

EMMA “Pat” ALLEN LIGON & LEMON LIGON

Interview 154a

September 28, 1999 at T.L.L. Temple Memorial Library, Diboll, Texas

Jonathan Gerland, Interviewer

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ABSTRACT: In this interview with Jonathan Gerland, Emma Jean “Pat” Allen Ligon and Lemon Ligon reminisce about growing up in Diboll as members of the African American community. Mrs. Ligon was the daughter of Walter Allen, beloved millpond foreman and namesake of a Diboll park. Mr. Ligon has many family members in the area as well. Both Ligon recall going to school at H.G. Temple School, shopping at the commissary, segregation and integration, Red Town, fishing, hunting, and helping to put out fires. Mr. and Mrs. Ligon were friends as children and each separately moved away from Diboll as teenagers, but both moved back and they were married in 1992.

Jonathan Gerland (hereafter JG): My name is Jonathan Gerland and it is September 28, 1999. I’m with Mr. & Mrs. Ligon and we are at the conference room of the T.L.L. Temple Memorial Library and we are going to...they are going to tell us about their remembrances of Diboll. I guess we will start with you Mrs. Ligon. Just state your full name and when and where you were born.

Emma Jean Allen Ligon (hereafter EL): Emma Jean Allen Ligon. I was born on the pipeline in Diboll, Texas.

JG: Ok.

EL: 1936. March 28, 1936.

JG: March 28, 1936. We will come back to the pipeline in just a minute. Let’s go to Mr. Ligon. If you would do the same, state your name and when and where you were born.

Lemon Ligon (hereafter LL): Lemon Ligon. I was born October 2, 1931 in Nigton Texas. We moved to Diboll in approximately 1933-34.

JG: Ok, ’33-34. And you were born in ’31 and so you moved. Do you have any memories of Nigton? Is that in Houston County?

LL: No that is Trinity County.

JG: Trinity County, ok.

LL: Very, very few. The only memories I have are when I grew up and we would go back over there to visit. There’s not one prior to that.

JG: Do you have a fairly large family that still remain there?

LL: At that time there was quite a few of us although my mother and father only had two children.

JG: Ok. And who were your sister or brother?

LL: My sister, my sister's name is Annie Bell Ligon. She married James Rhone in late '40's early '50's somewhere in there. I'm not sure the exact date; it was early '50's, 1950 or 1951.

JG: Ok. And when was she born?

LL: She was born June 2, 1933.

JG: Ok. So you and your sister then moved to Diboll?

LL: Yes.

JG: Ok. Did you have...were there other Ligon's living there or did you have other family? Who did you go back to visit I guess is what I'm asking?

LL: Oh we had a lot of relatives out there. A lot of other Ligon's that belonged to the family. You know kinda...that was there. They were at that time were moderately young. They have since passed on.

JG: What brought your dad to Diboll?

LL: That was, from what I can understand, because I think I was a little young to actually remember. But there was somewhat of a racial altercation that we were running from.

JG: Huh, ok. Did your father start to work for the lumber company here in Diboll?

LL: Yes, my father got laid on. I was...at that time I was with my grandparents who raised me. And my grandfather and grandmother and my dad came on later. Shortly after that my mother and father separated.

JG: This racial altercation, that you mentioned, do you know much about it?

LL: Only what I've heard.

JG: Only what you've heard.

LL: I understand that there was a black man that killed a white man over there. And there were night riders and they rode through our community in the bottom down next to the river searching for him. Other than that I don't know that much about it.

JG: So most of what you heard was later on in your life, and from family.

LL: Yes.

JG: Ok. Mrs. Ligon I thought maybe we would try to keep this as parallel as we can. And work up chronologically maybe. Some subjects we might just talk about by the topic. But you mentioned that you were born in Diboll. Tell me a little bit about your family and how many brothers and sisters you had.

EL: Well I had four brothers and one sister. Walter Allen, Jr. who is passed on.

JG: Tell me who your parents were, your father and mother.

EL: Walter Allen, Sr. and Neil Watson Allen was my mother. And I had Walter Allen, Jr, Herbert Allen, James Allen, Franklin Allen and my sister Shirley. There were six children.

JG: Was your mother from Diboll?

EL: No she was from a little town, not town, community called Weches up out of Alto.

JG: Just a minute. Where was your father from?

EL: Marshall, Texas.

JG: From Marshall.

EL: He came in with Mr. H.G. Temple. That is when he came to Diboll back in, whatever year, I don't know.

JG: Now your father was the legendary mill pond foreman and maybe had other titles. But he was "the man" on the ponds for many, many years. And he sort of became a legend. What do you remember of your father? What year did he die? Tell us...

EL: 1953.

JG: 1953. Ok and you were born in '36?

EL: Yes.

JG: Can you just tell us what memories you have of your father?

EL: Oh plenty! As a child, small child, I remember going to the mill to watch him on the logs. Spinning them in the water and picking them up with the sinkers. That is what they called the logs that would sink. And they would always use the sinkers when they would run out of logs. When they couldn't get in the woods to cut logs then they would have

this peculiar looking boat and they would pick up this long thing. I don't know what they called it.

JG: It had a winch on it?

EL: It had a spike in the end of it. And they would pull it up and tie it onto this boat and then they would send it in and bring it over in the water where they could get it up in the mill. And my dad was a funny man. He liked to...

JG: A practical joker, is that what you mean?

