

Excerpt from oral history interview with Lessie Randle for the Oklahoma 100 Year
Life Oral History Project
Interviewed by Tanya Finchum & Alex Bishop
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Tulsa, Oklahoma

Finchum *Were you here in Tulsa when they had the race riot?*

Randle Oh I was! I was quite small, but I remember a lot of the things about the race riot. I remember the people coming to our house and pushing us out of the house. We had to get out of the house. We had to leave. We walked on out to Mohawk [Park]. I'm right alongside them, tagging along. On our way out there, the soldiers came along in a bus and picked us up. They had to call in the soldiers it was so bad. What they would do, they would go into the stores and pick all the food and everything out of the store they wanted. Then, they'd set the stores on fire, and burn the stores down. That is what they did.

Finchum *They being who?*

Randle I guess you'd call them, I don't know what you'd call them. Maybe a bunch of people, come in, I don't know maybe called, hoodlums. (Laughs) I just call them hoodlums. That's what they would do, so they had to call the soldiers in, the authorities of the town called the soldiers in. They came in and chased them out of here.

Finchum *Well, when they picked you up, where did they take you?*

Randle Well, we went out to the fairgrounds. They took us out to the fairgrounds. They had cots and hot soups and what have you, out there for the people.

Finchum *How long would you have to stay there before you could go back?*

Randle Well, I think we might have, we might have spent the night. I don't remember. I think we might have spent the night out there. Then came back the next day. It was something else to think about. Some of it I've forgotten of course being so long. I do remember going out to the fairgrounds. They had the little cots out there for us to lie on and rest and sleep. Oh man, I tell you. It was quite a day. I never want to see that again. No, no, no, that was awful.

The thing of it was, I don't know why they were looking for all the men, but they were looking for all the men. They were—I don't know, but they killed a lot of men. They had a flatbed truck. They tell me that they killed those

men and stacked them on the truck like you would just sardines, and took them down to the river and threw them in the deepest part of the river. That's what they told us they did with them. I didn't see them do that. That is what they said they did with them. It was terrible. It was terrible. They killed all the men.

They came out to our house, and we had a loft up there. They had a cover, you know, pulled back, and they looked up in the loft. They looked up to the loft, but they were afraid to take the cover off because they didn't know what was up there, looking for men. They thought they were hiding in the loft. I don't know why they wanted to take the men. I never did learn why they wanted to kill the men, but they did. It was senseless to me. I don't see anything...

Finchum

Well, did your father go with you to the fairground?

Randle

My father was still in the country. I was up here with my grandmother when that happened. My father and mother was still in the country, still at home in the country. The next morning, after all this had happened and got cleared away, my dad hooked up his wagon and team. He was down in Bixby, you know where that is. He hooked up his team, and he and Mom got in the wagon and came to Tulsa. They had heard about it. He had been to Bixby, and he heard about the riot. They were coming to see about us in the wagon. They came up here in the wagon. Now, it seems like it is a hundred miles or more, since we got cars. That's the way they traveled. That's what they had to do, because not very many people had a car in those days. Oh boy, you wouldn't believe it. You could see it yourself and you wouldn't believe it. It was something else. Really something. I never want to see that again. I never want to see that again. It was so foolish. I don't know what in the world the riot was all about anyway. It just sounds so foolish to me. I just never could make any sense out of it. That's what they did. That's what they did.

Finchum

You would've been about eight or ten, somewhere along in there.

Randle

Yeah, along in that area.