

Audio File Name: shankleville_interviews_15
Transcription by: Rachel E. Winston, 2020 June
Interviewer: Lareatha Clay
Interviewees: Malchia Cannon, Willie Pate Shankle, Gwendolyn (Wilona) Cannon,
Larutha Odom Clay
Location: Shankleville, TX
Interview Date: 2004 September 4
Duration: 31:18

Speaker Identification:
Lareatha Clay: LC
Malchia Cannon: MC
Willie Pate Shankle: WPS
Gwendolyn Cannon: GC
Larutha Odom Clay: LOC

TRANSCRIPT BEGIN

LC: –September the fourth 2004. We’re in the Shankleville Community at the home of Malchia—last name?

MC: Cannon. Grandson of Floyd and Eary Shankle.

LC: Okay. And we also have Willie Pate Shankle who is–

WPS: The son of Pate Shankle.

LC: The son of Pate Shankle. Okay. And–

GC: Gwendolyn Cannon. Married to Floyd Shankle’s grandson.

LC: And Larutha Clay who is the daughter of A.T. and Addie Odom. The main question that I have for Malchia is—let’s talk about that you were born in California. How did your parents get to California?

MC: Mother and Aunt Nora went out there for nursing. And that’s where they took their training—in California.

LC: What part?

MC: San Francisco. They went out there to stay with Uncle Worthy Shankle. And while they were out there Mother got married to my Dad James Cannon. Started from there and they find themselves bringing my sister and I back to Shankleville to live with our grandparents. They were going to stay but the vibes wasn’t right for my Dad so they split up during that time and my grandmother and grandfather raised us. During that time—just before they split up—I had a brother that was born—McArthur—and—they split up after that.

LC: So how did you feel about leaving California and coming to Shankleville?

MC: Well I had no idea. I was a babe. I was three and my sister was six months. So we didn't have no kind of nothing to do with it—we were just brought! [Laughs]

LC: So when you were growing up in Shankleville—did you feel like you were not getting a lot of information—like people in Dallas or Houston—how did you feel about it? You grew up in the sixties and seventies right?

MC: Yeah. From the fifties—fifty-four to all through there. Getting information like the people in the city?

LC: No just—did you feel like, man I wish I wasn't growing up in the country—or did you love growing up in the country?

MC: No I loved growing up in Shankleville! I enjoyed growing up in Shankleville. Everybody raised you. Even your grandmother—Cousin Annie and Cousin Alvin played a big part in my life. [Laughs] You know—anytime you got out of line I would have to go down to Cousin Annie—see Cousin Annie would sell those cookies and [inaudible] plants and chicken bones. You don't find chicken bone candy!

LC: Chicken bone candy!

MC: That's what it was! Round—about that long. Aw man I would make it down there with the ten, fifteen cent I got out of my pocket and hand to Cousin Annie. And I'm talking about—she had great love—serious love for me. My sister too. But you know I was more the outgoing person. I had to get up on New Year morning and I had to make it to Uncle Pate's—be the first one to walk in they house. Had to make it over to Cousin Alvin's—

LC: Why'd you have to be the first one?

MC: That was a custom. A man walk through the home of the people's first before any lady went through that house on New Year's Day.

LOC: You hadn't heard of that Lareatha?

LC: Yeah but wanted him to tell it.

MC: My grandmother made sure that I had to do that. I had to go to Uncle Hardy's, Uncle Pate, Cousin Curley, and Cousin Annie and em. Boy it wasn't nothing else. And you had to get up and get there early. And if you didn't get up—you'd get a whooping on New Year's Day. And the old saying say—whatever happen to you on that day—that will happen to you throughout the year!

LC: [Laughter] So you didn't want to get a whooping!

MC: So that was the tradition thing. And that all come out of back in the slavery time. People brought these things with them—custom things. I didn't enjoy it then. But then when my wife and I get together people thought I was crazy because I would go knock on the doors—

LC: Oh you would still do it?

MC: Yeah! I did it til—people throw you off if you let them. But some of the things that I do I instill in my grandchildren and my children right now.

LOC: You have children?

