

FRANKLIN & ELAINE TAYLOR

Interview 143a

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Marie Davis, Interviewer

Retyped by Courtney Lawrence

ABSTRACT: In this interview with Marie Davis, Franklin and Elaine Taylor reminisce about growing up in East Texas – Mr. Taylor in Diboll and Mrs. Taylor in Fastrill. They recall the commissary, school days, pranks, and mill fires, and recreation activities. They also remember the depression.

Marie Davis (hereafter MD): Today I am talking with William Franklin (Nankee) Taylor and Elaine. They live at 407 Jackson in Diboll. Today's date is October 12, 1993 and my name is Marie Davis. Franklin when were you born?

Franklin Taylor (hereafter FT): February 19, 1921.

MD: Where were you born?

FT: In Diboll. At that time there were no house numbers or street names, but now it is now Office Street and Ashworth Street.

MD: Your parents' names were?

FT: Annie Ruth Rogers Taylor and everybody called her Patty, her nickname, and Jim Toliver Taylor. Everybody called him Jim.

MD: Your brother's names were?

FT: Terrell, Phillip, Rufus, Jim Dale, Woodrow and me.

MD: Now, Elaine, let's get your family on here. When were you born?

Elaine Taylor (hereafter ET): 1922.

MD: Where were you born?

ET: Out of Rusk--between Rusk and Fastrill.

MD: And your parents' names?

ET: Robert E. Gardner and Ada Gardner.

MD: Your brothers and sisters?

ET: Mildred, Thelma, Robbie, Jessie Mae and Evelyn.

MD: Franklin, let's talk about your early childhood memories of Diboll. I think you have already told us where you lived. Did you move?

FT: No. We lived in the same house until my mother and dad separated later when I was about 12 or 13. There was no indoor plumbing. We had an outhouse. There was no hot water heater. We used a wood stove, we used a wood stove for heating the house, the five brothers and myself, and we had a round dining table. When we came in to eat, we all sat down. Nobody started to eat before mama said to start. We had a washtub outside and we took a bath in a no. 3 washtub. We heated water on the stove – summer, winter or whatever. In the summer time we did not need to heat it, but in the wintertime we would heat the water on the stove. We had shade trees all around the house – Chinaberry trees. We had to keep the leaves swept up out of that yard all the time.

MD: Did you have any grass?

FT: No, we did not want any grass in there. No grass at all. When the leaves fell, we would sweep them up and carry them out the back. We kept planer wood—that was trimmings that came off the planer wood. We kept that in the front yard. On the side, we kept slabs. That was the trimmings from the sawmill. It was cut up in 18" or 2' and that was used for heating the house. I remember in the late twenties when mill 3 burned. At that time we had 3 sawmills. Mill 3 burned and it burned during the night. My mother got all of us up and we were all in the front yard watching. We couldn't see anything but the sky lit up. It was almost like daylight because it made a big fire.

MD: Was that the hardwood mill?

FT: All three mills were over there then. They supplied mill three off the Derrick from mill two pond. The logs were kept in the pond over there. This Derrick would pick them up and supply both mills – mill 2 and mill 3. Later after mill 3 burned, they built a box factory.

MD: Where was it located?

FT: Down from where mill 3 burned—Factory Street over there now.

MD: Over behind the Negro quarters?

FT: No, not behind, but north of the quarters, and they built houses north of the factory. Mr. Graham came to Diboll when the box factory was built from Dallas. Later, Phillip became foreman of it. In 1936 Phillip quit and went to California and then came back. When the box factory burned it was during the noon hour. I remember walking over there to the other side where we could see it. We never did get close to it. We got over there on no. 1 millpond, and we sat there and watched it burn during the noon hour.

MD: Do you remember about what year that was?

FT: I am not sure the year it burned. I was a pretty good-sized boy. I was in school. It was in the 30's when it burned. They made banana hamper baskets. They made soda water crates. Mr. Graham had gone back to Dallas with Temple Manufacturing over there. He left and Curtis Enlow took his place there in Dallas and they were making the same boxes and everything else.

MD: Do you know Mr. Graham's first name?

FT: I want to call him William, but I am not sure. Seems like I heard his name somewhere as William Graham.

