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**Session II**  
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**[Begin Tape 4536. Begin Session II.]**

**CHELSEA ARSENEAULT:**        Alright. Today is November the first, actually, 2015. It's a Sunday. I'm here . . . I'm Chelsea Arseneault with the T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History with LSU Libraries. I'm here today with Mr. Kenneth Lee at his home in . . . it's Westlake.

**ARTHUR KENNETH LEE:**        Moss Bluff.

**ARSENEAULT:**        **[00:24]** Moss Bluff. I'm sorry. Moss Bluff. This is our second interview together, his third interview for this project. We're here to talk today a little . . . a couple follow-up questions about your memories of Mossville. Just going, what we talked about last time, I wanted to get some clarification questions. You said you were on the water board with Mossville. Do you remember what date Mossville got water?

**LEE:** Exactly, no. But it was in the '70s, early '70s, that water was established. When the first, one of the first people to retire was Mr. Audrey Prater, I took his place on the water board, and fulfilled his term. And then I served a term. I was on the board until I left the Mossville area.

**ARSENEAULT:**        **[01:15]** So it was a , you had to apply for a federal grant?

**LEE:** Oh, they had already done that prior to me coming aboard, on the water board. We got a grant from the government and we dug the well. It was in process. They hadn't completed it, really, and that was serving the people. Mr. Prater decided he didn't want to serve anymore because of his health, and so they asked me to replace him. And then when the real appointment came up, I stayed with them. I stayed with the board.

James Rigmaiden was the president of the water board at that time. If I remember exactly, it was five people, or four or five people on the board. It served a purpose, and we got it extended a couple of times, and got everybody on board with the wells close out the regular old water wells, and got on the water system. Because of the health situation. Because a lot of people had the shallow wells in that area. It was a concern with the government about the welfare of the people in reference to the shallow wells. And then later the sewage came. It was a thriving little community. A lot of people really did good.

[03:11] We had a kind of a flight from the area for jobs and stuff. Some of the people that really could have contributed to the community left the community because of the job situation. We had like a, I call it a brain drain during that time, during the time that I stayed mostly, other than being, going away to the military—maybe I discussed this before— and working in Houston [Texas], summer jobs, and stuff like that. I basically, most of my time I was in the Mossville area. A lot of my friends, like Mr. Jackson, he had to go to Houston to get a good job, good paying job. And brain drain. We had a lot of good people that really did good. We had some doctors and nurses, and in all walks of life, all different kind of professions. But most of them went away. And a lot of them would come back, like the Edwards girls and different ones. After they would go away and work, they would come back. Some of them came back and went to, like some of my classmates, they went away and worked for the government

up in Washington, DC. And then when they retired, they came home. But they moved to Lake Charles [Louisiana] because of the expansion of the plants and stuff, and they were concerned about this and that being a problem. But to me, it was a blessing. To get the buyout was really a blessing, the way I seen it. But like I tell you, what's good for me might not have been good for them. And what's good for them wasn't good for me. A lot of people having a hard time dealing with it. But it's a blessing in disguise.

**ARSENEAULT:** [05:19] How was it a blessing for you?

**LEE:** Well, to get out of the district, to get out of there, and upgrading my standards of living. I had a nice house over there and everything. But I didn't feel free like for my kids. And they were talking about the contamination this and the contamination that. But we all worked in the plants and worked around it, so and here, they gave you a chance to get out and upgrade and get bigger. My house is no bigger, but I got more land. I had already 4,000 square foot home over there in Mossville, and swimming pool, and barn, and horses and everything. But I only had six acres. Here, I got ten. It's more modern than my house would have been at Mossville. And really, I call it a blessing. That's one of my favorite quotes right there.

**ARSENEAULT:** The will of God will not take you, or the grace of God will not protect you.

**LEE:** Yeah. And I think that was one of the main things that I contributed. A lot of us ain't got enough sense to get out of here. But hey, God going to take us out of there. He blessed us in a

way indirectly. Here's your chance. Your blessings come to you in all different kind of ways. It's just up to you be able to accept them, and go ahead on with them and make something good out of it. And I think this is, that Sasol and its buyout is good. Because I've been through first one with PPG that we had property down in Bayou d'Inde and we sold.

**ARSENEAULT:** [07:23] That was the first company that started the buyouts?

**LEE:** With me, and with my family. Okay? Then with the Lee family was down on the bayou, south of Mossville. There on the south side of Highway 90, we had a 200-acre strip in there. In the beginning, my grandfather inherited it from his dad and his mother. Some [industry, support industry?] bought portions of it. And PPG, Jupiter Chemical, bought some of it. It enabled me to build my house in Mossville. And then from there, I called it a blessing then. From there, Conoco bought my house in Mossville. Okay? A blessing, you understand? Bought my land. And then my mother died and we had some property, me and my brother had some property together in Mossville by my mother's house. And then Sasol bought that, me and my brother's land, and my mother's land. Okay? Blessing. Okay? Now Sasol, my grandparents and them had land there in Mossville, and the Lemelles. And Sasol, we in the process of selling that now. Blessing again. You know what I'm saying?

It's just been, you know, I thank God every morning, because I say man, that's five or six times. And then my Grandmother Lee, when we moved from Bayou d'Inde, bought some property there in Mossville and we moved the house. We tore the house down, but we still have the property. So bam, that's another Lee. You know what I'm saying? And I say wow, I mean, if people can't see that. They say, "Well, we're not you." Well, I guess not, but you're still getting

some kind of blessing out of it. You're getting a chance to get out of there. You all been hollering about moving and this and that, and this and that, and they're giving you three and four times the value of your property. That's a blessing.

**ARSENEAULT:** Why are some people not seeing it like that?

**LEE:** I think really, the real situation is that a lot of them got tied up with these federal grants behind this hurricane when they came through. And they had . . .

**ARSENEAULT:** [10:12] Hurricane Katrina?

**LEE:** Katrina. And some of them got that money and they put it in their house. They hadn't fulfilled all the obligations to pay it off, or some stipulations in that they can't sell it until such and such a day, or they get, the government gets all their money back, or take their money back out of the grant, you got to repay them. Different things. And some of them has like five or six siblings and they're living in the family house, and five of the six of them have left town, but one is staying there. And then you coming back and they wanting to sell, and the one that's still here is not going to get enough money out of it to live like they're living, to be able to purchase a house and don't have no house note. You know what I'm saying? And this is one of the reasons that some of them hesitated about signing. Four or five of them want to sell and this one don't want to sell because he divided it up 150 to 200,000 dollars six ways is not enough to put you living where you don't have a light bill, unless you go in the projects somewhere. Then if you

got that eighty, \$90,000, \$50,000, \$60,000, you can't go live in the projects. And it's kind of putting some of them in a bind.

[12:03] To my knowledge, maybe I'm incorrect on thinking, but this is something that people have told me, reason for why they can't, they hesitated about selling, because they're not going to be able to move and don't have a house note. But yet it's going to give them a break to up their standard their living. And some of them are on a fixed income. Well the ones that's working, that's got this five or six, seven, they don't mind, because they're going to get a chance to move and fifty, \$60,000 is a good down payment on a house. And it's just different situations that brings about don't want to sell and want to sell.

To me, it's almost you've got to sell. Because they've got so much work going into vibrations and this and that. And the pipes and stuff, the foundations of the houses is shifting and moving. You guys is feeling all that work going on around there in that area. All of them trucks ripping and running. You get sick, you can't get out. You know what I'm saying? Or if something happened. And this going to go on just not no three or four weeks; this going to go on for a couple of years. They got the majority of the people there that's still there, elderly people. And by the time the ambulance get in there to get you, you can kiss it.

That's another thing that they have to take under consideration that it's going to have to become almost a gated community because of the terrorists and everything. That they've got to have tough security in that area. Some of those roads they're going to have to block off.

**ARSENEAULT:** [14:08] What do you mean, terrorists?

**LEE:** Well, like this ISIS thing , , ,

**ARSENEAULT:** You mean oil?

**LEE:** Yeah.

**ARSENEAULT:** Okay.

**LEE:** [14:22] Because of the process and the danger with them trying to . . . it's kind of farfetched. But hey, man, nothing today . . . I could see anything trying to happen, or happening, with these people. That would be a great target, if they hit one of those industries here, because it would be a chain reaction. The government, or whatever you call it, security, it's going to have to tighten up, and if you, in there, close by, we're not really safe where we at here. But we're much safer than we were in Mossville . . . from the leaks, and because there've been times that we had leaks and we had to stay in and the alarm went off, and you had to stay . . . what they call that? Shut in? Where you had to stay in your house and turn off all your . . .

**ARSENEAULT:** What plant was leaking?

**LEE:** Vista, Georgia Gulf. Explosions. And I think PPG a couple of times, and . . .

**ARSENEAULT:** Was it ever Axiall?

**LEE:** Yeah, well, PPG, that's the old Axiall, it was PPG at that time. And since Axiall have had it, there have been a couple of incidents where they had a shelter in place. Because they had the

big speakers throughout the community down there, and they would come on when they had something in the area. Conoco, Olin, or some of them would have a chemical leak, a train car derailment, or something. They had a warning system, and it helped. But it was mostly because you, most of the wind comes out of the south and the southwest and everything. And the way Mossville was situated there, it was kind of fully almost surrounded by industry, some type of industry. Not all chemical, because the electrical thing was turning off, and Citgo and Firestone, PPG, and all of that to the south. To the east you had Conoco and Georgia Gulf and Sasol was Vista. It was pretty well locked in. It gave me a chance to get out of the boat. You understand?

[17:39] My grandfather used to say, "You've got too much in the boat, sooner or later it's going to run over. You're going to have some spills." So if you get a chance to get out of there, get out of there. You know what I'm saying? We got in and by then, they wanting to buy, it's time to go. But he died before, he was in the process of selling it. But he died before everything went through. And then by the time they did all the paperwork and everything, my dad was in charge, he had a heart attack.

