

BETTIE KENNEDY

Interview 170b

September 12 and 24, 2001, at 1411 Hall, Lufkin, Texas

R. L. Kuykendall, Interviewer

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ABSTRACT: In this several day interview with R.L. Kuykendall, Rev. Bettie Kennedy reminisces about growing up as an African American girl in Lufkin, TX. She tells about her ancestors – former slaves who lived throughout East Texas and her father, Will Engram, a house builder and a leader in Lufkin’s African American community. She talks about growing up in a diverse neighborhood, church, her memories of racism within the community, moving to California for a year, and the effect of World War II. Rev. Kennedy talks about segregation, education, racism, and the problems and challenges to the African American community in East Texas. She also recites some of her original poetry.

Bettie Kennedy (hereafter BK): Okay, we are at 1411 Hall. Today is September 12, 2001, Lufkin, Texas.

R. L. Kuykendall (hereafter RLK): Good morning, my name is R. L. Kuykendall. I’m interviewing Reverend Bettie Kennedy this morning. We are putting this effort together for historical reasons and Mrs. Rev. Kennedy has a lot of information I think that most of us or the world would like to hear. The next voice will be that of Mrs. Kennedy, Rev. Kennedy.

BK: I, Bettie Kennedy, was adopted at eighteen months old and brought to Lufkin, Texas to live with my uncle who became my father and my aunt who became my mother, Will Engram and Evie Jones Engram. At the age of eighteen months of being adopted I lived in a home that was rich with love and many experiences that I had as a child growing up. I lived at 402 Chestnut and the history of their lives is one to be recorded. I was born May 19, 1931 and I was adopted in 1934. Will Engram was a son of a slave who came to Lufkin in 1896. He was about sixteen years of age and he came to live with his Uncle Dave who was a slave that was brought from Georgia to Texas. Dave and Starlin were separated from their family in Georgia in 1859. The Birdwell Ingram who was the owner of a plantation in Georgia bought property, three hundred improved acres up in Smith County and had two hundred eighteen unimproved acres. Their son Benjamin, who had been the overseer of the plantation there in Smith County, decided in 1861 that he would then go out on his own and he moved about eight miles from Starville. The Island Creek Baptist Church in Hancock County was where a hundred wagons had gathered on the move for Texas. The train of wagons consisted of large wagons in which the furniture and trunks and heavy pieces were carried but lighter wagons for smaller items, but a host of field hands and these were where my two relatives, Starlin and Dave, were among the field hands with their children. They traveled in oxen driven wagons and had husk corn was the basic food they had to eat. The masters were dressed in plain homespun clothing, but the slaves were wrapped in blankets or other cloth, gunny sacks and suffered the

bitterness of cold as they traveled aimlessly to Texas. They traveled about like the oxen's that pulled the heavy loads, hopelessly and thoughtlessly and indifferent they moved. Dave Ingram moved to Lufkin and Will came here and I came later years in 1931 as a young child here to live with them. Will was an entrepreneur in this area and was well loved by members of his family. I have found that six members of his family were named for him. Willie C. Ingram of Galveston, Texas; Willie Earl Waters of Tyler, Texas; Willie Mae Ingram of Stamps, Arkansas; and Willie Jones of Crockett, Texas; and Willie, Willette Ann Louis my daughter in Katy, Texas were named for Will Ingram. He was a member of the CME [Colored Methodist Episcopal] Church and was chairman of the Steward Board and served as director and a teacher of the Sunday school and the Epworth League.

I grew up in the Long Chapel CME Church and was very active in many of the activities for youth of the church. His wife, Evie Bell Jones, was a young teacher, second grade teacher in Crockett, Texas and Will and Evie met at a dance in Crockett and he moved her to Lufkin. They married in 1916. They lived at 408 Chestnut in a small house while Mr. Will built a larger house that I remember as a child in growing up. Mrs. Evie Jones Engram came from a family of four sisters and four brothers. They owned sixty acres of land there in Crockett and were farmers and very prosperous in the community. Evie Bell Jones Engram went to Mary Allen [Mary Allen Seminary, a college for black girls in Crockett, TX, 1886-1978] in Crockett, Texas and also Prairie View A&M College, but after marrying Mr. Will Engram and moving to Lufkin he did not wish for her to work outside of the house. So, she sat up in the house they lived in when they moved to 402 Chestnut, the property at 408 Chestnut became then a beauty shop. It was one of the first beauty shops with a washroom and a sitting room and a room where they would dry and roll the hair. Mr. Will became, worked as a hauler of iron for the Lufkin Foundry and later went into the grocery business. He had the first grocery store at 408 Chestnut. Mr. Will was real estate broker. He bought property and sold property. He built houses. He had rent houses.

As a child I sold the food from the garden. I had a little pan in which the pan would contain whatever I had picked that morning, beans or peas or greens or squash, whatever from the garden and this pan would be a nickel or a dimes worth as I went into the community to deliver the goods from the garden. I carried eggs to the neighborhood, throughout the neighborhood to sell in the 1930's. Then later the property at 408 Chestnut was converted into apartments and the house in the rear of the property was converted to apartments and there was a washroom in which my mother later took in washing. She took washings from families in the community. She washed twenty loads of clothes every week, kept them separated. She hired two people to work for her, L. V. Euron and Henny Collins and they worked for her. Later years after my father had become ill and passed away she gave up the laundry business and became a maid for Dr. T. A. Taylor who was an outstanding doctor in this area.

There were many houses that my father had built in Lufkin and there were 125 houses that I have been able to locate. Mr. Sam Hyman was the financier of the house and also Mr. Ben Taylor. Also, my father built houses for Mr. Hyman as Mr. Hyman needed him

to build houses. Mr. P. A. Simond was the financier of his own houses that my father built, the six rent houses and the clinic. The clinic is still standing, Dr. Packard's clinic. He hired six persons to work for him which was very unique. There were Smitty Cole, Henry Cole, Marvin Jackson, Robert Jackson, Montana Lilly and U. S. Smith. U. S. Smith was hired in the later years of my father when he was ill and could not complete two houses that he had built or had started to build in 1946, the few months before he became critically ill with cancer. He worked for Mr. Homer Garrison, Mr. Pitser Garrison's brother, Henry Thompson and a long list of persons that he built houses for. He built houses for people who owned land, but then he built and worked in quarters. Many of the blacks of the area lived in quarters and he built the houses in Joe's quarters and Walker's quarters and Nesbitt quarters, Jack Stroud quarters and many of the quarters of our areas.

