

Charles Armstead
Interview 289a
May 28, 2019, by telephone in Paris, France
Jonathan Gerland, Interviewer
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ABSTRACT: In this interview with Jonathan Gerland, conducted by telephone, Diboll native Charles W. Armstead recounts his childhood and adolescence in Diboll and Lufkin. Mr. Armstead recalls segregation both in day-to-day life and schools in Angelina County. He also reflects on his relationship with Arthur Temple, Jr. and Mr. Temple's influence in Mr. Armstead's education and career. Mr. Armstead recalls his time working in Houston for Humble Oil and Gas Company and Temple Lumber Company. He briefly describes his work in advertising in New York. Of particular note is his recollection of his work for the Department of Defense regarding oil intelligence and his work selling oil to the government of South Africa in the 1980s. The interview concludes with his memories of his early life and the challenges he overcame.

Jonathan Gerland (hereafter JG): Today's date is May 28, 2019. My name is Jonathan Gerland. I'm in Diboll Texas. I'm visiting on the telephone with Charles Armstead who is in Paris, France. We are going to do an oral history interview today. Mr. Armstead had – he and I met maybe 10 years ago or so and of course I had met him in some of our records earlier than that. We have some newspapers clippings and things, and so Mr. Armstead maybe we can just begin, tell us a little bit about where you were born and growing up.

Charles Armstead (hereafter CA): Well, I will tell you that first, and then I will paint a mental picture for you of Diboll between 1940 and 1950. First of all, I left Diboll –

Interrupted.

JG: Okay, we are back recording again, go ahead.

CA: I was born in Diboll, Texas in 1940 and I spent the first nine years of my life there. My family moved to Lufkin when I was nine years old. So, I actually grew up in Lufkin but I kept in contact with Diboll. Now I'm going to paint a picture for you of what Diboll was like from 1940 until around 1950.

JG: Okay.

CA: Diboll was completely racially segregated with the poor whites, uneducated whites and the poor blacks all competing for labor jobs at Southern Pine Lumber Company. Now, I'm going to give you a mental picture of the position of Southern Pine Lumber Company. If you were standing on the railway track that runs through Diboll facing west, the first view you would have seen was the ice house, where all the workers and people employed by Southern Pine Lumber Company went to get their ice for their new ice boxes that were just being delivered. Next to that building was a commissary owned by the people who owned Diboll. It was a big store where you could buy from appliances to clothing to food, and since none of us had any cars during those days, when we go to the general store and buy our needs, a guy named Chester Willis, who worked for the company, would deliver it in the afternoon. Next door to the general store would be the corporate offices of Arthur Temple and his staff. Next to him, to that office would be the general post office. No one had any addresses in Diboll you just write, for example, Jack Armstead, General Delivery, Diboll, Texas, and you went down to the post office to pick up your mail. A little north of that was a small white house where T. L. L. Temple, Jr. drank himself to death. That is, if you are facing west, all the poor, uneducated laboring class of colored people lived on the west side and all the uneducated class of the whites lived on the east side. The dividing line was the railroad track.

JG: What about the store?

CA: This was before highway 59 was built...when highway 59 was built the racial dividing line was the highway but you still have predominantly ignorant poor colored people on the west side and the same thing for the white people on the east side. That is a picture of Diboll between 1940 and 1950.

JG: Yes sir. Do you remember going to the commissary?

CA: Yes, as a little kid.

JG: Okay, tell me about segregation as far as the store. Do you remember?

CA: The store was completely racially segregated but you could shop anywhere you want to, but when you get ready to pay for your goods and services you went through this line that said "colored" and there was a line that said "white". The manager of that store at that time was a man named Cruthirds. I don't know if you've heard of that.

JG: Yes sir.

CA: Cruthirds ran the store and especially the meat department. But they were very courteous in the store, no problem there.

JG: Tell me about your parents, who were your parents?

CA: My parents were Jack and Lillie Mae Armstead. My father was born in a small place outside of Trinity, Texas called Kittrell. It no longer exists today. My mother was born in Groveton, Texas, which still exists but very small, one of Texas's ghost towns. I don't know but that is where they were from. They managed to get to Diboll and that is where I was born and from there, with the help and encouragement of Arthur Temple, my father built a home in Lufkin. And he retired after about 37 years of working for the Temple people. I think I sent you his 35-year employment pin.

JG: Yes sir. So, he worked for Southern Pine Lumber Company?

CA: Yes, for 37 years.

JG: Thirty-seven years, well why did he build a house in Lufkin?

CA: He built a house in Lufkin because Arthur Temple had offered him a very good deal on the business material, the lumber and all the business material. This is what this man did, he gave him the loan of a material lien against the materials and left the deed and the promissory note open. So if I ever grew up and my father didn't pay for that, I could pay for it and he left it with no interest, none.

JG: Now, did you go to Lufkin schools after that?

CA: Yes, I went to Dunbar High School in Lufkin.

JG: Do you remember going to the schools in Diboll?

CA: Yes.

JG: Talk a little bit about that.

CA: I'm sorry.

JG: Tell us what you remember of the Diboll school.

