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Session I
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[Begin Tape 4418. Begin Session I.]

KYLE TANGLAO: Three, two, one . . .

TERESHA USSIN: Today is January twenty-third and I am Teresha Ussin and representing the T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History with LSU [Louisiana State University] Libraries. We're 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 a Mossville oral history day here at the Rigmaiden Recreation Center on Old Spanish Trail.

PATRICIA PRATER RUBIT: [00:29] Rigmaiden.

USSIN: Rigmaiden. Thank you. I'm here with Patricia Pratter . . .

RUBIT: Prater.

USSIN: Prater . . .

RUBIT: Rubit.

USSIN: Rubit. Thank you for agreeing to do the interview. This is going to be a short interview of about fifteen minutes, and we will likely be in touch with you later to set up a much larger . . . Longer interview if you are interested in continuing on.

RUBIT: [00:54] Okay.

USSIN: Well if you will again, could you state your full name?

RUBIT: My name is Patricia Prater Rubit.

USSIN: Okay. And where were you born?

RUBIT: [01:05] I was born in Lake Charles, Louisiana. Saint Patrick's Hospital.

USSIN: What were your parents' names and your grandparents' names?

RUBIT: My father's name was Elwood Prater, Senior. He was married to Ester Vincent. My grandfather was Austin Prater. He was married to Mittie Braxton.

USSIN: Okay.

RUBIT: My mother's father was Roosevelt Vincent and he was married to Mamie Perkins. And her . . . Mamie Perkins' family was James and Sinnie Rigmaiden.

USSIN: Those names, Braxton, Perkins . . .

RUBIT: Rigmaiden.

USSIN: [01:54] Rigmaiden, have come up a lot today.

RUBIT: Yes.

USSIN: Can you give us just a little . . . If you want, a little more background?

RUBIT: On the Rigmaiden side?

USSIN: [Agrees].

RUBIT: [02:08] As I said, my great grandmother was a Rigmaiden. Her name was Sinnie Rigmaiden, and she was married to James Perkins. Josh Rigmaiden was Sinnie's brother. They were brother and sister. So Josh Rigmaiden was actually my great great uncle. My dad's mother was a Braxton . . . name was Mittie Braxton. Her father was Augustus Braxton. And . . .

TANGLAO: Do you mind if I take your picture?

RUBIT: Sure!

USSIN: What is your earliest memory of Mossville?

RUBIT: [02:53] Oh, my earliest memory of Mossville was . . . Oh, it dates back so long ago. We were . . . I can remember I must have been about four years old. I can remember my parents building the house that I actually spent . . . well, grew up in. As my family . . . My mother and father moved my family from Mossville in the mid-60s, 1965 as a matter fact, and we went to San Francisco. Primarily because I'm one of ten children, and at that time the main reason was we were beginning to finish school. And so that was to further our education, going to college. After my father retired from San Francisco Municipal Railway, he moved back here. And subsequently, I moved back.

But I grew up here. Went to school here at Mossville. As I said I can remember I must have been . . . Oh, it was preschool age when we moved into the house there on Burton Street. 4016 and 4006 East Burton Street. My grandma . . . everyone . . . All my grandparents lived here. My uncles, aunts, extended family, so this holds a lot of history. I can remember growing up, it was always a . . . The community was a really wholesome community. Everyone worked together and everyone pretty much knew everyone. It was good times.

USSIN: [04:50] Sounds like it.

RUBIT: Very good times.

USSIN: Sounds like it.

RUBIT: Yes. It was.

BILL SHEARMAN: Ms. Prater, would you mind giving us the year you were born?

RUBIT: I was born in March seventeenth, 1947.

SHEARMAN: [05:01] Okay. Thank you.

USSIN: And since you mentioned there was a closeness, a tight connection with family, where did the church and the community play a role . . . Who were some of the leaders in the church and why?

RUBIT: I grew up in Mount Zion Baptist Church. As a matter of fact, my . . . one of my . . . A Braxton was the minister at the beginning of that. My grandfather was one of the first ushers that I knew at Mount Zion, Roosevelt Vincent, Senior. I have documentation, or the actual deed . . . A copy of the original deed in which that land was donated by the Moss family for the church there. I can remember the old church and when that was actually rebuilt. I think that was . . . Must have been in the 60s. Have some of the old pictures of that church. When I was a member there, Reverend White was the pastor.

USSIN: [06:31] Where did you go to school? Elementary school? High school?

RUBIT: Mossville.

USSIN: Okay. Can you tell me where the young folks would gather in the community?

RUBIT: The young folks would gather at . . . There was a place right across the street from the swimming pool, it was called Ms. Lula's Place. That was . . . It was like a little teenage spot. We call it a canteen back at that time. And also down in the Bel Air area was Ms. Freelow's. She had a . . . It was like a hamburger place and the youth would gather there. And also at the Recreation Center here. We would have games, and of course the pool and everything.

