, brand the calves and things like that. They would go in the woods and round those cows up and drive them to the house and put them there in the lot and they would get the branding iron hot. That is the way you would brand them, those calves you know, because people would steal your stuff. Well mother told the children, "Y'all come home. I'm getting rid of some of my cows. I'm going to give each one of you a calf and a cow a piece and it's yours to take care of and do whatever you want to." She said, "But you got to get in the pen and catch the one you want." So it come down to my younger brothers they caught theirs and time for my older brother to catch his cow, "Come on Helen help me." (laughter) Momma said, "No, Helen ain't going to help you, you have got to catch him yourself. She ain't going to help you."

GD: Now is that your grandpa and grandma? (looking at a picture)

HD: Yes.

JG: Oh yes!

RD: That is the Runnel's isn't it?

GD: Yes, Jim.

JG: Yes, their tombstone has their picture on it.

HD: That was the powder monkey.

JG: So he was the powder monkey, Mr. Jim Runnels?

HD: Yes.

JG: Now he was born before the end of slavery. Is that right? That is what the tombstone said.

GD: Yes, because he went to the reservation and got his wife.

RD: Well that was my next comment. You remember that? You hear what he just said?

JG: Yes, say it again.

GD: They went to the reservation when they abolished slavery and tell them he needed a wife so, they sent him to the reservation to get a wife.

JG: Really?

HD: Well see my daddy lived with white people, but they wouldn't use him for a slave. They just raised him like he was their child.

JG: Mr. Pettis?

HD: No, Runnels.

JG: Okay.

GD: Her grandpa.

JG: Okay, I was confused.

HD: And when he got grown they give him land and they told him to go to the reservation to get him a wife. He needed a wife and so now he wasn't treated like a slave. He was treated like he was their own child.

RD: Do you happen to know what nationality of Indian she is?

HD: No I don't. I don't know what reservation was close that he went.

JG: When was the Alabama Coushatta Reservation?

RD: Well, that would be the closest reservation but they had other Cherokee, Choctaw, Kickapoo.

JG: That would be the closest one beside Oklahoma, right?

RD: Yes, but there were still little pockets of Indians around.

GD: Well, way back then there...we said they sent him to a reservation to get it but back then they just sent him to one of the Indian camps or whatever, so it wasn't necessarily a full blown reservation.

JG: Organized reservation.

GD: Yes, because like you said there were pockets of different tribes of Indians still here.

JG: Do you remember much about him? Can you just talk about your grandfather? Did you see him much as a child? Were you around your grandfather much?

HD: Well not too much. I know we would go up there to see Grandpa and Grandma and he would be sitting in his rocking chair on the porch and Grandma she wouldn't never ask you how is your Momma, how is your Mammie. (laughter)

JG: Mammie. (laughter)

RD: Helen where was their house?

HD: Right below where the Frazier's house is?

RD: Yes ma'am.

HD: Well it was back this way from their house.

RD: Up on the hill kind of?

HD: No, yes it's on a hill from where our property is, it's on a hill. Well, they first had a small house and then he built a big large house, he did. He would be sitting on the porch and his wife would ask, "What is your mammie doing?" We would say, "Nothing." He would say, "Now listen you tell her to get off that job because that is my job doing nothing." (laughter) We would sometime play ball. Uncle Harrison ran the school bus, take us and come back, me and my step-brother. Where they lived my second brother lived with them mostly and they got you up at four o'clock in the morning and you fixed a fire in the fire place so it would be warm time for Grandma got up. Then when she got up she was going to go to the kitchen and fix the food, the breakfast. After I married then my brother lived with them he was still in the habit of getting up too soon. Well, I wouldn't normally dress on a Saturday. They didn't have to go to work and my brother would get up and go out to the wood pile, "Wolf come on cows, wolf, wolf." I said "I'll be glad when you get you a wife and get out of my house. I can't rest no time." Yes, that was the one that did all that blasting.

JG: What did he do after the quarry filled in with water and he stopped blasting? What did he do after that?

HD: Just farm.

JG: Farm okay.

RD: Did you ever pick any cotton Helen?

HD: Oh Lord don't mention it, yes sir. I tried hard but I picked two hundred pounds one day.

RD: That is pretty good. I never could do that.

HD: Lord yes, I have picked a many boll of cotton. Glen went down in the valley or somewhere...

GD: No I was out in West Texas.

HD: ...he broke a cotton twig off and brought it back.

JG: Did you switch him with it?

GD: It wasn't but about that long.

