

QUEEN ESTHER TAYLOR KING

Interview 208a

August 11, 2010, at Trinity Mission, Diboll, Texas

Patsy Colbert, Interviewer

Patsy Colbert, Transcriber

ABSTRACT: In this interview with Patsy Colbert, Queen Esther Taylor King reminisces about growing up in Diboll as an African American child and attending the segregated H.G. Temple School starting in the 9th grade. She graduated in 1944 and attended Prairie View A&M University. While in high school, Mrs. King was named the H.G. Temple Forest Festival Queen and rode on the H.G. Temple float in the parade. Her children were in elementary school and junior high during the integration of Diboll schools. She discusses race relations, desegregation, attending school, working at the Pine Bough restaurant, working at the Housing Authority, and working for several white families, including the Cooks and Sweenys.

Patsy Colbert (hereafter PC): Today's date is August 11, 2010. I'm Patsy Colbert and I am here at Trinity Mission Nursing Home today with Mrs. Queen King and we are going to talk about the early history of her school days at the H. G Temple School. And, Mrs. Queen if you could, just tell me when and where you were born.

Queen King (hereafter QK): I was born in Poplarville, Mississippi July 31, 1930.

PC: Okay, and who were your parents?

QK: Emmett and Lena Mae Taylor.

PC: Did you have any siblings?

QK: Sure.

PC: Do you want to name them for me?

QK: Sure, start with me.

PC: You were the oldest huh?

QK: I am the oldest then Deora, Mary Helen Taylor and Ruthie Lee and Melvin C. Taylor. We called him Buddy, and Dorothy Taylor, and Darlene. All of them have passed except four of us and that is me, Dee, Ruthie Lee and Dorothy.

PC: Okay and what brought you to Diboll?

QK: Momma and them.

PC: Okay, did your dad come here to work?

QK: My parents, my dad came here to work.

PC: For Southern Pine Lumber Company?

QK: Yes.

PC: What year did you all come to Diboll?

QK: In 1944.

PC: So, you were around fourteen years old then.

QK: I was exactly thirteen and eleven months. I turned fourteen on my birthday. We came in June of 1944 and my birthday was July and I turned fourteen.

PC: So, what grade were you in when you came to Diboll?

QK: Well, I had graduated from the seventh grade in Louisiana, but they only went to the eleventh grade at that time. They hadn't started having twelfth grade in high school here in Diboll so I never was in the eighth grade. I started school here in Diboll in the ninth grade.

PC: Oh, so you got to skip a year?

QK: Yes.

PC: And what was the reason for that?

QK: Well, they changed this school, Diboll School, from graduating in the eleventh grade to graduating in the twelfth grade.

PC: Okay.

QK: Instead of going to school through the eleventh grade you got a chance to add another grade to twelfth grade. So, that was the beginning of our high school.

PC: Okay, so we know that Mr. Bradley acquired accreditation for the Temple High School and we think the first graduating class was 1944. So, is that what you are referring to here is the year that you came in '44?

QK: The first graduating class was '44?

PC: We believe so, and this is the first year you came here so, is that what you are remembering that was the first year they changed the school to twelve grades?

QK: I came in June so it could have been that '44 'cause they had put on another grade then and that's why...I graduated from elementary school to high school so they didn't have...elementary school here was still the eighth grade. So, since I had graduated elementary school I went to the ninth grade.

PC: Okay, so you got to skip a year. Okay, and what year did you graduate?

QK: '48.

PC: 1948. Do you remember how many were in your graduating class?

QK: Sure, five.

PC: Five, can you name them for me?

QK: Jim Ligon, J. L. Rhone, A. V. Lewis, Ed Allen, how many is that?

PC: Four.

QK: And me.

PC: And yourself. And, what Rhone was that, was it James Rhone?

QK: Yes.

PC: Okay, 1948, okay.

QK: And, I was valedictorian.

PC: Okay, you were valedictorian. Did you receive any special recognition or award or something for being valedictorian?

QK: I think I did, seem like I got my tuition to Prairie View for a year for both semesters.

PC: For being valedictorian you got tuition to Prairie View for one semester or something.

QK: Two semesters.

PC: Well good, tell me about your educational background as far as after high school.

QK: After high school?

PC: You went to Prairie View.

QK: I went to Prairie View and I majored in mathematics and I was trying to find something that I was familiar with because we had this small school and they didn't teach everything in our little school. I thought, I didn't know what to do so, I just majored in what I thought would be easiest for me, but I found out it wasn't. (laughter) It might have been easy, but it wasn't as easy as I thought it was.

PC: Right. Did you graduate from Prairie View?

QK: No, I only had sixty hours, a few hours over sixty and it took a hundred and twenty to graduate, so that meant I went to school there for two years.

PC: Okay, and then did you come back to Diboll after that?

QK: Yes, my parents had six other children in school and they were both sick so I thought it would be best for me to get out of school and help take care of them and the kids, so that is what I did.

PC: Okay, now going back to your school days at H. G. Temple you came here in '44 and had the school been renamed at that point?

QK: H. G. Temple High School, yes.

