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[Begin Tape 4514. Begin Session II.]

JAMIE DIGILORMO: Okay, so we are here today, Friday. It is September the fourth? The fourth or fifth? Fourth. So at two o'clock. We're still here on 1606 Opelousas Street in Lake Charles, Louisiana. I'm Jamie Digilormo, and I'm sitting here with Mr. Wes Montgomery doing a follow up interview. Chelsea Arseneault is our audio engineer. Last time we started talking about your childhood over in Duson and Crowley [Louisiana] and that area, but I kind of wanted to go back a little further and find out about your grandparents.

WESLEY MONTGOMERY: [00:46] Yeah.

DIGILORMO: Let's make sure this . . . there . . . Pause for a second. Fix this . . . Continue recording. So I wanted to talk to you about your grandparents a little bit. We didn't talk at all about that. Where they came from. What about your daddy's side?

MONTGOMERY: On my daddy's side . . . Now my daddy you have to understand, he had a gift from Jesus from heaven. He was a faith healer.

DIGILORMO: Yes, sir. We . . .

MONTGOMERY: He could cure you. He'd go get them out of the hospital. God was in him, and he was in God. He was . . . I mean, Billy Graham couldn't touch my daddy.

DIGILORMO: [Laughs]

MONTGOMERY: [01:39] My daddy healed people. He had white folks . . . He had about four white to one black. That's how much white people he had. Every day. Seven days a week. He was a healer.

DIGILORMO: And did he get that from his father?

MONTGOMERY: Yeah.

DIGILORMO: Okay.

MONTGOMERY: [2:10] His daddy give it to him.

DIGILORMO: Where was he from?

MONTGOMERY: Duson. All from Duson.

DIGILORMO: All from Duson? Okay.

MONTGOMERY: Yeah. My daddy he had . . . At one time when I was living in California, had ten children living in Los Angeles. So he'd go to California and treat the people three times a year, then he'd come back to Duson. But he'd go to California just for three times a year. Stay there a month, a few months, then he'd come back here.

DIGILORMO: And he treated people in Duson as well?

MONTGOMERY: [02:54] Oh yeah, he'd stop in to Houston. He'd go to the Hilton and get the biggest suite they had. [?] every day. He'd stay there for maybe five, six weeks, treating people in Houston, Texas. He was really a man of God. God hear me speaking now.

So I was working for Conoco refinery. I'd been there since I was twenty years old. And my daddy called me and asked me to come home. I didn't know what he wanted. "Wes," he said, "I need you to come home." When my daddy spoke [F. E. Hunton?] spoke. When my daddy spoke we listened. I could get fifteen, twenty children. That didn't mean nothing. When he spoke you listened. "Wes, I need you to come home." So when I got off from Conoco refinery I told my wife. I said, "My daddy called. Get the children ready." Our four little children. So my wife got ready.

DIGILORMO: That was your wife Agnes?

MONTGOMERY: Agnes, Agnes. So we left. We went to Duson to my daddy and my mama. We got there about, I don't know, I guess around nine o'clock that morning . . . Ten o'clock. When I got there he was . . . He had a room where he'd treat people like this size here. Then he

had another room smaller where he'd just pray. You couldn't go in there. Nobody go in there. He just go pray. So we walked into that treating room, and Daddy he had all of these white folks in there. Nothing but white. He grabbed his four little grandchildren, and he kissed all of them. He grabbed my wife, he kissed Agnes. Then he grabbed and kissed me. So he told me, "Wes you go in the kitchen and meet your mother." And he said, "I'll be there when I clear all the people." He had so many calls out there. The whole . . . everything was packed outside the house with calls, inside the house. And he said, "I'll come meet you."

Sure enough around eleven, eleven-thirty, clear everybody out. He come sit with us in the kitchen. He told me, he said, "Wesley, I need to talk to you." "Dad," I said, "What you got?" He said, "All of my children in California, they getting on my time. They say I'm getting old. They want me to pass my treatment." He got it from his daddy. I told him, "I can't live in California. I want to live and treat people in Duson." So he said, "That's what I called you for." He said, "Look," he said, "Would you like to be a treater?" I said, "Yes, Dad." Well he said, "My first charge was your baby sister Diane." My baby sister. He said, "I was going to give her the treatment. She wanted it. She'd accept it." But he said, "Then I asked her 'can you deal with the spirit?' She said, 'Oh no Dad. Oh no.' She said, 'I can't deal with the spirit.'" Well he say, "You can't be a treater." So my daddy, see how we talking in here? My daddy talk to the spirit like I'm talking to you all!

DIGILORMO: Yeah.

MONTGOMERY: [06:55] Well this man was something else. It was something that you never saw in your life.

DIGILORMO: And his daddy could do it, too?

MONTGOMERY: [07:01] Yeah! That's where he got it from.

DIGLIORMO: Did your grandfather get it from his daddy?

MONTGOMERY: I don't know.

DIGLIORMO: You don't know?

MONTGOMERY: I don't know that.

DIGLIORMO: Okay.

MONTGOMERY: But I know he got it from his daddy. I would assume he got it from his daddy, my grandfather. But I can't quote that.

DIGLIORMO: Right, right.

MONTGOMERY: I know where my daddy got it from. So he said, "Wes, Diane can't deal with the spirit. She can't handle it. You was my second choice." He said, "Do you want to be a treater?" I said, "Yes, Dad." He said, "Can you deal with the spirit?" I said, "Today." He said, "What?" I said, "Today. I'm ready right now." So this is what he told me. And God is listening to

me right now, what I'm telling you. You see, God hears everything. I'm telling you the truth. I told him I was ready. Well he said, "I'll tell you what, I'm not ready to give it to you today." But he say, "You will be the next treater in the family." And he says, "I'm going to give it to you," but he said, "I'm not ready today to pass it on down." Which I understood that. Because he caught me by surprise. God know I was ready.

So it went on. It went on, and then he died in California. Took sick in Los Angeles. He died at the hospital. I didn't go to California. I should have gone, but I guess God knew I was not supposed to go. So I did not go to California when he was sick. So my brother, the one named [Oren?], is older than me. He died there about seven or eight years. He told me, "Wes," he say, "You missed Dad's treatment." I said, "Yes." He said, "You wasn't there." I said, "No." But he said, "I got it." So I believed him, but he lied.

DIGLIORMO: How did you know he lied?

MONTGOMERY: [09:29] Walter, my other brother, we like twins.

DIGLIORMO: [Agrees]

MONTGOMERY: I'm eighty-one, he's eighty-two. My mama raised us two at a time. She had sixteen. She raised us all two at a time. So me and Walter raised like twins. All the Montgomerys love to drink. They love to party. That's the Montgomerys.

DIGLIORMO: [Laughs]

MONTGOMERY: He come out here for a vacation. We went out in the night club having a good time, and we brought my daddy up. Daddy was a big thing in our life. My mother too, but my daddy played one heck of a role in our lives.

DIGILORMO: Yeah.

MONTGOMERY: So "Wes," he said, "you missed Dad's treatment." I said, "Yeah," but I say, we all got nickname. I said, "Stick got it." Oren, we call him Stick. He said, "Who told you?" I said, "Stick told me that." He said, "When Dad died," he said, "just me and Stick was at the bedside when he gave up his ghost." He said, "He lied to you." I said, "What you mean?" He said, "He ain't told you the truth." He said, "He asked Dad for the treatment. I was right there. Dad never spoke. He just did this with his head. He came back the second time with our Dad for the treatment, because he wanted it. Daddy shook his head. Then he died [break in tape].

DIGILORMO: [10:57] Testing one two. Say . . . Say your name for us? To make . . . Okay so we were talking about your dad and his dad.

MONTGOMERY: Yeah.

DIGILORMO: And how his dad was a treater as well.

MONTGOMERY: Yeah.

DIGILORMO: [11:11] In Duson.

MONTGOMERY: Yeah.

DIGILORMO: What did he do for a living?

MONTGOMERY: Who, my dad?

DIGILORMO: Your grandfather.

MONTGOMERY: [11:18] Well he was a . . . I never met my grandfather.

DIGILORMO: Okay.

MONTGOMERY: You know I never met him. I met my grandmother.

DIGILORMO: Okay.

MONTGOMERY: But I never met him. I wished I would have. Bad, I want to meet my grandfather. But I met my grandmother.

DIGILORMO: Okay.

MONTGOMERY: [11:36] Little short woman. So he must have been a tall man, because my grandmother was about your height.

DIGILORMO: Yeah.

MONTGOMERY: Short woman.

DIGILORMO: So you don't know what he did or . . . ?

MONTGOMERY: He had to be a farmer.

DIGILORMO: Farmer. Yeah.

MONTGOMERY: [11:50] Crop. Sweet potato, corn, cotton. That's . . . Well that's what they did.

