Kate Ellis: Would you state your name and when you were born?

Audrey Metz Gabriel: Audrey Metz—Gabriel. February 12th, 1925.

Kate Ellis: 1925. Okay. Mrs Gabriel, where were you born?

Audrey Metz Gabriel: Jeanerette

Kate Ellis: Jeanerette, okay.

Audrey Metz Gabriel: It's in New Iberia

Kate Ellis: Is this comfortable, is that—

Audrey Metz Gabriel: Yes.

Kate Ellis: What I'd like is for you to maybe begin just talking about your years coming up in this community. Just what you remember about your growing up years and the community that you grew up in.

Audrey Metz Gabriel: I wasn't raised here. I was raised for in Ward Seven.

Kate Ellis: In Ward Seven? Okay. And Jeanerette?

Audrey Metz Gabriel: That's in St. Mary Parish when you say Jeanerette. We got a Jeanerette address, so we St. Mary Parish.

Kate Ellis: Right.

Audrey Metz Gabriel: Ward Seven, St. Mary Parish.

Kate Ellis: Okay. But the name of the town that you came up in was Jeanerette? And this is all part of St. Mary Parish. Right. So can you tell me about the community that you grew up in and what your parents did, what you remember of your family?

Audrey Metz Gabriel: Oh, I had beautiful parents. My father name was Oscar Metz.

Kate Ellis: Oscar—

Audrey Metz Gabriel: Metz. And my mother's name, Viola Barvin Metz. I had two brothers, Leon Metz and Earl

Metz. I had four sisters, Gladys, who died when she was small. I had Ruby, Mercedes and Mary. We all living, we were seven, but my older sister died so we were six, and then my two brothers are dead. Now we only four girls left. And we were just some happy kids. All the things that my parents would do, they would make a provision for us. My father would work on the farm and then he had a farm. Most of the farm, what we lived on was ours and we'd raised everything. We ate mostly and we had cows. He milked the cows, everything that we had, and raised the sweet potatoes, raised the vegetable.

Audrey Metz Gabriel: My mother make the butter. We had the watermelons. It's everything that we had, it was provided for us. We just had to buy clothes and then we buy material 'cause my mother would sew the clothes. My mother was a seamstress. She used to make beautiful clothes for us. And each of us had our own chores. The boys had what they had to do, the girls had what they had to do.

Kate Ellis: What kind of things did the boys have to do?

Audrey Metz Gabriel: They would help my daddy with the animals and getting in the vegetables and whatnot and bring it in for us to clean and take care of everything. They had the outside work. We had the inside work, turn the house clean and helping my mother polishing, cleaning, cooking, everything like that. And the boys would help my father on outside to do the things that he had to do. Such as getting feed for the cattle and putting them up and changing the place, taking them out in the sun in the hot summertime and whatnot.

Kate Ellis: Did your mother do any paid work?

Audrey Metz Gabriel: Any what?

Kate Ellis: Paid work or was—

Audrey Metz Gabriel: Well, my mother did work for a family at the Landry's. She would do the ironing for them with those black irons, heating on the stove—

Kate Ellis: Those heavy black—

Audrey Metz Gabriel: Heavy black iron heating on the stove. And she was a very good ironer. She would do iron work. She would on it, do the clothing for them, washing them, iron for them, for the Landry family. And then she would stay at home and do for us. And then sometimes she'd work in the field when we were small.

Kate Ellis: When you were small?

Audrey Metz Gabriel: Yeah. She work in the field and then larger ones would take care of the smaller ones. And then she worked doing seasonal, doing the time when harvesting sugar cane, she wait that time. Then all the rest of the time, she's at home and she's working for you too.

Kate Ellis: Was this a typical family arrangement in the community that you come from?

Audrey Metz Gabriel: Oh yes. Yes. Everybody was friend with everybody and if one needed something, the other one had it, you can have it. We just share and share like it. We had good relationship with our neighbors and everybody's house. And ours was mostly like the big house. Everybody would come to our house for advice and for this, and I think my mother was smart, she was so for everybody in the community, for us. Plus she would sew everybody's other clothes who they want. And we would walk to school three miles from where we live in the rural area up into the city of Jeanerette to the Jeanerette Colored elementary, at first it was. And after we graduated, we Jeanerette Colored high. We had segregated schools. The Whites had a bus and we had to walk. They wouldn't pick us up.

Kate Ellis: So they'd pass you on the road?

Audrey Metz Gabriel: Yes, son. Throw spit balls at us. And my mother and my aunt, her sister went to the school board office to ask them while a bus passed into our house, if they can pick us up. And the secretary did not let my mother and my aunt even get to the superintendent. She said, We don't bus niggers. You don't have to quote that. But that's what she said. And we still had to walk up until we got to about seventh, eighth grade.

Audrey Metz Gabriel: By eighth or ninth grade, my mother bought a car and my aunt bought a little pickup truck and my aunt's son was in high school. And we would ride a week in my mother's car and a week in their car. That's how we finished school. But I walked to school 'til I was in ninth grade. Three miles going, three miles coming. Rain, sleet, snow or whatever. We walked, take off our shoes and put our good shoes in a bag and clean sock, walk in those shoes getting over to school. We wipe our feet and everything my mother give us and we put on our good shoes and our good socks.

