

Elodie Miles Edwards
Interview 122a
June 12, 1990
Marie Davis, Interviewer
Retyped by Courtney Lawrence

ABSTRACT: Elodie Miles Edwards recalls her life as a child growing up in Diboll and her time teaching in Diboll as a young woman. Mrs. Edwards remembers Fannie Farrington, who gave her a coat and a dress for graduation, and all of her teachers. She also remembers the flu epidemic, riding in a car for the first time, and playing baseball with the boys at school. Mrs. Edwards went to college in Rusk and Huntsville, and eventually taught in Diboll for six years. After her marriage to Grady Edwards, she moved with him to Baytown, where she continued to teach for many years.

Marie Davis (hereafter MD): I am talking with Elodie Miles Edwards who was a former school teacher and resident of Diboll. She now lives in Baytown, Texas. Today's date is June 12, 1990. My name is Marie Davis. Miss Elodie, when were you born?

Elodie Miles Edwards (hereafter EE): I was born August 23, 1905.

MD: Where?

EE: In Rockland, Texas.

MD: Rockland. And who were your parents?

EE: My parents were John Alvin Miles and Alberta Frances Miles.

MD: Who were your brothers and sisters?

EE: I had six brothers. I mean six sisters and one brother.

MD: Would you tell their names?

EE: Pearl Parks, Jewel Waller, Ruby Chandler, Zada Stout, Nona Lowery--let's see, that's five and me. My brother was Alvin Miles.

MD: When did you come to Diboll? Do you remember?

EE: Oh, goodness, yes. We came to Diboll in --I was seven years old when we came to Diboll. At that time kids started to school at seven. My first year was in Diboll and I also went to high school here and taught here six years.

MD: Where did you live when you moved to Diboll?

EE: When we first moved to Diboll, my dad had to sell everything we had at Rockland because mama had to have care from a physician. His sister, Aunt Jo Ratcliff, had a big saloon building, prohibition had come in –and we fixed that up and that’s where we lived at first. We lived there for quite a long time, several years.

MD: Was Mr. Ratcliff constable here?

EE: Yes, he was the constable.

MD: I had read that.

EE: And he scared me to death. You know, he carried those guns and was so proud of them.

MD: Do you remember any of the black people who lived there?

EE: Oh yes, I never shall forget old Chester – Chester Willis was one of the sweetest friends I had. I was just looking at that picture, wondering if I could find Chester. And I don’t know what her last name was, but we called her “Aunt Susie,” she lived behind us, down in the back. Could I tell a little something?

MD: Oh, I wish you would.

EE: One morning, you know we didn’t have much, we were poor. One Sunday morning, I was sitting on the steps mending a hole in my socks, so she came around and told me – she saw me sitting on the steps mending that hole in my socks. She came over to me and she said, “Honeychile, did you know that you are picking a pin in Jesus?’ I’ll never forget that.

MD: Did Carey Smith live over there near you?

EE: He might have – I have forgotten more that I ever learned. But I’ll tell you there was another family who lived across the road. Rosalee Buffalo was the girl, and she and I got to be good friends. They lived between the store, pretty close to Oliver’s store. There were not many neighbors. The Oliver’s were down the street. They were the ones who had the store. That’s where we bought our groceries.

MD: Did the Conner’s live over there? Gib Conner?

EE: Yes, the Conner’s lived further on down. Gib Conner.

MD: She is still living--she is 98.

EE: Yes her picture was in the paper not long ago.

MD: And you walked to school?

EE: Yes, indeed. Through the Negro quarters, it is the black quarters now. Yes, that was the only row of houses back there.

MD: What church did you go to?

EE: We went to a Baptist Church. That was on up-we called it Copestown. We walked from behind the Methodist Church. We moved over in that part of town and we lived across from the Chandlers. So we walked from there. That was after papa got on at the sawmill. We walked from there over to the Baptist Church. But there is something else that maybe people don't remember about – the Methodist had church two Sundays, everybody had Sunday school, but the Methodist had a preacher two Sundays and the Baptist had two Sundays. The Sundays that one had it, the others went to the other church, and I went to the Methodist Church services just about as much as I did the Baptist. Twice a month.

MD: Was the second Baptist Church started before you left here?

EE: No.

MD: What are some of your childhood memories? Do you have any real sweet childhood memories? Who was Uncle Jim?

EE: He was a man who was a real good friend of papas. This was when we lived in Rockland. I was 18 months old and papa would set a trap on the top of a fence because the owls were getting the chickens. This man had a big old bay window and there was a swing out in the yard. But he loved me and he would come over there and he would pick me up and I would press against his stomach and he would swing me. Now one night an owl got caught in that trap, and I have never before or since been less frightened. I grabbed him around the neck and started screaming. He took me and tried to comfort me. That is the most I have ever been frightened in my life. I remember it just as well.

