

I need you to state your full name and where you were born and when you were born.

Mr. Coleman: Jim Donivel Coleman. I was born June 10 according to my birth certificate, 1926. My mother always said I was born June 11th. She knew more about it than they did. They have on my birth certificate and on my records June 10th.

I imagine she would probably know a little bit more. That is not an experience soon forgotten.

Mr. Coleman: She used to tell me, "They can put it down the 10th if they want to but it wasn't the 10th, it was the 11th."

What was your mother's and father names?

Mr. Coleman: Hervin Coleman and Maddie Coleman.

Were they from around here?

Mr. Coleman: They normally were from around here, yeah.

Were they farmers? What was their occupation?

Mr. Coleman: Yes, they worked the farm and sharecropped. During the depression my daddy was buying a house but I guess it fell through because we never did keep it. We wound up sharecropping after that.

Whereabouts in town? Were you out here in the Woodlawn area or were you down south side?

Mr. Coleman: We were down near Erin. As a matter of fact do you know where the Erin United Methodist Church is?

Yes sir, I sure do.

Mr. Coleman: We were about ¼ of a mile to the left, that road that turns to the left. We lived up there during the depression. Back then there wasn't much money floating around, I tell you. You could get 10 gallons of gasoline for \$1.00, but you had to get that dollar and that was hard.

Did you'll own an automobile?

Mr. Coleman: My daddy had an automobile at that time. My mother and daddy worked on the farm and raised everything practically that we ate. My daddy cradled his own wheat and made his own flour. We made our own corn for cornmeal. We had our hogs, we had our cows and we had our milk and everything; just about everything we needed. They raised peas, and beans and things. We would have pea hulling at night. We would put a quilt on the floor and get down there and shell peas. Things were pretty tough back then. I had an uncle that was in Detroit and they were on soup line. They kept begging my daddy to see if they could borrow the money to bring them back home. He brought them back and they stayed at the house with us for a few months until they could make up some furniture. They would take apple boxes and anything they could get would and nail it up and make an end table out of it for their house. They practically made most all of their furniture. They made chairs and things to sit in. It was pretty tough back then. We didn't have any money as far as that goes. If you got anything done, my daddy needed a tobacco barn built to put his tobacco in. They would have what they called a barn raising. People from several neighbors around would come help build that barn if my mother would fix them a good

dinner. She would scratch up everything she could to fix them a good dinner. I know they built some barns that way when I was just a small kid. The depression years were pretty tough.

I've heard my grandfather talk about them. I know he worked with the CCC. I know you were pretty young but do you remember any of those federal work programs that Roosevelt had....

Mr. Coleman: WPA. We used to say, "We Piddled Around." For my daddy to pay his taxes they called it pole tax. For him to pay his taxes he had to give so many days work on the road. Well they had gravel roads then; it wasn't blacktop and all like they are now. If he took his wagon and his mules that would count two days off of his time working the roads. He would haul gravel to help gravel the roads. They would get in the creek beds and use an old slick scraper. I was just a small kid but I remember them using it. If that thing happened to hang on a rock or something it would throw them plum over the top of it. They didn't turn loose. Times were rough back then but we never really went hungry. We didn't have everything we wanted to eat but we had plenty such as it was. It might be beans and taters.

What about pork and chicken?

Mr. Coleman: Something like that if we raised them but we didn't get a lot of junk food from the store. My mother she would dress hens and then carry them to Erin and sell them. We raised chickens on the farm there. She would fix up the prettiest hens you ever seen. She would cut that back and put them feet in there just like they do nowadays when you buy them out of the counter. She used to fix them up and she would moe butter and carry it to Erin or my daddy would. We sold a lot of milk. I would always want to go over to my daddies. I remember one day I was about 3 ½ years old and he asked me, "What are you good for anyways?" I said, "Eat, sleep and go." I told somebody the other day that I was still trying to foot them.

Not a bad motto.

