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JENNIFER ABRAHAM CRAMER: Ready? Alright, wonderful. Okay, so today is January the twenty-eighth, 2016. This is Jennifer Abraham Cramer with the T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History with LSU [Louisiana State Universities] Libraries, and we are working in conjunction with the Imperial Calcasieu Museum on a project to document the history of Mossville [Louisiana]. And this is interview session number three with Mr. Edward Butch Lemelle.

EDWARD BUTCH LEMELLE JR.: That is he.

CRAMER: [00:35] That is he. And we are here today in his house in Sulphur, Louisiana. And your wife is also present, so can we get you to state your full name for the record? What is your full name?

LEONA LEMELLE: Leona Lemelle.

CRAMER: Okay. What was your maiden name?

LEONA LEMELLE: Rideau, R-I-D-E-A-U.

CRAMER: Okay. Very good. Okay, so it's Leona, and Butch and I, and Rebecca is the audio engineer, and Chelsea is over in the corner as well. So we got a big group over here today. So what we're doing is we're picking up from interview number two where we left off.

LEMELLE: Okay.

CRAMER: [01:11] And we're going to talk . . . We've got a lot of different topics to discuss, but I still have some questions from listening to the second interview, and just some things you were talking about, and I wanted to see if you could elaborate a little bit on some of them. So in your last interview you talked about how in the '40s and the '50s leaders . . . about how leaders, mostly elders and men, would get together to decide political actions. For example, voting for one person for . . . you gave the example of sheriff, and then how everybody would get together and be on one card, and that men would make the decision. And so I was just curious as to how did people . . . how did the men come to those kind of decisions? Did, you know, what kind of decisions they would be.

LEMELLE: Well as I can remember one of the descendants of some of the former founders of Mossville, the first families, were the Rigmaidens, the Mosses, and some of that generation that fell beneath that generation. Especially . . . there was one, Mr. Josh Rigmaiden, who we considered more like the little mayor of Mossville. And there was a Mr. Dallas Moss, which was a descendant of the original Moss family. Well either at the . . . Mr. Josh Rigmaiden's place, he had a little business, Rigmaiden's Grocery, and of course Mount Zion Church. Mr. Moss, Dallas Moss, was probably one of the old deacons there at the church, some of the first members.

And these were the kind of men that got together, and they discussed . . . hate to use the word politics, but they discussed leadership. Who would be best fitted for our little community. Who would fill the needs of the community? And once they discussed that among themselves, a few of the men of the community and the church, well this is when they would call—then they were called the “body” of the community leaders and families together and say, "This is what we would like to do. This is who we think would be best fitted for our sheriff. Sheriff Ham Reed, we think this is who we need. We think that," I guess I can call names, “that Mr. Frank Salter was best fitted for our district attorney.” And it was a unanimous decision that was made. Usually a hundred percent of the community went that way. Even things affiliated with the Mossville School. The men then were leaders, and the women were followers. [Laughs]

CRAMER: You say that while looking over at Leona like, "Uh oh." [Laughs]

LEMELLE: [04:17] But, in all sincerity, the men in those day in the '40s and the '50s they made . . . I guess they made the decisions for the community that were best suited for the community.

CRAMER: So what would the needs of the community be? Can you think of some examples of what . . . How, for example, Ham Reed or . . . I forget, Frank Salter . . .

LEMELLE: Frank Salter.

CRAMER: . . . like how could they help with those type of needs?

LEMELLE: [04:47] Well in any given community or any area where there was families, there was also . . . between your school and families there was also a need of discipline. And if young men or young women got into certain situations, then they knew that Mr. Ham Reed would assist in that particular young person's life, and not to just take them and slam them in jail. I guess that was one of the biggest things is that we had people that the community leaders could go to and say, "Well this is Mr. Lemelle's son, and yes, he made a mistake so let's see what kind of way we can correct him besides putting him behind bars." There's other means that we could take. Put him on the football field and make him run, or make him come over to Mr. Rigmaiden's store and clean up.

We had community service in those days. They just coming up with it, but we had community services. You may have to go and from your punishment might have been to go clean somebody's yard, or whatever. But this is most of what the men were, with people in leadership as far as like the sheriff's department, the district attorney, school board, all these things. Those men paid close attention to see that we had, I guess, a way of letting leadership fall into the community. They would appoint even men as like little deputies and stuff.

[06:42] In fact, when I was in high school one of our school bus drivers was Mr. J.C. Hamilton who moved us to Mossville community. And he played a big part because Mr. Hamilton was a school bus driver, but he worked under them as a . . . I can't think of what it was, but it was more like a little policeman. And he had his little badge, and of course, he had his gun. Civil defense, that's what it was. Civil defense fell under the leadership of the sheriff's department. He was with the civil defense. He was very active with the young people because he was the bus driver, but he'd taken us on trips wherever we had to go. And of course, from Mossville school up to [Goodly?] Road you didn't . . . you stayed out of trouble. Everybody

knew you was going to get it when you got in. Somebody was paying attention to the kids. And the authority was given to them. They that authority.

CRAMER: [07:54] So a couple of other questions while you were talking, came to mind. One is, what about the laws that weren't necessarily fair that were broken? So for example, Jim Crow laws or anything like that. So what if somebody got arrested for something that today wouldn't even be lawful to arrest somebody for? I mean, I know that's kind of a leading question and I apologize but . . .

LEMELLE: Well I'm almost say some of the . . . Jim Crow, man that was a hard one. Because back, to me, young people, we didn't get into too many serious things. It was always little old minor things, and there was some things that happened and it came back down to . . . with adults that it came back down to who you knew. There were gofers . . . go forth and speak for you. A lot of people are shy of the idea that a little community like this how many murders we've had here in the Mossville community. There was a few, but a lot of times the men . . . Again I say, like Mr. Josh Rigmaiden, would go and plead this person's case. Unless it was just purely out of . . . I know several people that what you got away with then for such a short period of time, of jail time, you would do some serious time now. You would do some life or . . .

CRAMER: Like negligent homicide kind of thing?

LEMELLE: Right.

CRAMER: Like that?

LEMELLE: Right.

CRAMER: [09:36] Like if there's a fight . . .

LEMELLE: Fight.

CRAMER: Breaks out and somebody . . .

LEMELLE: Breaks out and someone gets shot or get cut or stabbed to death. That's the best I can remember on that.

CRAMER: Well my other questions are, so why all men? What . . . You kind of jokingly said sort of . . . You had a big smile on your face. You said, "The women followed." So what was it? Was that just the times, or what role did women play in these big decisions?

LEMELLE: I would think to say that, my way of thinking, the women played a great part, because I would say ninety percent of the women that I can remember when I was coming up was either Sanctified, Baptist . . . Ninety percent of the community that's what it was. And the women then, they fought for right according to God's word. So they played a big part in the church and brought that to the home. So women . . . My mom was a pretty solid lady. A lot of things that we would have gotten away with my father, but we didn't get away with the mother.

And the mothers and the women, kept their homes in order. They kept their communities. Some of the strongest educators were women. I would think that when I was in high school eighty percent of the instructors were women, and this was women that didn't play. You met Ms. Rogers. Always mention her name. And there was others: Ms. Paige, Ms. Cole, they had . . .