So my brother said, "Kenny." I say, "What, Rick?" He say, "Man, I want to sell it, but it's a bad thing here. Everybody, when it gets time, before you get the money, everybody, we had two in a row." He said, "We going to be three." I said, "Hell, we're going to try." You know, what Grandpa said? He said, "The bowl running over, son. They going to have us competing around it." [Lee clarifies competing to get out of it]. He said, "It's time to get out. If you get a chance to get out of the bowl, they going to treat you fair. Go ahead on and get out." Because he had some wisdom about it, some things he would tell you that it wouldn't register at the time. Like this thing about, maybe I told you before, about educating you about ignorance. And it worked the hell out of you. And people down the street were doing something, and my dad, he'd



make us go help them. We said, “Daddy, why do we got to go help them?” “I’m educating you about ignorance. You’re going to have to work with that [shit?] or get you a good education,” he said. “And the education is the key to get you out of here.”

**ARSENEAULT:** [19:31] So what would happen when the alarms went off?

**LEE:** Well, they would stay shelter in place. A lot of times they shut all the traffic down coming through. Just depending on what kind of spill or release they had—how long or what. And there’s times they shut the interstate down. Depending on which way the wind’s blowing, too, they shut the interstate down, or you had to stay in your house and turn off all your air condition and stuff because of the suction of, and a lot of people got sick over it. You got caught in the wrong place. And if you in transit there and you’re passing by there and there’s chlorine, formalin or whatever the leak was, it get you. A lot of people had to go to the emergency rooms. But like they say, “Oh, it’s not that bad.” But if it’s bad enough to shut the interstate down, like he said. Grandfather used to say, “Too much of anything that kills will kill you.” If it kills something, too much of it will kill you. [Portion omitted per Lee’s request]

**ARSENEAULT:** You were in college at the time?

**LEE:** Yeah, playing first base at Grambling [State University]. Scholarship.

**ARSENEAULT:** [21:04] So you remember Coach Eddie Robinson.

**LEE:** Yeah, I know . . . I knew Coach Rob, yeah. My brother played football up there. He was a four-year captain under Eddie Robinson.

**ARSENEAULT:** What?!

**LEE:** Yeah! We went up there this year and my granddaughter, the granddaughter's a cheerleader up there now. And my brother's in the hall of fame up there. I knew Coach Rob real well. Coach Holly, Coach Rob during the '60s. I was always . . . I had no name. I was always related to, as Richard's little brother. My brother was a big man on campus. In fact, he played for the Boston Patriots and the 49ers. I was up there during the Grambling heydays. Best of the best. Every year we have a gathering, a reunion of, call them the G-Men, Rob's boys. We all played. . .

**ARSENEAULT:** Coach Robinson? They called him Rob?

**LEE:** Rob Boys, yeah.

**ARSENEAULT:** [22:11] Rob Boys.

**LEE:** Yeah. And the G-Men, the Richard Lee gathering, the G Men. And he, my brother's the one that started it. Every year around the nineteenth of June, the weekend before, the weekend after, we get together. Seventy-five, eighty, 150 of us get together and relive and go over some of the things and have some speakers come in. And Coach [Broderick] Fobbs spoke this year, the new coach, football coach, he spoke. In fact, his wife is from Lake Charles. We went up there to

one of the home games this year. We went around my old baseball coach, he was the assistant coach back then. He's there. We all went by the athletic building and talked and relived the old times.

**ARSENEAULT:** [23:20] What year did you go? What year did you start?

**LEE:** I graduated from high school in '66. I went to Grambling.

**ARSENEAULT:** Did you live, you would have to have lived there, because it's like three hours away.

**LEE:** Yeah, I lived there on campus.

**ARSENEAULT:** In a dorm?

**LEE:** Yeah. And then I had an apartment off campus, too. I had a homeboy, Prater, was already up there at Grambling and he had a room, a house off campus. I kind of stayed between the two. You know how it is back then, you're eighteen, nineteen years old and your homeboy . . . And we were close before he went up there. So he had some space in the apartment, in the house where he was living. So I kind of lived with him. I had a car and I was back and forth with him. You know how it is in college. College days was great days, especially back then. Everybody knew everybody, just about. You had about four thousand kids at Grambling then. It wasn't as big as it is now, but it was kind of neat that everybody knew my brother, because he was up there

two years before I went. I was always related to as “Richard’s little brother.” “What’s your name?” Just like this, up there and I was walking up them stands, and it’s about 150 steps. And man, I say, [ . . . ?]

“Hey, Little Richard! Want me to call 9-1-1?” I call it the little man section. I say, “Hey, I’m not coming up there to the little man section and meet you all.” But it’s all good. And that was back in the day. But I enjoyed Grambling, man.

[25:30] Mossville remind me a lot of about it, because a lot of the kids from Mossville went to Grambling. A lot of my cousins and stuff went to Grambling before me and after me. There’s some there now. My daughter, my granddaughter is there. My son went to Grambling, and he went to Mississippi Junior College, and then he transferred to Grambling. His daughter, in fact, that’s his daughter there. And my sister-in-law, my brother’s wife went to Grambling, my niece went to Grambling. And a bunch of the Prater girls from Mossville went to Grambling, which are my relatives. You have a little Mossville community within Grambling. You have a problem with something, they kind of looked out for one another.

And they kind of recruited, because Johnny Comeaux, he helped recruit my brother. Johnny was up there, athlete from Mossville, first athlete from Mossville, to go to Grambling. He was a high school all American in basketball. In fact, he played for New Orleans [Louisiana] and several other teams there. I think, that was in the early ‘60s. And he recruited my brother, helped recruit my brother to come to Grambling. And the Prater girls were there.

[27:16] But speaking of the partying and stuff at Mossville at the Paradise Club, that was a special thing. And I got a chance to see those people there. And went horseback riding with Bobby Blue Bland and different ones like that, different things. And Mr. Montgomery and them would cook for them during . . . a lot of times they would be playing, like on a Friday or

Saturday, they'd get there on the Wednesday or the Tuesday. Because they was making a tour. And they called it the Chitlin Circuit.

**ARSENEAULT:** [28:00] Yeah. What is that? What is the Chitlin Circuit?

**LEE:** That was kind of a name they used for the black circuit that the bands would travel around on. And I don't know where the name from, who started it. But they would call it the Chitlin Circuit, referring to blacks, I guess, because a lot of blacks liked the chitlins and stuff. They would cook, and barbecue, and boil crawfish, depending upon what time of the year that it was that they were here. They'd spend two or three days here. A lot of them didn't, would come in the community and be there at the Paradise and they would practice. You'd get a chance to see them practice and singing. Some of us worked in there before, you know, wait tables and stuff like that.

**ARSENEAULT:** Where was the Paradise Club?

**LEE:** On Prater Road. Prater Road. It was, in fact, it was on the same street as I was raised on, and it was only a few houses down from where I lived most of my life with my mother and them. At one time or another, it was two or three different places we lived down Prater Road. And Daddy built a house, and this, that and the other. And then him and Mama divorced and we bought another place there and built the house.

But anyway, the streets, Prater Road, from Highway 90 to the Old Spanish Trail, they'd be parked, people parked. And they letting them park in their yard for fifty cents and stuff like

that. It was a big thing Friday night. Bobby Blue Bland's going to be in the house. Saturday night, Bobby Blue Bland is going to be, or BB King is going to be, and Little Alfred's going to open . . . Little Mack's going to open. Little Shef, Sheppard's [Mack Sheppard] going to open for him. You got Otis Redding, you got Joe Tex and them Barbara Lynn, a left-hand guitar player, a lady. And this lady that played on this story they had there about Etta James, I seen her there at the Paradise. Man, she could really . . . she could go, man. It was a real treat. But you look at it back then, it wasn't no big thing because it wasn't nothing to say, "Hey man, Joe Tex is coming to town. Coming to Mossville!"

**ARSENEAULT:** [31:21] How did you all find out? Was there like a poster?

**LEE:** Yeah, they put posters out and it would be on the radio. Bubba Lutchter had a radio show on, I don't know if it was, I forget the call numbers. But anyway, they'd have a soul hour, like three or four hours on the radio.

**ARSENEAULT:** Was Bubba Lutchter . . . Was there a black newspaper in Lake Charles?

**LEE:** Not at that time there wasn't.

**ARSENEAULT:** It was just the *Lake Charles American Press*?

**LEE:** [31:56] Yeah, the *American Press*. But they'd put signs everywhere, like at the little cafes and the, or little bus stops and different things. And Bubba Lutchter would be on the radio

from like one o'clock till, he'd come on after the news till about three or four o'clock in the afternoon. Three or four hours. And then you had like Nashville, Tennessee, they had a radio station there that would come on at night. You could catch it and they mostly talked about the Chitlin Circuit, about where, who was, that's why, I guess, we called it the Chitlin Circuit. Because Nashville, John R. was the deejay. I never forget that name. He would come on and tell you Ray Charles is in such and such a place, and Bobby Blue Bland is going to be down in Louisiana and different artists going to be where. It kind of kept you up with the happenings on the Chitlin Circuit.

[33:24] And then the local radio station would have soul hours, they'd call it, and Bubba Lutchter would talk about it and tell me, I mean, he'd tell us who and where they were playing. And balls at an auditorium there in Lake Charles, and between balls and the Paradise were the two spots where the big name entertainments would be.

Everybody liked to prefer to go to the Paradise because it wasn't in the city and you could go all night at the Paradise. Where at in like in the city, you had to shut it down at certain hours. But the Paradise, they had a little café at one time right there on the grounds that you could eat, and get food. It just had it going on. That was the, everybody wanted to go to the Paradise. It was an upstairs and a downstairs, had a dance floor downstairs, had a balcony around on both sides, and in the back they had a balcony, too, up top. And they'd come down there, the dance floor in the middle.

