

Interviewee: LaSalle Williams
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[Begin Tape 4431. Begin Session I.]

CHELSEA ARSENEAULT: Alright. Today is March twenty-seventh, 2015, and I'm Chelsea Arseneault 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, Bill Shearman, to document the history of Mossville [Louisiana]. Today we're at the Rigmaiden Recreation Center on Old Spanish Trail. I'm here today with Coach Williams. Thank you so much for agreeing to be interviewed. It means a lot to us. This is going to be a short interview. About fifteen to twenty minutes.

WILLIAMS: [00:27] Thank you.

ARSENEAULT: Yes, sir. And we'll likely be in touch with you later to set up a longer interview if you're interested in continuing.

WILLIAMS: Sure.

ARSENEAULT: [00:34] Okay. Just for the record, can you please state your full name?

WILLIAMS: LaSalle Clarence Williams.

ARSENEAULT: LaSalle . . .

WILLIAMS: Clarence Williams.

ARSENEAULT: [00:44] And when and where were you born?

WILLIAMS: I was born in Houston, Texas. June eighth, 1931.

ARSENEAULT: And what are your parents' names?

WILLIAMS: Agnes Williams and Arthur Williams.

ARSENEAULT: Agnes. What's your mother's maiden name, if you remember?

WILLIAMS: No. Let's see . . . Yes, I might remember. I'm looking at her . . . we called her Teddy all the time . . . Nickname, but I can't recall her real name. Probably come to me later. But my biological parents, let me just throw this in, they gave me up. I was adopted into the Williams family. My biological mother . . . I never did know who my biological daddy was, but my . . . I always knew who my biological mother was. And so the Williams . . . my . . . The Williams family also raised my biological mother. Matter of fact and the whole family, and so I was adopted into the Williams family. My biological mother just passed not about eight years ago in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. They all moved from here and went to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. They wanted me to go. I went up there and stayed several days, several . . . I

would go every summer, but since my ties was here with my . . . I call grandparents, but that was the ones that were adopting me and that's where I been all my life. So that's how I got into the Williams.

ARSENEAULT: [02:49] So what was your grandparents' last names?

WILLIAMS: My grandparent's last name was, I think it was [Hednots?] I believe. I've been trying to find out where they came . . . All these years never thought I was going to need this information but never know . . . I know one part of them came from Deridder [Louisiana]. Now the other part, I don't know, somewhere down east. They had all these places in [Racatoe?] and all of them, didn't know about all that area down there. But we never . . . They never really shared that with us that much. So, what's next?

ARSENEAULT: What is your earliest memory of Mossville?

WILLIAMS: My earliest memory Mossville, about going to school in Mossville, is where I attended elementary school. And I remember [clears throat] my daddy had a business, and it was a wood yard.

ARSENEAULT: A wood yard?

WILLIAMS: [04:12] Right. Selling wood like firewood. See back in those days, in this area we didn't have no fireplaces but everybody had woodstoves. Like just gas and all that

electric stove they didn't have, everything was woodstove. So wood was a valuable commodity back then. But he sold to mostly wealthy, white people who had fireplaces. And they had two wood yards in Mossville. Williams had one, my dad, and then Rigmaidens. That was two businesses. And my earliest memory is I learned how to use a crosscut saw. I cut so much wood with a crosscut saw, and broke so many bocks, and stacked wood, and I know all about that.

Going to school, we had to walk to school. We didn't have no buses or nothing. School was located in this area. There's two . . . One building with two big rooms and they had a partition in the front. And that's where I got my basic elementary education. I can remember the principal, the teachers, and that was here at that time. And in the afternoon when you got out of school, walk home, you had to do chores. And that was . . . Everybody had to do chores and they didn't have no telephones or nothing like that, but people knew how to communicate. In other words, you did something somewhere, by time you got home your parents knew about it. So that was memories and not only that but chores that you had to do.

[06:10] We . . . On weekends, we had recreation. We had our own little ball field. We didn't have no real ball. We make our balls out of rocks and tape, and rags, and sewed them up. And we had broom handles something like that as our bats and we had all kinds of fun with that. The other big game we had in Mossville for recreation was shooting marbles. See, and we played Indians and cowboys and all that. And interesting enough, you probably too young to know about the Tarzan movies. The Tarzan movies were real popular back in those days. Tarzan? And then these woods right there they had a lot of rattan vines. You don't know what that is. That's the things that what you call him would swing on in the jungle and we'd go play Tarzan in the woods. See with these . . . These are big old vines that grow high up and real strong. Swing all over the woods with them. So we had a lot of fun with that. Other things, crawfishing and all of

that. We . . . Then wasn't that, it was popular to us, but it wasn't that valuable. We had a lot of fun in Mossville. But I . . . There's so many memories if you kind of kick something out to me . . .

ARSENEAULT: [07:39] Where did you live growing up?