Audrey Metz Gabriel: And going into school clean, we take the other little bag and stick it on our desk, put it back on and come home and eat. And we got an old principal, Mr. M.B. Poke, Matthew B. Poke, he used to come from New Iberia and he'd pick up all here, an old bus. And he'd pick up all the kids from New Iberia and the teachers all from Iberia and he'd bring them to the school. And if you get there early enough and the weather was bad, he'd come on the back streets, all where we were coming from and he'd come pick us up and bring us to school free of charge, just to get us out the weather. He's a doll. He was so good that we had, that was something to help us out too. And people see us. They had very few cars but people seen everything else.

Audrey Metz Gabriel: There was so many of us 'cause we would meet up with the group, we'd leave our house, my two sisters and myself and my brothers and all, we leave our house. By the time we get to the corner, our cousins will be there. We make another group. We get to the next spot and by the time we get to school, we a hundred kids walking up the street. We'll meet together at these different sections. Coming back, that's where we do drop off somebody. By the time we get to us, it'd be just us going home. We walked to church, we walked to Sunday school.

Kate Ellis: Walked everywhere.

Audrey Metz Gabriel: Uh-huh, we had no transportation up until I was in the ninth grade when my mother and dad was able to buy a car.

Kate Ellis: And how were they able to buy a car?

Audrey Metz Gabriel: Well, my mother was a skinner. My mother knew how to save money.

Kate Ellis: Really?

Audrey Metz Gabriel: Oh yes.

Kate Ellis: She was a skinner, did you say?

Audrey Metz Gabriel: A good, a thrift.

Kate Ellis: A skinner?

Audrey Metz Gabriel: I just said a skinner, but used to thrift.

Kate Ellis: I just have never heard that term. That's a good term. Skinner.

Audrey Metz Gabriel: Oh yes. She would naturally, she would do whatever. She would skin a flea for his hide. She was just that type of provider. She would do things like that. We'd go during the summertime when the fall, we were harvesting rice, after the people being fixed their rice. We would go in the field and pick what was left by sacks. And well there's a man named Mr. Coleman who had his truck and he would come around and pick up and take it to the mill. Oh, I think it was in Crawley, where that mill was. He take all of our, we had, my mother had our name on their sacks. They'd take it over there and they would husk it and clean it and they would take a share of it and give us all the rest of it back.

Kate Ellis: Do you say that everybody had their name on their sack? So he'd bring all the sacks there, I see. And then he'd know—

Audrey Metz Gabriel: Know whose is whose. You see 'cause he just put it all in there. And we had to take a tag and tag on. Everybody tagged their own sack and he would take just a truck full and go bring 'em. And when the man put them back, he'd know who got to get their share and just whatever had to be, you see. We husk it right. We'd do the same thing with corn. When he finished planting corn, we'd go and scrap corn and bring the corn, the same gentleman. He'd run his taxi truck, he take his corn and bring it to the gin. You grind it to make cornmeal. Some of it was fine and need some course for yellow grits. And the man who did it, he would take his share for doing it and they send it back. We have all that respect.

Kate Ellis: Oh that was Mr. Coleman?

Audrey Metz Gabriel: Mr. Frank Coleman drive the truck. He would bring it to them, bring that beer to the gin.

Kate Ellis: And so that was the way that you would make a little extra money?

Audrey Metz Gabriel: He'd make extra money for taking it for us. You give him little cash for his gas and for what not. He'd be taking things for himself you see, 'cause his wife would go out there and his daughter and help pick like we did. My brother and sisters, my older brother and sisters, Leon, Earl, Ruby, they pick cotton, they work in the field and everything too. When it got to me, I didn't do none of that. I didn't pick cotton 'cause I was too young. I didn't go in the sugar cane field because I was scared to go in there.

Kate Ellis: You were scared?

Audrey Metz Gabriel: I was coward. As soon as I finished high school, I went to New Orleans and I worked in the drug store in the daytime and I went to business college at night. Therefore I did, I missed the field completely. But my two sisters below me worked in the field, Mercy and Mary. And Ruby, everybody work in the field except me.

Kate Ellis: Except you?

Audrey Metz Gabriel: Yes, because I was dodging.

Kate Ellis: You were dodging?

Audrey Metz Gabriel: I was dodging. I wouldn't—

Kate Ellis: Dodging the field work.

Audrey Metz Gabriel: Yeah, I wouldn't work, I never did work in the field. Never did work in the field.

Kate Ellis: Why were you in afraid of the sugar cane fields?

Audrey Metz Gabriel: You hit a cane, a snake come out there. I was afraid. I wasn't going there.

Kate Ellis: You had a, I'm sorry, there was a—

Audrey Metz Gabriel: You hit a cane and sometime a snake come out there. Oh I was just frightened to death. I wasn't going in that field.

Kate Ellis: And they didn't make you go?

Audrey Metz Gabriel: No, my mother give me something to do around the house 'cause I would've cried so much and I was always small and puny and she didn't force me. I had an advantage being small.

Kate Ellis: They took pity on you?

Audrey Metz Gabriel: Yes, and I went, now my sisters below me, they've worked in the field. My two brothers and my sister ahead of me worked in the field. But I didn't.

Kate Ellis: How long did your sisters work in the field for?

