

FORT BEND COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION

ORAL HISTORY COMMITTEE

Interviewee: **Bessie Lee Pettie Lewis**

Interview Date: 09/12/2015

Interviewer: Diane Ware

Transcriber: Megan Moore

Location: Simonton City Hall, Simonton, Texas

19 Pages



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Transcript

WARE: This is Diane L. Ware, about to record an oral history interview with Ms. Bessie Lewis. Today's date is September 12, 2015. We are recording this interview at the Simonton City Hall in Simonton, Texas. Please tell us when and where were you were born.

LEWIS: I was born in 1932 in Fulshear, Fort Bend County, Texas.

WARE: Were you born in a hospital?

LEWIS: No, with a midwife, at our home. We lived in Fulshear Bottom.

WARE: Fulshear Bottom?

LEWIS: Do you know where Bois d'Arc Lane is? Well, it wasn't no Bois d'Arc Lane when I lived there. It was just a lane. A road.

WARE: (with humor) Okay. What is your full name?

LEWIS: My full name is Bessie Lee Lewis.

WARE: Do you have any older sisters or brothers?

LEWIS: I have one sister under me. Her name is Johnnie Lee Davidson.

WARE: Does she still live in the area?

LEWIS: Yes ma'am, she lives with me. I have a brother living too, Jesse James Pettie. He doesn't live with me. He lives in Richmond.

WARE: So was your maiden name Pettie and then you married Mr. Lewis?

LEWIS: Yes, ma'am.

WARE: What were your parent's names?

LEWIS: My mom's name was Ora Lee Gill. My daddy's name was John Pettie. My dad was from Chappell Hill.

WARE: What brought them to this area?

LEWIS: I really don't know.

WARE: Are you the oldest?

LEWIS: I'm the oldest living child. My brother died – he had cancer. My sister died of cancer. My other brother died of cancer. They all had cancer.

WARE: Oh goodness. You were telling me you didn't know why your parents moved here.

LEWIS: No, I don't.

WARE: Did they have any brothers or sisters that lived in this area?

LEWIS: No.

WARE: What did your dad do for work?

LEWIS: My dad was a farmer. My dad died when I was eight years old. So I don't know what he did but I know he had horses and things like that. We all lived on a farm.

WARE: Did your mom remarry?

LEWIS: No, she didn't. She died in about 1946.

WARE: So you were born on a farm. Your dad passed away when you were eight?

LEWIS: My mom passed away when I was fourteen.

WARE: Did you go to school?

LEWIS: We went to school in what is still called Pleasant Hill School.

WARE: How far away was the school?

LEWIS: Well, I guess we walked at least two miles to go to school.

WARE: You had to want to go. (laughs)

LEWIS: No, I didn't. But I went. (both laugh)

WARE: Was that a one-room schoolhouse?

LEWIS: It was a one-room schoolhouse, because all the kids were in the same room. It was one room. We called it Pleasant Hill. They tore the school down, but the Pleasant Hill Church is still behind there.



Pleasant Hill Church, Fulshear, Texas

WARE: There was one teacher?

LEWIS: No ma'am. One was Professor Hayne. I know her. Another lady was named Miss Daisy. Those are the only two I remember. I went to school until I was about in the eighth grade.

WARE: What was your favorite class?

LEWIS: Math. I stopped school after my mom passed. We moved to Richmond with my stepfather. Well, he wasn't my stepfather; he was my mother's boyfriend. I married when I was sixteen years old. I had my little brothers and sisters to take care of. My oldest brother was there. His name was Elmo Pettie and he was married; we stayed some with him. Before that we used to stay with my stepfather's brother. I married Elmo's wife's brother.

WARE: Family married family?

LEWIS: Yeah. He was my first husband, we stayed together for three years and about seven months. We just couldn't get along. We were too young for one thing. But I had to have somewhere for my brothers and sisters to stay, you know?

WARE: Right.

LEWIS: My little brother was named Roosevelt Pettie. That was my baby brother. My little sister was Essie Lee Perkins. Because she was a Perkins, she wasn't a Pettie. Then I had another sister, and her name is Johnnie Lee Pettie. They all was Pettie. So anyhow, that's why I married, so we would have somewhere to stay. That's why I married when I was so young.

