

Nicole Musgrave: So, we are recording now. This is Nicole Musgrave. I am here with Karen Jones Cody. It is February 10th, 2023. We are at the old Carr Creek High School in Knott County, Kentucky. This is for the Carr Creek Oral History Project. So, I guess just to get started, can you say your name and tell me a little bit about who you are?

Karen Jones Cody: Hi. My name's Karen Jones Cody. I'm co-owner and editor of the *Troublesome Creek Times*. Lifelong native of Knott County except for when I went away to college. I live beside Carr Creek Lake on what's left of my family's property.

NM: Tell me a little bit about your people and where you are from.

KJC: Okay. My people were Smiths from Smiths Borough. It sounds almost like a joke that I'm half Smith and half Jones, but that's it. My father died when I was 3. So, my mom's family raised me. My mom and her three sisters, mom was the only one that had kids. So, I was an only child and an only grandchild. We lived in and around the family home, which was a big white house down the hill in Smiths Borough over the hill from where I live now, where the lake is. Our house is where the lake is.

NM: Whereabouts is your house now that you are at?

KJC: Between the beach and the [Cotswold?] lots.

NM: If you are going towards the beach, is it on the right or left?

KJC: If you leave here and go toward the beach, the lake is on the left. My house is on the right.

NM: So, tell me a little bit about some of your early memories growing up in Smiths Borough there. What was it like?

KJC: Picture of a picture because I didn't have time to get things together. This was my grandparents' house. My mom and dad's little house was on one side. Then down the gravel road, was my other aunt and uncle. It's hard to not think of it as heaven because I was 7 when we moved. Everything was perfect, [laughter] big old yard, great place for kids to play, with your cats, and dogs, and all the family around. My grandparents lived in that house. By the time I was 6, we spent most of our time too, mom and I, in that house instead of in our own because she helped look after her parents.

NM: So, the photo you are showing me on your phone, it is a painting of it, right?

KJC: Yes. We had a cousin who did a painting from a photograph.

NM: It is a big, white, wooden house, looks like.

KJC: Okay. When they started tearing it down, the thing that I didn't realize when I was a child, under the whiteboards were these huge logs. It was a log structure that was two stories, two sections. The door you see in the middle was kind of a door in between the two sections. It went

upstairs. So, it was just a huge log house that then, they covered. Then to modernize it, then in the back, there were extra rooms built, kitchen and bathroom and...

NM: Two brick fireplaces on either side.

KJC: Big, old stones. We still have some of those big stones.

NM: They are stone. Okay. They are stone.

KJC: Yes. They're like this big.

NM: What is that? Like a 3-foot by –

KJC: Probably, yes.

NM: – one-foot tall.

KJC: Not something I could pick up. We have some of those that we took to the place that we moved.

NM: So, you lived, not in that house, but the house next to it up until you were 7?

KJC: Yes.

NM: What was life like there up until 7? What sorts of things did you do for fun as a kid?

KJC: Well, had cousins across the street. That was really about the only kids that I had to play with. Had cats, dogs, chickens, a pony. Like I said, I was an only grandchild. So, I had my grandparents who were wonderful and adored me, and my aunts who – my mom shared me like I had four moms. So, playing outside a lot, helped them in the garden. I was a lot of help. They had a big garden always. Mom used to say that my grandfather always had a job. But my grandmother worked a lot harder than he did because she took care of the kids and did the garden work and put food away. They had a cellar back in the hill, the shelves and all the canned food and...

NM: What did your grandfather do for work?

KJC: Actually, he started out to teach school. Back in those days, of course, they still rode horses and stuff. They put him someplace that was kind of far away. He was not happy with that. He wanted to be back in the home place. So, he didn't work in the mines, but he was like a foreman out with a mining company. Of course, that was long before me because mom had me late in life. So, they were elderly when I was born. They were up in their 70s, my grandparents were, when I was born.

NM: So, you have sort of painted this image of your home place. I am curious, what was the larger community of Smith Borough like? Where were your neighbors? Who were they?

KJC: Oh, a lot of family. Then the people who weren't blood relatives were like family. Everybody was really close and loved each other. It was a terrible thing to be torn apart.

NM: About how many families would you say lived in Smith Borough?

