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Session I
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[Begin Tape 4399. Begin Session I.]

DOUGLAS MUNGIN: Alright, today is January 23rd, and I am Douglas Mungin representing the T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History with LSU [Louisiana State University] Libraries. We are working in conjunction with the Imperial Calcasieu Museum and Bill Shearman to document the history of Mossville, Louisiana. And to kick that off we are holding Mossville Oral History Day, here at the Rigmaiden Recreation Center on Old Spanish Trail. I'm here today with . . .

JOSEPH PAYNE: Joseph Payne.

MUNGIN: Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed. This is going to be a short interview of about fifteen minutes long, and I will likely get in touch with you for a longer interview in the upcoming weeks and months. Okay. Alright. Could you please state your full name?

PAYNE: [00:42] Joseph Eddie Payne.

MUNGIN: And when and where were you born?

PAYNE: I was born April 6, 1946 in Carencro, Louisiana

MUNGIN: And where is Carencro, Louisiana? Where's that?

PAYNE: Right on the outskirts, north of Lafayette.

MUNGIN: Okay.

PAYNE: Maybe three or four miles from Lafayette.

MUNGIN: And were your parents born there?

PAYNE: Parents was born there, went to school there. My mother went to school there for sure, and my dad, he didn't get much of an education, but he grew up in Carencro area.

MUNGIN: And your grandparents came there or they were also born there?

PAYNE: [01:20] Grandparents was in Lafayette, Louisiana. He was . . . my grandfather was a railroad man back in that day. My grandfather . . . My grandmother she was a regular blind lady. I grew up with my grandmother, and she was blind. And she always needed somebody to be there with her. And we grew up with her and learned to cook with her and enjoyed Carencro. And I was a little kid, got ran over, followed my brother, and had both . . . Well, my leg was broke.

MUNGIN: How old were you?

PAYNE: Five years old.

MUNGIN: What did you get hit by?

PAYNE: A car.

MUNGIN: Where?

PAYNE: [02:20] On a gravel road in Carencro, crossing the road, following my older brother.

MUNGIN: Following to what?

PAYNE: They was leaving the house and I wanted to go with them [laughs]. And I got hit by a car, and I was . . . I got my leg broke, and they had to re-break it again after they found out . . . They had it in a cast, and they x-rayed it. And then they took the cast off, and it was crooked. Doc said they had to break it again and reset it and said, possibly, I'd never walk again. And I ended up playing football, going to the military on that broke leg and seeing like today it's giving me the trouble now.

MUNGIN: [laughs] It took all that time to finally give you some trouble.

PAYNE: Yeah.

MUNGIN: So what were your parents' names?

PAYNE: My daddy was Wilson Payne, a bricklayer. He had no education but [was] the best bricklayer in this part of the country. My mother, she worked odd jobs at the restaurants, since we was here in Lake Charles. We moved from Lafayette to Lake Charles. We was, well my parents. . . He was a fine bricklayer, good bricklayer.

MUNGIN: Did he work for a company or was he just . . .

PAYNE: He worked for himself. He was a helper with another bricklayer, that's how he learned. He was a helper for a bricklayer, and the bricklayer said, "Man, you always on my scaffold, man. Won't you go get you a house and build your own . . . work on your own house?" And that's what my daddy did. He started working for himself, and he ended up being the best bricklayer in this area.

MUNGIN: What were your grandparents' names?

PAYNE: George Bernard and my grandmother was Josephine Bernard. They also lived . . . that's where they come up in Carencro.

MUNGIN: [04:42] So when did you move to Mossville?

PAYNE: We came to Lake Charles first and stayed there.

MUNGIN: About how old were you when you came to Lake Charles?

PAYNE: About six years old.

MUNGIN: How many siblings did you have?

PAYNE: Ended up being thirteen of us.

MUNGIN: Thirteen?

PAYNE: [laughs] Yeah. But at the time, I was about the third, fourth oldest.

MUNGIN: How many boys and girls?

