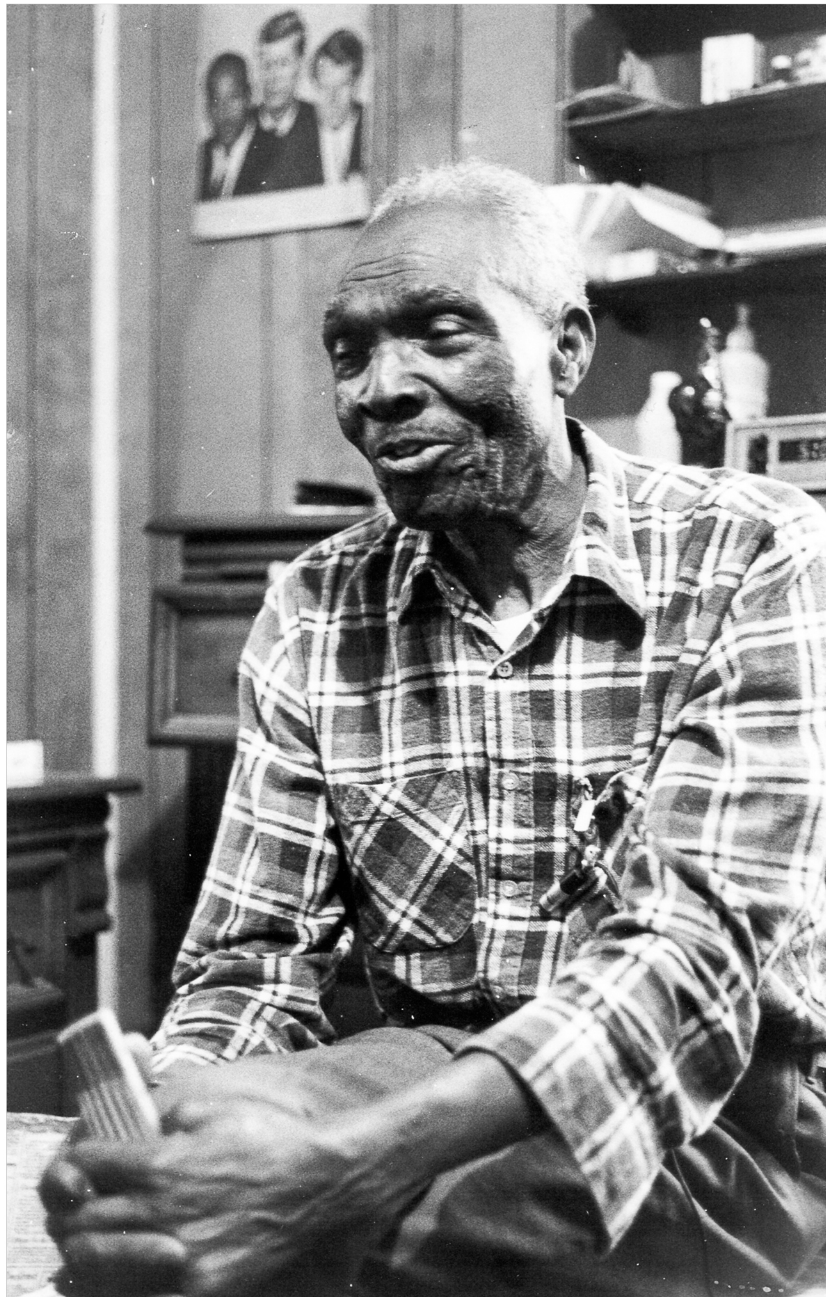
i ain't lying

Volume 5 Spring 2023 No.1



i ain't lying

Volume 5 Spring, 2023 No. 1

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"When I started high school, I had no thought as to what I was going to do in the future, but photography changed that. I learned to take pictures well enough to please my friends first, my family next, and finally Mrs. Crosby and other teachers and grown-ups. With these skills, I have even had some pictures published and some paying jobs. I would like to challenge you to find something you like and build a successful future as I intend to."

Roderick Red wrote this on April 18, 1984, when he was a junior at Port Gibson High School and an I Ain't Lying student at Mississippi Cultural Crossroads.

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Volume 5 of I Ain't Lying was researched and edited by students and staff of Mississippi Cultural Crossroads in the late 1980s. It was not published then, unlike its four predecessors, but takes its place with them now on-line, as a digital work in progress courtesy of Mississippi Folklife, a publication of the Mississippi Arts Commission. The original materials from the 1980s are housed in the Mississippi Department of Archives and History, P.O. Box 571, Jackson, MS 39201.
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Ellen Duffin interviews her grandmother, Celia Anderson.

Celia Anderson

Interview by Ellen Duffin
Transcribed by Ellen Duffin and Jessica Crosby
Edited by Darcy Schraufnagel

As I sit down to write this introduction I find myself at a loss for words because I have never felt that my grandmother needed an introduction. She has always been a powerful and everpresent force in the lives of her family, friends, and former Head Start pupils. She is "Mama Celie," mother, grandmother, teacher, and in my personal opinion a heroine.

I am happy and excited to share her warmth and experience with others. During this interview I began to understand my grandmother and value her even more. In one afternoon I discovered my past, began to understand my present, and was given a storehouse of knowledge for the future. Celia Anderson is a wonderful person and a joy to interview.

--Ellen Duffin

Although I've never met Mrs. Anderson, I've learned a lot from her. Last fall I began to edit the transcript of an interview that Mrs. Anderson did with I AINT LYING students in June, 1985. Her life is full of history. She was born in Franklin County but she has lived in Claiborne County since 1930. In the interview she told the students about the days when she was sharecropping and working with Head Start. Mrs. Anderson took part in the Port Gibson boycott in the 60's and many protest marches. After listening to Mrs. Anderson talk about her life and the times she lived in, I will not think of Claiborne County in the same way.

Listening to Mrs. Anderson on tape reminded me of times I've spent talking with my grandmothers in Wisconsin. Their stories may be of different places and times, but I have learned from all of them. Listening to the experiences of older people and learning about their lives has taught me more than all the history courses I've taken in school. I would like to thank Mrs. Anderson for sharing her life and I hope to someday meet this fascinating woman with so much to tell.

--Darcy Schraufnagel

"Peanuts! Boy that would knock you out of school when it came to digging them old peanuts. We had to pick them scoundrels."

I was born in Franklin County down in Meadville, Mississippi, November 6, 1914.

[My parents were] Hattie Wardley and Moses Wardley. [They were both from] Franklin County, Mississippi.

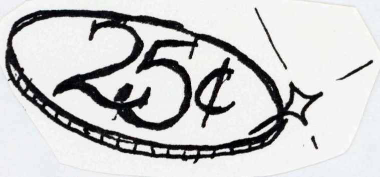
We farmed. And my stepfather--he was the only Daddy I knew--he worked out at times in this little town they called Bude, Mississippi. It was a big saw mill down there and he would work. Most of the time he had to walk, I don't know how far. That was a long way. But he wouldn't come home until every weekend. And Mama took us, the children, and farmed.

We had cows and hogs and chickens and everything. We milked. We'd have milk the year round. Milk and butter. We raised cane sorghum. Make sorghum molas-ses every year. And plenty potatoes. Peanuts! Boy, that would knock you out of school when it came to digging them old peanuts. We had to pick them scoundrels. Mama planted three kinds. Those white peanuts, those big ones. Those red ones, with the little red shell. They call them the Texas. And some little old bitty ones. They called them goobers. They was planted separate

and we had to pick them separate, and put them in separate sacks. But you washed them and put them in those croker sacks and put them on top of the house to dry.

And Mama would sell them. You know, mens was working out in the woods cutting logs. Little saw mill--they call them ground hog mills. And they come out by the house and she would sell them peanuts. After they found out she had them, they'd buy them all! Hog cracklings, sell them.

Butter. And around Christmas time she made some money off butter. Wasn't selling it for but two bits a pound. But that old lady had money in cans. It was safe for it to hide in.



Mama gave me a cow. I raised about ten off of that one cow. After I married, she gave all of them a cow.

[How did you meet your husband?]

We kind of grew up together. At church and Sunday school. But the old folks didn't let you go out then, like you know, no social things. You could go to church and Sunday School. And that's how we met. We had to walk to church and back, you know. And that was nice times like that. We enjoyed that. That's the only time you could be together.

I was fifteen [when we met]. We courted young, boy. But we had a good time.I was going on 18 [when I married]. I thought I wanted to marry when I was 16 or 15. I thought I was grown. But Mama didn't know it though.

If I had to do it over I would[n't get married that young]. You can't have no fun after you get married. You just got to be with that one man, you know. You can't talk to nobody. You ain't going to talk to anybody you want to because they won't like it, you know. I'm telling you.

[I've been married] sixty years. We married on Thanksgiving Day, November the 27th, 1929. We came to Claiborne County in the last of thirty. Because it was thirty-one we farmed down there on Little Craig.

[Did you know who your grandparents were?]

William Moore and Missy Moore. I used to stay with Grandma. Spend nights with her. But I was afraid of Grandpa. He was mean. My sister, she went and stayed when she was real young. She stayed with them 'til she was 14 years old. But I'd just go spend

a couple nights.

Grandpa was so mean, girl. The cat couldn't meow and he'll run and holler at him. And that cat was 'fraid of him. Golly! He'd run when Grandpa say something to him. He'd meow a time or two and he'd tell him to scat. That cat would get. He was so mean. He got after sister a time.

I tipped light. I didn't bother him. I know what he liked, what he didn't like. He didn't like no noise. Didn't like you messing with nothing, you know, in the house. You know how old people are. And I didn't do it.

"I tipped light. I didn't bother him. I know what he liked, what he didn't like. He didn't like no noise."

And he'd say something, my sister be behind his back. I be so scared he gonna look around. She make faces at him. Ooh, he would have killed her. But she wasn't 'fraid of him.

But I liked Grandma. I always said if Grandpa would die, I'd stay with Grandma. And Grandma died first. She died the seventh day of June. I'll never forget that.

My grandmama didn't talk much. We followed her fishing everyday. She loved to fish. My grandpa wasn't going to tell you nothing 'cause he too mean. He sat up and smoked that pipe. He act like he didn't want us to stay. I don't think he did. But Grandma loved children.

[What was it like when you were growing up?]

Oh, it was okay. We played. Sliding down the hills and banks in the dust. And climbing trees getting muscadine and grapes in the fall of the year. Eating berries--we called them redhull--and it was some huckleberries. They was winter berries. They bear in the winter time. We'd eat them long the road coming from school. In the evening we'd be hungry. And have a lot of fun, dodging cows. They'd fight you. We had to go through the pasture and places on other folks places, walking you know.

[Were you a tomboy?]

Yeah, with all them brothers. We'd climb them muscadine vine trees and swing and got all them grapes and things. Wherever they went, I'd go. This time of year [summer] we'd go out breaking up wasp's nests. Knocking

them down. And they'd outrun me and they'd tell me to lie down, you know. "You ain't got to run far. They ain't going to sting if you lie down. They ain't coming down." I'd lay down and get stung all the time. Yeah, I'd act a monkey and lie down. And the wasps would get me. But I'd still follow them. We had some good times and bad times.

I have four brothers and three sisters. Oh, we had, good times playing in the yard. Mama she worked for the white folks everyday and we would tend to the baby all the time. And I'm one had to feed the baby. They didn't have bottles like they have now. She leave food. And I'd eat more of the food than the baby did. My baby brother he sucked his thumb, until he was a great big old boy. Poor thing would be hungry 'cause I'd been and ate most of the food up.

I know we used to have to pack water from a branch about a mile and a half from the house. And we didn't have cars like children have today. My

brother would make wagons. He'd take a tree or log like that and cut the round thing and make a wheel and then knock a hole in there and make the axle. Make them wooden wheel wagons.

We didn't have no toys. We made dolls out of flour sacks. My older sister made 'em and stuffed 'em. Mine was a big old stuffed doll and I name her Annie. We had play houses and make up mud cakes. And June and July, blackberries be ripe. We decorate our cake with blackberries lying on top of it. There were plenty berries out there. We cooking up a storm! And we'd set it in the sun and get it dried out, you know. I loved to cook.

The only time [we'd] play was when Mama be home. When she go to work we couldn't play down that hill. We had to tend to the baby.

[Did you go to school when you were young?]

Yeah. We walk eight miles every day. Eight one way. Had fun playing and fighting along the road, with other children.

"We didn't have no toys. We made dolls out of flour sacks. My older sister made 'em and stuffed 'em."

We [went to] the Kelly School. It was on a lady's place named Lizzie Kelly. She and her husband built the school in that community. Its a little one-room school house. We went everyday until time to gather cotton, dig peanuts and potatoes. We always had to stop and do that. When we got done with all that then we start back.

"We worked on the third. That mean the landlord got the third bale. You make three bales, he get the third one. You make six, he got two. Nine bales, he got three."

One thing was kind of worst. Whenever there come a big rain, we had to cross a branch. And if you couldn't find a log somewhere to walk cross, you couldn't go that day. It would get up.

And my problem was my brothers. I was just one girl. It wind down to me going long with my brothers and some more old boys on the place. And they was getting me scared all the time. Saying they gon' shake me off in that water. I was afraid of cows. They go through the pasture. They said they going to climb the trees and leave me. And just keep me running and fighting all time.

[What is your husband's full name?]

Charlie Anderson. Mr. "Working Charlie" Anderson. Ha, ha! He's 79 years old and you can't keep him at home. Every morning he gone. I have to cook every evening.

[Why did you come to Claiborne County?]

My husband's people was up here and he come up here where he could find a job. Wasn't no jobs down there back then. Twenty-seven, twenty-eight, and early thirties it was rough. During the time President Roosevelt took the seat, was elected, he closed banks and a lot of jobs was closed down. This was a farming county then when we came up here. We farmed on a plantation for Herman Marx. They call it Craig because the old big house was up there. The old slavery house. Great big old upstairs house. And Herman Marx was the owner. He also was the undertaker.

