

**CLEVELAND MARK**

**Interview 268a**

**September 4, 2014, at The History Center, Diboll, Texas**

**Jonathan Gerland, Interviewer**

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**ABSTRACT:** In this interview with Jonathan Gerland, Cleveland Mark discusses growing up in the Trinity County community of Nigton and living in Diboll in the 1940's and 1950's. He talks about living with his grandparents in the small, tight-knit African American community founded by freed slaves after the end of the Civil War. He discusses farming methods, raising animals, attending church and school, going to Apple Springs in a wagon, smoking meat, and making soap. He also talks about race relations in Nigton and Diboll, discussing segregation, visits by white vigilantes, and Jay Boren's treatment of Diboll's African American community. Mr. Mark mentions Willie Massey, Professor Jackson, Arthur Temple, the Ligon family, the Deason family, the Lacy family, Snuffy Harris, the Roach family, the White family, and the Womack family.

**Jonathan Gerland (hereafter JG):** Today's date is Thursday September 4, 2014. My name is Jonathan Gerland, I'm here at The History Center with Mr. Cleveland Mark and his daughter Clevette Mark and today we are going to do an oral history interview. I thought Mr. Mark maybe to get us going just tell us when and where you were born.

**Cleveland Mark (hereafter CM):** Yes, I was born in Nigton, Texas, August 4, 1931.

**JG:** Who were your parents?

**CM:** My parents were Willie Andrews "Redoe" Mark and Hester Ligon.

**JG:** Okay, what...did you have brothers and sisters?

**CM:** Yes, I had four sisters and two brothers.

**JG:** Okay, where were you in the birth order?

**CM:** I was number two.

**JG:** The second oldest then.

**CM:** The second oldest, yes.

**JG:** Okay, what did your father do for a living?

**CM:** He was a farmer and he worked in the woods, he does pulpwood. He cut pulpwood.

**JG:** How long had he lived in Nigton?

**CM:** He was born out there.

**JG:** He was born out there.

**CM:** All his life, yes.

**JG:** About what year would he have been born, do you know the year?

**CM:** My momma...1905.

**JG:** 1905, okay.

**CM:** Yes sir.

**JG:** So, who were his parents?

**CM:** His parents were Robert Monroe and Viola Mark.

**JG:** Mark, okay. And, how long had they been in Nigton?

**CM:** My grandfather was born in Nigton.

**JG:** Okay.

**CM:** My grandmother was born in Piney, Texas.

**JG:** P-i-n-e-y?

**CM:** P-i-n-e-y.

**JG:** And, where is that?

**CM:** That is between Corrigan and Groveton.

**JG:** Okay.

**CM:** It is really out close to Woodlake.

**JG:** Okay, so the Mark family goes pretty way back into Nigton's history. Were the Marks some of the earliest settlers of that community?

**CM:** My great-grandfather came from Mississippi and migrated to Nigton as a slave.

**JG:** As a slave or a freed slave?

**CM:** No, as a slave.

**JG:** As a slave okay. And what was his name?

**CM:** His name was John Wesley Mark. They called him Jack, Jack Mark.

**JG:** Jack. But Nigton wasn't known as Nigton then if he was a slave was it?

**CM:** No, my grandfather was born in 1972...

**JG:** 1872?

**CM:** ...1872 and he died in 1976, and Nigton was founded in 1873 so he was born before Nigton was established as a community.

**JG:** Do you know who your grandfather's owner was, the one that came from Mississippi?

**CM:** No, I really don't.

**JG:** You don't know. So, he got to that area, Trinity County I guess in the days of slavery?

**CM:** Yes.

**JG:** And, so when the slaves were freed he was one of the founders of the community of Nigton?

**CM:** Yes, Nigton was founded by eight or nine freed slaves in 1873, that is when Nigton became a community. It gave the name...

**JG:** Yes go ahead...I just said did your family tell you these stories. Just share some of the history as it was passed down through your family since they were some of the pioneers there.

**CM:** Well my grandfather said his father was...he remembered when his father... the Indians would come through. They had a trail, an Indian trail through there once a year. They would come and the chief would come and sit at the table with my great-grandfather and ten or twelve braves with him. They would all be off to themselves, but he can remember Indians coming through visiting with his father.

**JG:** Did he say what tribe they might have been?

**CM:** If I'm not mistaken he said it was a Cherokee Tribe.

**JG:** Cherokee tribe, okay. Do you think it might have been the Alabama Coushatta?

**CM:** Alabama Coushatta could have been.

**JG:** So, that is some of the early memories that he had?

**CM:** Yes.

**JG:** What about some other memories of the community, the other families that started the town?

**CM:** Well, they didn't give the names of the people who were present but one name that always come up when they talk about it is Jeff Carter.

**JG:** Carter?

**CM:** Carter, Jeff Carter.

**JG:** Jeff Carter.

**CM:** They seem to think he kind of gave Nigton the name. Then there was...

**JG:** Now was he a black man too?

**CM:** Yes, he was listed as a Mulatto.

**JG:** Mulatto, okay.

**CM:** And, we didn't know it until a little while ago, all of my ancestors on my grandfathers side were listed as Mulatto's.

**JG:** And that is from census records y'all have looked up?

**CM:** Yes, census records yes.

**JG:** So any other memories you have of your ancestors talking about the early days of Nigton?

**CM:** Well there was York Ligon, Jim Ligon's grandfather.

**JG:** Okay, what was that first name?

**CM:** York, we called him Uncle York but his name was Robert. His name was Robert Lee but everybody just called him Uncle York. We found that he was raised by the Womack family. The Womack Family had two slaves and one of them was York Ligon, and one of the Womack's was named Henry Womack. He was about Uncle York's age and they was kids and they gave Uncle York to this little Henry Womack. A little boy about...they just gave him somebody to play with. So, what he did, Henry Womack belonged to the confederate army so, they grew up and he got old enough to go to the

confederate army and after he came back from the confederate army he freed Uncle York Ligon and gave him seven acres of land and a house.

