

Interviewee: Elvera Dowling Lee

Interviewer: Laurie Sommers

Interview Report Date: June 26, 1997

Interview location: Interviewee home in Brantley County, GA

List of acronyms: EDL= Elvira Dowling Lee, LS= Laurie Sommers

Transcript by Sarah Davis

[Begin Transcription 00:00:23]

Lauria Sommers: Okay.

Elvira Dowling Lee: Our address is Waycross.

LS: Is it? Not Hoboken. Waycross.

EDL: Not Hoboken. Its Waycross, Georgia.

EDL: We live in Brantley County, but our mail comes from Waycross.

EDL: My husband was a good fan of talking. [00:00:40]

LS: Was he? Was he?

EDL: I can write better than I can talk.

LS: David and Tollie are both talkers. What relation would David Lee be to you? [0:00:48]

EDL: Well, he's really Silas' brother's grandson.

LS: Are you related to Lee's at all on the Dowling side? Are there any... [0:00:59]

EDL: No, not that I know of. I was just a Dowling.

LS: So, Dowling is the maiden name? [0:01:08]

EDL: Yeah.

LS: And you say it, Elvera? Right?

EDL: Yeah, Elvera Dowling.

LS: Right. And can I ask when your birthdate? [0:01:15]

EDL: September 28 of 13.

LS: And where were you born? [0:01:23]

EDL: Here.

LS: Here...

EDL: Here, in this facility. The house was here, but they tore it down and built another one. No, I believe the house I was born in burned down. After, we lived in and remodel it and we lived here a while. It burned and we built this one.

LS: So, you were born in Brantly County? [0:01:44]

EDL: I think when I was born it was really called Pierce County and they changed it to Brantly County.

LS: Okay.

EDL: And they got Brantly County it. I don't know when that happen but it was after I was born.

LS: But here, would you call were you were born, Slaterville or... [0:02:02]

EDL: Close to Slaterville. Slaterville district. I say that.

EDL: A lot of time we get mail called Old Stagecoach Road. We would get it, but it really Route 2, Box 273. But sometimes, we would get a letter called the Old Stagecoach Road. This road from Waycross when down past Blueberry restaurant. If you know where that is? [0:02:29]

LS: Was it really a stagecoach road? [0:02:33]

EDL: That's what they called it. The Stagecoach Road.

LS: I tell you it's daunting when you get to that stop sign and you got kept going. If this is your first time, it doesn't look like anybody lives here. But then you get down their and there all sort of houses on this road. [0:02:46]

EDL: Yeah, they live down to the creek. It used to have a bridge down there. And you could go on over to Hoboken or Blackshear. And now they got a blueberry restaurant, but the bridge is gone. The bridge is torn up and they have to go around. The other way.

LS: So, now your living in the same area you lived in your whole life? [0:03:06]

EDL: Only I, you know I when to school, Savannah and Jacksonville and stay a while. And when to school.

LS: Were do you go to school? [0:03:14]

EDL: I when to John Gorrie in Jacksonville, but I just worked in Savannah. You know some, I didn't work a lot.

LS: What you do? [0:03:24]

EDL: I worked at a dime store, one time. I worked at a restaurant. "not understandable."

LS: Was that before or after you were married? [0:03:43]

EDL: That was before.

LS: Before you were married.

EDL: Yeah, it was before I was married. I guess I just want to get away from home and what I could do.

EDL: I met Silas before I when out there. And I met him when he was little. I reckon, when I first saw him, he was sitting in... you how the school desks used to be. He was sitting in his chair, his feet wasn't touching the floor and he was a singing. And I was sorry for him because he didn't have on any shoes. And was the only one I can remember seeing at that sing, that day. You know we kept going and then when I away kept seeing each other along and along. But he'd then when we started dating, we met back at that same song at that same house and sang. [0:04:26]

LS: So, it was a sing at someone's house?

EDL: Yeah, it was a singing. My daddy was teaching the sing at the schoolhouse. That was where we meet.

LS: What schoolhouse? Do you remember the name?

EDL: It was the Cascade schoolhouse.

LS: is that near here?

EDL: Yeah, it over there across the creek. In fact, Carolyn's son has remodeled the house. It was already remodeled; he is living in that house. But it's made to a home now.

LS: What year was it about when you started dating or courting? [0:05:02]

EDL: Well, I started going out when I was about seventeen I reckon or eighteen. I cannot remember what year it was.

LS: Okay, we can figure that. Let's see that would probably be 1930.

EDL: Yeah, we married in 34'. But he was a good singer and a good teacher.

LS: Was it unusual...

EDL: We had a good life. Lived together ninety-three years.

LS: Now, was it unusual for young women around here go to school in Jacksonville? [0:05:46]

EDL: Well, some of them would. Now, my sister when off to further down in Florida to school.

