

**BETTIE KENNEDY**

**Interview 170c**

**October 2001, at 1411 Hall, Lufkin, Texas**

**R. L. Kuykendall, Interviewer**

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**ABSTRACT:** In this interview with R. L. Kuykendall, Rev. Bettie Kennedy continues with her reminiscences about growing up as an African American child in Lufkin. She highlights the African American community through the years, speaking of the doctors, dentists, businesses and neighborhoods that made up her community. She discusses racism, teaching African American History, the challenges within the community today, education, the Citizens Chamber of Commerce, and the community's changes. She also recites original poetry.

**Bettie Kennedy (hereafter BK):** The County was Charles McClendon. This was S. T. Lewis's great uncle. His mother was a McClendon. His grandmother married a McClendon and this was her husband's brother who was the first medical doctor in Angelina County. From McClendon we had Simmons and Dr. Simmons office was down on Chestnut at about 418 or 420 Chestnut. The building burned in later years but, that is where he practiced medicine. After his death then Claude Stewart, Dr. Claude Stewart was a medical doctor here and his office was off of Angelina. This was another cousin of S. T. Lewis's. And, from Dr. Claude Stewart, S. C. Packard came and from S. C. Packard to Dr. C. A. Allen. That is the medical doctors and today we have several doctors that I'm not familiar with in our area which has been a blessing. But, each of the early doctors had their own little clinic. Dr. Simmon's clinic was in the lower part on the first floor in the Masonic building on 422 Chestnut Street. Upstairs is where the Masonic family met. This is part of the historical area of Lufkin. I remember Dr. Simmon's vaccinated me when it was time for me to start to school. Dr. Claude Stewart's clinic was at his home site where he lived between Angelina and First Street which was predominately a white area of town but he administered to white and black alike. Dr. S. C. Packard now was at Martin Luther King and it was called Packard Clinic and the Chamber of Commerce made it possible for Dr. Packard to come to this area because there was a need for doctors for our people in this area and from that Dr. Allen and the Chamber of Commerce made it possible for them to get.

**R.L. Kuykendall (hereafter RLK):** Let me ask you, you said the building was located where?

**BK:** On Chestnut.

**RLK:** So, that is for colored or?

**BK:** Yes.

**RLK:** Okay, when you mentioned that I wanted to get a little more information. Go on please.

**BK:** Okay, that Dr. Packard was on Martin Luther King and it was called Packard Clinic. That building is still standing. Dr. C. A. Allen who came later also had his clinic there but later he moved to the hospital and moved up on Lakeview and had a nice building there and then he moved out on Ellis and he practiced medicine in the hospital and now he is retired. Those are the list of doctors that I have located in our area that has been profound through the Chamber of Commerce in our area. Where there was a need the Chamber of Commerce was at hand.

**RLK:** What was the general reaction of the community? I guess when I say community I mean community of color in relationship to having their own chamber and citizens or whatever you want to call it, the Citizen Chamber. What kind of things were possibly expected by the community from them?

**BK:** Well the community well received them and was very pleased to have such an organization and was one of the early organizations of our community. To have them have the heart of the whole community, black neighborhood, at heart and with them bringing in people of our color to just to do many things. Many of the choirs, many of the soloists who came here to perform was because of them. The doctors where there was a need came because of them. Also, Dr. Pierre came because of the...

**RLK:** The dentist?

**BK:** ...yes the dentist, because see Dr. Martin had passed away and because of that they brought Dr. Pierre in here. So, those are the two dentists I have known in this area. They have done an awful lot here in this area and that has helped so much. There are many things that I could talk about for our community in the area of Chamber of Commerce. We have had several funeral homes that I know about. Mr. Pace's funeral, well Gipson was the first that buried black and white and then later Mr. Pace came and he had a funeral home on Leach Street. Latimore had a funeral home over on Angelina and Tim's, I. D. Tim's had a funeral home and he came out of the Pace era because he worked for Mr. Pace and operated in the Masonic building there until he built his own building which was next door to the Masonic building there.

**RLK:** Where was this located?

**BK:** On Leach Street. It might interest you to know we had quite a few businesses in the Lufkin era which is considered today as the historical area. And, on Chestnut and what we call old Lufkin and Lufkin land those were...and the New Addition. New Addition is what is called North Lufkin. We had a blacksmith which operated from downtown Lufkin near where city hall is today on Third Street. Mr. Finis Price was the only blacksmith that we had in early years but, we had many taxi stands. December Taxi Stand was located on Chestnut.

**RLK:** Do you know what years?

**BK:** That was in the thirties, in the late thirties and the early forties when Mr. December's taxi stand was on Chestnut and that was about 338 Chestnut Street. We had Nash's taxi stand. Nash taxi stand got its beginning in what was called the One Thousand Alley. One Thousand Alley was downtown. It was located off of First Street between First Street and what is known as Angelina Street today and it was just a block in there and in that block we had a barber shop, a pool hall, a taxi stand and several little things. Big Barber was one of the early barbers of that era. Maggie McCoy cut hair in the One Thousand Alley. Big Barber later moved his shop which was located on Chestnut and Paul Street and he was a noted barber and he left here and went to Chicago but people would go for him to cut hair. We had several barber shops today. Maggie McCoy's barber shop was located in the One Thousand Alley and when she closed her barber shop she started teaching. She moved into the Lufkin Independent School District as an English teacher.

**RLK:** I hate to interrupt but I wanted to ask a question. Today what is where One Thousand Alley was? What is there today? How would I recognize it not being a native of Lufkin?

