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Interviewer: Lareatha Clay  
Interviewees: Malchia Cannon, Willie Pate Shankle, Gwendolyn (Wilona) Cannon,  
Larutha Odom Clay  
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Speaker Identification:  
Lareatha Clay: LC  
Malchia Cannon: MC  
Willie Pate Shankle: WPS  
Gwendolyn Cannon: GC  
Larutha Odom Clay: LOC

### **TRANSCRIPT BEGIN**

LC: How do you feel when people who don't live here come back and go—and come back and go—and so forth? [To LOC] Is that what you're trying to say?

LOC: Yes I'm thinking about—take over. Look like you trying to take over [laughs].

WPS: Well I'll tell you as long as they're doing the thing right I feel alright. Because I don't think it's [inaudible] going to try and take over everything. [Inaudible]. Is that what you're talking about?

LOC: Yeah. I'm talking about like me and Lareatha! Like we come and taking over this scholarship program and everything.

WPS: Oh! Oh that's fine.

LC: Sometimes do you feel that the people who come back—that people give them a lot more credit—

LOC: And act uppity. That's what I'm trying to say.

WPS: No I don't feel way.

LOC: You don't think we act uppity?

LC: You know sometimes—let's say at Homecomings and sometimes when people come back and go on and on about, “oh live in California!” or “they became a general!” or “their son played football!” all that. So I'm just asking—

CROSSTALK: No!

MC: That's just like Brayford(?). I'll use him because he made it. I'm happy—

WPS: Yes. That's right!

MC: I don't see nothing wrong with it. You see I got something—okay. I'm going to show you another example. I go to Jasper and I brags about Elzie Odom. I brag on Elzie Odom to the mayor of Jasper because the Mayor of Jasper once was a Black man—R.C. Horn. But I told R.C.—see I get straight up right down nasty when I want to—I told R.C., The only reason you are a mayor in Jasper is because the white folks had to make a little change. I said, But you catch a Black man in the city of Arlington, Texas—that's ain't no bull. That's business. It ain't about we need this—we getting by on a corner and we need to put this nigger here for this. They done killed James Byrd—they drug James Byrd so we going to make sure this nigger's here. This will settle them down inf they got a Black mayor. No, no. I said, Elzie Odom was very, very intelligent—not that you're not intelligent—but I know what you did. I done seen what you did. That's the kind of brother I am. I love my people. I love to brag on what a Shankle done did!  
[Laughter]

LOC: Do you feel put down because we wait on you to fix that food for us? [Laughter] And come back and put everything on there and fuss on it!

GC: No! I feel privileged to be a part of Shankleville. Because when he first brought me up here to a Homecoming I met so many wonderful people. And it was people at that Homecoming from all over the United States. It let me know that those people came from a community of love. You would not come back to a place that you didn't love every year. You wouldn't travel this distance if you didn't love Shankleville. When I first started coming to Shankleville I found some special people. Special little town. And when they started telling me about the heritage and how it was founded, how it got started—it was just amazing to me. Very much. I was proud to know that so many people had accomplished so much—so many Black people. I'm talking about Black people—had accomplished so much in life that came out of this little town. Just like you said—you have mayors, you have doctors, you have lawyers, you have professors, you have generals in the Army. They came from a small community that a slave founded and they're spread all over the United States doing good. And uplifting the Black race. So I feel privileged to be a part of Shankleville. When I go back to my little hometown small community—we have some people that have accomplished things but the love and unity is not there. They do not come back home for Homecoming. The Shankles are proud people. Very proud!

When I look back and Jim Shankle—I see a hero in Christ. I see a man that built his life on faith in God and what he could accomplish through God. Because none of this would be possible if he was not a Christian man. So he had to know God. You cannot found a community and spread love if you were not a Christian. So the people that grew up here in Shankleville are very special people to me. I've met a lot of people—in the thirty-one years that I've been married to a grandson of Jim Shankle—I've met a lot of loving people. I have not walked up to one Shankle that hurt my feelings. So that says a lot for Shankleville and Jim Shankle. And my husband has a love for his people that he would do anything to keep that Homecoming going, to keep this community going.

LOC: I didn't think he knew me!

GC: Oh yes!

LOC: We came out here and he said, Hey Larutha! I said, I didn't know you know my name!  
[Laughter]

MC: I did that on purpose! I don't speak out like that.