LS: Was that Highschool or...

EDL: Yeah, I didn't finish school. I just when to the tenth grade and I came back home.

LS: So, it was a boarding school kind of thing?

EDL: No, I stayed with my sister. I had a married sister down there; I stayed with her and when to school.

LS: So, you would go here through the eighth grade, and then if you wanted to go beyond that...

EDL: Yeah. I when here until the seventh grade and then I when down there. I when on until the tenth. I didn't want to go no higher.

LS: Could you had gone to school around here?

EDL: No. Well, Hoboken had high school there, but you know they didn't have no bus then riding and I wouldn't have no way to go. I didn't live close enough to walk to Hoboken.

LS: Well, tell me a little bit about growing up, your father's name was Martin Dowing. And he was the one they talked about in that article who led the singings. What was your mothers' name? [0:06:46]

EDL: Nancy.

LS: And what was her maiden name?

EDL: Nancy Dryden Dowing.

LS: Dryden?

EDL: Dryden. D-r-y-d-e-n.

LS: Was she from around here? [0:06:56]

EDL: Yes, she was from around here too.

LS: And you said you had 10 brothers and sisters? [0:07:09]

EDL: Yeah, I had... there were six girls and four boys.

LS: In your family?

EDL: Yeah.

LS: And I was wondering was your family raised in the Primitive Baptist Church, then? And your father was he a deacon or was that your grandfather? [0:07:32]

EDL: Yeah, he was a deacon. My grandfather was too, he was a deacon.

LS: Was that the High Bluff Church?

EDL: Yeah.

LS: Which is the same road the other way? Is that right?

EDL: Yeah... you come to Slaterville you would have to turn the right, in Slaterville it's on down there.

LS: So, it's the High Bluff Road that is right at the Slaterville intersection.

LS: In your family, growing up were you exposed to any music that wasn't religious music? [0:08:03]

EDL: Well, if I when anywhere where they had pianos and music. Yeah, I was, but mostly around here at the sing we didn't have music in that. We just have singing and the notes.

LS: So, you had the singing and then you had church, would there be hymns? ... would there be hymns sung in church? [0:08:23]

EDL: There wouldn't be notes in there, they would just sing the hymns in the handbook. But it would be the same song. They just didn't have the notes in them.

LS: But, for example, I know around here probably when you were a young girl, they might have frolics were there be fiddles and square dancing, were you allowed to go to something like that? [0:08:42]

EDL: Well, not to start with. I never when to many. I know my mama told me to go if I wouldn't dance. I when and Silas was there, and he asked me to dance. I wouldn't do it and he thought I was a high hat. I said to him "No, my mama told me not to dance and I can't dance." It was silly I reckon, but I was scared to death because I promise her I wouldn't.

LS: What do you remember about that, where would those be held?

EDL: Well, it was at the neighbor's house. Then I when to one at another place and my brother was with me, and I danced that night. But I didn't never go to about three or four square dancing.

LS: So, it would be usually at somebody's house?

EDL: Yeah, in somebody's house.

LS: So, what kind of instruments would be providing the music? Do you remember?

EDL: They would play a fiddle, and someone would call, say it you know. You being to one?

LS: I've been to square dances. And you said you might go to someone's house where there was a piano. Like visiting someone or ... Tell me about that. [0:09:45]

EDL: My aunt up here had a piano. I can play it. You know I would get on there and play it be ear. I didn't play it by notes. I could play several little children's songs. If I would have lessons, I could have learn it good and I can play them heart.

LS: That's what Tollie told me. He told me you taught him how to play a little by heart.

EDL: He told me I taught him. I thought he heard me playing and he played.

LS: How you get started do that. Do you remember?

EDL: My brother had a harp, I got it and just when to playing it.

LS: What kind of music did you play?

EDL: Just any kind of song, I played most any kind of song I heard of, and I mean a notebook song or a little silly school song.

LS: So, you had music in school. Were you taught music in school? [0:10:35]

EDL: No, we didn't have music in our school. It was a country school you know, and they didn't have no music there.

LS: But, as a young girl when you might socialize, other than these square dances did you hear dance music or people singing songs like ballads or songs that weren't church songs? [0:11:02]

EDL: I would hear, you know I would go to where they would have a TV or not TV. Radios, I heard them, and I like them. You know love songs; I learned a lot of them.

LS: Did your family have a radio?

EDL: No, we didn't have... I remember the first TV I ever saw. I was there when they first came out. We had a radio at one time, but we quit having it. Lightning struck it and we never had it fixed.

LS: I was wondering if there was any religious reason not to have a radio or whether ...

EDL: Well, they just didn't care about the music with the singing. It was prettier without the singing. I mean without the music.