EL: Yes and he stammered real bad. And sometimes when he got angry he couldn't say anything. He just "Uh". But he was really firm with the boys. My sister and I, we kinda got away with a lot. Especially her, she was the baby. And she was always the mean one. (laughter) My dad was a wonderful man and we enjoyed him. And he used to tell us a lot about history, which I wasn't interested in at the time, 'cause I didn't want to be bothered with that. But now I wish I had listened. But he was all right. He was an ok dad.

JG: And we will come back chronologically and talk about some other things. But when did y'all two start dating? When were you married?

LL: We were married....

EL: (laughing) November 19, 1992. But...

JG: Oh ok.

EL: ...we courted in Jr. High School at H. G. Temple back in 1949.

JG: 1949. I was just trying to establish when Mr. Ligon, to see what you thought of her father or what you could remember of Mr. Allen.

LL: Well I was kinda small when I first met Mr. Allen. I think her baby brother is one year younger than I am. And, we used to play together, barefoot, no shirt, cut off pants, running up and down the dirt streets. Mr. Allan was an impressive man as I recall. And my impression of him was that he was very, very, very strong on education. He was very serious about that aspect of it. He was somewhat of a disciplinarian, especially with the boys. I was a little bit afraid of him in those early days as a little boy, as a preschooler. I was kinda frightened of him. But he was a nice guy; he was a very nice guy. He was knowledgeable and to me very impressive. You know how little children are, you look up to him and he looked like a pretty big man. For many years you know, I looked up at him kinda in awe, with respect and I thought a great deal of him and his wife. They were wonderful people.

JG: I didn't know that y'all had married just only, fairly recently. I'm sorry.

EL: That is ok.

JG: Well can each of you just in turn or together, just tell me about going to school in Diboll? Mr. Ligon you had made a mention last week that growing up you thought, as most people do often times from fairly small towns, maybe want to get away, thought life would be better somewhere else. And then once you did get away, Diboll wasn't so bad after all. But can you just tell us some memories that you have of going to school in Diboll and just life in general?

LL: Well growing up was at the time, I thought was quite difficult. We never finished doing what there was to do. Our parents always found something to keep us busy. We had enough leisure time, to be perfectly honest we had plenty of leisure time. But you know I came home from school, like every other household in town, in that part of town, we'd come home from school and immediately you start chopping wood, stove wood, heater wood, or whatever it was. The school...when I first started to school I think it was in 1936. There was only one building and it was located at that time on the south side of Diboll. We had two rooms with wooden bi-fold doors. We'd open all those...we'd open those up, fold them back in the morning for something like an auditorium. We'd read verses from the Bible; sing a hymn and whatever announcements that were to be made they were made during that period of time. The bell would ring, the old hand bell and they'd close the doors and we'd...went on doing the class.

JG: Were there several classes? You said one building but would they be divided amongst the different ages of the children?

LL: Well yes, there were several classes probably on one side and on the other side. Maybe one class would let out for recess while the other class was having studies or something of that nature. And...

JG: How many teachers were there?

LL: Well I'll have to ask my helper on that. (laughing)

EL: Well I'll have to count them.

LL: Now we are talking about before Bradley, which was Professor Davis.

JG: And Professor Davis was schoolmaster or...?

LL: Yes, he was the principal at the time.

JG: The principal. Ok.

LL: I think the school only went to about the 9th or 10th grade.

JG: Do you remember his full name?

LL: No I don't.

JG: Professor Davis, ok. So this would be in the '30's?

LL: Yes around 1936.

JG: 1936.

LL: It was my first year of school.

JG: So you would have started around the first grade?

LL: Yes.

JG: Do you remember about how many students there were?

LL: I can only guess.

JG: Yes I realize that.

LL: I'm going to guess and say maybe 80 or so.

JG: And that is all ages?

LL: Yes. And time brought about change naturally as it always does. And the school began to grow. Professor Davis moved on and Professor Otis Bradley came in.

JG: Do you recall approximately what year that would have been? Before or after the war, World War II?

LL: Before.

JG: Ok, so '41 or earlier.

LL: I'm going to say and I hope someone can correct me on this, I'm gonna say maybe '39 or '40 when he came in. Then the school started to make some changes. Actually brought that school into a high school, moved it up. Made a tremendous difference because then the kids did not have to travel to Lufkin or other places to finish high school.

JG: Ok. What do you remember of the early days of school in Diboll?

EL: Alton C. Henderson. My first grade teacher, that was back maybe '41, '40, '41, somewhere in that area. And then my biggest dream was, I would be glad when I would get in the upper class so I could change classrooms. You know like they do now. But at the time we stayed in one room and one teacher taught us all the subjects. But then when I got to be in I guess you call Jr. High now, I was able to change classes. I would go for

homemaking in this building and then I'd go in another room for math. And basketball, I loved basketball. I played from the time I was in the 6th grade until I moved to Lufkin. Which I continued my education and played basketball there. I played basketball six years. And that was really, really...my brothers played, Franklin, well all of them played but Herbert.

JG: Did you have a girl's basketball team that played girls teams from other schools?

EL: Sure. Yes we traveled on this old bus. You know half the time it wouldn't work, but we traveled on this bus and we would go to different towns and...

JG: So this would be like late '40's early '50's?

EL: Yes, uh-huh. And then on Saturday, was a big day.

JG: What were some of the towns that you played?

