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Arkansas Memories Project

Interview with:
Dorothy Mayo Stevens
May 17, 2006
El Dorado, Arkansas

Interviewer: Tom Dillard

Tom Dillard: Today's date is May the seventeenth, 2006. I'm going to ask you to state your name—all three names—just as you did now.

Dorothy Mayo Stevens: Dorothy Mayo Stevens.

TD: Mrs. Stevens is visiting with us today on the subject of her growing up in the tuberculosis sanatorium at Booneville. [Arkansas State Tuberculosis Sanatorium, 1910–1973] May I call you Dorothy?

DS: That's fine.

TD: Call me Tom, please. I'd like for you to tell me about your birth and your parents and your—your infancy. Where were you born?

DS: I was born [on June 7, 1928] in a little town out west of Magnolia [Arkansas] named Lambertine.

TD: Lambertine?

DS: Lambertine, uh-huh. I was one of six children. And my daddy was a farmer,

TD: What was your father's name?

DS: Jack Gamill Mayo.

TD: Jack Gamill Mayo. And your mother's name?

DS: My mother's name was Mattie Frances Duncan Mayo.

TD: Mattie Frances Duncan Mayo.

DS: Mhmm.

TD: Okay. And you had siblings perhaps?

DS: There were six of us.

TD: Six altogether?

DS: Four brothers and one sister. My sister is still living, and that's the only one. I had a brother who died last year, my baby brother. I was the third—I was the fourth child. I had three brothers older than I, and then myself. I was the first daughter.

TD: What did your father do?

DS: He farmed.

TD: He was a farmer?

DS: Yes.

TD: A cotton farmer, perhaps?

DS: Just general. Just general.

TD: Just a general farmer?

DS: Uh-huh. Yeah. Had a lot of cotton. They did have a lot of cotton. Mhmm. I remember riding on sacks [laughs] as my brother picked the cotton.

TD: Mhmm. So, you were young enough that you didn't have to do that?

DS: No, I was small. We left the farm when I was about six years old.

TD: Okay. Was that because of your mother's diagnosis?

DS: No. It was just because of where we lived. The environment was not suitable for my

mother because—well, it wasn't suitable—their occupations [moonshine] around where we lived, and so she demanded that we leave. And then that's when we came to El Dorado [Arkansas], and I went to school at Myrtle Grove School out on [Highway] 335, which was destroyed by fire back while I was in the sanatorium.

TD: Hmm.

DS: And I finished the fourth grade out there, and then that's when . . .

TD: Then your mother was diagnosed?

DS: Yes, my mother was diagnosed in [19]37 with tuberculosis. She had the flu, and we didn't have facilities in our house, you know, and she had to go down and wash and carry her clothes, and she never went to bed. She had six children, and never did go to bed. And she took tuberculosis. At the time, we didn't know it. She just was sorta sick after she had the flu. And it's the only case that we know of in our family. She just had the flu. Just kept feeling bad. And then we were at my daddy's sister's, and they were laughing, and she had a hemorrhage.

TD: Mhmm.

DS: Just blood went everywhere, you know, with the hemorrhage.

TD: Mhmm.

DS: Daddy took her to the doctor, and she had a spot about the size of a half a dollar on her lungs, and they said it was tuberculosis. They recommended that she go to the sanatorium, and she would not go because she had six children. The youngest one was in diapers, and she just wouldn't leave. She said she would go to bed, though, which she did.

TD: Mhmm.

DS: She got to where she was stronger and weighed more—113 pounds was the most she ever

weighed [laughs], but she's my height. Anyway, she felt a lot better, and she got up and started to doing things, see? And about a year later, she got to where she could not—couldn't walk. She was so weak she couldn't walk. Now, I do not know why this happened, but my sister [Joyce], who is three years younger than I, and I were taken to Booneville one year before she was. We were in the Masonic building. And now we were never diagnosed with tuberculosis, but I guess it was prevented. I guess to prevent us from having it—being there with her. Now, I'm not clear on that as to why we were [taken there], but my daddy agreed, and I had a brother that was four years younger than my sister, and they did not take him because Mama said, [she] “just could not part with him.” And they did not have room for her up there because she was a terminal case, you know. By this time, they said they could do nothing for her. And so they had to take the people that they felt like they could do something for. So, she was a year coming up there. My sister and I were up there by ourselves for about a year.

TD: And how old were you at that time?

DS: I had just finished the fourth grade.

TD: So that would make you around ten.

DS: Ten or eleven, yeah, because I had diphtheria when I was in the first [grade], so I was a year late starting. So I was probably eleven years old by that time.

TD: Mhmm.

DS: And I finished the eighth grade in the center. I was there four years.

TD: You were at the sanatorium four years?

DS: Four years. Mhmm. And the building was called Masonic building, and the Masons really took care of us. In fact, at Christmas time, they—we wrote a letter to Santa Claus,

and we were given three things. And Santa Claus came and brought all those three things.

TD: Three wishes?

DS: Three wishes. And you're talking about eighty children that was in there. I would say I'm not positive on the number eighty, but I drew a little picture of the Masonic hall where we were up there.

TD: Uh-huh.

DS: And there were about forty beds on each end of the Masonic building that we were in. The cafeteria, the kitchen—the staff members and everything was in the center, and we were on each end. There were children, you can see, from eighteen months up through the eighth grade in there.