**BK:** Well it's the telephone building now. It is connected with the Lufkin Conroe Telephone.

**RLK:** Bremond?

**BK:** Well, Bremond, Groesbeck.

**RLK:** So, it was in the Groesbeck area?

**BK:** It is a block over. It is right there between First Street and Angelina and that building that is there now is part of the telephone company. They...I've only been in there a couple of times. It is where the workers come and meet and get their assignments for the day and its part of their administration there.

**RLK:** Groesbeck, right by the railroad tracks.

**BK:** Right by the railroad track right at the overpass there.

**RLK:** Was that considered as a black area?

**BK:** Well it was, it was a black area and it was called, why it was called One Thousand Alley I don't know.

**RLK:** I was going to ask you that, why was it One Thousand Alley?

**BK:** Yes, One Thousand Alley was some name for it but, that is what it was called One Thousand Alley.

**RLK:** But it is actually Groesbeck Street today?

**BK:** Well it is a block over from Groesbeck.

**RLK:** Going toward town?

**BK:** I don't think that street has a name there.

**RLK:** Is it Dozier?

**BK:** No, no Dozier is farther down. This is just before you come to what is known as Lufkin Avenue or Frank Street today.

**RLK:** Frank Street that is what I was trying to think of.

**BK:** First Street. It is right...go down Angelina and go where the library was and start walking, now we are going to go back toward Bremond and it is just that first little street there before you get to Groesbeck and the Lufkin Telephone Exchange there owns those buildings in that area.

**RLK:** And we haven't gotten to the railroad track yet.

**BK:** Well it's right at the railroad track.

**RLK:** I was just trying to imagine today.

**BK:** Yes, where it was.

**RLK:** I have heard somebody mention this. In fact, my wives uncle was telling me he used to have a club or he ran a club and he sold milk. Did they sell milk down in that area or something? He worked for something that sold milk.

**BK:** Well they had so much going on. I was quite small and I don't remember everything that they had going on there. It appears that maybe I was too young to go in that area at all but, I do remember some of the things that went on in the area.

**RLK:** I was told it wasn't necessarily the best area either.

**BK:** No, I guess maybe the pool hall and that kind of thing they had gambling or some of the things because there had been some shootings at One Thousand Alley. When you say One Thousand Alley you really...

**RLK:** Kelty's or something.

**BK:** No, you are not on Kelty's.

**RLK:** I'm thinking of Wilson Street or something like that.

**BK:** That is right.

**RLK:** Okay, speaking of that, I'm getting you off.

**BK:** That is all right.

**RLK:** What was Wilson Street at the time? Was it there or was it happening?

**BK:** Yes, it was there. That was called the New Addition. There were not many people living in that area. You had Walkers Quarters and then you had Kelty's Street but that was called the New Addition, not many houses there. My father built several homes in that area, so that was the New Addition. It was called the New Addition and is called North Lufkin today so it was a very interesting era there. Charlie Malone came later years and had bought the property on Wilson Street and there he had a taxi stand. He also had the Horseshoe Motel in that area and there were little cafes and barber shops on that Charlie Malone's.

**RLK:** What kind of year, what time...?

**BK:** We are talking about now in '50 or '54. Mr. Malone drove a taxi and I had just begun to teach here then and he would pick me up every morning. S. T. was in the hospital at that time and had had a wreck and Mr. Malone would pick me up every morning and take me to school. He ran this taxi line. Maybe he had three or four cars and somebody to help him to drive, but his responsibility was to pick me up every morning.

**RLK:** I didn't mean to totally take you away from that to begin with but...

**BK:** Well it's all together. It's all blending together there. That was some of the early years of Lufkin. We are talking about a little bit of North Lufkin. Talking about barber shops, Mrs. Thelma who is still living had her barber shop up on Charlie Malone's front. Parilee Dodd had her barber shop located on Kelty's Street.

**RLK:** She has always been there?

**BK:** As far as I remember that is where she got started on Kelty's Street, but not at the site where she is now. She was a block away where Garfield Lewis's service station was, in that area.

**RLK:** On Kelty's?

**BK:** On Kelty's just a block away from her business.

**RLK:** Which way on Abney?

**BK:** We are going the other direction; we are going back toward O'Quinn, right off of O'Quinn there. Those were interesting things. I don't know whether you are aware we had a movie show. We had a movie house. This was called Joe's Movie Show. We may have mentioned this before but it was located on Lightning Street in Joe's Quarters. This was just for blacks. Mr. Joe was Italian, Joe Stephano and we could go to the movies on Sunday evenings and during the week maybe a Friday, Saturday. I don't remember the movie being open every day, but yes. Maybe we paid a quarter or fifteen cents to go to the movie, but Mr. Joe was the first to have a movie show. Then Lynn's downtown opened upstairs and it was called the Buzzard Roost, so we could go upstairs and that was a pretty nice place to go. But then Pines Theater, which was one of the elite movie shows, whites only and later they opened their upstairs to blacks.

**RLK:** This is on First Street?

**BK:** On First Street, then you had Texas Theater which was across from Lynn's Theater on what is known as Frank Street today and that is where that theater...they never did open their theater up to blacks.

**RLK:** So it was located by where the jail is right now?

**BK:** Across the street. Lynn's was where the jail is now.

**RLK:** Okay.

**BK:** But, across the street is the building where Texas Theater was and that is on the side where Lillian Armstrong and Glen Armstrong's buildings are, right down in that area. They have a business downtown, graphic camera shop.

**RLK:** Oh HOP&S [House of Photography Studio]?

**BK:** HOPS, yes, Lillian and Glen Armstrong, yes.

**RLK:** Okay.

**BK:** I've been asking about some of the early clubs of this area. The booster club was a club that came out of the brakes men. During the thirties and forties that was one of the leading jobs. If your husband was a brakes men then you knew they were bringing in nice money and they were the best dressed men of the community and their wives were the best dressed women of the community and they had beautiful rings and you recognized them immediately.

