

Audio File Name: **shankleville_interviews_14**
Transcription by: Rachel E. Winston, 2020 May
Interviewer: Lareatha Clay
Interviewee: Trogie Shankle, Larutha Odom Clay
Location: Shankleville, TX
Interview Date: 2004 September 4
Duration: 30:48

Speaker Identification:

Lareatha Clay: LC
Trogie Shankle: TS
Larutha Odom Clay: LOC

TRANSCRIPT BEGIN

LOC: —have his funeral. My funeral! [Laughter]

TS: Well I'll tell y'all the truth about it. There's something in there that never was dug up. And I don't like to say nothing about it.

LOC: They say he was not there. Some strange thing happened.

LC: What is the speculation about what it could have been?

TS: Well I talked with Coleman—he said he went out there with all kinds of disinfectant and everything. And when he got out there man laying out there just like he was in the bed. Not defected no way. Out of as many days as he been gone. You understand me? They say he was just as clean and nice and everything.

LC: So you think somebody put him out there? Or he was walking around and—

TS: Well I'm gon tell you what. Didn't I just tell y'all awhile ago James said be careful with your tounge? I don't like to talk about that. Because it's something crooked there. I was out there in the woods. I had a short way radio in my pocket. Two or three of us together. And what went on in Jaffe and Newton County among the police and everything—I could hear it and know what was going on.

Let me tell you one thing. It's time for everything. It's something went wrong there and it never was scratched out. That's right. We don't know where we living. In my book it wasn't a better man in Shankleville than Uncle Pate. And he didn't do nothing to hurt nobody. If he could help you he'd help you. You understand that? And you talk about a hurt man—I was a hurt man. I'd walk all day and wouldn't get tired.

LOC: Was Pate about your age?

TS: No Uncle Pate was a whole lot younger than I am.

LC: He was younger?

TS: Yeah. He was a whole lot younger than I am now.

LOC: Because Tim was the oldest one and that's his daddy.

TS: Uncle Pate was a younger man than I am now. When that happened.

LC: Oh okay. But he was older than you?

TS: Yeah. You understand me? Because let's see—Valree was born at Uncle Pate's house and that was after Valree was born. Because we were living right there below Wiley while all this was happening. I was living right there below Wiley when Uncle Pate went missing.

LOC: I didn't know you ever lived up there. Cousin Wiley?

TS: Why? I lived right there below Wiley's house. You remember members of the big house now. Russell Simmons—

LOC: That was across eighty-seven.

TS: I know it. Right there is where I lived. See I lived in Uncle Pate's house with him. I lived in John Galloway's house.

LOC: After John Galloway died?

TS: No I stayed at John Galloway's a few months.

LOC: That's the one Jonnel(??) say he didn't want them passing through his house. Didn't want it because he was particular about his stuff. Then after he died said birds were living in his house. Uh huh! I didn't know he let anybody live in the hose with him.

TS: Yes. He was a hell of a man.

LC: What do you mean hell of a man?

LOC: Was he smart? That was a teacher—he was one of the first teachers out there.

TS: I hurt my wife to keep her from killing his ass. She had that forty-five and was trying to get to him. And I caught and drug it out of her hand. And up until she died that arm hurt her.

LC: Well what did he do to make her mad?

TS: Well she sent Elray out there to get some peas out of the crib(??) and he shut the door up. And she hollered and told him, My baby's out there! Said he looked back and grinned at her and started off. She said, I'll fix your damn ass! I didn't hear the conversation. But I happened up and she was coming out the house with the forty-five in her hand.

LC: So that's why you didn't live there long?

TS: No! I don't know why he didn't live long.

LC: No I said you didn't live in his house long.

TS: No! No! I wasn't gonna stay around nobody ain't got no sense! I'll tell you the truth about it. You know what? Peoples can get hurt fooling with trash. In my book he wasn't no damn good for nothing. You understand me.

LOC: Was he a good teacher? That's what I wanna know. John Galloway taught all those people in Shankleville.

TS: I'll tell you what—I don't know nothing. I just got eight grade school.

LOC: Well that means you got a lot.

TS: But I heard a lot of white men said, John Galloway didn't have no principle. Said he was the highest educated man it was among the Black mens in Newton and Jasper County.