KJC: Oh goodness. Now, you're asking me something that, as a child, I wouldn't remember. It was a well-populated community. At one point, I can remember there – well, Smiths Borough and Cody kind of were together. But had grocery stores and little mom-and-pop stores and a dairy bar and a gas station. It was a community. Besides just families, it was kind of a self-contained because back then, people didn't travel like they do now. [laughter] I'm not sure how many families. I couldn't even begin to guess.

NM: It is hard when you are a kid trying to think that. Yes. So, Smith Borough and Cody, did they blend in together?

KJC: Yes. Cody was here where the intersection was and just around a couple of curves. Then it was Smiths Borough. I guess Smiths Borough included the area where the marina is now. Then there's a hollow up in there. I think that was considered Smiths Borough, and then down farther.

NM: What was the school you went to when you were in Smiths Borough?

KJC: Carr Creek High.

NM: Carr Creek?

KJC: I went to five schools and only moved once because I went to the old Carr Creek grade school that the lake took. I went to the new Carr Creek Grade School. That's where it is now. When Carr Creek students were in eighth grade then, they went here. So, I went here one year.

NM: The old Carr Creek High School?

KJC: Yes. Eighth grade went with the high school. Then after that, over to Knott Central. But I didn't go to the Main Knott Central because then they put the freshmen in the old Hindman campus. So, I went there and then up to the big new school.

NM: Oh, my gosh.

KJC: [inaudible ] went there. [laughter]

NM: So, yes, [laughter] five different schools.

KJC: Five different schools and only moved once.

NM: What are your memories of going to the old Carr Creek High School or grade school?

KJC: Oh, man. I loved it here.

NM: Sorry. I meant to say the grade school.

KJC: Well, we loved the old grade school too. It wasn't old. I mean, it's kind of sad. I don't think it had really been there that many years before they had to tear it down. It was in really a better area than the school they have now because it was flat and open. We had a huge playground and loved to go outside and play. I'm an outside girl. But I loved here too. The one year here made me hate the next four at Knott [laughter] Central. It really did. We'd go out at lunch and sit on that old stone bridge. My classes, eighth grade, were, one was in the basement. Very different to go to a high school that has – I don't know how many – a hundred students compared to Knott Central with 850. It was a very different atmosphere.

NM: I'm curious, thinking of you growing up with your mom and your aunts and having your grandmother there. I'm curious, were there any kinds of creative things that your – you mentioned gardening. Were there any other creative things that your family was engaged in?

KJC: Of course, my grandmother and my aunt did quilting. My mom, not so much. My youngest aunt was a teacher. So, I don't know. Maybe because everybody read to me from the time I can remember, but I always had my nose in a book when I didn't have my cousins to play with. I've been a writer since I could hold a pencil. So, that's not even something I chose to do. It's just something that I was.

NM: That is so interesting.

KJC: [laughter]

NM: Yes, that you describe it that way. Do you remember, as a young person, anything in particular inspiring you to write?

KJC: Just how much I loved to read and just loved words. I can remember how much I adored my first-grade teacher. The year I was in first grade, my grandmother passed away unexpectedly in the house in front of us. Just stroke and she was gone. So, I loved my – my first-grade teacher was a little old lady with flat hair in a bun. She was just my best friend. I can remember her being excited because it was like we were learning to read. She got excited that I got it. That it wasn't just a word, but it was putting words together. They meant something. I'm just a word person. [laughter]

NM: Well, I guess I am curious, do you recall if there was a certain moment when you learned that you were going to have to move?

KJC: I don't know about a certain moment. I think it's something that was a worry probably in my family before I was born because I think they were aware of it. There were rumors of it a long time before it was a fact. I remember that it was a lot of heartache. I brought this to show you. This is a land grant. This is how long my family has been there. A land grant from 1847

that describes the property and this tract or parcel of land to William Smith and his heirs forever. Then forever is when the government changes its mind. The big, white house was probably built not long after that as a log house. So, they had been there forever. My grandparents didn't survive to make the move. They saw the place we bought, knew what it was going to be like, were involved in fixing the big house up they were going to live in, but they didn't survive. My grandmother had a stroke in the old house and passed away. My grandfather died in the hospital a few months later. My oldest aunt, the stress, she had these terrible headaches that would paralyze one side of her face. It took a long time after the move before those went away. Now, my mom was a tough little girl. You don't realize until you get this age and look back. My mom lost her husband, her parents, and her home in a four-year period. She was tough. She hated the government until the day she died. [laughter] But the funny thing is, she didn't hate the lake. She decided, for whatever reason out of that, that after it was here and there was no getting around it, that it was something beautiful. When they were building the beach, the family would go down there with lawn chairs before it was open and let me go down and play in the water. [laughter]

NM: It is hard to imagine what sort of strength it would take to endure all of those hardships, especially in such a short amount of time. Yes. Well, you described it as, not like a particular moment of knowing this would happen, but just sort of years of worry. So, do you...