**RLK:** High society?

**BK:** High society and they were called the boosters club. These men did a lot for the community. The Cotton Club is where the booster club would meet and they would do shows and programs and it was just a thrill just seeing those ladies in the community even

at the church or that kind of thing. We have touched on some of the things that went on into our inner community. In early years there were many beauty shops or pressing shops they were called in our area. We had Cora Adams. Well go back earlier, my mother in the thirties, Evie Ingram, had a beauty shop at 408 Chestnut. Cora Adams' beauty shop was down on Margaret Street and they were leading shops because Mrs. Cora had a special room on the side of her house which was her shop and her daughter worked with her. Mrs. Lucy who is still living worked there and the two of them had operated their shop. Mother, Evie Ingram's beauty shop on 408 Chestnut she did the predominate work but she had persons come in to dry the hair and to help her to press, so she had two chairs there in her shop. We had several little café's or clubs. L. C. Lilly had what we called the Blue Room down on Chestnut and this is where the teenagers of the community would go and gather and dance and have a chance to visit on weekends.

**RLK:** Is this in the sixties?

**BK:** No, we are still back earlier than that. We are still in the forties.

**RLK:** Okay.

**BK:** Those were interesting years. Grocery stores, we had several black grocery stores here. Will Ingram had the first black grocery store at 408 Chestnut. Then we had Hackney, Carl & Hackney Grocery Store which was located at 418 Chestnut Street. They had a grocery store by which you could call in and tell them what you want and they would deliver it or you could go and purchase it and they would deliver it to your house. They had a delivery service. They had a truck in which they would deliver groceries to the homes. We had Knighton Grocery Store which was located on Cotton Belt.

**RLK:** Cotton Belt?

**BK:** Cotton Belt and North Avenue, it was in the North Lufkin area.

**RLK:** Let me...I keep hearing Chestnut, Chestnut must have been the hub for everything.

**BK:** It is.

**RLK:** Was it thought of as old Lufkin or was it the new?

**BK:** No, Chestnut was part of the historical part of Lufkin. Mrs. Grant who is going to be the speaker, I don't know if she is going to cover Chestnut or not, and it may come up in her new book, but Chestnut is a historical area. It is most interesting. Let's kind of look at Chestnut, you and I. From Groesbeck to Paul Avenue was where blacks lived, but across the street where they lived, across the street on Bremond and Chestnut were whites. From Seventh Street and Chestnut there were whites living. The one block on Seventh Street, which is Groesbeck were Jews. Going down Chestnut, Groesbeck across the track were Dutchmen just across the street. So, where I grew up I never had some of

the experiences that many of the blacks in Lufkin or in many cities were acquainted with. For example, I never knew that I was different from other people until I was at least twelve years old. When it was time for me to start school, my little white friend across the street, Madeline McDermott, whose mother was of the Kennedy, Kennedy was a jeweler here and Mrs. Mae Kennedy and Bess Kennedy who lived on Groesbeck and Sixth Street had a jewelry store downtown. The building is still there and it was called Kennedy's Jewelers. Mrs. Kennedy's daughter, the McDermott's, had a daughter named Madeline and Madeline and I played together every day, all day and I would go to her house and she would come to my house. Madeline had started school and it was about time for me to start school, so I wanted to go to school where Madeline went and Mother said, "No I want you to go with Mrs. Olivia Hackney," who was teaching at Dunbar and I could ride with her every morning. So, that I did. I rode to school with Mrs. Hackney every morning to school. Well that sufficed because I didn't know that made a difference. Just for her to tell me she wanted me to ride with Mrs. Hackney certainly soothed my thought of even going to school with Madeline.

**RLK:** You know you were mentioning Groesbeck and the different cultures, I never thought about that but when I go down Groesbeck on that end, like going to the...the houses, the architecture of the houses is totally different. They are larger and you don't see as I can remember, I don't see that same type of architecture of those houses any other place in Lufkin. And, maybe what you just said had something to do with that.

**BK:** Okay, Sam Hymans house, a Jewish person, my father built that house and from what I found out from my interview with Loraine Blotten Doughty he built the Oggs house which is a huge house on the corner of Sixth Street and Groesbeck and it is off to the right going down. He built that house. And she even mentioned the Kennedy's house which is across the street and these are huge homes, large structures.

**RLK:** Do you know where Rev. Josephine lives?

**BK:** Yes, now that was a boarding house. That house was in the thirties when the Southland Paper Mill was brought here. People from Canada came to Lufkin and with that they brought their culture and many had not seen blacks and that is where we're talking about, Chestnut and North Seventh Street, in that area. That was Mrs. Gogola who had the boarding house there. That is still in the community where I grew up.

**RLK:** It is a very large structure.

**BK:** Three stories.

**RLK:** I was in, I think you were still talking with Josephine mostly about how I marvel the house right there. When I went into the house I could see it was older but the point is it had to be something in the architecture that was totally different. It seems a different culture.

**BK:** I don't know who built that house. I don't think my father did, but in the back of that house was a garage apartment.

**RLK:** Facing Chestnut?

**BK:** No, behind where her house is. We are on Seventh Street there on Groesbeck. Turn on Groesbeck and go on Seventh Street, run into Chestnut. There was a garage apartment there and next to it was a smaller house and I think that was the Wideman's that lived there. I think they may have worked for Mrs. Gogola. Mrs. Gogola had a boarding house in which these persons from the north lived and on Groesbeck there were many boarding houses, many boarding houses which are not standing now. Where McFarland's office is there was a boarding house.

