

**JOE DEASON**

**Interview 254a**

**October 26, 2012, at The History Center, Diboll, Texas**

**Jonathan Gerland, Interviewer**

**Patsy Colbert, Transcribers**

**ABSTRACT:** In this interview with Jonathan Gerland, Joe Deason reminisces about growing up in the Trinity County African American community of Nigton. He talks about his grandfather, his parents, going to the segregated school, attending Diboll's segregated H.G. Temple School for high school and race relations. He mentions his brief visits to and experience with segregation in Lufkin, attending Prairie View A&M for college, and time in the military in Vietnam.

**Jonathan Gerland (hereafter JG):** Today's date is Friday October 26, 2012. My name is Jonathan Gerland and I'm with Mr. Joe Deason and we are at The History Center today and we are going to do an oral history interview. Mr. Deason if you could, let's just begin by stating when and where you were born.

**Joe Deason (hereafter JD):** I was born in Nigton, Texas 1947, February 25<sup>th</sup>

**JG:** February 25<sup>th</sup>.

**JD:** Yes, to Batie and Equila Deason.

**JG:** How do you spell that first name?

**JD:** Batie, B-a-t-i-e and Equila, E-q-u-i-l-a.

**JG:** Okay, what was your mother's maiden name?

**JD:** Spencer, Equila Spencer.

**JG:** Were they from the Nigton community all their lives?

**JD:** My dad was.

**JG:** Your dad was.

**JD:** Yes, he was born and raised in the Nigton Community but, my mom was from the Pollok, Huntington area. They were kind of migrant farmers and they migrated from Huntington over to Pollok and then somewhere in that mix my dad and her met and married and had ten children. I had nine siblings.

**JG:** Where were you in that?

**JD:** Number seven.

**JG:** Number seven.

**JG:** Yes, five boys and five girls and I was the fifth boy.

**JG:** Wow, how about that.

**JD:** There was three girls younger than I.

**JG:** So, talk a little bit about your home life and growing up, you know, I guess you and your brothers worked.

**JD:** We grew up as sharecroppers on my grandmother's farm. My grandmother was Mary Deason and she was I believe sixteen when the slaves were freed and she was...as best I know there were two of them, she and her brother. And they were from the Georgia area. After a period of time, she told me that once they were told they could leave they were given the opportunity to stay and earn some money. They stayed about three years.

**JG:** In Georgia?

**JD:** In Georgia. And, the next thing she remembered she was in Nacogdoches, Texas, and then she came in contact with the family who three generations, one of whom was my godfather. That was J. C. Womack, who passed away about a month ago. He was 95. She came in contact with them and she moved to Nigton and spent some time, she and her brother.

**JG:** With Mr. Womack?

**JD:** With his uncle, and she was able to purchase 75 acres of land from him and her brother purchased 75 acres.

**JG:** Then she married a Deason, right?

**JD:** She married a Dixon in actual.

**JG:** A Dixon.

**JD:** In actuality but, we maintained her name all through seven generations because they didn't stay together very long. They separated.

**JG:** Maybe I misunderstood, are you saying Dixon?

**JD:** Yes, D-i-x-o-n.

**JG:** Okay, so she had 75 acres.

**JD:** At some point let's edit that out.

**JG:** Okay.

**JD:** We are going to stay with Deason.

**JG:** Okay, so you just changed the name then?

**JD:** No, we've just always remained Deason's.

**JG:** Oh okay.

**JD:** She and Dixon had no family but, she never...they divorced. They divorced and she stayed and raised her children. She had five and so we remained Deason's, the seven generations were Deason's.

**JG:** Okay, okay. So, talk a little bit about just living in Nigton.

**JD:** We lived on her farm and we sharecropped. We were just like everybody else we paid our part. When we raised crops of corn or cotton the first of everything went to her. The first load of corn went to Maw, we called her. The first bale of cotton went to her and then after that whatever we made was ours.

**JG:** Were there other families doing the same thing on the same land?

**JD:** Yes, yes, she had a couple of other kids who were sharecropping on her land also. But, we were...my grandfather Wilson Deason was the operator and the manager of the whole operation so, we were fortunate enough we got the biggest share.

**JG:** Now was that the grandfather you were telling me about earlier who was sort of a cowboy and ran barbeque.

**JD:** He was a cowboy and he ran a barbecue pit on what we called the corner. And, all during the week he would buy different types of meat from people and he and I would, you know, slaughter that meat and then my job was, he would have orders from people. If this person wanted a piece of this one, this person wanted a piece of that and he would wrap it in small packages and write their name on it with the amount and then I would get on horseback and deliver it.

**JG:** So, did y'all do the slaughtering too?

**JD:** We did the slaughtering, we did everything.

**JG:** You did everything, slaughter and then preparing it.

**JD:** Yes.

**JG:** So, you would barbecue it and deliver it?

**JD:** No, no, we delivered what we called raw meat that is uncooked. Then what was left on Sunday mornings he and I would get up about four thirty, put it on a slide, a little slide, a little make shift wagon and we would put the meat and wood and everything on there, take it up to the pit and put it in a big pot, drop it in there and boil it with all type of seasonings. Then once it got tender we would take it into the shed, we had a shed there and it was a barbecue pit made out of big pieces of wire with cement around it and we would put it on that pit and smoke it. Then about ten o'clock he would lock the door and he would go home to change clothes and I would go to Sunday school. He would give me a nickel and a penny and the penny was to put in Sunday School and the nickel was to spend.

**JG:** What kind of wood did y'all use for smoking?

**JD:** He was totally hickory.

**JG:** Hickory, and did you go out and chop the hickory too?

**JD:** We cut the hickory with a cross saw, split it if it was big so, we did it all.

**JG:** Did you have brothers helping you too?

**JD:** My brothers did a little of that, but they mainly did the farming. I was more of his assistant.

**JG:** You were the barbecue guy and they were farmers.

**JD:** Yes, at a very early age somehow or other I probably spent ninety percent of my time at his house, from the time I was three or four years old, so he taught me the ranching and taught me horseback riding, taught me to cut calves, castrate calves, doctor cows, which I do all of that now.

**JG:** Talk a little bit more about him if you don't mind.

**JD:** He was a very self made, very focused, knew what he was going to do daily. When he and I laid down at night most of the time I slept with him and he called me Joe Mack. He would say "Joe Mack in the morning we got to get up and you got to make sure the first thing you do is feed the dogs and we got to go down and feed those horses. Then I want you to go down there and make sure those gates are open." He would lay that out before we went to bed. And, we would lay there and then every night he would take his pipe out and light his pipe, smoke about three times from his pipes and put it out. He and I was normally in the bed asleep by eight, or seven-thirty 'cause he was very conservative. He didn't believe in burning his lights so he would only turn the lights on to get in the bed and then he would turn the lights off.