WILLIAMS: Where'd I what?

ARSENEAULT: Where did you live growing up?

WILLIAMS: Where did . . . ?

ARSENEAULT: Can you describe the house?

WILLIAMS: The house was . . . Had three bedrooms. My mom and dad lived in one room. Her mother lived with us in the middle room, and I had the back room. And the floors were wood. And the walls, we didn't have wallpaper like they have today. They took regular newspaper, and they would take this . . . I think it was starch and someone would mix it up and make a paste and paste your walls over with newspaper. We didn't have no air conditioning. You sleep at night with your windows open. We had screens naturally from the mosquitos. And our floors were just hardwood floors and naturally wood stoves.

And my dad raised a lot of chickens, and ducks, and geese, guineas. Then plus not only did he have a wood yard, he had a big farm in the back. And he did all of this with two horses, a

[slide?], whatever them plows and all that, wheelbarrows. I remember those things. And he raised corn, beans, and everything just basically that he raised, that's what we ate and shared with other people in the community. Hogs. Well he did . . . He had everything and all that and we survived. Now my mama, Agnes, was the first woman that I know in Mossville that . . . she'd haul . . . You don't know nothing about sulfur mines, you may have heard about it.

ARSENEAULT: [09:38] What is it?

WILLIAMS: Sulfur mines. That's where they would manufacture sulfur. That's how you, in Sulphur there was the mines. And we always . . . They always . . . I don't know how they did it but they always had a car, a Model T Ford or something; they always had a car. And she'd haul women from Mossville each day over there to work for the wealthy white folks in the restaurant business and that's what she did most of her life. And she always had an automobile, as a matter of fact. That's how I learned. I stole it one day and crossed the field and I learned how to drive. But she was quite an instrument in Mossville helping other people. But my dad was mostly around home, a hard worker. Now I understand somebody told me he used to gamble but I must have been too small to see that. When I grow up, when I got big enough, I never seen him do any of these things.

ARSENEAULT: So your family had a garden?

WILLIAMS: [10:48] Oh, yeah. That was every year. Chickens . . . We didn't buy chickens we raised chickens. I done killed so many chicken by wringing their neck. And see

what they would do is . . . The chicken was all over the yard, but when they get ready to eat one they put them in the coop. I guess that's what they called. Clean them out for so many days and then our job was to go out there and kill them and wring the neck of them. They showed me how to pick them. The same thing with the ducks. Of course them guineas, I never could catch them. I don't remember dealing with guineas. But I tell you something else that always stick in my mind, I guess there's about nature. They had plum trees, fruit trees, you ain't never heard of nothing . . . You heard of muscadine?

ARSENEAULT: Muscadine wine, yeah.

WILLIAMS: Well we used to go in . . . these muscadines . . . Would go in the woods and collect them. Well we had fig trees, peach trees, and oh . . . I guess eight or nine plum trees. And they were I mean big old healthy plums. And all of a sudden this stuff just disappeared, and I think I know why. That's when industry started coming in. But just about everything that we . . . except for sugar and stuff like that you'd go to the store and get . . . and it might be interesting to know, you might want this in your . . . The big interview. They had one grocery store in Mossville. Only one. There was gas on that right there by the railroad track.

ARSENEAULT: [12:34] What was it called?

WILLIAMS: Garrett's Grocery Store.

ARSENEAULT: Garrett's Grocery Store.

WILLIAMS: [12:38] Ira Garrett. And you could go there and get sausage . . . Anything in the house. And what he used to do to get by on credit. You'd go there and they'd write it on the book and they pay it. Now, many times I had to go to the store with that bill to collect. And that was the only store that served the whole Mossville. And by that same area they had a post office one time in Mossville, across the street from it and right by the grocery store were the railroad tracks. They had a passenger train, and some people caught the train right there off of the . . . Get on the train and ride to Texas, wherever they had to go. Baton Rouge. So it's . . . Mossville have an interesting little history behind it.

There were some other businesses, too, they have in Mossville besides that. They had a drugstore in Mossville one time. Purdy's Drugstore. Now it was a sub . . . I'd say a sub-drugstore from the one she had in Lake Charles [Louisiana] on Mill Street. Then she opened one over here right down the street from where school is now, where Sasol [energy and chemical company] is. Now talk about clubs . . . I had a bunch of clubs like bars and all that over in Mossville. Had a hotel in Mossville one time right down Evergreen [Road], see. So I remember a lot of things about Mossville. You ever heard of Shoat's Prairie? Well, somebody going to have it somewhere. It's up in . . . He got his name from all of the wild hogs, and that's right up there where Sasol is building some of their . . .

ARSENEAULT: What is it?

WILLIAMS: Shoat's Prairie.

ARSENEAULT: Is a shoat a kind of a pig?