EL: Chester, Woodville, Corrigan, Colmesneil, Nigton, we went so far as one time to go to Logansport, Louisiana. I remember that. Lufkin I guess...

JG: Was it pretty much the same schools that the white teams played?

EL: Oh well I don't know, I don't know that. But I don't think there was such thing as a district then.

LL: Well yes, there was a district but the classification was totally different. I think we started off as, one of my first...my memory of the classification was a Class B School. And as we...you know I played baseball and football. And of course the first football team we had here was 1945. It was a six man team.

EL: Can you imagine six men on a football team?

JG: Six man football team. (laughter)

LL: As she said we had this old bus and we used to, we'd go as far away as Orange, going that way. Girls...well we didn't have much of a cheerleading team – we didn't have much of anything in those days.

JG: Did the boys and the girls travel together?

EL: Together, yes.

JG: On the same bus?

EL: On the same bus. Yes with the principal. He was always...Professor Bradley drove the old bus.

JG: He went with y'all.

EL: We would freeze, oh we would freeze, but we were happy you know. (laughter)

LL: He was our principal, our coach, basketball coach, football coach, baseball coach, he was all that.

JG: And in case I haven't already asked you, what was his first name?

EL: C.O. Bradley.

LL: Charles.

JG: Charles Otis Bradley. And his wife was the...

EL: Eddie Mae.

JG: Eddie Mae who wrote the column in the Buzz Saw.

EL: Right.

JG: Ok. Tell me about just some of the school activities?

LL: You mean like out on the playground?

JG: Yes just some memories of school, anything that stands out.

EL: I remember, I was small, but I remember when we didn't have a gate. The school yard had a fence around it, a plank fence. We didn't have a gate; we had steps to go over from the street into the school yard.

JG: Steps going over the fence?

EL: Yes, over the fence, we didn't have a gate.

JG: Ok.

EL: That I remember, and I remember the boys took homemaking just like the girls. Let me see what else I remember. Jim Ligon used to play the piano. He could really play I guess by ear they called it. And then this other young man, J.W. Armistead would sing. And we would have what they called the assembly, gathering. Oh there was so many things. I should have wrote some things down that I can't remember right now.

JG: What about Professor Jackson the instrumentalist? Was he here then?

LL: Yes he was, yes he was.

JG: Did he do like maybe school plays or programs that y'all had? Was he involved with that?

LL: No at the time...at that time, we didn't know that much about Professor Jackson except that he knew music and he could play anything. Any kind of music he could play.

JG: Where would you have heard Professor Jackson playing?

LL: At the church.

JG: Community gatherings, at church?

EL: uh-huh.

JG: We talked last week about there being three churches. Methodist, Baptist and Church of the Living God.

EL: There was a fourth church also. It was a Church of Christ in the Red Town area, and when I was small.

JG: Talk a little bit more about the Red Town, because when you say Red Town to most white people, they of course are referring to the one over here on this side of the tracks. Which I assume was the housing like for the Fastrill camp people maybe. I'm not sure. But tell me about the Red Town on the other side of the tracks.

EL: Red Town like I told you, don't know too much about Red Town. But Red Town was started directly behind H.G. Temple School. That is where Red Town started. And it had little red houses, well not little red houses, but red houses.

JG: They were just all painted red.

EL: All painted red. At one time all of Diboll on our side, the black side of town was all red.

JG: The whole town. (laughter)

EL: The whole thing.

LL: It was kinda like, if you can imagine back in the '30's and '40's we called it a railroad red. It was a rusty looking red.

EL: A rusty looking red.

JG: Yes, kinda like the old maroonish red, like a box car or something?

EL: Right. Uh-huh like the old caboose or whatever. And then later on they painted this side, north side of the school, they painted the houses gray. Well that left Red Town red. So I guess that is why we just called it Red Town.

JG: Started calling it Red Town. Do you recall about what year that might have been that the town was painted gray?

EL: During the '40's. I can't tell you when.

JG: During the war, or after the war?

LL: Probably during the war.

JG: So that would have been maybe the origins of the so called Red Town being in that part was whenever it was painted, although like you said the whole town was painted red at one time.

LL: They started building houses and you see that area prior to Red Town had been a swampy area.

JG: Now this was south of the school.

EL: Yes.

LL: And kinda south and westerly of the school.

JG: Well what is there now? That will help me understand where.

LL: Well that is where Diboll is now.

EL: That is where Diboll is now. Like where the parks, Walter Allen Park and up further where Marcellos's cleaning shop and stuff like that.

JG: Ok. Like the Maynard crossing of the railroad tracks did it go that far south?

LL: The street that comes across the railroad track?

JG: Yes sir, called Maynard.

EL: It was further back behind the school, further south.

LL: It was a little bit further south.

JG: Oh further south or closer this direction.

LL: Let me see about that.

EL: Red Town started behind where the....

JG: We are north...right now we are north of like where Walter Allen Park and swimming pool is. And you're saying Red Town would have been more or less in that area.

LL: It would have been, it would have been...it wasn't really that big of an area. It would have been from that point back to...

EL: No, babe listen. Where the Baptist church is located? It was the Baptist church, then another row of houses, another row, then the school, then Red Town. Like that.

JG: Ok, that kinda got the general area.

EL: 'Cause just looking at it you really have to zoom in.

JG: Yes, things have changed quite a bit.

