

Carr Creek Oral History Project
Paul Collins Oral History
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Interviewer: NM – Nicole Musgrave
Transcriber: NCC

Nicole Musgrave: This is Nicole Musgrave. I am here with Paul Collins at his home in Hazard, Kentucky. It is February 27th, 2023. This is for the Carr Creek Oral History Project. So, I guess you already kind of started off on it. I already told you my first question. So, Paul, tell me about your people and where you're from.

Paul Collins: Well, I'm just sixty-eight years old as of December of 2022. So, I was probably a young child growing up at Smithboro, Kentucky in the [19]50s and in the early [19]60s. My parents were Guy Collins and Hope Collins or Hope Amburgey Collins. My father was from Irishman Creek, which his home was affected by the acquisition for the dam. But it wasn't inundated by the water. It was part of the tailwaters of the dam on Irishman Creek. My grandmother lived there. She died before she had to move or relocate. My mother's parents were John J. Amburgey and Ida Smith Amburgey, who lived in Smithboro. My grandfather had a store there. He was part of a family of Amburgeys who were stuck in the merchant business because he came from Irishman Creek also and wasn't born there. But his family lived there in Irishman Creek, in the Trace Fork of Irishman Creek. He had brothers who had three stores within sight of one another at Amburgey on Irishman Creek. That's at the mouth of Irishman and Trace Fork. For whatever reason, my grandfather became a schoolteacher. He had an eighth-grade education plus a teaching certificate. So, John J. Amburgey began to teach elementary school with that qualification, did that at Hindman Settlement School. Professor Clark, as they called him, was the teacher, I guess, there at the time. He was a contemporary and knew something about Alice Lloyd and Alice Lloyd College at the time. Never got an opportunity to attend college. He got married to my grandmother and started teaching school. But he never lost his desire to be a merchant either. Because while he was a partner with one of his brothers in one of those three stores on Irishman Creek, he later moved about two and a half miles away and built his own store there in Smithboro. They had a daughter. Her name was Hope or Eugenia Hope Amburgey. She married my dad, Guy Collins. So, that's my immediate family. I'm an only child. So, if you want to know any more about the history of either one of those two plans, I can tell you a little bit about it, I guess.

NM: Okay. Well, I guess the first thing that strikes me is the stores. Can you describe what you remember of the stores?

PC: Well, let me begin on Irishman Creek at the junction of what is known as Irishman Creek and Trace Fork. Now, with the 911 descriptions, those are completely different. There were three stores there. One was owned by Newt Amburgey and his wife. I'm trying to remember, but I believe her name might have been Ida as well. I think maybe they were postmaster there. That store was located right in the junction. My grandfather's brother, Burn Amburgey, had a second somewhat larger store there at the time. His was the polling place there. I remember going there to vote. There was always a polling place there at Amburgey. The third brother was Estill Amburgey. Estill and John J. were partners for a time and had a smaller store, which was downstream, but all within sight. So, if you can imagine the irony of having three brothers, all three merchants, all three competing against one another as a small general store owner. My grandfather – I guess, maybe I'll give him credit he wasn't due. But he probably recognized that that wasn't a very good arrangement. So, he moved two and a half miles away and built a small general store at Smithboro. When my mother graduated from high school, she became a partner – got married to my dad. They partnered with my grandparents, and they expanded the store

there. So, at one point, it was what they referred to as a department store in those days. One section of the store was groceries; another was dry goods and plumbing fixtures and electrical hardware, everything; and then a third section was furniture, appliances, television sets in the later years. So, we've got some pictures if you want to see pictures of that. But basically, that store sat right at the mouth of Big Smith Branch. I don't know if you are familiar with the geography and topography of that area, but the current Carr Fork Marina sits at the mouth of Little Smith Branch. There are just two hollows. They're right there together on the marina side. The first one you come to now by road is Little Smith Branch. That's closest to the marina. If you go on around the mountain and go off to the right, you come to Big Smith Branch. It's actually left, as you view it from the road. But if you keep going and turn right and go up the second hollow there, that's Big Smith Branch. They all come very close to the border between Knott County and Letcher County at the head, up near a place called Carcassonne or some other areas up in there.

NM: You described that your father's store, once they partnered with your grandparents, it became a department store. The other three stores though, were they all general stores?

PC: We're talking about different locations. The three stores were at Amburgey. This store was in Smithboro. They were all general stores in that regard, especially in the beginning. A general store for a merchant in that era, in the [19]30s and the [19]40s and the [19]50s, they sold everything. If we don't have it, you don't need it type of philosophy of merchants. I grew up in the store. But about 1960, my grandfather and grandmother retired, probably about 1950, [19]51, [19]52. My dad was a veteran. He'd been in World War II. My grandfather was drafted for World War I but never went overseas. But my parents built a home, which is out where the marina is right now. It's the bottom area there. They had a fairly large area that they owned there. We can go into that in more detail if you're curious about it. But what happened was they traded the home that Dad had built with his own hands, with my grandparents. My grandparents, in turn, exchanged their interest or ownership interest in the store building. So, in effect, while they had been partners in the store for a time, for a couple of decades, my grandparents moved as they retired into the home occupied by my parents, and that meant, occupied by me. We moved into the rear living quarters behind the store. So, it was a classic general store in the sense that quite often, merchants lived behind the store. That was for security purposes and every other purpose. So, from 1960 through about 1968, which would have been when I was a freshman in high school, I grew up in a general store and spent most of my childhood inside that general store there even when I wasn't living behind it. Because we would go to work in the mornings, and I would leave home, and we would go to the store. My grandmother would cook for everybody for lunch. I did a lot of my playing inside the store, up and down the aisles and in my pedal cars, and things like that. So –

NM: What was the name of the store?

PC: Well, it was the John J. Amburgey General Merchandise Store for a long time. Then when it was expanded – and I'm guessing my parents had a lot to do with that. But when it was expanded and the other two parts of the building were expanded, it was then known as the Collins Department Store after the trade.

NM: Okay. Do you remember the names of your uncle's stores in Amburgey?

