Mississippi Oral History Program

Simpson County Historical and Genealogical
Oral History Project

An Oral History

with

Dolphus Weary

Interviewer: Joe White

Volume 1217, Part 29
2003

Louis Kyriakoudes, Director
The Center for Oral History and Cultural Heritage
118 College Drive #5175
The University of Southern Mississippi
Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001
601-266-4574

An Oral History with Dolphus Weary, Volume 1217, Part 29
Interviewer: Joe White
Transcriber: Stephanie Scull-DeArmey
Editor: Stephanie Scull-DeArmey

Biography

Reverend Dolhpus Weary was born to Albert and Lucille Granderson Weary in Sandy Hook, MS in August 1946. Both of Weary's parents had children from previous marriages, as well as children from their own. Lucille had two children before meeting Albert; Albert had seven children from his previous marriage. Albert and Lucille had six children together, including Dolphus. After their divorce, Lucille remarried and had two more children; Albert also remarried and had two more children – thus meaning that Dolphus has eighteen siblings. His grandfather owned a farm, and at the age of seven Dolphus began picking cucumbers; at the age of nine he started picking cotton. Weary graduated high school from Piney Woods, as did all of his immediate siblings. He attended Los Angeles Baptist College, CA on a basketball scholarship, obtained a BS in biology, and remained to get a master's degree in Christian education. After earning his master's Dolphus moved back to Mendenhall to begin his ministry work. Dolphus married Rosie in February 1970. Together they have three children, two boys and one girl. While attending the L.A. Baptist Theological Seminary, Dolphus played basketball for the Overseas Crusade Sports Ambassadors, enabling him to travel, play basketball, and evangelize in Taiwan, the Philippines, and Hong Kong. Weary's ministry work throughout the 70s, 80s, and 90s resulted in his eventual leadership as president of Mendenhall Ministries, an umbrella organization for churches throughout the region.

Table of Contents

AN ORAL HISTORY
with
DOLPHUS WEARY

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

White: —is Friday, May 9, 2003. This interview is conducted under a grant from the Mississippi Humanities Council, as a part of the [Mississippi] Oral History Project directed by The University of Southern Mississippi. Today we're interviewing Reverend Dolphus Weary at his home in Richland, Mississippi. Could you state your name, full name, please, sir?

Weary: Dolphus Weary, D-O-L-P-H-U-S, and W-E-A-R-Y.

White: No middle name?

Weary: No middle name. I always wanted one. I wanted it to be a D.

White: D?

Weary: That's right.

White: Any particular reason, or did you just like D?

Weary: It was a dream that if I ever became a doctor, I would be Dr. D.D. Weary.

White: Oh, OK. (laughter) Why not make that legal then?

Weary: That's right.

White: And when and where were you born?

Weary: I was born August the seventh, 1946, in a little town called Sandy Hook, Mississippi, outside of Columbia. Born in the home there by a midwife.

White: By a midwife. And what were your parents' names?

Weary: Lucille Granderson Weary. My father was Albert Weary.

White: What type work did your dad do?

Weary: I think my dad was a farmer and a construction worker. And the reason for that is—I have to use that terminology is—that I was born in Sandy Hook in 1946, and then a year or so later, we moved to the D'Lo/Braxton Community, so—

White: I knew we better make a Simpson County connection (inaudible).

Weary: Right. So I must have been about two years old when we moved to the D'Lo/Braxton Community. And then about two years later, my father was doing farming, and he was doing construction work. He would be gone, doing construction work, and one day he left and never came back.

White: Just didn't come back.

Weary: Just didn't come back.

White: Was he gone for days at a time or weeks at a time when he was (inaudible)?

Weary: He was gone for days at a time in terms of the work. And so from the time I was four until the time I was twelve, we lived in a community around the D'Lo/Braxton, and we were so disjointed from that community where I was born and that whole area. OK? The only time I remember reconnecting with my father was when he came home when I was twelve years old. He wanted to make sure that we, the children, were connected to his social security. OK? He wanted to make sure that all of our names was connected to his social security.

White: Right. What brothers and sisters do you have?

Weary: OK. Good question. My family is made up of five different marriages. My mom was married and had two children before she met my father.

White: And people think modern families are mixed up.

Weary: Right.

White: My family is somewhat in the same situation.

Weary: So my dad was married; had seven children before he met my mom. When my dad and mom met, my dad had children older than my mother. OK? So my dad was much older than my mom.

White: Well, he had a number of children he wanted to make sure got on his social security.

Weary: That's probably right. That's probably right. And so they were married, and they had six children, which means my greatest immediate early family was surrounded by a mother and eight children that was in the house. Then about six or so

years later after my father left, my mother got married again and had two children, and subsequently, my understanding is that my father went back to—my father got married again and had two children. So it's about twenty children, but the good news is no more than eight of us was in any one house at any one time.

White: Well, that's (inaudible). My [great]-grandfather had twenty-one children, all in the same house, (laughter) so that was a pretty crowded group, too. My great-grandfather. I'm sorry, not my grandfather. My grandfather had seven. Do you remember the names of the children who were all in the househiolod when you were living in the Braxton area?

Weary: Oh, yes. My oldest brother was named Charles, and his last name was Nathaniel. Next to him was Joe Louis Nathaniel. And then my oldest brother—and all of these are deceased now—is Albert Weary Jr. This was the first of my father's children. Then my sister's L.G. Weary Clayton(?). I have a brother in DC, Melvin Weary; then me. Then I have a sister in Grand Rapids, Michigan; her name is Cathy Weary Large(?), and I have a sister in Magee, the Sanatorium area. Her name is Patricia Weary Holloway. And then that's that immediate group. And then my mother's last two children, I have a sister in Bolton; her name is Virgie Belle Craft Harris(?). And then my brother who works for Mendenhall Ministries as the finance director there, his name is Billy Frank Craft(?). So that would make up that eight.

White: Right. That will make a very good listing—I'm glad you knew those names—for somebody doing research.

Weary: That's right.

White: Your mother obviously worked to help support a number of children there, too. What type work did she do?

Weary: Well, nine of us lived in a three-room house. When I'm speaking somewhere, somebody hear me say, "Three-bedroom." (laughter) And I have to follow that by saying—

White: Three room.

