Interviewee: Enola Margaret LaTour-Pitre **4700.2584 T4544**
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STEPHANIE DRAGOON: Okay. Today is November twenty-third, 2015. We are at Ms. Margaret's home in Lake Charles [Louisiana]. I'm Stephanie Dragoon with the T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History with LSU [Louisiana State University] Libraries. I'm here today with Ms. Margaret LaTour-Pitre to talk about her memories of Mossville, Louisiana, as part of a project conducted in conjunction with the Imperial Calcasieu Museum to document the history of Mossville. Thank you so much for inviting us to your home again. This is our second interview session together.

ENOLA MARGARET LATOUR-PITRE: You're quite welcome.

DRAGOON: **[00:39]** So we're going to start with some more questions about growing up in Mossville.

LATOUR-PITRE: Okay.

DRAGOON: Kind of start again where we left off. How has the community changed within your lifetime?

LATOUR-PITRE: **[00:53]** There is . . . The change that I noticed was small, it contract, it sometimes looked like we have a full community. There were new people coming in, families getting married and staying in the community, and then sometimes it looked like . . . I think it was just the natural order with people as they got older, and they would rotate out and look like, it would start to get smaller. And you felt like okay, it's going to cave. It's just going to be . . . But the thing that was always interesting about it is that it sustained itself somehow, and even until just . . . especially until just before the buyouts started, there seemed to be another infusion, where people actually moving back into the community, building new homes.

So when we first moved to Mossville, myself as a child, that I can remember, we were at the extreme end of what was then considered Mossville proper near Prater Road. We were all the way at the other end. Our house, and the Braxtons, one of the uncles, the Guillory, Mr. Perkins, were pretty much isolated from the rest of the community, a little distance off. We were . . . There was no television. There was radio. There was the music my dad played. But we self-entertained each other a lot as a family. Family culture, the culture . . . my family's culture was very deep into family. They entertained themselves. They worked really hard. They played really hard . . . but to the other . . . So our area kind of stayed small. It was like well-established, old, the Perkins and the Braxtons had been there for a very long time. My parents, as I said before, moved in around '46, '47. So, in that area, pretty much stayed as it was for a very long time. **[02:59]** But the rest of the community, like I said, there were time periods when we had grocery stores. There were two little grocery stores in the community that I can remember. Gas stations had come and gone through there. So, like I said, it was really self-sustaining and thriving little community in that periodically what the community needed was being provided. Then after the

cycle, they would cycle out. But entrepreneurship on a small scale was one of the things I would say that I noticed about the community.

DRAGOON: **[3:32]** Can you talk a little bit more about the entrepreneurship?

LATOUR-PITRE: Well things . . . Like I said, people would open little grocery stores, little snow cone stores. But the idea was to try to serve the community with some of the little general and basic needs: the gas station, recreation centers. So like I said, and then when the school was built, there was this huge building near the Rigmaiden Recreation Center was just an old building. And I'm sure the history will tell you who it belonged to. But I can remember as a kid it served as a clinic. We would leave the school and go there to get our inoculations and all that kind of stuff . . . so, the shots that we needed for school.

DRAGOON: Where was . . . I'm sorry, where was that?

LATOUR-PITRE: It was near that railroad track at the recreation center. And I'm sure somebody else that you're going to interview was more familiar with the building itself. I remember it was kind of like an old preserved historical building that had been there for a while, from what I can remember. So that was . . . And as I said before, they were really . . . I think as a community they would really try to work together, and support each other, and support the community. It was a diehard there, in terms of trying to keep it alive, and I think they were really successful, like I said. The contraction, as I said, of businesses and houses, and people who had moved in and out. But there was always something there. And the Montgomery Club, that was

on Prater Road, that was, again, an example of a businessperson who opened up a business that was successful. Had some of the big name R&B performers would come through.

DRAGOON: **[5:34]** Was that the Paradise Club? Or the Montgomery Club is different? Or was it owned by . . .

LATOUR-PITRE: It was probably called the Paradise Club, because, you know, we always referred to it by the person, Valery's Club, or Wes Montgomery's Club. But the proper name probably was . . . [laughs] And being a young person, I couldn't tell you I know exactly what the name was. But I could remember hearing them talking about it. It was right on the main drag, so we would see it often.

DRAGOON: Did you ever go there when you were older?

LATOUR-PITRE: [laughs] By the time I got older, I got married and left. But my wedding dance . . . Because there was the wedding, the reception and then the dance, that's how they always structured it. So at night, after everything, then everybody would go there. That's where it was held, at the Paradise Club. And my father played the music. It was the only time I'd ever gone there, because I got married at nineteen and left and was gone for forty years. During that time period, it thrived pretty good for a long time, and then, of course, folded. But that was the only time I'd gone there. We didn't frequent a lot of those kind of places, the young girls of my family. [laughs] What we did do is go to . . . Sacred Heart here in Lake Charles would have a Teen Town during that time period, the American Bandstand type dances. So my mother would

drive us into Lake Charles. So she was selective about if we did go out, what kind of venue that we could go out and socialize in. And so as we became teenage girls, my sister and I, primarily, because we were a year apart, we ran like twins. But yeah, we would go to something like that, a lot of family gathering and dancing. But seldom did we go to a place like the Paradise Club.

DRAGOON: **[7:34]** You mentioned grocery stores and the snowball stand. Were those places you went a lot when you were a kid?

LATOUR-PITRE: There was a story that you're going to hear about, Rougeau, Mr. Rougeau's store. Because during that time, he was like the primary store, the primary store in the community. So yeah, we would go to Mr. Rougeau's store a lot. We had a distant family . . . That's why I need my other family members. We'd call him [Bay?] as a nickname. He was also Creole and had moved into Mossville. I'm not quite sure the timeframe. But he ran a small store on Old Spanish Trail for a while. And then things like the little snow cone shop was, again, in an area near a relative. They just opened up a little . . . Those are the ones that come to mind right now that I can think of. And then, of course, there was always the mechanics, the guys who would fix cars in their yard or in their houses, and fix cars for the neighborhood people and stuff like that.

DRAGOON: Can you tell me about the canteens? We've heard a little about the canteens.

LATOUR-PITRE: Again, not a lot. [laughs] We were really isolated down in that end of town. [laughs]

DRAGOON: Okay.

LATOUR-PITRE: Yeah, I don't remember the canteen. In Mossville proper? Yeah.

DRAGOON: **[9:07]** I believe so.

LATOUR-PITRE: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

DRAGOON: Did your family go to the movies?

LATOUR-PITRE: [Agrees] A lot.

DRAGOON: Where did you go?

LATOUR-PITRE: **[09:25]** That was the other thing we did for entertainment a lot. When the drive-in opened up, that was the best thing since sliced bread. [laughs] We would go to the drive-in on Highway 90 very often. Before that, there was a theater in Westlake, on the main street in Westlake, and we would go there. My dad was really big into Westerns. My mom was big into Clark Gable. [laughs] She liked the romantic-type movies. And of course, like I said, he was totally into Westerns. So that was one of the form of entertainments that we would do a lot.