PC: I do. Newt Amburgey was my grandfather's brother. Burn Amburgey was also a brother and Estill Amburgey. I would say that Estill Amburgey's family is probably more well-known in the Hindman area of Knott County because Dr. Gene Watts married his daughter. Therefore, a lot of folks know Dr. Watts who worked there for many, many, many years. Odus Amburgey was the fourth brother. His daughter married Jake Huff, who was the circuit court clerk of Knott County for something like close to forty years, I guess.

NM: Okay. Great. I guess I just want to know a little bit about your childhood growing up in Smithboro. Paint me a picture. What kinds of memories come to mind for you?

PC: All of that portion of Knott County was a cluster of what I would really describe as small villages. Probably someone who's not familiar with that, you'd call them communities. But they're really mostly rural villages. They were strung out along the Carr Fork tributary that fed the North Fork of the Kentucky River that flows through Hazard today. If you start at the dam area, that was called – really, the dam was constructed at a location where the Little Dove Regular Baptist Church was located. Coming toward Smithboro, you'd come through Kelleytown. You'd pass the mouth of Irishman Creek, which is no longer in the valley but now up on the new road, the Kentucky State Highway 15 now, across a massive bridge. I watched every bit of that bridge going up as a child. You would come to Smithboro after Kelleytown. Then from there, it stretched along the area from around where the marina was and below the marina where the beach is now. It stretched almost all the way toward Cody. But Cody would be the next major tributary. Above Cody would be Red Fox or Breeding's Creek. If you turned on 160 toward Hindman, you'd come to the actual Carr Creek School, which was the old high school that's still there today. Then, oh, goodness, now you're running a little bit farther past, but you'd come to an area called, well, Littcarr, ultimately. But there are a couple of other places, Wolfpen, Burgey's Creek, which is also Amburgey's Creek, I guess, and Main Carr, and so forth. But I don't know if I'm answering your question. What's life like? A series of small villages. Smithboro itself would have been a place with two major general stores. Those were primarily the hubs, I guess, because lots of folks would come out of the hollows and come to trade there. It was kind of a vibrant area because there was some mining that would go on. A lot of folks worked in the mines, not in the immediate vicinity of Smithboro. Although, later on, they had a lot of surface mining, mostly after the dam was constructed in the vicinity of Smithboro. I can remember lots of families that would come out of Big Smith Branch particularly. The other store, incidentally, was owned by Dennis Cornett, there at the mouth of Little Smith Branch. As far as the history is concerned, a lot of the area there was probably owned by my grandmother's family originally. Now, I'm talking 120 years ago, which is the Smith family. There was an older home that was upstream of Smithboro but still in Smithboro and between Smithboro and Cody. That was the home where my great-grandfather, Shadrach Smith, lived, and before him I guess his father, William Smith. They owned lots of property, sold off that property in Smithboro to various sundry people and, in some cases, to coal companies. But we can get into that if you want to ask that question later. You asked about what the character of the community was. There were several. My parents had gas pumps out in front of their store, I guess. So, we sold gasoline, as did Dennis Cornett. When I was young, the post office was in a small building beside Dennis Cornett's store. Later, it was moved to a different part of Smithboro. There was a

garage, a local garage, where somebody would work on vehicles. There was another service station with a little bitty restaurant or whatever that was halfway to Cody in a very sharp curve. (Eversole?), a fellow by the name of Slick Eversole was his nickname, and I can't remember his regular name, but he owned that. Then you get into the area where Cody was located. They had their own general stores and service stations and so forth. The community was bisected by a creek. There was a walking bridge or a swinging – we called them swinging bridges. There was a swinging bridge across the creek directly in front of the store and lots of families lived on the opposite side of the creek. I think there was maybe at least one other swinging bridge if not one other than that. Then there was a bridge where you could drive across the creek. It would have been upstream. But lots of families lived over there. At one point in time, my grandparents lived in a home on the opposite side of the creek from where the store was located, just a small residential community. They farmed, had a lot of corn growing, and some people kept chickens. I guess not many cattle when I was a child, but a lot of that going on. Well, the other thing I would tell you about Smithboro, there were quite a few churches. There had been a local honky-tonk establishment before alcohol was banned in Knott County. It was located not terribly far from where I grew up actually in a building or maybe at least on the site of a building where my – how do I describe this – where my great-aunt Luna Smith lived with her husband Jerry Smith, who was my great-uncle on a different side of the family. So, what had happened there is my great-aunt and my great-uncle were not related to one another, but they were related to my mother's side of the family. They were related to my father's side of the family. They married each other. So, I had double first cousins, or my mother had double first cousins there. But that honky-tonk establishment used to be called the Blinking Moon or, as they referred to it, the Blinky Moon. My mom would tell me stories about spending time with her cousins who lived across the creek from it. The young girls would sit and look across the way and imagine what might be going on in the honky-tonk over there. So, that's either here or there. The other thing I would say is that Smithboro got religion pretty early on. My grandfather donated a couple of tracts of land, in fact, to churches that were constructed in Smithboro. The first, I don't remember which came first, but he gave some land to the Smithboro Baptist Church which established kind of on the corner of our property upstream. He was a fellow who had a foot in two different religious camps. The big difference, he was mostly a regular Baptist, but he strongly believed in Bible scholarship. So, he very much appreciated the value of Sunday schools, which were more common to what they call missionary Baptists, what we call Southern Baptists today. But he donated a second parcel of land for it to the regular Baptist group that were planning to establish a church in Smithboro. So, I grew up between those two, having gone to both of those churches at one point in time or other. So, I'm not unique in that respect. There were a lot of folks in Eastern Kentucky who were familiar with regular Baptists and familiar with missionary Baptists or Southern Baptists. But I spent most of my time and my parents in the Smithboro Baptist Church. That church was relocated. We can come to that later. But it was relocated from Smithboro. I was involved in that process actually. The church collapsed as they were trying to move it. We can talk about that later if you like. But it was rebuilt in Sassafras, Kentucky today. You can see it there today. Providence Church was also relocated but not moved and was reconstructed on Main Carr, very close to where my great-uncle Estill moved his store from Main Irishman Creek up to Carr Creek. So, we're (Carrful?). What else can I tell you?

NM: Gosh. Well, it sounds like a lot. [laughter] Yes. This is really exciting. I guess just a

point of clarification, the creek that bisected Smithboro, did it have a name?