Audrey Metz Gabriel: My older sister worked a while up until she decided she go to Houston. After she got to Houston, she stayed over there working. She got married and she stayed away. But my other sisters, they finished high school and they work every season. When it was time to harvest, they would work every season 'cause they're home. When they finished high school, they went away too. After my sister Mercy went to Southern University, Mary went to Texas. So that was the end of that working. But they worked back and forth.

Kate Ellis: And the harvesting season for the sugar cane?

Audrey Metz Gabriel: That last about three months.

Kate Ellis: And that was, is that from about October to January?

Audrey Metz Gabriel: Sometime. Sometime before. Sometime you get out in February, in December. Okay. Just according to how the cane is 'cause sometimes it be thin and sometimes it's thick. Sometimes it's laying down from the weather and just according how they can process the weather they get to get it out.

Kate Ellis: Now you all went to school, all of your, you and your brothers and sisters all went to school.

Audrey Metz Gabriel: Every one. Three of us graduated. I did, Maurice and Mary. The three younger one graduated. The other stopped along the way.

Kate Ellis: Okay, so one sister, one sister stopped and the boys—

Audrey Metz Gabriel: Two brothers—

Kate Ellis: Stopped and they went to—

Audrey Metz Gabriel: To work in the fields.

Kate Ellis: To work in the fields and make good money and start their own families? No, but just get out—

Audrey Metz Gabriel: Well my oldest brother started his family a while, a good while afterward. My youngest brother went in the service in '43. And when he came back, well he's doing other work. He never did come back home. He stayed in New Orleans after they came out the service and he would do carpenter and plumbing work and all stuff as that, after he got out the service. But my other brother had a family with seven children.

Kate Ellis: In this area?

Audrey Metz Gabriel: They don't live too far. Back way—

Kate Ellis: Did he continue working in the fields?

Audrey Metz Gabriel: Who?

Kate Ellis: Your brother who had a family of seven.

Audrey Metz Gabriel: Oh no, he got out the field and he went to work to Sutton junk yard. And he went to work to all different things and make more money then. And during the war where they had money making it, he went all about there because he had his boys. But what he would do, when he was working for Sutton, he would hold—

Kate Ellis: Sutton?

Audrey Metz Gabriel: Yeah.

Kate Ellis: What was Sutton?

Audrey Metz Gabriel: Lionel Sutton, he has a salvage and he had junk business. Selling cars and buying old cars. And my brother would bring all the strip and cleaner, he had a truck. He would haul all that material, all that stuff to his house. A lot of things Sutton would give him to take the armatures out of it and all different parts that they can sell. And his two boys did that. My two big nephews, the older ones after they finshied High School, they would take that and they would clean all that, salvages part what they used to keep the armatures, the brass and aluminum. They would clean all that and put that in separate place and put strip and take the old cars and they haul them back and all the other material, they're boxing and Sutton would give them money for doing that. And that's how they got money for them to go to school, them two big boys.

Kate Ellis: For them, the two big boys to go to school?

Audrey Metz Gabriel: Go to college. Go to college. They both went to Southern. One is, they both finished at

Southern and then the oldest one went further. He's an ophthalmologist. He does, Dr. Leon Metz, he does surgery. And the other one is a IBM computer specialist.

Kate Ellis: Wow.

Audrey Metz Gabriel: And all the girls went to school.

Kate Ellis: To university.

Audrey Metz Gabriel: A lot of them went to Southern and some teachers, some—

Kate Ellis: The girls, you mean?

Audrey Metz Gabriel: My nieces, nephew. My oldest brother, his children.

Kate Ellis: So the generation coming up right behind you all went to university?

Audrey Metz Gabriel: Oh yes. Every one of them.

Kate Ellis: And then your brother, the father of your nephews, of the ophthalmologist—

Audrey Metz Gabriel: Metz, uh-huh.

Kate Ellis: So he obviously got out of the fields and went into the junk business. And then that's what he—

Audrey Metz Gabriel: Then he went into drive the school bus and he went into carpentry. He was a hustler. Then he opened a grocery store for himself and whatnot. Well he do good, his kids came up real good.

Kate Ellis: Seems like almost anything, any work was better than the field work.

Audrey Metz Gabriel: Oh yes. He got away from that field. Oh yes. When he can get better paying, he left. He certainly did.

Kate Ellis: That's a period that actually interests me, which I want to talk to you about some more. Let me just clarify something. When you were all going to school, elementary and high school, did you pause during the harvest season? Did you have to stop going to school during harvest season?

Audrey Metz Gabriel: Sometime we did when my mother worked, and we stay home and my brother would stay home and mind us.

Kate Ellis: So you'd sort of stay out of school for maybe a month?

Audrey Metz Gabriel: About a couple of months. Give her a chance to work and catch up and pay bills and get things for, get some extra material and all kinds of stuff for us. So doing the grinding, we would doing sugar harvest. Not all the time, but whenever she would work, a few years that she worked then at last, she stopped. But when she was working, we were small. My oldest brother would stay home and take care of us while she worked. The rest of us would stay home.

Kate Ellis: And that again was something that a lot of families did at some point. That's what you had to do?

Audrey Metz Gabriel: 'Cause the money was needed, because money was needed and he would hire women. So they'll get out there and help their husband to catch up because after sugar cane harvest, it rain all the time. There's nothing too much you can do until the spring when weather clear up. So there'd be a gap in between sugar cane harvest and planting cane and cleaning up and do thing. It's a gap between there that you have to have some money to fill in until the things open up.

