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[Begin Tape 4531. Begin Session I.]

CHELSEA ARSENEAULT: Alrighty. Today is September 30, 2015. It's a Wednesday.

And we're here today, I'm Chelsea Arseneault with the T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History with LSU libraries. I'm here today with Mr. Arthur Kenneth Lee at his beautiful home in, is this Westlake, technically?

ARTHUR KENNETH LEE: No. This is Gillis.

ARSENEAULT: [00:25] Gillis?

LEE: Yeah.

ARSENEAULT: G-i-

LEE: G-i-l-l-i-s.

ARSENEAULT: Okay. Okay.

LEE: Yeah. And I have some new furniture in my mouth. So my words might not be as clear as they normally would be.

ARSENEAULT: Oh, you sound good to me. And the audio can pick up. You don't have to talk too much. It's pretty sensitive.

LEE: Okay.

ARSENEAULT: And we're here today to talk about your memories of Mossville as part of a project in conjunction with the Imperial Calcasieu Museum to document the history of Mossville. This is our first interview together, but this is your second interview. I think you did . . .

LEE: Yes.

ARSENEAULT: . . .your first one at the Oral History Day.

LEE: Yes.

ARSENEAULT: [01:04] At the Rigmaiden Center.

LEE: Correct.

ARSENEAULT: All right. So, in your initial interview, you talked a bit about your family and their origins. And we're starting to learn how everyone in the community is related. And we wanted to talk a little bit more about that. So could you tell us how you're related to Perry Trahan?

LEE: [01:22] We're brothers. We have the same father. And we have different mothers. My dad and mother was together. And then Richard and I was the only two kids from my mother. And my father and mother divorced at very early age. But my father still had a hand in raising us, you know. He was there and paid his child, it wasn't really child support back then. But he helped us, took care of us. And the main thing was the things he tried to instill into us is to get a good education and the work ethics that he demanded. And the grades in school he demanded, you know. It wasn't no C action or no D action. It was A and B action, or you will see me later. You know. And he stressed education.

And he worked, and somebody else in the neighborhood was doing some hard work, my uncle ran a farm for Dr. Fellows. And that was, on the Jordan side of the family. My mama's sister married a Jordan. And he worked for . . . he ran the farm for Dr. Fellows. And they . . . my dad and my uncle and them would see that we'd go to work with my uncle and work hard.

And they said back then they was educating us about ignorance. And at the time you know, we used to kind of, hey, what's wrong with that statement? Something is not . . . what the hell he talking about? Educate you about ignorance? And later on, you know, as I got older, I realized what they were saying about working hard and you know, you have to work hard to make a good living, and get you a good education. It's very possible if the opportunity come up you'll be qualified in order to, you know, do some other kind of work besides manual labor.

Because that was one of the things throughout my life is work. I worked two jobs most of my life. Had a business on the side and stuff like that. Ran a club, a little club called The Pub in Mossville. And me and one of my friends. And I worked in law enforcement. I worked two jobs twenty-one years. The same two jobs for twenty-one years. And prior to that, I worked for the post office. Worked for the government. For the federal government. And I did hustling on the side, you know. And I opened a little club.

[04:42] And I worked, you know, here and there, at odds and ends coming up. Jimmy Comeaux and I were good friends. And we worked for [Gene and Dylon Kile], the trucking company. And [Comeaux] and them had a filling station. And we was young kids. And we'd go work, you know, at the station on the weekends. In the afternoons we wasn't playing, or practicing for football, basketball, for sports, then we would go work and make money and purchase things that we wanted. Because I feel like I was lucky because I was in eighth grade. And I had enough money, I bought me a car. You know, and my dad signed for me. He bought it. I mean, I paid for it, but I had to have the money for the insurance and the car, but I had no driver's license. So you know, it wasn't that much traffic. And I was limited to where I could go in the car. Anyway, to work and school and stuff. At night, all through high school, I had a vehicle. And felt like I was lucky in the, you know, the work and things that, work and be able to contribute to the material things that you could get and accomplish.

And I tried to instill the same thing into my children. My children, their values and work ethics and education. They all went to college and, you know, one has a doctor's and the other one is working on her nurse practitioner license. And my son, he works for the parish as a tax assessor. And you know, it gives you a good feeling, you know, that you did accomplish something. And you know, Mossville, in that we use community raise. And you know, people,

you'd come home . . . I'm kind of rattling around, back and forth. But you know, you'd go to school and you'd go in the high school there, you'd play ball and people would see you. And you know, "Y'all going to Shreveport? Here's a couple dollars. Where you all going? Here." And they, the pride in the community, in the school, that, you know, during my period there I was able to see Mossville High School win the state football championship, basketball championship, track and tennis and, you know, my brother's record with the shotput stood for years and years. And when the school was segregated. And I don't think his record was ever broken during, and after they integrated, it might have got broken. But at that time . . .

ARSENEAULT: [8:19] Is that Mr. Richard?

LEE: Yes.

ARSENEAULT: He had the shotput record?

LEE: Yeah. He had the shotput record. And I, you know, I played, I was a [trainer, and book-keeper for the football team] during the days he was there. And he was ahead of me. And I won the police Olympics with the shotput, you know, in Baton Rouge, the state, I worked for the sheriff's department. And they had a Olympics, the police Olympics. And I won the shotput. And you know, the year before that, they'd say, "Well, they threw thirty-five, forty feet."

I said, "What?! I can do that." You know? And I said, "Man, I could just front that." And they said, "Oh, man, you just can't do that."

So I tried. I showed them. I said, "Mike [Williams], come on, man, Mike, will you?" And we went to Sulphur High. And I shot it out there, 48 feet. Mike said, "Man!" He say, "We going to win!" I say, "What's that 'we' thing?" You know?

But I learned that hanging around there with Richard. We had, John Reado was in my class, a grade ahead of me, behind me. And he was, him and my brother would throw together. But Richard would practice at home and I'd mess around with him. And Mossville was just . . . man. It's not enough time in the day for me to say and state the things that, you know, as a kid, a young kid, you wanted horses. I liked horses. My passion. Well, my uncle and I got some out there. My uncle and several of my cousins, he told us to go watch the horses, see how they move. It was during the summer. School was out. And he said, "We're going to, you all go study them." And he said, "We're going to go and catch some for you all." And we did. We went and watched them for about two weeks.

[10:41] And then one Saturday morning, they got up, my uncle and one of my first cousins, [Dickie] Prater. And we went out there in the woods up off of Evergreen up there. And sure enough, we went and caught, captured some wild horses. And everybody got one that was, and things like that, man, it was a learning experience and, you know, it contributed a lot of my survival in the service was you know, we'd go camp out there and watch the horses all day and track them. You could tell where they had passed. And if a bell rang, you'd go out there. In the service, and in training and everything, and you could see, it all came back into well, I learned this at home. That you can tell through the dew or the bushes that something passed through here. You know? And it rings your bell.

And I don't know, Mossville was, man, it's, you know, things happen throughout your life and you can relate back to the community activities and the people and, you know, and I was

the law over there for 15, 16 years. I was the resident deputy there in Mossville. And very seldom I took a kind of a different approach to where I would, you know, if I hear of, or see something that's going on, I would go to your father. And talk to him, to try to get him to correct it. If it wasn't something major, you know? And I felt like that way, you know, everybody deserve a second chance. And if it wasn't really that he hurted somebody or something like that, I kind of used a different approach. And sometimes they maybe took Uncle Harry's lawnmower or something. I'm just using these names [as an example]. And I'd go to the father and say, "Look. I don't have the bare facts. But I heard your son, your grandson, was involved in stealing Uncle Harry's lawnmower. You understand? I'm sure they didn't steal it, they just borrowed it to go cut some grass somewhere. Make them a little change. And they forgot to bring it back, you know? And I want you to go see about getting Uncle Harry's lawnmower back." And nine out of ten, Uncle Harry would get his lawnmower back, you know what I'm saying? Now he's got to go cut up Uncle Harry's yard for . . .

