

Michael Kline: What is your full name?

Thomas Bonner: Tom Bonner, Thomas L. Bonner.

MK: Thomas L.?

TB: Yes.

MK: Were you born right here?

TB: Yes, right over there.

MK: That's your brother's house?

TB: Yes, that's our home, basically. That's where we were all born.

MK: How many generations of Bonners lived in here?

TB: Just us, me and my family.

MK: Your dad?

TB: Yes.

MK: Was this following...?

TB: We came here in 1918. He came from the Mountain, over from (them Ozark?) over there. The (CWNNS?), when [inaudible] down there at Hendricks, he hired him for a freight agent. After he came here, then he was working for (Lindsey?). Then another fella had the store, and he got old, and he wanted to sell it out. So, my dad finally bought it, and he took a job. Then later on, well, he took a job as postmaster and then he had all three of them. That's how we got in here. I don't whether you know them Days' down around there or not, their granddaddy is Lloyd Day is freight agent here in they sent Lloyd to [inaudible].

MK: Who was your mother?

TB: Smith. She was a Smith, [inaudible] Smith. (Hayley Van Meter-Smith?).

MK: From?

TB: They was from the [inaudible] over here. He was and she came from over at Petersburg. She was a (Van Meter?) from Petersburg. Her granddaddy was from over here on the [inaudible] within that area.

MK: What was it like here growing up when you were a kid?

TB: It was a lot of fun [laughter]. Railroad trains was running. It has a lot of excitement. We had trains about four times a day here in two lines. There was a lot of big freights that went down through here. So, maybe it had twenty-five or thirty cars at least once or twice – sometimes twice a day. Toward the end, they used to pull coaches, you know what I mean? They hauled the passengers on behind and then freight in between. Along toward the end, whenever it got slowed up by then, they had a special bus; they called it the Jitney. They ran it twice a day just like a regular bus only run on a railroad track. I think it was a twenty-eight or twenty-seven Chevrolet converted into a bus that run on a track.

MK: So, you weren't really very isolated?

TB: No, you could go down in the morning, come back in the evening. You wanted to go to the store to shop in Parsons or Hendricks. You could go down at 11:00 o'clock [a.m.] and come back at 3:00 o'clock [p.m.]. I think it got to Hendricks at 12:00 [p.m.]. You'd have from 12:00 [p.m.] until 3:00 [p.m.] to shop in Hendricks or Parsons. You had to wait to get to Parsons and come back by 4:00 [p.m.]. It cost fifty cents to go down and back.

MK: What year were you born?

TB: ['21. 1921. It was that way until about '34 or '35, [inaudible] remember. About '35, I figured whenever they sold this out, and then they tore the rails out. But that Raine -Andrews had come and intercepted [inaudible], went out earlier, probably somewhere about 1923. But I can remember – I was old enough to remember at '23 or '24nother wasn't here too long until it went out in the '30s. That'd be ten to twelve years.

MK: How many kids were there in your family?

TB: Ten altogether.

MK: Ten?

TB: Yes.

MK: What were their names?

TB: [laughter] Well, Ralph is the oldest one living. We had one brother died, the first one died. Then Ralph, then myself, Tom, then Raymond, the one that drowned, then Jack, Norman, Allen, and George. And there was a girl – yeah, Ted. Then there was a girl in between somewhere – is in between Jack and Norman, wasn't she? Just one.

MK: What was her name?

TB: (Naoma?). She was born and just died just a little bit after she was born. The same way with our oldest brother.

MK: She never lived.

TB: No.

MK: So, just boys?

TB: One was a boy, and one was a girl. But there was eight boys – no, nine boys. There's nine of us all told.

MK: Did you go to school right in here somewhere?

TB: We went to grade school here. You had to go to high school at Parsons up until the railroad – when the railroad went out, and they had put the bus on. The other part went to Davis from then on. About 1937 or something along there, started going to Davis. Buses started running. We had grade school here until – what year did our grade school end?

MK: '50something?

TB: Probably in the '50s, I figure. Somewhere around 1950.

MK: What was it like going to high school?

TB: I never went. I never got to go to high school.

MK: I mean, to the grade school?

TB: Oh, grade school. Grade school was really, I think –it was all right going to grade school. I mean, we had a small school. At that time, there wasn't over a dozen of us.

MK: Did the teacher board in the community?

TB: That's right. Well, sometimes she'd stay over at home, and sometimes she'd stay with (Ed Long?). He lived here at that time and stayed with (Andrew Teeter?), my wife's granddaddy in this community. Over in the mountain, they'd stay with [inaudible], Judy, John Parsons. Then they'd stay with the (Waybrights?). Yes, they stayed right in the community. They only go home on a weekend or something. Whenever the weather was too bad, well they didn't do that, call us back. Some of them years – see, why a lot of them had to walk in here or ride on a horseback. Whenever the train was out, there was no way out and in here, only to ride a horse or walk until they opened up the railroad grade, come down in here the road that washed out.

MK: So, was it up through eighth grade then?

TB: Yes. I went to the eighth grade, that's all.

MK: I bet you got a pretty good education then.

TB: Probably it amounted to as much – to my way of thinking, it amounts as much to eighth grade is what high school would amount to today.

MK: You could read and write and figure pretty well?

TB: Right. Yes. I think most of the kids seemed like everybody had run up close to eighty or ninety average at that time in grades. The teacher taught all grades, just one teacher. I think you got more out of it than what you would today on account of having so many different people to work with. Well, the way I think, one teacher will do for you. If you work with the same person, you understand her, and she understands you, and I think that she can do more for you. Where if you have a lot of teachers, it makes it more confusing.

