

Leon Coffee
Legendary Rodeo Bullfighter
May 8, 2007
Filmed at Peyton Colony Cemetery at Mt. Horeb Baptist Church

Interviewer: David Hall
Videographer: Patrick Dunavan

Leon Coffee (LC): My full name is Luke Leon Coffee.

David Hall (DH): What was your father's full name?

LC: My father's name was Luke Coffee Jr. My granddad was Luke Coffee. And his dad was George Coffee. And--that's about as far back as I can tell you.

DH: So the head of the Coffee family keeps the name Luke. Is that right?

LC: Pretty much so. The head of the Coffee clan keeps the name Luke.

DH: Can you give us your date of birth, please?

LC: -- I was born October 11, 1954. I live about a quarter of a mile over that hill right over there—a quarter of a mile from this cemetery. Kinda ironic that after all these years I've come back to here.

DH: You've come back. Where you were born?

LC: I was born [laughs]—this is ironic also—I was born up there on the town square here in Blanco. When the town square used to be the Courthouse in front and the hospital in the back, and—I'm what we call a Courthouse baby. We had a website and the whole nine yards.

DH: There's a list on the wall in the Courthouse hallway of people who were born there. You on that list?

LC: Yeah, I'm on that list. And--I think I may—between myself and a cousin that died not long ago—I think we're the last two Coffees born up there in that hospital. And -- that's quite a deal since--here I am back here again.

DH: You say you're back here. Where did you go to and when?

LC: Well, my dad moved to Austin from Blanco. I don't know exactly what year, but I was probably five years old when he moved to Austin—and --- or maybe, you know, four or five years old. And my sister—one of my sisters was born—well, all three of my sisters were born in Austin, and--my brother and I were born in Blanco. And--we moved there in Austin, and I went to school there. And--when I was growin' up I couldn't—my birthday was in October—and—we--didn't start school until—we're supposed to start school at seven. And you had to be seven years old by September 1st, and I wasn't, so I wasn't able to start school 'til I was older. And--I might've been six and started at seven, but--I was a year behind everybody. So--in that year that I was behind, my dad was shearin' sheep and goat all up and down this country up here around Blanco, and I was the guy that drug all them sheep and goats to the [unintelligible] for him. --He had a four drop rig that he had three other guys sharin' with him, and we put all these goats in one big pen, and he'd send me out there drag 'em goats to the [unintelligible] so he wouldn't have to go out there and get 'em. I'd drag 'em to everybody, and it was quite the little deal. I was five years old—five or six years old—and had to drag all 'em goats—they were scared to death, but you had to be tough back then. And so my dad was gettin' like twelve cents a head, and I'd get a penny or somethin' for every goat that I drug over there. And I was fourteen years old. I'll never forget this. I bought my first horse from my granddaddy—and that saved all in pennies.

DH: Did you have to keep that horse in Austin?

LC: No, my granddad gave him to me basically. I just thought I'd bought him. And I bought him. And my dad had a place there in Austin that we worked for a doctor there. And we took that horse out there, and we had him out there—little bay colt I thought the world of. And my dad had a place there, and we kinda took him over to that place, and we worked him there. We went out to Dr. Dryden's place and had her out there for a little while. But this colt—I didn't know anything about how to really take care of one—this colt got milk worms 'cause I never knew nothin' about wormin' a horse.

DH: So that was your first horse—when you were fourteen.

LC: Well, I'd owned 'em all my life. But that's the first one I ever bought.

DH: I forgot to ask—why did your dad move ya'll to Austin?

LC: My dad married the last woman in Blanco County that he could marry—that he wasn't kin to. So when we moved to Austin that was the only way, you know, his kids

could be able to marry somebody that they wasn't kin to. [laughs] So it was for the preservation of the Coffee family.

DH: I see.

LC: Yeah.

DH: And when you started school in Austin, were the schools segregated?