ARSENEAULT: [13:59] A month?

LEE: Yeah. Not necessarily a month but you know, some kind of punishment. And you know, it, you know, it was a community effort. And you see, because I don't want to pull up at your house with the police car, detective, to go there to arrest your son about something, or your grandson. And it's a bad image. But somebody got to do it. And this is the way I'm going to try to do it. Now I'll go do it. Now don't get me wrong. But if you can correct this, you know, I think John deserves a better chance. To let him know that he can't get away with this kind of activities. But, and that's what Mossville, that was family. You know?

And I have 100 uncles out there and then maybe half, about three or four. But everybody was an uncle, Uncle John or Uncle Bob or something like that, you know? But they wasn't really blood uncles. Just, you know, when, and you know, you get in trouble, you know, kids, kid thing, you got to be fighting out there, playing ball and start fighting. Well, Aunt Lorraine going to whoop you. You know, get down there and [John Prater's] mama seen some of it. John was involved in it. And I'm with John. She'd pass you a couple of licks. And the telephone would beat you to Big Mama's house, you know? The whole village raise you. And it don't happen like that no more. It don't happen like that. And it was a harsh discipline, I think, but you know, I'm a disciplinarian. I like, you know, things.

But abuse and everything got kind of out of hand. And the kids using it on their parents is in reverse, you know. They do something and you try to chastise them for it, you end up getting in trouble. But Mossville, it was a whole different ballgame. It was a whole different ballgame. Because my daddy would just still be in jail [16:44] because he would put it on. You know what I'm saying? But life in Mossville, it can't, I keep saying that, but man, there's so many things that happened in the school and in the system at Mossville. And I graduated in 1966. I was the president of my class. And captain of the basketball team. And went to Grambling.

ARSENEAULT: [17:20] What year did Mossville High School get built?

LEE: I think it was around '57. I'm not sure.

ARSENEAULT: Okay.

LEE: It was in the late '50s. And my aunty, Kim to Mama, Aunt Julia was in one of the first graduate classes.

ARSENEAULT: So that's your, how are you related to . . .

LEE: Kim's mother, Aunt Julia, is my mother's sister.

ARSENEAULT: What's your mom's last name?

LEE: My mom's name was Elaine Lemelle Lee.

ARSENEAULT: Okay. So she's a Lemelle.

LEE: She was a Lemelle.

ARSENEAULT: Okay.

LEE: Kim's mama was a Lemelle.

ARSENEAULT: [18:00] Okay. Right. There's five girls, right? And then Uncle Butch is the only boy.

LEE: Yeah. That's the way it was.

ARSENEAULT: And your dad was a Lee.

LEE: Yeah.

ARSENEAULT: And his parents?

LEE: Were Jim Lee and Alda was an [Olivier?] before she married Jim.

ARSENEAULT: Okay.

LEE: My grandfather Jim, he was a stevedore [worked on the waterfront loading and unloading ships at the docks]. And he was like the, like what they call now the business agent, he was like a business agent for the blacks. And the docks [port] was over where PPG was. What they called back then Bayou D'Inde.

ARSENEAULT: Stevedore was his last name?

LEE: Jim Lee.

ARSENEAULT: [18:59] Jim Lee?

LEE: Was my grandfather.

ARSENEAULT: Okay.

LEE: And he was like the stevedores like they unload the ships and stuff.

ARSENEAULT: Okay, okay. I got you.

LEE: The docks and everything.

ARSENEAULT: Okay. I see.

LEE: And that's what he, he retired off the waterfront. And went to the docks were back there by Bayou D'Inde. And we would Bayou D'Inde to Mossville, Mossville to Bayou D'Inde. And Jim was the business agent for the blacks back then.

ARSENEAULT: What does that mean?

LEE: Like he was the head man, like a foreman or a supervisor.

ARSENEAULT: [19:37] So there were black workers and white, they were separated?

LEE: Yeah, black workers and white workers. And he also, him and Marvin White purchased some land from Grandpa that right there on Highway 90, right there by Mossville, they had the Midway Drive-in. And my mom and my grandfather and them sold the land and my mama ran

the kitchen, they had the black and the white side. My mama and a couple of my cousins cooked and sold food on the black side for the drive-in movie. And a lot of the people, that was where we'd go for Mossville. We'd go to the picture show. And it was right, it was just east of Prater Road on the south side of the road. And see my grandfather had a 200-acre strip from there all the way back to where PPG was. The Jupiter Chemical, where they had the killing in the '70s at Jupiter, that was in our own backyard back then.

ARSENEAULT: Who got killed?

LEE: What his name was. I want to say, one of the, I don't want to call his name, I might call it wrong. But they was having union/non-union troubles. Union and non-union. And one of the people got killed. They were shooting and all. It wasn't really trying to kill him, but they were just shooting. And he got hit and killed. And but that was in our own backyard back there. And because, you know, a bunch of us would get together from Mossville there. And we'd cut through the woods and go to the movies, you know? We're up always running it, you know. And you know, the nights that I didn't have to go at work, I made popcorn, and boxed popcorn. And then some of my buddies would come meet me. My grandfather would let them in. And then we'd stand around and watch the movie. Then I had a car, and they would come meet me. And we'd sit in the car after, I had to keep checking the popcorn machine and make sure they have some boxes of popcorn on sale.

[22:16] And it's so much that went on that from time to time comes through my mind about, there don't be no more. You know? But the memories is there, you know. To drive down the road and say Uncle Harry used to live there, you know, I remember when Ms. Aida whooped

me over here. I had done something wrong. I threw a stick in my brother's spokes. I wasn't trying. I was throwing it at him, but I hit the bike and it went in the spokes. And my aunty, was rude to aunty [Ms. Aida], and Aunt Eunice was talking, and they seen that. No doubt, you know what happened. And my brother fell, scratched his arm. He thought he was going to die the way he was crying and going on. And then he looked and Eunice was whooping me, I could see him smiling. And I said, "You bastard," I said, you know. (laughs) [Lee clarifies he said this under his breath].

ARSENEAULT: [23:30] That made him feel better.

LEE: It made him feel better. But I got a couple whoopings that day about that. I don't know, man, it's a joyful, happy feeling, because, you know, you've got a chance to upgrade your standards of living, if I had the money and the purchasing or selling and everything. And good for me might not be good for the next person. But it was good for me, and good to me. Because I moved up here [to Moss Bluff] 16 years ago, you understand? I was in one of the buyouts with Conoco. And I purchased this house and all this other work, the house wasn't finished. All the rest of this I did, through contracting it out. Some of it I did, and some of it my friends did. Like this, I took the fence up I had in Mossville, that [three rail] white fence and all of that. It's given you a chance to really, you know, you can upgrade. And to me, that's one of the challenges of life is to, you know, don't be stagnant and close-minded about things. Yeah, we're losing Mossville. But yet, we're gaining success in upgrading the standards of living. And some things that you probably ordinarily wouldn't have been able to purchase through God and, you know, things, have given you this opportunity to better yourself and better your living conditions. And

your standards of living. It's a win/win subject to me. If I had eight brothers and a little small piece of land, I could maybe say, well, and I'm living on that one little piece of land, and I've got to split it with eight people, I wouldn't be happy, you know? Because that's what I tell, you know, Kenny, what, I say, "Wait a minute. Before we start discussing this about Sasol or this and that, what's good for you might not be good for me. And what's good for me, might not be good for you." I said, "That's why they call it life." You understand? And I say to you, all kind of challenges going to come at you." I say, "Just like the devil and God. You got a choice. You want to go with the devil, or you want to try to go with God." You know? Because he ain't going to put you nowhere that you, you know, the grace of God won't [unclear]. And I said, to me, this is a blessing. And that's the way I'm looking at it, as a blessing.