CA: What I remember of the Diboll school was the name of the school was called H. G. Temple, and it was still private at that time. It was for the children of the employees of Southern Pine Lumber Company. The teachers were very, very good there. I learned a lot there. It was a good school. It was just dilapidated as you all know. It was a wooden building; we had no sanitation. You had to go to what was called the outdoors toilet. There were no lights at night when they had basketball games so they had torch lights and you could not play basketball in the white gymnasium on the other side of town. That changed when Arthur Temple came to town.

JG: And, he came in 1948.

CA: He came in 1948, and he was 28 years old when he landed there.

JG: Yes sir. He came because his cousin Henry Gresham Temple had passed away and that is who the school was named for.

CA: That is right. Gresham Temple used to own a gas station on Highway 59 where the Village is today.

JG: Okay, yes.

CA: His cousin Henry Gresham Temple had passed away so he came to Diboll to take over the executive position. He inherited it from his father actually.

JG: So, tell us a little bit more about your father. What do you remember of your father?

CA: I remember my father being a common laborer. He had no education at all. He worked everyday for 37 years, and saved enough money to build a house in Lufkin. He was the type of guy who worked hard every day. Went to bed at 9 o'clock at night, get up early in the morning to beat that 7 o'clock whistle at Southern Pine Lumber Company. There is a book called The Cornbread Whistle...

JG: Yes sir.

CA: Now, in that book is some true facts but I can't get the book because it's a reference book at the T.L.L. Temple Library. (JG: yes sir) If you get a chance can you get some of your staff to make extra copies of that and send it to me.

JG: Okay, we have it on our website actually so I can send you a link if you have an email I can send that to you directly or you can access it through the internet as well. If you'll give me your email address, I can send it to you.

CA: I don't have one.

JG: Oh, you don't have one.

CA: I don't deal in emails. I don't see why I should have personal information coming through some of these companies before it gets to me.

JG: Okay, we will mail you one then to that address you provided the other day. I will make a note to do that.

CA: If you get your questions together of what you want to asked me, I will be very happy to answer them.

JG: Tell me about any other memories of Diboll. If you moved around 1950 to Lufkin, do you have maybe just of the town, experiences at the store, maybe your comings and goings of the trains around the tracks.

CA: The train was very, very, busy because they were hauling oil from the oil fields in East Texas by railway mostly, so big tank cars would pass through Diboll every day. That was before the pipeline was built by Humble Oil and Refinery Company, from the oil fields of east Texas to the refineries on the Gulf Coast.

JG: Okay, tell us about going to school in Lufkin.

CA: Going to school in Lufkin when I first arrived there was like going to black board jungle. It was a mess. People were stealing, lockers were being broken into, one young girl had been ice picked to death, another young man had died a mysterious death in Jones Lake Park. It was a terrible situation until a man by the name of E. E. Cleaver came to town and he cleaned up all of that. It was actually E. E. Cleaver who introduced me to Arthur Temple.

JG: What year did you graduate? Did you graduate from Dunbar?

CA: Yes, I graduated from Dunbar High School in 1957.

JG: In '57 okay. Tell me a little bit more about Mr. Cleaver.

CA: Mr. Cleaver was a man of excellence. He believed in excellence and he believed in trying to get as much to his students as he possibly could. He is the principal who had also invited girls who had gotten pregnant, for whatever reasons, he invited them to come back to school and get an education. The clergy in East Texas were against him when he was doing that. He said look these girls have made a mistake and I'm not going to punish them. They can come back to school and get their high school education. That is the type of man he was.

JG: Talk about some of your teachers at Dunbar.

CA: Some of my teachers?

JG: Yes sir.

CA: One of my teachers was very good. His name was Travis Carter. He was excellent. He was teaching us about things that were happening a long way away. We were very aware of Vietnam and what happened there with the French because he was teaching that kind of stuff in a Civics class. Another good teacher was a man named Lee Williams who went on to get his PhD in mathematics. He taught mathematics at Dunbar High School. They were excellent and they believed in pursuing excellence, not equal opportunity employment. They were against this equal stuff, pursue excellence. Be excellent at what you do, forget about equal because that is a myth. That is the kind of people that they were.

JG: How did Mr. Cleaver introduce you to Mr. Temple, to Arthur Temple, Jr.?

CA: What happened was that Mr. Cleaver had gone to a community relations meeting in Lufkin that Arthur Temple attended and he mentioned to Arthur Temple that Jack Armstead, which was my father, worked at the Southern Pine Lumber Company and he had a son who was interested in working for summer school. So, Arthur Temple said send him down to see me. So, I went down to see Mr. Temple at that time, he was no longer called Mr. after we got to know each other, and I told him...he said "yes I know who you are. You are Jack Armstead's boy and you're looking for employment." I said "yes, I'm looking for a job for the summer do you have any jobs that I could fill." He said "we will find something." Hello?

JG: Yes, I'm still here.

CA: So, he sent me to Vernon Burkhalter. You know who Vernon Burkhalter is don't you?

JG: Yes.

CA: So, he sent me to a man named Dred Devereaux.

JG: Oh boy!

CA: Dred Devereaux built things and made things. At this time, I was about 12 and a half years old. I was young and I went in for action, so I asked him if he could find something more active for me. So he had Vernon to transfer me to the dry chain, and I worked on the dry chains every summer for 6 summers, saving money and hustling and scuffling to go to Prairie View even though I had a scholarship.

