

LOTTIE K. MARK

Interview 239a

September 18, 2002, at her home, Nigton, Texas

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ABSTRACT: In this interview with Robert Kuykendall and Rev. Betty Kennedy, Mrs. Lottie Mark reminisces about growing up in Nigton, Trinity County, Texas. She recalls her experiences as an African American girl in the 1920's in this primarily African American community in East Texas. Her life revolved around Ligon Chapel CME Church and school. She grew up in Nigton and later married and continued to live there for her whole life. Mrs. Mark talks about her family's struggles after her father left, going to raising a garden and chickens, going to Apple Springs to the store, and various family relationships.

R. L. Kuykendall (hereafter RLK): I'm in Nigton, Texas this morning along with Mrs. Reverend Betty Kennedy. We will be interviewing Mrs. Lottie Mark. This is one of the series of interviews we are taking from some of the elderly people so that we can learn as much as we can about things that occurred at earlier times. The next voice that you hear will be that of Mrs. Lottie Mark.

Bettie Kennedy (hereafter BK): Just wherever you want to start.

RLK: Just start talking.

Lottie Mark (hereafter LM): Well I can remember going to Sunday school. I was my Auntie Sadie Stewart was my Sunday school teacher and I can remember the first little bible verse I said, "Jesus wept." I can remember that. Coming on up after I got old enough to go to school we had our school here at Nigton.

RLK: What was the name of it?

LM: Pine Island I think was what it was.

RLK: Let me interrupt you at this point. Will you tell the listeners your age?

LM: I'm 91 now but, Saturday the 21st of September I'll be 92.

RLK: Can you tell us something about your mother and father and the members in your family?

LM: Well my mother, she and my father are dead. They had three children. I had two brothers. They were older than I am and I was the baby, two boys and one girl and I had a half sister. My father married before he married my mother and he had one daughter. And, about me going to school we had a big school house and it was upstairs and we had

three teachers and I finished high school. And, I was christened in the CME Methodist church and then after I got of age I, you know, joined the church and I've been a Methodist all of my life. We had a school after some years, well they moved our school to Apple Springs. I would say about ten years ago maybe longer.

RLK: What years are we talking about right now? Do you remember the year?

LM: No, I really don't.

RLK: Okay, all right.

LM: Our church was named Ligon Chapel CME Church and it was our pastor, it was named after him. His last name was Ligon but I can't think of it. I think it was Columbus. I think now, I'm not sure. And after I got of age and I finished school my father left my mother with three children, so my mother had to take care of us and we were farmers. And I finished high school.

RLK: Do you know what year that was?

LM: I sure don't.

RLK: Okay, I'm just seeing if we can get the year we can kind of place things you know. That is okay, go on.

LM: My mother wasn't able to send me to college because we were kind of on the rough side of the mountain, as we called it.

RLK: Let me interrupt you. Can you kind of tell me something about the rough side of the mountain? What kind of things were going on in Nigton at the time?

LM: Well my brother, he had went to school, you know, when I was going to school and he took kind of little odd jobs to make ends meet. He had to help my mother to take care of us. Of course we were able to have our own vegetables and fruit trees and we had hogs and cows and we wouldn't have to buy no kind of meat. We didn't have to buy milk or butter. And we had...we didn't have a deep well we had a well dug and they boxed it in with planks, you know. And about three different families would get water at my mother's house, you know, out of the well and sometimes they would have to wait to bathe to bring more water in so they could get water and they would come up there and wash. And we lived in...it was a large house and we had hallways in it, you know, divided the two rooms. And we had a wood stove and a fire place. I don't know if you know what that is.

RLK: Yes. (laughter)

LM: We didn't have to worry about no wood because we had plenty of wood and pine, you know, and we had places down below our house where we could go fishing. They

called it Sandy Creek and it went from the lake, out from that creek toward the house. That is where my mother and the neighbors, we would go down there and wash our clothes and bring the clothes to the house on a slide or something like that to hang them up so they could dry. We didn't mow no yard. We had to keep the grass cut and my mother always had a beautiful flower yard because she wouldn't let no sprig of grass grow.

RLK: How did you cut the yard?