**JG:** With electricity?

**JD:** That is when we finally got electricity. Then the next morning around 4:30 or five he would wake up and he would be laying there and I'd say, "What you doing, grandpa?" He would say, "I'm mapping my day out." He was saying "I'm mapping my day out." Because, quite often his day consisted of going to meet somebody to pen cattle or cut hogs or to castrate cows, so he would do that in the mornings quite often. When he was doing that then he would have these other things for me to do if I wasn't in school. Now, he was a very, very, big advocate of education. He didn't let you...nothing came before you getting your lesson. He was going to make sure that I did that. If he had any doubts I hadn't done it or if he thought it was something I didn't understand he would put me on his horse and he would carry me to the teacher's house and drop me off and then he would say "now you go in there and you get her to help you with that and I'll come back and get you." So, he was a big advocate of that. But, anyway he would go and work a half a day sometime and then he had a small portion of the land that he farmed that was his. He did this, maybe two acres of cotton and he planted lots of peas because that was his money crop. He sold peas to make cash money and then also he would plant peanuts and his wife would pick the peanuts off and parch them, put them in small bags and on Sunday's she would go up to the barbecue pit and she would sell them for ten cents a bag. That was a lot of money. And so, that was kind of our typical operation getting the barbecue pit ready. Then back to me going to Sunday School, once Sunday School and church was over I had to come back because I had to be there to run errands and do things. Normally in two hours all the meat was gone because the people from Lufkin, Diboll, Corrigan, Groveton, they knew he was going to have it.

**JG:** Now would these be whites as well as blacks?

**JD:** Probably more whites.

**JG:** More whites okay.

**JD:** Because they would come buy like orders of meat. Most blacks bought sandwiches.

**JG:** Sandwiches.

**JD:** Yes, but the whites would come and buy orders.

**JG:** Now this is the cooked meat, the barbecued meat.

**JD:** The barbecued meat, yes. They would buy two pounds of pork and two pounds of goat and then they would want a whole chicken and stuff like that.

**JG:** So, y'all had pork and beef.

**JD:** Pork, chicken, and small amounts of beef, goat was one of our major meats which I still eat plenty of now.

**JG:** Now did y'all raise the goats as well?

**JD:** We raised them but quite often he and I would take the horses during the week and we would go up to places like Nogalus Prairie and Apple Springs. We would ride down to Helmic, Trevat, we would ride all those areas and a lot of older people would have goats and sometimes they would be old wore out goats or there would be a goat that a dog had gotten on him and bit it's ear off and my grandpa would buy that goat for a dollar and then we would tell them we would be back on Friday or Thursday with the wagon. We would buy all week, or he would go by himself and buy if I was in school and then say on a Friday evening or Saturday morning we would take the wagon and make our rounds and pick up goats, pick up hogs, pick up chickens. I often laugh about it. A lot of times he would be coming home and it would be late in the evenings and everybody knew it was us because you would hear pigs squealing, chickens squealing, goats baying but we would bring them home. Then all day Saturday we would kill.

**JG:** So, was this an automobile?

**JD:** A wagon.

**JG:** Pulled by?

**JD:** By mules.

**JG:** By mules, okay.

**JD:** No, he had one car that I remember. Sometime in his older days after I was maybe in high school then, he traded somebody a yearling for an old Pontiac car.

**JG:** A Pontiac, yes.

**JD:** And it was worn out but he just wanted a car and so they drove it enough to get it to our house and I was sitting there on the porch the other day laughing about it. He and I spent about a week building a little shed for his car. We got the car under his shed and to get it started he would get on his horse and pull it and let me crank it and (laughter) low and behold one day we got it cranked and he decided he wanted to go, he would take a little nip, you know, he was noted for that.

**JG:** Drink whiskey?

**JD:** Get him a good drink of whiskey and get energized and he got him a little drink and he said "boy I tell you what I want you to do I want you to drive me to Apple Springs." And, he was a notary public also, so he was kind of a guy ahead of his time and we were going to Apple Springs and I'm just big enough to see over the dashboard, but I'm driving, you know, and a highway patrolman passed us. The highway patrolman came and turned around and stopped me and he said "what you doing?" He said "I got this boy to carry me to Apple Springs. I need to get something." And, they gave us a little old

warning ticket but we had to go see the Justice of the Peace who was Mr. Arnold Tullos. Well, two or three days later we went up there and of course my grandpa knew him well.

**JG:** In Groveton?

**JD:** In Apple Springs.

**JG:** In Apple Springs, okay.

**JD:** It was Arnold Tullos, he was the Justice of the Peace for years, and he told my grandpa said “keep that boy out from under that steering wheel” so we got out of that. But, anyway he was a...and also he raised watermelons and peanuts and stuff, so he was a...

**JG:** Jack of all trades.

**JD:** Jack of all trades and he stayed pretty well scheduled. He didn't believe in a lot of down time. And, almost every day he would go home at one and take about a forty five minute nap.

**JG:** So, how old, probably most of your memories would be in the fifties of what we are talking about so far in the fifties if you were born in '47?

**JD:** In the fifties.

**JG:** So how old would he have been? Or when was he born do you know?

**JD:** I do know. I looked on his tombstone. He died in 1975 and he was 90.

**JG:** Okay, okay. Maybe we can come back to him some more, sounds like he was a pretty big part of your formative years but, I want to talk a little bit more about Nigton the community and ultimately I want to get to the schools. I know the schools are a big part of that community but just describe the community of Nigton growing up in the 1950's. How many people were there? How big a geographic area was it? Did everybody pretty much do what y'all were doing or?

**JD:** Yes, I have a book I wished I had brought with me that he also...

**JG:** Talking about your grandfather?

**JD:** My grandfather. He cooked for the schools and fed the kids and he fed them for 25 cents a day according to his records and some days he was feeding like a hundred kids, so the school got up to a real good size.

**JG:** Now what school would that be?

**JD:** That was Nigton Elementary and High School.

**JG:** In Trinity County.

**JD:** Right there on the corner of Nigton. Have you ever been in Nigton?

**JG:** I've been by it, I haven't been through it.

**JD:** You need to come by and let me give you a tour. When you come to the four way stop sign in Nigton, if you leave Diboll go down here and go through Goathill, when you come to that four way stop on that corner there is where the school was. On this corner was where the store and the barbecue pit was. If you look down here to the right at that time and still is the Methodist Church and my grandmother gave the land for that Methodist Church and the graveyard. So, Nigton at that time it was a real thriving community. I imagine there were 25 or 30 families or more I know and because it was a farming community a good many of the families had large numbers.

**JG:** Were these all black families?

**JD:** These were all blacks. The best I can remember except my godfather, J. C. Womack, he was always there and then there was another family the Roach's that were there but 98...

**JG:** They were white?

**JD:** They were white.

**JG:** Okay, the Womack and the Roaches.

**JD:** ...and the Roach's that I remember real well. Now in my teenage years there were two or three other families that moved in but when I was growing up it was predominately black.

**JG:** I think Elaine Lockhart...

**JD:** Elaine Lockhart, the Roach's were her brothers.

**JG:** Okay.

**JD:** Glen and Tommy, in fact my grandfather used to go over there and buy goats and stuff you know.

**JG:** From the Roaches?

**JD:** Yes, Glen was the business man, Tom was in the background and Tom played a guitar and every time I would go over there and Grandpa and Glen would be talking he



would want me to come in and listen to him playing. They were super guys and this was Mrs. Elaine's brothers.

**JG:** Yes, her brothers, right. She was county clerk there for a long time.

**JD:** For years, super lady.

**JG:** So, talk about the schools.

**JD:** The schools were...people were very serious about education, ninety percent of them were. We worked, but my dad never let us sacrifice the educational part. He worked at Texas Foundries.

**JG:** Talking about your father?

**JD:** My father, Beaty, and he made sure we were in school. You had some families that did keep the kids out to work quite a bit but what he did with us if we had to be out he would make sure that nobody missed school two or three days in a row. If you had to...just like this type of weather now, if you had crops in the field you almost had to get them out because if this weather sets in if you don't get it now you not going to get it. But, what he would do is he would let one go to school today and then another one go to school tomorrow and rotate them. And, so that way you didn't miss very much school.

