

William Jefferson Clinton History Project

Interview with

Jewel Dean Moore
Hope, Arkansas
29 November 2004

Interviewer: Peggy Lloyd

Peggy Lloyd: Today is November 29, 2004. Peggy Lloyd is interviewing Jewel Dean Moore, Hope, Arkansas. Tell me a little bit about your background. What was your maiden name and who were your parents?

Jewel Dean Moore: Sherman and Ethel Cox.

PL: And you were born in the Hope area?

JM: Right—Hempstead County, between Hope and Washington.

PL: Okay. Was your father a farmer?

JM: Yes.

PL: You married at a young age. Who was your first husband? Tell me about that.

JM: My first husband was Lester N. Watkins. He was twenty-three and I was seventeen. We married in 1939.

PL: What did you do after you married? Were you working?

JM: No. I guess you could say I was a housewife. I didn't work. He was a service station and grocery store attendant. They sold gas and groceries at the store.

PL: And later he worked at the Southwest Proving Grounds.

JM: Yes.

PL: When did the Proving Grounds start?

JM: I really don't know. I would say probably 1941.

PL: Okay. What did he do out there?

JM: I think he was a surveyor. I'm not really sure.

PL: Later he was drafted into the army, right?

JM: That's right.

PL: Tell me a little bit about his military career and what you did during that time.

JM: When he was drafted, he was sent to Camp Maxey in Paris, Texas. After his basic training was over, which consisted, I suppose, of eight weeks, a friend of mine whose husband was in the same company—we went to Paris and stayed there for the remainder of the time they were there, which was approximately a year. We both had jobs in a large grocery store. Unless they were on duty, after their basic training was over, they would come in and stay with us at night. We had an apartment. It was a very happy time, considering.

PL: Who was your friend?

JM: Neva Baker.

PL: And what was her husband's name?

JM: Ferrell [Thomas Ferrell Baker, also known as "Ferrell Baker"] Baker. He was also in the army.

PL: Yes.

JM: He was also in the same division. I don't remember what division of it.

PL: But there came a time when they shipped out?

JM: Yes. They left on the same day, but Ferrell Baker was sent to the European part of the conflict, and my husband went to the Pacific. They separated at that time.

PL: What did you and Neva do?

JM: We came back to Hope. I went to work shortly thereafter at Ward Four Food Store.

PL: Ward Four Food Store. Tell me a little bit about the store. Can you describe it?

JM: Yes. At that time, it was a very attractive store. It was large. It had a glass window all across the front. It was on the outskirts of town. It wasn't in the most desirable of neighborhoods, but it was a good location for a grocery store. They had a very good business. A lot of it was to the black [population], but we had a lot of white customers, also.

PL: What kind of staff did they have at the store?

JM: There was a market, and Mr. [George] Griffin was the market man. The two Mr. Cassidys, Calvin and [James] Eldridge, were the owners, and myself and the delivery boy, Chester.

PL: Was Mr. Griffin the butcher?

JM: Yes.

PL: And the two owners were Calvin and Eldridge Cassidy.

JM: Yes, that's right.

PL: They were both Cassidys. What was their relationship to each other?

JM: They were cousins. I don't know if they were first or second [cousins], I just know they were cousins.

PL: And they were in partnership together in the grocery business.

JM: Yes. That's right.

PL: Did they live on the premises?

JM: Eldridge Cassidy—there's a small house—I'd say a four-room house—adjacent to the Ward Four Store. And, I mean, it was very close proximity. That is where he and his wife, Edith [Grisham] Cassidy, lived.

PL: And what about the other Mr. Cassidy?

JM: Mr. Calvin Cassidy lived—I don't know where he lived—quite a ways from the store.

PL: Did they both spend all day at the store?

JM: Yes. Sometimes Calvin Cassidy would not be there. He had other business, and, for the most part—he was out occasionally.

PL: And what was Eldridge's job?

JM: Just clerk—wait on customers and whatever needed to be done. Now, Calvin Cassidy would also wait on customers, but he also worked in the office. He [took care of] the managerial part.

PL: Did he do the books, and that sort of thing?

JM: Yes, he did. And Eldridge Cassidy clerked.

PL Well, you could characterize Calvin, then, as the dominant partner?

JM: Yes, I would say so.

PL: How long had they been in business when you went to work?

