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[Begin Tape 4425. Begin Session I.]

DOUGLAS MUNGIN: Alright. Perfect. Alright so today is January twenty-fourth 2015 and I'm Douglas Mungin representing the T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History with LSU [Louisiana State University] Libraries. We are working in conjunction with the Imperial Calcasieu Museum and Bill Sherman to document the history of Mossville, Louisiana. And to kick that off, we are holding Mossville Oral History Day here at Rigmaiden Recreation Center on Old Spanish Trail. I'm here today with . . .

DAREN DOTSON: **[00:26]** Daren Dotson.

MUNGIN: Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed. The interview should last about fifteen minutes or so, and then at the end we have some . . . A gift bag for you. Alright. So could you please . . .?

KYLE TANGLAO: Sorry. One second. This is not working right now.

UNKNOWN FEMALE: They want you to say senior?

DOTSON: I will say senior this time. I forgot I got a junior there.

MUNGIN: [Laughs]. Don't worry. We're going to give you . . . I'm going to ask you like your full name in a second. You ready? Alright. So could you please state your full name?

DOTSON: [00:58] Daren Fitzgerald Dotson, Senior.

MUNGIN: Alright. And where did you grow up?

DOTSON: I was . . . I grew up in Maryland, but I spent all my summers here in Lake Charles. I was born here in Lake Charles.

MUNGIN: When were you born?

DOTSON: In 1965. November eighteenth, 1965.

MUNGIN: [01:15] Okay. Scorpio?

DOTSON: Yes.

MUNGIN: Alright. What are your parents' names?

DOTSON: [01:20] Donald Dotson, Senior and Janie Gardner. She was Janie Lyons at the time . . .

MUNGIN: Okay.

DOTSON: Before they got married.

MUNGIN: So what did your parents do?

DOTSON: My father was a plumber. My mother, she worked in insurance.

MUNGIN: And did they . . . Are they originally from Mossville?

DOTSON: My mother is. She's originally from Mossville. She met my father in Moss Bluff
[Louisiana]. . .

MUNGIN: Moss Bluff, okay.

DOTSON: But she did come here to Mossville

MUNGIN: So what's Moss Bluff?

DOTSON: [01:47] Moss Bluff is another city on the outskirts of Lake Charles.

MUNGIN: And what are the names of your grandparents?

DOTSON: Dave Lyons and Lula Lyons.

MUNGIN: [01:56] Dave and Lula Lyons.

DOTSON: [Agrees].

MUNGIN: And are they originally from Moss Bluff and Mossville?

DOTSON: Well my grandmother, she was originally from Oklahoma. My grandfather I think he was from here. It's hard to say. I don't know too much of his background, his history, but I know my grandmother, her history is from Oklahoma.

MUNGIN: [02:21] From Oklahoma?

DOTSON: [Agrees].

MUNGIN: So what is your earliest memory of Mossville?

DOTSON: About maybe two or three years old standing in the front yard of my grandparent's house.

MUNGIN: And where did your grandparents stay?

DOTSON: Right on Lyon's Lane. They have a street named after them.

MUNGIN: [02:39] How was that? Growing up on a street named after your family?

DOTSON: It's . . . Gives you something to look forward to. We got a street named after our grandparents. It was just that.

MUNGIN: [02:51] And so . . .

DOTSON: And it shows how long they been here. And that the town . . . They thought enough to name that after them.

MUNGIN: So how was it when you were a kid growing up in Mossville?

DOTSON: Oh, it was wonderful. We had a swimming pool across the street from the house. It had ten foot diving board. I was terrified of it until I finally . . . Lifeguard chased me off one day and then it was just nothing. It wasn't nothing. Then . . . It was wonderful. We had friends. Horseback riding. Trails. It was . . . just nice. It was good. It was good.

MUNGIN: [03:22] So could you describe the property that your grandparents lived on?

DOTSON: It's . . . The house is gone now, but it was a corner lot. Right here off Old Spanish Trail. It was right across from the swimming pool and this very rec center. I used to play in as I

was a child. This was nice, man. It just . . . Even with the plants down there, you got truck traffic, but it was a community here.

MUNGIN: Yes.

DOTSON: [03:48] Everybody hung together. All the families looked out for each other.

MUNGIN: How did the house look back then?

DOTSON: Oh, it was wonderful. It was a brick . . . It was cinderblock house, but it was nice. It was real spacious. We had a carport, fenced in yard, pecan tree out in the yard, so.

MUNGIN: Were you the only grandchild . . .

