

JOHNNIE DIXON

Interview 199a

June 15, 2010, at The History Center, Diboll, Texas

Patsy Colbert, Interviewer

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ABSTRACT: In this interview with Patsy Colbert, Johnnie Dixon reminisces about growing up in Diboll and attending Diboll Colored School and H.G. Temple School in the 1950's and 1960's before school integration. She remembers several of her teachers, including Inez Smith, Willie Ross, Mr. Jeffero, Mrs. Gilbert, and Mr. Massey. She also recalls Diboll Day and the segregated events, especially in 1964 when she was nominated as one of the Diboll Day Queen candidates for the African American community. After graduation, Mrs. Dixon worked in the Diboll schools for 36 years, starting out as an elementary school P.E. aid and eventually retiring in 2009 as the high school receptionist. Mrs. Dixon recalls going to The Family Affair club, The Timberland Theater, Joe Diamond's Café, and Pavlic's and Powell's grocery stores.

Patsy Colbert (hereafter PC): Today's date is June 15th, I'm Patsy Colbert and I'm here at the History Center with Johnnie Dixon and we are going to conduct an oral history interview today about growing up in Diboll and going to school at H. G. Temple School. So, Mrs. Dixon if you could just tell me when and where you were born.

Johnnie Dixon (hereafter JD): I was born here in Diboll in 1944 on June 27th and this is my home. I was born and raised here in Diboll.

PC: Okay, and who are your parents?

JD: Johnny and Sammie Gambrell and they are both deceased.

PC: Okay, and what did your father do for a living?

JD: My dad worked for Temple Inland, he worked until he retired and he retired at sixty-five. And, my mother, before she went to work for Temple she used to work for the Pouland's. If you want to say a maid like, yes. Then, she worked for them for a long time and then she worked at Plus-Tex Poultry which is Pilgrim Pride now. She used to work at the chicken poultry, then after that she worked there for years. That is how we made do, we had to make do with what we had and we got along.

PC: Right.

JD: Then she worked there at the poultry for years and when she quit there she got on working for Temple working at the Plywood Plant, which is the laminating plant now. But, it was the plywood plant back when I was growing up in Diboll.

PC: Okay. And which Poulands did she work for?

JD: John Ralph and Geraldine Poulard and them.

PC: Mrs. Geraldine and her husband was Hillary, I believe. What was your educational background?

JD: I finished high school here and unfortunately we wasn't able, financially able, to send me to college and I have just been blessed to have got as far as I have and I trust that I keep on going.

PC: Well, that is wonderful. Now, you were born in '44 you said so you would have started to school around 1950, is that correct?

JD: I guess, I'm not sure.

PC: Did you attend school in the old Diboll Colored School building?

JD: I can remember when I was small I started to school in that old building here up on that hill, right where they got that...the playground is now. It used to be a school there. But see I was real young because I was like five years old.

PC: Okay.

JD: But I can remember, my mother had told me...I know we are getting off the topic.

PC: That is okay.

JD: My mother told me when I was in school at eleven o'clock the eleven fifteen whistle would blow and everybody knew it was time to get your cornbread ready. Well, we was outside having recess and my mother said that whistle blew and I left school and didn't nobody miss me. I walked home and I walked because where the plywood plant was, there wasn't no plant there, it was houses. The Baptist church, the Shiloh Baptist Church, have always been where it's at right there on that spot.

PC: Right there on that corner, okay.

JD: I walked home and mother looked up and asked me "Johnnie Mae what are you doing home?" And I said "I come home to get a piece of cornbread." Well, I got the cornbread. I got a spanking for coming home. I got the cornbread and my mother walked me back to school and the teacher never missed me.

PC: How funny (laughter) that is a cute story. Now, did you normally have lunch at school?

JD: No, we didn't have a cafeteria, we walked home. We had an hour for lunch; we would go home from twelve to one. You had to be back at school by one o'clock because

if you got back to school five after one Mr. Massey would be waiting at the door with the paddle.

PC: Uh-oh!

JD: No, they didn't build the cafeteria until they built that new school and I think it was the year that I was going to graduate. We never had a cafeteria, we had a homemaking room. I take that back Patsy, we never had a cafeteria we had a homemaking room and of course Mrs. Gilbert, she was the homemaking teacher. She was teaching sewing and cooking but we didn't have a cafeteria period. Not when I graduated.

PC: Okay. But, when you started to school in the old building and you heard the whistle ring, ya'll went home for lunch anyway right and then came back?

JD: Yes.

PC: Okay. Do you remember anything about that school facility? Anything you remember about what it looked like?

