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Lareatha Clay: LC  
Jeanette Gatlin Collette: JGC  
Larutha Odom Clay: LOC

### **TRANSCRIPT BEGIN**

LC: It is September the fifth 2004 and we're in the home of Oletha Woods in Jasper, Texas. We're talking to Jeanette Gatlin Collette. Can you tell us how your family tree is and how your roots are in Shankleville?

JGC: I am the fourth descendent of Stephen McBride and fourth descendent of Oliver Gatlin. My grandfather and Aunt Jesse—which is your great-grandmother—were sisters and brothers.

LC: The Gatlins from Grandma. So if you walk down the line of Steve McBride how does that look?

JGC: Okay let's walk down the line. Stephen McBride was my great-grandfather. My grandfather was Fred McBride. My mother was Harrie Mae McBride. And then me.

LC: Okay. Now walk down the line of the Gatlins.

JGC: Oliver Gatlin—that's as far back as I've traced it—was my great-grandfather. My grandfather was Henry McBride—

LC: Gatlin.

JGC: I'm sorry, Gatlin. My father is [inaudible] Henry and then I'm Jeanette Gatlin.

LC: You grew up in Shankleville?

JGC: I was born and raised in Shankleville on the road to Wiergate. I was somewhere out there in the log cabin on July the nineteenth in 1937. I don't know exactly when—but after my mother and father separated then my mother remarried Abe Strahan and then he became my stepfather. The earliest memory that I have is from when I was about three years old. And that is of my grandfather Fred McBride. I remember going to Wiergate and seeing him—he was a break man on the train. I remember my step-grandmother—my Grandmother Evie—taking me up to see him. I vaguely remember him coming home with the black lunch pail that he always would save me something from his lunch. I remember when he died—I remember the wake at the house and I remember his funeral. Those are my earliest memories.

LC: Is he buried in Shankleville?

JGC: Yes. He's buried in the big community cemetery.

LC: Can you tell us what a break man is on a train?

JGC: Break man on the train—I can't describe—I would say that—I really don't know exactly what they did.

LOC: I thought they were responsible for the maneuvering of the trains. Starting and stopping. Getting out and flagging. Especially when they crossed and intersection—

JGC: Yes. Because at that time they didn't have—

LOC: There was the driver and the break man was giving him directions. When to move and when to pull over.

JGC: Yes because they didn't have all of the crossings and railroad—

LC: Is that a job that a Black man normally would have?

JGC: Normally? No. If I recall correctly there was only three. And that was Daddy Fred McBride, Uncle Jimmy McBride and Mr. Joe Raspberry.

LOC: Joe Raspberry was white?

JGC: No.

LC: What happened to make them be able to get that job?

JGC: Well I'm not sure but my grandfather was a mulatto. That I do know. When you would look at him you could not tell him from any of the other white people. I would say that had something to do with it. Although Uncle Jimmy was a little darker he was still a McBride. With Old Man Steve McBride—he was a businessman. He not only—you heard about the college in Shankleville. He had bridge mills—he even had a store. He was a businessman and he dealt with that so I'm sure that that had a lot to do with it. Now as far as Joe Raspberry—I don't know too much about him. It could be that he was a relative. Those were the only three Black men that worked on the railroad.

LOC: Do you know any of Joe Raspberry's descendants?

JGC: I have not even gone down that route yet.

LC: So you grew up with your mother and your stepfather. What did he do?

JGC: He was just a farmer. In my earliest years I was the only child that was in the house because my sister older than me she was in Beaumont with my grandmother. My other two sisters—they was married—they was much older than me. And my brother was with my father. So for the first few years of my life I was an only child—until 1942 which is the first year of the Homecoming. I said that was a very memorial year for me! I went from being the baby of the family to being a big sister. That was the year I started school—I was five. And that was the year

I told them I had my first non-paying job—I became a babysitter for my little sister [laughs] while my mother would go work in the garden or—

LOC: I can't remember her name.

JCG: Who—Johnetha?

LOC: Yes. And like I said—when I was five years old I was just a little bitty skinny popeyed red head girl that had to walk five miles up the hill somewhere to school.

LC: Did you walk by yourself?