DOTSON: Oh, no.

MUNGIN: In the summer?

DOTSON: [04:07] No, it was me and my older brother at first . . . for a while. Then . . .

MUNGIN: And what's your brother's name?

DOTSON: [04:14] Donald Dotson, junior. He's here. He'll be . . . Y'all interview him in a little bit. It was just wonderful, man. My grandparents. Anything we ever wanted they . . . It seemed like when we came here for summer they had it ready for us.

MUNGIN: Yes.

DOTSON: One year we was . . . This is funny. We was chasing behind the kids on bicycles. Next day she went out got us some bicycles. She knew we wanted to ride horses, she rented a horse for the summer. We wanted a dog, they had a dog here for the summer for. . It was like heaven to us. You know what I'm saying? It was real nice.

MUNGIN: [04:47] And so how was the community back then? Like . . .

DOTSON: I guess they was real friendly. Everybody knew everybody. A lot of that was because of my grandparents knew everybody. They was like some of the first people . . . settled here. One of the first. From what I . . . my understanding. And they knew everybody. So it was like you had a place to go play and was no cell phones then, but they had a way of getting in touch with you. So it was nice, man. It was nice. I moved . . . About sixteen I stopped coming down for a while, but every time I came back everybody knew me. So it was like I never left. And to the point of when I moved back down here and I came in Mossville, everybody knew me.

MUNGIN: [05:36] When did you move back down to Mossville?

DOTSON: Going on five years ago.

MUNGIN: Okay.

DOTSON: I moved back and I moved into my grandmother house.

MUNGIN: And how has the community changed from when you were a kid? And then now coming back as like an adult with your own family?

DOTSON: [05:51] Well of course a lot of the families . . . the people you . . . Some of the people you grew up with have passed on, or they done moved away. A lot of the business was gone though, compared to . . .

MUNGIN: So what businesses were there when you were a kid?

DOTSON: [06:04] When . . . a lot of support . . . Lots of factories. How would I say . . . Plant support businesses, which as you see now is coming back, but when I first got here it was gone. It wasn't as busy as here. A lot of the stores . . . like we had . . . When I used to come here it was two convenience stores, they're gone. Like that. But the older people are still here. The younger generations . . . A lot of them are gone.

MUNGIN: Why do you think that is?

DOTSON: Probably just work. When the plants start cutting back it took a lot of work. People had to go find somewhere to work. Take care of their families. Provide for their families.

MUNGIN: [06:44] Okay. And so . . .

DOTSON: That's my opinion.

MUNGIN: Yes.

DOTSON: That's my opinion.

MUNGIN: [06:47] And so where did you go to school?

DOTSON: I went to school up north. I went school in Maryland. Fairmount Heights, Maryland.

MUNGIN: Okay.

DOTSON: Like I said I spent the majority of my life up there with occasional visits maybe once or twice a year to see my grandmother mainly.

MUNGIN: And did you decide to go to college?

DOTSON: [07:06] I went to a community college.

MUNGIN: Which one?

DOTSON: Prince George's Community College. I went there for about a year or two. Maybe about a semester and a half. And then I went to Middle Tennessee State for about a semester and a half. I moved to Nashville.

MUNGIN: [Red?] Raiders, right?

DOTSON: Not Red Raiders, but Blue Raiders.

MUNGIN: [07:23] Blue Raiders. There we go.

DOTSON: But I went to Middle Tennessee State for about a year and a half. I moved Nashville for thirteen years too, so.

MUNGIN: Okay.

DOTSON: But . . .

MUNGIN: [07:30] How does that . . . so you went from Maryland to Middle Tennessee, Nashville, now back to Mossville. Like, how does Mossville compare to those other places that you were growing up? I mean that you grew up?

DOTSON: Maryland-D.C. area . . . the [DMV?] as we called it . . . Busy. Hectic. Always something going on. Nashville . . . I moved to Nashville to go to school. Watched that city progress and it turned to be a beautiful city. I see potential in Lake Charles to do that. So we . . . I can see it coming because I've seen it develop in Nashville and how they went from a little so-called country music town to a big city as I say. And I can see . . . I'll see Lake Charles and this area is about to do the same with Sasol bringing businesses back into this area. I'm hoping the best for who stays here . . . people who stays here.

MUNGIN: [08:32] And so who were some of the . . . you mentioned earlier how your family . . . Your grandparents were kind of looked up at as upstanding people in the community. Who were some other community leaders that you remember while growing up?