PAYNE: Nine boys and four girls.

MUNGIN: [05:12] That's a lot of boys. [laughs]

PAYNE: Yeah. And we made a name for ourselves, too. [laughs] We were football players.
Enjoyed it and . . . good members of the community.

MUNGIN: So you were six when you moved to Lake Charles. What age, how old were you
when you moved to Mossville?

PAYNE: [05:34] Possibly seven. About seven years old.

MUNGIN: Why did your family move from Lake Charles to Mossville?

PAYNE: I had an uncle live here, and he had, he knew of property right behind his house. We moved from . . . well we bought property over in Mossville. I think that was some of the money that, from the [law]suit they had when I was a kid, when I got run over.

MUNGIN: So you, your family sued the people than ran you over?

PAYNE: Yeah.

MUNGIN: How much was the suit for?

PAYNE: It wasn't a lot of money. Couple of thousands, maybe.

MUNGIN: And was property pretty cheap back then in Mossville?

PAYNE: Yeah.

MUNGIN: What's your earliest memory of Mossville?

PAYNE: [06:30] First moving to Mossville, that's my first memory of it. [laughs]

MUNGIN: So what did it look like?

PAYNE: It was wood, all over the place. It was the main drag of Prater Road, right across the track, was a little neighborhood with about two or three houses. Behind there, that's where we moved to. Queensboro, another subdivision across the street from, as you cross the railroad track on Prater, they hadn't even sold a lot over there yet. I remember the time when they was having the sale over there. We was on this side of the track, and the sale was going on on the other side of the road. It was nothing but woods there.

MUNGIN: So it was a pretty small community when you first moved here.

PAYNE: Yeah.

MUNGIN: And so, when did people start moving in?

PAYNE: [07:33] Oh. People always . . . it was always moving in. Especially when that little neighborhood opened up and then . . .

MUNGIN: What little neighborhood?

PAYNE: Queensboro.

MUNGIN: Okay.

BILL SHEARMAN: That was the subdivision?

PAYNE: Yes sir, the subdivision.

MUNGIN: [07:53] And then that's when the community started to get bigger and bigger.

PAYNE: Yeah, that's what it seemed to me. And they had the night club over there.

MUNGIN: What was the name of the night club?

PAYNE: The Paradise.

MUNGIN: [laughs] Was it a pretty happening night club?

PAYNE: Oh, yeah. It was the biggest and the nicest night club in this area, even in the Lake Charles area. It was only maybe one or two big night clubs over there, but we had a pretty big night club over here in Mossville also.

MUNGIN: When did it close down?

PAYNE: [pauses] I would say about twenty years ago now. It's been a good while ago now.

MUNGIN: Why did it close down?

PAYNE: [08:35] Oh. [pauses] I don't know. If the guy, if Mr. Valery Montgomery was . . .

MUNGIN: Was that the owner's name?

PAYNE: Yeah.

MUNGIN: Okay.

PAYNE: I don't know if he was getting elderly or what, but he did shut the place down.

SHEARMAN: Did you say Val Montgomery, Mr. Payne?

PAYNE: Valery Montgomery.

MUNGIN: So when you were growing up, what . . . where did you guys move to? What was the street, again? I'm sorry.

PAYNE: Yeah, we moved right across the street from here.

MUNGIN: Okay, what street is that?

PAYNE: Old Spanish Trail.

MUNGIN: Oh, okay. Could you describe the house? How did it look back then?

PAYNE: [09:18] It was like . . . It wasn't a sharpshooter, it was much wider than a sharpshooter. But it was a long, straight house and . . .

MUNGIN: So was it like a shotgun house? Or . . .?

PAYNE: It was bedrooms on one side, and the living room . . . dining room and kitchen on one side, and bedrooms on one side. It was about three or four bedrooms. And I always stayed with my grandmother. My grandmother lived right behind the family house, and that's the family house right across the street.