HD: I said I got to carry this to the Frazier's so they can see some cotton.

JG: Where would y'all sell the cotton?

HD: Zavalla.

JG: Go to Zavalla and sell it.

RD: Erin Barges Gin.

GD: Yes.

HD: Yes, Mr. Barge he was Momma and them's pet. They could go there and get anything they want from him.

RD: He was a good man, he really was.

HD: Didn't have to have a penny just whatever you need you got it.

JG: Is that where Mr. Harrison Frazier would have gone? You mentioned he had an automobile and he would go to town and get peoples supplies. Is that where he went was Zavalla usually?

HD: Yes.

JG: Okay.

HD: That is where he would be going to Zavalla. They finally put a mail route on where we wouldn't have to go up there to get mail. They would stop at your house and run out to the road and go out and get your mail out of the box. Yep!

JG: That was a pretty good walk what we were talking about earlier when y'all walked back from Rockland. That was a pretty good walk across that highway bridge and then...

RD: Probably four or five miles I bet.

GD: It's farther than that from the railroad back to their house?

RD: She said they would walk from Rockland back home. They would walk across the bridge and then turn down the County Line Road I guess.

HD: Shoot that wasn't no walk a'tall compared to what Uncle Mac did. You know what? He walked from home, the Settlement, clean to Beaumont.

JG: Now how long did that take?

HD: That wasn't no walk at all for him.

JG: I believe I would have hoboed on the train or something.

HD: No, he would walk to Beaumont. He had kinfolk in Beaumont. When he got ready to go see them he would get in the road and, "Well I'm going to step on down to Beaumont today."

JG: Step on down.

HD: He would, he would step on to Beaumont and he would get ready to come back home he would step it back home. He didn't ride the train. He walked to Beaumont.

JG: Anything more you can remember about that train, the railroad that was just below your house as you were talking about south of the...

HD: That would go to Rockland and to Aldridge?

JG: Yes ma'am, any more memories about seeing those trains? Of course I guess they were all steam engines.

HD: I guess so (laughter) all I would do is get on and ride them with my brothers and stick my head out the window looking and if it blowed the train "whoop", my brother would say, "Get your head in here."

JG: I guess it went across the river there, that trestle that me and Mr. Donovan went down and saw a couple of years ago by canoe and there is all there is, is just some old pilings in the river bottom there. That is pretty high. The river is pretty deep there. That must have been a high trestle. Were y'all ever as kids scared to go across the river that high? I guess not jumping in the blue hole.

HD: No we wasn't afraid of no water, shoot the creek would get up down there and back up so high and children couldn't come to school. My step daddy put a boat down there because there is water all across them bridges. He would put his ladder, I mean his boat and he would pick the children up, the school children, bring them across the water to go on to school. Then he would take them back because some of them was sick. My mother

would make pallets and all and keep them so they could go to school the next day. Yes, we had a way of getting by all right and going.

RD: Helen do you happen to have any idea where Sterling's wife is buried? Sterling Boykin, where his wife is buried? No one I've ever talked to knows where she is buried.

HD: Sterling Boykin?

RD: Yes ma'am, he was an old pioneer that came in there.

HD: I really don't know.

RD: I can't think of her name, it escapes me right now.

JG: Is he buried there at the campground at Boykin Springs?

RD: Well they say he is but, I am not sure of that Jonathan. I wouldn't bet money that he was there.

JG: But, is that what they are saying that little cemetery is?

RD: Yes.

JG: But you don't think he is buried there.

RD: I would be surprised if he is.

JG: Okay.

HD: But, you know I think where my mother and them used to have to go to church, way across from where the cemetery is now, they come from up where they lived by where the cemetery is now, way on the other side of there. That is where they had to go and Sterling, he is probably buried over there. I've never been there, but maybe that is where the body is.

RD: I don't know. It would be interesting to know that. I can't think of her name to save my life. And like I say, I wouldn't bet Sterling is buried over there at the campground either. I think that Forest Service did that. I don't know.

HD: Yes, I've heard Momma talk about Sterling Boykin though. She knew all of them.

RD: I wish I could remember that woman's name. That aggravates me so bad.

JG: We need a copy of your book.

HD: You never did know Uncle Jim Boykin did you?

RD: Beg your pardon?

HD: Did you ever know Jim Boykin?

RD: Yes ma'am.

HD: I remember Uncle Jim was sitting on the porch...

RD: I've heard this story.

HD: A man drove up looking for Jim Boykin...