[11:42] So I'm saying in the community to me it started with the women first of all in the church, their beliefs and their fear of God, and they brought this to the home. And then husbands and wives would sit down and come to an agreement. And this is man's law and this is God's law, so we put them together see what we going to come up with. Man say this, and God say this, so we put it together and we going to make this thing work for the kids. That was the biggest thing, I think, when I was coming up. Everybody provided for the kids. It was all about children coming up. You didn't make mistakes down the road. Everyone was . . . Every parent was responsible for someone else kid. It taken a village to raise the kids. This is what Mossville was all about.

Sometime I talk about it and I get . . . I don't know if I just get full in memories of how it was being . . . I use the word tutor. Being tutored by so many adults. Everybody was concerned about everybody's child. My mother's home, I can't tell you how many young men came through that house that if I picked up the phone now and called them say, "Oh man, I remember when we did such and such thing at Big Mama's house. I remember that Sunday man, you know." Not only my mother's, but I can speak that because I know, but I know other guys that I grew up with. I have a dear, dear friend. He lives in Florida. His name was [Leeman Shanker?]. We still yet communicate by phone at least two or three times a week. His father was my Cub Scout leader, and we still talk about those days when we all gathered at Mr. Shanker's house, we all gathered at Mount Zion church and different ones would come in. Mr. McKeever Edwards was a

great teacher. And like I say, sometimes I think about the walks that I had from my school to my home. The people that paid attention to you and what you were doing. I guess it brings tears.

My wife would tell you how much I'm glad that we . . . God provided for us, but it was a hurt for me to have to give up my community. But I knew it was nothing I could do about it. But just the old memories, oh man. We have some memories that if I could share every memory I had with people and let them realize why this is just so important to me is the oral history of my grandkids and great grandkids can say, "Well this is what Paw-Paw came from. This is why he's where he's at." Mossville, just Mossville.

CRAMER: Painting that picture, that's what we're really trying to do. Now this is totally and completely jumping ahead, but I figure while we're kind of on the subject I'm very curious to know . . . You're here now. You're in Sulphur. You've moved from Mossville to Sulphur. What is the community of Mossville like? And by that I sort of mean are you able to keep up with people on a regular basis with whom you used to be neighbors, go to church, and if so kind of how. I know it's a long convoluted question, but just how is that going for you right now?

LEMELLE: [15:59] And I'm always on a percentage. If I taken a hundred percent of the people that I knew and lived in Mossville, I guess we're down to twenty percent that we communicate with daily, weekly, I have in my community left there. My family from the Towners and the Lemelles, I only have two of my families that's still there. That's two sisters. My niece, nephews, they already gone. And out of those . . . I'm just going to put it like this. My mother had six kids, twenty or thirty grands, and so many great-great grands, and out of all of those I think we have maybe four families that . . . I have two sisters and a couple of nieces and

nephews that we talk to frequently. And the closest one I have is a first cousin, Mr. [Artis Ledoux?]. We communicate all the time. But on a scale from one to ten, I'd say we about two that we communicate with. Half of the people that was my neighbors, I don't even know where they are now. I really don't. I have a first cousin that lived across the street from me behind the church. I don't even know where he's at.

CRAMER: So you don't see them at church or . . . ?

LEMELLE: [17:32] He doesn't go to our church. He lived . . . His home was behind the church. His name was [Carey?]. This was the guy that say he wants to give an oral history of what his thing was about Mossville. He [. . . ?] and stuff. He . . . I don't even . . . I saw him . . . What, Sunday?

LEONA LEMELLE: Carey?

LEMELLE: A couple of Sundays ago? No, I saw him for Christmas.

LEONA LEMELLE: Yeah, because that was . . .

LEMELLE: We had a Christmas dinner, the Lemelles, and he came.

LEONA LEMELLE: Yeah.

LEMELLE: And I haven't seen . . . I'm just saying people that I saw every day. My cousin across the street, Tommy Prater, she lived . . . she in Sulphur, but we don't communicate anymore. Her brother lives way out in Iowa [Louisiana] . . . almost to Iowa. So Mossville as a whole is scattered.

CRAMER: Right. And so when you do it's like by phone or sometimes seeing people at reunion, like Christmas.

LEMELLE: Walmart.

CRAMER: [18:33] Walmart. The gathering place, right? [Laughs]

LEMELLE: The gathering place. [Laughs] Or like you say, if you have a family . . . We had a Christmas dinner and last week we had a birthday with my favorite cousin, Joanne. So a lot of the family . . . Because every fifth Sunday of the month, every fifth Sunday through the year I get the Towner family together and we have dinner as a family. So since the fifth Sunday was so close and her birthday, we did it all for her birthday. That way we won't have a fifth Sunday this time. We won't have dinner this time.

CRAMER: What's a fifth Sunday?

LEMELLE: It's just the fifth Sunday of the month.

CRAMER: Oh, if you happen to have a really long month or something. Is that what that . . . ?

LEMELLE: Right. With five Sundays in the month.

LEONA LEMELLE: Yeah, we don't have that many.

LEMELLE: So this year I think we have four. Four months that'll have a fifth Sunday. So this is what I've done in the last . . . what? Three years?

LEONA LEMELLE: [19:29] No, because . . .

LEMELLE: This was an idea for my family, because I've seen family just going to opposite to the way we were raised to go.

CRAMER: You mean physically or morally?

LEMELLE: Morally, morally, morally. Our kids. My little . . . I'm going to say great-great nieces and nephews, my second and third cousins from that age of fifteen to twenty-five were just going a different . . . And I thought if I brought families together . . . And Carey's one of them I'm speaking of. I thought if we brought people like that together his sons that are teenagers would see family love and family values mean more than anything else. You're standing on the grounds at this church where your grandmother and grandfather sweat blood to raise us and raise us the right way. Excuse this, I'll be dog gone if I'm not going to put forth an effort to help you

stay in the right path. And I think it helped. It brings us together. So since you didn't know what fifth Sunday was, that's every month that has five Sundays in it. We . . . So with this month having this Sunday being the fifth Sunday of the month we did it for her birthday. We had all the family come together to celebrate her birthday, Joanne's. She's seventy years old.

CRAMER: [21:15] That's almost . . . She's older than you.

LEMELLE: She's about . . . A few days. Her birthday's on the twenty-first. Mine is the fourth. We were born . . . That's my mother's oldest brother's daughter. What? You can speak out.

CRAMER: Yeah. What'd you say?

LEONA LEMELLE: I said he was born, she was changing life.

LEMELLE: Oh yeah my mother was in her forties when I was born.

CRAMER: You were a miracle baby.

LEONA LEMELLE: [21:43] Yeah.

LEMELLE: Aren't you glad?

CRAMER: And you were the baby-baby.

LEMELLE: I was the baby-baby.

LEONA LEMELLE: And I was the oldest one in the family of twelve children.

CRAMER: Oh my goodness.

LEONA LEMELLE: [21:54] So that's a big gap there.

CRAMER: Oh my goodness. That's a big gap. Wow. We need to come back and do your oral history. Yes ma'am. Yes ma'am. Yes, we need to know all about your family I think.

LEMELLE: Need to know about your family.

CRAMER: While we have the chance.