[27:00] Now you take it like you want, you know, and do what you can do. But I thank God that he let me get out of there when I did, and gave me a chance to get up here and do this, you know? And now, what you going to do with yours, that's your business. You understand? And if you want to stay there, stay there. But I say you all been griping about this water, you know, in Mossville, and this, that and the other every time a plant blew up. You fall out the bed or your plumbing won't stay in the wall. Here's your chance to get out. You know, and as I say, I left it, I said, I love Mossville, I love the people in Mossville, but they can't take the memories away. But the, what you would say, back, the structures and all of that can be tore down, but they can't tear them down in here. And I say, that's where you keep things like that. I say, just like your brother died, they can't take that from you. They might could take your brother from you, but they can't take the memories of your brother from you. And just like they used to say, get your good education. You might not can get the job you want, but you got the education you need to get the job if the job becomes available. You know?

And some of my friends, on report card day, (laughs) “Man, we going by Kenny’s house, you know, see what kind of grades we got. Because if he got some bad grades, his daddy going to whip him,” you know? And any of them kids that come there, that would come play at the house, they had to show their report card, you know? If you going to go to the store, Daddy come, sometime he’d come on the weekend and take us, go get ice cream or something, and the kids be there playing, he’d bring them, too. Well, like he tell them, he say, “When’s the last time I seen your report card?” He said, “Now, you know, I come check Kenny and them every six weeks. Just because me and his mama can’t get along, that don’t mean I’m not going to be there to see that he get his education.” “Well...” “He said, “Come on this time,” but he say, “next six weeks” . . . he had it down pat, he could tell you the date and everything . . . “I’ll be back over here. And if I don’t see you, or you don’t make arrangements for me to see your card, the next time I come to pick them up to go to the movies or go wherever, to the baseball game, or wherever we going, you not going. So it would behoove you to show me your card. And to have a good card. Because that’s going to be the key to your success.”

[30:50] And that has been a key thing with my kids that I contribute to is that Mossville raising. And you know, everybody pushed for you know, you to go to school and, you know, like my uncle, my great-uncles and all of them, my grandfather, he’s had to quit school at an early age to help send his brothers and sisters in school. And his dad died. Well, all them got their doctors, and United States ambassadors and professors at universities and everything, and it all was because of education, you know? Got a chance to go to a college [Grambling State University] where my uncle was an instructor there, before I got there, you know? But it gives you a good feeling to know that they have kind of paved the road for you. And you could live by example, by seeing the things that they accomplished. And it made you want to accomplish

more, you know? And you and your friends in Mossville, we'd be talking about this and we had, "Oh, Artis [LeDoux] is a welder. "Yeah, man, I think I want to be a welder!" Well, you know, you need to start hanging out with Artis. You know, he's going to welding school. And just a lot of, my Uncle Frederick [Ida Mae Lemelle's brother], my great-uncle, they had a cabinet shop there.

ARSENEAULT: [32:50] In Mossville?

LEE: In Mossville.

ARSENEAULT: What was it called? Do you remember?

LEE: Was it the Towner Brothers Cabinet Shop?

ARSENEAULT: So you're related to the Towners?

LEE: Yeah. Butch and their mama, Big Mama, was originally, Big Mama Lemelle, her maiden name was Towner. T-O-W-N-E-R.

ARSENEAULT: Okay. So are you related to Ms. Lenoria Ambrose?

LEE: Yes.

ARSENEAULT: Okay.

LEE: Yeah.

ARSENEAULT: Because she's a Towner, too, right?

LEE: Yeah.

ARSENEAULT: So are you all cousins?

LEE: Cousins.

ARSENEAULT: Okay.

LEE: Her grandfather and my grandmother were brother and sister. See, that's what I'm saying,
the whole . . .

?: You okay?

ARSENEAULT: [33:36] Oh, yeah, thank you, I'm good.

LEE: Everybody there . . .

ARSENEAULT: He's talking too much. He's not drinking his. (laughs)

LEE: . . .was related one way or, and then there's kind of the thirteen or fourteen original families, kind of intermarried, you know, married this one, you know, married a Braxton, this one married this one. And so it all, the circle just got bigger and bigger and bigger. Because Uncle Frederick did the cabinet work. Uncle Johnny I learned the tile work. And Uncle Arthur, which is Lenoria's grandfather . . .

ARSENEAULT: So are you named after him?

LEE: Yeah.

ARSENEAULT: Okay.

LEE: Uncle Arthur, and he was like the structure itself, like the framing. And they all worked together back then. And at night Uncle Frederick would, we'd go by the shop, they had a cabinet shop right there, where old Bell 7/11. It was on the Old Spanish Trail. Right across from that church. Because Kim, that was Grandma Towner's property that Kim had got. And Kim donated it to the church. And that's right where my grandmother . . .[Lee clarifies this where his great-grandparents lived].

ARSENEAULT: To the Mount Zion?

LEE: [35:12] Not Mount Zion. Mossville Truth Tabernacle. That's an old family property that Kim, she donated. She had got it from Uncle Frederick and Uncle Johnny. And they all would, they would work back when they was building Maplewood, they would build houses during the day. And then Uncle Frederick would come home and he would make the cabinets in the cabinet shop on the Old Spanish Trail right there. And we'd all learn that and, you know, sweep it up and we'd get the shavings out of the shop to put in your horse stall. You know what I'm saying? So you had to clean the shop.

And it just was a, it was a cycle there where the family, you're learning but you'd, you know, just like a lot of stuff they called me to recycle here [they called him the recycle man]. Well, that fireplace right there that's in there come out of my mom's house. The box itself. Now I got a man come do the stonework. And then my board in there, I took, I tore my mom's house down in Mossville. And on the inside [of his barn], I go that old cedar, all throughout it [from mother's house]. And I tore my house down in Mossville. I built me a camp in Mamou. And I built like a living quarters, or outdoor kitchen, and my board, from the recycled stuff from Mossville. I said well man, I say, hey, that's all it is here. I don't, I've seen this before, where my uncle's at, you know? I said no, that ain't the way I want it. They say, "Well, that's going to leak." I say, "No, it ain't going to leak." I say, "You put it on a tilt. You come up an inch and a half on that corner," and I said, "and it's going to pull all that water in, right in that." You know and it just, it stems back to Mossville. You know? Where you're bringing the education. And we don't have that today in, we're not sharing our craft with our kids.

[37:52] And mine were going to a prom one time and my oldest daughter, and I told her, and my son. I say, "You all got this work to do and you all have it done before the time for you all to go to the prom, or you all not going."

And man, sure enough, time come up to go, and they didn't have it ready. So they, the pace picked up. The thing is, they said, "Well, Dad, that's hard."

I said, "Let me tell you something. What happened to me. You think that's cold." I say, "We was helping Uncle Toots [Hartman] put a roof on a house. Me and Richard, my brother, were packing the shingles up a ladder to put them on top of the house. Okay? My class was going on a picnic. They was going to Galveston. Mossville High School. My class, my tenth grade class. So Daddy told us, "Make sure you all had that on the roof before you leave here." So Richard had something to do Friday and so that threw us Saturday morning. Well Saturday morning, the bus passed down Prater Road, I'm putting shingles on top of the house. I'm mad. Talking about my dad under my breath and all that.

