

Interviewee: Brenda Cole Jones
Interviewer: Stephanie Dragoon
Transcriber: Anne Wheeler
Auditor: Laura Spikerman
Editor: Chelsea Arseneault

4700.2665 Tape 4622
Session I
May 5, 2016

[Begin Tape 4622. Begin Session I.]

STEPHANIE DRAGOON: Perfect. There is Velcro on this table. Alright. Are we good? Are we recording? Oh, perfect. Okay. Today is May eleventh, 2016. We are at the Imperial Calcasieu Museum. I'm Stephanie Dragoon with the T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History with LSU [Louisiana State University] Libraries and I'm interviewing today Ms. Brenda Cole Jones to talk about her memories of Mossville, Louisiana as a part of a project conducted in conjunction with the Imperial Calcasieu Museum to document the history of Mossville. Thank you so much for your time today.

BRENDA COLE JONES: Sure.

DRAGOON: [00:36] And for sharing your stories with us. This is our first interview session together. I'm going to start with some basic biography kind of questions.

JONES: Sure.

DRAGOON: Can you please state your full name for the recording?

JONES: Sure. Brenda Cole Jones.

DRAGOON: When and where were you born?

JONES: [00:55] I was born in Lake Charles, Louisiana at Saint Patrick Hospital. Then I lived in . . . For a couple of years in Sulphur [Louisiana]. Then my family moved to the Mossville community in like 1956 as my mother told me. We moved into the Lincoln Heights subdivision, which was located two blocks behind the Mossville School . . . High School.

DRAGOON: And what year were you born?

JONES: 1954.

DRAGOON: And you said you moved there in . . .?

JONES: 1956.

DRAGOON: 1956.

JONES: Yeah, 1956 maybe '57. But I think she said '56.

DRAGOON: [01:39] What are your parents' names?

JONES: My parents' names were Joseph Cole, Senior and Ruthia D. Vincent . . . I'm sorry, Ruthia D. Perkins Cole.

DRAGOON: And what did they do for a living?

JONES: My father was a truck driver. My mother stayed at home, and for a short term she was a beautician. She did hair. Hair styling.

DRAGOON: Did she do that in Mossville?

JONES: Yes she did. She did it in the Mossville community at home.

DRAGOON: And what about your grandparents?

JONES: [02:23] My grandparents lived over in the Willow Springs area. They both were I think from that area. My grandmother was [Leada?] Vincent [Perkins] and my grandfather was James Perkins.

DRAGOON: And what did they do for a living?

JONES: My grandfather worked for the railroad and my grandmother did housekeeping. Then she became a stay at home mom.

DRAGOON: Do you have any siblings?

JONES: Yes I do. I have, let's see, I have one brother and he lives here in Lake Charles.

His name is Joseph Cole, Junior. I have two sisters, but they're both deceased. Yvonne Cole Hester and Deirdra Cole Green.

DRAGOON: Why did your family move to Mossville?

JONES: [03:18] There was an opportunity for housing there that they could rent. It was closer to the area that my father worked in. He was a truck driver over in Sulphur. He worked for Como and LaFleur. It was [a cement] step company, and so he drove trucks there.

DRAGOON: What is your earliest memory of Mossville?

JONES: My earliest memory is that when we . . . As I got to be close to school age, I remember we started getting more neighbors to come in because for a long time we were the only family on our end of the block. There were a couple of other families that moved in and as they moved in they all had children. So that gave me an opportunity to have some playmates. There were some families that had moved next door to us. The first family was the Fontenot's and they moved back to Lake Charles. And then the Singleton family moved next door. Then we had the Miles family, the Reado family, and the Mouton that lived by us, so. Everybody was real close.

And by my mom not working if any of the other mothers had a job they needed to go to then they would leave their kids with her because they knew that she would be at home. So even though for a long time I was the only child that my mother and father had, my father had children from a previous marriage, but for a long time it was just me from that marriage. So I was excited

because I always had somebody to play with. Somebody coming over.

[05:08] We would go occasionally down to the Mossville area we called “across the track” and we'd go to the recreation center there and play on the playground equipment. But otherwise we just went from house to house playing games . . . Ball, hopscotch, shooting marbles. I was a girl, but I had my own little sack of marbles. My dad had taught me how to shoot marbles. So it was just everybody was real close knit.

If somebody butchered they shared the meat with the other families. We all got to know each other's family members. If something was going on with one family everybody would go over and see their family members and vice versa. They'd come over to our house if my grandmother came over to visit. So it was just real nice. It was . . . When there were shade trees we all got to play outside under the shade trees. It was a community where I can remember at night you didn't have to lock your doors or windows because it was real safe. So everybody just . . . Once it got dark you went in and you took your bath and settled down for the night and that was it. You'd hear cars passing. But we still didn't have a lot of neighbors even into the early sixties, and then the community, it just continued to grow. There were more and more families that started coming in.

DRAGOON: [06:44] Did you ever know why there were so many people coming into the community? Did your parents talk about it at all?

JONES: No, I never remembered anybody saying . . . Just like I said, there were more and more houses that were either moved to the neighborhood, or houses that were built. There were job opportunities over in Sulphur and the Westlake [Louisiana] area. So the men that were

working, it was easy for them to get back and forth to their jobs. I remember everybody liking the fact that the school was so close. The children could walk to school. And back in the early sixties, a lot of children came home for lunch. They didn't eat at the school. We were just that close to the school so it was always somebody coming and going. We lived on the corner, so therefore we got to see everybody as they were coming in, or going out.

DRAGOON: How long did you live in Mossville?

JONES: [07:45] I lived there until 1976. Then I got married, and then I moved away. Well not far. I only moved to Lake Charles [laughs].

DRAGOON: Did you meet your husband in Mossville?

JONES: Yes, his family moved to Mossville in like, 1969. And we were all friends and we dated, then we got married. And when we first married we lived with my parents until we bought a house in Lake Charles. And the only reason we didn't buy one in Mossville, there weren't any houses that were for sale. Everybody was in their own home. So everything was basically occupied at that time.

DRAGOON: What did Mossville look like when you were really young as opposed to the time that you left?

JONES: There were areas where some people would have gardens. There were areas

where you would see people that . . . A couple of people had cattle. There was families that had lived next door to us . . . Well I call it next door, it was just across the street. But then Entergy bought that property out and they came through with their power lines. So those families, they relocated, but it was just a couple of streets away from where we lived. And like I said, it was . . . green trees. You always saw somebody out doing laundry . . . Hanging their laundry on the line. Children getting ready to go to and from school. So it was a lot of activity that was going on in the area that we lived in.

Then as we grew into teenagers there were still things that we would go to the school for. Some of the children knew how to ride skateboards, so they would go to the school because there was paved areas. We didn't have blacktop streets or asphalt streets until 1976. Everything was rock and dirt roads. So it was always a lot of dust flying in the area. We'd get out there and ride our bicycles when we were young. That didn't stop us any. But it was, like I said, it was just a lot of fun times. We knew all the children on our street and the other streets because we went to school together. Then also on weekends a lot of the families would get together and sit around. Our mothers would drink coffee and talk and laugh and watch the children.

DRAGOON: [10:26] What do you remember about your family home? What did it look like and who lived in the house with you?

JONES: Okay. I lived there with my parents, and it was just the three of us. And then about thirteen . . . Let's see, I was thirteen when my sister was born. So for a long time it was just the three of us and then it was the four of us. We had a wood structure home. We had a carport on the side for the vehicles. We had just . . . Regular wood frame home. It was three bedrooms, so just standard living.

DRAGOON: Did you have a garden?

JONES: No, we didn't. We would be in and out because my father was a truck driver and we would go over to my grandmother's just so my mother and I wouldn't be home by ourselves. Then if they needed transportation to get back and forth to the doctor's or something my mother would be there. But it was only maybe a fifteen minute drive from our house to where my grandparents were.

DRAGOON: So you saw them often?

JONES: Oh yes. Went there every weekend. Every Sunday I knew where I was going to be. We were going to be at her house every holiday, and then eventually in the mid-seventies we finally . . . Well the early seventies, we started to get my grandmother to come and visit us at home and have a meal with us instead of her having to do all the cooking. But otherwise all the major holidays were spent with my grandmother.

DRAGOON: And she cooked a lot?

JONES: [12:06] Oh yeah she cooked. She loved cooking. So it was always somebody at my grandmother's house. And my mother loved to cook, too. She cooked every day. It was always a community where I don't care how many children were in a family or how big or small the pot was everybody offered you something to eat. I used to go, "Why is she offering them something to eat? We've got only three beans left. Everybody has already eaten." The previous

people ate so it's nothing left. But they didn't mind sharing. It's just a type of community that we had. I just kind of hated everybody started moving away, but it was just one of the things.

DRAGOON: When did you really feel that everyone was moving away?

JONES: By the time I got into high school because a lot of the students . . . The children that were in the neighborhood once they graduated if they didn't go to McNeese [University] they had to move out of state looking for jobs and schooling. So that's when I started noticing a lot of them were moving, but eventually a lot of them came back. Even if they moved back in with their parents. So it was a constant in and out. But I stayed on even after I finished high school and I attended McNeese and I continued to live at home with my family.

DRAGOON: And where did you go to elementary and high school?

