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[Begin Tape 4520. Begin Session I.]

JAMIE DIGILORMO: Alright. You let us know when you're recording. And we'll . . .

CHARLOTTE WILLCOX: Okay we are recording so can go ahead and start.

DIGILORMO: Okay. So today is September twenty-fourth, 2015. I'm Jamie Digilormo representing the T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History with LSU [Louisiana State University] Libraries working in conjunction with the Imperial Calcasieu Museum in order to document the history of Mossville [Louisiana]. Today we're at the Rigmaiden Center . . . recreation center on Old Spanish Trail. And I'm here with . . .

MCKENNETH EDWARDS: McKenneth Edwards.

DIGILORMO: **[00:32]** McKenneth Edwards. Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed. And this is going to be a short interview. Again, about ten minutes. And we'll hopefully get in touch with you at some point in the future to maybe get a little bit longer interview if that's something you're interested in doing. Alright, so I know you just stated it but one more time for the record, could you please state your full name?

EDWARDS: McKenneth Edwards.

DIGILOMRO: McKenneth Edwards. Okay, and when and where were you born?

EDWARDS: I was born in Saint Patrick Hospital.

DIGILORMO: Okay. In Lake Charles [Louisiana]?

EDWARDS: Lake Charles. 1950.

DIGILORMO: [01:08] Okay.

EDWARDS: And I was raised in Mossville.

DIGILORMO: Alright. So did your parents already live here in Mossville when you were born?

EDWARDS: They already was living here. I think Saint Patrick was the only hospital in this area at that time.

DIGILORMO: [01:25] Right.

EDWARDS: Yeah. Either Saint Patrick or you had to go to Lafayette [Louisiana].

DIGILORMO: So you've lived in Mossville your whole life?

EDWARDS: My whole life. All the way up until 1972. That's when I got grown, got married, and left the area. But I was living in Lake Charles. I moved from Mossville to Lake Charles in 1972.

DIGILORMO: Wow.

EDWARDS: Yeah.

DIGILORMO: [01:55] And just real quickly, what were your parents' names?

EDWARDS: My daddy was McKeever Edwards Senior and my mother was Thelma Prater Edwards.

DIGILORMO: Okay. So she was a Prater?

EDWARDS: Right, a Prater.

DIGILORMO: And what about your grandparents? Did they . . . Were they from here as well?

EDWARDS: [02:16] I'm not sure about my . . . Okay I know my grandmothers was

from here.

DIGILORMO: What were their names?

EDWARDS: Anna Perkins and [Middy?] Braxton.

DIGILORMO: Braxton.

EDWARDS: Prater. See she was a . . . Okay, Anna Perkins Edwards and then Middy Braxton Prater. That was my grandmothers. Now Middy was raised in like . . . They used to call that area Saprack off of Evergreen Road.

DIGILORMO: Okay.

EDWARDS: [03:12] If you go all the way north until around like Sam Houston Road. The Braxton's lived back off in there. Okay. The Perkins live almost in Sulphur [Louisiana]. They call it Perkins' Town. That was almost to Sulphur. So when my grandmother and my grandfather got married my grandfather bought the Perkins' home and moved it to Mossville.

DIGILORMO: Wow.

EDWARDS: See, they moved it from Perkins' Town to Mossville. Alright now where my grandfathers come from? I really don't know.

DIGILORMO: Yeah.

EDWARDS: Now I been hearing like Thelma daddy . . . His people come from somewhere in Texas.

DIGILORMO: Okay.

EDWARDS: [04:20] Somewhere in Texas. Now my daddy's daddy . . . I don't know where his people started up.

DIGILORMO: Hmm. Did you know them very well or . . .?

EDWARDS: I knew my grandfathers but I was too young to get to know my grandmothers.

DIGILORMO: Okay.

EDWARDS: Yeah I think one of them died before I was even born. That was my mama's mama. And my daddy's mama died when I was like about one year old.

DIGILORMO: Wow.

EDWARDS: So I didn't know them. But I knew both of my grandfathers.

DIGILORMO: [04:59] Okay.

EDWARDS: Yeah.

DIGILORMO: Okay. So where did your family live? On a . . . Did they live on Prater Road? Or did you . . . Where did you grow up?

EDWARDS: Okay I was raised on Old Spanish Trail.

DIGILORMO: Okay.

EDWARDS: I'm trying to think of that street. But it's Old Spanish Trail and Moss Avenue. Or right now they call it East Burton. East Burton. On the corner of East Burton and Moss Avenue, which is Old Spanish Trail. Maybe a half a mile from here on the left. I was raised there. And we used to play down here. Swim a lot in the pool. Every Sunday . . . Well every weekend. In the summertime every day.

DIGILORMO: Yeah.

EDWARDS: [05:55] This place be full. Everyday playing ball, swimming, just doing whatever. Every year. Mossville was an active town for a long time. Until the late sixties . . . Okay, I was a part of the last graduating class of Mossville.

