

Carr Creek Oral History Project
Corbett Mullins Oral History
Date of Interview: June 24, 2022
Location: Mallie, Kentucky
Length of Interview: 01:35:40
Interviewer: NM – Nicole Musgrave
Transcriber: NCC

Nicole Musgrave: All right. I'll introduce us on the tape here. So, this is Nicole Musgrave. It is June 24th, 2020. I'm here in Knott County, Kentucky, Wolf Pen Creek, with Corbett Mullins at his home or outside on his carport. This is an interview for the Carr Fork Oral History Project. I guess just to get started, Corbett, will you say your name and your birthdate?

Corbett Mullins: Corbett Mullins, July 3rd, 1948.

NM: All right. Great. Do I have your permission to record?

CM: Yes, you do.

NM: Okay. Great. Well, before we totally get started on the topic of Carr Fork or the creation of the lake, can you tell me a little bit about your people and where you're from?

CM: I am born and raised at Smithboro, which was one of the small communities that went away as a result of the lake being built. I was born and raised there up until, well, when the lake was built. I was in college. But I remember all too well going through all the process of having to relocate and see other people that had to relocate. So, I lived it. I lived the building of the dam. As you as you would well imagine, there were lots of people that were dead set against it. They didn't want it. At the time that that it came about, we were told that there was going to be two reservoirs built primarily for flood protection in Hazard. Because hazard had experienced some pretty devastating floods. The last one that I remember, very catastrophic one was in 1957. But they were going to build the one at Carr Creek, and they were going to build the one at Alva. Alva is up on what's Highway 7 now, going – if you're coming from Hazard, you would turn right at Jeff and go up Highway 7 that way. Alva was up there. I'm not exactly sure how far, but that's where the other one was going to be built. But I don't know what happened. I know that there was, like I said before, sentiment against either of them being built. But maybe Alva had a little more push [laughter] to stop the building of that one, or maybe they finally realized that they only needed the one. But anyway, Carr Fork, I say Carr Fork, and you say Carr Fork. But there's some people that don't want to call Carr Fork. They want to call Carr Creek. Because if you look on old maps, if you look – if you talk to old people that lived here back in the teens, early 1900s, they say there was no Carr Fork. It was all referred to as Carr Creek. When the light was built, it was dubbed Carr Fork Lake. Then I'm not exactly sure when it happened, but there was a movement that was successful to get the name of the lake changed from Carr Fork Lake to Carr Creek Lake which is what it's called today. So, that's no big deal either. Whatever you call it, whatever you want, we were all referring to the same place. But like I said, when the lake was built, our house was the last house that they purchased – the Corps of Engineers purchased up our little – there was a Little Smith Branch and a Big Smith Branch. They were sort of side by side. They're down there where the boat dock is today. Our house was the last house in Little Smith Branch to be bought. They didn't want all of my dad's land. They only wanted probably, maybe an acre or less. But it just so happened that acre or less was where the house was sitting. So, like I said, they didn't buy all of his land. So, he went up over the hill, behind where our house stood. We had a garden. He hired a bulldozer. They came up there and leveled off that garden and built a road up to it. So, they come in there and jack their house up, back the lowboy under it, set it down on the lowboy, pulled it out, and then backed it up that road with the aid of a bulldozer, up on the top there, winching it up. I died a thousand deaths that day.

I was there watching it as it was coming up that hill and the cable would roll up on that winch. All of a sudden, it would slap free. When it slapped free that way, it would cause the house to rock on that truck. But the guy told my mom, he said, "Now, listen, you don't have to do anything, packing away any dishes or anything like that. We'll not harm anything in your house." Sure enough, they didn't. They moved it up there, blocked it up, and bang. We had a new house on the hill. But at that time, this house that we're sitting out here now, it was moved up here from the beach, right where the beach is now. It was very common to be driving down 15 or 160 and made a flagman flagging you off the road, and you're looking here to come a house. I think it was called Tristate Movers out of Tennessee. They were the primary ones that moved all of the houses up here. There was a lot of them that was moved. Because you had the option – I remember my dad, we had the option of the government bought the house, gave us what they considered fair market price for it. I don't even remember what it was. But then after they purchased it from you, you had the option to buy it back at a very nominal fee. I mean, maybe \$600 I think was what my dad paid for it back. He received several thousand for it. But you bought it back with the understanding that you had x amount of time, maybe three months, to get it off the property. You could either carry it down, move it, whichever, but you had to have it off in that length of time. So, like I said, my dad, we chose to move it. But this house was moved here. That house sitting over here next to us, it was moved here. The next house above it was moved here. This all in here, you see we are like a really sort of a low swampy area. They come in and build it all up and made house (seats?) out of it. So, this is where a lot of the houses ended up. My brother lives on up here. He's deceased now, but his house was moved here. I don't know really how many houses here on Wolf Pen Creek were moved in here during that time. But like I said, that was the way to go. Now, it was bad enough to lose your home, your homestead, I'll put it that way. You didn't necessarily lose your home, but you lost where it stood. The big thing that bothered most people more than anything was the removal of the graves. They had to move. Gee, I don't know how many, 100 graves, had to be moved from here. I know my wife's grandparents, they were moved. They created Carr Fork Memorial Cemetery, which is not too far from here, for that purpose. They moved the graves in there, according to which cemetery they came from. In other words, each area of the Carr Fork Memorial Cemetery was dedicated to a specific graveyard that was moved up there from down in the area, the dam. Her family, they were Smiths. Her Grandma and Grandpa Smith both had to be moved. That wasn't a very big cemetery. Down not too far from here, maybe a couple of miles from here, there was the Stamper Cemetery. Now that was a big, big cemetery. That's where most of the graves came from that ended up being moved up there. You had the Cody cemetery. I'm not sure if they called it Cody or Johnson, but it was a pretty good-sized cemetery. That one had to be moved. But a lot of people, that was the thing that really (knotted?) them. They did not want to see their family members disturbed from their eternal rest and moved. But as far as I know, I'd never witnessed any of the actual moving. But it was all done according to plan. It was done appropriately, if you can call something like that appropriate. But it was done according to the rules and regulations. I know down here in the Stamper Cemetery, and I guess in a lot of the cemeteries, you had graves that were – all it was a stone sticking in the ground. They say that there were Indian graves down here in the Stamper Cemetery. I don't know that. But I've always heard that there were – and any other cemetery that you probably visited, you had unmarked graves. Those were moved right along with the others. When they brought them up here, they used the stone that marked the grave down there. They didn't try to alter anything. Really, I guess they couldn't. But like I said, that sort of really knotted people to have to go

