

(Tape 1 of 1)

An Oral History Tape Transcription

Of

Interviewer: Karen Knight

Interviewee: Ruth Majors

November 10, 1975

KK: Monday, November 10, 1975. I'm talking to Ruth Majors who now lives at Allenbrook Convalescent Center.

KK: Ok, Ruth, you moved here in 1921? And when did you say you were born?

RM: 1902.

KK: You have to speak up more. (Laughs)

RM: 1902. I didn't have to tell that; tells my age, (stupid).

KK: (Laughs) Ok, and you moved here, you were about 18?

RM: Yeah, I imagine.

KK: You moved here in 1921?

RM: Yeah.

KK: And there wasn't a school here, so you had to go away to school?

RM: I had to go back. Yeah, I had to go back where I came from.

KK: Where did you come from?

RM: They didn't teach our grade, they taught school to a certain phase here. But not as many as we have now, but they had school. But they didn't have enough to teach me.

KK: So you were in high school when you came?

RM: Yeah.

KK: And they didn't have high school?

RM: I graduated.

KK: They didn't have high school grades here?

RM: No, they didn't – I don't know how far they went, but I don't really remember that. But I bound to – couldn't go anyway. And so I went back, and finished at Hubbard, Texas, close to Waco. Between Waco and Corsicana. On the Cotton Belt Railroad.

KK: (Laughs)

RM: And I went to school there, and finished. My mother came up and saw me graduate, see. And then I came home. But my family, see, had already moved down here. My father worked for the Gulf. They were already down here, so I went and came here. And I don't know what I did the first – well, it was a wild and woolly oilfield, and we had – Pelly was rough. We didn't have any town like Pelly. Pelly was rough. And women didn't go down the street in Pelly by themselves. In fact, it got so tough that we had the Ku Klux Klan twice.

KK: You had to do what?

RM: The Ku Klux Klan had to come out.

KK: Oh, no!

RM: And show up in one of the churches and ...

KK: (Laughs)

RM: ... try to straighten things up, see? Oh, they had ... every kind of a vice that you could think of.

KK: Hmm.

RM: It was terrible. And Papa wouldn't let us go on the street by ourselves, us girls. You didn't go out there by yourself.

KK: Do you remember what street you lived on?

RM: Well, I lived in the oilfield; right down in the middle of the oilfield. Wooden derricks all around my house.

KK: Oh.

RM: And then we went to Pelly. That was the town. And the Main Street – the one that goes through Pelly now – yes, it's the same Main Street. Same one.

KK: Um-hmm.

RM: But they didn't – oh, it was terrible. And we – they finally got a Baptist Church in Pelly. And we went to the Baptist Church out there. I don't remember who the pastor was. But anyhow, it was a very tough place, and we didn't go out by ourselves. They didn't have... They had kind of things. In fact, the churches had to have it cleaned up.

KK: (Laughs)

RM: I guess they got the Ku Klux Klan; I don't know who else got 'em.

KK: (Laughs) Somebody.

RM: Yeah.

KK: Tell me some of the organizations you belonged to.

RM: Organizations?

KK: Uh-huh.

RM: I was Baptist then, the Baptist Church. The only thing I remember, as long as I met there, we had a lodge, this lodge I remember. And that's about all.

KK: And you belonged to the Rebekah Lodge?

RM: Yeah. First they had another lodge – I think it was the Optimists first, then they – this Rebekah's was mostly women, see?

KK: Uh-huh. A women's branch?

RM: We had a good time, and had a lot of entertainment.

(Knocking on door.) [3:37]

RM: Ok.

(Tape cuts off) [3:38]

KK: Ok, and then after you moved here, you worked on the Houston Chronicle.

RM: Well, another thing – wait a minute, I worked for Lacks store in Baytown, too. They had a Lacks store in Baytown, and they were owned by Mr. A.L. Lack, a Jew that scheduled my ... and he had store in La Porte. So one the first jobs I had was at Lacks store.

KK: Um-hmm.

