

**DR. ODIS ODEAN RHODES**

**Interview 232a**

**January 10, 2001, at Dr. Rhodes home, Lufkin, Texas**

**R. L. Kuykendall, Interviewer**

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**ABSTRACT:** In this interview with R.L. Kuykendall, Dr. Odis Odean Rhodes discusses growing up in rural Nacogdoches County and moving to Lufkin, attending the segregated Dunbar High School in Lufkin, and continuing his education at Wiley College. Dr. Rhodes discusses the differences between his school in the rural Nacogdoches County – Winters Hill and the more urban Dunbar in Lufkin. He also discusses the differences in school discipline and child raising from his adolescence to the present day. Dr. Rhodes talks about racism in Lufkin and Nacogdoches and living in segregated neighborhoods. He gives details about the various African American neighborhoods in Lufkin, their boundaries, and social life within them.

**R. L. Kuykendall (hereafter RLK):** Today I am visiting with Dr. Odis Odean Rhodes. He is going to give me information concerning his early life and in due time through many tapings we will get up to date. I think it is going to be really interesting to those of you who know very little about the area and he can inform each of us. I am very interested in learning myself. The next voice you hear should be that of Dr. Rhodes. I need to tell you the date is January 10, 2001. This is taking place in Dr. Rhodes home. Dr. Rhodes.

**Dr. Odis Rhodes (hereafter OR):** Yes, I consider it to be somewhat an honor to have been asked to share some of my life experiences. I was not aware that people would value things that I had encountered and it's rather flattering to realize that there might be people who are interested in what has transpired since this person was born. I will go at this time to my birth place which was in a little rural community in west Nacogdoches County, called Winters Hill, Texas. I was born January 23, 1932 in a little shack back in the woods, but we were proud of that little shack and many great experiences occurred within and around that little house and around that community. Now, people that knew me from my birth up to the time that I finished Willey College knew me as Odean. But, people who have met me since I entered the armed service, in the armed services they required you to use your first name, I always went by my middle name which was Odean, so when I met people or when people heard about Odis Rhodes who had known me from birth through Willey College, they didn't know who they were talking about. I can remember when I first ran for the school board I used the name Odis O. Rhodes and many of my Dunbar classmates did not know who I was and they did not vote for me. So, the next time I ran I had to let them know that Odis O. was Odis Odean Rhodes. I had to include that Odean.

**RLK:** You mentioned Dunbar maybe someone would like to know who or what is Dunbar since it seems to be part of your life.

**OR:** Dunbar is...I'm referring to Dunbar High School in Lufkin, Texas. That is the high school from which I graduated in 1950. There are many things that transpired back at Winters Hill before I came to Lufkin to Dunbar and we will be alluding back to that throughout this interview. So, we can go back now to Winters Hill as I reflect on my boyhood days out there. Those were some very difficult and trying times but, as I reflect back on my life now they were very rich and valuable times and beneficial times as well. Times were very hard. We were very poor, but as I have heard many people say I didn't realize that we were really poor at that time because I thought that was the way everybody lived. Because practically everybody I knew and saw in the community were living virtually the same way that we were living. We were scraping by the sweat of our brow living primarily off of what we grew in the fields and in the gardens and got from the woods and from the rivers and the creeks and these kinds of things. So I just simply accept that as a way of life and many, many years later that I was made aware that everybody in the world didn't live that way. But as I said those were some very rewarding, in spite of the fact they were very hard and difficult times but yet very rich rewarding times.

Looking at my early years in Winters Hill, back there everybody had to work and when I say everybody I do mean everybody. The children when they were of age to do any chores around the house like feed the chickens or water the hogs or slop the hogs or rake the yard or cut the grass in the yard and when they graduated from doing chores around the house you didn't really graduate from it you just graduated into doing other chores. Then when they became big enough and I say big enough because it didn't fit very much on age if you were physically able to do certain chores you did it, so you began working in the fields like chopping cotton, picking cotton and digging potatoes and planting corn and all of those kinds of things associated with farming.

**RLK:** Let me ask you were these chores that you were involved in were they supervised or was it something the children just actually knew that this is what we do, how we do, maybe something is said in the morning, "John I want you to go out there and I want you to do thus and so."

**OR:** You were shown one or two times how to do a particular chore and it usually didn't take any more than that. If you didn't do it correctly after you had been shown as many as two times then you usually got spanked on your fanny and it sort of sunk in pretty clearly that time just exactly what you supposed to do.

**RLK:** Always consequences.

**OR:** Absolutely there were consequences and it kind of amuses me when I see children today when their parents tell them to do something or show them how to do something and it takes them so long to make a move in the way of doing it. And it takes them so long to learn how to do the simplest of chores. That wasn't the case back in my early childhood days and at most two times around and that was it. You better know how to do that.

**RLK:** It appears today that children do not want to do it and they take their time and somebody else is not rushing them along, so it may or may not get done you think?

**OR:** They deliberately decide not to learn very fast or very well hoping that parents then will relieve them of that responsibility. But back in my day once you had been shown and when your parents told you to do something they didn't tell you but one time.

**RLK:** The luxury was doing it as you were told. That was a luxury whereas today a luxury is deciding.

**OR:** Right, decide what do you want to do and not...I've even seen modern parents today say, "If you don't get up from there I'm going to start counting, don't you let me count to three, one, two, two and a half..." Had that been back in my day on that one and half count they would have been picking you up off the floor or off the ground. (laughter)

**RLK:** I just thought I would see if I could make that clear for someone who may be listening later on.

**OR:** Of course we thought very long and very harsh back during our childhood but you can look back now and you can appreciate that stern discipline that was administered back during those days because I think it helped to make me a better person, a more conscientious person, a person more conscious of doing a job promptly and doing the job correctly.

**RLK:** You said you were born in 1932, so what we are speaking of right now about what age were you?

**OR:** We are talking about from the age of four or five to the age of twelve or thirteen when we moved from Winters Hill. You really started doing chores I would say about four or five years of age. You take a kindergarten age kid, there are quite a few things you were required to do around. If it was no more than cleaning up and mopping the floors in the house or helping to gather eggs, or all kinds of things you could do.

**RLK:** Let me just prompt you with this question. What were the parents like other than what you are saying about doing the work? How would you compare the parents then and their attitudes as to parents today in terms of showing their concern but yet expecting you to carry out your responsibility also?

**OR:** Parents were very loving back in those days but they were very strict and very stern. They didn't lavish the child with the love and affection in kissy-kissy fuzzy-fuzzy that we shower upon kids today, but you never doubted for a moment that they didn't love you. But, they were very strict and very stern and when they told you to do something, even when they just talked to you in general they talked very stern sometimes harsh tones. If you were to use those tones today at kids they would think you were being abusive, verbally abusive to kids but that is just the way parents were back in those days.

**RLK:** Did you find compared to today as you have described the way they were, that you put fairness in what they were doing or how they went about doing what they were doing and saying to you and expect that yet you found fairness even though love was not the thing that was shown but the fairness?

