

MRS. CECIL PURDY
Interview 002b
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Marie Davis, Interviewer
Retyped by Courtney Lawrence

ABSTRACT: Long-time Diboll piano teacher Cecil Lightfoot Purdy recalls her time in Diboll. She began her schooling in Diboll's two-room schoolhouse with I.D. Fairchild for a teacher, moved to Garrison, and then Pineland with her family, and then returned to Diboll as a married mother of 3 girls. Mrs. Purdy taught music to several generations of Diboll children and was very active in the Methodist Church.

Marie Davis (hereafter MD): Today I am talking to Mrs. Cecil Purdy. She lives at 511 South Temple Drive in Diboll. Today's date is October 5, 1984. My name is Marie Davis. Mrs. Purdy, do you know about what time, how old you were or about what year that you and your parents came to Diboll?

Cecil Purdy (hereafter CP): No. I do not. Numbers don't mean much to me. It was my first school. That is all I know.

MD: You remember that I read in the Ryan Chapel Church records that your father was Sunday school superintendent in Diboll in 1899.

CP: No, I don't remember that.

MD: Okay. So you all must have come here just about the time Diboll started?

CP: He worked for Mr. Temple. He came here to estimate timber for Mr. Temple. And it was going then, because there were a lot of people here then.

MD: Well, do you remember what the town looked like?

CP: Oh, yes, but you couldn't describe it. Sawmill houses with porches all around them. And my mother did a lot of nursing here for the doctor. There were not enough doctors, you know.

MD: Well, that is interesting.

CP: Yes, she did a lot of nursing. I started to school in two little rooms.

MD: Do you remember where the school was located?

CP: No, I couldn't locate that school. I remember the railroad. We had to cross a trestle to walk. And we had to go around that because this little friend I made of the Bonner girl,

her sister had been killed there. Yes, I remember the school very distinctly. We had to walk across the mud in tomwalkers. Is that what you call them?

MD: Yes.

CP: Tomwalkers. And I had a new pair of shoes, and I was so afraid I was going to fall off and ruin those new shoes. Now, see incidents I can remember.

MD: Yes, well, that is what they want.

CP: See, dates don't mean a thing to me.

MD: Well, that is what they want. It is hard to remember dates.

CP: I told Becky—"Don't jump on how old—Diboll thinks they know how old, but they don't." I said, "You never remember dates."

MD: No, we just want things that happened.

CP: I know of dates.....

MD: Do you remember a school about where the Arringtons or where the golf course is?

CP: No, it wouldn't be where the golf course is. It would be nearer the railroad.

MD: Nearer the railroad?

CP: Yes, it would be nearer the railroad. Mr. I. D. Fairchild was the teacher, from Lufkin, you see. And he went home to eat his lunch with my mother. My mother said, "Bring him home." She said that there wouldn't be anybody to give him anything to eat. And all her life, she was giving somebody something to eat. She was that way.

MD: She was? Well, that's good. Do you remember anybody you went to school with?

CP: This little Bonner girl in Lufkin called me from Tencha after we were both married and had children and tried to rake up a lot of things. We didn't have telephones—that was when we were in Pineland. And we didn't have telephones then and called me from there. We had the first bicycles. People by the name of Massingill lived out on your road. (Now Farm Road 1818)

MD: They were my kinfolks.

CP: Lived out there...

MD: He was my great grandfather.

CP: Now that is the people I remember the names. My brother went with a Massingill girl.

MD: He was my great grandfather.

CP: Now isn't that funny that we connected up like that. I remember those things because he had a bicycle and he would ride out there and she had one. Now as far as the others, when we would get to the trestle at church...I mean school, we would have to get down and go around because our parents wouldn't let us cross it. The little Bonner girl was killed right here in Diboll.

MD: Oh, she was killed?

CP: That's it. She was killed and that is the reason we had to go around. That is the reason the incidents mean so much to me.

MD: Yes, well, that is what we want, really.

CP: The names, when I came back to Diboll, you see, had grown children.

MD: You all came back in about '36.

CP: Yes, I think it was.

MD: I kinda remember.

CP: Yes, you were just a little girl. And I started teaching.

MD: Yes, teaching music.

CP: Yes, and have been at it ever since.

