

Michael Kline: What is your full name?

Edith Bell Holden: Edith Bell Holden. That's the only name I've had [laughter]. Never had a male name.

MK: Your dad's?

EBH: Was IJ Bell.

MK: Your mother?

EBH: Cora Crystal Bell. She was named after my father's people, but they had never met. His aunt ran a boarding house, and he came there to board and of course, she knew her and she was named Cora Bell Crystal out of my father's people. But my father and she had never met until he came to the boarding house to work. To stay there with his aunt.

MK: Where was that?

EBH: Near Mount Clare Mines, was Mount Clare, West Virginia. Three months later to the day they were married and they-

MK: Did not let any coal dust gather under their feet.

EBH: No. So, after they were married, she taught him to read and write. He could just barely sign his own name because he had very little education. So, she didn't realize that when they were married, and she saw him lying on the floor trying to figure out some papers and stuff. She asked me what he was doing. He was stressed out on the carpet. He said, "I was trying to – some legal papers that we had to about their home." That was a shock to her. She realized he couldn't do very good at reading and writing. So, she taught him and he got to pass the test and get his engineer on the railroad. He worked for B&O Railroad as a farmer and engineer for thirty-nine years.

MK: I see.

EBH: He could figure what he said after he learned. She could do faster than I could do it on paper. [laughter]

MK: Do you have brothers and sisters there?

EBH: I have six sisters and one brother. There were seven of us all together.

MK: The Bell girls.

EBH: They were all married most of the time when they were sixteen or eighteen. I was the old maid of the family. I was about twenty-two when I got married. My brother lives at Barton, Ohio and I have one sister who's now dead. She had run Bells Bakery there in Weston for years

and years, twenty-some years anyhow.

MK: What was it like growing up with all those kids around?

EBH: Well, we were all outdoor people except my sister that died. We've often thought if she would've been more outdoor type person, she might be living today. Because she died of emphysema. But we were just regular tomboys.

MK: What do you mean outdoor people?

EBH: I mean, we'd rather be outdoors than in the house. Like feminine things. She liked to dress up and go to parties and do things where we would rather be out running through the woods or swimming, hiking, anything I could than to be in the house. Or she didn't, she never would work in a garden or wouldn't go swimming. Just didn't care for it. Then when she was in her sixties where she smoked a great deal. She developed emphysema in which eventually died from it.

MK: She liked to be out in the wild, out in the country?

EBH: No, not her.

MK: No. But the rest of you?

EBH: Oh, yes. Still do. I'd rather be outside than inside.

MK: Why is that?

EBH: Because I just have a love for nature and wild animals and things that I just feel at peace when I'm outside, especially if I'm near water. It's always been. Ever since I can remember, I've been that way. I used to run off mom when about three years old and go to the river. That's where they did nearly always find me or in the woods somewhere. It didn't matter to me.

MK: Which river was that?

EBH: Buckhannon River. I was born and raised on the island as you come in to come to Elkins. I believe there's children's home or daycare. That was where I was born.

MK: It is called the Island Buckhannon.

EBH: That's my dad's. We owned that and I was born there. My dad and mom built that house that sits back at Green Gold Boxer house. That was theirs too. That's where Jury and Collins were born.

MK: So, you lived on an island?

EBH: Yes. It's Buckhannon Island because the river completely surrounded it.

MK: Was there a bridge then to your house?

EBH: No, it was right on the main highway. You pass it as you go into Buckhannon.

MK: Oh, I see.

EBH: What made the island was a channel cut through all the river had cut it. I don't know which used to be an old mill there. Gristmill. It's right. Then you look right across that you see the college campus.

MK: So, you went to school in Buckhannon then?

EBH: Until I was twelve years old.

MK: Then where?

EBH: Then my father was transferred to Weston B&O. During the depression, everybody got bumped around, seniority rights and things. We lived there all the rest of my life until I was about twenty-four. My husband and I moved to Cuyahoga Falls, Ohio and lived there twenty-eight years. When that home burned, we came back to West Virginia. I lived down the farm about ten years and he died. Of course, the dam forced us to move. I came up here.

MK: Where was that place exactly?

EBH: In Weston.

MK: When you came back the farm.

EBH: It was located on what they call Little Skin Creek in Lewis County. Just about eight miles out of Weston, between Weston and Vandalia, on the Little Skin Creek Road, which is a county route 30, I believe it's listed. My parents had three farms there set in a triangle. It comprised two hundred and thirty acres. My brother used to have a farm there. He sold it and went back to Ohio after he got married. After he came home from war and he decided not to keep it. At one time altogether, we must have had over three hundred acres there. I never did figure it out how many there were. But my parents had an old home there that was built before the Civil War and had a spring of water there. It was enclosed that Civil War, we used to camp there. It was a beautiful old home in old country place. But it's all gone now.

MK: They lived there while you were living in Ohio?

