

Sanford, Charles

Also recorded: Edsel Newman

Katie Bell: Okay, so we've got, you've already signed this, and its over there, but anyway, first, I'd like to ask questions about the reunion, and then life at Fontana village in general, and then at the end, I'll open it up for whatever you want to talk about, whatever you think I missed.

Charles Sanford: [00:19.1]

KB: Does that sound good?

CS: That sounds good.

KB: Alright. So for the recording, could you give me your name, where you were born, just basic information for the record?

CS: My name?

KB: Yep, just for the recording.

CS: Charles Sanford.

KB: That's it, awesome. And where were you born?

CS: [00:43] Georgia

KB: Georgia?

CS: [mumbles agreement, "mmhmm"]

KB: Ok. And, when did you move up to--when did you live in Fontana Village?

CS: I moved to Fontana maybe in--well, when I first moved up here, I moved up on what they called "Old Road," 288. Which is right behind the dam, and [pause] [1:00]

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that was after, we got a house over in the village, and we lived over at the village. And I was in the 7th grade and we moved up to a town called Evergreen, Alabama, in south Alabama. A hundred twelve miles north of Mobile. And moved way up there.

KB: Oh wow, that's quite--quite the hike.

CS: Yeah, and uh, over there out on 288, and we rode a bus over here to the village to school and we didn't have--over there we didn't have electricity and we didn't have running water.

KB: Oh wow.

CS: and I was in the 7th grade. And I had a—two sisters, and a brother. And they went to school here.

KB: Oh wow. What were their names?

CS: I was in the 7th grade, and I went to 7th, 8th and 9th grade, and moved back to Alabama. Yep.

KB: What were the names of your siblings? Brothers and sisters?

CS: Oldest sister was Billie Jean, and the younger sister was Betty, and my brother was Tommy Sanford. And in fact Tommy started school up here.

KB: Oh okay, wow.

CS: And then they had a hospital up here you know.

KB: Yeah, I've looked through there actually, yeah.

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CS: My mother back then you know, life was a lot different, than the way it is now, you see you had all four of us kids, tonsils took out cause it didn't cost nothing [laughter]. So she made--they had all us had our tonsils took out [laughter]

KB: Oh wow [laughter] all at the same time?

CS: Yup

KB: Get it all done with I guess.

CS: All of them done at the same time. Sure did.

KB: Wow.

CS: Because the TVA you see, build the hospital up there and had doctors and everything. They practically just built this whole town up. The grammar school, first through the sixth grade, then they had the middle school up to ninth grade, then they had the high school, tenth, eleventh and twelfth you know.

KB: Now your parents, did they work on--

CS: My daddy worked on--he was an equipment mechanic, he worked on the equipment.

KB: Okay

CS: My mother, she you know, she took care of the four kids.

[Both laugh]

KB: That's a job and a half itself.

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CS: Well, right there at 288 we had—it was several houses right there, and none of them had electricity or running water. We had one big spring that we used for water—drinking water and all. And [laughs] yeah, we'd get one whole bath [coughs and laughs] once a week.

KB: Brrrr

CS: [laughs] and then the rest of the time we just--[laughs]

KB: Gotta do what you've gotta do.

CS: [laughs] That's it. Do what you gotta do. That's--[4:14] you know--

KB: What were your first impressions of the dam? Do you remember when you first came up here?

CS: Yeah, I remember we--let me tell you [pause] my daddy like I say, we were living in Evergreen, Alabama, and he got a job with the TVA. He was working with the state of Alabama at the time as a heavy equipment mechanic when he got this job up here. So he came and worked a month before he decided he'd stay. And So he sent for us, and what he did, so us kids, I was about 12, 13 years old, and so she went to the train station to buy a ticket to Fontana dam, and the looked and looked, and they said--well really they just didn't know where Fontana was. Tennessee on a train, and we got on the train. Come to Chattanooga, and well, Im the oldest, and theres four of us kids. My mother she had—she said, she says a heart attack when got to [5:24] Alabama, and we had to stop and get off the train and spend the night in the hotel.

KB: Oh my goodness

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CS: But she didn't, it was chest pain, you know.

KB: Oh, okay.

CS: She [5:31] bless her heart she lived to be 95 years old [laughs]. But anyway, we got off and come home, and back to Chattanooga the next day and she told them they wanted a ticket to Fontana dam North Carolina, and they looked and looked and they told—they really just didn't know where that was but said "best go to the bus station. They'd probably know." So we went over and got a taxi, went over to the bus station, and told we needed a ticket to Fontana dam North Carolina, and they looked and they said "really"—they knew exactly where it was, but they thought it was right around Bryson City, so—

KB: Oh, okay. That's still a bit of a hike from Bryson [laughs].