TD: Eighteen months?

DS: Eighteen months. We had a couple of children that were eighteen months, and we just—we just were like a family, really. After we got over the fact that I've left my mother and daddy and my family, and all this, we were sorta like a family. And when someone would come in, you know, well—we would hear them crying. You know how that—how that—the . . .

TD: Yeah. Sure.

DS: And so we'd slip over there into bed with them, and you'd have a friend for life. You knew how they felt.

TD: Yeah.

DS: But, then, it was the best thing. And I say right now, orphanages are not that bad because a lot of children would be better off right now in an orphanage . . .

TD: Mhmm.

DS: . . . and grow up.

DS: Because we learned to get along with chil[dren]—with people, and we learned to have responsibility. We had our own responsibility. We just had—we really had a good life for four years there because we had a lot more than we had at home . . .

TD: Yeah.

DS: . . . even though my daddy—I had a good daddy. Had a real good daddy. And mother, too. But my mother was sick from the time I hardly knew.

TD: Let's talk about when you first got there. You were old enough to remember that . . .

DS: Oh, yes.

TD . . . arrival.

DS: Oh, yes. Yeah

TD: Tell me about the—the trip up there. You left from El Dorado.

DS: Well, we left from El Dorado. Uh-huh.

TD: Did you go up by train?

DS: We went by bus.

TD: By bus?

DS: By bus. Uh-huh. We went by bus. And we carried our clothes up there 'cause we knew we were going to stay. And my daddy went with us. Just my daddy and my sister and I. We got off the [bus], and do you know I can't remember how we got out there; but from Booneville to the sanatorium, we always walked. My daddy did not have a car. He had pulp wood trucks, and that's the way he made his living at this time. But when we

moved to El Dorado, that's the way he made his living. Anyway, we evidently—we walked. I can't remember—certainly, getting a cab—that would've been—back then—I would have remembered it if we got a cab. But we always walked to and from Booneville to the—to the . . .

TD: To the hill.

DS: . . . sanatorium. Mhmm, to the hill.

TD: So you took the bus from El Dorado to Booneville?

DS: From El Dorado to Booneville—uh-huh.

TD: And then you walked on out. And you were . . .

DS: And carried our clothes.

TD: What time of day did you get there?

DS: Oh, we got there in the morning. We got there in the morning because—I'll tell you why I remember this—it's because it was so strange to me just to go in there and all the kids and everybody there, you know? It was just really strange. And to know that I was going to be left there—it was an ordeal. But I can't remember my sister or I either one crying.

TD: It must have been horrible for your father.

DS: It was horrible for my father, and more horrible for my mother . . .

TD: Well, of course.

DS: . . . because my mother and my father both just—they loved their children. My daddy—if we were sick, he never went to bed. He walked the floor. [Laughs] Anyway, when we got there, it was before lunchtime. I can show you a diagram of the way we lined up in the hall to go into the dining room. They were all lined up in the hall when we got there. And I said, "I'm not hungry." I was about to starve to death [laughter], but I wasn't fix-

ing to line up with all those children, you know? I was just embarrassed, really.

TD: You were new.

DS: Well, yes, yes. Very, very much so.

TD: You didn't know anybody.

DS: We didn't know *anybody*—*anybody*. And the lady was so nice. She said, "Honey, you don't have to eat anything. We do have to line up and go in there, and you'll see our facilities, but you don't have to eat if you don't want to." That was the biggest dinner I think I ever ate, [laughter] after we got in there, you know? But anyway, that was my first . . .

TD: So, you arrived in the morning, and you went in and you had some lunch.

DS: We had lunch. Then, after lunch—after lunch up there, from 1:00 [p.m.] until 3:00 [p.m.] you rest; and you have chasers that you put over your eyes. And they gave us our room. And I'll show you how our room was. And out of the room was the veranda, which was forty beds. They believed in windows up there. Open windows, you know. Fresh air and open windows.

TD: Even for the children?

DS: Oh, yes! Yes. The entire hall was windows on this side and then the long hall. They had two [children] in a room, and they had about twenty rooms on our end. Now, see, the boys were on one end and the girls were on the other. We never were mixed at all. And then you went into your room, and then had a door to go into your room, and a door to go out of your room onto the veranda; and right outside of your door was your bed. So there was a bed on one side of the door and a bed on the other side. Well, after we got through with our lunch, well then we went out—they showed us our room, and we carried our

clothes down into the room, and my daddy left!

TD: Yes.

DS: And there we were. And so we—they showed us our room, and then they said, “We rest from 1:00 ’til 3:00.” So we got on the bed. And you have a little towel that you fold in three pl[aces]—three folds; and you put it over your eyes, and you rest—you put your chaser—they call it a chaser. Then when you get through with your chaser at 3:00, you hang it on the end of your bed. And then if you—and we’d go to bed. We went to bed at 8:30 [p.m.].

TD: At 8:30?

DS: 8:30.

TD: Lights out at 8:30.

DS: Lights out at 8:30, and you were not—you were not supposed to [laughs] get out of bed.

TD: But we know children.

DS: Well, we know children. So we would slide under our beds, you know, and go to the next bed and talk, and that’s the way we’d . . .

TD: Do you remember—do you remember the f[ood]—the—give me an example of the kinds of food that would be served at meals.