KJC: I can tell you the moment that it hit me exactly how huge it was. Because they tried, I'm sure, they tried to make me not be a bad person in every way they knew how. [laughter] They tried to make it not a sad thing for a child, something exciting. We're moving here. We're fixing all this up. My grandfather would say, "When the lake's done, we will build a bait shop and sell worms. [laughter] But I remember when they started to tear down the big, white house. Here's this huge log thing. Well, I was going to look for pictures. I didn't take the time. I have pictures of the sisters standing around. You could see that they were crying. It was odd. Between the logs on the inside, they found things like a – I have a fork, an old fork, and some kind of really neat-looking little piece of jewelry that somebody had stashed. Because then on the inside, I think first, it was newspaper and then wallpaper and then sheet rock as years passed, because it was there for so long. But tearing it down, they would save artifacts. I've got like a whole collection of old bottles that came from under the house. But it hit me to see them, how they were devastated by the loss of that house. There was, I guess it was a land company they made up. What they told us, the way things are now, if something like this happened, they would probably try to preserve that house. It would be a historic thing. But back then, it was like the people who came, the government representatives who came, there were a couple that my family liked, but most of them were just terrible. They took pictures of an old outhouse in the middle of the garden that hadn't been used for years, and a shed that my grandfather had coal in for the fireplace. They gave them just chicken crap money for their place. They really did. They didn't give them time. A lot of people moved houses. I think my family just was so rushed, they didn't even try. It wasn't like they would pay and take your house and relocate it. So, my family ends up – my mom had a nice, little, two-story house with hardwood floors. She sold her house to somebody else and bought a trailer. So, I grew up in a trailer. Not funny. I don't know where I was going with that. I lost myself.

NM: Just talking about how tearing down the house because they did not have time to...

KJC: They didn't have time to really relocate. Well, now, I think people would be forced to do better, government representatives. But we felt like we were raped and pillaged. They moved the cemetery. My oldest aunt went up and watched when they dug up the family cemetery. That's just horrible stuff. But there was a land company formed. What they told us about the old house was, since they recognized it had some historic value, that they were going to take those logs and take it up there, the little place called Pioneer Village, and recreate. There were two or three other really old houses. Just put them back together. But they didn't do that. They took the logs out of my family's house and put them in with another house and – [laughter]

NM: Put them in with another house at Pioneer Village?

KJC: Yes. Now, that's not even there anymore. It's been moved to a place where – at least what's left, I hope it will be preserved and respected. But it's a Thomas Francis Stamper house, but part of those logs [laughter] were our house.

NM: So, I have heard a little bit about the Stamper house being moved to Pioneer Village. Now, all of that maybe is being relocated to Leatherwood, or has been.

KJC: Yes.

NM: So, logs from your family's home were put into rebuilding the Stamper home?

KJC: Yes.

NM: Gosh. So, in the years leading up to this, you said that it was more like years of worry kind of hearing the rumors and maybe reading the writing on the wall. Do you remember the kind of talk that the adults were saying?

KJC: Probably, I was insulated from a lot of it. They didn't want to go. They didn't have a choice. Then the next thing you know, there are people coming to do the estimates. Then it was a big hurry, and we had to go. When they were tearing the house down, we'd go back. There would be strangers digging up flowers out of the yard. My mom always figured, some of the people that were tearing the house down – I had one of those little pedal cars. My pedal car disappeared before we could move it. So, we just felt raped and pillaged. [laughter]

NM: Was it local folks that you think got flowers, or you do not know?

KJC: I don't know. I don't know.

NM: You just know that they were gone.

KJC: Yes. We'd come and find people we didn't know in the yard [laughter] digging stuff up.

NM: That must have been really difficult to go through that. When all these people started coming in, as far as bringing in estimates and all these things, do you remember what you

thought about at all as a young child?

