Interviewee: Lenoria Ambrose **4700.2466 Tape 4484**
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[Begin Tape 4484. Begin Session II.]

CHELSEA ARSENEAULT: Alrighty I'm here with Ms. Lenoria Ambrose in her lovely home. Is this Lake Charles [Louisiana] technically? Lake Charles. And this is Chelsea Arseneault, and it is Friday June the third. Its 3:07 in the afternoon, and this is her follow up interview. Our first interview was I think in January?

LENORIA AMBROSE: Right.

ARSENEAULT: It was you and I in January on Oral History Day. And we just want to follow up with the history of Mossville [Louisiana], and the origins, and your family history, and all that kind of stuff. And I know you have a lot to share about that. Well where I first wanted to start, because we've been doing a lot of background research and it's been kind of difficult to figure out the geographic boundaries of Mossville. Like where was it? Where in the map?

AMBROSE: **[00:53]** Well the geographic, and I always tell her they laugh at me when I say that. When the . . . Before the school was built right at the railroad tracks when you turn off of Prater Road and you make a right hand turn and you get to that railroad track. That was Mossville proper. Started right there and went west. And there used to be a sign there that said Mossville. And after the years that went by, the school was built. The sign was still there, but I

don't know who removed the sign or who gave the permission but they took the sign down. And now they kind of consider all of Bel Air [suburb of Mossville] and all down in that area Mossville. But Mossville proper is from the railroad track west. That's where they . . . That's Mossville.

ARSENEAULT: How has the community changed within your life time as far as physical appearance is concerned?

AMBROSE: **[01:42]** Well when I was young, I married at nineteen and moved to Lake Charles, but my family was still there. It was a community of family. We had a few people that moved in when they brought Queensboro in and, which is off of Prater Road, and Bel Air and Lincoln Heights. New people came in from Lake Charles. So it grew. Mossville really, really grew . . . We had suburbs in Mossville. Which was Queensboro, Lincoln Heights, and Bel Air. And but before that time it was mostly family.

We had all the churches there. We had a Baptist Church, we had two Sanctified Churches or churches of God and Christ. We had a Methodist Church. And everybody was . . . belonged to one of those churches. And then the Catholics went to Westlake [Louisiana] or to Sulphur [Louisiana] for their services. So the community really changed. Everybody kept their homes up really well. They helped each other. They cut their yards. It was just beautiful. It was a beautiful little community. Well over the years it changed, because more and more people came in that wasn't from Mossville. Didn't have the same ethics and aesthetics that our family had.

[02:56] I remember when my grandfather . . . We had six acres of land. And he cut like half of that when I was a little girl. With push lawnmower. That was before they came out with

the self-propellers and stuff like that. And he walked that yard and he picked up every rock, every stone, every . . . anything that wasn't grass he picked it up before he started cutting his grass. Now days they just hop on the lawnmower or pushing lawnmower without even looking at anything like that. But everybody's yards were always very pretty. Very green. It was just . . . I don't know. We had a wonderful, beautiful little community. And I look at it now, and I'm just saddened by the way it looks. Not only because there are no houses there, the houses are all gone, but people don't take care of their property like they used to. You just didn't have boards hanging off, or yards growing up to your ankles. It's just different. It's a lot different.

ARSENEAULT: How would you describe like the physical appearance in the peak of Mossville?

AMBROSE: **[03:55]** It was beautiful. It was a quaint little community. Like I said, wood frame houses and as time grew we had brick homes built there but it was just beautiful. It . . . The lawns were well kept. It was just . . . it was beautiful. To me, because that's home. And I have a history. My history is Mossville. So, now it's just a downer to see it now, the way it is now, versus what it was.

ARSENEAULT: Who were the community leaders when you were growing up?

AMBROSE: When I was growing up, my mother . . . They used to call my mother the district attorney.

ARSENEAULT: What was her name?

AMBROSE: [04:36] Gloria Jean Towner Harris and any of our boy or kids would get in trouble my mama had an open door to Frank Salter who was the district attorney here in Lake Charles, and there was a Mr. [Mazalee?] who was the police detective or chief. I don't know. I think he worked for the Calcasieu Parish. And then there was Ham Reed who was the sheriff. And any time any of our boys or anybody would get in trouble, my mom just had to make a telephone call and they would be out and sent home, and then she would take care of it later. And then Jake Rigmaiden was considered the mayor. He was a business man in Mossville. He had a little store. And . . .

ARSENEAULT: What was his store?

AMBROSE: [05:22] His store was . . . It was just a little . . . Do you know the . . . Have told you where Prater Road comes and makes a . . . all the way down and stops right there just before you go to the rec center? Well his home was there, and I think you probably talked to his daughter. She has a funeral home here in Lake Charles. James Funeral Home. Lola, Lola James. Don't know if you've talked to her. Well, that was her father. And his . . . It was just . . . I don't even know what they call his store. I guess just Rigmaiden's Store. It had . . . You could go there and you could buy chips, and candy, and cookies, and cold cuts. It was just a small store. And in fact Mossville at one time had . . . And this was . . . I was very young when it closed but it was a drug store there. I don't. . . there was a post office but it closed before I got . . . I was born. We had a service station. Two . . . Three service stations there on the Old Spanish Trail. All of them

on the Old Spanish Trail. There were a lot of businesses.

[06:25] There were a lot of . . . We had two canteens. Or three. When I first started . . . When I was born, there was one called The Sweet Dreams. I don't know if they told you about that? Well there was one called The Sweet Dreams and that was owned by [Edie?] Bradley. Edie Moss Bradley. Then there was one Martill's which was my grandmother's sister. She had a barber shop in her store and the canteen where you could go and sit down. And then a jukebox and you could buy sodas and that sort of thing. And then we had four. And then the Lula Lyon's opened the one right by the rec center. And then we had one down by the school that was by . . . had the Freelows. The Freelows. So it was right by the school. So we had like four canteens in Mossville.

And there was a lot of business. People had our first grocery store, I think might have been Ira Garrett's which was right at the railroad track. He had a grocery store, which was close to the school. And like I said, Jake Rigmaiden. And later on during the . . . as I grew to be an adult, we had the Ross family who had a . . . It was a Seven Eleven I think it was. A chain type thing, and they sold alcohol in there. The other stores didn't sell alcohol, but they sold alcohol in theirs. And it was just anything you needed . . .

Of course, if you wanted to buy groceries we had to come to Lake Charles or go to Sulphur for your groceries. But I remember we would come . . . There was an old bridge before they built the I-10 [Interstate Ten] bridge and we would come down around back across the river. Might be sort of kind of in the spot where the casino is or just before you get to the casino. And we would go to Joyce Therioux's. Over on . . . Here in Lake Charles over on Railroad Avenue. Off of Railroad Avenue. Where we went to the grocery store here. Or there was a store in Sulphur. W. T. Burton's. I'm sure you've heard of that. Or have somebody's told you that. We

would go there with our grandparents, to buy groceries there.

ARSENEAULT: [08:33] We are definitely going to talk more about that. I was going to ask about the street names of Mossville?

AMBROSE: Those came about when I guess when they . . . As time grew and they . . . When they put in the streets down at Bel Air, and they put in the streets at Queensboro, and they put in street names at Lincoln Heights, and then they came down into Mossville. And we had so many little lanes that people were living on, and they just sort of named them after the people that somebody owned that street. That lived on that street. Because where my family's property is, it's called Junius Road. That's toward the west. Almost the end of Mossville. Which a long time ago was called Perkins Town.

That was the . . . A long time ago we had two areas of Mossville. Saprack which was Evergreen Road and Perkins Town. Which was around where we live. Which was the Perkins and the Mosses and that group of people that lived in that area. Settled in that area. But then they started naming the streets after certain families. And I often wonder why they . . . Where our family was on the corner of Junius and the Old Spanish Trail, but they named it after one of the old, old settlers. Her name was Lizzie Hines. And well, she was a Junius so they named her road Junius. Well my grandfather gave three quarters of the right of way for the road, and I thought it should have been named after my family, but they named it after her. So I was good with that too, because she was a cousin so it didn't really matter. And she was an old, old lady so . . .

ARSENEAULT: [10:13] It's kind of interesting, a road being named after a woman.

AMBROSE: Yes, it's called Junius Road.