MD: I thought you said you didn't remember anything.

EE: Well, that was a long time ago.

MD: You remember a lot. Do you have any special people that you remember?

EE: Oh, goodness yes.

MD: Will you tell us about some of them?

EE: Well, I'll tell you about one couple – the Farrington's. Had it not been for Mrs. Farrington, I would have not been able to take part in the graduation or baccalaureate. She made my graduation dress out of voile and put 28 yards of lace on it by hand. And

then she made my bando. She had the store and she gave me, I'm sure Mr. Temple gave it to me, but she gave me my Georgette Orchid dress and hat, kid gloves to go to the baccalaureate. She was always special. You have a lot of letters in the archives. She was my godmother.

Mr. and Mrs. Durham were real special. Mr. and Mrs. E. C. Durham and Mr. and Mrs. D. C. Kenley – is that their initials? You know I taught two of the Kenley children. And they are responsible – partly responsible for my last year of teaching here, because I had married in July and because I was married I wasn't supposed to teach. They wanted me to teach their son. Anyway, they were real special.

And I would like to mention Mrs. Roberts and Mrs. Kirkland. I taught their daughters in the first grade. They gave me my shower when I got married.

MD: That is Mrs. E. H. Kirkland and Mrs. Cy Roberts. Their daughter's names were Shirley Kirkland and Mary Beth Roberts.

EE: Shirley Kirkland and Mary Beth Roberts.

MD: And you went all the way through in Diboll?

EE: All the way through.

MD: Who were some of your teachers?

EE: I remember Mrs. Ezell McCall; I think she was about my second grade teacher. And I remember Mrs. Ruby Burke who was my fifth grade teacher. I was on the debate team and I had to learn Mr. William Jennings Bryan's speech. Our teacher had written a note and told me to go in the next room and say my speech. But all I did was hand Mrs. Burke a note. She said, "Well, go ahead, Elodie." And I turned and started to leave. She said, "Don't leave. Go ahead." And I turned and said, "What do you mean?" She thought I had read the note. She said, "Go ahead and say your speech." So then I went ahead and said it. Mrs. Ruby Burke – I was in her class for many years. Then I remember Mrs. Rainey.

MD: What year did you graduate?

EE: 1924. But I can remember the names of a lot of the teach – that taught with me and the name of my Principal. My Principal was Mr. C. H. Miller when I was teaching. Also Mr. Bush and Mrs. Weise was teaching here, Marian Wilmoth and Harris. I guess that's about all I can remember.

MD: What were some of the activities in school? You said you were on the debating team.

EE: You mean while I was in school? Baseball – played with the boys, baseball.

MD: You did!

EE: Oh, I was –I am going to brag now. I was a good baseball player and the boys asked me to play with them. And then we played volleyball and basketball. I won first in Lufkin on debate team. I was salutatorian when I graduated.

MD: I think I had seen that on the program you sent us. Some people have mentioned that Chatauqua that came to town. Did you ever go to that?

EE: No, I didn't go to the Chatauqua.

MD: Did the circus ever come to town?

EE: We had one circus and Uncle Jim, because he was an officer, got tickets to the circus. But we did have an old theater over here somewhere. I remember, I got to go to the picture show one time. And they had a restaurant over there somewhere and they served oysters. That was the first oysters I ever ate.

MD: After you graduated from high school, where did you go to get your teachers certificate?

EE: I went to Rusk College, which was a Baptist Junior College. My pastor at First Baptist got me a place to work my way through and I worked my way through two years. During that two years I was sent \$60.00. That was made up by my Sunday school class by giving a little play. Now that paid all. I worked enough that I paid my expenses and tuition and everything.

MD: How would you get from here to Rusk?

EE: They had a train from here to Lufkin – I went on the train. I didn't come home but once and that was at Christmas. We went on the train--the train stopped right there in Rusk.

MD: How long did you teach in Diboll?

EE: Six years.

MD: What was your last year?

EE: 1931-1932.

MD: And you met Mr. Edwards.

EE: We met and married in 1931. But I owed so many school debts he let me go ahead and teach the next year to pay them off. I wouldn't let him pay them for me. As a matter of fact, he wasn't making enough.

MD: And then you just moved to Baytown after you married. Did you ever get to come back very much?

EE: Oh, I came back a lot then. My sister lived here and mama was here. So we came back quite a bit. I think the last time we came was about 5 years ago.

MD: But you spent most of the years that you remember growing up, you spent in Diboll, didn't you?

