

Lee & Pat Allen Ligon
Interview 154b
November 8, 2000 in Lufkin, Texas
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ABSTRACT: In this interview with R.L. Kuykendall, Lee and Pat Ligon reminisce about growing up in Diboll's African American community in the 1930's and 1940's. Lee was raised by his grandparents in Nigton, Lufkin, and Diboll before joining the Air Force after graduating from high school in 1951; he returned to Angelina County in the 1980's. Pat Allen Ligon is the daughter of Southern Pine Lumber Company's foreman Walter Allen. The Ligon's describe growing up in a segregated logging community and going to segregated schools. They mention attending the movies in town, visiting the cafes, and dealing with racial tension. They also discuss constable Jay Boren and law enforcement in the African American section of town. Both Mr. and Mrs. Ligon compare their schooling to that of late 20th century children.

R. L. Kuykendall (hereafter RLK): It's November 8th, I'm visiting with Pat and Lee Ligon this morning and I'm asking them to just relate their early lives, their families, things that went on the area as they were growing up into adulthood. The purpose is to be aware of some of the incidents that happened to us as a racial group and we just want to get these things, not meaning it to be harmful, but I think we need to know something about our background. The next voice you hear will be one of the two, whoever chooses to speak first.

Lee Ligon (hereafter LL): My name is Lee Ligon. I was born October 2, 1931, Trinity County, Nigton, Texas. A country farmed community and things were at that particular time and during the Depression, things were very difficult. We were at a time when there was a great deal of prejudice and discrimination. As a matter of fact one of the first incidents that I can remember is when one black man killed a white man and it kind of upset the balance of everything in this part of Texas. There were manhunts out for him because he ran into the woods to take refuge. He hid in the woods and they used to have, well which used to be referred to as night riders, but they were whites, would saddle their horses in groups and go into the woods looking for them. It was at around that time in 1933 or so that my people, my folks, decided to move away from that part of Trinity County and move into Angelina County at approximately 21 or 22 miles away, possibly a little more than that if you wanted to count the distance from the road down in the woods where we lived on the farm, the river bank. We moved into Lufkin as I say about 1933 or something like that. Went to work for, my folks went to work for a lawyer named E. J. Conn. At the time he was a very prominent, very well known criminal lawyer, lived on the corner of First Street and Conn Avenue. The side street was named after him. He had a big farm south of Diboll at a place called Old Emporia. After almost a year of living here in Lufkin and working for Mr. Conn we moved down on the farm where my grandfather took over as foreman and my mother was a cook, my grandmother was a cook. I failed to mention that my grandparents were raising me. We lived there for

several years and this lawyer had a great deal of property, animals, farm animals because he did a tremendous amount of farming, dairy farming and raising cotton and things of this nature. That is where we lived when I started going to school about '36 but I didn't get to really start that year. I started but I didn't finish because I had an injury. I crushed my fingers making sugar cane and that caused me to lose a year there. Things were rather difficult but fortunately as we were working for one of the richest men in this county we didn't find it to be so difficult at that particular time.

If I may now skip to my educational background, I graduated from high school in 1951. I was a little bit behind in graduating because of, as I mentioned prior, to the injuries to my hand, I had another injury to my hand later on that caused me to miss another year, which delayed me from graduating until 1951. I finished high school at Diboll, Texas, moved to Beaumont-Orange area where my mother lived and went to work in a hospital down there briefly during the Korean conflict. I was classified 1A, went into the military and I continued my education from that point. Four years of college, 21 hours of post graduate work. At this point now I am fully retired, thank God!

RLK: Could you tell me something that may have occurred when you were a small person, a young person some incident that you may have experienced. You mentioned something about you and some young fellow were playing one day.

LL: Yes, we were about 5 years old, me and a little white boy, we were down living on the farm at old Emporia just immediately south of Diboll and it was during harvest time for sugar cane. We use to raise a lot of sugar cane in this area. I guess sometime they still do raise a little bit but anyway we were running around like young kids do, preschoolers, just a year before starting to school and having fun enjoying things. They were grinding cane and when this cane got into this mill after they had gotten electricity in there it would sometimes get clogged up and we would have to climb up the side of the machine and pull those crushed cane out of that thing so it would continue to grind. So, one day...then we would pile that stuff up in a big pile on the side of the mill. And one day we were just playing around, you know, just pulling crushed cane out and running up on the pile and we got a bad odor and so we started to pull out and a human hand fell out and we found a black dead man who had been killed, or murdered rather. Somebody had put him and buried him up under that stuff and well naturally we were quite frightened and we took off and started running to report it to our parents.

RLK: Any results came out of that, can you remember?

LL: Well, the custom was back in those days they didn't let us know. We never did find out what the results were of that. We don't know if they ever caught those people or whatever happened. We never did find out after that.

RLK: Did anybody know the person?

LL: Yes, most everybody because he was a worker on the farm there. Everybody on the farm knew him, everybody in the Lufkin-Diboll area knew him just about because he had been born I think at Nigton. I'm not sure but he had some people over there.

RLK: So there was nothing known in the paper or...

(Mr. Kuykendall test recorder)

LL: He gambled a lot and some of the rumors were floating around that they had been out in the woods gambling with some white people and he was the winner or something, he won the money and they beat him up and killed him. Naturally during those days, this was in the early '30's, a white man kill a black man that is kind of like, you know, somebody shooting a mad dog. Nothing is ever done about it.

RLK: Who is Walter Allen?

LL: Walter Allen was my wife's father. He was the first black foreman and at that time it was Southern Pine Lumber Company. He supervised the mill pond for Southern Pine Lumber Company. He was well known, well known and well respected.

RLK: Can you tell us more about your father?

Pat Ligon (hereafter PL): Oh sure. He was a mill pond foreman. He was born in Marshall, Texas to Kathryn and Joseph Allen. He had one brother and two sisters as far as I can remember. I think it was a step sister somewhere in there, but I don't remember. He worked for Southern Pine Lumber Company until his death. He worked there for 47 years. I think if his health hadn't failed he would have stayed on a little longer, but his health failed and he passed March 5, 1953.

RLK: I know he is your father but can you tell us something outstanding or something good in particular about him as a man rather than just a father?

PL: Well yes, he was...I can say he was a very firm father, he was...

RLK: Firm meaning what?

PL: Well he meant what he said. He would always...I really can't describe my father.

LL: He was somewhat of a (unintelligible).