LOC: But no principle.

TS: No principle. It's bad for you when nobody can depend on you for nothing.

LOC: That's right.

TS: That's bad! And just like y'all—I had forgot y'all was coming over here this morning.

LOC: We're not dependable Lareatha! [Laughter] Those cops stopped us. They stopped us from driving. Those cops made us go slow. And it's the highway under construction too. We left home on time!

TS: Well I ain't saying nothing about that. Let me tell you something—

LOC: But you're dependable—that's one thing about you. And that helicopter was dependable up there too! With Junior White sitting up there waving down at you. [Laughter]

TS: Yeah they found me. But I had walked so many miles. My children say they wanted me to pick them up and carry them back there—they wanted to see that big old tree where I sleeps under. But I know I had to get somebody with a four-wheel drive to get back there.

LOC: And did any animal or anything bother you while you were sleeping?

TS: No. No animal didn't bother me. I heard a panther hollering.

LOC: Heard a bear?

TS: A panther hollering.

LC: A panther?

TS: Yes. That's all I heard.

LOC: What did you do when you heard it? Talking about that's all. What did you do when you heard him—you weren't afraid of him?

TS: No! He comes where he wants. I had a stick.

LOC: You can't fight a panther!

TS: Huh? What?

LOC: You can't fight a panther!

TS: I know I can't. But I can keep him off me.

LC: They not going to bother you.

LOC: I wouldn't sleep out there in those woods. You actually went to sleep? [Laughter]

TS: I done the best I could. Every now and then a bunch of 'skeeters would come along say, Here he is! And they get full and go off and here another bunch come! [Laughs]

But girl I'm going to tell you the truth about it. That water, that water, that water, that water. David Hadnot and his wife was the first one got to me. They were on four wheel a piece.

LOC: Who is David Hadnot?

TS: He stay right here on the highway.

LOC: Is he the pastor of the church in Newton?

TS: No.

LOC: Who that pastor of the church over there—Antioch Baptist Church—in Newton?

TS: All I know is he's a Hadnot.

LC: So they came with the water—

TS: He's the one had the water. That boy had—he come there and I told him—a woman in Jasper—a doctor—heard it over the news. I told 'em, I'd give ten dollars for a drink of water. He said, I got it. He reached in the keg and he got me a drink of water. And that done made me feel better than anything. And I went I ate breakfast that morning and drank water and I didn't eat nothing until that next day.

LOC: And the mosquitos had eaten you up! Bless your heart.

TS: A person don't know what they can go through here. You just gotta have faith in yourself. If you ain't got no faith that ends. Was that my pen?

LC: That's your pen.

[Laughter]

LOC: That's your pen. Let me give you your pen back! Yes sir. Do you have any advice for us?

TS: If it ain't but one thing I can tell you. Be careful. Why? People watching everything. Some people know and some don't. Ida Mae said she tried to get her children sometime to come by and talk with me. Said, That man knows more about Shankleville than anybody living. And said, None of them have time. I said, Well a person do what the want and that's when it happen. Yeah. I don't try to push myself off on nobody. And if I can help you I don't think I'm over nobody else.

LOC: Do you have any enemies? Enemies that you know of?

TS: Well do you know an enemy?

LOC: Yeah!

TS: So you do? Well I don't. I'll tell you what—do right there. And just check if you live five more years than I live and tell me how many you've found. Your enemy is the one that you wholly depend on.

LOC: I depend on friends. Because the enemy is not dependable! They trying to dig ditches.

TS: Your enemy is right close to you.

LC: That's what he's saying. You think they're your friend but they might be your enemy. Sometimes—that's what she's saying.

TS: Did you ever read that story about the man [inaudible] the poor Samaritan come along. He got down off his mule and carried him on. You see what I'm talking about. Man taken him and given him relief he had never seen! You understand.

LOC: You sure you're ninety-four?

TS: Ninety-four. Why?

LOC: You don't have any eyeglasses—

TS: Yes! I've got eyeglasses.

LOC: No hearing aid—

TS: I need a hearing aid. [Laughter]

LOC: I'm telling you! God bless you.

