

MILDRED KITCHENS

Interview 297a

August 05, 2020, by telephone

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ABSTRACT:

In this telephone interview with Patsy Colbert, Diboll native Mildred Griffith Kitchens answers questions about growing up in Diboll and Lufkin, going to college in Denton, working for the Works Progress Administration in various parts of East Texas, and marriage during World War II. Mrs. Kitchens remembers the Durham and Chandler families, going to school in Diboll's small school, transferring to Lufkin's schools, and starting the cheerleading program in Lufkin. She recalls Lufkin coach Abe Martin and writing a column for the Lufkin Daily News. Mrs. Kitchens also talks about earning money to attend college at what is now Texas Women's University during the Depression and her first job after graduation as a social worker for the WPA. She also tells Patsy about meeting her husband and marrying him before he was sent overseas during World War II.

Patsy Colbert (hereafter PC): Today is August 5, 2020; I'm Patsy Colbert and I'm here at The History Center in Diboll, Texas and I'm going to be doing an oral history interview today with Mrs. Mildred Griffith Kitchens who is residing in Denton, Texas and we are doing this via the telephone today. Mrs. Kitchens I thank you for joining me today and we will just start off if you can tell me when and where you were born.

Mildred Kitchens (hereafter MK): Thank you! I was born in Diboll, Texas, July 17, 1920 and I think at the time I was born Dr. Crab was the company doctor.

PC: Dr. Crab, okay. So, you just celebrated your 100th birthday. That is amazing.

MK: It was wonderful!

PC: Did they have a special party for you?

MK: We had a party. We are locked in because of the virus. I'm in the facility called Brookdale, pretty well known throughout Texas and we had under the carport, portecochere there, we had a party set up for my close friends and family and about 16 people were there.

PC: Oh, that is wonderful, that is quite a blessing. That is awesome and just for the recording the virus she is referring to is the COVID-19 virus that we are all dealing with right now. Mrs. Kitchens can you tell me who your parents were?

MK: Tell you what please?

PC: Who your parents were?

MK: My parents were John C. Griffith and Georgia White Griffith.

PC: Okay, and did your father work for the company?

MK: He worked for the Planer Mill which is what we called the Southern Pine Lumber Company at that time. He worked for them and my mother, who was only 15 or 16 years old, stayed home. I have an older sister.

PC: Okay, and tell me about your siblings, your sister.

MK: Our family consisted of my mother, father and my older sister Margarette Griffith and my younger sister Joyce Griffith, and our grandfather Tom White lived with us most of the time. In those days you didn't have facilities for old people; you took them into your home and that is what everybody did in the 1900's, 1920's.

PC: Yes ma'am, now did your grandfather Tom White, did he work for Southern Pine Lumber Company at any time?

MK: He was retired. He had been a farmer all his life at Shawnee Prairie (**PC:** okay) down below Huntington there, and after his wife died, when my mother was born, he stayed there for many years but did most of his business in Lufkin.

PC: Okay, do you have any memories as a child going to your grandparent's house in Shawnee Prairie?

MK: No, not there. We went to my Griffith grandparents who were right out of Burke, between Burke and Lufkin.

PC: Oh okay.

MK: When we had family reunions, they were usually on my father's part. Tom White's family lived, he had two daughters and two sons and they didn't live near each other. One daughter, Mabel, lived in Louisiana; Nolan lived in the country out of Huntington. Frank lived in Livingston and worked for his brother Ed, who had the Chevrolet Company, if you can believe it that long ago. Then we lived in Diboll so we were all separated by some miles at that time.

PC: Yes ma'am; and who were your grandparents that lived at Burke? What were their names?

MK: Well, they were the Griffith's and I seem to think my grandfather's name was Ben, but I'm not certain. A friend of mine is doing the DNA on the Griffith clan now and has found all of my father's brothers and sisters or who they were at that time. Most of them are dead now of course. It was a lot of family at that time. They had a lot of children, you know.

PC: Yes ma'am.

MK: I tell you near us, we lived in Diboll, but in Lufkin my father's sister, Emma Collins, lived. Emma Collins was a seamstress, alteration lady for the Abrahms store there and she had a daughter Sara five days younger than I, so, we were together quite a bit.

PC: Tell me about your school days when you started to school in Diboll.

MK: Diboll had a nice school yard, fenced of course. All the buildings were made of lumber and I guess as I looked at pictures, I had I think they made our desks. I don't think they were custom made desks, but they were all alike anyhow. It went through eleven grades of course; the grammar school from first grade to sixth was on one side of the campus and the high school on the other. We had a large privy (outhouse) way down the road there, the campus there, from the buildings and that was the bathroom facilities for both units of school. Before I went to school, two sisters from Lufkin came down and I seem to think their names were Tennie, but I'm not sure; and started a little Kindergarten and I was five and a half years old but my parents let me go to the Kindergarten, which was at the edge of the campus of grammar school. That is where I met Lura Durham and Marjorie O'Hara, as little girls, five and a half years old to six and a half years old and we went to Kindergarten and learned the ABC's and little poems we said and to count to 100 and many other things they teach in first grade.

PC: So, if you were five that was 1925.

MK: Yes.

PC: Did all the kids go to Kindergarten or was this just a special, or did your parents pay for this kindergarten?

MK: There must have been about 25 or 30 of us and I'm not sure who they were. I can remember the school was one building and we had little chairs and tables.

PC: But it was part of the Diboll School District?

MK: No, it was a private thing.

PC: It was private, okay.

MK: Those two women came down and started I think for practice teaching, you know, in those days as now you practice teach a semester or two because later, they were teachers in the Lufkin School district.

PC: Okay but you remember their names?

MK: All I can think of is Tinney sisters, T-i-n-n-e-y; but I could be wrong about that. That was a long time ago.

PC: Okay, there was a Tennie Havard...

MK: When the next September came, we were supposed to go to the regular Diboll public school and when we got there, they didn't have enough desks at the first grade for Marjorie, Lura and myself. They were short three desks and so they talked to our parents about putting us in the second grade since we had most of the instruction that first grade gives and so they did. That put me, I would be 6 years old, six and a half; my birthday comes in the summer between times.

PC: Yes ma'am.

MK: So, the three of us were in the second grade skipping the first grade, and we went on through school that way, the third, fourth, fifth and sixth alright; for some reason we had learned enough we could maneuver the second grade.

PC: So, you actually never went to first grade.

MK: We never went to first grade.

PC: Well, my goodness.

MK: I think those two teachers were practice teachers in Kindergarten, but using first grade material. That is all I can come up with.

PC: Yes ma'am.

MK: It didn't seem to matter because all three of us graduated at the same time and made good grades and seemed to fit in well even though we were a little younger. I'm not sure about Marjorie and Lura's birthdays. They could have already been six and a half or seven but I was six and a half I know in the second grade.

PC: Do you remember your second-grade teacher, her name?

MK: I can't quite remember her, but my third-grade teacher was Mrs. Wilkerson, pretty well. I remember her well because of two things. One is she was a blonde and she was pretty and secondly everybody talked about it because she had a boyfriend whom she later married who came to Diboll on his motorcycle. And, at that time that was kind of questionable; a man who rode a motorcycle. You know it is kind of like a race car driver?

