

T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History Collection

ABSTRACT

INTERVIEWEE NAME: Emma LaTour, Carol Porter, Kathy Jefferson, Claudia Handy and Preston Jourdan

COLLECTION: 4700.2668

IDENTIFICATION: Siblings who grew up in Mossville, Louisiana

INTERVIEWER: Chelsea Arseneault

SERIES: Mossville History Project - Field Interviews

INTERVIEW DATES: June 10, 2016

FOCUS DATES: 1940s-90s

ABSTRACT:

Tape 4625

Introductions; name spellings; teachers added “u” to their last name; father’s name Shelton Jourdan, Sr., and mother’s name Marian Lemelle Jourdan; parents’ work; memories of grandparents Edward Lemelle, Sr. and Ida Mae Towner Lemelle; grandmother babysat them, gave them three meals a day, and taught them how to be women; on hair-washing day, she washed their hair in rainwater to make it grow; taught them to do everything to the best of their ability; great-grandmother Ira Towner lived across the street, and fed them spiritually; family life based on faith; different churches they attended; grandfather Lemelle Catholic, but grandmother Baptist; grandmother’s love a tangible thing; special home cooked birthday meal; grandfather would pretend they were a burden, but would buy bread for them from the bread store and missed them when they were gone; was a gardener, and also worked for Garrison family; grandmother took care of discipline; biscuit making contests; values instilled in them; importance of family; fresh flowers in the house at all times; shell peas and shuck corn in summer; Jefferson’s dislike for hard labor; difficulties fitting into the community because of their Creole background; father called “the crazy Frenchman;” sawmill work brought him to the area; also worked on Dr. Fellows’ farm; Dr. Fellows would see them after hours, since the clinic was segregated; grandparents watched them, but their parents raised them; after their father’s death, mother continued to raise them; Big Mama respected their father - a hardworking, independent man; taught them to work at an early age and to sacrifice for others; raised Preston to be man of the house; Preston took this to heart when their father took sick; taught them to protect each other and stand up for themselves; Jefferson suffered in school for her lighter skin tone; fabricated story about being a war baby; always had nice clothes, because Dr. Fellows had five girls and they wore the hand-me-downs; taught to respect the male in the family; family disease that comes from European decent; mother a homemaker, a strong woman; mother spoiled

brother Preston; protective of her children and grandchildren; parents adamant about education; father had a fourth grade education, but could build anything; built a new room every time their mother had a baby; parents met while father working at Chennault homes in Maplewood; father reminded her of Clark Gable, who had actually come to that area and wanted to take her back to Hollywood; cared for their father while he was sick; colored section at St. Patrick's hospital; Doctor Gilmore first to discover family illness; three siblings who also passed away from disease - called Ehlers-Danlos type four; siblings' names; grandfather a sharecropper; grandparents' origins; family work ethic made an impression on Mossville; memories of the old house on Prater Road; neighbors were the [Kellum's?]; Preston tried to scare Ms. [Kellum?] with a firecracker, but it went off in his hand; buried everything in the woods, even old baby dolls; Preston stung by wasps, and tried to hide it from their father by keeping his hat on; tried same tactic when he shaved off his eyebrows; first cousin Richard Lee would spend the night, and was like a brother to them; worked at Rougeau's grocery store, next door to them; Rougeau's a white, Cajun family; sisters would run the store while the family on vacation; raised chickens and hogs; smell during butchering made them sick; old wives' tale that it would make your blood pressure go up; butchering pet cow; boiling fresh milk; Paw Paw Lemelle had a big garden; fared just as good as kids whose parents worked at refineries; older brother went to work for Bell family in Connecticut; everyone had a job; older siblings worked out of sense of love; shared everything; sister used money to buy bunkbeds- first time each had their own bed; surrounded by family in Mossville; entertainment was counting cars and riding horses; enjoyed going to farm with their father; quizzed them on the way to the farm in DeQuincy; church events; drive-in movie; the summer after he died, they learned how to swim at the Mossville pool; protest at Rougeau's store; father built a cab in the back of his truck; father believed in the doctor; mentions a few home remedies used occasionally; geographic boundaries of Mossville; didn't consider Bel Air a part of Mossville; independent community; community leaders; recall a treater named LeDoux; siblings had to carry Jefferson to school, so father got the bus to pick them up; first kindergarten in Mossville; old school buildings; memories of integration; difference between their experiences at Westlake and Sulphur high schools; didn't want to close Mossville High School, just wanted equal books - "when you close a school, you close a community;" favorite teachers; teachers they disliked; whippings in school; weekend entertainment; football games popular; teen time with Bubba Lutcher, local DJ; different dances; when city water came to Mossville; grandparents' well best around; everyone would use that water to wash clothes and they would stay white; used Clorox to clean outhouse; everyone came to Big Mama's house to see the TV; explosions from the plants a monthly occurrence; many men employed by the plants; shallow wells exposed to contamination from industry; the different families who lived in Bel Air; buyouts; a lot of people in that area had cancer; feel America founded by cheating others; Jefferson's displeasure with how buyouts handled; Kennedy and King's assassinations; concern with Donald Trump's rhetoric; what they'll miss most about Mossville; family something you carry within you; feeling of abandonment when school taken away; regret over not fighting for Mossville sooner; pride in their children's accomplishments; closing.

TAPES: 1 (T4625)

TOTAL PLAYING TIME: 1 hour, 44 minutes

PAGES TRANSCRIPT: 166 pages

OTHER MATERIALS: Interview questions (5 pgs); Correspondence

RESTRICTIONS: TBA