MC: Yes ma'am. We have six girls and one son. And I tell them the thing that—since they were little bitty girls—I told them the thing they had to do. But they couldn't do the things that I did because I was a man and they were girls. But I told them about the good times. And I brought them to Shankeville just like you brought her.

LC: So after you grew up and went to high school here—you went to Burkeville—

MC: Wiergate. Then we changed to Wiergate to Burkeville. And then—

LC: And then you moved away?

MC: Yeah I moved to Kirbyville. Well I moved—I went to California. Come back—I didn't like the city. I thank the Lord for not growing up in the city. Because the things that I went through here in the country—if I grew up in the city you probably wouldn't be looking at me now you know. That's the way I feel about it and I'm happy to be raised by my grandmother and grandfather. And the community. You know—Cousin [inaudible name], Cousin Otis(??) Strahan, R.C. Strahan, Annie Odom, Alvin Odom [laughs]. Just all of them! You know and I stayed vexed at them all the time! I stayed angry—I don't know what these old people talking about! You know. But now I see. You know the things that I was going through children are going through it now. Because I'm out there I'm saying some of the same things that were said to me—what you got to do to make it in life—you gon do this and I'm gon whoop you bout that—we're here to raise you the same way—you know it's beautiful when it's on your foot. That's one beautiful outcome. But after you get back and think about things you—it makes you think. It wasn't nothing bad—it was all good.

LC: So how long have you been living in Shankleville this time?

MC: Let me think—fourteen years. I think we've been back here fourteen years. About fourteen years.

LOC: So you lived in Kirbyville for awhile?

MC: Yes. Twenty—twenty-six—twenty something—

GC: No it wasn't quite twenty years because you would've been at the co-cop twenty-seven years.

MC: I was at my job for twenty-seven. Disabled but I've been there still employed.

LOC: Now I saw your mother and your sister close to Reverend Boatman(??)'s store. Did you live close to there?

MC: Yes ma'am.

GC: Across the street.

MC: I stayed back down the street there a little ways as you cross that stop sign. That's where I was.

LOC: I was coming out and they passed by and they saw me. And she had to hit the brakes!

MC: Oh Lord! [Laughter]

LOC: I still don't know if she's Ora or Nora!

MC: That was Ora. [Laughter]

LC: What's the story about Ora and Nora?

MC: They were Floyd Shanke's twins. Aunt Larutha and Uncle Pate can tell you more about that.

LC: Ok so can y'all tell me the story about them?

WPS: Ora and Nora. We all born the same month. I was just twenty-one days older than they is.

MC: They're twins.

WPS: Twins. And we was born with a big house—field right across from Uncle Floyd and them. And we worked in the field across [inaudible]. And J.D. [inaudible] getting up and treating them girls and had them hollering and crying over there—I be out there in my field working when it start and I jumped the fence—I go over there and we take him down. I came and hold him down and say [inaudible]. [Laughter] J.D. was awful terrible when he was in control—

LC: Who was that?

LOC: J.D.

WPS: J.D. That was they brother. The youngest brother.

MC: My mother's brother.

LOC: He's in the Texas senate.

LC: Okay. And he'd be whipping them? [Laughter]

WPS: Yeah. [Inaudible] and when it start I'd hop the fence—I'd go over there and we work him over. [Laughter]

MC: Yeah I heard that so many times.

LC: And one of them is your mother?

MC: Yeah. Ora. Ora Lee and Nora Lee.

LC: And they were identical?

MC: Identical yes.

WPS: You couldn't hardly tell them apart.

MC: I don't have a picture here—

LC: Even growing up around them you couldn't tell them apart?

MC: Your mother was they third woman! They went to college together and everything.

LOC: Yeah we went to college together. Lived in the same dormitory. They had to approve of my husband! [Laughter]

LC: So could you tell them apart?

MC: I got caught one time! One time I couldn't tell them apart because I was with mother [inaudible] with Aunt Nora. But they—mother married and went to Biloxi.

LC: Now this is not Mississippi?

MC: No. Biloxi, Texas. Down here on the other side—down eighty-seven.

LC: Okay.

LOC: You know where we came to that stop sign.

