

JIM LIGON

Interview 185a

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Jonathan Gerland, Interviewer

Patsy Colbert, Transcriber

ABSTRACT: In this interview with Jonathan Gerland, Diboll native Jim Ligon reminisces about growing up as part of Diboll's black community during the Great Depression and in the 1940's. He talks about his father's restaurant, The Froggy Bottom Café, the boxers and performers like Count Basie that visited the café, and his famous barbecue. He recalls his years in the segregated school, especially Professor and Mrs. Bradley and their contributions, and his other teachers. He speaks about his time living in Seattle with his brother, where he experienced an integrated society for the first time – riding a bus and sitting anywhere he wanted, as well as attending school and working at Bowling with whites and other races. Mr. Ligon also talks about race relations in Diboll, particularly Jay Boren, the “quarter boss” or “special ranger” that had a quasi-law enforcement job in Diboll.

Jonathan Gerland (hereafter JG): Today's date is November 6, 2009. My name is Jonathan Gerland and I'm with Mr. Jim Ligon. We are at the History Center today in Diboll and we are going to do an oral history. Jim, if you would let's just begin maybe by telling me when and where you were born.

Jim Ligon (hereafter JL): Well, Jonathan I was born in Diboll February 23, 1929 just during the Depression. Well, growing up here of course all that time was just spent in the local town. I hadn't gone anyplace else in a long time. It was like going someplace interesting when we went to Lufkin. That was the big city.

JG: Who were your parents?

JL: Jim Ligon, I'm a junior.

JG: A junior, okay.

JL: Jim Ligon and Estella Ligon, her maiden name was Patton.

JG: Patton?

JL: P-a-t-t-o-n.

JG: Where were they from originally?

JL: Well my mother was from Houston County, like Crockett or really Kennard.

JG: Kennard, okay.

JL: Kennard and Tadmire, a neighborhood area over there pretty close together, Ratcliff. Daddy was from Grimes County, Anderson, Texas in Grimes County. That was where he was born so of course he went around several different places close around the areas I grew up. That was, you know, like...I remember very well we had an assignment from school, this was very interesting. The teachers had us to bring that information to school to tell where our parents were born. I was on my way to school that day to give the answer and I had not asked my mother where they were born. So I had to go back and ask my mother. She said, "I was born in Houston County, Ratcliff or Kennard." I think it was Kennard. On my way out I asked my dad and he said he was born in Anderson Texas, Grimes County. So that is how I found it out.

JG: Now you had told me before about your father that he was at Alcedo, the Southern Pine Lumber Company logging camp for a while. What do you know about that?

JL: Well I was much too young to remember anything that was going on there.

JG: That was before you were born right?

JL: Yes, that was before I was born. I really don't know what year that picture was taken.

JG: And you are referring to a photograph that you gave us the other day.

JL: Right, but Dad did tell me a little bit about it as a kid. He had this...he barbequed and he was a cook. So, he followed these camps around in various places where they were cutting timber and what have you and he provided them meals and what have you to take care...

JG: And from the photograph it looks like he had a crew of four or five other people, other men.

JL: He did have a crew; he had a crew. And on that picture you'll notice the man standing next to him on the right hand side, my mother would tell me a lot about him. His name was Mr. Horn.

JG: And that was to your father's left.

JL: Yes, to my father's left. She said that he was my dad's best friend and apparently he must have been important to Daddy probably in his work or whatever, but I never knew him.

JG: You never knew him. What was your father doing that you can remember when you were a child say school age, young school age? Where did your father work then?

JL: Well he never worked for anyone but himself.

JG: Okay.

JL: See in Diboll he leased the land that we lived on for a hundred years.

JG: Okay, he leased the land.

JL: For a hundred years, right. So, Daddy kept his own business instead of working for the lumberyard and mill and everything. Course he knew all the people and all that. Everybody still patronized him. They would come and buy barbecue every weekend so he built this café called the Froggy Bottom Cafe. It was located on the west side of Diboll going toward the lake, Ryan's Lake you might say, the very edge of the woods, just across from the graveyard that is existing there right now. That is where he continued to work for himself at that location until I was really oh, until he died really.

JG: Now did y'all live next to the restaurant and cafe?

JL: We lived right there on the same property.

JG: Same property.

JL: Well, he built a house right across from the house that we were living in before I was, I was born in this house behind the Froggy Bottom, hadn't been built then. But after I was born in 1929, sometime after then he built this house first and that is where the family lived. He had leased all this land so he built Froggy Bottom Café. That was really an amazing thing because as a kid I can remember a lot of activities that were in there. Like boxing, he had this guy, a pretty well known boxer. My brother knew him pretty well. He kind of traveled around. He had a few fights and he came through here one time and he was going to fight anybody who could stay in the ring with him for one round. He was going to give him ten dollars. We had one guy, he was one of the guys that worked for Southern Pine Lumber Company, I can't think of his name. I can't right now, I'll probably think of it later. Anyway, he was going to fight him and everybody was all up in the air going to see this fight tonight. When he got off from work at Southern Pine they turned to look for him and he was gone and they couldn't find the guy no place. So, he didn't show up for the fight.

JG: The outside boxer?

JL: Yes, the guy that lived here. The outside boxer he was ready.

JG: Oh, he was ready. The guy from Southern Pine didn't show up.

JL: Right, yes. I remember it very well. He had this deal and he set up this boxing ring inside of the café. It was a big café there. He was getting ready, he was coming, I can't think of his name right now but, maybe it will come to me. But anyway he didn't show up.

JG: So did you fight him then? (laughter) Did anybody step up?

JL: Nobody stepped up because everybody was anticipating...

JG: To watch.

JL: Yes, they were going to watch the fight. He just didn't show. This guy, I can remember him, the real fighter I can remember him very well because he was sparring around in the ring a lot, you know, that they had fixed in the café. He was shadow boxing and everything. We thought that was really fantastic. Of course maybe that is what scared him away, but he didn't show up. Daddy had a lot of... I remember it being the type of place that most young people didn't hang out there. It was mostly for grown ups, of course you could come but it wasn't really a hang out for young people, like a canteen or whatever. But, at any rate he had this friend of his, of Daddy's, was named Prayer Davis or Roosevelt Davis I think it might have been. Anyway, he worked for the company too; but he was a guy that booked activities for Daddy's café because it was big enough to have little things going on, socially.

JG: So, it was kind of like a nightclub in essence.

JL: It really was. Somewhat like a nightclub, but it was like a little civic center, too. You know you could have little functions in there. So in addition to having the jukebox in there and the dancing and all that kind of stuff he could have the fights, the boxers, and anything else that went on. That was the two main things that he had, that I remember. Except the one other thing when Prayer Davis...

JG: Spell that first name.

JL: Davis, P-r-a-y-e-r. I think his name is on that list that I gave you.

JG: Prayer Davis. Okay, I'm sorry.

JL: Prayer Davis, Roosevelt Davis I think is his real name. Prayer was one of his nicknames I think. But anyway, he found out that Count Basie was coming through Diboll. He had been probably to Shreveport or somewhere and going to Houston and Diboll was in between and he contacted him to stop over and would he play at Diboll that Saturday night and sure enough he did.

JG: Wow, Count Basie.

JL: You wouldn't believe Count Basie played at my daddy's café.

JG: How about that.

JL: And I remember we couldn't go in as kids, you know, too much even though I lived there.

JG: Yes, that is what I was going to ask you if you worked there or anything?