[What was it like farming on Craig?]

We worked on the third. That mean the landlord got the third bale. You make three bales, he get the third one. You make six, he got two. Nine bales, he got three. We always make ten or twelve bales every year.

[How much did a bale of cotton sell for in those days?]

Around 100 some dollars. Cotton went down to five cents a pound during that time--five cents! Hard as it was to make and pick. Wasn't hard to make but you had to gather it. Wasn't picking it with no cotton picker then. We picked it by our hands. I pick cotton for thirty-five cent a hundred. Thirty-five cent a hundred. Now, you know, a hundred pounds of cotton, thats a lot of cotton! We had to pack

it in a sack, pack it and pack it. Every time we empty out, we pour it in another sack and pack it. Thirty-five cents! And that nearly killed you. Pick that. But we got it though.

[Why did you leave the Craig place?]

Marx, he sold. They said it was government land. He had it leased. And after the bottom fell out the cotton and everything, he got in debt with the government and that's how come these houses all around here. The government took it. They sold the land to people that was able to buy, such as Mr. Jesse Johnson, and Roscoe [Johnson], and [Rev. Sampson] McGriggs and all of them. Bought so many acres. Then they got old and decided they didn't want to farm. They sold it out in lots. And we bought an acre. At that time it was $300 an acre. That's why we left from down to Marx.

Old Marx was good. He was a Jew. He used to bring his caskets to church and advertise them. He had that word, "If you don't believe we'll bury you, die." And everybody would laugh.

[For funerals] we paid two dollars and twenty-five cents every quarter--every fifth Sunday. Just start off as a little society. It used to be 25 cents a month. But everything else went up, up. Even the casket. So they went up. The casket used to be $35 when Mr. Marx had them. And they were nice at that time. But they gone up now. And they just keep it a going because its an old organization.

It's two of them in Claiborne County--Christian Aid and Baptist Aid. See last year, we had $15,000 or something in the bank. That will bury a good many people. Good while. But every time, every Aid day, you know, they bring in more, but also pay out more. According to how many died.

Back then everybody was poor. They didn't have nothing. That's all the kind of insurance we had.

"Back then everybody was poor. They didn't have nothing. That's all the kind of insurance we had."

[When did you have your first child?]

My first child was born in 1932, a boy, Levi. Jessie Bell the second. I'm a mother of fifteen. Ten girls and five

boys. They're all living, last I heard of them. Some in Ohio, California, Louisiana. Most of them here in Port Gibson.

[Did you enjoy having a large family?]

Yeah, at that time I did. They were worrisome, but we made it. By farming and raising everything, you know, mostly food at that time. And we owned cows and raised hogs. We would have our own meat. And milk and butter. Them cows was worrisome though. You had to go get them up out the pasture. Put the calves up in the evening. And then separate them from the cow so you could milk the cow the next morning, get the milk. That's what the children had to do. When they come home they talk about how they used to have to work.

In those days them children work, honey. I didn't have to do no housework. After Jessie Bell left home, Hattie Mae took over. And I could get out and go visit neighbors on wash day, and leave that poor girl to wash. See we was washing on that rub board and pull water up out the well. And we had them old boys with all them old heavy pants.

"In those days them children work, honey. I didn't have to do no housework. After Jessie Bell left home, Hattie Mae took over. And I could get out and go visit neighbors on wash day, and leave that poor girl to wash."

And Hattie Mae left. She run off one night. She left and married. And every wash day I was crying. I said "I won't [make my children] do this no more. I'll do my own work." I been doing my own work ever since.

[Hattie ran off and got married?]

Yeah! She left one night, her and brother Turnipseed. I mean out the house and we didn't know it. Charlie said he heard her getting her clothes off the rack, but he wouldn't even wake me up. Somebody was outside help her with them clothes, suitcase. They went to Chicago. But his mother made him bring her back, before they went to Chicago. Brought her back. And old lil' brother come there sit up shaking his legs. "Now there['s] Mrs. Anderson, Lil' Brother, ask her for Hattie Mae." That didn't make it no difference. Lil' Brother asked. He wasn't shame. But don't y'all try that. You get caught.

[How old was she then?]

Hattie Mae had finished school when she run off. She got tired of doing all that work. I don't blame her though. I'd leave. I wouldn't even help her wash. Scrubbing on the board. And had to hang up them clothes, all them clothes. I bet she fixed me.

[When did you join the church?]

When I was nine years old. I joined a Methodist Church because that's where we lived close to at that time. And after we moved up here we joined a Baptist. Been Baptist ever since.

[During the time you had children, did they have Head Start?]

No, they didn't have it then. This just started 'long the late 60's, when President Johnson was president. I was trying to think of the man--Owen Cooper--his home up in the Delta. He was a white man. He and Mr. [Charles] Evers got around and got it going. They give him a retirement over at the Holiday Inn in Jackson and we went, taking some of our children. Had a program for him--gave him a beautiful plaque--and we had a lot of fun.

Mrs. Celia Anderson with a picture of her mother, Mrs. Hattie Wardley.

He was telling us how the white folks used to do him and Charles. He and Charles, when they go around up there in that Delta, it's kind of rough. But they got it organized, and it's a good thing, especially for those children suffering in malnutrition.

We had some children come in there. It was just terrible! They little stomach was pot [belly] and they were bad! The worms was bad! You know, a lot of the teachers were afraid of them, when they take them to the bathroom and those worms pass from them. They be up there running, hollering, calling me. "Come here, Mrs. Anderson." Sometimes there just be a big ball of them. Terrible.

They give us some kind of medicine. You only give them two doses of that. Worm medicine. The nurse brought it from Jackson. And that would cut those worms and they stop passing whole like that. Those younger ladies were afraid of them worms. The children would be up there crying themselves. But before I left you wasn't even having that problem. You didn't see no worm. But it was terrible when they first started.

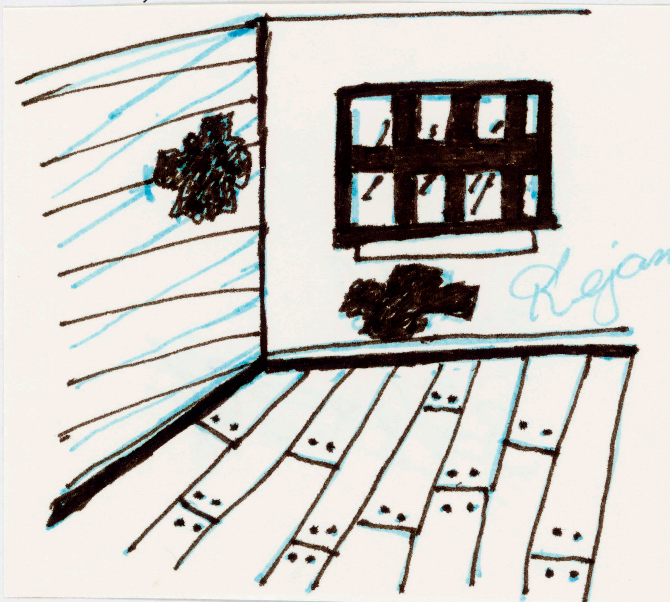
Mrs. Anderson was one of the early organizers of Head Start Centers in Claiborne County.

"And we couldn't scorn nowhere we went. You know, we wouldn't talk about the people."

[How did you get involved in Head Start?]

Doing a lot of volunteer work, you know, for the government. Going around recruiting children and parents. We had to go through the county, you know, and see how many was available for that particular thing. You know it had to be a certain age. And that what made us had to go all through the county. And I had 450 hours, volunteer hours in Washington. Ladybird Johnson sent me a certificate she had signed by President Johnson. They had to send all that paperwork to Washington. And I got hired [because of doing] volunteer work. And I worked until I retired.

We had to visit all the homes, back out in the rural. It was so pitiful! Some of the homes, the cracks, you know, in the floor and in the walls.



You go there in the winter time. In one home they had a heater made out of old iron barrel, and it was all smoked up--the house was. We had to go there and they would always teach us how to be friendly and everything.

And we couldn't scorn nowhere we went. You know, we wouldn't talk about the people. Just tell them how to do and how they could improve themselves. And a lot those families, now they got nice homes out there. And got jobs. Don't look like the same people. It help the grown as well as the children, because they didn't know what to do.

We had two social workers, Ms. [Thelma] Crowder [Wells] and Ms. [Mozella] Carpenter, and they rode through the community, you know. And they would talk with them, and tell them how to go about getting homes. And a lot of them got them now. Most, a majority of them.

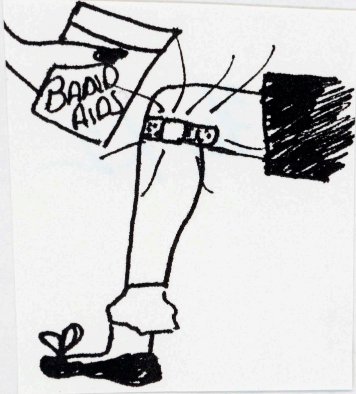
We used to go the year round. You know, they wouldn't turn out for summer. We teach the year 'round. And this time of the year [summer] them children would be buck naked. And flies. Oh! It was just awful! But, I think Head Start brought them out a whole lot. Because a lot of them back-in-the-woods people just didn't know no better. And didn't go out to be told nothing.

And we'd have parent meetings, you know. They would come to the meeting. And always would be somebody down from Jackson to talk to them. And explain. And they really would come out to those meetings. And when we have a program, we'd get flocks of parents. That was the rule, to feed them. They'd mostly come to eat, I said. After the program they would eat. But anyway they came. It was good that they came. It helped them.

The teachers all give it a good name. They say they can tell when the students been to Head Start when they come to Richardson [Primary School]. They have less problems with them. When children first started school they sit up and cry and miss their parents, you know. But when they been to Head Start, they don't do that no more hardly. They been done got broke in.

'Cause we had to Mama them.

They had funny rules. We had to act as a mother for them. And we couldn't whip them or nothing. But we just trained them. And they were crazy about us and I was crazy about my little children. I miss the children worse than I do those grown people. If they scratch their hands or stump their toe, here they come. You'd got to do something for them. Each unit had a first aid kit in their unit. They want just bandage on it. It was well, then. Put a bandage on it and they were ready to go.



I went to their graduation over at Addison [now Watson Junior High]. They marched in just like twelfth graders. Had they little caps and gowns on. They called their names and they'd walk up and get their little certificate and walk out. It was beautiful.

[You started off as a teacher in Head Start?]

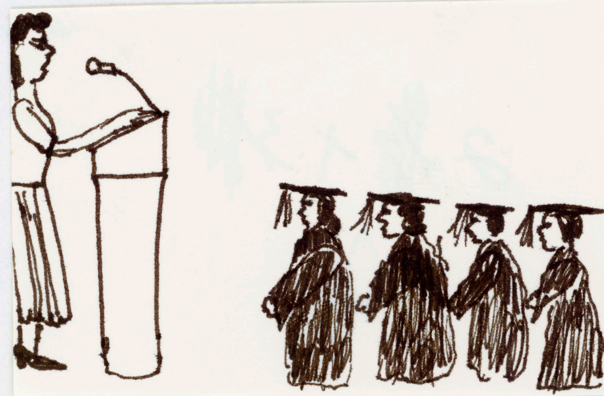
Teacher's aid, and I was promoted. They sent us off to a workshop, you know, training. Sometime we stay a week, but sometimes we stay two weeks. But it was real good there. I went through some of my papers last night.

[Where were the training sessions held?]

Had to go a lot of places, 'cause we go in other counties, you know. Like we had a workshop in this county some months. Next time it would be in another county. Then when they have the big convention we would go Jackson. Peoples from all areas, you know, different counties would meet up there--white and black. We'd have lots of fun. Stayed in hotels. The government paid all expenses. Ate everything we wanted. We never would have had that privilege, you know, if it had not been for that. Had never been slept in a hotel before in my life until then.

I [taught for 10 years.] Oh, boy, we had to evaluate those little children. Can they do this? Can they do that? Eighteen children! That's something else, too.

I was looking at some of them [Head Start pictures] last night. I just made a mistake and didn't put the name on the pictures. I didn't put their names down, but I meets a lot of them now. A lot of them done finish twelfth and finished college, too. Those we had when we were at Mercy Seat, they college students.



[Head Start was at Mercy Seat?]

Yeah. We had four units down there. Eighteen children per unit in the basement. [Later] Mr. Williams consolidated and put Rising Sun, Mercy Seat, Wagon Wheel, and Morning Star--four different schools--into one. It was a good school. It got burned down.

"They marched in just like twelfth graders. Had they little caps and gowns on. They called their names and they'd walk up and get their little certificate and walk out. It was beautiful."

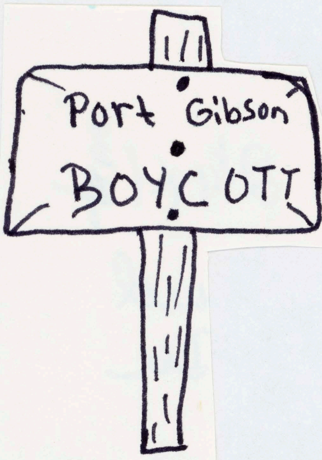
We had 162 children out there altogether in Pattison.

[Did you have many white children going to Head Start at that time?]

No, along toward the last, they had. After Bechtel moved in here for the Grand Gulf, those white people sent their children.

[Before that were all the kids from around here?]

Yes, just our children. We tried to recruit them, but they wouldn't send them. Father Dominic [Cangemi] was a Catholic priest. He helped us when we was getting organized and white folks run us away from their house. We go to the meeting and he told us one night, "Well, don't you all go back no more, I'll go." So we finally let them alone. They didn't send them. But they have white children now. I don't know where they're from. I haven't visited the center in a good while.



