

MRS. VENA MALONE
Interview 015a
May 21, 1982, in Diboll, Texas
Becky Bailey, Interviewer
Retyped by Courtney Lawrence

ABSTRACT: In this interview with her granddaughter, Becky Bailey, Vena Malone reminisces about her life in East Texas. She moved from town to town her whole life, first as a child after the death of her mother and the death of her father in the 1918 flu epidemic, and then as a wife married to a lumber grader. She recalls the Depression, having a garden, canning, and eating armadillos.

Becky Bailey (hereafter BB): What is your name?

Vena Malone (hereafter VM): Vena Malone.

BB: What is your maiden name?

VM: Baker.

BB: Baker.

VM: Elvena is my name.

BB: Really!

VM: That is really my name.

BB: I didn't know that.

VM: That is really my name.

BB: E-L-

VM: V-E-N-A. But nobody knows but me.

BB: Is it on your birth certificate?

VM: I ain't never had a birth certificate.

BB: You never had one?

VM: Never had one. Dadda (her husband) never had one either.

BB: I'll be durned. Where were you born?

VM: I was born up in Holly, in Houston County.

BB: When? What year?

VM: Nineteen and two.

BB: 1902.

VM: September, Nineteen and Two. I'll be eighty years old this September.

BB: Right.

VM: Ain't many of them gets out and does as much as I've been.

BB: Not many have that big of a garden.

VM: Huh?

BB: I said not that many people have that big a garden when they are eighty.

VM: But I realize my strength. I guess maybe I've worried about the rain and everything and it's what got me down. That's why.....

BB: Do you remember your parent's names? What were your parent's names?

VM: My mother's name was Lilly. My dad's name was Miller Green.

BB: Miller Green Baker. And let's see, you told me your dad died in the flu epidemic. When was that?

VM: 1918.

BB: 1918. Were you still living at home then?

VM: I was still at home. It was a place above Lufkin, going out there, right there by the paper mill. At a little place called...well, the train stop was "Lufkin Lands" was where the train stopped. But it was at a little sawmill.

BB: Out there by the paper mill. Out that way on 103.

VM: That's where...we had our stuff. We hadn't gotten all of our stuff in when my dad died. We were staying in a hotel.

BB: Oh, really? Like a hotel.

BB: I am interviewing Mrs. Vena Malone. She lives in New Willard, Texas and her address is Rt. , Box Leggett, Texas. I am interviewing her at my home in Diboll, Texas on Friday, May 21, 1982. My name is Becky Bailey. Mrs. Malone is my grandmother and I will be using the terms “Mamma and Dadda” when I speak to her or refer to my grandfather. Mamma, would you tell me where you were born then.

VM: I was born in Holly.

BB: What year was that?

VM: 1902.

BB: 1902, so you will be 80 years old this September?

VM: September 30th.

BB: The 30th. What were your parent’s names?

VM: Lilly and Miller Green.

BB: Miller Green was your dad’s name? And their last name was?

VM: Baker.

BB: How many brothers and sisters did you have?

VM: I will have to stop and count...three sisters and two, three...five brothers.

BB: Three sisters and five brothers. Let’s see, Pearl was the oldest.

VM: Me next, Sally. There was three of us.

BB: Three girls.

VM: Three girls.

BB: And then what were your brother’s names? Earl was the second.

VM: Earl was the second. But I don’t believe the other two lived. They died when they were tiny. I don’t remember them.

BB: And then they had?

VM: I was born the third and then Bill, and one dead between Bill and Robert. And one dead between Robert and Jessie. But them two I don’t know all those names.

BB: And Jessie was the youngest.

VM: Yes.

BB: Of all. That was a bunch of kids. Eight of you all together.

VM: Five and three. Well, I had eight. Six are living now and two dead.

BB: Do you want to tell me their names now? (her children's names) Let's see, my dad's the oldest. Clayton.

VM: Well, I guess we won't call Pete, Pete. He is Elmer Robert.

BB: Oh, his name was Robert. I didn't know that.

VM: Elmer Robert, it was Pete, I mean, Elmer Robert, then Wanda. Then Buford, then Teddy Roy, then Bobby Frank, then Willie Louis.

BB: And then you had two.

VM: Two what?

BB: One that was born dead, right?

VM: The oldest one died. Not born dead, but lived three days.

BB: Okay.

VM: He was born here in Diboll.