DIGILORMO: In '69?

EDWARDS: In '69. So '69, and '70 things started getting quiet when they split the community up. Some students had to go to Sulphur, some had to go to Westlake. And for now I guess the community just got . . . How you say that? Disoriented? And everybody just started losing what they had; what this place had. And you know we had a lot. We had a good sports program. The band was good. I mean you were just a close community.

DIGILORMO: Yeah.

EDWARDS: And we did a whole lot together.

DIGILORMO: [07:16] What were your first . . . What are some of your first memories as a kid in Mossville?

EDWARDS: So much, man . . .

DIGILORMO: Or just maybe one or two of your favorites?

EDWARDS: This area . . . Record hops. See this place here . . . We used to come and have what we used to call record hops. That's when you pay a quarter to come in and somebody playing some music and you dancing.

DIGILORMO: Y'all had like a live band?

EDWARDS: [07:57] No it'd be records.

DIGILORMO: Records yeah that makes sense.

EDWARDS: Okay. They used to call it a record hops.

DIGILORMO: Yeah. Yeah.

EDWARDS: Record hops. And every summer you had a lot of baseball teams: Pewee league, junior, and high school. Now we had all this going on here every year. When school let out. Another thing, May Day in school . . . That was a big thing because May Day it was no school. Of course we had to go to school, but it was no classes or nothing. All day it'd be outside activities. Just different things.

DIGILORMO: Yeah.

EDWARDS: [08:49] And I looked forward to that.

DIGILORMO: Yeah.

EDWARDS: Okay. Another . . . some memories I had it was picking blackberries. That

was a big thing. We used to pick blackberries. This area was full of blackberries. All the time. And we used to pick them to sell them.

DIGILORMO: Oh nice.

EDWARDS: And of course Mom and them wanted their share so we had to take care of Mom and them first. We'd pick a lot of blackberries, fill mama up and then all the rest we'd sell them. And we bought some all-star tennis with them. Or something for school. It was a fun time because all the guys my age we looked forward to going to pick blackberries. And that was a joyful thing.

DIGILORMO: [09:42] Where would y'all sell them?

EDWARDS: On Highway 90.

DIGILORMO: Okay.

EDWARDS: We get those gallon cans and we get some big rocks and we lean them up.

DIGILORMO: Yeah.

EDWARDS: For when the people pass by, they can see they big, pretty, whatever and they'll stop and buy them. Now one gallon can would cost you a dollar. That wasn't much for

blackberries at that time. But that was a whole lot for us.

DIGILORMO: Yeah.

EDWARDS: [10:21] So we picked the whole blackberry season. Then mayhaws . . .

Well really it were mayhaws, blackberries, figs, pecans. Or "pee-cans" what they're call them today. But we usually called them "puh-cons".

DIGILORMO: "Puh-cons"

EDWARDS: Yeah pecans. And we used to just . . . Mossville had everything. Children stayed occupied with stuff to do. Now we all had to learn how to swim because of that pool.

DIGILORMO: Yeah.

EDWARDS: See that pool was here before Mossville High was built. So it was a guy named Mr. Philip Broussard I think his name was. But he'd come every summer and he'll have swimming classes and I learned how to swim. I was between seven and eight years old. Everybody in Mossville my age, we had to learn how to swim. That was the thing.

DIGILORMO: Yeah.

EDWARDS: [11:29] So when one learned how, everybody else wanted to learn.

DIGILORMO: Yeah.

EDWARDS: So I mean the pool stayed full. Every day the pool was full. In the summertime.

DIGILORMO: Right.

EDWARDS: This really was our hangout right here, in the pool. That's the furthest we went. Baseball stadium . . . They had a big field over there. Sometimes the teams go play in Westlake, some would go play in Lake Charles. But we had good teams. I mean, Mossville was full. It was full of children back then. Full of children. I mean we just . . . I just enjoyed living here.

DIGILORMO: [12:13] How many brothers and sisters do you have?

EDWARDS: I have five sisters and two brothers.

DIGILORMO: Wow. What end of the spectrum . . . Are you a younger or older sibling?

EDWARDS: I'm the second boy and I'm the fourth child.

DIGILORMO: Fourth child. Okay.

EDWARDS: [12:30] So two and four is my numbers.

DIGILORMO: Yeah.

EDWARDS: Two and four.

DIGILORMO: So your household must have been pretty busy?

EDWARDS: Busy, yes. [laughs]

DIGILORMO: What was it like? What was the house itself like?

EDWARDS: [12:42] Let's see. Well we was . . . When the TVs come out, that's really what brought us together. Sometimes we argued on what channel to watch. Of course, it wasn't that much channels. But when Tarzan came out, everybody wanted to watch Tarzan.

DIGILORMO: Yeah.