MD: Who were some of your neighbors when you lived in the house on Ashworth?

FT: Well in front of us was the Warner's – Pate Warner, Smokey Warner. They lived in front of us. Back then everyone had a garden spot and it was all fenced in. Your yard, your garden was all fenced in. Walter Broker lived diagonally across the street from us. Dixie and Walter, Jr. were the kids. Walter, Jr. got killed in service, alter. Dixie married the Methodist preacher's son, Weatherby. Other neighbors there were the Sturrock's, Sterling's, Landers – Louis and his sisters. Louis was a "meanie."

MD: What did he do?

FT: When highway 35 made a dead man curve where Dr. Cathcart's office is now, I saw Louis pick up a little pig with that left hand and hit the windshield on a truck. We all played together and we would get in our scraps now and then. We didn't always agree, like kids did then and they still do. In the summertime we would go swimming down here in White Oak Creek. Behind the Temple office there was a big hole in there and we would go swimming there. There was another down in the Orchard Park and we would go swimming there. And every now and then, we would have somebody steal our clothes when we would go swimming.

MD: What would you do?

FT: Well, they did not move them very far. There were two of the Arrington girls. We would go swimming down there and they would take our clothes and we would have to get out and find them. Growing up in Diboll – we had a lot of fun as kids.

When mother was making tamales, I had to be home from school – straight home from school. She would have a pot of tamales – maybe 5 or 6-dozen in it. At that time we got 15 cents a dozen for them. They were rolled in shucks. A lot of people did not have the cash money to pay for them, but they had a charge account in the store. Mama would say, "Now if you want to trade anything out today," maybe we would need some milk or meat or this and that, things that they could go in the store and charge and come and swap for the hot tamales.

At that time at the commissary up there, there were two big yards of grass out there. The flagpole was in the center of it. The depot was to the south. There was only one track running through Diboll then. We had 4 trains a day that came through Diboll. We had a passenger train going north and one going south. At 2:16 the freight train went north in the evening and 144 went south later in the night. A lot of times if we were in Lufkin and needed a ride home, we would catch the 144, but it did not slow up in Diboll. So we had to ride it until it got to Wheeler Hill over there and it always had to slow up (south of the Neches River.) We got off--it was shorter to walk from Wheeler Hill to Diboll than it was from Lufkin. Remember Zack had a place up there in Lufkin that sold hamburgers--big old burgers--for ten cents. For ten cents you would get a drink and a hamburger.

ET: He sold hot dogs, too.

FT: We grew up in Diboll; we had good neighbors. The girls in that area were Cleo Bowlus, Annette Burrows, Margie Placker lived on down further and Johnnie, Charles and Wallace. Wallace and I were about the same age and he and I used to climb trees quite a bit. He still has a big scar under his arm. He slipped out of a tree and grabbed the tree and caught a snag and it ripped out a lot of flesh. He still carries a scar from that.

MD: Were you with him when he did that?

FT: I was with him.

MD: Did it scare you?

FT: Well, yes, we had to carry him – you had to walk to the doctor’s office. It might be interesting to know that in those days the doctor came to the house when I was born. At the commissary up there on the north end of it was the post office. The next door was an open door up stairs and that is where the doctor’s office was. Then the next door from that was the barbershop, the next-door down was the drug store. Mr. Agee was the druggist at that time and Bernice Hines filled most of the prescriptions. He was not a registered pharmacist, but he knew all the ends and outs of what you needed. Then the next door was the main entrance to the commissary where they sold clothes--Jim Fuller ran the men’s department and Mrs. Farrington ran the ladies department on the right hand side and you would go on back to the left and you bought your groceries. Beans and everything you bought in there was bulk. They would put them in a sack and tie it up.

We saved all the string that they put on these bags and we would make our string balls out of it. That is what we called a string ball. We did not throw anything away. The first driver’s license I ever had was from Fred Nelson. I think I gave him 50 cents. All I had to do was to give him my name. There was no address to it--just Diboll. No test, no nothing.

MD: Do you remember Ed Day working in the commissary?