TS: Now what else you want to know? I got one thing I'm gon tell you. I always tell peoples time is still rolling. The morning that I got my neck broke—I was cutting a log for two trucks. It was 11:25 when I got my neck broke and that man paid my wife one hundred and twenty-some dollars for that morning cutting log. I was going to make me a thousand dollars that week—that was the eighteenth day of December. And I was just in too doggone big a hurry. You understand. And I likely got killed. You hear me.

LOC: I'm telling you! With your neck broke.

TS: Well the doctor said it broke and I got a scar back there where they cut it open and sewed it up—they couldn't put it back in place. And I cant half turn around. Did you see me when I got crossway in the chair?

LOC: Well thank the Lord. Yes. I'm telling you—that you can use your limbs that's better than a lot of folk.

TS: I can't turn around good.

LOC: That's alright. Thank the Lord.

TS: I know how to do some things here. If you trust in God—He will provide. You hear me. Yeah. He will provide. Old James tell me when I was working hard like a fool, Ain't no need in you doing all that work trying to do this and trying to do that—

LC: James who?

TS: James Lewis. Me and him grew up boys together.

LOC: Uncle James sure didn't do too much work did he?

LC: He told you all that and then what happened? Oh he used to tell you just don't work hard?

TS: Yes. Said he wasn't going to die tired. [Laughter]

LOC: He didn't either. I heard him say one time—you know when you plow you say, Get up horse get up. That's what you tell them to go. James said he wouldn't tell a horse to get up if he sat in his lap! [Laughter]

TS: You know what Percy said? Percy said when he retired he wasn't going to do but one thing—set under the shade trees when I share them out(??)—said, Because I ain't going to quit work I'm going work my damn fool to death. [Laughter]

LOC: Have you shut it down now or are you still working? You shut it down?

TS: Yeah.

LOC: Good.

LC: You have? You stopped working?

TS: No! I do what I want to do now. Some of it.

LOC: They're still getting that hay?

TS: Yeah I cut hay. Let's see. The last time I cut my hay I cut eighty-five rows and four hundred and forty-something square bales. Last time I cut my hay.

LOC: How many days did it take you to do that—how many weeks?

TS: One day. Cut it down in one day.

LOC: But you don't bale it up—your machine would cut it and bale it at the same time?

TS: Yeah I got my machine to cut it. Then I got back and scatter it around—go back and rake it up—then I go back and roll it up.

LOC: The machine does all of that? You sitting up there riding.

TS: No I do all that. I do some of it.

LOC: So the machine does it.

TS: Yes. I got a mower out there. I can cut a hundred rows of hay any day. That's right.

LC: And what do you do with the hay once you cut it?

TS: Well I get some more cows—

LC: How many cows you have?

TS: I got four or five.

LOC: Do you still milk them?

TS: No. An old cow tried to hook my wife right after we moved here. And just before we left up there with Wiley a cow hooked Wiley's wife. And I said, Baby don't you fool with that cow no more. Because if he act like a fool and hook you—I said, I ain't [inaudible]. And she stopped milking. I been buying milk ever since.

LOC: That used to be my job—I used to like to milk. They used to time me. See how long it would take me to go down there and open the gate and go in there and milk the cow and come back.

LC: So when a cow hooks you—that means it hooks you with its foot?

LOC: Horns!

TS: They kick you. They kick you.

LOC: I thought that meant hooking you with their horns.

TS: They did hook Thelma. That cow did hook at Thelma but she had a stick where she kept the cow off and when she motioned her head at her—she put that stick on her nose. Thelma was a tough little old woman. Yeah she was a tough little old woman. And Elray—I had an old mule when I was staying out with Wiley. Wiley say he looked at mule to kill and Elray won.

LOC: Elray was tough too huh?

TS: Oh yeah. I said, Baby get him over there—alright Daddy I got him!—and she had him too. Elray was a tough little old woman. But you know—most women—I don't know why—they want to be [inaudible]. Don't want to—you know—get up against nothing. You understand me. Just like you—just like you said you used liked to go milk. See when you was coming along girls milking that was something real.

LOC: I did all of the outside work. Breaking the wood up. The other two girls didn't want me in there hearing what they were saying because I'd tattle. I go to tell Mama what they'd said.

TS: Yeah! You see what I'm talking about!

