

unedited first draft

MRS. FRANCES M[outon] OLIVER
REEL I [only]
May 10, 1969

INTERVIEWER: William Russell
NOTES: Richard B. Allen
SUMMARY: Dan Weisman
TYPING: Dan Weisman

[Mrs. Frances Oliver was Jelly Roll Morton's sister. Bill Russell conducted the interview at her home on 1918 Amelia Street in New Orleans.]
+ 1918 Amelia Street, New Orleans, La.
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W. Russell, - Dan

[Mrs. Frances Oliver was Jelly Roll Morton's sister. Bill Russell conducted the interview at her home on 1918 Amelia Street in New Orleans.]

[Russell also provided a detailed, hand-written account of the circumstances of the interview with observations. This is included in this folder. DSW 19 December 1990.]

This is a pretty good picture of Jelly here though, Mrs. Oliver says. WR notes he interviewed [Omar] Simeon, and [Johnny] St. Cyr.

I think you have most of the pictures I have, Mrs. Oliver continues. That's a picture that I really treasure over here, where he sits at the piano. He's wearing those high top shoes, and dark black coat.

My sister had some pictures with him, and somebody in Chicago named Mabel. [Mabel from New York, WR notes.]

But, I don't have those pictures because I wasn't living down here then. I was living in West Texas.

I don't have this, either. [WR shows pictures. Here's one that isn't very good, he says. This is one of Paul Barnes. He still plays down at the (Preservation) Hall.]

But, you know, I can remember him when I was up there [in

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Chicago] when he was sick in 1925. He sits at the piano, and ideas would just come to his head.

I passed a remark one time and he said, 'I can use that. Hold it right there.' I remember him saying that so plain.

I can't remember where he lived [in Chicago at that time]. I lived on Eberhart Street. I lived with Mrs. Martin up there on Eberhart Street.

[Continues looking at pictures...] This is very good. You know who he remind me of? Jerry Vales, here. Standing up here. The way he's standing up.

Jerry Vales stands, holding his hands up like that when he completes a song. I've been watching Jerry Vales for a week on Mike Douglas's Show. Jerry Vales reminds me of (Russell chuckles)...but, he's so short, and Jelly was so tall.

My sister's taller than I am, too. I'm the shortest of the three...children that my mother was able to raise.

I thought she was [taller]. When I was a little girl, she looked like she was just mountain high.

I don't really know [how much older my sister is than I]. She won't really tell me her age. But, she knows mine.

[WR thinks she told (Alan) Lomax when he was working on his book (Mr. Jelly Roll), that she was 11 years younger than Jelly.

I'm the seventh child, and she's the third. So, I don't know. Jelly was born in [18]85, and I was born in 1900.

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[He was really born in (18)85? asks WR. Because later he told someone that he was born in (18)86.]

I don't know if it was [18]85, or [18]86. I know my mother's first marriage license, where he gives his name on one of those records as La Menthe. He says, my name is Ferdinand Joseph La Menthe.

You see this thing: he created jazz in 1901. Well, I mean, I was just a year old. My birthday is the 18th of June. Colorful, and opinionated, (reading) egotistic. You don't have to tell me about that. Egocentric, that's right.

I wish they had taken the diamond out of his tooth. He had a great big diamond in his tooth. I remember it in Chicago.

The one thing about it. We all have a very small smile but Jelly had it...when he was standing like he was standing [in the famous picture] with his both arms out. You could see...this smile here. You can see the tooth right next to his eye tooth.

[WR met Jelly Roll in 1938, and he didn't have the diamond in his tooth then. I don't know what he would have done with it.

[I don't stare at people usually so much when I talk to them, WR continues, so I might not have noticed the tooth.]

It's a funny thing about you, Mrs. Oliver says to WR. There is something about you that I recognize from your voice, the other day when you were here.

And then, when you came the first time when I was ill, and

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had a bone removed out of my jaw. I just was afraid to catch a cold because the weather was cold then.

When [Jelly] was such a young man, my grandmother wouldn't let him live with us. My aunt had begun to have a lot of children. She said that he couldn't play in these shady places [i.e., Storyville], and come on back where all the children were.

My grandmother's name was Laura. My mother's name was Louise. My grandmother was Laura, and my great-grandmother was Felice'--Felice' in French. Her last name was (spelling) P-E-C-H-E. Peche.

My mother's [name was] (spelling) M-O-N-E-T-T-E. She married La Menthe, and then married Mouton later. [WR asks her to spell the name.] Because, I mean, my father came from Arcadia County, [Texas].

That's what this man [Alan Lomax] started writing me about...because his wife had lived down here. He remembered me saying it on the air when they were talking to me...making those pictures for "Shades of New Orleans," [a program on WWL-TV].

I don't know if they made them especially for "Shades of New Orleans," but "Shades of New Orleans" uses them. They use the pictures.

I see them on the air all the time. After 10:00 [p.m.], after the last show - at night, before they come into the late movie - they have "Shades of New Orleans."

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Jelly had a different father than I. My mother was married twice. We look more alike than my sister and I. [WR was surprised when he saw me.]

My brother looks like my mother. Jelly looks like my mother, and so do I. Because my mother had large eyes, and my sister had small eyes.

I never saw his father [La Menthe]. I saw some uncles of his...when I was a child. I couldn't remember their names now.

[My first recollection of my brother] was when I was six years old. He brought me a pink sweater with a tassel on it and...some high-top shoes with tassels. I never have forgotten that.

My brother brought the pink sweater to me, and the blue one for my sister. But, my grandmother made him give me the blue sweater because I was vowed to the Blessed Mother for blue, and white. So, every time I received a package from him it was blue, and white.

He told me, you won't have to wear this rabbit. When I was twelve years old, he sent me a big pink bunny rabbit at Easter-time.

When I was 16 years old - for being a good girl - he sent me this dresser set, this gold-top studded dresser set. A beautiful thing. I kept it throughout the years. Everywhere I went, I carried it with me.

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[WR and Mrs. Oliver discuss some trays that are actually picture frames. The tray that is used as a picture frame came with a scarf with roses that is on the table. There is also a powder dish that they discuss.]

I never shall forget when I went down there [to Chicago] in 1925. Albert Nicholas was playing at the Club Plantation...with King Oliver.