"We weren't doing nothing but marching. The children say they were marching for their rights."

[Were you involved in the boycott of white merchants in Port Gibson in the 60's?]

Yeah. I was in it clapping, marching and everything. Getting eggs throwed at me. We marched at night up the streets like a monkey. Them cows upstairs were throwing them eggs down there on us. But once we down there we won. They had all our pictures up there at the court house one time. Don't know what they did with them. They probably got them there. They were trying to bluff us taking our pictures. We kept a going though. Them supervisors were acting pitiful.

[Why did you start marching?]

Well, we wanted a piece of the pie. We didn't have no black police, no black nothing. The black couldn't go in the certain places where the white were. If you was out somewhere, you couldn't even go in the restroom. Nothing. We just wanted it mix up.

We had some children went on to [Port Gibson High] school [under "freedom of choice" integration]. That Brandon girl and I can't think of them all. Yeah, Mrs. Burnell Monroe had a boy went. They had three or four over there. But they made it. Think Kenneth Brandon was the first one to graduate over there at the white school, at Port Gibson [class of 1967]. They hung in there. They said it was hard but they went on. They finally got alright. Didn't take them long to cool down.

[Who decided it would be a good idea to march?]

It must have been Mr.Charles Evers, because he always led the march. It had to be him. Just got out there and we marched daytime. We marched at night. We sung, prayed. They locked them up. But I didn't never get locked up. A lot of them did but I didn't. I always lucky.

They put them children out there in front. They lock them children up. Yeah. They turn them out. We didn't have to pay [bond] for them. And we end up getting paid. They had to pay for the time they kept them in there, because it's illegal. A lot [of them were] underage. That's all. We weren't doing nothing but marching. The children say they were marching for their rights.

[Who were some of those children?]

Some of mine. They not here. Sylvester, he was in every one. Hattie Mae was one. Them the only two of mine marched.

[Did either of your children get locked up?]

Uh-uh. We got over there one day. We live so far back out here we didn't know they were fixing to march. And when we got there, they were loading them up. That time they filled all the jail cells up from here to Natchez, Vicksburg. They had them buses hid back there. And when they come out [of] them buses, [the children were] just a waving and hollering like they were going to a ball game or something.

They weren't scared. Told you that's the reason they locked them up. Because they clowned so. They clowned. That's what made them get locked up and you couldn't keep them cool.

They sure did fill them jails up. And Mr. Evers said he ain't never seen nobody run to get in jail. He was leading them, so when they got to the jail, he just backed up. "I want to see all my children in and I didn't want nobody hurt." And I just stood back because they were hitting that door coming out of there and going in that jail. They got in there and stood up in there strong and proud. Terrible.

"That time they filled all the jail cells up from here to Natchez, Vicksburg."

[Did things change when Mr. Evers came?]

He made it change. It changed. Oh, it's a lot different. Well, we got black police right away, so that was the first something we got. Then they integrated and they started to hiring blacks in the store. They didn't have no blacks in the store. All you can do, go in there and buy, so they went to hiring the black people in the store on the cash register. Some of them didn't hire no blacks. I know some didn't hire no blacks yet, and don't no blacks go in there much either.

"The night they shot in the church--lucky I wasn't there that night."

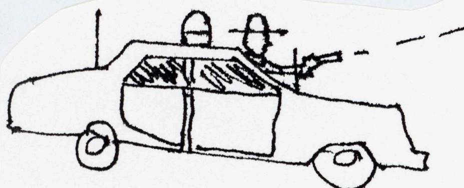
[Did you have meetings before you marched?]

Oh yeah. We had meetings. Different one talk. Put in their complaints. They make decisions what the next step to take. And they kept on meeting and discussing till finally the white folks were beginning to meet some of the demands. You know, things that they asked for.

[Were there any leaders besides Mr. Evers?]

Oh, we had leaders, sure. Mr. Doss' father, Reverend Evan Doss. And Reverend James Dorsey, First Baptist pastor. We had Uncle Nay, I call him. Nathaniel Jones. They were presidents of the NAACP at that particular time. Reverend Dorsey brought us through the crisis. He was the leader at that time and he would stand up.

The night they shot in the church--lucky I wasn't there that night. Didn't get runned over. Fact I didn't even know they having a meeting until my son come home and told me, "Mama, they having a meeting over there and the highway mens and National Guards everywhere. I couldn't hardly get through." My home



didn't have no telephone.

Them people done went in the church and shot. Peoples jumped out the window and went under benches, they say under the pews. They often tease Mr. Collins. Say Mr. Collins jumped out the window. Say he told them "Follow the judge." You know he was the judge at that time. They kept that up. They say, "Follow the judge." They kept that up to Old Mr. Collins. They sure did.

[Did anyone get shot?]

Jim Holt. Faye Holt's daddy. You know Faye Holt work at Sav-Rite.

[Did anybody die as a result of the shots?]

No, didn't nobody die. Tore up the piano and things. Went all up behind, you know, them tall old things, they call them pipe organs I reckon. And they went all up behind there, searching for guns and things. And they was sharp too. [They picked a] night when Mr. Evers wasn't even there. And we didn't have no

cameraman or nothing. And, our boys was off guard. They had been guarding the church, you know. They'd be outside watching. Jimmy Smith and them used to get up on top of that church tower and sit up there and watch. But everything had lightened up you know and we didn't think they were going to bother it. They sure came in there.

I don't know why they couldn't put that in no suit. I don't know whether [Reverend] Evan Doss just wouldn't do it or what. He was the president. The president have to be the one to do it. I don't know why they didn't sue them. Look like the patrolmen ought to been on the highway, on they jobs.

And my son was here from the Navy on a furlough and he come to Vicksburg. He stopped at the red light and had to search his car inside. Say, "Where are you going?" But they say somebody outside that was coming in, I reckon. And they was checking everybody, giving them a hard time to get through town that night. The patrolmen and the National Guard. They put on a curfew, for one thing. That one of the reason they stopping them. But if you were out of town, and you didn't know what had happened, you better try to go home. Because they sure did some rough things.

[How did it stop?]

I don't know. When everybody ran off I reckon. Anyway Mr. Lightfoot had a shop, he fixed icebox and things like that people would take to him. And he'd work out in the daytime and come in late and work on somebody's box and they went in there and beat him near to death.

[Why did they beat Mr. Lightfoot?]

He the only one they could get to at that time, black. I went to see him in the hospital. He didn't look right. His head was so big, swole up. Beat that man. He had never participated with no NAACP, no march, no nothing. He never did approve, be affiliated with that. And I think they done him wrong. But they like to killed him. Somebody--they never did find out who--shot one of them patrolmen. He going up the steps and they just shot him in the leg.

"Look like the patrolmen ought to been on the highway, on they jobs."

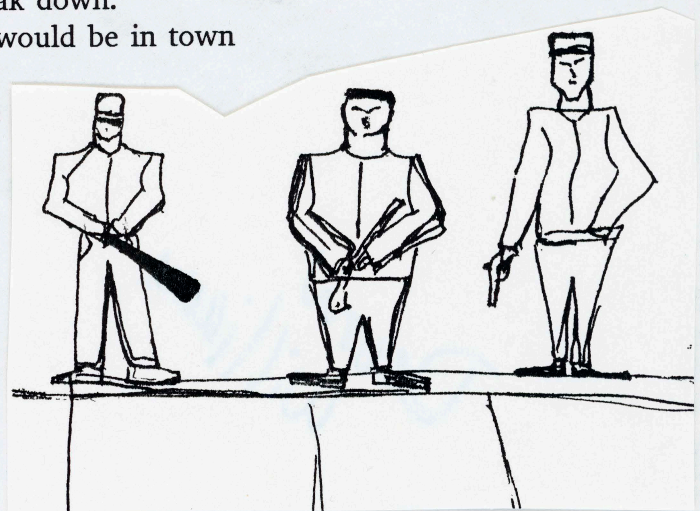
[Somebody shot back?]

Mm-hmm. Somebody outside. Saw them, you know.

[What happened after the highway patrol and the National Guard came and shot into the church?]

Nothing. They locked up some of them Negroes. And took the guns from them they caught. It was two went up in the tree and stayed until daylight. Negroes. They were scared to get down. They were down there looking for them like dogs. Finally got a chance to sneak down.

But they would be in town everyday. Them folks be in town everyday. Sitting on them streets with them guns and things. And bats I call them. Billy clubs. Sure was.



[When the boycott came about, were you one of the people who were sued?]

No. They didn't sue me. I didn't have nothing. They sued people that had crops. This a government house. We paying on these houses, you know. The government connected with them. And they couldn't a got it no way. They picked those that had something. And they hung in there, too. For about 14 years? They kept that suit some time. Those people that were sued had problems. Just like you want to buy an acre of land to build your house they couldn't even sell it. They couldn't sell their land.

Men would sue you for not coming in they store. But they didn't get nothing. They'd scare a lot of people. And worried a lot them to death about their property. That would've been terrible, though. Know [John] Ellis? He dead. He couldn't sell no land. They had him on it. He ain't never been to a NAACP meeting or marched in his life. Him neither his wife. But he had property. You know, clear property. He bought some of this land from the government, and had paid for his home and everything. He and his wife dead now. Nobody live in that nice house over there. The son come in one while and move and take all the furniture and everything over there.

[How did Reverend Dorsey help through the crisis?]

Oh he just was our leader and would talk to the people and tell them how to act and everthing. He was a lot of help. He was a good leader. They would follow him at that time. And he would be the one go to the white people when they send for him to see whether they were going to meet the demands. And he'd come back to the meeting and tell you what they say and everthing. So they finally give most everthing that [we] asked for. Negroes started to vote. That was the most of the problem.

[When did you register?]

I had registered two years before this boycott. Before this stuff started. I saw in the paper where you could register, you know. We could. And I went up there. You had to pay two dollars poll tax then when I registered, and when time to vote, I voted.

[Did you have to pass a literacy test?]

Not at that time. I didn't. I hear them talking about that test, but at that time I registered you didn't have to. Just asked you a few questions and I answered them. Just how old I was and what grade, you know, did I go to school. Such stuff like that. I wasn't nothing like what I heard Mrs. Jones was telling the other night. Course she's older then I am. Yeah. They asked them all kinds of questions. They flunked their test. Had to to go back again.

When I voted, I voted. I went up there by myself. I got my receipt and

everything. Still have it. Where I registered, for the voting. Then, come time for me to vote, they sent me way to Pattison to vote. My husband went to the National Guard [Armory to vote]. Me and some more people, we went on that time.

Next time, the next four years, here we go again. And I told Merle Lee Williams--he still over in there from Page them--I said, "Merle Lee, I am not going to Pattison today. Let's go up to the courthouse." And I went up there. "Mrs. Easley," I said, "Well, my husband and I stay in the same house and he voting down at National Guard and why I'm going out there?"

"Well it must be a mix-up." And she gon' look for my name and I'm just looking on the book with her.

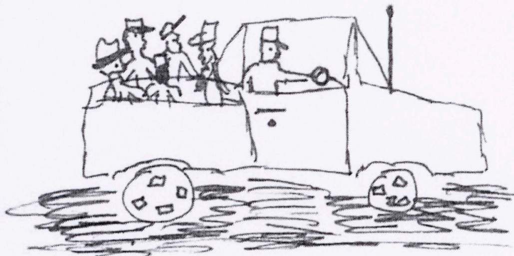
"It takes time, you know," she said. She was getting nervous. "It just takes time." And she got to my name.

I said, "There my name." And she went on and wrote me some kind of little old thing to take back out there.

"Now you won't have to ever go back out there to vote."

I said, "I wasn't supposed to go in the first place. Me and my husband stay in the same place so if I went he supposed to went."

They send me to make it inconvenient so you wouldn't vote. But we voted anyway. We went on Merle Lee's truck. Whoever go would just carry as many they could. And we got them votes in there anyway. They try and keep you from voting--getting some black people in there, you know.



Mrs. Celia Anderson at the time of her interview, June 20, 1985.

[Do you think its important to vote?]

Yeah. I think so. Really that's using your rights. And we had people to die for that. I give up [a lot] for this privilege and I think we should use it.

A lot of these young people not interested in this political stuff like they should be. They should get out there, because they'll be the ones that'll be holding down these jobs in the future. Try to help. They supposed to mix it up. Really I would love it mixed and everybody work together.■

Charles Miller

Interview by Coleeta Jackson
Transcribed by Coleeta Jackson and Emilye Crosby
Edited by Jessica Crosby

I got to know and appreciate Charlie Miller the same way you will, through his words and stories, and without the added pleasure of sitting down and hearing him in person. When I first listened to his interview on tape, I knew that he was James Miller's father, but nothing else. Several hours later, I had been transported around the world and back in time.

"I had been transported around the world and back in time."

He told stories about growing up and drowning before he learned to swim; about church and revivals; about school and hunting. I laughed when he told how he bought ice cream, not only for his future wife, but for her grandmother, too. He knew how to court. I listened fascinated as Mr. Miller told about farming, cutting logs, working the night shift at Port Gibson Oil Works, working on the Trace and on the Mississippi River. He took me to North Africa and Italy for World War II, and taught me what it meant to return to Port Gibson as a veteran. Listening to stories about the civil rights movement in Port Gibson, I appreciated the many struggles and sacrifices.

As a historian, I can't get enough of Mr. Miller and the other men and women who speak to us through I AIN'T LYING. Their stories more than fill in the gaps often missing in more traditional history. Historical events and times that we've read about take on a life of their own and are filled with the excitement that accompanies individual people and their lives. But even more important, it is through the words and stories of Charlie Miller and others that we can understand our past and shape our future.

--Emilye Crosby

"I didn't know nothing about my people. My daddy died before I was born, they told me."

