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**U.16 Long Civil Rights Movement:
The Women's Movement in the South**

Interview U-0547
Mary Lee Rogers
11 May 2011

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ABSTRACT – MARY LEE ROGERS

Born in Washington County, Tenn., in the 1940s, Mary Lee Rogers became a leader in the community movement to close down a toxic landfill in Bumpass Cove, Tenn. in the late 1970s and her story was featured in the documentary film *You Got To Move*. In this interview she describes growing up in Erwin, Tenn. in the community of Bumpus Cove, Tenn. (formerly Bumpass Cove); mining and brickyards; lack of employment opportunities in the community; her mother's informal work; games she played as a child; bluegrass music; teenage years and dating; her education; marriage to Russell Rogers; how girls and boys were treated differently in the community; working outside the home; employment history; and providing foster care. She describes the Bumpass Cove landscape; when the community began to protest a toxic landfill; cancer and illness in the community; tactics for protesting the landfill; Bumpass Cove Citizens Group; interactions with the Health Department; interactions with politicians and police department; describes community gatherings that they would have, with food, music, and dancing; gender relations in the community; death of Hobart Story; and attending Highlander Research and Education Center workshops; and the filming of *You Got To Move*. This interview is part of the Southern Oral History Program's project to document the women's movement in the American South.

FIELD NOTES – MARY LEE ROGERS with Russell Rogers
(compiled May 18, 2011)

Interviewee: Mary Lee Rogers with Russell Rogers

Interviewer: Jessica Wilkerson

Interview Date: May 11, 2011

Location: Rogers' home in Bumpus Cove, Tennessee

THE INTERVIEWEE. Mary Lee Rogers has lived in Bumpus Cove her entire life. In the 1970s, she and her neighbors began to notice strange liquids and smells from the trucks that were headed to the nearby landfill. They soon learned that hazardous materials were being dumped into the landfill illegally, and they began a protest to stop the dumping of toxic waste. Rogers and the community movement were featured in the documentary film *You Got To Move*, produced by Lucy Massie Phenix.

THE INTERVIEWER. Jessica Wilkerson is a graduate student in the Department of History at UNC-Chapel Hill, currently conducting research for her dissertation which will explore social justice activism in southern Appalachia, with special attention to women's activism in the late 1960s and 1970s.

DESCRIPTION OF THE INTERVIEW. I met the Rogers at their home in Bumpus Cove. Mary Lee and Russell's daughter, Tina, sat with us and listened to part of the interview. Sometimes Mrs. Rogers asks for Tina's help in recalling a detail. My friend Liz Tapp, a graphic designer and photographer living in Knoxville, TN, joined me for this interview. She took photos of the Rogers and filmed the interview. Russell Rogers did not join us until later in the interview; he was sitting across the room, so his voice is rather soft in the recording. The interview often took on a conversational and casual tone, and we took several breaks throughout.

NOTE ON RECORDING. I used the SOHP's Zoom recorder.

TRANSCRIPT – MARY LEE ROGERS with Russell Rogers

Interviewees: Mary Lee Rogers with Russell Rogers
Interviewer: Jessica Wilkerson
Photographer: Liz Tapp
Interview Date: May 18, 2011
Location: Erwin, Tennessee
Length: One audio file, approximately 114 minutes

START OF INTERVIEW

Jessie Wilkerson: This is Jessie Wilkerson of the Southern Oral History Program and I am here with Ms. Mary Lee Rogers and we are in—. We're in Erwin, right? Is this officially Erwin? Also Bumpus Cove. So, Ms. Rogers, can you first say when and where you were born?

Mary Lee Rogers: I was born in Washington County, Tennessee, August 23, 1944.

JW: And were you born at home?

MLR: Yes.

JW: Did your mother ever tell you stories about that? Do you know much about when you were born?

MLR: No, she didn't tell me much about it. We used to have to—. Well of course I can't remember anything about me, but I know when my siblings were born they'd take us away from the house. We didn't ever hear any screaming or yelling [Laughs] or anything, you know.

JW: How many siblings did you have?

MLR: Four.

JW: And what order were you?

MLR: First.

JW: Oh, you're the oldest.

