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[Begin Tape 4530. Begin Session II.]

CHELSEA ARSENEAULT: Alright, today is October first, the first day of October—that's exciting—and a beautiful Thursday afternoon. I'm here with . . . This is Chelsea Arseneault with the T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History with LSU [Louisiana State University] Libraries. I'm here today with Ms. Gloria Rogers in her beautiful home in Lake Charles [Louisiana] 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. This is our second interview together, our first one being at the oral history luncheon on September twenty fourth. And you were talking about [A.M.] Barbe High School [Lake Charles, LA].

GLORIA ROGERS: [00:38] Okay.

ARSENEAULT: B-A-R-B-E?

ROGERS: [Agrees]

ARSENEAULT: Okay.

ROGERS: Excuse me. Could you pause that?

ARSENEAULT: Yeah, of course. [break in tape]

ROGERS: . . . High School.

ARSENEAULT: Yeah.

ROGERS: When I first went there . . .

ARSENEAULT: To Mossville High School?

ROGERS: Yes. That was in August of 1955.

ARSENEAULT: Okay.

ROGERS: [01:00] The students were curious. Oh, Lord they were so curious. And they would make remarks—not that the remarks were bad. But then after they got into my class, some of their attitudes began to change, because they saw . . . even though at that time I was really young. In fact, I was as young or younger than some of my students, because they had not been in a situation where they could go to school all the time. You know? They did have an elementary school down in Westlake [Louisiana], and I think they might have had one in Mossville. I really don't know. But the bottom line was, because of circumstances, a lot of them told me that they would ride the bus to Lake Charles to go to a high school called Washington High School. But it was just so inconvenient catching the bus, good weather, bad weather. And

as a result, they were not able to remain in high school.

But after they built the high school in Mossville, the situations . . . circumstances were better because the school board provided buses to go down in Westlake and pick them up and bring them to Mossville. And of course, they did the same thing for the students in Vinton [Louisiana], and Vinton is twenty-something miles from over there. And then, they would pick . . . I believe I talked about this early on. The students who would come from Vinton, they would ride the bus and, of course, they would stop in Sulphur [Louisiana] and pick up the students and bring them to Mossville High School. Some of those students had the intelligence, but they had not been taught certain things that they should have known. As a result, a few of them had to really struggle.

[03:20] But what I admired about them, they were so conscientious to learn, because they had been indoctrinated with the idea that if you are going to go anywhere in this life, you got to get an education. And they came to school with that attitude—most of them. You always have a few who want to do things their way. But those kinds were not able to survive, because it was so few of them and they didn't want to be ostracized. So they began to do better, even in the classroom. There was one young lady in my class, she . . . how would I want to describe her? She was, I guess, of average intelligence, but sometimes it was difficult for her to catch on. She would ask me if I could help her after school. I said, "Sure. If we didn't have to have any teachers meeting, I would be glad to help you." And that young lady was so determined to do well. She graduated from high school, and she went to school at Grambling. That's in north Louisiana. And do you know, she graduated from there and then she went to some university, a college, in Houston [Texas], and she graduated from there. She got her master's. So it lets me know that if a student is considered below average, if they are determined to succeed, they can, but they got to

want to. And then they would seek the help of those who were able to help them.

[05:15] But some of the students, they knew they needed help, but they were somewhat shy. They didn't want the other students to know that they didn't know. And you try to tell them, "You are working for you, not for them, because if you get out of high school, it means that you're going to be on your own and you can't look back at your classmates and say, 'I would have done this, I would have done that.'" But most of the students that we taught, they did well because they were determined to succeed. Those . . . There were a few who could have done better, but their attitudes were not as, I thought, they should have been. But you still want them to succeed, because reality check—when they get out there in this society, they're not only competing with their classmates; they're competing with people from all over. And if you're not prepared, and especially—and, of course, that was years ago— especially in the society today, what kind of job can you get other than maybe some of these hamburger places?