**ARSENEAULT:** [34:50] Was there a bar?

**LEE:** Yeah, there was a bar. The bar was all night. The southwest corner of the building on the bottom floor, you had a bar. And they had one upstairs, too, a smaller bar upstairs. Because they had stairs on both sides on the west end of it. It was, yeah, it was nice back then. You know what I'm saying? Back in the '50s and '60s and early '70s, all of this was going on. And in the '50s there, we stayed about three houses down from the Paradise Club. And we all, you know, we was all raised like family. They had some, Mr. Montgomery had some boys, Alan and Nelson, we all played together coming up. They had their work around there, and we worked, too. Mr. Valery would give us a little change. People might order some food from the little café, hot links or something during the dance or something like that, and we would bring them and deliver them and stuff like that. And we'd clean up and put the tablecloths on the table back then. After the dance, we'd go all get together and he would hire us to help him clean up and park cars or whatever.

[36:37] The neighborhood kind of centered around it. It was super entertainment. Because you hear today about how the rock stars and everything, but back then, they were stars, but they were everyday people to us. You'd look for them, and they'd say, "We'll see you next year. We're going to do this next year. Make sure y'all keep them horses, we're going to go riding."

Because I seen Bobby Blue Bland at Jazz Fest in New Orleans. I went, I told him what was going on and I said I wanted to talk with him. And he said, "Why?" He said, "Man, I used to ride horses with that man in Mossville years ago." And he remembered that. He said that the Paradise Club, he said, "Man, them were some fun times." He said, "Life was simple." He said, "What's the name of that road we used to go ride on? That place that was covered with trees, the brimstone."



I said, "That was the old Brimstone." There was an old pipeline. It was an old brick road, but they turned it into the pipeline. It ran just like Old Spanish Trail did, and it ran east and west. We could ride horses on it. You could ride all the way to Sulphur on that Brimstone, the old Brimstone. And that's where we would go ride. He told me, he talked about it and he laughed. He asked about Mr. Montgomery and all, everybody, how they was doing and all that. He said, "That was the good days." He said, "We don't have those days like that no more." And I said, "You're right."

[38:44] Some of the younger people that were with me was related to Mr. Montgomery, the Bernard girls, Uncle John's daughters, Gwen and Sandra and them. And they were surprised. They said, "He remember Uncle Valery and them?" I say, I'm telling you, it ain't like he just came here one time or two times, it was kind of like a yearly, every year, just like Christmas. They were coming, because they made that circle, that tour. A lot of times they would be coming out of New Orleans or Baton Rouge [Louisiana]. And then, Lake Charles and Lafayette [Louisiana]. I mean, maybe Lafayette, Lake Charles, and they'd go on into Houston, making their tour. Man, they did that for years. And then when Paradise shut down, it was like a blow. Mr. Valery got old and the kids didn't keep it up. They ran the club for a while and then just got where they changed it into a motel. He just, after a while, they just closed the doors on it.

**ARSENEAULT:** [40:11] What was the name of the motel?

**LEE:** The Paradise Motel.

**ARSENEAULT:** Oh. [laughter]

**LEE:** Yeah. And then Mr. Rodney Caesar opened a little club, a small club there on the Paradise grounds. Where Mr. Montgomery and them used to stay years ago, before they built that big house there on Prater Road, they had a little small house on the front of the Paradise Club. They tore the Paradise down and everything. And Mr. Caesar, Rodney Caesar, opened a little club there on the ground for the Paradise Club. He took that house and converted it into a little small private club. It went on until he died a couple of years ago. He ran it for about twenty-some years for sure. The exact date, I couldn't tell you, but I know he ran it for a long time. Because I was doing the deputy thing then, the deputy sheriff thing. When Mr. Caesar opened that club where the Paradise used to be. Are there any other questions or anything?

**ARSENEAULT:** [41:28] I wanted to know . . .

**LEE:** I gave you a list of the . . .

**ARSENEAULT:** The musicians, yeah.

**LEE:** . . .the musicians that I got a chance to see.

**ARSENEAULT:** Did you have a favorite?

**LEE:** Yeah.

**ARSENEAULT:** Who was . . .

**LEE:** Etta James. Etta James, man, she . . .

**ARSENEAULT:** Why was that? Why was she your favorite?

**LEE:** [Pardon?]

**ARSENEAULT:** Why was she your favorite?

**LEE:** [41:47] She could sing, and the songs that she would sing, it was like things you could relate to. All the music I kind of relate to it. But Etta James, that song that she sings, "I'd Rather Go Blind than to See You Walk Away." And I got it now, I play it. I got a CD and that's my favorite. You ever seen the Cadillac movie?

**ARSENEAULT:** No.

**LEE:** Well she starred, I mean, what's her name? Beyoncé.

**ARSENEAULT:** Oh, yeah. Yeah, yeah.

**LEE:** Plays Etta James in that.

**ARSENEAULT:** I think I, yeah. Yeah.

**LEE:** She could sing. Man, she said she'd rather go blind than to see you walk away. And that's been my favorite. I play that all the time. I have two or three other CDs that I play, but that's my favorite song.

**ARSENEAULT:** [43:04] What do you remember about the Montgomerys?

**LEE:** They were some real Creole people. Mr. Valery never met a stranger, I don't believe, in his life. And they would cook and, "Hey, you all come eat!" They were real open-hearted and kind. Valery, Mr. Montgomery, he was a real asset to the community. "You all going to New Iberia play ball, here coach," he had something for the boys. You know what I'm saying? Help the team [Wes?] or something. Or they got some kind of activity for the school or something.

**ARSENEAULT:** He would give money?

**LEE:** [44:03] He'd give money, contribute to it. That helped, indirectly helped everybody in the community, because a lot of times we would go places, like normal things like go on the bus, but we had to go in cars because we didn't have the facilities and everything to go. But people in the neighborhood, like Mr. Montgomery and Wes Montgomery and Valery, [Oreece?] Thomas, and people like that. Mr. Josh Rigmaiden and all of them, they would contribute. "Boy, I know you ain't got no money. Here's a couple of dollars when you all get over there to spend." Things like that, that meant a lot then. "I'm going to cook a dinner for you, because you all won these games." Stuff like that. It meant a lot.

And if you had some kind of problems, you could go to them and they knew the right people to go see to try to get it corrected. Some of the boys got in trouble or something, they would kind of talk to them. They was kind of some role models in the community. They would help anybody that they could.

A lot of people stayed at, with Mr. Valery and them. They'd come to town, wouldn't have a place to stay or something like that, he'd take them in. He had a couple of rent houses back then and they'd stay there and they'd get on their feet. He just was the kind of a man that you was proud to know and to be associated with him. I'd say, to kind of, how you would say that? He was just an asset to the community. I just can't put it no better than that, I guess, because he helped a lot of people.

**ARSENEAULT:** [46:32] Did he ever get involved in politics?

**LEE:** Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. In fact, the first time I saw or met a governor, I met the governor at Mr. Montgomery's house.

**ARSENEAULT:** What governor was it?

**LEE:** Edwin Edwards. He was a good friend to Edwin Edwards. That was the first time I met a governor in person. And I met him at Mr. Valery's. The sheriff Ham Reed back in the day and a lot of people, lots of people, a lot of politicians. He was influencing a lot of the community politics, and police juries and stuff like that. He would always give some kind of function for that, for the political movements in the community. Just, he was, I'll say it again, he was an asset

to the community. Not only in politics. Just structure, anything that he could help somebody with. He wasn't . . . And I've never heard him badmouth nobody, even though he was in politics. It was like your judgment is your judgment, and what you do, we're not going to let it interfere with our friendship. You might be for this one, I might be for that one. But I still think this is the better man, because if we need something, we can go to him, somebody know him, and we can get some things did for the community.

[48:31] He'd be, you know, but he wasn't a man to blow his own horn about things. He did what he had to do, he did what he could do, and he just did it. He ain't going to say, "I fed all of y'all," or, "I gave you all some money to go to the football game" and all that. It was just . . . you'd never hear it. But a lot of people wouldn't say that he did it. I was one of the ones that he did do it for, and I'm not ashamed to say it. You know what I'm saying? Because when we first was, when we was building our house over there, I'll never forget it. He came to the house and he told my daddy, he said, "Richard, until you all get your well," back then, we didn't have water, you had to dig a well. He said, "You all can come and get some water, until you all get your well done, dug from the house." He said, "You all welcome to do that." We didn't have to ask him, "Could we come get some water?" Which we could have with our grandmother, but it was much further. And he'd say, "Until you all dig your well, or whatever you all need some water for around here, to drink or whatever, clean up with, until you all get your well done, you all could come get water from us." We had some five gallon buckets and a wagon, and we'd go get some water from Mr. Valery.

[50:26] It was like maybe like to that second fence, that's where we lived at. I'd say about three houses down from where the old Paradise was. We'd go get the water from him over there. And I think it was about, took us about four months to build our, about three or four

months to build it. During that time we'd get some ice and stop there, and my dad and them would fill up the, not the, wouldn't [run?] no ice chest, but one old crock pot with some water, and they had some ice, block ice in it. Because my dad and my uncle and them build the house. It wasn't no hire nobody, the contractors come and build it. They built it in their spare time. And then we dug the well after they finished, and stuff like that. My dad did, told him we appreciate everything. And sometime they would cook, like on a Saturday, Valery or somebody.

**ARSENEAULT:** [51:41] What would they cook?

**LEE:** Barbecue, like some chicken or make a sauce. They used to like to make them sauce . . .

**ARSENEAULT:** Sauce piquant?

**LEE:** Sauce piquant. When they're working, his wife would make that sauce piquant. She'd bring everybody a plate, or she'd come by and say, "You all come eat." Anybody in Mossville would do that. "You all got your dinner for the day, or what? We're going to bring you all some dinner." They kind of talk with their French accent. And Mama Eula, man, she always had something cooking in there. We all went to school together. She had two girls and two boys around our age. A couple of the boys were older and the girls were younger, by a year or two younger than us, but we all came up together.