JM: Actually, I don't know how long they had been there. I just know that they had an established clientele. I really don't know how long they had been there, but I think for four or five years, something like that.

PL: You mentioned their clientele—was this in an area that was largely black at Hope?

JM: Yes, it was.

PL: What street were they on?

JM: North Hazel.

PL: North Hazel.

JM: Yes.

PL: So most of their customers were blacks who lived in [the area].

JM: I would say so. They had more black customers than white, although they did have some very good white customers who came from other parts of town just to trade there because they liked the friendly atmosphere and the service. And they also did a credit business. Most of these people had accounts, and they would pay by the month.

PL: What was your job there?

JM: I was just a clerk. I did what was necessary. I just waited on customers, mainly.

PL: Were you the cashier as well?

JM: Yes.

PL: And you were the *only* cashier.

JM: Yes.

PL: Now, when we talked earlier, you mentioned that a Mrs. Ames had spoken to you when you first started there. Who was she and what did she . . . ?

JM: She and her husband lived across the street in a really nice home. She just told me [when I was twenty or twenty-one at the time], "I think you ought to think about going to work there. There have been a couple of girls who have worked there, and they were not able to stay because Mrs. Cassidy would make it so

unpleasant that they had to leave,” or had run them off, or something to that effect.

PL: This was Mrs. Eldridge Cassidy.

JM: Yes. And I laughed and said, “Oh, that doesn’t bother me. I get along with people very well. That’s no problem. I have no problem with that.” Now, little did I know . . .

PL: How well did you know Mr. Eldridge Cassidy?

JM: I didn’t know him at all. I didn’t know any of them, as a matter of fact. You know, I knew of them, but I didn’t know any of them personally.

PL: How long were you there before difficulties began to arise with Mrs. Cassidy?

JM: That I can’t tell you either. It was probably less than a year. I really don’t know.

PL: Did she come into the store very often at that time?

JM: She would come into the store, but not as often as she did after she became—what is the word I want to use? After she became infuriated with me—when she confronted me and asked me to leave and I didn’t—then she came every day and took her seat at about 3:00 in the afternoon on one side of the store. There she sat until [it was] time for her to go on duty at the hospital with her patient. Up until that time, she would come in to get some groceries or something like that. She was very friendly and nice.

PL: Okay. So you had been there about six months, you think, before this trouble blew up?

JM: Well, maybe six months. I really don’t know. It might have been less time than that, Peggy. I just—I had been there quite a while.

PL: What was your impression of the Eldridge Cassidy family?

JM: Well, I really thought nothing about them, to tell you the truth. They were just a man and his wife. I didn't know anything about their history. Calvin Cassidy was a very well-known businessman in Hope, and very likable. Eldridge Cassidy was likable, and so was she, for a while.

PL: Did you know their daughter?

JM: No, I did not know Virginia.

PL: So you didn't know her at all?

JM: No, I didn't. I just knew they had a daughter, Virginia, and they would speak of her often. Actually, it was because of Virginia that we had this conflict and confrontation.

PL: Tell me what happened.

JM: Well, I suppose Virginia was in Little Rock in nursing school. At that time, the trains would stop at Hope. And I'm still not clear—I don't think Virginia was on this train, but she was coming home—whether to stay or go to work in Hope. But she was sending her trunks, and they had come in on the train. The train station was just probably three blocks from Ward Four Food Store across the tracks. Anyhow, she had called—she knew they had come. And, at that time, all the grocery stores and privately owned stores closed on Wednesday at noon. So this was on Wednesday, and she called, and it was close to closing time. Edith called Eldridge and said, “I want you to send Chester up to the station to get Virginia's trunks. They've come in.” I heard his conversation, and he said, “Well, honey, it's almost closing time, and Chester is on a delivery. We're going to close in

twenty or thirty minutes. I'll go get the trunks myself." So all the customers had just practically left. It was closing-down time, waiting on Chester to get back. As I said, the window all across the front was glass. So we were standing there looking out this window, and she whizzed by in the car. Well, it made her mad because he didn't send Chester out after the trunks right then, and he didn't go himself. And she went up there herself and got the trunks. That's when she became enraged. The next day, she came over. I had no idea anything was amiss. She said, "Jewel Dean, I'll take you home this afternoon." I always walked. I didn't live too far. I was living with my parents and they lived not too far away. That's where I was staying at the time. I said, "Okay." Had I known, I never would have gotten into the car with her. On the way there, she informed me that she did not want me to come back to work the next day. I said, "Why? I thought I was doing a good job. Everybody is pleased with me." She said, "I don't like Eldridge to be nicer to someone than he is to Virginia and me." In other words, because she saw us standing there at the window looking out, it enraged her because he didn't immediately go to get the trunks. She said, "He had time to stand there and talk to you, but he didn't have time to get the trunks." That was it. So I went to see Calvin Cassidy that night and told him what had happened.