PC: Okay, because it was the Diboll Colored School and we know from the records they were just an elementary school up until the time that Mr. Bradley acquired the accreditation students had to go to Dunbar in Lufkin to actually graduate.

PC: That is right.

QK: But, he began working on the accreditation in 1942 and like I said earlier we know that in '44 they had the first graduating class. So, when you came here in the summer of '44 you would have started to school that fall.

QK: That fall, it was in September, so if they had a graduating class that would have already happened and the school would have already been renamed because I just came here in '44.

PC: Right. Okay so when you came here in 1944 it was already H. G. Temple High School?

QK: Yes.

PC: We know they voted and came up with name H. G. Temple to name their new school but, we weren't sure how long that process took either. You know, did they rename it immediately after accreditation or what? But, we know they would have renamed it by the time their first graduates so, when you moved here it was already H. G. Temple High School?

QK: It was already H. G. Temple High School when I moved here.

PC: Do you remember hearing any stories from the community people or teachers about the process that Mr. Bradley went through to acquire the accreditation? Do you know anything about the history of that?

QK: No.

PC: Was Mr. Bradley still here when you came here?

QK: He was here when I finished.

PC: You graduated under him?

QK: Yes.

PC: What can you tell me about him, Mr. Bradley?

QK: What you want to know about him? (laughing)

PC: Well, what kind of principal was he?

QK: He was a very good principal as far as I'm concerned. I was concerned, you know, he pretty well took care of the teachers and the students and all of them had a lot of respect for him. He was not, you know, wishy-washy. When he said something that is what he meant and you couldn't get him to change too much 'cause you know, I tried.

PC: Once his mind was made up it was made up, huh?

QK: Yes.

PC: Okay, now you attended school then in the old school building. What was the condition of the facilities? And describe to me the equipment you might have had, the school books and things like that when you first moved here.

QK: Well we had two separate buildings on the old school site and behind one building of course we had all the grades in these two separate buildings. At high school we went from class to class instead of having one room like they did up until that. So, we had one room for each class up until we got to high school. Then the high school would just rotate from room to room.

PC: For your subjects?

QK: Uh-huh, but we had a home economics building and we didn't have agriculture building. I remember some of the boys had to take home economics for us to get some of the classes that we did have because it wasn't enough of us in the class. Maybe some of

them might have been skipped too if their grades had allowed them to be able to take all the subjects, you know, after skipping up. If they were not able to maintain that they had to go back.

PC: So, you remember the boys took home economics so they would have enough students to make a class?

QK: To make a class, yes.

PC: Well in a Buzz Saw article from 1947 they mention they added home economics as part of the accreditation requirements. Do you remember anything about the first home economics classes that you had? What did y'all actually have to work with that made it home economics?

QK: Well we had kitchen equipment, you know, we learned how to cook and buy groceries and we learned how to make clothes.

PC: Okay, so just like we know as home economics. They had all of those type of supplies to teach ya'll the class. But they didn't have Ag at that point?

QK: No, we didn't have agriculture.

PC: Do you remember them adding Ag before you graduated or not?

QK: No, I don't remember that. I don't think they had Ag even when I graduated.

PC: Okay, what was the condition of the books and study materials that you had to work with can you remember anything about that? Was it limited or did you have what you needed?

QK: It was limited. They brought us the used books from the white school. We always had the old books that the white school used.

PC: Okay.

QK: I don't think I saw a new book the whole time I was in high school.

PC: Really, were the books in good shape?

QK: Yes.

PC: Okay, so how many teachers did you have in high school? Like the high school we know today we have seven or eight subjects, was it like that or did ya'll just have a few subjects?

QK: We had everything, math, English, we had literature, history and what else. It's been a long time Patsy.

PC: Is there anything else about the condition of the school or any particular memory of the school facility itself that you want to share with me?

QK: Yes, in one we had these two rooms that were built together and they had a dividing wall between them so that when we got ready to have a mass meeting we had to take the walls down between those two rooms and that is where the whole body could meet and go to chapel or whatever else we might have.

PC: Okay, make it one big room.

QK: Make it one big room.

PC: Okay.

QK: So, that is all we had as far as auditoriums were concerned. We even had a little vocal music class.

PC: Okay, who taught that?

QK: Mrs. Henderson.

PC: Like a music class?

QK: Yes.

PC: Did you participate in that?

QK: Yes.

PC: Okay.

QK: I participated in everything I could. I don't know whether it was all that good or not but, I was in it.

PC: Okay, and so the first year you came there in the fall of '44, just to clarify from our earlier conversation, it was already a twelve grade school at that time, when you first came in '44?

QK: No, I guess it had to be. It was that way when I went to school. I came in June and school started in September.

PC: And it was already twelve grades?

QK: No, that is the first time they was having the twelfth grade. That is why they had to skip me from the seventh grade to the ninth grade. We had to skip.

PC: So fall of '44 was the first year of twelve grades?

QK: Fall of '44.

PC: Okay. Well we've been trying to find that out so you just answered a real important question for me. That is wonderful, that is wonderful to know. And, that is why you skipped the eighth grade. Was that so they would have the right amount of numbers that were required?

