

Michele Mitchell: You said that when you first started working the cafeteria, that you worked downtown?

Agnes Chatman Landry: Uh-huh. Lawrence A. Pemberton. That's the first school I worked, two years as a worker, and the third year, I went as a manager at J.B. Livingston. And I stayed there till integration.

Michele Mitchell: This is the Templeton School?

Agnes Chatman Landry: Lawrence A. Pemberton. It's not Lawrence A. Pemberton. It's downtown — what it is now? Oh, it's an elementary school.

Michele Mitchell: Mm-hmm.

Speaker 1: Lee.

Agnes Chatman Landry: Lee Street, yes.

Michele Mitchell: Thank you.

Agnes Chatman Landry: You see they took the names of different one off of the school. They had a boy that went to Henderson High, fought that for the longest. Wanted them to put it back on Henderson High.

Michele Mitchell: Did he?

Agnes Chatman Landry: You know, a Black man, they weren't going to put that back on no Black man.

Michele Mitchell: Mm-hmm.

Agnes Chatman Landry: This boy used to come every year. He's in California now. Come every year and fight that.

Michele Mitchell: Comes back, huh?

Agnes Chatman Landry: Fight it.

Michele Mitchell: But what sort of — now when you worked at Pemberton, what sort of cafeteria was it? Was it a big cafeteria?

Agnes Chatman Landry: You talking about [indistinct 00:01:51].

Michele Mitchell: Was it now?

Agnes Chatman Landry: Oh, that cafeteria. It was an elementary school. And it was all broke down. Now they got a — you know they got another place.

Michele Mitchell: Mm-hmm.

Agnes Chatman Landry: Broken down, honey.

Michele Mitchell: Was the equipment broken down too?

Agnes Chatman Landry: Equipment wasn't as good as the White ones. But you had to work so hard to keep it up, to make it look like it was clean. Was four of us working, I think, the manager and three helpers.

Michele Mitchell: Did the children eat in the — was there a cafeteria with tables?

Agnes Chatman Landry: Oh, yeah. It was a cafeteria, old time, like them picnic tables.

Michele Mitchell: Mm-hmm.

Agnes Chatman Landry: That's what they had, like old picnic tables. That's what they had.

Michele Mitchell: Were they wood?

Agnes Chatman Landry: Yeah, wood, uh-huh. Yeah. J.B. Livingston was a new school, when I went to it. I think it had been built about two years, when I went there. And so we had tables and chairs at that school. And Freshman High was another school what was new. They had tables and chairs there.

Michele Mitchell: Must have been happy to leave Pemberton.

Agnes Chatman Landry: Oh. Oh. Girl. Old cement floor that you had to scrub, and the corners, you know how them dirt there form up, we had to get that out every day. We had us a hard time. I just did it two years.

Michele Mitchell: [indistinct 00:04:31].

Agnes Chatman Landry: When I left I was on my own.

Michele Mitchell: Yeah.

Agnes Chatman Landry: That's right. On my own.

Michele Mitchell: Did you start working in cafeterias after your children were —

Agnes Chatman Landry: Uh-uh.

Michele Mitchell: Yes?

Agnes Chatman Landry: Michael was a baby. Small child.

Michele Mitchell: How old was Rose?

Agnes Chatman Landry: Rose, Rose was almost ready to go to college, or finish high school I believe, when I — She must have — yeah, she was almost ready to go to college.

Michele Mitchell: Michael was the baby.

Agnes Chatman Landry: Michael was the baby. That's the only one I had a problem with when he get there in the morning. "Mother, didn't feed me no breakfast." See, I was at the school where he was going, you see. Michael, and then later, he's over there, used to spoil it. And get there and fix him some milk and bread — no, he didn't drink milk. Fix him biscuit or something and give him — fry him an egg, or something they give him. But I didn't have no problem with none of my children through school where I worked at, nobody but that old boy.

Agnes Chatman Landry: They'd tease him right now, "Mother, I'm hungry. They didn't fix me no breakfast." "Michael. Please, Michael." Them ladies would get right there and find him something up, stir it up for him.

Michele Mitchell: Yeah. Yeah, so he got him something to eat. [indistinct 00:06:54]. I think, ma'am, the only questions I have left — I think I've got everything. You told me that — now, did you have a job before you worked Pemberton, in some other place? Where were you working then?

