

Western North Carolina Tomorrow

Black Oral History Project

Tape #9 - Mrs. Susie Bryson

Interviewee: Susie Bryson (B)

Interviewee: Lorraine Crittenden (I)

County: Jackson

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I: Miss Susie, has your family always lived in North Carolina?

B: Yes. Yes they have. My great grandmother, Harriet Rogers, she was a slave. So far as I know, she was born and raised here and she had, I think it was, ten children in slavery. Some of those are from the White masters and some are from the Black people. The names, I will start with my grandfather George Rogers. He belonged to the ancestor of Uncle Dave Rogers who was the owner of Western Carolina University at that time. I'll say the land. There wasn't no school or anything like that, just land. That's what my grandparents have told me and that's where we came from. She had another son, Silas Davis. He's by a White owner too. And Uncle Lewis Rogers, he's Black. Uncle Joe Brown, Black. Uncle Allen Hooper, Black. Aunt Elizabeth Rogers, Black. Aunt Lou Van Hook's mother, I can't remember her name. I have been told, but I'm getting kind of old now and I don't remember too well. But Aunt Lou van Hook's mother was Black too. And when Grandpa Rogers was eleven years old, well Grandma Harriet, she had been sold for \$500 in her day and when Grandpa George was eleven years old, they said he was sold at \$3,000. I don't know whether that's true or not, but that's what I have been told because the people that owned him the information about him got burned up in a house, but at one time they had it out at the Stillwell Building in a glass box. You know how they have these things locked in. Well, at one time I had seen it, but at that particular time I didn't realize I should have copied that off and had it for history. I was younger and didn't realize what history meant at that time, so Theodore Lackey, he is dead now. He is the one that took me over there to show it to me because I was working at the library at that time in 1945. So, Grandpa George, though after he grew up, he had a lot of children. He was the father of 23 children. He had four children by his first wife which is my mother, Millie Rogers Love, Wilson Rogers, Laura Rogers Blakeley and Turner Rogers which all five of them have passed away now. Then by his second wife there were ten children, John Rogers, Earnald Rogers, Pierce Rogers, David Rogers, McKinley Rogers, Daisy Rogers Coward, Ada Rogers Streeter, Halley Rogers Lackey, and George Rogers and Vertie Rogers Burkes. That's the ten children by the last wife. Well, at that time he had several outside children. One, Aunt Georgeann Fisher of Franklin. She was by a White lady. Aunt Ellie Wilson of Sylva, North Carolina. She was by a White lady. Aunt Ida Cox which the Cox family raised at Cullowhee, everybody know because they were famous people at that time, Davis and Cox, that's where Aunt Ellie worked. She was by a Barnes lady. Aunt Harriet Underwood, Black lady, Burley Worley, and George Hill, Black lady. That was his children. If there were any more I don't know about, but those 23 are the only ones I have heard of. So by his being sold for \$3,000 they must have known at that time, you know kind of like cattle or something like that, so

somebody must have known he was going to be a good breeder. So, then my mother married Jack Love of Haywood County and they had five children, Janie Love Renoir is the oldest, George Love, next, Daisy Love Young and Curtis Love, that's my next brother and me. I'm the baby. So there were five of us and my mother was living in Asheville at the time I was born, and she passed when I was seven years old. She passed in March and I was seven in August and her brother, Wilson Rogers at Cullowhee at that time, he adopted my young brother and me. We were the only two that was not able to take care of ourselves. The other three children were grown at that time.

I: Did they stay in Asheville?

B: No, they stayed in Waynesville. The one that was in Asheville with us, Daisy, she came back to Waynesville to be with the two older children, but Uncle Wilson Rogers at Cullowhee, he adopted my brother and I, and I lived there for twelve years. Then I married Charlie Bryson and moved to Sylva.

I: How old were you when you got married?

B: When I got married I was 19. And so we had four children, Ruby Bryson Freeman - she lives in East Moline, Illinois. She's teaching there now and Hazel Bryson - she lives in Oxon Hill, Maryland, she's a social worker there and Charles Junior Bryson, he had 21 years in the Air Force - he was a flight technician, and after those 25 years, well he was married in the meantime and he had four children. So when he came out of the service, he went over to STC and he took a plumber's course and when he graduated they moved to Oxon Hill, Maryland, too. So now he's a plumber at Amtrak in Washington, DC. He's been there for ten years now. And Bobby C. Bryson, when he graduated from A&T College, we had a cousin in Columbus, Ohio, Lockwood Love, he was working at Ohio State University. So he had taught Bobby in High School and he knew Bobby was a Chemistry major and that's what he was working, you know, with the Chemistry, so as soon as Bobby graduated from A&T he went right straight to Ohio State and went to work the next day. Dr. Al Garrett hired him and he went to work the next day. He worked there for 15 years, but after the Lockwood accident he got a little nervous, and I don't think he worked but about four years after Lockwood passed. And he asked Dr. Garrett would he recommend him in Washington, DC. And he did. So Bobby went right straight to Washington, DC, and he went to work for the government and he worked on the, I guess you call it manpower. I have one of his cards, but that's the kind of work he did for the next 15 years. So he came home. He passed. He was with me about eight months. He had been in the service too, so he died at Oteen Hospital in Asheville. He was my baby. And he passed at the age of 49. You know back when our kids were in schools, schools weren't integrated then and we had to send our children away to even get high school. Ruby graduated from Allen Home. And after she graduated we were very fortunate because Lilly Mae Davis, that's Lockwood's wife, was working at Winston-Salem Teachers College, and one of her friends needed a girl in the business office so she called me and said if Ruby had had typing to have her write a letter and say she wanted to work there, you know, until school opened, so they hired her. I told Ruby don't take any pay, we'll send you a little spending money. And I said let that go on your entrance fee, so they gave her \$10 a week and her board, and it was ten weeks before school opened, and her entrance fee was only \$101, and she had the money in the office - had the \$100 in the office because she hadn't taken out any of the money. That's how she got in at Winston-Salem. You know back in those times, times were hard. Hazel was the only one we had that could graduate in Sylva - that's