LEONA LEMELLE: A little bit.

CRAMER: A little bit. We'll do a little bit.

LEMELLE: Anytime you're the oldest of twelve kids, and out of the twelve that was alive only you've lost one brother, that's a lot of good history.

CRAMER: [22:26] That's a lot of good genes, too.

LEONA LEMELLE: It is.

CRAMER: Yeah, right.

LEMELLE: She's the eldest and I think the baby of the family is close to sixty, huh?

LEONA LEMELLE: Sixty-one or sixty-two.

LEMELLE: Ruth Anne is the baby so . . .

CRAMER: Yes, one day we would really like it. We can do it short and sweet. We can maybe even do it together. Well, so going back to the past, I have one more question about the political decision making during that time. So you talked about the sheriff and the district attorney. What about positions like the mayor of . . . I guess would it be the mayor of Lake Charles? Or is there a mayor of Westlake?

LEMELLE: [23:06] We never did have too much . . . I'm going to put it like this. We jump city and went all the way to the state.

CRAMER: Okay.

LEMELLE: As far as the mayor of Westlake, the mayor of Lake Charles, never did really play a big part in us being . . . We were not either in the city. We were parish. So the sheriff was

Calcasieu Parish. Played a big part. The district attorney was the district attorney of Calcasieu Parish. So I'm going to bring you a name that you've heard before, but there was a governor by the name of Edwin Edwards who, Mr. Valery Montgomery could come in not read or write, but go in his pocket full of numbers and pick out a number and call it and say, "This is Val Montgomery. I need to speak to Governor Edwards." They'd tell him, "Hold on a second Mr. Valery." "Hello Valery, this is Governor Edwards. What you got?" "Well dadadada" "Okay and what I want you to do then, Val, is get in touch with Richard Ieyoub who's your . . ." At that time Richard Iyeoub was in office, too, as a district attorney after Frank Salter. "You got a problem there and Mossville you get in touch with Richard Iyeoub. Tell him I said to call me." So we jumped the city . . .

CRAMER: Right.

LEMELLE: . . . and went all the way to the state . . .

CRAMER: Parish.

LEMELLE: . . . with the government's office.

CRAMER: [24:32] So what kind of relationship did Valery Montgomery and Edwin Edwards have? Like how did they even meet? What was the nature of their interaction?

LEMELLE: Back to leadership. Whenever there was time for elections, community leaders started, this is who we think that we might want to be our governor. So we're going to invite the

Crowley [Louisiana] boy to come down to Mossville. Edwin Edwards was a country boy from Crowley. So he's invited to come to Mossville and meet different ones. Valery Montgomery and his brother Wes, and different ones were more or less who was introduced. And it goes back to a place of business, where back then Valery Montgomery had a night club which was called The Paradise. This was an easy place for someone that is running for office to come and say, "Okay we're going to come Saturday, and we're going to campaign here. We're going to furnish all the food and whatever if you would just furnish us a place to come."

[25:56] And this was one of the ways that Valery Montgomery got in touch with a lot of people in the political realm. And I can remember the first time that I met Edwin Edwards was at Valery Montgomery's The Paradise Club. And even Mr. Ieyoub, she remembers Mr. Ieyoub. But Frank Salter . . . All these people I remember, and of course I stuck my nose in to kind of hear and get to be friends, too. "My name is Butch Lemelle. I'm from Mossville. Blah, blah, blah." "Oh, okay. If you need something, call me." "All right." So it goes back to what I said. It all started at the top of leadership in the community. And that's how Mr. Valery Montgomery got so popular. I'm serious, this man could pick up the phone and call.

LEONA LEMELLE: Excuse me. If that man would have went to school, Valery, and got some education he'd be sitting where you're sitting now.

CRAMER: Probably higher.

LEONA LEMELLE: He's smart.

CRAMER: Be a lot higher than me.

LEMELLE: He's about ninety years old now.

CRAMER: I regret that we could not interview him.

LEMELLE: [27:13] His daughter, she said if you want to try again it's some things that I could help her with because some things Judy has forgotten that I remember. A lot of things about his father and his business and everything.

CRAMER: I think that would be wonderful. Didn't you say he sometimes speaks French?

LEMELLE: He's a Frenchman.

CRAMER: Right. So . . .

LEMELLE: But I don't want Wes anymore involved.

CRAMER: Okay. I understand.

LEMELLE: You can put that on tape. I don't want him involved because Wes is all about himself. I want a story about Mr. Valery Montgomery and about Mossville.

CRAMER: Yeah, you said he's almost ninety?

LEMELLE: [27:48] He should be ninety.

CRAMER: Yeah, if we can . . . If there's a possibility that we could set that up . . .

LEMELLE: All I have to do is go by there and a get in touch with his daughter and say, "Okay Judy, they want to do your father's interview again. You need to come in and I'll come sit with them and help you out with things, the questions you might not remember." Another person that probably would remember a lot, he has a brother-in-law, Mr. John Bernard. What is it? Bernard?

LEONA LEMELLE: Yeah. [. . .?]

LEMELLE: Mr. John?

LEONA LEMELLE: Yeah, John Bernard.

LEMELLE: Was his brother-in-law and he was always around Val's business.

CRAMER: Kind of like a second hand person?

LEMELLE: [28:38] And he can speak French.

CRAMER: Okay.

LEONA LEMELLE: Parlez français, honey.

LEMELLE: Not parlez français. Parlez-vous français.

LEONA LEMELLE: Parlez-vous français.

CRAMER: No, no I don't parlez-vous français.

LEONA LEMELLE: My mother and daddy did.

CRAMER: [0:28:53] Yeah. Now did your dad speak French? I know we talked about this in one of our oral histories.

LEMELLE: Yes. Yes.

CRAMER: He did. Is it . . . Where was he from?

LEMELLE: My father was born in Leonville [Louisiana],

CRAMER: That's right. That's right.

LEMELLE: Around Opelousas [Louisiana].

CRAMER: Yeah.

LEMELLE: [29:08] Leonville.

CRAMER: They're French. I mean, they speak French over there.

LEMELLE: Right.

CRAMER: Julia was talking about how he knew some home remedies and stuff, but we can address that later. I still have . . . I think that might be all the questions from the political stuff, and we've got it down so you are . . . We're going to reexamine the possibility of interviewing Valery again.

LEMELLE: Okay.

CRAMER: That would be wonderful, and you offering to help with that. And then maybe John Bernard who also speaks French.

LEMELLE: Who did him before?

CRAMER: We never got a chance because we had set it up . . .

LEMELLE: I thought someone went in?

CRAMER: [29:47] We tried to be then he got sick, and we interviewed Wes instead.

LEONA LEMELLE: That was a mistake.

CRAMER: Yeah. So then we just dropped it. So if there's a possibility, even half an hour . . .

LEMELLE: Yeah.

CRAMER: . . . just to get some of his ninety years of history down.

LEMELLE: Oh, man.

CRAMER: With the help of you and some . . . maybe a French speaker. But even if we can't get . . . Oh, yeah. We could maybe get some translation on the transcription.

LEMELLE: [30:17] I think what it is with him now is according to . . . I guess he's more dementia now. And it's according to how what's clicking that day.

CRAMER: Right. And sometimes people who have Alzheimer's or dementia remember the past well.

