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

TRANSCRIPT BEGIN

JGC: —that would be Ms. Pearl and she already had children.

LC: One of the reasons I asked is because I have heard that Gatlins have tempers.

JGC: Oh yes!

LOC: They've got a sharp tongue! [Inaudible name] tried to tell me something and said, I'm sorry I snapped at you. I said, I started to tell you—don't you know you a Gatlin!

JGC: Yes and yes! Believe you me—I lived it. I'm sixty-seven years old and I still get it thrown in my face.

LOC: By snapping at folks.

JGC: By snapping at folks and it just comes before you know it—I ask God all the time, Guard my tongue! Because I know that I've changed. Because there was once in my life when I didn't care. I was going to have the last word. If you knocked me down I was going to have the last word.

LOC: While you're down on the ground!

JGC: That's right.

LC: So you're a Gatlin too.

JGC: Yes, yes!

LOC: Cousin Sherry(??) running around talking about, I hope we don't get it. I said, Y'all already got it! I hope we don't get it [laughs].

JGC: Already got it! Yes! My father was a little bitty man. He wore a size six shoe. But you would've thought that he was a giant. I am serious. My daddy was something else.

LC: Why? Why do you think that Grandma—was she mean too?

LOC: Yeah! She was snappy. Talking about was she mean. Wasn't Grandma fussy?

JGC: Yes. Yes she was.

LC: She was?

JGC: Yes she was. But not that you—she wasn't just loud with it. She was gonna tell you what was on her mind. See now we were gonna tell you what was on our minds—you was gonna know.

LOC: Now let's tell this story. See a man and a woman got killed at their house on the way to Wiergate.

LC: At who's house?

LOC: At their house. And I don't know if that's Hoy's brother or not—Hoy Gatlin. It was a Gatlin. And somebody—they don't know what happened. He killed his wife and then killed himself and I want to know do you remember that?

JGC: I don't remember that. But like I said—it was—

LOC: You may have been gone. But you would've heard about it had it been your daddy's brother. You would've heard about it. So we just had a lot of mysterious things that happened in Shankleville you know. And that was just one of them—and you know I just thought you remembered it.

JGC: I'm trying to think who it could have been.

LOC: They called the woman Sister Girl.

JGC: Sister Girl.

LOC: Sister Girl and the Gatlin man—both of them got killed up there one Sunday morning. That was the talk of the town. Now let me see now—that was a Marshall lady that got killed on the way to Wiergate. On the way—between Burkeville and Wiergate. They said that people lynched her.

JGC: Oh yes that I remember.

LC: What was that about?

LOC: White men [inaudible].

JGC: Well actually they—it could've been that too. But the fact was that she looked like a white woman too. And her husband I think was dark.

LOC: You know that was Doretha Lowe's daddy's sister. Carrie—Carrie Marshall.

JGC: Yes. Carrie Marshall. Like I said there's two versions of that—one they said about the white man and one they said they thought that she was a white woman with a Black husband.

LC: And so they killed her?

LOC: Why would they kill her?

JGC: That's what I don't know. That's what I know. They drug her behind a horse. So it was probably the other way around.

LC: That they thought she was a white woman and some white man liked her?

JGC: Right.

LC: So what would he have done? Tried to flirt with her or something?

JGC: If he was a white man going with her knowing even as white as she was that she had any Black blood in her at all—that's why.

LOC: Now Lareatha like that white man was doing my—that technician who was giving my breathing test said, Why y'all didn't do something about it?

JGC: What could you do?

LOC: I asked him, What could you do?

JGC: What could you do? Nothing!

LOC: Even today it's still going on and we can't do anything about it.

JGC: That's right. Look at what they did to Anthony Peacock.

LOC: That's right.

JGC: The sheriff was in it and they still haven't done anything about it.

LC: So what do you know about that?

JGC: What?

LC: The Anthony Peacock thing.

JGC: Anthony Peacock was the fact that he was going with this white girl in Newton and one of the sheriff's deputies was liking her too. And he saw them together so when they went out that night they didn't do nothing but follow him. When he got out there—somehow or another they stopped him—they killed him—and laid him out there in the middle of the street—in the middle of the highway.

LOC: They said he got killed running cows—horses.