[06:32] It's nothing wrong about that, because I was telling some students . . . they were saying, "I wouldn't do this, and I wouldn't do that." I said, "Let me tell you something." I said, "You know, my husband is working and I'm working." And I said, "My husband went to the military. He stayed there over twenty years. He retired from the military. And when he got out, he was fortunate enough to get a job at Olin Chemicals." And I said, "Do you know he seeks overtime, in addition to what he's supposed to work. He's always begging whoever the head man is about working overtime." I said, "My point to you is this: if you have a family, and if you are trying to buy a house, you know. . . ." I said, "You sacrifice and you do what you need to do to get it, as long as it is legitimate." I said, "Now, if you get into the drug society, then you are doomed. You might succeed for a few days or a few weeks," I said, "but it will eventually catch up with you." And, of course, they didn't like to hear that, but I was telling them, I said, "You know

what? If I needed a job, I would go to Burger King, McDonald's, and if they would hire me, I would accept that job." "Oh, I wouldn't work for three dollars." At the time, I don't know what they pay now. At the time it was three dollars and something an hour. I said, "I would." I said, "Because you know what? I would be able to buy bread and a few other things." And I said, "That's legitimate." I said, "You know, nothing bad lasts forever. So you do what you got to do to try to move on." You know, but they didn't want to hear it. Some of them, those boys especially, "Ms. Rogers, I can't believe you would work for three . . ." I think it was three twenty-five, or three-something. I said, "I surely would. If I needed the job, I would work for that." But some of their attitudes at that time were not what I thought it should have been.

[08:53] But back to Mossville, our students, a lot of them . . . well, with integration, it brought about changes. I'll never forget, there were students at our school who, if they had remained at Mossville High School, they would have been either valedictorian or salutatorian, but when they merged . . . And that was one thing those students didn't like. But when they would merge, there was no way that they could come into another school and be salutatorian or the valedictorian. And that was upsetting. Now, what happened, they did indicate students who had maintained a certain grade average. They honored them by putting an asterisk by their names for graduation. Students are graduating with honor.

But like one of the boys said, "Well Ms. Rogers, I would have been valedictorian." I said, "True, true, true." I said, "But you know what? The best is yet to come. Hang on! Hang on! Hang on!" "Ms. Rogers . . ." You know, they're going to show me where I didn't know what I was talking about. I said, "Look, nothing bad lasts forever. Nothing. Because, according to . . ." They didn't like to hear me say this, but I think it was Ralph Waldo Emerson, in a poem that he had written, he said, "In life, there is the balancing." And I have come to believe that. You might be

down today, but if you want to move up with God's help, you can move up, but you got to work. And nobody's just going to say, "Because you're a minority, we're going to give you a job." No, they're not going to do that. And like I would tell my students, you got to show that you are really, really concerned. But when I reflect on the students that I taught, they . . . most of them—there are exceptions to any rule—they have done well in life. The young man who did that portrait, that picture of me . . .

ARSENEAULT: That's your picture?

ROGERS: [Agrees]

ARSENEAULT: That's good.

ROGERS: [11:32] Yeah.

ARSENEAULT: Did you have to sit for it?

ROGERS: Yes. No, what happened, they were getting ready to have school reunion, but at this reunion they wanted all of the black high schools in the area—Mossville, Washington Marion, LaGrange, all of the black schools—they wanted to have homecoming. So they . . . those students from Mossville selected me to be the parade marshal. Okay, but they wanted a picture. And I gave one of the students a picture, but they didn't tell me that they were sending it to the young man who's an artist. He lives in California. They said, "We're sending it after the

fact." They told me they had sent it to him. His name was . . . last name was Collier. He was from Sulphur. But in high school he always drew. That was his thing. If he . . . Like in class, and you're supposed to be concentrating on this, doing this, he's drawing. I mean, that was his thing. And he went to California—I don't remember which part of California—and he got a job somewhere at an art something, and it helped to develop his . . . it helped to develop his talents. So, they . . . some of the students sent the picture to him and he drew that picture over there from the one that was sent to him.

[13:20] And then I had another student who told me, she said, "Ms. Rogers, you remember how you used to have us do those book reports?" They had to read the books, and they had to discuss them based on certain criteria that I'd given to them. She said, "I went to California and," she said, "I decided I was going to go back to school, get my master's, and do whatever I needed to do." And she said, "When I was called in for an interview to become principal at one high school . . . " She told me, but I don't remember. She said the people who were questioning her they told her, "Oh, you really did well. You just speak so well." She said, "Ms. Rogers, you know what I told them? I have no idea." She said, "I told them I had this English teacher . . ." Every month, all of them, they had to report because, you see, some of those students would go somewhere and get somebody to tell them something, and they would write that down. They didn't know I had this book that had all of the books in there, summarized . . . the main points. And they would come up there with some foolishness. I would ask the other students. I said . . . Because the students evaluated what the other students were doing.

