

JAMES RHONE

Interview 100b

July 20, 2010, at The History Center, Diboll, Texas

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ABSTRACT: In this interview with Patsy Colbert, James Rhone reminisces about growing up in Diboll, attending school at the Diboll Colored School and H.G. Temple School, race relations, and integration. A graduate of H.G. Temple, Mr. Rhone has many memories of the segregated schools and also experienced sending his daughters to school after integration. He talks about the school accreditation process, basketball and football, text books and other aspects of school life. Mr. Rhone also reminisces about his 45 years working for Temple and the many community activities he was involved in throughout the years, including Cub Scouts, Diboll Day, Juneteenth celebrations, the Walter Allen Park and Pool, the Diboll School Board, and the Diboll Housing Authority.

Patsy Colbert (hereafter PC): Today's date is July 20, 2010. I'm Patsy Colbert and I'm at the History Center doing an oral history interview with Mr. James Rhone. Mr. Rhone, if you could just tell me when and where you were born.

James Rhone (hereafter JR): I was born in Long Leaf, Louisiana April 23, 1931.

PC: And who were your parents?

JR: My mother's name was Lou Ella Rhone, well she was Lou Ella Tribblett and my father's name was Morris Rhone.

PC: Okay, and did he work for the sawmill, for Southern Pine Lumber Company?

JR: Yes he did, he worked for Southern Pine. He was a block setter for Temple. He worked for Southern Pine Lumber Company, started off with Southern Pine Lumber Company and worked on through. I don't remember how many years he worked but he got hurt and then he retired from work, disability. He was what you called the key man in the mill besides the sawyer because the sawyer would tell him, he was running doing block setting and the block setter was handling the logs to produce the lumber and that is what he was doing, those two worked together.

PC: Okay, okay. And when did you move to Diboll?

JR: We moved to Diboll in 1941.

PC: So you were ten years old?

JR: Ten years old.

PC: Okay so you would have been in what grade when you started school here?

JR: I was in about sixth or seventh grade by then because I graduated in '48 and that was the twelfth grade.

PC: Okay and do you have any siblings?

JR: Oh yes, I got...it was a total of twelve of us.

PC: Oh wow! (laughter)

JR: Twelve, a big family. I can't remember the year we moved, they moved away from Diboll after my daddy retired. They went back to their home place up in Louisiana, North Louisiana. But, I had a sister to graduate from Grambling College, two of them from Grambling College and one is teaching in Atlanta, Georgia. The other one taught in Louisiana. Both of them are retired now too.

PC: Okay.

JR: I had two brothers was working for Hughes in California. One was a finishing carpenter and the other one was in electronics at Hughes out in California.

PC: Okay. And you graduated from Diboll, from H. G. Temple School in 1948?

JR: Diboll, H. G. Temple, '48.

PC: And, what is your educational background beyond that?

JR: My educational background I went to Texas Southern for Industrial Education and I didn't stay there. I came back when I was working for Temple and they sent me to school. Of course, they brought the school to us. All that want to be, take training as supervisors and I was in Industrial Education so I got my training on the job with Temple. That is how I got to be a supervisor. We had all the classes that we needed to be a superintendent or supervisor or whatever field that we was working in out there and got credit for it from Texas A&M.

PC: Okay, that is great. What year did you start to work for Temple?

JR: I started to work after it was the summer after I came back in '48. I finished in '48 and I came back to Temple and started working then. I wasn't in Houston at Texas Southern but a few months. We went down on a scholarship and we found out they just had made Texas Southern, it was a junior college, so what they done was recruit all the Houston schools and got all the boys from the high schools there and they got first choice so all these little East Texas boys was knocked out of it. We didn't get it so I came back home and got a job.

PC: After your scholarship ran out you had to come back home and go to work. So, you actually went to work for Southern Pine in '48.

JR: Southern Pine in '48.

PC: The same year you graduated. When did you retire?

JR: In '93.

PC: Wow!

JR: Forty-five years.

PC: Forty-five years, that is wonderful. Well, you saw a lot of changes in the company then didn't you?

JR: Oh Lord, I was in the changes and made the changes and saw them.

PC: That is right. Well, you were around ten years old when you moved to Diboll and you were in elementary school so, you actually attended the old Diboll Colored School?

JR: The old school, sure did.

PC: Okay, can you explain, tell us the condition of the school facilities and stuff like that when you started school?

JR: Yes, I can because I had the janitorial part in the school. We had wooden heaters and we had to make fires and we had the old pot belly heaters in the school. One part of the building, the main building, it was two rooms which was like a gym part of it. We couldn't play inside. The basketball court was outside, but it was used for stage purposes like we had plays and things like that.

PC: Right.

JR: And they had the doors that divided these two classrooms and when they had anything going on in the auditorium type deal they would open these doors up.

PC: Okay.

JR: And we had to go out, all the janitors or custodians, about three of us, and we had to go about five o'clock in the morning and start fires in the heaters at the school.

PC: Now how old were you when you started the janitorial work? Were you a student then?

JR: Well no it wasn't at ten then I was on up.

PC: On up, later?

JR: Later.

PC: But, you were still attending school there when you were a janitor?

JR: Still attending school, right.

PC: Oh wow! Did you get paid for that?

JR: Yes, it wasn't much but I got paid.

PC: Okay, so maybe like your high school years, or junior high, high school?

JR: It was in high school years.

PC: High school years you were janitor. Wow, well that is wonderful! Who else was janitor then with you?

JR: We had another boy, his name was Archie Mattox.

PC: Well at least you got paid, a little money.

JR: Yes, we did.

PC: Anything else particularly about the school when you first came here that stood out in your mind about the school itself?

JR: Well we had that one building and they had two buildings. The other building, I think it was three classrooms and one of the classrooms was home economics in the back. It was two classrooms in the front and then the home economics building was in the back, in the back section.

PC: Okay. And, who was the principal there when you started to school?

JR: Bradley.

PC: Mr. Bradley, okay. And do you remember who else was in your graduating class in 1948?

JR: Yes.

PC: Can you name them?

JR: Jim Ligon was one and Queen Esther Taylor, well she is Queen Ester King now, and Edward Allen, and let's see it was Eugene Hodges.

PC: Okay, so that would be five.