JG: Did you know any other people, maybe community leaders in the black community during that time? It sounds like even though you were living in Lufkin you were working in Diboll. Did you ever come across Professor Will Jackson?

CA: No, never knew Will Jackson. As a matter of fact, my first choice of college was not Prairie View. It was in Massachusetts. I am trying to think of the name of that school. It was only about 10 students per teacher.

JG: Okay, and ...

CA: I didn't have the money to get out of Lufkin let alone get to that school. I borrowed two dollars and hitch hiked a ride out of Lufkin.

JG: To Prairie View?

CA: Yes.

JG: Was there any kind of financial assistance?

CA: I'm sorry.

JG: Was there any kind of financial assistance to go to college?

CA: Yes, there was from Arthur Temple Jr. (JG: okay) and his Temple Foundation which was not completely formed at the time. But yes, he gave me some financial assistance and I repaid him that in 1983 and he was surprised. He said no one had ever repaid him so I repaid him with interest in 1983 and we had a big laugh about that because he was looking then to get out of sawmilling. He talked about how labor intensive it was, and it was! He had a group of bankers meeting at his office in Lufkin. At that time, he formed something called Exeter Investment.

JG: Yes sir.

CA: He was looking to get out of sawmilling. He wanted out, he wanted on the financial side but it took him a long time to get there. It took him until about 1998 before he finally made his decision because we used to meet sometimes in New York. His friend had a suite at the Stan Hope Hotel in New York. So, Arthur and Lottie would stay there while Arthur went to his board meetings.

JG: That was when Time had purchased Temple Industries, I guess during the 70s and early 80s?

CA: That is exactly right. That is when his Aunt Munz...

JG: Georgie Temple Munz.

CA: At that time, she was the largest single stock holder in Time Inc. She owned 15% of Time, Inc, at that time. She was very, very wealthy. I never met her.

JG: Oh, that is what I was going to ask you if you had ever met her?

CA: No, I never met her. I only knew about her wishes. She and Temple Webber and Arthur conferred with her about what she wanted to do with her extensive holdings and they communicated back to their lawyers, and that is how the Temple Foundation was formed.

JG: Yes sir. Yes, she was one of five children of T.L.L. Temple and her inheritance was undivided. Her husband had died young.

CA: Died in ??? (1948)

JG: So, this shows you a little of the wealth that T.L.L. Temple had generated.

CA: Oh, it was huge.

JG: Yes.

CA: A huge amount of money. Did you know that T.L.L. Temple, Jr. was an alcoholic?

JG: Yes sir, and I knew he had died in that building that you were describing. They ...

CA: My father used to pass the bottle to him.

JG: Really?

CA: Yes, morning or at night, he pissed off all of his fortune. T. L. L. Temple III, Latane, we called him Latane.

JG: Tell me how you met him because you ended up working for Latane didn't you?

CA: Yes, Latane and I were very close.

JG: Okay, talk a little bit about that. How did you come to know Latane?

CA: I came to know Latane because at that time in 1962 Latane wanted to diverse his retail outlet and get into remodeling. And he somehow had heard about me being Jack Armstead's son and had gotten a job in Edna, Texas teaching commercial subjects at a high school. So, he contacted me and I went down to see him and we met...

JG: You were in Edna, Texas?

CA: Edna, Texas.

JG: Spell that please.

CA: E-d-n-a.

JG: Edna, okay. You were teaching there?

CA: Yes, only for about 8 months.

JG: Okay.

CA: Only 8 months. So, I met with Latane in May, he hired me in June as a trainee.

JG: And that was '62?

CA: That was 1962.

JG: And where did you interview?

CA: At the ??? in Houston.

JG: In Houston, and that was where the Great Texas Lumber Company was.

CA: Great Texas Lumber Company was rebranded. It was Temple Lumber Company up until December of 1963. (JG: yes) That is when Arthur came down and said he had to stop the bleeding. Which he did!

JG: (laughter)

CA: He did. Arthur fired Latane.

JG: Yes, yes, he wrote about it in the annual reports of the company.

CA: He did?

JG: Yes sir!

CA: I didn't know he wrote about it.

JG: He said it was like...I forget the word he used, but he wrote in the annual report and said it was a complete disaster or something like that. A total loss.

CA: Right. Southern Pine Lumber Company was financing Temple Lumber Company.

JG: Well, how I first met you was through the Houston Informer, the newspaper down there and you were photographed a few times.

CA: And at the library that day.

JG: So, tell me a little bit about Houston and working down there. Did you work at a lumber yard or were you a salesman, a traveling salesman?

CA: No, I worked at Temple Lumber yard for about nine months before I was brought into the remodeling department. The articles that you see is when I was in the remodeling department.

JG: Which lumber yard did you work at?

CA: The one in Houston, the one at 4807 Kirby Drive.

JG: Kirby Drive, okay. Is that the one in the Heights?

CA: No, no.

JG: Okay.

CA: Very exclusive.

JG: What did you do there?

CA: I was a remodeling salesman. I sold new kitchens, new bathrooms, and remodeling for people in Houston.

JG: White and black?

CA: Correct.

JG: To white and black customers?

CA: Yes, to white and black customers at that time.

JG: Okay, and that was '62ish?

CA: 1962-1963.

JG: What do you remember of that? How many black customers did you have?