PC: Yes, it's called Carr Creek. Carr Creek would start as a tributary on 160 or off 160 actually and over toward Beaver. But it would come down past the Carr Creek High School. It would join there Breeding's Creek. Then the two together would come down through Smithboro, down past Kelleytown, and then come to the present location of the dam.

NM: Got it. Okay. How wide and deep was Carr Creek?

PC: Like most small streams like that, it varied, obviously. I never swam in a real swimming hole because the closest one that would be deep enough to swim in was up near my great-grandfather Shadrach's home, which was upstream or in the upper upstream area of Smithboro. There was supposedly a swimming hole there. Where I grew up, for the most part, Carr Creek was about 3 or 4 feet deep until it wasn't. The other thing that would probably be a dominant theme of my childhood and growing up in Smithboro would probably be the periodic flooding that we would have. If we want to get into it, one of the interesting aspects of the impact of the construction of the reservoir was that I was kind of in the middle of that. The early construction efforts to build Highway 15 involved constructing that really tall bridge that is between the beach and the marina. At one point, they (built fills?) out from either side, either mountain, as they built the bridge abutments. The effect of building those bridge abutments was to dam up Carr Creek a bit so that when we had flood waters or high waters, they tend to back up there because of the road construction that was going on. When I was in high school – which is jumping forward in the conversation – when I was in high school and people were vacating, there were people who lived in Little Smith Branch and people who lived in Big Smith Branch there and people who still lived in Cody who could get home by riding the new highway. But I was still living in the valley. During modest flooding, it would cover the roads, and the buses couldn't get me home. So, I've had a couple of three times in my probably junior year, sophomore, junior year, when I had to exit the bus, climb the mountain, and walk across. In one case – if my folks had known this, they would have been crazy – but I walked across a log with water in the hollow raging beneath me, walked the log to get home during the school. So, I haven't told my kids about that probably. But that's a true story.

NM: Wow. Gosh. Hard to imagine that. Yes. Wow.

PC: Yes. It probably wasn't something I would do today at the age of 68. But in those days, I didn't think too much about it. I was probably carrying my – I didn't know if I had a book. I probably had a book bag of some sort, but I don't remember if it was a backpack in those days.

NM: Well, I am curious to know a little bit more about what it was like growing up in a general store.

PC: I just wrote – my kids just bought me – it's called Storyline or something like that. So, I'm having to revisit some of those things. I just finished one of the stories talking about growing up in a general store. As I say, I was in the general store from almost the time I came out of a bassinet or a baby bed until I was probably fifteen or sixteen years old. That's when the store closed, and we vacated the area there. I had blocks when I was growing up. But very quickly, I

grew out of those ABC blocks and graduated to stacking Carnation milk cans in the store. So, I learned how to stack things by stacking merchandise in the store. I learned how to drive my pedal cars by racing down the aisles of the store and learning how to parallel park a pedal car by parking against the counter. I don't think I ever hit a customer with any of my pedal cars and so forth, but I can't say the same for some of the counters. I probably nicked more than a few. So, that's part of what it was like. But the other thing was growing up in a general store, instead of a lot of toys – and I had plenty of toys growing up. But instead of toys, if I needed to build something, I could go to the pipe fitting section. I could screw pipes together and have L-joints and T-joints and so forth. If I needed string, there was always string available to me. If I needed wire for whatever reason – and I just put this in the story. I remember getting into trouble because we would sell spools of wire, and you could come and measure. Whether if you were selling chain, you could measure the length of the chain. If you had a spool of wire and you needed 100 feet of it, you'd just roll it off the spool and so forth. It was pretty heavy stuff. I remember one day, going and wanting about 2 feet of wire or something like that. I remember I couldn't reach the end of the wire because it was rolled back underneath the cabinet. I don't know how old I was at the time but old enough to probably know better. I just snipped it out in the middle, which my dad brought to my attention when he found out that I had cut the wire in the middle, probably left 70 feet of wire on one end and 280 feet of wire on the other. But in any event, it was an interesting experience. I got to experience just about everything. We sold nearly everything. I got to look and read comic books that we would sell. You know, we had a small toy section. I didn't get to tear those out of the bags and then play with them, but I did get an opportunity to see all these other things. I had probably an indoor space that was like no other because the building was probably 100 to 120 feet long. It was about 30 feet deep. We had a warehouse. So, I could go back in there and play on the feed sacks or do all these other things. Well, could you imagine growing up in a mini-Walmart? That's how I would probably describe it. If you could grow up inside a mini-Walmart, imagine what that might be like.

NM: Did you work there yourself as you got older?

PC: I did. One of the first chores that I had, of course, was to take the pop bottles or soda bottles and take them out of the space where customers would place them when they would return them. I had to take them and put them in racks that we kept for them. The vendors would pick those up, take those back, and refill them. I also had to mop the wooden floors with – in those days, we actually put some oil down to keep down dust and so forth. So, we would oil the floors. That was one of my early chores. Believe it or not, by the time I was ten or eleven years old, I was sitting behind the cash register. I can remember our first adding machine was of the type where we would have to pull the handle. It was a mechanical apparatus. Then we got an electric one. Then I'd stand there and hit the buttons. I was old enough to know better. But the other kids would come in who were younger, cousins and things like that, and they'd hit the button. Then it would spew out this white receipt tape or whatever paper out the back. Until recently, probably the last ten years, we probably had one of those old cash registers lying around somewhere. But in any event, that was interesting. But I would trade with people. If you want to know what that was like, being a merchant gives you an interesting perspective. We lived in a friendly world, okay? As a merchant, everybody is a customer. Everybody is entitled to respect. The old adage about the customer is always right is something that a merchant always keeps on his mind. So, we did our best to get along with everybody who came in. We were in a community. We didn't

have many people who were diverse in that immediate area of Smithboro. But 4 or 5 miles away, 3 or 4 miles away was Red Fox, and there were Black families who lived there. They would come. They'd trade in our store, just like they'd trade in any other stores. So, I grew up like that. I grew up playing with Arthur Christon at times, who Arthur Christon and his wife have the IGA store that was recently in the news because it was damaged in the flooding that took place in Letcher County in 2022, in July of 2022. So, I knew them growing up. I knew his wife growing up. We attended elementary school. Also, in addition to growing up there in the store, right behind us was an elementary school, a one-room or maybe it was two-room. I don't remember. I never went to school there. But I could see the kids coming by as I was growing up before I went to school. But I entered first grade at the brand-new – then brand-new Carr Creek Elementary School, which was constructed just near Cody, Kentucky. So, I went to a brand-new consolidated elementary school that did away with the school building that was right behind me. I could've walked out my back door and gone to school in that. My Smith relatives, in fact, my Collins relatives too, but my Smith relatives particularly had lots of teachers. So, my grandfather was a teacher many, many years ago, but I had all kinds of cousins who were teachers. So, a lot of my teachers growing up were either my cousins or were married to cousins or whatever. So, that was an interesting aspect of my elementary and high school.