KJC: I just remember sitting back and kind of absorbing, knowing. My mom was furious. It was kind of an unusual thing back then to write a letter to the statewide papers. My mom wrote a letter and got it published because she was furious at the way we were portrayed. Like I said, they did take pictures of the outhouse and make people think that you really don't have anything that's worth anything.

NM: So, it seemed like that the government was trying to do that to justify or just to not have to pay you as much?

KJC: Yes, to not have to.

NM: So, Smith Borough, was it more of like a middle-class community or working class? How would you describe sort of...

KJC: I would think so, yes.

NM: Sort of a mix of middle class and working class, or how would you describe it?

KJC: [laughter] Again, from a child's perspective, just ordinary people. A lot of teachers in my family, extended family, and like I said, little stores, and just an ordinary community.

NM: You said that your family did not have a lot of time to figure out moving the home. Why was there not time given?

KJC: I don't know. I really don't know. I think there were people who probably fought the estimates. I asked mom once, later in life, "Why didn't you all fight?" [laughter] Her answer was, "Well, you had to go to Pikeville. We couldn't do that." [laughter] I think I had a cousin who later went to Harvard and was a lawyer. Maybe his family had enough political savvy that that's what they did. They held out and probably got more what their property was worth. But my family was just sweet, kind, little people. They just thought the government was the government. They said, "Go," and you had to go. So, they got up and went.

NM: Do you have any idea what the letter that your mother wrote, that was published?

KJC: I have it somewhere.

NM: Do you remember the gist of what she was saying?

KJC: That she was just disgusted that they would come here and trivialize our life and give us nothing and make us go.

NM: You talk about your mother writing this letter, your other extended family holding out for more money, and doing whatever that entailed.

KJC: I guess maybe legal proceedings in Pikeville.

NM: So, I guess I am curious, are you aware of any other ways that people resisted this process?

KJC: I don't think people thought we had the right to resist.

NM: I guess when the government comes in, it is hard to think you have recourse.

KJC: We heard, years later, that there were plans that would've put it further downstream where things were less populated. But what we heard was that Carl D. Perkins wanted it in Knott County. Obviously, I have no idea if there's any truth to that.

NM: But I think it is still worthwhile to know the stories that get told. So, tell me a little bit then about what you recall about the new place and settling in.

KJC: Well, like I said, moving from a house to a trailer, that wasn't a whole lot of fun. We bought a piece of property, my family all together. My family just always stayed together. It had a good-sized house on it that was older, that needed a lot of work. Well, I said older, probably built in the [19]50s. But whoever was living in it, it had hardwood floors, and they had painted them yellow. I remember the yellow floors. So, my oldest aunt, she and her husband, and my grandparents were going to live in the big house. Then my aunt, who was a teacher, and my mom both bought a trailer. My other aunt and uncle lived in Lexington. They would come home once a month. He was a civil engineer at IBM. So, I had one aunt who moved away, was gone for a lot of years, ended up moving back here when they retired. But my older aunt, it was like a source of pride for her that they made something pretty out of that old house and sanded down those hardwood floors and refinished them and redid the house. But like I said, my grandparents never got to live in it. They found a place that had a fireplace. My grandfather always had a fireplace in his bedroom. So, they had a big bedroom with a fireplace. They were all excited that they were going to have that for my grandparents. They never got to.

NM: Where was the new land?

KJC: Not very far from here. [laughter] My mom said, "I don't want to live up a holler." [laughter] Burgeys Creek, 1410, across from Carr Creek Grade School, about a mile up in there.

NM: Why did your mom not want to live up a holler?

KJC: [laughter] Because she wasn't raised in a holler, and she just didn't like a holler. I don't know. [laughter]

NM: Just was not a holler girl.

KJC: She was not a holler girl. "I don't want to live up a holler." [laughter] Mom said the only place besides home – the old place is what they called home. The only place besides the old place that she would've ever been satisfied, would've been up here. I guess there was nothing up here for sale then.



NM: Up here on the hill that we are on?

KJC: Yes. Because she and her sisters went to school here and loved Carr Creek. Actually, my older aunt's in-laws had the one brick house. They did end up, years later, living there. Mom loved that. When she came to visit, she'd stand and look outside their picture window at the lake, she'd say. The sister-in-law, she was just one of these ladies that would complain about stuff. Mom would say, "If I lived here, I'd never complain." [laughter]

NM: That is sweet. [laughter] I guess I am curious, do you remember anything else just about the general atmosphere or goings on during the time of the lake construction?