**JG:** So they were childhood friends?

**CM:** They were childhood friends.

**JG:** And, then after the war was over he freed him.

**CM:** Yes.

**JG:** Okay.

**CM:** And some members of the family asked why they called Uncle York uncle and some members of his family said that he and Henry were like brothers and they just felt like he was a member of the family. They feel like he and Henry were more like brothers.

**JG:** Talk a little bit more about the Womack family so, they were a white family?

**CM:** Yes, they were a white family.

**JG:** Mr. Deason had mentioned that his family had bought some land from a Mr. J. C. Womack. I imagine that was a little later than the time period you are talking about.

**CM:** Well, his grandmother...that is another amazing lady...the amazing people of that time was Joe Mack Deason's probably his great-grandmother. She was, her name was Mary Deason and women had no rights back then but she bought 75 acres of land from the Womack family. And, she donated money for the cemetery and for the church.

**JG:** Okay.

**CM:** She donated the land for the cemetery and the church.

**JG:** How long did the Womack's stay around? Did they live in and around the area of Nigton?

**CM:** Yes, in fact one of them...see when I grew up out there it wasn't but about three or four white families that lived out there. The Womack family, J. C. Womack, James C. Womack was...he just died here several years ago. He was Joe Mack Deason's godfather.

**JG:** Okay, I think he mentioned that.

**CM:** Yes, he was his godfather.

**JG:** So, did they own a lot of land out there?

**CM:** Yes.

**JG:** But they were slave owners at one time, is that what you are saying?

**CM:** Yes.

**JG:** Yes, okay.

**CM:** But, Nigton is a very unique little old community because they were allowed to buy land and after they were freed they were allowed to buy land. In fact, my grandfather on my mother's side, Jackie Ligon, he bought 50 acres of land in 1916. So, we are coming up on in two years the farm will be 100 years old and it is still in the family.

**JG:** Oh okay!

**CM:** On the Mark side Robert Mark and his brother Wes Mark they bought 220 acres of land together and they divided it. My grandpa Robert, he took the west side and his brother Wes took the east side and they just divided the land and it is still in the family, still to this day it is still in the family.

**JG:** How did the black families purchase the land was it through sharecropping?

**CM:** Now this 220 acres of land that my grandfather Robert and Wes Mark bought they cut logs to pay for this land.

**JG:** Okay.

**CM:** They cut logs to pay for it. And on my mother's side, Jackie Ligon, he was never a sharecropper. He always owned his own land and they were allowed, whites allowed them to buy land and.

**JG:** So, what are some of the ways they, you mentioned cutting logs, what are some of the other ways that families supported themselves? I imagine there was a good bit of farming going on.

**CM:** Yes well they...

**JG:** What types of crops were raised?

**CM:** Well they raised corn, peanuts, cotton. I can remember seeing cotton fields that when the cotton come and got material it just looked like a blanket, a white blanket. My grandfather probably had twenty acres of cotton that he grew.

**JG:** Were you involved with picking cotton?

**CM:** That is something my grandparents didn't make me stay on the farm. I didn't like to plow a mule and all that. I didn't like that. But they never forced me to do that.

**JG:** Okay. (laughter)

**CM:** My mother had lived in Diboll and they would...every week my mother would send somebody out there to get me and bring me to Diboll. So, I grew up in Diboll. I went to school here.

**JG:** Yes sir.

**CM:** I went to school at H. G. Temple several times. But, I graduated from Nigton High School and under Willie Massey.

**JG:** Okay.

**CM:** Willie Massey was the principal.

**JG:** Yes, I want to get to him and Diboll and his connection to Nigton and Diboll both but, just before we do I would like to talk a little bit more about some of your earliest memories of Nigton itself.

**CM:** Well...

**JG:** The community, just maybe the school itself, the teachers, like I said eventually we will get to Mr. Massey.

**CM:** Well we didn't have no electricity, we didn't have no running water, and none of these conveniences but, we had a great...I had a great childhood you know.

**JG:** Just describe that childhood, someone from our day and age just help us understand what life was like.

**CM:** Well, we had to cut wood if we wanted to be warm, you know, we had to cut wood.

**JG:** Was that a chore that all the boys had to do, or did each family have a designated...?

**CM:** No, no it wasn't no designation it was everybody.

**JG:** Just whoever dad said do it huh?

**CM:** Girls too!

**JG:** Okay.

**CM:** Girls farmed, they plowed you know, it was a consented effort, everybody, but it was a wonderful time where if the neighbor needed something they always...I can remember when a widow would have a big crop in the field...

**JG:** Who is that?

**CM:** If a woman had a crop, a man had a crop in the field and he died.

**JG:** A widow, okay, yes.

**CM:** A widow, my grandfather and them would all go over there and finish gathering her crops or whatever.

**JG:** Help her get the crops in yes.

**CM:** And if a house burned down all the men in the community they would go over there and build a house. It wasn't no lumber and all that stuff they would just cut trees down and build the house back.

**JG:** So, a self sufficient, everybody taking care of each other and not being dependent upon anybody or anything from outside.

**CM:** Yes.

**JG:** Talk about were there any community gathering places?

**CM:** Oh yes, we had churches. We had two churches out there.

**JG:** Was it actually two church buildings or two congregations that shared the same building?

**CM:** Well it was a Methodist denomination and a Baptist denomination.

**JG:** Okay, did they share the same building?

**CM:** No, they had their own building, but what would happen we would go to the Methodist Church the first and third Sunday and the second and fourth Sunday we went to the Methodist [Baptist] church.

**JG:** It was Methodist and Baptist you said?

**CM:** Yes.

**JG:** Okay.

**CM:** So we just shared everything. It was wonderful.

**JG:** So, the church, did everybody in town or in the community pretty much go to church?

**CM:** No, all the women went to church.

**JG:** What about the men? (laughter)

**CM:** No.

**JG:** What about the boys and girls? (laughter)

**CM:** Well we had to go.

**JG:** Oh okay. (laughter)

**CM:** It was required, you know.

**JG:** But not the men?

**CM:** No, it is just like it is today, mostly women in the church, but they took care of the church. My father would go and clean the church and warm the church up, you know. He would build the fire so everybody would be warm but he would go fishing. He would have his fishing poles with him.

