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Session I
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[Begin Tape 4488. Begin Session I.]

REBECCA COOPER: Okay great, so today is July twenty-seventh, 2015. I am Becca Cooper representing the T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History with LSU [Louisiana State University] Libraries. Today we are working in conjunction with the Imperial Calcasieu Museum to document the history of Mossville [Louisiana]. I'm here today with Ms. Della Dotson at her home in Moss Bluff [Calcasieu Parish, Louisiana]. Thank for agreeing to be interviewed.

DELLA DOTSON: You're welcome.

COOPER: This is our first interview together.

DOTSON: [00:34] Thanks, that's good.

COOPER: So, could you please state your full name for the recording?

DOTSON: Della Ann Rigmaiden Dotson.

COOPER: Awesome. And what year were you born?

DOTSON: 1948.

COOPER: [00:48] Where were you born?

DOTSON: Mossville, Louisiana.

COOPER: What street did you first live on?

DOTSON: It was Old Spanish Trail.

COOPER: Wonderful, and do you have any siblings?

DOTSON: [01:01] Yes, I have one whole sister, and the rest of them are all deceased. They were half brothers and sisters.

COOPER: What were their names?

DOTSON: Wesley Rigmaiden, Carl Rigmaiden, Christine Davis, and Denise Rigmaiden.

COOPER: And your full sister's name?

DOTSON: Lola Bell Rigmaiden James.

COOPER: And what are your parents' names?

DOTSON: [01:39] Joshua Rigmaiden and Norine Smith

COOPER: Smith is her maiden name?

DOTSON: No, Fowler is her maiden name. Her . . . She was married to my dad which her name was Rigmaiden and after my dad died, she remarried and that's where the Smith comes from.

COOPER: I see. Okay. You also mentioned earlier that your father was remarried, too?

DOTSON: Yes, well, the first wife I don't know her name, and Mother L was one of his wives. Mother L was the first wife, and my mother was the second wife, and her name was Norine. And, it was two children born to that marriage with my mom. And the other four, CB [Carl] and Wesley were whole brothers, and Christine and Denise, I'm not sure about them because they were much older than us. So, I don't know. Now Carolyn, when you interview Carolyn Martin, she should be able to bring you up to that point.

COOPER: Okay. Yeah, we will definitely make a note to ask her about that. So, where were your parents from? Where was your mom from?

DOTSON: My mother was from Indian Hills, Texas.

COOPER: Okay.

DOTSON: And my father was from Mossville. Well they . . . When his parents originally came, they settled on the West Fork which is the . . . West Fork is like, almost in Houston River area, but that's still in Calcasieu Parish. Then, they came on to Mossville.

COOPER: [03:53] Do you remember the year that your father's family . . . Or around what time?

DOTSON: No, I don't know the time period.

COOPER: Do you happen to remember why they first came to Mossville? Or to the Calcasieu Parish?

DOTSON: They were . . . My grandparents were into the lumber [business] on the Calcasieu [River] and at the West Fork, they [coughs] I guess cut down trees and made lumber out of the trees and stuff. And I think the name of the company, I think . . . I'm not sure if it was Powell's lumber company or what, but some of the other siblings would know . . . doing Carolyn's interview. Now Carl Ray, which is . . . We call him CB, that's Carl Rigmaiden, that's my brother, my half-brother's son. He might can bring you up to that, in the interview with Carolyn. Because they're older than I am, so they'll go farther back than I can on that period.

COOPER: And your mother moved to Mossville from Texas, do you know what time?

DOTSON: My daddy was a minister, and . . . he had. . . My daddy was like a building minister. He was . . . let's see how to say that . . . Well to back up a little bit, Mother L and my father . . . Mother L was . . . The Christ Sanctified Holy Religion was founded by them, and my dad was the president of the district and he was considered as a building minister. And they would send him to different areas that needed a church built and he would stay there long enough to establish the churches and that's how he met my mom in Texas, because where they were from, it was so rural . . . oh it was . . . Nothing but red clay and sand, but I don't know what year. But I know my mom was a lot younger than my dad and he brought her back. They married here I believe, and they . . . well my daddy was . . . They settled in Mossville. And my daddy had . . . The house that my daddy built for us was a two story apartment, that's where I was born, and . . . my sister was born in Texas.

[07:18] My mother went back home [Texas] to have Lola, but I was born here [Mossville] by Doctor Ross. And it was January first, 1948 when I was born, and the place that I was born where we just had it demolished [demolished] when Sasol [energy and chemical company] bought out, and, my dad built another house on the side where we just had that demoed [demolished]. My sister was living in that until they demoed it. And the . . . where I was born after my daddy died, my mom . . . It was an apartment, well it was our house that used to be on the top, and then my mom added three more apartments onto that.

And I think, I'm not positive but I think we might have had the first rent houses in Mossville because everybody you really talked to stayed in those apartments. They moved in, moved out till they got something built, and it was right at the end of Prater Road and Old Spanish Trail. Right . . . You come across Prater and that's where it was. And now there was a pond that was dug in the back off the apartments, where my daddy gave dirt to build Prater Road.

A lot of more families had moved in by then, and by that time, I think the . . . Well we were in the original five families. The Rigmaidens were in the first original families, the first five, and after that I think it went to fifteen, and all . . . Like, I don't know what else after that point. But, now as time went on, we went . . . I went to Mossville Elementary School, everybody went . . . There was where the Recreation Center is right now, Mossville School used to be there, and it was one, two, I think it was three buildings there. One was the cafeteria, one was the main building, and I think the other one was for like the upper grades. And most of the children . . . See Mossville didn't have a high school. And I know during the time that my sister got to high school, they sent them to Washington High School, which is in Lake Charles.

There was a bus that would come from Vinton, Louisiana, would stop in Sulphur [Louisiana], pick up all the high school kids in Sulphur, pick up all the high school kids in Mossville, pick up all of the high school kids in Westlake, and they would be transported to Washington High School because there was no black high school for them in that area. And a lot of them graduated [from Washington High] . . . well no, some of them went to . . . They came back to Mossville, Mossville High School was built in nineteen . . . let's see that's . . . 1955.

COOPER: [12:06] Oh, yeah, do you want to explain what you're looking at for the recording?

DOTSON: That's a rug that we had made of Mossville because the name of the school was Mossville Pirates and the year the school was built was 1955, and it closed in 1991.

COOPER: Wow.

DOTSON: And my daddy was very instrumental in getting the high school built in Mossville, and also the recreation center.

COOPER: The Rigmaiden Recreation Center . . .

DOTSON: Yes.

COOPER: [12:51] I was going to ask you if that was named after one of your relatives.

DOTSON: The complex, the whole thing, is after my daddy and . . .

COOPER: Joshua Rigmaiden?

DOTSON: Joshua Rigmaiden.

COOPER: Wow, so he did a lot, he was very instrumental . . .

DOTSON: He was . . . They considered him the mayor of Mossville.

COOPER: The mayor of Mossville.

DOTSON: Yes.

COOPER: [13:14] That's amazing. So I have a few questions, you just gave us so much, and just to go back to get some clarification so, the . . . You said that your family maybe was the first to rent in Mossville on Prater Road, was your family the first to build on Prater Road?

DOTSON: No, it was . . . Prater Road is like this, Old Spanish Trail is like this, and if you come across Prater Road is where our property was, right there.

COOPER: Oh my goodness, and were those buildings that he built, were those associated with the ministry?

DOTSON: No.

COOPER: No, they were just . . .

DOTSON: And we had a grocery store in Mossville . . . Let's see, I believe we had the first grocery store, and it was right in our front yard.

COOPER: On Prater Road?

DOTSON: On 378 [Old Spanish Road].

COOPER: 378 Prater Road.

DOTSON: Yes [meant “no”].

COOPER: And who owned it?

DOTSON: My parents.

COOPER: Your parents.

DOTSON: [Agrees].