through that. That was one of the biggest, I guess, that people really thought – the building of the dam over. My personal feelings – and I would probably be shot for saying this, by some people – I think it was an improvement to the area. I think back now, I think ahead as to what it is now, and wonder what would it have been had the lake not been built? Where I live, Smithboro was a thriving little community. You had two communities, two of the bigger communities that that were moved, Smithboro and Cody. Both of them, I don't really know what I'd say. Smithboro was probably the larger of the two. We had two general stores, two churches, a dairy bar, a school. So, you know, we had basically everything that a small community would need. Like I said, we had we had two primary hollows, Little Smith Branch and Big Smith Branch.. There was another school way up in Big Smith Branch. I mean, way up in there, was probably 3 or 4 miles up to that school. The school that I went to was a two-room school. I'll tell you; we were moving on up. A lot of the schools were only one-room [laughter]. But we had two rooms. We had the little room and the big room. Okay? The little room was for first grade through third grade. The big room was for fourth grade through seventh grade. Then when you got to the eighth grade, you went to Carr Creek on the hill for eighth grade. But that school, it was no more. Well, really, that school did not end as a result of the building of the lake. It ended as a result of consolidation, maybe ten years prior to the time the lake was built. So, we can't mark that one down as being something that was ended as a result of the lake. I don't remember a whole lot about the actual building of the lake because I was in college at the time that most of the construction was going on.

NM: Where were you at college?

CM: I went two years to Alice Lloyd. Then my last two years was on Morehead. Now, I remember, when I was at Morehead, between my junior and senior year, I worked on the bridge, one of the bridges that crosses the lake down there at the beach in the in the marina. I worked there during the summer. I remember the construction that was going on there. They were primarily building the road, Highway 15, relocating it from Smithboro on up toward Cody and on beyond Cody at Redfox and then on across the hill into Letcher County. I remember that construction going on. I worked there – some on that. I was a summer ranger at Carr Creek Lake after they got it impounded and got water in it. But the construction was still going on at that time. Because I remember they hit a ridge here at the intersection of 116 and 115. They had the piers built with a bridge. They were going on up through there with the construction. They were right there at the pier when they let off a blast that had been packed a little bit too much, too tight, and they blew that pier over. Well, they didn't blow it completely over. But it looked like the Leaning Tower of Pisa. It had to be torn down. [laughter] I'd say somebody lost their job as a result of that. Because that was, I don't know, probably several hundred thousand, maybe even a million dollars to build that one pier because it was a pretty good-sized pier. They sent us up there – as I said, I was working for the Corps – to take pictures and send them to Louisville. I took pictures, and I labeled one of my pictures the leaning tower of Carr Fork. Louisville didn't see the humor in that [laughter]. Well, how do you think about that? But I remember watching with fascination at what they called – they were dirt movers, okay? I can't remember exactly what they called them, but they'd come down off that hill, down into where the lake would eventually be. As they were coming, they were losing their load. They opened the bottom doors on the thing, and they would lose their load as they come down. By the time they got to the bottom, they were empty. They'd just circle back around, go back up, and get another load.

Pans, that's what they were called, P-A-N-S, pans. I don't know why that name, but that's what they were called. I don't really know necessarily what you want to know. I'm sure you've probably got some preformed questions maybe that I could answer. I'm just sort of rambling on here and telling you some of the things that I remember. But it was an exciting time, I'll put it that way. Like I said, Smithboro was a thriving little community. We all hated to leave it. We had grown up there. I lived in Little Smith Branch. My wife, she lived down at the mouth of the holler. We knew each other from the get-go. We had gone to school together there at Smithboro School. She claims me as her childhood sweetheart. But anyway, everybody knew everybody. My granddaughter in particular, she likes to hear me talk about – we had a, I guess, you would call it the slums of Smithboro. It was a section that was on the lower end, going out of Smithboro, on toward Vicco. We humorously referred to it as gag town. There were some incorrigibles that live there, okay? As far as I know, the only bootlegger in Smithboro lived there. She kept her liquor in an old wringer washing machine full of water. I mean, who would think to look, if he was to come in – if he were to raid her and go looking for booze in her house, who would think to look in the washing machine for bottles of whiskey? But that's where she kept it. Now, not everybody – I mean, don't get me wrong. I knew the lady, was friends with the lady, but I never bought about any of her ware, I'll put it that way. She had two kids that she was raising that went to school with us. But everybody knew that that she bootlegged. So, it was just sort of the thing. No one made a big hoopla over it. Then up on the very upper end where gag town ended and regular Smithboro started back, we had one individual that lived there. He had his mother. He was mean. He was mean. He was mean. I remember in school; he had done something in school. I don't remember. We were in the big room. The door going into the building was, when you went in the door, you went into the big room. The teacher was sending him home. She was fed up with him. He got to the door going out. He turned around and looked back at her and went, "(Nye?), nye, nye," like that. From up in the front of the room, she couldn't drive at him with a paddle. I mean, it was woosh, woosh, woosh, like a tomahawk coming through the air at him. Well, he closed the door quickly and the paddle fell – hit the door and fell on the floor. He went home and got his mama. They came back. He and his mother and the teacher had a conference, to say the least, outside the door. We couldn't hear what was going on. But when all was said and done, she came back, and he didn't [laughter]. So, I don't know. I don't remember how long he had to stay out of school as a result of that. But you remember little incidents like that in growing up. Like I said, my parents – my dad was a coal miner. But we farmed, okay? We had a horse. We had a mule, not a horse. We had a cow. We had chicken. We had pigs. We had to raise corn for all those critters. So, we had to farm to do that. There were four boys in our family, I being the youngest one. I can remember growing up, four boys, riding out trees. I don't know if you know what that means. Well, it means you climb up on top of a sapling. You climb as far as you can on top of it until it starts to go over, and you ride it out down to the ground. Wee, this is fun. We had great rides that we would swing across the hollows on. We were constantly climbing trees. But my mom and dad raised four boys. Not one of us boys ever had a broken bone growing up, I mean, in doing all these ridiculous things. We had a two-story barn that we played in constantly, falling and jumping and all that. I always attributed that to cow's milk. My mom, she had a cow. She faithfully milked that cow. She always had a gallon jar of sweet milk, as we called it, in the refrigerator, along with buttermilk. I remember I was just talking about that the other day. I remember going to that gallon jar and having to move the cream back from the top of it in order to pour you a glass of milk. Then periodically, she would come and scoop that cream off and put it in a churn and churn it into