JONES: [13:35] I went to Mossville from first grade through my freshman year. Then it was no longer a high school at that time. If you were ninth through twelfth graders you went to school in Westlake. Then my sophomore year I started attending Westlake High, and I graduated from Westlake High. So from 1960 to 1969 I attended Mossville High School, and then from 1969 to 1972 I attended Westlake High.

DRAGOON: What do you remember about the teachers at Mossville?

JONES: They were very strict. They wanted you to stay focused on your learnings. We

always had homework. By the time we got to second and third grade . . . I remember the spelling bees. I always thought those were nice because everybody wanted to get a certificate and we'd get a list from the teachers. Everybody would have a list of words to go home and study. Then you'd get to compete with each other.

We had a band at the high school. I was in the band. We had . . . Let's see, we had a home ec [onomics] department where students of course learned to cook. And I happened to have the same teacher for three different grades. She taught me in first grade and she left. Then she came back and then she was my third and fourth grade teacher. But like I said, the teachers all stayed. They did have paddles to make sure they got your attention. They'd hit on that desk and say, "Pay attention." They got your attention. I remember saying the pledge of allegiance. Singing songs every morning when we went to class. It was just something where they tried to keep you involved. Keep your attention in the classroom.

DRAGOON: What kind of student were you?

JONES: [15:43] I guess I was an honor roll student. Not guess, but I was an honor roll student. Always was one of those students I tried to make sure I always had my homework and was always prepared. Of course my mother played a big role in that. She was education geared. She wanted us to not just finish high school, but to further our education. So she was always making sure we did our homework. If there were any little school plays or anything, which they always had, she never stopped me from participating. And she would come to watch us, my sister and I both, whenever we were participating in something at school. All the way through high school it was the same. She wouldn't come to a football game to watch us with the marching

squad, but she would come because she usually had somebody else with her, somebody else's child, and they would come and just watch us perform at halftime. Then she'd leave and go back home. Come back and pick us up. But it was always education. Once you finished high school you needed to try to go a little further.

DRAGOON: And you were . . . So you were in the band? What did you play?

JONES: I played a clarinet. Yeah and when I was like in the sixth grade I had tried out for the majorettes. I learned how to twirl the baton. So it was exciting for me. It gave me something to do. I was always looking for something else to do when the other kids had gone from the neighborhood. If anybody went off to visit their grandparents for vacation, or to help out, well then that left me by myself. So if I found something that would keep me focused my parents didn't have any problem with me participating in it.

DRAGOON: Were your parents musical, too?

JONES: [17:44] No, neither one was. We had one neighbor that she was a real strong Christian lady, Mrs. Miles, and she would offer to get us all to participate in Bible school in the summer when their church would be having it. She would always have little wiener roasts at her house and we would go to those. It was something that was fun. Back then it wasn't any . . . She wasn't going to let you have any dance music. It was all gospel music. You could play the little games, but it all had to be done according to the church music. But we looked forward to it.

That was all we knew at that time. We didn't know any other form of music. So that was

a great opportunity to just to get to see each other once again. It was always somebody shooting basketball at one of the neighbor's homes. And the smaller kids, we'd go and sit on the ground and watch them. The older guys as they would shoot basketball. Trying to make sure we stayed out the way, but we'd be right there anyway.

DRAGOON: What was the major . . . what was . . . What were some of the big differences between your education and your parents' education?

JONES: My father was from north Louisiana. He said he only went to I think maybe third or fourth grade. So he learned how to write his name, but that was about it. Whereas my mother, she had finished high school. She didn't go to college or anything. She had started working after she graduated from high school and she was still living at home. And I had the opportunity to go to college. My sister, she went to McNeese for a while but then she ended up doing to Delta [School of Business College]. So we both had an opportunity to further our education. We didn't have to pay for it. It was all paid for by our parents. Well, my dad because he worked, but my mother took care of the finances. So it was a great opportunity. A lot of kids didn't have that opportunity, but we did.

DRAGOON: What did you study at McNeese?

JONES: [20:09] Office administration and I worked there. Then I signed up with [Kelly Girl?], so I got an opportunity to work at a couple of the different industries in the area. Then eventually I got hired at . . . It was Continental Oil Company at the time when I got hired. I

worked there until I retired.

DRAGOON: What were you doing for them?

JONES: By the end of my career I was doing . . . I worked in a property tax real estate right-of-way for pipelines and claims. If there was anything like an incident from the plant then I got called out for emergency response. So it was an interesting job once I got into that department.

DRAGOON: What kind of incidents were you dealing with?

[portion removed per interviewee's request]

DRAGOON: Were these all plant workers that you were . . .?

JONES: [21:05] No sometimes they would . . . It was different individuals that would call in sometimes and say something about they . . . or either a lot of times they'd say, "Well I heard somebody say that this happened and so I was in the area." So that's why I would take the information from them and see if someone else would be able to assist them with it.

DRAGOON: Wow.

JONES: Yeah. Now that's the part I probably need to have restricted. Where I can't

because . . . In case it should turn into some type of lawsuit.

DRAGOON: Yeah.

JONES: From the investigation. So I would like to have that part restricted.

DRAGOON: Sure.

JONES: Okay.

DRAGOON: That's no problem.

JONES: Alright.

DRAGOON: [21:43] Do you want to make a note and then we'll talk to Jen about it?

JONES: Okay.

DRAGOON: I have so many questions about that. [laughs] But we can come back to it later.

JONES: Okay.

DRAGOON: So what kind of . . . Is that a train?

JONES: Yes it is and it's real close.

DRAGOON: Yeah. It just won't stop.

JONES: It's real close.

DRAGOON: [22:09] What kind of big memories stand out from your childhood in Mossville?

JONES: Let's see, well I can remember my mother and some of the ladies in the neighborhood getting us all together and taking us to walk down to the Westlake areas so that we could go crabbing. That was always a big thing. Everybody liked to fish and to crab. So that was one of the big things for the children. They'd come back and get together and boil the crabs. Then all of us would sit down and eat crabs, so.

Now my mother didn't fish, but my grandmother did. So I would go fishing with her and her sisters when they would get together. But just from the community . . . Also we'd get together and our parents would walk us to the recreation center and let us spend some time there on the playground equipment. Also going to the swimming pool. There was a swimming pool and we would learn to swim there. Took lessons. Then eventually as we got to be teenagers well then we could walk by ourselves when they felt we were responsible enough to walk down from where we lived to the swimming pool we could do that.

So those were some of the enjoyable times. Also the record hops. Like I said, we'd have one of the local disc jockeys, he'd come to Mossville at night once a week. He'd have what they call teen town and all the teenagers would show up and you'd pay to get in, listen to the music. You'd get to dance and once it was over with everybody would go home. But that was a great opportunity for us all to get together.

Plus we all . . . A lot of the young ladies, we all liked to sew. So we learned to sew and we were always buying patterns and switching patterns out with one another to make clothes. Even though our families would buy us clothes, we just liked the idea of having that opportunity of getting together, going to the store, and finding material, and coming back home and making pantsuits back then when they became popular.

DRAGOON: [24:28] That sounds amazing. I would love to see a picture of a pantsuit.

JONES: Oh I have plenty of those [laughs]. Oh, yeah and taking pictures, that was another thing. I would always have a camera so I was always taking pictures when we'd get together. And we'd . . . That was another thing we'd do on weekends. I had a little portable record player. It was battery operated and it played forty-five records. So we'd walk through the neighborhood on Sundays after church. Everybody would put . . . we'd put our short sets on and just walk through the neighborhood just listening to music. Not going anywhere in particular, but just walking around. So that was a great opportunity to get exercise in.

DRAGOON: What kind of music were you listening to?

JONES: [25:15] By that time we were starting to listen to Aretha Franklin, James Brown, Otis Redding . . . Some Otis Redding. I'm trying to think, who else was popular back then? The Supremes, the Temptations, so those were some of the groups we listened to a lot. Everybody would buy music and if you had the latest music we'd say, "Hey we're going walking." We'd call them up and say, "Hey we're going walking. Bring your records." So they'd bring their records and come out. And we'd . . . Somebody'd walk around with a little hand loaded records [player] and we'd just switch them out as we walked and talked.

We'd stop and we'd go to somebody's house and get a blanket out. Lay under the shade trees and listen to music and just talk. A lot of the guys in the neighborhood, or some of the guys we went to school with, they would come into our neighborhood and stop and talk with us. So it was just a great opportunity. We didn't have ice cream stands like they did in Westlake that you could go to, but it didn't matter to us. It was just an opportunity of everybody getting together and just being there. Sharing stories with each other. Talking about who was the cute guys in school and that kind of stuff.

DRAGOON: Did you . . . Have you kept in touch with some old friends that you grew up with?

JONES: [26:40] Oh yes.

DRAGOON: A lot of them?

JONES: Yes. Yeah I'm one of those people. I usually go to almost everything I would get

invited to. If it was weddings, or their children's graduations, I go to those. Baby showers. Funerals. I usually try to . . . If I wasn't out of town working, well then I would always try to make it to some of those functions that were going on. Did back then and I still do. I'm just a little older and a little slower now.

DRAGOON: And where did you go to church growing up?

JONES: Over in the Willow Springs area between Sulphur and Dequincy where my grandparents lived. [knock on door]

DRAGOON: Let's pause [break in tape]. Alright and we're back after a brief break. Sorry could you repeat where you went to church?