LL: As I was saying, you know before they started moving houses down in that area it was very swampy, lot of water. We used to go down there as little kids and get mayhaws all back down through there. That was between Diboll and the E.J. Conn farm, what they used to call Old Emporia. Which I lived down there, in fact that is where I was living when I started to school. I used to walk up through those woods up that railroad track up through the woods to the school.

JG: So you lived in what they called Old Emporia area?

LL: Yes.

JG: Ok. But still on the west side of the tracks?

LL: On the west side of the track.

JG: Did any black people live on this side of the tracks during that time period?

EL: Yes they did. What is his name? This tall man, what is his name. His wife was real tall and light skinned. What is Shirley's...?

LL: J.R., oh yea right. Ok they lived way back out 1818 somewhere.

EL: Yes they lived...but I can't think of his name. Why can't I think of his name?

LL: I'll think of it after a while.

EL: That was the only black. And of course Christa Bell, Mrs. Christian Bell cause she worked for H.G. Temple.

JG: What did she do for Mr. Temple?

EL: She was his cook and maid. She lived over there with them.

LL: She lived in servant's quarters.

JG: But there were no black families that lived in their own house?

EL: None that I can remember.

LL: Not over there no.

JG: Ok. Can you tell me about some of the community celebrations like Juneteenth, July 4th? Tell us what you remember of that.

EL: Well I was a little girl, and I remember Froggy Bottom. That was Jim Ligon's father's café. Was it a café?

LL: Yes it was a café.

EL: And they used to have this dance, they had this....what you call a platform and they used to dance on that on the nineteenth of June.

JG: On a wooden platform.

EL: Yes, now I remember that cause I would be standing back looking, I was only 5.

JG: So this would have been in the war years? Early '40's?

EL: Yes I suppose so. Then later on they used to have, the Nineteenth of June celebrations. They had this big pit behind the school in the ground. And Mr. Kiddo Phillips, what is Ben's grandfather's name? Joe somebody...Ben's Grandfather, Miss Mattie's father. They would do the barbeque. Put it that way. Then they would have all the celebrations and stuff like that. And I even remember...I don't know if it was a particular day or anything, but they used to have rodeos in the old park, the old baseball park.

JG: Now where was the old baseball park?

EL: Next to the school, next door to H.G. Temple where they played football. Did they play football there?

LL: The baseball park was also the football field, it was the rodeo ground. And celebrations like as you call it, Juneteenth, they would build a big platform out there for dancing. That was...if there was to be any outdoor gatherings it would done there.

JG: There at the park by the school.

EL: If the old bull wasn't in there. You remember the old bull?

LL: Yes.

EL: The old bull used to keep.... He was wild and mean.

LL: On one side, on the east side...

EL: He would get out and just run us all over the place.

JG: Who's bull was it?

EL: I don't know.

JG: Just the old bull, huh. (laughter)

EL: Just the old bull, yes.

LL: On the east side of that park, the parameter of that park, they had holding pens for rodeos, hog pens, things of that nature. It was rather interesting from the perspective of a small kid because so much could go on there.

EL: He was so huge to me at the time. You know, 'cause I was small and oh I thought that was such a huge park or what ever.

LL: Well it was big enough for the adult...big guys to hit a legal home run. We played a lot of baseball and basketball. You know I graduated high school in 1951 and there wasn't a heck of a lot to be done. But kids around town must have made their own toys to play with. Most of all activities, even the grown up activities were on this side. There were very few cars.

JG: On this side, you mean the so called white side, the segregated...the blacks...the segregated.

LL: The west side of the track was the black part of town.

EL: Except for the box factory.

LL: Except for the box factory.

EL: They were all white in the box factory. Now that was....

JG: Now are you talking about the workers at the box factory were all white?

EL: No, no people lived there.

JG: Oh people lived next to the box factory?

EL: It was a factory, a box factory.

JG: Right.

LL: They were a little different sociological level. I don't know some how or another I always got the impression that they were a little more, lower on the social ladder, the box factory quarters. And so our part, we were...well for lack of a better term, capsilized. The only time, when school was out we'd leave school, go to the commissary, check the mail, go back down across the track and go home. We didn't come across....the only time we came across over here was periodically we had mayhaws or blackberries to sell. Or we were put on a lawnmower to cut somebody's yard. Knocking on doors to get...

EL: Well we went to the movie.

LL: And we went to the movie.

EL: It was just right there, really.

LL: It was kinda across from the old Antlers hotel.

JG: What was the feeling amongst the black community coming over and....any thought given to that?

LL: I think the adults did, we didn't...

JG: As a kid that was just the way it was. You didn't think anything.

LL: That was just the way it was. We didn't think too much of it. Periodically the boys would get into a little scuffle with the other boys, the white boys, but no big thing.

END OF SIDE ONE

JG: Ok, we just flipped the tape over and we were just talking about attitudes or just perceptions of the segregated society of Diboll in the '40's and early '50's.

LL: The attitude was primarily that we were taught to stay in your place. And there won't be any trouble. Mind your manners mind your business and keep your nose clean and there won't be any trouble. If you don't, and one of the things that was emphasized to me most emphatically was, you know, either you do what we tell you to do over here, or the man will get you and you're going to do what he says.

EL: And I didn't have that problem at my house. We didn't have that kind of problems

JG: And you said that pretty much came from your parents.

LL: Yes.

JG: Now who is “the man?”

LL: The man is either, you or the sheriff, the constable or any...

EL: Jay Boren.

LL: Yes, Jay Boren.

EL: Or Mr. Green. Mr. Green was before Jay Boren.