MD: Now, do you remember going to church here the first time you lived here?

CP: Oh, yes. We had church in one building in one room. It's funny, Marie, that I don't remember the minister. I remember the school more than I do anything else.

MD: It was a two-room school?

CP: Yes, I never remember but being in that one room, starting off my school. You see, we moved to Garrison for the water. That was the reason we left Diboll, left Mr. Temple, we moved to Garrison. They were our neighbors in Texarkana, the Temples, the old gentleman.

MD: Yes, Mr. Tom.

CP: We moved here in a buggy.

MD: Oh! You did.

CP: The things came in wagons from Atlanta...Atlanta, Texas, close to Texarkana.

MD: Yes, close to Texarkana.

CP: And we were in these little trap buggies, two wheels...three of us, my mother, my father and myself.

MD: And your father was already here, probably.

CP: Yes, oh yes. He rode a horse estimating lumber...is the way I've always heard him talk about it.

MD: See, that is what my grandfather did, too, and that is probably the reason you remember them.

CP: Yes, that is probably it. And I was talking about Nanaw, everyone in Pineland said "Nanaw," being such a nurse. And he hurt his foot one day. She said, "The next time he hurts his foot, I want him to hurt something else because everyone passes here says, Good morning, Mrs. Lightfoot how is Mr. Lightfoot's foot." She said, "I hope he hurts his arm." We always had that for our saying, "Good morning Mrs. Lightfoot how is Mr. Lightfoot's foot."

MD: And Mr. Fairchild was your teacher?

CP: I. D. Fairchild. She and I became quite well-acquainted after I moved to Diboll here. In fact, I went to a book review that Cecil attended and that she gave or something.

MD: After you and your parents moved to Garrison, where did you meet Mr. Purdy?

CP: Oh, at Pineland...I mean at Bronson and Pineland. He was with Kirby Lumber Company. You see, he wasn't with Temple Lumber Company. It was Kirby Lumber Company in Bronson. We went from there over to San Augustine down to Bronson and he began to build little sawmills...little portables we called them...that was before there ever was Temple Lumber Company. It was Garrison-Norton Lumber Company of Nacogdoches. There was a whole lot they had in the paper one day about the beginning of Diboll, but the beginning of Diboll...I mean the beginning of Pineland...the beginning of Pineland was not Temple Lumber Company.

MD: They bought it?

CP: Yes, they bought it...in my living room, they signed the papers. There wasn't enough room at the office for the staff. I had the manager's house when the Temples

(Henry) moved there and they built one and they gave us that one. And so they signed the papers in my living room...to sell Pineland...and I never thought of that. I had a library table as big as this thing (kitchen bar) you know how big those houses were, and they were there in the living room.

MD: Well, that is interesting.

CP: Yes, that was interesting. The office was right across the street. But there wasn't enough room up there.

MD: How did the little Bonner girl get killed, do you remember?

CP: Train...it backed into her. She was on this trestle. Her name was Gortie Bonner. Isn't that funny...her sister's name was Frankie Bonner and she married a baseball manager in New York and called me from Teneha. We used to have to change trains at Teneha. We were quite friends, but never met up. Now don't turn loose your old friends.

MD: Yes, I know it.

CP: Just don't turn loose I tell Mary Beth and all.

MD: But it is hard when you....

CP: That is what she says and Pat, too. Pat can't remember all these reunions, she says.

MD: Because they didn't finish...they went to high school here but they didn't finish here, did they?

CP: No. Yes, Pat finished here, but Mary Beth finished at Denton.

MD: Yes, I remember that Mary Beth finished at Denton.

CP: Now, there is nothing else to mind, of incidents in Diboll...this spring water in Garrison was what was drawing everybody there. That was a resort. Did you know they had a hotel right across from the square. People would sit on the front porch and get up and go down and drink that water. We didn't have enough doctors. Mrs. Ramsey and I were talking about how many Lufkin has now, you know.

MD: Oh, yes, it seems they are getting more all the time.

CP: She is getting so much better with the new one.

MD: Then when you came back to Diboll with Mr. Purdy after you married....