JR: There was five, yes.

PC: Okay, and do you happen to still have your diploma?

JR: I don't know where it is. I got one but I don't know where it is.

PC: Okay, well we would love to have a copy of that.

JR: I looked and looked and looked but in the moving process I don't know what happened to it.

PC: Okay. Now, what do you remember about Mr. Bradley that you want to share with me?

JR: Mr. Bradley was a fine teacher, a fine man. He had discipline and he was a good teacher and he is the one that got the school up into the high school 'cause it wasn't a high school at the time, you know. He worked diligently to get the high school in Diboll.

PC: Right.

JR: And, he had organized basketball and we played on a dirt court because we didn't have a gym or anything. If it was bad we would use the gym over here at the elementary school and it ain't but one place that we went to play ball that had a gym and that was in Chester. They had a gym but all the rest of them was dirt courts. We played Rusk, we played Livingston, Livingston didn't have one. They had one later but, they didn't have one at the time when we started off.

PC: Now, you mentioned Mr. Bradley getting the school accredited, do you remember anything about that process and how he went about getting the school accredited and how long the process might have taken?

JR: I don't, I don't know that much about it but I remember when he was getting everything together to do that and he...we had some, I think some students was going to Lufkin, but he had to make out a report to try to get the accreditation. It had to be a certain number of students to do that, but other than that I don't know the whole details of that.

PC: Okay, do you by any chance know the first year that they actually had twelve grades and their first graduating class? You would have been in school at the time so I just wondered if you might remember anything.

JR: Yes but, I don't remember the year it started but I was in school at that particular time.

PC: Okay.

JR: We was still in school and then we was able to graduate from Diboll, didn't have to go to Lufkin to do it. We had several of them had to go to Lufkin to graduate, Joy Mae Williams, I think Harold Cade was two of them that went to school and graduated in Lufkin.

PC: Okay, we know that in 1942 he began the accreditation process and we have a photograph of a 1944 graduating class so we are assuming that is probably the first class, but we don't know for sure if there was a '43 class. I was just wondering if anything stuck out in your mind that you might remember about that.

JR: No.

PC: Do you remember anything about the naming of the school? We know from the records that they chose the name H. G. Temple. He was general manager of Southern Pine Lumber Company at the time and apparently had helped them with raising money and the company donating money to help them get everything they needed to get the accreditation.

JR: Right.

PC: But do you remember anything particular how that came about, the naming of the school?

JR: No, I don't. It was discussed that they were going to name it H. G. Temple, but other than any details I don't know. But, after it was approved Jim Ligon was the one that painted the sign on the school, H. G. Temple and also on the school bus. We had got a school bus too. Bradley initiated that, we got a school bus and that is how we would travel to ball games and he put all that, I mean, he painted all those signs, H. G. Temple High School.

PC: Oh, so Jim Ligon was still in school then?

JR: He was still in school, yes.

PC: So he painted the bus and painted the sign for the school. Well, he is a great artist.

JR: He is; did you ever see any of his sculptures he made?

PC: Yes sir, I sure did, I sure did. He is a great artist. Well, again we are really just trying to collect as much of the history of the H. G. Temple School and this is also part of our integration project and desegregation of the schools, but we are just really trying to confirm the date of the first graduating class. Is there anything else you remember as far as being a student in the high school when they made the transition and became

accredited? Do you remember any big changes that took place? You know, like in curriculum was there any difference in the curriculum or did they hire more teachers?

JR: Well, they did get more teachers and then, you know, at that particular time the books that was at the high school over here [the white school] we would usually get those after we got up in high school. We finally got to where we would get new books, but in the transition they didn't have them and I guess they couldn't get them or didn't get them, but after we got it all set up we started getting new books that nobody else had used.

PC: Getting new books, oh, well that was a big deal.

JR: It was, that was a big doings, sure was. We could look in the book and we could tell who had that book before we got it and a lot of them, most of us was in it too besides that. That is the way we done it.

PC: Now, you mentioned that you remember some of the students having to go to Lufkin to graduate which would have been Dunbar School at the time.

JR: Dunbar, right.

PC: But, you actually remember some Diboll students having to go to Lufkin because we didn't have the accreditation?

JR: The only two I can remember that even graduated, I don't know if there is any others went that didn't graduate but, those two Harold Cade and Joy Mae Williams, they did graduate.

PC: Okay, yes. I believe they might have graduated from H. G. Temple. They got to come back and graduate from what I understand. We've interviewed both of them and they are really helping us to get this date narrowed down. Okay, seems like they had to acquire more students plus add more curriculum I think for the accreditation but, apparently Mr. Bradley worked really hard at getting that done.

JR: Yes, he did.

PC: Now, did he also teach?

JR: Yes, he did.

PC: What did he teach?

JR: He was a math teacher.

PC: A math teacher, okay. Did you have a favorite teacher in school here at Diboll that you remember?

JR: Well I did, one of my favorites was Mrs. Inez Sibley. She was an English teacher. And also Austerine Johnson, she was a homemaking deal. We would go into homemaking deal, we got some training in homemaking too at that particular time, yes.

PC: Now, we talked a little bit earlier about the renaming of the school, do you happen to know the exact year that they renamed the school when it became H. G. Temple? We know that in '42 they started the accreditation and we know in '44 that we had students to graduate from H. G. Temple school but we don't know how soon the name changed or if it was a high school for a couple of years and then they named it or did they rename it immediately after acquiring the accreditation?

JR: No, I can't...I don't remember that, sure don't.

PC: No town hall meeting or anything, or course you said Jim Ligon painted the sign, he might could tell me what grade he was in.

JR: He was still in high school I know.

PC: Okay, okay. Well that will be helpful there. What sports did you participate in school?

JR: Basketball and I played football. We didn't get into this but I played on the football team too but that was the only thing we had going was basketball and football.

PC: I noticed in the H. G. Temple Alumni souvenir book there is a photograph of the 1948 Temple Tigers Southeast Texas Basketball Conference Champs.

JR: Conference champs, sure is.

PC: And you are on that team.

JR: I was on that team.

PC: Tell me about that championship year and going to that championship, tell me about that.

JR: That championship game was played in Pineland over the weekend and we went over on a Friday and that was elimination. If you didn't win, you know, you'd be out of it, but Diboll went all the way through. We won all of it. That's when we went.