CS: We bought a ticket to Bryson City, and back then they didn't have motels and hotels—well, they had hotels, but they didn't have motels.

KB: Right, right.

CS: [6:18] ...Bryson Ci—Ms. Jones, I never will forget her. We got that ticket, to Bryson City and got off there. They didn't have no busses or nothing going to Fontana. So, we spent the night in that tourist home, and mother was going to get a taxi the next day to bring us over here to Fontana, and it was going to cost \$25, you know. And that's what she said back then, its like \$250 you know

KB: That's, that's quite a sum.

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CS: And miss Jones, got, she said “oh.” She got on the phone. ‘Course she’s a resident of Bryson City, and she got on the phone and found out they had a work bus that brought workers in here from Bryson City. We rode that work bus into Bryson City. And then, now our old—our house on 288, and you can imagine, kids coming from [laughs] south Alabama, flatland country [laughs]

KB: And then you see mountains.

CS: Up here in the mountains, with no electricity.

KB: Wow, a whole new world I suppose.

CS: And no running water. Now when Daddy wrote, he told mother [laughs] that it had running water, you know.

KB: Oops.

CS: Well, we got up there and there was running water, but it was running right through the yard. It was a creek [laughs].

KB: I guess you could say that is running water.

CS: But you couldn’t use that, you had to use that to washing cloths and all. They had a spring down there—a community spring, that served several houses.

KB: Oh okay.

CS: And all. And even that little community back then had one of them little old one room. Course, they weren’t using it then, but it was a community where they had

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them—The mountain people had a school house—one-room school house right there. And that was right across. In fact, in fact that was opened up. They closed that road all the ways, I guess from Bryson City toward 88, but uh, they left just a little place up there, this great big cemetery that sits up on top of the mountain right on the other side of the dam, and right there is where we lived. That community was called “Brackus Camp” that was after from the mountain

KB: Brackus?

CS: Brackets, Brackets Camp. That was some of the mountain people that lived right there in that—they had a house, they still lived there you know.

KB: Oh wow.

CS: And so I don’t—like I said, that road was open because we rode the school bus you know. And so, that’s about the history of me, being introduced to Fontana [laughs].

KB: That’s fantastic. With the people that were already there—the mountain people that lived there, did you all have interactions with each other?

CS: Yeah, I got to know some of them. I had a really—I had one good friend of mine. He was [9:06] like I way, I was 13 years old and he lived up the creek and the name was Tipton.

KB: Tipton?

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CS: Tiptons, yeah. There's a lot of them mountain people named Tipton back then, and he had a pair of horses. He had a dam built there for water where he can grind his corn and you know. But he had bee hives, and apple trees, and a little place for a garden. He had two horses that you know—in the winter time he'd take those horses and turn them loose up in the mountains 'cause if you put them in a—fenced them up—a bear or something would catch them, you know. So—But every year in the spring he would go up there and catch the horse and come down and use them and he got me one time. I worked with him to get his firewood up. He got two horses and we'd go up on the mountain and cut trees down and saw them limbs off and all, and skin one side of the log and then let it slide and run down the mountain, and then get them horses and pull them down to the house, and then he'd cut it up for his firewood and all you know. And that was to me—that was a thrill you know, for a thirteen, fourteen year old boy. Get to do it and they were—I met a lot of them people up there.

KB: Did any of them end up working at the dam?

CS: Some of them worked at the dam, but I didn't of many of them that worked at the dam though.

KB: Yeah.

CS: I know they've still got that cemetery, I used to go back—every year I'd go over there and go up on top you know, just to—and its, it's a hundred yards up that mountain that they'd have to trail—they'd have to carry that casket. And that's a big cemetery too. But I noticed one of the Bracket boys, he was maybe two years older than

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me, I noticed that in the last few years he was buried up there. But that's the only Bracket I seen but there's a lot of graves up there. Especially young little babies. It was—through the epidemic, 'cause something came through here you know. But that cemetery is well kept now. And I—it had been before, I know, but I hadn't been up there in the past year, but up till then its always well kept and its right on top of the mountain. Why they put it up there? And no road up there, just a trail to carry them caskets up that mountain. And, it'll be hard for me to get up there now, to just walking up that mountain [laughs].

KB: I think recently there was—I think maybe for that one in the area, and some others that are more remote and harder to get to, they have like a decoration day—

CS: I really don't know. I hope, I never seen anybody who knew anything about that, because back in them days when I was young, that was the last time we thought of it, the cemetery and everything. So I've never been able to talk to anybody that really—that could tell about it.

KB: Yeah. For—back to Fontana, what was the biggest event that sticks out in your memory? Or, the most important thing that, to you that's—

CS: Really, this was probably the biggest playground in the United States back in them days.