JD: I just remember that it was a big old building?

PC: Was it just a two story, I mean two rooms, like two separate or four separated rooms?

JD: Oh, Patsy it's been so long ago. I can remember that and I can remember that we didn't have a gym. Because, they didn't build that gym until the year before I graduated. We didn't have a gym and the way we had our basketball games they...somebody in the community strung lights out there and had bleachers built and they were built at the back of that...and we had a big old auditorium. It was big old auditorium.

PC: Right, I know they built the new gym around 1960 or something like that. The new school was built in 1953 so, you would have still been in elementary school then. Do you remember starting to school in that new school?

JD: In the school that is there now? Oh yes! Oh yes!

PC: I guess that was a pretty exciting time.

JD: And they tore everything down.

PC: Then tore the old building down?

JC: Yes.

PC: Anything particular you remember about the new building, being impressed with something or anything like that?

JD: Oh girl that has been so long ago, sixty some odd years ago. Yeah, we were just excited about it, just to get a new school.

PC: Right.

JD: Everybody had their own room. My Aunt Inez and them, the teachers, everybody, we was just excited about a new school.

PC: Right.

JD: We didn't have no air conditions, we had windows. You could pull the windows down and we could sit there and be looking out the windows and the teacher come down the line there, down the aisle and pop you with a ruler.

PC: Right, that is right. Now, do you remember any type of playground equipment at the school in your elementary days?

JD: Swings, we had big swings and that is all I can remember that we had was swings. Of course we had jump ropes, because we would jump rope. Oh honey, and we would make a hop-scotch and we would bring jacks from home and play marbles. Oh baby, I used to could shoot marbles when I was young. (laughter by Patsy) But other than that the only thing that we had was just swings.

PC: Just those fun things that kids don't have a clue about today.

JD: And, we had fun because we enjoyed going outside playing jacks on the porch and shooting marbles and playing hop scotch and jumping rope. But, you don't see kids jumping rope anymore unless it's...well, I take that back, they do do it at the Primary School inside of the gym.

PC: Well that is great. Now what year did you graduate?

JD: 1963.

PC: And you graduated from H. G. Temple?

JD: Yes, right over there.

PC:1963. And, we were discussing earlier about your graduating class, do you remember how many students were in your class?

JD: No, not off the top of my head. I know it might have been around, I can estimate approximately maybe 20. I'm just thinking.

PC: Can you name any of them?

JD: Yes, Dorothy Jones, Charles Ray Mack, Richard Gordon, Joseph Harris, Josephine Canada, Mattie Smith, Jerry and Shirley Jones. They are a set of twins, brother and sisters. Robert Charles Dixon, Jeff Jackson, Jr., Solomon Moses and Jerry Teal and see by the time I leave from here and get home Patsy, I'll be done thought of a lot more of them.

PC: Well, that is okay. You can let us know. We are just trying to compile a list of the H. G. Temple graduating classes.

JD: Well that will give you a start.

PC: Yes, that's a great start. But, you are saying there were a few others?

JD: Yes, a lot of them is deceased.

PC: Okay. Who were some of your school teachers?

JD: Mrs. Ruby Simmons, she is deceased. My cousin, which we were told to call her Auntie, Inez Sibley, but she was Inez Smith, that was her maiden name, Inez Smith if I'm not mistaken. But, I know her married name was Sibley. She taught school. She was one of my teachers and Mr. Massey was one of my teachers. He was my math teacher. And, Mr. Ross, Willie Ross, he was one of my teachers. Mr. Jeffero, they both still alive, no I didn't take Ag, but he was one of the teachers.

PC: He was an Ag teacher, right. What did Mr. Ross teach?

JD: He taught P. E. if I'm not mistaken. I do know that.

PC: He was a coach.

JD: Who else, oh, it was quite a few, yeah, quite a few.

PC: Did you have a favorite teacher?

JD: My Aunt Inez.

PC: Your Auntie.

JD: Yes, and Mrs. Gilbert, she was my homemaking teacher and Herbert Allen. His daddy, that is who they named the pool after, Walter Allen Park. Herbert Allen they grew up here. He was a teacher, he taught me math.

PC: What about Mr. Massey, tell me what you remember about him and what type of teacher and principal he was?