LS: Without the instrument you mean.

EDL: Yeah. My mama could play the accordion. But I never did hear, but she said she could when she was young.

LS: So, you when to very few dances it sounds like.

EDL: Yeah, very few.

LS: So, your socializing would have been when you when out and visited neighbors. Would that been when go to someone house for a singing or singing school? [0:12:17]

EDL: Yeah, they would have sings at people's house. And we go.

LS: Tell me about that. What do you remember about that? [0:12:23]

EDL: We just... I been so long. We when to a lot, we have cane grinding, you know. They go to a cane grinding and maybe they going into the house and have sings. We had a great time.

LS: Did your family raise the cane?

EDL: Yeah, we had crane here. We had cane grinding. All the neighbors back then had cane grinding and we go to them.

LS: Now, when the sings be after the grinding was over for the day and people would come in. When did the singing take place?

EDL: Yeah, a lot of times we play games. Young people would play games at the cane grindings. You know the older folks would go into the house and sing.

LS: Would there be games with singing? Remember any of the kinds of games?

EDL: Yeah, some of them would be games, *Fishing for love*, you might remember some of them.

LS: You remember how it goes?

EDL: Well, I don't exactly remember the name of it, but each boy would pick a girl to go with him and they go walk off and stay so long and they come back. I can't really remember it's been so long.

LS: Well, you're doing great, you remember more than I do about them.

EDL: It was a lot of fun, you know.

LS: So, it was more the adults would go back in and sing.

EDL: Yeah, the older ones would. Well, we all would. We all liked to sing when we were young. But the cane grindings I reckon was the most were they play them games. But they would have sings at the houses too. Everybody, there would be a big crowd.

LS: If you remember, I know this is a long time ago now. You do have a good memory; you remember quite a bit. Would different families around here have a little different version of singing? I think this is something David suggested to me. Like the Chesters might have their own, you know you might have a Chesters family reunion. And the Chesters would come and maybe they would sing one little kind of way and the Lee might sing another little kind of way, and the Dowling might sing another little kind of way. [0:14:40]

EDL: I don't know remember us doing that. They all sang from the handbook as far as I knew. Unless it was somebody we didn't know. You know, that when to a different church and had other kind of singing.

LS: But if you when to someone's houses would it tend to be relatives?

EDL: Yeah, relatives and friends, it was a big neighborhood that we when to.

LS: And would the sings just be. If your father was say, holding a singing school would someone invite people to sing to have a social gathering? [0:15:17]

EDL: They have the singing schools seven days a week so like that. And sometimes it would last two or three months, you know in the Fall, everyone kind of caught up with their work. But he'll go like Thursday, Friday, and Saturday something like that. And have his sing and go back to the school on Sunday and all go back to sing.

LS: Have all-day sing after church, maybe?

EDL: Well, no that was just the school, they would sing at church. Sometime of the morning they would sing. You know, before the church started. They would sing songs there, before church started. Then it got to later after church they got to singing. And they used to have sings in the church house, but they began to have trouble. You know, men were drinking, and they quit that. I don't see no harm in having myself that can happen anywhere. They quit having sings in the church house.

LS: When did that stop, I mean the sings in the church house?

EDL: It's been so long; I can't remember it. It was before I was old enough to remember it. But I remember when they were singing before church started, you go early and sing before it started.

LS: Was that singing out of the notebook or hymn book?

EDL: Hymn book or notebook either one.

LS: Did your family just sing together, sometimes of an evening, just get out the notebook?

EDL: I guess they would, I don't remember when I couldn't sing. My aunt used to come down and get my sister and me together and sing for them. We would shut up in a room or we go up in the room and start singing in the notebook. She liked hearing them, she liked to come to hear us sing. It was a good life.

LS: Now, I guess the way it works the song leader is always a man? Is that right? [0:17:22]

EDL: Yeah.

LS: There never a woman?

EDL: You know the one that said select a brother or whatever you want call them to, you know lead the sings. But they don't do that now, they've changed. David and Clark has got to, they sing, and you probably know that, how they do. But they used didn't do that, Silas was the leader when he was there. We get up and walk time. If we wanted to, part of the time. But now they put two of three up there at a time and they sing like that. Have you been down to the lot?

LS: Yes, yes.

EDL: You know how they do it.

LS: Right.

EDL: They didn't do that back then.

LS: But the song leader or the singing song master was always a man.

EDL: Yeah.

LS: Is that Right? So, what was the role of the women? [0:18:16]

EDL: Well, the women would sit, like the tenors would sit in one place and the trebles in one, my daddy would go around by each one to see if they were all doing it right. He would give a sound; he didn't give a sound like they did, and Silas didn't either. He would start and he would give a sound here where the bass was, and he would go all around. And he saw if they didn't sound it right, he would stop and let them do it again. It's a lots different. And to me then the singing was prettier than is now.