**JG:** Now did you like to fish? You said you didn't like to farm, but did you like to fish?

**CM:** Yes, everybody in my family. I don't know nobody in my family that doesn't like to fish.

**JG:** Describe fishing back then compared to today, or just tell us about back then... how did you go fishing and where did you go fishing?

**CM:** We went fishing in the Neches River, then there was Hackberry Creek, there was Sandy Creek, Mulberry Creek and you didn't buy no bait then.

**JG:** You didn't buy any bait.

**CM:** No, you just went and got whatever grasshoppers, anything that moved you just caught it, crickets, and we went...we would go as teenagers we would go a place out there where Sandy Creek runs into the Neches River.

**JG:** Yes sir.

**CM:** And there was a camp spot down there and sometimes on the weekend it would be as many as twenty boys down there. We would just go spend the weekend down there on the creek.

**JG:** Did y'all run like trot lines or poles or?

**CM:** No, no, we just...

**JG:** Tie onto limbs or?

**CM:** Couldn't run no trot line because nobody didn't have no boat.

**JG:** Oh okay.

**CM:** We just fished with a cane pole.

**JG:** A cane pole okay.

**CM:** Yes.

**JG:** Anybody use nets or anything?

**CM:** Yes, a couple of my cousins, they knew how to build those hoop nets.

**JG:** The hoop nets, yes.

**CM:** And they would catch...there wasn't no game warden then like it is today and they could do just about what they wanted to.

**JG:** Did you pretty much keep everything you caught?

**CM:** Yes.

**JG:** Okay.

**CM:** Yes it wasn't no limit or no size or nothing.

**JG:** What all kinds of fish did y'all catch, catfish as well as scale fish?

**CM:** Catfish, perch, now I don't remember white perch.

**JG:** Crappie, yes.

**CM:** I just don't remember it. We would catch catfish, perch and I don't remember us catching that many...that many...what kind of fish do they catch?

**JG:** Bass?

**CM:** Bass, I don't remember catching too many bass fish. I remember going to small creeks and taking walnuts, green walnuts, and dragging them up and down, you know,

and the fish would come up and you just catch them and put them in the...I think it cut the oxygen off. But everybody was well feed and Joe Mack Deason's grandfather, Wilson Deason, he was kind of the H.E.B. of the community. (laughter) You know, you eat, you had plenty of pork and chicken.

**JG:** Pork and chicken huh?

**CM:** Yes, but beef was kind of...that was kind of a delicacy. Wilson Deason would go and kill a beef and he would cut it up and wrap it up and put it in little packages and put peoples name on it and Joe Mack Deason would get on a horse and go deliver it to different places.

**JG:** I think he talked a little bit about goats, that there was quite a bit of goat eating then too.

**CM:** Oh yes, his grandfather had a barbecue pit and he and Joe Mack would get in the wagon and go up around Nogalus Prairie and all out in the country.

**JG:** Now you are a little bit older than Mr. Joe Deason aren't you?

**CM:** Oh yes.

**JG:** Here is you some water if you need it.

**CM:** I'm 83 and I think Joe is probably in his sixties.

**JG:** But you remember his grandfather even before Joe probably remembers him huh?

**CM:** Oh yes, he was just an entrepreneur person.

**JG:** Entrepreneur. Did you ever work for him?

**CM:** No, when my grandfather got through working us we didn't have any energy to go work for nobody.

**JG:** Well, talk about some of the jobs your grandfather had you doing.

**CM:** Well, he had us cutting wood, picking cotton, chopping cotton, plowing, they did – I didn't.

**JG:** Yes, you said you didn't like the farm work.

**CM:** I didn't like to farm. I liked to live in the country though. I loved to live in the country but that never appealed to me. I'm the only Mark in the family that don't hunt. They all had, when we grew up everybody had a horse and a dog you know. It was just the way of life.

**JG:** What about hogs did any of the family have hogs?

**CM:** Oh yes, see my daddy...

**JG:** Did y'all let them run loose or did y'all have them?

**CM:** Yes, they would let the hogs run loose in the woods but what they do, what my daddy and them would do they would make traps and they would catch these hogs when they were pigs and they would cut them.

**JG:** Mark them.

**CM:** They would mark them and then they would cut them though so it really wasn't a wild hog.

**JG:** Right.

**CM:** It wasn't really a wild hog. Everybody marked their hogs and when you wanted a mess of hog you just go down there and find one of your hogs with your mark on him and just kill a hog and just take him and cook it, you know. It wasn't no Brookshire Brothers.

**JG:** Yes.

**CM:** You had to...

**JG:** Talk about that, talk about hog killing time and all that.

**CM:** Oh man yes.

**JG:** Because today's generation doesn't know anything about that except what we read in books or something, but not many of them.

**CM:** They would get a barrel and they would boil this water and they would put this hog in that barrel and they would just turn him over and over and over and they knew just how hot to get the water so the hair would come off the hog, you know, and then they would lay them out on this table and they would scrape the hair off of him and they would cut him up and Joe Mack's grandfather was quite a butcher though. Like a butcher in the store now?

**JG:** Yes.

**CM:** He knew how to cut that hog up and get pork chops or whatever meat you eat and they just were self sufficient. They were self sufficient. They didn't have to go and...

**JG:** So, did they smoke the meat? Did you have a little smoke house?

**CM:** Yes, everybody had a smokehouse. What they would do is they would put this meat down, the whole side of a hog and they would just load that hog down with salt. I see people now say you can't eat pork and all that and that was all we ate.

**JG:** That is all you were raised on huh?

**CM:** We didn't have no refined Canola oil and all that you just use hog lard.

**JG:** Hog lard.

**CM:** Just get it from the fat of the hog. That is what you did, whatever you was going to fry.

**JG:** Did y'all make your own soap too, lye soap?

**CM:** Yes, in fact my mother was still making soap, she was still making lye soap up until a few years before she passed. In fact I got some lye soap of my mother's at my house right now, somewhere. My daughter she moves things around so...

