

MRS. CECIL PURDY

Interview 002a

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Mrs. Marge Shepherd, Interviewer

Retyped by Courtney Lawrence

ABSTRACT: In this interview with Marge Shepherd, Cecil Lightfoot Purdy reminisces about growing up in Garrison, Texas and Pineland, Texas, and moving to Diboll as a married woman. Mrs. Purdy loved music, received a piano as a gift from her father, studied music and was a music and piano teacher to countless Pineland and Diboll children throughout her life.

Cecil Purdy (hereafter CP): Oh, well, you mean where I was born?

Marge Shepherd (hereafter MS): Yeah, that's right.

CP: Born in Atlanta, Texas, 1891. I moved to Diboll from Atlanta when I was a very young child, before Diboll was much of a town. And then I left Diboll when I was about ten years old. My first school was here, though, in Diboll. And then I didn't see it again until I was married and moved back here and it had grown. Now that is about that part of it. Now what do you want to know?

MS: Okay. Now tell me a little about how you became interested in music.

CP: I don't know about that. It seems to me we had very little music going and I thought piano was the greatest thing and no one but rich people really owned a piano. I had a little toy piano. One or two little finger works that I took from a woman in Garrison, Texas. We moved to Garrison, Texas, then. So that is my first piano lesson. I don't remember too much. I remember something about them, but I don't like to tell.

MS: Mrs. Purdy, when did you get your first piano?

CP: Well, my father had a small sawmill out of Garrison and in the summer when there wasn't any school, we would go out there and stay with him, and he bought me a piano. I went to meet the wagon that was bringing it in. Two horses pulling the piano from Garrison, out there in the woods and they had turned the piano over. So the first time I saw my piano, a big, heavy, carved piano, it was turned upside down. It took a lot of beating and took a great deal of hard times and I enjoyed that old piano. So I stayed out there and almost taught myself then. I practiced a lot. But that is really the first time I can recall having a piano.

MS: Then when you left there, did you move again?

CP: Yes, we went to San Augustine and I had a very good teacher in San Augustine in school. From San Augustine, my father was building a mill in then what was Rush,

Texas, which is Pineland. He was building a little mill. He had the small mill to cut the lumber to build a big mill, which became Temple Lumber Company later.

MS: You don't remember the date on that, do you?

CP: I really don't. It was Garrison Norton Lumber Company who owned it from Garrison. They had gotten him to build the mill.

MS: That was your father?

CP: Yes, we moved from San Augustine down to Bronson.

MS: Mrs. Purdy, did you have any sisters or brothers?

CP: No. I had one older brother. He died at Pineland.

MS: And then from San Augustine you moved to...

CP: To Pineland. And then I went to school – I had to go to a private school in Dallas which was a conservatory, too, of music. I concentrated on music more than I did anything else. And I went there all the time that we were building and living there (Pineland). Talking about my piano, I went down from Dallas to Pineland during a cold winter spell, and it had snowed in the house before it was covered, and the piano had an inch of snow on top of it. So that was another hardship that old oak piano took. But I stayed in school up until the time we built a home in Bronson, Texas. And that is where I met....

MS: Mr. Purdy?

CP: Yes, that is where I met him. He was with Kirby Lumber Company.

MS: Did you meet him where you were going to school or did you meet him...

CP: No, I met him in Bronson. He came from Kirby Lumber Company. They sent him up there. That is where they had a mill in Bronson.

MS: Was he a salesman?

CP: No, he was a planer foreman.

MS: And how long did you all go together before you got married?

CP: Oh, three years.

MS: You had a nice long courtship.

CP: Yes, we knew each other that long...but not a courtship that long. He was a little older. He thought I was too young for him. And I guess I thought he was too old for me. But it didn't turn out that way.

MS: When did you all get married?

CP: Oh, April 28 – I can't tell you the date – 1904. Look up there. April 28....

MS: Bronson, Texas, April 28...it doesn't have a date on that.