After me and my first husband separated, I moved to Houston and stayed with my auntie. Then I moved back out here and I married another man. His name was Tom Lewis. We stayed together for twenty-eight years until a bull killed him.

WARE: Tell me about that.

LEWIS: I was at work and this young bull would come down to our place. We had cows and they would come down there and this bull was trying to get in to the cows, you know? He would go every day to take the bull back up on the hill to this little boy's house.

On this particular day, he went and got the bull, and he put him behind his car and was taking him back to where he belonged. So he got out of the car to take the bull loose, but he fell and the rope wrapped around him and the bull killed him!

WARE: Just being squeezed?

LEWIS: He stomped him in the face, for one thing. He stomped him. He died from that. That was in 1975.

WARE: You lived back in Fulshear at that point, right?

LEWIS: I lived where I live now, yes ma'am. They call it Fulshear. I call this Simonton. We live on Little Prayer, well, Pool Hill. You know where Pool Hill is? Now, that's closer to Simonton than Fulshear.

WARE: So you married Tom Lewis. What year did you marry him?

LEWIS: I married Tom Lewis, I think it was in, it had to have been by 1953.

WARE: And you were together until he passed? Then you stayed in your house. Did you ever have any children?

LEWIS: No, I never did have any.

WARE: But you were raising your brothers and sisters.

LEWIS: Mm hmm. But they were mature. No, I never did have any kids at all.

WARE: Did your brother Elmo have children?

LEWIS: He had three.

WARE: What did you do for work?

LEWIS: I was a maid. The first people I started working for was Palmer. They lived in Fulshear. I stayed with them 'til they moved out of Fulshear. Then the next people I used to work for, I used to work in Houston. They were Beauguard. The next people I used to work for, let me see, I used to work for a lady named Culpepper. I used to take care of a lady named Becky Stokes. She had three little children. They moved to Caller/Culler Creek, I think. I started working for the Stokes in 1993 because they moved from Houston.

WARE: Okay, now I know that you worked for Steve Holmes' parents.

LEWIS: Yeah I worked for Steve Holmes a long time. It was Steve, Gary, Carl and Jenny. That was their sister, Jenny. Then I used to help take care of Miss Dale's child, Jim. I helped take care of his children, too. I've just been around them all my life.

WARE: About how many children do you think you've raised?

LEWIS: Oh, I couldn't remember. I raised a whole lot of them. Yes, ma'am. Then I helped raise my two little nephews. They always called me their grandmother. I raised my oldest niece's little girl. They all call me Nanny. Everybody calls me Nanny. I'm their nanny.

WARE: Right. That's what Steve called you, his nanny.

LEWIS: Yeah, I'm his nanny. You see?

WARE: You say you worked as a maid, but you really worked more as a nanny. What kind of things did you do as a nanny?

LEWIS: Well, what I did was, for instance, feed the kids, and I used to do the wash, take care of the house, you know, like that. But my LAST little one, he's my joy. His name is Harrison Gray.

WARE: Oh, yes. I know who you mean. Luanne's little boy.

LEWIS: Yeah, that's my last one. Harrison Gray. I don't work for them no more on account of he goes to a tutor in the evening, you know? So I said, "Well, Harrison, I won't see you no more." You know what he said? "Oh, yes you will. You'll see me when I come to your church."

WARE: (with humor) Good for him.

LEWIS: They come to my church every year.

WARE: Do they?

LEWIS: They come to my church every third Sunday in May. Every third Sunday in May they come to my church.

WARE: Why do they do that?

LEWIS: I have a program. My program is a family and friends day. So they come to my church.

WARE: What is your church?

LEWIS: My church is Lively Hope Missionary Baptist Church, on Pool Hill, on Ash Road.

WARE: How many years have you gone to that church?

LEWIS: I joined that church, I think it was around about 1953. I've been there a long time.



WARE: What sorts of things do you do at that church?

LEWIS: Well, I'm not active no more in the church. Only thing I am in that church is the pastor's aide president. I stand up there and I got a bowl and everybody coming by is going to give the pastor something; they put it in that dish.

WARE: Oh! So it's like to help him. To support the pastor?