KB: Yeah?

CS: I mean it was, you know. I mean, where could you find a place they'd just turn you loose? And you went swimming, and played tennis, played softball—we had tennis courts, a basketball goal, we went camping. We were into Boy Scouts big. Yeah,

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we spent a lot of time on the Appalachian Trail. The Appalachian Trail here now goes across the dam you know. Back when I was up there, I got my hiking merit badge on the Appalachian Trail. But the Appalachian Trail went around the mountain here at the Pocono, around that way. But after they built the dam, I guess to bring people across—you don't see the dam, all of it. They cut all that out and brought the Appalachian Trail across the Dam. But, we used to—another big thing we'd done—of course, that's right in the middle of World War Two, you know. Always, this village, when it was built, this was the deciding point. Half this way, and half that way, and we used to play "war." And we'd get brown paper bags, and fill it full of flour, you know. We'd buy back then, upwards probably 24 pounds sacks of flour. And then, we'd have a war against one side of the village and the other, and we had camps built back there in the mountains you know. If you got hit with a sack of flour, and you got flour on you, you was dead. I mean, that wound you up, you know. And we'd spend the whole day out there like that, you know.

KB: And that stuff don't come off easy.

CS: Yeah, and it was just—I mean, that's the way we would spend our time. We were either fishing, hiking, and camping. Or playing tennis. And they left the lights on down there on the ball field. We had softball teams, you know, and everything.

KB: That's fantastic.

CS: It was just a big playground. I mean, after I left here, I've never seen nothing like it. And never could find nothing that was close to it.

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KB: Yeah. That's amazing. Especially because people came from all over.

CS: We had checked it out, and it was somebody from every state in the United States except Idaho.

KB: Really?

CS: In the school.

KB: Wow.

CS: Sure did. So we had them from all over you know. And like I said, it was just a big playground.

KB: You say you lived here, uh, was it three years?

CS: Yeah, well, not really. I just went half way through the seventh grade, all the way through the ninth grade, and half way through the tenth grade.

KB: Okay.

CS: And then I moved back to—we moved to Mobile, Alabama.

KB: I suppose you do have tons of friends here who come to the reunions. Was there a particular group of people? I'm trying to connect different people, in terms of friendships, as well. Who were some of the people that you hung out with the most?

CS: Well, you mean when I was up here?

KB: Yeah, when you were up here.

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CS: Well, Bob Keim, the one you are going to interview, he and I were in the same grade. We was in the seventh, eighth, and ninth together. Harvey was older than me, but he had a brother that was a good friend of mine, younger than him. And we had a bunch of them. A bunch of them gone you know. But—[extended pause]

KB: Let's see, what kind of stories did you hear about—did you hear any stories about the building of the dam? Like outside people telling stories, at all?

CS: No. Now we had—another thing, we had—they built a camp over there, you know, a couple miles from here, and built a camp, and that was—had big dormitories, and they had a ball field over there too, you know. And they had a big gym over there, we had a basketball team there too you know, and that's where the—they had a post office, and then they put in a place that had pool tables, and of course they had a big dining hall—I believe, I don't know, but I believe that dining hall was, back then, would seat, I know it was would seat 400 people.

KB: That one just right—just this one?

CS: No. It was about two miles away. They went and had a camp. You know the way you go down to the dam? That clear place? That used to be a [17:34] over there, and they had big old dormitories and everything.

KB: Oh, okay.

CS: And they had a post office over there, 'course we had a post office here.

KB: So that was a separate—deal.

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CS: [mumbles affirmative] That was the people that didn't have their families up here, had them dormitories, same people didn't have any families, you know.

KB: Oh, okay.

CS: For the workers that worked on the Dam.

KB: I didn't know that.

CS: [Mumbles affirmative] See, 'cause we had worked—probably, I think it was over 5,000 people that worked on the job you now. And a lot of them were single, and a lot of them didn't have a family. They just came up here and worked. And they stayed in them dormitories. See that's where my daddy stayed for a month, before we got up there, he stayed in the dormitories.

KB: And after that he moved to the little house?

[Pause, a gentleman sat down at the table and waved us to go on. This was Edsel Newman, a son of one of the Dam Kids]

KB: A lot of the areas that I've—haven't heard too much about was with tourists. I know generally it was later, but were people coming to look at the construction of the dam before it became a resort, while you all were there? Look at it?

CS: No, see, I left though, in—well, I left in February of '45.

KB: Was that right about when it finished construction?

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CS: Yeah, they finished the dam but they [19:25]—I think last year on [19:28] they had a bulldozer [19:29]—night shift when a bulldozer turned over in the river down there in front of the dam. They was clearing out the concrete in front of the dam. I remember that was the last job that—he worked on. They finished the dam except, you know, they hadn't poured the concrete for the dam and all, but see, it was finished.