JGC: And at that time of morning—no he didn't. He wasn't running no horses. They killed him! They killed him and castrated him.

LOC: This is Terece's son.

JGC: That's right.

LOC: And see—the Peacocks and the Gatlins mate. Because one of the Gatlin girls married a Peacock.

JGC: That's right. Mr. Elbert's mother—Lottie—her name is Charlotte—that's right that was. Yes.

LOC: And we'd go to Sunday school and they'd come up there whispering about Carrie—they found Carrie dead—what could you do! What else could you say?

JGC: Nothing. Nothing that you could do.

LOC: What else could you say?

JGC: That's just like when we was growing up and you was asking about did we know we were different. We knew that when we went places and we started seeing signs that said 'colored' and 'white' but actually—we just thought that was the way that it was. And people today—you know the generation that's coming up—they have no earthly idea because the hardship that our fore parents went through—we can't—and the way that we came up—and today even my children, Oh that was back in your time! You know, That was old fogie. They are not—and some of the younger generation, Well we don't wanna hear about that!

LOC: Let me tell you about Lareatha. Lareatha bought some used appliances in Jasper to put in Big Mama's house. And they couldn't deliver them all on the weekend and she was going to meet a delivery man up there in Shankleville at Big Mama's house on a Monday morning. To let him go in Big Mama's house and put the appliance in there. And I just bucked the ceiling!

LC: Normally—Clayee went up there—

LOC: Her brother. And she didn't want to go up there—and you just don't do things like that! But see her experiences couldn't have alerted her to that. See they take advantage of that every time. They could've pulled her on over and I could've never heard from her again.

JGC: Yes. Because of the fact that it's isolated.

LOC: That's how those boys that did that dragging did—they thought they'd go up there and have some fun and nobody would never know it.

JGC: It's true.

LOC: That's right.

LC: You're talking about James [inaudible last name]?

LOC: Yes.

JGC: Yes.

LC: I'm surprised you said they lynched this woman by dragging her behind a horse. A woman!

JGC: Yes a woman. And they said that that's the way that—they told me she was drug and you know. Out there in the woods they lynch folks and hang them through these trees. But that was the story I heard.

LOC: I was just telling you that it comes up in these white boys! They just love to see Black people suffer.

JGC: Yes they do.

LOC: It just comes over them—you don't think so? See—I got transferred from a Black school to a all white school. And you have to change the whole different [inaudible].

JGC: Yes you do. You really do.

LOC: And once you think you'd get em—like the Black kids tell you, Turn the other cheek. I wasn't turning the other cheek. They gonna find out how many cheeks you have! It's just all together terrible.

JGC: Yes. And all the different places that I worked I worked—even when I was working for the phone company—I was working for the phone company in 1969—I had a whole lot of women—I started when we had the cardboard—you know when you plug in? When you go in and your shift begin you had to take and plug your card in where somebody else's was already because there may be or have somebody on the line you know—so you got to keep that connection up. And I had a whole lot of them—would not want to relieve a Black person. A lot of the white people they would not relieve a Black person. I've had them—me being an operator I've been called some of everything except a child of God. But one of the things about it on a lot of them that they would call in and they would say, I don't want to talk to that nigger! They'd be talking to me. Because at that time I was a supervisor so whenever a operator had a difficulty with a person I would go in and plug in and take over. Oh and they would call—I would let them rant and rave and I would use that voice to soothe them down you know and see what they want. And sometime according to what I felt and I know—when they got calmed down and everything and then there'd be a place, Oh well I thank you and blah blah this and oh by the way I'm Black too! I would do it sometime. And at my last job it was a young man—speaking of younger people—

LOC: She'd kick into that white voice! [Laughter] You don't know about that.

JGC: It was a young man—his mother was raised up as one of those Southern belles out of Baton Rouge, Louisiana. And you know they raised up to—she was very prejudiced so this was instilled in this young man—you know about people. When I first started working there he would talk friendly. But if he had to hand me something he would never touch my hand. I just you know—kept on treating him nice—but I knew that he would never touch me. So finally when in his confidence and me being the person that I try to—show friendliness and try to love the unlovable and all that—and we became real good friends and became close. And he finally started telling me that he was raised prejudiced but he said, I can't see it. And then he started talking about his home life. Matter fact I'll tell you who you may—his people is on you remember us awhile back—Edwards. They mayor—governor of Louisiana that got into a—well this Edwards—that's his uncle.