PL: That very night?

JM: That very night. Neva Baker went with me. She was related to the Cassidys herself.

PL: I didn't know that.

JM: Yes.

PL: What kind of relation was she?

JM: I guess Calvin was her second cousin, or maybe her first. I suppose Eldridge was, too. Anyhow, he took it rather lightly, and he said, “Oh, don’t worry about that. You just come on back to work.” In other words, that was kind of the norm for her, he thought, and that it would all blow over. So I told him, “All right,” and that’s when she started coming over there every day, and she would look at me. She had really black eyes, and she would just—oh, stare right through me! When I would see her coming, it got to the point that I would just have a nervous chill.

PL: How old a woman was she at the time?

JM: Well, to me she was old, but actually she wasn’t. [Laughs] She was probably in her late forties then. I really don’t know. One day after that, she—Calvin Cassidy was not there. The market man was there and her husband and myself. She got over behind the counter where I was, and she was a large woman. She was supposedly helping wait on customers, and she would go by me and purposely bump into me and call me some terrible names, some of them I’d never heard before. I was just a little naive country girl. A few years later, it would have been a different story, but I guess it’s just as well that I didn’t say or do anything. That night I went back to see Calvin Cassidy. Neva Baker went with me then. I said, “Mr. Cassidy, I cannot come back. I have just about had it.” He said, “Well”—and I guess he could tell, too, that things had been deteriorating. He knew she came over every day and sat and stared at me.

PL: She came to the store every day?

JM: Yes. After she had ordered me not to come back, she came every day. He said,

“Just don’t come to work tomorrow and half the next day, too. I’ll talk with Eldridge tomorrow. Either I’ll buy him out or he’ll buy me out, and I’ll have her put under a restraining order.” So I think after the second day he came to my parents’ house and told me to come back to work, that he had bought Eldridge Cassidy out. And I never saw her at the store again after that. She did not put her foot in the store, nor did I see Eldridge Cassidy.

PL: Did they continue to live in the house next door?

JM: They continued to live in that house, yes. They were still living there when I no longer worked there. They were there for quite a while.

PL: This was before they bought the house on Hervey Street.

JM: Yes, that’s right. I suppose they bought the house on Hervey Street when they moved from that house. And I suppose that Virginia came home a few days later, since her trunks had come in, but I never did see her or anything. I didn’t know her at all.

PL: So it was strictly with her father and mother that you had any kind of relationship?

JM: That’s right.

PL: What was your overall impression of the family before this conflict?

JM: Well, really, he was just another man and his wife, as far as I was concerned. I didn’t know that they really had problems. Later, I read in Virginia’s book that there were problems—her mother was trying to accuse her daddy and had mad fits, and treated him terribly. But I didn’t know all of that at the time. They were just husband and wife, as far as I was concerned. And Mr. Calvin Cassidy was a

widower. He was a very nice man, and both men were very respectful to me at all times—very nice.

PL: So this relationship of which she was so jealous was just a figment of her imagination?

JM: I really don't know what—I don't think she—she was a person who liked to be obeyed, and when he didn't immediately jump when she called, and then she saw that we were just standing there doing nothing—I really don't know. It has always puzzled me. He wasn't exactly being nice to me just because we sat in there and had a few idle moments, but, nevertheless, it enraged her to the point that she caused him to lose a prosperous business. That's what happened. And she also caused me to almost have a nervous breakdown because I was terrified of her.

PL: When she had you in the car, when she first revealed herself to you, what was your impression of her then? What was her . . .?

JM: I was totally shocked. I was shocked. I had no idea. I couldn't believe it. My imagination—it's just something that I had never dreamed that—she just took me completely by surprise, I guess you could say. And, I guess, she fully expected me not to come to work the next day, but I did, and that infuriated her. She was a woman, I suppose, who liked to be in control and was used to people obeying her slightest command. You didn't cross her, in other words, or you were in trouble.