DIGILORMO: Right.

MONTGOMERY: That was they living.

DIGILORMO: What did your grandmother do? Do you know? Did she . . . ?

MONTGOMERY: When I met her she was living with her daughter, my daddy's sister at

Newton [Louisiana]. She was living there when I met her.

DIGILORMO: Okay.

MONTGOMERY: [12:09] Little short woman wearing a bonnet. You know?

DIGILORMO: Yeah.

MONTGOMERY: I loved her to death. And as far as I know that's all she did.

DIGILORMO: Yeah.

MONTGOMERY: She was staying with her daughter. Had chicken, and geese, and ducks.
Had all of them in the yard.

DIGILORMO: Okay, so she raised . . . She stayed . . .

MONTGOMERY: Oh, yeah.

DIGILORMO: Home and raised animals.

MONTGOMERY: [12:27] Oh, yeah, oh, yeah, she stayed home.

DIGILORMO: She had herself a garden, I imagine?

MONTGOMERY: Not her.

DIGILORMO: Not her? Okay.

MONTGOMERY: But my auntie, her daughter, and [?] my daddy's sister.

DIGILORMO: Got you.

MONTGOMERY: She did all of that.

DIGILORMO: Okay.

MONTGOMERY: [12:42] Yes.

DIGILORMO: That's beautiful.

MONTGOMERY: Oh, yeah.

DIGILORMO: So what about your mother's side of the family? Did you met your grandparents on her side?

MONTGOMERY: No, I didn't met none of them on my mother's side.

DIGILORMO: Okay.

MONTGOMERY: [12:55] Just my daddy's side. I met my grandmother. But on my mother's side . . . Good Lord in heaven, how beautiful would that have been. I never met my grandfather or my grandmother. I just met all of the brothers and the sisters . . . Mama's brothers and sisters. But I just . . . They passed away before I was able to meet them.

DIGILORMO: Yeah. Right.

MONTGOMERY: You know?

DIGILORMO: And were they from Duson as well?

MONTGOMERY: No, they were from Opelousas [Louisiana].

DIGILORMO: Opelousas. Okay.

MONTGOMERY: [13:22] Sunset, Opelousas. That was back there in the country. You know?

DIGILORMO: Right. Yeah.

MONTGOMERY: Yeah.

DIGILORMO: Yeah. And do you have any that . . . Where they croppers too? I mean, did they grow . . .?

MONTGOMERY: Yeah. That's . . .

DIGILORMO: Farmers.

MONTGOMERY: . . . all you can do.

DIGILORMO: Yeah, right.

MONTGOMERY: [13:36] Back then black folks . . . Really that's . . . I'm telling you like it is. What black folks did in them days was . . . They were farmers. Cotton, corn, potatoes.

DIGILORMO: Yeah.

MONTGOMERY: That's what they could do. You weren't allowed to do anything else.

DIGILORMO: Yeah.

MONTGOMERY: Today black people runs the world. Look Obama. They runs the world

today. Back then they couldn't do nothing but clean commode, clean your floor, clean your house.

DIGILORMO: Yeah.

MONTGOMERY: [14:05] That was the way of life.

DIGILORMO: Right.

MONTGOMERY: Let's face it. That was it. And happy to do that.

DIGILORMO: Right.

MONTGOMERY: That was the way of life. And I accepted it. I didn't fight.

DIGILORMO: Yeah.

MONTGOMERY: And to get back on my brother, Walter when he told me about my brother Oren hadn't told me the truth about my daddy. That really got to me. So we was out at the night club; just partying, two brothers. We called ourselves . . . We were twins. Like right now I'm eighty-one, he's eighty-two. And I said, "Well Walter, my daddy called me and asked me to come home. He was going to give me the treatment. Called me." And I says, "I wasn't there when he died." And see, my daddy's sister in Newton, the one where my grandmother was

staying with her, she told me, said, "When Abraham died he knew he wasn't coming back." I said, "What?" Say, "Abraham knew he wasn't coming back to Duson. He know when he died he was not going to be back." I didn't know that.

DIGILORMO: Yeah.

MONTGOMERY: [15:41] All I know he left. He went to the priest. Confessed to the priest. Which he hadn't been in over forty-some years. He went to the priest. And when my daddy died the priest told everybody in church . . . Packed house. You couldn't get in there. He said, "Truly he was a man of God."

DIGILORMO: Yeah.

MONTGOMERY: They couldn't wake him like they wake people like me or you. They couldn't wake him. They had to wake him twenty-four hours around the clock.

DIGILORMO: So many people?

MONTGOMERY: They had to wake him night and day. Oh, yeah. White and black went there crying on their knees when that man died.

DIGILORMO: Yeah. Was your whole family Catholic?

MONTGOMERY: [16:27] Oh, yeah, all Catholic.

DIGILORMO: All Catholic. Now did your family speak French at all?

MONTGOMERY: No. We learned that on our own. See my daddy, he was a treater and the white folks would come home. [speaking in French] Well we do the best we can. And that's how we learned.

DIGILORMO: What did you just say?

MONTGOMERY: [16:51] Where's your daddy?

DIGILORMO: Where's your daddy?

MONTGOMERY: Where has he gone? When he going to be back?

DIGILORMO: You . . . [Laughs]

MONTGOMERY: Where has he gone?

DIGILORMO: You would know those sentences. [Laughs]

MONTGOMERY: [17:02] You know? And that's what they'd tell us. They were still

Frenchmen.

DIGILORMO: Yeah.

MONTGOMERY: And that's how we learned. Because our daddy and mother didn't speak French to us.

DIGILORMO: But he knew it?

MONTGOMERY: Oh, they knew it, but they wouldn't talk it. They talked just English. But people come all day long. [Speaks French] Well we do the best we can.

DIGILORMO: Yeah. So people were coming and asking you those questions?

MONTGOMERY: [17:31] Yeah.

DIGILORMO: I understand.

MONTGOMERY: Yeah, and we had to do the best we could.

DIGILORMO: Yeah.

MONTGOMERY: We didn't know what we were saying, but we learned.

DIGILORMO: Yeah.

MONTGOMERY: [17:41] Yeah. We learned. And became now, still is . . . Thank Jesus I still got that French [?] but . . . And so that night, when we was in that night club, my brother Walter, "Wes," he said. "You lost Dad's treatment, because of one reason." I said, "Why?" "Wes I never seen a man with so many women in my life." He say, "Too many women, Wes." Which was right. "Wes," he say, "You have so many women. Wes, I never seen a man with women. You know? White, black, you had them all over the world, Wes." He says, "You . . ." He says, "That's why you didn't got that treatment." So I thought about this a long time. So I told him one day. I said, "Walter," I said, "you know, you probably right." But I did have a lot of women . . . They were beautiful girls.

DIGILORMO: Now how old were you whenever your father passed?

MONTGOMERY: [18:46] When my daddy passed, honey, hell, I was married then. I had four children.

DIGILORMO: Okay. So you were in Mossville?

MONTGOMERY: Yes. Oh, I was in Mossville.

DIGILORMO: Okay.

MONTGOMERY: That's where I stayed.

DIGILORMO: Right.

MONTGOMERY: Since the age of fourteen years old.

DIGILORMO: Right. When you moved with your brother?

MONTGOMERY: [19:03] With Valery, my brother.

DIGILORMO: Valery.

MONTGOMERY: That's where I stayed. And when my brother told me that, it really got to me. So I . . . I says, "I guess you're right." But I did . . . I did have a lot of girls. I . . . white girls, black girls, they come in . . . Some of them flew two thousand miles from Los Angeles. Went to Howard Johnson Motel. Paid for the room. Paid for the motel. Just to come with me to make love. I was that good.

DIGILORMO: Wow.

MONTGOMERY: I was good at what I was doing. I was. I was just like a bred stallion. You know? Yeah and then the world knew it, and everybody knew it. My boss man told me . . . Chester Barrett was the same age. And I was driving this big equipment. He called me. I had

went and buried my brother in Los Angeles. A.B. Montgomery.

DIGILORMO: Okay.

MONTGOMERY: Went and buried him. So I met a girl in Los Angeles, and the girl fell in love with me. Well, I had to come back home. I can't stay with her . . . I got a wife, and I got five children. So I come back home, and I'm driving that big machine. And I had a walkie-talkie and he said, "Wes, this Chester Barrett." That's my boss. He said, "You need to come to the office right away." "Chester," I said, "I'm [. . .?]" He said, "Wes, I need you to come in." "Chester," I said, "I can't." "Wes," that's my boss now, a white guy, "You need to come here now." So I had to tell my people that I'm working with. I said, "I'm sorry, shut it down."