LM: How would it been prettier? Can you describe it in words the difference might have been?

EDL: Well because I don't know, now when they're down there it seem like the altos or the something sing. When I was there, they would sing louder, and I couldn't hear all of it. I think

there to close together. When we're in the schoolhouse it seems like they were father apart and he would go around to each one. Now, some of it is pretty. I like the singing and I like to go but it's a lots different than what it used to be when my daddy, and even when Silas was teaching.

LS: Did they always have the altos as long as you can remember? Because I know, I read that very early on there were just three "not understandable."

EDL: Well, there weren't a lot of altos that sang then, but treble, bass, and tenors has always been. They got to bring in the altos. But you know some of them from up North or wherever they come from their young and they sing really loud. It drowns out the others to me.

LS: Sound like you remember more of a blend maybe? Of the different sections. Now what are you? Are you a treble or an alto?

EDL: I'm a treble.

LS: Well, I notice that seems like the men's voices are really strong.

EDL: Yeah.

LS: And it's hard to hear the treble sometimes.

EDL: The last time I when. I sit between two trebles and the one on me right was singing so loud till I couldn't hear myself hardly. But the one on the left wasn't. Of course, I don't want to call no names cause I don't want to hurt nobody feelings. I love the girl, but it was just, to me she a little too high for the treble and the altos was just terrible high. Of course, if that's the way they want to sing, we got take it. I don't want the singing to go away. They had the prettiest singing at my husband's funeral, I think I have ever heard. They sang pretty there.

LS: Did they sing at the church or at the cemetery?

EDL: They sang at the church and when they came to the cemetery they sang there too.

LS: Was there a favorite song?

EDL: Well, they sang two or three songs. I can't remember, even what they were singing, I was so hurt and upset I cannot even remember what they sang. Only Marty, our baby boy sang a song after they got through. He's got a beautiful voice.

LS: Where does he live? [0:21:37]

EDL: Savannah. He's coming this weekend. He goes to the sing down there some.

LS: So, you and Silas had ten children also. Is that right? [0:21:49]

EDL: Well, the last one I miscarried it. I reckon it was about four months or three when I miscarried it. So, I really had eleven and then one died. Our oldest boy died when he was forty-nine years old.

LS: That's hard, isn't it?

EDL: Yeah, it was, but I believe this was worst.

LS: Did they all go to the singing schools then? When your husband had them? [0:22:19]

EDL: Yeah, they all went, when they were young. Of course, you know David when working the railroad, got away from home. They didn't go then much.

LS: David Lee? You're talking about David?

EDL: Our David.

LS: Okay.

EDL: We had a David Lee, he's the one that died.

LS: Okay. Your oldest son was also named David.

LS: When you would go to the sings, say they would have all afternoon singings or all day singing. [0:22:50]

EDL: Well, sometimes they would have an all day singing we would carry a lunch, you know, like on Sunday. Now during the week, I don't think we did that. I think we would go for a certain time and come back. Then, a lot of times he when off, way off from home, we didn't go. He just go, you know my daddy. He just go off and stay three or four days and come back and we didn't go. You know we were little.

LS: Did your husband do that also?

EDL: He did that too sometimes; I would go with him sometimes though.

LS: I was wondering about the all-day singing, it must be if you bring a lunch, the women take care of that. [0:23:29]

EDL: Everybody carried their own lurch is what they do.

LS: Was there ever an occasion where there was a potluck, where everyone would bring a dish? [0:23:38]

EDL: No, they did not do that, they did that in Hoboken here. Before Silas died, they had all day singing and dinner on the grounds. It said, I reckon they meant the school because they had it in the cafeteria and everybody called a pot there. We had more food, there were a lot of people there and it was good.

LS: So, dinner on the grounds is not something you remember so much from your growing up.

EDL: Well, what it was a dinner on the grounds they just carried their lunch, and they go outside to eat. They got out and maybe sat under a shade tree and eat it. Is what I remembered.

LS: If you would do that this type of year, brave this South Georgia heat. What kinds of things would you carry? Would you be able to do it this time of year? [0:24:25]

EDL: I couldn't. We carried sandwiches, you know bread and potatoes and sausage and stuff like that. Cake, cookies, and just enough to get by you know until we got home.

LS: Was the sausage something you make your own?

EDL: Well, it was sausage we made. You know we made our own sausage, back then.

LS: What did your husband do for a living? [0:24:51]

EDL: Well, he farmed, and he worked in the shops. Then he worked in Brunswick in the shipyard. It is about the only three things he did I reckon.

