

**Oral History Interview of  
Betty Darby**

**Interviewed by: David Marshall  
July 27, 2018  
via phone**

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*General Southwest Collection Interviews***

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### Preferred Citation for this Document:

Darby, Betty, Oral History Interview, July 27, 2018. Interview by David Marshall, Online Transcription, Southwest Collection/Special Collections Library. URL of PDF, date accessed.

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### Recording Notes:

*Original Format:* Born Digital Audio

*Digitization Details:* N/A

*Audio Metadata:* 44.1kHz/ MPEG-4 video file [audio only]

*Further Access Restrictions:* N/A

*Related Interviews:*

### Transcription Notes:

*Interviewer:* David Marshall

*Audio Editor:* N/A

*Transcription:* Ian Fehl

*Editor(s):* Kayci Rush

## Transcript Overview:

This interview features Betty Darby as she discusses her family and Ropesville, Texas.

**Length of Interview:** 00:59:31

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Introduction, background information; farming	05	00:00:00
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Segregation of schools; Ella May Ward	26	00:47:59

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### Keywords

Ropesville, Texas, Family Life and Background, Farming

**David Marshall (DM):**

The date is July 27, of 2018. This is David Marshall interviewing Betty Darby. I'm in Lubbock, Texas and you're in Seminole, Texas. So we're going to talk a little bit about Ropes and your information in the history of Ropes in preparation for this centennial celebration that's coming. But to get a little information on you, can you give me your full name, including your maiden name?

**Betty Darby (BD):**

Yes. It's Betty K. Bigs Darby.

DM:

Okay. Then what is your date of birth?

BD:

It's March 5, 1937.

DM:

And where were you born?

BD:

I was actually born in Childress, Texas.

DM:

Oh okay.

BD:

Little place called Kirkland.

DM:

Okay. Can you give me your parents' names?

BD:

Yes. [clears throat] Excuse me. My dad was Duke and my mom was Jonny Bigs. Duke and Jonny Bigs.

DM:

Okay. What were they doing in the Childress area? Were they farmers up there?

BD:

Yes, we were farmers. My granddad was a farmer. And my mother and dad married in 1932.

They were having to live with my grandparents because they just couldn't make a living otherwise. So they were farming together and they heard about the project in Ropesville. [clears throat] Excuse me. So in 1937, my dad went to Ropesville to investigate and find out what he could do. You had to be very poor to be able to be on the project, like have nothing. And that's exactly what they had, was nothing. They let him pick out a piece of land—property—that we would settle on and farm. The first group that went did not get to do that. They were given land. But the second group, which we were in, that went got to select their own land where they would like to be.

DM:

Well I understand that there were two phases of development out there. So you're talking about the second phase that y'all were in?

BD:

Yes. We were in the second phase. We didn't know about the first one. My in-laws, which were Preston and Edna Darby, were in the first ones that came?

DM:

Okay. Was that the main difference in the phases then?

BD:

Yes, that was. They didn't get to pick, they were just towed, and we got to select. And that's basically the main difference in how they got it started.

DM:

Well, what parcel did y'all get? Do you know the number?

BD:

Not right off hand.

DM:

That's okay. There's a whole list of those, you know, so your name may be on there.

BD:

Yes there is. I did know at one time and I know it's on the courthouse. We have a monument at the Courthouse. I know it's listed on that. Ours was about five miles from Ropes.

DM:

All right. Well, so, did they move down there in '37, the year you were born?

BD:

No. We didn't move until '38. He selected the parcel of land, but they were building houses on the land so we had to wait until they built the house. And it was supposed to have been ready in the May of '38. So that's when my mom and dad moved there. But when we got there, the house had burned down.

DM:

Oh no.

BD:

So, they didn't have a house so they stayed in the house that was supposed to have been somebody else's but they let us live there for I don't know how long, two or three months, I guess, till they rebuilt our house. Then we moved over onto our farm then.

DM:

I guess that the first things you remember in life were—are that farm.

BD:

Yes. I was one year old when we moved up there.

DM:

Did he—what kind of parcel did he get? Was it—a lot of them were 160 acres. Some of them were eighty acres.

BD:

Ours was a little over two-hundred acres because we got some pasture land. It was like—I want to say like 237 or something like that. We got a lot of pasture land with ours.

DM:

All right. So, did y'all have cattle then?

BD:

Yes. In the late forties, sometime in the late forties, we had a dairy. We bought cattle—cows—and had a dairy and sold milk to Bell Dairy in Lubbock. They had a route that they came out and picked up milk. It was quite a big deal back then because you had to do milking by hand, and you had to have coolers, had to be inspected, had to be setup a certain way. But we—for—I'd say until the late—middle fifties, we had a dairy.

DM:

Okay. Did you get to do some of that milking?