Like I said, when the drive-in opened . . . Yeah. One of my memories of the drive-in is in the summer afternoons when the clouds, when the thunderstorms would come up, we'd hold our breath. It was like, okay, are we going to make it? The fog and the thunderstorms. I think I'm fascinated even today with the clouds here in the southern area after a storm, or as they start to build. Because we would watch them. And then the big shower would come, and you're watching the cloud and it's like, it's not going to rain, we can go! [laughs] So we would head out for the drive-in.

DRAGOON: Do you remember the first time you went to the drive-in on Highway 90? Maybe what movie, or any particular movies that stand out?

LATOUR-PITRE: **[10:41]** I don't remember the first time I went. But one of the movies I remember, like I said, other than a lot of the westerns . . . but one of the movies that made a lasting impression on me was *Gone with the Wind.* When *Gone with the Wind* came out, my godmother and her family were still living right there on that end of Mossville with us. They had built a house where my uncle's house was. The Guillorys were back in the wooded area back there, off the main drag, but within walking distance. We'd go to their house all the time. But my mother and her sister . . . Like I said, that's why I guess Clark Gable stuck with me. They were going to see *Gone with the Wind,* piled the kids in the car, hers and my mom's kids. And we'd go to the drive-in. And the fog rolled in and shut it down. [laughs] Couldn't see a thing. I think a night or two later, we all piled back in the car, went back again. So that was one of the ones that I can, that stayed with me, because of the circumstances around it. And so, I guess, I don't know, that would have been, what, early '50s, I guess, it came out, something like that. So. But we kind

of . . . All of the movies that were coming out during that era, we kind of would watch. If they were appropriate, then, yeah, we always tried to catch a lot of the new movies.

DRAGOON: **[12:06]** Where did you guys go . . . Where did you get your clothes? Where did you buy your clothes? Or did you make them?

LATOUR-PITRE: My mother made a lot of our clothes. My sister and I, especially. Very much. That's why I said earlier about us being twins. She would make our identical clothes as well. And we laugh about it now, because my sister was a smaller, petite person than I. I was a taller, just a broader . . . my shoulders and everything was broader. And so she'd make clothes and they were identical. She'd make very nice clothes. She liked sewing. She was very particular and very meticulous about her sewing, and it was very exact. She matched her patterns and lines and what have you. So she did a really good job in making our clothes. But we would go out and we would wear the same thing, and people would always ask us, "Oh, are the two of you twins?" And we'd go like, "We're not twins. [laughs] You can see that we're not twins." But it was the clothes, because of the way she dressed us. So she made a lot of the clothes. We would go shopping in Lake Charles proper: The Lerner Shop, Sears . . . [Mullis?] was not exactly within the budget, unless it was extremely special occasion. Then we would maybe go there. And then there was the shopping center in Sulphur, a store called West Brothers. I'm sure everybody in Mossville has gone to West Brothers. And so a lot of the . . . That's where we primarily did our clothing shopping. Other than that she would, like I said, she'd make a lot of it. And taught my sister and I how to sew, of course, as we were growing up. We started making clothes ourselves.

DRAGOON: **[13:52]** Where did you get your hair cut? Did your mom cut your hair?

LATOUR-PITRE: **[13:56]** My mom's kitchen or the back porch or outside somewhere. [laughs] Yeah, she primarily took care of it. The difficulty she had with my hair was that I was one of the kids . . . And like I said, if you look at it now, you'd never believe it, but there was a couple of us in the family, one or two of my brothers, but the youngest brother and myself, we had like very, very thick, I mean, just thick hair. I can remember her doing the thinning out underneath, in the back. I remember braids, and I remember her trying to do the braids. Then as we started to get older and becoming young ladies, we would go to the pressing. There was a lady, I think she was a Braxton, and she would take me there. She had a little shop in her home on what is now Trousdale Road. She used to live on that. It was Hilltop, I think, they called it at that time. And she would press my hair out. So then there was like a day and a half, or a two-day fight about don't get your hair wet. [laughs] So it was always a struggle with my hair.

And again, inside family joke even to today about my sister and her beautiful, soft, curly hair with the green eyes. She ended up with the softer grain of hair. She didn't have the problems, the thickness, that I was fighting with. So I tease her all the time. Like I said, it's a family joke about the thickness of my hair and how difficult it was for her to maintain it and to . . . I'd have it frizz all over. And of course we'd come up with all these nicknames . . . and I don't think I'm going to share those. [laughs] For our shortcomings. We were big on nicknames—just a sidebar. I don't think anybody in the house ever was called by their proper name. There was always a sub-name for us, which made my husband crazy when he first met us. Anything from like Moose Head, Chubby . . . I mean, all kinds of silly names . . . [Pecan?]. But it would make him crazy when he first started communicating with us. "Doesn't anybody ever go by their real

name?" Yeah . . . [laughs] when my parents get angry. [laughs] So my sister was an easy care with taking care of the hair. I was a little bit more difficult. But again, my mom was very . . . she was very particular about . . . she always made sure that it was taken care of.

DRAGOON: **[16:33]** I'm going to backtrack a little bit. I know you mentioned . . . you talked a little bit about the clinic. Where else did you go, did your family go for medical care, healthcare?

LATOUR-PITRE: There was a Dr. [Lacour?] in Lake Charles. My best memory serves when we started . . . when I, as a child, was being taken to Dr. [Lacour?]. He became our family doctor. Prior to that time, there was a lot of family treating. Not like traiteurs, although some members of my family did go to treaters. But if you had a flu, or if you had a cold, or if you had the mumps, they had remedies and things that they would do from way back. So we didn't see the doctor, that I can remember, very often. I don't think I ever saw a dentist as a child. There was . . . Like I said, there were things that if you ever had a . . . especially with flus, they had their remedies that they would treat us with, with flus. One of the things I can remember was a concoction of Vicks and honey and . . . oh, I can't remember the third thing. But for colds or something like that, they would give you these things. I think my mother's approach to her house was a big help. I mean, she Cloroxed everything all the time and really fought to minimize it. When somebody came home with a bug it was like oh, jump on it, scrub down everything and kept everything clean. So I don't remember as a small child seeing a doctor very often.

[18:24] The school, again, took care of the required inoculations, so we didn't have to go to a doctor's office for that. The parents took care with the home remedies of getting us through

bugs and flus. By the time I was ten or eleven, as now teenagers, we started getting more serious illnesses. My brother ended up with an ankle injury from . . . he hurt it in football, and then he was doing, working at a bowling alley in Sulphur [Louisiana] and the pin hit the ankle. The ankle got so infected. By the time everybody noticed how bad it was, they had, they were starting to wonder if they might have to amputate it, the foot. But they put him in casts and they treated him for like an entire year. He was off his feet a little over a year and was . . . and it healed okay. So well then that had certainly involved the doctors. I don't think he had a hospital stay with that. They just treated it with [lamp and composts?] and medication. Around that same time was when I developed a cyst and had to have surgery. And then a year after that was when I had the meningitis. So now, that's when Dr. [LaCour?] comes in. and we're seeing him. We went through that period where there as problems in the house and sicknesses. I think one of them stepped on, it must have been my sister, stepped on a nail that got infected. But, so we went through that period.