The whole place was covered with artificial watermelons made out of tissue paper. I was so impressed with it, really and truly, that I didn't hear the music from looking up all the time. I had never been in a nightclub before in all my life.

It was decorated with imitation watermelons on the ceiling. The vines were on the walls, but the watermelons were on the ceiling. Yes.

[WR never went to the place.] That was a long time ago, 1925. [They discuss another picture that WR has of Jelly Roll directing a band there. Mrs. Oliver would like a copy.]

I have two other pictures, where he's working on the RKO Circuit with other men. One, where a guy is sitting on top of the piano. The other picture I have--he is standing up...full height in a dress suit.

He was playing....He came down from Chicago to Memphis. He wanted us to come out there, and my grandmother didn't want me to go. She said I hadn't been travelling enough to go to...a small

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town.

I was 16 [years old] when Jelly sent me these. [Presumably, the tray, and scarf, previously discussed]. It was a birthday present--born the 18th of June. He always remembered it, too.

He was happy that I had never been married, and I was still a young lady. My sister married at 15. I didn't marry. I didn't marry until six months [before I was] 18.

I was all finished with school. I would have gone [to Memphis], but my grandmother [didn't want me to...]

(Low sound, followed by crackling sound for about a minute...)

Then, he [?] had a sister that lived next to his godmother. Her sister was my sister's godmother so...Jelly Roll went over to Biloxi when he was 17, or 19, or something. I don't know how old he was.

The last time I saw him - the first time I ever started to remember him - he was in Biloxi with my aunt Hortense. They called her Hortense in French. [Spells it for WR.]

He called her Aunt Lolly' [accent on last syllable]. She was Miss Domer. That was my sister's godmother. That was my grandmother's sister.

His godmother was named Lolly'. That was half of Lolly' Hunter. And his godfather lived in Watts, California.

Since I've been married a second time, he told me that his

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godfather lived in a place that he owned in Watts at one time. Diamond Street. I never will forget that.

[When WR was out there in 1940, your brother was still living in New York. WR went out there to see Kid Ory, and another old time guitar player whose nickname was "Giggy" Williams, Norwood Williams. He lived down in Watts.] I remember him speaking of Giggy.

[He was running a filling station, WR continues about Williams. He told me that he thought Jelly Roll's mother, he didn't know it was his godmother...] It was his godfather... [His godmother died at that time. Eddy Hunter and Lolly Hunter...] That was his godmother, and godfather. [So, I didn't get to meet him.]

I mean Lolly' was so crazy about my mother that she wanted to take all three of us to raise. My grandmother wanted us to be raised Catholic, so she wouldn't let us go.

What good does it do to hand down religion before a child knows what they're doing? You know what I mean?

I didn't do that with my son. I had him christened, and that's all. When he went to get married, he went, and had to make his communion to be confirmed, and everything; because, suppose he had married a Protestant girl. Then, he'd have to change over again.

My brother was quite religious. He's Catholic [and he was

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buried Catholic too.] He was quite religious.

He'd always tell me: 'Baby, take the bitters with the sweets, and remember God's above, and he will always take care of you.'

I think he admired me because I never did beg. I never could ask for anything.

I couldn't show more appreciation. I was always thanking him for what he sent, and asking him what I could do for him after I married [Dartinger]. He said, 'I'm just so glad you're married, and doing well,' that he didn't want anything from me.

I went to Texas in 1931, and got married. I came back home in [19]45 to live.

My son finished his grammar school work there. Then, he went to Texas. He went to Marshall, Texas to college. My son went to Bishop College. He graduated from high school in May. He went there in September to Bishop College, and stayed there four years.

I don't know anything about my brother's formal education. [WR mentions that Jelly Roll went to St. Joseph's University, and took music.]

I don't know anything about his education here, because I was the baby, and my grandmother never discussed anything with me.

All of this information that I'm giving you now, I got out

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of an aunt by marriage. My uncle's wife told me.

My sister told me just a smidgeon. She wouldn't tell me too much.

Then, my aunt that died here three years ago. We went out on the Fourth of July, one time, just the two of us. Her name was Viola Haynes. She was married. She was Mrs. John Haynes, and she just died a few years ago.

We went out on a lake, and just sit there. She talked about everything she thought I should know. I appreciate her for that. I have pictures of her, too.

[We didn't have a piano in my grandmother's home, nor any other instruments around that I can remember.]

I was interested in music, but I never did learn anything. My grandmother wanted us to be housewives. She taught us how to cook, sew, wash, and iron, take care of babies. She felt like marriage was an institution as well as any.

My grandson plays music now. He's a pianist. I gave him a piano when he was 12 [years old]. He's doing nicely with his music, too. He's 17 now.

I was just hoping some of them would have [what] my brother had. Some of that talent.

His teacher says he shows such wonderful potential...He plays Errol Garner's "Whispering," but his teacher just wants him to play classics.

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[WR notes he studied music, and that's all I ever played was classics. But, I got interested in the jazz.] She said just so you know music. You can play any kind, once you learn music. He'll be 17 in August.

I first saw my brother when he was about six. I don't remember whether he came over from Biloxi, or I went over there.

I can remember sitting at the table. He put a napkin around my neck, so [] on my dress, because it was a blue dress that he had bought me.

And listen, I was so proud of my clothes...I didn't have the sense enough to say then...I wouldn't meet myself on the street. I know now that they were exclusive.

I knew of [Jelly living in] Tacoma, Washington, and some place he used to write us [from] all the time. He'd leave Washington, and go back there. He was out on the [West] Coast a long time.

So many people that know of him never, never mention Jelly. They'd say, I want you to go down to the Cabildo, and see this artist down here, he's simply...

I'd say: well, that's my brother. He's number 30 on the list, you know what I mean? Friends would say, 'Why don't you speak about him?' I'd say, 'Well, sometimes it hurts.'

I didn't see my brother after 1906, until 1925 [when I went to Chicago.] When I saw him again he was sick.

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[WR notes my sister said the only time she heard Jelly play was in 1918,] but I don't remember, because I got married in 1918. I'm going to tell you, our family are peculiar people.

My sister was very, very selfish. She tried to keep her children, her husband, and everybody to herself. I was just different.