CP: Oh, Mr. Temple...he came with Mr. Temple (Henry) from Pineland...Mr. Henry Temple. They loved Pineland so much and they didn't tell it for the longest, but they got

out over here at Huntington or Zavalla to get them something to drink...they were together and they both cried. And Mr. Henry Temple said, "If you want to go back, we'll go right now." And I was already over here, and I wouldn't quit Diboll and I loved Diboll just like I did....

MD: You love everywhere you live.

CP: I don't know anybody at Pineland now, you see. Let's see 20 something years, or 36 years. Somebody told me that yesterday that we had been here 36 years.

MD: You've been here longer than that...

CP: Have I?

MD: I imagine nearly 50.

CP: We lived in that big house up there. Mr. Temple...

MD: By Mrs. Drew...you and Mrs. Drew lived there together.

CP: Mr. Temple gave us that house.

MD: Where did you get your music education?

CP: Oh, that was from San Augustine and Bronson...from Pineland and San Augustine. I would go back and forth to music and I made friends with a very dear girl that was in Dallas Conservatory of Music. Every day of my life, Marie, when I teach, I think maybe of one teacher or the other. That is the reason I try to leave a good impression on mine because I want them to think like I do of the good teachers I had. They came from Chicago down there. We had the best! It was a four-story building and a medical building right next to it. In the medical building was Dr. Tinkle. When I came to Diboll, I met Dr. Tinkle and I said, "My lands." Now, his brother was going to school there, and I had a date with him one night, we were about 18 then. They had a high school right next door. I wasn't even in high school at San Augustine...yes, at San Augustine I was.

MD: Did you ever teach piano in Pineland?

CP: Oh, from the time...they didn't have a piano in Pineland when they started the school building there. And when I left they had 13 pianos.

MD: Oh, is that right?

CP: Different buildings, different rooms. I had sold 13 pianos from Houston at different times, you know. Oh, I taught day and night. It was part of the school...very much part of it. That is where all of these...Linadene Simmons, daughter of the Baptist minister there.

She is one of the products of Pineland music at Lufkin. She is one of the best teachers up there.

MD: And when you moved back to Diboll after you had your family, you started teaching...

CP: Yes, started with two pupils, Mary Jane Christian and Dorothy Cruthirds.

MD: No telling...and you have no idea how many...

CP: How many sprung from...Dorothy decided she was going to teach. And I put her in my place one day, and I would go in there, and I would get so aggravated with her teaching. It was up at school. We had so many to teach. She said, "Take it over. I never want to teach again."

MD: She didn't have the patience.

CP: You've got to have patience. Our Diboll church...

MD: Yes, I remember you taught me Sunday school.

CP: Did I Marie?

MD: Yes it was me and Dixie Broker and Dorothy...

CP: That crowd, yes.

MD: Mary Jane was a little older.

CP: Well, Mary Jane and Bea and I...well, Mary Jane and I went up and bought those chairs. We got five dollars apiece from the class. We bought those special that have cushions in them. And then we bought the piano. It has Mr. Purdy's name on it and Mary Jane Broker...it's on the back, you know. We had a big crowd then. Mary Jane was way above you...she was older.

MD: Oh, she was about 3 or 4 years. We sat down there, in the old church, on the right hand side...that is where we had our little class.

CP: Do you remember the pretty music when Marian Fuller was here? Somebody said we never had such good voices, but we had some good singers then. We have always had some pretty voices in that church. Mmmm it was pretty. We had five or six good sopranos.

MD: I remember Dorothy had one, you know.

CP: Dorothy was always in it. Dorothy's sister, do you remember her? (SKIP IN TAPE)

MD: I remember when I was growing up and had the recitals; nearly every body in town came. You remember you had programs up there in the old community center?

CP: I tease Mary Jane to this day. I said, “Everything was perfect that night until your number, and I kept waiting and waiting for you to come out.” I sat on the front and didn’t go back where they were and she had gone out. She had gotten with Franklin and they had gone.

MD: Did she ever show up?

CP: No. But if Sharon had done that she would have killed her. Mary Jane and Dorothy were about the same age.

MD: Yes, they were about the same age.

CP: I had some good ones in every class.

MD: Oh, yes, I imagine so.

CP: There have been some good musicians here. I’m teaching the second generation now.

MD: Or third generation.

CP: And some of the third, yes, some of the third. Bessie said yesterday, “You can’t get sick. We’ve got to take care of you.”