COOPER: Do you remember what it was called?

DOTSON: [14:19] No, I don't. I don't remember what it was called. I never thought about that. I guess just "the store" . . . I don't know. But, that never crossed my mind.

COOPER: And what year, do you know around what time that opened and how long it was open for?

DOTSON: No, you see I was very young then, so I don't know when it . . . The date that it actually opened. But I know we had a store and it was right in the front yard, and I was young then, when we did that. And now, in Mossville, now Mossville was a great place to grow up, I mean a great place. You didn't have to worry about your children, or anything. And we didn't know what we didn't have, because we thought we had everything. We got a TV when . . . Oh

my God I don't know what year that was, but we had a TV and it was a round screen. It was old-type, but it was a new TV for the time. And, I think we could only get a few stations and the TV would go off, I think like at ten o'clock at night. The station would just shut down, no . . . Nothing. The station's closed and everything. But I don't think we could get but maybe one or two stations. I know channel seven was one, that was KPLC, I remember that very good. And I remember watching Roy Rogers, and all of this kind of stuff.

But my daddy was a very good provider so we had . . . I guess you'd consider us being middle class, but we didn't . . . You didn't carry what you had as being putting you better than anybody, because everybody was on the same level. If you had a problem in Mossville, you would go to my daddy. [16:47] He would go to Henry Reed, they would get the problem solved. And if . . . People would like wake us up at all time in mornings and night to go get somebody out of jail [16:53-16:55: personal information omitted].

But it was . . . Life was really, really good. My daddy died when I was seven, so I can't go too far back as to what happened before that because I was young and I didn't really have no interest in knowing these things because I had my daddy and my mom and my sister. And we had a yard that . . . The yard, we didn't have any dividers it was just yards just ran into each other. And I had no young siblings, but there was, the Praters lived . . . My auntie lived next door and the Praters lived next door to them, and they had about eight kids.

So I had sisters and brothers of my age that we associated with and it was really . . . Times was just great when we were growing up because we had no fear of people coming in your neighborhood and taking your children or anything. Because if you got in trouble or if somebody saw that you were farther than you should have been, playing, they went and told your parents. And you got brought back home. And my mother, my mother worked all the time. She

worked in Maplewood and they would walk to work.

COOPER: And what did she do in Maplewood?

DOTSON: They cleaned houses. And it was quite a few ladies from the Mossville area that worked over there, and then my daddy finally got my momma a car. And they . . . Well my mom didn't know how to drive so she taught herself. And my . . . CB, which is my brother, [his] wife was the only one that would ride with her because she didn't know how to drive. And that was her companion as far as a riding companion that would go anywhere with her. But she didn't go any farther than Maplewood. And interstate . . . they were building Interstate 10 when . . . Let's see, I was about maybe twelve when they were building on Interstate 10. I can remember that very well, because it was Highway 90 that was the main road then, before Interstate 10. And, we would have to cross Highway 90 to get to that area, which was . . . It was Prater Road would have run on across.

[20:31] And we used to ride down there on our bicycles and watching them build the interstate, which was . . . That was fun for us. I mean, to do that that was just something to see. And we had a . . . the Praters had a . . . They had a job, the kids had a job. They always . . . The kids always had an old car and the old car, they delivered newspapers. And they had a convertible, a convertible Ford and we would go to the . . . It was called The Midway, a drive in movie, and it was a dollar for four to get in the movie. And it was like, they had . . . you would . . . They had a white section and a colored section, they said. Okay, Jim Lee was the manager over the colored section. And the . . . they had speakers that was in the ground and you would have to . . . And it was like on a mound, and you'd drive your car up on the mound, like the front

wheels, and you would take one of these speakers off this thing in the middle and hang it on your window, so you could hear the movie. And it was always more than four of us in the car because we was slipping in, because we didn't have enough money for everybody to pay.

And Mr. Jim Lee would come by and find all the [there was more than four] . . . We'd get put out of the drive-in because we had done slipped kids in there that wasn't supposed to be there. But that was alright, we didn't mind that. And I don't think they told our parents because we didn't get in trouble for it, which we really enjoyed that. And when we were also growing up . . . Where my daddy had the pond built, where the dirt that they put on Prater Road? Well the Praters, June had a goat and June was going to build a boat. Well, June built a boat, and tied the . . . He took tin and made the shape of a boat and he took and [tarred?] some tin to the bottom of the boat. And the goat would pull the boat around the pond and too many of us got in the boat, and the bottom of the boat fell out.

COOPER: [23:40] Oh no!

DOTSON: And we were all in the water [both laugh] but it wasn't that deep that . . . None of us got hurt, it was a miracle we didn't get hurt, because what we wouldn't try wasn't thought of. But it was really fun, we made our fun. Because we went to church, it was like . . . The religion was like the Sanctified Religion, the Baptists, the Methodists, and the Catholics. The Catholic Church was in Westlake [Louisiana], and the other churches was all in Mossville. And during that time, being young . . . Well the Catholic kids only went to church for one hour but, in the Sanctified Religion, it looked like we stayed in church all day. And the Methodists didn't stay in church too long, and the Baptists always had something going on for their kids, and the kids

from the Sanctified Church . . . Well, it was like, "I want to be Baptist" or "I want to be Catholic" because it seemed like their religion was fun. And we stayed all day, but we finally got used to what was going on after we got older.

[25:06] And we also used to have a bus that would come . . . I don't know who had the bus service in Mossville during that time, but it was a bus that would come from Westlake, and it would stop in Mossville and it would take us to Lake Charles. And I remember we used to catch the bus, they used to drop us off on the corner by Newberry's and that's where you had to catch the bus to come back to Mossville. And I think it cost like twenty-five cents to ride the bus. And on Saturdays, that was such a pleasure to be able to go to the . . . to Mossville, to the . . . To go to Lake Charles on the bus. And let's see what else we did . . . Oh, they had a fair that would come to Mossville every year. Every year there was a fair. And it was . . . We owned the property across the street, and the fair would come there every year. Just like the Cal-Cam Fair? This fair would come to Mossville. And that was . . . We looked forward to it.

COOPER: And that was right across the street on Prater?

DOTSON: Right on . . . It was on the corner of Prater and 378 [Old Spanish Road], which is across the street from us. We own that corner.

COOPER: I see.

DOTSON: [26:50] So that's where the fair would set up every year.

COOPER: Wow, so that was . . . Your home was a bustling place then, with the grocery store, and all of the kids, and the pond.

DOTSON: Yes.

COOPER: So next door when you talk about . . . When you're telling these stories of playing with the kids that live next door, those are the Rigmaidens, I mean, those are the Praters?

DOTSON: Praters.

COOPER: And did they help . . . Did any of you kids help with the grocery store or . . .?

DOTSON: [27:10] Yeah, my sister.

COOPER: Your sister.

DOTSON: My sister worked in the grocery store, and my mom. I didn't because I was too young.

COOPER: What did they do?

DOTSON: We had like a meat counter, I can remember that. And they had a heater in there, and they sold . . . I know they had a thing on the counter with cookies. Two . . . I remember two

cookies for a penny. And they was those coconut . . . They still have them now. These coconut . . .

COOPER: Macaroons?

DOTSON: Yeah. They had those cookies and people would buy cookies. Like the kids would come in and buy a slice of bologna, a slice of cheese, and the cookies. And they would buy sodas, I can remember them buying sodas. Well it was like bread, and it was just like a neighborhood store. And it was a gas station on it.

COOPER: Wow.

DOTSON: And they used to fix flats on the side . . .

COOPER: [28:21] Where did they get all of the meat and the produce from?

DOTSON: It used to come from Lake Charles, from . . . I think it was Kelly Webbers?

COOPER: Kelly Webbers?