MC: Yeah. Yes. My Auntie came home from California—Aunt Nora. She came home and it was her vacation. Mother came from Biloxi to be with her. And they were just like two girls when they got together. Boy it was a happy time. I mean it was on! Okay so they got ready to depart—Mother was supposed to went back to Biloxi and Aunt Nora supposed to go back to California. We went to school that morning and that evening when I come in it was a lady laying there—one of them laying there on the swing—you had that swing—they called it the garry back then. And they were laying on the garry and I say, Mama—she woke up and looked up—I said, Mama I thought you were going back to Biloxi. She said, I'm not your mom—I'm your Auntie! That's the only time she got me. And when she woke up and looked at me I said, Mama I thought you were going back to Biloxi! She said, I'm not your mother—I'm your Auntie. She had that California accent. She kept it. Mama let it go—Mama, I believe Mama was more tomboyish than Aunt Nora. I believe she was more tomboyish. Aunt Nora—she had a little quietness sprit. But Mama was wild as a buck deer! [Laughter]

LOC: They were Floyd Shankle's! Floyd was manish—have you ever seen a manish old man! [Laughter]

LC: What does manish mean? What do you mean by manish?

MC: He's a flirt. He was—oh he was something!

LC: Uncle Floyd is Houston's son?

CROSSTALK: Yes.

MC: I say it like this here—he loved all women. But he didn't get out of the way with no one. He loved women but he treated them with the upmost respect. I feel that deep down in my heart. But

it wasn't no bad thing—he was just a man born to love women and talk to them and be around them and treat them nice.

GC: And his grandson inherited that! [Laughter] That's a trait that he inherited.

WPS: He got some ways on him like Floyd unlike any of the rest of them.

MC: They tell me that. You know and I'm proud of that. I really am proud of that. Because he instilled a lot in me. Taught me how to work—like don't be scared of work. You got to work to have something. And my grandmother—she didn't care if I worked or not. I was her baby. And she took care of me and they would have arguments about a certain time I had to come out of the field—“You can stay out there Floyd and work yourself but you ain't gon work that boy to death!”

And I tell people right today—grandmothers and grandfathers shouldn't raise grandchildren. Because they will spoil them. I know. My sister and I and brother—we were spoiled. We were spoiled as—

LOC: There's nothing wrong with loving them!

MC: No, no! Nothing wrong with that.

WPS: Because he didn't have to worry about nothing—he needed money or anything they'd turn around and give it to him. He didn't have to work.

LOC: I don't think that's bad. [Laughter]

MC: But she instilled in me though—she always instilled that if anything ever happened to me, she said the Shankles don't have no bad name. She would always tell me that. The Shankles held a respectable place—they hold a respectable, they were respectable. And she went far enough to tell me just before—I guess it was after Papa died—she said, When my eyes close you did your job. It was a long time you know—I still could feel it, what she was telling me. Because she said, You don't have to do nothing baby I'll take care of you. She told me more than she told my sister. She told me stuff that it was just men shouldn't know! She told me stuff that men shouldn't know but it shouldn't be a woman—a grandmother telling them! I mean she told me some lady stuff! And another thing she told me—she said, Don't mess up no girl. And you can feel what that mean. She said, Don't mess up no girl. If you didn't want her don't mess her up. And so that stayed with me. Stayed with me and stayed with me! I said well, I'll court her. [Laughter] You know there was just something about her. She gave up her whole family for my grandfather.

LC: What do you mean by that?

MC: She was Shankle. When you see two people become one. She gave up all—in hurtness and everything. She didn't want nothing to do with nothing in Jamestown where she was from. You know she gave it all up for him. That was her everything. And that was her husband—her spouse—her everything. And it's proven to be true by the death. He died in September 1929 and she died December the first the same year. That's a month and—two months? You know. So she

as dedicated to her husband. That's what she lived for every day. To make sure that he was happy. I see all that and I think about all that and that's why I say, One day I'm gon find me a lady like my grandmother.

LOC: That's a good role model. A lot of these kids don't have a role model. They haven't seen a family in action. You know? And so they don't know how to create it.

MC: See we had to eat at the table like The Waltons. [Laughter] We had to pass the bowl. You didn't reach over and get nothing! If you did—

GC: You were just taught good table manners.