BB: That was...I think that was eight I counted.

VM: Well, I guess that would be eight. Six living and two dead. Two girls and six boys.

BB: Do you remember your grandparent's names?

VM: No.

BB: What about Dadda's parents? His parent's names?

VM: Elizabeth, I believe.

BB: Was her name.

VM: Yes, and his was named Eli.

BB: Oh, that was where daddy got his middle name.

VM: Did you know that I thought that was all of his name until that boy came by and Wanda and him were talking. And he said that Eli had a different name. I said, "Well, I didn't know that. I said I named Clayton after him. Eli was all that I ever knowed." But it was a funny name.

BB: But were Dadda's parents still living whenever you..?

VM: Oh, yes. They lived until, oh, I believe she (Wanda) was married when his daddy died. But his mother died whenever they were kids, Clayton and all.

BB: Where did they live?

VM: They lived at Camden.

BB: Oh, really?

VM: Yes. They really did. They both died in Camden. But they were from Arkansas.

BB: Oh, they had come down from Arkansas?

VM: Yes, when dad was nine years old.

BB: How did they come? Did they ever tell you stories?

VM: I told that boy "Very little did I know about them." He was trying to question me. I told him "Honey, you have just come to the wrong stump." I never knew anything about the history of the Malone's.

BB: Well, if they came from Arkansas, that was more than I knew.

VM: Yes, they came from Arkansas. He has the whole history. If you want the history you ought to get in touch with him.

BB: Ok.

VM: He is really going to have it when he gets through.

BB: Let's see, your dad died in the flu epidemic.

VM: 1918.

BB: 1918 and your mother had died in?

VM: 1917. March 15, 1917. Not the 15th, the 29th. That was the day Jessie was two years old.

BB: Oh my word. Now he was the youngest of your brothers, right?

VM: I mean Jessie is my sister.

BB: Jessie is your sister. There was you and Pearl and Sally...

VM: Why there were four of us wasn't there. There was four of us.

BB: There were four girls and...

VM: Four girls and how many boys did we say?

BB: Four boys then.

VM: Four dead and one living.

BB: So there was five. So there were nine of you and not eight.

VM: Now there were four girls.

BB: And you said that your brother died in that flu epidemic too.

VM: Yeah. Just four days before my dad died.

BB: And some of your sisters were already married.

VM: Pearl was married and that was all.

BB: How did the rest of you take care of yourselves?

VM: Well, we lived with her for awhile. Then they took, you know, two of them were already dead, three of them were already dead, and Earl those two boys that died when they were tiny. We took Jessie and Bill and Robert to Lovelady to my Uncle's. We let my uncle that lives out from Groveton have Jessie for awhile. Oh honey, if I could remember I could write a history on it, but I can't.

BB: When did you meet Dada then?

VM: I told you. I was out in West Texas and his cousin was writing him letters. He wrote to her all the time. And I said "Oh, tell him 'howdy'" and we got started writing.

BB: Why were you in West Texas?

VM: Picking cotton. You done forgot that?

BB: No, I haven't forgotten, I just wanted you to say it so we will get it on tape.

VM: I picked cotton.

BB: How did ya'll get out there?

VM: We went out there in a wagon.

BB: Horse drawn wagon, right?

VM: Horse drawn wagon.

BB: How much did you pick cotton for?

CM: Well at the beginning we picked for fifty cents a hundred.

BB: A hundred pounds?

VM: But later on in the fall, we got \$3.00 a hundred for gathering it. Picking burrs and all.

BB: Did you camp out the whole time or did you get a boarding house when you got there?

VM: We camped and sometimes we had a house. But we had our camping equipment.

BB: In the wagon?

VM: Yes.

BB: How many of you were there?

VM: There was Aunt Lena. Of course, she was your Aunt too. Her husband and her daughter and...was her son there? I don't guess so. Just her daughter...two daughters. Aunt Lena had a girl and Uncle Ed had a girl. They were half...no stepsisters wouldn't they be.

BB: Yes. Step sisters.

VM: And we picked cotton.

BB: Then when did you come back?

VM: When did we come back?

BB: In the winter time? When it started getting cold?

VM: When the picking was over. It was about October. When we started back. But I think I came back...I went with Aunt Lena and Uncle Ed. But I came back with my sister and her husband.

BB: How old were you then? About nineteen?

VM: Oh.....between seventeen and eighteen.