I remember when they first built this swimming pool across the street over here. Man, we was swimming out there, man, they had brought the bulldozers over there and they dragged line, and they started digging, and there come a big rain. And . . . we was swimming out there in the little mud hole they had dug. [laugh] Before the swimming pool was built.

SHEARMAN: That was fifty-five, Mr. Payne?

PAYNE: Yeah. A long time ago.

MUNGIN: So . . . Did your . . . did the property have a lot of land around it, and what did you guys do with that land?

PAYNE: It was constantly being developed for more houses and more houses and . . .

MUNGIN: Your piece of land? Or . . .

PAYNE: Oh, what, the family house land?

MUNGIN: Yeah the family land, yeah.

PAYNE: Oh, no. It wasn't that big of a land. [laughs]

MUNGIN: Did y'all have like a garden or anything like that?

PAYNE: [11:03] Oh yeah, we had gardens. Oh man. Big berry trees, fig trees, all of this, man. All in the yard.

MUNGIN: So your father was like a bricklayer. Did your family have like have any hobbies or anything that you guys did? Like with your father, or your mom, or your grandma?

PAYNE: [11:27] We . . . We always worked with my dad. Enjoyed learning to lay bricks. I would have probably been his best bricklayer next to my oldest brother here for, if I would have stayed in this area, but I graduated and went to the military, and I was in the air force.

MUNGIN: So what are your siblings' names again?

PAYNE: From start to . . .

MUNGIN: [laughs]

PAYNE: From top to bottom?

MUNGIN: [laughing] I know that's a lot of them

PAYNE: Alvin, Alvin was the oldest. Alvin, Ella, Wilford, Joseph, that's me. Leo, Dorothy, Helen, Larry . . . Did I name Sunny?

MUNGIN: One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight.

PAYNE: I got Sunny down on there?

MUNGIN: No.

PAYNE: [12:31] Well, Sunny. I got Dorothy?

MUNGIN: Yes.

PAYNE: Dorothy, Helen.

MUNGIN: Yes. Someone's going to be upset with you.

PAYNE: Calvin, David, and Barbara.

MUNGIN: Alright, you knocked it out.

PAYNE: [12:53] Okay, that's all of it?

MUNGIN: Yeah [laughs].

PAYNE: Keeping up with them.

MUNGIN: So where did you go to school?

PAYNE: Oh, Mossville.

MUNGIN: Mossville? Where was that? Right here?

PAYNE: Mossville down the street. About a mile, half a mile from here. Just where the Mossville, the school . . . was first an elementary and before they built the high school. It was right across the street from my house and I was late for school most of time, living right across the street.

MUNGIN: So the elementary school was here?

PAYNE: Yeah.

MUNGIN: So where was the high school?

PAYNE: [13:29] They didn't have a high school right at the time when the school first opened, the elementary. And what was that, in fifty five? I think it was, with Mossville. They got the high school. And . . . That's when they had the football team, a good football team, out of all the schools in the area. It was Vinton kids came to high school in Mossville, Sulphur kids went to school at Mossville. Westlake and Mossville. We had a heck of a team out of all of those surrounding areas. [Payne and Mungin laugh]

MUNGIN: So what year did you graduate?

PAYNE: Sixty-seven.

MUNGIN: Sixty-seven? So you decided to go into the air force?

PAYNE: Yeah.

MUNGIN: Okay, how long were you in the air force for?

PAYNE: Four years.

MUNGIN: Okay. What was your job in the air force?

PAYNE: I was a civil engineer.

MUNGIN: Okay.

PAYNE: [14:34] In the air force, I think, it was almost like next to going to college, man.
Going into the air force.

MUNGIN: Why do you say that?

PAYNE: Because I learned a craft in there and just about any job you have in the air force,
you will learn a craft. Something you can use when you get out. And I seen a lot of action, a lot
of my friends come from Vietnam and that was the time.

MUNGIN: Did you have to go to Vietnam?