**JG:** And again he had five boys.

**JD:** Five boys.

**JG:** And you were the youngest.

**JD:** I was the youngest and I was fortunate that I did like school a lot and my older brothers normally wouldn't say a word they just they would do the work and let me go to school.

**JG:** They rather you be the one to go to school.

**JD:** Yes, if they had to they were always that way for some reason. I think that probably had a lot to do with my grandpa because he was a big pusher and I think he probably made me do more book work than the other ones.

**JG:** Talk about the school day, teachers.

**JD:** School day, normally you had to do things before you went to school. You were up early and more than likely you had to milk a cow and you had to feed the hogs or you had to get wood if your mom was at home so she would have wood to be warm during the day and to cook because we used a wooden stove. In most cases somebody had to make sure that my grandmother had wood at her house because she was still living, so you had

to get up in the morning and do all those things before school started. We were fortunate that the school was almost, the school land joined our land. So, I could leave the house and walk to the lane and I'm at school. Now a lot of kids caught the bus or they walked to school. When I began I believe in elementary there were two teachers taught everything. When I was...I started to school a little bit early and the reason being that my brothers and sisters were in school and I was young and on the days that my mom had something to do I would go to school with my brothers and sisters. The teachers would give me something to do. Well, I could do it fairly well so they just started me to school. As a result I think I finished school when I was about 16 or 17 because they just put me, I did the work and they just let me go and as I say we had two teachers and maybe a principal but the principal taught classes. He was in charge of the paddling.

**JG:** Who was the principal?

**JD:** I had two or three principals, Willie Massey was one of my principals. His brother John Ed Massey was one of my principals and then a guy by the name of, I want to think it was Wayne Wright [or Wainwright] but I know his last name was Johnson.

**JG:** Now would that be before or after Mr. Massey?

**JD:** Before.

**JG:** Before Mr. Massey.

**JD:** Yes, before because I remember he gave me a good whipping one time and I ran home and told my mom and then I had to go back.

**JG:** That was Mr. Wayne Wright [or Wainwright]?

**JD:** That was Johnson, yes. He whopped the devil out of me.

**JG:** Now do you remember why?

**JD:** I think I got smart with him, you know, I had that habit a little bit and I did and he let me know you don't get smart with me. I made a bee line home to tell my mom about it and she sent me right back.

**JG:** Sent you right back.

**JD:** And, I took with that you know, you had math, science, English, history, unfortunately you know at that time a lot of the teachers were not as nearly prepared as they are now. I discovered after and I guess it was in my early elementary years that my grandfather and Mr. Massey and some others, I assumed this, determined that we were not being challenged enough at Nigton and that is when the agreement that we would come to Diboll was worked out. And, I was probably still in the fourth or fifth grade then. And, our school had gotten in those years pretty lacked, we just weren't being

challenged. They brought in a guy from Mt. Enterprise, I just thought about him. I was through Mt. Enterprise yesterday. His name was Cleophus Hall.

**JG:** Cleophus?

**JD:** Hall, and when he got there as usual the kids were used to doing nothing. You know, play a little ball, go in, piddle around and they brought him because he had a reputation of having school. I know that to be a fact, now that I'm older. And, so they decided, they rang the bell by hand, time to go to class and a few of the leaders in the school decided they still wanted, I think some of them was having church at school or something, they was really into something and they didn't pay the bell any attention and I never will forget, he had on a nice suit that day and he left, he lived on the campus in a little house and he left and went home and got out of his suit and put on a short sleeve shirt and he was a part time barber. He cut hair on the weekend.

**JG:** A barber.

**JD:** Yes, on the weekend he cut hair. And, you know these straps they use to sharpen a razor?

**JG:** They sharpen the razor, yes.

**JD:** He came back with two of those and by the end of the day everybody was in class. Some was bruised, some wasn't feeling good.

**JG:** Razor straps huh, wow!

**JD:** Yes, but we were all sitting in class because it was unpleasant to be outside the classroom environment with him roaming. You know what I'm talking about? And, from then on everybody decided it was easier to go to class when the bell rang.

**JG:** And that would have been when you were about?

**JD:** I was probably in the fourth or fifth grade, but I had older sisters that were a little resistant. I never will forget that evening in the community everybody was saying, man I tell you what you wait till Uncle so and so get home and hear that he whooped so and so...you know how it gets, but he was a pretty good sized guy and he was able to, you know. Two or three of them came up to talk to him, they hadn't never met him but they went on back and decided it wasn't worth it. (laughter)

**JG:** That was Mr. Hall?

**JD:** That was Cleophus Hall, but he brought us back into having school.

**JG:** Having school.

**JD:** And it saved some people, sure did because when we came to Diboll I was able to compete with the kids in Diboll.

**JG:** I don't want to leave Nigton just yet but to help my understanding when did you come to Diboll? Do you remember what year?

**JD:** I came to Diboll in '59.

**JG:** So, this would have been probably about '57 then with Mr. Hall.

**JD:** I was about 10 because I came to Diboll when I was 13.

**JG:** Okay, so I guess Mr. Massey was already here then.

**JD:** Mr. Massey was already here.

**JG:** He had left.

**JD:** He was running the bus. He was the one who brought the bus from Nigton to pick the kids up.

**JG:** Yes, I remember Mrs. Toran telling about that.

**JD:** Gloria, yes that is her dad.

**JG:** Yes, I remember her talking about that. I know there is more I want to know about the Nigton schools any particular teachers that you remember at Nigton?

**JD:** Yes.

**JG:** Any you care to talk about or mention?

**JD:** I think the lady who taught me in my formative years and made a profound impact was Mr. Massey's wife, Louise. And, then there was another teacher and both of these ended up coming to Diboll to teach was Odessa Wallace.

**JG:** Mrs. Wallace.

**JD:** We had some loving teachers in the early years that love you to death but they just weren't as structured academically and they were from the community, so they kind of had their own reputation. Good people, one of the most caring teachers I ever had was Mrs. Daisy Scott. She was out of one of the prominent families there and was a wonderful human being and taught me some things.

**JG:** Wasn't the Scott family one of the early families?

**JD:** Her family was, her daddy was John Mark, that was her daddy and he was one of the originals.

**JG:** Originals, one of the freed slaves that started the community of Nigton.

**JD:** Yes.

**JG:** Did you, did the Nigton schools, I know you were probably too young to participate yourself but what about organized sports, was there a basketball team?

**JD:** Yes, we had a basketball team in junior high and a very good team. Then in the early years of course they had basketball teams from what I understand were awesome, but we had organized basketball, didn't have track or nothing.

**JG:** Did you have a girl's team too?

**JD:** Had girls team.

**JG:** Boys and girls.

**JD:** Boys and girls because the girls played three on one end three on the other, couldn't cross the line.

**JG:** So you had dedicated offense and defense?

**JD:** Yes, on this end you had three defensive players and on that end you had three.

**JG:** Oh really! You didn't run the court?

**JD:** No, no.

**JG:** Did they ever trade out or if you were once defense always defense or?

**JD:** No, they switched you some. Your good shooters were offense and then you had those good guarders.

**JG:** I didn't realize that. What were some of the schools you played against?

**JD:** Okay, we played Corrigan, Mt. Enterprise because our principal was from there. They played normally friends, you know, Corrigan, Mt. Enterprise, every now and then we would play Groveton. Let's see another school we played was Concord.