GC: He loves—he loves Shankleville.

MC: I did Cousin Ferry(??) like that at the Homecoming. I said, Hey Ferry! You made it? Why was she looking around! And she saw who I was—she said, Oh boy! You know I just like to uplift you.

GC: And you know that scholarship program? I'm looking forward to the day that one of our grandbabies walk up there and win first prize! That's what we're working on now. It'll be awhile but I'm entrusting you all to keep that going. Because that's so needed.

LOC: Now that's a hard thing for me. That's a hard thing for me—to make sure that it's fair. Oh Lord have mercy.

MC: I heard that.

LOC: We had a little thing this year you know. When somebody gets eighty-nine and somebody else get eighty-eight and nine tenths—I just want to call it a tie! And they don't want to. They talk about the elected judges get together and pick one. But all of the judges are not here!

LC: Y'all are getting off this topic on my tape! [Laughter]

LOC: Three of the judges in Beaumont and they judge the written part of it. And so when those children get up there they already have accumulated some points and they're trying to get forty more. Well I don't care how good they are up there—if they just get forty then they're just not going to beat those kids who have a good paper. And so I'd just like to win this argument.

LC: Okay Mom. Alright. Let's get back to the tape. Let's talk more about the Willie Pate Shankle era. We talked a lot about the seventies and everything—so talk about the school that you went to and who was in your class.

WPS: I went to school out there at old Enterprise. I went there plenty until they started they school. I went to Wiergate one year.

LOC: I didn't know that!

WPS: I was there one year. When I went that year I dropped out.

LOC: I thought you were in my class?

WPS: Well see I flunked. I wasn't smart at school. I started off in your class. Then I flunked out.

LOC: I didn't know you kept going. That was in forty-five when the school closed and they went to Wiergate?

WPS: Yep.

LOC: So you went to Wiergate and finished in forty-six.

WPS: I went one year. Yes. So I just dropped out.

LC: Why'd you decide to drop out?

WPS: Well my age done got about time for me to get out of school and come on and go to work. So I just come on the farm and work on the farm. And I worked along with your daddy. Cousin Al [A.T. Odom] we done carpenter work.

LOC: You know they built that house on Washington Boulevard.

LC: Oh I thought his daddy built that house.

LOC: No. The two of them and dad. They would drive in there—they drove so many nails in that wood I mean nothing is going to tear that wood! [Laughter]

WPS: You were a baby then weren't you?

LC: Yes sir.

WPS: That's right.

LC: So what was that joke about you cooking peas all the time?

LOC: Oh yes. They'd bring the peas and I was cooking dinner for them. And Cousin Pate said, Well I see we got a change. We went from Brother Odom peas to the Pate peas! [Laughter]

WPS: We had plenty of peas. And we turned them over to Cousin Ruth and she done the cooking. And we had plenty of peas. Because during that time we'd work there in Beaumont but you were living in Port Arthur. And we'd work and drive over to Port Arthur and spend the night and come back the next morning and go back to work. We sure had some fun and enjoyed down there working.

LC: How long did it take?

WPS: About two months—wasn't it?

LOC: I don't know. I know y'all haven't been back since! I've been trying to get them back. Got the mail going to the other house! [Laughter]

WPS: I haven't been there since you left out there.

LOC: That's what I'm saying. No you haven't.

WPS: But we really enjoyed working down there. Yeah we had more fun and love down there.

LC: So the house—the carpentry crew was Big Papa, A.T. Odom, Willie Pate Shankle.

WPS: Was Leo and Elzie up there?

LOC: No just three of y'all. Daddy would walk over to that old house we tore down and get some lumber—he wouldn't go to the lumber yard. He'd go get some old lumber—must've been good

it's not rotted down yet! And we bought that stuff next door. That duplex. And that stuff rot—every time somebody move the floors sunk in. Just rotting out!

MC: Oh man.

WPS: I tell you that was some good lumber back then. That old lumber.

LOC: I don't know—but I know that house of Washington Boulevard is standing better than that stuff we bought. Y'all put some nails in that house!

LC: Did y'all do other jobs together—the three of y'all?

CROSSTALK: Yeah!

LC: Name some other places y'all built.