LEWIS: I'm the mother of my church. I belong to a mission in my church.

WARE: Tell me about being the mother of your church.

LEWIS: You know, everything has changed. You used to be able to guide the young people on what to wear and how to dress. You don't tell them that no more! They get mad with you. Therefore, I just sit and look at them. I hate to see kids coming to church – grownups too – with nothing on their arms. You know, that's embarrassing. There's so many of them that come to church with their dresses too short. They're too tight. Nothing on their arms – just bare. They don't even wear shoes no more. They wear flip flops to church! To my eyes, they don't recognize God's eyes no more. If you have respect for God's house, you're going to go DECENT to God's house. You know what I'm talking about? You don't go to God's church like you're going out to play or something like that. But that's what they do now. They don't have respect for God's church no more.

WARE: Is your congregation still pretty big at your church?

LEWIS: Yes, we have a big congregation.

WARE: You said you're the President of the Pastor's Aide. You're the mother of your church and you are active in the missions?

LEWIS: I'm a mission sister.

WARE: Tell me what a mission sister is.

LEWIS: If somebody in our church is sick or needs help, we're supposed to go and help them, take care of them. If they need something from the store, go to the store for them. If they need to go to the doctor, go to the doctor with them. If their house needs to be cleaned, we clean the house.

Most of all, we're supposed to have mission with them. For instance, we're supposed to sing and pray and read the scripture and tell them about God.

WARE: Women primarily do that? That's wonderful. So you've been at your church since 1953. For someone who doesn't do much it sounds like you do a lot.

LEWIS: Mm hmm.

WARE: You've raised so many children you lost count. Your sister lives with you. Is that Johnnie?

LEWIS: Yes, ma'am. Then I have a niece living with me because she had a house and she lost it. She had a blood clot in her leg. They had to cut her leg off, right to here.

WARE: She doesn't have any children?

LEWIS: Oh yeah. She has two; a boy and a girl. A little girl named Darlene Dickenson who lives in Louisiana and a boy named Frederick Dickenson.

WARE: So you have had someone living with you your entire life?

LEWIS: All my life (with feeling) I never have lived by myself. NEVER have lived by myself. Always had some family. I have pictures of my oldest brother, Roosevelt, the little boy that died, my mother, and my baby sister. She's dead, too. Her name was Essie Jackson. I also have pictures of me, my sister Johnnie, and her daughter, Darlene, and Betty Jean Smiley and her daughters. I partly raised her oldest daughter.

WARE: What is her name?

LEWIS: Bernice Gordon. When Bernice got pregnant I was working. Then I paid for the midwife for her. (laughs)

WARE: (laughs) Well that's just so you didn't have to deliver her.

LEWIS: Oh God! That's a blessing! You know what? When Johnnie had Lisa (we call her Lisa but her name is Ulysses), I was throwing up and everything. (both laugh)

WARE: Too much!

LEWIS: It was too much for me. It's entirely too much for me.

LEWIS: That little boy that just called me is Carlos.

WARE: What is Carlos's last name?

LEWIS: Dominguez.

LEWIS: (laughs) Miss Rose's mama's name is Anne. Me and Miss Anne would go – you know she couldn't walk, so I pushed her all through Fulshear in a wheelchair. Johnnie's oldest son is Clifford Davidson.

WARE: He's a police officer?

LEWIS: He's a police officer. First it was in Simonton. Then Wallis. After Wallis he went to Brookshire and then he went to Conroe. Now he's in a little town called Palson or something like that.

WARE: Did you ever farm at all?

LEWIS: Yes, ma'am! You know, when we were little, we used to live down on Bulldog/Boward Lane. My mother worked for a man named Sam McJohnson and we lived on his farm. I picked spinach. Ten cents a basket. They had green beans and we picked them, too. You know, they used to give poor people food. They would give us cheese and that brown flour. They would give us prunes. It wasn't food stamps.

WARE: Was it surplus food that the government had? Where did you go to get that?

LEWIS: We would go to Fulshear, I believe. I think it was at a store or something.

WARE: Bois D Arc Lane. What was the man's name?

LEWIS: Sam McJohnson. After that, it was turned into Walker.