JD: Oh Mr. Massey, he was a good person. He was a fun person. And, we could get him started when he got in the classroom, get him started and get him talking about something 'cause we wouldn't have that assignment ready. (laughter) He would get to talking and then we called him "Fess" that is what we would call him. Then he would look up, "Well class, it's about time for ya'll to leave out." And our class period would be over and he would tell us, "Well, I'll pick it up tomorrow." But Mr. Massey, I really did like him; he was a good person. I used to ride back and forth with him when I, after I got married and I had moved out to Nigton, well I used to ride in the afternoon my two children and I with Mr. Massey. He would be going to feed the cows and the horses and he would pick me up and my dad and drop me off. Mr. Massey and Mrs. Massey were just good people.

PC: Just good people. Yes, I remember Mr. Massey myself in school here.

JD: And he didn't get in no hurry for nothing or nobody. (laughter) But he was good. They were good. Now Mrs. Massey, his wife, she didn't teach me, but she was a teacher at high school. She was a teacher over there along with him. They both were school teachers, and he was a principal.

PC: What do you remember about Mr. Massey driving the bus from Nigton?

JD: Oh he would be late a lot of times because he would have to get up early to go out to Nigton to pick up the Nigton children and bring them back to Diboll, you know. He wouldn't be too late; the only time he was like late was like if we had bad weather because we didn't have buses like they got buses now.

PC: Right.

JD: See Patsy, I walked to school and if it rained we didn't go to school until it slacked up and we wasn't counted absent or tardy. And when it was cold we went to school because our parents bought us coats and we went to school and everything.

PC: What was the reason that he was bussing the children from Nigton?

JD: Because the school at Nigton just went I think to the fifth grade and that was it.

PC: Okay.

JD: So, the children had to get an education and they might not have, I don't think, you know...

PC: So him being from there his heart was really there.

JD: Yes, and he bought the bus. You know he bought that bus himself and he went out there and he would bus those kids because they needed an education. The schools in Apple Springs wasn't integrated, so the kids had to get to school. That was the reason for them to be bussed to school here. They went to school here and they graduated from here.

PC: Okay, let's see, what year did you start to school? Did we say that was around '50? So, sometime in the forties we know that Professor Bradley began acquiring accreditation in '42 and we know the first graduates were either '44 or '45. Do you remember hearing any talk of that situation and how that came about them getting the accreditation and exactly what year that happened?

JD: No, I don't know anything. I remember my parents talking, my mother used to talk about it, but I don't know anything about that.

PC: Okay, you didn't have any...I thought maybe if you had older siblings that maybe they were in school at the time.

JD: I'm the oldest in my family.

PC: You are the oldest, okay. What race relations did you experience in Diboll growing up as far as having a relationship or intermingling with the white community?

JD: We all got along. Like I had mentioned before, I have been knowing the Pouland's all my life and I know Pop and Sis Rich who are both deceased now. I've known them all my life. I can remember Sis when she was working at the old Temple Inland Credit Union. I used to go there with my dad when he would be going to you know, that is where you would go and get your loans or whatever. I remember the Powells because Mr. Powell's was where my dad used to have his account at his grocery store right up there on the corner there across from that, used to be a church but it's a funeral home now, that big white two story building?

PC: Right.

JD: That was Mr. Powell's store that I can remember. Now I remember my parents talking about the old commissary. I don't know anything about that because I was a child, a young child. But, I do remember Mr. Powell's had that grocery store and that is where everybody got their groceries and my dad...

PC: Okay, and that was over by the church where you are talking about that was actually what we considered across the tracks right?

JD: Yes.

PC: Okay. So, that was a business over there and everybody traded there.

JD: Well, that is where they traded then, but going back as we talk I'm remembering now. Mr. Carl Pavlic had his store over in our community. That is when I was small and we all, you know, we used to, all of the black people would go to Mr. Carl Pavlic's store and shop and bought groceries.

PC: Where was it located?

JD: It was located over there down where the Family Affair, if I'm not mistaken. My parents were talking to me about where the Family Affair, where it used to be the Family Affair. It's a church there now. It's a big oak tree; Mr. Carl had his store there and Mr. Carl's store was over there for a long time before he moved it over here across from Dixon Furniture and all that on that corner.

PC: Okay.

JD: Jim Tanner, he had, they have always lived over there with us. We all got along because my parents had an account there and we all traded there with the Tanner's.

PC: And this time frame that we are speaking of is before integration?

JD: Yes.

PC: So you had experiences of being around the white community before integration especially with your mother working for the Pouland's?

JD: Yes, yes.

PC: Okay.