ARSENEAULT: I actually drove down that road today. I passed up . . .

AMBROSE: Oh you did?

ARSENAULT: I did.

AMBROSE: [10:22] Yes, well our property is on that corner of Junius Road and the Old Spanish Trail.

ARSENEAULT: Can you describe the weddings held in Mossville?

AMBROSE: Oh Lord. Family oriented again. I remember a long time ago, when I was a little girl they didn't have a . . . Nowadays a wedding is a big blown out thing where you have food, food, food. Everything is catered. You have flowers, flowers, flowers. When I was a little girl . . . When I was a little bitty girl, they would just take flowers out of the yard, because everybody had beautiful flowers and they would make the arrangements with those flowers. And they would have cake, and punch, or lemonade, or they would make ice cream. Homemade ice cream.

And I remember when my sister got married, there was this bakery here in Lake Charles called Sanitary Bakery. And they made the different color breads. Any color bread you wanted. And my mom made finger sandwiches. They would make chicken salad sandwiches or egg sandwiches or cucumber sandwiches. And they would make it with this . . . these different color

breads. And when my mom would serve her circle, which was part of our church, whenever it was her turn, she would make these cute little sandwiches. But she would use the colored bread. If she wanted pink and green she would order her bread. And they don't do that anymore. And I often wonder what happened. Why they stopped. I know the . . . That bakery closed. That we don't have really a bakery here in town that . . . in Lake Charles anymore that bakes bread. We get our bread from somewhere else. But they . . . It was just . . . You know, I hadn't thought about that now that I'm talking about it. I don't know what happened that we didn't keep a bakery here that could do those types of things, because whatever color you wanted any color of the rainbow, you could get that color bread and make these cute little . . . I call them little demitasse sandwiches. And it was like little tea sandwiches.

[12:24] And they used to do those kinds of things, but people got away from proper etiquette. They sort of just started doing stuff. Whatever was easy. And they got away from the way we were taught to do things. We were taught to, you learn etiquette in high school. You learned your manners. Whenever you did something you did it properly you didn't just throw it together and say, "Okay. That looks okay. That's what we'll have." But they went out of their way to do things a little bit different to teach us that there was a way of doing things other than just the ordinary. You could do things out of the ordinary. And that's the way I came up. I was reared in a family like that. They always went that extra mile to do things. And I loved that.

And they make fun of me sometimes now my family, because I had a tea party for one of the ladies that I worked with. Her little girl was having a birthday. And they weren't going to do anything but just have cake and punch, so I had a tea party for she and her little cousin and had like three little girls . . . four little girls here. And I had them dress up with hats and fix little demitasse sandwiches for them. And it was just really sweet and they enjoyed it. They had a

good time. But people, they take their kids out to these tea rooms. But they don't want to do the work at home. And I had everything dressed up with their names tags at their . . . where they were seated and it was just really cute. They loved it.

ARSENEAULT: I'm sure they loved that.

AMBROSE: They did. They did. They had a good time. And I enjoyed doing it.

ARSENEAULT: **[13:54]** So the weddings in Mossville. Who was invited?

AMBROSE: The whole community, normally, because it was all family. Some way. Marriage or otherwise. And the whole . . . You always had a big crowd. Whenever you had anything. Anything for the churches, birthday parties, because everybody invited . . . the kids would invite their classmates and then if they had sisters and brothers then they'd have their classmates. You had more grownups. And we're still like that now. When we have something and you have more grownups than you have kids because everybody will bring two or three kids but your friends will come and it's a big party. And they enjoy that. So birthdays were a big thing too. They always have lots of cake and punch and ice cream. Or hotdogs or hamburgers or they . . . balloons. They . . . it was a big thing too.

ARSENEAULT: **[14:48]** What about the funerals?

AMBROSE: The funerals were . . . When I was young I don't really remember . . . The only

person I remember when I was a kid growing up was my grandmother died at forty-six years old. My mother's mother passed away. Forty-six. And I remembered her funeral. And in fact, most of my family is buried in the cemetery behind Mount Zion Baptist Church. And that was a big thing. People came from everywhere. Wherever you had family, they came to the funeral. Lot of times they won't come nowadays. But we had . . . It was a big thing. All the cousins. It was like a family reunion, because everybody was there for the funeral. And most of them were . . .

When I was growing up, there were two black funeral homes in Lake Charles. There was Combre's. No, there were three. Combre's, Gilmore's, and James Funeral Home. They handled all the majority of the funerals. And later on they . . . Another one was added, Fondel's. But we always used Gilmore's. And, they would have the viewing of the bodies in the homes. They didn't have it in the church. They would have it either in the funeral home or in the home. And like we were in Mossville, so a lot of people didn't have transportation to get to Lake Charles so when my grandmother passed they had it in her . . . in our living room at home. And then they . . . of course they came and took her to the church and had the funeral at the church. So a lot of the funerals a long time ago were held in the . . . Viewings were held in the homes. And they would take pictures. That's another thing I find strange nowadays I'm an adult. But they would take pictures. I don't think anybody does that nowadays.

ARSENEAULT: **[16:48]** Of the dead bodies?

AMBROSE: Yes, yes.

ARSENEAULT: Wow.

AMBROSE: Yes. Yes. I don't know where that came from, where it started, but they did. A long time ago. Don't do that anymore and I'm glad they don't because I wouldn't want to take one of me.

ARSENEAULT: Do you have any photos of . . .?

AMBROSE: Well I'm trying to think. Of my grandmother but they're in California with my mom. We don't have the pictures here. But I remember when she . . . When my mom moved to California in 1970 she took all the family pictures with her and they . . . Those pictures are in California. Hadn't thought about that in a long time either.

ARSENEAULT: What was that?

AMBROSE: [17:27] I hadn't thought about that in a long time either.

ARSENEAULT: Oh yes. When you were growing up who were your neighbors?

AMBROSE: We had . . . Gosh, we had the . . . My godmother and godfather, the Davises. Christine and Fred Davis lived right next door to us. That was on the west side of us. On the east side of us, the Hardies lived. Two doors down . . . Door down we had the LaTours which was Raymond LaTour. His father lived next door to him. Across the street we had the [Guillorys?] and the [Goodlys?]. And the Goodlys were all younger than us. They were a young family that moved into the neighborhood. Mr. Hardy had no children. My godmother had no children. The

LaTours had children my age. Some of them were my classmates, some were young, and had one son older. And Mr. LaTour, the father of the LaTours, the grandfather I should say, of the LaTours, he had kids that were older. Older than us. We had a lot of boys in our neighborhood. Maybe half and half. Or maybe a little bit more with boys than we had girls. And then down from us we had the Vincents.

[18:51] And I don't know if . . . Where Coach Williams Road is in Mossville? During the time I was growing up, the Chennault Base was here. Have you heard of that? Chennault Air Base? They have a lot of airmen living here in Lake Charles. And that's how in east Lake Charles it was called Chennault Air Force Base, and now it's called . . . I think it's still called Chennault, but it's an airport now where they bring in planes to be worked on [. . .?], Boeing, that kind of thing. Well anyway, they had a lot of airmen here at that time and there was a . . . He was . . . I can't remember his first name, but his last name was [Renard?]. He was a school teacher, and he had a whole bunch of homes built in there and we had all these people from all over the United States that lived here that would come. They would rent these homes on that property he had. I guess he must have had four or five homes, and single homes and duplexes that was on that property.

So there were a lot of people that came during that time from all over the country because they had somebody that was in the military and they came out there to live. And so we had a lot of people. And we were . . . I guess at that time we were lucky to be able to visit with people who had lived all over the world. And I remember the first time I was ever saw Asian furniture. They had this . . . I call it [Baroque?] now that I'm older but it was just carved and it was just beautiful as . . . The most beautiful furniture I had ever seen. And we were able to see that because a lot of them had been to Okinawa, Japan and had lived there. And they were able to

bring furniture back home from their travels. And I remember my sister-in-law when she . . . She was a school teacher at Sam Houston High in Lake Charles and she . . . her husband went to Germany, and she couldn't wait to get to Germany because she wanted to be able to bring furniture back. And when she came back she had these huge things called a shrunk. But what it was it was a big wall unit with glass doors heavily carved, and you could put different things. It was like an armoire. But they called it a shrunk.

