

Present: Lodge Compton, Tim Potter, Michael Nobel Kline

Michael Nobel Kline: Can you start out by saying, "My name is?"

Lodge Compton: My name's Lodge Compton. I'm with the, editor, publisher of the *Virginia Mountaineer*, the weekly newspaper here in Grundy.

MNK: And you've been in that position since?

(004)

LC: Since, ever since forever, before history was taught! No, I've been with the paper all my life. I've actually been editor and publisher for twenty-five years or so.

MNK: Tell me a little bit about your people, where you were raised.

(007)

LC: I was raised in Buchanan County up in the headwaters of Dismal (?sp.) River, is where all my father's folks were. And he was a writer, and was a photographer, and had dabbled in politics and such. But it was a--You know, a lot of people make some connection with he and I with the newspaper, which really there was no direct connection with it. Although once upon a time when the paper was founded, he was the editor of the paper, but that was long before I was born, and he was only with the paper a year or something. But we grew up on a little mountain farm called Loggy (?sp.) Bottom Branch off Dismal River.

(015)

It's up in the Whitewood area. Of course there was five sons in the family, and we all managed to get out of there. Not so much get out there, we moved to Grundy when I was about eleven years old. I have one younger brother and of course three older brothers. And one of--My oldest brother, of course, has died. And the next one's retired. And I have one brother that works for... but he's been with them--He'd been a district manager and such for a number of years. He's ready for retirement, I guess. And my younger brother's president of Grundy National Bank. So we left Loggy Bottom, and we all managed to make it okay.

MNK: Took Grundy by storm, it sounds like.

(024)

LC: Well, we were very fortunate. My younger brother went to college on a football scholarship, and a couple of my older brothers got to Virginia Tech on the G.I. Bill. So we were fortunate to have those things happen to us.

MNK: And where did you go to school at?

(028)

LC: Well, I just--Actually I started working in the newspaper when I was just a kid and went through, even in elementary school and through high school. A year after high school I stayed with the people who had just bought the paper. And I went down to--I'd decided I was going to be a great football star too, so I went down to little... College down in Madisonville, Tennessee, and stayed one semester, and had no money, and came back, and went to work for the newspaper again. So I--But it just grew out of that.

MNK: You're story's so fascinating. I don't want to linger on the early stuff too long, but I wonder why they, why the family left the farm to come to town?

(037)

LC: It was a very meager existence. It was old, old poor land that never been fertilized. It was-- Never been--The ground had never been restored. Of course it was a way of life. It was changing, you know. This--We--Dad had been fairly active in public affairs until the Depression came. Then of course we were in a period of ten years, and it was a pretty meager existence. And of course you just, you know, he could pick up enough work on the side, you know, to buy shoes in the wintertime and raise a tobacco patch. And so that was just about it.

(046)

On the type of property we had, you couldn't, there was not enough grazing for livestock. And there was really--You know, you couldn't tend enough to really feed the family on that type of a situation. But anyway, he was--When World War II started up he had enough expertise as a lab photographer, and went down to Norfolk, and worked a few months, and gained a certain amount of knowledge about how to operate. So he came back to Grundy and put in a little photographic studio.

(055)

MNK: So it was photographic in Norfolk during the war?

LC: He worked--Yes, at a--He didn't actually do--He worked inside. He was a lab, more I guess you would call it a lab technician. And so he came back here in about--

MNK: ...

(057)

LC: --about '40, probably the summer of '43. And put a little studio in. Of course at that time, you know, there was plenty of money around because of the war, and you had servicemen.

And of course naturally the photographic business was good at that day and time. There was nothing you could buy with your money, everything was rationed. So people could buy--Their pictures weren't rationed, so you could go in that direction! But anyway, that's--You know, it just kind of grew. And of course we actually--They three younger boys all grew up here in Grundy.

MNK: What was the town like when you--What year was it you came?

(066)

LC: We came, the best I remember, in the winter of '43. Yeah, it was a--It was the typical coal mining-related community. It was altogether a Saturday town. Everybody did all of their business on Saturday. The coal companies paid off. And of course that was the payday, which... no supplements going at that time. But payday, and Harmon Mining, and Buchanan County Coal. You had old Red Jacket Mining, Keen (?sp.) Mountain. And Grundy was just the only place that you could buy anything. You had a few little country stores, but you couldn't have bought a piece of fresh meat. You might have salt bake, and possibly a cured ham.

(077)

No green, no produce, some can goods. But, you know, at that particular period most everybody raised their own meat and grew their own vegetables, so the store business didn't necessarily need that part of it. But if you was going to do something like that, you had to come to Grundy to do, you know, to buy that. Of course Grundy was, being the county seat, the court's always been active. But when I was eleven, twelve, thirteen years old, there was three theaters on Main Street. They were all filled to capacity on Saturdays. You had--Everybody came to town. You had a beer joint about every other door! And it was a very active little community of--You know, we had a lot of fun growing up in it.

(088)

MNK: Can you tell me, an outsider, somebody who is completely unfamiliar with the lay of this countryside here, can you tell me how this land lays, how the mountains are situated, how the rivers and creeks ... are situated?

(091)

LC: Well, first the mountain is very, mountainsides are steep. We have a very narrow valley, just room for the river, and the railroad, and a piece of highway. And every now and then you'll have a little bottom land or--But it's rugged. It's rugged mountain country. And of course the mountain tops, generally speaking, in those days were settled not hardly at all. Most all of your settlements

were up the creeks and hollows. And I guess that goes back to the old days when probably the river traffic was the best way to transport.

MNK: Do you mean to say that boats came up this river?

(101)

LC: No boats of any size. The biggest thing you had in the, during the early logging days, the river was used to raft the logs down to the Ohio. And of course that was big business. A lot of big companies came in--And just like the Levisa here, I've seen old photographs--I don't remember this, but I've seen old photographs where this whole river channel was backed up with logs, because they waited for that spring thaw to come. Of course in those days I don't know what caused the difference, but the river constantly froze over. It was--It would be solid ice during the wintertime. And I guess it's because of probably more of a natural...elements, or runoff, or what have you in the water, I guess to keep the freezing down.