FT: Yes I do. Ed Day lived right over in front of the Sturrocks, by us. My mother was the barber in that end of town. After the Days moved from there over to where the primary school is now Hugh, Ed’s son, was running with a sawed-off 22 and fell, the gun went off

and killed him. At that time, Foster Davis lived right behind his house. Oneta and Talley Day were other children and Ed worked in the grocery store.

MD: We have had a lot of people to say that they always waited until he had time to wait on them if they wanted candy because he would give them a little extra.

FT: On down from the grocery part was the door where they brought in their extras – where they stored their supplies. You went on south to the next door and that was the meat market. Mr. Cruthirds ran the meat market at that time. They had 2 doors to the market. One on the south--the colored went in that side and the whites went in the other side.

You never saw any colored boys on the east side of the track after dark. When dark came they would be on the other side of the track and that is the way it was. We had C. C. Mathis was the constable and Ike Green. They kinda enforced that rule. Later Jay Boren came here from San Augustine.

There was no street lights in Diboll, there was no pavement whatever. Lee Massingill hauled logs and he had this mule team. He would stop in the afternoon on his way in with his quart fruit jars. He would say, “Now, Nank, when you sell all those tamales, I want you to pour all that juice in here. I will give you a quarter for it.” That was worth more than the tamales were. He brought his corn bread with him and that is what he ate—the tamale juice with corn bread in it. I used to go out to his house – the old barn is still there, I just looked at it awhile ago. We would go out there and help him unload his corn and help him throw it up in the loft. Then when we need shucks to make tamales, we would come out there and cut the shucks off the corn and put the shucks in a toe-sack and carry them home. We would put the corn where he wanted it. Sometimes he wanted the corn shelled for his chickens. We would have to shell it for him. We would do that for him.

MD: Tell me about your mother making the hot tamales. How did she get started in that?

FT: My dad got her the recipe from a Mexican. I think he gave him 50 cents for the recipe. He got him to come to the house one time to show her – you can’t write a recipe down. You have to see and do it in order to roll tamales and make them right. That Mexican came to the house one time and my dad gave him 50 cents and mom picked it up from there. The recipe has been in the family over 70 years, I know.

MD: And you have picked it up now?

FT: I have always - I’m kinda a cook myself. I always watched her and helped her. That way you learn a lot when it comes to tamales. We do have parchment paper we use now. We do have shucks, but mostly we use the parchment paper. There is no wax in it. It is like a cookie sheet. We get it out of Chicago. We have to order about 50 dollars worth in order to get it.

MD: Do you make a lot of them?

FT: It is a lot of work. We just make them for our friends and neighbors. Every once in a while we make some for people outside the family. There are some secrets to making tamales. We make it all out of corn meal. We never use mace. A lot of the Spanish people use mace, but we use cornmeal--seasoning and the meat.

MD: It takes a long time to roll them up--

FT: It takes...Elaine and I can roll about 6-dozen an hour. That is just rolling. You have to cook the meat and grind it and then season it. You have to pour hot water over the meal. It has to be to a certain consistency before I roll them.

MD: Do you roll while the meal is hot?

FT: Well, it will cool off, yes. I scald mine until it gets real stiff and thick. It takes a lot of arm work. I mix up 6 or 7 cups of meal at a time.

MD: Do you do it all by hand?

FT: Yes. All by hand. We use an electric grinder for grinding the meat. Mostly, we make them out of beef. Sometimes people want them made out of chicken or some other type of meat.

MD: Did you go to the commissary every day to sell hot tamales?

FT: Yes. As well as I can remember, I sold them in the late twenties and early thirties. It was summertime and wintertime.

MD: My mother said that your mother always made hot tamales for the Halloween carnival, and that she would go down there and help her roll them. Sometimes they would roll all afternoon.

FT: Forty or fifty dozen for the Halloween carnival. That is where I met Elaine – at the Halloween carnival. She was with Van Wilkerson at that time.

MD: Were you allowed to go to the mill when it was not running during your early childhood days?

FT: We went over there a lot of times on the weekends when the mill was not running. As to where it was allowed or not, I don't remember seeing anybody over there to run us off or seeing a guard. At that time at the mill one, Diboll had condensed water. It was steam off the boilers in mill one. It was condensed water in these big old red tanks. There were three of them sitting just outside the shavings room. That is where the water supply came from. There was no underground water. It was all condensed water, boiled right out of the boilers over there. The steam was condensed into water.