DOTSON: Yes. That place is called the . . . now they've turned it into a . . . It's like an entertainment center now. I can't think of what they called it now, but that's where produce . . . I mean where the stuff comes from, Kelly Webbers. I don't remember if my parents went and picked it up or if a truck delivered it, but I know a truck delivered the gas and the kerosene,

because kerosene was big at that time. And let's see what else . . .

COOPER: Do you remember what brand of kerosene and gas or what the truck was called?

DOTSON: [29:16] No, I don't remember that. And it was like . . . Oh, and the Praters, Mr. Audrey Prater worked at Conoco [refinery in Lake Charles, Louisiana]. And we didn't have a swimming pool, but he used to take us to Conoco Park, which is across the street. I don't know if it's . . . If that it is still there now or not but it was a square . . . cement pond like thing. And it had a water spout in the middle, and Mr. Audrey would bring us there swimming. It wasn't really deep enough to swim, it was just deep enough for you to get in the water. And every year, he would take us to Beaumont [Texas], to the state fair. And that was . . . Oh my God that was a treat.

[30:20] So that's why I'm saying we didn't know what we didn't have, because we had so much. And we did so much and it was like . . . It was just like a family. I mean everybody was a family. And across the street is where . . . Across the street from the Prater's house is where the Vincent's lived and they had four or five kids, but it was three of them that was in our age group. And we liked to sit down and play cards. We used to play Old Maids and we would play on Sunday. Everybody had to go to church on Sunday. It was no if you went to church; you went to church and you better act right in church. And we would play cards and the Vincent's mom wouldn't let them play cards with us on Sunday because she said it was a sin. But we wasn't gambling, you know? We were playing cards and we never could understand what her reasoning was. And we would always want to play on their front porch because their front porch was up high off the ground.

And we always liked to go over there and Mr. Beaux Collins, which was their daddy, worked at the . . . Worked for the railroad. And he would . . . We would pick muscadines. And he would make wine. But he wouldn't give us any, but we had to pick the wine . . . Pick the berries. And we enjoyed doing that. We also had a sugarcane mill in the neighborhood where they made syrup. And that was at the . . . Their name was Vincent too. That family was a Vincent too. And the sugarcane was grown on the Hartman's property.

COOPER: [32:34] And did . . . Did they ever sell any of the sugar cane syrup?

DOTSON: Syrup?

COOPER: Or the wine from the . . .?

DOTSON: No, Mr. Beaux Collins didn't sell the wine he just . . . He drank it and gave it away. And I know they sold the syrup.

COOPER: [32:51] In your store? In your family store?

DOTSON: No, it was just they bought it from the sugarcane mill. It wasn't . . . Nothing licensed you know. The sugarcane place wasn't licensed or anything. They had a mule that would pull . . . They would stick the sugarcane in a hole in this thing and it would turn around with the donkey . . . mule pulling it and it would squeeze all of the syrup . . . the juice out of the sugarcane. And then they would cook it in these big vats. But I don't remember them doing . . .

They had to have sold it to people around in the neighborhood because I know it wasn't in the store. Well if it was I don't remember. But that was most of the stuff that went on in Mossville. Oh and my mom was a school bus driver after a while, and she would pick up the kids from Houston River [Area in Sulphur, Louisiana?] and bring them to Mossville.

COOPER: [34:00] Was she a school bus driver at the same time she was cleaning houses in Maplewood?

DOTSON: No she had stopped cleaning houses then. And there was another bus that would come in from . . . After the school was established there was another bus that would come in from Sulphur that would bring the kids from the . . . I think the eighth grade to Mossville and the high school to Mossville. And my mom would pick up the kids out of Houston River and bring them to Mossville. And the kids from Westlake, I don't know how . . . What bus they came in on.

But everything went in to Mossville, to the school, which was a powerhouse. The Mossville Pirates were really, really a good school because we had so many kids feeding in from different areas. And it was just . . . I don't know how to say it, but it was just great. Then they finally built us a stadium, because we used to have to use Westlake High School's stadium. We didn't have one of our own. And my . . . And at the time, well that's when they built the gym then they built the stadium and they added on to the school, which still stands. That's where . . . Have you been to Mossville school?

COOPER: [35:43] [Agrees]. I think . . . is that . . . that's right . . . Oh, we drove past it. We drove past it on the way to the Rigmaiden Center.

DOTSON: That's the school. And it was one of the nicest schools in the area. White or black, it was really a fine school. And we were very proud of it. And the kids did real well. Because Mossville School was . . . the kids that . . . The teachers that came into Mossville School was like came from Grambling [University in Grambling, Louisiana] and they came from Southern [University and A&M College]. And like the teachers, our teachers wasn't much older than we were, because they got out of school like at twenty . . . College like twenty-two and twenty-three. And the kids, the average kid graduated from Mossville was like eighteen, and so it wasn't too much different in the teacher and the . . . [phone rings]

COOPER: Uh-oh.

DOTSON: Hey [?] can I call you back? It's here. Alright, bye.

COOPER: [37:16] Alright. Yeah, if you could put it a little higher up like, maybe over here? Yeah perfect. We can make sure we get your voice. Oh my goodness. Okay so there . . . This is wonderful. So I'm curious to know a little bit more about your father. So he was a minister, but he also had the grocery store and the gas station. What else did he do? Is there anything else that he was . . . ?

DOTSON: Well like the mayor . . . People considered him being the mayor of Mossville. And he was a sheriff for Henry Reed. During that time he had to be one of the first, or if the first black sheriff that was a . . . and his whatever you want to call it . . . I don't know if he got paid or not. But I know he and Henry Reed were so close. And anything that he needed done he could

get it because he had a word, and he believed in a handshake and you didn't have to have anything written on paper. He gave his word that's . . . That was good as gold back then. And there were a lot of more people in Maplewood that . . . I mean they just really respected my daddy. He was a leader and he was a good guy.

And that's all I really can . . . because I mean the name just . . . His name just spoke for who he was. And I'm very proud to be his daughter because he was really, really a good person and he . . . What he stood for, that made you respect him even more. And from where . . . During that time, being a black man and having the power that he did to help people, and to understand what people were coming from, and to be able to help them it's really . . . It was really a joy. Because he was really there for everybody, and he was just respected by everybody, and it was really great.

COOPER: [39:56] And you showed me the card earlier, his official deputy sheriff card. So he had that for he was officially . . . What was the title? It was the deputy of Calcasieu Parish?

DOTSON: Parish, yeah.

COOPER: And he didn't get paid to do that?

DOTSON: I don't think he did. I don't know.

COOPER: [40:13] Do you remember him telling any stories? Or do you remember any . . . any of the experiences?

DOTSON: All I remember is that if you got in trouble in Mossville . . . Well they called him Cousin Josh. Go to Cousin Josh and he'll help you out. Because I know one of the Braxtons . . . Daniel Braxton used to get in trouble a lot. I mean a lot. And when my daddy died, he told my mom he said, "I'm going to have to stop getting in trouble because Cousin Josh is gone, and I won't have anybody to get me out of jail." And I don't think he got into any more trouble, because he was like a bad kid and he knew my daddy would get him out. And but he was . . . he came from . . . They were kin to us; the Braxtons are kin to us. Well really everybody almost in that neighborhood. Intertwined with relatives marrying relatives and everything. So it really was . . . It was just Mossville was like a big family. And my daddy . . . my grandfather . . . Let's see. My daddy's daddy, that would have been my grandfather, was white.

COOPER: [41:35] And what was his name?

DOTSON: I don't know if it was Henry Rigmaiden but Karl . . . Carol and them would know that. But they came out of the West [Fork?]. But like the Ryans, the [Salgays?], the [Bells?], these are all white families but they met . . . See they married during that time. So they married and that became . . . All of us became kin. And now, there's a lot of white Rigmaidens don't want to be kin to us, but every Rigmaiden is kin. White, black, or whatever; we are all kin. But a lot of them don't want to, but maybe now they might reconsider because like in DeQuincy [Louisiana] there's a lot of Rigmaidens and they just flat don't want to accept that fact. But it's a fact. But we don't push the issue. I mean if you want to be kin to us or if you don't want to say you kin to us that's fine. If you don't want to we still know the truth. So it didn't matter. And it was . . . That's just how life was then.