(112)

But the logging was, I'd been told, that even they'd have such a log jam that stretched out not only here, but at other places. This happened to be one of the wider bends. And of course the mouth of Slate Creek had logging coming from that direction too. But they would actually have to dynamite sometimes the lower part to get the log jam to start floating. And of course they just had log rafts that the crews would ride and keep it going, almost like herding cattle, you know, until they went all the way down to Catlettsburg, Kentucky. And of course that was--I had an uncle who did this. He--I don't know how many times, but he made those treks, you know, back in the early days.

MNK: Could you picture in your mind the character of this river based on its behavior during your lifetime?

(126)

LC: Oh, yeah, pretty much so. It's very volatile. It's flash flood prone. Slate Creek, particularly so. Slate Creek has such a steep pitch, the runoff, my gosh, just a couple hours after a heavy rain you already see the creek is on the rise. Levisa not as much so, but it has a lot of the same tendencies, just takes a little longer. And of course one of the big problems you have here in town, the--If you have a crest, Slate Creek crests at the same time Levisa does, then you got yourself a backup situation. You know, one of the things that's helped us many times in the past, where we were near flooding, well, we had flooding but I mean near a catastrophe was the fact that Slate Creek would stop to drop before Levisa had crest. So that makes a lot of difference.

(140)

MNK: So the Levisa actually created a backwater up Slate Creek as well?

LC: Well, it has at times. But that's--That particularly happened in '57 and '77. The crest was very near the same time. Only difference was in '77 we just had a lot more rainfall. Of course--

MNK: So '37, '57, and '77—

LC: Yes.

MNK: --had been big years?

(147)

LC: Yeah, and then about '17. I'm not sure it was exactly '17, it could have been '18, '16, '17, or '18, but there was--My dad always referred to it, the old- timers always called it the June Flood, and that was in the late teens. Now I don't know what--If it wasn't 1917, it was very near that. Of course that was well before my time. I don't really remember the '37. I was just a young... five or six years old. But I know--It had been so recent that I remember a lot of talk about it.

MNK: What was the talk?

(155)

LC: Just, you know, just what you normally will have. Of course you didn't have the damage done like in the teens or in '37, because you didn't have the encroachment. You didn't have the building on the river that you had in '57, for instance. '37 was a period that a lot of Grundy didn't even exist much beyond the Slate Creek Bridge over on the lower end of Main, Street. There was only a building or two that was there in '37. So Slate Creek I'm sure spread out a lot when it came down. For instance, the Morgan Theater Building was, I don't think was even built. Of course it was built into the, along the Slate Creek water, into, right out into the edge of the water. And of course all the old pictures--

(167)

In fact, I have one on the wall here that you might look at in a minute. But for--There was nothing on the other side of Main Street. You might want to just look for your information right now. It's right here on the wall. That was probably about 1920. The one here on behind the door, right over here. Let me hold this for you.

MNK: Okay.

LC: ...you're over the depot ara [sic] now looking right at the courthouse. And you can see what's on Main Street.

(175)

MNK: And that was--This is what year?

LC: That was probably about 1920. I'm not certain of that, but it was in that era.

MNK: Okay.

(178)

LC: What happened along there, you had--The first structure, of course, were primarily wood, and there was a couple of fires. We had a couple of devastating fires. In fact, the courthouse was burned on a couple of occasions. The present courthouse, of course, has been added onto in recent years, but the first structure was built about 1900, maybe 1905. I'm not certain of the exact date, but it was right in--But it had burned on two prior occasions, which is the same thing, just like a, you know, a frontier town. It was all mainly wood, had no fire prevention of any kind. And of course if a fire started out it just swept the whole thing. There was no way to extinguish it. Or no real way. I mean bucket brigade. You don't put out too big of a fire that way. But anyway, the growth of the downtown area really came about, starting about the mid-'30s as the coal industry began to develop. The big-time coal industry came to Buchanan County after 1930.

MNK: During the Depression?

(194)

LC: Just as the Depression was beginning to wind down all of these, you know, smaller rail mines, I guess they would be called, started to open up. See, the railroad didn't even go above Grundy at that time. The railroad ended here. And I believe about 1935 is when the old depot building was put up. And then it started going upriver after, it was '34 or '35. And went--Of course first served the area around Oakwood, came out. And then went up Dismal, oh, I don't know, maybe seven or eight miles. And then in the late '30s it was extended on up to the Jewel Valley Mine. It was just built to serve that one mine. So that all came about really in my lifetime. So I don't actually remember when the railroad just came to Grundy, but I do remember when it was under construction on Upper Dismal. And this was like 1937, '38. I think probably the first coal run at Jewel Valley Mine was about '39.

MNK: Well, there have been families living in the countryside—

LC: Oh, yeah.

MNK:--of the hollow ...

(212)

LC: Sure. Most everybody had a, you know--Everybody did some type of gardening or light farming. And then on the seasons of the, usually the man of the house had a job in the timbering industry, or he, you know, did something to add a little cash in. They had no, nothing to provide any cash. So they would, you know--There was these odd jobs. Might even go over into McDowell County or whatever in order to, you know, pick up a little supplemental income. Of course it was just a natural when the coal industry came in, these people just waiting in line to get jobs in the mines. And of course at that time the whole picture began to change. The farms, more or less, were gone. And the whole economy started to change. You had more of an industrialized economy that came about rapidly.

(226)

MNK: Harry Coddle (?sp.) wrote that they could trace the end of farming in eastern Kentucky to, I think it was 1927. Flood there just simply washed all the topsoil off ... And--

LC: I don't know. Of course Coddle, you know, was primarily an opponent of strip mining, surface mining. And I doubt that there was any surface mining done prior to that. I might--You know, he might lay blame, but I don't think-- MNK: No, I don't think [sic] he blamed surface mining...

LC: No, not for that. Because there was no--

MNK: ...That was when all the small farms washed away.

(236)

LC: Well, this may be so, I don't know. I'd never heard that. But I know, you know, in his like... you know, he was mainly, you know, opposed to the strip. And they did. There's no question they left it in a terrible shape. There's no regulations and such. So when they, when it wasn't profitable anymore they just moved off and left it no matter what shape the land was in.