PC: Yes ma'am.

MK: I think they later married and became a family of the Fuller family in that area. They could have moved but they started in Diboll.

PC: That would have been an unusual scene a young guy riding a motorcycle at that time.

MK: I never saw a man on a motorcycle to be pulling up. Then about 4th grade, every spring they had a Maypole celebration and I remember a Maypole on campus with ribbons and everybody gathered around and they elected a queen. Little school girl queen, and it was kind of a big thing.

PC: Yes ma'am.

MK: Our neighbor Linda Carol was the queen one year; she lived next door to us and I was so envious of her because she got a little crown and was dressed up in some special clothes. It was a big thing for Diboll.

PC: Yes ma'am, the Maypole. Do you remember the name of a teacher named Miss Elodie Miles? Miss Elodie?

MK: No, I don't remember Miss Elodie. I remember a Miss Monzingo in the 6th grade.

PC: Monzingo?

MK: Mrs. Monzingo took Marjorie, Lura and myself to Nacogdoches on a long weekend to meet her family and we were there about two and half days. We had never been to Nacogdoches; we thought it was like going to New York City. You know?

PC: Yes ma'am.

MK: We were so impressed! That I remember well.

PC: What nationality was Miss Monzingo?

MK: She could have been Hispanic but I'm not sure. I don't remember that she was any different looking or speaking than anyone else.

PC: Okay, it was a very unusual name.

MK: She was a good teacher and we liked her so much. [**PC:** yes ma'am] Our house burned in the summer after the sixth grade. I was in Galveston with the Durham's and Lura and I think Marjorie was there with us and maybe a girl named Sis Pickle.

PC: Yes ma'am.

MK: Seemed to me there were four of us at the Galvez room where the Durham's were in another. Mr. Durham often went to Galveston to see a man named...the man who

owned the railroad...I'll think of his name. I had it on my mind but it slipped away. We went to Galveston for about three days or four days and it was great.

PC: That was a big trip!

MK: Between the sixth and seventh grade we moved to Lufkin though because there was not another company house available. You see in Diboll everybody lived in the company houses.

PC: Yes ma'am. Do you know...

MK: There was no private residences available either.

PC: Do you know how your house burned, what happened?

MK: Our house burned because my mother cooked on a wooden stove in the kitchen and that wasn't unusual for the house to burn. We all had wooden houses very similar to each other, picket fences, yards. We all had outdoor privies except the ones who were higher up in the company. They had larger houses and they had indoor facilities; commodes and hot water heaters and things like that, but we didn't have. The common folks lived with wooden stoves and privies.

PC: Yes ma'am. Now, tell me about your friends in Diboll, your closest acquaintances. I know you mentioned the Durham's and Lura Durham. Anything else you want to share about them or any other close friends you had while in Diboll?

MK: Well one of our neighbors, Mrs. Smith, she lived about two doors down from us had a little daughter named Marguerite Smith and she was really a little older than we were but about once or twice a year she would come by and tell us her momma was going to make tamales; which was an unusual thing for us in those days and several of us would go down to their house and sit on the kitchen floor and Mrs. Smith would show us how to make tamales. When she got the batch made, she would take two or three out and cool them and pass them to us to have one and it was festive. It was wonderful!

PC: Yes ma'am, eating tamales freshly made tamales.

MK: Yes now, Mrs. Smith made them herself; Mrs. Smith made.

PC: Anything specific about the company house that you lived in that you remember that you want to share?

MK: Honey we all had...it was a one-bedroom house with a kitchen and a little back porch, a little dining area and a living area, the little front porch was screened in usually, but we had also a sleeping porch and nearly everybody did; built on, it had screens and it had curtain type things that rolled up in the summer and let down in the winter to keep

the air out pretty much and we had double beds out there; three double beds on that sleeping porch.

PC: Yes, ma'am that was some fun summer nights wasn't it.

MK: Our family slept on the sleeping porch. It was sort of the pattern for a lot of the families.

PC: Now you said you were good friends with Lura Durham. Is that the daughter of Paul Durham, Sr.?

MK: E. C. Durham.

PC: Oh E. C. Durham, excuse me, E. C. Durham's daughter Lura.

MK: Good friends of the owners of the mill and the O'Hara's and Rutland's and other dignitaries. Lura had two older brothers who went to A&M, Edwin and Jake. Lura was sort of young in age really and Mr. Durham, Mrs. Durham was not well but he worried about her being lonely so throughout our lifetime until we both went to college he would come by or get in touch with my family and asked if I could go somewhere with them as company or companion to Lura. So, we went many places, Houston, Dallas, Galveston, many places and Lura and I were close friends because I was her companion. Until the fact that when we went to college we didn't live as friends together anymore, but I was very lucky that the Durham's took me so many places because otherwise I wouldn't have learned as much as I did, without leaving home and going places.

PC: Yes ma'am. Anything specific about Mr. E. C. Durham that you remember that you want to share about his work or his job with Southern Pine Lumber Company?

MK: They were gracious and kind to me until I married and even later. (**PC:** yes ma'am) I attended his funeral after I married and Lura was married. At that time, I took her mother-in-law along from Tyler down to Lufkin, where he was buried, I think.

PC: So, you and Lura were the same age?

MK: Mr. O'Hara I didn't know that well but his daughter Dot was beautiful. I knew her. That was Marjorie's older sister and Marjorie had a brother who was not there, off at college I think most of the time or somewhere. There were quite a few people in Diboll who were always our friends. The Devereaux's across the street from us had a telephone we could use if we had to. The Wilkerson's...

PC: Was that...

MK: Josephine Rutland and her family; the Kirkland's, Shirley Ann Kirkland and her family. Those were all the people I can remember their faces you know?

PC: Yes ma'am. Was the Devereaux was that Mr. Dred Devereaux?

MK: I don't know his first name but he had a daughter who was my older sister's friend, Marguerite's friend. I know that we went across the railroad tracks; they lived right in front of us but across the railroad track which ran right through the middle of town. If we got calls on his phone, their phone, they would tell us somebody called and we would call them back.

PC: Oh, that is nice. Can you describe to me where your house was located when you lived in Diboll?

MK: Well at first, we were on the second row on the east side next to a family named Wilkerson and a couple named Turner, Charles and Verna Turner. But, about the time that happened my father left the Planer Mill and took over the cleaning and pressing shop and they moved us over to a house on the west side of the railroad track and next to us were the Carol's on one side and the Kirkland's on the other. So, we lived on Main Street there on the west side.

PC: Okay.

MK: On the east side were the big houses and the dignitaries had the big houses.

PC: Yes ma'am. So, he left the planer mill and went to work for a different department?

MK: No, they had a little shop called the Clean and Pressing Shop. At that time men of worth, not their work, but the men who ran things wore pongee suits. Pongee was a Chinese fabric like silk and it had to be hand done, hand washed and hand pressed and that little shop was put up because of the pongee suits that most of the dignitaries. He had two workmen; a man who cleaned the clothes and a man who pressed on the big pressing machine and my dad would go around and gather them up from the front porches and then deliver them later.