**JG:** Is that down here Angelina County, Concord?

**JD:** No, Concord is up near Mt. Enterprise.

**JG:** Okay.

**JD:** We played Concord, Huntington.

**JG:** Again this is before integration.

**JD:** Before integration and at that time tournaments were very, very, very popular, you know.

**JG:** So everybody just go all the different schools and play a tournament.

**JD:** Go on a Saturday and play all day, a tournament. Chester used to have huge tournaments.

**JG:** Did anybody have a gymnasium?

**JD:** Yes, Corrigan had a gymnasium because I remember if you ran too fast to shoot you were going to bam the wall and Groveton had a gym and I remember it was freezing when it was cold.

**JG:** So, wood floors?

**JD:** Oh yes, and now we had tournaments but we played outside. We had a pretty decent field. It was amazing after you played on those grounds so long it got to be pretty decent, you know.

**JG:** It got leveled off.

**JD:** It got leveled off. You know when you got in the gym you thought you had died and gone to heaven.

**JG:** I bet so!

**JD:** I remember when Diboll built this gym, man I thought I was in heaven playing in that gym.

**JG:** Yes, I bet that was quite a change.

**JD:** Yes, it was quite a change. The same way with baseball, you know, you play baseball on those old cow fields so long if you went to a field where they kind of graded it and stuff you thought you was in the Astrodome.

**JG:** I talked to a man here the other day that in the fifties I guess played semi-pro baseball, Mr. Ivy, you know who I'm talking about, Roscoe Ivy.

**JD:** Yes, Roscoe Ivy, I know him I sure do.

**JG:** I think he was the one telling me they went to Nigton one day and played and he said the tough thing about Nigton was the outfield just continued on forever, there was no fence.

**JD:** That is exactly right on the old field.

**JG:** He said if you had a fence a home run was a home run. He said at Nigton you could never be guaranteed to get a home run.

**JD:** He is exactly right.

**JG:** They could always run the ball down.

**JD:** I remember another team we played was San Augustine and I remember playing San Augustine in baseball and really, the left fielder was down under a hill and you would have to holler and say hey man it's coming. You couldn't see the left fielder. (laughter)

**JG:** Everything was in play huh?

**JD:** Yes, yes.

**JG:** So, was that a pretty big event when these basketball tournaments would come? Did Nigton ever host a tournament?

**JD:** Yes, sure did.

**JG:** Now did your grandfather supply the food for that?

**JD:** He always found a way to get a little of it, you know.

**JG:** Entrepreneur.

**JD:** That is right. He may have some sugar cane to sell or he would sell soda waters. He would go buy a bunch of soda waters and sell it or it may be a time that he would provide peanuts. He was always just kind of figuring it out.

**JG:** Any other families in that area? Weren't the Ligon's from there?

**JD:** Yes, they were there.

**JG:** Now Jim was telling me that his father ran a little barbecue operation too or maybe it was his grandfather over there at some point, the old Alcedo log camp.

**JD:** Okay, that was before my time. The Ligon's were very active people. I am trying to think of how Jim and I are related through our grandmothers, because I believe both of our grandmothers were Odom's. (**JG:** Okay) Then the Odom's married the Ligon's but,

my daddy's mother was an Odom. Her name was Bell Odom and I think Jim's grandmother was an Odom and my grandpa Odom was blind. I never got to know him but I've heard so many stories about him. He was the only guy that could tell you where every corner of his land was.

**JG:** But he was blind?

**JD:** He was blind.

**JG:** Was he born that way?

**JD:** From what I understand because I never heard nobody say otherwise.

**JG:** And he lived there at Nigton?

**JD:** At Nigton, yes, but they would tell stories about everything he could do even though he was blind.

**JG:** Was anybody in the Nigton, I know there was a lot of sharecropping going on and, you know, making a little money or making a living with these side jobs and things but what about, of course you said your father worked for Texas Foundries, were there others that had should be say more steady type jobs? Did anybody work for the lumber companies or the paper mill?

**JD:** Yes, let's see...there were and then some worked in Diboll for Mr. Temple.

**JG:** Okay, they just commute?

**JD:** They commute, yes. And, one of the larger families was the Lee family.

**JG:** L-e-a-f?

**JD:** L-e-e.

**JG:** Lee, okay.

**JD:** They worked for Mr. Temple and finally so many of them started working for him until they moved down here and when the kids got grown they moved back to Nigton and they died there. Yes but, I had an uncle that was another brother of that Lee, Fox Lee that raised a big family, a good family and he worked for the paper mill. I'm trying to think of who else. My momma's brother, Willie Spencer who raised a very big family and all successful kids he worked for Lufkin Foundry. My Uncle, Elbert Deason, worked for Lufkin Foundry. I'm going down the road, up the road, let's see, across the creek.

**JG:** What about, you mentioned church, how many congregations there in Nigton were there?



**JD:** In my early years there was two, there was a Methodist and a Baptist. The best I remember as a kid they alternated.

**JG:** One building?

**JD:** No, two buildings. The Methodist was there on my grandmother's place where I was raised. I was raised from here to the bank from the Methodist Church.

**JG:** Okay.

**JD:** And, we had church on the first and say third and then the Baptist Church, which is across the creek from where my Uncle Lattice Spencer lived, had it on the second and the fourth.

**JG:** Okay, were these traveling preachers or were they from your community?

**JD:** The best that I remember were from outside.

**JG:** From outside and they would just travel and pass through?

**JD:** No, they were assigned.

**JG:** Yes, assigned but they didn't live in Nigton?

**JD:** Well yes, they did.

**JG:** Oh they did!

**JD:** Well, one or two of them did live in the community.

**JG:** Well, what did they do? I guess they had jobs, other employment.

**JD:** I don't remember them working. I just remember them being clean and just preaching.

**JG:** Just preached every other Sunday.

**JD:** Well, they went to another church.

**JG:** All right.

**JD:** Then when I was twelve or thirteen there was a guy from Diboll named B. B. Phipps...

**JG:** Phipps?

**JD:** Yes, there is a Phipps family here now. He came to Nigton and started having church at houses, Pentecostal.

**JG:** Pentecostal.

**JD:** And my mom and my auntie got real big in that and my grandmother and they later built a church and it is still there, called Deason Temple.

**JG:** Still there, Deason Temple.

**JD:** That is a Pentecostal church.

**JG:** Pentecostal church, okay. Now I think like Professor Jackson who lived and worked here in Diboll, the musician, isn't he buried at Nigton? I thought he was. They called him Professor. Did you know of him? I was trying to remember when he passed away. Maybe he passed away in the sixties, no maybe the seventies. He lived to be over 100 years old. You ever remember hearing people talk about him?

**JD:** I remember him now that you are pulling it. Did you ever meet him?

**JG:** Oh no sir, no sir.

**JD:** If I remember well he was a real dark skin guy.

**JG:** He would have been quit elderly in the seventies. I'm sorry I don't remember.

**JD:** If I'm not badly mistaken he still has some offspring here. I think so.

**JG:** I know Jim Ligon remembers him. I remember the way Jim describes it, these may not be Jim's words but, the way he would describe his walk, he had purpose to his walk and says it was like he had pep in his step. It was like he was marching to a song or a tune but, he was pretty talented musician.

**JD:** Jim Howard may know if he is the guy I'm thinking of he has some.

**JG:** He worked for the TSE [Texas South Eastern] Railroad if that will jog your memory, but I was just trying to think of anybody else before we made the transition to Diboll there, some Nigton connections.

**JD:** Yes, there were Mark's, Ligon's, Lee's, Spencer's, Dixon's. Those are the main ones.

**JG:** All right, anything before we kind of transition to Diboll, anything else you would like to talk or mention now about Nigton or maybe your family?