Agnes Chatman Landry: I worked in a home, Laport bus line, they called it, because he had buses, that went out to St. Martinville, and went to Abbeville, and all them places, them places around like that. But I used to cook for them over there. I used to cook for them.

Michele Mitchell: Was this in a private—

Agnes Chatman Landry: House where, yeah, private home. But the bus his office was right there in the house. Yeah, I always did work. Believe it or not, I cut cane. Now I did that on my own.

Michele Mitchell: Can you tell me a little bit about that?

Agnes Chatman Landry: I did that on my own. I wanted to do it.

Speaker 1: And you know what's so weird. My mother was an only child. My mother was an only child and

then had nine children. But you know life for her has — being an only child. And [indistinct 00:08:27] having nine children. And my mother, I know did the cane before she got married.

Agnes Chatman Landry: Mm-mm. No, I didn't.

Michele Mitchell: Nope.

Speaker 1: Had all these children, and had to survive—

Agnes Chatman Landry: Helped my husband.

Speaker 1: — [indistinct 00:08:32] when they moved. When he moved her here, from Texas. She had shoes to no end. And this is one of the things that he talked about on his dying bed, about how she had deprived herself of the things that she always had had, to take care, to help support him.

Agnes Chatman Landry: [indistinct 00:08:57] nine children.

Michele Mitchell: That's beautiful, though. It is. And—

Agnes Chatman Landry: They didn't have the best of clothes.

Speaker 1: And this might have been out of six marriage, because I think her mother was married three times, and I think her father was married twice. Five marriage, she was an only child. I'm sure she wished she would have dated, after having to do so much. It's like taking [indistinct 00:09:39].

Agnes Chatman Landry: Oh, but I enjoyed that year. Let me tell you about the cane cutting. I enjoyed it.

Michele Mitchell: So it was in the '30s or the '40s?

Speaker 1: This was in the late '30s. Got married in the late '30s, but I'm sure she cut cane—

Agnes Chatman Landry: It was in—

Speaker 1: — in the '40s.

Agnes Chatman Landry: — yeah.

Speaker 1: And probably the '50s. Okay.

Agnes Chatman Landry: I cut cane just one year.

Speaker 1: Well, that was in the '40s.

Agnes Chatman Landry: One year.

Speaker 1: I wasn't born, but I've heard this story so much.

Agnes Chatman Landry: A lady was — the thing about it, I've stayed three places since I married. This house — was the old house, this house, and then we moved out there on the farm where who my husband was working for then, Mr. Paul Hebert, we moved out there. I learned how to milk cows that I didn't know anything about, chicken feed, chicken and things like that. We raised hogs—

Speaker 1: Well, you did just farm work, period.

Agnes Chatman Landry: Yeah.

Michele Mitchell: Paul [indistinct 00:10:55]?

Agnes Chatman Landry: I learned — yeah, his name was Paul Hebert, but they called it Hebert.

Michele Mitchell: Hebert.

Agnes Chatman Landry: Yeah, Hebert.

Michele Mitchell: So Hebert is the pronunciation.

Agnes Chatman Landry: Yeah, but we called it Paul — I mean we would call him Paul. He wouldn't — [indistinct 00:11:11]. Hebert. Hebert.

Speaker 1: This area is amazing. With the French.

Agnes Chatman Landry: There's a lady lived by me, oh she, "Oh come on. You're going to enjoy it." And I did. I really enjoyed it. And the men used to — see, they cut so fast, and they used to — when they'd get they row out, they get in our row, come and meet us. Oh, we had a good time. My husband used to come and help me.

Speaker 1: At least she enjoyed working.

Michele Mitchell: Yeah—

Speaker 1: And made it a part of her. What she does, as she gets older, the people in our area, the older people, those were her friends. [indistinct 00:12:06]. I mean, it was just a part of us. She made it a part of us. And she's still doing it to us. I wanted to choke her yesterday. Her church was going to Lake Cho, and my mother is the oldest, now [indistinct 00:12:23] and I wanted her, listen to me, she's the oldest of the people

that she wanted to go with her. All of these people have kids, just like she had kids. But she volunteered to take one of us. Well, hey girlfriend, my kid's got a friend, and she's still doing it. And we might be mad, but we don't dare say no. And that has just been a part of our upbringing. We know that we are supposed to do — it's going to be rewarding for us to do for the older people—

Agnes Chatman Landry: Ms. Robbie don't have no children.