WARE: Okay, so McJohnson sold to Walker?

LEWIS: No, it was a niece or something. I think they were related. I think Sam McJohnson died and Sam Walker was his name. A long time ago they used to have that store in Fulshear there. I remember after he passed and he had two daughters and one son. Then all of them died, I think. After that it was Meier's Store in Fulshear. That used to be where we got groceries.

We used to get the groceries from Dozier too. His name was Ed Dozier. That was Mary Ann's brother. She passed. When my husband started working for him, is when she passed. I went to her funeral. I was at the house. You didn't come to the house, did you?

WARE: Yes, I did.

LEWIS: You did?!

WARE: (laughs) We just know each other and don't know we know each other.

LEWIS: That's right! That's right. Because I stayed there with Harrison. Me and Harrison didn't go to the funeral.

WARE: Because he was real little.

LEWIS: That's right. That's right.

WARE: So when you needed to go buy things you'd go to Meiers' store in Fulshear, or you'd go to Dozier's store? What about if somebody got sick? What did you do for a doctor?

LEWIS: Well, we would go to Rosenberg to a doctor. Don't ask me the doctor's name. A lot of times, people get sick and they use home remedies. You know, like if they get a cold, they would give you some hog hoof tea.

WARE: Some what?

LEWIS: Hog hoof tea! The hog, you know, has the hoof on there with the feet. My mom used to boil that and make us drink it for tea.

WARE: Tell me some more home remedies.

LEWIS: (laughs) Now you know, I tell you, they used to raise tea. You know, wild tea? We used to drink that too. It was a wild tea, you know, it just comes up all by itself. It just looked like a little weed. You ever see wild garlic?

WARE: Yes.

LEWIS: Yeah, we used to eat that. (makes a chopping/chewing noise)

WARE: You used to pull it and eat it?

LEWIS: Cook it with the food and everything. Mm hmm. Yes, ma'am. My mom and them used to raise hogs. Me and my husband used to raise hogs, too. We would butcher them at home ourselves. Then we would cut it up and make sausage and pork bones and different stuff. We used to have a smoke house. We would take that meat and lay it down and put that salt over it. That salt would cure that meat. The sausage, we used to put some smoke up on it, and that would cure that sausage, too. You know, put salt on one side, and let it stay there. Then turn it back over, then put it back on the other side. Then when you let it stay up under there so many days, then you take it and put it in some hot water and wash the salt off it. Then you get the string and hang it up in the smokehouse and dry. Then you go in there and cut yourself some bacon down. Sausage, the same way. But they don't do that anymore.

WARE: So, tell me how to butcher a hog.

LEWIS: Oh! My husband used to take an ax, you know, and knock him in the head. Then he'd cut his throat. Then they'd put hot water on that hog and scrape it with a knife. That's the way they used to clean it. Then they would cut him wide open and get the guts out and make the sausage. You know, stuffed it with the sausage. Then, the maw, we used to cook it. You know, the bag that holds the hog's food in.

WARE: It's a lost art. People don't know how to do that.

LEWIS: That's right. That's what I'm talking about. They don't want to learn. They call you "Old Fogey". (laughs)

WARE: So did you hang the hog up?

LEWIS: Yes. We have a tree. We'd swing that hog over and hang him up outside, and that's where you cut him up. You cut him in two, then you cut him in four quarters.

WARE: Did you have any cows?

LEWIS: Yeah, we had cows, too. We never killed them. We used them for milk.

WARE: Did you have chickens?

LEWIS: Oh, yes, ma'am. We had chickens and we had turkeys, too.

WARE: (surprised) Turkeys?

LEWIS: Oh, yeah, they're big. (chuckles)

WARE: Did you ever eat turkey eggs?

LEWIS: Mm hmm. Hen eggs, too. Now I don't eat none of 'em.

WARE: (soft laugh) You had enough?

LEWIS: That's right. When you didn't know better, you didn't know better. Well, when you're hungry, you'll eat it. Really. But now you don't have to do it. They don't raise turkeys no more. Not here. They don't raise chickens here no more. Nothing like that. All that's gone. People don't raise hogs no more. Only thing they raise is cows.

WARE: Right, for beef.