JG: Ok.

LL: It was very strongly, and I guess I looked at it as my grandparents were farther away from me than my father and mother. So I got taught some of their ways. My grandfather was born in 1880. He was born closer to slavery. He...I mean, you know, so they brought some ideology from that time frame and it was passed on to me. Well they had seen things and they had experienced things that they didn't want me to experience. So it was brain washed into me “hey behave yourself.”

JG: And Mrs. Ligon you were saying that wasn't that way at your house?

EL: No not at my house. We just lived. Dad was....the boys, you know they had more of an attitude than we did. We stayed home most of the time. We went to church and the grocery store. Of course I played basketball and all this other stuff that he's talking about I didn't think about that. We were sheltered.

JG: You said your parents divorced?

LL: My mother and father did yes, when I was quite young. I don't even remember.

JG: And who did you live with here?

LL: My grandmother and grandfather, Walter Grey Ligon and Melbranane Ligon. Most everybody knew them as Uncle Walt and Aunt Mel.

JG: Did they work for the lumber company?

LL: Yes.

JG: What job did they do?

LL: She was mostly a housewife. But she did take in washing and she did some cooking.

He worked at the mill, I'm really not sure what part of it, 'cause I wasn't out there.

JG: Ok, so work pretty much wasn't discussed.

LL: He also was Mr. Henry Temple's gardener, right down here at the big house.

JG: Where Mr. Arthur Temple lives today?

LL: Right. And I remember going down there playing with his, Mr. Henry Temple's children, those that were about my age at that time. And the old man was quite a gardener. He was very good at it. I always thought he could grow things when nobody else could. He kept a garden. He would work you to death.

JG: Yes, you said most families did....

EL: Most families had gardens and my daddy had hogs.

JG: Had hogs. Did ya'll have a garden too?

EL: Yes my mother had a beautiful garden and she used to send Mr. Temple, Mr. H.G. Temple, greens...collard greens from the garden. And Mrs. Christa Bell used to come over and get them. Yes I remember all that.

LL: Most everybody did have a garden. We had cows and hogs and chickens, things of that nature. It was my job to take care of all that. In the fall of the year was butcher time. You know we would kill a hog, you know a cow, a young cow, goats or whatever. And everybody had a smoke house in their back yard. I would have to go out in the woods and gather up the hickory and bring it back. They'd hang meat up to cure it. Most everybody in town would do the same thing. They would cure their own meat, hickory smoked what I called sugar cured at that time by hand. We would do it with our hand.

EL: Make sausage.

LL: Make sausage and whatever else.

JG: Did you have any hunters in your family?

LL: Everybody hunted.

EL: My brother did, Walter did, Herbert did. I don't remember my dad doing any hunting. I don't think he liked hunting too much. But my two older brothers did, especially Walter, Walter Jr.

LL: My folks were all....my dad hunted until he couldn't. My grandfather did too, he would go out in the woods...you see before we came here over into Angelina County that was about the only way to survive. You had to go out in the woods...

EL: You had to hunt off the land.

LL: ...and kill what we called pineywood rooters, squirrels, rabbits and things.

JG: Any deer hunting?

LL: Oh yes, when you could catch 'em. We had a lot of deer. We ate a lot of it too.

JG: Where did most people hunt that lived here in Diboll?

LL: Oh what we called the pasture, down around Ryan's Lake, west of Diboll.

EL: We used to fish down there a lot too.

LL: Yes a lot of fishing down there too, camping and hunting. The kids...during the summer months you could go down and camp out over night. Fish and hunt and enjoy ourselves.

EL: Well my dad didn't because he was always at the mill. Now that I mention it, he never took a vacation. Mr. Temple asked him one time, "Walt don't you think you need to take a vacation?" And he said "well uh, no, no, no, Mr. I don't think I need one, but if you want me to go I'll take one." (laughter) So my mom got his clothes ready. He had one sister in Paris, Texas and he said "Well I guess I'll go" he stammered real bad, "I guess I'll go and see Lola." That was his sister's name. So she got him ready and he caught the train. The train come around and he caught the train going to Paris. So the next day around the same time...uh Lufkin had a cab, a taxi cab. And this cab pulls up in front of our house. And so my mom says "I wonder who that is." And so then Daddy had on his white suit. I'll never forget it. And he stepped out of that cab with that hat on. What do you call that hat, them flat top hats?

LL: Oh yes, them pomp shaped hats.

EL: Yes, well anyways, he set his luggage on the porch. We had a high porch. He laid that hat on that luggage and took, went to the mill. He never spoke never said a word, he just set it down and went on to the mill, white suit and all. He just loved that job. He loved that mill. And he worked there 47 years and when his health failed he had to give it up. And when his health failed he just went and that was the end of it. But when he could, I mean like late at night when it would rain a lot, he had to get up and get that lantern and go and open the flood gates and let the water go down, I guess into the wherever, so it wouldn't flood.

JG: From one pond to another?

EL: To another, yes.

JG: You mentioned the pipeline a few times.

EL: That is where I was born on the pipeline.

JG: Now is that...tell us what the pipeline was.

EL: It was just a row of houses, just row after row after row. I could tell you exactly how many rows from the back street to school. It was twenty rows of houses, all black people lived in these houses.

JG: But what was the pipeline itself?

EL: Nothing, just houses.

LL: Tell him the origin of the name pipeline.