RM: In the office there. That's how come we walked there. And the guy that run the store here at that time now is La Porte. He was at La Porte, see? I guess he still is. But anyhow, I worked in a Lacks Store is one of the stores I worked at. And let me see... I didn't want to work; didn't really. I didn't really have to work, really. My father didn't...

KK: How old were you then when you worked?

RM: I don't remember how old I was. How many years I worked these places. Cause that's all about the Lacks is about the last one, I guess. The last one. But, I didn't want to stand on my feet and sell no baggage store, and I didn't want... and all that. My father didn't want me to work. But I did. And I worked there quite a long time. Then I got back to La Porte because he moved to La Porte, see? And I didn't move to La Porte. So I had to go back and forth to service the books. Till he got married, and married ...[Inaudible].

KK: Is that when you went on the ferry?

RM: Yeah. When he moved away.

KK: Tell us about the ferry a little bit.

RM: Well, see there was a ferry that crossed there, going across to La Porte. Instead of having a tunnel, there was a ferry. I forgot what they called the ferry. But anyhow, we had to cross the ferry. And I would go there – I had to service the books over the weekend, see, on Saturday.

KK: Was this ferry a one car ferry, or how did they run it?

RM: I think about – I believe maybe two car, I think. It was small, really.

KK: Two cars at a time?

RM: Sat on each side like this so it'd be balanced. It was probably, if I remember right it was. And we had to cross the ferry. Well, it's alright but when you started to come back, he'd meet me. I'd get somebody to take me down to the ferry. He couldn't come get me on Saturday; they were busy, see? And he'd help me in the store. He and wife both. So somebody would – I'd go down to the ferry, somebody'd take me to the ferry, and then he'd pick me up at the ferry. And he'd come – I'd get across the ferry. I sat on this guy name Eli, he rode across with me said one time.

KK: How long did it take you to get across?

RM: Just a little... How long – you don't know how long it'd take?

KK: No.

RM: Just – I don't know how wide it was. Go back to some of your old records and find out how wide the water was. It maybe...

KK: Is it in the same place where the tunnel is now?

RM: I don't know that. That's what I asked you, was it?

(Tape cuts off)

RM: ... tunnel out. Your files ought to tell that. When you asked where the tunnel was.

KK: Uh-huh.

RM: See.

KK: Where the tunnel is now?

RM: Where it is now.

KK: Ok.

RM: But we had to cross the ferry.

KK: And they built that tunnel in 1952.

RM: They did.

KK: So it was before that.

RM: Yeah.

(Tape cuts off.)

KK: Ok, and then after you worked for Lacks you worked for the Houston Chronicle, and you covered stories in Baytown?

RM: Well, now I covered the Houston Chronicle. I worked for them, and worked for a lot of people. But I don't – I didn't work anywhere full time. But, uh ... I don't know. Let's see, where did I work? Lacks, and then I guess the Chronicle.

KK: And you followed in the firetrucks? You followed the firetrucks to the fires?

RM: Yeah. Well, I got... I don't know how I did it, but... I couldn't drive very good, but... But I had to use my daddy's car. But I did make some, cover some things. I'd write it and give it to 'em or get it over there. But we had a man that came out here with the Chronicle. His name was John Billy Yates. He waited, seemed like – I don't remember, I think that's what he named. And have him come out, and I'd have the newsman pick it up, see, that night. And about weekly I went to the Chronicle office. About Saturday night was all [7:44].

KK: And turned in your stories?

RM: Yes. If something extra came in (see).

KK: Did you have a limit of stories you had to cover each week?

RM: No, it didn't make any difference.

KK: Just whatever?

RM: Whatever the Chronicle state is what it covers. You know, what they give you. But, see, you can always call that stuff in unless you have something special. If they have, oh, you know, they have some kind of win game, you'd have to cover that mainly.

KK: Do you remember any of 'em?

RM: No.

KK: Where any of 'em were?

RM: They – one time they sent me out to cover a ballgame. And I couldn't go. Joe Noele was supposed to cover it, and something happened he couldn't go and I said, 'I don't know anything about football. You're crazy.'

