

Nicole Musgrave: So, we are recording now. This is Nicole Musgrave. It is April 25th, 2023. I am here with George Gibson. We are at his home in Knott County, Kentucky. I guess, just to get started, can you say your name, and tell me a little bit about who you are?

George Gibson: My name is George Gibson. I was born in 1938 on this farm where we are now. Been a lot of different places. Been in business in two or three different states. Have a home in North Carolina currently. Stayed there part time, and then I come over to this farm once in a while. My father and grandfather bought this farm a hundred years ago. They took a note back for \$2,000. They traded the store they had opened at a coal camp over in Letcher County for the farm, and then took a note back for \$2,000. They paid that note off by buying pigs in the lower end of Knott County and taking those pigs on a wagon to the coal camps and up around Jenkins and selling them for \$2.50. So, this farm's been in the family quite a while.

NM: Tell me a little bit about what it was like growing up here.

GG: When I grew up here, the roads were mostly in the creeks. My father had a – when he bought this farm, he had a water ground mill to grind corn into mill. It washed out in the flood of [19]27, then he had an eight-mile engine operating the grindstones. I remember when I was a boy, people coming to his country grocery store, he had a grocery store and a mill. They would typically ride horses or mules or walk. As I said, most of the roads were in the creeks. Mail was carried on horseback here until sometime in the 1960s. So, it was a pretty rural area.

NM: What was the name of your father's store?

GG: Mallie Gibson Grocery.

NM: Where exactly was it located?

GG: It was located at the confluence of Big Doubles, Little Doubles, and Buffalo Creeks. We are currently on Little Doubles Creek. The first creek to the left of us is Big Doubles, and the one on the other side is Buffalo Creek. Not known as Buffalo Creek today, but that's what we knew it as a boy. Now, Burgeys Creek is Road 1410.

NM: Do you have memories about growing up around the country store? I imagine it was a vibrant place.

GG: It was a meeting place for people in the community. The country grocery stores were centers of their communities at one time. I remember James Steele, the writer, telling me that after World War II, he couldn't do anything. He just felt powerless and helpless. He went to see an old general practitioner in Lexington and he said, "You need to socialize." So, he started coming up to my father's grocery store to socialize with people. He said my dad told him, "If you want to hang around here, you need to learn how to chew tobacco, spit, and tell lies."

NM: Did he?

GG: Well, he kept a little notebook in his pocket. He didn't talk a lot, but occasionally he'd

make a note.

NM: What did you do for fun as a kid?

GG: Played basketball, rambled around the mountains, picked a couple berries on top of the mountains, picked raspberries and blackberries for my mother to can, make jam, played with my buddies on the mountainsides, worked in the garden, worked in the fields with my father.

NM: How did your mother spend her time?

GG: She was a very busy lady. She had nine children. There's two still living. I have a sister living in Louisville. Of course, she was busy cooking. Of course, the gardening was always left to the mother. The father would plow the garden. The children would help with the garden. So, I helped my mother in the garden. She canned things. We dug a hole in the ground to put potatoes in for the winter. We'd cover it with straw, and then a piece of tin or whatever. Then during the winter, we'd get potatoes out. Although we had a country grocery store, the only thing we used from the store was staples really because we canned most of the stuff we ate during the winter. We raised corn. I always kept a couple of mules or a horse or two.

NM: Your father's store, I am curious, what communities did that serve? Where do people come from to shop?

GG: Mostly from Little Doubles Creek, Big Doubles Creek, Buffalo Creek, and the whole thing was Burgeys Creek, which is now Road 1410. So, it was within two or three miles. Because if you went about three or four miles across the mountain into Letcher County, you were in Colson. There was a country grocery store over there.

NM: I guess, I am curious if you could tell me a little bit of what you remember of the area that is the lake area now, and what those communities were like when you were growing up.