PAYNE: [15:07] I went. Yeah. I saw how all the fellows was coming back, man, and I say,
"Man, I don't even want to go to the army. I know they going to draft me, and I want to make my
own decision." And the first, when I was eighteen, you had to report for the military, and I hadn't
graduated yet, but they told me, they say, "As soon as you graduate from school, we going to be

calling you again." They called me again as soon as I graduated, and I went to take my physical in Houston.

[15:44] As soon as I get back, I didn't even go home and talk to my parents or anybody about me joining the military because I knew that was something I had to do. I knew they was fixing to get me, so I said, "I'm going to make my own decision." I talked to all the recruiters in there, and I said, "I'd like to take the test for the air force." I took the test for the air force, and the guy told me, he said, "You passed the test." I said, "Wow." And I said, "I didn't think I'd pass no test." Because I wasn't a student of testing at all. And I passed the first important test of my life. [laughs] And . . . I came home and I told my parents, I said, "I just signed up for the military, Mom." "Boy, you don't know what you doing! You see your brother in the Army, and he's . . . he's just a cursing dude, boy, he caught up in the military." I said, "Well I'm going in the air force." She said, well she was a little bit relieved with that. And, in the recruiter actually said, "When do you want to go?" He said, "Want to go in three months?" I said, "No, I feel like the military going to get me sooner than that." He said, "I got one going in a week, you could go in a week." I said, "Yeah, I do that." I said, "I'd like to go in a week." Went home and threw me a party. [laughs] I was ready to go man, and I went into the air force, enjoyed myself. Enjoyed my four years. I wish I would've stayed in longer now, but . . .

MUNGIN: Why?

PAYNE: Huh?

MUNGIN: Why?

PAYNE: [17:38] Oh, I could have retired and retired at twenty years. [laughs] But I got out and I was in a good field. I was in civil engineering. I was, I was anxious to go back to the Vietnam area to work as a civilian. Well, they had a lot of, a lot of jobs in Saudi Arabia and all over elsewhere, that's where I said I wanted to go to. Tax-free money.

MUNGIN: Is that what you did once you got out?

PAYNE: What?

MUNGIN: Is that what you did once you got out?

PAYNE: I got out and I went to a heavy equipment school again. I went to a heavy equipment school when I got out the military. I took it while I was in California, my last duty station. And they was passing pamphlets out, and they had a heavy equipment school. It was in Miami. Did not know I was going to be going back to Florida. I took the test and passed everything, and I had to do my residential training over there. My wife also, I met my wife while I was in the military.

MUNGIN: And what was your, what was your wife's name?

PAYNE: Vivian. And I call her my souvenir from the military. [laughs]

MUNGIN: And you met her in Miami?

PAYNE: Pensacola.

MUNGIN: Pensacola?

PAYNE: Yes. I enjoy Pensacola, that's my next best place to being home . . .

MUNGIN: So your family's been here since the 1950s, right?

PAYNE: [19:18] Yes.

MUNGIN: So how much has this area changed since then?

PAYNE: It changed a lot, it changed a lot. Lot of houses that came into this area before all the refineries taking over right now, and I know it's time for improvements and time for changes, but we going to miss the old neighborhood. [laughs]

MUNGIN: [19:46] So there was a period in time where the population in Mossville, like, started to really spike up. Like in the 70s and the 80s.

PAYNE: Oh yeah.

MUNGIN: So why did that population, why did the population start to grow around that time?

PAYNE: I think it was just all the family members that was born here, they got married and had kids here, and wanting to stay in this area, and built it up more and more.

MUNGIN: So who else has been some of the community leaders? Like during that time that you've been in Mossville.

PAYNE: [pauses] The Rigmaidens, they was a big . . . They was the mayor, had a little mayor of Mossville at one time.

MUNGIN: For how long?

PAYNE: [pauses] Ten. Quite a few years.

MUNGIN: Oh, okay.

PAYNE: They had a little mayor here. And the when the old, the elderly died, they just branched off to just about nobody being the mayor.

SHEARMAN: Was he elected, Mr. Payne?