MNK: And after that had an effect on subsequent—

(243)

LC: I don't think that had any effect on our leaving the farm economy. I don't think that there was any of this. It was just the fact that our terrain is such there are very few farms that could actually, could call itself a farm. There's-- you probably could count the farms almost on your hands that could actually, could have worked machinery, could have operated a tractor. The property that we had, for instance, you couldn't have operated a tractor, even a present day tractor you couldn't have operated on it. It was just, you know, steep, just straight hillside. And there were a few mountain top farms on, just beyond where we lived. In fact, some of my folks still live up there. Beautiful country, but it is mountain top. And it was nice lay of the land. And

you had a few of these. You got some of it going into the Fletcher's Ridge and going back toward Counsel, which is getting away from the coal deposits more all the time, going back toward Russell County. But there are--Still today there's sizable farming in the Davenport, Counsel, Fletcher's Ridge area, Boyd Ridge. But this was on the, just on the fringe of the coal deposits.

MNK: Do the mountains lose their water retaining capabilities with a lot of the surface mining and timbering?

(265)

LC: Oh, I'm sure they do. I think there's no doubt that certain seasons you could stand a lot more rainfall than you can others. Our--You know, our--The two that I'm more familiar with, one came in January when there was no foliage at and one in April when nothing really was out. So you had the runoff. And we have had some big rains, heavy rains in the middle of the summer. We've had a big river, but we never had, you know, the devastating flooding, because I'm sure that it did make a lot of difference.

MNK: So the foliage has a--

LC: Oh, yeah, has a lot to do with it.

MNK: With?

(275)

LC: With the runoff and such. It slows the runoff a lot. And of course our terrain is--You're going to have runoff just immediately. You're going to have enough of it in mid-summer when everything is in full blossom, you know. But certainly in the wintertime, especially after you've had freezing and such, you know, it takes very little rainfall to start those creeks running.

MNK: So you remember the '57 flood pretty well. Could you--

LC: Pretty well, yeah.

MNK: Could you... a little bit?

(285)

LC: Yes, we were still--You know, I was into the business then. And we were over on the lower end of town in a lower floor. In my time I had never--I'd worked there, you know, for I guess nearly ten years, maybe around ten years, ten or twelve years. I was familiar with the lay of the land. We'd never seen anything, you know, we sat there and just could not believe what was happening. There's no way. I mean when it was all up waist deep, I was still saying, "This can't be!" So, you know, it--When you'd never seen it before you just couldn't believe what was

happening. I mean we, you know, just worked ourselves to death just trying to block our doors to keep the water from coming through under the door, and a few minutes later it was coming through the windows. You know, once it's, that--I don't know why that it goes up so rapidly, but you could almost watch the water rise. It was--That was how fast, once you got to a point. I had never seen it, you know, never up to the floor level even in the place we were in then.

MNK: Which was located? (305)

LC: Is down--It was--I believe it's in the building--It's a building where Thomas--Well, they're not Thomas Furniture now. Near the DMV, old DMV building there, down on--It was a lower floor. There was a theater beside the building we were in. And it was down on the lower level. But we had never had, you know, to my knowledge there had never been any water at that level.

MNK: Now that was the newspaper office or your--

(312)

LC: Right, the newspaper office. So we, you know, we--It did come up. We were--Of course that was a different. Letter press printing, heavy equipment. Everything had a big electric motor. And of course when we first realized we was in trouble, we started trying to salvage our motors because that put us out of business, you know, if we didn't have those motors running. So we busted ourselves for the, you know, first hour or so trying to get everything disconnected. And we got a lot of them off and set motors up on one of our work tables. And when we left the work table was covered up too. So it just kept coming up. Finally ended up about six feet. Covered every piece of equipment we had. And much of it washed away. We never saw it again. And we--Of course we had quite a cleanup effort. We did manage to get back in production in about two weeks. I think we missed two issues. But everything was, you know, it was all under water. We had to break down equipment piece by piece... clean. So it was quite--Not only just getting rid of the mud and muck, you had all your equipment that was starting to rust down too. So it was quite a chore.

(334)

MNK: And in two weeks you were back up and running?

LC: Back up and running in two weeks. And that was without any outside help whatsoever.

MNK: Or sleep, I guess.

LC: Or sleep. Didn't get a lot of sleep during that time. And one of the things that hurt our cleanup effort then, we weren't on city water at the time. We were on a--Of course the private well was out of production too. So it did make a difference in the cleanup effort. But we managed to do it.

MNK: You had to haul in all your water?

(342)

LC: Just anywhere we could get it. Of course we used a lot of river water to clean equipment with, you know, because, my gosh, you're in a mud hole. So that's no time to get too finicky about what you're using to clean it with. But we did have some neighbors from a couple other towns that came in and helped us. People that were in the trade. And spent--You know, we just worked around the clock for a couple--It went on for weeks and weeks after that, but we were able to operate after a couple of weeks. But we lost all of our old files, all of our old records, and a lot of things that you have no way to put a value on. But it's just, you know, it's just gone forever. So--

(354)

MNK: Old photographs.

LC: Everything. Our old files, which are invaluable in this kind of business.

MNK: Um hmm.

LC: And we, of course we lost all of our records prior to about 1950. Everything was gone. We even lost all of our current records, you know. And once we knew that we had a problem, it was just too late to get anything out.

MNK: And you had no--Or did you have any warning about this flood coming in '57?

LC: I don't recall that we did. Maybe there was something--

MNK: ...

(365)

LC: --out there, but I don't know that there was any warning on it at all. And I'm not saying there wasn't in the general area, but I don't know that we had any--We had--You know, I guess we should have been suspicious because we'd had an awful lot of rainfall. But it came so--It came early in the morning. Oh, I don't know, by noon we were getting close to crest I guess, because it must have really started into our place like nine o'clock in the morning or something. And I managed to get out and go around the hill. We couldn't--You couldn't go up through the street, so I managed to get up and get on the hillside, and got up to what they call Cow Town here, and a neighbor took me in. So I sat on a front porch there and watched the river the rest of the day. But it dropped so rapidly I was able to get back out before dark and even go down to our newspaper plant and look at it. Because that's how fast that the river can come up and come down.

MNK: And what did you find when you got back to the newspaper office?

(385)

LC: I found quite a mess. It was just--You couldn't--At the time when you first looked at it, of course, you just, no way that you--You know, you were just heartsick. You had no way to know that you would ever salvage anything, because it looked like it was all gone. Of course everything—I mean mud knee deep. Everything coated with mud. That was one of the great problems, was the cleanup. That silt sets up so fast, and if you can't get... If you can wash it down immediately, it's not such a problem. But you don't have access to anything to wash it with as a rule. That's where your problem comes in. So we learned a lot that week. What we learned and then carried over to '77, and we managed to clean the place up a lot quicker because we knew what we were dealing with then. So we did get access to a pump, put it in the river, and by the time the water was, while it was still had water standing in places we were washing it out. So it did make a big difference. But you learn.