**JG:** Do you move them around Clevette? Maybe she knows where it is.

**CM:** She don't know.

**JG:** She probably hasn't used it. I know she probably hasn't used it. (laughter)

**CM:** But we used to use it you know, use that soap and them little sores you have on you, you could take that lye soap and rub it on you and all those things disappear.

**JG:** Along with other stuff too huh? (laughter)

**CM:** Then grandpa and grandma they would go out in the woods and dig up roots and boil it and that is some of the worst tasting, you know, but we didn't know no difference and psychologically we got well, whatever you were.

**JG:** You mentioned lye soap was like medicine did y'all use like kerosene for medicine and stuff?

**CM:** Yes, we used kerosene and it was just...

**JG:** If you had a scratch put kerosene on it or something. (laughter)

**CM:** We had a fireplace and when I was eight or ten years old grandpa had a big old fireplace in the house and we had to go cut wood, but it was a good life.

**JG:** I bet you liked that big fireplace in the wintertime though.

**CM:** Oh man yes. They would take anything and make a mattress out of it. They would take feathers and make mattresses.

**JG:** What would they stuff the feathers inside of?

**CM:** They had a lady came from down at Groveton, she was the Home Economic lady and she would come out there...

**JG:** Kind of like a county agent?

**CM:** Yes, the county agent.

**JG:** The county agent okay.

**CM:** She would come and bring these beds like you make and she would bring all these thick cloths out there and they would stuff it full of feathers.

**JG:** Was she a black lady?

**CM:** Yes, well see during that time they had a white county agent and a black county agent (JG: Okay) back then and she would come and they made brooms. They made brooms down there at the home economic room down there at school. They made quilts.

**JG:** I interviewed a black lady who was the agent for Polk County years ago and she was telling me about some of that too.

**CM:** Yes.

**JG:** So, that is good. Tell me about schools, we've talked about church, so let's talk about school as far as the community.

**CM:** School was...it was two rooms, two classrooms and I think we ended up with four classrooms that could divide the students you know.

**JG:** Was the division by ages, like the younger ones and then the older ones or...?

**CM:** Yes.

**JG:** Boys and girls in the same classroom?

**CM:** Oh yes, and really some kids started to school when they were five years old, because what would happen if some older kids were going to school and if Grandma and them had to go to Groveton or something and they had a little young five year old kid, they just send them to school with the rest of the kids. It was mostly like a babysitting, but everybody got along. Nigton was noted for its academics.

**JG:** Yes, Mr. Deason talked about his grandfather instilling the importance of education and his dad...I remember him saying something like there were times when you just had to miss school because you needed help in the fields or help doing something, but he tried not to let them miss consecutive days in a row, you know, just try to schedule the work around...school was a priority. So, was that the same case for you and your brothers and sisters?

**CM:** Oh yes, well actually when school was going on we never missed no school in our family.

**JG:** Okay.

**CM:** We didn't miss no school.

**JG:** Especially if it was cotton picking time huh?

**CM:** Yes well.

**JG:** You weren't going to miss school for that!

**CM:** At cotton picking time I come to Diboll and stay with my mother, you know. And, my grandparents see...some grandparents wouldn't let you go stay with nobody.

**JG:** Really?

**CM:** They made you do this, you know.

**JG:** So, why did you come to Diboll and stay?

**CM:** Because my mother was here and they allowed me to come and spend time with my mom.

**JG:** You said they, who would they be?

**CM:** My grandmother and grandfather.

**JG:** Your grandmother and grandfather, okay.

**CM:** They were real lenient towards me because...

**JG:** So, did your grandmother and grandfather more raise you than...?

**CM:** Yes.

**JG:** Where was your father, if you don't mind me asking?

**CM:** My father was never in my life in my young days.

**JG:** Okay.

**CM:** He and I had a little tat for tat, but we made up, you know, he...we sat down and talked and he told me he couldn't do nothing about what happened back there, but he said we started from that day you know.

**JG:** About how old were you when your mom came, or she lived in Diboll then?

**CM:** Yes.

**JG:** Okay about how old were you when your mom moved to Diboll? I guess she moved to Diboll but you stayed with your grandparents?

**CM:** Yes, my grandparents raised me. They were my primary keepers.

**JG:** Okay, is that when you were really young?

**CM:** Yes, that is when I was really young, but they never denied me coming and see, you know, they would always let me come to Diboll. And I regret that right now because I don't know that much about farming, now I don't know that much about farming.

**JG:** Do you need to?

**CM:** Huh?

**JG:** You think you need to? You wish you had learned more?

**CM:** I wish I had learned more because you know my cousin that stayed out there, he always had a big garden, and my brother right now he has a garden and it looks like the Garden of Eden at his house. All fruit trees, any kind of fruit trees, he loves farming.

**JG:** You were one of the older ones, so this would be a younger brother?

**CM:** My younger brother, yes. Nigton is...there were several black communities that were formed after the end of...

**JG:** Civil war?

**CM:** ...Emancipation Proclamation.

**JG:** Like Lacy, was Lacy one of those?

**CM:** Lacy was one.

**JG:** Okay.

**CM:** See Fodice, it is a little community named Fodice up there, but most of those little communities have gone out of existence. They are just not there anymore, but Nigton is still a thriving little community.

**JG:** Thriving community. Does your family still own some land there?

**CM:** Yes.

**JG:** Okay.

**CM:** Yes, my mother owns 50 acres, the Ligon heirs and the Marks we got...my father had 24 acres and so it fell to the children and there is six of us so we just divided it into six.

**JG:** Is the land being used for anything, cattle or ranching or anything?

**CM:** No, no.

**JG:** Is it woods now or pasture still?

**CM:** It is still trees have grown up like small pine trees and all that but it is still...and at one time grandpa used to farm all this land.

**JG:** Okay.

**CM:** He had about five boys and...

**JG:** Talk a little bit about, you mentioned earlier that you didn't have electricity in your earlier days. What was your earliest memory of electricity? Was it in a public building or was it in Diboll when you came to see your mom or where did you first see electricity?

**CM:** Diboll, when I first came to Diboll the Company furnished the lights. The only thing about it, some kind of steam operation, it was operated by that and at nine o'clock at night the lights went off here in Diboll, the lights went off but...