RM: At home, in the little town where I used to live, I worked for a paper, too, in the little town where I used to live. But they didn't have a stadium, see? We went down here right out in the middle of everything. And so, but one time they had some out here where he had to run down line first.

KK: Um-hmm.

RM: At first they didn't have stadiums.

KK: In Baytown?

RM: Yeah. They didn't have stadiums. And...

KK: Where did they play?

RM: I don't remember where they'd play, but they didn't always have sit down games, and they had to be covered. Well, Joe Noele was supposed to cover 'em, see? Well, something happened. He, he didn't do it, see? But you could sit somewhere or you know, or something like that. A lot of things covered, that I had to cover that they didn't have a man, see?

KK: So you got to do it?

RM: Yeah.

KK: Had a woman doing it?

RM: Yeah.

KK: Liberated.

RM: Well, I guess a woman's smart as a man, I reckon.

KK: That's right.

RM: But yet, it's so different then. They didn't have any of that card. But, you know, I had to go report every week, anyways, see? Well, I didn't like football because I didn't like that football team, see? And I said, and I'd have to get Joe to cover it. If I had to cover something like that, somebody else had to do it; I couldn't do it. I couldn't run up and down the sideline. And they didn't have stadiums. You'd get up in the middle of it.

KK: Yeah.

RM: But, so I'd have to get somebody else to do it. But these what got me were some of these society things they had you had to go to. Lord.

(Tape cuts off.)

KK: To play the piano for church, too.

RM: Yeah.

KK: For which church?

RM: Well, I'm from the Trinity Tabernacle, but I used to work with some evangelists. Went out to the little churches. I got more fun out of that. Out of little churches, they didn't have a piano player. And I could always play, so... They'd get me – we'd go to these little church, country churches where they couldn't afford to pay somebody. I had to do that.

KK: How long did you play?

RM: Oh... They had, these were churches that Jillian and I were ... And they've all got big churches, organs I imagine, now. But then they didn't have.

KK: You played piano, not an organ?

RM: Not an organ.

KK: Did they have organs then?

RM: Well our church finally got an organ, but I had retired it there.

KK: Oh.

RM: Oh, I can play an organ.

(Tape cuts off.)

RM: Somebody completing something. Something happened. But ... there's something happening every day. So that's up to you to go get it.

(Tape cuts off.)

RM: But it's just kind of rough on a woman, but...

KK: Yeah.

RM: She... But I got, had a lot of help from the Houston Post. There was a guy that was with the Post that came down here, and we got to be real good friends. We'd go together to things, see. He could drive a

car. He'd take his or mine, or my brother's car. But ... they had newsmen all over the place. Well, and they'd blow out a derrick over at the oilfield and have a big fire or something like that. And that was news.

KK: You covered the oil derrick fires?

RM: Not that close. (Laughs) That's too dangerous. But that was what happened sometimes. We've had men get killed at the oil derricks.

KK: Hmm.

RM: Get killed.

KK: Did you ever see any of that happen?

RM: Well, I lived right in the middle of an oilfield. And everybody was, yeah. I'll tell you I lived, we lived over right, when we first came here we lived right over off a creek bank. There's a creek over here runs up and down this way. And then the oilfield was right here, see?

KK: Um-hmm.

RM: Up the side?

KK: Um-hmm.

RM: And this was the dirtiest, nastiest old water. I guess it was fed into that creek from all these other places here. Well there was some people that lived – after, we had lived on the creek once, but after we left there some people moved over there about where we used to live. Right down on the bank. You walked out your door, and there was a creek. And it's deep water. Well, anyhow, the little boy of this family fell in the creek. And the water is nasty. It's a dirty old creek. Nasty. I don't know, he's a pretty good sized child. I don't just how old he was. But the crabs – you know how these people eat them nasty crabs. Well I saw them people peel those crabs and eat 'em. Well, after I saw this boy after he got eaten up by one ...

KK: Oh.

RM: Not eat up, but his body, before they could get him out of that nasty water. So he got ... by crabs.

KK: I didn't know crabs would do that.