[. . .?] I got to his office. He gave me a phone number. He said, "I'm going to lock the door." He said, "You call this number." I says, "Chester, I'm . . ." "Wes," he said, "call this number." So he got [. . .?] he locked the doors and said, "Don't let nobody in here." It was Howard Johnson Motel. They done change it five, six times now. Them foreign people got . . . But that time it was Howard Johnson on Highway 14. You can go look in the books. That was the original Howard Johnson.

I dialed that number. She pick up that phone, she say, "Hello." I said, "Who am I speaking to?" She told me. She said, "Wes." I said, "What you doing here?" She said, "I can't live without you." I said, "You two thousand miles." She says, "Wes, I'm here for a month." I said, "You came two thousand miles." She said, "I done paid the motel. I got round trip airfare. [. . .?] everything." About twenty-six years old. Well educated.

DIGILORMO: [22:23] And she knew you were married?

MONTGOMERY: Yeah!

DIGILORMO: [Laughs] Okay.

MONTGOMERY: She knew it . . . Yeah. I got five kids.

DIGILORMO: Right.

MONTGOMERY: I said, "Well," I said, "How long you going to be here?" She said, "I'm here for a month." Oh, God. I said, and I believe in negligée. I'm a negligée man. If me and you wants to make love I'm going to get you a negligée. I just was a negligée man. So I asked her. I said, "You got your negligée?" She said, "Oh, yeah." And I'm going to tell you the truth what I told her. I say, "You ain't got no panties on.

DIGILORMO: [laughs] Oh, Mr. Wes!

MONTGOMERY: No, no. That was me.

DIGILORMO: I know. I know it was you. I know.

MONTGOMERY: No, you talking to Wes. I was a bred stallion.

DIGILORMO: I know. I hear you.

MONTGOMERY: She said, "I'm just like you want me." I said, "Look. I'm going to be getting off at four o'clock, I'll be there about four-thirty." And I got there. I rang the bell. And she was pretty. She was high yellow. About your color. She was not white, but she was high yellow. She came to the door she had the, that damn thing is short, you know. And that excite me. Oh, look, when I see a woman in negligée. Well it just . . .

DIGILORMO: I understand.

MONTGOMERY: It just . . .

DIGILORMO: I understand.

MONTGOMERY: That's me.

DIGILORMO: That's your thing.

MONTGOMERY: [23:48] That's me. By the time I got in there she just fell in my arms. I never stop. I took her right to the room. Said, "We going to put this show on the road." That was me. So I had to be there every day. Every day. And I had to go back to the house. Then I was dating all them girl at McNeese College and stuff. So I had my . . . I had a full time job.

DIGILORMO: It sounds like it.

MONTGOMERY: [24:13] That's the first time. I'd go take them girl at McNeese [State University in Lake Charles]. Have to go back to my house. Take care of my wife. Come back to Howard Johnson. It was every day for a whole month. Then she didn't want to leave. I said, "You got to go. You're killing me!" I said, "Now you got to go." Me and her. I said, "You got your round trip ticket. You're alright." She said, "I don't need nothing." But she said, "I need more time." I said, "Oh, no." I said, "Now you've got to go." She cried crocodile tears. I got up, took her, put her back in her plane, she was going back to Los Angeles. Two thousand miles.

And so my brother told me. "Wes," he say, "there's nobody like you in the world." He said, "That's your problem." I could walk in a room. They could have five, six women in here. And before I leave, one of them . . . Two coming with me. Oh, they coming! I didn't have to ask them nothing. They following Wes. That wasn't, I was born like that. That wasn't me.

DIGILORMO: Yeah.

MONTGOMERY: [25:27] That's the way I born. So I just went on and went on. I just went on and . . .

DIGILORMO: And that was your problem.

MONTGOMERY: That was my . . . That and liquor. I drank.

DIGILORMO: Yeah.

MONTGOMERY: I had but two problems. If I could have gotten rid of them women and liquor I believe I got have . . . God hear me speaking. I could have cured cancer. Because God give me the gift. But he say, "Wes, you got to leave them women go."

DIGILORMO: Yeah.

MONTGOMERY: Too many. They was hanging over my waistline. Having children.

DIGILORMO: [26:06] And having children.

MONTGOMERY: Oh, shit. Had ten of them. I had to hire a special doctor, and not my doctor in Lake Charles. I had to go to Sulphur [Louisiana] to get a doctor for all them children at McNeese College. Because I wanted them to have no babies.

DIGILORMO: Yeah.

MONTGOMERY: I'd have been going through [. . .?]. I'd of had so many children. I didn't want that. All them girls they wanted babies. "I want to have a baby for you, Wes." I'd say, "Oh no. We ain't going to have that."

DIGILORMO: So how many children do you have?

MONTGOMERY: [26:37] Ten.

DIGILORMO: You have ten. By how many women?

MONTGOMERY: Five.

DIGILORMO: Five. Okay.

MONTGOMERY: [26:42] Yeah, five women. And my daddy had sixteen. I don't . . . I surpassed my daddy. I'd have passed him way . . . But me having doctors and remote control. And I had birth control for them children. So you know they was all girls. They were virgins. Never made love in their life.

DIGILORMO: So you have five by your wife Agnes?

MONTGOMERY: Yes.

DIGILORMO: And then five by other women?

MONTGOMERY: By other women. Yes.

DIGILORMO: Got you.

MONTGOMERY: [27:08] Yes, that's right.

DIGILORMO: I got you.

MONTGOMERY: And I love them. Beautiful children. They just . . . and it just . . . I went to Conoco Refinery. Let me tell you something. See that's where I got to write this big book.

DIGILORMO: I know it because all this . . .

MONTGOMERY: Twelve to eighty-one. I went to Conoco Refinery. They had a woman named Alberta who was a pretty white woman. Oh! She was about five-eleven. Weighed about a hundred and forty pounds. That woman, I mean I tell you the truth, when I see her I want to cry. She had the . . . her desk was . . . When you walk in it was right to the front. And my job was delivering the mail. And I'd be clean. . . . gave them starch . . . My wife had the starch and ironed khakis. Them black shoes you could see yourself. I had a head of hair like Diamond [Neil Diamond?]. And when I'd get there, I'd bring her her mail. And I seen something was coming. She'd sit at her desk like this. She hold her head like this. When I get there. And I didn't know what it meant. Every day when I'd get there. Says, "Wes, why you so much in a hurry?" I said, "Well I got to give all this mail." So my brother Valery, my oldest brother, he's ninety years old today.

DIGILORMO: Today?

MONTGOMERY: [28:49] He's ninety.

DIGILORMO: Okay.

MONTGOMERY: My oldest brother . . .

DIGILORMO: Yeah, I got you.

MONTGOMERY: . . . of sixteen children, he still living.

DIGILORMO: Yeah, I got you.

MONTGOMERY: "Wes," he says, "This white women going to make me and you both lose our jobs." And he says, "I see she's after you real bad." I said, "Well Valery." I said, "What you want me to do?" He said, "Leave her alone." I said, "I'm not . . . It's all about her." He said, "Leave her alone." Matter of fact, he had five children. He said, "That's all I got to make a living, man. You going to make me lose my job. You going to lose yours. . . You [. . .?]" You couldn't even mess with white women back in those days.

DIGILORMO: Right.

MONTGOMERY: [29:37] Well she's . . . Every day. Every day. So I told her one day, she had a black dress on. Beautiful. All her dresses. Nothing short. Her dress was just below her

knee. And I told her. I say, "I'm going to tell you something." I says, "That black dress you've got." I say, "It fits you so beautiful." I says, "It turn you upside down." She said, "Wes." I said, "Yes ma'am." That black dress. She went and bought about five or six black dresses. But different . . . Different styles.

DIGILORMO: Different styles.

MONTGOMERY: And every day she's put one on. And every day when I come to deliver her mail . . . I never forget. I'll bring it to my graveyard. That thing was so pretty. And her eyes was . . . Like she wanted to cry. She was so much in love with me. But you know, I was scared. Scared as hell. And so it went on and it went on. So finally one day she told me. She said, "Can we go somewhere in the evening?" I said, "No. I tell you what." I say, "I got so much to do in the evening." She say, "Every day?" I say, "Every day." She was getting to me, you know, just in my heart. Finally she broke ice. And after that started her . . . She was married. Her husband was in the army. He was at Fort Polk. So they transferred him to Los Angeles. She come to me and told me. "Wes," she say, "I hate to leave," She said, "My husband be transferred to Los Angeles, but I'm not going." I said, "Oh yes, you is. Look," I said, "I got a wife and five children." I said, "You got to go." "Wes," she said, "Ain't nothing for me to live for." I said, "Don't start that kind of talk." I talked to the woman for three or four months until I got her to leave.