PL: Yes he was.

LL: He had four boys and two girls and in the very early years, my early years, we used to live right across the street from him and me and my wife's brother used to play together, running up and down those dirt streets. Mr. Allen was...whew golly, you know outside the family I was a little bit afraid of him, a little bit, because when you're a little boy a grown man looks quite large, you know. But, he was a wonderful father. He didn't

give those boys too much leeway. He gave them enough, but he didn't give them too much.

PL: He loved politics, now he loved that.

LL: He was a stickler for education too. He was very, very, you know, that was one of his main things. He believed in it very strongly.

RLK: Do you know anything about his schooling?

PL: No, elementary schooling is about as far as he went.

RLK: About what year?

PL: I really don't know.

LL: Well in my case it was mid-thirties I would guess, '35 or '36 or so because as a matter of fact, see I'm five years older than my wife and I remember when she was born. I used to be around their house quite a bit because she had a bunch of brothers. As I said four boys, you know, and we all tried to...that is where a lot of us who was...at the time I was the only kid in my household and that is where you would go. That is where most of the boys were, you know.

RLK: Let me ask you something. You said you were reared by your grandmother, was there a particular reason? Your mother and father were they there?

LL: Well my mother wasn't there, my father was there. My father was kind of young when I was born and I guess as a senior citizen used to say he was still sowing his wild oats. My grandparents took me when I was three months old and I stayed with them until I would have graduated and went into the Air Force. So, it was I guess you would call it a normal childhood for those times.

RLK: Did you have brothers and sisters or you said you only had one?

LL: I had one sister that was born June 1933 but she was with my mother. We were separated when we were babies.

RLK: Where was your mother?

LL: Well to be perfectly honest with you, I don't know. My grandparents knew but I had no idea where she was, most of the time I didn't know where she was.

RLK: Any brothers?

LL: Well, the next first boy born I was about 17 or 18 years old, it was a half brother, my father's son. All the other children, brothers and sisters were half brothers and sisters. My mother only had two children.

RLK: Do you know anything about them now?

LL: Yes, most of them I do. There is only one that I don't have too much knowledge about. Of course even that one we went to school together but most of my brothers I have, let's see, H. W., Kenneth, Dan, Gerald and David, there is five more boys and three, one, two, three, four girls, nine children in all.

RLK: You told me something about a sister that you knew but didn't know she was your sister.

LL: Yes, that is the one I was referring to when I said I went to school with her but I didn't know she was my sister until about 1955-56 when my daddy kind of pulled me off to the side and told me about it. From that point on I never had much contact with her. I left town and grew up and enlisted in the Air Force and I guess she went on and went to school. I think she is a school teacher.

PL: A barber.

LL: A barber?

PL: Yes.

LL: Well, okay I'm sorry.

RLK: You told me you left Diboll and went to Lufkin.

PL: March 1950, I was in the eleventh grade.

RLK: In 1950 where was he when you left?

LL: I was still in Diboll at that time. I was working at...Southern Pine Lumber Company had a creosote plant. I was working at that creosote plant.

RLK: What I'm trying to do is put the two of you back together. Somebody found somebody or something happened.

PL: Okay, we courted in I guess junior high, just puppy love and then I moved to Lufkin in 1950, he left and went to the service in '52. Okay, that cut all ties and I didn't see him anymore until about say 30 or 35 years. Then a member of my church passed and we had a friend, a common friend, a minister Rev. Tim. I don't know if you knew him but anyway he drove this minister from Houston to Lufkin to the wake that night and that is where I saw him. So, we just talked and he went on back to Houston and at the time I was

just, didn't think nothing of it so, then later on in '85 he came back to Lufkin and that is when I saw him again and in '86 things began to come together again. So, then we got married.

RLK: Okay, I got you back together. Have we missed any kind of incidents that have occurred in the process of going about your business and doing different things locally? Anything that may have occurred that is worth remembering or that you would never forget, whether it happened directly to you or just anything you can remember?

LL: Well during the time that she was, see I left here in the summer of '52. I returned in I think it was November 1984. Incidents between those times because I didn't come home that much so there weren't too many incidents that I can recall in this area, most of the period of time that I can refer to is prior to departure in June of 1952 and after November '84. The rest of it was in the military and I was in some weird places like the North Pole.

RLK: Anything happen that you can think of?

LL: Well there were many things that happened. I was involved in some things in the service, an oil well fire in [unintelligible]. I was involved in a skirmish between the American forces and the Russian forces in 1958 or so up in the Bering Straits during the Korean conflict. Other than that now and then I would get letters from home saying that we had lost this person or that person had passed on or gotten killed or whatever you know, So, I moved around quite a bit in the 23 years that I was in service.

RLK: 23 years, I was about to ask you how long you were in service. What was your responsibility while you were in service? Were you just an airman and from day to day were there any specifics about it?

LL: Well yes, I had a few. To begin with the very early years I was responsible for medical service and medical attention on the flight line for incoming planes and outgoing airplanes. In other words if a plane had radioed in where they had some difficulty on the plane or the landing gear wouldn't come down or smoke in the cockpit or something like that they scrambled the fire department and the ambulances and I was the ambulance that they would send out on plane crashes, a lot of those occurred. On, the military installation fires on post, I drove ambulances for many years. I was in charge of the emergency room, eventually advancing to the stage where I was a department head, midlevel supervision in that respect and finished out my career at that level.

RLK: So we could say that you were a medic?

LL: Yes, when I graduated from my first schooling, which was in Montgomery, Alabama, I was considered as a combat ready medic. Years later as it evolved and the medical field advanced and evolved we realized that my group that went through that schooling was the parent class of what we now refer to as Physician Assistants, or P.A.'s.

RLK: Let me ask you something. In these classes were there very many minorities at the time or just a handful or?

LL: Just a handful. There were several in my class which was 57C and that was just a number denoting the class, you know, but yes, there was several of us in my class. We lost one or two because they couldn't keep up. The majority of the group there were about 80 of us. They put together a class kind of like they would a platoon or what we in the Air Force would call a flight and there were about 80 men in that flight. I think maybe at the beginning of that course there might have been maybe 10 blacks in it and we lost a few along the way because they failed.

RLK: Could I say then that you went into the service in 1952 and you graduated from high school in '52 also?

LL: In '51.

RLK: In 51, the same time I did. But, at any rate there was no time for schooling otherwise? You finished high school and went right on to the Air Force?

