

Nicole Musgrave: Sherry, so we are recording. I will go ahead and introduce us on the recording. So, this is Nicole Musgrave. I am speaking with Sherry Caudill Parks. It is May 30th, 2023. This is for the Carr Creek Oral History Project. I am calling in from Whitesburg, Kentucky. Sherry, where are you calling in from today?

Sherry Parks: North Vassalboro, Maine.

NM: So, a little ways away. [laughter]

SP: Just a little.

NM: Well, Sherry, just to get started, can you say your name and tell me a little bit about who you are?

SP: Yes. It's Sherry Parks. I was born in Big Smith Branch or Smithsboro, Kentucky where the marine is now, at the lake. I can remember before the Smithsboro was put in and places I lived in. I'm glad to give you information I can that might be helpful.

NM: Well, tell me a little bit more about your people, your family.

SP: My father was Tildon, T-I-L-D-O-N, Caudill, C-A-U-D-I-L-L. His ancestors were originally from Virginia. He was born in Letcher County. My mother was Martha Blair. She was born in Knott County. Her ancestors also came from Virginia. A big family, there's eleven siblings, only, let's see, seven left. Just a wonderful life, it was a wonderful way of living. I miss it.

NM: What did your parents do?

SP: My father was a coal miner. My mother, with eleven kids, she stayed home and had babies. She didn't work out of the home. Well, when she was younger before she married my dad, she would peddle, as she called it, some produce on the mule and go to different little towns or hollers and sell that for extra money. But other than that, she didn't work anywhere other than the home.

NM: What job did your father have in the coal mines?

SP: I'm not sure. I just know he worked in the mines. He would have to crawl in. It was before all the safety standards were set, really dangerous. He had four sons. He didn't want any of them to work in the mines. They didn't. They chose military instead. I'm not sure what his position was.

NM: You said that your mother grew up in Knott County. Is that right?

SP: Yes, she was born in Knott County. She has relatives or had relatives. Her family originally was from Perry County, the Sassafras area. Then she lived in – let me think – probably Letcher County. That's where she grew up. I was lucky to know my great-grandfather,

her grandfather. His name was Sylvester Jent . He was from Letcher County. He passed away when I was in the fourth grade.

NM: So, around the same area in one way or another, kind of close?

SP: Yes.

NM: Well, Sherry, I would love to know a little bit more about what it was like for you growing up there in Smithsboro. What are some of your early memories growing up there?

SP: Well, I can remember grades one through third, my sisters and brothers and I walked to school, a one-room school. It was the Smithsboro, I guess, Elementary School, a mile there and a mile back. When I was ten, I guess, we moved to Carr Creek. That was the first time I ever rode a bus. I was just really concerned about riding the bus and going to a bigger school. That was before the reservoir was put in. Actually, the house we moved to at Carr Creek was torn down when they started moving the house. Some, they tore down. At that time, we moved to Redfox [inaudible]. That's where I lived until I moved. But I can remember seeing houses being moved and men on top of the roofs lifting the power lines. I used to ride my bike in the creek, in front of the house in Carr Creek. I'd ride the bike until I couldn't ride it any farther because the water got too deep. I would fish. The Carr Creek High School, I don't know if you're familiar with that. We lived down in the bottom or the flat part of [inaudible] high school. The high school is still there. They didn't have to do anything with that. But I just remember it was just a wonderful life. We played in the hills. I don't really remember if the people were really upset over the building of the dam. I'm sure they were. But in high school, I actually worked for a construction company as a secretary for one summer, when they were building the dam. That was at Cody, Kentucky. I don't remember the name of the construction company. But it was big changes for people. Then I think it was for the better because of the flooding, even though it didn't help last summer. But it was just a good life. I wish everyone had the life I had when I was a child.

NM: What do you remember about living in Smithsboro? What was that community like?