**RLK:** In that same spot?

**BK:** Yes, in that same spot and the next block was a boarding house. Where the telephone office is today that was a boarding house.

**RLK:** What about the church, First Baptist?

**BK:** First Baptist was already there in my lifetime and then where their parking lot is that is where the First United Methodist Church was where their parking lot. So, when they moved...

**RLK:** Excuse me the parking lot across the street in front of the church where the office is?

**BK:** No on the side where Bremond is.

**RLK:** On the side where the house and the building were torn down.

**BK:** On Second Street.

**RLK:** Yes, on Second Street.

**BK:** And that was a fabulous building. I regret they tore that building down today because it had such stained glass windows that just shouldn't have gone, just shouldn't have gone. They should have been able to move them. I regret that today.

**RLK:** Maybe it would break them probably be easier to...

**BK:** They just let them fall to the ground and crumble to pieces. They only saved four small ones and they got them in their building now. Beautiful stained glass windows.

**RLK:** Well you have told me things about different areas that I've noticed but I had no background knowledge of it and especially going back up around Groesbeck. What about the church around on the corner there of Groesbeck.

**BK:** Okay, the Church of Christ?

**RLK:** Yes.

**BK:** Okay, that church was built during my lifetime. All those were my neighbors. My parents must have been well respected in that community because I had the run of the community. I could go from Chestnut up to Fourth Street. That was my boundary.

**RLK:** That was a community of diversity.

**BK:** It was diversity. On the corner of Groesbeck and Fourth that is where the Brookshire's lived, Oscar Brookshire, Eugene and R.A. Brookshire and Lois Ann.

**RLK:** That is why you had the little conflict that you told about.

**BK:** The "N" word, yes.

**RLK:** Okay, I was trying to imagine why were you so close to them in light of what area we live now I say. I was thinking where were you and why was she where they could have done something to her.

**BK:** See Houston Brookshire lived here on Fourth Street. See the Brookshire's they were noted people of the community. I can't remember their father, but Austin Brookshire and Houston Brookshire I do remember because they lived in that community. The first store was downtown where the county jail is now and that was about in 1916 or '17 when they had that store there. That was before my time but Mother married and moved here in 1916 and she spoke of that. But I remember seeing the Brookshire's, Mr. Austin Brookshire and Mr. Houston Brookshire. I remember seeing them well.

**RLK:** So, they must have been from Texas, being Austin Brookshire and Houston Brookshire. Do you know if they are originally from Lufkin?

**BK:** I don't know that, but I understood there is a relation there in Tyler. They are all kinfolks there in some kind of way. I think one brother moved there and these two brothers stayed here and there might have been more. That is probably going to show up somewhere in our history. They were very attractive men I thought. Seemed like dark hair sort of olive complexion and tall very tall and being a young child didn't take much being tall but I thought of them as being very tall.

**RLK:** Let me know when you think you need to have your lunch.

**BK:** Oh, okay...I just haven't had a formal meal you know, like oatmeal and toast. I think...oh well you know oatmeal is very sustaining. My meal as a young child in the 1930's consist of pancakes, that you call them today, but they were called hotcakes and

my father would cook them. They would be corn cakes. He would take the meal rather than flour and make the corn cakes.

**RLK:** I know about that.

**BK:** You know about that?

**RLK:** Yes.

**BLK:** That was my week meal then on Sundays we had a flapjack which was made with flour and he would cook breakfast meal every day. Mother would cook the dinner meal which would be peas and cornbread and greens and stew meat. Sometimes we would have stew meat. We would have steak and then those days she would give me a quarter and I'd go down and get some steak and it would be enough for a meal and that kind of thing.

**RLK:** Let me ask you this and then we can end it so you can do whatever. Have you ever found yourself wishing you were not an only child?

**BK:** Yes, I wished I was but I think if there had been any other child bond what would that child been like if I'm like I am today.

**RLK:** Well maybe you would have been a better person.

**BK:** Oh, that might have been it! (laughter)

**RLK:** Well I'll say this again, I do appreciate your time for giving me this information and it's more meaningful to me than some other person. The fact that I'm not from Lufkin and it's odd being said since I've been here thirty years, but that doesn't tell me that I know some history about Lufkin. I know the experiences since I've been here, but you have said quite a bit especially when you move into other areas around town and differentiate between the different locations and the title names like Old Lufkin and Lufkin Land and things of that nature.

**BK:** New Addition.

**RLK:** Yes, New Addition.

**BK:** Now, Cedar Grove was still Cedar Grove at those times and you might enjoy that too because many of the persons, the Satterwhites, that lived out in the Cedar Grove area were part of slavery. So that would be another story because Squire Long was a part of the slaves who were freed in this area. Those are two of the names and probably others will surface that were slave descendants of this area and they established in the Cedar Grove area which is very knowledgeable. The Masonic organization was founded by Squire Long.

**RLK:** Who is Squire Long?

**BK:** Squire Long is Battell's great-great grandfather. Pat McKenzie's great-great grandfather. He was one of the freed slaves. He is on the mural downtown. Floyd Yancey played Squire Long in one of the plays they had here.

**RLK:** At the college?

**BK:** Wherever they did it.

**RLK:** I remember seeing something about that.

**BK:** Well, he played the part of Squire Long and Bettell will be doing a paper on Squire Long.

**RLK:** So that is her great-great grandfather?

**BK:** Yes, it was her grandfather's father.

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**BK:** A young lady and really was an asset to other queens who came after her. That was one of the things I remember profoundly about it. Even today the Citizen Chamber of Commerce likes to reach out and bring people to speak to the community, to expose the community to some of the outstanding people of color who have served the country who has been a part of our culture and certainly they bring that to Lufkin and put it on the table for us to enrich our lives.