LS: So, was this the house, this a different house or is this the house where you raised your children? [0:25:06]

EDL: We raised some of them here, it burned. It burned when I believed some of them were already married. It was about half of them. I reckon, hadn't married and living here. But some of them had married, Carolyn and Janice. I believed they might have been the only ones married, just two of them.

LS: Well, are these fields I can see out here, you might have owned? [0:25:38]

EDL: We finally owned them. But our uncle lived over there and that was his, but we finally brought them when he died. Silas brought the land.

LS: So, what did you raise around here? [0:25:47]

EDL: Tobacco and cane and corn. We had our own cows and milked our own cows.

LS: Well, you were a busy woman with ten children and a farm. We're you?

EDL: Well, all milked our own milk. Now, that milk is not even good.

LS: So, what then the making sausage was that another time you might have singing? [0:26:16]

EDL: Well, in the wintertime. You have to wait until in the wintertime to kill your hogs, cured your meat, and make your sausage.

LS: Do you have a bunch of people come over to help with that?

EDL: Yeah, your neighbors would come, and you would help each other. We cook our back bones in grease and put them up. Cook our sausages, hang them, and get them smoked. When they dried and we would have to fry them. Put them up in lard to get them to keep. But we did have no freezers back then.

LS: You mention there would be singing sometimes with the cane griding. What about with the hog killing time? Would there be singing then too? [0:26:53]

EDL: No, that was work then.

LS: So, cane griding was more fun, less work?

EDL: Well, cane griding was more fun and you know, it was work too. But they built a fire out in the yard and played games and just singing. You know, songs like for the playing.

LS: Right.

EDL: Drop the "not understandable," I don't remember, can't remember all those names. If Silas was here, he could tell you some of them.

LS: There also would have been the kinds of occasions where you remember singing taking place. Obviously, there would be the singing schools and you said the cane griding. And maybe when someone got married? Was that another time when would be... [0:27:41]

EDL: Well, I don't remember singing much if somebody got married like they do now. Marty Hill, when his son got married, he sang for them. They didn't do that back then.

LS: But what when your husband was raising your children and your children got married? Was there singing at your wedding? [0:28:07]

EDL: No, singing.

LS: No singing. Not even in the church? Not even a hymn?

EDL: We married at home.

LS: You married at home.

EDL: And two of our daughters married at home or three of them. Well, I believe all four of them married at home. Just the preacher married them, and they left. I was nothing like what they do now.

LM: Now do I remember Tollie said that your husband didn't join the church until he was forty-two, I think that's what Tollie told me on the phone. [0:28:44]

EML: He probably was because I joined first and then he joined about three months later. I think that's the way I remember it.

LM: So, you were raised in the church would have gone as a child with your father. But then you didn't join until you were...

EDL: I was married when I joined, I had children.

LM: So, some of your children would have probably been quite older by that time.

EDL: Yeah, the baby boy, Marty was I believe about two of three years old at the time.

LM: Now do you have a radio in your house? For your children? [0:29:30]

EDL: No, we did not have a radio. They didn't have a lot of radios back then. It's been a long time eighty-three years ago. Of course, that's when I was born.

LM: Say in the twenties, but after you and Silas got married...

(The tape stops and beginning of tape two).

LS: So, I was asking you about a radio and you say when you were raising your family...

EDL: Yeah, we had a radio one time. Actually, lightning struck it, and we never got it fixed, again.

LS: So, you've mentioned that before?

EDL: That was after Silas, and I were married.

LS: Okay, but in your own childhood you don't remember owning a radio.

EDL: No, I my childhood the church didn't believe in have music in the church, and we didn't have any at home either. But now I think some of them, some of them do now have radio and TVs in their homes. Of course, some of them back then didn't think it was right.

LS: Right, what about TV then. Did you get a TV when it came out? [0:31:09]

EML: No, we didn't have a TV. Now here since all the children own a this. All their names are on it since he sold and gave land away. I mean sold to one of the children and the ones that are staying are like Becca lives here. She brought over a little whatchamacallit, VCR here. And she got back there, in her room and she goes in there and watches it. So, that's the only thing we got.

LS: Did the church frown on a TV, also?

EDL: Well, they just never allowed or never did have it. The church started a long time before TVs came in see. They just never did have it.

LS: So, you still don't have one?

EDL: Nothing other than the only Becca brought over here to put in her room.

LS: But you did say you might have heard radio at some friends' house when you were growing up.

EDL: Oh yeah. Yeah.

LS: When you were growing up. When they started coming out?

EDL: Yeah, I might have heard it at my sister's when I lived with in Jacksonville, she had a radio. But that's been a long time ago too.

LS: What about a record player?

EDL: Well, they had them and my sister had them.

LS: But what about your family, did you have one?

EDL: We didn't have one here.

LS: But what about your family when you were raised by your parents? You didn't have one?