ARSENEAULT: [21:13] A shrunk?

AMBROSE: A shrunk. And she brought that back from Germany. So I realized then how these people who lived in all these different places . . . And I have a friend now that's a part of my book club. She . . . Her husband was in the air force and they lived all over the world. And she has a lot of beautiful things that she bought when they were in Japan. They lived there. She and her kids. And a lot of women would stay home and their husband was . . . would do the travelling. Then there were so many of them who, which I think is wonderful . . . I mean, your kids never stay in one place a long period of time, but they learn to meet different people, and they learn to see different things.

And my sister-in-law used to tell me when they were in Germany how close things were. We think Germany and France and Spain are so far apart. But they would drive from Germany to France and just like here too, I guess, I don't know how many miles it was, but it was nothing for them to drive to France. And then they would drive from France to Spain, and then they would have these things they called Volksmarches where they would take and they would walk. Take a whole weekend and they would walk the Black Forest. And it was just wonderful. So, I think that

it was something in that taking your kids so that they could see different things and experience different things.

ARSENEAULT: Where these airmen . . . Were they coming back from World War II?

AMBROSE: [22:38] They were . . . I think it might have been Northern Korean Conflict. I think World War II was over with. But they had the Korean Conflict, for those guys.

ARSENEAULT: Did any of the elders ever talk about being in the war? Fighting . . .

AMBROSE: [22:55] We had . . . My uncles were. I know one uncle my mom's . . . My grandmother's baby brother was in World War II. My grandfather's brother was World War II. And then of course my generation, everybody . . . Almost everybody I knew had a stint in Vietnam. And which most of the guys that came back from Vietnam they wouldn't talk about it. They just . . . You couldn't even get them to hold a conversation. And now some friends that I have now I've mentioned it to them. Why don't you talk about . . . You have . . . and they all have problems. They all have anger issues and can't sleep even these many years afterwards. They just have a lot of problems.

And but the guys it seems like they came back from World War II and the Korean Conflict I don't hear them, they don't talk about it. And I guess it was the different ways that wars were handled, the . . . I don't know what to . . . Maybe in Vietnam it was more hand to hand combat where they actually had to kill people with their bare hands rather than bombs dropping. I don't know what the difference was. But they . . . I don't know. I don't really know. When we

were younger we used to like to talk to them about . . . from my uncles. From World War II. And they would tell us the things that they did. And back then it was a segregated army. So you had a lot of blacks fighting with other blacks and they would tell us some of things they did. And then but Vietnam of course it was integrated there, so we had family from both World War II, the Korean Conflict, now I guess everything. Vietnam, Saudi Arabia. Up until now.

ARSENEAULT: What kind of things would they tell you about the war? Your uncles.

AMBROSE: [25:09] Well they would talk about the . . . I think some of them were on that when they talked about them landing on these beaches and having to get out of these vehicles that would kind of run up the beach and they would get out and have . . . They would talk about that. And how, because we used to ask them if they were afraid, and they said you were afraid but you don't really have time to be afraid, you're just trying to save your life and save the people you're with, and you got a job to do so you do it. And I know since I've been growing up, I've talked to some of them and I would ask them I said, "You know . . ." I said, "When you think about it, you're trained killers." And they said at the time you don't think of it that way, but once you get home and start reflecting and you finally you think "yeah".

And then when you listen to the music you hear the younger guys who are killing their families who are come home angry. You think about . . . You reflect on what it was like or why they're like that. You can see why they're like that. And they don't understand why the military or the medical people can't see what they've created. You know, when they send people to war. Because killing is not a natural thing, to me.

And I think to the . . . my uncles that I talked to it wasn't a natural thing to them either.

But, during those times you were drafted so you had no choice. You go to war or you got to jail. I have a couple of uncles. My mom's brothers, they volunteered for the military. But I don't think during the time they volunteered it wasn't . . . there was no combat going on. Then of course something happened and they were sent to . . . One of my uncles was sent to Korea. That was for the Korean Conflict. But I never talked to him that much about what his experience was. But some of the older ones I did talk about and then some of the younger ones I talked to who wanted to talk about it. We talked about it and that's what they said. They understand what the Vietnamese guys went through because they were trained killers. Don't even want to think of yourself as that, but it's either kill or be killed. That's the way they had to look at it.

ARSENEAULT: [27:25] Does your family all live close?

AMBROSE: No. Most of my family now, they're in California. We have a big bunch of our family in California. They kind of scattered all over the place now. We still have a bunch in Mossville, of course. People that live . . . That are still there. But my mom's and my immediate family are in California. So I have a lot of cousins, first cousins. And I have a sister there, and two brothers, and I have one sister, when my husband passed in 2005 she came home to visit me and to spend some time with me. Well she stayed. She's been here since 2006. And so I would have had two sisters and two brothers there. But she came home, so now I just have one sister there and two brothers. I've been trying to get them to come home. Come back home.

ARSENEAULT: [28:22] Growing up were you surrounded by family?

AMBROSE: Oh yes. Yes, we were in Mossville. We knew nothing but family. I was lucky enough to have . . . to live and my grandparent . . . my grandparents and great-grandparents. So I was able to know my great-grandparents until I was an adult, and married. My mom's mama, unfortunately, she died at forty-six of a cerebral hemorrhage. But then I had her mother that I grew up with, which was my great-grandmother, and then my grandfather. I was grown and married when he passed, but I had his mom and dad that we grew up with. And then of course, on my father's side I only knew his mother. I didn't know his father. His father I think passed before I was born. But yes, we had aunties and uncles and we were . . .

We had two distinct families. We had the Towner side who were all loving and down to earth and just loved everybody. They real huggy kissy type. Then we had the Perkins side who were a different type. They were very stanch and upright and everything had to be perfect. You had to be the best little girl, and you just had to be perfect. And they were the ones who had more money than the Towner side. But the Towner side was more giving than the Perkins side. The Perkins side, they held on to things very tightly. But the Towners they just, "if I have you have". So I guess we had the best of both worlds.

[30:13] And we had my great-grandmother, my grandfather's mother. She was a type that, she just knew things. She read her Bible all the time. She was educated. Both my great-grandmothers were educated as far as they could go in school at that time. But my . . . They both wrote . . . could read and write. Both great-grandmothers read . . . could read and write. And on my grandfather's side, the Towners, I had a great-great-grandfather who learned to read and write at seventy-eight years old. He had something happen to him. They lived up at Deridder in Sugartown and he bought, during the time when they had the . . . you could go homestead acreage? He homesteaded some acreage up there and he couldn't read or write so he depended on

someone to take care of it for him. And the man ended up taking the land from him. And Grandpa, they said that he said he would never let that happen again. So he went to the school, at that time it was segregated, but he went to the black school there and he learned to read and write, so he could know what was going on. He didn't have to depend on somebody else.

So. And my family, they were big, both sides, were big on education. Big on education. We thought that besides being a person of your word, if you shook hands that was just like signing your name in blood. That's the way they were. But they also realized that you had to have an education so that you could know what was going on. You don't have to depend on anybody else to tell you. Because you can read, you can write. So they were sticklers on education.

ARSENEAULT: **[32:07]** The post office?

AMBROSE: That shut down before I . . . I don't know if it shut down before I was born. I think it shut down before I was born. But they had a post office, and if I'm not mistaken, the post office was in the Rigmaiden Store. And I have something I'm going to give you. It's the history of Mossville, there's two different parts to it. But I'm going to give it to you, and then I don't know if I gave a copy to Calcasieu [Imperial Calcasieu Museum], but they, and there's two on my church at Mount Zion. So I'm going to give you those two. I'm going to rewrite them and probably get it in some type of order and maybe add a little bit more to them. I'm just going to give you what I have now, and you can just keep it and I don't know what you'll do with it.

ARSENEAULT: It'll be useful for our . . .

AMBROSE: Okay so somebody'll type it in . . . But I'm going to try to put those two together.

ARSENEAULT: Yes that'd be great.

AMBROSE: Because they left some of the ministers off.

ARSENEAULT: Okay.

AMBROSE: **[33:07]** That were at Mount Zion. But, and the history of Mossville, I think that's somebody probably gave you a copy of that too. I'll show it to you.

