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[Begin Tape 4548. Begin Session I.]

REBECCA COOPER: Okay, great. So today is November twenty-third, 2015. I'm Becca Cooper 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 to document the history of Mossville [Louisiana]. So I'm here today with Mrs. Evelyn Gasaway Shelton at her home in Lake Charles [Louisiana]. This is her second time being interviewed. So yeah, thank you for agreeing to be interviewed again.

EVELYN GASAWAY SHELTON: Sure.

COOPER: Last time you shared a bit of background information on your parents and your grandparents, and you gave a brief overview of education and entertainment growing up in Mossville. So today we're going to delve a little bit deeper into your experience growing up in Mossville. To start, you mentioned a bit about your mother's parents, Della and David [Spikes?]. Is that right?

SHELTON: [Agrees]

COOPER: [00:51] So what do you remember about them?

SHELTON: They were some of the greatest grandparents you'd ever want to come across. I remember that. My grandfather was short. My grandmother was a little taller than him. As a matter of fact, my grandmother looked somewhat like you, except that she might have been a bit taller. [laughs] She was a very pretty, pretty lady. Both of them were very compassionate persons. My grandfather and grandmother lived in a town that was called Bancroft [Louisiana]. My grandfather farmed and he grew corn. I don't know . . . Oh, just a lot of vegetables. What I remember that really stood out was when we would go there on summer vacations and he would get us out of the bed early. He wanted . . . He had us go into his field. We hadn't been in the field before, but he had us to go in and try to pick cotton. Oh, we thought that was a big deal. So we did, and my sister and I, we'd try to outdo each other as to filling up the sacks. Well everything that we saw on the bush, we picked that green bulbs and cotton, everything. So he looked at our bags and he saw where we had . . . we were stripping the plants just about, so he told us "Nuh-uh. Never again."

[03:05] He didn't call us children; he called us "chaps." Later on as I grew older I found out that that was a German word for children, "chaps." "Oh your chaps are going inside, and don't you ever come out here anymore." [laughs] We thought we were really doing a big deal. That was our last time of ever going into any fields or anything. He had plum trees . . . well fruit trees, I'd say. You couldn't just go out there and pick fruits . . . plums or peaches or anything. He would have to do that for us, not us, because you couldn't go up in the trees. I don't know why they were so particular about all that, you know? But he was a character when he'd come see his plants and whatnot.

[04:11] We'd go to church on Sundays. It looked like we stay in church all day just about then. [laughs] Well they didn't have anything else to do. The ladies would bring covered dishes

and we'd stay there and eat. Go back in the church later on. Those are some of the things that I remember really well. Oh, we'd have family reunions. They would be out at Grandpa's and Grandmother's house. They had a log cabin. They would cook the sweet potatoes in the fire place. They'd push the . . . I guess the ashes back and put the potatoes in there and cover the potatoes up with the ashes again. They also did syrup, making syrup. We thought that was really neat how they would take the horse and they'd go round, and around, and around in circles making the syrup. But those were the good ole days.

Oh, and my grandfather would not eat out of nothing but a solid white plates. Nothing with designs or anything. It had to be solid white. I couldn't understand how he lived so long, because when my grandmother would fix grits, well he'd have a tendency to . . . well she cooked his bacon, but he'd use the drippings off the bacon and put on his grits. As I've gotten older, I said, "Well gosh, how did Grandfather live so long? Ninety-something years old and he'd take that drips to put on his grits." [laughs] But the things that they did back there . . . But everything was natural, I guess. No preservatives and all that kind of stuff in the food. But those were some of my memories of my grandmother and grandfather.

COOPER: So that was in Bancroft, Louisiana?

SHELTON: [06:51] Bancroft, Louisiana.

COOPER: And how did they get to . . . I think you mentioned that your grandfather had come from Georgia.

SHELTON: Yeah, that's what he told us. He was a freed slave.

COOPER: And how did they end up in Louisiana?

SHELTON: [07:05] I don't know. I never did find that out. I'm sure some of my uncles could have told, but at that time we weren't inquisitive as to how they got here or anything. Not until they had passed on, and then we wondered how they got here to Louisiana. But he was a freed slave. His original name was Culpepper. I remember that. Culpepper. But after he got to Louisiana, I guess his slave owner gave him his [last] name, [Spikes?].

COOPER: Wow. And then . . . Okay, so in your last interview you also mentioned your parents came to Mossville . . .

SHELTON: My daddy.

COOPER: . . . for the industry. Right?

SHELTON: [08:02] Yeah, back in 1943. A lot of people were coming this way in 19 . . . back there in the early '40s, and he came here in the 1943. He came in 1943.

COOPER: Were they brought in by a specific petrochemical or industrial plant?

SHELTON: Yeah, Cities Service [Gasaway adds: He came on his own. He'd heard about

the industries here].

COOPER: Cities Service.

SHELTON: [Agrees] He came here and got a job with Cities Service. That's where he worked until he retired.

COOPER: What did he do at Cities Service?

SHELTON: [08:39] Well, he started off by, I guess . . . oh, common labor[er]. He started off with common labor. Eventually he ended up being a truck driver. He drove trucks. He was a fork lifter for a while and a truck driver. That was . . . He did that for years. Yeah. As a matter fact, as a result of his working there, I was able to get their scholarship to go to college.

