

T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History Collection

ABSTRACT

INTERVIEWEE NAME: Mildred Calvin Guidry

COLLECTION: 4700.2554

IDENTIFICATION: Former elementary teacher in Mossville, Louisiana

INTERVIEWER: Chelsea Arseneault

SERIES: Mossville History Project - Field Interviews

INTERVIEW DATES: July 30, 2015

FOCUS DATES: 1940s-2015

ABSTRACT:

Tape 4490

Introduction; Guidry jokes about wearing false eyelashes; she is eighty-one years old; Mossville was her first teaching experience, she went by her maiden name Calvin at that time; enjoyed the teaching environment there, there were good teachers and involved parents; community was not integrated back then; when integration came, she was sent to teach at Westwood Elementary School; hated teaching there because people didn't respect her; enjoys looking at cute babies and hopes not to upset their parents; Mossville had some of the prettiest children; she used to hug her students at Westwood, one child relayed a message from her father that Guidry was not to put her "nigger hands" on her; other parents were nice; parents in Mossville wanted the best for their children, children have grown up and done well; she taught first grade, discusses professions that her students went on to; explains that she kept her ex-husband's name to match her daughter; recalls confusion people had because they don't recognize her married name; started teaching at Mossville School when she was nineteen just out of college; became discouraged teaching at Westwood and moved to teaching first grade at Cherry Street School until she retired; room mother at Westwood was very helpful; Guidry paid for her daughter to attend private Catholic school which was difficult for her financially; one of the parents at Westwood would sew Guidry's daughter's uniforms for free; when Guidry dropped out of school in sixth grade, a white woman she worked for convinced her to go back to school; Guidry's mother was poor and trying to raise three children with help from the nuns she worked for; Guidry remembers Mrs. Stuart, the white woman she worked for, giving her a dress to be in a school play, people laughed at her because she was older than the other children; Mrs. Stuart also helped Guidry get things she needed in high school by asking wealthy friends; she worked her way through college at Jarvis Christian School because she didn't have anyone to send her money; when she graduated, Mrs. Stuart helped her apply to work in Louisiana and that's how she got her job there; she went to Grambling State University over the summers to get certified to teach in Louisiana; when her baby was born, the Stuarts came to visit her and Mrs. Stuart predicted the end of Guidry's marriage; her ex-husband went to Southern University and she suspects he only married her

because of her job; Guidry believes the interviewer's parents could pay for her to go to college; her ex-husband paid child support but didn't help pay for their daughter's private school; wanted her daughter to go there so she would have more opportunities and not be like her mom; daughter graduated from McNeese State University in accounting and got a job; after a new superintendent was hired and the person working a level above Guidry's daughter was promoted, her daughter got that job; Guidry is happy that her daughter will be able to take care of herself and her children should her husband leave; Guidry's father may have been killed by his girlfriend when Guidry was three and her siblings were one and two; her mother never remarried; when Guidry retired, the Stuarts attended her party and she thanked them in front of the superintendent for all they had done for her, despite a coworker's disapproval; if it weren't for the Stuarts she might have taken to drinking like her sister had; when she first started working for Mrs. Stuart, she didn't think Mrs. Stuart liked her; believes not all whites are racist; most of the people from Mossville got good jobs except one man who killed his wife; Mossville was the best place for her; when she taught first grade at Mossville they didn't have kindergarten, so you had to teach them everything; there were three first grade teachers at Mossville at that time: Ms. Smith, Ms. Lemelle, and herself; other teachers would help her write on the board before she got good at it; she lived in Mossville for a while but moved to Lake Charles, Louisiana; her first impression was parents in Mossville wanted their children to have more than they did; her daughter went to predominately white schools but was treated well and her best friend was white; her favorite memories of Mossville are the caps and gowns with tassels and the respect parents and students had for teachers; Pastor [Achan?] died and they had the funeral in the biggest church in Lake Charles; Guidry says whites never went to the black school; she heard rumors that they built a new school to keep out the blacks in Sulphur, Louisiana; when she taught at Mossville it was a joy and she wanted to love the children at Westwood the same way; she taught some of the prettiest children; Guidry goes to an exercise class in the mornings which is why she is dressed that way; she has gone to this class since she had a minor stroke and her doctor advised her not to go back to the classroom where she was substituting; conclusion.

TAPES: 1 (T4490)

TOTAL PLAYING TIME: 57 minutes

PAGES TRANSCRIPT: 35 pages

PHOTOGRAPHS / PHOTOGRAPHER: Two photographs taken during interview with interviewer Arseneault. Photographer Jamie Digilormo.

OTHER MATERIALS: Biographical data form; Interview questions (4 pg); Correspondence

RESTRICTIONS: None