JONES: [27:40] Sure. I belonged to the Willow Spring Baptist Church, and it's located between Sulphur and Dequincy. That's the church that my grandfather belonged to and it was just located down the street from where he and my grandmother lived. We had a lot of family that belonged there. My grandfather's siblings and my grandmother's siblings had also belonged to the church. So I call it my family church.

DRAGOON: What did a typical Sunday look like growing up?

JONES: Typical Sunday . . . It was real quiet the early part of the morning if we were at home because a lot of the neighbors had gone to church. They had taken their children to Sunday

school and that was early in the mornings. Then after what was church service held it was about . . . I guess about three everybody would start . . . coming back out because they'd come back home from church and they'd eat and change clothes and they were just ready to visit. Just still relaxing. Everybody would just kind of walk around in the neighborhood talking about the upcoming week. The parents would be out and they would always . . . we called it "holler" at each other back then. But it was pretty quiet still. You would see . . . For some of the neighbors, excuse me, they didn't have a car so you would see them walking to catch a ride with somebody that was going to work in the area where they were working, or asking to be dropped off on their way.

DRAGOON: Was your family very active in the church?

JONES: [29:25] No. No they weren't. I was the only one that would go to church. Of course like I said because my dad worked out of town a lot . . . And he drove cross country. And then my mother she would go on some of the road trips with him. Back in those days you could take your spouse with you. So they got to go, but I was perfectly content to stay with my grandparents and my grandfather and I would go to church. My grandmother had belonged to a different church than my grandfather and so I just ended up going to church with him. I stayed a member there for years and years. I left and then I went back and I'm still a member there now, so. One of my relatives from Mossville is my pastor.

DRAGOON: Let's see . . . What was the role of women in the church?

JONES: They were deaconess in the church, the women were, and they were leaders of the choir. We have male musicians, piano players, but a lot of the leaders of the choirs were women. We had women on the usher board and Sunday school teachers. Let's see . . . Over the cafeteria. So they were real active in the church. Always making sure that when the holidays rolled around there was some type of program for the young children to participate in because they felt that the youth were the future of the church. And that they could keep them involved in different activities, well then they would want to continue coming, the young children, and then bring in more young people with them. Some of their friends, or maybe neighbors. So we did a lot of visiting other churches, also. Other faiths. So it was . . . But they were very active in the church.

DRAGOON: Were your parents very religious people?

JONES: [31:41] My mother would not attend church every Sunday or anything, but she read the Bible every day. She had completed reading the Bible several times. I mean she knew it from cover to cover. She just wasn't always there. And then later she joined and she was active. An active member after she did join the church. Then she got sick and she just broke away from going. She wasn't . . . Her health didn't allow her to go. And so . . . But I have had continued to go and keep her updated as to the preaching and everything. Sometimes we tape the services and bring them back and let her listen to the services.

But she used to like revivals. That was another thing we had years ago. We used to have a lot of tent revivals coming into the community. Preachers from other areas would come and they'd find a vacant lot and they'd put up a big tent. There would be chairs and they would have their choir members with them. There was singing and praying that would go on. A lot of the

neighbors would attend even if that was not of their faith. You would hear it and it was kind of like the music caught your attention. You would head in that direction. Your feet would go to tapping because you could hear the music. And so of course the children we all wanted to go. It gave us an opportunity of course to stay up late. But we would still go and listen and get the word at that time.

DRAGOON: Was that happening in Mossville?

JONES: [33:24] In the area that we lived in. The Lincoln Heights subdivision, yeah.

DRAGOON: Who were your childhood role models?

JONES: You know, I never ever thought of that. I don't know I guess because mostly everybody was close to my age. If they were older than us, they didn't hang around with us. They had their own agendas. Their own groups of friends. But basically all of us that were the same age is who we would be with.

DRAGOON: Sorry I'm trying to decide which one to ask you next. What kinds of values do you think your parents instilled in you growing up?

JONES: [34:21] To be kind to everybody. Everybody was somebody. There was not a nobody. Everybody had to be treated the same. I don't care if it was a person that was hitchhiking a ride . . . Back in the sixties and early seventies you could give hitchhikers a ride, but they were

treated with respect. It was a, "Yes sir," to them just like if it was one of our neighbors. They weren't treated any different than anybody else was. I was always taught to respect my elders. To always help whenever I could. Those were just some things that always stuck to me. I was never better than anybody, but I was never less than anybody either. We were all on the same playing field. Because I was always taught whatever you do to somebody it's going to come back to you and it's not going to feel good when it comes back to you. It wasn't called karma back then, but it was just taught to be kind.

[35:27] Another thing I remember hearing a lot not just from my mother but from my grandparents, my grandmother's favorite thing was, "It's nothing like a bought lesson." She said, "You can tell a child that . . ." She had a wood heater in her house and she said, "I could tell you that that heater is hot if you touch it with your hand you're going to be burned." She said, "But if you don't listen to me you're going to go and you're going to do it anyway." And she said, "Once your hand is burned you're going to know what I said was true." So she said, "It's nothing like a bought lesson."

Sometimes you have to let a person experience things for themselves before they understand that you're telling them the right thing, not something to hurt them, but something to guide them in the right direction. And my mother was always a very kind person. She always did what she could to help somebody and it was always one of those things, "Do what you can to help a person, nothing to hurt a person." Because if you don't want to be hurt then you should not hurt somebody on purpose. If you do something and if it's wrong you need to go back and tell them that you're sorry for it. And don't say you're sorry if you're not really sorry.

DRAGOON: [36:57] How were decisions made in your family between your parents

and you?

JONES: Basically by my mother. She was always the forceful one. My dad . . . He was kind of laid back and sometimes he would say something different. If she said no then I could catch him by himself maybe and talk to him and maybe he'd say yes. But usually he'd say, "You have to go by what your mom said." And that was her rule because he wasn't there a lot and she didn't want either one of us, or her nieces and nephews that would come by, she didn't want them going to him asking for something that she had told them no on.

DRAGOON: Do you think she was a particularly strict parent?

JONES: [37:48] Yes. Oh, yes. If I did something that was wrong I would get a spanking for it. That was not anything that I could get around.

DRAGOON: I want to ask you . . . So you mentioned you got married in seventy . . .

JONES: Six.

DRAGOON: '76?

JONES: Yes.

DRAGOON: [38:17] Did you meet . . . What's your husband's name?

JONES: Hayward.

DRAGOON: Hayward?

JONES: [agrees]

DRAGOON: Did you meet him in high school?

JONES: When his family moved to the Mossville community.

DRAGOON: Oh, right.

JONES: Yeah. They had lived in Houston [Texas] and they moved to Mossville in 1969.

One of . . . They were relatives to another family that lived next door to us. So that's how I got to meet them. They . . . my husband had . . . He's from a family of eight children so Mossville was a small town for them coming from Houston.

DRAGOON: How old were you when you got married?

JONES: [38:58] Twenty-one. I made twenty-two the next month.

DRAGOON: And did he go to McNeese as well?

JONES: No, he didn't. He worked for a while over in Orange [Texas] at the shipyard and then he got a job over in the Westlake area.

DRAGOON: And do you have children?

JONES: Yes I do. I have two children. They're both grown. Neither one's married. I don't have any grandchildren. I have a grand-puppy as everybody calls him. But yeah they both live here in Lake Charles.

DRAGOON: So they grew up in Lake Charles?

JONES: Yes they did. Now for a while . . . Back in 1991 we moved back to Mossville. We had sold our house and when we put it on the market then we moved back to Mossville and we lived with my mother.

DRAGOON: How long were you living with her in the nineties?

JONES: [39:54] Around I guess about nine months or maybe a little longer.

DRAGOON: Was it strange for you to move back . . .

JONES: No.

DRAGOON: To your childhood area?

JONES: No. Not at all. No because I had always . . . Even though I had married and moved to Lake Charles we attended church in Sulphur, but my in-laws lived two blocks from my mother. So we were always back in the community and we kept the same friends. We'd see them at different functions and activities. So it was . . . Nothing had changed. It was just like back in the old days when I moved back with my mother. I was grown and had children, but her rules were still her rules because it was her house. So she was glad to have us because she had company then. I guess my sister had married and had moved to Houston by that time. And so . . . But we enjoyed it. My children enjoyed it because they could walk down to my mother-in-law's and visit with other relatives that were there. And like I said, they knew the other children that were in the neighborhood. My son went to school in Westlake while we were living on that side.

DRAGOON: What did you notice was different about Mossville? Like moving back in the nineties. Did it feel different?

JONES: [41:19] To me it didn't.

DRAGOON: Okay.

JONES: Yeah. To me it was still the same. Just everybody that I had grown up with basically of course was older, but I still . . . I can remember sitting outside at my mother's and we used to play ball in the evenings after school where Entergy had their high line. It was a cleared

area so we'd get out there and we'd divide up, make two ball teams, and we'd play ball. We'd laugh and talk about how we played ball and who had the best team and such, so. And it was fun because I told them, "I always knew that every time there was a ball game I was going to get to play." And that was only because I had the ball, the bat, and the glove. [laughs] So I knew that I was going to get to play. So we always laughed about that. But everybody still was the same. We were still in . . . In the early seventies some of our classmates got married. We were in their weddings and then when we got married some of the classmates were in our weddings. Like I said, we did . . . We'd go to the showers, bridal, baby showers for each other.

DRAGOON: What were weddings like in Mossville?