GG: I'll start on the Carr Creek, the end of the lake. At the headwaters of the lake was the Littcarr Post Office, and Aster Amburgey had a store there. Then down in the big bend where you go across a bridge at the upper end of the lake was Stampertown. That's where the Stampers lived. They had several old log homes over there. When I was a boy, we lived near there, near the Stampers. They had several big bottoms where they raised – I remember they raised peanuts. I'd never seen that before, among other things. They were skilled farmers. Then Aster Amburgey's store was there, and then also right at the mouth of this creek, Burgeys Creek or Little Doubles Creek, was the old Carr Baptist Church. It was one of the oldest churches in the region. It was a huge wooden building with horizontal siding on it. They had church there once a month. That was a big social event. A lot of people went to church, even the gamblers went. They'd get up on the hill and gamble. They'd meet at the church. I remember two brothers that went to – they would tear a cigarette paper in half and roll a cigarette. I asked them why they did that, and one brother said, "Well, we smoked this tobacco that wasn't very good. But the best was Prince Albert, so we wanted it to last. So, we smoked Prince Albert when we went to church." Of course, one of the stories I remember about that church was a member of the community that was not noted for being truthful. Another member of the community was noted

for drinking a little bit. So, the guy that was not noted for being truthful was baptized. He came up in the middle of winter. They had to break the ice. So, he came up shivering and shaking. The guy who was known for drinking said, "Hey, are you cold?" The fellow said, "No. The glory of the good Lord is with me." The drinker said, "Put him under again. He hasn't quit lying yet."

NM: [laughter] That is a good one.

GG: That's one of the stories I remember about the church. It's long gone, of course. Going on down the creek, you had James Francis' farm. He went to Arkansas for his health in his forties, but he lived to be, I think, 102. He was driving an A-model car when I was a boy. He actually dated two little sisters at that time when he was about eighty-five or ninety, and they were fourteen or fifteen. He had a couple of children by those girls. I do remember he was down at Aster Amburgey's store having his car filled up with gas. The guy who was operating the pump looked in and saw one of those young girls and said, "James, isn't she a little young for you?" Uncle James said, "Why? No. I reckon she's thirteen." That was a long time ago. So, going on down the creek past the Francis Amburgey farm, you had some Amburgeys that lived across the creek, then you had some another family or two or three. You got down to Cody, you got the store of (Laird Watts?). He had a sort of like a department store. He carried about just about everything. It was a big country store. He had clothes and whatnot. (Gidd Frazier?) had a little store down in Cody, and that's where all the creeks come together, Breeding's Creek and Carr Creek. Then going up Carr Creek, up Breeding's Creek, I'll start at the head of the lake. My grandfather lived right in front of the hollow that's now known as the Pioneer Village Hollow. He had a store next to the road. He had a big lawn and his house set back up. He had a store there and that was the dividing line between Cody and Redfox, that hollow was, that came out there. Across the little hollow was a place called the Rainbow Tavern. It was one huge log place, and then several little log buildings for the people to stay in, sort of like a motel. Now, the Rainbow Tavern was built in the late [19]30s when Knott County was wet. That's the reason it was called the tavern. Because the columns that built it wanted to take advantage of the fact that he could sell liquor legally in Knott County. Of course, that didn't last very long. The bootleggers and the Baptists always united to vote down any proposition to sell liquor in the county. That was where Alan Lomax stayed in 1937. It was the reason he was at my father's country grocery store in 1937. He recorded Ambrose Deaton playing a dulcimer there, and also my friend, Ken Craft. But for some reason the Ken Craft recording was either lost or they believe they were all recorded by Ambrose Deaton. But that was in 1937 when he stayed there. Going on down the river, we get down to the junction. There was a large store. Then the road that's on the opposite side of the creek from us going down, you went down to Kellytown. There was a wide place in the road. They put a little bench there and a little barrel, and they put a sign on it that said, "Little Barrel." Sam Stamper was riding down with James Steele and someone else, and he saw that. He said, "Little Barrel, Little Barrel, hell, this has been Kellytown ever since I was a boy." But Kellytown was on the right. At one time, when Knott County was wet, they had a tavern there that was called the Blinky Moon. People called it the Blinky Moon. I was down in Vicco once, the first little town in Perry County from here. This fellow slid in the seat beside me, and his eyes were crossed. He looked at me, and he said, "Son, do you know why my eyes are crossed?" I said, "No." He said, "Your uncle hit me between the eyes with a .45 up at the Blinky Moon." He said, "Well, I didn't hold a grudge." I was buying moonshine