JL: Oh, I helped Dad all the time in the café.

JG: Even as a small child?

JL: Even as a small child, uh-huh. Just to be going there just to sit around – none of the kids hardly ever came. They came in to buy a soda or something like that.

JG: Were they just not allowed too?

JL: Well I wouldn't say they wasn't allowed, they shouldn't be there because there was a lot of activities that kids shouldn't be around.

JG: Was there drinking, alcohol?

JL: No, it wasn't drinking it was just...well they played a lot of dominoes and card tables. These are grown up games and they just didn't want kids around I guess. It was mostly done at night not usually during the day so that kind of cut us out of it.

JG: Did they have live music on a regular basis or was it jukebox?

JL: No, this is the only time that we had a live band or anything is when Count Basie came through there. What made me remember it – I really didn't know who Count Basie was at the time, but this lady that was singing with the band. I remember my mother let me come into the kitchen part and I could see outside. We were like behind the band. We had this counter in the front and the band was right in front of the counter and they had all that room out there for dancing, but behind here was the kitchen part. I was back there looking at the dance so she let me come in for a little while and my sister. This woman who was singing had long hair and it hung down about her waist in the back.

JG: And she was a black woman?

JL: Yes, and so she was singing this song and she went backwards like this, how you can lean back all the way and how she stood up to do that I don't know, but she leaned back until her hair touched the ground, the floor. (laughter) And then she raised back up and continued on with whatever was going on. But, that was the thing that stuck in my mind. (laughter) It was amazing.

JG: That woman with the long hair that could touch the ground. (laughter)

JL: Right, it was such an amazing thing that I don't remember anything else. Mother told me to go on back in the house or whatever; we just stayed in there for a while. But it

was interesting. That was just some of the things. Dad had a lot of things going for him. He was a blacksmith too. He could build wagon wheels, I mean from scratch. I mean the spokes, the hub and all of those things. That is where I found out how they put that iron over the wheels when they get the wood and stuff around it. He had this rim; it was just an iron rim. He built this wheel just so it was a little bit larger than the rim. How he measured and got that so perfect I'll never know. But anyway, he heated the rim in a fire. So this makes the metal expand. So, then he dug this trench in the ground and they poured water in it about so deep. Then they run a rod through the wheel when they got ready to put the rim onto the wheel, well the rim had expanded and they laid it on the ground and they had to tap it around until it went right on. You could see the smoke coming from around the rim and then they immediately put it into this shawl through this rod and then they spin the wheel so it could hurry up and cool off and that made it jam tight on the deal. And if you've ever noticed it must be the way they've always done it because you never see any nails or rivets or anything in the rim. It's just tight to the wood. And that is how the old people...it's got to be the only way they did it.

JG: Yes I think so. They even did that on the locomotives, on steam engines. They had the steel wheel but then they had, they called them tires but it was that outer band, the flanged part. They would do the same thing, they would heat it up to expand it, push it on and then cool it off.

JL: That is how Dad did it.

JG: But your father did that for wagon wheels, huh, on wood spoke wheels with the metal bands around them?

JL: Yes, for wagon wheels with wood spokes. I used to watch him do it. Instead of sandpaper I remember very well he would take broken coke bottle glasses and that is what he would use to finish it with.

JG: Oh!

JL: It would get just as smooth, instead of scrapping it, just curl up. It took a little while to do that. He did every spoke and they all looked alike.

JG: Now what about your siblings – how many brothers and sisters did you have?

JL: Well there were seven of us, my mother had eleven all together but seven of us survived. The other four they came before, I'm the baby of the family so I didn't really get to know them. She had seven of us and all seven of us survived up until my oldest brother died about 1970.

JG: So some of your brothers and sisters were already, had already left home by the time you were born?

JL: Well they hadn't really left here because all of my sisters and brothers was always around close.

JG: But I mean they didn't live in the house with you?

JL: Oh no, my oldest brother was married.

JG: They were married.

JL: Right, of course, and my other brother got married. They all got married, I think, before I finished high school.

JG: Okay, I was just going to ask you if you had memories of your older brothers maybe helping your father with the blacksmith business or the café.

JL: Oh yes, they were here and many times they would help dad do work around there. I wasn't quite big enough to do some of the things they were doing. I remember them cutting wood for the heaters and they had these cross cut saws and stuff. They would cut wood, split it and stack it and cord it all up you know for the winter and stuff like that. They would help him around the café at times. I didn't...the only work I did was sweeping up and keeping the floor clean after something went on. I'd clean it up and clean the yard up. That was basically my job.

JG: Okay, what were your brother and sisters names?

JL: Johnny Jones, these are all my half brothers and sisters. Johnny Jones is my oldest brother, then Oscar Jones and Vester Jones. Then Della Jones, my sister and Joy Mae Smith, you might know her. They are all very good friends of the family. Well I say the family, they were good friends of Ellen. My sister worked for Ellen.

JG: Ellen Temple?

JL: Yes, a long time and Buddy. We all just got together a lot of times. I had a lot of Christmas and Thanksgiving and things together. Della was a cook for them so I got a chance to enjoy a lot of that.

JG: Tell me about school. What are some of your earliest memories of going to school in Diboll?

JL: Well starting at the beginning my sister took me out to enroll me in school.

JG: That was Joy Mae?

JL: Joy Mae.

JG: Joy Mae took you to school.

JL: What happened that morning was very strange. I was so happy about the fact that I was fixing to start going to school. At that time they didn't have kindergarten, you had to be six years old to start to school. They took me out there that particular day and the teacher told her said "you have to take Junior back, he is not old enough to start to school yet." Man that just hurt me. I was so sick about that I think I cried all the way home. And then Joy took me back home and told Momma what happened and she had to go back to school. So, that was my first experience of school. I didn't get a chance to spend the day.

JG: You didn't get to go.

JL: I didn't get to go.

JG: So what, you weren't six yet?

JL: I wasn't six yet, me being born in February that kind of put it off, you know. I had to wait until the next school term started. If I had been born closer to May when it started, I mean September I would have been able to go.

JG: Do you remember your actual first day then, after that disappointment?

JL: Well after then I can't remember after the disappointment. That was a year later. But, that was my very first experience in going to school and I was so disappointed I couldn't stay. I guess I was...

JG: That would have been around '35 then.

JL: It would have been somewhere in there. I wanted to go to school really bad because all the other kids I played around with in my category was already going to school and they seemed to be having so much fun. Of course you know, when school starts and all the kids that age are in school you don't have anybody to play with.

JG: So all your brothers and sisters were older and your friends were older at that time.

JL: Joy is the next one, she is next to me. Then Earnest was next, then Della and Oscar and then Johnny. Johnny was the oldest one.

JG: Well, going back to the school, maybe not your first year or even second year but what are some of your earliest memories of school? How many students would you have had in a class? Maybe teachers you remember.

JL: Yes I remember some of them. My first teacher was Mrs....well we had two teachers during my first year in school. Mrs. Henderson was my very first teacher. There was another teacher, I don't think she stayed here very long, but I can remember her being in my primary years. Her name was Mrs. Piggy. I talked to a lot of my classmates and nobody could remember Mrs. Piggy, nobody but me.

JG: Was that a nickname?

JL: I don't think so because they referred to her as Mrs. Piggy. I couldn't remember whether that was her nickname or her real name. It could have been.

JG: That is just how you knew her.

JL: That was all I knew her by. I think she stayed maybe a year and then she went someplace else I believe. After then, after Mrs. Henderson, she was my primary teacher. I remember her, she stayed a long time after Mrs. Piggy was here.