BD:

My job was to bring up cows every night. I used to—what we called strip. We had electric milkers. Of course, they didn't get all the milk so we had to go back and do the stripping. I put out the feed. I was the oldest girl. My dad and mother only had two daughters and, of course, I was the oldest one. My job was to bring them up, put out the feed for them, and get them in the pin for Dad to put them in the stalls when he came in at night.

DM:

Okay. What kind of milk cows were they? Were they Holstein?

BD:

We had Holstein. We had Jersey's. I can't remember off hand. I can't think of what other kind we had. But most of them were Holstein's, but we had some Jersey's.

DM:

Okay. About how many would you have at any given time?

BD:

Well, we only had stalls for, I think, ten at one time. We'd have two milking. We'd do that one then we'd let them go, then we'd do the other.

DM:

Okay.

BD:

We had probably about twenty.

DM:

Probably about twenty in all?

BD:

Yeah.

DM:

That's a lot of milk.

BD:

Yeah it is, especially when you're a kid it looked like a lot.



DM:

Oh yeah. Yeah, I had heard that some of milk out there was sold over to Bell Dairy so they had a truck that came out.

BD:

Yes. They had a truck route. There were several. Ours wasn't the only one. But they had a truck route. They came out every morning and you'd put your canned milk in the cooler and they'd come by every morning and pick it up.

DM:

Do you know how many other dairies were in the Ropes project?

BD:

No. The only other one I can remember was Mr. and Mrs. Wilson that had one. I spent a lot of time at their house growing up—is the reason I can remember them having one. But I'm sure there were several others around that had dairies.

DM:

Did y'all grow your own feed out there on your land?

BD:

No, we really didn't. We purchased the feed.

DM:

Would you purchase it locally or from Lubbock?

BD:

Well, years ago there was a farm store they used to call Four Corners. It was up toward Lubbock. We'd go up there and buy our feed from them.

DM:

Okay. What was your land used for besides pasture? Did you also have some farmland?

BD:

Yes, we grew cotton and back then we had maize for our feed at that time.

DM:

Was it mostly a cotton farm?

BD:

Mostly, right.

DM:

Was that a bigger operation than your dairy or was the dairy the bigger part?

BD:

Well, probably the farming was the biggest part. The dairy was just an added thing later to help supplement the income.

DM:

Sure. But, you know, that's good diversity right there having dairy, cotton, and maize. Did you have a garden crop?

BD:

Yes. We grew everything that we had. We had chickens that we sold at Furr's grocery store. We grew all of our vegetables. We had big gardens and did a lot of the canning and preserving of the foods for the wintertime. If we got to go to Lubbock, it would probably be like on Saturday. We just never got to go to Lubbock to buy groceries except just a few items that we didn't have. We mostly raised it all ourselves.

DM:

Did your dad slaughter hogs out there?

BD:

Yes, sir, we did. I can remember very well slaughtering hogs, cattle, then our chickens ourselves.

DM:

I guess you had at least one windmill out there. Did you have one or more?

BD:

We had one windmill at the house that provided the water for the house. And we had a big tower tank that pumped water into the tank, then the water from that.

DM:

How'd you get water to the cattle? Did they have a tank, too?

BD:

Yes. We drew irrigation wells on the farm and the pasture. They had a big tank of water.

DM:

Were those—was—that first irrigation, was that windmill or was it gas-powered motors, electric?

BD:

Gas-powered motors.

DM:

Okay. Do you know about what year that came in?

BD:

Probably in the forties. I can remember in the early fifties, we always set up with the wells. It was always a big thing to bring in an irrigation wells. We had big parties. Your friends would come.

DM:

Really?

BD:

Yeah. Kids would play and the men would watch the wells to be sure—the pumping of the sand was the big thing then. You had to keep it cleared in what we used to call backflush. I don't know if you know anything about irrigation wells. But they'd have to backflush them and try to get all of that sand out. The men would sit up and watch the wells, the women would visit, and the kids would play. And that would be in the late forties, early fifties. It might've been in the middle forties. I've kind of forgotten what years.

DM:

That sounds like a lot of fun. Did the kids play in the water?

BD:

Oh yes. We used to have a lot of accidents running into—they had the dig slush pits for all this excess water to run into. Some of us had been known to run into the slush pits, playing and running. It was just a big party. It was a big thing back then for farmers to bring in water. Of course, we got water back then. It was exciting.

DM:

I understand that some of the pipes were eight-inch pipes. Pretty good sized pipes.

BD:

Yes they were. We had good water, what we called good water.

DM:

That in itself would be exciting, eight inches of water gushing out like that.

BD:

Oh yeah. And to see it gushing out that far, it was. It was really exciting.

