

# Mississippi Oral History Program

Simpson County Historical and Genealogical  
Oral History Project

An Oral History

with

Havard McDonald

Interviewer: Joe White

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*An Oral History with Havard McDonald, Volume 1217, Part 18*

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## Biography

Reverend Havard McDonald was born to Jake McInnis and Willie Bell Collins McDonald near Magee, MS in November 1942. McDonald is one of eight children; two others died. McDonald attended Jamesville School, south of Magee, until the third grade. He started the fourth grade in the Magee Consolidated School. He graduated from McLaurin Attendance Center. McDonald left Magee in 1962 to hitchhike to Hammond, IN. He learned that his father was staying in Chicago, IL and traveled from Hammond in order to meet him. McDonald worked in small factories while living with his father in Chicago. He married Winnie Lee Weathersby in Chicago in February 1963. They had four children together. McDonald worked for MagnaTek (Universal) for ten years, starting in the mid-1960s, until getting laid off during an economic slump. Havard and his wife bought McBroom, a record store, together and converted it into a Christian book store in 1981. He is also the owner of Douglas Diamonds. McDonald started preaching in 1988. He preached in Fanning, MS and Pelahatchie, MS before preaching in Hattiesburg. McDonald has fifteen grandchildren and still lives in Magee, with many of his children and grandchildren close by.

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AN ORAL HISTORY  
with  
HAVARD McDONALD

*This is an interview for the Mississippi Oral History Program of The University of Southern Mississippi Simpson County Project. The interview is with Havard McDonald and is taking place on September 9, 2003. The interviewer is Joe White.*

**White:** —is Joe White. Today is Tuesday, September 9, 2003. This interview is conducted under a grant from the Mississippi Humanities Council as a part of the oral history project directed by The University of Southern Mississippi. Today we are interviewing Reverend Havard McDonald at his jewelry store in Magee. Reverend McDonald, do you have a middle name?

**McDonald:** No, I do not.

**White:** No middle name?

**McDonald:** No middle name.

**White:** You know we've run across that with a lot of folks. I think that must be a Simpson County tradition or something.

**McDonald:** That's very possible.

**White:** Certain people have had to adopt a middle initial due to government requirements or social security, but you haven't run into that problem yet, huh?

**McDonald:** No, I have not. I've received mail with Havard P. McDonald, and I tried to figure out what the P was for. (laughter)

**White:** Person maybe.

**McDonald:** Beats me.

**White:** When were you born?

**McDonald:** I was born November 21, 1942.

**White:** And you were born in Simpson County, I believe you said.

**McDonald:** In Simpson County, yes, I was, (inaudible).

**White:** And what was the name of this community?

**McDonald:** I guess it would be called the—I have (inaudible)—(laughter) the Siloam(?) Community as well as I can remember, or Usbahoa(?) at that time.

**White:** Usbahoa.

**McDonald:** In that time it was called Usbahoa.

**White:** I remember hearing that name, but I certainly don't know how to spell it. That is close to Magee.

**McDonald:** It is. It's somewhat centered between Magee and Mount Olive.

**White:** Just south of Magee then.

**McDonald:** South of Magee.

**White:** Your father's name was?

**McDonald:** Jake McInnis.

**White:** And where was he born?

**McDonald:** He was born in Jeff Davis County.

**White:** And what was his occupation?

**McDonald:** He was a farmer.

**White:** Did he have any brothers and sisters that you—

**McDonald:** A whole slew of them.

**White:** A whole slew. (laughter)

**McDonald:** Yes.

**White:** It sounds like you can't name them all, then.

**McDonald:** I would have a time, but I could name a few.

**White:** Would you name a few of them, if you could remember?

**McDonald:** He had a brother named Joe McInnis, Claude McInnis, Jake McInnis, which was my father, Tom McInnis, to name a few. That's just a few.

**White:** That will help genealogical researchers. Most of them, I presume, grew up down in Jeff Davis County, too, then. Is that right?

**McDonald:** (Inaudible)

**White:** And what was your mother's name?

**McDonald:** My mother's name was Willie Bell McDonald, or Collins was her maiden name.

**White:** Collins. And where was she born?

**McDonald:** She was born in the Magee area, too. Her original birth was in Simpson County in the same area, in the Mount Moriah(?) area.

**White:** Close to the Covington County line.

**McDonald:** Close to the Covington County line.

**White:** And I'm jumping ahead here right now, but while we're naming names, I'd like to get your wife's name.

**McDonald:** My wife's name Minnie Lee Weathersby McDonald.

**White:** And she is from Simpson County, too, probably, isn't she?

**McDonald:** She was born in Hinds County.

**White:** She was?

**McDonald:** Yes, she was. And raised in Simpson County.

**White:** Right. Well, I knew most of the Weathersbys were around here.

**McDonald:** Yes.

**White:** We'll get back to your marriage and everything later. The first thing I'd like to talk about, though are your early years. Were you raised by your mother?

**McDonald:** I was raised by my mother and my grandfather in my early years. My mother married when I was about six years old. We grew up in the Mount Moriah area, the Usbaho area, during my younger years. Don't have lots of knowledge about that, but I can remember moving to the Skiffer(?) Community where we now live, when I was around the age of four or five years old.