EDL: No, they didn't one. Now they when to the church, my daddy used to play the fiddle for the dances.

LS: He did.

EDL: Yeah, but when he joined the church. The church did believe in that back then or didn't allow it. So, he just quit.

LS: So, was that before you were born? So, you never heard him play the fiddle?

EDL: I didn't never him play the fiddle and I ain't never hear my mama play the accordion. She said she did.

LS: Maybe they met at a dance?

EDL: They might have.

LS: Did they ever say?

EDL: No, I don't remember how they met.

LS: Well, good fiddlers are... I play the violin myself. I always appreciated a good fiddler. But there are probably not as many around here I would guess with the church not viewing dance music.

EDL: Well, a lot of people, you know the neighbors and friends and things would have them, we go there and hear them. But we just didn't have them at home.

LS: Now, what are we talking about radios of...

EDL: No, we didn't have no radios back then. What I'm talking about, we didn't have no record players.

LS: Record players. So, you would hear it, but you didn't have them here.

EDL: Right.

LS: So, say as a teenager would hear some of the records that your friends had?

EDL: Oh yeah, they used to play them and have them to dance with. They play them to dance with. Most of the time those square dances someone would call the dance. I reckon you know about that.

LS: But would that be with live music or with record music?

EDL: Well, I don't remember if they had the record playing while they are calling the set or not. I didn't go to a lot of them. I know I when one in Jacksonville one time, it was in some kind of big building, they had a kind of waltz dance and a square dance. They had music there.

LS: So, tell me when was that?

EDL: It's been back when I was going to school, I was about eighteen I reckon or seventeen or sixteen.

LS: But that was in Jacksonville?

EDL: Yeah, that was in Jacksonville.

LS: Well, did Jacksonville seem really different to you once you left. Had you left this area much before you traveled to Jacksonville? [0:25:07]

EDL: No, I hadn't, I've always been right around here. Of course, I would go to Waycross, and you know, other places, but I visit. But my home was here.

LS: So, what about picture shows? When those started coming in did your kids go to picture shows? [0:35:26]

EDL: Well, they did. We didn't we weren't allowed to go you know. But after I got grown, you know and started dating we would go. But after our children dated, they when.

LS: So, you let your children go even after you joined the church that was okay for you to go to picture shows?

EDL: Yeah. Well, they did. They didn't go a lot, but they would go out on a date. I guess that were they when.

LS: Now when your father was a deacon did, he led the singing in the church then? Did he lead the hymns? [0:36:10]

EDL: He would start the song. When the singing started in the church, he would always start it and lead it. But was different than that. He would you know walk time it at the schoolhouse, where he taught the sings. You ever been to Primitive Baptist Church?

LS: I when to Tollies' down in Salice in February, it was lovely. He has a very nice voice. A lot of talent in your family. That wasn't the first time I've been to a Primitive Baptist service but the ones I've been to, were in Indiana. And they are different than they are here. But did your father lead the songs the way Tollie does when he preaches? [0:37:03]

EDL: He would give it out. No, the preacher would give it out and he would start it.

LS: I see, I see. So, he would maybe give the pitch or something? Is that it?

EDL: Well, he would just start the song, and everyone would follow. It didn't have no pitches; he would just sing the song. He knew how to do it and he starts, and everybody would follow him. The treble you know you give a treble a sound at the school but at church you had just get you own sound.

LS: Now did your mother have a nice voice? Did she sing?

EDL: She sang treble too.

LS: And were their singers in her family or did most of the singing...

EDL: I guess some of them could sing. I don't remember a lot about her sisters. You know they would come to see us, but I don't think they could sing like she could.

LS: Did she sing around the house, or did she sing with the kids?

EDL: Well, I guess what she did. They used to get us to sing, you know, as children. They would get us to sing.

LS: When you were home as a family?

EDL: When we were little you know. We give sings here to you know, like on Saturday nights. We invite a bunch of people in and have a sing.

LS: Was this when you were small?

EDL: Single, single.

LS: Yeah. What do you remember about those? Do you remember anything particular? How many people would you have?

EDL: Well, one time we had a sing, that was after we married and come here. There was so many people I thought the house was goanna... It was board floors then. I thought the house was goanna cave in because there was so many here. But there always be so many.

LS: Did they always try and fit in the living room or...

EDL: Well, they take the living room and all the halls.

LS: And did you try to get chairs for everyone to sit?

EDL: Well, we had a bunch of chairs, and they sing around the table too. You know the dining table.

LS: Did you fix food for all those people?

EDL: They didn't do that back then.

LS: Well, that's good. I can't imagine raising ten kids and fixing food for all those people.

EDL: I couldn't have done that. But later on, now they would always have a snack after the sing.

LS: We just finished up here.