PC: Okay, so a cleaning and pressing of clothing, clean and pressing shop, a cleaner.

MK: It was open but few families could use it.

PC: So, he would go around and pick up the suits and clean them for the dignitaries and then deliver them back to their home.

MK: Yes, later.

PC: Okay.

MK: My father fell in love with old john barley corn and would disappear for two or three days at a time and my mother would have to go to the shop and keep it going and we were little children at home; all three of us.

PC: Yes ma'am.

MK: So, two colored women would come, one in the morning and her daughter would come in the afternoon, Aunt Callie and Aunt Cassie; one would come in the morning and get us fed and dressed for whatever the day demanded and then at one o'clock after lunch when we were put down for naps the other one came and stayed until after supper. They did the washing and they did most of the housework and that kind of thing.

PC: So, these are two African American ladies?

MK: Black women.

PC: Okay black women.

MK: Two of them, they may have been mother and daughter. I really don't know at this time in life what they were but mother and daughter I think, Cassie and Callie.

PC: Okay, so did your mother work at the cleaners?

MK: No, they worked at our house...

PC: No, your mother?

MK: My mother's children while she went over to the cleaners and kept the shop open and the work going while my father was out somewhere.

PC: Yes ma'am.

MK: We had that for quite a while until Marguerite was in school and I was in school. Joyce was by then, my mother was...we were no longer in the cleaning business and my mother took care of Joyce. She was four years younger than I.

PC: Yes ma'am.

MK: It blends in with our rearing because we had these wonderful black women who taught us what they knew along with what we learned later in school; you know.

PC: Yes ma'am. Now do you remember going to the commissary store?

MK: Oh yes, I loved to go! I can see it in my mind going up those big steps, everything wooden. The first thing was the post office and next to it was the drug store, if I remember correctly; then the big Commissary where the clothing on one side and the groceries at the back. Then was the market and beyond the market was the ice house.

PC: Yes ma'am. Anything particular...any vivid memory you have of going to the commissary? Something you purchased? Somebody who worked there or a story you want to share about that?

MK: Well, Lura and I when we were playing, sometimes we would dress up in her mother's clothes and go across the street, across the railroad track to the commissary and go to the post office and get their mail. We knew how to open their mailboxes and to us that was a big treat. A big treat!

PC: Yes ma'am.

MK: I remember the Durham's were very kind and when we had a dime, we would get an ice cream sandwich. I forgot what they called them in those days, Eskimo pie! It was a treat. The people in the Commissary were always very accommodating; you know prices were so low, bread was 15 cents a loaf, you know (**PC:** yes ma'am) and stuff like that. Ice was delivered by a man in a wagon with a mule and he would bring the ice to the back of your house, go in the back door, which was unlocked and put it in your refrigerator.

PC: Oh wow! Do you remember how much the ice cost?

MK: We were the first people in Diboll to have a refrigerator with copper coils that the ice would sit on and a little faucet in the front of it so you could get cold water out of the refrigerator.

PC: Oh goodness!

MK: The back door was always unlocked and the neighborhood kids knew how to come in and get ice water. (laughter)

PC: So, your mother had a trail of children all the time; in and out.

MK: Well in and out, our neighbors' kids, you know.

PC: Well, that was big stuff to have a cold-water fountain.

MK: Well, it was something he had seen somewhere and brought home. I don't know if there were others in town but that colored man would put that big block of ice on top of those coils and then the water bottle sat on top as it does today and it would be in the coils and you get the faucet to get you a cup of water, you know, ice water.

PC: Yes ma'am.

MK: We also had the first car with crank up and down windows.

PC: Goodness, what kind of car was it do you know?

MK: Well, I think it was a Buick, but I surely could be wrong. It was blue, I know that. Dad had a touring car with canvas on the side that you snapped on and off to keep air out; everybody had that but Daddy came in with this car, two door or four door car and showed us that you could crank the windows up and down and the whole neighborhood came over and helped themselves to see how it worked.

PC: My goodness, that was exciting.

MK: Well in Diboll; we had one of the first radios and after supper our little living room would be crowded with neighbors, men, women and children, and we would turn the radio on. We got static mostly, one station but it was a radio; the first in Diboll but there could have been others everywhere. I don't know but...

PC: Do you know if he purchased the radio at the Commissary store?

MK: I don't think so. I think he brought it in from somewhere. He was on one of those...as I told you, he would leave for several days and come back...

PC: Oh yes ma'am.

MK: ...he went and he had friends a lot of places. He did a lot of stuff in Lufkin at that time even though we lived in Diboll.

PC: Did you know Mrs. Fannie Farrington?

MK: I knew the Farrington's.

PC: She worked at the Commissary store.

MK: Well yes, we bought our shoes and our clothes there with the company money which is in your brochure. The company issued its own money.

PC: Yes ma'am.

MK: It was like poker chips more or less.

PC: Yes ma'am; I was wanting to ask you if you remember those.

MK: Very well, and I remember too that you spent them back to the Commissary. You paid your bills and bought your groceries and everything with those chips, more or less.

PC: Yes ma'am.

MK: I can remember, almost remember the colors but we didn't have plastic then so I guess they made them out of celluloid or something like celluloid; had them made somewhere because they were quite durable going from one family to another.

PC: Yes ma'am. Do you remember riding the passenger train?

MK: Yes, we got a telephone call at the Devereaux's from Aunt Emma, in Lufkin, that her daughter Sara Ann and her son Tommy were going to go to Houston to Aunt Kate's for four or five days on the train. They were going to ride to Houston and wanted to know if they stopped in Diboll if we wanted to get on and go with them. Well, my sister Marguerite was not interested and Joyce was too little but I did. We must have been about 8 years old. I'm trying to think; my mother hurriedly packed a bag and we went down to the station in front of the commissary there at the depot and when the train stopped, I got on and got with Sara and Tommy and we rode to Houston on the train and stayed with Aunt Kate and her family for several days.

PC: Oh, that was...

MK: They put us on the train and sent us back home.

PC: That was a fun time!

MK: It was great! It was our first experience on the train.

PC: And you were 8 years old?

MK: About that, yes. I don't remember the exact date. I remember for Mother to let us go we had to be old enough to dress ourselves and tend to ourselves you know.

PC: Yes ma'am. Any other time you remember riding the train? Did you ever ride the train to Lufkin for the day or shop and then come back?

MK: We drove to Lufkin.

PC: You drove okay.

MK: We drove and usually take Mrs. Turner along with us in our car and we would go to Lufkin to Piggly Wiggly grocery; which was a big treat. Then, we would usually get an ice cream cone apiece to eat going home going back to Diboll. That was a big treat on Saturdays.

PC: Yes ma'am.

MK: On Sundays Mr. Durham would take Lura and me to Lufkin to the Pines Theater and there was a little drug store adjoining the Pines lobby and we would get a milk shake

or a malt there and go to the picture show. Then he would be there to pick us up and take us back to Diboll. That was a treat!