LM: With a hoe, take a hoe and...

BK: It wouldn't be no grass at all.

RLK: Tell me something about Nigton. What can you tell us about Nigton?

LM: Well Nigton we was all loving people and we would help one another. If somebody gets without something they come to my mother or my mother would go to them and borrow like maybe need some baking powder or soda or stuff like that. Our meal, we wouldn't have to buy nothing but flour and sugar 'cause we always, well baking powder and stuff like that. We would already have our corn. They called it a grist mill and we would have to shell the corn and carry it to a mill and they would make it, you know, grind the corn up and make mill out of it. We called it the grist mill. We raised sugar cane and we got our syrup and they had a sugar mill and it was built up on our field and it would go around but it was pulled by mules, two mules. And after they would get that juice well they had a furnace where they put it in and make syrup. They would put it in there and different ones take it when it went to boiling it would make a foam and they had something they would skim it and had something they throw it in. And, some of them old fellows would take that and call it the skimming and they made something they called white lighting. (laughter)

BK: Oh yes!

LM: A drink; but they didn't know nothing about this dope, you know, they always made these little drinks.

RLK: What was it...I know you are telling me these kinds of things but, what was it like growing up when you were a child in Nigton? I mean what kind of things were you able to do as a child? Let me ask you this too, what did you do on the nineteenth of June?

LM: Oh we would have a big gathering, a barbecue and the community would donate so much to different things, and they would barbecue. We would have some old settlers they would barbecue all night and we would have a big community dinner on the nineteenth of June.

RLK: Let me ask you this, we are going to some of the I guess tough times and when I speak of tough times I'm speaking of World War I. Can you tell me something that happened at that time in Nigton during World War I?

LM: Well, really I can't remember too much about the war.

RLK: Okay.

LM: But, I think we had some people from Nigton that went to the war. Now I don't know which ones.

RLK: Okay. Can you think of something, you mentioned the nineteenth of June, can you think of something that was exciting about growing up in Nigton?

LM: Oh yes, we would have in our school we would have basketball and baseball and each year they would call it the tournament. Like, we would have a date and our school would go to another school and we would have, you know, a big school tournament like, they play ball now we play against another team.

RLK: Well, I'm trying to be kind of delicate I guess, what was the racial of black and white in Nigton at the time you were growing up?

LM: Well...

RLK: How did you get along with each other?

LM: We get along good because, now when I was telling you about my mother and where we lived well, it was a white family lived up above us. It was just in the woods, you know, but it was near the farm and the place was cleared and they would get water at my mother's well. They were the Roach's. The nineteenth of June some white people would come and cooperate in the June activities.

RLK: Okay, I was told that Nigton exist as a result of ex-slaves who migrated or came here and grew up as they were released. Are you aware of anybody ever saying anything to you about that?

LM: No, if they did, I don't remember.

RLK: Okay.

BK: Was the old school down right here?

LM: You know where Edna Fairbanks' house is?

BK: Yes.

LM: That is the spot.

BK: I remember that. I remember the school because Daddy built some houses out here, Will Ingram.

LM: Ingram, yes.

BK: He built some houses beyond the church. I remember coming out here with him. I don't know whose houses they were. That is a long time, in the thirties.

RLK: Did she know him?

BK: Do you remember Will Ingram? He was a carpenter.

LM: I might have, but you know right at this particular time I can't remember.

BK: Yes ma'am. How many churches were located, was it just Ligon's Chapel and the Baptist Church?

LM: And the Baptist yes, we just had two churches.

BK: Was that the one just across the creek over here?

LM: Yes.

BK: Yes. I can't remember the name of that church. What is the one across the creek?

LM: Mayo.

BK: Mayo Baptist Church.

LM: Mayo Baptist Church. And we used to walk from our church, you know, and we would go over to their church. These churches cooperated with each other and we would have to walk. No cars, but then we had wagons, but we didn't have no other transportation.

BK: And Nigton has brought forth many outstanding professors, teachers, doctors and lawyers.

LM: Doctors and lawyers, yes.

BK: Dr. Claude Stewart is from this area and the Marks, E. C. Johnson's mother, Mrs. Elsie. Elsie was a Mark and they were all rooted here. Maggie McCoy...