Mr. Will as remembered by Earnest McGowan, Mr. McGowan is a city councilman retired in Houston, Texas also served on the school board there and grew up and was born in one of the rent houses that Mr. Will and Evie Engram owned.

As recorded by Earnest McGowan: Mr. Will Engram was a master of mathematics with his work in geometry and algebra and did not know it with a third grade education. He drew plans of buildings that he was to build. Daddy Will as I called him, worked long on figuring out the materials to be used in the house. He did the electricity, the plumbing and everything that was to be done for the house. He was excellent in figuring the dimensions down to six and seven grains of sawdust.

Continuing with his story: He loved children and he worked in the Sunday school with the Epworth League. He had no children. His wife had conceived one son and they lost that son at five months. They adopted baby Ruth at the age of eighteen months. He built our house on Adam's Street and we lived in Mr. Will's rent house while he built our house. I was five years old when we moved on Adam Street. But, where Mr. Will lived we were well integrated. There were Jewish families, Italians, Dutch, and there were white families. They were all a part of our neighborhood. He built many houses for people who owned their property and many Negroes who lived in the quarters and later bought property. He was a first; he was the first to stand for equal citizenship in our community. He owned the first car. He owned the first phone and the number was 794. He had the first indoor toilet. Daddy Will was a well dressed man and worked in striped overalls. He wore stripped overalls that were well ironed and starched. He changed them every day and he wore the white ones when he painted houses. He was well respected by the bankers of our community. He had a bank account in which he could get money as need be for the jobs that he was rendering. He purchased materials from Angelina Lumber Company, Taylor Hardware, Abney & Medford, Sam Hyman. This was in 1928 through 1935, these years Mr. Will was doing the purchasing. Mr. Will contracted jobs from anyone that needed to have a home built. He did all the work and finished and turned over the key to the owner.

BK: Mr. Will spelled his name E-n-g-r-a-m while the rest of the family spelled it I-n-g-r-a-m and it came about the change was his mail would always be delivered to a white

family a few blocks away from where he lived and he was tired of going to get his mail so he decided that he would change his name to E-n-g-r-a-m. So, my name is spelled with the E-n-g-r-a-m and our cousin of Galveston, Willie C. Engram spelled his with E-n-g-r-a-m, but all of our family members in Smith County and other places in Texas and elsewhere spell it with an I-n-g-r-a-m. When Mr. Will and Mrs. Evie adopted me, Bettie Ruth Kennedy, they took Annie Mae Ingram along with me that she would help to take care of me. In that adoption Annie Mae Ingram was really my aunt and was a young girl, maybe 14, at the time they adopted me at eighteen months. I was named Baby Ruth Engram. I was named for the candy bar. It is said that my mother Willa Mae Ingram every time she got a nickel she would go and buy a candy bar, a baby ruth. She liked that candy and when I was born she named me Baby Ruth and my name was changed when I was adopted to Bettie Ruth. Smitty Cole who worked for my father with his brother Henry building houses, Henry was left handed and Squirrel, or Henry, was right handed so my daddy would cut the boards along with Marvin Jackson would cut the boards and Smitty would work on the left end of the house and Henry would work on the right end of the house and they would finish houses very quickly while Mr. Will would cut angles for the boards. Mr. Will cooked breakfast every morning. During the weekday we had corn cakes. It was like a hot cake but it was made out of meal and on Sunday's we had what you call the flapjack. The evening meal would consist of a hoe cake which was a large biscuit which was cooked on top of the stove. These meals would be eaten with butter and syrup. Mr. Will Engram would build the bedrooms of the home on the south side of the house in order that the rooms would be cool in the summer. We didn't have fans or air conditioning in those days so he used a strategy of building the bedrooms on the south side of the house so the rooms would be cool.

In studying about Mr. Will Engram and his family it has brought an emotional moment to my life as I go from study to study to find out about them. Mr. Will's father always said we came from Africa to Jamaica, from Jamaica to Georgia, from Georgia to Texas and that is a part of a story. I wrote the saying that "from the shores of Africa, to the Island of Jamaica, to the auction block of Georgia, to the piney hills of East Texas, to freedom, to voting, to education, to moving all over this great country to making a difference to being somebody and may the dreams and hopes of my heritage live forever."

It is said that in Georgia it was in Hancock County, and it's where the wagons had gathered to come to Texas, the census of 1870 show that Starlin Ingram was 57 years old, was a male, he was a field laborer and from Georgia. His wife Mary was 30 years old and came from Georgia. The three children that I remember, Mary, Annie, Addie and Lillie, the four of them, came from Georgia but the other children were born in Texas. That makes true the travel of that migration to Texas. Mrs. Evie Bell Engram who was a second grade teacher and it is most interesting that we have a certificate where she taught in 1914 in Crockett, Texas but upon marrying Mr. Will in 1916 he did not wish for her to teach anymore. I am the granddaughter of Will Engram's brother George. George Ingram was one of the brothers, the third brother and Willa Mae and Sara were his two children along with Goldie and Willa Mae was my mother.

I love to recall the property at 402 Chestnut, the house at 408 Chestnut where they lived while the big house was being built at 402. But, the most interesting part was Will Engram had made it convenient for Mrs. Evie Engram to live at home and work at home and make a living at home. So, he built her a washroom and the washroom had a wash pot right outside the door that was elevated on a drum. Inside the wash room area there was a ringer type washing machine with three tubs. The first tub clear water, the second tub the bluing, the last tub was the ringing of the clothes. The rub board tubs for you to rub the clothes and if the weather was bad there was a drying area with a heater in it and that is where the clothes were hung in bad weather. The garage where Mr. Will would keep his truck at night, there was a storage of lumber and there was a workshop where he made the cabinets and everything that would go into the house that he was building. There was a play area that was set aside for me. There was always a large wash pot and a small wash pot and mother made the soap, the lye soap that she used for the rub board. The house at 402 Chestnut was a wonderful place to be. Mother would take in roomers and make it possible for those who had come to the community of Lufkin to live for them to have a space. To prove that this is a receipt of the tax in 1924 in which they paid the taxes. This is a tax receipt for the property at 402 Chestnut. I was very active in the elementary grades and sang in the little choir. I loved school very much. I enjoyed all about school. Later years the house that had been the washroom mother added two rooms to it and it became a dwelling house.