SP: Well, we lived in a very wide house. Big Smith Branch was the name of the road. You go so far, and there's a fork in the road. I was born on the left fork. I was born in 1955. I'm the tenth of eleven children. I remember my grandparents, my dad's mom and dad also lived on that road close to me. Of course, like I said, walking to school. Then we moved to the other fork of the road. I probably was five or six. Lived there until we moved to Carr Creek. But it was just a real close neighborhood, I guess. Most of the neighbors were related. I have a brother that lives close to the old homeplace that we had. He still lives there. But we just played in the hills and the streams. We had to work in the garden and help with the garden. We had a milk cow. We'd always have (quarts of – my dad would have a hog and kill it in the fall when it got cold enough. We'd milk the cow for milk. We had the garden for vegetables. My mom canned dried apples and dried beans. We just lived off the land. If she bought anything, it was flour or sugar. She didn't need to buy anything. The resources were there to have what we needed. We worked. We all had a part that we had to do. I can remember standing in the chair, doing dishes. I can't remember anything else right off my older brothers. The school only went to the eighth grade,

the one-room school. Let's see. Five of my older siblings only went to the eighth grade. The four boys went into service when they were old enough to go. They went into the army branch. My older sisters stayed with maybe relatives that had someone sick in the house or maybe just stayed during the week and helped out with the household chores. It was mostly relatives that they stayed with. I can remember there was a hardware, not a hardware store, (Ambergris?) grocery at the mouth of Smith Branch or Big Smith Branch. I can remember the store. It was like a department store more or less, but you could get anything there. Also, their son and his wife had a dairy bar. It was called Paul's Frosty Freeze. That was a big, big treat if we get to go and get an ice cream, which wasn't very often. But I can remember my dad had a jeep. I don't know how we got in the jeep. Not all of us went.

NM: What sort of ice cream would you order at Paul's?

SP: Well, just vanilla. It was probably a quarter each back then. I don't know. Just a vanilla cone and that was so good. If we had ice cream at home, it was made with a crank – not electric, but a crank ice cream maker. That was maybe 4th of July. We would have watermelon and ice cream.

NM: That sounds nice. You mentioned your early memories of a one-room school. Can you tell me a little bit more about your school there?

SP: The one-room school?

NM: Yes. What was the name of it?

SP: I think it was Smithsboro, S-M-I-T-H-S-B-O-R-O, probably grade school. It was just one open room, grades one through eighth. I was in class with – it might have been with Curtis. There were four of us brothers and sisters. A lot of the students were brothers and sisters. She would start out with, it seems like the first grade. You had to be quiet and do work until she got to your class. We had our own cup. The boys would get a bucket of water out of the – I'm thinking it was like a pump that you pump, and the water would come out. You would drink out of your own cup. Either the teacher or some of the older boys would get there early in the wintertime. It was a coal stove for the heat. The bathrooms were outside, the toilets. There was one for boys and one for girls. We would play in recess and sometimes take walks behind the school in the woods. My first teacher was, I think, (Mr. Mullins?). I can't think of his first name, to be honest. The second one was (Homer Haywood?). He was the teacher when they closed the school down, and it consolidated with Carr Creek Grade School. Now, they had to close that school when the dam came through the other school. We would play in the creek. The missionary women would visit for bible study and stuff. We had a county nurse that would come and get our shots, [inaudible] shots. At the end of the week, Friday, the teacher would have a list of names who had to stay after school for paddling. I had to stay one time for talking, got a paddling. I didn't like that at all. I don't know. I can't think. We would take our lunch in a peanut butter – the peanut butter used to come in a metal or a little bit bigger than a quart size, little bucket. But sometimes, we'd talk milk and bread and set it in the creek if it was summertime. With winter, it was cold. We'd have our lunch or milk cold. It was just sitting in the creek. That's all I can remember. Maybe once a month, our dad would – the shift he worked

in the mines, we hardly see him because he worked at night. Yeah, he worked at night. Of course, he went home, we didn't see him. Then he would sleep during the day. So, maybe about once a month, he would get us a treat and drop off at the school if he got off earlier and whatever. That would be usually at noontime. We didn't get much, RC Cola. But I'm trying to think what else he brought us. But he would stop by the school and give it to us.

NM: So many sweet memories. I love hearing all that. That is so nice.

SP: One of my older sisters, her memory was so good. She could tell so many things a lot better than I can.

NM: You mentioned that you started off living over there in Smithsboro. Then you ended up moving to Carr Creek. What took you all to Carr Creek?