PC: So y'all took the championship?

JR: Took the championship.

PC: Did you go any farther after this?

JR: No.

PC: That was as far as you could go then?

JR: Yes, that is far as we went.

PC: Did you go to Pineland very often to play games? Did y'all travel to out of town games?

JR: We didn't play Pineland that often, but they had it set up at that particular time for the play off deal and the championship to be played there because it was some other schools came in too but, they was eliminated and Diboll won it.

PC: Okay. Were there any students that went to play basketball, college basketball from H. G. Temple?

JR: I don't think we had any, sure didn't.

PC: I see here that Mr. Bradley was also the coach.

JR: Yes, he was the coach.

PC: Did y'all have football at this time, the same time frame?

JR: Yes, we played football during that season.

PC: But you didn't play much football?

JR: No, I didn't play much football.

PC: Well that is quite an honor then to win the Conference Champs.

JR: Yes.

PC: So, this is your senior year when you played in '48, that would have been your senior year?

JR: Yes, that was the last year.

PC: Okay. In a Buzz Saw article from March 1948 states that, "the basketball team played 40 games with only 4 losses and had the most outstanding record of any colored high school team in East Texas. They also played larger schools and Temple High had a minimum of equipment and an outside court to practice on."

JR: To practice on, sure did. We played Chester, we played Livingston, we played all the schools around in the area, Rusk and all, Alto and all those schools. And, like I say

we had a minimum of equipment. We didn't have any extra equipment. Even when they was playing football we had to just patch up shoulder pads and things to make up enough equipment.

PC: Where did your equipment come from, was it just stuff that was given to the school?

JR: Some of it was given to the school and then the high school would give us some of it, the white high school.

PC: The white school would give y'all stuff.

JR: The white school would give us some.

PC: And when you went to other schools, were their conditions the same, the outside court and same conditions?

JR: Yes, now Chester is the only one had an inside court. Of course, Livingston got one before we did and of course we never did play in Diboll no more than over here in this white school gym. We never did get a gym over there until after everybody finished, Mr. Massey was principal when they got the gym over there.

PC: When you traveled to out of town games, y'all had the one bus?

JR: One bus.

PC: So, everybody went on the bus?

JR: Everybody went on one bus.

PC: And when you had teams to come here to play did y'all play at the white gym?

JR: We played over there unless it was bad weather. But we played all the games over there.

PC: Oh okay, so if the weather was good you played outside on the court. And, everybody was used to that?

JR: Yes, outside courts.

PC: I've also heard a lot of talk about the tournaments; they held a lot of tournaments. Do you remember any tournaments being held in Diboll at the school?

JR: Yes, they would play all day and the last one might be around midnight before they got through. They had a lot of teams to play.

PC: Well that was exciting times wasn't it?

JR: Just about all of them everywhere we went most all of them was similar to these tournaments.

PC: Who were some of your other teachers that you had at H.G. Temple?

JR: We had at the time I was in school Mrs. Austerine Johnson, I said that. Then we had Mrs. Bradley, she taught too, Coach Bradley's wife. Let's see, Lilly Simmons and Ruby Simmons, they was our teachers there at that time.

PC: What other extracurricular stuff did they have at H. G. Temple after they acquired accreditation other than sports? Were there any other extracurricular activities?

JR: They had the sports and everything like that but, every year every teacher had to put on a program, a theater type program, where the students would learn their parts and act out and everyone of them had a play.

PC: Like a play.

JR: A play or something they put on every year. That was part of the curriculum.

PC: Do you remember a particular play you had to do?

JR: No, lord. (laughter) And, I'll tell you another thing, we had a music teacher, and at graduation you had to march. You didn't walk, you had to march. She would drill you.

PC: And who was that music teacher?

JR: That music teacher was Mrs. Henderson. Her name was Mrs. Henderson.

PC: Okay. Now when you came here in '41 was Mr. Bradley here already?

JR: Already, sure was.

PC: And he was the principal when you graduated so, you were only here under Mr. Bradley?

JR: Right.

PC: Okay, well we know before Mr. Bradley came it was the Hurdle Family. So, you weren't here during that time?

JR: I never did know them.

PC: Didn't know them, okay. Did you ever hear of a Mrs. Daisy Mark being in Diboll around 1939? I know you didn't move here until after but, I was just wondering if you ever heard of her or knew any information about her.

JR: Never knew of her.

PC: Okay, is there any other school memory that you want to share with me, anything about the school before we move on, just your high school days, or when you first came to Diboll or anything about the school that you can think of?

JR: No, I can't think of anything.

PC: Okay. Now when you moved to Diboll in '41, where did your family live?

JR: We lived over there in the quarters, which wasn't a street name we just had house numbers. We lived there until they moved but, for street names we didn't have no street names just house numbers.

PC: Okay.

JR: And the town, the quarters was divided what they call the South Side and the North Side of the pipe line. That was houses all the way across from where the plywood plant is located, down in there.

PC: As a small child, you know, you were ten years old when you moved to Diboll, what was your first impression of Diboll as far as comparing it with where you lived at Long Leaf?

JR: Well, I didn't like Diboll, when we first came. (laughter)

PC: You didn't like it. (laughter)

JR: No I didn't, sure didn't.

PC: Were you just opposed to moving or you just really didn't like the looks of the town or just?

JR: I didn't like the looks of it at all. The houses was painted I guess you call it a red, you couldn't even get close to it, you know, if you laid up against it or stand up against it, rub your clothes, you got it on your clothes, you know. And, they had these fences, the type of fence they had was just like a cattle barn or something.

PC: Just didn't look impressive to you as a ten year old child.

JR: It didn't look impressive at all.

PC: What did you do for fun in the afternoons and the weekends, what did y'all do for entertainment?

JR: Well everybody had little games they would play and they would make basketball goals. We didn't have no ball, what we would use was, we had milk cans or something like that to go through hoops. And, play baseball it would be the same way. Have a stack of them and we would just beat them cans down as a ball.

PC: Now, I think they had a section called Red Town is that what you are referring to?

JR: Yes, Red Town, uh-huh. And, they had a café just about in each one of the areas. They had one on the pipeline, they had one on the North Side and they had one in Red Town and they had a place called the...boy I can't hardly think of the names now. My memory is getting bad. But, teenagers, young people couldn't go to this restaurant, it was for adults.

