

**Oral History Interview of
L.T. Starkey**

**Interviewed by: David Marshall
November 28, 2012
Lubbock, Texas**

**Part of the:
*Southwest Collection General Oral Histories***

© Southwest Collection/
Special Collections Library



TEXAS TECH UNIVERSITY

**Southwest Collection/
Special Collections Library**

15th and Detroit | 806.742.3749 | <http://swco.ttu.edu>

Copyright and Usage Information:

An oral history release form was signed by L.T. Starkey on November 28, 2012. This transfers all rights of this interview to the Southwest Collection/Special Collections Library, Texas Tech University.

This oral history transcript is protected by U.S. copyright law. By viewing this document, the researcher agrees to abide by the fair use standards of U.S. Copyright Law (1976) and its amendments. This interview may be used for educational and other non-commercial purposes only. Any reproduction or transmission of this protected item beyond fair use requires the written and explicit permission of the Southwest Collection. Please contact Southwest Collection Reference staff for further information.

Preferred Citation for this Document:

Starkey, L.T. Oral History Interview, November 28, 2012. Interview by David Marshall, Online Transcription, Southwest Collection/Special Collections Library. URL of PDF, date accessed.

The Southwest Collection/Special Collections Library houses almost 6000 oral history interviews dating back to the late 1940s. The historians who conduct these interviews seek to uncover the personal narratives of individuals living on the South Plains and beyond. These interviews should be considered a primary source document that does not implicate the final verified narrative of any event. These are recollections dependent upon an individual's memory and experiences. The views expressed in these interviews are those only of the people speaking and do not reflect the views of the Southwest Collection or Texas Tech University.

Technical Processing Information:

The Audio/Visual Department of the Southwest Collection is the curator of this ever-growing oral history collection and is in the process of digitizing all interviews. While all of our interviews will have an abbreviated abstract available online, we are continually transcribing and adding information for each interview. Audio recordings of these interviews can be listened to in the Reading Room of the Southwest Collection. Please contact our Reference Staff for policies and procedures. Family members may request digitized copies directly from Reference Staff.

Consult the Southwest Collection website for more information.

<http://swco.ttu.edu/Reference/policies.php>

Recording Notes:

Original Format: Born Digital Audio

Digitization Details: N/A

Audio Metadata: 44.1kHz/ 24bit WAV file

Further Access Restrictions: N/A

Transcription Notes:

Interviewer: David Marshall

Audio Editor: N/A

Transcription: Paul Doran

Editor(s): Jason Rhode

Transcript Overview:

This interview features L.T. Starkey, who discusses his early life and experiences as a lawman in Crosby County.

Length of Interview: 01:53:18

Subject	Transcript Page	Time Stamp
Parents and family	8	00:04:11
Family background	9	00:06:50
Early jobs	12	00:10:05
Life on the farm	15	00:16:00
Rain on the plains, water	22	00:25:00
Animals in the country	31	00:35:10
Pulling cotton	38	00:43:15
Taking the job as deputy, sheriffs served under	44	00:50:05
Trouble spots, crime, race relations	56	01:03:42
Retirement	62	01:13:00
Details of homicide cases	69	01:25:40
How Ralls has changed	74	01:34:11
Generational change, respect	80	01:41:29

Keywords

Crosby County, Flomot, law enforcement, farm life, race relations, rural, police

David Marshall (DM):

Okay, the date is November 28, 2012; this is David Marshall interviewing L.T. Starkey at his home in Ralls, Texas. Can we start with your date of birth?

L.T. Starkey (LS):

October 3, 1932.

DM:

1932, okay, about my dad's age, by the way. And where were you born?

LS:

Lamb County, Olton.

DM:

Alright, and how long did you live there?

LS:

I think we lived there when I was about two or three, four years old.

DM:

Okay; you remember it at all?

LS:

Moved to Floyd County, at Cedar Hill. We lived there until I was about twelve, and then we moved to Flomot.

DM:

To Flomot.

LS:

And lived there until when I graduated from high school, about I guess '52. [In] '53 I moved to out here at home, and went to work on the farm for Olan Bryant. Then I was working out there, and I guess it was about November of '55, I was plowing in the field, and the sheriff and the deputy come out there, and I couldn't figure out what in the world I'd done wrong, but I didn't even know anybody involved. And they'd heard that I was interested to get to law enforcement, and they come out there to talk to me, and that was just out of the clear blue, I had no idea. I didn't know the guy, hadn't really even seen him before. But I knew they were police, because they had the guns on. And anyway, I talked to on a turning row and—of course, all my growing-up years I wanted, kind of dreamed of being a police officer. And so they hired me out there on the turning row.

DM:

I'll be, right there on the spot.

LS:

Yep.

DM:

Golly.

LS:

And I had to give them—I mean I didn't accept it at that time, but he offered me the job. And a couple of weeks, well, maybe about next week I could let him know I would take the job. And that's when you didn't—if you was able to walk, you carried a gun. And I went to work October 1, 1955, and I was twenty-one years old the third day of October after that. And, but that's the way I got into being a deputy.

DM

Well I'll be, okay. Yeah, so that was a change of pace, wasn't it?

LS:

Yeah it was.

DM:

Can I ask you how much they offered you, back then for the--

LS:

Best of my recollection, my salary was two hundred and twenty-five dollars a month.

DM:

Yeah, and this was deputy sheriff, full-time.

LS:

And you had to furnish your own car.

DM:

Furnish your own car, wow. Any mileage reimbursements or anything?

LS:

You got twelve cents a mile for mileage.

DM:

Okay, that's interesting.

LS:

And you had to furnish your own car.

DM:

Okay. Now we're going to come back in a minute and talk a whole lot more about that, but I want to back up, again—do you remember Olton at all, were you too young?

LS:

No.

DM:

Do you remember Floydada?

LS:

Now when we moved to Floyd County, that was out there in Cedar Hill.

DM:

Oh, Cedar Hill, okay.

LS:

Yes, I remember—I don't remember the move—but I remember living out there.

DM:

Now what did y'all do out there at Cedar Hill?

LS:

Farm.

DM:

Farm—same as--

LS:

Little old dry-land farm.

DM:

So what they did in Olton, also?

LS:
Yeah.

DM:
Farm. Can you tell me a little bit about your parents, your family?

LS:
My mother and dad, they was really fine people. Had eleven brothers and sisters, four boys and then eight girls in the family.

DM:
Where'd you rank in there?

LS:
Middle.

DM:
Right in the middle?

LS:
Uh-huh. Yeah, I was about five down and six up, or whatever.

DM:
Can you tell me their names, your parent's names?

LS:
My parent's names was Charlie and Bessie Starkey. You want my sisters and them?

DM:
Well, if you don't mind, there's eleven of them; I couldn't remember that many, but--

LS:
Margie was the oldest girl, then followed by Johnny, next oldest; Jackie was next to him, Viola was between him and Dean, and then myself, and then Nola Mary, and, let's see, Bobby, Percy, Sandra, and Phyllis. And that's—well I've got—eight of us still living, and--

DM:
In this area mostly?

LS:

No, we're spreading from Austin to Houston, Oklahoma. Three sisters in Oklahoma, a sister in Austin, and a sister in Abilene, and Johnny lives at Flomot, and Jack and Dean are gone, and Viola's gone, and then I live here. And my older sister lived in Lubbock, but she's buried in Lockney. She passed away in Lockney.

DM:

Okay, well did your parents—were they born out here in West Texas, or were they moved here by their families?

LS:

They were moved. My dad was born in Oklahoma. And mother was born in East Texas.

DM:

Oh, whereabouts, do you know?

LS:

Yeah, but I can't remember.

DM:

Okay—curious, because my wife's from East Texas.

LS:

Mother and them moved in from Wellington to Cedar Hill; my dad lived in the Cedar Hill community, and that's where they—they settled in Aiken, Texas, when they moved from Oklahoma. Then granddad bought that farm in Cedar Hill--

DM:

Okay, so--

LS:

And lived there.

DM:

So he owned his farm?

LS:

Yes.

DM:

Okay. How much acreage did he farm?

LS:

He had a three-quarter section.

DM:

Oh, well that's quite a bit, but he had eleven kids, too.

LS:

Yeah, that was granddaddy's place. Dad bought the half section in Flomot when we moved down there—and we'd till on it.

DM:

Yeah, okay. Now what kind of farm, is it cotton?

LS:

We farmed cotton, milo, had wheat—that was the basic crop; all dryland.

DM:

Yeah, how did that change over time? Sometimes wheat was more important, then it fell out of favor, or what happened there?

LS:

Wheat was winter grazing, and that was the main reason for wheat—grazing for the stock. Of course, then you'd went ahead and pulled off of it, and when it was [inaudible], it'd make wheat. That was the reason a lot of the wheat was planted, because of the livestock. You had to feed your horses, and cows, and stuff. And had to have horses to work the farm, so that was the reason for that. Then they had the milo, and they'd bale it, bundle it—there wasn't no baling—bundle it, then stack it, and grind it, and feed them [the horses] in the winter.

But our basic livelihood was cream and eggs; we milked the cows and separated the two—milk, and then sell the cream. And sell the eggs, and buy groceries and stuff—that was the way we lived.

DM:

You had some cash products there you could sell. Where did you sell it?

LS:

Floydada.

DM:

Floydada.

LS:

Yeah, the cream was shipped. I was telling a lady yesterday that cream cans back then—and I've got some in the backyard, but—had a name and address on them, and we'd take the cream to the mailbox and the mail carrier would pick it up. Then the city—I don't remember the name of the town in Colorado—anyway, they said "Ship the can, a ten-gallon can of cream, to Colorado by mail." And then the mail carrier would bring the can back, and set it back at the mailbox.

DM:

Good grief, I've never heard of that.

LS:

I know, but Dad bought me a little red wagon when I was pretty small, and I thought he was buying it to play with. I was a little boy, I was really proud of that wagon. But it was to haul the cream cans to the mailbox which was about a quarter of a mile from the house. And we had to do that once a week; pick up the can and pick it up empty again, bring it back, but that was what the wagon was for, it had to have roller bearings in it. He bought it, but I thought it was to play with. It was that too, but it was to work with also.

DM:

Yeah, how long did that hold up?

LS:

I don't remember; every year we did that.

DM:

I wish you still had that wagon, that'd be a keeper now.

LS:

Well, we wore that thing--

DM:

I imagine you did.

LS:

Flat out, and we took the wheels off of it, and put a board down, and put the wheels on it, and we pulled it.

DM:

Well that is something; wonder what the post people thought about picking up cream and--

LS:

That was just the way of life. But we shipped it in ten-gallon cans, and I'll show you one after we get through.

DM:

Okay, good.

LS:

We've got cans out there that has labels. But they would pick them up, and bring them back.

DM:

Did a lot of people do that? Did your neighbors do that also?

