

Myrtle Nolen Rushing
Interview 94a
March 15, 1986
Marie Davis, Interviewer
Retyped by Courtney Lawrence

ABSTRACT: Born in 1903, Myrtle Rushing's family moved to Diboll when she was nine years old. In this interview she reminisces about life in early Diboll: bed bugs, school life, early mornings, walking to town, the picture show, and the 11:15 whistle. In addition, she discusses working for the PTA and assisting at their fundraisers. She also remembers when Diboll's houses first got electricity, Franklin Farrington, Jim Richards, and Mrs. Arthur Porter.

Marie Davis (hereafter MD): Today I am talking with Mrs. Myrtle Rushing, she lives at 1415 Ryans Chapel Road. Today's date is March 15 – my name is Marie Davis. Mrs. Rushing, when were you born?

Myrtle Rushing (hereafter MR): July 21, 1903.

MD: And where were you born?

MR: In Shelby County.

MD: Who were your parents? What were their names?

MR: Joe and Carrie Nolan.

MD: What are your brothers and sisters names?

MR: Maud and Mason and Mabel and Madeline and Mary Lou and Pat and Allen, the boys, Mason, Pat and Allen.

MD: You had rather a large family?

MR: Yes, there were eight of us at that time, they all lived to be grown. One had passed away.

MD: So you lived in Shelby County until you were about how old? Do you remember?

MR: We moved from there to San Augustine County when I was very small. I just can remember it.

MD: Do you know when you moved to Diboll?

MR: I was about nine years old when we moved to Diboll.

MD: How did your family hear about Diboll?

MR: Through Ashworth, mama's brother. He got a job here and wrote us that caused us to – my dad was a farmer but he decided he'd do some sawmilling, so we moved to the sawmill after we heard that he had a job.

MD: Did you have any brothers or sisters born here or were they all born before you came here? You had some born here, didn't you?

MR: Yes, Mary Lou, Pat and Allen were all born here, three of them.

MD: Were you old enough to remember how you moved?

MR: We moved on a train.

MD: Did you have any furniture to bring with you?

MR: Yes, they sent it by wagon, I believe, the best I can remember. There were no cars so they brought it, but we came on the train.

MD: I thought maybe you came on the wagon, too.

MR: No, we came on the train. The baby was only three weeks old when we moved here, Mabel.

MD: Was it hard for you to find a house to live in?

MR: No, it was hard to clean one when we did find it because the Italians who lived here had a bunch of goats. They didn't have any screens on the doors and they just had access to the house and the goats lived in there. The houses were terrible and they weren't kept very good. We had a time, there were plenty of houses at that time, but they were just so unkempt and all. Like I said, the goats were in there. We had a time getting it cleaned. But we stayed a day or two with my Aunt, and we moved in after getting the place ready to move in.

MD: About where was it located? Do you know where you first lived?

MR: It's what they call "Snuffy," down on "Snuffy." We lived there oh, several years and my dad worked at the sawmill for a while, then he got a job in the market, worked a while there. Then from there he was moved to Rayville. We went out on the ranch and stayed a while.

MD: Is that where you met Mr. Rushing, at Rayville?

MR: Oh no.

MD: Oh, I know he told me he used to work there.

MR: Yes, he did.

MD: When you moved there, did the family move there to Rayville?

MR: Oh yes, we lived there for just a few months. There were no schools there so we had to come back.

MD: Do you remember what Rayville looked like out that way?

MR: Yes, it was just a big ranch. Plenty of cattle was about the only thing there.

MD: Did they have housing out there for you? Were they kind of boxcar houses?

MR: No, no, they weren't. There weren't many houses, but for the working people, they had a house. They were clearing a lot of land and my dad helped them clear the land and take care of the cattle and everything. Building and fixing fences, so we had a good size house.

MD: You said that you lived in the part of town called "Snuffy." Do you remember the other terms that people called the other sections of town?

MR: The main street was called "Silk Stocking St." I can't remember any other than that.

MD: The first house you lived in, you said it didn't have any screens?

MR: No.

MD: Was it painted or do you remember?

MR: I can't remember it being painted but surely it was, I can't remember that about it.

MD: Did you have running water inside?

MR: Yes, oh, yes.

MD: Had electricity?

MR: No, no, no, we didn't, not for a long, long time. It was a good while before they put electricity in.