And one girl got up there and she just said anything. She gave the title of the book, and she gave the author. When she finished, the students said, "Ms. Rogers, is that the truth?" I said, "You ask the presenter." She had to come clean. She said, "Oh, I thought I could get over." I

said, "What do you think?" [laughs] But anyway, she got a U [a failing grade] for that too. She would tease me. She said, "Ms. Rogers, you remember the book report?" I said, "Yes, because it was so different. You getting up there and giving the title of the book and the author and just saying anything." And I said, "I gave you what you earned." "Oh, Ms. Rogers." But anyway, it was all in fun because she is out of school and all of that. But back to the young lady in California. She said, "Ms. Rogers," she said, "when you would have us do those book reports," she said, "I would really become frustrated because I didn't want to do it." I said, "Well I knew . . ." I said, "You know, in this life we cannot have everything we want. In this life, there's a give and take." And I said, "Do you think everything I did in college or high school was something I loved doing?" I said, "But I had a goal in mind, and I knew if I didn't do certain things, I wasn't going to make it." But she said, "I am so grateful." She said, "Guess what?" I said, "What?" "They hired me as the principal at this school." I said, "You see?" She said, "Because I spoke so well." I said, "Well congratulations."

[17:02] It's things like that for any teacher when your students come back and tell you how successful they have been, that in itself is worth any amount of money, because money is not everything. And I've had some students who have really done well, and, of course, they're grown now, they have families of their own, some of them live in the Lake Charles area, and they're doing really well. In any situation, everybody is not going to be as successful. And that . . . But they remember me [laughs]. Oh, when I go somewhere, like I go to the store, some of them are working at Walmart, some of them are working at Lowe's. "Ms. Rogers, you remember me?" I say, "Well how can I forget you?" I said, "Now, what are you doing for yourself?" "Oh Ms. Rogers, I'm working." I said, "Well good. You have you a job." I said, "Hopefully you will be able to stay on that job." "Oh, I am, because I want to move up." I said, "Well you got the right

attitude." And those experiences, all of us like to see students do well. The sad thing, to me, is that many of them could do better than what they do, but they don't want the challenge. It's my way, or I just won't do it. I'm going to say this and then I'm going to move onto something else.

[18:38] I remember—this is after I had retired from Barbe—I worked at a school called . . . What was that school? Adult Education. But that wasn't the exact name. But the bottom line was the students that would come to that school, they were students who had dropped out, or either the young ladies had become pregnant and they had to get out of high school and come to that school in the evening in order to get enough credits to be able to graduate.

So, I had this . . . There was a man, he was an adult, he came from my class and he said, "Ms. Rogers . . . " He talked to me alone. He said, "I want to learn how to read." I said, "Well let me tell you, I will do everything I can to help you." And he was just so conscientious. He was determined that he was going to make it. And I did what I could to help him. Sometimes he wanted to stay after the classes were over so that there would be certain things he could learn. And do you know, every time I think about it . . . Now this was an adult. He graduated from that high school. It was called the P.M. High School, but it was for the young adults who had dropped out for whatever reason and they would be able to come back and get their diploma. And this man, when he started the school he was already a family man, but he decided, he told me, that he was going to go back to school to get his twelfth grade diploma.

So anyway, we worked, we worked, and the other students, they didn't like for me to take up a lot of time with him. But my attitude was, he doesn't know; you've been in school and you can read—because this man came there not reading. He was using books that was on a different grade level than what the regular students were using. But that man is now a minister, and he reads well, and I just . . . It's . . . You get gratification when you see an adult or a student so

conscientious that they will do whatever they need to do to learn what they need to learn.

And there was another man in my class, he was in his seventies. He told me . . . He was a white guy. He said he was in high school at Lake Charles High School, but his parents needed help, so the only way he thought that he could help them was to volunteer and go into the service, because he would draw a check every month and he would be able to send money home. He said, "You know Mrs. Rogers, I told myself if I lived long enough, I was going to graduate from high school." So I said, "I tell you what, I am willing to help you." Of course, he could read and he could write. But he said, "I'm just so far behind." I said, "Well don't worry about that!" I said, "Where there's a will, there's a way." And I said, "When we are discussing something or doing something you don't understand, don't pretend . . . " I said, "Either you come to me personally, or you ask your questions openly." I tell you, some of those students could be so rude. And I said, "It's up to you." But that man came into that class, and he worked hard. I was just so proud of him, because he was the one who was determined to succeed. The night of graduation, he said, "Ms. Rogers, thank you. I can read." And you know what? I didn't want to cry in his presence. I was crying because, well tears were coming, because they were tears of joy.