And before we got big enough to really go in, we'd go to Alan and Nelson [Demont?] that afternoon when the dance coming up and you could hear everything outside the building. You couldn't go in. You're ten, twelve years old, you can't go in there. You're not big enough

to, and Mr. Valery say, “No,” or something like that. “You’re going to get hurt, so you better get out of the way.” But you could go sit out there on the porch.

[53:15] They had a porch on the front porch at his house, which they turned into a club later on. Mr. Caesar did. You could listen as the musicians played. And you could go in there when they was practicing during the day and stuff like that. After you got fourteen, fifteen, sixteen years old, they’d let you go in and work and make a little change. That was the times, man.

And Etta James and Barbara Lynn, I liked that Barbara Lynn, because she was a lady and she played that guitar and she was left handed. It just, because she’d just sat there and pick it, man, and sing. There wasn’t all these electronic stuff back then. It was doing it from here. And it was real music. Joe Tex would bring down the house, him and Joe Simon. It was a good day. It was the good days. It was the good days.

**ARSENEAULT:** [54:34] Did people dance?

**LEE:** Oh, yeah.

**ARSENEAULT:** Was there names for the dances?

**LEE:** Oh, well they did a two-step, which was the step, basically. But they always had some kind of new dance, like the watusi and the shuffle and the James Brown thing, and different things like that. And the funky chicken.



**ARSENEAULT:** Where did people learn? How did you learn?

**LEE:** Well, you, sometimes you would see it on, somebody was always coming from the city to visit somebody. And the dances, or they would make a tour, and they had people that was with them, and they would be doing it.

**ARSENEAULT:** Like groupies?

**LEE:** [55:30] Yeah, groups. And later on, like this one would have a couple ladies singing, and later on they would break off and start their own group. Like Al Brass and all of them, they were always somebody's backup singer. And then Al took on, on his own. Just like that. Then they'd be dancing and they would show different ones and the dances.

And they had teenagers always coming to visit, [ . . . ?]. Because like I said, they had a brain drain, and a lot of the people left and they could come back to visit. And they would show, we had some canteens back in the day, back then. Freelows, and Ms. Lula's and Ms. Martill's, they had them canteens for the kids would hang out, and dances. Someone was always showing somebody something, or we would go visit here or visit Houston or somewhere and pick up or something, they'd come back and they'd show it.

With your proper dancing and all that, we had that at school in P.E. They had Miss . . . What her name was? Ms. Dawkins. Oh, Lord, I can close my eyes, I can see that lady. But I can't call her name right now. But anyway, they were the physical education instructor for the girls.

**ARSENEAULT:** [57:13] And they learned how to dance?

**LEE:** And they would teach it. You'd have a dance class and a waltz and stuff like that, and a lot of things. What's that woman name? Why can't I tell you? I could remember Ms. Dawkins. Ms. Madison. Ms. Madison. She was from, I think from around Baton Rouge. And there was always something that they would come back and show the girls, young ladies. A lot of the time, some of the teachers were fresh out of college, been out a year or two. They were, I guess we'd say, still clubbing. Just out of college. They pretty well knew what was going on in the world. And they were from all different places, and they would bring their culture to Mossville. If you want to call it culture or whatever. You learned a lot from, man they was . . . And one would show one and it would catch on and everybody would be doing it.

**ARSENEAULT:** Did you dance?

**LEE:** [58:33] Yeah. Not a lot. But I used to like to dance. I used to like to two-step, and what they call slow dance, slow drag. I used to like that. But that was the thing to do, man, because they had like teen time at the Catholic school there, Sacred Heart, on Wednesdays, Wednesday night, in Mossville. And they had those canteens right there by the school. We used to dance there. You could go there and have fun. Ms. Freelow and them had the fried chicken in the canteen, and hamburgers. Ms. Lula had like the ice cream parlor and hamburgers, but she mostly was an ice cream thing. Mr. Thomas [Oreese?] had a little canteen across from the school, and it was mostly dancing and soda pops and cakes and stuff like that, chips and stuff.

Ms. Martill was next door to the barber shop, and mostly hers was open on Sundays, Saturdays and Sundays, because of the barber shop and the canteen. It was basically a store during the week, Monday through Friday and Sunday. Sunday they really, it was just for the

canteen. But Saturday evening, it was a little dance and she had right there at the barber shop, in the back of the barber shop. Mr. Benson, Lorenzo Benson, was the barber. Later on, Mr. Thibodaux opened a barber shop down there. And [Belle Aqueese barber?] but Uncle [Brock?] had them retire. But that was a . . .

**ARSENEAULT:** [1:00:53] Who went to the barber shop?

**LEE:** [Pardon?]

**ARSENEAULT:** Who went to the barber shop?

**LEE:** Well, the men, the boys, young men. Because they had that Afro thing going back then. You keep your hair fluffed out, and keep it lined up, keep it up straight. The Afro was a big deal back in the '60s, and the early '70s. Get it trimmed. Keep your hair . . . And then the Ivy League, the close-cut. You had to have a fresh haircut, man.

**ARSENEAULT:** Did you have an Afro?

**LEE:** [1:01:38] Yeah, at one time, I did. Yeah. I liked the Ivy League cut. And then the Afro took off in the late '60s, about the mid-'60s. That's when most of them start wearing the Afro, in the '60s. But I started shaving my head after I came out of the military. A couple years after I came out of the military, I started just shaving it all off. It's not that it won't grow or I'm bald-

headed or nothing. I just prefer that. My grandfather was a bald-headed, bald head, and I just said it was a Lee thing, and I bald my head.

**ARSENEAULT:** So where did the women get their hair done?

**LEE:** [1:02:37] Ms. Rigmaiden had a beauty shop. Ms. Joanne Rigmaiden had one. And later on, Mrs. Linda Louis had a beauty shop there at the end of Michigan [Avenue], right off the Old Spanish Trail. She had about a three or four-chair beauty shop. And my aunt Artemis Irving, she had a beauty shop built onto her house. She had a shop there in Mossville off the Old Spanish Trail. Most of the people on that end of town in the Mossville went to Ms. Irving, Aunt Ida, we called her Aunt Ida because of my grandmother's sister, my great-aunt, she was an Irving. She married Bernard Irving. But anyway, she did a lot of the styling back in the day. When the women were cutting their hair with the bobs and all of that, she was one of the ones that would do it. And then she, all of them retired.

And Linda had, Linda Louis had the big shop down across from Bel Air down there, right off of Michigan, at the end of Michigan and the Old Spanish Trail. She had a big, three or four-chair beauty shop. She had it for a long time. And I think Conoco, during the time I sold out, probably bought her out then because she moved and she went to Lafayette. That was in 2000 or something like that, because '99 was when I did this up here. I sold out to Conoco over there in '99.

**ARSENEAULT:** [1:04:53] Was there ever like a unisex, or like both gender barber shop or anything?

**LEE:** Well, they would cut men hair, too, especially with, but specialized with the women, there were the young ladies. They would . . . And her husband ran that little sandwich shop or food shop next door. Lawrence. He worked at the plant, but he had a little barbecue stand next door on like Thursday, Friday and Saturdays. He would make barbecue sandwiches and stuff like that, and we'd hang out. It wasn't a club, but it was go there and have coffee and sat around and talked. It was a gathering place for the men. In fact, I owned a little pub there for several years there in the Mossville area on the First Avenue. Had a little neighborhood bar. We'd open like from Wednesday to Saturday.

**ARSENEAULT:** What was it called?

**LEE:** The Pub.

**ARSENEAULT:** The Pub?

**LEE:** Yeah. It was where the old country club used to be in Mossville. I owned it. One of my friends, Donny Mouton, one of my, we grew up together. He was kind of disabled. He ran it for me, but I owned it. And we had it there for several years there on First Avenue and Bel Air.

**ARSENEAULT:** [1:06:52] What kind of things did you serve?

**LEE:** We served mostly beer and whiskey. Every Wednesday we would cook, or Thursday we would cook a sauce, or cook something. Had pretty good business and good clientele, mostly

working class. They would hang around, they'd come on Thursdays and we'd cook supper. We started it on Wednesday. We had a pool table in there and we had pool tournaments and beer. It. I'd say a couple of years, for about three or four, about four years, for sure, and then I shut it down and they remodeled the building. But it was some dispute about them, the building. I was leasing it. And I got ready to try to reopen it, and they had built the building. Something about the [boundaries?] in the building. And they never, nobody never could open it up because they never did get it straight about the property lines. So I didn't open back up. Nobody did. And I was renting it, leasing it. I was renting it or leasing it. No one never did open it back up. I couldn't open it up because they were in dispute about the property line. They never did go to the courts. I don't . . . I really didn't follow up on it because I was so disgusted about it. I just let it go.

**ARSENEAULT:** So what happened to the land?

**LEE: [1:08:56]** I guess . . . I don't know if they ever got it straight, but I'm pretty sure Sasol did. It was the dispute about the property line. They said that the building that he rebuilt exceeded this property line. And he had some kind of injunction to stop it from opening, so we couldn't open back up. I checked into it. I waited and waited and waited, but they never did get it straight. So I just said, well, forget it, because I was already working two jobs. And my buddy that was running it for me, we just didn't pursue it anymore. I tried to buy it out from both of them, buy his land and his building. And one say, "It's on my property, that's my building, part of the building is mine."

And I'd say, "Well, if you all could come to some kind of agreement about some kind of price, reasonable price, I would buy it, buy your land and your part of the building, and your land and your part of the building." But I never could get it straight. In fact, a lawyer, I contacted him about the situation, but they never could get it straight. One didn't want to give in to the other. So I just told my buddy, "Don't worry about it, because," I say, "I'm running enough as it is now."