**OR:** Oh yes, they were very fair and they were very loving, very protective and very caring of their children and never doubt it. As a matter of fact sometimes I think my mother wished to be too fair. She wanted to make sure she was showing no difference between the two of us, my sister Margie Neal, and if she punished one she felt like she owed it to me or the other even though I hadn't done anything. She would say, "I suspect you need it too, you better come here." (laughter)

**RLK:** Well let's compare Mother and Dad even at that time did you find as you think back a definite difference between the attitudes of mothers and fathers relating to their children?

**OR:** My dad was more laid back in his discipline. That is the little things he didn't concern himself with too much. He left that up to my mom, you know, like whether they did the dishes, whether they cleaned or swept the floors just right or whether they cut the grass in the yard, this kind of thing. Those little things Mom would take care of that. Now the big issues, you had a fight, or somebody said you used a bad word at school or something like that, somebody said you stole something, then he would take over. The little things, if mom thought you thought something wrong she was ready to get you. And she used a switch. She would send you to get your own switch. "Go get me a switch, boy, and you better not come back here with no little bitty twig either." She would make you choose a switch that was appropriate for what she considered to be a crime I guess. Now, my dad he would beat you with anything. Mom was going to use a switch from a tree. Dad might use a picket fence. He might use a rope. (laughter) He bordered on child abuse even back then. (laughter) He might use a whip from he used on his mule. He might use a razor strap. He would beat you with anything.

**RLK:** But you are still here.

**OR:** But I am still here.

**RLK:** What kind of attitude did you, as a child, have about what was going on?

**OR:** Well I was scared of my dad to be perfectly honest with you. I thought he would hurt me and he would. (laughter) I loved him, but I made sure that I avoided doing those things that I knew he would whip me. I was always guilty of quite a few of the little things my mom would whop me because I could take those little stings. It would hurt, it would sting but they wouldn't bruise you. My dad would give you a big bruise (laughter) and you would walk around for days knowing that you had been whipped. As a matter of fact I can't recall my daddy whopping me but once and he whopped me with a picket fence, I mean a picket from the fence. My sister was a different story. She was mischievous. She was devilish and she would get a whipping almost...well she would get

a whipping from my momma every day. That was a given. She would usually get a whipping from my dad at least once a week. I have known the time when my mom had to plead, "Please don't kill that girl, don't kill that girl."

**RLK:** Was she older than you?

**OR:** She was older than I was about a year and a half older than I was. And these whippings didn't do a bit of good. She did not mind. It was just in her. As a matter of fact she seemed more determined to do something else devilish every time she would get a whipping. She was just defiant.

**RLK:** Revenge, revenge was sweet to her.

**OR:** I was not like that. I've always been kind of the little scaredy cat so I tried to avoid those things. Particularly those things I felt I would get a whooping from my dad.

**RLK:** Let me ask you this. Don't let me get ahead of you but what age were you when you started to school? Can you remember?

**OR:** I started to school when I was five years of age. Back at that time you were not supposed to start school until you were six. Kindergarten was a venture that came into being a little bit later on and of course you know being in education yourself it was only recent when kindergarten became...I'm not even sure if it is mandatory now.

**RLK:** It is not mandatory.

**OR:** It is not even mandatory now. But at that time they didn't even provide anything for a five year old. But my mom had to work in the field and she had to do something with me and often she would have to go to neighboring farms to do the work and I was too small to be tracking behind her going to these different fields, different farms to work in the fields so, she was sending me to school.

**RLK:** What school?

**OR:** We had a two room schoolhouse at the time. You've heard much about the little one room school but we had two rooms.

**RLK:** Multiple grades.

**OR:** Grades, multiple grades in each room. Had grades one through I believe one through four in one room and five through eight in the other room or something like that. It was a break down. The school at Winters Hill went through the eighth grade, once you graduated from eighth grade you would be bused to Nacogdoches to E. J. Campbell.

**RLK:** Okay, speaking of school was your school the only school at Winters Hill or did the other children go to Nacogdoches automatically?

**OR:** No, we had several little community schools. There was a school at Winters Hill. There was one on the other side of Douglas which is a little town five miles down the road called County Line. There was a County Line School and there was a little colored school in Douglas, so they had several colored schools so to speak around in the various communities. Virtually all of these little schools went from one through the eighth grade and when depending on whether they were located closer to say Cushing or Nacogdoches they graduated to the ninth grade they would go to the next little town that had a black high school or a colored high school. And we were nearer Nacogdoches than we were...let's see, there was a school in...Winters Hill was in the school district of Douglas and the same thing was true with County Line. It was all in the Douglas Independent school district boundary lines but because of segregation you couldn't, and they did have a high school in Douglas for whites but blacks of course couldn't attend so then they would...this is why I get a little bit bent out of shape when I hear these people complaining about bussing across town for integration because they didn't bus you across town in those days they bussed you out of town to the next city. (laughter) And nobody complained. So the kids who lived in County Line, which was on the other side of Douglas would be bussed past Douglas High School, which was all white, and be bussed on past Winters Hill because Winters Hill stopped at the eighth grade too and they would be bussed on to Nacogdoches to E. J. Campbell High School which was about 25 miles away for those kids that was in County Line. It was about 12 miles away for the kids in Winters Hill.

**RLK:** Let me ask you, where was County Line located? Was it a place or...?

**OR:** It is a place.

**RLK:** That is the name?

**OR:** It's another little rural community. They gave every little rural community where people kind of clustered around some geographical feature or something and this was a little place that was bordered on Cherokee County and Nacogdoches County. It was located right on the Cherokee County line and some of the people lived across the county line right in Cherokee County and the others lived on this side of the road in Nacogdoches County so we called it County Line near where the two counties meet or butt each other and the little community exist today, just County Line.

**RLK:** What about today, being a full grown man, was your early school a state school, a church school or what?

**OR:** It was a state school. The Douglas Independent School District provided material, such as they were, faculty, building etc. for the little Winters Hill School. But during those days we did not get anything new. No new books, no new materials, no new supplies, no nothing. When the white kids...when the books went out for adoption and the white kids got through with them they would send those books down to the Colored School so to speak. They would have so many names in them where white kids had used them over the years until there was no space for you to write your name on the name

page. You would be reading the story and get half way through the story and then you would flip the page and you are reading now on page 38 you turn the page and you are on page 42 because the pages in between are all missing.

**RLK:** It is strange you say this thing about books out of adoption and what they are doing with them when they went out of adoption. I can remember I have bagged along with my kids many books because they are out of adoption and had to be returned to Austin.

**OR:** Returned to the state or either burned up.

**RLK:** Or burned.

**OR:** That is right.

**RLK:** The period where you are getting a good education, a page is missing.

**OR:** That is right, half worn out, out of adoption. Much of the material we were reading was no longer even true. I mean facts about geography and history and particularly geography and civics, things that existed eight or ten years ago completely erroneous today. Those people are no longer in office some of them are already dead and here we are reading about what is happening and so and so and this place or that place and that place doesn't even exist anymore. Those people don't even exist anymore. They are gone on, but we are reading this as if it were current information.

**RLK:** Tell me about the teachers, how do you feel about them today? Tell me about the teachers you had, based on what they had to deal with in terms of the material.