MK: There wasn't as many distractions either?

TB: No, there wasn't as many distractions. There wasn't so many things going on. Like in grade school where we went here, if we all worked – went to a small school. We had the afternoon off on Friday, and everybody really worked hard all week to get a half a day off Friday. If you got a half a day off, if everybody was good, then you'd go on a hike, or you'd have a ball game just like it goes now between the schools like Jenningson, Shavers Mount, or Red Creek. But you didn't have no bus to ride, you had to walk. [laughter] Then you'd play ball. But you'd have a lot of good time.

MK: Some pretty good ball teams?

TB: Yes. I never will forget whenever we'd play Shavers Mountain – like she was from Shavers Mountain, and I was from Gladwin. We had Mr. [inaudible]. Delbert, he's dead, but Delbert, he'd teach over in the mountain. And (Opal?), she'd teach here because it was easier for her. On Fridays, they'd come over and boy, Delbert – he slobbered a lot anyway, and he'd get all mad. Her oldest brother, he'd kind of mad, [inaudible], and he'd get mad. [laughter] We'd have an awful time. Everybody'd get all stirred up over it, just about like it is now. It all seemed like it was a lot more fun. I don't know, maybe the kids enjoy it better than what I would.

MK: Would they play ball a while and then you'd have to fight after?

TB: No, they didn't allow no fighting. You'd just get – you know what I mean? [laughter] No, they didn't allow any fighting. If anybody got to the point of fighting, that was the end of the situation.

MK: I thought maybe after the game, he had to whip the people that won..

TB: No, the only time I ever done any fighting was coming home from school, between home and whenever you walked. If there was any differences, that's where it would always come out. Never hardly come out at school. It'd always come out like going – we had to walk clear up on the hill, our schoolhouse still sits up there. It was like the Carrs and the Plaughers – Eldon Plaughter – and a lot of the Carr boys, it's down around Hendricks and Parsons. Now, we all went to school together. Delbert – course he's dead now. Whether Opal's still living or not, but their

children live down there. I think they had two or three girls. Back then, if there's a young teacher qualified to teach, maybe they don't have to go to school. At that time, they would graduate from high school, and then they go to college just a few hours for a summer or so. Then they started them to teach. They'd teach eight months, eight and a half or nine. Then next summer, she'd have to go back until they got their degree, you know what I mean?

MK: Yes.

TB: But they would let them work their way up. They didn't have to have it all at one time. But anyway, the board education then, if they hired somebody from Parsons or Thomas or Davis, they had to come to these little schools to teach before they had led them in Parsons or (Mountaineer?) you know what I mean? They always started them in a back school. A young teacher, she always got a country school. Then, they eventually worked their way back to the big school. But Elizabeth [inaudible] taught here. [inaudible]t whenever she came here. Grace Thurston, Bill Minear's first wife. And (Delbert Arby?) and his wife – that's whenever I started. (Ruth Raynes?) she taught me, but of course, she's dead now. She is my [inaudible]. And then Russell and [inaudible], they was all number one teachers. We all got along with them. We had (Glen Alt?) now and then, but he wasn't as good, you know what I mean? Seemed like he was strict, but we didn't like him [inaudible] laughter]. But he was a good teacher.

MK: Did they have spelling bees at that time?

TB: Yes, we had lots of that.

MK: One school against another.

TB: Right. Always had big church, Christmas programs maybe last for two hours.

MK: Plays and things?

TB: Yes. They called them dialogues then. Maybe be ten or twelve different people or something.

MK: Dialogues?

TB: Yes. Everybody would have, just like we're talking here, Christmas stories, and you'd act them out. So, they'd pick a story, and then it would be acted out in plays. Everybody would have so much to talk about, just a whole lot like a soap opera or something, only it was all about Christmas.

MK: After you finished school then did you mostly stay right here?

TB: Now, after I finished school, I worked on the farm here with my daddy. Of course, my oldest brother was in high school. We both couldn't afford to go to school at the same time. Of course, they kind of figured well, whenever they got him through high school, why then I could go. By that time, it was too late for me, of course. My oldest brother, he had to miss a year because he

didn't have the money. He had some problems getting started because he had to pay board, had to go downtown board. But I worked on the farm, and then I thought I wanted to do something. So, I went to CC Camp in 1940. [Editor's Note: referring to the Civilian Conservation Corps, first created in 1933] I stayed in there for, I think, twenty-two months. On December 17, they declared war. I had that summer – August that summer – so I hung out there until the end of spring. I knew I was going to have to go to service, and I thought I wanted a break from it. So, I worked with my uncle and had him write them a letter that I could make more money out than I could in.. Of course, you didn't have to make a whole lot of money then because you's only getting a dollar a day. But I had to prove to them to get a couple of months' vacation because I had to go to service in a couple of months. But I had to prove to them there that I wasn't making more money out than in to get an honorable discharge. So, my uncle and my daddy wrote. So, I took my AWOP [absence without pay] from them until they fixed up a letter. I started driving truck for them. They were in the lumber business. That's how I got out there. I got two months' vacation and went to the service until 1945.

MK: Where was this camp?