BB: Somewhere in there. When did you marry then?

VM: I married in 1921.

BB: 1921.

VM: I married in March before I would have been nineteen.

BB: Where did you and Dada set up housekeeping?

VM: We went to San Antonio. He was in the Army.

BB: He was still in the Army?

VM: We went to San Antonio before he had come out to me. He had already rented a room and how come... and he went ahead and bought a stove and a bed and I don't remember where we had a dresser or not. We just had a little camping outfit for one room. He had that already paid so much down on the furniture. But when we got there we didn't had a room to put the furniture. We rented a furnished room and lived there awhile until we got a room.

BB: That you could put your furniture in. But he didn't stay in the Army very long after that, did he?

VM: He stayed in the Army from March until August then they discharged them all, cutting the Army down. We came back to Soda. His mother and dad lived at Soda at the time. We stayed there and he went on to Port Arthur and worked two months.

BB: But you didn't go with him then?

VM: I didn't go. I stayed with his mom and dad and she made me up some clothes before I left to go to Port Arthur. He came in they let him off. We left then and went back to Camden to his aunt and uncle's. His uncle was sick. We stayed with them until he died.

BB: What did his uncle do? Sawmill work in Camden?

VM: Uh-huh. And he died. And we went right back to Soda to his momma and daddy. He went on back to Port Arthur then and I went with him. He didn't get no work then. We stayed there about two weeks. We come back to Soda, and went then to Camden....not to Camden, to Diboll. My sister and brother, Pearl and her husband were living there, and he got a job. He rented this room from John. My brother-in-law's brother got one room, and we bought a stove, one mattress, no bedstead and we had a table. And we had some dishes. And went to housekeeping there. We stayed there until we got this house. The one that was by that store that I told you had disappeared.

BB: Right, that's gone now. And it was a company house?

VM: Company house, uh-huh. We lived there. We bought enough furniture. I don't think we had a dresser. But we had a bedstead and....but now when our baby died, his mother come and spent a week with us, with us, with just one bedstead. She had to sleep on the floor. Sleep on the floor.

BB: Do you remember how much rent ya'll had to pay in the company house?

VM: I can't remember that. But it was very little.

BB: Very little.

VM: I think it was four or five dollars, but I can't remember what it was. And we had that big huge house. We could have had the furniture if we could have bought it. But we never was able to buy it. After the baby died, it grieved me so to be there that we got a house back in the quarters, a smaller house. We bought a little bit of furniture then. But we still didn't have but one bedstead. And I think my sister and brother, Robert and Lucy came.

BB: And they came to live with you then?

VM: They lived with us just awhile, not too long. They were living with my sister in Austin, Pearl, in Austin.

BB: Uh-huh.

VM: In Austin, and Pearl and John was about to separate....and I don't remember whether where she brought them back down there to me or whether they sent them on the bus. But anyhow they came....I got so aggravated with them. I wrote and told them me and Harry was fixing to separate she'd have to send to get them. She sent me ten dollars. I taken that ten dollars and caught that old train from Diboll to Lufkin and went and bought those kids some clothes.

BB: And just kept them?

VM: I don't know how come me to tell them... 'cause we never even thought about separating. Not the first time. But I pretended to her that we were going to separate so she would end me some money.

BB: And then you got the kids some clothes.

VM: Sent me ten dollars, and I taken it to Lufkin. I don't remember what I bought. But I bought them a little something out of that ten dollars. Now you can't look at nothing at ten dollars.

BB: No, you sure can't.

VM: But I think I got them some overalls, or something, or a dress. I can't remember now.

BB: Were they going to school here in Diboll?

VM: Yes, they were going to school. And...

BB: Did they walk? I bet they walked.

VM: Yeah, they walked. I don't remember how come that sister of mine worried and worried about them. And she met the bus and they never did come. And they got in their car and come to Diboll...and they picked the kids, they take the kids.

BB: And kept them the rest of the time?

VM: I never did have them any more until they got bigger. When they got bigger they would come and stay awhile and then go back.

BB: I bet that was hard when they were so tiny when your folks died.

VM: Well, Jessie was two years old when my mother died. And of course, we had to be strong and tough. She was just three years old when our daddy died. We had problems real problems.

BB: When you lived in Diboll, did you shop at the commissary or did you go to Lufkin?

VM: No, we shopped there all the time. We would buy our groceries right there.

BB: Did they pay Dada in scrip?