**White:** And what was your grandfather's name?

**McDonald:** My grandfather was named Old Man Dot(?) Collins. He was a history himself. He lived to be 102 years old.

**White:** Is that right?

**McDonald:** Lived to tell me a lot of things about back in the early 1900s and his early life. He said he come to Magee, Mississippi, from the Shubuta area in 1911. He used to dip turpentine and ride dummy lines and chip turpentine, ride dummy lines, and worked in the Eastman Gardener(?) camps, and things like that. He shared with me the first time he saw an airplane come over. Things like that in life, how he used to float logs down the Chickasawhay River.

**White:** Did he, by any chance, work for Great Southern Lumber Company?

**McDonald:** I don't believe so. I've never heard him use that name, and it could have been that, but I know that they logged a lot, and Eastman Gardener was the name that I most remember hearing.

**White:** Reason I ask that, my grandfather was a camp doctor for the Great Southern Lumber Company, and he worked at a lot of the turpentine camps around here from Simpson on down to Covington County.

**McDonald:** Well, it's very possible that they could have been in the—

**White:** And I have an idea a lot of those companies were interconnected at that time because they were cutting all the big woods out here, all the virgin timber that had never been cut out before. And your grandmother's name was?

**McDonald:** Jerusha Magee Collins(?). She was a Covington County native. Her home was down around Collins, Mississippi.

**White:** Do you have any memory, or do you remember your great-grandparents' names?

**McDonald:** No.

**White:** I told you we were going to dig into some memory today.

**McDonald:** They had died long before my mother was born. They had already passed. And I can only remember just a few of the ones that my grandfather made mention of. And I can't call their names right now.

**White:** Did your mother have any brothers and sisters?



**McDonald:** She had two sisters. Only three girls was born to my grandfather, and I was his first grandson.

**White:** Is that right?

**McDonald:** So we were always very close.

**White:** What were your aunties' names?

**McDonald:** I have one auntie that's named Annie Ruth Collins. She died at an early age. And the other one is named Martha Lee Collins Hall.

**White:** Did they live in the home when you lived there with your mother?

**McDonald:** When I was small, I can remember when they lived together, in my first four to five years old. When my mother married when I was about the age of six years old, they separated at that time.

**White:** And did you move with your mother when she married?

**McDonald:** Yes, I did.

**White:** Where did you move? Somewhere else in Simpson County?

**McDonald:** Yes. We moved in the Bouie Community. The Bouie Community is kindly southwest Simpson County. We were sharecropping at that time with a man that I call my white daddy, Mr. Herbert Berry(?), who's a good friend of mine. He's been a lifelong friend until he died. We sharecropped there for a number of years when I was small.

**White:** Is that toward Highway 13 from Magee?

**McDonald:** It is.

**White:** Down [Highway] 28.

**McDonald:** Go out [Highway] 28 and go across in the lower Simpson County area.

**White:** I thought I had that community right, but I've never been exactly sure where it is. I've probably driven through it without knowing where it was.

**McDonald:** If you went out [Highway] 28 to Gary's(?) Furniture and take the [Highway] 541 road south until you get to the—what's the name of that road? I'm trying to remember the name of the road. But it leads into the Bouie Community, or either you go [Highway] 28 to the old Welch's Store and take a left and go (inaudible).

**White:** Right. Yeah, I know where that is. Where did you first go to school?

**McDonald:** My first school was Jamesville School. It was a rural school. It was out in the country in what we call now the Skiffer Community. That's [Highway] 541, south of Magee.

**White:** Is that Jamesville?

**McDonald:** They called it Jamesville, Jamesville School.

**White:** You remember who the principal was when you started there? I'm going to put your memory to a serious test tonight. (laughter)

**McDonald:** That's not too hard. The teacher was Miss Lovie Payne(?), and the principal was—got to think of it in a minute. I know the name. His family still live in the Magee area.

**White:** Well, if it comes to you—

**McDonald:** Mr. Lenny Payne(?).

**White:** It came back to you quickly then, didn't it? Did either one of them know how to use a paddle?

**McDonald:** Whoo! Don't even talk about that. (laughter) That was the rule. There was no time-out, and there was no standing in the corner. That was the rule of discipline in that day and time. Spare the rod; spoil the child. The only problem I got is it doesn't work now too well. (laughter)

**White:** It didn't get spared very often back there, did it?

**McDonald:** Not often.

**White:** I've heard that from a number of people, some of whom bemoan the lack of discipline in schools today, and others who say they're glad (laughter) that it doesn't exist any more.

**McDonald:** Well, it worked with me.

**White:** It worked for a lot of people. How many years did you go to that school?

**McDonald:** I went to the Jamesville School till I finished the third grade. I started fourth grade in the Magee Consolidated School when the school consolidated back in the 1953-54 era.

**White:** In town here.

**McDonald:** In town, yes.

**White:** And did you graduate from the school here in Magee?

**McDonald:** I graduated from McLaurin Attendance Center. That's one thing I think we should share on the tape. I've heard many children talk about many things, and they say everybody must have lived ten miles from the school, but I can remember when we walked, my little sister and I, daily we would talk to school and back home, regardless of the weather, regardless of whether it was hot or cold. We walked from the Bouie Community to the Jamesville School, which was some three or four miles. We would go through the woods and the hills and the hollows and make it to school, and in the evening time we'd walk back, and all of the children that was along the road, we just went in groups until all of the groups run out. It was a routine thing.

**White:** Well, at that time the schools definitely were not integrated in Simpson County.

**McDonald:** No, they were not.

**White:** There were no school buses for the black schools.

**McDonald:** When I started to the Magee school, that was when I started riding the school bus, but I had to walk almost a mile to catch that bus because we lived back in what we called the boondocks, back in the pastures.