WILLIAMS: Wild hog. Wild pigs. And they'd run all over the place. People would kill them and eat them. Some people wouldn't because they was wild. A lot of people had a real regular number of hogs that they would raise. But these were hogs that they would run in the woods. And that's where it got its name, Shoat's Prairie.

ARSENEAULT: Just for my own curiosity, were the hogs dangerous? They have those tusks?

WILLIAMS: Well yeah, yeah they was dangerous. They'll cut you. Don't get too close to them, see. Most people were the ones that had guns but they'd trap them. See and then they would shoot them. But today I think that's what they do today, don't they trap them? They still got them in this area and they got them all around this area. In Carlyss [Louisiana], Moss Bluff [Louisiana], but they're real dangerous.

ARSENEAULT: [15:40] Where did you go to church?

WILLIAMS: I started church in the Methodist church. That's where I grew up, in the Methodist church. And it was located right at the corner of Prater Road. If you turn that corner, you see that open space there, well that's where I grew up in church. Now my parents . . . Well, my uncle and aunties all were Baptists and I was raised in the Methodist church. But I'm a Baptist today and somehow they recruited me from the Methodist to the Baptist. And I been there ever since.

But this was something, and when I was growing up this was a must. Every Sunday you

going to wind up in church. No if and ands about it. You was going to go to church whether you learned anything or not you were going to be there, and the parents was going to bring you. But it's not like today. They go if they want, if they feel like it. I don't know how it is in your area, but I know that's what I experienced. But then, that was a must. I don't care if you went out on Saturday night and stayed there until you was old enough, you going to go to church. You ain't going to be in no bed Sunday morning.

My rule was, my daddy told me I had to be in the house at twelve o'clock. He said, "If you ain't in this house . . ." That's when I was old enough. Said, "If you ain't in this house by twelve o'clock, boy, you ain't up to nothing good." So, many times if I got caught out to twelve, I slip in the back room. I know how to get in the window and get in my bed without . . . They didn't say nothing, so I bet they knew about it [laughs]. But church was a must.

I been a Baptist I guess over forty years now. So I left from . . . When I left the Methodist church I was superintendent of the Sunday school. So when they got me in the Baptist church they knew I had that background where I was superintendent of that for about fifteen years, I guess. I just decided that when I retired from education and I went and got this job at the sheriff's department . . . Well I didn't have the time then. Of course I was working shift work and a lot of Sundays I wasn't at church because I had to work. So I gave up the Sunday school because of that, because I couldn't justify giving [?] so. Now I'm chairman of the deacon board and I been that for, I guess twenty years now, maybe.

ARSENEAULT: [18:44] So who were some of the leaders in the church when you were growing up?

WILLIAMS: What is what?

ARSENEAULT: Who were some of the leaders in the church?

WILLIAMS: Well, most of the leaders then was the pastors and the deacons, and the deaconess. And of course the greatest ones that I know of in Mossville area was . . . Now these were different churches, you had only two main churches. One of them Sasol bought down here almost to the school. That was known as Sanctified Church. Then on the corner was a Methodist church, and then the church I'm at, Mount Zion, was a Baptist church. So that's the only three churches they had here. All these other churches came in through the years and that was the basic churches. Sanctified Church, the Methodist church, and the Baptist Church, but they all got along with each other. Somebody had an activity going they all went and helped the other church. It's not like today they're all selfish. They're all too busy about helping. But maybe something else. Ask me something else about the church.

ARSENEAULT: [20:03] Well, I was going to ask you where you went to school?

WILLIAMS: School? Well I went to school here in Mossville. And you know that's the time of the segregation. You don't know nothing about that; you probably read about it. But everything was segregated. Mossville went to the sixth grade and the idea was when you completed the sixth grade in Mossville, you done graduated from school. That's the furthest you could go. Then through the years, they went to one more grade, the seventh grade. So my parents, my biological parents, my parents was real anxious to see that I went to high school.

That I got a twelfth grade education. So when I completed my education here, the only high school they had in this area was Westlake High.

ARSENEAULT: Was that for the white . . .? Was it a white school?

WILLIAMS: White school. You know anything about Westlake?

BILL SHEARMAN: Yes, sir.

WILLIAMS: Alright. At that time Westlake High School was located where [?] eighty is. The main road from Mossville to Lake Charles passed right by that school. Lake Charles. Now that's going over the old bridge. They had a drawbridge then. I had to pass by a white school to go to Lake Charles to get an education. So what happened, my biological mother loaded me up, and my brother and sister, and she drove us to Lake Charles which was known then as Second Ward on Mill Street. Now that was a city school. At that time you had two school districts. You had the parish and the city. Those people who paid tax in the city went to the city school. The ones outside couldn't go because they were not taxpayers.

[22:17] So therefore they tried to keep us out from going to school. So you had to find somebody in Lake Charles that you know as a relative and establish your address. Well, what they found out was we went on the Second Ward and we was going back and forth, nobody bothered us. But they had the black principal trying to catch us to turn us in but he never could really catch us. I don't think he tried that hard really, as I mature now. Because he could have easy caught us.