MD: Would they put that in the pipes for the people to use?

FT: That is what we had to drink and bathe in.

MD: Was it warm when it got to the houses?

FT: No. It was cool. Then later they built the steel tank over them between mill one and mill two. They had pumps and underground water then. They pumped it up in the big tank and that was the water supply. A lot of the lumber back then was air-dried. They had the dolly runs to move the lumber. Back behind the old commissary, there used to be a planer mill back there. Charlie Turner fired the boilers there at the planer mill. Mr. Purdy and Bascom Weeks were foremen and they had several others during the years. Rufus Taylor was the foreman there at one time. They did not have any trucks to load at that time. They loaded everything in boxcars. Later when the East Texas Oil Fields came in, they got to cutting timbers for the drilling rigs, then they got the trucks. I can remember Charlie Turner driving a truck, hauling timbers to the East Texas field. There are a lot of things that you can look back and see – Bruce Christian was the shipping clerk there. Franklin Christian was his son. We played six-man football – that is about where Brookshire’s store is now. Mr. George had his farm out there. There was not anything out there then, but his farm.

MD: Were you old enough to remember the Depression?

FT: Oh, yes. The Depression was in the early thirties and I was selling tamales at that time. A lot of times mama would say, “Well, maybe you should trade for lima beans or red beans or whatever they have in the store or cornmeal.” It was bulk cornmeal, and they would put it in the sack for you. A lot of times we had slab bacon, red beans and corn bread to eat. Sometimes twice a day. Oh, yes I remember the Depression very well.

MD: Do you know of any other people who sold food around Diboll?

FT: Not in the Diboll area here, but we used to go outside. The Havards out here would plant a lot of Irish potatoes and we would go out and get Irish potatoes. We would go out there and pick cotton. I can remember when I wasn’t old enough to walk good through the cotton fields, Mama would put me on her cotton sack and pull me. She would put the cotton in there and I would be on there and she would drag me along.

MD: How old were you when you got a car?

FT: I got a car ...I had been married and I have been in the service. It was in the forties and I bought a Plymouth. I had worked on cars, doing this and that. After Elaine and I married, we lived in Orange. I started in Orange as a welder’s helper, then I became a welder and then I became a welding instructor. I stayed there until I went into the service. You couldn’t even hardly get a cab or a car or anything back in there. So she was pregnant with Ginger and I carried her to the hospital on a bicycle – 11 blocks. She was

born in 1943. I went in service in 1944 and came out in 1946. Anyway, that was part of growing up back then.

When Elaine met she was in Fastrill. She was living in Rusk but had been out on a date in Fastrill. I was working for Williams Brothers in Houston and there was a rainy spell in Houston and I came up here.

Looking back at it, you wonder how we survived back in the Depression days. When I was going to school, if we had a hole in our overalls, we would put a patch on the knee. In the summertime our past time was playing with marbles. We did wear shoes to school until it got cold. We took care of our shoes and as soon as spring started, the shoes went back on the rack.

MD: Tell us about making a string ball.

FT: We would save all the string we would get out of the store. Everything was put in a brown paper bag; it was wrapped 2 or 3 times with string and then a knot was put in it and you would carry it home. We would take the string off and then save it. We would take a sweet gum ball for the center and wrap the string around it. We would find us somewhere to play ball in front of somebody's house or up there behind the Lester's in front of the mill pond. We made our bats. We would go out in the woods and get us a good piece of hickory about the size of a baseball bat and we would peel the bark off it and that is what we used for a bat.

MD: Did you have a cover on the string ball?

FT: No, we just tied it. We had a big needle that we would loop the string to keep it from coming apart. There was no cover on it whatsoever. It was just a string ball. We made it about the size of a string ball. Some of them were a little larger.

MD: Could you hit it a long way?