CA: Oh, I really don't know to tell you the truth because I sold materials for remodeling to black people and white people if they had the money to buy. If they didn't have money to buy, we would arrange financing for them.

JG: I was just meaning like a percentage?

CA: I just really don't know.

JG: You don't remember okay, okay.

CA: Because the leads came in through what you called Dow, which was owned by U.S. News and World something like that and it didn't have any black or white on it, it just said this particular person or spot is going to be remodeled, go get it.

JG: So, you didn't deal directly with the owners or the customers?

CA: You mean the company, yes Latane.

JG: Yes, but I mean it wasn't customers coming to see you?

CA: No, customers were not coming in to see me. I would call and make appointments sometime.

JG: I understand.

CA: They would just drop into the store and look around. If I saw them, I tried to help them any way I could. So, after Arthur shut down Temple Lumber Company they quickly rebranded and called themselves Great Texas Lumber Company. That was Latane's doings, that happened in January of 1964 and I continued to work January, February and March in 1964. At this time, it was called wholesale, selling of building materials to contractors and developers and I only had two, that I remember, two black clients or developers. The rest were very wealthy people. One person you have probably heard of who has tremendous wealth today is Joe B. Hines. Joe B. Hines bought from me. Another guy named Pat Harness of Presidential Homes, he bought materials from me. The only black was Owens Construction Company who bought materials. That is the only black customer who bought from me at that time.

JG: Okay, I don't want to jump too far but to get to some of your material you sent to us I know you were a U.S. Department of Defense Finance Officer.

CA: Yes.

JG: And, I think you were selling oil to the South African government is that correct?

CA: That is correct.

JG: Was that during the sanctions that were going on?

CA: Yes, correct.

JG: How did that work?

CA: That worked because President George H. W. Bush put a clause in the 1986 anti-apartheid act saying that any company that was 51% owned by blacks in South Africa could do business with a company or organization or person who had 100% or 51% owned black in America. Well, that included me. I had something called Black International Business Exchange. So, sanctions didn't apply to me however we operated in a very quiet way.

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

CA: I don't mind.

JG: You were working for an American oil company, American Energy?

CA: No, I had a contract.

JG: Okay. You were working for yourself, what do you mean by that?

CA: The pie would be divided up if I brought business to them. If you look at that you'll see that I received about 50 cents per barrel of oil and at least 4 million barrels per month. That was South Africa.

JG: Did you travel to South Africa?

CA: Many times. I sent you my visas.

JG: Right, what was it like traveling in apartheid South Africa?

CA: Well for me it was like being in segregated United States, no difference for me. I had been to South Africa many times at the invitation of the government. Now these were trips that were very confidential and fortunately for us...I don't know if you know of a little island called Montserrat.

JG: No sir.

CA: When Montserrat was completely wiped out by ash and a hurricane, and that was good for us because most of the financial transactions we were doing were done through Montserrat, Bangkok, Hong Kong, South Africa, and France. I was living in France at that time and operating from France.

JG: From France okay. How did your job with the Department of Defense prepare you for this?

CA: By going to school and taking the courses that the Navy offered.

JG: Okay.

CA: I went to petroleum school. I went to all kinds of schools of the United States Navy. I went to places where the United States Navy had insulators that most Americans never heard of, top secret.

JG: Top Secret?

CA: At that time, I had a secret clearance.

JG: Were you ever in the C.I.A.?

CA: No, I was never in the C.I.A.

JG: Or if you were, you couldn't tell me.

CA: I had communication with the C.I.A. but no, I was never in C.I.A. It's a wonderful institution if it's used properly. It is a Central Intelligence Agency, that is what it is supposed to be, but it got into conducting wars and many other things after that.

JG: Did you work with both white and black South Africans?

CA: Yes.

JG: Yes!

CA: Mostly with the white South Africans because you know black South Africa, as you know, South Africa is tribal. It depends on which tribe you are from not which amount of knowledge you have but which tribe you are from and what connections you had or not have connections with apartheid South Africa. Apartheid South Africa was no different than United States in America. I felt very comfortable; they both were the same.

JG: Even living in Houston.

CA: I wasn't living in Houston at the time.

JG: Right, but I mean in shaping your background and for you to say that was Houston more or less segregated than your experiences?

CA: Houston was more segregated.

JG: Houston was more segregated?

CA: By a group of very wealthy men and they controlled Houston. I happened to know a few of them and Latane Temple knew more of them so, it was no different. What they were interested in was money and capitol at a fashion. People like Brown Brothers of the Brown Construction Company, Herman and his brother...the other Brown. I can't think of his name now. You know, they built that base in Cam Ranh Bay in South Vietnam so we were making money. It's hard for people to understand it. At that time, I was working for Humble Oil and we had the contract with the United States government for fuel supplies and other supplies. So, it was good.

JG: Well, how did you get from the Temple Lumber Company or Great Texas, when you worked for Latane how did you get...why and when did you leave?

CA: I left because there was nothing else for me to achieve at Great Texas Lumber Company and I drew a marketing plan and got an interview with Humble Oil and Finance Company. Latane happened to see that interview. Well, being as wealthy as Latane is and all his friends are wealthy, he wrote a letter to Humble Oil and gave me a high recommendation and I went to work for them in April of 1964.

