

**Oral History Interview of
Don Jones**

**Interviewed by: David Marshall
May 18, 2015
Lubbock, Texas**

Part of the:
Southwest Collection General Interviews

© Southwest Collection/
Special Collections Library



TEXAS TECH UNIVERSITY

**Southwest Collection/
Special Collections Library**

15th and Detroit | 806.742.3749 | <http://swco.ttu.edu>

Copyright and Usage Information:

An oral history release form was signed by Don Jones on May 18, 2015. This transfers all rights of this interview to the Southwest Collection/Special Collections Library, Texas Tech University.

This oral history transcript is protected by U.S. copyright law. By viewing this document, the researcher agrees to abide by the fair use standards of U.S. Copyright Law (1976) and its amendments. This interview may be used for educational and other non-commercial purposes only. Any reproduction or transmission of this protected item beyond fair use requires the written and explicit permission of the Southwest Collection. Please contact Southwest Collection Reference staff for further information.

Preferred Citation for this Document:

Jones, Don Oral History Interview, May 18, 2015. Interview by David Marshall, Online Transcription, Southwest Collection/Special Collections Library. URL of PDF, date accessed.

The Southwest Collection/Special Collections Library houses almost 6000 oral history interviews dating back to the late 1940s. The historians who conduct these interviews seek to uncover the personal narratives of individuals living on the South Plains and beyond. These interviews should be considered a primary source document that does not implicate the final verified narrative of any event. These are recollections dependent upon an individual's memory and experiences. The views expressed in these interviews are those only of the people speaking and do not reflect the views of the Southwest Collection or Texas Tech University.

Technical Processing Information:

The Audio/Visual Department of the Southwest Collection is the curator of this ever-growing oral history collection and is in the process of digitizing all interviews. While all of our interviews will have an abbreviated abstract available online, we are continually transcribing and adding information for each interview. Audio recordings of these interviews can be listened to in the Reading Room of the Southwest Collection. Please contact our Reference Staff for policies and procedures. Family members may request digitized copies directly from Reference Staff.

Consult the Southwest Collection website for more information.

<http://swco.ttu.edu/Reference/policies.php>

Recording Notes:

Original Format: Born Digital Audio

Digitization Details: N/A

Audio Metadata: 48kHz/ 24bit WAV file

Further Access Restrictions: N/A

Related Interviews:

Transcription Notes:

Interviewer: David Marshall

Audio Editor: N/A

Transcription: John Clements

Editor(s): Jason Rhode

© Southwest Collection/
Special Collections Library

Transcript Overview:

This interview features Don Jones, who discusses his family, upbringing, youth, and his experiences of rural life and racial oppression in East Texas.

Length of Interview: 02:08:52

Subject	Transcript Page	Time Stamp
His parents, their upbringing and ancestry	6	00:00:53
Description and history of the Jones' holdings outside of Carthage	8	00:05:23
Working on the farm during the Depression	16	00:11:56
Carthage, the arrival of electricity, education	27	00:39:49
Life at Center Point	33	00:54:24
Racism in Carthage	36	01:00:10
The rules of Jim Crow, legal resistance	44	01:21:50
Financial arrangements with Mr. Bill	48	01:34:57
Survival tactics in a racist society	52	01:47:58
Miss Froni, and inheritance	54	01:55:57

Keywords

Rural life, East Texas, farming, African-American history, racism, legal system

David Marshall (DM):

Today is May 18, 2015, and this is David Marshall interviewing Don Jones at the Patterson Library in Lubbock, Texas. And let's just begin by getting your full name. What's your full name?

Don Jones (DJ):

Don G. —I don't general give a name for the G. —Don G. Jones.

DM:

Okay, and then what's your date of birth?

DJ:

July 10, 1925.

DM:

1925. Where were you born?

DJ:

Long Branch, Texas.

DM:

Okay, now you've mentioned Long Branch, now this is where your brother, Robert, lives.

DJ:

This is where brother Robert lives.

DM:

Is he older or younger?

DJ:

He's older. He's ninety-one, I'm eighty-nine. He's ninety-one.

DM:

So this is the—this is the home place.

DJ:

Yes.

DM:

This is where—were all of you kids born there?

DJ:

We were all born and reared there. My Dad had to be—my Dad and Mom both had to be—well I guess everybody thinks their parents were a little exceptional, and I don't tell—I don't mention this very much, either, but my dad was born a slave—born in April of 1864—and he was a good deal older than my wife—my wife—my mom, and right now, I'll tell you, apparently he liked women—skirts—because there are three sets of children. He had a son by one lady that he married, then a daughter—they married, and then he married Mama. So total, he had eight kids—he had three girls and five boys. But anyway, no, my dad amassed a little bit more than a section and a half of land.

DM:

Golly, and that was there at Long Branch.

DJ:

Yeah, that was there at Long Branch.

DM:

A section and a half, that is a lot of land, especially in East Texas. You know in West Texas—

DJ:

Yes, yes. But even back then—West Texas was being developed back then, because we're talking about back in the—from like 1900 to 1922 or '23, when he bought his last batch.

DM:

Right, he was talking about maybe West Texas?

DJ:

No, I'm saying that you know back then, there were not that many people in West Texas, so it was a lot of land for—and it's all still intact except one hundred thirty eight acres. Murvaul Lake, Carthage, looking ahead for water, they dammed up a river—a creek, a stream called Murvaul, and it's Murvaul Lake, and—

DM:

It took some of that land—

DJ:

—it took 138 acres up.

DM:

Did they compensate reasonably?

DJ:

Yes. There's a long story behind that, but we won't go into that, because we—to put it in a nutshell—my mom knew up front that she wasn't going to stop it, see, because that was that eminent domain floating out there. And she knew she wasn't going to stop it, and that was a very aggressive fair-minded young attorney, and she spoke to him, she said “Yeah, we may can sweat a few more dollars out of them,” and I can recall—we were all there, we were grown then—no we were not, but I know we had a court date set, and we got to the courthouse and they—

DM:

They settled?

DJ:

Yeah. Mama settled. And Papa died in 1926, and Mama never remarried.

DM:

Okay, now, can you tell me their names?

DJ:

Sure. My daddy was named Wade H—Wade Hampton Jones, and Mama was named Rosie Lester Porter Jones. Porter was her maiden name.

DM:

Okay, now where was your daddy born? He was born in 1864—

DJ:

I can't tell you. And I don't know of anybody now that could, because my brother Robert and I are about the oldest people in that area now. My mom was born about six miles east of Waco, at a little place called Harrison Switch.

DM:

I've heard of that.

DJ:

Well that's where my mom was born.

DM:

Now your daddy, what did he grow out there on his section-and-a-half of land?

DJ:

Well, cotton, corn, peas, potatoes, you name it, if it'll grow there, and he also owned a sawmill. And there was a lot of virgin timber in there, then.

DM:

Was it pine?

DJ:

Pine.

DM:

Yellow pine, by any chance?

DJ:

I guess—I don't know, there was yellow and Loblolly—whatever it is in there. But it was long—

DM:

Long bristles, needles?

DJ:

Yes, needles, uh-huh.

DM:

I just mentioned yellow because there was a big demand for yellow pine back in the early twentieth century.

DJ:

Yeah, well, I don't know what—and I grew up there, and I don't know what—

DM:

Okay. Well, it was a pretty active mill?

DJ:

Yes, he—yes.

DM:

Golly, y'all were busy. I bet I know what you did—

DJ:

Oh, I don't know anything about that. I know—I only know what I was told, but Papa didn't

actually run the mill. Back then—and I can remember this—people—transient people, you know, and they'd come by and it didn't matter—black, white, whatever—they stopped and asked for food, you know, they didn't have food. And I know that there've been a lot of people that spent the night in our barns, you know, even in the wintertime they'd go out there, and we saved the cotton seed from the cotton, and shoot, you could snuggle down in those seeds, man, and stay pretty comfortable. Well, the story goes—according to Mom—that this white guy came by and he was hungry, and he just knocked on the door. And it happened to be—asked, “Would Papa happen to be home?” And they got into a conversation, and that was some attitudes back then, and he had a guy in the family that was doing the same thing, and the pressure got so heavy, they—

Pause in recording

DM:

Mishap with the recording here, so we're going to do just a little bit of catchup to cover the basics of what we've talked about, and then go from there. But you said that your daddy, Wade Hampton—

DJ:

Wade Hampton Jones was born in April of 1864 as a slave, and he didn't know anything about it I couldn't imagine, because you know, '65, the Emancipation Proclamation came out, but anyway—

DM:

And we don't know where—you don't know where he was born.

DJ:

No, don't know where. I really don't know, I want to say it was somewhere in that area. His mom, whom I knew—

DM:

Oh really?

DJ:

Yeah. Good God, I hated that old woman.

DM:

But she had been a slave?

DJ:

Yes. And she lived—we lived between a brother of Papa's and a sister of Papa's, and grandma would move from one to the other, and we were the stopping place between the brother and the sister. Grandma Malindey—oh, that old gal—

DM:

What'd you call her? Lindey?

DJ:

Malindey. I don't know whether she was Indian, but Grandma Malindey could plait her hair and sit on it.

DM:

Really, long hair?

DJ:

Long hair—mean—but I'm sure she wasn't, but she respected our plan too much for me. So that's why I didn't like her, boy, because she was always hollering at you, and she had a cane—walking stick—and we learned to stay out of reach of that thing, because she'd tell you something, and you got (makes a sound). But anyway—

DM:

How would you spell that name? Did you ever see it spelled?

DJ:

No, I never did see it.

DM:

Malindey.

DJ:

Malindey. But anyway, we felt that Mama and Papa were pretty special people in that he had acquired this, and—

DM:

Did he ever talk about how he did that? He got a section and a half of land together, a lumber mill—

DJ:

And it's pretty much that the road basically divided it—all of it is pretty much in one block on one side—on the east side of the road, and the rest of it is on the west side, all in one block.

DM:

And like you said, only about 138 acres were lost out of that because of the water—Murvaul Lake.

