

FORT BEND COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION

ORAL HISTORY COMMITTEE

Interviewee: **Mary Perry Thompson Arledge**

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Interviewer: Diane L. Ware

Transcriber: Marsha Smith

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32 Pages



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The Dew House ca. 1980

Transcript

WARE: Let's start with some basic biographical information. When and where were you born?

ARLEDGE: I was born in Houston, Texas, at the old Memorial Hospital on Main Street, August 15, 1938, just before World War II, and slightly after the Great Depression. This seemed to be the party years, the flappers and my parents loved to party. Ruth and Jessie Dew were some of their favorite playmates to go partying with.

WARE: What were your parents' names, and did you have any siblings?

ARLEDGE: Leslie Butcher Thompson and Edwin Tommy Imslee Thompson. I have a half-brother from my dad's previous marriage – his first wife died – and he had a son, Kinman 'Bubba' Thompson. I was born Mary Perry Thompson; Mary Perry was a friend's family name. I have a brother, George McCullough 'Mac' Thompson. McCullough and Kinman are both family names. They weren't very creative! (laughs)

WARE: When and why did your family move to the DeWalt area?

ARLEDGE: They rented their first home on Sunset Boulevard in Houston, near Rice University. They became close friends with Ruth Dew [Lalley]. There was a house next door to the Dew House that was available for rent. So, they lured my parents out there. They could play bridge, party, or go to Galveston to the gambling casino or the Balinese Room, out on the wharf. They would go down there and party all night.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Please read the Nancy Stephenson Woods interview on this website at <https://www.fortbendcountytexas.gov/home/showdocument?id=45528> for her recollections of Ruth Dew Lalley and her sister, Jesse, as a lifelong maid and friend.

We had all sorts of house help that I think my grandmother paid for. We had a nanny when we lived in Houston because my mother was in the Junior League, and they were all volunteering. My father started a newsletter for the servicemen overseas. It was a round-robin letter that started out for local families and ended up with a publication of 4,500. It was called *The News Well*, and it was one of the few things they let into prison camps. The military boys would write in as to where they were, and he'd put a little clip about 'so-and-so's' son is here, or 'so-and-so' saw 'so-and-so' over here. I have a copy of it if you would like to see it. It always had jokes, just corny fun jokes, and usually a picture drawing of women. Not like Playboy, but funny and provocative – clean fun. It was just uplifting. The Houston people donated to pay for the expenses of printing and shipping.

My dad played the ukulele and sang. He had a repertoire of songs that you've never heard of today. Everywhere he went, people would have him bring out his ukulele and they would start singing. He was the big entertainment. He would always leave it in the car, but it never stayed in the car.

When the servicemen were home, they would be entertained at dances through the United Services Organization (USO). Dad would sing and my parents would help out with food and refreshments. My brother was in World War II and that was another reason they got the newsletter started.

WARE: Ruth was involved with rolling bandages with the American Red Cross?

ARLEDGE: Jessie was the main one. She actually had a hat and an armband. They had big parties. They sterilized the sheets, tore or cut them and rolled them. Then they went down for a lavish lunch. Typical of the 'come and work and we'll reward you'. Ruth did that with the Cancer Society making Easter baskets for the children. Everybody would come and they would make those little baskets, wiring things together, and *frou-frou* them up. Then they'd go eat this lavish meal and play bridge the rest of the day. They mixed work with play and it supported a good cause. They always had a cause going.

EDITOR'S NOTE: *Frou-frou* - frills or other ornamentation, particularly of women's clothes, i. e. "a little frou-frou skirt"

WARE: What did your dad do for business?

ARLEDGE: He had been in the independent oil business. After the war, they asked him to be the Executive Vice President of TIPRO, Texas Independent Producers & Royalty Owners Association. He was a lobbyist with an office here when Congress was in session. His entertaining and his ability to win people over was perfect for being the spokesperson for the small, independent oil companies. Back then you could receive gifts, and he'd get turkeys and silk pajamas – nothing lavish, but little things that nobody thought anything about at the time.

WARE: What year did you move to DeWalt?

ARLEDGE: I think it was the early 1940s. My brother started school while we were there. At that time you started school at age seven, and he was three years older than I. I think we moved there when I was three, around 1941.

The war broke out, gas rationing started and you couldn't get tires or gas. Dad couldn't afford to drive back and forth into Houston for his job so we moved back to town. We had a couple of good years there. We were playful kids with a whole pasture and the whole world as our playground. There wasn't anything to worry about except snakes. Someone was always with you.

WARE: So how many years do you think you lived out there?

ARLEDGE: I think about two years. I remember Ole T was one of our nannies. Effie Blake worked for us for a while. Ole T was a big woman with big, robust bosoms and she would just gather me up when the other kids teased me. I was the youngest kid and the boys would pick on me. She'd gather me up and she'd say, "Now, you boys go on and get away and leave my baby alone. You leave Miss Mary Perry alone, you hear? Or you're going to get a taste of me!" She'd shuffle around in house shoes that remind you of the Maxine cartoon. She cleaned a little but mostly she just looked after us and was always there.

WARE: Do you remember who lived in the house before you did?

ARLEDGE: I suspect it was Ruth and the family who owned it – it was on their property. I think everything in DeWalt was their property, to tell you the truth!

WARE: That house is about the only thing still there?

ARLEDGE: Yeah. We had a pen out in the back with a billy goat who would chase you, believe me! But once you got somebody to harness him up and put him in the little buggy, you had a nice ride. We'd get in the cart and take all the little kids riding. My mother told our family doctor and pediatrician, Dr. Slaughter, in Sugar Land, to destroy her children's records, because we had scabies and lice. She said she remembered having to wash the sheets in gasoline and boil them, and scrub our heads. You'd have this pretty little dress on and you'd start scratching and there would be little blood spots everywhere. I picked up scabies from somewhere. Maybe from the animals. But we had a lot of things like that, typical of being in the country.

WARE: After your parents moved out of DeWalt, they still came back regularly?

ARLEDGE: Oh, yes! Mother and Ruth were very close and they were bridge partners. They took on these projects together. Ruth usually ramrodded and got things started and mother and some of her friends would come along.

But they were AVID bridge players. I never knew what bridge was and never wanted anything to do with it. All I'd hear them say was "Pass", "Trump", "Double". I didn't know what any of that meant. I spent half my lifetime on the sofa on the front porch while they would play until 2:00 AM. This was after we had moved to town and I was in school! We would come out after school and they would start playing bridge. I would go ride horses, come in and shower, and then have to wait and listen to them fuss at each other for not trumping or not playing right! They were cutthroat bridge players.

WARE: Did your mother ever bring friends from Houston?

ARLEDGE: Maynette Williams came with her some. I don't recall too many others, but Ruth would always have a group going. When we lived there, there was a hurricane that hit Galveston. I'm not sure what year that was. It was a pretty big hurricane and everybody was scared. They all came to the Big House. All the help was in the kitchen.

EDITOR'S NOTE: The 1943 Surprise hurricane was the first hurricane to be entered by a reconnaissance aircraft. The system developed as a tropical storm while situated over the northeastern Gulf of Mexico on July 25. Early on July 27, it became a Category 2 hurricane on the modern-day Saffir–Simpson hurricane wind scale and peaked with winds of 105 mph (165 km/h). The system made landfall on the Bolivar Peninsula in Texas late on July 27. After moving inland, the storm initially weakened rapidly, but remained a tropical cyclone until dissipating over north-central Texas on July 29.