**RLK:** You named some of the persons, is there anything that you can tell us about the ones you can remember as an individual their kind of work or whatever they may have done as a person who have been chosen to be a part of a group like this?

**BK:** Yes, each person had some connection with the community. Mr. S. T. Lewis was the operator of the Station One post office and it was the only one of its kind where people in the North Lufkin area would come to the post office to get their mail because the mail was not delivered to their homes. S. C. Packard was a doctor here and the clinic is still standing on Martin Luther King. Because of the fact that people of color were not accepted readily in the hospitals and we had a restricted area where we could go if we went to the hospital, so the clinic upstairs and downstairs is where he operated the medical clinic. He did minor surgery, had x-ray there and there were rooms for the patients to stay in at the Dr. Packard Clinic there.

**RLK:** Was he the only doctor there and nurses?

**BK:** He had nurses; in fact there were two nurses there that worked with him but he was the only doctor. In later years Dr. Allen came and worked at that clinic.

**RLK:** Was Dr. Packard from Lufkin?

**BK:** No he wasn't from Lufkin, either Mineola or some place in that area is where he came from, Jefferson. I can't remember just where, but he came and the Chamber of Commerce was responsible for him coming. So, the Chamber of Commerce was really the core or the root of our community and they planned and helped in many ways in the community.

**RLK:** Was it said that the office or the hospital or such came about the year 1948, or 1950 somewhere in there?

**BK:** Yes, let's go back to S. C. Packard. With my first child that was born in 1953 she was born at the Packard Clinic and the nurse that ministered, I guess the night I went in, is still living, too and her name was Linda...can't remember her last name just now, but Linda was the night time nurse and then there was a day time nurse who would come in. I remember that I was in the clinic for three or four days prior to the birth of my oldest daughter Bettell, who is now 45 years old. So that was some of the experience although in I guess about '40, '45 or somewhere in that neighborhood I had my tonsils removed and I was in that clinic for the period of time whatever it might have taken for him to remove the tonsils. So, operations of that minor set was done there although he had x-ray units there too that he could x-ray you. He was a very knowledgeable person.

**RLK:** I was about to ask you something in relationship to how even though it was 1953 you established the fact that people of color were not readily accepted in the local hospitals and even then in restricted areas when they were there, how could you compare or how would you compare his office setting with a setting that may have been at the hospital at that particular time? I know it would be different today. Do you feel that he may have had what he needed? Was there ever a situation where something may have occurred to your knowledge because a lack of having some supplies or mechanisms?

**BK:** No, I don't remember anything of that nature because see Dr. Packard I think had served in the Armed Forces. His rich background gave him asset to a lot of things that I guess otherwise a person who had not had the background that he had would have been confronted with. For him to deliver the baby there or to remove the tonsils I remember that there was Mrs. Gilda who had severe burns and she was treated there at the clinic. Those kinds of persons who were near the service of the clinic and for him to administer to them I think he did the best that he could with what he had. Maybe if there were some severe cases he may could have transferred them to the hospital, but see the doctors were not able to work in the hospitals at those times. All the nurses were not able to work there. Even the restricted area, let's say the one wing at Memorial Hospital which was the black wing, the nurses were white. Now a few years later in 1957, '58, 1958 when my second child was born she was born in Memorial Hospital on that restricted wing. They

would carry me to the delivery area wherever it was at that time. It seems it was upstairs but the service was administered on that restricted wing for blacks.

**RLK:** You say there were two nurses at the clinic, the Packard Clinic.

**BK:** Yes, there were two nurses.

**RLK:** Were they from Lufkin?

**BK:** Yes, they were from Lufkin and evidently had been trained in the area of medicine maybe at some of the black colleges. I don't remember the details of it but both young ladies were very intelligent and seemed to know their profession quite well.

**RLK:** I guess I am about to ask something you may or may not know but, these were during "those times" as we say many times. You wonder why the ladies who became nurses why they would come back to Lufkin. Was the Packard Clinic present when they went to school and then they came back because of it?

**BK:** Yes, I'm going to say they went to Prairie View.

**RLK:** Possibly so.

**BK:** Possibly so, one of the young ladies was a McDonald. That was her last name and it appears she went to Prairie View. I'm not sure where Linda, Linda was a Colwell; I'm not sure where she went, more than likely she went to Prairie View too for training.

**RLK:** Is it something like, assuming I guess are you? I mean, without saying, they trained, and they meaning the nurses, they trained in a college, if Dr. Packard had not had his clinic here they would have never come back home to work.

**BK:** That is a possibility but I'm not sure.

**RLK:** I don't mean never but I mean you know at the time they couldn't have done anything here.

**BK:** And I'm not sure what the salary was, what the possible salary for his nurses were.

**RLK:** All because of the same old...

**BK:** Yes, because of that. Now, E. C. Johnson who served as the president of the chamber was the county agent. In those years we had a black agent, a county agent and a white county agent. E. C. served as the county agent and he would check on the farmers and tell them how to care for the cows and things of that nature and his office was on Martin Luther King right next to Dr. Packard's Clinic. Also Mrs. Irene Johnson who had moved here from Crockett, Texas worked there as a home demonstration agent. She had classes on telling the women how to can food and how to prepare things for the house,

how to sew, whatever was needed for the home. She had classes in that area, a very profound lady.