KJC: Remember all the houses going away on trucks. [laughter]

NM: What was that like as a young person?

KJC: Just bizarre to see. Then the thing you've mentioned earlier about the church falling apart, that was a huge, big deal.

NM: Tell me about that.

KJC: I don't remember actually seeing it as much as hearing about it because that was just – they talked that they got it almost to the destination and then it – my mom sold her house. It ended up in Yellow Creek. My aunt's house that I loved so much, it was a little log house. I drive by going to work every day on the way to Hindman. I would love to go knock on the door and say, [laughter] "I'd love to see what this house looks like." Because I don't remember it as well as I remember the big house.

NM: Are there people living in it?

KJC: Yes. But it makes me really sad that they couldn't – somehow, it just didn't work out for them. I don't know, I was a child. I don't know why. But I guess it was more expensive to try to get a moving company and move a house than it was to just sell it and get a trailer and go on. You would think that somebody that's forcing you out would've had to do that themselves. If you wanted to relocate your house, they would've had to pay to relocate your house. But it didn't work that way. They gave the family X amount of dollars and...

NM: The onus was on the family to figure it out.

KJC: Like the bad Walmart greet or get your crap and get out. [laughter]

NM: It is hard to imagine having to make decisions amidst something so stressful.

KJC: Well, and too, my mom, it hadn't been that long since she'd lost my dad. I'm sure that her mind was so cloudy, she couldn't think. Then my older aunt, the stress was killing her. She had headaches. Then my grandparents died. So...

NM: How did your oldest aunt do after the move?

KJC: Gradually got better. Gradually got better. I'm sure that by the time they passed away, they were satisfied on Burgeys Creek. But it was never exactly home. They made the best of it. They had gardens and planted flowers. My aunt was like me. She was an outdoor girl. Tried to make things pretty and had pets.

NM: So, did you all just assume that the headaches were just from the stress of it all?

KJC: I think the doctor said so. She was on different medications for a while. I was instructed as a child not to bother her with problems [laughter] because we didn't want to make her have one. Usually, she would just have to go to bed. I walked in her house one day while she was in the middle of one. It was terrifying because really, it paralyzed the side of her face. Water would just stream out of that one eye like she – cluster headaches, I think is what they called it. It was a nerve thing, I think. But they said it was stress-related anyway.

NM: Were there other folks that experienced things like that during this time?

KJC: I don't know. I really don't know. I wouldn't be surprised [laughter] because every family had their own heart break.

NM: Well, I am interested in that, your family, they were able to find land where they could all still be on together. So, I guess I am curious, from what you remember, either from your own family or others, I guess I am just wondering, how were people able to maintain or did they maintain connections and relationships to their old communities and neighbors?

KJC: A lot, just from our area, and family ended up on Burgeys Creek. I think you talked to Corbett. Corbett's married to my cousin. [laughter] There must've been an area – there was just a lot of land that people were willing to give up. I don't know that you could ever recreate that community. It was an emptiness to not have it, and worse, closing this school because the school's kind of the heart of the community. A lot of people just scattered.

NM: What was that like, having to go through the process of the school closing? What was that like for folks and for you?

KJC: That was pretty terrible too. Like I said, going to school here in the eighth grade ruined me for Knott County Central because I would've loved to have been here. It was like a family. You have, what, sixty kids your age that you've been to school with since you were 5 or 6. It was just very different. You go over there. You're sort of like a number. Here, all your teachers know you. They know who you are when you go into class. They know what your capabilities are. This school was a really good family atmosphere. It didn't seem like – [laughter] I've lived here my whole life. You don't really think that we're basically poor people. We were working poor. You didn't feel like anybody was poor people at Carr Creek. It was more of a class thing when we went to Knott Central because it was like, there were some kids that either had more or appeared to have more. It was just really different. [laughter]

NM: That is so interesting. So, this area of the county was maybe like a poor area of the county in comparison?

KJC: I don't think so. I think maybe just what I didn't realize growing up is that this whole place is poor. [laughter] I mean, there might be people that have good jobs and nice houses. But compared to North Carolina or just other states, we're poor people. [laughter] Basically, working poor.