DS: Wonderful food. We had a lot of vegetables. We had meat. We had—it was wonderful food. They cooked it right there. The center building was the staff members, and then it was all open. The cafeteria was there with the tables and all, and then the kitchen was behind that. They cooked their meals right there. They even grew their meals there—grew their . . .

TD: Food?

DS: . . . food there. They grew their cows there.

TD: Did they have a dairy?

DS: They had a dairy. They also had a laundry that—that you put your clothes right outside your door, and they picked 'em up once a week, and they took 'em to the laundry, and they brought 'em back.

TD: Were the students expected to work in any of the facilities, like the laundry or the dairy or anything?

DS: No. No. We did no work. We went to school twelve months out of the year.

TD: Oh, school was year-round?

DS: School was in the bottom of our building.

TD: Uh-huh.

DS: And it was one through eighth grade. We had one teacher for one through eighth grade.

TD: Uh-huh.

DS: And I graduated from the eighth grade there, and I have my picture over there.

TD: I saw your picture.

DS: Yeah [laughs], my picture when I graduated. I was the only one . . .

TD: Oh, it's a *nice* picture.

DS: I was the only one in the eighth grade, so I graduated. They had a big to-do over in the McWilliams Building, I believe, was the name of the building that they had the graduation in. And they fixed up flowers and everything. [Laughs] This was interesting to my children. My daddy bought me three yards of pink shantung material, and I made my suit that I graduated in [laughs] by hand.

TD: How did you learn to sew?

DS: Well, my mother sewed.

TD: Oh, okay.

DS: And I think it's sort of a—in fact, I made these pillows. [Laughter] I think it's sort of a—yeah, and those curtains, too. [Laughs] I think it's sort of a gift that I had, that I did sew. I sewed for all of my children—even my son. [Laughs]

TD: Well, we're going back to school and talk about school here a little bit.

DS: Okay. All right.

TD: But first, I want to talk some more about the general facilities, and so on. That first day, you took a nap, and then around 3:00 [p.m.], you would have gotten up . . .

DS: We get up and we go outside. We'd go outside, and we stay until—I believe it was 6:30 that we have our dinner. And we went back in and we eat. And we had—we had a huge bathroom. We had one bathroom for all the girls on that end.

TD: Mhmm.

DS: It was completely separated for boys and girls.

TD: Right.

DS: And we had one bathroom. And the bathroom had about three showers; and on the wall, we had a thing that had little cubbyholes. And each child had their name under their cubbyhole. We had our toothbrush and our cup and our toothpaste in the little cubbyhole.

TD: Mhmm.

DS: And so that's that. And in the bathroom—we usually didn't take a bath or shower—either one that you wanted—but we usually took one once a week.

TD: Once a week?

DS: Once a week. [Laughter] That's when we took a bath, once a week.

TD: Now, we're going to get back to school in a little bit, but the routine that I've heard so far does not provide time for school. When was that? You rested from 1:00 to 3:00.

DS: Oh. Oh. Well, we went to school in the morning. We went to school when we got up—after we eat our breakfast, we went to school until noon.

TD: Mhmm.

DS: We finished our—I think it was 8:00 [a.m.] that we went to school—from 8:00 to 12:00, and we went twelve months out of the year.

TD: Yeah. So, it would be equivalent to a regular school, it's just that it was spread out over a year.

DS: Yeah, over a year. Ummm. We went from 8:00 'til 12:00 every day, except Saturday and Sunday.

TD: Okay. All right. Back to that first day. You go outside, and at 6:30 [p.m.] you would have come in for supper, I presume. Do you recall whether or not you made any acquaintances that very first day?

DS: Well, no, I can't recall, but it wasn't long until I did. And the reason I say I don't recall—I was a very shy person.

TD: Mhmm.

DS: I've gotten out of that. [Laughter] But I was a very shy person, and so was my sister. One of the reasons was we had been there at the house—you know, when you have tuberculosis in a home, you don't have any visitors.

TD: Yeah.

DS: No child is allowed to come to your house. No [hired household] help is allowed to—no

help will . . .

TD: Work for you.

DS: . . . work for you. No.

TD: So, did the authorities—did the health authorities here in town—when your mother was diagnosed—did they put up a sign, for example, that would warn people?

DS: No. Oh, no. Oh, no.

TD: It was just that everybody knew.

DS: If anybody found it out . . .

TD: Everybody knew.

DS: . . . like we lived in the country.

TD: Mhmm.

DS: We lived out between here and Norphlet [Arkansas], if you know where Norphlet is.

TD: Mhmm. Mhmm.

DS: Well, we lived out there and went to a rural school that was out there. I suppose everybody knew because we maybe would have some help to come in, and they would stay two days, and they would not go longer, you know?

TD: Mhmm.

DS: So we did not have help. I don't know, like I say, we fit in more as a child with a better environment in the home up there [at Booneville] than we did at [our own] home because—well, of course, there were six of us, and we played. We had fun. I don't remember not having fun or anything like that.

TD: Well, your father must have just been worked to death.

DS: He was.

TD: You had a little bitty brother.

DS: I had a brother that when she took tuberculosis, he was in diapers. Mhmm. Yeah.

TD: Who did the work around the house? The children helped?

DS: You're looking—[laughs]. You're looking at who did the work.

TD: So, each of you pitched in and worked?