NM: You mentioned people trading things at the store. What would people trade?

PC: When I said trading, I don't mean – we didn't barter. But we had a credit relationship with many families. In those days, it was commonplace. I have a vivid memory of a box under the counter, the cashier's counter. It had probably 40, 50, maybe 100 individual books. By the time I was 12, if someone bought something, you had to list what was purchased. You had to list that. You'd give them a receipt. But you put down the amount, and that added to the amount that they owed at the end of the month. They might get a payment at the end of the month, or they may get paid if they worked in the coal mines or whatever. Typically, end of the month was when they would get paid. They'd come in and settle up their accounts. So, we did that. I learned math by having to check people out at the store and having to make change. So, I was able to do that. My parents, in addition to the store, they had some rental property in Smithboro. They had some mobile homes that were there that they rented and lots for other mobile homes. They had a couple of smaller houses that they rented to people who were there. Then about 1959 or so, when I would have been 5, they decided they would build a dairy bar, if you know what a dairy bar is. It's a mini version of DQ. But they built a dairy bar on the site. So, it was out in front of the store. I spent a great deal of time there. So, in addition to being a cashier at a general store, I grew up in a dairy bar and made change and helped my parents run a dairy bar there. They located or relocated that to the top of the mountain at Red Oak, which there's a dairy bar there now on the way to Whitesburg. But that's a different dairy bar. Theirs was actually across the road from there. I probably should have mentioned earlier, if you know where the dairy bar is located now at the top of the mountain at Red Oak, the home that my dad and mom built in Smithboro was actually relocated from the area which is in front of the marina. They put it on a truck and hauled it down to the top of the mountain at Red Oak. It's the stone home that's down there now. It's almost straight across the road from the existing dairy bar that's there.

NM: Okay. I will have to definitely keep my eye out for that next time I pass by.

PC: Well, it's interesting, built in about 1953 or [19]54. When the Corps of Engineers was beginning to acquire property and beginning to move people out of the dam area, there were a couple of three other people who did it and did more than Dad did. But Dad was pretty much a handyman. He could plumb the house. He could run electricity through the house. He was a carpenter, almost a master carpenter, I guess. So, he built our home. He probably laid up the stone himself as well. So, he would have been a good mason. But he decided he would get into the business of buying some of the homes that were being sold for salvage value and then pay someone to move them, which he did. There were five or six homes on Main Carr Creek where he moved homes to and then refurnished or remodeled and sold those. Well, that's what he was doing at the time. So, a lot of those other homes in the dam area were relocated. There were a couple of places where people moved twenty or thirty of those houses. I got busy helping the house mover. I was probably fourteen, fifteen years old at the time, but I'm drawn like a magnet to that kind of activity. So, I actually got under some of the houses and helped to do what some of the men that were working did, which is to set them up on blocks and raise the houses on jacks, hydraulic jacks, lower them onto steel. I didn't do any of the driving of these vehicles. But as a fourteen- or fifteen-year-old, I confess I got behind the wheel of a flag vehicle once or twice and drove down the highway, flagging traffic as people would pull to the side, so they could move it. That brings me to another story. I know quite a bit about this. Smithboro Baptist Church there, they proposed to relocate it. My mom had been a charter member of that church. My grandfather had donated the land for the church. That church, they thought they could relocate. It was a concrete block building, probably one of the heaviest buildings that anyone had ever attempted to move at that point in time, certainly the heaviest that was attempted to move in that area. I think, if I remember correctly, it weighed probably 240 tons. Now, they loaded that on a truck and some dollies. They pulled out with our help to do that. They headed toward the location in Sassafras, which is where they bought a lot. They got on the old road, old Highway 15, which is now under the water. They got into a spot where the road was elevated in one direction at the front end of the vehicle and elevated in a different direction at the back end of the vehicle. It applied torque to the building in a way that the concrete blocks just simply could not withstand. There was a guy riding on top who helped to move the wires, the phone lines, and so forth, that had to go across the top of the building. He had to leap off and onto a cliff in order to get away as the building itself crumbled. It crumbled and collapsed on the side of the riverbank. It was just a terrible tragedy. I wasn't there at the time, but I came and got a couple of pictures. There aren't very good pictures of that. So, there's a story about how the Smithboro Baptist Church collapsed, how it was rebuilt. We had a pastor at the time, a man by the name of Jesse Bourne, who spent one summer cleaning the brick, recovering and salvaging the brick that came off the old building and how he knocked the mortar off, cleaned the brick up. They used it to put a brick on the exterior of the parsonage, which is beside the Smithboro Baptist Church now at Sassafras. So –

NM: Was that a local man, the pastor? Was he a local fellow from around here?

PC: No. He was from Owen County originally. He returned to Owen County later on. But he was actually there twice, from about 1959 until the late [19]60s. Then he returned for a period of time in the [19]70s, I think, to be pastor there.

NM: Okay. You mentioned that you helped out a little bit with moving the church. What

specifically did you do?

PC: Well, in order to move a house – and this is a memory of long ago. But in those days, in order to move a house, you would first puncture holes in the block foundation. You would push or pull, mostly push, long pieces of steel, steel beams, underneath the house. If it was a wooden structure, you didn't need many cross pieces of steel. But if it was a brick structure, they would put smaller crosspieces under the foundation. Then you would raise them up and put wooden blocks, cribbing. That's the way I would describe it, if that name means anything to you. If you could imagine stacking – and I don't know the name of the children's – but like the wooden –

NM: Like Lincoln Logs?