JONES: [42:42] Our weddings were nice because the brides always got together. Picked out girls from the neighborhood and we made our gowns to be in the weddings. We'd get together go select the pattern and the material. Get together, make the gowns. But then the family, the bride's family, always had a big dinner at their house when the wedding was over with. So you didn't go to places like they do now where you're finding a venue to have a reception. That was all done at home. You had cake and punch at the church, but the families always served food for their out of town family members at home before the wedding. Then when the wedding was over with, everybody that went to the wedding, plus the out of town family members, were there and you got to eat again.

It was just tons of food that was cooked and there was music and everybody standing around laughing and talking and watching the little kids dance. Just way into the night because all the weddings usually were early in the evening. So if it was summer and it wasn't too hot

people stayed a little bit longer outside. They weren't all worried about going in to be under the air conditioner. But then for years when weddings took place their houses didn't have air conditioning, so everybody stayed outside. You were under the shade trees or something. Big window fans. I remember we had those in the house too, to keep it cool.

DRAGOON: So did you have a big wedding reception at your parents' house?

JONES: [44:21] Yes I did. Yeah we had the reception at our house. We served cake and punch at the church. Then we went home . . . Went to my parents' house. And my in laws had also cooked because they had family from out of town, but it was the same. We had barbeque and all the side dishes to go with it and served everybody at home and sent food home with people, so. It was just one of those type of things that everybody just enjoyed. Some families would use the recreation center in Mossville by the Rigmaiden Center and have receptions there. But I didn't have a big family, so we weren't going to have a lot of people coming in from out of town. It was just basically the neighbors and my dad's coworkers.

DRAGOON: What was one of the greatest joys of your childhood in Mossville?

JONES: I guess going to . . . Starting school. Back to school. Getting to see everybody because when we returned back to school . . . That was one of the things in middle school. They would always let you talk about your summer vacations. What you did, if you went away for a trip, and just getting to hear about what everybody else had done because it sounded so exciting. If you heard somebody say they got to go to Galveston [Texas] to a beach and you listened to

them talk about the water and swimming, or if someone happened to go out of state. Those type of things was always fun to me. And like I said, for a long time I was by myself so it didn't take too much to get me happy. Just to be with the other children. That was good enough.

DRAGOON: And what did you do during the summer?

JONES: [46:09] Basically we always had a lot of children at our house. Of course everybody liked coming to my house because I had a swing set also. So they . . . [laughs]. And parents when they would come over my mother drank coffee, so she always had a pot of coffee going. And so a lot of the other mothers would come and they'd sit under the . . . We had a shade tree in the back and one in the front so the kids could get on the swing set and play or kick ball and the parents would sit and drink their coffee and talk. We'd just have a good time until it was time for nap time and then everybody started leaving and going home.

DRAGOON: What kinds of big social events did you have growing up?

JONES: Social events. I'm trying to think . . .

DRAGOON: Like big get togethers. Barbeques.

JONES: [47:07] We didn't really have any big get togethers because my mother had a small family. She had one sister and one brother and I can remember every Sunday we were at my grandmother's. So when people started talking about family reunions and getting together

and like going to their grandparents' and all the other relatives coming and I was like, "That's not nothing new." I thought it was a little boring until I got to understand that they did a little bit more than all get together and sit around and talk and eat. But that was about it, like I said. Then I didn't know anybody from my dad's side. So it was just basically over to my mom's mom and that was it.

DRAGOON: Did anyone in your family serve in the military?

JONES: [48:05] No.

DRAGOON: Changing a little bit . . .

JONES: Okay.

DRAGOON: Where I'm going with this. [laughs] Did you learn to cook from your mother?

JONES: Yes I did, but it was after I was grown and married. She did all the cooking. She didn't want me around the stove because I might get burned, or set something on fire. That was what she did. She just would do all the cooking so I didn't have to worry about . . . I didn't have to do any housework. I didn't have to do any cooking, so. But it was one of the funny stories that I tell everybody. I had some relatives that lived in Lake Charles, so when I'd go visit them they'd let me do all their work, so. But I just didn't have to do any.

DRAGOON: What kinds of dishes bring back memories from your childhood?

JONES: [49:10] Some of the dishes with the wheat [design] in the center on the little dishes that you'd get. And you all are young so you don't remember it, but the ones you get with the box of oatmeal. They were either pink or green. You'd have little small bowls or saucers and cups and you could collect them to make a full set. Four or six settings. Those are the little things that I can remember. Also . . . And back then it was not a set of dishes like you have now where everything matched. Things were just whatever you had. So it . . . I can remember my mother had . . . Dee some blue dishes, I called my parents by their names, so Dee had some blue dishes. They weren't the Blue Willow that all of people see now and collect, but she did have some of those. And a lot of years later when you would be able to go to the grocery stores, all of the ladies, they collect stamps, and then they could trade those in to get sets of dishes where everything matched. So there were some green ones with the yellow flowers in them and brown trim with brown flowers. Those kinds of things.

DRAGOON: And what kind of meals? Like do you cook things that you used to eat when you were young?

JONES: Oh, yes. Yeah.

DRAGOON: What kinds of things?

JONES: [50:42] Smothered chicken. Chicken and okra with sausage and shrimp.

Sometimes just okra, sausage, and shrimp. I don't cook it, but my son has, the potatoes with stew meat. That was something my mother cooked. We would have liver with gravy and rice. Things along that line. Pork roast. I used to always cook pork roast on Sundays and have like speckled butter beans with okra or purple hull peas with okra with the roast. Those were the things that I remember my mother cooking. For the holidays it was ham. She always cooked a ham and everybody loved it. I can cook a ham, but not like she could. I'm going to be totally honest.

DRAGOON: Where did your family go grocery shopping?

JONES: [51:42] We would go to Westlake. We would go . . . At one time it was a grocery store called Broussard's. Then there was a Piggly Wiggly. Later there . . . Broussard's became Marcantel's in Westlake. Then the Market Basket came in. We would go to A&P. That was located on Highway 90. Then to Weingartens. So those were the stores that we shopped at a lot. Oh, and . . . For the holidays we would go to Missies over in Sulphur to get the big roast or the big ham at that time.

DRAGOON: Did you ever do any trades with folks locally for produce, or?

JONES: No. We didn't have a garden, so. Now my parents would buy meat deals. They'd find a butcher shop that would have meat deals and they would do that. I can remember how excited they were to get a freezer. A deep freezer to put meat in once they got the meat deals.

DRAGOON: Did your family ever go hunting?

JONES: [52:57] Joe did, my dad. He would go hunting. He'd go squirrel hunting and he would go over into . . . Hunting in the area where my grandparents lived because it was a lot of wooded area. So he would . . . kill squirrels and bring those home and my grandmother would cook those. She'd make, I think it was . . . I think she called it dumplings. Dirty rice or something. But she would cook that. And my husband would go. He went a couple of times with my dad hunting also.

DRAGOON: Did you ever go?

JONES: No. I didn't mind the fishing, but I think my dad never would take me hunting.

DRAGOON: Where did your family go for medical treatment if you were sick or . . .?

JONES: We went to Doctor Smith over in Sulphur.

DRAGOON: Okay.

JONES: Or to Cal-Cam hospital.

DRAGOON: Do you remember there being any healers in the Mossville area?

JONES: [54:04] If there were any they weren't in the Lincoln Heights or the Bel Air subdivision where we were.

DRAGOON: Did your family have any home remedies?

JONES: Yeah just little things like . . . I don't know if you'd call it a remedy, but like if we were congested my mother would put a pot of water on the stove and boil it. Put a tablespoon of Vick's Vapor Rub in that water and let it come to a boil and then that odor was in the house and it would open up a congested nose. If you had a bad cough rubbing Vick's Vapor Rub on the chest to get that loosened up. I was trying to think if . . . I can't remember anything else. Usually she would just get something from the drug store.

DRAGOON: How were babies delivered in the area?

JONES: At the hospitals.

DRAGOON: At the hospital.

JONES: Yeah. [Agrees].

DRAGOON: What kinds of shops do you remember in the Mossville area?

JONES: [55:21] Now in our . . . In the Lincoln Heights and Bel Air area we had like just eventually a little grocery store came in, but for clothing we'd have to go to Westlake or Sulphur. Bradley's in Westlake was one store, and then West Brothers in Sulphur, but nothing actually there in our community.

DRAGOON: And you said you would sew your own clothes as well sometimes?

JONES: Yeah I would sew. Yeah but most of the time my dad would buy . . . Get money for me to buy clothes. But they didn't deny me the opportunity to do what the other kids were doing too and making them.

DRAGOON: Did you have a sewing machine?

JONES: Yes I did. I had a Singer sewing machine. Dee had an old machine and after she saw that I was going to stick with it, then she got a new machine for me. Then the lady next door, when she was teaching her girls to sew, between she and my mom they taught me how to sew.

DRAGOON: Where did she get the old sewing machine?

JONES: [56:23] I don't know where she got it from. Because I can remember my grandmother and her sisters making quilts, but my grandmother didn't have a sewing machine. But her sister, she had one of the old treadle . . . Where you do with the foot. But I don't ever recall my grandmother having a sewing machine, so I don't know where my mom learned to sew.

DRAGOON: What did you do for fun when you were a teenager with your friends? I know you mentioned walking around with your record player.