PC: Well, that was a big treat to get to go to Lufkin to the movie theatre.

MK: Yes, that is when the organ played the music, you know, they were black and white and whatever it was we loved it. It was great and wonderful!

PC: Yes, and you mentioned a Dr. Crabb in Lufkin, excuse me in Diboll when you were here in Diboll; any other doctors you remember in Diboll?

MK: The Company employed one doctor who took care of all the people who worked and lived in Diboll. He delivered babies and doctored people who were hurt. He was a young doctor and for some reason I put Crabb as his name because it seems to me, years later I saw where a Dr. Crabb in Ft. Worth was mentioned and I thought I guess he left Diboll after he practiced awhile and went into private practice in Ft. Worth. I'm not certain of that.

PC: Yes ma'am.

MK: Just remember that mid-wives did most of the deliveries under his care.

PC: I know you told me you lived in Diboll until the sixth grade and you mentioned your family's home burning. Was that the reason for the move to Lufkin?

MK: Yes, there was not another company house available for us and by then my father was not working for the Company anymore see.

PC: Okay.

MK: We moved to Lufkin, it was in the summer and I was in Galveston with the Durham's at that time and my Mother called and told them that our house had burned and to tell me that before we got home. We went to Lufkin and we bought two pairs of shoes and clothes. It burned everything up.

PC: Yes ma'am.

MK: Then they decided to move to Lufkin to a rent house, which is what we did; a duplex rent house and we loved it. We loved it because the move didn't bother us as much moving after the 6th grade and starting to school in a new place as it would have had we not finished grammar school in Diboll.

PC: Anything you remember about starting school in Lufkin? You would have been going into the 7th grade.

MK: Yes, but I didn't get to start school in the 7th because the Durham's, Mrs. Durham had died and Mr. Durham asked my family if I could go with Lura to Longview. He was going to let Lura live with his sister, Mrs. Bivens there, because she was at the age, he felt like she needed a woman's care and my family agreed to let me go for a week with her to Longview, which I did. I went to school with her every day in the Longview School for a week so that she felt comfortable enough to stay by herself and not know anybody with the Bivens family.

PC: The Bivens family.

MK: I came back to Lufkin to Kurth Ward School for the 7th grade.

PC: Kurth Ward, yes ma'am. Do you remember who your teacher was?

MK: I'm trying to think if that was somebody like the Teeny sisters; the woman's...the teacher's father was a dentist as I recall in the 7th grade but I met a lot of new people and I loved it. I loved it!

PC: Yes ma'am. So, your whole family moved, your mother, your dad and your two siblings?

MK: Yes, we moved to Lufkin. My older sister was in Lufkin High School, two grades ahead of me and my younger sister was in the second grade.

PC: Okay.

MK: She started to school more or less and, on Fridays after we had been there for quite a while my older sister played piano. She was really good. She could hear a song on the radio and duplicate it. She was really good. I was taking shorthand in high school in Lufkin when we got to the 8th or 9th grade, and so by then we were pretty well acquainted with all the kids and on Fridays the principal, Mr. Henson, would have all the kids gather in the auditorium for the weekend, speeches what we could and couldn't and what was happening and all that. My sister, Marguerite would play the piano and I would have taken the words down in shorthand at home on the radio, and I would sing and my little sister, Joyce, would come over...she was a great tap dancer, and we entertained the kids at the high school there for 20 minutes until the principal and his program got itself together. We did that many Fridays.

PC: Oh, like in an auditorium, like an assembly?

MK: Yes, it was.

PC: So, your sister would play...

MK: We were pretty well known. People knew us as the Griffith sisters, you know.

PC: The Griffith sisters, okay.

MK: We were just common folks.

PC: Will you spell your maiden name for me?

MK: G-r-i-f-f-i-t-h, Griffith.

PC: Okay, I wanted to make sure that I had it correct. That is the way I had it spelled but I wanted to make sure I had that correct. So, you would sing, your sister would play and your other sister would dance.

MK: Tap dance, she was a great tap dancer.

PC: That is awesome!

MK: She had taken tap from some private person on the side.

PC: Yes ma'am.

MK: We loved it! We loved it! In Lufkin High my junior year I was chosen to be a cheerleader with a boy named Paul Beard, B-e-a-r-d; Paul Beard. Lufkin had a good football team and the kids had a drill team. We all wore little purple uniforms and we didn't have anybody teach us how to do anything but we sat together at ballgames, you know.

PC: Yes ma'am.

MK: It was great!

PC: We recently found a newspaper article from *Lufkin Daily News* that mentioned you and the drill team at Lufkin was organized in 1935 and you were a part of that first drill team.

MK: Right, right.

PC: Do you know who or how it got organized or anybody particular that you want to mention that you might remember how it got started?

MK: The P.E. teacher was new and she is the one who organized it. I can't think of her name. She was a single lady and I can see her in my mind but I don't remember her name. In fact, we all wound up with purple uniforms and Paul and I were the first cheerleaders.

PC: The first cheerleaders.

MK: Yes.

PC: Was that separate from the drill team or was that part of the drill team then?

MK: No, that was head of the drill team.

PC: Okay, gotcha. When did you graduate from Lufkin?

MK: 1937.

PC: Okay, anything about graduation that you want to share with me?

MK: No, but I will say this; I think I was first girl to ever get a letter sweater on a football team because at the end of the season the coaches, and by the way Abe Martin was one of the coaches. I can't remember who the others were. They were measuring the football players for those letter sweaters that they gave the players and they let Paul and me have one too.

PC: Oh, that is awesome.

MK: I was kind of proud of that because I was the only girl on campus with a letter sweater at that time.

PC: Was that because you were the cheerleader?

MK: Because we were cheerleaders and we had worked very hard with the team. I wrote the column for the *Lufkin Daily News* for the athletic activities for the school my senior year every mid-week. I wrote the column and the coaches would tell me what to say. I would type it and take it down to the newspaper and it would be in the Friday news, as a rule.

PC: Friday news, okay. We were looking for some of those. We were made aware that you did that and we did a search trying to find a few of those articles that maybe you had written. But you did take them to *Lufkin Daily News* or did the school have its own little paper?

MK: I took them down to the *Lufkin Daily News*. They were in the Friday paper because the ballgame was Friday night.

PC: Okay, all right.

MK: Not every week but for the important games.

PC: Yes ma'am.

MK: I wrote a column for the school paper but so did several other people. About five of us wrote columns, chatter columns, for the school newspaper that weren't worth a dime but that is what you do for kids in high school.

PC: Did you say "chatter" columns?

MK: It was called...mine was called "Chatter." I saw a copy of that in something Mrs. Wood had, the one who was doing the research and contacted you to begin with.

PC: Yes ma'am, okay.

MK: It wasn't the athletic one. There was a sports reporter for the *Lufkin Daily News* named Morris Frank, F-r-a-n-k...

PC: Yes ma'am.

MK: ...that wrote the funniest tales about the football games that I ever have since read even. He was hysterically funny but he was right on the nickel you know.