My first husband and I separated. But, my son know all of his aunts - he has eight of them - and three uncles. He's down there with them, now, and married. He's down there with them.

His daughter lives right next to his father. Inasmuch as we're separated, I didn't want to separate the family.

My son went to see his father every holiday. Every other Saturday, he'd go down to see him, and he never paid alimony either.

I didn't see my brother [again] until 1925 that I can remember. He was sick in Chicago, and had something like Wabash Avenue fever. ^[? - Was this a fever in Chicago?] He lived on Wabash, and I lived on Eberhart [Street].

He was just writing me that he was sick, and I just came up. I came up for three weeks, and I stayed a year. He was playing music, and writing music.

Whenever [I tried to visit], he'd tell me not to come in because he was having company. He said he wanted to study, or something like that.

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I was stopping on Eberhart Street. He lived on Wabash. I can't remember where, now, though. It's been such a long time.

[People told WR that Jelly lived around 35th Street. That was the music center where all the clubs were, and the music stores, and publishers.]

I don't remember going any place with him, but going up to...He had a Marmon, an old car [he had borrowed] when he met me [coming up at the train station.]

The next day, he came out in a new car, and got me. [He] said, 'Now, this is my automobile. Now, remember sister. I'm not but 28 years old. I don't know how old you are.'

He knew he was so much older, but men don't want to show their age not more than woman. I said, (imitating a girlish voice) '28, Jelly?' But, he didn't give me a chance to say any more than that.

He'd come, and take me out every day after he got better. I stayed over at Miss Martin's over, on Eberhart Street. They were religious people, lovely people.

They were so nice because they were harvesting somewhere, out from Chicago, a lot of corn or something. Canning or something.

I had never seen anybody can anything in my life before. I was so interested in it that every time I would talk to him, I would talk about the things that we were doing today.

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He would say, I'm from Tennessee. You should see Chicago. I didn't know nothing about seeing Chicago. It didn't matter with me whether I saw it, or not, because I wanted to see him, and his friends, and that was the end of it.

A Mr. Ralph Scull came, and took me out one time. I understand, now, he's a teacher at the University of Chicago. He's a polo player.

At the time, "Ink" [J. Mayo] Williams was very popular. Ink Williams...He sent him to take me out one day, and tried to show me all the interesting places in Chicago--museums, and things like that. Show me the different schools, the different colleges.

[Ink] said how my brother had pulled himself up by his boots. He said: you know, your brother really educated himself by pulling up on his bootstraps.

My grandmother wanted him to be like the rest of the family. Carpenters, bricklayers, plasterers, and that kind of work. Butchers, barbers.

She had so many sons. She had some in every walk of life. She felt like - after my mother passed - my brother should go along with one of my uncles.

Just to think they had him dish-washing in a restaurant for three dollars a week, and he didn't want his hands to become stiff.

Later on in life, I told my grandmother one time about

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somebody had their legs insured for a million dollars. I said that's what my brother thought about his hands.

He just didn't want his hands to be ruined. He had great big long hands like I have...(She shows her hands.) See what long fingers I have. I have big hands.

[WR mentions that I look just like my brother.] I look just like him, that's right. My grandmother said I had all his mannerisms.

She wanted me to speak Creole to her. I had gotten free from it so long. I could remember just certain syllables. I would tell her [something]. If she'd follow the conversation in English, she'd say, 'Ooh, you have changed so much, child. Your mother'd be proud of you.'

My mother died [when] I was just a baby. Two months, I think. Two, or three, months old. I was a baby. I didn't remember her at all.

My grandmother lived until I was 27 years old. She was 91. Strong and healthy.

She had asthma all of her life, and it weakened her heart. She was coming through the door, and then she told her daughter: 'Honey, some cool water.'

When she came back, my grandmother had slumped. I think she lived three weeks after that.

They were doing everything they could for her. My sister

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came by that heart condition honest, because everybody of my family died of a heart [attack]. My aunt, and her two sons, died. I mean, just overnight, just dropped. Not sick at all, [and they] just dropped dead.

My uncle he was 87 when he died. Henry Monet. He fell out of a bathtub. [He] slipped out of a bathtub, hit his head, and he never did get over the shock.

My cousin had taken him out of his home to their home. He wasn't used to that little bathtub without the ring on the side where you catch on.

[WR notes that Jelly talked about a home on the corner of Frenchman and Robertson, at 1443 Frenchman (St.),] but I don't remember because I was just a baby.

[WR shows me a picture that is pretty.] This house is still there on Frenchman because that's what they had on the [Mardi Gras] float this year. The grey one [represented] his home. I forget whose parade it was. [WR missed it.] L

I don't remember this [Frenchmen Street] house, but my grandmother moved to Derbigny Street. Later on, we moved two, or three, doors from an uncle of mine in the 1300 block of St. Bernard Avenue.

She wanted to be close to her children all the time. After my aunt was still having children, she thought they would go to themselves. But, my aunt never did leave her.

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[I ask WR if he has a picture of my house that was used on "Shades of New Orleans." He doesn't. I describe them taking pictures, but WR was out of the area - taking care of his mother when she broke a hip - during those two years.]

Lizzie Miles knew my brother well, too. [She made records on Victor with him, WR says. WR knew her quite well.]

My grandchild [when he plays piano] sounds so much like Jelly. You'd be surprised at the resemblance.

[I show WR my grandson's picture.] Looks like him more than my son does. [I show WR pictures of my granddaughter, and my son.] Nice looking fellow. I'm a little embarrassed to say that because he looks just like me. I'm proud of my son because he's never given me a day's trouble.

My brother had a baby grand [piano] in Chicago. [I talk about buying a piano for my son, and the lessons he took on the piano.]

[WR notes that the visit in Chicago was the longest period of] time] when I saw my brother. I didn't see as much of him as I thought I would.

When I first got up, he took me out a lot. And then, he had to work. I took care of him [in bed] for about three weeks.

I never shall forget. Brother said - the doctor left him some cough syrup because he had a hacking cough - and he said: well, if two teaspoons would help, then a bottle would help more.

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He drank the whole [four ounce] bottle down the same day, and didn't wake up.

It must have had codeine in it to relax him. It scared me so, I'm telling you. I called all my friends. We were doing everything to wake him up.