DS: I was the oldest girl, and I had a brother three years older than I was. He helped me. In fact, when we washed [laughs]—we had no washing machines back then.

TD: Yes, sure, sure.

DS: When we washed, and we got out there—I couldn't wring out the clothes. I was too small. So, he'd get on one end and I'd get on the other end.

TD: You'd twist together.

DS: He'd wring one way and I'd wring the other, and we'd wring them and hang them out. My daddy and my two older brothers had the pulp wood business then. They wore overalls, and that's what we washed—with a pot . . .

TD: Mhmm. And they're heavy, too.

DS: . . . with a pot that you boiled. You boiled your clothes in the pot. [Laughs]

TD: I'm too young to remember that, but I remember . . .

DS: I'm sure you are. I'm sure you are. And it seems odd.

TD: . . . seeing many of them. When I was a little kid, there were still black wash pots in people's back yards.

DS: We have one. [Laughter]

TD: Well, it's a remembrance of things past.

DS: She [daughter Patti Paulus of El Dorado] made a barbecue pit out of it. We did.

TD: You had lights out at 8:30 [p.m.].

DS: Yes.

TD: Did you have mandatory study time in the evening?

DS: No, we did not. I do not remember studying at home. I do not remember homework at home at all. And, you know, I did all right in school. When I came back . . .

TD: You felt like you got a pretty good schooling?

DS: Well, I finished high school. I took a beauty course. I had a beauty shop for years—forty years.

TD: Mhmm.

DS: I did not go to college, but I finished high school and always made good grades.

TD: Mhmm.

DS: When I came back here—as odd as it was when I went up there—see, I was the only one in my eighth-grade class.

TD: And now you were thrown in with all those other children.

DS: Two hundred at El Dorado High School. Two hundred. So I was thrown in ninth grade with 200 children that I was not [laughs] used to going to school with 200 children, Tom.

TD: I would think, also, that being a child at the sanatorium, you would have had, perhaps, a certain bond with those other children?

DS: Oh, you did. You did. You sure did. In fact, you just felt responsible for the eighteen-month-old [children]. And we had some real good, real good bonding up there. We really did.

TD: And the children—there was staff on duty at all times?

DS: Staff on duty at all times. All night and all day. We had the main superintendent that

lived upstairs. She was an old maid [a single woman regarded as too old for marriage]. I thought she was probably eighty then, but she was probably about forty. [Laughter] But, to me, she was old. [Laughs]

TD: We know that phenomenon, yes.

DS: She lived upstairs. And then we had a chart room—a chart room that all of our charts were kept there. And we had a lady that stayed in there all night long and watched us in case we wanted to get up and talk. [Laughter]

TD: Well, but they were also making sure that nothing happened to you, too.

DS: Well, well, certainly—certainly did.

TD: You never felt that there were any cruel or . . . ?

DS: No cruel[ty] whatsoever. We had the most understanding help. Of course, if you got out of line, you were disciplined, you know.

TD: Mhmm.

DS: But it was not a whipping or anything like that.

TD: How was discipline normally [administered]?

DS: Standing in the bathroom. [Laughter]

TD: Standing in the bathroom?

DS: She [referring to her daughter Patti Paulus] wants me to tell it, I know. But I got this one by standing in the bathroom. [Laughs] What we did was we went to bed in our beds at 8:30, just like we were supposed to, and what we would do—our friend was maybe three beds down. So we would scoot under the bed and sit there by the bed and talk to our friends, you know?

TD: Mhmm.

DS: Then, at a certain time, we'd scoot back under the bed and get back on the bed and . . .

TD: Go to sleep.

DS: . . . go to sleep. And that wasn't bad [laughs], but we had one little girl who was always a tattletale. Her name was Peggy Heggai. We called her Peggy "Hey Guy." I don't know if it was Heggie or Heggai. I think it was Heggai. But we called her Peggy "Hey Guy." She went and told on us that we were slipping under the beds, and so we had to stand in the bathroom—two of us had to stand in the bathroom for an hour and a half. So while we were there [laughs], we got her toothbrush, and we cleaned the commode.

TD: [Laughter] You're talking about the toothbrush of the tattletale?

DS: Yes.

TD: Well, she deserved that, didn't she? [Laughs]

DS: She did. She did. We put it back in there. We did not wash it out. We put it back in there, and the next morning we watched her brush her teeth with it. [Laughs]

TD: And you enjoyed that morning a great deal.

DS: We *definitely* enjoyed that morning.

TD: [Laughs]

DS: In fact, she not only tattle-taled on us, she tattle-taled on everybody, see? So, everybody enjoyed watching her use her toothbrush. [Laughter]

DS: And she had no idea what was going on.

TD: Okay. So you get up in the morning. You've gotten back in your bed. You've been punished. You're back in your bed. They wake you up in the morning. Everybody gets up at the same time?

DS: Everybody gets up at—I think it was 6:30 [a.m.] that everybody got up.

TD: Uh-huh. And school started at eight, so that gave you an hour and a half.

DS: It started at eight. And we had our breakfast.

TD: Tell me about breakfast. The typical meal would be the kind of thing that you would have had anywhere?

DS: Yes. We had eggs, bacon, biscuits. We had a full meal. Every meal—every three meals, we had—we had nothing in-between times. No snacks or anything like that, because there were no vending machines, or anything like that in there. But we had our breakfast, our lunch, and our dinner every day, and it was good. It was really good.