RLK: When?

BK: This was in about 1940. The outside house, this house is still standing at 402 Chestnut. Mother was well known in the community and well loved by many people of the community. Mrs. Sadie Hackney Young worked as a clerk in the grocery store – the grocery store at 408 Chestnut and she was a hired person to work there. Mr. Will stood 6 feet 3 inches tall and was a very businesslike man. I never saw him laugh too much. His niece, the oldest granddaughter of his father, grew up with him very much like a sister rather than like a relative. Today I am a preacher in the CME Church. I have been preaching at Collins Chapel CME Church for eighteen years. My foundation was laid long before I came into the church because Starlin Ingram and Dave Ingram were CME's at Mount Zion on Old 31 in Kilgore, Texas and today I am honored to be a preacher in the CME Church here in Lufkin at 801 Rose Street.

I have taught the deaf and the blind and I taught school for 38 years in the public schools. I taught the kindergarten of the Lufkin Day Care Center. I love working with children. My love of history and it's very emotional for me to even talk about my life and the members of my family and the struggles that they have come through to be a part of the history of Texas. It's a wonderful experience to recall the businesses that they were involved in and how they helped many in our community of which I have enjoyed.

RLK: Can you think back into your earlier years in relationship to your school and where you started school and the kind of things that may have gone on while you were there from elementary to high school and on through and, some instances that may have

occurred in between the relationships of the communities as we know it? Just speak in general please.

BK: I remember I said we lived in an integrated neighborhood and Madeline McDermott, a white child, was my very dear friend and when it was time for us to go to school Madeline went to Central Ward School and I wanted to go to Central Ward with Madeline and mother said no, I want you to go with Mrs. Olivia Hackney who is the teacher at Dunbar. And that was first grade so I rode with Mrs. Hackney every morning to school and Mrs. Hackney was my first grade teacher. Mrs. Melinda Garrett was my second grade teacher and from the second grade I came to Carver School, and at Carver School, which doesn't exist anymore, Mrs. Hackney was my teacher again. And from that I stayed at Carver School till the sixth grade and from the sixth grade I went to California and lived in California, that was in 1942 I came back to Lufkin. I went to school in California for one year and when I returned from California I was in the seventh grade at Dunbar. Dunbar was the main school, junior high and high school. I finished from Dunbar in 1949. I was a member of the Glee Club. Mrs. T. D. Thomas was the choir director and it was a delightful time to sing for her because she put such demands on you and expected you to respond. I sat in the second chair for soprano. Those were delightful years and from that I left to go to Prairie View A&M College in 1949 in September 11, 1949. I met my friend, Myrtle Jiles Davis, who has been my friend and she reminded me that on yesterday, which was September 11, 2001, that we had been friends for 52 years. That is awesome!

RLK: May I back up a little bit, going backwards.

BK: That is fine.

RLK: Can you kind of give us a description, describe the school, the early years what it was like? Maybe compare it to what we have today. What do you think may have been missing was not there that could have been better for you in your learning and for teachers?

BK: There are many things that I regret but there are many joys also. The first school, the building was just a two room building and this was for the first and second grade is where Mrs. Melinda Garrett and Mrs. Hackney taught those two grades in that building. We had to come out of the building to go to the big building for the restrooms. We had no cafeteria; you had to carry your sack lunch. You were disciplined. I remember they had a book called *Joe Boy and Spot* in the first grade. Mrs. Hackney had a play house and if you were very good and obeyed the rules you could play in the play house. The playhouse was made of cardboard and was inside the classroom but it had little chairs and little table and little dolls and you could get a chance to go to the playhouse and that would be fun.

I remember particularly by Mrs. Garrett, if someone was caught talking or was a tattle tell she would draw this image of this person on the board and she would place a long tongue that you were just a tattle tell and no one wanted to be the tattle tell. But those were some

of the early experiences of first and second grade. Upon coming to Carver School, and Mrs. Hackney was my teacher again, we had what we called May Fetes. That is where we would have a queen and a king and you would dress up and you would sing and you would do the little dances for the program and invite the community out and invite the mothers out and it was always a delightful time in May and it was called a May Fete. That would be a very interesting time. Mrs. Hill, Mrs. Essie Mae Hill, who was my fourth grade teacher, had organized a little choir and she played extremely well and she would have us singing and performing in the little choir that she directed. Upon leaving, the war now had started and Mother wanted to go to California and we went to California and we lived there for one year. I just didn't like the big city and I guess I could have been the reason for her returning, but I think my father had written her and asked her to come back home. She worked in an airplane factory there. The house in which we lived was very crowded. There were so many people there we had to sleep in the living room on a sofa bed. But all the rooms in her house were taken and Mrs. Green, who was the owner of the house, slept in the dining room on a little single bed but we had asset [access] to the whole house and at certain times we would cook and that kind of experience. After coming back home, seventh grade, now it was in 1943, I took homemaking from Mrs. Barbie Johnson and Mrs. Johnson passed away so Mr. Washington became principal and Mrs. Washington taught homemaking. That was an experience to have homemaking where you learn to sew and cook. We had trips and we had the Hi-Y Club and the Tri-Hi-Y Club. Mrs. T. D. Thomas was over those clubs. The Tri-Hi-Y was the girls club and the Hi-Y was the boys club and it was a delight. We would meet on Sunday evenings and that gave us another outlet for Sunday evening. Sunday morning would always be Sunday school and church and then Sunday evenings about two o'clock we would go to school for the Hi-Y and Tri-Hi-Y meetings.

RLK: Rev. Kennedy you mentioned the process of going to California, the war, World War II had begun. Is there anything or things in particular that you can relate to concerning the war? Maybe how things were here at home and maybe the rationing of foods and things of that nature, just how it affected? I know different areas had these experiences, but they were different kinds of experiences. How did it relate to you at the particular time?