RD: Rode up, yes.

HD: ...and he was sitting on the porch so they ask for somebody they were looking for and...

RD: They were looking for a Jim Boykin.

HD: Yes, they were looking for Jim Boykin so, they said, "Oh no, this is a nigger we are looking for" and Uncle Jim said, "Well I'm the nigger then if that is who you are looking for." (laughter)

RD: Get down and come in, is the way I heard the story.

HD: Yes, get off your horse, rest your horses and come in. Yes, they thought he was white. They were looking for the nigger Jim. He said, "This the nigger you are hunting."

RD: Letty was her name, Letty Neil. Letty Neil was Sterling's wife, Letty Neil.

HD: Well I've heard Momma call that name Sterling, but I hadn't never heard her call what his wife was named. I don't remember that one.

RD: Slipped away I guess.

HD: Well, you knew quite a bit of them old folks back then didn't you?

RD: Yes ma'am I did. I knew the teacher from down there. I can't think of his name either, but the teacher at Vernon School, you know. I think they took him back to Palestine or somewhere and buried him did they not?

GD: I can't remember.

HD: Who you talking about Glenn?

GD: All I can get out right now is Chester.

RD: He was kind of short.

HD: Who?

GD: Used to teach school up there at the school, just before the school closed, used to come down to Grandma's all the time and eat.

HD: I'm not thinking now.

GD: We called him Professor or something. I can't think of it.

RD: Professor, that is what we called him, called him Professor.

GD: He was up there when Aunt Talitha was teaching school and Ronnie and Kent and them were all going. I used to go up there and go to Grandma's and go up there and buy a 16 ounce bottle of RC for a nickel. They lived where the school house was here and a little shop deal like thing was here and he had this house sit right there. He lived right there at the school.

HD: They had a teacher's home.

GD: Yes, he was the last teacher that taught school up there. You know him just like I do but I can't think of his name for nothing right now.

JG: Did you go to school down there?

GD: No, I went to school here at Camden.

RD: It was closed by the time he came along.

GD: No.

RD: No. How old are you Glenn?

GD: I was small but it was still going on.

RD: Okay.

GD: No, I went to school here at Camden. My first eight years were here at Camden. Now, some of my momma's sister's children started to school up there.

JG: Just for the recording can you remember some of those teachers names so we would have some of that?

GD: Well my aunt taught up there for a while, Talitha Russell.

JG: Talitha Russell.

GD: Because it was a two room school. They went from first through eleventh grade, but it was only two rooms. I can't think of the principal's name for nothing.

JG: And that was part of Tyler County Schools, is that right?

RD: Yes.

GD: Yes.

JG: Tyler County.

RD: It was in Angelina County but they went to Tyler...it was in Jasper County but it went to Tyler.

JG: I think Colmesneil was north.

GD: Colmesneil, yes they all go to Colmesneil now.

JG: Even though it's in Angelina County.

RD: But, at the time if I'm not mistaken, she is talking about the ball games, I think they called themselves Eagles. Is that right?

GD: Zavalla?

RD: I think they call themselves the Eagles.

GD: What did y'all call your ball team?

HD: Call what?

GD: Your ball team, what was y'alls mascot?

JG: Vernon School's mascot?

GD: Was it the Eagles?

HD: No, we didn't have no certain thing.

GD: It was just Vernon County Line huh?

HD: Yes.

RD: I believe they called themselves the Eagles.

JG: What were some of the schools y'all would have played?

HD: Oh we played Jasper and Colmesneil and Woodville and all around.

GD: Camden.

HD: Every school.

JG: Who was the...in your years who were the best athletes? Did y'all win more than you lost?

HD: I tell you, we went to...our team Professor Phillips...

GD: Professor Phillips that was his name.

HD: ...we went to Camden once to play against Camden. Okay, the principal at Camden told our principal, said, "Your girls are small and I'm going to play Mary Allen College today, the same day y'all are going to play. Let me play the college first and if I beat the college they will have a big send off beating the college." And, my principal said, "Go ahead, play the college" he said, "Because your girls are small." He said, "Well just go ahead and play the college." So, he played Mary Ellen College and they beat Mary Ellen. But you see they used to play basketball two divisions and then they changed it to three divisions on the court. When we got out on the court and pulled that three division they didn't know nothing about it and they stopped the game and the principal said, "My girls are not used to playing three division. We still play two divisions." So, Phillips said, "Well any way you want it, we'll play it any way you want it." So, we played two division like they were used to. Boy, we tore them up. It made them so sick to get beat. They thought we weren't going to be nothing, you know. And the funniest thing they all thought I was the teacher and when I went into the room to change to put on my suit they say, "Well I thought you was a teacher." I said, "No I'm a student, I'm not the teacher."