**OR:** Some of the teachers were very well learned. Some they did the best they could with the background they had because at that time, I'm not too sure of these facts but it was something like, if you finished high school and there have been some that say you didn't even have to finish high school, if you finished the tenth grade I believe some say that you could get a teaching permit or something. It wasn't a certificate from the state but they could give you some kind of permit that allowed you to teach. You certainly didn't have to have a degree. I don't know if any of my teachers back in those days actually had a degree. I know you could finish high school or go to college for a year or two years maybe and then you get a permit to teach. Most of them had that kind of permit.

**RLK:** Do you know if this was possibly true in the other schools in terms of qualifications to teach?

**OR:** Not sure whether that was the case at other schools or not since we knew so little about what happened in the other world I can't say whether that was the case there too. I would just guess that they probably could do that but, I would suspect they would insist that their teachers would have full training would be my guess. But I can't state that for a

fact. Just as now you know, you can get temporary permits and these kinds of things and teach out of your specialization area and all that. That could have been going on the other side. I'm not certain.

**RLK:** Tell me something about your schools, maybe about you in school and the daily activity of the day and all this kind of stuff.

**OR:** Well let me go back to my beginning of school first.

**RLK:** Okay.

**OR:** When I went to school the teacher sent me back home with a note telling my mother, "O. D. is not old enough to go to school, they have to be six years of age." And my mother sent a note back to the teacher and said, "I'm sorry I don't have anywhere else to send my child each day. He can't go with me to the fields, so I'm sending him back." Then the teacher would send that note back to my mother again and say, "I'm sorry it is against the law, we have no place for him to sit and we don't have enough chairs." My mom sent a note back and said "Let him sit on the floor." (laughter) And this is a true story. I've got to work in the fields and I can't take him with me and he has got to come to school with his sister. So finally the teacher just gave up and she let me stay and gave me an old book. I'll never forget it. It was Dick and Jane. Dick and Jane and what was the little dog and cat? What was the dog?

**RLK:** Spot.

**OR:** Spot and Pup, seems like it was pup but anyhow, I can remember that little book very clear and I remember Dick was riding his little tricycle and his tricycle turning over the wheel running off and these kind of things. I just thought I was in heaven when I got that little book, very dear to me.

**RLK:** Could you do something with that book?

**OR:** I could do something with the book.

**RLK:** How did you learn?

**OR:** I learned by listening to the other kids and listening to the teacher when she was teaching the other kids. So finally after she realized she couldn't get rid of me she just started including me in some little activity. I can remember the little writing activity where you took the pen and made those little strokes and made little circles and circles and these kinds of things. So I got a fairly decent background in education in spite of the fact that we had virtually no material and supplies, and we had out of date books and these kind of things.

**RLK:** What else do you think you learned by comparison I guess, as much from the children as you did from the teacher?



**OR:** Oh yes and this is where when this new thing of multi-level learning kind of thing, when they say these were new innovations they weren't new at all because that is the way I started out in these multi-levels because there were three and four grades in one room. You had the luxury of learning from all of them. When the teacher got through working with the first grade then she moved on to the second grade and of course you did your little activities at the first grade level and then you got to listen in and see what the second graders were doing. So, there were some benefits there.

**RLK:** Those were the kinds of things we had to go through with multi-age at Garrett and parents not wanting it to take place. Plus my experience, I had a classroom of two grades, seventh and eighth grade in the same room. What you just described was very true because sometimes my seventh graders would be with the eighth graders they knew, they had to sit there and listening. I know they were listening because we didn't agree. (laughter) No, I'm just...but I could tell they were getting it whether they tried or not, osmosis or somebody when they moved to the next grade level.

**OD:** Right, so there were some benefits there. I can remember the highlight of our...of the week, we would always have a spelling bee on Fridays and we would spell the regular list of words from our spelling list and then we would start giving each other words. We would have teams, you know, we would line up on teams one this side of the wall and the other on the other side of the room then you started giving words to your opponent trying to give them words that they could not spell.

**RLK:** It's called involvement.

**OD:** Sir?

**RLK:** It's called involvement, pupil involvement.

**OD:** Yes, pupil involvement there. I remember my dad was working and I must have been about fifth or sixth grade level now and my dad was working in Lufkin and he would bring the newspaper back, the Houston Post he would get from his place of employment and he would bring them home on the weekends when he would come in. And I would look through these papers and find these difficult words and try to find these difficult words to hurl at my opponents during the next spelling bee. I remember the pet word. I would always set and find that would be my one. When we had gone through all the spelling list and gone through our little petty words and I would spell it. I would throw it out and say, "spell Sakawatez." And, of course that would blow their mind. "Saka what?" Yes, Sakawatez, and of course no one could ever spell it. And, so I always turned out to be the winner.

**RLK:** You had to spell it also?

**OD:** I had to spell it also but, see I had the luxury of having the paper with the word in there you know. But, the funny thing was when I finally learned and the teacher didn't

know any better, bless her, (laughter) and when I finally learned what the actual word was it was Sakowitz. (laughter)

**RLK:** Phonetically speaking.

**OD:** That is right. I would pronounce it phonetically. I thought it was Sakawatez. (laughter) So it was a clothing department store in Houston there, Sakowitz. But at any rate I am not even sure if I learned that until I came to Lufkin which was in the seventh grade I believe. I think I used the same word a time or two at Dunbar and they said, "Boy that is not Sakawatez, that is Sakowitz." I said well don't tell nobody I didn't know.

**RLK:** Well tell me this, I know that the schools were segregated. What about the social aspects at the time when you were living here?

**OD:** The biggest social event we had was the field day. We had what we called Fields Day...and we would have Halloween programs but the big event was Fields Day. It was kind of like a track meet really. We would have all kind of things. We would have a little basketball, we would have races and we would have pole vault, long jump but all this was done in dirt. We would have pits with sawdust put in the pit where you jump into when you do the pole vault and the long jump and this kind of thing. We would have soda pop and candy and this was the one day you got to drink all the soda pop. We didn't see soda pop very often nor candy and things like this so this was a big, big day.

**RLK:** Support from the parents?

**OD:** A lot of support. Our parents would come out. They would cook barbecue or fried chicken. We had the works. That was a big, big day. Everybody, all the parents would come from the community. They would come to school the whole day.

**RLK:** Did the superintendent or any of the board show up?

**OD:** I don't ever recall seeing any white person at the school period. I think back over the five or six years I was in school there and I can't...the only time I remember seeing whites was when they would show a little movie maybe once a month and there would be a white person operating the projector and other than that I really can't recall seeing any whites on campus.

**RLK:** Were there any social contacts between whites and both sides at any time other than going to the grocery store? Or what was it like if you went to the grocery store in Nacogdoches?

**OD:** Well the grocery store you had to go to Nacogdoches to get a full bill of groceries. There was a little grocery store right up the street, up the highway from the school where you could get bags of sugar and flour and I'm trying to recall if they had...I know they had bologna and cheese and cold cuts. I can say that, cold cuts and things of that sort, but to get a full bill of groceries you would have to go to Nacogdoches and go into town.

Usually we went into town on Saturday, get the wagon, hook up the mules and it would take you a couple of hours to go those ten miles in the wagon.