LL: There was time; there wasn't money.

RLK: Okay.

LL: It was very difficult. You see when I finished high school we didn't have, we weren't privy to as many scholarships and other means that kids are privileged to now. We didn't get all of that. Things were, as a matter of fact we, for what we had, the resources that were available to us we were very fortunate we got a darn good education for what we had.

RLK: How would you compare it to today even though there are more things available to students how would you compare your education at that time to?

LL: I would say in some respects my generation was better prepared. In other respects we were ill prepared. The teachers that we had, because it was a segregated school system then, the teachers were more sincere about teaching. They cared more about us as school kids and this is my own personal opinion, you know, but I really think that our teachers really cared whether we learned anything or not. My observation, because when they began to desegregate I had my own kids in school, but I don't think the kids coming after us under desegregation got as good a care or concern as they did prior to being, shall we say, set free from segregation in the school system.

RLK: I understand that because some people say today and I firmly believe that students do not care how much you know, all they want to know is how much you care. I think this is what you are saying, you felt very sure at that time teachers really did care by comparison to today.

LL: That is it exactly because all the students were black and all the teachers were black and I think the black teachers cared more about what the black students learned.

RLK: What do you think could have caused that? You just said that you think because both being black, students as well as the teachers, do you think there is some factor that stands out when you have a group of people with the same kind of experiences, similar experiences as compared to one who tends not to, or you believe they do not, having walked a mile in your shoes?

LL: When I think about it and from my advantage point it's kind of like my children as opposed to someone else's children. Naturally if things are critical I'm going to look out for my own kids first. That is number one for me. That is kind of where the whole thing stems from. Black people and those who really care are going to do more for black kids. White people are going to do more for white kids. I mean you know, that is kind of human nature in a matter of speaking. There are, I have to admit there are some white teachers who sincerely care about educating a child period and there are some who just don't give a hoot, the majority of them.

RLK: Pat you have any comments on this area?

PL: No.

RLK: No feelings about it.

PL: No.

LL: You know education system, I found that to be true when I was going to college because after I retired from the military in 1974 and I was finishing off some medical courses and I had to go back and get freshman English, my instructor as I found most English professors are always writing a book and the course requires you purchase this book and when you get in the class they tell you to throw the thing away we are not going to use it. The instructor and I got into a little squabble about that sort of thing and he didn't grade me properly. During the main course, in the middle of the course I would get B's and A's, at the end of the course I got a D or an F. And, I knew that you just don't drop from B's and A's to a D and F in one test period. So, I went to...I challenged the course actually is what I did. I went to Trenton University and took the test and passed it and of course my English professor tried to stop it but it kind of sticks in your mind instances like that because you take you figure that are you going to get a fair shake. Why should you feel any different? Why would people do you that way?

RLK: Pat what can you talk to us about? You had some experiences I know that probably coincides with these, but there are something about being different persons that you experienced some things that were not the same even though you got together rather early?

PL: Well yes, I left Diboll and of course came to Lufkin, then left Lufkin, graduated in 1953, went to Texas College. Things were okay up there. It was an all black college as you know, things were okay. I have no complaints about that part of my education. I stayed there two years.

RLK: What was your major?

PL: Physical education.

RLK: Okay.

PL: Then I left and got married and went to Los Angeles. Went to Los Angeles City College for a year and then the babies started coming and I just never did go back. I worked awhile in the school system out there. Things were okay. I didn't see anything wrong because I'm the type of person I see it but don't see it anyway. So, that is about it with education.

RLK: How did you get back or why did you come back?

PL: Sickness, illness.

RLK: On your part or your family?

PL: My part. I was in California for 23 years and then started having a few heart problems so my sister Shirley came out and we talked about it and I came back to Lufkin so she could...see she had these four boys and her husband had already passed on. I said well it would be easier for me to come home where so she could look after me and that is how I moved back to Lufkin when I finally ran into him again.

RLK: Unfortunately. (laughter)

PL: (laughter) So, other than that things have been okay.

RLK: What is life like now?

PL: Fine, I can answer that!

RLK: You have some ailments.

LL: Well old age, but yes I was injured in the service and of course as you get older some of those injuries will worsen like that especially if they are fractures and things of that nature some of it is just stuff you acquire over a period of time. Actually things are quite well under the circumstances at this time.

PL: Except for my surgeries. I have to have one more. I've had ten already.

RLK: Ten?

PL: Yes.

RLK: In how many years?

PL: Since 1980.

RLK: Is it safe to say, even though you have one more are you getting better or?

PL: Well, I can say I'm getting better but I'm also getting older, so that makes today's thing sound...that makes it sound better but other than that.

RLK: Would you want to mention some of the hardships from time to time that may come into play as a part of the fact there are some things of quality from time to time did it present any hardships?

LL: Well I can tell the condition after I went into the service in 1953 and right now those are ancient times. They didn't know what it was to begin with; eventually it was diagnosed as cluster headaches. These are the worst kind. These are, cluster headaches are either vascular or chemical imbalances that cause unbelievably painful episodes that can last and have last up to four months. It's always on one side or the other.

RLK: Of the head?

LL: Of the head, involving the eyes, nose and the ear. The eye starts running, tearing and running water, the nose gets stuffy and starts dripping and the ear feels like you got cotton stuffed in it on that side, on that painful side. It's a very numbing pain. The pain is so severe that you just go numb with it. I've had one episode in my life that was so severe that I forgot the whole thing. I had amnesia for that period. I drove 40 miles and returned to the doctor but I still have them to this day and thank God they have come up with new medicines and new procedures or treatments and things of that nature to help you deal with those things. Some of the worst days some of the time and she has seen me experience one since we have been together, just one. But, those years of service I've had doctors tell me I was allergic to my wife, I was allergic to the house I lived in, just...see when these things begin, as unusual as they were they were said to be reserved for people with a very high degree of intelligence. This is what the white medical profession believed.

RLK: If something happened they looked to you in terms of what they thought the...

LL: Yes, they threw me in the physco ward because they figured, well a black person cannot have these kinds of things because they are reserved for people with a high degree of intelligence and black people cannot have that high a degree of intelligence. But intelligence has nothing to do with the ailment.

PL: You are right. (laughter)

RLK: That is easily decided isn't it? (laughter)

LL: It's very easily decided. (laughter)

RLK: What else can you tell me about the two of you, just life in general? What are you doing today?