LS:

Neighbors did it, I imagine—I may have thought there were two different people set up out there—and I don't have any idea how many he picked up; I was too small to even pay attention to it. But that's where we got money, was by moving flowers, and groceries. We went from selling eggs—we sold them in Floydada. But--

DM:

Then you bought your goods in Floydada also?

LS:

Do what?

DM:

Did you buy your other things in Floydada?

LS:

Well yeah, because that was the only—there weren't nothing in Cedar Hill, except that one little old store; they didn't have much stuff, just a convenience store.

DM:

How far is Cedar Hill from Floydada?

LS:

Oh, about seventeen miles northeast.

DM:

So, how often would you go in to town to do all of this?

LS:

We didn't go to down, Dad did. He'd go maybe once a month, or once every two weeks or so. He picked up little stuff at a little old store. And the store at Cedar Hill was operated by a blind man. Most fascinating thing you've ever seen, because that man, if you gave him a dollar bill, he'd tell you what it was. Or a twenty. It'd make no difference. And he'd make you change for it.

DM:

Remember his name?

LS:

Tom Fortenberry. Really a nice guy. I haven't been in his store probably in, well, after I got grown, I'd go on by there but I never stopped—I stopped there one day, probably hadn't even seen him in four, five, six years, and I stopped to get a Coke or whatever it was, and went in and he asked me, said "How's Charlie doing?" He knew exactly who I was and who I belonged to. It fascinated me, I couldn't believe it.

DM:

Just from your voice I guess.

LS:

Just from something.

DM:

That's amazing.

LS:

My oldest brother come back from the service before, he'd been gone—he stopped there at Cedar Hill, and called him by name. It's like he could see. It was amazing.

DM:

That's incredible, incredible.

LS:

Fascinating fellow. We bought Cokes, mostly Cokes—well, we didn't buy no Cokes, when we'd work for somebody, they'd pick up Cokes and stuff. We didn't have no money; we didn't go to

the store. Once in a while we'd go over there with Dad to go get gas. But, you know, we didn't have no money, we didn't have no *business* going to the store.

DM:

How many milk cows did you have out there on the place?

LS:

We milked eight cows--most of the time.

DM:

Okay, now were they some kind of dairy breed, like Holstein, or Jersey?

LS:

Just Jerseys.

DM:

Jersey, a lot of cream, huh?

LS:

Jersey cows. We milked them twice a day, didn't make no difference, rain, shine, sleet or snow, we milked twice a day, same time.

DM:

How many of you kids were involved—were you kids doing that work?

LS:

The boys done the milking and stuff; the girls didn't have to do that, they didn't have to—we did all the—and Dad didn't do the milking, the boys done the milking. I milked cows until I left home.

DM:

Yeah. Did you have any beef cattle out there?

LS:

Uh, no. No, the only thing we had—well, we butchered the calf or something other, but that would be a Jersey calf—it wasn't for a beef cow, no.

DM:

Did anyone do any ranching out there?

LS:

There was a lot of ranchers. There was a lot of grassland around us, but back then you could work with horses and team, and you didn't break out a lot of land, lot of park or grassland.

DM:

How far are you from the Caprock out there at Cedar Hill?

LS:

We were half a mile from our house to the canyon.

DM:

Then it pretty much all becomes ranchland, doesn't it, on off the canyon?

LS:

Yeah.

DM:

You ever go out there?

LS:

All the time.

DM:

Do you, okay, because I've got another question about that area that I'm going to come back to. But so you had dairy cattle, you didn't have any beef cattle. How about—you had chickens, I know that—how about pigs?

LS:

Had hogs, hogs, which we'd raise them, and fed them, and sold hogs. We'd also eat them, but--

DM:

You'd slaughter them in the wintertime occasionally?

LS:

Yeah. First cold spell, we had a hog-killing day. But we'd kill two or three hogs, and had the meat box and stuff you put meat in—no electricity then; there wasn't no such thing as electricity. We'd have an icebox when we could afford to buy ice, but there wasn't no running water, and no electricity. Running water we had a bucket and run it, and get it and bring it back to the house.

© Southwest Collection/
Special Collections Library

DM:

Yeah. So you had a well--

LS:

Windmill.

DM:

A windmill, okay. So what was the house like; for example, was it a single-wall, did you have any interior wall?

LS:

What's called boxing strip, a single-walled house.

DM:

Yeah, vertical board and batten kind of thing.

LS:

One with twelve strips, and one before.

DM:

One by twelve, with a one by four over the crack?

LS:

Over the crack, that's the boxing strip.

DM:

Okay. Was that house already standing when y'all moved out there?

LS:

Yes, yes.

DM:

Do you have any idea where the lumber came from, to build houses out there?

LS:

Oh, I have no idea. It was an older house when we moved in it, and--

DM:

Seemed like there was a lumber company, maybe a Higginbotham in Floydada pretty far back.

LS:

Back then, Wilson & Son—and I'm not sure about Higginbotham. And I did have one later, but I don't remember—my dad did all his business with Wilson & Son, and I don't know—there were two other yards there, and I don't know—Boxforce Galbert had one I believe it was, and Wilson & Son, but Dad did all his business with Wilson & Son.

DM:

Okay, seems like some of those Wilsons are still around.

LS:

Yeah, Jimmy Wilson--

DM:

Jimmy Wilson

.

LS:

One of the sons of the old man, he was in the lumberyard. And Jimmy's still alive, but he's up in years pretty good.

DM:

Yeah, yeah, I think I've talked to him.

LS:

I think Wilson & Son Lumberyard in Plainview is some of the same bunch.

DM:

Yeah, I think I talked to him a number of years ago, and that they had a string of lumberyards around.

LS:

Yeah.

DM:

Do you remember when REA [Rural Electrification Administration] came in?

LS:

I don't remember for sure what year it was, but it was after World War II. I'm going to say it was about '48, '47. I remember, I come in from school and we had light. Amazing, we had light.

DM:

That would be amazing, that's an incredible difference, isn't it?

LS:

I'm telling you.

DM:

For those of us who never experienced that kind of a change, we can't understand you like you can.

LS:

Yeah.

DM:

Going from no electricity to a flip--

LS:

Daddy bought a propane refrigerator. In the war you couldn't buy nothing—you could order it, put your name on a list for it to come available, to get a refrigerator, or cook stove, or something like that, but appliances wasn't available, tires wasn't available, sugar wasn't available—everything was on ration. And Dad had [inaudible] on the butane place in Matador; Dad was on the list to get a refrigerator. And a friend of ours lived north of us, they were on the list to get a refrigerator, but he had a long list of people who wanted a refrigerator. And he went to Plainview and picked up two refrigerators, and I don't remember the size of them, but a pretty good size. They never did take the other one to Matador, and he dropped one of them off at our house, and took the other one to the other people's house, because we had the biggest family on the list. And with propane refrigerators; we used that thing—well, we wore the door off of it really. And my sister lives in Austin, she was telling a guy down there that we'd bought Mother an electric refrigerator, and it was that old refrigerator sitting outside. She was telling this guy that mother had it, and he wanted to buy it because he had a deer lease he needed a refrigerator for, and he drove from Austin up there and give her forty dollars, or forty-five dollars, whatever it was, for that old refrigerator, and hauled it to Austin and used it until—and maybe still using it, I don't know, but he used it for a long time.

DM:

Can you tell me about the size of that propane refrigerator, how big was that, how big did they make those?

LS:

It was as big as that refrigerator.

DM:

Oh as a modern refrigerator?

LS:

It was a big refrigerator.

DM:

What about your first electric one?

LS:

Well, I guess we bought the electric one after—I don't know, it was several years later.

DM:

How big was it?

LS:

I don't remember what it was, eighteen or twelve—I don't know about cubic foot, but it was a big one.

DM:

Oh it was, okay. I would have just guessed they made real small ones at first.

LS:

No, no they were big refrigerators. And Mother's was just a regular refrigerator, didn't have anything on it, it was—the burner was in the bottom of it, like if you bought one now it would still be the same thing.

DM:

Okay. Right. Well, so you came home from school, you had lights—I guess, was this an uncovered bulb, hanging from a wire, or how did--

LS:

No, we had a—the REA had a wired code, that you had to have the house wired to meet their code. And of course, Dad, at that time—and we didn't have no appliances for electricity, other than just—he had one plug put in; there was room for, maybe, hook up a radio or two. And there was one in the kitchen, we didn't have no electrical appliances.

DM:

When you say one, was it a one-double, duplex?

LS:

Like the plugs today.

DM:

One duplex plug--

LS:

Yeah.

DM:

In the living room, and one in the kitchen.

LS:

Yeah.

DM:

So four plugs?

LS:

Yeah.

DM:

And then how many lights?

LS:

We had four room wired, and we had one light in each room.

DM:

Well that's pretty nice, pretty nice. Could you see the wires running up the wall?

LS:

No, they come through the ceiling.

DM:

Came through the ceiling, okay.

© Southwest Collection/
Special Collections Library

LS:

The wire that went down to the plug in the kitchen, it was on the outside down the wall, and the one in the living room was down the wall; we could see the wire—because it was a single-walled house.

DM:

Yeah, you were probably about fifteen or sixteen at the time?

LS:

Fifteen or sixteen.

DM:

Okay, pretty exciting stuff.

LS:

My brother and I started school one morning, and the meter was on a pole out north of the house, and we'd always chuck one another with rocks, and he threw a rock at me and hit that meter, and just made a little hole in it. Well, a piece of that glass went in and locked the meter down. Well, back then you read your own meter, nobody would come out, you'd just put it on a card, mail it in, they'd measure your card for each month, first of the year, and then you'd fill it out every month. Well, they finally decided that there was something wrong, they come out to our—cost Daddy seven dollars to replace that globe. And he never did find out which one of us boys broke it, because we'd have had our heads skinned, but anyway, he threw a rock at me, hit that meter. But we was always throwing rocks at one another and stuff, but that was just the name of the game.

DM:

I remember that, yeah, that's good. Now what about gas tractors, did y'all ever have one?

LS:

Did what?

DM:

A gas tractor?

LS:

Yes, Dad bought a H [tractor] John Deere back during the forties, early forties. And a little two-road John Deere H, and he had an old D John Deere, that [inaudible] with.

DM:
Okay.

LS:
But we farmed with horses up until he got that little H John Deere.

DM:
So sometime during the war he got him a John Deere?

LS:
Yeah.

DM:
Was farming pretty good at that time--

LS:
Yes.

DM:
During the war—lots of demand?

LS:
It rained a lot more back then than it does now; we had a lot more moisture. Nineteen-forty and '41 I remember very well, because it rained and snow in the winter of '40, and spring of '41 it rained a *bunch*, and snowed. You'd walk over to the barn over the snowdrift, on the barn. We had to shovel out the barn door to get the cows in to where we could milk them. But yeah, we had a tractor, I guess in the early forties.