[19:56] Then of course Mom, with her pregnancies, she always delivered her babies in the hospital. The three of us were born in Lafayette [Louisiana], and the boys, the two boys, were born here at Saint Patrick. So she was certainly . . . like with the last two, I know she was under doctor's care during those times. She had complications, not serious, not like life-threatening complications during her pregnancies. But her pregnancies weren't that easy. And then after the last one, that's when she had the really bad episode where she got, I guess, an infection or something and nearly died. But that's when they ended up doing the hysterectomy, once they stabilized her and stuff. And for a while, she was the one who . . . she had problems, like with . . . I guess female problems. She did have a heart condition that developed as she got, got worse as she got older, and which ultimately was the result of her stroke and her death.

But there was a period when she was not well. She'd function. She wouldn't stop for a minute. She'd function. But then once she did the hysterectomy and they got her on medication with the heart and they kind of stabilized her, then she just dealt with the heart problem. But she never stopped. She was just pushing, going, going, go. Both of them, actually. But I guess, in a way, we were blessed. And we say that often, too, without ever having had like major illnesses or disabilities in the family. We recognize that was a blessing . . . because I think other than a couple of episodes I cited, I can't remember anybody else having a real . . . really serious medical problem, other than Mom. And then, of course, in their old age, and then when Dad got cancer. But I mean, when we were growing up, we were basically healthy.

DRAGOON: **[22:05]** Can you tell me about treaters? About who were the treaters?

LATOUR-PITRE: My knowledge is limited about it. But my grandfather definitely came from a family of treaters and using treaters. In Creole, it's traiteurs. They've talked about it on TV before. Basically it's a person who offers herbal remedies for treating . . . and prayers. As a matter of fact, one time I did have a, remember had a ringworm on my chin or something and it wouldn't . . . Mom kept trying to work with it and it just wasn't going away. My grandfather suggested that they take me to this lady. And so we went to Vinton [Louisiana]. I remember being in her house. And she had me stand on a chair in front of a door . . . Was it a door or mirror? And she had the salve that she put on it. And again, I was too young to remember all the details and understand exactly. But that was the one time that I actually did go to one.

And like I said, my grandfather, we laugh about that, too, both paternal and maternal grandfather, every now and then they had a little rag or a little salve and they were using it. They

would put it on something. My father's, my paternal grandfather who lived next door to us, I think I told you that, that they had moved there, he had a concoction in a bottle where if you were nauseated or was throwing up or had stomach problems, there was garlic in it and God knows what else. It tasted awful. [laughs] But it seemed to work. If you could keep it down . . . if you could get it down, it would work. And the castor oil treatments. They were big on the castor oil treatments and stuff like that.

DRAGOON: **[24:01]** What are the castor oil treatments?

LATOUR-PITRE: A good dose of castor oil. The worst part is when they would put it in the hot honey tea and you had to sip it just like . . . Much later on when we got older, it was like it would have been better . . . just give it to me on a spoon and give me something. But it was in a cup of hot tea and you had to sip it. It was like it didn't end. [laughs] It was terrible. It was kind of interesting, because they did bring a lot of treatments, remedies, that they had learned, and they did work. They served a purpose. And then we went completely away from that. Like none of that works, you have to go see the doctors and get the pills. And now you go full circle. You're finding people are looking for and trying to find more herbal approaches to staying healthy. I being one of them. So it's kind of interesting. I didn't know enough about it to qualify it, to say yeah, it's bona fide. But it seemed to make a difference for the people who did practice this.

My uncle's wife, who lived in back of the Guillorys, I keep saying in the back because it was further off the highway, she was one of the people, too, who would get the leaves. Sassafras tea and the sassafras leaves were really big. But she knew. She knew what berries and what

leaves, and roots. They would primarily boil and make teas. Or if it was something that was a salve, however they would fix it.

DRAGOON: Do you continue to use some of the home remedies that you . . .

LATOUR-PITRE: That I what?

DRAGOON: That you used as a child? Do you continue that tradition?

LATOUR-PITRE: If I get congested, if I get a cold, if I start finding that I'm getting anything respiratory, I don't rub the Vicks on me anymore. [laughs] Horrible. Actually, I did . . . I had a persisting cough. It was a bug, it was a flu that was going around, and a good throat rub with the Vicks and then wrapped it with a towel overnight. So, yeah, especially, I'm big on the Vicks for sure. The ginger roots for bad stomachs. Yeah. Like I said . . . And I've learned in the last few years of her life, as I would come to visit with her, she would talk and she'd make recommendations, so I'd pick up some of those from her. But not a lot of them, because I don't know which ones are which. Sassafras tea was one of the ones that they'd put the castor oil in, so I don't do sassafras tea. [laughs] But castor oil I don't do. I paid my dues. I'm not going to do that one again. [laughs] But yeah, some of them I do . . . because they seem to work. The hot . . . the cayennes and stuff like that, for cleansing, also, I'll do that. I'll tell anybody, I don't know what it's going to do for you. It seems to work for me. So I will do it.

DRAGOON: **[27:16]** Did you grow herbs in your yard? I know you mentioned that you had a garden. Did you have herbs?

LATOUR-PITRE: **[27:21]** And like I said, my mom . . . No, we didn't. Especially not for treating. And I don't remember her, like . . . Well maybe parsley, onions like that for cooking. But none of the herbs that she, that they would grow, was for treatment purposes. A lot of what they used was something that they had learned from their parents. But it didn't include them growing special herbs for treatment. Because Mom was . . . I think Mom was very . . . the word I would think of for her would be progressive. She had a very curious nature about things outside her world, and so she was always open to learning something new and to doing different things, and to moving from the old ways. When they discovered the cyst, it was one of the things Dad kept saying, "Ah, just give her a dose of castor oil. She'll be all right. There's nothing wrong with her. She just got bad bowels." And she's going like, "No, she's going to the doctor." [laughs] So it became a family joke. Dad's cure to a cyst was to give her some castor oil. [laughs] So she didn't stay in that . . . And I don't know if she ever even really learned, I don't think, in her household—it wasn't passed on to her—where they said do this, that and that. She became aware of it, she knew of it, because of the practice around her. But it wasn't something that was really passed on to her. So she didn't do it.

DRAGOON: **[28:55]** We were talking last time about cooking. And I was wondering what kind of food and dishes brings back memories today of your childhood. What kinds of things would your mother make, your father?

LATOUR-PITRE: My father finally helping me understand the correct way to cook rice so that I didn't have to be totally afraid every time I would have to cook. [laughs] I think they started trying to introduce us to—"us" meaning primarily the girls—some form of cooking at a pretty early age. Because my parents were taking responsibility for things at seven and eight and nine years old. My dad was cooking when he was like nine years old and stuff. So they would start moving us into those pretty young. And the frying eggs, stuff like that. I'm sorry, it brings back the memory of the summer days when my parents were both at work in the middle of the day and it was time for lunch and she would tell us what we could eat—a bologna sandwich with mayonnaise and Kool-Aid. I don't think I eat those now because of that. [laughs] One of our favorites was also mayonnaise and sugar on bread as kids. As kids, we'd go in the kitchen, we'd concoct all kind of stuff. [laughs]

[30:15] But anyway, they did make an effort early on to start showing us how to cook. One of my nemesis was cooking rice and getting it just perfect, because there's a way they want the rice cooked. And most of the time, it was just too sticky. It was too much water. And of course he'd pitch a fit. "You don't know how to cook the rice! I done told you to do something." Finally one day he's standing there, and he said, "You don't know how to . . . " I said, "I don't know. I keep trying this. I never have enough water." He filled a pot and he stuck his finger in it and he, "Bring the water to the first marker." And it was like a Eureka moment. It was like, that's it! That's all it took! Never missed a pot of rice . . . seldom miss a pot of rice ever since that. And that's what I've passed on. You want to make a good pot of rice, just touch the top of the rice, bring the water up to the first inch on your finger, and it's just about always perfect.