(407)

MNK: Yeah. How did--

?: ...

MNK: No, thanks... How did the town as a whole fare? You sat and watched the river all afternoon. What--

(411)

LC: Well, I was out of the business section by that time. I was up in a residential area up on 4, you know, going out of town. Of course I didn't know. You know, of course... very shortly you lost all your electricity. You lost your telephone service. So whatever or whoever you could see, that was about all you knew about. Because not that many battery radios around and so forth. The same, basically the same thing happened to us here in '77. We happened to be on one of the higher spots, and we managed to stay all day and spent the night across the way here in an optometrist's office. Our whole crew was here, because we had a lot of young people. And by the time, by noon, when you realized what you were into, I just discouraged them from leaving, because it's better to spend the night somewhere that the family don't know about you than it is to be floating down the Levisa, you know. So I thought it was a pretty good choice. And--But we all stayed together. Went over. A friend of mine, had an office across the way, a higher ground, high and dry. No electricity or heat, but, you know, we had a--Later in the night some of the town officers were out, and they'd gone by, and--Wherever they knew some people were, they managed to get by, I think one of the grocery stores and pick up a few items to keep us all from starving too much. So it was quite a night. But--I'm jumping ahead, but I'm into '77.

MNK: ...

(441)

LC: Anyway, this was what--Like I say, the pictures here--Just as soon as there was enough daylight to see the next morning, I came in here and got the camera, and, because I couldn't do anything else. And, you know, it was a pretty sad time to be out making pictures. But anyway, we got some pretty dramatic shots. But this was the reaction. You can see--I don't know whether that one shows it, but we had companies that had already started brining [sic] equipment in by daylight the following morning to start, you know, to start cleaning. That's the difference in these folks and you have in some areas. Because they got out and cleaned, you know, we started cleaning up the next morning and didn't wait, you know, to come in and get all the surveys done, this, that, and the other. I mean the town was, within a few days was more or less operational again. The biggest problem we had, of course we had-- Transportation was such a problem, because the road was closed in some places. We would have not missed the publication had we been able--We would have made arrangements with like Richlands, for instance, to do some of our work. But we couldn't get anywhere. If you got there, you might go to the lower end of town, you might be two or three hours getting back, you know. It was just--You were so isolated. And we could have made it without the electricity and without the telephone service had we been a little more mobile, but we just couldn't get anywhere because of road damage, blockages, and bridges out, and this--You know, it's the things that go along with it.

MNK: What are we looking at here?

(472)

LC: This is the old Depot Bridge. The abutment's still over on that other end there, which you can see there in town. This probably was--I don't know how near the--This was not the crest, but it was getting fairly close. Water did come over the bridge. The bridge stayed, but somewhere along in the afternoon a couple of mobile homes washed in this upper side. It looked pretty desperate there for awhile. But the old bridge did withstand it. Because that had been build, I think, by the railroad back in the--And it was built, I guess, to hold a train almost. But that was some of the debris. And of course it got much worse than that. But I don't know how much--I just don't remember. That wasn't the crest, but I don't know how--Because it was almost dark when the final, when the crest came. I'm saying along five o'clock or something, 5:00, 5:30 in the evening. Of course at that time of the year, you know, the darkness comes early.

MNK: This illustrates pretty nicely how trash compacts--

LC: Oh, yes.

MNK:--and creates almost another dam.

(498)

LC: Oh, yeah. Well, you've just--That was just a fraction of the material that was on the river. I mean we had huge trees, telephone poles, light poles, all these things. You've got big barrels. My gosh, one of the, a couple of the oil company storage lots got in. You had sixty-gallon drums floating everywhere. This was one of the things that happened to us here. Our basement floor-- Of course we had a, our old press was down in the basement floor. And next door this little shop had... storage bin there. And when our--Of course their building was gone. It was block, cinder block, and it was pretty poor construction. But as we looked out the window we watched their building break down and float away. And then about this time we had a huge basement, big basement doors, just big wood doors. Of course the pressure just broke through. And we could have moved a lot of our material out of our street floor level, and it practically had no damage as far as loss of material. But when this broke down all this... and oxygen tanks. The last time I looked down in the basement where all my basement was filled with this. They were floating and electricity was still on.

(528)

And no way I could get--You know, we couldn't have turned it off. Of course it wouldn't have mattered anyhow. It was up above even our switch box shortly. So it would have made a--We had to abandon the building, you know, hours before we would have had had we not have run in to this particular thing. But there was just no way. Once that building went down next to us. We didn't know what was happening under ours either, you know. So we--

(538)

MNK: What did it feel like to be in that situation? I can't imagine what it would feel like to be in that situation.

LC: It's scary, but we could not leave our people in here. It's better to be out and get wet, you know. You take that choice.

MNK: You were afraid the building would...

(543)

LC: I was afraid the building would go too. And particularly after a couple of structures... Automobiles floating down the river, I mean it was not common at all. See, somebody'd left a car parked maybe on the curb out the way here, just see that car pick up and float away. And, you know, you don't know what's happening to your--Oh this is a strong structure, but you don't know what's happening under that water, you know, but it's that far on it. And it is, it was--Of course the rain, it was chilly, wasn't all that cold. But it was cold enough to be very uncomfortable, and we moved across and just kept going to higher ground all the time, and

stayed out until dark. And then we finally gave up the fight and went up and spent the night over at Dr. Arnold's office. Some of us would nap a little on the floor, whatever, you know, just anyway that you could get through the evening.

(564)

Everybody was basically the same boat, so to speak, because everybody had lost something. And of course the last contact that I'd had with my family was about noon. And of course they live, we live out of town, in what I had hoped was above the high water mark, but I didn't know. We'd never had anything like that before. So we had one young son, and he was only two, three years old, and of course naturally it's a source of a great concern. I had just hoped that they would go to higher ground too, and if the house went, the house went. But we were fortunate at home. And that was one of the things that I guess we felt that we were so much more fortunate than the others. We had people their business and home both. And when you left the mud downtown, you went to the mud and muck at your residence, and that would be pretty tough. I--At least after a couple of days I could go to a dry floor, and that was a real asset.

MNK: What was the crest? What was the height of the river at crest?