PC: Like Lincoln Logs. You would put wooden cribbing down as you jacked up using a big hydraulic jack. They used to use railroad jacks, which were all by hand. I don't know how they did that. When I was working, they used a hydraulic jack so that you put at least four, sometimes six or more jacks under this steel. You would raise it up. As soon as you got it up another 6 or 8 inches, in order to make sure that the jack didn't fail and the whole thing collapsed, you had to have a man at every cribbing station. You had to have lots of these wooden timbers. They would lift timbers into place and just build these cribs and keep going on up until you got high enough with the steel that a truck could back under it, and it could be lowered down. The church thing, the building, house or otherwise, could be lowered down onto the truck bed. The truck bed would support the weight of the house. You could pull out, pull away, and move it up the road. But it took a lot of effort. Someone usually had to ride the top of the roof because the phone lines and power lines would be such that they'd have enough flexibility to maybe just barely get over the top of the roof. The guy would raise up the wire and walk it back along the roof and then drop it at the rear. When you get to the other location where you were going to put it outside the dam area, reservoir area, you'd have to do everything in reverse. You would jack it up again. Then you would lower the cribbing down until you got it into place. Sometimes they would build the – I guess they would almost always build the concrete foundation under it. Then you would have to lower it into position. I don't remember this, but I doubt you could leave it. A house mover probably wasn't going to – maybe they even built that foundation ahead of time. I don't remember. I can't imagine a house mover waiting for a week for someone to build a foundation. So, maybe they were good enough to move that house into position and get it exactly in place on the foundation that was being built below it and then lower it. I just don't recall. I don't recall.

NM: I have heard that story of the church before. I guess I am curious, were there many other casualties in moving buildings?

PC: Honestly, I don't recall any. I think that's why, in part, this was such a shock. It's curious that they attempted – but the home that my dad constructed that was relocated was probably the second heaviest house or structure that was moved. It was something like 140 tons because of the rock on it. Interestingly enough, if you want to know how they do that, the stone would fall off the exterior of the house, if you were just lifting it by the wooden foundation. So, there, they would put the steel under the first or second row of concrete blocks up the foundation, so you'd lift part of the foundation, which would hold the stone in place. But in any event, instead of

driving down the old road, which was the old Highway 15 in the valley, where the torque had caused the long church building to break up and fall apart, by the time they moved my dad's home, dad and mom's home, they were able to access the new Highway 15. There was a road that led up from the valley up to new 15. They used that road rather than the old 15. That's one of the reasons perhaps they were more successful in moving that house in that fashion. But I don't know of any other casualties. I'm sure there may have been. But most of the other homes were one- or two-bedroom wooden structures. In fact, some of those structures were so light compared to these heavy structures. I remember it seemed like there were two or three different house-moving companies that were doing this at the same time. I can remember looking up one day and seeing a small house being moved. The truck was going 20 or 30 miles an hour down the highway with a house on the back. That was amazing. The church, on the other hand, moved about 4 or 5 miles an hour. I would have been lucky to move faster than that.

NM: Gosh, you paint such a vivid picture of all of that.

PC: Imagine looking up and seeing a semi-tractor-trailer truck pulling a trailer, and on that trailer is a two-bedroom or three-bedroom house, not a shotgun house. This one would be probably 25 or 30 feet wide, which means that you had to control traffic and come down the round curves and so forth. Just imagine that coming around a curve and seeing it coming at you at 25 or 30 miles an hour.

NM: Yes, you would remember that.

PC: I can remember that, yes.

NM: You mentioned the dairy bar. I have heard about a dairy bar in Smithboro. Is that the dairy bar?

PC: That is the dairy bar. Paul's Frosty Freeze was the name of it. It was relocated to the area across the road from where the existing dairy bar is now. Of course, when they built there, the place now occupied by the dairy bar at the top of Red Oak Mountain was just merely an overlook area. They paved an area there where you could come up and look out over the lake. I guess the trees have grown up now to the point where you can't really see as well, but you could see the dam, how it was constructed. You could see part of the lake area there and look back toward Kelleytown.

NM: Was the dairy bar named after you?

PC: I think so, yes. Well, I know so it was named. I have no idea how they picked the name. They must have thought it was cute to name it after their only son or only child. So –

NM: Well, you have already talked about moving houses. So, I guess I want to shift a little bit more into when that plan started coming into place. So, I am curious, when did you first become aware that the lake was going to be built?

PC: I don't know that I can give you a specific date and time. It would have been in the late

1950s or early 1960s. It's curious. I became Hazard City attorney when we moved back here. I spent thirty-plus years, most of that period of time, working with William D. Gorman, who was the mayor of the city of Hazard. You have to understand the motivation for work with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. I guess I have had an opportunity in my lifetime to be able to live on both sides of that street, okay? I've lived in Hazard. I've experienced flooding in Hazard. So, I understand the motivation to try to minimize flood damage. But I've also lived on the other side of the street in that I grew up in an area that was basically sacrificed in order to try to achieve flood control. So, Mayor Gorman was known for encouraging the construction of dams by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers on tributaries of the Kentucky River in an effort to try to minimize floods or flooding. If you go back and look at flooding in Eastern Kentucky, I don't go back to 1927, but a lot of older people can tell you there was a large 1927 flood. There was a larger 1937 flood. There probably were floods in between, but there was a gigantic 1957 flood, which was probably the largest in this area and larger maybe in certain respects in Hazard, particularly than the flooding that took place in 2022. Although the 2022 flood was enormous in the smaller footprint area that it directly impacted, okay? After 1957, there was a [19]67 flood. Now, I mean, it just goes forward. So, people in Eastern Kentucky have grown accustomed to having to live in close proximity to streams that will rise up against you on a periodic basis. Part of the effort to try to mitigate that damage was the effort to try to build flood control reservoirs. You can look at other points in Eastern Kentucky, Dewey Lake, which was built in Floyd County. But Mayor Gorman was instrumental in getting the Buckhorn Dam constructed. He may very well have been important for some of the folks in Hazard, important in getting the Carr Fork Lake constructed. They worked toward getting a dam built on the main part of the north fork of the Kentucky River in the Letcher County Watershed. But the people there rose up and dams were becoming less popular in those days. Consequently, that dam never was constructed. But I was probably five or six years old when I began hearing my parents talking about the possibility of a reservoir. I mean, it caused a lot of concern among the people who were going to be impacted directly, maybe some local resentment. I remember that Congressman Carl D. Perkins was our local congressman. He's from Knott County. I didn't know him very well growing up, but I met him. I later worked in Washington D.C. my first year. Between my first and second years of law school, I went to work for Congressman Perkins' committee and worked out of his office. But in the early 1960s, there was a little bit of resentment there because he was known to work very closely with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Of course, all of the flood-prone areas were in his constituency as well as the areas that were going to be impacted by the flood construction. So, I've worked with Congressman Perkins who was on the fence. He had to reconcile things with all of his constituents. But in one way or another, some people had to give up their homes and their properties in order to attempt to control or mitigate flooding for others. So, I've been on every side. I've lived on both sides of that street. So –

NM: Yes. What was the community in Letcher County that there was a plan for a dam?