I was born in Jefferson County, Lorman, Mississippi on January 19, 1912. There was a plantation called the Baker's Place--I do not know who own it now, but at that time it was Baker--on the same road what going to Fellowship now. You know where the drive-in theater is? Well, the road used to be on that side of that, you know, going south. They done change now down this way, but it wasn't nothing but gravel road then.

You know, I didn't know nothing about my people. My daddy died before I was born, they told me. My auntie raised me. She raised three of us together. Two boys and one girl. I was 18 years old before I knowed I had any other people than them three people. My aunt and the other two people was raised with me.

The first [school] I went to was Fellowship Church. Wasn't no school then, was church, see. We had a teacher, Beau Snodgrass. You had to get your lesson, he made sure of that. He lay you 'cross his lap and tighten those britches, you know, and had a switch called a rattan vine. And you has to get that lesson. A superjack vine. It's a vine grow in the woods.

[Did you work?]

Did I work? Man, what you talking about? I come to school I wore overalls and a shoe they called a scout shoe. And when we came from school, we pull them clothes off and go to field in the summertime. You know, in the spring of year [we] knock stock. In the fall of the year we pick cotton.

[What was the most exciting thing that happened to you when you were little?]

I like to got drowned. We went swimming in Coles Creek. And I saw those men, you know, just laid back on their back swimming. I tried it too. And I just went on down. I was about 12, I imagine.

Another fellow caught me. He was a grown man. See, it wasn't over his head. He just wade out there and caught me.

[Did you go swimming after that?]

Oh yeah. I went on and learnt. I didn't quit.

[When did you learn to hunt?]

I been hunting ever since I was a kid. When I was staying in Jefferson County about 10 or 12 of us boys get together. We didn't have no gun, [just]

a stick, but everybody had a dog. And when the dog jump the rabbit he wellst to come on get in us bag. For we gonna get him. He went in the ground we gonna dig him out. And if he went in a tree we gonna smoke him out or twist him out. He didn't get away. See, the dog would jump him, see. It was about 10 or 12 of us boys but we had a rule now, I don't care who's dog catch the rabbit, the first boy made it to him, get 'em. That was his rabbit, see. Didn't care who dog caught him. We didn't have gun the first. Stick. He come from here to that car he wellst to lay down, 'cause we gonna break off a leg with that stick.

[Who taught you to hunt?]

Nobody we just did it ourself.

[How old were you when you got your first gun?]

I was in my teens.

[What did you hunt?]

We hunt rabbit, deer. Coon at night. Possum.

[Did you eat what you hunt?]

Yes, that what we hunting for. That's what we had to survive.

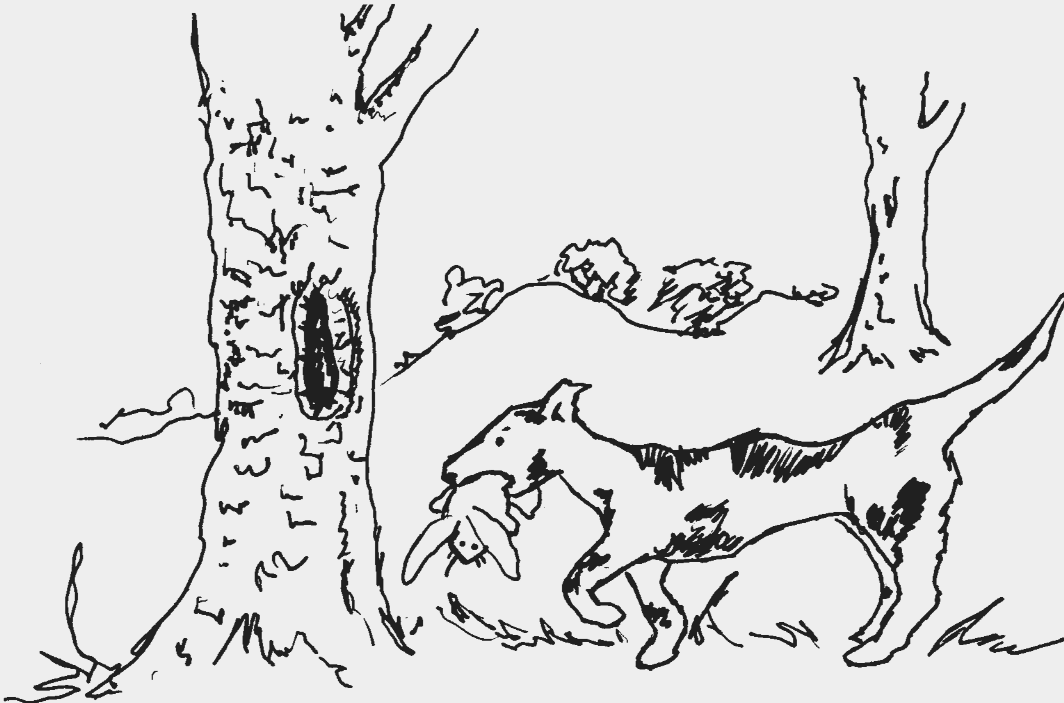
[When did you join the church?]

I joined church in the thirties. 'Cause I came up here in April in the thirties, April 24th, 25th, somewhere about in there.

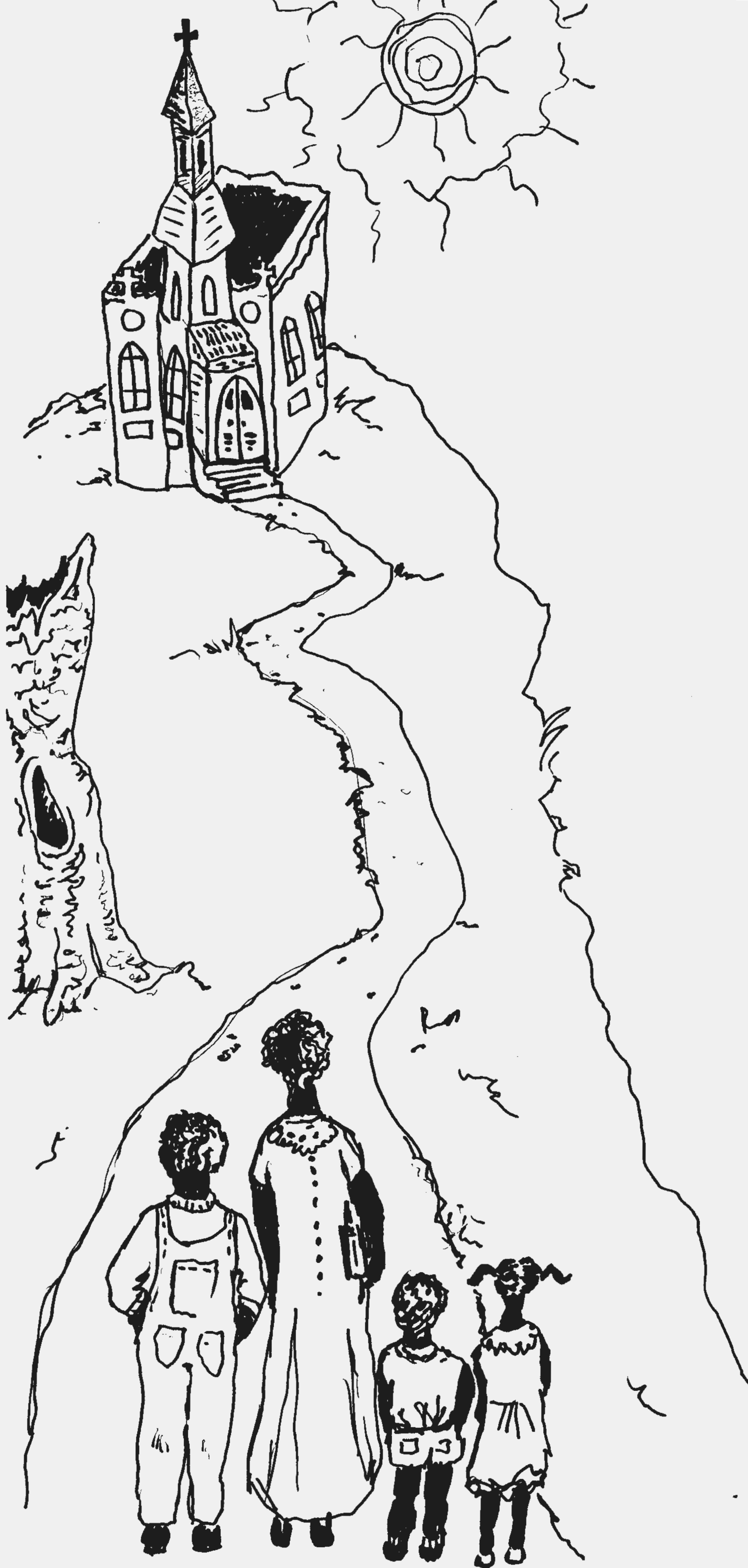
I joined Come and See up here in Ingleside. Come and See Number 1. Then I left there and went to Jerusalem out here on the Grand Gulf Road. Jerusalem, that the name of it. That's the one. I went to that church there.

[Did you go to a church when your auntie was raising you?]

Yeah. We'd walk. Only way we had to go was walk. It's like that song said them boys used to sing in the army, said they's 'Walking Doughboy.'



"But we had a rule now, I don't care who's dog catch the rabbit, the first boy made it to him, get 'em."



"If it wasn't for the Pacific Ocean,
We'd walk into Tokyo."

That's the only way you had to go. Walk. Wasn't no riding. Them there folks, I call 'em big shots, you know, they'd have a horse and buggy. We didn't have no way to ride, man. Walk everywhere you go.

Back in them times, they called the meeting. Everybody would cook and carry a basket. They didn't have it at night like they do now. It was in the daytime. When 12 o'clock come them old sisters would set them tables. They trying to push, make you join church.

It run like a week or maybe some of them run two weeks, but after that two weeks over you didn't go everyday. You go on Sunday, whenever your pastor' day was, he come on Sunday, like first Sunday, second Sunday, third Sunday. You go then.

But every church would do that. Used to have a week, two weeks to run. It let out and then the other would run. And them folks would go church and the only way they had to go was walk. Them old ladies would tie those dresses up and have on some old piece of shoe. You get like from here down to that house there. They stop then and have a rag--wipe dust off the leg and things--put they shoes, stocking on and go on to church. I ain't lying. That's the truth.

[Do you think it's important to go to church?]

Sure. It's important for everybody, if you a Christian. The book say, the Bible say, "A tree is known by the fruit it bear." Now, I'd say that's all a church is for is to show the people here on earth what side you on, 'cause that church ain't gonna save you. You know that.

[What's gonna save you?]

Your heart. You got a true, pure heart in your body, you'll make it. That's right.

[What was it like when you first went out on your own?]

Oh, it was tough. I pulled corn. You know, with the men. When I was between 12 and 18 years old. And I came to Claiborne County in April. I farmed for 5 years with my kin people here. After then, I went to work by the day, you know. Cutting logs, cutting timber--went cutting timber with a crosscut saw. Two men. One on one end and one on the other end of it. Pulling it, see, for $1.50 a day. I got a raise from a $1.50 to $1.75 from $1.75 to $2.00--and that was the limit. I cut logs then from 1936, that's when social security came out, until 1940, when I went back to farming.

[Who did you cut logs with?]

Oh, different people. The first man I cut logs with was Hugh Anderson. And I cut logs for Thomas Travillion. Cut logs for Tom Norwood--all of them. When I left that in 1941, I went back to farming. I farm '41 and '42. I went in the army. World War II.

[Did you volunteer?]

No indeed! I didn't volunteer for nothing! No ma'am.

[Who was on the draft board when you were drafted, do you know?]

No, I sure don't. But my mama told me, said, "If you marry, you gonna get put in the army." You know, I married on 22nd of November and the 2nd of December I was in the army. And that's the truth. Didn't waste no time. That was in '42.

I went in North Africa. I landed in Casablanca. That's where we got off the ship at--Casablanca--left Casablanca and went to the old land. Africa. Stayed there a while and then we went to Naples, Italy. When we left there, we was headed to the Pacific. After the Germans gave up over there, they said it was two down and one to go. We had to go down in the Pacific and get Tojo. We had done got Mussolini and Hitler, see. We had to go get Tojo then.

"We had done got Mussolini and Hitler, see. We had to go get Tojo then."

[Were there black men and white men in the army where you were?]

Yes, after I volunteered for the combat. But when we unloading them ship, wasn't but all colored, see. We was all mixed up when I got in the fighting outfit.

[Which did you prefer? Unloading the ships or...?]

Oh no. I left that. I had got tired of working. And Uncle Sam said you got to work or fight. So I volunteered. See now, the 2nd Division came over there, wanted replacement. Man, I just lucky, though. The Lord was with me. It some boys right here in Port Gibson--the outfit I left--they went on down in the Pacific. I was here 6 months before they got here.

We was on our way. We left Italy on 7th of July and, you know, the government, they dropped them two bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. And they give up. And the captain that boat, the captain come out and blowed his whistle.

He said, "Boys, the war is over. We going home." Didn't nobody want

"Man, we done changed course. The sun in the rear of the ship now."