the second girl because their daddy he worked at, we called it the tannery down here, but after these kids got old enough to go to school, we did not make enough money to send them so I had been doing day's work for \$.50 a day and after they began to go away, I went to Cullowhee to work as a maid at Moore Dormitory and at that time they started me in with \$60 a month which was a lot of money to me in those days. So by that we were able to keep them entirely. Hazel, she graduated from Livingston College in Salisbury which is a Methodist school, and the first year the church gave Hazel \$100. The next year, they gave her \$35, and the next year they gave her \$16, and the last year she didn't get anything, but she was lucky enough to live in the home with one of the professors and his wife. She was their little girl's big sister. So she got to live there free, so all we paid was just her tuition. She got to live there for her board. She worked for her board. She did Mrs. Price's silk things, you know the things that don't go to the laundry. The things you do with your hands, and she was their little girl's big sister, took her to the movie and different places. It must have been about a ten-year-old child or maybe eleven. And so, we were fortunate enough to get that. And Bobby, see he graduated from A&T College. Charles Junior went to A&T College while he was in service, I believe, his first four years and then he went to A&T one year, but he went back into the service.

I: Well you certainly are fortunate in that all your children received an education.

B: Yes, but I tell you Ruby married Robert Lee McDowell, but Ruby's first two years was in Georgia. She taught in Georgia. Lewisville, Georgia two years. She taught in Andrews, NC, for three years and then she married Robert Lee McDowell and he was in East Moline, Illinois, and that's where they moved to. But when Ruby went to East Moline, Illinois, she did not have an Illinois teaching certificate and she couldn't teach there.

I: So what did she do?

B: She was elected Rock Island Treasury Department's secretary. She's the first Black secretary they had, so she worked there for three years. The last year she told them that she wanted to go back to teaching. And so they arranged, she worked, and she went and got her Illinois teaching certificate and now she has completed 27 years at one school there in East Moline, Illinois. She teaches first grade. In Georgia she had third grade. In Andrews she had 1-6. That was a little one-teacher school. First grade through sixth grade for three years in Andrews and they wanted her back, but she married and, of course, she had to go with her husband. So she's living in East Moline, Illinois, and she has 27 years in there. My father, I can't remember what, but I do know he worked for the city in Haywood in Waynesville, North Carolina-Haywood County and they were digging a water ditch (water line) and he got killed. It fell in on him and killed him. It caved in on him and killed him. That's how he passed. And I don't know about his education. I can't tell you about that because I don't know and I don't even know the age he was. I must have been at least four years old at that time.

I: So you were very young when he died.

B: Uh Huh. I don't even hardly remember going to the funeral or anything like that. And then too, my mother, she was a housekeeper for the Dirielblica's here in Sylva. Somebody may know about that, and then they moved on to Asheville and she was their housekeeper over there too.

I: Did she take the children with her when she went to Asheville?

B: Uh huh. I was born after she went over there.

I: Did your mother have her own home, or did she live in the home with this family?

B: Lived in the home with this family, I think, but after I was born she passed on at 126 Pine Street. That's where she died at, in Asheville. But she lived in the home with this family, I think, until I don't know how long because the best I can remember is.

I: What time of day did her day start with that family and when did she get back to you?

B: I imagine that was quite a little bit of time because I remember my little brother taking me to school with him. We didn't have no...my aunt, she looked after us like that but didn't have no babysitter or anything like in those days because when my little brother went to school, he was a little caddy at the golf course. He was big enough to be a little caddy. But when we went to school, he always took me because I was...the best I can remember... I was about third grade when I come to Cullowhee, but I was too small to walk to school. We lived on Long Branch and it was too far to walk.

I: So how did you get here?

B: I had to stay out of school one year, and then the next year I was large enough to go to Cullowhee. See, there was just the little one-room school at Cullowhee at that time and the Black church and cemetery was up where Robinson Hall is now. So they dug the people up at Robinson Hall and carried them over...you know where the church is built now on the street over there?

I: Yes.

B: Well, they built us that church over there and dug up our dead people and carried them over there. Uh huh, that's our cemetery, uh huh. See my mother was buried up on the hill. Grandpa George and all of them. Quite a few of them. And they dug them up and carried them over to where Mt. Zion Methodist Church is now. And they built us a church over there. Built us a church over there. Built us a church. I imagine they purchased the land too. I am sure they purchased the land for us too. But you know the building where Robinson Hall? That's where our school, we had a little one-room schoolhouse up there. So they, I guess you would call moved Cullowhee School to Sylva, and we rode a bus from Cullowhee to Sylva to come to school at that time. See, schools weren't integrated. And Black kids, they rode a bus from Cullowhee to Sylva and that's how I finished. I didn't finish high school. I only went to the 9th grade because it wasn't any higher than the 9th grade. After the 9th grade you would have to go to Asheville or Lincoln Academy or somewhere like that, and so I went in the 9th grade for two years and then I married.

I: In the one-room school, how did the teacher manage all seven grades?

B: I don't know, she managed it. Everybody knew to be quiet and when your class called whatever your class was supposed to be, you went on and performed. It's unbelievable to you, but that's facts.

I: No, I went to a one-room school at Bryson City. By some magic she had it so organized that no one was disruptive while the other grades were doing the assignment.

B: Yes. Well...that's the way it was at Cullowhee. We had wonderful teachers. Beautiful teachers. I mean strict teachers that really you had to learn. There wasn't no foolishness with you. They meant business.

I: And what were the subjects taught?

B: Reading, writing, arithmetic, spelling, geography, English, and a little bit of science at that time.