USSIN: [07:23] Okay. And in the beginning of the interview you said that you just moved back, correct?

RUBIT: Yes.

USSIN: Okay. So knowing that you grew up here and now that you're back, can you do like a comparison contrast of what you seen was different, was the same?

RUBIT: Oh, dear. I was gone for about forty years. I lived in the San Francisco Bay area. And after I retired, I worked for . . . It's now AT&T. I was an engineer for AT&T. Actually I was employed by Pacific Bell. At one time Pacific Bell was under the umbrella of AT&T. And then they . . . I'm sure everybody knows about that breakup, and now they're back together again.

USSIN: [Agrees].

RUBIT: [08:21] But once I worked for them for thirty years, and after I retired, my husband . . . After both of us retired, my dad was here. And I decided . . . We decided to move back. Now, I left in the mid-60s and there was quite a bit of change. But yes . . . when I left . . . Well, there's a big span of time, but just remembering the way that I grew up and when I came back it was like everything was fragmented because people had migrated to other places. That real real close camaraderie that I grew up with wasn't there anymore. I didn't move back to . . . Actually I moved back to Mossville, and subsequently once my father was living I moved to Lake Charles, but once he deceased, back to the family property here in Mossville. So it was quite an adjustment. Just . . . it took me . . . Actually it took me about five years to adjust to being back here because it was that much of a change.

As I said when I grew up my grandparents were all here. All my aunts and uncles. I grew up with my cousins. Very close knit family. As a matter of fact, we primarily lived in separate houses, but all together. And we would just . . . I had never seen anything like it. I mean we were just very very close . . . Visit. There were no . . . You didn't have to worry about locking your doors or leaving anything out. I mean it was just a community based thing. You walked down the street everyone knew each other. Kids were very much disciplined and it was like the entire community raised the children. I mean it wasn't just your parents and grandparents, but your aunts and uncles and the rest of the community that was involved. The school teachers, when I was in school, the . . .

TANGLAO: The mic.

RUBIT: Oh, I'm sorry. When I was in school the . . . As a matter of fact, the old school building I think was situated somewhere here. Right here in this spot, or almost in this spot. And it was a big building, two classrooms. Then of course they moved . . . They built the school that's still existing down the way which was open to first through the twelfth grade. And as I said I graduated from high school in 1965, which is the year that my family actually relocated to California.

USSIN: What is the most important thing you want people to remember about Mossville that isn't in the history books?

RUBIT: [11:42] Everything. The community, how everyone worked together. It was a cohesive . . . It wasn't incorporated, but I can remember as a little girl that my Uncle Josh Rigmaiden was more like a mayor, but he wasn't actually a mayor. He did have a store. And I can just remember a sense of togetherness, and everything was like harmonious. The neighborhood was well kept and manicured. The housing . . . it was like everyone was . . . had . . . How would I say? Some pride or proud . . . Just the families.

USSIN: Did your family have a garden? Did you raise livestock?

RUBIT: [12:43] Yes. My father had a garden.

USSIN: Okay.

RUBIT: A vegetable garden.

USSIN: Okay.

RUBIT: And an abundance of fruit trees, and nut trees, and . . . My father did a lot of hunting, and fishing, and gardening of course.

USSIN: [13:00] That's what I hear from a lot of folks that have been interviewed today is you could live off the land.

RUBIT: Right.

USSIN: It was a very rich land.

RUBIT: [13:10] Yes it was. Very rich.

USSIN: Is there anything else that you want to add that's just really important before we . . .? Getting close to time, but anything that you really want to have on record about your family and the community that you haven't already said?

RUBIT: Not that I can think of at present. I could probably think of some things, but I guess I wasn't really prepared for the interview today.

SHEARMAN: Ms. Prater, do you approve of our project?

RUBIT: [13:49] Yes. I do.

SHEARMAN: Okay. Thank you.

RUBIT: Yes.

USSIN: Okay. Can I wrap it up? Okay. Well our time is up. On behalf of the center and the museum, we appreciate your contribution today. And you say you don't have anything else really in closing, or you do?

RUBIT: [14:17] No, I don't.

USSIN: Okay.

RUBIT: Not at this time.

USSIN: Okay well this concludes our interview. We'll be in touch about the possibility of setting up a second interview with you later.

RUBIT: Okay. Thank you.

USSIN: Thank you.

SHEARMAN: Ms. Prater, you still live here?

RUBIT: Yes.

SHEARMAN: Okay. In Mossville?

RUBIT: [14:31] Yes.

SHEARMAN: Okay. If you like I can show you where the desk is and we'll scan
your pictures.

RUBIT: Okay.

[14:36]

[End Tape 4418. End Session I.]