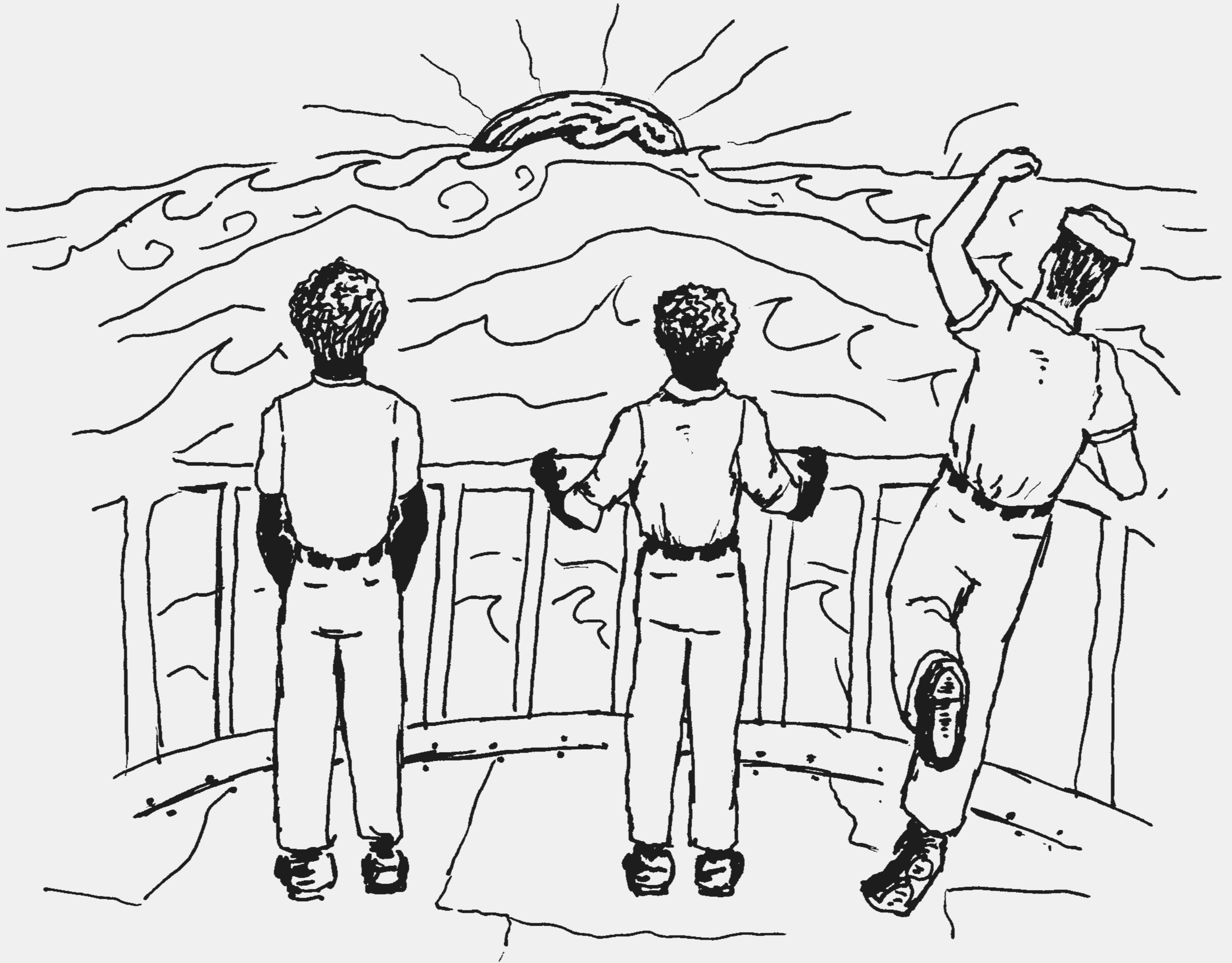
to believe him. I got those pictures up there now. Show you. We were going on. There were 7000 on the ship, 7000 of us. The boys said, "We ain't going home, that an old army rumor."

So 'bout an hour after that--see, we was going as the sun was facing us--and somebody said, "Man, we done changed course. The sun in the rear of the ship now." And it's the truth. When they found out we was coming home, for about an hour you couldn't hear nothing. They hugging one another. Throwing they hats overboard.

And we came on to New York, then. All over the port. "Well done. Welcome home." We got off there. Everybody came to where they was inducted. We came on to Camp Shelby, stayed over night there and came home on furlough. Before the time was out they extensioned our furlough. I told my wife, "Well, I'm gonna get out when I go back now." So I did, went on back and got discharged. I was in 92nd (division) when I got overseas. But when I was here I was in the 9th Cavalry at Fort Clark, Texas.

[Who else was in the Army about your age?]

It's one boy died--D.C. Edward. It



one live over here living now, S.C. Low. Another one called Ernest Walker. All them, they here in Port Gibson. Now Ernest Walker, like I'm telling you, he went on down the Pacific, see. I come to Port Gibson there wasn't a soldier here. That's true. I was the first one made it back. You know I did not know what I was doing, I just said I'm a leave this outfit. I'm a volunteer for combat duty. You know when the war is over, the combat duty is going to be the first thing come home. Them guys working going to be over there cleaning up, you know. I was here.

[What year did you get out?]

Forty-five. I stayed overseas 18 months. I stayed in the army 2 years, 10 months, and 17 days.

[Eighteen months overseas? What place did you like best when you were overseas?]

All them country over there look good to me. Africa a nice looking country. And also Italy. I didn't make but two country. But I was glad I didn't see no more, cause I was headed down in the Pacific. I didn't like that country down there. I see them folks cutting their way through the jungles with knives and things. I didn't want none of that.

But over there in Italy and Africa, you know, you can see it, open land. I liked that better. With them jungle, I could see them big old snakes and things down in there. I said, "Lord, have mercy. I don't want to go down there." When Uncle Sam said two down and one to go, y'all got to go down there, some of those guys been down there for two years. They wanted to come home and then go, you see. Uncle Sam say no, but the Lord was with us, see.

[Did you like living on ship?]

Yes, I liked it all right. When I was going over, I didn't know when we was gone. I was on KP down in the kitchen, you know, peeling Irish potatoes, and I come up on deck. I couldn't see no land nowhere. That true.

[What was the most exciting thing happened to you when you were in the army?]

Let me see. The most exciting thing. I got a scar right up there over one of my eyes right now. See I was in Texas. We had them horses. To keep from make them hikes and reveille and retreat, I went to shoeing horses, see. And a horse kicked me right there. That scar up there right now. Think it over my left eye. That the most exciting thing. You know everything else went smooth.

"To keep from make them hikes and reveille and retreat, I went to shoeing horses."

[Did you get any training in the army?]

Well, I took 12 weeks training overseas for combat duty. See we wasn't doing a thing but unloading ships. I was in the cavalry and they didn't take no horses over there, see. And we was unloading ships and Uncle Sam said you had to work or fight. But I got tired of working and I signed up for combat duty. And to show you how lucky I was, when I took my basic training the Germans was coming up and coming in and giving up, and we didn't do a thing but do guard duty, see. Before we got on the Pacific the Japs gave up and I was the first solider in Port Gibson. That's right. My outfit I left went on down the Pacific cleaning

(1)
Port Gibson Miss.
April, 7 1945.
Dear Husband;
How are you to-day fine
I do hope as this leave me
Well in Health But still
with you on my mine.
Honey I rec. your sweet
letter a few Days Pass. Proud
as ever to here from you
Baby it made me feel so
good to read those
sweet lines of love from
you. Darling I could
read your letter and jus
Emagie I could see you
Baby I am Glad you hear
from Tea cup. But one

(2)
thing I Won't more then
ever. to see you now I
Don't know whate I would
do. if I could see you
Honey now. I love you
Darling remember. those
sweet Day of long ago.
Smile. Baby I sent your
ring about 3 mount ago
Before you change
address, I Guess that the
reason. you haven't got
it yet. But it haven't
come. Back. to me. so I
Will Waite a little While
and if you dont Get
it, then I Will have, Get

Rosa Lee Miller, Charlie Miller's wife, wrote him this letter while he was stationed overseas during WW II.

The envelope Mrs. Miller used to mail the letter.
Note the postmark and the 6 cent airmail stamp.

(3)

another one made and send
you, Baby I think that is
a good ideal to save our
money and Buy a home
when you come home its
all right With me, Just
any thing you say it
all right With me. I am
Doing like you tead me
to do, Rev, Brown ask me
about you at Church Sun..
I tead him you Was Well
and getting along fine. He
say that he was Glad to
here that, I told him yes
you. is getting along fine
But I Would Be Well, if

4

if you Was home. Smile.
all send love to you and
Good Luck, mama say
She show do Wont to see
you now, I Dream about
you all the time Wish I could
hole you in my arms, so
you think I could, I have
sent you a lovely Easter
Greeten Honey I am pray.
for you and you must to.
that the Lord Will Bring
us togather soon. so.
Baby I am Still Sweet
for you. all from your
Wife R. L Miller
Be sweet. Baby

Mr. Miller saved the letter and graciously allowed us to photograph it for this issue of I AIN'T LYING.

Negro Service And Supply Troops Ask And Get Line Duty

HEADQUARTERS, EUROPEAN THEATER OF OPERATIONS.—When a call for reinforcements for combat units went out last winter through the rear echelons of the European Theater, hundreds of Negro service and supply troops volunteered to become combat soldiers with a chance to fight the Germans with a rifle.

A few months ago they were unloading ships at busy French and Belgian ports, driving trucks laden with ammunition, gas and food up to the front, repairing roads and building bridges, guarding prisoners or cooking in Army mess halls.

Today, they are in foxholes along the 1st and 7th Army fronts, fighting the Germans with rifles and hand grenades and bayonets, the first Negro troops to fight shoulder to shoulder with white infantrymen in the same units in the European Theater. Reports indicate they are performing excellently.

Each of the men is a volunteer, and each had had earlier basic training in the infantry. But before they went into combat each was given a six-week refresher course with emphasis on fighting with the rifle.

A newspaper article from 1945 describing the first use of black soldiers in integrated combat units during WW II. Charlie Miller was one of the black soldiers who volunteered for combat.

up. Policing up. I was here.

[Was it hard coming back, after being in the army, to live in Claiborne County?]

No. It wasn't that tough. What I should have did was come and get my wife and left on away from here. See I'd a got a job anywhere I wanted at that time, see. But no, I come here and went to farming good. I liked the army all right. But I didn't like it well enough for to stay. When we came home and went back to Camp Shelby, man told me about we better stay in here. "Boy, there ain't anything out in that world." I say, "Man, you can save that breath. I'm getting out of here." He was telling the truth.

"I carried her to [the] ice cream parlor, gave her some ice cream. Bought her grandmother some."

[What made you decide to come back here from the army and stay?]

Well, see, my wife. She had her mother--wasn't nobody but her and her mother. Wasn't nobody living here but my mother, see. My mama said don't leave. Don't go. [And] my wife said, "I can't leave Mama." See, and I just give up.

[What was your wife's name?]

Rosie.

[How did you meet your wife?]

I knew her, but I ain't had no, you know, contact with her. I met her on the street in Port Gibson one time. Her and her grandmother was up in town. I carried her to [the] ice cream parlor, gave her some ice cream. Bought her grandmother some. From then on...(laughter). But that been many a moon. Cause I'm 77. I married November '42.

When I came back and farmed, I farmed out here on 547. On a place they call Disharoon Plantation. I was farming off a mule, at first. When I sold the mule, I done bought me a tractor and went to farming. One year I made 17 bales of cotton. One year I made 25.

I farm at day and work at the oil mill at night. Port Gibson Oil Works. I had a job called seed cleaning. You sitting there--just like it's a big hole. You all have seen a sifter where you sift the meal? Shake just like that but its wide--I'd say about 4 feet wide and about 6 feet long. Well the cotton seed would be falling in that thing, see and you shake the trash out of them. That was my job, watch that, keep from choking up. I worked up there 10 years at night.

Made about 40 dollars a week. That's true. Forty dollars a week. That's all. Yes, at that time, you see, every thing was cheap. Back at that

time, a gallon of gas cost you 15 cents a gallon.

I worked at different places. I worked on the Natchez Trace three years, cleaning up. Worked on the River--a quarter boat. Now, they don't work but two or three months. That's when the river's down, that's when they can work on the river. When the water's up they can't work, see.

We laid matts, concrete slabs. Put it on the bank, you know, that to keep the bank from caving. Just like a curve in the river. Well see that water be coming right, be cutting that bank. The grading unit, they would come out, they go in front of the boat and grade them banks down. Level them up. And then we come on behind them and lay the matts. But the biggest work you do is in the curve, in the bend in the river, see. When the river straight, it don't do too much caving. But right on the curve that water be coming out, and make it be turning, and it'll just cut that bank, just cave off.

I liked that good. I wish I was out there now. [laughter]. Then you make that money. Yes indeed. See you never did work under 11 hours [a day]. That's right. That money roll up there when you get that overtime.

[So how much were you making per hour?]

I was bringing home--see, we come home every two, they pay off every two weeks--I was bringing five to six hundred dollars home. I had never made that much money before in my life. I miss it now. You didn't have to carry a thing but your razor and your tooth brush and comb. They furnish everything else. You stay on that boat, see. Yeah, we had it made.

But they don't work nothing pretty much but veterans on [the] Trace. But now on the boat they work anybody. But the veteran, they hire them first.

That's the last job I had for the government. I came home and had a heart attack, see. So, my doctor here, when my letter from the river came, he told me, said, "I wouldn't advise you to go back this year. You go next year." And I said, "Doc, if I can't go this year, I don't never want to go." So he said, "I'm going to sign you up for disability." I'm on disability.

But when I first started out, that was hard. A dollar, you try making it, a dollar and a half a day. All day now from seven to six. A dollar and a half. Course every thing was cheap, you know.

[When was the first time you got to vote?]

In '66 or '67 one. I think it was. I couldn't vote until then. They didn't allow you to vote. It wasn't no black folks voting. No indeed.

[What brought about the change?]

Well, when Charles Evers came in here, what was that, '66. Somewhere along in there. We could register to vote. But before then you didn't register. You couldn't vote. That's right.

Did you ever do any marching or anything?]

Never did. I couldn't march with him see. When they putting them dogs, shooting that water, I couldn't have stood that, see. I wouldn't march. Oh, I was with him 100 per cent, but I didn't want

"I was bringing five to six hundred dollars home. I had never made that much money before in my life."