LL: Well we are retired.

PL: We both retired and we both on disability.

RLK: This is a dumb question. Do you find it very difficult to the fact that you are both on disability?

PL: No, it gets boring, it's very boring. You can only fish so much. I like to fish.

RLK: Does it keep you from doing certain things, or eating certain foods or enjoying certain things?

PL: Food, now he is a diabetic and certain things he can't have and certain things I shouldn't have but I eat it anyway so.

LL: Well, the reason for that is because she has blood pressure problems.

PL: I have a stomach thing, diverticulitis, and that's really bad, it's really painful, but I eat and take the medicine and go on.

LL: The main thing is I don't think we let any one thing stop us from doing whatever we want to do. The only thing that has stopped us from doing now we have a fifteen year old grandson here and that will slow you down a little bit.

PL: You forget, like one day I left the house and forgot the child was coming in from school but I turned around and come back to the house.

LL: Other than that fortunately my years in the service have made life a little bit easier, not that much. We still experience, well can you term it racially, racial problems or racial imbalances or things of that nature.

RLK: Any particular reason or just the fact that you were born where you were born? Have you run into anything because of Navy intelligence, somebody has found that to be a problem to them which caused a problem to you?

LL: The only thing that I found along those lines is that when I applied for some jobs after I got out of service I was told that I was over qualified. As a matter of fact I went to

one particular place and they looked at my resume and told me they were out of application forms.

PL: What about the thing at SFA [Stephen F. Austin State University]?

LL: I had forgotten about that. I went to...I was going to go and...I have a Physician's Assistant degree and which is really suppose to be about as close as you can get to a doctor without being one. I was going to go and go on to nursing because I had been to just about every doctor in the city looking for a job.

RLK: In Lufkin?

LL: Yes.

RLK: What kind of things did you experience in Lufkin?

LL: Well, I experienced not getting hired!

RLK: What did they say?

PL: Excuses.

LL: It was excuses, always excuses.

RLK: Like what?

LL: "Well we can't use you right now we don't have any place for you right now." And see when I started there was one physician's assistant in this city. This was in 1984. There was only one physician's assistant in this whole town. Now my specialty was treatment of eyes, ophthalmology, optometry and dispensing, making and dispensing eye glasses. I also went and did surgical procedures like cataracts. My post graduate work is in contact lens technology out of Baylor Medical School in Houston. When I came here I had done it all. I have delivered babies in Alaska. I've treated botulism off a ship in Thule, Greenland you know. I've seen just about everything that you can see in the medical profession.

PL: Get back to SFA.

LL: Getting back to SFA as I say, I decided I was going to go out and get an RN so I took all my credentials to Stephen F. Austin University in Nacogdoches.

RLK: What year was that?

LL: What year was that Pat?

PL: In about '89 or 90.

LL: Somewhere in that vicinity, 1989 and they went over what I had and told me that I was well beyond anything that they had at Stephen F. Austin. So, they couldn't do anything for me. I tried to get in Angelina College and I was turned down there. What I wanted to do at Angelina College I wanted to have my credentials evaluated and be given credit for what I already had. They wouldn't do it.

RLK: What did they say?

LL: I'm trying to remember. They wanted me to take the whole course over. I said no that doesn't make sense. Why should I have to take the whole course all over when I've got Southwest Texas State University in medical technology? I've got Florida A&M. I can't remember the school in Alabama, Air University twice, hey all medical. I've done just about anything in the medical field that you can think to do. Orthopedics, plastic surgery, general surgery, I've done everything in the medical field just general practice, I've done all of that but, they refused to allow me to challenge the course.

RLK: I just thought of something you told me. Didn't you tell me you had a business in San Antonio?

LL: Yes I'm sorry. I had an optical shop and I had worked for...

RLK: In San Antonio?

LL: Yes, in San Antonio and this was after I had retired from the military and I had gone to work for some doctors down there. I knew all of them and practiced together and we decided that we wanted to open up another optical shop so they gave me the shop, 51% of it, and it worked out pretty good until I had to leave San Antonio.

RLK: Health?

LL: Well yes, divorce and other things. I had lost my job and my business through this divorce and everything, sore subjects so, I came back home.

RLK: Anything else that happened in San Antonio other than your business? You were out of the service at that time?

LL: Yes, I was out of the service when I had the business. Nothing of any consequences, San Antonio was a good place to live it is just that circumstances required that I depart at that time.

RLK: Let me back up. You told me something about sharecropper's cabin.

LL: Yes, you are talking about where I was born. I was born in the Nigton community in Trinity, County and it was in a little small one room sharecropper's cabin, log cabin, in the middle of a cotton field on a Friday.

RLK: I knew you had told me something about a sharecropper's cabin.

LL: My mother's people were sharecroppers.

RLK: You were about two and a half years old when you left Nigton, you said.

LL: Yes, two and a half, three years old somewhere in that vicinity.

RLK: Okay, something had happened in Nigton.

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RLK: You told me when we were talking earlier it had to do with the time you left Nigton you were two and a half years old and something concerning some kind of murder or something. Was that the reason for leaving?

LL: Yes, a black man murdered a white man. I don't know what it was about or anything, I was too young at that time, but my aunt because my grandfather was a very strong headed individual he wouldn't back down from anybody. We all thought, my folks all thought he might end up getting killed for bowing up to white folks. You don't talk back to white folks back in those days, so my aunt, my oldest aunt who lived in Galveston at that time came back to east Texas and got a pickup truck and moved us to Lufkin on South First Street.

PL: (unintelligible)

LL: Yes.

RLK: I guess you mentioned something about this earlier, the east side of 59 this guy did some major farming.

LL: That was old man E. J. Conn, yes.

RLK: Okay. (Unintelligible)

LL: Yes, he was a lawyer. He owned massive amounts of property south of Diboll down there and he farmed both sides of the highway. On the west side was a dairy farm, on the east side was regular farming of vegetables, cotton and sugar cane. All kinds, he raised it for market. There was a time when he had 60 to 80 men working for him farming.

RLK: Anything happen between the men at the time because I'm sure it was not just one group, just one racial group working and farming?

LL: No, he had Mexican workers and black, mostly black. He had some white.

RLK: No incidents that you remember?