TB: Well, I was in Parsons. I went to Parsons. Parsons broke up. I went to North Fork over at Petersburg. But whenever I was in Parsons Camp, I spent most of my time up here in the old 566 [inaudible] up here [inaudible] that broke up. So, Parsons used that area for a side camp. So, we worked up in this area in surveying, road construction, stabilizing road banks, and timber survey, anything like that. We surveyed and potted all this timber in here before the war that they sold after the war, before the service did. Then they plotted it, and then after the war or while the war was going on, they started selling all the timber in this area. It was already done by us in the CC Camp. Telephone crews, we built telephone line all the way from up there at Red Creek to Parsons, government line in the ranger station at Parsons. We built it from the Ranger Station at Parsons through to Stuart Park – it was a federal thing. Through the Bickle Knob Recreation Area there, Roosevelt Park – they just finished Roosevelt Park. Then we built that place down below Parsons. While Parsons was going, I worked down there in the wintertime, usually down at Camp Horseshoe. The federal part, we built that [inaudible]CC Camp. Of course, they built Roosevelt Park. But that was before I went in there. But I know when I worked down below there – I don't know whether you ever heard of Smokey Harsh or not. e used to be over the state park over here. He was a leader at Parsons whenever I was there. Then he went to some state park and he spent most of his time. And they had him over here where he retired from Blackwater, Smokey. He was the leader down when we was building Horseshoe. They built a lot of roads. We built and serviced that road all the way from Roosevelt Park through the Bickle Knob, down Stuart drive. We used to service and stabilize that all the time. Same way all the way down from Stuart Park in there down to Parsons, that route all the way down there. We had telephone line on that. We built that, too. I know I was driving truck, and you get kind of restless sometimes. I put on a pair of climbers up in about where Elmer Carr lives. . It was moving the line, putting up new wire. And I got a pair of climbers on; I was just going along in that, kind of practicing. They'd put up the new and take down the old. There's a big high ledge went out over the road, must have been fifty feet above the road, and an old crooked tree there, and the wire was fast to it. I climbed up the tree. I didn't climb over at ten feet, right? But the darn thing went out over the ledge. I unhooked the wire and started to come back down and looked to see how high I was, and I just about couldn't get back down. [laughter] I had to look up in the air for a

while before [laughter] I got [inaudible]. I am not too good at heights anyway, but I hadn't come that far from the ground – but the [inaudible] went out over the ledge.

MK: That would have scared me.

TB: [laughter] It scared me too.

MK: So, you lived in this CCC Camp too?

TB: Yes, I stayed.

MK: What did you do for entertainment?

TB: Well, to tell you the truth, we had a day room. What they call a day room. Just like service, you had pool rooms, and you had everything. You didn't have to really leave, you know what I mean? You can buy your pop and candy and stuff like that. But just like down in Parsons, we'd usually walk out down across the railroad track. We went to the Victoria Theatre all the time, maybe once or twice a week or Saturday night or whenever there's a good movie on.

MK: What was showing back then?

TB: I don't remember. [laughter]

MK: [inaudible]

TB: Yes, there's a lot of good movies, really more interesting than I always thought from what are now.

MK: Do you remember any that you saw at that time?

TB: Not really. Names never meant all that much to me. I'd walk in and watch them only time. I just never paid –

MK: A lot of Westerns or –?

TB: Yes, Westerns mostly, a lot of Western. There was one fellow I remember; I believe John Carroll was his name, I know I'd seen him a lot, and he was a movie star. I know I'd saw him in North Africa after they'd drafted him into the army. I'd seen him on the screen and mainly in North Africa. I picked him up. In the Air Force, I'd picked him up there in transportation one time. [laughter] I know he is a movie star because I'd seen him in pictures, either down at Elkins or down Parsons.. Whenever we was up here, it was about maybe fifteen miles into Elkins. We used to go in every night. If everybody was good, like I say, your discipline had a lot to do with it. The whole camp, like up here at Glady, they would let us go out. We would stay there pretty much confined, especially through the fall that year. They wouldn't let you out on account of fire season. We had a lot of forest fires. But if everybody was good, they'd always try to let so many go to the show or into Elkins, whatever you'd wanted to get into. If you's a drinker and wanted

to drink beer, go pool or sop up a lot of beer – whatever your personality was – or go to a movie, you had until 11:30, and that truck left, brought you back in. Now, they do that Wednesday night and Saturday night. But then to go home, like if you wanted to go home Friday night, a truck would go to Elkins, take everybody in. And Sunday night, 11:30 [p.m.], it left Elkins to come back to camp for the week. If you was free to go and didn't have far detail or KP[Kitchen Patrol] or – had to be somebody there to run the place. If you wasn't on some kind of duty.

MK: I always thought that there were such good training programs then and we have never had anything since that –

TB: That's right.

MK: – amounted to very much.

TB: I remember there's a lot of criticism like there are today. But I think that they got more done, just like what you see going today and what you see going then. Well, you just take this road up here, for instance. Now, it draws a lot of criticism. They say they've got their problems. Course, back whenever I was a boy, and they built this road up this mountain and they'd say, "Well, you never get it done," you know what I mean? But they built it in about 1932 or '33. . I can take you up there and show you work that them guys done then. It's just as good today as it was the day after they finished. But the worst trouble for them guys, they was only making a dollar. They only made a dollar. Every day they spent there, they made a dollar. Maybe that wasn't too much money. Where now, you see a lot of standing around, you know what I mean? Them guys wouldn't let you stand around then because they went from place to place, but they didn't ride. They walked. It would be [inaudible] so many for us kids. They kind of kept you moving. You could mess off on them a little, but not too much. They kept you moving around. I know there are not as many idle hours then than what are in the country today. I think for a dollar, they got more than what they do now. [laughter]

MK: So, after the war then did you come back here to stay?

TB: I came right here. Right here is where I come.

MK: Right here is where you have been?

TB: Yes, [inaudible] and we've set right here ever since 1946. One winter, we stayed in the logging camp for this winter.