ARSENEAULT: [22:56] You don't think he wanted to catch y'all?

WILLIAMS: I don't think so, really. But that was his assignment to make sure that nobody out in the parish would attend the city school. Well, what happened that same time, Second Ward, they built W. O. Boston, which was the high school right across the street. Well they had a football team. The other school didn't have nothing but basketball, football, and track. I went out for football. And what the coach did, he was from New Orleans, he lined everybody up and made us run two hundred yards to see who was the fastest. That's the way of picking out who his backs was. And unbelieving to me, I was thirty yards in front of everybody. So then they knew what kind of speed I had. I became a football player and once I became a football player, and I had the best track record in Lake Charles.

[24:05] There was the white coaches who were keeping up with me at Lake Charles High because we did all of our running on their track, see? So I know he was anticipating some time and point that integration going to take place, which we didn't know about, because that's what I got caught up in. But anyway, when they found out how good an athlete I was, they didn't bother me. I ride the bus every day. Or catch a ride, nobody bother me. But see we . . . They had a city bus in Mossville. That bus ran I think six or seven days a week. It was six o'clock, ten o'clock, three o'clock, and ten o'clock at night. We would pay ten cents because we were students to ride that bus. It passed right by Westlake High School.

That's how I got my high school education. So the same track coach that was watching me when I'd run in high school, when I got a scholarship to Grambling University, it was Grambling College then, to run track. The first year I ran track at Grambling I did so well, the second year that's when the schools integrated, the college integrated. When he found that out he

recruited me back to Lake Charles see, to run track at McNeese [State University]. So that's where I wind up being at McNeese and I got all my three degrees at McNeese. My bachelor's, my master's, and plus thirty. So that's the background on my education. That same school that had to pass me, I had to pass by, I wind up working at it. At Westlake High School coaching and teaching. So that's . . .

ARSENEAULT: [26:11] How far away from . . . How far did you have to commute to go to high school?

WILLIAMS: It's about ten miles.

ARSENEAULT: How far was it to the white school?

WILLIAMS: [26:22] About three. I could walk to Westlake High and back every day.

ARSENEAULT: What year did it integrate here?

WILLIAMS: Let's see that was in 1954, I believe . . . '56. I think it was somewhere in there. Because I went to the military two years in Korea, and then I came back and went back to school. But I can tell you some things. There was a senator, the name [William] Rainach . . .

ARSENEAULT: What was the . . . ?

WILLIAMS: Senator Rainach. That's all the . . . You can find that in Baton Rouge, I'm sure. He was a state senator and he apparently passed a law after integration that no black could compete against whites in sports. So that kind of held things up when I was at McNeese and they were fixing to send us back to Grambling. But then we had people like Ms. [Combrey?] that was president of NAACP and she hauled us back and forth in New Orleans to court. So they finally wiped that law out. That's why you see black athletes competing at McNeese now. He didn't want . . . And that law stood for a little while but they ruled it unconstitutional. Well I got caught up in that.

ARSENEAULT: What do you remember about World War Two?

WILLIAMS: [28:05] The only thing I remember about World War Two is what I read, and I taught American history.

ARSENEAULT: You weren't born . . . ?

WILLIAMS: I'm a Korean . . . My dad was in World War One. I can . . . I remember World War Two. I think I was in maybe high school, yeah. But I taught it in American history. But when I went to Westlake I found out from the other . . . All coaches had to teach social studies, and I was the only black coach and they had five other white coaches. The most important thing to them, and looked like the kids looked forward to it, was the Civil War. That was the great, and that's what they were teaching. Of course, I did a little bit different because I went back into slavery, see. I had a lot of white kids in there.

But I was telling . . . I want to share this with y'all and it's the God truth, because I told it in my church just a few days ago. We were talking about teaching and that's part of our Sunday school; teaching and praying. But I really never did have no fear when I went into white schools teaching. You had that stigma like they said that white kids were smarter than black kids. Some of them were saying smarter than . . . White teachers were smarter than the black teachers. I never did believe that, and I don't believe it today. So that's why when they integrated the schools here, they took the best . . . What they call the best black teachers and sent them to the white schools. What they call the weak teachers they left them in the predominantly black schools. Well, I was teaching American history and I'd go back to the Civil War. I had Doctor White, which is still living, he was the first medical doctor in Westlake. I had his son in that class. I had Doctor Caraway who runs the Caraway's Pharmacy in Westlake. I had his son and daughter in class. Then I had the principal, Vincent, had his daughter in my class. So I looked, I said, all these heavy people around here.