DM:

Well, let's see. Did you ever have an idea how deep your windmill was? Did you ever hear anyone talking about how deep the water was?

BD:

No. But it wasn't very deep because they always just called it windmill water. When we moved down to Seminole, we basically did the same thing when we pioneered some land and the water wasn't very deep for what they called windmill water. So I'm thinking that wells probably were not very deep for that type of water. Of course, you had to go deeper for irrigation water. But I can't tell you how deep they were. I don't know if I ever knew.

DM:

By the way, when did y'all move down to Seminole?

BD:

My husband and I moved down here in 1970.

DM:

Okay. So you were—I didn't know if you were still a child at the time. But you spent your childhood out there at Ropes, huh?

BD:

Yeah. Yes, I went to school at Ropes, graduated from high school, then married in 1955 to my husband that went to school there. And his parents were some of the first that moved to Ropes in 19—

DM:

Yeah, you said they were the first phase of families.

BD:

Right, they were in the first phase. In fact, I think they moved out there in 1935.

DM:

Now what was your husband's—what's your husband's name?

BD:

His name was Doyle Darby.

DM:

Doyle Darby. What about his parents? What were their names?

BD:

Preston and Viedna—

DM:

Viedna, okay.

BD:

Um-hm. Darby.

DM:

They'll be on the list also for that first phase?

BD:

Yes, the first phase. I don't know what number farm they had either. It was that first phase of farming. I met him there and we lived there until 1970 farming, then we had an opportunity to move to Seminole so we moved down here.

DM:

What—was it cotton farming down at Seminole, also?

BD:

Yes, it was cotton farming. We diversified. We had peanuts, we grew green beans for Del Monte, then cotton.

DM:

Out at Ropes, can you kind of describe your house for me?

BD:

Well, when we first moved there, it was just a small two bedroom, kitchen, living room, no bathroom house. I can remember not having any electricity when we first moved there. But we did get it shortly thereafter but we didn't have it to start with. Of course, we had—only thing we had was the bathtub in the bathroom. My house is still living—where I grew up is still there. They have added onto it. We sold the farm several years ago, but they've added onto the house. It doesn't look like the same house now but the basic house is still there that we had. And the community building, or the community center, whatever they called it, was right across the road from my house.

DM:

There was a store there, too, wasn't there?

BD:

Yes. It's called Foster's Grocery Store. That was on some of our land. The first store they had there was down by the gin. Then they wanted to move. I can't remember for what reason. They wanted to move so my dad rented them some land, and they moved up right next door to us, up on the—further up the road—not far, but a little ways up the road—and built a bigger store in the—and built them a house there where they could live there by it. And it was called Foster's Grocery Store.

DM:

That's kind of convenient having them that close, huh?

BD:

Well, it was. And my mother worked there. She would—they were a couple that didn't have any

children and they had no relatives that lived there. So, when they'd have to be gone, my mom would keep the store open for them. Then they got—when they got older, she'd take them to the doctor and what have you. Then one of them passed away and they finally just closed the store and left it.

DM:

Do you remember their names?

BD:

Bill and Mary Foster.

DM:

Okay. All right. I also understand that there were other stores kind of out on the fringe, not all the way over to Ropes but another store or two. You remember anything about those?

BD:

The Foster's store is the only one that I remember.

DM:

These others might've been in different eras also.

BD:

They could have been. Right offhand I can't tell you where any others were except the Foster's store is the only one I remember.

DM:

Okay. What kind of fuel did y'all use out there at the house for cooking and for heating?

BD:

Butane.

DM:

Okay. Did someone come out of Lubbock to fill those things up?

BD:

Uh-huh. We had tanks and they'd come out and fill them up every so often. I don't know if they regularly came at certain days or if we just called them when we got low. But it was on butane.

DM:

Okay. Then you were talking about electricity. Do you know when rural electrification came in there, what year?

BD:

I cannot tell you what year, but it must've been somewhere around the late thirties, '39, '40.



Must've been somewhere in that area because I can't remember the exact date, so must've been pretty young. But I remember the first light we ever had, how excited we all were.

DM:

Oh yeah. Did it start out that you had single lightbulb? Was that your first—

BD:

Yes. Yeah, you just had this lightbulb that hung from the ceiling.

DM:

Did you have a pullstring on it?

BD:

Yes we did.

DM:

Okay. Can you kind of describe what was added and in what order things were added to that, other electrical appliances?

BD:

Well, not really because as long as I was at home, we always had the gas products. But I know in the late forties—because we had electric milkers at the barn for the cattle. So I know we had—had to come in somewhere in the early forties because we had the electric milkers, but I can't tell you what year.

DM:

It sounds like that rural electrification came in a little early there to Ropes because I've heard of people talking about late forties—in other parts of the South Plains—talking about late forties, maybe even early fifties sometimes.