from him two or three weeks later. I said, "Who was that?" He said, "Tennessee Slimp." That was my uncle, Cullen Morton. So, that was Kellytown. Then going on down, you had a huge store in Smithboro. Don't remember who owned the store. It was a big country store. Behind that store was – we called Big Smith Branch that went next to Red Oak Mountain. Quite a few families lived up in there. Then you had the Cornett Hill where you had to go up the mountain and around a big curve, and then down to Sassafras and then to Vicco. That was below the dam, Sassafras Forest. The dam was right at Cornett Hill. It covered all this area. Do you have any questions?

NM: [laughter] Gosh. I am just soaking it all in. Well, I have got a lot of questions, I guess. But one thing that is standing out is the Stampers growing peanuts. What did that look like?

GG: Well, I'd never seen them before. They pulled them right out of the ground. I sort of imagined they might have grown on trees. But they grew a lot of things. They were very able farmers. By the way, the Stampers had an old log home that they used for square dances. I'm talking about [19]30s maybe, [19]20s and [19]30s. Because no one lived there anymore. But the name of the log home was the Blue Goose. The Blue Goose was the name of an old folks only thing around here. Actually, down in Letcher County, when you go down Route 7 to the line, there was a, at one time, was a liquor store down there called the Blue Goose.

NM: Did anybody else grow peanuts? How did they learn to grow peanuts?

GG: I don't know. But they were able farmers, the Stampers were.

NM: Is that the Stamper family that is also the fiddling family? The Stampers, the musical fiddling Stampers?

GG: No. Another family, the fiddling family was. Art Stamper was a friend of mine. His father was Hiram Stamper. He lived on the other side of the county, but he moved to Steer Fork when I was a boy. I knew Art Stamper pretty well. We both played down at Berea College one time. We were staying in the same motel, and I went to get him to go eat. I got in his room, and he said, "Well, before we go, let me play you a fiddle tune." I think about two hours later we got out to eat. He played one after the other.

NM: Just could not stop. [laughter]

GG: His father was the same way I heard.

NM: Well, you mentioned the Blue Goose, the Blinky Moon, you mentioned the church, the Old Baptist Church that met once a month, and the country stores. So, you mentioned all of those as sort of social spaces in the community. I guess, I am curious, were there any other social spaces that you have not mentioned?

GG: Well, I remember my father and mother and a few neighbors going to the Black church on Breeding's Creek on weekends when they didn't have church at the old Carr church. There was a Black church on Breeding's Creek that had some Black preachers. But they went to that church.

I think it's called the Little Dove Church. It's still around there.

NM: What was the racial makeup of the area like at that time?

GG: Well, the only Black folks in the county lived in over on Breeding's Creek. Now, if you drive up Wolfpen from the Breeding's Creek side, you get the top of the mountain. There're two cemeteries. There's a White cemetery and a little point next to it, it's a Black cemetery. I think it's a Christian family, a black Christian family cemetery. I'm pretty sure Will Christian is buried there. He was a fiddler that fiddled for dancers around southeast Kentucky around 1900, 1910. But also, you'll see the headstone there of Elisha Breeding. He came to Breeding's Creek around 1816, and he had several slaves. The creek was named after him. He freed his slaves right before the Civil War, and then Southern Brigands took him out on the field. He was in his field when he was, I believe, 1863 with his family, and they took him out and shot him. I think he was seventy-five years old.