When the doctor came, he gave him some kind of shot. He made me give him a lot of black coffee, and lemon juice.

He was, kind of, out of his head for two, or three, days. He took the whole four ounce bottle of cough syrup at one time. I was afraid to leave him until he got up, and started moving around.

He went, and borrowed a car so he could take me out. He said, 'You see my car was in the shop, that's why I was using that old Marman.' But, that old Marman was really his car. (WR laughs.) That's right.

I never heard him [on a job.] He never took me out to a night place.

The only place he took me to one time. Barney Bigard, and Albert Nicholas worked with King Oliver, and he took me to the Plantation [Club], so I could hear them.

I wasn't there an hour, I don't believe, because he said my eyes were as big as saucers. I had never seen a cabaret before. My goodness, no. [My grandmother wouldn't have approved at all.]

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The funny thing about it. You try to tell your people the truth. My grandmother said, you're being evasive. There's something wrong. Something you're not telling me. And it all came out. I told her everything.

When Jelly left me, he would come alone to pick me up. He'd come, and visit me alone. He'd never bring any of his friends around.

He would always give me some kind of excuse. When I'd say, 'Tomorrow I'll be going downtown. May I stop over there?' He'd say, 'No baby. I'll let you know when you can come.'

He always wanted to treat me like I was still 16 years old. He just couldn't imagine that I was married, and had a child.

I told him one time, I had never been to Dryades Street until I come up here. I went to Dryades Street to buy my suitcase.

He said, 'Dryades Street, that's right off Canal Street.' I said, 'Yeah, but the stores are way up in the 1700 block, and I was afraid to go up that far.'

They raised girls so timid in those days. They aren't timid now. You get these little 10 year olds. They say some things that shock you, really shock you.

[WR mentions some of the musicians around Chicago that I have talked to, like Natty Dominique; and Roy Palmer, trombonist, and Lee Collins - he's now dead - the cornet player.] They made

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records with my brother around that time, 1924 and [19]23.

His friends wanted to call me "Little Jelly," and he didn't want that. He said, 'Her name is Mimi.' You see, [so] they wouldn't [figure] my name.

They would say, 'Alright "Little Jelly," so-and-so.' He kept me away from his friends. He didn't want me to be nicknamed "Little Jelly."

He was 6'3". Yes sir. He's taller than my tallest uncle. [WR shows me what they say is the last picture taken.]

When he wrote my sister, he told my sister to contact me because there was something he wanted to say to me. She never did. She said her husband was so sick in the hospital. They had removed...one of his lungs. She said she just couldn't have time to write.

She was so evasive about a lot of things. When I came down here, [the reason] was because she was taking money from [Juanita] Gonzales. She just didn't want to...She felt like I just didn't need it, that's why.

The only time I ever saw [Juanita Gonzales] was in [19]43 when she came here. I was just surprised because he never did like fat women, and she was so fat.

She said how good she was to him, [and she] was with him all the time. She was no longer Miss Ford. She was a widow from Mr. Ford because she was...[Jelly] wasn't living in Oregon, he was

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living in California when he died.

You see this suit with these high-button shoes, and this belt behind his coat [in the picture we are looking at.] They were wearing those kind [of clothes then.]

That suit had a belt on. It was [] front, and had a belt in the back. [They are, possibly, looking at photo in Pictorial History of Jazz, according to RBA's notes.]

That's a perfect picture [of how he looked then]. Of course, my picture is better than that [because it is unfaded.] High bottom shoes.

At the time I saw him in Chicago, he looked just like that. His hair was very long. He used to push it from the front all the way to the back.

When I was ready to go, he was up at the head of the stairs. The lady where I was staying at had a piano. He was singing "I'll Be Loving You Always."

[Mrs. Oliver begins crying, and WR apologizes for making you think of those things. I know how you must feel.]

Why can't he be in that song, now, in a whole different place?

After the tape was made [for the television show], I was sick for two weeks. (Pause.)

He got well. He was able to take care of my sister, and her husband. My sister had an appendectomy, and her husband had a

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lung removed. He was taking care of that.

Mr. Colas, [my brother-in-law,] looked just like a Frenchman, too. Just like a white man.

In fact, that's just how my mother looked too. My mother, and my grandmother, looked just like him. That's why those kids looked all just alike.

My sister has so much light blood behind her that she didn't have a dark child. She's the only one that came out dark, and she blamed my mother for it. She never did forgive her for that.

She said, God made you light. I'd tell her all the time. You don't believe in God if you think mother had anything to do with that.

My grandmother was white. My grandfather was a Creole--my mother's father.

My grandmother's second marriage: she married a Portuguese. His name was [Ardoin DaShello?] She had two children with this Portuguese.

Papa Joe, we called him, because his name was [Ardoin DaShello]. I wouldn't know how to spell that.

[I wonder if the tape player is still on, and excuse myself because I don't usually break down crying like I did before.]

My great-grandmother's name was Mimi. My name was Mimi Francis....I am [cranked as] M. Oliver all the time, and the "M" can be for Mimi, or Mouton. It's for the Mouton because I never

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have dropped my father's name.

[Jelly Roll's] name was La Menthe. He took the name [Mouton] because he wanted to be right along with us. My mother wanted it that way.

He changed [the spelling] to Americanize the name. He just didn't want to be from the South, that's all.

He'd be like Benny Moten, and all those other people up there. He changed it because it was so near. Like Mouton, he just put in the "R" instead of the "U". Just changed one letter, that's all.

My sister said all the time: 'The reason I don't like for you to have an interview is you don't do nothing but tell the truth.'

One thing about it is I can remember the truth, but I can't remember other things for it. When you start manufacturing [words], how are you going to remember that, when it didn't actually happen?

Aren't you thirsty yet? [WR isn't.]...I have to take some medicine, too. (Machine off.)

There were seven children in the family, but I don't believe they were all children that lived long enough to be named.

They had yellow fever in those days. My grandmother lost a sister during the yellow fever. Her name was Helene.

But, I don't believe my mother had any children named but

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the three, and then, they didn't know whether I was going to live, or not....

I think I was born on Frenchmen Street. My grandmother started moving around later on. After different members of my family would die, she would move out of the house. People did a lot of renting houses then.