COOPER: Wow.

SHELTON: That's where he was. He relocated here in '43.

COOPER: And so he went to . . . he went up to the eighth grade, and you mentioned your mom went through to college.

SHELTON: My mother finished high school . . .

COOPER: Yeah.

SHELTON: . . . and spent a couple semesters in college until she met my dad and she didn't go back then. But she insisted her children would go to school. Well both of them did because she didn't get a chance to go back and finish. That was always one of her dreams, to go back and finish.

COOPER: [10:04] And where did she go to school before she met your father?

SHELTON: Weirgate High School. And you know, back then they had kings and queens for the school because she said she was named Ms. Weirgate at one time. [laughs] So they had kings and queens back then. We were shocked.

COOPER: Okay, so you mentioned family reunions at your grandpa's house. What were those like?

SHELTON: Oh, fun! My uncles . . . We were always . . . I guess petted because all . . . it seemed like everybody was always much older than we were. I can remember them, my uncles, getting out there in the yard playing, we called them, ukuleles, the guitar, and singing and dancing. They'd have a big fire out there in the front yard, because the house had a big porch across the front of it. My grandparent's house had a big porch across the front. There was . . . they called them lanes that you drive up the lane, they said. We could hear certain cars come from a distance. "There comes so-and-so," because we knew that particular car made a certain

noise and we knew they were coming in at that particular time. But I know I'm kind of rambling. But those were good times, getting out there singing and dancing. I could see my uncles getting my grandmother up off her seat to make her dance with them. It's just some of these . . . You see on some of these cowboy movies where you see them just dancing around. Not all this hip-hop stuff that they're doing now. It was just a lot of . . . just jumping around [to my idea?], but they called it dancing.

COOPER: [12:29] And how would you get to Bancroft for the family reunions?

SHELTON: How did we get there?

COOPER: [Agrees]

SHELTON: My dad would take us in his car.

COOPER: What kind of car did he have?

SHELTON: A Plymouth. I don't know . . . later on he got him a Buick. Later on, old Cadillac [laughs]. But he was really one of the few who had automobiles back there at that time. One of the few, like I said. I remember when he would . . . some of the ladies in our immediate neighborhood, right around my house, would have a baby, then he would take them to the hospital and you could hear his car over on Highway 90. We lived on Prater Road. You could hear his car on Highway 90 going to the hospital because it made that much noise. But it would

run though.

COOPER: Wow.

SHELTON: [13:32] But see, we didn't have but just the two of . . . two girls at that time.
But later on my mother had other kids.

COOPER: So how many siblings did you have?

SHELTON: [13:44] I had five. Yeah, I had five.

COOPER: What were their names?

SHELTON: I had one . . . You said their names?

COOPER: Yeah. What are their names?

SHELTON: Okay. The sister next to me was named Lilly. She was named after my daddy's mother. My baby sister, who was next to Lilly . . . There were three girls and three boys. The girls were born first and then the boys. The next one was Della. She was named after my grandmother, my mother's mother. Let me see . . . And then we had one boy to die. He was named after my father. He was Casey Junior. Next was Larry. Then Jimmy, and then Billy. Those were . . . that was the family.

COOPER: Where did you fit in age-wise?

SHELTON: [14:45] I was oldest.

COOPER: The oldest.

SHELTON: Yeah. And they say I was the most spoiled one. I don't think so, but that's what they said [laughs].

COOPER: What were your chores growing up in the family? Or did you have certain responsibilities as the oldest?

SHELTON: [15:00] Yeah. We had to keep our rooms such as we had. Keep our room neat. Fold clothes when my mother would wash. Hang clothes on the . . . out on the line. They had clothes lines then. So we had to hang our clothes out on the clothes lines. No cooking because you couldn't get in that kitchen and mess up food [laughs]. So we didn't do any cooking and such. We could watch my mother cook, but we couldn't do any cooking. We could wash the dishes, now, but not do any of the cooking.

COOPER: And what was your house like that you grew up in, the one on Prater road? Can you describe it?

SHELTON: [15:57] Okay. The first house that I grew up in, that was up until 1950-

something . . . 1950. I don't remember the one we lived in when my parents first moved to Mossville. I know that it was near the railroad tracks. It was like North West of the railroad track, before you get to the recreation center. But I think . . . I know that house was . . . no I don't. I don't remember that such [house?]. All I knew was where it was located. The next one that we lived in, I remember that one, which was on Prater Road. It was about four bed . . . I mean four rooms, not bedrooms. Four rooms. They had a room for my parents, room for the girls, a kitchen and then another room. Now we didn't have any electricity. That's what I can recall, not having any electricity, because I remember having to study by the lights from the lamps, kerosene lamps. We kept warm from the heated stove, wood stove and whatnot. I remember alongside of the stove there was always a water thing that they kept water in. I don't know what that was for. A water reservoir was what it was called. But that was always on the side of this big stove that they had in this little house. That was the extent . . . That was the way the house looked at that time. Four rooms.

COOPER: And that was the one on Old Spanish Trail? Or on Prater Road?

SHELTON: On Prater Road.

COOPER: On Prater Road.