Oh yeah we had a . . . I forgot, well it was a night club in Mossville. Well they had more than one, but they had one called the Paradise. Valery Montgomery owned that. And every big name artist during that time came to Mossville. Like B.B. King, Ray Charles . . . let's see who else . . . Etta James. Let's see who else . . . I mean just all of them. They all came to The Paradise. So Mossville was just up there. You name it we had it. We had a great school, we had a great community, we had good public relations, we had a good . . . We was getting a good education.

[44:10] And the education was . . . It wasn't second class, but we got hand-me-down books. But we learned . . . You learned. I mean you learned, because the teachers were so instrumental on us learning. Because when school . . . When it first started out in Mossville we only had three teachers. One was Ms. Washington, one was Ms. [Billips?], and one was Ms. Mitchell. And you learned what you had to learn. I don't care if you didn't have good books, you wasn't going to be a dummy because that was important to them, and all they had to was tell your parents you weren't acting right, or you didn't act like you wanted to learn. When next day you went to school, you were no problem.

Because I think education back then was so important, because they didn't have a lot of education. Because my mom . . . I think my dad went to third grade, and he could write his name. He could do . . . He could read, he could write, he could drive, he could do it all. And my mom, I don't know what grade she stopped in, but they were so rural and in Texas that they worked in the fields all the time. So they didn't have too much education because it was ten girls and no boys and so they were . . . They worked hard in the field.

And mama laughed . . . Mama would laugh and say she was so happy to get out of Texas that when my daddy asked her to marry him she said she didn't even have to think about it

because she knew she was getting out of the fields. And she laughed . . . She would laugh about that all the time. And she said she didn't care how old my daddy was. She learned to love him because he was a good person and a good provider. And he really took good care of my mom because she was really a young woman when she came to Mossville.

COOPER: [46:38] Do you remember what year they were married?

DOTSON: No, I don't. My sister might know. And another thing about my mom, she loved to take care of people. She . . . Like the graveyard in Mossville, Morning Cemetery. My mom wanted to kind of like upgrade, and she would ask people that had people in the . . . Buried in the cemetery to come and help her paint the graves, repair the graves, and just keep it clean. Well she got a little help, but she said, "I'm not going to keep begging people to help me do this." So she bought all the paint and she would . . . She had this guy that lived not too far from her. Used to go with her to the graveyard, and they painted the graves. They . . . Every two weeks my mom took her own money and paid somebody, paid Archie [Prior?] to cut the graveyard. And she would go down there and she would sit and be sure it was done right. And she paid to have the graves cleaned and painted on her own, out of her own pocket. And after she died . . . Well it's grown up a lot and I would like to do more back there, but it's so secluded until it's dangerous.

COOPER: Where is the cemetery located?

DOTSON: [48:41] It's in Mossville, and it was behind the church which was torn down. But it's . . . I had talked to . . . I can't think of his name . . . At Sasol about the graveyard. And I asked

him was it possible . . . Could he find out who owned the property in the front of the graveyard so it could be cleaned out, so it wouldn't be . . . You could see all the way to the graveyard. And now the parish kept the road up to get to the graveyard. They put a . . . There's a really nice bridge they put there and people used to go back there and dump their trash. And my mom was able to get a gate put there so you couldn't get . . . you'd have . . . They would just throw their trash in. That was before the trash had to be picked up door to door. And . . . But after she died the graveyard has just gone down. It's because nobody is doing what my mom took it on her own to do. And she was . . . That was her pet peeve. She really enjoyed doing that.

[50:12] And she . . . Like a lot of the guys or the young men that rode her bus lived in the neighborhood that was on dope and didn't have money, she would feed them. And then one night she used to plant greens, vegetable garden along the front of her property. And one night somebody came along and stole . . . Pulled all her greens up. Stole . . . Pulled them up from the roots. And oh she was angry, she was very angry about that. And she called the sheriff department they came out they asked them. She said, "I know who did it. I found out who did it." Because see everybody . . . All of them loved her because she'd feed them. And she found out who did it and the cops said, "Well you want me to arrest them or what you want to do?"

She said, "No. I don't want you to arrest them." Because she said, "What good would it do? They'd done either ate the greens or sold the greens and if you turn them upside down and shake them all day, a dime won't fall out of their pockets. So what are you going to get out of them? Nothing." So she let that go. But the other guys, that didn't set well with them. That person stealing my mom's greens. And but she soon got over it. And the guy who stole them she let him still come back and feed him. So this was the kind of parents that I had. And it was really good. It was really, really good. She loved all of us. I have two children. Which she loved. And my

sister had two children.

COOPER: And what are your children's names?

DOTSON: [52:05] My daughter name is [Deidra?] and my son name is David. And my sister . . . Okay well Joshua is my sister's. He's the oldest. And what Deidra is the next oldest which is mine, Jackie is my sister's, which she's the third one, and David is the fourth one. Which is mine. So they were brought up like they were all sisters and brothers. But my mom was so good to them and she'd go to the store and she would have . . . she said she couldn't . . . Well her eyesight got real bad, she was a bad diabetic. Her eyesight got really bad and she just stopped driving. She said she wasn't putting anybody in danger. She just stopped driving.

She had a 1957 Impala and we used to call it the banana and she had that car looking like it was a truck. You could ask her. She had tools in the back, she had paint in there, she had a saw in there . . . A power saw. She had a chainsaw, she had all of this in the back of that old car. And she had Archie to drive her around. And if Burger King had a sale on hamburgers, man she'd go buy a whole big bag of them. And she would come here and give me so many, and she would go to my sister's give her so many of them. I mean this is how she was. Or if she would . . . She might would go buy chicken. She'd bring me a box, she'd bring my sister a box.

Or if the man came around selling sweet potatoes my mama would buy them. Every time he'd come around she'd buy a sack of sweet potatoes knowing good and well she wasn't going to do anything with them. She would call me to come get the sweet potatoes. I would go get the sweet potatoes. I would take and peel them, boil them. And by the . . . By November I might have fifty potato pies I'd done made in my freezer because when mama kept buying sweet

potatoes. And so I told her. I said, "Mama what days does that man come?" And she told me. I said . . . I told my husband. I says, "I'm going to go over there and tell that man don't sell my mama any more sweet potatoes, because I'm tired of making pies and she's not doing anything with them."

And so we finally got her stopped after a while. But if the man came by the next year she was going to buy more, but she didn't buy no more that year. And then she planted fruit trees all over her yard. Then we would have to go pick them. Well it was mainly me, because my sister wasn't going to do it. She would have pears. I'd have to go pick pears, I'd have to pick pecans, I'd have to go pick grapes. And I said, "Mama I'm tired of doing all of this stuff." I said, "You don't want it." She said, "No, I don't want it that's for y'all.

COOPER: [55:57] And this is after the store closed? So . . .

DOTSON: Oh yes. This is when she had remarried and had moved from our house to a 4244 East Burton.

COOPER: Oh okay. So this is on East Burton?

DOTSON: Yeah she lived on East Burton. That was right down the street from us. See because Old Spanish Trail turn in to East Burton. If you were on the east side of Prater Road it was Old Spanish Trail, and if it was to the west side of it, it was East Burton. So that was the dividing line between Westlake and Sulphur; Prater Road.

COOPER: Did she have trees and vegetable gardens on your old property too?

DOTSON: Yeah. She had a big garden. She had chickens and all this kind of stuff. My mom was just . . . Like I said, my mom and my daddy was two special people. They were just two special people that enjoyed helping people.

COOPER: [57:01] Yeah. So your mom would she cook with all of the stuff that she'd grow? Was she . . .?