JD: And of course we didn't have no policeman and all that. We had one law person here and I think his name was Jay Boren and he rode a horse. I can remember that. The blacks and whites they all knew him. We all knew Mr. Jay Boren. You didn't mess with Mr. Jay Boren 'cause he would tell it to you like it was. He didn't care who you were, what color you were. And, of course we loved the Temples, Mr. Henry Temple, the old man Temple, I don't remember him, but I hear my parents, my dad used to talk about him. And he took care of... what my dad and mom used to say, "He took care of his people." And then Mr. Arthur Temple...

PC: And you're speaking of Mr. Henry Temple who was general manager at the time that they named the school after, Mr. Henry Temple?

JD: Sure did.

PC: You don't remember going to the commissary store then, you were too small? You don't remember going there with your parents or anything?

JD: No, I don't remember anything about that.

PC: What other establishments, while we are talking about that, do you remember in the black community during your time of growing up that you went to?

JD: We had a Dairy Queen and it was in the white community.

PC: The Dairy Queen?

JD: Yes, but we could go to the side window and order our food.

PC: Okay. Now, is that the one that we actually called the Dairy Kream, that was locally owned by the Brookshire's gas station now? We called it the Dairy Kream, that one, not the Dairy Queen we know today.

JD: Oh yes, yes.

PC: Just for the tape and for the record that we are speaking of the old Dairy Kream. I remember going there in my childhood.

JD: Because Mr. Jay Boren used to own that.

PC: Okay, so they had a window for the colored people?

JD: Yes, a side window, sure did.

PC: And when you went there you were treated well?

JD: Yes, treated just fine. We would get our food and we would leave. We were also able to go to the picture show as we called it. The first picture show in Diboll was up on that corner right there by the railroad tracks. I can remember the blacks went upstairs and the whites went downstairs.

PC: Mr. Shirley Daniels' picture show, the Timberland Theater you're speaking of?

JD: Yes.

PC: Okay, you remember going to the theater?

JD: Yes, I remember when my granddaddy took me and we was upstairs. Of course we was always upstairs and he said that it was a big gorilla, you know, that movie picture it looked like it was coming straight to you. I screamed and hollered so he had to take me out of there and he said he wasn't going to take me back to the picture show. But that is when I was small. I was a child, you know.

PC: Did you get to go very often?

JD: I don't remember going very often but, I do remember we used to go where Joyce Bowman and Larry Bowman used to run the picture show when it was the theater. Let me get back to calling it the theater, the picture show. I'm from the old school baby, from the old school.

PC: That is okay. (laughter)

JD: Joyce and Larry Bowman ran the theater here for a long time, right there on that corner there. What is in that building now? A photograph company?

PC: Is that where the Free Press used to be or is and Temple offices now.

JD: No it was on...it might have been up in there but I thought it was on that corner.

PC: What they called part of the Village.

JD: I thought it was where Allison Hearne has her deal.

PC: Somewhere in there, yes.

JD: Because we went upstairs and the whites went downstairs. We got our tickets and we just...we didn't have any problems.

PC: Okay, good. So at the time the schools were integrated you were already out of school, you graduated in '63. But, were you living here in Diboll during that time?

JD: Yes, ma'am, I grew up here.

PC: Do you remember anything about the years of integration? Full integration was fall of '68. Do you remember hearing any stories or hearing any incidents that took place concerning integration?

JD: No, no, there were no problems. There were no problems whatsoever.

PC: What was your first knowledge of integration? Do you remember anything about hearing or knowing that it was going to happen?

JD: Well, Mr. Massey and them was talking after I graduated. We were talking that they were going to integrate and they slowly selected so many students to go over at a certain time. They didn't send them all over at one time because they didn't know how it was going to react and after they seen year by year then they all merged.

PC: Freedom of Choice was '65 and they had one student to start the elementary and the senior boys went in '66. I believe the athletic program was integrated. Then the next year was full integration but they started...it took about four years there.

JD: My brother graduated from over there.

PC: After integration?

JD: Yes.

PC: Did he ever speak of any problems?

JD: No.

PC: How did he feel about the integration process and having to switch schools?

JD: He was fine.

PC: Okay. How did your parents feel about integration?

JD: Fine, like I said baby, Patsy, we didn't have any problems with nobody.

PC: That is great. That is pretty much what we are hearing, you know, through this process, this project of collecting the history on integration. It is a very important part of our history and Diboll was very unique. Everybody had their own unique experience.

JD: Everybody was a close knit...

PC: But being a close knit community and being that the Temples were always very gracious to everybody. I think that helped a lot.

JD: Yes, they really were, they really were.

PC: Were you involved with Juneteenth Celebrations in Diboll?

JD: No.

PC: We know that in 1962 that you were selected to run for queen for Diboll Day celebration.