MC: The best table manners! I did it one time when Aunt Nora was home from California and—fried chicken, boy! I reached over there and got a piece of that chicken. It come up to my mouth but Aunt Nora put it in that eye! [Laughter] Bam! Blinded. So I had to eat with one eye that whole supper. I ain't never did that no more. I never reached and got nothing out of there unless I take a chance here. I'll take a chance here! [Laughter]

GC: We gave all our furniture away!

MC: That's the beautiful part of life.

LC: Okay. So besides Ora and Nora and J.D.—what other kids were there?

WPS: Worthy.

LC: Worthy. Those were the four?

MC: Yes. Floyd had four.

WPS: Worthy was the oldest. J.D. was next. Then two twin girls were the last two.

LOC: I called you to tell you that Worthy's wife had died and Pate told me you were on your way.

MC: I was one my way [laughter].

LOC: That's family.

MC: Yes ma'am.

WPS: And you're the one that's always going to funerals and things.

MC: Yeah. I found my other side the first time I went out there.

LOC: Good.

MC: I found my Dad's people—that's how I got that picture there.

LOC: Good. Well you sure look like him.

WPS: Ruth look like you ought to remember his daddy [inaudible].

LOC: I was married and gone by that time.

MC: No see—she was in college. Mother—y'all parted in college, right?

LOC: Right. Yes.

MC: She went to California and you stayed here.

LOC: They finished up that nursing training in California. [Crosstalk] But they started of in Prairie View. And the nurses had a special dormitory. And for some reason I got a chance to live in it.

MC: On really?

LOC: Lived in the same dorm. I mean eating sweet potatoes, chitlins, it didn't make any difference! Whatever it was we were [inaudible] [laughter].

LC: So y'all were the same age?

LOC: And we used to wink our eye at each other. And when we couldn't wink we'd say "wham"—that meant we were winking the eye. Try and make the rest of them go on somewhere else while we go pull those boxes out! [Laughter] I don't see why guys and roaches(??) didn't get in it.

MC: It wasn't like that! [Laughter]

LOC: I don't care how long we kept it—[Laughter]

WPS: Well that's alright!

[CROSSTALK]

LOC: I guess I got some of those problems right now! [Laughter]

LC: Okay so you [Malchia] moved back to Shankleville and you [Willie Pate] never left Shankleville—why did you never leave? Willie Pate Shankle is who we're talking to.

WPS: Okay. Why I never left Shankleville—I raised up there with my mother and daddy. And after they got down sick I just stay on. Didn't get married or nothing. Beforehand I was intending to build me a home down the road here. But after they got down sick—my sister and brother had left home—so I just stay on and took care of them. So after they passed away I say, well now I got too old now to think about getting married. So I just stay on the old place. And I'm stuck there right now.

LC: You feel you're stuck?

WPS: Well I won't say now too much to feel like I'm stuck. I'm happy though where I'm at. So [inaudible] I been married.

LC: Okay. How did it feel growing up in a community called Shankleville and your last name is Shankle?

WPS: I feel good. That makes me feel great. Sure do.

LC: Did people ever tease you about it when you were growing up? Or have you felt like it was a burden or were people teasing you about it or anything?

WPS: No.

LC: Because everybody around here is a Shankle! [Laughter]

WPS: Maybe it's too good to name a place after—I was named after. Place named after Shankle—that makes me feel good. So I do all I can for Shankleville.

MC: Thank the Lord. For real.

WPS: Yes I love it.

LOC: I used to tease Willie Pate about at his funeral we going to pass out blank sheets of paper.

WPS: That's right! [Laughter]

LOC: Because he didn't leave any survivors! No grandchildren! He outliving all this!

WPS: That can be my obituary—blank!

LC: That's wrong! [Laughter]

LOC: In 1977 we had an Enterprise reunion. And we really gave praises to those who stayed here—like Willie Pate—and did things. If everybody had left there wouldn't be a Shankleville to come back to.

CROSSTALK: That's right. Yes.

WPS: You catch right now I'm the only full-blood Shankle that lives back in here now. I'm the only one.

MC: That's right! The only one that has a Shankle name.

WPS: The rest of them move on.

MC: He is the only one. The only one.

WPS: And Trogie is about the next one to me—

MC: Yeah he's closest to you in Liberty. Because it's a certain part of that was Shankleville.