DJ:

Yes, Murvaul Lake. But anyway, he and the guy that worked with him all the time—he never said it to me, but Robert was talking last night and it came up—this man was named Charlie Magee, and Robert, being older, was around Mr. Magee more than, you know. And he said Mr. Magee told him any number of times how Papa had urged him to buy land, and he said “I don't”—and the last try, Robert said that Mr. Charlie told him “Wade said ‘I found thirty acres if you want it, I'll spend for it.’” And he said—and of course, now he saw his mistake, but anyway we were—I guess I was fortunate to be born one of Wade's kids.

DM:

I'll tell you what, it's an amazing story. He was born into slavery, he got himself up somehow, but you never heard the story, really, of how he did this. Hard work, I suppose.

DJ:

Hard work. Well, you know, there's some people just have a knack for stuff, you know. Of course there were other people down there. Where we grew up—we grew up on the edge of a—well, really not on the edge—black community stop here—white community stop here, we lived about here, and then there was one white family that lived right here, so—

DM:

You were kind of towards the middle.

DJ:

Yes, but we were—the gap between the communities, and in that gap, there were two families: the black family—the Joneses—and the white family—the Robertsons. And this was the situation when Papa was alive, because I do know that large farm equipment—and we said “large,” like riding cultivators, disks, and this kind of thing, hay bailers, Papa and Mr. Robertson bought those things partnership, and whoever used it last, that's where it was, and if you needed it today and I wasn't using it, you just go get it.

DM:

Okay, well would he lease it out and make a little extra off of letting them—

DJ:

No.

DM:

—just let them use it?

DJ:

No, no, just Papa and Mr. Robertson used—for their personal use.

DM:

Okay, if it was sitting out there, then Mr. Robertson could go get it and use it—okay.

DJ:

Yes, or if it was at Mr. Robertson's and Papa needed it, he'd just go get it. Now I knew Mr. and Mrs. Robertson and all of their kids—because their kids were grown. When Papa died—he died in July—the harvest was completed, and then next spring, Mama couldn't hire anybody, and she started—got out and started plowing, herself. And Mr. Robertson had—they weren't his younger kids, but they were Roscoe—Jessie and Roscoe were his sons, and they lived there. And they would always—the oldest boy—got up, see, when Papa died, the oldest child was twelve, which was a girl.

DM:

Okay, because this was early—this was in '26, did you say?

DJ:

This was back in the teens. Now when Papa died, it was '26, but the early—the oldest child was a girl, and she was just twelve. And I don't know which one came by and saw Mama out there wrestling with those mills and that mill bust and said "Rosie, you don't do that." They would always—Jessie or Roscoe—would always do that first breaking—plowing—in the spring, and they'd get it back by us helping them chop cotton or something, but it wasn't a charge, Mama just say "We caught up, I'll send the kids down there and help you."

DM:

That's really good community spirit there, helping each other like that.

DJ:

Well, they were a duo, Jessie and Roscoe.

DM:

Well, and that kind of speaks for your dad's business knack, to go in with somebody to buy equipment, you know, that makes sense.

DJ:

Well, I guess he—I don't—they must have known each other up through the years, because when Mama—Papa was a good deal older than Mama, and when she—when he went out and married her and brought her there, the old man Robertson and Mrs. Robertson were the first people that she met. And Mrs. Robertson, Mama said, told her "Rosie, you need any help, let me know. I'm a pretty good cook, you need—" The Joneses and the Robertsons are known to be—

DM:

Thick

DJ:

—thick. Even now, there are a few of them still—

DM:

They still live around?

DJ:

—their grandkids, but there's a couple of daughters of Jessie's, one of them works in the county clerk's office in Carthage, and they look—I go down there and we have a ball. I like black-eyed peas, and ol' Sue—this girl's named Sue—not a girl anymore—she knows what to do to mess with black-eyed peas, and if I got down there, even now, I'll just about get me a bowl of black-eyed peas.

DM:

Well that's something else to look forward to, going down there, isn't it? Sounds good, too. Well, now, your Mama had all of you kids there in Long Branch?

DJ:

Yes, there in Long Branch.

DM:

Was there a midwife that came by the house, or—?

DJ:

Yes, I'm sure it was.

DM:

Okay, now, how many kids, and where do you fall in with them?

DJ:

Well, I'm the youngest.

DM:

You're the youngest?

DJ:

I'm the youngest. There was Sydney, girl, Casey, a boy, Trudy, a girl, and then three boys: Albert Tracey, Robert, and then Don.

DM:

Did you say Sydney?

DJ:

Is the oldest, was a girl.

DM:

And then—

DJ:

Then Casey, a boy.

DM:

Casey, Casey. And then what was the—?

DJ:

Third one was a girl, Trudy.

DM:

Trudy, okay.

DJ:

And then a boy, Albert Tracey, then a boy, Robert—

DM:

Okay, and then you. Abatracey, how do you—?

© Southwest Collection/
Special Collections Library

DJ:

Albert, A-L-B-E-R-T, Albert Tracey, two words.

DM:

Albert Tracey, two words, Albert Tracey.

DJ:

And those people—you look at me, I'm little—those people in the middle, big people. If Robert walked in here now, if you couldn't see some facial resemblance, you wouldn't think we were connected any way. He's about six-three, weighs about two sixty, two seventy, big person.

DM:

Well, that's all right, your size worked better on a submarine, anyhow.

DJ:

Yeah, but after I got grown, I used to tease Mama—now Sydney, the oldest girl, she was puny like me. Sydney died at a young age. We said she had—they said she had consumption, but I bet it was cancer. We didn't know the word "cancer," then. But anyway, Sydney was puny. I'm puny. I used to tell Mama, "You and Papa didn't know what you were doing when you made Sydney, and by the time you got down to me, you'd run out of material—those four people in the middle—big people."

DM:

And now what brothers and sisters are still living?

DJ:

Nobody but Robert.

DM:

Just Robert, okay.

DJ:

Just the two of us.

DM:

You get to go see him occasionally?

DJ:

Yeah, I see him quite often. I'm going, matter of fact, I'm going to see him this weekend.

DM:

Oh, good for you. Well, tell me about your childhood. I bet you worked on the farm a bit.

DJ:

I surely did. I know that—I can recall being counted as a member of the workforce when I was eight. We used wood for fuel for cooking and heating and I cannot, to this day, figure out why Mama did this, but in the winter we got up at four o'clock in the morning. We had to walk a good ways to school, and basically the only time we saw the house in the daylight was on Saturdays and Sundays, because it'd be dark when we leave, dark when we get back. And I don't know why that old woman would make—she'd call me first, and all of us were at home, then—she'd call me first, I'd get up and start—put a stick of wood on the fire. The fireplace would stay hot twenty-four seven, and then go in the kitchen and started a fire in the cook stove, then I could go back and get in the bed for ten or fifteen. But she'd get me up every morning, and I was thinking “There are five other knuckleheads, call one of them.” But every morning—

DM:

I guess the youngest one got that duty, huh?

DJ:

I guess so. Well this youngest one did. But anyway, we worked, and we basically grew the same thing—cotton, corn, potatoes, peas—cotton being the cash crop. Every blue moon, Mama maybe would sell a few bushels of corn, but that would be to neighbors, it wasn't a marketable thing.

DM:

Did she mostly can this? Did she can it?

DJ:

Oh yes. We tried to be through chopping cotton by the nineteenth of June, and we tried to be through plowing by the Fourth of July. And then, between the Fourth of July, and the—must have been the fourth Monday in August—well, put it this way, the Monday following the third Sunday in August, we went to the cotton patch, if we had to walk two or three yards to find a boll of cotton open. That was just a thing with Mama.

DM:

Okay, she had specific dates.

DJ:

Yeah, she did—

DM:

Well, the first one was Juneteenth, and that's a—

DJ:

Yeah, yeah, then—

DM:

—second one was the Fourth of July—

DJ:

Fourth of July, then the Monday following the third Sunday in August, we went in the cotton patch with cotton sacks to pick cotton. Of course, it would be—you may walk—but it would be open pretty well. But between the Fourth of July and that fourth Monday in August, [was] when we would repair fences, and cut wood for the winter.

DM:

Okay, and then you started the cotton picking.

DJ:

No, we started the cotton picking—yeah, then we started the cotton picking. And between the Fourth of July and that fourth Monday in August, fix fences, cut winter wood, and pick fruit and vegetable for canning.

DM:

Lot of work in that—

DJ:

And Mama canned everything. Mama even—we didn't grow watermelons for market, for sale, but she grew a good patch, and we'd take and go get wagonloads of them.

DM:

And it's the hottest time of the year to have that fire going to can, isn't it?

DJ:

Yeah, yeah. But we would gather peaches and pears—we had an orchard, a peach orchard, and a pecan orchard, and we would gather peaches and pears and go pick blackberries and Mama would can those things, and she'd, I guess, run out of money to buy jars, and then they'd slice the peaches—I can't think of Mama doing—I don't know whether she did—I can't remember whether she did pears, but we'd slice those peaches real thin and—

DM:

Dry them?

DJ:

—dry them. Put them out on the boards in the top of the barn, anywhere, and dry them, and then she'd take them and sack them up.

DM:

Well, things grow so well down there, and wild blackberries and things like that, too.

DJ:

Yeah, we'd have a time with those blackberries, because we'd pick a gallon and eat two. Mama said, and she knew where those blackberries—“Now I was down there yesterday, there was more blackberries—,” “Yeah, but Mama—,” we couldn't tell a lie about snakes, because we had two dogs [that] took care of the snakes. And she knew that we had eaten all those berries, but anyway, there was seven of us, counting her. And she tried to kill seven pigs, and soon as it started getting cold, we put up one, and fattened that one and killed that one. And then somewhere around Easter, in that area, she'd kill that last one.

DM:

Uh-huh, so in between, seven pigs.

DJ:

Yeah, then we'd have what we called a “hog-killing day,” where we would kill the rest of them—four or five in one day, and she canned a bunch of that stuff, too. She had a pressure cooker—big ole pressure cooker and a sealer and we would—she'd can those—

DM:

She did this on a wood fire?

DJ:

On a wood fire. And that was a chore, trying to keep that pressure in that old pressure cooker—

DM:

Just right.

DJ:

—yeah, pretty close to being right, you know—stoking that sometimes, the pressure start, and you'd have to pull fuel, wood, away from it, start dropping, you'd push it back.

DM:

I'm glad you mentioned that. I never had thought of that because my Mama always did it on a gas stove, you know, but that would be a challenge. Did you scald and scrape the pigs?