[32:09] So I quit shaving. I didn't shave no more. I had three years. I mean, I had a beard. So she left to come for vacation to Lake Charles. Well, all them white women in the front office, they had one black. It was all white women, about twenty of them in the front office. Well they all know that [?] . . . Including the manager of the office. They all know that. So she come

here and when she got in the office she says, "Where's Wes?" "Wes is in transportation." Said, "I got to see him." So the manager, the big wheel, he say, "Give her what she wants." So they called Joe [Conohan?] who was a white man. My boss. He says, "Wes here? Tell Wes he got a package he left in the front office." I was . . . Mail. I was delivering mail. "He need to come pick up this thing. And is he going to pick it up tomorrow?" They said, "No, no. Mr. Ratliff want it done today."

Well he . . . Joe Conahan, my boss, he said, "Oh no, he got to come today. Tell him just come get it and pick it up and you can have it at your office tomorrow." So he said, "Wes, you need to go. Take the truck." I had my own truck. "Go over there and pick up the mail." And he said, "Bring it here and tomorrow, you going to deliver it." They fabricated this thing! And boy, here I'm thirty in the waist, forty in the chest. Built. I had a head of hair like Diamond. I hadn't shaved . . . I had a beard, black and white, I kept it up trimmed good.

So when I got to the front office, I walk in there. I said, "What is the mail?" So she opened the door and she hid back of the door. They say, "It's in the office. Go get it, Wes." And they had about fifteen or twenty white girls. They wanted to see. The manager was there. Mr. Ratliff. They was all waiting to see. So when I walk in the office she opened the door. Good thing I had a good heart. I'd have caught a heart attack. She fell in my arms. She just . . . Crocodile tears. I tried to talk to her. We couldn't talk.

DIGILORMO: Yeah.

MONTGOMERY: [34:49] And . . .

DIGILORMO: That's a beautiful story.

MONTGOMERY: We hug, and we kiss, and she said, "Let's go." I said, "Okay." So we left, and everybody in the office was crying. They didn't have a dry eye in the office.

DIGILORMO: Yeah.

MONTGOMERY: Including the manager. He was . . . Everybody was crying.

DIGILORMO: Yeah.

MONTGOMERY: Walk out the office went in the corner and we left. And she stayed here for about a month. "I got to go back to Los Angeles, go meet your husband." He was in the service. He had a big job in the service.

DIGILORMO: Were you ever in the service?

MONTGOMERY: [35:29] Never. Never did, no.

DIGILORMO: Okay.

MONTGOMERY: No, I told them, if I went [. . .?] keep me for twenty years.[. . .?] Yeah. They brought me to New Orleans when I was eighteen years old.

DIGILORMO: And that was for the Korean War?

MONTGOMERY: Yeah. Vietnam.

DIGILORMO: Oh, Vietnam. Okay.

MONTGOMERY: Yeah, and they kept me there about a month in New Orleans. Wouldn't let me come back to Lake Charles. They said I had too much . . . I told them I didn't go to school. I couldn't read and write. I wish I didn't.

DIGILORMO: Okay.

MONTGOMERY: [35:58] But they say, "Your IQ is too high. You got the highest IQ we ever had." I didn't know what that was.

DIGILORMO: Yeah.

MONTGOMERY: I was smart.

DIGILORMO: Right.

MONTGOMERY: I was the smartest man they had there. But I didn't know it.

DIGILORMO: Yeah.

MONTGOMERY: [36:14] And when I come back I had somebody to look into the history book. How you call it? Your dictionary. I said, "What is the IQ?" They said, "Wes, that's the smart man." I said, "What?" They said, "Why?" I said, "Well in New Orleans they wouldn't let me leave New Orleans, they kept me there for a month. Maybe two months. Wouldn't let me leave. They said I was lying to them." This is the highest IQ they'd ever had in New Orleans.

DIGILORMO: And they thought you were lying about not being able to read or write?

MONTGOMERY: Yeah. So they came to Dusan. They come see my record. I went to school one year. Bob and Nancy. That was the little book.

DIGILORMO: That book.

MONTGOMERY: Bob and Nancy. And the pictures in the book in front. And I didn't go to school no more.

DIGILORMO: Yeah.

MONTGOMERY: So they came to Dusan. And they come back in the front of the draft committee and say, "Yeah, you didn't go to school."

DIGILORMO: [37:06] And then they let you go?

MONTGOMERY: They let me go. They paid for my motel. They paid for everything for me to stay there. They paid for my bus to come back here. They paid for everything. They say, "You the smartest man we ever had here." I was just an old country boy.

DIGILORMO: Yeah.

MONTGOMERY: Didn't know that God . . . It wasn't me. God had that in me.

DIGILORMO: Yeah.

MONTGOMERY: You know God had me . . . Nobody could touch me.

DIGILORMO: [37:33] So were you too young for the Korean War?

MONTGOMERY: [Pardon]?

DIGILORMO: Where you too young to be drafted for the Korean War?

MONTGOMERY: Well what happened, when they were taking people to war . . . What they told me, they wanted nobody wasn't educated.

DIGILORMO: Okay.

MONTGOMERY: [37:46] But every . . . One day we went there we was thirty-two. It was about eight or ten that couldn't read and write. We all stayed here including me.

DIGILORMO: Okay.

MONTGOMERY: They took everybody else.

DIGILORMO: I got you.

MONTGOMERY: So that's how I survived the war.

DIGILORMO: Yeah.

MONTGOMERY: No schooling.

DIGILORMO: Yeah.

MONTGOMERY: If I'd have been . . . Because they told me if I was lying, they put me in the frontline. That's what that . . . Wes . . . I'll take it to my graveyard. They say, "We find out you lying, because we going to Duson . . ."

DIGILORMO: Wow.

MONTGOMERY: And they say, "If we find out you lying, we going to put you in the
frontline." That mean I'd have got killed when I got there.

DIGILORMO: [38:21] They really didn't believe you.

MONTGOMERY: No! But they came down, they told me they was sorry. Said, "You're just a
smart man."

DIGILORMO: Well let's . . . We got off track a little bit.

MONTGOMERY: Yeah.

DIGILORMO: Let's talk about Mossville for a second. So your brother Valery. Does he still
live there?

MONTGOMERY: [38:42] Yeah. He still live there. He's ninety years old.

DIGILORMO: He, still lives in Mossville?

MONTGOMERY: One of them old timers, you know.

DIGILORMO: Okay. What was his role? I know you said you went for work . . . You went and he got you a job. Correct?

MONTGOMERY: Yeah.

DIGILORMO: When you were a teenager.

MONTGOMERY: I was a teenager. Conoco Refinery called for me to go to work.

DIGILORMO: Okay, but that was after you were in Mossville for a while.

MONTGOMERY: [39:11] I was in Mossville. Conoco wanted to hire me. They didn't want Valery.

DIGILORMO: They didn't want Valery.

MONTGOMERY: No.

DIGILORMO: How come?

MONTGOMERY: Well because they . . . It was Jesus.

DIGILORMO: Okay.

MONTGOMERY: They come after me.

DIGILORMO: Okay.

MONTGOMERY: [39:22] So I told Mr. [Lyon?] LeBlanc the supervisor. I said, "Why don't you all hire my brother? He got five children." I said, "I'm a single man."

DIGILORMO: Yeah.

MONTGOMERY: "Come get me later." "Wes," he said, "They don't want Valery." So after we kept . . . I kept talking to him for a couple of weeks. They said, "We'll hire him." So they hired Valery in my place.

DIGILORMO: Wow.

MONTGOMERY: So Valery was there about five, six years. They come back to Valery and say, "We still want Wes." Well they hadn't hired a black man in ten years, you got to understand what I'm saying.

DIGILORMO: What year was that about?

MONTGOMERY: [40:00] Had to be . . . Let's see . . . I married in 1956. At twenty-two. So you have to back that up. That had to be around forty-nine. I guess.

DIGILORMO: Okay.

MONTGOMERY: Because you had to back it up.

DIGILORMO: Yeah.

MONTGOMERY: You see. So my brother come to get me. He said, "Conoco still wants you to come to work." So I went to work. And once I got there the plant fell in love with me. They had never hired a black man in ten years. Just white.

DIGILORMO: Right.

MONTGOMERY: Terminate them. They'd hire blacks, but every year they'd terminate you. And they'd rehire you . . . like my brother. He had been there five years. Every year they'd terminate him. Rehire him again. You couldn't do nothing. That's the law.

DIGILORMO: Okay.

MONTGOMERY: [40:50] But when I got there, God said, "No, not this guy. Him. Not him." That was Jesus. And my boss told me. Said, "Wes, they want you to go in the plant."

DIGILORMO: Yeah.

MONTGOMERY: I said, "What for?" He said, "Well, they want you in the plant." They watching you. They never seen a man like you." I said, "What?" He said, "Yeah, they got them binoculars. They watching everywhere you go." I said, "Okay." So I went in the plant. Within six month he said, "They want to put you permanent." It was ten years they hadn't hired a black man. It was my uncle. My mom's brother. Ten years.