PC: Oh, I see. It was for adults but you don't remember the name of it?

JR: It was Southside Café that is what it was.

PC: Okay, Southside Café was the name of it?

JR: Uh-huh.

PC: Okay. Now, so you were living in Diboll at the time that the schools were integrated in '65 through '68?

JR: Sure was.

PC: Okay, what was your first knowledge of integration?

JR: I don't know whether you saw in the Cornbread book where I had an article in there called "As I See It"?

PC: Yes sir.

JR: I was concerned about the black teachers when they said they was going to integrate. Would they get a job? Would they have a job or would they put them out? But, it worked real fine. They was in school and they hired them too.

PC: Okay.

JR: I can remember, and I kept up with this, all of the schools that integrated Diboll was the only place I know of that kept the black school and used it and utilized it too. A lot of them tore them down. Up there where my mother lived they hadn't been too long they had built a new school and a new gym and you know that school went down and is still down.

PC: I think that meant a lot to the students and helped the transition.

JR: It did.

PC: Yes sir. What race relations did you experience as a young child as far as being around the white community?

JR: What now?

PC: What experience did you have as a young child being around the white community?

JR: The white community? You know, we never did have any bad relations with the whites. We always, you know, I guess we was taught that way, brought up that way. In fact of business I never know of any incident from anybody that caused to have any friction at all.

PC: That is good.

JR: Diboll was always an example of a better place than a lot of them. It really was.

PC: Okay, did you go to the commissary store?

JR: Yes, sure did.

PC: What do you remember about that?

JR: Going to the commissary store, everything was right there in the commissary, everything.

PC: Were you able to go in and shop, you know, like everybody else?

JR: Yes, we would go in and shop. Now, they did have an area at the meat market, you had to go in on one end and they had to go in on the other end and they had different meats.

PC: In the market?

JR: Separate in the meat market, sure did.

PC: So you had to go in a different area to the meat market and you had a different section of meat to purchase?

JR: Different section, sure would, sure did.

PC: Okay.

JR: And, they had an ice house and you'd buy ice. Most people didn't have refrigerators they had ice boxes. And, just like it is now real hot and we would go down and get a

block of ice and by the time we got home we had to go back and get another 'cause it done melt. We would sit down and try to cool our feet and everything off too, you know.

PC: Cool your feet.

JR: Yes, barefooted.

PC: Now, what about during integration did you know of any incidents, you know, in the community due to the integration process or school incidents?

JR: No.

PC: Of course you were working for Southern Pine or Temple then.

JR: Yes.

PC: What about as far as integration, you know, at the mill, pretty much it was always integrated anyway wasn't it?

JR: It was integrated anyway, it was. I remember this, Mr. Temple had sent out a survey on it that you know, this survey consist of benefits. Would you rather have benefits or just raises and a lot of them said raises. Benefits consisted of more than just raises you know. You had insurance and you had vacation time and all this and everything and he the one that set that thing into motion.

PC: So you remember actually getting to take a survey on that and vote on it.

JR: Yes, take a survey on it 'cause I filled out one of them and I wanted benefits and not just the wages.

PC: Right. Now in the forties and when you first started working for the company did you work with white employees?

JR: Yes, I did.

PC: So, the race relations there were good?

JR: The first job after I got hired they had bought timber in the Big Thicket down around Hull and Daisetta and all the ones I graduated with, they hired us and we went down on a labor bus every morning. They would bring us back in the evening and we worked, what we were doing was cutting a right of way in that Big Thicket to lay a railroad through where they were going to log. And, out of the five, let's see there was four of us and I was the only one that stayed. The rest of them quit. They didn't like that, they didn't stay. Then when they got through down there they came back into Diboll and that is when I went to work in the shop.

PC: So that was your first job with the company?

JR: Yes, first job.

PC: You would get on the labor bus and go to the Big Thicket and worked on...

JR: The labor bus, yes, we would leave about five o'clock every morning and then go down. Of course, it wasn't many hours to work because we would work and then come back and they done that for a while and they found a place that they could pay, that we could stay till the weekend. Make a week and come back in and they paid for our room and board at that time.

PC: And how long did that job last, when you were working on the Big Thicket area?

JR: I think that run on about, that was in the summer part of it and we came back in the fall of the year back to Diboll.

PC: Just a few months.

JR: Because we were through with that part of it and another crew went in and laid the railroad and logging crews took over.

PC: Now during this time of the integration process for Diboll Schools was 1965 through 1968. Did you have children in the public school system at that time here in Diboll?

JR: No.

PC: Okay, what year did you get married?

JR: 1968.

PC: Okay, and what is your wife's name?

JR: Marva.

PC: And how many children do you have?

JR: We have two, two girls.

PC: Two girls okay, so that was after.

JR: Yes.

PC: So when your children started to school integration was...

JR: Yes, right.

PC: And they went to school here through the Diboll school system?

JR: Yes, they finished school here, both of them did.

PC: Okay, okay. So, do you think the transition of the integration process was smooth for Diboll?

JR: It was, it really was, a hundred percent. We never did have any incidents. If it was any incident it wasn't publicized or nothing like that or just something that they taken care of. It didn't get out of hand.

PC: Okay. Now, before we move on I want to ask you, go back to your janitorial work at the high school. You mentioned you would go at five or five thirty and put the wood in the heater to heat the school. What other job duties did you have as a janitor at the school?

JR: Well we had to sweep and clean up, done that after school.

PC: Okay.

JR: After school we would do that.

PC: So you went in the mornings to get the heater going and then after school you done the sweeping.

JR: Sweeping and cleaning up and picking up paper and stuff.

PC: Was that every day?

JR: Yes, everyday, during the wintertime too.

PC: Okay. Anything else you want to share with me about the school or integration that you can think of?

JR: No.

PC: Okay. Well, moving on we know that you were the first black man to be elected to the Diboll Independent School District board of trustees. So, tell me about that and how that came about and when that was?

JR: I think I was elected in '73 for the school board and I served on the school board until '93. I retired after, retired from the company. What happened, I can't remember now which one but, one of the board members was leaving and they called me back and

wanted me to serve on the board then until election time and I got back on the board again. I had served on the board all that length of time.