DM:
I think '41, or '2 still holds the record for moisture out here; one of those years had thirty-some odd inches, or--

LS:
Them old playa lakes run together. And run off in that canyon north of our house—it seemed to me like [it rained] all summer, because we'd go down there and that water falls on the weekends, on Saturdays and Sundays, and play in that water. And it seemed to me like it rained all summer.

DM:
I imagine.

LS:

'Course back in the [inaudible] down below had what we call a twenty-foot fall. The spring water then was pretty good, and it run all the time.

DM:

What'd you call it?

LS:

Spring water.

DM:

Twenty--

LS:

We called it twenty-foot fall.

DM:

Twenty-foot fall?

LS:

Yeah.

DM:

Was there a little waterfall out there?

LS:

Yeah, water coming off of it, and you get down there, and boy you could take a good bath in that.

DM:

Was it right there at the Caprock?

LS:

It was off the cap there.

DM:

Now so a spring was feeding that?

LS:

Yeah.

© Southwest Collection/
Special Collections Library

DM:

That's interesting.

LS:

Yeah we'd walk down there on weekends and play in that water. We'd get to that water, pull our shoes off, and wade in that little creek down there.

DM:

That sounds like paradise.

LS:

Yeah.

DM:

I bet you don't have a waterfall out there now.

LS:

No, the guy that owns the land now built a tank down below that waterfall, and covered it all up with water.

DM:

Is he still getting spring water out of it?

LS:

It's still got spring water in it.

DM:

Oh good.

LS:

Yeah.

DM:

Because you know what--

LS:

But I did have a nice time over there.

DM:
Okay.

LS:
But I don't know--

DM:
A lot of people say that the Caprock is different now, because you had springs gushing out here and there, and you just don't have them anymore.

LS:
Yeah, there are little springs down in there in places, but most of them are dried out.

DM:
Okay, but there is still some?

LS:
The river over there, if you go back up west of that highway going to Quitaque up there ahead of some of the rivers, there are still little bits of spring water, but it's not much.

DM:
Okay, so what has taken it down, is it irrigation, or brush?

LS:
Dry weather, no rain.

DM:
Yeah, dry weather.

LS:
You've got to have water from above to get it below.

DM:
Well, you have quite a bout of dry weather in the early fifties.

LS:
Yes.

DM:

Started in, what, '51 or so?

LS:

Yeah, '52, and somewhere along there.

DM:

Do you remember any difficulties that you had in that time?

LS:

No, not particularly.

DM:

Okay, just that it was drier?

LS:

Yeah.

DM:

You can't remember back as far as the Dust Bowl, can you?

LS:

No.

DM:

You were pretty young.

LS:

No, the Dust Bowl was in the early thirties—I was born in the Dust Bowl.

DM:

Yeah.

LS:

All I know about the Dust Bowl was hearsay.

DM:

What's the worst sandstorm you ever saw?

LS:

© Southwest Collection/
Special Collections Library

I guess the worst sandstorm I remember was after I went to work for county, probably in '57, '8, maybe somewhere along in there. I had a wreck out east of Crosbyton, and I mean you couldn't even see the hood of the car; it was the worst I'd ever seen.

DM:

You were deputy sheriff at the time; there was a wreck because of the visibility problem--

LS:

Because of the visibility.

DM:

And you had to go out there. Was it multi-car, or just--

LS:

Oh it was terrible, it was a two-car wreck.

DM:

Two-car wreck.

LS:

But it was, I mean, sand was terrible.

DM:

Yeah. They talk about the dust storms in the thirties as coming in as a big, black, slow-moving cloud—was it different in the fifties from that?

LS:

Yeah, it was just a dirt storm then.

DM:

It was high winds, and--

LS:

Yeah, it was high winds and stuff. But what my dad—chickens went to roost like at four o'clock in the afternoon, because it got so dark. And he said that—it's like I said, it was just hearsay—that he threw water on the side of the house, at the stucco, to keep us from smothering to death in the sand, the dirt.

DM:

So the dirt would cling to the—just make a mud--

LS:

Make a plaster.

DM:

Good idea.

LS:

So he threw water on the house to stop the dirt. Back then—I mean, them houses, they wasn't made like they are today. Well, my brother-in-law tells that when we lived over there at Cedar Hill, that one of the kids was born—I don't know which one of the girls it was, but anyways—they had an old wood stove sitting in the living room, and there was a wash rag hanging on the rung of the chair, froze solid, sitting pretty close to the stove. So, I mean when the wind blows, the paper on the wall just blew like [inaudible], I mean--

DM:

Did you not have any insulation at all, just the two layers? Yeah.

LS:

No, wasn't no such thing as insulation. Some people had—my grandmother's house had the double wall, it had sheet rock inside. But ours was just single-walled—with the cheese cloth--

DM:

Cheese cloth.

LS:

And paper stuck on it, and that's all it was.

DM:

Yeah, the paper would be moving.

LS:

Oh yeah. Bulldoze the thing down now; it wasn't fit to live in.

DM:

I've heard people say that somewhere along the way, they pulled that cheese cloth off, and a bunch of sand fell out.

LS:

Yeah.

DM:

I imagine it did collect up.

LS:

Wasn't nothing to them. It just protected from the wet weather, about all it--

DM:

By the way, how'd you heat the house—did you have a wood stove, coal stove, or?

LS:

Wood, had a wood-burning stove.

DM:

Where would you find the wood out there?

LS:

Well we had the mesquites off the Cap—we had to spent all summer, and all the days you could building mesquite piles up for winter. And Mother had a cook stove, and my grandmother had a wood cook stove. But mother had a four-burner cook stove, with an oven on it, which had a six-burner cook stove.

DM:

Yeah, with an oven up on the pipe, on the stove pipe?

LS:

On the side.

DM:

Yeah, and it was a coal oil, huh?

LS:

Coal oil.

DM:

Wow, pretty nice. You'd have to buy that coal oil I guess, what five gallons or so, how much--

LS:

Dad bought it in a barrel, sixty-five gallon barrel. Sometimes—and of course, when you didn't have enough money to pay for that much, we had whatever money we had, but I think coal oil

then was a nickel a gallon—ten cents a gallon—gas was ten cents a gallon. And that was the cheapest I remember, but coal oil was the main thing. Our main heater was a wood stove. If you didn't go out and get the wood in the afternoon, you got up early in the morning when it was pretty cold, and got the wood in for the stove. But you wanted to make a habit of getting it in in the afternoon, because it wasn't near as cold then.

DM:

Did you know anyone who had coal stoves out there?

LS:

Seemed to me like a wood stack would be like twenty-five, thirty foot long, and four or five, six foot high with an old mesquite stump; you had to put them—but I'm pretty sure they wasn't that big, but that's what you think of it today, as a pretty good size stack of wood.

DM:

Well and then mesquite's tough to cut; did you chop it, or saw it?

LS:

Had to split it with an axe.

DM:

Yeah, wood--

LS:

And didn't use no saw; just split it with the axe. We spent a lot of time on the wood pile; people off the Cap wouldn't let you just go down there and cut the top off, you had to [inaudible]. I don't know why, because it's just as bad down there now as it ever was.

DM:

Are they just as bad, or are they worse?

LS:

They're worse now.

DM:

They're worse now, yeah.

LS:

Yeah.

© Southwest Collection/
Special Collections Library

DM:

Yeah, well that would make you pretty tough, cutting that mesquite all the time. But that was the deal then—if you come, you can have the mesquite, if you come down and grub it out, was that what they said?

LS:

Yeah, get you that stump.

DM:

Do you remember what ranches you were cutting off of?

LS:

I don't remember.

DM:

Okay, okay.

LS:

It's along the highway, there's one in Flomot and I don't know who owns the land, I don't remember. But they didn't care if you went and would go out and get all the wood you wanted; they didn't care. And Daddy get rattlesnake-bit gathering wood.

DM:

How'd he fare from that, how'd he do?

LS:

He done real well, the old snake just had one fang. And he was down several days, but I don't know that—I remember instead of using a cane, he'd use the old cane-bottom chair, put his knee in it, and walk that way to the outhouse and stuff. But he was sick for a good little while with it.

DM:

Okay, well how are the rattlesnakes now, they just as thick, or thinned out a little bit?

LS:

I think there are a lot more.

DM:

Really? Big old diamondback rattlesnakes you think?

LS:

Yeah. Back then, in the wintertime you never seen a snake, you never even thought about a rattlesnake. But now you go down there every time, you going to find one. So, and I think they're a lot worse than they was.

DM:

You ever see any of those little massasauga, those little pygmy rattlesnakes, small rattlesnakes?

LS:

All we ever had was diamondback.

DM:

Diamondbacks, yeah. You see other kinds of snakes down there, like bull snakes and--

LS:

Oh yeah, razor snakes, what we call razor snakes. Razors and stuff, and a lot of water snakes—of course there are not many of them anymore, because there ain't water, but there are a lot of bull snakes and stuff.

DM:

Did you have water moccasins down there?

LS:

No, weren't no water. But there wasn't no water snakes except little old—what we call—grass snakes.

DM:

Even back then, okay. How about, did y'all hunt down there much along the Caprock?

LS:

Oh yeah.

DM:

How has the wildlife changed?

LS:

Well, wasn't no deer back then; the deer and turkeys and stuff that we never did see back then, there wasn't any. Of course, the government stopped a lot of them now, but there wasn't no wildlife worth hunting. Few antelope in places, but that's all.

DM:

Why do you think it's increased so much?

LS:

Well, because they've turned them loose.

DM:

Yeah.

LS:

They've brought the deer up and turned them loose, turned the turkeys loose, and restocked it—that's the reason they did.

DM:

Yeah, okay.

LS:

I wish there'd been some deer back then, because we'd of had a lot of fun trying to rope them and stuff, but--

DM:

You would see them every now and then, huh?

LS:

Yeah.

DM:

Were they mule deer, or whitetail, or could you tell?

LS:

Mule deer down there.

DM:

Yeah, okay.

LS:

That's what they turned loose up around [inaudible], they turned the mule deer loose, and that's what we got down there.

DM:

Any other kind of wildlife down there, that you--

LS:

Well we don't got turkey, we got quail, and doves of course—no wild hogs now.

DM:

Yeah.

LS:

But, like I say, there wasn't any of that stuff.

DM:

What about quail, did you have quail and dove back there?

LS:

No, we don't have any quail no more, because I guess the dry weather and stuff took care of that. But used to be a lot of quail, a lot of quail.

DM:

You ever see any big cats out there, like mountain lions, in that country?

LS:

No, bobcats about the only thing we—I think some been there, I think now [inaudible], but bobcat's about the biggest cat, coyotes.

DM:

Coyotes will always be there, won't they?