ARSENEAULT: All I've really been able to find is *Adventures in Old Calcasieu*. It's a book and then in the book, there's a chapter on Mossville and it's just kind of an outline.

AMBROSE: Well I'll show you what I have.

ARSENEAULT: Okay.

AMBROSE: But and then you can look at it and see if that's what . . . The post office they . . . And I think in one of these that I have, one of these histories, it gives you a little bit of a history of the post office or just tells you that the post office was here. Really was here. And I think after Westlake grew and Sulphur grew, then they had no reason to keep the post office in Mossville because we were kind of in between the two of them.

ARSENEAULT: **[33:57]** So you just used the post office in . . .?

AMBROSE: Half of the . . . Half of Mossville is considered Westlake route, and half is considered Sulphur. So they did it like that.

ARSENEAULT: What are some of your earliest childhood memories of Mossville?

AMBROSE: My earliest childhood memories . . . Well some of my earliest childhood memories were there was nothing for us to be afraid of. We didn't lock our house. Nobody ever stole from anybody, and I think the first time that anything was ever stolen from us is after I was married, living over here and nobody lived in our home in Mossville. Well we didn't lock our . . . I'm trying to remember the first time our house was even ever locked. I was, I guess in high school and we all left and went to San Antonio [Texas]. And we locked the house. That was the very first time our house had ever been locked, and we would go to Jeanerette, and DeRidder, and all over. There was nothing. Nobody ever stole from anybody. You had no robberies. We had very little . . . Well, now that I'm learning more about Mossville there was crime in Mossville but it wasn't that petty crime. We didn't have petty crimes.

And like I said, everybody looked after each other. Looked after each other's children. We could . . . I remember one time we had stopped along the road to pick black berries. We usually rode the bus, but this time we walked home and we were on the highway and somebody called. Before we got home my mom had known that we had been stopping on the road picking black berries. It was. . . The news would just carry, like a carrier pigeon or something. They knew everything that we were doing. And you couldn't do anything . . . Somebody could talk to

you, whip you, send you home and you might catch a whipping again. Because everybody took care of everybody's children. Everybody looked after everybody's children. And I remember in our church we would have fundraisers for our church, and we had things called penny marches. I very seldom hear of anything like that. Church out in Sulphur had one and I . . . A pew rally. We had pew rallies. Just . . .

ARSENEAULT: What is that?

AMBROSE: [36:24] Where everybody would be responsible . . . Certain ladies in the church would be responsible for a pew. Like a line of seats. And you had . . . You would invite people to come and sit in your area and then they would give money and whoever had the biggest amount of money would then, they would be the winner of the pew rally. And we had things called cake walks which was, it was drawn out on the floor. And it was sort of like they would put the different cakes in the different squares, and you would just march around to music and whenever the music stopped whoever was on that square with that type cake well then they would win it. Sort of like musical chairs. Kind of sort of. We had that. And it was just so many things that . . .

ARSENEAULT: What's a penny march?

AMBROSE: [37:13] The penny march . . . I can't remember exactly how the penny march went. But it was sort of like that too but you used pennies. Where it was music and you would march. And I was telling my aunt that the other day. I said, "You remember how the penny march went?' She said, "No." She said, "I can't really remember how it went." But she said, "I

knew we had pennies and you would march around." But I don't remember exactly how it went. I'm going to have to ask somebody else. I hope somebody at the church will remember how it went. But we had things like that, that they used as a fundraisers. And they had at the school, they had something called the “womenless weddings”. Where they had all the guys play all the parts of the ladies in the weddings. And it was always hilarious.

ARSENEAULT: So it wasn't a real wedding?

AMBROSE: No, no, no, no, no.

ARSENEAULT: **[38:08]** Oh okay.

AMBROSE: No, no, no, no, no. It was like a play kind of sort of. But the bride was a man, the bridesmaids were men, and they would be all dressed up and all made-up. We had things like that. We had . . . I don't know. It was just so many things that they had back then that they don't have now. And then we played outside a lot. Children played outside a lot. We were always outside. And you weren't able to . . . They didn't allow you, once you got through with your chores in the house you went outside. You didn't stay around grownups, and grownups were in discussion. We didn't . . . Like some of the people now the children know more about the family happenings than the grownups do. We weren't allowed to do that. Children stayed in the children's place.

And my sister and I were talking last year. She was saying . . . And I was telling her that when I went to work at Olin [Olin Mathieson Lake Charles Plant, later Olin Chemical

Corporation] that was in 1966. First job I'd ever had. And I always said that we had an idyllic childhood, but the only thing I felt that was I missed was not having a job and not knowing how to handle money. Because my grandfather didn't believe in us working. And I had wished that I would have had a babysitting job or something that I could learn to handle money and not just wait for Mama to give me my money and do what I wanted to do. I said but other than that we had an idyllic childhood. And she said, "Yeah."

[39:41] I said, "Because I didn't realize that we were poor in the sense of not having a bank account where we had a home and my grandfather didn't owe any money on it. And he . . . We had cars. But we didn't have . . . He didn't have a huge bank account, because he was always taking care of us and taking care of his boys. His boy's needs." He said, “You know what?” She said, "We didn't." She said, "But we weren't really poor." She said, "Because we got a roof over our head. We had food to eat as much as we wanted." My mom had a . . . Down the street from us was a grocery store, she had an account there, so when she worked if we needed anything we just went down there and put whatever we wanted on her account and then when she got paid she paid it.

And I said . . . And she said, "When you think about." She said, "We had six acres of land to run around on." She said, "There were all kinds of animals." We had horses and since we can remember cow. We had a cow. Then of course we had, when my grandmother was alive, we had chickens and always had rabbits and always had animals. She said, "And then we had a pond." She said, "And there . . . If we wanted to swim we could have swam about in our pond." She said, "People have ponds nowadays, but that was nothing to us. And we had a little walk out into the pond that we could walk out on a little docking thing." And I said, "Yeah." I said, "I guess we were rich in a lot of ways."

[41:06] And we had lots of love, because we were always told how wonderful we were. We were always told how smart we were. So we had no reason to think that we weren't the smartest kids in the world. And we had it on both sides of the family . . . would tell us how wonderful we were. How smart we were. We could do anything we wanted. We could be anything we wanted. So, we never had that where . . . I never heard . . . My family didn't use profanity. They might have used it but not around us. And when I started working at the plant I was with nothing but men, and I had never heard . . . And I had . . . My mother had four brothers that we grew up with and they never used profanity around us.

And I would go home crying to my mama in the evening when I get off of work and she was saying, "What's wrong with you?" She said, "Are they being ugly because . . ." I'm the first black to be hired in the office at Olin at that time. When I was hired in 1966, I was the first black at Olin, and then there was another girl, she was a Guillory, she was the first black at PPG [PPG Industries, chemical plant, Lake Charles]. And we were hired in the . . . I was hired in July and I think she was hired in the . . . In June. Because my husband didn't want me to go to work, so I had to talk him into letting me, and his mom, and talk them into letting me work. So she was hired in before I was. And she thought maybe they were being ugly to me or something and I said, "No, they're not being ugly to me." She said, "Well why are you crying?" And I told her I said, "Mama they just use such bad words all the time." She said, "They do what?" I said, "They use bad words." She said, "What kind of bad words?" She said, "Are they speaking to you?" I said, "No." "Are they talking about you?" I said, "No." She said, "Well, let Mama tell you something. You're in the real world now." She said, "You're over with a bunch of men. They're used to using that kind of language." She said, "So it's time for you to grow up. As long as they're not talking to you or talking about you, you just let it go in one ear and out the other."

And I was still very sensitive to it but I eventually . . . And they were constantly . . . because they knew that I would . . . I don't know if it was the look I had on my face or my flinching. I don't know what it was but they would apologize to me. And then finally one day one of the guys said, "Look Lenoria, I'm going to apologize right now for all day." So he said, "Now I'm not . . .I see your face." He said, "You still bothered by it?" I said, "Mhmm. I'm still bothered by it." He said, "Well you'll get used to it. You'll get hardened to it after a while." He said, "Because you're with a bunch of men, and they don't mean to hurt your feelings or they're not talking to you." But he said, "It's just a man's thing." So, and I'd tell my husband I said . . . You know and he said, "You going to have to get used to that." He said, "Because men . . ." He said, "I didn't used to use a lot of profanity either." But he said, "I worked on the docks with a bunch of guys." He said, " And you get . . . You just get in a rhythm." So, I still get kind of offended by it but . . .