SP: Well, my uncle found a house, a bigger house, and a better place for us to live, I guess, or he thought it was. I'm not really sure, unless it was a better opportunity for my mom and dad and, I guess, the kids as well. It was a flat land. We lived in the head of a holler. The garden was on the side of the mountain. That was hard to tow and take care of. It was just more convenient. If I'm not mistaken, the reason that we moved, too, is because of the dam, because they were planning on closing the school we were going to. That all was in process. I think I may have been ten when we moved to Carr Creek. So, that would put me in the fourth grade. But now, the dam didn't come through until about [19]76. I think it was [19]76 because they had...

NM: I think that is right.

SP: I graduated high school in [19]73. But it was just to better us, a lot easier to get to. In the wintertime, the roads make it so bad up in the holler. You couldn't get in and out. It was just an improvement for convenience and the school. It was a great place to live. It was flat and the gardens were good. I can remember my dad – a part of it was a little bit sandy – and he raised peanuts which, that was a big treat for us. He'd roast them. I like to fish. So, I can get the creepers right in front of the house. So, I would fish in the creek every day if I could.

NM: I am so curious. You mentioned your dad raising peanuts. How did he learn to raise peanuts?

SP: I have no idea.

NM: [laughter]

SP: I don't know. He also raised sweet potatoes, sweeps as he called them. People all in the community would come and buy them off of him. He would start to plant. Then when it's time to plant the garden, they'd come and buy the sweet potato plants off of him. Cantaloupes, stuff, I guess, we had been able to raise where we lived. I can't remember where he would – now, my older sister if she was here, she could remember how he found out about that and that he could raise them. He knew the soil needed to be sandy, I think.

NM: Do you know, was that something that a lot of folks in the area did? Were there a lot of people that raised peanuts?

SP: No, not that I'm aware of. It was just him.

NM: You said he would roast them? That is how you all ate them?

SP: Well, we would roast them, yes. We wouldn't eat the boiled peanuts that they eat down South now. But he would roast them and salt them. He usually roasts them in the shell, roast them in the oven.

NM: Did you all just eat them as a snack?

SP: Yes. We got our first telephone in that house. Of course, we had a party line. That house is under the lake, right below Carr Creek High School. The house is probably down under the lake, but that's where it was, in that area.

NM: Do you remember what the house was like? Can you describe it to me?

SP: Well, it had – let's see, one, two, three, four – only four rooms, but they were big rooms, two bedrooms and kitchen and a living room and an outside toilet. In the kitchen, one of the walls was sort of rounded. It had a porch almost all the way around it. In the front was a rock wall with steps that went down to the creek. There was a long driveway out through the bottom or out through the field to the house. I think we used coal heat. I don't know. I don't remember any other heat source right off. It was quiet. It was a pretty house with a tin roof, sort of like houses you would see down in Louisiana or Mississippi or something. I guess, in my mind, that's what it looked like. We would sleep – let's see, how many were home at that time – two to a bed, except my brother, of course. He was raised with four sisters. So, he got his own bed. But I think it was three beds in the big bedroom and only one in the small one. I can't remember.

NM: Well, Sherry, you mentioned that you loved fishing. What kind of fish would you catch that you would eat?

SP: We would eat, I call them shiners, sun bass. The biggest fish I ever caught in a stream like that was at that house under the bridge that went across to Carr Creek High School. It would be bass and sunfish. We'd (clean them. I would clean them usually.

NM: Would you?

SP: I still like to fish. I'm in Maine. I haven't found a place to catch any good fish yet, but I'm still looking.

NM: How would you all cook the fish up?

SP: We just fry them. We would just take the scales off and then take the insides out and then cut their head off. Then you fry them whole. Bread them with cornmeal and salt and pepper.

We would just deep fry them. They get so crispy that you had to pull the meat off the bone on the body part of it. But that's how we eat them. If it was big enough to fillet, we would fillet it.

NM: So, when you moved over to Carr Creek, you said you were around fourth grade. So, did you go to Carr Creek Elementary then?

SP: Yes, I did. It was scary. I didn't like it.

NM: Tell me about that. What was it like transitioning?

SP: Oh, I thought I moved to New York City. It was okay once it all worked out. We never rode a bus. We'd never been to a school that didn't have all the kids in the same room. It was me and one brother and two other sisters. Then I had two older sisters that started – well, they had to start high school. They didn't go to elementary school. They were old enough to start – probably off to their eighth grade. They're ready for freshman and sophomore. I played softball. I made friends that still are my friends. It was good. It was a good move.