DJ:

Yes, we scalded—yeah, we scald and scraped. And on hog-killing day, we knew what we were going to have for dinner. We were going to have some kind of veggie, but we knew we were going to have liver, and see, that—people now don't know what liver is, because our liver never got cold. We'd take it out of the hog, over here to Mama, wash it, slice it, into the—

DM:

Liver must be something that you can't put up as easily as other meat, I don't know. Or maybe it was just—

DJ:

You can freeze it, Mama didn't can liver. We ate the liver, all that we didn't eat, she gave it away. But she didn't can liver. But pig feet and oxtails and whatever, and I mentioned Mr. Charlie Magee, he was the butcher, and he and Mama had an arrangement. Sometime down in the summer, you know, you—and they didn't buy meat back then—didn't go to town and buy meat—this summer, Mama would kill a big hog, and Mr. Charlie would kill a beef—a steer. Next summer, Mama would kill the steer, and he'd kill the hog. But you'd—we'd have fresh pork sometime in the—during this time between July and August, we'd have some fresh pork and some fresh beef. And he'd come over and kill, and he'd take half of—whether it was the hog, he'd take half of it with him, and if it was the beef, he'd take half of it. Now, I don't know what hunger is.

DM:

Yes, I was about to say.

DJ:

I don't know what hunger is, because we ate, now. It may not be what you wanted, but we ate, and people's—I hear kids now, said "I don't like this, I ain't eating it," yeah, you get hungry enough, you'll eat it. You'll learn to like it, and I don't know of any basic American food that I can't enjoy, because Mama taught us. And generally, we had enough, and she'd say "Get all you want, but eat all you get," because if you had some left over, that's where you started your next meal. Be it—if you left over—we called it breakfast, dinner, and supper—if you left over some supper food, you didn't start off with ham and eggs and that—you ate that left over supper food first in the morning, and then you went to the breakfast food.

DM:

That makes sense. Those are some things that could be useful today, you know?

DJ:

That's right. You know, I look at—even at our house, we throw enough food away to—back then, to have fed two or three families.

DM:

Well, y'all really needed this kind of food intake, though, because you worked hard.

DJ:

Yeah.

DM:

Sounds like you really worked hard.

DJ:

Well, occasionally we worked hard, but farm work isn't hard, it's just demanding. And even now, it's—well, it's less difficult, less tiring now, because it's all mechanized. See, we walked behind the mules and the horses then, see, and—but it wasn't very physically demanding, you just had to be there all the time. You know, you just didn't have any break.

DM:

Did you do some of this plowing behind mule or horse?

DJ:

Oh, shoot yeah. Oh, yes I did. All of us did. Well, we got, I guess they wore out, I didn't know about the riding cultivator, I guess they wore it out before I got—and Mama finally worked up to a riding cultivator, and shoot, people would come by and look at that thing.

DM:

Really?

DJ:

Yes, you sit in it—but you only plowed one row at a time.

DM:

Did you chop cotton with a hoe?

DJ:

Whoa. I got more spanking—not spankings—I got more whippings behind that—and being the youngest, Mama finally, after we—in 1934, yeah—maybe '33 —some energetic, motivated—what do we call those guys? —county—he was an ag man—

DM:

Okay, the Ag Extension Service.

DJ:

Yeah, that's it. He came in with the idea of growing tomatoes for the market. And he wasn't getting any takers, and he came to Mama—not being egotistical or anything, but because of the size of the farm, anything new came in, they would all—Mama would always be among the first—black or white—that the people would approach. This guy didn't, and we said—the east part of town, we didn't know anything about those people—they were foreigners. We were on the west side of Carthage, and that's where, basically, Mama's influence nested. And he didn't do it, and then people—oh, it's too much work—well he came to Mama, and she got to thinking about it, and said “Yeah, we'll give a try. I'll try an acre.” Gah, that is work. That is work. But anyway, I can't remember how we got those tomatoes to the market. I guess, there was a family named Pullum that were truckers.

DM:

Pullum?

DJ:

Pellum, P-U-L-L-U-M

DM:

P-U-L-L—

DJ:

—U-M, Pellum. They must have—they had trucks, pickups, they must have—but the second year of tomatoes, Mama paid her farming expense—now, we got through with tomatoes in early June, then we start—we picked them green, and then we started picking ripe tomatoes for the cannery. And then, in the fall of '35, Mama bought a new International pickup, paid cash for it out of the tomatoes. Now she had paid for fertilizer—of course, until tomatoes came, we didn't use commercial fertilizer, but tomatoes introduced us to commercial fertilizers.

DM:

I see, you had to have it.

DJ:

We had to have it. And there's a process with growing tomatoes—it's a long story—but anyway, she paid for her expenses for making the tomato crop, the cotton crop, bought our school clothes, had a little money for the winter, and paid cash for that International pickup, and we didn't get—the highest I recall getting was a penny and a quarter a pound for tomatoes. Imagine. Tomatoes now—vine-ripened tomatoes are what, over two dollars a pound? I don't know, I don't buy them. But anyway—

DM:

Lot of work, but it really pays off.

DJ:

Lot of work, lot of work. You start in February. You start with a hot bed. You build this bed, and put flues in the bottom of it, and because it's cold, to warm that soil, then you plant those seeds, and then, when they get up about two leaves, oh, about like that, you go out and build a cold frame—eight feet wide, sixty feet long. And then you go with a shovel, a square shovel, take those things out of the hot bed, and put them in the cold frame, and you do it plant by plant. And you have a peg board that has—ours had four rows, two inches apart, either way. And you put them in that cold frame, and all the preparation, that soil was almost like pie. It was so—we'd work it so fine. Heavily fertilized, and then you get them in the cold frame, you'd have to have rafters built so you have this muslin sheet you pull over that thing, because you put them out in March, and you've still got weather. And we'd go out in the forest and rake up pine straw, and we'd have that pine straw, if it'd get cold, pull that sheet over and put the—cover the sheet with pine straw to keep the plants warm. And then, when they got up about yea tall—

DM:

About ten inches, huh?

DJ:

Yeah, then they shovel again, you go take all that stuff down, and you take these plants, put them on a slide—the rows were about eight feet wide—wide rows—and then you take plant by plant and put it in a fir closet.

DM:

How far apart were the plants in the fir?

DJ:

Oh, about twelve to sixteen inches, about like that.

DM:

Enough to let the plant expand a bit. What a lot of work, but hey, you get an International pickup truck.

DJ:

You get an International pickup truck. And you had to water those things, and we had to go to the creek, and we watered them with regular hand sprinklers, we didn't have—yeah—and you put them out today—we're talking about an acre, now—you get it out, and if it rained this evening, and say you put them out, get through, one thirty, two, and it rained three thirty, four, you'd go out and plow them.

DM:

Plow them?

DJ:

You'd plow them that evening, or plow them first thing the next morning.

DM:

So they don't get too much water?

DJ:

I don't know why we did it. I guess the guy told Mama to do it, and we did it. But one thing about a tomato plant—all those tomatoes grow on one side of that stalk. We call them "clusters," and we'd have to make sticks to stick each one, then we had to tie each one, and then, once they got the fourth cluster, you'd top it so it wouldn't put on any more. And it was work, but like I say, back then you'd get two, three cents a pound for tomatoes, and we hauled our tomatoes in the pickup, about sixty miles, and Mama was particular, and you had buyers, and two of Mama's tomatoes was about a pound and a quarter or better.

DM:

Okay, big ones.

DJ:

Big ones. And those buyers would come, and they'd bid on your tomatoes.

DM:

Well, isn't that something?

DJ:

And—

DM:

Now, sixty miles away, where was that?

DJ:

That was—we were in Carthage—Jacksonville. Yeah, we hauled from Carthage to Jacksonville. There wasn't a market in Carthage or Henderson, or Longview—

DM:

It was well worth it, then to—

DJ:

Well, they didn't even have a market, the nearest market—because, see, they were growing tomatoes over in Cherokee county, but we didn't know anything about it. And this guy, this little Asian ag man introduced us to—and we ended up, at one—well, for several years, we grew as many as ten acres of tomatoes. (makes sound)

DM:

Wow. Ten acres. How many years did you do this?

DJ:

I don't think we did ten acres but about three, because the war came in, and help was drafted, so we had to cut back.

DM:

Did you even feel the Depression out there on the farm?

DJ:

No, I didn't know I was poor. And I wore pants with patches on patches, but heck, you did, too, so what the hell. We didn't know we were poor. And of course, when the tomatoes came in, everybody thought that they were rich because they basically, they had money left over from the tomato crop. Now, the cotton crop, that was because the tomatoes paid for the tomatoes and the cotton. So that cotton money was all—

DM:

Extra pocket money, huh?

DJ:

Yeah, yeah.

DM:

Well, not just everybody could show up with a new International pickup in the Depression.

DJ:

No, but we worked. I mean, now, I have done hard work. Cleaning a new space, cutting down those trees, and you didn't have time to burn them, so you trim them, and then you—four of you would tote that log off—now that's hard work. Take a twenty foot oak log, about your size in girth—

DM:

That's weight.

DJ:

That's weight, and I've been whomped a time or two about that, because I learned how to cheat. You're on the other end of me, and we said "Down," the next thing would be "up," when you're down, I'm coming up, and I'd roll that long on you, and you had all the weight.

DM:

I guess, would you let those season out there awhile, and then chop them up?

DJ:

Yeah, then we chopped them up.

DM:

How would you—did you pull the—after you cut them down, would you pull the trunks up and everything?

DJ:

You'd dig around them, then hook a—

DM:

Hook up a team?

DJ:

Well, yeah, or some people, if they had, but we'd usually hook up three abreast, and then yank that—but you'd dig around it pretty good, and yank that thing out.

DM:

Did y'all have any trouble with boll weevil?

DJ:

No, we never did. But I guess, occasionally, we would poison, but we poisoned for tomato worms always—every year, that was a given, you were going to poison for—

DM:

What are you saying? Pausing?

DJ:

Poison.

DM:

Poisoning for tomato worms, and—yeah.

DJ:

And we used DDT, that stuff—because it's outlawed now, but it was some bad—yeah, you didn't do but one run with that DDT, because we'd mix it with flour. You didn't do straight DDT, you'd mix it.