Because the storm occurred during World War II, information and reports were censored by the Government of the United States and news media. Advisories also had to be cleared through the Weather Bureau Office in New Orleans, resulting in late releases. This in turn delayed preparations ahead of the storm. The storm was considered the worst in Texas since the 1915 Galveston hurricane. Wind gusts up to 132 mph were reported in the Galveston–Houston area. Numerous buildings and houses were damaged or destroyed. The storm caused 19 fatalities, 14 of which occurred after two separate ships sunk. Overall, damage reached approximately \$17 million (1943 USD). See the detailed summary by weather researchers Lou Fincher and Bill Read on the National Weather Service website at https://www.weather.gov/hgx/projects_1943surprisehurricane

Every family that lived out there was stuffed in that part of the house. Ruth & Jessie and mother & dad were in the house, playing bridge. They played bridge all night long. I was upstairs with Miss DeMeyer. She was the lady who came to take care of Ruth's mother, Alice, in her later years.

I still have the same silver pattern and a tomato server with the initial 'D' on the handle that Ruth gave me. Her mother used to go out in the flower bed and dig with that sterling silver tomato server! (laughter) It was just the right shape for digging for her!

WARE: Do you remember what Alice Dew was ill with?

ARLEDGE: She lived to be 101. I think it was just old age. She needed somebody with her and Miss DeMeyer came out to stay with her. Miss DeMeyer lived in the garage apartment. She had been there so long with them, that when Alice died, they kept her on. She was like family. That's the way people who lived out there and worked for them were. They became family. She took care of the chickens. She had the sweetest way of talking to the dogs and the little pets. She'd say, "Now, come on, sweetie. Oh, come on, you little sweet thing. Come over here". No animal could resist her. She'd take bread out to the old paint horse and let me feed him stale bread. I'd hold it out and he'd come up. You couldn't throw away watermelon rinds because she would have to take it to the horses. I LOVED following her around. When I got older I finally got brave enough to ask if I could spend the night with her. I asked her first, and she said, "Well, if it's okay." And they let me.

I would come out on the weekends and set my alarm for 5:30. I'd get up and get dressed, and tiptoe down those squeaky stairs with all those wild animal heads around the stairwell that just scared me to death. I didn't want to make any noise, but I wanted to go downstairs and be there at daybreak because Sam would go down to milk. I would tell Sam the night before that I wanted to meet him so he wouldn't leave me. They had a black and white "Heinz" dog, named Spot. Spot would be with me and we'd stand there at the back gate and I'd watch to see Sam's lantern. He'd be walking down there, carrying a lantern. The minute I did, I would holler and Spot and I would go loping over there. There was a little trail through the grass over to where he was, but I was so afraid of snakes. They had chicken snakes that came up to the chicken yard and I'd always send the dog ahead of me and then I'd go running and leaping, hoping I would jump over them if there were any there! I was petrified of snakes.

Then I'd get with Sam and we'd go down and I'd watch him milk the cows. He'd squirt milk over at the barn cats. They had a temperamental Jersey cow and she wouldn't let down her milk if anybody was there. So Sam would wait to milk her last. It would be about daylight, and he would say, "Now you go on up to the house. I'm fixin' to milk the bull." I didn't know any difference so I'd run up to the house and wait for him.

Then he'd come with the wheelbarrow with the big buckets of milk. He put cheesecloth over the top of these big tin urns, and strain the milk through there, to remove any debris that might have gotten into the milk. He'd carry that up to the house and we'd put it in the separator in the fore-room. That was the part they had built on after the main house was built. It was a big separator, and he'd pour the milk in, we'd turn the crank and the cream would come out one spigot and the milk would come out the other. That just fascinated me!

Then we'd put the bottles of milk in the refrigerator and the cream would still rise to the top. That was the best! They furnished the milk for the store. They furnished chickens for the store. They furnished beef and pork for the store. The general store had everything. I know they bought beans, rice, crackers, and things like that and some food goods.

Then we'd come back to the house and by then Effie would be there and she'd fix a big breakfast. I always liked my eggs sunny-side up and crisp around the edge. By then Garbell would have come over and tied my horse to the back fence. I'd go out and ride my horse and go to the barn and hang out. Sometimes they were gathering corn. They would bring the mules and hitch them up to the wagon. We'd get in the wagon and go down the rows of corn. They'd break off the dried corn for feed. Occasionally they'd let me drive the mules. They'd gee and haw them. It was just the greatest time in my life. They had a slop bucket at the house and Garbell would come get the slop. He had a big tub of stuff and he'd put grain and water in it. It would kind of sour and swell overnight. The pigs loved it. It smelled like the dickens! He had a wooden sled with a big barrel on it. He'd hook it up and pull it into the pig pen and pour the slop into the troughs. The pigpen was behind the horse barn and went down to the river, so they could have their mud to lay and roll in.

EDITOR'S NOTE: *Gee and Haw* - voice commands for an animal to turn right or left, respectively. Historically the terms are reported to have been relative to the driver, so away or towards the driver respectively. The etymology of both words is unknown.-- *Wikipedia*

WARE: How many pigs do you think they had?

ARLEDGE: They mostly had Durocs, the red pigs. They had some really BIG sows, maybe ten. They were always having babies and you had to be careful. If they had babies, you didn't want to get near the pen. The big old sow would chase you out in a heartbeat.

WARE: How many mules did they have?

ARLEDGE: They had a herd of mules. They'd bring the mules up and take the work mules out and put the other ones in that pasture behind the house. There was a 'Livestock Crossing' sign there. They were driving mules across the road and there was a herd of them, maybe twenty mules.

A car came speeding down the highway and plowed right into them and killed several of the mules. Walter [Lalley] had to go out there and shoot one or two of them that were badly injured. He had to put them out of their misery and then they had to haul the bodies away. It was so sad.

WARE: You mentioned Sam Watkins. Was Eliza Watkins still alive at that point?

ARLEDGE: Yes. I loved to go over to their house at night and sit on the porch. I think I felt more comfortable with the help than I did with the rich people. I never knew how to carry on a conversation with Ruth. She intimidated me. I thought, "What do I ask about? I don't know anything about bridge. How do I talk to her?" It was so hard to make conversation with the adults and I felt so at home with the help. I'd hang out in the kitchen. When we lived there, they had an old wooden stove and a Sears & Roebuck catalog. That was the greatest thing. It stayed in the kitchen and it was the big 'wish book'. You could spend hours and hours looking through the book and daydreaming.

Mac and I fit right in with Nancy and Jessie May and Boots. Boots was the oldest and I think Nancy and Mac were pretty close to the same age, and then Jessie May and me. We would play together and sometimes they'd bring the old paint horse. We called it Mr. Meyer's paint horse. There were two paint horses; one was kind of ornery but the other one was REAL gentle. He was 'kid smart'. We'd get on him bareback by pushing him up to the fence, climb on the fence and get one him. Somebody would have to stay on the ground and keep him next to the fence because about the time you started to get on him, he'd sidestep and step away. The last person always had trouble getting on, and that was usually me. Then we would start trotting down the road, bareback on this horse, all holding on. We'd start giggling and then one of us would slip and all of us would fall off. He'd just stop and stand there. We spent all day getting on that horse and then letting him dump us.

WARE: I've seen a picture of Eliza Watkins when she was younger. Describe her to me.

ARLEDGE: She was a short, heavy-set, big bosomed woman with a heart of pure gold. She was a good cook. She had a little garden out back and she always had good food. The houses weren't quite like row houses like they had in New Orleans, but they were very simple.

They had a front porch, two bedrooms and the kitchen in the back, and an outhouse. That was it. But you were always welcome. No matter what they had, Eliza would always serve me up a plate or offer me something.