EE: All of them were in Diboll.

MD: Tell me about winning the automobile.

EE: Mercy me. Well, I needed to go – I needed to get to school. And if you know me, you know I've always prayed about everything. Well, I finished Rusk College with a certificate to teach and finished my other work during the summers at Sam Houston. But I had no place to go and I had to have a school. So one day Minnie Jackson came down to the house. She had never been to my house before. She said, "Elodie, I have something I think I need to tell you," she continued, "I have a school out at Sublime and I have one closer home and I haven't resigned yet. Would you like for me to resign in your honor?" And of course, you know I was thanking the Good Lord as well as her. So I applied and I got the school. But I had no way to go down there, no clothes to go or anything. And so, this same girl came back down one day and told me that there was going to be a contest about getting a car, giving away a car. The Chevrolet Coupe would be for the backers for the Diboll area and the bigger car would be for the Lufkin area. So, she asked me if I would like to enter. I told her I would be thrilled to death and I appreciated it. So I entered it, but I had no way to go and get subscriptions. It was a daily newspaper. Mrs. Travis Porter came down one day and asked me if I would mind for her to carry me around to see if I could get some subscriptions. You know, nobody can tell me that wasn't just one step after another miracle. So she carried me around. I did not know if I would get enough or not, but I told Mr. Griffith who was a good friend of ours, "If I get the car, I am not going to take the car. I want you to take it and sell it as a new car because I need the money to buy supplies." I have that in one of my articles. So he went with me, and I was so excited because I knew I was going to get that car. So they gave the Lufkin car away first and then they started talking about another one. When I went up to get it, the man started to hand me the keys. I called Mr. Griffith. I told the car dealer that Mr. Griffith would sell the car for me. He got \$500.00 for that car. Can you imagine a car going at that price? Of course I gave him part of it – more than he wanted to take. Not only was I able to buy supplies and reach my destination, but I was able to help mama and papa with some of the things that they needed.

MD: Would you say that living in Diboll was a good growing experience for you?

EE: Wonderful.

MD: The people?

EE: If it had not been for the people in Diboll, I would not be where I am today. Everybody was sweet and friendly and helpful to me.

MD: We have a picture of the coat that Mr. Temple gave you through Mrs. Farrington, can you tell about that?

EE: That was the first bought coat I had ever had that wasn't given to me that hadn't been used. One day I went by – I would usually go by and say something to her. I loved her so much. She said, "Elodie, Mr. Temple wants you to come in and pick you out a coat. He wants to give you that for graduation." Nobody knows how thrilled I was. So I went in. She wouldn't help me. She said, "He wanted you to get the one you wanted." So I picked out a coat. The picture of that coat is exactly the way they wore them back then. You know, nobody can understand how thrilled I was. That was one of the most wonderful things that ever happened to me. I really wanted to see Mr. Temple and hug his neck, but I didn't get to see him. I wrote him a letter and you have the letter that I got back from him. Now this is amazing, there wasn't much money back then. Five hundred dollars is like fifteen thousand now. Do you know I found out not long ago that that coat, at that time was \$60.00. Can you imagine that?

MD: That was a lot of money for a coat.

EE: It was cashmere, which I didn't know.

MD: Well, you had your coat any way.

EE: Mrs. Farrington helped me pick it out, she fitted it on me and everything. That was the sweetest thing. Let me tell you one more little thing. One day I was walking – mama sent me to the grocery store. I was just a child and I was walking down that long hallway and Mr. Allday (I forgot to tell you about the Alldays, but they were good friends.) Mr. Allday was leaning against the banister there on that long porch. It was Christmas Eve. When I passed him, I hugged him and loved him and I said, "Christmas Eve gift, Mr. Allday." You know he reached in his pocket and handed me a dollar. I didn't know what to do. I didn't know whether to take it from him.

MD: He probably wanted to give it to you.

EE: He did and I said, "Are you sure you want to give this to me." He said, "Yes, I want you to take it. I'm glad you said what you did." I'll never forget things like that.

MD: Can you remember your first ride in an automobile?

EE: Oh, I surely do. We lived in that little tiny shotgun house over by Aunt Jo. We had moved to Pine Valley and stayed there and then we came back. Aunt Jo's house was vacant and we lived there. Mama took the flu. She was really about to die so we had Dr. Mann come over. I guess that was the only car in town. I don't remember seeing any

more. Papa gave me a prescription and said, “Now, Elodie, you run and get this prescription because mama is in a dying condition.” So I started running, and I was running just as hard as I could down that road. Dr. Mann rode up behind me and stopped and said, “Elodie, come get in and ride. I’ll take you to the drugstore.” I said, “I’m sorry, Dr. Mann, I don’t have time. I’ve got to get to the drug store and get the prescription filled.” So I started running and he kept easing along beside me and he said, “Come on in, I’ll get you there.” Don’t you know he wanted to die laughing. But bless his heart, he didn’t laugh. But he got me there.