Mr. Coleman: Maybe I'm talking to much about the old times.

That is exactly what I am here to discuss.

Mr. Coleman: Roosevelt came in and he said he was going to put _____ in every spot and two cars in every driveway I believe he said or something another. He did a pretty good job at it.

Did ya'll have a radio?

Mr. Coleman: Not back then. We did later years, we got one. We had an Atwater Kent. That thing was as long as this table is wide. It had a big old round speaker sat up on top of it. I think it ran off of a car battery the best I can remember.

Was that before World War II?

Mr. Coleman: Yeah that was back before Pearl Harbor. That was World War II wasn't it?

Yes sir.

Mr. Coleman: We moved later years. I guess my daddy couldn't make the payments on that farm and we moved later years and started sharecropping. I remember we used to get one pair of shoes a year and we had to take care of them. We would always get them in the fall of year so we can have shoes to wear to school. During the summer we went barefooted. Our feet would get so tough I could run down a gravel

road like it was nothing. Now I couldn't walk on one. It was a rough time and a tough time. We took our baths on Saturday night out of an old galvanized washing tub. We had to fill it up with water. Of course I was the youngest and I would usually be the one that would have to take a bath last.

Low man on the totem pole.

Mr. Coleman: There were five of us kids, four boys and one girl.

I know I have always heard from my grandfather and I also heard from my mother, in the older agricultural communities especially Tennessee a lot of times young boys they would get about 8th and 9th grade and they would go to work in the field. What was the case for you and how far did you go in school?

Mr. Coleman: I went one day in the 8th grade. I failed one year but that was my fault. I just didn't try to study and didn't really care. I didn't think I cared if I passed or if I didn't and I didn't pass. I had to stay over in the same grade the next year. That was a little rough on me but I guess it taught me one more. My daddy died when I was 14. I went one day in the 8th grade and my mother told me that I was going to have to quit and work on the farm. It was just me and her. My other brothers were married and away from home and having to struggle trying to get buy their selves. She would go to the field with me every day and she would help sucker tobacco and hold tobacco. I would plow it and spray it for worms and stuff like that. We would go home at dinnertime and she would fix us a bite of dinner. We would sit down and eat that and we would get up and go back to the field and work until night. When we came in at night I was about 14 years old then I guess and when I would come in night I worked for a fellow that owned a stockyard in Erin. He had all kinds of jacks and studs that he kept in the barn. Sometimes when I would quit work it might be 9:00 before I get through feeding and cutting wood. We had a wood stove to do our cooking with and our heat. It might be 9:00 when I get through at night. We would eat us a bite, go to bed and the next morning get up and do it again. We made it a good seven years there like that. My older brother he went in the Army. I remember when he went in he was getting about \$30.00 a month or something like that. That is all he got paid. He was down at Fort Jackson, South Carolina and he hitchhiked to come home. Occasionally he would give my mother maybe \$10.00 or something. Most of the stuff we had to eat after my dad died we raised it there on the farm. My mother came over here to town to talk to _____ to see about getting some help from welfare so she could send me on to school. _____ told her "Get his birth certificate, and bring it over here and I think we can help you." She kept that birth certificate two years and this is the honest truth if I ever told it. She sent it back to my mother and never did give us nothing. She sent it back to my mother and said, "I'm sorry Mrs. Coleman, I can't help you now. Your son has become of age." I was 16 years old.

She said you were of age when you were 16?

Mr. Coleman: Yes. I had become of age where I could go to work at a job. I came to Clarksville and I went to work at the MP Brothers store delivering groceries for \$10.00 a week. My mother kept Kyle F____ son, that was her baby, to pay our house rent and done their house work for her. She paid the house rent and we lived of \$10.00 a week when I first came to Clarksville. One day Al _____ and Mack M _____ asked me, "Wouldn't you like to have better job than this?" I said, "Yes I would." He said, "Well be at Acme Monday morning and I think I could put you to work." I went out there and I went to work at Acme Boot. I worked there I guess about a year. I was clipping the toes of boots and I stand on one foot all day and use that lever with the other foot to pull those vamps down through those heated arms to make them crimp so the guys could trim the toes of the boots. I done that and I made \$16.50 a week.