WPS: Yep that's right.

MC: Shankleville run from here all the way to the other side of eighty-seven.

LOC: I don't know—Lareatha was talking about white folk. And I said no white folk ever lived in Shankleville. And Trogie said that's where the Medleys lived—that was called Shankleville. I remember the Meddler's but—you remember? I didn't know that was called Shankleville.

WPS: Yeah that was out there on eighty-seven wasn't it?

LOC: Yes down there towards that bayou.

WPS: Yeah that's right.

MC: Oh! Down there.

WPS: Down there across the bayou.

MC: Okay. Well you know—

WPS: On the right-hand side going back toward Liberty.

LOC: We never came in contact with them. I've never seen the Medleys.

MC: All I know is that one that stay up there.

LC: There's one in Shankleville now?

MC: No he stay out on eighty-seven.

WPS: Oh you talking about out there with Benita(??) Medley.

LC: Oh okay. So that's not Shankleville?

MC: No.

WPS: Now it was somebody that lived down there across the bayou. But now you catch—I can even remember when that house was there. They done moved out when I come along. I can't remember but Cousin Trogie can remember. Now between that and the Sibley place where his wife was raised up there.

LOC: Sibley. Oh I forgot the Sibley place. Good thing you've got yourself a memory! I'm telling you.

WPS: Yes I remember all that.

LOC: You don't ever write stuff down do you? Don't you keep that graveyard plot now? Where's that graveyard plot? That's showing where the graves are over there in that Shankle cemetery.

WPS: Oh! Now I have a map here.

LOC: That's what I mean. Yes.

WPS: I have a map and I'll let you have one.

LOC: You don't need a map do you?

MC: No.

LOC: I'm saying—Willie Pate can remember!

GC: He don't need to—he can remember because we put flags out every year—

CROSSTALK: Every year—

GC: For Veteran's Day or something?

MC: Yes.

GC: And he was just walking and he had two of the grandchildren walking with him and he knew every grave to go to that was a veteran. He didn't have to look at the sheet. And my granddaughter had the sheet but she say, Granny he knew where everyone was! And every grave that he went to was a veteran. So he don't need a map. It's in his memory. He has an excellent memory.

WPS: Those children are a lot of help to me because they love to pop flags so I just give them the flag and I go to the grave and pick one out here like that. We really enjoy it.

LOC: I didn't know y'all did that.

MC: Yeah we do that every year. That's one thing. I always said—my wife she didn't believe me while —because I was raising the girls—I said, if I could just get back to Shankleville. There are a lot of things I don't think would've happened the way they happened—but you know they happened so therefore—but I wanted to raise my daughters in Shankleville.

LC: Why?

MC: Because it—I would have more control. And you've got a neighborhood that would help you. See—

LC: Do you think that's still the case today? It was the case when you were growing up. But do you think that today in 2004 that that's still the case—that it's still a community?

MC: Yes! This community?

GC: I can say because our baby lives here. She has three daughters and they have some values that our other children don't have by being raised here in Shankleville. They love it. You know they may get teased when they go to Jasper or even back to Kirbyville about Burkeville School being so small. The classes are small but they're learning more because the classrooms are not crowded. And here in the community they have people to look up to that's been here for years and know how to be neighborly. They think Uncle Buddy—there's no other person on earth like him. This is like a grandfather to them. They look up to him. And the stories that they tell him—our oldest granddaughter by our baby—one day she says that when she grows up she going to do something to see that Jim and Winnie Shankle is in a textbook. A history textbook. She said, I'm going to do that Granny! And she's just twelve. And when they have something at school this is what she do her essays and things on. This is the talk she gives! On this heritage of Shankleville. Because she say, That's so important Granny! And she say, Someday it will be in a history book!

LOC: Alright!

MC: She's not lying.

GC: They're learning things here about how to love on another. How to be a good neighbor. And people still look out for one another. And how to share what you have.

MC: And they also learn that not everywhere but—I teach them that a grown person is just not going to tell a lie on you. And I say especially around here. I said, they not just going to flat out just walk by you and come tell the parent a flat out lie. I said you going to be—

TRANSCRIPT END