JD: That was not my idea.

PC: Tell me how were you selected to run?

JD: I was told the next day. They had a meeting and they was...they had chose...I was selected by my father working for Temple Inland. But at that time it was Temple Lumber Company. Okay, I didn't know anything about it because I'm not that outgoing person, I like to be in the background, you know. And so when Mr. Massey called me into the office and told me I told him, "No, you just select somebody else. I don't want it." (laughter) And, of course he said, "Well, you've been chosen." And I was excited about it and I got to go home and tell my mom and they was excited too. My mom said, "Oh my God, girl we got to get you something to wear." It was hot the day of the parade, it was hot. But like I said, I remember Mr. Massey telling me they had a meeting.

PC: Okay, who was they? Do you know who else was involved?

JD: I'm sure it was the Temple's and them, they were all involved and the school, the teachers.

PC: Okay, so it was a process of being selected and then he just called you in the office and told you that you had been selected.

JD: Yes.

PC: You mentioned the parade, at that time was there just one parade?

JD: One big parade, yes.

PC: Okay, but then you had separate activities or what? You know, like the daily activities.

JD: Everybody just went over to the park and just sitting on the logs, listen to the speakers and everything, I can remember that.

PC: Okay, now this is 1962 before integration?

JD: Yes, I can remember that. You know, I guess we did but, I went home. I remember going home because it was so hot and I had to ride on a black Cadillac. Mr. Massey had gotten one of Mr. Hood Davis's Cadillacs for me to ride in the parade on.

PC: Okay, so ya'll were in the parade with the other Diboll Day white queens? Were y'all separated?

JD: Yes.

PC: But you remember going to the park?

JD: Yes, over there.

PC: Did they announce you when they selected the queen? Was it at the same event?

JD: I wasn't selected as queen; I was just one of the candidates. We didn't win, I didn't win.

PC: You didn't win, okay.

JD: I was one of the selected candidates. One of the other girls that was running...uh...

PC: Do you remember who won?

JD: I think it was Patricia Moore that was selected.

PC: Okay, was y'all's selection announced at the same event as the white queen, or y'all had your separate activities?

JD: No, we had ours separate.

PC: Okay, you had your separate activities. So, you had the parade and then they choose the queen and she was announced as queen.

JD: Yes, because see we didn't know...

PC: But y'all did not go to the, at that time I guess it was Whispering Pines Park, the white park? After the parade y'all went to the Walter Allen Park?

JD: Yes, that is where they all went and I went home and then like I say baby, it's been so long ago.

PC: Well that is okay.

JD: My memory is coming back as we talk.

PC: Now, do you remember doing anything to raise money that year?

JD: Let's see, Mr. Massey and them we would have socials and stuff like that, dances you know, after the football games because our football games were on Saturday night here because the whites would have theirs on Friday night. If they played a game here on Friday night ours was on a Saturday night here in Diboll. But, if they had a game out of town that Friday night we used the football field that Friday night.

PC: Oh okay, because y'all didn't have a football field. Y'all shared the field that the Diboll High School boys played on.

JD: Sure did.

PC: Okay, I didn't know that.

JD: We sure did.

PC: So, y'all had to alternate your schedule depending on what the Lumberjacks did.

JD: The coaches and the teachers they had already did it and we knew ahead of time that if the whites had a football game that Friday night ours was that Saturday. And, we used which is the old stadium now, we used that stadium.

PC: So y'all had a game that Saturday of the Diboll Day that you ran?

JD: We didn't have one that Saturday because up until the big event we didn't... 'cause I didn't raise a whole lot of money back in the day. We just didn't have it, you know.

PC: And you mentioned your dad at that time it would have been Temple Industries, what division did he work at?

JD: Well, all I can remember he worked at the mill.

PC: At the sawmill, okay.

JD: At the sawmill.

PC: So you were really chosen to represent the...

JD: The black community.

PC: ...the black community and the sawmill workers. There was another girl that represented the school or something like that?

JD: Yes, they had somebody else.

PC: Okay, well that is great.

JD: My dad worked at the sawmill.

PC: Okay. Anything else you remember about the Diboll Day activities from the early days before integration when they had separate activities? Anything you remember?

JD: We would all go to the parade every Diboll Day and we would stand out there by the office, the old Temple place. They have torn it down now. We would all stand there and after the parade was over we would go back 'cause we was already on that side of the tracks and we would go back to our house or whatever and do what we needed to do. But, we all went to the parade.

