

**LASSIE SCURLOCK**

**Interview 243a**

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**Valencia Kuykendall, Interviewer**

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**ABSTRACT:** In this interview with her niece Valencia Kuykendall, Lassie Scurlock reminisces about growing up in Lufkin as an African American girl during the era of segregation. She discusses going to school at Dunbar School, her teachers, sports, and traveling to out of town games. She also talks about living in a segregated society, with separate public facilities and sitting on the back of the bus. Mrs. Scurlock concludes the interview with words of advice for her niece.

**Valencia Kuykendall (hereafter VK):** This is an interview with my Aunt Lassie Scurlock.

**Lassie Scurlock (hereafter LS):** I am 69 years old.

**VK:** She will discuss some ideas that I think will be interesting to us as we study black history. Aunt Lassie, will you give me some information about your mother and father?

**LS:** Well my mother was a Louisianan from Shreveport, Louisiana and my father came from Mississippi. How they got together I really don't know, but that is about all the background that I know about my mother and father. My grandmother there in Shreveport was a slave and my father said that my grandmother on his side was a full blood, my great-great-grandmother was a full blood Indian. I don't know about their husbands.

**VK:** How many sisters and brothers did you or do you have?

**LS:** Well there were 14 of us in the Tims family and I am the last three in the dish. I am the baby girl. I have living now one brother and two sisters with, myself makes four of us.

**VK:** Did they all attend school?

**LS:** Yes, they all attended school and two of them went to college, three, Reverend Tims, my brother. I had one brother who was a preacher, Reverend Moses P. Tims he went to Butler College. I went to Butler College. I also attended Texas College. My sister Viola went to Houston College in Houston, Texas. That was way, way back.

**VK:** I didn't know that. What do you remember about your elementary school?

**LS:** Well when I was in elementary school I went to the old Dunbar School. You couldn't tell elementary from the high school because we were housed in the same

building. From the fourth grade through the seventh grade we were kind of in the middle of the building and the primer folks, they were kind of at the front part of the building. It wasn't a very large school, but we had good teachers and I can remember us having spelling bees like on Friday. You would have so many stand up beside the wall on this side and so many on the other side and spell and the last one down was the speller. He was the one that got the prize.

**VK:** This was at Dunbar High School?

**LS:** This was at Dunbar High School.

**VK:** Now you know where I got my jacket from?

**LS:** Okay.

**VK:** What do you remember about your high school days?

**LS:** Well my high school days were equally as good as the elementary days. We still wasn't divided. We had one great, great big, I would call it kind of an auditorium look like and all the classes were in there. We were from seventh grade through the tenth or eleventh. I am so...my mind, I done forgot but from the seventh through about the tenth grade or eleventh and we had good teachers, good professors. I was the val. of my class when I finished high school. I was the valedictorian of my class and we had a banquet.

**VK:** A senior banquet?

**LS:** A senior banquet. We would have all of our activities over at the First Baptist Church over on Leach Street. We had the banquet downstairs at this church and I can remember so well my first pair of high heel shoes. (laughter) I walked from my house over to the church house in these high heel shoes and this long dress. We didn't have cars where we could ride to the banquet like these children do today.

**VK:** How much has Dunbar now changed since you were in high school?

**LS:** Well you wouldn't know it. Actually you wouldn't know Dunbar then and Dunbar now. Every class has its own room now and when I went to school the boys played on one side of the campus and the girls played on the other side.

**VK:** That was my sixth grade year.

**LS:** It was mixed up when I went to school. The boys had a basketball court where they would play at twelve o'clock for lunch period and we girls just played ring around the rosies and run up and down. We didn't have anything to do. That was about the size of it. You wouldn't remember Dunbar now and Dunbar then from the way they have progressed.

**VK:** Did you all have extra-curricular activities such as band, choir, basketball and football? I know you had basketball because you played basketball.

**LS:** Well, through the years I guess we got about to ninth grade they hired a teacher, Mrs. White, from Houston, to come in and teach physical ed. Then they had a boy's basketball team and we had a girl's basketball team but that is about all we had as far as sports. Well we had a coach they finally hired a coach. I want to say Pete Runnels and his brother Dave Runnels of Lufkin, we give them credit for teaching the boys how to play football because we didn't have a coach but, they finally hired one.