LEWIS: For beef. That's all. We are having a raffle at our church tomorrow, and the ticket is twenty five dollars. He's selling a heifer. One rifle and a heifer. The heifer ticket is twenty five dollars and the rifle ticket is ten.

WARE: That's a good fundraiser. Did you have a garden?

LEWIS: Oh, yeah, we had all kinds of things in the garden. We would raise mustard greens, collard greens and turnip greens, and cabbage, watermelons and snap beans. That's green beans, snap beans. Black-eyed peas, we raised them, too. Okra. We also raised corn. Then I picked cotton.

WARE: Tell me about picking cotton.

LEWIS: Oh, God, I hated to pick cotton. I did. My husband was a farmer. So we had cotton we had to pick, and I hated picking cotton. But I picked it. Then he used to have a hay field. You know, he would rake the hay. After that he would bale the hay for the cows.

WARE: So did you own your land outright? All you told me about picking cotton is that you hated it. Tell me about what was it like. Tell me HOW to pick cotton.

LEWIS: You know, when the cotton will get ripe there would be a blackish green boll. They'd let that dry. When it opens up you go in there and pick the white - the cotton turns white. You pick that white cotton out the boll.

WARE: It's hard?

LEWIS: To my eyes it was. But I did it though. (both laugh softly)

WARE: I'm just going to tell you honestly, I've never met anyone who enjoyed picking cotton, ever.

LEWIS: I know it! Nobody loves to pick cotton. I know I don't.

WARE: So your husband had a farm, but you were out taking care of these babies all the time. So during the day you'd go take care of babies. Did you stay overnight with them ever?

LEWIS: Oh, now sometimes I did. Like, for instance, Luanne's kid. Sometimes I stayed overnight with them. Sometimes I would stay with Becky Stokes's children, too.

WARE: Okay, but usually you'd go in the morning and come home in the afternoon?

LEWIS: Yeah. Now Jenny, Stephen Holmes' little sister, I used to bring her home with me sometimes on the weekend and keep her and she'd come to church with me on Sunday. I'd take her back home that Monday.

WARE: After you got home in the afternoon, if you didn't have a child with you, or they weren't spending the night, did you have to do farm work after you got home?

LEWIS: I was tired! (soft laugh) No, I did not. (both laugh louder)

WARE: That was a definite answer. "No, I did not". Did your husband have anyone who worked for him?

LEWIS: No. He did it himself. Sometimes that little boy, Winter, used to be out there with him. He used to work with him all the time. They stayed across the street from us, you know? In the morning, you'd see him coming on across the field there where we were. In the evening, when he got through working with Tom, he'd go on back home. He always was a little worker (chuckling). He's the deacon of my church.

WARE: Really? What's Winter's last name?

LEWIS: Gordon.

WARE: Are there many family members that go to your church?

LEWIS: Oh, there's a good deal of them. The Simpsons, the Fields, the Bells and the Lawsons all go to my church. That's the maiden name, the Lawsons. The McKinneys go to my church, two sets of McKinney's go to my church. Who else goes to my church? The Hales go to my church.

WARE: Well, so, you've got a big church because they're all your relatives.

LEWIS: Yeah, uh huh. All of the family! Harris goes to my church, the Woods, the Browns, and the Walters all go to my church. Reverend Simmons, my pastor, and his wife, Sister Simmons, go to my church. I've been under his leadership for twenty-seven years.



Reverend E. R. Simmons, Sr. (right), pastor of the Lively Hope Missionary Baptist Church, and his wife, Sister Simmons.

WARE: That's interesting. You raised children, your husband was in farming, and you were active in your church. Are there any other organizations or groups you're active in?

LEWIS: A long time ago I used to work with the 4H, when I had little children.

WARE: When you were growing up, this area was segregated. Were there ever any problems with whites and blacks when you were growing up?

LEWIS: Not when I was coming up, no ma'am. Not here. Not in Simonton, not in Fulshear. No, everybody was the same. You know, the kids I worked with, their parents were never...they were always the same, too.

WARE: Were they mainly white children that you raised, other than family? Was it mainly white children that you raised?