LEMELLE: The past. Well.

CRAMER: So that's . . . I mean, I think if we could get him at a good time.

LEMELLE: [30:40] I'm going to check with Judy and see.

CRAMER: Okay, that's great. Thank you.

LEONA LEMELLE: Where does he live?

LEMELLE: To what?

LEONA LEMELLE: Where do John live?

LEMELLE: Mr. John is in Moss Bluff, baby.

CRAMER: So I think we talked about . . . I was going to ask this again, but I think we already talked about it. You had mentioned . . . you said that the community, around the '60s, the community lost leadership. And you kind of mentioned changes in government, younger generations became more radical, things just sort of changed in the '60s, and that there was a loss of leadership. I was wondering if there was anything specific you wanted to add to that. Did the loss of leadership last?

LEMELLE: [31:23] I would say the latter part of the '60s. Because the early '60s was good, the latter, latter part of the '60s when there were changes being made in government, in the world as a whole. The movement in the '60s, and we all know that in the '60s there were marches that began for equal rights. And some of the things that was being done was against what our great Dr. Martin Luther King was preaching and teaching. And we saw it coming down, I guess, where we had younger people then wanted to be more of a radical act. Of course, I came out of school in '65 and we were totally different. But during that period of time from '67, '68, '69, to me, it was a change because it was almost that you had to do what was being done in order to . . .

CRAMER: Pause it? We can pause this.

LEMELLE: You want to pause?

CRAMER: Yeah.

[break in tape]

CRAMER: When it was on pause I asked . . . You were talking about leadership some more and I said, "Look, you know was it basically after Josh Rigmaiden died that the leadership changed?" And you said . . .

LEMELLE: [33:24] Well it was not that we lacked leadership, but it was a different type of leadership. Because everything, what you know, everything in the cities or whatever, trickles

down to your small cities, your smallest communities. And it just wasn't a place for a Malcolm X type neighborhood because this is what we weren't all about. So leaders then became, I would say more pushy. I don't like to call people radical, but more pushy because they felt that's what had to be done in order to have your voice heard. Examples, people heard the great Dr. Martin Luther King and the type of messages that he brought, always being strong, humble. But then there were others that was bringing a different message that was strong and more on the radical-type of force. So all this trickled down from the big city to a smaller city down to small communities.

[34:55] Mossville is not the only community in the world that had went through some of the things that we went through. But somehow we still try to stay focused on what the real issue was. What were we looking for. I wanted my daughter to have the same . . . and my children to have the same opportunity that any other red-blooded American had because I felt that we were citizens of a great, great United States, and one of the sweetest, finest communities on God's earth. So it wasn't a loss. It was a loss of the way we were. It was a loss in change. To me it's that simple. It was a loss in change, the way you did business, the way things did, the way things . . . Even in the homes people that changing in their homes because, "we have to do this *because*." No, you don't have to. You stay with what you . . .

This is one things I've always said about my wife. She's always stayed firm into what she believed the way your children should have been. And she do it with her grandkids. This is the way my daddy did. To me it was right. It kept me straight. I didn't steal. I didn't lie. I didn't do this. And we respected out neighbor. We respected the law. We respected God. And a lot of this, we lost in our little small community. We lost a lot of this. And I'm going to tell you the reason why. In my opinion, by mistakes. Younger people start doing what they had to do. People from

other places moved in to our area. You called the latest name a minute ago that gave a history, she's not a Mossvillion. She passed through and married a Mossvillion, which did not make her a Mossvillion. I am a Mossvillion. But I thank God she became a Mossvillion with me, and she helped stay with the old rules and stay with the old way. That's the way it went. So leadership just changed.

CRAMER: So during this time period Mossville was growing, then? So it like . . . There were different economic opportunities and that's why people were coming? What kind of economic activities were there?

LEMELLE: [37:54] Well let me put it like this, when you're in a rural area such as Mossville, we were on the map with probably one of the greatest black schools in the state. When people were coming here Mossville High School was a school that, in the '59s, a few years, they were recognized statewide academically, sports. And then there were jobs that came open. But of course it was economical for someone to move here and pay forty thousand dollars for a house then to go somewhere else and pay ninety-five. So everything here was less expensive for them to move to Mossville. Buy them some land, build them a home, and settle in this community. It was less expensive than to go somewhere else.

CRAMER: Where were people working?

LEMELLE: [39:00] Well a lot of people came into construction work. The refineries, for an example. I keep calling this man's name. His family to me was always a great family, Mr. Valery

Montgomery. I was a little boy when he and Wes and them move here from around Lafayette [Louisiana] out in the country. And they met my father, and I still say Wes will remember they came and met my father and my father loaned him his first fifty cents. And that's when Mr. Valery and them start working into the construction part of building the refinery or the refinery area. And Valery and Wes got blessed to get into Conoco as hired laborers. And I think Val stayed at Conoco refinery probably for thirty plus years, he and Wes, and with his other business. So people move here because it was a great place to come. And the cost of living for you wasn't extreme if you was living somewhere in Maplewood trying to go to work in Cities Service.

CRAMER: What other . . . So there's Cities Service. There was Conoco. There was construction around it. What other places were employing people?

LEMELLE: That's about it.

CRAMER: Okay.

LEMELLE: [40:25] Those were probably your main sources of income was your refineries, which was the two major refineries: Cities Service and Conoco. That was before. This was back in the '50s and '60s that it was really booming.

CRAMER: So we're going to change gears a little bit here, because we talked about you living in Boulder, Colorado briefly. But we didn't talk about how long you lived there, when you came back, who you lived with. So I'm going to ask you all those questions. You said you went

when you were sixteen? So that makes . . . I'm terrible with math.

LEMELLE: What year was that?

CRAMER: Sixty-two, maybe?

LEMELLE: Sixty-one?

CRAMER: [0:41:08] Sixty-one? Okay.

LEMELLE: Sixty . . . I'd have to call her.

LEONA LEMELLE: [. . .?]

CRAMER: So early '60s.

LEMELLE: Probably 1960 because I would have been like a freshman in high school.

CRAMER: How long did you stay there?

LEMELLE: [41:26] I stayed there probably half the year. Went to school.

CRAMER: Who did you . . .

LEMELLE: I lived with . . . Back in those days we call your mother's godchild your love sister or half-sister.

LEONA LEMELLE: Oh okay.

LEMELLE: [41:34] And in other words my mother's baby sister's daughter that my grandmother raised. Her name was Gwendolyn Harris. She married a Hardy. And she moved from here to Boulder in . . . I left here the summer to go and help her with her little kids because she had like four or five little kids, and she moved to Colorado. I rode the train with her to go and help her on the train with the little ones. Got there and began to enjoy it. So I started school there. Which was a . . . What you call it? It was like a . . . Not a climate change. It was a climate change, but environmental change. I speak openly. You are raised by a mother, father, with five sisters in a one hundred percent black community, segregated. You just left a place that you had to go to the back door to use the bathroom or you looked at a sign that said, "Whites only." "Coloreds." I paid the same amount for a hamburger that everyone else did, but I had to go to the back window to get a hamburger.