LC: Oh yes, definitely segregated. I went to Blackshear Elementary School, Keeling Junior High School, and Anderson High School. And I was a freshman at Anderson, and then my dad moved us out to Crockett High School—I mean to south Austin, and we started going to Crockett High School. They were not segregated. They were just—desegregation was ordered, but all the schools hadn't complied.

DH: You still weren't bussed back and forth by then.

LC: No, not at that time. My sophomore year, my dad moved us out to Crockett High School, which was predominantly all white. And my brother, my sister, and I and a family from—oh, there was probably ten black people in this whole school, and there's, oh, 3000 kids there. And so I was playin' football. I got to be quite the little football player, and so everybody kinda knew me. And then my junior year, they shut down Anderson High School.

DH: The all black high school.

LC: The all black high school. And they bussed all the kids from Anderson to all different schools. And a lot of the friends that I grew up with that went to elementary school, junior high school, and my freshman year of high school—all of those kids came to Crockett High School. And I'll never forget this long as I live. Mr. Born came to my class one day and got me out of class says, "You're now my mediator." I didn't even know what *mediator* meant. He said, "I want you to walk the halls and stop all the fights." Ahhh, I don't know if I'm gonna do all of that. But I was the only—oh, how should I—connecting factor from the Crockett High School to Anderson High School—I was the only connecting factor of both. 'Cause I knew all the kids that were at Crockett High School that I was playin' ball with. And I knew all the kids from Anderson High School that I went to school and grew up with. So he told me I was gonna be the mediator, and all I had to do was just walk around and stop fights and make people get along. So, oh I guess, five, six weeks, that's all I did. And that got quite interesting. But it was a little

different—it was a little different. But we probably got a lot of things done and a lot of things handled. It was a great deal.

DH: You learned how to mediate.

LC: And I didn't even know what the word meant. [Laughs]

DH: After you graduated from high school, did you think about continuing with a football career?

LC: Yeah. I thought about it. But I wasn't as big as my cousins. I could run, but I just wasn't big enough to play ball and decided to go college, and that didn't work. So went to army—stayed there for a while and came back. But I guess my biggest thrill kinda goes back to my heritage. And that's my granddaddy was a horse trainer, and I rode horses all my life. Every summer, I was the littlest kid in the herd, and I'd ride all them colts. I'd ride every one of 'em. I mean my granddad put me on some stuff that— [laughs]. "Hey, you the littlest. You get on him. You ride him." So I learned to ride buckin' horses at a very young age, and I loved rodeo. So I started off doin' that, and I got to ride bulls. And I'll never forget my mother tellin' me one Easter Sunday mornin' was havin' a ropin' out there Dr. Dryden's place, and my mother say, "You're not gonna be no cowboy. You're gonna be behind somebody's desk with a white shirt and a tie on." That's when the total rebellion came out in me. I said, "Nope, I'm gonna rodeo." And so I went to ridin' bulls and a little bit of everything. Rode bulls, bareback horses, roped calves—just a little bit of everything in rodeo. And it was just somethin' I wanted to do. But football was somethin' I really wanted to do, but nobody ever really gave me a chance to, so I gave that up.

DH: So shortly after you got out of the army, you took up rodeoing.

LC: Well, I was rodeoin' before I ever went to the army. I was rodeoin' in high school. I started ridin' bulls at the age of nine in little bitsy rodeos.

DH: Oh.

LC: Bastrop, Texas. I'll never forget little ol' shetlands and little steer [unintelligible]. And it was quite the little deal, and I remember winnin' a little blue ribbon. [laughs] I won the bareback ridin' and won second in the bull ridin'. And I beat my brother in bareback ridin', and he beat me in the bull ridin'. But I won the little all-around, so I won the all-around ribbon. And for many, many years I had that ribbon and kept it. But I started rodeoin', and when I got back outta army, there was a friend of mine—I was stationed at