DM:

Do you know anyone who had any bad effects from DDT?

DJ:

If we did, we didn't know it. You get two—or get a—depending on how many rows you wanted to carry—we generally carried four rows. Get a long pole, measure the space so it'd be—a bag would be right over the row, then you get on your horse with the saddle, and take that pole and balance it off the horn of that saddle, and shake—and you do it before the dew dried up, and it'd just float down on it. You do that, and you wouldn't have any worms. If you didn't—

DM:

You wouldn't have a crop, would you?

DJ:

Yeah, they'd wear you out. But we worked—all of us did—the girls—you asked me about chopping cotton, yes. By now, Casey is dating age, and they're movie-going age, and oh, I'd say at least twice a month, they'd go to the movies on Wednesday night. And I'd ask to go, "You're too young." I asked Mama, "Can I—," "You're too young." Well, we'd go to the field to chop cotton—now, I had to turn row every time they did. You know, David, I'd go out and take time, count those rows. I never put Mama in it, and I'd divide those—that total by six, and when I chopped—I didn't see any need to sit there and drag—cut that grass out from around those cotton stalks as clean as the top of—because they was going to come back. And once you

chopped, there was always a plow that'd come behind. And I figured "Heck, dirt will smother that grass, so if I cut it up, that's fine." But I would lay it down to where the plow could cover it, and shoot, by three thirty, four o'clock in the evening, I'd done my rows, I'd go out to the end—I was an avid reader, and I'd always have me a book, and I'd go out there, and I got whipped behind there. And finally, I told Mama, "Look, you know, I'm too young to go to the movie. I do as much work as Casey, so I don't think I ought to do my work and some of Casey's, too, if I'm too young to go to the movie." And Mama thought about it, and I would—every week, every time they'd—"Can I go?" "No, you're too young." The next time I—said "No, you're too young," Mama said "No he isn't. Yeah, boy, you can go." Of course, she had whipped me a time or two, because when she—I'd see her coming, I wouldn't jump up and run—now I would help Trudy and Sydney. You know, a lot of times, you didn't drink water in the middle of the field; you drank water at the end of the row. So if it's water time, and they[re] struggling, I'd help them finish out their row so they could drink, then I'd go back and sit down. And when I'd see Mama coming, I didn't get up, because I'd chopped my thirty rows—the heck with the rest of them. And she thrashed me a time or two, and then we had a good conversation, and Mama was a reasonable person, and it made sense, you know.

DM:

Then you started going to the movies.

DJ:

Then I started going to the movies. Sure did. And Casey and them would say "No, boy, you're too young, you're too little." And Mama would say "No he isn't. Yeah, he can go," so when they got ready to go to the movie, I got ready, and I got to go to the movies.

DM:

Now where was the movie theater?

DJ:

In Carthage.

DM:

In Carthage? Okay, how many miles was that from y'all?

DJ:

The way we had to go then, it was about fifteen; it's only about nine, now. There's a highway—Highway 315—runs from Carthage to the—well it runs from Carthage to Mount Enterprise. But I remember the Rusk county part of 315 was always there, but it came—and where the county line, Panola and Rusk county met, that highway stopped, and it wasn't anything but woods, now, it just ended. And then in the '30s, they extended 315 to Carthage, and that highway was built

without any kind of motor machine—no maintainers, no bulldozers, those people used what they called “Fresnos” and mules, rubbing hoes, posthole diggers, and shovels. And of course, the guys out there working was thicker than thieves, I imagine. I imagine in a couple miles’ space, you may have two or three hundred guys out there working, but they did all—315 was built with—

DM:

You know, going through those woods like that—that’s a lot of work. You’d have to cut down trees and everything else.

DJ:

They cut down those trees. They had guys—each—they had guys that’d do that. Now they got their stumps up with dynamite. And then they’d come in with—they had those huge plows, maybe four—

DM:

Four shares to a—

DJ:

No, four mules to a—and they’d plow that and break those ruts and all—but they did it all with man labor, you know, no—well later on, before they paved it—I don’t remember paving. I just remember them getting the roadbed. Now the paving, they may have used something like maintainers, graters, or stuff, but that basic roadbed was done with—

DM:

That’s incredible—lot of work. When did y’all get a tractor on the farm?

DJ:

Never got one. Never got a gas tractor until—heck, I was married. We didn’t get a gas tractor until the late ’40s. All of us were gone. Who ran that tractor? I guess a farmhand. Now there were houses on the place, and we had renters, and one of the renters had a guy that we would refer to as being slightly retarded, and he worked for Mama year-round. And what was his name? Golly—I can see the guy—but he could drive that tractor, and he could set the plows and he could bicker with it—Clyde, Clyde. Ole Clyde. But I never drove a tractor on our farm—never drove a tractor.

DM:

Now what about electricity? When did electricity come?

DJ:

April of 1948, I know when that hit.

DM:

Forty-eight, did you say?

DJ:

No, April of '47, because our house had a hall in it, and I had been—I was kind of puny. I'm out of the military now, and I was there on a cot about eleven o'clock at morning, just happened to be looking up, and the lights popped on. The house had been wired, and the lights popped on (Yelling) "Aww, we got lights—we got lights."

DM:

Oh, that's a nice memory, isn't it?

DJ:

And of course, I wasn't there, but eventually we had city water and natural gas out there. But Mama drilled a well, so we had running water long before we had the city water and the natural gas.

DM:

Did you have a well on a pump, an electric pump out there?

DJ:

Yes, but before then, our well was sixty feet, hand-dug, that thing was sixty feet deep—hand-dug. Water was so good. The well is still there. But the pump has been pulled, because Robert lives on his section of the—in the—not in the old home site, he lives—so that—I don't know what happened to that pump.

DM:

Where's the—is the old home site still standing out there?

DJ:

Yes.

DM:

The house is still standing?

DJ:

Yes.

DM:

When was it built, do you know?

DJ:

It was built in—when did that house burn—our house burned—the old, old house—it must have burned first of January, January 1, 1947.

DM:

Okay, the house you grew up in?

DJ:

Yes. '47. It burned January 1, 1947, and the lights came on in April of '47.

DM:

That was a new house that was built?

DJ:

Yeah, that's the house that's there now.

DM:

When y'all were kids growing up, working on the farm, did that ever affect your school? Did you have to be out for harvest or anything like that?

DJ:

No. We may would miss one or two days, but mom, and I guess, pop, both was the advocates of—they called it “book learning,” yeah, book learning. So no, we didn't miss school. And of course, we walked to school. My first school was about a quarter of a mile, or at most, a half mile from our house. The next school was four miles from our house. And then the next school was about two and a half, three miles from our house.

DM:

Okay. You remember the names of those schools?

DJ:

Yes, the first one was named “Shiloh,” the next one was named “Shady Grove,” and the next one was named “Shiloh Bethel.” They consolidated the Shiloh district with the Bethel district, and they named it Shiloh Bethel.

DM:

Were these schools where grades were combined? Or did you have your own separate teacher?

DJ:

No, they wasn't. No. Back, a few years ago, the education system came out with the open

concept that people were wild. Well, hell, I started at an open concept. I was—it wasn't anything new to me, because I was always, up until Shiloh Bethel, I was always in—there were always three grades in the room that I was in, you know. The teacher always taught singing. Say, if she had grades three, four, and five, she had a third grade math, then the fourth grade math, then the fifth grade math.

DM:

Did they live nearby? Or did they have a teacherage, or—?

DJ:

No, no, they lived nearby. They would come in and board—you know, room and board—with a family. And open concept isn't bad if it's used, because hey, the way they operated, they'd do the lower grade first, and you didn't get quite as much. And then the next grade, and then the—most of the time, say you get an hour; you'd maybe get fifteen minutes. The next grade would get fifteen, and then that last grade, the higher grade, would get the thirty. And heck, I never had too much difficulty, because—

DM:

I guess you were learning the advanced—

DJ:

Yeah, I was learning—say if I was in the third grade, then I was learning the fourth grade stuff, and also the fifth grade stuff. Matter of fact, I would do some of the—some of my brother's fifth grade work. I'd charge him a little bit—"Hey man, you going to chop the wood for me tomorrow?" "Yep" "Okay, I'll do your homework."

DM:

And you read a bit.

DJ:

Yeah, I read a lot.

DM:

Do you remember any of the books you read as a child, any of the titles, just off the top of your head?

DJ:

No, I was—I read a lot of fiction stuff. I read a lot—I was a comic book—that's where I spent my money, was on comic books. And I can—oh God—Flash Gordon—all of that was so fictional, then, Dick Tracy with his wrist TV, and all of that has come to pass.

DM:

It's amazing, isn't it?

DJ:

Uh-huh. And Flash Gordon in all of these wild airships. Well, what we have now would put Flash Gordon's stuff to here. But no, I read a lot. I didn't read a lot of what we called factual stuff, I read the—

DM:

Imaginative stuff, fiction.

DJ:

And who is the guy with the chimp? Tarzan. I read a lot of Tarzan stuff.

DM:

Oh yeah, that's fun stuff.

DJ:

Yeah, fun stuff. Now I didn't read factual stuff, that's boring. But I'll tell you what, we had a book of—twenty-four-volume encyclopedia, and if it rained, and we had to leave the field, you didn't go home and go to sleep. Mama would say "Get a book." And—a book? She's say "Get a book," and she taught, "Just go through it and read the captions under the pictures." And if you read that caption—if you read three—one out of three was going to grab your attention, and you were going to go look, and do more reading.

DM:

She knew that.

DJ:

Yeah, she did. And that's what we would do. Oh, she may would let you nap if you'd been working pretty steady. She may would let you nap fifteen or twenty minutes, then she'd wake you up "Get a book. Get a book."

DM:

So she encouraged all of this.

DJ:

Yes, she encouraged all that.