VM: Seemed to me like it was in those checks.

BB: In checks?

VM: In checks.....a \$1.75.

BB: What kind of work did he do?

VM: He always graded...graded lumber. He graded lumber until he retired at Livingston.

BB: And that was in 19...what?

VM: I can't remember. He was sixty-eight years old. I can remember that. But I can't remember what year that was. Willie Louis was still in high school.

BB: During the Depression, then what kind of...he still graded lumber or some sawmill...

VM: Honey, they didn't work during the Depression. But the company just donated them two dollars a week.

BB: Ok. This was when you lived in New Willard, right?

VM: When we lived at New Willard.

BB: You had already moved from Diboll by then?

VM: When we moved from Diboll, where did we go? We come back to New Willard. No, no. We went to Carmona. We moved to Carmona and that's when we went to the farm.

BB: And you farmed a little while?

VM: We farmed and made a crop. We just had rooms in an old store at Carmona. There was a party there that was going to move up there around Pennington. They talked dad into the notion of going up there and renting a place he went up there and rented this farm. We moved out there. We went out there in about March...Clayton was born.....we didn't have a doctor. We had a midwife. He was born in May.

BB: So you just barely got settled before you had Dad then?

VM: Huh?

BB: I said you just barely got settled on the farm when Dad was born.

VM: I got down sick and had to leave the farm.

BB: Oh.

VM: We made six bales of cotton, but that just barely put us...we lacked one bale being through picking. And I got down sick with kidney trouble. We got Mr. Avery to carry us to Groveton to catch that train that went to Livingston. And his daddy met us and his daddy and Dada left and went back up to the farm in the wagon.

BB: To get the cotton?

VM: No, no. To get our furniture.

BB: Oh, to get your furniture and things.

VM: We tried to sell, you know, and the only thing we had except Mr. Avery was the niggers...we didn't have no white people neighbors, and they went up there and when they came back through Groveton, that big church house, I don't know whether it is still sitting there. It was a big church house; they had the first service that night. Dadda went with his daddy to church in that building.

BB: In that building. The first time they had it open?

VM: As they came back through with our furniture.

BB: So you all kind of share cropped up there? For just one year?

VM: On halves, on halves that's what it was.

BB: But he decided that wasn't for him?

VM: When I got away from there, I said no more farms for me. You know, I didn't want to go though, but he went anyway. He did.

BB: So you had daddy during that time, and you had three kids by the time the Depression struck, didn't you in '29?

VM: Wanda was born in '28, and the Depression started in '29. And Buford was born during the Depression in '31.

BB: And dada hadn't started back to work by then?

VM: Oh, he had already....we went to Diboll....we left Carmona and went to Soda. And he come back to New Willard and got a job. And we moved to New Willard.

BB: Now which company was he working for?

VM: Texas Long Leaf.

BB: Texas Long Leaf.

VM: And we stayed in New Willard until Clayton was about 18 months old, then we moved to Camden and Pete and Wanda was born in Camden.

BB: Oh, and he worked for W. T. Carter there, didn't he?

VM: Yes. Then somebody come by and wanted up above....when Wanda was just three weeks old, somebody wanted him up above Lufkin. Up there close to Rusk, a little place called.....

BB: Oh, was it Fastrill? A logging camp?

VM: It was a little sawmill. And he graded lumber there. We stayed there about three months.

BB: Did ya'll have a car by this time?

VM: We had a car at that time.

BB: Thank goodness.

VM: An old whoopee car. When we left Camden, his Uncle Tom had come down to Camden to get a job. And he went up there with Dadda, up there and he got a job up there. He had an old car and when we left Camden and went, we had our car loaded with chickens, little biddies. At the time we meant to stay at Camden and raise chickens. We had chickens to glory. We had bought the chickens, little biddies and we got on the road and we run out of gas. Well, Uncle Tom and Clayton was a little thing, he was riding with Uncle Tom, and he went on up the road and he waited and waited. Harry didn't have no money and we went to one of the neighbors and he told him he was broke and he had no money and had just run out of gas. And the man gave him enough gas to get where he was going. We sent the money back. We were so proud.

BB: With all those chickens. Whenever you moved from that place did you take all those chickens with you again?

VM: We sold and got rid of those chickens because when we left that place, we came back to New Willard.

BB: And then you stayed there the rest of the time?