LEWIS: That's right. Trey, he had a little girl. Clifford's got a little girl named Ashley. I'm supposed to start helping take care of Ashley's little girl. Her name is Kinley Lee Garfield. That's my oldest boy. I raised, his little girl, his granddaughter.

WARE: That's Clifford's granddaughter.

LEWIS: Yeah, that's Clifford's granddaughter.

WARE: So even working in the homes of white people you never had any problems?

LEWIS: I never did! They always treated me nice. I have to give that to them though. I never was – nobody ever was nasty or nothing like that. Everybody was good. The people I worked for were the good people. (with humor) No problems at all. Never did.

WARE: Are you still in contact with any of the grown children that you were with?

LEWIS: The only person I'm in contact with is Luanne Holmes. Once in awhile Becky Stokes calls me. Oh yeah, I got another little girl – her Mama's name is Joanne Pointdexter. That girl is 37 or 39 years old now.

WARE: What did you do for entertainment when you were a kid?

LEWIS: Like what?

WARE: Like when you were a kid. Well, your mom died when you were fourteen, so before you were fourteen.

LEWIS: Nothing.

WARE: No movies?

LEWIS: No. We were living in Fulshear. We didn't have no movies down there. Now, a long time ago, before my mama passed, we used to walk to – you know how they have the shows that come to Fulshear, come to town? We would go there.

WARE: So what kinds of shows would come to town?

LEWIS: Movies.

WARE: Show them at the school or something?

LEWIS: I used to go to 4H, you know how they have the...what was that? Every year they have it. You know, at the fairgrounds.

WARE: Oh, the fair, oh yes.

LEWIS: I used to go to the fair and all like that. But I don't go to the fair no more. Too far to walk. It's too many people. It gets pushy and all, stepping on your feet and all like that. I stay home.

WARE: Do you have a favorite memory from your childhood?

LEWIS: Favorite memory? No, I can't remember. I'm the type of person, I'd always like to help somebody. All the time. God called me to help. I always help needy people. I came up the hard way. I always see somebody, you know, who needs help, I don't mind helping them at all. They don't even have to pay me or nothing like that. No, I get a joy out of helping people. That's my joy in life; helping someone. I am a nobody, but I am somebody to tell you about somebody. I have had a good life. I don't have any regrets, not at all though because I have learned how to accept things. You know lots of times you can be happy and you can be sad. But every day of my life I try to be happy.

I don't promise. That's what happened to my husband. He promised he was going to do this for the next day. He wasn't here to do it. So I learned from that. No, I don't promise what I'm going to do tomorrow. No, I never have. Because tomorrow's not promised to you. Do what you can while you can. Be happy as you go along because you know what? You never pass this way again. Really!

Everybody knows Bessie. Everybody say, "There goes Bessie", "Bessie this, Bessie this, Bessie goes everywhere." What I love about Stephen Holmes, he has really helped me a whole lot in my life. I had quit working for them a long time ago. He'd go about his business and I'd go about my business. I was in Jim's store, that's his cousin, Jim Dozier. They had a family reunion in Katy, and I was working for Jim. So he said, "Bessie, I want you to come to my family reunion in Katy." I said, "Okay." That was his Uncle's wife. Anyhow, I went there. Luanne was pregnant then.

Luanne's mama asks me, she says, "Bessie, would you mind taking care of Luanne, 'cuz she's pregnant?" I said, "Uh uh! I'm not taking care of no more babies. I took care of enough babies." Luanne said, "If I get her down there and have this baby, she's gonna fall in love with it." She didn't lie. She didn't. (WARE softly laughs) So along comes Harrison! I would feed Harrison his little breakfast. She had a playpen. I'd put him down in there and he liked to watch TV. Sometime in the evening when she came home he would be sleeping in my lap. I'd change his diaper and feed him. He didn't like green beans. Baby food, he didn't like until I put some sweets in it. He'd eat it and everything. He was the best baby I ever had to take care of! I never had any problems with Harrison. NEVER did.

WARE: And you didn't want to take care of him.