**JG:** So Diboll was the first time you seen electricity?

**CM:** No, no, see Apple Springs.

**JG:** Apple Springs okay.

**CM:** Apple Springs is about five miles from Nigton.

**JG:** Yes sir. Did y'all go into town often?

**CM:** Oh we go into town maybe once a month over in Apple Springs.

**JG:** But you would see electricity there?

**CM:** Yes, they had electricity up there.

**JG:** Okay.

**CM:** It came to Nigton and they just got water out there about 7 years ago.

**JG:** Okay. (Laughter)

**CM:** They just got running water (JG: okay) but most of the people had deep wells.

**JG:** Why would you go into Apple Springs?

**CM:** Well you would go up there to buy...you done worked all the week and grandpa would get on the wagon and we would go up there and you may get you an apple and some candy, you know.

**JG:** Yes sir. Talk a little bit about race relations, like when you would go into Apple Springs or Diboll or anything like that. What is some of your earliest memories of race relations?

**CM:** Well my earliest memories of race relations was...

**JG:** Or even thought of it I guess.

**CM:** Well you go to Apple Springs and white people coming and you had to get off the, you know, and you couldn't wear your hat in a store.

**JG:** Was that something your grandparents would have told you or you just sensed it or?

**CM:** We just knew that.

**JG:** You just knew.

**CM:** But my grandmother and grandfather were highly respected people in the community and Grandma was a midwife and she went all over the country.

**JG:** And, say again their names just so...

**CM:** Jackie and Sina Ligon, they raised me, they were my mother's parents and that is who raised me.

**JG:** Okay, so talk a little bit more about them. You said your grandma was a midwife so she helped out with anybody.

**CM:** She was a midwife and she worked for people that...she worked for...cleaned houses for people.

**JG:** For white people?

**CM:** Yes.

**JG:** Okay.

**CM:** Yes, but she chose who she worked for and she was fortunate enough to work for the postal lady, the lady that ran the post office.

**JG:** Was that out of Apple Springs?

**CM:** In Apple Springs, Mrs. Susie Saucer and she worked for the mechanic. It was a man who had a garage named Charlie Graham. (JG: okay) She worked for them, which was really, really, just super people towards us. They shield us a lot from all of these things and we just stayed out there in the community. But, you know, white people allowed you to exist out there in Nigton. It wasn't no interference. I've heard of places like Nigton where white people come out there and shoot up your house and all that.

**JG:** Nothing like that happened at Nigton?

**CM:** No.

**JG:** No, okay.

**CM:** No in 1936 Havard Lacy killed James Womack's father. They got into it and something happened.

**JG:** So was that a white and a black man?

**CM:** Yes, a black man killed a white man.

**JG:** Was it over an argument or something?

**CM:** Yes an argument about something.

**JG:** You were just about five years old at that time.

**CM:** I was five or six. I can remember it though.

**JG:** You can remember it?

**CM:** I can remember these horses and people running up and down the road on horses but, it made Nigton a better place.

**JG:** Was any charges ever pressed?

**CM:** Yes, he went to prison.

**JG:** Went to prison?

**CM:** Yes.

**JG:** The black man went to prison.

**CM:** Yes, Harry Lacy went to prison.

**JG:** Did he get out? I mean did he do the time and get out?

**CM:** They don't know. It is rumored that he did but it was back then.

**JG:** Okay, but that would have been one of the only...or were there other instances you can recall?

**CM:** Yes, I can remember when the Klu Klux Klan, well it really wasn't the Klu Klux Klan it was just four white people with the sheet on, you know. And, I can remember when they came out there.

**JG:** They did?

**CM:** And, burning a cross.

**JG:** Really?

**CM:** My grandfather, and they didn't have no telephones, but anyway they got together and they got them squirrel rifles and went down there.

**JG:** Squirrel rifles?

**CM:** Yes.

**JG:** Would that be twenty-two's?

**CM:** Twenty-two's and they ran them people off.

**JG:** Now were the trouble makers were they from the area or from outside the area? I mean were they Trinity County people?

**CM:** It was Trinity County people. It wasn't nobody coming from no long distance (JG: okay) but my grandfather and them ran them off.

**JG:** Was anybody killed or injured?

**CM:** No, no.

**JG:** Just ran them off.

**CM:** Yes, just ran them off.

**JG:** And about how old were you when that happened?

**CM:** I was ten or twelve years old.

**JG:** Ten or twelve, so that would have been in the forties then.

**CM:** In the forties.

**JG:** Okay.

**CM:** Yes, in the forties.

**JG:** But, in Apple Springs, when the community of Nigton and I guess Lacy and these other communities that would go into Apple Springs do you recall any incidents or anything other than what you mentioned?

**CM:** No.

**JG:** Were there segregated stores or did the blacks and whites go to the same stores and were treated differently or how did that work?

**CM:** Oh yes, you couldn't even go in the front door you had to come in the back and all of these things, but we have come a long way though.

**JG:** Right, well just talk a little bit about that because that is something your generation and people that actually remember it, not just reading about it in books, you know, while we have the opportunity just talk a little bit about that.

**CM:** It was just, it was just...that was a rule, that was the rule then, you know. And it was accepted, it was just accepted but, my grandmother and grandfather you know but see my grandfather he...the Ligon family they just were not afraid of white men. They weren't afraid of nobody and if you came messing with their family, you know, it would just be consequences and everybody respected, they knew who stood up in the community. It was just, right here in Diboll, right here in Diboll it was segregation right here. It was prejudice people.

**JG:** I can think of one name that comes up quite a bit if you want to talk about that person.

**CM:** Oh Jay Boren, yes.

**JG:** Yes.

**CM:** Well what always...I never understood how he could just...he had a badge and a gun and how he could just come over in the black community and just beat people and kick them and nobody say nothing. Ain't nobody said that is wrong, you shouldn't do that to them...and he had a license to kill you if he wanted to and that was in the late forties and early fifties, it just wasn't no good place for no black man in Diboll. Jay Boren could do what he wanted to and nobody never stopped him, nobody ever said anything to him.