VM: When we got to New Willard we couldn't get no house. We moved to Leggett. And we stayed at Leggett for over a year before we got a house in New Willard.

BB: And the house you lived in New Willard was a company house, wasn't it?

VM: It was a company house.

BB: How much did Carter charge you for rent? No, I mean Texas Long Leaf? That's who it was.

VM: I think it was \$4 or...about three and a half or \$4. They didn't charge us high rent at that time. But I believe it was about \$4 the rent was.

BB: So you were there by '29? He was working steady there.

VM: He went to work in '28. Wanda was just very little. He went to work in about August.

BB: So he had only been working a year. Did the sawmill close down? I mean, as far as...

VM: In New Willard?

BB: I was thinking when the Depression hit, didn't you say that....

VM: They just shut down.

BB: They shut down. When was that? Was it in '29? When the crash first started? Or was it a little later?

VM: No, it was later, because in '29, when it first hit we were still living in Leggett. And we moved on to New Willard in '29.

BB: He was still working there.

VM: I was crippled then with rheumatism. And he took me from the car to the bed when we moved to New Willard from Leggett. And...

BB: So that was '30 or '31 before the mill...?

VM: Before the mill got to where we couldn't get no work. And he (unintelligible).....a man by the name of Barkley had a store there.

BB: And he worked for him?

VM: He didn't work much for Mr. Barkley. He went on to old man Hollingsworth and worked for a dollar a day.

BB: And the mill still paid him a salary?

VM: Yeah, when he was working for a dollar a day. They paid him two dollars a week. I can't remember, I think...now Buford was born in '31. The Depression was real bad

then. Dad would go out and hunt, get armadillos at night. I have had four armadillos at the house at one time...

BB: To cook?

VM: And we was glad to get it. We was glad to get it. We really was.

BB: I bet. But did they get the name of "Hoover hogs" around here too for an armadillo? Did you ever hear that?

VM: No, I just heard it over the television. That's all I've ever heard that. Really. But I know we ate a many of them. But I never have wanted any more. They looked more like a baby dressed.

BB: Oh, really? When you dressed them?

VM: They really do. They really do.

BB: Oooh I bet that was terrible.

VM: It was terrible.

BB: Did ya'll vote in the election? What did you think of Hoover?

VM: Well, at that time the women didn't vote.

BB: Oh, really? You could, you just didn't? Huh?

VM: I don't think we could vote then. Don't you think it was later whenever they put it in?

BB: I would have to look the date up...I don't remember.

VM: I really don't think that women could.

BB: Well, what did Dadda think about Hoover then, since he was the one voting? Did he blame it all on him that there wasn't any work?

VM: I don't remember, I don't remember whether he blamed...

BB: We just existed.

VM: We just existed on armadillo meat.

BB: Did you have a garden and all too?

VM: I don't believe we did. You know, I was down and not able to. Dad had to do all the cooking and all that. I don't believe we had a garden at that time. But we did later. It was after Buford was about eight months old. The following year after Buford was born that we began to have a garden. We did.

BB: Did you see many hobos come through?

VM: They would come to the door and knock wanting something to eat.

BB: There were a lot of them, uh.

VM: But you know you'd always divide with them. Now, I wouldn't do it at all. But I have set out many a meal.

BB: Did they do any work around the place, to pay for their meals?

VM: No. I never did ask them to.

BB: They just...

VM: They wanted something to eat. Oh, they wanted to work. But I just gave them their eats and let 'em go.

BB: Yes.

VM: Now, you would be scared to. People were just hunting something to eat. I tell you without eating causes problems.

BB: Just getting enough. Well did you have trouble having enough clothes to wear? Or finding enough clothes or did you just made do.

VM: You know, Dad made all the sewing...that I....

BB: It sounds like you had it easy. You...

VM: Honey I never had eyes to see and I had arthritis and rheumatism. If I was able to getup and do anything I was lucky at that time.

BB: But he did the sewing.

VM: He did the sewing. I have a quilt he had made for I couldn't. I am blessed that I don't have it so bad any more.

BB: Was there a company store or commissary in New Willard?

VM: Oh, yes. Uh-huh.

BB: But it's not standing anymore?

VM: Oh, there's nothing in New Willard no more.

BB: Could you get clothes at the store?

VM: Yeah, if you had the money. If you had the money you could buy it.

BB: During the Depression, I know the company still paid you, but did they offer you any credit at the store, or anything like that?