DOTSON: It's . . . Well I can't say . . . I don't know by their first names. I cannot really say their last names. But the Mosses . . . I remember the Mosses. The Clarks, the Paynes, the Rigmaidens, I got some family out here I can't think of their last names. Edward Julia last name . . . Can you go find out? Edward Julia. Find out her last name. I want to say her last name. And all these people, they like helped raised us. The names of [. . .?]. They were my grandparents' friends. And the kids. A lot of people I'm naming, we played with their children growing up.

MUNGIN: So I keep hearing in our interviews of how like the community helped raise the kids from like door to door. Did you get that same type of . . . ?

DOTSON: [09:37] Yes. Like I . . . it's . . . if I . . . I could eat next to . . . I didn't have to worry about if I was hungry. I could go somewhere and eat because we was all like family. These people was presented to me as family. You know how you say . . . everybody says this your cousin, but when I was brought up and they was telling me this, it was put to me like this was really my family, so. And that's the way they treated us, so. Like I said when we came here to visit it was a good time. It was like just being around a big family.

UNKNOWN MALE: Gordwin.

DOTSON: Gordwin?

UNKNOWN MALE: Gordwin or Lemelle.

DOTSON: [10:11] Edward Julia Gord . . .

UNKNOWN MALE: Gordwin.

DOTSON: Gordwin.

MUNGIN: Okay.

DOTSON: [10:17] And I just want to put they name because she was a big influence in our life, too.

MUNGIN: Yes.

DOTSON: Like I said we spent time . . . there was houses we can go and spend time with. Spend time with they children, or you was disciplined like you was family. What I mean by that is you knew better and they would point you in the right direction. They didn't want you going in the wrong direction. And all these people I never . . . All I can do is got good memories of them. All these families. All of Mossville. I really . . . it was like I said, slice of heaven. It was a getaway. We come down here. You got a swimming pool, you got all the little toys you could possibly want, you got friends, then . . . and the food. The food.

MUNGIN: [11:01] So where did the young folk hang out, like you were saying like you . . .

DOTSON: We used to . . . The swimming pool. Sorry to cut you off. The swimming pool. This rec center we're interviewing in, the Rigmaiden Rec Center, this was . . . And the ballpark right next to it. Those . . . This was our play areas. This is where we played at. We'd go to a friend's house, people house, but mainly this is where we played at.

MUNGIN: So I got a couple more questions for you. So what does home mean to you? So like people keep saying like, "Mossville, that's my home. That's . . ." What does home mean to you?

DOTSON: [11:36] Well I lived a lot of places and I called a lot of places home. With Mossville, the reason why I say home when I said I'm moving home is because of my grandparents and this where they was. And this is where a lot of my good memories were spent. So it just . . . It was home. It was like . . . It was my grandmother's house. It was like coming home.

MUNGIN: Did your grandparents like, tell you the history of Mossville or anything like that?

DOTSON: Not . . . No, not so much because they were up in the . . . They was up in age. So basically we got the grandparent. We didn't get the history. As far as I can tell you, no. She just . . . All I ever known was here as far as a child, as far as . . . But they never discussed the history. Basically my mother would kind of talk about it. But as far as that, that's as far as I can think of. As far as I can remember is my grandparents and the people in the neighborhood.

MUNGIN: Yes.

DOTSON: [12:39] As far as . . . At that time in my life I wasn't worried about the history [laughs].

MUNGIN: Yes.

DOTSON: We worried about fun.

MUNGIN: [12:45] So what does community mean to you?

DOTSON: Community. It was . . . That's a hard word to describe because people look at that differently. A good community is family oriented. Church based kind of. That's a hard word to describe because there's so many ways you can describe a community. I say close families, man. Family. I say family.

MUNGIN: Is Mossville still a community?

DOTSON: When I was living here, the . . . Yes. I say so because the people I visited were still the same people, so. And they genuinely cared about you. But like I said some . . . A lot of people done moved away, so my social network of who I used to deal with is not the same now that I got older and a lot of them done left, so.

MUNGIN: Yes.

DOTSON: [13:48] But like I said everybody still remember me. I was welcomed back here with open arms. Anything I needed or they could do for me they did. They tried to help. They helped me try to get my house together. So it was . . . Basically it was like I never left.

MUNGIN: Yes.

DOTSON: To be honest.

MUNGIN: So when you moved back where did you work?