I: So you had to learn more. A variety of subjects.

B: Yeah. Uh huh. And when we came to Sylva, we got Latin and Algebra. That's as far as I got, you know. I had Latin back in those days and Algebra. That's as far as I got.

I: Now, was that during the time of Professor Davis?

B: Yes, Professor Davis, uh huh. Well, we were here one year before Professor Davis came over here, or maybe two years because they had two teachers in the schoolhouse and one teacher taught in the church. Ms. Neal, Mary Neal from Charlotte, North Carolina, she taught in the church and Alberta Love from Waynesville and Mrs. Edgenton from Asheville taught in the schoolhouse. And then the next year or maybe two, Professor Davis...oh, Riverview was sent over here, too.

I: Was there a school in Riverview?

B: Uh huh. And then they moved those children over here. You know, Cullowhee School, Sylva School, and Riverview School all came to Sylva. All in one. Combined. Combined all three of the schools.

I: So you had more than one teacher.

B: Oh yes, we had Professor Davis, Ms. Carey, Ms. Mattie, that's Professor Davis's sister, Ms. Neal. I guess we had about four or five teachers at that time.

I: Would you say your generation received more education than most?

B: Well, I think we did a pretty good job. I really do. Because you see after we came from Cullowhee that was combined a little bit more and then after Riverview came, we done very well.

I: How long did the school year last?

B: About six or seven months.

I: After school what did you do?

B: Well, I was in the country so I farmed. I wasn't big enough to do too much work but I can remember before corn droppers came out you know, planters, the machine that plants the corn now. I do remember when I was a little girl, my uncle would always say let Susie drop the corn because she is heavy handed, and I didn't know what heavy handed meant. But what he meant when the other kids dropped the corn they just dropped two grains in a hill and my little hands were small and I would drop three or four grains and he said he had rather thin it out than have to replant it. I can remember that. That was my little chore. But my chores around the house was to

feed the chickens, feed the pigs, and when I got large enough to milk, I milked two cows when I got large enough to milk.

I: You milked before and after school or what?

B: You milked before you went to school in the morning and then you milked in the afternoon.

I: What time did you have to get up to start your day since you had to milk the cows before you went to school?

B: Oh, I guess about 6:00 because all those many years I didn't milk the cows alone because I had some help in the meantime. But at one time when everybody was gone, two cows, I milked them myself after everybody married out and gone. I guess you would have to go milk and then you would have to come in and bathe. We didn't have bathrooms to go in and bathe in those days. We had to bathe in a tub. At first we had wooden tubs and then they bought tin tubs. We had tin tubs to get in and take your bath in that tub because you didn't have bathrooms then. I mean the poorer people didn't have them, I'll say it like that.

I: Did you have a well or...?

B: No, we had a spring. Because you see Uncle Les Wilson, he had I guess about 100 acres of land at that time because he had land at Flat Gap and on Gribble Mountain and up where we live too. He had a lot of land, you know. Of course, we didn't tend all that land because Flat Gap, that was cattle, you know, kept cattle in, pasturing and like that and over on Gribble Mountain, I remember raking hay a lot over there. They must have used it for hay.

I: Now how did a Black man acquire as much land?

B: He was just a smart man and he was the type grasping after what you know was loose and see he was a miner. He was the head of this mine. He had men under him digging mica. Have you ever heard of mica?

I: I've heard of mica. Now where was this mine that you're speaking of?

B: On Long Branch. It's closed up and been closed many years, but it's right across from Josie's house. And there were several people you know. And then there was a mica mine somewhere else in Sylva, too, because they would go to sheet the mica, but I was too small to sheet the mica.

I: What's sheeting mica?

B: You had to sheet it and separate it in different boxes and it was sold by this kind so much and that kind so much.

I: What was it used for?

B: I don't know what they made out of mica because it was sent away. I don't know what it was used for.

I: Was it loaded on a train?

B: Uh huh, I imagine loaded on the truck or whatnot to get to where it had to go to, and I imagine loaded on a train. I can't tell you for sure about that because I wasn't big enough to do that. But the other girls, they paid them for sheeting that mica. They sometimes had \$13 on a payday or something like that. But I got my change. They let me sell the syrup. I sold syrup and that was mine.

I: Who made the syrup?

B: We did. We raised everything darling. We had the mill to grind it and a big copper container that you cooked it in, and Uncle Les was one of the best syrup makers there was and my Grandpa George, how they make their living, they were farmers, too, and then he tanned leather and made their shoes. He never did make me any shoes, but he made my mother shoes and the older children shoes because he was dead before I was old enough to wear shoes.

I: Now, you just mentioned clothing. How did the family get clothing?

B: Well, Aunt Ivy washed for a family, Dallas Wike, and that was about one of the largest families, or I would say well-prepared families in Cullowhee. At that time, if I make no mistake, he was a postmaster. And we washed for them, and instead of giving you money gave you the children's clothes. And see they had, I think it was, five girls, and we got all their, see they were able to wear the best, and when they give you something it was just like something new now. I mean it hadn't been worn long enough to be worn out or anything like that, and that's how we got our clothes.

I: Well, how did you get your first shoes?

B: Shoes? I can't remember. I had shoes when Mama died. I guess they were bought in Asheville. The first pair of shoes I remember, I guess, that I paid any attention to was at her death. See she died in Asheville. We brought her over here on the train and then she stayed in Sylva down at the Methodist Church that night. Wasn't no funeral homes, evidently, and she stayed in the church and people sit up with her that night like a wake and the next day put her in the wagon and carried her to Cullowhee and buried her. And my first shoes, I remember, was a little pair of black boots, patent leather at the bottom, and then the other must have been kid or something and then a little patent leather around the top.

I: Oh, those sound gorgeous.