VM: No, you couldn't get credit. They gave you those \$2.

BB: Well, were the prices cheap? Did the price of things go down at that time? So you could afford to live?

VM: Honey, the prices were down, way down. What you could get for a dollar, you couldn't get for fifteen dollars hardly at this time.

BB: Was there....this may sound like a silly question. Do you remember any people coming through that tried to organize a union or anything like that around here?

VM: Well, not at that time. But later they did try to organize a union.

BB: How much later? Do you remember?

VM: Not really...long about.....I know they did, but I can't remember the year.

BB: Do you remember anything about the WPA projects? Or the CCC projects?

VM: Well yeah, they used to have CC camps.

BB: Did any one you know work at them? Dadda never considered.....

VM: Well, we never did have nobody, but Paul's boy, Edward, he was in the CC camp. But I don't remember where his camp was. At the time, I don't know where they lived at. It may have been Carmona. I believe they did.

BB: So he worked down there in...

VM: I don't remember where they lived. I feel like they lived at Carmona, though, at the time. You know, Sally's oldest boy, G. W., lives down at Splendora now. He stayed at my house many a day would walk from my house to old man McIntyre's house, you know where McIntyre's live. He walked there every morning to make a dollar a day. He was down in Livingston, Tuesday, to get Sally to sign a car. He give Sally a car. He bought our dinner. And we were sitting around the dinner table laughing coming and

about staying so long with me working for a dollar a day. He would work the whole week and he would take the six dollars up to Woodlake to give to his daddy and mama so they could pay for...

BB: Those really were hard times.

VM: He would come back Sunday. And...

BB: He worked six days a week. How long did he work, from sunup to sundown...?

VM: From sunup to sundown.

BB: For a dollar a day?

VM: For a dollar a day.

BB: How many hours did Dadda have to work at the sawmill?

VM: Ten hours a day. Well, he did work for a while for a dollar and a half. But they got to where seventy five.

BB: For ten hours worth of work? How many days did he work? Five or six?

VM: Oh, sometimes five, but most times six. When it would run good, most of the time it was six. Not like it is now, forty hours a week.

BB: But did they have any fringe benefits like....did he get vacation during the year?

VM: No...

BB: Nothing like that. What about holidays? Like for Christmas?

VM: Well, they laid off, but they were on their own time.

BB: They didn't pay you for holidays.

VM: They didn't pay you no time. No time whatever.

BB: What about insurance? Was there insurance available? Did they have a company doctor or what?

VM: At the time, we paid a dollar a month. That was to pay for the doctor. He would come every day if you was sick.

BB: To your house?

VM: Yes, in our house even on up to Dr. Blow.

BB: That was in the fifties, wasn't it?

VM: Ted was about nine or ten years old when he got burned. And he was still there. It was in the fifties, I am sure.

BB: Did you know of many people who owned there own home and the bank foreclosed on them? Around here? Or did they...most everybody have company housing?

VM: Well, here and in Diboll they was all company houses.

BB: And the same was true in....

VM: In New Willard too. We just here lately, they sold the houses. In 1957. That is when we bought ours.

BB: Do you think a Depression like that could ever happen again?

VM: Well, it's just liable to happen. It just liable to be fighting one right now. They say we want to have it.

BB: Well, do you think people would act the same way this time, as they did last time?

VM: Honey they wont. They'll be killing one another...uh-huh. They couldn't take what we did.

BB: Ya'll just accepted it.

VM: Now we was just raised up without nothing.

BB: You didn't have anything to start with, huh?

VM: We didn't have nothing to start with. It was worse when we were little kids. Well, we was used to it.

BB: You already had hard times.

VM: We always had hard times.

BB: Let's see...did you tell me you went through the third or fourth grade.

VM: Fourth grade.

BB: Fourth grade. That you were going to school...

VM: The last time... I started to school after my mother died. And I went all of about two months.

BB: Is that why you only went through the third grade, because you would start and then you would go a couple of months and then you would stop?

VM: No, I went to the fourth grade.

BB: You went to the fourth?

VM: Went through the fourth grade. I started in the fourth grade at Friday but that was too much trying to take care of those kids and go to school. Of course Pearl had already married and lived at Helmic and I was oldest.

BB: Do you remember what your schools were like? I mean, like before your mother died when you were going?

VM: It was just a one room building. You had....sometimes we had long benches, sometimes we had desks, yes.