BK: Well we did not fly to California because they didn't have the commercial planes as they have today, so we rode the train and that was a two day ride. It was like it was forever to get there on the train. We had coupons for the purchase of meat especially and we would save the coupons to get so many where we could go to the store and buy meat. The working in the factory mother only had to go two blocks to work in the airplane factory and it was just a part of the plane. I think it was the wing part, a portion of that wing part that they were assembling at this particular part of the factory and then they would ship it off to another part. That was interesting because she wasn't very far away and I could go down to the factory where she was. I had never gone to school, now that I'm in the sixth grade, I had never gone to school with white children although I lived in a neighborhood that was well integrated, so this was an unusual experience to have a white teacher and my class was a mixture of Filipinos, whites and blacks together. I had

a chance to go to the store and go to the movies by myself there and that was unusual. We were out in central LA and that was an unusual experience.

RLK: Did you have any family members in the service?

BK: No, had no family members in the service. Daddy was too old at that time to go to service and my uncle, really a cousin Willie C. Engram of Galveston, that I refer to quite frequently had served in World War I and then he came to Lufkin and lived with Daddy. He left here and went to Galveston and I was just reading this morning that Galveston was one of the larger cities in Texas at that time population wise.

RLK: Tell me, did you have any sisters or brothers?

BK: No, I had no sisters or brothers. I was an only child by birth and an only child by adoption.

RLK: Are you saying you spent most of the war years in California?

BK: Yes, well I spent one year; that was in '42 and I came back here.

RLK: You left here when?

BK: I left here in...had to be the later part of '41 because I went to school there.

RLK: Tell me, can you remember any experiences as a result of the war beginning in '41 here in Lufkin that may have played...

BK: Other than there were just so many people. Here in Lufkin there were the foundries. At that time the oil foundry that was making the pumping units for the oil field and then the Texas Foundry which was making smaller iron parts and both of these had stepped up because of the war. And the old foundry had begun to make guns for the war and the Texas Foundry was making smaller equipment for parts of ships and so forth if I remember correctly. So that stepped up many jobs for people here, especially the African Americans. They hired them to work and it was a good thing because they paid good. At that time the Papermill had already become in existence. I remember when they started the Papermill here in the 1930's, in 1937. It was a very strange thing in that many whites who had come from Canada here to set up the Papermill, it was called Southland Papermill, they had not seen, many of them had not seen people of color, people that were black skin and brown skin and it was an unusual thing that we gathered on Saturday evenings and danced and they would toss coins for the little band to play. My friend Pearly and I would do the trucking and dancing for them. We never had a chance to enjoy any of the money. The band kept all the money, so that was some experience. Mrs. Gogola had a boarding house which was right across the street to Chestnut and we would go up to Mrs. Gogola's.

RLK: Would you say that those war years tended to improve things in Lufkin, worsen things or what do you think about the general climate as a result of the war? Because, this is the war for Americans and you had Americans going to war. Did you see any kind of improvements?

BK: Yes there were a lot of improvements, better jobs and better pay. There were more employments here for blacks, so they had many move into this area because of job opportunities although people from neighboring towns would drive in and work and return home at night. So even though the war was going on it provided better opportunities for people of color and that was a good thing.

RLK: Did you see any obvious changes in race relations?

BK: Yes, the foundries would put money up for the Chamber of Commerce and they would back the little baseball teams here and they would have dinners and just do a lot of things to help to improve the community. I was going to Long's Chapel Church at that time and we had just scuffled to pay for the new church and we were very proud of it and the Foundry ran an article in the paper about Long Chapel, the colored Methodist Episcopal Church and what a wonderful thing they had done in this community. So, it was a better relationship between blacks and whites of our community. There were not many Hispanics in our area at that time, but persons Italians and we had a large population of Jewish people at that time and they really run the main part of the city in dry goods stores and restaurants and drug stores. So, the heart of Lufkin was really governed by the Jewish families of Lufkin.

RLK: Do you know of building the houses by one of the Foundries or either one of them in the Lufkin area?

BK: No, I don't know anything about that. My father died in '46 and the war had just ended and it was rather strange with him being on his bed and ill. He had hired two men, Montana Lilly and U.S. Smith who came from Alto here to work for Daddy and to complete the three houses that he had started and not completed and he told them how to do it from his bedside and that was unusual.

RLK: Okay, were you back in Lufkin around 1943 and '44?

BK: Yes, I came and I was back in Lufkin then and I was going to Dunbar and Dunbar was up on Leach Street in those years.

RLK: Can you remember German prison camps?

BK: Yes I do.

RLK: Can you tell me something that you may remember?

BK: I remember the Germans. I would stand in the yard and watch them come by on the truck and the German prison camp was located then out on what is now known as Raguet. Raguet was way out and it was rather sad. You would see them looking at you and you'd be looking at them and I guess the barrier of language or they were not allowed to speak but, they would pass down Chestnut Street because Chestnut was one of the main streets here in Lufkin, they would pass carrying them to a place to work. Where that place was I do not know, but you would see them pass in the mornings with them on the back of the truck and then they would bring them back in the afternoon.

RLK: You were not working age at this time, but I was about to see if you could tell me anything concerning salaries that you may have heard from adults.

BK: Yes, I was working. I started working at the age of 12. I would go to Mrs. Blackburn who lived across the street, to make up her bed and sweep and wash the dishes for her. I worked there until my father found out and he was displeased with me working so I didn't work anymore until after my father had passed. So at the age of 14 now I began to work for Sam Hyman's wife up on Groesbeck which was a block away and I would do the same thing, sweep and clean up, wash the dishes and do whatever chores there. I would get off about the time when they would finish dinner. I would wash those dishes then my day would be ended. But it was interesting working for Mr. Sam Hyman, and he was the financier of my father's work and then my father would work for him to build houses for him. So that was an unusual experience because Mr. Hyman and Mrs. Hyman had three girls, Shirley, Carolyn and Lillian, and Lillian and I were the same age and Carolyn was a little bit older, so Lillian and I had a chance to ride bicycles together and play dolls together. I could go up and play with Lillian. I would carry my paper dolls and we would play together and then Mrs. Hyman felt that it would be okay for Lillian to ride her bicycle with me. We were allowed to go two blocks up the street and two blocks down the street and two blocks over from where they lived on Groesbeck.