You were 16 then?

Mr. Coleman: I think I just turned 17. I worked there at Acme Boot for awhile and my mother got sick. I didn't have a car and I had to go to town and get her some medicine, to the drug store. I asked the boss about getting off for dinner so I could walk to town to get her medicine and back. I figured it would take me about dinner by the time I would get to town and back and get back to work. He kindly smarted me off. He said, "If you take off for dinner, you may as well take off all day." I said, "If that is the way you feel about it I just want be back at all." He said, "You can't quit." I said, "You just think I can't. I done quit." He said, "You are froze to your job. We want release you." I told him practically where he could put that release.

You speak of being froze. What did he mean by being froze?

Mr. Coleman: You couldn't change jobs. You couldn't go from one job to another. If you were on the job during the war, you had to stay with that job.

Was that through the state government or was that coming down... ..

Mr. Coleman: That was handed down through the government. It was a ruling. There were so many people in the Army and everything so they kindly froze, they called it freezing you to your job. I left there and I went to Detroit.

How old were you when you left?

Mr. Coleman: I was 17. I knew that if I left one state to another; well I went down to the unemployment office and they said, "No, Acme don't agree to release you." I said, "Well you'll can do the same thing with it that Acme can do." I caught me a train and I went to Detroit. My sister and her husband were living up there. I went out there at the school and got me a workers permit. I think it was the next day I went to work for .97 cents an hour.

What were you making at Acme?

Mr. Coleman: \$16.50 a week. I don't know what it figured an hour.

How many hours a week did you work when you worked at Acme?

Mr. Coleman: I was working 40. Sometimes maybe work more but most of the time it was 40 hours. After the depression my mother did, we had to have ration stamps. Everybody got rationing stamps. You could buy one pair of shoes a year. You had to give so many stamps for five pounds of sugar. Whatever you bought it cost you so many stamps. You had to pay for whatever you got but still you had to turn these stamps in to show that you gave your stamps you know. Stamps was the going thing then. Some people I think sold them or traded with somebody for something else, you know trading some stamps for one thing to another one. Times were rough back in those days. I worked in Detroit at a Dodge truck plant for I guess about three months. My brother-in-law got a call for the Army. When he got called for the Army I didn't have nobody to stay with. My sister and him were coming back down here so I took my mother up there with me. She went with me wherever I went to work. I came back here and I worked at Fort Campbell a little while at the PX, service club #2. I didn't make much money out there but I managed to get by by walking and I think I did ride a bicycle some. I didn't have no car. I didn't get a car until I was 25 years old. I bought one for \$100.00 and borrowed \$100.00 to buy it with. I've had a pretty rough time in my younger days but the Lord has blessed me throughout the years. My brother was in the Army and he went over to Pearl Harbor, right after Pearl Harbor was bombed he was over there. They had him guarding a railroad. He said that he captured a German spy that stole some papers off of the boat or

something and was making his way down that railroad with them. He had to jump that fence to get over there and stop him. He threw the gun on him and stopped him.

Where was this at?

Mr. Coleman: Pearl Harbor.

Was this over in Hawaii?

Mr. Coleman: Yes. He said that all the guys were coming over and patting him on the back and telling him what a great job he done and everything. He told me he didn't want them patting him on the back. He just wanted a chance to get another one if he was doing something he wasn't supposed to. I worked at Fort Campbell a few years. My brother and his wife went to St. Louis. I went up to St. Louis and my brother and I were walking down Cass Avenue down there in St. Louis and we smelt the best aroma there ever was; something smelt really good cooking you know. I told my brother I said, "Boy that smells good. That smells like where we need to go to work." He said, "Yeah there it is right up there. It's a bakery, National Biscuit Company." So we went up there and walked in and sure enough they hired both of us.