EBH: When my father retired from the Railroad, they moved out there. They had already bought it previously. In fact, my mother and father, and my dad especially liked to go fishing. Of course, my mother went with him and they'd been looking at farms and they went out there one day and they spotted this house. So, my mother inquired of who owned that then. He said, "I think the written houses." So, she waited, of course he went back out on the run. It's called a

run when a railroader has to go out, take his turn to go. His run went to Canon Mongolian, Pickens all up through there and clear back around by Grafton. Take him about three days each time he'd be gone. So, she got on the phone and found out whose place that was and she bought it of course. So, he said, "Well let's go fishing again. Let's go back out there." She said, "I'd like to see that house." He said, "Well, that would be trespassing." She said, "Well, I'd still like to see it." So, she went in and he said, "Mom, he's the crossing, that's trespassing. We could get arrested." He said, "I'm not sure who owns this." She said, "I think I do." [laughter] So, he said, who's that? She said, we do. [laughter] Dad fell over. So, as soon as my brother came home with service, so they moved out there.

MK: In the late [19]40s.

EBH: See he got home about [19]45, one of those. In October [19]45. So, then they started packing up, moving. So, by spring they were moved in.

MK: You came back there in what year?

EBH: I came back December the 24th, 1969 because our home burned in September. September 23rd, [19]69, exploded, burned. Then we lived there. My father died. My mother had already passed away. My father died then seven months after I got there. My husband and I were living in a trailer there right close to the house to watch on him because he was around ninety years old and he only lived seven months. So, then I left my husband there by himself to run that farm. We took care of it until September the 17th. He died rather suddenly; he died about five heart attacks. This series of one right after another.

MK: How long after you were back?

EBH: Would be about ten years. We lived there alone for almost ten years. No one was inside of the place. I mean, we had the three farms laid in a triangle there. So, there wasn't anyone in sight. Then after he died, of course I was there entirely alone in the middle of two hundred and thirty acres. No one because everybody at that time had moved away except the nearest place would be almost a mile away. It was Stonickers and Taylor's down the road. Of course, I was going to be forced to move and I had all that on my back all myself. You just couldn't get much help.

MK: Was it a pretty good farm?

EBH: No, it was a private place. I mean, you owned it and no one could get in close to you. No one could move inside of you. I expect it to run a mile on the highway from one end of the three farms to the other. Lots of fishing and hunting but it was badly overgrown because no one had worked seems since my brother moved away in about –well I've lost track of time, about [19]47 or something like that. He left after he returned for service. So, it was really badly overgrown, but it was home. We kept the place clean around the house, the lawn and everything.

MK: Did you have a garden?

EBH: Yes, there were coal mines on the place too and just about anything you wanted. There was plenty of water. Streams of water. It was beautiful but it sat down in a valley so you didn't have much view like we have here.

MK: So, what happened then?

EBH: Well, of course the army clocked in through there condemned all those places and were taking it for this big damage that's going in. So, my husband died in September. Then they came, they'd already contacted us of course through Jury, my sister up here. So, all the legal aspects and things, I was in too. I didn't have any part in it because my brother-in-law was named as agent and she was helping him. Well, in the meantime, while that was going on, I had all my husband's affair to take care of him. I had to run his will through state of West Virginia, through the state of Ohio. I had to get ancillary- Someone to help you, is that what the name I would?

MK: Yes. I guess the ancillary administrator.

EBH: Yes, that's it. Well, it took a year to get his will straightened up. I just sold his place or our place, well just last week. It was last Friday, week ago this Friday. So, while that was going on, getting his will settled, my sister and my brother-in-law was busy getting into the Army (core?) business straightened up and then we would not accept the offer that they gave us. It wasn't high enough to suit us. Of course, they took us to court to condemn it then. I think it was another year. Seeming like I moved away from there in September. I moved up here in September the 21st, 1981. That had been going on all that time since [19]79.

MK: So, it took you two years to settle with the court?

EBH: Yes. Then it had to be split six ways because in the meantime my sister had died and that money was split six ways and it didn't leave me enough to buy a home really. I was the only one in the family who had to buy it because the rest of them all owned their own homes and had plenty to go on. So, I was really hurting because they have to show you three places at least and she brought out the folders of real state. But when I would go, I was shocked what they offered me for that. Like 39,000 it was places that would be 15,000 would be tops for them. Funny I –

MK: Would you say that again?

EBH: Well, they have to show you the real state things that they have in comparison to what they're taking from you. Well, when they went, they didn't take me any place. They just told me where they were and I had to go to Real Estate Agent Gardens and look at them myself. I was shocked when I saw what they were trying to shove off onto me. They were nice about it and I was nice about it but inside I was burning up, see, because I didn't have that much money and I knew I was given a much better place than what they were showing me.

MK: Were these other places in Lewis County?