DM:

Now where did you go to high school in your later—

DJ:

Okay. Mama didn't feel that the public school was adequate, so none of us finish high school in Panola county. And all six of us went to boarding schools [for] our last grades. Sydney and Trudy finished high school at Mary Allen High School in Crockett. There was a junior college named Mary Allen Junior College, but it also had a high school. Mama sent Sydney there, and Sydney wouldn't stay without Trudy, so Trudy and Sydney finished high school at Mary Allen. Casey—Prairie View had a high school—Casey finished high school—his last high school, his senior year in high school was done at Prairie View. Albert Tracy, Robert, and Don finished high school at Center Point High School in Camp County¹. That's where I met my wife. They had a big old boarding school out there, and Albert Tracy and Robert—all of them—Trudy and Don were the only ones that spent more than one year, because Trudy stayed in order for Sydney to stay, so Mama had to pay for Trudy. So Trudy had three years away from—Casey and Sydney and Albert Tracy and Robert had one year. I had two years, because when I was scheduled to go to Center Point—I left Shiloh Bethel as a tenth grader, going—if I'd stayed—well, no. I was a tenth grader going into the eleventh grade, and the eleventh grade—that's where high school stopped, with eleven grades. But over the summer, those knuckleheads down at Austin said we needed another grade, so when I went to Center Point, I thought I was going as a senior, but they added that twelfth grade. So when I went to Center Point, that put me a junior again. So I spent two years there. So all—I finished high school where my wife grew up.

DM:

Okay. She grew up at Center Point.

DJ:

Yeah, and that was a big—they had dormitories—boys' dormitories, girls' dormitories, dining hall, just like Texas Tech, you know, the dormitories. So I spent two years there, because—and I'm the only one out of the six that had to do twelve grades.

DM:

Isn't that something? It might've been advantageous, though.

DJ:

Well I guess it was, because I learned a little more. But see, they—up until—that must have happened—I went to Center Point in—that must—'41, '42—that must have happened over the summer between '40 and '41—the school year '40 and '41, because when I got to Center Point,

¹ Center Point, Camp County, Texas is currently a ghost town, founded in 1865 by freed slaves. The school itself closed in 1955.

I was a junior again. And I remember, I heard all about the bombing of Pearl Harbor, and I heard Roosevelt when he asked the Congress for the declaration of war. And I heard when we declared war. I heard it on—I heard it live, because I was listening to it.

DM:

That's when you were at school, there.

DJ:

Yeah, there at Center Point. And most of the kids—none of us, when Mama sent us off to high school, none of us worked. I don't know how that old lady managed that. But I was the only non-community kid that—well, I'll put it this way: I was the only guy in the boys' dormitory—that lived in the dormitory—that didn't work. I didn't work. Mama paid for my school.

DM:

You know what, she was really, really devoted to y'all's education, sending you out like that to do the boarding—

DJ:

And she would knock a knot on your head with no reservations if you didn't come up with those grades. She didn't play.

DM:

Well she was sacrificing, you know, it sounds like, to make that happen.

DJ:

Yeah, yeah. But anyway—

DM:

What about your wife? What's your wife's name?

DJ:

Dorothy.

DM:

Dorothy. What's her maiden name?

DJ:

Thomas.

DM:

Dorothy Thomas from Center Point.

DJ:

In Camp County. And the first year I was there, there was a dormitory on the east side of the road, right at—right just like our houses, it was in line with the houses. It was a large community—bunch of people. And then there was a—we called it “The Rock”—there was a dormitory they made out of natural rock; that’s where the girls stayed the first year. And I don’t know what—and it never did make sense to me, because I could, in a hard rain, run out the north end of our dormitory and run in the west end of the cafeteria and would hardly get wet. We were just right there. And the girls lived—hell, the girls had to walk three hundred yards to get—and it never did make sense why they had the girls way down there. Well, the second year, they switched—put the girls where we lived, and put us down in the rock cabin. And I spent two years there, because they added that twelfth grade. Texas did—added that twelfth grade. And I originally was going as a senior, but when I got there—I don’t know how Mama didn’t know this, but when we got there, that’s when we were hit with it. And Mama said “Well, boy, you’re a junior again. Well, you’re a junior.” Well, see, why I left Shiloh Bethel as a tenth grader, I was a junior because next year I would be eleventh grade—a senior. And when I got to Center Point—well, if I’d gone back to Shiloh Bethel, I would have been the same thing, because it was all over Texas.

DM:

And wouldn’t you know it, it’d be just in time for you. So you graduated when? When did you graduate from there?

DJ:

’43.

DM:

’43. May, you think? May of ’43.

DJ:

Uh-huh. And it wasn’t really a graduation. We didn’t have a graduation. We had—we went to bacculaureate that Sunday, and that Monday, boy, half of the class—probably eighty-five percent of the guys in that class went off to the Army that Monday, went right off. So we didn’t have an official graduation, they just—because the class was so depleted by the draft, they just gave us our diplomas. But we did have the bacculaureate ceremony, but we didn’t have a formal graduation.

DM:

Oka. Did y'all get married around that time?

DJ:

No, we didn't get married until '47.

DM:

Forty-seven, after you were out of the military. When did you—you weren't pulled out at that time, were you?

DJ:

No, I was pulled out of Prairie View.

DM:

Right, now, well tell me how you got over to Prairie View, then—well then you went to Bishop, also somewhere—

DJ:

Yeah, but that Bishop was after. Okay, what happened—during that time, as far as race relations in the city of Carthage—it was awful difficult because I—I've had my son to tell—well he told me one time “Daddy, I wouldn't have taken that.” Okay, you had a choice: you take it, or get your neck stretched. Now, you make your choice. And Mama taught us survival tactics as far as the police and all these people. Well, we didn't have police, we had sheriff's department. And I had an incident with the sheriff, and David, back then a black man didn't put his hands on a white man in anger. If he did, he knew what was the consequence. I even have experienced the Night Riders, where you and I got into it today—and it doesn't matter whether you roughed me up or not—I am not—I was not to put my hands on you in anger. And you roughed me up, I had a visit from the Night Riders tonight, see. Well, I had a situation in Carthage with the sheriff's department, and this is where—and I'll make this statement: I don't think Mama was liked too well in Panola County. But Mama was respected in Panola County.

DM:

Was she not liked because she had so much?

DJ:

That was one of the things, plus being a woman—being a female. Well I had this situation—Sydney and I—black people couldn't wear white shirts in Carthage during the week, unless you were going to a funeral, or going to a church. No, you wouldn't ever be caught walking down the streets with a—black dude with a white shirt on? Hey, you were asking for a head-beating. Well this day, Monday—it was a Monday, Mama woke me up real early and said “Get up and take

Sydney to Carthage to catch the bus to go to the doctor in Tyler. I wasn't—I didn't have the time, it was right—harvest time. And I said "Where are my clothes?" and she said "Go ahead and wear your—here're your pants, go ahead and wear your shirt. You just going to take her down there, put her out, and come right back." Well, when we got to the bus station, we found out that the bus—and the buses were very erratic because sometimes they ran and sometimes they didn't, because of mechanical problems. Well, Sydney told me—ran in, and she said "They don't know whether the bus is going to get out of Nacogdoches or not." So I said "Well I'll drive around." I knew not to get out. And I'd drive around and go back, "No, bus still hasn't left Nacogdoches." And in the process, those guys spotted the white shirt. So I said "Okay, I'll just ease down and park the pickup and go into one of these businesses—cafes." Well, I don't think they were—I don't really think, giving them due, I don't really think that they had nailed me in the pickup. But I happened to be in—I happened to think, that's why I parked the pickup and went into one of the cafes. And they came in and saw me, and they got five of us. The other guys—four of the guys—didn't have on a shirt. They just got them because—"Where do you work?" "I don't have a job." So they got five of us. And Sydney, she had found that the bus wasn't going to make it, and she had had an idea where I was. So she saw them as they were putting me in the car, and she came and asked, you know, "This is my brother. What are you arresting him for?" So the guy—

DM:

This was actually the sheriff and his people coming up?

DJ:

Yes. This was the guy—the guy that was driving the car was the second in command. And of course, when he said "You ought to know," well Sydney was pretty fiery, and she said "No, I don't know, all I want to know [is] what you[re] charging him for. What has he done?" and he slapped her. Well, they—the side of the street where we were parked was angled—pretty tilted pretty well—and he parked on the—he parked—the way his car was parked, it was on an angle, and there was a little guy—a deputy—standing outside. And when he slapped Sydney, she fell into the guy outside, and he spun her around and whomped her again. That's when I bailed out of the car. Not to fight, understand me, because I was just going to grab Sydney and hold her and take her licks. Well, when I bailed out, he came out with his gun and pistol-whipped me. Well instinct took over, so I whomped up on him pretty good. And they got it stopped. They guy under the steering wheel came out and put his gun on me and with a few strong words, I'd done enough to be in the graveyard, so they carried me to jail—the sheriff's office was in the courthouse, and there was a—right—just about in the middle of the—just like—Jefferson? I can't remember. Well you know, all those little towns made on a square. Well they carried us in the west side of the courthouse because that's where the sheriff's office was near. And in the middle of the west square, there was a toggerly store—a men's specialty store. And about the same space in the south side, those same people had a women's specialty store. They were

named Matthew and Martin—I don't know—I just knew that because of the writing on the—but one of those men, when they came, carried us in, and closed the door, he apparently saw us and recognized us, because I remember, he just opened the door—the door was closed—he just opened the door—and I don't know who he was, Matthew or Martin, I don't know—but that guy opened that door and stuck his head in the door—the sheriff—we called him the “High Sheriff”—was named Corbett Akins. I won't forget him. The guy right under him was named Kush Reed. And when that man stuck his head in the door, he was sitting just like this—he was facing east, Sydney and I was on the—standing right here. Those other four guys were over here. That man stuck his head in the door—because they piled all of us in the back of a 1948 maroon Pontiac—I remember it. Did I say '48?

DM:
'48 is what you said.

DJ:
No, '38, not '48, because we're not to '48. '38 maroon Pontiac—Chieftain Pontiac. And he didn't come in, just stuck his head in the door—the door was over here—and he said “Corbett, I don't know about those four boys” —pointed to those four men—“but you better know what you're doing when you mess with that girl and that boy” and pointed to Sydney and me. And he backed out and closed the door and Akins' attitude changed just like that. Just like that.

DM:
Who was this person? An influential businessman?

DJ:
He was in this men's specialty store, and this—I don't know how he knew us, because we were not able to go in either one, but he said “I don't know about those four men—those four boys—but you better know what you're doing when you” —and he used the word “mess with that girl and that boy,” and pointed to Sydney and me. And Akins' attitude changed, because he had told them to take me over to the jail and give me a good whipping.