BD:

And it could've been. I won't disagree with that because I really don't know. But I just remember that it had—and it had to be somewhere in the early forties for us to have had the dairy in the coolers and that kind of thing. We had to have had electricity early. But I know that we got rid of the dairy, like—I think in '55 or '56—got rid of all the cattle and we didn't have it any longer.

DM:

After that it was all cotton?

BD:

Yes. We didn't—we had, I think, just a few cows then I think we finally got rid of all those and the pigs. In 19—in the—let me see. I married in '55. My dad got sick in '59 with Leukemia. Back in that time, we had to mix all of our chemicals ourselves for putting it on for the bugs and



things. My dad was mixing chemicals because I was helping him. He got the chemicals spilt on him and he got Leukemia from that. So, he passed away in '61. Then I married in '55 and my husband took over the farm in '59. He started farming the farm.

DM:

Okay. Did your dad have a tractor as far back as you knew?

BD:

Yes, we had tractors. We started out with what they called a Little Ferguson and then we graduated up to a big Farmall. That was exciting.

DM:

I'll bet.

BD:

I can't ever remember my dad ever farming with a team or anything. He's always had a tractor as long as I could remember. It was a little tractor but it was a tractor.

DM:

Maybe different in Childress.

BD:

Well, now, in Childress they farmed with a team. But I've heard my granddaddy talk about it in the team. I know one time they ran away with my dad and he was seriously hurt. But as far as my recollection, we never had the teams in Ropes. We always had a little tractor of some kind.

DM:

You remember any bad weather out there, some hailstorms where you lost a crop or some severe drought where you lost a crop? Did you ever go without a crop?

BD:

Oh yes, many times. We would get blown out. We would lose our crop. Those sandstorms used to roll in. In fact, it hadn't been too long ago till I think one came in like they used to years ago where you could see them coming. They would build and they would just roll in. You wouldn't be able to see your hands before your face. People would get lost. The sand would blow so bad. We had a couple one night that stayed all night. They had a baby. They were going to somewhere over in Old Mexico and they got lost. They could see the lights of our house and they stopped and spent the night with us until the next day. Our houses were so poorly built that you could almost open the front door and it'd blow out the back. You'd think it was going to blow off. [laughter] I mean, it was bad.

DM:

So there was a lot of sand in there after these sandstorms?

BD:

Yes. We used to have a lot of sand, yeah. And I'd seen hailstorms completely wipe out the farm and not make a thing. up into one year in September on Labor Day, we got completely wiped out. After you put all your money into it, your time, your effort, that's heartbreaking.

DM:

That close to harvest, too. September, you're getting them close. Oh my goodness. That would be so hard.

BD:

We had a lot of hailstorms. I can't—or droughts. I'm sure during that time—I couldn't tell you because I don't remember. But I'm sure we had a lot of times where we probably didn't make a crop and that's why we had the milk, chickens, and that kind of thing, because it was—it was just West Texas and sometimes it doesn't rain when you want it to.

DM:

I understand that was especially bad in the early fifties.

BD:

Right. Yeah, when I was in high school it was really bad.

DM:

On the other hand, do you remember the wet years in the early forties?

BD:

Yes. We had good crops then. It was good. I can remember we had no air conditioners. The weather would be beautiful, be cool. I guess we had hot days but I guess we don't remember those days. All, I can remember at night being able to raise the windows and it be so nice and pleasant. We could play outside till it got dark. Those were the good days.

DM:

Oh yeah. What did y'all play, by the way? What kind of games would you play around there?

BD:

Hide-and-go-seek. Most of the time that's what we'd play, at night especially. We had playhouses in the dirt under the shade trees. We'd make our little make-believe playhouses. Just that kind of thing, just games, just make up your own game. And tag and that kind of thing.

DM:

Were there other kids living near or was it just you and your sister?

BD:

No, we—well, as I said, the community building was across the road from my house. And I don't know how often we had parties. But that was kind of the center of the project out there.

We'd have barbeques and we had parties. And it was later turned into a skating rink. The kids all congregated there. Well, Mother and Dad's friends were a lot closer then than we are today with our neighbors and things. Every night, we'd probably go somewhere and they'd play dominoes and we'd play, or we'd have separate—somebody else's house or they'd be at our house. They visited a lot. We just had good friends. And we had neighbors that we lived close enough to that I could sneak off and go up and play with them.

DM:

That's good. It sounds like you were really nicely located near the—

BD:

We really were. Mom and Dad had a really good location. And especially with the community center being built right in front of our—across the road from us. It provided a lot of entertainment for people out there. And we were all so poor. We didn't know we weren't happy and didn't have anything. We'd just get together. The men would visit and the women, they had a quilting club. They'd meet up there and quilt. Just get together. There was ice cream suppers. It was just one big, happy family, really.