PC: I really couldn't tell you how concrete those proposals were, but I know that Carr Fork Lake has had a modest impact by – this is all third-hand hearsay. But I think Carr Fork Lake has had a modest impact on flood levels in Hazard. But the main flooding that takes place in Hazard comes from the area of the main tributary, the North Fork, that stretches back toward Letcher County. If you've been here long enough, you know how Route 7 leads up by Blackey, up back toward Isom, back through Whitesburg, and those areas. So, Linefork and those other areas tend

to produce more flood water for Hazard than Carr Fork did. Yet the dam, the first one that was constructed, was at Carr Fork. Buckhorn Dam is another example of a flood-control dam that was constructed in Perry County.

NM: What do you remember was the feeling of your parents or close community members about all this?

PC: Nobody is ever going to be happy about having to surrender their homes in order to – even if the purpose of it is to mitigate someone else's house somewhere else. I know there was a lot of concern, a lot of older people who were being dislocated at the time. When I say that, I'm talking about people who are my age now but who are older than me. The idea of losing homes that they lived in for decades or perhaps for generations, that's always a tough thing. There were cemeteries that had to be relocated. The Carr Fork Memorial Cemetery is located on Highway 160 today. They relocated that from areas that I can remember growing up as being hillside cemeteries, not far from where I grew up or whatever. There's a separate issue about whether you're being fairly compensated. As a lawyer, I can point to the Fifth Amendment, to the U.S. Constitution, the Bill of Rights, which says that there's not going to be a taking a property without just compensation. That process I have engaged in as a city attorney, not much but a little bit, where I've been familiar with projects that involved eminent domain. I understand the public need for acquiring property. But it's never a pleasant prospect for the person whose property is being acquired. It starts with appraisals. Probably, people are going to have different opinions about what their property is worth. Sometimes the government, whether it's the Transportation Cabinet building a highway or the Corps of Engineers building a dam, they're going to have a budget in mind for that construction project. The appraisers are going to be hired by the government. They may shade their views or viewpoints toward the idea of what that budget might be for the project. So, from the standpoint of the landowner, it's going to be a tough process. It forces the landowner to come back not just to negotiate, but forces the landowner to come back and, if they challenge the valuation, to hire lawyers, to hire appraisers, expert witnesses, and to go through an eminent domain process. My grandfather was able to reach an agreement with the – but I don't know how quickly they reached agreement on the property which included the building my parents constructed, if you recall. But my parents had a bit of an unusual situation. There's a small 2- or 3-acre parcel or 4-acre parcel there beside the highway which had a large general store, which had a dairy bar, which had rental properties for mobile homes, which had at least a couple of small one- or two-bedroom houses on it. This rental property generated a little – we weren't wealthy by any means, but for a small parcel, it was generating a lot of revenue. I don't need to lecture your audience about how you do appraisals, but you do appraisals based on the income approach, based on what it costs to build, or based on comparable sales. People always throw out the cost because the cost may be forty years ago. So, you're not going to look at how much something cost forty years ago. But it falls down to the income approach or the comparable sales. It's hard to find good comparable sales for a 4-acre parcel or 5-acre parcel where you have so many different activities going on. If you look at the income approach, the condemning authority, the government, is going to have trouble with that. Because if you multiply whatever that income is by ten, which is rule of thumb, that's going to result in a very, very high value. So, in the end, it required a condemnation process. There was a settlement. But we're talking several years later. There was an inconvenience. People who couldn't reach agreement might be able to draw down that money in order to build

back. My parents built the dairy barn but didn't build the store back, didn't get the rental property back, didn't do all these other things. So, they were hampered or hindered in that by the eminent domain process. Having said that, like I said, I've been on the other side. One of the more difficult things that I had to do as a Hazard City attorney and an attorney for the local airport board, we had to negotiate with a family to relocate some graves from a family cemetery that was on top of one of these ridges. It's not like you can just scoot the airport over. If you're going to build a 4,000-foot runway or 5,000-foot runway and you start on one end and you're building on a mountain ridge, you can only go one direction. So, you don't have any choice about being able – you can't put a curve in the middle of it in order to avoid a cemetery. So, you have to do what you have to do. I could certainly empathize with and sympathize with the family that we were working with. So, maybe my experience with having been forced to relocate as a child helped me to understand what that felt like from the standpoint of the condemning authority later on in my life.

NM: Well, that process of challenging the government's offer and going through that eminent domain process, hiring appraisers, attorneys, were many people able to go through that if they felt they wanted to?