ARSENEAULT: [39:34] They were on their way to Texas?

LEE: They was on their way to Galveston. You understand? So he just said, "You want to go to Galveston, son?" I said, "Dad, I sure would have liked to have gone with my class to Galveston." He said, "Is it with your class, or you want to go to Galveston?" I say, "Well, both of them." He said, "Well," he said, "one thing about it, you all done finished, all right?" I said, "Yes, sir." He say, "I done call your uncle." Papa had a brother, Papa Lemelle had a brother that lived in Galveston. "And told him that you was going to be late coming down there, but the class was going to be on a bus. But you see, the thing is, because of the way you worked, and the hustle, you can get in your car and go to Galveston and meet your class after you have completed the task that I instructed you to do. But you all finding other things to do, so I'm going to let you go to Galveston. But you take your car and go to Galveston."

And you know, I said, well, you know, it was a hard lesson, but I didn't know all the facts at the time. And he had already took care of that. Because he knew Richard had a football game Friday night. And then Friday evening, I wasn't going to get out there and try to go up and down that ladder with those shingles, in case something happened, one of us get hurt. You know, the other one ain't there.

And that was a, you know, another Mossville lesson. That you know, you can't depend, you've got to do what you need to do. And there's thousands of things like that that happened where you know, you sat around and you'd think about those things. And you and some of your friends would talk about it, that's what happened.

And you know, Ms. Martill's with the canteen. We used to go hang out there. And Uncle [Brock?] was a barber. He cut hair there. And you know . . .

ARSENEAULT: [42:07] What do you remember about the canteens?

LEE: Oh . . .

ARSENEAULT: Was there just one?

LEE: No. There was, Ms. Lula had one and Ms. Martill had one. There were three, and Ms. Freelow. The Freelows. Cousin Freelow, Cousin Hollis and them had a canteen and fried chicken. And French fries. Right down from Mossville School. And that was the main one there, you know, because you could go there, get some fried chicken.

ARSENEAULT: How much did it cost?

LEE: I think it was something like fifty-some cents for two pieces of chicken and some fries. It, man, we had a good time coming up. And we'd go camping all the time, you know. Our uncles, you know, hey, November, cold as a, man, we working at the farm. "You all want to go swimming?"

Somebody said, "Where? Boy, I sure wish that water..."

He said, "Well, hey, build your fire. If you want to go swimming, go swimming." You know? But prepare yourself for when you get out of there, how cold it's going to be. So you build your fire before you go in there. You know what I'm saying? He said or either I'll crank the truck and put the heater on.

ARSENEAULT: So you get out and warm up really quick.

LEE: Yeah. You get out, when you come out of there, you're through. You ain't going back in. You're going to swim all you want. He says, "It's going to be cold, but it's not going to be that cold for in and out." He said, "If you get in there, stay in there till you get ready to get out. You know? But prepare yourself for when you get out. You build a fire."

So we was up there in the woods. We went and got a bunch of them old pine knots and built a big fire. And just, you know, you got to do boy things. We had a pond, a dynamite hole. And we'd take a number three tub and we called it skiing.

ARSENEAULT: [44:42] What's a number three tub?

LEE: You know, a washtub. You know?

ARSENEAULT: Like a metal tub?

LEE: Yeah, metal tub. I got one out there.

ARSENEAULT: For the horses?

LEE: No. You see it back there? People used to wash in those. Look under that stainless steel table, right by the bricks. You see?

ARSENEAULT: Oh, I see. It's propped up.

LEE: Yeah, it's propped up.

ARSENEAULT: Yeah, I see it. Yeah.

LEE: We'd take a rope and get on the other side of the pond. And have a rope and tie it on the pommel of the saddle of the horse. And pull it across. Take off with the horse. (laughs) It may be skiing.

ARSENEAULT: [45:22] What happened when you fall out?

LEE: Well, you'd be in the water, you know? But nine out of ten, if the horse running fast enough, you come on across the pond in the tub, you know? (Arseneault laughs) So that's fun things that we would do. It's like the carwash, back then, you know, we didn't have the big city water. Everybody had a well and stuff, you know? And you could drive back to the dynamite hole in the car and go back there and wash the cars. And you know, we didn't have what you'd call running water because we had a pump, we had the hand pump sort of thing. And then when the water thing came, we had, Papa and them dug a well, Mama and them dug a well. We had running water. But for years there, we didn't have running water. You know? Because I'm 67 years old. And we didn't have running water. And then the water system came through. When the water system came through, I was a grown man, because I served on the water board. Mossville water district.

ARSENEAULT: [46:52] How did that happen?

LEE: Through the health, the board, through the health unit and what do you call this program, through a federal grant that we applied for. And we got the money. This organization. I can't call the name of it at this time. But we got a federal grant and put in the water system because it was a lot going on during those times about the purification of the water, and the water table was being polluted. And they wanted to get away from the shallow wells that we had. And a 100-foot well was considered a shallow well. And some people in the neighborhood, we had a 200-foot well where they would service more than one house. And the water company and the federal government and the board of health, because, came about with a grant and everything to build

water systems in undeveloped neighborhoods and stuff like that. Because we wasn't incorporated. And that was one of the things.

I served eight years on the water board. I wasn't on the original water board, but some of my friends were. And I took one of them's place on the water board, and then I stayed on it for eight years.

ARSENEAULT: [48:45] Was it all Mossville residents?

LEE: Yeah. All Mossville residents. And then later on they tied it into, I think to Sulphur. And just in case we had an emergency, our well would go out or the Maplewood well would go out, and that we'd have a backup.

And the same thing with the sewage. We got a federal grant came through and did the sewage in Mossville. And that was great. And you know, [unclear] It really, I enjoyed it. I couldn't imagine growing up anywhere else. And we experienced the things that I had a chance to do. And you know, because like hey, hell, when I came up, the typewriter was amazing. You know what I'm saying? And now, all you've got to do is talk and it records and print out. And I've seen technology just – (whistles) You know? And the TV, you know. Mossville, we had a TV and my grandmother and them had one. And then, you know, people just come to your house and watch TV. Your friends, especially on Saturdays, if we wasn't going to the farm, we'd get up and several friends come over, watch the cartoons. *The Three Stooges* and stuff like that. And if I had a TV, my friends had a TV. If I had a car, they could ride, too, you know? But Daddy said, don't let them drive, but they could ride. You know? Because they ain't got no driver's license. You know? Don't ride too many, and don't ride nobody you don't know. If they not one

of your associates, no. Because they talk to, you know, we was all, it was all family. It was the same thing when my cousin got a car. I couldn't wait to go to college and try to better myself, you know? Like the neighborhood was behind me. I'd go to school in Mossville . . .

ARSENEAULT: [51:40] You mean they were supporting you?

LEE: [Pardon?]?

ARSENEAULT: You mean they're behind you like they were supporting you?

LEE: Supporting you, any kind of way. Spiritually, financially. Not that much, you know, they give you five dollars, two dollars, three dollars. You know, we had just like, we had a couple local people we called, what, we'd call them a wine head today. You know what I'm saying? And they would see you, and you'd be home from school. We'd went and played a game somewhere at a high school or something. "Hey, boy, come here! Come here!" And then they'd call you over and give you, "Look, man, I sure don't want to do this, but yeah, man, you and your boys, you all played a good game last night. Go buy you all a soda." You could get a soda for a dime back then, a nickel, really. You know, they'd give you a quarter, 50 cents, you know, a little help. "You all keep winning. Keep Mossville on the map. You know what I'm saying?" Everybody used to say, "Where is Mossville?" But then after a while, Mossville name became a household item. Because one year we won state football, basketball and track. The same year.