WPS: We did a house all around here. All in Jasper, everywhere. You know Old Beacon(??) and them house over there. You know when they moved from Jamestown [inaudible]. And then we build Evergreen Church over there.

LC: Where is that?

MC: In Jasper.

WPS: That's where my seat come from—that church.

MC: These seats right here.

WPS: That's right. Evergreen.

LC: So how many years did y'all do that?

WPS: Oooh many years.

LOC: Now there were different times where there were different people would work with you. Like J.D.—

WPS: Steve McBride I worked with.

LC: Is this the original Steve McBride?

WPS: H.B. Marshall.

LOC: H.B. Marshall that's right. And [inaudible first name] and I used to laugh about it—he founded two funeral homes in Beaumont.

LC: My classmate's daddy?

LOC: No that was his uncle. And he'd laugh about how he hid his fingers trying to learn how to carpenter with y'all.

LC: So who was the guy that was on the roof and put the shingles on wrong?

LOC: Oh that was Cousin Philander. Daddy likes to tell that joke about Cousin Philander called him says, Come up here Brother Odom and see if this is right. And Daddy went up and said, No Cousin Philander—they called him Shotgun—no Shotgun—I thought it was wrong when you put them up! [Laughter]

WPS: He started with them before I start. When I start he had stopped—he wasn't working with them.

LOC: Now one person I know that Daddy couldn't train and that was Zee's husband—that old sorry boy that called Bigum. You remember Bigum?

WPS: Yeah. Bigum [inaudible].

LOC: Okay I'm off! I should never leave Beaumont! [Laughter]

WPS: Hey Ruth—don't talk about your brother-in-law!

LOC: He dead now. They said didn't but three people go to the funeral. [Laughter]

WPS: He was a sure thug.

LOC: And Mama and them couldn't stand those [inaudible] boys. I don't know why they let him marry Zee. One of them come knocking, Mrs. Odom is Ruth home—yes she is—May I speak to her?—No you may not. And slammed the door in his face! [Laughter]

WPS: I tell you old people back then they picked for their children.

LOC: I guess Bigum was [inaudible]. I guess that's how he got in.

MC: I remember when churches would visit each other. Every Sunday—like it was at the Baptist, the Methodist, Church of God—they would come to the Methodist Church. Just like we do the Homecoming now. Every Sunday we was at a different church and we'd fellowship together and everything. And I used to could do it—I can't do it now. I used to mock your Granddaddy when he'd break out in one of them old hymns. I used to could mock him—I can't do it no more—and I had it down T but I growed out of that. My grandmother would say, You gonna be walking around here talking like Cousin Alvin boy you better stop mocking him! I couldn't help it I just had to do it. [Laughs]

LC: You could do his stutter?

MC: Yeah! I used to do it but I can't now. Practice makes perfect. Boy I practiced! I practiced everyday. I'd go down there behind him. See he'd be out in the fields plowing and I'd be out there with him you know. I was everywhere I wasn't supposed to be. I'd slip off from in the house. And I remember—see a lot of people don't know—I was taught this side is called Shankleville. From the other side of the Shankle graveyard on this side—that side of the highway was called Hell Half Acres. That was Hell Half Acres over there and I wasn't allowed over on Hell Half Acres. I wasn't allowed over there. Floyd Shankle and Eary Shankle told me I wasn't supposed to go over there because bad things happen over on Hell Half Acres.

LC: Bad things like what?

MC: It was any way the wind blows.

WPS: Not unless you catch Velma(??) she has a big mouth. You can tell she'd get mad over there—and you'd hear clear at Wiergate school. You would hear her voice good—she'd be mad then.

LC: She'd be singing?

MC: Yeah she'd be singing.

LOC: And when she wasn't mad she'd be singing. I know you could hear the singing.

LC: I thought he said when she was mad she would sing?

WPS: If you make her mad you hear her sing and cuss and all!

MC: People had a lot of tradition and customs and it was certain things allowed and certain things they didn't allow.

LC: And one was not to go over there.

MC: Yeah you couldn't go over on the other side.

LOC: The other side of what?

MC: The other side of the road. Okay—you cross the creek—see we crossed the creek right down there. And go over on the other side of westside highway.

LOC: You talking about where the Black gang used to be, Willie Pate?

WPS: No where the Kites(??) used to live.

LC: Where who used to live?