**JD:** Well the thing that I would like to mention, the thing that I remember extremely well about Nigton was that in my family and all the families were that you had mothers,

we talked about our dad's, we talk about grandfathers, but the mom's were really silent giants. My mom was a lady of very few words but she knew what she was saying and she expected you to know what she was saying. My dad was a man of many words and he was identically the same, but I never remember them having any real issues about the way we should go and the things we should do. They never, if my mom said "I'm going to tell your dad" that wasn't a good thing. You know, you just didn't want to get into that and she very seldom said that because she could handle it. I never remember her saying I'm going to wait until your dad, if it needed taken care of she taken care of it, but it was always...I think about this and it's very comforting to know that he was going to make sure that the business and thing was taken care of but she literally ran the house and he didn't get into that a lot unless he had to. We talk about that now with my cousins and it was the very same way at their house and the moms spent lots of time together, you know. They did lots of stuff together like canning and quilting and I think that made a difference.

**JG:** I know one other thing I wanted to talk about before we transition and that is just your early experiences of race relations. You mentioned that you would sell meat to whites and you mentioned the Roaches and a few others I guess. Can you talk a little bit more about that? Not just your experiences but maybe the community of Nigton's relationship with the rest of the world. This was the day when everything was segregated of course, the schools were segregated but just in day to day life how interactive were the races?

**JD:** Well we talk about this quite often and I feel that I was extremely fortunate because my grandfather and my dad dealt with the white all the time, you know. My dad was at the Foundry and my grandpa was in Apple Springs, and we would go to Nogalus Prairie when people would say "oh I wouldn't go up there." He just didn't have any place he didn't go. Now, I would be afraid sometime because I had heard so much but I never saw it.

**JG:** Would it be places like Nogalus Prairie?

**JD:** Yes, I had heard things but I never experienced it. He and I went just anywhere we wanted to go and my dad a lot of time we worked in Apple Springs on the weekend. I had buddies in Apple Springs who had old trucks and they would need somebody to help them haul hay and they would come get us and we would go haul hay all day, you know, and I'm still friends with a lot of those guys. We just kind of had that relationship. I was telling a guy the other day and I'm very serious, I may be extremely wrong, but I never heard my dad disapprove or hear anything about disapproving of who the president was. I remember when Eisenhower was president and somewhere or another he found a picture of Eisenhower and put it up over our breakfast table and he said I want to know who this is. So, I just never had, we didn't have a lot of negative input about anybody in my house and I never heard my dad come home and talk about anybody on his job that did him wrong. My grandpa, he and I didn't and so, I just didn't get that, you know, and I'm thankful I didn't.

**JG:** What about more social interaction say if you went to town to see a picture show, a movie, where would you go and what was that experience like?

**JD:** I was, I guess, twelve or fourteen maybe before I went to a movie I can remember and in Lufkin from what I understand and I guess this is true, the blacks went upstairs and the whites went downstairs but, I probably only went to Lufkin to a movie once or twice in my life. So I don't really...

**JG:** You don't really remember.

**JD:** I really don't.

**JG:** Did you go to the movies in Diboll?

**JD:** I may have gone to the movies in Diboll one time.

**JG:** Was it still segregated then?

**JD:** Yes, and I don't remember who sat upstairs and who sat downstairs.

**JG:** Any other social interactions like that?

**JD:** Well I remember we didn't go to Lufkin very much but I do remember the black water fountains and the white water fountains.

**JG:** When you would go to Lufkin did you ever go to a store to buy something at the store was there a black business district, business community or?

**JD:** No, in Lufkin I remember we would go to I believe Clark Aire's, Matthew Miller's. I can't remember there may have been a J. C. Penney's.

**JG:** Did you ever go to Perry's?

**JD:** Yes.

**JG:** Was it integrated?

**JD:** Yes, the thing I used to go to Perry's for is man they had the best candy and that is all I remember about Perry's. But, I remember my mom and them buying lots of little old stuff at Perry's but, you know, that is all I remember.

**JG:** What about like public restrooms do you remember public restrooms?

**JD:** They were separate, yes.

**JG:** Water fountains and things like that?

**JD:** They were separate.

**JG:** You actually remember that?

**JD:** I remember that.

**JG:** Did you think anything of it at the time?

**JD:** I have to be honest I just get a drink of water and I wasn't going to be there that much no way so unfortunately now, I may have...should have been more aware but just because I think what happens the people who live there, you know, and encounter it day in and day out, you know, if you had to wait to go into a restroom and here is a restroom that is open, you probably remember that. You know what I'm talking about? Or, if you were thirsty and the black fountain was out and you couldn't get a drink you would remember that, but I just didn't, I wasn't there enough to encounter it.

**JG:** Was the experience of just a big town in general influencing that as well maybe?

**JD:** Just being there?

**JG:** Just the experience of coming to...

**JD:** Town may have been more important to me than the fountain. It may have been now that we are talking because I never reflected on that very much. Just like the movie, you know, I just didn't go to a movie enough that would have stood out with me because, like I said, I know I didn't go to Lufkin twice and I may have gone to Diboll once but kids who were here week in and week out may have experienced that or had a little more.

**JG:** So, in Nigton you were pretty much a self sufficient community. You mentioned you didn't have to go to Lufkin much, there wasn't a need to or the bigger towns unless the day to day working with your grandfather and things, you know, that is when you got out and about.

**JD:** And see with the white people that I was with say like my godfather and Mr. Roach and Mr. J. T. Durden. My grandpa and I used to go down there. I just thought about him. We used to go down there and spend two or three days hog hunting. I would love to go and the reason being he would know that I was coming and he would pile up everything he knew I liked. He knew I liked Vienna sausages and cookies and so that was like a treat, you know. He didn't have any kids and my grandfather and I would go down there and we would stay. He had a little house and we would stay two or three days just hunting hogs. Well that was a treat for me and I'd go to my godfather's you know and that was kind of like they was waiting for me to come. As I said when I went off to Diboll, you know, I had a wonderful reception. I was treated extremely well.

**JG:** Did you have any older brothers that went off to the military or anything?

**JD:** No, I'm the only one that went to the military.

**JG:** Okay, I know I'm jumping around here. I want to get to that a little bit and also get to Diboll but before we do you were talking about hunting hogs and things and other sort of getting out and about so to speak. What about fishing was there anybody in Nigton that did a lot of fishing?

**JD:** Fishing was a recreation but it was a source of food.

**JG:** Did you fish in the Neches?

**JD:** More than anything we fished some in the Neches but we fished in the creeks around Nigton.

**JG:** What were some of the names of the creeks?

**JD:** Hackberry that runs through our farm was the major one.

**JG:** What kind of fish would you catch?

**JD:** All kinds.

**JG:** Scaled and catfish.

**JD:** Catfish, every now and then you would catch a big turtle. That made an awful good meal.

**JG:** Okay, well let's move to Diboll then. So, what prompted you coming to Diboll was it the schools?

**JD:** Oh yes.

**JG:** And that was about '59 you said?

**JD:** Yes, '59, you couldn't wait to get into the ninth grade so you could go to Diboll.

**JG:** Okay, so you finished eighth and it just went through eighth grade and then ninth grade you came to Diboll?

**JD:** Came to Diboll.

**JG:** Okay, I guess Mr. Massey was here.

**JD:** Mr. Massey was here.

**JG:** You already knew him or knew of him.

**JD:** I knew him well.

**JG:** Okay, I don't know where to begin here, but just talk about the school, the experience you had in Nigton, classroom experience there versus classroom experience in Diboll.