(590)

LC: I really don't know. I've got those figures, but I'm not much for remembering figures. But it was certainly at the all-time high. Main Street out here, not here but down in the end of the courthouse area of Main Street had about five feet of water on Main Street. In '57 I think we only had a foot or two. There was--In '57 all their lower floors were wiped out, but there was not that much damage on the street floor. In fact, some of the storefronts might have not had any water in the floor at all on the street floor level.

MNK: In '57?

(605)

LC: Right. But there was enough water--I know when I came across the Slate Creek Bridge water was already coming across the bridge. And of course the sidewalk was up a little, a few inches above the street level. But the street-- Well, I know it did get up to about the sidewalk, at least to the sidewalk level. But then in '77 it was about five feet above that. Here in this building in '57-- We weren't of course here, we moved right after that into this building.

MNK: Because of the flood?

LC: Right, yes. It became--

MNK: ...

(618)

LC: It became available, and this is one of the high spots in town. So I knew it would never get flooded here! So we moved here in the spring after the flood in '57. The building became available, and we moved into it. And of course never--We thought we were high and dry forever. And it just didn't work out that way. But our basement here in '57 had four or five feet of water in the basement. In '77 we had the basement completely filled and about two feet of water on our street floor. So there was a sizable difference.

MNK: You gave such a vivid description of how the water came. First you were fighting to keep it out from under the doors.

(636)

LC: I think people that had never been through a flood--This--It's your first reaction. You know, if you have a water line break at home, the first thing you start doing is trying to protect something there. And if you put--This was the thing with us. You know, we'd never seen anything like that. So what we're trying to do is keep that little water out. And we worked hard, you know, trying to do that. And it just, in a matter of, you know, probably less than an hour, it just overwhelmed. And once it started it just came up so rapidly. Once it got to that point it just jumped up. We worked in the place until, what, we were probably water above our waist trying to move things around. And finally you get so tired, you know, you're fighting that all the time and you just finally get so tired you get to the danger stage. So we finally had to leave.

MNK: And how did the '77 compare with that in the speed it came up?

(663)

LC: I don't know whether it was any faster or not, but it was a similar thing. I--Say mid-morning, '77, or late in the beginning of, toward late morning. I thought we were in for a '57-type flood, which we could have handled all right. You know, we weren't all that worried about it. And so--But as the day, an hour or two went by, that just, you know, it just kept--You know, you're still sitting... here knowing that that's as far as it's going to go. It's not going to get any higher than that. The next time you look it's a foot higher, and a foot higher, and the next thing you look it's coming down the street out here from the old hospital location. Water has already come over about the Hoot Owl Bridge. It's already turned down the street. So it's just a matter of--My gosh, you just can't believe until it's right at your doorstep. And there's a--We—I think we managed to do it without panic, but I don't know that we would have if we hadn't had the prior experience. It's easy to panic in a situation like that.

(697)

MNK: And then you're wondering, I suppose, you're trying to picture what's going on in the rest of the town.

LC: You don't know what's--You know, you can, we can go down to just beyond Virginia Funeral Home, and all you could do is just see a lake.

(Side Two)

LC: Stayed in town and moved to the upper floors, I don't know how many people actually—I think there's a few people stayed in the courthouse, but I'm not sure. But anybody that had an automobile, there was no place you could park. I don't know how many automobiles were lost, because there was just--Anybody that had left one that day, you know, a good, safe place, it was not safe. And all of your--The high points along the road were all taken. My gosh, everybody moved everything they could to those high points. And this was, I guess, the reason I want to see 460, something done with, because you don't-- You can't appreciate just having a half mile of road out of the river, how much that'd be worth to you, how much material you could salvage that way. But we didn't have that. Everything up in here was covered up with automobiles.

(012)

People just rolled up on those hills just as far as they could get. And you just left them, you know. But--It just--You know, just no way really to describe it unless your [sic] into it. You got-- I guess this is the thing about it. You're so busy that you don't have time to think too much about it, you got so many things that you're trying to do. But the biggest--That was my toughest decision, knowing that I, that even at almost at that time I still didn't think we were going to get water on, you know, on our main floor. I still didn't think that was going to happen. But when-- But we--And we could have done so much, because we had a full crew here. But you just could not leave them in the building when so many things started happening. I just could not leave them in here. And it would have made a big difference in our own case, had we been able to, kept people, moved a lot of things. We were fortunate having this upper floor, but if the building withstood, then we would have at least have, we could move a lot of things onto this level.

MNK: Now what was--Talk a little bit about the aftermath of the flood. Does the community get severely depressed at a time like that or do people rally or--

(030)

LC: This was a, has always been a rallying community. Of course it was-- There's no question that the--Maybe it speeded up some of the decline in maybe the downtown business are. We had some stores that never reopened. Not a lot, but we had a few that never did. They probably wouldn't have stayed in business for maybe another year, or two, or three anyway. But, you know, we don't know that. But it did have a devastating effect there. Of course in our business,

not so much that we had suffered such physical damage ourselves, but our market was gone. We had no--All of our customers were out of the, you know--

(040)

Who's going to advertise, you know, if his store's been washed away. So this was the--That was the hurt that was put on us, it was an economic indirectly caused, but it was not our own loss, it was our neighbors' loss that had such an effect on our business. And I don't even remember how much. I mean we only did a fraction of the business, or income, or gross income that year as we had done the year before, for instance. Because, my gosh, we had some business that were easily out a month or more. Like food stores, for instance, they had--Their entire inventory had to go. We had a store like Magic Mart up the way here. They had four or five feet of water in their place.

(050)

So they were one of our best customers. Food City didn't actually get damage into their retail space, but all their merchandise, all their storage was wiped out underneath. And this just was repeated time, after time, after time. Our customer base was too busy cleaning up the aftermath to worry about trying to sell something, you know. That was just the type of situation we were in. So it took weeks, and weeks, and weeks to get over that.

MNK: Let's see. Was FEMA in the picture yet?

(058)

LC: Yeah, they were in the picture, but they came--I don't know exactly when they came in, probably within, I'm sure within days. But you had--You know, they had nothing that you could do immediately. I mean you got to go through a process. They didn't come with a pocketful of cash, you know!

MNK: ...