PC: Yes ma'am, there is a ball park in Lufkin named Morris Frank Park.

MK: Yes, that is what it is. He was fantastic! And, he left *Lufkin Daily* to go to *Houston Post* I think after I was out of school. But I can well remember his columns. I couldn't wait to read them every week because they were so funny.

PC: Anything you remember about the coach, Abe Martin?

MK: Well, Mr. Martin was always so nice and he taught one of my classes. In those days the coach also had to teach a history class or a math class and Howard Grubbs had taught me at one of the schools. Then Mr. Martin, who was head coach, taught one at Lufkin.

PC: Do you remember which class he taught?

MK: I can't remember which one. I can remember him in class because I had hay fever and every now and then I would sneeze six or eight times in a row just as fast as I could sneeze. I couldn't help it and he would hold up class and say "let's let Miss Griffith get through." If he said it once he would say it a dozen times. Once I got through sneezing I didn't sneeze anymore. We had open windows. We didn't have air conditioning then; we had open windows that the air blew through. It wasn't like now...

PC: Yes ma'am. Did you walk to school?

MK: We walked to school. When I went to high school, we moved a little closer because it was too far to walk and I went home for lunch every day. Lunch was twenty-five dollars at the cafeteria. That was a sandwich and a drink...I mean twenty-five cents;

but I didn't have twenty-five cents. Nobody had any money in the thirties, nobody had any money.

PC: So, you could walk home for lunch?

MK: Yes, I went home every day at lunch; walked home and walked back. Most of the time I walked with a neighbor named Robert Warren. He was a year ahead of me. His father was with the Chevrolet company there; Robert Warren.

PC: Yes ma'am.

MK: And by the way he was one of our first Lufkin casualties in World War II. He was a bomber pilot and was shot down.

PC: Oh goodness. Mentioning walking to school, walking home for lunch reminds me I want to go back just a second to Diboll. Do you remember anything about the whistle blowing at lunch time for the men to go home for lunch?

MK: I don't know that, but I know at school we let out for lunch and I went home every day for lunch too, all of us did.

PC: At Diboll?

MK: At Diboll. We would cross the railroad tracks about two or three blocks to our home and ate lunch at the kitchen table, you know, like we did every day and back to school.

PC: Go back to school huh?

MK: Yes, for the afternoon.

PC: Yes ma'am; now when you graduated from Lufkin High School what did you do?

MK: At high school, that was my senior year of high school and we only had 11 grades and I was cheerleader there and we had Sara Collins and Mary Cochran, the three of us handled the pep squad.

PC: The pep-squad? The cheerleading?

MK: Well, I was head cheerleader and they were the other two, three of us and we had a big pep squad, about 50 people, maybe more.

PC: Oh okay, that is big for then.

MK: I had a picture of that somewhere.

PC: Well, if you find it, you'll have to send it to us.

MK: Alright, I'll do that.

PC: What did you do after you graduated high school in '37? Did you go to college?

MK: Yes, I tell you I had worked at Perry Brothers at Christmas my senior year when we were all out of school; I worked behind the candy counter there for two weeks and so as soon as school was out, I knew I had to get a job. I wanted to go to college and there was no money at all. So I went to the courthouse with my cousin Sara and we went down to the courthouse to ask if we could work the summer for somebody. And, she went to work for the County Treasurer I think as a typist and I went to work for a Judge named Butler Ralston, R-a-l-s-t-o-n, Butler Ralston. He was an attorney who had been elected county judge. I'll say this about him now; he was one of the smartest people I've ever worked for and one of the funniest I've ever worked for and probably pulled off the most tricks in court.

PC: Yes ma'am.

MK: He was great! Everything was great! We were in the old courthouse, burning hot, no fans; an old typewriter and you had to use carbons. He wanted three carbons for everything that went out of there; but he told me he said the county is broke and I don't get paid and you won't get paid, but if you'll be here at 8 o'clock every morning Monday through Saturday and work until 5, I'll let you work for me. You get an hour for lunch; you can go home for lunch. I said "okay." So, I walked to lunch; I walked 8 blocks I think it was to the courthouse every morning. I was in bobby-socks in those days. I went to work for him. I did all his typing, all his errands, and when he wasn't there, I answered his phone and made his appointments for him.

PC: Well, that is awesome.

MK: That was June and July. July, I told Sara I said, "Sara I'm going to college and so are you." Mr. Wars, our homemaking teacher in Lufkin had gone to the...

PC: Repeat that...where did you say she had gone to?

MK: It was called C.I.A. the place was called C.I.A then.

PC: C.I.A.?

MK: It was a uniform school, C.I.A. [College of Industrial Arts] stands for...I can't remember. So, I got Sara by the hand and we went up to a lawyer's office named Chester Denman, and I said "Mr. Denman we want to go to a Women's college in Denton and we don't have any money can you help us? Could you help us get a job up there so we can go to school?" He said, "certainly, certainly." He had known us through his sister's child, who was Mary Clara Denman had been with us through all the classes. So, he picked up

the phone and called Denton, hung up and said, "if you can wait on tables three times a day you got a job." So, Sara and I went home and my mother contacted the school and got the patterns for the uniforms. They were poplin, white poplin and blue chambray. We had to have one navy dress and a navy coat so, they sewed the rest of the summer to get us ready to go to C.I.A [College of Industrial Arts]. By then they changed the name to TSCW, Texas State College for Women. It was a uniform school and we got to Denton and checked into the dormitory where they told us to. Then our mother decided we had to room together so we moved a girl out who was my roommate and moved Sara in. (laughter) Then Sara and I went down to see what kind of work we could do and they told us to be in the dining room every morning at 7 o'clock in white uniforms and wait on tables until 8:30 and then we could go to class; come back at 11:30 and wait on tables until 1 o'clock, then supper at 5 to 6. So that is what we were doing. Then we also went to the registrar's office. We had to have \$300 to get that first month behind us if we were going to work our way through and we gave him our \$300. I had sent that note down there somewhere; somebody is going to have it; probably you all, the Lufkin people will have it. I still have it. I went to the bank to borrow the \$300 and they said you are only 16 years old and can't lend you that without three signatures. So, I went to Mr. Durham and he co-signed it; I went to Mr. Corbitt, Ralph Corbitt, and I went to an insurance man name Maurice...I'll think of it in a minute; and they co-signed it with me. I got \$318 which got me into the school in Denton.

PC: That is awesome.

MK: Aunt Emma borrowed \$300 from Abram's where she worked to get Sara in and so we got over here to Denton and found out that Eleanor Roosevelt had a program, NYA, [National Youth Administration] that would pay the college \$15 a month if we worked 15 hours a week for one of the Deans so, we applied for that.

PC: Now, what was Sara's last name?

MK: Collins, C-o-l-l-i-n-s, Sara Collins.

PC: Sara Collins, so she was a good friend.

MK: No, she was my first cousin.

PC: Oh, your first cousin; thanks for clarifying that. So, you had to go to work and then you got into this program for the NYA [National Youth Administration].