When was this?

Mr. Coleman: 1947.

So the war had ended. Now your brother that you were with was that your brother that was in the service?

Mr. Coleman? No, this one had never been in the service. He was turned down. He still lives in Illinois now and I've got two brothers that died of Parkinson's disease. He and I went to work at National Biscuit Company and I worked there 2 ½ years. That is where I met my first wife there in St. Louis and wound up getting married. We had a son born and my wife was so nervous at that time. She had had Saint _____ when she was a young girl and it came back on her. She was so nervous that they kept her in the hospital for 72 days before the baby was born. After the baby was born the doctor advised me to get her out of St. Louis and take her some place where it would be much quieter and he thought she would be much better off. So she agreed to come to Tennessee and we came here to Clarksville. Of course I went back to work at Fort Campbell then. I was working in a civilian grocery inside of gate 3. I worked there I guess about a year, maybe a year and a half. I made \$29.10 a week and I was feeding a wife and one kid, buying milk for the baby and everything. One week I just ran real short on money. I had almost enough to buy a gallon of kerosene. I was running out of kerosene and we were heating with kerosene. I went over to the store on Cumberland Drive. I asked Carney Wall about; I done drew a gallon of kerosene and I asked him about waiting on me until the next day because I got paid on Friday and it was Thursday and I would come over and pay him. He said, "We are not taking no new credit customers." So I said, "Mr. Wall, my brother has been trading with you seven years. Did he leave here owing you anything? Did he beat you out of anything?" "No, no, Mr. Coleman has always made it good. He was mighty good." I said, "Well I want to tell you something. I think you are mighty cheap that you can't let me have a gallon of kerosene until tomorrow to keep my baby warm with." I scratched in my pocket and I liked a penny of having enough to pay. He said, "Oh just forget about that penny." I said, "No I want forget about it." I went home and I dug that penny out of the baby's piggy bank and carried it back over to him and there was a bunch of men sitting around the store. I told him right to his face, "I think you are mighty cheap. Here is that penny I owe you. I think you are mighty cheap if you can't afford to credit a man for a gallon of kerosene until the next day. Furthermore, I don't want nothing else you got in this store. I've been buying over here and have been paying cash for everything I've got." I walked out of there and I walked up the street to Mr. Jones Trotter. I went up the street to Jones Trotter little store. I told him how they done me down there. He said, "Mr. Coleman, if you need anything in this store you come up here and get it. Whether you got

the money or you haven't, I will let you have it." I traded with him for several years. My refrigerator went bad and here I was working for \$29.10 a week and I didn't get no welfare or nothing. I went over to Phillip Nadge and asked him about buying a refrigerator. "How much you want to pay down?" I said, "I don't have no money. I don't have a place to put my baby's milk. I am working at Fort Campbell and I will pay you every dime of it." He said, "Well, we can sell you one if you will write us a check and let us hold it." I said, "Sir I hadn't got no money in the bank. I have never wrote a cold check in my life and I ain't going to start now." I walked out of his store and went around the corner and I can't think of his name right now, but I walked around the corner and this man I told him what my problem was and that I needed a refrigerator. He said, "Son, we will send it right out to you." He sent that refrigerator right on out there. I didn't have a dime to pay down on it or nothing. I paid him every penny of it.

How things have changed nowadays.

Mr. Coleman: I have had some tough times.

You were telling me the other night about being drafted and going down to Georgia?