Coubion, the red tomato sauce with the fish in it. I know how to cook it. But one of the problem we had there…being the oldest daughter, you was the one who got experimented first,

had the first round of these things. Don't stir the pot. When you put the fish in, don't stir the pot. [laughs] And until I learned that, it was like, oh, he walked in one day just having a screaming fit. "Don't stir the pot!" Of course, you'd break up all the fish.

[31:46] I learned to clean a rabbit with my dad. We had homegrown rabbits. And especially after my oldest brother was gone in military, but even before, we learned to clean the rabbits, learned to clean the chitlins. When they would do the butcher, you're the gofer. All the . . . Some of the things, the washing of the meat, or the hauling it back and forth in the house, cleaning the chitlins, was, for sure you were assigned to do that. And the gumbo. The fresh pork was usually stewed or roast. The rabbits. The squirrels that he would come home with, and wild rabbits and wild squirrels when he would go hunting. He grew up hunting. He was a hunter. When we were younger, we would hunt more often than as he got older, later on in our life, because he was working full time at Firestone, and then he started playing music on weekends. And so he didn't hunt as much. But he would bring that home, and Mom usually cooked it up. Stewed it, roast it, but primarily cook it on the stove, I guess, those things.

So the gumbos, wild game, homegrown meats, stuff like that. Vegetables were kind of basic. The big ones were the maque choux corns, the okra, the stewed okra, the way we cook it, not a gumbo. Okra never went in a chicken and sausage gumbo. That was a no-no. [laughs] When I first moved away and people said, "Oh, I love gumbo with the chicken and sausage," and when I'd hear okra, I was like, "What?!" But that's a style. That's the way that some people would cook it. We didn't do it that way. It was a couple of times there were chickens and we would get maybe fresh eggs . . . that general kind of stuff. I'm the one now in the family everybody keep laughing about, "She don't cook, she microwave." But I know how to cook. [laughs] Mom would make cakes sometimes. But I don't remember like a lot of cakes. There was

a period when she learned to make yeast rolls that that, that was a period when that, we would have a lot of them. She would make them a lot.

DRAGOON: **[34:12]** What is that?

LATOUR-PITRE: The yeast. The bread, rolls that rise. And the thing about when they would make them, the rolls were like this. They could be even light and fluffy. But they didn't make like a small roll like you'd get in the, they were like gigantic roasting pans. They would rise above. And figs . . . We had a fig tree, so she would can some figs. And of course as kids, we were in the woods all the times and we'd get mayhaws, and she'd make that blackberry dumplings, she'd make that. We'd go pick the blackberries and some pears. So every now and then she would make like the watermelon rinds, because she grew up with them. But it wasn't something she made often enough that it got passed on so that, like I say, any one of us know how to do it. We have an idea how to do it. We'd have to experiment with that. A lot of rice.

[35:14] Fridays was always funny in my house, because you either had stewed fish or you had eggs and rice. Because being Catholics at the time, that was a requirement—no meat on Friday. So we'd have whatever we ate on Thursday. Friday there was fish or eggs and rice. Saturday by ten o'clock my dad would swear he had not eaten since Thursday, and where was the food? He was starving! And well, wait a minute, you just had yesterday. "That's not food!" He was a rice and meat guy. If he didn't get the rice and the meat, then it was like he had not eaten. And then one of the things we would also fix on Friday was like, he would fish a lot, too, in addition to hunting the turtles. Turtle was one of our favorite. The turtles were good. And then

with the eggs and everything. And a variety of fish. He didn't crab a lot, but every now and then we would get some crab.

One time I remember he and Mom, I guess it was after Hurricane Audrey . . . For some reason there was, South Cameron, towards Cameron was inundated with crawfish. They were coming out of everywhere. People were driving . . . I can remember people were going in the night and basically they were just crossing the roads and everything. So that was one of the times when I can remember we had a lot of crawfish. Other than that, we would just go in the front yard and ditch and catch three or four of them. If we managed to get enough, then we might maybe would boil them. But we didn't have like big crawfish boils like they have today. But we did eat some. We had enough every now and then that that was part of what we had. Yeah, that's kind of some of the main things, main ones, that I can remember.

DRAGOON: **[37:08]** Did your family ever buy meat from other . . . from a butcher, or did you mostly hunt?

LATOUR-PITRE: Yeah. They would buy it, again, with family connections, they would either maybe drive out to one of their families or, because most of my relatives, I could say, yeah, maybe most . . . yeah, most of them were farmers, on both sides of the family. So we would probably get meat from them or Dad might know somebody and maybe buy some of the meat from somebody he knew. So, yeah, he would buy some of it. But I don't remember . . . He liked his meat but it wasn't like steaks and potato kind of, it was generally the stews to the stretch kind of pots where . . . backbones . . . There was a period there was a lot of pig feet, and

as they got older, everybody started to like wean off of them. But best thing my mama would make was a pig tail stew. [laughs]

DRAGOON: That was your favorite?

LATOUR-PITRE: **[38:25]** It was just one of those things that was just good. It was like, I don't know if I would say it was my favorite, but boy, when she'd come up with a good pig tail stew it was like yeah, it was good eats for a while. And then one of the things he would do, of course, was he had his set up with his raw onion was here, and his water was there, and his hot peppers. So that kind of got passed on to some of us, too. Not the raw onions, but the hot peppers are good. One of the things he would do, too, especially during the daytime if he was home, eat a meal and I guess because he was so busy, he was working a lot, he would just be busy, busy, busy. And then when he'd finally sit down to eat, one of his favorite things was he'd drop his head on the table and after a while you could hear him snoring. You'd take a little quick nap, and he would wake up and gone again. [laughter] But when he finished eating, he would just drop his head and fall asleep. And he was a small, wiry little guy. He was never . . . He gained weight as he started to get a little bit older. But my dad was always a little small guy, thin guy. Just hyper energy.

DRAGOON: **[39:33]** No one dared to wake him up.

LATOUR-PITRE: Oh, absolutely not. No, no, no. Not waking him up, yeah. That was another thing. When he was working at, when he started working at Firestone, he was working

shift work. Boy that was an interesting adjustment in the household. [laughs] Because with the shift work, he would try to get some sleep. And then everybody in the house had to quiet down. My oldest brother was the worst culprit. Every now and then he'd start doing something silly, and everybody started trying not to laugh or make a noise a little bit too loud, and Dad would wake up. One of his favorite things Dad would do, also, he'd wake up and start cussing and fussing. "Didn't I tell you all to be quiet? I'm trying to get some sleep!" And then precisely at a certain time of night when he was on midnights, they call it graveyard, you had to go wake him up. Well sometimes we would go in there and he was awake in the dark, because the room was dark, it was night, and we had to go in. And we were told don't just go in there. You have to go in and make sure . . . don't jolt him. But we'd go in to wake him up. He'd wait until we got right near his bed, and then he would sit up in the bed or he would say something. We'd . . . [laughs] He had a great sense of humor. He was always trying to pull tricks and jokes on people like that. But we'd come screaming out of that room. [laughter] So you either got in trouble if you woke him up, or he would lie in wait and scare you if you went in the room.