QK: No, no, no, that was because they didn't have the eighth grade anymore. Elementary school was the first through the seventh grade and from here they graduated from the elementary school in the seventh grade when I came. But...

PC: And then started ninth.

QK: ...when they put on the high school they started the high school that year at twelfth grade, put on the twelfth grade so, those people that were in the eighth grade were promoted to the ninth grade and I was not in the eighth grade but I had graduated from elementary school so that made me be out of the elementary school when I came here.

PC: Okay so they put you in the high school that first year.

QK: Yes.

PC: You should have been in the eighth but the elementary was one through seventh so they put you in the ninth.

QK: I had graduated from elementary school.

PC: From elementary got you. Well that is interesting. We know that through the years they struggled with their numbers to maintain the accreditation.

QK: Sometimes we had to take some out of the eleventh and twelfth graders or eighth and ninth graders to make out a class for that grade, you know. So, some people might have been skipped.

PC: Skipping around, so you remember that?

QK: Yes, if their grades were good enough.

PC: Okay.

QK: We couldn't go to another grade and hadn't earned previous...

PC: Previous requirements. So, if their grades weren't up to par maybe they went down a grade and put in a class. Did that ever happen?

QK: They stayed in a grade they were supposed to be in. They wouldn't put them up there with a group of people that would make them feel inferior.

PC: Okay, did you say your junior year or senior year do you know if other students were brought up to your class to make the numbers or was there a requirement like as far as the number of seniors to make a class?

QK: What we did instead of bringing them up to that class we might take a class together you know, like we might not have enough for say English class. Eleventh grade might have twelfth grade English with us if they would bring their grade points up enough to be with us.

PC: Okay, to make enough for the class.

QK: Yes, to make enough for the class.

PC: Okay. Now when y'all graduated what kind of ceremonies or graduation exercises did you have?

QK: We had regular graduation exercise.

PC: Okay, where was it held at?

QK: It was held at the church. We had a baccalaureate sermon at one of the churches, mostly Shiloh but they would go to some of the other churches in Diboll.

PC: Okay.

QK: And, we also had a program at the school where we would have to divide the room. We didn't have an auditorium or nothing like that so we would have to have our baccalaureate service no, that was the graduation service. The baccalaureate is what we would have at the church.

PC: Okay, so you had two separate services, the baccalaureate and then the graduation exercises.

QK: Yes.

PC: Okay, do you happen to still have your diploma?

QK: Yes.

PC: Well we would be interested in that being donated to the History Center if you would like to donate it. We do not have a high school diploma from H. G. Temple School. We have very little H. G. Temple memorabilia.

QK: I have one.

PC: Do you have a photograph of your graduating class? Did y'all take a photograph?

QK: I don't know if I have that or not but I tell you someone that was very...Jim Ligon might possibly have one.

PC: Okay, well we would be interested in that diploma or anything else that you have, photographs or anything of the school, photos. Did you participate in any sports?

QK: Yes, I tried to play basketball.

PC: You tried to play basketball?

QK: Yes, but I had asthma so I couldn't play too long. I played as long as I could in each game, but I wasn't what they called one of the best players.

PC: Where did y'all play, other schools? Did you travel out of town like they do now?

QK: Yes.

PC: How did y'all go to the out of town games?

QK: We went in the cars or busses, the bus.

PC: You did have a bus?

QK: Yes, we did have a bus or somebody had a bus and we would charter that little bus they had. I know...we didn't have the school buses for our side. All of us was right over there so we could go to school right there so, we didn't have a school bus but we could borrow the white school bus.

PC: When you went to out of town games or something?

QK: Yes.

PC: Okay, there wasn't really a need to have a bus, everybody lived right there close to the school.

QK: Yes.

PC: Is there any particular game that you remember, a special game, a tournament or something that you want to share with me?

QK: We used to have our tournaments over at the elementary school gym.

PC: The white school?

QK: The white school, of course it was the only white school and we had the only black school.

PC: Right.

QK: But they had that one gymnasium and when we had to have a tournament or something like that or if the weather was real, real bad we might could have it there if they weren't having something in the gym.

PC: Okay and your courts were just dirt courts outside?

QK: Yes, dirt courts outside behind the school.

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

QK: Mrs. Lillie Simmons, Mrs. Inez Sibley, Mrs. Etta Mae Bradley and some of mine, this was a long time ago.

PC: Did you have a favorite teacher?

QK: I guess that would have to be Mrs. Lillie Simmons.

PC: Mrs. Lillie Simmons, what did she teach?

QK: English.

PC: Okay. Is there anything particular that you remember about Mr. Bradley as far as...

QK: He was one of my favorite teachers. He taught math in our high school class and that was one of the classes we took with the tenth grade when I was in the ninth grade. So, I thought I was smart then.

PC: Oh okay, so you were in the ninth grade but you took tenth grade math?

QK: Tenth grade math, yes.

PC: And, that was back to the issue you mentioned earlier about moving students around to have enough to make a class.

QK: So we could have that class, yes.

PC: Do you know anything about Mr. Bradley bringing students in to the school to meet the numbers? You know would he go around and try to get students to sign up? Maybe they had quit school or something. Do you ever remember him recruiting so to speak?