**JG:** That has generally been the consensus is disbelief, you know looking back on it it's like why or how could that have happened. But is that the same way y'all thought of it then, or when it was happening? I mean you would have been close to being an adult and him being an adult.

**CM:** Yes, I was in my twenties.

**JG:** Just talk a little bit more about what that was like.

**CM:** It was...

**JG:** Has he told you things Clevette that you would want to share? We are being recorded so it is for educational, value but I know this is a subject that as time goes on more and more people and I'm not trying to make an issue of it...

**Clevette Mark:** Oh yes.

**JG:** ...but just while we have an opportunity to talk about it.

**CM:** It was just...it was a bad time.

**JG:** Okay.

**CM:** It wasn't no good time back then. But you know he never arrested...it was a man here named Amos Harris, we called him Snuffy and Jay Boren never arrested him. He could do whatever he wanted to over there.

**JG:** Was he a white man or a black man?

**CM:** He was a black man.

**JG:** Black man.

**CM:** Jay Boren never did come over there and arrest him.

**JG:** But everybody thought maybe he should have been arrested, is that the feeling?

**CM:** Yes he just come...

**JG:** I mean he was a bad character, Mr. Harris.

**CM:** Yes, he was...

**Clevette Mark:** No, Mr. Snuffy, why would he never arrest Mr. Snuffy? Was he afraid of Mr. Snuffy?

**CM:** He was afraid.

**Clevette:** Yes I think he was afraid of Mr. Snuffy.

**JG:** Mr. Snuffy might have been a person that should have been, is that what is being implied that he should have maybe been arrested?

**CM:** No, he was accepted in the community.

**JG:** Okay.

**CM:** When he come, he would...see he would drive around Diboll. He worked for some man out there and when the man would wear a car out, big old Pierce Arrow automobile...

**JG:** Pierce Arrow automobile.

**CM:** ...instead of trading it in he would sell Snuffy the car, and he just ride around all over Diboll and if he see a bunch of men standing out there drinking he would just go over there and take their bottle or whatever they had.

**JG:** He was like a big bully then sounds like.

**CM:** Yes, you know, and everybody would laugh about it.

**JG:** Even then?

**CM:** Even then, they would laugh about it. They would say here comes Snuffy.

**JG:** His physique – was he a big guy?

**Clevette:** Yes he was very big!

**CM:** Yes, he was one of the strongest men ever been in Diboll.

**JG:** Okay. What did he do? What was his occupation?

**CM:** He worked at the sawmill out there.

**JG:** Worked at the sawmill okay.

**CM:** I don't know what he did.

**JG:** Okay.

**CM:** Some job probably nobody else wanted to do. But, he turned out to be a deacon in the church, he sure did.

**JG:** But Mr. Boren, Jay Boren never confronted him?

**CM:** No, no, no. They would go tell him Mr. Boren, Snuffy is over there. He would say, "maybe somebody will kill him after awhile, I don't want to have to go over there." But he wouldn't go and you know without that gun I don't know what...he wasn't a big old man.

**JG:** Yes, I've seen pictures of him. He wasn't that large.

**CM:** Yes, he was a little man. But for him to be able to do this to people it is just amazing you know. What really stopped him, Marcellus Jones called the FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation] and after then he stopped doing that. But other than Jay Boren, you know, Diboll was...Diboll was a nice place back in the day.

**JG:** Talk a little bit, I know what we just were talking about got into the 1950's (**CM:** yes) but let's go back a little bit in time and talk about the school. We talked about Nigton School, but talk about your early memories of Diboll. You came over here to stay with your mom and you went to school here occasionally.

**CM:** Well I was in Diboll all the time, you know. In fact, I went to the military from Diboll. I went in the military. I was staying with my mom then.

**JG:** What branch of service?

**CM:** I went in the Air Force in 1952.

**JG:** Air Force, 1952, okay. So, your residence then was Diboll?

**CM:** Yes.

**JG:** Talk about school, we talked about Mr. Willie Massey.

**CM:** Yes.

**JG:** Who was Willie Massey to the Nigton Community?

**CM:** Well, I tell you Willie Massey loved all the children, you know. I guess he loved all the children, but he had a special love for the Nigton children. He went all out of the way to see they got an education. That is the way he ended up in Diboll.

**Clevette:** I got to go to my lunch with my granddaughter, but I'm coming back to get him.

**JG:** Let me just pause this just for a second.

[Recoding Paused]

**JG:** Okay we are continuing to record now. Okay, Mr. Mark go ahead and finish.

**CM:** Nigton have been a very unique little community. They have...from Nigton they have had two people from Nigton that has got a PhD.

**JG:** Okay.

**CM:** Jesse Jarue Mark and...

**JG:** Jesse Mark?

**CM:** Yes, Jesse Jarue Mark and Arthur Ray Byrd, they both have Phd's.

**JG:** How do you spell Byrd?

**CM:** B-y-r-d.

**JG:** Okay. I thought so, B-y-r-d.

**CM:** Yes. They have a PhD.

**JG:** Are they still alive?

**CM:** Yes, no, no, Jay Roe Mark died, but Arthur Ray Byrd is living and he is president of some college out in Nevada.

**JG:** Okay.

**CM:** Yes and, they had...

**JG:** What did this Dr. Mark do that had the PhD?

**CM:** He was a biology teacher.

**JG:** Okay.

**CM:** Yes, he taught in Kentucky State and then he taught at Texas College. That was his last assignment.

**JG:** Where did he get his PhD from?

**CM:** Prairie View University.

**JG:** Prairie View, okay.

**CM:** He was a great athlete down there back during the day, but he came back home and started cutting pulpwood. He went out in the woods and started cutting pulpwood because he said he hadn't never worked. He hadn't never did no labor, no hard labor and he just wanted to see how it was.