JG: What was a typical school day like? How did the morning start off?

JL: Well about typical as an average morning. I think school started around about 8:30 and we were there.

JG: Everybody just walk to school?

JL: Oh yes, everyone walked to school. You know, we didn't take a lunch because we all lived in the community and close enough to walk to school. School turned out at twelve o'clock. We came home and ate dinner and went back to school at one. We got out at three forty-five I believe it was. That was just routine for our activities as far as going and coming. We didn't have to take a lunch because if you remember like when everybody ate about the same time here in Diboll because the mill shut down. Everybody went home and they had to cook the meals and everything. That is what that cornbread whistle was all about.

JG: Right, so even the schools took their lunch break at that time.

JL: Oh everyone was tuned into that.

JG: So everybody in Diboll was eating lunch at the same time.

JL: Yes, at the same time. It was really something, you know. I'm starting to write a book and I mention that in my book. I got...it's just in the rough form right now. The manuscript is all I got right now. I got to get it all together. I mention something to that affect like, when we go home to eat lunch, all those houses that we'd pass by you could hear those plates rattling and the knives and forks clinging together and everything. You could actually smell the food and you would know what they was having for dinner.

JG: Now I imagine you had pretty good dinners with your father being a cook and having the café.

JL: Oh yes, and Mother was a good cook too herself. But now Dad, he was more professional. He had the best barbecue. People would come from miles around to get his barbecue.

JG: I want to ask you more questions about school, but I also forgot to ask you about your father's café. Do you ever remember who patronized your father's...did any white people come?

JL: Oh yes, as a matter of fact Mrs. Hall, you may not remember her. She had a store.

JG: Spell that last name.

JL: H-a-l-l.

JG: Hall, okay.

JL: She used to get him to barbecue for her quite often. I don't know whether she was having family type of thing or what. As a matter of fact the night my daddy passed away she had asked him to barbecue for her that Saturday but he said he couldn't barbecue for her that Saturday because he had a lot of barbecue work to do for that weekend. In which he did. That was the same weekend he passed away. She had a store and then there was two more stores, Wyatt's store, and one more store up here is called Copestown. The building is still there. It is a two-story building. I think somebody is living in it right now. But there used to be another building built just on the same order only it was over there by Wyatt's store.

JG: Spell that.

JL: W-y-a-t-t, I think that is it, Laura Wyatt. But, anyway that was the store activities. We had one...

JG: So they sold your father's barbecue at their stores?

JL: Yes, they sold him meat and what have you. But, Dad bought a lot of his meat from the market here at the commissary. I remember going and many times they would pick out, because they had the best choice of meat for barbecue.

JG: So he got his meat from them but as far as him selling his food to...I mean, did like in the evening, a typical evening people are coming to your father's restaurant to eat, did any white people come and eat there inside?

JL: Yes, as a matter of fact, well they never really sat down and ate. They would come and order. In fact I can remember many times they would come up and get an order of barbecue. One guy came up and Daddy had sold out of barbecue and this white guy asked him said "Jim do you have any of that gravy?" (laughter) When he would barbecue, you know, like the barbecue sauce, today you can buy it in a bottle, but daddy had made up

his own barbecue sauce and that is what he would serve with his barbecue. You'd make a sandwich and put that on it and it was all homemade and they wanted to just buy some of the sauce. (laughter) And one guy came to the house one time and he was a white guy and he wanted to get some barbecue and Daddy didn't have any. He got mad. He came in the house and everything and he was raising a whole lot of sand about that barbecue. Why we didn't have no barbecue. I really think he had had a few drinks.

JG: That is what they call demand isn't it?

JL: Yes, I tell you that really was demand.

JG: Supply and demand, demand out ran the supply.

JL: Well to tell you the truth again Jonathan, Daddy had a café in Henderson, Texas.

JG: Okay, that is a good bit away from here.

JL: Yes, that is good bit away from here. I remember we had one photograph of him standing, sitting on the outside of his café.

JG: Now was that while you were...

JL: This was before I was born. This was before I was born; I was born in Diboll.

JG: Okay, right. I didn't know if he managed two at the same time or not.

JL: No, he didn't but it was called the Stucco Café.

JG: Stucco.

JL: Stucco because it was built and it had stucco on the outside.

JG: Stucco walls, okay.

JL: Stucco walls during them days and they called it the Stucco Café. Would you believe that when I opened mine, I had a café here too and I named it the Stucco Café? I had the business and all that kind of stuff.

JG: Now did the Froggy Bottom Café outlive your father, or did it end when your father passed away? You mentioned your father had passed away. What year was that?

JL: Yes, well that was in 1944.

JG: '44 okay.

JL: We had gone, we had done, Daddy...

JG: You would have been about 15.

JL: I was 15, that was exactly what I was. That Saturday, I'll tell you about that, Daddy had barbecued for Mrs. Hall, and remember I told you about her.

JG: Yes sir.

JL: He had rolled up this meat. Well, she wanted him to barbecue for her but he was barbecuing for himself and some more people at the time. I wanted to go to the theater that Saturday because there was some kind of movie going on, a matinee or whatever. Daddy was making me stay there to watch him make up this meatloaf to go into the barbecue pit and he was showing me step by step how he did it. I had seen him do this many times. This was the first time he had ever particularly wanted me to pay attention to what he was doing. So, he made me stay for a little while and I am thinking I am going to miss part of the movie, you know.

JG: So you weren't paying attention.

JL: I wanted to get on out of there but he made me stay until he put it all together and he told me how he seasoned it and all that and roll it up and tie it up and put it in the barbecue pit. Then he gave me thirty-five cents to go on to the movie and I went on to the movie. Now, Daddy had high blood pressure and Dr. Dale had told him, Dr. Clemons had told him that he shouldn't eat salt too much. That was one of the bad things he had a bad habit of. He just couldn't resist his own good cooking I guess. I came in from that movie that Saturday and I came by the café and I looked to my left and that is where the door goes into the kitchen part of the café. I saw Daddy was sitting there and he was just enjoying himself eating that barbecue. I thought about it, I thought, "you not suppose to be eating that barbecue like that." That night I went, you know, like kids go out and I had to be home about nine o'clock. Anyway, that Saturday I came on, you know Mr. Walter Allen, his son and I are very close friends so we always come home together. So, he wasn't there that night at Mrs. Evadale's café where we would hang out at so, I just decided I would come on home by myself. No one told me anything. I'm on my way home and I got home I walked in the yard Jonathan, I walked in the yard I saw my mother sitting on the porch and my sister was over her with her arms around her. I had no idea. Then when I walked up there I could see my mother was crying. The people, no music was going on in the café. Everything was kind of quite, a few people was mingling around on the porch. I said, I asked my sister, "What is the matter?" Momma never said anything; my sister didn't say anything. They saw I was getting excited, my mother told me to go in and look at my daddy and I went in to look at him and he was on the bed. He had had a stroke or heart attack and of course that is what took his life. So, that was that Saturday night on Oct. 10, 1944 and so after then you know everything went to...I don't know my whole world was upside down then. Because, he was teaching me how to barbecue the way he did. That same style, imagine that.

JG: Wow that is a special story. So you then later had a café?

JL: Yes.

JG: I want to come back to that, but if we could let's go back a little bit more to your school years, specifically the school. I know you played football. You showed us the photograph and of course you graduated I think you told me in 1948.

JL: Yes.