[30:49] Anyways, got on the . . . You ever seen the old chalkboards in school? They green and you take . . . Wash them and you have the eraser. Well, when all those kids got in my class I went and took all these dates, these events, and I put them on a line on the chalkboard. I had two chalkboards, because I never did teach sitting down. Chalkboard over here and a chalkboard over here. I put all the events on there, the dates and what happened.

ARSENEAULT: Like a timeline?

WILLIAMS: [31:29] Like a timeline. Then I took an eraser and erased them. They couldn't see them, but I could see them because I put them up there. So when I got up and went

to teaching and when I got through rattling them dates and them events and what happened, they went back and told their parents, "Oh, Coach is a smart man. We all going to get in his class because he knows." That's the way it happened and anybody can tell you even Hal McMillan. You know Hal? The police juror? I told him. That's I guess a mark for me as far as the relationship go. They say, "Get in Coach Williams' class." Then again it put me on the spot, because I had to really do some more teaching then, from then on. There were other areas you had to teach where you weren't dealing with events and dates. But they would follow me in the book. Say, "God dog, he right on all this! We looking at it in the book." And say, "He ain't using no paper or nothing." So it's all kinds of little tricks out there now. Even do it in coaching a lot of time just not on that . . . I guess I was blessed with that because I don't think I'm that smart, but I got away with it.

ARSENEAULT: Do you remember any of your favorite teachers in Mossville?

WILLIAMS: [33:03] Oh yeah. [Zora Lyons?], [P. M. Washington?], H. T. Williams, which was the principal. Most of those were the only teachers I had in Mossville. All the other teachers were from Lake Charles. But those were . . . And Ms. Lyons taught me something that I'll never forget and I couldn't understand it. She was considered to be a mean teacher, but strict. The bell rang one day, and we had these desks. We had . . . What do you call it up on that . . . And they had the rows, so it was some books this girl left on the floor. Some magazines. So everybody getting up and I'm being the last one she said, "Look, pick up those books and put them in place." I made the mistake, I [. . .?] I said, "I didn't put them there." What did I do that for? I got one of the worst whippings. Man it took me to understand later she didn't care who put

them there; she gave me an order to move them. And that stuck with me today and I can see why. But I thought she was mean. I said, "She was teaching me what?" Look, I you give me an order, you do it. And I feel that way today.

They tried to get me . . . I went up to Philadelphia to visit after I won the state championship, my team won in all three sports. I went up there to visit my mama . . . My biological mama, and my sister, and brother. One of their best friends to my sister was a school teacher. Well they'd heard about me and they saw my clippings. They lived in Germantown. I don't know if you know anything about Pennsylvania. Germantown, that's the east side. But where my mother lived in Germantown, about three blocks down they had Germantown High School. Big school. They had so many students in that school they had to come in shifts. Some come in the morning, some come in the afternoon. But they had a football . . . so they told . . . I was up there visiting, they say, "We want you to come meet our principal and walk over our school." So I went and he took me all over the school. He was an Italian guy, almost German, I guess. And we talked and he showed me.

[35:40] But I observed some things that I couldn't agree with. But he wanted to give me a job up there coaching. But I . . . The disciplines I noticed in the classroom, the kids did what they wanted to do. If they didn't want to learn, they put they heads down. The teacher didn't bother them. They walk out the classroom, they get ready. And if they want to play a game while she was teaching, or he was teaching, they didn't bother them. I said, no way. I can't have this kind of discipline. If I'm teaching, you going to pay attention. You going to listen. I'm going to get your attention. You not going to go to sleep, and you're not going to do anything else. So that's the reason I didn't wind up with that job. I guess I'm glad I didn't, because I don't think I would have lasted under those conditions. I couldn't conform to that. I can't conform to it today.

I'm going to have some discipline. I guess that's why the good lord got me out in time. Because they would have fired me with the way some of the kids the way . . .

ARSENEAULT: [36:51] When you were younger, where did the young folks gather? What did they do for fun here?

WILLIAMS: In Mossville? On Sundays I tell you we were out there playing softball. Now on this side of Mossville . . . They had two sides of Mossville. They had the north side, I guess you called, and maybe the south side.

ARSENEAULT: What was different about them?

WILLIAMS: [37:19] Well, the families. Like on the what you call 'em, everybody was kin on that side. We'd go up there, and like I'm telling you in Saprack, on Sundays after church and we'd have a big softball game. We'd play against each other. Now let me tell you what the grown folks were doing. The grown folk were back in the woods, and they were barbequing beef, pork, and they also were gambling. They had gambling tables back in the woods. The gamblers, the men, not us. So these were recreation activities with them when we play ball.