B: And they were buttoned up on the side. Now that's the first shoes I can remember. Of course I had shoes before, that but I guess I hadn't paid that much attention to them.

I: There's always that special pair, isn't there?

B: Uh huh. That's special and they were about half way up my little legs. I was short and fat. I never will forget those boots.

I: I know. I remember I had a pair of red shoes that I didn't want to part with for anything even though I outgrew them. I still tried to get my feet in those red shoes.

B: Because you didn't want to give them up. Now that's the way I was by those little black boots.

I: Now, you said you put your mother's body on a train. Did you ride on the train with the body?

B: Yes, we rode on the train. You know, see they had I guess like a thing that you haul the bodies in. I mean a coach that you haul the bodies in. See, we were in the train sitting down but the body was in the coach.

I: Since you were so young, what were you thinking then?

B: I can't remember what I would be thinking about, I guess where I was going and what not.

I: Was that your first train ride?

B: No, it isn't the first train ride because my mother took my little brother and I with her to Borderland, West Virginia, to see her brother. Now that was my first train ride. This evidently was my second train ride. I'll never forget going to Virginia, and I wasn't more than four or five years old.

I: What did you think of that first train ride?

B: Well, I'll tell you, I just thought it was marvelous. You know how a kid would be. But one thing that strikes me, we stayed at a, I guess you would call it a hotel in those days, I don't know. But I never will forget, my mother, see my father was dead at that time, my mother when we went to this room she...my little brother and I all slept in the same bed. But I remember her pulling the head of that bed up to the door and I just wondered and wondered what was that for. I don't know, I guess because she was a woman and riding with just two children.

I: On the train?

B: Uh huh and at this hotel where we had to spend the night somewhere, I never will forget that.

I: So that was her way of protecting her young.

B: Uh huh. Probably the door was locked, but still I never will...it was on rollers you know, an iron bed on rollers, and I just remember her rolling that up and it just made we wonder What, but that's the way she had I guess as you say of protecting her children, I guess. Gonna be sure nobody didn't break in on her, right? That's one more incident I'll never forget with her.

I: What's the first Christmas you remember?

B: Girl, back then we didn't get too much. I can't hardly tell you the first one. I can't hardly remember my first Christmas.

I: Do you remember one that was really special?

B: Really special when I was a child? Well, I guess I thought they was all special. You know when you wasn't used to so much you know, I guess they were all special with me because back in those days, you know like we had oranges, candy and apples and everything, well back then we had plenty of apples because we raised apples, peaches and grapes and stuff like that, but oranges was really rare-something you didn't have only just special times.

I: Do you remember when you received your first doll?

B: I had a doll. I brought my doll from Asheville with me, but I can't remember how I did treasure that Christmas, but I had a doll before... I guess that was my first doll, the one I brought from Asheville with me when I was six years old, but I can't remember that first Christmas, I mean as to how it hit me you know. I guess probably back then and us living in the city in Asheville, I probably had more than I had when I come to the country.

I: That's a good possibility.

B: And a mother and two little children and only two of us, the others were grown. My younger sister was about sixteen when Mama died.

I: Well, do you think that because you had older brothers and sisters that you and your younger brother had more?

B: Uh huh. I think we did. We did. I'm sure we did. I know we did.

I: Did your older brothers and sisters help your mother by sending money or anything like that?

B: I can't remember whether they did or not. Probably Brother George and Sister Janie. But Daisy she was living with us and she wasn't working at that time. At the time my mother was sick and died, Daisy was there with us then that last year. So I don't know whether she came from Waynesville to be with us or whether she had already been there or what not.

I: Well do you remember your seeing your first car?

B: Yes, I do remember that because they had cars in Asheville when my mother died.

I: Oh.

B: Uh huh, and street cars, too, because I remember riding a street car.

I: So Asheville was progressive.

B: Uh huh. It was a progressive place in those years. Asheville's been progressive a long time because I remember street cars and I remember cars. But I don't remember the first one what I thought about it.

I: Do you remember the first time you rode in a car?

B: No I can't. I remember the wagon cause that wagon was something you know.

I: Your family had a wagon. Was that here in Cullowhee?

B: Uh huh. That was in Cullowhee. Uncle Les had horses and wagons, buggies.

I: And that was your means of transportation?

B: He was a progressive old man. Yeah that was our transportation. He was a hard worker and he was a smart person.

I: What happened to all his land and the mines?

B: Well, I don't know about the mines, it's just closed up there, but the land, a lot of it, is still there. Josie has sold some. I think there's about 60 acres of land. I think she sold it down to about 60 acres of land. Because I know she sold Gribble Mountain on account of the airport went through there. And then the place we had eight acres up on Long Branch above us, I know they sold that too.

I: On the remaining land, is the timber cut off?

B: No, the timbers on there.

I: So, it's just idle, nothings being done with it?

B: You mean with the timber? Aunt Josie let some people cut along, but there's still plenty up there.

I: Otherwise it's just still there?

B: Uh huh. And then Clifford Casey, he wired up a lot of the flat land for his horses to graze on. You know how you build wire fences, too places is wired in for horses to graze. And I think she lets horses graze up there, I'm not sure. I know she did when Clifford was living. I imagine she still does. I'm not sure, but I imagine so. Yeah the land's there. There's 60 acres.

I: Would you say that your family had more than most people?

B: I think they did. Yeah. Especially the Black people. Because I don't know of anybody else unless it was the Davises had that much land and they would be about the only ones. See that's his granddaddy's brother, Uncle Silas Davis. Yeah they were prosperous. Grandpa George, Uncle Louis Rogers had several acres of land.

I: In the Black culture, church has always been part of our lives.

B: Yes, always. But now when I was in Asheville, I attended the First Baptist Church. That's where I went to Sunday school. That's where our mother sent my little brother and I to Sunday School. In fact, she belonged there. But when I came to Cullowhee, it was up on the hill, just the Methodist Church, where I told you they moved the church.