PC: I can't give you or quote you statistics. You might be able to ask – and I'm sure those files probably still exist in some form or another. Everything is on the internet these days. But my impression was that there were at least dozens of cases where people didn't agree. Those cases wound their way through the federal court system. They involved the filing of a federal lawsuit from Smithboro, Kentucky. The nearest federal court was Pikeville, Kentucky. Even in those days, Highway 80 hadn't been constructed. So, it was a pretty difficult process to drive even from Smithboro to Pikeville to attend the federal court there. I think there was a federal court building in Jackson, but it wasn't being used for that purpose. Maybe it wasn't being used by the time my family's case came to trial. I can remember going with them – I was in law school at this time – but going with them to a federal court building in Lexington, Kentucky. Of course, my parents would probably have been maybe close to my age, maybe not quite my age but close to my age then, in their fifties and maybe early [19]60s. That was a bit of an ordeal to travel two hours to make a court appearance. I remember my mother joking with me about what it felt like to make court appearances and so forth. She used a phrase that my dad had probably told her because it comes from World War II, I think, in the Army. They talked about the way that the Army did things. You had to hurry up and then wait. Hurry, hurry, hurry. Go from this point A to point B and then wait until somebody could make a decision. Well, the process of ushering these condemnation cases through the court system was a process of hurry up and wait. If they had court appearances or motions to be heard and so forth, they would go. Usually, all those were heard the same day, which is common for court appearances. But they would show up and there may be a dozen or two dozen families there that day, all 120 miles from home, and their case would be called. But in those days – and I will tell you this was the case even when I graduated from law school, in Lexington, Kentucky, in the eastern district of Kentucky – the judges would schedule every motion to be heard on a series of days every couple of months, or so it seemed. So, there may have been 150 lawyers there at one time and the families and the litigants and parties. So, it would take two to three days sometimes to get through the cases. You never knew when he would call your case next. So, they may have to stick around and stick around. So, it was a cumbersome process at best. I remember when it was settled, when my

parents' case was actually settled in Pikeville before a trial took place. Almost all civil litigation gets settled or compromised to a solution. Mom and Dad probably got what would be considered quite a bit of money at the time. I don't know how their award or settlement compared with the other settlements of other families and other businesses in that location. But it would probably have been considered quite a bit. But at the same time, it wasn't enough by any stretch of the imagination, to replace what they had given up, and no sentimental value is ever compensated in any kind of due process proceeding. So –

NM: So, as far as the timeline goes, were you still living at home when you all relocated?

PC: That is probably an interesting story. Mom and Dad wanted to continue running their businesses in that location as long as possible. The first things to change were that the mobile homes were relocated. People took their homes – if they were renting. They took their homes – excuse me just a second. No, it's okay. Nancy, there is a story associated with that. They took the mobile homes out first. Most of the other homes were disappearing. Families were moving. But for Mom and Dad, they were still one of the two or three stores in that whole community and in the area from Sassafras to Breeding's Creek or Isom. There were relatively few stores that were still in that area. So, they fulfilled an important purpose. I would say the acquisitions began in the early [19]60s, [19]63, [19]64, [19]65. But by 1966 and [19]67, most of the folks were leaving and were gone. But there were still people who lived in Big Smith Branch, people who lived in Little Smith Branch, and they still needed a place to trade. We still had an active store business during that time period. We still had the dairy bar going at that time period. Mom and Dad had planned that they were acquiring and had acquired maybe the lot that they bought at the top of the hill at Red Oak. So, they were going to transition from one location to the other. The first thing is the mobile homes went. Then they tore down the store building, actually literally had it torn down, or the government did. I forget exactly which. We lived in the back of the store building, which was a residential addition to the store. They tore down the store in front. Then they remodeled the living quarters behind. We lived there briefly. But then they moved that. That was one of the five or six houses that my dad had relocated to outside the dam area. So, once that was moved, it was no longer an option for us to live there. So, they took one of the areas that had been occupied by a rental home, and they moved a mobile home in there. So, when I was probably a sophomore and maybe through my junior year in high school, we were still living in a mobile home on our property. But the store was no longer there. The dairy bar was still there. They were still running it every day. But we were living in that mobile home until the very last minute. That's why I said I believe we were the very last family to move out of that area. It was pretty quiet to be honest. We'd drive home after dark. There wouldn't be anybody from Cody all the way to Smithboro. In fact, we were still taking that old road when other people were being allowed to drive on new Highway 15, so up on the mountain across from us.

NM: So, what did you make of all this as a young person?

PC: Honestly, because they started talking about this, my parents would have conversations with each other, and I'd hear those conversations. I experienced it from the time I was probably 5 until the time I was 15 or 16. It seemed like normal course of business. So, I didn't – it probably wasn't as catastrophic for me as a young person as it would have been for some of the 75-year-

olds or more my grandfather and grandmother or other grandmother who passed before she had to move. But it was probably not as big a change for me and seemed more like a normal transition than anything else. Everybody older than me would probably have had a more catastrophic feeling about the transition.

NM: Yes, that makes sense. When you grow up, just knowing that it is happening, then yes, like you said, it just seems like the normal course of action.

PC: You can imagine what it would be like growing up in a war zone today, watching kids playing in the streets of Ukraine today. For them, unbelievably, what is becoming normal to them is having to deal with issues that kids should never have to deal with. I suppose it was traumatic to have to relocate. It was tough at times to see the impact on Mom and Dad who had to relocate, had to negotiate for property, to buy new property, had some concerns. Should they stay in the area? Should they relocate? I cannot express what this felt like for the other families in that area. But I've known people who stayed nearby but who moved from Smithboro or Cody to Letcher County, who moved from Smithboro or Cody. Curiously, Big Smith Branch, as I said, backed up to Letcher County. Little Smith Branch backed up. Some of the folks from Big Smith Branch more or less moved across the mountain over onto Doty Creek in Letcher County, if you understand where that is. It comes out there at Blackey or below Blackey. So, they just moved across the mountain. But others moved on 160 up toward Hindman. The cemetery, that's a traumatic experience to have your family members exhumed and relocated to a new cemetery. It's a lot easier to get to Carr Fork Memorial Cemetery today than it was to get to those cemeteries on mountains that were rendered inaccessible by the lake. Some people moved to Viper in Perry County or other locations like that. So, people moved. Some moved nearby. Some moved very, very far away. So, it was traumatic in that respect.

NM: You mentioned that your parents considered relocating. Did they consider relocating farther away?

PC: I don't think there was ever any serious consideration of going too far. But they wanted to find a spot also in Knott County. But my grandfather initially bought a piece of property near the old Letcher County High School. It's still a middle school or something. It's past Blackey on that road. He bought a lot there. Interestingly enough, maybe this is in transition, but he also bought a house for a period of time, a brick home on Sand Lick Creek near Whitesburg. So, he had planned to move there. My mother was an only child. So, my grandparents were going to be dependent upon her. So, they subsequently relocated when we detached the residential part of the store, moved it, and remodeled it. My grandparents sold the home in Sand Lick, I think, and relocated to that house. So, they made the circuit. They lived in it in Smithboro. They retired from it, moved to the other home. They moved into that home. Then they came back to the home that they had vacated in Smithboro because we lived in the mobile home for a few years after we relocated and moved the house. My grandparents moved back into the house there. Then, finally, when I went away to school, to college, my parents moved in with my grandparents until their deaths. So, we played musical chairs with those houses for a while.