I remember from 1925, or [19]30, they moved to their own home because Mr. [Peché] - the man I was telling you about where my grandfather worked - made it possible for the two of them to buy a home. That's the home they have now on St. Anthony Street.

When I got married, I moved just two doors from them. I lived on St. Anthony, too.

[We were born] right at home [by] midwives, granny-women they called them. I went to - it is now St. Mary's Academy - it was named the Holy Family Convent.

Whenever my grandmother had asthma, we stayed there until she got well. They'd keep us there. It was an orphanage as well as a boarding school.

My brother must have gone to a Catholic school, but I don't know anything about his [early] life. The only thing concrete was when he moved to Biloxi. Everybody knew that he was there. And Alabama, things like that.

I don't know anything about...with his godmother, and godfather [in Biloxi.] Her name was Lolly'. They used to call her

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Lolly'. The other children didn't live long enough to be named.

My great-grandmother was named Felice' Mimi Peché'. I had an aunt - my father's sister - named Mamie Mouton. That's what my mother wanted to call me. If she had lived, I would have been named Mamie.

My grandmother...didn't want the name Mamie after my mother didn't live. She had me named for her mother.

My great-grandmother died in 1913. I was in the bed with her. She had abscess on the liver. Then, when it breaks...I was the one who went to call my grandmother, and my aunt.

My grandmother had a sister there. The two of them were there. They were staying with her at night, but I slept with her. I remember when this abscess burst. The blood, and all, came up through her mouth, and she was dead. She never said another word.

They all called me baby when I was a child. My sister is about four years older. I don't exactly know because she won't tell me.

My grandmother - they called her Laura - but her name was Eleanor, just like Eleanor Roosevelt. She married Julien Monette. I have the marriage license here.

That's where my son gets his name from. My mother was named Louise Monette. She married La Menthe. Then, she married Mouton.

[WR summarizes: my mother was Louise Monette, married La Menthe. Jelly Roll said his mother died when he was about 14. She

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died in 1900, then, the year you were born?]

That's what they told me then. I just hope I'm telling it right. The year that I was born. They didn't keep records. But, you would be surprised, I have my mother's marriage license. Yes, indeed....

In order for me to get social security, I had to use my marriage license, and they contacted...But, I did have a birth certificate because...in order to take my communion, you had to take it to the cathedral.

That was the last year that the children made communion there from the Holy Family Convent at the [St. Louis] Cathedral Church. I made mine in 1911. My first communion.

My sister's name was Amide. Her name was Eugenie. My name was Mimi Frances, but I use Frances instead of [Mimi]. It sounds so infant-like.

I just felt like...well, listen, I'm not a child anymore...I'm not [wanting no] pet name. I thought it was just a little pet name. Mimi. It sounded so little for a grown-up, an adult.

Mouton was French. He was a Creole. Not from here, but from Arcadia County [i.e., Parish]. [WR asks where that Parish is] *[For just all the Arcadia Parishes of 1847]* but, I don't know anything about [locations of town] in Louisiana, really and truly.

I can tell you all about Texas because my husband and I used

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to travel a lot in Texas.

But, here? We didn't go anywhere. My grandmother was old, and my aunt was having children every 18 months. We just didn't get a chance to go anywhere. [My aunt's] name was Viola Haynes. It was Viola Adams before she married.

Every one of my aunts, and uncles, are dead now. Even the in-laws, my uncle's wives.

I have one aunt who's living in Berkeley, California where my Uncle [August] "Gus" [Monette] died just three years ago. She is nearly 80 herself.

August Monette had 21 children by one woman. My mother's third - no, second - brother.

My other uncle was named Neville "Ned" Monette. He had two children. My aunt had six boys straight. Then, she had a little girl, the one that died recently. She was 78 years old when she died.

My grandfather...worked as a lumberjack, they called it. Then, he worked as a [] at Whitney Bank. Not Julien Monette. I don't know what he did.

I know my grandmother had a lot of paper money--nickels and dimes in those days. She had a great big box of this money.

[My grandfather] was in politics of some kind...some kind of negro politician. I don't know what he was.

My son looks more like him than any one of my mother's

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children, any one of my grandmother's children. My son looks more like my grandfather.

I don't remember my great-grandfather's name. When I knew my great-grandmother, she was working for the Solaris family. She was a wet-nurse. That's what they told me. She was a wet-nurse.

I didn't know her really well until I was 13 years old because she lived, and worked, on premises on Exposition Boulevard. Mr. Solaris used to own a lot of that ground up there. They had a big orange grove.

I know what her maiden name was, but I don't know what her married name was. I don't know anything about my great-grandfather.

Dr. Crozat told me one time that the only Peches...He was a bishop. Te bishop had a brother, so my grandmother might have...His name was Peche...and my grandmother would go up to Exposition Boulevard all the time.

She traveled all over the world with the Solaris's. Every time she had a child, Mrs. Solaris would have one. She was a wet nurse. A long time ago they used a wet nurse.

I know she had one son and (counting) one, two, three, four daughters. She had only one son, and four daughters.

I never saw Jelly play slide trombone, nor any other instruments. He would practice with the band, conduct the band, and play the piano. I never seen him do anything else.

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In Chicago, he rehearsed the bands at his house, but never when I was around at the time. He didn't want me around.

[WR mentions that the musicians could talk kind of rough sometimes.] That might have been one of the reasons I wasn't around them in Chicago. They're used to being around men, and not used to be talking around women.

He just didn't want me to be familiar with them, period. He didn't want me to be familiar with Ink Williams, but he was a popular football player, Ink Williams. I think he was in the Hall of Fame. As a youngster, he was a football player. He was popular as a football player. That's how I knew him.

Ink Williams didn't want me to be friends with Ralph Scull because Ralph Scull was so popular. Not only popular, but, I guess, he was important, more important than Ink. He was, and is, a polo player now. I read something in one of the Chicago [papers?] not too many years ago.

I'm going to tell you something that's really true. I just begin paying attention to sports since Jackie Robinson got in with them. I just didn't know anything about them before that time. Being a nurse...I didn't have enough time to keep up with sports.

[WR has seen Satchel Paige, the pitcher who is still around.] He's 62 years old. He was great.

Jelly Roll never mentioned sports, or playing pool, because

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he was sick when I first went there [to Chicago].