SHELTON: [18:22] The one on Old Spanish Trail I can't . . . All I know, it was north west of the railroad tracks. It was long, but that's all I remember of it. That was very small when we came as a toddler.

COOPER: Did you have a garden at the house at Prater Road? Or did your mom have a garden?

SHELTON: Did we have a garden? Not until my parents built. I can't recall them having a garden before then. My daddy bought some acreage on the other side of this little four bedroom . . . four room house. He bought acreage on the south side of that house. After they built in 1950, then later on he started to have a garden in the back because he had all that acreage.

COOPER: So around 1950?

SHELTON: That's when we built the house.

COOPER: And what sorts of plants were in the garden? Do you remember?

SHELTON: [19:45] What vegetables? Tomatoes and peas, because my daddy loved peas. He didn't eat any dry beans. Everything always had to be fresh, especially fresh peas. As a matter of fact, we didn't have any beans and rice until we started school. My brothers especially, because my mother would always have . . . well not dried beans and rice; they'd have fresh beans and fresh peas because they would either gather from the little garden that they grew, or from my grandfather who lived in Bancroft, because he gardened for his family. It wasn't for selling and all of that. He did it for his children.

COOPER: Was there another place in Mossville that your parents would buy food from?

SHELTON: They'd go to Westlake to . . . because Westlake was the town, you might as well say. They'd go there and buy groceries that they needed. Such groceries that they did buy, that's where they'd go. I remember even going to Westlake and buying . . . that's where we'd get some of our clothing too. My mother was a seamstress. They'd buy the flour in the flour sacks. She'd always keep the sacks and take them loose and they'd try . . . she'd always try to buy the same kind . . . the same design flour sack so that when she got ready to make something for us to wear she'd have enough pieces to put together. Let's say if she had three sacks of flour, all those sacks would have the same stripes or flowers or whatever on them. So that's what we did. I remember we'd even get the little shoes there in Westlake.

COOPER: And where did you buy kerosene from for the lamps?

SHELTON: [22:29] I don't know where they bought the kerosene. I guess in Westlake because [nowhere?] in Mossville they could find any.

COOPER: I want to talk a little bit more about the geographic town of Mossville and what it looked like physically growing up. What . . . As far as you know, what are the geographic boundaries of Mossville?

SHELTON: From the school . . . You mean where it started from the school? I don't know how far it went. I can't estimate that part. All I know is it extended from the school . . . You know where Mossville School is? Okay. From there on to South to West . . . It was North, South, East, West. I can't recall the boundaries of it.

COOPER: That's okay. And how has the community changed physically within your lifetime?

SHELTON: [24:15] Well, we didn't have running water and sewage back there then. As I've gotten older the town has gotten running water, it has gotten sewage. Oh, I know one thing we didn't have. We had a two-room school back there then when I was a youngster growing up in grade school. It was a two room school. The school had . . . We could play underneath it because it was up on stilts and it had a porch all the way across the front. They had what they call coat . . . They call them cloak rooms, but the coat rooms where if you get in trouble, the teacher might put you in the coat room.

Then we had . . . Like I said, we had the two-room school room. Later on, another building was added and it was a one-room building, but it housed several grades. I don't know . . . four, five, six. But the first one, you were in there from first grade all the way up to fifth grade. That was basically how the school looked. I'm trying to see what I have here on this sheet that I remember from that building. And the teachers were very strict. They were very concerned about the students learning back there in that little two-room school. We also ended up gradually getting our own cafeteria, because before all of us had to bring our sack lunches. We'd go underneath the building and share our sack lunches. The play was . . . You hardly ever . . . I don't ever recall kids fighting or anything back then.

COOPER: [26:58] And would you play with the neighbor kids back at home too?

SHELTON: Oh, yeah.

COOPER: Do you have any memories of . . .

SHELTON: Playing with the neighbors' . . .

COOPER: [Agrees]

SHELTON: [27:04] . . . kids? Oh yes, a lot of memories of playing with the neighbors' kids. Like I said, we were seemingly the younger ones on Prater Road at the time. We really liked when it rained [laughs] for some reason because we could get . . . we were able to get out there and wade in the ponds. If the water was deep enough, the guys would carry us on their shoulder and they'd play in the water and throw us in the water because they were much bigger than we are . . . we were. We always had . . . oh, what [do my?] say? The fun that we had was never anything that was derogatory or anything. I mean we'd sometimes make up our own games and play. We didn't have baseball bats at that time. We might get a broom handle and use that for the baseball bat. We'd play jump rope because we would get a jump rope maybe for Christmas or something. We played jump rope.

[28:46] Oh, and another thing I remember. We made . . . The girls, my sister and I, would make doll houses out of boxes. She always wanted to be an architect, but she didn't go into that. But anyway, we want . . . we would make doll houses out of boxes because our parents couldn't afford to buy the little doll houses that they had back then. From the magazines, they had the old [?] and Montgomery Ward magazines. But we'd cut pictures from out of the magazines and put them on the back of a stick and those would be the people that lived in the house and whatnot. We would make dresses out of the paper bags and whatnot to put on these

little people for our doll houses. [laughs]

COOPER: [29:57] And do you remember who your neighbors were?