LM: Nancy Lee...

BK: ...Nancy Lee were all outstanding persons from this area.

LM: We used to, Nancy Lee and them's mother used to have the post office and the way we would get our mail...well John Mark he would have to ride his horse from Apple Springs and get the mail and bring it to the post office and we would have to go there to her place to get our mail. And after so long a time, a good many years, well Elsie Johnson started to have a post office. It was right down there. You might know that. Can you remember?

BK: Yes ma'am I remember that, right down there.

LM: Well, then after John Mark stopped getting the mail, well Jeremy Mark, he would ride and go to Apple Springs to get our mail. That is the way we had to get our mail.

BK: Now are we at the Mark Hill where we are now is this the Mark Hill? There is an area here they call the Mark Hill. I think that is where Cleveland Lang's mother lived.

LM: Cleveland Mark?

BK: Yes.

LM: His mother lived up the road a piece.

BK: Oh, okay.

LM: Did you ever know where Daisy lived?

BK: Oh yes, I remember cousin Daisy.

LM: Well, get off this main road and well, Daisy's house there isn't nothing there now but, you turn to your left and go down that lane.

BK: Down that lane yes. Mark's were outstanding leaders in this community, Jim Bob Mark.

LM: Jim, that was my brother-in-law. My husband was named, but they called him Shorty, but his name was Booker T.

BK: Oh okay. So, Jim Bob was your brother-in-law?

LM: Yes, but see the Mark's see, I was a Carr, I married a Mark but it's not the same family of Marks. They are Mark's but they are not related.

BK: Oh okay, okay. Well I know there was an outstanding group of Mark's from this area. And the church afforded a lot of the gatherings, you would go for service then you had homecoming.

LM: Yes, we had our homecoming the second Sunday of this month.

BK: Well I missed it. I should have come on out here.

LM: Yes, we had a good time.

BK: That is what I was told. Reverend Jeffrey preached and that has been going on for a number of years.

LM: Now homecoming was organized in 1940. Laverte Massey, she brought, well my husband was the chairman of the steward board of the church and she wanted a homecoming organized here because in her home town they would have homecoming, so that is when we had church meeting he brought it up and everybody voted yes to have it the second Sunday in September.

BK: And you had people from California, Houston, Dallas and all that would come back to that gathering.

LM: Oh yes.

BK: They would seem like so happy to come home wouldn't they?

LM: Yes, yes, yes. That is what I say, none of my children don't live here. My two daughters, you know, I got three children, two girls and one boy. My two girls live in California and my boy lives in Liberty.

BK: Oh yes, isn't that wonderful.

RLK: Let me ask you, did you do much traveling to Lufkin when you were growing up?

LM: No, no! (laughter)

RLK: No?

LM: We sure didn't.

RLK: Was it because of lack of transportation?

LM: That is right. That is right. See up here in Apple Springs they had plenty of stores up there for us to buy our groceries what we needed and we had dry goods, you know, the clothes, but all that is gone. And see the bank at Apple Springs it used to be a bank there at Apple Springs but they moved it from Apple Springs and moved it to Groveton. That bank at Groveton used to be at Apple Springs.

BK: Can you think of some of your teachers that taught you as a child?

LM: Yes, Mrs. Shoulder's and Mrs. McCoy and Berry, we had a Berry and Nancy Lee.

BK: Oh Nancy! What would your food consist of when your mother would cook breakfast or cook dinner or supper? What did y'all have to eat?

LM: Well in the morning time my mother would make biscuits and she would have biscuits, syrup and bacon or sausage to eat. We would have plenty of bacon and plenty of sausage and we would have butter and we would have rice, you know, not every meal, every morning but, you know.

BK: Right, every morning, yes.

LM: Then for lunch we would have baked sweet potatoes, peas or greens or beans or Irish potatoes like that, but we would always have cornbread.

BK: What about supper?

LM: Well we just had leftovers.

BK: Well that diet is showing up in many families so it's basically the same thing.

LM: Everybody was in good health.

BK: Yes, good health and better than they are now.

LM: Because we had plenty of chickens, we never would have to buy no chicken and never had to buy no eggs.

