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[Begin Tape 4421. Begin Session I.]

TERESHA USSIN: His name, right? Sorry.

ELIZABETH GELVIN: I don't have it here.

USSIN: Larry Payne?

LARRY PAYNE: [00:05] Yes.

USSIN: Alright just want to make sure I pronounce everything right. Okay. Ready when y'all are.

CHARLOTTE WILLCOX: Yeah. Go ahead.

USSIN: Okay. Today is January twenty-third, I am Teresha Ussin representing the T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History with LSU [Louisiana State University] Libraries. We are working in conjunction with the Imperial Calcasieu Museum and Bill Shearman to document the history of Mossville, Louisiana. And to kick that off, we are holding a Mossville oral history day here at the Rigmaiden Recreation Center on Old Spanish Trail. I'm here today with Larry Payne.

PAYNE: [00:47] Yes.

USSIN: Thank you for agreeing to do an interview.

PAYNE: Thank you for inviting me, or should I say I'm just glad to be here.

USSIN: This is going to be a short interview for about fifteen minutes. We will likely be in touch with you later on to set up a much longer interview if you're interested in continuing on.

PAYNE: Okay.

USSIN: Okay. Can you state your full name?

PAYNE: Larry G. Payne.

USSIN: Okay. Where were you born?

PAYNE: Right here at Mossville.

USSIN: Okay. What is your parents' names and your grandparents' names?

PAYNE: [01:19] My father name is Wilson Payne, Senior. My mother name is Anna Lee Bernard Payne.

USSIN: Okay.

PAYNE: My grandfather is George Bernard. My grandmother is Josephine Bernard.

USSIN: Okay. Alright. What is your earliest memory of Mossville growing up?

PAYNE: Hmm. Earliest memory. Well, when I was allowed to come out the house, what I saw was a building here, located right here. The building, it must have stood about over five foot off the ground with brick pillars. And there was a fence . . . not a hurricane fence, but an old fence located on the side of the road with steps. And in order for you to get over the fence you had to cross over some steps that went from one side of the fence to the other side of the fence.

USSIN: That is unusual.

PAYNE: [02:30] It is. It is.

USSIN: Okay.

PAYNE: And I was told that that building was the original school, but when I came up it was used as a recreation center. It was used as a recreation center.

USSIN: Okay.

PAYNE: And I remember us playing in it. It was a big building. And I remember playing under the building because it was so high off the ground. And I remember they had a chimney when they were tearing it down they had bees in it. And they wanted to . . . They found out that there were a hive. A bee hive in it. And they only person that could do . . . That could get the beehive out was an old man live in Mossville they called Pete Moss. He drove a wagon with horses and his wife named Caledonia. They had dogs on the wagon. And this guy, he would come around back in the days we had pigs, hogs, we would take our waste food and put it outside in a barrel. He would come around and collect the spoiled waste food and bring it . . . collect it from all the people in the neighborhood. They knew what they had to do and he would pick it up, put it on his wagon, and bring it back and feed it to his pigs. So his name was Pete Moss.

And when they tore the building down, well he was the one that came and got the honey comb from the chimney. And I remember that. And when they . . . After they removed . . . They did not tear the building down. They removed it. They moved it to the site where they built the brand new high school, Mossville High, is still existing. And they put the building in the back and so this is what I remember about Mossville. It was not that many traffic. We had to learn how to cross the road, which it was traffic.

USSIN: [05:13] Right.

PAYNE: Even as little kids. Our mother and father, grandmother, grandfather, told us how to cross the road. They showed us how to cross the road, and then everything else was on our own. They always say, "Look both ways. Look both ways," and my grandmother used to always say, "Y'all don't play in the road because them car going to pass on y'all. Them car going to pass on y'all." So we

always remembered that. We did not want the cars to pass on us. So we had to learn how to watch for the cars both ways even as young children. Because my mother and father was at work and this was the site of the recreation center.

USSIN: [Agrees].