NM: Shot him because he had freed his slaves?

GG: Yes. I stop on top of Wolfpen Mountain once in a while, check that cemetery out.

NM: You have brought up a few musicians. I know that that is obviously your wheelhouse. I am curious, what other notable musicians were from the communities around the lake?

GG: I don't know if there were any notable musicians. But at one time, in this area, in a musical family, everybody played the banjo, girls as well as boys. My father learned to play banjo when he was five years old in 1905. He learned along with his older sister. They played with a neighbor boy named Mel Amburgey. I knew Mel later in his life, and he told me that at one time they could play three hundred songs in one tuning of the banjo. They tuned it several different ways. My father probably tuned the banjo more than twelve or a dozen ways, probably fifteen or eighteen tunings. But there were lots of musicians, but they played locally, and most of the dances actually featured a long banjo player. Now, a fiddler and a banjo player were preferred together. But there was one fiddler on Wolfpen Creek named Johnny Amburgey. He went to fiddle a dance, and he had a child that was sickly and had died, while he was at that dance. He never fiddled anymore. There was a fiddler on Carr, who was a Thomas. The Thomas family had Indian ancestry. They were very dark-skinned, high cheekbones, straight black hair. He was an herb doctor, carried a little black bag. He was a fiddler. He moved out of Carr and went to Johns Creek down in Pike County. So, all the dances I heard about, and I researched this, was a long banjo player playing. They always played Hook and Line. Josiah Combs, in his book, *Folk Songs of the Southern Mountains*, said, "Hook and Line came in before the Civil War with the Black folks." But one thing people missed about this area is it wasn't just Black folks or White folks, there were a lot of in-between folks. There were a lot of folks with African American ancestry. The most musical family on the creek had, I think, ten children, maybe. They had recent African American ancestry. The one that played most often for the dances at the Buffalo School, if you saw him, he just looked African American. While his brothers and sisters looked more Indian, real dark skin, straight black hair.

NM: What was the name of that family?

GG: Amburgey, branch of the Amburgey family. Of course, the Amburgeys were original settlers on this creek. That's the reason the whole creek was called Burgeys Creek at one time. Burgey was short for Amburgey.

NM: So, when you were coming up, were there still dances happening, or is that sort of not going on?

GG: The dances in this area disappeared in the late [19]40s. I had a friend a couple years older than I described going to dances at the Buffalo School and the Big Double School. But I was twelve years old in 1950, and they sort of disappeared by 1950. Because with the one-room schools, they would have dances when they had school openings, school closings, holidays. They'd have dances and cakewalks to raise money for the school. So, they had square dances at school, but the one-room schools were closed by the – some were up in the [19]50s. So, many people were moving out. One of my earliest memories is my father moving people to Ohio or Indiana. Half the houses were empty up and down these creeks in the [19]50s. The culture collapsed in the [19]50s from a variety of reasons. The radio came in. People didn't provide their own entertainment at home. My father walked to the head of this creek when he was sixteen years old. At that time, five people lived in this creek. At the last house in the creek, where a fiddler lived, named Simon Ward. My father walked up there to play banjo with him and sing. At that time, they had a telephone system in here. When my father said he did that in 1960, and played over the telephone, I thought he had to be wrong. But then a fellow named William Aspenwall Bradley was at Highman Summer School in 1916, he walked across the hill to Carr Creek, and the first log home he stopped in, people were listening to hymns over the telephone. So, they had a telephone system that each house had to maintain their portion. If they had a couple of poles on the land, they had to maintain them. But it all disappeared in the flood of [19]27. But my father paid over the telephone with the fiddler at the head of this creek in 1960. People up and down the creek would take their phones off the hook and listen in. This was a party line system. The exchange was at the Stamper family at the mouth of the creek. They had the exchange for the telephone system.