BK: That is right, that is right.

RLK: Excuse me, what about doctors; when you became ill what did you do?

LM: Oh we had doctors at Apple Springs. I remember the first doctor that delivered my baby.

RLK: Did he deliver the baby in a hospital?

LM: No, right here in Nigton. My husband would have to get on the horse and ride down...yes.

RLK: The lady would be in the wagon I imagine.

LM: Do what?

RLK: The lady having the baby would be in the wagon or what?

LM: No, they wouldn't carry me I would stay at the house.

RLK: Okay, get the doctor and bring the doctor to the home, home visits.

BK: Was that a white doctor?

LM: Yes, my husband would always make an appointment with the doctor, you know. That is what happened and my neighbor living up above us they had a car, a T-model and they would go get the doctor and the doctor even had to ride with the one that went after him because the doctor didn't have no transportation.

BK: My goodness!

RLK: In other words if possibly somebody didn't have a car. Were there many midwives at the time?

LM: Yes, I have had a midwife too. Her name was Morgan Masten.

BK: That is a good area to talk about because we had a lot of midwives in Lufkin that delivered babies. So, midwives are very essential to the community.

LM: Yes, that is right. But, my first one I had a doctor.

BK: You had a doctor.

LM: Yes.

RLK: How about care once the baby was born did you have to see the doctor again or were you able to?

LM: My mother always would take care of them, never would have to see the doctor because they know what to give the baby if they had hives or know what to give the baby if they had colic or, you know, things like that.

RLK: How long did you have to remain in bed following having a child at that time? What is it now the next day they send you home?

LM: Oh no, my mother would keep me in bed about two weeks.

BK: That is right, you couldn't get up.

LM: And a month I couldn't go out on the ground until my baby was a month old.

RLK: Did she say what would possibly happen had you not done it that way, had you gone outside or had you gotten out of the bed?

LM: She never did say.

RLK: Did you feel like you wanted to move about?

LM: Yes and there was certain things...

BK: You couldn't eat.

LM: ...that is right.

BK: I can't remember all the things you couldn't eat.

LM: No fish.

BK: Okay.

LM: I tell you what, my mother, she would give me bacon, but it was crispy and she wouldn't let me have butter. I got some light bread and my mother would always make biscuits and see at that time people nursed their babies. No bottle babies.

BK: That is right so you had to watch what you ate.

LM: Yes, that is right.

BK: You'd give the baby colic.

LM: Yes, give the baby colic that is right.

BK: Isn't that wonderful. Where was the house that you grew up in? What area of Nigton was that house?

LM: Well it was over the road by Hester's; we used to live back over in there.

BK: Back in that way, okay, yes.

LM: It was a big a family, my uncles and it was a white family and some houses where white people lived there. It was just a big community.

BK: And a thriving community.

LM: That is right, that is right.

BK: Because you had the hall, the Masonic Hall, you had the churches and you had the school in this area and I know it was a noted community.

LM: Yes. Can you remember when that...back in there where I was that old cafeteria? Can you remember that old building?

BK: Yes ma'am. I was just telling Mr. Kuykendall this road was not always paved. It was deep sand and you could get bogged down in the sand it was so deep.

LM: That is right and a lot of people lived in a log house because I have lived in a log house.

RLK: Have you ever lived any other place other than Nigton?

LM: No, I haven't?

RLK: Any traveling and then coming back to Nigton to live?

LM: Oh I have visited, you know, but just on a visit. I've been now, my mother and the two boys and my daddy they lived at Fodice [in Houston County]. That is where my daddy's home is Fodice but see I was born in Nigton.

RLK: Was your mother born at Nigton too?

LM: Yes.

BK: Mrs. Lottie, who were you named for?

LM: I was named for my grandmother. My mother's mother was named Lottie and my father's mother was named Katie and my name is Lottie Katie.

BK: Isn't that wonderful. Now are you kin to Dr. Stewart? Were you kin to Nancy?

LM: No I wasn't kin to them. My auntie married Claude Stewart's daddy but she wasn't his mother.

BK: Yes.

LM: Aunt Feet.