TD: And since you were not expected to work, you didn't have to worry with washing dishes or anything? When you finished, did you . . . ?

DS: We had no—we did do our beds. Our room was to be kept [clean]. And we kept our rooms.

TD: Mhmm.

DS: And we kept our closets. We made up our beds right outside of our—every morning when we got up, before we went for breakfast, we made up our beds. It was routine, you know, which is so good.

TD: Do you still do that? Do you still make your bed when you get up early in the morning?

DS: [Laughs] Unless H. J. [Hollis J. Stevens, Dorothy's husband] goes back to bed which he does. He says that some time I'm going to make him up in the bed [laughs], but I have never done that. [Laughter in the background].

TD: You finished with breakfast, and you go to school.

DS: We go to school. We have one teacher for eight grades.

TD: One teacher. So all the students would be in one room.

DS: In one room.

TD: But my suspicion is that in an institutional setting like that, you probably did not have much in the way of disciplinary problems in school?

DS: We didn't. We did not. I don't remember, really, a discipline problem. I remember one time a couple girls slipped out downstairs. I wasn't in on this, [laughs] but they slipped out downstairs and met some boys who had slipped out downstairs. That was the only discipline problem that we had. And, let me tell you, our old maid lady took care of it. [Laughs] Now, there was no—I never even knew of them hitting a person or spanking them, or anything like that. That just was not done.

TD: Yeah. They didn't have to.

DS: No. They did not have to. They did not have to.

TD: In a room with—how many children?

DS: Two. We only had two to each room.

TD: No, I mean in the classroom—the school.

DS: Oh, the classroom. Oh, we're talking about probably thirty children.

TD: And that teacher managed them. So, it was about the size of a normal classroom, except . . .

DS: Normal classroom—thirty or thirty-five children.

TD: . . . they ranged in age from six to whatever eighth grade would be.

DS: Six to thirteen or fourteen.

TD: And you were—I'm sure it was a regular certified school, probably, just administered by the state. But I'm sure it was a regular school. You got a diploma when you graduated.

DS: I got a diploma when I graduated from the eighth grade. Yeah. Sure did. [Laughs]

TD: Yeah, that's what I meant.

DS: Yeah, they made a big to-do over that—the eighth-grade graduation, because we had—now, we were allowed to go to the show once a week.

TD: On the campus—in the facility?

DS: It was in one of the buildings that we all went up—walked up to—I believe it was in the McWilliams Building. It was in one of the buildings that—each building had a name. I'm not sure it was the McWilliams Building, because there was another . . .

TD: Did that facility also serve like the assembly hall and maybe for meetings and church services?

DS: That's right. That's right, it did. Now, I don't remember having a church service there, but they did have a meeting room there; and that's where we had the graduation. That's also where they showed the picture shows.

TD: Mhmm.

DS: And if we were not quarantined, which was very likely that we were—that many children with—at that time, they had mumps and measles and chicken pox and whooping cough and all this.

TD: Mhmm.

DS: So we were quarantined most of the time. But if we were not quarantined, we were allowed to go to the show once a week, and we walked up to the picture show at the McWilliams Building.

TD: But to go by yourself? You didn't go as a group?

DS: You went as a group.

TD: You went as a group.

DS: You *never* went any place by yourself. Now, see, after my daddy came up there—well, he could take us out on the weekend, and we could not go into the buildings, you know, like the Nyberg Building. That’s where my mother was. We could not go into that building. Now, we did see my mama once a week if we weren’t quarantined, and she was not allowed to kiss us or anything like that. She did hold our hand or something like that, but that was all she was allowed to do.

TD: Okay.

DS: And we were allowed one hour [to visit my mother].

TD: One hour?

DS: One hour.

TD: On Saturdays—you did not have school on the weekend.

DS: Huh-uh.

TD: How did your Saturday and Sunday differ from the rest of the week?

DS: Well, we played. We played and we had a lot of fun. In fact, we had church services. [Laughs] We built us an arbor.

TD: You mean, the children had services?

DS: This is the church. This is the children. This is—I’m talking about our playing. Our playing was—we would—we built us a . . .

TD: A brush arbor.

DS: . . . a brush arbor, and we would all go in there. And my daddy and my mother were Church of Christ [members] at that time. So I was Church of Christ, far as I was concerned. [Laughs]

TD: Yes. Sure.

DS: “Upon this rock, I will build my church. And so, if any of the rest of you are not Church of Christ, you’re not allowed in this church.” [Laughs]

TD: You said that?

DS: Yes—[laughter], ’cause I was the preacher. And the reason I was the preacher—I was the only one who had a Bible.

TD: Oh. [Laughs]

DS: And the reason I had the Bible was that the Masons, you know, gave us three wishes, and I ordered a Bible. So I got a Bible, and so I was the preacher. [Laughs] We had one little girl—she was a Pentecostal, and she was not fixing to go in our church. [Laughter] I said, “Well, you know, you can start your *own* church.” But nobody wanted to be Pentecostal [laughter], so we had a Church of Christ little arbor. We had a lot of fun with that. We really had a lot of fun. Now, our playground was a mountain. You know how Booneville is, it’s [mountainous]. We were on top of a mountain, and our playground was a mountain. If you played ball, you went to the bottom of the mountain and got the ball.

TD: Yeah.