SHELTON: [Agrees] We had the Praters. We had the Hartmans, which was Dorothy and her sisters and brothers. We had the Moutons down the street from us. We had the Wilmores across the street from us. We had the Fontenots down the street from us too. Those were about the only ones that I . . . Oh, the Jourdans. Those were the ones when I was growing up. Later on there were other families to move in on Prater Road.

COOPER: Did you have any relatives that lived nearby?

SHELTON: I had one uncle, and he lived on Old Spanish Trail . . . my daddy's uncle. Other than that we didn't have any other relatives in Mossville.

COOPER: Were there ever any occasions for family gatherings in Mossville?

SHELTON: Like a family reunion or anything?

COOPER: Yeah, or a wedding. Did you ever have weddings, or funerals, or maybe a certain holiday in Mossville?

SHELTON: [31:19] Well, we would always go and spend the holidays with our

grandparents. Now there were funerals there in Mossville, but there were not relatives' funerals or anything because our relatives were away just about.

COOPER: What do you remember about the funerals in Mossville?

SHELTON: That was like a family reunion. People that you had not seen in a long while, you see them at the funeral. That was about it because I remember at . . . just like now. "Oh, I don't see Harry until there's a funeral or whatever." But that's all I can recall. Oh, I know one thing about the funerals. They had the wakes in the houses instead of a funeral home. The wakes were always there in the house. But of course, I never had the privilege of sleeping in the same house where a body had been overnight [laughs]. I don't know if that would have been weird or what. I never had that privilege. Some of my friends have had it, but we didn't have it. I didn't have it.

COOPER: Was there a funeral home in Mossville?

SHELTON: [33:02] No. No funeral home.

COOPER: So the post office for Mossville was established in 1915. Do you know how long it was in operation for?

SHELTON: A post office you said? 1915? Well I don't know about the post office [laughs]. I don't know about the post office.

COOPER: That's okay [laughs].

SHELTON: Okay.

COOPER: I figured I would ask just in case. Was . . .

SHELTON: [33:30] Somebody else supposed to mention about a post office?

COOPER: I think so, yeah.

SHELTON: Well I never . . . I didn't ever know we had one.

COOPER: Do you know if Mossville was ever incorporated into a town?

SHELTON: I don't think so. I don't recall. I'd have to ask my husband if he . . . which, he's not from Mossville. He's from Westlake, so I don't know if he knows. So I don't know if he knows if it was ever incorporated. I don't think so. I don't recall, because I left there in '58. Yeah, I left in '58 . . . and came back for. . . '58, '59 . . . [Shelton clarifies it was 1962]. I think I stayed there four years and then from there I came here.

COOPER: And you mentioned when you first lived in Mossville that there wasn't running water, sewage, or electricity. Do you remember when you first got those amenities?

SHELTON: [34:48] No, I sure don't recall. I don't recall when we got electricity.

COOPER: [sneezes] Excuse me.

SHELTON: I can't recall when we got them.

COOPER: Do you remember what it was like when you did get them?

SHELTON: Yeah. [?] when we got . . . I'm trying to recall. Really, my memory is fading there too. All I can remember when my . . . when we got the first television there in our city [Shelton's edit: town] . . . and I said it, that was when the Rigmaidens got the first television. That's what I can remember, having that first television, because we all went down there to watch TV that Sunday, a particular Sunday on the black and white TV. But I can't recall when it was when we got the electricity. I know it had to be a joyous occasion. But so far as being able to recall, I can't.

COOPER: [36:09] And what else . . . I know you mentioned in your first interview about Lula's Canteen. Can you describe a little bit about what that was like?

SHELTON: Ms. Lula's Canteen?

COOPER: Yeah.

SHELTON: Okay. Her canteen was in the front of her house, and that was the place where the youngsters would go on the weekends. We'd dance and have candy and sodas, and that's about it. Clean fun. Meet our little boyfriends and girlfriends.

COOPER: And what kind of music would you listen to?

SHELTON: I guess you'd call it rock and roll back there then. But I can't recall the titles of any of them back there then. All I can recall is getting back there and dancing, getting up there on that floor dancing, and jigging, whatever. That's all.

COOPER: And did you go to the drive in movies?

SHELTON: [37:20] [Agrees] after I got to be a teenager with my boyfriend. [laughs]

COOPER: What do you remember about the drive in movies?

SHELTON: That we'd drive up there and they'd have the big screen out there on Highway 90. We'd watch. That's all I can remember from it.

COOPER: Okay. And also, I think either you or Dorothy mentioned The Paradise Club . . .

SHELTON: The Paradise Club . . .

COOPER: . . . or Montgomery's Club.

SHELTON: Oh, Montgomery's Club was down the street from our house.

COOPER: Oh yeah? Could you describe what that was like?

SHELTON: [38:04] Oh, they were boogieing all the time [laughs]. We were forbidden to go down there as children. We couldn't go. We could pass by, but so far as going in there, no. That was for adults. We could hear the music from our house. We'd sit out there on the porch and listen to the music. It was just that loud.

COOPER: Did your parents ever go?

SHELTON: No.

COOPER: Do you know who owned it?

SHELTON: Huh?

COOPER: Do you know who owned it?

SHELTON: Yes, Valery Montgomery. My daddy, they were religious folks and they didn't go.