JONES: Yeah that was the big thing. [laughs] That was the big thing, and just listening to

the radio. We'd get together, get out in the backyard and somebody would get an extension cord and turn the radio on. Bring it out as far as we could and we'd listen to music. Or we'd sit in the house and talk on the telephone or watch different shows. Every week we had something . . . At one time it was like Star Trek or something that we would sit and watch and then everybody talk about it later.

DRAGOON: Did you ever go to see live music?

JONES: Not until I was grown.

DRAGOON: [57:40] And you mentioned the dances that happened once in a while?

JONES: Yes, in the summer when they would have the teen town and we would go to that.

DRAGOON: Teen town.

JONES: [agrees]

DRAGOON: Where was that held?

JONES: That was held at the Rigmaiden Center and it was like I said we had . . . His name was Bubba Lutchter we called him. He'd be on the radio, but on Thursdays he would come over to Mossville and they'd play the records. It was like a . . . Basically like a record hop. We'd

go to that. Then we had a lady Ms. Reesa Mae, she had what they called a little canteen. Now I didn't get to go to that often because Dee wouldn't let me, but on Sundays a lot of kids would go there. And after the football games you could go and buy cookies and pickles and listen to . . . They had a jukebox in there. You put your quarter in and everybody dance and things like that.

DRAGOON: [58:37] But Dee didn't want you to go to the canteens? [laughs]

JONES: No. I didn't get to go to those often.

DRAGOON: Why is that?

JONES: She just didn't think that I should be going because we'd have to walk back and it was a couple of blocks. We didn't have street lights so she just didn't think it was really safe. She said, "You know, you don't know who's watching." So . . . And then she didn't always have a car to come pick me up. Even if I'd tell her I was going to walk back with a group of girls she'd go, "It's not safe." She was like, "They grab one they can grab more than one of y'all." She said, "Nope." So I didn't get to do that often. I was kind of sheltered on some of those things. I didn't get to go to teen town every time when they were held on Thursday nights either.

DRAGOON: [59:23] Because your . . . Because Dee was nervous about . . .

JONES: Yeah.

DRAGOON: Maybe unsafe activity?

JONES: Yeah. Now see, and if we went to teen town that was a long ways to walk back at night. Especially just a bunch of girls. So I didn't . . . Like I said I get to do that often, either. She was a little more comfortable if she could drop me off and give me a designated time as to when she was going to pick me up, or who would be picking me up.

DRAGOON: Let's see. Okay. Do you remember . . . What do you remember about the Paradise Club? Anything?

JONES: Oh, yes. I had my wedding reception there.

DRAGOON: Oh, wow.

JONES: [1:00:10] Yeah later that night we had just the young people went up to the Paradise and I don't remember attending any of the dances there, but there was some really good performers. James Brown had been there. I heard Tyron Davis. Just a lot of different performers that had gone there, and you would always hear somebody talking about it. Like I said, but I knew I was under age so that was another thing. And see by the community being so small you better not show up an underage because they would go, "What are you doing here young lady? Does your mama know you're here? Or does your daddy know you're here? Wait a little let me go call them." So to avoid from getting further troubles with Dee I knew it was best not to head in that direction. But I can remember it was two-story . . . A two-story club. There was a bar

downstairs. Like I said, it was . . . Some dances I would hear people talk about it, but I never got to go.

DRAGOON: It sounds like it had kind of a reputation.

JONES: It did.

DRAGOON: Around town. Why is that?

JONES: [1:01:26] I don't know. I don't know. Like I said, I knew the Montgomerys owned the club. I went to school with the younger son Alvin, but . . . and I knew Mr. Valery and my dad would talk all the time and Joe would go to . . . He'd go to the clubs. Now Dee didn't. She stayed at home, but he'd go meet his buddies and they'd go there and they'd sit around talking and drink some and whatever. Then they would come back. He'd come back home. But I just knew I wasn't allowed there.

DRAGOON: Did a lot of folks . . . Was it mostly men who would go to the Paradise Club or was it like . . .?

JONES: There were some ladies too that would go. Men and women that would go.

DRAGOON: Okay.

JONES: Yeah. Couples. There were a lot of couples that would go.

DRAGOON: Okay.

JONES: And especially when it was a dance going to be held. They would call . . .
Different ones would call and ask Dee if they were going to be going, but she would always say
no. She wasn't going by herself and if . . . Especially if Joe was gone. I don't remember them
going there to any dances together. Joe probably did if he was on his way back in, but I just . . .
She wasn't much of a person to go to clubs and such. We had another little club that was near our
house. It was called the Cowboy Inn.

DRAGOON: [1:02:57] The Cowboy?

JONES: Cowboy Inn.

DRAGOON: Okay. Wow.

JONES: Yeah.

DRAGOON: Where was that located?

JONES: It was in the Lincoln Heights area. Bel Air, Lincoln Heights, it was on Fifth
Avenue. It was owned and run by Peter DeVille. It was a little small club. It was nowhere near

the Paradise, and they never had performers or anybody to go there. It was I think more of a place where you could just go and sit down and get drinks and such. I remember going . . . I was in a wedding and the bridal party was going there. And I showed up and there was a lady sitting there and I'll never forget she said, "Brenda, what are you doing here? Does your grandmother know you're here?" And I was like, oh my gosh. So I knew then that it was over with for me. We all had to leave because once the owner recognized me he was like, "Oh no you're not old enough to be in here. See you later." So then we all had to leave.

DRAGOON: [1:03:58] Sounds like it was kind of hard to get away with stuff.

JONES: Yeah you weren't going to get away with much. Depending upon who you were, you were not going to get away with much in that little community. They would watch . . . And it was one of those things where it was like it takes a village to raise a child and that's what they did. They'd look out. If somebody's child didn't go to school and the parents would be looking for them, you couldn't think you were going to hide out at nobody's house like children do nowadays. They don't go to school, but somebody will let them hangout at their house. They pass by and they're like, "Hey I'm looking for so and so did you see him he was supposed to go to school but I see his books are still on the corner." So it was . . . They'd start looking, "No, I didn't see him, but I will let you know." And trust me if they saw you they'd go, "Hey your mama's looking for you." So, but I told them once we left Mossville High School and started going to Westlake, it was like we had a job because the bus picked us up at six forty-five in the mornings and we didn't get back until four thirty in the evenings. So the parents had a real good chance keeping tab on the younger children.

DRAGOON: What was it like going to Westlake for high school? Was it . . . ?

JONES: [1:05:24] It was totally different.

DRAGOON: Yeah was it a . . .

JONES: Than being . . .

DRAGOON: Bigger school?

JONES: It was a . . . Yeah. It was a bigger school. Things were just done totally different.

We met a lot of prejudice once we got there. I can remember the police had to be called out to be on campus with us because of the problems that we had the first year that we were in attendance there.

DRAGOON: What was happening?

JONES: [1:05:54] It was a lot of fights and a lot of the parents didn't want the children from . . . Us from Mossville to attend the school there. And I think more the problems stem from the parents than the children. The children were probably already afraid, but then when the parents came into the school and would tell you, "Don't get next to my child you're going to fade on them." Or they'd push you over on the side. And so it just got to the point where they had to call the police in. They had to come into the school and actually be in the halls when we would

be changing classes and in the cafeteria. That went on. And then the principal that was there when we first started, he ended up having a heart attack and they had to bring somebody else in. They started trying to get some improvements done in regards to the communication and cooperation between everybody.

[1:06:56] I remember one morning arriving at school. I had missed the bus and I was in serious trouble. Dee had taken me to school and she dropped me off and I noticed it was real strange. I didn't see anybody that I normally rode the bus with outside. And the assistant principal was outside and he told me to come in . . . Me and another guy Payton Smith. And he brought us inside the school and he led us to the auditorium and that's where I saw the rest of the kids that would ride the bus from Mossville in there. But before we got in, there were parents that were outside. They had ropes with . . . And they were shaking them at Payton and I and saying, "This is for your kind of people." So what do you do? You kind of look around and you the only two black people out there so you know you're . . . It's like, "Oh my, what's going to happen?" So it's . . . Then the parents had gotten phone calls and they had to come and pick us up. And so it was just . . . It was real stressful the first year of going there.

DRAGOON: Was that the first year of integration of that school?

JONES: [1:08:11] No there had been just a few black students that had been attending the school, but this was the first time buses were rolling in bringing students into the school. It was a lot of fights. It was just something that I had never experienced because I had never been taught that there was a difference in people because Joe . . . His coworkers would always come by the house and they would talk. And they would invite us over to their homes and we never had any

problems. So when I get there and see this happening, it was a rude awakening for me. I didn't know just what to expect.

DRAGOON: Were Joe's coworkers mostly white folks?

JONES: Yes. Yeah and even the people that owned the company, they would invite him over to their house and he would bring us and we'd sit down and talk. And it was just never any prejudice that was shown. So when I got over there and started seeing this kind of stuff going on it was just . . . It wasn't what I expected. I just thought the people were really rude for some of the things that were being done and said. There's no reason.

DRAGOON: Had any adults in your life talked to you about what you were about to face? Did people know? Did you . . . ?

JONES: [1:09:36] No they never said anything and if our parents did they didn't say anything about it. I mean the family next door to me, they had had a son that had attended high school there and had graduated, and they never said anything. And then their children were starting to go to Westlake at the same time I was going. And there was another family . . . Several other families, had children that were going there. We just never heard anything about it.