MC: Cousin Joe, Spikes and all that down through there—they call that Hell Half Acres. That's what my grandfather and them called it.

LC: Did you have a rule like that when you were growing up?

LOC: No we didn't go anyplace! Mama would watch us while we were at the schoolhouse. I don't believe she got her work done! Any time you left and went three building or something—anytime you go from one to another—she'd say, What were you doing over there for?

LC: Did you have a rule about going over there when you were growing up?

WPS: Ah yeah. Some of the time they let me go but most of the time they wouldn't.

LOC: You talking about going down by where Opal used to live?

WPS: Yep. Back where Aunt Sue and them used to live.

LOC: I didn't know that Aunt Janet used to bootleg liquor! Until S.T. came back here!

GC: She was on that side?

MC: Yes.

GC: Well that's why! [Laughter]

MC: That's what I'm saying—it was more that went on that side. The Shankles didn't allow no—you had to be correct! You had to be serious business around here. They didn't believe in you going over there—whatchacallit—fornicating and having fun all that there. But that was the first place I was headed! [Laughter]

GC: Now we know why they didn't go over there!

MC: It was serious. It was serious business. And I found out—everybody was more loose and did things—just had their way.

LOC: Ms. Velma had a honky tonk up on the Blackland you know. Right up above the church. You used to walk through there huh? And she had a honky tonk up there. And we could hear the music all over town. We didn't even dream about going over there!

WPS: Yep, yep.

MC: That's what I'm saying! Y'all didn't have to be told. But I was told.

LOC: I hear people are getting up in church and testifying about what they used to do. We didn't get a chance to used to do something! [Laughter]

MC: A lot of people don't understand that.

GC: It's just how you were raised.

LOC: You said you liked Shankleville. I wanted to get out of here!

MC: You did?

LOC: Yes! I wanted to get away from here.

MC: You know at a moment when I could get angry—only time I didn't want to be in Shankleville was when I couldn't do what I wanted to do. And I called that—it wasn't fair. What I wanted to do was what I wanted to do when I wanted to do it—and I would get angry. And that's why I quit school. I wanted to do what I wanted to do!

LOC: That's the way your daddy was.

MC: I wanted to start going out during the time—I always had elderly men—being around and listening to what they had to say. And the group that I got with was doing more than saying. We were having a good time—they introduced me to the good time. And so I just felt like—when it was time for me to go back to school—I ain't got to do this. I'm a man. I know what's happening. I know about life. I can read—I'm one of the best readers and spellers it is. But I got all this—eleven years under me. So I told them I wasn't going back. So I went to school the first day—first couple days—and Valree said something to me—I got grown before my time. And so I thought I was that and wasn't really. Wasn't nothing.



LC: So Valree Brailsford was your teacher?

MC: Was my principal.

LOC: See his father was the principal until he died and then Valree took over.

LC: Did Valree teach up there?

MC: Yeah he taught before he become principal I believe.

WPS: Yes he did. Because he became principal after [inaudible] got gone.

LOC: Willie Pate—did you feel like they pushed you out of school? Or did they help you all they could?

WPS: They helped all they could. I'll tell you what it was—I never did go to school [inaudible]. Because I was intent to keep the farm going. Because my dad—he was working at Wiergate and him and Ma separate and I wasn't but nine years old. And so when they separate—why I had to go ahead and take care of the farm. And so I stayed at the farm then go to school some miles and come back to the farm. Up until him and my stepmother got married—she come on in and help us. Me and her done the plow work and when we get the plow work caught up we jump back and catch up with the hoe work. So that's what we'd be doing.

LOC: You don't feel like they stole something away from you?

WPS: Well in one sense I should've got more school but I didn't. So that left that account blank. Yeah.

LOC: Because I have a grandson that act like—you know they just want to stomp on him and the kids tease him and put him down and everything. And you know I want to just go and turn over the school! People not doing enough to help those who—everybody can learn—but some learn at a faster rate than others. And just like you Malchia—wasn't no need in putting you down. You just didn't want to do it that way. They should use different teaching methods!

LC: Is that your real name?

MC: Yes.

LC: Spell it.

MC: M-A-L-C-H-I-A.

LC: Oh like in the Bible?

MC: No. That's Malachi.

LC: Malachi! I'm sorry.