**JD:** The number one thing is that you spent the summer getting your wardrobe ready.

**JG:** Your wardrobe?

**JD:** Yes, for Diboll because you know, you had to...Diboll kids their dad's worked for the sawmill and they were fairly dressy.

**JG:** Compared to Nigton. (laughter)

**JD:** Compared to Nigton so, you had to step up a notch in your wardrobe so, I spent the summer getting my wardrobe ready, putting things on layaway and knowing I would be ready.

**JG:** So you would have store bought clothes?

**JD:** Oh yes.

**JG:** Where would you shop for your clothes?

**JD:** At Clarks and Matthew Miller's.

**JG:** In Lufkin?

**JD:** Yes, and then there was Canon and Parker's.

**JG:** Yes, Canon and Parkers.

**JD:** And I tell you the amazing thing they would let you put your stuff on layaway so, what you would do is pick your stuff out in say late May and pay a little on it every week so, when school start you would have it. So, I worked all that summer, I worked hard.

**JG:** Getting your clothes together.

**JD:** Getting my clothes together so, the first day was a big day, up and ready and clean.

**JG:** You ride the bus?

**JD:** Ride the bus.

**JG:** Did Mr. Massey drive the bus?

**JD:** Mr. Massey drove the bus. You get to Diboll and you want to kind of see what the scene was like and for the first time you get a schedule, a hand schedule, math, science, language arts, social studies. And this is exciting, you know, that you got a schedule and you are going to be in this class at this time. I liked that, you know.

**JG:** Regimental.

**JD:** Regimental, I liked that. So, we got our schedule and you can't wait to get to Mrs., you heard about Mrs. Inez in English, she is tough and you heard about Coach Allen in science and he is tough. You heard about Coach Ross in History, you know, somebody has told you about all these people.

**JG:** So, your brothers had come through already?

**JD:** Yes, they had come through.

**JG:** Okay.

**JD:** So, they've told you what everybody is like. So, you get in and really and truly they are going to tell you "yes, I had your brother, he was all right" and "what is he doing" and "I had to do this with him" and they let you know that they know you and was real welcoming, you know. Just letting you know it was okay to be here because you are going into somebody else's territory. And so, the academic part felt comfortable, you know, the first thing but then here comes football practice. You had never put on a football suit. You don't know how to put nothing on, you know, and the kids in Diboll had just a little advantage on you because they had been here, you know. So, you go in there and they throw you some stuff and say put it on.

**JG:** And, let you figure it out.

**JD:** Yes, you just trying to figure out what in the world is this all about. Where does this come in? But, you get through it and you get out there and you awkward, you know. I decided to go skiing this year and I felt just like I did the first day I went to football practice. How did I get here? But, anyway that went well, survived that, got home and you know, reflected on the first day and I had made it and from then on Diboll was a process and thank the Lord I was able to make good grades. I was very competitive in the classroom and was able to make the football team and establish myself there. Then you got to figure out when am I going to get me a girlfriend, got to have a girlfriend. You haven't arrived unless you can call somebody your girlfriend whether she is your girlfriend or not you gotta be able to call her your girlfriend. So, I started talking to my brother Ben, who was a grade ahead of me. And, Ben was a very good football player so he got to telling me "you ain't got no girl?" I said "no Ben I haven't talked to nobody yet." He said "well I tell you what Friday night after the game I'm going to tell this girl you are going to talk to her." I said "well what do I say?" He said "well don't worry



about it” she will tell you some stuff. He said “she will do some of the talking for you” but, anyway he set me up with my first girlfriend and that went okay once I got...

**JG:** You remember who it was?

**JD:** Yes.

**JG:** You want to say her name?

**JD:** No!

**JG:** Okay. (laughter)

**JD:** But, once that was over I had done climbed that hurdle and low and behold then I guess the next thing that becomes important to you is being accepted into the fraternity. There has got to be a little fraternity that your accepted...and that is three or four people that other people has pretty well accepted and the Gordon's took me in.

**JG:** Gordon's?

**JD:** Gordon's, and the Williams and...the Gordon's, the Williams and the River's. The Rivers was our quarterback, one of the Gordon boy's was a good athlete and then it was...

**JG:** What year did you graduate?

**JD:** From Diboll in '64.

**JG:** Okay.

**JD:** But once I got into that group start getting invited, you know, to lunch at their house and stuff from then on it was pretty well set. Then I started dating this girl whose mother cleaned up the big offices they call them up here and she also cleaned up Mr. Temple's house.

**JG:** Now the big office that would have been what was the old commissary building with Southern Pine Lumber Company on the front?

**JD:** Yes, and I would go down there with them and then we would go to Mr. Temple's house and that is when I got to meet him.

**JG:** That would be Arthur Temple, Jr.?

**JD:** I assume so.

**JG:** Buddy's daddy?

**JD:** Buddy's daddy.

**JG:** I was trying to remember when he moved there though. Was he there yet?

**JD:** Yes, he used to wear a t-shirt and we used to go clean his house.

**JG:** So, you played sports then, played football for Diboll?

**JD:** Yes, then basketball came around. That was another challenge, am I going to make basketball team? I was able to make the basketball team.

**JG:** How many tried out? You mentioned making the team, how many didn't make the team? I don't mean an exact number but, just the size of the school.

**JD:** Well it was a number because they could only suit out so many. You only had so many suits.

**JG:** So, there was a lot of interest? There were more kids than positions?

**JD:** Yes.

**JG:** So pretty competitive then?

**JD:** Yes, it was pretty competitive and basketball was even more because a lot of time they didn't take but six or seven players.

**JG:** And Coach Allen was here then?

**JD:** Allen was here then. He was my football coach, basketball coach and baseball coach.

**JG:** Talk about him a little bit if you don't mind.

**JD:** He was a guy that made you do more than you thought you could do, yes, he had high expectations.

**JG:** Because he left and went to bigger schools didn't he?

**JD:** He went to Anahuac and then he went to Klein and won the state championship in baseball. He was a unique guy. Really he did, he made me do more than I thought I could do academically and athletically. I know he saw things in me that I didn't see and he didn't mind telling you. If you didn't listen then he would show you.

**JG:** So, all this time you were living in Nigton riding the bus over?

**JD:** Right.

**JG:** So, how long was your school day with football practice and all that kind of stuff?

**JD:** Oh I would get out of the bed around six and get back around six.

**JG:** That is not too bad. My son is in the Lufkin High School band now and he has to be at school by seven and doesn't get home sometimes until after I get home at 5:30. Then they play Monday nights until 8:30.

**JD:** Yes, but that is good.

**JG:** Yes, well we are ready for him to start driving now.

**JD:** Oh yes, he make you where you will say I'll get you a car. I went through four of those.

**JG:** That is all we are doing is running him around.

**JD:** We did that with four and now I have a granddaughter and trust me, granddaughters don't let up on you. They expect Pawpaw to do a lot of stuff.

**JG:** So, you had a full day going back and forth.

**JD:** Now that I thought about it I did. I haven't ever thought about it. That was good for me because once I got out...

**JG:** So Mr. Massey would wait then for I guess school was out and y'all had football or basketball practice after school but, he would wait to take the buses back.

**JD:** No, here is what would happen on most days. A few days he would have all the kids to wait, but most days he would take them, people that didn't play ball, home and he had an old truck or little van that the ball players would come home in. That is when I started driving. I would drive the van and then by the time I was a junior I was driving the bus. I would drive the bus from Nigton to here.

