

African American Oral History Project

Old City Hall

Denham Springs, Louisiana

Interviewer: Sarah Colombo, Head of Adult Services, Livingston Parish Library

Interviewee: Daniel Landry, Denham Springs, Louisiana



Livingston Parish
L I B R A R Y

S.C. Today is Tuesday, December 10, 2013, and this is the start of an interview with Daniel Landry at the Denham Springs-Walker Branch of the Livingston Parish Library in Livingston, Louisiana. My name is Sarah Colombo. I will be the interviewer. I am the Head of the Adult Services for the Livingston Parish Library and we will be talking to Mr. Landry about his knowledge of Denham Springs and education in the area and whatever else he wants to share with us. So first, just go ahead and introduce yourself.

D.L. I am Daniel Landry, Sr., and a lifetime resident of Denham Springs, Louisiana.

S.C. Okay, and when were you born?

D.L. I was born November 1, 1947.

S.C. Where were you born?

D.L. I was born here in Denham Springs, and I was not born in the hospital, I was born at home.

S.C. Okay.

D.L. Midwife.

S.C. And where did you go to school?

D.L. I began and completed my education, pre-college education, at West Livingston Elementary and High school in Denham Springs. That was located formerly on what was Rodeo Drive here in Denham Springs and has since been re-named Martin Luther King Drive in Denham Springs. I attended school there from roughly 1952 until my graduation in May of 1965.

S.C. Okay. So when you started school, the schools were still segregated in this area?

D.L. Yes. Yes. All of my education was in a segregated school. West Livingston was at that time. West Livingston was an elementary. Well, we didn't have, when I went to school, we didn't have kindergarten, what we called primary school, started in grade one at about age five. And some twelve

years later hopefully we graduated. From the same school. All of the, all of the entire plan of the school was contained in that one site, grades one through twelve.

S.C. Oh really?

D.L. Yes.

S.C. Did you have the same teacher for multiple years, or a different teacher each year?

D.L. No. Basically we had different teachers, beginning with the first grade. Only in, in fact I can't recall, except when we got to high school and at that time, of course, we had multiple teachers because we had multiple subjects and we went according to the subject area to a different teacher. But, no, basically, we had a different teacher each year.

S.C. Did you have tracks in your high school?

D.L. In terms of, you're asking that in terms of...

S.C. Like agricultural, mechanic, something like that?

D.L. No. We had, we just had the core subjects, and we had what we considered electives that you got looked at, but into, the girls went into home making and there was an industrial arts class for the guys, you know. That was about as close as it came to anything in terms of tracking, and there was not a free college curriculum, so everybody was held to, and expected to meet the core standards. Of course, around that time, it was about, it was expected that probably no more than 40-50% of the students would go on to college. Those who were not college ready, or college eligible, or whatever might be the best term for it, they went on to other jobs, or careers, or did something else.

S.C. What were you interested in when you were in high school? As far as hobbies, or....

D.L. Well, sports was, was always one of my assets. I was an avid, sports enthusiast as well as a pretty good athlete during my early days, however at the school we only had one sport and that was basketball.

S.C. Oh really?

D.L. We were a small school so we didn't have a football team, we didn't have a baseball team, but through other pursuits, recreational during the summer they would set up programs, so athletics was always one of my pursuits. My early pursuit was I was intrigued with the legal field, in becoming a lawyer. But the person didn't have any lawyers, any African-American lawyers, in the community, but as television became more viable then we had the opportunity to see some of the types of careers. That was one of the things that intrigued me. And the persons who were most held up as our role models and models that we could readily see in our community, were school teachers. They commanded a great deal of respect, and we thought that they made a great deal of money, though we know now they really didn't.

S.C. Yeah.

D.L. So you know, it was expected that if you went to college, that you were going to come out in the area, generally, in the teaching field. And of course, the other more visible areas in our community were in mortuary science, which I didn't hanker for. I didn't want to fool with dead folks. Of course preachers were also held in very high esteem, and I didn't get the calling for that either. So, it's all...oh and there's the fourth one that was the military.

S.C. So you said that there was only a 40% graduation rate?

D.L. No,

S.C. going to college.....

D.L. Of those who, of those persons who graduated probably only 40% went on to college even though preparation was being made for those of us who had showed the aptitude. Even before "No Child Left Behind" and all these programs we have come to know were in place, at West Livingston which was the main school for a large part of the parish, especially the western part of the parish, the parish was sort of divided into, like two schools. West Livingston took in students all the way from Port Vincent, from

Walker to Livingston, all that area, came west to school and then when the school was built, Albany-Springfield, East Livingston it was called, and it took in the area of Albany, Springfield, and then I think Port Vincent area then went to that school. But for a long time West Livingston was the only black school in the Parish. So persons came all the way from the farthest reaches to the east, I know, or at least as far as Livingston Louisiana, Port Vincent and Head of Island and that area, they came all the way to school every morning.