"You teach a child something, it be a long time before they go against that...

that marching stuff. Man, somebody come hitting me and slapping me, you know, I'd dropped an atomic bomb if I'd a had it. That's true. Truth of the light. It was dangerous. Look them people come in here, what they call 'em, Road Patrol. And they had them meeting, you know. They beat one man and he dead now, Horace Lightfoot. Right there in Port Gibson. He had a little shop there. And they beat him up that night. And he ain't never get over it.

[Why did they beat him up?]

Cause he, you know, participating in that Civil Rights stuff. That's what its all about.

[Was it hard for you to be in the army fighting for your country and then come back to Port Gibson and not be able to vote?]

Un-huh. I didn't think about that then. I didn't think about no voting or nothing like that see. I had never woke up. See, had nobody wake me up to nothing.

That's the reason we thought the white men was our superior."

[When did you wake up?]

I told you. When Charles Evers came in here. That's right. See a child can't do no better than he taught, he don't know no more than what he taught, see. You see, when they brought us over here from Africa, the white man taught us what we know. He cooked some bread. He cooked some bread and burnt it real burnt, you know. Then he cooked some nice brown bread. Okay, he give me a piece burnt bread and I chewed it up. I didn't like that. No good. Okay. He gave me some of that brown bread. That was good. He told me that black bread was me and the brown bread was him, see. If you a kid, you believe that, don't you? You don't know no better. You know burnt black bread taste bad. Well, that's me. "That's you, Joe." He took that good bread and let me taste that. That's better. That was good. So that was him. That grew up in you. He was more than I am. Hell, he better than me, see. That what come about.

[Were there other things you were taught to make you think that way?]

No, what I mean. That wasn't me. That was when they first brought--see they went to Africa and got us. They get a ship out there, give 'em food and played that music and get a load on and sailed on off with them and brought them over here. That's the time they come to teaching 'em what they know, see. You teach a child something, it be a long time before they go against that. That's right. Yes sir. That's the reason we thought the white men was our superior. See he was over us. We wasn't good as him. You get a little kid right now can't talk or nothing, and go to teaching him

something, he going to believe what you tell him.

[How did Evers turn your mind around? How did he wake you up?]

Well, he showed me points that I had done come through--I had experienced myself, see. When I had something to see, I could see through that, what he was telling me was good.

[What things did he point out to you that you had come through?]

Well, just like I'm telling you now, I working out there for 50 cents a hour, a white man making a dollar fifty a hour, you see. I could see that. And I get on the bus I have to get up and go to the back of the bus, see. I'm in line here, maybe at the Post Office getting mail. Here come a white man behind me. What you want Mr. So-and-So? I had that to happen right there in Port Gibson Post Office. Course it been a good while ago.

Captain Bagnell was the high sheriff. That was back in the '30's or early '40's. We line up there. Captain Bagnell walk in, the lady behind the Post Office there, "What you want Captain?"

"These here in front of me." That's what he told her. He said, "These in front of me." Sure did. Right up here in the Courthouse.

You know Doss? Well, the first year he got elected tax assessor, the people was lined up getting their tags. Kenny Vaughn and Mr. Mott went up there. Well, they want to get in front of everybody else but the boy that wait on them, see, he didn't do that, see. Well, they had him put in jail.

And the governor had them to turn him loose. Governor Waller had him turn out. Turn him loose. That's the reason Mr. Mott ain't our supervisor right now. He was the supervisor. He had been there long as he wanted. But when he went there messing with Doss, by that the folks didn't vote for him no more.

Charlie Miller makes a point to Coleeta Jackson.

[Your son James ran for supervisor, right?]

Yeah, sure did. He losed out. He couldn't have run then [when I was young]. Wasn't no colored supervisors. Nothing. Its been a big change. Back in those time [when] I was a boy--the age that James is now--you couldn't run for no supervisor, nothing else. 'Cause he couldn't vote.

[How different is it now?]

A whole lot different. A 100 per cent different.

[What's the biggest change since you were little?]

Well, everything is changed now. If you got the money you can get what you want. Used to, had the money you couldn't get everything you wanted.

"If you black, they ask you whose car, you better said it your bossman. That's true."

You wasn't suppose to have it. Just say for instance, you had a nice car like the car you got there, and it certain places you go, and if you didn't tell it was your bossman's car, they take it away from you. I ain't kidding.

Yes, if you black, they ask you whose car, you better said it your bossman. That's true. Now people may hear me say that and don't believe it.

I tell you something else right down here in Fayette, MS, in Jefferson County. Years ago, if you go to town with a white shirt on, I'm telling you, run you out of town. Because you wasn't suppose to have it on if you're black. And another thing. You go in that bank, if you didn't pull [your hat] off you didn't get waited on. You wait hours and they say, "Ain't you forgot something?" You had to go pull this off when you hit that door. I'm telling you. Yes sir. So, it been a big change.

[Did you build this house you're living in?]

This here. No. It was, another fellow built it. I was working on the river when he built this thing for a cafe, they call it. That's what. I was on the river and my wife was running it see. Miller's Cafe, they called it.

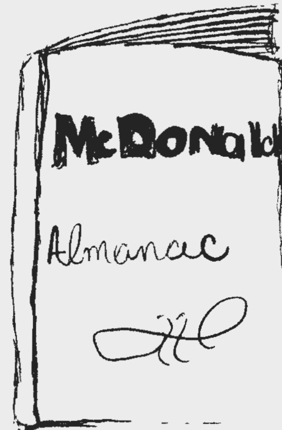
[Do you garden?]

Yes. I raised some stuff last year. Peas, okra. That's the things I planted. You go by the moon. If you want [to] plant something--I don't care what it is, unless its something grow under the ground--you plant your stuff 'bout two or three days before the moon full. If its going to field above the ground. If its a sweet potato or something [you plant] on the dark of the moon.

[Do you think that helps?]

It do help. If you think I'm telling a story you just go out there, on a young moon and plant something. Plant you some mustard. Plant you stock of corn, anything. And then wait till about three or four days [before] that moon full and plant you some mustard and then watch it, see what make the best. You can plant mustard on a young moon and it'll come up and go right on to seed. Blooming. And you can plant on three days after the moon supposed to be full and it'll grow big wide leaves. That's true.

[How did you learn to plant by the moon?]



Well my old folk taught me that--my aunt what raise me. And then I get's me the McDonald Almanac. Now it tell you what days to plant. Tell you what days to set hens. What days to kill weed. What days to wean babies. All that's in that McDonald's. That what I go by. I got collards right out there now. Everybody around here, they died. Mine looking pretty out there.

[How long have you had hogs?]

I have been raising hogs ever since I been in farming. I call 'em, they come. I keep 'em under control. I train 'em when they are little things like that. When you feed 'em, see, you call 'em. Say, "Come on," they come.

[How do you feel about life in general today?]

Life sweet now. Wish I could turn back the hand of time. Everything so, you know, so free now. Nobody wants for nothing. Get everything you want. A kid don't get an education now, he just don't want it. 'Cause he ain't got nothing to worry about. Bus run right by here everyday. Go down there to Watson, Port Gibson. He down there in a brick building. Gas heat in it. Getting a free lunch, free book. My auntie had to buy my book. She wasn't able to get them all. If a kid don't get it now, it's his own fault. That's true.

That's [the] reason I work so hard trying to put my children through school. They graduated. They got their masters. The girl got her masters in Ames, Iowa. The boy got his in Ann Arbor, Michigan. The other boy got his in Boston, Massachusetts. Just like I say, if he don't get it, its just his own fault. They ain't got nothing to hinder 'em from getting it.■

Charlie Miller displays his family pictures: (l-r), Rosa Garner Miller, his wife; Lillie "Ma Tin" Smith (inset), his mother; James, Carolyn, and Don, his children; and Willie B. Jackson, his wife's aunt. Also pictured are a grandson, Hasani (between James and Carolyn), and Don's wife Joycelyn (inset with Don).

Lydell Page

Interview by Stephanie West and Sheila Moses
Transcribed by Mary Keller, Sheila Moses, and Jessica Crosby
Edited by Dana Schraufnagel

Lydell Page at the Page family reunion, held on July 8, 1983, at the Alcorn Community Park.

Mr. Page was a man full of history. He told I AIN'T LYING students about his struggle to get an education and make a living in the early 1900's. He also told us about the difficulties he had as one of the first black voters in Port Gibson.

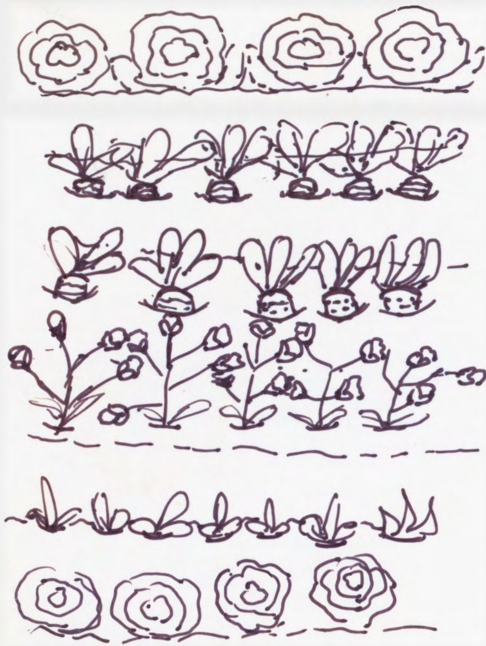
He worked many jobs but he was best known for his paper hanging. He papered some of the beautiful old homes that are part of Port Gibson's history.

Religion played a big part in his life. In the church he was known as a "doer." He was secretary for the Christian Missionary state convention for thirty years and was secretary of the local church for a number of years.

He was a past worshipful master of Port Gibson Masonic Lodge #21 and a member of the board of the Claiborne County Community Health Center. He was also active in the American Legion, the NAACP and the Southwestern Mental Health Board. In 1987 the Southwestern Mental Health Commission paid tribute to Mr. Page by dedicating an office building to him, naming it the L.J. Page Mental Health Office Building.

Mr. Page lived with his wife, Vera, in the Pine Grove community until his death on September 14, 1986. He was a great role model for people growing up today. He struggled and made something good of himself during some rough times. He was truly a man to be admired.

--Dana Schraufnagel



[I was born] in Claiborne County on May 23rd, 1908. Life was rough, tough, during that period. That was in the early 1900's--things were cheap. Labor was cheap. Most the folk in this area where I was born, they were farmers and we had to beat the bushes to make a living. We had cotton, corn, peas, potatoes, you name [it]. And we raised garden. That's during my early age coming up. It was rough.

[Where did you go to school?]

Well, I first went to a school at Watson Chapel. That was over here near Russum. Just across the road from the Watson Chapel Church, there used to be a school under those oaks over there. It was a school set over there on the side of the road. That's where I first went to school.

An old man called William Price was the principal down there and he was a teacher, too. He was rough. He was one of those teachers that it was the rule, when you come in the school, to sit down at your desk. You knew where you was gonna sit. Then when you go there the next day you were going to sit in that seat. You wasn't going to talk, you wasn't talking to nobody unless you ask him first. "May I speak?" And if he said no, you better not speak. He was one of those that whipped you at school. They didn't wanna tell you, "You better stop or I'm going to report you," or what not. When you know anything they'll be on you with that strap.

""May I speak?" And if he said no, you better not speak."

They had straps at that time in school, about two feet long. And when you know anything they'll be coming down across your head, face, back anywhere with it, and you weren't going to talk either, that's one thing, and you was going to sit there.

And your lesson, you had to get them at that time. And if he gave you an assignment, if you didn't get that assignment, you were gonna have to sit up in that corner with your face against the wall. You couldn't face the people, you know, the other people. You had to face the wall.

At times they had it so you had to stand on one foot. You would get tired of that, you know. Sometimes you'd go to shift and they would ask you, "Did I tell you to change?"

He was a tough principal in school, and you was going to be at school on time. At that time they was riding in buggies or horseback to school, but he was a buggy man. And he was going to be at school when time for school to open. The people wasn't going to be there and he coming in. He was going

to be there and you come in.

There wasn't a lot of noise like you hear in the schools today. When you come in you was quiet. When you come in you wasn't going to be hollering, laughing, talking, swinging and what not.

[Did you walk to school?]

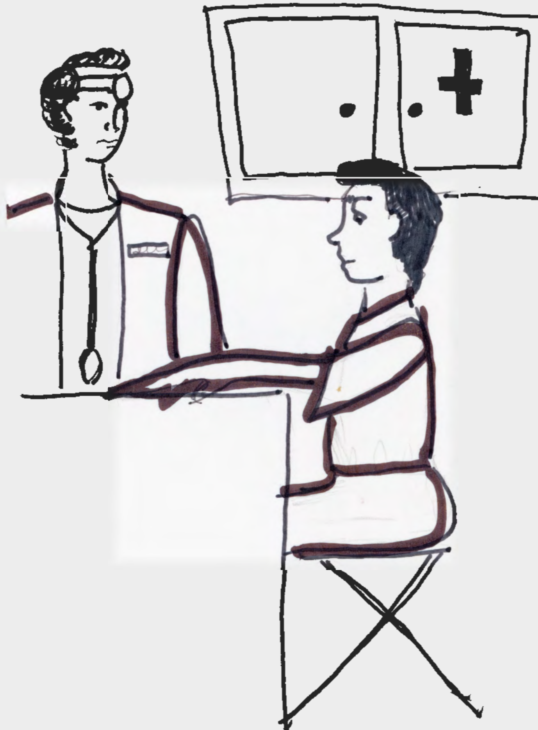
Over there I had about two miles to walk. When I was ten years old, in 1918, we moved down here to this plantation [on Gordon Station Road]. That house right down the road where Price and them live. My daddy bought that house. And we moved there. That house had 60 acres of land with it that he bought. Then I went to Pine Grove to school. I had to walk from here to Pine Grove to school. That distance is not a full mile. No more than a mile, if it's a mile.