DM:
The sheriff had.

DJ:
Yeah, had told, because when he came in, the little fellow—the one that I'd had the fight with—the altercation with—I bruised him pretty good, because I had the advantage. He was downhill, and he was puny like me—a tad more punier than I. And he was trying to fight uphill, and I'm fighting downhill.

DM:

But because of that, they're going to whip you.

DJ:

Yeah, because of that, they was going to whip me. And he told him, you know—and they were pretty adamant about it, because Sydney chimed in, and he said “We can give you some of it, too.” And that's when the guy opened the door and said, “Corbett, I don't know about those four boys” —pointed to those other four men—“but you better know what you're doing when you mess with that girl and that boy.”

DM:

Was it because of—did he know your Mama, or know of your Mama?

DJ:

I don't know how, because we didn't trade with him. We were not able to. That was where the affluent people—a whole lot of white people didn't trade there. This was like Malouf's.

DM:

So why do you think he stood up for you?

DJ:

Because he was a man, and believed in right. And Akins' attitude changed just like that—just like that.

DM:

Did they release you?

DJ:

Yes.

DM:

Right then?

DJ:

Yeah, they started to, kind of backtracking. And how Mama got the word, I do not know, because we didn't have phones, and then it was about nine miles, because 315 was in, it made it—the highway made us closer. And I met Mama—they recognized the pickup, I didn't recognize—because I'm pretty upset now—and there were four vehicles behind Mama, they were—with white guys. They had weapons.

DM:

They were following her?

DJ:

They were with Mama; they were following Mama. They were supporting Mama, and if Akins don't do right, we got news for him. One of those guys was named Sterling Davis, and Sterling didn't like anything associated with Corbett Akins, you know. Matter of fact, he—Corbett drove a '41 Roadmaster Buick, and he'd come through Clayton with that Buick, bouncing with that siren on, and Sterling told him, "Look, if any of these N-people do anything out here, you don't have to do this. If they do anything, we'll see that they—if they do something Saturday night, they'll be at your office. Don't come through Clayton" —he was in Clayton—"don't come through Clayton like this anymore." Well Sterling was an avid bird hunter. He heard ol' Corbett coming with that siren—and I didn't see this, but it's a fact—he went in the house and got his shotgun, and when Corbett came by, he opened up, "Boom, boom, boom, boom," yeah he did, but he was shooting bird shots, and he didn't—he shot the door, see, they didn't—it stopped—and Corbett didn't arrest him. Old Corbett was a little guy, too, he didn't arrest him, either. Yeah, old Sterling—

DM:

So Sterling's a white guy?

DJ:

Yes, a white guy.

DM:

So there's a rivalry there.

DJ:

Yeah, and see, the white—I don't know what went on the east side of Carthage—the east side of the county, but the west side of the county, there was a relationship between the blacks and the whites. Now, if there was a west side white man involved with a west side black, the others just let it—but if it was anybody from Carthage east, got involved with the west side blacks, those west side whites would defend them, up to a point. And see, and old Sterling had told Corbett a couple times, "You don't need to do this. If any of these N-people—"

DM:

Did he use that word?

DJ:

Yeah, he used the word. Yeah, he'd say "If any of these niggers out here do something Saturday

night, don't come out here. If they kill one, the killer will be at your office. If they fight, both of them will be there Monday. Don't come through here with this—" I don't know what had happened.

DM:

In other words, the local people will take care of it and get it to—

DJ:

Yeah, will take care of it, see.

DM:

Now was this, was this—Akins—was he Ku Klux Klan, you think?

DJ:

Do you know what? That never crossed our minds.

DM:

What are you talking about when you say "Night Riders?"

DJ:

Well, they're just a bunch of white people would get together—

DM:

I figured you were talking about Klansmen, but you're talking about something—

DJ:

No, they'd just get a bunch of—get in their vehicles and come out to the black man's house and if they decide they're going to lynch him, they lynch him, and if they're going to whip him, they whip him. No, but I didn't—I didn't ever—the only time I ever heard Mama talk about the Ku Klux Klan, was the situation in Waco. Mama never—we never talked about Klan. We knew about them, but we never discussed them.

DM:

You never saw anything like that.

DJ:

No, I never saw a sheet, or anything, no.

DM:

Back in that area where you grew up, did you ever see or hear of any lynchings close by, or beatings and things like that?

DJ:

No, but I—beatings—but I knew of a—there was a black guy that killed a white constable. Now they hung some black people behind that—they didn't kill them, they just stretched them—just kept enough weight that they didn't hang them, trying to make them tell about the black guy that did that. And that went on until the white people got enough of it. And some of them were in it. But they said "This is out of hand." And they were not able to disperse it—shut it down—and a Texas Ranger came in there and shut that down.

DM:

About when was that, do you know?

DJ:

This shooting happened the Saturday night before the first Sunday in September, and the reason I know—

DM:

Of what year?

DJ:

Must have been '39 —'38 or '39. And the reason I know, because all those churches in the area had what we called "revival" —protracted meetings. They started on Sunday, go Sunday, and every night—end on Friday night. And this happened the Saturday night—in Murvaul, where I grew up, the church, it would start with Bethel—old Bethel—the fourth Sunday in July, and then there was one every Sunday until—and of course, the other churches would rush their service. They'd have service, but they rushed that service so that they could go to the—

DM:

Oh, to the revival.

DJ:

Uh-huh. I used to know—Shady Grove was the third Sunday in August. That's the reason I knew—had that pinned down, because the day after Shady Grove, we went to the Cotton Patch. But Bethel, the fourth Sunday in July, Hollins Corner, the first Sunday in August, New Zion, the second Sunday in August, and Shady Grove the third Sunday in August, the fourth Sunday was—can't think of that name—and then the first Sunday in September was Murvaul.

DM:

Okay. Did y'all go to a particular church, and did y'all go to the revivals?

DJ:

Yeah, we—yeah, you'd go every Sunday, you'd go to Murvaul for our service, then wherever, like the second Sunday, we'd leave and go—get through with our service and go there.

DM:

Was Murvaul—did they—were they a particular religion? Were they Baptist, or Methodist—?

DJ:

We're Presbyterian. All of the other churches that I names was Baptist, but we were the only Presbyterian. And all of those other churches grew out of Murvaul. Murvaul is one of the oldest churches in that area.

DM:

Being the Presbyterian church, but some became Baptist as they scattered out. Okay.

DJ:

Well, see, they would come, and there was not a Baptist church, so they'd come there until they could get a Baptist church established. That was before my time, though, because all those churches I named were well-established.

DM:

It sounds like that you were safer in your community than you would be if you wandered into Carthage, or east of Carthage. Is that true?

DJ:

Absolutely.

DM:

Now what would your Mama tell you to prepare you for this? You said that she kind of let you know.

DJ:

Well, yeah, but she didn't ever say "Come here boy, let me tell you." But just in casual conversation.

DM:

Telling you what happened to so-and-so, or—

DJ:

Yeah, yeah, and “You shouldn’t do that. You should’ve this,” or somebody would come by—and incident happened, and somebody would come by and they’d be talking about it. “Well, he”—he being me, the black guy—“well, you know we have tempers”—you’re another black person, we’re talking—“Well, you know, David, we have tempers, but hey, man, we know what—old Don should have—I know he hates—but he shouldn’t have hit him,” you know. Now if you hit me first, then they said, “Well, Don should have gotten him one lick and then ran.” So this is why we, you know—

DM:

What were some of the things that you had to remember? You weren’t to wear a white shirt to Carthage, you weren’t to put your hands on a white guy in anger—

DJ:

And one of the things that my mom never told me this, but I—we formalized this phrase: if a white guy comes up to you, and he reaches out his right hand to shake your hand, don’t worry about that right hand, you watch that left hand, because he’ll be shaking your right hand, and—shaking your hand, and with that left hand, sticking it to you. We came up with that ourselves. Now Mama never told me that, but hearing it, you know—and I’ll tell you another thing, probably what helped us. I told you Papa liked skirts. There was a daughter of one of his exes, after he died, sued us for child support. That old gal was doing a good job, too, but—and she probably—it probably wouldn’t have mattered too much, had she just sued for a child’s part, but she sued for the whole shooting match. Somebody told her, she—I thought she was in Houston, but Robert told me she was somewhere in Oklahoma. But there was one of his in Houston, because their name was Ollie. Well, let me correct that. Robert thought she was in Oklahoma, but she was in Houston, and that old gal was working—and I knew, this was in the early ’30s, and I knew something was up, because Mama was leaving home every day in Sunday clothes—not on Sunday, but Tuesday, Wednesday, Monday, she would leave, and we knew something was wrong.

DM:

Was she going to court?

DJ:

She was going to court. And Mama had her—our attorneys were out of Waco. I guess they must have been pretty good.

DM:

Who was it?

DJ:

Her attorneys were from Waco.

DM:

Her attorneys were from Waco, okay.

DJ:

Our attorneys were from Waco. And they must have been pretty good, because this thing—it just wasn't a day or two, it—and it finally hit them. We came in with three strikes—with two strikes against us. One—big city attorneys against the little city, and black woman with this property—and it—they were up two days and down four, you know. And somebody, it finally hit somebody. We need to change. What we need is some white attorney that will be our mouthpiece. He—we'll get all the work, but he presents it. We just kind of stayed. And old guy named Brachfield²—there's a little town—

DM:

Brachfield

DJ:

Brachfield—between—one way we can go from Henderson to our place [is to] go through Brachfield. I don't know any of these people, because I never saw them. If I did, I didn't know it. But anyway, he was retired—it was an old attorney, had been a judge, and had retired. But he was keeping up with this, and somebody said “We know the man y'all need to approach.” And they went and told him, he said “Yeah, I'll do it.”

DM:

Now do you know his name?

DJ:

Name's Brachfield.

DM:

His name's Brachfield—

DJ:

I don't know any of the other attorneys, all I know is Brachfield.

² Charles Louis Brachfield. In 1926 Brachfield ran for attorney general, thus becoming the first Jewish Texan to seek statewide office.

DM:

Brachfield was his name, I thought it was the name of the town.

DJ:

Well, the town was named after him.

DM:

Brachfield. Okay.

DJ:

“Yeah, I’ll do that.”