I: That was the only church in Cullowhee.

B: Uh huh. Later a Baptist Church was built at Cullowhee. Now I'm a Methodist, but it went down girl when they built back on. It was later when I was a pretty good size so the Baptists all came to Sylva.

I: Well do you remember any of the services or customs that you had then that you don't have now?

B: No, I don't because it is pretty well... the Methodist Church is pretty well the same thing. I don't remember too much more then different to what it is now because we had our quarterly meetings every four months. The presiding elder would come and preach for us then and then we had our conferences once a year just about, might be a little more now, but at that time we always had the big conference which is the annual conference. It was once a year and the district conference was once a year. I guess now we have more missionary mass meetings, check-up meetings and those different kinds of meetings now.

I: What about special dinners or anything like that at church.

B: Yes, we have special dinners. We had special dinners back in those days too. Not as many probably as you have now, but we would have them. I remember carrying out big baskets of food. Especially on the quarterly meeting we always carried out the dinner and maybe say Easter or something like that, always the Easter program. We would always carry out dinner. Back then they carried big baskets of food, huge baskets, because see they were country people and cooked a lot.

I: Did people come from surrounding towns?

B: Yes, uh huh, they would come from surrounding towns.

I: Did any of these people ever stay overnight or was this just a one day...

B: Well, sometimes for the quarterly meeting the presiding elder came on Saturday and he had to spend the night. Usually had a special place for him to stay. He usually stayed at Aunt Lena Davis's. That was the closest to the church and they were good livers, too. That's Uncle Sile Davis', that's Grandpa George's brother's family.

I: Now would you say that the Black women were for the most part the providers in the family?

B: No, not the Black women. Not then, the man was the provider in those days. The man was the provider of the family in those days because if they had something else to do, another job, they had some man doing the man's work there, helping to help out.

I: Oh, I see.

B: Yeah, the man was the provider in those days. Practically I think most every family the man was the provider, I believe.

I: So that's different from...

B: Than nowadays when we have the woman and the man. Back then the woman usually just stayed home and did the work unless she would go out to wash clothes or wash quilts and you know, things like that for the White families. I know we had White families that we worked for and then Aunt Ida used to go different places and wash quilts and we would wash quilts all day and then go home and go back the next day and wash quilts for somebody else.

I: Now was this extra money that you could do with it what you wanted.

B: Yeah, you usually had it to buy the things you didn't have or something like that.

I: Could you use it for frills like hair ribbons and things like that?

B: Yeah, you could do it for things like that, socks, and different things like that that you didn't have too much of in those days.

I: Well, how did the family spend time together during the winter or at night?

B: Well, we at our house, you know we would sing and just stuff like that, you know. They would see that you got your lessons done. The family I was raised in, you had to get your lessons, and Uncle Wes was a smart old man. Aunt Ida wasn't as smart as he was, but he seen

that you got it , and if there was something that you couldn't do yourself, he was able to help you work the problem, and if he couldn't help you work the problem, he sent you somewhere else to get it. I never will forget at Cullowhee, I think Mrs. Mae White was our teacher, and we stayed on one problem about three days and Uncle Wes couldn't solve that problem, so that afternoon when I came in and I said we don't have the problem yet, he says you go up to Ms. Louise Bishops and tell her to help you with that problem. That's a White lady. Their farm joined our farm and I went up, Ms. Bishops worked the problem and I carried the problem in the next morning. She really drilled it into my head so I really knew what to do and how to do. And I was real proud of that problem because we had been on it two or three days, so I don't know whether the teacher couldn't work it or whether she was just going to make us do it. Back in those days that's about the only thing you could play at home, checkers, you know at night, you know like everybody could play, see who could beat playing checkers. That's one thing too, but that's the only thing I can remember that they had.

I: Do you remember when you first had electricity?

B: Let's see, I don't think we had electricity at Cullowhee then I married, but when I came to Sylva, Charlie and those had electricity when I moved down here. No, I don't remember when electricity first came out. I can't remember that. I can't think right now.

I: When you got married, did you have electricity?

B: Yeah, we had electricity when I married. Yeah, they had electricity, but at home we still had the lamps. That's 1927. They got their electricity after I married. No, we didn't have electricity when I married and we didn't have a bathroom in the house at that time. They put that in since I married, too.

I: Well, what other historic events do you remember about your life in Cullowhee?

B: Well, that's about it except the flood. You know we had a flood, but I was living in Sylva when we had that flood. But went back to see it where it washed Mr. Robert Davis' house away. Washed it in the river. Washed the house down off the land into the river and washed the bridge away. I remember that.

I: But the family escaped?

B: Yes, uh huh, the family escaped. Then when they built a new house, they built way up on the mountain, up on top of the ridge there.

I: Now at that time did the Social Services help them rebuild the house or did they have to do it themselves?

B: I really don't know whether we had Social Services in those days or not. I don't think we had stuff like that back then. I don't remember hearing about social services 'til the late years. I know Charlie's daddy was blind and he only got \$2.50 a month and he was blind.

I: Two dollars and a half?

B: Uh huh, a month, and Charlie would walk over to Webster. Back then you had to go to Webster to get the money and he would walk over there and get that \$2.50, and he was blind.

I: So there was some kind of aid?

B: Yes. That was. But other, if there was any, I don't know about it.

I: Well, do you remember the depression?

B: Yes, I remember the depression very much.

I: What do you remember about it?

B: Well, I didn't suffer too much at it because my husband was liked very much at the tannery, and he was called in to do a lot of extra work, plus Carter Williams at that time, I don't know Where Carter's from, but he was living in Sylva and he hauled produce from Atlanta to Sylva. You know, back then you would take your truck and haul produce and bring it to the people in Sylva to sell, and my husband would always go with him to help load the produce and unload it when he got back here.