Kate Ellis: That's not called the lay by season is it?

Audrey Metz Gabriel: No, the lay by season is in fall, now.

Kate Ellis: Once it's planted, it's—

Audrey Metz Gabriel: It's lay by time now. You don't do anything to it now. You're just waiting, call lay by. You just wait until you've done all you can do for it. You're waiting now until it's time to cut and start planting again.

Kate Ellis: So is that a sort of gap? Gap is called—

Audrey Metz Gabriel: It's called bad time.

Kate Ellis: I'm sorry?

Audrey Metz Gabriel: Call that bad time in between. That's time that you just have to make ends meet the best way you can, doing any gap between harvest and when you get some, see daddy can go out sometime and let off water or cut ditches. You cut the sickle, the ditch bank and all sort of stuff as that in the field. And that wasn't bringing in too much, you see. And during that time, just like they giving commodities, they gave that.

Kate Ellis: What was that?

Audrey Metz Gabriel: Commodities, you know like they give the free food from the governor. Certain times the of month, you give certain times that the truck will come to a certain place and put off and then you would go there. And according to your family and whatnot and all your cards, you can get commodities. But that's the same thing they doing now. But during that time they were giving you, according to your family,

they were giving you meat. Such a salt meat, a whole shoulder, a big 25 pound bag of rice and all sorts of stuff like that. They give you commodities. But they were giving you the large portions, according to your family. It was a lot, they had a lot of it at that time.

Kate Ellis: Yeah. Was this in the thirties that we're talking about that that the commodities?

Audrey Metz Gabriel: Oh no, I was born in 25 and I remember, so it had to be in the thirties. Thirties and the forties.

Kate Ellis: And did you say that it was a truck? Would a truck come by? How would you?

Audrey Metz Gabriel: Oh no, no. He would go to, put it onto Mr. Landry's store. One place, a George Landry's store in the back and the people who had no nothing, they would go and they would issue out to each person. He was the one, he's the contact place in our area and for corner, they would have it at one of the churches and he in Sorial, they would have it at another place and different things like that. And you would just go in and get your commodities.

Kate Ellis: Now Landry. Okay. Oh I see. And your mother worked for the Landry's, I was trying to remember.

Audrey Metz Gabriel: That's relatives.

Kate Ellis: Oh okay. The Landry, that was a big family around here, huh? And they had a plantation too?

Audrey Metz Gabriel: Yep. They had a farm and a lot of boys used to work the farm and everything. Yeah and just call her mom. And that was for his cousins. Brother's children lived right up the street where Landry's Seafood is up there. The other bunch. And the ones live right around the corner that big, as you're going you see a big two-story house. That's the one. And we used to live right across the street from them.

Kate Ellis: The big two-story house. Where's the two-story house?

Audrey Metz Gabriel: Going back this way towards Jeanerette on the right hand side.

Kate Ellis: So that was the Landry house. It's sort of set back from the road and—

Audrey Metz Gabriel: Two-story, white. As you're going back full end, it's on that side.

Kate Ellis: Okay.

Audrey Metz Gabriel: That's Landry Seafood.

Kate Ellis: That's good to know.

Audrey Metz Gabriel: Well that's the Landry's that my mother would wash and iron for.

Kate Ellis: She worked in that house?

Audrey Metz Gabriel: Yeah, she washing, ironing over there for those people or she would wash it over there and they'd dry and everything and she would bring, the son would bring the clothes at home and my mother iron them at home. On a wooden ironing board with the hot irons and a cool bucket of, a furnace we would call it, the cool. And oh boy she would iron those clothes pretty with that kind and I always just think about it.

Kate Ellis: So she was good at what she did.

Audrey Metz Gabriel: You've ever seen those irons?

Kate Ellis: Yes, I've seen them and I can't imagine, that must have been such arduous work. Especially if it was hot.

Audrey Metz Gabriel: But she would do it and we didn't have no electricity or nothing like that at the time. We got to build our house over and got electricity and all kinds of thing, I think in 1937.

Kate Ellis: That's when you got electricity in 1937?

Audrey Metz Gabriel: When it started coming through.

Kate Ellis: When?

Audrey Metz Gabriel: When the electric people started expanding out in the rural area. We rebuilt a house, a family house. My daddy bought it from this other family and we rebuilt it and then we had electric.

Kate Ellis: Now let me—

Audrey Metz Gabriel: All before we didn't have any.

Kate Ellis: There's so many things I want to ask you. You mentioned this at the beginning. Your father worked, you said he had his own land that he farmed on and he also worked on other people's farms.

Audrey Metz Gabriel: He worked for the Morise's.

Kate Ellis: Can I, who was that?

Audrey Metz Gabriel: M-O-R-E-S-I

Kate Ellis: Oh, okay. On their farm. Was it a big farm?

Audrey Metz Gabriel: Yes. A lot of people.

Kate Ellis: About how many acres was it?

Audrey Metz Gabriel: I don't know. But he had a large farm, he bought him.

Kate Ellis: I'm sorry?

Audrey Metz Gabriel: I don't know exactly how much, but he had a lot.

Kate Ellis: It was a large one?

Audrey Metz Gabriel: Yeah, a huge farm.

