

JEWEL CAPPS
Interview 065a
July 11, 1985
Billie Jean Capps, Interviewer
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ABSTRACT: In this interview with her granddaughter-in-law Billie Jean Capps, Mrs. Jewel Capps recalls life in Angelina County from the beginning of the 20th Century. She reminisces about taking care of her siblings, washing clothes outside by the creek, killing and preserving hogs, recreation, school, and discipline.

I am interviewing Granny Jewel Capps at her home. She is 83 years old. I am Billie Jean Capps and today is July 11, 1985.

Billie Jean Capps (hereafter BC): Granny, you came to Angelina County when you were ten years old. What were times like then?

Jewel Capps (hereafter JC): Well, you know there just wasn't much to do then. We played with dolls and things like that. The mail was brought on a route, well it wasn't a buggy it was a two-wheel gig. I think that's what they called that then, and that there was drawn by a horse and that's how we got our mail. We walked to school.

BC: How far did you have to walk?

JC: It was about a mile. In later years, it was three miles there and back.

BC: Did you take your lunch with you?

JC: We carried baked taters, fried eggs and such as that.

BC: How did you carry it?

JC: In a syrup bucket. Yes, that was how we carried it. We had to carry our water for school too... we taken turns carrying water and at school we played dolls and playhouse.

BC: How many brothers and sisters did you have?

JC: I had two brothers, two half sisters, and four half brothers.

BC: What else did you do for fun?

JC: We played dolls as I said and what we called "Over." We had a group on each side of the house and we threw a ball over the house and if one caught the ball then you run

around and get them on your side.... It was what we called “over”. We played whoop-on-the-river, stealing sticks, drop-the-handkerchief We played and we had lots of fun.

BC: What were your chores?

JC: Well, I lost my mother when I was ten and I had to help Papa do the housework and that’s what I did and when I got older, I had other things to do... help in the house ‘cause I wasn’t old enough to wash.

BC: What did you do around the house?

JC: Oh I, you know... cooked, washed dishes, made beds, just kept house you know... churn, we had to churn back in them days.

BC: What kind of floors did you have?

JC: Pure ole’ wood floors with big ole’ cracks in them. You know, we had to scrub them with shucks. They had a big thick board and they bored holes in them with an auger an they’d put them shucks in there. You’d get them soft and put them in them holes an there’d be about 12 or 14 just according to how big you’d want them and you’d put this on a handle and pull it back and forth. I think we used mostly lye water or ashes on our floors to help clean them cause we didn’t have washing powder. We made our own soap.

BC: How did you do this?

JC: Well, best I can remember you used an 8-lb. bucket of water and a syrup bucket packing full of meat cracklings, a can of lye and we’d cook that and the lye would eat that meat up and it would get thick and be soap.

BC: How did you cook it?

JC: In a wash pot out in the yard. That’s how we boiled our clothes backed in them days too. It was hard work!

BC: Where did you go to school?

JC: Well, my first school was at Antioch and that was between Orr and Huntington out from the old George Youngblood place and Robert Ivy’s place. It was in there.... between there and Springtown or what we used to call Springtown back in them days. It was a little one room house, not very large but everybody went there... they taught till the 12th grade. One room... and they had a heater that would keep us warm... about middle of the floor of the room. We had one teacher and Ms. Birdie McCaughey taught one year and Ms. Myrtle Jones, she was there... she married Richard Pride... she taught one year, and Ms. Essie Day taught one year that I was a going there and Mr. Clyde

Ache... and them's the teachers I had there at that school. Then they consolidated with Orr and was when I had to walk three miles to Orr until we got the Hoodlum wagon. This was a covered wagon with planks on each side where the kids sat and Professor Brown, the principal of Orr, drove the wagon.

BC: Describe a day in your school life.

JC: Well, when I was little, we'd go get that water you know I was a telling you about and then we'd play in our playhouses at recess but a lot of the ones would play ball and stuff... and we had two recesses and our lunch period. We taken up at eight and turned out at four and that was the school hours.

BC: What about your books?

JC: Well, I had a reader and a geography and arithmetic and what we called a spelling and language was what I had. I think they call it English now and those were the books I had.

BC: What did the old schoolhouse look like?

JC: Well it was just a one room more or less like an old barn... old crib barn, one room you know...

BC: What about the desks?