WARE: Their house was right near the big house?

ARLEDGE: It was in the pasture behind the big house. It was the only house and they were the only house help who lived close.

They had gotten that house because Sam took care of the cows and needed to be there early. He was tall and bony. He was always laughing. He was a dark black man. I followed in his footsteps for many a year. He was just the nicest man that ever was. He had a big, hearty laugh. He was little and Eliza was big. Eliza worked in the big house. I don't recall that they had children of their own but they took in Nancy, Boots and Jessie May, and raised them.

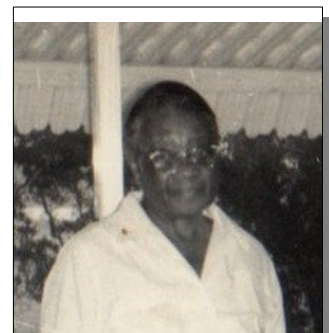
WARE: You mentioned Effie Blake. Describe Effie for me.

ARLEDGE: Effie was a love. She was tall and well built, a little overweight. She was the main cook and she sang hymns and cooked. She was always humming, always happy. She ruled the kitchen, though! If you got in the way, she'd send you skedaddling. She was VERY religious, loved Jesus and was at that little church all the time. They had a black church on Oilfield Road. I don't know what the name of it was. I'd come out on the weekends and we'd go riding. We'd ride by that little church and you'd hear them singing and the little roof would just be bouncing, there was so much joy in that church.

WARE: Somebody told me that over next to the store was a little beer joint.



Eliza Stephenson Watkins, ca. 1916, cook at the Dew House until her death in 1959.



Effie Blake was the main cook at the Dew House.

ARLEDGE: Yes, the Ruthie. They named it after Ruth. I can't remember the lady's name that ran it. When I went down on the weekends, I never thought about the help and that I might be an inconvenience. They wouldn't let me go ride by myself so they'd call up either Slim Blake, Effie's husband, or Old Joe – Mexican Joe. Joe was a little wiry guy and he had a big old growth by one eye. It wasn't really a mole, but a growth. He'd work all week and go to the Ruthie all weekend. By Sunday night he was staggering up the drive, asking for more money.

Old Joe had a little sorrel horse named Popcorn, and he loved Popcorn. He'd go back there and drink a beer and he'd get somebody to give Popcorn a drink. I remember one time I couldn't tell which was staggering the most. He couldn't even get on his horse he was so drunk. He was coming down the road wanting more money and Jessie came out and scolded him real good and sent him home. (laughter)

When we'd go riding on Saturday mornings, we'd stop by the Ruthie and he'd have me hold the horse. He'd say, "I'll be back in a minute" and go in. He'd send the lady out with a bean burrito for me, this was before they had breakfast tacos and burritos. I've never tasted anything that good in my life as that big old fresh, soft flour tortilla, rolled with beans. I wouldn't tell anybody what we did – he bribed me well!

I was probably between eight and ten years old and loved the country. After we moved back to town, my brother, a city boy, didn't come back to DeWalt very often. When we first moved, we came back quite a bit. He came because he didn't have another place to hang out. We'd go riding and they'd put me on Miss DeMeyer's paint, the kid-savvy one, and he'd get the other paint. They always had a lead line on my horse. We'd cross the old dam behind the store and go into that pasture. If you'd ride around to the north, it would follow the bend in the creek. There were wild grape vines and a dirt road going through there. Mac would lag back and then he'd lope up. He wanted to lope. I wanted to do it so bad but they kept me on a lead line. I couldn't wait until I got big enough to get off the lead line so I could lope.

WARE: You mentioned Slim Blake. Was he truly slim? What did he look like?

ARLEDGE: No, he was kind of a big old, kind of slow guy. His feet looked like canoes. I remember one morning I was walking to the barn, and I would always walk right down the middle of the road. Like I said, I was afraid of snakes, and they had a lot of cottonmouths because of the creek and the lake behind the house.

So I'd walk right down the middle of the road, just watching for snakes. There was a water moccasin that came out and I turned around and skedaddled back to the house, hollering. Slim walked down there and stomped the snake in the head with his boot. Slim loved to fish. He was kind of lazy and slow. He rode a palomino horse named Buttermilk and he'd sit off to one side, a bit crooked in the saddle. Anything he did, he didn't get in a rush. You couldn't get him to panic or hurry for nothing. He just enjoyed life.

He was always down by the dam, fishing. He'd catch alligator gar and everything. He'd show them to me. He'd take me down there and we'd go crabbing. We'd get bacon and tie it on a string and find the crawdad holes. I loved to follow him around, too. We'd ride to check the cattle in the pasture behind the house. They were a Brahma cross. They had some brindle cattle, a little Hereford and a little Brahma, and some of them came along and had a spotted roan color to them. Jessie kept several so she could breed them and pass that color down.

We'd go down Oilfield Road to the pasture behind the house, where the cattle were. In the summertime you had to watch for screwworms. If there was a cut place or the umbilical cord of a newborn calf, they got in there and laid their eggs. When they branded the cattle, if they didn't 'dope' it good, the worms got in there and laid their eggs and larva hatched out and ate a hole in the side of the cow's hip. So they always kept a rope on their saddle. When Joe wasn't riding Popcorn, he rode a horse named Henry, who was a palomino stud. I have a picture of him. He wasn't a conformation horse but he was a good cow horse. He had a lot of cow sense. Even when we were in the pasture next to where the mares were, if Joe was catching a calf, Henry was all business. He'd hold the line tight. He wouldn't wander over to the mares.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Conformation Horse - Equine conformation evaluates the degree of correctness of a horse's bone structure, musculature, and its body proportions in relation to each other. Undesirable conformation can limit the ability to perform a specific task. --Wikipedia

Joe was the roper. Slim would stay on the horse and keep the mama cow away until they were able to 'dope' the calf. He had the little bottle of medicine he carried in his saddle. It was black, smelly stuff, kind of smelled like creosote, and it might have been creosote. He'd clean out the wound by getting a match to flip those maggots out and then he'd pour that medicine in there.

WARE: You're talking about branding. I've only seen proof of the one brand that's in the stained glass window at the house. Do you remember what the brand looked like?

ARLEDGE: No, I don't. Jessie and Ruth kept cattle. They did everything together. After Jessie left DeWalt, Ruth lived in the big house all of her life. Jessie got married to an Air Force Colonel, Ernest Agnew, and traveled the world. She brought back a lot of things from the Orient. After he died, she came back to the house. Jessie and Ruth were like partners in everything. Jessie was the postmistress. When they put the post office in the store, she got the training so she was legally the postmistress.

The old general store was a big, long building. The post office was at the very back. They had some little mailboxes and she stamped the letters. On the south side were mainly work clothes such as work gloves, Red Wing boots, jeans, coveralls, jackets, and straw hats. On the other side was the food. They had a locker in the back where they hung a side of beef or pork. Early on they didn't have a meat locker but they got one later on.

WARE: Did they have a butcher?

ARLEDGE: Whoever was working there did it. I don't know if he was hired as a butcher but these people knew how to butcher anything, because they lived on farms all their lives. They brought milk down that Sam got in the morning and they sold the extra milk. It was good, raw milk. I never heard of anybody getting sick on it. They had bins of beans and of rice with scoops. They had the cracker barrel. Then they had a candy section and soda pop!