[Who was your teacher at Pine Grove?]

I had several teachers at Pine Grove. I had Roaster Brown. Mrs. Georgia Franklin was our principal there. They had a two-teacher school at that time at Pine Grove.

After I left Pine Grove--I'm giving you a little history of mine. I left in the eighth grade. I didn't finish that year. I stopped before graduation time. I was fifteen years old then. I left and went over in Lousiana. I got to be a man, you know. My daddy, he was kind of [a] rough citizen. One of those tight fathers. At that time he drank a little, and he was kind of rough with my mama, you know. One of those men that fought women. So, I didn't like it too well. So, rather than to get into it with him I left home. Went into Louisiana and started working in the sawmill. That was in 1923. And I left from there and went up to Greenville, from there down to Terry, Mississippi working in sawmills. I finally left Terry and come on back to Vicksburg and started to work at a cafe there in Vicksburg. I got sick and went in the hospital and my father, this man I left, had to come get me and I came home and they decided that I [should] go back to school.

And I went to what is called SCI [Southern Christian Institute], Mount Beulah College, out here in Edwards [Mississippi]. Henry Earl Jennings, we were out there together. I was out there from '26 through '29. Then, I got two fingers cut off in manual training class. I was hospitalized in Vicksburg



"I got two fingers cut off in manual training class."

for that. The [school] didn't pay the hospital bill. So they had it charged to me. It was four or five hundred dollars, which was a lot of money during that time. I didn't pay, so I couldn't go back there to school. Then I came on back to Port Gibson. I begun to go to Claiborne County Training School. So I was there

through the eleventh grade.

"I did learn to read. And I was pretty fair on that arithmetic."

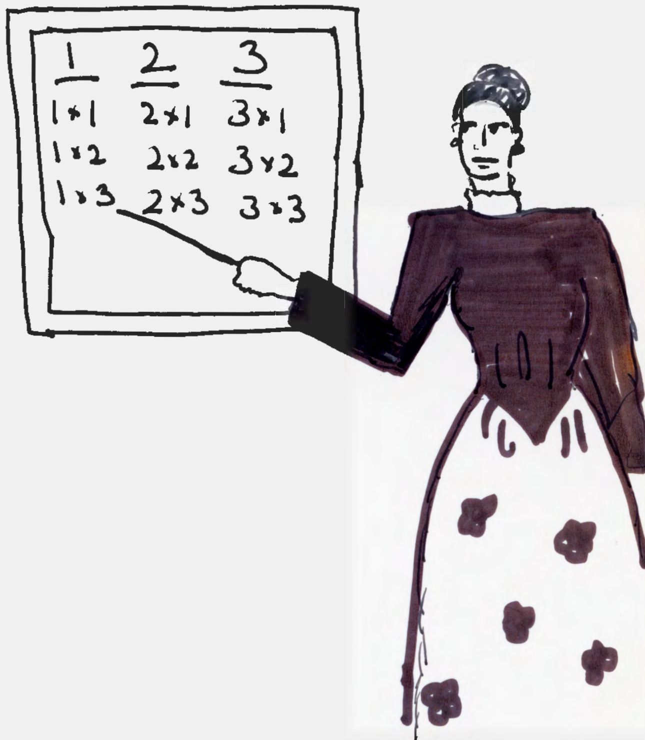
[Who were your teachers at the Claiborne Training School?]

I had Mrs. Watson, you know. Junior Watson--who is principal over there [Watson Junior High]--now his mother, she was one of my teachers. I had Professor Johnson. He's dead now. He was the principal at that time. He was one of my teachers. I had so many different teachers I wouldn't be able to call them now, but those were two of my main teachers.

[What was your favorite subject when you were in school?]

We had three subjects: reading, writing, and arithmetic. When you could master that, you know, you got your grades. Then a lot of us couldn't write too good. I can't write too good today. I did learn to read.

And I was pretty fair on that arithmetic. The arithmetic in that day



was much different from the arithmetic today. What is it called today? Mathematics? I did have algebra when I got in high school. At that time you know you had to learn your tables--one times one, and two times two, and three times three. That's what you learned first. Then, when you were able to master that, you began to try to solve your problems. But today they're trying to solve their problems and don't know how to multiply one times one, two times two. Now I tell you, how can [a student] solve a problem when he doesn't know how to multiply with tables. That's complicated to me. But when we got to say, third and fourth grade, we were able to master time tables.

ABC's. You had to learn them first. You had to know your ABC's. You had to know them by heart. Then you had to know the letters when you saw them. That's in your early school age.

[What games did you play?]

In school? I was a tennis player. Tennis was the only athletic playing that I did. Well, we didn't do too much football playing at that time in high school. And you take basketball, it hadn't got started at school at that time when I was coming along, but we had a tennis coach there. I did play tennis. Right where Richardson [Primary School] is now. It was several of us playing, Odessa Johnson, Beatrice Lee, Edward Lee, (you know, him that had the store--they're closed down now.) Marguerite Thompson. All of us played tennis. Sometimes I won and sometimes I lost. I wasn't no professional. I wasn't too much of an amateur. We just played, that's all.

[What were your parents' names?]

My father was Frank Page. My mother was Liddie Martin Page. My father's father was Willis Page. My father's mother was named Lucy Clark. Mother's father was named Martin and my mother's mother was Rachel Martin.

[Where did you met your wife?]

I was a burial insurance writer for Thompson Funeral Home for about twenty-five or thirty years on the side. I did that as a part-time job. It was just certain days I had to go do that. I was a paper hanger by trade. I always took paper hanging jobs by the job and I could collect my burial insurance, cause I had certain days. I was collecting burial insurance and her mother, was one of my members. She had a husband. They had separated. She had four children and I went to her mother's to collect insurance. And, as I said, she and her husband had separated and she had moved back home. And I met her. She came out and introduced herself and we kept meeting and finally she got a divorce from her husband and then she told me she wanted me to marry her. She needed a husband (laughter) and I seemed like the very best choice she oughta have. So finally, we married. As I said she had four children, that's something ain't it. A man marrying her with four children.

Lydell Page's father, Frank Page (center), with Hamp Hutchenson and Ike Wells.

Lydell Page's maternal grandmother, Rachael Wallace Martin, in a photo from the family album.

[What was it like when you first went out on your own?]

Man, it was kinda rough then when I first went out on my own. You ask about meeting my wife. Now, I didn't tell you I had been married previous myself. And that's when I went out on my own, when I married the first girl. It was rough then. She was going to Alcorn, then. And I was furrowing, you might say, trying to make some corn and cotton and peas and what not. Small farmer. I didn't have no team. Just starting out. So it was rough with her. Trying to

support her up in school and support a house too. So we found a little house down the road there and we moved down here in it. And we scuffled. I mean it was hard. You know sometimes I didn't have nothing much to eat. I tried to be industrious and I made good gardens and what not. I would do what I could, little jobs, you know to kinda help along. At that time they were putting this [Hwy.] 61 through and I worked out there a few months, maybe two months. Twenty cents an hour, I believe. Support a home on 20 cents an hour.

Finally, I worked with her father. As I say farming, making cotton. He sold butter beans, flat beans, various other things. We'd sell 'em. He added what he could. That did help me some. It was rough with me during the early years but I made it.

[What other work have you done?]

After I stopped school I took up paper hanging and painting. I did that off and on until 1966. About thirty-five years that I hung paper and painted. When I started out I worked with a old man called Frank Redman. He was an old paper hanger in Port Gibson. I started out with him and another younger man called Johnnie Loab Weathers.

He was kind of rough with me. We were hanging paper and he had me hired and went in to paper a house there in Port Gibson. He carried me there and showed me what we had to do in the room. We had the paper. We tore the paper off and we canvassed it and he goes to the folk and gets the money, gets all the money what they was going to pay us for

Lydell Page standing in front of wallpaper he hung 40 years ago in the old Disharoon place on Church Street in Port Gibson (now Gibson's Landing, a bed and breakfast). The paper has since been replaced.

papering the room.

The next morning he didn't come to work. I goes in and I had to finish papering that room. And I papered that room thinking that I was going to get the money when I got through. And when I got through papering it, the man told me that Loab done got it. Loab has gotten the money already.

So then I went to him asked him for my part of the money. So he told me he had spend it, and he had to pay me later. I didn't get anything for papering that room. And from that day on I began to paper, you know, to go out and contract for myself.

I papered from then on. And you may ask anybody around Port Gibson--white, black, red, blue, any kind--about my papering. There are some papering right now that I did forty years ago and it right there. One of them was called the old Disharoon House. It is a winding stairs. It has a beautiful flowered paper on there. I papered that hall stairway. Well, you might say I papered the whole room and stairway for Mrs. Nancy Rie Barland. She works over there at the Co-op. I papered that room for her to get married, and she has grandchildren now. That paper is still on that wall. It's several more around that I did in those old ante-bellum homes. That's work.

I had to stop painting because I was asthmatic. My last job I did was in April of '66. I took sick on this job on a colored fellow's house, right up the road here. (Black, word we use now.) And I left my ladders and everything right there and they stayed there, I guess, a month or more than that, because I went in the hospital and I stayed in there about three months. I haven't done any labor or what you might call work since. That is for hire. I've worked around the house--mow the yard. I had a few cattle. I saw after them. I retired on disability from Veterans and also on social security. Since then I been piddling 'round here.

The asthma took me in 1929. I been had it every since. It would leave, come back. I went in the service when I was 34 years old, in 1942, and it came back on me in 1943. It's been on me every since. It haven't left me anymore.

[Were you drafted or did you volunteer at that age?]

Well now, that's a, story. During that time defense jobs, that is building airplanes, anything that was being done for the government so far as defense purposes, they were scattered about in like California, New York, different places.

So I'm a big man, I said I'm gonna apply for defense job, but you couldn't apply for defense job unless you had registered for service. So I goes up and registered for service, that is, volunteer. But didn't think they was gon' take me because I had asthma and also those two fingers off.

And I went to Camp Shelby where they examine you and what not. [They] carried about fourteen of us, I believe. May of been a little bit more of us went over there. And I was in charge of them. Went over there and I'm so sure they were, you know, gon' turn me down and I could go try to get me a job in the defense department.

They took me. I reckon about six or seven of those come back. They didn't pass. And I passed. Told me in fourteen days to report back. And I went in the service. Sho 'nuff.

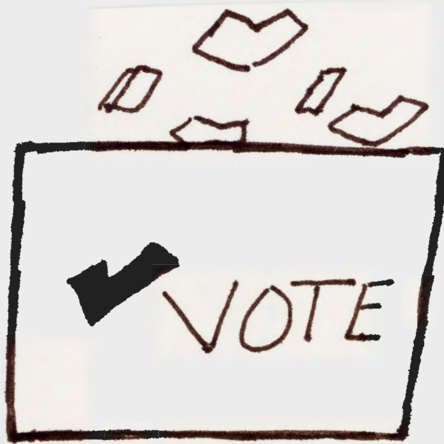
[Where did you serve then?]

I went to Camp Shelby. I left Camp Shelby and went to Camp Lee.

"So I goes up and registered for service, that is, volunteer. But didn't think they was gon' take me."

they were called camps at that time, they called forts now. I went through my basic training at Camp Lee and then I went into Officer's Training School there for a while at Camp Lee. But we moved in up at Langley Field which was an air base there. I was by night the chief foreman there to keep the boilers and everything going.

So when I left there I went to Mitchell Field. We was taking calisthenics, that is getting ready to go across, jumping ditches, climbing those ropes, fording in those bayous, and what not. That's when the asthma came back on me, and I stayed in the hospital there three months, then I was discharged. I didn't go across. I wasn't in combat at all. I made a year in service.



[When did you register to vote?]

Well, I came out of the service in June of '43. At that time, it wasn't anyone registering--at that time they wouldn't let the black register. 'Course they had a test and the test was so hard and so complicated till most blacks didn't want to take the test.

But a veteran, when you come out, the law was that he wouldn't have to take a test. See, didn't many know it, though. Didn't many veterans know about it, but I found it out. All I had to do was just go sign the book by being a veteran. Just three questions I think they asked you. Whether you believed in segregation, whether you believed in right to work, and one more question that was [to do with] the democratic platform. Those are the things that you had to do to be a democrat. So I goes up and register.

"Then he'd come down and question me as to what I believed in. Whether, you know, I was a bonafide democrat."

Each time that it was voting time I would go the poll wherever they were. They find your name on the register, then you sign the book. I was the only black, you see, that voted. They didn't let me put it [ballot] in the box, only for senators and presidents. See, it never got to the box otherwise. I couldn't vote for no local officials.

But during those periods I could cast my ballot, put it in the box, and it gone and they didn't challenge me or nothing. Because wasn't anything running but democrats, you know--I could vote for them.

But, on the local level, I would go there and sign the book. Then I'd go mark my ballot. But when I got to the box, I couldn't put it in. I couldn't put it in the box. They would challenge it. Then they would call a lawyer. Little Bobby Gage, and who else was lawyer then? Drake. They were lawyers. They called uptown to get a lawyer.

Then he'd come down and question me as to what I believed in. Whether, you know, I was a bonafide democrat. That's what they would say. Whether I believed in segregation? Whether I believed in a bill called right to work? And it was another question that they asked me along with segregation. They'd ask, "Do you believe in social mixing?" You know what that is--you're white, and I could go to your house, sit down and eat or what not. "Did I beleive in that or did I want that?"

Well, you know, I wasn't gon' say I wanted it. But I believed in it. They asked about segregation. I said this about segregation. I told 'em I said, "Now, if I didn't believe in segregation, I wouldn't be here. I wouldn't stay here in the South. I'd be gone on." At that time if you was in Chicago or California or New York or somewhere, the whites and blacks could, you know,

socialize and also marry and what not. I said, "But here," I say, "I know how it is. Therefore I'm not, you know, attaining for it or voting for it."