DM:

And that worked.

DJ:

Up to a point. But he got to the point to where his value topped out, and it hit him. They’re just not—they being the white community—they’re just not going to let that woman hang on to this stuff. We’re going to see—those guys were working for a percentage, like you do. And they were—the community—

DM:

But it was just galling for them to see this black woman owning all this property.

DJ:

Yes, and that wasn’t going—and they had been looking for a chance, and now this was it. Old Brachfield was smart enough, he said “The only way I know that we can survive this stuff is for that woman” —see, Mama didn’t have much; Mama and Papa bought a hundred acres. Papa had all that other stuff before she came—“The only way” —now, that’s strange. I said “All of it,” but the gal wasn’t shooting after that hundred acres. That was cut out. We were going to end up with a hundred acres, because, see, she had to fight Mama. She couldn’t get—she couldn’t touch—actually touch but fifty acres, because Mama was still alive. Mama and Papa bought the hundred, Mama had half and Papa had half, lawful in Texas, you know. So she cut that out, but all that other—those other hundreds—boy, she was—and he says “The only way is for Rose” —and Mama’s named Rose—“for Rosie to hang on to this stuff is to give up” —you see, she was our mom, and she was also our guardian—had legal over—see, all that other stuff we got. Mama just had a widow’s—until she lived—until she died, see, Mama couldn’t sell an inch. Papa made sure of that. So he said “We need to find fairly wealthy white man with as few relatives as possible, and see if he” —well, they had approached Mama, and she said “Anything to hold on to it, because this is the promise that I made to Wade. Yes, find the right person.” And we—

Clayton—you know, I said Clayton—we would trade, and that's who we traded within Clayton. The guy was named Bill Bryant. And Bill Bryant, as I can recall, had an adopted nephew. That was the only relative I ever knew. His wife was named Sophronie—we called her "Miss Froni." You haven't met a sailor [that] could out-curse Miss Froni, golly. That old lady—Miss Froni and Jessie Robertson—you remember I mentioned Jessie and Roscoe—and I got a lot to tell you at the end of this about Jessie and Roscoe, my son-in-law says this is a "true lie" if it's anything, but this is, would be a true lie. But Miss Froni, golly—that woman—people say every other word—every other word that came out of Miss Froni's mouth, and those four-letter words hang. She had dibs on all of those—golly, that woman could curse, and it didn't matter—I knew her minister, and I've heard her around Jackie and Miranda—and he wouldn't even turn red. He'd just stand there—because it was a natural thing. But anyway, they approached—Miss Froni didn't have any relatives. She had one, Sterling Davis' wife was Miss Froni's sister. That was the only one—only relative—we knew about. Miss Froni—when they approached—you know, back then, women didn't get involved in men's business—but they—Mr. and Mrs. Bill—Miss Froni and Mr. Bill have a store in Clayton, and that's where we traded. And Miss Froni—and I didn't know for a long time, I didn't know why Miss Froni was pretty protective of us. I don't know about the rest of them, but of me, because I was little, and Mama would get a dozen eggs, put some cotton seed in the bucket and then some eggs, so—because she knew with me, it was rambunctious—I'd do, and I'd break all the eggs, you know. And then I'd head out to Clayton, you know. And we only bought salt, sugar, and flour. And Mama would get ready to bake a cake and didn't have enough sugar, so you got eggs—dozen eggs—and you'd go swap, and I'd go. And Miss Froni was pretty protective of me. Some little white boys, you know, would be—and she'd—and she had some choice words for them, too. She was a whip. But anyway, they approached Mr. Bill, and he declined. They explained the situation, "Yeah, I know Rose, and knew Wade, but I don't want to get involved in this." And when they got home, the story goes, when they got home that evening—closed up the store and everything—Miss Froni asked what was this about, and Mr. Bill—that's what we called him, Mr. Bill—told her. "And you declined? You're not going to do that for Rosie? You're going to have a long time sleeping on the couch, boy." They had a phone, and she made him, then—I guess it was suppertime—and she had him to call—they had a phone number, and got in touch with—I don't know, one of the attorneys, I think it was old man Brachfield, and said "Yes, I'll do it." Miss Froni said "Hey, look, you need to do this. You do this." And let's see, if this was '32, I was seven, Robert was nine, Albert Tracy was eleven, Trudy was thirteen, Sydney was—the oldest was about sixteen or seventeen. Mr. Bill decided to do it, went to court, testified, "I'll sign any paper saying that—and I'll do it," and that thing—like that happened [at] ten o'clock this morning, by three o'clock this evening that thing was over.

DM:

Golly. Now, how did they arrange it? Mr. Bill was a guardian?

DJ:

In other words, yes, anything that came—that we didn't grow—Mama had two accounts. Tomato, cotton money went in one account. The—and you know I told you there were houses on the place—any money that the tenants—any timber money, and oil or gas lease money went in another account. And Mama couldn't touch that account without the approval of Mr. Bill. And Mama couldn't lease—rent a house. You know they rented on half and halves, I don't know whether you know, that half and half deal meant that the landlord furnished everything, even down to tools and team, and whatever was made was cut down—

DM:

Like a sharecropper.

DJ:

Yeah, that's what we had. We had sharecroppers. It was cut down the middle. If you made five bales of—six bales of cotton, the landowner got three. And then, there was a third and fourths, where the tenant furnished his stuff, and you got every third bale or every fourth bale, whichever way you agreed on. And we had—there was four or five tenants on the place. So that money, if there was any, and it had to be converted. We only got—only looked at cotton, because no one sold—if they sold twelve or fifteen bushels of corn or something, that just didn't count. But the cotton, that stuff was converted into money. Now they get—we'd get the cotton. Mama couldn't—she could sell it, but she had to sell it with Mr. Bill's approval.

DM:

I see. She had to have—basically, she had to have a white man as a guardian over her and her children.

DJ:

That's it. Over her—now see, he didn't handle this. He didn't handle this hundred acres; he didn't touch that, but that other—and

DM:

But that protected it from the others, who were trying to take this all apart.

DJ:

Yes, and I'll tell you what. You see, two things give me a different perspective—gave me a different perspective of white people, different from my siblings. Now Mr. Bill, if that joker took a penny, he was slick. He was slick, because by the time I got to be twelve, I was curious, and I would—people would come around, you know, like I said, a guy trying to lease some land. He'd show up, then he'd show up again. I knew something was going on, and I'd inquire, because I'm still—I didn't—just recently—I say “recently,” it may've been fifteen, thirty years ago—but I

had concerns in my mind about this suit. And every time I saw white people, that fear—and I inquired—once I got up, I'd inquire with Mama, and she'd tell me, "Well, they're trying to lease some land," or "they're trying to buy some timber." And a joker came in there, and he's paying white guys three dollars an acre to lease land, and he come to Mama, "I'll give you a dollar and a half an acre." And he'd have the figure, "That's a lot of money." Old man Bill, "Rosie, next time he comes by, you tell him to get to stepping, or I'll tell him." He has a choice, he give you three dollars an acre, or we don't lease. He come by, trying to buy some timber, offering somebody—other people—"X" number of dollars for their timber, and want to give—he would not, and "Well, I really need some money." "You don't need money that bad. You just may want it, but you don't need it." And if he realized she really needed it, "I'll go to town; we'll get it out of the bank, you don't sell that stuff for less." He never allowed—and Mama ran a bunch of cows, too, and—

DM:

A bunch of what?

DJ:

Cows. You know—and she would sell her—keep her calves—the females for milk, but she'd sell the little bulls. And she had four or five to sell, and Mr. Bill would say "You don't need to sell them now, Rosie; [the] price is down." "Well, I need some money." "What do you need it for?" "Well, I need to pay the kids' tuition." "Well, I'll go to the bank; I'll let you have it. Do whatever you want to do." And a lot of times, if Miss Froni was around, she didn't even sign any papers, boy she was—Miss Froni was a whip. Gdt-dang that woman could curse. And she'd say "Uh, Bill, you know Rosie is going to pay you, just give her the money. Don't charge her." And she'd be curing up a storm. But anyway, if that guy ever went bowlegged in favor—against us—I don't know it. I know one thing that Mr. Bill asked—one favor. Papa had a little stack-barreled Derringer, like the thing that killed—Booth shot Lincoln with.

DM:

What'd you call it? A stacked—

DJ:

Well, that's what they called it, because stacked—

DM:

Oh, stacked-barrel Derringer.

DJ:

He came out there one day and said "Rosie, I know Wade had this little gun. I don't want to buy it, I don't want you to give it to me, but I want you to let me keep it." Mama kind of—he said

“I’ll see that you get it back.” So Mama let him have that gun, and God, I don’t know how long that man had that gun. But Mr. Bill got sick, and he came out—I remember—he came out on a Wednesday evening, and brought Mama that gun. By Saturday, Mr. Bill was dead. I have the gun at home, now.

DM:

I wonder why he wanted to keep it—

DJ:

I don’t know, it was just something of Wade’s. But he kept that gun forever, and we all decided “Hell, we’ll never see that gun again,” because that adopted nephew was named Doug, and his last name was Jones—Doug Jones. I guess his name was Douglass, but we called him Doug, and we’d say “Shoot, Doug’s got that gun, we will never see it.” But the week before that he died, he brought that gun himself—Doug drove him, he wasn’t driving anymore, Doug drove him out there, “Boy, tell Rosie [to] come out here. I don’t feel like getting out.” And Mama went to the pickup, he said “Rosie, here’s the gun.” And I have the gun at home now.

DM:

So as far as you know, he treated y’all okay.

DJ:

Super okay, because there were times when he could have really jerked the rug out from under us.

DM:

It’s interesting that his wife was the sister of Sterling Davis, who had the talk with the sheriff.

DJ:

Now, I don’t know, but I guess maybe Sterling—I know Sterling—if you got in Sterling’s shadow, he’d give you a chance to get out—a short chance. If you didn’t, he’d put you out. Now he was married to Miss Froni’s sister. I didn’t know anything her, but Miss Froni was the same way. You got in Miss Froni’s shadow, she said “David, you and Don, y’all need to” —and hey, the next thing, young man, some hurt was coming towards your way. Yeah, Miss Froni didn’t play.

DM:

She’d give a little warning, there, huh?