Mr. Coleman: I was drafted when I was 18 years old. I went down to Fort Oglethorpe, Georgia. There were 73 of us that went. There were two big busloads. We went down there to be examined. We lined up to get through the line and when I got to the end of the line I turned around and started talking to some guy and the guy told me I had better quit that talking. I turned around and looked back like I didn't know who he was talking about and he said, "I am talking to you." By that time everybody was looking. They turned me down. When I got to the end of the line they said, "You are turned down." I said, "Why?" He said, "Your nerves turned you down." I thought I didn't know I had any nerves back then. I came back home and I worked on the farm. I think they gave me a deferment on the farm. They finally sent me a card. I don't remember what it had. It was kind of like a deferment after I was turned down. They sent me that card because I was working on the farm. Me and my mother had been back on the farm for about two years. Later on without reexamining me or anything they finally sent me a 4F card. That is very unfit. That is the way it was looked at back then, very unfit.

It was all about your nerves.

Mr. Coleman: Yeah, they never did examine me. I thought they would call me back and reexamine me but they never did.

When your brother was gone and he was overseas did you'll get letters from him very often or get phone calls or anything?

Mr. Coleman: We would get some letters from him but they were little cards and they censored these cards. If he said something that they didn't agree with or something they thought they was trying to tell something on that card that they wasn't supposed to, they would censor it out.

It would just be blacked out?

Mr. Coleman: Yes. It was a black card and I believe it had black writing on it. The best I remember they blotted it out with white. I remember I had one of them for seven years. Danny Vaughn sent me one. He was in the Army over in Germany I believe; somewhere over there.

Who is Danny Vaughn?

Mr. Coleman: He was a friend. He sent me one of those cards back asking about his girlfriend. He later married that girl when he came back here. He was worried about old Jodie. He kept asking me about how she was doing. I probably could sit here and talk to you half the night and it still wouldn't tell you nothing.

Let me check these questions and make sure I got everything that they want as far as on that. We pretty much in a roundabout way have covered everything.

Do you remember any scrap drives; collecting aluminum, sugar?

Mr. Coleman: A man used to come around and pick up batteries, car batteries. He brought them over to Louie H_____ and sold them. We never did have enough scrap iron or anything to bring and sell or anything like that.

When you went to Detroit and worked at the Dodge plant were you'll making automobiles and trucks?

Mr. Coleman: We were making Army trucks. We were making 40 trucks and hour. My job was, I wasn't old enough to get in a union, so I was a stock chaser. I helped supply the line. I took the material up to the line where they were putting the trucks together with. Of course there were two ladies that worked with me and another man. That man would stay out at night a lot of times and he would come in; those Army trucks had a curved out place for the wheels in the back of them underneath where they would set them on there and people could sit on them as they put them on there. We would have a bunch of them sitting up on the ends and he would crawl back in there and sit anywhere where there was one of them wheels were supposed to be and pull these others in on him and sleep if we got the lines supplied. One day the boss came through and asked me, "Where is Max?" I said, "I don't know. He was here a few minutes ago." I didn't want to tell on him. I said, "He was here just a few minutes ago." I knew then that he wasn't any further from here to that wall from us. Later years when I was working at Fort Campbell in the service club out there one day a guy came in and ordered some milk shakes. He said, "Can you give me a ___ to put them in?" I always called them sacks. I sacked them up for him and he turned around and walked through the door and he turned around and he came back and he said, "By the way did you ever work at Dodge Truck Plant?" I said, "Max Gardner." He said, "I got fired after you left there."

Was he now in the Army?

Mr. Coleman: He was in the Army. He said what he was doing. He was driving a jeep carrying a Lieutenant or something around the post. I said, "This is a small world running into somebody like that and think you will never see them again." Here I run into them again.

All the way from Detroit. Was he from Detroit?

Mr. Coleman: Yes he was from Detroit.

I've always heard a lot of times that a lot of women went to work in the factories during that time. Did you see much of that?