NM: I love that. Giving concerts over the party line. [laughter] That is pretty neat.

GG: William Aspenwall Bradley wrote a book of pretty awful poetry, and he named it *Singing Carr*. Because he met so many singers on Carr Creek. People sang in their homes. They didn't have television or radio. They had to provide their own music.

NM: I know that you come from a musical family. Were there folks also singing in your home, too, growing up?

GG: Not really. My mother wasn't a singer, and my father would hum and sing. But I traded for banjo when I was twelve or fourteen years old. After I'd driven everybody crazy, he picked it up and played one day. He was a great singer. In fact, he told me one time that in the late [19]20s, someone said, "You ought to take your banjo and go to Bristol. You could make a million dollars." If he'd taken his banjo and gone to Bristol, they would have heard a good banjo player and a hell of a lot better singer than anybody that was recorded down there in [19]27. I

just went through the place. Country Music Museum down there.

NM: I have not been, but I have been wanting to check that out.

GG: Yes. You need to go. It's worth taking a – they've done a good job. Now, the last time I went, they had some things that were not quite right, and I was disappointed. But this time, they got everything straightened out. It's a great experience, and Bristol's a nice little town. I like it.

NM: Well, George, you brought up the schools, the one-room schools. So, I am curious, what was your school experience like growing up here?

GG: Well, my mother persuaded my father to move out of the hollow. So, he bought a little plot of land on the mountainside down below where the Stampers lived, right above Shingle Branch. So, hollow and went back and brought at the headwaters of the dam, and he opened a store there. So, we were close to the Carr Creek School. So, that's where I started school. Actually, I missed the first year of school. Because it was a gravel road and I had some buddies who lived down the road and I was playing and I ran out in front of an A-model. It hit me and knocked me down. I was in a depression. It ran over me, but the wheels didn't hit me. Of course, the A-model was high. So, I remember my back hurting. They took me to the hospital, but I missed a year of school. But I started at the Carr Creek Elementary School. Then my father always wanted to move back. So, he moved back to the mouth of Burgeys Creek and opened a store there. Then he finally moved all the way back and built another store up here. So, in the fourth grade, I went to the one-room school at Big Doubles. Instead of one teacher, they hung a white curtain through the middle, and they had two teachers. Lotus Alston taught the first four grades, and JD Bentley taught the second four grades. So, I was in the fourth grade. So, I'd sit there and listen to all the eighth graders, what they were doing. So, by the time I was out of fourth grade, I knew what – I'd read every book in the school. I knew what the eighth graders were studying. Actually, something interesting happened. The girls would sing. Some of the older girls, they were good singers. That's how I learned Barbara Allen and two or three other old folk songs and ballads. A couple of them were really pretty. JD had a girlfriend and Lotus Alston had a girlfriend. JD Bentley would get back in the corner with his girlfriend at lunchtime and Lotus Alston would get behind the door, and they'd shoo us all out. We had a bucket full of water and a dipper in it. We all drank from the same dipper. So, I'd run in and get a drink of water just to see what was going on, what they were doing recording. Well, they finally got to where they were walking up the creek on Saturday night. So, I'd watch for them, and they'd try to wait until it got dark. I'd run out and speak to them, let them know I knew where they were going. But they married those girls. Now, if that happened today, they'd be put under the jail. But they had pretty good marriages, actually. Now, when I went to Carr Creek High School, I had a math teacher named Mr. Hale. He asked me about them. I told him about my teachers and how they married those girls. He said, "Well, they took a page from my book." I said, "What do you mean, Mr. Hale?" He said, "My mother gave me a silver dollar every year I stayed single." But he said, "When I was thirty-six, I was teaching an Algebra class and this little girl sitting in front, I just fell in love with her and married her." He raised a family.

NM: Interesting. Times have changed, that is for sure.