S.C. Wow! Did a bus take them?

D.L. Yes. They had buses that had a regular route to go and pick them up, as far north as Watson, Louisiana, all the way to the Saint Helena line came, and I think that some of the persons who were near to the Saint Helena line just crossed over into Saint Helena to go to school there cause it was easier to do.

S.C. So where did ... why did ... you obviously you went to college, right?

D.L. Yes.

S. C. Where did you go?

D.L. Southern University.

S.C. Okay.

D.L. I began attending Southern University September of 1965.

S.C. Okay. And why do think you ended up going to college when such a small percentage of the people you went to high school with did go to college?

D.L. Oh, by the time I graduated, by the time I graduated, there was a higher percentage of persons who were going. But as I started to say was one of the things even before we had standards that were set up much like the testing standards that hold students accountable and accountability, if you didn't make the grade you didn't get promoted to the next grade. So that you stayed in a particular grade until you met the

standards at West Livingston. Which is why even though you might have had students in some cases one or two years older than you were, in class because they had not met the standards. They weren't doing social promotions unless you got really, really old in a grade, then you know, so you'd find that there were quite a number of students who finally just go too old for – like they'd be 14 or 15 in the eighth grade, and something of that sort - and they would be, they would just drop out. So a lot of those didn't make it all the way through.

S.C. So did you feel like - were your parents really encouraging for you to go college? Or?

D.L. Oh, yeah. Well, our parents were encouraging. You were going two places in my household you were definitely going to be going: that was the church and the school. And it was expected in our family that we would go on to, in spite of the hardships that it sometimes caused for the family financial situation and funds, but my parents, I have four siblings, and we all went to college. Three of us completed college. My older brother spent some three years, then he went to the military, and into industrial employment. He was the only one that did not finish. At that time we had raised our levels of expectations of what we could be. By the time I graduated from school then I saw lawyering as a distinct possibility. My older brother wanted to be an engineer, but of course that involved monies and things of that sort for the supplies, and stuff that you had to have and, you know, and waiting for one of your friends to finish at one or two o'clock in the morning so you could get started to borrow things, so I think that had some impact on if you didn't have a grant or scholarship or something of that sort it made it extremely difficult. I didn't have the easiest time getting through from a financial standpoint, but with God's help, and whatever our parents put in, and of course working in addition to that. I was very fortunate. I married very young. I was 18 ½ when I got married. I got married in '66 after having graduated in '65. And my wife was very instrumental, and she worked as a food service manager at the same school that we had graduated, we both graduated from West Livingston. And so we were able to provide for families and do all the other type of spending, through working and going to school.

S.C. So you were married after your first year of college?

D.L. Yes.

S.C. Okay. And what year did you graduate?

D.L. Graduated in 1965. Oh, from college.

S.C. From college.

D.L. My first graduation was my bachelor' degree was in 1970.

S.C. What was your degree in?

D.L. In social studies. In education. A major in social studies concentration in political science.

S.C. And then after that you went on to get a master's degree, or you worked...

D.L. I took a master's degree in '74 and +30 in '77. Thirty degrees above a master's degree.

S.C. Oh, I've never heard of that. So what was your master's degree in?

D.L. My master's degree was in administration.

S.C. And then after that what did you start doing?

D.L. Well, the other hours, a compilation of, a myriad of courses but they would be in administration primarily and in the fields, of further advanced fields of the early studies of political science and social studies courses.

S.C. So what did you do? You said you worked while you were in college. Where did you work while you were in college?

D.L. Well, believe it or not, the year that I started work in September, I mean that I started college, was the year we had one of the more disastrous hurricanes hit, Hurricane Betsy and she struck September 5 I think in 1965 and so we began. Well, my first job was to come back from college because the college

campuses were sort of shut down for a while, well just for about a week because they got debris and stuff. One of the first jobs I started working with was the City of Denham Springs removing debris and things of that sort, and later I worked for who would become future mayor, Herbert Hoover, and he owned the appliance store. His appliance store was right there on the corner of Julia and Range, right where they have the party store.

S.C. Yeah.

D.L. That was the appliance store then. I worked part time for him while I went to school. Later I worked there, took a semester out of school and worked at a plant in Saint Charles Parish with my brother, worked for the city of Denham Springs in the street department for a short while before going back to complete my degree.

S.C. And what did you do when you finished your degree?

D.L. When I finished my degree, I didn't have a job immediately, and I finished in August of '70, I think took my undergrad degree in August of '70 and went to work as a shipping clerk, I guess you'd call it, my job was making sure the packages and stuff got to the post office on time there for what was then Maison Blanche, or Goudchaux's, was an old, was a long-time business in Baton Rouge, around 1500 Main Street, I think it was. And so I worked there and made applications for various jobs, East Baton Rouge Parish in particular, and got the call in October. This was after the school year began because the school year would begin in September, and I got a call and asked to come in for an interview, and very thankfully was awarded a position at Sherwood Junior High School. October 5 of '70 is when I began my teaching career.