CROSSTALK: Wow.

JGC: That's his gangster uncle! But anyway he was a real nice young man so we became friends and he began to trust me. And matter of fact—since I've been retired I've gotten a letter from him. And he'll send a card occasionally. But you know it was just something—he was saying that these young people—they're taught that. They are taught to actually hate a person for the color of their skin.

LOC: Color struck.

JGC: Yes. That is now—although I live here I haven't had any problems when it comes down to younger people or something. I'm travelling between Jasper and Newton all the time. And there's a lot of times I'm on a lonely stretch where there is no other cars. But if I see a car coming up behind me real fast I try my best to see if I could tell. I give them a chance to pass me—and of course I drive with my doors locked at all times whatever. But I'm still—that's still in the back of my mind. To be careful. And especially these supped up trucks. You know the kinds of trucks that they drive. When they say, Take God everywhere you go—that is the time when I really start talking to Him. Because you just cannot take it for granted because you never know. Because there is so much evilness out there and we know that Satan has tried to destroy everybody that he can anyway that he can.

LC: So we're almost at the end of our second tape. Do you have any other questions?

LOC: No I just wanted to tell her that I have gained new admiration for her. You know—to see that she came out of all of those experiences with two hands and two ears and two eyes and a good brain and she's made good use of it. That's right. In spite of it all! You still love on them.

JGC: Oh yes! I had to overcome an awful lot. And awful lot. Matter of fact I don't know if they still have this school here in Jasper—when I first moved here I was going to take a class but they didn't have enough people. But if I had the money I would be in class right now!

LOC: So you could learn some more.

JGC: Learn some more.

LOC: Ms. Simmons told me they'd have her washing dishes—and at that time they'd put newspaper on the wall for wallpaper. And instead of washing dishes she's up there reading. [Laughter] They'd catch her reading you know. And she just instilled that in us. Just to keep on reading.

JGC: I worked for the Simmons—for Professor Simmons and Ms. Simmons when I was going to school. That was the way I paid for my lunch. In order for me to get free—

LOC: In Wiergate or in Shankleville?

JGC: In Wiergate. No at Weirgate.

LOC: Because you were so young at Shankleville.

JGC: Yes. In Shankleville I didn't but—

LOC: See they lived next door in between us and the Methodist church.

JGC: Yes. But in Wiergate they lived—that house was right out there on—

LOC: Yeah. They moved their whole [inaudible] room up there.

JES: Yes. And when other children was out at recess eating I was over there washing dishes and making up their beds. That's the way I got my lunch. I paid for my lunch.

LOC: What about your perception of their son that they adopted—Peter.

JGC: What was that child's name?

LOC: Peter [inaudible] China.

JGC: Yeah he was from where—Korea or one of those places. Somewhere. But I didn't know too much about him. I wasn't around too much.

LOC: Because he got there in 1955. And you left there in 194—

JGC: Yes I left there—I guess about a year that I never was around him.

LOC: He turned out to be a monstrosity! He put them through everything and I was over their estate and dealt with me the same way. He wanted something for nothing!

JGC: Yep!

LOC: All day every day of his life.

JGC: I'll say! I was telling—showing Linda that house where the Simmons lived in that curve over there—in Jasper—where it used to be white—it's a house there but it's painted that old mustard color yellow. I told her that used to be the most beautiful house. I thought it was so pretty.

LOC: What about your perception of Cleo? The girl they adopted. Was she along with you?

JGC: She was above me. Yeah I didn't have too—

LOC: Because she's on the that picture too that I'm going to send you.

JGC: I forgot about her. I didn't have too much dealings with her.

LOC: She came back when Ms. Simmons passed away. And we tried to find that house but we didn't do a good job of finding that house.

JGC: Yeah it's still there. Yes indeed.

LC: Any closing thoughts?

JGC: No more than the fact that by the grace of God I'm still here and I plan to be here and do all I can as long as I can. And to keep learning—keep searching for my roots. I'm like the elephant now—I've returned home. I've returned home!

LC: Okay. Thank you!

LOC: It sure was a pleasure.

TRANSCRIPT END