JG: Okay.

CA: Now, I stayed there until about 1969 when I was offered a better opportunity in New York.

JG: What did you do in New York?

CA: In New York I worked for an advertising agency called Ogilvy and Mather.

JG: Can you spell that?

CA: Yes, O-g-i-l-v-y and Mather, M-a-t-h-e-r.

JG: Okay. What did you do there?

CA: I was the assistant accounting executive on three products, Ban Hammonds and Nodose. I stayed there for about a year and then another opportunity opened for me at General Foods when Marjorie Merriweather Post owned the company and her chief executive officer was Charles X. Cooke. I don't know if you've ever heard of him or not.

JG: No.

CA: Well by my being from Texas and X. Cooke being from Texas it was a common logy so I stayed there for about a year with the company, I guess.

JG: What did you do there?

CA: I was the assistant planning manager; I think it was. I think I sent you a copy of that. Associate Sales Planning Manager, and of course that was a very good job. I kept that job until McKenzie and Company came to town. When McKenzie and Company came to town, they cleaned house. They fired about four region managers, all the assistant managers, and a few ground managers. Well, that is what they do so, I'm...

JG: Then what after that. I think you started for U.S. Department of Defense in about '79. Is that correct?

CA: That is correct.

JG: What happened leading up to that?

CA: Leading up to that, you may have heard of a guy named Michael Milken.

JG: Yes.

CA: Michael Milken created a bond that the media called junk bond. Why they called it a junk bond, I don't know. But Michael Milken created an instrument that was high yield and high risk, and he had formed a company called Univex in New York funded by Drexel Brown Burham, anyway.

JG: Drexel what?

CA: Drexel Burham, B-u-r-h-a-m.

JG: Okay Burham.

CA: Lam, L-a-m-b-e-r-t. Now that company was created to do business with black South Africa. However, Michael decided to withdraw funding of it because he had his problems with the stocks in New York. They convicted him on some charge so he went to prison.

JG: On what charge?

CA: I don't know, I don't know what charge it was. He went to prison, served his time, and paid a \$500 million dollar fine and was released. And he still had \$500 million dollars to spend. I never met Michael Milken. I was operating in New York and Michael Milken was operating out of Modesto, California, not New York.

JG: Okay.

CA: Which he created \$5 million from it, that is what Wall Street does. It creates financial investments and then trades them. So that is how my friend and neighbor was president of Univex and my other friend was chairman of the board and we worked together in advertisement. See once you are in that circle people protect each other. They don't just throw you out to the wolves. They protect each other.

JG: So how did you...

CA: They get you into what I called retirement but I really wasn't retirement because I would get assignments ever so often.

JG: So, talk about going to work for the Department of Defense.

CA: Department of Defense...I was hitchhiking in the South of France and I met an American who worked for the Department of Defense.

JG: How did you get to France? What brought you to France to hitch hike?

CA: What brought me to France was my wife. We weren't married then we were just dating. My wife was born in Paris.

JG: Oh okay.

CA: We met in New York so I just decided I can take a hike and go to the South of France and see what that was like and I liked it.

JG: Okay.

CA: I met this guy who introduced me to a woman in New Jersey who worked for the Department of Defense. She interviewed me and they had a collection on me that you wouldn't believe going all the way back to my birth in Diboll, Texas, and they showed it to me. They said "well you've never been in jail, you've never been included in any crimes, you have a clean record, we think we can do something with you." It was a woman.

JG: Was she white or black? What race was she?

CA: Italian, yes. She says to me "are you free to travel?" I thought she was joking and I said "yes, I am." She said "Well meet me in New Jersey at the Silver Spade." She said "I want to take you to the movies. I want to show you what you looked like in 1962," and here I am on the screen in 1962 at a McDonalds or a Burger King or something like that. "I just wanted to show you that." She said "well as far as we are concerned you've passed all the tests that we have for you." She said "how free are you to travel?" I said "I'm free to travel anytime." She said "well tomorrow you are going to leave on Pan Am Flight whatever it was to Athens Greece. Here is some money and here is directions and good luck and good bye." And, I never saw her again. I arrived in Athens by I think Pan Am or TWA, whichever are American flight carrier, and as soon as I disembarked at Leonardo Da Vinci Airport our pilot decided to go on strike. So, I had no way to get to Naples, Italy because that is where I was going.

JG: So, you're stranded in Athens?

CA: I wasn't stranded because I met a young Jewish guy who was sending his son to school in Italy to learn Italian so he could go into business. So, he told me how to go down to get to the train station, so I went down and took the train. I rode a train all night to Naples, Italy. And my contact was supposed to meet me at 12:01 am. I met my contact at midnight and at 12:01 we left Naples and I didn't see America again for about a year.

JG: Did you see your wife in the meantime, or your girlfriend?

CA: No, didn't see her either because she was working at the United Nations.

JG: So, what did you do during that year?

CA: I'm sorry?

JG: What did you do during that year?

CA: During 1979?

JG: Yes.

CA: During 1979 I spent working for the department, the Department of Defense in Intelligence Acquisition Analysis and Presentation. I learned how to grade fuel and my job was to grade J.P. 5 and DSM fuel.

JG: To grade it like g-r-a-d-e?