MD: What did you cook with? What kind of fuel did you use to cook with?

MR: Stove wood and the company furnished it, you could get wood from the planer. They sold wood; the company sold you your wood. We all had wood stoves and wood heaters for the heat in the winter.

MD: What did you do about washing your clothes? How did you wash them?

MR: We used a rub board and boiled them in a wash pot: had to build a fire around the pot and wash them on a rub board. It took a day to wash, just about half a day, for a large family.

MD: Did you ever make lye soap?

MR: No, but my mother did. When we were on the farm, she made all of our soaps, you know, to wash with. I've seen her make a pot full of it lots of times.

MD: Do you remember – can you remember anything about the town, what it looked like when you were a young girl?

MR: All I remember is just the old houses and all, the commissary. It still looks like it did. For years it has looked the same. It hasn't changed too much. The most natural thing around here that I can remember is the library, it sill looks so natural.

MD: The Love Wood Products?

MR: The building, yes, it looks so natural.

MD: Do you remember if that was here when you moved or was it built later?

MR: I can't remember, being a child. I can't remember back, but I do remember, for years and years, it was there. It seems like it was.

MD: Probably one of the oldest buildings, that and the commissary that's left there. Do you remember, did they ever use that for a library or was it just called that?

MR: I can't remember but I do know that when some of the officials came in, you know, they used that, they stayed there. As far as having the library, I can't remember – I don't believe they did.

MD: That's what I was trying to find out, I've heard it called that but nobody could ever remember it as a library.

MR: I don't believe they did, I don't know why they called it that.

MD: They might have intended to use it as such but never did.

MR: I believe they did.

MD: When you first started school here, where was the school located?

MR: It was where the elementary school is now. They only had four rooms, I can remember so well, it had a big open hall and we all lined up when the bell rang. We all lined up, one on one side of the building and one on the other side, and we marched through those halls going to our rooms. There were only four rooms at that time.

MD: Do you remember your teacher?

MR: Emma Roth, Miss Emma Roth.

MD: Fenner's mother?

MR: Yes, Fenner's mother. She had two children and she would bring those children to school a lot of times. She was a real good teacher.

MD: Good. Then they just kept adding rooms there, grades, as the town grew? They probably didn't have the high school when you started, did they?

MR: They didn't have, the seventh grade. You could go through the seventh grade, complete the seventh grade and you could get a diploma to teach at that time. I was just thinking how different it is now. They really almost require you to have a masters degree. It is a good thing though.

MD: Did you ever – excuse me, go ahead.

MR: We had – one of the Stovall girls would play a march for us to march, it's so different now from what it was then.

MD: You marched in and marched out?

MR: Yes.

MD: I guess the discipline was pretty good then, was it?

MR: It was, it really was. Everything was just so in order and it was really disciplined. It's so different from what they are now, I think. Children were not disobedient with the teachers like they are now. We didn't think about – the only bad thing that we ever had was George Powell; he was a booger. They would expel him and he would come with old cowbells and come to the windows and ring those bells. It didn't do any good to expel him. He was more trouble to the teacher when he was expelled than when he was in school.

MD: He would come to the windows with cowbells?

MR: He was a booger when he was a young boy.

MD: Did you ever hear anything about the first school burning down? The first school in Diboll?

MR: One did burn, I don't know what time or what year it was but I remember the old building did and, of course, it doesn't look anything like it did then.

MD: Oh no, they have torn down all the old buildings, put the new elementary school there. Tell me, now when did you and Mr. Rushing marry?

MR: In 1923, March 17, 1923.

MD: How did you meet him?

MR: In church, in Pine Valley, he was staying with his Aunt, Mrs. Ashworth and so we met at the Pine Valley Methodist Church.

MD: How would you get to Pine Valley from Diboll?

MR: Well, how would we get there? We would come around by the Chapel.

MD: Would you walk?

MR: Oh, we had to walk everywhere, honey, people didn't know what it was to ride unless you got an old buggy or wagon, but we would rather walk anyway. We walked to the picture show a lot of times from Pine Valley and didn't think a thing about it. Now a days these people can't walk a block.

MD: Did you live at Pine Valley at one time?

MR: No, no. Our parents did after I married but I never did live there, but I had an Aunt that lived there, George Hardin. His wife was my Aunt. Of course, I stayed with them a lot but we never did live there. Yes, I did, I've forgotten, we lived on the Ashworth place, Mr. Wesley Ashworth's mother.