DOTSON: She could cook, but she taught me to cook when I was young.

COOPER: Okay.

DOTSON: And she used to . . . She drove a school bus for years. She owned her own bus. And she would leave . . . I couldn't cook too much, but she would like . . . I would like, cook rice. I could cook rice, and I could fry meat and I was always trying to help her, because my daddy was dead and my mama hadn't remarried yet. So I was always trying to make it easy on my mom by helping her do things that I could do. I was like . . . tomboyish. I mean my sister was girly. But I wasn't. I mean I would do . . .

Like right now I do a lot of a lot of different things that most ladies wouldn't do. After my husband died I just . . . This is how I came up. This is how I came up and I just carried it on over and it is a blessing, because you don't have to be as dependent on people to do everything for you. I'll try to do it. If I mess up well then I know I can't do that. But I enjoy trying, because this

is how I was brought up. And it was really a pleasure. And I learned a lot from my parents.

COOPER: [58:51] What sorts of things do you remember learning from them?

DOTSON: Well I learned how to cook, my mom taught me that, and to be independent that was the main thing, and how to get along with people. And I think I instilled this in my children, how to get along with people. And my . . . niece and nephew are the same way because they got a lot of value. I mean they are very respectful people, and my sister is a very respectable person. She owns a funeral home. It's James Funeral Home, which she inherited that from her husband. And she was the . . . My sister's a teacher. Was a teacher, she's retired. And she's very easy going. Very easy going.

But we're two different people. I mean we both have a lot of values but she's . . . She don't get out there and cut her yard. She's never done this kind of stuff. She's always been on the girly type. I was on the tomboyish type, because it was just the two of us with my mom and we were both girls. So I had to do what I had to do to help her, so I thought. And like I said my sister was . . . She went to McNeese. She finished from over there and it was just great. It was just great. We had a good . . . We have a good family. We're close. We're closely knitted. We're not a big family, but we really enjoy each other. Because everybody turned out to be great people and I'm proud of that. I'm proud of my children, I'm proud of my nieces, I'm proud of my sister, and all of my nephews, my half nephews or whatever you want to address them as. But we're still one solid family. And I thank God for that. I thank God for who I am, and I know my children do too.

[1:01:25] And being brought up during that time and being black and being white we . . .

It was a lot of stuff we couldn't do. But it didn't hurt us as bad because we weren't . . . slaves. And it was just like one man told me one day he said, a white guy, he told me, he said, "Della, I can imagine." He said, "I can imagine. I can put myself in a black person's position." He said, "I can understand being black because I was . . ." He, the man, said he was brought up poor. I said, "You cannot understand being brought up black as no more than I can understand you being brought up poor." I said, "Because I don't know what being poor is like." I said, "I've never wanted nor needed anything that my parents didn't provide." I said, "I've never gone to bed hungry. I've always had a roof over my head. I had a mother and a father that loved me." I said, "I always had clothes." I said, "We always . . . We didn't have a lot of money, but we wasn't broke."

And it was . . . I said, "So you can't understand where . . . I can't understand you being poor and not having shoes no more than you can say you know how I feel being black because the two don't match. Because I'd never been poor, and you've never been black. So you can't say you know. You don't know because I don't know either. So he looked at me. He says, "You know what? You got a point." I said, "Really?" I said, "But I can understand what loving you and you loving me as a person is like. But far as me being poor . . . Me being black and you being poor. That's not a comparison." Which it really wasn't, because I don't know what it was like.

COOPER: [1:04:07] Do you have some poignant moments or experiences growing up where you . . . Where you experienced being black?

DOTSON: Well . . .

COOPER: In Mossville? In a community or maybe in the larger Louisiana community?

DOTSON: [1:04:21] Not in Mossville. Now I know like, we used to go to the movies in Sulphur, I think it was called The Star, and we would have to sit upstairs, and they would sit downstairs. That was a separation. But you know what? We didn't hate anybody for it. We didn't know no other life. And like you couldn't go like to a restaurant, and like if you went to like a Dairy Queen they had signs in the stores, "White and colored." There wasn't . . . You wasn't called black. You were colored. And you like at the movies the drive-in theater was like the white and the colored. But you know, with the signs and having to go to the back doors and do these kinds of things yeah it was there but we had so much in our neighborhood and communities and we could go . . .

 We went to the movies and we didn't . . . We didn't feel hurt. I mean I don't know if we didn't have enough sense or our parents didn't teach us racial stuff. See and I guess that made a big difference. We knew the white kids could do more than us outside our neighborhood. But you see what I'm saying? Mossville was where you had it. And being black . . . People had cars, you could go places, you could do things. But the signs didn't mean . . . We knew what it meant. We knew what we . . . We knew our limitations, but it wasn't like in other areas where there was slavery and all of this. We don't know about that. I don't know about that.

 And in my neighborhood they didn't . . . The kids weren't treated like that. So I just don't know what to say about that because like I said, we would go to Beaumont. Go to the fair. Mr. Audrey would bring us to the pool. We couldn't go to the white pool because we knew. We just knew. See, and being brought up in the fifties segregation was big and . . . But our parents didn't teach us that. They didn't teach us that the white kids were better than us. So that was a blessing.

That really was a blessing that they didn't teach that to us. And we just kept going and being happy and which . . .

COOPER: [1:08:04] Do you . . .? Oh sorry.

DOTSON: Go ahead. And that was . . . That was a good thing being brought up in the Mossville community because my mom worked for the white people, everybody mostly worked for the white people. But if you wanted to open up a business like cutting wood and taking in washing and . . . This was fine. I mean but other areas . . . Crime was not a thing in our neighborhood. You didn't have crime. You didn't have drugs. They had wine. You know, liquor, but it wasn't drugs. And then Mossville really fell apart when a lot of new comers came in. That's when Mossville changed. But Mossville was one of the best places you could bring up a family because we weren't taught that we were poor. And we wasn't taught that the white kids were better than us because they just didn't . . . My parents just didn't do that.

COOPER: [1:09:22] Did they ever talk about their experiences working elsewhere, and talk about some of the discrimination they faced outside of Mossville?

DOTSON: No. My mom didn't because my mom was born on the farm with ten girls. I mean in rural Texas. And my daddy never said anything because his parents were white.

COOPER: Both of them?

DOTSON: No Grandma [Linney?] the picture . . . She was black. But his daddy . . . see with the . . . They were the Rigmaidens that was on the West Fork. What they were doing . . . They had money. They had everything that they wanted. So I don't know if that protruded over into this area or not because I wasn't here; I don't know. But like I said we didn't face much of that because I mean, we knew the kids went from Vinton to Westlake they had to go when they was passing all these high schools. But then we got a high school of our own because my daddy pushed and he pushed for Mossville to have everything. We even had a post office. And we had everything. Mossville was one of the best places . . . Best cities you could have been brought up in. A community. That's all I could say. Bottom line. Mossville was good.

COOPER: [1:11:19] Do you how your father's mother and father met and how they came to be married?

DOTSON: No. That was before. I never even thought about that kind of stuff when I was growing up. Well she was dead when I was born. But I know Grandma [Linney?] used to live . . . They had a house in the front yard is what my mom told me because she used to live right by us. Now my sister remembered her very well, but I don't even know if my sister knew who my grandmother's people were and if they were . . . They just didn't talk about that kind of stuff too much during that time and then I was too young to be nosey, to try to find out who was who. I was just happy being me. We was too busy being a kid. And because my daddy died when I was seven and . . . But I remember a lot.

COOPER: [1:12:27] Some people mention the importance of voting. Especially after the

Voting Rights Act of 1965. And you were about seventeen or eighteen right then. Do you have any memories of voting for the first time or what that was like in the community?