DM:

That really sounds nice. Did y'all ever eat that Junket Ice Cream? You ever heard of that, Junket?

BD:

Never heard it called that, no.

DM:

It's a brand.

BD:

I don't know what that is.

DM:

My mom was born the same year as you and she talked about this Junket Ice Cream that you didn't have to use a freezer, you'd just mix it up and put it in a—you put it in the freezer but you don't have an ice cream freezer that turns—

BD:

You don't have to freeze it like—yeah.

DM:

I was just wondering if it was a West Texas thing, too.

BD:

And it probably was but I don't recall it. All I recall is having to sit on the ice cream freezer while somebody cranked.

DM:

That's right. I remember doing that.

BD:

You're probably not that old either.

DM:

That was so exciting, though, because you know what was coming.

BD:

Yeah, you couldn't wait till it got ready.

DM:

How about—over there at the center, the community center, did you have specific holiday gatherings, like for the Fourth of July, or Christmas, or anything?

BD:

They probably did. I don't know that we did Christmas. But I know during the summer we had Fourth of July barbeques. Then they had—I don't know if you're familiar with Extension Homemakers. Back then it was the Home Demonstration Club.

DM:

Right. Um-hm.

BD:

And all the women in that area belonged to it. I know we had two or three different ones. They'd set dates for special occasions and all meet together. But as far as Christmas, I know we had Halloween parties there because I remember one year that the ladies fixed it underneath the building, and we had to crawl under the building. It was dark and you had to feel up all these different things and try to figure out what they were. We did that one year. I can't think of really—maybe we—I don't know if we had Thanksgiving—community Thanksgivings. We probably did, I just can't remember.

DM:

Did you dress up at Halloween?

BD:

Oh yeah. You dressed back then. We didn't have trick-or-treating out in the country. I'm sure they probably did in town but out in the country—and we didn't go to town to do that like they do now. We stayed out in the country and the women would get together and have parties for the

kids. We'd all just have one big party, play games, and, of course, have our candy and stuff, and refreshments.

DM:

Sounds really nice. When you say you dressed up, are you talking about in a costume or were you just—

BD:

Costume, yeah. You know, costume or whatever you wanted to dress in. It didn't have to be a Halloween thing. We just dressed differently for that particular day.

DM:

Do you remember any of the ways that you dressed or people dressed?

BD:

Not particularly. I just remember that we didn't wear our good clothes that day. We always dressed up like—this is not a good thing to say, I guess—poor people. I hope you edit this anyway.

DM:

That's fine.

BD:

Old clothes: raggedy clothes, coveralls, and that kind of stuff. It didn't have to be Halloween costumes. And I don't ever remember having a mask. I probably did. I don't remember at that time. It's been a while.

DM:

It sounds like a great life.

BD:

It was. And I think about it a lot, about what good times we had. And we were all in the same boat. We were all poor but couldn't have been happier. We were so blessed to have the families that we had out there. And some of my best friends still live at Ropes. Even though I lived down here forty years, I still stay in contact with a lot of my friends there. We were all so close. We were just like one big family.

DM:

That's what everybody's saying that I'm talking to that grew up in that area, that just that close community, family feeling.

BD:

And it was. If one had a tragedy, everybody was there for them. I don't know. I just can't explain the feeling that was different then that it is now. We just don't have that loving nature, I guess,



that we had back then because we've all—we have more now than we had back then. All of us had to be poor not to be there. So, we all were the same. Nobody had any more than anybody else. And everybody was thrilled when somebody got something. Everybody was thrilled. And we partied. Just had a good time.

DM:

That's so nice. Did y'all—did your family go to church?

BD:

Yes. We were members of the First Baptist Church and went to church in Ropes.

DM:

Did you often go—oh, you probably had some events there, too. Did you have Christmas there?

BD:

Well, I can't tell you a whole lot. I know we had a lot of—we had what we called GA's. We had a lot of activities through the church where we had parties, and socials, and meals at the church. I remember when we first came, we had a little church then we built a church—and how proud—and what a crowd we had the day that it was dedicated. I've got pictures of the day that it was dedicated. It's a wonderful feeling. We were just one big, happy family there, too. Of course, we had a Methodist church, we had a Church of Christ, and we had a Nazarene church there, too, at that time.

DM:

Did the churches ever get together? Did they ever combine together for dinners on the ground or any kinds of events, or did they do their separate things?

BD:

I'm sure we did some, but I don't remember really. I spent as much time going to the Methodist church with my best girl friend as I did probably going to the Baptist church, and she did the same. So I know the Methodist and the Baptist did some things together, but I don't remember with the Church of Christ or the Nazarene very well because most of my friends were where I went to church at or at the Methodist. We spent a lot of time there.