S.C. And what subject did you teach?

D.L. I taught social studies and English.

S.C. And you said that was an elementary school? High school

D.L. No, no, a junior high school.

S.C. And how long did you work there?

D. L. Eleven years at Sherwood, before I was awarded a position as a personnel relations specialist with, at the school board. That job consisted of serving as sort of a spokesperson, an ombudsman, sort of between persons on the staff, teachers, food service workers, mechanics, or whoever. If they had a difficulty, they could call one of us to come in to serve, to intercede on their behalf with the entity, with whomever the difficulty was. It might be their immediate supervisor, principal of a school, the head of the mechanics pool, the head of food service, or whatever. This was brought about because there was a strike that was had in the East Baton Rouge Parish school system in 1979. And so to abate that and to prevent that from happening again, there was set up a mechanism by which persons that were having difficulties could come to someone and try to get it resolved at a level closest to where it was happening. And that position consisted of persons from elementary level working with elementary, persons middle school level working with persons in the middle school level, high school person working with high school level. And then all of us were trained in working persons who were auxiliary personnel, for example like in the ... working with other parts of the school system. And the limit of time it was written into the procedures of that job, and that person, they would rotate that person in that job so as not to stagnate that position or a person be every two years, a person would serve that position for no more than two years and then they would rotate out and have someone else come in.

S.C. And so what did you do after the two years?

D.L. After the two years I went to Glasgow Middle School as the assistant principal. And I was an assistant principal there for three years and at the end of the three years I was moved to the principalship at that school. In all total I was at Glasgow for a total of fourteen years.

S.C. And then.

D.L. And then I moved to, back to central office to serve as, with the Title I program as a Title I supervisor.

And

S.C. And this was all in East Baton Rouge Parish, right?

D.L. And all this was in East Baton Rouge Parish. The seventeen years I spent, I spent seventeen years which is culminated with my retirement there on October 5 of 2013. Exactly 43 years after I began on October 1957.

S.C. So, you said you were born in Denham Springs. Where in Denham Springs did you grow up? In the same house the whole time?

D.L. Yes, yes. I lived at what is now called Deemer Street. It was not Deemer Street at the time. It was located just off Summer Street. And 190. Just south of that is the road that is Deemer Street. And I grew up in that area. All the area that comprises where the West Livingston School was is now called L.M. Lockhart Park, or West Livingston Recreation.Center and Park, L.M. Lockart. Mrs. Lockhart. The reason that the Mrs. - if you look at the sign you'll see in parentheses the Mrs. and say why would they put that there and it was put there mostly because of the impact of one of the things that happened at one of the graduations and didn't just happen one time, but I know it more memorably that it happened where one of the board members, and I think even the superintendent addressed our principle Mrs. Louise Lockhart she was a legend in our area. He was introduced by her and he said 'thank you Louise' and we just thought that was so distasteful and disrespectful instead of Mrs. Lockhart.

S.C Mmhm

D.L. And so that when the site was renamed and made a park we were very insistent that it show up Mrs. Louise Lockhart.

S.C So Mrs. Lockhart was the principal when you were there. And you felt that she wasn't as respected maybe?

D.L. We know that she wasn't respected at the level that she should have been respected by the all-white school board. They would come to the graduations, and I attended graduation maybe even before I was in school. But I know certainly that I can remember one of the most memorable graduations was the graduation of Author Perkins, when he graduated from high school. It was held out in an open field area in the evening we sat out on the grass and stuff at the graduation on a platform at the back of one of the buildings. One of the home economics building I guess I want to say, but I remember that, and my parents taking us out to the graduation.

S.C. What year was that one? Do you know?

D.L. I think Mr. Perkins probably graduated in '55, so if I was born in '47 so I was probably eight years old.

S.C. So do you have any specific memories of Mrs. Lockhart? Any good stories about her?

D.L. Yeah, do I have any specific memories? I don't think any history of Denham Springs in general, and certainly no history of Denham Springs and the black community and her impact on the black community would be complete without mentioning her. And if you interviewed a hundred persons my age, maybe some of the younger persons wouldn't know, but Mrs. Louise Mack Lockhart was the center of everything that we did in the black community, both school wide and community wide. It was Mrs. Lockhart who symbolized for us what we should be, and what we could be. She was a lady who was very stern but very committed to all of our education. When I arrived on the scene in first grade I already knew about Mrs. Lockhart, because I had siblings. I'm the youngest member of my four siblings and so we knew about Mrs. Lockhart, and we knew that if you didn't act right on campus she took care of that. She kept something in her purse that would take care of that for that matter, and you asked if I had any remembrance of her, yeah I have plenty of remembrances, because I didn't always do what I should do.