PC: For twenty years?

JR: Twenty years, yes.

PC: So, you were elected by the people?

JR: Yes, by the people.

PC: Okay, I guess you enjoyed serving if you served that long.

JR: Yes, I did, sure did.

PC: Anything particular during that time frame that stands out in your mind that you want to share, anything?

JR: Well, we had a lot of midnight oil to burn and to work on. We had some problems. We had a coach that was taking the boys to a game and they stopped over in Nacogdoches and all of them got off the bus and got a beer and somebody called the superintendent about it and he called all the board members and we was in a meeting as soon as they got back.

PC: Wow, that was something to deal with, wasn't it?

JR: Something to deal with, we got rid of him. He came up with all kind of excuses, but you know, the guy that called about it was the one that sold the beer to them. Every boy on there got a beer I guess, the boys was in trouble and he was too.

PC: Wow, I guess so! Well, you also served as president of the school board.

JR: Yes, I was president, sure was.

PC: What would you say was one of your greatest accomplishments while serving on the board?

JR: Well when we had the bond election to build a new school, the one we got over there now, the new high school. We had a lot of opposition of building it, but you know of getting the bond passed but, we did get it passed. Everybody had different opinions about it and they'd say we didn't need it and we didn't have to spend that kind of money but, it did pass.

PC: Well, we definitely needed it that is for sure.

JR: Oh yes, we really needed it.

PC: That is great.

JR: Just like now, we got a lot of kids in Diboll.

PC: Now, tell me about your involvement with Juneteenth Celebrations in Diboll and when your involvement began and just what all you are involved with.

JR: Before the Alumni took over on Juneteenth we had what we called a Concerned Citizens Group and we would...the churches would donate a certain amount to take care of all the meat and other items that we needed. On the nineteenth of June, well the night before, we would prepare the meat and serve everybody. We had open doors on the Juneteenth. It didn't make any difference about the celebration, the whites was welcome to come and we fed a lot of the whites. A lot of them would attend and come over and, you know, eat with us and everything, didn't have no problems with it at all.

PC: What about as a child, did your father...do you remember Juneteenth Celebrations as a child?

JR: Yes, yes, most of the older men before when we were kids all the old men would handle that. We had Robert Williams, Nash, and Joe Carr, all those men would barbecue. It's a funny thing what they had the way they would do it. They had a bulldozer to dig a hole and they would put a screen over that hole and put...they had that fire in that pit and they put all that meat on top of it and they would do a good job. I still didn't understand how a fire that far down, and of course it would be just the heat that was doing it. But, they didn't have to put a whole lot of more wood on it once they filled that thing up and they cooked that meat.

PC: So you remember that as a child?

JR: Yes.

PC: And then as you became an adult then you kind of had to help start making all the plans?

JR: Yes, then we started helping, yes. And, over in the Walter Allen Park when they built the swimming pool, Mr. Temple called me and said "I want you to come go with me and pick out the place where we going to build the swimming pool and get you're thinking on it" where the swimming pool is in Walter Allen Park.

PC: Oh, okay.

JR: I picked that spot out.

PC: Oh, wow!

JR: And, then when that pool was built I ran that pool until we got somebody else to do it, you know.

PC: Oh, you were in charge of the pool?

JR: In charge of the pool.

PC: So you did that like after work and in the summers?

JR: Yes, and I had a lifeguard that would take care of everything when I was working 'cause I was still working then. And, we had, they had the underwater lights and then they had a big light to cover everything, cover the whole pool. And, we had problems with that pool on the filter system and come to find out those people that built that pool, the first one I guess they built. They came in out of Dallas and built that pool and in all of their filter system where the water is suppose to be circulating they didn't cover it up and it had concrete in them and they had to go in there and redo some of it to get it to working.

PC: And who did you report to in the early time when the pool first went in?

JR: I report to a guy by the name of Calvin Lawrence and he was over the Booster Club and the Booster Club at that time was taking care of the pool.

PC: Okay, so you actually picked the spot out for the park.

JR: I picked the spot out, sure did.

PC: And then they named it Walter Allen after that, after the pool went in?

JR: Yes, sure did.

PC: Okay, were you involved with that, the naming of the park? Do you remember anything particular about that?

JR: Well, Mr. Temple had a hand in that too because he said in memory of Walter Allen it would be named after.

PC: So, it really wasn't like a lot of people voting. It was just Mr. Temple decided.

JR: If it would have been the choice of the people it would have been a big fight. But, he said that is what it's going to be Walter Allen Park.

PC: And how long did you manage the swimming pool?

JR: I believe that was in '53 and I think about five years.

PC: Okay, okay.

JR: It was in the summer time and I worked with Mr. Massey on it too. He was over the park, over that swimming pool too.

PC: Okay, now you were out of school by the time Mr. Massey came right?

JR: Right.

PC: But, being so involved in the community I'm sure you had a lot of opportunity of course to work with Mr. Massey.

JR: Right.

PC: What can you share with me about him?

JR: Well, Mr. Massey was a fine man. I love him, I liked him. He was straight and he was a good disciplinary man and a very good teacher from what I heard. I wasn't under him, but a good math teacher. He specialized in math and he and his wife both were teaching school and he done a good job. Now, he brought to build the school up because the students were still, a lot of them was dropping out. He recruited students from Nigton over to Diboll to keep that accreditation up on high school, sure did.

PC: Okay, okay. Well with you working for the company and being a community leader during those years through the integration, did he ever share any concerns with you about the integration process?

JR: No, he said that...I heard him make a statement, he said...they asked about integration, I asked him and he said "Well, I'll tell you, we will integrate when the time comes." He said "but if Mr. Temple say we are going to integrate, we are going to integrate." And, that is what it is, and they did. They didn't have no problems.

PC: Well according to some of the newspaper articles he was really for it and the numbers were falling and the athletic program. He went to the school board, he certainly played a great part in it.

JR: That first year they had the student's choice, I think most of them that came over was basketball boys too.

PC: The football boys, they integrated the athletic program at first and that was on his recommendation actually to the school board so, okay. Were you involved with the Diboll Day celebrations?

JR: Yes, sure was.

PC: Okay. Do you remember anything about the separate queen races before integration?