Kate Ellis: So your father had some of his own land and with that he could grow food that would feed the family?

Audrey Metz Gabriel: Oh yes.

Kate Ellis: And cows.

Audrey Metz Gabriel: He had his own little horse that could put a sled on to put a, what you call a sliding wagon in the back to go and get corn and grass and all kind of things to feed it.

Kate Ellis: Oh se he could haul things—

Audrey Metz Gabriel: For his animal. For hog, cows. And we had a horse, named Maude.

Kate Ellis: Named Maude. Maude, the horse.

Audrey Metz Gabriel: My godfather gave me that. And we kept him and we hook him up on the slide, they called it make a big square bottle and you called it the slide. You hook him up on it and you go in the field and you cut grass, and all kind of things you bring home and feed the hog, feed the cows and you mix it in with corn and water. And then slop and scrap that you have from the kitchen, you would feed your hog with.

Kate Ellis: So it sounds like it was a real self-sustaining sort of—

Audrey Metz Gabriel: Sustainable agriculture.

Kate Ellis: Yeah.

Audrey Metz Gabriel: I know about that because we started out with sustaining.

Kate Ellis: Oh really?

Audrey Metz Gabriel: Sustainable.

Kate Ellis: Sustainable. And that's, as you said earlier, that's basically what you lived on, and what you needed money for was—

Audrey Metz Gabriel: To buy clothing.

Kate Ellis: To buy clothing.

Audrey Metz Gabriel: And my mother was doing different things, she was working, she would sew for other people. That's when she do that, she buy material for us. And we were the best dressed children at school because my mother would sew and make clothes so nice and stitching. My brother, she wouldn't make pants. She buy pants and everything in the store for my brother and my two brothers and my father. But she made those shirts.

Kate Ellis: She made those shirts?

Audrey Metz Gabriel: Oh yes ma'am. And she made all of our dresses. She just look at what you have on and she make them.

Kate Ellis: Right away?

Audrey Metz Gabriel: No pattern. Uh-huh, she make all that.

Kate Ellis: I bet she could get some of her ideas from the clothes that she ironed of the Landry's.

Audrey Metz Gabriel: Everybody. That's right.

Kate Ellis: She ironed and say, Oh okay I'll make that. Is that right, would she?

Audrey Metz Gabriel: She would look at something and she would make it. She know how to make it and she would sit there and before she would cut on material, she cut a newspaper and she'd look at it and she will be sure that fits you. She make us up on one of us. She call us and she cut that newspaper according to how she wanted it. And she measured it. Then she cut that dress. She got that sewing machine, that big old, that you pat with your foot. And she would sew. And when you come out, you had one of the most gorgeous dress you want to see. That's right. She get cotton material and whatnot. She make panties for us, make

dress. She would make the slips, she make jackets and we were just self-help, self-sufficient.

Kate Ellis: But still there would be the hard times that you talked about when there was almost no money coming in?

Audrey Metz Gabriel: And the weather bad, was no money coming in. When it rain, you couldn't work.

Kate Ellis: And so for those times you might go to the commodities?

Audrey Metz Gabriel: You'd go to the commodities and my daddy get out there and kill a hog.

Kate Ellis: And he'd kill a hog?

Audrey Metz Gabriel: He'd kill a hog. And then those hogs and everything, we had ice in the box. We had the refrigerator, put ice. And then you have a big crock barrel, about that tall. You clean that meat and everything and salt to pickle it.

Kate Ellis: I'm sorry?

Audrey Metz Gabriel: Pickle. You pickled it. Pickle it, put salt and everything else and put in that big barrel and cover it. And it wouldn't go bad, and we could eat all that. And now everything that you eat, you get sick off it.

Kate Ellis: Right, now you mean, now you do.

Audrey Metz Gabriel: Every winter he would have a calf that is big enough and he had been fattening up, ready to kill. And a nice big hole when you kill a hog, because after grinding when it's raining, you can't do no work. We need to eat and then during the fall, we have all that rice that we have saved and sacked up. We have that. We had the cornmeal that during the fall when they cut the corn we have that ground up. But we'll have rice, we'll have meat, we'll have corn, we'll have for cornbread, we'll have grits and we'll have all— My mother or my daddy raise it on the farm. My mama jar it up, put it in jars, preserves it. She'd make preserves, she jar her vegetables, tomatoes and all kinds of things. Dry okra, jar okra and we eat would eat all the time.

Audrey Metz Gabriel: We never were hungry. We were never hungry. And we had a lot of her, she'd make her own breads. She'd make light bread. Those are rolls. She make that or she would make corn bread, she'd make biscuits. She'd make her own butter from the fat from the milk, what not churn on it. We were never hungry. We had plenty and always had to give the other kids who would come play with us and everything.

Kate Ellis: Did you?

Audrey Metz Gabriel: Give the neighbors, that's right.

Kate Ellis: It sounds like your family provided for the community in a lot of ways. With your mothers sewing for people and giving food and people coming to your house.

Audrey Metz Gabriel: We enjoyed that. It was fun. And she, my mother cooked and you go there even after we was grown and everything was so good and we were all married and everything. We go to the house and she'd cook on Sunday. Tell her we're not home. We just say, Uh-huh you don't want my food. She's the person that liked to feed you.