[laughter]

Well, I am curious, when you mentioned that you played basketball growing up, and I know Carr Creek High School has a storied history with basketball. So, tell me about basketball in this place.

GG: Well, we'd put up a goal. We had one up at the Big Double School. I had one out from my house. We'd just play on the dirt courts. We'd go around the Wolfpen School and play. But I never played for the high school team. But that was one of our pastimes, was playing basketball.

NM: What was the team like when you were going to the school? Was it in the [19]50s that they had their state championship?

GG: In ([19]55?), they beat Hazard three times out of four. The fourth time, Hazard beat them in the regional and went on to win the state title. In ([19]56?), the year I was supposed to have graduated, Carr Creek won the state title.

NM: So, was that...

GG: There was only thirty-eight in my graduating class. What happened to me was, you had four subjects you took as a freshman, four as a sophomore, four as a junior, and four as a senior, so you had sixteen – four, eight, twelve, sixteen credits, and then you graduated. Well, I was bored, so I went to the principal and said, "Can I take an extra class?" when I was a freshman, and he allowed me to do that. So, I did the same thing when I was a sophomore. I did the same thing when I was a junior. So, I have taken five subjects each year. So, by senior year, I was taking biology, typing, and shorthand. That was all that was left. So, I was sort of bored, and for various reasons, I dropped out at the end of the first semester. Then I took...

NM: Do you want me to pause this?

GG: Yes.

NM: You were telling me about your senior year.

GG: Oh, my senior year. Well, I dropped out after the first semester, and then I took a correspondence course. But I'm not listed as a graduate of the school, although I took a correspondence course and had the number of credits to graduate. I just didn't get listed for some reason. But then I went to what was then Caney College for two years, then I went to University of Kentucky.

NM: Let me adjust my – here. Sometimes it makes a funny little sound that I have to deal with. Well, I know that other folks that I have talked with that went to Carr Creek High School, talk about it very fondly. I guess, I am curious, what was your experience there?

GG: Well, it was a good experience. Actually, it was. I sort of enjoyed it. I was bored most of the time. I do remember the semester when I was taking that correspondence course, supposedly

to graduate. I had a teacher named Gurney Adams, and he came up to see me. We lived in that log home where you came before you crossed the creek. I was sitting on the porch, and he said, "George, my wife's taking a correspondence course. It's an open book test and supervised by the principal of the school." His wife wanted to become a teacher, too, I think. He said, "There's one problem, she can't work." He said, "I want you to work it for me." I said, "Well, what's the book?" He said, "It's a business course." I said, "Well, how can I work it out? I haven't read the book." He said, "I know you can do it." So, I read the problem first, then I went to the section of the book and read a little bit of that and worked this problem for him. So, I remember that pretty well.

NM: I know the process of creating the lake was a long one. It happened over a period of time. I am curious, when did you first hear about the proposal to build the dam and the lake?

GG: I don't actually remember. I know it was floating around. Our congressional representative at that time was going to do this wonderful thing, build this lake. I heard that when they were condemning properties, they took photos of log houses that hadn't been used for years to sort of get the properties a little cheaper. A lot of older folks that moved, I also heard, died earlier than they should. Because they were living on property that had been in their family for generations. They were forced to move. It was a pretty problematic thing. They started talking about building a dam over in Letcher County. But the people over there figured out what happened here, and they got up in arms and stopped it.

NM: Do you know any more about what happened in Letcher County, how they were able to stop it?

GG: Well, they did. I don't know how you would learn about that. You could probably go in the files of the newspaper up there, the *Mountain Eagle*. You could find something about that. But they did get up in arms. They didn't want the dam. They saw what happened over here. I've never been on that lake down there. I don't like it because of the way it was done.

NM: Do you remember what some of the chatter was around the community when it was starting to take shape?