QK: I can't say that I remember that.

PC: Okay. Now we know from the records and from a photograph, and I have a copy of it here, that you were the Temple High School queen and you represented the school in the Forest Festival Parade in 1947. So, tell me about that and how that came about and how you became the queen that year.

QK: Well, each year they would pick out four girls from each class, one from each class, and we would raise money, you know, for the Forest Festival Parade and we raised money to fix the float, you know. We made this float ourselves. We got the stuff and we did this all by hand.

PC: Well looking at the photo it's a beautiful float. A lot of work went into that.

QK: It sure did. Temple let us have one of those little jitneys.

PC: Oh, is that what it's on one of the little jitney cars?

QK: Yes.

PC: Okay.

QK: And we built this platform that would fit over that jitney car so it can go down the street you know, on wheels.

PC: Okay, okay, so was this your junior year then?

QK: My senior year.

PC: This was your senior year. So, it was fall of '47 but you graduated in '48 so, it was your senior year. And, was this float made just for the Forest Festival parade?

QK: Yes.

PC: Okay, so the queens of each class, was that something they did every year?

QK: Yes, it didn't make any difference what class the queen was in just so she raised the most money.

PC: Okay, so each class had a queen and then whoever raised the most money that is the girl who became the queen?

QK: Uh-huh.

PC: Kind of the same principal that they started later on with Diboll Day.

QK: Yes.

PC: But this was before Diboll Day, this was just school related.

QK: Yes.

PC: Okay, okay. So that was a pretty big event wasn't it? We've used this picture quit often in different exhibits so, and behind you there looks like the state of Texas?

QK: It is the map of Texas.

PC: Okay, did y'all have a theme for your float?

QK: I forgot.

PC: Or were you just showing that Diboll was right here on the map?

QK: We had a star on there somewhere.

PC: Okay.

QK: We had a star where Diboll should be on the map.

PC: Who helped you with the float, what teachers were involved, or was everybody involved, school related?

QK: Everybody! Now, Mrs. Bradley and Mrs. Henderson, all of the teachers.

PC: So, it was the only float in the parade representing Diboll, Temple High?

QK: Yes.

PC: Okay, and what did you do to raise the most money?

QK: I don't know, I mean I didn't do that much it was the whole class.

PC: The whole class.

QK: I just represented the class. They chose the girl out of each class.

PC: But, how did y'all raise money? What were some of the things you did to raise money, do you remember?

QK: Same way we do now. We sold hot dogs and hamburgers and donations and stuff like that.

PC: Okay, okay, well that is interesting. Now, Mrs. Queen were you living in Diboll at the time that Diboll public schools were integrated in '65 through '68?

QK: Yes.

PC: And what was your first knowledge of integration?

QK: My first knowledge of it? When they said they were going to integrate I had two children in school then.

PC: Okay.

QK: I think Elaine was in the eighth grade and she was going to have to go anyway, and I heard some of them say that they didn't want to go to the white school because they was scared the white school wouldn't give them the right grades. They think if they made an A they wouldn't give it to them and I told them their grade didn't matter what they made, you know. If you are going to school you are going there to learn something. They said, "We ain't going to learn it like that." I say, "Yes you can learn it, if they teach you in the same room as a white kid you better come out of there with something because I am not going to feed you and send you to school and you come home with nothing." Mine had to learn.

PC: Okay, so you encouraged your children?

QK: Yes ma'am. I said if they teach you the same thing they teach you the other. They say, "Yes but they don't ever call on us." I say, "That is okay, they don't have to call on you to get your education."

PC: Now you said you daughter Elaine was in the eighth grade. Was that the first year of full integration in '68?

QK: Yes.

PC: They had Freedom of Choice in '65, '66 and '67 but she continued to go to H.G. Temple School until full integration?

QK: Until full integration, yes.

PC: Okay, okay. How did she feel about integration and changing schools? Do you remember anything she might have shared with you or how she felt about it as a child?

QK: Oh, she felt alright. It's according to how you got along with people.

PC: That is right.

QK: The same way it is now.

PC: Okay, now she would have been like junior high age so, that first year of integration did she have any problems that you remember, as far as problems with white students or problems with teachers?

QK: No.

PC: And did she have any problems adjusting, did she adjust well?

QK: Yes, she had to.

PC: Do you remember any incidents that took place the first year of full integration?

QK: Well they started when they had them contest. They would run a white girl and a black girl.

PC: Like the school contest?

QK: Yes, the contest like Mrs. Diboll high or football sweetheart they would have a black and a white running against each other and I remember them saying that they didn't care who won the most votes wasn't no black girl going to get it no way.

PC: But, they had representation from both races to make things equal I think.

QK: Yes.

PC: That way they felt like they were represented as well by them having a queen from both races?

QK: Yes.

PC: Do you think that helped the transition to go smoothly because they were included in things?

QK: I think so.

PC: Okay, were there any other issues that you remember being something they had to work through?

QK: Emmett was in sports.

PC: And Emmett is your son?

QK: Emmett is my son.

PC: Okay, and how old was he that year in '68, what grade was he in?

QK: In '68? I have to think...Emmett was long about the fourth or fifth grade I think.