FB: We stayed up there in '45.

TB: '45 and '46. The spring of '46, I saved enough money, and I bought and paid for this, but I had to sell my car. [laughter]

MK: You raised – what did you tell me ? – five kids here?

TB: Yes, five kids.

MK: What were their names?

TB: [laughter]

FB: (Jerry?), (Jean?), Jane, Jim, and Tom Junior.

TB: She can remember. [laughter] Yes, that's as far as we got. That's why I was telling one of these fellas down here, well, Tommy, our youngest boy, he still comes up, and he looked over, and he said, "Daddy," he said, "You could go somewhere," and he said, "Buy a farm." [inaudible] straighten this one up. I looked over, and I said, "Yeah, but I wouldn't be home." [laughter] Here's where I've been. I guess I've spent more time here than any other member of the family. I've been a member of the family, but I didn't leave. Of course, I left, but I just returned. I didn't leave because I wanted to. I left because I had to. That was back when I went to CC Camp. Wasn't nothing going on; you couldn't make anything. Well, I went to work for my daddy in 1937, right after going up here. And there just wasn't enough for us all, and we was all home, and my oldest brother is going to school. I picked up odd jobs here, and hell, = sometimes I'd let him have ten or fifteen dollars. That was a lot of money, really. Of course, he'd have to borrow money. He is borrowing money to go to school. So, I drifted off to CC Camp. I know I'd have a check coming plus you got your clothes and everything was furnished, your medical bills and everything. So, I hung out there. I saved enough money in there to buy my first old car with five dollars. The way they had it set up, you'd send twenty-five dollars home, or else, we can give it to your daddy or mother to help with the family, or you could put in soldiers' deposits. I helped my daddy with what I could. Then I saved a little, then I bought my first car before I went to service, secondhanded, and it was three or four years old. Then, he used it all the time while I was in the service. Then, when I came back from the service, I kind of got him out, and we'd go to different places. In some places, we had board and then come back and do the farm until he retired.

MK: But this place always held you?

TB: Yes, I never –

MK: Why was that? What is it about home that is so important to you?

TB: It kept me alive is all I know. [laughter] I just never could be happier and rela – [Recording paused] Like, you can just get up. If you get tired, you can just get up and walk out. You can do what you want to. I don't know, I just like nature just like it is. I mean, I never did care a whole lot. It didn't take me long that I got away from fancy things. I don't care too much about anything. Like a new car, I used to think I'd always like a new car, but it wasn't too long –well, the way I was raised up, you didn't have it. Then you thought you wanted it, and then you found out that there was a lot of things in life that you just couldn't have [and]that other things was more important. So, you learn to live with what you have, that's all. Just like a car, you have to have it now, but you don't have to have a Chrysler or a Cadillac. You need a car that will take you and bring you. I think that's what's wrong with the country today. Everybody went too fancy.

MK: Try to get above their reason.

TB: Right, spend too much money. Me, I couldn't live here – well, that's the only reason I can say that I stayed here really because I learned to live on little, where other people wanted more. But still in the end, I'm just about as well off as them, you know what I mean? It went away. If you look, it all goes and comes, I think. I mean, if it only get so far, it don't make any difference. There are peaks in everybody's life. I think there is a peak in your life, there is a peak in my life. You will do well to a certain point and then you start going back down the other way, just like age, your financial problems I think, the same way. [laughter]

MK: So, you have lived along this river all of your life?

TB: Right. Just like my brother, for instance, but he's been gone for thirty years.

MK: Which brother?

TB: The one that drowned. Me and him and the oldest brother, we were closer because we was raised up more together than what the younger ones is because we were the three first ones. We had just a little bit of stronger ties because then, after we grew up to a certain point, and they were all small, the rest of them, we had to leave. Of course, I was more acquainted with all of them really than what my oldest brother and what Raymond was because both of them left, you know what I mean? Like, my oldest brother, he left here in 1941. He spent little a time at home. He never comes back that much. Raymond was gone – he's been gone for thirty years, and he'd just come back. He'd been back fifteen months. But he'd come back every summer on vacation. That's how he built his house.

MK: Where had he been living?

TB: Pittsburgh. When we came back from the service, like I say, there wasn't that much to do here. Some drifted off. They had a period, they drifted off to Ohio. I know then later, they started drifting off to Virginia. One of my younger brothers, he went to Virginia because back then, the school system picked so many people, and they got him a federal job of some kind, like FBI, CIA. They'd come around. They don't do that anymore. But I have one brother who worked for the CIA. He's been in there ever since he graduated from high school. But they picked him in the Mountaineer High School, him and I forgot who else was in his class. They picked him and he's been there ever since. He got educated in that plus he went to college, made his way on to college. He lives down there. My oldest brother, he went to the Marines, but he graduated from Morgantown in the spring of '41, I reckon. I know he owed a lot of money going to school, and he worked and drove spikes. They were redoing Thomas Mountain at that time. They got him a job on the railroad. He drove spikes after coming out of school that year. His hands were all blistered. But he was going to the service, and he had graduated from (RNR?)– took ROTC and agriculture. Then, he had decided that he was going to service because there's more money. Like agriculture, it never has been that good. But he would been an instructor in high school in agriculture. Teaching profession was slumped too. It was no good. So, he was going in the Army and they had canceled his call. So, he went to work on the railroad up here against a mountain. My mother wanted him to teach school and he said, "No, there wasn't no money in school

teaching.” He couldn't pay his bills. So, whenever they canceled him out then he just got in his car, and he went to Washington enlisted in the Marines. They called him in a couple of weeks. But he lacked two or three pounds to being heavy enough at that time. You had to have real good health at that time. They told him what to do and to come back in three or four weeks and try it again. That he did and he made it. He stayed in there thirty years. [laughter] He lives down in Alexandria. He's a real estate agent down there, but he finished college. He went to school all the time that he's in service. He went from first lieutenant to colonel. He'd been all over.