(063)

LC: Yeah, that's what they needed. That's what people think that you're going to get. It's just not that way, you know. Red Cross came in and did a lot. As far as--And I'm sure a lot of families benefited a lot from this, because we had a lot of residents, mobile homes and... who were just completely destroyed. And they did--There was quite an effort through the region. We had lots of distribution of not only clothing and blankets, fuel, this type of thing, you know. This was--The--Of course the--What am I trying--The Corps--Not the--The National Guard, I guess, were here the next day. But it was a show more than anything. I mean it was nothing. They left after a

couple of days because they didn't have the type of services, you know. We didn't have any old ladies that needed to be carried across the swinging bridge and so forth.

MNK: And they weren't about to pick up shovels and start shoveling.

(078)

LC: No, they--The last time I saw a group of them, they were gathered around the barrel in the courthouse square, had a big fire in it and everybody was warming his hands, you know, and standing in mud up to your ankles. So it seems to me like, you know, picking up a shovel and bringing in a couple pieces of equipment, that's what we needed. And that didn't, of course didn't happen. That's what one of my brothers called--He finally got in here about a day later, says, "What can I do? What do you--" He was still thinking of we need food, we need this. And I said, "No, we need a sump pump, and we need gasoline." All our gasoline was... You know, they couldn't pump gas, had no electricity. And we need a generator. We need things like this. We're beyond the donut stage, that's just not where it is. We need water. We need fresh water. And we need gasoline. We need pumps, and we need generators. And we'll make it if we get those things.

(092)

MNK: ... Have you got any questions?

Tim Potter: No. I mean he's covered the ground...

MNK: This is great. Who was the old mayor at the time? I saw this old picture of this old bearded man.

(095)

LC: That was before. The flood was before his time. I believe the mayor in '77 was Barbara Berry. She was a doctor's wife and got, had been on the town council and such. And she is deceased now. In fact, they, the family doesn't live here anymore. But they lived out here, just out on the hill out there, in one of those houses. And she was very active in it, of course, in the follow up. And of course you had some to try to get the thing organized. Of course state police sent in a lot of people very shortly thereafter and they more or less-- You--Of course they had a—

(105)

Well, it was for all of us who were trying to get back and forth to clean, to do our work, it was a bit of a nuisance, you know, to get in a traffic line maybe for a mile. And most of them get turned away. But you--But they had to do something. You got to keep curiosity seekers out, because, you now, a couple three days afterwards when we pulled everything out of here the

street was a constant line, just people out looking. They weren't doing anything, wasn't helping anything, just creating a nuisance, you know, by having the roadways filled. But this goes with the territory. It's going to happen every time. But we found that it was a rallying thing with most of the townspeople. If you had any goodness in you, came out at that time. And people were very free with their property.

(119)

You borrow whatever you could get. Nobody worried about it, you know. That's just the way it was. We would--We went through--Naturally there's a run on all of these things, shovels and squeegees. How many squeegees are you going to stock in a town like this, you know. And we made a lot of those things ourselves. We'd take rubber matting and cut up, because you can't, you don't know how many times it takes to get a floor clean after it's been covered with mud. You can wash it down, it looks pretty good. When it dries you don't think you've ever been there, you know, you just go over it time, and time after time. And of course you got to go around a lot of things. Anything that you can put on the back burner, you got to put on the back burner. And-- But we were fortunate and, as I said, the power company--We were one of the first places that they, you know, restored electricity. Telephone company did too.

(132)

They were very helpful. They did all they could do. They just had so much to do that there's no way that--But I think we got electricity in, maybe in three or four days. I'm not sure, but it wasn't, it certainly was not a long time for everything to be in a state of chaos like it was.

MNK: Let's tum to the future and to this concept of a new town up on the-- Where is it?

(140)

LC: Well, it's just really across the river, see, in the old, what we call the old depot area. The plan is to... to move the Norfolk and Southern tracks back, cut into the, that--It's a long horseshoe turn there, and to move the tracks back--I don't know. I've heard the figure, but I don't remember, maybe two, three hundred feet straight back. And then of course you're going to have a lot of material. And I would imagine that whole area would be built up to some extent. Then of course starting about here most everything on the left side would be taken out. The highway would be constructed so as to provide a buffer zone for the courthouse and Walnut Street area. And then you--Of course naturally there's been a lot of exaggeration about it. The national news media gets a hold of it, they put their own spin on it. It's--Really what we're, you know, we'd be basically moving a short block down in--And it's all low lying.

(155)

None of it's as high as this building is here, but the level would come off, say about this high point out here. Then of course the roadway would help as a dike for the right-hand side of town. Then the part that's built on the riverbank would be, of course, moved across and I'm sure elevated to some degree on the other side. And of course it would be connected with another bridge or two. And it--There's no perfect plan, of course. I mean it's not perfect, and there's no way to do one. And there's no way that you can do one that's not going to have some adverse effects on some people. No question about there's some people going to be paid for their property, and they're going to put it in their pocket and go run. That's just the way that the life is, but that doesn't mean that people won't come back, and won't rebuild, and won't set up businesses.

(168)

I think as long as we have any local economy, you're going to find that happening. And I've got some reservations, but there's no question, it's going to be a lot of disruption. There's going to be some people displaced. We're going to lose some people, no question about that. In the start-up phases, we will lose some residents. And of course we can ill afford to lose any residents. We're already losing population, and it will happen. But I think if we could, this concept will prove out, then we will get some people back. Maybe different people, but we will get some people back. And it could be a, tum into a model town, you know, if all of it falls into place. But it's--We got several years that we're going to have to deal with it, because there will be some considerable disruption.

MNK: In what sense will it be a model town?

(183)

LC: Well, first of all, you--By the--At least what I have seen by the landscaping and the new structures--You know, after all the block that we're talking about, the primary block is, every building there is probably more than fifty years old. And they were built--They're not the greatest structures in the world. They were all built with fronts and a gaudy back that's evident for anybody to see. With the flood ordinance that's in place now, there's very little that can be done as far as expenditures. Even if the owner wanted to do it, there's not a great lot that they can do. So we're going to have it that way unless we--I think it just outweighs--The positives outweigh the negatives, and I think that when you consider everything, I think it is the best way to go.

MNK: It will certainly change the character.

(198)

LC: Change the character of the town, and what it will--The character of the town is going to change one way or the other whether this project happens or doesn't happen. It will bring that change around more rapidly, and we will...to keep it from dragging on for twenty-five or thirty years. It could happen in a period of five, or six, or seven years. And I think that in itself will be an asset.