**RLK:** Can you recall any incidents that occurred between the two groups, negative or positive?

**OD:** I don't recall any negative except in the fields, you know, there were some of your overseer's you might say. The field hands, sometimes they would get abusive. They didn't get physically abusive but they would curse you if they didn't think you were picking cotton fast enough for them.

**RLK:** These people were whites?

**OD:** They were whites. All these overseer's you might say of the field hands were white.

**RLK:** Is this to say you are working for a company when you are out in the field?

**OD:** No, you are just working for the individual. Individual would have, particularly these that had big farms, had a lot of cotton. When the cotton got ready it had to be chopped right then. When it got ready to be picked it certainly had to be picked right then so, if it was a big farm they would hire a bunch of hands. If you were a good worker you were in great demand. My mom was one of the best cotton pickers there was in those parts and everybody wanted Reba to pick cotton for them. There was another fellow named Elmer Hollis, he was the very best cotton picker in the area and my mom was second best. They always wanted Elmer Hollis and Reba to help pick cotton.

**RLK:** By comparison today what was the education level of your parents?

**OD:** I think my mom finished maybe the fifth grade and I think maybe my dad finished the seventh. Back in those days when you got old enough and big enough to work in the fields you had to help work in the fields.

**RLK:** Do you feel this is true of both sides?

**OD:** To some degree, not to as great a degree among the whites, but this was practiced even among the whites, but not to as great a degree as it was among the blacks because many of the whites they had substance or they had resources. They had big farms that had been left to them. They had cattle and some even had back in those days had oil wells and gas wells.

**RLK:** You did pick cotton?

**OD:** I did pick cotton.

**RLK:** Were there black and whites picking at the same time?

**OD:** In some fields there were blacks and whites.

**RLK:** Any problems with the young people or any conflicts or something?

**OD:** No, we knew our places and you stayed in your place. I was always...well the blacks in general always talked. Those older blacks say, "stay in your place boy, don't sass those people, don't talk back to them."

**RLK:** The thing about it that wasn't fear that was common sense.

**OD:** That was common sense. That was reality check because this is reality. But it's one thing I have to give my granddad some credit for. He always emphasized to us when you talking to the white man look him in the eye. Don't be scratching your head looking down at the ground or clawing, look him in the eye and tell him just straight up what it is.

**RLK:** You know, that is the thing that gets to me and I know this is about you not me, but at the same time I often think about I do not have the habit of looking at people. I don't know why. And it gets to me and I'm speaking for members of the opposite race that they may get the wrong idea about that. I don't know I seldom look at people.

**OD:** Well that was a very bold thing to do back in those days.

**RLK:** I know.

**OD:** My granddad he would do it. He would say "look at him" because sometimes a person don't appreciate you looking him right dead in the eye and telling him straight up how things are, but he emphasized that.

**RLK:** I don't ever want anyone to misunderstand me because I'm not looking at them.

**OD:** Right and just because you are not looking at them doesn't mean you...but, he did that and another thing he always emphasized and I really didn't know what he meant at the time but he said "let your word be your bond." I thought he was saying bone but I realized in later years he was saying "let your word be your bond." Whatever you tell a man you are going to do you find yourself doing it.

**RLK:** Wouldn't it be wonderful?

**OD:** If we all did that. And, he said "if you find yourself not able to do what you told him don't dodge him you go to him and look him dead in the eye and tell him Mr. so and so I promised you I would pay your money back tomorrow, but I don't have it."

**RLK:** Sounds like the Bible doesn't it.

**OD:** It does, it really does.

**RLK:** It is just paraphrasing it.

**OD:** It does, and I've tried to live by that and it has helped. It is not easy to do all the time but it's best to do it that way. There was a world of difference between different land owners. You would find back even in those days there were some whites who had compassion and had concern and consideration for even the black farm workers. And there were some that would provide us a place inside to eat, have a screened back porch and a table there. There are some that would feed field hands, others you had to bring your own food. I can't recall what this person's name was but he always had a screened in back porch with a table and he provided food for his field hands. "Y'all come on, come on in out of the sun and relax awhile."

**RLK:** Stay in your place.

**OD:** Yes, stay in place but others you had to sit down under the trees and fight gnats and flies while you trying to eat yourself out of your glass jar, your peas and your greens. We didn't have sandwiches back in those days. Some treated almost as if you were a slave and others treated you with dignity and compassion.

**RLK:** I know your time is important, can we kind of wrap this segment up unless you have more. What I'm trying to say the next time we meet we can move into town.

**OD:** Okay, we will just sort of briefly wrap this segment up. Now, in Winters Hill this phase, my granddad, he was, I just want to say a bit about him. You will probably hear me talk about him a great deal because to me he was a phenomenal man especially considering the time he came along. He was rather prosperous too. He amassed about three hundred acres of land and he himself would hire farm hands even though he might help Mr. Jones pick some cotton, but he also had fields of cotton that he would hire hands to pick. After he got to a certain point he didn't work in Mr. Jones' fields anymore. He took care of his. He was self employed. He had his own you might say little plantation to take care of and so forth. He was self sufficient and a very proud man, a very strong man. And when he passed he left behind what was considered to be a fairly decent reserve for my grandmother and her children. It wasn't a lot of money but as a matter of fact I don't think it was more than \$5,000 but back in '52 five thousand dollars back in '52 was a pretty good sum of money. And he also had a brand new pickup truck and a home that was paid for and that was something you didn't find many blacks having. As a matter of fact I can think back during the time I was in Winters Hill there were only two black people I knew that had cars period. My granddaddy wasn't one of them. He didn't get his until later. There were only two blacks, and I'm talking about in the whole western part of Nacogdoches County, there were two blacks that I knew of that had cars. The rest they would do good if they had a pair of mules and a wagon. But my granddaddy was one of the more fortunate ones and he provided rather well. He was in pretty decent shape and I guess at that point we will put a pen in things and we will pick up from my granddad and his raising and his crops and going to the gin and making homemade syrup and those kind of things. We will touch on that a little bit next time.

[Tape Stopped - End of Part 1]

[Tape Started – Part 2]

**RLK:** Today we are going to continue the conversation with Dr. Odis Rhodes. The date is June 14<sup>th</sup>. The next voice you will hear will be that of Dr. Rhodes.