**White:** And the rural students had no buses at all, did they?

**McDonald:** In that time, no, the rural schools never had a bus.

**White:** And it was during the [19]50s that most of the schools consolidated, and they closed a lot of these small schools (inaudible).

**McDonald:** I believe it was in [19]53-54, all of the country-life schools, Jamesville, Macedonia, Zion Hill, all of the little, country schools like that was closed, and everything moved into the cities.

**White:** How big was the school, and how many students went to it when you first started?

**McDonald:** Maybe 100, 125.

**White:** Pretty big school.

**McDonald:** We only had two to three teachers.

**White:** Pretty big school. That's a lot of students.

**McDonald:** I might be overestimating that, but when I was small, (laughter) it looked like a lot. So may not have been that many.

**White:** Was the school, were there any lunchroom facilities provided then? You brought your own lunch (inaudible).

**McDonald:** You carried your lunch.

**White:** What kind of lunch did you carry?

**McDonald:** Don't talk about that. (laughter)

**White:** Oh, come on. Let's talk about it. (laughter)

**McDonald:** I often make the statement to people that when we were small, of course food supply was not as plentiful as it is today. So I often share with them that I ate so much rabbit and rice when I was small that I hop when I walk.

**White:** Rabbit and rice.

**McDonald:** Rabbit and rice, but we had balanced diets. In the winter months, that would be when you would kill your hogs and things like that, and you might would share meat. But then you would have your spring and summer months where you ate your syrup and biscuit or whatever you could get a hold of.

**White:** Well, you mentioned the magic word biscuit. I'm kind of running a survey. Did your mama make good biscuits?

**McDonald:** She made some pretty good biscuit. Hey, I learned how to do it, too.

**White:** (laughter) Is that right?

**McDonald:** Yes, sir.

**White:** Still making the same kind of biscuits, huh?

**McDonald:** I can still make some pretty good biscuits.

**White:** Well, I want to know this. Did you put your finger down in that biscuit and add something to it every once in a while?

**McDonald:** Make that little imprint in there. You always done that. (laughter) That was part of the technique. (laughter)

**White:** I've actually talked to two people who didn't know you were supposed to do that.

**McDonald:** Oh, yes.

**White:** Did you put syrup in it or sugar in it?

**McDonald:** Syrup most times. When we had syrup, we used syrup, but we also learned to take sugar and put it in water and boil it to make what we called sugar water.

**White:** I remember doing the same thing. I think my grandmother taught me how to do that, too.

**McDonald:** Yes.

**White:** You mentioned your sister. How many brothers and sisters did you have?

**McDonald:** They's eight of us, five boys and three girls. Could you cut your tape off? (brief interruption)

**White:** We were talking about your family, your immediate family. You said there were eight.

**McDonald:** Yes. There was eight, five boys and three girls.

**White:** And you were the firstborn?

**McDonald:** I'm the oldest one of all. My mother has two that's dead. There was a total of ten of us born in that family. One boy is dead, and one girl. The boy next to me and the baby girl.

**White:** Can you name them all, starting with yourself, here now? You've already named yourself.

**McDonald:** Well, myself, yes, I can remember that. The boy that was born next to me was named Clyde Earl. My sister next to her is Martha Sue. The next one born was a boy; his name was John Edward McDonald. Then we have a brother named Louis L. McDonald; sister named Jeannie Belle McDonald. We have a brother named Alan McDonald, Gersin McDonald, and my little, baby sis, which was named Jan.

**White:** She'll always be your little, baby sis, too, it sounds like (laughter) from the tone of your voice.

**McDonald:** She works with me every day.

**White:** What was it like growing up in a family with that many children?

**McDonald:** In the [19]50s it was rough. I never spent a lot of my teenage years with my family. I left home when I was fourteen years old, and I guess I've been pretty much a man ever since then. I left home when I was fourteen, and I went through some family problems. And I went to stay with my grandma and grandfather. And at that time my grandfather was down on the bed, sick. And my grandmother was a very, very high-rate diabetic.

**White:** This is about the grandmother and grandfather that you lived with when you were very young.

**McDonald:** Yes. At the age of fourteen I went to stay with them, and she was a bad diabetic, and she was unable to work. And that year my grandfather got down in his knees, and he was not able to work. So I taken on a sixty-acre farm and three adults at the age of thirteen. I haven't had time to be a boy; never have been a—

**White:** Knew something about work, then, didn't you?

**McDonald:** I know how to work. I've always done that.

**White:** Did you work mostly on the farm, or did you have another job, too?

**McDonald:** I've never had one job since I left home. I've always had (inaudible).

**White:** I don't believe you have one job here on this street, today, either.

**McDonald:** I still don't.

**White:** Judging by the stores that you own and manage here.

**McDonald:** I worked the farm in the daytime. In the evening times went to school. I worked at night catching chickens in the poultry industry, played football and basketball and maintained a B average. And I don't understand these children today. I have a lot of problems.

**White:** I'm sure you do have problems understanding them. I want to know one thing. How many chickens could you hold in each hand when you were catching chickens?

**McDonald:** We would make it a habit; you carried about eight or nine in one hand, and the remainder—because you had to carry thirteen or fourteen. So you'd carry five or six in this hand.