LL: Not particularly except the incident where this man got killed that we found, that is about it. I already related that. That is about the only thing that I can recall that actually happened. Mr. Conn as I say, from our point of view he was very rich. For one reason he owned all this property, he raised all these things for market. He had a lot of domestic animals, horses, mules.

RLK: This is the story of your life right now?

LL: In a nut shell yes, yes it is.

RLK: Pat?

PL: Well I don't know anything to talk about really except growing up with my brothers and sisters. I had four brothers.

RLK: Anything happen when you moved to Lufkin?

PL: No.

LL: She was a very good basketball, everybody in her family was athletic, her brothers, she and her sisters.

RLK: Who was your family?

PL: Walter Allen family, Walter Allen was my father, Neil Allen was my mother. They came from Alto, a little place called Weches. Then it was six kids born to that union, my oldest brother Walter Allen passed away last year.

LL: Walter Allen, Jr.

PL: Walter Allen, Jr., Herbert Allen of course you know. You didn't know my brother Herbert? Everybody else did.

RLK: The name sounds familiar.

PL: He used to coach at Anahuac. He taught swimming at...he taught everybody how to swim in Lufkin, but anyway, I lost a brother in '92 and now I have one brother left, my sister and myself.

RLK: What do they do, your sister?

PL: She is retired from the pharmacy at Wal-Mart and my brother works for Pioneer, he is a foreman at the Pioneer Trailer Company in Longview, Texas.

RLK: Now that you have...you in particular, how could you compare East Texas to other areas as it relates to blacks?

LL: Well, if I may back up a bit here. I was in Montgomery, Alabama in 1957, anyway when the racial squabbling first began I was down there. I saw Rosa Parks. I saw her personally. I stood very close within 8 foot of her in Montgomery, Alabama. Jesse Jackson on a Easter Sunday night in 1958 there was a massive march on the state capitol in Montgomery and I never seen so many black people in my entire life. I grew up here in this area, Lufkin, Diboll, Angelina County, Trinity County, Hardin County, I had never, as much prejudice as we have here, that we have experienced here socially, I had never seen three K's painted on a wall ten foot tall until I went to Alabama. And this was very bad in my mind, you know. I knew that when we were around here when I was a kid we used to push a lawn mower and we had to go to white folk's back door, knock on the back door and ask if they wanted their lawn mowed for a dollar. Or in May when all of us kids, young teenagers, would go out and gather mayhaws, you had them in syrup buckets, gallon buckets, you had to go to the back door and knock on it. "You want to buy mayhaws, mayhaws for sale," so they could make mayhaw jelly. As a boy ten or twelve years old, the grown men around town and every time I would see one of them standing up talking to a white man he would take his hat off. He always had his hat in his hands when he was talking to white people. It seemed to me it didn't make no difference how old they were either. But, we lived...the railroad tracks divided Diboll from the white part of town. The black part of town was on the west side of the railroad track and the white part of town was on the east side of the railroad track. We had a movie theater in Diboll back in those days and basically we didn't get to go to the movie during the week. We had chores and homework and school to do.

RLK: Could you have gone?

PL: No, I couldn't have.

LL: Probably not so, when we did...

RLK: On Saturday?

PL: Saturday only, Sunday we went to church.

RLK: But in terms of was it the policy of the theater or just that your parents would not let you?

PL: No I really don't think it was open Monday through Thursday. I don't think it was open.

RLK: So, it was really because your parents even if it were open you could not have gone anyway?

PL: No.

LL: They kept us busy. Now that is one thing that those elderly people had more or less in common, an idle mind is the devil's workshop.

RLK: That is true.

LL: They kept us busy.

PL: All the time.

LL: We stayed busy because about nine o'clock or so we were tired and we were ready to settle in because we worked. But, on Saturday for about ten or fifteen cents we could go down to the theater and go upstairs in the balcony and watch those serials like the Lone Ranger and Scarlett Horseman, all those different movies, serials they showed on Saturday. That is about the only time you got to go.

RLK: Did you ever have any racial problems at the movie?

PL: I didn't.

LL: Not really, not really.

PL: The boys were more...

LL: Yes, you know boys, we would go out the emergency exit and set off the alarm or whatever they used for an alarm, you know, but sometimes we would throw popcorn over the balcony downstairs and things of that nature.

RLK: Another words if you stayed in your place everything was fine, whatever your place was.

LL: If you stayed in your place you were alright. We had...growing up down there we had an old constable down there named Mr. Green, great big fat dude.

RLK: He was black?

PL: No!

LL: No, no, he was white. He kind of had...I guess every town, every little sawmill...they had a many little sawmill towns scattered throughout this part of the country, sawmill camps and so on and, Temple had a lot of them, yet every one of them they had somebody who bootlegged. Old man Green would let you bootleg if you paid him kickback but every now and then he had to come in and raid just to make it look right. All the people would know but us and then they brought in this one called Jay Boren. They brought him in...

RLK: When you say they who is they?

LL: They hired him, Temple, as a constable and he had a big old white stallion and that sucker was huge. It was sixteen hands or better.

RLK: No car?

LL: Well he had a car but he rode this big white horse and he had this big cowboy...he portrayed the movie version of the Texas Ranger.

RLK: Yes.

LL: His reputation was that he would kill a 'nigger' and he did. Yes, he would whoop a nigger in a minute. They brought him in because of his reputation.

PL: He was an ex Texas Ranger right?

LL: Well so they said. We never knew that to be a fact but it was said that he was an ex Texas Ranger, but I mean man; I mean Jay Boren was tough.

RLK: You think he was brought in to corral everybody in Diboll?

LL: To corral the blacks, to corral the blacks. We had a little place down there a little café called Southside and on the weekend that is where all the adults go.

PL: We had Rodgers too.

LL: The kids we had Rodgers Café. It was a two story building and Mr. Rodgers had built it. Mr. Rodgers was black by the way, and Mr. Rodgers had built a skating rink in it at one time and there was a place where the kids could play the jukebox for a nickel, dance, skating, buy soda waters and a hamburger or something for like a quarter and nickel ice cream.

PL: And coke.

LL: And coke. (laughter)

RLK: That was your social life.

LL: That was the social life in the sawmill town in Diboll. Now the adults had Southside and man they used to have some dances up there on the weekend. It seemed like they would have so much fun. We weren't allowed up there too much. We would ease around sometime and peek in the window.

RLK: Any things followed that because sometime in settings like that you can find the wrong people.

PL: Oh all the time!