He was so far behind in his work that he would come, and get me, in the afternoon - or morning, sometime - and take me out in that old Marman car.

He [wrote his music at the piano.] He would sit at the piano, just like he looks in that picture there. He would sit there, look at the key, and it would look like it would talk back to him.

He'd get ideas, and put his fingers right to the piano. I'd like to hear him play "Twelfth Street Rag." He'd play a lot of music in there.

He could play anything that he just heard once. That's what Erroll Garner would say. Erroll Garner said [Jelly Roll would] play the piano, and have somebody around to catch the music because he didn't write music, or know music.

Erroll Garner is very popular, and famous. You know Erroll Garner. My grandson played "Whispering," one of his numbers.

My brother played by ear. I mean - yes, indeed - from eight, or ten years old, he would just sit there with his fingers, and heard himself until he got the tune that he wanted to play. I was told [that.] I wasn't born then.

[In Chicago], the men would play from the music. Jelly would play from his head. He was writing out music....

I think some guitar player, after he had gone to school at

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St. Joseph Academy, was teaching him more of a jazz style of it. They didn't have jazz much. It was...you know, they called it ragtime music.

In 1925, in Chicago, he was having some pieces published by Melrose. There was somebody by the name of Rose [in Melrose.] Rose himself...contacted us one day to take us out to dinner.

[WR says, Al Rose, who has written some things on jazz.] He took us out to dinner.

My brother took me to an exclusive store, and had me fitted for a suit [that] I came home with. He was very nice to me, and really and truly, I couldn't thank him enough for sending us things. I wouldn't have asked him for anything. I haven't written him a letter yet, asking for anything.

He was so pleased with me when I married Dr. Oliver. He really was pleased with me. I told him I met him - a graduate from Maharis Medical School - and that I couldn't be Catholic anymore if I married him. He told me to make up my own mind.

He didn't want to hand anything down to me. I don't think, of all things, you should hand religion down. I think it should be inspired...something you feel yourself.

I don't have any of his letters [that he wrote to me.] I have all the [letters] he wrote to my sister.

I have a little chest upstairs that I have all the things in. I just brought a little [for this interview] down at a time.

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All his letters are in a box somewhere, but I have so many things out of place upstairs.

[I explain how I'm rearranging my house these days, and it's difficult to find letters, and such.]

[WR mentions a man in Washington (Roy Carew) who has some music that Jelly Roll wrote out.] Yes. In his last days, Jelly Roll wrote music beautifully, as does my son.

My brother didn't write down music in Chicago when I saw him, and he was sick. When I was going down to see him after the bands had left, and I come in, the music would be stacked down on the piano. He could read it, but not write it [at that time.]

My brother always called me a comedian, but I never sang or...In schools, we had plays. Somebody'd be the straight part, and I'd be the comedian. We sent him pictures of those things. I don't know what he did with them.

One time, I was a violet, all dressed in purple with this great big yellow thing around my head. I was supposed to be a violet, and I had a poem to say. I don't remember what that was. I was 11, or 12, years old then.

My brother was on the stage on the RKO Circuit. I have pictures of him when he was doing RKO work. I have three pictures of him. Two with men, and one alone...with him sitting at the piano. I have those.

My grandmother always said he had a sense of humor that she

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couldn't understand. He'd hear so many things, and try to change them around so he could tell them at home. I don't know what they were.

I wish I was about eight years old, or something like that, when he left because I could have remembered more.

When I was eight years old, my Aunt Hortense was living, and working in Covington for some people by the name of the Elliotts. My grandmother took me to the station - we had a little Southern [Railroad] Station in there near Krauss's store - and I had so many tears in my eye.

I didn't know where I was going. I got lost on the street. By the time my grandmother got to Covington, somebody was taking me back. (Loud phone ring.)

Downtown too...My grandmother going away the first time to Covington. Mind you, Covington's just forty miles away from here. But, my aunt had to take me up there, and when I got up there, her fever so...I just cried all the way home.

I didn't want her to go out of my sight. I couldn't stand for her to go out of my sight. She had big greenish-gray eyes. Beautiful eyes....

The front of her hair was white, and she had a big great black twist on her head. It looked like every time I'd find a lady on the street that had a twist, I'd want to touch her, and see if mama hadn't come back. we called her mere.

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As children, we all spoke French. My grandmother couldn't speak English...I know conversational French, but I don't know anything about writing French, or reading it out of a book.

My brother had to learn English because he was a Frenchman himself. He didn't have anything but French around him. Everybody spoke French in the house.

My mother had been trained that way, too. My grandmother couldn't teach catechism because she couldn't speak English.

My Uncle Henry was a cooper. They called them coopers when they made barrels. He was just about 91 when he died.

After that time, he went to work for the Acme Insurance Company. He worked for them for 30 years. When he retired from that, he went to the Masonic Order, and worked as a secretary.

They took part of his intestine out when he was 82, I think, right there at Charity Hospital. The doctors there were just crazy about him. He looked exactly like a German Jew. He was the only one who looked exactly like a German Jew.

My brother once worked at the Brooklyn Cooperage company, too, making barrels. My uncle did that, and my grandmother wanted him to follow one of my uncles.

I had two barbers. [Henry] was a cooper. I had one that was a carpenter, and one a butcher.

Nelisco--I have never heard of that name anymore. Nelisco, we called him John for short, was a carpenter, and a butcher.

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Ned [Neville] was a barber....Gus - August - was a barber, and Henry was a cooper. Then, he got out of making barrels. He worked for [Henri Blocker?] wine cellar for years, and years.

He wasn't a very tall man, but he was so strong. He could pick up a barrel of wine, and put it [somewhere]. They didn't have all the stuff they have now to move things.

He was afraid of rolling the barrels, because the corks would come out. So, he would pick up the barrel, and pick it right up. He wasn't a big man either. I never should forget, he just...

Before he died, I was doing the laundry for him. I went up to his house to put some curtains up. He said, 'I'm an old man. I don't need curtains.'

I said, 'Oh yes, you do. At night you draw them together because you sleep half-dressed, and you have young ladies next door to your house. So, keep these curtains up there.'

When the weather got so cold the next winter, my cousin - my aunt's oldest son's daughter - took him in, and that's where he slipped in the bathroom.