PAYNE: So we had to come and play . . . We played horseshoe, we played dominos, and other games over here at the recreation center. And not only that, well that when I was young, but eventually they built . . . This is the second structure right here. This is the second structure . . .

USSIN: For the recreational center?

PAYNE: [06:30] Right.

USSIN: Okay.

PAYNE: They had the original school, they move it, they built the structure, they tore it down, and they built this one here.

USSIN: Okay.

PAYNE: We had . . . this was always . . . Really the recreation center was always a haven. A safe haven for the kids in Mossville. Not only the kids in Mossville, but at one time the kids from

Sulphur, from the Sulphur area, they could not interact over there because of segregation. The kids from Westlake right down the street the same way. They could not interact, they could not be a part of . . . So they had to come to . . .

USSIN: Mossville.

PAYNE: Mossville in order for them to receive recreation and interact and that's how we became . . . everyone knew everybody.

USSIN: [07:29] That's really beautiful.

PAYNE: Yeah. Yeah and then eventually when the school was open, the kids from Westlake, their school only went to the sixth-seventh grade. So they had to end up coming to Mossville, and that's how Mossville grew . . . The school grew. And the kids from Sulphur had to end up . . . Their school only went to the sixth-seventh grade also, and they had to go . . . come to Mossville. And that's how both towns . . . Black towns, black community, knew each other and got to know each other.

USSIN: Okay. Well who were some of the community leaders that you remember growing up?

PAYNE: The community leaders has always been, I was told, Mr. Rigmaiden. I'm not sure if . . . There were many and I'm not exactly sure of the name. Jake Rigmaiden . . . I'm not sure about the individuals, but it was always, excuse me, the Rigmaiden who were spokesmen or leader in the community.

USSIN: Okay. Now you spoke a lot of livestock. Did you have a garden?

PAYNE: [08:58] Oh, yes. We always had a garden. My grandfather, he would raise chicken. A matter of fact, my grandfather, I'm sorry for going back.

USSIN: It's okay.

PAYNE: He came from Carencro, Louisiana and I'm going to assume that's the reason why they came . . .

USSIN: Here to Mossville.

PAYNE: Here. My . . . I think my uncle, my daddy brother move here, and then I'm assume . . . I wasn't living, I assume that my brother followed his brother. And when my father came and my mother, I'm assume once again that my . . . Because she was the only child. So my grandfather and grandmother moved from Carencro, Louisiana to be with their . . . her daughter. Because at the age of thirty-eight my mom had thirteen babies.

USSIN: Wow.

PAYNE: [10:01] So she was having babies almost every year.

USSIN: Yeah.

PAYNE: And my . . . I'm a just assume that my grandmother knew that . . . she knew that she couldn't . . . She was going to need help with those babies.

USSIN: Yeah. Definitely. Yeah.

PAYNE: So but my grandfather was a railroad man. He retired from Southern Pacific. And every week he would go to work, he'd catch a train in Lake Charles, he'll go to work and get back on the train where he rode free. Him, and my mother, and my sibling that was old enough, they'd get free pass because he was employee at Southern Pacific.

USSIN: Employee. Right.

PAYNE: [10:41] And on the weekend he would get back on the train and go back to work at Carencro, and on the weekend he'd come back and he done that for a long time. He was a dedicated man to even do such a thing. And back at that time, they did not use modern technology.

USSIN: Of course.

PAYNE: [11:02] To lay those tracks down.

USSIN: Right.

PAYNE: It was hard. He was a big man. Stand about six two, six three, and very knowledgeable about everything. And I've always wanted to be like him. But going back to the garden, yes, he always had a garden. He raised chicken. He would get his chicken from George Therioux. I remember that. Little biddies. He would go get them biddies and raise them chicken. And it was my grandmother job to kill them.

USSIN: [Laughs]. What a job.

PAYNE: [11:35] And she would ring the chicken neck. And she would get in and ring the chicken neck and she would get in there, bake that chicken, fry that chicken, and it was . . .