D.L. But this was a different time. And it was understood that she was... there is a Latin phrase for it "In loco parentis" means in the absence of the parent. She was the parent on that campus, and even on the

weekends if she heard that you done something in the community, you were brought to the office to hold accountability for it, even if you did it on the weekend. And she would advise you: “be sure and go and tell your parents, because I taught them.” And so there wasn’t a parent who was going to go to say to Mrs. Lockhart “well that happened on the weekend.” And, I can recall one incident were the parent gave the children permission to go to Franklinton Fair. Franklinton is located up near Bogalusa, and they have a big fair there every year, and Mrs. Lockhart, because she had some concerns about that, had put out an edict. And this didn’t happen to me, because I was still a bit young, but that persons were not to go to that particular fair, and some persons defied her and went anyway. When they arrived at school on Monday she knew exactly who had gone, and they all had a visit with Mrs. Lockhart.

S.C. So you said she had, what did she have in her purse, a switch? A paddle?

D.L. No, it wasn’t a paddle. She had a leather strap belt.

S.C. Wow.

D.L. Yeah. Where you acted up at is where you were corrected at. If you acted up in an assembly you were brought up to the front of the assembly and that’s where it was dealt with. I mean it wouldn’t be done today because with lawyers, and with persons waiting for an opportunity to pounce on any nuance or whatever. Anyway that’s the situation we were brought up in, and we were better for it, let’s just put it that way.

S.C. So I wanted to talk a little bit about that because you did work in education for so many years. How did you see it change over your lifetime? How the schools were in Denham Springs when you were growing up, and then how they changed.

D.L. Oh, there’s a vast difference, first of all the segregation. When we were going to school, we received school books that already had been over utilized, and as they were discarded at one site at a new school, a white school I suppose they brought us the books in many cases. Now as things increased, as I said I

had twelve years to observe toward the ends of that time we did begin to get some of the newer resources, new books. And it wasn't until I reached high school that I began to get books that didn't already have names or stamps in them that said, that were from all-white schools. So that was one of the things. The provision of recourses. The West Livingston campus, inside that school, there are persons that can give you history it moved some three times. It was first begun at a church, then moved from a church to the area now on the corner there where what would be 190 I guess. Where the McDonalds is now. And later moved to a site which later became West Livingston Elementary School. There are persons that can tell you that every family had to provide kindling and wood for potbelly stoves during the early years. Probably Mr. Perkins can relate to that and probably would have been a part of that. I wasn't a part of that, because by the time I got there in '52 or thereabouts, some things had begun to improve. Even though we were receiving the outdated books, I won't say outdated, but anyway they had been used, they weren't the new editions. I've seen transitions. I have seen more specialized tracks put in. Special education venues and programs and improvements in terms of imposition of federal funding, like Title I funds to help make up the difference where families didn't have incomes and stuff. Title I stepped in to fill those gaps, because it's based on the poverty index and things of that sort.

S.C. That was in East Baton Rouge, though?

D.L. No. Title I is a national program. And so Livingston parish also received Title I funds for the utilization of filling in the gaps. For educational recourses to provide media and cameras, and books, and training, and all of that's a part of what Title I funds were used for. So all school districts receive Title I funding, just like they receive Special Education funding, and it is expected to be utilized to fill in the gaps. And yes I've seen with the integration of schools and I've seen it in both positive and negative ways. I've seen it in positive ways, where in, where I worked I was given an opportunity, because where I worked at in the 1970s, Sherwood, Sherwood had an all-white student clientele. Then we were part of, albeit I came about a month behind the other teachers who began in September of that year, what was called

cross-over teachers. They were teachers following the court ordered desegregation of schools. The personnel was integrated first.

S.C. Was that the first year? 1970?

D.L. 1970 was the cross-over year in East Baton Rouge Parish. The last year for West Livingston as a school I think was 1968 or '69. They had begun with integrating some students I think as early as 1968 at the High School level, and West Livingston finally closed as an elementary school, grades 1-5, with Mr. Perkins being the principal. I think that was in '68 or '69. It might have been the last year before there was a high school, and it may have continued one additional year as an elementary school before all the schools were fully integrated and West Livingston was closed as a facility.

S.C. So what was your experience like in the cross over?

D.L. I had two sets of experiences. One: I lived here in Livingston Parish so I had an experience there, here in Livingston Parish, and I also had an experience with the system of being a teacher in a different system. The way that I ended up in East Baton Rouge Parish I've got to say, is because of the fact that as a young man even before I graduated out of college, I represented, I want to say, the communities because we had persons come before the school board, to request that they leave West Livingston open and that whites be transferred to West Livingston as opposed to transferring all the black students into the other side, of course that was met with disdain. That was part of the reason, because of my request to meet before the board, that it was recommended it would not be a good idea for me to seek a job, if and when I did finish college, in Livingston Parish. Let's just say that this was done, by that time, having had several years of college under the belt, and as I told you at one time that being a lawyer, and being a spokesperson was nothing foreign to me even at a young age. There were persons who were within the school system who were fearful that their jobs might be compromised if they took any stance. So when the call was put forth for someone who would be willing to go and advocate on their behalf, I felt strongly enough about the good things that had occurred for me and for many others at West Livingston.