EBH: Yes. Finally, I called my sister up here who had a business place called Country Corners

and was complaining bitterly about what I was running into and couldn't find a place. Meantime, I'd had two notices to get that trailer off the property, my husband's place. She said, "Well I know some good friends of mine and Mrs. Aris. She's been in there saying she's going to have to move because she's being transferred or something like that." So, that's how I found this place here was through my sister. Must have been over here in town. But I know I had gotten two notices to remove the trailer, but I don't think they sent me notice to move out of the house. It was just that it was my husband's thing so I suppose they wanted that off there. But anyhow, I sold the trailer to a man up the road. He come and got it and moved it off. I think that was just about – I'd have to look in my checkbook and all my records, but it was maybe two weeks before the trailer was gone that I finally moved away. But it took me three months to move up here and just started in. Aris has sold me the place on July the 4th [19]81. Of course, you and he, Roger, still had some of their things in here. I just slowly moved over that period of time until the 21st of September of [19]81. So, it was an awful long, hard struggle and I just wouldn't want to go through it again. I wouldn't have the courage to go through it again, knowing now what I did go through with.

MK: The people over there in that area must have known you had to leave? Is that right?

EBH: Yes. Of course, there were looters, everybody had problems being looted.

MK: What do you mean?

EBH: Well, whenever you were going to town, there was hordes of cars and trucks would move in and just clean you out. My neighbor up the road just around, not any further here from down to Marion's, but out of sight of me, they were moving to a place someplace between Weston and Jane knew, I don't know just where, but they were elderly retired couple. She had oriental rugs and antiques and things and a deep freeze full of all their winter's supply of meat. They tore the house down. So, you had to move and tear your house down or make some arrangements to have it torn down or leave it there and the government would tear it down. I forget now, just what arranges how you had to work that. Or you could buy the place down and tear it down yourself or something like that. But I knew I wasn't physically able to tear that big two-story house down. Getting back to my neighbor's, they hadn't been gone twenty minutes till somebody went in and ripped up the floor, went through and unlocked the basement and just backed the truck burn just cleaned them out. They were just heartsick or something because they could never replace them. Of course, the freezer full of their winter food, meat that had just been stocked up. So, I know when I was pulling out and like lot's wife, I looked back where you coach [laughter], and I had about fifteen minutes for a daylight and there they came, pulling in just that quick. Jury said, "There comes the vultures." I lived there by myself and I set up all night long with a 12-gauge shotgun and a 45 and another gun or two I borrowed the [inaudible] and fought those looters off. But still they got some of the doors prior to open but couldn't quite make it in and it was a terrible ordeal.

MK: You fought them off. What do you mean?

EBH: I mean, the looters, the people who come to steal off of you. To break in. I put two before against the door. I nailed plywood over the windows and they still got some of the doors

open but not enough that they could get in because I had them blocked clear across the room.

MK: They were trying to get in while you were in there?

EBH: To steal, while I was there at night by myself in the middle of two thirty acres, nobody around. I sat up all night with a shotgun. A 12-gauge loaded with buckshot. That's when the one cops came in by the way and a 45. Many, many nights I had to fire those guns. The Sheriff said that's why he told me to have my husband's sale immediately, which took me thirty days, to get everything ready. He had a machine job and a gun job. I placed a full gun. He said, "We can only come by here once tonight. We can't help you any more than that. You're out here by yourself and on your own and my advice to you is to have a sale and sell all of his gun because they'll go one at a time. They'll just clean you out." Even so I lost quite a bit of things.

MK: Who were these looters?

EBH: I don't know.

MK: When did the looting start?

EBH: Just as soon as people started moving away. I worked midnight shift at the State hospital and I saw my husband was not getting too well. I mean, he was having these sick spells and I begged him to get put off the midnight shift to go back on the second shift to midnight. I mean, I'd get home around midnight. As I was going down the road, it suddenly dawned on me that there wasn't any more people on the road between me. They'd all moved away one by one. It was just like a bunch of termites. You could hear them ripping the wary and the lumber off when I was going to work and I got scared. That was another thing that prompted me to get all on a daytime shift, which I knew I was not able to do it. Well, you'd go at night and come back the next morning and half the house would be gone. Of these empty houses where people moved out of my next-door neighbor who bought my brother's place. We are just over here by far from here to Hughes place but out of sight over the ridge. She went to work at the hospital that morning. When she come back that evening, about 4:30 p.m., half of her barn was gone. They just moved in there and stripped it. So, that's what all of us had to put up with. Moved away from there. Especially those out in the country. I don't know about, that is out in that line out of the way. Stoves or refrigerators. Everything would go.

MK: Did the corps attempt to protect those places or?

EBH: If they did, I wasn't aware of it. I think it was up to each individual to protect himself.

MK: But it sounds like after the corps moved in, that there was just complete chaos everywhere.

EBH: I never got out much to talk to other people but there was the rumors that I heard everybody was having a rough time protecting themselves and finding a place to go. I just don't know. It was just hearsay because I worked the midnight shift and I had to sleep at least until 1:00 p.m. That only gave me four hours sleep. Then I always stopped to see my husband as I came in, talked to him. He lived in the trailer right there close to the house. Then I would

maybe have a cup of coffee with him and I'd go up and go to bed, sleep till 1:00 p.m. then we'd start in on the farm doing some work or something. In the wintertime he had gun work and when he was highly skilled mechanic or machinist. He didn't realize he didn't have to go through all that to know what it was to be alone and to be afraid I guess.