MD: Was that before or after you married?

MR: It was while, just before we married. We were dating and he was staying with his Aunt, Wesley's mother, and we were neighbors to them. That was in 1921, I guess.

MD: And you would walk into Diboll?

MR: Yes.

MD: Where was the picture show?

MR: It was, let me think now. It was over there between the planer and George Smith, no not George Smith, Frank Smith. You know where they lived, it was across the track over there.

MD: Before you got to the quarters?

MR: I thought you would remember that, Marie. Well, that was where it was.

MD: Was it called the Airdome, is that the one that was called the Airdome?

MR: Yes.

MD: Do you remember one being up in Copestown?

MR: Copestown? No. I don't believe I do.

MD: That might have been the very first one.

MR: It might have been, I don't remember that one.

MD: After you and Mr. Rushing got married, where did you live in Diboll?

MR: Well, we lived down on Snuffy about, on the very last street down there. And all out in front of our house it was just woods. It wasn't cleared, nothing cleared and we lived there about two months. We rented rooms from a family and then, we couldn't get a house, so finally a house came vacant up there by the feed barn and we moved up there then, lived there for years, several years.

MD: Now, tell me where the feed barn was?

MR: It was next to the TSE Railroad track, between the commissary and the TSE office, that's where it was.

MD: So it would be north of the commissary?

MR: Yes.

MD: Well, tell me sort of a typical day that you spent being a housewife and having to get up?

MR: Well, Jim had several jobs. He started out working in the shop and then worked days, and then they put him on the log train and we had to get up at 3 o'clock, sometimes 2:30. He worked there for years and then he got on the local, passenger train that ran from Diboll to Lufkin.

MD: Was that the TSE local?

MR: Yes. And I never shall forget, Jim Richards was night watchman and he always called us every morning. I told him, “Oh, I almost hate your voice.”

MD: Did you have a phone?

MR: No, honey, no.

MD: I didn't think you did but he would just come by your house?

MR: Yes, he would come and call. He had to call the night crews to get them up, you know.

MD: Well, that was nice.

MR: It certainly was, the alarm clock, sometimes they fail. He would always call us, every morning.

MD: On – while he was making his rounds?

MR: Yes, on his rounds he would call. I never shall forget, he'd holler “Hey, Jimmy, come out by me?” He didn't even come in. We had an old fence, you know, had to come in at the gate. Every house had a fence around the yard, so he would just holler as he passed by and it would wake us up. He had a voice like a lion.

MD: After you got up, would you always fix him a lunch?

MR: I had to fix lunch, fix his breakfast and fix his lunch.

MD: Was he late getting in at night?

MR: Well, on the log train they worked days, then finally they had just one train, and they had to use the log train during the day time to haul logs. Then at night, they would pull the local freight, you know, and he had to work at night then.

MD: What would you do while he was gone during the day?

MR: During the day, well, your usual work, house cleaning and keeping house and I can't remember anything other than just keeping the house.

MD: Why did everybody have fences?

MR: It was open range, to keep their stock and hogs and things like that out, because there were just no stock law, you see. Just open range. If you didn't want to live with the

hogs and stock and things, you had to have a fence around. I guess that's the reason they did it. But after this stock law was passed, they did away with the fences. I'm pretty sure that's why they were there, but the company had to keep those fences up. It was rather expensive for them, you know, to keep the fences up.

MD: Did you have a cow, did you ever milk a cow?

MR: Three of them, three different cows we owned while we were living there.

MD: Did you raise chickens?

MR: We raised chickens, too, that's right.

MD: Did you ever have a garden in town?

MR: During the Depression we had to have a garden. We raised lots of pretty gardens there. Now, it doesn't even look that way, you know, they have torn all of it down. That's one reason we moved, we had to move. They moved our house, moved all those houses. They have offices and things fixed there now, you know, where the dwelling houses were. They moved all of those houses, so we had to move into a duplex apartment and they moved our house. I didn't like the location and I didn't want to live there. We lived there until we bought the place out on 1818.

MD: When you were in town, if you wanted to move to a different house, how would people go about getting another house? What process did you have to go through with?

MR: Well, you just had to ask someone over the houses. You had to see him to make a move. We never did move.

MD: If you needed some work done on your house, would they pretty well do it?