Fort Hood—and a friend of mine had kids in high school rodeo in Georgetown. And he said, "Why don't you come over here and help these kids out? The bull fighter didn't show up." I said, "I don't know what to do." You know I rode bulls pretty good, but I knew I wanted a bull fighter to be, but I didn't know where to be. I didn't know how to get there. He said, "Well, all you gotta do is run fast and act goofy." "You bet, man. I can do that. You gonna pay me for this? I used to get kicked out of school for this. Now you gonna pay me for it?" "Yeah. I'll pay." So we did that, and I kept Johnson Johnson tape and Bengay in business for about two years and then decided to learn how to do it the right way. And I went to tryin' to learn how to do it—why to do it. And I went to the school of hard knocks. There weren't any schools to learn how to do that back then. So I went to these schools—hard knocks. If you get hit goin' one way, you get up and go back the other way. You just have to be tough to stay in it.

DH: Is there a secret to staying alive doing what you're doing out there with a bull? What's the technique that you would try to convey to somebody who'd never done that before?

LC: Don't do it. [laughs] No. There's no secret to it, but there's no set rules to how to get by—how to live. The basics will keep you alive. If you know the basics, they will keep you alive. They'll keep you from getting in tremendous danger. In this business, it's not if you get caught, it's when and how bad. And that's what I've chose to live, and I've lived it for thirty-four or thirty-five years now.

DH: Well, you told me one time that you stay close to the shoulder, I think. Is that what I remember right?

LC: Yeah. The biggest deal about fightin' bulls is stayin' close enough to 'em that they can't hurt you. The problem is getting that close. [laughs] That's where the trick comes in. And when you fight bulls for a livin', you gonna get hit. It aint no doubt about it. But you gotta learn how to take those punches like a prize fighter. You know, you gotta know how to roll with the punch or roll with the flow. I mean you just can't just stand there and think that you can out muscle a bull. --Not gonna happen. But by you stayin' close to him—I'd much rather get hit from a bull this close than that far away {gestures short distance followed by long distance using arms/hands}. Because when it comes from here over there, it's gonna really hurt. And right here, all you gotta do is just punch you away. I've taught lots of kids how to fight bulls. The secret I guess is havin' the tenacity to stay there long enough to get in a position to where you can't get caught. And that's "Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil" 'cause I'm the baddest cat in this valley. And you've got to convince yourself of that and make your feet stay in one position until that bull gets in the right position, and

you've got to make a move to get away from him. And it better be the right move because there are no mulligans. There are no do overs. You better shoot from the hip and better be right and if you're not, you're gonna pay for it.

DH: Is there any one bull you remember in particular that you'd like to never meet again?

LC: How much time you got? [Laughs]

DH: More than one, huh?

LC: Yeah. But I'll have to say the worst bull—there's three that will always be in my mind. They will always be in my mind. Well, I'm gonna start—well, the least of the three to the worst. The least of the three was Joe T of [unintelligible]. He was scary, very scary. But I could get around him. But he had caught all of my idols—all the people that I thought that their ability to fight bulls was really, really good. And I didn't think I was as good as they were, and they got caught by him so his legacy had already beaten me.

DH: When you say "caught by" you mean seriously injured.

LC: Oh, yeah. When these bulls catch you—when I say catch you, I mean they gonna run over you, they gonna step on you, they gonna hit you with a horn, they gonna hurt you. And my idols had been caught by 'im—Skipper Voss, Rick Chatman, Miles Hare, Rob Smets—these guys have been caught by this bull. But I guess they didn't have the speed that I did, and that was the only thing that got me around him. The second one was a bull called Gentleman Jim of Kelseys up in the Northwest. Oh, that bull frightened me. That bull frightened me because he was not only a fightin' bull, he was a killer. If he got you down, he was gonna hurt you. He was gonna hurt you bad, and he knew it. The third one was the most gracious fightin' bull I've ever been around because he didn't cheat you. He just beat you. And that's Crooked Nose of Harry Vold. And he was undoubtedly without any question the rankest bull I ever fought in my life because he knew what to do, how to do it, and you better not stump your toe, or he was gonna make you pay for it. And I can honestly say that I fought that bull seven times and never got caught by him. 'Course there's another little deal for that 'cause I was so afraid of him when they opened the gate, I was in high gear. The bull never had a chance because his reputation had preceded him, and there was no way on earth that bull was gonna catch me. My feet had done made up my mind.