JGC: No it was some other people that lived near us—some other cousins—that I would walk back and forth to school with them there down at Enterprise. You know when that school was there in Shankleville. And one of my first teachers and one of the ones that really—I would say that she is responsible for me and my learning—was Ms. Annie Jay Simmons. She was my first teacher. I always had a yearn to learn—just to learn things. And she was instrumental in doing that for me. She was my first teacher and one of my last. I enjoyed school—I never wanted to miss. I remember one time when we left home and it had rained, it was cold. And my mother told us if it rained over the foot log to turn around and come back home. No! We decided to sit down on the side of the creek—take all of our shoes and boots off—walk through that cold water—then sit down on the other side—put them back on. And when we to school—there wasn't very many people there because the people that was on the other side of the creek they couldn't cross. So when we got there and Ms. Simmons knew what we had done so she made us put some more wood in the heater and made us sit there and dry the feet. But that God I never got a cold [laughs] I was never sick. I was never sick.

LC: A foot log is like a stick—a log that you walk across?

JGC: Yes you walk across to get to the other side.

LOC: Sometimes it had a handle on it and sometimes it didn't.

JGC: And it did not have a handle on it. And if it gets slick then you know—you could easily fall in. If somebody like mischievous children did sometime they'd push you in—

LOC: They'd shake it!

JGC: Yes they would. But you know growing up during that time we were what people might call poor. But we didn't realize that we were because everybody was—you know the ones that had a little bit more—they may've had more chickens, more cows or more hogs or whatever—everybody shared. Everybody had a garden and they would always share and everything. And so we didn't realize it—so when going to school and meeting my other cousins and just growing up and even after we moved from there and moved out in the Shankleville community further down and being close to my Auntie and after she got married she would go out there and play with us. And her house was the center—

LC: Which aunt is this?

LGC: Aunt Opal Strahan. My mother's sister. And she was just such a loving person. All in all I really appreciate growing up in a small town like Shankleville. Because the saying says it takes a village to raise a child. It was one thing about it—we was raised up to respect your elders. You were taught to say, Yes ma'am and no ma'am. Although there were times—as children will do—we may murmur behind their back or turn our head and say something. But we knew if they chastised us that that's what they were supposed to do. And you got it at home so you know it didn't matter where we were—we knew that we had to be obedient. And that I do appreciate. I appreciate my umble beginnings.

LC: Let's talk more about the school. What was the school atmosphere like?

JGC: The school—I don't remember how many rooms it was but I know on one side was like the elementary children and over in another building was the high school—you know the larger children. I don't remember too much. I know we had the heater in winter time. We had a well outside for water. We had of course the outdoor toilets—one side was the toilet for the girls and the other toilet somewhere else for the boys. We had little cast out scratched out desks from the Burkeville—from the white children. I remember that. And of course the books—some of them bad backs and some of them didn't. Some of them—it was cast off—they had been passed down so many times we didn't even have anywhere to put our names to list our names in the book.

LC: How did that make you feel?

JGC: At the time I didn't because I didn't know what—we didn't know that we were being made a difference. Because that's one thing our parents never talked about—us being different from anybody else. We were raised up to love everybody and they never mentioned color. And by us not traveling and going and mixing—we didn't see too many white people. You know sometimes somebody would come down through there selling something or something but we didn't see too many of them.

LC: They didn't come into Newton or Burkeville?

JGC: Oh well—like I said I remember being in Wiergate. And at the time Wiergate was a pretty big city. But I did not—it didn't dawn on me that we were any different—even if they treated us like we were any different—later on we know that they did. At that time we didn't even realize it.

LOC: We didn't know what was going on outside of Shankleville—how we going to feel mistreated?

JGC: No. That's right. I remember that there used to be—I don't know who the man was—there have been several of them—that we would be down at Aunt Sue's house and they all—

LC: Who was Aunt Sue?

JGC: Aunt Sue was Stephen McBride's daughter. They would call her Auntie. And you know we thought it was out of respect for her being an older woman. But then later on I found out that it was some of the white McBrides or whatever that would—that was why they called her Auntie. They would say that she was—you know—related. But no—we did not know that we were

different from anybody. We just grew up in a close knit community where as far as we know everybody got along. As we got older and people would sit around talking—when children were supposed to be out playing—we would hear little rumors but that was years later.

LC: You started out at Enterprise and then you ended up in the consolidated school?

LGC: No I ended up in—I don't remember if Enterprise was still there then they started moving us to Wiergate.

LOC: They tore Enterprise down [inaudible].

LGC: Yes. And then they moved us to Weirgate. Because I remember my first—fifth or sixth grade—was at Wiergate.

LOC: She's a little behind Elzie.

LGC: Yes.

LOC: See Elzie went in forty-five and Elzie finished in what must've been forty-six—Elzie must've finished in forty-five and Ruby in forty-seven. See she was behind them.