LEWIS: No, I didn't! I said, "No. No more babies. I'm tired of taking care of babies." But Harrison was always my baby. Right now, if he gets anything to eat, he'd say, "Bessie, you want some of this?" He'd always look out for Bessie, all the time. "Bessie," he'd go and get different stuff, "You want that?" "Uh uh. Thank you, I don't like it." He'd always look out for Bessie. He never was a crybaby at all. I kept him dry and fed him, and he would watch TV all the time. "Okay, Harrison, night-night time." "I don't want to go night-night." "Harrison", I said, "Go. To. Bed." And he'd go on ahead and go to bed. (WARE laughs) I never had any problem with Harrison at all. And Reagan, I never had no problem with her either.

WARE: Okay, so are you going to take care of any more babies or are you done?

LEWIS: I might have to help take care of Carlos's baby. I doubt it though because they live in Houston. I probably won't have to worry about his babies. But anyhow, I'm going to help Ashley with her little girl. She wants to be a policeman like her dad. Her granddaddy was a policeman, her daddy was a policeman. Now she done passed the test and everything. I told 'em I won't raise another baby now. Yet still, I'll help, you know?

WARE: You can't help it.

LEWIS: No, that's in my blood. (both laugh)

WARE: It's the way God made you. You said it.

LEWIS: That's what I'm talking about! That's the way God made me, to help one another. You know, I have been blessed. My old house, just wore down. Sister Talley, one of the ladies who worked at the church, was telling a lady about it.

They'd come out there and look. They said, "No, this house cannot be fixed, nothing like that." Anyhow, they were all looking at it and they couldn't do nothing. All right, okay. Somehow she got in touch with some people in Katy with a church. They set aside different kinds of bowls, you know, they take their money up here to help the poor. That's what they do. Anyhow, Sister Talley kept on going. She got with this here lady that belongs to that church in Katy and they worked together.

They gave us so many thousand dollars. All right, come to my church. They raised some money at my church. They helped me get a trailer house. They got me a trailer house. After that, they still need a whole lot of money. So Sister Talley says, "You know what, Bessie? Sister Louis, I'm going to ask Stephen!" I said, "No, don't bother Steve." She went and called Steve and told him the amount they need. He says, "That's no problem!"

WARE: Well, because he loves you.

LEWIS: He says, "That's no problem." That wasn't no problem. He went over and paid it. I said, "God is good." I said, "You know what? I'm old, and I'm getting all my benefits now."

WARE: Because you've invested.

LEWIS: That's right! So I said to that little boy, you know, Harrison? "Boy, look what you did to me." "Boy, you better get back here. You don't know what a blessing you are to me!"

LEWIS: See, I'm just saying how that God had put me back in Stephen's life, and Stephen in my life, and back in Luanne's life and this little boy's life. See? That's Stephen's grandson. Anyhow, he's invested because I'm taking care of his grandchild. But he wanted me to have a decent place to live. Stephen gave me his mama's car. But the nephew didn't tell him it had the oil leaking. I didn't even know it was oil leaking. It went bad. He gave me another car, a van. It went bad on me. I had a 2000 Lincoln. I was using it. That's mine, I bought it myself.

I was going down the road on my way back from sitting with Luanne's mother-in-law. I called Luanne. "Luanne, my car is running hot. It ain't running hot, but the gauge had gone bad." She said, "Where are you?" I said, "I'm at Kroger." She says, "Okay, stay there. I'll be there to pick you up." She goes and calls the wrecker and the wrecker came and picked my old car up and said it wasn't no good. Took him about four thousand dollars to fix it. So she said "We'll junk it." So she junked it.

They had this car, it's a 2004 Mercury. Stephen had it at his job. He said, "You reckon Bessie would want that car?" She said, "I don't know." I didn't want that big car. I wanted a little car. Anyhow, he brought the car to me. I locked the keys in my car. So I called Luanne and said, "Luanne, my keys are locked up in the car." "Don't worry about it." AAA came out and unlocked it. She said that other key was at the office. She brought the key to me, so I have two keys to my car now.

WARE: You mentioned that you babysat for Luanne's mother-in-law. Why did you babysit for her?

LEWIS: Oh, the husband got sick. She wasn't sick or nothing like that, but they needed somebody, you know, to take care of her. So I took care of her. Her name was Debbie.

WARE: I'm out of time. Thank you so much for sharing your memories with us!

Interview ends.