LS:

Yeah.

DM:

Something else I wanted to ask you about in that country up there, and down here too, is a little bit more about the weather. You were talking about those snowy winters in the early forties—what's the most snow you ever saw—probably, out here, you see drifts pretty much, but--

LS:

I imagine about twenty inches is about the most I ever seen.

DM:

Drifted up, or level?

LS:

Mostly level, it was about that deep on level.

DM:

Yeah.

LS:

I've seen the drift where you up over, like I say, you go up over the barn and stuff like that, over the fences usually. Cows couldn't walk over or break through, but you could walk over the fences and stuff.

DM:

Did you ever have any difficulties with—did the bad weather ever take any of your cattle, or could you get them up?

LS:

Oh, we'd always had our cattle—of course, like milk cows and stuff, we fed them—wasn't no problem, we didn't have a problem with the weather and cows.

DM:

Did y'all turn them out loose in the wintertime, to feed on the stalks, or did you gather those stalks up and keep--

LS:

Well, we turned them into the field after the wintertime, [inaudible] got stuff done, but [inaudible] want to do then, but we fed everything.

DM:

So did you ever see any tornadoes out in this country, or up there at Cedar Hill?

LS:

Worst tornado I ever seen—and I was pretty small—was north of our house over in the canyon—and I can remember seeing trees come up out of that canyon, probably a mile, three quarters from our house. And we stood in the cellar door and watched that.

DM:

Okay.

LS:

I mean that's really the only tornado that I ever seen.

DM:

Okay. How about more recently, have you seen any up here around Ralls?

LS:

We had some here in 1957 I believe it was, and I don't remember what month, but anyway, I was gone to Oklahoma, took a juvenile prisoner to Gainesville, and went over to spend the night with a friend of mine in Oklahoma, and I was gone when all that happened.

DM:

Okay, well aren't you lucky?

LS:

I didn't see nothing.

DM:

So when Lubbock got hit in 1970, y'all were out here just fine, huh?

LS:

Yeah, yeah.

DM:

I'll be. It's funny, because storms do come through; they hit Petersburg all the time, they hit Floydada all the time it seems like, hit Crosbyton.

LS:

Well, that one in '57, I think it come southwest out here and got part of the town on this northwest corner.

DM:

Okay.

LS:

But I was in Oklahoma that night, so I missed all that.

DM:

Okay, well good for you. Now, was there a school out there where you lived, out at Cedar Hills?

LS:
School?

DM:
Uh-huh.

LS:
Cedar Hills had a school; my brothers and sisters, the older ones, went to Cedar Hills for a while, but I started in Flomot.

DM:
In Flomot?

LS:
Yeah.

DM:
Yeah.

LS:
We lived on the plains, twelve miles to school, but we drove to Flomot, we were in Flomot district.

DM:
So you had a car, you could drive to school?

LS:
Well, we had a piece of a car.

DM:
A piece of a car?

LS:
Yeah, we had an old Chevrolet, I don't remember what year model it was. And it had a pickup we drove—it wasn't like they have today.

DM:
It just gets you there, huh?

LS:

It would get us there and back.

DM:

What was the school like, were there few teachers there, or?

LS:

Oh yeah, we had a nice school.

DM:

Okay.

LS:

It was a good school. When I started, of course, there were just ten grades, eleven maybe, and then they went to twelve grades. But it was a good school, up until a few years ago when they closed it, but it was a good school.

DM:

You ever heard how many school used to be in Crosby County? There was one at Robertson.

LS:

There was Cone, Fairview, Big [inaudible]—there was four right out this way. But they were all closed when I come here; Cone was the only one that was operating when I come here. [inaudible] had a school, but they consolidated, [inaudible] consolidated with Cone when [inaudible] came to Ralls.

DM:

I think Cone's building is still out there, isn't it?

LS:

Yeah, yeah. But they were the only two that—well, Ralls [inaudible] had a great school; Caprock had a great school when I come here. But they were closed pretty quick—I don't remember much about the schools here.

DM:

Yeah, okay.

LS:

Yeah.

DM:

Were there times of the year when there were demands on the farm, where you had to take out of school for a little while, go help on the farm, or were you able to just continue going?

LS:

We'd go to school about a month, and then we'd take out of school and pull bolls until after Christmas.

DM:

So you'd go to school in September pretty much, and then October, November, December; pull bolls?

LS:

We didn't go back to school then until after Christmas.

DM:

Uh-huh.

LS:

We'd go to school [inaudible] we'd go to school, but you didn't get much education then, because--

DM:

A lot of work to do.

LS:

Yeah, you'd miss so much.

DM:

Yeah.

LS:

But after we moved to Flomot, after we moved down there, we got to go a lot more, but we still had to take out and pull bolls, but we did get to participate in some of the sports, and good enough to keep our grades up enough to where we could play football and stuff. But we had to work, we were poor folk. And pull cotton, and hoe that old [inaudible] grass.

DM:

Did you do any of that after you were grown, any chopping cotton and all that?

LS:

The last cotton I pulled was in '54.

DM:

When you were--

LS:

When they offered me a job to come inside I was glad to take it.

DM:

I asked you, because everybody says the same thing: "I chopped cotton as a child, and I didn't want to do it later on."

LS:

I was glad to take the job, to get out of—I didn't have to walk them fields and pull cotton, and pull bolls.

DM:

So how were you at pulling bolls?

LS:

The last I pulled, I pulled a thousand pounds and quit at four o'clock in the afternoon.

DM:

Oh really, wow. How much could you stuff in one of those bags?

LS:

A hundred pounds a bag.

DM:

A hundred pounds, so ten bags and you could--

LS:

I don't know how we handled that stuff with a hundred-pound bags in a big old sack, but we did.

DM:

Yeah, golly.

LS:

Made it to a hundred pounds.

DM:

Now when did mechanization come in; when did they bring machines in to start harvesting it?

LS:

First boll-pulling machine I ever seen was the one-row John Deere picker, and I thought it was the most amazing thing I'd ever seen in my life, because man they were going to [inaudible]. But it didn't work; we still had to follow that thing and pick up what it didn't get. But I will never forget that thing, it was right up north of where our place is down there now. Just kind of brought that thing down there, and it had a two hundred and fifty pound box on the back of it. And when you fill that box up, you had to dump it, and then fork it in the trailer or something like that.

DM:

I see, yeah.

LS:

But I remember what an amazing thing it was; you pull that cotton, and then just put it right in that box.

DM:

Did you take this cotton to the gin by the bag then? Did you have all these bags and you hauled them in a truck to the gin, or?

LS:

Oh, back then all the cotton was hauled—mostly one bale trailer.

DM:

Okay.

LS:

In the early days, some people had two bale, but most of it was one bale trailers.

DM:

Yeah.

LS:

And you take a gin and you have to set a gin all night to get it ginned off, because if you set your trailer there, they wouldn't move it, so if you didn't stay with it, [inaudible] suction yourself. But then later on they got to where you could take your trailer out, and you had a four-wheel trailer, and park it, and they [inaudible]. But there wasn't anything—they did come up to the strippers

and stuff, they blow the cotton in the trailer, and then take them down that way, but the earlier days you hauled a one or two-bale trailer.

DM:

Yeah, did Cedar Hill have its own gin?

LS:

No, they never did have it in Cedar Hill. Flomot had two gins.

DM:

Okay.

LS:

But Cedar Hill never had a gin.

DM:

And when you were at Cone they had a gin there?

LS:

Had two gins at Cone.

DM:

Two gins.

LS:

Well, they had one gin when I come up here, and then they had two out there.

DM:

Okay. What about irrigation, did y'all ever start irrigating out there at Cedar Hill?

LS:

No, we never did have any irrigation. I wasn't exposed to irrigation until I went to work up at [inaudible].

DM:

Okay.

LS:

That's the first irrigation experience I ever had. [inaudible] was just dry land, and it still is.

© Southwest Collection/
Special Collections Library

DM:

When you were working there at Cone, was irrigation pretty new?

LS:

Yeah, they were just drilling wells then.

DM:

Just open-ditch irrigation--

LS:

Yeah.

DM:

That kind of thing?

LS:

Yeah. Good wells at that time. Although ditch water, water out of the ditches and stuff. They didn't have any of—none of this modern stuff we got today.

DM:

Well, how did the dry land farmers compete with irrigated fields, was that difficult?

LS:

Dry land farmers were good back then, because it rained more. But then the irrigation boys just boosted it up. But the dry land farmers were good back then. Because like I said, we got more rain. It's [inaudible] rain out here anymore.

DM:

Okay, well that makes sense, it was in the fifties I think that irrigation really started taking off.

LS:

Yeah.

DM:

And that's when it was dry.

LS:

Yeah, yeah.

DM:

Okay. Well, let's see, so you were out here in—did you say it was '52, or '53 when they came out to the field and said--

LS:

Fifty-five is when they come out and talk to me about coming in and being a deputy.

DM:

Fifty-five, okay.

LS:

Yeah.

DM:

Right before your twenty-third birthday.

LS:

Huh?

DM:

Right before your twenty-third birthday?

LS:

Twenty-first birthday.

DM:

Twenty-first birthday, okay.

LS:

And I took that job, and moved in to town.

DM:

Here in to Ralls?

LS:

Uh-huh. And I worked twelve-and-a-half years at the county; I started out with Slime Harrington.

DM:

He was the sheriff?

LS:

He was the sheriff.

DM:

Okay.

LS:

And he got into some trouble, and then I worked for Alvie Rathal for a while. But then when Slime got in trouble, for about four or five days, I was the deputy Texas Ranger, because when he resigned, it resigned all of us; there wasn't no law enforcement left, so the Rangers come over, and they deputized us to work for the Rangers until the county appointed Alvie Rathal. I worked for Alvie for a while, and then Fletcher Stark ran and got to be sheriff, and I went to work for Fletcher then.

DM:

Fletcher--

LS:

Fletcher Stark.

DM:

Star, okay.

LS:

And I worked for Fletcher then until, I don't know—well I spent twelve-and-a-half years with the county, I don't remember the year or dates very well.

DM:

But the total under those three sheriffs was twelve--

LS:

Twelve-and-a-half years.

DM:

Twelve-and-a-half years. Let me make sure I have their names—Slime?

LS:

Slime.

© Southwest Collection/
Special Collections Library

DM:

Slime, S-l-i-m-e?

LS:

Yeah, that's his nickname.

DM:

Harrington.

LS:

Harrington.

DM:

Harrington.

LS:

Yeah.

DM:

Okay.

LS:

He took office in '55.

DM:

Okay.

LS:

Fifty-five.