DH: Have you kept track of how many bone breaks you've had in your career?

LC: Yeah. I sure have. As of this date, it's been a hundred and thirty-four. A lot of these bones have broke twice—two or three times. Bull'll step on your feet and break your toe or foot or ankle or arch in your foot. All these fingers have been broke. I mean there's no ligaments left in any of these fingers, and I just kind of roll 'em around wherever you want 'em to go now. [snaps fingers and twists head] I've been broke up a few times. [twists head again] Ah, that feels so good. [Laughs]

DH: You've been punished but you've had quite a bit of success. What are some of the awards you've won in your career?

LC: Wow! You know, a man told me somethin' one time. I was fightin' bulls, and I thought I was God's gift to the bull fightin' world. And this man told me, he said—man, [makes a whew sound] my head got really big, and this man walked up to me, and he says, "You know, you gonna have to quit readin' your own press releases." That brought my head out of the clouds. From that day on I don't worry about what I've done. I've done a lot of things, but I've never really had to keep track of it since then. I can name 'em off to you now, but I wasn't tryin' to do 'em. After that, I wasn't tryin' to get to any of these accomplishments. I've been to the final five times. Actually, I've been there—in the year 2000. In 2001, a man told me, he said, "Leon, you're now a legend." I said, "What are you talkin' about?" He said, "Well, you're now a legend." I said, "Yeah, maybe a legend in my own mind, but I'm not a legend." He said, "Yeah, you are." I said, "Why?" He said, "Because you're a myth—worked the national finals rodeo in four decades, two centuries, and two millenniums." I looked at him, I said, "You're telling me I'm a thousand years old. That ain't possible." But it actually was because I've worked the finals in the 70s, 80s, 90s, and the 2000s, and that's two centuries, four decades, and two millenniums. And I never even realized that I did it. Be a thousand years 'fore somebody can say that again. So I guess I can say that "Okay, I'm a legend in that category." But I've been to the finals of one rodeo clown a year. I've done lots of things. I've been to every major rodeo in the United States. I've been all over Mexico, Canada, just everywhere. I've worked the Canadian finals, the national finals, just about every finals in the United States, the Indian finals, the—I mean just everything—the TYRA [Texas Youth Rodeo Association] finals, the AJRA [American Junior Rodeo Association] finals, the everything finals, the Copenhagen Cup finals, Dallas Stampede—it's all the greatest rodeos in the world.

DH: Weren't you inducted into the Black Cowboys Hall of Fame?

LC: The Cowboys of Color Hall of Fame and Museum, yeah, in Fort Worth, Texas. I went in the Cowboys of Color Hall of Fame and the Texas Rodeo Cowboys Hall of Fame one year apart. But it really blew my mind about goin' into the Cowboys of Color

Hall of Fame. I went in with Jerry Dias, who is a trick rider and trick roper and champion charro from Mexico, and Vickie Adams, who is a Indian princess from a tribe in Oklahoma. And she's an entertainer in the pro rodeo world. And with Mel Blount, who used to play for the Pittsburgh Steelers. And, matter of fact, Mean Joe Green was even there. So it was quite a deal to go in with these people, and I'm like "Whoa!" I didn't realize this is quite the deal it was, and to go in there was quite a deal. And then to go into the Texas Rodeo Cowboy Hall of Fame was a great deal because when you go to that, it's a tribute to every person that's ever had anything to do with rodeo in the state of Texas. And I didn't realize what kind of an impact that was gonna be to be in that. But once I got there to see who all had been inducted, it was an eye opener.

DH: When you started rodeoing, was there resistance to black cowboys? Did you have problems with race in your profession?