Weary: Three rooms is three rooms. My mom, we lived on my grandfather's place, you know, as a farm. He had forty acres. We lived on the place, so we basically did farming.

White: That was your mother's father's place.

Weary: Right. My mother's father's place. And she worked doing domestic work, cleaning house, ironing, cooking, and would get two dollars a day for that domestic work. Then she worked at a egg farm where she picked up eggs, and cleaned eggs, and stacked eggs. And so those were the two basic jobs that she had to help provide

some kind of money for the family. Sometimes people talk about now third-world countries where people live off $500 a year, third-world countries. I can understand that. And people who grew up in Mendenhall, Simpson County and all those can understand that because of the fact we had no house note, had no utilities, and no car and no insurance, no need for anything much. So basically we grew a lot of things, and based on that, we were able to take care of our basic needs.

White: You ate. You didn't do much traveling, though, did you?

Weary: That's exactly right because you talk about a garden. You talk about going to the store and buying salt and pepper and sugar and flour, and that's about it. You might buy some kind of meat periodically, but (inaudible).

White: If you're like my family, you probably also bought snuff while you were there. (laughter)

Weary: Well, it—(laughter)

White: My grandmother bought snuff. (laughter)

Weary: Bought snuff. No, we didn't have a snuff dipper. We had some aunts, though, that were snuff dippers or chewing tobacco with some Red Mule, but we didn't have that. So mom sort of was the stabilizer for—Mom's situation was that she smoked, and that was a real difficulty for her, but did not get into the snuff and all that. (laughter)

White: What was her father's name? Since you lived on her—what were her parents' names?

Weary: Ed Granderson and her mom was Virgie Granderson. Virgie passed away probably when we were all—I was pretty young, six, seven years old. But he lived until the end of the [19]70s, 1978. He provided that man, male image. We didn't all live in the same house. He had his own house, and we lived in this house that was on the same property, and he was the one that was really running the farm, and we worked with him in terms of running the farm.

White: Do you know how many acres he had?

Weary: He had forty acres in terms of property. We would farm about fifteen to twenty acres; about twenty acres was in farming, and the basic crops we grew, you know, of course was corn and cotton and cucumbers. Cucumbers and cotton was the basic crop we grew for the market.

White: Where did you sell those?

Weary: Cucumbers, Pinola, you know. (laughter)

White: I would hope so. (laughter)

Weary: We used to get on that old truck and go down to Pinola with those sacks of cucumbers to the cucumber vat in Pinola, Mississippi.

White: I know my Great-uncle Henry Bush ran it for a long time. I don't know who ran it before he did. I believe that was a forerunner of the Rainbow Pickle Company, but I'm not sure. It was the only place that I knew of in Simpson County where—

Weary: That's right. People came from everywhere. That was the place where you took your cucumbers.

White: Did you also sell cotton in Pinola?

Weary: That's it. It was Pinola, and I'm not sure when Mendenhall came in there. It was either Pinola or Mendenhall, and I don't remember which one that we used to take it to. But I know cucumbers was no question.

White: But you said truck. You never did use a wagon or anything. You used a truck as long as you can remember?

Weary: I think I was too young to ride the wagon. OK? I do remember my grandfather had a wagon. As I got to be twelve, thirteen—

White: I remember some of them being used up until the [19]60s in Pinola, itself, when I as there.

Weary: Right.

White: One of them was by a great-uncle of mine who I think was a little odd anyway. (laughter) But his old wagon tracks are still seen between Strong River and Pinola.

Weary: That's a good question. When was the transition? My father had an old [19]50 pickup truck, and I remember the wagon, and that transition somewhere between the time I was twelve or thirteen that he got that truck, and that was that level at which I was more involved in the whole process. Before that time, I just picked cotton and cucumbers, and that was it.

White: Well, when did you start picking cotton and cucumbers? How young were you?

Weary: I started picking cucumbers about seven or eight, out there in the cucumber patch, hearing my grandfather, yelling, "Don't step on the vines." I said, "How can

you not step on the vines? Look at all of these vines in here." And yelling to try to keep us straight.

White: If I remember rightly from my grandfather's cucumber patch, too, it wasn't exactly pleasant on your hands.

Weary: Oh, absolutely not.

White: (Inaudible) pick cucumbers.

Weary: I had a sister that stayed out of work because she would stand around and scratch and be itching, and she'd get broken out with bumps. And so she didn't have to pick them. I said, "The reason you got them because you were lazy, standing around, itching." (laughter) But that stain and that itch (inaudible).

White: I never tried that, but I wish I had now that you say it.

Weary: That's right. If you scratch long enough, man, you could have got out of the cucumber-picking business. (laughter) The worst whipping I ever received was picking cotton.

White: Is that right.

Weary: It was picking cotton. And I guess I must have been nine, ten years old. My grandfather would always tell me, "Dolphus"—you know. I'd be picking cotton and daydreaming, dreaming about one day getting out of the cotton field.

White: Dreaming about anything but cotton.

Weary: That's right, everything but cotton. So what I would do is take one of my hands and lay it on my knee and then fill up that hand with one hand and then put it in the sack. My grandfather would yell, "Dolphus, pick cotton with both hands." And then I'd start back picking cotton with both hands. And then all of a sudden I'd go back into my daydreaming mode, and I'd lay that hand on that knee, and I'd fill it up. Fill it up and then put it in the sack. And I remember him telling me about three or four times to do it. Next thing I knew I was daydreaming again and just picking cotton and fill it up, and my grandfather grabbed—I don't know how he got that cotton stalk out of the ground so fast. But he reached down, pulled that cotton stalk out of the ground and started whipping me, beating me all over my back, so much so that when I went home, my mom had to get some lard. Now, y'all don't know what lard is. Y'all don't know what lard is.

White: I know what lard is. (laughter)

Weary: But my mom had to get some lard and just grease my back down because of many whelps that was on my back. Now, today that would be called child abuse, but

then it was just a good, old-fashioned whipping. (laughter) And I bet you the next time I was picking cotton with both hands. And so I remember that distinctly. Well, I had to remember it from all of that (inaudible).

White: You didn't lose your desire to get out of the patch, though, did you?