DM:

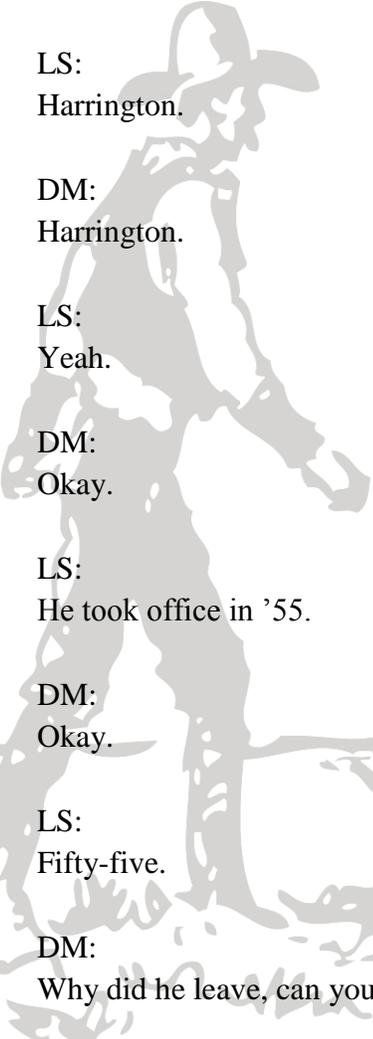
Why did he leave, can you talk about the trouble?

LS:

Well, he got taking fine money that was supposed to have been turned over to the county, that he was putting into his own pocket.

DM:

Oh, I see. It was confiscated money at a crime scene, or something like that?



© Southwest Collection/
Special Collections Library

LS:

No, it was money that was—back then, when we'd pick up drunks and stuff, we'd let them pay it out by the week.

DM:

Yeah, yeah.

LS:

And instead of him turning in money to the county, he was putting it in his pocket.

DM:

Okay.

LS:

They tried him in Lamesa for that.

DM:

Yeah.

LS:

And found him not guilty for some—but anyway, we found out that they had a guy on the jury that was a convicted felon—he wouldn't have been convicted anyway. And, so, but anyway--

DM:

And who was the next--

LS:

Alvie Rathal took his place.

DM:

Alvie Rathal.

LS:

Alvie Rathal.

LS:

Uh-huh.

DM:

R-a-t-h-a-l, something like that?

LS:
Yeah.

DM:
Alvie Rathal.

LS:
And he went in and served out there, and the unexpired term and then Fletcher won for sheriff, and got the--

DM:
Okay.

LS:
Appointment then.

DM:
And that was Fletcher?

LS:
Then Fletcher stayed in there for I don't know about how many years. I quit him after about four or five years.

DM:
Yeah, what was his first name?

LS:
Fletcher. Fletcher Stark.

DM:
Star, Fletcher Star, okay.

LS:
Fletcher got shot, I don't remember what year it was, and his health changed, and his attitude changed a lot after that. I had to quit, I didn't agree with things that was going on. So I quit and went to work for Pioneer National Gas at the time, and worked for them five years. I went to down to Baptist Encampment and spent two years down there, and then--

DM:

Just helping with the site, the buildings, or what did you do down at--

LS:

Down at the camp?

DM:

At the camp?

LS:

Maintenance.

DM:

Yeah.

LS:

I done the maintenance work on that down there.

DM:

That's a pretty spot down there.

LS:

Huh?

DM:

That's a pretty spot down there.

LS:

It is, we lived there two years, beautiful, we really loved it. But I was still going to get back north working, they offered me a job in Ralls, so come back and I took it.

DM:

Yeah.

LS:

So I stayed there eighteen years then.

DM:

So you were down there at Baptist Encampment, then you came back up here?

LS:

Yeah.

DM:

Then what'd you do up here?

LS:

I was going back work for the city police.

DM:

Oh you did?

LS:

Yeah.

DM:

And then for how long?

LS:

Eighteen years.

DM:

So you were twelve-and-a-half years as deputy sheriff, and then eighteen years as city police—that's a lot more law enforcement experience than I realized.

LS:

Yeah.

DM:

Okay, what's the difference between being a deputy sheriff and a city police, as far as challenges, or duties?

LS:

Pay was a lot better, hours was about the same. Back then there wasn't no eight-hour days, it was you worked whatever you had to. But you didn't punch a clock, they didn't worry about the time, you answered your calls, and done your job.

DM:

Having this big, busy highway going through town—did that add to your workload a little bit, was there a lot of traffic problems?

LS:

Not really, of course '86 was the year when I came here, and '62 was. Of course, back in the early days, in the fifties, it wasn't as much traffic. Like I say, and the highway patrol worked out of Lubbock out here, and radar then was a tripod—sit on the side of the road, and catch them when they come by. But the early days, law enforcement—when I was deputy, we had a lot of fun. There wasn't as much crime going on, and you could have a lot more fun with one another, pull stuff on one another. Used a lot of common sense, and to me, law enforcement was always fun. It's just kind of like, you get hunting in your blood, you kind of like to go get him.

DM:

Yeah.

LS:

Well that's the same way in law enforcement—"let's go get him."

DM:

Yeah.

LS:

And but the officers were all friendly, had a lot of fellowship with—well, when I started here, we'd just started radio communication. Slime got the first radio in the car, when he went into office. Up until then, they had a dispatcher over at [inaudible] radio, it was on kind of a one-way deal, more or less [inaudible] need him. But they put in the radios in '55, and Lubbock County, and every county, and every police officer had the same frequencies. And so you knew everybody.

DM:

You knew what was going on, didn't you?

LS:

Yeah. The city of Lubbock was all on the same frequency we was.

DM:

I'll be. And you could pick them up alright?

LS:

Oh yeah. If something happened, you'd go to Lubbock to help them. I mean everybody helped one another. The county lines, or city limits, it made no difference—if somebody needs something, we was willing to help them. Because we would communicate with one another. And

then they separated all that stuff up, and DPS [Texas Department of Public Safety] always had their own frequency. The amazing thing that people don't understand—when I went to work [inaudible], DPS was on 429, but they had an AM station, and they could track from Lubbock to Austin on AM. Well on your car radio, you could slide your band over, and pick up that AM station. Well I could call Lubbock from my car on 37-180, and I could get them after me on AM, and we could communicate back and forth that way.

DM:

Uh-huh, pretty good.

LS:

The guy in Lubbock now, that was—can't recall his name—the dispatcher for DPS, back when I come here. And we were laughing about talking back and forth on AM—going one way, and coming back on the other.

DM:

Oh that's funny, so anyone could have picked up the coming back.

LS:

Yeah, you could just talk to them on one, it'd come back on the other one. [inaudible] early morning, four o'clock in the morning, call there and get the dispatcher, and have a little conversation with him.

DM:

Pretty good; how many deputy sheriffs were there in Crosby county?

LS:

Three deputies was the *most* we ever had. Then we were out from down from one to two at times, but three was all we ever had.

DM:

Would there be one on call all the time, one on duty?

LS:

All three was on call all the time.

DM:

Okay, so they just called you when they needed you, and you might--

LS:

Yeah, you was on call all the time.

DM:

Yeah, okay.

LS:

Twenty-four seven.

DM:

And then there were times they might call you all out at the same--

LS:

[inaudible] several eighteen, twenty hours [inaudible]. I think when Fletcher got shot, it was probably thirty-six hours without--

DM:

Oh, I imagine; how'd that happen?

LS:

Oh, a little Spanish boy [inaudible] we had had a little trouble, and had a little pistol, and Fletcher went to take care of the problem, and kid, this little boy was afraid of him and shot him.

DM:

Yeah, where'd he shoot him?

LS:

Right in the gut.

DM:

Right in the gut?

LS:

An old gun that wouldn't have fired if you'd picked it up, it wouldn't have shot, but it fired that time.

DM:

It did fire.

LS:

When I quit city, there still wasn't no time, I worked 24/7 all the time I was in law enforcement. After I quit, they hired three people to replace me; went to eight-hour days.

DM:

Times had changed hadn't they, golly.

LS:

Yeah, but no we had a lot of fun; we had a lot of fun with one another. The highway patrol—like I say, I worked out of Lubbock out here—and they loved to work Crosby County, because we had a lot of fun. We just had a lot of fun with one another.

DM:

That's good.

LS:

And one night we was working radar—well, if they were working radar, we'd go out there to help them; if they needed us or not, we went out there and helped them. And they'd sit out east of town—and like I say, Post had DPS frequency on their radios, and the deputy from Post come up and come through that radar about a hundred miles an hour. And we would set up about half a mile inside from where the tripod was set up, and [inaudible] went south of the eighty-two, about halfway between the two. Well, he come through it and blow it wide open; turned south, went there down that turn row, turned back, went back down the [inaudible] road—boy, you ought to have seen that dirt fly.

DM:

Y'all were after him?

LS:

Got down there about a half mile, stopped, waited, got out of his car, and just whooping himself laughing. But stuff like that was always happening. But, like I say, you really didn't know when you got after somebody whether it was another officer or whether it was--

DM:

Did you have pretty good cars?

LS:

I had a '57 Chevrolet.

DM:
Yeah.

LS:
That was still when we were furnishing our own cars. And then the county started buying the cars, I don't know, sometime after that; I don't know what year it was the county started buying cars. And paid a little bit more money too, but--

DM:
And maybe in the sixties or so, early sixties--

LS:
Yeah.

DM:
Somewhere in there, okay.

LS:
Yeah.

DM:
Well how would you spend most of your time? When you were called out, or when you were on—you say you're always on duty—but if you weren't running radar, what else might you be involved in? Did you have a lot of burglaries, or?

LS:
They didn't come over here but once in a while, the radar. Rest of the time we were on general patrol, just looking around.

DM:
Drive all over the county?

LS:
All over the county.

DM:
You got to know the county real well.

LS:
Yeah, yeah.

DM:

Were there trouble spots in the county? Were there spots in the county where there was always trouble?

LS:

Well, we worked, back then, bootleggers was pretty popular. And we worked the southwest corner part of the county, because our bootleggers would come out of Big Springs.

DM:

Yeah.

LS:

That was the place to buy anything, and they come all up through Slaton and up through where you live down there.

DM:

Did they come up Texas State Highway 207, or did they come out through Midway and out Robertson, out--

LS:

They come out through what's called Horseshoe Bend Road, and then--

DM:

Drop off at the Slaton Golf Course--

LS:

Yeah.

DM:

And come straight up, just west of Midway about a mile--

LS:

Yeah, yeah.

DM:

That road?

LS:

They come up—of course, we'd pick them up—we worked that corner where they come into

Crosby County off through the rural county roads over there. They [were] little old paved roads then.

DM:
Yeah.

LS:
But that's where we spent a lot of our weekend, back in there. And the rest of the time would just be what problems [inaudible].

DM:
Were there any bootlegging rings that you can call by name--

LS:
No--

DM:
That you had trouble with, or it was just little operation—

LS:
Little operation—just small stuff. We had two or three down there in the Flats.