DIGILORMO: Wow.

MONTGOMERY: And I say, "Okay."

DIGILORMO: So I'm sorry to interrupt, but if your mother's uncle worked at . . . He worked at Conoco?

MONTGOMERY: Yeah. Edward [Babineaux?].

DIGILORMO: Did he live in Mossville as well?

MONTGOMERY: He live in Lake Charles.

DIGILORMO: [41:44] Lake Charles. Okay. Got you.

MONTGOMERY: He live in Lake Charles. He couldn't believe it. Nobody couldn't believe it.

DIGILORMO: Yeah.

MONTGOMERY: They was hiring another black man permanent. Oh, they'd hire you like my brother and I, all them guys but . . .

DIGILORMO: What was your first job at Conoco?

MONTGOMERY: [41:58] Cutting grass and then [. . .?]. All them big [. . .?]. And I . . . I was such a healthy boy. I was working three or four people at a time and they seen that. They say, "We need to put him in the plant. We never had nothing like that here."

DIGILORMO: So how long did you cut . . . You said six month, and then you went to the plant?

MONTGOMERY: Yeah I cut grass about five, six months. Then they say, "Oh no, take him out of there. Bring him in the refinery."

DIGILORMO: What did you do in the refinery?

MONTGOMERY: Got some [. . .?] weighed five hundred pounds. I was rolling them [. . .?]. To dump [. . .?].

DIGILORMO: Okay.

MONTGOMERY: And you had to be a bull.

DIGILORMO: Yeah.

MONTGOMERY: [42:36] Five hundred pound barrel. I was rolling them things like it was popcorn.

DIGILORMO: And what is . . . What is that exactly?

MONTGOMERY: It's [. . .?]. Some little bitty things. They real small. Smaller than a marble. You got a drum. Fifty-five gallon drum. Full to the top and they got a lid on it. And you got to roll that over where they can dump it.

DIGILORMO: Where were they dumping it?

MONTGOMERY: In the separators.

DIGILORMO: Okay. Got you.

MONTGOMERY: Dump it in the separators.

DIGILORMO: Yes, sir.

MONTGOMERY: [43:08] That was my job. And when they seen that they say, "Well we got to put him on permanent." Well they . . . Doctor [Emmett?] and Doctor [Barn?] was Conoco's doctor for all the employees. Well they brought me there to take a physical. And I had never been to a doctor in my life. I told that to all these white nurse at Saint Patrick . . . They fall on the floor. They cried. They said, "Wes."

But this is a true story. I went in Doctor Emmett office to take a physical. And they send two of them little white girls in there about eighteen, nineteen years old. And here I'm twenty. I mean I'm looking like a movie star. You know? They come in the room there and they says, "Well you going to have to strip down you know?" I said, "Hell." I said, "Ain't no way in hell." And they were just laughing and having fun. But I wasn't having no fun! And so they come out the office. I could hear them laughing in the hallway. Talking to the older nurses and stuff because that was a big office there at Conoco. And they said, "Well he going to have to strip down." They say, "You going to have to go back there again."

So they come back in there and they was pretty. Cute, I was nineteen maybe twenty years old. And, "Mr. Montgomery, you fixing to broke history. They haven't hired a black man here in ten years. You going to be the first to get hired." I said, "Well I'll never get on. Not if I got to take my clothes off. Nobody. I'm not." And they were having fun! And I'm pissed! They get in the hallway just laughing their ass off. So here come Doctor Emmett. He said, "Mr. Montgomery . . ." [doorbell rings]

DIGILORMO: Oops.

MONTGOMERY: [45:17] Go see who it is.

DIGILORMO: Alright. Can you pause that for me? [break in tape]

MONTGOMERY: He said, "Wes." Nice doctor, beautiful doctor, about six feet. He look at me say, "God damn. Do you lift weights?" I said, "No." He said, "You're built like that natural?" I said, "Yeah." "God damn, Wes." He said, "What you wear in the waist?" I said, "Thirty." He said, "In your chest?" I said, "Forty-eight." "Wes," he said. "I'm [. . .?]. I see why them two young girls cracking up. They got a reason." I said, "Well they can crack up all they want, but I ain't taking no clothes off here, Doc." Well he said, "Wes, you won't be able to get on to the plant." He said, "You're breaking history. Wes, they haven't hired a black man here in ten years. Wes, you going to have to strip down." I said, "You got an old nurse here?" "Yeah," he said. "I got me [. . .?]. She's sixty-two years old." I said, "Send her in here." I said, "Don't send them children in here no more." I told . . . It's like I said don't send them kids you know. They were having the fun of their life.

She come in there, and she was so nice. Oh she was . . . She treated me just like . . . like a grandmother. She told me how nice I was; how good I looked. And she said, "You the best dressed man come in here. You just really . . ." Oh she really terrific. I said, "Thank you." I said, "Whatever you want." She said, "Well you going to have to strip your clothes off." I said, "It's not going to happen. I never been to the doctor in my life." I said, "I'm twenty years old." I said, "My daddy is a faith healer. He's a treater." And I said, "Something wrong with us he treats us." She said, "Well yeah, but that's the law." I said, "Well I'm not going to take . . ." She said, "Mr. Montgomery, please. Please." And she was so nice. Polite.

DIGILORMO: [47:23] Yeah.

MONTGOMERY: Oh she was a doll. She just talked the clothes off of me. She just . . . talked the clothes off of your damn body. So I said, "I tell you what I'm going to do." I said, "I'm going to take my shirt off." She said, "Just the shirt won't do." Said, "See you got an undershirt." I said, "Yes, ma'am." She said, "Make sure you take that off too." And then she say, "You going to have to get rid . . ." I said, "Oh, no, no, no." I said, "I'll tell you what I'll do for you. I'll take my shirt off." I had a white shirt. I used to wear them white shirts from Sears and Roebuck. I said, "I'm going to take my shirt off and take my undershirt off." But I said, "Once you get out the room." I want her out the room. That's how I was raised.

DIGILORMO: Yeah.

MONTGOMERY: My Mama raised me like that. Sixteen children. Back then, white folks. Shit. It ain't like we here today.

DIGILORMO: Right.

MONTGOMERY: [48:18] So she got out of there, boy I caught hell. Took the shirt off. Took my undershirt off. And I'm stuck there built like a bull. And so she [makes knocking sound]. I said, "Come in." She walk in. "Oooh!" she said, "I know you lift weights." I said, "No, ma'am. Please." I said, "I don't lift." She said, "Mr. Montgomery I know you . . ." I said, "I don't lift no weights." I said, "I'm born like that." Man she said, "I tell you what." She said, "You going to have to take your pants off." I said, "It'll never happen." It's eleven o'clock, and I've been there since eight. In five minutes I could be gone.

DIGILORMO: But you were fighting it. [Laughs]

MONTGOMERY: Five minutes I could had my butt out of there. But I don't undress. So she said, "You going to have to. You going to have to take off your pants." I said, "Let me tell you something." I said, "Once you get out of here I tell you what I'm going to do." I said, "Get Doctor Emmett to come back in here and talk to me. I said, "If I decide about my pants don't worry about them box . . ." I had them boxer shorts. But that would never happen. She said, "Oh." She said, "Give me a hug." I didn't want to hug her. Oh, hell no. I mean this a white woman here and this shit ain't going good with me. You know? So I hug her but as far as I could. I wasn't raised . . . Black people was not raised that way.

DIGILORMO: Yes, sir.

MONTGOMERY: [49:55] So she come out. She told Doctor Emmett. She said, "He need to see you." Doctor Emmett come in there. He said, "God damn." He said, "You just about there." I said, "Well that's as far as I'm going to go." He said, "No." He said, "Wes." He said, "Look." He said, "Them pants." He said, "I got to check you for ruptured . . ." But I didn't know what that . . . I didn't know what it was.

DIGILORMO: Right.

MONTGOMERY: He said, "I got to check you for ruptured." And he says, "You've got to take them pants and them boxer shorts." I said, "The boxer shorts ain't going nowhere." But I

said, "We can talk about the pants." And he look at me says, "How long you been lifting weights?" I said, "Where you all get that lifting weights from? I don't lift no . . . I don't know what that is." He said, "Wes don't come here with . . ." I said, "Doctor. I ain't never lift no . . . I don't know what that is."

DIGILORMO: Just worked all your life.