DS: It was not a smooth playground for you to play on.

TD: Did they have play equipment there, like seesaws and teeter-totters, or anything like that?

DS: No. No, we did not have [them]. I don’t remember any equipment. I’ll tell you what separated the boys from the girls. We had a big hedge, and we separated the boys from the girls. The older girls would sometimes get behind a tree and wave at the boys [waves]. [Laughter] That was the only flirting that we did. [Laughter] Oh, shoot.

TD: Did you go into Booneville very often?

DS: After my daddy got up there—after the first year.

TD: Okay, after the first year . . .

DS: My daddy worked there.

TD: Okay. So he moved up.

DS: Now, what my daddy did was—in the hospitals where the—he worked in the Nyberg Building, that was the terminal [patients'] building. It was a huge building. I have a picture of it over there. It was a huge building. And he worked in the building so he could be close to my mother. What he did was at the side of their beds, they had their sputum cups. You know, that's one of the things of tuberculosis [patients] is they have a lot of sputum.

TD: Sputum. Uh-huh.

DS: So, that's what he did. He carried them.

TD: He cleaned those?

DS: No, he didn't clean them. They had paper ones.

TD: He just carried them out?

DS: They carried them and put them in an incinerator, and put new paper cups.

TD: Sure.

DS: He did this twice a week. That's what he did was pick up these cups twice a week. When they would finish with a cup, they had a little brown paper bag that they put their cups in, and they would stay there until he picked them up.

TD: Yes.

DS: And then they'd put them in the incinerator.

TD: Mhmm. How long did your father work there?

DS: Three years. We were there four years, and Joyce and I stayed here the year before he

began working at the sanatorium.

TD: So, your mother came up after a year?

DS: After a year.

TD: She was admitted after a year.

DS: They found a place for her after a year there in the Nyberg Building, and my daddy and my brother came, and he was in the other end of our building.

TD: I'll bet you were glad to have all of them up there.

DS: Oh, we were glad, but we did not see him [brother] much except in the cafeteria. We would see him in the cafeteria.

TD: Did you get to talk to him?

DS: He did not go to school. No, we weren't allowed to talk to the boys.

TD: Even though it was your father?

DS: Even though it was my *brother*.

TD: Oh, yeah. But what about visiting your father?

DS: Oh, my father? Oh, yes, he would come and get us, and we would go out. I have some pictures that he would take, you know, around when we would go out.

TD: So you all got to do things together?

DS: We got to go out.

TD: You were able to re-establish your family life, to a certain degree.

DS: Once a week. He would be allowed on Sunday afternoon. He would be allowed to come and get us and take us out for a short period of time. We would have to be [back] there before our night meal.

TD: Mhmm.

DS: He did that not every week, but lots of them. We did it lots of times. And we would just walk. We would walk into town sometimes, and then we'd walk out on the hill. The hill was real pretty. It had a lot of flowers around on it. He made a lot of pretty good pictures that I have.

TD: Mhmm.

DS: He would make some pictures of the kids. We had a play, and I've got pictures of several—about twenty of the children, or so, that were there.

TD: Mhmm.

DS: But I only remember one person's name. Isn't that something? They would go and come, you know? As their parents left, they would leave.

TD: Sure.

DS: And as someone came in, they would come, too.

TD: Did you ever run into any of those folks in later years?

DS: No, I did not. But the one that I remember—her name was Lillian Lincoln. She married one of the schoolteachers there in town after she got out. Her mother was in there [at the sanatorium], and she didn't have a father. She was an only child. She married one of the schoolteachers there in town. She wrote me after I got back home and told me about it. She married a Roberts. Lillian Lincoln Roberts was her name, and he taught school there in Booneville.

TD: Your mother was admitted and put in the Nyberg Building.

DS: Mhmm.

TD: And that was the building for the most severe patients?

DS: That's right.

TD: That was for the terminal patients?

DS: That's right. That was probably about 1939 that she went in there. She stayed three years, and she died in September of 1942. She was forty-three years old.

TD: She never had surgery?

DS: No. She was too far gone for them to do anything. They did a pneumo surgery [procedure, which is no longer practiced, to collapse a lung for the purpose of letting it rest and heal], they called it—pneumo surgery. They also collapsed lungs up there in the Stewart Building. This was all done in the Stewart Building, but she had no surgery whatsoever. Nothing. Nothing was done for her except she laid there.

TD: Mhmm. The patients slept outside on screened verandas. Is that correct?

DS: Now, this was our building. This was our building. They did that in the Stewart Building or several of the other buildings where they were not terminal patients. But the terminal patients were in rooms. They were in hospital rooms, just like . . .

TD: And they didn't have to sleep out on the veranda?

DS: They did not. I have a picture. They had no outside . . .

TD: Yes. Well, they were just making them as comfortable as they could, I guess.

DS: That's right—with nothing to . . .

TD: Mhmm.

DS: It's a horrible disease. To me—of course, I'm more involved in it, but to me, it's a lot worse than cancer, you know, because of the isolation. That's a big thing of getting no help.

TD: Mhmm.

DS: And the lingering. The lingering of it. My mother took tuberculosis—oh, she probably

had it six or seven years, see? And she got to the last five years—she was not able to get up and walk. She could not walk. She could not stand up long enough for us to weigh her. She weighed sixty-eight pounds when she died. It's a horrible disease, and I'm so thankful that they do have something that . . .