MC: It's two A's in there. But the A—one is in front of the L and one is behind the L in Malachi. And mine—A is at the end and behind the M. M-A-L-C-H-I-A. When Mama went to California she met an Italian nurse. And they were doing their nursing together and they were good friends.

And I was born and she let—mother let her name me. And that's what she gave me. I don't know what it means. That had me messed up for a while. I love it now. Because no one else is that. [Laughs].

LC: So did you want to straighten out your trees?

LOC: Well I found Pate and Zela Shankle. Zela Mae was first right?

WPS: Yes—Zela Mae.

LOC: And then Willie Pate was second.

WPS: Yes.

LOC: And then Lela Mae.

WPS: Yes. Lela Mae third.

LOC: And Lilly the fourth.

WPS: Yes.

LOC: And Leon five.

WPS: Yes.

LOC: And Claudette! I was so surprised to see—

WPS: Claudette was the baby.

LOC: I was so surprised to see her. And she walked up in there and asked me did I know—and I know she looked just like Lilly. And that name just came to me. But I called her Claudette—I got mixed up there. And she'd been growing up here since she was around five.

WPS: Yes. Her and my brother Leon they were the youngest two. And my mother raised them two and my daddy raised the rest of us. He raised four and she raised two.

MC: You said Lilly is younger than Lela?

WPS: Yeah.

MC: I didn't know that.

WPS: Yeah she's younger.

MC: Lilly is younger than Lela Mae?

WPS: Yes. See Lela Mae right behind me. It's just nine months between me and Lela Mae age.

MC: Oh okay. I thought it was Cousin Lilly. I didn't know! I'm glad I got that!

WPS: No Lela Mae was the youngest one that my daddy raise up.

MC: Okay.

LC: So you were the only other male in the house at that time? It was you and two sisters.

WPS: Yep.

LC: Did you boss them around?

WPS: Well no. I didn't boss them too much.

LC: How'd y'all get along?

WPS: We got along good because what I done is—I do the outside work and they do the housework. Most of the time I'm next to them is at night because in the daytime I'm up in the fields. We got along good. Yeah.

LOC: That's one thing they taught you in Shankleville—and that's how to work! [Laughter]

CROSSTALK: Oh yeah!

LOC: They would find stuff for you to do! It's like they were born to work.

WPS: Hey Ruth—we knew work!

LOC: Mama had a pile of lumber and she'd want you to move it. And then move it again! And she'd have it moved somewhere else tomorrow. Just keep you busy. Y'all can like it all you want to but I wanted to get away!

MC: Cousin Trogie is like that now.

WPS: Yeah he's like that now.

MC: Cousin Trogie. I can go down there right now—the only reason y'all didn't do nothing is you a ladies man. Y'all might not tell me—

LC: So if you go up there he'd have your working?

MC: You didn't have to go get him a glass of water? Banana? Reach over and get him a banana—nothing? You sure? [Laughter]

LC: No. He offered us a glass of water!

LOC: He was on his best behavior.

[CROSSTALK]

MC: Okay. Y'all blessed then. He'd come here and find something for you to do—in your house!

WPS: Oh yeah. I'd go down there—I gotta take him over that whole big farm before I leave there. He won't be satisfied.

MC: That's right. Him and Anderson White—they going to find something for somebody to do.

WPS: Something for you to do! That's right.

LC: You have to take him around the whole farm?

WPS: That's right.

LOC: His farm?

MC: Yes. His farm.

LOC: Why?

MC: He's going to show you something—always got something to show you.

WPS: That's right.

MC: I go and found out—I love him so but—I ain't riding all over this today. I can go down there and just be sitting and talking and talking and he'll get up—and if he ain't got his shoes on he'll go find a pair of shoes. And he going to be still talking. Say, Well Cousin Trogie I guess—No! I got something I want you to do—I got to show you this. I said, I come down here to talk with you—Well we can talk and do that too. He's something.

WPS: You know he just cleared up Uncle George place down there.

LOC: Say what?

WPS: He just cleaned your Uncle George Lewis place down there.

LOC: He did?

WPS: Yeah. I go down there—I got to take him clean down there and let him show me that and now I got to bring him back to the house.

MC: That's right—you going to do something.

LOC: He loves work.

CROSSTALK: Oh yeah!

LOC: Cousin Pate could work too! Cousin Pate didn't go slow.

**TRANSCRIPT END**