LC: There were isolated incidents. Overall, I came in at a time where was a lot of animosity on my part because I didn't know if—oh, this is not gonna be good—this is not gonna be good. I don't know. I don't know. But when I first started, [laughs] I worked rodeos, and I'd paint my whole face white—all the way down where you couldn't tell I was black. I wore a great big pink Afro wig, and I painted make up all over the top of that wig, and I wore white gloves. Nobody knew I was black. I walked outta the arena one day—over there at the old Wimberley arena—and I pulled my gloves off, and a lady saw that I was black, and she fainted. I went, "Oh, my God! I was just been a star in the arena. Now I'm probably gonna go to jail. They'll probably gonna think I hurt this woman." You know? So from that point on I went, "No." There's been a lot of times that I was leery. But, you know, I always thought that I was tough enough to go through somethin'. To be perfectly honest, the good Lord was protecting me when I didn't know I even needed it. And by sayin' that I mean I thought I was just tough enough to go on through it, and he wasn't gonna stop me. Well, I coulda' been stopped. The good Lord had somethin' in mind for me. He just had to get me through it. But Jackson, Mississippi, one year—I went down there for the Steiner Rodeo Company, and the Steiners took a big risk in taking me to Jackson, Mississippi. 'Course that was their biggest contract, but Tommy Steiner—Buck Steiner, Tommy Steiner, and Bobby Steiner all took a huge risk of takin' me to their rodeos. But they were true pioneers that said, "You know what? It ain't the color of your skin. It's the ability he's got that's gonna keep him in this." And that's when I realized that in rodeo, you're not judged on the color of your skin. You're judged on your ability —what you can do. When you got a bull rider just about to get run over by a bull or if he's hung up to a bull, that bull rider's not gonna say, "Hey, don't send in the black guy. Send in the white guy." He's not gonna do that. He's gonna say, "Come get me outta this." He doesn't care who that is. He doesn't ask any questions.

He says, "Help. Black, white, green, or farmer's uniform or cop outfit—whatever"—he wants some help. I happen to have the ability to go do that.

DH: In addition to your rodeo career, you've also had a movie career. Can you tell us a little bit about that? I know you've made a few movies—*Jericho*, one of the prominent ones. Just tell us a little bit about that—what it was like.

LC: *Jericho*. *Jericho* was a great deal. A friend of mine called me. I was workin' a rodeo at Austin. And he says, "Hey, man, we're doin' a deal down here in San Antone. We're doin' a script reading for a movie." I said, "And?" He said, "Well, we need a big black cowboy that can ride." I went, "Excuse me?" [laughs] He said, "Yeah. Why don't you come down and read for this." "Yeah. You bet." So in between performances, I go to San Antonio and meet with this guy named Merlin. [laughs] And we meet at the Denny's restaurant, and he hands me a script. He tells me to go read this for about an hour. And I go read this script, and, boy, I'm really, really likin' this—a good movie, I thought. I didn't know much about 'em. I said, "Cool." He told me to read this part about Joshua. Said that'd be just right. So I read it, and I go back, and I meet with him. He said, "Well, I don't have time to take you back to the set to read on this." He said, "Where can we read?" I said, "Well, I've got a big truck sittin' out there." He said, "That's fine." So I read for him in this truck—in my truck. And he threw me the script and says, "Be ready to go on Monday." I said, "Excuse me?" He said, "You're him." I said, "Really." "Yeah." So we got to shootin' this movie, and it was with a guy named Mark Valley and Lee Ermey and Buck Taylor, and, boy, I thought, "Man, I have arrived." It was a great deal. Again it comes back to that grave out there. In this movie, they said that they wanted me to be an old black preacher—1800's western—mystery western. And in that mystery western, they had these lines in there for me to be this freed slave preacher—

DH: Reminded you of somebody, did it?