BK: Yes, I remember Aunt Feet yes.

LM: Now my husband, that is his people.

BK: Aunt Feet was. Yes, well they were outstanding people in Lufkin.

LM: Yes.

RLK: How many brothers and sisters did you say you had?

LM: Who me?

RLK: Yes.

LM: I have two brothers and I got a half sister but all of them is gone. I don't have a living brother or sister, mother or father and I don't have any aunts and uncles that I know of.

RLK: You are the last?

LM: Yes.

RLK: Did your families remain in Nigton or did your brothers start moving out and going to other places?

LM: Well one of my brothers, after he married, he lived in Lacy and one of my brothers, he married and he lived at a place called old Piney. I don't know if you know about it.

BK: Pineland?

LM: Piney, it goes down...

BK: I know where Lacy is. Lacy is right on the highway. Piney is where?

LM: It is going down...well...

BK: Is it going back toward Pennington?

LM: No, it's going back toward Corrigan down there.

BK: Oh, down that way, okay.

LM: Did you ever know a woman by the name of Fannie Sweats?

BK: Yes ma'am. She was a member of the church where I pastored for so long.

LM: Now, that is where her home was, Fannie Sweat, and they used to have a Methodist church at Piney but after all of them moved out from down there, I learned they had made dwelling houses out of it.

BK: Yes, well Mrs. Fannie Sweat was an outstanding missionary.

LM: Yes she would ride, when the Sunday school convention was going on, she would ride her horse and come up here.

RLK: What kind of businesses did you have here in Nigton? Were there any businesses where people could work or they had to go some other place to get jobs?

LM: We used to have a man run a sawmill here. That is where I was talking about my brother had to stop school to work. He worked there. It was a white man and the man went bankrupt in the end. But the mill was back down this way going past Doll's [Thedious Coleman] place. Did you ever know where Learalee lived?

BK: No ma'am. I know where Doll [Thedious Coleman] lives.

LM: Well anyway the man went out in the woods, it was a white man, and he killed himself. He went bankrupt.

BK: Mrs. Lottie what is your day like? When you get up in the morning here at your house what do you do?

LM: I get up and say my prayer and read my daily paper. I read for prayer for guidance at 8 am and twelve noon prayer for prosperity and at 9 pm at night I pray a prayer for health and healing.

BK: Amen. And then you fix your breakfast.

LM: Oh yes.

BK: What do you usually fix?

LM: Oh I have toast and coffee. I got to have that coffee. (laughter) Sometimes I scramble an egg and sometimes I boil it or see I'm a diabetic.

BK: Oh yes.

RLK: Do you watch television?

LM: Oh yes, sometimes I get tired of watching it and I sit out on the back porch and look at the birds and the bees and the cows.

RLK: Do you have very many visitors during the day?

LM: Well not too many because the children are going to school and them that is not able to work like Doll [Thedious Coleman] and myself. Well, we too old to get on the roads and visit, but the way I visit is with the telephone.

BK: Yes ma'am that is a good thing.

LM: When I go out on the back porch I carry it with me.

RLK: Now I understand you are still driving?

LM: Oh yes, yes. I don't drive on...I don't know.

RLK: Only if you have to pretty much, to church or something?

LM: No, my daughter comes up here and I drive down to, I don't know whether you know Margie Lee Byrd, Willie Massey's niece Margie, well she usually drives me to town.

BK: To get your things you need.

LM: Yes and to the doctor. No, I wouldn't get on that highway to drive for love nor money.

BK: Well we almost can say that.

RLK: It's just as scary.

BK: I'm telling you it's getting worse.

LM: I've just been wondering how long will they let me get my driver's license.

RLK: Probably as long as nothing horrible happens, maybe or else until your children or a relative may decide that you need to stop driving.

BK: You don't have a bad record, no car wrecks or anything like that.

LM: No, I never have had, never had. I got my car insurance.

BK: Well all of those are good signs. We don't want to keep you too long. We are going to come back. We don't want to make you tired.

LM: Well I'm enjoying it!

RLK: You are?

LM: Yes.

LM: Back to our church we used to have a building close to the church for the pastor and his family to live in. So, we had to have us a place where we could have homecoming. That is the reason we got that cafeteria.