NM: You said you went to Carr Creek High School. So many folks that I have talked with have talked a lot about their experiences at Carr Creek High School. I am curious, what was it like for you going there?

SP: It was great. I was on the track team. We had the first girls' basketball team to start there. I was into sports more than going to school. But it was just great. My sister's really involved with the school still. They're trying to turn it into like a bed and breakfast or tourism center or something of that nature. But I visit there when I go home to [inaudible]. Usually, they have activities. They have antique sales that they have once a month. If I'm home during that time, I go. But it was just a really good school, a lot of good memories there.

NM: I am curious. You talked about them starting up the girls' basketball program while you were there. I know they have such a story history with basketball, men's basketball specifically. Tell me what it was like getting the girls' team going.

SP: Well, I don't really remember to be honest with you. I just remember some of the girls that played double-team with me. Our competition, when we were in track, was usually just more into Hindman. It seems like one time we went to Jackson for that. A couple of the basketball players were the coaches for the track team. I don't remember the coaches for the basketball team. We were good to be an early team. It was just a lot of fun. The Carr Creek basketball history is about the tournament and all that that they won. They started out with dirt basketball court. I don't know who bought their uniforms or if someone made them or what they did with them. There's just a lot of basketball history there. Every year, they had a Carr Creek alumni reunion on Memorial weekend. They just had that last week. They had a really good turnout. I think the collection for donation for the school to help with – they need some more roof work, was over \$7,000. So, that's good.

NM: That is great. I am so curious, Sherry. You mentioned that house that you lived in in Carr Creek that it got taken by the creation of the dam and the lake. I guess I am curious, turning to

that, when do you remember first hearing about the proposal that they were going to build that dam and put that lake there?

SP: I'm thinking it had to be when we lived in [inaudible] house because I know that was the reason we had to move. I can't remember what grade I was in when we moved to Redfox from Carr Creek. Let me think of the year I went to Carr Creek Elementary. Probably that'd be three years, maybe seventh grade. I don't know what year that would've been. But I can remember them talking about it. It happened.

NM: What do you remember them saying about it?

SP: Well, people were concerned about having to leave their homes that they were born in. It was just the older generation, of course, were more upset over it. I'm sure they bought them out. They got money. I don't know if the corps of engineers helped them move their houses. But they would have to buy property. They couldn't just move it here and there. They would have to buy property to move with them. A lot of people would just move it – like the house I sold to (Jimmy Hall?), they owned the property that their house was on. They had to move it out of the low part where the dam – it was the right of way of the dam and [inaudible]. They just moved it higher up. Some people had enough land that they could put a house seat and move their house up. But I'm not sure if the corps of engineer helped people to buy property, so they can move their house. There were a lot of homes moved. I had aunts and uncles and my older sister, her and her husband, moved their house. I can't figure out anyone else right now. But I was excited about it. I wasn't upset. I was excited for the change.

NM: What were you excited about?

SP: Probably fishing. [laughter] I'm just kidding. I guess just a new beginning, and it had to be better. The roads had to be better. There was improvement. The flooding concerned me. They did it try to keep flooding in Jackson and Hazard. When the [inaudible], I guess the other waters would come down. That's why there was so much flooding in Hazard, in Jackson. They couldn't control it. But I was excited for the – I knew it was going to be beneficial, I guess, in a lot of ways, especially the roadwork, the roads. There was a lot of improvement.

NM: You mentioned that you had family members that had to move and that you all had to move. Do you know, did the Army Corps of Engineers, did they buy out your parent's home, or did you all move just on your own accord? Or what was that process like?

SP: My parents never owned a home. They rented. My oldest sister who passed away a couple of months ago, she was eighty-four. They bought her home. Oh, wait a minute. The house had to be moved. It was in Big Smith Branch. They bought that home, or someone bought it for them. They had it moved to Knott County. That's the only sibling that moved, and then the house was moved. But my mom's brother and his mother and father-in-law, their houses were at Carr Creek close to where we lived. They had those houses moved to Redfox. They had to buy property to put these houses on. They had to have some kind of financial aid from the corps of engineers or something. Because I can imagine what it would cost to move a house and buy property to put it on and all that. That would be something I would have to research to see if the

corps of engineers did pay for this.