COOPER: I think on your bio form it said that your father's name . . . was Reverend.

SHELTON: Yes.

COOPER: [39:02] So he was a reverend.

SHELTON: Yes.

COOPER: Which church was he at?

SHELTON: Rose of Sharon Sanctified Church. That church is demolished now. Well, practically everything else out there is demolished now.

COOPER: And how was your mom involved in the church?

SHELTON: She would take us. Sometimes if they had a secretary of the church, and the deaconess, and she was that . . . she kept herself busy doing something there at the church. Yeah.

COOPER: Did you have any jobs growing up in Mossville? No?

SHELTON: [39:48] No other than around the house [laughs].

COOPER: Okay, in your first interview you and Dorothy . . . you spoke a little bit about

gardening, and your upbringing, and you talked about cane, sugarcane. Was there any growing in your father's garden or in the neighborhood for plants for home remedies, or any sort of medical treatment?

SHELTON: No, not really. I remember my dad going to my . . . his father-in-law's, my mother's dad house to get roots, sassafras roots, and they'd use that. But other than that, I don't . . . I know we didn't do any from our house. Oh, I do remember one thing, come to think of it. Pine needles. They'd get the pine needles and boil those pine needles and make, I guess, some kind of liquid, and have us to drink that when we would have a cold or something and fever. Put lemon juice, they'd put . . . squeeze lemon in it and they'd have us to drink that spoonful's of it at a time. But pine needles. My husband even tried that on me [laughs] a few years ago. I was sick. He said, "Oh I'm going to go . . . I know what I want to do [. . .?] get some pine needles and boil them." But, they worked. They worked. They had to be green, though. Green pine. I guess it's that turpentine that was in the . . . in those pine needles that they were getting out of them. That was the only home remedies that I can recall back there.

COOPER: And where would your family go to get medical treatment?

SHELTON: [42:11] They had . . . The doctors would come and go to your house at that time. We had an old doctor, Dr. Ross, and that's who would doctor on my parents and us. And for having those babies, they'd have midwives.

COOPER: Did your mom do an in-home birth for when she gave birth to your siblings?

SHELTON: Did she do any what?

COOPER: An in-home birth?

SHELTON: [42:47] Not that . . . I guess she did, but I can't recall . . . because I know we had to . . . we were delivered by a midwife, my sister and I, and maybe my baby sister was too. But I was too young to remember my baby sister being born at home, but I know she had to be. But I know my brothers were born in the hospital because they came along later. The three brothers were born in St. Pat's Hospital.

COOPER: Do you remember any of the names of the midwives?

SHELTON: [Disagrees] [laughs]

COOPER: Do you . . . What do you remember about the sugarcane mill?

SHELTON: [43:47] The sugarcane mill? Well, I don't know anything about a sugarcane mill. All I know, Dorothy was mentioning about a sugarcane mill. I don't know anything about a sugarcane mill. All I know that my daddy would get sugarcane and . . . from my grandfather. He'd sit there and peel the skin off of them and then cut it up into little bitty pieces and give each one of the kids that. That's the only thing I can remember about the sugarcane, other than my grandfather making syrup from the sugarcane. But so far as having any at our house, the only sugarcane we had at our house was the sticks. We'd get those.

COOPER: And what would your grandfather use the sugarcane syrup for?

SHELTON: [44:43] For his biscuits and our biscuits [laughs]. Yeah, it's just like . . . it tastes just like the Steen's syrup.

COOPER: Do you know anything, or remember anything, about the oil refineries?

SHELTON: Other than my daddy worked there and . . . Quite often they would have a release. We didn't know it was release. They'd have a release and a big old booming sound. I can remember the booming sound. And every time they'd have that booming sound, we'd say, "Oh, Daddy's gotten killed," because it was so loud and we thought it was an explosion each time. But it was not; it was those . . . that release that they . . . At the time, we didn't know it was a release. We didn't know nothing about a release. But now that I've gotten older, I know that's what it was, a release. And they'd have . . . Every year they would give a picnic for the employees and their families. They'd also give a Christmas party for the employees and their families. And all the children would get a gift. So that's what I remember about that.

COOPER: Do you remember what gift they gave you?

SHELTON: [46:22] Oh, well I know you'd always get fruit which was good. You'd always get fruit and some kind of little . . . You know, I can't remember what they gave me back there then.

COOPER: Where would they hold the parties for Christmas and for the picnics?

SHELTON: They had a big building you know Cities Service was rich back then. And they had a big meeting room where they'd have that. For the picnics, they had even a big area where it was covered for where they would do the barbequing and what not and the cooking underneath there. But you could use . . . They had seating areas all over because it was a park more or less. But it was their park that they used for their employees.

COOPER: Okay. So, to ask you a little bit about family life, how were decisions made in your family when you were growing up?

SHELTON: Well, my mom and my daddy always made their decisions together. If my dad would come up with a decision he'd pass it by my mom to see if she approved of it, and vice versa. That's the way it's always been.

COOPER: And who made decisions about housekeeping and the budget?

SHELTON: [47:59] I think my mom did more of that, because I remember my dad coming home and he'd always give her his check. She mostly did that . . . took care of that part of it.

COOPER: Was she also in charge of child care and discipline?