JC: Well it was like they used to be at churches... long wooden benches but they had a desk in front of them, all long too. They had little places but in them each one had his place and could put his stuff in there... about a foot and half I guess, or maybe not that big best I can remember... where we put our books and we was lined up there like we was in church.

BC: What about the discipline?

JC: Well the teachers had the switches and they used them if they needed to.

BC: Did they use them often?

JC: Well they was always some that got whippins... my brother was bad to get whippins. There were some more like him because they couldn't do all that by themselves. One of them would leap out in the floor on his all fours and the others would get on his back and they'd ride out the door. Oh! I coulda just killed him, and they'd throw the erasers, we had erasers and blackboards, and they'd throw them up in the top of the house and them women teachers... one woman taken a switch and just whooped my brother around back the neck, you know, by the shirt collar, just trying to make it really hurt but they's tough and they didn't care... they'd laugh at the poor thing... bless her heart.

BC: How did you all stay warm in the wintertime?

JC: With ol' wood heaters... that's what we had. It stood upright you know, and you'd take the lid off and put the wood in. I don't know who got the wood now... but you know...we had wood. Hon, you'd just move them benches round and round that heater and sit there and we kept our coat on. You kept warm.

BC: What about bathrooms?

JC: We didn't have none. We went to the woods. Boys went one way and the girls the other. They just wasn't nothing hard about them days Billie Jean.

BC: What about school supplies? How did you write?

JC: We used pencils and tablets. Now my brother... I can remember him when he went to school and he had a slate and pencil and he wrote and done all his stuff on a slate but I wasn't a going back there then but I can remember his slate.

BC: Tell me about your married life.

JC: Well, I married the first time when I was 18 years old. I married Odell Collins and we lived together... it liked about a month being 4 years and he passed away.

BC: How did he die?

JC: With locked bowels. Then I met Tom Capps later and I married him. I had lived with my first husband 4 years and we didn't have any children and Tom had... he just had a bunch of children... he had three small ones and I always loved children and I felt sorry for the children... one reason, because I had lost my mother and I just felt sorry for the children and they'd lost their mother so I felt like I could be good to them and that I wouldn't have any myself, so I married him and I loved them and they loved me.

BC: How many did you have altogether?

JC: I had 9, four lived. He had 10 when we married. He didn't have his baby. Its aunt raised her. It was just 3 years old when its mother died and her sister raised it and we lived 3 miles out from Huntington then.

BC: What did Grandpa Tom do for a living?

JC: He was a farmer back there then. He farmed.

BC: How did you farm then?

JC: Well, he was pretty well fixed in that line. He had a cultivator and disc you know... all kinds of things like that, most of them he had. In my early life, back when I was a

child, we just had old straight stocks and turning plows and what they called an old harrow and it'd just go along... with teeth in it that would scratch, you know and we'd plant the crop. It was pulled with horses and that's how Tom's things was pulled... you know... with horses and mules. We raised cotton, corn, peanuts, cane, hygear, and things like that.

BC: What did you do with the kids when you went to the field?

JC: They worked! All of his worked. We all went to the field and the little ones... and usually we'd leave one at the house to keep mine. I didn't have to carry mine to the field....there was always somebody to keep them and one girl was sixteen and me and her would take turns going to the house to cook lunch. We all worked. Everybody worked. One year we raised a ... we borrowed money to make this crop and that year we raised enough cotton to pay back what we had borrowed and bought a new car.....a hoopy and then we picked cotton out and bought us clothes. We all worked though... and we canned you know, back there you could make a living. I don't think you could now 'cause things are higher than they was back then. We canned our meat.

BC: Did you kill hogs?

JC: Oh yes! We raised our own meat from year to year. We couldn't get by without it.

BC: Tell me how you did this.

JC: You canned the meat off the bones. We all killed the hogs. We had two pots. We'd heat them up with boiling water... and we'd kill the hog and we'd stick him in his heart and make him bleed and then you'd put that hot water on him and scrape his hair off and hang him up and cut him open, dig out his intestines, heart and all that, get all that out, and then they cut him up. If it was a big hog they'd spread him out on a shelf in the smokehouse and let it cool overnight and then the next morning we'd salt it down, cut it up, put salt over it and stack it on top of each other, each piece to fit and know which to cook and you'd let it lay there about a week and you'd heat you some more boiling water and then you'd scald it and hang it up in the smokehouse and keep smoking it till it dried and you could pack it away, in jars, is what we did. It would be cold weather. You'd have to do it in cold weather. Now we did kill them in the summer but we'd have to cook it up. If we got without meat, we'd have us one we could kill and we'd have to cook all day and we'd put it in jars. It was just good old boiled meat. You could make dressing, you know, and season your food with it. You loved all that stuff back there then. Wasn't like what we have now but we didn't know the difference.