Said, "Well, do you believe in open housing?"-- was the other one. Right to work and free housing, you know, you could buy a house anywhere you wanted to live, anywhere you wanted a house.

So I said, "As far as the housing is concerned," I said, "if you don't want me in your neighborhood or don't want me to live there," I said, "I wouldn't go there because I know the animosity that there would be because of me moving there," I say, "And I can live."

I say, "My father was lucky enough that he'd bought a home. I have a home." I said, "I can go right out there and stay out there. I don't have to move, you know, in your neighborhood."

I said, "And so far as the right to work," I say, "I believe a person, if he's qualified, ought to be able to get a job anywhere that they're hiring. And because of my color I don't believe I ought to be discriminated against in a job. I believe in free occupation, free work."

I didn't adhere to their platform, or their creed. They challenged my vote. I couldn't put my ballot in the box. They did it the first time in '46, but I didn't stop. They did me that way every time it was election. Up until Charles Evers came through and they got [blacks] started to voting. But I went to the poll, everytime.

I don't know whether any of you know Floyd Rollins. You might. Well, he came in from Memphis. He was a school teacher and he retired, and he came in. So he went up and he took the test. And he passed it. Karl Thompson took the test. Marguerite Thompson took the test. Sadie Thompson took the test. And it was one or two more. I can't recall right now, but they all took the test and they passed it.

It was thirteen of us that was registered on the book to vote. Karl Thompson and his wife, Marguerite, they had gone up several times and tried to vote, and because they didn't let them, they didn't go back no more. But Floyd Rollins--he was out in district five, he went to Pattison--he did the same thing I did. We did it every year until '64.

And as I say our ballots were good for general elections, that is, for senators and presidents. But for any local officers, like the sheriff or the governor or representatives, my ballot wasn't any good.

[Was it easier to vote after the boycott?]

It was much easier after the boycott, it was much easier because we noticed that they did start to letting the blacks on the polls, you know, as poll workers and what not. That's why I'm saying they call me "the white man's nigger" or whatever you might call a person.

[Election officials] knew I had been going to the poll trying to vote before hand, so when it got so that they would use the blacks on the voting polls, they got me. And the black folks began to say that I was with the white man. I was working with the white man which I was not, because the white man thought I was operating in the NAACP before Charles Evers come in, way back.

I was working for a lady in Port Gibson, a white lady. I was up on the ladder, she was on the floor and she said, "Page, stop a minute," and I stopped, looked around.

"I didn't adhere to their platform, or their creed. They challenged my vote. I couldn't put my ballot in the box."

"The blacks were accusing me of being with the white man, when I was accused by the white man of leading the black."

She said, "I want to ask you a question." I said, "What is it?" She said, "We understand that you are with the NAACP." I said, "Sho 'nuff." She said, "Yeah?"

I said, "Well, now it's not a chapter here." They knew it wasn't a chapter here. But, they thought I was working for somewhere else. I said, "Its not a chapter here." I said, "I don't see any harm it it." I say, "If I'm a member in it, I don't see no harm in it."

I said, "Now, I'd like to ask you a question." She said, "What is it?" I said, "Are you a member of the Citizen Council?" [Laughter] Now that was Mrs. Greer. And I said, "Are you a member of the Citizens' Council?" And that killed that right there.

Then I had a white policeman. He was working in Port Gibson as a policeman. He came to me one night. I was going to town. I didn't live in town, but I was going to see a friend in town, and I left my truck by a filling station.

So he come to me one day and he say, "Page, I wanna tell you something, I'm a friend of yours." He says, "Don't leave your truck where you been leaving it no more." He said, "I wouldn't

leave it nowhere, because they say that you belong to the NAACP and you are working here."

That's because I go into the polls trying to vote. And so I was very appreciative of him for telling me that because he had told me this fellow--I won't call his name because he is still living and I'm living, too--he told me that the man said he was going to get me because I belonged to the NAACP.

Now this was the policeman. He came to me and told me. And those things I appreciated. But I was just trying to show you how the blacks were accusing me of being with the white man, working with the white man. When I was accused by the white man of leading the black.

[You mentioned that things changed when Charles Evers came. What happened?]

It was back in the sixties when he came in. First he started in Port Gibson trying to get the people organized. They come together and they wrote some proposals that they would like the county to adhere to or either put into operation. That is hiring blacks in the store. Giving blacks the courtesy, you know, as to Mrs. and Miss, Mr. or what not. And, as I just said, to hire them as clerks in the stores or working in the offices. Wherever they were qualified to be. and he came through and he offered

some proposals and they didn't accept them at first.

But finally they put on what they called a boycott. They boycotted the stores and business places. It was a boycott, too. And they still did not adhere to the proposals and [the white merchants] put in a lawsuit against [the boycotters]. It was through the NAACP which Charles Evers was a part of. And they sued the NAACP plus the individuals here in Port Gibson that were heading the boycott.

They boycotted the stores. You wouldn't be able to go into the stores and places and what not. A lot of people tried to go over the boycott, and they would do something to their cars or either they take their groceries. If they went in the grocery store, they told them not to go in, take their groceries and throw it out or what not. And the boycott was very effective. So, they sued the NAACP and some of the individuals, but the court didn't uphold them in that part of the suit, and they did the verdict in favor of the NAACP and the individuals that were sued.

And therefore that may have made Port Gibson, Claiborne County rather, a far different place than it was before the boycott. Because you notice now, there are plenty of stores that are operated by blacks. And then you notice that in most of the stores that are white stores, most of the cashiers are black, so they have made Claiborne County a much better place for the black people.

Course a lot of us, we haven't done right since they put us in office and we haven't done as we should have done toward each other nor towards the other person. We said, if you put us in office, we gon' make it better. And some of it is worse now than it was before, because we are in there now fighting each other and causing the program not to progress. We have goals set and we haven't reached those goals. They look like they getting farther from us, instead of being there.

Those things have transpired and I have tried to do the best I could. I will do what I can for the advancement of all the human race. You know, that was my part of it. I didn't believe because anyone was white and I'm black, that if I had the power then that their forefathers had, that I would do what they had been doing. I just don't feel that. So those are the things that have transpired that are still happening here in Claiborne County.

"We said, if you put us in office, we gon' make it better. And some of it is worse now than it was before."

[What do you remember about your grandparents?]

I stayed with my father's mother. I lived with her until I left off and went to work. We had a family reunion last year and one of the family members has started the project of trying to get at the roots of the family. Now that's something. Our parents didn't talk too much about their parents. No more than to say how their parents brought them up, talk to them and chastise them. Tell them about the world.

Now, my father he didn't know too much about his father, because his mother wasn't married to his father. And they were the Pages.

I don't know whether you read any 'bout the Pages on the other side of Port Gibson. During that time, it was the Reconstruction days, and they had property out there [near Grand Gulf]. Harrison Page did some killing, you know, of some folk.

[What did your father tell you about the Page shootout?]

They didn't just come out and tell me. We don't know much about it

because little was told, you know, but the records are there, if you can get them. ***Claiborne County, Mississippi: The Promised Land*** gives a lot of details and things that we hadn't been told, you know. We didn't know about it.

It was told [after the shootout, Harrison] left some of 'em laying around out there, and then those that he didn't get, they ran away. That gave him [a] chance to get out and get away. Don't anyone know what has happened to him. There are tales that he went to Louisiana, but our folk, they don't know. They didn't never hear from him no more. He didn't come back.

But they practically took the land and everything out there, where the crossroad is going to Vicksburg. You know where to go to Grand Gulf? Well, it is out west of that. It's called the Page's place.

[Did he leave his family?]

Not his immediate family. But he had some nephews and one brother. He left a brother. But he didn't stay here that long, but the nephews and all, they stayed around here. Rosa Page Welch's father was one of the nephews, you know. And he stayed around. He worked at the Mississippi Southern Bank for years until he died.

I've learned more through history, you know, reading, and other folks talking about it. It wasn't talked about much. People were afraid to mention it to each other because--whatcha call the black when they go to talkin' to the white folk about what you say? Uncle Tom?--so, the black folk were afraid to talk about it to each other, because sometime they didn't know [whether] that fellow would go back and tell the white man what you were saying.

So it had been a hush-mouth thing all the way down until here since we been desegregated and the black man has been able to speak out. I've had several white persons to mention it to me. "You ain't got no temper like your ancesters had." That's the word they used. 'Cause my daddy was the same way, almost. If he went out there and two people were fighting--he didn't have to know the person, if someone was doing something to him--he was gone to stop 'em.

"I don't care what, he could open a knife so quick, it's just like lightning."

I remember an incident, my daddy was a wild man, wild, wild. He gambled and he drank and he went about, too. He'd go 'way from home on Friday night or Saturday morning, and it'll be sometime Monday morning when he come back. But now he wasn't off running 'round going to some women's house or something like that. He was gambling. He went from place to place and gambled and drank. That's what he did.

And one night, two fellows were fighting. One had a gun and he drew it on the other one. And my daddy was standing behind him, see, and he was a man that would cut you. I don't care what, he could open a knife so quick, it's just like lightning. He had it so he could just throw it like that and it would open.

And when that man that had the gun on the other one knew anything, he just come right cross his stomach like that, and all of his bowels just fell out. But lucky someone was there and they caught 'em and put 'em back in and sewed 'em back up and he got all

right. But everybody after that, they were afraid of him.

[How big a part has religion played in your life?]

Oh my, you struck the nail head then. It has played a wonderful part in my life. I tried to be a religious person. I joined church [when] I was twelve years old. I worked hard in the church. As I told you when I was young, I wanted to go into convention and what not. I was secretary of my local church for years. I was secretary for the state convention, Mississippi Christian Missionary State Convention. I was secretary there for thirty years. Also the Mississippi Missionary Bible School Convention. I was secretary of it for several years.

Religion has played a wonderful part in my life because I tried to live a Christian life. I worked in the local church [as a board member] and secretary of the local church for a number of years.

[What do you do as a board member?]

You write down the rules, recommendations, whatever comes up for the church, as a manager of the church. That's in the local church as a board manager. As a state board member I worked to carry out the mandates of the church. To see that churches have preachers. I was about to tell you, the Christian Church Disciples of Christ--that's what it's called, our church. Our convention is known as the Mississippi Christian Missionary Convention.

The local churches are Pine Grove Christian Church, Disciples of Christ; Christian Chapel, Disciples of Christ in Port Gibson; King David, Christian Church, Disciples of Christ out there.

This photo of Lydell Page and his wife, Vera, was taken in their yard on June 25, 1985, a little over a year before his death.

[Do you garden?]

Do I garden? Oh yes, yes. You might peep out the back there before you leave. And you can see that I garden every year. I live out there you might say. I be out there till 12 o'clock at night. I have a light on the back there. I be out there till that time of day. In the garden. I have plenty greens to produce the whole year round.

[Do you plant by the moon?]

No, now sometime I might. [My neighbor] Mrs. Williams, she'll tell me don't plant this week. Next week is good planting. Now if I feel like it I might wait to plant till she say. Lotta times when I get my ground prepared, I plant. And I've been lucky so far. And

Lydell Page pulling turnips in his garden.

Some of Mr. Page's old tools on display for I AIN'T LYING.

I made good gardens every year. I've had stuff to throw away. I had plenty turnips, mustards. And I have collards out there now. Begin to break them off now instead of just cropping the leaves off them. I'm breaking the head off because this cold could freeze 'em. They ain't gonna be any good that way.

[What is the oldest thing you own?]

I have some old dog irons out there and a old iron we used that way back to press clothes with in these shops with. I have some of these old scales that we used to weigh cotton with, and what you call the pea that hang on the scale, what you read by. I have that out there.

And also I have some old hames that you put around the horses, the collar. Well, it's a collar fits up around the neck, fastens over the top of the neck. If you gonna hook 'em to a plow, if you gonna hook 'em to a wagon, or whatever. It was a hames they called 'em.

Sometimes they were metal. Sometimes they were wood with metal on 'em. And then you hook your traces back to the plow or to the wagon that fasten on to these hames. Now I have those hames. I have the collar. I had started to throw them away, some of them have been thrown away, but I just keep 'em for a souvenir.

[What advice could you give young people which would help them to lead better lives?]

First thing, try to get you an education. Then, after you get your education try to work with people. Help somebody that is less fortunate than you are. Try to help them.

Be the best. Whatever you do try

to be the best. Be all you can, and then try to treat the other man as your fellow man.

First thing is prepare yourself. If you get prepared something will come up for you. Have a disposition. You know a lot folks mad with the world all the time. My mother quoted a verse from the Bible. It says: "A grievous word storeth up anger, but a soft answer turneth the world around." I'll tell you, it's wonderful. Life is wonderful.

But there is so much going on in life today that makes you kinda miserable. We don't trust each other. Until we begin to trust our own people and try to help them instead of trying to tear them down, I don't think we will find life will be worth living. But as it is it's kinda tough now.

[What can we do to change that?]

The citizenry got to raise up. We got to organize up. We got to get together and demand that these things be done right. Government be carried out as it should be, instead of doing so much undercover stuff, I'd say. Citizens come together and come to the point [that] we're not going to let it go on. Get together and organize. It's pitiful, at one time I could be of service but I'm seventy-four years old and I'm just not able with my condition, with the asthma. Some days I don't feel much like living or getting out. [Sometimes] I get down and get my nerves all upset because of action of our people. Life is critical.■

"I started taking pictures back in '26, 27. I had a little old Brownie camera."

"And I would take pictures when I was at Southern Christian Institute. It was just a little old box camera. I took wonderful pictures."

Lydell Page shows Mary Keller his old Brownie camera.