And most teachers like to see students do well. It doesn't matter about their age. If they want to learn, most teachers are willing to do what they can to help you. And I . . . Look, I could go on, and on, and on because I've had some situations.

ARSENEAULT: [24:01] I'm curious to know how you got the job at Mossville.

ROGERS: Oh, how did I get the job? Okay. When I graduated from college . . . well, in college, they had told us if we . . . I was certified to become a teacher, some of the things we

needed to do. And they said that you could write a letter of application and they would guide you in the steps and everything. So, I did. I sent one to Calcasieu Parish, I sent one to East Baton Rouge, and West, one at Caddo in Shreveport [Louisiana]. I didn't want to go to . . . I lived in a small town, and I wanted to go to a larger place. I never knew that Mossville existed, because when I wrote the letter, the letter didn't go to Mossville; it went to the Calcasieu Parish School Board. They were the . . . well, the school was just opening, so they needed teachers. Every person that they would hire would be new to that school. So I wrote the letter, as I said earlier. Excuse me. And they sent me some forms to fill out. In the . . . Well, they had written a letter asking me if I were really interested in the job, they would consider me for the job. They wanted to know when would be a good time for me to come to the school board, because they could explain certain things to me. And I did.

[26:01] Then when I came back home . . . when I went back home, I had, as I said, applied in Caddo and I applied in East Baton Rouge. I had gotten a letter from East Baton Rouge. At the time I . . . Well, my mother died when I was in high school, and my father was living in California. My grandparents didn't want us to be separated, meaning my brother and me. So they wanted to keep us. After I came from Lake Charles back to my home, which was in Arcadia, about fifty-five miles from Shreveport . . . You know where Shreveport is? Well anyway, I had gotten this letter from Baton Rouge considering me, because at the time we had to take . . . what kind of test was it? The ACT? But . . . No, you had to make a certain score within the subject area that you had majored in. They had seen my test scores, so they were offering me a position. I had not worked in Calcasieu Parish, but I had signed a contract. I was going to start in that August. So when my grandmother . . . She said, "Well, I don't see why you would go to Baton Rouge and you already have a job." You know, that kind of talk. I was always . . . I always tried

to be obedient. So, I said, "Well, Lord, I just guess I'll go on to Calcasieu Parish." And that's how I ended up. I got here . . . Well my cousin had worked in Calcasieu Parish, so when it was time for me to come down here to live, she knew a lady who had worked with her who lived in the Mossville area. She talked to this lady to see if I could stay with her, and the lady agreed.

ARSENEAULT: [28:29] Who was the lady?

ROGERS: Pardon?

ARSENEAULT: Do you remember the lady's name?

ROGERS: What was her name? Ms. LeVan is her . . . Ms. LeVan. So she was working in Lake Charles, and I was going to be working over, across the lake. But anyway, she afforded me . . . she rented me a room, and I had access to the kitchen and the bathroom. So . . .

ARSENEAULT: Where in Mossville was it?

ROGERS: You know where the recreation center is where we go sometimes? It was across the street . . .

ARSENEAULT: Okay.

ROGERS: . . . further down to your right.

ARSENEAULT: [29:14] So not on, like, Charles [Street]?

ROGERS: No, I wasn't . . . It was in Mossville.

ARSENEAULT: Okay.

ROGERS: You know the recreation building where we have dinner sometimes?

ARSENEAULT: [Agrees]

ROGERS: Okay, that's . . .

ARSENEAULT: So it was off the Old Spanish Trail?

ROGERS: [29:29] It's on the Old Spanish Trail.

ARSENEAULT: Okay.

ROGERS: That's the rec. To your left, if you're going west . . .

ARSENEAULT: It's like the railroad track.

ROGERS: Yes. I [had?] across the railroad track.

ARSENEAULT: Okay.

ROGERS: And to my left there was a store in front of the house where the lady lived that I was living with . . . That I was going to live with.

ARSENEAULT: [29:54] Okay. Was that Garrett's?

ROGERS: Yes. We lived . . . Her house was behind that store.

ARSENEAULT: Was it on the same property?

ROGERS: No, it was her property.

ARSENEAULT: Okay.

ROGERS: It was her property. So I stayed there . . . oh, for a long time. I don't remember the number of years, but I did stay there. And then I didn't have transportation when I went there.

ARSENEAULT: So you just walked?