MK: Well, we both got on that and you had to keep a B average to stay on that. I was assigned to the biology teacher, Willie I. Birge, B-i-r-g-e, the Willie I. Birge and I would report to her at the given time for my three hours with her; get the specimen out for her classes and she would have me crawfishing in the ponds for crawfish specimens and I would chloroform cats for the other group.

PC: Oh goodness.

MK: I would buy those little baby cats for twenty-five cents a-piece. She had me put them in a churn, drop in the chloroform, put the top on the churn and sit on it so they wouldn't bounce up and I would chloroform two or three cats at a time for her.

PC: Goodness! Now what did the NYA stand for?

MK: I think it was National Youth Association. It paired off with the WPA, the CCC and the sewing room for the adults you see. Eleanor [Roosevelt] came to Denton to the Women's College twice and I got to meet her both times.

PC: Eleanor Roosevelt?

MK: Yes, Eleanor Roosevelt, FDR's wife who did his traveling for him.

PC: Yes ma'am.

MK: I tell you what I worked for Willie I. for that whole year, nine months and then they didn't have it in the summer; I just waited tables. But, in the fall Dean Jeffrey Humphries, H-u-m-p-r-i-e-s, was head of Sociology and the senior dean needed a secretary so I was assigned to her for 15 hours a week and after about two weeks she came in one day and said, "Mildred you are going to work for me 30 hours a week. I've got permission to put you on full time for me. I need a secretary; I don't need students in and out." So, for the rest of my career at Texas Women's College, which was Texas State College for Women at that time, I was the Dean's secretary, Dean Humphries secretary.

PC: That is awesome.

MK: I never saw a dime of the money. I worked 15 hours a week but the University got paid for my tuition and fees.

PC: When did you graduate from the Women's College?

MK: June 1, 1940. I went through in three years, one summer and one winter.

PC: Okay, 1940. What did you do after graduation from college?

MK: Well, that was Friday and Monday morning I was at the employment office to ask for a job and they assigned me, they needed a social worker for the WPA [Works Progress Administration]. I would work in the field interviewing the workers for the government. So, I went to work then for the WPA. We were in a deep depression. You're too young to know about that but it was really bad.

PC: Yes ma'am. Where was the WPA employment at?

MK: Well, the office I was assigned was the one in Marshall, Texas.

PC: Marshall, okay.

MK: So, my mother took me to Marshall and we found a new apartment and she paid me through my first month. When I reported they found out I was only 19 and they said when will you be 20 and I said in two weeks. They said come back the day you're 20, you're employed.

PC: Oh, that is awesome.

MK: Go back home and wait two weeks until I was 20 and then I went to work for WPA. I went with another woman who had a car. We would go out to a project where they were working, a bridge or a park or a school, and we would turn a bucket upside down and sit on it and the workman would come one by one and either sit on the ground or kneel in front of us for the interview. They didn't want to lose any time. They worked ten hours a week (day) six days a week and as I recall they made thirty dollars, about ten cents an hour.

PC: When you went on site what were they doing? What job were they doing?

MK: Different ones; construction, WPA was construction. We didn't interview for the CCC. They were planting trees and doing that kind of stuff, but they were single men, we had men with families, poor as an old turkey, bad health, no dentistry, they were just people that ought to be at home getting well.

PC: Yes ma'am.

MK: Trying to make a living for their family.

PC: I didn't know if you might remember what specific construction job they were doing in Marshall. Were they building something specific?

MK: They were out of Marshall in the county there. I remember when I was assigned to Tyler area, we built the school in downtown Whitehouse, Texas. We built the swimming pool at the park in Tyler. We fenced the cemeteries.

PC: So, you remember them building the school in Tyler, the WPA, while you were employed there?

MK: They didn't build the school in Tyler it was in Whitehouse, Texas.

PC: Oh, Whitehouse, okay.

MK: Whitehouse, Texas is where this \$40 million dollar, \$4 million for ten years, 25 year old quarterback for the Kansas City Chiefs lived.

PC: Yes ma'am. What is his name Pat? Can you say his name for the recording?

MK: pardon me?

PC: Can you say his name for the recording?

MK: That is current now, 80 years later.

PC: Yes ma'am, but can you say his name for the recording?

MK: P-a-t, Pat, M-a-h-o-n-e-y, Mahoney; Pat Mahoney [Patrick Mahomes].

PC: Pat Mahoney, yes ma'am. So, when you were working for the WPA and they were building schools and parks and fencing anything else you remember about the WPA?

MK: Well projects, bridges, all kinds of things that they were building and my concern was he is unhealthy, pathetic fathers were trying to make that \$30 for their family. It was heart breaking for me. I could hardly stand it. They had to be reviewed like every six weeks. There were several men waiting for the job. If they found that one was able to make it without the job, he was off and another man was on.

PC: So, when you would go and sit on the bucket and interview these men what kind of questions were you asking them; in regards to their health?

MK: We asked them about their health; we would ask them about their children; where their children were; we would ask them where they lived; ask them about how they were surviving, whatever, whatever.

PC: Yes ma'am, and where did you turn that information into the government?

MK: Well, we came back to the office and one day a week we transcribed all that into their permanent records.

PC: Oh yes ma'am.

MK: The people who ran it, the bigshots who ran the programs would decide who could go and who could stay.

PC: Okay, that is how they determined who was going to keep their job or who might need to go somewhere else?

MK: Yes.

PC: Okay!

MK: If they had a special skill, they could move him.

PC: Oh okay, so that was another part of the questioning to see what they were capable of doing.

MK: Yes, they could move me around because I was single. So, I would come to the office maybe at the end of a week and they would say by the way you're to report to Longview next week; you're moving to Longview or you're moving to Center, Texas.

PC: Okay, and where did you stay when that happened?

MK: Well, I would call my Mom and she would come get me and we would pack what I had and move me to the new town and find me a room somewhere or somewhere to stay and I'd be moved by Monday.

PC: For the week or just stay there for that time frame until you got the job done?

MK: Until they told me to move again.

PC: Okay.

MK: In three months...

PC: Okay, so they were trying to see what capabilities they had to do better on a different job skill.

MK: Yes.

PC: Okay, got you!

MK: As time went by WPA built some great things that were still good.

PC: Yes ma'am.

MK: They had good engineers but they weren't owned by the WPA, they were running it.

PC: Now tell me what you remember about the Depression. I know it was a hard time. You were in high school.

MK: Well, there was no money and the mothers made most of the clothes. The sewing room made blouses and dresses out of flour sack material that had been washed and straightened out and every now and then the government would have somebody with an overflow of sugar or flour or cheese or peanut butter or something gathered at one place and people would get in line to get a sack of groceries, like they do now for the virus [Covid] thing when they're out of food.

PC: Now do you remember that as a young girl being in line to get food?

MK: No, we didn't have to do that.

PC: Oh okay.

MK: No, we managed to get by but my WPA people, when I finally got a car, I would load it up and we would go out and wait in line until they got their sacks of food.

PC: Okay, so you would take them, the WPA workers.

MK: Yes.