MONTGOMERY: [50:55] Like a bull. So he said, "Well, go on. I'm going to get out of here." I said, "Doc, get out. I'm going to take my pants off. Don't come back for nothing else." So when he got out I dropped my pants. Here come mama, the old nurse. She walked in. "Oooh," she said, "you ready, ain't you?" I said, "Ready as I'm ever going to be." I said, "Don't ask me for nothing else." I said, "I'm serious here." Here it was twelve o'clock. And they close at twelve. I've been there since eight. And I could have done that in five minutes. She said, "Well you . . ." I said, "Oh, no, ma'am. Now it ain't going to be no history breaking in that Conoco Refinery. I said, "This is it." I said, "I'm sorry. I'm going to put my pants and my undershirt and my shirt back on. I'm going to get back and I'm going to work, but I ain't going to be no history breaking here. Ain't nobody going to see me with no shorts on." See my privacy? Shit, that's me! It ain't for nobody else. I told them I ain't, oh, no. So she said, "Well, I'm going to talk to Doctor Emmett about it." So she told him, he walk in there. He said . . . I said, "Doctor, do what you got to do." I said, "It's getting late here now. You all about to close up." Because they open until twelve on Saturday. Eight to twelve. Four hours and that's it. He said, "Say ahhhhh." I said, "Ahhhhh." He had them little lights.

DIGILORMO: Flashlight and stuff.

MONTGOMERY: Yeah. And that thing hung over his neck here.

DIGILORMO: That stethoscope.

MONTGOMERY: Yeah. When I say, "Ahhhh," he hit me with those things to check me up. I picked him up. It was an eight-foot ceiling. I had him against the ceiling tiles. Those things in his neck was all . . . He couldn't do nothing. He said, "Mr. Wes will you please put me down." He said, "I'm about through." I said, "Doc, you funny? What you feeling on me for? Man, you might be funny, ain't you?" I told him. Oh I told him! Shit. Girl, he finally put me down. And he said, "I'm going to try to do it with your boxers on but I got on more thing to do with you." And he says, "Check you for rupture." But I didn't know what that was." What in the name is ruptured? So he checked.

DIGILORMO: Oh, lord.

MONTGOMERY: [53:38] He said, "Say ahhhhh." I said, "Ahhhhh." He just fooling me. You know. He just shooting a bunch of bull. But I did not know.

DIGILORMO: He trying to distract you.

MONTGOMERY: I'm dumb to the fact. He up there with that light in my mouth. He got up

there and he stuck his finger up around my balls. I grabbed that damn doctor. I put him against the wall. I had him . . . He couldn't move. I mean he was . . . He was froze. He said, "Mr. Montgomery." I said, "Yeah." He said, "You can put me down I'm going to write a letter on you." He said, "It's over with." "Doc," I said. "I want to ask you one question." He said, "What?" I said, "Are you funny?" "No," he said, "I'm doing my job." I said, "To feel me there? Doc, that's my privates." He said, "That's my job."

DIGILORMO: Yeah.

MONTGOMERY: [54:36] He said, "Now you can get dressed." It was about eleven-forty-five, about twelve o'clock, time to close. I took my . . . I dressed so Goddamn fast. And them two little white girls, they was waiting down the hallway when I came out. They were having the time of their life.

DIGILORMO: I guess so.

MONTGOMERY: They wanted to get . . . Look them girls . . . They can write a book of my life. Young! Eighteen, nineteen. Doubt if they was twenty years old.

DIGILORMO: Yeah.

MONTGOMERY: Oh, they enjoyed that! Oh, I could hear them. I'm getting out the door to go meet my brother. Them two girls you could still hear them. "And he is good-looking. And he

is good-looking." I said to myself, "Let me get the hell out of here." So I went and met my brother.

So the doctor got me an envelope to give to Ms. Verna Day, to the nurse. Said, "Now this you got to give to the manager." So here I get to the plant and Ms. Verna Day, she's the nurse. A registered RN nurse. And she didn't give a damn whether you were black or white. She told you what she . . . [Laughs] That heifer was a hell of a . . . They couldn't wear no pants in those days. Like what you all got? Oh no you couldn't. You had to wear a dress. So she had on one of them long white dress down to her ankles, down there. White tennis shoes and a white cap on her head.

[56:01] And when I got there she said, "Mr. Montgomery." Said, "You got something for me?" I said, "I got an envelope." I can't read and write. Hell, I didn't go to school. I didn't know. She got that little knife. She got that little knife, she open that letter. Woo! She got on the phone. She called Mr. Jack Jones. He wasn't over but five foot. He was the big wheel. He was the manager at the refinery. Said, "Mr. Jack Jones." Said, "I want to tell you something." Said, "As of today, Conoco Refinery now has a stallion." She said, "They got a stallion. You got to read this letter."

Then I had to bring it to Mr. Jack Jones to go read what my doctor . . . I couldn't read it. I didn't know what damn . . . They had on there. But Doctor Emmett had written a letter for me out of this world. About my health. The type of man I was. You know what they did? They hadn't hired a black man in ten years. Then that wasn't the only thing. When they hired you, white or black, you had to stay ninety days before they could prove you permanent. But me, he called the front office. He said, "As of today, he's permanent."

DIGILORMO: Wow.

MONTGOMERY: No ninety days. Put him on as of today he's a permanent employee. Oh, yeah.

DIGILORMO: Wow.

MONTGOMERY: Oh, yeah. I worked there twenty-four years. When I made forty-four I give them my resignation. I went into business.

DIGILORMO: [57:34] So whenever you worked there for those twenty-four years . . . And you started in the fifties?

MONTGOMERY: Yeah.

DIGILORMO: You saw the plants become integrated?

MONTGOMERY: [57:44] Oh, yeah! Oh! John F. Kennedy and Bobby Kennedy. They the ones.

DIGILORMO: After that?

MONTGOMERY: Yeah. You see the white and the black . . . In the front office. The dressing

room was in the front office, where you take your showers. Well that big sign up there, "White. Black." But black we had a little bitty box there. It wasn't shit, you know.

DIGILORMO: Yeah.

MONTGOMERY: But the white folks had a huge . . . And John F. Kennedy, in the name of Jesus, him and his brother Bobby. Shit. They sent four white guys to Conoco Refinery say, "We want you to get some chainsaws. Get you all some people to saw them walls down."

DIGILORMO: Wow.

MONTGOMERY: We want one dressing room here, black and the white together. All over the plant . . . You know them water fountains that you drink?

DIGILORMO: Yes, sir.

MONTGOMERY: They had black and white. They said, "We going to take every sign down in the refinery. Everybody drink out of the same fountain."

DIGILORMO: [58:49] And how did that go over with the workers?

MONTGOMERY: Oh it was hell!

DIGILORMO: What'd they do?

MONTGOMERY: Oh, shit! So what they did, they had a big meeting with the union. With the white and the black. And they had a big union. They said, "Look now." They had . . . They took some of them books. John F. Kennedy and Bobby . . . Some nice little books with the two brothers' pictures on the . . . And little book. Shit, them white guy would take them books and tear them in half.

DIGILORMO: Yeah.

MONTGOMERY: [59:25] Throw them in the trash can.

DIGILORMO: Yeah.

MONTGOMERY: So the union . . . They was all white folks. They said, "Let me tell you all something." He said, "With five hundred people working at Conoco today, it's all federal government. It's all Bobby Kennedy and John F. Kennedy. Federal government, you see. Their people, we had five hundred." He said, "Now we can give you all opportunities to decide." That big ass . . . Big page with a clamp on it. He said, "Everybody is willing to integrate the refinery, sign yes. The ones don't want it, sign no." But he said, "You all turn it down, you know how much people going to be left working here? You maybe have twelve, and you've got five hundred now. You all can start looking for some jobs. Because we going to lay everybody off. Everybody."

DIGILORMO: Yeah.

MONTGOMERY: [1:00:25] Everybody. We're going to close the plant down. Shit. They took that paper. I'm not lying. Name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, I'm telling both of you all. They took that big paper and that gold [?] Everybody, yes. Everybody, yes. They going to have no job. You got a wife with a bunch of children. Where they going to go at?

DIGILORMO: Right.

MONTGOMERY: So it passed. So then they start . . . All we could do was clean the commode and wax the floors. But now we could start getting in bigger jobs and paid more money.

DIGILORMO: Were there any fights or any hassles between . . .?

MONTGOMERY: [1:01:06] Some threats.

DIGILORMO: Some threats?

MONTGOMERY: Some threats. One guy want to drop a valve about a hundred and fifty feet in the air on Mark Stevenson and kill him. Guy name was Mark Stevenson. He was a big deacon in church. But the manager put out a report throughout the plant, "Anybody here harm anybody, you gone."

DIGILORMO: Wow.

MONTGOMERY: Oh yeah. And John F. Kennedy and Bobby Kennedy. And they killed both of them.

DIGILORMO: Right.