DM:
Now what's the Flats?

LS:
Colored town.

DM:
Yeah, here in Ralls?

LS:
Yeah, in the southwest part. There used to be a lot of folks down there, and of course there's not anybody down there now, but that's where we spent a lot of time. A lot of fun, because we'd get gambling, and we'd get bootlegging—it was a lot of fun; catching gamblers was a lot of fun. You could walk into them old houses, they'd be there shooting craps, or playing poker or whatever, and you'd walk up to the table and watch them for a few minutes before they realize you're there.

DM:

Was it usually craps, or poker?

LS:

Most of them was craps and poker.

DM:

So you had gambling, you had bootlegging—you have prostitution down there in the Flats?

LS:

Not anything we bothered—there was some I'm sure, but it wasn't anything that--

DM:

Wasn't big time?

LS:

It wasn't that big.

DM:

Yeah, yeah.

LS:

But we had one or two that would run, [inaudible] we just got to run, and you'd have to pick them up later.

DM:

I bet you got to know some of these people pretty well?

LS:

Best friends I ever had, I'm not lying to you, it was right down there. There's guys we'd pick up every weekend, but they're still the best friends I ever had.

DM:

Yeah, yeah.

LS:

They held a grudge, they never—they'd fight for you, really. Best friends I ever had. I won't ever forget, Lubbock County, because we were one time looking for a colored guy, and I don't remember what for—but anyways, something they needed him for, and they [inaudible] got together and I went down to the Flats and was driving around, asked two or three about him, and

[inaudible] said “Man, you messed this up, we won’t never find that guy.” “Yeah we’ll find him.” And so there was a [inaudible] restaurant down there on the highway, and I said, “Let’s go get us a cup of coffee,” so we went down there to get a cup of coffee, and [we were] sitting there, and hadn’t even got the coffee drink; this guy, knocking on the window, I said “There’s your boy right there.” “How’d you do that?” I said, “Well, I’ve always said, you treat them fair. Treat them like you want to be treated, and you won’t have no problem.”

DM:

Yeah.

LS:

And I never had one that run from me, I never had one—well of course they’d run from me, in a crap game in stuff some of them would run, but must of them, we’d go pick him up later, didn’t make any difference. But I’d always agree with treating them fair. I never mistreated one—I only had to stop on the side of the road one time, and I really I guess shouldn’t have done that. But you can only take so much, and—

DM:

Oh, they were in the car and giving you trouble?

LS:

Yeah, and like I say, I could probably have gotten by without that. But anyways, their temper gets up sometimes, and you just have to stop and take care of it.

DM:

I can’t imagine; it would take a lot of patience I would think.

LS:

I picked up a big farmer at Lorenzo, met him outside here on the side of the road [inaudible]. He was going on the wrong side of the road; I picked him up for a DWI. All the way to Crosby he punched me; “Do you know who I am?” “Yeah, I know who you are. Don’t make any difference, you’re still going to jail.” He punched me again; “Do you know who I am?” “Don’t make any difference who you are, you’re still going to jail.” Well, I did put him in jail, went up and told the sheriff who I had out there, and he had made arrangements to get him out of jail pretty soon. The old man come in the next day, or day or two, and pled guilty to the DWI. Then he come hunted me up, thanked me for treating him like he ought to have been treated.

DM:

Yeah.

LS:

He said “You were the only one who treated me like I should have been treated. Rest of the time I’ve been able to say who I am and get off. Said “You never looked back, you just drove right on to the jailhouse.” I said, “Well, you were just as guilty as anybody else.” He said “I certainly was.”

DM:

That’s good.

LS:

But that’s the kind of relationship I had with most of the people. And I always said, you got to be honest, you got to be truthful, and you got to stand your ground—you’ve got to carry a bluff, you’ve just got to carry a bluff. I never had no problems—I told you about the only one guy I ever had any trouble with; like I say, I could probably have made it to jail without stopping, but you just take so much. But I just believe in treating people fair. I made eighteen-and-a-half years, never shot nobody.

DM:

Oh yeah.

LS:

Never pulled my gun on nobody.

DM:

Oh really, yeah, I was going to ask you about that, if you ever had to pull a gun.

LS:

Well I take it back; I did one night, I did. I caught a colored guy stealing tires off the new car down at the Buick house. And this is like four o’clock in the morning, and I had to chase him around there a ways to get him, and I did have my gun out that time.

DM:

Yeah, okay.

LS:

And one other time—I didn’t have to—some kids stole a tractor out north of town, and when I got out there, I’d got one of them, the other one had run out across the old playa lake. I pulled my gun out and shot it up in the air, and I know I shot that gun up in the air, and that kid hit the ground just like that. Face down, and didn’t move. I handcuffed the other one to the car, and had to walk out there to that lake to get the other one. And it seemed like half a mile out there,

because I know [inaudible] shot that kid. Know it all the time there wasn't no way. And I got out there to him, and he got up when I got out there to him; of course, there wasn't nothing wrong with him, but that was a long walk--

DM:

I know, I know, I understand.

LS:

Knowing.

DM:

Even though you know that you didn't hit—you still got to wonder.

LS:

I shot just to maybe stop him or something or another, and sure enough it did. But man, I thought I'd shot that kid.

DM:

Oh yeah, that was a long moment, wasn't it, oh boy.

LS:

It all worked out okay, but I look at these guys now carrying all this crap on their belts and stuff—can't use it, not now. If you use it, you in trouble.

DM:

Oh I know. Do you ever talk to the current policemen or deputy sheriffs or anything, do you ever talk to them--

LS:

Not anymore.

DM:

Enough to exchange information?

LS:

I don't know who they are anymore.

DM:

I bet you're glad you're not in this modern police--

LS:

Yeah, I don't know who are local police officers are anymore. I know one of them, that's all.

DM:

Well you're retired.

LS:

Well I retired, and I pulled my pickup in the driveway and walked in the house, I don't care.

DM:

There you go.

LS:

But I been retired eighteen years, and it don't seem like it. But first few years after retirement was really, really tough.

DM:

You miss that part of your life?

LS:

Well, when you spend eighteen years on the road, away from this house—come in, eat, take a nap, and up and gone, and then all of a sudden you stop.

DM:

I understand.

LS:

It was really tough. When I'd come in the house, I'd pull my gun off, put it on—had a washer and dryer right there—put my gun on the washer and dryer, pulled my boots off at the back door, which was right there then, and pull my pants off and shirt, put at the foot of the bed. And one night, I had a call—I knew this guy was going to take off. I just didn't know for sure what—but anyway, well it's a mile north, and a mile back east. And this old boy, a dope head, living with grandmother out there—and the guy that farmed the land lived in a house next to it, and he knew that old kid was fixing to steal his grandma's car and take off. So he called me about, I don't know what time it was—ten, eleven, twelve o'clock—as I'm going to bed and sleep. But I got my clothes on, fully dressed, and caught him when he got out there to the north side of town. Of course he wasn't burning the [inaudible], but I was.

DM:

He thought he was in the clear.

LS:

But I caught him right out there. That old boy said “There ain’t no way; there ain’t no way you could put your clothes on, you were sleeping with your clothes on.” “No I wasn’t.” Said “Yeah you was, you was sleeping with your clothes on, because you couldn’t have got out there that quick.”

DM:

The guy who called you said that?

LS:

But I caught him before he got—and--

DM:

Don’t you like when it works out that way, huh?

LS:

But I had to do that all the time. This guy who worked for the school, the alarm would go off at school, and he done his best to beat me to the schoolhouse, and he never beat me. So just about a month before I retired, he come in one night [inaudible] on Saturday night [inaudible], he come in and the burglar alarm went off, and they called him. He beat me that time; that was the only time he ever beat me, just because of that. He goes “I don’t know how you do it. I don’t know how you get there so quick.”

DM:

Just used to it I guess huh?

LS:

Well, I have the stuff all lined out, ready to go.

DM:

Ready to go, yeah.

LS:

It’s like I said, you used to not put anything on but your gun and handcuffs is all you ever put on your gun belt. And so that wasn’t that much of a deal. Now they got a bunch of stuff that can go on it.

DM:

Oh I know, I know it. Well what kind of gun did you carry?

LS:
.357 Magnum.

DM:
Did you ever carry a shotgun; did you ever have to have one?

LS:
Had one in the trunk of the car.

DM:
What's that?

LS:
Had it in the trunk of the car.

DM:
In the trunk of the car.

LS:
Accumulating dirt. Never used it. Shot a rattlesnake with it, and that's all. But I never used it for the business of law enforcement.

DM:
Did y'all ever do any target practicing or anything?

LS:
Done a lot of target practicing.

DM:
Did you, okay. The city, and before that the county, would provide the ammunition?

LS:
No, you furnished your own.

DM:
Okay.

LS:
I had a reload, and I reloaded a lot of my pistol shells.

DM:

Yeah, okay.

LS:

We had a lot of target practice.

DM:

Okay.

LS:

I don't know what good it done, but we did anyway.

DM:

Yeah, just in case. In this county, you've mentioned the Flats, and you've mentioned where the bootleggers came through down there at Horseshoe Bend. Were there particular towns in the county, Lorenzo maybe, or Petersburg, or any little places like that, that seemed to you had to go out there and straighten things out more than other places?

LS:

There were always places that—well, like in the Flats, you had more problems down there than you did anywhere else.

DM:

Yeah.

LS:

And after the Spanish started coming in, scattered over town, then there'd [inaudible] places that you had quite a bit of different places. Lorenzo, their Flats was always a little bit more problems than the Flats here.

DM:

Yeah.

LS:

Crosbyton had a lot more colored folks then. But you always knew where the problem was, and what the problem was before you got there, because repeated deals.

DM:

Right. And repeated people?

LS:
Huh?

DM:
The same people doing--

LS:
The same people, same people over and over. And so you knew what the problem was.

DM:
Yeah.

LS:
And dealing in a little town like this, most of the problems you knew it was going to happen before it ever happened—because the wind was blowing and stuff.

DM:
Well there's the benefit of all your experience right there. You can kind of guess what's going to happen, and you know who's going to be there, and you know their personality.

LS:
I could answer the phone at night, and by the sound of the voice, tell you who it was. And one night I got a call, and I thought I knew who had called, but I knocked on the people's door, and they wasn't they one that had called me. But I knew who it was after I talked to them; I knew where to go then. But most of the time somebody called you, some of them wouldn't give you their name, because you knew who they were. But a lot of repeated calls.

DM:
Did you have much problem with house burglaries?

LS:
Uh, very few. Back when we had more business burglaries with the house burglars out there. Earlier days, when I was deputy, we didn't have any house burglars. Maybe somebody walk in in the wrong house or something another, but we didn't have any reported house burglaries.

DM:
Okay. Has that changed, as far as you know? Is there a problem with house burglaries now?