RLK: I know you told me you would give me about an hour of your time. Let me ask you this one more question, you've done quite a bit of talking.

BK: I'm not doing anything else.

RLK: I guess this could be the fun part of it. What activities, what kind of activities city wide I guess we might call it, were available to blacks inclusive of the rest of the community?

RLK: Okay, there were quite a few activities especially now, you know the number one activity in the community was church, so church took care of Sunday School, church and an evening worship or any activity they had during going on in the week like prayer meeting on Wednesday or choir rehearsal. So, church was the hub of the community but in those years we had what we called the Boosters Club. The Boosters Club was the persons who were...

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BK: ...activities in the community of Lufkin in the early years. The Boosters Club was a group of men that worked for the railroad and the railroad went from Houston to Shreveport and it was the Southern Pacific. These men were called brakemen and they would work on the railroad and their wives organized themselves and they would do things like fashion shows and they would come and have dances. The Cotton Club was an outstanding club in this area and they would have it at the Cotton Club. These women I thought were the best dressed women for they had diamond rings and beautiful earrings and they would certainly be an active part in the community in bringing activities here. I remember so well because I was in one of the fashion shows there. Mrs. Libby Loftin and Maggie McCoy were two of the ones particularly I remember, but it's a long list of men who had beautiful wives and they were the best dressed women of our community.

The Texas Foundry had a baseball team and this was most unusual and those guys could play so well. A person of the foundry would let them meet there and play on those grounds of baseball. They had teams that would come from nearby towns and come into Lufkin. So to go to a baseball game would be outstanding.

The movie theaters was another thing. Mr. Joe Stephano, who was an Italian here, had what you called Joe's Show and it was in Joe's Quarters and this was where blacks could come. Whites did not attend, so this was just for blacks and his daughter or son would collect the tickets or sell the tickets and then you would go into the shows and it was a nice thing to do and a very enjoyable thing to have an opportunity to go to the movies. That was not very far so I could go to the movies when they were in the afternoon and mother would go with me if they were at night. So, the movies were very good.

RLK: Where was Joe's Quarters located in compared to today?

BK: Where Inez Tim's apartments are now. They bought that from Mr. Stephano, from the Stephano family.

RLK: Inez Tim's apartments are on Chestnut.

BK: Yes, on that property. It's on Chestnut and Lining.

RLK: Okay, it was called Joe's Quarters?

BK: Yes.

RLK: And these were houses that had been built by this person?

BK: Well Daddy built the houses for Mr. Joe.

RLK: Okay.

BK: See that goes back to the quarters and he built those houses for Mr. Joe.

RLK: Okay. I don't need to ask you the question I was going to ask you on the affect religion had and you pretty much explained that in your own way. Were there any parks?

BK: Well we didn't have any parks at all. Later years Jones Park as it is known today was a white park. We could go by and see them swimming out there in the lake and looked like they were having so much fun. They had swings and merry go rounds. In later years in '46 or '47 they gave that park to blacks and we certainly enjoyed it. There was a dance floor and we could go there and dance. We could sit under the trees and hold hands or swing and it would be a nice gathering place on Sunday afternoons for the young people of our community.

RLK: Here is one where I think you will probably do quite a bit of talking. Tell me about activities and things that occurred on Juneteenth.

BK: Juneteenth was an unusual time and that is when the foundries would have the baseball games and you would dress up and you would certainly enjoy Juneteenth. My family was a little peculiar. I didn't get a chance to enjoy Juneteenth like many of the blacks of the community. If I got a chance to go to some of the festivities in our area it would mean that someone else would carry me. It may have been that Mother and Daddy were older or just did not take part in those activities. But I can recall the foundry once, I don't remember who carried me, but I went to see the baseball game. I can remember that they served food. I remember watermelon and it was always a nice gathering place for the Juneteenth. That was an outstanding time. We went through a period where we did not even celebrate Juneteenth. Finally it just dwindled and no one celebrated Juneteenth. We thought that the Fourth of July really was a white celebration and Juneteenth was a black celebration and finally Al Edwards of Houston had Juneteenth as a legal holiday and we began to recognize it again.

RLK: Why do you think it was thought that Fourth of July was a white holiday and the nineteenth of June was a black holiday? What is your thought about that?

BK: I just listened to what was being said and usually followed suit on it. That is what I heard and that is what I believed, but as I find now as I do research I find that the nineteenth of June came about because of our history and we did not know we were freed until Colonel Granger came in at Galveston and read that emancipation proclamation that we were free. I began to respect it with a deeper respect again knowing that it was a dear part of our heritage. I also found that Sojourner Truth was supposed to have been freed on the Fourth of July in 1824 and her master had told her that he was going to free her and he freed the others but did not free her and for those reasons she ran away. So, I began to respect then the Fourth of July and now today I find that both holidays are very important in our culture and one holiday should not be any different from the other one for we are all Americans and it's...we touch both holidays.

RLK: Okay, as you know we both like to look into history and historical kind of things. Had you given any thought to the fact that in 1776 Fourth of July and that is indicative of freedom but yet, the Nineteenth of June became indicative of a freedom. It seemingly to me contradicts something. That either freedom was in 1776 for Americans and it makes you...well think about it that this is eighty seven years difference between those two freedoms and it causes some thought about why we have two different freedoms for people. That is just a thought of mine that I added, you know.

BK: Yes, well I have found that when I went to Holloman's Air Force base that it so happened that the soldiers there were putting on a play and we were going to the play and I ask for a script. In that script it pointed out that the emancipation proclamation that had been written for this particular Fourth, July 4th that we were not covered because we were inhuman and did not know how to act and conduct ourselves therefore, we were not covered under that constitution, the great constitution of our country. Well, I tried to digest that and tried to respect their reasoning but I haven't come to that understanding yet. Although with the struggles that we've had with the constitution, with the amendment that gave us right to citizenship, gave us right to vote and those kinds of things. I still fight to be just a citizen and not to fight for all these things.

RLK: Yes, this is true because it's conflicting in that the Boston Massacre is what we have read about and there were only five people involved, killed I should say in the Boston Massacre and one was a black individual.

BK: A black person, yes.