KB: Can you tell me a little bit more about your dad's work?

CS: Well, not except that he worked on all the diesel equipment and everything. And on them big old—they had them big old “uke” trucks and big old bulldozers, and all that. And you know, we had several people to get killed on this dam.

KB: Dangerous place to work.

CS: And they worked eight hours a day, seven days a week, too. And like when it'd snow, they had to walk from here to the dam and work you know. You could hear them in the mornings, some of them would be falling down and cussing and all that [laughs].

KB: [laughs] Slipping on down the hill.

CS: [laughs] Yeah. It would be dark and there trying to go to work, and they'd slide down that.

KB: Wow.

CS: But it was different, you know. Time's different now.

KB: Yeah, that it is. Was there anything that we missed that you'd like to add?

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CS: I don't think so. I guess we covered about most of my part.

KB: That was fantastic. I really appreciate you talking with me.

CS: Okay, well I enjoyed it.

KB: And then, like I said, we're here all day, so if you ever think of anything else, or want to come chat—

CS: That should do it, that should do it.

KB: --you can just drop in and I'd be more than happy to—

CS: Nah, I'm good. I appreciate it.

KB: Well thank you so much.

CS: And thank you, and good luck, and you have a good day.

KB: You too.

[Edsel Newman (EN), still sitting at the table, motions for me to turn off the recorder. I do so, and he proceeds to ask Charles Sanford to tell a particular story. He then prompts me to turn the recorder back on, and afterwards I ask if we can use the part of the interview in which he partook. He reviewed and signed the release form included here]

CS: Now she was [0:00:03] –

KB: Ms. McGill?

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CS: Mrs. McGill.

KB: Okay.

CS: She was the first principal we had, and after that year, they wanted—they hired all new teachers except one that was in the second grade, Ms. Easterwood. She stayed on as a second grade teacher, and her husband also was a carpenter at the dam and also taught carpentry—we had a carpentry shop, you could take carpentry too. But they fired every one of them teachers.

KB: Oh my goodness.

CS: Except one. They got Ms. McCall, you know, you heard of her.

KB: Right.

CS: Ms. McCall, they got her and [00:34.7] six of the teachers come out of Maribel College [?]. That was the first year [laughs]

KB: Wow. That's amazing.

CS: [00:42] –I forgot about it.

Edsel Newman: Something about—Of course, now Charlie didn't have anything to do with it, but somebody hung the garbage cans from the flag pole, and—

KB: Just like, strung them up?

CS: [laughs] wrapped right around the flag pole.

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EN: Yeah, all the way at the top. And they's trying to let them down and something messed up and they wouldn't come down. TVA had to take their crane off of the dam and bring it over.

CS: [laughs]

EN: And they were pissed. 'course now Charlie didn't have nothing to do with that.

CS: [Laughs] No.

KB: [laughs] Nothing. Nothing. [laughs] Thank you.

[Break in recording. Edsel and Charles come back to the table and Edsel again prompts Charles Sanford to tell another story]

KB: We've got another story about a bicycle?

CS: Yeah [laughs]

KB: Oh my goodness!

CS: [laughs] you—you've heard of the Tail of the Dragon, hadn't you? Its where the motorcycles ride? The Tail of the Dragon?

KB: Oh yeah, the road? Yep.

CS: Well, I rode my bicycle.

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KB: Like a little pedal bike?

CS: Yeah, I rode my bicycle from here to the Tail of the Dragon.

KB: Oh my goodness.

EN: But, when your mother sent the bicycle up here.

CS: Yes. When she sent it up here, they sent it up here in a wooden crate from Evergreen, Alabama.

KB: Oh, okay.

CS: And it come—I forget how many days, or weeks, or what it took us to get it see, ‘cause it went in from Bryson City I guess, then that train come from Bryson City into the dam [00:51.0] and it took me, I don’t know how long, before I got that bicycle. Yeah. But now I don’t know if—I don’t know whether I wore it out up there or what happened to it. Long time I’m thinking about what did I do with that thing.

EN: Well you were telling me that it was so hilly that it wasn’t much good up here.

CS: I know it. It wasn’t. You could ride—

KB: [laughs] Its quite the workout.

CS: You could ride, but you’d done more pushing than you did riding, you know. The hills were always bigger coming back than were going down [laughs]

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KB: I can imagine. All right, well thank you. And uh [toward Edsel], my name is Katie.

EN: I'm Wanda's son.

KB: Wanda's? Okay. Nice to meet you. Thanks.

CS: Okay, bye.

KB: If you think of anything else—

CS: I'll do it, I sure will.

END OF INTERVIEW

Katie E. Bell

12/5/2014