I left that here, and when I got there it was like I'm in a different world. I can't believe that I have friends that I can walk in . . . This was my first time ever going into a Taco Bell in the front door, and went in and sat down. I didn't even know what a taco was. And the guy say . . . We're ordering tacos and I'm dumb to that. I said, "I'll have the same." I didn't . . . I'm used to rice and gravy. But it was like a total . . . Going from a dark room into a room that's lit up. There's another world that I never seen . . . and totally different. Boulder, Colorado was totally different from Mossville, Louisiana.

CRAMER: [44:32] So people treated you differently?

LEMELLE: In which way?

CRAMER: Well I mean, I guess society treating everyone differently.

LEMELLE: Society there was like . . . the only thing white here is snow. The only thing black here is the roof of your house. As far as you, you are a person.

LEONA LEMELLE: Yeah. You're just a person.

LEMELLE: You are a person. And my high school, Boulder High School . . . one, two, three, four, five . . . my freshman class was over 1,500 students, and out of that class I was the fifth African American. They had two girls. They were twins. They had a friend of mine. His name was Buddy [Iniss?] and [Flowers?] and myself. So I was number six. I've always been number six for some reason. Mama had five daughters and six. So this was the friends, but everyone at Boulder High School were super, super good people. Like I said, it wasn't no . . . I didn't run into a color barrier. But it was such a big change for me, so it almost put you into a state of shock. What am I doing here? I'm going to make it here.

CRAMER: [45:55] Did people talk about racial politics openly, or was it just an understood thing?

LEMELLE: It was understood that some of the . . . Because we lived . . . I lived . . . I never forget the street was Water Canal. We lived not far from the college . . . from Boulder . . . my school, Boulder High, and then there was CU [Colorado University]. We could walk from our place to CU and I'm used to seeing football players. I went to . . . I left for school that . . . My peers were all black, and the college that I saw, Grambling, Southern, were all black. I'm going to a college now that, it was just . . . This guy I met, he was from McKinley High School. Yes, ma'am. He got a scholarship at CU One of the first people I met. I was shooting basketball. He was from McKinley High School around Baton Rouge [Louisiana].

CRAMER: What was his name?

LEMELLE: [47:14] All I can remember, we call him Tank. He was . . . I mean, he was like a superman. And when this dude got a football in his hand it was like . . . And he ran track. And he had calves. Man, I looked and I said, "Man, where you from?" He called me Red. He said, "Where you from, Little Red?" I said, "Man, I'm from Louisiana." He said, "Little Red, I'm from Louisiana." I said, "What?" I said, "I'm from a little place called Mossville, Mossville High School." "Oh," he said. "I ran over them boys down there. I'm from McKinley High School." I said, "You've got to be kidding." So we got to be . . . Now he was like a freshman in college. I'm still a kid, and he tucked me under his wing. And say he was . . . I can't think of that kid's first name but all they called him was Tank.

But to see here's a college that you're looking at majority, but you had black and white playing ball together and loving each other, and just getting along like family. And it was like, you from California, you know what I'm talking about. So leaving the South and going there was

a life change experience. But being Mama's baby and stuff I couldn't stay away long enough to me. I wish I would have. And another thing about it that hurted me so bad, when I came back home I had an uncle, Dr. Tilden Lemelle, lived about three quarters of a mile from where I was at. He was a professor at CU and I didn't even know it. I can call him now he'll say, "Butch, if I'd have known you were there then, I would have came got you." But I had another part of the story that I don't want to put there as one of the reasons that I came back home.

CRAMER: You don't want to talk about it?

LEMELLE: [49:16] I'll talk about it to you all but not on camera.

CRAMER: Okay.

LEMELLE: My wife knows about it, but . . .

CRAMER: We can pause it if you want. If you want to tell us now.

LEMELLE: Yeah.

CRAMER: Okay.

[break in tape]

LEMELLE: [49:30] I was saying if I would have stayed with my cousin Gwendolyn in

Colorado, in Boulder, and got my education there and went on, Barak Obama would have followed me because I know the quality I could have gathered. Especially having an uncle who was a professor at the college . . . well two of them. Two brothers, Dr. Wilbert Lemelle and Dr. Tilden Lemelle, they always followed each other. Dr. Wilbert Lemelle went to CU first and then his brother followed. And during the time I was there, Tilden was a professor, an English professor, at CU. Speaks like seven languages. And he chews me out. He said, "Butch, man, if I would have known you were that close to me." He said, "Your uncle would have came got you, and you'd have stayed here." Because he know what happened, and he used some other words but we won't go into that. So I know that, but I still came back and loved Mossville.

CRAMER: How did it . . . How did living there change you, and did it manifest in your return to Louisiana?

LEMELLE: [51:00] I guess it's two things that it changed in me. That part of my life showed me what are the possibilities for a human being, especially a male human being. There are so many possibilities and opportunities, but some things can spoil you that you don't put forth one hundred percent effort because you can get by with sixty percent. So I came back doing sixty percent of effort, which didn't let me get on the ladder as I should have because I was only putting out sixty percent. And I'll make somebody smile. Another great change in my life was that there was a female that came in my life and changed me from being sixty percent to want to be a one hundred percent. Her name was Leona, and I tell my wife all the time if it was not for her the sixty percent that I was out doing, forty percent of it was bad. And I'm being honest about myself. I was spoiled, and I was a thug.

CRAMER: You were seventeen or sixteen, too.

LEMELLE: [0:52:51] Sixteen, seventeen years old. I came back home and wanted to be something that I wasn't supposed to be. So I only gave life sixty percent and forty percent of that is again, I say forty percent of the sixty was bad. Because I was spoiled. Wanted to be . . . I don't know. I didn't say . . . I never thought I wanted to be a nobody, but I was headed to being a nobody.

LEONA LEMELLE: You wanted to be a man.

LEMELLE: But I wanted to be the wrong kind of man. I wasn't being a man like I should have been.

CRAMER: So tell me about how y'all met.

LEONA LEMELLE: You ever heard of a club called The Paradise? Valery got a club . . . had a club called The Paradise. I was there working. Behind the bar I was working. He'd come messing with me, talking about my eyes, this and that. He'd love talk to me. Those are just some of the thing I remember.

LEMELLE: I blowed her mind. [Laughs] She wanted me to . . . She's here after fifty-eight years she's still here. But seriously this is mine, some of this stuff you don't have to put out, but I'm telling you all my life being in Mossville and where I come from and what changed me

wasn't where I was living. It's what I wanted to do different than what I was raised up to do. We all can go on the wrong path, and I was finding an easy way out because I always said, "I won't have to do what my dad did in order to make it. I can do better than that. I can make mine easy." Want my hands to stay soft and pretty.

LEONA LEMELLE: Yeah. I used to say that all the time.

LEMELLE: [54:50] But then someone showed me that there was another way. That he said in his word, "You don't work, you don't eat."

CRAMER: What was the moment when you realized you didn't want to do the forty percent anymore and what role . . . like what moment happened between you and Ms. Leona that . . .

LEONA LEMELLE: Girl, you don't want to know that! [Laughs]

CRAMER: Chelsea [Arseneault] is blushing all the way over there.

LEMELLE: I don't know what she have in her mind.

CRAMER: Well I'm imagining you . . .

LEONA LEMELLE: Well in my heart . . .