RLK: And, you know, you are fighting for something and gosh all of a sudden you are not recognized but at the same time there was one like you who died in this well known Boston Massacre. Okay, well just a little bit of information. Let's stop here and then I can take it up with you at another time when you give me a date.

BK: Okay, that will be fine.

RLK: Okay.

TAPE STOPPED
TAPE RESUMES (a different date probably)

RLK: Reverend Kennedy, me not being a Lufkinite tell me some things that you have learned since or you knew about Lufkin when you were growing up that seems to be very striking when you look at people being people. Just tell me about Lufkin.

BK: There have been some unusual things that I've found out as I interviewed Loraine Blanton Doughty, who grew up a white girl that grew up in the community where I was and as I interviewed her there were different things that were pointed out, one that the blacks of the community did not go to town but certain days. If you wanted to go to town on a Monday you could not go. There were certain days you were allowed to go to town

and she pointed out that Will was so unusual, he and his wife Evie Engram here, that I guess the location of which they lived or their involvement in building and that sort of thing that they could go to town any day, but it was only certain days that blacks were able to go to town in this community. It was most interesting that I heard the N word and had never heard it before. I had gone to town to pay a bill for mother and as I came down Groesbeck the Brookshire brothers, Oscar, Eugene, and R. A. Brookshire had chunked rocks at me and called me the N word. And, I went down the sidewalk crying and this is why I remember Lorraine so well, as I got into the next block here Lorraine was coming up the block and she said, "Why are you crying?" because she thought she was my little mother, and she took me by the hand and went up the street and drug me with her and she blessed those boys out. But, even today when I talk to R. A., R. A. said he was too little to have done that so it had to be Oscar and Eugene. So, we found that Eugene would not have done that so it must have been Oscar. Oscar is not living to defend himself, but that was one of the stories particularly that I remember there.

Many of the blacks in the community who worked for the white families in the community had certain privileges that many of the blacks did not have in the community. So, our living in basically two blocks of the historical area of Lufkin certainly gave us more privileges than many of the blacks who lived farther out in the community.

RLK: Okay, there is I guess a lot more that may have occurred and I'm not trying to say Lufkin was any worse or any better than any other city in the south because I experienced different things in my home too, even black to black. But it is just good to learn the way things were and then look at today. This is when you begin to experience and appreciate the progress that has been made. Things could be the same for the reason they were that they were. Let me back up a little bit farther.

BK: Okay.

RLK: You mentioned sixty acres of land in Crockett. To your knowledge does that still exist?

BK: Yes, it's still in the family. Apparently my grandfather knew what to do and they have established this as a homestead. I hope I have the right word here in which the property is still in the family and has been all these years. Now, I don't remember when it was purchased because evidently this is where mother grew up. Mother's mother was a midwife and mother's father was a farmer and they farmed these sixty acres of land. Now, the boys and girls worked those acreages. Maggie who is the oldest girl, who is also a teacher moved away, got married and moved to Tyler and that left the other girls here and then with Evie Bell marrying and moving to Lufkin in 1916. Ida never married. Connie married and just moved in the community there but then eventually came home. Buddy Sam lived in Houston and after he became ill came back to that property, the sixty acres of land. The land is still there. There are two ponds on it and there is a gravesite for family and also for people of the community. It's called the Jones graveyard.

RLK: Where is this located?

BK: It is on the Centerville Highway about twelve miles out of Crockett.

RLK: Is that Highway 7?

BK: Highway 7.

RLK: Okay, backing up a little more, you mentioned Dr. Packard and the building in which he worked and was built some time ago.

BK: Yes.

RLK: Will you tell us the location of that building today?

BK: Dr. S. C. Packard's clinic was built by P. A. Simond. P. A. Simond was the financier and the owner of the property and Will Engram built the building. It is still standing and it is located on Martin Luther King Drive. It is a two story building. This was another insight that John Simond was a young lad and had gone to Prairie View and came back and he also said that Mr. Will was working geometry and did not know it as he came back from school and would come over and asked Daddy questions or he would work with Daddy.

RLK: Business trained child. I wish everyone were given a chance to prove that they could or could not do a given thing or whatever. How wonderful this America could or would be if every chance were given. And again that also tells us or shows us how certain things or many things have changed and how now some people who have abilities can actually exercise the ability and cause us to do...well maybe think carefully about what we experienced when we were growing up. It's just good to see. Okay at this time I will let you rest a little.

BK: Okay.

RLK: I appreciate this.

BK: I appreciate you.

RLK: We need to continue.

BK: Yes we do.

RLK: Again, thank you.

BK: Thank you.

TAPE STOPPED

RLK: Good morning Rev. Kennedy. I would like to say to the listeners that today is September 24th about 11:15. Rev. Bettie Kennedy is going to continue the interview we started before. Rev. Kennedy, we have spoken on different areas prior to this time and we have talked about your life, your schooling, your parents and related incidents but today I would like for you to talk about your family, marriage, your children and things that would fall into that plane. If you would just do it for me please.

BK: I certainly will. I am a writer of many things and several years ago I wrote a poem about me and the title of the poem is "All About Me" and I think this may lay a foundation for the things that we are going to talk about today. It begins like this:

When I was eighteen months old Bell ask my mother to give me to her. These words were the richest, richer than gold, with it my life was changed. She never worried about my background she wanted me just the same. I often reminded her "you better keep this baby" Willa Mae gave you this baby. Words I never knew I had said. To give me back was the thing that I dread. I was adopted legally in 1934. The years were hard, the Depression hurt many by the score but Bell kept me and loved me so deeply. There is one thing that I needed to repeat "you better keep this baby" is what I said. To give me back was the thing that I dread. Before this came about to California we went and there we stayed one year. It was life well spent. I went to school with white kids, but this wasn't new where I grew up we all lived together it's true. Oh, I remember 1946 this was the time my father got sick. October is the month he died. The thing he told me are the things that I tried. I finished high school in 1949 and off to college I tried. Now college was very new it was hard to be away from mother too. There I met Myrtle my best friend, our life together has no end. In 1953 was an uncertain year for me. I married a man named S. T. but he never married me. We had two children, girls, the most beautiful girls in the world. In 1958 was the end of my life, end of our lives together that could have been great. 1959 I married once again; Oscar Kennedy was the second man. To this marriage five children were a part, each one is special in my heart. Twenty years have gone by and Lord I have wondered why. You kept me here at times I wanted to die. I am giving life back to you, use it in a special way. Walk with me Lord from day to day. Now its 1979, a new year is on my mind. Whatever will I do with it? How can I make it go? Lord you are greater than I and only you will know.