RM: Yeah. And no telling what else was down there, see? But they... Well, yeah, I saw these people coming out of Louisiana and places that ... and eat the little nasty things. My momma wouldn't let one come to her house. Ugh. I liked the shrimp they brought out across that – they didn't get 'em out of the creek, but they brought 'em out of the bay. Came through the – brought their boat up through the creek and land on the landing. I wouldn't eat them things...

(Tape cuts off.)

RM: ... then I see the oil well blow in, and derricks all over the creek.

KK: Would that happen a lot?

RM: Yes. Most definitely. Course they had a whistle then. A lot, you know, see. That's what I said is this little boy fell in that nasty old creek. And before they could find him there the water see as many old boats or something up there. Pretty good size boats went up there and got him. And they liked to never – they had a hard time finding him. I would imagine that mother I knew...

(Tape cuts off.)

RM: ...thing out there. They have a barge I believe it is they called it. They'd go out there to work on it, do something. One would blow in, what they called coming in. When one come in, it'd – it comes in red with fire, you know. Or comes in blowing stuff out the top of it. Course everybody jumps and probably want to see what's happening. (Laughs) And that's, uh ... they're watching some well blow in. And they've got to cap it before they can stop it.

KK: Um-hmm.

RM: Sometimes a man is hurt trying to cap it.

(Tape cuts off.)

RM: Every day you might have something like that.

KK: Did something like that happen almost every day?

RM: Lot of times. Cause we – then, we were right down on the edge of the oilfield; right in the middle of it. Course we assumed our company house uptown. Moved down there, but we lived down there a long time. So you can have some company houses uptown.

KK: Um-hmm.

RM: On Gulf Street. I lived on Gulf Street.

KK: Gulf Street?

RM: Yeah. By the bank of Goose Creek up there.

KK: Uh-huh. I know where that is.

RM: I did know the number of the house, but I forgot the number. I went to visit somebody not far from it. I like it. But those were pretty nice, just little frame houses.

KK: Yeah.

(Tape cuts off.)

RM: ... during the night you don't know what it's going to do before the morning. And noise. So I got so I didn't even those pay any, pay any attention to noise. My brother came to visit from California one time, and he ... he nearly went crazy. He said, "Mama, how in the world do you stand this?"

RM: And Mother, my mother said, "What?" (Laughs)

RM: Like nothing happened, see?

RM: All that noise you'd hear the rolling and popping, and you'd hear something blowing, and you look out the door and there's fire all the way up there, see? Course you'd get up and see if everything's alright, but...

KK: If it is, you'd go back to bed. (Laughs)

RM: Yeah, you'd go back to bed, and forget about it.

KK: (Laughs)

RM: Some of these companies storms we had ... they'd blow half the derricks down.

KK: Hurricanes?

RM: Yeah. If they just hit 'em just right, see? My father's company shop right was right in the middle of where those derricks were, see? And they had to get out.

KK: When the hurricanes came?

RM: Yeah. Cause you never know when they was going to topple one over.

KK: Yeah.

RM: Course they didn't pull any wells or anything like that. All that was still... But... You just didn't know. You could hear all kinds of noises. And my brother said, "My God." He'd fall out of that there, and he said – cause we were living out in the middle of it. And he said, "I don't know if I want to live in this place."

(Laughing)

RM: Oh!

(Tape cuts off.) [17:25]

RM: I didn't want to come down here, see. But they had moved my family, moved everything, see? When I came home that day, they came [17:36] after I came home they came. I looked at my mother – she's real tiny, and she's just as little as she could be. But she, boy she...

KK: Like you.

RM: ... out working by herself. [17:46] And so I came, I got in the house. I finally got in the house, and I said, 'Where's Mama?'

RM: And I looked over at my piano, and some big ol' guy was sitting on my stool. We had a stool there then. And he was stomping both feet on the pedals, just playing and stomping 'em. [18:06] And I slammed the door real hard, and I said, 'Wait a minute.'

RM: And I didn't know who he was. He had on a ball player's cap. And I said – Mama had six boarders that were ball players with the company.