ARSENEAULT: [53:09] What year was that?

LEE: In the '60s. That was in the early 60s. And we had a high school all-American. Johnny Comeaux. And Johnny averaged 34 points a game in high school.

ARSENEAULT: Was that basketball?

LEE: [53:26] Basketball. And we had a, and they had, football team won state that same year, they had seven sets of brothers on the football team. You know, Mossville. Hey, the trophy was so big, it's coming from the playoff, they had to stop and put the trainer on the bus with the trophy because we went in cars. We didn't go on the bus.

ARSENEAULT: It didn't fit in anybody's car?

LEE: It wouldn't fit in anybody's car. We were all smacked in there, you know what I'm saying? But we won it. Had the trophy hanging out the window. And it was cold coming from up around [Weymouth? Lee clarifies: North Louisiana]. And they had to stop. Of course they know, it was cold. They say oh, no, we're going to stop and put somebody on. I think it was Buford Garrett they put on the bus with the trophy. Because we had no room in the car for him with the equipment and all the players. And it made us that much tighter, you know, as a community. And the people really seemed like they appreciated it. Oh, Ms. Payne cooking something tonight for everybody. Or Ms. Delafosse is cooking supper. You know, if you be somewhere at someone's house and they cooking, hey, especially Big Mama, we called her Big Mama.

ARSENEAULT: [55:10] That's Ms. Julia's mother?

LEE: Yeah. Big Mama. Everybody, man . . .

ARSENEAULT: Did she live in the house on the Old Spanish Trail with the window?

LEE: Yeah. Yeah, with the . . .

ARSENEAULT: With the one window?

LEE: Yeah. The house is still there.

ARSENEAULT: So that was Big Mama's house?

LEE: That was Big Mama.

ARSENEAULT: Okay. Got it.

LEE: See, my grandfather owned that whole block, all the way down to where them Praters lived at down there.

ARSENEAULT: Jim Lee did?

LEE: No.

ARSENEAULT: Okay.

LEE: Edward Lemelle.

ARSENEAULT: Okay, okay.

LEE: Butch [unclear] Lemelle.

ARSENEAULT: Okay.

LEE: [55:38] Jim Lee owned from Highway 90, going back to Bayou D'Inde, back there by PPG.

ARSENEAULT: That's right. Okay.

LEE: And Edward Lemelle owned that, and Big Mama. And Grandpa always made a big garden. And we all worked the garden. And he had some animals, barnyard animals. And there was always something cooking at Big Mama's. [unclear] or some toast or something like that, you know. If you were there, you eat, too. That's why everybody in the family would go after school, especially, my mother worked. Shelton, her mother worked, and Jerry [unclear], we'd all go to Big Mama's. That was the babysitter, the chastiser, and everything. And every Sunday, Big Mama's house for dinner.

ARSENEAULT: What kinds of things would she cook?

LEE: Oh, man, fried chicken and peach pie. You name it. Pork ribs and gumbo. Man, man, Big Mama could cook.

ARSENEAULT: [57:04] Did you have a favorite thing that she would make?

LEE: Peach cobbler and [sweet] cornbread. I love my cornbread and milk. You know? It wasn't [unclear]. It was cornbread and milk. I liked it. And [unclear] Big Mama, and she could . . .and you'd go pick blackberries, and she had blackberry preserves. All the mayhaws, mayhaw preserve. That's why I planted all the fruit trees I've got out here. Pears and mayhaws and all that. We can that for food, you know? And, but she used to, and she'd do, and then during the winter, there was a big crowd coming through there. And we'd eat and she always had something to cook.

And my grandfather would always say, "Get out of my icebox! Get out of my icebox, boy! Just hold the door. Go in there and get you what you need out there. You know what you want before you go in there. You want something to eat. So get something to eat and get out of that icebox!" He'd just be messing with us, you know.

I said, "Oh, Papa, you need me to cook you something?" I said, "No, I'm just looking to see if that guy left."

He said, "What you want? I'll fix you something. I'll fix you something." He had us all spoiled. But he talked like he was going to beat you down. Ain't never whipped me. That's the only person in the family didn't whip me. (laughs) My aunty, all my aunties, and my uncles and

all them. I call it, no, Kim never did and Mama never did. Never did whip me. But for the rest of them, my great aunts and all of them, and my grandfather, he never did whip me, Papa never did whip me. But the rest of them got [a part of me?]. And Kim, Kim and my Aunt Judy. Because she, man, she the one taught us how to play football, really. Every [June?] we're kicking Kim [and her mama?]. Yeah, she was young. And we was coming up. And me and her would play, we'd play Butch, Richard and Bubba would be on one team. And them me and Aunt Judy were building a team together. She said, "I'm going to block for you. You run the ball."

ARSENEAULT: [59:44] So she was a tomboy.

LEE: Oh! Was she ever. Was she ever! She could play, and she was rough. Aunt Julia, Aunt Julia, I got a lot of respect for. Because after her husband died, Aunt Julia went to work in the plant. And worked like a man, you know? I have a lot of respect for her. My brother tried to get [her to go to college], between us, he tried to get her to go back to school. Because she was smart and educational, book-wise. And she said, "I got these kids. I got to go to work." She said, "I'm not going to sit here and wait on welfare." She put her boots on and she went to work in the plant. And worked in the plants a long time. And paid for her house. I admire her for that. She talks some smack, and every one time, she can back it up, too. Aunt Julia.

And the stories there, and everything, Kim's dad, too. He would make us work hard. You know, he'd say, "If you was a college professor, you wouldn't have to do this. But you a college professor?" "No." "Well, get your ass on over there. Get on that shovel." How you dare to say that? "I'm educating you about ignorance," he said. "I'm helping, too." Say, "You don't have to do that, Uncle [unclear]." Picked it up, man. And that was the thing back in the '60s. A lot of us

did real good, you know, that my crowd there, my age group. We turned out real good there for Mossville. And some got some doctors and lawyers from Mossville. And, you know, my kids were among the group that Mossville [achieved in getting an education]. And Mossville, Westlake. I don't know if there anything else you, I've been rambling on, you know.

ARSENEAULT: [1:02:27] I wanted to ask you about the farm. What kind of things did you all grow? So you, Edward Lemelle had a garden.

LEE: Oh, yeah.

ARSENEAULT: And then your other grandfather had a farm?

LEE: My other grandfather, he, well, first of all, to answer your first question, Edward Lemelle, we planted like corn, okra, field peas, snap beans, Irish potatoes, you know, and mustard greens. Cabbage. Whatever time of the year it was for growing this, we had that. You know? And you'd break this and you'd turn it up, and plant here. Old Charlie, they would plow, an old horse, he had a plow. He had no tractor.

ARSENEAULT: Was that behind the house on the Old Spanish Trail?

LEE: Behind the house on Old Spanish Trail. One side of it was the garden. And on the other side, he had the chicken yards and some pigs, pig pens. And pear trees, fig trees. And but Grandpa again, he had like cows. He didn't raise too much of anything, the more than Grandma

had, like a black pepper tree bush. And she had like green onions. And she had a little patch right outside the back there. But so for like the big garden, no. Because Grandpa Jim had the farm. He had . . .

ARSENEAULT: [1:04:16] Livestock.