BK: Many poems I have expressed lives of people that I knew and my life and that poem I thought would certainly set our language for the things we will discuss today. After finishing college in 1953 I had already been asked to go to Austin and work at the blind deaf and offering school which was a beautiful experience. There I worked with deaf children. I was put in the primary department and I had six little children that could not hear and you certainly have to be creative and read feelings and do a lot of fantastic experiences for little children that are deaf and that which I planned for the years that I worked with those children. After I returned to Lufkin I would hear from the kids from time to time. As the years have gone by I've lost track of them and I'm not sure where they are or what they are doing in life. Those experiences I've longed for again. I enjoyed

the years of working with the deaf children. Upon coming to Lufkin I worked with second graders. I worked through all grades, second, third, fourth, fifth, sixth and seventh grade. I never taught first grade. Those years were very interesting. I have had some very gifted children. Many of the children really didn't need me as a teacher but because they were so brilliant and well read I just had to provide experiences for them.

Some of my experiences were most unusual. There were several men from Africa, young men who came to Prairie View and as my sixth grade class was talking and studying about the world I thought it would be nice to have Victor Creque and Mr. Cummings to come to my school. They arrived here on a Friday evening and it was too late, school was out and my class came back the Saturday morning to hear them and talk with them. I set up several meetings for them while they were here. It was a wonderful experience for these children to have the chance to meet people from the continent of Africa. I will never forget that experience particularly.

I recall one day that I was working at Carver School and something happened over the radio that was in Mr. Chimney's room. The call had come through that the President had been shot. It threw a time of sadness over the class and in fact we just stopped and put our heads on the desk and tried to listen as one runner would go back to Mr. Chimney's room to hear the report. Finally the news was that President John F. Kennedy had been killed by an assassin.

The experiences through the years have certainly recalled to my mind this morning many things that has happened in my life that were sad and many were joyous occasions. I had an opportunity to work at the seventh grade level with children who were special children and my heart would bleed often because I knew the children could learn, could do better than they were and every day I would set up some type of creative thought and have them to recite that they could do things. They could read and they could improve their lives. T. J. Turner was one of my students and T. J. was standing six feet tall. At that time I would have to look up to him. I would remind him that, "You are going to make it, you can be somebody" and embedded that deep into his mind. He would repeat this and many of the students would. Don Bronson was another one that was standing at twelve years old standing six feet three inches tall. I would remind him, "Don you have the height." He was very good at basketball and many of the athletic programs. But, the summer at the end of the seventh grade when Don was now getting ready to go to high school at that time, his aunt came and said, "Mrs. Kennedy what can I do for Don to help him to read again." So, we decided on some series of books that would help him. Don went through school, finished high school and then went to the University of Texas at El Paso. The years were hard because reading was one of his major problems but someone took him under the wing and continued to work with him. Don spent a little more time in school than he thought he should. In fact it took six years for him to graduate from the University of Texas. He is doing well in Houston now. He is working as a supervisor for the juvenile program and has done a fantastic job. He has two children, in fact I have a picture of the oldest child. I have not seen the new baby. It was such a wonderful time.

T. J. Turner, who was in my seventh grade class and had gone on now to finish high school and was away in college and here I was teaching other boys and girls in the seventh grade class and I gave them a project to do. One young man said I want to do T. J. Turner. I said, "Well that is a good thing you can do your little project." So, we began to find pictures of news articles and cut out whatever we could find about him. And, we had T. J. Turner to come and visit our class and he brought with him films from when he played high school football and we showed the films and the little booklet I have among my memoirs now of all the progress that T. J. Turner has made. I taught T. J.'s mother, Lois, and those were good years. T. J. went on to play football for a professional football group and has now retired and living in Houston. A few years ago while I was working with the day care children I had him to come back as a resource person and he sat there and the little ones who were five and six years old would look up and see what a giant of a person he was. They thought he was so tall. He had a truck, he drove his truck up and we had to go out and look at the truck. Two of his little nephews were in my class, Tommy and Chris and that was a delightful time. He sat there and talked with the children. Then we began to reminisce on Curtis Mills and Marvin Mills and the Mills brothers here because in my class was one of the Mills brothers nieces. It was such a rich experience for the children. I do feel if you expose children to human resources and expose them to resources in the community that children can learn and can achieve. These two persons Don Bronson and T. J. Turner have proved that you can make it in spite of hardships.

Some of the things that I recall as a teacher in which I long for, I long to go back into the classroom and work with children, I dream of writing a curriculum by which our children can learn about their heritage. I dream of having an African American Museum. My thoughts have gone to an African American School in which your heritage would be taught. Those are the dreams that I have dreamed and there is nothing wrong with dreams. Whatever you do if you enjoy doing it will certainly enrich your life and enrich the lives of those about you if you love life. You have to love and appreciate life in order to do that.

Some of the unusual experiences I have had to bring about laughter there was once Mrs. Davis, who was a librarian next door to me, sent for one of my students to come and move a typewriter for her. So, the young man came and picked up the typewriter and dropped it. Screws and typewriter went everywhere. Mrs. Davis said, "Oh my, why did you drop the typewriter?" He said, "Oh Mrs. Davis you knew I'm a special person." We laughed about that. Today as I work with children's children in the CASA [Court Appointed Special Advocacy] program I have four children that are one of the young mothers that when she was a child in my class and she has had six children and four of those children are my CASA kids. That has been an unusual experience that now I'm working with CASA. I go to visit these four children who are in foster homes and write up their little reports and that kind of thing. So, I've had success in the mighty depth of struggles. The young mother had a problem in school and the children had a very hard way to go and yet they have had a chance to live in a foster home in which they have a hot meal when they come in from school. They have a chance to get their lesson and learn. Three of the children are in special classes and we are hoping that at least one

of the three is going to be able to return to regular classes because of the environment. The home in which they live in now is very clean and they have such a motherly, fatherly atmosphere there and the children are doing so well. There are times that you cry because of pain that has afforded life as you have worked with those children. Particularly little Chris Jones has lingered in my mind who had gone to camp one summer. What a delightful experience for a child to go to camp. But he was afraid to swim and someone pushed him in the pool, from the story that I have gathered, and they had gone back to the room and Mrs. Crisp didn't know where he was and they found him at the bottom of the pool. It is such a heart breaking story and has stuck in my mind through the years now.