JG: Tell me about the helmets that y'all wore. You were telling me something interesting the other day about that.

JL: Well during that time you know, I guess Bradley was our principal.

JG: Charles Bradley?

JL: Charles Bradley and he also was a coach, see he did all that and he taught school. We had a football team. The first football team we had only had six or seven guys on the team, six on the line and one on the backfield. So, that was our football team, a six-man squad. During that time we didn't have any money to get real helmets so Bradley went to, I guess the Army-Navy store or something like that, and these leather helmets with the...tank helmets is what they really were.

JG: Like Army tank helmets.

JL: Army tank helmets that was what we used for helmets.

JG: They were probably better than the football ones.

JL: They were leather, thick things and very heavy. We didn't have enough shoulder pads but we just got along without them. We only had a few pads you know for your hip pads on the sides. That is about all we had.

JG: Who were some of the schools that you played?

JL: Oh we, considering the district we played Zavalla, we played Livingston. They were much larger schools than we were at the time, Livingston especially. I'm just thinking, Seven Oaks and all those little bitty towns around us we could get to.

JG: Did you have any big rival? Was there a certain team every year you would look forward to?

JL: Well we did not have any rivals. We would have had one if we would have been a big enough school to play Lufkin. But, Dunbar in Lufkin was a much larger school and we couldn't compete with them. We did play football as far as Orange, Texas.

JG: That is a good bit away.

JL: At Orange we played them I remember on two occasions. They just beat us crazy, 58 to nothing I believe it was on one game. They had squads they could send in every quarter and all of them be different players. They just beat us so bad.

JG: Just wore y'all down, huh?

JL: Yes. Well you see Coach Smith was the coach down there. You've heard of Bubba Smith, I know you have, Bubba Smith. Well, that was his daddy.

JG: His father, okay.

JL: And he was from Orange and Coach Smith and C. O. Bradley was very close friends. I think they had some college relationships.

JG: And that is Charles O'Neal Bradley.

JL: Charles O'Neal Bradley and Coach Smith.

JG: Tell me a little bit more about Professor Bradley and what you remember about him.

JL: Well the one thing that stands out in my mind about Bradley, when he first came to Diboll it was really not a high school because we didn't have enough students to qualify as a high school at that particular grade level. But, he did something that was very strange and it worked. We had enough guys walking around the streets who should have been in school but wasn't going. So, he took the names of those boys and put them on the roster even though they weren't going to school, but he turned this in to qualify for a high school accreditation and it worked. Now the superintendent, Mr. Pate at the time, accepted this type of thing. Maybe it was an agreement I'm not sure because the kids that were coming along that next year would have been enough kids to establish us as a high school.

JG: About '42 or so?

JL: That was somewhere in there around about there. It was just before the war. I remember he was there in 1941. Well let me see because his wife was there in 194...the war started in 1941 wasn't it?

JG: December 7th, that is when we entered.

JL: December 7th, well I remember being in her class that morning. She is the one that broke the news to us that we were in war. She said "the Japanese declared war on the United States." Declare, I mean what is that. (laughter) I didn't know we were fixing to go to war.

JG: Well that is okay just for time reference anyways.

JL: But Bradley, but that was one of the things he did was to create this, to start a high school.

JG: So you were just getting to high school age then at the time?

JL: Well I was not quite in high school when he came but I was pretty close.

JG: But, it was a big enough event that you were aware of it even at the time.

JL: Oh I was aware of it at the time but I really didn't know for some time after then that this was what he did to make that happen. I was told about it later on and it worked real good, and from then on we were able to maintain it as a high school with proper kids coming along.

JG: And actually graduate and get a diploma that meant something.

JL: And get a diploma, right. He did another little trick to save us again on that when I graduated. There were three other students in the eleventh grade but they weren't...they weren't...something happened here that they weren't going to have the twelfth grade the next year, however that was. They were allowed to take the twelfth grade with us and then go back to school and take the eleventh and then graduate as an eleventh grader. If you can understand that. (laughter) Anyway, it worked again and from then on it sustained itself pretty good.

JG: Tell me about Eddie Mae Bradley, Mr. Bradley's wife. You mentioned that you were in her class when you got the news of Pearl Harbor. What else can you remember about her?

JL: She, well one thing about her we all thought she was the prettiest teacher that ever came there. And she was a beautiful lady. But at any rate, I was in her class on two, let me see, I'm trying to think what class she taught us. I think it was history, history yes I think it was, but anyway, Mrs. Bradley was a beautiful woman. I think everybody just fell in love with her because she was just pretty. You might have seen her pictures.

JG: Yes.

JL: She was just pretty and everything and she was just a regular teacher. When I graduated she was very close to my sister, who was in college at the time.

JG: That is Joy Mae?

JL: Yes, Joy Mae.

JG: Where did she go to college?

JL: Jarvis Christian College.

JG: Jarvis, okay.

JL: And then she left there and when she left there I think she took a year or so at Prairie View. Now Mrs. Bradley, Joy Mae and I graduated on the same night. I graduated from high school and she graduated from college. She is four years older than me. Now my mother had a choice of going to my graduation or going to Joy's graduation. My mother and Mrs. Bradley, Mrs. Bradley say, "well I'm going to Joy Mae's graduation and you can go to Junior's." They all called me Junior. So that is how my mother went to my graduation and Mrs. Bradley went to Joy Mae's. And that was something interesting. We couldn't change the date on that one.

JG: No you sure couldn't, you sure couldn't. Tell me a little bit, I'm kind of switching gears here. Eddie Mae Bradley, I know as much of her as anything through the little articles she wrote in the Buzz Saw. If I'm mistaken you tell me, but I think one time you told me years ago that maybe Mr. Daniel, Shirley Daniel...

JL: Yes, I worked for him.

JG: ...or maybe Mr. Temple, somebody put you in touch or access to a camera.

JL: Yes.

JG: Tell me a little bit about that. And if I think if I remember right you had told me, it was in the context that at the time you really didn't appreciate what they were trying to get you to do as far as document the community and you had a regret in that regard.

JL: Right, well I really didn't know what Mr. Jake Durham was trying to tell me to do. As a matter of fact...

JG: Jake Durham, okay.

JL: I had...I was working for Shirley Daniel. I kept the theater. I was the janitor there and I kept his yard clean and everything.

JG: Janitor at the Timberland Theater.

JL: He is the one I was telling you about all the money. Actually, Mr. Jake Durham told me, said, "Jim, I'm going to get you a camera, a little Brownie Reflex." I think they cost about \$3.50, and a roll of film. Now, Paul Durham I think they were kin some kind of way. He ran the other paper after him. Anyway Mr. Jake Durham said, "I want you to take pictures of all the school, take pictures all around you. We will write something about it." So I did.

JG: And this was for the Buzz Saw newspaper.

JL: Well it was for him.

JG: Just for him. Okay.

JL: So he was the one that put them in the papers.

JG: Okay.

JL: So, I took pictures all around. Everybody thought I was so popular with the camera. Nobody else had one, you know. I took pictures and everything. I didn't have much money to put them in the shop to get them out so when I would take the roll out I would give them to Mr. Jake Durham and he would process them. Many of the pictures I never did get a chance to see that I took but I remember taking them. Some of them I did, but then I managed to get, since I was working for Mr. Daniel we bought the camera. Used to have a little jewelry section built in with the Timberland Theater and you could go in there and buy a little jewelry and stuff like that. They had these little cameras and that is where I got it. So, then you could put your film in there so I was able to put a few film in there as I got paid. I was only getting \$3.50 a week but, that was pretty good money in those days, especially when you didn't have anything.