**VK:** Okay, what do you remember about the sports?

**LS:** I know we didn't know anything about it and they would let the girls that were in the pep squad come down in the afternoon and watch the boys play so we would know when to holler when they made a touchdown or if they made a touchdown. We didn't know. Basketball we knew, but football, when we got it, we didn't know anything about it.

**VK:** Did you all have school buses?

**LS:** Well we didn't have school buses. We walked to school and we were never late. The children from Cedar Grove walked to Lufkin to Dunbar to school and they were never late. We always had to walk in the rain and the snow and the sleet and all. When we got to school we had one teacher that kept a bucket of warm water we would put our hands in it and we would kind of thaw our hands out because they would be so cold.

**VK:** How did you get to out of town games?

**LS:** Our principal Professor W. H. Brandon would hire Robert Denum bus that he moved people in, a great big long trailer on this bus and put a tarpaulin over it and some benches.

**VK:** What is that?

**LS:** A tarpaulin is a cover.

**VK:** Oh, okay.

**LS:** And some benches in this bus and we got in there on these benches and set down and rode to Nacogdoches, to Jasper and all around the places that we played football. That is the way we would go in this big old truck.

**VK:** Okay, I know you grew up in Lufkin during the segregation era. What is the most lasting thing you remember about this era?

**LS:** Well I know I remember it was a terrible time looking back on it now and the way we are today. When we go to...we didn't go to town to the café's to try to go in and eat at Angelina Hotel or places like that. They had little stand, well like these Dairy Queen places and we would go in the back. They had a little room back there for the colored people to go in and a window. If you weren't going in you stood at this window and get your food or whatever it was, but you didn't go inside and sit down like we do now. We finally got a city bus and you rode in the back of the city bus. You didn't sit up at the front on the city bus; you knowed your place was in the back, so when you get on everybody pretty much sit in the same place. We got to the back where we was supposed to get and you would go on to town.

**VK:** Could you talk about the water fountains when you went to the movies or the theater or something?

**LS:** Well, we weren't allowed to drink from the water fountains in all the stores, the water fountains inside of the store. They had a little sign up over that fountain that Negroes couldn't drink from that fountain. We had to not bother that fountain and they didn't have one for us. And also, the fountains and the restrooms were about the same. They didn't have a restroom for you to go to. I don't care what kind of a tight you got in you didn't go to this restroom. It was...looking back on it now it was terrible times back there.

**VK:** Didn't later they progressed and got two water fountains?

**LS:** Yes, for colored down through the years as bigger stores come in, J. C. Penney, I remember when they came in and the Fair Store, they would have a fountain on one side and one on another that said "Colored" and the other one said "White" so, you knew your place where to drink.

**VK:** Okay, what types of jobs have you worked or you had, rather?

**LS:** Well I was a babysitter for a long time before I went to college. I was a babysitter. I kept folks' babies. I never did cook because I never could cook too good.

**VK:** (laughter) Yes, you can.

**LS:** As I went on and on after I got married, I had a job at a clinic, Father James Clinic and I worked there for a number of years, but babysitting was about all the job that I ever did.

**VK:** I remember when you kept me. Do you have a special talent?

**LS:** Well, I had one the good Lord give me. I picked it up. I didn't have music. Back there we had one colored music teacher here, Mrs. Ester O'Quinn. I took music from her about a month and she passed, she died. So, that made it we didn't have nobody to take no music. She charged fifty cents a lesson.

**VK:** I wish it was like that now.

**LS:** That is what we had to pay for it, so I just picked it up and picked it out and picked out songs and I would play for the choir here at my church. I played for about twenty years with the choir until some of these younger folks come on and they could play and I just stepped down and let them have it.

**VK:** What advice would give to us as teenagers?

**LS:** The main thing I would like to see the teenagers do today is pay attention to your parents and get your lessons down. You are going to have to have a good education to get anywhere. You need to stay in school and let the dope alone. Don't bother the dope and cocaine and all that. Pay attention to your teachers and to your parents and go to church and serve the Lord and I think if you do all those things and add them up you will come out more in confidence.

**VK:** Thank you. This concludes my interview with my aunt. Thank you!

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END OF INTERVIEW**