WARE: Your voice went up when you said candy section! (laughter)

ARLEDGE: I could go riding and come up and tie my horse up front, go in and get a soda pop and candy and I didn't have to pay for it. I was home free! That was my luxury. At first they had to put ice in an ice box before they had refrigeration. The Cokes were in bottles and there were aluminum rods fairly close together where the rods caught the neck of the bottle, and you could just slide a bottle. Each row would have root beer, Big Red, Big Orange, and Royal Crown Cola. I don't remember if they had Coke and Pepsi back then. You could pick out what you wanted and then slide the bottles until you got to the one you wanted. Boy, on a hot day when you've been riding, to come in and get a big old strawberry Big Red and drink it down – it was a good thing.

WARE: When you went riding, what other kids rode with you?

ARLEDGE: There weren't any kids. Sometimes Muffie or June were out there. Muffie and I were pretty competitive. She had a palomino horse with a white mane and tail named Pal and Ruth eventually gave me a colt. I was the first one who ever touched the colt, playing and talking to him.

EDITOR'S NOTE: See Linda "Muffie" Moroney's interview on the FBC Historical Commission website at <https://www.fortbendcountytexas.gov/home/showdocument?id=42954> and June Moroney's interview at <https://www.fortbendcountytexas.gov/home/showdocument?id=45711>

Every time I went, I took him some feed. I'd whistle and he'd come up. I could even go out in the back pasture and whistle, and he came up. I wanted him and finally got up the nerve to ask Ruth if I could have him. She said, "Well, you know, it's going to be two years before he's old enough to be broke. Why don't you take the white mare, Lillian?"

There were two white mares which were Ruth's. They were a mother and daughter. The mother's name was JoAnne and the daughter was Lillian. Like I said, they weren't creative with their names! They were solid white, long mane and tail and they had a little bit of Arabian in them. They were kind of prancey. She pranced and swung her feet out when she walked. Ruth gave me Lillian and that just blew me away. I loved it!

I wanted a saddle for years and years but they were expensive. In fact, after the war, there just wasn't money for saddles and things. One year for Christmas she got me a martingale and bridle with silver things on it. A martingale goes around the horse's neck and attaches to the saddle to keep the saddle from slipping back. It's meant to keep the horse's head from 'rearing' back toward the rider's face. Generally seen on very high spirited horses or horses who have that bad habit of throwing their head around. It's meant to protect the rider. It wasn't exactly the rough cowboy thing I had in mind but I never said anything. You'll see it in one of the pictures.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Martingale - a strap, or set of straps, attached at one end to the nose band (standing martingale) or reins (running martingale) of a horse and at the other end to the girth. It is used to prevent the horse from raising its head too high.

Muffie and I would ride together and at that time we could ride without being on a lead line. We were competitive. We'd lag back and then race our horses. Muffie and I would play together in Muffie's mother's (Jessie's) room. Jessie had a window air conditioning unit, so after lunch, we'd go up there and get on the floor and play. We were on our hands and knees, rearing up and pawing and whinnying. We were wild horses.

I remember one time we went down into the bar that was built onto the side of the house. They had a nickel slot machine and we'd put nickels in and more nickels in and never won. Finally we got to messing around and found that it was open in the back and you could turn the dial and make it pay. So we did that. Then Muffie got to feeling bad about it and she tattled on us and we got in trouble. Then I had to put all the nickels back in and I couldn't quit winning! (laughter) I was kind of mad at Muffie for tattling like that, but she had a guilty conscience. We shouldn't have been doing it. They had a brass rail on the bar and the spittoon and we'd play like we were cowboys standing there at the rail.

Cotton was king back then, particularly during the war. I think they made a lot of their money on the cotton crop. They raised cotton, corn, maize [milo in today's parlance] for the livestock. Those were the primary crops.

All that part going up FM 1092 toward where Ruth's house was later on, that was all cotton and cornfields. I think they started taking their cotton to a bigger gin somewhere after we moved back to Houston.

WARE: I know they shipped their products on the Sugar Land Railroad. Do you remember the train being there?

ARLEDGE: Yeah, I remember the railroad tracks and the train. Ward Williams and I were out there one time, riding. There was a dirt road that went from the General Store down past the barn and the railroad track paralleled it. One time I was riding JoAnne, the mother to my horse, Lillian, and she started running and I couldn't stop her. I had to pull on one rein to circle her. I pulled and circled her and she was headed for the railroad tracks. I was thinking, "Oh, my gosh, she's going to fall and break a leg." But she finally pulled up.

I don't remember the trains coming through very much. I'm sure they did but I didn't take much notice of it. They weren't there on a daily basis, but they came through for a long time even after the gin closed down.

WARE: At the store, were there gas pumps?

ARLEDGE: Yes, there were some gas pumps in front. There was a maintenance shop next to the store where they worked on tractors and things. That's where the gas pump was.

WARE: You mentioned Ward Williams. Who is he?

ARLEDGE: Ward's mother, Maynette, and my mother went to high school together, in Fort Worth. Maynette was my mother's best friend. She married Cricket Williams and they introduced my mother to my father. So we grew up together. Ward and I were about the same age. Ward and I would ride down that road. I generally rode Lillian and he rode a palomino named Tony. He was a five gaited horse and a really smooth ride. We were going to race one time, from way down the road all the way up to the store.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Five gaited horses are notable for their ability to perform five distinct horse gaits instead of simply the three gaits, walk, trot and canter or gallop common to most horses. The ability to perform an ambling gait or to pace appears to be due to a specific genetic mutation. Some horses are able to both trot and perform an ambling gait, but many can only do one or the other, thus five gaited ability is not particularly common in the horse world. -- *Wikipedia*

We didn't think about our racing past the barn with the gate open. Here we were running full blast and the horses just took a hard left and we went flying through the air! DUH!! (laughter) You don't run horses past their home gate without expecting them to stop. We did get into some trouble – nothing bad – but you learned to use common sense when you grow up on a farm. I guarantee it taught me a lot of common sense about animals and things.

WARE: You mentioned a lot about the help. What types of things were segregated at that time?

ARLEDGE: They had their own cemetery across Hwy 6, way out in the back pasture past the dam. It was a pretty good ways back there. They had all these row houses that all looked alike. They had their own church. They all called me 'Miss Mary Perry'. It was just a given. I think Nancy still calls me Miss Mary Perry.

WARE: Muffie's mother was out there from time to time? Tell me about her.

ARLEDGE: 'Little Jessie' was a classy lady. She had a lot of style. She was intelligent, friendly, and powerful. You knew that if she said something, you didn't argue with her. She was a strong businesswoman with a good mind. She was beautiful. I was so much younger that I didn't engage with her very much but I always admired her. She had a nice figure and took care of herself. She was very distinguished, even aristocratic. A class act.

WARE: Who lived in the Big House over the years when you went out there?

ARLEDGE: Ruth and Jessie, and then Walter. I remember hearing stories about Frank and Henry. Henry lived elsewhere and Frank passed in 1941. I remember my mother telling me about Frank; and we associated it with the story of Frankie and Johnny. I thought that was a sad story. He was really the one that, to me, brought the ranching and farming dynasty together. He was a very strong leader and he knew the right people. He knew cattle and cotton. He was a mover and shaker and knew how to get things done.

EDITOR'S NOTE: "Frankie and Johnny" is a traditional American popular song. It tells the story of a woman, Frankie, who finds that her man Johnny was involved with another woman and shoots him dead. Frankie is then arrested. At trial, Frankie Baker claimed that Johnny (his real name was Allen Britt but it was changed to Johnny by songwriters because it rhymed with Frankie) had attacked her with a knife and that she acted in self-defense; she was acquitted and died in a Portland, Oregon, mental institution in 1952. -- *Wikipedia*

He was kind of a workaholic but he never settled down, got married and had children. But he loved what he did and loved the land. I think he was active in the Livestock Show and things like that. He was probably the one who bought the two white horses. They used to use them in parades.