LOC: So I'd go milk the cows. Do everything. Get the corn. And the chickens and stuff. You learn how to do stuff like that.

TS: But you know what? I trim hair about twenty-three years—until I was sixty-nine years old.

LOC: I didn't know that! That's why you said Hap came down here to get his hair cut.

TS: That's why he come here. Every month he come here two times to get his hair cut. Charlie would hook that old wagon up and haul him down.

LOC: How much were you charging?

TS: I couldn't charge him because he was sick.

LOC: How much you charge other people?

TS: I'd charge fifty.

LOC: Fifty cents? [Laughs]

TS: Yes. When I first started cutting hair I charged boys ten cents and men twenty-five. And before I quit—before I got my neck broke—I ain't been able to do nothing since I got my neck broke.

LOC: How long ago was that?

TS: I was sixty-nine years old when that happened. I ain't even been able to shave myself.

LOC: Oh I forgot that.

TS: Yeah. It's been awhile. Let's see—sixty-nine from ninety-four—

LC: None of us know math! I can't think of what that is. Sixty-nine out of ninety-four.

TS: That's right. That's how old I was when I got my neck broke.

LOC: Thirty-one?

TS: Thirty years.

LC: Okay. So are we concluding?

LOC: How much tape we got?

LC: We don't have to go through the whole tape.

TS: Y'all take it easy.

LC: Okay. Thanks a lot!

[24:26: Tape stops and begins again, in the middle of LOC speaking]

LOC: —together and not divided. That's what I'm interested in.

TS: Well I'm gon tell you what—it's one thing they have done. Now don't misunderstand me. The Shankle family have improved a whole lot. Now don't say what I said. You watch what I tell you. When they first started—Cousin Willie, Cousin Alvin and Cousin Ed—and Uncle Pate. Now what did they do. Will we remember that. Can you remember that?

LOC: Not specifically.

TS: Cousin Wille made the speech. Cousin Ed was the president. Cousin Alvin was the secretary. Uncle Pate was the treasurer. Curley Shankle had a wagon and a pair of horses. He'd get two barrels of water and bring out there. I had a one-horse wagon. I'd go up there and get sugar, lemons and I think there were two or three hunks of ice—you know they had the big hunks—and bring out there. And Cousin Curley would fix the water.

LOC: You told me Cousin Curley couldn't make lemonade.

TS: [Laughs] He could make it good. And he'd give them children that cup—he didn't allow them to play in that water. You understand me? And if they throwed they cup away they didn't get no more water.

LOC: Reverend Riggins told us about that last time.

TS: That's right. And last one there—Cousin Ed we was all in a meeting. He said, him and Cousin Willie would need to figure a way to get all the Shankles involved. Shankleville. I have been to Shankleville and dug a grave by myself from the time start on up. That's when the went to electing people out of the Shankle family to try to run the Homecoming. I hate it so bad when that first Sunday in August come. I didn't get a chance to play dominoes that day!

I had to go get that ice water and everything. After I got down here Thelma said, Daddy all them people got all this stuff. I said, Well baby I'm trying to help it grow. And here's what we got to do. Do you see how much improvement the scholarship has made? It's one more thing I want to try to get—if I get there. Thank God. I was in there from the start of it up until now. And I ain't turned nobody down on nothing they asked me to do. Do you know how important it is to have a place on the map in Texas? Nobody but colored folks. Colored folks names. How many more you find?

LOC: Have you found any Lareatha?

LC: There are a couple. But Shankleville is one of the most well known ones.

LOC: Because we didn't come into contact with any white folks.

TS: You see?

LC: So then what's one thing you'd like to do? Before my tape runs out!

TS: I would like to—you know—just like people out there Sunday—out of service was fine. Come on back. Had a good offering. Everything, everybody had plenty of something to eat. You understand me? And I didn't get a chance to get back to the business meeting but they tell me it went out good. The business meeting went out good. I like to keep up with my stuff. In other words I got no trouble. You know what that is?

LOC: You're nosy!

TS: [Laughs] But I sure want to see that.

LOC: See the books and everything?

TS: Yes.

LOC: I want to see it from Charles, Lareatha. I want to see it in our family reunion. That's the only way to do business! The only way to do business!

TS: That's right.

TRANSCRIPT END