Then they had a little canteen they called Sweet Dreams right down there in the curve. That was a canteen there that ice cream and cold drinks. And they had a couple of slot machines like the slot machines you see in the casinos. They were in Mossville. The grocery store had them, the canteen had them, and we would play them. They ain't worried about nobody's age. You could win all of the nickels and the pennies. That's where the girls would gather. That's

where everybody gathered. Have fun listening at the jukebox. So that was our main source of . . . On Sunday evenings this road would be full of kids walking going to the canteen. They'd have something going on up there. That was our recreation. Like this? [Referring to the Rigmaiden Recreation Center] We ain't have nothing like this. Only recreation take place had to be at your house in a family yard where they playing Indians, or we made bow and arrows out of wood, sharpen them down, I don't know how some of us didn't get hurt. We had bow and arrows made out of these rattan vines. That's about it for recreation.

[39:26] We didn't have no . . . Only swimming you got to go in the dynamite hole. My daddy whipped me one time, and now my mama whipped me . . . I can go kiss her grave, if I had a dollar the times she put on my butt. But he whipped me only one time. He'd always talk to me. He told me, "Boy don't go in the dynamite hole." Well the dynamite hole was over there by . . . Almost to Highway 90. We walked through the woods. But all my buddies, they was swimming. I'm sitting on the bank. So I decide I'm going to get in. I couldn't swim that good, but I got in the shallow parts and that's where I learn how to swim in the dynamite hole. But I came home that evening and [. . .?] he could look at my head and tell that I'd been in swimming. That's the worst whipping he gave me. I thought I could get by and not knowing that he could look at my head, look at the hair, and tell I'd been swimming. So that's the only place we could swim was in the dynamite hole. Complete with turtles, snakes, and leech. You don't know what a leech is. You know what a leech is?

ARSENEAULT: Sticks to your body?

WILLIAMS: [40:47] Yeah, I had a bunch of them on me. They like to get around your

feet between your toes and suck your blood. We survived all that.

ARSENEAULT: Alright, start kind of wrapping it up. I have like the last few questions. So what does home mean to you?

WILLIAMS: Home? Well, home means everything. [We're nothing without home?]. My whole life was home. If you go up and stay the night some people, some elders lived in Beaumont [Texas]. And during the summer we would go over there and stay with them. My auntie, and vice versa, their kids would come stay with us one summer. But I'd always, I'd get to Beaumont, stay over there about three or four days, and I'm ready to come back home. In the same way, I'd go to Pennsylvania. When I go and stay one week, they go up there, want us to stay a month. I might stay but one week up, I'm ready to come back home. That big city life just never was a thing for me. I can adjust to it, but I just . . . And today I can't live in the big city. I'm trying to figure out now where if I have to move, but it won't be in no city. I have nothing against it, but I'm just not the city type.

When I built this house up here and I said, "We going to build a house." Matter of fact I got that plan from up in Philadelphia, the house that I'm in in now. I said, "I'm going to get me another land and put it right in the middle of it." And that's what I did, I bought three acres. I didn't put it in the middle but I put it at the highest point, which I got two acres on this side of me and then a half on the other side. But I didn't have no neighbors but one that . . . When I built it and that's the Mosses, my auntie, which I bought out of this subdivision. But now they got four or five families around here now. But we all get along because we know each other. But when I get ready to get up and walk out at night, walk out in the street, walk around my house with half of my clothes on, I feel comfortable. You can't do that in the city. I sit out on the porch in my

pajamas.

[43:17] Home was just about everything. There were three things in your life then. It was home, church, and school. We didn't have no TV, everybody had a radio. Matter of fact, when I . . . The first TV I saw, I think it was in Pennsylvania up there. They got all these buildings up there, they build three stories, three or four stories, so for a while a room . . . Them houses this close together, you look into the other people, you couldn't hear but you could see the picture of what was going on. You couldn't hear, but you would watch the other people. [Laughs]

ARSENEAULT: [44:10] You'd be watching TV through their window?

WILLIAMS: Yeah. You couldn't hear what they was saying, but you could see what was happening. We had a theater one time in Westlake. A movie theater. It was segregated, because white people go on the bottom and we had to go up the stairs. It was a nice what you call it, but you couldn't go in the same . . . They had two different windows that you paid. I seen a lot.

ARSENEAULT: Okay.

WILLIAMS: That was part of our recreation, too because you see on Saturdays . . . We couldn't wait until Saturday because that's when the cowboy movies in the continuous. Never hardly we'd go to the movie on Sundays. Mostly every Saturday, we were going to head to. . . It's going to be Gene Autry or Roy Rogers, or Wild Bill Hickok.

ARSENEAULT: Kind of going off that, what does community mean to you?

WILLIAMS: Community means a lot. That's all I know. All my background in this community. Like I said, everybody knew everybody; everybody tried to help everybody out. They share with one another. If somebody was sick, everybody knew it. They'd go over there and sometimes they sit up all night with people who was sick. Just visiting, make a big bonfire in the yard, and we'd sit around the bonfire. That would happen sometimes all night until the person got well. That's the way people did. If somebody passed, everybody went to their family to share their grief.