Weary: That's right. That's right. Always still dreaming that one day I'm going to get out of that cucumber patch and cotton patch.

White: Well, you're working in the vineyards of the Lord today, so you're still in a patch, all right. (laughter) (Inaudible)

Weary: I tell you. You're probably right.

White: We'll get into that later. But when you were—did all of your brothers and sisters work on the farm in the same manner, in the fields?

Weary: Yes. And it was when my oldest brother went to Piney Woods, he would go to Piney Woods, still living at home.

White: Piney Woods School.

Weary: Piney Woods School. And I remember that was a major shift for us, and he was much older, sixteen or seventeen years old, eighteen years old. But he took a trade.

White: He went as a high school student?

Weary: Went as a high school student to Piney Woods and learned the trade as an electrician.

White: Good trade.

Weary: And started doing electrical work and started earning a little money before he went into the armed forces. One of the things he did was, because our house—I guess we're talking about mid to late [19]50s. We had no electricity for our house. This boy came home and went into that electrical pole, hooked it up, ran a illegal line to the house, and we had free electricity.

White: But you didn't have much to hook up to it.

Weary: No, no. He hooked the light in there.

White: Oh, you had lights.

Weary: No, no. He hooked up everything. He wired the house, and he was able to run a line to it and hooked it all up. And then it didn't last no longer than a month because my mom was very, very ethical and saw the fact that that was illegal, and that was wrong, and she really pushed that he would take it down. And then he then in turn, began to say, "OK. Well, you need lights." And as he was doing a little work, he started paying for us to be hooked up to the electrical system.

White: How long was it before you got any sort of electrical or gas heat in the house?

Weary: Gas heat was probably when I was a sophomore in high school. We were able to—I remember us having this little gas heater. Before then it was the fireplace and the wood stove, fireplace and wood stove. Even when we got the gas heat, it was still the fireplace and the wood stove. We did not have a gas stove and so forth.

White: Mom still cooked on the wood stove.

Weary: Mom still cooked on the wood stove.

White: All right. What did you smell when there was some good food cooking? (laughter) What do you remember smelling on that stove?

Weary: I can remember smelling both the smoke, and I can remember smelling the bread cooking. Those are things that you can, that aroma just goes through the house. But it had the little hint of the smoke. Used to come home from school, and you could smell those baked potatoes. As you walked through the door, you could smell those baked potatoes on the—

White: Sweet potatoes?

Weary: Sweet potatoes. So for us it was grab a sweet potato, grab something to drink, and go to the field. That was another thing that we had to do.

White: You did that straight after school?

Weary: Straight after school.

White: But did you all go to school then?

Weary: We all went to school, but it was an understood thing that school for us began in November. It was just a basic understood. There were times we might start school, but everything centered around the farm.

White: Now, when you said, "y'all," you mean your family?

Weary: Y'all, meaning my family.

White: Or was it the entire community?

Weary: The black community and especially those who lived on the farm, and the whole school system, educational system, man, if we'd have had a mandatory-limited number of days you could miss, none of us would have graduated because we just knew that the first part of the year was tied into harvesting. We had about ten acres of cotton, five or ten acres of cotton. We would pick our cotton and take that to the market, and then we would be hired out to pick cotton.

White: Other farms.

Weary: Other farms and picking cotton was a way of us making money to buy some school clothes.

White: When you were hired out, did you hire out to other black farms, black-owned farms or white-owned farms or both?

Weary: Most of the farms that we were hired out to—there was only one black-owned farm that I remember that we would go and be hired out to. Most of the farms we were hired out to were white farmers with black tenants living on the farm. And that's what we did most. A truck would come pick us up. I still remember riding an old truck at five o'clock in the morning to—

White: In the back of the truck?

Weary: The back of the truck to get to the cotton field by the time the sun started coming up so we could start picking cotton.

White: How long were you in that kind of deal, where you worked for somebody else?

Weary: When you worked for somebody else, you knew it was sunup to sundown. That was basic then.

White: What kind of food did you take with you?

Weary: Basically they would, most of the time, as I remember, is that they would have, most of the places would have access to some kind of grocery store, and the favorite meal was a hobo biscuit. Now, you might (inaudible).

White: I don't think I've heard of it.

Weary: You had a hobo biscuit. Cinnamon rolls we used to call hobo biscuits. I don't know where it came from, but a cinnamon roll was called a hobo biscuit. So for me it was a hobo biscuit and a piece of cheese.

White: Did you ever eat a sugar biscuit at home? That's what we did. We'd take our thumb and put it inside of the biscuit and put a little sugar in there and eat it.

Weary: We never did that. We never did that. (laughter) We took that biscuit and put some sugar in between it. Cut it open and put some sugar in between it, or we'd take the biscuits, and just carry them by themselves. Very seldom did we ever have any meat. Going on some of those trips, [Mom] may have fixed some biscuits for us to carry, but most of the time we were on our own, and we could spend twenty-five cent to get lunch and picking cotton.

White: Did they pay you by the day so you had some money on you?

Weary: Or what they'd do was they'd keep a record.

White: That's what I was wondering, yeah.

Weary: Right. If you borrowed, some people at the end of the week owed the man. (laughter)

White: Yeah. Ate and drank (inaudible).

Weary: That's right. At the end of the week, they owed the man. (laughter) So I'm saying, "Wait a minute. That doesn't make sense." Because if you started off with say, two dollars a hundred or two, fifty a hundred, and you really have to be a good cotton-picker to get a 150 pounds. A better cotton-picker is 200. A great cotton-picker was 300. I never was a great cotton-picker. My brother picked 300 several times because he'd get out there and get in these competitions, and I always wanted to pick 300, but I couldn't. One day I remember picking 170 by lunchtime, and I had 300 in sight, but I ran into a watermelon. (laughter)

White: Uh-oh. (laughter) I think I would have quit somewhere—

Weary: Look here. I ran into a watermelon, and out there under this cotton, there was this watermelon, and I had to have it.

White: It had your name on it.

Weary: It had my name on it. It was a matter of busting that watermelon and eating it. It was so good, but then for the rest of the evening, I was no good. Probably picked another fifty pounds the rest of the day, but I had my sights on that 300 and just couldn't pull it in.