**OR:** In spite of the fact that my granddad did quite well farming, primarily farming, there were a few cattle but they didn't raise cattle for beef cattle, primarily for milk and butter, I was still determined not to make that my way of life. He seemed to have enjoyed farming, country life, but I hated it. I vowed that I would do virtually anything to avoid having to depend upon raising cotton, corn, potatoes, peanuts and those kinds of things for a livelihood. That was one of the motivating factors for me to continue my education. In approximately 1944 or 1945 my dad decided we would move to Lufkin and to me that was a very happy, happy day because I was glad to get out of Winters Hill and away from country living and the hard work that was associated with country living. Upon arriving in Lufkin, of course I had visited Lufkin several times before because I had a grandmother, my dad's mother, who had lived in Lufkin for quite some time and we would usually visit with her during the summer and spend some time. So, I knew a little bit about Lufkin before we moved here and I had already made a few friends in Lufkin so it wasn't a totally new experience for me when we made the move. At any rate, I was accustomed to working quite hard being a country boy so, when we moved to Lufkin it didn't take me very long even though I was only twelve or thirteen years old to find little odd jobs that I could do in order to acquire a little pocket change to buy myself some socks and shirts and things of that sort. I had always wanted to be kind of an independent person because I remember when we would pick cotton and get paid for it and go to town on Saturday in Nacogdoches; my mom would usually give us a quarter spending money. At that time it would get you quite a bit because you could get a hamburger for a nickel so long as you didn't have tomatoes or lettuce on it. You could get a bottle of soda water for a nickel. You could get a candy bar for a nickel and that left you a dime to jingle in your pocket. So though that quarter seemed to be quite little it could go quite a long ways for an eleven or twelve year old boy. But at any rate to get back to Lufkin, I remember when I began school at Dunbar everybody called me little country boy. As a matter of fact they used to call me plug ugly, so you will hear some people even today say "hey plug." Nobody knows how I acquired that name except those that were back there at Dunbar during those years because they poked fun at me, because one I was a country boy and I was pretty homely looking country boy at that. But at any rate there was a fellow by the name of J. B. Davis who was a football player. I had played basketball quite a bit out in the country but football was a new adventure for me. But, anyway I was fascinated by the game and I was eager to play and there was a fellow by the name of J. B. Davis who was a senior at the time and I was like in the eighth grade I believe and he sort of took a liking to me. After I came out for football he asked me and I told him yes. So, after we practiced football and had gone home and done our chores and did our homework about 10:30 we would begin our trek to the Angelina Hotel down the Cotton Belt track in order to arrive there by eleven o'clock when they closed up. So, we would mop the floors, put out the trash and all these types of things and we would finish up

about twelve or twelve thirty at night. Of course I would come home, go to bed and get ready for school the next morning. We would always get ourselves a glass of ice cream or something. They were serving ice cream primarily by the school. We didn't realize we were doing anything wrong at the time, it just seemed right to us to get us a glass of ice cream before we went home to eat on the way down the track as we walked home. I guess it was sometime much later when they started talking about models and how people stole from the workplace that I reflected back and I said well I guess we were kind of stealing and didn't know it. We just called ourselves getting some good old ice cream to eat on the way home. But at any rate after I came to Dunbar I realized some opportunities that I didn't realize at Winters Hill even though Dunbar was still very much deprived as a school, if you want to compare Dunbar with Lufkin High or Lufkin Jr. High, whatever the case might be. Even though there were many advantages I had at Dunbar that I didn't have at Winters Hill there were still other opportunities at Lufkin High that Dunbar did not experience. There were no foreign language classes. The only science class we had was a biology class where we had a little workbook that we worked through. We had no science equipment, no supplies, no nothing except I believe we had a Bunsen burner and a flask and that was just about it. This is why it kind of bothers me that people feel that blacks somehow are inferior because they don't seem to measure up to the level of our Caucasian friends but, you consider the dire circumstances that we came from and the lack of materials and lack of supplies, lack of books. Because the only books that we got were the ones that had gone out for adoption that the white kids had already used up. By the time we got the books there was a dozen or so names in them that had used them years before and half the pages were missing. You might be reading a story or reading a historical event on page 122 and the next page is 171 so, all of that in between you just have to imagine what transpired. I can recall our football equipment. We never got any new football equipment. The only equipment we got was the equipment that Lufkin High School threw away and that went for shoes, helmets, pads and everything yet, we were supposed to be on a par with everybody else. No way! I think it's rather remarkable that we have done as well as we have and achieved as much as we have in spite of the fact that we were denied many opportunities and many materials, many provisions and that was typical for the white grades at that time.

**RLK:** Let me interrupt you.

**OR:** Sure.

**RLK:** At this point these are the circumstances that existed in the school system. Talk to us about once I left school what was it like living in Lufkin. Those things that are related to what you have spoken of, the lack of or was it out in the world I guess I'll say, in the city.

**OR:** Of course there were two worlds as everyone that lived back during those days realized there were two worlds. There was a white world and a black world. Two sides of town; the black side of town and the white side of town. Two systems for everything, two church systems you might say. Two school systems, even though it had the same name, totally two different worlds. Now where I lived at the time was what they called the

Walker Quarters, which were over by the tracks. Many of the houses were between two tracks. The Cotton Belt track which ran from Tyler to Lufkin and I'm sure farther than that, but that was the limit of my perception of space at that time or distance from Tyler to Lufkin. And you had to live in the midst of the noise and the dangers of those trains coming through with their sometimes dangerous cargo and here you are within about six or eight feet of those tracks and there is your living room or your bedroom or whatever the case might be. There was no indoor plumbing at the time, not in the Walker Quarters. We had a little outhouse and three or four houses had to utilize the same outhouse and if we had a large pail or tub at the bottom of the outhouse as I recalled and about every two or three weeks someone would come through and take away the feces and the urine and dump it in a big wagon and haul it off and spread lime around the toilet so the flies and maggots wouldn't be so terribly bad, yet they were still pretty bad. The little houses primarily were shotgun houses that people often refer to them. It's usually about three rooms and the living room which also served as a bedroom then you had a kitchen and that was pretty much it. You called them shotgun houses because you could shoot a shotgun through the front door it would go right on out the back door, straight through. So, the living conditions were pretty dire though we did keep the premises as neat as possible. My mom had always been taught and always taught us to keep the floors swept. We had to scrub the floors once a week and we had to scrub them with lye water then rinse the floors off so the floors were perfectly clean and sanitized and this kind of thing. So we made the best of what we had. There were no playgrounds or parks for blacks at that time so you just had to find your open field or something if a person would allow you to make you a baseball field when they were not growing their crops then that is where you played baseball. You would find you a couple of shade trees and you played quiet games under the shade trees and you improvised with your surroundings. You made do with what you had available to you.

**RLK:** Well what about working conditions in terms of your father or adults anyway?

**OR:** My dad during the war years he had moved to Lufkin several years before we did in 1944-45. He was here when the war began I believe and everything was rationed. You could get sugar or shoes, clothes, you couldn't buy rubber tires. You had to buy tires, I forget what the synthetic material was at the time that they made tires from. The old rubber tires that were in existence you couldn't have them replaced but they had what they called recap. You could recap them. They had these slabs of rubber that you could actually somehow glue around the tire and you could retread them. So, my dad worked at this kind of establishment for a number of years that vulcanized and retreaded old rubber tires because you couldn't buy any new rubber tires. I was cleaning out my dad's house a couple of months ago after he had passed and I ran across some of these old rationing books that had stamps. They would give you so many stamps per month or per year and every time you bought sugar or flour or whatever you had to tear out your stamp. You buy a pair of shoes you had to tear the stamp out to buy the shoes. You use up all the stamps that was it. You couldn't buy no more flour, no more sugar or whatever. If you had an exceptionally large family often these people would run out of stamps before the allotted time was up. And if you had a small family and you find yourself having more stamps than you needed then you could give your stamps to somebody else or you could



trade them off. Maybe you didn't need any shoes but you needed some sugar, here I'm giving you my shoe stamp. Gasoline of course was rationed off. Virtually everything was rationed during the war. Fortunately my dad was a bit too old to have to go to World War II. I was not old enough of course and so at least we didn't have to deal with the threat of our father or any close family members being killed in the war.