MLR: I'm the oldest. I have an older sister, but she's just my half sister, but with my mom and dad there was five of us.

JW: Can you say a little bit about the place where you grew up?

MLR: It's the place I live right now. I was born within a hundred feet of this house, and it's always been like this. It's just been a good caring community. Everybody tried to help everybody, and there's never been much work going on around here, you know. Well, when we were small children, the men worked in the mines and then some of them would go out and work at the brickyard and that kind of thing but basically it's just been a laid back community, 'til the landfill.

JW: What did your parents do for work?

MLR: My dad worked in the mines his younger years, and he worked at the railroad a few year and then the latter part of his life he worked at the Washington County Health Department, but I don't know his title there. He worked there for like twelve year I guess.

JW: What about your mother?

MLR: Mother never worked. She was always just a housewife. She worked a little seasonal work sometimes at the pepper mill, but basically she didn't work. She did sewing for people, cut hair, gave people permanents, that kind of thing.

JW: And what about running the household? What did it take to—? I'm sure that was a lot of work. What sort of—? Did she have a garden or—?

MLR: Oh, yeah, she always had a good garden, a big garden. We had to get up early in the morning and go out and pull all the weeds out of the garden before the sun came up.

JW: Can you say a little bit about your childhood, like what it was like growing up with your siblings and growing up in this community? Are there any stories you remember from when you were young? [Laughs]

MLR: Well, like I said I was the oldest one, and there was no electronic toys and that kind of thing so we would get out and have playhouses and ride bicycles, and I always wanted a bicycle. I never got a bicycle, never ever, still have never had a bicycle, so I pledged if I ever got married and had children they'd all have a bicycle and they'd all learn how to swim, and, amen, they do and they've all had a bicycle. [Laughs] And they can all swim. But I can remember riding bicycles, my friends' bicycles and things. We have lots of music in this area, so we listened to music and people made music. My whole family now is musical. Well, my husband's family and our children. My family wasn't much. My dad was, but my mother wasn't.

JW: What kind of music?

MLR: Bluegrass mostly. My son now, he likes to play some—I don't know what you call it—Beatles music and that, but he can't play real good. He can play some.

JW: Well, what kind of music did you listen to on the radio?

MLR: Oh, I listened to Elvis, of course. [Laughs]

JW: [Laughs]

MLR: And I liked Marty Robbins. Marty Robbins is my all time favorite. So it was country.

JW: Did you ever get to travel as a child? Did you ever go anywhere?

MLR: No. One time when I was small we rode a train and went to Virginia, but I can't remember anything about it. I just remember getting on that train and getting off. I don't

remember anything else. Now on Sunday Daddy would load us all in the car and we'd go riding up around Shady—.

Tina Rogers: [Whispers] Shady Valley.

MLR: I forgot.

JW: Shady Valley?

MLR: Yeah, Shady Valley, and Butler, you know, all up in there, and Greenville, and he'd take us to North Carolina because we had people that lived over there, but to travel often, oh no.

JW: So would you go into town and do things there?

MLR: No. I didn't. Russell did but I didn't. I didn't ever go—. I never went to a movie 'til I was grown. I mean I must have been probably seventeen year old before I ever saw a movie.

JW: Do you remember the first movie you saw? What was it?

MLR: *The Girl Can't Help It*, and I slipped off. I'm glad Mama won't hear this. [Laughs]

JW: [Laughs]

MLR: I had stayed with my friend and we sneaked off and went and saw that movie. It was not a bad movie. It sounds bad but it wasn't bad. But anyway, that's the first movie I ever saw, and I've not been many times since. I didn't care for it. I just didn't want to spend my money for that, especially after TV came out. You could just sit there and wait awhile and you'd see it anyway.

JW: So what else did you do for fun once you were a teenager?

MLR: You don't understand. If we got to walk up and down the road it was fun. I mean we didn't get to go to town and go and have games and go to carnivals and that kind of thing. We just visited each other and our boyfriends came and we sat on the porch. That's basically it.

JW: Can you tell me about your school when you were young?