LEE: Yeah. Livestock. And then he had trucks. He had two trucks. He would take them in, my daddy's brother, and his cousin, would drive them in, go through Mossville, pick up a lot of the people that worked at the docks. Put them to work. And when Joyce Therioux and Steadmans, he would go, he would send my uncle and them, would go pick up the produce that they'd [wanted] to throw away. And they would bring that over there for the animals. And you know, that's what he would do. And my uncle and Mr. Siase would drive the trucks. In the afternoon, they'd clean the trucks back up and go back and pick the men up from the waterfront and take them home. And that, and then Grandpa would clean up and go to the drive-in. To the, and work the drive-in, to the picture show. And that's what he did.

ARSENEAULT: At night.

LEE: At night. And Papa Lemelle had a big garden. And Uncle Shelton ran Dr. Fellow's farm. And hay, sweet potatoes, peanuts and Irish potatoes, stuff like that. That's what they would plant out there. And it all came together, you know, every now and then Grandpa Jim, if they had a bust sack of rice or something, they could get it and buy it or we got food from the docks. You know, beans. The same thing with beans. The bag would bust and they'd have a little left. And it

would just survival, you know, and when Grandpa would divide it up, you know, “Hey, Saise, you can have that today. Bob, take that, give that to Ms. Rembert down there.” You know, some of the old people in the community that they shared. You know? And, you know, because sometime you come home and they got a big old piece of meat there, and where it come from? Well, Mr. Braxton and them barbecued, they killed a calf, or they kill a hog. And Daddy made me and Richard go down there and help them so they give us some meat. And what are we going to do, bring it? Yeah. You know, for Big Mama to cook. “Bring that to your grandma, boy.” You know, stuff like that.

And at the time, we just, oh, man, I got to go down here and scrape this hog. I got to go kill it.” And we, off the record, this past weekend, we was on that ride last week. And we was out there in the country. And a man said, “You all want a hog?” And [Bobby?] says, “Yeah, we want one, but we got to take him to the slaughter house.” I said, “Man, no. We can kill him right here. We ain’t got to do all that.” A couple of them old boys, they knew how to do it, too. But we butchered right there.

ARSENEAULT: [1:08:08] Had a pig roast.

LEE: Yeah. Had a hog, we had a couchon de lait. And cut that back strap out of it and had backbone [stew]. And then [while couchon de lait was cooking]. Over there, you know.

ARSENEAULT: You wouldn’t have known how to do that otherwise.

LEE: Yeah. “It’s 2015, man, what do you know about killing a hog?”

I said, "Man, you'd be surprised the things I know. Having been around all my life." I said, "Man, I ain't no forty-some years old, no city slicker. I come from the country. You know?" I say, I come from hard times. Not really hard times. But times, the way things was, you know? And I contribute that back to Mossville. Yeah. And shit, we got a saw, man, and went to work on that thing. "We ain't got no tools!" I say, "You got a hardware store up there." I say, "We can get a saw for about ten, fifteen dollars." "Oh, man, [unclear]." I say, "No, you're going to do the work. I'm going to tell you how to do it." And then the [one boy?] say, "Yeah, I know how to clean them and everything, but to cut them?" I say, "We're going to cut them, we're going to cut them, cure and clean them and take that back strap out. And we're going to make a sauce out of that back strap. And we're going to keep that hog, and we're going to roast that hog."

Because one of the boys had a pit that we put half of that hog on one side and half on the other side in a rotisserie. And I say, shit, or we can dig a hole in it and wrap them, coon ass microwave. He say, "Country boy." I say, "That's what I'm talking about, buddy. That's what I'm talking about." And it all comes from being exposed to it in childhood there in Mossville. The way a lot of the kids closer to Lake Charles than Westlake was knew nothing of that kind of life. And the survival, you know. During the hurricane. You know? And I thought about the things like my grandfather and them. Your chicken yard. He had some chickens he kept up off the floor. And he said they was on death row. My grandfather used to say.

ARSENEAULT: [1:10:49] Chickens were on death row?

LEE: Yeah. You put them up off the ground in a pen, and you feed them the corn, you're getting them ready to kill. So he called that death row. So I had these chickens out here during the hurricane. We killed a chicken that day. And cooked it. I got gas in my outdoor kitchen out there. See the big silver tank in the front of that?

ARSENEAULT: Yes.

LEE: Well, that's butane. So this is all electric. I said when this go out, we can cook out there. And same thing during Hurricane Audrey. I was in Mossville.

ARSENEAULT: What did you all do during that?

LEE: We was at one of my aunt's houses, and every day they killed two chickens because the crowd, the number of people that were there. And when auntie [unclear] her sister Cole and she was a cousin of mine but we called her aunt. And we killed two chickens a day and they cooked them. During Hurricane Audrey, no electric, no power. And same thing here.

ARSENEAULT: Did Mossville flood during Hurricane Audrey?

LEE: No. Some parts of it flooded, but not where anybody's life was in danger. Some of the low-lying areas flooded, the roads flooded. But I think this last storm, whatever, Katrina and Rita and all of them, it was worse then than it was during Hurricane Audrey. What made Audrey so bad, and this was bad, too, but it took the service to get the lights and stuff back on, it took

longer. But everybody over there mostly had gas and electric. It wasn't like here, this house here is totally electric. You've got your fireplaces for the wintertime. But for cooking and survival back then in Mossville, you had gas, natural gas. And Big Mama and them had a gas light in the yard.

ARSENEAULT: [1:13:29] Like kerosene?

LEE: No, not, we had some kerosene lamps, too. But they had a gas lamp say like that bell, it was piped from, by the sidewalk there by the front door. Like now we've got the big flood lights and stuff out there, where they had a gas light outside. And we could see in the house. It took, a lot of people had it. And they had electricity, because I remember my grandfather saying if you ain't studying or doing something constructive, there's lights on in the house. No, no. No, no. You better be reading something. Getting your head right. That TV, you're catching the news, or some kinds of sports activity. So for that acting and all of that, no. He said, all them lights come on for something constructive. Now if you want to read a book, you could light up the whole house. But if you just want to sit around there and watch TV, no, no, no, no. You turn them lights out. Because they got enough light coming off that TV to see enough.

And you think about those things, it made sense. And my grandpa used to tell me, he'd say, "Son, you see that TV, that light, that gas and all that?" He say, "One day that's going to come to where it's going to be just as expensive as you pay house note."

I said, "No, no way, man."

He said, "I'm telling you, son." He said, "I'm not going to see it in my time." But he said, "You're going to see it in your time, to where your gas bill, your light bill, and the gas for your

automobile, is going to cost you just as much or more as your house note.” He said, “Don’t think about insurance. Don’t even think about it.” I lived to see that. He say, “You get through paying for your house. But as long as you live, those other things, your insurance, lights, or gas for your automobile or your house, you’ll never get through paying for it.” He said, “You’re going to die owing one of them or all three of them.” And you know but damn if that old man wasn’t right.

ARSENEAULT: [1:16:26] It’s expensive now.

LEE: Just, you know, it’s the same with all kind of crap, you know what I mean? I said, this old man crazy. But he said, “They got one in every family, and you’re mine.” He said, “You’re going to do good. You might not be the brightest bulb in the class. But you’re going to light up.” And he said, “Can’t always get. Get all you can while you can from who you can.” And he said, “When you get old enough to retire, you’ll be set.” He said the can thing. If you can get out there and you can, and work and save some money, you can. You know? And he said it’s a can thing. People going to come get you in their white coat. They’re going to take you in, because you’re crazy. But all the time, he was trying to prepare me for what was going on in the world. And what it’s going to be. And he told me some things that I’ve seen come true. He said, “When I grew up, the [sun here?], in Bayou D’Inde and Mossville, it was Shoat’s Prairie, I think it was. It was amazing to . . .