So community meant a lot. I saw so much changes in the community over there. Of course you can't stop change. Change got to take its course somewhere. But community taught me a lot. Of course, somebody, I tell you walking down the street and you do something bad, they going to correct your butt. And you get home, and then find you're going to get some more. Now today it's just the opposite. You go out there and correct somebody's child, they going to come and want to shoot you. Don't want you to tell them. That wasn't the case back there. You wouldn't dare do something like that and sass somebody. They going to whip your butt, and when you get home you going to get some more. So that shows you some ties that kind of protected your behavior in a lot of cases. Be careful, you think about what you're going to do before you do it, because they're going to be some consequences. It ain't going to be long before they know it.

[47:10] I'm going to tell you this right quick. One of the worse whippings we gotten. Me and my little buddies had some devil in us, my little friends. The same guy told me about the alligator down there? He raised a bunch of chickens. Not only was he in that business and

grocery business, he was in the muskrat business. He trapped muskrats, and coons [raccoons]. He had big old lines in the back of his house where he skin them, and he dry that out and take them to the market and he'd sell them. They say they make, whoever make purses and all that out of them. Anyway, he had chickens running all over the place. So we all had BB guns. And we . . . Down the railroad track, you see right down there? That was two big old rice farms.

ARSENEAULT: [48:10] Rice?

WILLIAMS: Rice farms. Where they grow rice. See, they had some rice farms out here and cotton farms. We go down there with our BB guns trying to shoot these marsh hens. Marsh hens is a bird. So we could eat them. We wasn't getting too successful, so we decided one day that we was going to shoot some of his chickens. They were running in the woods. So we did that, went back to his sister's house which was . . . her son . . . We was all friends. We dug us a whole in the ground, made us a barbeque pit. So we was going to barbeque these birds. What we did to kind of disguise them, we skin them so you couldn't tell it was a chicken. We thought we were getting away with it. We were having fun. We barbequed and ate, but he went and told it when he got home.

When I got home I didn't get a good whipping like I'd been with that switch. My mama, we got a big old tree in the front yard. It was so big that's where they parked their cars as a garage. She got the Bible and she went to the book of Proverbs. And she sit down with me under that tree. And when she went in the book of Proverbs, I say, well, this the worst whipping. And I still say that. That's the worst whipping I ever had. Because she worked on my mind. I remember because my daddy always said, "Boy, you go out here and get in trouble and go to jail, I'm going

to come see about you. But if you steal something, I ain't coming. You going to stay." He meant that. "Anything else I'll come see about you, but if you steal something, I ain't coming." He meant that. I tell my kids that. I tell even my football players that. Butch can tell you, because if you steal something I don't care how small it is, you going to pay for it four or five times. It's going to come back. And while I'm on that note, I'm going to share something else. You ever heard of Cagle Brothers?

SHEARMAN: Spell it?

WILLIAMS: Cagle Brothers.

SHEARMAN: Oh, C-A-G-L-E?

WILLIAMS: Yeah the Cagle Brothers. Car dealers.

SHEARMAN: Yes, sir. Bob, and Robin, and Joe.

WILLIAMS: Yeah, you know they had the dealership on Broad Street.

SHEARMAN: Yes, sir.

WILLIAMS: [50:43] My mama used to work for them. So I went and bought a brand new Savoy Plymouth. Brand new. That was the first brand new car I'd ever owned. I was

working at this recreation center. Matter of fact, I happened to develop all this around here, come under my . . . Even that gym over there. I'm the one drew up the . . . I was getting a school check which today now, look, me and my wife been married for sixty-three years. Now you might call me a chump. I don't care what you say. Up until this day I have never handled my school check. She always get it. But see, I had a recreation check. That was mine. That check come to me; it came twice a month. But the school check, now I haven't touched it today. She handles all of that.

So anyway, I went to Westlake. Broussard's Grocery Store. That was the main grocery store in Westlake. Meat market. Good friend of mine. Well, he had this white cashier lady, husband who lived in the back of the store that flew these confederate signs . . . Flags. So we always . . . About all them confederate flags, say, "Well they don't like black people." Well, she worked in that store. One of the Broussard's, I guess main cashiers . . . But anyway I went in that day to cash my check, had a lot of people in there. I purchased some meats, and steak. She cashed my check as usual. She gave me my change. I'm looking at her when she counted it. I said to myself, that lady giving me too much money back.

[52:48] But they had a lot of people in there. I'll show you how the devil work on your mind. My good conscience say, this is an opportunity to show this lady how honest you is. Let her know that she has given you too much money. Well the old devil say then, no, keep it, because she don't like you no way. So that's what I decided to do.

I goes out, get in my car, counts it. It's like the lady give me twenty-something dollars too much. Again, something say go back. No, keep it. So I was scheduled that night to go and scout a game in Grand Avenue in DeQuincy [Louisiana]. That was one our competitors. They was on Grand Avenue. I had to go scout them because we were going to play them the next

week. I said, "Well, I'm going to use this twenty bucks up there and have a little fun with it."