MD: Well, there have been a lot of changes in Diboll, hasn’t it?

CP: Yes, there certainly have been a lot of changes.

MD: Do you think it is for the best?

CP: Not when 65...kinda bad when 65 are arrested for dope around here, isn’t it?

MD: Oh, yes.

CP: You don’t know who...I would hate to go through my children coming up again.

MD: I would, too. I surely would.

CP: There is nothing I could do about things now. They want theirs perfect, of course.

MD: How many grandchildren do you have, Mrs. Purdy?

CP: Two, four, six, eight...eight grand children and fifteen great grandchildren...I mean five great grandchildren...fifteen years old this last March. Yes, I just now thought of those great grandboys and mine were all girls...every one of them. Pat and her husband went to the Olympics, and I said that it wasn't the Olympics that took them there, It was that grandchild of theirs. She will be in...they will be in next week. Yes, they will be here. Oh, they love it here.

MD: What did you all do for fun?

CP: For what?

MD: For fun when you were in Diboll...were you here long enough to...

CP: Well, what do they do now?

MD: Oh, I don't know...but it was so different then...you were probably too young to really get out...

CP: I helped at the school a lot. They had a lot of programs. They had a lot of dances and they had a lot of things.

MD: You had a silent picture show. Where was it? You remember?

CP: Right in front of the post office.

MD: Where the post office is now?

CP: Yes, right across over there. They gave away prizes like watermelons. Pat had all the watermelon she could eat, but she won one one night, and we went over to pick her up and she had the watermelon. If it had been a gold something, it wouldn't have been any more precious because she got it.

MD: She won something!

CP: She won something...a watermelon. I have...

MD: You have two sets of Mr. Temple's china.

CP: I have given it to the children. Some of it is left here. Now here are the cups. They haven't taken these. Mary Beth and Pat get those.

MD: Oh, yes.

CP: Now wait a minute. There is one of them that Walter had. Mrs. Henry Temple and I went over there and she had been to Texarkana and brought all of this china back after Mr. Temple's death. And we went over there and cleaned that drug store out of

things...twenty-five cents. Mine are in yonder...cut glass and everything. So I divided up and gave my family. Well, I couldn't move it all in here. I had a big buffet and china cabinet. So all of the plates I have divided into two sets. They were great big plates. They had dinner plates, breakfast plates, pie plates, on down then to little plates. She was crazy about it. She (Mrs. Henry Temple) said, "I'm not going to give you all of this." She put it in my living room, "Because I owe you fourteen dollars on music lessons," she said, "and if you will cut that fourteen dollars off, you have can both sets" we have laughed a lot of times about how she said cut the fourteen dollars. So I cut fourteen dollars and took both sets.

MD: Both sets?

CP: Of that china.

MD: What do you remember about Mr. Tom Temple?

CP: Oh, my lands! I practiced myself to death to play for him. We gave a program every time he came to Pineland. They came to Lufkin to see my kids dancing recitals from Texarkana...Mr. Gilbert and all of them. But he was dead then, you see. That was a long time after. But they had come to Pineland for every program I had. He came and then we would have them over at Mrs. Temple's. She would have the crowd. Now she sang beautifully.

MD: Mrs. Henry Temple?

CP: Mrs. Henry Temple. She sang and we would practice and practice. See, we lived twenty years together. And then we would go to practicing for Uncle Tom. Marie, I played "Hungarian Rhapsody" every time he came. I could still play it as far as knowing it. But I don't have the shoulders nor the hands.

MD: Oh, yes.

CP: I just don't have them. The last time I played it, he sat in the sun porch. He loved it better than anything, "Hungarian Rhapsody" by Liszt. And then we went to Hot Springs every year, or I went. I would go with the Temples and Walter came one time, he and Mr. Temple. (Henry) And we would go by Texarkana and stay one night and they would play bridge. He was a big bridge player.

MD: Was he a kind person?