butter. There were lots of people that came to our house to buy milk, to buy butter, to buy eggs, and if we had excess, my mom would sell it to them. My dad was the local barber [laughter]. He had an old pair of hand clippers. They weren't electric. They were hand. He only knew one way that was to cut your hair off, [laughter] okay? Don't ask for those certain styles or anything like that. You were going to get it his way or no way. But this was what we were grown up with, and this is what we had to give up. Carr Creek High School, which I'm a member – the treasurer of the Carr Creek Alumni Association. Carr Creek High School was the center. Everything was sort of built around that school. It was the hub of the community, okay? Then after they built the lake, they closed the school because you weren't going to have enough students left in the area to keep it going. They built Knott Central Consolidated, Carr Creek Hindman, and the old Knott County Integrated School – I mean, high school. They consolidated those three into that one. So, Carr Creek ceased to exist as a school. What we're trying to do now is we're just trying to keep its memory alive. Because, well, it went out – the last graduating class was 1974. I think they impounded the lake, I want to think, maybe [19]76. I'm not sure exactly exact date. But like I said, we want to try to keep that memory alive. Because everything was built around that school. If there was something going on in the community, that's where it was at. That's where it was happening, there. That was a very traumatic thing to have happened was to have that rug pulled out from under us there, our community center taken away from us. Because it did start as Carr Creek Community Center, much like Alice Lloyd College started as Caney Creek Community Center. In reality, Caney Creek helped Carr Creek get started by sending over some people that had come over there and that they could spare them and send them over here as teachers. They made the comment that if CCCC, Caney Creek Community Center, was good enough for them then Carr Creek Community Center was good enough for us, CCC. So, I guess that's how that name came into existence. I don't know of any other way that it would, but that's what some people say. The school, as it was then, you had Highway 15 and Highway 160 and Highway 899, I think it is – 582, that's the highway that goes up Carr. We didn't miss much school. If it snowed, they'd get a grater out earlier in the morning. They'd clear the highway off, and the bus would run. Because buses back then didn't go up every little hollow, nook and cranny, picking up students. We walked out of the hollow. Me and the people that lived on that hollow, we waited at one of the general stores. It was my wife's uncle. He had the store there at the mouth of Little Smith Branch.

NM: What was it called?

CM: Dennis (Cornish?) Grocery, okay? Then we had the Amburgey Grocery. That was the other one that was just not too – well, it was less probably. It might have been a fourth of a mile on up the way was Amburgey Grocery, and that was at the mouth of Big Smith Branch. There weren't a whole lot of students. The problem was you had a little bit of a congregation of people right at the mouth of Big Smith Branch that were part of Smithboro. But once you got past that, then it was at least a couple of miles before you encountered another house. So, it was really too far for those students to walk out of there. I think maybe they did run some kind of a bus, or they subcontracted a parent or something to bring those students out of there, down to Amburgey's to catch the bus. But other than that, I mean, we went to school and missed very, very few days. Because like I said, you didn't miss school. They cleared the roads, and you went to school. That was it.

NM: Yes. You've already painted such a vivid picture of what was Smithboro like. Is it Smithboro or Smith's?

CM: That's been a controversy that I don't think has ever been solved. I'd have to go back and look at an old postal constellation. A lot of books have it with an S, Smithboro. Some have it just without the S, Smithboro.

NM: You say it without the S, right?

CM: I say it without the S.

NM: Okay.

CM: Yes.

NM: Well, I'm curious, you said that your father was a coal miner and your family farmed. Did a lot of people in the community farm, and was coal mining a pretty common occupation for your neighbors?

CM: Yes. Coal mining was the occupation. Unless, like I said, her uncle and the other people up there ran a store. But other than that, it was coal mining. My wife's dad was a coal miner. My dad, just about everybody on the hollow that worked were coal miners. I don't know that everybody sort of went into farming as big a crop as we did. My dad, we didn't have enough land to grow the crops that he wanted to grow. So, he would rent bottoms of land down below the mouth of the hollow, up toward Cody. I remember he rented bottoms of land up there. We didn't have a tractor. We had a mule with a good turning plow. Old Jim, that was his name. Like I said, I was the youngest one. I didn't get into the actual turning of the land. But my dad, my other three brothers, they could all operate the plow. My job was – I was the weight on the drag. The drag was a set of old bed springs, the old metal bed springs. They throw a board on that, hook it up to the mule, throw a board on it for me to sit on. I would climb on that thing. I was the extra weight that was needed to ride behind the mule and break up the clods of dirt that had been turned up during the turning process. I think back on it now, it was quite a dangerous job. Because corn had been raised in these fields in prior years. So, there were still some pretty hefty corn stalks in there. From time to time, those corn stalks would shoot up through them old dead springs, and I'd be dodging corn stalks left and right. But like I said, we raised a good crop of corn every year. We had an old [19]48 Chevrolet pickup truck. Like I told you before, we had a two-story barn. Then the lower right-hand corner of that barn was the corn crib. That's where we took the corn. It had a little bridge that we backed across, and we would unload it into that crib. Just about every year, by the time the growing season was over, the crib was full of corn. We had plenty of corn. My dad never was much on hay. He didn't feed his livestock hay. The cow ate corn. The mule ate corn. The pigs ate corn. The chicken ate corn. So, you had to have quite a bit of corn in order to feed all those critters through the winter months. Then right there at the house, we had our own garden where we raised our own vegetables, corn, sweet corn, green beans, tomatoes, cucumbers, that kind of thing. So, we didn't know we were poor because we thought we had it good. We did have it good. I don't remember any of us boys ever going to bed any night hungry. That just didn't happen. My mom saw to it that we were