Speaker 1: But she had three other ladies. And my sisters laugh all the time, how she would make us go. You'd have to go.

Agnes Chatman Landry: Old people always have been my friends, from young.

Speaker 1: See, my sister's—

Agnes Chatman Landry: There she coming now.

Speaker 1: — [indistinct 00:13:29].

Michele Mitchell: What happened?

Agnes Chatman Landry: My oldest daughter.

Speaker 1: She's been in university. She's in the area working on—

Michele Mitchell: Hello. Nice to meet you.

Rose: How are you?

Agnes Chatman Landry: That's Rose.

Rose: Nice meeting you. Working on what?

Michele Mitchell: We're collecting stories from people who remember life—

Agnes Chatman Landry: From way back.

Michele Mitchell: — in the South. Yeah, from way back, exactly.

Rose: That'll make an interesting collection. Mary [indistinct 00:13:55].

Agnes Chatman Landry: Yeah.

Speaker 1: No, this lady's [indistinct 00:14:06]. She's in pain.

Agnes Chatman Landry: And is—

Rose: This your assignment?

Michele Mitchell: Uh-huh.

Rose: They gave you her name?

Speaker 1: We got one to tell you. Did they tell you about it?

Agnes Chatman Landry: What?

Speaker 1: [indistinct 00:14:18] story. Oh, I wanted to tell her, but I didn't know whether I should.

Rose: Why?

Speaker 1: The abuse they brought on Blacks during those days. And that was before I was born, I think.

Agnes Chatman Landry: He was in — yeah. In prison, he was in jail.

Rose: When they would arrest them and put them in jail, they would sexually abuse them, they would physically abuse them, they would — I mean, abuse them. Some of the stories. On of the stories that we heard was about my daddy's friend, who was accused of molesting or flirting with a White woman.

Speaker 1: Flirting, Rose, not even molesting.

Rose: Whistling. Which is flirtation. And they put him in jail, and nobody, none of his friends and family was allowed to go and see him, and while he was in jail, he was sexually abused, he was beaten, I mean just abused. Abused. They abused him, and when he did get out, he had to leave New Iberia, and he couldn't come back—

Agnes Chatman Landry: They made him leave town.

Speaker 1: He came back when we were grown.

Rose: He came back a few years before my dad died. Very, very angry. Because he thought my dad had denied — had deserted him.

Agnes Chatman Landry: But they wouldn't let nobody—

Rose: They wouldn't let him, and he sat and told the story of what they — sexual abuse.

Speaker 1: Well, I don't know if my father ever tried to [indistinct 00:15:39].

Rose: My daddy said yeah. He said that that several of them had gone — I don't think Daddy tried, but I think friends, their friends had tried, but they were scared.

Speaker 1: They were all scared.

Rose: They were. And this man came back and sat and told us.

Speaker 1: Weren't they all afraid to go and see him?

Agnes Chatman Landry: Huh?

Speaker 1: Weren't you all afraid to go and see him?

Agnes Chatman Landry: Yeah.

Rose: [indistinct 00:16:16].

Agnes Chatman Landry: Oh yeah, he used to sit — he used —

Rose: That was his first time coming back into New Iberia. I heard them talking about it, but I must have been in my — I was in my 30s when he came back, so after 30 years.

Michele Mitchell: And he's here now?

Rose: No, he came just to visit, and I don't think he has been back since that.

Agnes Chatman Landry: He lived right there, in the house right there. His mom died when they was young, and his daddy raised him, and then he left them in the house and — see, he was a brakeman.

Michele Mitchell: A brakeman?

Agnes Chatman Landry: Uh-huh. And he moved to — what that place name? DeQuincy.

Speaker 1: She doesn't necessarily want to know about integration, she also want to know what life was like.

Speaker 1: I want to know more about what life was like—



Rose: And you could tell more.

Speaker 1: [indistinct 00:17:11].

Rose: That story is just what life was like.

Michele Mitchell: When did this happen? I have—

Rose: It happened in the '40s.

Speaker 1: In the '40s.

Agnes Chatman Landry: '40s.