JG: And that was money from working at the theater.

JL: At the theater right. I swept it up. Sometimes I would actually find money sweeping up that people had dropped you know, and couldn't find it in the dark. By the time I got all the trash down to the front and started picking it up there would be all kind of change down in there. That was another supplement for me.

JG: That was your tip.

JL: Yes, that was my tip.

JG: So how long did that last taking pictures?

JL: It lasted...well I would say a good...it lasted better than a year I'm sure.

JG: Okay, you took quite a few pictures then.

JL: It lasted like during the school session.

JG: So you were a student then?

JL: Yes I was a student then. I was only about 16, years old, 15 or 16 years old.

JG: So this would have actually been before the Buzz Saw I guess.

JL: Well it might have been.

JG: I think the Buzz Saw started in '48 maybe '47 I don't remember.

JL: They must have had something. I don't remember when this Buzz Saw started. It was pretty good.

JG: Well Jake, I think you know, he was with the human resources, but that was as much like public relations too. I think it was a lot of what the company was doing and course the Buzz Saw when it did come in was for public relations and that kind of thing.

JL: The after thought about all of that, what Mr. Jake Durham was trying to get me to do was take pictures and kind of record things.

JG: To document.

JL: To document but I didn't quite understand the purpose. If I had known then what he really had in mind I would have been taking pictures of buildings and things that we would really appreciate today. Because, some of those buildings are torn down and long gone and there is no pictures of them.

JG: Any pictures of Froggy Bottom Cafe?

JL: No pictures but I did a drawing of Froggy Bottom. I did a drawing of all of the café's and restaurants and little cafes and things where the kids would go. I have South Side, Froggy Bottom, Bright Spots, Evadale's Café. There is a drawing of the Number Two Store, Laurels Store; I have pencil drawings for my book.

JG: Just one more clarification. When your father passed away was that the end of the café, the Froggy Bottom Cafe?

JL: Relatively it was, because you see I was not quite big enough to assume any kind of responsibilities like that. I didn't really know what was going to happen. I thought perhaps my mother just would take it over, you know. She didn't have the expertise my daddy had and I found out she could not have kept it going that way. So, it came to a point we had to, we was just about in the process of leaving Diboll. See, my daddy was not working for the company and being that he now had passed away and I am just 15, wasn't no way I could do it. One of my brothers was living in Trinity so I think they had talked. I remember one day mother had me to get ready and tell them at school that I was leaving. I had to turn my books in and everything. I had no idea what we were going to do, but we went to Trinity. We went to Trinity and we stayed that day. For some reason I don't think my mother really liked it. Something happened with my other brother who wanted Momma to come back to Diboll and we would find some place to stay. So we came back but we wasn't having to move right then. Apparently she had gotten the word but we hadn't moved then. So she came back and in the process of coming back, one

person, my brother in Crockett was living in Trinity. That was the one we went to visit. So, when we got back Mother must have made some arrangements with somebody, I think it was...he is the guy that he and his wife were killed in that train accident, remember up here.

JG: Stubblefield?

JL: Stubblefield [Horace and Beth Stubblefield], yes. So he told her that she could just stay on there and everything would be all right. She would have plenty of time to do what she needed to do. So, Mother got married to Mr. Carter. Mr. Carter was a well-known man that the Temples brought from Texarkana. He worked for the mill for a long time.

JG: What was his first name?

JL: Henry Carter.

JG: Henry Carter

JL: He was very much liked by Mr. H. G. Temple. He came with the first group that came to Diboll, I guess. I won't say the first group but during that particular time among some of the first people who came from Texarkana with them here. So then after she got married to him then that really established us, it was really a good thing. He was really a great father to me.

JG: And this was in your teenage years?

JL: Yes in my teenager years. He lived until that year that I graduated. I think he died in 1947. The next year I graduated and then after then I didn't really know what I was going to do.

JG: So, you lost two fathers.

JL: I lost two fathers. I couldn't have had a better stepfather in this world. My daddy, you know, we were just buddies, you know. Mr. Carter was just the same way. He taught me. See, I went to work for Temple when I got out of school, graduated. He told me about all of the dangers and things, how to be careful out there about this, that, and the other because he had seen all these things.

JG: Mr. Carter did?

JL: Mr. Carter did, see. He briefed me on everything to be careful about. I'm sure enough glad he did because he told me about that fighting the bear. That was a job and I did get that opportunity to do that. What it is the lumber that comes off the green chain and it goes through these saws and you have to kick that bark over to the side and let the good part pass this way. But, you always had to be watching it because it would be coming at you all the time. That is what he was telling me.

JG: Sometimes it could shoot out pretty fast.

JL: Shoot out pretty fast. He said, “Always keep your eyes on that son, never take them off.” And then chains, he was sure right about that. The little hole is no bigger than about that and you are down in here. You don’t have too much you just get over to the side and let it get by.

JG: Who typically fought the bear? Who had that job, was it mostly black people, white and black?

JL: No, it was some white that was fighting that bear, just mostly us.

JG: Was it inexperienced people? Was it typically... (laughter)

JL: In my case it was. (laughter)

JG: Was that your orientation into the sawmill business? (laughter)

JL: Well not really. We had some very easy jobs when I first went to work for them because we didn’t have to do a lot of hard work. What we were straightening these sticks on these stacks where they stacked the lumber.

JG: Stacking the lumber.

JL: We had to straighten these sticks for them.

JG: And they were stacked a certain way so they would air-dry.

JL: So they would air-dry them, uh-huh. But they had to be straightened every time they put a layer on them we had to put those sticks under there. That is to keep you rolling.

JG: You just walked around and did that?

JL: Yes just walked around, just kept it, they had the sticks already there so when they got that layer finished you just stacked them on there like that. Then they stack the other lumber. That was a real interesting job. They had plenty of jobs there that was kind of hard but youngsters, like real young guys couldn’t really do it. Like standing over those stacks, those stacks would be eight and ten feet high. Those guys, I remember them stacking that lumber everyday like that. You could hear those planks falling all across town and everything. When twelve o’clock noon came it was like everything just quieted down. It seemed like it was just a vacuum and then as soon as one o’clock come you could hear it coming up again.

JG: All that machinery starting back up.

JL: The machinery would start going and everything.

JG: Belts and pulleys.

JL: Belts and pulleys clinging and clapping and all that.

JG: We are jumping back chronologically; but I think, I just remembered you had told me once before about when you were a child or maybe even a teenager but, tell me about fishing at the mill pond and getting the worms out of the logs. Tell me about that.

JL: Well I was looking at that picture out there. The picture with all them people on it right out here. You can see where the trains used to come and there was a tilt and a roll off.

JG: Yes, where the log cars would be inclined for logs to roll off.

JL: Right, now that was the famous place for catching these big brim we called them.

JG: Brim, perch.

JL: And we would go out there and there was always fish to be caught. We didn't have to worry about any bait 'cause we would take a knife and those pine trees where the bark is, just peel that bark off and we called them sawyers, but they were little white worms in there and that is what we used for bait.

JG: Little grub worms.

JL: Grub worms, yes. I don't know what they call them today, pine beetles or something like that.

JG: Did you have actual hooks, barbed hooks?

JL: Oh yes we had actual hooks.

JG: Barbed hooks and line.

JL: Well what we used mostly, we didn't have any artificial, we didn't have any rod and reels. We used cane poles.