properly cared for and properly fed. She had a big old wood burning stove in the kitchen that she cooked on. She was a fabulous cook. I mean, I just can't say enough about – the stove was a big modern stove really for that day and time. Because if you stand facing the stove on the right side – the end of it, it had a reservoir where you could pour water in. While you were cooking, you were also heating your water to wash the dishes. Because we didn't have hot water. I mean, we had running water, but for the longest time, we didn't have hot water. I mean, you heated up the water there, or you got a kettle and put it on the stove and heated it if you wanted to take a bath. The bathtub was a number three wash tub. You hope that you weren't the last one [laughter] to get a bath. You wanted to be the first while the water was fresh. But I don't know; I was probably in high school, maybe a freshman or something like that, when we finally got indoor plumbing. We had an outdoor toilet, one of which my brother burned down. He didn't add it to his death that he set that toilet on fire, but he was sneaking out there smoking. For some reason, there was an old coat lying on the floor there off to the side of the privy part. But anyway, we think that he caught that on fire [laughter]. The privy part of it was concrete. We managed to save that, and we used it in the next one we built. But Keith denied that he was one that was responsible. Naturally, he would have. One, he didn't want to be guilty of setting the toilet on fire; and two, he didn't want to be found out to be smoking. Because my mama didn't approve of that stuff. But my dad and my mom, neither one of them smoked. My dad, I never saw him take a drink of liquor or touch a cigarette to his lips. That wasn't his cup of tea. My dad was not much bigger than you, Nicole. He was probably about 5'6", 5'7". I'm 6'4". My brother, Philip, was 6'4". My brother, Keith, was probably 6'1" or 2". My brother, Kenneth, was probably about 6-foot. We were all much bigger. We're not much bigger, but we were bigger than our dad. But we did not dare to talk back to him. We did not dare to question his authority. If he says, "Now, boys, when I get home from work today, I want this, this, and this done," it was done. I remember seeing him one time, lift a hand to one of us boys. It was my brother, Philip. He threw salt in my eyes. We were out unloading corn, I think. I don't know what we were doing with salt, but he flipped it in my eyes. I was, like I said, the baby. So, I started crying. My dad smacked his butt for that. But that was the only time that I ever remember him lifting a hand. He didn't raise his voice either. It was very low, even keel, very matter of fact, "This is how I want it done." Now, my mom was another [laughter] – she was the disciplinarian. Especially my brothers, Keith and Philip, they were the two middle ones. They would fight constantly. I mean, every day they were into it over something. She'd wear their butts out. She was the kind that would use the switch on you. That was bad enough, but she'd go make you cut your own switch and bring it to her. That [laughter] was bad when you had to do that. I did a few little mischievous things and got caught in them. So, I got my little cup of tea, as we called it. I got my little cup of tea as well. So, I wasn't an angel that had to straighten my halo every morning. But my brother, Kenneth, he sort of took me under his wing. He was the oldest one. I was his pet. I remember I couldn't say Kenneth. I call him (Candy?). By the time I started school, I knew my ABCs. I knew how to count. I could write rudimentary writing. I could do a little bit of writing. Kenneth had taught me all that. Kenneth went on to college. But he was the one that sort of took me under his wing and taught me all these things. While Philip and Keith were out fighting [laughter], Kenneth was teaching me my ABCs and to count and so on and so forth. So, we had it good really. I can say that. It made me almost cry. My granddaughter, she just graduated high school. But she used to go down to the Carr Creek meetings with us, just to be going, you know, while she was in high school. She made the comment to me one day, because she had heard us talk about Carr Creek High School so much. She said, "Grandpa, I wish I could

go to school here." She wished that she could have gone to a small school. Now, when I say small school, at most, we may have had around 400 students or maybe a little more at any given year. But that would be that would be considered a small school. Many years, it was probably down in the 200 range and so on. But she had heard us talk about that. She had heard us talk so much about the good times that we had there that she says – she made that comment, "I wish I could have gone to school here." That made you feel – that meant a lot coming [inaudible] when she said that. Because she was going to Knott Central, and there was probably – in her graduating class this year, I think there was maybe 120, 150, somewhere around there, which would have been probably – that one class would have been at least close to two-thirds or three-fourths of what we had down there in the total population. But it was a good thing. We had it made. We really and truly had it made. I look back now – at the younger generation now, they will never know what we had. They will never go through what we went what we went through. It saddens me to think that. Because looking back now, we had a good time. Our life was good. There were no big-guy-little-you type things in our neighborhood. Nobody was rich. Nobody was poor. We were all sort of the same even level keel. Like I said, we would play out every night until past dark, doing something, kick the can, hully gully, I don't know, rooster – what was it called? We would throw a ball across the top of the roof. Then you'd try to switch. You try to go around to the other side and keep that person who the caught the ball from hitting you with it. It was a rubber ball. Those kinds of games that these kids today will never know. They're busy exercising their thumb on a phone and all that. It just saddens me to think that they'll never know it. It saddens me too to think that we didn't know that we had it made. We had it made. We were living the life, and we complained, no doubt. I remember many mornings when I was big enough to go to the cornfield and how I remember many mornings standing there at like 6:00 a.m., looking down those long rows of corn and thinking, "Oh my goodness, we've got to get all this done today." Dad had what was called a cultivator that he hooked to the mule. It would run down. It would straddle the rows of corn and loosen the dirt up. But yet we were to come through with a hoe and get any of the excess weeds that were in between the stalks of corn, get them cut out, and then pile dirt up around the corn stalk. You wanted to give it a pretty good base in case of the wind so that hopefully it wouldn't blow over in a windstorm. So, looking down through there, many a morning, I was, "Oh, my goodness, we'll never get this done." But we did. We did. We got it done.