I: Now was that a one-day trip?

B: That was yeah...if it was a day he was at work it would be after he got off from work. Him and Roy Pickens would always ride with this man and then Charlie never would take money for his, he would just take produce ever what he was going to give him. And I remember one time that he gave him 100 lb. of pinto beans. It was just a whole big sack of pinto beans, and we had pinto beans, I guess, a year. Plus gave all the neighbors pinto beans. I'll never forget that, and my children were real small in those days. They were real small. I'll never forget that.

I: Were they complaining about having to eat so many pinto beans?

B: I can't remember whether they did or not, I don't think so. But I gave all the neighbors pinto beans. I tell you the depression didn't hurt me that bad. I guess because Charlie had a chance of doing extra work and things like that because back then it didn't take as much to...pinto beans were just about \$.08 a lb. because I think he got \$8.00 each time he went, and I think that bag of beans must have been \$8.00 at that time.

I: That's a lot of beans.

B: Honey, I bet you the beans lasted two years. I gave all the neighbors close around a mess of beans. I'll never forget that. But I didn't suffer too much during the depression.

I: Do you remember the rationing of food stamps?

B: Yes. But I never did...

I: You didn't have to use the stamps? What about for your sugar?

B: Yeah for sugar we had to. I remember that, but I must have got a plenty because it didn't bother me.

I: Was this an all-day affair? Did you have to go stand in line?

B: No, I never stood in line for nothing. I don't know how we got those stamps. I don't remember standing in line. I remember you were allowed just so much of something. I remember that. We had a plenty for our family. Cause I have heard so many worry about the depression, but it didn't hurt me all that bad. I guess...I don't know what.

I: Were any of your sons in either of the wars?

B: No. My brothers was in the wars, not my sons. Charles, Jr. was in there for 21 years, you know, in the Air Force but not fighting, and Bobby was in there two years, but not fighting.

I: How about some of your uncles?

B: My brothers, my oldest brother was in World War I, but he went and come back.

I: Why was that?

B: I mean when the war was over, he come back just like he went. And then my other brother was in when they bombed Pearl Harbor because they nicknamed him Pearl Harbor. That's his nickname. He worked at Newport News, Virginia shipyard. He was fixing these, I guess you call it, when you fix these ships and things like that because he used to crawl under them and he weighed 300 lbs. and sometimes he was so big he couldn't hardly get up in them holes to do the work, but he worked there until he retired. He retired at 62, but he didn't get hurt. He come back too. You know you remember when they bombed Pearl Harbor? My son Charles, when he was in the Air Force he was sent across, I don't know, he said he had been in very foreign country except in Russia and his buddy, I don't know what they were, but his buddy was shot down right beside of him. Was killed right beside of him and he said they didn't have on their Army clothes, they were just in civilian clothes. I don't know what they were doing, but they were over there. He stayed a year that time.

I: Do you remember where he was?

B: No, I really don't remember what country but I do know he said he had been in every foreign country except in Russia. See he was a flight technician on the plane.

I: So he has seen the world.

B: And he really had to know whether that plane was ready to go up in the air or not because I remember him telling that he refused one time to go up on account of the plane wasn't prepared, but they let them prepare it and they went on their trip. But I do know he said his buddy was shot down right beside of him.

I: But he didn't tell you the reason?

B: Uh uh. He don't talk about it much, you know, see like he worried a lot when he first came home. But see in the service you do whatever you're sent to do. And that's the only serious thing I've ever heard him talk about during his years in service and he was in there 21 years.

I: Well, do you remember any social customs that you really enjoyed such as were there weddings?

B: Oh yes. I've enjoyed a lot of weddings in my younger days. It was mostly church work and school work when I was a kid. We did have such a thing as entertainment, like a box supper. You would put ever what you would enter in a shoe box or some kind of box. Then they sold those. And ever who bought that box got to eat with you. You never knew who was going to eat with you until your box sold and ever who bought that eat with you. That's about the only thing I can remember.

I: Did any of these box suppers lead to romances?

B: I don't know whether they did or not. Probably...so you can't ever tell, can you?

I: What about dating?

B: You mean about me? Well I dated quite a little bit. It was nice. It was country dating.

I: What do you mean?

B: I mean that we went to church, but always the parents or somebody was along. You never had an opportunity to date like they do now days, you know. The parents was always walking along. Everybody was just walking along talking like that. But like going out in the cars, you didn't have an opportunity to do anything like that. When you come back from those suppers ever who was carrying you home from this entertainment, the parents and all, everybody was along in the road there together.

I: Very protective.

B: Yeah. Very protective. Not no chance of anything, you know back in those days.

I: What if you and the young man decided you wanted to marry, what was the procedure?

B: Well, I didn't let him ask for me because I was afraid they would say no, and when we decided we should get married, he says now Susie, I'm going to come and ask for you. He says I'm not afraid of Uncle Les, I'm gonna ask for you. He says I'm gonna bring a taxi and says if you don't meet me below the house just around the corner down there, he says I'm gonna come on to the house and ask for you. So I said to my cousin, I says now he will come and ask for me and I don't want him to. And we told Aunt Ivy, that was my aunt that raised me, that I was going down to Grandma Clearsy's for a short time and that I would be back and she says "Well Susie, I would rather you wouldn't go because we're killing hogs today and I wished you wouldn't go." I said "Well I won't be gone but a short while, and he met me and so we came on to his sister's house and got married.

I: That same day?

B: The same day and they had fixed a big dinner for us that night and Reverend Noah Cox married us. Have you ever heard of Noah Cox?

I: No, I haven't.

B: He's a Baptist minister and he married us at his sister's house.

I: Well, when did you tell Aunt Ida?