NM: But there was a class distinction that you noticed at the high school though.

KJC: Yes. [laughter] I'll trash Hindman. My husband's from Hindman. I shouldn't...

NM: [laughter]

KJC: But I didn't know. He was older than me. So, I didn't know him then. But [laughter] Hindman was not a friendly place. I remember my oldest aunt saying, "I don't understand people over there. Nobody likes each other." At Carr Creek and Smiths Borough, everybody loved each other and held each other up and wanted – it's like a jealousy thing over there. Like, "I'm up here. You're down there. You need to stay."

NM: Did folks from Hindman or other parts of the county have...

KJC: That's a broad brush. That's not fair to say, but –

NM: Sure.

KJC: – some people. Some people.

NM: Yes. But I guess continuing to speak in generalizations, did people from Hindman or other parts of the area seem to have preconceived notions of folks from Smith Borough or around the Creek area?

KJC: I don't know if it was as much them having preconceived notions of us or just their opinion of themselves was higher. [laughter] Like, they were in charge, and they were supposed to stay that way. Yes.

NM: So, you mentioned Carl Perkins. I guess I am curious, as far as you understand it, why was the lake even built?

KJC: To save hazard because I guess that came from the [19]57 flood, which now, we've all been through the horrors of flood. I understand that they would want to – but I don't think the placement of this lake was probably the best thing to save hazard. It seems like it does a better job of saving what's just below the lake. Corbett says there was a plan initially – I don't know that I'd ever heard that except from Corbett – that there was initially a plan that there were going to be two lakes. Maybe the other one was over in the Leatherwood area that would catch more

of the watershed from Letcher County and in that direction. That's what I can recall being told, that it was to save hazard from floods.

NM: You mentioned that there were potentially other areas that were being considered. Do you have any idea or do people speculate on why they chose this area?

KJC: I told you that the thing that we heard was that Carl, they wanted it in Knott County. I don't know if that's true. I'm the wrong person to ask. My mom had a deep resentment. [laughter] She went to some kind of – I don't know if it was a political picnic or a family thing and he just showed up there, but some big picnic. He came up with his hand out. She wouldn't shake hands with him. She walked away. [laughter] They told that story on her. Some of the families said he turned to somebody else and said, "Who is that woman?" [laughter] She was ticked eternally.

NM: Because of the lake or was this...

KJC: Yes, because of the lake, at Carl D. Perkins, and the government. My mom did not care for the government. [laughter]

NM: She sounds like someone that would be fun to talk with.

KJC: She's a little thing. Shorter than me, but she's a fireball.

NM: Well, I guess I am curious, do you have any sense – and again, it might be harder for you to talk about this since you were so young when it happened. But do you have any sense of how the lake impacted the economy of the area at the time?

KJC: Well, I know, like I mentioned earlier, there were all kinds of decent-sized grocery stores. I remember a furniture store in Cody, and all kinds of little mom-and-pop businesses. But it seems like around every few curves, there was some kind of grocery store. Then everything's just gone.

NM: Did it have impact on any of the mining around that you know of?

KJC: Not that I know of. I think there'd been mining done before that time period. I know there was on our property. There was auger mining done behind where I live up on the mountain.

NM: Any other stories or memories that bubble up as far as the lake being built in that time period?

KJC: I just remember what it was like to live in the middle of the construction because the road is actually what took our place first before the lake was impounded. Because they cut the hill down and shaped it differently and put the road up because the road was way down where the water is now. So, we went to the old school from the new place we lived. We'd travel the old road. They were building the big bridge down here at the intersection. I don't know what they did. They set a shot off wrong or something, and one of those big pillars tilted. I remember

[laughter] we would drive through all that. That was a big deal. They had to start that one over and tear it down. We lived in the middle of all that madness for a while.

NM: What was your thought when you heard about that pillar going down?

KJC: [laughter] That I wish the whole thing would just go away, and they'd scrap the [laughter] whole idea. But it was too late for us. We were already out.

NM: Do you remember when they started filling in the lake?

KJC: Vaguely. Yes. I guess I was in high school by then. It was filled. The beach area was ready maybe a year or two before they actually opened it. Because like I said, I can remember my family taking lawn chairs down and sitting on the beach and me going out and swimming [laughter] when we probably weren't supposed to be. But, yes, I loved water. So, that part I liked.