Now, getting back at Dunbar I received a good foundation in some things at Dunbar, not so good foundations in other things. I remember especially my English classes. I think my English teacher was an exceptionally good teacher. My math teacher though she did the best she could, she had not even been trained in math. I won't even give her major because it might identify who she was but she had to study her math a day or two ahead of the lesson. Like I said she did the best she could, but she simply was not trained in Math. At that time the powers that be did not care what kind of education black kids got. You might have had a specialty in agriculture and they might have you teaching English or history and you knew virtually nothing about English or history, but they just wanted some live body in that room that they could say we have somebody teaching these blacks something. Whether they are getting a quality education they could care less. Probably prefer that you didn't get a quality education. The power structure at that time, outside forces pretty much determined who got the teaching positions not the board of education.

**RLK:** Can you tell us what you mean by outside forces?

**OR:** Outside forces I mean the powerful influential people of the city. Though they might not be on the school board, most of them were not, but they owned big businesses or industry or they had lots of money. They were a powerful influential people of the city. They called the shots no matter what those shots were and they could virtually dictate who got teaching positions. It would not be the most qualified, it would be their nanny's daughter. If my mother had worked for one of the rich influential people of the city I would have not have had any trouble getting a job whether I was qualified for the job or not. This practice at...some parts of society after I had gone to college and acquired my teaching certificate and I thought the same system was in operation at the time so I started talking to the people that knew the powerful people and I wasn't so fortunate to get a job right away 'cause by that time they had begun to look at quality because this was like in 1956 after the 1954, I believe, Civil Rights Act had been passed. This was where the Supreme Court had deemed that segregation must be eliminated. So then we began to get more qualified people to teach these very subjects.

**RLK:** Can we go back to your time at Dunbar? We know that preparations were necessary, you've indicated that sometimes the teachers were well prepared and did the best they could. There was something going on at this time with Odean Rhodes because see he was still a little boy, he became a young man. There are some things that were going on other than just school, at school, experiences. You played football and there were some other things that I think you may have been involved in at the time.

**OR:** I played football and I participated in practically all organizations that were available to me at Dunbar. I can remember one of my teachers and since this was a very

positive effect I don't mind calling his name was John Simond and he emphasized that a quality education was very important. He taught industrial arts as well as...I forget the other subject but I guess he had more impact on me through industrial arts than anything else. He said it is great to get a good solid education but you should get you a useable skill as well and he taught me how to paint, hang paper and hang sheetrock. As a matter of fact I painted and hung paper for a livelihood for about fifteen years. He was a very serious kind of guy yet he was very kind of lighthearted fun kind of guy. He was one of my favorite people and when I couldn't get a teaching job, when I first finished Wylie I relied on those skills primarily painting and hanging paper. The Korean War...

**RLK:** Excuse me again...I'm trying to get you to tell me about you not only in subjects but there must have been some girls or something on campus. Something must have been going on in your life that was typical I guess I should say.

**OR:** Sure, the social life in Lufkin at that time for young people, teenagers was basically two things I can recall, well three if your mom let you go to these little clubs that existed at the time and even if she didn't sometimes you sneaked away and went anyhow. But usually during the school months we had what we called a social every Friday night. Primarily just a little dance and you come in about eight o'clock and then at eleven o'clock you had to go, so you had a little social where you danced and tried to find you a favorite girl to walk home. There was also Jones Lake Park at the time they built a platform out on the back. It didn't have the swimming pool at this time but it had a platform out on the bank with a jukebox and on Friday nights and Saturday nights I don't recall whether they were open on Sunday night because we went to church and they wanted you to get ready for school the next morning, but particularly Friday nights and Saturday nights we would have the dance. I can recall, I don't remember the first time that I really met Pat who became my wife, but I can recall the first time that I asked to walk her home and I do mean ask because in those days you didn't just arbitrarily decide you were going to walk a girl home. You had to get permission from her parents to walk her home or get permission to come and see her. So I can recall this time that her mother was at the park because often parents took their kids to these functions even though the kids might have been sixteen, seventeen, eighteen years of age. Frequently the parents would walk them there and either stay there until they got ready to go or else come back and get them about closing time. So this particular time her mother stayed there during the entire period of time and it was time to go home and I asked Pat if I could walk her home and she said, "You have to ask my mother." I recall very clear I was afraid to ask because well I never had to do that kind of thing before because usually I just had kind of puppy love with girls we teased and throw acorns or pebbles at each other and that was it. I never actually walked one home so I remember asking her mother if I could walk her home. She said, "Well let me think about it awhile." And just when they were about to play the last record of the evening they would click the lights three or four times letting you know we were just about to close down. I remember when they flicked the lights and I got the last dance I went and asked her again could I walk her home. She said, "Well I guess so." So I walked her home for the first time and of course the mom started off in the front and we started walking a little slowly and we would get a little too far behind she would stop and remind us, "You better get on up here, don't be slacking back."

(laughter) So, early on and I think this was about the ninth grade I had a penchant for her, this young lady and she just stuck in my craw and under my skin ever since I suppose.

**RLK:** What year was this?

**OR:** This must have been about '47, '46 or '47 because we dated all the way through high school for four years. I left and went to Wylie and spent four years there, came back and we still were in contact and in 1954 we were married after some eight or ten years of courtship.

**RLK:** Let me ask you during this period of time is there anything that you can remember that may have happened in Lufkin that could be thought of as earth shaking? Something you always remembered? Let me just...anything between the races or whatever. I'm trying to get some idea not only the social life with you but the general picture of Lufkin. The kinds of things the conflicts or whatever that might have taken place.

**OR:** I think the most traumatic thing that ever happened to me, it was not in Lufkin it was in Nacogdoches. I was living in Lufkin, they had a used clothing store, a men's clothing store in Nacogdoches I recalled. Even though there were a lot of kind of violent things happening around me to other people, to other blacks, I didn't personally experience many of those things because I was always kind of diplomatic enough to avoid getting into a situation where there would be a violent confrontation between me and some white person. I just learned how to avoid most of those kinds of things. But I can recall when I was about to finish high school or had just finished high school, I had just finished high school during that summer when I was preparing to go to Wylie College that fall, I had went to Nacogdoches to purchase some used clothing at this used clothing store. And I recall walking down the sidewalk and there was this constable and I had heard a lot about this constable being such a mean bad person and I was walking down the sidewalk and I was just about to approach this used clothing store and he walked up behind me and kicked at me. He didn't actually kick me because I jumped out of the way and he says, "Get your blankety-blank off the sidewalk, the sidewalk is made for white folks, you niggers walk in the street." And he kicked at me and I jumped in the street and then I proceeded until I got in front of the used clothing store and I stopped there in the street waiting until he passed on by and turned the corner to get to the clothing store. That is perhaps the most traumatic thing that happened to me personally so far as the black and white thing is concerned.