LL: Oh they had fights all the time and every once in a blue moon somebody might get cut, you know, when they was fighting, but most of the time somebody was always bootlegging and they would have their little drinks and you know. I can remember one incident where one person got killed when I was about 16 years old. It happened on the nineteenth of June.

RLK: That is what I was going to ask you, what was the nineteenth of June like for you? Talk about that, both of you.

LL: In those years the nineteenth of June was a big deal. They would take a twenty dollar bill and tack it to the top of that pole and then they would grease that pole and turn us kids loose and see who could go get that twenty dollar bill. Then they had the grease the pig contest, you had to go catch that pig. But, normally the nineteenth of June began a day before. All the men in town, all the leaders of the community they would go out and they would dig a big hole in the ground and then they would get the wood and build a fire and they would barbeque. They would start Friday night like, you know...

PL: The day before the nineteenth of June.

LL: Yes, the day before the nineteenth of June and they would barbecue all night long.

PL: I don't eat goat, I had enough goat. I don't eat it.

LL: I guess at each house they would do the same thing, barbecue at their house. We didn't have barbecue pits in those days like we got now. Some of these guys got fancy barbecue pits on wheels. We had to dig a hole in the ground, a big old trench in the ground and we would put this rebar kind of stuff over it, you know, make a screen and they would spend, they would barbecue beef, pork, goat, chickens, deer.

PL: Excuse me do you know who did the barbecuing? You can't remember can you? Joe Phillips, Joe Carr...

LL: Yes, I can remember Joe Phillips, Joe Carr.

PL: They finally did get a barbecue pit. Do you remember when they used to pull them? They got those long barbecue pits, the nineteenth of June that was later on.

LL: That was later on.

RLK: Did people just contribute their meats themselves?

PL: Mr. Temple, not Arthur but H. G. Temple.

RLK: A brother?

PL: They were cousins I think.

LL: But he was chairman down there during the '40's.

PL: During our time.

LL: During our time in our growing up time in the '40's.

RLK: This was just the nineteenth of June just during the '40's.

PL: Yes, late '40's.

LL: During the '40's and I mean it was a big thing.

PL: Oh yes, everybody looked forward to the nineteenth of June.

LL: Oh yes, you know the strange thing about it? The white people looked forward to it too.

PL: Yes, because they were over there too enjoying the barbecue.

LL: Yes, they would come over and give speeches and we had a baseball park in Diboll. They used to go out there and the company would donate the lumber and fix up a big old dance stand, you know, music and everything. We had a rodeo. We had a baseball team in Diboll.

PL: I have pictures of all that.

LL: And, everybody would go to the baseball park and we would have the rodeo one part of the day then some part of the day they would have the baseball. We would have baseball teams come from Shreveport, Houston, all around.

PL: They played baseball every Sunday during the summer.

RLK: You mentioned the '40's and you were old enough to ask somebody, maybe she was, how did the war affect...? Do you know of anything because I know some guys went into service possibly?

PL: My oldest brother walked out a junior and went to World War II.

LL: It raised the standard of living for us. It pulled a lot of people together. Prior to World War II we had a tremendous amount of, shall I say young black men, not

necessarily just young black, but black men period who were out of work, along came the WPA which put some to work. The three C's put a lot of people to work. We had three c [Civilian Conservation Corps] camps scattered around this county and I don't know whether it was fortunate or unfortunate but the Three C people ended up being pulled into military service. A lot of them got into the army through the Three Cs. It improved our standard of living because it meant work and pay. The pay wasn't all that great. It wasn't that great. My first job for me was at nine years old and I worked at a pressing shop for a white man who owned a pressing shop down there, Mr. Smith, cleaning clothes and I think if I remember correctly Mr. Smith paid me maybe fifty cents an hour. And every summer we found the company down there they set up a situation where all the teenage boys, you put them to work cutting weeds around town just to keep them busy and keep them out of devilment so to speak. They paid them but I think you had to be twelve or thirteen years old before you could go to work on that crew. We went out early in the morning and cut the weeds all around Diboll, all around the black part of town. We kept them all cut down in the summer and it also gave us a little money. A little show fare and a little money to show off in front of the girls, you know. We had a little jingle in our own pockets. It was I guess we had it fairly good.

PL: I did because my dad and Mr. Henry Temple were real good friends. As a matter of fact when Mr. Temple came to Diboll my dad came with him from up around Marshall or up in that area somewhere I really don't remember. I was too small. And, that is why they named the Diboll Park in the black neighborhood was named for my father in 1958.

LL: Walter Allen Park.

PL: Walter Allen Park. Your wife is also in that picture.

RLK: Why?

PL: It was nineteenth of June day.

RLK: Well tell me about that.

PL: I don't know I wasn't there but anyway it is in that book, where they picked the queens.

RLK: Okay so what you were saying is there were many things other than the barbecue that went on.

LL: Oh yes.

PL: But see this is after, way after we had moved, left.

LL: Not all of it. Some of it I did, but not all of it. I don't know when they started Diboll Day.

PL: I don't remember.

LL: We were gone, but we had Easter Sunday...

PL: I remember when Oscar and my dad was there with Arthur Temple.

LL: Easter Sunday was a big day for us on our side of town. Christmas was a big day and the nineteenth of June was a big day.

RLK: What kind of things happened?

LL: On Easter Sunday they used to have a Easter parade down in Diboll that would knock your eyeballs out. Everybody in town had to have on something new. Back in the early '40's the Easter parade would start right after church and most of the people went to church. Easter Sunday everybody went to church on Easter Sunday and as soon after church those people who came out those ladies had on their spring dresses and they had their parasols. It was beautiful for that period of time it was amazing. I used to live to see that.

PL: I had a good childhood growing up, very good. We didn't have much but what we had we enjoyed it. My dad and my mom, my mom used to sew a lot and she would sew late nights. My brother is the oldest so Walter had a job and he left Diboll and went to Prairie View in 1944, then from Prairie View he went to Oakland, California and that is where he stayed x amount of years and then Herbert was in the Korean War and taught at Anahuac and several different places, Diboll. The other brothers lived in California so I had it pretty good because I had brothers to contribute to my upbringing, especially Herbert because he was more like my dad.

RLK: You say he went to Prairie View how did that happen? What I'm speaking of times were not the easiest.

PL: I really couldn't tell you because he was the oldest but all I know is he went to Prairie View. It was something like...