BC: Did you ever make cracklings?

JC: That's what made the cracklings. When we cooked this lard out when you killed hogs and you cut all that fat off and chipped it up and cooked it out and that's what made lard. And we used that but the cracklings...them was that meat you had cooked in wash pots.

BC: Tell me about your typical washday.

JC: Well... honey, to get off you had to milk all them cows, gathered your clothes, then you'd have them clothes tied up in a sheet and you'd put them on your back and we didn't have water. We had to go to the creek or pond to wash cause our water wasn't good at the house to wash in. And so there was always some little children to bring up wood and stuff to boil their clothes in cause you boiled them in a pot and you had you a stick to punch them with. We washed those clothes on an old rub board and wring them out. We washed all day long. It took all day to wash for us cause we was a big family and if you didn't have many garments a piece it was still a lot of clothes cause we was a big family.

BC: Where did you do the washing?

JC: Well, down in the pasture... the pond, we didn't have water. You could see the house but you had to go down this steep hill and carried the clothes and you carried the water from the pond to put in the tubs and you hung them out. I've washed where clothes was just like you hung them up then that's the way they stayed... they froze when you hung them up in the wintertime... and you had to wash often when you was raising children. We all didn't have as many clothes back in them days. You didn't buy like you buy now. You had your own baby diapers... you didn't have too many and you had to keep them washed but now you could wash them out at the house if you had to. but anyhow, it was a lot of work back in them days Billie Jean, but they was happy. They'd all gather in on a Saturday night, they young people, we had a good time at our house.

BC: Why do you think people were happier then?

JC: We didn't know everything like they know everything now. There wasn't no TV, no radio, and you didn't hear nothing. You got one paper a week and what you heard was about Dallas, that's where it came from... it was from Dallas and you just didn't know everything.

BC: What did you and Grandpa Tom do for fun?

JC: We didn't have no fun, Hon – just glad to get to set down. That was fun, Hon, we enjoyed that and just watching the others... we enjoyed that, that's what we did. The kids had record players and they'd play them, and a lots of times there'd be a bunch of the young ones come in and they'd get to dancing and once in a while me and Tom would join them. We'd waltz.

BC: To a record player?

JC: Yes, it was one you wound up and it would last through that record and you wound it up again.

BC: Where did you go to church?

JC: We went to church at Orr. It was a Baptist church. We walked three miles there and three miles back. Now when Papa could, he would carry us in the wagon, but he wouldn't work his horses in the field and then make them pull us to church cause he said they worked too hard in the field. He would work them from daylight to dark. They didn't have church but once a month hon. Church that morning and church that night and there wouldn't be no more till next month until we got to where we had church twice a month. The preacher came from Huntington in a buggy. Brother Lock was his name.

BC: Granny did you go to the city?

JC: Huntington was the city and Hon I got to go about once or twice a year. I think when I first saw Lufkin was when I went to get married when I was 18 years old. Lufkin was a city but Huntington was a town and it took a wagon and team to get out. Ivy had a store and Mr. McKewen had a store and Johnny Foster had one and then we had a doctor there... Dr. Stewart... we had two doctors and Dr. Wilson. Oh, and I forgot about this place, we had a post office and a depot. The McKewen store all of a sudden was Tom Wilson's... the Wilson's store. He had a you could get anything there. He had a big store. Johnny Foster – he just had dry goods, he didn't have groceries but them other s you could buy groceries. They didn't have no candy. Honey, the beans was in a barrel, rice was in a barrel, sugar was in a barrel, flour was in a barrel, coffee was in a barrel, all that... there wasn't no canned stuff.

BC: Didn't the bugs get in them?

JC: I don't think so. I don't think we had bugs back in them days like we have now. I didn't see none. I don't guess we did. Well all that was in a barrel and they had the cover. We made our own bread. We carried corn at the gristmill and had it ground for our meal. You shelled your corn, you raised your corn and carried it to this grist mill at Huntington and they made you meal and you cooked your bread out of that cornbread, and we bought flour... you didn't buy much stuff. You raised your stuff. If you wasn't smart enough to raise you some chickens, meat and stuff, well then you could eat vegetables.