DOTSON: No I can't remember. [Phone rings] This phone don't usually ring this much. That's my son. Hello? Hey. You didn't call. I didn't see it. Y'all on y'all way back? Okay. People over her interviewing me. From Mossville . . . About the Mossville. Okay so I'm going to call you back. Okay. Bye. That's my son. He's on vacation there in Florida. Wanted to know why didn't I call him.

COOPER: Okay. Perfect.

DOTSON: Okay.

COOPER: So you . . . I was just asking you about the Voting Rights Act and if you remembered any of that in the community?

DOTSON: [1:13:48] No. My daddy was . . . my daddy . . . I know my daddy back in the day campaigned a lot. Well, he campaigned for Henry Reed. And then Jake Rigmaiden. That was his nephew. He was politically strong in Mossville too, Audrey Prater. So they really . . . During that time we didn't really pay attention to many things like that, but I know Mossville had their own voting precinct. I don't know what year it started. But I know Mossville had their own voting precinct and it used to be at the school, then they moved it to the Recreation Center. So now I'm almost sure that I started voting at Mossville School because they had a precinct there, and I

know my mom voted. All of us voted. When you got . . . That was a privilege. You got the age to vote and you get your driving license at fifteen and we got all of that. I mean we did all that but we don't . . .

Like I said, living in Mossville you had it all. You didn't think of the outside world too much. You really didn't. But it would come . . . it was coming to us so . . . but we didn't really think too . . . we were just like a big . . . We just thought we had it all. That's just the bottom line, we thought we had it all. And that . . . Now when I got married and I moved to Moss Bluff [Louisiana] . . . I've been up here now about forty-four years. About forty-four years. But I go back and forth to Mossville. Mossville was home. And my children went to school up here in Moss Bluff. Now my daughter Deidra . . . It was kind of funny. She went to Moss Bluff Elementary. She started . . . well we had her at a daycare and my . . . When she went to Moss Bluff Elementary, out of a hundred and twenty-five kids she was the only black.

COOPER: [1:16:52] Wow.

DOTSON: She was the only black out of a hundred and twenty-five kids at Moss Bluff Elementary.

COOPER: And what year was she there?

DOTSON: Oh Lord. I can't remember what year Deidra was at Moss Bluff. Goodness she was born sixty . . . six, seven, eight, sixty-nine. Might have been about seventy . . . Seventy-one. Somewhere along in there.

COOPER: And what year were you at Mossville Elementary?

DOTSON: [1:17:34] Now Deidra was at Moss Bluff.

COOPER: Oh she was at Moss Bluff Elementary. I see.

DOTSON: And that's here.

COOPER: Right.

DOTSON: This is Moss Bluff. And Mossville is what we're talking about.

COOPER: Right.

DOTSON: [1:17:50] But to try to instill things in my children. My daughter would come home and say, "Mama they call me a nigger." I said, "Well baby we're going to have to deal with that." And I told her that they were no better. "These kids are no better than you." And she couldn't understand, because we didn't teach that. And you see, I wasn't taught that. And she would come home crying. So we kept dealing with her until those kids accepted her, because after a point they didn't look at Deidra as being black because she . . . After a while she'd come home and say, "I got a boyfriend and his name . . ." What that boy name was? Brent, I believe. And she got along well with them, because we tried not to teach her to hate. These kids' parents had told them that. So we were trying to keep our children as colorblind as we could.

[1:19:21] So Deidra turned out . . . Well when she'd come home she would tell me, "Mama I got to wear my hair hanging long." Because all of the white kids had their hair down. So I had to be sure that Deidra's hair was hanging down too. Because she used to say, "Plaits make you look stupid." So she didn't want her hair braided. So my kids really had it harder with integration than I did because I was almost shield from it. But my kids . . . It was there. It was no shielding them from it. You just couldn't do it. And what we did . . . Deidra would . . . We laughed about it. She would come home speaking like she was white. She was white all day long. And she was with all of these white kids all day long, but she at the end of the day she had to come home and be black.

So this was a hard transition for them to make at this time. But we struggled through it, and Deidra finished high school. Now they were very prejudiced at Sam Houston during that time because you see she went from Moss Bluff Elementary to Moss Bluff Middle, which by then was more black kids then. But a lot of the black people didn't want their children because they think they wasn't going to be treated right. But Deidra was so strong willed. She went to a . . . She went to school at Sam Houston and he told us. She say, "Mama I'm not going to stay there for long." She said . . . my daughter wanted to . . . She took correspondence courses at that time you didn't have to be failing to take correspondence courses. And she took correspondence courses from LSU [Louisiana State University] to advance herself to get out of high school faster. Well in her . . .

[1:22:09] And then she also went to summer school. She went to summer school . . . She wanted us to let her go to summer school at Washington High School. Well we knew our daughter had never been to school with black kids and we wanted her to know what being black was like because she wasn't brought up with a lot of black children. So we sent her to

Washington so she could see how black people lived. So she wouldn't be just thrown to one side of it. So she learned to mingle. She can deal with anybody. She can . . . She even got to the point where she could deal with a person calling her a nigger. Because she was brought up white all day and black at night and we sent her to summer school for two years at Washington to try to help her not be mean, not be angry, to accept things as they were. And to make a life for yourself.

Deidra turned . . . Deidra was . . . Deidra graduated . . . Her birthday is May the first. And she graduated from Sam Houston in three years because she said she was getting out of that school because it just wasn't right. They . . . Moss Bluff was a hard place to live in. It really was but our house . . . My father-in-law was a plumber. He always had a lot. And I guess I'm getting off the subject from Moss Bluff to Mossville but it's all intertwining with my family. And they burned a cross in his yard so to . . . You see what I'm saying? I came from Mossville now. When none of this stuff existed to Moss Bluff where it was prevalent. It was just wide open.

[1:24:55] Now our house was burned down. And it was a lot of black houses burned down. And they couldn't prove who did it but they knew it was arson. And the Klu Klux Klan was bad here. They were bad. It was coming from out of Gillis and [Topsie?] area. It was really bad. They didn't want to see you with anything. And our house burned down and my husband said, "We're not going anywhere. We build right back soon as our insurance . . ." And I think . . . Well we had it insured. My husband had a good job. We rebuild. And I think the FBI came in on it because it was so much being done during that time. And we had State Farm Insurance and State Farm pushed it because so many of their buildings, their insurance clients, were being burned out. And I think they pushed it so hard till this did away with a lot of the Klan activities from what had happened.

COOPER: Around what time was this happening?

DOTSON: [1:26:20] That was in the seventies. But Moss Bluff was rough when you're talking about integration, it wasn't in Mossville, Moss Bluff was bad. Lake Charles was bad, too. But Moss Bluff was where nobody wanted to come. But we stayed here because my husband was born and raised here in Moss Bluff. Moss Bluff was bad. And then I was a school bus driver. I just retired. And the first bus that they integrated, it was only two black drivers. It was on the first bus that they integrated was my bus.

COOPER: Wow.

DOTSON: And you talk about had problems.

COOPER: What year was that?

DOTSON: [1:27:19] Maybe the eighties, somewhere along in there. And they . . . when I was . . . When my bus was integrated it was like in trailer parks and they gave me a rough bunch of black kids, and I had these rough bunch of trailer kids. And they had mixed . . . The families weren't mixed, but like being brought up by mamas no daddies stuff. This is where the problems were but thank God I made it through. I got to be a bus driver that had no color. I wasn't white. I wasn't black. I was just the bus driver. And thank God with the principal out here, Mr. [Barket?], I made it through because it was complaints on me in the white community that I was too harsh. I made the kids sit together, which I did. You didn't act right you didn't separate yourself. It wasn't

no white side and no black side. You don't want to do it we don't move. We sit right here until you decide you going to sit where I told you to sit. And that kind of smoothed itself off.

[1:28:48] And right down the street here when you go back out you'll see there's some apartments. And it used to be a lot of houses in there and it was section eight [Housing Act of 1937]. You know what section eight is?

COOPER: [Agrees].