DRAGOON: **[41:02]** What did he do at Firestone?

LATOUR-PITRE: He started as a carpenter. No, actually he ended up as a carpenter. He was just one of the laborers, loading the rubber and stuff like that in one of the processing areas. I can remember he'd come home and the black gook would be like in his ears and on his clothes, and you could smell it. And so he was in the processing area, I guess where they were bagging it, processing it and bagging it, I guess. And he'd come home with this black gook on him. I can remember that.

DRAGOON: I guess . . . What is Firestone, exactly?

LATOUR-PITRE: It's a rubber . . . tire . . . Bridgestone Firestone. And they manufacture the rubber here, right here at the plant over here.

DRAGOON: Okay.

LATOUR-PITRE: The polymer, I guess, for the tires. Because I don't think they make, they don't make the tires there, but they make the polymer that they ship it out and then they use it to make the tires. So he worked there for a long time. And then he moved into the carpenter shop. So the last few, several years when he was working there, he was a carpenter. He was a, they had a day they tore down my house. Oh, God. I couldn't get anybody to buy it. I thought sure I had a buyer. I had to finally take it down. And when I went back, I went there the day they were taking it down, there were chunks of cement from the porch and the steps where the guy was saying, he said, "This was . . . " and everybody who, even the guy who took the house down, everybody kept saying the house was well built, because he took pride in his building. He was very meticulous about it. Mom was meticulous about keeping up her house, and he was about building things. And so they were like a real complement to each other.

[43:00] When I looked at all the cement work that he had done and the brick . . . He was a bricklayer and cement finisher, that was probably his primary skillset. It was really good work. Big, thick, he made sure he got a good thick slab that didn't crack, didn't break. The bricks, when they started taking things down, there were some places he still had bricks that they had to oh, just break it all up. And I went like [audible sighs]. He poured the pads for his pillars, the

pillars that the house was set on, because he kept working with the store-bought ones and they wouldn't work. So he just went out and made his own. So like I said, by the time he retired, finally retired from Firestone, he was doing just basic carpentry. And actually, when he retired from Firestone, he and my oldest brother and the middle brother started a little refurbishing business on the government grant, I guess, that my oldest brother had requested, gotten some money for to go out and service low-cost housing and do some, what do they call it, handyman kind of stuff, the refurbishing stuff. So they did that for a while. And Mama, of course, she was a domestic. She cleaned houses for the most part. And then, in her later years, she worked for the rectory in Sulphur for quite a few years.

DRAGOON: **[44:30]** What? I'm sorry, what?

LATOUR-PITRE: The rectory. The Catholic . . . where the priests live, in their home. She cleaned house. She didn't cook. The other lady cooked. But she was the one who pretty much cleaned. And then her final job was the janitorial job, cleaning offices at the end of the day.

DRAGOON: When did they take down your family home?

LATOUR-PITRE: **[44:57]** You'd think I could remember the exact date. Just about a month ago. I finally said, "Okay, go ahead, take it down." Because like I said, a lady came through and I thought, she was all excited and she was going to . . . I was trying to see if I could get somebody to just give me whatever you can for it and move it. Just move it and refurbish it.

And she was all excited that she could do this. Then she started pushing it out, "I'm not ready yet, I'm not ready yet." I said, "Okay, I can hold it. But I've got a commitment with Sasol [South Africa Synthetic Oil Liquid; Chemicals Company]. I've got to go to settlement at some point." And then she fell off the face of the earth. She just stopped communicating. When I would talk with her, she kept talking about all the projects that she had in [?]. I told my husband, I said, she probably got overextended. She couldn't come back and close this deal.

Then I offered it to Habitat [for Humanity], see if they could take it and move and refurbish it. And they looked at it. Like I say, everybody's going, it's a well-built house, it's a really well-built, it's a strong house. They couldn't find anybody who'd be willing to take it. Because I think what they do, is if you donate it to them, then they sell it to somebody else. I think that's how it works. But anyway, I got to a point where I just had to pull a trigger. I had to make a decision. So we worked it through. I decided it's okay, it's good. [laughs] Take it down. At one point I thought, I'm not even going to look. But I actually went the day they was taking it down. And then my husband and I went back a day or, the next day or so. I tell them, I say, it's still a beautiful lot, even without the house. It's a pretty piece of property.

[46:44] But one of the things that my mom would very frequently say and talk to us about . . . And I think about Dad, and I said, like look, I tried. Because he was the one who wanted to hold on. I think it's kind of typical for guys, anyway. Mom was, like I said, she was progressive. She was kind of like use what you have when you need it. When you don't need it, pass it on, give it away, let it go. And so I labored a lot with it. But I kept hearing her advice. What are you going to do with it? Because I had promised myself when I bought the property from my siblings that I wasn't going to let the property just sit there and run down if I couldn't take care of it or if I'm dead and it's just sitting there. That's one of those things I was saying

earlier about Mossville. People would start dying or leaving and the properties would just sit there. And to me, I always thought that's unfortunate that happens, because they work hard. They put in a lot of effort. If you can do something with it, do it.

My big fantasy when I bought that property was I'm going to buy my parents' property, my grandfather's adjacent property, and develop it into a really small little community with reasonably low-cost houses, just if I'd gotten with a developer and made all the requirements. Well, what I start to realize after I had it was, that wasn't going to happen financially for us. We just couldn't, we weren't going to be able to pay what we needed to get it outfitted and set up for development to meet all the county requirements. They came back through with septic system requirements that we just, I just realized that wasn't going to happen. So even when Sasol first came with the offer, my first inclination was no, I'm not selling it. But as I started thinking about it, I said, you can't develop it the way you wanted to. You're going to die with it on your hands. It's going to do what you don't want it to do. It's going to just sit there.

[48:40] So I decided to take their offer. But one of the things I did do was include a letter asking them, "I can see you're selling property as you're buying it. The signs are coming up. A lot of it is turning into commercial property." I said, "I would just like to ask you to seriously consider if you resell this property and my grandfather's property that you allow to sell it to a developer, a residential developer." Because where it's located is still in a residential area. It's in an area where most of the people have not sold. It's right against a new development called Barcelona, where they have a whole track of houses right next to mine. So I'm hoping that ideally if they would resell, a developer could come in and put another few little houses and it would stay a residential area. And I tell them, I said, "You know, the fantasy or the hope was to honor my parents' hard work and what they had accomplished, when I bought it, was to be able

to turn their property into something like that." So, like she said, we've got to move on. It's theirs, now, so hopefully they're going to do something good with it.

DRAGOON: **[49:49]** What was it like for you to visit the site when they were tearing it down?

LATOUR-PITRE: Surprisingly, not bad. I had a surprising momentary meltdown when I got ready to actually sign the papers after the house was gone. I guess that was the closure. What I was allowed to do, my siblings cooperated with me, which I really appreciated, because when I thought the lady was going to be able to take the house, I asked everybody to come back to the house one last time. And we got together as a family and took pictures. I wanted the pictures to be about the property, not so much about us. But there was a picture with the three of us, the older ones, when he first built it. My parents and the three of us took a picture on the steps in front of this house. So I had a photographer come out and we took . . . the first three of us took a picture in front of the house again. I just tried to stage a couple other pictures. The kids, the grandchildren, some of the great-grandchildren walked through the rooms. My youngest brother was explaining to his grandchildren, where the rooms were and where they slept. The kids had never . . . the grandchildren had never been there. And everybody, as many people as possible came out, and I think they really enjoyed it. So it was a good closure for us.