MONTGOMERY: [1:01:42] You see, I'm going to tell you something that people don't know. I got a history. So I want to go to work in transportation so I would get a dollar raise. But I couldn't read and write. So I went to Mr. Joe [Conahan?]. I said, "Mr. Joe, I want to go to work for you in your office." Well he said, "Wes, you did not go to school." I said, "No, but man, I can do everything you got here." "Wes," he says, "I want to hire you." So they had a black guy, he had done got in there, Joe [Hayes?]. So Joe Hayes seen that our boss wanted to help me. So he got up the office. He said, "Wes, go lock the door. Go lock it." So I went and locked the door. So it was just me and him. "Wes," he said. "I got three words for you to pass." I said, "What is it?" He said, "Rice, ice, and a rat." I couldn't do either one of them damn things. "Wes," he said, "That nothing but a three letter word. Wes." He said, "Come on." The man wanted me, you know.

DIGILORMO: Yeah.

MONTGOMERY: [1:03:01] "Wes," he said. "Come on, Wes." He said, "Ice" I said, "Ice." "Wes," he say. "Come on, Wes." He say, "I-C-E." I said, "I-C-E." "Wes, you got that. You got

that." So he put a check mark down.

DIGILORMO: He gave it to you?

MONTGOMERY: Yeah!

DIGILORMO: He just . . . [Laughs]

MONTGOMERY: He warned me. That's why he told me to lock the door.

DIGILORMO: Yeah.

MONTGOMERY: He said, "Rat." God damn. Going in the cold in the wintertime. I'm sweating drops big as a crocodile. "Wes," he said, "R." I said, "R." He said, "R-A-T." I said, "R-A-T." He said, "Rat. See, you got it. You got two. You got one more to go." He said, "Rice. Rice. Oh, Wes, you got two you got one to go." I was sitting there, goddamn, it was so cold and I'm sweating drops like that. "Wes," he said. "I know you can . . . Rice." "Wes," he said. "R." I said, "R." He said, "R-I." I said, "R-I." "R-I-C-E." I said, "R-I-C-E." He says, "You got all three of them you made a hundred." He written a hundred. He said, "Bring it to Mr. Clyde [Stode?] and [Matt Clemens?] at the front office." He said, "You made a hundred. Bring it to them." So boy, I go out there with Mr. Matt Clemens and Mr. Clyde. And they knew damn well . . . They knew when I signed up I didn't go to school. Oh they say, "Wes you ain't [. . .?]." They said, "Oh, Wes Montgomery, told us you couldn't read and write. Look, you made a hundred." I couldn't say

shit. I couldn't say a word.

DIGILORMO: [1:04:49] They were poking fun at you.

MONTGOMERY: Yeah, they were poking fun at me! They said, "Wes, we going to put you in transportation." I said . . . He said, "As of Monday you going to Mr. Joe [Conahan?]." But now this is what the black did for me. [Dallas Frank?]. All these guys that couldn't read and write. So John F. Kennedy and Bobby Kennedy. What they did . . . They got a tutor. A teacher from Baton Rouge. Three time a week to come to Conoco and teach all these dummy black that couldn't read and write. Come teach them how to read and write. [. . . ?] know about the Kennedys. But now both of you all know. They got tutors. Not from Lake Charles. From Baton Rouge! Drove here three times a week to tutor all us black . . . I call them dummies. Couldn't read or write.

DIGILORMO: [1:05:44] Well you say dummy. I understand what you mean but . . .

MONTGOMERY: Yeah, didn't go to school.

DIGILORMO: Illiterate. Yeah.

MONTGOMERY: So let me tell you what the black did me. Now this wasn't white folks. It was black. [Dallas Frank?] and Frank [Petrie?] and Wilson [. . . ?] none of them couldn't read or write. Conoco hired . . . Had hired a whole black . . . nobody could read and write. They wouldn't hire nobody that went to school. I was included. So we got there and they say, "Well

we going to have to put you all in school for three times a week." So Dallas Frank, don't you know, they went to the front office. Got the union to file some agreement against me. Sure, and I'm black like them!

DIGILORMO: Yeah.

MONTGOMERY: [1:06:39] But they knew I couldn't read and write.

DIGILORMO: Jealous . . .

MONTGOMERY: Why could I move and they can't?

DIGILORMO: Right.

MONTGOMERY: But God had me . . . Jesus had me in his hand. You can't do nothing with God. You know what Mr. Hank [Clemens?] and Clyde Stewart the personnel manager . . . They went to the Mossville High School and talked to the principal Mr. [Almstar?]. They said, "Look, would you mind working with us? Wes Montgomery is uneducated; he didn't go to school. But we putting him up to get a big job in transportation. He's a smart man. He can do anything. He can handle all them heavy equipment." He said, "This man can do anything, but I need your help." He say, "Can we fix some papers like he went to school here?" "Oh, yeah," he said. "That ain't nothing to do." Shit, he got that book and type them out some letter and nothing they could do about that shit. None of them could read and write. Shit, you figured them papers . . .

DIGILORMO: [1:07:50] So you didn't have to go to those classes because of that?

MONTGOMERY: No! Shit, them white folks fix it up for me! I'm telling you them white people, get with the right one they can get anything you want! And they got it. I got in transportation.

DIGILORMO: Yeah.

MONTGOMERY: I had a raise . . . Forty dollars a week raise. Overtime . . . A hundred dollars a week with overtime.

DIGILORMO: Wow.

MONTGOMERY: [1:08:17] That's right. I stayed there until I retired.

DIGILORMO: Yeah.

MONTGOMERY: Until I retired when I made forty-four. [. . . ?] Going into business.

DIGILORMO: Yeah.

MONTGOMERY: That's right.

DIGILORMO: Wow.

MONTGOMERY: That's what I'm telling you. When God is with you, you can always . . .
You can make it.

DIGILORMO: Yeah.

MONTGOMERY: And who got me there? White people. Not black. Black was holding me
down. White folks brought me up. They passed my physical. I couldn't pass my physical . . .
Passed my physical. They signed everything. I got in transportation. It's all white again. All
white. They gave me everything. I mean . . . And here I'm dating the finest white woman they
got on the job. Ain't nothing . . . They had a white woman [. . .?]. That was a machine. Any man
would give his right arm for that. So it was white folks all the way. It was just the way that
people took care of me my whole life.

DIGILORMO: Yeah.

MONTGOMERY: [1:09:22] Yeah. And let me tell you what happened to Mossville. You
need to know that. We didn't have no water in Mossville.

DIGILORMO: Okay. When you first moved there?

MONTGOMERY: No water.

DIGILORMO: Okay.

MONTGOMERY: So we lost between four and six kids. Well the health department in Lake Charles say, "The reason why them children is dying . . . Nobody had no money to dig no deep well." The little old well was twenty-four foot down. When a snake died or frog died, well that shit all go back in the well. The health department checked them children had died. He said, "That's from the water. Contaminated." President Johnson . . . He was the president. Lyndon Baines Johnson.

DIGILORMO: So this is back in the sixties?

MONTGOMERY: [1:10:15] Yeah. Governor [Edwin] Edwards was the governor. One of the best governors they ever had in the state of Louisiana. He's the best . . . And he was my brother.

DIGILORMO: Yeah.

MONTGOMERY: The man is . . . I'm eighty-one. He's about ninety-two. And married a little white girl. She thirty-six years old and got a baby for him. And a boy!

DIGILORMO: Yeah.

MONTGOMERY: You believe that? A boy! You see, a man's sperm never dies. See a man's sperm . . . People don't know that. His sperm lives forever. But a woman when she reach forty-

five she can throw her deck in the card. She's through. Maybe once in a blue moon she may get pregnant. But if she hasn't been pregnant before, that's all over with.

DIGILORMO: Yeah. So children were dying in Mossville?

MONTGOMERY: [1:11:11] Oh, yes!

DIGILORMO: In the sixties?

MONTGOMERY: Dying! Yes. Died.

DIGILORMO: And they were saying it was because the wells were too shallow?

MONTGOMERY: Contaminated.

DIGILORMO: Was contaminated. But not with chemicals, with organic material?

MONTGOMERY: [1:11:24] No, no. There was some snakes, frogs that died. And once they died leaked back in the well. It could have been from chemical and whatnot but they said it's from animal that die in the ground in the . . . Well it makes sense. Take a leak back in the well, you're drinking that crap.

DIGILORMO: Yeah.

MONTGOMERY: But now me and my brother we were working at Conoco. Well we had some wells five-hundred foot. We had big job. We could afford wells. So we give . . . We'd furnish water to some of our neighbor, because we had a deep well. My well was over five-hundred foot. Oh, shit. I could furnish water to the city. So . . .

DIGILORMO: How many people would you share with?

MONTGOMERY: [1:12:16] Four . . . [. . . ?] Three or four people with me in my well. And my brother did the same thing.

DIGILORMO: Yeah. Okay.

MONTGOMERY: We both had deep wells.

DIGILORMO: Good.

MONTGOMERY: We both worked for Conoco.