USSIN: That's how it's done.

PAYNE: Yeah. It was a lovely lovely . . .

USSIN: I'm assuming that you went to elementary school here.

PAYNE: Yeah. In fact, yes I did. In Mossville.

USSIN: Graduated high school . . .

PAYNE: High school. I ended up graduating from Westlake High.

USSIN: Okay.

PAYNE: [12:01] The last year Mossville . . . well, I'm not going to say existed. They closed . . . Well, we were sent to Westlake High in '69-'70.

USSIN: Okay.

PAYNE: But later on they reopened it up for a junior high. It was a junior high.

USSIN: Okay.

PAYNE: But '69-'70 I was in Westlake High.

USSIN: Okay. Do you remember . . . going back to those youthful high school days, do you remember what the young . . . Where the young folks would gather?

PAYNE: Where did the young people gather?

USSIN: Gather. Yes.

PAYNE: We had . . . Oh, look. We had everything. We had no need to go out anywhere. We had a canteen. I don't know if you ever heard of canteen.

USSIN: [12:49] No I haven't. Could you kind of explain a little bit?

PAYNE: We had canteen where private people would have a little business.

USSIN: Okay.

PAYNE: And it design just for the youth to come on a Saturday evening or Sunday. They'll have a jukebox.

USSIN: Okay.

PAYNE: And we would gather there and we would play music, and dance, and things like that. There were one in . . . Down the street. It was called the Pirate's Den.

USSIN: Alright.

PAYNE: [13:22] The Pirates was named . . . It was the name of our mascot. Mossville Pirate.

USSIN: Okay.

PAYNE: So they call it the Pirate's Den.

USSIN: Den. Okay.

PAYNE: And they had another canteen. I don't know the name of it. It was ran by Ms. Risa Mae Mouton. And then they had another canteen ran by Mr. Jennings. So, and then they had a Dairy Queen before Dairy Queen even . . . The name Dairy Queen showed up. We had the first Dairy Queen.

USSIN: A Dairy Queen.

PAYNE: Here.

USSIN: Dairy Queen in Mossville.

PAYNE: Right. In Mossville.

USSIN: Wow.

PAYNE: [14:05] Not only that, right . . . That vacant lot, our home is right here. There's another home. And then that vacant lot, it was Mr. Dave Lyon. He was the first to have his own ice cream stand in his house. And he would serve lime ice cream, so . . . But we had many places to go. At school they would show . . . At the gym they would show free movies. On . . . I'm not sure what night. Tuesday night. Wednesday night. But it was free movies.

USSIN: Movies. Okay.

PAYNE: And this is how we was introduced to the theater . . .

USSIN: Theater, right.

PAYNE: Side of things.

USSIN: Okay. Alright. That's really cozy and fun.

PAYNE: [14:59] Yeah. Yeah.

USSIN: Sounds fun.

USSIN: What does home mean to you? And community?

PAYNE: Oh, boy. Home. Mossville is really home. It is. We . . . like I said, we had everything. We had gas station, black owned. We had furniture store, black owned; ran by Braxton. They are part of the land marker Mossville, also. Braxton.

USSIN: Founding fathers [agrees].

PAYNE: And we had club for the older people. We didn't go to club. We had a major club here called Paradise where just about every . . . When B.B. King started out, Bobby Blue Bland, these people was in here Mossville.

USSIN: In Mossville. Wow. Okay.

PAYNE: [16:09] And that was ran by Valery Montgomery. We had everything here. We had no reason to go anywhere besides the grocery store. We would go to Westlake and we would go to Sulphur, at West Brothers I think, to buy clothes and things like that. But we would go to church, too. We was Catholic. We went to Saint John Bosco. They had the Baptist churches here. Mount Zion was major major Baptist church. Big Baptist church at that time. Everyone knew everybody. We explored the woods. We knew that wintertime was for our time to go in the woods and summertime we were taught it's for the snakes, so y'all stay out of it. So we knew the system. We knew about things. We knew what area to go in. And we had no fear of anything. We had none at all. And we had sports. A lot of us grew up playing sports.