**White:** You'd balance it out.

**McDonald:** Yeah.

**White:** And a lot of folks are not going to know why you're carrying a bunch of chickens in your hand. Can you—

**McDonald:** They had to be transported from the house to the chicken [truck].

**White:** Put them in the metal cages that go on the truck.

**McDonald:** Put them in the cases. As you drive up and down the highways now, you still see chickens that's transported in cages on trucks. They have to get in there. You can't just drive them in there. You have to catch them and put them in there.

**White:** Caught by hand most of the time.

**McDonald:** Caught by hand. They're still caught by hand.

**White:** I know a couple of people who used to try to use these wire hooks, coat hangers and things to try to catch them, and they would usually get beat very quickly by people who'd catch them and knew how many they could hold between their fingers without losing any of them while they grabbed the others.

**McDonald:** Four, three, two, and one.

**White:** You know exactly how many fit between your fingers.

**McDonald:** Still remember. The rest of them in this hand.

**White:** Was that with a local poultry place here?

**McDonald:** It was. I worked for the co-op for a long time. All the way through my high school years, I worked with the co-op here in Magee. I was once asked—a number of years ago I done an article here in town that come out in the local paper entitled, "You Can Make It If You Try." And one of the things, I met a young man in the corner store around there, and he said something to me as if I had always been where I'm at. And I asked him what did he do for a living. He said he caught chickens. And I said, "Well, there's nothing wrong with that. I used to do that, too." He looked at me and said, "You what?" I said, "I used to catch chickens, too." He said, "Hmph. I always thought you was born with a golden spoon in your mouth." And I said, "No, sir. I probably come up harder than you did and probably had farther to come from than you." And I started mentioning the number of places that I had worked here in town. And one of the places I had worked a long time was at the co-op. That was the way I put myself through school.

**White:** And you weren't able to go on to college then right after school, either, were you?

**McDonald:** I'd had no help. I'd been on my own all my life. I didn't really know how to get there. No one to see. I knew nothing, really, about college except it was a high level of education. I worked my way through high school. I'd been on my own ever since I was seven or eight grade. So I really, really lost out on that.

**White:** Did you live with your grandparents until they died?

**McDonald:** I lived with them until I finished high school, and whenever I finished high school, I had to make a decision of what I was going to do with my life. So July the thirteenth of 1962, I left Magee, hitchhiking, going to Hammond, Indiana. I had \$6.35. I hitchhiked from Magee.

**White:** And why were you going to Hammond, Indiana?

**McDonald:** Try to start a new life, and whenever I got that life started, I sent back and got her.

**White:** Why Hammond, though?

**McDonald:** I had an auntie that lived there. That was the onliest relatives that I had in the North, and I left hitchhiking.

**White:** And somewhere in here, I believe, you met your wife. Since you sent back for her, (laughter) after you got to Hammond.

**McDonald:** We grew up in the same community. We went to the same church, and we graduated from the same school.

**White:** What church did you go to?

**McDonald:** Our church home is Pleasant Grove in the Skiffer Community, out at the same place where the old Jamesville School was at. I can remember when they moved from Hinds County, the D'Lo area, and moved into our area back in the early [19]50s, [19]51 or [19]52. In [19]52 she was just a small, little, plump, pretty girl, even then. She's very nice.

**White:** Believe you had your eye on her early, then.

**McDonald:** I had my eyes on her early. (laughter) My problem was to get her to look at me. (laughter)

**White:** You had a little trouble with that?

**McDonald:** Had a little trouble with that. (laughter)



**White:** Was she the only young lady you dated while you were in high school?

**McDonald:** No, sir. There were others, but that was always my favorite. I couldn't date her because she always turned me down. (laughter)

**White:** Well, we're not going to talk a lot about Hammond, Indiana, because this interview is basically on Simpson County, but we do need to talk about your experiences there and how you ended up getting back to Simpson County.

**McDonald:** I went to Hammond in 1962, and I arrived there July 15, I believe it was, on a Sunday afternoon about six o'clock. I thumbed that distance in that three days. And the nation was in what you might call an economic slump, and there was not many jobs in that area. So I worked and searched around, and I found a few jobs here and there, nothing that was substantial. And in November, I believe it was, of that same year, I found my father, a man that I'd never known or had never been around. And he lived in Chicago. So I left from Indiana and went to Chicago. And there I was able to find work. I stayed with him a few months until I kindly got a job and got my feet on the ground. And I sent back and got her.

**White:** What were you doing in Chicago?

**McDonald:** I done, first starting off, small factory work. Most all of it was factory work. I've done a number of little things, just working my way up, but it was all factory work.

**White:** But it paid a lot better than salaries in Mississippi, at that time, I would imagine.

**McDonald:** Better than the dollar an hour that we were making here. Better than the dollar an hour.

**White:** Yeah. And when and where were you married?

**McDonald:** We were married in Chicago in 1963, February the sixteenth.

**White:** Well, you got a better memory than I have. My wife accuses me of always forgetting our anniversary, and I see you remembered yours.

**McDonald:** Quite well, it's right after Valentine's Day. (laughter)

**White:** Well, my wife's birthday is two days earlier than mine, and I keep forgetting it. I'm in trouble all the time.

**McDonald:** You in trouble.

**White:** Of course I forget my birthday, too, which might explain a little bit.

**McDonald:** That would explain.

**White:** How did you guys and when did you guys get back to Simpson County then?

**McDonald:** Well, we moved back to Simpson County Labor Day Weekend in 1966. We had three children at that time. My wife couldn't wait to get back for some reason or another.