Kate Ellis: Oh really? Keep eating, huh? She'd get you to keep eating?

Audrey Metz Gabriel: She wanted you to eat some, she wanted feeding you.

Kate Ellis: Let's see. There's something else about [indistinct 00:28:11] going a little bit. Let me just write this down.

Audrey Metz Gabriel: My daddy go to town on Saturdays, he buy enough candy, apples and all different thing and he bring it home and hang it up in the basket. The house would be cool and we'd have enough to last us. All of us would have a piece of candy every day, end of day.

Kate Ellis: Really?

Audrey Metz Gabriel: It lasts all of it. He buy plenty, plenty. And when he come home, my mother save it and separate it and when we ask for a piece, it was there.

Kate Ellis: Were there special occasions that you celebrated?

Audrey Metz Gabriel: We celebrated, just like everyone else. The Christmas and the Thanksgivings and the Easter holidays and all stuff and we celebrate everything and we have company. Anyways, it'd be better celebration than it is now because you go to some of your neighbor's house and your relative house and all you'll have eats and drinks and all stuff as that, and they would come to you. But now it's not that. You stay to your house. The next one's stay to theirs. They don't go around like they used to. But that was just something nice to do. You go from house to house and have a slice of cake or do different things. They don't do that anymore. Cut that out completely. You might have some coming from out of town come and spend the holidays. But it's not like the people in the neighborhood would go from different one house thing.

Kate Ellis: But that's what it used to be like? You would go from house to house and—

Audrey Metz Gabriel: Eat something or you share. But they don't do that no more. Just the very few that you used to or go you do that but not now, you don't do like these anymore. Times have changed completely.

Kate Ellis: They have haven't, they?

Audrey Metz Gabriel: I'm telling you truth.

Kate Ellis: Are you sometimes nostalgic for the way that it used to be?

Audrey Metz Gabriel: No. I don't want to go back. I enjoyed it while it was there, but since they improve, I wouldn't want to go back to the time no more. We had a hard time so I wouldn't want to go back to that no more.

Kate Ellis: What were the things that were hardest about it? What made them hard times?

Audrey Metz Gabriel: We had to walk to school. That was one of the things. I had to sit up there and strain your eyes at 10, 11 o'clock getting lesson by a lamp light. That was something hard. And just to see that you wanted go to the store, you had to walk to the store and come back and we had nobody to bring her back. My dad had to bring things back on his back with the sack and also stuff like that. That was tough. Really tough. And to see you walking, pulling the mud and everything on the school and the bus passing right by you and they couldn't pick you up.

Kate Ellis: That must have made your blood boil.

Audrey Metz Gabriel: It was slash mud. Then he hit the mud for the kids on that bus would throw spit balls at us, and walking. My mother would stand on the porch when the weather's bad and whatnot, and we didn't want miss school. And she'd stand on that porch and she'd be crying as far as she can see us.

Kate Ellis: Really? Watching you have to walk.

Audrey Metz Gabriel: And the others passing by sailing in the bus. I didn't have no bus 'til— I was out of school when I had a bus and I think my two sisters out of school and they had a bus. I think just my niece and nephews got some of the bus. I've never ridden a bus.

Audrey Metz Gabriel: And when you put something on the table, you'll cook a nice big part of everything and if it's something that you didn't like, you would find something on that table to eat unless you wouldn't eat. That's some of those things would happen. But right now if you don't want that, you go in the kitchen and find something else and cook for yourself, or you wouldn't even cook that. You cook what you like or some of that stuff. But not by that time.

Audrey Metz Gabriel: My mother fix a big pot of beans and rice and some salt meat, stewed chicken and make some biscuits or some dinner rolls or whatever she do anything. And you sit down at the table and eat it, or find something. Several menus where she got that, you eat it or else you don't have nothing to eat. She not going to take you out, say make a sandwich for you. She say eat what's there. And I appreciate that. I enjoy that. As for being forced by the kids these days, they'll come in and say you want that and give me two, three dollars and going to the hamburger stand, and they gone. That's right.

Kate Ellis: I want to ask you something that can be a sensitive topic but as far as those hard times, one of the things that I'd like to know more about is more about how Whites and Blacks got along during that period and how White people treated Blacks.

Audrey Metz Gabriel: Well some of them are good. Yes, we had some good White neighbors and we had some different things but there's so many things that you couldn't in the business form and you couldn't go into their businesses because they cater to White only. The water fountain was White only, all different things like that you see. You couldn't go in there. But from our neighbors and for people around there, we had good people.

Kate Ellis: Can you tell me about your neighbors? Did you live in an area that was mixed race?

Audrey Metz Gabriel: Yes.

Kate Ellis: You had White neighbors and Black neighbors? And what was the livelihoods of the people of those neighbors? Both White and Black.

Audrey Metz Gabriel: Some of those White kids played with us because, some of Landry's then we go to some of their children. Wayne Landry was a mortician. He's dead now and he had his sister and all them. We would play with those kids and we had Mrs. Joe, I forgot her last name, that's her husband's name, Mr. Joe. And his family and they were White. They lived on Landry farm. We played with them. E.G. Landry and then we got the Landry on Landry shop. Anything over there.