**JG:** You would have to get up pretty early then to pick everybody up huh?

**JD:** I would and I loved it, you know, there is lots of power in that. (laughter)

**JG:** The bus man.

**JD:** Sure did my last two years.

**JG:** You would go around to each person's route?

**JD:** They knew where they had to be. You had your route. You would run your route. And, he taught me this don't be late waiting on nobody, and I don't remember ever

having to leave one or two people, but his motto to me was don't be late waiting on somebody. If you be late you be late because of a situation not because of a person.

**JG:** So, what about these situations, I'm sure some situations came up, mechanical, roads?

**JD:** Now the big ones were the roads because as I told you the one thing you want to do in Diboll and it transpired into my life, you want to look for some guys and girls in Diboll they dressed. I remember that, you know, everybody was going to have on nice shirts, clean khaki's, clean slacks. I even know guys who used to come to school in the mornings in suits, gorgeous suits.

**JG:** And ties?

**JD:** And ties, oh yes, that was very big, then go home at lunch and change into a shirt, some slick pants so in the evenings they wouldn't have a suit on when they got dressed from practice. Now that was the cream of the crop.

**JG:** Yes! You remember who some of those were?

**JD:** Yes, the top dressing family was the Gordon's. They looked like they just stepped out of Ebony every day.

**JG:** What did their father do?

**JD:** He worked at the Foundry, I mean the mill.

**JG:** Here in Diboll, in town?

**JD:** Yes, then their mom is the one that worked for Mr. Temple and most of them had little part time jobs. They were a working family. The next family probably was the Jones's. You ever meet Marcellus Jones?

**JG:** Yes.

**JD:** He ran the laundry and his kids looked like they just stepped out of a globe every day.

**JG:** Being running a laundry huh? Everything was pressed?

**JD:** Yes, hey they were clean. When you tried to dress with them you had to get up early yes. Then probably the next group was the Gordon's by far were number one. The Jones', the Jackson's, the Phipps, I mean I just don't know many men that didn't come to school looking like they...that is what I tell kids now when I came along dress was extremely...and everybody want to get their hair cut every week.

**JG:** Where would that take place?

**JD:** If you were in the in crowd, in the upper class, you know, the upper echelon, Charlie Little.

**JG:** Charlie Little?

**JD:** He had a barber shop and if you could get Mr. Charlie to cut your hair you just arrived, but that was hard to do because you had to get it done during the school day and if you go to Mr. Charlie likely you are going to have to wait behind 8 or 10 people. He didn't get in any hurry. He was going to make, when you walked out there would be no doubt that Charlie Little cut your hair.

**JG:** So, where did the rest of the people go?

**JD:** We had a barber in Nigton who was Gloria's daddy's brother named Ike.

**JG:** Ike Massey?

**JD:** He cut a good head of hair. In Nigton he was the guy. Now, if you couldn't get nobody else you would get my Uncle Miles and when you got Uncle Miles you just got...it is just bad, bad. That was the last thing in the world that you wanted to do was let Uncle Miles cut your hair. (laughter) But, every now and then you would have to do it.

**JG:** I need one now myself. (laughter)

**JD:** But, Diboll was a good experience. Herbert Allen was a guy that made you reach a little further and I was fortunate enough to spend some quality time with him in the best part of his life and labored to let him know that he did. In fact I spent the last four years I got to take him to lunch and then he died that weekend.

**JG:** So, you graduated in '64 which was the civil rights legislation passed that year. Do y'all...just describe that time what you remember about it. Was it big news or wasn't aware of it or how aware of that were you?

**JD:** I tell you how I think you may can compare it. I'm '68 today. I'm sorry I'm 65. My perspective of the presidential election is way different than my sixteen year old nephew. So, probably a civil rights deal was far different to my daddy than it was to me because at that time I thought I just felt like I could conquer the world. I'm going out to conquer the world and I was so glad for the civil rights. You know what I'm talking about, but I was already on my way.

**JG:** Yes.

**JD:** You see what I'm talking about?

**JG:** So you were just basically unaware of it or it was going to take it awhile?

**JD:** I was unaware of it but you got to remember I had in my head where are you going to school? How you going to pay for it? Can you do it? You see what I'm talking about?

**JG:** Right.

**JD:** My head was full at that time of my next major step.

**JG:** You were busy.

**JD:** I'm stepping out of Diboll where I've achieved. I've written my name on the halls of Diboll now I got to start all over as nobody on somebody's college campus. Am I capable of even going? Am I going to have the money to go? Can I handle the social graces? Can I handle being away from my momma? I'm going to a totally new world and that was consuming to me. Now, the civil rights was important but what I had to do was more important.

**JG:** Right, for you at that moment.

**JD:** For me at that moment.

**JG:** For you in your perspective.

**JD:** Now, my dad was probably saying I'm so glad of this because it's going to help Joe, it's going to help Joe's kids, and it's going to help Joe's kids' kids. See that is the way I think now but at that time my perspective was different.

**JG:** What was at the time, you commented about perspective and things appearing differently now than at the time but, if you can try to remember back to your experiences at that moment just the race relations in Diboll say pre '64? The times that you were going to school here what interactions did the black community that you witnessed and the white community have, any interactions about town or school or athletics program?

**JD:** See I thought, you know, we were in pretty decent shape and the reason being is that I had good experiences with the white people that I come in contact with. I had met guys I remember Mr. Don Weir. You ever met him?

**JG:** Yes.

**JD:** I often tell them that I remember once seeing Mr. Weir show up with a truckload of football equipment and it was so improved over what we had and I learned that he had made an effort to find equipment that the white school could do without and he talked them into saying give it to them. So, Mr. Weir and Mr. Massey, see I guess my perception of them was based on what I saw Mr. Massey's relationship and he had a good relationship with Mr. Weir and Mr. Burkhalter. Mr. Pate, I remember him, Mr. Temple. I

remember we used to talk about when we get in the playoffs and when we would get in the playoffs three of the four years that I was here.

**JG:** Was this football?

**JD:** Football.

**JG:** Okay.

**JD:** We were getting ready to go play Charlton Pollard in Dallas and going to Dallas was like going...

**JG:** Charlton Pollard the Beaumont school?

**JD:** No in Dallas.

**JG:** In Dallas, okay.

**JD:** That is where I got that scar right there. I remember we were getting ready to go up there and, you know, the one thing you remember people from certain background food is extremely important. We knew we could probably play ball but man what about food because you go way up there and you got to have some food man. We can't take no bologna sandwiches and we saw Mr. Temple go in Mr. Massey's office that day and when he came out he said "hey man we are going to eat good" and we did.

**JG:** So, what was it?

**JD:** He gave him money to feed us.

**JG:** Okay, so y'all stopped at restaurants in Dallas?

**JD:** Man we ate good. He let us pick what we wanted.

**JG:** I guess it was segregated or was it?

**JD:** Where we stopped?

**JG:** Yes, the places where you stopped and ate was it blacks only or?

**JD:** No, I don't think so.

**JG:** Okay.

**JD:** I don't think so. If it was I don't remember. The food was more important, the food and getting to the game.

**JG:** So, that was a pretty big experience getting to go to Dallas. Had you ever been before?

**JD:** I don't think so.

**JG:** And y'all rode on a bus, did the whole team go on one bus?

**JD:** One bus, yes, I remember that. I'm saying those kind of experiences and then I knew a good many of the guys that played ball here, you know, and we had a pretty good relationship and we played over at the stadium here our games.