TD: Yes. It's making a resurgence again.

DS: Well, that's what I've heard. That's what I've heard.

TD: I think it's more common in prisons. I've read where the prisons have replaced all their lighting with fluorescent lighting in order to kill the bacterium.

DS: I read a lot about it after my mother had it. I read a lot about it. I don't think it is as contagious as people think it is because we were there right—now, my daddy built—they said a lot of air. So he built a screened-in porch, and that's where my mother stayed, in the screened-in porch. But, of course, we were right there. We were right there *with her*.

TD: And none of you contracted it.

DS: I did all the cooking. I carried her food to her.

TD: She had it, of course, before she knew it, and your father never contracted it.

DS: No. My father never contracted it. And we were *never* diagnosed with it, even though we were up there.

TD: Yes.

DS: We were never diagnosed with it. And, like I say, and what I've read about it, everybody has the germ.

TD: Mhmm.

DS: It's when the body becomes so run down, you know, that they take the tuberculosis.

TD: When the immune system is weak.

DS: When the immune system is weak and run down.

TD: Mhmm.

DS: And why we didn't take it, I don't know. But I think the Lord was just with us [laughs] all the way.

TD: Did you have speakers who would come and address the students?

DS: We had a few. We had one, I remember. He was an older man. When I say "older man," you know, it was forty-five or fifty—an older man to me at that time. They've gotten—you know, as the generations pass, they get younger.

TD: Well, of course they do. I see that phenomenon myself.

DS: [Laughs] But anyway, we had one fellow that came; and he did a lot of puppets on the board, and so forth. That was a *real treat* to us. We did not have lots of treats like that. We didn't have lots of visitors. You know, like you say, when there's tuberculosis, you don't visit. There's not much visiting.

TD: What about ministers? Did [they] allow ministers to come on campus?

DS: Well now, other than me? [Laughs]

TD: Ministers in *addition* to you.

DS: Oh, shoot. Well, I remember us going into town on Easter a couple of times, but, other than that, I don't remember us having church. I really don't. I don't remember us having church.

TD: I have read that some of the clubs and organizations in Booneville [would] come out at Christmas, and that sort of thing, and . . .

DS: The Masons. Oh, the Masons were *great*. They were great, I tell you. They just gave us the best Christmas that you'd ever—*every* child who was up there could order *three*

things—write a letter to Santa Claus, you know?

TD: And a lot of those kids probably had never had a meaningful Christmas in their lives.

DS: Never had a meaningful Christmas. And we would order—three things we could order. I ordered a little lamp to go on a table. I've got that. And my Bible. I really can't recall a lot of the things that I did order, but we ordered three things each year. Santa Claus would come with his bag and his wagon in his trailer. He brought all those gifts. They were from the Masons.

TD: Yes.

DS: The Masons did that.

TD: Yes. What a wonderful service.

DS: It was. It was. They put us up a big Christmas tree. Now, this was in our schoolroom downstairs. That's when the boys and the girls could all come down there. They had the Santa Claus, and he came in and gave out all of our gifts. He read the letters. "I got a letter from so-and-so," and he'd give out the letters. The Masons were really, really nice.

TD: They pulled that off nicely.

DS: They pulled that off really nice. And, you know, the building that we stayed in was the Masonic Building. That was the name of the building. So, how much they . . .

TD: They built that building and donated it.

DS: They built that building? I did not know that.

TD: Yes.

DS: But the Masons were the ones . . .

TD: Yes, they built the building and, obviously, didn't stop with that. They kept giving through the Christmas celebrations and that sort of thing.

DS: Mhmm.

TD: I suspect you were not allowed pets, or anything like that.

DS: Oh, no. Oh, no.

TD: That would not have been appropriate.

DS: Oh, no. No. Nothing of that type.

TD: Did you get to go to the county fair or anything like that?

DS: No. No, we were not allowed off of the hill other than . . .

TD: I mean, they didn't take you as a group, or anything like that?

DS: No. No. We got to go to the show once a week. That was our recreation, if we were not quarantined.

TD: Mhmm.

DS: We did go to the show once a week. Once a week they had a show. But, other than that, we were just a group that played together, and there were a lot of us. I don't look back at my childhood as being a bad childhood at all. In fact, I think it enriched my life a lot because of the stability that we had, the routine—I believe in routine and responsibility.

TD: Did you follow that? When you had children of your own, did you try to instill that appreciation for routine into their lives?

DS: Well, I tried to. [Laughs]

TD: Maybe with varying success?

DS: I have three good children. All three of them are Christian children; and I've got good grandchildren, and they're all Christian children. So I have a good Christian family.

TD: Not necessarily Church of Christ?

DS: *Not* Church of Christ. No. [Laughs] We did stray away from the Church of Christ. Even

my daddy strayed away from the Church of Christ.

TD: Well, tell me about your father. After your mother's death, you all . . .