DOTSON: And there was a white family in there and I can't remember the names. And they couldn't find anywhere else to stay so they had to stay there, down there. And they had two little boys, two little white boys, and these little boys they knew I didn't pick up going down. I would turn around and pick up coming back and the kids would be playing. And these two little white boys when the bus got there they didn't want to run and play with them they just stood at the stop. And they hollered at them, "Come on you bunch of niggers the bus is here!" Two little white boys now. "Come on you niggers the bus is coming! The bus is here!" And I say, "Baby, do you know what you're saying?" They didn't know. They said they daddy said everybody in that trailer . . . In that apartment was niggers. So okay. I mean it was funny to me, but it wasn't funny. Because if these kids had any sense with all these black kids they ought to know they was going . . . They should have got whipped to death in their neighborhood.

[1:30:16] So finally I would let them sit in the front because I was protecting these two little white kids. So these . . . The kids got back on the bus. I forgot how long, about . . . Maybe they stayed there about a year. And then one evening they told me they say, "Ms. Dotson, guess what?" That's these two little white boys. I say, "What baby?" They say, "My daddy said we are

going to move." I said, "Where you moving to?" He say, "My daddy say we're going to move where there's no niggers." I say, "Baby when you go home tell you your daddy that Ms. Dotson said that he could move to the backside of hell and there's going to be niggers. So I don't know where y'all going." [laughs] So I didn't see them anymore because they moved. But see they didn't have any sense to think it was hurtful to say that and I didn't take it as though it was hurtful for them to say that, because I didn't start nothing with it. And my kids on my bus didn't start anything.

So you see if you . . . These kids was really taught that by their parents. But those kids were lucky to get out of there alive if those kids would have been mean in that area where they were living. So this is just to show you and to say what things were like. Because I'm sure you, y'all don't know a lot of . . . Didn't go through a lot of this harsh stuff either because of the areas that you came out of. But Moss Bluff was a heck of a place to live. But it is great now. All of . . . Well it's still some here that you never going to get right. But the majority of them are. Because I've driven a school bus in every area in Moss Bluff and I retired at forty-two years. And to be a black bus driver in all the white areas that I drove in you could tell Moss Bluff had changed.

COOPER: [1:33:02] Now your mother was a bus driver too. So how do you think your experiences differed?

DOTSON: Well my mom just hauled black kids. I hauled black kids for a while and then my bus was integrated.

COOPER: And she was in Mossville? She was driving in Mossville?

DOTSON: [Agrees]. She was only Mossville. And Houston River. Kids from Houston River couldn't go to Westlake they had to come to Mossville.

COOPER: [1:33:29] Wow. So you were pretty . . . You were a young adult when Martin Luther King was on the national stage. Do you remember anything about him or about President Kennedy and Johnson during that time?

DOTSON: Yeah I remember when President Kennedy got killed and I remember when Martin Luther King got killed. That was very hurtful. It was like our world was . . . We were going to be set back after they died because it was all . . . Everything was progress you know to a certain point. And it was really . . . It was a sad time in our country during that time. But like I said we just overcame so many challenges. Because at the hospital when you go to the hospital it was a colored section.

COOPER: The hospital in Mossville?

DOTSON: No, in Lake Charles.

COOPER: In Lake Charles.

DOTSON: [1:34:34] Yeah, it was a colored section. But you were . . . I guess coming out of Mossville and being treated like we were, and what we had, and we knew, and what our parents was teaching us, just helped us to be better people. Just helped us to be much better people. And

that's why I said I just thank God that I was born, raised, educated in Mossville and had the parents that I had, because no telling what I would of been if I hadn't come through where I came from. I'm proud of Mossville. I'm really proud of it. And I hate to see it go away, but Mossville now to me is like alpha and omega.

[1:35:34] In the beginning, I was there far as like Mossville has been bought out three times by the plants. First time it was by Conoco and they bought out a church and a few families. And they were right next to Conoco. And then it came to . . . was is Vista? It was Vista bought out Bel Air, and that was the second time Mossville was bought out. Third time is Sasol. And Sasol just wiped us out. And that's what I'm saying it was like alpha and the buying out of Mossville by Sasol was omega. So it was the beginning and the end of Mossville. So that's why I compared it to like in the Bible, alpha and omega. So the end of Mossville is really . . . it's really . . . Sasol has . . . With Mossville being bought out it was hurtful because we had so many memories there.

But so many of the people that were there when Sasol started buying out put them in a better position than they were before because they're able to get a better place, they're able to have more to leave to their children. Because when Conoco bought out . . . No [when] Vista bought out they didn't give people enough money to even move. And these people had to move and incur a lot of debt on trying to move and God knows they weren't able to do it. So like I can say Sasol has been a blessing in a way. It has been a defeat to what we know but it has been a blessing to a whole lot of people in Mossville. I hate to see it go because it was such a great place, but Mossville had gone from greatness to drugs.

COOPER: [1:38:22] In the time that Mossville . . . you explained it alpha to omega, the time

that Mossville was a booming community in the time that you were there, how have you seen it change physically over the years?

DOTSON: Mossville had gone from being a place that you would be glad to call . . . Say that you were from, to a place that drugs were so prevalent there up until now I would say drugs is still in Mossville but it's not that many people there. Gone to a place that you wouldn't want to move into because drugs had gotten so bad and people would say, "Oh you from Mossville? Oh my God." But you just didn't know what Mossville was like when we were there. But people would say, "Oh my God. You're from Mossville?" Because it had just gone to . . . I wouldn't say the gutter, but it has gone down so very much from when I was there.

COOPER: Let's see, I have so many other categories I want to ask you about too. But I think I'm curious right now to know a little more about your mom's . . . the way she was . . . She had plants and doing all of this you know the way you explained with her car was like a truck. Do you know if she grew any plants for home remedies or . . .? No?

DOTSON: [1:40:10] [Disagrees]. No she didn't. She didn't grow anything like that. There was a man that used to come around, they call him the Mamou Man he used to make mamou tea and you could buy it from him. And my mama didn't [. . .?] that kind of stuff. She didn't do any of that but she raised vegetables like but that was for our use. And figs in their fig trees and stuff . . .

COOPER: What sort of dishes now bring you back to your childhood in Mossville?

DOTSON: Potato pies, Lord! [laughs] Oh we would crawfish a lot and out of the ditches. We didn't . . . Crawfish wasn't like it is now. You used to could go in any ditch and catch crawfish.

COOPER: In Mossville?

DOTSON: [1:41:16] Yeah, and crawfish would like . . . If it would rain hard crawfish would be on top of the ground. And they had these mounds . . . You ever seen a crawfish mound? There's a . . . They would build a mound out of the ground and it would be out of dirt. You might can find some of them now, but it's a mound that these crawfish would come out of; out of the ground. And we would crawfish, we would pick berries, we'd sell them on the side of the road. It was . . . But my mom and like mayhaw jelly. Now we had mayhaws in Mossville. They grew like in wet spots. And blackberries making jellies. They would make wine. My mama didn't make wine. My daddy didn't make wine.

My daddy used to be a trapper out of Cameron [Louisiana]. He used to trap muskrats. And my daddy could do floors. He would take . . . Get pine. Buy pinewood and varnish . . . Sand it down and varnish it. And he could make the most beautiful floors you ever wanted to see. Because we had some in our house and when my daddy died my mama covered them up with carpet. I was so glad. Because they used to use the Johnson case wax. You'd have to get on your knees on the floor and take the wax and rub it on the floors and she had a buffer. When the wax would dry she would buff it with the buffer. I had that buffer. I don't know what I did with it. Probably threw it away. But it had two brushes under it and it would go around and then you put a pad under them and it would shine it. But I was glad. My mama said she was so tired of them floors. Until she put carpet down. I was tired of them because I was . . . Had to get on our knees

and put the wax down. It was almost like “wax on wax off.” You know in that movie? You'd go one way then you'd go another way. So . . . But . . .