[51:06] When I went back, again, I try to be a faithful Catholic. My thought was bless the rooms because it's whoever gets the house. So I blessed my house. But then when I realized I was going to have to . . . that it wasn't going to happen, nobody was going to take it, I think I was ready to let it go. Because like I said, when I went there the first day, that had probably been

a time when I expected. But it was good. Once I made up my mind, yeah, let it go. I was ready. And like I said, she was telling me what to do. [laughs] She was standing there. Let it go. So I think I had worked through some of the . . . and for me, my emotions get more of a stress. Like I knew there was a period where it was like, I could feel the tension of having to make the decision and of executing what needed to be done. And when it finally hit, I said, "Okay it's done, it's done. Let it go." Then it's gone. I don't go back over there anymore. I have no reason to. [laughs] But I'll check every now and then, see what they do to it.

DRAGOON: **[52:14]** How . . . Growing up, how did you notice the development of the refineries? The progress of Conoco, Condea Vista, Sasol?

LATOUR-PITRE: Most of the refineries were pretty much in place by the time I born and moved, we were living, when we moved there and I became aware of it, most of those refineries were already operational on a smaller scale, maybe, but they were there, because a lot of them were developed after, during and after World War II. They brought people in from what we call "The North" to run those facilities. My mother worked for one of the families who had migrated here to work. Other than that, it's provided jobs for a lot of the uncles that I knew. I would hear them talking about the Cities Service, Conoco, and of course you get the merging and the names change and what have you, but they kind of go, so I can remember hearing a lot of the men talking about the job opportunities that they had from there.

But in spite of moving here when the plants were already operational, when my dad first moved here, and I think, too, it's because of his language barrier when he first moved in the area, he still had a very, very heavy French accent. And my mom spoke a better English than he did.

So the jobs he went after were like still service kind of jobs. He worked at the lumber mill. Then he started doing carpentry type work, gofer . . . what they call gofer work at first. Then starting to build, and stuff like that. So he did that kind of work for a long time. That's where he learned his cement finishing skills and his bricklaying skill before he got to Firestone. So he didn't go into the plants until like the '50s, where I have uncles who had been there for quite a while.

And then the other issue of that, the people of Mossville, my family, my culture, was the race issue. Men of color didn't just rush in, they weren't exactly just pulling you into the refineries. So it was quite a while before you started seeing a real influx of blacks working in the refinery. But it was before the '60s. But it was slow. It wasn't something they were invited to come into very easily. I can remember one of my father's uncles, he would talk about trying to get my dad in where he was. My dad finally got into Firestone because my mom was cleaning house for the family down the street that I told you about. And the man put in the word for him, so he was able to get in, to get in there.

DRAGOON: **[55:12]** Do you . . . What was his experience like working for Firestone?

LATOUR-PITRE: His first few years, and I can't say exactly whether it was his first five, ten or whatever, but I can remember there was a period where I tell the kids and I tell people I talk to now, while I do understand the problem that unions have, or has had, their reputation about being unfair and demanding, when I saw how my father was working before a union came to Firestone at that local plant compared to what happened after the union, after they unionized, I am pro-union. Because they would work, my dad would go to work, and if he had, eight-hour shift. If his relief didn't show up, he had a sixteen-hour shift. If he started to burn out,

too bad. I need supper, I need some food. It was like, just work. I mean, you've heard the story. Driving them sixteen hours, eighteen hours, if he'd needed to. He could have probably worked a double, and then maybe his relief was late. So that means he'd have to work a few more extra hours . . . exhausted. And, of course, treated with a disrespect. I mean, like you're here to do a job. Don't say nothing. Just work.

When the unions came, the union came in and set up there, they got time off. I mean, and basically they were abusing the resources to the point where these guys were so exhausted they were accident-prone. My father did end up with an accident. He had cut his arm while working there. Working long shifts. And so with the union, they got more decent pay. They got better benefits. And then they got a more reasonable work schedule. I can remember that was one of the things. The confidence he had that if he tried to make a request for something, or wanted to be treated with respect, was that he could go to the union leader. So that was good. Without the threat of having to lose a job. He couldn't say anything before that, because you'd lose your job.

DRAGOON: **[57:27]** What year did they unionize, do you think?

LATOUR-PITRE: Let's see. I think he started, I guess, in '56. So I don't remember exactly. But I guess it would have probably been around '58, '59, maybe, that we really started noticing a more reasonable work pattern and more respect on the job. More opportunities, even. Because again, he had done a lot of work as a carpenter and had some of the cement skills and stuff. But they wouldn't, he wouldn't get those, because those are better paying jobs. So, they kept him in the loading or the other processing area.

DRAGOON: I know from other people we've talked to, I've heard stories about explosions at the refineries.

LATOUR-PITRE: Oh, yes. I started to say . . . Yeah, I'm glad you reminded me. I don't know if I mentioned this the last time, but that was like a constant fear. It's like when we talked about the integrated school. When you get to school and you're already in a state of fear. So yeah, and even now, for some of the older people in this area, I think, we still wonder, okay, are we ever going to hear that big boom again? Because you would hear some of, depending on what type of explosion it was, it could have been really, really bad for the community. So every time you heard a sound, you didn't know whether this was going to be the really bad one for the community. But the house would rattle. I don't ever remember like really breaking windows at the house. Maybe cracking. But yeah, the house would rattle and then that god-awful sound, whistle, would start going off. Everybody held their breath. Because those of us who had families in the plants, until you could hear from them, no cell phones, until they would finally show up at home, you didn't know. You didn't know how bad it was. You didn't know who was injured. I try to tell that to my young men now. "I don't want to work at the plant. It's unsafe there." No, you don't know unsafe. Plants are safe now. [laughs] All of the safety requirements they have now, and the process . . . the way they process their product now, it's nothing like it used to be.

DRAGOON: **[1:00:01]** Did you hear about a lot of injuries that would happen to people you knew?

LATOUR-PITRE: I didn't hear about a lot of them. But I had heard of some of them. As a younger child, because like I said, by the time, around '56, I was around ten years old. So between '56 and '58 when I started to become more aware of it, once the unions got in, it was at least a little bit better because they started imposing some of the safety requirements, also. Between that and then the EPA [Environmental Protection Agency] started to kick in in the '60s and '70s. And so then once they came in with the air qualities and the water qualities and the OSHA [Occupational Safety and Health Administration] requirements. So, you hear of injuries. There were still explosions after that where you would hear somebody was killed in an explosion. But I would imagine it probably was a lot worse than that when I was young. At a certain age, I was just too young to pay attention to it.

DRAGOON: **[1:01:08]** Before the EPA, were folks in Mossville talking about the air quality or the water quality?