KK: With Gulf?

RM: Yeah. And he was playing my piano, see? Just stomping it. I thought I'd never forget his name.

KK: (Inaudible) [18:35]

RM: Ebar, I believe his last name was Ebar. Don Ebar, I believe. And my sister said, "Don, this is Don Ebar," and said, "This is my sister."

RM: And I said, 'Get your feet off my piano bench, my piano keys things. [18:50]

RM: Well he, boy he could play that thing.

(Laughing)

RM: And they had just got through eating and got up from the table, see. He thought it'd be smart – and she had six boarders, and was gonna have a baby. I didn't know that even till I got home, see. And she was old, you know. And her tenth child.

KK: My.

RM: And I just blew my stack right there. And told 'em they could go board somewhere else; they wouldn't eat there no more, either. She's not gonna cook for you. And I'm not gonna cook for you, I tell you. Cause I'm not a cook. And there, I – man, I was so mad. Well, she – we thought surely, you know, she'd lose the baby, maybe.

(Tape cuts off.) [19:37]

RM: ... but we – she had it in the house. [19:39]

KK: Hmm. Did you help?

RM: But we had her doctor who stayed right there, I'll tell you. When my sister went to work, she went to work for that doctor but she, she was younger than I was. (Inaudible) [19:52]

KK: What was the doctor's name?

RM: Dr. Robbins. They had a home down past the town out toward Baytown.

KK: Um-hmm.

RM: He had a girl, and let's see, Philip, and three boys, I believe. But they – he was here. He's dead. I don't know... [20:13]

(Tape cuts off.) [20:12]

KK: Why?

RM: Well, the prettiest hair [20:16] – she had gray hair and everything. Well, she had a pretty mouth, and had a big oval tooth right in the right place, and ...

KK: (Laughing)

RM: See, remember my sister worked for him a long time until she got married and (inaudible) [20:30].

KK: Um-hmm.

RM: But...

(Tape cuts off.) [20:36]

RM: This town was nothing like it is now.

KK: No. I guess not.

RM: There's all kind of people here. **Everywhere. [20:43]** I mean, there was kind of a ... what do you call it? Uh ... **not apartments; a bunch of people all in the resident, you know. [20:51]**

KK: Uh-huh.

RM: And they were all different. **But you know that... [20:58]**

KK: From all over?

RM: Yeah. **Familiar [20:59].** They were part of the United States, I guess.

KK: Um-hmm.

RM: Especially from Texas. Cause there were oilfields all around; they'd go from one to the other, see.

KK: Um-hmm.

RM: They'd work for one a while, and then they want another job, and they'd go to another one.

KK: Move on?

RM: Yeah. But we had a hard time getting churches started. And we had a hard, you know, enough to be interested in 'em.

KK: Um-hmm.

RM: Well, they worked all kind of shifts, you know.

KK: Yeah.

RM: And the schools at first where **terrible. [21:24]** They had – one building they had wasn't too bad. It was framed-in and all. But I got to see 'em. I got ... I worked for the school board when they built all the buildings.

KK: You worked for the school board?

RM: **I went after worked I worked at the school while I was here. [21:35]**

KK: For Goose Creek?

RM: Yeah.

KK: Were you on...

RM: Tax office.

KK: Um-hmm.

RM: And my boss always had a cigar in his mouth. But we...

KK: **Who was your boss? [21:51]**

RM: Where the old bank building. We were in the old – there used to be an old bank. It had what we call back of the bank. It was a building upstairs.

KK: Um-hmm.

RM: They had – I don't know if that building is still there or not, but we had ... that's where that man, you know, where man had his uh... and he had ... I think he had a son, and a couple of daughters. **But I worked for him for a long time. [22:15]**

KK: What was his name?

RM: Jordan. S.A. Jordan. J-O-R-D-A-N. Oh, he called it Jerdan. (Laughs) Now, we call him Jordan.

KK: (Laughs)

RM: And I've wondered lots of times, you know, you lose ... connection with people. I've wondered a lot. Whatever. He was a craziest – he was a very peculiar sort. He was...