JG: What kind of line did you use? Was it actual monofilament?

JL: No, my daddy used number 8 sewing thread.

JG: Sewing thread.

JL: Number 8 sewing thread was the best. It was tension enough, strong enough to just about hold any brim you going to catch. I don't know what to say about a 5-pound bass, it would take pole and all. But that is what he used.

JG: Okay, what would you use for a pole?

JL: We used bamboo; we would go out and cut them. They grow all around here. We didn't have to buy them or anything.

JG: Try to get the longest one huh?

JL: Yes, but dad always kept a lot. He would go and cut a bunch and let them dry out. I got some at home right now. Hang them up and let them dry straight.

JG: Right.

JL: That is what we used, a number 8 sewing thread and a shank hook and a goose feather. That was all we needed and we would go out there and catch all the fish we wanted.

JG: Tell us what the goose feather was for.

JL: Well that was your float. You strip the feather part off that quill and then you put a little hole in it and then you run your line through it and then that floats. You got your float and you got your line and your hook. You just throw it out there and just keep right on going, fishing and bringing them in. I remember Mr. Walter Allen and Daddy were very close friends.

JG: And Walter Allen, just for the tape was the foreman of the millponds. I'm sorry... go ahead.

JL: Anyway, him and Daddy went out there one day and they caught 98 brim. They were all big as my hand. They come back with all them fish. We had a ball that day.

JG: Did you have to clean them all?

JL: No. (laughing)

JG: Who cleaned them?

JL: Daddy did.

JG: He didn't have you help?

JL: Not much from me. One time I was really surprised at one of the biggest fishes at Ryan's Lake down here. Daddy had a trotline set out down there and he caught a catfish.

That catfish weighed 90 pounds. It took him and Mr. Charlie Lee Carter and Mr. Earl, I guess between...I wasn't down there but some how or another they had this big line. I guess typically they could catch catfish like this all the time down there.

JG: About two and a half three feet long was standard.

JL: Some of the species I guess died out because we don't see anymore of those spoonbill cats anymore. I don't know what happened to them. They would catch lots of fish. It was really good fishing between the millponds and Ryan's Lake.

JG: Oh Ryan's Lake, okay.

JL: It was pretty easy for us to make a living too, Jonathan. It was really in a sense, considering if you really was hungry you could find some way to feed your family.

JG: Tell me a little bit about Professor Jackson, the man who taught Harry James how to play the trumpet.

JL: And he also taught me how to play the piano.

JG: All right.

JL: My sister took lessons from him, but I was just fooling around. I didn't have time.

JG: Professor William Jackson right?

JL: Yes, Will Jackson.

JG: Will Jackson.

JL: He was really...when he walked he made real short steps. He carried this satchel with him. He was like a mail carrier for Southern Pine. I don't know what was in there, but they must have had some kind of mail transactions between...

JG: I think he worked for TSE Railroad and maybe he was delivering shipping bills or something. Go ahead, so he had a little satchel.

JL: Or something like that. He had that little satchel with him all the time. I never knew what was in it, but it would always be with him. You would see him when the trains come in and all that kind of stuff. He played every musical instrument that I could imagine. I mean from the trumpet, the saxophone, the piano and he did play with W.C. Handy's band. Now, I don't know if you all have that tape or not but Mr. Nelson gave me that tape where he was interviewed.

JG: I think we have one.

JL: You got one?

JG: I think so. Was it KSPL radio?

JL: If not I can get you one.

JG: Was it KSPL? I think that is the one we have.

JL: It was either KSPL or KRBA out of Lufkin.

JG: KRBA, okay.

JL: They interviewed him and he told about his experiences with W.C. Handy and how he had...

JG: Describe his walk. I'm trying to remember how you described it one time before.

JL: Well what I'm saying he...

JG: You used the word stride. He had a certain stride.

JL: Yes, right. He had a certain kind of stride. He kind of reared back when he walked but he would make kind of short steps you know.

JG: So he was leaning back making short steps. I think the way you told me once before, that it was obvious, or certainly, and the reason why I think its important is because I've talked to a lot of people that remembered him, but nobody has mentioned that but you. I can't get it right, but you said it was almost like he had a tune, he had a beat in his mind always and you could just tell it in his walk.

JL: Yes, you could tell in his walk and he would always be checking his watch a lot of times. I never knew why.

JG: That came from being a railroad man. (laughter)

JL: I guess so; he would pull out his watch.

JG: Always checked his watch.

JL: Always checking his watch. I think because he walked the way he did might have been because of that satchel he was carrying. I thought and thought about that because he always had it strapped on him and it would be right around about here. It seemed kind of like he would be leaning back a little bit but his steps would be kind of short, you know. He wouldn't be like striding like that; it would just kind of be short steps when he walked. He married my cousin.

JG: What is her name?

JL: Mrs. Emma, Emma Jackson. She was...she had one, two, three, four sisters. I don't remember all of them names, but they were all sisters and they all came out of Nigton. My grandmother Betty is on my grandmother's side of the family. He married Mrs. Emma and you have her and his picture I think. If you don't I can probably get you one.

JG: Tell me, how did he...you said he taught you how to play the piano. How did those lessons go?

JL: Well I didn't stick with it long enough really. My sister did, she stuck with it pretty good and learned how to read music. It was reading the music I didn't want to get off into. I just played by ear.

JG: By ear okay. But he actually read music?

JL: Oh yes, he wrote music and you know something, that is another thing. I wasn't here when he passed away but he lived in a small house by himself at the time. He was like about 90, oh gosh; at that time the last time I remember seeing him good to talk to him he was in his '90's. I think he was like 102 or 103 when he died. He had papers and everything in this old trunk, all of his music and stuff. I remember he had a lot of documents. I never saw them to look at them individually, I never did. But, I knew he had them there. I wasn't here when he died and when they buried him.

JG: What became of those papers you think?

JL: That is what I'm saying. Whatever happened to all of that, that was a treasure that we should have never let...

JG: Yes, because that was original music that he wrote.

JL: Original music.

JG: Wow that would have been something.

JL: That would have been something. See a lot of people don't see the value in it, they just think it's just nothing so they just throw it away.

JG: Did you ever get a chance to ask your cousin what happened to it? Did she not know?

JL: No, because Cousin Emma passed away first.

JG: Oh, okay she was already passed.

JL: I was in Seattle at the time. See, when I left here I went to Seattle after I finished...

JG: Yes, tell me a little bit about that, you graduated from school. How long was it before you left Diboll after graduating?

JL: Well let's see, I graduated in...my brother came that Christmas, that would be December, about six months, six or eight months.

JG: And you were saying you left because you had a brother that lived in Seattle.

JL: Yes I had a brother that lived in Seattle and he came home that Christmas. During that time I had a scholarship to Tittelson College.

JG: Tittelson?

JL: Tittelson College. I think it's still an accredited school. That was in Austin and I didn't know anyone there, didn't have any relatives there. Then too, my sister was graduating from college the same year I graduated from high school and I was kind of looking forward to her getting a job and kind of sponsoring me through. We didn't really have any money and it would have been me away from home, and what was I going to do.

JG: So you never went?

JL: I never went, no. I never went to Tittelson.

JG: You never went.

JL: When I went to Seattle I still had a little time in the second semester going into Roosevelt High School. So I post graduated. You can do that, you know, get a diploma because you already got a diploma.

JG: So you went to a school called Roosevelt High School in Seattle, Washington.