LATOUR-PITRE: I think what happened for a long time was an acceptance. Because even now, you hear a lot about this is your livelihood. We're going to come in and we're going to make changes, we're going to buy out a community. But look at the opportunities this is going to afford for you. Once black men start being able to start getting into these refineries, any of the environmental concerns that maybe was there and should have been thought about, it was like, the more focus was on at least I finally got a decent job; and it was sold that you got a decent job. I think it wasn't until much later, when you get a new generation coming in and then start on a bigger awareness of some of it, because even now, not all the elders would probably say oh, we have a problem. It would be like leave them alone, it's job security. But as times changed and

generations changed, people started to go, wait a minute, we need to be more concerned about how is this impacting our community.

[1:02:22] My personal feeling is that once that started in the Mossville community, it resulted in what we're dealing with today. Their solution to oh, you think you have a problem, is let's just shut the community down, because we're not going to keep fighting with you guys and try to appease you guys and try to pay you guys, we'll just buy out the community and shut it down. That's how a lot of us feel they managed the concern the community had about the quality. The air quality used to be pretty bad around here . . . pretty atrocious. When I first got married and left, and I'd come home, and even now some days when I'm going to work, there's a yellow haze. But compared to the way it used to be, it has improved tremendously. That may be an overstatement. But it has improved a lot.

But the water quality is an area where I still feel . . . And that's again one of the problems that Mossville was having. When you live there and you see what kind of water's coming out of the taps, it's like, are you serious? And the concern . . . And then when you hear actual reports of people discussing actual reports where there's a plume lurking. I think that's another, the refineries took advantage of the fact that the community was not well-informed, was not well aware, was not . . . was more interested in their jobs than protecting the environment at the time, because it hadn't manifested. They figured hey, what, they don't see it. So I think they took advantage of that and were . . . It was probably just the nature of business at the time. Like I said, before EPA got really, really stringent, they just produce. They're doing it in foreign countries now. Because as long as there's no restriction, they just threw out and trashed out whatever they needed to, and it was no big deal.

DRAGOON: **[1:04:14]** Do you know what kind of conversations were happening between Mossville and the refineries? Or like what kind of relationship they had? For instance, when the explosion happened, was there a conversation that happened? If windows were broken, did they pay for them? [laughter] Was there any sort of community conversation going on? Or was it mostly just . . .

LATOUR-PITRE: Business as usual.

DRAGOON: . . . go to work, come back.

LATOUR-PITRE: **[1:04:45]** Until Mossville reached . . . some of the people in Mossville reached that era, that place where they started making demands, and it started with the . . . oh, the Oxy . . . oh, gosh. [Brain fart?] brain on that one. Geez, I keep skipping across my brain. But a few years ago, the material that they found made national news and everything. Until that happened, like I said, I think for the most part, you probably always have a small element, a small group of people who are looking up and asking questions and wondering what's going on. But until that spreads out and you get enough people interested in what's going on, there's no obligation to the community. I don't remember them . . . When all of the hoopla started, and they started filing charges and what have you, the refineries, and especially the ones closer to Mossville community, became more interested in opening up a dialog with them. Conoco Philips was involved in the situation once before, and they wanted to discuss.

I attended a meeting once at the Mossville community regarding what do you want to do about the pollution that's in the air, in the air. And what do you . . . Well, what I heard was: we

want restitution, we want to be compensated for what happened to us. But there's always that caution of, but we don't want to make them mad. This is my personal feeling. It's like, we want to make them responsible, but we don't want to make them mad. Well, when you're caught in a position like that, it's really kind of hard for you to sit down and come up with some really serious valid, and especially if you look at the community. If you're just starting a movement and you don't have the history, the knowledge, the experience of knowing how to put this stuff together, they want something, but they can't tell you exactly what it is. And I think their concerns were valid, or still are valid for those who going to even stay. But as long as the refinery . . . So I think the refineries took the position: well until you can give us very specific ideas of what it is that you want from us, we don't know what to do for you. Well, I don't think they were like really community-friendly as they could have been, because I think they could have recognized the people's concern. And they knew that there was some cases where there was a legitimate concern, enough to say . . . but it was business as usual. I'm busy. I hear you.

[1:07:33] So like I said, again, when we get to the point where we are now, where the community is being dismantled, that became the solution: let's just shut the community down. This might be the sensitive piece of information . . . discussion, part of the discussion. But I think the community leaders were not diligent enough in what happened with the Mossville community. Having been in businesses and stuff like that, you know there's always a five to ten-year plan of what they're going to be doing, and whether there's expansions, and what their plans are. If they have a five to ten-year plan to expand in a parish, in a community, somebody in the parish has to know about that. Somebody has to have some idea that this is what we're going to be proposing. I found it interesting that the police jurors who represent the parish, maybe we had one, maybe, that attended a meeting. But it was mum's the word. They didn't . . . They could

have come out in advance. This is what frustrated the community. Because when they finally heard how draconian it was going to be, how they were going to handle the problem, shut down the community, it was a real shocker, I think, for a lot of us. This is the best way? This is how it's going to happen?

[1:08:53] So I think a lot of us felt like where are our leaders? Why weren't you talking to the refineries and telling them, "You've got to make a better effort at working with the community and cleaning it, and keeping it clean and safe if you want to stay next to them . . . somehow or another. Make the community feel like we hear you, we have your best interests at heart, let's work together, community. We don't feel that happen in that way. And I think if it had, you wouldn't have had so many frustrated and irate people. Because you give a good explanation and ulterior motive, or ulterior plan to people, most of them will understand, will accept, I believe. It makes sense. You've got something you can hold onto. So I think I'm going off point. But [laughs] as a community, one of the community members of that community, that's my personal feeling about what happened.

[1:09:55] I think the money moved in, the opportunities move in at a level where I'm not even sure it's benefiting the people in Mossville and a lot of the people here. When I hear there's an expansion, there will be forty thousand jobs, and then three thousand permanent jobs, what does that do for the people here? Forty thousand jobs are contractors. That's people who's going to come in, they're going to make big bucks. I look at my sons and my grandson. They're still fighting to get this minimum wage. And everybody keeps saying there's money to be made. Well, there is money to be made. But if you're not doing the contract work, or doing the refinery work, you're fighting to . . . So it's like where's the real opportunity? I work for Advantage Staffing as a contractor. My manager personally said, "They keep saying there's a lot of jobs.

But nobody don't want to pay anybody." She's a placement agency. She's placing people on jobs. She says, "But nobody don't want to pay anybody." So, you look at where is the opportunity for us? Where's the advantage for us? But not everybody feel that way. [laughs]

That is my opinion . . . and my little circle, those of us who discuss. I respect and I admire the people who stay on . . . who decide I'm not selling one way or the other, because even if it stays spotty . . . And that was one of the questions I asked in one of the meetings, now that you've fragmented the community, empty lot here, house there, how do you put together, for those who are going to be staying, how do you now join a community back together? It's going to be smaller. But if they really want to stay and they want to hold on to their property, do you have some kind of plan, some kind of idea, on how you can put the community back together? There's another phase. We're going to talk about that later.

DRAGOON: **[1:12:07]** Alright. I have a few more questions.

LATOUR-PITRE: Okay. Like I said, I do tend to get off tangents. So pull me back. [laughs]

DRAGOON: No, that's great. So I'm going to do a little bit of a time check. We're at an hour, twelve minutes. So maybe just a few more questions.

LATOUR-PITRE: Okay.