NM: Well, that's great. I'm thinking too. I know that you said that you were in college when they decided to create the lake, and the house was sold and everything. But I'm curious, do you remember when you heard about the lake, like where you were, and who told you?

CM: Let's see. Probably it first started being talked, I'd say, in the early [19]60s. Because if you look over here behind me on this concrete slab back here, it has the dates of when that concrete slab was poured, and it had the initials of my wife's dad, Watson Smith, his wife, (Rhoda?). It had her initials and her brother, Danny, and her two sisters, Anna and (Billy?). It had all their dates on there. I think that was poured in [19]66. That's when this house was moved here, in 1966. So, as far as when I first heard about it, it had to be right around the early [19]60s. I would have been about 12 years old. I was probably too young to really understand the full impact of what was going to happen. But I was old enough to at least basically comprehend that, "Hey, well, we may lose our house." Because at that time, we didn't know to what extent and how far they were going to go and all that. We knew almost from the onset that Smithboro was

gone. It was going to be gone. Cody was going to be gone. Those, like I said earlier, were the two biggest communities that was in the zone that was going to be flooded. No doubt, it caused a lot of anxiety, a lot of uncertainty about what was going to happen. Where were you going to go? This house was moved here from down there where the beach is, but that's a distance of probably at least 6, 7 miles. They had no idea where they were going to find a plot of land to bring this house to. It just so happened, her dad, my wife's – my father-in-law and her uncle who had owned the store there, they came up through here looking. This is what they found. They ended up buying enough land for this house and her sister's house there next door. Now the house out beyond that one was her aunt, my wife's aunt. Someone, I'm not sure who, had come up and bought that land for that. The old Carr Church, which is up here at – it was the next house above that brick house here. That had to be moved up here. Now, they didn't move it. They moved it, but they didn't move the building. They tore it down and brought it up here and built a brick building. As far as I know – well, not as far as I know, I know for a certain fact than in all the houses and stuff that was attempted to be moved, only one was wrecked. It was sort of a silly notion on the part of them to think they could move it anyway. It was a two-story, red brick church house, a very, very big building. They got it up, got it loaded on the trucks, and were heading to its new location. They had probably gone 4 or 5 miles with it when they come to an area in the road that was – I want to throw this word at you. It was sad sigogglin. Do you know sigogglin?

NM: No.

CM: You don't know sigogglin. Okay. Sigogglin means crooked. If you look at an old house sitting on the side of the hill, and it doesn't look plumb, it doesn't look straight; it's sigogglin. I've used that word before. I've had people look at me, "What?" [laughter] But anyway, they come to an area on Highway 15 that was sigogglin. It wasn't level. It was sort of slanted to the right a little bit. They got about halfway through that little stretchy road, and the church just crumbled. There were two people on top of the church, two of the workers up there, keeping branches and powerlines and stuff off the church. One of them jumped off before it went. The other guy rode it all the way down to Carr Creek, the water – the river down below there. It didn't hurt them. Then they just brought in bulldozers and just bulldozed it over the hill. Today, if you went down there and looked down under the water, get down there and look, you would find all those bricks, those red bricks lying down there, where they pushed that church. I guess the moving company was insured. They paid them for the loss, and they built a new brick church down there, where it stands today, just before you get out of Knott County into Perry County.

NM: Okay. Gosh, that's wild to think of. [laughter] So, I know you said that as a 12-year-old, you maybe weren't able to fully comprehend what inundating Smithboro would mean, long term. But do you recall sort of what you felt about it at the time, or what you thought of all the talk?

CM: Well, all of the talk was negative, very, very negative. I, being a 12-year-old, just sort of jammed right in there. That was my thought as well. This is going to negatively impact us in a big way. A lot of the people, a lot of the older people, they took that hatred and the animosity and the devastation with them to their graves. They never outgrew it. I mean, they hated to lose their home. They hated to see their ancestors uprooted from their final resting place. They could

not get over that. They just simply couldn't. They couldn't wrap their head around anything that might come about as a result of building Carr Creek Lake. Like I said, as a result, they went to their grave still hating the notion of it being built. I don't know where you could find anybody today that still has that animosity. I just don't know. I don't know of anybody, I'll put it that way. I can say, as far as I'm concerned now, knowing what we have down there, it's been a great thing. I only wish that I could see more being done down there. The lake is sitting there now. I use that word sitting because that's basically all it's doing. It's providing water for the county. They're pulling water out of it to the water treatment plant and shipping it back out all over the county. But other than that, it's not – yes, it still provides flood protection for Hazard. But personally, I think that there are so many things that could be done with the lake to enhance it that – but nobody's taken any effort. See, they had two campgrounds. They turned the one campground, the Irishman Creek campground, they turned it over to the state. They turned the beach over to the state. It became a part of the Kentucky state park system. That was a mistake. I don't know where the state pushed them to let them have it. Or maybe the Corps Engineers pushed the state to take it. I don't know which was which. But the state park part down there is really run down. Right now, if you go down there and look, there are signs up on Highway 15 that says the beach is closed. Now, I don't know why. I don't know why the beach is closed. I talked to someone just the other day. They said the last time they went to the actual campground down there, that it was really, really rundown. I know we went through there one time. It's hard to tell you. The grass was mowed. But, like, the picnic tables at each campsite were just about ready to fall apart. In other words, I'm saying the state hasn't maintained it. Now, to me, that's a black eye, as far as us giving up our homes, to see it come to this point. I don't like that. I would want to see something done. We have a problem. I don't know if you've been here in the fall of the year, but have you seen the growth? It's called hydrilla. It is a very highly invasive plant. It will literally clog up a waterway like it is down here now, on the on the upper end down here, the Littcarr area of the lake. It's getting bad, getting really bad. In the fall of the year, this stuff grows. It's a bottom growing plant that grows up and will eventually rear its ugly head on the surface. If you get it on your boat, just a dried piece of it that's on your boat, boat motor wherever, and you take it to another body of water, you spread it. Because it will come off. Then it will rejuvenate itself. I don't know how it came into here. I'm good friends with the people down at the Corps of Engineers. But they missed the mark. When that stuff first started appearing here, they should have taken a very strong stance toward eradicating it. But they didn't. Now, it's growing out of out of proportion now. It's really bad. I've talked to them. I've written letters to district engineers in Louisville. I've written to the Kentucky Department of Water. One says that the responsibility of the other. The Corps of Engineers said that the Department of Wildlife had brought in a certain kind of carp that's supposed to love this stuff. They'll eat it. There is no way. I said, "If you had carps that could eat as much of that stuff as down there, why they'd be big as Moby Dick." I mean, they would be really fat, really huge. They say that there are, I guess you would call it herbicides that they can use to eradicate it. But where we are a source of water, they can't use it. Where the water is being pulled out of there, even though it's probably 2, 3 miles upstream from where the water's coming out, they still can't do it. So, I don't know what's going to happen with it. Like I said, it's getting worse and worse each year.