ROGERS: I walked sometimes. Sometimes parents would be bringing their students to school and they would pick me up. Then, I met a lady who was hired at Mossville High School during the time that I was hired. Her mother lived down in Bel Air. You ever heard of Bel Air?

Okay. Her mother lived in Bel Air. So she decided that she was going to build her some apartments in Bel Air, and she said, "If you want to, Gloria, I'll make sure you get a room." So I said, "Why not?" Because that would be closer to the school. So anyway, that's what happened. I left Mrs. LeVan . . . I don't remember the year. But anyway . . . Let's say school is out in May. I did not return to Mrs. LeVan the following school year.

In fact, I stayed in my friend's apartment in Bel Air, and then after a while one of those plants wanted to buy them out and, of course, they did. So it was just . . . something, something, something. When we were told that the high school at Mossville was going to be disbanded, we were hurt because, like I said, our students would not be able to get the recognition that they would have gotten had they remained at least the remainder of that school year. But anyway, that's life. When we went to Westlake High, oh my God.

ARSENEAULT: [32:27] I definitely want to hear about that. But first, I'm so curious. What was your first impression of Mossville? Since you didn't grow up there, you got a really unique outsider's perspective.

ROGERS: I surely did. When I went to Mossville I didn't know anybody over there. Now, the lady that I lived with, I didn't even know her. But my cousin knew her because they worked at the same school, and my cousin was responsible for helping me to be able to live with Ms. LeVan. The first time . . . Well, new and young, trying to find your way. I found out where the church was, the church for my faith, and some of the members would tell me, "If you want to go to church at Mount Zion, let us know and we would be glad to pick you up." I said, "Well great," I'm thinking to myself. So they said, "Just call us. We will be happy to pick you up." So I stepped

out on faith, believing them. And they did; they picked me up. They would see that I would get to church, and they would see that I get back to where I was living.

ARSENEAULT: So you went to the Mount Zion Baptist?

ROGERS: [34:04] Yes, because the lady that I lived with, she was a staunch Catholic. Sometimes she would bring me to Lake Charles because she was a member at Sacred Heart, and sometimes she would bring me to Sacred Heart with her. Not that I knew anything about the Catholic religion, but I was gradually learning, because I was curious. By that time, by the time I had begun to really catch on, I had begun to get involved at Mount Zion, which meant I would spend my time at Mount Zion, rather than coming over here with my landlady. The people, I thought, were really nice. They really treated me nice, and they would tell me if I needed a ride to town, just let them know. I thought they were really, really nice. They made me feel welcomed. I had begun to like the area because all the people, they were so nice.

I remember there was a lady who worked at Mossville High School. She liked to cook, but she lived in Lake Charles. She would say . . . Because at the time I wasn't married. She said, "Ms. Kilgore, you know I like to cook chicken." And she said, "Would you like some?" I said, "Oh, yes ma'am." And the question was, how was I going to get to Lake Charles? But I had some friends who had cars, and they would bring me. But it all worked out well, because when I went over across the lake I didn't know anybody over there. But after I stayed there a while, I began to fall in just like the others.

The parents were cooperative with their children. I tell you, there were some boys in my class and I would stay on them and they didn't like that. I'll never forget. I had bought . . . After I

had worked there two or three years, I had begun to save my money so to have a down payment on my car. I bought a Ford Fairlane 500 from Sulphur. One of the men [Oliver Jones] who worked at Mossville High School, he's from somewhere around New Orleans. But anyway, he taught me how to drive.

[37:02] So these boys, sometimes they wouldn't do their work like they were supposed to have done. And because they didn't, they didn't get the grade they thought they should have gotten. But I didn't care, because at that time my attitude was "whatever" and they didn't like that. So I guess they were out to show me "whatever." So anyway, what happened? They did something to my car. I really don't remember what they did. But they messed up my car. I didn't . . . I had no idea who had done it. None. And one of the boys said, "Ms. Rogers, I want to talk to you." No, Ms. Kilgore, because at that time I wasn't married. So he said, "Do you know who messed up your car?" I said, "I have no idea." And he went on and he told me. So I said, "Well that's just too bad. I'm going to call the police." And I did. I called. I didn't consult their parents, because I didn't really know their parents that well. But I called the police. And the police . . . I don't remember what the police did, but the policemen did find them and he talked to them. I don't know if they had to pay a fine. I really don't know the details. It was so long ago.