**RLK:** Did the county agents only serve the black community?

**BK:** Yes, far as I know. Now, they might not have limited to just the black. I'm sure some persons of the other race would ask I'm sure they would render their service, but profoundly it was for the black community. They were well respected in the community. If anyone had a problem they could go there and asked and talk with them.

**RLK:** In this area we are speaking of it kind of makes me wonder about the way that the two groups managed to get along or didn't get along. Can you remember anything that may have occurred between them based on race in Lufkin that could have related to this incident? This medical person, these medical people, the chamber, was there any conflict with the other group at a table presenting itself as a Citizen Chamber as compared to the Angelina County Chamber?

**BK:** I am going to back up for the medical side. As far back as I can remember the first medical doctor we had here was Dr...

**END OF SIDE ONE**  
**SIDE TWO BEGINS**

**RLK:** The first person in charge of the chamber and I think you had mentioned as we talked before that you cannot remember any conflicts between the two chambers, the Citizens Chamber and the Angelina County Chamber. But, if we could move into some other happenings in Angelina County or in Lufkin that you would like to talk to me about that would be fine also.

**BK:** Mr. Kuykendall there is so much that has happened in our community, the black community per say, that we need to preserve and I deeply appreciate the efforts you put forth in helping to do that. I would like to share with you about ten years ago I worked trying to preserve black history month in which I would find out the activities for the month and bring them together in an agenda so that people of our community would know the activities just for the month of February. That month would bring forth to our community and our children and families of our communities activities in light of our people of Angelina County, in light of our people throughout the state and the nation. The activities of the month would run like this, there would be a news article in which the agenda would appear. There would be singing. The United Voices has been very active with the activities of the black history month which is in February. We had plays and dramas and dinners, activities in art, art displays at Angelina College have been unusual in that they displayed pictures from the highway department of a black family up in what is called the Flats at Alto, the Mumphreys and it depicts their house and family members sitting on the porch and tells about activities that their family has been involved with in the Alto area. Angelina College has always had speakers and forums which has brought

in persons of our area from Livingston, Corrigan and Lufkin. We have had African American dances in the area and that has helped.

There have been performances at Head Start and programs here in character. There have been displays at the correction center in Diboll. There have been nursing homes that have received persons to come in to sing and drama. The nursing homes and the churches of our area have welcomed special recognition during that month. Harriet Tubman has been a very popular character in our area in which the children are reading about her as a character and reading about her life and from their readings her character becomes a real person in the room and tell them more about her lively hood during the period of slavery. Dunbar Primary, well all of the schools, Garrett School, Hackney School, Slack School, the middle School and the high school there have been dramas about Harriett Tubman, Sojourner Truth have been very popular.

Five years ago I became Coretta Scott King and she was an outstanding character from Corrigan and Nacogdoches through the Lufkin community. These characters are just a few of which I have portrayed through the years and it's been confusing to many people who see her. Coretta Scott King is one of the ones they think I am her when I come alive as Coretta Scott King or Sojourner Truth or Harriett Tubman. It's been a blessing to keep our history alive in drama, in character and it has been a welcome sight. Last year Valerie Kuykendall did Negro Spiritual in story and song and it was excellent. It was superb, it was super. The work that she put into preserving our Negro spirituals and the narrations because many of us were not aware of the details that she went into in narrating the program and that is one thing that we need to do is to preserve our heritage.

Also, the arts of our people, we have people who do sculpture and drawings and paintings and many of our people do not know these persons. Displays of their artwork has been essential and very important. Often I write poetry and some of it has been excellent I think and last year I wrote this one.

*When you preserve people you preserve your own people  
When you give hope to others you give hope to yourself.  
When there is concern for people then there is a concern for you.  
When you give love then love will be given.  
When you bring to life a generation then a generation is restored.*

We are a people that have been lost in the history books of our time and for many years there were no readings, no writings of our people and to have living history recorded in forms of tapes and videos it certainly makes it important for our people to know about our people. For one example, this week I will be going to Central School. I will be in character as Harriett Tubman. When I go into character I actually become a live asset character. I do research on her from several books or tapes or film or whatever I can find about her and I bring her alive in dress and in drama along with her relics from her history of Africa and along with the narration of her story. And, that gives the children an example of what she was really like and make her come alive in their lives. For today, which is Monday, the children would begin to read about Harriett Tubman. Thursday

when I become Harriett Tubman to walk in the room in dress it will certainly put an impact on their minds of what Harriett Tubman stood for. This is only one of the ways that we can help to preserve our people. I also carry with me pictures of her of her old age and then of her younger life when the struggle was so great for her and the demand on her life.

**RLK:** Let me ask you something, if I may interrupt you a little bit.

**BK:** Yes.

**RLK:** You have done quite a bit. I know that because I've seen you in action. Do you notice or do you hear enough to cause you to feel that you are really touching someone? Not doubtful about you, but how are people reacting?

**BK:** There has been such a great reaction that I am getting requests. For an example, my agenda is already begin to fill up for 2002. There are persons already called in asking me to come to their school in February 2002 to help the children to understand. There have been tears. There have been embracement and often I can't tell them no I'm Bettie Kennedy. I'm not that character. Even when I say it they just don't believe it. Last year I had an unusual thing. I met a grandmother whose granddaughter had seen me earlier that morning at Garrett School in character and she could not convince her granddaughter that I was Bettie Kennedy and not Sojourner Truth. The little one said, "That is grandmother you just don't know, that was Sojourner Truth." So, that is one experience and when I have those kind of experiences it really gives me strength to go on to be other characters. I'm up to doing ten characters now which are most unusual. Many of the characters are very parallel. For example, Sojourner Truth and Harriett Tubman lived in the same time frame. I'm not sure whether they actually knew each other but their lives are very parallel as I do the characters. I'm working on Rosa Parks now. I'll be doing her in months to come. I dreamed of doing Barbara Jordan, but I have not worked that character up yet.