PC: You are speaking of the old commissary building that we knew of. So, y'all would just gather up there and watch the parade. And, this is just in general, not the year you ran of course you were in the parade. You are just speaking in general of other Diboll Day events.

JD: Our band, at the time I think we had a band then.

PC: Do you remember...we know in 1964 Diboll Day was still segregated because we have a photograph of the girls that ran in '64. That is the only two years we have photographs of the separate queens.

JD: Do you have one with Debra Washington?

PC: Well, that was after integration. I'm just speaking of before integration. There was your group in '62 and then another group in '64. But, I was wondering do you know when they integrated Diboll Day activities?

JD: No, I don't have a clue; I guess it would have to be after.

PC: Or if they had in '66 a separate group of queen candidates?

JD: No, like I said Patsy, I don't have a clue.

PC: The only photos we have are the '62 Diboll Day, the one when you participated and then the next year in '64 a group of girls and that is it. We were just wondering when Diboll Day activities were integrated. We are assuming it probably went along with the schools, when they were integrated.

JD: I'm sure it did.

PC: But, we were just wondering if you knew any details on that. What do you remember about the Sunday afternoon baseball games? That seems to have been a big part of the Diboll Day community. What do you remember about that?

JD: I used to go. I can remember my dad taking me when I was five years old. I used to go with my dad every Sunday to the baseball games. We had that black league here. My mom would get me dressed because I was an only child for a long time. But like I said I was five years old so, I remember going to the baseball game with my dad. That is the only thing that I can remember, because you know, we would go and have a good time and that is all I can remember.

PC: And that would have been in the early days, the teams were the Diboll Dragons or the Diboll Eagles, one.

JD: I don't know the name I just know that Jelly.

PC: That was a big event, everybody went to watch the games.

JD: The one we call, everybody in Diboll knew him by Jelly, Mr. Jelly.

PC: Mr. Jelly, we know Mr. Jelly too. He is a good friend of mine.

JD: Oh really?

PC: Yes, Mr. Jelly and my dad were best friends, they worked together.

JD: Oh honey!

PC: So, I grew up knowing Mr. Jelly and Mrs. Ruby. (laughter) Do you remember anything particular about the baseball park? Anything about how it was...did you have to pay to get in? Do you remember if they charged?

JD: I don't remember.

PC: You were with your dad so you don't have to worry about that. We talked earlier about some of the businesses that you remember being in the black community growing up as a child, but do you remember going to the Rodgers Café and Skating Rink?

JD: I remember going when I was growing up to the Rodgers Café but I don't know, no I didn't go to the skating rink. We only had, I'm just thinking off the top of my head, we only had one cleaners here at the time and it was over there in our community but it was on the corner here. Where the boys and girls club is now?

PC: Okay.

JD: It wasn't no Boys and Girls Club there, it was a cleaners and it was run by Lloyd and Sister Baby Tribbly. They were black and they both is deceased now, but they ran that cleaners. That was before Marcellus's.

PC: Okay, do you remember the name of it?

JD: No I don't but, I just remember it was sitting on that corner right there on that corner.

PC: And it was the only one in Diboll?

JD: Yes ma'am.

PC: So, the white community used it too?

JD: Yes ma'am, sure did.

PC: I remember, you know, Mr. Marcellus's cleaners and...

JD: Well see that was before Mr. Marcellus.

PC: Mr. Tribbly's was before Mr. Marcellus's?

JD: Yes, Floyd and Sister Baby, Felicia, that was her name, Floyd and Sister Baby Tribbly. They run the laundry and then Marcellus because it burnt down. I think Mr. Marcellus was the owner when it burnt down 'cause it burnt down.

PC: Now backing up to your graduating in 1963 from H. G. Temple, what can you share with me about your graduation exercises? Where were they held and what all took place and what did they actually do?

JD: We had two, we had two exercises which was a commencement and a baccalaureate. The baccalaureate was held at Shiloh Baptist and then the commencement was held at the new gym. The gym right there – that is where I graduated.

PC: Okay, so they built that new gym at H. G. Temple School during your high school years, can you share anything about that?

JD: Well, they built it the year before I graduated because I remember us having, we had...well, they built it before then because I can remember them having a banquet there, a football banquet.

PC: I believe they built it in '60 or '61.

JD: We had a football banquet there because Herbert Allen was our athletic director. He was over the football and he was in charge of football. We had different coaches over the basketball, but he was over the football. We also had our prom there. I remember my prom, we had our prom there.

PC: Okay, so you went through a lot of changes at the school because you started school in the old Diboll Colored School building that was up on the hill and then they got the new school in '53 and then they got the new gym in '60 or '61. So, you really saw a lot of changes in your school days and a lot of improvements.