NM: I thought that was so interesting what you said earlier about your mother just being so furious and heartsick that this was happening, and yet, she didn't take it out on the lake itself?

KJC: Yes.

NM: Tell me a little bit more about that.

KJC: She was a very strong person. I don't know how in her mind that she turned that around. But she really did love it and was proud of it. We felt like they didn't really do enough with it as far as a recreational thing. But she wrote a little column in the newspaper right around the lake, telling about the people that she knew that were left, and if anybody came to visit, wanting them to go to the beach and the marina and – I don't know how. You'd have to be an extremely strong person to somehow set your mind to look at what was good that came out of it. Then I can't remember what year they put the water plan in. But that was kind of a big deal too because finally, there was something useful. They had a lot of plans, again, that didn't materialize. We thought we would get a lodge and have more buckhorn and have more recreational things. That was disappointing. But when they finally put the water plan in, that was actually land adjacent to ours that belonged to one of my cousins. They were able to convince him to sell it. That's something that now is useful to a lot of people. So, I think things like that, too, helped her to see that it had a purpose besides just saving hazard. [laughter]

NM: What was your mother's name?

KJC: Joyce Smith Jones Blair. [laughter]

NM: Joyce Smith Jones Blair. [laughter]

KJC: Yes. I had a stepfather in between that we really don't want to talk about.

NM: Sure.

KJC: From the time I was 8 to the time I was 16. But about the time I was a senior in high school and that part of my life was over [laughter], a childhood friend that had grown up in Smiths Borough, his wife passed away. He came back here to see his mom in Letcher County. His brother said, "I bet I know somebody you'd like to see." He said, "Take me to her." So, by the time I got out of college, they got married. (Menan?) Blair was my stepfather from Letcher County. They had twenty-three years together. I think my mom was probably happier than in a lot of her life. So, that was the Blair. Joyce Blair was my mama. Smith by birth, Jones in between –

NM: [laughter]

KJC: – that was my daddy. When Tim and I got married, Tim said, "Do whatever you want to with my name, but don't throw your dad's name away." But I'm basically a Smith because that's who raised me.

NM: Sure. Yes. I like that your mom just racked up a lot of one syllable names. [laughter] Well, the perspective that your mom had about coming around to really enjoying the lake and it being a sense of pride, is that something that your aunts or other people embraced too?

KJC: Yes, I think so. I think so. My aunt who lived in Lexington, my Aunt (Fern?) and Uncle Lou built a house up on the hill, really pretty house overlooking the lake. Anything to do with the lake, they wanted to be involved. Like I said, there were plans. At one point, there was a Red Fox Resort. My Uncle Lou, being a civil engineer, he was all over that. He wanted to be part of that planning project. But I think that was one legislator in Frankfort. After he didn't get reelected, that just went away. But it would've been nice to have more – the lake could be more of a focus of in the county and help the economy. That's why we're trying to do something with this building because we don't have a lodge. We don't have a lot of attention. Like now, I'm going to have to call the guy at the Corps of Engineers. The campground that was so pretty, and now, it just looks like a moonscape. I read they're just kind of sitting and waiting on funding. It's not going to be open in the spring. So, what little we did have, this flood's kind of taken out, for a while anyway.

NM: Well, you have sketched it out a little bit, but I am curious, what would you like to see with the lake?

KJC: I think it'd be great if something could be done with this building. I don't know if we'll ever have the financial means to do that. But the campgrounds are great. I'm more aware of that in the last couple of years and have stayed with friends and stuff. It could be a better recreational focus. It could help the economy. We need lodging. A bed and breakfast here would be awesome. But I guess we'll see if the funding ever happens. We don't have a private investor who's got an interest. That would be great. Not so far. Sitting around waiting on the government with grants and stuff just is depressing. [laughter] Again, you see my family influence. I love the government.

NM: [laughter]

KJC: I think about this document often.

NM: Do you feel that what happened with the lake has affected people's long-term feeling about the government?

KJC: [laughter] Yes, I do. I really do because they were mistreated by representatives. They came in here. It was just kind of rude. I guess people from the outside view it as a poor area. Growing up here, I didn't really understand that it was. It was just normal. But people coming in here like we were a second class of people and didn't really deserve to – why do you want to hold on to all this old stuff? Because we've been here since the Civil War basically. [laughter] It's home. We love it. Here I am. A lot of people my age left. I stayed here because my mom and her sisters needed me, I think. I don't feel like I ever – I don't mean it in a bad way to say I didn't have a choice, but I didn't want the choice. They invested a lot in me. It would've been callous of me to not return that when they needed me.