DM:

What about—how did you get to school?

BD:

Well, I rode a school bus. We only had like—when I started school, we only had one route. It took you forever to get to school. Anyway, I rode the bus for a long time. In the afternoons when you'd get home, you could get off at a certain place and stay and play, and the bus would come back an hour later and you could get back on the bus and go home. [Laughter] I had some friends that we used to have what they called clod fights. I don't know if you—dirt clots. And they'd get

on one side of the road in the borrow ditch and we'd get on the other side, and we'd throw at each other. But we entertained ourselves that way. Then the bus would come back by, pick you up, then take you on the rest of way home so we didn't have to ride the bus the whole route.

DM:

That is so funny.

BD:

It is. But it used to go where—what they called the Spade Ranch, which was probably—it was a good ways from our house to the Spade Ranch at that time. We could get off on a dirt road where some of my friends lived, then they'd deliver all those kids over there, then they'd come back and then deliver us closer to Ropes. Then they finally—oh, it was a terrible old bus—then they finally got where they had some more routes and things.

DM:

Someone said they had a panel truck. Sometimes they used to—

BD:

It was. It was kind of like—that's what it was. It was just a wooden truck.

DM:

So that's what you rode in?

BD:

That's what I rode in when I first started to school. But I don't think I rode in that very long till they got some better buses. I know we had—our lunch room at the school was underground. You walked down under one of the buildings and the cafeteria was down there. But you took your lunch. They didn't provide lunch at that time. You always carried your lunch. But that's where we would eat then we'd come out of recess. And that wasn't too many years later till they got rid of that, too, and started doing school lunches and that kind of thing.

DM:

The school you went to, was it that—was one story brick? Is that what it was?

BD:

Yes. When I started, yeah.

DM:

Is it still there?

BD:

No. They've all been torn down and rebuilt. The high school that I graduated from, it's just been redone but it's still there. And I think the cafeteria has been redone, but the main cafeteria is still there.



DM:

Do you remember if—

BD:

The building.

DM:

Okay. Do you remember any of the teachers by name?

BD:

Yes. I had Mrs. Wallace, [clears throat] Mrs. Dopson.

DM:

Can you tell me the grades also when you mention the names? If you know the grades.

BD:

No, I can't. [Laughs] I don't remember. I just remember some of the names [clears throat] that I had. [Clears throat] Excuse me. Mr. Etheridge was my high school superintendent. I do remember him because he had a little store across from the high school and I worked for him. I remember him. Right offhand, my memory just seems to have left me about the schoolteachers.

DM:

That's okay. Did you—do you remember having any favorite subjects in school?

BD:

Not really. I wasn't a very good student. [Clears throat] I spent all my time playing.

DM:

[Laughs] That sounds fun. Well, what about—were you ever in athletics?

BD:

Well, I played basketball when I was—up until I was a freshman in high school. And I'm not but about five foot two. By the time—when I got to freshman, they all had outgrown me and I was little so I just never did play after that. But I did play till I was a freshman in high school. Cheerleader and that kind of thing.

DM:

I understand that girls basketball team has done good at different times through their history.

BD:

They did. The year or two after I graduated when my daughter—my daughter—my sister was in high school, they went to state [championship]. I can't remember if they won or not. It's been so long. But they did do well. And when I was in school, I think, they went to state. They had a

coach that—that was the coach then. I think they went to state then, too. But I've been so—down here so much—and the basketball—it's hard for me to kind of remember back then.

DM:

Right. Did you—do you remember any rival towns around there?

BD:

[Clear's throat] Oh yeah. Meadow was our rival. They clawed at each other a lot of times and I know a lot of different things that happened. I can't remember exactly what happened, but there was something one time about a horse. One time, I think, they got a goat. I don't know. They was always getting each other's things, taking them away, hiding them, and that kind of thing. So, there was always something going on.

DM:

Pulling pranks on each other.

BD:

Yeah. Especially just before their football games or during that time.

DM:

Those towns are pretty close together.

BD:

Yeah, about five miles apart. And I'm not sure whether or not they're still rivals.

DM:

They might be. What year did you graduate from high school? Was that '55?

BD:

Yes, 1955.

DM:

Okay. And you got married that year?

BD:

I married in December that year after I graduated, uh-huh.

DM:

Oh okay. What else do you remember about the community of Ropes? Any particular stores or businesses that your family might have gone to?

BD:

Well, I know that we used to have quite a few stores in Ropes. They had one they called the Riehaus Department Store [?] [0:44:34]. Richard, their son, was in my grade at school. And the drugstore used to be—Mr. Berry had a drugstore. He had that up until in the fifties because my

youngest son used to go with my dad to the grocery store and get ice cream. That was one of his highlights, is taking my boys to the drugstore. And he had it for many years. And then we had Mansfield Filling Station. At one time, there was several hotels there, banks. But I can't tell you when they all left. They just kind of went by the wayside.