NM: Yes, that's a big issue. I'll have to keep my eyes peeled for what it looks like. I don't know, maybe I've noticed it but just didn't know what it was.

CM: Well, now, if you come back in the following year, heat, the hot weather that we're having right now, it's growing by leaps and bounds down under the water. You can't see it yet. But it's down there. It's growing. Then usually, maybe by the end of first or sometime in August, you'll see it start to rear its ugly head above water. By the end of August, starting of September, it's really, really, really noticeable. It's ugly. It makes what we would like to refer to as a beautiful lake, an ugly lake, up on this end especially. It thrives more in somewhat shallow water. They don't like deep water. So, that's why it's not really going to be on the bridge down here on Highway 15. It's sort of from that bridge back up this way is where it's most prominent.

NM: Okay. I see. So, that's interesting, hearing you describe that, at this point in your life, you don't have the same animosity you did at one point. But there's also dissatisfaction in the fact that parts of the lake aren't being kept up. You've given up your home for this. I guess, I'm just curious, made me think back to like when the lake was being created and plans for it were being made. You described that most of the older people were definitely – or most everybody in the community saw it as a negative thing. So, I guess I'm just curious, were there ways that people were organizing to resist the lake that you remember?

CM: Oh, yes. We had petitions. We appealed to our congressman at that time, Carl D. Perkins, who was probably one of the most influential people in Washington. But he was pushing for it. He had a voting base in Perry County. That was his area too. They were pushing for him to get it done. We were pushing for it to not be done. So, it was who had the most clout? Well, naturally, Perry County had a bigger population base than we did. We were just, like I said, two small communities and a few straggling other houses down the river. We didn't have the voice power that was needed to put it to rest. We knew going in that the primary reason for it being built was for flood control, to help save Hazard from being flooded. That created a little – well, that created a lot of animosity between us up here in Perry County and Hazard down there. Why should we give up our homes just to cover your behinds and that you really shouldn't have built your building so close to the river that they get flooded. They did. The [19]57 flood, I remember. Oh, my goodness. This house, I want to think it was sitting on thirteen blocks thirteen concrete – it was high. Her dad built it and put it up on a high foundation for that very reason. He knew that area flooded. But the [19]57 flood almost got in it. It was like up on the last run of blocks before the water started to recede. That was the thing. If he had the foresight to do this, then shouldn't they have had the foresight to build their businesses away from the water down there? That was what a lot of people were saying, is that, "Hey, we took measures to protect yourselves up here. Why shouldn't they have done that down there? Why should we have to give up our homes just to save their hide?" I don't know if you were familiar with Martin, that little town of Martin over here. They've completely relocated Martin. They are in the process of it right now. It flooded. I don't want to use the word, but the dummies built their homes right down on the creek bank. Every time you turned around, it was flooding. So, somebody, I don't know who it was, that had a lot of clout got a multi-multimillion dollar project going. They've gone in there, and they've literally tore Martin out and put it up on a hill there behind where it used to be. It's still going on. They're still in the process of doing it. They created apartment buildings up there for people that were living in those houses to go up there and live. But like I said, we knew what it was being done for. We may not have known of the recreational part of it, the boating, the fishing, the boat dock, the beach, and all that. That's come

about later after the lake was built. But like I said, they're sort of dropping the ball now. They're not keeping up – now, the Corps of Engineers, they still have control over the Littcarr campground down here to the mouth of hollow (rally?). They still have control over that. If you go down through there and look right now, you will see just about every campsite field, a camper's sitting there. But you go down to the state park part on down there, and you won't find that. I don't know, the state parks, whether they're like that statewide or not. I don't visit state park. So, I don't know.

NM: Do you know why they chose the communities that they did to create the lake?

CM: No. I'm sure that there were there were engineers probably in Louisville. This is part of the Louisville district of the Corps of Engineers that they studied long and hard. Because I remember it being talked, said they were going to build one on this fork of the Kentucky Rough that will come up that way. They were going to build the other one to where, as I told you earlier, up on Highway 7, that area. Well, those two branches come together at Jeff, Kentucky, down there, about probably 7 or 8 miles from Hazard. Well, someone said, "Hey, why don't we go down just below Jeff and build a bigger dam down there? When we have these seasonal floods and so on, it's going to catch the water coming out of both forks of the river. Because even after they built our lake here, Hazard still floods. Primarily, the floodwaters that it's getting is coming out of Highway 7, that part up toward Alva, where they proposed to build the other lake. But it never happened. But who actually pinpointed this location. I wouldn't have any idea. But like I said, it all come out of out of Louisville. I'm sure there was a lot of discussing who and where to build it. They, no doubt, picked areas where they would have the least amount of negative impact. I would hope that they did anyway. Smithboro and Cody were just two little dots on the map. So, we didn't really – in their eyes anyway, we really didn't count that much. So, bye-bye [laughter].