CA: Yes, to make sure there were no impurities in it. And to make sure the flash quart was correct. So, that is what I did for that year and to buy it, good quality.

JG: Who would you buy it from?

CA: You buy it from the local suppliers, like the local suppliers, the Italian suppliers and local Spanish suppliers.

JG: And supply it to??

CA: The U.S.

JG: Oh okay.

CA: And you know you learn a lot because some of those guys would try to cheat you. They would bill you for 100,000 gallons, and only pump 50 [thousand], especially the Italians. But what they didn't know was that we had a meter on the ship itself that was measuring. That is how we caught them.

JG: Okay.

CA: And during that time, we had something called green checks. I was authorized to issue green checks for whatever amount it is. The U.S. Government backs it anywhere in the world.

JG: Were there other people doing a similar job to what you were doing? Did you work with other people doing the same thing?

CA: No, not really. I seemed like a lone wolf! My boss was in New Jersey and I was still in D.C. and I signed a letter to that effect. You are traveling at your own risk, the United States State Department or Defense Department vowed that it has no knowledge or contact with you.

JG: So how did you represent yourself to the people you bought the fuel from?

CA: Well, you have what they call husbanding agents in those countries. They come down to the ships because they want to sell. I didn't have to look for them, they look for us. And every time we pull into port they are there. There was many of them. They want the American dollar and they want to sell to America. So, there was no looking. Every month we used to meet in Tulong or near the south of France. The French government,

the United States Government, the British Government and we exchanged information. That still goes on. And every 30 days we were in Holy Loch, Scotland, that continues today.

JG: Scotland?

CA: Holy Loch, Scotland.

JG: And those would be face-to-face meetings?

CA: Yes, face-to-face meetings.

JG: Were there other blacks working?

CA: No.

JG: You were the only one?

CA: That is right.

JG: What was that like?

CA: As I said to you it was nothing, it was segregated America. I was born under that. I grew up under that so I was taught survival skills, so I understood how to operate with that and through that.

JG: So, you did that until about 1986 is that correct?

CA: That is correct.

JG: How did you get from that to working with South Africa?

CA: Because my wife worked at the desk of the United Nations office that was linked to the Netherlands and she had all the oil reports and transition reports. Now the young guy who really made good was Mark Rich. You may have heard of Mark Rich. He made a tremendous amount of money. So, she would give me those reports and I told her one day I said listen "give me the one with the South African trade office is located." She did and I went to see them, and when I went to see them, they made me an offer. Come to South Africa and see for yourself, and they paid for it, first class. No problem, I went and we did business.

JG: Now when you say you did business was it you yourself or were you working for...?

CA: No, for myself and the South African Government. As you know, South Africa at that time needed oil. It was no different selling them oil than you buying a tank of gas for your car.

JG: So, what was the Strategic Fuel Fund?

CA: The Strategic Fuel Fund was the fund that funded oil purchases for the government of South Africa. It was a secret fund at that time. SFF, Strategic Fuel Fund, that went on up until just prior to Mandela being released from prison. When I first started going to South Africa, Mandela was still in prison but he had been transferred from Robin Island to Pollsmoor Prison. You should have seen Pollsmoor Prison, man he was catered to. You saw him on television probably when he first went in. Trimmed, dress nicely, I said that is the prison I want to go to, where Mandela was. (laughter) But the first few years before that he was busting rocks on Robins Island. That is where the Indian Ocean meets the Atlantic Ocean. It is very dangerous. A lot of ships get sunk around that place.

JG: Tell me about Tolman Trading and Petrinex?

CA: Petrinex and Tolman Trading were South African companies. These companies were interested in trading with America if they could get the product. They were like middle men that is all, hustlers.

JG: But the Strategic Fuel Fund was money set up to make the purchases.

CA: Exactly, very powerful people in England and in South Africa.

JG: So, who did you report to?

CA: The Strategic Fuel Fund?

JG: Yes, I'm still just trying to understand who...

CA: Oh, I will tell you, I worked for myself.

JG: You worked for yourself?

CA: Yes, I think I send you the name of the person who was over the Strategic Fuel Fund. I can't think of his name now but I put it in the little box to you.

JG: Okay. And again, you were telling me about George H. W. Bush had arranged where it could get by the sanctions?

CA: Yes, he did a beautiful thing for people. Many people missed that, George H. W. Bush, if you look at that 1986 anti-apartheid act copy which I sent to you, you will see that.

JG: Okay, I'm just writing down some notes.

CA: That is okay, you'll probably have to look at that stuff and have more questions as we go along. I will call you back in a few days or so to answer any questions you have. But now you have a good picture of what Diboll was like between 1940 and 1950.

JG: Yes sir, and going back to that anything else you want to add, just some memories that you have of the school, the town, any particular personalities in the black community.

CA: I tell you one I have that is funny. Many people have probably heard this story. You know when the Freedom Riders came to Diboll to the Pine Bough Restaurant (JG: yes) I just happened to be sitting with Arthur that day. We were just sitting and talking about nothing. I think a woman by the name of Jimmie Ferguson had called Arthur and said "Mr. Temple there is whole bunch of Negroes on buses and coming to the Pine Bough." So, Arthur said "great, I will tell you what, I'm coming down to the Pine Bough and I'm going to run the cash register and Lottie is going to serve everybody." Now you can imagine what she felt like.