JR: Yes.

PC: Okay, what can you tell me about that?

JR: When they had it separate we would...it was backed by the PTA, the black PTA would select the queens and they were selling tickets and the one that sold the most tickets would be elected queen. But, we had the black queen and we had the white queens and it was separate.

PC: Okay.

JR: The first Diboll Day was down, they had the concessions and all right there in the Village by the First State Bank, the bank, Diboll Bank and Mr. Temple was addressing it and he talked to me about it. He said "this is fine" he said "but we don't need no two different groups, it ought to be all together." And, they started working on that to be together, under one.

PC: Okay. Well Diboll Day started in 1953 did they have separate queens even in the beginning?

JR: Separate queens then in the beginning, sure did.

PC: Okay, we haven't found any record of that but maybe we can. Do you remember anything about that first one?

JR: I don't know whether it was documented but we had, it's a book somewhere that we had those queens, the names of those queens in it and how they run. I don't know where it is.

PC: Well maybe you can find that for us, we've only been able to find 1964 Free Press article about the Temple queens and then a 1962.

JR: Yes, it was both of them, sure was.

PC: But, you remember it actually starting from the beginning that they had them.

JR: Yes, from the beginning really.

PC: Okay, say those first years in the fifties when they had the activities were they combined activities? Did everybody come to the Village or did they have separate activities?

JR: No everybody came to the Village, but I don't know whether it was the same. The next year I think it was moved over to where the corporate office is.

PC: The scout house.

JR: The scout house, they had it there and it still was separate then.

PC: It was separate? So, they had separate activities?

JR: Yes, separate activities, sure did.

PC: Separate queens race, separate activities. Okay, what about the parade?

JR: Everybody was in the parade.

PC: Everybody was in the parade. Anything particular you know about the parade that you remember or anything?

JR: Well the PTA and they would have a float or have a car decorated and the queens would ride in different ones. Different cars would be different sponsors. Most of the time the Chevrolet place would let her have a car for each one of them.

PC: For the queens to ride?

JR: Yes for the queens to ride.

PC: And you mentioned the black PTA, I haven't heard anything about that.

JR: Is that right?

PC: Do you know when that began and how that went about, who was over that?

JR: Well the first president of the PTA was Mrs. Cora Nash and I think Mr. Massey, well I know he was, he was the one that got that all set up and got those people ahead of PTA.

PC: Okay, was it just like it is today, just involved with the school activities and doing things with the school?

JR: With the school really.

PC: But the black PTA was the one that selected the queens to run?

JR: The queens, yes.

PC: Then they helped them raise money?

JR: Raise the money.

PC: And the one that raised the most was queen?

JR: And whatever the classroom would need they put on projects to support that class for the class to get whatever they needed.

PC: Okay, like fundraisers?

JR: Yes.

PC: Okay, well that is interesting. I hadn't heard about that so that is great.

JR: Is that right? Well, they sure did.

PC: Mrs. Cora Nash she was very involved in the community.

JR: She was, she was a very good community, and church worker. Even in churches she was the top lady that went that put on projects to bring in money.

PC: Okay, now did you help organize some of the Diboll Day events for the black community?

JR: Yes, I did, I did that.

PC: Like serve on committees or something?

JR: Yes, we would pick a queen, make a selection on them and see if they wanted to participate and have ticket raffles and things like that.

PC: Okay. Do you recall when Diboll Day became one big event and became integrated, when they quit having the separate events? Would it have went along with the same time frame as the school integration by any chance?

JR: I think it might have been a little bit before the school integration, it might have been a little bit before then.

PC: We have this 1964 photograph but, we didn't find anything after that. The next one would have been in '66 and we started Freedom of Choice in '65.

JR: And it integrated then.

PC: I was just wondering if there is anything particular you remember about when they stopped having the separate queens.

JR: I don't remember. I know my daughter was in it but that is way past when she got in it. She was in the queen race.

PC: After integration?

JR: After integration, of course went to school when it was integrated. They didn't go to Temple School anyway.

PC: Right, well like I said, we don't have anything on record but, we are just assuming that it probably just went along with the integration of the school.

JR: I think it did. They probably was in the making in the last one and they just got together on it.

PC: Anything particular that you remember, a certain Diboll Day event, a special memory you want a share? Serving on a committee, or some parade or anything particular, a fond memory?

JR: Well I tell you they had some good parades then and had a lot of people involved in the parades. I was working at the time, if any organization needed a trailer or float that was my job to get it in shape. I had to keep a record of who all wanted them and we had to have a place to store them and I would organize all that part of it.

PC: Oh okay, through the company?

JR: Yes, if daycare wanted one they would call and we would give them a number and where their float would be located. Big Tin Barn would be the same way, the school would be the same way and that was my job to do that.

PC: Oh okay, so you were over, like through the company, they would call you to get their float reserved and you saw that it was delivered to a certain location?

JR: Right.

PC: Oh, well that is great. How long did you do that, quite a few years?

JR: Quite a few years, every Diboll Day until I retired, sure did.

PC: And getting to that, you're working for the company you actually started working when it was Southern Pine in 1948 and you retired in what year?

JR: '93.

PC: In 1993, so you worked forty-five years.

JR: Forty-five years.

PC: What position did you hold at the time of retirement?

JR: I was maintenance superintendent over the trucks and also the shop where we repair forklifts and things like that, mechanics and truck drivers.

PC: Okay, and you mentioned earlier that you had went through a lot of training through the company for supervisor positions.

JR: Yes, lot of training, right.

PC: What, how long did you hold that position and what position did you have before that, after you worked on the Big Thicket?

JR: Well, I tell you what, when I came from the Big Thicket I was in the shop and I was a service man. I washed and do maintenance on cars, washed trucks and fixed flats.

PC: Okay.

JR: And then I got promoted from fixing flats to a mechanic and then from a mechanic I went to supervisor position and I worked seven years at night at log processing as a supervisor. I stayed down there seven years and then after the seven years down there well my supervisor asked me did I want to go back to the shop. They needed somebody over in the shop and I got the superintendents position over in the shop. I stayed there until I retired.

PC: Oh, well that is wonderful.

JR: It is.

PC: Started at the bottom and worked your way up didn't you?