**ARSENEAULT:** Well we are almost to an hour and a half.

**LEE:** Any other questions you want to ask?

**ARSENEAULT:** [1:10:49] Yeah, I have some. There's one I wanted to ask about, let's see. When did you all find out that the water table was being polluted?

**LEE:** Exactly, I don't know. But it was in the early '70s.

**ARSENEAULT:** Okay.

**LEE:** [1:11:14] It was in the '70s, early '70s. Because when I came back, if I'm not mistaken, in 1970 I came back from Vietnam, there was a big discussion about the water. They had the board together and everything, and they were in operations or, I can't remember exactly. But I know it's in the early '70s. You got another one?

**ARSENEAULT:** Yeah. Sorry. So how did they find out?

**LEE:** [1:11:58] I don't know exactly how they found out about it. They seeing, they started seeing a lot of the people were having cancer and they came to thinking. They had some independent people done some, come out and did some tests on the water system. The government, a lot of them were there before the water system went in that was using those shallow wells, to my understanding. If you're going to drink out of this shallow well for twenty years, we've had this water system for four or five years, well, I mean, how can you tell it came from this well or it came from your other ten years or whatever, five years that you drunk this other water? You understand what I'm saying? It's kind of which one came first, the cart or the horse. You know what I'm saying? Because to my understanding, I might be wrong, but if you going to eat this over here for five years, and then this other once you stop, and then you start eating this over here, now for a year or two, and you're going to say this is the one making you sick. You've eaten both of them. So I mean, which tree did the pollutant come from? From the shallow well living, from the environment, from the air, or from the water? The water might be bad, but the government is testing it and . . . I couldn't see it. You know what I'm saying, what I'm talking about? If the water that bad, why the government keep letting us drink it? You know what I'm saying? I mean, it ain't like they didn't come out and do some testing. So it was an information gap there. I lived there and I always did drink the water. Because I say, hell, I've been here, I'm twenty-some years old, I've been drinking this water all my life, I ain't dead yet.

**ARSENEAULT:** [1:14:27] Did you all treat it or anything when you all drank it?

**LEE:** Not back then, no. But after the water system started, they started treating it. We had a damn thing you pumped like that, the old-time pump. I'm sixty-seven, sixty-eight years old.



Back then, when I was born, they had a pump. And then my grandfather had a well where you dropped the bucket in there and it would fill up, and then you'd pull it up, and you'd dump it out, the thing in your bucket, and carry it out. They had a big old crock pot, the crock, that they would tie a straining rag, I called it, and they would pour it in there, and it would strain it, the water, as it poured it in the crock. You had dipper, you'd dip it in, you'd get you some water and pour it in a glass. But plants kept growing and getting bigger. And the water system came in. And they said it's the water. I mean, you've lived in California twenty years, then you're going to come back here and tell us this is what's happening? And we making you sick? How do you know it wasn't something over there you got a hold of that's making you sick? Because everything that you take in like that, it takes, like asbestos, it takes ten, twenty years sometimes before it show up.

[1:16:07] I'm not going to dispute you. But I'm not going to jump on the bandwagon with you, either. I mean, I ain't crazy. You know what I'm saying? I might be wrong. You might be right. But I can't see the government letting us drink this water if it's not, if it's contaminated. I can't see it. I mean, I don't think that the government is that bad, because I've seen bad shit across the water, excuse my French. It changed my ideas thinking about a lot of things, to see the way people lived over there compared to the way we lived over here, even though we was treated bad, you know, the blacks were treated bad. It wasn't fair. But look around over there. And I said, "Man, thank God for the United States." Even though I might have been, couldn't go in that door over there, and had to take the door on the left, but compared to what's going on over here, give me the door on the left. And it opened my eyes about a lot, a lot of things. But it also made me understand that I'm not like, my grandfather used to say, "I'm not going to bend my neck so you could ride my back." Do you understand?

Now I fought and killed for this country. I want what's mine. I'm not going to the door on the left just because you say I've got to go to the door on the left. I'm going in the door. You try to beat me up or send me to jail, whatever you want to do. But I killed people for this country. This is my country. You understand? I laid down my life and took life for this country, and I'm not going to let you tell me or dictate to me what I can do and what I can't do. You understand? And I mean that from the bottom of my heart.

[1:18:32] Just like I was working for the sheriff's office [ . . . ?]. [Dusay?] told me, "You're not bringing me to jail." I said, "What?" He said, so and so, "You ain't taking me to jail." And I said, "Well, I'll tell you one thing. I can show you better than I can tell you." I said, "Ninety-two sheriff's office, send me an ambulance, 1079, to this location." He said, "What you calling? You better be calling [?]." I said, "No, I'm calling for an ambulance." He said, "What are you calling for an ambulance for?" I said, "One of us is going to need it. More than likely, it's going to be you." He said, "Let's go."

I say, "Man, you messing with the wrong one." I say, "I'm here to do a job. And I'm going to do my job. If you run, you're going to jail." But he wasn't used to nobody my color standing up to him. I said, "I'm not afraid of you. And I don't want you to be afraid of me. But I'm here to do what I'm supposed to do, and I think I'm supposed to take you to jail. And I'm going to take you to jail. Or I'm going to take you to the hospital, then to jail. Or that ambulance going to be here to take care of me or you. But one of us going to need it if you don't want to do what I'm asking you to do." So after that, I had very little trouble. I told him I meant that. Because I got counseled about it. They called me in, talked to me. I told them, "Yes, this is what I told him." I said, "I'd tell you the same thing."

**ARSENEAULT:** [1:20:35] What was your circuit?

**LEE:** [Pardon?]

**ARSENEAULT:** Did you have like a circuit? Or what do they call it?

**LEE:** I was a deputy throughout Calcasieu Parish. But I became a resident deputy in Mossville for sixteen, seventeen years. But when I first started, I was parish-wide. You understand? So they'd send you anywhere, different places and everything. And you know how it was back in the '60s and the '70s. Well in the '70s, early '70s, about the mid-'70s, I start working for the sheriff's office. And it wasn't all over the parish. Some places they didn't respect the black man to be a man. You had the incidents throughout life where they'd challenge you sometimes. You know what I'm saying? Or say stuff to you. But they couldn't back it up. It's like I told them. It's just like when I moved up here.

I'll give you a for instance. Me and one of my friends, we were building some stalls in my barn. And they had a truck kept passing, kept passing. So we left to go get some dinner. So we coming up, walking up the driveway, the van pulled in. And the man say, "Hey, you boys!"

I'm six foot-five, three hundred and some pounds. I looked at my partner, I looked around. He said, "No, I'm talking to y'all. To you." I said, "Yeah?" He had his wife with him. Before I can say anything, he said, "I'm looking for that man you boys working for." I say, "Yeah?" He say, "I want to invite him to church Sunday." [laughs] I look at my buddy and I laugh. I say, "Mister," . . . I can't say what I told him. But anyway, I say, "I'm the M.F. that

owns this.” And I said . . . He said, “Well, you don’t have to be cursing and don’t say that in front of my wife.”

[1:23:19] I said, “Well, let me tell you something. You’re on my property. And this is America, last time I checked.” I say, “I fought and killed people for this country.” And I say, “And I’m going to let you travel up here to my house and call me a boy? I’m six-foot five, three hundred and some pounds, 325 pounds, and I’m not a man to you?” I say, “Well, you get out of that van and you show me how much a man you is.” “I still don’t like you cursing in front of my wife!” I say, “You cursed me. You called me a boy.” [mimics more yelling] I say, “Look, let me tell you something, mister. Best you do, take you and your wife.” I said, “And if you come here again, you leave her home if you don’t want to hear what I got to tell you. Because what I told you is not Christian-like. I know it’s not. But it wasn’t Christian-like for you to come here and you being a preacher, calling a black man a boy. Two of them. You understand? And asking me where the white man at that own this, like a black man can’t have nothing like a place like this.”

[1:24:37] I say, I told him, my friend, I say, “That was one of the worst things, to me, when I came back from the war and the way people tried to treat me. That I know what I went through and sacrificed for this country. And then somebody come back and do something like that to you, that hadn’t even been in the Girl Scouts or the Boy Scouts.” I say, “That was the most traumatic thing for me to handle and control myself was that.” From time to time, it happens. But it got to where I could deal with it. But that was hard. That was hard. Really hard. You come from a generation, you don’t know nothing about that. When I was in college, they had places you couldn’t stop to get, to eat and buy gas. They had a sign, “No Ns allowed.

**ARSENEAULT:** [1:26:03] I remember reading about Coach Robinson would make the boys sandwiches because he wasn't allowed to stop.

**LEE:** Wasn't allowed to stop. But you had to, you could take me over there and make me kill people for this country, and then you're going to want me to come back and bend my neck? No. No. I'm not bending my neck. I'll be carried by eight or juried by twelve. I'm not going to, I'm not going to take it. And I'm not going to, let you know how I feel. I'm going to tell you how I feel. Yeah. It was bad, baby.

[1:26:45] But I could see the light. To live in Mossville, and to see . . . God let me live to see a black man as the president. I thought this would never happen. I seen Martin Luther King in person in Arkansas. I could see where we were trying to go, and I seen all the obstacles in the road to get there. I get emotional about that, because it was such a tragic and dirty road to travel to get this far, and to see that everything that has happened, happened. And to see him make it to that office, is just . . . hell, I don't know. I say, this really is a miracle. Because I thought I would never see it. Not in my lifetime. I wasn't sure it wouldn't happen.

But when they first told me that Obama was running for president, I just, I just, I couldn't see him making it. I could see him being able to be president. But the attitude of the people from generations past, that somebody would try to assassinate him. And I thought he would get assassinated. Because of the way that Kennedy, you understand, and how they did Martin Luther King. And then it showed me that hey, it can happen. That he did win. He stayed in there, won it, not one time. It was no accident; he did it twice. And I said there's really got to be a God up there. Because I just . . . I don't know. People change, times change. I just never thought I'd see it.