DIGILORMO: You all lived next to each other at this point?

MONTGOMERY: [1:12:29] Not far. We was about . . . Me and my brother was I'd say about a block. A city block.

DIGILORMO: Were you all on Prater? Were you still on Prater?

MONTGOMERY: Oh, yes. Still on Prater.

DIGILORMO: Okay.

MONTGOMERY: He was on Prater. I was on Prater.

DIGILORMO: He was on Prater, too. Okay.

MONTGOMERY: [1:12:47] We both was on Prater. It was . . . Just one house was between me and him.

DIGILORMO: Okay.

MONTGOMERY: Between me and my brother.

DIGILORMO: Yeah.

MONTGOMERY: Yeah. My neighbor they all had tap into my well.

DIGILORMO: So you all must have of been . . . I mean people must have appreciated that greatly.

MONTGOMERY: [1:13:01] Oh yeah! Well they had no choice.

DIGILORMO: Yeah.

MONTGOMERY: Yeah. Then President Johnson . . . We needed a million dollars to put water in Mossville. One million. So President Johnson said . . . I think he said they had around nine-hundred thousand. Still lacked a hundred thousand.

DIGILORMO: Yeah.

MONTGOMERY: So we got the money, but we couldn't put the well because nobody in Mossville had the money to supply water for the well. They couldn't pay for that.

DIGILORMO: Right.

MONTGOMERY: We had a hundred thousand we had to come up with in Mossville. So Governor Edwards . . . I'm telling you what kind of governor he is. Both of you all need to know that.

DIGILORMO: Yes, sir.

MONTGOMERY: [1:13:45] Governor Edwards made three trips here from Baton Rouge. Came to my house in Mossville. "Look," he said, "we got right at nine-hundred thousand under

the federal government." He says, "It's under Democratic President Lyndon Baines Johnson." And he says, "We got to come up with a hundred thousand." and he said, "If he lose the election and you put a Republican president, he going to take this." See the Republicans, they don't know nothing about no poor people. Damn the poor. You can die if you want, these people don't care about you. He said, "They going to take this money." Governor Edwards told them. We had . . . We give a big meeting . . . We had a big night club. Upstairs and downstairs. You couldn't walk within miles. People there to listen to the governor. He said, "I'm going to donate so much money." Then he asked me and my brother to donate so much money. We . . . I put on so many thousand, my brother did, because we had big jobs at Conoco.

DIGILORMO: Yes, sir.

MONTGOMERY: Governor Edwards, he wrote a big check there for so many thousand.

DIGILORMO: And he gave that speech in Mossville?

MONTGOMERY: [1:14:55] In Mossville. Over here at our place.

DIGILORMO: And did . . . So what night club was it?

MONTGOMERY: The Paradise. My brother's club.

DIGILORMO: Okay. Your brother . . .

MONTGOMERY: Me and Edwards was like two brothers.

DIGILORMO: Yeah.

MONTGOMERY: [1:15:05] We were the closest . . . me and Edward . . . See I'm the one that got him to run for governor.

DIGILORMO: Yeah.

MONTGOMERY: I got him to run. I'm the man. That's why everybody told you to come to me. Because they know what I did.

DIGILORMO: Right.

MONTGOMERY: So . . .

DIGILORMO: So he came and asked . . .

MONTGOMERY: He donate, oh yeah, and he made a big speech. And then he waited about four or five months. He called us back. He said, "Let's go. We got to raise some more money." He said, "You all going to lose this money." He said, "If Lyndon Johnson lose the presidency and a Republican win, they going to take this money and use it for something else." He said . . . I'm telling you Governor Edwards. He said, "You all better . . ." He come back. He donated so many

thousand. I did. My brother did. And everybody in Mossville put whatever they could.

DIGILORMO: What they could.

MONTGOMERY: [1:16:02] And they come up with some more money. Everybody donate. And you could give fifty dollars, ten dollars, a hundred . . . Whatever you give, give it. So we raised so much money. And went about another six months. He said, "The elections ready to get up there for the president." He said, "We better get this million dollars." So he came back. Donated money. I did already. Everybody come up. We come up to a million. We made a million!

DIGILORMO: So you all raised that hundred-thousand that you all needed?

MONTGOMERY: Oh, yes! And we got water in Mossville.

DIGILORMO: Wow.

MONTGOMERY: [1:16:39] People don't know that. That's how we got water in Mossville.

DIGILORMO: I didn't know that.

MONTGOMERY: That's right. Governor Edwards played a hell of a role and President Johnson the Democratic . . . He was the keynote man. He was the man. You see, don't get me

wrong. I don't know if both of you all if you all Democrats or Republicans. I don't care. Everybody can be what he want. But Republican don't give a damn about the poor white, about the poor black. Nobody that's poor. You can be white. They don't give a damn if you die. That's the real . . . That's what the rich people like Trump [Donald Trump]. You see he running for president? He got ten billion. Using his own money! He got sixteen more Republican running. Seventeen with him. They got to pick up donations. Well, okay. Now listen to this. Like both of you all young. If you all . . . both of you all, go for both of you all. See, I'm one of the biggest black politicians they had in this part of the country. I'm the biggest they ever had here. Let's say if you running for president, you go to them billionaires. They going to give you five or six million. She goes to the Super PAC [Political Action Committee]. She going to pick up five or six million. You go all over the country. Well then the guy come back to you. They give you five million. The Super PAC come back to her, "Well look, I need this done at the White House." Well who you going to cater here to?

DIGILORMO: That's politics today.

MONTGOMERY: [1:18:29] God damn it. You going to the man. She going to the bank. I can't blame you. But Trump don't have to listen to nobody. He say, "I'm my own man." Why you think he's running so high on the polls?

DIGILORMO: Yeah.

MONTGOMERY: Look this black guy. He running neck and neck. Big Trump is . . . But he's

so smart. Them white folks voting for him . . . He a smart man. This man is a genius! He separate babies born together. Separate their brain. Who can do this? He a smart man. Well they voting for him. They voting for him. They the two top runners. Whoever take . . . In the Republican you'd have a black man running up there. But the guy is a genius.

DIGILORMO: Yeah.

MONTGOMERY: [1:19:22] Don't you know if he was a white man there wouldn't be no race?! He'd win that shit head down. But he's black.

DIGILORMO: Right.

MONTGOMERY: Look, I'm going to tell you something before we finish.

DIGILORMO: Yes, sir.

MONTGOMERY: Let me tell you. I'm one of the biggest politicians there is. Shouldn't Obama run? I told everybody. I went throughout the country. I went through the world. I was traveling so much. I said, "Obama got a hundred percent of the black. He got the white women. He got the black women. He register all them white children. He's the one." He register all them white kids . . . He went to every university, every college. Registered all them white kids. They all voted for him. He get all the black kids registered. They voted for him. All the Latinos. Well how you going to beat a guy . . . He got about five groups. You cannot beat him. How you going

to beat him? All you got is just the ordinary white folks. They can't put you nowhere. And that's what's going to happen to Trump. Why you think they're fighting Hillary Clinton so God damn bad? They fighting that woman like a dog. She going to be the first woman president. They know there ain't going to be no race! If she win, she is through! That heifer is smart.

DIGILORMO: You call her a heifer.

MONTGOMERY: [1:21:01] She's a heifer. No that ain't a woman. This is a heifer. She going to bust that dress. Look, she got all the blacks. They done say it. She got all the black. She got the Latinos. Now if you get a Republican woman. Not the Democrats. You got a Republican woman saying . . . Look at her the other day on TV. "Oh no," she says. "You got to go with Hillary." You got to go with her! She got all the Latinos. What the . . . What they do they taking her down. Every day they undress her. Every day they undress her. They find something that . . . Look, they done got together if Hillary get away ain't going to be no race. Then we will never make president.

Because you see when you run for president it's nationwide. And Latinos now they got more of that than anything else in the world. So you can't . . . It's about the black. When you see . . . All you going to say is Bill Clinton. Just say Bill . . . Look, he went to the convention in Washington DC I was over there. The biggest convention of black in the world. Honey that place is so big, that's the biggest thing I ever seen. When he got up to speak everybody . . . Everybody done talk. He was the last one. That son of a gun got up there. He said, "Ladies and gentlemen." He said, "I've been hearing you all have wanted a black president for a long time." He said, "I'm your first black president." They give him a standing ovation. What you think Hillary . . . He's in

the back of her and he don't want to show. He telling her what to do. But he can't come out. He got to let her run on her own.

DIGILORMO: Right. Right.

MONTGOMERY: [1:22:56] But when she go back at night, Daddy come down there, say, "Honey, let's sit down." He says, "Let's go over this, because you going to win this thing."

DIGILORMO: Well I'm going to stop . . . I'm going to . . .

[1:23:07]

[End Tape 4514. End Session II.]