JD: Yes, I sure did.

PC: That would have been a real exciting time in the sixties for that gym because y'all had a great basketball team with the Temple Tigers.

JD: Yes, and we played on the bare ground.

PC: Did you participate in basketball?

JD: Oh no, I didn't participate in no activities. I didn't even want to be a cheerleader. They tried to get me to go out for cheerleader and I told them nope. Like I said, I didn't want to do it and my parents didn't insist on me playing basketball. I didn't play basketball, I didn't want to be a cheerleader and I just didn't.

PC: What were the H. G. Temple School colors during your high school days?

JD: Green and white, green and white.

PC: Okay, green and white. Because we know earlier they had purple and white and then it changed to green and white.

JD: It was green and white.

PC: So it was green and white. Do you remember anything about the colors changing or was that before you started to school?

JD: That was before me.

PC: So your whole time at H. G. Temple it was green and white?

JD: It was green and white.

PC: Okay. Anything else you want to share with me about going to school at H. G. Temple? You mentioned about basketball and playing on the dirt, the Temple Tigers had a great basketball team.

JD: We had a good football team too.

PC: When they had games with other schools where did they play?

JD: We had our basketball games over at the black school over there and we would have our tournaments. We had our tournaments outside.

PC: Outside on the dirt.

JD: If it rained we didn't have them because of course it was muddy but, we had our tournaments outside on Saturdays all day. I can remember going, and that was the good times. We had tournaments over there.

PC: Right. So, even though they had dirt courts and didn't have a gym they still had tournaments and played their games there. And, other schools were accustomed to that?

JD: Yes, we did.

PC: What were the conditions of the other schools when y'all went to out of town games? Did y'all travel to out of town games?

JD: I didn't go. I didn't go to the games that I knew the teams would go, but we would play on the bare ground.

PC: Well I know from some previous interviews that they had a lot of tournaments held over at the school.

JD: Oh we did!

PC: A lot of basketball playing.

JD: We sure did.

PC: And we know from the records that there were a lot of trophies earned by the Temple Tigers. Do you have any recollection of the location of those trophies are?

JD: They should be...some of them, if I'm not mistaken, is over in the trophy case at the high school.

PC: Oh, are they? Okay.

JD: But, like I said honey, I don't know what happened to them. We had a lot of them.

PC: Yes, there were a lot of trophies is our understanding.

JD: There really was.

PC: And, Coach Allen, I believe he left in '62, and resigned and left. Do you know anything about that situation and why he resigned?

JD: No, baby I don't know anything on why he resigned.

PC: Now, when did you begin working for Diboll Independent School District?

JD: Oh Lord have mercy, I can't remember what year I started.

PC: What position did you start in when you started working?

JD: I was an aid, P.E. aid and at the time when I started. How I got the first job, Pop Rich was the business director here. He was over business and he called me at home and I came over and talked to Mr. Foster who was the superintendent. The superintendent's office was over at the high school there and he called me and he said, "Johnnie Mae have you got a job yet?" He said, "We got a note for you to go and apply." I had went and talked to Mr. Massey because at the time I used to work for him. I used to work for Pop Rich and them.

PC: Oh, okay.

JD: And he knew that I was looking, I needed, I guess, a better job. And I went over and I applied and then I walked, of course we didn't have cars. Some blacks had cars but my parents never had a car because my dad didn't drive and my mom never knew how to drive. We walked here in Diboll nearly everywhere we needed to go.

PC: Well that would be a new experience for some people today, wouldn't it?

JD: Oh yes baby, people don't want to walk nowhere now.

PC: That is right.

JD: We walked, I walked over to the school which is the Primary School now, but it was the Elementary school and I met with Mr. Bill Greer. And, I loved, oh I loved Mr. Greer. I met with him and he showed me around the school because the lady that had that job, at the time you couldn't be pregnant and work. Because in her position she was a P.E. aid and they were afraid you might get hurt or something like that. I really didn't know if I was going to get it and so my dad said, "Johnnie Mae just pray about it." And I did and I said, "Well I probably ain't going to get it Daddy, but I'm going to go over here and give it a try." And that evening about three o'clock Mr. Greer called and told me, said, "Johnnie Mae you gonna have to go over and sign some papers at the administration office 'cause you got the job." And I worked and that is how I started. I don't know what year.

PC: Okay, what year did you retire?

JD: What...09.

PC: 2009?

JD: Yes.

PC: How many years did you have?