JL: Yes, you might be able to do that, but at that time, you know, you could, schools were not as crowded as they are now.

JG: What was it like to move from Diboll, Texas? I think you had said you had never really been out, been far from home, and then all of a sudden now to go to Seattle.

JL: Well, it's a little funny story behind that one. Well, when I got to Seattle it was raining when I got there and it rained every day. (laughter) It rained every day, every day. I just couldn't understand it, when is this rain going to let up. So, along I guess I had been there about a month maybe, maybe a month and a half, seemed like two months at least. I woke up that morning and I looked out the window and I saw this great big mountain over there. My brother's girlfriend I called her, I said, "Lizzy, come here and let me show you something. I said, "Look at that big mountain out there."

JG: You had never seen it before. (laughter)

JL: It had stayed cloudy and raining and everything. So, when it wasn't raining they had all that overcast. She said, "Yes Jim that is Mount Rainier." I said "Wow it sure is big." (laughter) She is the one that told me if I let the rain stop me from going anywhere I never would go anywhere. But anyway after then some good things happened to me while I was in Seattle, some funny things too. Being from Texas to be honest, I was still like kind of shy about going places. I didn't know where I could go that I would be really welcome. So, I'm in this big city here and I'm just wanting to go someplace.

JG: Was Seattle segregated?

JL: No, as a matter of fact it was just as, that is what I'm getting at. When I got to Seattle my brother never told me...

JG: So it wasn't just being new in a new town, but the intermixing of whites and blacks.

JL: That is right. Well you see when Lizzie told me that if I let the rain stop me from going anywhere in Seattle I never would go anywhere. So she said, "Brother, just get on the bus and ride downtown and get you a round trip ticket and come back and just see what you think." So I said, "Okay I think I can do that."

JG: Did you have to ride in the back of the bus?

JL: No, that is what I'm telling you. I went and got on the bus. There was plenty empty seats all up in the front and people all mixed up. I looked around and thought where I am going to sit. I said, "Well I'm going on back to the back." So, I went on to the back and I sat down. That is where I'd ride the bus every time I got on there. I went straight on to the back.

JG: But you could have ridden in the front if you wanted to.

JL: I could have set on the first seat. (laughter) I could have set up there with the driver it wouldn't have mattered. But, it hadn't sank in to me. And, everyplace there was no segregation nowhere. I mean, you could just go wherever you wanted to go.

JG: So that was quite a shock in the other sense.

JL: Yes, that is right. It really was amazing. That was the good thing about Seattle.

JG: Now, how did you get to Seattle? Did you go by train?

JL: You went by train.

JG: And that was segregated wasn't it?

JL: Well I'll tell you what happened. We went from here to Shreveport.

JG: Shreveport, okay.

JL: We got to Shreveport we got on the train. The train we got on at Shreveport went north towards Seattle. I don't know exactly what route, but it stopped at several places and people started to get on the train. That is when I noticed that everybody white and black was getting on the train just sitting where they wanted to and everything. About the time we got up around Idaho and places like that it was all mixed up, white and black.

JG: All mixed up.

JL: When we got into Idaho, another thing about that trip, we hit a snow bank. It was snowing so bad the train had to stop. We stayed in one place for 20 hours. That was something. They had to bring us all blankets and everything and so to me it didn't matter, I wasn't in a hurry. They brought us and then they gave us sandwiches and stuff like that until another snow train met us from the front my brother was telling me. Then apparently they cleared the way and then we took on off to Seattle. That was a good experience

JG: That would have been late forties, '48-49?

JL: Well that would have been like during Christmas, that would have been around December, somewhere in there. I graduated in 48, so it would have been forty something, about 49. Then while I was up there I went to work for Bowing Aircraft Company.

JG: Bowing?

JL: Bowing, they are the one that sent me to school and taught me how to read blueprints. That was a good education because they paid for it and the school was locally right there on the premises so I didn't have to go someplace else. They taught me how to read blueprints and that was the beginning of engineering you might say and my first exposure to some kind of engineering. We were converting B-29's into B-50's for Great Britain. It was some kind of modification and that is how I got the job. Then that is when I got my letter, too from them being inducted into the service. The Korean War was going on then. Then my sister...

JG: So, you joined the Army?

JL: I didn't join they drafted me.

JG: They drafted you, okay into the Army?

JL: The Army yes. See my mother had me go down to the post office and register when I was 18 right here.

JG: In Diboll.

JL: Yes.

JG: Okay so you were already registered.

JL: That Selective Service they referred that and I was already in Seattle.

JG: They found you in Seattle.

JL: Yes so she said, "Man you got to come home or they are going to send you." So I came on home. I had some time in between. When they first notified me they called me in but later on they called me to have my physical after I had gotten here. That was during the fifties. But I tell you it was a good experience to be able to go to Seattle in the first place. My mother wanted me to see what the other side of the country was like.

JG: I bet that really was quite an experience to see.

JL: It really was.

JG: Not... you know, the integration of the races.

JL: Well especially for me because I was so used to the segregation. That was not something that I could just make a [snap fingers] turn around on, you see. Hey, everything is...all of a sudden everything's different. I had to sort of blend in with it.

JG: You had to take it a little slow and easy.

JL: Take it a little slow and easy. Everybody was like...actually Jonathan I had to look hard to find black people in Seattle. It just wasn't a lot of us there. Well, if they were we were just spread out so thin that you didn't see us at all. We lived anywhere.

JG: What about at Bowling? How many blacks? Did you intermix with the whites there? Did they keep the blacks together?

JL: Yeah, yeah, oh sure, everything was integrated.

JG: Everything was integrated?

JL: Everything, I can't think of anything in Seattle that wasn't integrated, nothing as a matter of fact.

JG: The school that you went to was integrated.

JL: Yes, they didn't have any black schools in Seattle.

JG: Not yet, there weren't enough blacks I guess.

JL: If you went to school you went to school, save that money. (laughter) It was just all in the people. There you would find a mixture of races, like Indians, see Seattle was the Indian Chief. I think that is who it was named after. But anyway...

JG: What about Japanese?

JL: Oh yes, Chinese, you found lots of Chinese, Japanese and Philipinos. That was basically, from what I could see the mixture of different kind of races. They all had their little...now China had their own little area, you know like China Town. I guess that is true maybe with a lot of big cities. There is always a China Town. We would go to China Town, we'd go over to Tacoma Washington and the Chinese run that whole place. They gamble a lot over there. I was too young to get into this gambling place; it was really against the law. You had to go and look through a little deal like this. I went over there with my brother; I said, "I'm not going in here." It was kind of funny. But, we had a lot of fun in Seattle for the time I was there. I would like to go back really just to visit.

JG: Well I see we've gone about an hour and fifteen minutes. Can you believe it's been that much time?

JL: Oh, wow!

JG: We generally try to keep the interviews to about that length. I'm sure we've got other things to talk about. Before we wrap this one up, I mainly wanted to concentrate on your early years in Diboll but I know you've got a lot of other experiences. But, is there anything else for this interview? Like I said, we might can do another one in the future. But for this interview is there anything we didn't talk about that you would like to bring out?

JL: Well growing up in Diboll there is a lot of experiences we had here just as kids. What you really remember a lot about Diboll in my case is like when you were growing up. Actually when you get grown you just do other things. But growing up here we had a good...there were some people here that weren't too good and some was very good. I mean among the white people and the black people and how they got along. But we seemed to manage to get along really good with all of the basic white people. But there was some people like we had an old law here named Jay Boren at one time. He was hired by Temples to ride their pastures or something. But he took on the title like he was a Texas Ranger and he wasn't really a Texas Ranger. He might have been a ranger to ride the range and the pastures and stuff like that. But you know they ran him out of San Augustine because he established such a bad reputation there.