RD: Because you were so tall is that right Helen?

HD: I guess so. So, we went out there and we pulled a three division on them. They didn't know which way to go so they stopped the game. He said, "My girls never played three divisions." He said, "You know that hasn't been long come out." He said, "We play two division" and our principal said, "I'll play any way you want it." He said, "Well two division." They put it in two divisions. Shoot, these little girls as he called it, we ran over Camden. Boy they were so surprised, oh them little girls could play ball. We could play that basketball. I tell you why girls were so good, our team. When the larger boys, they had to quit school to help with the farm work and it left O. C. Smith, the youngest one of four brothers, he was the only one left to go to school because he wasn't old enough and we played with him, you know. So us being playing with a boy well we got a lot of experience on the field playing basketball, playing with him.

JG: Did you ever play Diboll? Did Vernon ever play Diboll?

HD: No, we never did go towards Diboll. We went the other way.

JG: Southward, okay. Well I know there is probably other things I should be asking. Can you think of anything else?

RD: No, I can't Jonathan.

GD: If you think of anything later on, she is here twenty-four/seven.

JG: Okay.

GD: Except on Sunday's and every once in a while she goes to see her sister, but other than that she is here all the time.

JG: We met one of your kinfolk I think coming in, one of the Williams. We forget her first name though.

HD: Which one?

RD: It is over on the...

GD: Community.

JG: The main road.

RD: No, after you turn off onto Lillie Loop, turn right on that farm to market road and then go out that way just a bit.

JG: There is a green house on the main road. We didn't turn off, we passed Lillie Loop up and we kept on going.

GD: Green house got the shrubs in it, on the left there, talking about Mary Zion.

HD: That is Reverend Hubbard's daughter.

RD: She is a nice lady.

JG: Very nice, we pulled up and Mr. Donovan said, "We are looking for Helen Darden" and she told us right where to go. I think she said that you were her auntie.

HD: Yes, they all call me Aunt Helen. She married a Darden and he is kin to my husband, but all of them call me, practically the whole church calls me Aunt Helen.

RD: Well what is the idea of this ball park or something up here named Helen Darden Park.

JG: Yes we saw that.

GD: All right, I'll give you the scoop on that. My mother used to take care of a gentleman here in the community. His name was Babe Barnes and he lived past the barn, or what we call the barn, he lived up there. In his old days he wasn't married so mom used to cook and carry him food or he would come over and get food and whatever, so when he passed away he left mom four acres of land. Her nephew, her brother's son Sammy Jean Pettis, was living in Houston at the time but they wanted to get a riding club, a horseback riding club out here. So, Sammy came up with the idea of if momma would sell him them land.

HD: No, he said I wish we had a place.

GD: Yes, he came up with the idea so Momma said, "I'll sell you the land real cheap." Because what we are going to do is build kind of like a community center so everybody in the community will have a place to go if they want to have a family reunions, get together's or whatever.

HD: No, that is what I told him. I'll let you have the land if you put something nice on there if somebody want to have family reunions or whatever they can come there.

GD: And so they did and they named it the Helen Darden Park.

RD: Pretty nice.

JG: We went there too and got directions. (laughter) We missed the road.

GD: Missed that little turn, yes.

JG: We saw another truck was right in front of us so he pulled in there so, we pulled in too and I said well this may not be her house but here is her park.

GD: I need to get your number because I'm trying to get together the Runnels family, Momma's side of the family for a family reunion the last Saturday in July at which it will be the descendants from the family up at Boykin Settlement. And, if I can get everybody together I'll call you and let you know and you can come down and talk to some of the younger ones. Her sister will be there.

JG: Oh okay.

GD: Mom will be there and hopefully some of the Boykin's and some of the people from the Settlement we can get them to come down, you know. All it will be is just a big day of...

RD: You better hurry.

GD: ...eating and talking. Yes, it's getting thin up there, you know. I've got it reserved for the last Saturday in July.

RD: Where?

GD: At the barn.

RD: Okay.

JG: I tell you what, let me turn this recording off and then we can visit a little bit.

GD: Okay.

JG: Again, I really appreciate you visiting with us and letting us share some of your experiences. So, I'll go ahead and stop the recorder.

END OF INTERVIEW