SHELTON: [Agrees]

COOPER: And was it the same when you were raising your family, too? Do you feel like you . . . ?

SHELTON: Huh?

COOPER: Was it the same when you were raising your family as well? Do you feel like it was . . . that you parented in the same way you were parented?

SHELTON: Well, I tried to for a while. But my husband, he seemed to have been better . . . not so far as the housekeeping and all that part. Decorating the house and all that, that was left up to me. But when it came to financing, paying for the house and putting money aside, he would be responsible for that investing and all that. He's over that part of it. But so far as the . . . all the other, the cooking and figuring out what kind of furniture and all that stuff, I'm really responsible for that. But we . . . I'd always pass it by him, "Do you like this?" or, "Is it okay with you?" Like that. We'd try to share, but like I said, he's over the financial part of it and I do the other part.

COOPER: [49:49] So you said . . . I remember you said that you didn't do any cooking growing up because you weren't allowed in the kitchen.

SHELTON: Huh?

COOPER: You didn't . . .

SHELTON: Oh, no.

COOPER: But what sorts . . . what did you learn from your parents growing up? Did you learn how . . . Were there certain dishes that they did teach you how to cook? Or did they teach you how to do other things around the house?

SHELTON: They taught me how to keep up the house . . . try to keep up the house. They taught us how to try to conserve food, don't waste. That part, they taught us that part. I've always tried not to waste and to . . . I mean [do?] have any waste. So that, they taught us that. And, "Always have a bird in hand," is what they would always say.

COOPER: What food today brings back childhood memories?

SHELTON: [50:59] Oh, Lord. Macaroni and cheese and fried chicken, because every Sunday seemingly we had fried chicken.

COOPER: And what was your mother's favorite dish to make growing up?

SHELTON: Mother was such a good cook. For dessert, pineapple coconut cake was her favorite for making. For vegetables, collard greens. She liked to cook collard greens and mustard greens. Those were her two favorites. And cornbread. My daddy had to have hot bread every

day. He wanted cornbread. So we ate a lot of cornbread. Now, he didn't want it cooked on top of the stove like they usually . . . I know some people call it hot water cornbread. I don't know if you've ever heard of it. You're mighty young [laughs]. They'd put it in the skillet and cook the cornbread on top. Daddy had to have his baked in the oven.

COOPER: Did he have any other stipulations? Like I know your grandfather would only eat on a white plate.

SHELTON: No . . .

COOPER: Was there anything else?

SHELTON: . . . Daddy wasn't . . . he wasn't persnickety like Papa David. [laughs]

COOPER: [52:55] And did they . . . did your mom pass any recipes on to you?

SHELTON: No. Seemed like everything was always in the head. They'd take a little bit of this and a little bit of that and a little bit of that. "Well how much . . . ?" Just put a little bit in there," like Justin Wilson used to do on TV. That's the way they would do it. It would always come out just fine, but you couldn't go behind them and try to do it like they did it. That was out of the question.

COOPER: Do you cook anything now, today that she used to cook back then?

SHELTON: Spaghetti and cheese . . . because my grandbaby loves pasta. So, spaghetti and cheese is . . .

COOPER: Were there special foods that were cooked for special events or family reunions that you only got at a certain time of the year?

SHELTON: Oh, dumplings. Chicken dumplings and squirrel dumplings. I don't like squirrel dumplings. [also fruitcake, Shelton adds]

COOPER: [54:01] When were those made?

SHELTON: During . . . when it would get cold. But when we'd have special family things that the chicken dumplings would be . . .

COOPER: Okay. I have a few more questions about Mossville and, specifically, Civil Rights history in Mossville. Some people mentioned the importance of voting, especially after the Voting Rights Act in 1965. So you would have been about twenty-five around them. Do you have any memories of voter registration in the schools, or voting in Mossville?

SHELTON: When I started voting . . . The Civil Rights Movement took place when I was in school back in 1960. I was in Baton Rouge [Louisiana] at the time. I remember . . . Now how . . . What was happening back in Mossville during that time, I don't know. All I remember when we were . . . in 1960 when we had a march on the capitol as a student and we were all told to

leave the campus and go to the capitol. Being a little country girl from Mossville, I joined them, [laughs] but they put the dogs on us and [. . . ?]. So we had to end up going back to the campus. That was all I can remember about that Civil Rights Movement. But I do know that from that time on, we were able to vote. [Register to vote?] From that time on, I started voting . . . because I finished back in '62, so I started voting then.

COOPER: In your first interview you mentioned that for your first year of high school you had to go to Washington because of segregation.

SHELTON: Right.

COOPER: [56:30] Do you have any memories about what that was like growing up during segregation in Mossville?

SHELTON: We had to get up real early to catch the bus to go to the end of the street. I lived in the middle of Prater Road, so we had to go to the end of Prater Road . . . north end near the Spanish Trail to catch the bus to go to Washington. Eventually, they started dropping us off on Prater Road, directly on Prater Road. That's what I remember, going, getting up early and getting home late.

COOPER: What . . . How was it different going to Mossville High School once it opened in '55, I think?