PC: So he was a few years younger than Elaine?

QK: Yes.

PC: Okay, okay. And, what about his situation did he have any problems?

QK: Yes, he came home complaining. He say, "Mrs. Stubblefield over there say oh lord there is old Queen and Lindberg's boy, I could beat him to death. Y'all need to know white folks." He said, he thought he was going to have it made if them teachers didn't know his folks and then Mrs. Stubblefield comes up with that. "You Queen and Lindberg's boy I can beat you to death." And, that turned out to be his favorite teacher.

PC: So he thought if the teachers didn't know his parents he had it made, it was better. But, she ended up knowing you of course, and so that changed things for him.

QK: Yes.

PC: Okay, but it really wasn't a problem?

QK: No.

PC: He didn't have any problems the first year?

QK: I didn't have any problems with it. I say, that is as far as I can go because you know, some of them might have had a problem or two that they wasn't getting their grades. "They don't give me what I make." I told her, "That is alright, it's not the grade that you get there it's what you get out of the class. You can come home with something. You can't sit under that teacher all day and not get nothing." I say, "At least you're not and come here and I feed you. You're going to get something out of it."

PC: How did the people in the black community, you know, what was the talk within the community during the early years of integration? And, even the Freedom of Choice years and when they knew full integration was coming, what was the response within the community?

QK: Well the response was that the kids were getting an education over here, but they would be subjected to more courses over there because whatever was new we never had a new book over here. All of our books were used books and sometimes we thought well

maybe they are obsolete. They are not using them anymore so they are just passing them on down to us. I say, "But a poor education is better than no education so, you just thank God for what you get and do the best you can in that." And, they felt like that the poor black children would not be treated the same as the rich or affluent white people's children. And, that might have been the truth in some cases, I don't know. But, my children never came home and complained about anything like that.

PC: Okay, so just some fears of how their children were going to be treated maybe?

QK: They were just fearful that would happen but, it didn't necessarily happen.

PC: Okay, okay. Do you think the transition of integration overall was a smooth process for Diboll?

QK: I think so and I think Mr. Temple, Arthur Temple, had a whole lot to do with that. We all lived together and he said we are going to get along together. That is what he said.

PC: Do you remember him actually ever making like a public speech or, did he ever come to the black community and speak about integration?

QK: Yes he spoke about integration at the elementary...what is it now? The elementary school gym, Mr. Temple made a speech over there to us about integration.

PC: Are you referring to the H.G. Temple School gym?

QK: Yes.

PC: He made a speech to the black community?

QK: Yes.

PC: And you attended that?

QK: Yes.

PC: Was it a lot of people there?

QK: Yes.

PC: And was it just focusing on integration?

QK: I don't...yes mostly, mostly integration.

PC: Did other people speak or was it just Mr. Temple speaking?

QK: Well I don't know, I think somebody had to speak to introduce him and stuff like that.

PC: Okay. Do you remember anything else that he said in the speech to the black community?

QK: He said, "This is a community we are going to live together, we are going to vote together and we going to go to school together." He said, "This is not something that is black and white it's just a people thing." And that is the way we wanted to be treated like people.

PC: Okay, do you think that helped the situation? Do you think the black community was receptive to that?

QK: Well they felt like Arthur might have been on their side, somebody had sympathy for them.

PC: He was concerned.

QK: Yes, he was concerned.

PC: And, that made them feel appreciative of him expressing the concern.

QK: Yes.

PC: Do you know of any problems or incidents that were race related in the community pertaining to integration during those first years? You know, were there racial slurs or were there, you know, between whites and blacks if they met up at the grocery store or at school, were there any incidents that you remember?

QK: Oh lord, that has been so long. It might have been some, but I am not one that remembers stuff like that.

PC: Okay, now before integration years...

QK: I remember one time right after I was married I guess, we lived down at the section houses and of course I was a fast little girl. Not fast, not real fast but, I was quick to speak and some of the white boys say "oh look a there, I didn't know y'all had anything like that over there." And I say "you didn't, your momma's over there." You know I thought I was being bad then, but where I would take it lightly you know, somebody else would take it as them meddling me and if you couldn't say nothing back then, you know, they could talk about me I'd talk back to them. I say, "You didn't, your momma is over there." They say, "We didn't know nobody was over there look like you." That was...I didn't know how to take that. I didn't know whether they was talking like I was looking real bad or looking real good or what. From a statement like that you don't know what they mean.

PC: Right, you were just responding out of...

QK: I was just responding out of...don't put that in there but, that is the truth I said it. But, it wouldn't have been no fight 'cause I wasn't one of those. There wasn't going to be no fight if I couldn't talk I wasn't going to do nothing else.

PC: Right. Now, before integration and even growing up as a child what relations did you have with the white community and white people growing up before integration? What experiences did you have?