MK: But Raymond had been in –

TB: Raymond, he left.

MK: Pittsburgh?

TB: Yes, he left here about 1947 I reckon, or something like that. And he stayed in Pittsburgh. He went to work in the steel mills. Then he got on the railroad in the (Diesel Park?). He hung that out until fifteen months ago. Then he took his retirement. He's still only fifty-nine years old. He hadn't gotten his railroad retirement, but he was drawing his mill retirement. But he was getting pretty good vacation, so he bought this lot up here and then he came back down here. He'd save his money and build his house. He kept doing that until he had it done when he retired. All he had to do – he sold his property up there and move back down here. He just lived fifteen months. He had a lot of money tied up here.

MK: How had the river behaved all those years? You said you saw it high beforehand.

TB: Yes, but not this high. Well, probably (I spoke?) in 1918 or something like that, I cut the tree down there where you come in at the gate. Now, Oliver Carr lived there then. I've heard him talk about it, running through that house, right down there by the road two feet deep. That was about as high as I'd heard of, you know what I mean? Until somewhere in the '50s, whichever year that Hazel, Hurricane Hazel, tore around, whatever year that was '54, '52? And it was up to the edge of this bank down here. It covered part of that bottom over there. It comes down through and crossed over there. But it amounted to about what I'd heard of back in the teens, I believe 1918 or somewhere in there. I know my barn. So, like I said, out therewhere my barn was, they'd left the door open when they milked that night, and there's a (forked?) tree went in the barn door and around the side of the barn. It was up in my barn, probably two bales of hay high. That was like this time, whenever I went out there, it was about that deep again. That was running down through here pretty good to cross over there. But I never thought about my barn to go. It was plum full of hay from the ground up. The sheds were full, and stalls were full. It was full up to there. I had the rake, milling machine, and hay tedder in one side downstairs. I had double doors where you could drive through the shed. It was up against the door, buckled the doors when I went around there. I asked my wife if she had drove the cows out (the meadow?) over here, and she said she had and said the water was running across the culvert out there then. She had to wade and had trouble getting the cows out. But I had been out – then it was six or eight feet deeper and was trying to push the doors in on the shed, but I had them locked at the top and at the bottom and there was a buckle in it. I thought if I just get over there and open them doors, the water would flow through it, maybe it'd save the doors. I didn't think about it getting that

deep. Then, it went on about an hour later. Then my brother, Raymond, he was right over there hung up in it, and there was no way to get to him.

MK: Right where?

TB: Right straight across there. He'd come down in this low place right over there trying to come out. He's right straight across the road there.

MK: The side of the house here?

TB: Yes, right straight across. See over there, where that pole broke down? Right there, his truck lodged right against that. When he first came down there, he'd come down right over there, and it washed it down over there, then it turned it around. Now, as long as they had got out of the truck, and they was in the back. The water held him in because the truck was headed down this way and down the river. The water was coming in behind, so they kept climbing. So, that fence down through there, there's [inaudible] fence all the way down along there. It held him there. It dammed up against the fence and it protected them. I had gate post [inaudible] over there four feet deep in the ground in that woven wire, and it just kept in the [inaudible] and made a dam. They was just sitting on the other side of it, [inaudible] tore the fence down, right? When the fence broke, it went over there and then the truck turned around and then it went backwards. It kept taking him backwards lodged against the tree down there. They was still in the back of the truck, but way up here in the water. Then the way my one brother said that it seemed like a log or something came down. Then it shot that water up over him, and that was the last time we saw him. But the water hit the windshield, or something, and it just went clear over the top of him. That was about the last time that anyone ever saw. That was probably around 12:00 o'clock wasn't it?

Freddie Bonner: No, not that late.

TB: 11:30?

FB.: Probably.

MK: From where you were standing out, there was forty to fifty yards?

TB: Yes, with the water – see, the water was right up there. They had trucks parked over there. Then fire department come in toward the end. They saw him wash out; I didn't. But they had lights over there so they could see him. But it was clear up there in the [inaudible]. But I could hear him. I could sit right here and hear him holler until around 11:30. Then I'd come in the house, and they were still out there watching. Now, you could hear him holler, but you couldn't holler over there to him because where they sat there, see, they was between two main(currents. They was in the middle, right? The main current went down that way and then the main current went down this way. That left him in the eddiest water there was from here over yonder. They was in the high part in the middle of the street. It was making so much noise for them. Now, you, from here, you could hear him. I could hear him from right here.

MK: Who was with him?