MLR: I went to school right out probably two tenths of a mile from where I live right now through eighth grade, and I loved school, I really did. I went every day. I didn't miss a day, made straight As. That's all I can—. I mean I don't know anything else. I mean I love learning so I didn't have a problem learning, so I just liked to go every day and I went. We walked to school most of the time, walk home for lunch and walk back.

JW: What did you like most about school?

MLR: Math. I always liked math. I did not ever like science or geography. [Laughs] I couldn't find my way out of a phone booth right now. I mean I don't—. I'm here to tell you, I don't have any sense of direction.

JW: And was there a high school?

MLR: Yeah. I started to high school at Lamar. Do you know where Lamar School is now?

JW: No.

MLR: Well it's about three mile.

JW: Okay.

MLR: It's not a high school now. But I started, I guess I went maybe two months, but I wasn't pushed and I quit. I mean my parents didn't care if I went to school or if I didn't. I guess they was really glad when I didn't go because I could be home and help with the house work.

JW: Do you remember why you decided to quit?

MLR: Yeah, but I'm not going to say.

JW: Okay.

MLR: [Laughs]

JW: So when did you meet Russell?

MLR: Lord. I went to school with Russell for awhile. He was in eighth and I was in sixth, but we didn't get along then. Of course we don't get along now, but then, let's see, then we got—. He went on to high school, he just went one year, and then, I don't know, years later—. I don't know. We just met, probably at church, and he asked me could he walk me home and I said yes and that was it, so you know we had to walk.

JW: And when did you decide to get married?

MLR: I dated Russell, well, let's see, four year. We got married when I was eighteen. In 1962 we got married. We've got a forty-nine year anniversary coming up.

JW: Wow, congratulations.

MLR: Thank you. Well it's not all been real good, I mean super, but it's been good. I mean it's amazing that anybody can stay together that long, and he's the love of my life so, you know.

JW: So how would you compare your experience as a girl growing up to the experience of the boys in the community?

MLR: Totally different. The boys went and came as they pleased and they did what they wanted to. They all, you know, they could go to Erwin, hitchhike and go to Erwin and see movies or eat at little restaurants and all that and the girls couldn't do anything. Boys didn't have any rules. I mean they'd go fishing all the time. We just had to be at home.

JW: Did you ever think about that as a girl?

MLR: Oh yeah, I thought about it, but there was really nothing I could do about it at that time because we didn't have money so—. Now we didn't suffer. I'm not saying we was in poverty or anything, but we didn't have money for me to travel or to do anything that I could reach out, you know. If I'd a'went on to school I'd have been better off, but I didn't. But now I've done all kinds of things in my life. I've owned restaurants; I've been to school with H & R Block; I've done many things. It's not like that I'm pitiful, but still I could have been much better if I'd a'went to school.

JW: So when you were young did you ever imagine what you would be or do as an adult, or did you have any—? Was there something in particular that you wanted to do?

MLR: No. We were raised to be good housewives and mothers. That was our parents' goal, to make us be good housewives and mothers, and that was my goal. But now I've worked many places. I mean after I got old enough to understand that I could have a say, too, and that I could do what I wanted to, and I did.

JW: When did you figure that out?

MLR: I had a houseful of children by the time I figured that out. [Laughs] I went to work in—when did I go to work?—'74, I guess, and I've not stopped since. I mean all of it's not been on—. Well I went to work in a factory, and then I worked season work, then I went to work in a restaurant, then I bought me a restaurant, me and my sister, then I did the SALT [Southern Appalachian Leadership Training] program, you know, and I've been a foster parent for about ten year I guess, and now I'm with special needs people.

JW: Can you tell me about that first job, how you decided to get the job and where it was?

MLR: [Whispers] This is going to make Russell look bad.

JW: You think so? Let's pause for just a minute. [Break in recording] Okay.

MLR: I know I was scared to death when I first went because I'd never been out much. I didn't even learn to drive 'til I was like twenty-two, I guess, twenty-three, and I had to do that on my own. Well, my mother helped me learn a little bit, but then I'd been married a long time when I got my driver's license, a long time. But then I just hadn't never been out anywhere, and I went to work and it was Empire Furniture. But I did really good. I got raises. I mean they promoted me. Within three months I was over on another line doing what people who had been there for like three year couldn't do. So I did okay with it.