CP: He was a peculiar...very, very peculiar. He would come and stay with Mrs. Adams, the manager that took over before Mr. Temple (Henry) came there. He used to come there even when Mr. Adams was manager before he sold out. I said they sold out. He would come on the train and she would fix up extra, because she had to keep him. There wasn't any good places. She had two servants all the time. She would say, "I'm just cooking myself to death." She was Cecil's godmother. She said, "I'm just cooking

everything in the world and he might have a headache and if he does he won't speak when he comes in. He opens that door, opens the bedroom door he's used to going in, closes it and we never see him." Christian Scientist. She says, "I know he's sick." I went up and played for Latane three Sundays after I was operated on, after I came from McAllen ten years ago. He was at Nacogdoches...the church up there, scientist. They do their own reading. No preaching. I didn't know what I was going to play or how to play it.

MD: But you did.

CP: But he was so good to me. Now Mr. Tom Temple, until Cecil married, she got a box of candy from somewhere that he sent because she entertained him so much, sang and danced and did all those things. I made up a little song yesterday that I remember she did, and I thought, "I would love to teach that to my little class like we used to do it." We don't do those things, cute like that. But he loved those things. He had no way of showing it. He gave Cecil the most gorgeous pearls...now she gave the evening shawl...you know when they wore those evening shawls. Mrs. Temple gave it. She lost all of hers in that Baylor fire. He gave her a real string of pearls when she graduated.

MD: Did Cecil go to Baylor?

CP: Cecil went to Baylor Belton. She graduated from there and Academy too, Academy and college. She got her masters in speech at Dallas (Denton) at TSCW...no that is Denton. And then she went back to Dallas when Dr. Latimer was there and worked with her. And when she married and was in Tuscon, Arizona, Dr. Latimer was head of the speech department and tried to get her to teach there. But she was going to have a baby. Jimmy was coming home. And she said that she was not about to let someone else hear that baby's first words. He was wounded in Iwo Jima. She married an Army man and that was it. He was called.

MD: And they are still in Arizona?

CP: Yes....she's got a broken hip.

MD: Cecil does?

CP: Yes...she's using one of these walkers. She got the first grandchild and she just couldn't take it. She reached over in the playpen to pick it up. She didn't have gumption enough to know you couldn't pick up a baby at her age. She's my oldest one. He (Mr. Purdy) was agreeable with everything in the world. "You go on with the children, he would always say, go on." All he wanted to do was to fish. I guess I was criticized as much as any woman in town. Then no one understood, you know, He would say "Hon, don't pay any attention to it. I want to fish anyway."

MD: Well, Mrs. Purdy, you worked while a lot of other women stayed home, didn't you? A lot of other people didn't have the talent you did.

CP: I enjoyed everything I did up here even after they moved in these new schools. We had so many cute programs. I was telling April, Deanna's oldest girl, was playing this number in the book "The Wedding March" a child's version of it. It was the cutest thing. And I said, "Hon if I had that years ago...the new music is so cute...I said, "Do you know what a Tom Thumb wedding is?" Never had one that is equal to that like it is written now, you know. She was so interested! I said, "Really learn it, maybe we can have one for our church." I had three in this church down here...three Tom Thumb weddings...and I had one at the Pilot Club. I have had four in Diboll. That little book is somewhere around here. I will tell you who...Sis Davis...Claude Welch was one of the little tots...meanest little dickens...

MD: Oh, yes, he really was.

CP: I wasn't going to put him in it. Both of them, you just couldn't control them. Jewel said, "If you will let them be in it."She was doing part of the playing. I wouldn't have to have anybody to do the playing now...I have enough of them that could play. The Wedding March...the first part and everything. They come down that aisle. Those cute little things. Some of them up there are so cute, aren't they? (Methodist Church)

MD: Oh yes, they really are.

CP: Go down and get their banners. Who is...the little McGauey girl...but she is a little older. But it would be darling. You could make a lot of money. And the little ushers. I bet that book is in...if we had a school library. The Sunday school doesn't have one I don't think.

MD: No, ma'am. I think they are trying to organize one.

CP: And you talk about entertainment...and we had something really going all the time. And I think we had almost as many pie and chili suppers.

MD: I know it.

INAUDIBLE: Mrs. Purdy's father was Thomas J. Lightfoot. Her mother was Hattie Lightfoot. Her daughters are Cecil Purdy Concannon, Mary Beth Purdy Phillips, and Patty and Ann Purdy Hector. She was married to Walter F. Purdy.

END OF INTERVIEW