**White:** Well, let's name these three children.

**McDonald:** Our oldest child is named Renette McDonald(?). She's a Hayes(?) now, Renette McDonald Hayes. She named my first [grandson] after me, Havard Jr. My next child that was born in Chicago was named Delphine McDonald Johnson(?), and I have a baby son named Leonard K. McDonald(?). He's presently a student. He was a student at one time at USM [University of Southern Mississippi], and he is presently a student at William Carey [University].

**White:** With you, I understand, huh?

**McDonald:** Yes. At the same time that I was in William Carey, he was at (laughter) USM. And I often tease him; I had a higher GPA [grade point average] than he had. (laughter)

**White:** Fellow students then.

**McDonald:** Yes. I was able to get a grant because I was in college and had a son in college at the same time. I was able to get a grant.

**White:** Finally benefitted from one of those programs, huh?

**McDonald:** Yes.

**White:** All right. You moved back to Simpson County then. And what did you do here?

**McDonald:** MagnaTek, which we know as Universal, had just began. Industry had began to move into the South, which was not here when we left, going North. But MagnaTek had come back, and I come back, and we come back on the Labor Day Weekend. All of our furniture and everything was still in Chicago, and I went that Tuesday after Labor Day and applied for a job and got it.

**White:** That was about a year after MagnaTek opened, I think, wasn't it?

**McDonald:** I don't remember exactly what year it opened.

**White:** Sixty-four, sixty-five, I think.

**McDonald:** But I know that was [19]66, the fall of [19]66. Matter of fact this Labor Day Weekend was kindly our returning anniversary from Chicago.

**White:** And you worked, I believe you worked offshore for a while, too, didn't you?

**McDonald:** I did. I worked at MagnaTek for approximately ten years. And then [19]75, we had the slump in the economy, again. And I got laid off, and whenever I got laid off, I had to do—I'm a survivor. I know how to survive, so I went back and went into the woods. Like I said, I've never had just one job. So whenever I was working at MagnaTek, I also had done pulpwood and logging and stuff like that on the side, whatever it took to provide for a family, whatever it take to make it. I'd haul cans or pick up glass or haul watermelons, a truck patch, along with my regular job. I'd never had one job. Now, that have had its bad points, too.

**White:** I'm sure your wife would say it has its bad points, too. (laughter)

**McDonald:** It has its bad points, but still, it's a point of survival. So when MagnaTek laid us off in [19]75, I done logging for almost a year because by that time I had all my own equipment. And well, I say equipment. We had trucks and saws and tractors and things like that, so we went to the woods. And it was in the fall of [19]75 that things had got rough. I'd made some business decisions that didn't pan out as good. I'd bought an eighteen-wheeler and decided I didn't want to go in trucking. And I had went back to the woods, and we kindly had some obligations that we needed to meet, and I didn't have the money to do it. I put a fleece out before God, and I told him that I needed a way to make \$400. I needed \$400 to pay this debt off. I had prayed until he had given me the confirmation that I was going to receive it. How I didn't know. I looked in the mailbox on side the road, and all this stuff. And it hadn't showed up. So one day we were in the woods, working, and my wife stopped me and said, "You know, we've got that bill to pay. What we going to do?" And I cut my saw off and set it down on the log and told her, I said, "You know, I don't really know what I'm going to do. But I do know that one thing have happened. I talked it over with my maker, and he assured me in my heart that he was going to get it. How, when, or where, I don't know, but I have the peace in my heart that it's going to come to pass." I was not a preacher at that time, but I did believe God. When I got home—I think it was the same evening. My grandfather was living with me. That was one greatest thing about my grandfather. I lived with him when I was small, and when he was old and not able to take care of himself, I brought him home.

**White:** You returned the favor then.

**McDonald:** I returned the favor. I brought him home with me. And anyway he told me that they was a man had been calling me that wanted me to go to some place called offshore. I'd never heard of offshore oil drilling. I never knew anything of that nature. And so not long after I'd been home, he called me again, and I never knew

him, never heard of him or anything. But he asked me if I would go offshore to work with him because he had to hire a black at that time. And I was a little bit reluctant to do it, but he kept trying to talk me into it because another man that I had worked for, named Bill Holbrook(?) at MagnaTek had recommended me. He said, "Hey, we can do it." And anyway, to make a long story short, what convinced me of it; he said, "I promise you one thing that if you'll go, you'll make \$400 a week." And I said, "Well, let me think about it. Talk it over with my wife."

**White:** Four hundred dollars sounds like what you were looking for.

**McDonald:** That was the answer. (laughter) That was the major decision. So I decided to do it. If nothing else come out of it, I would receive what I had asked God for. And I wound up staying there thirteen years.

**White:** That four hundred dollars was a week and not just the money right then.

**McDonald:** Not just the money. I remember we worked a whole year. I remember the first year that I left home when I went to stay with my grandparents, I picked five bales of cotton by myself. I was a cotton picker.

**White:** How many hundred pounds a day could you pick?

**McDonald:** You know what a bale of cotton is?

**White:** Yes.

**McDonald:** I ginned a bale every week. You put 12[00], 1300 in a bale. So I'd just pick whatever I needed to have that bale.

**White:** The reason I ask that, we talked to one interview subject from down here in Magee who said his wife could out-pick him. It just embarrassed him so badly (laughter) until they got married. And he said he really had to fight to beat her, and he beat her one time, and then he retired from cotton picking. He just let her have it.