Audrey Metz Gabriel: The Landry restaurant on 14, we played with them. We would go there, we'd go there to get corn or to do all kind. We'd play in the barn. We would play with those guys. We were small but you had your share of segregation among people. You would go to the stores, you couldn't, certain stores and certain things you'd go, whatnot. They wouldn't let you try on different things in the stores to see if it would fit you and all kinds of things like that. Just had nitpicky things. It was kind of rough at times.

Kate Ellis: So you had just been talking about how you played with White neighbors and now did you say Mr. Joe's, they were White neighbors?

Audrey Metz Gabriel: They lived on the Landry's farm. And the kids would play with us all the time.

Kate Ellis: They lived on the Landry's farm. Did they—

Audrey Metz Gabriel: Lived on the Landry's farm to work on, working up here. You know how you have the farm houses, like each plantation. Each farm owners have several houses and the house, the people that live on the farm to work.

Kate Ellis: That's interesting to me 'cause sometimes I'm wondering if people forget that there were poor

Whites who worked on land.

Audrey Metz Gabriel: That's right. They sure did. And they were nice people.

Kate Ellis: They were? So you played with the kids. But you went to different schools.

Audrey Metz Gabriel: We all went to segregated school. We had to go the Colored elementary, White elementary, the Colored Black, the elementary White, that's what they call it at that time. Colored. So when I graduated from high school, you see every time they had that grade was Jeanerette Colored High and that's what they call it. JCHS, Jeanerette Colored High School. We were the first, my class was the first graduating class.

Kate Ellis: I saw that picture you showed me and you had said that that was the first graduating class because every year of your class, it was just elementary. Well why don't you explain it.

Audrey Metz Gabriel: It was elementary. You used to graduate at the time, seventh and eleventh. And every time someone makes seventh grade in our class in school, you'll have to leave. You have to catch the bus to go to IPTS in New Iberia. But when we started school, every year, every time we made a grade, they added a grade. When we got to seventh grade, time for us to leave, they add eighth grade. When got ready for us to go to eighth grade, to go to ninth grade, they add another grade up until 1943 they started at 11th grade where they would graduate. I graduated in 1943. The first graduating class at Jeanerette Colored High School.

Kate Ellis: As you had said, there were 11—

Audrey Metz Gabriel: Girls and one boy. The boy went into service and he went in service in April, inducted him during World War II. And he went and they took him in and they mailed his diploma. And then 11 of us marched.

Kate Ellis: Together. So all girls marching. And I had asked earlier why there were so many more girls than boys?

Audrey Metz Gabriel: Boys would drop out. And it wasn't compulsory that they go to school 'til they're 16 and all like they're doing now. Dropped out when they got ready, go work in the field or they lay around and find other little jobs and different other things and stay home. They just didn't go and the parents didn't push them. But the girls wanted to go in and they went.

Kate Ellis: Was there labor— Did the boys have more opportunity for paid labor than the girls? Was there also more of an economic incentive for boys to drop out of school than there was for girls at that time?

Audrey Metz Gabriel: No, they just dropped out 'cause they wanted to. A lot of girls dropped out, like when we started in the sixth grade, we were 56, and that's what we ended up with when we got out of high school.

They dropped out. And the parents weren't pushing them to stay in school like they did before. And they didn't have the convenience and things to send them to school. And some of the kids, some of them didn't want to go to school looking worse than others and so forth so some stay home. So it was just that easy.

Audrey Metz Gabriel: Everybody didn't have opportunities like we had because we were on our own place. We didn't have to go from farm to farm, living in find places to sit with 'cause we had our own home. And my daddy would work and my mother would work and then she'd do things and keep things first and everything. We didn't have to go, if this farmer, your daddy pulled out with this farm person, you had to find somewheres else to go. But we didn't have that. We didn't have that to do. We stayed in the same place all the time. And then the house is still back there.

Kate Ellis: Your house that you grew up in?

Audrey Metz Gabriel: Yes, it's still there. And we just, my sister bought us out, but the house is still there and she rented it to somebody's else. She renovated and rented it to somebody's else.

Kate Ellis: I was going to ask, how did your father get the land that he had in the first place?

Audrey Metz Gabriel: He bought it.

Kate Ellis: He bought it?

Audrey Metz Gabriel: Oh yes, he bought it.

Kate Ellis: When he was young?

Audrey Metz Gabriel: He bought it, I think my mom— You see it was a family land. His daddy had the land. And he had his sisters and his daddy bought it, his sisters and brothers. And we stayed there 'cause all of them going, except him, stayed. And my daddy bought in '37, my daddy bought all their sisters and brothers out. That where was ours.

Kate Ellis: But am I right that it was unusual that your grandfather would've been able to purchase land?

Audrey Metz Gabriel: Things were so cheap. It's a lot of people had land in those days, but they lost it because they didn't keep it up and whatnot and everything. And the White man ended up having it.

Kate Ellis: I'm sorry, they weren't?

Audrey Metz Gabriel: They didn't—

Kate Ellis: They lost it because?

Audrey Metz Gabriel: They lost the land some kind of way by not being able to keep it up or make the payments on it and whatnot and everything else. And the White man end up with it. They swallowed them in.

Kate Ellis: So the Whites just—

Audrey Metz Gabriel: That's why they end up with more because they were able to, the Black man wasn't able to keep his land because he couldn't make all his payments and whatnot and everything. And he lose his can trying to harvest it and whatnot 'cause he didn't have the right kind of equipments and whatnot all then. And the White man was able to buy 'em off.