LS:

Yeah, big problem, house burglaries now.

DM:

Okay. That just sounds like a dangerous situation.

LS:

Well, house burglaries is caused, most of the time, by that time of year, Christmastime and stuff, and then somebody talking, they may have something; "I've got something [inaudible]" or something other at my house, and the burglars pick it up, and try to get in and get that. But most house burglaries are caused by communication—well, most of them are that way. But even some of your business burglaries—we had one here at one time; they broke into that restaurant down there, and we picked her up in Dallas. I went down and got her, and I asked her—it looked like an inside job, because they went and got the money, didn't bother much anything else, just got the money, and I asked her how she knew where [inaudible], and her lifestyle and the lifestyle of the people running the café, they told her where it was. And if you just prod them a little bit, they'll tell you what you want to know, so she knew right where the money was at, come home and got it and we got her picked up in Dallas. It was real funny—I went down to get her, and I had to take a guy with me that lived here—he's gone now, but anyways—he went with me down there, and they brought this lady down for me to put my handcuffs on her. And this guy looked a little funny, he looked at that woman, he just had a firm look on his face, and I said, "He knows her." But anyways, we got in the car, started home, put her in the backseat, and of course had her handcuffed, and he was in the front with the seat with me. And she just leaned her head over the backseat and looked him in the eye and said "I know you, don't I?" "No, no, you don't know me." She said "Well you lying so and so; you know I know you." And so I stopped to get gas, and boy, they were talking in the car when I left. We got home, and another guy that lived down there south of town, he wouldn't even speak to me. We were good friends, man, he ducked me, he'd go the other direction completely. He was afraid I was going to meet that old gal. But it was a funny--

DM:

Did you have any murders in the--

LS:

We worked a few murder cases.

DM:

Did you?

LS:

We had two or three in Crosbyton, and had one here after I started went to work with the city, a little girl got killed up here. A real good friend of mine, and it was a pretty hard case to work.

DM:

And what were the circumstances of the murder?

LS:

Jealousy. Boyfriend killed her. It was, like I say, a good friend. And of course after you stay here as long as I did—and I worked with the kids. I had RAs [Royal Ambassadors, Southern Baptist church organization for boys] and youth's church, and I worked with the kids all the time, and took care of them.

DM:

RAs, is that the Baptist Church?

LS:

Yeah. And I worked pretty close with the kids, and you build a relationship; you got a pretty good friendship.

DM:

So you knew this person, you knew this girl?

LS:

Oh yeah.

DM:

Oh my.

LS:

Knew the family. But you get into those situations, you have to put friendship aside, and do a job. [inaudible] If you give somebody a traffic ticket, in Ralls they's all your friends, but you didn't run the stop sign, they did.

DM:

Yeah, that's right, that's a good way to look at it.

LS:

One time at a council meeting, one of the guys on the council was giving me a hard time about 16th Street, it was a pretty fast street, and kids use it a lot, and they do drive fast on it, and boy, he

was giving the kids a hard time about driving fast on 16th Street: “[inaudible] kids [inaudible] kids [inaudible] kids.” So he run the service station down here, and I knew what time he opened the station, so the next morning, I went out on 16th Street and set my radar up, and, oh man, here he comes, forty-five miles an hour. I stopped him, he said “Damn you, I knew you was going to be out here, I knew it.” I said “I just wanted proof that it wasn’t all kids.” And he didn’t give me no more trouble about that.

DM:

That’s good. Were the murders in the county mostly domestic disputes, that kind of thing?

LS:

Mostly Spanish.

DM:

Yeah, yeah, jealousies.

LS:

We had some back in the fifties, and early sixties. We’ve got a family here that’s mean people, and some of them was living out north and west of town, and they shot one another. That drive-by shooting, they killed two of them right out there. Killed their own family, their own brothers. So one of the oldest boys of that bunch, he was in trouble some, but he’d always liked me, I never had no problem with him. And when I went to work for the city, I chased one of them up in his yard, and there was a whole bunch of them gathered up out there. And the one I chased up there [inaudible], and, well, if you get into a mess—and I had got myself into a mess—but I was trying to get this guy out of his car and into mine, and the rest of them was ganging up pretty good, and this old man was walking—well, at that time he wasn’t an old man, but he was older—he walked over and told the rest of them to get out of the way, and told that guy to “Get out of the car, and get into that car where you’re supposed to be.”

DM:

Good.

LS:

But he got me out of that mess, because I was fixing to shoot my way out of that one.

DM:

Yeah, that’s tough when you have just a few people in the county.

LS:

Yeah, and you're by yourself, and you run into that—I mean you get there before you know it. You're just in that mess.

DM:

You don't really have any choice, it doesn't seem like, to just go ahead.

LS:

Yeah, you've got to chase that car, and get him where he stops; and I was in a mess.

DM:

Well that's a tough thing. Now, typically, were there more stabbings, or shootings, if there was some kind of violent act?

LS:

Most of them was—we had some stabbings—a lot of them was just shootings, though. Spanish was pretty bad about stabbing, they'd cut the guts out. But a lot of it was just shooting.

DM:

How about suicides; we talked about the one out at Robertson, but are there others you can think of?

LS:

I think I worked four suicides.

DM:

Yeah.

LS:

One, the man put the .22 in his mouth and shot, pulled the trigger; that was a shotgun. Then there was one up here on the corner right up there that shot himself with a shotgun, and I still have the gun. The boy didn't want it.

DM:

Yeah. What were the reasons for these—were they common, were they economic problems?

LS:

This guy that shot himself up here was as good a guy, well, it's like Johnny, as good a guy as you ever seen, there was just some reason—he lost his wife, and the stress got him.

DM:
Yeah.

LS:
We had an old JP that was in Lorenzo, Justice of the Peace—there used to be a windmill on that Golf Course Road, running the canyon going up to where you turn off sixty-two, going up the golf course. There was a windmill on the south side of that road, and that old man went up and climbed that windmill and jumped off and killed himself.

DM:
Golly.

LS:
But he lay there three or four days before we found him; that's one you don't forget.

DM:
Oh I imagine. Would that even really kill you, just jumping off a windmill?

LS:
Some way or another he'd killed himself. But the flies, bloated, and he was pretty well--

DM:
Oh, boy, that's tough work.

LS:
I had a call one time by the police officer here who had this colored guy that lived out south of town down close to where you live—didn't ever have a driver's license; he'd come to town and we'd pick him up *every* Saturday. And had a little old jail down here, and we'd always put him in that jail every Saturday, pick that guy up. And we picked him up one Saturday, and I got a call—and we were living here in this house—and they called me and I went down there and a colored guy, [inaudible] he'd shot the city judge [inaudible] and in a position to kill him.

DM:
In a what?

LS:
He was in position to kill him.

DM:
Oh yeah.

LS:

And they called me and I got down there, and I said “Ambrose, what’s the problem?” He said “Mr. Starkey put him in that jail again.” And I said, “Well, get in my car.” He walked over and got in my car, and I carried him across and he yelled “Mr. Starkey, he’s not going to do it again. I’ll kill him. He ain’t gonna do me that way no more.” And that’s like I said, with every one of those cases, you treat them right, you won’t have a problem with them. But he’d have enough, and he wasn’t going to take no more. And he’d done fought them both down; that old judge was an older man, and, well, the police officer was too, he wasn’t really in too good of health—colored guy wasn’t going to go there no more. And he’s still a good friend of mine.

DM:

Let me tell you something a district judge told me one time, and I want to see what you think about this. He was the district judge in Hale County, he said most of the people that came into his courtroom—every now and then you had a mean person—most of the people who came in there though were not bad people, they were just people who did something stupid. Is that right?

LS:

That’s true.

DM:

That sounds like it, from what you’re saying here.

LS:

Yeah, it’s good people just making mistakes.

DM:

Yeah, okay.

LS:

And some make a lot worse mistakes than others, but most of them are good people.

DM:

Yeah, so they deserve to be treated with some consideration.

LS:

You treat them like human beings.

DM:

Yeah, okay.

LS:

And that's always been my philosophy, is you treat them like a human being, treat them right, you won't have a problem with them.

DM:

Yeah.

LS:

And I don't know, I guess I've always been the guy that believes in honesty, and being right, and treating people right.

DM:

By the way, you mentioned your work with the Baptist Church, and the Baptist Encampment, were you raised Baptist, was your family Baptist?

LS:

Yes, my family was Baptist.

DM:

Yeah, okay. Was there a Baptist Church out there at Cedar Hill?

LS:

Huh?

DM:

Was there at Baptist Church out there at Cedar Hill?

LS:

Yes, yes there was.

DM:

Okay.

LS:

We didn't go there, we didn't go to church until after we moved to Flomot.

DM:

Yeah.

LS:

We started going down there some.

DM:

Yeah.

LS:

Once in a while, I [inaudible] was Assemblies of God, my brother and daddy, we would go to the Assemblies of God church at Cedar Hill, once, maybe twice a year. But we didn't really start getting involved in church until we moved to Flomot.

DM:

To Flomot, yeah.

LS:

And then our bus driver was a Baptist preacher, and he got to be real good friends of the family, and spent a lot of time out at the house, and him and dad spent a lot of time together.

DM:

Okay. Last thing I wanted to ask you about was just how Ralls has changed. You've been here a long time now, you've been here for, oh, I don't know--

LS:

Fifty-two, [fifty-] three years.

DM:

Fifty-five, fifty-something years. So what was it like in the mid-fifties, as compared to what it's like now, maybe as far as the number of businesses--

LS:

Well the businesses—of course, we don't have any businesses no more—we had business then.

DM:

Yeah.

LS:

And ninety percent of the people here, or ninety-five percent of the people here, were white folks.

DM:

Yeah, there's two huge changes right there.

LS:

And when you change the culture, businesses close. We've got mostly Spanish people now. We had a pretty good colored population back then, not a big one, but a pretty good Spanish population, because they worked the cotton press. And the cotton press closed, so they moved, and the Spanish people come in working on the farms, so the culture changed.

DM:

Right, so the number of black people declined, but the number of Spanish people has increased. Is it a majority?

LS:

Yeah, a majority of the people are Spanish.

DM:

What is it that brought the black people out here in such numbers?

LS:

Cotton press.

DM:

Cotton press, okay.

LS:

Nearly all of them—there was a few on the farm--but nearly all the people in the Flats worked at the cotton press.

DM:

Here in Ralls?

LS:

Yeah, they employed a lot of people down there.

DM:

Yeah, okay. How many do you think?

LS:

Oh there was probably about from twenty to fifty.

DM:
Okay.

LS:
In the fall.

DM:
Okay. Is it the same situation in Crosbyton, and other towns in Crosby County, that you had a larger black population that declined, and smaller Hispanic population that increased?

LS:
All over town it's the same way.