MK: There was no way you could get out very fast because there was a long court fight.

EBH: Yes.

MK: Was that true of everybody who sold out to them?

EBH: Some of them I think sold out immediately. Accepted What? When they first started buying them out, they gave them much better price. But they took the people that only had a house and a lot. They picked them off first. Those who had – they just kept – they had a scale, in my mind that's the way it was. We had two hundred and thirty acres more or less there. The bigger people up there had fifteen hundred maybe much more. I heard some of them had as high as three thousand acres. I'm not sure. Those who were well better off and more prominent farmers, they put them off to the very last. They used to publish the price in the paper of what each farm got. Then there was such hassle or many phone calls that they quit that. But it seems to me like we got 165,000. I would have to ask Jury because she handled all of the money. Our father's will said we each had to share and share alike. When my sister died, of course, her share had to be redistributed amongst us. This place here was forty-five thousand. Now I think I come up with twenty-three thousand. \$333.33 they split it six ways. My moving bill up here was over \$4,000. I had to keep an accurate account of everything, receipt for everything, which I did because I did bookkeeping and that kind of work for years. So, that wasn't any problem to me. So, I was better off than some who had to just struggle with that. They then reimbursed me for all my moving costs.

MK: The court did?

EBH: Yes. But as for replacing what they had taken from me, it didn't cover it because I had to put in a new septic system here and two-three other things I forget. Oh yes, the bathroom wall, well you know the floor fell out the bathroom and then the wall fell out. I have never been able to have the money to have that repaired yet. But those are things you run into where a man who can do carpenter work would just jump onto this place and fixed it up. But it is a nice warm house. I mean, there's no problem about that. Of course, the view was fantastic. The millionaires sometimes don't have a view like we have. Of course, the fresh air and the good water, I suppose more than compensates for giving up the better house.

MK: You like it up here?

EBH: I didn't at first. I couldn't already stand it. I don't know why. I just didn't like it. But now I'm getting used to it.

MK: What was the house like that you lost?

EBH: It was a big two-story house. Like I said, it had a hallway went clear up through to the upper floor like the old southern homes. There was two large bedrooms upstairs on hallway in a bedroom downstairs and a living room, a large dining room, almost as big as this, and a large kitchen and a bathroom. Of course, the cellar house outside with large cellar house up forward. There was room for everything. Over here I'm crowded. Used to have a great big front porch on it. Originally during the Civil War, it had a front porch, it went clear up to the top, to second story. But it was uncomfortable and I like old antique houses.

MK: I do too. So, you got 165,000 for this.

EBH: I believe now. I wouldn't know until you checked with Jury.

MK: Two hundred and some acres of land. Did you?

EBH: Yes, we didn't get as much as we should have had. But what can you do?

MK: What was the difference between the price you were offered initially in the court settlement?

EBH: A hundred and forty I believe. We had mineral rights and coal, timber. We didn't get anything for that. They took it.

MK: One hundred and forty was the original offer and by waiting and going through a court case.

EBH: Probably, yes. I forget Judge Maxwell or somebody over here. Oh, Jury you should let talk to her because she knows the monetary all that. She handled all that. Well, after my husband died, that left me out there all by myself. Having to work midnight shift, that was really bad because not a soul was around there. It was just now and then I guess the members of my family that they could spare some time to come and stay and guard the place. Because guard you had to do. I mean, you had to guard with a gun, but you wouldn't have had anything. Well, I had enough time to build up that I didn't use my sick time and my leaves. That I only had to work about ten more days until I could retire at sixty-two years of age and that's what I did. I retired because I knew I had to move and I was sitting in a very critical situation out there, being alone, no one in sight. So, I took early retirement at a loss of pay. Then seven months later my sister died and of course, that was a shock, because she was going to move up here and live with us, probably with me or with Jury. Or we were going to get three of us going to go together and buy a bigger, better farm than what I could do on my own. But as it turned out, I had it all to do on my own and to buy a home. But she left us a farm out in Arkansas, eighty acres. We have enough for sale. We have a buyer for it now but the legal papers that the attorney for the people was going to buy, I believe it's a big timber company. We've already sold several thousand dollars' worth of timber off of. Then she left us mineral rights in two hundred acres out there. So, maybe they'll all work out. I'll update this place as I get money to do it. I've had an offer on this place, \$50,000. But when I went to look at the places, they offered me 65,000, I was sick. I come back as I got better right here. I'm not going to better myself if I go it all. My brother-in-law tells me he comes out and does his mowing. He says, "You've got a beautiful place here. I

mean, your scenery is so beautiful. You got plenty of water, fresh air, and sunshine. Good neighbors. What else could anybody want?" I guess he's right.

MK: When you first heard of the them or were first approached by the cops, what did you imagine that living would be like or did you not think about it or?