DJ:

Yeah, she’d give a little warning. She was a person. But I had a—I think, now, if I had an

opportunity to know—to have what I had as growing up, I mean, the attitude and all that stuff, and somebody—and now, and somebody said “Okay, you can live like it is now, or you can go back,” I’d go back, because I couldn’t survive now. We talk about young people now, but when I think about all—see, we didn’t have any distractions. We went to bed almost when the chickens went to roost, and got up when the rooster crowed in the morning. Like I tell you, we got up at four o’clock, just about three sixty-five. Now we would—we’d sleep in a little late between Fourth of July and the fifth Monday in August, you know, but—only thing we knew, we knew about marijuana, but we called it “reefers,” guys smoking reefers. And you didn’t hear much of that. Now, those guys—they made moonshine booze, and of course, being boys, you a moonshiner, we’d stalk you and find out where your stash was. And we’d go steal your stash, and then you drank some, then you’d think “Oh heck. I’ve got to go home.” And see, Mama didn’t use tobacco or alcohol in any shape, form, or fashion. Mama was very clean-spoken. I never heard Mama—well, I heard her use “damn” and the “S-word” once. She just didn’t. Up until Mama was in her mid-seventies, before—now, taking communion—and I suspect it was grape juice—now, we would always have a big Thanksgiving dinner, and somebody at—I told you that Papa had James, then Bertha, then Sydney—James and Bertha were halves. But Mom adopted—Bertha was twelve when Mama married—Mama and Papa married—and Mama adopted her, and Bertha was just like a whole to me, so we would meet at Bertha’s house a lot of times after Mama got—and have the Thanksgiving dinner, and somebody came up with some wine, some white wine with the turkey, and after Mama got hooked on that, if you didn’t have wine, Mama wouldn’t eat your turkey.

DM:

She liked it, huh?

DJ:

Yeah, yeah. She had to have that wine. That’s the only time she—she didn’t ever sip on it, but she’d get her share during that turkey business. But she was very clean-spoken.

DM:

You talk about those times and these time, how do you deal with being talked down to? Like being called “boy,” or being called the “N-word,” or being—having restrictions on you that other people—white boys don’t have—how do you deal with that?

DJ:

You were taught, you know, you deal with it or you don’t.

DM:

You know it’s injustice. You’ve got to know, from a—

DJ:

Yeah, but you—what do you want, to continue to live and deal with this injustice, or buck it and die? That was your choice.

DM:

It's survival.

DJ:

Survival, that's what I told you. Mama taught us survival tactics. And Mama never went to jail to get neither one—one time, Robert, an adult now, was going from home—he was living in Houston. He got stopped in Lufkin, and had a weapon in the car, and he got arrested. That was the only time Mama ever had any dealing with the officers about one of us. And you know, we—I told you about this young aggressive lawyer—this white guy lawyer? He was a unique person. He had problems getting in law school, because—I don't know whether they still have to do it now, but then you had to have a recommendation from an attorney. And nobody in Carthage would give him a recommendation, because he played with the black boys. He was born on the wrong side of the tracks. His name was Fred Whitaker, and we—he got so good we called him the "Perry Mason of East Texas." Oh, Fred—and he was always for the black guy. Always, and old Fred—a lot of property—just about all black people had property in our area, but not like Papa. And they lost a bunch of that property—like you needed some money, "Well, yeah, I'll let you have some money, but put up your land," and they'd let you pay, and then whoom! They'd take—you didn't pay, you get—and Fred got—when he came out of law school, I guess Mama was one of his first clients. She'd leased some land, and Mr. — Mama did all the footwork like that, but those papers had to go by Mr. Bill. And she had leased some land before, and had some knowledge of it, and she went—tried to go to some other lawyers there in town, and they wouldn't. And she went to Fred—and I remember his office was over at First National Bank in Carthage. He had an old rickety desk, two chairs, and nothing on the floor. And he ended up being a millionaire. But anyway, anytime a black dude—well, he just about had all the black trade in three or four counties around there. And if it was—if you were opposing a white guy, you certainly wanted Fred Whitaker, because he had a—I guess he had a vendetta—the main law firm in Carthage—I think it was two brothers, and maybe a nephew. And they had that thing wrapped up. And they were the ones that wouldn't give Fred—write him a letter, said "You grew up on the wrong side of the track." And old Fred—

DM:

He was having to fight the system, then.

DJ:

Yeah, and he glowed in it. And he was good at what he did. He would go back and research stuff, and he'd come up with—and I've known the judge said "We've got to have a recess,"

because the judge didn't know what Fred—"Where did you get this?" and old Fred didn't lose any cases. A black guy killed a white guy, and he stayed gone forever. And they finally caught him and brought him back to Carthage—by now, old Fred is pretty established. Mama went on to bond, and old Fred had him out. And Robert, the brother, came home, and—the man's name is Caine—and saw Mr. Caine sitting on the curb, went home and said "Mama, I saw—what's going on? I saw that man, Caine," "Where about?" "Out there." "Take me to town, take me to town." And Mama headed—Robert and Mama went to Fred, and he said—and I'll tell you another thing. Then, you were a boy and a girl until you were just so old and decrepit. Then, I became your uncle, or the woman was your aunt. You stopped calling me "boy," and now you'd say "Uncle Don," or "Aunt Rosie." Well, Fred Whitaker, playing the system, he had respect—I say this—respect for Mama. He couldn't say "Miss Jones," but he found out that he could say "Miss Rosie Jones," and it would go right over the top of people. But if he said "Miss Jones," they'd take notice, but if he said "Miss Rosie Jones," you know, and that's how he referred to Mama all the time, "Miss Rosie Jones." Just here, just the two of them talking, "Now, Miss Rosie Jones, you know better than that," instead of "Rosie," or "Miss Jones," he said "Miss Rosie Jones." He did want to call her "Rosie," didn't want to call her "Auntie," but he knew if he called her just "Miss Jones," he'd raise—so he called Mama—

DM:

Right, he knew how to exist in that system.

DJ:

Yeah, he'd call her "Miss Rosie Jones." And he told Mama, said "Miss Rosie Jones, that man is the safest man in Panola County. He's under"—they got him out of Arizona, somewhere, and he worked a deal with somebody. They had to put up a—Panola County had to put up a hellacious bond to the state of Arizona to get him extradited, and he said, and then when they got him back here, old Fred put—he said "He's the safest man in Panola County. He better not even break a nail on that man—fingernail on that man. Yeah, he's the safest man in Panola County."

DM:

He was effective, then.

DJ:

Yeah, he was very effective.

DM:

Thank goodness there're these people that will stand up, you know, in opposition to the established power in Carthage.

DJ:

Yeah, well, you see, when you think that you stand up and then you go to church and then your minister tells you, "It may be well for you to look for another church home," see, that's pretty tough, man. And I—now, I don't think Mr. Bill had that problem, because of Miss Froni, because Miss Froni would—and they were pretty wealthy. Miss Froni would have told that minister, "Well, hell, I'll just buy your contract and send you scooting. You may need to find another church home."

DM:

You know, it makes you wonder what Miss Froni and her sister's background was, to make them that good of—that strong a person.

DJ:

I don't know. I can't talk about Mrs. Davis. I can't talk about—but I just think Miss Froni was just Miss Froni. She just didn't like the big guy messing with the little guy. And I guess the best way to put it, she just didn't like injustice. And she—and in Miss Froni's way, she fought it, you know, because she did a couple of—and see, I knew better. A couple of them little—and they had a good-sized—big store, and they sold everything. I didn't know it until here recently; I didn't know they even sold caskets. Robert was telling me, I didn't know that, he said, "Yeah, man, they kept them back there in the back of that feed room." I said "Well, it's a good thing. I'm afraid of dead people. It's a good thing, but" —they sold everything. And you could go in there, and it—they had—I don't know whether people—but there would always be several people in the store.

DM:

Now when was his—he died, and so what happened to his authority over the farm?

DJ:

Well, as each child became twenty-one—see, he dropped off.

DM:

So when you were all adults, it was all taken care of.

DJ:

Yeah. Then they said that, you know, now it's all taken care of. And it's just been here in recent years when that stuff was divided. Up until—in the '80s —when did we divide that stuff? That stuff—that property was divided in the late '80s, early '90s.

DM:

But anyway, it went out from under his guardianship—

DJ:

Uh-huh, as you became twenty-one.

DM:

And everything ended okay.

DJ:

Everything ended—the last thing he did, and I don't know whether it was legal or not, but between Bill Bryant and Fred Whitaker—I don't know, but the land was leased, and I was the last one. When I became twenty—well, I was twenty-one, but I was in service, and when I came home, the next day or two, I was in the store, messing with Miss Froni, and she was raking me over the coals, you know, but she was enjoying it, you know, I was messing with her. And Mr. Bill told me, said “Boy, you know, you've got some money coming.” I said “What do you mean, some money coming?” He said “You know that lease? Your part of it—your stuff—is not leased.” I said “You've got to be kidding.” He said “No,” and it was Skelly Oil Company had the lease. And of course, they had all of this other stuff, and between Bill and Fred, I got a pretty good chunk of money, because, see, I remember, they leased that stuff for two dollars an acre, when it was—I was at home at the original lease, and I got fifteen dollars an acre out of mine. And we're talking about back in the '40s, oh no, and anywhere you go, the stuff was undivided, anywhere you go, we're going to make sure that Don claims that. You go here; he's going to claim that. You try to put a well; he's going to claim that. Yeah, I got a pretty good chunk of money.

DM:

Good, that's a good thing right out of the service, too, isn't it?

DJ:

One of the big mistakes, though, it still bothers me—I didn't have Papa's whatever—I could have bought a house and ninety acres of land [for] what I paid for a used car, and I chose to buy the used car. And that bothers me now—

DM:

That just sounds like what a typical young guy would do, though, you know?

DJ:

Yeah, yeah. And before military, Casey was the only one that was dating, and Albert Tracy would go, because Casey was skittish. He didn't like dark; he didn't like night, so—and when we got—all of us were adults, and we had never ran around together. And David, we spent enough money that summer—golly—the first year we were ever—ooooo boy. Ooooo. You know, it was pitiful. But anyway.

DM:

Let's pause this just a second, I'm going to hit this button.

End of recording



© Southwest Collection/
Special Collections Library