COOPER: [1:43:54] And you . . . who was living . . . which tenants were living in the house when you were . . . When your family was renting it out?

DOTSON: Oh my God. Almost anybody you interviewed will tell you that they lived in those apartments. It was . . . Oh I mean just everybody. I mean people that I didn't even remember. Because it was one man that I do remember his name was Henry Duncans. He lived in Jennings [Louisiana] and he worked at P.P.G. They used to call that Columbus Southern, and he lived there I don't know how many years. He lived there and he would drive home on the weekends. But he lived there. And he finally retired and moved back to Jennings. But that's the first one I can remember. His name was Henry Duncans. And then other people, the families . . . I mean I just can't tell you who all lived in that apartment. But it was . . . My mama had four units and I just can't remember all that people that lived in there.

COOPER: So your mother continued to rent after your father passed away?

DOTSON: [Agrees].

COOPER: Wow. And do you have any memories of growing up with other tenants living in the house too?

DOTSON: [1:45:15] I can remember some of them. The Lemelle lived down there. They lived . . . They were kin to Butch Lemelle now. You know Butch? They were kin to Butch. And let's see who else. Oh I just can't remember who all lived there but it was just so many different families. The Williams family I remember them because they had three kids. Oh I just don't remember who all stayed there. It was just too many of them to remember. But my sister probably remember a lot of them. But a lot of families lived in there.

COOPER: And where did you buy clothes from growing up?

DOTSON: My mom bought a lot . . . Well all our clothes was bought out of Lake Charles. And I can remember in Westlake there was a store, a clothing store, I can't remember the name of it and a lot of the things we made because they had a couple ladies that lived in the neighborhood who'd take in sewing. And they could sew real good. So a lot of our clothes were made too.

COOPER: Do you remember who the seamstresses were?

DOTSON: [1:46:45] One of them was Roberta Cotloeng and the other one was Frankie Gasaway. They were very . . . Oh and there's another one. They called her Ms. Sweetie and she was handicapped but she could sew real good. So those are the three that I knew. You would buy your pattern and your material and you'd take it to them. And I can remember my mom used to buy a lot of things from Rift's store in Lake Charles. That was one of the . . . and [Muller's?]. And she bought a lot of things there because that was the better stores. But . . . and the Fair Store

and [LaVene's?]. No, [Lernna's?]. And a lot of stuff was bought there for our clothes and so it was a good variety.

COOPER: And were there . . . Was there a local library that you would go to?

DOTSON: The only library that we had was I think it was one in Westlake. But the only library . . . Well we had a library in the school. So you see when we moved into the high school they had a big library there. But we didn't have one, a library as such, that we . . . Because see the school open in fifty-five. So that was the library at school. But I think it was one in Westlake and probably Sulphur. But we probably wasn't able to go to them.

COOPER: [1:48:43] Also I wanted to ask you more too about your father helping to get the high school to come to Mossville. Do you remember what it . . . Any stories from when he was campaigning to make that happen?

DOTSON: No, he was . . . I can't even remember, but he pushed hard. He talked to all of the important people and I know with the help of Henry Reed they got it done; got the land. I think the land was . . . I don't know if they bought it or if it was donated to the school. But getting people to donate land was for the improvement of Mossville. Yes, they would do it.

COOPER: And did your mom . . . I wanted to ask another question about this cemetery too. Did she have family members buried in that cemetery?

DOTSON: Yes. Well my daddy was buried there. And his sister was buried there. My . . . One of my brother-in-laws was buried there, and I have a set of twins that's buried there, and Uncle [Wassey?] was buried there. [Shola?] Rigmaiden was buried there. See they had like . . . That cemetery was like more Rigmaidens and Hartmans and Praters buried there, and Mount Zion Baptist Church there's another cemetery behind Mount Zion was like were the Mosses, the Perkins, the Vincents . . . the Baptist people was buried over there. And but it's a lot of people that was buried behind the church. Behind . . . Well in Morning Star Baptist Church graveyard. But there was two predominantly . . . graveyards that was in Moss Bluff . . . Mossville.

COOPER: [1:51:08] And what was the name of the church that you all went to . . . Your family went to growing up?

DOTSON: We went to Morning Star, Christ Sanctified Holy Church, and we went to another church which was a Sanctified church in Brownsville. It's . . . Brownsville is like . . . It's an area in Lake Charles. It's off of Lake Street. My daddy built that church. My daddy built Morning Star Church, too. He built the church in Lake Charles which we went there for years, and it was called The Rose of Sharon Christ Sanctified Holy Church and that was in the Lake Charles area. And we had one in Mossville and one in Lake Charles that was predominately here. But it was like my daddy built churches like in Rayne Louisiana. [Momentah?], [Branch?], Jennings, Liberty, Texas, Indian Hill, Texas. Wherever there was a Sanctified church my daddy was instrumental in building it.

COOPER: And he was also a minister too? How . . . Oh sorry.

DOTSON: They would send him to an area that needing building a church and he would stay there was the pastor until it was built.

COOPER: And was your mom involved or were women involved in the church as well?

DOTSON: [1:52:50] My mom was involved but she wasn't . . . She didn't travel with daddy a lot to all of the churches that he was building, but the main headquarters was in Jennings on Cutting Avenue and he built that church. And on the side of that church he built . . . They called it a dormitory. They built a dormitory on the side of the church where when you went down as a delegate it was you lived on the church property. And they had rooms and then downstairs there was a big kitchen and a big area where you'd eat. So the Sanctified Religion back in those days was really a big religion and because my daddy built that church . . . Like they had churches in Beaumont, Houston, everybody would come to Jennings in June. I forgot . . . Well it was different dates in June that they would go to Jennings for convention. But my daddy was big in that.

COOPER: How did he get to be so big? How did he get to bring that church to Mossville?

DOTSON: [1:54:07] You see "Mother L" and my daddy . . . see she was the original founder of the Christ Sanctified Holy Church. And my daddy . . . They were together and that's how it got started, right there in Mossville.

COOPER: So it began in Mossville?

DOTSON: Began in Mossville.

COOPER: Wow.

DOTSON: Yes.

COOPER: [1:54:38] Wow. Well we are . . . this has been . . . Time has been flying by and it's almost been two hours so I think we should probably wrap up for the first interview.

DOTSON: Okay.

COOPER: But yeah I just . . . On behalf of the museum, on behalf of the Oral History Center at LSU, we really want to say thank you for . . .

DOTSON: Oh you're quite welcome.

COOPER: This has been wonderful. And we will also figure out a time if that's okay with you to do a follow up interview and ask some more questions because there's a lot . . .

DOTSON: Okay.

COOPER: You have so many amazing stories.

DOTSON: And you it's . . . You don't really know what you remember until you start talking. And sometimes you can't tie it right into it right then but you think about it as you're talking. But . . .

COOPER: [1:55:23] Is there anything else on your mind that you want to say before this interview ends?

DOTSON: Now the young man that you're going to see today, his daddy would like pick up . . . See we had like if you had stuff you wanted to get rid of, he would pick it up. So it was like we had everything in that neighborhood. This is what I'm saying. He picked up all the trash, all the things that you didn't want and kept . . . It was like keeping Mossville clean. And he would salvage what he could from what he picked up. So . . .

COOPER: This is Mr. George Braxton's father? Okay.

DOTSON: Yeah and he was Mr. George. That was his daddy's name, Mr. George. So you see we had . . . You don't think about this but he kept Mossville clean and I never thought about it like that but he did, he kept Mossville clean. So we had everything!

COOPER: That's amazing.

DOTSON: [1:56:30] We had everything! We sure did. We had everything. So that's why I keep telling you I'm proud to be from Mossville. I'm very proud of Mossville.

COOPER: Well this has been amazing. Should we . . . You want to turn off the recorder now?

[1:55:36]

[End Tape 4488. End Session I.]