DS: Well, after my mother died, of course, we left Booneville on the bus. We buried my mother in Camden because she had some brothers living there, but we had no place to go. We had no home. We had no home, really. I didn't ever think about it, but we didn't. Looking back, we did not have a place to go. So after we buried Mother there in Camden, my daddy's sister that lived here in El Dorado—she had lost her husband out at the airport in an explosion. She had three boys, and two of the boys were gone from home, and she had one boy left at home. She took the three of us in—my brother and my two sisters—and we lived with her in the ninth grade. That's when I went to El Dorado [High] School. And she was sweet. She was the sweetest thing. I can remember her scrubbing clothes and all this, and never asking us to do it. We weren't used to doing things. By that time, we really and truly were not used to—I had already gotten lazy, I guess. [Laughs] Anyway, we stayed with her a year and [I] went to the ninth grade. Well, my daddy, I guess, thought we needed to be passed around, so he took the three of us up to his brother in Hope [Arkansas]. And I went to school my tenth grade in Hope. It was not a very happy time up there because my daddy's brother was the oldest brother, and he was cranky [laughs], and his wife was an invalid. She was in bed. Her daughter is the one who kept the family together.

TD: Yes.

DS: That's where I got my first job. [Laughs] There was a basket factory that made baskets for fruit that was right close by to their house. My cousin worked in the basket factory. Of course, you know, the three of us stayed there for a while, and then my sister stayed

over with one of their sons. Anyway, I decided it was time for me to get me a job. It was the summertime. I've always been really ambitious. [Laughs]

TD: Ambitious?

DS: Ambitious. [Laughs] I haven't always talked this much, but I've always been ambitious. Anyway, I decided that I would go down to the basket factory and get me a job.

TD: Yes.

DS: So, I went down there, and I went in for this interview. The guy told me, "We really don't have any work here. The only job we have open is stacking boards out on the yard." So, I started to leave. And I thought, "Well, I wouldn't mind stacking boards out in the yard." [Laughs] Of course, that was black people's jobs out there; and there was a couple of black people working out there, but it didn't matter to me because I didn't mind stacking those boards. So I went out there and I started stacking boards. [Laughs] And he came out there, and he said, "You know what? I do have one job left in the factory," [laughs] so he put me to work. I worked that summer, and then I worked on Saturdays. I got up to punching bands around the—on the machines around the band [laughs]. So we stayed there that year in Hope. And after that year is—is our time up? [Laughs] After that year in Hope, well, I told my daddy that we needed to get us a place to live so all of us could be together. My brother was there with me, but my sister was at a—so we came back to El Dorado, and we got an apartment. That was when I was in the eleventh grade. The eleventh and the twelfth grade, we had an apartment, and I kept house for my brother and my sister. My daddy remarried when we were—the last half of my senior year. She had a house, and we moved into her house, and I had a stepmother.

TD: Even though we're straying from the tuberculosis sanatorium here, let's continue on by

saying that you finished high school here.

DS: In El Dorado.

TD: Then you went to beauty school?

DS: Yes. I finished high school. Lilly Faye McCord had a beauty school and a beauty shop. When I finished school in May, I told her that I wanted to be a beauty operator. I had a brother that was going to pay for my beauty [course]—he had just come in from the service. He was wounded overseas in World War II, and he was going to pay for my beauty course. So I went into beauty school. I started in May. At that time, you could go as many hours as you wanted to. So I worked twelve hours a day and got my beauty license in December, and then I went to take my state board [test] in January. I had been going about two months, and my brother got married. [Laughs] I went and told Lilly Faye, “I’m going to have to quit, Lilly Faye, because my brother is married.” He was paying so much a month on my beauty [course fees]. She said, “No, you’re not, either. You’re going to work for me whenever you get out of beauty school.” So I went to work for her in December; and I worked for her for five years—no, I worked for her for three years, and then I got married. We were married—no, I didn’t work for but about a year until we got married; and we were married nearly five years before we had any children. And that’s where I worked. I worked for her. I quit in December—December 24—and my son, who is the oldest, was born February 24. And that was my last working out[side of the home]. I never worked out[side of the home] again. I put me in a beauty shop so I would be there with my children.

TD: Yes.

DS: I was here with my children. I was a homeroom mother. I had Blue Birds. [The young

girls' group affiliated with the Campfire Girls.] I had Boy Scouts. But I was right there with them. I could do my appointments and be there with them. I'm proud of my children.

TD: You've had a good, full life.

DS: I've had a good, full life. I sure have.

TD: And you're getting ready to start the second half now.

DS: I do not want my children to mourn for me. [Laughs] I'm going to have to do something about that because I'm afraid they are. [Laughs] They depend on me too much.

TD: Well, that just shows what a strong person you are.

DS: Well, I had my daughter from Siloam Springs [Arkansas] call me this morning and say, "Mother, now, I've got some shrubs here. I want you to tell me how to put them out." Here I am, in El Dorado, and she wanted me . . .

TD: [Laughs] Two hundred and something miles. Well, closer to three hundred miles away, I guess.

DS: Three hundred. Yes. "I want you to tell me just how you think they need to be set." [Laughs] But I got the sweetest Mother's Day card from her. She said, "I just am so fortunate that I've got a mother and a friend." And, you know, I'm proud of my family. I'm not saying that I did it, but they made good choices.

TD: Yes.

DS: That's the whole thing—the choices that you make.

TD: Oh, absolutely. And it's too bad . . .

DS: Absolutely. You can have wonderful parents, but if you don't make the right choices . . .

TD: Oh, absolutely. Yes. Well, I really appreciate your taking time to visit with us today and

share this.

DS: I've enjoyed it. It's been a long time [laughs] since I've gone back this far.

[End of Interview]

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