GG: Yes. There was talk about the lake and how it was going to be a great thing. Of course, the people who lived down there didn't think it was going to be a great thing. They moved a lot of people out. In fact, one of the oldest homes in the area was a Stamper – there was another name. I'd stayed in that log home when I was a boy. Ray Stamper's a friend of mine, about my age. I went to school with him. He was an only child. He lived in that old log home. It was one of the first log homes built on Carr Creek and just a beautiful place. Huge logs, big kitchen, big fireplace that had been bricked up when coal came in. But it was reasonably big enough to put a six-foot log in it. Just a beautiful place. They had to move. That was traumatic moving. I remember how it was for them, searching for a place to buy, or a house to buy, or a plot of land to buy where they could build something. That log home, by the way, got donated to LKLP. Now, in my opinion, LKLP, when it started, was a criminal organization. Because I know some of the things that they did that weren't very nice. The man that run it was, in my estimation, a criminal. They gave that log home to LKLP, and they put it up in the Pioneer Village Hollow

and soon screwed it up. I worked with my friend Ray Stamper, he's dead now, when they were – LKLP gave it to the county. The county let the old Johnson Log Home deteriorate and fall to the ground. Now the oldest log home in this area, I would say the oldest log home in East Kentucky was the Johnson home down at Cody, but it's underwater now. It was a tavern during the Civil War, by the way. It was donated to LKLP. They let it deteriorate, gave it to the county, and it fell to the ground rotted, the oldest log home in East Kentucky. There was a log schoolhouse on Hales Branch on Breeding's Creek that I wanted. The family that owned it, the husband and wife, the wife was a cousin, and they said, "Well, we promised it to LKLP." So, I drove by on one of my visits, there was a bunch of logs lying on the ground. Next time I came, they were just gone. If you keep these logs in the dryer, they last forever. If you dump them on the ground, they don't last long. That was the old schoolhouse. So, I asked the guy who ran LKLP at that time, "What were the –" "Oh, that was the old schoolhouse." "Well, why did you dump them on the ground?" "Well, we had the money to move it, but we didn't have the money to put it up." I said, "You dumped it out on the ground. You didn't put it off the ground and put cover over it." They didn't care. That's probably the last log schoolhouse in Knott County gone because of LKLP.

NM: Gosh, that is a shame. That is disappointing.

GG: The oldest log home in East Kentucky deteriorated and gone because of LKLP.

NM: I can understand not having a favorable opinion of them after all that. That would be tough. You mentioned your friend, your Stamper friend and his family having to move. Did you have other family that had to move because of the lake?

GG: I didn't have any. Well, by that time, my grandfather died in 1963, so we took his property. My dad owned it at that time, and he owned Pioneer Village Hollow at that time which he sold to LKLP. By the way, the Stamper Home is now down at Leatherwood. They've got a place down there where they've got some old – do a Civil War reenactment. So, I worked with Ray to give it to them. So, they moved it down there and put it back up and we went down and showed them how that was put up originally. So, it's still down there.

NM: Does it look pretty good by your estimation?

GG: Yes. They did a decent job.

NM: I guess, I am curious, what was the explanation for why the dam and lake were being built here?

GG: Well, recreation, it was going to be a benefit for East Kentucky. Our congressman was gung-ho to get it done. You had the boosters wanting it done, who didn't live there. The people who lived there didn't want it done, but they didn't have a say in it when it came down to it.

NM: Why do you think they chose that area?

GG: Well, because Cornett Hill area, it narrows. The mountains come down pretty close. So,

it's a logical place if you wanted to build a dam to build on.

NM: I know that some people have said that the impetus for the lake was to take water off Hazard.

GG: That was, yes, I'd forgotten about that. It was supposed to be a big benefit for Hazard. They had some of the biggest floods they ever had, in fact, in Hazard, after that lake was built. It didn't do what they said it would do.

NM: I know that you mentioned your Stamper friend, the awful process of trying to find land or a home. I guess, what was that like for folks trying to find where to go?