**RLK:** Do you feel that others are taking up where you left off once you leave them? I mean, I understand people request you to show. Do we see any other instance that something is happening in some of the people? Let's say the schools, are they doing, to your knowledge, things beyond what you have done or perform the catalyst for them to say, "Class this is something that we need to do?" Do you see any of this taking place or do they invite you back to see something that they are doing?

**BK:** I have been invited back but I have not seen where they have done beyond that point other than letters, follow up or drawings. I have drawings from the school, thank you notes and that kind of things, but I don't know what other things that may take place or have taken place at the schools to deeply embed in the minds of children that these are people of color.

**RLK:** The dates that you have for the year 2002, off hand could you estimate maybe the number of black churches that would be in that list?

**BK:** That is a good thought. There are very few black churches that have invited me to come.

**RLK:** See we can remember when, being that we are old, or whatever we want to call it, everything that took place in the black community started at the churches.

**BK:** That is true.

**RLK:** Whatever it was.

**BK:** That is true.

**RLK:** The preachers were open, the people were there and just speaking for myself I see very little leadership on the part of most preachers. Not that I know all of them but surely there would be something that would be announced. We know that, you and I know anyway that Reverend Thompson is a leader in this area. What is his first name? I can't think of his first name.

**BK:** Leroy.

**RLK:** Leroy Thompson is one who has lead this and tried hard to incorporate many of the other churches. In attending many of the meetings that he has requested too often we never found the black preacher.

**BK:** That is true.

**RLK:** So, it kind of says something. We all know there is a God and we respect God, but this is part of Gods work if you look at nothing but the releasing of slaves. Regardless of who Abraham Lincoln was God works through man whether Abraham wanted to do it at all, it was God's choice to say you will do this. There is so much involved with our religion and we know we are tied close to religion. I don't want to take up your talk, but I'm being inspired just listening to some of the things that you are saying.

**BK:** Yes, well this was the year 2001 February and there are only five churches here that have had persons in. Some churches say that they do a small portion of their worship hour and then with this the five is including Valerie Kuykendall who did an evening of Psalm and spirituals. The other is that we have had speakers in here but this was for 30 days in February 2001 and there were only five churches to be recognized with some type of program or another, but it may mean that I wasn't aware because maybe they didn't talk about it.

**RLK:** I think that people look at history the way they want to look at it. There are some things that they care not to involve themselves in. I sit as you know on the city council and the Angelina College wanted permission from the city to portray an incident during the civil war, but because they were going to use Dunbar they needed permission from city council to do this in the city. Everyone on the council, Mr. Boyd was not there, voted

yea, yes, I voted no. After the city council meeting one of the guys who understands clearly what is taking place, he listens and he asked me, "Why did you vote against that?" I said, "My reason for voting against this reenactment is when we speak people do not want to hear about what happened back then, that was back then, but now you come along and you want to portray, and this is a big thing in the United States battles and things of that nature but then I can't talk about what happened to my people. Nobody wants to hear that." So, I find something in there that the culture isn't right. Everything goes into the picture. Don't leave some parts out of the picture. This is the way I feel. This is what I experienced.

**BK:** I can understand that. I wrote something pertaining to that several years ago. *Freedom from Slavery, Freedom from slavery took place in Smith County. That was my family you see. As it freed the slaves it also freed me. Freedom, freedom ring out over Texas to all. On the Juneteenth freedom, freedom ended slavery and gave us a new way so they say. Freedom, freedom to be cooked and cooked by white men destroyed our dreams, freedom when will it come. Will it be the year 2001? Open the door to you and one more memory of my ancestors Joe and Mary Starling Ingram, freed in 1865, the nineteenth of June.* That was one of the writings I've done. I've done many writings about our people and the freedom. We cry out about freedom and I wonder how much freedom do we really have?

**RLK:** It is always used as a comparative meaning that you are freer than you would have been if you were in Russia. You are freer than you would have been if you'd been in some of the worst places. We tend to compare the United States with the worst places which makes it look good see. Something like, "Well fellow you need to shut up, if you were blah-blah over there then this wouldn't happen to you," but, no you don't have the same kind of freedoms that I have. We can't let you have all of it. It's just the way it comes out.

**BK:** Here in Angelina County I have not been able to find it, but there has been one hanging here. I've never found out who the person was. I had an experience when I took a group of youngsters to the museum and on this wall was this picture of this person that was hung and there was a very attractive little five year old with me and he kept going back to that picture. "Who was it, what happened to him, why did they do this to him?" At that time the person who was carrying me through the museum was Mrs. Bronough and I asked her, she did not know. But the little fellow's mind was just puzzled about that picture. Since they have moved that picture, they have moved it completely out of site of those who come in to tour the museum. We have come through times of shame and mistreats and abuse of our people, but yet we have stood and we have rose to such high heights that we have been able to see our children and grandchildren achieve goals that were not open to us and yet we fight each day for a better tomorrow for those of our people. I think preserving our people in a living history certainly is going to help to better our hope.

**RLK:** Mrs. Reverend Bettie Kennedy we worked together for three or four years in the school system.

**BK:** Yes sir.

**RLK:** This that I'm hearing from you did not show itself at that time. You were a good teacher, but I had no idea that things of this nature were with you, the type of things that you do and the way you are well received. I guess we never know each other. Do you feel those things were present at that time we worked together?