SHELTON: That was the life then . . . because we had our own school and we didn't have a football field or anything, so everything that we played was on the outside . . . I mean games. Football . . . We did what they called soccer, but they called it kickball back there then. But we played the soccer ball out there in the back. Eventually, we did get a gym and all of the other games were held in the gym. The basketball games were. Now before that, we would have the outside basketball goals.

COOPER: And did you have school dances?

SHELTON: Huh?

COOPER: [58:22] Did you have any school dances or a prom at Mossville High?

SHELTON: Yeah, we did. We had a prom. I don't know if I have . . . I may have a picture from my eighth grade prom. We did have an eighth grade prom . . .

COOPER: Do you remember what that was like?

SHELTON: . . . and a high school prom. Yeah.

COOPER: Do you remember what that was like? Or where they held it?

SHELTON: Let me see . . . What was that prom there? At the school. It was held at the

school.

COOPER: And how . . . So I know in your first interview you talked a little bit about having books that were handed down from schools with white students. How else did segregation affect your education? Or were you aware of it growing up in Mossville in elementary school?

SHELTON: [59:18] We knew that we were getting hand-me-down books now, but we just made the best of it. As a result, we had many kids to go on to be successful in school and become . . . what do they . . . citizens that were capable of helping the community and whatnot. We had lawyers. We had doctors. We had educators. We had other . . . We had entrepreneurs, all to come out of Mossville, even in spite of the fact that we had those hand-me-down tattered, I mean tattered books. But they were eager to see . . . the teachers were eager to see that we learned. Many of us were eager to do that. But most of us had parents that stayed on your time. They wanted to be . . . They wanted to see you prosper more than the way they did. So they encouraged you to do your best. They also saw to it that you did your homework. I know my parents did. They saw to it that you did your homework. Most of the others did because we would not have had as many to go to . . . further their education from that little town if they did not have parents that were concerned. Our parents didn't go to the school to raise hell; they went out there to help in any way that they could. I think that's why many of us . . . why we had so many successful students to come out of that little neck of the woods.

COOPER: At what point did you know you were going to college?

SHELTON: Oh, Lord.

COOPER: What was that like for you?

SHELTON: [1:01:54] When I started at high school. My parents . . . My mother goes, "You are going to college. That's all there is to it. You're going to go to college." And at that time, we only had two that we could go to and that was either Grambling [State University] or Southern [University]. Of course, later on after I started Southern, then McNeese was integrated. That was instilled in me from the beginning of high school that, no ifs and ands about it, you're going to go to school. You can forget doing anything else. You're going to go to school.

COOPER: [1:02:45] And was that the same for your classmates?

SHELTON: Huh?

COOPER: Did your classmates also go off to college?

SHELTON: I had some to go. I don't recall how many. I had . . . I know one stayed here and went to college because she was able to go to McNeese. By that time McNeese was integrated. She went there. She might have been one of the first students to go to McNeese. I'm not sure. I didn't have any to go with me to Baton Rouge. I was by myself.

COOPER: And what did you study when you went to Baton Rouge?

SHELTON: [1:03:36] Home economics. That's what I started off in. Ended up in elementary ed [education]. Ended up in supervision in administration. So I went from home ec, to elementary ed., to supervision in administration.

COOPER: Do you think that your schooling in Mossville influenced you to become an educator?

SHELTON: Yes. I really do.

COOPER: [1:04:11] Do you have any special memories of a teacher or something in Mossville that stuck with you?

SHELTON: Yes. One of my teachers, which she's still alive today, she was . . . When I started high school, she was the English teacher there. She was . . . She'd just gotten out of college herself. But she was not a pushover. She stayed on us and she was very articulate. I really used her as my mentor. Now, so far as down in the grades, when we had the two-room school house, Mrs. [Ezora Lyons?] and Mrs. P.M. [Prater] Washington were my idols at that time. And back there if you got into trouble, your parents best not know because you're going to get into trouble at home if you get in trouble at school.

COOPER: What were some of your fondest memories growing up in Mossville?

SHELTON: [1:05:48] Staying out in the yard playing. Having the little minstrels come to

our city once a year maybe, and it would be down on Old Spanish Trail. Traveling, like a traveling . . . I call them traveling minstrels. Well they had those back there then.

COOPER: Could you tell us a little more about that?

SHELTON: Huh?

COOPER: Could you tell us a little more about the traveling minstrels? What was that like?

SHELTON: [1:06:28] Like the fairs, and they'd have them . . . might have two or three little Ferris wheels that you can get in. I can't recall. I just recall the fair with Ferris wheels.

COOPER: Do you remember where that would take place?

SHELTON: No, I can't recall when it would take place. I just remember the traveling minstrels coming to town. And another thing about school that I recall that was really one of my fondest memories, they always saw to it that we went on field trips because that's where I first got my . . . got a chance to go to the capitol. When we still had that two-room school house over there, we went . . . they took us on a trip to the capitol. We went on . . . We've gone to New Orleans [Louisiana]. See because many of us probably wouldn't have never even left out of Mossville to even go across to Lake Charles. But anyway, we took . . . We went to New Orleans to the Cabildo, St. Louis Cathedral. We went to visit the Tabasco factory. That's down around St.

Martinville. And they had the bird sanctuary, we went there. They tried to see to it that we had a wide variety of experiences as soon . . . as much as we could get at that time. In other words, they introduced us to some of the cultural events that were taking place there in Louisiana, or cultural scenes that were in our state. That was really one of my fondest memories . . . going on those field trips.