**ARSENEAULT:** [1:29:42] What do you remember about Dr. King?

**LEE:** There's a story there. But he was a remarkable man. Because I'm not the one to turn the other cheek. I might turn it, but soon as I turn it, I'm turning it on. Because some people only, that's the only thing you can get their attention with is firepower. But he got it with kindness. And I got a certain amount of kindness to me, but I kind of believe in an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. If you hit me, I'm going to hit you back. I might turn the other cheek, but soon as I turn the other cheek and you hit me, I'm going to hit you. But he was a very remarkable man, because he took . . . Man, they spit on him, they did everything to him. And they ended up killing him. I thought that was what was going to happen to Obama.

In fact, he really should have been one of the first black presidents. He had that intelligence about him, because he could, he held millions back in the violence that was about to take place in America. He controlled a whole lot of black soldiers that he made them stand down. Because it was going to be some real trouble here in America. Which there was. But he made them stand down, and that was remarkable. He said that we was going to win this thing in kindness. See, it might take a little longer, but it's not going to take as much blood. And it did. But then, and I just . . .

**ARSENEAULT:** Did you ever hear him speak?

**LEE:** [Pardon?]

**ARSENEAULT:** [1:32:32] Did you hear him speak?

**LEE:** Yeah. I saw him in Arkansas.

**ARSENEAULT:** Where in . . .

**LEE:** In the '60s.

**ARSENEAULT:** Okay.

**LEE:** [1:32:42] And he's talking about getting into all walks of life. Don't just be preachers and teachers. We need firemen, policemen, we need this and we need that. And operators, draftsmen, doctors and all. Get into all walks of life. During those times, to make a long story short, I got out, I didn't do anything, but I was accused of doing something that I didn't do, and the police kind of mishandled me.

**ARSENEAULT:** This was in the '60s?

**LEE:** Yeah. So I mean, I got drafted in the military. Everything, my grandfather say, "Things that happen to you, happen to you for a reason." So after I got in there and everything, I was in training, they offered me to go through the federal investigators' school. He said, "You would work undercover."

"Well I don't want to be no police." He said, "None of this would be on your record. You're just undercover, you write [letters?], they give you an address that you would write to and everything. You'd just be like a . . ." I said, "You want me to be a snitch! I won't be no

damn snitch!” That night, man, I went to bed and I tried to go to sleep. Martin Luther King talked to me all night. He wanted us to make a difference, to get an education, get into a field that where you know they need help. Because you are a victim of the brutality that puts you with the badge and that gun with authority to do what they did to you, that you could prevent them from doing it to somebody else.

I couldn’t wait the next day to go talk to my CO about going to this school. So I became a cop. But I wasn’t [ . . . ?], I was a federal investigator. So it’s just, that’s one of the things that they say happened for a reason. Because I had no business going into the army. The military. Some things are beyond your control.

**ARSENEAULT:** [1:36:13] What were some of your duties in Mossville as resident sheriff?

**LEE:** Well, I’d keep the peace. I’d patrol and I would serve papers, civil papers. I worked warrants. The regular, just, that was my area that I took care of. I worked traffic. I gave tickets and I’d talk with the juveniles. I kind of handled it my way. And a lot of times I knew kids were doing certain things, I wouldn’t talk to the kid, I’d go talk to his dad. I’d say, “Now, if you can’t stop him from doing what he did, I know he took Mr. Williams’ lawnmower. You understand? Now Mr. Williams ain’t got his lawnmower back by tomorrow, a certain time . . . in fact, no. I want to see him cutting Mr. Williams’ yard with that lawnmower.” You know what I’m saying?

**ARSENEAULT:** [1:37:19] You gave him a chance.



**LEE:** Yeah. Give him a second chance. Now I say, "Now if you can't do nothing about it, I can. But I don't want to." I said, "Maybe he'll learn from this." Now a lot of times I went back over there and hey, he was cutting Mr. Williams' yard. And Mr. Williams go, "Hey, Kenny!" I say, "Hey, man! [?] he'd take your lawnmower to the . . . and then cut his daddy's and them yard, then he'd come back and cut your yard. Say he cut your yard before for you, he didn't use your lawnmower." He said, "Yeah, he sure did, he cut my yard before." And I said, "That's where your lawnmower was. He had got your . . . used your lawnmower, knew you wouldn't mind him using your lawnmower, because he'd come cut your grass for you." Yeah. I say, "Yeah, but he was just sizing [him up?]." I say, "Now you was just sizing Mr. Williams up to steal the lawnmower, just to find out where everything was around there. Now if something else come up missing, I know you did it. So if you didn't do it and something else come missing, you better know who did, all right?" I said, "I might let this go this time." But I said, "See how easy it is to get in trouble?" And a lot of times, a lot of them learned from it.

**ARSENEAULT:** [1:38:33] Were there any unsolved mysteries or anything?

**LEE:** No. Most of the stuff . . . They had break-ins at the school. They would tell me. They would call me and tell me, "So and so stole the lawnmower from the school," or they did this, they done that.

And it just, I'd go to them and say, "Look, if that lawnmower ain't back to that school in the morning when that bell ring." I say, "I should take you to jail. But, you stealing from somebody ain't got nothing." And I say, "Now, you're going to make some mistakes. You're going to do some wrong." I say, "I'm not perfect." And I say, "I don't expect you to be perfect.

But I expect you to try to correct what you're doing. You're stealing from somebody that's on a fixed income, or not a fixed up income." I say, "Now these people don't have the money and stuff to replace these things that you all are doing this and that with. Now go get that and bring that back to them people." I say, "I'm going to have to take you to jail." And I say, "I don't want to go pull up in the front of your grandma house in the police car to pick you up."

**ARSENEAULT:** You're going to be embarrassed.

**LEE: [1:39:55]** You're going to embarrass your grandma. You going to be embarrassed. And I say, "Now I'm going to be halfway to being embarrassed. But I don't mind doing it, because that's my job. I'm going to do it. But for your grandma's sake, and something like that, I don't want to do it. So do what you're supposed to do. And you ain't going to have that trouble out of me." You know what I'm saying? Now most people would just run over there and kick your door in and do what they need to do. But I'm going to try to work this out the community way. And I say, "Now if you see something going on wrong that you think I need to know, you call me and tell me, or come by and tell me. If you don't want to be seen, call me. Here's my card, here my phone number." And you would be surprised of the things that would come to you.

**[1:40:52]** They had a kid from Mossville that took place, a murder in Houston. He didn't do it, but he was there. He was a material witness. Well, he cut out on them and came home. Okay. Houston found out about it. They called the sheriff's department, sent two people over there to investigate him. So they called me because his grandfather and parents and them lived in my area. I'm off. I'm barbecuing. True story.

“Kenny.” I say, “Yeah.” “What you doing?” I say, “I’m barbecuing.” He say, “I got two detectives here from Houston for so and so.” I say, “Yeah?” He say, “We need . . . They need to pick him up. They need to talk to him about a murder in Houston.” So I say, “Okay.”

So I got off the phone. It wasn’t far from my house. So I went over there. I didn’t go in the police car. The boy wasn’t there. He say, “He go on and take my wife to the store.” I said, “Look, let me tell you what. They got two detectives from Houston coming to interview your grandson about a murder that he was a witness in Houston.” I say now, “I don’t want to come back over here in the police car with these detectives following me in another car from Houston.” I say, “You a preacher in this area.” I say, “That ain’t going to look good.” He said, “Kenny, I appreciate it.” I say, “I tell you what. When he come back with your wife, you bring him to my house.” He say, “You got my word on that.”

[1:42:56] So I went back home and start barbecuing. I was cooking. Here come the policemen from Houston. They came by. So they say, “We need so and so.” I say, “Hey,” I say, “have a seat. You want a soda or water or something like that?” I say, “He’s on his way. He’s coming.” So he said, “Hey, man. We need to get this done and get back to Houston.” I say, “Hold on. You’re in my town and you need my help. Okay? I’ve got this. This is my town. We might not do it like you do it in Houston, but we going to do it.” I said, “Now, if you want me to help you, you help me by not getting on my nerve. You understand?” I say, “Because I’m going to pick the man up for you. You’re going to see him.”

[1:43:54] So my phone rang. I answer the phone. He say, “Kenny.” I say, “What’s up, [Rev?]?” He say, “We on our way.” I say, “Good.” I say, “He be here in about ten minutes.” One of them says, “Like hell. You going mean to tell me he going to come bring himself over here

and turn himself in to you? And he ran from Houston?" I say, "Chill out, man. I told you, this is my town, okay?"

So he sat down. A few minutes, a car pull up. Grandpa pull up. He say, "Hey, you." The cop looked at me. He say, "What kind of police stuff is this? You mean to tell me you can get his grandpa to turn him in?" I said, "Well, man, that's depending on how you run your town." I say, "You run yours you way. I run mine this way." And I said, "People got faith in me. They trust me. They know me." And I said, "Now you want to take him in, or you want to take him in my house and talk to him? Or you got enough to take him downtown or whatever?" And the other just kept shaking his head. He said, "We can talk to him here. We don't need to really bring him in. We just need a statement from him" and everything.

So they went in the house and they did the statement and everything. Make a long story short, and they came back to me, they said, "Man, I ain't never seen that kind of police shit in my life." I said, "Well, it depend on how you do it, how you run your town."

They left, and about a week later, I got a letter from their officer, I guess, their superior officer. They went back and told him what happened and everything. And they said, man, they called the sheriff and told the sheriff the way I handled it. And the sheriff say, "Well yeah, that's Lee. He got some strange ways, but they're very effective." He said, "We call him Killer." He said, "That's his nickname."