TB: His wife. Him, and his wife, [inaudible]. I know my other brother came in here and told me they had to go and try. I know it wouldn't no use for them to try because I know we couldn't get over there. That's about time it turned the truck around. That was the last time I saw him because there was no way getting over there. I'd say after 6:00 o'clock, it would have been an impossible task. Well, some of them come in here and said, "We better call for somebody." Well, our phone had done went out. They said the phone over at Norman's is still on. But anyway, my son lives up here. He had a radio and we had this one. I heard him on there, and I didn't want him to come down across that bridge up there because whenever I'd crossed it, it was up to it. This was an hour later, see. Now, I'm talking about an hour later. So, I know that he couldn't cross that bridge, but I know he might try. So, I picked him up [inaudible] and I told him stay away, not to come. But then I told him about my brother over here, and I said you get back up and call for help, and he said he would. He said not to worry, that he would go and he could get some help. But I didn't think that would do any good unless they'd get a helicopter. They had called for a helicopter. They wouldn't let any helicopters out. The fire department came probably an hour or so later, but they just got here in time to see him wash out, and they couldn't have made it anyway. There was no way. I've seen that [inaudible] you couldn't do much stuff [inaudible]. No way to anchor. If you could anchor it over there, you couldn't gone over there. It'd kill you before you go over there. Because there wasn't no way. Now, I saw that tried in (Italy?) one time, and it worked, but there was no debris. But this was full, you know what this was like? It started picking up debris around. Well, at the time they came down there, it was picking it up you know what I mean? It's like Raymond up there where he lived; everything he had was coming down through there. Now, he had probably thirty-five, forty cord of wood; it was coming down through there, sticks of wood. Can you imagine crossing that much water with wood, a day-old hay, pieces of buildings? Even if you'd a rope tied over there, you couldn't get there because it can kill you – broke the rope. There was no way. But I always thought if he would have went back on the time before – if he had [inaudible] back up the road, on up the road maybe three or four hundred yards, they could have survived. But see, they come down here and got in right where it was going back to the river and that's what got them. If they've been up –

MK: Were they trying to get here to your house?

TB: Well, they couldn't get in here. He was just trying to get away from the water, I reckon. But see, he was coming into more water. What he was really doing, he was leaving the eddiest part of the water before he was water-bound in. If he had stayed even at his own house, he'd have been in less water. But he'd come down here to where it come in above his house. Then right over here, it started going back.

MK: It swung back?

TB: Yes, it swung back. He was right where it was swinging back into the main river. Over there where his truck's headed, turned it around, took it off the road, took it over at the edge of the riverbank, and the truck caught right close maybe ten feet from the edge of the riverbank, caught on a tree. But there was nothing there and after being in the water there, probably four hours, he was in – they was in such a shape. They couldn't held onto nothing if they got a hold of it, like a

tree or something. But we could still see him flash his flashlight up a tree there. But the tree that was there was just a straight tree, there was no way to climb it. There wasn't no limbs on. We'd seen the house come down and everything. That bale of hay – fourteen-hundred bale hay just from my barn coming down. There's three acres of saw ledge from right above that come down.

MK: So, you had to sit here and watch him on that truck and you knew?

TB: We all stayed here and watched what time we can stand to watch, we was out and then. But we couldn't do nothing. My brothers were here. One brother and his wife and his boys were all here.

FB: Our daughter-in-law and five grandchildren.

TB: There was all here. Everybody was here but we couldn't do nothing. Course, Norman, our other brother, and his son-in-law and his daughter was over there, but there just was nothing nobody can do. If we had something like Dewey Wilfong had down there in Parson, well we could've gone in [inaudible] if it at first you could have got in. Just for an ordinary tractor or ordinary truck, two-ton truck, wouldn't face it. That big truck was already wet from trying to pull a house trailer, and it was all messed up. But if he got up in there, it couldn't've backed out because it was in the dark and he'd probably missed the road to come out backward because you couldn't get turned around. Yes, that's a mess. [inaudible]nobody can do, just really hard to take and keep going and do the best you could. That was all. [laughter]

MK: Oh, man, I cannot imagine. [inaudible] tell me about it.

TB: I said it was really worse than war, you know what I mean? Like, in war, most of the time you're separated unless you have some real close buddies that gets hit or hurt, but you shake it off. But to watch something like this, it's hard.

MK: And to have it go on and on, way into the night.

TB: Yes, it was going on. Well, it started around 5:30 [p.m.], I'd say. First, between 5:30 [p.m.] and 6:00 o'clock [p.m]. Like, time, it's hard to get that time in there because the time you just couldn't keep no track of time. About the last track of time I really had until the next morning was whenever I got to Jenningson, and that was about 4:30 [a.m]. From then on, time didn't mean much. [laughter] I know whenever I got up there and I crossed that bridge. But whenever I left the grade school in Thomas, the secretary come out and gave me a list of phone numbers. Now, I know it was bad even before that because one bus driver came in. I stayed at school all day. It rained all day, and the bus driver came in and he told me, he said that part of his route was done washed out. He told me about a bridge in Laneville being washed out. So, we left there, and drove over to grade school. While I was loading up, the secretary come out and gave me telephone numbers of people that was already – didn't want their kids to come home because they had then left. They gave them phone numbers that the kids were supposed to call before the other bus – I had to [inaudible] before he brought them. So, he'd know where to take them. Instead of taking them home, he took them somewhere. I kept going pretty good and, of course, your runs – like Blackwater was on the road. You kept doing all you could because you