NM: Why was it that your family stayed there in the mobile home for as long as they did?

PC: It was easy to relocate the mobile home. Or you mean – that depends on what you're talking about.

NM: I mean by the dairy bar, why did you all stay in that area?

PC: Well, until we could reconstruct a new dairy bar at the top of the mountain at Red Oak, it was important for them to live near their livelihoods. They could walk down the hill from the mobile home and continue to run the dairy bar there, which was their livelihood. By that time, there was no store, no rental property. Their livelihood was operating that dairy bar. When they did get the construction underway – and I don't remember if there was a gap in time. But when they got construction underway at Red Oak, they then relocated to Red Oak. They moved the mobile home. We lived in the mobile home there at Red Oak for a time period until we got everything fixed up with the stone home that they relocated to Red Oak. Does that make sense? So, we're playing musical homes instead of musical chairs. But they lived near their place of business when they were running the store and the dairy bar in Smithboro. They lived near their place of business when they relocated to the top of Red Oak Mountain. They were just accustomed to having a close relationship. Mom and Dad worked together their whole lives from the time they were married until they passed away.

NM: Well, I want to be mindful of our time.

PC: I'm at your discretion, whatever you want to do.

NM: Well, one thing that you mentioned that would be helpful for me to clarify, so you mentioned that some of the cemeteries, the graves that were moved. Is it right then that it was not necessarily that those cemeteries would be inundated? It was just that access to them would be cut off by the lake, and that is why they were moved?

PC: Primarily. I could think of a number of different cemeteries, but I probably couldn't name them all for you right now. People didn't bury their family members in bottomland probably for a couple of reasons, because of flooding and also probably because those were croplands, okay, especially early on. So, there was a tendency to put them on rocky ridges. That's where a lot of cemeteries were constructed. Some of these were going to be rendered inaccessible even if the flood or the water of the reservoir wouldn't inundate those cemeteries. So, they're probably both types. But they relocated all those. If you know where the marina is located today, there is still a cemetery that's behind the marina. But there were other cemeteries that were on the ridges especially on the opposite side. I can remember my family cemetery, the Smith family cemetery, being halfway to Cody and up on a ridge. Those had to be relocated because there's no access across the lake to get to that. There are plenty of other examples of cemeteries that were small family cemeteries that had to be relocated. What they did was they made arrangements to do that. They bought the property where the Carr Fork Memorial Cemetery is today. That's on the road to 160 or on 160 on the way to Hindman. They basically set up a trust fund and a board of directors to manage that cemetery. For a short time, I served on that board when I came back here to practice law.

NM: Yes. I guess I had just been picturing it from people's stories and from just what I had

made up in my head, just that it was that all these cemeteries were going to be inundated. But it makes sense that actually a lot of them was that the access was just going to be cut off. So, that makes sense. I guess one thing I am curious about, I guess I have heard maybe one or two people talk about this, but do you remember when they officially started damming it up and the lake actually filling up with water?

PC: Only from the perspective of Smithboro itself. If you recall, they had not begun to raise the water levels until I was in high school. Actually, they didn't actually retain water in the reservoir until I went away to college. So, I wasn't in Smithboro or even in Knott County. I was at Eastern attending college when they began to raise the water levels. My experience with that was limited to the experience I related to you when the floodwaters would come and what would typically be just that the river would be out of its banks became a flood because of the way the road construction and the dam construction had constrained the river or the creek to a point where it would begin to flood even though they didn't have the dam closed. So, I don't really remember that because I was away at school at the time.

NM: Got it. Well, is there anything else about the period of construction that sticks out in your mind that I have not asked you about?

PC: Pause it for a second.

NM: Sure.

PC: You don't have to. Let's chat.

NM: Yes. Well, I guess maybe a wrap-up question and then I will have like a few other questions regarding next steps you think I should take as far as gaps in my questioning or things that I should be asking people about that maybe we have not discussed. But maybe one last question that I have asked a lot of people who I have talked with is just what do you feel about the lake now?

PC: I'll probably begin by talking about how I've taken my grandchildren up to the boat dock. One of my favorite activities for them, I like to get out there and show them where I grew up, talk to them a little bit about the area where the marina is located, and tell them a little bit of the history about that area. That's very enjoyable for me to sit there. They're very young. I've got a 10-year-old grandson now. But we began taking him out there when he was probably 4 or 5. I have a 2-year-old, and we've taken her out there for picnics. I don't have or hold any animosity for the fact that the government saw fit to construct a flood control reservoir. It's provided recreation even for Knott Countians. Lots of people have forgotten what was lost in that process, but that's okay. The fact that we have an oral history project is designed to remember that there are pros and cons whenever there is a public betterment project or a public improvement project and that there are sacrifices that have to be made. So, that's how I relate to the lake today. I don't think I've ever been on a boat on the lake today. But that wasn't by design. It's just I'm not a fisherman, and I'm not a boater. My dad and mom used to enjoy taking my daughter and son out there. They would walk along where the marina is now. They would fish off the side of the bank and fish there. They never caught anything bigger than a sunfish, I think, but that was

basically what they enjoyed doing. So, my kids have grown up in the periphery around the lake and have a positive attitude about it. Mom and Dad, if they were here today, would probably tell you they enjoyed talking to people, enjoyed seeing the folks driving, would stop at their dairy bar on their way to and from the lake and sell them hamburgers and hot dogs and custard and so forth. So –

NM: Yes. Nice. Well, you started maybe talking about some other folks that you think that would be good for me to talk with. So, are there other folks you can think of that would be good? Or maybe before that, another thing I was going to ask was if there are just any other topics that I should be asking people about? You don't want this on?

PC: No, I want to think about it. No, I don't really. I know you're tired.

NM: No, you are fine. I am just going to sign us off here. So, this is Nicole Musgrave. I have been speaking with Paul Collins on February 27th, 2023. We are at his home in Hazard, Kentucky. This is for the Carr Creek Oral History Project.

[end of transcript]