ARSENEAULT: What brought him to, what brought your family to Mossville? Do you know when they first came?

LEE: Well, they got several stories.

ARSENEAULT: [1:18:24] Okay.

LEE: Now, my grandfather Lemelle came here through [a farmer?]

ARSENEAULT: Okay.

LEE: Okay? My grandfather, my dad's people, they say, came here on the boat with [Jean] Lafitte.

ARSENEAULT: The pirate?!

LEE: That's a saying.

ARSENEAULT: Okay. Just want to make sure it's the same guy.

LEE: Yeah. And they could not say Lee Lafitte, so they just called him Lee. So he was Lafitte's, my great-great-grandfather, was Lafitte's cabin boy. Slave. And they got off the boat down there in Bayou D'Inde. Because all my ancestors on my dad's side was tied in with boats and water, worked on the boats, did that and did that. And this is what they say. They came here on the boat with Lafitte. And they used to talk about digging this, and digging treasure.

My grandfather had a lot of old gold pieces. Lots of them. And I got my hands on some of them. And in the eighteen, 1700s, some gold pieces. And he had a set of cufflinks out of five dollar gold pieces, my grandfather did. I got them. And I got some, like I don't know what country, you can't hardly see where it's from. And got it, and I got some fifty-dollar gold pieces, some ten-dollar gold. They're worth thousands and thousands of dollars. I had one of them checked, and a man offered me 2500 dollars for it. It was a ten-dollar gold piece. And I told him no. And I got them in a safe deposit box. But I got the cuff links here, because I wanted to show it to my son. He didn't believe me. I said, "I'll show you." I said, "Boy, your grandfather, his dad wore these." [unclear] And that's what they say, and that's why Grandpa and them, all of them stayed around the . . .

ARSENEAULT: [1:21:13] The water.

LEE: The water. And my great grandmother and them ran what they called the Westlake Laundry. She was a Cotloeng. Jeanne Baptiste Cotloeng. I've got a picture of them, her and her three sisters, washing clothes out in the bayou down there. They call it the Westlake Laundry. And they would wash clothes for these logging camps, when they was logging back through here.

And Mom, Aunt [Pinky?] and Aunt Minerva, there were some old midwives. They'd go live with a woman that's going to have a baby. They'd go there and help the woman deliver the baby. There's a lot of boys and young men I knew that were older than me, white and black, they knew who I was, I was a descendant of Mom, everybody called her Mom, because she brought a lot of them in the world. You know? And that's, that was my dad's grandmother.

So they was supposed to have been like her parents were from Ethiopia, where they came in there from. I'm the runt compared to my brother. And they were all some big, tall people. My grandfather was about six-three. My dad was about six-four, six-five. I had some cousins seven foot, six-eight, six-nine.

ARSENEAULT: [1:23:07] Wow.

LEE: So it's interesting. And the other story is like they came in here after the Civil War. And they came off of Robert E. Lee's farm [plantation]. And they came through here. And they settled back there on the bayou, met that Cotloeng woman. And Jeanne Baptiste Cotloeng had 1600 acres back there along the bayou. And he gave each one of his kids 200 acres. And Mom happened to be our attachment to the 1600 acres. And she became a Lee.

And my grandfather's daddy was Jim Lee, too. My grandfather was Jim Lee, Junior. So that, I don't know, I hear both stories. My grandfather used to tell me both of them. And he said, "Now, I don't know. One of the two is the truth. And one is," he'd say, but he said, "I've got the old money, that he came on the boat," it's been, the thing is that he came in here with Mr. Porter and all of them. And they, when [Rigmaiden?], grandfather that I knew, he looked like a white man. They say he was a [heir?] with Robert E. Lee. Now I don't know which story is the truth. But my dad's mama is real light. You seen the picture?

ARSENEAULT: [1:25:13] On the fireplace over there? He's always trying to remember that quote.

LEE: Yeah. Well, anyway, she's real bright, light and bright. Damn near white, I used to tell. It's a mixture. It's a Creole mixture.

ARSENEAULT: Are there other Creole families in Mossville?

LEE: Oh, yeah! Everybody in Mossville is mix, that I know of, you know. And they don't, a lot of them won't claim it. But you know, a lot of them, most of them come from down east.

ARSENEAULT: Where's down east?

LEE: Mamou. New Iberia. See, Papa Lemelle and them came from Leonville. Okay? Leonville. It's over there off the bayou. And then they moved to New Iberia, his daddy did, to work in the mines and stuff. And Papa Lemelle, went to work, his daddy died, he went to work. He was working in the oil field. Cooking. He was young. And the man who owned the oil rig tasted some of the food that he was cooking and said, "Hey, who did this? Who cooked this?"

They say, "Well, Edward cooked this." So he asked Papa would he come to work with him in Lake Charles, and he would see that he had a place to stay and everything, and establish him over there. He said, well, and so he came. So that's kind of a story that how the Lemelles got to Mossville.

And that was like with the Bell estate. Old man Bell, [unclear] oil and gas and all, multimillionaire. So he worked for a family, sixty-six some years.

ARSENEAULT: [1:27:24] Cooking?

LEE: Cooking and overseeing. Because they had a house here in Lake Charles. They had a house in Big Lake. They had a farm in Hacker. I'm talking, you know, talking money like David Junior was at LSU and his aunty died, and she left him twenty-five million dollars. That kind of money. You know what I'm saying?

ARSENEAULT: Wow.

LEE: Yeah, that kind of money. The aunty died, leave me twenty-five million.

ARSENEAULT: Wow. I need that to happen to me. (laughs)

LEE: That must be nice. But anyway, Papa, he stayed in Lake Charles a little while and then he bought that house, got that house there in Mossville. And some of them Cotloengs . . .

ARSENEAULT: How do you spell that? What is that last word? Is that . . .

LEE: Cotloeng?

ARSENEAULT: Yeah. Is it a last name?

LEE: C-o-t-l-o-e-n-g. And some of them spell it C-a-t

ARSENEAULT: C-a-t?

LEE: Yeah. L-o-n-g. C-o-t

ARSENEAULT: Okay.

LEE: Yeah. And some of them, back when grandfather, he'd tell you, it all depend on, this is off the record, he said it all depended on what white man that slavery that you belong to. Some of them spelled it like this, some of them spelled it like that. And a lot of them were telling them what their name was, he said, and a lot of people had different accents back in the old days. And you might tell them one way, but you didn't know how to spell it. So they wrote it like that. And then you went with that. Because they say like the Towners and Tanners. Yeah, my grandfather say it all depend on what . . .

ARSENEAULT: [1:29:18] It's the same family? It all depends?

LEE: Yeah. Some people say it is, and some people say it ain't. But some of the Tanners was our uncles. So I don't know, you know? I just, I called them cousin. You know, I'd say we all related. Because what my grandfather said, makes sense. And he said some of them married their cousins, who had nobody else you had to marry. And he said they don't come to the family reunion. They say they're not Towners because they're Tanners. You see, because they're ashamed because they married their cousin. You know? Hey, I don't know, you know? It makes sense, you know? How can this man over here be my uncle and he's a Tanner? And my grandmother's a Towner, but that's uncle's kid. You know, that's Uncle so and so. Well it's not, it wasn't just a thing like, you know, everybody was Uncle this and Uncle that. But this over here

went a little deeper, you know what I'm saying? You can't talk to her, because that's Uncle Bob's daughter. And she's a Prater. And you're kin to the Praters. And no, they say I'm not kin to the Praters, I'm kin to the Tanners. Yeah, yeah, okay, okay, go marry her and have a kid and the head will be on backwards, and then you'll know, you know? All kind of that stuff, man. But that was Mossville, you know? And it was . . . I know you got enough of it. You have any other question you want to ask me?