LC: Yeah, it did. Yeah, it did. And I asked Merlin in one of these scenes, I said, "Merlin, I just don't know if that's right for me to say that." And he said, "What are you talking about?" I said, "Well, did an old black preacher help you write this?" He said, "Well, no." I said, "Then how would you know what he said?" He said, "Well, I guess I wouldn't." I said, "Well, I've got a few of them old black preachers in my family. My grandad was a deacon in the church, and my great grandad was a pastor over there at Mt. Horeb Baptist Church. Why don't you just let me play them?" He said, "Okay." So my grandad was a big influence in my life. He knew the Bible pretty well, and he could come up with a scripture out of it that fit your life in any given situation and just roll over to it at any time. And I asked him, "Why don't you just let me be him?" And he said, "Sure, why not." And after that I knew the gist of what I was supposed to say. I just got to playin' my

grandad. 'Cause I knew that's what he would do, what he would say, how he would do it. So I just portrayed my grandad in this movie. Wound up bein' a great deal. And we won two film festivals with that movie. We won the Marco Allen Film Festival in Florida, and we won the Houston Film Festival. The Houston Film Festival—I really enjoyed winning that one 'cause we had Barbara Streisand in the movie—I mean, had her movie there. And they were gonna start the festival off with hers, and then they watched ours. And we bumped her movie, and we then won the film festival, so she was really upset with us. [laughs] But we won fair and square.

DH: And you were playing your grandfather.

LC: Yeah. Yeah. Kinda ironic sittin' out here. Yeah. All my lines became a lot easier for me to do, and after it was all over, I realized that what I'd read in that script to begin with wasn't what I was actually sayin' on camera. And it wound up bein' what I thought my grandad would've said and did say 'cause I was portrayin' him. And it worked out great.

DH: From the past, let's take a step into the future. I know you've had a dream for what—seven, eight years. Tell us about that dream.

LC: This dream's been in my head for eleven years. Let's put it this way—all my cousins are big time ball players. Gene Upshaw, head of the Player's Association of the NFL, played for the Oakland Raiders; Marvin played for the Kansas City Chiefs, Gene's brother; Willie Upshaw, Juggie, played for the Toronto Blue Jays—got a lot of athletes in the family. I guess I'm what you call the family's only idiot. I'm a rough stock rider and work on the other end—livestock end. But I've had this dream of having rodeo teams just like the NFL. And what we've done is created the NFL in rodeo. And we call it the National Rodeo League. And what we're doin' is selling franchises—one per state—and getting the state loyalty fan base and playin' games. My objective in this is to see that a cowboy can make a livin'. When I was rodeoin' really, really hard, there's a lot of things that I missed because I was just gone tryin' to make a livin'. The mystique of a cowboy is so huge that nobody ever realizes that they really don't make a livin'. Some of 'em make a lot of money, but they spend it tryin' to make it, which is what a lot of people in this world do. But these guys are individual contractors—individual people that they live by the seat of their pants. They live from hand to hand, check to hand, hand to mouth. They don't really make the livin' that they deserve to make. And so I've tried to start somethin' that's gonna give them an opportunity to make a livin'. When I started, there's a lot of things I missed. I missed my daughter's first day of school. My second daughter—she was three, four days old before I got to see her because I was a long ways away. I had to rodeo. I had to try to make a livin'. What I'm doin' now is gonna be able to put these families back together. Quite a few years ago, the good Lord told me

to go home and put my family back together. I thought He was talkin' about my immediate family. The family that He was talkin' about is the family I know out there on the road—the family that we used to have when the Snyders were goin', where everybody knew everybody and was there for a week, and you knew everybody in the bull ridin', you knew everybody in the bronc ridin', everybody was cheerin' for each other, and it was a big happy family. The economy has destroyed the fabric of that family. And I'm determined—no, I'm not determined. God's determined to put that back together, and he's usin' me to get it done.

DH: This venture into corporate America. It must be quite a change from what you're used to.