White: Well, when you guys picked—I say you guys—kids picked your cotton on your grandfather's place, did you get any money out of that?

Weary: Oh, absolutely not.

White: That was part of the family (inaudible).

Weary: That was part of the family, part of the family.

White: Just expected.

Weary: Um-hm. It was an expected thing to get up and go to work, expected to do the plowing, the hoeing, expected. One of the toughest feelings for me and my older sister, we used to walk about two miles over to the 49 highway between D'Lo and Braxton, that old 49 highway. At that time it was the only 49 highway.

White: When it was gravel.

Weary: No, no. It was a regular paved highway that ran from Jackson down to Gulf Coast. It was a two-lane highway.

White: Right, the two-lane highway, right.

Weary: And we had like three acres of cotton over there, and I remember going over and hoeing that Bermuda grass and the difficulty of hoeing, and for two straight years we made less than two bales of cotton on that whole place.

White: Three acres.

Weary: On the whole three acres, so it's almost like a bale for three acres. The cost of the, for a number of things, that was a lot of hard work. You start talking about any kind of reward for that; the only reward we received is that we used to stand out in the middle of the field and count the cars. That was it. We used to argue about which car was ours. (laughter)

White: The ones going by?

Weary: That's right. When they'd go by, my sister, "Oh, that's my car." And the next one, "Oh, that's my car." Those kind of little games kept us going, working, and at the end of the day, end of the week, end of the summer, there was basically no personal reward. We know that when that bale of cotton was sold, my mom probably got something to help with the household expenses.

White: What do you remember about the food that you grew? Did you grow peas and butterbeans, things like that? Did you work in the garden?

Weary: We grew cabbage, collard greens, turnips, mustards; that was the basic leafy side of us. And then what they called purple-hull peas was a main staple. String beans, I still love string beans today. Butterbeans, I can take them or leave them.

Okra, tomatoes, that was—and then you start talking about the Irish potatoes and sweet potatoes. Those were the basic things, and then corn, of course.

White: You don't remember much meat in the house?

Weary: No. We basically would have a hog every now and then that, now, my grandfather helped us with that. And that was really neat because he had this smokehouse. So we would grow a couple of hogs and kill them and put them in the smokehouse, and he'd smoke them. That was sort of a way of having some meat around. I used to always envy my neighbors because my neighbors had a father and a mother at home. They had the same number of children, ten children, father and mother, but the father consciously made sure that they grew seven or eight hogs that they would butcher and smokehouse, and you could pass their house and smell that bacon cooking. You just wanted some of it. You just wanted some of it so bad.

White: Country-cured bacon.

Weary: Country-cured bacon, and some of those sausages, and you'd go up to the house, and they had some still left over from breakfast, and you'd be wanting some so bad because we didn't have that. We didn't have that. Meat was, we probably killed one hog, and most of the time that was gone not too long after we had done that. But these guys had it year round.

White: Did you do any hunting, or did you grandfather do any hunting?

Weary: No hunting because my grandfather never did any hunting. My older siblings, brothers, never went hunting that much. So I didn't grow up hunting. I grew up fishing. We used to go fishing and catch all these little perch and come back, and it was always a thrill on Sunday morning to have fried fish and maybe some rice and biscuits. That was a big meal for us was on Sunday.

White: Speaking of Sunday morning, did you go to church every Sunday?

Weary: Well, now, that's a good question. Because of the fact, it was every Sunday it was a natural thought in our house that we would go to the church house every Sunday. That was a natural part of growing up. And most of the time we walked, and the church was about two and a half miles away that we would walk to the church. And I used that as a (inaudible) because in the country, D'Lo, Braxton, we had what was called the first Sunday service. That church happened once a week. The worship service happened once a month where the pastor would come to the community, and we'd have a preaching service. The rest of the time we had a Sunday school and—

White: And no preaching.

Weary: And no preaching whatsoever, so we got used to one (inaudible).

White: What church was it?

Weary: Shiloh.

White: Shiloh.

Weary: Shiloh was our church that we used to almost take a straight walk down that Gum Spring?) Road.

White: And that's Shiloh Baptist.

Weary: Shiloh Baptist Church is where we used to go to church.

White: Right. The old Gum Springs Road church is still there, going southwest (inaudible).

Weary: Right. And if you get to—I get them mixed up. Now, Gum Springs, is that the one closer to Braxton, or the one closer to (inaudible)?

White: One closer to Braxton.

Weary: That's closer to Braxton. Then there's one closer to where Shiloh is; it's a white church, I'm talking about. And there used to be a store there, and this is our store that we used to go and have our little tab, was this one little store. You could take that Braxton Pinola Road. It was that one little store, and these guys had the chicken houses and so forth, this one little store. And that's where we had our little tab where we—

White: You remember who ran that store? I imagine your mom kept pretty close looks on the tabs, too, didn't she? (laughter)

Weary: I'm not sure about that. (laughter) I don't know whether it was Gus Bennam(?). I don't know if Mr. Bennam that I think that owned the store, had the chicken houses, and so that's where we basically—

White: Close to the Jupiter area.

Weary: Yeah. That's what it is. That's the church. Jupiter Church is the church, and then like a half a mile from Jupiter Church was a store that sat right in the fork. If you turned to the left, you go across that old, swinging bridge, that old, swinging bridge.

White: Toward Pinola and toward the Chapel(?) place.

Weary: Well, see, if you took the left, you would go across that swinging bridge that come out of that (inaudible).

White: Right.

Weary: But if you went straight, you went straight on down to Pinola. So the store sort of sat right in that hole (inaudible).

White: Barry Lovitte(?), was that the man's name that ran the store there?

Weary: That's not ringing a bell for me. That's not ringing a bell for me.