CRAMER: Yeah.

LEONA LEMELLE: . . . there might be something different than in yours.

LEMELLE: [55:33] Well she's asking me or you?

LEONA LEMELLE: Well she's asking you. [laughs]

CRAMER: I'm just wondering at what moment . . . You know, you always see when it's reenacted somehow where a woman has really . . .

LEMELLE: Let me just tell you a story.

CRAMER: Yes.

LEMELLE: And it's going to be a brief story. And then you'll see a person. I don't know what she has in her mind, but I've told her this before. In every person's life there's somewhere there's some sentimental things in your life, in your heart. Sentimental can turn to care. Care can turn to love. When I met her, like she said where she was and what she was doing. I talked to her. About two days later I passed this place, The Paradise Club. She was sitting out and had a little girl on the front porch. Her name was Jackie. And I stopped, and my heart fell. I said, is this the lady I talked to the other night that was looking so beautiful, and here she's sitting out with a child that has muscular dystrophy, that can't do for herself, and she's trying to be out in the world to make a

living for herself and this baby? And this is true. My sympathy for her through that baby just made me want to be there for her and be there for her kid.

This is where it started at. And from that day out there on that porch I made it my business to continue to try to communicate with her. It was not my biological child, but nobody could tell me that. That was my baby. This is when I fell in love with her, through her child. And of course some of . . . The other man still was there lurking that you don't want to really . . . So she decided one day that she was . . . She and her mother and I were real close. But she decided that she was going to leave because I wasn't working like most guys. She left, and she went to San Antonio [Texas]. I'm telling them. You tell them then. It's your story.

LEONA LEMELLE: [58:11] It's because you wasn't working.

LEMELLE: Isn't that what I just said?

LEONA LEMELLE: Oh, I'm sorry.

CRAMER: It was. It's okay, though. It was sweet.

LEMELLE: Because I wasn't working on a permanent big-time job, her brothers and them were probably out hustling on the [?] boat. That wasn't my thing. I wanted an easy way out. So she left . . . left Lake Charles and went to San Antonio, Texas. Her mother told me, she said, "I think she's in San Antonio." My grandmother named Ira Pots Towner. I went to her and she laid hands on my and prayed. I had never been to San Antonio, didn't know where San Antonio was

or nothing. I left Lake Charles with seventy dollars my grandmother gave me and she prayed for me. She said, "You go get her if you want her." I said, "Grandma I don't know where I'm going." And you know what my grandmother told me? "God will lead you if it's for you." And I left here and I don't know how it was except it was God, that when I got to San Antonio, Texas and pull over to a little service station and ask the question they said, "Well that's right there."

LEONA LEMELLE: God lead you there, huh, baby?

LEMELLE: God lead me directly to her.

LEONA LEMELLE: Sure did.

LEMELLE: [59:46] And I gave her a choice: you come home or I'm coming to get my baby. It's left up to you if you want to come back with us. I think she beat me to the car.

LEONA LEMELLE: You don't remember saying, "Baby, I want you to come home."

LEMELLE: No, I don't remember that.

LEONA LEMELLE: "I got three jobs." I remember that.

LEMELLE: I don't remember telling you I need you. I told you I come to get my baby. Stephanie was a baby.

LEONA LEMELLE: You know I wouldn't let that baby go nowhere.

LEMELLE: [1:00:08] Because little Jackie . . . What happened to my picture?

LEONA LEMELLE: It's up there. It's on that white frame.

LEMELLE: The one by herself.

LEONA LEMELLE: Can you reach it, baby? Because she tall. Can you reach that white frame up there? Yeah. Or you going to need a stool?

LEMELLE: We going to get it later. You still recording?

CRAMER: [Agrees]

LEONA LEMELLE: Oh, Lord [. . .?] on and on. It's okay.

LEMELLE: [1:00:38] And . . .

LEONA LEMELLE: I'll get [. . .?] to fix it for me. That's the baby. She was, what, four, five? Five. When she died she was almost six.

LEMELLE: But guess what? Jackie was almost six and Leona . . . God has played such a big

part in our lives that we may not even look at and realize, but little Jackie died October the second, 1968. And Stephanie, who she never thought she'd have any more kids, was born November . . .

LEONA LEMELLE: Six.

LEMELLE: Not even six weeks later. Four weeks later. I mean six weeks later Stephanie came into the world, November the nineteenth. And then we turned around and we had a son.

LEONA LEMELLE: [1:01:50] But during the time I was pregnant carrying David, I had cancer in my womb and I didn't know until after I delivered him. So they had to do a hysterectomy.

CRAMER: It's a miracle, though, that . . .

LEONA LEMELLE: It is.

CRAMER: . . . the baby was born.

LEONA LEMELLE: Yeah.

CRAMER: [1:02:10] With . . . I mean, that's amazing.

LEMELLE: It's all about God.

LEONA LEMELLE: I wanted a boy so bad. So bad.

LEMELLE: [1:02:18] But if that wouldn't happened we'd probably be like my cousin. We probably have about sixteen children. [Laughs]

LEONA LEMELLE: Yeah. I wish I could have had some more. Yeah.

LEMELLE: Because that's the sister of twelve. So you know how that goes.

CRAMER: You were one of six.

LEMELLE: One of six. And that girl walked in here, then we'd have probably still coming from high school. [Laughs]

LEONA LEMELLE: [Laughs] I'm too old for that.

CRAMER: [1:02:46] So what year did y'all get married?

LEMELLE: Ask her. She if she remembers.

CRAMER: Oh wait, forty-seven years ago, right? Or forty-eight years ago?

LEMELLE: June eleventh, 1967.

LEONA LEMELLE: I can't keep up with the date.

LEMELLE: Clear everything. Nineteen sixty-seven. I tell . . . And I've found your poem.

LEONA LEMELLE: [1:03:10] Where it was?

LEMELLE: It's in there in my shirt drawer, my t-shirt drawer. If you go in there look now you'll see it.

LEONA LEMELLE: Y'all want to read it?

LEMELLE: I'm going to tell y'all what I did for her birthday. Almost four years ago for her seventieth. When she was turning seventy I thought that was something that she needed because we had twenty-five year anniversary. I told her the sky's the limit. Whatever you want it's yours.

LEONA LEMELLE: Where the socks at, baby?

LEMELLE: Where my t-shirts at. Under the TV.

LEONA LEMELLE: [1:03:42] Oh, okay.

LEMELLE: All this on camera. We just common, old common, people.

CRAMER: We know where your sock drawer is.

LEMELLE: Just leave them down, baby. We'll put them back up.

CRAMER: Oh my goodness. What year was this one taken? That one right there.

LEMELLE: That was at a Joe Tex Dance. Somewhere in the '70s, I guess.

CRAMER: [1:04:01] So y'all were already married?

LEMELLE: Yeah.

CRAMER: Yeah.

LEMELLE: We were out to Joe Tex dance at [Boss?] Auditorium. And that was a little small, small and I had it taken off it and had it put on there.

CRAMER: That's in good condition. I mean there's good color quality and everything. So Becca got good pictures of those.

LEMELLE: She's supposed to take and get someone to write this.

LEONA LEMELLE: Yeah, redo it.

LEMELLE: Print it or something and put it in a frame. But I'm going to read it to you guys about . . .