PC: Now tell me about the sewing room you mentioned, what was that?

MK: Well, I knew several of the women who were in charge of the sewing room and these women would make clothes to be passed out to the children of the WPA workers.

PC: Okay, so this was a WPA project the sewing room?

MK: Oh yes, that was part of Roosevelt's plan for women and the unmarried men were in the CCC [Civilian Conservation Corps] camps and planted trees and trimmed things and built fences and bridges; stuff like that. They all had projects.

PC: So, your family, did you notice a big difference during the Depression or did you just mostly notice it with other people? The difference in their lifestyle?

MC: Our family too, we had no money; we had no money. Mother made all our clothes and we had no money.

PC: Did that affect anything particular in school days that you...because of the Depression that happened?

MK: Well, I couldn't eat at the school. I didn't have the quarter for lunch. I went home for lunch.

PC: Did most other children go home for lunch?

MK: A lot of the children had to go home for lunch or brought their own lunch in buckets you know, or whatever.

PC: Yes ma'am. Do you remember any conversation your parents had about the Depression being concerned?

MK: Well constantly, constantly, gas was fifteen cents a gallon and we had to be careful about that and of course, my Mother worked at several different little jobs that she did

mostly from home. We had to reach our credit piles at our house. I know that she furnished information to the merchants when she got calls. I knew that.

PC: Yes ma'am.

MK: But we got by, we got by; hand-me-downs, it didn't matter. My sister Marguerite, who graduated from Lufkin High School, went to work for the Chamber of Commerce as a typist and she won Miss Lufkin in the Miss Lufkin contest in 1936. And she went to Ft. Worth to the state contest and the Billy Rose Review was in Ft. Worth to celebrate 100 years for the state of Texas and she danced at the Pioneer Palace and over Casa Manana when they needed extra dancers that whole summer. Everybody went to Ft. Worth to the Review, that is when Sally Rand came out with her fans for the first time in the country.

PC: Sally who?

MK: Sally Rand, R-a-n-d, Sally Rand! The Ft. Worth Review was a big thing, national thing. Billy Rose came from New York to set it up and run it and it ran through the first of September from the first of June. (**PC:** yes ma'am) It was called the Texas Centennial.

PC: Oh okay.

MK: That was a big thing. I was a junior, to be a senior in high school then, but we went every weekend to Ft. Worth to see my sister and be sure she was alright.

PC: I wanted to back up to the WPA for just a minute. Do you remember when the WPA ended? When you stopped working for the WPA and how all that transpired?

MK: Yes, I stopped working for them when I got married. The war had been declared and the man I was dating had joined the Navy and I was still with WPA when he called me from Seattle. We were going to get married on his break after (unintelligible) but the war was so bad he didn't get a break. He was sent to Seattle on a draft to go to Alaska and he called me and said, "could you fly up and us get married before I go to Alaska?" He said I don't want to leave you and so I flew up from Dallas and we got married in Seattle.

PC: And what is your husbands name?

MK: My husband was Frank Kitchens, K-i-t-c-h-e-n-s.

PC: Okay, was he from Lufkin originally?

MK: No, he is from Tyler. I was at WPA in Tyler then, the second time they sent me there but ...

PC: So, you met him while you were working for the WPA?

MK: Yes, and I wired the WPA office from Phoenix. I got bumped off the airplane; I didn't have a priority to fly. The war had just started and you had to have a priority to fly. I got put off the plane at Phoenix and I wired the WPA office and said, "won't be at work today, possibly never again, sorry, talk to you later." That was it!

PC: That was it; you were getting married.

MK: I quit my job while I was in Phoenix.

PC: Tell me what you remember about the war, speaking of World War II. That was during your college days, I guess.

MK: No, no, I was out of college.

PC: You were already out of college okay.

MK: June of '40 and the war was declared in December of '41.

PC: Okay, well tell me what you remember about the war days.

MK: Well nearly everybody I knew, everybody had already been taken or signed in to see what their studies would be about being called into the service, then everybody in my group were A-1's, which meant number one going out there. And, it was different. People weren't on WPA, jobs weren't available, because men were leaving their jobs and going to war. It was like emptying a dorm of people, lots of spaces left. The WPA ended shortly after that, about 6 months for it to close down, I think, but meanwhile when I came back home, I went to work for American Red Cross, at the Red Cross office.

PC: Now when the war broke out where were you?

MK: When the war broke out, I was in Tyler.

PC: You were already in Tyler at college or out of college?

MK: I had been out of college honey, when I went to work for the WPA. I graduated college in 1940, June of '40 and went to work in June of '40.

PC: And the war was around that same time.

MK: The war didn't start until the 7th of December of 1941.

PC: Okay, so you said '1940.

MK: I finished...

PC: Anything particular that you remember about being hard to find because of the war and things being limited and short supply of things? Anything how it affected your daily life?

MK: Honey that is a whole different part of your life. Everywhere we went, and I followed my husband all over for 44 months. I worked for the Navy, I worked for the American Red Cross, I never was without work. I had to contact his staff wherever they sent him.

PC: Yes ma'am.

MK: When he went to sea I just stayed on the West Coast because I was with the Red Cross there and waited until he got back from the war was practically over then in late '44.

PC: So, when did y'all get married?

MK: We got married March 1942.

PC: Okay, and then where did you spend most of his working career?

MK: He was a banker.

PC: A banker, okay.

MK: He worked for the Citizens First Bank in Tyler.

PC: So, after the war y'all came back to Tyler?

MK: We came back to Tyler and back to his job.

PC: Yes ma'am. So, when he went off to war then he was working at the bank before that?

MK: Yes, he had been at the bank about 4 years.

PC: Okay, then went to war and came back to his job.

MK: Yes.

PC: Okay, I also wanted to ask you about any other big events, world events that took place during your life time that come to mind that you want to share a memory about?

MK: Well, I've had a good life. I've had some great jobs. I worked for the Department of Public Welfare but I retired from there by the way.

PC: From the department of what?

MK: I worked for three oil companies at different times and I also worked for a Federal Program in 1971, when they brought the First Family Planning to the State of Texas to try it on for size to see whether or not people would allow them to do family planning free in the state of Texas.

PC: Okay, and where did you retire from?

MK: I had been teaching school at John Tyler High School for 8 years.

PC: Oh, you said you retired, your last job was the Department of?

MK: I retired from the Department of Public Welfare.

PC: Public Welfare okay. What about...

MK: I continued to work; I worked until I was 80.

PC: Oh wow! That is a blessing. What about a big event like JFK's assassination, John F. Kennedy? Do you remember where you were that day?

MK: Yes, I was President of Tyler Women's Forum and we had a luncheon, it was Tuesday and we had a luncheon planned and program, about 200 women who came from all over East Texas to the Forum on Tuesdays once a month. I heard it at 11 o'clock and I drove immediately to the Forum to see if we could stop the preparation of food and cancel and we already had the food ready, so two of the board members and I decided to cancel the program and serve the women and send them home.

PC: Yes, ma'am.

MK: It was a national tragedy. Which we did. I remember that very well. It was bout '63 or '64 wasn't it?