GG: Well, it was very difficult to find a place, and then you had to build some sort of house if you found a plot of land. It was a traumatic move, people moving where they'd been for generations. I did hear that some of the older people died prematurely because of that move, and I don't doubt that.

NM: Do you think anybody got a fair deal from the government with how much they were given?

GG: Maybe, but I sort of doubt it.

NM: Were there many people that you know of that tried to fight back in terms – or push back in any way on the amounts being offered or anything?

GG: They were condemned. They went through a condemnation process if they fought back. They were offered x amount to buy the place. But if they turned it down, then they would go into condemnation proceedings.

NM: I know that Wolfpen was an area that some people were able to find spots to move. So, what was it like being from around here and seeing that sort of population shift?

GG: Well, a lot of people relocated on Wolfpen, a lot of people relocated up in the mouth of Big Carr, up through there, up Betty Troublesome. The Stamper family bought a little place at the mouth of Betty Troublesome Creek, just above the big Y, the store around there. It's a small house compared with the beautiful log home they had it was just basic. These log homes were log homes. They weren't log cabins.

NM: I have heard people describe, too, living in these communities just how tight-knit folks were and even you describing the music being shared. I guess, I am curious, were there ways that people were able to maintain their neighborly connections after this upheaval?

GG: I think I described for you what happened by the [19]50s with so many people moving out, the one-room schools closing. There was a culture crash. The culture actually crashed. I know of people who had psychological problems because of it, but they never got diagnosed as such. I know a couple of different people who went to places like Indiana and couldn't stay there, came

back, and just sat down sort of paralyzed. I know one that did seek some treatment, but that was largely flew under the radar.

NM: So, did the lake being built sort of exacerbate what was already happening then?

GG: Yes. It was just on top of everything else.

NM: What do you remember of the actual construction process? What was it like to witness that?

GG: I was probably – let's see, that was – when was it being built? Mid-[19]60s? After I left the University of Kentucky, I taught two years at the Wattsburg High School. By the mid-[19]60s, I had taught two years in Indiana and two years in Ohio, so I was gone. Basically, never came back except for visits. I lived in Indiana for a while, lived in Ohio for a while. Got a job with a big company, moved to Philadelphia, lived in Philadelphia for thirteen years, resigned from that. I still draw a little penchant from the place. Moved to Florida, lived in Florida for thirty-some years. It was a happy day in my life when I moved to Florida. But the happiest day of my life was when I moved out. So, now I have a home in North Carolina and then my home here. Of course, the log home which I was born in had water, eight or ten or twelve inches of water. It's got to be rebuilt inside.

NM: From the most recent flood?

GG: Yes. It was the only structure that had water damage.

NM: I guess, one of my ending questions is just going to be how you feel about the lake now, but I guess you already sort of answered that. You said you have never gone over there, gone down there.

GG: I haven't. I've never been on the lake.

NM: Do you have any vision for that area? What you wish it could be moving forward?

GG: Which area?

NM: I guess the lake area. I do not know. Is there anything that you wish could happen to the lake area or anything?

GG: No. I have no dreams about what could happen down there. What's done is done, and what's there is pretty much there. Some recreation, a little beach area, a little area where people go to do what they call camping. They take their televisions and their motorhomes and sit down there for a week.

NM: Well, is there anything else that I did not ask you about that you think folks should know about the communities that were there, or about the lake being built or anything?

GG: I think we covered a large part of it.

NM: Well, maybe just to wrap up, I want to get thirty seconds of the room tone. So, we can just sit here for thirty seconds, and I will just ask you one more time if there is anything else still on your mind. So, I will count off thirty seconds here. Well, anything else still on your mind?

GG: No.

NM: Well, I will sign us off. This is Nicole Musgrave speaking with George Gibson. It is April 25th, 2023. We are at his home in Knott County, Kentucky. This is for the Carr Creek Oral History Project.

[end of transcript]