EBH: No, I was living in Ohio at that time and they had approached my parents. See, this has been going on more or less since I believe, as far back as 1933. Each new administration gets in it was dropped or re-picked up. But when Rockefeller came there just to groom himself to become governor and later president, which he is aiming for. One day that is after my father died and I was living alone there in the house and my husband lived in a trailer. That way we could guard both places because he didn't dare leave the house by itself or the trailer, but both sleeping in the same place. I worked the midnight shift I could go up there and go to bed and he could go on with his work. Well, one day somebody knocked on the door and the man was there and he says, "I'm lost." I said, "Well, where would you like to go?" He said, "I'm looking for – " and he gave a trick just some, but it was a dump there where people would come from town to dump all their trash and it was an old strip line place. It was this lover's lane too. Would you know all that tell you turned into several acres of it. He said, "I came here from Tennessee to survey that road, get ready to put a road through here." I said, "A road?" He said, "Yes, a road to bypass for you people to use for this dam that's going in." I said, "Well, I didn't know anything about that." He said, "Well, and by the way, all of those people who come through here was told to come through these back roads, not to go down the main highway." I don't know why. But anyhow, Rockefeller stood right there on the courthouse steps tolled up and down was on the TV. He knew nothing about all these plans. He had to know this because they were coming through there, this man came through a good thirty days before he was there at the courthouse steps saying he never heard tell us. He knew nothing about this dam. Of course, his speech would be on record. You can check that out. But many, many persons come through there and ask. They came through the back country roads and I don't know why. Then one morning when all this had died down, I came from work and down there was a great big pump station down the road gas station where Annette finally moved out to Copley. There was a great big tractor trailer loads across the road of lumber, packing crate lumber with the Virginia license plates on it. I had to sit there and wait till they could back around and go in there. They was getting ready to load, pack, all that big machinery stuff in there. So, they had to know all of this before he gave his speech. They didn't hire anyone new that they could get out of that anyone from Weston. They went and got all outside labor. I don't know what the real reason, unless they were afraid of sabotage or what. Some of the doctors went in. I heard this from some people I worked with. His mother owned a farm right below the dam site, that would be at the base close to the base of the dam. So, the doctors while he was overseas in the service and that's what kept him going to think that he could come home someday and be on that farm and raise chickens and something. Said, "I built a chicken house before I left. When I got home, the farm was sold to a doctor." He said, "Judge Fury and Dr. Pertz all was buying up the land all in this area because they knew they'd been tipped off." Now that's just his saying. I don't know if that's true or not, but I worked with this and Cecil Blake, that's his mother that had that farm. He said "To this day I could cry about her selling that farm because that kept me going overseas to think I would come back to that." I think she sold it for just a few, maybe \$1,500.

MK: This doctor put a lot of pressure on her?

EBH: I don't know for I never knew his mother. I just went to high school with him and then worked with him at the State Hospital as an aide. He worked the midnight shift along with me.

MK: What was the purpose of building the dam?

EBH: They say it's to conserve water and to stop flooding of Weston.

MK: Was Weston bad to flood.

EBH: Yes. But as everyone knows down there, it was in that Skin Creek area that's all under laid with quicksand. When my parents bought that farm, I'd say in the [19]40s, during the Second World War, the garden place was solid and up, you could walk right out the gate. The bottom below the road you'd sink into your knees in swamp. When I moved away from there, the gardens area had sunk three feet and the land below the road was solid. You could drive a truck over. We could not keep gravel and rocks in our driveway. It was just two or three times a year we had to fill. They would go out of sight and you'd even, as far as you stick a stick down, you didn't hit bottom. Of course, we know there was quicksand places all up through above us. When the big tractor trailer was going up, the new rush run hill, which shift gears, my house shook and trampled like a bunch of jello in a bowl. Now I wouldn't live anywhere below that dam if you'd give me half a Weston. I'd be scared to death up. That ground would suddenly shift. Although the (core?) of Engineers says they built below the quicksand went below it, you still got that layer in that could shift and break the dam in too in my way of thinking, of course I don't know much about construction work, but I do know we could never keep the bottom in that driveway. If you go out there to this day, you can see the ruts in it.

MK: So, you think it is possible the dam might not be able to hold up on that kind of ground?

EBH: Well, the Stonecoal dam and everybody knows the Burnsville dam has got a crack in it. Just the winter before I left down there, Weston was suddenly flooded out at the football field going out towards Buckhannon, the Stonecoal area. They said, "How come?" Well one of the men told me that it has a crack in it and it filled up with so much water. They opened the floodgates and flooded that part of Weston because they were afraid it was going to let go and he didn't want the Weston people to know it. Now whether he was just talking to scare me, I couldn't tell you. But I do know that Burnsville Dam has a crack in and they have been drilling holes and filling them up with cement trying to get it stopped. Everybody up in there knows that.

MK: Did other people in the community think that the dam might break? Did you ever hear that talking about?

EBH: Yes. Everybody knows that there's underlayment of quick sign up in there.

MK: Where was your farm located with relation to where the dam is?

EBH: We're up on this end of the water. They said it would be ninety feet of water over the house when it's full. I'd say we was up the road, what, five miles maybe above the dam.

MK: What was the experience of people in the Stonecoal area? When they built that dam, was it similar?

EBH: I assume that it was because I heard much grumbling from the people that didn't want to give up their homes and go.