DRAGOON: The day that you got to school late and . . . It was mostly Mossville kids in the auditorium?

JONES: [1:10:13] Yes it was all the Mossville kids in the auditorium.

DRAGOON: And they were . . . and that was . . . was that the . . . Like towards the beginning of the year?

JONES: Yes it was.

DRAGOON: It wasn't the first day of school though?

JONES: No, it wasn't the first day of school. No.

DRAGOON: Okay.

JONES: No, because by the time we went back to school after Labor Day is when we had the police that had to be on campus. Because see, back then we started school in August so it was prior to the Labor Day holiday. Then like I said that's when we . . . It was like almost right off the bat.

DRAGOON: [1:10:53] And these were parents . . .

JONES: Yes.

DRAGOON: Protesting outside? And was that happening every day?

JONES: Yes. You always had parents there. When the buses would pull up you would see cars with parents there already. At first I didn't pay them any attention because I thought they were just dropping their children off, but then I noticed more and more of them were staying and coming into the school itself. And it . . . A lot of it probably could have been avoided if they would have been told that they were not allowed in the school. Just let the kids handle it. I think it probably would have worked out a lot sooner and a lot smoother, but by the parents being there it got ugly.

DRAGOON: What was a typical day at Westlake like for you?

JONES: [1:11:51] Well once we'd get there we'd get there so early the school wasn't open and we'd just be standing outside until the school actually opened up.

DRAGOON: How long would you be waiting for?

JONES: Gosh, the bus would pick us up at like a quarter to . . . Like I said a quarter to seven and we'd get there a little after seven, but they wouldn't open up until . . . because about twenty minutes to eight or so. Just before . . . A few minutes before it was time for the bell to ring. Once you got in you had to get to your lockers and get to your homeroom and be there for roll call and that was just a typical day. And we'd be the last students to leave campus. Everybody else, except for the kids that were participating in sports, everybody else would be gone. We'd be waiting on our bus to come.

DRAGOON: Why is that?

JONES: Because they had so many areas to pick up kids.

DRAGOON: And how long were the police at your school do you think?

JONES: [1:12:58] I'd say for a couple weeks they were there just to try to get it . . . Get everything settled down.

DRAGOON: How did the teachers treat you?

JONES: [1:13:14] They basically just checked roll and got your assignments, and that was it. They didn't have any interaction with the students that I can recall. Not at first. And then later I guess it was just to see what type of students we were going to be and who was interested in learning. And then as the years went by, then you could see a difference in some of the teachers. A lot of the teachers at Westlake High they had children of their own that were in attendance there because they lived in Westlake, also.

DRAGOON: I know you were pretty young in the sixties.

JONES: Yes.

DRAGOON: But do you remember what that time was like during the Civil Rights

Movement? Did your parents tell you stories of that time, or did you talk about it much?

JONES: No. They didn't.

DRAGOON: Okay.

JONES: [1:14:14] No. Now every now and then I would hear Joe talk about areas that he would go to drive through, sometimes he'd run into problems. One of the things I can always remember him talking about was when he would go places you had . . . It was segregated as to colored for eating. So was it . . . Over in Sulphur when you go to the doctor's office. You had bathrooms that were marked for colored only in restaurants, at the doctor's office. So and then . . . It stayed like that for years and then some of the doctors just shut it down and said everybody come into one area. It wasn't going to be only one group in this area and another group over here.

DRAGOON: [1:15:06] When did you notice that change start happening?

JONES: In the seventies. I noticed the doctor that I would go to over in Sulphur, Doctor Smith's office, they would . . . They didn't have a sign on the door that said "colored only." One day I went there and I didn't see the sign and I went in and I noticed it was just a couple of people sitting there and so one of the ladies came and she said, "Do you want to come sit in the front?" And I looked at her and I was like, "No." And she said, "You don't have to sit back here you know." She said, "It's no sign on the door; you're welcome to sit wherever you want to." So that was a little different. But like I said in Westlake you would see a lot of that if there was a

bathroom, a restroom, it would have a sign on it saying "colored." Or if you went to get something to eat . . . If you went to pick up food . . . Drive for pick up food you'd see the signs where you could only go in at certain doors.

DRAGOON: What kinds of stories did your father tell about driving through places?

JONES: [1:16:26] He would say some areas he would get to . . . And it was getting into the late sixties, like after Martin Luther King had been killed and President Kennedy had been killed, and he would say that there were certain areas like in Mississippi and Alabama what still had the signs up saying "colored only." Water fountains that had "colored only" displayed on them. So he would say it didn't matter to him because he knew he wasn't going to be allowed to go into where it said "whites only." So he said as long as he got his food and was able to get back on the road that was the only thing that mattered to him. He said the only thing he couldn't understand, why you would say you didn't want black people to go into a certain area, but you're allowing them to cook the food that you're eating. He said, "That's where you should have really been worried." If anything was going to happen.

DRAGOON: And . . . Oh I had a question that just escaped my mind. What materials was your father delivering?

JONES: For a while he drove and he delivered steps. Cement steps. And he would load them on and off the trucks. Then later had went to work for a company that had the wood that was used to make the roads for the oil field. The pallets that they would use.

DRAGOON: Oh, okay.

JONES: And then in the mid-sixties he was driving for Cesco and then BFI. He was hauling chemicals. He was a chemical truck driver.

DRAGOON: [1:18:32] Let's see. What do you remember about any political activism in or around Mossville?

JONES: I don't really remember any. I know you'd hear people coming around when it was getting close to election time . . . Talking to my parents about going to vote and to vote for this person. And they would just kind of say why they thought that person would be good to be elected into office. But any of . . . Any problems or anything like that my parents would have kept it away from me. They wouldn't have let me hear about it.

DRAGOON: And who were the community leaders that folks kind of looked to?

JONES: [1:19:26] I would . . . I remember James Rigmaiden would come by and he would talk to my parents because he and my mother had gone to school together. And then LaSalle Williams from the community, and then there was Kenneth Lee, he worked with the sheriff's department, also. I'm trying to think . . . That's about all that I can remember.

DRAGOON: Sure. What do you remember about the refineries around where you were growing up?

JONES: I remember like sometimes we would have real bad odors we would smell. Especially if we were getting ready to get on the I-10 bridge because where Olin was and it would smell just like Clorox from there because they made ammonia. Then we lived two blocks from the VCM plant, which is now I think a part of Axial due to the merger. And sometimes there would be explosions and we would feel our homes shake even from as far away as the Cities Service Refinery. I remember panes rattling in our homes because they were older homes, so of course you could feel the vibrations of the homes.

[1:21:11] A lot of people would complain about the plant having exploded the night before and windows being broken out, but it was a time back then you didn't hear of the lawsuits. Nobody . . . I don't ever remember anybody calling saying they called one of the plants and told them about having lost windows and needing to have somebody come out to inspect their homes or anything like that. I remember being at Westlake High and they closed the school because there had been something that had happened at the VCM plant and they were trying to get all the students back home. So the buses were there, picked us up, and took us all back home and school was closed. I think for the . . . I know for the rest of that day, and maybe the following day. Those were just some of the things that I can remember going on.

DRAGOON: [1:22:10] Did you hear people like, talk about being worried about like, poisons being released into the air, or into the water, or the ground? Were people talking . . .?

JONES: Not while I was living there.

DRAGOON: Okay.

JONES: A lot of it came up later, but while I was living there I didn't hear of it because more of the people were my parents' age, but the younger people they were more tuned into what was going on environmentally. They took a different look at things than what I would say when my parents did.

DRAGOON: How have the refineries surrounding Mossville changed in your lifetime?

JONES: [1:22:56] I think they've become . . . Tried to become more community oriented. Get buffer zones between their facilities and where homes were located. Where people were living.

DRAGOON: And what do you think your . . . What was your view and your family's views and maybe the community's view of Condea Vista and Conoco?

JONES: Like I said my mom was just so mild mannered she didn't say anything one way or the other about it, but I don't remember when VCM was constructed, but I'm sure it had to be it was built while we were living there. Now the . . . Conoco . . . Well it's now the Phillips Refinery, it was there before the community was built because I think it was built in the thirties.

DRAGOON: VCM was built in the thirties?

JONES: No, VCM would have been built sometime in the sixties I would say.

DRAGOON: Sixties.

JONES: [agrees] Yeah because it was the Phillips well it was the old Conoco Refinery, and then the Conoco Chemical Plant, which is now Sasol. And then the VCM . . . The old VCM plant, it was originally a part of the chemical plant, but it is now part of Axial.

DRAGOON: Okay.

JONES: [1:24:32] But like I say, the refinery was built like in the thirties.

DRAGOON: How often would explosions happen?

JONES: Not that often. Not that I can remember. And it was . . . Most of the time it was at night like when we'd be in bed.

DRAGOON: And was that . . . How did you react to that?

JONES: Oh, I was young so I'd just feel the bed shaking and a couple of times I just thought I was having a bad dream. But somebody would always call and check to see if everybody was alright. Or the next day they'd say, "Well you know . . ." They'd name which plant it was had the explosion. They'd say if they had noticed anything different at their home or how it had shaken their home during the night.

DRAGOON: And what do you remember about the relationship between the town and the refineries?

JONES: [1:25:38] I don't remember.

DRAGOON: Okay.

JONES: Yeah.