He was there for about three months waiting for spring to come so he could go home and plant mirletons. He used to plant mirletons.

His social security - or whatever they gave him from the insurance company - served him well. He didn't want for anything.

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He lived in his own house, just about six blocks from where my mother lived when I was a baby. [It was] on Touro Street, 1917 Touro.

[WR mentions Dr. (George) Nelson, the father of Louis Nelson, the trombone player], but I don't remember him.

I know Dr. Fredericks. A school on Touro Street right across from my uncle was named for Dr. Fredericks. Dr. Fredericks was a surgeon. He just recently died, and left a million dollars...

I never did know what my father worked at. I didn't get to know my father, or my mother.

I was raised by my grandmother, and my mother's stepfather, my grandfather...named Ardoin Chalute [sp?], but they called him Joseph Adams. I don't know whether that was the translation for it, or not...but he called himself that.

Emile Peche' was my grandmother's only brother. He had a daughter named Charlotte. She just died recently. She had nine children, and she has great-grandchildren all over the world. Her children are in California, New York, Chicago, Houston, Texas. She has children all over.

Jelly Roll's godmother did laundry. She was a beautiful ironer. She did laundry for the better class of white people in Biloxi. She raised him.

Even before my mother died, he would have to go over there. My mother was losing babies. She was always sick.

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She didn't live here. But, my Aunt Hortense came back here. Then, she worked across in Covington for the Elliott family.

[Jelly Roll] might have lived in the Garden District, but I don't know because my grandmother was so strict I didn't know where Dryades Street was even.

She got a certain age, my grandmother didn't go out anymore. We had a church - Sacred Heart Church - right around the corner from us. We walked five miles to school, but she didn't go any farther than church, and back.

I think she was 60 years old when I was born. She's been dead ever since [19]31. She died December 8, 1931.

I didn't know anything about Juanita [Gonzales]. I didn't know anything about Mabel [i.e., Jelly Roll's wives].

Even my sister wouldn't tell me he was living common-law with anybody because he had never been married. She would not have told me that.

I was too well-sheltered. It made me so stupid for a long time. She said I haven't learned to lie yet, but I just don't want ever to learn how to do that.

[WR says, if you speak the truth, you don't have to remember what you said the last time.] I agree...

I tell you: my attorneys, and the people that rent from me, and the plumbers, and electricians, and everybody, says that if Miss Oliver says that, that's the truth, because you could go to

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her ten years from today, and she'll tell you the same thing again.

Every now, and then, somebody says [to me], you haven't changed a bit. You can't change when you're original. You know what I mean? No. You can't change when you're original.

That thing that hasn't been published yet. That [record] that was on the General [label]. He sent us that. That was the first one we got, and then we bought the others. Friends would send them to us.

I have a Dr. Richards here that used to teach in the public school, and his wife is Mrs. Richards. She just got her PhD out at Dillard [University.] They send me records all the time. They buy them, and send them to me. Especially, since I've been hurt, everybody's been so nice to me.

[WR mentions that the last one just came out.] "The Shadows." Is that it?

[The one about Buddy Bolden and "High Society," and all of that, WR says.] I have two new ones here. I haven't played them too much because...(voice trails off.)

My brother would tell my sister more than he would tell me because they always looked down on me as being the baby.

[Looking through objects...I note, I have them right here. It's a funny thing when you have somebody in the house helping you. You move things in the house, and never find them.]

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[That's why I like to do most things myself, WR notes.] I do too. They just mix things up for you.

[WR recalls that my sister said in 1918 when Jelly Roll came down here, and played...she thought that was probably the last time he was ever in New Orleans.] My son was born in 1918.

[This is another Victor album, WR says. WR surmises that I probably didn't even see my brother when he came for a visit because my son was born then.]

[Continuing to sift through records etc., WR notes that this is probably the General one with Tom Anderson's, and all. Oh yes, I have that, too, he says. That's Brunswick, and came out in Chicago.] That was made about a little after I was up there in 19...

[There's one record here that looks like it's about to spill out, he continues. It's in there loose...] I have both the new ones that came out on Victor lately. [WR says one is about Buddy Bolden, and "Climax Rag."]

One is named the "Shadows" ["Shades of New Orleans," by Merle Koch on Carnival? WR asks,] and the other one is named something else. [Some of those things with Barney Bigard on them, WR says...]

Every time I hear his records I cry so I don't put them on...[Yeah. Oh yes, WR says...but don't bother, because I have everything that comes out by him...That's Southland...I had a lot

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of Mardi Gras records here.] This is where he reminds me of Jerry Vales...on one of these things.

[Looking for a picture of him,] he had a light gray suit on [in Chicago], and it looked so much like him. When he came down to the station, it was warm, and he had a suit on. He took the coat off, and he had a beautiful shirt with a lovely tie. He had it open because it was so warm.

I was there a year. I came back here because I was taking music courses, and I wanted to graduate with my class. He was alright when I left...

[Continuing to look through pictures of my son's wedding. My sister in New York...I am talking about my family, and the pictures....] Everybody in my family is light. My son is the only brown-skin baby that was ever born in the family.

My brother wasn't prejudiced. He wasn't prejudiced at all. But, I'm going to tell you: in Louisiana, a long time ago, people believed in class, and caste.

Right now, Downtown at the Autocrat's Club, they're losing members by the score because they've got too many dark people down there. They had the Iroquois Club here, that if you weren't Creole by birth, you couldn't belong to it.

My brother didn't make remarks about dark people because he was crazy about King Oliver, and he was a great big black man... [I continue talking about my son and his wedding...]

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I can remember everything my brother sent me, but I don't have anything to show you. We had to wear blue skirts at the school, and he would send the material to make the skirts.

They didn't want us to wear embroidered blouses. He just wouldn't get that in his head that we had to have plain white blouses. My grandmother would always have to make us dresses out of the material he would send for the blouse.

He sent the material from Vancouver that, my goodness, my grandmother...They were too large for us anyway. He must have thought we were going to be big like him. But, he sent coats, and sweaters.

I mean coats. You weren't supposed to wear those kinds of coats, he was sending us. Sometimes, she'd let us go to school with them, and sometimes she wouldn't...

She would say, when I'm not able to pay the 50 cents a week for you[r school] for the sisters to look over you, and feed you, and everything...