COOPER: [1:08:56] Do you remember who the community leaders were when you were growing up in Mossville?

SHELTON: [agrees] Mr. Josh Rigmaiden was one of our community leaders.

COOPER: What do you remember about him?

SHELTON: He had a store. And when political leaders would come to town they'd always go to Josh and Josh would always have the big barbeques and what not for the political candidates. That's who I remember as being one of the leaders for sure was Josh.

COOPER: Do you remember if he had any involvement in . . .

SHELTON: Excuse me.

COOPER: . . . in getting the Mossville school built, the high school built, or if he helped with any specific political issue?

SHELTON: I'm sure he did, but . . . I'm sure he did, but I can't recall. But I'm sure he did. Josh along with possibly McKeever Edwards. I don't know . . . maybe one of the Lemelle's, perhaps. But I know those, Josh and probably McKeever Edwards for sure, because he was another.

COOPER: [1:10:46] What does Mossville mean to you?

SHELTON: What does Mossville mean . . . It means so much. Mossville means . . . I'm trying to put it together. My roots . . . I'm trying . . . That's where it all began for me. My roots, I would say. That's where it all began. From your roots, everything else sprouts out. So Mossville is considered my roots. So that's where it all began, with my roots. I would consider Mossville my roots, because I wouldn't be able to . . . If it had not been for my roots, which would be Mossville, I don't know what else . . . where I'd be. So Mossville, that's what it means to me. My roots. Let me see what I put in here. I don't know if I put anything in here about . . . I know I said there was always excitement in our community. Well, that's what I would think. Mossville . . . those would be my . . . that's my foundation. Mossville is my foundation, my roots. That's what it means to me.

COOPER: Any what year, or when, was the family home . . . I know you mentioned that it was demolished on Prater Road. When did that happen?

SHELTON: Last year.

COOPER: Last year.

SHELTON: [Agrees]

COOPER: [1:13:27] What will you miss the most about Mossville?

SHELTON: My family home. My family home. And a lot of my friends that were there. Yeah. Let's see . . . Dorothy lived right behind us. I'll miss our family . . . our little neighborhood.

COOPER: Well, it's been about an hour and fifteen minutes. So we'll probably . . . Time kind of flew by, huh? We'll probably wrap up. But is there anything else you want to share? Is there any other memory of Mossville that you want to share?

SHELTON: No. Let's see what I have in here. Did I tell you how we used to go to the beaches? We'd have hay rides.

COOPER: Hay rides?

SHELTON: Yeah. You don't know nothing about hay rides either. You have this big truck and have hay on the back of the truck . . . on the bed of the truck. And all these kids would be on the truck riding. That was fun. We did it to the beaches in Cameron. That was big time when we'd go to the beaches in Cameron. I was saying . . . Oh, okay I have here that the first female to head a university system taught math at Mossville High School.

COOPER: Oh, wow.

SHELTON: [1:15:40] The first female to ever head a university system. A former McNeese State University professor, Dr. Whitney Harris, was a Mossville graduate. I don't know if y'all have heard of Dr. Whitney Harris. He taught at McNeese for a while. Professional football player, Richard Lee, was from Mossville. Johnny Comeaux was an artist, he was from Mossville and also a professional basketball player.

COOPER: Wow.

SHELTON: And he had a . . . And my husband was the first black TV news man for KPLC.

COOPER: Wow. He's from Westlake?

SHELTON: He graduated from Mossville.

COOPER: Oh, wow.

SHELTON: [laughs] Yes.

COOPER: Is that where you met, in Mossville?

SHELTON: Mossville, at the high school. Yeah.

COOPER: [1:16:57] How did you meet?

SHELTON: Well, when did I . . . Oh, we had a . . . At the swimming pool there. We had a swimming pool.

COOPER: There was a swimming pool at Mossville High?

SHELTON: No. Not very far from Mossville. But we met each other in high school. We were in high school. But he really spoke to me and such at that swimming pool. I'm looking at all the folks that have come from out of that little town. Bankers, teachers, counselors, nurses, hospital administrators, entrepreneurs, accountants, engineers, plant operators, spiritual leaders, vocalists, law enforcement agents, military officers and community activists. Dorothy was a community activist. Have you heard of Mickey Smith?

COOPER: That name sounds familiar.

SHELTON: He's a music educator at Maplewood High School. A Grammy Award winner.

COOPER: Wow.

SHELTON: [1:18:31] He's from Mossville. That's why I want you to have this. I don't

know if it will help you any.

COOPER: Yeah, that's wonderful. So, just for the record, you're reading off of a document that you typed up.

SHELTON: Yeah.

COOPER: And what's it called?

SHELTON: "Mossville through Our Eyes: A Walk Down Memory Lane."

COOPER: "A Walk Down Memory Lane." Very cool. Alright, well I think we're going to stop here for now. So on behalf of the museum, the Calcasieu Museum, and LSU, thank you so much for allowing us to come into your home and to interview you again. Yeah, we're very thankful. So thank you for sharing all your stories with us. And with that, I'd like to close the interview. You could stop.

[1:19:24]

[End Tape 4548. End Session I.]