White: Well, I'm not trying to sidetrack you on food here. (laughter) Of course you can tell that I like food, but what else impressed you in early life? We got to get you in school here at some point and talk about school and talk about church. When did you first become a Christian? I hate to jump around here, but—

Weary: If you take me there, I'd have to give you the two phases or the three phases. The first phase was, as I looked around at my life and trying to understand poverty, trying to understand where is there connectedness; it seemed like the church was the center of life for us. And everybody belonged to somebody's church. And during the revival time when I was seven years old, the preacher finished preaching, and the invitation was given to come to become a Christian, and become a member of the church. I looked at my mom and asked her could I do it. She looked at me and said, "You're a little young." The next year at age eight at the same church and during the revival time, they opened up the doors of the church, and I remember walking down, shaking the preacher's hand. Some lady came along and wrote my name down in the book, and they took me down to this pond and ran the snakes out, and they dunked me under the water, and they brought me back and told me that, "Now, Dolphus, you're an official member of the church."

White: That same Sunday.

Weary: No, not the same Sunday. This was just during the course of that week. On that Friday, they would normally have the Baptismal baptizing at some pond. And then on Friday evening, they'd bring everybody who was baptized during that week back in front of the church and sort of give them the quote, "right hand of fellowship."

White: Well, can you tell us a little bit about how the baptism ceremony was handled in ponds? You said they ran the snakes out. How did they do that? Did they push them out in the water?

Weary: I assume that some was there before we got there, but with the singing that the sisters would be there and prepare us for the baptism. Preacher, deacons, everybody's around the pond, and the pastor's out in the water, and we're led out, and we're actually baptized out in the water, brought back out, and so forth. And I think that I use the terminology "ran the snakes out" because if there was any in there, all the noise we were keeping up and singing, and so—

White: They were bound to leave.

Weary: They were gone (laughter) by that time. Some of those ponds, you have to understand; we're not talking about clear water. We're not talking about a swimming pool.

White: You're talking about Simpson County pond (inaudible).

Weary: We're talking about a Simpson County pond.

White: Look pretty brown.

Weary: That looks brown and all those kinds of things. The cows been there, and everybody's been there (inaudible).

White: If it didn't have tinges of green on the top.

Weary: And the reason of it because that was the only place that we had. And some neighbor, somebody in the community would let the church use their pond for basic baptism. (End of digital file named tape one, side one. Beginning of digital file named tape one, side two.) So after joining the church when I was eight, I was told how to be a good church member, but I was not told how to have a personal relationship with the Lord. So I became a good church member at age eight. Many years went by. At age fifteen, I'm sitting in the same church, revival time.

White: Did you mention the name of the church?

Weary: Shiloh Missionary Baptist.

White: It was still Shiloh.

Weary: Shiloh Missionary Baptist Church.

White: I just want to make sure we mention which church.

Weary: And the preacher was preaching, and he gave an invitation, said, "All those that know you are *not* a Christian, raise your hand." And I remember raising my hand. And then the next words that came out of his mouth were, "If you know you're not a Christian, come join the church." I was already a member of the church. That was when I was fifteen. At age seventeen, I had the opportunity when John Perkins(?) started the ministry in Mendenhall, that they had a tent meeting at D'Lo. And at that tent meeting, for the first time I heard a clear message that Christ died for me, and that I needed to personally accept him as my savior, and at age seventeen, I gave my life to the Lord in a tent meeting in D'Lo, Mississippi.

White: Well, not only have you served the Lord since then, in a lot of fashions, ending up as the head of Mission Mississippi now and working with Reverend Perkins for years, but we mentioned earlier your education in school there. Could you sort of pick up from there and talk about what you did to educate yourself over the years, and what it was like in elementary school, on up?

Weary: I remember when I started off in school at Piney Woods. Piney Woods had something called preprimer. So I went to Piney Woods preprimer, first grade. This was before it was legislated that you had to go to school in the county in which you lived. OK? So Piney Woods used to bring a bus down to where we lived on Braxton Road, picked us up, took us to Piney Woods, and it was when I went into the second grade, was when I guess it was mandated that we started going to school in Simpson County. And a bus literally came around to pick us up to go to school in Mendenhall, which was Harper School. I remember distinctly as a second-grader, learning my time tables, and my teacher used to take me to the fourth-grade class so that I could recite my time tables. She thought it was fascinating that a second-grader could go all the way through time tables in terms of twelve.

White: And probably wanted to stir that fourth-grade class on, too.

Weary: That's right. And so I felt a little bad. They probably was frowning up at me, saying, "What is he doing in here?" And so that was a part of my education. How did I feel about it? Didn't have much of a feeling until I start getting into the junior high, began to ask a lot of questions about the kind of school bus I was riding, began asking a lot of questions about why our school didn't have certain things. And I remember in seventh, eighth grade, somewhere in there, having to take me a couple of marbles to school, and I would play marbles and win other people's marbles and sell them back to them, so that I could have five or ten cent (laughter) to buy me something to eat on. I remember that just distinctly. And that was the way that I had to survive. I remember a friend of mine used to bring a peanut—I couldn't believe it—a mayonnaise/banana sandwich to school, and I thought that was the best sandwich in the world because I was so hungry, and he used to always share it with me. I thought it was the best sandwich in the world. But just understanding that we didn't have very much. Other people did, and trying to figure out how to deal with that was always a struggle. And so that made me sort of try to make sure that my kids came along, I wanted to make sure they had some money because I realize what it felt like just to be broke all the time.

White: What you're saying is that there was no such thing as separate but equal schools back then.

Weary: There was no such thing as separate but equal schools. And I used to get textbooks. When my inquisitive mind start taking over, and I'd look down the list of the names in the book, and I couldn't recognize anybody's names in the books. And I couldn't understand why I didn't recognize any names. It was not until I was like a junior or senior in high school before I realized that we got the hand-me-down books.

So there might be five or six names of people who had used this book, and then it was handed down to us for us to basically use that book. But I had, though, and what we had is that we had a mother that said, "Do your best." OK? "Study hard, and do your best." And that was like the driving force behind all of us as kids. And I just happen to have this brother who was one year and a half older than me that could look at a book and make an A, or he was one of these almost a photographic memory. For me, I was burning that kerosene lamp at night, studying, because I really wanted to be an achiever. I think my mom put inside of me that I needed to be an achiever.

White: Did she help you with your homework?

Weary: Absolutely not.

White: Or was she able to?