She would let us stay down there with her until the weekend. I was so glad to stay in school all the time because when I came over here, they had so many babies to take care of, so many children...

My grandmother left no stone unturned where we were concerned. I'd seen her crying many days. She wouldn't tell us what she was crying about. She wanted us to have everything that

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every other child had.

My brother wrote about once a month to me, but he didn't write to my grandmother for a long time. I told him one time...I would write the letter to him in ink. I had just learned how to use ink. It was so blotted because ma mere was crying.

I did want him to write my grandmother because (crying) she was so good to us. The thing about this was she wanted him to respect a girl, and not tell his experiences of the night before to our uncles, and all. Some of those things were shady, I guess.

Jelly would come in [when I was a child, when I was about six years old. He come down here with some kind of...she called it a tin pan band, you know, tin alley. Lawdy, people looked down on theatrical people at that time.

My grandmother was from the old school that just wouldn't accept it. [My mother too, WR agrees, didn't believe in people going to any theater, or dance, when I was a boy. I was raised as a Methodist, and that was part of the Methodist religion.]

Catholic people around here were a lot more privileged. You could play cards. You could dance, and everything. Because they even taught us dancing in school...

My grandmother was very strict. We couldn't go any farther than the front door, and sit on the steps. We had to play in the yard with the little long pants on us, the little long drawers...made out of yellow carpet sacks.

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Lord, those were the days though. I'd give anything to call them back. Oh, I'd give anything to have my grandmother here...

After I was married, and divorced from my first husband, I went to dances. I had never been out to a dance, or anything, before that.

Parties in different people's backyards. We'd go to parties. Garden parties, and things in the backyard, all the time...on holidays like the Fourth of July, Labor Day, and things like that.

We'd have the whole family together. Looked like my grandmother would sit like the queen. All the kids would come in. She expected them, and they didn't disappoint her either.

[A.J.] Piron was a violinist, and he would really play. I worked in a place, after I came back from Chicago. I was going to school in the daytime, and had to work in the evenings because I had to support my kid, my son.

I worked in a place...they called it Bucktown, [out by the lake, WR interjects], and he [Piron] played there for special...dinner parties. It was...a supper club.

They didn't have no hankys and pankys going on there. Like you would say, no entertainment--just the violin, that was all, and he would play beautiful music.

I didn't have any idea about music. Not until Fate Marable came down here with the Steamer Capitol, did I realize then how

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famous my brother was.

He had a different touch altogether. [WR notes how he could play anything so easily.] With those long fingers, and long arms. (Chuckling.)

[I offer WR a drink, and he declines, saying he drinks a couple of glasses of fruit when he rises in the morning, and doesn't get thirsty for a while.] It's best not to drink soft drinks anyway. [WR agrees, saying he doesn't drink much coke either.]

My brother never drank. You'd be surprised. My grandmother with all her sons. She never had a drunk.

Just the last young son started drinking after he lost his first wife. Of course, he had been married three times before he died. He had nine children with one woman, seven with another. I don't know how many he had in Chicago. All her children had a lot of children. I'm the only one in the family who had one child.

We didn't have a lot of drinks around [the house.] You know how later on in life people made home-brew...Didn't have any liquor around our house like that. They cooked themselves to death, but they didn't have any liquor.

I wasn't around [my brother] in the daytime. He'd have to come, and get me. He wouldn't let me come through Chicago by myself. He'd always come, and get me, and we'd go out to a place.

We'd stop at his place for a little while, and see if he had

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any calls. I don't know if he was working regular, or not. He said he was going to see if he had any calls, and I didn't know what they were. I didn't ask any questions.

He was sure to have me remember that he was 28, and no matter how old I was, not to tell it. I wasn't quite 25 when I was there.

He would take his tweezers, and pull his gray hair out. He wanted to be young, as young as...

He was so particular about his teeth. He had two, or three, of them capped. Now that I know what it means to have white caps on them, so that they would show off his diamond all the time.

You would just look into his mouth and see that thing, if the light was facing him, anyway. An upper tooth just next to his eye tooth, right here (apparently pointing at a picture). He had four teeth in there. One on the left side.

They say he was flamboyant, whatever that means. He wasn't around us that way. My sister was so - when I came back, and was telling her about him - and he didn't want me to hear that...She was sick, and she knew he didn't want me to tell her that he was sick.

So, when I came back, I didn't even write her, and tell her that he was sick.

She wanted to know why I didn't stay with him. Didn't he have a wife? I said, no. He found a place for me, where I could

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be.

They had two, or three, girls younger than me, and one older than me. He wanted me to be where they had young people like myself.

He didn't travel [out of Chicago.] Things were kind of quiet around there. It was peace-time. There wasn't too much money in circulation.

I went in the spring of 1925. Right after all the snow was up. He didn't want me to come during that winter. He was sick during that winter, but he didn't want me to come. Early in 1925.

I wanted to graduate from my beauty culture class. So, I had to come back home. For hairdressing. I was a manicurist then--working daytime, and going to school at night.

I stayed there almost a full year. In fact, when the weather was getting too cool for me to stay up there, he wanted me to come home because I wasn't used to the North. It would be too cold out there.

I didn't stay the whole winter. It got too cold. I got up there [in] the early spring. I left there about October, or November. I wanted to be there for my grandmother's birthday, the First of November.

Listen. He took me to the station, and he couldn't find a man to carry my trunks out. That's what he told me. But, that wasn't it. He didn't have the money because my trunk was

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overweight.

He told me, I travel like a country girl. I took everything I had. The trunk was so heavy that he couldn't handle it.

I was home nearly three weeks before the trunk got there. It looked to me like it had just been sent a day, or two days, prior to when it arrived here.

The thing of it is...I don't believe he had the money. [Sure, WR agrees. I've been broke, too, and it's no disgrace to be broke.] He didn't have enough money to send me home.

My son always wanted to be like Uncle Jelly. My brother wrote such a nice letter when he was in school. He was in school from [19]35 until he graduated in [19]39.

Jelly Roll wrote the nicest letter, and he showed it to everybody. He was so pleased to have an uncle that was in the musical world.

[Anyway, WR says, we're just about out of tape. The next time I come, we'll look at the photographs...]

(Phone rings, and tape is turned off.)

END OF REEL