EL: Oh the pipeline, a pipe coming through...where was it?

LL: It came from Ryan's lake...

EL: Ryan's lake.

LL: ...to pump water from Ryan's lake. I think they originally...this is a guess, but they pumped that water to fill up those two ponds.

JG: I think so.

EL: Yes I think so, but it was a big pipe.

LL: Yes, that thing was huge.

JG: Three or four feet around.

EL: Yes and I guess that is where the pipeline got its name from, that pipe.

JG: And those houses were just parallel with that pipeline.

LL: As a matter of fact, there possibly might be part of that old frame still down there around the catfish hole, what we called the catfish hole at Ryan's lake down there.

JG: And you were telling me, Mrs. Ligon, that you lived pretty close to what was known as Mill 2.

EL: Yes, uh-huh.

JG: One of those houses, and we were looking at a photograph last week of that.

EL: Yes that is where I lived with the garden. You can see where the garden was and all that. And the old barn, we had an old barn behind our house. You can see all that just as clear. Yep, I can remember everything about the pipeline, everything. (laughter)

JG: I want to go back to segregation just a little bit more. You were saying that you would come to the commissary and shop and do whatever business you needed to do there. How was society then as far as mixing like in the commissary itself? Were there...I don't guess there was a white side and a black side or was there? Can you just comment on that?

LL: Well on the water fountains there were, things of that nature, bathrooms. There was...well for example, if we were at the meat market, standing at the counter and you came in, it was polite for us to step aside.

EL: Didn't they have it divided at one time? No?

LL: I don't think so. I think things were considered to be humble, good control here in Diboll.

EL: There was no problem that I knew of.

LL: It was comparatively, to some other places that I've been that had some experience, they were pretty good.

EL: We had it good. I think we had it pretty good in Diboll.

LL: Yes things were pretty good.

JG: Ok.

LL: Growing up here finishing high school, joining the Air Force and (unintelligible). I didn't want to join the Army. I was scared they would send me to Korea.

JG: And what year did you join the Air Force?

LL: 1952.

JG: '52, ok.

LL: Anyway I remember that in comparison in 1958 I was in school in Montgomery Alabama. And they had chains, 1958. And they had big log chains down the middle of the stores to separate the colored side and the white side.

JG: In '58?

LL: In 1958, '57 and '58. And if you went into a store there in Montgomery you had to know the size of clothing or shoes or hat. You couldn't try anything on. That is the first

place, I was down at (unintelligible) at that time. I had never seen (unintelligible) caged before in my life. But I saw them in Montgomery Alabama.

EL: You see in Diboll we could try shoes and we could try it on at the commissary 'cause that is where we bought most things.

LL: We bought...well yes, you might say we bought everything at the commissary.

EL: We did, we had a charge, you know you just sign, Mr. Jimmy Fuller, he was the one over the part, the grocery store part or somewhere in there. Jimmy Fuller, I remember Mrs. Zettie Kelly was over the post office. Mrs. Farrington was over the department store.

JG: Tell me a little bit about Mrs. Farrington.

EL: She was friendly, always smiling. She always had a smile on her face. She was just kind to everybody. She was a likeable lady; she was an older lady. But I remember her; she always had a smile, always.

JG: Did the black community have a Mrs. Farrington? We've heard through past oral history interviews a lot of people talk about Mrs. Farrington being a social...just a solid social pillar in the community, someone always looking out for the best interest of the community, whatever that might be. Was there a...

EL: I'm trying to think.

LL: I'm thinking there might have been more than one for us over there because our community was of such that the kids, everybody in town raised them. We couldn't...if you did anything on the pipeline and you lived in Red Town, you could run home and the news was already there. If you accidentally threw a rock or something and broke somebody's window they kicked you half way home.

EL: There was Mrs. Cora Nash.

LL: Yes, Mrs. Cora Nash.

EL: Cora Nash, she was a pillar. I'm trying to think of somebody else. It won't come to me right now, but she just comes to mind.

JG: Right, right, Cora Nash.

LL: Well I could say Mrs. B. Williams, 'cause she used to whip my rear end all the time. Let's see....

EL: Polly O'Neil, which is my godmother. And her husband was Dave O'Neil, which is my godfather.

LL: Mrs. Sally Smith...

EL: Sally Smith.

LL: And the other Mrs. Smith.

EL: Mattie.

LL: Mattie Smith, oh that was, you know the kind of women who took hold of everything. If they saw you doing something they would give you a lick or two and send you home. By the time you got there and if you got there before them or the word got there before them, they'd come right behind you and report, "I had to whip your son up the street here. He got a little bit out of hand." And then Mom or Pop would get a hold of you too.

EL: Well in my case it was my mom cause Dad didn't do it unless it was the boys.

JG: Unless it was the boys.

EL: Uh-huh. He just didn't do it.

JG: What about....I'm sorry.

EL: Go ahead.

JG: I was just going to ask you about the churches. Mr. Ligon did you attend church?

LL: Yes.

JG: And which one?

LL: The Methodist Church.

JG: The Methodist Church

LL: Perry Chapel, yes. Well it was during some of those years we had church twice a month here because the minister had to be in between, each week he had to be at a different church. Along with the pastor we had, had to pastor here and Nigton.

EL: What you call part time.

LL: Yes part time. And I think most of the churches at that time might have been that way. On the off Sunday's that our preacher wasn't here we would go to the Baptist church. Or you know whichever church.

JG: But each denomination had its own building?