NM: What was it like for you? You mentioned already seeing the houses getting moved. Can you describe to me what that was like?

SP: I can remember houses being moved. It was scary to see these guys pushing the power lines up, so the houses could go under it. That's what scared me. But my father-in-law had some old video of his brother's house being moved. It was just really odd-looking to see this house going up the road on the back of a tractor-trailer flat bed. But there was a lot that moved.

NM: Do you know that that video of the house being moved, does that still exist somewhere?

SP: It's here in my house.

NM: It is? [laughter]

SP: Somewhere. It's probably in storage. [laughter]

NM: Oh, my gosh.

SP: If I ever run across it, I will get in touch with you.

NM: That would be great actually. [laughter]

SP: We were wanting to put it on a –maybe put on a CD from my cousin, but I'm not sure. I can check with my cousins. Let me get back with you. Write her name down. She may have the footage of that.

NM: That would be so neat. I have heard so many people describe it. It would be neat to see some of it. That is really neat. Sherry, you said that earlier on, you worked for a construction company. I think you said that they did some construction around the lake. Can you talk a little bit more about working for that company?

SP: I've worked for one summer, probably between my junior and senior year of high school. I just kept the paperwork and stuff for them. It was just a dusty, muddy, nasty place. It was just a little office trailer. It was at Cody, Kentucky, which is under the lake now, that area, just a lot of heavy equipment in and out. I really can't remember. I don't know why I can't remember. But I don't remember much about it other than working there. It seems like the pay was good for that time in my life. I can't tell you how much that was.

NM: Do you remember any of the projects or work that they did?

SP: Probably it had to do with getting the houses and stuff cleared out, so they could build the dam. The roads hadn't been built. We were still using the old road [inaudible]. But just getting things cleaned out. I can't remember, I really can't, what their job was actually.

NM: That is okay. Well, I am curious. You were in high school for a lot of some of the action of the dam being built and the lake being put in. So, I guess I am curious. Did you and your high school friends talk about it very much? What did you think about it as a high school...

SP: We had a wonderful time on that straight stretch there at Smithsboro. I graduated from high school in [19]73. The dam was built in [19]76, or completed. So, we would get out on the weekend. They had probably a straight stretch of the new highway they were putting in. I may not need to tell this, but we would drag race on that. Someone would get on one end of it with the CB radio and then the other one that was doing the actual drag race. I participated in riding sometimes. It was fun. We had a good time. They didn't have it completely barricaded. You could move the barrier. We would go up there and drag race usually Friday or Saturday night. I can remember they built the – are you familiar with the marina, the Carr Creek marina down at Smithsboro?

NM: Yes, I am.

SP: For some reason, that long curb, that long road that goes around the lake, I can remember the house, that little A-frame house that sits back there now. I can remember when that was built. I don't know why. But it was an exciting time.

NM: Are there any other exciting things that you and your high school friends got into, around the lake being made or anything?

SP: There is, but I don't know if I should tell you. One Halloween, we caught a purse to a long string and threw it out beside the road. This was before the big road was open. When someone would stop to look at the purse or to get it, we'd start pulling it back. We were up on a rock ledge beside the road. They couldn't see us. So, we'd pull that string and pull the purse back in. Then they knew they were tricked.

NM: [laughter] Oh, my gosh. That is too funny. It sounds like you all had a good time.

SP: We did. We had a good time.

NM: It sounds that a lot of your friends, and yourself included, were real excited about the lake being built. Did you have any classmates that you remember that had to be relocated that maybe were not very excited about it, or was there any of that chatter between you and your high school friends?

SP: I don't recall any. I don't recall. As I said, it was usually the older generation. I can understand that. I wouldn't want to leave and pull up everything I'd ever worked for. There were a lot of people who moved from there and went other places.

NM: Do you remember where folks moved to?

SP: A lot of people went to Indiana and Ohio, my husband's family. But now they moved before the lake was ever – a lot of them moved to Michigan. They just didn't want to deal with

it, and work, too. They were always looking for some better work, better than the mine.

NM: What was it like when you moved over to Redfox then?