MR: Sometimes. Mrs. Arthur Porter was really nice. She got all the houses painted. When we moved in that house there were so many old bedbugs there til we fought them continually for two years. Mrs. Porter was living just above us, just north of us, so she just said "Well, there wasn't no use in this, something has got to be done." So she went to Mr. — I can't remember who was over the houses then, anyway the man who was in charge of the houses, and she told him those houses had to be painted. They painted all those houses, inside and outside and that did away with the bedbugs. They were terrible. They weren't just in the dwelling houses, they were on the lumberyard. They were everywhere.

MD: What did you do to fight them? What did you use?

MR: We used everything that could be heard of. And we had to take our beds and sun them, take the bed slats and scald them in lye water and it was really a job.

MD: I've heard a lot of people talk about the bed bugs.

MR: They were all over that lumber yard.

MD: You just wonder, now what happened to the bed bugs. You don't ever hear of them any more.

MR: You don't ever hear of them. I haven't seen one in years. Thank the Lord, I'm glad of it. Oh, I hated those things.

MD: Sometimes I wonder what happened to the bed bugs.

MR: I guess people just finally killed them out. They've got so much stuff you can kill them with now. At that time we used kerosene oil and, I just don't know, lye water, anything you could hear of. We would honestly scald the walls in lye water and, oh, it was so terrible to have to do that. It was an all day job when you got your house cleaned.

MD: Did you go to the commissary every day?

MR: Not every day but we went a lot more than we do now. We had to go pretty often. We didn't have electricity. We had just old ice chests and all. It was hard to keep your food. Diboll has come a long way now.

MD: It surely has. With Mr. Rushing being gone a lot, did the 11:15 whistle mean much to you? Did you have to listen for it every day?

MR: When he was working in the shop, I did. That was the bread whistle, it was time to fix your bread. Yeah, when he worked in the shop and he worked for several years in the shop, and we lived by the whistles then.

MD: But when he was on the log train for the TSE you –

MR: He carried his lunch.

MD: And you had to cook supper.

MR: That's right.

MD: What time did you – did you go to bed early?

MR: Well, earlier than we do now. When we had to get up at 3 o'clock, we had to go to bed early to get up that early.

MD: When Jackie Bob started to school, did you work with the PTA?

MR: Yes, I did. Yes, I was room mother two years I think when she was in school – elementary school.

MD: What did the room mothers do?

MR: It was during the Depression and they had plenty to do because there were a lot of children, underprivileged children that we had to see after. In fact the room mothers would feed so many, give them their lunch every day. They didn't have lunchrooms then. I know we had several little children out in the country that were so underprivileged that they didn't have the food, they had to have help. Then we would take them to the store when they would need shoes and the PTA paid for it. Seemed to me like more work then because there were so many children to care for.

MD: Someone said that the PTA, what we know as the PTA, was first called The Mother's Club. Was that before your time?

MR: It must have been before my time, honey, because it was always PTA when Jackie started to school. I know, it seems like it was really good to help children. Some of them wouldn't have got to go. We bought their supplies, school supplies and furnished their shoes and things like that. And the room mothers would feed so many. I fed, I think it was three or four, their lunch ever so often you know.

MD: Would you just take it up to the teacher, take their lunch up there?

MR: No, they would come to the house.

MD: Well, that was good. How would you raise your money when you needed money for the PTA?

MR: We had different things, like Halloween, we had carnivals and I know I would always help with the mulligan stew. We'd fix it in a wash pot. We did pretty good with that, the carnival and all. Different days we would have things like that. Then, I can't remember what all we would sell, different things that we would make but I know we always had money, I can't remember everything we did.

MD: But that was the main money making project, wasn't it, the Halloween carnival?

MR: That's right.

MD: Tell me about the stew making, how would you –

MR: Different ones of the parents would furnish food. Some furnished chicken, some furnished beef and different things. Some canned stuff, you know. We just put all those vegetables and meats together and make a big stew. But everybody went for it.

MD: And you cooked it in the wash pot?

MR: In the wash pot. Everybody wanted stew. It was real good.

MD: Did you feel that the school system was pretty good?

MR: Yes, I did.

MD: When Jackie Bob was in school, was it pretty good?

MR: Yes, it was real good.

MD: Did you ever think that you would have liked for Jackie to go to a bigger school?

MR: No, I was satisfied.