know time was all you had, and all the runs were across the road. I've about had the best of my bus the way it was for running. I know the last water I came through up Red Creek, my heaters and lights started going off, the brakkers were waterlogged; it was kicking my main breaker out front, the one that controlled the system. So, I cut everything off on it, all of it, just the motor, that's all I had left. It wasn't getting too much because it was so wet. Whenever I come to Jenningsston, I come around that bottom there, I thought maybe we was completely cut off from home. I knew if I could make the bridge, I could get home. I only had seven kids yet to get home. I was kind of shocked when I came and seen the Johnson bottom covered. That's when you come down big run there and look across the Dry Fork and go up around. When I got to the bridge, it was right up close to the bottom of the bridge. So, I dropped it back in low gear because it didn't have much power and I didn't want us to die on the bridge. [laughter] I dropped back in low gear and [inaudible]. I made it across there and my daughter-in-law was waiting on other side up against the hill. I had two kids for up in the middle of Jenningsston Road. So, I told her to follow me because I didn't know whether that thing was going to run or what.. I made it up to where I'd parked back some years ago. Rose [inaudible] daddy was there waiting just pouring rain down. I pulled it off in that parking lot and I said, "I'm going to leave it here." He said, "It might not be here when you come back." I looked at him and laughed. I said, "I've waded in got it before." He said, "Look up there," and we looked up through the bottom there. The foam was coming down there. The white foam was coming down through that bottom, I'd say, three to four feet deep in. That was clear and above his house. He hollered at the girls to get to the house and get what clothes they wanted, and "Let's get out of here." So, we jumped in the car. My daughter-in-law, she had the car turned around, me and the five kids jumped in that car and we took down through the bottom. I think before Charlie came out – them girls' daddy – while they was waiting in the water, the water was pushing them out, and we hit the mountain. Then her brother came in. He lives on above them. My wife's brother and he came in right behind me and he tried to go up. It was giving him trouble, and he made it just above that house. He thought he could make it to his house. He lived on up about a half a mile, and it got to crowding him too much. He turned around and the water pushed him back out and he came down, and he went to the top of the mountain. You can see the house up there as you go down the mountain before you come to this big curb and come down in Jenningsston, that's where her brother lives. You've probably been there maybe [inaudible]. And that's how he got home that night. But we came around this mountain. Until we got down here, hat water was already all over here. We had to wade in from over there and we parked the car over there. I told my daughter-in-law to leave the keys in it because my brother [inaudible]he got all tore up. He was tore up trying to move stuff around. It got up in that car before they got moved out of the away, sitting over in the driveway. But it was running across this here two or three feet deep. That's how quick it got down here until we just went up around and come down, probably. I'd say, we came around, it may have been seven or eight minutes that night, wasn't long. Then about an hour after that, then Raymond came down over there. It was dark – raining and foggy and dark. I know that an hour before that, that you couldn't get to him because I'd been out there. I'd went around the hill and looked at my barn. I was telling you about the barn, and running through the barn. I'd looked up to his house and his truck. He used his truck all the time. He never had his car out. He had a new car. His truck was sitting right by his patio door. I never seen nothing [inaudible], no lights or nothing. So, I figured he was over at my brother's right over there on the bank at the trailer. I came back to the house and we'd eat a bite of supper. I was sitting there, and my other brother came in and said, "Raymond went over there." I said, "Well, if he's over there, he'll? have to sweat it out." We

still didn't think about it getting that deep. But there was no way to get over there. He had already tried the truck and he couldn't get in. He was wanting to ride inner tubes over, but I don't think he'd ever got back if he had gone over because there's too much stuff coming in the dark, and it was raining. I mean, daytime, might have a little chance. But he had two-wire fences to face, barbwire fences, and plus the stuff that was afloat. It was just one of them things. The only thing I couldn't figure out, why he stayed that long? But see, around his house from the last report I heard – from what they claimed, it was coming in at his upper patio doors and his upper patio doors was at least two and a half feet off the ground level, you know what I mean? Now, that's how deep it was when he left the house and that up there is the highest part. So, he came down here, and he drowned out. But they said he'd got out and cut his fan belt. But I don't know whether he did or not. But I think really what he was waiting on – he thought that Norman could get up in, which he failed on that. But if they'd went back up the road, held on to that fence, they might have saved themselves. But you couldn't get over there to them and you couldn't tell them what to do. Like, Jack got up there, my other brother, he tried to holler over and tell him not to go down here but see, he couldn't hear him. You could hear them, but you couldn't talk to him. It's got too much noise between as the river was roaring too much.

MK: Do you think he'd been away from home too long and forgot about the river and what it could do?

TB: No, I think just like everybody else, he just underestimated. I think we all did. I mean, I don't think anybody ever dreamed of it being that high until it just kept pouring in. He just [inaudible] off too late that's all. I still think he could have got out, maybe himself at first. But she wasn't used to water and was afraid of water, and he couldn't – wasn't much he could do. So, he just stayed with her, probably. He just stayed too long. Now, he knowed. He had been here all day and the rest of us hadn't. He'd been up and down the road, hadn't he. He was a devil on some of them other boys about getting out. Now, whenever they moved them trailers up through there, them boys came out to my barn, two of them. One was my nephew –

[Recording paused.]

MK: He had been deviling the rest of them all day about getting out?

FB: [laughter]

TB: That evening. Yes. Just whenever they pulled the trailers up, he was acting a fool with them and deviling “better get out of there,” and all that stuff. Yet, he wasn't going himself. He had went –

FB: He was going to show you where that limb was on that Locust Street down there.

MK: Yes, I can see it.

TB: He was telling them boys they better get out of there. All right. Them boys, they was. But yet he was fooling around. He had went back in the house, and now what – he probably setting stuff up or something, probably moving stuff up. He knowed it was up that deep and he was

probably moving furniture or something until too late. But he told them boys – he was deviling them about they better get out of here. Well, they'd come down there, and they couldn't get across. One could swim, another one couldn't. So, the one jerked his coat off, and he started to jump in. My brother's boy said, "Hell," he said, "I can't swim." He said, "What am I going to do?" So, the other boy then – he didn't go. Whenever he said he was a go – he couldn't swim, he wouldn't leave him. So, both of them took off, and they waded out down through this bottom here. They got down there, and it was up around their waist where they crossed the road and said whenever they'd get off in the grass, it would start moving their feet. They'd get back on the hard top. They held together, and they come through that. But that was at least forty-five minutes before Raymond came down. They made it out, see? [laughter]

MK: Just waited too long.