So one of the parents called me and she said . . . well, she identified herself. She said, "Ms. Kilgore, I understand that my brother or some relative had . . . was one of the boys who helped them mess up your car." I said, "Yes, ma'am. Another student told me who did it." And I said, "I believe that young man is trustworthy", my point being I believed him. So she said, "I wish you would have called us before you called the police." You realize I didn't know that. You know how you're young in your first year, there's so much you don't know, but you learn through experiences. But anyways, and another parent called me. She said, "Oh, Ms. Rogers, I wish you

would have told me . . . told my husband." I said, "Ma'am, I'm sorry." I said, "I wasn't thinking along those lines." And I wasn't. But anyway, they had to pay to get my car fixed. I don't remember what all they had messed up. I know they messed it up.

So their parents had them to come and apologize to me. I said to myself, "You said it because they're on you. You don't really mean it." But that . . . I just accepted their apologies. But I had no more problems after that because they saw that if you met a . . . if you bother . . . That's my territory. It would be the same if I'd go to your house and mess up your stuff. Then I'm in trouble. One of the boys told me, he said, "You know Ms. Rogers, sometimes I cry." I said, "Why you crying?" "About what I did." I said, "Well that's history." I said, "Well let me tell you, I hope it helped you. You wouldn't do that to somebody else, would you?" "Oh, no ma'am. No ma'am." I said, "So for you, it was a learning experience." But through it all, I weathered some storms. But when I look back, it was really a learning experience for me because when I left there, Mossville . . . not wanting to leave, but I needed to work. So I went to Westlake High, and of course another story.

ARSENEAULT: [41:03] So you were there when it first started until it got disbanded?

ROGERS: That's correct.

ARSENEAULT: Wow. So that was from 19 . . .

ROGERS: 1950 . . . I started at Mossville High School in August of 1955.

ARSENEAULT: First class coming in.

ROGERS: [41:17] Yeah. It was an elementary . . . It was called the Mossville High School, but there was an elementary division, too, grades one through—what?—six, seven. And then . . . What did they have? The elementary, the middle school, and then the high school. High school was from ninth through twelfth. So the high school was disbanded after this integration came about. Now, it depended on where the students lived. If the students lived in a certain vicinity, those who were coming to Mossville High School, they would end up going to Sulphur. And then if the students lived in a certain area . . .

ARSENEAULT: They'd go to Westlake.

ROGERS: . . . they'd go to Westlake. They would go to Westlake High. And then the children from Vinton, they just stayed in Vinton.

ARSENEAULT: Okay.

ROGERS: [42:16] They didn't have to come back to . . . Well the high school kids didn't because there was no high school after . . . let's see. That was 1955. No . . .

ARSENEAULT: Was it '69?

ROGERS: No, 1969.

ARSENEAULT: Okay.

ROGERS: That's when the high school was disbanded.

ARSENEAULT: What do you remember about the protests? Were there any protests?

ROGERS: [42:37] The only protest I saw was at school at Westlake High School. I don't remember the parents protesting. I don't remember. Our protest was at the school. Our students-- and when I say our, the black students--like I said earlier, they didn't want to leave because some of the guys played on the football team and they had certain positions that they would play, and they liked football. But going to another school that's already in progress, what do you do? I mean, you may be able to get on the team. I really don't know about the football set-up. But there were students who were in various activities at Mossville High School. They couldn't just go to Westlake High and get involved. They had to show that they were worthy. And some of the students were really, really upset.

The first year, I would come home, I would tell my husband, I said, "You know what? I don't know if it's worth it," because I would be so stressed out. Stressed because . . . I don't know if you've ever been in this situation where you're not wanted, but yet you got to work. So what do you do? If I'd had a choice, I wouldn't have gone there; but the choice wasn't mine. But even though there were those faculty members at Westlake High who were really, really cooperative, because they understood we weren't there because we wanted to be there; we were there because our children need to get an education. And that was the high school that many of them were assigned to, so we just . . . But some of the teachers . . . I don't know. And I felt so sorry for the

principal because . . . Oh my God. He was trying to do the best that he could considering the situation.

ARSENEAULT: Do you remember his name?

ROGERS: [45:10] [Agrees] Mr. Latard. To me, he was so gentle. He was trying to get those teachers who didn't want us there to understand this is not his doing.

ARSENEAULT: How did you know the other teachers didn't want you there?

ROGERS: By the way they acted. They never told us anything. Well, they never told me and I don't think they told anybody else. But you know what?

ARSENEAULT: It was their attitude.