(Tape cuts off) [22:36]

RM: ... knew about anything. I had to run the office.

KK: (Laughs)

RM: And if the school superintendent wanted to know anything, he had to come ask me, or go in the file and make me look for it.

KK: What was the superintendent's name?

RM: I don't remember now. But **Lord, I met me that Mr. Jordan. [22:54]** But my sister worked for this Dr. Robbins **right in the middle of town. [23:00]**

KK: Um-hmm. Were you on the school board?

RM: No.

KK: No?

RM: I didn't have – to the school board meetings.

KK: Oh.

RM: I just worked for him for – I guess they call it the school office. Well, they didn't have very good buildings then...

(Tape cuts off) [23:18]

RM: We had to use the building downtown.

KK: Uh-huh.

RM: But old Herring's Drugstore. Now there's a man here. Herring's was right, there was a street here, and right here was Herring's right ... and there was some store in here. Next to it was Herring's Drugstore. And this Mr. Tapp that lives here.

KK: Uh-huh.

RM: See he knows he and he always – because we used to drink coffee at Herring’s Drugstore every morning, see. And when they had Herring’s Drugstore.

KK: Um-hmm.

RM: And he’s always telling somebody. I say, ‘You sure do like to tell my age, don’t you?’ (Laughs)

KK: (Laughs)

RM: But, poor thing, he’s having trouble with his lungs. He...

KK: Do you remember what year that was?

RM: Hmm.

KK: Around what year?

RM: No, and I don’t have any of my files or anything. But, Lord.

(Tape cuts off.) [24:12]

RM: ... was there. I was working for the school district. And after (static) [24:18] worked for Lacks – see I quit work for a long time. Then I went back to work.

KK: What did you do?

RM: At Lacks Store. I was a bookkeeper.

KK: While you quit what did you do?

RM: I didn’t do anything. I didn’t plan, you know, to work much anymore. But you can’t sit down and do nothing.

KK: That’s right.

RM: So I just, I always have something to do.

(Tape cuts off.) [24:43]

RM: But I didn’t – one woman that remembers me.

KK: What was her name?

RM: I don’t remember her name. But she remembers seeing me. [24:50]

KK: She did?

RM: Maybe not in the manuals, you know. [24:51]

KK: Uh-huh.

RM: That’s what the man took me to Lacks, took me to the ferry that day. He just happened to see me.

KK: Um-hmm.

RM: Recognize. [24:58] Yeah, I see you...

(Tape cuts off.) [25:03]

RM: I set word by messenger. See, my roommates from all over La Porte. [25:04]

(Tape cuts off.) [25:07]

RM: ... too, don't you? It was a plumber, Pat Rule [25:12], and I knew his mother and him. But I've known his mother. She used to come to our house before breakfast every morning.

KK: (Laughs)

RM: And I hadn't seen him in years. And he said, "You know me."

RM: I said, 'Pat Rule,' [25:24] I said, 'the one that's city plumber.'

RM: I said I thought well, now I've heard that name somewhere cause he put in a plumbing company. Been in business here a long time. He says, (inaudible). [25:34] And the nurse over at the desk, "You know everybody."

RM: (Laughs) I said, I never know. I don't know if – I guess he knew everybody. [25:41] This man that lived here left here, Mr. Alan. I went with him – Fern and I went with him, and – out to see his mother and father. And I'd never seen him before. And she looked at me and grinned, and says, "Yes, you have, too."

RM: (Laughs)

KK: Where did you know him from?

RM: Well, she says cause he had been [26:01] to my church. Used to go to my church. And the husband had a funny eye. I thought there was something. [26:06] He had a – his eye had been injured someway. And he sat, and I looked at him, he grinned and said, "You remember the eye, too, don't you?"

RM: Cause he had worked at the church as a janitor.

(Laughter)

RM: I said, 'Well, where'd you get that?'

RM: He said, "I worked out at the church."

RM: When I didn't remember, see.

KK: Trinity?

RM: Yeah.

(End of tape)

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