**ARSENEAULT:** [1:46:30] Killer?

**LEE:** Killer. Because we got into a couple of fights and one of the fellows said, "Man, what happened to you?" He said, "That fellow right there. You all got that killer working for you all!"

He just try to kill people.” I say, “No.” I say, “You started the fight.” I say, “I didn’t want to fight you. I wanted to bring you in, do my job. But it’s like I told you. Anytime,” I say, “you want me to call an ambulance? Or you want [ . . . ?]. Because I ain’t going to play fight. I’m going to fight you to win. If I’ve got to cheat on you, I’m going to fight you to win.” And he say, “You a killer?” And ever since then, they’ve been calling me Killer. They’ve been calling me Killer. They called me Killer the whole while I worked there at the sheriff’s office. Half the time, I wouldn’t even have a gun. I’d have it in my pocket. I wouldn’t wear it. I’d go somewhere and knew everybody, because I played ball here.

[1:47:38] I stayed there in Mossville, and I’d give them a fair break. “You done broke the law. I’m going to have to do this, or you need to do this, or give me them keys and I’ll pull your car over there and take you home and tell your wife where, is your wife home, where the car at and everything.” I say, “Because I can take you to jail. It’s going to cost you some money, and you might lose your job.” I say, “You’re not really drunk, but you’ve been drinking. I can smell the alcohol on you. I’ve got probable cause to take you in. But you ain’t hit nobody. Pull that car over right there. Leave that car there. And I’m going to take your keys and I’m going to take you home. And I’m going to give your keys to somebody at your house. And if there ain’t nobody at your house, I’m going to keep the keys and come back later and give them to somebody to keep you from going to get that car.”

A lot of times, it worked. Later on I’d see them and they’d say, “I appreciate that, man.” And they’d call me. They’d see something happening, they’d call me and tell me. They’d say, “Because you gave me a chance, that’s going on over here, and we need this, that and the other.” Or, “So and so, I seen him do this. I seen him do that.” But one hand washed the other. And nothing major had happened.

Well back then, you could do things like that. In the '70s and '80s, and the early '90s, you could kind of control things. You knew what was going on. Because like the paper boy knew more about what's going on in your town than the mayor. Because when the mayor's sleeping, the paper boy out making his rounds. There are certain people you'd stay tight with. And them old ladies, them clubs and stuff they had, them organizations, they know what's going on. The paperboy know what's going on. The mailman knew what was going on. Because I was a mailman for seven years, and you see all kind of stuff going on. So all these people feed you the information that you need. And they see stuff, and they wouldn't hesitate about calling to tell me what was going on, where it was going on, or why it was going on. They'd never hear it, but I was working on a way that it's like it got to me that you doing this. Now, "Is you doing this?" "Oh, no, you wouldn't do that, because you know I'm going to get you." [whistles] It's nothing major happening to the place, but you're not doing what you're supposed to do.

**ARSENEAULT:** [1:50:56] You got it before it got out of hand.

**LEE:** Yeah. You've got to control the situation. He'd say, "Well, okay, that's the way it is." But that was Mossville for you. A lot of people appreciated me. And then people that didn't live in Mossville, you'd drive up on somebody, three, four o'clock in the morning, they're sitting there waiting for their train to go. Then they went to sleep. Sitting at the train tracks.

**ARSENEAULT:** [laughs] That almost happened to me.

**LEE: [1:51:33]** Yeah. They'd call me and tell me, "Hey, Kenny. They got somebody sleeping in the car down there at the railroad track. I didn't know if they was drunk or died. I didn't want to stop and check them out. You better go check them out, see what's going on with them." And there's people there that I had done favors for. Not necessarily favors, but that they would, they felt like they owed me something because I had kind of helped them out, or helped their nephew out. Or I'm going to take you to jail. You're hungry? I'm going to pass and get you a piece of chicken or something before I take you to jail because they already ate at jail. And I've got to take you downtown. But if you're hungry, I'm going to take you and get you something to eat before you go to jail. Okay, now if there's something in that jail going on that you think I should know, or anything you see in the future that you think I should know, when you come of jail, you ain't doing that stuff, what you doing now, no more, because you're going to the hotel, you're going to join the big boy. I'm going to talk to him, try to get him to put you into trustee. But if you know of anything or hear of anything going on in this jail or anywhere in the future that you think I should know, I want to know.

**[1:52:53]** And I'm not going to implicate you as the person that told me. I said, I'm going to work it just like I did you. Because somebody told me what you was doing, you understand? But I got to do what I got to do, you understand? But I'm going to try to help you. I'm going to get them to put you where the trustees at or something. You know what I'm saying? Throw something out there for you. And if you need something on your book, those people don't come put nothing on your book, I'm going to put ten, twelve dollars on your book for your commissary. You know what I'm saying? I say, "Because I've been knowing you all your life."

You'd be surprised at what the things that would come back to you from just doing that. Not exactly that, or something similar to that for them. You know what I'm saying? Even though sometimes they say, "Well, man, I'm not hungry, I already ate, or this, that, the other."

After we got the cell phone, "Somebody else you need to call before we get to the jail? I'll let you use my phone to call. Because you get to jail, you ain't going to get but one phone call. Want to call your girlfriend or your wife or whoever and tell her, hey, you're going to jail, or this, that and the other? Because there's always somebody that needs to know where you're at." I say, "You can use my phone before we get there. Or when we get there, before we get in, I lock you up, I'll let you use my phone." And man, you'd be surprised at stuff that would come back to you.

**ARSENEAULT:** [1:54:33] What kind of stuff? If you don't mind me asking.

**LEE:** I don't want to go in no detail.

**ARSENEAULT:** Yeah, you're implicating a lot of people.

**LEE:** But some of it was major and some of it was minor stuff. And they would tell you. They got a car in the river up there at the boat launch.

**ARSENEAULT:** Was somebody in it?



**LEE:** No, nobody in it. A car. Somebody stole it and, so and so stole it and joyriding, and when they got through, they went and put it in the river. And then you go, you call them people, they get the diving, then they go up there and they check. Sure enough, there's a car in the river. Stuff like that. You know what I'm saying? And they got a car they got stripped down up there at such and such a place and they stripped it, at so and so's place up there. Stuff like that. It paid off in the long run. But after I retired, it got out of hand.

**ARSENEAULT:** What do you mean?

**LEE:** [1:55:49] I don't want to throw no rocks. It was good while I was there, and I felt like I made a big difference in the community, in the way things got along. There were times that deputies went to arrest somebody over there and they was boxed in and it was a miscommunication that yesterday I was telling my old lady the other night, how we be seeing this fellow. Well, him and his wife got into it. He worked on the railroad. They got into it. And he, to make a long story short, she worked in the restaurant for her brother. They lived behind the restaurant, in the alley and him and her got into it. So she called the police. They asked her did, what happened. And they say they got into it. And they asked her did he have a gun in the house, and she said, "Yeah, he got a gun in the house." Well, they thought that she had, that he had the gun on for her the way he'd got. So they went and knocked on the door and they say, "Who is it?" They say, "Sheriff Department." He said, "Is that Kenny Lee?" They say, "No, it's not Kenny Lee. It's so and so." "I ain't going to jail for nobody. Anybody take me to jail, Kenny Lee going to come take me to jail." He said, "If I need to go to jail, Kenny Lee going to bring me." They say, "Well, you got a gun in there?" "Yeah, I got a gun in my house." He ain't had the gun

for them. The way they asked him. And she had told them, "He got a gun in the house." So they thought . . .

**ARSENEAULT:** [1:57:44] He was about to shoot somebody.

**LEE:** Yeah. He was going to shoot somebody. So to make a long story short, so they called me. And I happened to be home. They say, "Kenny, do you know so and so?" I say, "Yeah." He say, "Well anyway, he's in the house down here. And him and his wife have got into it. And it came down to trouble, he said he wouldn't go into jail with nobody but you. You the only one could take him to jail. They say he's a pretty big man, he worked on the railroad." I said, "Yeah, he is a big fellow." I say, "He's a pretty good man, too." I say, "Tell them to hold off. I'm coming. I'll go."

So I get there. I go. I got out, I walked up to the door and I say, I called his name and I said, "Open this damn door." He say, "Kenny, is that you?" I say, "Yeah, that's me." I say, "Why you driving me down here? I'm about to eat supper." Yeah, I got a shotgun in here for hunting,' 'Yeah, I got a gun in here.' Like you got a gun on somebody." I say, "You ain't going to bust a [cap?] in a food fight." He say, "Man, you know that." But he say, "I didn't want those fellows coming up in here, taking me to jail when I can go with you." [laughter] I say, "Damn, "I said, "don't you do that no more, man! You could have got killed, boy!"

**ARSENEAULT:** [1:59:29] [laughs] That's funny. He was mad at his wife because she didn't cook him dinner.

**LEE:** Yeah. "You mad over a lunch! You could have went up there to your brother-in-law's place and got you something to eat!" He said, "Well, she could have brought it home." I said, "Damn, now this ain't . . ." I said, "Well anyway, don't worry about it." Things like that. He say, "Well, I don't want to go along with nobody but you. Because I know you're going to treat me right. Because didn't you take so and so and got him something to eat before you took him to jail?" I said, "Yeah." He said, "Well, I know them boys weren't going to take me to get nothing to eat. You would have brought me and got me something to eat before you took me to jail." I said lord, you're rubbing me the wrong way, boy. He said, "Well you would have, man, wouldn't you?" I said "Yeah, I would have". We went to school together. But they took it the wrong way.

**ARSENEAULT:** [2:00:34] Well, Mr. Kenny . . . We're . . . Yeah, we got a good interview this time. I didn't get to ask all my questions, though. So we might have to do one more.