DRAGOON: I know a lot of folks worked there . . .

JONES: Yeah.

DRAGOON: From Mossville. Did you have a lot of . . . Do you have family members or friends that were working for the refineries growing up?

JONES: [1:25:50] As I got older, yeah. After I graduated there were some from the community that did work at one of the local industries. If not Conoco it was maybe Olin, or the old Cities Service, which is now Citgo. One of those. I worked for a while myself at the old VCM plant.

DRAGOON: What was that like?

JONES: It was a learning experience because I worked as a receptionist and I did teletype work typing for the engineers, but that was it. I didn't have to go out in the plants and do anything.

DRAGOON: [1:26:41] I have now kind of a series of questions regarding the plants and I know because of your job it might be like a sensitive subject. So feel free to answer . . .

JONES: Sure.

DRAGOON: What you feel comfortable with, or we can always restrict access to this interview later.

JONES: Okay.

DRAGOON: If you think back and aren't comfortable . . .

JONES: Okay.

DRAGOON: With something being released. So, let's see . . . So what do you remember . . . In 1980 Condea Vista announced that EDC had been leaked into the Mossville groundwater?

JONES: See I didn't . . .

DRAGOON: Do you remember much about that?

JONES: [1:27:25] No I don't. The first I remember about the EDC situation was in the nineties when the class action lawsuit came about. I didn't know anything about it before then.

DRAGOON: Were you surprised to hear that?

JONES: Yes I was. Yeah because like I said my mother was still living in the community, my in-laws were still there, and they didn't know anything about it either until this lawsuit came about. And that's around the time when the buyout came about in the late nineties, like '98, because my mother lived there until that time, and so did my in-laws.

DRAGOON: And then their home was bought out?

JONES: They were . . . Yes. They were bought out by the first . . . I call it the first buyout. But I was just really surprised when they started talking about the leak because I knew nothing about it.

DRAGOON: Yeah what was your reaction to that?

JONES: [1:28:27] I was just surprised when they start talking about it. I guess a lot of things that went on a lot of people wouldn't talk to me about it because maybe they felt because I worked for the industry that I would be biased if they said something to me about it, or to my

mother. So I think that's the reason I didn't hear a lot of what was going on.

DRAGOON: Do you know anything about the effort to clean up the area? Did you hear . . .?

JONES: I remember that there was a big effort between the two companies Condea Vista . . . I think it was still Condea Vista at the time and maybe it was Sasol, I can't really remember, and Conoco to get that cleaned up. I remember there were a lot of meetings, and I kind of remember things from the news. More of what I would see and hear on the local news than anything.

DRAGOON: I know that Bill Moyers did an investigative report on PBS. Do you remember that? Or the documentary *Blue Vinyl* at all?

JONES: [1:29:40] No, I remember somebody telling me that I needed to try to find that on TV and watch it because they said it was so similar to what had happened with the community.

DRAGOON: And then . . . Okay, I'm backing up a little bit. In 1997, I believe that's when they were doing blood tests and finding that Mossville residents had a higher level of dioxin in their blood?

JONES: I remember seeing that on the news and hearing about it, yes.

DRAGOON: Yeah. What . . . Do you remember what people were talking about during that time? Were people worried? Were you worried?

JONES: [1:30:22] No I wasn't worried. I remember people saying that a lot of that had come from the EDC leak and that's what had made the dioxins into their system. But my mother never was tested so I didn't really have a clear understanding as what all was being done on a lot of that, so.

DRAGOON: Did you . . . Yeah. Did you feel like unsafe at all because of . . .?

JONES: No I didn't.

DRAGOON: Let's see. Can you tell me more about the buyouts? The first buyouts.
[Coughs] Sorry.

JONES: [1:31:02] All I can remember is that they got letters from Vista and they were saying that they were going to buy . . . Offering to buy them out. They had in there what they were offering them as the purchase price for their homes. And a lot of people, from what I can understand, they had a group that went to them and said, "Okay if you sign this paper you're going to get this amount of money." And they didn't really have a good understanding as to what a share was. Because I think, if I'm not mistaken, they were paid by the share and the people that had gotten them to sign up when they did find out what amount they were getting, some were really disappointed because it was nowhere near what they thought they were getting.

I remember telling my mother not to sign if she wasn't comfortable with doing it, and she was really concerned that if she signed that might have some kind of effect on my job. And I said, "Honey if they're going to let me go they're going to let me go whether you sign or not." I said, "Just . . . I just don't want you to be left by yourself back here. Everybody else is selling and moving out." Because it was going to be really deserted.

[1:32:31] So she kind of waited. She didn't sign up when she got the first letter. And I went with . . . my sister had come from Houston and she and I went to meetings so we could try to hear some of what they were saying. Judge Gray was there and he was telling the people to sign up and they could not . . . Sasol did not have . . . I think he called it Sasol, maybe it was Condea Vista. Didn't have the right to force them I think is what he said for them to sign. So people then started I think getting a little more comfortable about receiving the letters and not feeling that this is something they really really had to do.

So she eventually . . . My mother did eventually sign to move, but she was at the very last couple of days. She barely got in before they shut down the buyout date, but a lot of them . . . They all spread it out. They were not together like they were before. But they kept in touch with each other. They would talk to each other, but it was not the same little community that it had been before. Some went to Westlake, some to Lake Charles, Sulphur . . . Different places.

DRAGOON: [1:33:56] And what happened to the home? Your childhood home.

JONES: You . . . They gave them an option. You could sell the house yourself. They would buy it, but then you could take the house and sell it, but you had to have it off the property by the time they gave you the money. So if you . . . The day you got your money, your check for

your house and property, you had to be off the property. You couldn't go back. So some people were able to sell their homes and get a little extra money, and then others were not. So if you didn't sell to someone else then they just went in and had somebody to tear it down. So you had to try to get out everything that you needed and wanted out of there before you accepted that check. Now they did pay additional monies for I think they called it water contamination. I'm not too sure, but I think they did pay that. So that was additional monies that they got.

DRAGOON: And that was . . . Who got that money?

JONES: [1:35:07] The residents. And like if you had lived, had been a resident of the community, but you had to have proof that you had lived there. You had to have documentation for the number of years that you were claiming that you lived there. So they gave you a list of things that you could have for your documentation as having lived there for the number of years that you said. And you'd have to bring that with you when you would go to a meeting with I think it was . . . Yeah Flavin I believe was the company that was setting all of that up.

DRAGOON: Do you . . . Were folks getting sick from the water spills? That you remember?

JONES: I don't remember. Like I said by living in Lake Charles, and we didn't hear about it. I mean you would hear people being sick, but nobody ever said . . . And that was one of the things that I think that they said. That people were getting sick and it was as a result of the water. But at the time nobody really knew what had been making them sick, so.

DRAGOON: No one was talking about a possible connection?

JONES: Not when people first started getting sick, but I think as the years went by that's when it seems like more and more people are saying that it was as a result of that.

DRAGOON: When did you notice people started getting sick?

JONES: [1:36:47] I . . . Like I said, I'd just hear somebody had gotten sick. Somebody maybe had cancer or something and they had died, or was in the hospital. But nobody at that time could just really say, "Okay Brenda this is what they got sick from." They just said so-and-so has cancer or they got heart trouble. They're in and out the hospital and then the next thing you know they're bedridden and then they would say so-and-so died. They died from this type of cancer, or that type of cancer. Like I said, then in the late 90s into the early 2000s is when I started hearing more and more people saying that . . . Hearing rumblings that that was what it was caused from.

DRAGOON: Was that happening with mostly older folks or kids?

JONES: There were some young ones. Some young people, and then some older people too that was dying.

DRAGOON: [1:37:45] So it was both young people and old people . . .

JONES: Yeah.

DRAGOON: Who seemed to be getting sick?

JONES: Yeah. And I think in the nineties is when the group MEAN [Mossville Environmental Action Now, Inc.] was formed. The Mossville Environmental Action Network. That's when they got together and started I believe putting together their information as to some of the things that was going on, and maybe doing documentation. I can't really say because I never did see it, but that's what I had heard.

DRAGOON: [1:38:17] What else do you know about . . . Can you tell me more about MEAN? What you know about them?

JONES: I just know they were active at one time in the nineties, but I don't know what happened to them. I saw them a couple of years ago where there was like a small trailer located off of Prater Road that had a sign in the front. So I was taking for granted that's where their office was located, but before then I don't know where they were located. I don't know where they met. Because you just didn't . . . Like at one time they were pretty active from what I can understand, and then all at once it just kind of got real quiet. Then I think when Doctor Gupta came . . . Is it Sanjay Gupta? I'm not sure what the name is, but I want to think somebody said that MEAN and the group from Carlyss had gotten together and they were working together with him. So I don't really know because by that time my mother wasn't living over there and I didn't hear much anymore as to actually what was going on. I'd hear little bits and pieces, but not

enough to say that I would have a full story as to what was what.

DRAGOON: Do you know if they were mostly Mossville residents?

JONES: [1:39:37] Yes. With MEAN, it was mostly Mossville residents.

DRAGOON: And they were well supported by the Mossville community?

JONES: Now that I don't know because I could hear that they were a group, but I never would hear anybody like my in-laws, the siblings, my husband's siblings that still lived there . . . I never heard them say they went to a meeting. I didn't hear any of the younger people saying that they were going to a meeting. And a lot of the older people, they weren't going to get involved. They were like they had their health issues and they were mainly interested in trying to stay stress free and not have any more strain than they really needed with their health conditions if they did have one.