EDL: Would you like something to drink? Would you like some drink or coffee or tea. I got some Coke. [0:39: 31]

LS: Well, I don't want to put you to any trouble Mrs. Lee.

EDL: It wouldn't be no trouble to do that.

LS: Maybe, we'll have after we just...

EDL: You want to finish that. Is that all you want to know?

LS: I was wondering when you were talking about having these people to sing at your house on a Saturday night, how long would something like that last?

EDL: It would last two or three hours. Maybe to ten or eleven clock or twelve sometimes.

LS: So not real late.

EDL: No.

LS: And people wouldn't expect food, you were saying.

EDL: No, unless. You know it been a pretty good while they started do that. Giving them cake or something.

LS: Did that continue? I guess that's doesn't seem to be happening anymore, that you go over to people's house and sing. And I wonder if you had an idea about when that would have stopped or why that phrased out?

EDL: I think some of them still do. In fact, they had one here not too long ago.

LS: Here in this house?

EDL: Yeah, you know we would have company and they would all get in there and sing. Not real give out as a sing. We have a bunch of company and go in there, the dining table and sing.

LS: So, the difference is that might be more spontaneous rather than you inviting people over just to do it.

EDL: Yeah. Well, we used to do that. And like we had the reunion up here at my sister in-laws. After the dinner was over, they would all get on the porch and have a beautiful sing there.
[0:41:02]

LS: Reunions for the Dowlings or the Lees?

EDL: No, the Lees and the Dowlings. Not my family, Silas' side of the family was having them reunions. But now our immediate family has one here. In May and they have theirs up there in October, the Lee reunion, his family.

LS: Now for your immediate family reunions do you usually have some singing for that?

EDL: Well, if they're anybody that will come in and sing, they generally do.

LS: So, you have that here at this house? So, you're talking about your children and your grandchildren?

EDL: Yeah, our own immediate children and their families. They come here and they get out there and cook chicken and bring food too. And we have ate outside then.

LS: How many people do have with your immediate family do you have? Just coming for that.

EDL: There a lot because some of them will bring their friends. And I say there might be a hundred. Sometimes it will be almost.

LS: My goodness.

EDL: I never counted. I don't think, but I have thirty-five I think, grandchildren. No let me see twenty-seven and there been a bunch of great grands and all their friends and boyfriends and things. It's a pretty big bunch that comes.

LS: So, I imagine the Lee one they have in October is really big.

EDL: Yeah, it is cause that's everybody. That's all the Lee's and anybody who wants to come they'll tell their friends to come too.

LS: Well, if the immediate on is one hundred, I can only imagine if... you need a football stadium for all those people.

EDL: Yeah. I don't reckon there ever been really a hundred, but I never counted them to know for sure.

LS: I bet you be surprised.

EDL: It be, you couldn't hardly get all in this house, you know. It be crowded with them in here. And you know the front part of the living room, dining room, and kitchen would be crowded.

LS: Well, how would you compare what happening with the singing now compare say how it was say when you were younger? [0:43:19]

EDL: Well, you near have to been there to know it's hard to explain. Tollie should tell you because he knows. He can tell you better than I could.

LS: Well, tell me in your words? How would you describe it?

EDL: Well, my daddy walked time all by himself, you know. And he would give out the song and people would select their own songs and he would give out the song and everybody would sing. And it was just pretty.

LS: And you don't remember? You said you didn't know your grandfather was a song leader until read it in the Dowing history? [0:44:06]

EDL: Yeah. You see, he died when I was about six years old, and they just never tell me that.

LS: But he must have passed on the song leader to your father.

EDL: Yeah. He married the other one ahead of him, he married her girl. A guy used to be a leader and he married her girl.

LS: Say that to me again?

EDL: MY granddaddy married the Guys that taught the sing, married his daughter.

LS: Okay, I see.

EDL: Mary Ann Guys that was my other grandmother.

LS: She was the daughter of a singing leader, what you're saying?

EDL: My daddy always said that every sing that has every been there come a wedding from it.

LS: But that's not how you and your husband met? [0:45:01]

EDL: Yeah, we met at the sings.

LS: That what you were telling me. Well, it must be a good place for courting then.

EDL: Yeah, it was a good place.

LS: Now was there anyone... do you have brothers... was there anyone from your generation that continuing being a song leader after your father? Any Dowlings?

EDL: No, not any of them. They could sing but they never tried to teach the sings, like Silas did.

LS: But he didn't get it from your father, did he?

EDL: That's where he said he got.

LS: Okay. So, the line when over to your husband and now its down to your husband's ...

EDL: Nephews.

LS: Nephews. Okay, I'm get this straight. All these. So, there is that continuity then it came through your marriage to Silas and then he pick it up from your father.

EDL: My daddy.

LS: Do you remember anything about how he became song leader? [0:46:07]

EDL: My daddy?