**LEE:** What you want? What you want?

**ARSENEAULT:** Well, I don't want to take up too much of your time, and . . .

**LEE:** Oh, yeah, I get carried away talking about Mossville.

**ARSENEAULT:** No, well, it's a lot of good stuff. I guess maybe we'll do one more next time. I can talk to you about like, I didn't get to all of the questions about the entertainment in the area. I wanted to know about the zydeco, if there were any like local musicians or anything?

**LEE:** Well, zydeco wasn't big back then. [Buzu?] at the Paradise, it wasn't that much zydeco. It was just mostly the big name entertainments and Mac Shepherd, Little Mac, it's all the same people, they would open for some of the big bands and stuff, big groups and everything.

**ARSENEAULT:** So those were local people? Mack Sheppard was local?

**LEE:** [2:01:40] Yeah. Mack Sheppard was local. He was the . . . Helen! That was his nephew [Joshua Ledet] or great-nephew on *The Voice*, or *American Idol*. *American Idol*.

**ARSENEAULT:** Oh, okay. Okay. Okay.

**LEE:** He won that from this area. He was in . . . I think he came out second or third. But he was one of the top ones on there. He stayed on there for a long time. His daddy was a minister of Mossville.

**ARSENEAULT:** What church?

**LEE:** I think it was a . . . no, it wasn't Philadelphia. It was right there at the corner of Rigmaiden Avenue, we called it the Reverend Gasaway's Church.

**ARSENEAULT:** That was his name, Reverend Galloway?

**LEE:** Gasaway.

**ARSENEAULT:** [2:02:31] Gasaway.

**LEE:** His daddy was a Ledet [pronounced luh-day], a Ledet [pronounced luh-det]. Nathaniel. Nathan Ledet. Helen! Well anyway, that boy was . . .

**ARSENEAULT:** What about the Cowboy Inn?

**LEE:** Cowboy Inn. Yeah. Peter Deville.

**ARSENEAULT:** He owned it?

**LEE:** [2:02:55] Yeah. He owned that. Peter Deville ran that. He didn't have dances or nothing like that. It was just the neighborhood bar. The country club, John Williams and them owned that. That's the club I opened up later on, The Pub, was the old country club.

**ARSENEAULT:** Who would go to the Cowboy Inn?

**LEE:** Locals. A lot of locals. A lot of people. And wasn't no, it wasn't like the Paradise. It was just a pool hall and drinking. Paradise had live entertainment. You know what I'm saying? It was more of a show place like. But the Cowboy Inn was just a nightclub. It had a lot of regulars that would go there and drink and shoot pool and stuff like that. But the Paradise was, I'd say a different class because of the entertainment that they had. The Cowboy Inn had good business. It had good business. The bar business was a good business in that area. You had a lot of people

that would come in there. They had a little trouble every now and then. But it wasn't nothing that, you know, very seldom you had something that was, that required a police. I believe they came to my club maybe one time. But it wasn't something at the club. It was something that transpired on the street during the period I had it.

[2:04:54] But the Cowboy Inn, it was kind of, it was what you call a Cowboy Inn. They'd fight, and next fifteen minutes they drinking together. Like I told them boys, "Just don't rush to get there, unless there's a gun involved or something like that." Take our time. By the time I'll get there, the fighting won't last that long. By the time the sheriff's department get there, it was over and they sitting down there drinking together. Whatever had happened had happened. You know what I'm saying? But you never know what it's going to turn into until they do. But they had a lot of disagreements and stuff. But nothing hardly major. You could count on the major things that happened at all these clubs, all of them, in the period of time I was in law enforcement, because everybody knew everybody. "I don't want to press charges on him!" And this, that and the other. If you take, it took over fifteen minutes to get there sometimes from where you was. If I wasn't on duty, by the time they sent another unit in there, they'd get there, it's over with. They say oh, it's a disturbance. They'd just list the people that was involved in it. And that's it.

But on the up and up, compared club-wise, it was pretty low-key. They had a fight at the Cowboy. Well, she might have snapped at her husband. Somebody came in there and her husband might have been sitting down talking with another woman. A big fight. That ain't nothing. You know what I'm saying? A lot times, that was all conversation or somebody was being messy, call so and so, and told her that her husband down there with some women. And nine out of ten, that was his second cousin or first cousin that he's sitting at the table talking with

them. Stuff like that. Nothing major. At the Cowboy Inn. And they had another club, Marge's, that was a little neighborhood bar. And same thing. No entertainment. Nothing but jukebox.

**ARSENEAULT:** [2:07:35] Where else did people go for live entertainment?

**LEE:** Not Mossville. Lake Charles. They have a lot of different, when I was coming up, some baseball activities and football games and stuff like that. That was the major things, Friday night football and basketball games and stuff like that . . . and the club. The only thing they had, that had live entertainment was the Paradise, and the people come from everywhere for that. They'd be cars, like I said, all over Queensboro and down there, parked, and all the way from . . . all down highway, Prater Road, all the way from Old Spanish Trail all the way to the—

Just tickled me, I laughed as I thought about something. They had a church on the corner of Prater Road and Old Spanish Trail, and my grandmother and them lived in the next house right there behind the church, on the other side of the church, going west on Old Spanish Trail. They had those big dances and people would be parked all the way down there in the church yard and everything. But Grandma would say, "Kenny!" I was a kid. "Go over there and make sure there ain't nobody sleeping in the cars from last night, drunk." [laughs] Before the people come down to have church.

I was a kid, and I'd go there and say, "So and so is over there." She'd say, "I figured that. I seen that car over there and I figured they had been there since all night. So you go over there and wake them up and tell them to move because the people are supposed to come have church over there. They don't want to be caught there." Stuff like that. That was kind of comical. She

was policing. I'd say, "See Grandma, I was the police before I knew I was going to be a police."  
She's say, "Yeah, boy." She said, "You my boy."

**ARSENEAULT:** [2:09:44] She trained you.

**LEE:** [Pardon?]

**ARSENEAULT:** She trained you.

**LEE:** Yeah. I said, "You get me started in my background. Go over there and check people out and make sure they get them off the church yard."

**ARSENEAULT:** They'd be embarrassed if they got caught.

**LEE:** Yeah, that's what she said. She said, "You wouldn't want somebody to come." I said, "No, ma'am." She said, "Well go over there and make sure, and if they got any beer bottles or beer cans over there, pick them up and bring them back over here. Take your bag with you, because you don't want, because the church going to [pull?] around me and don't want people to park there, and Mr. Valery going to lose some customers." She said, "You got to look out for your people in your neighborhood, because Mr. Valery look out for you all." I said, "Yeah, he do."



**ARSENEAULT:** [2:10:32] So were there any local, other local musicians that you remember?

**LEE:** Yeah, they had some, but not played at the Paradise.

**ARSENEAULT:** They just played, where did they play?

**LEE:** Well you had like Garfield Verdine playing with Gatemouth Brown. They were big time. They went all overseas and everything. And Arthur [Proxide?], Garfield played with him. And they had Moses O'Neil, he played the trumpet, and he played with some of the big bands up at Chicago, in that area. Those were two of the best that came through around high school, around one time with us, that went on and made it big time. Garfield was really, he was playing on TV when he was in high school. He was talented, very talented. He could play any instrument in the band. And he taught a lot of, he taught me how to play the saxophone when we was in school, in junior high.

**ARSENEAULT:** [2:11:46] Were you in the band?

**LEE:** Yeah, I played in the band until I got in about tenth, eleventh grade. [ . . . ?] Because at halftime at Mossville, football, some of the athletes, we was a small school, [?] [eight?] that would play at halftime with the band in uniform, in your football uniform. We didn't have a lot of people. So you can imagine. Then they said, "If you going to play sports, you going to play

sports. You ain't going to be up there in the band." At times you'll be practicing, you'll be on the field.

But Garfield—back to Garfield and Moses—Garfield made a couple of records with these people with Gatemouth Brown. That's that old blues, real blues, lowdown New Orleans type jazz.

**ARSENEAULT:** They were from Mossville?

**LEE:** Who that?

**ARSENEAULT:** Garfield?

**LEE:** Yeah. Garfield Verdine was right there with Sasol building the plant [at now?]. And Moses O'Neil was, too.

**ARSENEAULT:** Do you remember the name of any of his albums?

**LEE:** [2:13:10] No. I can't remember the name of them. But I know he's on several of them with Gatemouth Brown.

**ARSENEAULT:** Verdine? It's V-E-R- . . .

**LEE:** V-E-R-D-I-N-E, I'd say, I think. And Moses was an O'Neil. He was a trumpet man. And they both was real exceptionally good. They used to have, like on the talents . . . on TV in the afternoon before the news would come on, they'd have some special guests. Garfield played on there several times. He was unbelievable. He was a one-man band.

**ARSENEAULT:** Wow.

**LEE:** Yeah. Sometimes the band instructor wouldn't show up, because we didn't have a fulltime band director. And the days that I [?] like he had two of those schools he was working at, or he'd be off sick or something, well Garfield would teach the class. Because he was the man. He could play. He could play any instrument. He taught me how to read music. He taught me how to play the alto sax. And I played it for about four years: junior high, and two years in high school. I wish I'd have kept playing that, though. Really. That's something I could do now, sit around, play.

**ARSENEAULT:** You could always pick it up again.

**LEE:** [2:15:07] Yeah, but my lungs.

**ARSENEAULT:** Oh.

**LEE:** I can't blow a bubble. But anyway . . .

**ARSENEAULT:** Well, I guess that's a good place. We're taking up a lot of your time today.  
So thank you for your time today, Mr. Lee.

**LEE:** Anytime, man.

**ARSENEAULT:** We'll probably set up another one, do one more, and then call it good.

**LEE:** Yeah. Okay.

**ARSENEAULT:** And I have the copy of the last one for you, too, if you all want to give it a listen. It's on a CD.

**LEE:** Okay.

**[2:15:37]**

**[End Tape 4536. End Session II.]**