LGC: Oh yes I was behind them. Matter fact I was behind Lee. And I went there until—well like I said the school was set up there in the middle of Wiergate wherever it was—and went there until whenever it was they built a new school out off of Highway 63 and then we transferred out there.

LOC: Did you ever go to Burkeville?

JGC: No I never went to Burkeville. No 1955 was my—

LOC: Did Johnella ever teach you?

JGC: Yes Johnella did teach me. In my—I think that was my junior year—Johnella—it may have been her first year teaching—and of course by that time I was a typical teenager that I grew up with Johnella and had been knowing her all of my life and she was going to come back and teach me and tell me what to do and what to say. We would be on the bus together and she would be telling me to be quiet and I was you know—I would say, You don't tell me what to do!  
[Laughter]

LOC: You know what I'm thinking about? Harold Junior came up with a picture where Lonnie—Harold's wife—taught in Shankleville.

JGC: Really?

LOC: Yes. And he came up with the picture of students with Lonnie and wanted me to identify them. And Cubie was the only one on there who we could identify. And now since I'm looking I'm wondering if you were on there.

JGC: You know—

LOC: Because Cubbie gave it back to me at the Homecoming.

LC: Cubie Shankle.

LOC: Cubie Shankle gave it back to me at the Homecoming. So you don't remember being in a class with Cubie?

LGC: Well I—no Cubie was ahead of me.

LOC: Okay. Well you might've been one of those little girls!

JGC: I could have been. Like I said because the school—it's possible. You know I can remember a lot of the people I went to school with that was much older than me because like I said—I remember Elzie, Larutha, Lee. And then Anderson White, O.C. White—because O.C. White married my sister Ruby Lee. I remember that because she was—she went to school there but they got married before he went into service in WWII. Then the Ridgeways—there was Annanise(??) and Emma. They were all so much older than me. I can't say that I remember Lonnie.

LOC: Well I'm going to send you that picture. Would you mind giving us your address now?

JGC: My address is [redacted for privacy].

LOC: I'm going to send you that picture.

LC: So when Cousin Johnella was your teacher—did y'all ever straighten it out? Or what happened?

JGC: Oh I became obedient! [Laughter] Like I said at that time—she was trying to get her bluff in on us and you know—because she knew a lot of people that she had gone to school with. It was either straighten myself out or I was going to get straightened out at home! But no—I did not disrupt her class too much. But yeah she was my teacher. And Artie Brailsford was another one that I had this—

LC: He was the principal?

LOC: Clash—Mama used to use the word “clash.”

JGC: No. Clash—I clashed Artie Mae Brailsford. No Mr. Brailsford—I never was under him.

LC: Who is Artie Mae Brailsford? I thought that was the principal.

JGC: No that's his daughter.

LC: Oh. What was his name?

JGC: Artie.

LOC: They had Artie and then they had Artie Mae. Artie Mae is mad at the world still. She thinks they mistreated her as a child. And it's so strange—she's the oldest. I just don't know why she never did reconcile with her mama. I mean I went to her mama's seventieth birthday party and Artie Mae sat up there and ran her mama down the whole time. I just couldn't get used to that.

JGC: Oh. She was always a negative person.

LC: She was a teacher there?

JGC: Yes she was a teacher. She was another one that you know—went to school at Wiergate and then went off and then came back to teach there. Yes.

LOC: And Dorothy died.

JGC: Yes.

LC: Who was Dorothy?

JGC: That was another Brailsford.

LOC: That's Artie Mae's mama.

LC: So he's kin to Valree?

LOC: Oh yeah!

JGC: Yes, yes.

LOC: And Marvin.

JGC: Yes Marvin was in my class—one of my classmates.

LOC: Then you were way down than I. And that's why when Ernie Holmes came back to that evening session Ernie didn't think he was Artie Brailsford's son! He thought he was his grandson. He couldn't get that through his head—that Marvin was a son. They look so young you know.

JGC: Yes. In going to school I loved learning and I wanted to be—like I said—good grades. That was very important to me. I never had a problem going to school in Shankleville—like I said I was the only girl and one time I was the only girl in my class. It was Archie Baily(?), Amazay Lewis(?), Charlie Lewis and there may have been one or two other boys—but I was the only girl.

LOC: Looks like I saw Charlie on that picture.

JGC: You may have.

LOC: I said, This could be Charlie. But Cubie wouldn't touch it—he said he didn't know anyone but him! I'm wondering who that big-headed boy—he says all of them big-headed!