BB: Oh. Did you have slates and stuff...?

VM: Yeah, we had slates, not paper like that...but usually we wrote on a slate. But you know, I can't remember too much about that.

BB: In other words all the grades were in one room.

VM: All in one room, one room.....and we went from eight to four in the afternoon.

BB: Did you have to bring your lunch? I am sure you did.

VM: No, no, not most of the time. When we lived there in that house...the one I'm going to show you, we lived close enough to go home for dinner.

BB: Well, that made it nice. Did you have P.E. and all these other things?

VM: Oh, no....it was just school.

BB: You just went and you learned.

VM: You learned the ABC's and that's about all you learned.

BB: Did you do a lot of reciting? You know, like one grade recites...?

VM: We had spelling bee's, you know. We would have one side and one the other. And one would outspell the other. Like that.

BB: And that was fun, huh?

VM: Uh-huh.

BB: But you always lived close enough to walk?

VM: The best that I can remember, we did. I did live close enough to walk. But that little bit that I went to Friday was the last I went after my mother died. I can't remember just where, I think we were living, when we left Holly we went to Trinity. We stayed in Trinity and I can't remember the nigger that was hung in Groveton but my dad walked from Trinity to Groveton to see that nigger hung. And during that time he got a job on the road, working on the road. And we moved in a tent between Groveton and Trinity and lived in a tent. And my mother cooked for a bunch of people, a bunch of men. We lived in the tent and another tent where a bunch of men eat, and she cooked over there. Well my sister was up, you know big enough...

BB: Big enough to help?

VM: She could do the work for a week. We was at, she would do our cooking and then go over and help her wash the dishes and things.

BB: That seems like a hard life.

VM: I tell you if I could remember it all, I could write you a book. But I can't remember it all. I really can't...when we left there, we come to Groveton and Dad rented a house.

BB: You could camp in the summer time, but ya'll didn't camp in the winter, did you?

VM: In the summertime. No, it was through the winter, because we didn't move to Groveton until in March. We went there and one day my mother taken sick the next. And we didn't have no coffee. And...me and my youngest sister, Sally, went down to one of my neighbors....lived a little ways away and asked her if she couldn't give us some coffee. Thought maybe if she got some coffee, you know, 'cause she believed in it, we've always had coffee. And she made it, but she taken pneumonia.

BB: So she died in Groveton.

VM: We lived there just about ten days. Then we went to Helmic.....a little place out...you know where it is at, or do you? Well it's between Groveton and Lufkin. Out there when you leave Lufkin you go to Apple Springs, then the next place is Helmic... and that is where we went to.

BB: What kind of work was your dad doing then?

VM: He was working...he was going to work for an old man named Bess Farm. We moved there in March. We moved away from Groveton about two weeks after our

mother died, and he found this place in Helmic. And we lived in Helmic until...it was about August, I guess and we moved back to Groveton. Then we went back to Friday.

BB: You sure did a lot of moving around. All in a wagon I guess.

VM: Yes all in a wagon. Sometimes oxen.

BB: Oh, really, you...the rest of the times, it was mules or horses?

VM: Well I remember when my mother was living and we come to Groveton to see her brother, Uncle Bill, we come in oxen.

BB: How long would it take you to go, would it take you all day?

VM: Well, they were pretty fast. No, I can't remember that. I think about half a day, really.

BB: Would you go and stay a few days and then go home?

VM: Yes, and then go back. We didn't have no mules, we had oxen.

BB: Where did you learn to do all the canning and stuff that you do now? Did your mother teach you, or did you just have to learn that....?

VM: I learned that of most myself. My mother wasn't much on canning. She never did have much to can.

BB: Well, it didn't sound like they were in one place long enough to...have a garden and all.

VM: We stayed there at Holly until Pearl was....I guess we left Holly when I was about ten, about eleven or twelve years old. I oughta been further up in my grades, but I wasn't.

BB: Because you didn't go to school. Nobody made you go to school. The law didn't?

VM: Sometimes you had to work to make a living. You couldn't do it. I worked for fifty cents a day for many...

BB: Oh, you worked too?

VM: Yes...

BB: But doing what?

VM: Chopping cotton.

BB: Out in the field. They don't raise that much cotton around here any more....

VM: But we used to, everything had to be cotton.

BB: Everything was...

VM: Of course, we had corn. Tend corn.....everything.