LC: Oh, you can't imagine! [breathes out audibly] I guess you could call it a cultural shock to go from just takin' care of my little business of just runnin' up and down the road and tryin' to book rodeos—stuff like that—into dealing with the lives of many, many people. To do that is tough for me to do because it is somethin' that—I've never been there. This corporate world [sighs]—Ed Gaylord is a friend of mine. And he told me when I went there, and I said, "Ed, I need to try to get this done." And he looked at me, and he says, "You know, it sounded like a great idea." He said, "Man, I don't believe in a lot of things, but I believe in you. I believe if anybody can get this done you can." And he wrote me a check he said to get it started. And from there, I went many years and thought that maybe I was ready. Maybe I'm ready. I needed more money. I needed more money. I need more this. I need more that. But I didn't want to go back to Ed and say, "Help me do this, you know. I wanna try to make it work." I just didn't get that done. But again I had to realize that all that I was wanting done was not gonna be done on my time. I had to give it to God and say, "Okay, God, I'm gonna get out of your way. I'm gonna get outta your way and let you do this. Whenever you want me to do it, I'll do it." And when I got outta God's way, He started makin' this work. And then that's when I met Jeff Mayfield, and Jeff has been god-sent to me. And he funded this deal, and we've already done a pilot for it. And this is huge. And when we know that it's working, we just gotta to stay on the timelines that we're on to make this work right and make sure that every "I" is crossed—I mean every I is dotted and every "T" is crossed, and everything's done right. Once we get all of that in place, which has got to be done by the end of this month, we're ready to go, and we're gonna change the lives of a lot of people and help a lot of cowboys make a livin' instead of havin' to fight to make one.

DH: I wish you a lot of luck with that endeavor. By the way, what was that funny noise we heard over the fence?

LC: [Laughs] That was some donkeys that kinda parade around out through here, and they're owned by the people that live over here right next to the graveyard here. And that's a sound that I'm very familiar with.

DH: They just roam around the Peyton Colony's graveyard.

LC: Yeah. They're the watchdogs. They're the gatekeepers.

DH: You're back in Blanco now. You even said you found your resting place. What now does Peyton Colony—the history of Peyton Colony, the cemetery, the old schoolhouse, the Mt. Horeb Baptist Church—what does that all mean to you now?

LC: That means more than any accolades that I've gathered up. Nothin' that I have done on the road with anybody in the world worth more than bein' able to come back and see my dad's grave, my grandad's grave, my great grandad's grave and know where I come from—know why I'm grounded—where I'm grounded—what their struggle was for. Their struggle made my life a lot easier. I hope that my struggle will make lives a lot easier. My struggle to make the National Rodeo League work is somethin' that—it's gonna help a lot of people. I know it's gonna help a lot of people. In doin' so I know that their struggle—their struggle [gestures toward cemetery] is what allowed that to happen. And this is for people they'll never know. And these people I'm tryin' to help will never know them. Their struggle is gonna be worthwhile.

[LC and DH walk through cemetery.]

LC: Well, David, this is where it all begins or where it all ends. This is the Peyton Colony Cemetery. This is where all the history of Peyton Colony is. It's all everybody right here. This is it. This is where it all begins. I mean this is where it all ends, but this is where we find out where we come from—the history of it. I'm kin to everybody in this graveyard. My dad married the last woman in Blanco County that he could marry without bein' kin to her. And so now I'm kin to everybody in here on my mom's side, on my dad's side—on both sides I'm kin to everybody—the Uspshaws, the Burches, the Nichols, the Coffees, the Joneses, Jacksons, the Citys—everybody in here in this graveyard I'm kin to. The Upshaws—died in 1936, born in 1877—that's a long time. I'm kin to all of them. Johnsons—Nemon Johnson, Lola Johnson—they're all kin to me. There's so many, so many graves, so many gravesites. It's unreal how much history is right here. This gravesite up here—I wanna know who they are, how they're kin to me. I wanna know who they are. The Hinds born in 1822, died in March 15th, 1895. That's a long time. Then there's Sam Hinds, died at the age of 91 years old. Wow! Lived a long time. That

kinda throws out the theory of people not livin' that long in those times. Everybody in here—

Notes:

This interview was conducted and produced by the Oral History Committee of the Blanco County South Library District.

In spite of the best efforts of the Oral History Committee, some errors may be present in this transcription. Please refer to accompanying video for original source.

Transcriber: Margie Dyer

Transcription editor(s):

©Blanco County South Library District, Blanco, Texas