Especially given the fact that the high school had already been integrated. We were talking about leaving it open as an Elementary School, talking about a school at that time that had just undergone probably half a million to a million dollars worth of construction. With new special education buildings, new cafeteria, improvements to the school had been made to the building, and they were willing to shut that down and just let it go into ruin rather than bring students to the school. I thought that was both wasteful as well as so, I did make the trek and did speak before the board. Even though it was met with some moderate success by several persons who thought that was an idea worth considering. Most of the board voted down the idea of keeping it open, I think at that time, I'm not sure if they had nine members or seven members at that time. They later went to a nine member board to comply with some guidelines. I think at that time they probably had five members on the board. And I think the vote was like maybe four to one in terms of closing it. In favor of closing it. I'll never forget the one dissenting vote was Ms. Candace Strickland who thought that it was an idea worth considering, but she was the only female member on that board. All the males voted unequivocally to close it.

S.C. So that made it so that, you felt like that, or you were told that it so that it was difficult for you to work in the parish?

D.L. No, let's just say for healing purposes I don't dwell on it a great deal. But no I was told specifically by individuals that I need not apply as long as they were, had anything to do with the board.

S.C. So you ended up in East Baton Rouge Parish?

D.L. Yes

S.C. And you said you were in the cross-over year?

D.L. Cross-over simply meant that teachers from all black, and all white situations were sent to racially different schools. Now in East Baton Rouge Parish, that involved some teachers from white situations going over to all black schools, and some teachers from all black school coming over to schools that

were formerly all white. That wasn't the case here in Livingston Parish because in Livingston Parish all that black schools were closed, and so all the black personnel transitioned over to white, or formerly all white schools.

S.C. So they crossed the teachers over before they integrated the student body in East Baton Rouge?

D.L. In East Baton Rouge it occurred on, I think in similar both students and teachers were. Of course not at Sherwood, cause at Sherwood you had cross over the faculty first. And it was several years before there were any black students. Because all the schools were localized schools, they had their own school district, and Sherwood Forest at that time probably because of living patterns determined where a person goes to school and there probably were no black families living there. So as black families moved into those areas I recall we had, the first year I think, there were two black students among some seven, eight hundred students. I think they may have lived in some duplexes or apartment complexes or something. And that put them in the bussing zone for that particular school. But now there are much more persons that move, there's much more portability for persons moving into areas, and moving out of areas. Forty years ago that wasn't the pattern.

S.C. So how was it that first year, for you?

D.L. My first year went fine for me. Because I had very good training both coming in through West Livingston, and having an idea of what the teaching level was. Southern University where I did my undergraduate studies, prepared us very well because they could see where the trend was going, so I had a good year.

S.C. So a good first year of teaching, haven't heard that very much.

D.L. Yeah, yeah.

S.C. So your parents, were your parents born in this parish too?

D.L. Both of my parents I might say. My mother lived in this parish, in this area. Her mother and family lived in the area but they moved, I wouldn't know exactly what year it was, but they moved quite early I guess, in the late 1800's, into the Denham Springs area. They moved from an area which was called Deerford. Now my parents, my mother, they were sharecroppers and they lived on persons' places, and they did sharecropping, and they would have a little house or something. So they didn't always stay at the same place, but eventually they landed in this area. My grandmother Rachel Hamilton, bought property in the area, in fact I live on a piece of the property now, off of East Street, and she bought a plot of land which was enough to provide, she had nine children, nine lots and I live on one of those lots now. And it ran from between what is now Martin Luther King, was Rodeo at one time, all the way to what is Bay Street. And each lot is about eighty feet deep by a hundred and twenty feet so, whatever nine times a hundred and twenty is I guess it's about a thousand. She bought enough property in one area. You have to remember that property was probably selling at, you could probably get a lot at about twenty-five dollars.

S.C. Wow

D.L. But that was a lot of money during in that time, so that was my mother. My father was from the Sorrento area. He migrated according to the work patterns, and where he could find work. Remember that 1947 was right after the depression ended in 1945. So persons had to move according to where they could find work. Fortunately he moved into the area and met my mother, and they were married, and so as we might say, the rest is history.

S.C. What was your mother's name?

D.L. Wilma, Wilma Jackson. Jacson was her maiden name, and Landry was her married name. My father's name was Henry Landry, and I bear a portion of that name, my name is Daniel H. Daniel Henry Landry.

S.C. Are your parents still alive?