JD: Thirty six.

PC: Thirty six.

JD: Because I started out as a P.E. aid and I worked with Janice Milligan. We worked together. I started out as a P.E. aid and I worked at the elementary school for years until they got an opening and then I resigned. I resigned I think three times that Sara told me that I resigned. When I got back into the system, I subbed until I got back into the system full time. That is how I went to high school.

PC: Okay, well that would be about 1973 then that you started.

JD: Yes, you are right, you are right.

PC: Well I knew that you were there when my children were in school. You were the P.E. aid at the elementary then.

JD: Yes, and the story time teacher and the store lady.

PC: When Stacy started to school you were the P.E. aid. I remember that. So, you went through several different positions.

JD: I have seen, as they say I've raised a lot of children. I've raised children's children and then their children. I have raised a lot of them.

PC: And your final position at retirement was where?

JD: I was a receptionist at the high school.

PC: Okay. So, you've seen a lot of changes in your career with DISD.

JD: Oh yes!

PC: What would you say was one of the biggest changes that you've experienced during your working career?

JD: Well, when I started to work over there at the new high school that they built over there, where I retired at. I thoroughly enjoyed working there, but when I retired, like I said I was a receptionist but I wasn't always a receptionist. I was also an aid in the classroom. I used to work with the teachers and things like that. But I enjoyed that. I enjoyed the kids. Now I miss the kids and I miss some of my friends, but you know, I miss the kids because they come and go and when they graduate they go their separate ways. But I had a good time.

PC: That is good. What is one of your most memorable experiences growing up as a child?

JD: Now Mrs. Patsy you are making me put my thinking cap on because I had good times and bad times. Oh, when I was growing up and when I got to be a teenager we got to go to Mr. Joe Diamond's Café. (laughing) That was over there and we would go there on Saturday and Sunday evenings. That was our enjoyment. We would go there on a Saturday night and dance in that little 'ol café, rock that little building baby.

PC: And that was memorable wasn't it?

JD: Yes, and then on Sunday evening.

PC: Well that is great. Sounds like you had a good experience growing up in Diboll.

JD: Yes I did, oh yes.

PC: And, share with me, we overlooked it but, share with me your working experience, you mentioned working for the Rich family which is Pop Rich that you are referring too?

JD: Yes, Doyle and Sis Rich. I loved...I used to love working for them and I worked in their home.

PC: You worked in their home?

JD: Fran would tell anybody today that she was the oldest teenager with a babysitter. But, you know I would cook and clean because my parents, my mom, taught me how to wash and how to clean. And you know I just did what I had to do and I enjoyed that. I got along, like I said, I got along with them. I mean they were good people and they were good to me!

PC: I know he enjoyed going to those ballgames and things.

JD: Oh yes, he enjoyed doing what he did best.

PC: Now, did you go with your mom to the Pouland's as a child when she would go to work? Did you go with her?

JD: I don't remember going with my mom.

PC: Is there anything you would like to share with me that I haven't asked you about that comes to your mind about Diboll in general, growing up in Diboll, working in Diboll, your school days, you know?

JD: Just had a good time.

PC: Just had a good time.

JD: I can't remember having a bad time not that...I'm sure I probably did.

PC: But overall, you know, our focus being integration and race relations over all how would you describe that as far as your growing up experience in Diboll?

JD: I would rate it excellent. I really would and I don't think nobody would dispute me because truly, we didn't have any problems, we got along. Like I said, they did their thing and we did our thing. But when it comes to doing whatever we just got along.

PC: Just got along, that is great. That is wonderful.

JD: And, we didn't have any problems.

PC: That is good.

JD: I can't remember nothing and I know for a fact that it wasn't anything.

PC: Well that is great, that is great. Okay. Well, that is all the questions that I have Mrs. Johnnie unless there is anything you want to share.

JD: Oh honey you going to have to clean it up.

PC: We appreciate you so much coming in and sitting down with me today and helping us with this part of our history.

JD: When you first called me Mrs. Patsy, I was really leery about it 'cause I was trying to fish my way out of it. I told my daughter, "She wasn't going to let me fish my way out of it." (laughter)

PC: Well, again I just want to say thank you for joining me today.

JD: Thank you for even thinking enough to ask me 'cause truly I thoroughly enjoyed coming down here talking. Baby I can sit down and tell you a lot of stories back in the day. It comes to me.

PC: When we get your mind rolling.

JD: Oh girl when I was little...oh.

PC: Well thank you Mrs. Johnnie.

JD: Thank you for having me.

END OF INTERVIEW