Mr. Coleman: Yes, there were quite a few women that worked in the factories. I don't think as many probably as there are today. Back years ago most women figured it was their job to keep a house and take care of the baby and cook the meals and stuff like that. Later years more and more it just seems like it took two of them to make ends meet. I worked out at Fort Campbell and I left there in 1949. I was working at a civilian grocery out there. I left out there making \$29.10 a week. I left there and went to work at Frost D___ for .75 cents an hour but they said, "We will give you all the hours you want." I

worked about 12 hours a day I guess, on average most of the time. I finally got raised on up. I worked there 28 years. When Frost D___ shut down I was the top paid man in that department. I was making \$4.61 an hour. Today I get a retirement from them, for a little better than 28 years; I get a retirement of \$36.03 a month.

You'll weren't unioned or anything?

Mr. Coleman: Yeah the union came in but they didn't get but about three contracts. They told me that if I would wait, I was only 55 when it went down; until I was 65 I could draw about \$80.00 a month. Well I said if I wait until I'm 65, I'm 55 now; I got 10 years to wait. I would have to go until I was 75 for value anything realizing anything to wait. My wife wanted me to go ahead and take it. Of course after I retired from there I worked at the zinc plant and done maintenance over there and done two years of maintenance for Daniel Construction. I worked labor in pipe fitter I guess for about a year before I done maintenance work over there. After that played out Ron Smitto sent me to the Nissan plant and I worked up there. I laid that 12 inch water line around behind that Nissan plant and ran pipes into the building and shut off valves and fire hydrants and everything. After we finished that they wanted me to go to K_____ Clark Plant in Paris, Texas. I decided that was too far from home and I didn't want to close up my house. I wasn't going to leave my wife because she wasn't in too good of health at that time anyway. I went to work at Bobby Wall doing underground plumbing in Nashville. We done several subdivisions up there I guess before I retired. She wanted me to retire at 62. She said momma and daddy waited until they got to 65 and both of them died and neither one of them drew a paycheck. She said, "I don't want you to do that." I quit up there and I went to driving cars out there. I have been out there a little better than 14 years driving cars.

All over the state of Tennessee.

Mr. Coleman: Today I went to Springfield and back and I went to Gallatin and back. I done a little work on the yard out there.

During the war did you know anybody that got injured?

Mr. Coleman: My brother and it was over in Pearl Harbor. He got shell shocked. Him and his partner were standing beside an ambulance and he said he looked and he seen smoke rolling. He told his partner, "You better get under that ambulance. We better get under this ambulance." He said he crawled under there. His partner said, "Aw there ain't no need of that." All of a sudden then that boom went his partner fell in there on top of him and just about under that ambulance. He said the shrapnel and stuff came down and hit that ambulance and just knocked big dents down in it. When he came back from over there he was so nervous he couldn't stand to be around soldiers at all hardly. If he went to town and a bunch of soldiers came around he would say, "Let's go home." He wanted me to go to town with him but if I walked up town with him or something or another and soldiers came around he would say, "Let's go home Jay." He would just get shaky and he wound up with Parkinson's disease and died. Of course I had two brothers that died with it.

Was he at Pearl Harbor when it was bombed?

Mr. Coleman: He went in there right after it was bombed but it was a powder mine. He said it exploded where they had some powder buried or something. It blew up and that is what done the damage to them.

You mentioned your brother-in-law, he went in. where did he go?

Mr. Coleman: He never did go. They examined him but somehow or another they turned him down. He never did go.

That friend of yours that wrote you, he was over in Europe?

Mr. Coleman: Danny Vaughn was over in Germany I believe it was during that war over there. Him and his brother both were over there. His brother got captured. He finally managed to get away from them. He somehow escaped and got away from them. But they kept him captured for a long period of time. I was just raised up with these boys and they were real good friends of mine.

Mr. Coleman I know it is getting late and I don't want to take up too much more of your time. I appreciate it.

Mr. Coleman: Don't worry about that. It ain't late until 10:00 and then it's getting too late then at 10:30.

You are just a spring chicken aren't you?

Mr. Coleman: We don't usually go to bed most the time until 10:00 or 10:30

(End of Interview)