JR: At the bottom, I worked my way up, sure did with the help of them.

PC: Well that is wonderful. So, you saw a lot of changes within the company too.

JR: A lot of changes and in the mechanic deal I experienced a lot there and I loved mechanic work and there was a guy by the name of O. D. Stivers. You probably knew him. Do you remember O. D. Stivers?

PC: I just know the name through some newspaper articles and things.

JR: He and I worked together and was a mechanic. He was a mechanic at that particular time and we had, we was running Chevrolet trucks and we had an extra motor and we had an extra rear end and an extra transmission and if it was a truck broke down on the road, if it was a transmission or a rear end, he and I would go out on the road and we would

pull the transmission and put it in, or a rear end and put it in and the truck would go on. And, we worked together I mean just like clockwork.

PC: Oh, that is great.

JR: That truck would go on then and deliver his load and now if it was the motor problem we would just have it towed in and then we would do it at the shop.

PC: Were there any other boards or organizations that you served on in Diboll?

JR: Yes, I'm chairman now of the Diboll Housing Authority and I'm the only original member that is still there and that started over forty something years ago.

PC: Okay, so you started serving on the Diboll Housing Authority board when it was first organized?

JR: First organized.

PC: Okay, and how did that come about?

JR: Well, we had Willie Massey was on the board and Horace Stubblefield was executive director, Vernon Burkhalter and let's see who else was on there...Mr. Shepherd. All of us was on the board when it was organized.

PC: So you are a charter member.

JR: Yes.

PC: Well that is wonderful.

JR: I am on the library board and let's see what other board I'm on...well I'm president of this but I gave that up.

PC: Of the Alumni Association?

JR: Yes.

PC: Tell me about that, how that was formed and how that came about and when.

JR: Louis Mitchell was the organizer of this and you need to get him. He can tell you a whole lot about it.

PC: Yes, I recently interviewed him.

JR: He organized it and he put this booklet, him and Jim Ligon put that book together but he can remember things more than anybody I know of.

PC: And it was formed in 1988, is that right?

JR: 1988.

PC: And you've served on that?

JR: We've been having them ever since, the reunions.

PC: Okay and is it just to do the reunion of the H. G. Temple School or what other activities do ya'll participate in?

JR: No, we give out scholarships too, the last one we gave out was five scholarships and we have been giving scholarships out for quite awhile.

PC: Okay.

JR: And, we help a lot of community service projects we work on, helping people and when somebody passed, deceased and everything we usually take care of the food for that family and do that.

PC: Okay, you mentioned earlier that you help with Juneteenth Celebration now too.

JR: Right.

PC: So, they pretty much sponsor all of that now.

JR: Yes, they sponsor all of that now.

PC: Okay, so you were actually on the Housing Authority board at the time that the grants after the city became incorporated and they got the grants for all the projects?

JR: Yes, in the beginning.

PC: Well that was a big step for Diboll. What do you remember about that, anything particular?

JR: And also, I was in the making of the City of Diboll being incorporated.

PC: Okay.

JR: I was I guess what you call a forerunner talking to people and getting people to the polls to vote for that purpose to incorporate. Clyde Thompson was the first mayor and we had an election and I would haul people to the polls. One incident that I had that I never will forget, it was a huge man. He was just about tall as that door and I had picked up everybody and he knew I was picking up people and I hadn't stopped to pick him up. He was sort of half way off anyway so, I didn't want to fool with him and, he stopped me

and he say "what's wrong, why you hadn't picked me up, I want to vote." I say "okay, I'll take you." So, he had on a carpenters apron and a hammer and I took him down to vote and Mrs. Kimmel was one of the ladies that was taking care of the voting. And, she just made an admiration about "oh you really a huge man" and boy that insulted him. He say "is that got anything to do with the voting." She said "oh no, no, you can vote, you can go ahead and vote." And, I went back down there she say "don't you bring that man back down here any more." (laughter) I said "well I didn't want to bring him but he just about made me bring him down here."

PC: So, you were involved with encouraging people and taking people to the polls to vote for the city incorporation?

JR: For the city incorporation, yes.

PC: And, how did that come about? Did you just always have a desire to serve your community?

JR: Yes, I guess I must have been a stand out or something, they would always call me. They called me to help and would I serve to do this, do the various things that needed to be done and I was willing to do it.

PC: Well that is wonderful. Now, do you remember anything specific like town hall meetings or something when they were trying to get the city incorporated that took place?

JR: Yes, I remember that, ug-huh.

PC: Tell me about that.

JR: We had a lot of people against it like they do everything else now you know, not understanding. Like Mr. Temple had said, you know, if we was incorporated we would get a whole lot of benefits and things from the government and the state that you wouldn't have to pay for and it would help. We would have police departments and fireman and all that kind of stuff. What he was trying to tell them, he was getting away from company policy. The company wasn't going to have anything else to do with it.

PC: Just the typical sawmill town, the company was trying to get away from that.

JR: Just get away from it.

PC: Now, did you live in a company house?

JR: Sure did, and the rent was much of nothing. You just had a house too. Now he told them, he made a public speech at the ball park over there and he said "I notice that everybody is going to California looking for better places to work, but if you stay here we are going to have the same thing here you going to have in California." A lot of them come back and they see it was a lot different than from the time they left.

PC: When was that, what time frame was that?

JR: Was that?

PC: That has been mentioned to me before about a lot of people left to go to California. Now, are you just referring to the black community leaving to go to California?

JR: No, it was just the idea of everybody going to California. Their wages was good and that is what they were looking at but, they didn't realize that the cost of living was higher too with the wages.

PC: Okay.

JR: That is what it was.

PC: Okay, so he actually had a meeting and was encouraging them to stay?

JR: To stay, yes.

PC: So he knew that people were leaving to go to California?

JR: Yes, he sure did.

PC: Okay, okay.

JR: I don't know what time frame that was but we had a ballpark over there that year, at that particular time and he was over there and made that talk, sure did.

PC: Okay, well I know the baseball games were a big Sunday afternoon enjoyment. What can you tell me about that? What do you remember about the baseball games?

JR: It was a big deal on Sunday. Everybody would go to the ballgame and where they had the drinks, the sodas and all that would be in a tub with a grass sack over it and it seemed like that was the best cold drinks that ever was.