- D.L. No, my father died in 1980, August of 1980, and my mother died in 2001. She died on June 8th 2001.
- S.C. Where are they buried?
- D.L. There buried at the Plain View Cemetery, which is off of what we call Magnolia Bridge Road. That's the road that's opposite Lockhart Road here in Denham Springs, but going west into Baton Rouge, if you were to travel down 16, and when you arrived at that light which is Lockhart Road, and Magnolia Bridge Road, make a left, going into East Baton Rouge Parish, and go I guess about three hundred yards, and there's a little road that detours off called Plain View Cemetery. And they're both buried there.
- S.C. What year was your mother born?
- D.L. My mother was born in 1912, my father was born in 1902.
- S.C. 1902?
- D.L. Yeah.
- S.C. And you have how many siblings?
- D.L. I have three other siblings. My older brother Charles, he's about nine and a half years older than I am.
- S.C. What's his birthday?
- D.L. He was born on August the 13th of, I want to say, '36 I guess. Whatever nine years would be. I'll have to go back and compute. Then my older sister Elizabeth is, she's 71, she still lives and she lives in East Baton Rouge Parish, but maintains properties here. Then my sibling that's next to me, Sarah, whom you've met, she's still a teacher at the Denham Springs Elementary school. I think she's going into her forty-sixth year, and she's two years older than me.
- S.C. What's her married name?
- D.L. Sarah Scott.

S.C. And your other sister is she married?

D.L. Elizabeth Smith .

S.C. Do you have any children?

D.L. Yes I have five children, and some twenty-five grandchildren. And so my oldest daughter is Dana. Dana was born November 20th in '66. And then my son Daniel was born fourteen days after I started teaching, he was born on the 19th of October, 1970. And my middle daughter Danita was born on May 2nd, and she was born in '74. My youngest daughter Danisha Landry Goldman, she was born June 6th of '76. And then my youngest son Danecus Landry was born on June 21st of '79.

S.C. And what's your wife's name?

D.L. My wife is deceased. Late wife, Carolynn Morris, was her maiden name, Landry. She's also interred at Plain View Cemetery.

S.C. What year did she pass away?

D.L. She passed on June 21st of 2001.

S.C. And what did she do?

D.L. She was food service manager here in the parish. She was the food service manager at South Side Elementary School on Range in Denham Spring. Times would pass when she was the only Black food service manager in this parish.

S.C. How far back do you know of your family history?

D.L. In terms of how much I actually know, or how much I did research...

S.C. Either one you know, the farthest back ancestor you know or what you know about them.

D.L. Probably the farthest ancestor I know back is my grandmother. Both of my grandmothers, I didn't know either of my grandfathers. Both of my grandmothers on my father's side and my mother's side. My grandmother, my father's mother's name was Delfine Sylvester, and then my mother's mother was Rachel Hamilton Jackson. And the other information had been handed down, and passed down by our parents, but I knew both of my grandmothers. I guess as far as my history goes back in terms of actual knowledge of them, are those grandparents.

S.C. The only ones that you met?

D.L. Yes

S.C. What stories have you heard about your family before then? Anything?

D.L. Just that they were sharecroppers and that they had to move. My father and their family moved, they had to move and came to the Denham Springs area. My father lived in the area around the Gonzales-Sorrento area, and he would tell us some things about the boyhood, things of coming up. Times were hard they went through, not only one but evidently lived through two depressions, and they would tell us about how hard things were. But most of my actual vivid memories were of my grandparents were that they were church loving, fun loving persons, and very strict and orthodox in terms of what they expected from their children and grandchildren. And the grandchildren didn't receive any special dispensations if they misbehaved. We could be disciplined by any of our relatives. I had aunts and uncles, and the extended family was very, very important. If you acted up or misbehaved at church, or out in the street, or did whatever, you not only got that spanking or whatever. I can remember being four or five years of age and my mother did housework and she went to various, not only one family, but she had a certain number of days with this family and then had another certain number of days with some of the other families. Some of the more prominent families in the Denham Springs area, because she was very good at what she did, so by word of mouth they would pass it on at the country clubs I guess or whatever, that such and such a person was excellent in terms of housekeeping, and ironing and things of that sort. So