BB: Tend corn and chop cotton for a living. Let me see, when you and Dadda got into the....in New Willard and had your permanent home there, did you have...did you cook on a wood stove, or...did you have a gas?

VM: You mean in the house we bought here?

BB: No, in Diboll and New Willard, right at first.

VM: Well, in Diboll we had a wood stove. And when we moved on the farm we had a wood stove. A wood stove at Carmona. And when we first went to New Willard, we had a wood stove. And during the Depression we had a wood stove. And later years, long about.....oh, Wanda had done married before we got an oil stove.

BB: Oh, it was oil first and then you got a gas?

VM: Even when we moved....up there where you remember we lived, we had a wood stove.

BB: Really?

VM: We had a wood stove there. But we got an oil stove there. Then....

BB: How did you can on a wood stove? Was it hard to do?

VM: Well, you...it was something that you was used to.

BB: You knew how hot to get it.

VM: We didn't know nothing else. When gas come in, well, we got a gas stove. Honey, I don't can at all now what I used to. When I set my head, we would get a hundred jars of berries we'd get a hundred jars of this and that. We'd can. We didn't play about it. We didn't have no freezer.

BB: You really put it up.

VM: We had to put it up to have it.

BB: I can't imagine putting up a hundred jars of berries.

VM: Well, we have. That's right.

BB: Oh, me.

VM: We ate it, too.

BB: What all did you can? Did you ever can any meat?

VM: The way we did our meat, we put it in the smokehouse and smoked it. But later years when we were killing twelve...

BB: The twelve hogs you were talking about.

VM: Yes. We sliced that meat and put it down in big old containers and put grease over it to save it.

BB: Without any refrigeration. When do you remember getting your first refrigerator and stuff? I can't imagine living through the whole summer without any ice.

VM: Well, for a long time, you know, they would deliver ice around. And we had this ice box for a long time. And then...40...I can't...about 42 maybe '40, '41, '42 the electricity come in New Willard. Then we got electric, we got an ice box. I believe Willie Louis was about a year old or something like that when we got our first ice box.

BB: Mother says that she can remember when she first married daddy, that you were still washing clothes out in the yard.

VM: I mean. She helped wash, she did. I never will forget Travis Chapman, she lived there in San Antonio. He and his wife was there and Helen and your daddy was there. I was out there rubbing clothes and Ruth said, "I don't see how you can stand washing so much." And I was right in the middle of rubbing a pair of Travis's old pants. I felt like taking them pants and wringing them around her neck. But I didn't do it. She is still living, though.

BB: Did you boil the water outside? You did all this outside, didn't you? Instead of inside?

VM: Well, when it was raining bad, whenever my kids were little, I went through the house when they went to school, and gather clothes. I washed every day of the world. Had to do so they could go to school the next day.

BB: They just didn't have that many clothes.

VM: They didn't have that many clothes. I mean, I was rubbing on a rub-board, too.

BB: I don't know how you did it. I really don't. You just do things when you have to.

VM: Nowday, ya'll wouldn't do it.

BB: No, we probably wouldn't.

VM: You wouldn't do it. You wouldn't do it, no ma'am. You wouldn't go through what we did. You really wouldn't.

BB: But all your kids had to go to school, and you made them go.

VM: Yeah, my kids went to school, went to Sunday school, every one of them. Now, your daddy went to Sunday school until he went to the Army. He got his eighteenth birthday pin and Pete got about.....seventeen. And Ted went to Sunday school until he went to the Marines. He might be bull-headed but he went to Sunday school. Every one of them, every one of them, from Willie Louis on up. That is one thing sure. By the time I got them off, I wasn't able to go I was done wore out, but they went. Sometimes they went in their little blue jeans, I mean, in their striped overalls. But they went to Sunday school.

BB: We had a church there in New Willard.

VM: Same one, the same church right now.

BB: But ya'll had services every...

VM: Sunday school and preaching church there.

BB: Well, it used to be big enough...did you have circuit preacher or was it...

VM: One that preached every time. Brother Dawson preached there so long. Then he got....then he got another preacher. Wanda had married at the time. It was real funny. This preacher was single. And of course, we would have church from different houses...you know, prayer meetings on Wednesday. And...he asked to take her somewhere, and she said, "Man, I'm already married." Now Wanda went to Sunday school. Of course, she quit it and I don't know if she ever goes no more.

END OF INTERVIEW