ARSENEAULT: **[44:13]** Did you have any issues being the first black . . . Were you the first black person or first black woman?

AMBROSE: First black woman in the office.

ARSENEAULT: So they had a black man working?

AMBROSE: They had black men working as laborers in the field. But I was the first black woman. No and I guess when I was growing up in Mossville, we had one white family. The Bensons that lived in our community right in fact right down from us. And those boys were

friends with my uncles. So and then of course my mother worked so we were really used to being around whites all our lives and then our family history . . . we were part Indian part white part black so, and we were always told who we were. And except for my great-grandmother she never wanted . . . She knew who she was. She knew she was half white. Her mom was black and her dad was white. But she never wanted to talk about it. But we knew, because she told my . . . her children. So they in turn told us.

[45:24] So we didn't think . . . We thought we was as much as anybody else. And when I . . . The first . . . I think the first time that I ever came in contact with segregation or felt it was when I went to McNeese [State University] other than that because, when we rode on the bus, we would ride the bus from Mossville to Lake Charles to do our little shopping at Sears and Roebuck or the Fair Store something like that, well we knew that when we got on the bus if there were . . . If Ms. Benson was on the bus or some other white got on the bus because we got to go all the way around English Bayou to Lake Charles that we were to sit the seat behind the front seat. If nobody was on the bus, we could sit anywhere we wanted to. So a lot of times it would be nobody on the bus but us and the bus driver. He didn't care where we sat. But if somebody white got on, well then we knew that we had to . . . where we had to sit.

So that was just something and then like I said the Bensons, my uncle, they were around us all the time and then some of the kids. There was our house and then three other houses and there was a big stretch of woods. Well part of that property belonged to our family but then after that big stretch of woods there was a . . . the white neighborhood started. So Ms. Benson had a daughter that lived in that area and then my uncles had the family of guys that would be with the Bensons that were friends with my uncles. So we were used to seeing that. I mean when I went to McNeese, I was in a chemistry class and I had to park . . . I was the only black in the class.

ARSENEAULT: So what year was this?

AMBROSE: [47:08] 1965 . . . sixty-four.

ARSENEAULT: Okay.

AMBROSE: 1964. And I had to partner with someone, so I partnered with a girl from DeRidder. I think she was from DeRidder. She chose me to be her partner. And then one guy that was sitting behind us. He made the comment that . . . And we were talking. She and I were talking. And he made the comment that we have to go to school with them but we don't have to associate with them. And that was the first inkling that I had ever had of hatred. It just never even crossed my mind. Because we went everywhere we wanted to go in Mossville and if we went to Sulphur we were always respected and when we came to Lake Charles we had never . . . I had never heard anything like that. So that was my first inkling of somebody who could hate somebody for the color of their skin.

ARSENEAULT: So your childhood do you just . . . Y'all were sheltered from all the hatred and . . .?

AMBROSE: Oh yes. We knew about it because we could read and we saw what was happening in other areas of the world . . . of the country. But we . . . We were . . . We never had to deal with it.

ARSENEAULT: Were you ever scared that . . .?

AMBROSE: No. Never. Because we had dealt with it. We knew we heard old people talk about early the Klu Klux Klan. We knew about the Klu Klux Klan. We knew that if you went to Moss Bluff you had to be very careful. But our church would take us to a family in Moss Bluff that was like an excursion for us. They lived in Moss Bluff. So they would take us to Moss Bluff but nothing ever happened to us, so we didn't have any reason to be afraid. And . . .

ARSENEAULT: **[48:58]** Did you have to be careful because that's where all the white people lived or Klan people lived?

AMBROSE: There were blacks that lived in Moss Bluff.

ARSENEAULT: Oh okay.

AMBROSE: But the Klan was there. That was a stronghold of the Klan.

ARSENEAULT: Oh okay.

AMBROSE: But nothing ever happened to us because we would go there on our church excursions. That was like going out of town to . . . it was just Moss Bluff. From Mossville to Moss Bluff just seemed like it was a long ways to us. So we never . . . I mean like I said we never had a problem there. But when I got to be an adult and married and moved over here to

Lake Charles and my mother-in-law would tell us some of the horrid stories. She . . . My husband's mother . . . I have a picture of her. Her dad was a tug boat operator. And she would tell us. That's my husband's mom and dad.

ARSENEAULT: Oh wow.

AMBROSE: It's kind of dusty.

ARSENEAULT: They look so nice.

AMBROSE: **[50:03]** It was their fiftieth anniversary.

ARSENEAULT: Aww it's beautiful. I love her dress.

AMBROSE: But her dad was white her mom was black. Her mom was . . .

ARSENEAULT: She's so . . . She's very fair.

AMBROSE: Yes.

ARSENEAULT: **[50:14]** Very light skinned.

AMBROSE: Her daddy was white. And she would tell us the horrid stories about the Klu Klux

Klan. And she would tell us say . . .

ARSENEAULT: She's from Lake Charles?

AMBROSE: From here in Lake Charles. And she would tell us about how she had brothers and when they were lynching's up at Moss Bluff, people from here who had family members lynched, her dad would have to go with them to get the body and bring it back. And it was only because he was white they were going to allow him to do that. And she said that . . . A long time ago she said the reason that she respected the Masons and the Eastern Star so much is that a lot of . . . And she said that was not something that was supposed to be known, but she said, "I'm old I can tell anything I want". She said, but a long time ago, she said it was Masons who saved many a black boy life, because they would put them in caskets as if they were dead and put them on trains and send their bodies . . . send them out. Out of the city, so they were able to escape that way. And she said it was just awful.

[51:26] She said a long time ago, black boys could be accused of things that they didn't do anything. If you looked at somebody too long or if you didn't hold your head down when you walked or . . . She just said it was awful. So I learned more about the things that happened, and then in sixty-five, sixty-six when they first started integrating the schools here. Well then we had . . . there were crosses burned here in Lake Charles, but we never had anything like that in Mossville. Happened outside Mossville. That's one of the things that we didn't . . . we weren't around. We didn't know anything about. We were . . . I guess you could say we were sheltered. We were sheltered from all that. And then my great-grandparents lived on Highway Ninety. I don't know. Have you been right down from Walmart on Highway Ninety? Have you been to

Walmart?

ARSENEAULT: **[52:17]** I don't think so.

AMBROSE: Well on your trips over here when you're going down Prater Road you get to the Highway Ninety.

ARSENEAULT: Yes.

AMBROSE: Okay when you . . .

ARSENEAULT: I always take a left on that . . . on Highway Ninety.

AMBROSE: Okay well you take a right

ARSENEAULT: Okay.

AMBROSE: **[52:29]** Well you say you've been down Coach William's Road?

ARSENEAULT: Yes.

AMBROSE: To Highway Ninety?

ARSENEAULT: I don't remember.

AMBROSE: The Walmart is across.

ARSENEAULT: Is it over that bridge thing? Is that a bridge in Highway Ninety? No? I might be thinking of something else.

AMBROSE: [52:46] If you went down Coach Williams Road . . . Where were you going when you went down Coach Williams Road?

ARSENEAULT: I don't remember. We were taking pictures. I don't remember.

AMBROSE: Well if you went left you went to Highway Ninety.

ARSENEAULT: Oh okay.

AMBROSE: And right over to your right is where my great-grandparents lived.

ARSENEAULT: Okay.

AMBROSE: [53:07] And they had a lot of land over there because Granny, my great-grandmother, homesteaded a hundred and sixty-seven acres.

ARSENEAULT: Is that Bayou D'Inde there or . . .?

AMBROSE: Bayou D'Inde [pronounces it D-E-N].

ARSENEAULT: Is that what that is?

AMBROSE: No. Bayou D'Inde is over to the left.

ARSENEAULT: Bayou D'Inde [pronounces it correctly as D-E-N]? Oh okay.