Kate Ellis: So the Black man just didn't have the resource?

Audrey Metz Gabriel: The resources to keep his work going. The resources, equipments and whatever not.

Kate Ellis: And your father, your family was able to do that?

Audrey Metz Gabriel: My dad kept all that they had and passed to the children after they died. And all my other aunts and uncles had moved out of town, different place and all, after they married. So we stayed there and live at the place. And so my daddy bought them out and it's still there. It's still there.

Kate Ellis: Just up the road.

Audrey Metz Gabriel: Passed the Landry's, going this way. Past the Landry's Seafood on the left-hand side.

Kate Ellis: How far are we from Landry's Seafood?

Audrey Metz Gabriel: Not too far.

Kate Ellis: Oh, okay. We just drove by there last night. I'm still getting the lay of the land.

Audrey Metz Gabriel: So you just go this way, you go 318 and you make a right. And Landry's is on that side.

Kate Ellis: Of the four lanes?

Audrey Metz Gabriel: Before you get there. And our property and everything's right around the corner. You see my brother bought— You see my daddy bought the family property and my uncle from New Orleans had the next spot where my brother bought that from him. So we got the whole spot. My brother has one and his son, his house is there and his son. My brother dead, but his wife live there still.

Kate Ellis: Getting back to what you were saying earlier about playing with the White kids. So there were kids who went by you in school, on the bus, who threw spitballs at you. But you also had White kids that you

played with?

Audrey Metz Gabriel: In the neighborhood, we had a lot of White friends. Oh yes.

Kate Ellis: Was there ever a point at which you got to a certain age and stopped being friends? When the White kids and the Black kids stopped being friends?

Audrey Metz Gabriel: Not those that we knew of. The few that was around us. No—

Kate Ellis: You were always friends.

Audrey Metz Gabriel: We're always their friend. I go back to E.G. and them now. They know me, this is good and everything. E.G died, but his family, his children are there. I think his wife's still living and whatnot and all those. We go there and then the Landry's would live by our house, the two-story building. Wayne died, he's a mortician. He died. And anyway, he would see me, he would speak to me.

Kate Ellis: He'd see you?

Audrey Metz Gabriel: Oh yes, he'd speak to me, Hey Audrey. And he'd talk to me and go and everything. And his sister live in Franklin and she, we went to the body and everything when he died. And she came up to me and hugged me and talked. And oh, the Dareeses, oh we had some good friends there. The Dareeses.

Kate Ellis: The Dareeses?

Audrey Metz Gabriel: Yes, they're two family of them. O'Neil Dareese had the grocery store and his brother, Lordis would work the farm.

Kate Ellis: Lordis?

Audrey Metz Gabriel: They work the farm. And they were backed on this end of us. And we go to the store and Mr. O'Neill give us candy. He and my daddy were like that.

Kate Ellis: They were close?

Audrey Metz Gabriel: Oh, there was some good people. And they were so nice. And the kids, we all, and I see those kids right now. So one of them will come, one of the daughters have Williams Tire Center and some other girl lives in Franklin. Some of their daughters working, I even know— Their daughters call, Hey Miss Audrey, whenever you see them, anything. We see them all there. They were nice. There's some other White people that was real nice. From the grocery store, we go by our grocery store from here and we didn't have enough money, he let us have it anyway. And y'all go ahead on home now, I'm going to give y'all those extra pennies. Mr. O'Neil. He was so sweet. Oh, he was sweet.

Kate Ellis: This is what's interesting to me is that, and maybe you can sort of help shed some light on this for me. I've heard some terrible stories about what Whites have done to Blacks in this area.

Audrey Metz Gabriel: Oh yes.

Kate Ellis: Things we haven't even talked about yet. But I'm sure you well remember or had perhaps documented yourself since you've been documenting the history of this area, and yet there also seem to be so close relationships that go way back between Whites and Blacks. So I don't know. I'm just wondering if you can talk to me more about—

Audrey Metz Gabriel: It's such a mixed emotion. That's why you guys said.

Kate Ellis: Yeah, it just seems complex to me. And it's something that actually Michelle, one of the other interviewers and I have talked about a lot like, what's going on here?

Audrey Metz Gabriel: I know they had the Guillotes and another set of Darville, Dareese, another brother and his family used to live up on this end from us. And Mr. Honor told Guillote that was his family. We got along good with those people and we still see some of them, speak to us and we speak to them and we pass a conversation. Everything. When we were small, we had no problem. But that was just those people, our neighborhood people. Those were in the surrounding neighborhood, from not too far from us, walking distance you would say. And it was nice. We had no problem with those people. But it's so many things that people has done to other people and mean things and everything. You don't even want to hear about it.

Kate Ellis: Well, I would like to hear about it if you'd be willing to tell me.

Audrey Metz Gabriel: It's so many things, different people who has gotten killed by Whites and some of them have gotten sent to jail for things that they didn't do and all sort of stuff as that. It has happened.

Kate Ellis: Would you mind telling me a couple stories?

Audrey Metz Gabriel: I better not.

Kate Ellis: Really?

Audrey Metz Gabriel: Yeah, because it just, it's something, it's a man. It was a man. Don't write this down. It was a man had one time, the White fella used to like a good-looking Black girl and it was another—