**JG:** Okay.

**CM:** He just wanted to see really how it was.

**JG:** Now did the pulpwood go to the Papermill in Lufkin?

**CM:** They worked down at Liberty down there.

**JG:** Liberty, okay.

**CM:** Hull-Daisetta.

**JG:** Hull-Daisetta.

**CM:** Yes. They cut pulpwood down there.

**JG:** I guess that Sheldon Mill was down there at the time maybe.

**CM:** And they also have...Nigton also has produced two doctors and...

**JG:** Two medical doctors, yes.

**CM:** Yes, medical doctors, yes. They have produced lawyers. A guy from Nigton's son is a lawyer down in Houston and my cousin's son is a lawyer. He is in Austin now, but their roots came from Nigton. They have two sergeant majors from Nigton. They were

very patriotic, one family out there, Uncle Bud Dixon and Aunt Carrie Dixon had six sons in the military at the same time. People have gone and...

**JG:** Talk about another person I just happened to think of that was from the Nigton area, I guess back and forth, not from there but had some connections was Professor Jackson.

**CM:** Oh he married a lady, his wife was from Nigton.

**JG:** Okay, isn't he buried there, Professor Jackson?

**CM:** Yes.

**JG:** Talk about your memories of Professor Jackson.

**CM:** Well Professor Jackson was a gifted musician who got...he had a group here that went everywhere. He was my uncle.

**JG:** A musical group?

**CM:** Yes, a male chorus that went everywhere, sure did. Mr. Temple bought them some uniforms.

**JG:** They would just travel and sing?

**CM:** Yes, they would just go on the weekend and they worked at the sawmill, but on the weekend they would go different places.

**JG:** Can you describe his musical abilities? From what I understand he was pretty good musician.

**CM:** Yes, he played piano for this group.

**JG:** Piano for this group, yes. We have got some pictures of him with the singing group. They are all wearing their nice suits and he is at the piano.

**CM:** Yes.

**JG:** Were they white suits? They are kind of light color. I know it was black and white photography.

**CM:** Yes, they were white, yes. He played down there. And, you know he trained Harry James.

**JG:** Yes, I've heard that. He played the trumpet huh?

**CM:** He played the trumpet.

**JG:** That was when I think it was the Kristie Brothers or something like that. One of the circus's down in Beaumont I believe.

**CM:** Oh yes, he was quite a man. He married one of them Calvin sisters from out there at Nigton.

**JG:** Oh okay. If I'm not mistaken I think it was Jim Ligon that told me that Professor Jackson always had a distinctive walk. (**CM:** yes) It was like he had a song or a rhythm in his head and he walked to that rhythm.

**CM:** Oh yes.

**JG:** Can you describe it?

**CM:** Well it was kind of a strut like.

**JG:** A strut.

**CM:** Yes, he had a distinctive walk.

**JG:** Did he snap his fingers?

**CM:** Oh yes he would walk along there.

**JG:** Walk along snapping his fingers, okay.

**CM:** Yes, I guess music was going through his head.

**JG:** Yes, I remember Jim telling me about that.

**CM:** They had some great men here in Diboll, Dave O'Neil.

**JG:** Oh yes, Dave O'Neil, talk about him.

**CM:** Dave O'Neil was one of the most outstanding men. He was a Sunday School superintendent about 60 years, over sixty years.

**JG:** Sixty years, what church was that?

**CM:** The Methodist Church, Perry Chapel Methodist Church.

**JG:** Perry Chapel.

**CM:** Yes, he would take that belt too.

**JG:** The belt?

**CM:** Yes, he would pull that belt off and would wear you in.

**JG:** Did he ever spank or whip you?

**CM:** No, I knew better because I belonged to Perry Chapel Church...I belonged to the Methodist Church for sixty years. I was born in the Methodist Church.

**JG:** Okay.

**CM:** I go to the Church of the Living God right now. I've always been in the church, though. I always been in the church and they have had some outstanding men here in Diboll: Reuben Jackson, Roosevelt Clark, Joe Garr. He was over the 19th of June.

**JG:** Juneteenth celebrations huh?

**CM:** Yes.

**JG:** Talk about that the Juneteenth barbeques.

**CM:** Well they just close the mill down and everybody came and...

**JG:** Just a holiday.

**CM:** It was a holiday. They would build a trench...

**JG:** Was it held the same place each year, the barbecue? Or different? Where were the barbecues held?

**CM:** Mostly over close to the baseball park.

**JG:** Okay.

**CM:** Yes over close to the baseball field.

**JG:** They would dig a pit in the ground.

**CM:** They would just dig a hole in the ground and throw some logs off in there and set them on fire and they would burn a couple of days and when they got down there...

**JG:** Good coals and ashes.

**CM:** Oh man, Mr. Joe Garr was a big old man.

**JG:** What kind of grate did they put over it?

**CM:** Whatever you could find.

**JG:** Just make a grate?

**CM:** Whatever would hold those old mattress springs or whatever you could find to hold the meat.

**JG:** Whatever you could find.

**CM:** Just a day of celebration and it has fallen away now though. It has...

**JG:** Did any white people come to the Juneteenth picnics?

**CM:** Oh yes.

**JG:** Who would they have been? Did Mr. Temple ever come?

**CM:** Arthur Temple would come.

**JG:** I think one year we have got pictures at the baseball field, Martin Dies I think came one year and spoke to the Juneteenth crowd. They put an old flatbed trailer out there. He was always willing to get up there and talk. But do you have memories of things like that?

**CM:** Oh yes man, it was just a day or two or three days of celebration you know.

**JG:** It was always on June 19<sup>th</sup>. It wasn't like wait until the closest weekend to it; it was always the day itself, the day itself.

**CM:** Yes, the 19th of June.

**JG:** Regardless of what day that fell on.

**CM:** Well see Emancipation Proclamation was declared in 1863 but it was two years before they got to Galveston (**JG:** right) and declared, you know, and people were lost. They didn't have nowhere to go. They were...them being free they didn't have no...and a lot of them just stayed on where they were at, stayed on where they were at and that is the reason I think they founded Nigton.

**JG:** Yes, you were saying earlier that one of the families was the slave and was freed right there and then kind of started the town or the community huh?

**CM:** Yes.

**JG:** Yes.

**CM:** But see, they were successful farmers because that is what...that is all they had been doing all their lives, farming. They found Nigton is very rich, the soil is very conducive to growing vegetables, you know.