EL: Yes.

JG: It just didn't always have a pastor there each and every time.

LL: Right.

JG: And what about, which church did you attend?

EL: I attended the Church of God down by the....

JG: By the graveyard. That is the one you were telling me about last week.

EL: Yes, that is the one I attended.

JG: I was just going to say, if you'd like to get a drink of water we can stop the tape.

EL: No, I'm ok.

JG: And what about the Church of the Living God, was it the same way? Did it have a pastor the same way? Did it have a pastor every other Sunday?

EL: Yes, it was every other Sunday until later years and it went full time. This was after I was a teenager you know. I had moved away to Lufkin.

JG: What belief is the Church of the Living God, say compared to the Baptist church?

EL: To me it is no different; it's the same.

LL: It is just a different denomination.

EL: That is all, just the name.

JG: Ok, did you have baptisms?

EL: Yes, oh yes.

JG: Where were people baptized at?

EL: In the pond.

LL: In the millpond.

JG: The Diboll millpond?

EL: The Diboll millpond. Now the Methodist church was the first church in Diboll to have a baptismal pool. Now that is where I was baptized. I thank God I didn't have to go with the snakes. (laughter) But before that everybody went to the pond.

JG: Do you recall maybe which pond, the one closest to your house or the other one?

LL: The middle pond.

EL: It was the middle pond wasn't it?

LL: Yes, I think it was the middle pond, or mill 2 pond.

EL: Because the one closest it was kinda hard to get to because of the tracks and there wasn't much room.

LL: And it stayed full of logs.

EL: Yes I think it was the other pond.

JG: So this pond you are talking about, where people were baptized wasn't necessarily always full of logs.

LL: No it was more or less a holding or a run off pond.

JG: A holding area or run off pond, ok.

EL: Now if C.F. Perry was here he could tell us exactly which pond. But I remember they did it in the pond until the Methodist Church got this pool. And that is where I was baptized, 'cause they would let all the churches use it.

JG: And I know we were talking last week about the graveyard. I had asked you what did the community call it and you said pretty much...

EL: The graveyard.

JG: "The Graveyard." (laughter) It didn't have a formal name or anything.

EL: No just the graveyard, 'cause I didn't even know what the cemetery was. I was...cemetery, what is that? It is the graveyard. But I can remember about that Mr. McGough. I remember the day he was buried but I can't tell you the date 'cause I was a real small child.

EL: I did tell you his name didn't I?

JG: Yes ma'am. You said Ray McGough. Do you remember your father's funeral?

EL: Oh yes I was 16. He died March 5, 1953. He died in March and I graduated from high school in May the same year.

JG: Do you remember...and I probably...years from now I may not remember everything either when I was 16. You don't think about things that way. But do you remember if there were any white people present?

EL: Yes it was. It was white people. I can't tell you who it was, but there were white people.

JG: You do remember that?

EL: Yes.

JG: And was that...I don't want to answer your question by the way I ask it, but was that common for the black community?

EL: No. And also the day that my father passed he died in Memorial Hospital in Lufkin, I was told that they rang the...blew the whistle at the mill at 5 o'clock 'cause he passed at 5 and they, they got to...blew the whistle, let everybody know that something was wrong you know.

JG: Kind of a tribute.

LL: Yes they had the...was it the 11:15?

EL: Oh yes.

LL: The siren they used to blow at 11:15. The cornbread....

JG: Yes, the so-called Cornbread Whistle.

EL: Yes, so they could put the cornbread in the stove. (laughter)

LL: When that thing blew other than that time, something was wrong.

EL: Well they used to blow...

JG: Now that was the planing mill whistle as I understand. Is that what y'all know it as?

LL: Yes, but it was 45 minutes for everybody to get the cornbread in the oven.

JG: So that is pretty much remembered by the black and the white community then?

EL: Oh yes it is.

JG: They didn't have a black and white whistle (laughing).

EL: No they didn't. (laughter) Yes the whistle used to blow at 7 o'clock in the morning.

LL: You could set your clock by that at 15 minutes after, that whistle blew. If it blew at 10 o'clock at night, everybody jumped up and started putting on their clothes. Something was going on.

EL: Something was wrong.

JG: And y'all could tell by the sound which whistle it was.

LL: Yes. Somebody's house was on fire or something was wrong.

JG: Since you mentioned fire, I think last week you said something about...we were just talking about the days of steam and the refuse burners from the mills and steam locomotives and that kind of thing. And you said something about a fire hazard. Do ya'll remember many people's homes burning?

EL: Oh yes. I remember Mr. Dan Deberry's house burned. R. L. Covington's house burned completely. The Roger's, Jessie Faye Rogers's house burned. A lot of them.

JG: Were those contributed to the mill?

EL: No, no, no, no. Just fire I don't know what caused that.

LL: You could stand out sometime and see those sparks flying. Depending on which way the wind was blowing. And everybody washed clothes and hung them out on the line. There was some days you, those old women were particular about their washing. They washed...a steel wash pot with a fire in there boiling your clothes. Then you had 3 tubs. A washtub and 2 rinse tubs. The last tub had bluing for the white clothes. And they would hang them out and let the sun get to them. And those things...that stuff came out white, white, white. Some days you'd go out there to bring them in and they would be just as dingy and dark because of the smoke.

EL: The cinders. But see Red Town didn't get too many cinders it was too far away. But me...us...we lived right in the middle of it. (laughter)

LL: And even sometimes you'd take a sheet or something off the line and you'd see a big hole burned in it because of the cinders.