JG: You heard that story or you were with Arthur when...

CA: I was with him when the story happened.

JG: Where were y'all?

CA: In his office.

JG: In his office, okay.

CA: Have you ever been in his office? His old office?

JG: Well not when he had an office there but I've been in it when they used it for storage.

CA: You may remember the first part of the office was where Lottie sat. She had a desk right by the door. Then the second part of the office was Arthur's office. He had two pictures on the wall, one of his grandfather and one of his father and he had a toilet and sink where you could make coffee. Very simple, remember, he lived like the workers. The house he lived in was owned by the company, the car he drove was owned by the company. The servants worked for the company not him, not him personally.

JG: Did you go down to the Pine Bough that day?

CA: No, we sort of laughed about it afterwards. I don't know what happened after that I didn't go no.

JG: That would have been...that was after the Civil Rights Act, I guess, is that correct?

CA: That would have been about 1960-something.

JG: Yes, putting the pieces together I think it would have been after the Civil Rights Act, that summer of '64.

CA: I think you're right. At that point we were planning to put public housing in Diboll, the Diboll Housing Authority, and we were meeting with Neil Pickett who was the FHA Director for the state of Texas and the guy from Harvard. I think I sent you a picture of him.

JG: Did you know Neil Pickett?

CA: Yes.

JG: Did you meet him?

CA: Yes, I met him at his Houston office.

JG: Yes, talk about that.

CA: A very nice guy, Mr. Neil Pickett.

JG: He was the mayor, is that right?

CA: No, he was not the mayor of Houston at that time I don't believe. I think Welch was the mayor (JG: okay) and Neil Pickett has a street named after him in Diboll.

JG: Yes sir.

CA: By the way Jonathan, if you have a map of Diboll and a map of Lufkin, and if it's not too much inconvenience send that to me please. Just put it in the mail.

JG: Okay. And I will send you too, there is...it was based out of Lufkin, it was known as the Negro Chamber of Commerce.

CA: Yes, I've heard of it.

JG: And in 1956 they did a book called "The Mirror" M-i-r-r-o-r and it is sort of...a Chamber of Commerce type publication, but it is in the days of segregation. It shows the black businesses and the schools and the churches. And, so we will look through there and see if there is some interested pages that might interest you and we will try to send those as well.

CA: Okay thank you!

JG: But like I said we have those on our website too if you do have access to the internet, you would be able to look at all that as well. We probably have about 300,000 pages of documents now on our website.

CA: Wow!

JG: All the old Buzz Saws...sorry.

CA: Did you ever meet Latane Temple?

JG: No sir I did not. I have talked to a lot of people that did know him though but no sir I did not.

CA: A great guy. You know he moved to Mexico to an artist colony and he died there in 1997.

JG: Did you keep in touch with him until the end?

CA: Yes, as a matter of fact I spoke with him about two years or so before he moved there and he had married a woman named Billie and he was telling me all about that. Yes, we kept in touch with each other. He was in Mexico in San Miguel at that time and I was living...my wife and I were living in Big Skills, New York in Westchester County at that time and of course in 1999 we left America.

JG: Okay so you've lived in Paris ever since, okay.

CA: Yes, have you ever been to Paris?

JG: No sir.

CA: Well, if you ever come call the number on my card, if I'm still alive.

JG: Okay, hey while I have you on the phone do you mind giving me your telephone number?

CA: I don't even know my telephone number myself but I'm going to go get it. Hold on just a moment.

JG: Just a moment.

CA: Hello.

JG: Yes. (disconnected)

CA: Let me give you this number because it is a long number. If you are dialing direct from the USA here is the number you would dial.

JG: (gives number)

CA: That is correct. And, if you are in Paris just call the number on my business card.

JG: Okay. Well, like I said going through here, there is that picture I was telling you about and you were a junior class officer at Dunbar School and you look like you are the tallest one there.

CA: Probably so. (laughter)

JG: It said that Heiskell Royal was the sponsor and Mrs. L. L. Simms (CA: yes) and Fayette McDonald was president. Anyway, I will try to send you that page when we send your stuff.

CA: And any questions you have in the future please do not hesitate to write to me or call or ask me.

JG: We will send you that Cornbread Whistle and some pages out of the Mirror.

CA: I really appreciate that Cornbread Whistle because that is actually true.

JG: Okay, so the mailing address that you put on that box that will be where we send this to right?

CA: Yes.

JG: It's been a while since we sent anything overseas, but we just write it up just as you have it on there, I guess.

CA: Just a quick question here. Is the Temple...I guess most of the Temple interest, you can't find the name of Temple anymore? The Temple Outreach Center it's still controlled by the Temple Foundation, correct?

JG: Well, yes sir, the T.L.L. Temple Foundation is active. What was the question though the Temple Outreach Center? I'm not sure.

CA: The Christian Outreach Center.

JG: Oh yes sir, yes sir, that is still on going, yes sir.

CA: Do you ever see Chotsy Temple? We had met here in Paris a few years ago and had lunch together.

JG: Oh okay!

CA: That was about eleven months before Buddy's death.

JG: Yes...

CA: You know Chotsy?

JG: Yes sir.

CA: You ever see her?

JG: Occasionally.

CA: Good, well if you do see her tell her I said hello.