**McDonald:** I could pick 300 and better a day, no problem.

**White:** But that wasn't what you wanted to do the rest of your life, I don't believe, was it?

**McDonald:** No, sir. Whenever I graduated high school, that was the onliest factory there was in Simpson County, was the Avery Body Plant. And I think they was paying a dollar an hour, and even at that time, I was making more than the adult men that was working at Avery because I would work. I had a good rapport with the white community, and I never was without work. I always loved the work, and I was a hard worker, and people like Mr. Carrol D. Horn(?) and Mr. Dickey(?), and the people at the co-op, and even Mr. Roach at Mr. Roach's Cabinet Shop—you may never know

him. I was his boy. He hired me one day; I went to him and asked for a job one day. Thank you, Lord. I applied for a job, and he said he didn't have anything. And then he said, "Wait just"—(End of digital file named tape one, side one. Beginning of digital file named tape one, side two.) He give me a pick and a shovel and a stick and walked away. At 10:30 he come back and looked at the ditch and looked at where I started and said, "I believe I'll give you a dollar." (laughter) I worked for him most of the summer that year, but that was kindly a routine. I could always get a job; I could always keep a job. Most of the peoples in town always looked out. Now, I'll mention one thing. You mentioned us moving back from Illinois, back to the South. After finding out the city and how it worked and how the people, how they think and how they do things, even though my wife wanted to come back much, much badder than I did, I still felt that I could do better in the South, even as they say as prejudiced as it was or as low income as you may seem to think that it was. I felt like I could make it better in the South because I knew people when I was growing up here that would give me a hand and that helped me, that would help me along. That had been one of the stories of my life, why I'm able to have as much as I have, because I found somebody by the name of Mr. Sidney Davis(?) of Peoples Bank that took me under his arms and carried me. He still carries me, even though he's dead. He still carries me.

**White:** Well, it's nice to know a good banker. That's for sure. (laughter)

**McDonald:** It's good to get in with a good bank. That come through old Dr. Weathersby. Dr. Weathersby saw me, my wife's uncle. He saw me, and he saw how I would work because I was working in MagnaTek and cutting logs in the daytime and working at MagnaTek. And he said, "That old boy'll work!" So if I needed a loan and I didn't have anyone to really turn to, I went to him and asked him if he would help me, if he would do it. So he introduced me to Mr. Davis, and he cosigned for me for one loan. That was all I needed, just one chance. My (inaudible) that thick now, but I taken that one.

**White:** Nice to have that first chance, too, isn't it?

**McDonald:** (Inaudible) give you one chance. Give you one chance.

**White:** Well, you've worked yourself up into a number of businesses around here. You're, I guess, best known as the owner of Douglas Diamonds, the store we're sitting in here in Magee. You own a number of others, but one question, but one question comes to mind. Why is it known as Douglas Diamonds?

**McDonald:** That was the name of the business when I bought it, and I was not trying to make a name for myself. It's not about me. I was just merely trying to make a living. And it was going to cost me a thousand dollars to change everything over into McDonald. And I said, "Well, I could put that thousand dollars on something else." (laughter) Why spend all that in a name when I'm just merely looking to make a living?

**White:** Is that the business that you started with here, the jewelry store?

**McDonald:** It was the name of the business when I bought it.

**White:** No. I mean, was this your first business in Magee?

**McDonald:** No. No. The Christian Book Store was the first one. My wife bought that. We bought that. I bought it for my wife and started off in it; it was a record shop at that time. It was McBroom's Record and (inaudible).

**White:** I remember that now. I had forgotten that. Sure did.

**McDonald:** We bought that out, and immediately my wife started converting it from a record shop into a book store. Everything she made, everything she could get, she would, instead of buying records, she would just pay the record bill and take the extra and put it into religious material. And we worked it like that until it grew enough. Well, it still didn't grow enough to take care of itself, but come the time that we separated it and taken the records out of there. And I had bought Douglas Diamonds, and we put the records over there. We still had not started preaching at that time.

**White:** What year? Do you remember the year that you bought the Christian—

**McDonald:** McBroom?

**White:** McBroom?

**McDonald:** That was in 1981. I was in the oil field.

**White:** That wasn't a good year economically for Simpson County, either, if I remember.

**McDonald:** No. But I was in the oil field, and it didn't have effect on the oil patches—we called them.

**White:** If I remember, not only did the international oil embargo come along, that was about the time that Universal laid off a group of workers, or they went on strike. There was some sort of—

**McDonald:** Strike.

**White:** Strike, that's what it was around 1981. And I know it hurt a lot of businesses at that time around here.

**McDonald:** Yeah. But at that time one of the greatest things—and I suggest this to many people. If you're going to start a small business, it's good that you can start it and not depend on it for an income because many times—if we had to live out of it—

and still the same today. If we had to live out of it, we would still have a difficult time. But by me being able to work in the oil field and working the seven and seven and the fourteen and fourteen, I was able to flip-flop back and forth. But that was really my (inaudible).

**White:** And reinvest.

**McDonald:** Yes.

**White:** Which is what it takes to get businesses—

**McDonald:** You have to.

**White:** —off the ground.

**McDonald:** She grew it from \$250 to what you saw the other day.

**White:** Yeah. And expanded into a dress shop, also. Looked like a nice, healthy dress shop next door.

**McDonald:** With some more investments. (laughter)

**White:** Yeah. Well, that's always part of it, is it not?

**McDonald:** Investments is part of the deal.

**White:** It is part of the deal, and that's the reason a lot of small-business people don't make it, is they don't know how to reinvest to help it grow.