QK: Well, I tell you I learned how that I could love white people, I was working for Lucille Sweeney babysitting and Jack Cook was a little boy. And, one day Jack Cook say, "Esther" he called me Esther he didn't call me Queen. He say, "Esther you don't drink coffee?" I say, "No, I don't drink coffee." He say, "Well how come you a nigger then?" I stood there and I thought awhile and I told him I said, "Jack Cook if you ever call me a nigger again I'm going to whoop your behind." "Okay Esther." He stood there a little while and then he come up and hugged my neck and I felt such a warm feeling for him. I say, "You taught me that I could love white people" 'cause that was the sweetest little child I had ever seen. He say, "Esther?" I say "What?" He say, "You not a nigger 'cause I love you."

PC: Oh, how sweet. How old was he then?

QK: He was about five, four or five and he told me...I told him about it since he been up there where he is with Temple now, you know, he's the president or something. "When you get old I'm going to take care of you." I said, "You ought to be starting now boy."

PC: Oh, that is neat. So you worked for the Sweeny family?

QK: Yes.

PC: Okay.

QK: And Dixie Cook and Gladys Rector.

PC: What year was that?

QK: The year I finished high school, just the year before I went to college.

PC: Okay, so you worked for them while you were in high school.

QK: Yes, when school was out I worked for them during the summer. I didn't work for nobody while I was going to high school.

PC: Okay, just during the summer.

QK: I had finished high school and I was going to the post office and we had to pass by Gladys Rector's house. And, Gladys Rector say, "Do you know anybody I can get to help me?" I say "no I don't." She say, "Where do you work?" I say, "Nowhere." She say, "Well why don't you help me?" I say, "Because I can't." She say, "You can't what?" I say, "What do you want me to help you do?" She say, "Wash and hang up clothes and get my water up to wash." I say, "Well I can't wash, my health won't allow me to do that." She say, "Well, where do you work?" I say, "I don't work nowhere." We had a house full of kids. Momma was cooking for the Pine Bough restaurant, my momma did, and my daddy was cutting logs out in the woods, so we had a house full of kids but I wasn't able to work because I had asthma. I didn't even wash my clothes at home. I said, "I can't wash because it make me have asthma so my dad don't let me wash. It was enough of them to do other things and I have other chores to do aside from doing things that is going to make me sick." She said, "Well, I'll teach you what to do. Can you help me press my clothes and iron a little bit?" I found out then I didn't like to iron. Then Billy Jean wanted me to help her. That was Gladys' sister.

PC: That was before you went off to college?

QK: Yes, before I went off to college. That was just a few months.

PC: Now, you went off to college and when you came back when did you get married?

QK: I got married in '51, December.

PC: And who did you marry?

QK: Charles Lindberg King.

PC: Okay, 1951 and you married Mr. King and so then you became Queen King, quite an unusual name.

QK: Yes.

PC: What did your husband do for a living and did y'all live here in Diboll all your married years?

QK: Yes.

PC: And what did he do for a living?

QK: First he worked on the railroad, Southern Pacific, they fixed the tracks and things out there and then he went to work for Temple Inland. He worked out there on the debarker at the mill. That's where they would take the bark, they'd take all them logs off the trucks and run them through a debarker and they took all the bark off of them and then sent them to the mill. They supplied the mill with logs for the lumber.

PC: Okay, did he retire from Temple?

QK: Yes.

PC: Now, you mentioned your mother worked at the Pine Bough.

QK: Oh, and then he retired from Temple then he went to work for the school awhile. He was a janitor. He was the head janitor at the school.

PC: Okay, I remember that.

QK: You remember that?

PC: Yes ma'am, yes ma'am. Now, tell me about your mother working at the Pine Bough. What years would that have been, do you remember?

QK: What years was the Pine Bough there? I think she worked for them as long as it was there until oh...

PC: I don't have the dates in front of me but, I know it was some time in the sixties I believe. Now we know it was before integration years, do you remember any incidents of black people coming to the Pine Bough and eating and how was that handled?

QK: That was handled like Mrs. Davis would tell them to go to the back. They could get anything they wanted out of the Pine Bough but, they had to go to the back door to get it.

PC: Okay, was that just local people or traveling people?

QK: Anybody, traveling people too, if they were black you go to the back.

PC: Was that just common, I mean everybody just knew that? Like, the travelers they just knew to go to the back door? Was that just the custom then?

QK: One time they staged a sit in. They were staging sit-ins all over the country and the black people would go and sit in these white restaurants and if they didn't wait on them they would just sit there anyway. So, I...my Auntie and I both of us was devilish, you know. I had been working at the Pine Bough myself.

PC: Oh, you worked there too?

QK: Yes, so we went by there one night they was staging a sit in somewhere else and we walked in the Pine Bough and Mrs. Davis knowed how crazy I was. She said, "Queen, what you and Addie Lee want? Y'all go on back there to the back." I said, "We don't want nothing, we just come by here." So, she wasn't going to let us sit out there and make our order. I said, "We don't want a thing, we just came in here to see how well the integration was going." She told me she said, "Queen, I don't believe you any kin to Lena

Mae." I said, "Why?" She say, "I just don't believe you are any kin to her." I say, "Well that is my momma." She told me one night I was working out there, she told me to come out here and sweep the front. I say, "Huh?" I would rather you fire me than ask me to come out there and sweep that front. She said, "Would you for real?" I say, "Yes, ma'am." I say, "You got girls out there working just like me." I say, "And, they look more able to sweep than I am." She said, "Well would you come out here and just sweep it this time." I said, "Well, yes ma'am." I came out there and I was sweeping and this old...what do you call white people that don't like black people? Rednecks, you know. He was there and I said, "Excuse me sir." And he said, "I will not." I said, "Frankly sir, I don't give a damn if you don't." I went and told Mrs. Davis so she didn't call me out there no more. I say, "Your customer said he wouldn't excuse me." She said, "What did you say?" I say, "I told him frankly I didn't give a damn whether he did or not." Mrs. Davis said, "You didn't." I say, "Yes I did." She said, "I've been wanting to say that for the longest."