**JG:** And you are pointing to the white field?

**JD:** Yes and a good many white people came to see us play.

**JG:** Yes, that is what I was going to ask you too about the audience, the crowd, that came to watch.

**JD:** It would be a good many people watch.

**JG:** Did y'all play on Friday nights or Saturdays?

**JD:** I think if they played on Friday night we played on Saturdays. We switched them.

**JG:** Okay.

**JD:** Yes, and as I said I would have to...I guess the first place that I experienced what I thought was racism was in the army. That maybe I was old enough then to recognize it or maybe I had time to recognize it but, if I had to say where in my career that I run into it it was military.

**JG:** That is interesting because I don't know about the common but you hear the opposite a lot of times where the military was seen as a little more liberating but, that wasn't your experience.

**JD:** It was an isolated case, it wasn't rampant. It was just a guy that I had as a commander. I felt he was a racist, but I managed that to.

**JG:** Did you go straight from right into the military right after high school?

**JD:** No, no, I went to college, went through R.O.T.C.

**JG:** Where did you go to college?

**JD:** Prairie View A&M.

**JG:** Right after graduating from high school?



**JD:** Right after graduation.

**JG:** Did Mr. Massey have anything to do with helping you select a school or anything?

**JD:** He was instrumental, yes. One Friday evening he told me he said “I’m going to pick you up in the morning and you are going to Prairie View to take a test.” He sure did.

**JG:** I guess he did that for a lot of students then.

**JD:** Yes, it was three or four of us went that day so, that was. But, I went through R.O.T.C. so I was an officer when I went in.

**JG:** When did you get out of Prairie View?

**JD:** I got out of Prairie View in ’68.

**JG:** ‘68 okay.

**JD:** That was a good experience. Now, that is where I had my first white professor at Prairie View.

**JG:** What course was it?

**JD:** Speech, Mr. Fisher.

**JG:** Mr. Fisher. What was his background do you remember?

**JD:** I don’t know but I remember he was a very sensitive guy that spent lots of time with us.

**JG:** How many other whites were there on the faculty do you remember?

**JD:** Let me see, I know there was Mr. Fisher and I had Mr. L. Margie but he was white and Mr. L. Margie I took history from him and then Mr. Dunkey. I’m trying to remember what I took from Mr. Dunkey. Those are the only three I remember at that time but Mr. Fisher was my first one. He was...taught me a lot of stuff about speech, made me spend lots of time with him because he would say “you got to come back and go over this speech again.” “You can make a little better grade on this” and he would point things out to me that later helped me.

**JG:** Now most of the people that were going to Prairie View were they...I don’t want to have a leading question but what was their interest for going to college?

**JD:** Get a degree so they could make a living.

**JG:** Okay, how many wanted to be teachers?

**JD:** About eighty percent. I'm just shooting from the head but not far off. It was teaching and engineering and nursing, probably if I just had to say a ballpark figure seventy percent teachers, ten percent nursing, ten percent engineers and the other ten percent in others.

**JG:** And you were looking to?

**JD:** Go into teaching.

**JG:** So, it goes back to your grandfather huh?

**JD:** Yes, I think so.

**JG:** Were you the first in your family to go to college?

**JD:** Yes, sure was.

**JG:** How did your siblings and your mom and dad and your family were they real supportive of you going to college?

**JD:** Extremely, extremely, they all were supportive. I remember my mom, you know, you didn't get to come home maybe once or twice a year because you didn't have no transportation and I remember once I caught a boy home at Thanksgiving maybe and got ready to go back and, you know, ever who could help get the gas that is who got the ride. So, I had been in Diboll at some place and he was going to pick me up and I had to hustle ten dollars worth of gas and I remember my mom had a watch that she loved very, very much and she took that watch and carried it up to a store and let the guy hold that watch so I could get ten dollars to get gas. They were extremely supportive. But, that military experience that was...I had a colonel, I remember him very well, Colonel Schulenburg. He was from Lubbock and...

**JG:** In the army?

**JD:** Yes, in the army and at that time afro's were popular and me being an officer you could wear an afro but you had to wear it neatly trimmed and you know, I didn't have a huge afro. I had a small one and when you put a cap on and pull it off it left a little rim well he wanted you before you come to a little meeting to comb that rim out and I rushed in one day and didn't comb that rim out and he made an unbelievable deal out of that. I ended up going to see the commander, the post commander about a rim in my hair and I'm going to say three weeks after that happened I got orders to go to Vietnam. And, I haven't never got that out of my head that guy didn't get me orders to go to Vietnam which is probably not true but I sure did believe that he did.

**JG:** So, how long were you in Vietnam?

**JD:** A year.

**JG:** A year. Did you see combat?

**JD:** No.

**JG:** What division were you with?

**JD:** I was with the 11<sup>th</sup> Armored Cavalry.

**JG:** What part of Vietnam were you in?

**JD:** Well, we flew into Saigon, which most people do and then they carried us down another place south there called Zeon and we spent ten days at what they call snake camp. That is telling you all the bad things that is going to happen in you make a dumb decision and once that was over one evening about six-thirty I'm down at my touns getting me a cold one, get me a little night cap and they come down and says "y'all need to pack up and be ready to catch a helicopter in about thirty minutes." Jump up and get out and the next morning I was in Cambodia so, I spent about two months up there. That is where I got injured in Cambodia.

**JG:** How did you get injured?

**JD:** They hit us.

**JG:** With shell?

**JD:** They hit our tank with an RPG.

**JG:** Oh you were in a tank okay.

**JD:** Yes, knocked me out and did a little damage and I ended up back at Bien Hoa hospital.

**JG:** What was your job in the tank?

**JD:** I was tank commander. I had four tanks in my unit and they knocked two of them out.

**JG:** What kind of tanks were they?

**JD:** They were M-50's.

**JG:** M-50's.

**JD:** Fifty inches of homogeneous steel but they found something to go through that sucker but they got in close range, you know, they had to be pretty close.

**JG:** Well, I see we've gone...I don't know what that timer says there, but I mentioned before we could maybe do one interview and then give us time to reflect on it and then maybe follow it up with something else if you felt like it.

**JD:** Sounds like a winner.

**JG:** I see it's about noon, but is there anything else from what we've covered so far that you want...I always want to give people the opportunity to have some closing words.

**JD:** I just once again, as I said, as I reflect back it's really been amazing experience that God has brought my way. Even those that I found weren't the most tasteful have probably been the most beneficial and that is what I try to relate to especially young kids is normally the things that come your way a lot of time you didn't choose them, you didn't make them happen but they happen for a purpose to make your character stronger and make you be able to look through others and see good when you might want to see bad. That is just been, I'm extremely thankful for that today that I've been able to do that and I think that is why I enjoyed my career at the administration so well.

**JG:** Yes and I want to, like I said I want to do that in a second interview bring your career, get into your career and bring it up to date and also give us an opportunity to go back and cover some other stuff maybe.

**JD:** Yes, I would like to talk about that and how my previous experiences played into that and I think that is sometimes what is missing that if you hadn't had some things that caused you to look a little deeper you don't see as much in other people as there are.

**JG:** Right, okay. Well, thank you Mr. Deason.

**JD:** Well this has been a wonderful experience. I'm going to tell you now, I got to tell you now Buddy...

**JG:** You want me to turn it off now?

**JD:** I'll tell you.

**JG:** You want it on here?

**JD:** Yes, I'll tell you, Mr. Temple he's the kind of guy that harasses me a little, but when he gets very serious I know it and he spoke extremely highly of you when he found out I was coming.

**JG:** Thank you, well good. I appreciate that.

**END OF INTERVIEW**