PL: You mentioned that she wrote you a letter. When was that?

JM: It was before they sold out, in the time that she was very unhappy that I was there. That's when she wrote the letter. I kept that letter for a long time. I finally threw

it away. I don't even remember what she said in the letter.

PL: Was she sort of repeating some of the statements she had made to you in the car?

JM: I really cannot tell you what was in that letter. I'll be perfectly honest. I don't remember what she said, but it was rather—it was a comprehensive letter. I wouldn't say that it was a threatening letter, but it wasn't a nice letter, to say the least. I can't remember any of the exact words.

PL: How long did you remain at the store after Eldridge Cassidy and his family departed?

JM: I don't know that, either. I stayed there until Calvin Cassidy sold the store to Leroy Spates. I don't really know—probably a year or something like that.

PL: Then you moved on to another position?

JM: I went to work for Perry Moses at another grocery and market store uptown.

PL: And when would that have been, about 1943?

JM: About 1943. Yes. I worked there until my husband was discharged.

PL: Did you ever have any connection with the Cassidy family then?

JM: No, I didn't, except one time, my sister-in-law, Hazel [Watkins] Underwood, was a nurse at Julia Chester Hospital, and she lived there. She had a room at the hospital, and she wanted me to come and spend the night with her. I said, "No, I really don't want to, Hazel, because Mrs. Cassidy is on duty out there at night. I don't want to see her. I don't want to be around her." And she said, "Oh, she won't bother you. My room is at the other end of the building. You don't even have to *see* her."

PL: Did Hazel know about this situation?

JM: Yes, she knew about it. Yes. She knew why I didn't want to—why I was afraid of her and didn't want to stay. I did go ahead, but there was no lock on the door. So I took a straight chair that was in the room and put it under the doorknob because I just had an uneasy feeling. And, so help me, that night in the middle of the night, a noise woke us up. Hazel got up and went to the door, and who should be standing there but Mrs. Cassidy! She said, "Oh, I'm sorry. I got the wrong room." Well, this was all the way in a completely different part of the hospital from where her patient was. Now, why she was there? Maybe she had the wrong room. I'll never know. But, needless to say, I didn't go back to spend the night anymore.

PL: Now, this was at the old Julia Chester Hospital?

JM: At the old Julia Chester Hospital. I'll never forget that.

PL: Mrs. Cassidy wasn't on staff there. She was a private . . .

JM: She was a private nurse. Yes. But she was trying to push that door open. Why? I don't know. [Laughs] I won't ever know. I have forgotten a lot of things over the many years. I'm now eighty-three, but all of this is just vivid in my memory as if it happened yesterday.

PL: She absolutely terrified you?

JM: Yes, she did. I was scared to death of her, and I think I had good reason to be.

PL: How long did it take you to get over this episode?

JM: Well, I'm not going to have the vapors or anything, but to this day, talking about and thinking about it, I get very nervous. It bothers me to this day. I don't get all upset, and I'm not the kind of person to get—as I said, go into—but I still

remember it so well, and it still can make me very nervous to talk about it or think about it. It's one of the most unpleasant—I had a very pleasant, wonderful life, but that was a very unpleasant experience that I'll never forget.

PL: Who did you talk to about this?

JM: Oh, I talked to my parents and my sisters—especially my sister, who is five years younger than I am. She's the only one still living who probably remembers all this. My friend, Neva Baker, has died. Mr. Calvin Cassidy has died, and all the customers that I can recall, especially the white customers. They have all died. My sister, Mary, is the only one who can verify what I'm saying. I wish I could have done this interview when Neva Baker was still living because we were very close friends, and I stayed with her a lot during this period of time. Of course, Hazel, my sister-in-law knew about it. And I wrote my husband a letter because I was afraid that Mrs. Cassidy—she was so vindictive, that she might write him a letter telling him—I didn't know what she might tell him. Or someone else might write him a letter and tell about the unpleasantness. I didn't want him to be worried, so I immediately wrote him a letter and told him what was happening there—what was going on.

PL: What was his response?

JM: Oh, he was very angry about it and told me to forget it, not to worry about it—which was easier said than done, of course. But he was very supportive.

PL: What did you think, years later, when Bill Clinton rose to prominence as governor and then as president?