PC: So, that was before integration and you were cleaning out in the restaurant?

QK: Yes.

PC: Okay. But that normally wasn't your job to do that?

QK: No, it wasn't.

PC: Okay, and then as far as the sit-in that you referred to, did that take place at the Pine Bough?

QK: No, we just walked in there.

PC: Okay, but as far as these groups did that ever happen in Diboll?

QK: No.

PC: Okay.

QK: Never did. Momma worked there until she couldn't. They loved her.

PC: What did she do, was she the cook or what?

QK: She was the cook.

PC: So, did you get along good with Mrs. Davis, pretty much?

QK: Yes.

PC: Okay.

QK: I had a little run in with Pauline Stivers. Do you know her?

PC: No ma'am, I know the name I think.

QK: She is dead now. One time I told her...don't put all this down...oh, I'm not going to say it. (laughter)

PC: Yes, our tape is running. (laughter) But, you enjoyed working at the Pine Bough it sounds like. And, your mom worked there as long as she could. Did she work there until it closed?

QK: Just about it.

PC: Okay, okay. Now I want to get to Diboll Day real quick. Do you remember anything about the queen's races before integration when they had separate queens? They had the white Diboll Day queens and they had the black Diboll Day queens. Do you remember that?

QK: (shook her head no)

PC: Do you remember how that took place and how it came about? How did they go about selecting the queens and what years?

QK: Yes, now what year it was, when did they start Diboll Day?

PC: In 1953 was the first Diboll Day. Do you know if they have black queens?

QK: I think the first Diboll Day black queen was Debra Washington.

PC: That was after integration.

QK: That was after integration?

PC: Yes ma'am. We found some photographs in Free Press articles in 1962 there was a group of Diboll Day queens from the black community and 1964.

QK: I guess that was just about when it...

PC: But we were just wondering did they have separate queen races from the beginning in the early years?

QK: Diboll Day was strictly for whites I think. They had the queen selection, it was strictly for whites, they didn't have any blacks running.

PC: Well we did those two years, in '62 and '64 but, we don't know when that started.

QK: Those two...if...

PC: You don't remember anything particular about that?

QK: Nothing in particular.

PC: I was wondering when they stopped having the separate races if it went along with integration.

QK: They never did have a separate race.

PC: Yes ma'am, in '62 and '64 we have photographs of it.

QK: Of separate races?

PC: We have a group of black girls that ran for Diboll Day queen in '62 and '64.

QK: Really?

PC: We weren't sure when they started that. If they had separate races from the beginning and then...

QK: We never had a race where they had a separate race you know, for Diboll Day. You know, when they started having Diboll Day school had already been integrated.

PC: Well, the first Diboll Day was in 1953 before integration.

QK: Before integration?

PC: Yes ma'am and we found a couple of photographs of separate queen's races for the black community.

QK: For Diboll Day?

PC: Yes ma'am. I didn't know if you knew anything about that or not.

QK: Well, '50 let me see I finished high school in '48 so '49 and '50 I was going to Prairie View. In '51 and '52 I was going to Prairie View so, if they had something I don't have a good memory of it.

PC: Okay, well that is okay. When did you begin working for the Diboll Housing Authority?

QK: In 1976.

PC: Seventy six, okay. And, you retired from there when?

QK: In 1995.

PC: Okay, so you had twenty years in.

QK: I was working at the Fiberboard Plant when Margie called me and asked me if I wanted to try to work at the Housing Authority. I say, "No, you know I don't type or do anything like that." She said, "All the jobs you don't have to type." She said, "You can read and write." I was mathematics major so I was good with figures and so forth and I was good at filling out papers and all kind of forms and things that I had to do quite a bit of when I was working at the Housing Authority. I didn't know how to type because when I was going to school I decided that it wouldn't do me any good to type 'cause nobody would give me a job in a office no way. So, when she called me and Mr. Shepherd was over the Fiberboard plant where I was working. I asked him, I wanted to go and try to work in the office for her to see if I could. He said, "Do you have enough education to work in a office?" I say, "I don't know but I want to go and try." He said, "You got a chance to go and try?" I say, "Yes." He said, "Well, you'd be a damn fool if you didn't go."

PC: Well good, that worked out good for you.

QK: So, that was one year while I was working at the Fiberboard plant Emmett got a chance to go to state track meet so, Temple paid our way up there and gave us a room at the hotel, at his hotel in Austin.

PC: Oh, well that was nice.