DM:

I think I've got some—I think I have something here that says that Ropes kind of peaked in population and number of businesses in about 1965.

BD:

That could be about right. [Clears throat] Excuse me. One of the grocery stores closed and so we only ended up with one grocery store then. [Clears throat] Just kind of dwindled. I don't know. we had a movie theater when I was growing up there. That was the hangout. [Both talk at once]

DM:

Go ahead.

BD:

That's fine.

DM:

Okay. I was going to ask: now, Riehaus [?] [0:46:13], I understand that they were some of the first Mexican-Americans in that area. Does that sound right?

BD:

Yes that sounds right. Uh-huh.

DM:

Now, did others come in to help with the cotton harvest or how did that happen?

BD:

Well, I guess they—yeah, we used to—what they called wetbacks. They'd come in from Old Mexico. But I don't remember ever them being in school. I remember coming and helping pick cotton on the farm, but I don't ever remember any children. They were mostly adults that came. Actually, it think Richard was the only Spanish boy that we ever had in our class at school.

DM:

So the others—

BD:

We had a colored school there. And the black people went to their school. We just didn't have any Spanish people at that time.

DM:

They must've come in—they must've been migratory, came in, worked, and then went back home.

BD:

Uh-huh. Then left, didn't stay. A lot of them didn't bring their families. They would come as—I know we had a house for them to live in, which we called—we called it the granary. But anyway—and they would live there during harvest, and then after harvest they'd leave and go back to Old Mexico. That's how we harvested our crop until they started coming out then with what they called the strippers and more modern equipment.

DM:

Right, right. Now, how many kids were over in the black school?

BD:

I cannot tell you how many. But I guess there was enough for them to have a school. That's about all I can remember because we never did anything together. So, I just don't remember. And I can't even tell you what year it disbanded. We just didn't have any black kids that went to our school.

DM:

And you've been away from there for a long time. Let's see. Seventy, did you say?

BD:

Seventy, yeah, 1970. So, I've been gone for a long time so I don't even know now what they have there. And I know very few people that live there now. People have moved out, passed away. All of the old timers are mostly gone that I grew up with. I'm nearly eighty-two, so I can't imagine how many years ago that's been. Most of my parent's friends are all gone except one lady. She still lives out there. I don't know if you've had an opportunity to interview her or not. But she's a 103.

DM:

Yeah, Ella Mae Ward.

BD:

Ella Mae, yes.

DM:

Yeah, I've talked to her.

BD:

Okay. She was one of my very best friends with my mom and dad, and her children.

DM:

Can you tell me about her a little bit, what you remember?

BD:

Well, I just remember having a lot of parties at her house. She had three children and one of them was a year older than I am. We spent a lot of time together just playing. I could walk to their house. I didn't live that far. I could cut across some fields and walk to their house. Very gracious lady. Beautiful lady, inside and out.

DM:

Last I heard she's still living out at that house, too.

BD:

She lives in the house that—the original house that's just been built onto. Hadn't been too awfully long since I've visited with her. I still visit with her and go see her. But she was one of those that you were very close to when you first moved out there. They moved out in the second group that came to. Like I said, we were all just a close family—knit family. Everybody out there knew everybody. She was a precious lady.

DM:

I hope she'll be at the celebration on August twenty-fifth out there at Ropes.

BD:

She will be if she's able. She doesn't miss anything. I still thinks she attends church. In fact, it's only been like a few years that she quit driving. She drove to Lubbock, drove in Lubbock.

[Laughter] I'm thinking, Oh my goodness. But she's very—she's been very independent after her husband died. I mean, she just—you know.

DM:

She did just fine.

BD:

Did everything. Yeah. Worked in her yard. Did her yard up until just a few years ago. Always had beautiful flowers in the yard. Just a hardworking woman, which the woman back in her days were. They had to work side-by-side their husbands. I think they lived longer than a lot of them do today, too. I don't know why.

DM:

Yeah, they sure do. Are you going to be able to come up?

BD:

I'm planning on it.

DM:

Oh good.

BD:

My plans right now are to be there. I don't miss a lot of things that go on in Ropes. I still come back. We still have our class reunions and I still come back to things that they have at Ropes.

DM:

Well, I'm so glad. I hope to meet you there. I'll be out there.

BD:

Okay. Well good. I'd love to meet you. I was one of the officers that when we got started at the Ropesville Community Project, getting the monuments and everything setup, I was on that committee. So, it will always be my home. I don't care how long I've lived down here. I've never known the people down here like we did when we lived at Ropes. You have neighbors and you have friends, but those first ones that you grew up with are your friends, longtime friends.