JM: I had mixed feelings. He had nothing to do with any of that. He was not

responsible. I was proud that we had someone in Arkansas who rose to be in these positions, but, at the same time, I was never able to support him, really and truly, because of his grandmother, I suppose. [Laughs] And he had—he was blameless, and so was his mother [Virginia]. She had nothing to do with this.

PL: Well, Mrs. Cassidy certainly sounds like an extraordinary personality.

JM: She was quite—years later, when I heard she'd had these terrible strokes and all, I thought, "Yes, she probably went into a rage." I'm surprised she didn't have one back in 1942.

PL: How would you describe her at that time? You said she was a large woman?

JM: She was very large. She had jet-black hair. I think, perhaps, it had a little help from the bottle, but I don't know that. Her eyes were black. She was not an unattractive woman. I wouldn't say she was attractive. She always wore a blue cape lined with red over her white nurse's uniform. She always looked very nice when she'd come by on her way to work. She wore her hair very short, combed back into kind of a pompadour, I guess you'd call it. It was always as black as midnight.

PL: Did you ever see her with her grandson, Bill Clinton?

JM: No. As I said, our paths never crossed after that. I just never did see her, period.

PL: With the conclusion of the war, what did you do?

JM: I went back to being a housewife. When my husband was discharged, I left my job and was a housewife and started raising a family. We built a small store in front of our home, and I ran that for a few years. But I was more or less just a housewife and mother.

PL: Until his death.

JM:: Yes. After his death, I went to work as secretary . . .

[Telephone Rings]

JM: . . . at Garland Elementary School, and worked there for twenty-five years until I retired.

[Tape Stopped]

[Jewel Dean remembered and recounted another bitter episode.]

JM: . . . tirade, and Calvin was not there.

PL: Okay. You say that you remembered another episode that occurred during this period of time. Tell me about that—the Sunday morning episode.

JM: At that time, they would open the store, I suppose, at about 7:00 on Sunday morning, and we would stay open until 10:00. Mr. Calvin Cassidy was not there that morning. This was—I think it was two or three days after she told me not to come back to work, and I had continued to come back. So on this Sunday morning there were customers in the store. I can see her now. She put her hands on her hips, and in the middle of the store in a very loud, angry voice, she said, “All right, Jewel Dean, I’ve warned you and I’ve warned Eldridge. If you continue to come, you will just have to suffer the consequences.” That was the only time that I made a reply to her. I told her that—I don’t remember exactly what I said, but I was very angry. That’s when she wrote the letter. I was very humiliated. There were people in the store, and I was so embarrassed and humiliated.

PL: What did the people in the store do?

JM: I imagine they were quite astonished and surprised. [Laughs] I was too embarrassed to even look at anyone to see how they reacted.

PL: And she would only make these public displays when Calvin was out.

JM: Never when he was there. Never.

PL: And you said that it was about this—shortly afterwards that she wrote the letter?

JM: Yes. And her husband never opened his mouth. He never tried to calm her down. He never . . .

PL: Was he present at that time?

JM: Oh, yes, he was present.

PL: What did he say or do?

JM: He did not say or do *anything*. He was afraid to.

PL: Did he apologize to you later on?

JM: I don't think he ever did. No.

PL: And this was within a few days after the conversation in the car?

JM: I would say this was a couple of days—two or three.

PL: And she would continue to come back to the store?

JM: And I continued to come back to work. It was after this, when I continued to work, that she came behind the counter and would bump into me and say all these awful things.

PL: How long did this period last before you went to Mr. Calvin Cassidy the second time?

JM: Well, when she came behind the counter that time, I went that night. I didn't come back to work for a couple of days.

PL: You mentioned that you returned to being a housewife after your husband returned from the war, and later you worked as a school secretary and raised a family.

JM: Yes.

PL: Then you married a second time, didn't you?

JM: Yes.

PL: Tell me a little bit about that.

JM: Oh, this was—I'm trying to think how old I was. I married Norman Moore. I had never even dated anyone or gone out after my husband died. I guess it had been twenty-five years when I went out with Norman. We saw each other for a couple of years before we married. He lived for five years after we married.

PL: And you've spent your entire life in Hope.

JM: Yes. Hope and the Washington area.

PL: Is there anything else that you'd like to add?

JM: I don't think so.

PL: I think that just about covers it. Thank you.

[End of Interview]

[Transcribed by Cheri Pearce]

[Edited by Rebecca Willhite]