MK: This was ten years earlier or?

EBH: It was, yes. Well, I don't know exactly when the Stonecoal was.

MK: Sometime earlier.

EBH: Because they must have been building that before I moved back down here.

MK: What kinds of things did people say about it?

EBH: They weren't happy to give up their places that they had in their family for many long years. Especially the older you get, the harder it is to pull up and start all over again which I've had to do twice within ten years. See, we lost everything we had. That was about \$150,000 far. It just wiped my husband out and he never did recover. It just seemed to break his spirit or something. He never had to same attitude about his work because he was sixty-nine years old when that happened. It's just hard to give up your life's work and place to move. When you're young it is more or less an adventure, but after you're get up in your sixties and seventies, it's something else again. So, many things could never be replaced. Of course, you have your memories, but they soon fade out. It's hard not to be able to go back. When we went back a year ago last July, Jury and I asked them if we could go in there. You have to get permission, you have to go back in. They said "Yes." Well, we picked up some old bricks from the fireplace. I wanted to cover and make door stops. Get each one of us one of them. But they had burnt the house. They'd cut down the old apple tree that had been supplied apples all those years when my mother had lived there. Beautiful old apple tree. They just whacked it off about four feet above the ground. They tore the house down, tore the cellar house down and burnt everything. Just pieces of the old-fashioned tin roofs that they had on the house. It was all curled up and burned in there and the pine trees were burnt and killed. The trailer, you couldn't even tell the trailer had ever been there except for one little pipe that was sticking up. Lots of trash hunters had moved in there and camping through their trash around. I had to move away and leave one small twice but it just too much. I couldn't clean it all up.

MK: Who burned the house down?

EBH: The people that bought the house from the government. You see you could buy the house back like for a dollar or some small amount, but if you bought it back then you had to tear it down. But if you didn't buy it back, it was the government's responsibility and other people, anyone could go to the government. We had an office up over the post office and buy that house

for a small amount of money and tear it down. In fact, I did buy my husband's trailer back for \$50. They gave me three thousand for the trailer. I could do anything with it. I wanted to move it, tear it up or set fire to it. They didn't care what? So, I bought it back for \$50. Well, they got the checking over the situation and said "We can't do that." They returned my \$50 because the reason they couldn't do it, it didn't belong to the bell outfit. It was strictly a holding trailer. It belonged to my husband. I said, "Mr. Monder so will I never ran into this before. Somebody else's property sitting on the bell property but they bought the whole unit seat." So, he said, "Well only thing to do is give your \$50 back and let you dispose of the trailer." So, I sold a trailer for \$800 because I had rented it to some people and it wasn't much left of it. So, I tried to sell it for anything I could get out of it. Even \$1,500 and I couldn't do it after people would come and examine it and said no way. So, my neighbor up the road bought it for 800 and I had to sign the papers. That means I wouldn't sell it back to somebody that had to be rerun out again [laughter]. You see? But in reality, I guess that's what really happened. Although he told me he fixed a trailer up and took it down to Bendale. That's what he would eventually be doing with it. I never asked him any questions or didn't care what he did with it. That couldn't have a conflict of inter serious sell it back to somebody that had to resell it back again to the government. They said, "You won't even recognize it." I get too with it because he could rebuild everything that he was trying to set up a trailer court up there above. He said he didn't have to move. I don't know if he did or did not. My other neighbor, Homer Hefner, lived up around the road out of sight. They paid him for his place and they tried to run him out time after time. He said, "No, I'm putting that money in the bank and whenever it builds up enough interest to what I think I should have had out of it, then I'll move." I guess that's what he did. But after I moved away from there, they were talking to my brother-in-law who was the agent and he said she could have lived there another year. I said, "No. He tells me but if I'd have stayed there another year, I would've been picked clean like a bunch of piranha," he said again. I wouldn't have had anything to move. I'd probably been over in a crazy house besides, because there's no way I could have survived living nearby myself.

MK: But they had told you before that you had to move?

EBH: Oh yes. I think the second notice, I know to get that trailer off. I suppose that was for me to get too from the house.

MK: Did you ever hear of the Upper West Fork River Association?

EBH: Oh yes. My brother-in-law was one of them. He belonged to Clan (row?). That was another organization.

MK: Clan (row?).

EBH: Clan, C-L-A-N, Clan (row?). It had something to do with the gas company. Where the gas company is still paying you the rates now that they leased your place like a dollar an acre and they were fighting that.

MK: Trying to get those leases raised.

EBH: Yes, did it.

MK: What did you think about the efforts in the community to resist the (core?)?

EBH: Well, everybody did just about everything they could do. I didn't take too much part in it because their meetings were held at 7:00 p.m. and that's the only time, I could get a nap is from 7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. When you work midnight shift four-hours sleep a night is not enough. That's all I was getting. The time my husband died, I was just totally exhausted. I had been living on four hours of sleep for over eight-and a half years. So, when he died, I was just about ready to collapse myself because the strain of all that, seeing what the other neighbors were going through with and knowing that I was facing the same situation. Mrs. Jackie Taylor lived down the road from me out of sight. She says "My god, Mrs. Holden. I wouldn't live up there alone like you are for anything in the woods, I would be terrified. I'm scared to death down here. My husband's with me, way people are doing." I said, "Well I don't have any other choice, nothing I could do."