MNK: What is the alternative? You said that it's going to change anyway. You think it's going to get washed away eventually or--

(207)

LC: Oh, you're never going to stop the river. I mean it's going to--But you got--The town is going to rebuild itself outside the town. If you just look up with this new portion of 460, it's just been completed. Almost every available lot has another structure going up on it. So I think you'll continue to see that. You'll continue see it going up Slate Creek. And you'll continue to see growth out this way.

(214)

Some down the way. For some reason down on the west end just doesn't seem to be as popular a business climate as it is back this way. So there are several pieces of property, say between, not several but a couple pieces of property from the Royal City area up to Little... Bridge. But I think if something is not done downtown, you're going to see some downtown buildings go on that property in the very near future. And probably anyway. They'll probably do it anyway. But that's good for all of us, you know. I we get some growth, great.

MNK: What about an interstate-size road going right through this narrow, tiny, little valley? What's that--

(225)

LC: Well, first of all, and of course this has been--This is what I've said from the beginning, you got an inferior four-lane road coming into the east end of town. You got an inferior four-lane road going out of town, why build an interstate through town. Seems to me like let's just keep an inferior four-lane road going all the way through and not take every piece of property that there is there. It can be done by just widening for--I'd say two-thirds of the distance can be done by widening what you already have. And I don't know that getting to the corporation limits in any town I've ever been don't mean speed up, that you got wide-open traffic from here to there. So I--As long as you got the four lane going through, all you have to do is go out on the east end of town and drive up 460 or drive down, because it's going to join the four lane that's already in existence down there, so--I mean why get too excited about building limited access or anything through the town itself. Keep the four lane basically like it is, or like it is on either end.

MNK: That'll provide lots of access?

(243)

LC: Lots of access. You're going to have to have the access. It don't have to be as much as it is now. There are going to be sections of it that will be very limited, just in the nature of the project, if it goes the way we, the plan or tentative plans that I have seen. There are going to be portions of it, of course, will lend itself to limited access without you having to even say that, particularly in the, say from the Hoot Owl Bridge area if they move up on the hill, go in behind, which, you know--And I'm sure that is the plan now because where the new Comfort Inn and Grundy National Bank and such, that will all be new location. And that in itself is an asset, you know. That's all going to be out of what we'd normally would consider the main line area. So it's not that it's going to be--It's going to cause some people certainly more problems, but I think it is the best way. If our building's taken, we'll find another place. I mean I still think the pros of the plan far outnumber the negative aspect.

(262)

MNK: So you do not envision a screaming four-lane road right down in the middle...

LC: No.

MNK: ...seventy miles an hour...

LC: No, I don't envision that.

MNK: Well, that's a relief [sic].

LC: I envision a thirty-five mile zone from one end to the other.

MNK: ...

(266)

LC: Maybe it was, maybe forty-five. But I'd say with certainty that you're going to have as much thirty-five as you do forty-five, because after all, you're going to be passing in front of the courthouse, and just to turn off to the law school, and turn across two bridges to get over to your business, other business area. So you're not going handle traffic running through there seventy miles an hour. And I'm sure that when this is all completed there's going to be some... parking provided, some open lots, maybe some small park areas that are, would add a lot to the appearance of the community, no question about that. So I think it's got a lot of possibilities, and I'm not that concerned about the superhighway aspect of it. I don't think that's going to happen. I mean why didn't they build it coming into town if you're going to go this direction. It just doesn't

make any sense at all to have one section that's interstate standard, you know. It's probably a mile and a half. And I don't believe that will happen. I don't think VDOT will even consider something like that.

MNK:... I wasn't clear about that.

(286)

LC: Have you been up to the upper end yet, up... Royal City going out area? Just when you're out that way just look at the width of the four lane portion compared to the road going through Royal City section. It's just not that much wider.

(291)

MNK: Well this certainly gives us everything we need and a great deal more. Oh, i [sic] wanted to ask about the rest of these pictures. This is called the "Morning After."

LC: Yeah, this was--

MNK: ...

(294)

LC: Right, this is the morning after, as you can see. Here there was a building. You can see where it connected onto our building. There was a shop here, a cinder block structure. And it just broke up and washed away. These are the-- This is the doorway that I was talking about where the... and oxygen all floated in. And that, I'm sure, was early that next morning. I can't say exactly when. I think you can still see some puddles of water around here. This was probably--

(303)

MNK: This is called "A Couple of Hours Before Crest."

LC: Yeah, and we were running out of daylight. So about the time the crest came our visibility had gotten to the point--The water actually got to about here, just about this sign here.

MNK: ... What does it say here?

(308)

LC: It's a parts and service. This lab, of course, is still intact up there. In fact, I believe this is still painted like this. It's just next door there on the other side. But the reason I didn't get anything at crest, darkness had already started settling in, and there was just no way I could photograph it.

But that I have no--I don't--I just don't remember. I would imagine that was shot somewhere three or four o'clock in the afternoon probably. And--

MNK: This one?

(317)

LC: This is out of Grundy. This is what, was at the mouth of Little Crater. That's one of the streams that comes into the Levisa, a couple, well, just about a mile above the town limits on the east end of town. And you can just see there what devastation took place. And of course I'm sure a lot of the problem was there. The river was already at such a height that there was no place for the water to go, so I'm sure a lot of that damage was probably caused by just backwater. Of course that's a low-lying area there. But you can just see what kind of damage that it can do to--

MNK: Undermining the whole...

(330)

LC: Oh, yeah. I have others and, you know, maybe I can pull them. When we can get an opportunity, I'll try to pull a few more prints and have them available for you.

MNK: Well, this is great. Thank you very much. Could you--Do you know other people around town who would have exceptional stories, as you do, to tell?

(336)

LC: Well, I don't know. I'm probably a little more long winded than most! One of the fellows that has gone through is a businessman in town. He's on the task force, a fellow, Gene Cecil. Gene has gone--He was a merchant downtown. He's out at Williams Insurance now at...But Gene had a department store right downtown during both of these floods. So he knows them very well. And he's been on the Town Council. He's been mayor. And he's had his share of flooding. He would be good.

MNK: Any women that you...

LC: Well, I don't know so much that were, would have been in business, that would have experienced both of them. We've had--You know, there's been a lot of turnover in the time. The Trivetts, they've been through both. And--

MNK: They gave us a good interview yesterday.