FT: Oh, yeah. It would depend on what you had in the center of it. Sometime we would find something harder than a sweet gum ball and put it in there. If you could find a small rubber ball and wrap the string around that, you had a good ball then. We had a lot of fun. Back then there was Junior Cook, L.D. Smith, Thomas Lester. Freck Sterling and Louis Landers. The Heltons lived behind us back there. Opal was the girl and the boy was Wilmner Neil and he wasn't quite old enough to play as rough as we did at times. A lot of times Opal would get out there and play ball with us. The Brokers, the Willeys--James Willey, they lived right up from the Brokers there.

Then we had the depot up there. Two a day passenger trains. There was no buses through here at all. If you ordered anything it would be on the south bound train--if you ordered it from Sears in Chicago. Mama used to order her chickens, little biddies. They would ship them in on the train. They would send a notice that they would be shipped in a day or two and we would meet the trains until the chickens came in and we would carry them home.

MD: Did you all have a cow?

FT: Oh, yes, we had a cow. We had a cow and a garden and 2 peach trees. We raised our own chickens. A lot of time we had fried chicken on Sunday and that was a treat. Especially if you had the preachers over, you had to have chicken. We had a good time growing up.

MD: Let's talk to Elaine a little. Elaine, you were living in Fastrill and you moved to Diboll.

ET: Yes, I was living in Fastrill and going to school in Rusk.

MD: They did not have a high school in Fastrill?

ET: They had a school for all the classes up to high school.

MD: And then you had to go to high school?

ET: By bus.

MD: When you found out you were going to move to Diboll, how did you feel?

ET: I did not move. I stayed in Rusk and went to school until I was a senior and I came to Diboll when I was a senior. My mother and dad and the others moved earlier and I moved in my senior year. I graduated from here in the class of 1940. Rowena Kimmey was valedictorian. I was salutatorian.

MD: Tell me a little about Fastrill.

ET: I can remember it as a lot of houses similar to each other. Mrs. Corine Glass, Sam's mother, lived behind us. She worked and I helped her sometime when I was a kid. The Stokes lived two houses down – Mary Lou Havard's mother and daddy. The Thompson's lived across the street from us – the George Thompson's. We had a swimming hole where we went swimming. Everyone went swimming in the summer. It was in the river, one of those shallow places in the river. My daddy told me I could go swimming when I learned to swim. I would go down there. When they moved from Fastrill, I stayed with my sister Robbie. We lived in the Redtown houses. We lived in the first one.

MD: Tell me how you all met.

ET: We went to the Halloween carnival here in Diboll and I saw him there. I was staying with my mother then. We went to the Second Baptist Church. After I graduated from here I went back to Rusk and put my application in to go to work up there and he came while I was there. He asked me to marry him and we came back here. Then we went on to Houston to get married in 1940.

FT: Don't forget you had to stop in Livingston and get a marriage license.

ET: Yes, we stopped in Livingston and he got the marriage license. We went with Philip and his wife and her brother.

MD: How many children do you all have?

ET: Three. Virginia Lynn, Judy Lee, and Robert Michael.

FT: We left Diboll, when she was talking about getting married. When we left Diboll that morning, I asked her daddy if we could get married and he said we could. We went into Livingston, got our marriage license, went on to Houston and was living with Philip and his wife. We went in on Jensen Drive and there was a tabernacle in there. The preacher lived across the street – 2726 Jensen Drive and the preacher’s name was Rev. John Smith. Back then money was hard to come by and I didn’t have time to buy a ring, so I borrowed a ring.

ET: We didn’t have a big wedding like people do now.

MD: A lot of people did not.

FT: Back then, just as long as you said, “I do.” It is interesting to look back how we did then.

ET: Iona, your sister, was in my senior class.

MD: Yes, and you all just had two boys in your class.

ET: Yes, John Rector and Earl Smith.

MD: Did you enjoy going to school here?

ET: Yes. They had that big hotel there (Antlers). We could go in there and look around while we were playing. We had a picture taken when we had kids day that year. Jackie Oliver and I had pigtails.

MD: We put that in “The Corn Bread Whistle.”

ET: Yes, you sure did.

MD: I remember that Frankie Jackson and Jackie Oliver had cars. They would get to bring their cars.

ET: Jackie and I rode up and down the road after school.

MD: She had to drive for her daddy and he let her bring the car to school.

ET: They had that store back there.

FT: He owned some property up in Jacksonville and she would drive him up there, too.