NM: Right. I don't know if you have an answer to this necessarily, but you described that people have the option to buy back their homes. Otherwise, they had to destroy it. Do you know people that chose to destroy their homes? Because I'm just wondering, what was that like to make that decision and go through the process of leveling your home?

CM: Well, very few people, I guess you could say, destroyed their homes. Now, some opted. They, no doubt, thought it was an expensive way to go. They tore their homes down. They hauled the wood to a different side and rebuilt. Well, like I said, let's, let's assume that they gave my dad \$8,000 for his home where it was sitting. He bought it back for \$600. Then he had to turn around and pay the movers 1200, \$2,000 to move the house. Now, some people didn't want to go that route. They bought back their house. They tore it down themselves and built it. Now, a lot of them, a lot of people, they just took the money and run. They didn't buy back their homes. Now, other third parties would come in and buy them. I know we had a guy that – back on 160, going back toward Hindman, if you look over there, if you know where to look, you will see a little community of probably seven houses sitting there all in a row. This one guy that live here on Carr, he went over, and he found people that didn't want their homes after the Corps bought them. He bought them off the Corps. He had them moved over there and set up and rented them. He had them over there. There was another place down here up on Carr called Seals Hollow. He had a lot of them moved up in there. He was a Seals. He had so many homes

up in there, they named the hollow after him. That's where a lot of them came from that way. Like I said, you had the option. You could just sell out and get out. Or you could sell out and buy back. A lot of people that bought back, they tore it down and moved themselves. I know my dad bought a building. I don't know why he did it, but he bought a building down on the lower end of gag town [laughter]. Remember that one? He bought a building down there. We tore it down just for the lumber. Like I said, I don't even remember what you ever use the lumber for, but it was good wood. It wasn't rotting or anything. We went down there and tore it down. Primarily, I think it was he and I that went down there and done the deed and brought it home. But to this day, I don't know what we've done with the wood after we got it home. It's like a dog chasing the car. What's he going to do when he catches it? Well, what was he going to do once he got that wood? I don't know.

NM: You've described that here in Wolf Pen, there's a little bit of cluster of homes that were moved from around the lake. I guess I'm curious, are there any other clusters around here where people moved homes from the communities that were flooded?

CM: They're up on 582, up on what we call Main Carr. There's one cluster up there. That's a whole row of – it's a pretty long stretch of road. There were several homes that were built or relocated there on the right. This here, there's this house below us here, this house, that house, that house, I know my brother's house on up here. I don't know whether there was any more that was brought up in Wolf Pen or not. Seal Hollow, that was one.

NM: How do you spell that?

CM: Seals, S-E-A-L-S. His name, I can't remember his first name. I can't remember. Lawrence Seals, he bought a lot of houses. I'd say he probably bought 20 or more houses. Like I said, it was that that sold out and got out. They didn't want them. There was a lot of people probably that sold out and got out. Because a lot of them went north to Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, places like that. The work was not all that steady around here. The coal industry, boom or bust. If you went up there, which my wife's older sister and her husband, they went up there. They settled up there and lived their whole life up there. I'm sure there were people that sold out and went north just to for the employment opportunities.

NM: You said that there's a period of time where it was just expected that you would see houses being moved during this time period. How long of a period was that?

CM: I'd say that it probably went on for a year and a half to two years. I think they were called New Way Movers, and they were out of Tennessee. They made a fortune moving houses up here. They really did. I mean, on any given day of the week, you could be driving down through here, and the truck waving ahead of the house coming would be pretty far out. He would tell you that, "Hey, you're going to have to get out the road. You're going to have to get way out of the road because we've got a house coming." So, you knew that you had to pull your car up into a little hollow or something to get way out of the way. But that went on probably, I'd say at least two if not three years of moving. Because as far as I know, they only had one truck and one set of equipment. So, they could only move one house at a time. It would take them usually about a week to get the house prepped, get it up. They set it up on big blocks of wood, then back the

lowboy under it, lower the house back down on it, secure the house to the lowboy as best they could, and take off with it. Like I said, it became a way of life to me, the house coming up down the road.

NM: I'm just thinking of everybody in these communities knowing that the community as they know it is coming to an end. They're not necessarily going to have all the same neighbors. So, was there any sort of way that people kind of marked the fact that the houses were being moved, and they were leaving? I don't know. Did they people say goodbye to their neighbors when they were moving? I don't know.

CM: Bon voyage parties or anything? No, there wasn't. A lot of the people from this area moved to London, Kentucky. There was a contingent of people that moved to Glasgow, Kentucky. I know I had an aunt, she and her immediate family moved to Glasgow. Our next-door neighbor on Little Smith Branch, they moved to London. I know one of my first cousins' husband, his family moved to London. I don't know why they chose London. I don't remember ever going to their house, our houses, but they ended up with pretty good-sized farms. I guess they invested wisely when they did go down there and bought land.

NM: I know you talked too about sort of just how tough it was losing the high school in particular since that was such a community center for folks. So, I guess I'm curious if people found ways to stay connected to neighbors that they had.

CM: I don't really think that there was any concerted effort to stay connected, unless it was your immediate family. Other than that, no, there was no – well, no, I take that back. I think it was 1989, I believe was the first year they started with the Carr Creek reunion. It has been ongoing ever since. That was a way for people to come back and to see their old neighbors and things like that. It goes on every year, Memorial Day weekend. This past year, we had about 100 people. We have had a probably in excess of 200 in the past. But COVID impacted our attendance, and people still haven't completely gotten over that scare. Plus, you've got to look that it's been [19]74 up to now, since there's been any new graduates coming out of Carr Creek High School. So, our alumni base is dwindling. We're losing members every year. That's sad. I'm the one that sends out the newsletter and all that good stuff every year. Every year I send them out, I'll get one or two back. I'll inquire about why it came back and so on. Well, they passed away. So, I have to take them off my mailing list. So, it's dwindling. It's sad to see that it is dwindling, but it's a fact of life that it is.