JG: Okay.

CA: The Temple Foundation is it still in Lufkin?

JG: Yes sir.

CA: Okay, it is still there that is good. You know, Arthur was waiting for Chotsy and Buddy to do something and he didn't make his move until about 1998. That is when he cashed out with Kenny Jastrow which I don't know, gave him money and power at that time. How is Ellen Temple? She is your boss, right?

JG: More or less, yes sir. She is still very active.

CA: By active, you mean?

JG: Well, she went back to school. She has a bachelors and masters degrees so she took some courses at the University of Texas this past fall.

CA: She went back to school?

JG: Yes sir, and she is making documentary films now. She is working on a documentary of the Women's Right to Vote in Texas.

CA: Good.

JG: She had published a book a number of years ago about it so now she is working with the University of Texas film scholar and producer and they are working on that film and...

CA: I'm glad to hear that. Now, the bank is in front of The History Center?

JG: Yes sir.

CA: Is that still a Temple bank?

JG: Well, it sold, they sold to a bank out of Tyler, Texas a couple of years back. It is known as Southside Bank now.

CA: Okay. And, where the Temple Inland and Forest Products office used to be who is in that place?

JG: Georgia Pacific.

CA: Okay, Georgia Pacific. So, Kenny Jastrow sold things out to Georgia Pacific.

JG: Well, no they sold to...he pretty much gutted the company and sold all the land and so ...

CA: He sold all the land?

JG: Yes, and then Temple Inland was just manufacturing only. They sold all the land to timber investment and management organization and that was the year after Mr. Temple died.

CA: In 2007.

JG: Yes, so Temple Inland was just manufacturing only and then I.P bought Temple Inland but they really didn't want the...they just wanted the paper side of it not the building products side so they sold all the building products to Georgia Pacific. So, it was really a three-part divestiture, I guess. The lands went first, then the plants went and then I.P. didn't want the building materials so they sold that to Georgia Pacific.

CA: Oh okay, I guess I'm all up to date. If you see Chotsy tell her I asked about her.

JG: I sure will and that is about what I had for today. I appreciate the visit. Like I said give us some time and we will send this to you and try to get this to you in the mail. Here is another picture I'm looking at is the basketball team at Dunbar and you are there.

CA: Yes, number 13!

JG: Let's see, Howard McClain...yep 13, you are between Howard McClain and Coach Redd.

CA: Yes, I remember that. Well, I'm glad you got the documents and I may have more to send. I don't know really but if I do I will.

JG: Okay, well Mr. Armstead...

CA: Thank you for the call and thank you for the interview.

JG: Thank you!

CA: I understand you're writing a book.

JG: I'm writing a book about some of the lands that the Temples, the Foundation still owns but it was Boggy Slough.

CA: I know it very well.

JG: Okay.

CA: He gave Boggy Slough South. He gave Boggy Slough west to Chotsy and Chotsy planted about 27 acres of grapes on that property and that property is near San Francisco. I'm familiar with the transaction. It's in Napa Valley, California.

JG: Yes, but I'm talking about Boggy Slough in Trinity County, Texas.

CA: Yes, I'm familiar with it very well. That all went to Buddy.

JG: Well, no, the Foundation owns it.

CA: The Foundation owns it?

JG: Yes sir, the T. L.L. Temple Foundation owns it and a little bit of the south end Buddy and Chotsy both own through Mr. Temple.

CA: Okay, the south end.

JG: It's 20,000 acres and Buddy and Chotsy own just...well Ellen and Chotsy own just under a 1,000 of the 20,000. Did you ever go out there to the old clubhouse?

CA: Yes, many times. It is right on the Trinity River.

JG: The Neches River.

CA: I'm sorry the Neches River, yes. It is right on the Neches River.

JG: Did you go to the clubhouse?

CA: No, I never went to the clubhouse.

JG: Okay.

CA: Because I couldn't go, it was segregated.

JG: They used to have staff...all the staff that worked out there were African Americans, the wait staff.

CA: Yes, I know they were my father worked out there. He was a barbecue guy.

JG: Okay.

CA: He used to barbecue for Boggy Slough and also for the nineteenth of June in Diboll.

JG: Juneteenth, yes sir.

CA: He worked as a laborer and got odd jobs as the barbecue person and he used to cut meat too.

JG: Okay.

CA: Because at that time my father was working at the mill, and he used to cut the meat for a guy name Wyatt, who had a Wyatt store in the African American community, the colored community.

JG: The blacks, yes sir.

CA: That is what they were called, colored people. So, we had plenty of food to eat but no money. I would say it was a great time. It helped me, my mother and father both taught me management skills. How to manage poor white uneducated people. I used to walk downtown Lufkin sometimes and she would tell me, "Now listen if you see a white woman coming down the sidewalk you get off the sidewalk and go someplace else. Give her plenty of room." She was telling about Emmett Till was killed in Mississippi. I was 15. So, I had been navigating those skills since I was born, so South Africa was nothing. Apartheid and America segregated was nothing different.

JG: Okay, well Mr. Armstead thank you again and we will get this off to you.

CA: Thank you for the interview and if I can help in any kind of way, please let me know.

JG: Okay thank you and you have a good rest of the evening.

CA: Thank you and you too, bye now.

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END OF INTERVIEW

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