MK: The sheriff came once a night.

EBH: He went by there once a night, and they did stop. They were awfully good about stopping and checking, asking how I was. But he said, "I just can't watch you all the time".

MK: Did you have protection of any other kind?

EBH: Not other than my guns.

MK: I mean, the state police, did they?

EBH: Well, they will come through there and they were awful nights and he stopped one time or two and talked. But he was just there to spread too thin. There was too much and too much other. They went on. It required somebody to be there day and night. You didn't dare take them a load of something and move and leave your place unprotected. You had to have someone there.

MK: Were there any prosecutions of people caught looting during this period?

EBH: Never could catch up. Then I know of now the sheriffs could give you some information on that if there was any of that.

MK: But it was happening all over the county as I understand.

EBH: Oh, yes. Everyone that I talked to had lost something.

MK: How many people were displaced by the project?

EBH: The actual figures I don't recall at this time but most of those, especially those people at Vandalia that kept a record of it, they could give you all that information. The Clara Mae Sprague and all that was head of all those organizations could tell you.

MK: Were they good people? Did you know a lot of them?

EBH: Well, yes, I knew many of them of course went to school with, I'd say 90 percent were the children of these old folks. I went to high school with them, if not my brother and sister who followed me through high school. They were four years difference. Four or five. They knew most of them too.

MK: What sort of people were they?

EBH: Just farmers, hardworking people, honest people, who'd rather stay home and work on their own place than be out somewhere else. They owned their own property and they raised their own food and their cattle. Took care of their own place and their children.

MK: Were they religious people?

EBH: I imagine that they were because they were churches all up through there. I'm sorry to say I wasn't [laughter], I never went to church. I was baptized up there that role beside though just before I moved up here. Something I'd always wanted to do and they had a creek up there and my neighbor had moved away. My father and mother had built a house there for one of my aunts who had no home for own. She was elderly so to have her near them and have someone near my mother when my father would be out on the farm someplace, they built a home there. My father built it for her. Well, my brother decided he didn't want it, so they sold it to the neighbor's son who got married and his church was having a baptism up on road beside him. Excuse me. So, I asked him if I could go and he said sure. So, they let me go up there and be baptized with their church. I knew a great deal of those people. A lot of them worked at the State Hospital. So, that was an experience and something I'd always wanted to have done.

MK: How do you spell Roeorabaug?

EBH: R-O- R-A-B-A-U-G-H. Rorabaugh but everybody says Rorabaugh. I worked with one of the original people that married into the original family. I guess they were quite well to do farmers up in there. They owned half that section up through there known one as Rorabaugh because there's an old railroad siding.

MK: Was that near the Vande?

EBH: Yes. Just go down there. Just near turn off right there where the dams being built. That iron bridge go right up that valley and came out to Roanoke.

MK: Those people who were trying to fight them, did they have real hope that they could keep it from being built?

EBH: Well, yes, I guess so. Everybody has hope when you're fighting, the cause like that.

MK: Yes.

EBH: But I think within the last two years everybody began to see the handwriting on the wall that was going to go through regardless. That it was Vincent, a lost cause. As you know there were many deaths. I think we had three deaths there within thirty days. It just seemed like it was just like a chain reaction. Probably the stress was too much or they were so many of them was getting old and had heart condition stuff. The thoughts of having to tear up and move and go someplace that you didn't know, maybe it was too much for some of them.

MK: Was there any feeling of contention or strife between the people who lived out there and the people in Weston because they wanted it?

EBH: Yes. No, I don't know just what triggered it, but I got many, many threatening phone calls, and I got scared. Knowing I was up there by myself. It seemed like they resented, I don't know what it was or whether it was just crank calls, but it seemed like there was resentment in their voices. Someone would say, "Well I hear you're for the dam," or something like that. They never identified themselves. But there was harassment like that.

MK: Did you know Barbara and Bobby Hefner?

EBH: No, I didn't. Although I understand that they had a greenhouse or somethings. Some of the plants that I have here on this farm are from their greenhouse. They gave them to my brother-in-law who was a manager of the IJ Store at Weston. This old gentleman came down and he gave me some things Well, many of the trees and things I have are from their place, but through someone else.

MK: Did you hear what happened to them?

EBH: Yes, I get the Western Democrat. I thought would happen to me. I expect there would've been some dead people laying around or I'd have shot. If I'd have been that boy and see him grab hold of my mother, I'd have killed him. I wouldn't even hesitate.

MK: I guess he was already in handcuffs by that time.

EBH: Probably so. Because you know yourself, you would not stand by seeing your mother manhandled, if you had some way to do something about it.

MK: What do you think was the intention of the Marshals?