WARE: You mentioned that Mrs. Alice Dew was alive during your childhood. Do you remember any funerals at the house?

ARLEDGE: No, I don't. We had moved back into town and I think at that time you didn't take children to funerals. I was in college when Jessie and Walter died. Mother didn't tell me about it until after the fact. I was in Lubbock at Texas Tech University and it was a long way to come for a funeral.

WARE: You mentioned that living in DeWalt was one of the best times of your life. Do you have a single favorite memory?

ARLEDGE: I loved that old porch on the front of the house. They had one of the first phones and it was a party line. It was a ring crank phone and you had to sit there and hold the earpiece with one hand and talk into the mouthpiece. You'd pick it up to dial and somebody would be on the line. Of course they could hear you pick up the phone – they could hear the 'click'.

People would listen in to each other's conversations. These old ladies would get on there and talk for hours and wouldn't get off. I think their ring was two longs and a short. You knew what everybody's ring was so no matter who was called, you knew they were getting a phone call.

We'd get up and go riding all morning. When we got back in Jessie would make us go take a shower and clean up before lunch. I didn't know why, because we were just going to go ride after lunch. They made us take a nap or have a quiet time after lunch, during the heat of the day. Then we could go ride again. Lunches were GREAT. This is where I shifted roles with Nancy and Jessie May, because they were serving us. They were trained as well as anyone who worked at the Houston Club or the River Oaks Country Club. We'd go into that long dining room table, and it was set with the good china and silver, and water goblets. Jessie sat at the head of the table and there was a buzzer under the carpet she could use if somebody ran out of biscuits or gravy or chicken – I can remember so much fried chicken. Effie would make a casserole out of a big squash called Cushaw, and it was like sweet potatoes. It was really good and not as heavy as sweet potatoes. I asked Nancy how you make it and she said it was a lot of butter and brown sugar, and you boil the squash. I get excited every time I see green and white squash at the grocery store, but I never have tried to replicate the recipe.

They came around and served us on the proper side. Ruth liked the wings so you avoided taking the wings. But they always had lots of drumsticks, and the kids always got drumsticks. It was so formal and nice. After lunch we'd go up to Jessie's room to play, where it was cooler because of the window unit. She had redone her section of the house and it was kind of fancy. Then we'd go back down and get on the horses and go riding again until the evening meal.

WARE: Would the evening meal be as elaborate as the lunch meal?

ARLEDGE: Sometimes, if something was going on. Sometimes it would just be casual, and leftover from lunch. The big meal was during the day. Sometimes they entertained and had lavish parties. I never realized, until I heard Nancy's interview that the reason I enjoyed it so much was because the help made it so easy for us. We didn't have to lift a plate. We were just royalty and very spoiled. They were doing all the work. They had a big garden back behind Sam and Eliza's house. In the summertime everything would get ripe at the same time and we'd go harvest the garden.

They had washtubs full of black-eyed peas, green beans, corn, squash and okra. They had peach trees, pear trees and lots of fruit. They were cooking, canning and preserving. I remember they had an old pressure cooker and used it to seal the lids. One time that pressure cooker blew up and it got all over Ole T scalding her pretty bad.

WARE: Did they do that at the Big House?

ARLEDGE: Yeah. I remember sometimes it was on the wood stove and they would take logs and throw them in there. Then they got a different stove. But the canning and preserving would go on for days and days. We'd sit in that breezeway between the house and the garage to shuck corn and snap peas. It was fun for us because we could do it and when we got tired, we'd get up and leave. But the help had to stay and finish the job.

I think milking time was most fun. In the early morning or afternoon I followed Miss DeMeyer to the chicken yard. We'd put on shorts, and I'd always try to go barefoot through the chicken yard. They had some wooden planks down and I tried to stay on them. I'd tiptoe, and lose my focus, and sure enough I'd step in some chicken poop. But Miss DeMeyer knew her chickens. She had little coops where she put the setting hens.

Some of the hens wanted to set on the eggs and hatch them. When they started showing signs of setting, she'd pick them up and put them in a little coop where she had put wooden eggs in the nest so they would set on the wooden eggs.

WARE: How brilliant!

ARLEDGE: They had a few ducks and some Guineas. Guinea hens ran loose and they were great for insects. They are like dogs – they bark! They are good 'watchdogs'. I don't think we ever ate the Guinea hens. They just ran in a little flock around there. I don't remember having Guinea eggs but we had so many of the chicken eggs. If you were lucky enough, when Effie was cooking eggs, she'd find a double yolk egg and it was just thrilling to get a double yolk egg! You don't get those at the grocery store now. They candle them and take them out. It was pretty cool, getting a 'twin' egg.

They had turkeys and she made mash. She took the leftover milk and let it sour and she called it clabber. It got watery with kind of thick clots. They had a grinder for the corn that would grind the kernels right off the cob. She heated water, mix it with some grain and the clabber and this was the mash for the turkeys.

Trying to put a turkey in a pen is the hardest thing in the world. They have a pea-sized brain. They'll go right down the fence and walk right past the gate and never see it. The horses turned in but the turkeys never turned in. So two people had to be on different sides of the gate to get the turkeys penned up.

WARE: Did they sell the turkeys?

ARLEDGE: I guess they did. I don't know if they had them for Thanksgiving back then. I'm sure they did, for Thanksgiving and Christmas. Maybe they made some available at the store. On chicken killing day, and generally that would be a Saturday morning, they would get Garb Miller's Slim out there to kill the chickens that Miss DeMeyer picked. They got them, wrung their necks and they flopped all around the yard with no heads and blood going everywhere. They had big pots of boiling water and they'd dip them in so we could pluck the feathers. We'd clean the guts out and I'd sit there and play in all that mess. I thought that was pretty cool because I didn't have to do it all the time.

Effie made butter from the milk. They had a butter churn, and I helped hand churn the butter. She'd put it in square blocks and you'd have a square block of butter. She kept one out all the time so it was soft. They always had fresh bread. You'd come in from riding, get a big old slice of Mrs. Baird's bread, spread that fresh butter on there and sprinkle sugar on it – OH, it was good!

WARE: Do you remember that big bell ever ringing?

ARLEDGE: No, it was ornamental. I don't remember calling everybody in to the house with it. It was there, and they had the parrot cage. I forgot who brought the parrot back. They had a parrot cage in the back yard. I talked to him all the time. There was somebody there named Bet that used to work there because he would always say, "Old Bet, Old Bet" and he'd say, "Polly want a cracker" and I swear he said "Spot." I think he said "Nancy." We'd play with the parrot and give him peanuts. I was a little afraid of him, too. He lived for a long time after everybody else died. He outlived them all, I think.

WARE: Do you remember when he died?

ARLEDGE: No. When the split-up came, I was in college. So I didn't really know about it. My life-long dream was to go to college, major in animal husbandry and come back and help them with the ranch. I never told anybody. It was my secret fantasy. I actually did major in animal husbandry.

I was the only girl in the department when I started at Texas Tech. I kept thinking, "Is this what I really want to do? Oh, my gosh!" I was committed to it and I did it. I wanted a ranch in my life and I wanted to go back and help them run that place. Then while I was gone, Walter died and they sold everything. They'd split up everything by then.

WARE: Did they have a falling-out?