ROGERS: Yeah. Certain teachers were really nice and they would . . . because . . . To my left, there was this teacher who taught twelfth grade English. To my right, there was this teacher who taught tenth and eleventh grade English. Okay. When I went there, I had twelfth grade English, I had tenth grade English, and I had eleventh grade English--three preparations. But that didn't bother me. The lady to my right, she said, "Ms. Rogers," she said, "I teach tenth and eleventh grade English." And she said, "If there's any way I can help you, just let me know." And I believed her. She was sincere. But the one to my left, she didn't say anything. I mean, not that it bothered me, but . . . I don't know. Some days . . . well, after we got there the teachers had to

stand on the hall to see . . . make sure there weren't . . . there would not be any disturbances. And Oh, Lord. The first week we were there, it was horrific. And when I would come home, I would just . . . Oh, Lord. All I could do was just sit down.

ARSENEAULT: [47:14] What kind of stuff would you see?

ROGERS: Well, it wasn't so much . . . Well, I didn't see a fight, but I was told that there was just fighting all up and down the hall. Because once the bell would ring, the tardy bell, I would have the students come in and I would . . . my door would be . . . when I closed it, it would be locked so they couldn't come into the room. I just tried to tune them out. And then there were students in the room, "Ms. Rogers, why you closing that door?" I said, "You don't have any idea?" I didn't even explain because my thinking was: they were intelligent enough to know why I was closing the door. I didn't explain, and I said, "Come on students, we have to get on with this class. We have to. We don't have any choice because we are already behind."

And then we would go to the cafeteria and somebody would end up hitting somebody, that kind of foolishness. To me, it was foolishness. But the students were angry. They were angry on both sides. The black students were angry, the white students were angry. Not all of them. Some of the white students, they were really nice. They tried to make the students feel welcomed. Oh, Lord, but some of them . . . no way, no way, no way. But it's amazing how time can bring about a change.

[49:01] My first year there we had one . . . well, when we went there Mr. Latard was the principal. He had to give it up before the year was over. Then they hired another man. I don't remember his name. And then he had to give it up. Well I'm not saying he had to, but I guess it

was so much commotion. You got to have some peace. He quit. And then they got a third person, and that person stayed while I was there. He stayed. He finished the remainder of the school year. I was there for three or four years at Westlake High. And then this was when . . . at the time my husband was stationed after . . . Wright-Patterson Air Force Base in Dayton, Ohio. So I had gone up there. My children . . . Well the three of us—I had a boy and a girl—we went there to be with him for the summer.

And then I got this telegram from Mr. Russell who, at the time, was the superintendent of the Calcasieu Parish School System. He was telling me to please call his office and he gave me the time. And that I did. First time I called I didn't get him because he wasn't in. But I did call and I did get him. He said, "Mrs. Rogers?" I said, "Yes." He said, "I'm calling because we are moving you from Westlake High School to Barbe High School." I said, "Why?" I don't even remember the excuse he gave. But he said, "You'll like it at Barbe. It's air conditioned." I said, "Sir, it's air conditioned over here." So that wasn't anything extra. He said, "But you would like Barbe." That was the first year of Barbe High School. And he said, "Do you know John Nicosia?" I said, "I've heard the name, but I don't really know him." And then he was telling me when I could come and meet him. He asked me if I knew where Barbe High was. I said, "No, I don't know." Anyway, during the course of the time that we were to meet I found out, but I didn't know where it was.

ARSENEAULT: [51:34] Where was it?

ROGERS: It's on . . . What's the name of that street? Let's see . . . You heard of Nelson Road?

ARSENEAULT: [Agrees]

ROGERS: Okay. You go down Nelson . . . Well, at the time we were going on the interstate because I had some . . . There were three of us who were working at Barbe. My friend down the street, she was in the social studies, and then I had another friend who was in business education, and I was in English. So we would alternate. I would drive one week, and they would drive one week. But the bottom line is we would get on the interstate and we would get off on Nelson Road and make a left turn, and we would go all the way down to McNeese Street, West McNeese, and then you make a right, and there is Barbe.

ARSENEAULT: [52:27] So it's in Lake Charles?

ROGERS: Yes, it's in Lake Charles. That was supposed to be the school.

ARSENEAULT: I see.

ROGERS: The school. There are those who still think it is the school. But anyway, students used to tell me, "Ms. Rogers . . ." [laughs] They, the students who would be talking to me, they had gone to Welsh Middle School, but then after they moved on up in grade they came to Barbe. They would tell me that, "Ms. Rogers, you know so-and-so?" Of course I didn't know who they were talking about, but they were trying to make me know them. I said, "No, I don't know them." "Well we ran her away." And they would tell me the things they would do.