**RLK:** Anything else that wasn't involving you?

**OR:** There was a big club here in Lufkin at that time the Cotton Club. You might have heard of the Cotton Club. They used to have big dances there. I recall Little Richard, Tina Turner, Ivory Joe Hunter, a lot of the big bands came to this Cotton Club and the people from Nacogdoches would often come down. Now this was also during the time when they had the big apple hats, the zoot suits, the drape pants for those younger people that don't know what the zoot suits are.

**RLK:** Year, what year?

**OR:** Oh this is probably mid forties and early fifties. There was a fellow in Nacogdoches, I think he was Chief of Police, called Roebuck. Roebuck did not allow those blacks there to do hardly anything. He called the shots. He would tell you when to get up, when to go to bed, when to get off the street. He would pass by and he would use this little teasing phraseology like sweetheart. "Sweetheart I'll be back by here in about thirty minutes and I don't want anybody standing on the street." And you knew you better get gone. He did not allow these fellows to wear these big apple hats with the tall feathers in them. He would literally take his knife and cut those feathers off. The zoot suits are made much like the suits many ministers are wearing now where the coat came down near the knees. Of course, the big vest that came up almost to your chin, pretty much on the same order except the pants had wide, wide knees and narrow, narrow bottoms called drapes. Kind of like T. D. Jake pants and Roebuck did not allow them to wear these zoot suits in Nacogdoches. What these black fellows had to do was catch the bus with their clothes in a suitcase or a paper bag; of course many of them didn't have a suitcase. They would ride the bus to Lufkin and when they got to the bus station in Lufkin they would change into their zoot suits and their big apple hats and come to the Cotton Club or go to the Black Cat across the river, wherever they would go until they got ready to go back home. They would go back to the bus station change back into their regular overalls or whatever they wore down here and go back to Nacogdoches. That is how bad things were up there at that time in Nacogdoches.

**RLK:** So comparatively speaking would you say that the law enforcement in Lufkin was maybe totally different from up there?

**OR:** I won't say totally different but not as, may I say, violent. Not as oppressive at least in a violent kind of way like they were in Nacogdoches. And primarily it was just one or two characters in Nacogdoches and that was one that I just called and the other I can think of his name but I refrain from using it because he was not as widely known as...I think I remember his name but there is no question about Roebuck. He was widely known all over East Texas and everybody was aware of Roebuck. He didn't attempt to hide his feelings for blacks. He looked at them with disdain.

**RLK:** Comparatively speaking what would you say about law enforcement in Lufkin I guess compared to Nacogdoches?

**OR:** As I mentioned before personally I didn't come in contact with the law enforcement system very much if at all. I had no close relatives or close friends that had many confrontations with them. In general the thing that all, I say all, virtually all law enforcement officers were guilty of at that time if there was a conflict between a white person and a black person the black person was always wrong no matter what the circumstances were. There were instances when there were means like if you just bumped fenders and cars the white could have been totally guilty but the black was always going to be found to be the guilty party. Now I don't recall any violent confrontations that were encountered by any close relative of mine or any close friends of mine. I think the law

enforcement officers here were just kind of denying there were some strict rules where you could go and could not go, parts of town you better not be seen in after the sun goes down, that kind of thing. If you were a black person you could not be seen unless you worked for one of the whites in that neighborhood; you better not be seen in that neighborhood after sundown. That was just understood. If you were seen in that neighborhood after sundown you were subject to get beat up, put in jail, run out or whatever the case might be. That was the case in virtually every town in East Texas and that was the case in Lufkin and I found that most of my people and most of my close acquaintances and myself, we just made sure when it gets close to sundown we don't be found in those neighborhoods. Even if you are working and I did quite a bit of work for whites, I painted many white houses. I hung paper for many whites but unless they could almost escort me out I got out of there before sundown because I knew that there was a danger that I could be picked up, beat up or whatever the case might be.

**RLK:** Would you want to say what part of town these things existed?

**OR:** Any white part. At that time you didn't find any blacks living in the white part of town period unless they were living in servant quarters. So, any part of town that was considered a white residential area you didn't find yourself there. You better not find yourself there. No matter what part it was and no matter what subdivision it was you just better not be caught there after dark.

**RLK:** I'm picking, I guess but today what parts?

**OR:** Well today of course Crown Colony did not exist I guess the most exclusive part of town was probably the Montrose area going toward Memorial Hospital. Mantooth, I believe its Mantooth or Grove Street back in that area, all up and down. There was one segment of Kelty's Street that was pretty much white. But I would say where Abney exists today from there back towards town was virtually all white. Abney was pretty much the dividing line, Abney back north on up Kelty's and all up the tracks. That was all blacks so, if you were found anywhere else from the south side of Abney back toward Memorial Hospital all back in that area was exclusively white area and you did not find yourself in that area after sundown. And that was just about my limit because I only had a bicycle to get around. Now what existed on the other side of town I hardly even know because you didn't venture too far from your home and I lived just off Abney right on those tracks there behind what is now the Congo Club, right in that area there.

**RLK:** Well what about Lufkin Land?

**OR:** Lufkin Land was there but Lufkin Land was almost in another world. It was primarily black part of Lufkin Land that I knew about but here again since we didn't have transportation in those days. Some of the families had a car. My dad had a car but he didn't let me use it very much. Lufkin Land was way out there in "never-never" land so you didn't do too much traversing over to Lufkin Land. As a matter of fact we had sort of semi-gangs at that time. They weren't as violent as gangs are today but if you lived in Lufkin Land you hardly could come over to what we called North Lufkin today. If you

lived in North Lufkin you didn't go to Lufkin Land. If you lived in Kelty's, and Kelty's was a unique little community, as a matter of fact it was a separate little city at that time, if you lived in Kelty's you had to be careful about coming over to the quarters. You had to have almost permission to come through those quarters so we didn't do a lot of I guess you might say inter-visiting Lufkin Land. It's not like it is now we just go all over the place and it ain't no problem.

**RLK:** What about school where did they go to school?

**OR:** When it got to high school they all came to Dunbar High School because Dunbar was the only high school.

**RLK:** What about elementary schools?

**OR:** Oh they had elementary schools in Kelty's. At that time they also had elementary school I think through the ninth grade in Cedar Grove. They had their separate school.

**RLK:** Lufkin Land?

**OR:** There was the old Carver School which was behind Albertson's there. Old Carver School and kids at Lufkin Land went to elementary school there at the old Carver School. So there was a Brandon School on Kelty's Street at that time and then eventually after Dunbar was created as Dunbar High School on the hill they built Garrett Elementary School at the present site where it is now. At one time there was virtually two elementary schools as I recall that was Carver, George Washington Carver and Brandon and Garrett was built later on. And the kids in Kelty's, they had a school in Kelty's. Then in Redland kids didn't many of them live in Redland as such they lived in Cedar Grove area they had their school until they got to ninth grade then they would come to Dunbar.

**RLK:** Were there clashes since you had your own turf?

**OR:** No open clashes, not violent clashes. They would chase you with rocks and things like that but no knives, and certainly no guns, mostly fist fights. Throw rocks at you, verbally chasing you, I mean verbally chastising you and attempting to run you out, but nobody ever got killed.