DRAGOON: I'm trying to decide. [laughs] What do you think you'll miss most about Mossville?

LATOUR-PITRE: **[1:12:48]** My own personal secret pride of being part of a black community that thrived for as long as it has. I think they were a proud people in that community. And even as I attended some of the meetings for this project, even then I'm hearing stories from people that I didn't even realize grew up in the community. And when I'm hearing them talking about their ancestors, and their connection to the community, I hear the same pride. I think we were a pretty cool little black enclave there in that we had the Creole culture, we had the historical people who were there from the beginning. But I think all of them had a sense of ownership, of this is my accomplishment, this is my land.

[1:13:49] I remember when I first moved away from home, when we were living in Ohio, and people were curious. They wanted to know what was it like living in the South, and about the ghettoes. And it was like, I can't tell you anything about the ghettoes. What I hear about the ghetto, what I know about it, is what you know, is what I hear. I didn't grow up in a ghetto community, or a ghetto area—and I don't mean that in a disparaging sense. But it's like an entire . . . I hear people make movies and say, "Well, this is how blacks live." And it's like no, I'm not . . . that's foreign to me. I didn't grow up like that. A lot of the people in Mossville, most of the people, they didn't grow up like that. We were a supportive community. We were a Peyton Place community. [laughs] Self-sustaining. And when my dad died was an example. Oh, people brought in food. They started, it was like what am I going to do with all this stuff? People were turning into the yard. My dad's funeral was . . . his viewing was just, people everywhere.

Some of it might have been his personality, because he was a man about the community. They knew him.

But that real sense of we are a community. We have to support each other and help take care of each other. And like I said, when I look at, they build their houses good, bad or indifferent, rickety or not, they tried to sustain their houses the best they could. But they didn't lose their properties. They would die and the properties would just sit there. And the lady who sold the property to my parents, Ms. Davis and Ms. Christine next door to us, her dress, her demeanor, her house, her property, just, yeah . . . it was good examples. It was a good environment to grow up in. And then couple that with my Creole culture. And again, like I said with the school, it was a . . . You felt safe in the community, and you felt the support, the respect.

DRAGOON: **[1:16:08]** How has Mossville affected . . . or I guess, how do you see it in your life today? How do you see it in you? How do you see your experience growing up there?

LATOUR-PITRE: In who I am?

DRAGOON: In who you are, yeah.

LATOUR-PITRE: A lot of what I think I just said. We've moved on. A lot of the people I grew up with in the community or was in school with, I don't even hardly communicate with them hardly at all anymore. [door opens] Hi, Chris. My son. But as a family, even when we . . . if we see each other out, the biggest problem everybody tease me about is I can't remember anybody. When you leave home and you've been gone for forty years, it's embarrassing. People

will come to me and they'll start talking to me and it's like I know the face, and they're calling me by name, and I'm going like I cannot remember who they are. [laughs] My sister tease me all the time, "Don't go out unless Cecelia's with you, because she's the only way you're going to be able to know who everybody is."

[1:17:21] But like I said, I think my culture, my family dynamics and the community helped me develop a sense of confidence, of pride. And not egotistical pride, but an acknowledge . . . Here's a comment I tell my nieces, nephews and kids: When you're confronted as a black person and say why are you here, or should you be here, or get an attitude with me about who I am because of the color of my skin, my response to them is, "Did your ancestors come in through Ellis Island? Or were they here in the 1600s, in the 1700s?" I come from a people who've been here. We've been here a long time. We helped shape this country. This is my land. I think living in a community like that helped me understand that, and to develop an attitude about I belong here. I don't have to be afraid. I don't have to convince you of anything. Just like I said. This land is my land. My dad worked this land, he cleared that land, he built himself a house on it. So it's a certain amount of . . . and it's something you learn as you're growing.

[1:18:41] Initially when you're at a certain age, you can't really appreciate it. But when you get old enough and you look back and you can see, then you start to really understand how it has played into your life. The school I told you about, being in that environment, in that all-black school with teachers who really took their job serious. The dress, again. You could clearly tell who was a teacher and who was a kid the way they presented themselves. They were very proud people in terms of having been able to accomplish an education where they could then educate. So I think that helped, and a confidence that yes, you can, if you tried. Just give it a shot. Because I think there, at that time, the walls weren't up so much within my community. I knew if

I left the community, then I had to deal with walls. But the walls were not up. So that if I was given an opportunity, or suggested, give it a try. My mother was a big give it a try. I guess both of my parents were, too. I guess maybe that's where it comes from, too. Don't settle for . . . Go for it. Just plug it. See what happens. So yeah, I think it has shaped me, helped shape how I live my life now. The respect, the support, and the confidence to make the effort, see what you get.

DRAGOON: **[1:20:11]** Okay. I think we're going to wrap up. Is there anything else you'd like to add?

LATOUR-PITRE: I thought of something the other day. Talking about memories again . . . Now maybe I said this before. One of the best memories was before we had television. We probably had a little radio, because my mom was in, she loved music. And she probably had a little broken radio someplace. We didn't have good reception. Aside from Dad playing and us with the spoons and the rubbing board and having dances right there, just the five of us at that time. It was just the first three and my parents, sitting on the front porch in the summer in the heat with the smoke [pipe?], watching the moon cross the yard like it was daylight. And there was this dog we had who would run up and down the highway barking at the least little something. Those were some of my best memories. And dad would tell us stories. My mom would swear some of them didn't sound quite true. [laughs] It was . . . And we would sit there for eight, nine o'clock at night. And then all the lights were out. Didn't want to draw the mosquitoes. Then go in and settle in for the night. Yeah.

The other gem that I remember about Mossville—and I hope somebody have enough information— is Pete and Virginia Moss. I think I might have mentioned them before, too, with

the wagon and the horse. They would go . . . Pete and Virginia would just come along in their wagon. There was hardly any traffic on that little road at the time. You could always see Pete and Virginia doing their little daily runs, doing their business, whatever. So that's one of our little fond memories. And the woods. I'm a lot more fearful now than I used to be. [laughs] We'd go out in those woods and just disappear and spend hours picking berries and fruits. And there was just so much stuff back in the woods back there.

[1:22:16] So I don't think I would say that I'm going to miss Mossville, because I think Mossville's going to be there in some form and shape. But I think as I, when I left home and I came back, because even when I got back, I had family members going like, "Oh, Mossville is dead. Mossville is nothing. They need to come in and plow it all under." But I don't . . . And I think because they stayed here, they didn't see what I saw. I don't think they saw it the same way I saw it. That every time I came back, it was still here. Even when it ran down, and then it came back up and it was still here. And that was a good feeling to be able to come . . . because you're going home. It's still there. It's home. It's still home. You could go and you could still see home. So now I see patches all over the place. But if I can see one or two houses I recognize, then I'll be home. [laughs]

DRAGOON: Thank you so much.

LATOUR-PITRE: You're welcome. I hope I gave you something useful.

DRAGOON: Thank you. You really . . . It was wonderful. Thank you.

LATOUR-PITRE: I came from an awesome family. Well, I guess I still do. It's a little bit nutty sometimes, but we're cool. [laughter]

DRAGOON: Okay.

LATOUR-PITRE: I thank you ladies for taking . . .

[1:23:29]

[End Tape 4544. End Session II.]