ARSENEAULT: Trying to scare you?

ROGERS: [53:18] Yes! I said, "Now wait, let's get something straight." I said, "Now if I leave it won't be because you will run me off. I'm leaving because I desire to leave." "Oh, but we would run you off." I said, "I'm not worrying about that. I'm not worrying about your running me off." But anyway, once I got my first year there at Barbe, people were nice. They were really nice. After I set those students straight about what they had done to another teacher, they just said, "Well, I guess I may as well just fall in line and do what I got to do." They were cooperative.

[54:08] They used to tease me about my car. They said, "Ms. Rogers, I can't believe . . ." What did they call me . . . call my car? "The Green Machine." I said, "Oh yes." And they would ask me so many silly questions, questions I couldn't respond to like, "Ms. Rogers . . ." Now if we had read a story and we would be discussing that story, they would try to correlate it with some experience out there in the community. "Mrs. Rogers, why in north Lake Charles . . ." That's where a lot of black people live. "Why in north Lake Charles you see people with Cadillacs?" I said, "I can't answer that question." I said, "I don't live in north Lake Charles, so you need to talk with one of the persons who has a Cadillac and they might be able to tell you." I said, "But I can't tell you." And I knew they weren't going to do that. They would say crazy things like that. Sometimes I would get tickled; sometimes I would not depending on how they would respond. But there were some smart students in that class. But just like any student, they wouldn't work hard at all until they saw that they had to work. You're not here in school to come and play around; you're here to learn all that you can learn. And even at that, you still have not learned enough. But anyway.

ARSENEAULT: [55:51] I'm curious. We're almost at an hour and I would hate to . . .

ROGERS: Okay, good.

ARSENEAULT: . . . tire you out.

ROGERS: Okay, good.

ARSENEAULT: I know.

ROGERS: Oh, Lord.

ARSENEAULT: I have lots of questions . . .

ROGERS: Okay.

ARSENEAULT: . . . so I might have to come back for another interview.

ROGERS: Okay.

ARSENEAULT: But I wanted to ask you what Mossville means to you personally.

ROGERS: [56:12] I'm going to get to that answer—I'm going to give you an answer—

because I'm going to digress. My husband could not understand why I would not move my letter from that church, Mount Zion. And like I told him, Rogers, "This church, to me, is home," because when I came here shortly after I had been here, I united with that church, and I have seen people come and go. But each to his own. Like some people would say certain things, but I mean I guess they were justified in what they said or what they did. But that's that person. That wasn't me. My husband, as I said earlier, he couldn't understand why I would want to stay over there. We lived in Lake Charles and . . . because . . . I said, "Rogers," I said, "why don't you come and unite with me at Mount Zion?" Well, in no uncertain terms he said, "No, I'm going to unite with the church over here." I said, "Well Rogers . . ." He said, "But I still don't understand." I said, "Well Rogers, that's home. That's home to me."

When I first came over in that area, really I didn't even know that place existed. But after I united at that church, the people were very nice to me. They treated me with respect. I consider that home, even though realistically it isn't. But that's my attitude about it, because God has blessed me. I started out working with x-number of teachers, and many of those teachers are gone. Some younger, some older. So I'm thinking, well God maybe has a purpose for me. You don't know what God has in store for you. But for some reason I decided that I've been here this long, why am I going to unite with another church?

[58:54] So to respond to your question, the area, the Mossville area, to me, is like I'm going home. When I go over there, it's not that I like everything that I am subjected to. But you could be in your own house and not be happy about everything. That's life. But you live to adapt to--that's my attitude--the environments in which you find yourself. And if you like people, people will like you. If you don't like this or that about somebody, that's your problem. I'm not going to be affected by . . . because you don't like Mary. Don't try to get me to this light, Mary.

That's between you and Mary, not between Mary and me. The older I get, the more absorbed I become in God's way of life. I don't care if I'm black, I don't care if I'm brown, it doesn't matter. But one thing I do know, I cannot go around disliking people because of the color of their skin. If I do, I don't have a place in heaven. If it's rough down here now, can you imagine what it would be like if you die and your soul is lost? You go to hell, and you would be burning eternally.

[phone rings]

ARSENEAULT: Well that's a perfect place to pause.

ROGERS: Huh?

ARSENEAULT: That's a perfect place to stop.

[1:00:48]

[End Tape 4530. End Session II.]