Weary: Absolutely not. Possibly could have, though, and let me say that possibly could have because you see, what happened to my mom was she went to Piney Woods School, was living on campus at Piney Woods, was a ninth-grader, going into her sophomore year, and her situation at home was so bad that she was anxious to try to leave home, met this guy, got married as a sophomore in high school, and all the teachers at Piney Woods said to her, "You have the potential of finishing high school and going to college." And because she got married and was not able to do that, she sort of took that and tried to get her children to do it.

White: Well, that helped inspire you, in other words, to go ahead and get an education.

Weary: Right, and that she kept pushing it because she was just that close to getting (inaudible).

White: Did all of you study hard?

Weary: All of us—

White: Don't name any names if nobody—

Weary: —studied hard. All of us graduated from high school, (phone rings) and then we had—my sister and them was the pacesetter. My oldest brother, he graduated from high school and went straight on into the military. OK? And that was great. He went into the military, was an electrician. So he was able to send some money back home to help out. My other brother, when he left, he went straight to New York. OK? Then my next brother, he went to New York, following (inaudible). My sister became the model and pacesetter. She graduated from high school, and she went to Jackson State. That was like, "Wow. Somebody's going to college." And when she went to college, it gave us sort of a hope of going to college, that it is possible to go to college. And I remember my mom used to say she will do everything she can to work and help

buy her clothes. But she said to us, as guys, "Y'all got to make it on your own." My brother then went on to Washington Bible College in Washington, DC, and then for me, when I came out I had this great desire because I'd been going to a lot of Bible classes, I had this great desire to go to what is called a Christian liberal arts college. I'd heard about the Belhaven College type, Mississippi College, and I wanted to go to one of those schools. John Perkins helped me to contact the colleges, like Cedarville College in Ohio and other schools, trying to get me in, trying to get people to look at me in terms of a student, but we were rejected from going to a lot of those schools because in 1965, the flavor of our country was of such that Christian schools were not open—Christian schools we knew about, me, John Perkins knew about were not open to accepting black students. And that's when I ended up going to Prentiss Junior College for a couple of weeks, and then I got a basketball scholarship to go to Piney Woods. Piney Woods used to be kindergarten through fourteen. And I went to Piney Woods on a basketball scholarship, and while I was there, they cut out the junior college my freshman year. So they allowed us to graduate, but they didn't have a freshman class during my sophomore year at Piney Woods.

White: They moved the teachers up to the sophomore class, then. I didn't realize that they had had a junior college, two-year program at Piney Woods School.

Weary: And the goal was that a child could come in there at age three or four, no money, no nothing, no family, no backing, and could literally leave there with a two-year college degree because Piney Woods provided a home for kids to be able to do that. Now, a number of models of people who been dropped off at Piney Woods, and they've been able to go on to graduate from junior college, and then go on to senior college because Piney Woods became their family.

White: Well, you've had quite a bit of education since then. (laughter)

Weary: Well, it was, (buzzing in background) got a basketball scholarship to go to Piney Woods, and then while I was at Piney Woods, a gospel team from Southern California came to Mendenhall, came to the junior college I was going to as a part of John Perkins' ministry. They were coming down to help, go into the schools in ministry, and they came to Piney Woods, and they found out that I was a Christian, plus found out I played basketball.

White: We not going to forget this basketball. We'll get back to it in just a few minutes after we finish on education.

Weary: OK. (laughter) And so I ended up going to L.A. [Los Angeles] Baptist College in California. I got a BS in biology, and then because they had a seminary division on campus, so when I graduated from the college, I was able to go on to the seminary and got a master's in Christian education, graduated from there and then came back to Mendenhall to work with the part of the ministry in Mendenhall.

White: Well, you later also got a doctorate of ministry degree.

Weary: Right.

White: And I think you have an honorary degree or two, but at some point in here, I believe you had met your wife.

Weary: That's right, somewhere in there. (laughter) Somewhere in there.

White: Was that before you went to California, (inaudible)?

Weary: When we went to California, two of us went out there. A friend of mine by name of Jimmy Walker and I, we went out to California on basketball scholarships, and being very naïve from Mississippi, we thought in California every place is integrated. We got out to California and discovered we were the first two black students ever to go to L.A. Baptist College.

White: They hadn't bothered to mention that to you before.

Weary: No. And it was just naïve on our part. We just thought, "California is not like Mississippi. They must be." They didn't say it. We didn't know. And then one of the great things they did was separated us, and they had prepared a couple of guys, asked them, "Would you mind having a black roommate?" So they prepared a way so that each one of us had a roommate when we got there. Then after discovering and talking to the president, they were really not interested in recruiting black students, then we decided to do it, came back in the summer of [19]68, and started working with students, talking to them about it. Rosie had no intention of going to school out there, as she told in her story, but ended up going to school out in California, and while she was there, we met during the summer, but really started dating her first year at L.A.B.C. and my senior and her freshman year.

White: Was she working with Voice of Calvary Ministries then?

Weary: She did not have a chance to work during that summer because she came like in July, near the middle to the end of the summer. But then after that, she worked the summer of [19]69 and the summer of [19]70, and we got married in 1970.

White: What date did you get married? I'm putting you on the spot here.

Weary: We got married August 15. It's easy for me. But do you know why it's easy for me?

White: Why is it easy for you?

Weary: Because I had a strategy and a plan. (laughter) My strategy and plan was to get engaged to her on her birthday. So I worked and saved this money and bought this ring. The goal was to get engaged on her birthday, February 26, and the goal was to

get married on my birthday, August 7. I had a plan and a strategy. (laughter) If it were not for this basketball tour in between, I would have hit the seventh. We wouldn't be married on the fifteenth. We'd be married on the seventh. That was my plan and strategy (inaudible).

White: Well, your plan worked pretty close (inaudible).

Weary: It worked pretty good. (laughter) It worked pretty good.

White: Well, before we leave the marriage part, you two have had several very nice children. Would you name them and say when they were born? Tell us when and where they were born. Then we'll get back to that basketball.

Weary: OK. Yeah. Our daughter Danita(?), our eldest, was born in 1974, April 19. She's called a flood baby because our house had flooded. My wife was pregnant and walking around, directing us and all that kind of stuff.

White: This was back in Mendenhall.