There are many things that we could talk about. There are things that jobs that I have had. I have not had many jobs in my lifetime, but some of the jobs are interesting. At fourteen, well I started working at twelve and my father did not want me to work. I was...all I had to do was go and clean up the house and make up the beds and wash the dishes for Mrs. Blackburn, a white lady that lived across the street from us, but my father did not approve of that. He did not like the idea of me going into the home, so therefore I didn't work that job anymore. But after my father passed away I worked for Mr. Hyman, Sam Hyman. I would go and do the same chores, sweep and clean up and make up the bed and wash the dishes and after the lunch hour I would do the dishes and clean up the kitchen, then my day was over. I worked there in the summer when I came home from school and that was an experience. Those jobs taught me many lessons. I got a job at Prairie View, now this was most unusual. I would work a whole month for ten dollars. The ten dollars would provide me with show fare. We could go to the show for twenty cents in those years. This was in '49 to '53 so ten dollars would be stretched out for show fair and to buy toothpaste or whatever little trinkets I may need at school. Those were unusual jobs but when I got the job to teach students who were deaf I thought that was most unusual and I looked forward to going to Austin to work there as a teacher. That is one job I have longed to go back for and work at the school for the deaf and teaching deaf children. I enjoyed that most. Then outside I worked at a grocery store on Sunday evenings. There would be three of us, Carl Jr. and Curly Parks and myself we would go and work at the grocery store and sell ice cream, mainly ice cream on Sunday evenings here in Lufkin for the boys and girls who would come in because many of us could not go to the fountains, the ice cream fountains downtown to buy malts and things of that nature. So, on Sunday evenings our main sale in the grocery store would be hand packed ice cream.

The war years were sad years because you could read in the paper here or the radio the damage that was being done in far away countries. Here in Lufkin we had two German prison camps. One was out off of Raguet and I'm not sure where the second one was. It seems like it was down near where Junior High West was.

RLK: Lufkin Middle School?

BK: Lufkin Middle School, yes. But, it was something to see them pass by with these people on trucks. We would wave at them and just see them go by. It really brought the war year's closer home. After mother had gone to California and worked in the war at the

airplane factory during the war and I had gone to school there then we returned home and that made the war years much a part of our lives.

RKL: Excuse me.

BK: That is all right.

RKL: Were you able to go near the camp where the German prisoners were?

BK: No, we could only see them at a distance. I don't know if I could have gone being rather young myself maybe if my father had taken me there we could have.

RKL: Do you know if it played any part in the community, any people you knew ever discussed or talk about the Germans or an experience somebody else had who may have gone around them or somebody who worked over there where they were?

BK: Well they would take them somewhere to work. They would take them down Chestnut where I lived. Chestnut was one of the main streets of that day and they would load them on trucks and take them down Chestnut. I don't know how far down Chestnut they would go, and work, they would be gone. You would see them pass in the morning and see them return in the evening. They would come back on trucks taking them back out on Raguet which was an old airport long before we had the airport out on Angelina County Airport where that is now. But, I never...I don't recall any particular stories of people who may have had a chance to be close to them or a chance to even talk with them even if they could speak their language.

RLK: In listening to you say the area at one time was an airport. Sounds like if it was an airport it was pretty much out of town at that time.

BK: It was, way out of town. It was a long way out of town.

RLK: So Lufkin has spread itself out pretty much as you think of going on Raguet now.

BK: Yes, and I really wish I could remember where they were going to work. It could be they weren't going that far but in those years it was a long distance.

RLK: What year do you think this was?

BK: This had to be in '44 or '45?

RLK: I ask that question because I have been told that the powers that be in Lufkin requested the Germans build this wall to be located here because there was an ice storm in '43 or '44 and timber was on the ground so, the powers that be were the lumber people and they needed that timber to be taken off the ground. There was not enough manpower here to get the timber before it rotted. I was told that was part of the reason it was requested. So, from what you are saying maybe this is where they were going.

BK: It could be.

RLK: To retrieve or get the timber off the ground so it could be used. Since you mentioned that, I forgot about what I had been told.

BK: That could be right because I know to me they went far away. They would pass down Chestnut and they went a long distance. See at that time we didn't have the lower end of Chestnut which is called 58. It wasn't as it is today. It could have been a dirt road or something of that nature.

RLK: It could have been the woods or something at that time.

BK: Yes. I mentioned also that my first marriage and my second marriage. My second marriage there was five children. There was Kermit Kennedy, Valencia Kennedy, Keith Kennedy, Bettie Kennedy, and Angela Kennedy. These children were born to the second marriage and those children are all grown and have families today. They are living in different parts of Texas and have several that are living here in Lufkin. Kermit Kennedy is working as the mail clerk at the county courthouse and has been there for quite a few years and is well liked by the people of the courthouse and the annex building and other places that deliver mail out of the courthouse. Valencia Kennedy is working at Progressive Learning Center and also one of the nursing homes here. Bettie Kennedy is working as a secretary at Dunbar Primary. Angela Kennedy is working at Grand Prairie and working at a stock company there. Keith Kennedy is an engineer and is living in the Dallas area and has two sons. Here now that I've gotten older I have learned to appreciate every day that I live and appreciate things that life affords me. I would like to mention what a day in my life is like. Usually when I get up early...

RLK: Two more children from the first marriage?

BK: Yes there are two more children, Bettell Lewis and Willette Lewis. Willette is married and has two children. She has a young son that is two years old and then she has a daughter who has gone to college for the first time, Marea Lemelle. We are very proud she is at Baylor University and is a part of the symphony orchestra there. She plays violin so we are anxious to hear one of her concerts that she will be performing there at Baylor. Bettell has worked for American Airlines for a number of years and now she is one of the managers at J. C. Penney's here in the Lufkin area. Both girls have achieved very well in their lives.

END OF TAPE ONE, SIDE TWO
END OF INTERVIEW