AMBROSE: [53:24] But anyway . . . And her land went from Highway Ninety over to Old Spanish Trail. And we would walk through the woods. Thought nothing of it. And we would see white people, white guys, white boys hunting in there. And they were on my great-grandmother's land, but it was her land so we didn't think anything about it. But we were never hurt or said anything ugly to us or anything. So we just . . . That was another thing, we didn't pay any attention. And then when we would go to my great-grandfather's and we had Doctor [Postelle?] Perkins was as a pharmacist from Sulphur and my great-grandfather would tell us to come and shake our cousin's hand. He was white. So we had no reason to be afraid. Or we didn't have the sense enough to be afraid. Because that's the way we were . . . we grew up. And he would always say whenever we'd see him, whenever he'd be at Grandpa's, he tell us to come and shake our cousin's hand, because we were related. We were related to the Mosses. And I don't . . . Vincent settled in Sulphur. Up around, I believe they called it Sabine. I don't know if it was a parish or what it was, but my great-grandmother would talk about a place called Sabine.

So, that kept us, I guess ignorant to the fact of what was going on around us. And there may have been things going on around in this area, in Mossville area, or Sulphur . . . Now we knew that Vinton was not a good place, but they had blacks living there. It wasn't a nice place for blacks. We knew that Vidor, Texas was not a good place if you got something wrong with your car, stay in your car, just don't go knocking on people's doors. And we also heard about Hornbeck, Louisiana. But our bus stop when we were teenagers in high school, we'd go on to play a school up at Shreveport [Louisiana], and our bus broke down on us at Hornbeck and we . . . We were on the side of the road. We had to use the bathroom and we saw way up above some lights. So we went to this lady's home. This family's home. She let us in, let us use the bathroom, offered us breakfast. That was Hornbeck. So there may have been some bad people in Hornbeck but the ones that we came in contact with weren't. So you just . . . And I think about that sometimes. I say, "Well, until you're confronted with it, you can just be ignorant to the fact."

ARSENAULT: **[56:09]** Sounds like it was kind of a blessing.

AMBROSE: It was. It was a blessing and it was a curse.

ARSENEAULT: Yes.

AMBROSE: But . . . And then, when I got my job at the plant, I wasn't looking for a job. I was practicing and going to school, and they had told me that I needed to go for an interview, because I had never worked before and that was part of my schooling. That I had to have an interview. So they sent me to the plant and we were planning on going to the . . . Mexico the fourth of July.

And they said, "Well you have to go to an interview to Olin." And I didn't even know what Olin was. I knew it was the plant because we pass it all the time, but never thinking of . . .

[56:52] My husband always said, "Well you not going to work. My mama didn't work and you can't work." So I said, "Well okay. I'll just go play interview." And when I went the guy called me and he said, "Ms. Ambrose." He said, "This is Mr. O'Brian." He said, "Do you want to work?" And I got excited I said, "Well yes, of course I want to work." He said, "Well we're going to offer you a job and you have to start on July the sixth." I said, "Oh okay." So I told my husband. I said, "We're not going to go to Mexico." I said, "I'm going to save that money and buy clothes to go to work." And he said, "Oh no." He said, "We not going to have that." I said, "Look, we don't have children. Just you and I." And I said, "I'm home all day." He said, "Yeah but you're going back to McNeese." I said, "But I got a job I don't need to go back to McNeese now." And my mother-in-law, had to talk to her and I told her what was going on. And she talked to him. She told him, "You let her go to work. If she want to work. You let her go to work. That's a wonderful job. How many black kids and black women are getting good jobs in these plants? You let her go." So I said . . . I started working. I made a promise to him. I said, "If we have our first child I'll quit and I'll be home." We never had children, so I kept working.

ARSENEAULT: **[58:02]** Why didn't he want you to work?

AMBROSE: He didn't believe in women working. His mom never worked. His mom had children.

ARSENEAULT: Right.

AMBROSE: And back during that time you could either be a school teacher or work in somebody's house. His mom thought she was too good for that. And his dad thought she was too good for that so he wasn't going to let her do that. And she had babies. She started having children. So she stayed home and took care of her children. It was a big difference. But it was just the two of us and we had no babies, so I said I wanted to work. And I worked for forty years.

ARSENEAULT: Wow.

AMBROSE: Forty years, and the plant shut down in 2006.

ARSENEAULT: Wow that's a long time.

AMBROSE: [58:46] A long time. The only job I ever had. And then since then I've worked at McNeese, and I put in an application for Delgado [University] because I wanted to go to New Orleans so bad. When the plant, when I retired in 2012 but before in 2006 I wanted to go to Delgado because I love New Orleans. I don't know why. I just love the atmosphere. I love the . . . I don't know what it is about New Orleans. I just love the flavor.

ARSENEAULT: It's the . . . I [talk to them?] for a while when they come down here. It's the most different place you'll ever be.

AMBROSE: But nobody likes it but me and nobody wants to go with me. So I said I'm going to shut my house down if I get a job. Shut my house down and I'll work there all week and I'll

come home on the weekend. And I sent my application in. I didn't hear anything from them. So I had a friend that was at McNeese she said, "Come and work at McNeese." I said, "I don't think so." So she kept bugging me. I said, "Alright, I'll do it." So I sent my application in and got an interview, and got hired and I said, "Well." I came home and I thought about it and I said, "Maybe I don't want this job." I said, "Because Delgado might call." And I was talking to somebody that said, "They may not call." And I said, "Yeah but I really think they're going to call." I said, "Okay I'm going to go ahead and take it." And the week that I started working at McNeese, I got a call from Delgado. But I'd already taken that job. So I didn't leave.

ARSENEAULT: That always happens.

AMBROSE: [1:00:08] Yes, for a reason. And we have to believe that that's why. It's for a good reason.

ARSENEAULT: I wanted to ask you going back to your childhood what were some of the greatest joys or sadness's that you can remember.

AMBROSE: The greatest joys I had was just my life in Mossville. How I was always cared for. Always taken good care of. I grew up around my family. My grandparents. My great-grandparents. My aunts and uncles. My church. And I guess really I don't know. I can't really think of anything bad right now. Well when my grandmother died. I guess that was the worst thing that had happened to me. And then my mother had a twenty-seven year old brother that passed. He had tonsillitis. He worked at Firestone and he . . . They gave him a shot, and it caused

him to have a heart attack and he died. But that was the only two deaths that I really remember growing up. But as far as my life, like I said we had an idyllic life. I can't . . . I have no sadness or . . .

ARSENEAULT: That's great.

AMBROSE: [1:01:32] Or anything. I just can't think of anything that happened that was sad.

ARSENEAULT: Who were your role models?

AMBROSE: My role models?

ARSENEAULT: Growing up.

AMBROSE: My goodness I have so many. Teachers. We had the most wonderful teachers. And our teachers cared for us. They cared. They were friends with our families. And they took care of us and made sure that we . . . And my mom is my greatest hero because she gave us everything that we needed to achieve our greatest. It was nothing that we couldn't do in school. There was nothing we couldn't participate in. She made sure that we had what we needed. And I just can't think of . . . And my mother was a single mother. But we were reared in the home with my grandfather, and then my uncles, my mother's brothers. But she's my greatest hero. But other than her and my grandfather, of course the people in my family, my school teachers. I had the most wonderful school teachers. They were caring, they were giving. They would . . . And

during that time that I grew up they didn't spare the rod. It didn't kill any of us. And that . . . I mean from . . .

ARSENEAULT: [1:02:52] You mean you got spanked?

AMBROSE: Right. From school to home. And in the community, if anybody saw they thought you needed it, you better not go home and tell your mama because you'll probably get it again. But yes. Yes.

ARSENEAULT: Who mainly did the disciplining in the home?

AMBROSE: My mother. My mother.

ARSENEAULT: Was it just spankings or . . .?

AMBROSE: [1:03:19] Oh yes. We didn't have . . . The only thing they would . . . punishment was if we didn't go to church we couldn't go to the canteen, we couldn't go anywhere else. But yes. We didn't get that many spankings when we . . . I didn't, when I think about it, because I didn't do anything to get spanked. I think the worst thing we got one time was we'd always find something so funny when my mama got on her knees to say her prayers. I don't know why. We would find funny things. And she would thump her foot on the floor to let us know that she could hear us and we needed to quiet down. Because she was in her room, we were in our room, but she could hear us. And seems like that just made it all the more funny. And I think that was

probably the worst whipping I ever caught. Was making noise when she was saying her prayers, because we were supposed to be quiet. So . . .