Weary: Back in Mendenhall. She was really born in the hospital in Jackson; I guess at University Hospital. But it was Mendenhall where we were staying, and a week before we were set to go have the baby, the house flooded, and that was a major part of our life. And we call Danita our flood baby. (laughter) Danita since has been graduated from high school and went to Rhodes College in Memphis; graduated, went to medical school; graduated, and is now, today, April, May of 2003, she's finishing up her residency in the University of South Alabama. Our son, Reginald Demond Weary(?)—we name our children simply by taking the initial from my name and the initial from Rosie name because when we first got married, Rosie told me, said, "Now, Dolphus, if we have any daughters, we're not going to name them Rosie because I'm the third Rosie in my family."

White: Is that right?

Weary: That's what she told me.

White: She didn't mention that to me.

Weary: That's why. She was the third Rosie in her family. She said, "If we have any daughters, we're not going to name them Rosie." And then she looked at me and said, "Now, Dolphus, before you get too excited, if we have any sons, we're not going to mess them up by naming them Dolphus." (laughter) So we had to compromise, and the compromise we came up with was to name our children by taking the D from my name and the R from hers. So our daughter is Danita Roneek Weary(?). Our son is Reginald Demond Weary. Reginald is twenty-six, was born July the sixteenth, 1976, right. Twenty-six years old, graduated from Tougaloo College in the area of business and accounting and works now with Mass Mutual. And then God blessed us

with a caboose. Ryan(?) is our fifteen-year-old who was born July 23, 1987, and he was born in Mendenhall, in Simpson County. He was the only one, only child of ours that was born in Simpson County at the Simpson General Hospital.

White: Reggie was born in Jackson also?

Weary: Reggie was born in Jackson, also. And so we allowed Danita and Reggie to name Ryan because we said it couldn't go too wrong. They had the R-D or D-R.

White: They had the rule.

Weary: So I think Reggie named him Ryan, and Danita, I think, named him Donshay, so Ryan Donshay Weary(?) is our fifteen-year-old.

White: D-R-R-D. We've got you married. We've got your children. We've got you working in the ministry of Mendenhall, but somehow I think we need to mention sports here before we go too far.

Weary: Well, I think there's a connection, though, before I get to the—let me connect it. When I graduated from college and then went to seminary, even though I worked in the ministry in Mendenhall during the summer, summer of [19]68 and summer of [19]69, there was really not a passion for me to come back to live and to work in Mendenhall. OK? Not to come back to Mississippi, period. My whole plan and strategy was to leave Mississippi and never come back to Mississippi.

White: I think you've written a book.

Weary: That's right. I think I wrote a book about that, (laughter) *I Ain't Coming Back*. But during the summer of—I had the privilege of playing basketball in college, and then basketball paid for my way to go to senior college in California. I graduated from senior college and then went to seminary, and the coach hired me to coach freshman college basketball (inaudible) to run the school's intramural program, and that paid for my seminary education. In the middle of that year, I received a letter about this Christian basketball team.

White: Is this Reformed Theological Seminary?

Weary: No. This is L.A. Baptist Theological Seminary. So I graduated from college, went straight on to the seminary and got my master's in Christian education. OK? And during my first year there, I got this opportunity to go with this Christian basketball team that toured the Orient, and so that was going to mess up my marriage plans. OK? (laughter) Because I started buying the ring in October, and I got the information in November about the possibility of going out for this Christian team. And then I didn't hear from them in December. I didn't hear from them in January; didn't hear from them on February the twenty-fifth. So I went on and got the ring and worked my plan, took Rosie out to dinner, asked her to marry me. She said, "Yes."

You know, that's just her. (laughter) And the next day I got a letter from this Overseas Crusade Sports Ambassadors, saying, "Dolphus, you have been approved to go with our summer basketball team out—

White: The next day.

Weary: —(inaudible)." The next day. So I said, "OK. This is going to mess me up." But then the good news was, the team went out May 2 through June the twentieth, and we were playing ball in Taiwan, the Philippines, and Hong Kong as a missionary team, so that we played basketball, shared our faith at halftime, passed out tracts, witnessed to people by reading tracts to them in English because they wanted to practice their English. So it was a great time to do ministry. And so the coach began to challenge me. He said, "Dolphus, because you seem to be a pied piper—wherever you go, these kids are clinging to you—why not consider becoming a missionary on the overseas crusade to either Taiwan or Philippines?" I said, "Coach, let's pray about it. See what God has to say." And six weeks and sixty-some ballgames later we sat down, and I said, "Coach, God is saying to me, 'Dolphus, are you going to a mission field? Are you thinking about going to a mission field, or are you running away from a mission field?'" OK? And so all these questions, "Why are you over here doing this?" And so much so that I really felt like the Lord laid on my heart, and he wanted me to come back to Mississippi. So after I finished up my tour, came back home in the end of June, and I thought it was important that I should tell Rosie that.

White: I would think so.

Weary: That's right. So she didn't want to come back to Mississippi, either. (laughter) And we sat down and talked and prayed about it, and she said, "Well, Dolphus, if you feel like this is what God want you to do, then I want to do it as well." And that was that commitment. So basketball paid for my college education. I tell young people all the time, "Use sports as a means to an end, not an end, itself." Too many young people want to use sports as an end. "I'm playing baseball so I can play pro. I'm playing basketball so I can play pro." No, no, no. You're playing basketball for exercise. You're playing basketball that you can get a scholarship to pay for your college education, and that's what basketball ought to be used for, not just to say, "I want to be pro, play pro." I had to look at myself as a college player and ask myself some questions. One, "At five [feet], eleven [inches], how many guys are playing pro?" I was too short. OK? Couldn't shoot. I was a great leaper and played exceptional defense. I always wanted to find the guy that was the toughest guy and ask the coach can I guard him. I guarded some guys that were six [foot], four [inches] sometime. The coach say, "You too short." I said, "That's the one I want," because that's the kind of tenacity I had in terms of—

White: You wanted a challenge.

Weary: I wanted to challenge. OK?

White: But you found out the challenge was really the mission field back in Mississippi. Is that right?