ARLEDGE: Yes. All I know is Jessie and Walter didn't get along. Walter was hard to get along with. He was a crusty old guy. He scared the heck out of me. One time we were moving cattle and working cattle and my mare was sweating and just shaking. I pulled up and went to the house. He said, "Well, get out there and help them." I said, "My mare's tired. She's going to die. She can't do this." He said, "Oh, the Hell she can't! Get off of there." He got on and whipped her and rode out the driveway. I was so mad at him. I was afraid he was going to kill her. He thought I was a sissy and wimpy, and I probably was. Nevertheless, he didn't have a lot of tact. I guess that's what I'm saying.

After the split-up, I'd go see Ruth (she was my godmother) at the new house. Miss DeMeyer was with them and she lived in one of the back bedrooms. They lived in the front room by the kitchen area, at that time. Walter intimidated me and I was so glad that Miss DeMeyer was there because I didn't know how to talk to him.

WARE: Let's start looking through some of these photos. I brought some photos of people I wasn't sure who they were. These are a bunch of kiddies on a horse.

ARLEDGE: That's Sam's paint horse. There's Ward Williams but I don't see myself in there. Nicky Blani used to go out there but I don't know which one is Nicky. Neither Jessie nor Ruth had children but they always had these big Easter egg hunts. Everybody and their children came out for the hunt. For the little kids, they moved all the cars out of the big garage and had rows of hay with the eggs hidden in there. The little kids could have a chance to find some and the big kids went out where they hid eggs in the trees and more difficult places. Then we'd all get a box lunch and they had tin tubs full of ice-cold Cokes. Of course, the parents went in and had a lavish meal in the Big House.

The servants dyed I don't know how many eggs. The Easter egg hunts were great! After that, they'd bring the horses around and 'this' paint horse would be hooked up to a buggy to take the children for a ride around that horseshoe driveway.

There's Jessie and I think that's Ruth. I don't know who that gentleman is, and this is Jessie May. I don't know if it is the same year these other pictures were taken.

That was another thing they did – gave the help clothes. Jessie May has a cute little Easter dress on and a bow in her hair. I think they sent some of the kids (Nancy and Jessie May) to school. Maybe Boots got an education. The house help had a lot of fringe benefits.

WARE: She is collecting eggs with the white children.



Easter Egg Hunt at DeWalt; Jessie May Stephenson (center) and Mary Perry Arledge are in the foreground and adults in the background, including Ruth Dew Lalley (with white scarf behind Jessie May), ca. 1942.

ARLEDGE: Mm hmm. I asked Jessie one time if I could have Nancy spend the night with me, and she told me that if you slept with a ('n word'), you would turn black and I believed her. She said it rubs off and you would turn black. Why couldn't she have just said “No, it's not appropriate?” But to tell a kid something like that.

The other paint horse would be saddled up and you could ride him. He went around the horseshoe driveway and came back. You couldn't make him veer from it. When I went out there and rode him, I could make him go by taking the reins and swatting him into a trot. It was hard as the dickens to get him to lope. He was a big old fat thing, and my legs didn't come down very far. What he wanted to do was just go around the driveway and stop. So you could put any kid on him and he would walk slowly around the driveway and come back and stop. If they tried to make him turn, they couldn't. He would just stop.

WARE: Nancy told me that's her, so I know that. Who's Nicky Blani?

ARLEDGE: The Blanis were some aristocratic people from Houston who came out. They were part of Ruth's clique. I just know that's Garbell. He was so big his jacket sleeves were not long enough. His pants were always short, too. I wish my mother were here. She probably knows these people.

WARE: I didn't know these people and I was hoping one of them might be your mother.

ARLEDGE: They used to have big barbecues. There was a gentleman who came from England who was important, and they had a huge barbecue. They dug a pit behind the chicken yard, back in that pasture where I went down to milk the cows. They put coals in the pit and wrapped the meat then placed it on a rack above the coals; then cover it with dirt and cook it. Then they'd open the pits and have this barbecue. I remember serving sweetbreads and brains. When I saw the movie, *Giant*, it reminded me of that. Every time I see that movie, that's just another era of DeWalt and the Dew era.

WARE: I think this is a family group.

ARLEDGE: I'm trying to see if Mae is in there. She was Little Jessie's mother, Mae Robinson. She was pretty strict. I remember her as being very strict, prim and proper. I don't think she approved of me too much. She kind of looked down her nose at me. She was the doctor's wife. I went to their house in Missouri City a couple of times. She just wasn't friendly. She was the only one who had children. She was different from Ruth and Jessie. She was more serious.

WARE: I'm going to follow your suggestion on these and I'm going to put a little number in pencil on the back.

ARLEDGE: This is a picture of me on a horse named Scout, a big old bay horse. He was a solid bay, leggy thing. That's my dad, leading me. There's a mule just out of camera on the right in the background? There are some kind of animals back there. I don't know if they are pigs. Sam and Eliza's house is back there, too. Those animals look like hogs from here. I need a magnifying glass! They may have had pigs over there. Back here is where the garden was. They had the pear orchard and the pecan trees.



Mary Perry Thompson Arledge on horseback being led by her father Edwin, ca. 1941

This is another of the same picture and you can see its winter time because we have jackets on. My dad put me on the big horse and he was leading me through a pasture. There's a road there that went across the street to the barn.

WARE: This is at the point where you were living in DeWalt?

ARLEDGE: Yes, we were living there. I don't know what they were rounding up or doing, but Dad got on a horse and helped them. I never saw Ruth on a horse but I saw Jessie.

I have a picture of Garbell and Mac, my brother. My brother just adored Garbell. We both did.

There was another kid we called Smitty or Butch. I think his last name was Schmidt and his dad worked for the oil field. He was the only other white kid who lived there when we were there.



Mary's father continues to lead her horse on the property, ca. 1941.

WARE: In the Humble Camp?

ARLEDGE: They didn't live in the Humble Camp. There were some more houses between my house and the row houses on Oil Field Road, so he lived in one of those houses. He'd come and play with my brother and me.

ARLEDGE: We had this big old oak tree and one of them came down during that hurricane in 1943. It didn't fall on the house, though. Everybody was gathered at the house; the black people were in the kitchen, singing hymns. They were scared to death. Miss DeMeyer had us children upstairs and the adults were downstairs, playing bridge. They were fine. They had coffee going and food going. Everybody had food to eat. It was like a big old party to them. They were just waiting out the hurricane.

ARLEDGE: This was my mother and my brother and me, standing on the sidewalk going into the side of the house. It had a big, screened in porch. I liked that porch. I was probably about four years old there.

ARLEDGE: I remember the house had wooden floors in the living room and dining room which were on the front of the house. The bedrooms were on the back and the side of the house.

WARE: Your mother looks very happy.

ARLEDGE: Yeah. Well, those were happy times. She had help so she didn't have to cook or clean. The help were like nannies. We'd had a nanny before we moved out there, but she couldn't drive back and forth so we lost Irene. But we had all the help. I think my grandmother paid for it, because my parents never had money. They could party and do whatever but weren't considered rich.

WARE: Do you remember who moved into the house after you moved out?

ARLEDGE: The Tuckers. Horace and Crystal Tucker. They had a daughter named Ellen who was very asthmatic and allergic to animals. She had a Domino chicken that was a pet. It was the only pet she could have. I loved to ride horses, and I'd have to go in and clean up and take a shower before I could go down there, because if I had a horse hair on me, it would give her asthma. I ran into her brother, Tucker, not too many years ago in Austin at a party. He was an artist who loved to paint ships and things. We got to talking and somehow we clicked on who we were. For a while I was corresponding with Ellen. She got married and lived in Arizona or Nevada and had five children. It may have been on that lake by Hoover Dam, Lake Mead. Then I lost track of her over the years, again.