LEONA LEMELLE: Thank you, honey.

LEMELLE: [1:04:42] This was after forty-four years together. On her seventieth birthday I was supposed to sing her a song, but I didn't sing because someone else sung the song that I was going to sing. So what I did, I wrote her a quick poem. And you have to know that before I read the poem to you.

LEONA LEMELLE: He just did that out of his head.

LEMELLE: That I explained to those that after forty-four years, but before then she was born and raised in Palmetto, Louisiana which is out by Opelousas. So this is a poem to the woman that I love. "When you were a little girl I saw you in my dream, the prettiest little girl I'd ever seen. You grew up some miles from me, not knowing what the future would be. Then one warm April day that sweet little girl came my way. [Laughs] And there were few words that I could say. After looking into your big brown eyes, loving you was no surprise. Now many days has passed away, but I can still tell you I love you. Happy birthday." Don't you cry.

CRAMER: That's sweet. I love it.

LEMELLE: My spelling may not be the best, but I knew what I was saying. So where we at?
We still doing oral history?

CRAMER: We are. Hey, Leona is a big part of who you are.

LEMELLE: [1:06:34] She is.

CRAMER: And you always talk about her, so I think that was...

LEMELLE: She is a wonderful part of me.

CRAMER: With your birthday coming up and your forty-eighth anniversary around a couple months away.

LEONA LEMELLE: June.

CRAMER: So we can't not . . . I mean if you don't want to answer this question that's fine, but when did you know you were in love? Y'all are a very romantic couple. I don't usually ask this question.

LEONA LEMELLE: It's kind of embarrassing.

CRAMER: You don't want to talk about it? That's fine. That's fine.

LEMELLE: [1:07:03] Are you ashamed of me?

LEONA LEMELLE: No.

CRAMER: She just . . . I'm asking a prying question.

LEONA LEMELLE: Yeah.

CRAMER: I thought, well you guys are very romantic maybe we'd get a little tape, but we don't have to.

LEONA LEMELLE: [1:07:22] I could tell you the reason. One reason I fell in love with Butch because he wasn't ashamed to kiss me in public. He wasn't ashamed to tell people he was in love with me. I had never had that done before, okay? And like, he wasn't ashamed of me. I was part of him. And then got a little bit closer and closer. And when I found out that part, that it that was kind of good too. Now that's about as far as I'm going with that.

CRAMER: Everybody has a love . . . You know what I mean? Everybody has that moment in their life when their soulmate, they have that moment.

LEONA LEMELLE: Yeah. Sometimes I have to go back to that to make my memories better. Just think about the good times. We did have good times, and we take off and go places. You had a surgery on your knee or something, and we was in Moss Bluff and I went to pick you

up at your mama house. I never forget that part. And yeah, I'm thinking about the broke leg or whatever you had, and you and me was trying to do something and . . . But we did it. [Laughs]

LEMELLE: That was the Barry White days. "I can't get enough of your love, baby."

LEONA LEMELLE: [laughs] Yeah, that was good.

LEMELLE: [1:08:40] Now you see what married to her. She's Barry White.

LEONA LEMELLE: I ain't no Barry White.

LEMELLE: Well you make me feel like Barry White.

LEONA LEMELLE: Oh God.

LEMELLE: Now she's tickled. She y'all got to take some of that off of there.

LEONA LEMELLE: Yeah, please don't put that on there.

CRAMER: [laughs] But you know what though? Y'all will probably love it. We'll keep it on there for you.

LEMELLE: For us.

CRAMER: Yes.

LEMELLE: Right.

CRAMER: We'll keep it on there for you, and you'll be tickled.

LEMELLE: But I do want you to know this day that I yet still love my wife and it's still, I'll tell anybody, a heart of love for people in general. And a heart of feelings can lead you to something great. And I still say to today, if it was not been for little Jackie I probably would have tried to hit and run and went on about my business. But it didn't turn out that way. You know what I've done? To show you where God brought us from. We were living in Port Arthur in a little old . . . Trying so hard to hustle to show that I cared and I loved her. We were living in a place that was . . .

LEONA LEMELLE: Two rooms.

LEMELLE: Two rooms. No, it was really one big room.

LEONA LEMELLE: [1:10:03] The bedroom and the kitchen was on the other side.

LEMELLE: On one . . . And we had to go down the hall.

LEONA LEMELLE: Yeah.

LEMELLE: To the bathroom.

LEONA LEMELLE: Yes, Lord. Other people [. . .?] too.

LEMELLE: And there was this lady and her little baby, my baby, that I was working in Orange and living in Port Arthur. Now if you don't think this is love, something wrong with you. From off of Highway 90 at Livingston Shipyard I had to get home to her and that baby and then have a way. I walked. I started walking at 11:05 from that site to Port Arthur. Across the Port Arthur bridge.

LEONA LEMELLE: [1:10:42] You ever been on the Port Arthur bridge?

LEMELLE: Single . . . At that time it was two-way traffic. I'm walking on the spot about like this to get home to her and that baby because I was afraid what could happen to them with me not there. I could have easily just said, "Heck away with it. Whatever."

CRAMER: Eleven at night?

LEMELLE: [1:11:04] Eleven at night. I got home from eleven until about one . . . close to two o'clock that morning I think.

LEONA LEMELLE: I don't remember.

CRAMER: And then turned around and went back to work?

LEONA LEMELLE: The next day.

LEMELLE: The next day. I was working evenings. But I was able to get to her and get to my baby and see that they were okay and secure. I say, "Well it's okay. We'll make it one more day here, but after a while God going to bless us." And sure enough we moved.

LEONA LEMELLE: Found a little house with two rooms and a bathroom.

LEMELLE: [1:11:31] Found another house.

LEONA LEMELLE: With a bathroom.

LEMELLE: With a bathroom inside. That was only the first thing we could find temporary because it's . . . you know. And we moved from there to . . .

CRAMER: What year . . . About when was that? Was that around that picture time in the '70s?

LEMELLE: No, that was before that. That was well before that.

CRAMER: Sixty-eight, sixty-nine, maybe?

LEMELLE: Let me see.

CRAMER: You got married in '67?

LEMELLE: That was somewhere in '69.

LEONA LEMELLE: [1:11:55] Because David was born in '60 . . . In '70 . . .

LEMELLE: No, this was before then. This had to be '67. That was '67.

LEONA LEMELLE: Yeah, we ain't even had Stefanie yet.

LEMELLE: The Port Arthur was the early parts of '60. When we first met. She told me I had to get a job or she was stepping. So the best thing I could find was Livingston Shipyard. I went to work there.

CRAMER: And what'd you do there?

LEMELLE: [1:12:20] I was a maintenance.

CRAMER: Was that your first job or did you have work before that in high school and stuff?

LEMELLE: I guess my first real job.

LEONA LEMELLE: I can tell you what he used to do. Sell clothes at S&M store on [Ryan?] Street that used to be on Third Street.

LEMELLE: That was for . . .

CRAMER: Like in high school or something?

LEONA LEMELLE: He didn't want to get his fingers dirty.

LEMELLE: Yeah.

CRAMER: No one wants to get their fingers dirty.

LEONA LEMELLE: And I done dug sweet potatoes, pulled sugarcane down. I done it all.