ARSENEAULT: [1:31:13] I have a lot of, we're at an hour and a half. So we can stop. But is it okay if we come back and ask a few more questions? I have, I want to talk about the club, I want to talk about the Paradise Club.

LEE: About the Paradise?

ARSENEAULT: And the pub. The one that you ran. You ran the pub. We'll talk about that.

LEE: Yeah. Yeah.

ARSENEAULT: We'll talk about that.

LEE: Yeah, they had the pub, and they had the Cowboy Inn. Peter Deville, and Rodney Caesar, and then they had Caesar's Inn.

ARSENEAULT: So I didn't know about any of those. Okay. We can come back and talk about that. And what else did I want to talk about?

LEE: Man, the Paradise had big name entertainment, man.

ARSENEAULT: [1:31:50] That's what I wanted to, the music in Mossville, I want to talk about that.

LEE: The old, what they call like the Chitlin Circuit.

ARSENEAULT: What's that?

LEE: The black groups, the famous black groups. And they called it the Chitlin Circuit.

ARSENEAULT: After the food?

LEE: After the food. Yeah.

ARSENEAULT: Okay.

LEE: And Bobby Blue Bland, BB King.

ARSENEAULT: [1:32:16] Wow.

LEE: Ray Charles.

ARSENEAULT: They played at the Paradise Club?

LEE: Yeah, they played.

?: Etta James.

LEE: Etta James.

ARSENEAULT: Wow.

LEE: And you see, we was right next door, about two houses down, from the Paradise, where my brother lived, where Richard.

ARSENEAULT: So where did you all, where was your house?

LEE: On Prater Road.

ARSENEAULT: [1:32:35] Okay.

LEE: My house, myself, was across the street from the Mossville School.

ARSENEAULT: Okay.

LEE: Now my mother and my brother stayed on Prater Road. And then one time I stayed on Prater Road in one of my old uncle houses. I got it after he passed.

ARSENEAULT: We know Prater Road. We interviewed Mr. Haki [Vincent].

LEE: Mr. who?

ARSENEAULT: Mr. Haki? Vincent? Is that on Prater Road?

LEE: No.

ARSENEAULT: That's not on Prater Road? Oh. Coach Williams. Oh, okay.

LEE: It's on Williams, down there around Coach Williams. Did you all interview Coach?

ARSENEAULT: Not yet. We interviewed him at the Oral History Day. But we still have to go back for his . . . he's busy. He still works, I think.

LEE: Yeah. He still work at the sheriff office, too.

ARSENEAULT: Yeah.

LEE: He's on the board.

ARSENEAULT: He's busy.

LEE: He was very instrumental in a lot of our lives, you know? And he, you know, he was there with us, he started at Mossville at a young age. And he had the experience out of the military, and college. And I think Coach, if I'm not mistaken, he was one of the first black to graduate from McNeese University. And he, you know, I looked up to him as a kid coming up. Because I was fairly young when he started coaching at Mossville. And he, yeah, he made a lot of history there with the football, basketball and track. And tennis and the board of education.

ARSENEAULT: [1:34:28] Where did he coach after they had to integrate? Did they move him somewhere?

LEE: He went to Westlake.

ARSENEAULT: Okay.

LEE: Yeah. But he was an assistant coach at Westlake. I don't know. You know. Some people say that was wrong. He had a better record.

ARSENEAULT: Politics?

LEE: Politics and everything. But Coach hung in there with them, and he's still hanging with them to prove that he is somebody. And he, to be reckoned with. Because he's well-respected, you know. And he mold a bunch of people. Do you understand what I mean? He said if I've got to mold you from your behind to your head, I'm going to do what need to be done to make you successful. And to make my program a winning program. Because he was over the recreation department before he became the coach at school. And he was from right there in Mossville. In fact, where I built my first house, I purchased the land from Coach Williams, you know? And that, his family owned that land. I purchased some land from Coach. In fact, his wife is related to me on my grandmother's side, on the Lee side. And he's all right with me. He's a great fellow. He deserved more than that road down there named after him. Because the lives he didn't touch through that school and the recreation is . . .

ARSENEAULT: [1:36:29] We hear a lot of good things about Coach Williams.

LEE: Yeah. He's contributed to the community. And I was the resident deputy there for 15 years. In Mossville. But I worked twenty-one years for the sheriff's department.

ARSENEAULT: You worked the same time?

LEE: I worked two jobs, twenty-one years.

ARSENEAULT: Wow.

LEE: The same two jobs. The sheriff's office and Citgo. And sixteen hours a day for twenty-one years. And came back from Vietnam, I couldn't sleep. I went to work for the federal government and I went back to school at night. I went to McNeese. Things happened, and then I went to work for the sheriff's office and the post office. And they had that non-union trouble out at Citgo. So the sheriff sent some of us out there to work at Citgo. And while I was out there at Citgo, they offered me a job in security.

[1:37:36] I said, "I don't want to be no damn security guard." And they told me, "You got all the qualifications. He say, "This ain't no [regular] security." He said, "We're paying," I was working for the post office, I was making six dollars. And he said, "You making seven dollar and fifty cent an hour." I said, "As a security guard?" I said, "You kidding me?" He said, "No, man." He said, "We're supposed to have a negotiation on a contract and it should go up." He say, "You make fifteen cents less than an operator." So you had to have a college degree, two years of college and two years of law enforcement experience. And he said, "You're qualified." I said, "Yeah." He said, "Man, we can get you on." He said, "You got two weeks' vacation. You got your [savings and thrift, a 401k] plan, you got retirement." I said, "Man, where you can sign up?" So I went to work there. And I stayed out there twenty-one years. And I retired, when was it? Ninety-six?

?: Two or three? Ninety-three? No, '96, I guess.

LEE: Ninety-six, yeah. I got hurt out there. And I was already injured from Vietnam. And I couldn't pass my physical to go back to work. So it kind of messed with me. But they retired me

just like I was sixty-five. And the VA changed my disability and I went to 100 percent disabled.

But just like when I told that lady, she said, "Where you work at?"

And I was filling out for my Social Security. I said, "I worked ten years for the government." I said, "I worked ten years part-time in the club thing." And I said, "I got twenty-one years at the sheriff's office," and I say, "I got twenty-one years at Citgo." She said, "How old are you?" I told her . . .

ARSENEAULT: [1:40:06] It didn't add up.

LEE: Yeah. Something ain't right about this. I said, "No, I worked those two jobs twenty-one years." I said, "I always had two jobs." And she shook her head. She said, something was wrong with the math. And I say, yeah. I said, "I was just waiting on your jobs, looking at you, and you're still writing that down, and you looked up at me." So but I did it.

ARSENEAULT: Well, we're almost at two hours. I would hate to take up any more of you all's time. But if you're interested, we can talk some more next time.

LEE: Yeah, I like to talk about the Paradise Club.

ARSENEAULT: I would love to talk about that.

LEE: I waited tables there as a youngster.

ARSENEAULT: Oh, perfect! Okay, I'm going to put that in the notes, because we're going to ask you about that.

LEE: Yeah. Yeah.

ARSENEAULT: And thank you so much for sharing this with us. We really do appreciate it. And we'll set something up with you next time.

[1:41:08]

[End 4531. End Session I.]