PAYNE: [21:09] [sighs] I don't know if he was, it was big politic-like that . . . election in this area or what. But he was considered, he was considered the mayor, Mr. Rigmaiden.

SHEARMAN: Josh?

PAYNE: Josh Rigmaiden. Yes.

MUNGIN: And what were some of the important places in Mossville, like during that time, like from then until now?

PAYNE: [pauses] It's really, it really went down after the elderly people that had it, they had a few stores here. Ira Garrett and the Braxtons, they had a, they left and moved to California. They had a good little business down. They had a store, like a grocery store. They had a little furniture store. They had a quite a few rent houses, too. And a few stores further down this way, down west of Old Spanish Trail here, they had stores over there. After the elderly died off, the stores went, too.

MUNGIN: [22:30] Alright. I've got about three more questions for you. So, what does home mean to you? What does the term home mean to you?

PAYNE: Home. It's a place that I like to always be able to come back to. But this going to be one time I never be able to come back to this home. Not to say it's no type of home, it's going to be refineries all over this place shortly. I'm kind of looking forward to coming back and even passing through the refineries and still see some familiar places.

MUNGIN: What does community mean to you?

PAYNE: A community. That's a place of . . . Where people can visit each other and . . . Because, I live in a community now where I hardly know my neighbors. And this neighborhood here, I knew everybody in town. Everybody in every house. Both side of the road. Right there where I live today, I been living there forty-something years and I don't know my neighbor three houses down from me. I seen them all my life but, and I know their names but, a visit. No visitor or none of that.

MUNGIN: Why is . . . Why have you been unable to get that kind of get that connection with your neighborhood that you have here?

PAYNE: What, that I left here?

MUNGIN: Yeah, like you have your own house in your own neighborhood. Why haven't you felt like that community there, but you feel it here?

PAYNE: [24:38] I have no idea. I don't know if it's the . . . I'm a friendly guy. [laugh] And I don't mind, I love my neighbors, but I just, we just, they not a talking people or something. I don't know what's the deal but-

MUNGIN: You're all talking people here? [laughs]

PAYNE: Yeah, always been a talking person here.

SHEARMAN: When did you leave Mossville, Mr. Payne?

PAYNE: When I got out the military. I got out in '72, and I stayed here about a year. And I moved to Lake Charles and I been there ever since, in the same spot. I never been a moving-around-guy. Me and the wife, we moved one time since, in our whole entire marriage.

SHEARMAN: Okay.

PAYNE: That right back there in Lake Charles, in the same spot.

MUNGIN: One last question for you. What's the most important thing you want people to remember about Mossville that isn't in the history books or folks don't really know about?

PAYNE: [26:00] I would like everybody to know that this has been the best neighborhood and all my friends I had then, they are still my friends today. I feel like this will, this always be home to me, even though the refineries here, this the best neighborhood that I could . . . I ever been a part of.

MUNGIN: Alright, our time is almost up but is there anything you want to add in the closing?

PAYNE: [pauses] Not. . . [pauses] I'm not much of a big talker. [laughs] But I just want everybody to know that this has been a great place, and I'm willing to let it go to progress. I know it's in good hands. [laughs]

MUNGIN: [27:14] Alright, so that concludes our interview for today but I definitely would love to schedule another interview with you in the next coming weeks, or in like the next couple months. Because I definitely want to talk about your cooking. We haven't even discussed that.

PAYNE: Oh yeah. [laughs]

MUNGIN: [laughs]

PAYNE: Oh yeah, that's one of my hobbies.

MUNGIN: Yeah, we're going to have to talk about that. [laughs]

PAYNE: Oh yeah. Can I bring some of my . . . Well, I don't know if I can take pictures, because I would have to bring so much stuff.

MUNGIN: Well, we'll come to your house. We can come to your house to interview you.

PAYNE: Okay.

MUNGIN: Yeah. Cool.

[27:48]

[End Tape 4399. End Session I.]