DOTSON: I worked with my brother. My father's part of the family were third generation plumbers. My grandfather was one of the first master plumbers here in Lake Charles. My uncles, my father, they all were plumbers. My brother now, he's a master plumber and he's teaching me to be a . . . To get my journeyman and maybe eventually I'll be a master plumber too, so. Basically that's what I do now.

MUNGIN: [14:44] I've been noticing like a lot of folks are just like, "My daddy was like this . . . A bricklayer. I'm a bricklayer." Like do you find that a lot in this community?

DOTSON: [14:52] It's funny because I guess it's like tradition to some people. It's what they do, it's what they taught, and that's what makes their living, so. I know a lot of people like you said, not just here, like in Lake Charles. Their family was house movers, now they're house movers. Their family was demolition people, now they demolition. I find that a lot here in Lake Charles. Not just say Mossville, but in general down here. Yes.

MUNGIN: So what's the most important thing you want people to remember about Mossville?

DOTSON: It's funny. They talk about a lot of the . . . How the plants made people sick and all that, but these people persevered through all that and they still here. It was a nice place at the time. It was a lot of good memories for me. But as time change, people change, things change.

So I'm glad y'all doing this so y'all can have some kind of history and remember because when the town goes and the people get old, any memory or record of us will be gone.

MUNGIN: [16:01] Yes.

DOTSON: So.

MUNGIN: You're the first one that we've interviewed that actually has mentioned how people started to get sick. Is that just something that folks just don't talk about anymore?

DOTSON: Well it's a known fact around here that people of Mossville been fighting about these plants for years, and years, and years. They bought up the plant to the tracks. They bought up the houses to the railroad tracks right here to the start of Mossville. And it's funny a lot of people was upset because they like, "Well if this place was here, why . . . I'm pretty sure water travel made . . . got in they water." It should have passed on, but it's . . . People got they own reasons behind why they did what they did. Like I say it's a known fact a lot of people around here died of cancer. A lot of people got sick. But . . . and that these people in this area been fighting with the government and these plants for as long as I can remember about that. I am not a scientist. I don't know, but what goes on speaks for itself. If you got a lot of people in one area getting sick then there's something wrong. A lot of people around here can't afford . . . Couldn't afford to leave. So what Sasol did helped some of the people out, but in general you have to talk to mainly the older generation about that.

MUNGIN: [17:28] They seem to kind of keep it . . . Not quiet, but it's just something that they don't want to discuss so much anymore.

DOTSON: Well it was . . . It's public record. And after a while, for fighting thirty some years about this, this can't . . . It's kind of like throwing water in the wind. It's going to blow back on you, you know what I'm saying?

MUNGIN: [Agrees].

DOTSON: [17:47] So maybe they're looking at it like that. Maybe they're just tired of . . . And then again, like I say Sasol came here and they started offering these people voluntarily to get . . . Move away, so. It's kind of late for some people, but then it's a blessing for others.

MUNGIN: Alright. So is there anything else you want to add? We're about to wrap up the interview, so is there anything else you want to add about Mossville, or about yourself, or just any final words?

DOTSON: Mossville. A lot of the . . . older generation when I was growing up, what I did remember they was all classy. They always dressed up every day. That's just one of the things that made to me I thought was special. You go to somebody house and knock on the door, the mother, father . . . They was dressed up. They didn't just throw on T shirts and come to . . .

MUNGIN: Yes.

DOTSON: [18:36] Like my grandma, she used to tickle me to death. I came down here . . . I brought my kids down here one time. We was coming to visit. And like I said, she was the type of person . . . She'd get up and put her face on and everything. And then don't go nowhere, but that's how they did. That's just the older generation. And she wouldn't let me in. She came to the door without all her makeup and stuff on. It just tickled me to death. She looked and she looked at me said, "Hold on baby." She shut the door. About five minutes later she came. She had lipstick, blush on, and her hair done up. And it just tickled me to death that she didn't want no one to see . . .

MUNGIN: [19:13] Like, "I'm your grandson!"

DOTSON: She didn't want us to see her . . . But that's just how they were back then. Things change now.

MUNGIN: Yes.

DOTSON: It's not the same, but that kind of . . . Everybody was like that. It just wasn't . . . it's just . . . it was . . . it's kind of hard to describe, but it was nice. People took pride in that kind of stuff. They took pride in Mossville. Mossville was . . . the high school was a powerhouse as far as when they did . . . The rec center put out good ball teams. It was just nice, man. It was just nice.

MUNGIN: Alright. I think that wraps up the interview. Alright. Cool. Thank you so much for that.

[19:52]

[End Tape 4425. End Session I.]