LL: I might be able to add a little something to that since I was just a tad older than she is. If I can depend on what I heard or my memory serves me right I think Mr. Allen talked to Mr. Temple. He had six kids and he wanted to be as well educated as possible and Mr. Temple made it possible for him to send Walter to Prairie View. I really think that is really how it, you know, I can't swear to this but I think I remember hearing something to this effect. Mr. Charlie had a special...he would kind of do extra things for them.

RLK: It sounds like Mr. Temple played a big part.

LL: Mr. Temple played a major part.

PL: Mr. H. G. Temple.

LL: Yes sir, he did. The concept was from our point of view Mr. Temple owned every nail, every splinter, every rock, every person that worked for him that come from Southern Pine Lumber Company at that time. We had a commissary down there and the building was...

PL: It's still standing.

LL: Yes, it's still standing right next to the railroad track. It had the post office on one...starting with the post office on one end it was a two story building. Up over the post office was a doctor's office, this is way back there.

RLK: How far back?

LL: Early '40's and even before. The first doctor I remember in Diboll was J. C. Clements. He graduated from medical school and came to Diboll. The doctor's office was upstairs over the post office and God knows what else. The only time I ever went up there was to the doctor's office so I don't know what else was up there. We had a department store.

RLK: A doctor's office you could walk in?

LL: Yes, you would go up stairs.

RLK: You would just walk in?

LL: You just walked in.

RLK: No special place?

LL: No you just walk right in.

PL: I don't remember that scene do you?

LL: You didn't have to make any appointments.

RLK: But, you could just sit where you wanted to sit?

LL: Well normally we didn't get chairs to sit because they would just take us on to the back somewhere.

PL: I don't even remember having to take a seat like you do now.

LL: Oh no.

RLK: It was segregated is why you went to the back.

LL: Yes, and we had the department store where you could buy clothing.

PL: Mrs. Farrington.

LL: Mrs. Farrington?

PL: Fannie Farrington.

LL: Then we had on one end was a meat market.

PL: Then the ice house.

LL: Then the ice house. Most of the people in Diboll didn't have electricity in my first memory. We used lamps then they brought in electricity. I was raised to begin with wood stoves and wood heaters. The first electric refrigerator that ever was in the house that I lived in I bought it after I went into the service.

PL: He had to order it.

RLK: Did you have an ice man that came around?

LL: We had an ice man.

PL: As far as I can remember we had an electric refrigerator, electric sewing machine, a Victrola, big radios we just had a little bit more.

LL: She must have had a little bit more money being the foreman than the average worker, the laborer. But, for my part at my house we when we got electricity we just had lights. We just had a cord hanging from the ceiling and you just pull the string. We finally...we finally got one of those washing machines that sat on the back porch, it had a lid on it but you could take it off and then they had a ringer where you had to turn it with your hand and squeeze the water out of it. I would get a water hose and put in that tank. Before that we had a wash pot out in the backyard.

PL: Don't forget the old outhouse.

LL: On the old bench we had three tubs where she did her washing and boil the clothes in the pot.

PL: I use to hate that when it was cold weather it was rough.

LL: We had the outhouse, it used to get cold. When I was a kid man I'd sit in my house at seven or eight o'clock at night and I would hear those pine trees bursting in the woods

going off like a stick of dynamite. It would be freezing. I've seen ice on the ground almost two inches thick just a solid sheet of ice. It used to get cold around here now.

RLK: Do you know of a situation that occurred, I'd like to know if it was only Lufkin or in the county since it had to do with Temple it had to do with wood, in 1943 or '44 there were German prisoners?

LL: Oh yes!

RLK: Can you say anything about that? Do you remember anything?

LL: I can remember that the prison camp was between Lufkin and Diboll and as I remember it was on the west side of the highway as I remember it. It doesn't necessarily have to be right.

RLK: Is it there now in that area?

LL: I think, I think it was somewhere in the vicinity of Days Inn, where Day's Inn is now because that was all wooded area back in those days. I don't know one of them supposedly escaped one time and it was a big uproar about that. He wasn't going nowhere you know, he is in the United States in Texas. Where is he going to go except catch a train and go to Houston or go north toward Nacogdoches? But, they found him downtown in one of the restaurants somewhere getting a sandwich or something. Yes, we had German prisoners here. I remember the troop trains that used to come through here man. That was a big thing. Oh man, I remember seeing my first train.

PL: Did it scare you?

LL: Did it ever!

PL: It didn't scare me because my dad worked around trains.

LL: Well over there where you were you saw trains all the time.

PL: I was around trains every day.

RLK: Were there any things about Germans that?

LL: I never did get that close to them. We weren't allowed to even talk to Germans, you know, there were no black guards, nobody black worked around the prison camp. They were afraid that the Germans would make us aware of how oppressed we were so, we weren't allowed around them.

RLK: Did you wonder why they were here of all places?

LL: I guess maybe I did but I soon released that thought because it was the kind of thing that wouldn't do me any good to wonder about it. So, hey don't waste time thinking about it.

RLK: Prison had to be someplace huh?

LL: Yes, that was the white folks doing so whatever the white folks decided to do that is what was going to happen. That was kind of the mentality that was the way it was. If the white man decided he was going to take a bigger house in town there wasn't anything black folks could do about it he was going to do it anyhow.

RLK: Were there any whites in particular who played the part that you just described of if this is what they wanted this is going to be it? Any leader who you think of?

LL: For us teenagers, younger folks and some younger adults, that the biggest authority figure we saw or we knew was the law and the reason for that was anytime quote "a nigger" unquote, got out of hand that is who the white folks called, they called the high sheriff. "Get that nigger back in line." I mean that was it, you know. Anytime if you had anything smart to say to any white man the next thing you know up walked the sheriff, the police, whatever.

RLK: Who was the police?

PL: The constable.

LL: "There come Mr. Boren."

RLK: I have learned since I've been here that Mr. Temple has (unintelligible).

PL: Yes.

RLK: Do you know of any incident where he may have been involved with some of this trouble?

LL: I can't specifically point to any figure, incidents yes. Whenever for example if there was ever a person that by any means that Mr. Temple couldn't control him...the killing on the nineteenth of June, Shrinker killed...what is his name?

PL: Humpty

LL: Humpty killed Shrinker rather.

PL: Didn't (unintelligible)?