DM:

It's a special place. And everybody I've talked to from Ropes says that, too.

BD:

Right. Well, it was.

DM:

Well, is there anything—

BD:

I didn't want to move. When we moved down here, I didn't want to move. [Laughs]

DM:

I'm sure. But you've been there awhile now.

BD:

The Lord had other things planned. Yeah. It's a home, okay, but it'll still never be home like Ropes was. And I still go by the old farm and my house and reminisce a lot, I guess.

DM:

Right. Okay. Is there anything that you'd like to add that I haven't thought to ask?

BD:

I can't think of anything. I think you've done a good job, and I appreciate—

DM:

If I think of something I missed, I may give you a call back sometime, if that's all right.



BD:

Okay. That'd be just fine. I'd be glad for you to. I like talking about Ropes. [Laughs]

DM:

I do too. I'll tell you what, it's really growing on me. I'm from a little community west of Fort Worth, but I've really enjoyed talking to people about Ropes.

BD:

Well, it was just unique with the President coming and everything that went on during that time. Nothing like that happens anymore. It was just a unique thing back then. I know my dad helped get the mineral rights, whenever they started working on the mineral rights. And I have a lot of letters and things that was written to him during that time. And so was my father-in-law involved with Harskill Moore [?] [0:54:43] and a bunch of them trying to get the mineral rights. In fact, I still own my mineral rights up there. If we ever get any oil, maybe I'll get rich.

DM:

There you go. [Laughter]

BD:

I'm not counting on it but you never know.

DM:

No, you never know.

BD:

When I sold it, well I kept the mineral rights on it. Because down here, we never—we don't have the mineral rights and we could never get them. It's important.

DM:

Yes. Well, do you mind if I keep this recording and we keep it here at Texas Tech so if people are researching Ropes, either any time soon or a hundred years from now, it doesn't matter, if they could—if we have this here, they can listen to you talking about it and I think it'd be really helpful.

BD:

Oh, that'd just please me quite well for it to stay up there. I think there is several things in the museum up there that my daddy did and helped do. So yeah, I'd be glad for it to stay up there.

DM:

Okay. I might send you—I'm supposed to get a signed permission. I might mail you one if that's okay. I'd like to get a recording of it, too, but would mind if I sent you something to sign saying, "Yeah, Texas Tech can have this?"



BD:

No, that'd be fine.

DM:

What's your address down there?

BD:

It's [REDACTED]

DM:

And what's that ZIP [code]?

BD:

[REDACTED]

DM:

[REDACTED] I'll either go ahead and send you something or I'll hope to see you on August 25. If I don't see you then, then I might mail it.

BD:

Okay. Do you ever get down to Seminole? Do you ever come down this way?

DM:

I've passed through. And golly, I know I've been to the little museum there. I think I've interviewed some people there. But it's been so long ago I can't remember names.

BD:

[Laughs] I understand that. I was going to tell you, if you're ever—I have a store downtown here. It's called Bentley's. It's a baby store. Drop in sometime if you ever come through. We'd love to meet you and visit with you.

DM:

Well, I'd love to do that. In fact, you were talking about some records you have that date back to Ropes. You know, we house those kinds of things at the Southwest Collection. So if you ever want to preserve them forever, consider sending some over.

BD:

Okay. What I have, you've probably got—have seen. Tony Sue Manning. You probably have visited with her because her folks were the first ones there. I have the same things that she has. That type of book that Ms. Server wrote up, that's what I've got. And then some letters that my dad had got when he passed away and mom died, I've got them. It's with that, too.

DM:

Well, I'm going to—

BD:

I don't know if my kids will part with them or not. But anyway, someday they may get up there.

DM:

Just tell them about us and if anyone ever decides to toss those things, hopefully they'll say, "No," and we'll put them in the archives.

BD:

I was going to say, we don't ever want to throw them away.

DM:

Sometimes it happens accidentally. But anyway, yeah, if y'all ever decide to put anything like that somewhere, Texas Tech would love to preserve it because we're collecting Ropes history.

BD:

Well, and I think that's great. I need to get up there and see it. I have not ever been. I keep thinking I'm going—

DM:

Well, come up then.

BD:

I know. I need to do that.

DM:

Yeah, next time you're here up around Lubbock, let me know and I'll show you around our facility here on campus.

BD:

Well, I'm pretty familiar with the campus because I come to the Tech football games and the Tech basketball games. My daughter graduated from Tech. So, I just hadn't been to the museum up there. Just always something: we're in a hurry or some reason. We just never have done it.

DM:

I understand that.

BD:

We talk about it but we just hadn't got it done yet. Yeah, I'm pretty much a Tech fan. We don't miss too much up there either.

DM:

I'm going to go ahead and pause this recording here a second.

*End of Recording*