(353)

LC: Okay. They've been--And they had flooding at home too. So they certainly would be there. Let me just think a minute. Gosh, I can't remember up, this residential area here. So many of those people that are not going to get moved or passed away in the meantime. Just trying to think of another merchant that was still, maybe still around. Hmm. So many of those downtown stores have come and gone, particularly after '77. A lot of those people have, of course that were in business are deceased now that would have experienced both floods. Have you talked to John Fleenor? John's at the--

MNK: ...

(370)

LC: --flower shop. John, of course, had--He went through both. The Trivetts. Gene Cecil. I'm just trying to think of people that I know went through, that have direct involvement in the thing. And I don't know. I guess you talked-- Have you talked to Roger? Roger Powers was around through both of them. He's on the Town Council. Roger would be--He's associated with Jackson Hardware, his family. He probably had a--He had a store over there, maybe in--I don't know whether—I can't remember. It was close to that. He might have not gone in until after '57.

(383)

But he had a men's store over on that end of town there. Trivett's. In fact, it's just beside of Trivett's. But Roger was here through, I'm sure through--Well, he might have been in the service in '57. But anyway, the family had a lot of involvement. Earl Dillinger. You talk to Earl and Dorothy? They're in the automobile business out at--They had the Buick and... sales. Earl's got some age on him, but he's still very, you know, I'm sure he could give you some insight, because they had a lot of damage at their place. And they lost a house during the '57, I believe. Maybe '77. One or the other, I know they lost their house. So that would be a good source.

(398)

Most everybody else along the way up there has changed. You know, there's been a change. There are new people, or they were, for one reason or other, weren't around at the time. But most of that you'll find through the Royal City area. I just can't really think of anybody that is still there that would have experienced at least both of the floods. I can't really think of anybody that much that even was there in '77 that were so involved with it. There was a supermarket there where Advanced Auto Parts, but they, of course, they're--

They got....They're owned by another group, a group out of town, and the managers, of course, are not people who were there then. The downtown area is the best bet. And I'm sure people like the Trivetts probably could refer you to a couple other places. Just like the Ford place, that's all

gone now. There was a big Ford dealership just on down where the community college operates a satellite campus from. And they were, you know, suffered just tremendous damage. But they're all--I don't think there's any of them still--If there's any of them still here, they're not--There's nobody still here, but there might be-- Ms. Smith might still be alive. She is, but she's moved over in the Avingdon area here in the last couple of years. So there was just lots--Thurman Boyd. Have you talked to Thurman? (427)

MNK: ...

LC: Thurman is a, will be a good source. That's probably--

MNK: That gives us plenty to go on. (430)

LC: Yeah, I think that's all of... That gets you a couple people out in the Royal City area. Royal City never, except for a couple of places, never had the physical damage that you had downtown. It doesn't mean that when you get out in a lot of other areas--Even below Grundy there was extensive damage, but it was mostly residential property. The Loony's Creek area was hard hit in '77. Maybe less so at ... I don't believe they hardly had the damage that...

MNK: ... Loony's Creek...

(441)

LC: Loony's Creek had a lot of damage at Loony's Creek area. And it, that's all heavily populated. There was a lot of mobile home. There was a sizable mobile home park there right at the mouth of Loony's Creek, which was fairly low-lying area. And there was several places down through there that the river was into the highway. Oh, I don't know what we... radio center down there, but I guess most of those houses had water on both sides of the road, didn't they? Because it's a pretty low-lying area. But, here again, most of this is residential property, and, you know, people come and go. So I can't say how many of these people still live there.

(456)

MNK: Finally, what has been your, the town's, not your personal response, but what has been the town's experience in dealing with these planning agencies? One of them is a federal agency, one of them is a state agency.

LC: On this--The present--

MNK: On the whole flood plan.

(461)

LC: Well, I guess probably got put on the back burner several years ago. And I'm sure the Corps was tied up on other projects. And, let's face it, West Virginia and Kentucky had better politics than we did, so their people got onto it quicker. We were--In the legislation that came down, it always been my understanding that we were included at the same time as Matewan, and Williamson, and maybe Pikeville, Kentucky. All those projects have all been finished, and this one was never started.

(474)

One of the things of course happened, I guess the core reason that this thing has never started because the funding. Nothing had been done. And then when the funding formula changed it just--You know, when you have to come up with twenty-five percent local money, it just more or less killed the project. And I think that's the way everybody ... It wasn't that it was anybody's fault. The town probably would have jumped on it much earlier, but they had no way coming up with this kind of money.

MNK: What are we talking about here?

(484)

LC: I think twenty-five, thirty million dollars maybe. And there's just--This town just can't come up with that kind of money. And this was where this coalition came about. The State, of course, is, had the road--The State has been mandated, at least that's my understanding, to four lane U.S. 460 to the Kentucky line. And of course this has been a holdup, and this really is the last section of 460 from here to Virginia, or to Norfolk that's not four lane. So it probably--That had something. But here again, the local sentiment naturally we never--We'd pretty much given up that...ever be anything happen with flood control. I mean that--You know, it's just almost accepted. But we had high hopes that 460 would bypass the town maybe over across the railroad, and that's what we--You know, I think that would be a general sentiment that it was an expensive project, there was plenty of other places to spend the money, and it just never got pulled out to a top priority. And of course this, bringing this thing together has, you know, activated it all again. And it looks like it is feasible all of a sudden, which a couple of years ago it wasn't. So times, they do change.

MNK: How did that coalition come about? How was it--

(515)

LC: I don't know exactly. I don't know exactly who brought them together. I'd been told that probably Delegate McLaughlin might have started, thought of, you know, come up with--He was on the Transportation--In fact, I think he was chairman of the committee that, you know, was in the House of Delegates that was directly responsible for, or at least the Transportation

Department's directly responsible too. And of course I'm sure he had certain clout. And then Congressman Boucher (?sp.) has gotten, certainly gotten active in it here in the last couple of years. So I think--Of course he's not--McLaughlin's not around anymore. But once it started to-- And, yeah, they had at least one or maybe more public hearings a year or two ago to say we've entered into this joint venture. And of course I'm sure that, me included, we didn't take it too seriously at the time.

MNK: You heard it before.

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LC: I've heard a lot of it before and--But it looked--In fact, just in the last several months is the only time that it actually has appeared that it just might go. And if it doesn't then, as far as the road, I have no idea what will happen there. I probably won't be around to find out! It's just one of those things. But we're hopeful that something might continue on it.