CP: Yes, it does.

MS: It does? Okay. I don't see it any place.

CP: 1909...yes, 1909.

MS: All right. Okay.

CP: 1909. Yeah.

MS: And where were you living, in Bronson?

CP: Yes.

MS: And then when did you move to Diboll?

CP: Let's see...all three of my girls were born in Pineland. We moved to Pineland, you see. And then all three of the daughters were born in Pineland.

MS: And give me the names of your girls.

CP: Cecile Concannon, who lives in Arizona; Mary Phillips in Houston; and Pat Hector in Austin.

MS: And how many grandchildren do you have?

CP: I have 8.

MS: Eight grandchildren, how nice. Now going back to when you moved to Diboll, Mr. Purdy worked for Southern Pine Lumber Company.

CP: Yes, Southern Pine.

MS: About how many years in Diboll?

CP: About 36 before he retired.

MS: He worked 36 years for the company before he retired, but you lived 20 years in Pineland.

CP: In Pineland, yes.

MS: In Pineland, and how many years in Diboll, then?

CP: Now the 36 was about that.

MS: Oh, about that?

CP: You mixed up dates there. Yes, 36.

MS: Oh, that's all right. And you lived on the other side of the tracks in the big house next to....

CP: Temple White.

MS: Temple White.

CP: Next to Temple White. I had a big piano studio and organ and taught from 35 to 40 pupils over there all the time. That has really been my life. That and my church work.

MS: Yes, teaching music and working for the church. How many years have you played for the church?

CP: I played for the church about 25 down here and there is a pupil playing for every church in town that I taught.

MS: That is very wonderful, isn't it? Okay, you can say that your work has been very rewarding, hasn't it?

CP: Yes, but my ambition as a girl, I thought I would be a great Schweitzer. I wanted to be a missionary and a musician all at once, and I found out I was just a little town person. So I enjoy the small places.

MS: Then Diboll was just suited for you, wasn't it?

CP: Yes, uh-huh, I loved it.

MS: And you found that your life has been very happy here?

CP: Oh, yes. After he died my children thought I ought to build a home wherever they are. But I wouldn't leave Diboll for anything in the world.

MS: Then you have found having your independence is really....

CP: Yes, oh, yes, Marge, you betcha. Just being independent and taking care of yourself and being thankful for what you have. I have been so grateful.

MS: Then the church has been a very important part in your life?

CP: It is.

MS: And you belong to the First Methodist Church?

CP: First Methodist Church.

MS: And how many years have you been a member of this church?

CP: This church down here? Ever since I got to Diboll. Now that is what I said about 36 years.

MS: 36 years, okay.

CP: I am a charter member of the Pilot Club. I belong to the Music Club at Lufkin. I have enjoyed the Lufkin musicians a lot.

MS: And you belong to the Garden Club, too, don't you?

CP: Garden Club.

MS: Okay.

CP: Any other club you mention.

MS: Are you one of the members of "Sometime You Stay At Home" Club?

CP: I guess so.

MS: Okay. I am a charter member of that.

CP: I met someone and they said you want to join something. And I said, "Yeah, whatever it is." And they were selling something. That was so funny. She started to ask me something.

MS: Mrs. Purdy, I don't remember if we remembered to put down your full name or not. But I would like for you to give me your full name – your first name and your last name and all of your names. Can you for me?

CP: My name? Cecil Lightfoot Purdy.

MS: Okay. Cecil Lightfoot Purdy. And who were you named after, Mrs. Purdy.

CP: Now, I couldn't tell you that because I didn't even have a birth certificate. The Atlanta courthouse burned and when I tried to get a birth certificate, there was no way in the world to get one. So I have no idea whether I have a namesake or not.

MS: And your mother and father are?

CP: They were from Missouri.

MS: They came to Texas from Missouri?

CP: From Missouri?

MS: From Missouri. Okay. Well, this has been very interesting, and thank you, Mrs. Purdy, so much.

END OF INTERVIEW