Weary: Absolutely. And the question that came to my mind was, "What's going to happen to people in Mississippi if everybody leave? Somebody must dare come back to work to make a difference." And that's where my story starts in coming back to Mendenhall, joining John Perkins, and asking the question, "Can our Christian faith have an impact on the community?" And that's when we began to dream up finding programs and hooking those programs up with community needs. And so every ministry that we developed was, "How do we bring our Christian faith to deal with some basic human needs in the community?"

White: You've ended up, and Reverend Perkins has ended up also, in the area of reconciliation in the middle of all of this. Do you think that was God's plan, or was it a plan that you two felt like needed to be the impetus of the missions?

Weary: I think that God has given me two passions. The first passion is a passion for the poor because I grew up poor. A passion for disadvantaged, a passion for those who don't have access, a passion for those who are trapped. There are many people trapped in poverty, and they have developed a poverty mentality, and they sort of wallow around in they sense of, "This is my world." And there's a broader world, and Mendenhall allowed me the privilege of living out that care for other people, to really minister to others, and especially those that are poor and those who are oppressed. That's the first passion. The second passion is that whole sense that we can really do it better together. If you can get people to work together, we could wipe out a whole lot of problems, a whole lot of things, if we can work together. So I have moved from a concern for the poor, which I still have that passion, to a passion of reconciliation. We have burned up so much energy, trying to keep things separate and divided and all of that, and especially the church would really be the leading force on bringing together the people of God. And I think over the years God has shown me that that's the cutting edge that I need to be on. Where did it start? Probably started in Mendenhall when I used to always ask the question, as a seventeen-year-old young person, "Why is there a disparity between the black community and the white community? Why is it when you cross the railroad tracks, none of the streets are paved?" There were no street lights, no businesses, dilapidated homes, poor conditions. And right on the other side of the railroad tracks, there were paved streets. Why is that disparity there? And part of it is due to the fact that one is that people are poor, and people continue to develop poverty mentality. The other one is racial off-balanceness has helped to create this kind of disjointedness, and I believe that the church is the great institution to bring us back to a sense of, "God really loves us all, and we have an opportunity to work together." I think that's where—and then it continued for me when I went out to school in California that I was on the campus of a conservative, white, Christian college. Now, L.A. Baptist College is like a, it's called a Regular Baptist denomination. That means that they are more conservative than American Baptist, Southern Baptist, Independent Baptist, you name it. At the top of the list was this group called Regular Baptists. That means that we are conservative

on the Bible. We hold the Bible to all (inaudible) truth, but I was on campus when Martin Luther King got shot, and I remember going to my room and listened to the radio, trying to find out what happened to my hero. And there were white Christian kids, walking up and down the hallway, laughing and joking about how glad they were that he was shot. When he died, I was trying to find out what happened to my hero, and they were laughing and celebrating his death. In that room, I went through a lot of emotions.

White: Theology students, too.

Weary: Right. They are training to do ministry. They are there, being trained to do ministry. And the first emotion I had was, "Should I hate white people? Should I go join the Black Power movement," which had just started in the San Francisco area, the H. Rap Brown, Stokely Carmichael and all that. "Should I not have anything to do with white people anymore? This, my Christian faith, is failing me." And so there I was, trapped. The last emotion God gave me was an emotion of compassion, and it came to me just as clearly, "These young people are only playing back the tape that's been recorded in their minds. They've learned how to hate Martin Luther King because somebody had labeled him a communist. So in their mind it was a communist that had got killed." So out of that I began to ask the question, "Lord, how do you help me to help people to erase the tape and to see that we're all a part of God's special creation?" OK? And that's what I want to do. I want to help people to erase the tape.

White: Erase the tape. (brief interruption)

Weary: When John Perkins left Mendenhall in 1974, at that time Artis Fletcher(?) and I had come back. I came back in the summer of [19]68, [19]69, [19]70, came back full-time in [19]71 and worked directly with John Perkins in Mendenhall. And then Artis came back in 1974 to become the pastor of Mendenhall Bible Church. And then we worked together in the ministry from 1974 to 1997. As the ministry grew, and as the ministry began to change in 1997, there seems to be that need for the church to be a whole lot more of an umbrella for the ministry. We had developed the ministry as a partner with the church, and I was the president of Mendenhall Ministries, and Artis was the pastor of Mendenhall Bible Church, but in 1997, there was that sense that we needed to move the ministry under the church and that the church should be the umbrella for the ministry, itself. At that particular time, I felt like, "Maybe it's time for me to move on and let this philosophy work itself out." And so we really agreed that it was time for me to move on and let the new leadership take this model of church ministry and move it forward, and that's when Artis Fletcher and Timothy Keyes(?) became the key players, and I began to ask the question, "Lord, where do you want me to go so that I can use my gifts in a broader Christian community?" I felt the ministry was narrowing itself down to a local church, and God has a broader church body that we need to be functioning in. And that's when God opened up the door for me to go to Mission Mississippi.

White: It's definitely a broad door because you don't travel just Mississippi. You seem to pretty much travel the world and the nation these days.

Weary: Well, the key, though, and my board in Jackson wants me to stay in Mississippi, (laughter) you know, and travel Mississippi. For example on May the eighth, I spoke to a group in Meridian, Mississippi. The evening of May 8, I spoke to a group in Starkville, and then the morning of May 9, I spoke to a prayer breakfast in Starkville, Mississippi, and while I was there, people were talking to me about coming back to Starkville and trying to help them begin to get some things together there. God has definitely put me in a broader arena for the church. And that was probably one of the reasons why I felt it was important to leave Mendenhall because I was in a broader—I mean, I was traveling 60 percent of my time around the country, raising funds for Mendenhall. I just began to feel like, "Now, I'm in church, and ministry is going to narrow down." Since that time the church's ministries decided that they need to be broad. But at the time I felt that it was narrowing it down, and it was like a local church rather than a broader ministry. I believe that God has called me to be a bridge-builder, a bridge-builder between the haves and have-nots, a bridge between the rich and poor, a bridge between black, white, and a bridge between denominations. Somebody got to call people to being Christians, not just Baptists or Methodists or Presbyterian. Mission Mississippi is calling people to do that, and I'm excited about that kind of move.

White: Well, thank you for coming back from Starkville and everywhere else to finish this tape with us tonight. Thank you very much. I enjoyed it.

Weary: Fantastic.

(end of interview)