there was no shortage in terms of, actually persons in that time, to be honest with you, would make contracts between themselves, I mean families: "I have her on such and such a day, can I have her on such and such a day?" Now of course that's with the person consenting, but they would get sort of like an approval between families: "Is it alright if I contact her about coming to me on the days that, you know?" "Yeah, I'll tell you to expect her." You know, that kind of stuff. I haven't seen the movie *The Help*, but I imagine it was something very similar to like that. But less I digress one of the things, I recall as a very young boy I was not even in school yet, was the person coming to pick my mother up to take her to a house for that particular day. My mother not having the time to properly see that I got to my aunts, because I had an aunt that I would stay with during the day, she told me where I was to go. I was old enough to know how to go through the pathway and go to my aunt's house, but on this particular day I took it upon myself I was going to follow the car that had come to pick up my mother, and I did a pretty good tracking job, all the way to the highway which was Florida Boulevard, we call it highway 190. I was about four years old, because I started school probably when I was five and a half, but certainly I wasn't in school. My uncle, there was a store across that highway, and when I got to the highway of course I couldn't track any further, so that I was squatted there by the highway, and my uncle was coming from the store and saw me by the highway. He whipped me all the way to where, I was, he knew where I was supposed to be, and he whipped me all the way over to my aunt's. Every time I stop he'd sting my legs a little more with it, and I never forgot that. And so after that when my mother heard about it, and found out about it, it distressed her. So she told persons that she worked with, that if they wanted her I came along as a package. She wasn't taking a chance, and the hard part about that is a year and a half later, I was struck by a car on that same highway, and almost killed. But I was with one of my siblings and a cousin, but didn't evidently learned my lesson.

S.C. When you were five? Is that how old you were when you were hit by a car?

D.L. Yes I was five when I was hit by the car.

S.C. So your family all kind of lived around the same area when you were growing up. Did you have any kind of special family traditions?

D.L. Yeah. Christmas was always special. We got one item, one kind of toy. Thanksgiving. Maybe a few firecrackers we popped on the Fourth of July, and stuff like that. Most of our family history surrounds being around the church and things of that sort, so we spent quite a bit of time because our parents were avid churchgoers. We spent a lot of our time in churches.

S.C. Where did you go to church?

D.L. Same church that I still attend Church of God in Christ Pentecostal Church. It's there on 515 Rodeo drive, or it was, but 515 Martin Luther King. I get used to saying it now since I advocated for part of the name change

S.C. Was the church in the same place the whole time? Or has it moved?

D.L. No the church has. There's been some modest improvements made, but it's in the same place.

S.C. Do you know what time, what year it was founded?

D.L. No I don't, but it was founded some years I imagine before I was born. I think the church is probably eighty years old.

S.C. And you said you advocated for the road to be called MLK, was that through your work with the NAACP or just personal or both?

D.L. No, it was not just myself, there were other persons who also made advocates, hoping that it would bring a new breath of enthusiasm and committedness to the area. So I was one person who advocated, just one person, and Mr. Arthur Perkins, and the mayor, and some other persons.

S.C. When did they change the name?

D.L. This is the second year I believe.

S.C. And then I did want to talk a little bit about your work with the NAACP, can we talk about that?

D.L. Well, like I said, my history sort of goes back to those early stages of being an advocate, a community activist, a community advocate. Not only did I advocate on that particular instance, but I have run for office on several instances. Most recently I was elected to be a Democratic Parish Executive Committee. I worked with practically every mayor since I was in my teens, eighteen or thereabouts. I knew Mayor Matt A. Scivique was the mayor when I was just a young man, he was mayor for probably some twelve or sixteen years, until I was about eighteen or thereabouts. And J.O. Burnett, my mother, that was one of those families that, my mother worked for. Then after Mayor Burnett, Mayor Hoover who I worked for, I told you he became mayor, and he was mayor for some sixteen years. Following him as the mayor, Mayor Jim Delaune became mayor, of course he had been the principal of my children's school at the elementary school. So I knew him and worked with him and then following him, James Durbin, Jimmy Durbin. And I always had a good relationship with Jimmy Durbin. I understand he is not going to run for mayor next term. I've had some, for well over fifty years, forty fifty years some connection with, and working with, mayors. I just always felt that it's right to do right by a person, and that no person should ever have to suffer through the humiliation of some of the times that we went through. That is of having signs put up over fountains. I go back to that particular time. Segregated the Carol Theater, which is now an antique place downtown, and was segregated. Blacks were relegated to seating at one position and whites in another. The doctors, we had to go through the back to enter the doctor's offices, and wait in a little area, dentist's offices. So the concession stands, Tastee Freeze and frosty in were two places. So I just always believed that persons ought to have to try to be on the right side of right and the right side of history. The NAACP was one of those organizations that was early in my memory stood out, as standing for the rights of persons, that everybody be treated equally. And one of the creeds of the NAACP, regards even though there are some persons who have negative imagery of the NAACP, I mean in white communities, in some cases because they don't have the true knowledge. The NAACP wasn't an organization, there were both whites and blacks that helped to establish the NAACP. I still hold it as one