JGC: And when the teacher found out that it was learning—it came easy to me—she would use me as an example to the class. And I would resent it sometime because I felt like if I can learn it they could too. If it was solving a problem or diagraming a sentence or even reading something for that matter—she would ask them then she would have me to come up behind them and show how it should be done. And I did—I resented it for—and I got over it because I'm not the type of

person to hold grudges very long. But when I got to Wiergate and we was with the other students—that was Marvin Brailsford, Maddisteen Trevillian(?), Ermalee Bryant and myself.

LC: So they were in Liberty and other places and they went over to Wiergate?

JGC: No they were already at Wiergate.

LOC: Turning their noses up at Shankleville.

JGC: Yes.

LOC: And then she went up there and let them know it was something came out of Shankleville.

JGC: That's right! Because they were a challenge. If they made A—I wanted an A+. And it was always that. I said, Well Marvin may have been a principal's son but I wanted to show them that I had a brain too. And Erma was my cousin and I said, Well I'm going to do better than her. Erma Bryant—she was a cousin of mine. And that was a challenge to me. And that was one of the things like I said Ms. Simmons instilled in me—that I could do it. And I did. She was one of the teachers that—I always loved to read—but she is one that taught me how to read. She could read Shakespeare and it'd sound good. And she'd put that emphasis on certain things you know—literature was my favorite subject because she would make it interesting. It would not be boring and that—I just had a yearning and I still do to this day.

LOC: Do you still read?

JGC: I still read! I read everything. And another goal of mine—although at the time it was my goal—I wanted to go to school. I wanted to go to college—I wanted a higher education. I knew my parents couldn't afford it. I knew there was no way. But it was still something. And even today at the age of sixty-seven I still want that. Now there have been times in my life—well after I married—there was opportunities. I did take some classes. But I've never gone where I could get a degree. I have certificates. I have diplomas in different areas and I have some credit—but I've never gone long enough. That is something—that I still like learning.

LOC: But you have the know-how. You've got the brains.

JGC: Yeah. And like I said—I wonder if it went back to Grandpa Steve McBride you know because he's the one that built the college and he believed in education. He was the one that donated the land for the school—for Enterprise School.

LOC: And the cemetery.

JGC: And the cemetery. He had a lot a lot to do with that. Then of course like I said—the grace of God—I still have that desire for learning.

LC: Do y'all know how the schools got consolidated? What happened to make the people at Enterprise decide that they would close it down and move everybody over to Wiergate?

LOC: I did the histories of the schools when we had that celebration in 1977 and I would ask the question—how did they let Enterprise get started? See because we weren't under any school district. They just let us have a local school district out there and said whatever you all do out



there is alright with us. It wasn't any guidance or any restrictions or anything. Mr. Simmons didn't have to do anything and I was waiting on her to tell you that that graveyard that was over there next to Mr. Simmons room—and if they had a funeral over there he marched every one of us up there to that graveyard—whether we knew the deceased or not! And I asked him—in his old age, How'd y'all get by with that? —Well the pastor wanted y'all to go—Well how'd you know the pastor wanted us to go?—I think he was lazy just getting out of work. So backing up—

LC: So you're agreeing he was lazy?

JGC: He was that [laughs].

LOC: You were saying how did they let us go—how did Shankleville decide to go—I think it's when the white folks decided. Just put them all in Newton County. Jamestown—Jamestown is way down there before we get to that divided highway going to Jasper. Because Jamestown received everybody but Liberty. And then Liberty went to Newton. So they ended up with just two high schools right?

JGC: Yes.

LOC: And everybody—Cedar Grove—everywhere—Toledo Bend—everywhere—came to Wiergate. And that was easy on them. So that's the answer to that question. It was easy on the white folks.

JGC: Yes. Shankleville was its own little separate—own little separate community—and whatever L.A. Simmons said—whatever he thought—it start and stop when he wanted it to stop.

LOC: He went out and recruited these teachers and I found out years later he was going with them! We didn't have sense enough to know it then.

JGC: Mmm. No we didn't.

LOC: A teacher would come and stay a little while and move on and then he'd bring another. They'd go to colleges recruiting teachers. So the question is not how did they let us cut it out—the question is how did they let us get started? I think we all would have been better off.

JGC: That's true.

LOC: Because four teachers up there trying to teach the whole—she's talking about the high school area down there. We didn't have anything but a homemaking lab and a agriculture. Mr. Simmons taught agriculture and math. And the homemaking teacher let us read out of a science book. That's the only science we had! And then we had that elementary teacher that had grades four through six or something like that—she then was teaching social studies. All we did was read. Didn't know any math—didn't learn anything—and then we got to Ms. Simmons—

**TRANSCRIPT END**