USSIN: What sports did you playing growing . . . That you liked and that you frequently played?

PAYNE: Say it again? I'm sorry.

USSIN: What sports did you like and what's sports did you frequently play growing up?

PAYNE: [17:37] Oh, I played everything.

USSIN: Everything?

PAYNE: Everything. Everything. I played football, basketball, ran track, played tennis. Trying to learn how to play a little golf right now.

USSIN: Okay.

PAYNE: Everyone here, we learned on the court, on the cement court. And we learned right here at the baseball field. Girls and boys. We just . . . That was just something that we did. It was just something that was a part of our DNA. Sports.

USSIN: Okay. We're . . . we still got time?

WILLCOX: We're about . . . Time's about up.

GELVIN: Do you mind if before we end the recording . . . I'm sorry to interrupt, but do you mind if we get your date of birth? Your birthday? The year you were born?

PAYNE: Oh, 11-1-52.

GELVIN: 11-1-52.

PAYNE: [18:41] November the first, 1952.

USSIN: Okay.

GELVIN: Thank you.

USSIN: And last question. What's the most important thing you want people to remember about Mossville that isn't in the history books?

PAYNE: First of all, what I've come to learn that we were being educated, my older brothers and sisters and their peers were educated off of borrowed books. Books that was coming from Westlake School. Pages was torn out, but yet somehow they receive an education. A small town like this, there are people that graduated from Mossville working right now all over the country. They had to leave home now, because Lake Charles was not set up for educated black people.

USSIN: Right.

PAYNE: [19:50] To me sometime I think about that, that the city had no expectation that we were even going to be educated. So the people had to leave. Los Angeles. Chicago. We have a family right now, the Franks. Right now they working at the Pentagon.

USSIN: Wow.

PAYNE: Graduated from Mossville with borrowed books, pages torn out. We had football players play for Grambling. Played professional ball. Basketball player. When the New Orleans Jazz was the New Orleans Jazz back in the days, professional basketball player. We had professional people. Professional people came out of . . .

USSIN: Out of . . .

PAYNE: Mossville. Right now, countless preachers. Pastors came out of Mossville. Countless. A little town, small like this. And one thing about Mossville, the families in Mossville was no less than seven. If you had a family of two or three, it was sad that the man wouldn't take care of business. So [laughs]. But we had anywhere from . . . Nothing less than seven. Seven to twenty in a family.

USSIN: Wow.

PAYNE: And that was the makeup. Twelve. Thirteen. Eleven. Ten. Twenty. Yes.

USSIN: [21:42] Wow.

PAYNE: So that what made . . . and every . . . it's so ironic that every family that lived in Mossville, they helped to make Mossville great. Guys and girls. They were just great people. The family produced great . . .

USSIN: People.

PAYNE: People. We knew each other. We didn't know anything about hate. We didn't know anything about robbing. It was just a close knit family. And Mossville is a great family. And number one, let me say this, that in order for you guys to come and do a documentary on Mossville, y'all would have to know y'all self that Mossville is a historical town. Well, that's the reason why some of us are going to fight until the end. We cannot hold up progress, but the reason why we're going to fight, because this is our home. Our grandmother, grandfather blood is in the soil here. And what Sasol

doing now, we cannot stop progress. They taking over. They are eating up Mossville. So we're just going to fight for as much money . . . and they say that they're giving us a fair, but we want as much as we possibly can because this is our home. That's it.

USSIN: [23:32] Okay. Well on behalf of the center and the museum, we very much appreciate your contribution today. And we are concluding this interview and will be in touch about the possible setting up a longer interview. Thank you very much.

PAYNE: Thank you. Thank you.

[23:50]

[End of Tape 4421. End of Session I.]