JG: Yes, he killed a black man.

JL: Yes, he killed, not just in Diboll but others. That is why they got rid of him over there, I had heard later. He came to my daddy's café when he first came to Diboll and he told him, he said, "Well Jim, I heard you have been selling whiskey." I was in the café when he came in there. Daddy said, "Yes sir, I sure was but when I heard you was coming that is when I quit." He said, "Because I knowed that if I kept going at it you were going to come here and we were gonna have a time about it." That is the way Daddy put it. So, I didn't know what he was talking about. But Daddy said he didn't...otherwise Jay Boren just left it that way. He didn't bother him any way otherwise.

JG: Did he ever come back any other time? Jay Boren?

JL: No, he never came back to bother us anymore. Daddy had a pretty good reputation with a lot of good people around here. He was a good service to the community really because of the things that he did, you know, barbecuing, he was the blacksmith and he'd build all these different kind of things. He built me a violin you wouldn't believe and I didn't even know my daddy could do such a thing. I don't know what happened to it. It got out of the family some kind of way. But anyway, those people that were not so good, I think they were just sort of overbearing. We saw incidents happen at the ballpark, like we would have baseball games and Jay Boren and his deputies would come over and they would just look us over, you know. I am just a young kid it didn't bother me but those grown up men they would just try to pick at them to make them do something or talk about them or "you drinking" or whatever. Just put something...

JG: Sort of antagonistic a little bit.

JL: Antagonistic... just try to do something like that.

JG: Now these baseball games did many white people attend them?

JL: Oh yes.

JG: I'm assuming you are talking about black team versus a black team.

JL: Well no...

JG: Or did the black teams play the white teams?

JL: Well one time they did.

JG: Now are we talking over on the west side of town or over here?

JL: Yes, the west side of town. We had our own baseball park and one section over here was for the whites and had a greater section over here for the blacks. The whites, there would be just as many of them over there as many times as there would be over here.

JG: Watching the black teams play?

JL: Oh yes, we had a good baseball team. Everybody liked them.

JG: So Jay Boren would come over there with his deputies.

JL: Oh yes, he would antagonize them.

JG: Would you say he antagonized maybe the blacks more than the whites?

JL: Well he had a bad reputation with everybody. That is why they ran him out of San Augustine, I'm understanding that. He just kind of put a big feather in his hat like he was boss about everything. A matter of fact, he had a daughter. I don't know, he was just a terrible guy. He was always getting into things and she ended up being kind of like a little tramp. I don't know what happened. Instead of being a little more sophisticated she just went down for whatever reason because I saw her sitting on the side of my nephew's cleaners on the ground out there one day. That was kind of strange, you know. I don't know what was going on, you think something's wrong. But anyway, he was not too good a guy. He wasn't really well liked. I think they knew that but they had to put up with him. Mr. Fogg was his sidekick.

JG: Fogg, F-o-g-g.

JL: Yes, I remember when he got killed out here at the mill, got cut up.

JG: Fell into the head saw I think.

JL: Now, Mr. Fogg never did really, he wasn't that way. He was just there, you know. You never seen him ravishing anybody or anything like that.

JG: Did you actually see Jay Boren get physical with anybody?

JL: Oh yes, he beat up my nephew, Marcellus, in his own yard. I saw him beat up another guy called T.L. Jones. And then they tell me Jay Boren got beat up by a black woman. (laughter) I wasn't there. I don't know who told me that story but anyway she beat him up or something. I don't know what happened there.

JG: I heard one time somebody say, Jay Boren was a small man.

JL: He was small.

JG: But he thought he was much bigger as long as he had that pistol.

JL: As long as he had that pistol. Maybe that was what his problem was. He felt real big as long as he had that big gun on, and he always did. Anybody could beat him up. As a matter of fact, I think his son-in-law or something like that beat him up really bad one

time, right here. He wasn't a bad guy, without his gun he was nothing. A couple of guys called him out on that, black guys. T. L. told him "you put that gun down I'll walk you out of here." He wouldn't do it. A matter of fact they got into a confrontation and it was Jay Boren's wife that broke them up. But now, he did some other things. Jay Boren killed George Andrews here in Diboll, right in front of the calaboose here. I remember that Saturday night. He shot him right through the head, right there. We went out there and you could see the bullet hole in there. It was...well it was the bitter with the sweet. In life you are going to have some of both. There is always somebody to do something like that. But, I don't think he was well liked by anybody too much. It just wasn't black people. He just had to have his way about being a boss. I think what might have gave him some of that attitude was the fact that he had this job that Mr. H. G. Temple had given him to safeguard his pastures and things, riding around. He just over did his authority, you know. He didn't have to do some things he did to keep the peace. He would create a problem to make it look like he was doing his job. That was bad because a lot of the people, you know, that he was harassing was here and they were employees. He was about to make it so bad 'till some of them was really just...they was just waiting on an opportunity to do something to him. They just didn't have an opportunity to do it so he probably lucked out that way, you know, but that was really bad for all of us. But, I'm sure he....J.L. Rhone you know him.

JG: Who?

JL: J. L. Rhone.

JG: Rhone, R-h-o-n-e, yes, Mr. Rhone.

JL: His name is out there.

JG: Yes.

JL: Well you know Jay Boren had really talked to him about he was really regretting the things that he did here. A matter of fact he cried about them to him. He was so sorry and he was able to apologize for a lot of things that he did and J.L. told me about it. You see we were classmates.

JG: This is James Rhone?

JL: James Rhone, you know. He is my classmate. He was telling me about it. I said well I guess it's never too late to apologize but it hurt a lot of people in the process. It might have made him feel a little bit better about himself if he did apologize. But who do you apologize to? The people that he should have been apologizing to should have been somebody close to the people that he did wrong. But, I guess you don't have an opportunity to do that if they are not around. But anyway he is quite a legend. I don't ever see his picture.

JG: We have got a few pictures of him.

JL: The only picture I remember he was standing in front of the commissary, right where the flag used to be. He is standing there with his gun on his side. That's Jay Boren.

JG: I think you put it a good way a while ago when you said the bitter with the sweet. It's sad that anybody had to experience hardships like that.

JL: Well yes you know history is something, Jonathan, I look at from the standpoint of it's in the past. It's all right to talk about them. A lot of things, we like to talk about the good stuff but that ain't all the history. You have to face the music and dance. (laughter) That is the way I see it. I think it's the best way to put something behind you, bring it out in the open and talk about it.

JG: Right. Well, I see we are just under an hour and a half, and like I said I know there is a lot of other things we need to talk about but for an interview session it's really best to try to keep it... a little bit. And we can come back and review this and I'm sure there will be follow up questions that will come to mind as we look at this.

JL: Well if you ever think of something jot it down as a question and we'll get back together and we'll think of something else.

JG: Well again, I sure appreciate your time and willingness to help us out. And again this is all part of collecting, preserving and providing access to our history. Oral history is unique in the sense that it's each individual's personal experiences and memories, things that aren't necessarily written down anywhere. It's unique to that person and the person that lived through those events and those times. There is a lot of significance to that. So, again I appreciate it very much and with that I'll stop the recording.

JL: Okay.

END OF INTERVIEW