EDWARDS: Howdy Doody show. I remember when the Edge of Night first come out. It was fun because we . . . My two older sisters, they were nine and seven years ahead of me.

DIGILORMO: Oh wow.

EDWARDS: So when me and my brothers and my younger sisters . . . The oldest ones weren't around us too much. So they was getting ready to leave or they was going on proms or dates and things like that. So TV really wasn't their thing.

DIGILORMO: Yeah.

EDWARDS: The older children.

DIGILORMO: Right.

EDWARDS: [13:54] But we start looking at . . . Well I think my oldest sisters was around when Tarzan came out. We used to go to a neighbor's house every Friday and watch Tarzan. That was a date that everybody you knew talk about Tarzan.

DIGILORMO: Yeah.

EDWARDS: So . . . With Johnny Weissmuller, see. So that was a big thing.

DIGILORMO: Yeah.

EDWARDS: [14:22] Then we had the Midway Drive-In on [Highway] 90. That was the first picture show around here.

DIGILORMO: Yeah.

EDWARDS: The Midway, that was a drive-in.

DIGILORMO: Right.

EDWARDS: So we used . . . Daddy used to take us over there or my grandfather and we'll just have a ball at the drive-in.

DIGILORMO: Yeah.

EDWARDS: [14:45] Then we used to go to Lake Charles at the Palace Theater and the Dixie Theater. But the Palace was first, then the Dixie. So that's where we learned about King Kong, Ten Commandments. They had this picture about this giant spider . . . Tarantula or something.

DIGILORMO: Sounds right.

EDWARDS: But it was a big old spider.

DIGILORMO: Yeah.

EDWARDS: And we went nuts over that. And then this movie, The Ten-thousand Year

Old Man. First scary picture I ever seen. And I couldn't sleep for a long time.

DIGILORMO: Did you get in trouble?

EDWARDS: [15:28] That was a . . . That was a scary movie!

DIGILORMO: Yeah.

EDWARDS: But my grandfather wanted us to go see it.

DIGILORMO: Oh your grandfather brought you. Okay.

EDWARDS: Man he took a car load of us over there. I never forget The Ten-Thousand
Year Old Man.

DIGILORMO: That's funny.

EDWARDS: [15:43] Okay.

WILLCOX: It's been about ten minutes.

DIGILORMO: I didn't mean to cut you off. See it starts flying when you . . .

EDWARDS: I know it . . .

DIGILORMO: I know.

EDWARDS: I ain't talked about the Paradise Club.

DIGILORMO: [15:55] Nothing. That's why we need to meet up again.

EDWARDS: Otis Reddings and [O.D. Wright?] [Wilson Pink?]. All of them came right over there.

DIGILORMO: I know I need to hear those stories.

EDWARDS: Bobby Bland.

DIGILORMO: I know. I know.

EDWARDS: Sorry. I didn't think it was that long.

DIGILORMO: [16:12] Yeah I'm . . . Well it happens. Well we'll go ahead and conclude this interview if that's alright with you?

EDWARDS: Yeah that's fine.

DIGILORMO: And hopefully set up a follow up where I can hear those stories because I'm curious.

EDWARDS: Mossville was a swinging spot ladies. That's all I know.

DIGILORMO: That's what I understand. I'm thinking I was born way too late and about two miles too west [laughs] of here.

EDWARDS: [16:36] Oh you was born near here?

DIGILORMO: I was born in Sulphur.

EDWARDS: You was in Sulphur?

DIGILORMO: Yeah.

EDWARDS: Okay.

DIGILORMO: Yeah. So . . .

EDWARDS: Because see we used to do a lot of things in Sulphur too.

DIGILORMO: Yeah.

EDWARDS: Before we started going over there. But Sulphur . . . That was a swinging spot too.

DIGILORMO: They had clubs in Sulphur?

EDWARDS: Yeah, but we couldn't go to them.

DIGILORMO: Right. [laughs]

EDWARDS: [16:59] No, no, no. The most things we can do over in Sulphur is the Cal-Cam Fair.

DIGILORMO: Oh yeah.

EDWARDS: You remember that fair? Every year that was the big thing. Real big thing. Cal-Cam.

DIGILORMO: Right. Yeah I was born in Cal-Cam [West Calcasieu Cameron] Hospital.

EDWARDS: Okay. Okay. Yeah. See I love . . . I still like Sulphur.

DIGILORMO: Yeah.

EDWARDS: Sulphur growing fast.

DIGILORMO: Oh yeah.

EDWARDS: It's growing fast.

DIGILORMO: A lot of people aren't too happy about that, but . . .

EDWARDS: Life goes on.

DIGILORMO: Right.

EDWARDS: It goes on. And them plants got a lot to do with it.

DIGILORMO: Oh yeah. They got everything to do with it. Absolutely. Well Mr. Kenney
when is a . . .

[17:41]

[End Tape 4520. End Session I.]