of the bright shining stars, to what we ought to be and the people we ought to be. So that's why I am a part of the NAACP. I don't know of anything that the NAACP has stood for that fostered hatred, and I wouldn't be a part of any organization that was built solely on hate for individuals, or individual rights. I wouldn't be a part of it, and likewise, I saw voting rights as being important, so I'm president of the Peoples Voters League which is one of the oldest, probably the oldest civil rights group here in Livingston Parish. It was founded in 1963, and '63 was about the time that I was coming into fruition in my knowledge as a young advocate. Although I was too young to actually be a part of it, I was old enough to know that there were persons who were advocating, for rights, for equal rights of persons to vote. We all know now is an absolute must in any democratic society. So when I was old enough, because when I began voting age was twenty one, and since that time it has been reduced to eighteen, but it wasn't eighteen at the time. But I could be on the fringes and I could sit outside the meetings on the windows and hear what was going on, and things of that sort. Probably my earliest, inroad into civil rights, or anything of that sort, was an incident that occurred when I was probably about seventeen. I would have to go back and do a review the history of it. A young man was killed here in the, it was an unfortunate accident, a young boy. Two parents left their children out in the car: black parents and white parents. And unfortunately in the car of the white parents there was a gun that was in the glove compartment, and the child, the young boy got the gun. I don't think he meant it out of malice as we go back and look at it, but it was an unfortunate. And he went to the car where the other boy was, and pointed the gun at him. I guess in, in that situation that was a perfect storm of bad things that would happen. Gun left in the car, parents both with children, and he shot the other kid and killed him. I don't even know the name of the child; I know the name of the black child, and it created quite a furor in the community.

S.C. What was the name of the child that was killed?

D.L. He was, Mitchell was the last name, and I would have to go back and remember what the first name of the child was.

S.C. Do you remember what year that happened?

D.L. No I don't but I think I must have been around seventeen so...

S.C. Sometime in the mid-sixties, sometime?

D.L. Yeah, yeah I know that it created quite a furor in the community, and there were persons who were angry thinking that maybe that it were done maybe more out of malice. I think like I said, it was just a situation that left itself open for something bad to happen. And I can remember as a young person, speaking to the issue, and I wasn't even the, so probably at my oldest I would have been seventeen. I think that was one of the reasons that persons thought I might be able to speak. Cause they normally wouldn't call an eighteen year old boy, besides I had the college experience, I had the reputation of not being shy to speak on what it was if something bothered me, or if I thought it was not right, and I still haven't lost that. So those are some of my earlier experiences at doing it. And speaking, I was appointed, at that young age as part of a delegation that went to talk with the mayor at that time, and to sort of bring some quiet to the situation, and that sort of launched me into where I am at 66. Still speaking out and still being involved in the NAACP, and Voter's League.

S.C. What's your position within the NAACP?

D.L. I am the Parish President for that branch here, the Livingston branch, here in Livingston.

S.C. I think we need to wrap up, but this is, you know we want this to be, the interview to be saved for Denham Springs residents, or you know anyone who's interested. Is there anything in particular you would like to pass along as part of oral history about Denham Springs?

D.L. Yes. The thing I'd like to pass along is that I had the saying cause I'm a teacher of history, and so I'm one who primarily believes deeply that history is very important, and being a pointer to where were headed. In fact I used to tell my children, my students in class that those who do not learn from history are doomed to repeat it, and I meant that both literally and figuratively. So the one lesson I can say to

persons, for more than thirty-five years Denham Springs has had a history that's been moving in the right direction. Arthur Perkins, I don't know if you know this, has served, I think this is his ninth term, serving as a councilman. I think he served all terms, except one since probably about 1968 or 7. One four year term span I think is the only time Denham Springs has been without representation from all of its major components of its community. I would hope that Denham Spring would continue in that particular vein and that it will continue to look for paths to make sure that all of the citizens are felt welcome. There are persons who still say to me, "Have you always lived in Denham Springs?" and some of the impressions that persons have had, and I can always point with pride. Yes I've lived here in Denham Springs, all sixty six years of my life. Have they all been perfect years? No they have not. But I can also point to wherever anybody else is coming from, and ask them: "Is the place where you are coming from any more perfect than, the place Denham Springs is?" And I think that at its very least we've had families, and mayors, and persons, who work for the good of all the community. And my advice to Denham would be to continue to do that. Finally I would say, blacks in this community made quite a bit of inroads too and they have done quite well. I have grandchildren now, who are highly held for their athletic prowess. A grandson now, who even now they're looking there, waiting for him to reach the high school. He's just in middle school. A granddaughter who is on the Denham Springs basketball team, and is probably listed as most likely to be player of the year, she's already been [indiscernible]. A person like Tasmin Mitchell who provided sports and athletics. We've got quite a number of persons who made contributions so, Denham Springs is a place that is ripe for improvement and for growth, and my desire is that in my lifetime, that I've made some contribution to that hope, that I've always tried to be on as I said the right side of right. And that will continue even as I go forward for my grand, my children, and persons who look at this through historical perspective, I guess that's as much as I can say.

S.C. Thank you. This is the end of the interview on Tuesday, December 10th 2013 with Daniel Landry and I am Sarah Colombo.