**JG:** Growing crops and things.

**CM:** They just went out there and cut those trees down. I know a couple of people didn't have no horses, they had oxen.

**JG:** Oxen huh?

**CM:** Yes.

**JG:** You mentioned earlier that there were two or three, I think you said white families that lived there, one was the Womack's?

**CM:** Yes.

**JG:** Was one of the other families the Roach family?

**CM:** Yes, the Roach family.

**JG:** Yes, the Roach family. Talk a little bit about them.

**CM:** They were...they just fit right in the community, you know.

**JG:** What did they do for a living, some of the Roach boys? Did any of them...

**CM:** They farmed.

**JG:** Did any of them work for the railroad or anything or the lumber companies?

**CM:** No, raise cattle, they had Glen Roach and Tump Roach.

**JG:** Tump?

**CM:** Tump and James Womack.

**JG:** James Womack.

**CM:** Yes, he was just a community, he loved Nigton you know. He stayed out there and then there was a Maxine White, Royce and Maxine White they lived out there.

**JG:** And they were a white family, white skinned?

**CM:** They were white.

**JG:** But they had the last name of White also?

**CM:** Yes.

**JG:** Do you remember anything about transportation? You mentioned some of the animals and stuff but how would y'all get to Apple Springs?

**CM:** In wagons, yes.

**JG:** In wagons. What would pull the wagon?

**CM:** They had mules and horses. My grandfather, they always, everybody had them a good team of mules.

**JG:** Okay and that was for farming and wood hauling and whatever huh?

**CM:** Pulling the wagon.

**JG:** Pulling the wagon. So y'all would just all load up on the wagon and go to town.

**CM:** Yes pile up on there and go to Apple Springs.

**JG:** Was it a two axle wagon? I mean it had four wheels?

**CM:** Yes.

**JG:** Okay. Not like a cart more like a real wagon?

**CM:** Yes a real wagon.

**JG:** Yes, go to town in the wagon.

**CM:** They built everything, they built wagons.

**JG:** Made their own wagons huh?

**CM:** Made their own wagon, yes.

**JG:** Did y'all ever go to Groveton?

**CM:** Yes, we go to Groveton...boy you go to Groveton that was like going to New York City.

**JG:** How long would it take you to get to Groveton in a wagon?

**CM:** It would take you three or four hours.

**JG:** Oh wow!

**CM:** It wasn't no roads, just old muddy roads. I remember when they put 59 through here.

**JG:** Here in Diboll the [Highway] 59, yes.

**CM:** Yes, I remember that.

**JG:** Do you remember when they did [Highway] 94?

**CM:** I remember when they did 94. And when that Harry Lacy killed that woman they come, I remember them coming to get my grandpa, Jackie Ligon, and take him off. They took him off and busted his head wide open and left him out there.

**JG:** Really? Left him out where?

**CM:** In the woods!

**JG:** Really?

**CM:** Yes.

**JG:** Now who is they, just some white vigilantes or the law or who?

**CM:** Nobody had no sheet or nothing on, they just come up there and we knew. And later on we found out who hit my grandpa and he went to Beaumont and they had a race riot down there and he got killed down there. Somebody shot him down there.

**JG:** Your grandfather did?

**CM:** No, the guy that hit my grandpa.

**JG:** Oh, the guy that hit your grandfather went to Beaumont and got killed down in Beaumont.

**CM:** Yes, in a race riot.

**JG:** What was his name?

[Editor's Note: Mr. Mark answered the question, but later asked that it be withheld from the transcript.]

**JG:** Was that in the forties, that 1940's...I know they had a race riot down there at the ship yard I believe in the forties?

**CM:** Yes, yes.

**JG:** Is that the one?

**CM:** That is the one.

**JG:** In '43 maybe, I can't remember. Was he living down there or did he go down there because of the riot?

**CM:** He went down there because of the riot. He was living up there in Apple Springs.

**JG:** Oh okay.

**CM:** But you see there have always been good white people that when I grew up out there in Nigton, if you didn't have a good white man, my grandfather, if he didn't have a good white man that would speak up for him it was hard, but he always had this one man that always, he would let my grandfather have money to raise crop with and all.

**JG:** And who was that?

**CM:** A man named Mr. Warner...Mr. Warren.

**JG:** Warren, like W-a-r-r-e-n?

**CM:** Yes, but my grandfather and grandmother they never...they always owned their own land. They never sharecropped.

**JG:** Never share cropped? But some of the families did right?

**CM:** Oh yes. It was a whole lot of families just...I didn't know how this sharecropping went, but we found out that they drew up a contract to raise so much. You had to raise so much cotton before you could clear anything. I went to Groveton and I read a contract that Jesse Monroe Mark was sharecropping with this man and he signed a contract and he had to raise 950 pounds of cotton before he could start clearing anything. That was because if you fulfill the contract the man didn't have to do what he said he was going to do. It was up to him, but my grandfather dealt with some good white people, you know. It has always been that way and I never...I ran into more prejudice after I left here and went to California.

**JG:** You had more prejudice in California than here? Is that when you were in the service?

**CM:** No, I lived in LA [Los Angeles] 12 years.

**JG:** You lived there 12 years, okay.

**CM:** After I got out of the military.

**JG:** What were you doing there were you working?

**CM:** Yes, I ran a warehouse (JG: okay) for the Los Angeles Independent School District. I was a foreman out there. I came back here in 1965 and I have been here every since.

**JG:** You got in right at the time the schools were integrating huh?

**CM:** Yes, or a year or two before, yes.

**JG:** Well I do want to talk about that. I see it is about 11:30 right now.

**CM:** Well we will come back.

**JG:** Okay, well good I really do want to finish and maybe we can get this transcribed and get it typed out what was said and maybe your daughter can look it over and maybe if there is something we didn't cover we can go back and look at that or I certainly want to talk about integration and things like that too.

**CM:** Yes.

**JG:** So, I thank you for your time today Mr. Mark.

**CM:** Oh yes. Is Louis Landers back?

**JG:** Yes, he is back. Let me go ahead and stop this.

**END OF INTERVIEW**