SP: Well, we lived in a two-story house. Actually, it's still standing, barely standing. It was a log cabin that had been enclosed. Actually, we've been there several years, probably sophomore and high school. We had indoor plumbing put in. We actually had natural gas heat. We didn't have to carry coal and wood in. It was good. I stayed there until I went through nursing school after high school and got married. I lived there until I'm married. But it was good. When we first moved there, come up in the holler, we had to walk, oh, I don't know, a mile, half mile. Or my brother, when he was old enough to drive, he got a vehicle. We would drive out. But still I had to walk some. We ran off of a gentleman that lived next door. He was a pig farmer. The mountain across from our house, across the creek was fenced in. He raised and sold pigs. He had a huge barn. The barn is still standing. One of my brothers was in Vietnam at the time. I wrote him a letter and told him how much I loved him. Then I asked him if he'd buy me a pony. So, he sent \$100 home. My dad went to auction over at Leesburg, Kentucky, and bought a pony, a saddle, a bridle, and a sack of feed for \$100. So, we were really excited about the pony. Let's see. We had one of the baby pigs get hurt. It fell off on one of the – there were rocks in a certain part of the pig lot. The landlord told me if I could keep it alive – the vet come and checked it and said he didn't think it'd make it – that I could have it. So, she lived. I got to keep her until it was time for her to be put up for the winter. I didn't like that too much. But we still had our garden. All these houses we lived in, there was always a garden and always pork and chickens and eggs. My dad's squirrel [inaudible] until – we eat squirrel. No one would eat it now probably, but we eat it. It was good.

NM: Did he continue raising peanuts over there on [inaudible]?

SP: No. The land wasn't sandy. There wasn't enough sand in there. No, that was the only place he raised it. It was a sandy bottom.

NM: Do you recall, did your parents ever limit having to leave the house in Carr Creek, or were they satisfied moving over there to Redfox?

SP: They were satisfied. It was just still better for the family, more room. It was close to my mom's brother and his wife. They lived just maybe three houses down the road. He was the one that got the houses for us, helped get the houses. Let me see. I can't think of the lot.

NM: Well, I am curious. Do you remember when they filled in the lake?

SP: No. I mean, it was a gradual thing. I can't remember that. I probably should, but I can't. I just remember it being completed and how it looked before. The Carr Creek Grade School and Cody where I worked had a service station and a little country store. But as far as what they've done – you mean fill it in with water?

NM: Yes, I guess I was just curious about that.

SP: I know when it was completed it was in [19]76. I can just remember it took time to fill it up. The rains had to come down from the [inaudible] and all that. The dam controlled how much they wanted to have in the lake at the time. They still do with the dam level. They would lower it and let water out when there was a lot of rain. Close it when the spring rains come and all that, to catch the water, I guess. But as far as remembering it, it was just there in my mind. [laughter] It wasn't there and then it was.

NM: After the lake was built, did you spend much time at the lake? Did you use it much?

SP: At first, we did. I was in high school. Of course, the beach was open. That was super nice to go to. We never went to the beach very often before that, maybe once a year. On 4th of July, we would go to Dewey Lake, Jenny Wiley, and have a family cookout and get to swim. But we enjoyed the beach and not a lot of boating. I had a brother later on that had a houseboat we would go out on, but just enjoying the beach. I don't think I've ever camped down there.

NM: Do you have any memories of going to the beach in high school or later on?

SP: Just good memories, meeting with my high school friends. They had a concession stand. The concession stand is still there, but it hasn't been opened in a long time. Not anything other than just having a good time with them.

NM: Well, you mentioned, Sherry, you said that you got a sister that is involved with the old high school and some of the stuff they are doing. What is her name?

SP: Brenda Adams.

NM: Brenda Adams. I was just curious if I had spoken with her. I do not think I have spoken with her, but I think I have heard that name around. [laughter] Are you still there, Sherry? I think Sherry got disconnected. She is messaging me on Facebook. So, I will go ahead and sign this off. This is Nicole Musgrave. I was speaking with Sherry Caudill Parks. It is May 30th, 2023. This is for the Carr Creek Oral History Project. I am calling in from Whitesburg, Kentucky, and Sherry was calling in from Maine.

[end of transcript]