BK: Yes, okay.

LM: Oh, there is so much went on.

BK: Y'all are getting ready to build a new fellowship hall aren't you?

LM: Yes.

BK: That is what I was told.

LM: Yes, because...and I am the secretary for Sunday school.

BK: And have been for a long time.

LM: Ever since my children were born.

RLK: That is a long time.

BK: It is and Doll [Thedious Coleman] has been a stewardess and administer communion for a long time too.

LM: Yes, she has been, you know, there a good while.

BK: Yes ma'am.

LM: I'm a stewardess and I'm on the ministerial.

BK: That is wonderful, that is wonderful.

LM: I check out all the literature and our elders are (unintelligible).

BK: That is what I was told.

LM: (unintelligible) and Reverend Charles Johnson and I got a cousin named Charles Johnson.

BK: He is going to be in Lufkin on Sunday is what I was told.

LM: Is that right?

BK: Yes ma'am.

LM: But you know I don't understand, we used to when they have the quarterly conference, like at your church, our church would come and hold quarterly conference together, but it's different.

BK: That is right and that was good fellowship.

LM: It sure was.

BK: Then we heard what ya'll are doing and it would make us want to do more and then we heard other churches reports.

LM: But I enjoyed it and our elders are down there.

BK: Reverend Sneed is a nice young preacher too.

LM: Yes and everybody from out here at Nigton call me Momma K., even Reverend Sneed calls me Momma K.

RLK: How did you pick that name up?

LM: I'm the oldest one in the church.

BK: That is right!

RLK: Oh okay.

LM: And, my children and my grandchildren all call me Momma K and the other people went to calling me Momma K.

RLK: How many preachers have you seen through your church?

LM: Oh Lord let me see. It would take me...yes, I know the Reverend Smith, and Barry, Peter Barry. I don't know if you know him or not, and Reverend Gardner, and Reverend Bradford and Brother Barron and Wiley. Wiley, that is my cousin.

BK: Oh really?

LM: Yes, I could have just killed him.

BK: There is some Wiley's over here at Pennington. There all kin to Oscar Willey.

LM: Oscar Wiley, that is Oscar Wiley Jr.s' daddy.

BK: That is right, that is right. It sure is. When you want to come back?

RLK: (unintelligible)

BK: Okay.

RLK: What we are doing now is seeing when we can come back.

LM: Television is rough on children. They don't have any business looking at the TV.

RLK: Tell us why you think this way.

LM: They see all this killing and this drug business and that makes the children want to do that too.

RLK: Okay, can you tell us what it may have been like when you were growing up? What kind of things were going on.

LM: Well I'm going to tell you when I was growing up the parents were particular about what the children would hear them talk about. Now, when my mother would have visitors and we would be in the house when the visitors come we would get out, she would send us out under a shade tree 'cause if there was some business or something another they had to tend to they didn't want us to...they wasn't talking to us.

RLK: What do you think about that? Compare that to today. It seems that youngsters or kids are around adults quite frequently and whatever happens happens. Do you think it was better when you couldn't be in the room where adults were?

LM: I think it was better. The children didn't know what was going on.

RLK: So there was possibly more respect at that time?

LM: That is right and whatever the mother see fit for the child and kids then she could discuss it with them but not when the company was there. Now, that is the way I see it. I may be wrong.

RLK: Well no, because what you are saying, now I had to leave out of the room too. There was a place for children.

BK: I did too!

LM: We would have play houses out under the shade tree and that is where we would have to go. We didn't have no air condition and no fans and all of that.

BK: Mrs. Lottie, children don't know how to play playhouse.

LM: They don't, that is right.

BK: They don't know anything about that.

LM: Now I got a granddaughter, a great-granddaughter, when she would be talking, you know when they come to California and when you talk, she be looking right at you. When you talk she be looking right at you, when you talk...you know, she is getting it all down and people have to be particular about what they say around a child.

BK: That is right. That is a good point there.

RLK: Okay then, we are going to shut it down at this point and we will arrange for another time. She said she is enjoying it but we don't want to tire you out anyway.

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END OF INTERVIEW**