ARSENEAULT: So how were you expected to behave in front of adults?

AMBROSE: [1:04:12] Quiet, respectful, yes ma'am, no ma'am. Stand up straight. That's . . . We were brought up that way. We were brought up to be respectful. We were brought up to look somebody in the eye when they're talking to you. And if it's an adult, I don't care if they were your cousin or who it was, you would say yes ma'am and no ma'am and Miss and Mister. That was the main thing we were to do especially.

ARSENEAULT: How did you know that was how you were supposed to behave?

AMBROSE: Because we were told and we were shown that. We were shown that by our older cousins and were shown that by my mama. The way she handle people. And my mother was a very talkative person. She was a very outgoing person. She didn't meet a stranger. And she taught us that we were to be respectful. We were to say yes ma'am to say no ma'am. We were to let older people go ahead of us. Open the door if they need it. We were taught to care for our elderly. And . . . I think about the kids nowadays. They let a door slam on your in a minute. They don't know how to say yes ma'am no ma'am, thank you, please. We were taught all those things.

At least it might seem kind of silly now, but I think if more children were taught that, they wouldn't have time to do so many of the little devilish things that they do, because they would know better. They would know better. But they're not taught that. And I mean it's in every

family, and I never shall forget my brother-in-law used to say that when his kids grew up, he wanted to make sure that they had cars when they got to be teenagers. Because he never had a car. But he had the use of his mom's car and his dad's car, so I never could understand why that wasn't enough for him. By the time all his kids got old enough to drive, they were getting their driver's license and they were driving. And I used to think about it. I used to tell him all the time I said, "You know." I said, "You want your kids to drive." But I said, "Your kids are not working. They don't need to drive. They don't need a car."

ARSENEAULT: Where were they going? Just all over?

AMBROSE: [1:06:59] School.

ARSENEAULT: Oh okay.

AMBROSE: School activities. But they could have taken them. And I said, "You don't think about your insurance?" And he had one girl and three boys. So his insurance was at astronomical.

ARSENEAULT: Yes, because boys are more.

AMBROSE: Yes. And I'm just going to sit back and I'd listen to that and I told Al. I said, "Al if we had children." I said, "I don't think our children would drive until they were ready to go to college, because we'd be hauling them around everywhere." And then the more I think about it, I

say well when we had businesses, so we had to be a little bit more careful. We couldn't let just anybody drive our cars, because if they got in a wreck, then it would be on us and then somebody knew you had a business, they're wanting to sue you. Because he always was self-employed. But I worked at the plant. And we just had to be very careful of things like that. But . . . And I see it even nowadays. I have a little cousin. She's a smart kid. She's a junior in high school. I think she'll be a senior next year. She's a good athlete. She goes right down here to St. Louis High School. Catholic school. But they just went and bought her a Z . . . whatever that thing is. I don't know.

ARSENEAULT: Like a BMW?

AMBROSE: No. A Z something.

ARSENEAULT: Oh I don't know.

AMBROSE: [1:08:23] Z 280. Is that a Nissan?

ARSENEAULT: I don't . . .

AMBROSE: It's whatever that big sports car that they have.

ARSENEAULT: Oh okay.

AMBROSE: And I said, "[Laurie?] now Laurie. The child has just go a driver's license. And you going to turn a child loose in a high performance car like that?" It just doesn't make sense to me. Maybe it's because I don't have any children. I don't know. Maybe they'd wear me down too, but I don't think so.

ARSENEAULT: **[1:08:49]** I want to know more about the canteens.

AMBROSE: Well the Dew Drop Inn, I remember seeing a building there, but I think by the time I got old enough to go to a canteen . . . I was reared very strict. We weren't just allowed to just run all over the place. And they, by the time I grew up, it wasn't a canteen anymore, it was just a little store that had cookies and candies and stuff you'd go and buy. But my uncles grew up at the time that it was there, and they said that they had a record player in there and those jukeboxes and it was a hot spot for teenagers. And then like I said Aunt Martill she had . . . That was my great-grandmother's sister. She had . . . We would love to go there because then we could drink Barq's Root Beers and Barq's strawberries and they had a . . . My cousin cut hair. He had a barbershop right in the same building. And we would go there and we could dance and my uncles taught us to dance. My mother's baby brother. He would dance with us at home and so we learned to dance and would listen . . .

ARSENEAULT: What kinds of dances?

AMBROSE: **[1:10:06]** Oh back in that time we had something called the slop and the . . . I can't remember . . . The twist. The hully gully. And he would teach us. And he taught us how to

two-step and to swing. And my mother was a wonderful dancer. So we would watch her dance. We'd play the record player or play her . . . play the radio. And we would listen to stations out of Tennessee. I don't know, all your stations that you listen to are probably local, but ours were . . . During that time we had KLK here, which had a black DJ. But all of . . . They were off at a certain time. But any time we stayed up late at night we'd have to listen to WLAC Seattle, Nashville, Tennessee, because they played R&B and blues. And then we would listen to . . . What was his name? He was out of New Mexico. He was a very popular DJ. I can't think of his name now. So we listened to the radio a lot when we weren't watching TV. Listened to the radio a lot.

ARSENEAULT: What kind of music?

AMBROSE: [1:11:23] We listened to R&B. We listened to . . . Back during that time we listened to country western because that was big. And all those stations. And we listened to country and western. We listened to jazz. And of course my mother bought a lot of . . . We were . . . When we were growing up, we had a record player and she bought a lot of Arthur Price, or Billy Daniels, Tommy Dorsey, which was a big band sound. So I grew up on all kinds of music. Whatever my mother liked, we listened to. And then what we liked, well we heard on the radio. And so I learned to appreciate all kinds of music. Don't listen to it as much anymore, the big band . . . I can take them in a little dose because now we don't have the same type of big bands that we had back then. But we listened to a lot of that, because we listened to everything that she had. And we'd buy what we need or listen to . . . We'd listen to . . . There were a lot of . . . When I grew up, there were a lot of shows on the radio like they have on TV. Like Amos and Andy and

The Gildersleeves, but we listened to them on the radio. They were like little shows on the radio. So we had a lot of that too, when I was growing up. And then we would have . . .

ARSENEAULT: Was the radio like in the living room?

AMBROSE: [1:13:01] No our radio . . . We had . . . Well I think they had a couple in the bedrooms, but we had a big kitchen, and we had a couch in our kitchen, and a big dining room table. And then we would sit in there and listen to the radio in there. The kitchen in our house was the hub. It was the hub of everything. We always . . . We had a little den that we had the TV in. We had the living room. But most of the times we were in the kitchen, because we had extra seating in there. Like I said, we had the dining room table in there. So everybody would sit around the dining room table and we listened to the radio.

ARSENEAULT: Sounds like so much fun.

AMBROSE: We had a wonderful childhood. I mean I can't say enough about it. It was just . . .

ARSENEAULT: Did you ever go to the movies?

AMBROSE: [1:13:46] Yes we went to . . . There was a movie theater in Sulphur called The Fox. We would go there. We had to sit up in the balcony. It was segregated. And then there was one in Westlake called The Lake. I think it was called The Lake. And we would go to that one. And we'd sit up in the balcony. Then after I married and moved here there was one downtown

where they had four theaters here. They had The Paramount downtown, The Lyric, then over on Railroad Avenue they had The Dixie, and here on Enterprise there was one called The Palace. And I would go to those after I married. But those were the two theaters we would go to. It wasn't something that we did often. I remember going to see . . . Let me think of what I saw. King Kong. I remember seeing that at The Lake in Westlake. My uncle took us. And I had seen Imitation of Life in San Antonio, but for some reason we saw it again at The Fox in Sulphur. The old Imitation of Life. And I'm trying to think of some of the other movies. Those are the only two that I can really remember.

ARSENEAULT: Do you remember any from when you were really young?

AMBROSE: [1:15:11] There were a lot of western movies. Jean Audrey and . . .

ARSENEAULT: John Wayne type stuff?

AMBROSE: No. There weren't John Wayne movies they were Jean Audrey.

ARSENEAULT: He was before?

AMBROSE: He was before John Wayne.

ARSENEAULT: Oh okay.