B: Aunt Ida said, she told Josephine. Josephine went back home and she told her that I got married. She said, you know I thought she was going to get married, says, because she has never gone off when I asked her not to go. Said I felt like it, but it was her cousin so she was very pleased with it and they liked him very much.

I: Now did you start housekeeping then or did you stay with your aunt for a while?

B: No, we started housekeeping with Charlie and his daddy. His daddy was blind and we started housekeeping with him, and we lived with them about three weeks. Then we moved in the house with his sister and her husband so we could build us a house, and so we built a house

about the second month of our marriage. He built a house on Allen Road they call it now. You know where the Methodist Church is? Right above there. You know where the Mason Hall--you remember a house sitting beside that Mason Hall that Fred Bryson lived in?

I: Yes.

B: That's the house that we built and we lived there for ten years. And then Charlie bought this place up here and we wanted to move out on account of we had four kids and we wanted to kind of get out by ourself, and we moved up here and at that time there were only two Black families here . They was some White families.

I: In this area?

B: There were only two Black families up here when we moved up here and so now it's full of people.

I: Now had Charlie planned on this marriage for a long time in order for him to be able to build a house?

B: Yeah, he had planned for it because we talked it quite a while before we married. He had planned to do that so that's why we were able to just move in with them 'til it could be built and back in those days things didn't cost a lot like they do now. This place here he only gave \$450 for it.

I: The land or the house?

B: The land and the house course there were only four rooms to the house so we added to it. We had to add the other three rooll3. Four hundred and fifty dollars for this house and three lots, the lot over there and the lot where this house is built here beside of us. All three of those was \$450. And there was a White family living here at the time we bought it, and they lived in here about three months and after they found out we had bought it, they moved out, so we moved in. We were going to stay where we were until, you know, get as much as we could out of it for house rent. It was just \$10.00 a month. So they stayed three months and moved out. So Charlie he built the other three rooms and the bathroom and things like that. And he was a carpenter and he did it himself.

I: Well, I was going to ask who built your first house.

B: My husband and Henry Love. Do you know Lula Mae Sanders?

I: Yes, I met her.

B: Her father. Charlie and her father. Her father worked all the time and Charlie worked at the tannery and when he came in in the afternoons, he helped then 'til dark. See back then you worked 'til dark. You didn't have certain hours to work. Working for yourself, you could work long as you wanted to.

I: Well, were there many Black men working at the tannery then?

B: Yes, that was about the only thing the B lack people had to do around here at that time. There were a few worked in the hotel kitchens and dining rooms, but the tannery was the only good job that you had that you really had your payday coming in.

I: Now did the plant build any of the houses down there?

B: Yeah, I think the plant had one or two houses down on the lower street. But the people bought those houses. Like Clarence Love, you know he bought down there.

I: So they weren't just rented out to the workers.

B: At first, when we were first married there was two or three rented out there to workers. But the Black bought it. I think you know where the colored playground is there?

I: Yes.

B: Well now, there was about two or three houses right there that the company owned. See the town owns that now and their company or something and so there was about two or three houses they lived in. But most everybody, you know almost every Black in Sylva owns their own home. They's not anybody living in a rented house. Not a Black person living in a rented house.

I: Have you seen much progress made in Sylva?

B: Yes. Very much, very much. Unbelievable.

I: Has the town grown or what?

B: Yes, it has in every way. It really has.

I: Now why do you think there are so few Black people now in Sylva?

B: Because after the tannery went down, they had to go away to make a living. My husband went to Detroit, Michigan, and was going to move up there. I went up there and stayed a month, but the city was too big for me and I had these four small children and his aunt lived with us. One of his aunts lived with us, Aunt Harriet Allen, for 20 years, and then his daddy was blind. He lived with us five years before he died. Then his Aunt Mary Thomas, lived over on Riverview. Her husband died and she didn't have any children, and we took Aunt Mary for 11 months before she died and his sister Bessie got sick in Asheville and I went to Asheville and got her and she was with me three months before she died. But I didn't quit work. I had Mrs. Linnie Coward to come in each day, and she took care of Bessie for me, and I had Ms. Stella Wilson, she died not too long ago, she was around 90 something years old, and she stayed with me.

I: Ms. Susie, you spent a lot of time or many of your working years at Western Carolina. Do you remember anything special about those years?

B: Yes, I do. Yes, I was there for 28 years, almost 29, over on my 29th year and I was at Moore Dormitory as a maid for 8 years, then when they built the new library, there were four of us sent to work. One each day, and when time come to choose a maid librarian, Mrs. Lillian Buchanan chose me, and I was there for 20 years. She was a wonderful person to work for and at that time they didn't have those buildings that have these meetings that they have at now. The library was the only place they had and Mrs. Lillian Buchanan was the lady that got these programs up or contacted the ones to come, because I had the opportunity of serving Lady Bird Johnson, Margaret Truman, Mr. Drummond from New York, I can't remember exactly what he was, and Dela Reese. I had a chance to meet her and serve her and Mr. Drummond at that particular time, Mrs. Buchanan when she sent me home, it would be some of them because it was night and I had to go. And this particular night they brought Mr. Drummond to Dillsboro to

spend the night and then as we were coming down, I was on the back seat and I heard this man talking to the other one. He said I saw the key to Western Carolina tonight. It is Lillian Buchanan. And they had some big doings there that particular night. Yes, it was an advantage for me to work there. It was an education. Those years I worked there and she was one of the most and everything had to be exact and we had a lot of wedding anniversaries, like the girls who were married at the Baptist Church or the Methodist Church or somewhere, well they would always have their reception at the library. And I had the opportunity of meeting loads and loads and loads of people that I never would have. It really was an education to me. And then she carried me to Missouri with her twice. We went there a week each time to her son, to visit her son and that was an opportunity and I learned a lot then. It really meant something to me to work there, dear. I learned a lot and met a lot of different official people.