DRAGOON: Do you know what the mission of MEAN was exactly?

JONES: No.

DRAGOON: Okay.

JONES: [1:40:31] No and like I said, by me working for the company I was going to be

treated with a long handled spoon. They . . . I wasn't going to get a whole whole lot of information.

DRAGOON: Sounds like you were kind of in the middle of all of this.

JONES: Yeah [laughs]. Yeah.

DRAGOON: What was that like for you?

JONES: [1:40:48] It didn't bother me. I knew what my main concern was, my mom.

Trying to make sure that she was okay. Then my in-laws, making sure that they were okay. The rest it didn't matter if I didn't have any communications with them or not.

DRAGOON: Was your job difficult for you?

JONES: No. No it wasn't. Not when it came to that because I mean I had gone at one time to a meeting and that's when I first heard about MEAN. I didn't know anything about it. I saw people there that I knew that were members of it, but they spoke to me. We hugged each other and everything, but they never treated me any different than they had before. So I felt it was okay as long as we weren't having to battle it out every time we saw each other.

DRAGOON: [1:41:46] Sounds like an incredibly complicated situation.

JONES: [Laughs]. It could have been. Yes. It could have been a lot worse than what it was. But like I said I don't know when they got started. I don't know who organized it. And like I said, I just hadn't heard anything in so long. One day I was on my lunch break and I rode by and I saw that sign and I was like . . . I wasn't sure I had seen it correct. So I had to turn around and go back and sure enough that's where it was. So I just didn't hear anybody say they were meeting anymore.

DRAGOON: So it seems like they kind of disappeared a little bit?

JONES: [1:42:23] Maybe so. Yeah. Or maybe they had a new person that was in charge. I don't know.

DRAGOON: How were Mossville residents organizing? Or what was the . . . What were people talking about during the time of the buyouts? What was that like that time?

JONES: Just wondering where they were going to move. The first buyout?

DRAGOON: Yeah.

JONES: That was the thing. Just wondering where they were going to move and hoping that they would get enough money to get a home where they were going to have the home paid for, and not end up with a note. Because they were older people . . . I don't care what the home looked like to somebody else, but to these people, what they had if it was paid for, they could

handle making the notes for insurance, or . . . homeowner insurance, fire insurance, and then their other living needs. But you wouldn't want to be at that age thinking about you're having to buy a new home and you're just starting out. You don't have enough to have it paid for when you move. I think that was more the concern that people were having in regards to it, and trying to handle the money properly when they did get it.

DRAGOON: Do you know if there were any education, or training programs for residents?

JONES: [1:44:02] Yeah back in the mid-nineties . . . Let's see. It was Conoco. I think it was just Conoco Inc. at the time. They were looking at buying some properties and some of the residents said, "Well you all are looking at expanding in this area but we don't have many people working at your company." So that's when there were some meetings with the company and the residents at the Rigmaiden Center. They started talking and trying to figure out where it would be a win-win for both. And that's when they said, "Okay to get a job at the plant you have to have certain training." So that's when they talked to ABC School and had them to have brochures put out with the different training classes that they had where people could go so that they could be trained to get out and get a job as a pipe fitter, or a welder, because a lot of people were interested in working at the plants but they said they just didn't have the training.

So this was an opportunity where they could get some training to get qualified to get into those positions. So there were people that went, but I think after a while some of them went for a couple of years. And you had to have been a resident of Mossville to get into the school. Then the companies had offered to pay for that training. So there were people that went, but they

ended up dropping out for one reason or another. A lot of times the jobs they had, they couldn't do the training and work their jobs. The hours interfered.

DRAGOON: What do you remember about toxic chemicals being dumped at the Willow Springs facility?

JONES: [1:46:15] Yeah that was something that was done by BFI and Cesco because there ended up being a class action I think lawsuit on that. A lot of people that lived on High Hope Road, those residents had filed suits against those two companies about that. I remember seeing a lot on TV and reading newspaper articles on those. Some of them had even gone to Washington to talk about some of the issues that were there. They complained about the odors coming from the pit. And monitoring wells were set up on different properties so that they could see what the readings were.

DRAGOON: Do you remember what the reactions of residents were during that time and what was happening?

JONES: [1:47:16] My grandmother lived really close because the road that would go to the BFI dumpsite was . . . It was very near her property; the border of her property. They would have smells, but a monitoring well was never put on that . . . Of my family's property there. I don't know if it was anybody that was really close to the pit that had the monitoring wells done. I think it was the people that were further down the road on High Hope that had the wells put in and that's where the majority of the complaints were coming from.

DRAGOON: Let's see . . . I know in the nineties Mossville residents were organizing to address gas flares and illnesses caused by emissions. Do you remember anything about that?

JONES: I remember hearing something about that, but I wasn't involved with any of it . . .

DRAGOON: Right.

JONES: With the company nor with the community. Yeah but I can remember them saying with the flaring they could see the bright light. And I can remember that . . . Seeing that as a child also because I remember we'd be outside. We didn't have street lights, but when the flares would go real bright we could run outside and play a little longer. But it's strange and it's sad that we were little out there running and playing and we never thought about it would be anything that could have made us sick. But then like I said years later people started doing more research and finding out more about this . . . These type of things, so.

DRAGOON: [1:49:22] It just wasn't talked about or really known?

JONES: No. Nobody ever . . . like I said we . . . My mother and her friends, they just would talk about how bright the flare would get. But . . . And if you were passing by you could feel the heat from it, but to say that they're . . . I never hear anybody say that it had made them sick at that time. I don't know about years later if they changed about it or not. Their thinking on it.

DRAGOON: Do you remember PPG and Vista publishing a newsletter called *The Source*? Do you know anything about that?

JONES: No.

DRAGOON: Okay. Let's see . . . where we're at. We're almost . . . It looks like we're almost at two hours. Time flies.

JONES: Yes.

DRAGOON: So just wanted to ask you some general Mossville wrapping up questions.

JONES: Okay.

DRAGOON: [1:50:39] What are some of your fondest memories of Mossville?

JONES: Just being with everybody. Just how relaxed everybody seemed. Where you always knew you had a safe place to go. If you needed to . . . If you got home and you couldn't get in at your house because the doors were locked for some reason or another, you could always go to one of the neighbors and they were going to always see about you. It was . . . You didn't have to worry about "latch key kids" back then because it was always somebody that was at home to look out for your child, or your children. If somebody had to go to the doctor and they didn't have a car, somebody always provided transportation and it wasn't one of these things

where you got to pay me to take you here or there. It's kind of like it's my car and if it's my car it's your car if it's needed. If somebody needed something to cook and they didn't have it at home, you always could go to a neighbor and you could get it. Everybody lived really close to each other. The houses were close. You could just go outside and stick your arm over and touch your neighbor's arm if they were in their yard at the fence or something. It was just a little tight knit community. It's what I liked about it. Like I said everybody just being there to support each other when something was going on.

DRAGOON: [1:52:19] What will you miss most about Mossville?

JONES: Just seeing . . . Knowing that I can ride through there whenever I wanted to and just look at the school and show my kids like, "Oh this is where I went to . . . started out my . . . all the way first grade through my freshman year of high school. This is where we had a football field." And how close it was to where I grew up. But now when I ride through there, you can't even tell that the area we lived in ever existed. It's just all . . . All the trees and everything's down. I can remember as a child too, we would go pick blackberries along the side of the road, but now all of that's gone once they came through and bulldozed everything over.

[1:53:14] I remember riding through the neighborhood, I guess about four years ago, and it was really hard to tell where I had actually grown up. I knew I lived on a corner and it just so happened that the guy across the street on the next corner, he still had his horse pen up where he kept his horses. So I knew about where I was, but everything . . . It just grew up so fast. The trees and all, but like I said now all of that's gone. You just ride on the Old Spanish Trail and you look back towards behind the school and all you see is mounds of dirt. Whereas when I'm riding on

Houston River Road on Sundays to go to church, I can look almost from Houston River Road back to Old Spanish Trail. It's no trees or anything blocking the view. It's just . . . Now you're just getting to see equipment and fences and units beginning to go up. So it's a different look now. You just never knew it was ever a community. It's almost just like it was all industry and it seems like it's been like that now for a while.

DRAGOON: And what does Mossville mean to you?

JONES: [1:54:37] Home. My old . . . My first home. A place where I grew up and I lived until the time I got married. And it will always be. I mean it . . . I may not have the house to look at, but I'll still have my memories and the people that I grew up with. And it's always good to see them. If I'm at a Mardi Gras ball or something and I'll see somebody I hadn't seen in a long time, we always got to talk about Mossville. What we . . . Get that last little talk in there on it. So we'll miss it, and I think my kids will too because they stayed every summer with my mother there until they got older and had different activities, but they did know what Mossville was about, too. And they have fond memories of it.

DRAGOON: Do you have anything else you'd like to add?

JONES: [1:55:37] That's it. That's all I can think of at this time.

DRAGOON: Thank you so much for sitting down with us today.

JONES: Sure. No problem.

DRAGOON: And telling your stories.

JONES: Enjoyed it.

DRAGOON: Thank you.

JONES: Glad I got the opportunity ladies.

[1:55:50]

[End Tape 4622. End Session I.]