JG: Well was there a volunteer fire department or a company fire department?

EL: Oh yes Diboll had a volunteer fire department.

JG: So like in the black community when a house was on fire, would everybody...

LL: Everybody in town.

JG: ...white and black...I imagine the company would have an interest if that fire then broke out into the lumber yard or something. So the company then would come as well as the community as a whole?

EL: Yes, right. Everybody would try to help.

JG: To put it out.

LL: On one or two occasions we would be out practicing football or baseball or something and when that siren went off the school shut down, practically shut down. I remember going to somebody's house one day and had all my football equipment on trying to drag stuff out. Everybody helped doing everything they could to help save those people's belongings.

EL: I was happy in Diboll. I grew up a happy child in Diboll.

LL: And a lot of us old boys didn't realize how happy we were. But that is why a lot of us came back. Stay away for many years and then come back home. I retired from the military.

JG: From the Air Force?

LL: Yes, from the Air Force. And I went back to that profession for several years and then retired from there and came back home. And I'm sure there will be more later on.

JG: And what parts of the country did you live in?

LL: Alabama, New Mexico, Washington.

JG: Washington State?

LL: No, D.C.

JG: D.C.

LL: A very brief period of time in Colorado.

JG: And this is all while you were in the service?

EL: Germany.

LL: Yes. Well he said in this part of the country.

JG: Well that is good to know too. I just didn't phrase my question good.

LL: I was in Alaska, a year at the North Pole.

JG: So you kinda got around didn't you?

LL: I was home based in Germany. I was in Holland, France, Denmark, and where else? All over.

JG: And Mrs. Ligon when did you leave and why?

EL: I left Diboll in March of 1950.

JG: And what year did you graduate from high school?

EL: No we moved to Lufkin.

JG: Oh your family lived...

EL: But my daddy, my dad was still in Diboll. He couldn't turn the mill a loose. But he would come home, he'd catch the train on Saturday morning, Saturday noon and come to Lufkin and then he would come back Sunday. And therefore I finished high school.

JG: But you were with your mother and what brothers and sisters were still living at home in Lufkin?

EL: Just my one brother Ed, my brother Ed. No he stayed in Diboll with my Dad. And then he left and went in the Army. So it was just me, my mom and my sister, except for the weekend. Until my dad got ill, he taken ill. Then I graduated from Dunbar and then I went to...

JG: And what year? I'm sorry.

EL: 1953, May of '53. And then I went to Texas College in Tyler and I spent a couple of years there and then got married and I went to Los Angeles.

JG: Do you mind telling us who you married?

EL: Garcia, Claude Garcia. His family was from Nigton.

JG: Oh ok.

EL: And then I went and took some courses in IBM and several different things. I went to West LA City and in between having a child every two years for three years, well six years. And that is about it. And of course the children got grown and all of this and then I came back to Lufkin in 19...I forgot when I came back to Lufkin. No, no, no, no, it was in 1978. Cause my health was failing. My sister had asked me to come back 'cause she had four boys and her husband was killed and she said "why don't you come home and we can take care of each other." So I came home and here I am.

JG: Here you are.

EL: That is about it. And of course you know I lost my third brother in February 1992. We called him Ed. And then I lost Walter August 9th. And it's just four of us left.

JG: August 9th of this year?

EL: This year, yes. Of course Herbert, he has had a stroke. I spoke to him yesterday – he is coming along just fine. That is about the size of it.

JG: Well ok. Is there anything that I failed to ask? Or can you think of anything that would be beneficial to, for history's sake.

EL: Well I'll think of a million things when I get home.

LL: Yes after we get home we'll think of things.

JG: Well maybe you could just make a list of some of the things that we haven't talked about and if you'd like we could do this again sometime.

EL: Well we didn't reach our spots where we used to dance.

LL: Oh, you talking about Rogers?

JG: Oh yes, Rogers Café.

EL: Rogers Café and South Side. Like the Bright Spot.

JG: Can you tell me something about Rogers Café?

EL: Oh yes, first it was the skating rink.

JG: And who was that? Who was Rogers?

EL: What was that man's name?

LL: Rogers was an engineer. I don't know much about his education. His wife was the pianist for the Methodist Church.

EL: Jody, I remember her name.

JG: Jody Rogers.

LL: He was a military person with a lot of knowledge, a tremendous amount of knowledge.

EL: First it was the Joe Diamond's. This was right in front of the ballpark. First Joe Diamond had it years ago. Then he moved and Mr. Rogers came and made a two story deal out of it.

JG: But it was a café before it was Joe Diamond's?

EL: Yes it was a café with a skating rink. It was a café when Joe Diamond had it. It was still a café when Mr. Rogers had it. He just added the skating rink in the back. He added it on and the living quarters upstairs. And then there was the Bright Spot, which was caddy-cornered from the H.G. Temple.

JG: Back to the Rogers Café one more time. Just for my understanding, about what time period are you talking about when the skating rink was added?

LL: Uh, late '40's early '50's.

JG: Ok. Did ya'll skate?

EL: They did. I never did learn how to.

JG: You never learned how. You did skate?

LL: Yes sir.

EL: Most of them did, I just didn't like it.

JG: So he had skates or did you have to bring your own?

LL: Oh you could rent skates from him.

JG: You could rent skates from him.

END OF INTERVIEW