**RLK:** Did the parents ever get involved in these kind of things?

**OR:** No, primarily just between kids. It never got to the point where the parent felt like they had to step in other than the fact to just tell them to go on and cut that out. Be careful you are not going over there, whatever. But, it never got to the point where it was life threatening. The worst that was going to happen was a good fist fight. The fellows that lived in that area would stand around and mostly just look at the two of us doing the fist fighting until they see their buddy about to get beat then they might jump in and make sure their buddy won.

**RLK:** Was there much killing in terms of adults?

**OR:** Very seldom did you hear of an adult getting killed. Now I've known a lot of adults get cut up but very few of them actually got killed. They seem to know just where to cut you or how deep to cut you I guess to keep from killing you. But there was quite a bit...very seldom you heard of a person getting shot. It was mostly fist fights and knock them in the head with a pine knots or something.

**RLK:** Anything between races that you want to share, heard about or in the paper?

**OR:** I've heard of incidents from mouth to mouth where there was confrontation with whites and blacks but the black and white youth I don't recall any conflict between them because you just didn't come into contact with each other that much. If you came in contact with them either you are working for their parents or you are working in the fields together or something like that. You didn't come together on a social level so there was not too much conflict except on occasion whites would mock black kids or poke fun at them or pick at them as we called it back there but seldom ever would the blacks retaliate because they knew the consequences. It is not like it is today, you know, a white doesn't dare provoke a black today because he knows he will set him afire but, back during those days blacks would walk off or run off before they would fight with a white because they knew the consequences were likely to be very, very traumatic.

**RLK:** What about going to the movies?

**OR:** The movies they had upstairs. They had a bathroom we could go in downstairs. At one time there was one theater that blacks could go to was Lynn Theater. There was a Pines Theater that the lady used as a church now. It was a long time blacks could not go to the Pines Theater. They could go to the Lynn Theater and at first they were letting blacks go downstairs and whites upstairs but whites began throwing debris and bottles and things down on the blacks so they reversed it and blacks would go upstairs and white would go downstairs. They knew blacks were not going to throw stuff down on the whites. So that was my experience with going to movie theaters here in Lufkin.

**RLK:** Do you know the old locations of all the movies downtown?

**OR:** Both of them were downtown. Lynn's Theater was on Frank Street and of course the Pines is where it is located now.

**RLK:** No other ones?

**OR:** There was one other one but I can't recall exactly where it was located. It seems it was also located on Frank Street.

**RLK:** Was it on Kelty's? I had been told

**OR:** Now later on a fellow by the name of Joe, I think he was Hispanic, he built a theater first over in the area where the Inez Tim's Apartments are, right in there kind of on that branch. He built a theater over in that area. Primarily opened it on weekends because kids not having means of transportation to get there during the week plus having to go to school it wouldn't hardly be financially feasible to have shows during the week, but on weekends he would. He would always have a midnight show that began at twelve o'clock midnight. And of course you had to be pretty good age and size before your parents would let you step out at midnight going to a movie.

**RLK:** You know, you said that and I guess I had forgotten because in my growing up there was a midnight movie on certain times, maybe Saturday night there was a midnight movie and you would see older adults going to the midnight and it was a big thing for entertainment. I think that I always wished that I could go.

**OR:** That you could go.

**RLK:** I don't know why I thought it was probably different than when I went on Saturday mornings to Saturday seminar classes.

**OR:** Yes.

**RLK:** What other entertainments in particular Fourth of July and Nineteenth of June what kind of things?

**OR:** Fourth of July, now this same Joe he moved, not moved but built the Lincoln Theater on Kelty's Street where the Congo Club is now located so, that used to be a movie house.

**RLK:** Okay.

**OR:** It was pretty popular for awhile but then with integration of course frankly everybody started going to the movie downtown. Now the movie cinema is proliferated all over town so those things no longer exist. You asked me about what other?

**RLK:** Fourth of July, Nineteenth of June.

**OR:** Don't recall the Fourth of July being big event for blacks back during my childhood. Nineteenth of June was a blowout!

**RLK:** Tell me about it.

**OR:** The Nineteenth of June used to be the day because this was the day that all blacks could relate to and you didn't have to have a lot of money but you could be assured that on the Nineteenth of June you were going to have a lot of strawberry soda pop, a lot of watermelon and of course the element they would have a lot of home brew and barbecue. And back during that time they would often barbecue by digging a hole in the ground and



getting some mesh. Often it would be hog wire laying it over the top and building a fire down in the ground and then putting the meat on top. They also did this during what we called big meeting day. We now refer to them as church revivals. At that time we pretty much called them big meetings. "I'm going to the big meeting at the grave land." At those big meetings they would have these big barbecue pits dug into the ground and they would often put half of a hog or half of a yearling on there and cook it all night. The interesting thing about the big meeting back in those days there would be those old brothers that would put on a batch of homebrew well in advance to have it come off right at the time for the big meeting of the church revival. (laughter) Because that was going to be his big selling day because he is going to sell a lot of homebrew during the church revival. (laughter)

They would also have a trail back into the woods where they would gamble. All day long they would drink homebrew and gamble on church day. And some of them when they got about half drunk they would come over and have the program that evening. They would always have a singing of the service and they would come up half drunk and get up in the pulpit and sing the church happy. Folks shouting and they up there singing drunk. I had an uncle good at that. I won't call his name; he has gone on bless him. He was a terrific singer and they loved to hear him sing but he would get almost sloppy drunk and get up there in the pulpit and sing the house happy. They would sometime have to hold him up to keep him from falling he would be so drunk. It wasn't uncommon at all, that is where you would have your biggest fist fights during the revival, people getting half drunk and getting in arguments and actually just fighting right there on the church ground. It was not uncommon at all. There were a lot of things that were rather ironic but it just seems to be a natural thing back in those days. This was the big social event because there was hardly anything else that went on out there in the country.

**RLK:** Let's see that is entertainment, what kind of work did blacks...I mean was it at the foundry or was the foundry around?

**OR:** The Foundry was in existence at that time I believe.

**RLK:** What time frame you speaking of?

**OR:** I'm thinking back now in the forties when I first came to Lufkin. The Foundry, the Papermill and those were the two primary ones. I don't recall whether both foundries were in existence at that time during the early or mid forties or whether just the one I believe. This was during the time also that timber I guess was a big boom so you found a lot of men working in the logging business and working at the mills. Of course, the mills back during those days at first were very small. As a matter fact some of them you might say were portable mills because they would actually go build the portable mills in the forest themselves and cut out this timber around this little mill and then they would move to another spot and cut out the timber around there. There were some larger mills that they would cut the timber and of course carry to the mills but in some instances the mill went to the timber and quite a few people began work. In my earlier childhood most of the work was agriculture work. Then they began branching out to the little mills and

eventually to the Foundry and the Papermill and things of that nature. Some would work on the construction job. I recall that during the war years they came up with different agencies or organizations or programs. Some called them the make work programs like the CCC, the Conservation Corps. I forget what those three C's stand for but they would work on roads and I think build buildings.

**END OF INTERVIEW**