AMBROSE: [1:15:32] And then of course we watch a lot of TV. We watched TV a lot. And of course we saw a lot of westerns on TV. The Lone Ranger and Dale Evens and Roy Rogers.

ARSENEAULT: Any favorite shows?

AMBROSE: Those were our favorite shows.

ARSENEAULT: Oh they were?

AMBROSE: The westerns.

ARSENEAULT: Oh that's funny.

AMBROSE: And then we . . . There was one called Father Knows Best. Highway . . . Oh what was the name of that? Highway . . . It was with Broderick Crawford. It was called Highway Fifty-Four. He . . . It was kind of a . . . He was like a policeman because they didn't have a lot of . . . They had a lot of shooting and driving fast but there wasn't a lot of killing during those times. They didn't let all that . . . TV was a lot different than it is now.

ARSENEAULT: No blood and guts.

AMBROSE: [1:16:35] No. Your imagination have to put all that in there for you. You didn't see any of that. But and then we had the . . . Trying to think of some of the old ones. We had

Amos and Andy. We used to listen to Amos and Andy on the radio. Didn't know it was white guys playing black voices. And then we'd watch it on TV, they were black. But when it first came out there were white characters in black face, but then by the time we saw it they had black characters. [. . .?] And now they're wanting to say that Amos and Andy was type casting. It was a bad thing. I don't know how they come up with all this stuff.

ARSENEAULT: Oh because they were white in black face?

AMBROSE: Yes, but we saw it when it was black face. I mean when it was black guys. Black characters. They weren't black face. I saw . . . I've seen some of those since we can go to the internet and pull them up. I've seen some of them. But we listened to it on the radio and didn't know it was white guys playing the parts. We found that out later as the television and all the reading about it. But we didn't know that. We just listened. It was fun. We enjoyed it. So if that's what they had to do to . . . It didn't hurt any of us, that I can see. Because we didn't know. But I think that was the only one that was black or white guys played the black parts. And of course there was [. . .?] Wilson came out. Nat King Cole had a show and of course we listened to . . . We had all those shows that we listened to.

ARSENEAULT: What do you remember about The Paradise club?

AMBROSE: [1:18:35] I was too young. I was too young to go there in its heyday. And when I got old enough to go there, they weren't having the bands that they had before. And then I got married at nineteen, and of course then moved to Lake Charles so I never . . . I went in there one

time in my life. And the thing that happened then, my uncle had picked us up and was bringing us to Lake Charles with him and he had to stop off to talk to somebody, and he asked us if we wanted to go in. It was a weeknight wasn't nobody there. He said, "Y'all want to go in?" He said, "I'll buy y'all a soda. You can sit right here by the door." So of course we'd never been in there and we wanted to go in. And we went and sat down, and oh my God when we got back home somebody called my grandfather. Had told my grandfather that we were in there.

ARSENEAULT: Was it a bad thing to . . .?

AMBROSE: In a night club? Of course to them, yes. To us it wasn't but yes. To them that was . . . But by the time . . . And they used to have wonderful, wonderful groups there. All there Bobby Blue Band, and all your R&B singers. But like I said we weren't allowed because we were young and even when I got into high school my grandfather wouldn't have allowed that. That just . . . We were reared very, very strict.

ARSENEAULT: Was there alcohol there?

AMBROSE: [1:19:58] Yes!

ARSENEAULT: So . . . Okay.

AMBROSE: Yes. Yes. Lots of alcohol.

ARSENEAULT: Who went there?

AMBROSE: Everybody, but us. Everybody went. People from Lake Charles all around. They would have these big groups there. It was a big thing. It was a big to do. He made a lot of money there. But like I said, by the time I got old enough to go, it wasn't that big anymore. It had run its course. They were having . . . I think the civic center was there by that time, or they would come over to Ball's Auditorium here in Lake Charles if they were having big groups there. And then I married a . . . My husband was the type that . . . He was old in his head. He didn't think his wife should . . .

ARSENEAULT: You mean he was old fashioned?

AMBROSE: Yes, very old. For a woman . . . For a man, they can skip up and down the road naked, it didn't matter. But for a woman, I could go to the civics' center. The civic center was fine. Anybody came to the civic center he didn't have a problem with that. But a night club? If he was with me, every now and then, that's fine but . . . And he didn't . . . I didn't smoke or drink. And he smoked but he didn't drink. So he just thought that . . . Well he could go out with his friends that was okay. But for a woman . . . Perfect. Perfect in all ways. So I was the perfect wife. [laughs] But I remember how there would be cars for days. Oh gosh and we used to just wish that we could go.

ARSENEAULT: **[1:21:41]** Was it close? Where was it?

AMBROSE: Yes it was on Prater Road.

ARSENEAULT: Okay.

AMBROSE: About midway between the Highway Ninety and Prater Road.

ARSENEAULT: The building's not still there?

AMBROSE: [1:21:52] No.

ARSENEAULT: Okay.

AMBROSE: The building is not there anymore. You probably see those dump trucks on the right hand side in that lot? That's where it was.

ARSENEAULT: Okay.

AMBROSE: It was a big place.

ARSENEAULT: Was it two stories?

AMBROSE: [1:22:03] That I don't know. I don't think so. I think we only went in it one time that was right to the door.

ARSENEAULT: Yes.

AMBROSE: So I didn't even know what the bar looked like. I mean we just walked in the door and sat right to the table right there. Didn't get a chance to plunder around and see what the auditorium part of it looked like. Because I think where we went in was just like a bar. You couldn't get . . .

ARSENEAULT: And the auditorium was separate . . .?

AMBROSE: Had to be somewhere else. Because we didn't see any big room or anything. And then I wasn't the going out . . . I didn't like . . . I didn't drink. I didn't smoke. I didn't like loud music. So I never . . . And I should have gone just to see what it was about, before they tore it down but I never did. I never had that urge.

ARSNEAULT: **[1:22:53]** We are at an hour and thirty right now and I still have about three pages of questions. Do you want to . . .

AMBROSE: Yes.

ARSENEAULT: Schedule a follow up?

AMBROSE: Yes.

ARSENEAULT: For later?

AMBROSE: Or you got something else you got to do?

ARSENEAULT: **[1:23:05]** I have to be . . .

AMBROSE: Yes we can schedule . . .

ARSENEAULT: In Orange Beach.

AMBROSE: Where is that?

ARSENEAULT: In Alabama. For . . .

AMBROSE: You got to drive there?

ARSENEAULT: I'm riding with a friend but I meet them in Baton Rouge and we're driving.

AMBROSE: Oh for the fourth? Y'all going there for the fourth?

ARSENEAULT: **[1:23:18]** Yes. So I can . . . I don't mind coming back and . . .

AMBROSE: Okay.

ARSENEAULT: And I think . . .

AMBROSE: Just whenever you want to.

ARSENEAULT: You have a lot more information probably.

AMBROSE: Okay.

ARSENEAULT: I guess the last question would be . . . . Do you remember . . . Well that's a really . . . Well I'll just wait because that's a really deep question.

AMBROSE: Okay.

ARSENEUALT: **[1:23:37]** Like what you remember about the elders. That could probably . . . You could probably talk about that . . .

AMBROSE: About what?

ARSENEAULT: Just the stories the elders used to tell you.

AMBROSE: Oh my God. Yes. Yes.

ARSENEAULT: Probably a lot of those.

AMBROSE: [1:23:44] Yes.

ARSENEAULT: I know somebody told me Evergreen Road is haunted and . . .

AMBROSE: That's what they say and I . . . I'm . . . They tore down the tree now that they said.

ARSENEAULT: The sycamore tree?

AMBROSE: Yes. I said, "I don't ever remember seeing . . ." But we didn't walk it, we only rode it.

ARSENEAULT: Oh okay.

AMBROSE: But I . . .

ARSENEAULT: You don't hold much stock in those tales?

AMBROSE: I . . . Those were the best stories that we ever heard.

ARSENEAULT: That's what I . . . I'm curious.

AMBROSE: Those would be . . . Frightened. We'd be so scared. But we would sit there and listen. Oh my God we just thought that that was heaven.

ARSENEAULT: Well I will come back and I'll get those from you then.

AMBROSE: Okay. We'll just call it.

ARSENEAULT: Okay. Thank you very much.

[1:24:25]

[End Tape 4484. End Session II.]