PC: Yes ma'am, 1963. What about walking on the moon do you remember that particular day?

MK: Not really, it wasn't anything I was involved in.

PC: Okay. Is there anything you want to share with me that I haven't asked you about today?

MK: No, not really. I have a lot of stories to tell about places I've worked, things I've done.

PC: What would you say was your most interesting job during your career?

MK: After I retired, I was asked by one of the law firms in the public court to do some work for them. I had a friend I had known a long time, she was a legal secretary to her father and then to a judge and she was really a lovely person. Her name was Florene Pat Meek, but as time went by her husband died and she continued in the old house they had, but she let herself go. She was sort of a bag lady, drove an old jalopy and wore bag clothes, hair bad, everything bad, but she told me when my husband died, she told the undertaker, if anything happens to me call Mildred Kitchens, she will take care of it. I didn't know that. I was in south Texas visiting friends and got the call that she had died and the undertaker wanted to know what I was going to do about it. So, I drove home and I said, on the phone, I said the most expensive casket you have, fill the room with pink carnations, buy them from every florist in town; put the prettiest outfit you bury in on her and I'll be in a few hours I'm driving toward Tyler as we speak. So, I got in the car and drove home and got to the funeral home and he had done all of that and we put a funeral together. The next day at the funeral, after the funeral he said, "now Mrs. Kitchens you owe me \$8,000 how are we going to handle this?" I said, "we are going over to her attorney's office." He said, "who is he?" I told him. I knew at the time. We went over there and the attorney said, "I never charged her a dime, pro-bono, she was so poor, but she has a little white house down on Bow Street. We will sell that and find the heirs and we will be through with this." So, the probate judge said we will wait on that. She didn't have any heirs. She didn't have any brothers, sisters, cousins, anybody that we knew. I took that and went out to her house to see about it. She had 20 cats living in the house, twenty. It was terrible. I found \$280,000 worth of CD's in a cat box and got that settled. When I called the bank, she had 13 banks with \$100,000 each in each bank.

PC: My goodness!

MK: Before it was over, I found 13 cousins finally, took me six months, and I reported to the court that we had a million, seven hundred thousand dollars in liquid assets from that bag lady.

PC: My goodness. A bag lady in Tyler, Texas.

MK: Yes.

PC: Were you surprised?

MK: Let me pull away a minute. My hearing aide was making that noise.

PC: Oh yes ma'am. So, was this a lady that you knew?

MK: Yes, that was one of the most interesting things I had really.

PC: I bet, that was very surprising.

MK: Well, it was. It was great; she got the funeral she wanted. She didn't have a will so the state told me who got the money. That took me nearly four years to get in and out of it.

PC: Yes ma'am.

MK: One of the most interesting things I did.

PC: Yes ma'am. Do you have children?

MK: I had two sons, Gary who died in December of '18 with multiple sclerosis. He was president of AT&T Ameritech in Chicago. He had a great job. He finished Texas A&M on a football scholarship, was really a smart young man. I had Tim, who is two years younger who went to A&M and worked for the Haggar Company making clothes and then decided he wanted to go into business for himself and had three restaurants that he ran off and on for 35 years. He just retired the week his brother died. He had retired, so he is the one who sort of looks after me now.

PC: His name is Kim?

MK: He really is sharp.

PC: His name is Kim?

MK: I have here in town with me, I have a granddaughter and a grandson and four little great grands, three little boys and a great girl.

PC: Oh, that is awesome; nothing like those grandchildren.

MK: These are just fantastic and they are the ones who will be the Kitchens family, they're the only male grandchildren we had.

PC: Did you say your sons name is Kim?

MK: K-i-m, Kim Kitchens and his son Cody and his daughter Brandy.

PC: Okay.

MK: Brandy was a missionary in Mongolia for three years after she finished North Texas University.

PC: Well, it sounds like you have a beautiful family.

MK: I have a great family. I have other grandchildren but they are not here, right here every day.

PC: And tell me where you reside today?

MK: I reside at Brookdale South, which is an assisted living facility, one of many, many that Brookdale has.

PC: Yes ma'am. Well Mrs. Kitchens is there anything else that comes to mind about a specific memory of Diboll that you want to share with me to wrap up today?

MK: Well, I loved Diboll. I think of Diboll as a really happy time. The people there we had no money, you know, we were all employees of the Company, but for some reason I don't remember as much distress in Diboll as in other places. School was fine, we had good teachers, and I don't know. We had two churches, one Sunday we had Methodist and one Sunday we had the Baptist; we all went to both.

PC: Okay, I wanted to ask you also, backing up a little bit, when you went to the Commissary did you actually go with money with company script to purchase or did you just put it on a charge ticket?

MK: I always took money with me, those little poker chips money with me.

PC: Yes, ma'am, the company money, the script.

MK: You know we had two pairs of shoes, we had school shoes and Sunday shoes.

PC: Yes ma'am.

MK: People didn't have like 14 pairs of shoes in my closet now. You didn't have that, you had two pairs of socks, you had two pairs of underwear. You wash one out at night and you wore the other one the next day then you wash that one out and wore the one you had washed the night before. And, everybody was poor it didn't bother anybody.

PC: Yes ma'am. So, it sounds like you really enjoyed your childhood at Diboll.

MK: I enjoyed it and my mother and grandfather, Tom White, an interesting man and they managed to take care of us. My father too, you know, he had a yearn for more than just Diboll. He liked to go places and do things.

PC: Yes ma'am.

MK: He did until he died, you know. I didn't know him that much in those later years. He was not anywhere I was. He was in south Texas, you know.

PC: Oh yes ma'am.

MK: Anyhow, we had a good life. I wouldn't change it.

PC: Well good, that is wonderful.

MK: I learned and learned from people. I still have friends there, lots of friends.

PC: Well good. Well Mrs. Kitchens I certainly enjoyed visiting with you today. I tell you what a blessing for you to have just celebrated your 100th birthday. That is a blessing in itself. It seems that God has been good to you. It sounds like you've lived a very fulfilling life and still doing so and enjoying life. I have certainly enjoyed doing this interview with you today. Is there anything else you would like to add?

MK: Yes, I have lived by the 23 Psalm day and night and I really think a lot of the things that have happened to me happened to me because the Lord wanted me somewhere else to do something else. I've always felt like whatever I was doing He was right there by my side. I was good. I was a good person for all those years. I was a real good social worker, and I helped a lot of people but I didn't help them; He helped them through me.

PC: Yes ma'am.

MK: I'm quite beholden to the Lord for what I have had and what I have.

PC: That is wonderful to hear. That is quite a testimony.

MK: By the way today on the Dallas News, front page there is a picture of a woman named Mildred somebody who is 102 and she said she lived to be 102 with good doctors and red wine. I haven't resorted to red wine but I have had good doctors and they've taken good care of me all these years.

PC: Well, that is wonderful; well Mrs. Kitchens I thank you for joining me today and I'm going to conclude the interview and when we get this transcribed, I will give you a call.

END OF INTERVIEW