BC: Granny you lived in the country all your life. Do you see a difference between city and country people?

JC: Oh yeah, they didn't have to work like we all did. They city men worked and the women stayed at the house. They didn't have to go to the fields to work... oh, they raised their gardens but they didn't have no fields.

BC: How is life different for you today than it was years ago?

JC: Oh honey, it's altogether different... my life is I just take care of myself and go to church. That's my whole thing... I just live like that you know. Course I enjoy my

neighbors, friends, and loved ones, and can ...used to have to work all the time and didn't get to be together except at certain times but now I can.

BC: What are some of the changes that you don't like?

JC: Oh Hon, I can tell you what I don't like. I don't like women smokers... just don't... I don't think that's right. I like for women to wear more clothes than they wear and I don't like that kind a life... don't think the Lord meant for them to go like that.

BC: How do you think our young people are different from when you and grandpa Tom were raising kids?

JC: Well... I don't know if they would be if Papa's here were like they were back then and they enjoyed listening to the record player and they'd dance and have a good time like that.

BC: What is the difference you see in teenagers now than back then?

JC: Well, that they want to go more. See we had no way to go and they stay out at night and we was with our parents or some other people. Papa and them always knew where I was at. I asked to go....but anyhow just to church was usually where I'd go. Now, I know there's some good teenagers but there are a lot of wilds ones too. Lot of them is on drugs and alcohol and stuff now. We didn't have all that back there then. It was always older people that drank back there then. Even boys didn't grow up back there then like they do now. They, they're thirteen years old now doing these things and I was still playing in the playhouse when I was 14 years old. We just didn't grow up back then like they do now.

BC: Do you think there is a difference in discipline?

JC: Yeah! Lord I do! I was telling you about my brother getting them whippins at school, well he always got another when he got home you know... Papa would whoop him because he didn't want him to grow up mean. Papa was ashamed because he did those teachers that way. He wasn't by himself... he was just one of them.

BC: Most of your kids went to school at Beulah. Can you tell me something about the school?

JC: It was a good little ol' school. It had two rooms at Beulah and then after it came a storm and blowed the old house away they built a new one and they had three teachers.

BC: When did it come a storm?

JC: Well it must have been in '54 or '55, you know the big storm that came through and blowed it away, killed Leonard Linton, and went plumb through Angelina County...it

was a tornado and it killed a little boy at Huntington and hurt some at Odell and broke a leg over there.

BC: They did rebuild?

JC: Uh huh. Temple gave them... I don't know whether he give them the land but I know he furnished the lumber... the logs to build the school. It's down there now - the old schoolhouse is a community center now. He furnished that for us. That's where Carolyn went. She was in that tornado. It blowed the room she's in plumb off, just left the floor... blowed her out... plumb out there and she caught a pole that had a net on it... a ball net and as she went by something hit her on her shoulder and on her head. Nora's grandson and her boy was there and he didn't blow that down. It blowed the end of it. Cook was blowed over on the cistern, Ms. Pearl Squyres was cooking there and it got her somehow she was trapped right over this cistern. Stuff was on her. I had an old battery radio and I was scrubbing the floors and I heard them tell about that tornado - wasn't doing a thing at the house... just raining and I ran to Nora and A.G.'s and told them let's get to the schoolhouse... they was asleep and they didn't believe that and I said ah yes it is. I heard it. I was just about to have a fit cause them kids was up there. We like to never in the world got there because there were trees on the road and when we got there the ambulance was leaving with ones who got hurt.

BC: How many grades were in this school?

JC: Uh, well I guess there was 8 or either 9 and they had to go to Diboll or Lufkin.

BC: When did that school consolidate?

JC: I don't remember what year that was Hon.

BC: Granny, if you were going to give my kids... Susie, Shannon, my other girls and you other grandchildren advice, what kind of advice would you give them?

JC: Well, I'd just tell them to, you know, to be good to their husbands, live honest and truly and I'd tell them to... it would be best that they wouldn't ever have to stay with their in-laws. That's what I had to do. She was old and we got along... 'course, I got along with anybody but she was hard to take care of and that was four years of my life I would love to have enjoyed. I tried not to show this to Tom cause there wasn't nothing he could do about it, his father died when she was old and back then they didn't have nursing homes like they do now. Bless his heart, the Lord taken him and left her.

END OF INTERVIEW