MD: He got you there.

EE: I ran home. During the flu season papa and I were the only ones who stayed on our feet. We were burning with fever, but we had to stay up. I was the oldest one then and I had to do the work. Papa had to take care of mama, and so, of course, we had young ones. The doctor had given us a prescription, thinking it was quinine, and I had it filled too. We took four of those a day. After we were well, we found out that it was aspirin. Papa made the capsules. It was a box or bottle of powder. He would take the capsules and fill this end and then fill the other end and put them together. We took four of those a day thinking it was quinine we were taking. But, you know, aspirin is good for colds.

MD: What year do you think that was?

EE: That was the year of the flu epidemic – I was about 12. One time, Jewel always looked like a fashion plate regardless of what she had on.

MD: That was your sister. Jewel?

EE: My sister, Jew Waller, you knew her. She had not married yet. She and I went to see Aunt Jo. When we got over there, Aunt Jo was out in the yard and there was a photographer there. The photographer would sic the chickens in front of her and Aunt Jo said, “Jewel, you and Elodie come get in the picture. Mama made us just straight little dresses, she called them aprons, and they had pockets on them. Well, my right pocket was torn. I put my hand over that pocket and you will notice that in the picture. I put my hand over that pocket to hide it hanging down. That tickled her when I told her about it. I was barefooted. Of course, nobody wore shoes. My father was a poet. He wrote poetry in two big ledgers. He was never able to have it published because he had to work all the time. And Ruby became a poet and I write poetry. I love poetry. Ruby died three weeks before Grad Grady died.

MD: Miss Elodie, I don’t think I asked you who you married.

EE: I married the best man that ever lived – Grady Edwards.

MD: How many children do you have?

EE: I have one child. Myra Jean Edwards Barnes. She had two. Brandon Barnes – he was named for his grandfather, John Brand Barnes, and then Jo Laurie Barnes – we call her Joley. She finished Baylor this year in three years and she is going to Argentina in July and take her first graduate course. Brandon is in graduate school in Clear Lake City.

MD: You and Mr. Edwards had a happy life?

EE: We had a happy life. I met him through prayer. I met him on Sunday. I was staying with Ruby. I went across to go to church with a friend because Ruby couldn't go as she was expecting a baby. Grady was boarding there. When I was introduced by the landlady, and he put the paper down, I almost dropped in my tracks. He wrote his parents that afternoon and told them that he met the girl he was going to marry. The next Sunday we went to my home and he talked to my folks. And the next Sunday we went to his home and he talked to his folks. Of course, we waited a year to get married. Now that is how the Lord led us together. Three weeks before he died, he went to church with me. Everybody said he was the best man they ever knew. I always said my father was the best man I ever knew until I met Grady. So that Sunday, the last Sunday he ever got to go to church, I changed my devotional and brought it on home. I said just what I am telling you, that my father was the best man that ever lived until I met my husband, and I said Grady Edwards is the best man I have ever known in my life. We had been married 58 years and liked one week being two months. He died one week after his birthday. I just thank God for the wonderful home that we had, and Myra Jean can tell you the same thing about her dad. She was not only his daughter; she was his son. She did everything he did, she went everywhere with him, and I think he is mostly responsible for what she is today.

MD: What a good person she is.

EE: She has three degrees. She has her PhD. She is wonderful. I want to thank you.

MD: I have enjoyed this.

EE: Marie, I want to thank you for your love through the years and for loving me and for wanting to visit with me. Thank you very much. I love you.

MD: Thank you for being my teacher and getting me started off right. You got me started off in this world.

(Insert the following paragraph about Auntie Farrington.)

EE: When I would thank Auntie Farrington for all she had done for me, she would say, "Honey, don't thank me, do the same thing for another worthy girl." I wish she could know that I did that very thing.

When Myra Jean was in Baylor, she roomed with a girl from Lebanon. She was attending on a scholarship and that is all she had to supply her needs. Since I made all of Myra Jean's clothes, I made hers, too. Her name was Lillie Nasrallah. After Myra Jean finished

and was teaching away from home, Lillie would visit us. One time she was here and she told us of an experience she had. One day she was walking to class and a girl called her. She stopped and the girl asked her if she knew Myra Edwards. She replied, "Yes, I do. She was my roommate for two years. Why do you ask?" The girl replied "Because you dress exactly like her." So I had finally thanked Auntie Farrington like she wanted me to.