QK: You know, Mr. Shepherd said, "Now Queen don't you go up there and ask for no hamburger, you order you the biggest steak as any white woman." I say, "I don't know what the biggest steak is Mr. Shepherd." I say, "I eat all kinds of them." He said, "Well just order and walk in there like you rich." So, we really did, we had a good time at the state track meet.

PC: Mr. Temple...

QK: Emmett was the first athlete to go to any state track meet from Diboll.

PC: That is wonderful. Mr. Temple paid your way and saw that you went, that was nice. Now, tell me about Emmett's football career. Didn't he get a scholarship from Diboll High School?

QK: From the University of Houston.

PC: Okay.

QK: He went to the University of Houston and from there he played football and he got a chance to play against Earl Campbell and Joe Montana and I got a chance to go to a few college football games and when the University of Houston played Notre Dame that is a classic football game and you can sometimes see it right now. They rerun it, and that is when Notre Dame, Joe Montana was playing for Notre Dame and Emmett King was running quarterback for the University of Houston Cougars. The Cougars had the game beat and Joe Montana came out there and worked magic with that ball and beat Houston. That is a classic football game to this day!

PC: Did you get to go to it?

QK: Yes, I was there. There was ice all over the place.

PC: Oh wow! Did you get to go to many of his games when he was playing?

QK: Yes, I went to quite a few of them. I couldn't go to all of them, you know, they played Arkansas and all those big people.

PC: Well, I know you were very proud of him.

QK: I was, I was very proud of him but, then they called him to the Jets. He was called to the Jets for a few minutes. He played about three or four months for the Jets and then he went to Canada. He played Canadian football. That is where he hurt his knees. His knees was messed up and so, he came back and got his degree from the University of Houston.

PC: Well, what would you say was one of your most memorable experiences living here in Diboll?

QK: Oh, I don't know. What would you think?

PC: Did you enjoy living in Diboll?

QK: Oh, yes I really do. I still do. I enjoy being down here.

PC: Good, that is good.

QK: I decided that wherever God saw fit for me to be that is where I would be the best me that I could be. I can't be nobody else but me and that ain't too good all the time.

PC: Well, that is a wonderful outlook on life Mrs. Queen. That is admirable. Is there anything you'd like to share with me today that I haven't asked you about? Whether its school days, or working days, or people in Diboll, special people, any particular memory you want to share?

QK: Well, they gave me a birthday party on my eightieth birthday.

PC: Wow, congratulations. That is wonderful. That is quite a milestone.

QK: It was given by Margie and the few other good friends in the community and that was really...they had it on the same day as we had a family reunion, the King Family reunion. That was their first family reunion and I tell you I was on an especially high after that party. I was down here so, I had left here early that morning and I got so tired I had to go to my house and go to bed before the birthday party. So, they woke me up and they took me...I didn't know they was having a birthday party. It was a complete surprise. I won't say complete surprise, but it was a complete surprise that night. Somebody had sneaked it out and told me it was going to be on Sunday, so I was looking for a party, but I was looking for it on Sunday. But, they had it that Saturday night.

PC: The party wore you out.

QK: Yes ma'am.

PC: Well, looking at this Temple High School photograph here of when you were in the Forest Festival parade, I want to ask you one more question pertaining to this parade. This was in 1947, so that was segregation then.

QK: At the Forest Festival.

PC: At the Forest Festival, it was segregation in '47 so, how was the parade handled as far as the floats from the back community?

QK: They had those floats lined up. I don't think it made any difference what school they were from. It was not integrated, but we still had a little place in the parade.

PC: Were y'all at the back of the parade or were you mingled in throughout the parade?

QK: We were mingled in throughout.

PC: Oh, well that is good, okay. And, what about the early Diboll Day parades before integration?

QK: Before integration?

PC: I know it was one parade but was the participants from the black community were they mingled in through the parade or just at the back?

QK: They were in the parade, they were not at the back, or were they. Let's see, the first time they didn't have them behind the horses. That would have been too bad, you know, horses leave stuff, and they didn't have them there. They were ahead of the horses at least.

PC: Okay, okay, any particular Diboll Day memory that you want to share, your involvement in any way? Something special you remember?

QK: Well I remember one time I was working for the Housing Authority and each division had a program on a Friday. They had a little dinner and that was one way they was raising money and we all got together in that group and we had a group of whites and blacks singing together. Sue, what is J.D's?

PC: Johnson.

QK: Sue Johnson and some other white girls, young women, were singing and we sung "This is the world, we are the people, we are the ones that make a better day so let's keep living. There is a choice we have to make to build a better day so...something about you and me, it's a better day. We are the World, we are Diboll." (laughter) But, I remember that and that was an especially enjoyable time. We would have those programs every Friday at noon time and that is what we had on our program.

PC: That is wonderful.

QK: For the black queen we always had the Housing Authority and some others, you know, there is always more than one sponsor for each Diboll Day Queen.

PC: Queen Candidate yes ma'am, yes ma'am. Well that is wonderful. Well Mrs. Queen I've certainly enjoyed the interview today. I really appreciate you spending time with me and helping us gather this part of our history and that concludes the interview.

QK: Well, thank you and I hope I wasn't too bad.

PC: You were just fine!

END OF INTERVIEW