NM: We've been going for a little while. I still have maybe just a few more questions. Are you okay if I sit for a few more?

CM: Yes.

NM: Now I say that, and they all just flew out of my head. What did I want to ask? Well, one thing I wanted to know, so as I understood it, a lot of the Black residents in Knott County lived in some of the communities where the lake was made. So, I'm curious, for Smithboro and Cody and some of the other places, as you remember it, were they more integrated communities, or was your community predominantly White?

CM: We had one community of Blacks. It was Redfox. I'd say at its heyday, it probably had maybe 50 people, 50 Black families that lived there. It was not taken by the lake. Maybe a tiny bit of it was, on the lower end. But the community nonetheless was devastated. It pretty much ceased to exist. I'd say there's probably no more than 15 Black people that still live over in that area. Knott County does not have a high number of Blacks living in the county. So, we never have, except for that.

NM: When you say the community there in Redfox was devastated, because of the lake, you say that?

CM: No. I don't know. I don't really know why it dwindled the way it did. Part of it was Highway 15 was located right through there. That done away with some of the Black houses no doubt. That sort of spelled a little bit of the doom to the community.

NM: Okay. I see. Yes, that makes sense. Well, I guess the other thing that I wanted to ask you too or one of the last things was, what do you miss most about Smithboro? Being able to go back there, what do you miss most about that?

CM: Well, I've often wondered what it would have been like to have grown up in Smithboro the way that my brothers did. I was just graduating probably high school. I graduated in 1966. Like I said, this house was moved up here in [19]66. I don't remember exactly what year our house was moved down there. But I know I was in high school when it was being done. Pretty much, Smithboro, as I remembered, it had been pretty well wiped. It had been devastated by then. Like I've said before, we had it made. We were living the good life. We didn't know it, but we were living a good life. I remember loading bales of hay that would sometimes weigh, I don't know, 50,60 pounds if it wasn't properly dried, for her uncle. He had cattle, and he used a lot of hay. We would help him to get his hay cropped in for 50 cents an hour. Things like that I don't miss, but it was a part of our life. We thought that, "Hey, 50 cents an hour, you work six hours, you've got you got \$3. That's big bucks." There was a lot of little things like that, that we took for granted, no doubt, but would love to go back now and relive it. Like I said, the kids today, they haven't a clue. They haven't a clue. If something major was to happen to error economy, whatever, they wouldn't know how to make it. They wouldn't know how to survive. I would know how. I wouldn't want to, but I would know how to do it. I would know how to plant a garden. We used to have a little garden right back here behind us where the pool is now. I know how to plant a garden. I know how to provide at least some of my food. But there are people, the vast majority of people in our society today, that don't have a clue. They would starve to death if push comes to shove. Because you're going to protect what you've got. You're not going to let them infringe on it [laughter].

NM: Right. Yes. Well, I guess for a last question, I want to ask you if there's just anything else either about Smithboro or the lake that we didn't talk about that you think would be important for me to know? I'm going to let you think about it for a little bit. I'm going to collect just the natural sounds. So, we'll sit here quietly, and I'll let you think if there's some last things that you still have on your mind. All right. So, anything else?

CM: As far as closing comments, I've told you what Smithboro was like. I would hope that everybody would have an opportunity to grow up in an environment like that. Like I told you, we were poor, but we didn't know we were poor. We thought we had it all. Now that I look back at it, we did. We had it all.

NM: Well, I guess maybe just one last question, as I'm doing this research and talking to other folks, are there any other topics that would be worth me looking into or points of inquiry that you think would be good for me to consider?

CM: Well, I don't know, you might want to talk to them a little bit more about their education, their schools that they went to. I mentioned Carr Creek. I mentioned the Smithboro grade school. But we didn't delve into that too much about the day-to-day goings on at those schools of what it was like. Like I said, I went there through sixth grade. Sixth grade, they consolidated almost all of the schools into Carr Creek Elementary, and Smithboro grade school ceased to exist. I mean, the building stayed there for a long time until the dam came. I don't think they tore it down. They took the roof and stuff off because it was wood. But the body of it was natural cut stone. I think it's probably still sitting down there, no doubt, being used by the fish today as a school. [laughter] How do you like that?

NM: [laughter] Okay. That's good to think about. Because you've described schools were such an important part of daily life and community life.

CM: Right. In talking about Carr Creek, get them to relate some of their highlights and lowlights of going to school at Carr Creek. I have trouble remembering a lot of things. I have a nephew who is a walking encyclopedia. He can remember things that he asked me. "Hey, Uncle Core, don't you remember the time that so-and-so?" "No, Paul, I don't remember that." But he does he. I don't know. Do you get the *Troublesome Creek Times* by any chance?

NM: I don't get it, but I've read it.

CM: In there, in the *Troublesome Creek Times*, there's a feature. I think it's a weekly feature now. It's called "Ponderings from the Patch." He lives over here on what's called Flaxpatch. That's the name of the hollow where he lives. He writes his ponderings or his thoughts. It's called "Ponderings from the Patch." He's a very proficient writer. But he writes in the vernacular that you think he didn't know his butt from a hole in the ground. But he does it for a reason. He writes that way for a reason and, and people love it. Karen at the newspaper, she found out about it. I don't know how she found out about it, through him, and then she invited him to start sending in a weekly one. He just turned over his whole file to who his wife who had been keeping everyone that he had written. She turned them all over to Karen. Karen, again, she can go back and pick one from the file folder in the back or get the current one that he's written.

NM: That sounds neat. I'll have to check that out.

CM: Yes, "Ponderings from the Patch."

NM: Okay. Nice.

CM: That's about it as far as – I think we pretty well covered everything that's in my feeble memory [laughter].

NM: All right. Well, your memory seems very strong and deep as far as I'm concerned. I always enjoy just sitting back and listening to you, Corbett. I'll go ahead and sign us off. So, again, this is Nicole Musgrave speaking with Corbett Molins on June 24th, 2022. We're on Wolf Pen Creek in Knott County at Corbett's home. This is for the Carr Creek Oral History Project.

[end of transcript]