TB: Just waited. He just misjudged it, just like everybody else. He waited too long. Now, he was deviling those boys about getting out. But yet he wasn't getting out himself. He was fooling around. He was that way all the time, deviling around like a fool. But he wasn't worried at that point. I guess he just didn't think it would get that bad enough. But he thought he could get through to come down here. But see, he knowed he couldn't get up the river. But maybe he knew he couldn't get down, too. I don't know. It's like I said; if we couldn't get to him, but he kind of depended on us to get him. But we couldn't. Wasn't nothing we could do. We done all we could do. If a helicopter – if it hadn't been so foggy and rainy, and the helicopters had come in, they'd have had plenty of time. They could have come from Pittsburgh. They'd see everything was [inaudible], and it was real foggy and raining. So, it rained hard you couldn't see, plus the fog. But they could've come from Pittsburgh and got them in the time, totally washed out. But they wouldn't let nothing out. Now, Elkins Fire Departments, like I said, they got here probably, oh, I don't know, it might have been ten minutes. They were trying to figure out the strategy to get over there and maybe they would've tried it. But then something hit the truck and turned it around again. That was the last I saw of them. So, that ended it all.

MK: Is there any kind of religious message in all of this for you? Well, obviously, his time had come, but do you think that that is how he was meant to go, or what do make of it?

TB: I reckon. I guess that's about it. His time just come. It was supposed to be that way. I guess that way for us all. I think your number – you're already plotted, but you don't know it. Mine is, too. I think it's that way. I don't know how you believe. I'm going to the bathroom. Give me a minute.

MK: [laughter]

FB: [laughter]

[Recording paused.]

MK: Tell us your full name anyway.

FB: All right. My name is Freddie Bonner.

MK: Freddie?

FB: Rachel.

MK: Rachel?

FB: Waybright Bonner.

MK: Waybright Bonner. You were a Waybright, same as Edith?

FB: Yes.

MK: Any kin to her?

FB: Yes. She's my sister. [laughter]

MK: I'll swear.

FB: Yes.

MK: She is, isn't she?

FB: Yes.

MK: I can see it now.

TB: Couldn't miss it. [laughter]

FB: [laughter]

MK: Small world. Well, tell me what you remember about November 4th.

FB: Well, about 3:30 [p.m.], my nephew, Joey, called and told me the water was running over the road. That the bus couldn't get down that way. So, I called my daughter-in-law to go around and go up to Jenningson and get Tom and her kids, the five grandchildren. So, after she left, I thought I'd better go out and turn the cows out of the meadow because the water was getting deep. I turned the cows out of the meadow, and Raymond was down the road at that time. He was checking on the water. I thought about going up to his house, but I didn't. I thought I'd better come back to the house because Tom and them would be coming back, and they'd be wondering where I was at. I just wondered whether I could get back to the house if I went up there. So, I came on back to the house. By that time, Tom and the kids come, and they couldn't get in our driveway. They had to come through the meadow. It just seemed like you just lost all trace of time. You don't know what time it was until 7:00 o'clock [p.m.], when the electric went off. You did know that because our clocks had stopped. That's about the same as what he told you from that time on. Just everybody didn't know what to do, or nobody knew what to do. All you had to

do was just walk the floor and look out the window and go out in the rain and look. That was about it.

MK: Did you ever think there was a chance the water would go down, and they would somehow come through it? Or what did you think?

FB: Well, you never thought that the water would be that high to begin with. But then, after you knew they were gone, you still had this feeling that you would get up in the morning, and just by some miracle they'd still be there. But that's about it.

MK: What has it been like for you since then?

FB: Well, that's a good question. [laughter] It's just not the same.

MK: They had lived here for fifteen months.

FB: Yes. Me and Dorothy were good friends because if she wasn't down here, I was up there every day. And if we didn't go back and forth, we talked to each other every day. I did her hair, and we did things together. She always went shopping with us and one thing or another.

MK: It's been, I think, fifteen weeks now, hasn't it?

FB: Well, all I know, it's been a long time.

MK: Lonesome for you?

FB: Yes.

MK: What about their kids? Did they have children?

FB: Yes, they had two boys. One's in Pennsylvania, and the other one's in Virginia. She kept her three grandchildren all summer, which they were one girl was eight, and one was six. Then they kept the little boy, too. He was Raymond's pride and joy. He was something.

MK: You were raised right out here at this house right by the bridge? Is that your home?

FB: No. I was raised on Shavers Mountain.

MK: Oh, that's right. You said that a while ago. How did you two meet?

FB: Well, I think we always knew each other. [laughter]

MK: How did you really meet when you knew that there was something a little bit special about him? Or had you always thought that, too?

FB: Ask him. [laughter]

MK: Was it at a ballgame or a church social?

FB: Oh, it's been so long ago. I don't even remember.

MK: You just clear forgot that?

FB: Oh, of course.

TB: You just don't want to fess up [inaudible] –

FB: [laughter]

MK: [laughter]

TB: I had a hard time [inaudible] her, but I finally got her to [inaudible]. [laughter]

FB: [laughter]

MK: [laughter] You had a hard time [inaudible] her, but she finally got you [inaudible].

TB: [laughter] That's it.

FB: That's about the way it was.

MK: [laughter] Well, thank you.

-----END OF INTERVIEW-----

Reviewed by Cameron Daddis, 5/29/2024

Reviewed by Molly Graham 5/30/2024