I: So it wasn't just pure drudgery?

B: No, no it really wasn't. Because we had plenty of help there and it was not drudgery work. It was something you enjoyed. I looked forward each morning to go to work. It was something like that.

I: Feel that way about going to work.

B: Well, now that's the way I felt because I knew it would be something new that day and like the Woman's Club and all those organizations and then I would prepare for the practice teachers going out to do their work, then when they would come in I would always have to prepare to serve them, which was a pleasure. A serving form. A serving that I served them when they went out and then served when they come in. And I did not, well for the practice teachers and those, I did that myself. But these other things, they would always be catered in and all I had to do was do the serving. I really enjoyed it. I really did.

I: It sounds like you did.

B: It was an education to me. It meant a lot. There was a lot of write-ups and pictures about me in the paper. I have several of them here that I have cut out and saved.

I: So you enjoyed your years?

B: I did, I enjoyed my years of work at Western Carolina. One thing I forgot to tell you, I worked 12 years at Mrs. Addie Brown's before I went to Cullowhee, and she had two twins, Anna. Nell Rector, she is now, and Madge. Anna Nell and Madge were the twins and they were just a year older than my two daughters, and the 12 years I worked for her I really enjoyed it because she paid us. I only got \$5.00 a week but she gave me all the twins' clothes and my children carried those clothes to college with them. In fact, that was the most clothes that they had.

I: Miss Susie do you remember having to go to a doctor when you were young?

B: I never went to a doctor when I was young. I never was sick when I was young because my aunt, the one that raised me, she dug roots, like blacksnake roots, or mae root and things like that and when we were sick she would always just doctor us with roots. I didn't know anything about the doctors or anything and Uncle Wills was the only one that was sick at home, he had pneumonia fever, but she used pneumonia sabb and black rock and these roots and things and the doctor came to see him and that's the only thing I can remember about the doctor. But when I

married I had all my children at home and with Ruby, the oldest one, I had a doctor. Dr. Alvin Nickles in Sylva. "Big Doc", we always called him. When Hazel was born, I had a midwife. I had such a hard time when Charles Jr. came I had a doctor (come) again and I had a doctor when Bobby C. was born.

I: But the doctor came to the house?

B: The doctor came to the house and delivered the baby in my bed.

I: And you didn't go to the hospital even though you had a hard time?

B: No, I didn't go to hospital with any of them. They were all born at home.

I: Do you remember when Blacks were first allowed to go to the hospital?

B: No, I don't. Somebody else would probably know. But I don't. I know I went to the hospital in 1953, that was the first time I went to the hospital.

I: Now was the hospital segregated then?

B: No, I don't think it was, it was over on the hill. It must have already been integrated. There wasn't any segregation because I was just put in a room.

I: Now, were these private rooms?

B: Mine was a private room, because I had a tumor, a very serious...I think it was 14 pounds when they put me in there. They got it down to seven pounds when they took it out. I stayed 13 days before they operated. And then six days after the operation they sent me home and I was off from work for two months.

I: Well, before 1953, if your neighbors or anyone had been sick, who doctored them?

B: The doctors came to the house. I don't remember any of them having to go to the hospital back then. Some probably did, but I don't remember. The doctors came to the home and you didn't have any trouble getting one. Now, Charles Jr., my oldest, is the only sickness I had with the children. He had infantile paralysis. There were three children who had it that year, two Blacks and one White. The little White kid died, the little Black kid died, but Charles Jr. lived. And Dr. Nickles, "Big Doc" Nickles, he said it was the way that I took care of him. I did exactly what he said night and day. And he said it was the care he had. And he (Charles Jr.) is not affected anywhere because he went into the service for 21 years.

I: That's amazing!

B: It is amazing. But, I did exactly what he said. And so Charles grew up to be a strong man.

I: Was there much sickness during that time in your life?

B: Well, this was the most serious, when those kids had that infantile paralysis. I know Arnold's little girl died. She was a little Black girl. Then I forget the White lady's name that her little boy died.

I: Do you think that there is more sickness today than there was when you were growing up?

B: Yes I do.

I: What makes that so?

B: I don't know. Do you think it's the powders that they put on the stuff that's growing out of the ground? Or the spray that you spray the beans and things with? I just don't know.

I: So you're saying that perhaps the preservatives that are used on the produce?

B: I don't know. That's the only thing I can think of. Because back then we put ashes on the beans to kill the bugs and things. And I do think we used fertilizer. But, spray, no way. Never heard of spray until I got to be a big girl.

I: Do you think people took better care of themselves back then?

B: Yes, I do, I really do. They didn't have the proper things that you do now, but what they had was homegrown, because I know. We grew our corn, our beans, our apples, our potatoes, our grapes and killed our own cows and killed our own hogs. We didn't buy but just a few little things, like sugar and coffee.

I: Well, because today there are so many drugs and other things that contributed to the...

B: I do believe that's what it is.

I: And that makes this generation weaker than when you were growing up. Even weaker than you are now.

B: Yes, that's right. Well, you know the Bible says weaker and wiser, each generation.

I: Do you believe that?

B: I really do. Because [Nancy] and my kids were born grown. They come into this world their eyes are open and ah, that's the reason. It is.

I: It's not like years ago. Because the baby's took a few days before opening their eyes and so forth, and holding their heads up. Today their born kicking!

B: [Laughter] I have a little great-grand and it's amazing the things she knows and the things she talks about at three years old. See that's fourth generation. So that's why I say, it's just different. I don't know why.

I: Has your life been a happy one?

B: My life has been a wonderful life. It has been a happy life. And it's still happy. I lost my husband and I lost my son, but I expect God to take care of me. I go to bed and I don't worry. I just say my prayers and I ask the Lord to take care of me. If it's time for me to go, I'm ready.