DM:
All over Crosby County?

LS:
Crosbyton had a cotton press, and Lorenzo had a cotton press. And they were mostly black. But when they quit pressing cotton, that stopped. They started doing it all in the gin now, and so that stopped the cotton press business. And the cotton press down here got maybe five employees, maybe. So, I mean, just the whole thing changed.

DM:
You think that the number of businesses has declined drastically?

LS:
Oh, yeah.

DM:
Where are they now, in Lubbock?

LS:
Lubbock. Because we used to have two clothing stores, or three, and two or three hardware stores, and two parts houses, I don't have any service stations, and several cafés; not now.

DM:
When did this decline begin, this business decline?

LS:

I don't know, I couldn't pinpoint the year on that.

DM:

Okay, but it was floating along okay in the fifties?

LS:

Yeah, they was on a boom in the fifties and sixties. Then mid-seventies, and all of a sudden it—like I say, when people started going to Lubbock--

DM:

It's about the time Lubbock really started growing, too.

LS:

Yeah, cars got better, and, of course, the gas prices got up, but that didn't stop anything going on. And go buy groceries in Lubbock—but we put people out of business.

DM:

Ralls, as far as I know, is around two thousand, or something like that now, population two thousand?

LS:

Yeah, we're right around twenty-two hundred.

DM:

Do you have any idea what it was back in the fifties?

LS:

Probably eighteen to twenty; I mean it's been about twenty I imagine. But it's changed from white to Spanish.

DM:

Some towns, some communities, have completely disappeared.

LS:

Yeah.

DM:

Robertson, basically there's--

LS:

Yeah, Flomot down there, there ain't nothing down there no more.

DM:

Flomot.

LS:

Used to be two gins, and two or three stores, and two or three service stations—there ain't nothing now.

DM:

Yeah, can you think of other towns that have pretty much just completely dried up, except maybe a house or two?

LS:

Petersburg, Burr, Dickens—all of them; everywhere around here.

DM:

Yeah. Now way back, Estacado—how do you say that town?

LS:

Estacado.

DM:

Esta--

LS:

Estacado.

DM:

Estacado, it's in Crosby county, isn't it--

LS:

No.

DM:

Or is it in Lubbock?

LS:

County Line runs just east of the--

DM:
Okay.

LS:
Old grocery store there.

DM:
Okay, but a lot of those people moved to Lorenzo I heard, does that sound--

LS:
Petersburg and Lorenzo.

DM:
Petersburg and Lorenzo absorbed that population.

LS:
Yeah. Yeah most of them went to Petersburg and Lorenzo. But County Line Road don't run straight. At Slaton, that County Line Road is in Crosby County, and on down yonder, Estacado to Lubbock. County Line don't run straight, that road.

DM:
Okay. So we talked about a couple of ways Ralls has changed, the businesses declined, the population has declined and changed, with more Hispanic, fewer blacks, fewer whites—what other ways? Can you think of other ways that the town itself might have changed, or the county?

LS:
Not really, but the culture changed, the people, people change.

DM:
Now, the landholdings seemed to have changed. We were talking about your family had its, what three quarters of a section did you say? And now you have large landholdings.

LS:
Yeah, well, bigger is getting bigger. And the prices of land have got so high now that that's all people could buy land for. And just think, my daddy gave thirty-five dollars a nickel for that whole place, [inaudible] it's worth twelve hundred now. So, and land like that is only bought for recreation purposes, there's no way it would help pay for itself. It took us forever to pay for it like it was.

DM:

The recorder's running here, so I don't know if you want to talk about this or not. But before we turned the recorder on, you were talking about how generations have changed. Do you want to talk a little bit about that on the recorder?

LS:

Well, the respect; I say it's the respect. For one another, respect for yourself; respect for authority has completely made a flip-flop. And that's what causes the penitentiary to be full today. "You can't tell me what to do, I'll do it if I please, and I'll drive like I want to; or I'll do as I please." And when you are stopped and just blaming the police officer for all your problems, or you're playing your teachers at school for your problems, or your mama and daddy for all your problems, you're bringing these problems on yourself. And when you leave your respect—and that's what has happened, and that's what our problem is.

DM:

There's a huge difference in the mid-fifties and now it seems like.

LS:

Well, when I was raised up, if your uncle told you to go do something, and you rebelled, he busted your butt. And he didn't ask mom or dad if it was okay. And today, mama and daddy don't dare touch him.

DM:

Well, and you were talking about the liability issues on the police force too, whereas people are well-equipped now, but they can't do anything.

LS:

That's right.

DM:

They're scared, because they'll--

LS:

Because of the courts. When I was a kid, I was a mischievous little fart I guess, but anyway, my uncle was setting out some mulberry trees—and I had a bunch of uncles, but anyway this one was setting out mulberry trees—and he and I had got crossways about something, and I told him I was going to pull up the trees, and he said "If you do, I'll bust your butt with it." I did, and he did. So I mean when they told you to do something, they had the authority to do it. But now, you don't dare touch one child.

DM:

It's kind of like they say—and this happened with me too—if I got in trouble at school, I got a spanking at school, and when I got home, I got another one.

LS:

I keep my daddy from knowing about it; my sister's always blabbing.

DM:

And when you have ten brothers and sisters, that might be quite a chore, huh?

LS:

Yeah, but no, the times has changed, and it's like I say, the authority, the respect has changed. There's just no respect. Like you were talking about them kids walking across the street, looking at you like they dare you to touch them. You won't run over them, but you can't ever touch them. But I still bust my grandkid's butts if they need it. And I know that I'll be in trouble for doing it, but I'd still do it if I needed.

DM:

Well I have exhausted my questions—do you have anything else that you'd like to add?

LS:

Not really, except I'm just surprised to be here. I will add that back after I got to work for city, we had formed a South Plains Chief of Police Association, which included the South Plains, all the chiefs we could get to join us, and we'd meet once a month over at Reese Air Force Base, and I would meet them and discuss things. And I acquainted with a lot of good police officers. Tom Nichols, I knew, got to know Tom real well, and Floyd Holder over at Levelland—and a lot of those guys--

DM:

Ted Holder?

LS:

Got acquainted with pretty well.

DM:

Ted Holder?

LS:

Ted Holder, yeah.

DM:

I know Ted real well.

LS:

Yeah, Ted, Ted Holder. I said Floyd, but Ted. And DPS officers always enjoyed the Texas Rangers, and the DPS officers—always had a great fellowship with them; lot of fun.

DM:

Who was that long-term police chief in Lubbock? Can't remember his last name now, I interviewed him.

LS:

Okay.

DM:

Yeah, so that was a cozy community then, if you could call on people and you knew them.

LS:

Yeah.

DM:

That's real good.

LS:

And Lubbock detectives and stuff, when they needed something—they liked to get out of Lubbock.

DM:

Yeah, I imagine.

LS:

Best way to get out of Lubbock was say "Oh, we've got a warrant for a guy in Crosbyton, or Ralls, we need to go there." They go over there and spend a while.

DM:

Yeah, that's good, that's good.

LS:

It was a whole different world. And you go across the shop and sit down to a table—didn't make no difference who was sitting there, you'd go sit down and visit with them. But I think I've had a

pretty good relationship here, I have a lot of friends here. And I'd always tried not to be partial to anybody, race or whatever. We'd have a little problem sometimes with someone being racist, but it just depends on the situation. And most everybody, in my opinion, deserves what they get, because they caused it. And if you stopped somebody, and he was a nice old boy, and you'd visit with him a while, and everything's okay. Next guy you stop and he's cross with you, give him a ticket. Oh, back in the fifties and stuff, we drove like crazy, because we had to get back, because there wasn't nobody here to cover for you. And I was going to Lubbock one day, and I decided right then I was going to drive the speed limit or below; I wasn't going to be in no hurry. And before I got to the Idalou, highway patrolman stopped me. And I was in my personal car, and he stopped me and walked up to the car, and said "You was driving a little fast, wasn't you?" And I said "I certainly wasn't." And anyway, in a minute he said "Well I stopped you because I wanted to talk to you, I had a question I wanted to ask you."

DM:

He knew who you were?

LS:

Yeah, he knew. And so "I need to ask you something," and so anyways, but that's the only time I've really been stopped—well I've never been stopped except two or three times—but that was one time I was stopped when I was really trying to do right, and he stopped me.

DM:

How funny.

LS:

[inaudible] used to get on me, because I knew everybody and stuff. And we was in Lubbock one day, and the policeman stopped me, and my inspection sticker was expired. And I knew it had, because back then they wouldn't put an inspection sticker on in bad weather.

DM:

Yeah.

LS:

And anyway, he stopped me and said "L.T., you know your inspection sticker is expired?" I said yeah, I knew. [inaudible] I said we've got to go off, and he said "Well I guess it does pay to know somebody, doesn't it?" But it does pay. But we had a good time, we've been able to establish a home, and it hasn't been easy, pay wasn't that good—I made more money after I worked with the city than I ever made in my life—but it's been good.

DM:

Was it a fulfilling career—well, you said you missed it when you retired?

LS:

Do what?

DM:

You said you missed it when you retired.

LS:

Well, you're changing your whole life.

DM:

Oh yeah, yeah.

LS:

When you spend twenty-four hours a day waiting for that dang phone to ring, and then all of a sudden you're sitting there twenty-four hours a day doing nothing, you come off of the high, down in the valley, and it was tough.

DM:

Yeah.

LS:

It was tough. I thought I had hobbies to take care of that, but a hobby don't replace your job.

DM:

And that job you had, sometimes it was a high adrenaline—a lot of excitement.

LS:

Right. Well, you wanted the phone to ring, I guess you could say. So you enjoyed it.

DM:

Right. Well you had to feel like you were really playing an important role, because you were.

LS:

And I enjoyed my work, I enjoyed being a police officer. And most trouble I had was with city council.

DM:
Really?

LS:
With the bosses, because if I give you a ticket, you go to one of the councilmen or somebody.

DM:
Oh, oh.

LS:
“Well, he was a friend of mine. I don’t want you to—” And I had [inaudible] but anyway, I had him tell me to leave him alone.

DM:
Golly.

LS:
And get certain ones, and leave the rest of them alone—you don’t enforce the law that way.

DM:
No.

LS:
You have to be careful, have to be honest, have to be grateful, and stand your ground, and carry a bluff. You’ve got to make them you’re thinking stuff when you aren’t.

DM:
Right, yeah.

LS:
If you tell them I’m going to kick your bottom—kind of like Fletcher Stark was; he said “If I’m going to slap you, you better start dodging,” cause he’s fixing to slap. And he was going to do it.

DM:
That makes sense. Well okay, anything else?

LS:
No I guess that’s it.

DM:

Okay, I'm going to shut this off.

LS:

Unless you got something--

End of interview



© Southwest Collection/
Special Collections Library