LEMELLE: Nobody tell you to be born in Opelousas and Palmetto.

LEONA LEMELLE: I was born in Deridder. [Laughs]

LEMELLE: [1:12:53] But raised there.

CRAMER: So well we have about . . . I'm going to say we have about ten more minutes.

LEMELLE: Take all the . . .

CRAMER: And one of my questions for you was what was your first job, so that's . . .

LEMELLE: My first job?

CRAMER: Going back.

LEMELLE: [1:13:10] My first job, really paid job was working with my father in a private home.

LEONA LEMELLE: Yeah.

LEMELLE: That was my first real job that I really loved and enjoyed.

CRAMER: What did you do?

LEMELLE: I was a custodian. Custodian, part-time chef, part-time chauffeur. Name it, that's what we did.

LEONA LEMELLE: Yeah.

LEMELLE: And before you leave I want to show you something. I don't want to get up with

this on me.

CRAMER: You're tethered.

LEMELLE: [1:13:52] Because she'll get upset.

CRAMER: To the camera. So how old were you?

LEMELLE: Sixteen. Seventeen? That was after I came back from Colorado.

CRAMER: Okay. So did your dad pay you?

LEMELLE: Yes. They paid me.

CRAMER: You were working for your dad or with you dad or . . .?

LEMELLE: [1:14:16] I was working with my dad.

CRAMER: With your dad.

LEMELLE: For these people. And you want to ask the question did they pay me? Yes they paid me. And guess what? My father told me, "You going to learn how to save, and when you get paid, you give me your money." And I said, "I don't see why I got to give you my money. I'm

working for it."

LEONA LEMELLE: Sassy!

LEMELLE: You see this scar right here? Can you still see it? It's grown up. Do you see a scar on my nose?

CRAMER: Yes.

LEMELLE: [1:14:44] That's my daddy's left hand with his wedding band. Pow. "Don't you ever tell me you going to do what you want to do with your money."

LEONA LEMELLE: That's right.

LEMELLE: I fell out for dead. But I got up. Came there Friday for my check. I told them, "I don't want it. You keep it. I don't want it, Daddy. I promise. You just . . ." Said, "Okay. I'm going to take your money, and I'll give you some of it. So when school starts you'll have some money." My father would give me an allowance out. And he said, "All I want to do is keep some of your money. I'm going to put it up." He would keep like ten or twenty dollars, but the rest he said, "You do what you want." And he would put it in his Bible. And I was keeping up calculating what he had for me. When it came time for me to get ready to go do my school shopping if I was supposed to have 130 dollars, I had 260 because every dollar I put, he added to it. He said, "Now this is how you save. Say, "Thank you, Daddy."

LEONA LEMELLE: I was alright now.

LEMELLE: "No, now this is not yours to go spend. We going to the bank and open up you an account."

LEONA LEMELLE: [1:16:04] Who coming in there?

CRAMER: Hi, we're still doing it. It's okay. It's fine. We can pause it. [break in tape]

CRAMER: You know what I mean? I'm not going to ask it again. I'm not going to ask you what your first job was again.

LEMELLE: Okay.

CRAMER: You know what I mean?

LEMELLE: You promise?

CRAMER: [laughs] Unless you want to tell it again. But so some of these you've already talked about. I think next time what we'll do is pick up talking about one more question I had for you to finish talking about was describing Big Mama's house, the grounds. The garden, the chicken house, the smoke house, the pigs, that kind of thing.

LEMELLE: [1:16:43] I saw a picture yesterday at Della's of my dad out in the backyard with a hog that he named, called Son.

LEONA LEMELLE: Son?

LEMELLE: And the hog stood every bit of this high. Della had . . . We been going through some old pictures, and Della have the picture of my dad out in the back in his pig pen. Our backyard. I'm going to get it and show it to you.

CRAMER: Okay. Oh yes. You might want to see if Ms. Susan will scan it, too.

LEMELLE: That was way back there.

CRAMER: Oh wow. What year do you think that was? Fifty, maybe, or '55?

LEMELLE: Fifty-five. Fifty-two. Fifty-five.

CRAMER: Wow.

LEMELLE: Let me see, '46. I was born in '46. So '56 I was ten. Fifty-six. Fifty-seven. Old enough for me to be out there remembering riding on the hog.

LEONA LEMELLE: [1:17:48] You would ride on the hog?

LEMELLE: See, my wife find out some things she didn't know.

LEONA LEMELLE: Yeah, I'm learning a lot.

LEMELLE: We used to . . . My dad had a hog and his name was Son. A big old black hog, and we could actually ride him. He was their pet. And my dad would talk to him. He had a little stick. He would, "Son, come on." Whatever my dad told that hog to do he would do it. He'd let us ride him. Della got a picture of him. I saw it yesterday, and I'm going to get that picture. And we going to have the picture of my dad. And somewhere I had a picture here of my grandfather. Grandfather Duff Towner standing out with his shovel. I saw that picture somewhere and I put them all away and I forgot where I put it at. But my grandfather on the Towner side used to . . . You remember I was telling you about the coal the man made? Well I got a picture of him somewhere standing out with his shovel in his hand. Standing up with it.

LEONA LEMELLE: [1:18:59] I want to know what Paw-Paw did with that hog.

CRAMER: Me, too.

LEMELLE: We butchered him. We ate it. That's what everybody did with their animals. No use telling a tale. It taken about seven good men to butcher him. They had to get an old neighbor across the street, old Mr. Ben Hartman, to get his horse. And I'll never forget we cried. We cried, but it was time to butcher him. And they had to get this man with a horse and come over when they butchered him. And they had to put a thing way up in the tree. And had the horse to have to

hoist him up for them to . . . That's how big he was.

CRAMER: You cried?

LEMELLE: Big old hog.

CRAMER: You were sad?

LEMELLE: [1:19:51] Oh, yeah. It was our pet. But Daddy say, "I raised him to eat." Oh, she about to cry. I'm going to bring you that picture. I'm about to holler. That's Mike. [Laughs]

CRAMER: Well that will be a really good place to start next time. And when we talk about Big Mama's house and then we'll continue on with . . . We've talked a lot about community. We've talked about World War II last time. We've talked about some of your childhood memories. We've mentioned a little bit about entertainment, but we'll kind of come back to that, and some medical treatment, and some places, especially in Mossville, that are just no longer there so we can kind of help paint that . . . Keep that picture painted for the history. And then in the meantime we'll see you on your birthday next week.

LEMELLE: Okay.

CRAMER: [1:20:44] And on behalf of the center and on behalf of ICM [Imperial Calcasieu Museum] and on behalf of the whole project I just want to thank you for giving the time today.

And thank you for sitting here . . .

LEONA LEMELLE: Y'all going to meet back here?

CRAMER: Sure. Is that okay with you? Is that okay with y'all?

LEMELLE: When? After the fourth? After our next meeting?

CRAMER: Maybe not after the next meeting because I might have to teach that day. It would probably be the following week or I know you guys . . .

LEMELLE: February.

CRAMER: Y'all are going on a bed and breakfast trip. You can cut it. And I know y'all are going on a bed and breakfast . . .

[1:21:15]

[End Tape 4557. End Session III.]