EDITOR'S NOTE:: Domino Ranch encompasses several different chicken breeds including Leghorns and Rhode Island Reds and then there is a Dominique breed.

ARLEDGE: My brother, George started school when he was six or seven. They had to put him on a school bus to Missouri City fighting and screaming. I remember Effie carrying him out to the bus, trying to put him on and he'd try to run back off. They'd put him on and he'd run back off. I always liked going to school and meeting people. He was the timid one.



George "Mac" Thompson, their mother Leslie Thompson, and Mary Perry Thompson Arledge on the sidewalk at their house, ca, 1942

Butch was quite a bit taller than my brother and I. But when there are no other kids around, you'll play with what you've got! I loved it because I got to play with them and they actually played with me. But when we moved back to town, there were two little boys on one side and another boy on the other side who were my brother's age. To my brother, I went invisible overnight. It was like "Who are you? Don't touch me! Don't come around me! I have boys to play with now."

WARE: It was a different time.

ARLEDGE: One summer in the early 50's, instead of going to camp, we went with my aunt to New Jersey to visit my cousins. So I could either go to camp or go to New Jersey. When I came back, the first thing I did was get on the phone and asked how the mare and the colt were. Walter said, "Well, the colt's fine but your mare is dead." That's just how he would break things to you. I was just devastated! She had gotten colic. They got the vet out and had her walking and when they left, she laid down and died. I pulled out every picture I had and sat there on the bed and just sobbed. Mother tried to console me but I didn't want to be consoled. I just wanted to cry and grieve. All my dreams and aspirations I had for that horse died.

They had a Dan Wagner stud. He was kind of a line black buckskin and she was a white mare. The colt came out kind of cream colored. I had a picture of the colt. He looked white but you could see his mane was a little darker. I named him Bingo. I raised him and rode him. Eventually I brought him into town. We had a pasture across the highway on Westheimer in Houston. There was a lumberyard and the guy who owned the lumberyard had a pasture behind it and he charged us \$1 a month to keep our horses there. The \$1 was to pay for the water.

We could turn them out on the pasture which kept his grain down. A few of us built a make-shift stall that we could put our horses in and feed them. I'd get up in the morning, walk across Westheimer with my bucket of oats and feed my horse. Then I'd come back and get ready to go to school. We were so busy our senior year with parties after school, that if my girlfriend and I were going to ride, we had to ride in the morning. So we'd go with our hair in curlers!

We liked to barrel race so we had barrels set up, and we'd run the barrels. It would be so foggy you couldn't see the third barrel. Of course, by the time we got in, our rollers were wet. But these were the sacrifices we'd make for our horses. We were great horse lovers.

I'm maybe fourteen or fifteen in this photo. That's in the driveway to the Big House and that's me and Lillian. There were cottonwood trees going down the driveway, and when the wind was blowing you could hear the rustle of the trees. It was beautiful. To me, that driveway was huge. When I go back, I look at the driveway and it looks so tiny! But it was huge when I was a kid.

I spent my childhood weekends and summers in DeWalt. The longest spell I stayed was about two weeks. My mother had surgery and Ruth kept me. I was just in hog heaven. I'd get out and follow Miss DeMeyer and then I'd go to the barn. I'd follow Garbell and then saddle up and ride all day. It was my heaven. In my imagination, when I was riding, I lived every horse book I ever read. I have a very vivid imagination.



Mary Perry Thompson Arledge and her mare, Lillian, ca. 1953.

Lillian was a beautiful horse. She was kind of slew-footed in the front and when she walked, she kind of pranced and swung her feet out. She was a little pigeon-toed so she'd sling her feet out. It looked like she was prancing. When I'd ride down the road, all the little black children came out and waved to me. It was like royalty was going down the road. I always waved back and said "Hi" to them.

They had quite a few horses they kept stabled and fed grain. During the day they would take them over and turn them into the pasture to the south, between my house and the Big House, to graze during the day.

I think Jessie put the rose garden at the Big House but when Ruth moved, she had a rose garden. She'd go out and cut the roses and then arrange them. She took every color and put them together and they were just beautiful. I don't think I ever went out there that I didn't see fresh flowers.



Mary Perry Thompson Arledge and William "Pinkie" Arledge at her bridal shower at the Lalleys, ca. 1961.

Here's another picture of Pinkie and me, with the gladiolus behind us. I'm quite sure Ruth arranged them in a big silver standing vase.

WARE: They look like they're from an alter somewhere. Look at the size of those!

ARLEDGE: They do. When she'd get her roses, she would put every color together and they were just a rainbow of color and beautifully arranged.

ARLEDGE: Ruth had an engagement party for me. This was my husband-to-be, "Pinkie" Arledge. This was at her house, the new house. The one that she and Walter built from the two row houses. She loved to entertain. She's got this umbrella and put white gifts around it. She always had fresh flowers and loved to arrange them. She had a rose garden at both places.

WARE: What was your husband's full name?

ARLEDGE: William Henry Arledge. You can see he had red hair, so his nickname was Pinkie. That was in 1961.



Mary Perry Thompson Arledge and fiancé, William Arledge, at her bridal shower, ca. 1961

ARLEDGE: Walter Lalley wasn't real tall but was kind of barrel-chested. Powerful people have this big upper body. Ruth could handle Walter. She would say, "Oh, Walter, hush," or "Oh, Walter!" They got along great. But I think she was the only one who could get along with Walter. He had ideas about how to run the place and Jessie had other ideas.

WARE: You said something about them making the house out of row houses?

ARLEDGE: They took two of the old row houses – the floors had the wooden pegs. They took those and put them on each end, built the partition in the middle and built the kitchen and garage area. They had two bedrooms. The back bedroom eventually became Ruth's when she got sick, because it was close to the garage.

The garage to the right side of the house and they had a little kitchenette – a little, tiny kitchen. Well, that didn't work for very long. So there are steps down from that little kitchen. They use that now for a bar area because Ruth liked to entertain. You'd step down and there was a porch between the garage. Maybe it was the garage that became the kitchen. The porch turned into a formal dining room. Then the garage became the big kitchen. She had one wall that was cabinets, floor to ceiling and every kind of beautiful sets of china and silver.

I remember when I was in college she was robbed. She had the most exquisite sterling silver tea service, all engraved with flowers and beautiful designs. It was stolen and most likely melted down. Oh, I thought of that piece being gone and it just crushed me, and I know it crushed Ruth.

WARE: Did she ever cook herself?

ARLEDGE: Ruth didn't cook but she supervised it, and she would tell them exactly how to do it and she would taste it. She taught the help how to cook. She would have poached pears, the most exquisite things. She introduced me to that dressing.



Walter and Ruth Dew Lalley at Mary and Pinkie Arledge's bridal shower, ca.1961.

When they had their home-grown vegetables, their tomatoes were so good. They were like a sweet tomato and you just wanted to go get a ripe tomato, slice it, put it on a saltine cracker with pepper and you were in heaven. She supervised. She made up the menus. When she and Jessie were having a party, they decided on the food and went to the grocery store. Sometimes they'd take Effie with them

I always got to pick what kind of birthday cake I wanted and Effie would make me a birthday cake. My favorite was Effie's banana nut cake with caramel icing. By the way, I have the original recipe and I'm going to give it to you. There are a few recipes that I found and I'm going to get that for you. It was three layers with sliced bananas in between and she would cook the sugar to caramelize it and OH, it was to die for.

WARE: That would be a wonderful thing to serve at a gala at the house.

ARLEDGE: Yes! Effie made wonderful desserts. That was my favorite cake of all time. I would always have that. She would make it and somehow it would get in to me, when we moved back to town.