This twenty-something dollars.

So I goes on up there and scout the game. And then normally, when I'm on my way home, I stop by the beer joint and had a few beers with it. Got in my car. On the way home, about halfway between here and DeQuincy, my water pump went out. Now that's a brand new car. Water pump . . . I had to get a wrecker . . . pay a wrecker that tow my car home. I believe the honor of the story is because of my dishonesty, God punished me. Because there ain't no way no brand new car blows a water pump supposed to go out. Whether it's true or not, I believe that. If I'd of gave that money back to that lady I don't believe my car would have broke down. So I ain't superstitious, but I believe that.

So like I say, if you take something from somebody, you going to pay for it. If you're dishonest. I think that may be one of my greatest assets in growing up and teaching is always try to be honest and fair to everybody. I don't care what color you are. That's what they found out about me in Westlake. This man don't make no difference. I'll tell you something, ask Butch. I kept a paddle everywhere I go. With my team . . . Kept it in my gym. The teachers or the principal got ready to discipline somebody they say, "Send him to coach." They don't want to come to me because they know they going to get it. Ask him.

[55:20] So when the schools integrated, they say, "Oh, no, there's another one. Ask him. Oh no, he ain't going to go down there with them white boys with that paddle." I took my paddle down there, and put it on . . . I got some white boys today who will tell you that they proud of the way I handle them, and they all good businessmen. Boy run Silver Constructions. Eddie Prewit. That's Eddie. Eddie brag on me say, "You put that paddle on my butt so many times." But they found out then, they thought I was going to make a difference. It don't make no difference. You

teaching kids, you teaching them. You discipline, you discipline. Don't care what color they are. So I think that probably . . . And that wasn't my intentions. I just wanted to do the right thing.

I'm still that way. You can go to prison and them guys going to tell you at the prison, white and black. I'm going to be fair and straight with you as long as you don't clown. I'm going to treat you with respect, and I'm going to demand respect. I think they do respect. Even though they locked up up there. I didn't lock them up, the juries locked them up. So it's my job to try and help them, not to punish them. So I could talk for days, I guess.

ARSENEAULT: [56:45] Well, we definitely want to sit down and do a longer interview with you. I had one final question. What's the most important thing that you want people to remember about Mossville that's not in the history books?

WILLIAMS: I want them to remember the churches, the schools, the recreation, the political ties that we had. Because one time Mossville had six hundred and some registered voters. You know what they did? They just like ducks. One duck follow the other. Like geese. You had the leaders in the community say, "We're going to vote for this man, we're going to vote for this sheriff, we're going to vote for this reason." Everybody block vote. That's why a lot of the politicians gave a lot of respect to Mossville, because they know them people going to vote the same way.

ARSENEAULT: [57:41] So you influence the leaders, and then the leaders can influence the community?

WILLIAMS: Right, yes. That's been a great power point for Mossville. Whether it's good or bad. Well today they say block voting ain't good but they still do it. It works.

ARSENEAULT: Yes. Right. It's kind of how the world works, I guess.

WILLIAMS: Yeah. So that's the school. And like I said, the churches. The recreation . . .
. That was the center points of Mossville.

ARSENEAULT: [Agrees].

WILLIAMS: This swimming pool you see right there, all of that came under my . . .
When I was here. Like I say, thirty-something years they built that pool. I was one of the first to manage it. My wife came in the picture, and we worked together. But it was under water before then. See, they got the city running it now, it was under water before Sulphur [Louisiana] had it, all the recreation center and swimming pool. The kids were so poor, I talked the director of recreation water [?] to allow us to have a free swimming day.

ARSENEAULT: [58:51] Oh, so you had to pay to get in?

WILLIAMS: Everybody come free.

ARSENEAULT: On one day out of the week?

WILLIAMS: One day out of the week. I tell you what, they'd come from everywhere.

Ask Butch. Everywhere. That pool be . . . I had to have three lifeguards. Old and young swimming all day long, free. Some of them swim that morning, go home eat and come back that evening, see.

ARSENEAULT: Get as much time as they can at the pool.

WILLIAMS: Yeah. So eventually what they did, I think now they all swim free, I believe. But I started it here in Mossville, because I saw a lot of kids that a lot of families had six kids in one family. They couldn't have that much money. They send some and some couldn't come or whatever. Well that was hurting to them, you see.

ARSENEAULT: Right.

WILLIAMS: [59:37] Here all these kids, they want to be together.

ARSENEAULT: [Agrees].

WILLIAMS: That was one of the great things that I helped do.

ARSENEAULT: That's wonderful. Thank you so much for sharing today, and on behalf of the center and the museum we appreciate you sharing all your beautiful stories. And we'll be in touch to follow up.

[59:57]

[End Tape 4431. End Session I.]