**McDonald:** You have to grow it.

**White:** And to feed it.

**McDonald:** When I bought this, I only had three counters, the three right there on the end. And they weren't as stocked as they are now.

**White:** Who did you buy it from?

**McDonald:** I bought it from Martha Rushing(?). Martha Rushing had bought it from Mr. Shelton Douglas Simmons(?).

**White:** That's where the name comes from. (laughter)

**McDonald:** That's (inaudible). Yeah.

**White:** And at some point or other in the midst of your entrepreneurial activities here, the Lord spoke to you, I think, didn't he?

**McDonald:** Yes, sir. That was in 1988. I got saved in 1983, and even though I'd been a church worker and in the church all my life, basically after I got old enough to go because when I was young, we were too poor to go. And I started back to church after we moved back from Chicago in [19]69, year of [Hurricane] Camille. We started back to church and got back involved in church, and that year, [19]79, [19]80, my wife got saved, and then after that I got saved. And looked like everybody in the community was going to get saved there for a while. But make a long story short, I always had a special calling in my life; didn't know exactly what it was or what to do with it, but there was always something special between God and I. And I think I probably voiced that in saying the fleece that I put before the Lord, about the \$400. But I started, instead of starting a ministry in church, I started a ministry on the drilling rig, and I started doing ministry in the prison facility here in Magee at the CWC [Simpson County Community] Work Center. We would do ministry there on my days off. On the rigs we had developed something that no one have ever heard of. We had church services on the rig.

**White:** I would imagine that's pretty rare.

**McDonald:** That was very, very rare. Very rare, but we done it. We done it. And it caused some problems, but we still done it. We cut off all those dirty movies on the television. Said, "This is our rig. We don't have this." And we got into a little bit of trouble, but we done it. We done it anyway. But during that time when I was working in the offshore, I got up the third Sunday in July in 1988, and reviewed the Sunday school lesson at my home church, at Pleasant Grove. And I told the class after I got through reviewing; I said, "If I had time, I'd preach this message to you today." And my pastor got up to do the pastoral review, and he said, "Well, you said it. You got fifteen minutes. You going to preach the morning service." (laughter) I said, "OK, Lord." I panicked for just a minute, and a voice within me said, "You can do it. You can do it." So I preached the morning service. And when I went back offshore I put a fleece before the Lord, and I told the Lord, "If this is the course you want me to take, my conference, the (inaudible) Conference will convene the third week in August. I'll submit my name and my interest in being a minister and being a pastor. One thing is sure with God; I won't be a jackleg. I won't carry the title, sit in the pulpit, pray, and pay. If I'm going, I'm going to go all the way. If not, if that's not what you have for me, I stay in the oil field." Well, needless to say, here I am in that conference. I received full-time ministry, and that never passes a church. He give me two churches because my pastor was also the elder, and he knew my abilities because he had been working with me for eight or ten years.

**White:** You were ordained—I don't know how the CME works, but you're ordained by Pleasant Grove?



**McDonald:** I was licensed a number of years back, and then after that, they taken me in under missionary rules. I started preaching when I was a boy, sixteen years old when I preached my first sermon.

**White:** Is that right?

**McDonald:** And I preached it for about three or four years, and it just didn't seem like it was going anywhere, and I quit. But it didn't quit. If it's there for you, it don't give you up. It followed me thirty-nine years.

**White:** And I believe it inspired you to go back to school, did it not?

**McDonald:** That was one of the commitments that I had to make whenever they taken me into the conference. They let me come in under what they call missionary rules, but I had to stand on the floor before that congregation and vow to the conference that I would go back to school. So I started college at forty-five.

**White:** You went to Copenhaver-Lincoln first, I believe you said.

**McDonald:** First started at Copenhaver-Lincoln. I started taking night classes, and I would take two classes a week, Tuesday night and Thursday night.

**White:** Here in Magee?

**McDonald:** Here in Magee. And after taking most of the subjects that they had here that would help me, that would give credit to me, I left and started going to William Carey in Hattiesburg.

**White:** Driving back and forth to school.

**McDonald:** Pastoring and working here every day.

**White:** But you didn't try to do an oil-rig job at the same (laughter) time with that, did you?

**McDonald:** I was scared to go back. (laughter) Scared to go back.

**White:** I don't know when you would have worked school in, if you'd tried to oil rig and run your own store here.

**McDonald:** But that was in the commitment between God and I. I told you I put a fleece before him that if I was going to pastor, it would have to be full-time. I didn't want it part-time because that would just mess up life. And so—

**White:** You pastored two churches to start, you said?

**McDonald:** Yes.

**White:** What churches were those?

**McDonald:** I pastored in Fanning, Mississippi, and Pelahatchie, Mississippi, one Sunday at one place and the other. First Sunday at Fanning, second Sunday at Pelahatchie, back to Fanning, back to Pelahatchie. I done that for seven years.

**White:** Both of them in Rankin County, huh?

**McDonald:** Both in Rankin County. Then we were moved to Lauderdale County. I stayed in Lauderdale County three years, and presently I'm in Forrest County, pastors in Hattiesburg.