**BK:** Yes sir. They have always been present and you never know what is inside the heart of a child. Often it may remain silent, it may remain subtle, it may remain hidden but the pain that one feels may never surface in a lifetime, but if you can allow the light to shine through the dark years of one's life then it makes that person a better person. Now, I came into this character theme just by accident. I was teaching children that we're special and I was wondering, how could I get over to my class black history and I decided I would do Phyllis Wheatley. Phyllis Wheatley's writing was very deep. As I came alive as Phyllis Wheatley I thought maybe I would use some of my poetry to encourage the class. So that was the very first character that I did. The children drew pictures about her and then wrote their own little poems about her. I regret that I didn't keep them. I don't think I have any of those poems that those children wrote. They were just four line poems, very simple but four line poems and that enhanced them to write.

**RLK:** Describe the children that you were speaking to.

**BK:** Many of the children in my class were just culturally deprived. T. J. Turner was one that was in my class then and the environment in which they come up. Being reared by single parent and a big family many of the children just had not been exposed to activities or art or cultural things in the community. Therefore it took a little more teaching with auditory, things that they could see rather than what they could hear would enhance their learning. I will never forget that T. J. would say "I'm going to play football one day." And I would say, "Keep that goal ahead of you." At that time he was six feet two inches tall and I would have to look up to him. When I heard of all the outstanding things he has done through the years, it was later years that one of the young men of the class wanted to do a book on T. J. Turner and that was really a fascinating book. I have a copy of that.

**RLK:** It sounds like you are saying that we who are teachers need to plan, devise strategies in order to get the concept over to those with whom we are teaching. Not so much as to who they are or how they learn best and if they learn this way this is the way we have to work with them. That seems to eliminate, that process seems to eliminate a lot of failure in a lot of people.

**BK:** Yes, I'll agree there. My heart bleeds today the way we have designed our special classes. There is no escape for those children who are trapped in special classes. The only way they can go is downhill if there is no one who can feel their warmth and work with them to pull them out of the stage that their minds are in they will struggle through school and never enjoy school, just sit there as zombies and never be touched with the deep love of learning and exploring who they are and what they need to know to survive in a time like this.

**RLK:** You know we hear the word failure used frequently, frequently.

**BK:** Yes we do.

**RLK:** And, failure has been used in such a negative manner that one should feel ashamed when they fail but, the mere fact there is so much failure it one day will be accepted as a part of life. Failure will always be around. We are going to fail at things, but we do not have to be castigated as a result of not doing something as well as someone else. A lot of this is what we find taking place from a racial point as well as culturally. If you are not like me and those kind of things then you become a failure or we can set you up for failure by doing things, giving you well let's back up to a time when one had to pay in order to vote.

**BK:** Yes.

**RLK:** Okay, you could only do this in Mississippi I know, if you could count the beans in the jar or if you could quote any parts of the constitution of the state and you could explain what it means. Now that is setting a person up for failure because I've always wondered the very ones who are carrying it out if they could do what they are expecting you to do. So, we have settings where we cause people to fail and then we criticize them. I think this is what I'm getting out of what you said to me each time we have talked, that if one is given a chance truly there can be success in some amount, maybe not like the other person but, there is a feeling of success. I think this is what I have pretty much gotten out of it.

**BK:** I think so. I wrote this some time ago. *A thing of the present: Black History is written everyday by people like you and me, written to accomplish our goals that others cannot see. Being black is beautiful so you set out to succeed, fighting from day to day with one step more and one more plea. Helping the people of the world to open more doors, you are black history in your own way you see today. The past is your foot stool to carry you one step further based on the prayers of that poor black mother. Get all the education you can get and bring that college diploma home. Be a firm foundation here even if you stand alone. You see black history is you my children just plain people like you and me.*

So, we all are part of black history whether we were on the receiving end or whether we were on the giving end. Those of us who received the beatings and the rejections and the Jim Crow laws that hindered us, but those who passed the laws to make sure that we did not succeed. So, we are all a part of this great nation of African Americans and a great part of this black history.

**RLK:** We have talked how many days, three or four days?

**BK:** Three days, maybe four.

**RLK:** There is a lot more information that you could add to this tape, but at some point we are going to have to put a barrier and then come back and this is what I'm suggesting at this point and time because it can go on and on.

**BK:** Yes, especially with the two of us.

**RLK:** What I'm working on is trying to get as many people whom I can, different viewpoints. But I have enjoyed sitting talking to you, listening to you. I've learned a lot that I've never heard before. With these tapes I hope, my plan is for others to hear the tapes and hope that somebody's eyes will be open. We don't want them to do anything but listen to them and hopefully their intelligence will tell them something. Because, we do more fighting with each other than we do getting along with each other, finding fault with each other. Sometimes that happens because we don't know each other.

**BK:** That is true.

**RLK:** I think this is one of the many ways we can begin to get to know each other.

**BK:** Well I deeply appreciate what you are doing. You know that any way that I can help I will do so, but what you are doing is certainly a foundation of what we need to do. So I deeply appreciate that. I am going to share with you these materials that I have from our listening today or our taping today. I want you to have these that we can add to them and help to preserve our people.

**RLK:** You are going to give?

**BK:** Yes, I'm going to give all of this to you.

**RLK:** Well I appreciate it even more. (laughter)

**BK:** I know that is the truth! (laughter)

**RLK:** Well again thank you very much. We will keep working in this area. Maybe one day Mr. Thompson, Reverend Thompson will be heard of. He has his own church right now. He has a process he uses a little different from many preachers but the point is he is delivering the word and that is the bottom line to God's work, to deliver it well. Again, thank you very much.

**BK:** Thank you Mr. Kuykendall!

**TAPE STOPPED  
END OF INTERVIEW**