MD: Who were some of the people who lived near you?

MR: Well, the John Martin family, Mr. & Mrs. Bob Cook, the Carrolls, Maud Carrolls family.

MD: I think you mentioned Mrs. Porter?

MR: Yes, Mrs. Porter, they lived near and Wesley Ashworth and his wife lived not too far from us at one time. That's about all I can remember.

MD: Now, your house faced the tracks?

MR: The tracks, the mill, yes, it did.

MD: Were you ever bothered with cinders?

MR: You better believe I was. When we would wash and hang our clothes I have had to wash them over. They were real bad. They would just be so bad sometimes you just had to wash your clothes over. They would just rain in there, we lived right on the street right next to the mill, especially if the wind was blowing in the right direction. If it was coming from that direction, it was just too bad. We tried to pick days when it wouldn't be so bad, we had to kind of wait to see which way the wind was blowing so it wouldn't get on your clothes. We didn't know what a dryer was. We all had to dry our clothes on a line.

MD: Did you have a little washhouse? Some people had little washhouses.

MR: No, I didn't have one. You just put your pot in the back yard.

MD: Did they get in your houses, did the cinders get in the houses?

MR: Real bad, they would even come through the screens. Housekeeping was really hard on you. It was real bad, come through the screen doors.

MD: You could stay pretty busy, keeping house?

MR: You had a day's job every day, it was the same old thing. You really had to work.

MD: But, still, do you feel you had more time then than now?

MR: We had more time, that's right. We had more time to visit and more time to visit sick people and all than we have now.

MD: Do you think the people in Diboll have always been pretty good about watching after their neighbors? Seeing about sick people?

MR: Yes, I do. I really do.

MD: If you needed to go to Lufkin for something, how would you go back in the early days?

MR: Well, we had to go on the bus, we rode the bus up there. Of course, we didn't buy groceries or anything like that there because it was so inconvenient, you know, to bring them, the way we had to travel. But we would go for different things. We had to go to Lufkin for some things but we rode the bus.

MD: Did you ever ride the TSE?

MR: Oh, yes, a lot of times we rode the train. We rode the train or the bus, but it wasn't too terribly long before we began getting cars. When we first came to Diboll there was nobody that owned a car, then I think one of the doctors got a car.

MD: Someone said Mr. Farrington got a car.

MR: I believe Mr. Farrington did.

MD: The streets were muddy when it rained?

MR: Muddy, I mean they were muddy, that's right.

MD: Did your daddy have a wagon when you first moved here?

MR: I can't remember. I believe he did though.

MD: I guess if you wanted to go anywhere you had to either walk or ride –

MR: Walk or ride in the wagon.

MD: Do you remember the early days about burying at Ryans Chapel – burying people at Ryans Chapel?

MR: And it raining and being bad? It was terrible to have to dig a grave because you had to dip the water out a lot of times and it would cave in. It was really a difficult job to do if it was raining or wet. I know, and they had to curb the sides a lot of times to keep it from caving in.

MD: Gosh, if you walked from the Pine Valley to Diboll, a lot of people probably walked out to Ryans Chapel.

MR: Yes, that's right, we didn't think a thing about walking that far. But I believe people were healthier, I believe they did better. People nowadays don't walk enough and I think it was good for them to walk.

MD: To exercise?

MR: That's right.

MD: Have you enjoyed living in Diboll?

MR: Oh yes.

MD: Made a lot of friends?

MR: That's right, I really love the people, I love Diboll, in fact, I wouldn't want to live anywhere else.

MD: Why do you think so many people love Diboll?

MR: Why do you think that? It's on account of the people, there are so many nice people here.

MD: Seems like people, sometimes when they get grown they will move away, make a living, and then when they get older, they come back.

MR: Come back home, that's right.

MD: I guess it does have some kind of special meaning for them.

MR: It must, undoubtedly, by people doing that.

MD: Mrs. Rushing, do you remember when they put electricity in the houses in Diboll?

MR: Yes, I well remember it. We had such a laugh about it. One family near me, the lady was so scared that she grabbed all the children and ran outside and told them to stay out

of the house, that it was liable to kill them. We all had such a big laugh about that. A lot of people just couldn't understand. They were scared to death of electricity. We can never forget that.

MD: Did she ever get used to it?

MR: Yes, she finally did. They convinced her that it wouldn't hurt her.