**White:** So you're still driving to Hattiesburg then.

**McDonald:** Still drive to Hattiesburg. Hattiesburg is a piece of cake compared to Lauderdale. (laughter)

**White:** I would imagine so.

**McDonald:** Yes, sir.

**White:** Are you taking some courses at William Carey now?

**McDonald:** No. I run into some conflict of having so many things to do. So busy involved in the community in ministry and in business that—I won't give you my real reason for it, but I don't try to take classes now.

**White:** You have how many children?

**McDonald:** Four of my own and one that we kind of taken on, on the side.

**White:** Well, we believe we let you have three up North, and then you moved back, and I think we had three children the last time you and I were talking about it earlier on the tape.

**McDonald:** Yeah. One was born in Magee General Hospital in 1972.

**White:** Name?

**McDonald:** Leonard McDonald.

**White:** OK. I want to make sure nobody is left out here now.

**McDonald:** If I leave out—I call my god-daughter—out, she would be upset with me if she ever heard the tape. Her name is Gloria Hobbs(?). One day I was working in the community, and her father Lorenzo Jones(?) and I were both hauling wood. We were both loggers along with other occupations, and he got sick. And I carried him to the VA [Veterans Administration] in Jackson. He shared all of his business with me on his way up there, and before I got him to the hospital, he made me promise that if he didn't make it back, that I'd take his baby daughter and raise her along with mine. And I agreed with him. I didn't think anything would ever happen to him. But I left that weekend, going back offshore, and that Sunday night, I left at eleven, and he died at one.

**White:** He didn't make it back out of the hospital, huh?

**McDonald:** He didn't make it back. So after that was over, I went back and told Gloria and her mother the vow or the promise that I'd made to him. And I told her if she chose to accept it, that I was willing to take her. This is not in legal papers or anything like this. This is on commitment of a dying wish, and I've had her ever since. She finished high school, and I bought this store, and she started at this store, and she still works with me, twenty years.

**White:** That's good.

**McDonald:** Still with us.

**White:** How many grandchildren do you have?

**McDonald:** Fifteen.

**White:** Can I put you on the spot and ask you to name them now? (laughter)

**McDonald:** Yes, you could. (laughter) My oldest daughter has four children, and one dead, and I might have to think a minute to try to get the first one, the one that's dead. But she have Jeremiah. All of them is Js, Jeremiah, Jasmine, Joel, and Jalynn(?). And I can't remember the other one—Victoria.

**White:** Victoria.

**McDonald:** Victoria was the little girl that died. My oldest son, Havard Jr., has six children. My daughter-in-law had the audacity, me teasing her, she named my first grandson Havard the third. (laughter)

**White:** Well, it didn't start with a J, did it?

**McDonald:** Didn't start with a J. But [he] has April, Havard the third, Melissa, Sonia, Joseph, and Josh. That's his six. My next daughter has three childrens, Tevin(?), Michael, and the little girl is adopted. Her name is Nikky.

**White:** Nikky.

**McDonald:** And my adopted girl, I call her my adopted girl. She has two. First one's name is Curtis, and I get these nicknames mixed up. (laughter) But the little boy, we call him Hooter. (laughter)

**White:** Hooter?

**McDonald:** Yeah. His nickname is Hooter.

**White:** Well, that's all right. I call my grandson Boo. (laughter) That sounds kind of like Hooter, I think. (laughter)

**McDonald:** My baby son has one, and he's three years old, and his name is Quan.

**White:** Quan. Do most of your grandchildren live around here? Do your children live fairly close?

**McDonald:** Too close. (laughter)

**White:** Remember, now. This is going on tape. (laughter)

**McDonald:** That's OK. I have one that lives in Garland, Texas. That's my baby girl. She live in Garland, Texas, and the others live in the community. And my oldest son lives so close that we can hear them fussing out the front door. (laughter) That's why I say, "Too close." (laughter)

**White:** Well, that would be a little too close, then, wouldn't it?

**McDonald:** And my baby son still lives with me. So that's close, close, close.

**White:** Yeah. I could see what you mean about a little too close. (laughter)

**McDonald:** Too close. (laughter)

**White:** I've still got one at home right now. I know what you're talking about.

**McDonald:** Bless your heart. (laughter)

**White:** Well, Simpson County has enjoyed having you. Have you enjoyed having Simpson County? Was it a good place to live?

**McDonald:** I would sum that up in a little story that I said when we went over to one of the churches in the community to welcome a convention to town. And I expressed it in this way. I've been a lot of places, and I've seen a lot of faces, but I've never

seen a place just like this place. This place is Magee, Mississippi. This is my hometown. I been to Israel. I fished in the Sea of Galilee, caught three little fishes. I've been in South America. I've played with the kangaroos. But out of all the places I've been, and out of all the places I've seen, there's still not another place just like this place. This place is Magee, Mississippi. This is my hometown.

**White:** I believe you've said that before, haven't you?

**McDonald:** I have. (laughter)

**White:** That sounds like a good way to end this. Do you have anything else you'd like to talk about?

**McDonald:** Not really.

**White:** It's been a very good interview, and I appreciate your taking the time.

**McDonald:** There's one thing that I would like to say. I encourage as many peoples as possible to get as much education as you can because the opportunities that was available to me and the peoples that helped me may not be there to hold someone else. I have three businesses in the city of Magee. I have three houses in the city of Magee, and we have a sixty-eight acre spot of land, and all of our family lives out in the country, but it haven't been a easy road, but don't tell me you can't make it because you can make it if you really try.

**White:** That's some good thoughts. It really is. I appreciate you taking this time.

(end of interview)