LL: Indirectly he did because see the point of it was even the whites, foremen and other authority, nobody did anything without consulting Mr. Temple. "Well Mr. Temple what

should we do about them niggers killing each other over there?” “Oh just a nigger killing a nigger just run the other one out of town and tell him not to ever come back.” Whatever Mr. Temple decided and whatever they did you can bet your hat and bottom that Mr. Temple told them what to do. Whenever one of Mr. Temple’s workers got drunk on the weekend and got put in jail he had to be let out before Monday morning or sometime Sunday night that door swung open “that is Mr. Temple’s nigger, he has to be at work first thing Monday morning.”

RLK: Just like the movies huh?

LL: Just like the movies. Now, we had...

RLK: How did y’all let it affect you, each one of you?

PL: I was real small it didn’t bother me one way or the other.

LL: Well, at that time it didn’t bother me either for one simple reason that later on I gave it some thought and the reason it didn’t bother me was that was the way of life. That is the way it was. Boys were raised a little bit different than girls because boys were subject to get into more trouble. Young men were more subject to say something, you know, to a white man that would get him into trouble. The boys were, primarily the boys were taught to keep their mouth shut, stay in your place, do your job, mind your manners.

RLK: What about the relationships, black man-white woman? And incidents?

LL: No, forget it!

RLK: No I mean any incidents of where someone may have said something?

LL: I can relate you one when I was thirteen or fourteen years old whatever the time was. It was said that one of the teenage boys had whistled at one of the white girls. Jay Boren got in his car...

RLK: Who?

PL: Jay Boren, the constable of Diboll.

LL: ...he came over to the black part of town and came over to the Brightspot, where the kids went, you know, and every boy he could find he snatched them in that car to question them. “Boy did you whistle at that white gal?” “No sir Mr. Boren I sure didn’t.” And it went that way all night long. My parents sent me down to the place to get some sodas and I didn’t even know what had happened and he snatched me off in his car. I got home I got skinned alive for not getting back on time.

RLK: Did you tell your pappy?

PL: It didn't make no difference.

LL: I told them what happened, but no it didn't make no difference. I told them what happened and then you know, it really kind of hit the fan then because my grandfather was kind of considered under those circumstances kind of considered crazy. He was a little short man, barrel chested, looked kind of like a Mexican. He sent for Jay Boren and the next day or two Jay Boren came riding up on his horse and my grandfather was standing on the front porch with his shotgun and he told Jay Boren don't ever do that again. If my boy does something you come tell me. Jay Boren told him "okay Walt" and wheeled that big white horse around and went on back to the white part of town.

RLK: This is a dumb question but were you fearful?

LL: Yes, I was. I was scared.

PL: (unintelligible)

RLK: Thank god.

LL: He pulled in every kid in town and questioned them and you know some of that stuff is still ricocheting around now. A boy I grew up with jumped me here not too long ago "you the one told Jay Boren I whistled at that gal."

RLK: This just happened recently?

LL: Yes, about two years ago.

RLK: But the incident occurred years ago.

LL: The incident occurred when we were thirteen or fourteen years old and I'm 69 now.

RLK: Was he joking?

LL: No he wasn't joking. No he wasn't joking, he was just silly, you know, so I had no idea because I hadn't been allowed out of the house that day.

RLK: Did they find anybody?

LL: If they did, when we have our alumni reunion we still talk about that incident. It is still being talked, nobody ever really found out who did it or if it actually happened.

RLK: Anybody ever know who the girl was?

LL: No, I didn't, at least I didn't. It and it's true as she said it really didn't happen at all.

RLK: It's on. (scrambling with the tape)

LL: She don't talk much anyway she said.

PL: Unless it's at a football game. (laughter)

LL: Well I was...let's see what was I talking about?

RLK: The incident with the boys.

LL: Oh yes, the whistling incident. There were probably...I started to relate about the law in Nacogdoches. What was his name?

PL: McBride was Lufkin's.

LL: Roebuck, Roebuck in Nacogdoches. I remember when we went up there one time to play basketball and this was in the middle of the '40's during the zoot suit period. The thing was everybody was wearing drapes as they called them, they were big at the bottom and to make a long story short as we were getting on the bus or getting off the bus Roebuck was standing there with a Texas jack and he took his knife and rip your pants right at the seams, cut them open. Black folks and kids wearing drapes, big bottom pants, that was the style. You didn't wear those in Nacogdoches in Roebucks town. I was one of them he cut the leg of my pants open.

RLK: Do you remember how you reacted?

LL: React? You stood there and let him do it. They used to tell stories about Roebuck. Roebuck had an electric blackjack, all he had to do was lay it on your head and press the button. All that kind of stuff, but he was known just as sure as the sunshine he would whoop a black man in a minute. If you spit on the sidewalk and Roebuck saw you, you had a bad day. You got a beating! Roebuck hasn't been dead that long.

PL: He died about two years ago I think.

RLK: I think Roebuck was still here when I came here in '69.

PL: He was still around.

LL: You talk about hating black folks – that sucker hated black folks. I mean he was worse than Jay Boren, you know, but if he arrested any black person by the time that black person got to jail he was all swollen and bruised and bleeding. I don't care what it was for. But Roebuck, all over this part of Texas, Roebuck had a reputation.

RLK: Talking about in Lufkin?

PL: I don't know much about Lufkin. I don't know about that.

LL: As far as I know Lufkin was not quite that bad unless it was prior to my period of time. There were other incidents that right between here and Diboll there is a place down there on the old Diboll highway called Hoshall. I have read that is where they used to do the hangings at Hoshall.

RLK: Hoshall?

LL: Yes.

PL: Hoshall is still there.

LL: Do you know where Toran lives? If you go straight down that road where it kind of runs into the south end of that going past Toran's south, well anyway going south past Toran's house when you get to the end of that road where it dead ends to that cross street there is some great big old trees, that is where it is said they used to do all the hangings. That is the hanging tree down there.

RLK: Do you know of anyone that was ever hanged?

LL: No, I don't really. I read about some instances where some people got hung down there, two or three times. As a matter of fact, there is something I read somewhere where they burned a man alive down there.

RLK: They meaning policeman?

LL: White folks in general. There were several instances...there is some older people here in Lufkin that could give you incidents of things that happened here. There was supposed to have been a joint somewhere in the vicinity of Angelina Hotel where all the truck folks coming in and going in and buy a shot of white lightning, boot leg.

END OF TAPE ONE SIDE TWO
END OF INTERVIEW