Speaker 1: [indistinct 00:17:25]. What I also remember in the '40s is talking about life, talking about lifestyle in terms of employment, in terms of family, our family, and now I realize that, our family was probably considered, although we had our own share of problems because we were poor, and alcohol was always prevalent, moonshining and all of that other stuff. We made our own liquor.

Agnes Chatman Landry: Not me.

Speaker 1: Our own beer.

Rose: Not you, Mother, not you, but your mom—

Speaker 1: But during those days—

Agnes Chatman Landry: My mom and — yeah.

Rose: I remember them talking about the rise in the beer and all that.

Speaker 1: They make their own liquor, so they made their own liquor. Alcohol was always a problem. [indistinct 00:18:18]. But I think our family—

Agnes Chatman Landry: Why?

Speaker 1: — in the neighborhood was probably considered more prosperous, not in terms of richness, in terms of family. [indistinct 00:18:33]. The lady who lived right next door to us had 10 children. How many of those children belonged to [indistinct 00:18:42].

Agnes Chatman Landry: I didn't [indistinct 00:18:47].

Speaker 1: [indistinct 00:18:47].

Rose: And to be honest, the job Daddy had is the job that I wouldn't want. But in those days it was considered as one of the good jobs.

Speaker 1: But just to finish, Dad, he always had a job—

Agnes Chatman Landry: That's when he worked in the field. Worked for Paul and at Paul Hebert.

Speaker 1: Daddy's still working for [indistinct 00:19:06] in the '40s.

Agnes Chatman Landry: I know.

Rose: But even when he wasn't, the White man was always [indistinct 00:19:15] or whatever. Paul Hebert brought food [indistinct 00:19:21].

Speaker 1: I don't know—

Rose: The holding to the —

Agnes Chatman Landry: I did. Neighbor Lennox did.

Speaker 1: He was on the [indistinct 00:19:40] or whatever you would call it. [indistinct 00:19:46].

Agnes Chatman Landry: Yeah. He was on one of them.

Speaker 1: One of those government, and he kind of could share [indistinct 00:19:53].

Michele Mitchell: So y'all lived on his place.

Rose: One time.

Agnes Chatman Landry: One time. You remember when I told you how I was out there cutting—

Michele Mitchell: Cutting cane.

Agnes Chatman Landry: Uh-huh.

Speaker 1: We thought we were rich then.

Agnes Chatman Landry: No, when I cut cane, I wasn't on this property.

Speaker 1: No, you were here.

Rose: They have a lot of Black mistress too. When we was growing up. White men, with Black women.

Rose: But just to tell you about it [indistinct 00:20:08], I think we were considered fortunate. That was one big [indistinct 00:20:31]. Although we had a lot of problems. Lots and lots of problems. And I think for the most part the neighbors knew some, but not all of the problems. I started first working in a meat market and—

Agnes Chatman Landry: Uh-huh.

Rose: — because Paul Hebert owned all of it. So my daddy worked for him, and my daddy was like straw boss in the cane fields. Drove the truck while the other cutting cane, including my mom. But I hate to say this, but that could have come because my daddy also comes from a fair-skinned White — I mean fair-skinned Black, and that's how they used fair-skinned Blacks.

Agnes Chatman Landry: His grandmother [indistinct 00:21:22] too, his grandmother [indistinct 00:21:24].

Rose: [indistinct 00:21:24] and he came from a fair-skinned Black family.

Speaker 1: His grandmother was biracial.

Rose: With the soft hair, and —

Agnes Chatman Landry: His mama died when he was two years old.

Rose: I think biracial on both sides of the family.

Agnes Chatman Landry: Look, they had family reunion in their family, and they can't find — they don't want —

Michele Mitchell: So this is the Landry family.

Agnes Chatman Landry: The Landry family.

Speaker 1: No, no, not the Landry, the Robinson family.

Michele Mitchell: Could you spell that?

Speaker 1: B-A-G-A-S-S-E-U-R-E.

Agnes Chatman Landry: You're just like your husband.

Speaker 1: And in the study of that name, that's how they used their [indistinct 00:22:11] to migrate in.

Agnes Chatman Landry: Somewhat? What?

Speaker 1: I mean if especially if they didn't got a father—

Agnes Chatman Landry: I got a credit. Where's it at?

Speaker 1: [indistinct 00:22:21] let the person live if a Black man doing something—