PC: Just had them in a tub?

JR: Just had them in a tub.

PC: And what was over it?

JR: A grass sack, we called them croaker sacks.

PC: Croaker sacks?

JR: Yes, just brown croaker sacks and that would keep that ice from melting, sure would.

PC: Oh okay.

JR: The guy that was handling them, that was in charge of that he would get me to sell the soda waters. So, I would get in for nothing and drink soda water.

PC: Oh okay, so you didn't have to pay to get in the game.

JR: I didn't have to pay to get in.

PC: Those were some good cold cokes.

JR: A lot of the boys would be on the outside didn't have the money to come in and if they knocked the ball outside the park that was their ticket to get in. (laughter)

PC: Well we know they had some great ball teams.

JR: They had some good teams, great ball teams.

PC: Now do you remember watching them as a young child? Is this when you're talking about that you worked to sell the sodas as a young boy?

JR: Yes, right.

PC: Did you ever play on the baseball team?

JR: No, I never did play on the baseball team. They had a team came in and played Diboll from it was the Cuban's baseball team. Right by the ball park Rodgers had a big café and had a skating rink and all of them stayed in his hotel up there. I think they had a series of games they played when they came in and they played good ball. Diboll would beat them too but, they played good ball.

PC: Now, did he actually have a hotel at the skating rink?

JR: Yes, it was he had a two story building; two story building named Rodgers Skating Rink. Of course he never completed that deal as he had planned to do it but, before he even completed the skating rink they started skating in it. But, he had I don't know how many rooms in it. It had a upstairs deal and he had rooms upstairs like a hotel.

PC: Okay, I didn't know that. I knew there was the café and the skating rink but I didn't know there was a hotel. But, he actually never finished it?

JR: He never finished it.

PC: But he did rent the rooms out to the baseball players?

JR: Yes, he sure did.

PC: Especially the Cuban team, huh?

JR: Yes, the Cubans, uh-huh.

PC: Now, they were from Florida?

JR: I think so, yes.

PC: What other businesses that you remember as a child that you went to that might have been over there?

JR: No.

PC: Where did everybody mostly shop at, the commissary?

JR: Yes, the commissary most of the time.

PC: Okay.

JR: See they had the company store which was the big store, the commissary and then they had one over in the quarters called the number two store.

PC: Okay, that is right.

JR: They had groceries and things over there too. Then also there was two more stores over in the quarters, was Whites and Mrs. Halls. So one down in Red Town was Mrs. Halls and then they had one over there down on the lower end from the number two store. We had more grocery stores in Diboll than we got now.

PC: Okay. Well is there anything else you would like to share with me that I haven't asked you about?

JR: Well, pretty well covered it.

PC: What is one of your most memorable experiences growing up in Diboll?

JR: The most memorable experience, coming on as a kid and we didn't have a whole lot of toys or nothing to play with. We made what we played with. I tell this joke all the time, the only thing I got for Christmas one year was a stick horse and I tied him to the front steps and daddy walked out there and stepped on it and killed my stick horse and I didn't have nothing. But we had some good times in Diboll and it wasn't like it is now. We didn't have a whole lot to play with and a lot of things to watch and everybody in the

neighborhood would help with the kids. I had a lady, and my mother didn't go, she stayed home, she didn't go, she went to church and everything but, anytime we was out at Rodgers Café or any of the café's this lady would be the watch claws of Diboll and when I started seeing her come over to the house I start wondering what have I got into today for her to come over here.

PC: You thought she was tattling on you, huh?

JR: Yes, she would keep everybody straight. I tell you! It was really, at that time it wasn't but, now after I got grown I saw what she was trying to do.

PC: Take care of you.

JR: Yes, sure was.

PC: I think Diboll is a wonderful place and I know the Temple family has been very good to Diboll.

JR: It's been a good place. When I first came to Diboll I said, "No, I ain't going to stay." I am the only one that stayed out of the whole bunch, really. (laughter)

PC: Well that is wonderful that you're one of the first members of the Housing Authority. I didn't realize that. That is great.

JR: Yes, I sure was.

PC: Well you've certainly served in a lot of capacities in the community and served your community well. I know that everybody appreciates your loyal service to Diboll and the community and for all that you do, have done, and continue to do. We appreciate you with this project and helping us to gather this history. That's all my questions.

JR: And I did have the first Cub Scout group in Diboll, organized cub scouts.

PC: Okay, well tell me about that.

JR: All the ones you see here and now, Louis Mitchell is one of them. He was in my cub scouts.

PC: Cub Scout group?

JR: Cub Scout unit, and most of them, everyone of the young men today made productive citizens, the Moses, the Scott's, Louis Mitchell, the Teals, and all of them. Right today when they see me they reflect back to that time.

PC: Yes, that is right. Now, what year was that, that you formed the Cub Scouts?

JR: Oh, it was in the fifties, sure was. I was trying to remember the scout master that was over, the scout executive that came down and we organized that. It was back in the fifties though.

PC: And you didn't have any boys right, you had the two girls?

JR: No, I had the two girls.

PC: What was the name of it, the number of your troop?

JR: Two seventy five (275).

PC: Two seventy five (275), so you were real active in Cub Scouts. You actually got that formed for the black community?

JR: Yes, sure did because they had a troop but didn't have Cub Scouts. Cub Scouts was taking care of the younger boys up until they get to the age of going into scouting and I had that group of boys. We had a good many of them.

PC: How long did you participate in scouts?

JR: I just about lost most of them to Boy Scouts and it just about faded out then but, the way that would operate we would have meetings, what you called Pack meetings and the cub would have regular meetings but they had den mothers that handled the cub meetings. They would have them during the week and then we would come together and whatever they had accomplished during that Cub Scout meeting then we would have a big meeting that day, that night.

PC: Okay, okay. Well you have worn many hats.

JR: Many hats sure did.

PC: Okay, well Mr. Rhone I certainly appreciate you spending time with me this afternoon and helping us with our project.

JR: I'm glad to do what I can.

PC: Thank you again.

JR: I told my daughter I'm going to write a book about my forty five years with Temple. I'll have everything in it. The best part of the company was back there then because it's different now.

PC: Yes sir, that is right. Well, thank you again Mr. Rhone.

JR: Okay now.