LS: Your husband, Silas.

EDL: Well, he could sing so good I reckon they got to wanting him to go and lead them. You see, he did before we were married, he go down there in Florida. I when with him down there with him one time and we spent the night with our friend. And he taught a sing down there. But I didn't always get to go back with him because I have you know too many children take. Sometimes I would go on Saturday. And sometimes when he when over in Pierce County, he like go on one day and maybe I come the next day. I be with him on Sunday.

LS: But the sings that Silas would have gone to with his family growing up would have been the singing schools led by your father. Is that right? He was the main one to lead for these parts.

EDL: Yeah, he was the first one I remember.

LS: Were there any others?

EDL: Well, there was.

LS: I mean other than Silas. Anyone from your daddy's generation that were song leaders, that you remember?

EDL: Well, his brother Frank tried it, but it didn't call on him. His daddy told him that Frank started. His daddy told him if Frank couldn't go one time, I got one that can beat Frank take him. And after he took him, they didn't never call Frank no more.

LS: So, Silas's brother, Frank? Your saying, okay.

EDL: So, he got to teaching them. Frank taught a few sings, but Frank wasn't as good a singer as Silas was, to me.

LS: But what about your daddy's generation, were there any men beside your daddy who led?

EDL: None that I know of.

LS: He was the main one. So, was he gone from home a lot because of that, teaching the sings?
[0:48:02]

EDL: Well, I guess he was. I can't really remember. Part of the time he would go off on a Friday and be gone until Sunday.

LS: Was Silas gone a lot?

EDL: Well, not too much. You know he would go like, I don't remember if was a certain time of the year he would go but it would mostly be like you know a Friday. Had the sing on Friday and Sunday teaching. And I mean Friday and Saturday, and on Sunday they just have a sing. They teach it on, with singing you learn. I don't remember when I didn't know the notes.

LS: Did you use the same kind of notebook that they use now? [0:48:49]

EDL: Yeah. Well, they changed them some there all the same notes but just different books. You know we have had some yellow back books and some blue back books and all kinds. But they all got the same songs in them. More new songs you know than there used to be.

LS: Do you have any of the old books in the house still, that you used, that belong to your daddy?

EDL: No. I don't have any of them. They burn. You see they burn when...

LS: When the house burned down. It seems to me most people got them memorized anyway. They don't need the notes so much.

EDL: Yeah.

LS: A lot of people know the tunes by heart.

EDL: You have to the book to go by though. If you know them, you do but when there written down, you can sing them can't you?

LS: Yeah, you see I read music. So, when I have to go fa, la, mi and know what the shapes mean. I'm still not very good at that, cause I get all tongue tied trying to remember which is which. I'll get there.

EDL: Yeah, yeah. Our daughter in-law, Max's wife. She teaches at college. She goes up there and teaches. She works for her doctrine degree. She can play piano and play a pretty song, but she can't sing a thing. Not bad because I hear her playing in the notebook on the piano but to sing she can't carry the tune. It's kind of amazing.

LS: Some people just don't have a voice.

EDL: But I think she got the voice; she doesn't know the something I don't know what it was.

LS: Well, it seems to me that people who grow up with singing, they just kind of grow up with thinking singing is a natural thing to do because you start so young.

EDL: Now this is Silas' cousin, he when to the sing but he never did learn to sing. But he said he can play the fiddle as good as anyone can. He didn't make no music, but he couldn't tell the music apart. That whole family couldn't sing like Silas' family could, but they were first cousins.

LS: What was his first cousin's name? [0:51:04]

EDL: Adam Lee. He said I can play a fiddle as good as anybody can, but he couldn't, he didn't make any music with it.

LS: Is he still living?

EDL: He is in the nursing home now. The Bailey Nursing home, you going there tonight?

LS: I am. Yeah, so maybe he will hear us all sing.

EDL: I don't know were he be able to go down there or not. He is kind of on the depend list.

LS: So, another fiddler in the family.

EDL: Yeah. I aren't never heard him fiddle. I think he might have tried but he just dinged on I imagine.

LS: Well, I don't want to tire you out Mrs. Lee. I've talked to you longer than I said I would.

EDL: I wish I could have told you more. If Silas had been he could have helped me. We would have done better, I reckon.

LS: You have been a big help. You really have. I appreciate it.

EDL: Well, I'm glad to have help you if I could. I feel like I've done much.

LS: Well, I told David and Tollie that I wanted to talk to some women because the men seem to the one to lead it. I my experience women are the glue that keep things going. So, I want to get a women's point view. You can help me with that, you certainly be around enough to see.

EDL: Well, I have been to a lot of them, but you know I'm getting a short memory sometimes.

LS: I do appreciate it.

End of tape.