EBH: Well, they were just doing their job. When you're a Marshal or a policeman, you have to do what you're told to do, whether you want to do it or not. It's just like being in the army, I guess. They had had several notices, I guess, to get out. I don't know the true facts about it other than what I read in the Democrat. But I suppose if I'd have stayed there and fought them, I'd run into the same thing.

MK: Well, do you think that they considered that to be part of their orders to do it in that fashion?

EBH: I don't know. I just don't know what took place of the actual background.

MK: Did it surprise you?

EBH: Yes, it did. But then on the other hand, some of this antique furniture that I have stored upstairs, I bought from Mrs. Monja whose husband is the head of the, I suppose that Army (core?) down there. His offices are upstairs. She told me she is afraid of living in Weston because she herself was getting phone calls. I don't know whether they're continuing or not. But she said, "I have never lived in a place before in my life or I have felt fear," and says "I am getting phone calls and we are going to go move back to Louisa, Kentucky when his time is upset." When I bought the furniture from her Victorian furniture, said "I have five more years to go on his job and we are getting out of here," said "I am absolutely scared of these phone calls I'm getting." So, I know how she felt. So, there's two sides sitting and my husband is a good man and he's kind-hearted and he's good to his family, but he has a job to do and he has to do it or lose his job.

MK: So, you can see two sides to this Barbara and Bobby Hener thing. The Marshalls had a job to do and...

EBH: Yes, it's just like the dog warden down there. People were just giving email all the time but he came out there, he helped me many, many times. People were dumping off their dogs and cats. I mean, by the dozens. You couldn't shoot them fast enough until they was another load there and they attacked him. They would attack you and they attacked this woman that was living in the trailer. I was sick a great deal because I have pneumonia off and on so much. She had a little three-month-old baby in her arms and the baby bottle in one hand and a four-year-old in the other hand coming up to see about me for I was down sick. I heard all this barking and screaming and I tried to get up. I'd had pneumonia then and I thought it was her dog maybe got after a stray cat here. Five or six dogs attacked her right at my door and she was trying to fight the dogs off. I got the door up and got her in and I don't know now if I fired a shot at him or not, but I called this game dog warden. He came out as soon as he could, wasn't very long. He got two or three of them. When her husband came home from his job – he was a truck driver, he had a 2506 and boy he could really knock those dogs off. I mean, they were running in packs of seven, eight, ten, twelve at a time. A starving dog is nothing to run into when you're out in the country because they'll fight and cats by the dozens. It's unbelievable. You just don't know unless you went through it.

MK: Sounds like a war. Well, I very much appreciate you telling us all this. We want to use some of this material possibly in a radio broadcast. Did you understand that?

EBH: Well, no I didn't at time, but it's okay.

MK: Possibly we may use it as the basis of a magazine article. I do not know yet about that. Is there anything else here?

MS: Nothing I can think of right now.

EBH: You see they had to see that you moved into a place comparable to what you were giving up. Well, I don't know whether I did or not [laughter], I just don't know. But I know I am more at peace with myself up here now because I was in turmoil all the time knowing that I had to move, realizing that my husband was ill and being left out there alone at night and I had to run that road at night by myself and all kinds of weather. No one on the road at night if you have flat tires, skid off. Then when my sister died, it just seemed like the whole weight of the world was on my shoulders and getting moved up here and that was a rough experience. Of course, everybody helped he could, but I would certainly hate to go through it again.

MK: There are still others living over there because maybe their court battles lasted longer or whatever. What could the court do to ease this that you would never want to live through again and that other people are perhaps faded to live through?

EBH: The fear. The fear knowing that I was alone and expecting to be robbed or beaten to death and no one in hearing distance. Of course, I had a phone, but that's the simple matter to cut the lines, but which was never done in my case. But if it was one or two men, I could finally shoot them off, help my own. But you take three men ganging up on one person out there by themselves and knowing there's nobody going to be there. I just don't believe I could've handled it, although I would've tried.

MK: How could the cops have made your move away smoother?

EBH: Well, I just don't know. They were certainly nice people to talk to. At no time did they ever raise their voice or say a derogatory remark or anything like that. They were very nice business-like people. It was just the fact that I had to go through it alone. That was such a struggle.

MK: Did they realize about the looting and the fact that people...

EBH: I'm sure that they were aware of it. That maybe they didn't realize. Well how could you keep from being, if you drove out there one day and had a house went back next day you just had a skeleton framework. That was true. It was unbelievable. I don't see how the people did that at night without any lights. How could you take the wiring and the pipes out of the house? I mean, you go back and all your electric wire was gone, your meter boxes, everything. All your water lines was gone. The doors were missing off the house, the windows were taken out and they did it all at night. I would go down the road and I would see these vans and trucks pulled up in there and I was afraid to even slow down that I would be shot if I asked them what in the hell they was doing up in there. Because I knew the people had just moved out and some of the stuff was still in there. They were building new houses or rebuilding something they'd bought and they needed all like 220 line, all this new line and stuff or the water lines. They were gone by the next

morning. Then Jenny would be gone the next morning. [laughter] and Rick Jenney. How could he do? Just the whole crew would move in there.

[end of transcript]