NM: You mentioned the column that your mother wrote. Was that a regular thing she did?

KJC: Yes.

NM: How long did she do that for?

KJC: Oh, goodness. I don't know. Ten years maybe.

NM: So, she got into writing too?

KJC: [laughter] My aunt who was a retired school teacher helped her. She fed her information because she was always on the phone, yakking to all her friends. So, it was a group effort. [laughter]

NM: Have you done much writing in your time about the lake?

KJC: Probably not as much as I wanted to. [laughter]

NM: What would you like to write about the lake?

KJC: Maybe some of the stuff that I've told you. I haven't got to be as much of a creative writer as probably I would have. Creative writers starve to death. [laughter] So, I go to meetings. I write what I see. That's mainly what I do. [laughter] I'm not much of a reporter. I'm a shy and backward person. I've probably talked to you more today than I do to some people in lifetime. But like I said, it's not like I chose to write. It's just what I can do.

NM: Well, maybe just wrapping up, again, you have already touched on it, but if you could just, again, tell me a little bit about, how do you feel about the lake today?

KJC: At home. [laughter] I go out in the yard, and that's what I see. It's home still. I said I live

on what's left of the property. Where I live now, it used to be a big climb from the house up the hill.

NM: How did it come about that you are living there now?

KJC: The original plan was the whole family was going to move back down there. By the time my aunt and uncle retired and built their house, mom had built my little house, which is more – it's a big, old, open living room and kitchen and a couple bedrooms and a bath. It's just almost a fishing cabin. It's not really a big house. But she had built that. By that time, my oldest aunt had lost her husband. She and my youngest aunt just really didn't want the hassle of moving again. They were where they were. That was so mom wouldn't leave them. But she had built a little house. So, when I got out of college, she gave it to me. [laughter]

NM: So, you have been there that long?

KJC: Yes.

NM: So, when the government bought the land of your family, they did not buy all of it?

KJC: They didn't buy all of it. I don't know if it depended on how much land you owned to start with. Maybe it was that. Some people didn't own to the top of the mountain. We owned. We owned a big chunk of property at one time. This passed down two or three generations. Then it was kind of split between two brothers. So, we had a substantial piece of property. So, we still have. But most of what we have left is hillside, just straight up hillside. There's not a whole lot you can do with it.

NM: Do you garden there?

KJC: I wish. We still have a garden at mom's other place. [laughter] We haven't for the last couple of years. The last time we tried, the raccoons ate all our corn. We got disgusted and quit for a while. [laughter]

NM: So, it is not necessarily the hillside bringing you down. It is the raccoons?

KJC: [laughter] The raccoons got us on the gardening. Yes. [laughter] It was funny. We had a really pretty little patch of corn. My husband said, "We'll come up here tomorrow and pick all that." [laughter] We drove up the next day. The raccoons must have heard him because they decimated it. They just destroyed the whole thing.

NM: Breaks your heart.

KJC: [laughter] They beat us to it. They gathered it real well.

NM: Well, hopefully, better luck next time. I will keep my fingers crossed for you. [laughter] Well, maybe just to end, I want to just record about 30 seconds of the sound of the room. So, we'll just sit here quietly for about 30 seconds. Then after, I'll just ask you if there is anything



else still on your mind that you want to tell me about. So, I will just count off to 30 seconds here. All right. Well, is there anything I did not ask you about that you think would be important for folks to know?

KJC: I'm the last of John D's girls. So, I felt like I needed to try to tell their story. I wish somebody had come and asked them. Arta and Fern and Joyce and Ruth, I wish somebody had come and asked them.

NM: I do too. Yes. Well, thank you so much for...

KJC: I'm sure there's gaps in my memory and a lot of things that I don't know that I wish – what would I write? I'd write their story.

NM: Well, I will go ahead and sign this off here.

KJC: Thank you.

NM: Yes. So, this is Nicole Musgrave. I have been speaking with Karen Jones Cody on February 10th, 2023. We are at the old Carr Creek High School in Knott County Kentucky. This is for the Carr Creek Oral History Project.

[end of transcript]