The family always had sherry at 5:00 – 5:30; always sherry. I hated sherry but I would take it and sip on it. It was sherry time! They did like to imbibe. They partied and had lavish parties. They entertained and had a bridge club.

WARE: Did you ever go to a New Year's party out there?

ARLEDGE: No, I didn't. I'm sure my parents did. That was probably a time when they didn't invite the children. Most of the time kids were invited but not then. Ruth got very involved in the Cancer Society. I know my mother gave my Easter dress from the year before to Ruth, and she gave it to this little girl who had leukemia. I got to meet her. Ruth went to get her and take her in for cancer treatments. She lived in Sugar Land but there were ten or twelve kids in the family and they didn't have any care and couldn't help. Ruth made sure she got to her appointments. Ruth really cared about people.

WARE: How do you think she became involved with the Cancer Society?

ARLEDGE: I don't know. When you don't work for a living, you need something to get you out of bed in the morning, some type of service. I think that's what we all need, to stop depression. How can you serve others? She always had a cause going. Maybe she lost somebody. I don't remember. But I remember those children. She would make Easter baskets for the children. They would have special parties for them.

I'll never forget that little girl. She was a beautiful little blonde girl with blue eyes. That second-hand dress meant so much to her. I thought it was so kind of Ruth. She would pick her up and drive her in to M. D. Anderson for her treatments because her parents didn't have facilities or anything. Ruth would make sure she got there.

WARE: Was Jessie involved in a lot of service?

ARLEDGE: Jessie was real big in the Red Cross. After that, I don't recall. Easter was their big lavish party. They didn't have any children but I bet they had thirty children there. They would invite all their friends who had children to bring them out.

They would dye hard boiled eggs for weeks, and have to hide them. All the help was there – the men and the women. They supervised the kids and had these washtubs with Cokes in them and a table spread out with box lunches. They made the box lunches, with sandwiches, fruit and a cookie. Then the adults had the fancy party inside.

WARE: So that was the biggest celebration that you remember?

ARLEDGE: Yes. Easter time was 'go to church and then go to DeWalt'. I had my Levis in the car every time. I couldn't wait until I could go change.

WARE: When you said in that picture that it looked like you were waiting, I think you were waiting to get on a horse is what you meant! (laughter)

I think we've covered all my questions. Is there anything else that you can think of that you would like to add?

ARLEDGE: Ruth had a robust laugh and when she got tickled, she would just laugh and everybody laughed with her. She had a very hearty laugh. Something would tickle her and she'd burst out in the deep laugh. Jessie was more like Mae. Of course, Jessie was a half-sister. They shared the same dad but not the mother. Ruth was not a beautiful woman nor was Jessie. I guess you would say Jessie was more beautiful than Ruth. Ruth had an obesity problem for a while. She got rather large but was always a stylish dresser.

On my 16th birthday, she invited me to lunch at the Houston Club downtown. I remember they had the finger bowls and they brought the little towels. It was so lavish and I was just wondering, "Okay, am I doing the right thing with my napkin? Is this the right way to do it?" She ordered *Baked Alaska* for me. Ruth loved *Baked Alaska*.

You know I'm a motivational speaker and I've written a book called *People Are Just Desserts*. I analyze people by their dessert choices. Ruth was the epitome of Baked Alaska. Elegant, sophisticated and chic. Very lavish, the baked, fluffed meringue on top and inside, full of hidden surprises. Three varieties of ice cream and then cake around the bottom with a little liqueur on it. So she was very uplifting with people but very organized.

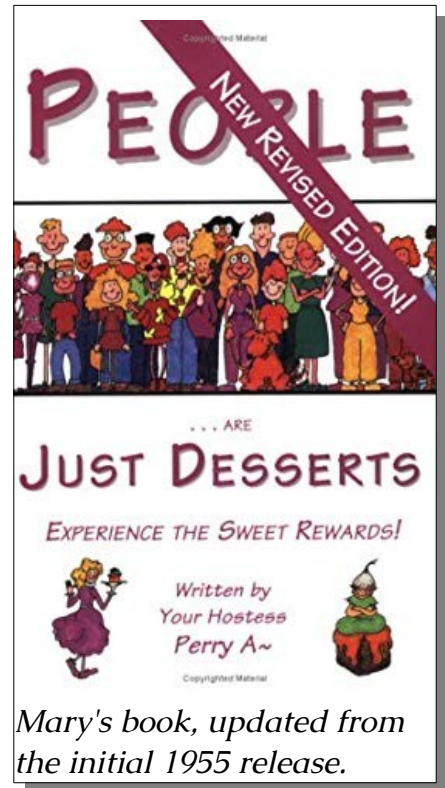
See the Neapolitan ice cream inside the center, frozen? Hot and cold, adventuresome, would go from one thing to the next. She was my Baked Alaska in my book. Does things with class and style. She was royalty and she knew it. She was a diva.

I have a Mastermind group and last week I said I want to know and accept my self-worth. One of my affirmations is that I am a diva. This month I've had some awesome experiences with people.

EDITOR'S NOTE: A mastermind group is a peer-to-peer mentoring concept used to help members solve their problems with input and advice from the other group members. The concept was coined in 1925 by author Napoleon Hill in his book *The Law of Success*, and described in more detail in his 1937 book, *Think and Grow Rich*. --Wikipedia

I got invited to go to Arkansas to meet some people. I own a clay business and they had a whole gathering of people at their house for me to give my clay talk to. I was just treated like royalty, like I'm a celebrity because I wrote this book. I figure if I can do something, anyone can do it, so I really have a hard time seeing myself there. Ruth and Jessie never had a problem with that. But with the help there was a separation of classes. They knew all the people in the know and entertained them. I bet everybody in Rosenberg had been to one of Ruth's luncheons at one time or another.

She was something else. Regal. I don't think she was married before she married Walter. I'm not sure. They didn't talk about that then. I think I saw that when I was going through your stuff. It must have been a short one.



WARE: Carl Calloway was one of the founders of the Fort Bend County Fair so he was a cattleman. I don't know if he passed away or what happened.

ARLEDGE: I don't remember any of that. I never heard the story and don't know if my mother even knew that. I don't know where she met Walter. For a while I had the picture, and I know you have it at the Dew House, christening the ship.

WARE: Yes. Do you know what business Walter Lalley was in?

ARLEDGE: No, I don't but I think he was a wheeler-dealer with a lot of different business interests. That's the type of man he was. I think a lot of people saw him as coming in and wanting to take over. He created the separation between Ruth and Jessie.

I remember being there once, when they were bringing the cattle in and were going to divide them up. So we got on our horses and we gathered the cattle and penned them. They had a box and a chute that you could push it to the left or to the right and the cattle you wanted to keep would go one way and the ones you wanted to sell would go the other way. Jessie would get up there, and Ruth may have been up there, too. She would always keep those spotted brindle cattle. They looked like a roan. They knew their cattle – which the breeding stock were and which ones were the ones to sell.

WARE: That's pretty remarkable in that day and age.

ARLEDGE: Yes, it is. I remember them sitting up there on that chute. I just remember Jessie up there. I think Frank was in control when cotton was king. I remember they had shipped a load of baled cotton somewhere and the driver threw a cigarette out. It started smoldering and caught the cotton on fire. I think that's when I was in college.

They had a whole truckload catch on fire. It just smolders and you can't put it out because it's so tightly packed. He's driving down the road and all of a sudden his load was on fire. They lost a lot of cotton. 500 pounds per bale!

WARE: Thank you.

Interview ends