MD: She moved up there after she finished school didn't she?

ET: Yes, and then she married R.M. Morehead. And they have been back for the homecoming.

MD: Yes, I have seen Jackie several times. She has been by to see me. A while ago, we mentioned the Second Baptist Church. Franklin, do you remember anything about that?

FT: The first Second Baptist Church was over behind the quarters in an old building over there. I don't know what it was used for, but it was an old beat-up building. On down that same row but at the other end of it, the Conner's had a grocery store over there, Cliff Conner and his daddy (Gib). Then later they built the Second Baptist Church down below where Ike Green's house was.

MD: That would be South First Street today.

FT: Yes. I don't remember who the preacher was there at the time, but I was baptized into the Second Baptist Church.

MD: Where did they baptize you?

FT: Emporia Pond. Emporia Pond is not there any more but that is where everybody was baptized down there then. Not everybody, because everybody didn't believe in dipping in water.

MD: Was that Second Baptist still here when you left Diboll?

FT: It was here when I left, but I don't' know what happened to it after that.

MD: Did you ever go fishing in Emporia Pond?

FT: Oh, yes. We used to fish down there quite a bit when we were youngsters. There used to be two ponds--the upper pond and the lower pond. Finally the dam on the upper pond broke and washed both ponds out and they never did rebuild the dam on it. We could swim on the backside of Emporia Pond. Mr. Conn (E.J.) and Alex Conn. They owned that property in there at that time and we would swim on the backside where they could not see us.

We used to go fishing with Lewis Placker – Wallace and I would. We would walk. We would walk down to Yellow Bluff, Ryan's Lake, down to the river. We would carry what we needed to fish with. We had to catch fish to eat. Back then, the boats were not locked at the river. We would borrow a boat, use it over night and carry it right back where we got it. We had to paddle that boat up the river to Cedar Creek and that was a pretty good pull.

MD: I guess you went out to Ryan's Lake.

FT: Oh yes, Ryan's Lake. I can remember when they pumped water from the river to Ryan's Lake and they pumped water from Ryan's Lake to the millpond in Diboll.

MD: Were the pipes above ground?

FT: Yeah. All the pipes were above ground. They had to keep the water level up in the ponds over here to keep the logs floating. They wet them down to keep the insects out of them. We would get out there and walk those logs and walk completely across the pond. I can remember seeing the water run in the ponds over there and it would run from the river to Ryan's Lake. I remember when Atmar Lester got killed, he was working on a pump and it blew up and killed him.

MD: You didn't have any trouble finding anything to do, did you – keeping busy.

FT: We kept busy all the time. There was always something to do – nothing mean or anything like that.

MD: What did you do on Halloween?

FT: Sometimes we turned some of the outhouses over. But we had to go back the next day and put them up. I guess the worst thing I ever saw or helped do was one time at the First Baptist Church, a group got together and took a wagon apart. We carried all the parts of this wagon and put it up in the pulpit and put it back together.

MD: In the pulpit?

FT: Yes, in the pulpit. We had to take it apart later. Wood Russell had his grocery store just the other side of the church (in Copestown). There was a barbershop right behind him. The Welch's lived on the other side of that curve and the Rectors and the Vaughn's on the other side of the street—come on down and the old handle factory. The Hogue's were over there. My first job that I ever had with Southern Pine Lumber Company paid 18 cents an hour.

MD: What were you doing?

FT: Working in the Lathe Mill for Claud Bowlus. I think I was 16 at that time. Back then there was no age requirement. If you were big enough to work, you could work.

FT: We got paid in those old chits and later we got coupons. You could go to the grocery store, barbershop, drug store and spend them.

ET: You had to spend them in Diboll.

MD: Sometime you could cash them in couldn't you?

FT: You could exchange them for money. Joe Bob Hendrick would buy them up at a discount. He would save them up and cash them in later. He made a lot of money off it. We gave some old Temple coins encased in plastic. The Temples made it and fixed it up. It is nickels, dimes, quarters, half-dollars and dollars. Each denomination had a different color.

MD: And they were made out of cardboard.

FT: Yes, they were sewed on the edges and they were round, encased in plastic for a desk weight.

END OF INTERVIEW