JW: Where was that factory?

MLR: It was in Johnson City.

JW: And is it shut down?

MLR: I don't know. It wasn't a couple year ago.

JW: Okay.

MLR: It's been a long—. I mean I don't know now.

JW: And did you enjoy working?

MLR: Yeah, I did. After I got used to people I enjoyed it. I worked there about two year. I got mad at my boss and quit.

JW: Was that factory unionized?

MLR: No.

JW: So after that job did you go to work somewhere else?

MLR: Worked at the pepper mill, seasonal work, two or three year, and then I think—. I don't know how many jobs I had. That's the only factory I ever worked in. Then Gail [Randolph] started working at the Chuckey Trading Company. It was a Mexican restaurant.

Frankie, my son, well all my children were just about grown. Tina was ten, eight, something, and then I got pregnant with Frankie. Anyway, he was eight months old and Gail came to my house and she said she was doing dishes at the Chuckey and she said, "If you'll go down there and do dishes I can wait tables." They're going to teach me to wait tables. I said I don't want to go down there and go to work. Well, she bugged me about that for about three days, and finally I said well I'll go for a couple of weeks. Well, that couple of weeks turned into five year. I was the night manager, and I worked there for five year. Gail waited tables and I cooked, after about two months of dishwashing. Then, me and my sister bought a restaurant in Johnson City in the professional building and we kept it four year. Then my oldest daughter, she was waiting tables at the time for us, and she got killed in a car wreck. I could not stand that place anymore. I just never liked that restaurant anymore, so we sold it, and that's when I got into doing foster care and this kind of thing. I stayed with elderly people for a long time and I don't mean [18:00] but I got so depressed just being with elderly people because I felt—. And I know I'm an older person, but I never look at it like age. I mean, I do what I can do every day the best I can do, and I don't want nobody to think I'm old. And I would stay with these people that were just sitting doing nothing, you know, and I decided, well, I don't want to do this anymore.

So you can see I've jumped around to a lot of things. Then I just got in the paper, and got to looking around [for] something else to do and called this company I first went to work for. Oh gosh, I can't remember. It was doing foster care. Then I quit them and went with the Department of Children's Services, and all in all I think I had fifty-two foster children.

JW: Wow.

MLR: And I enjoyed them. I enjoyed almost every one of them. A few of them I was glad to be rid of, but most of them I really enjoyed. Some of them still come back, some of them got

children and they come back. They call us Grandma and Grandpa. We had basically girls because I wouldn't leave girls in the house with Russell and go to the store or anything, so I took them with me. I never would keep the little ones because they get to my heart too easy, and when they take them away from me I didn't like that. I kept two little girls one time, and when they took those two little girls away I said I won't do that no more. Don't call me again to take little children, I'm not going to. The big ones, they got a smart mouth and there's times when you say that you're glad to be rid of them, not totally rid of them, but.

JW: [Laughs]

MLR: Then I quit doing that and then I got—. Well I kinda got hooked into the job I've got now. Tina was doing PA services for a little—Angie's daughter, Bianca, and she was working somewhere else, too, but the way it worked out she was getting like she was going to have fifty hours a week. They didn't want to pay her that extra twelve hours, so I went and did the training and I did the twelve hours. Then Tina completely quit and went to doing dispatching, and Angie moved Bianca into assisted living and I went with her, so that's how I come into that. But I enjoy that, I do. I have a good time with these girls.

JW: So were you involved in or interested in politics before the Bumpass Cove stuff happened, or did you keep up with what was going on?

MLR: [21:26 Yeah, I did.] I kept up, you know, with world news but not until after I was married. My parents, they listened to the radio, but we never had a TV, not because we couldn't afford it; Dad just didn't want one. I didn't know anything about that kind of thing. After I got married I did keep up with world news, tried to, but, let's see, I guess when we got started with that landfill thing is basically what got me really involved in everything that goes on around me, you know?

JW: Mm hmm.

MLR: Because they really didn't do us right with that. We were told that was household garbage, and it was not, so.

JW: Well can you describe the landscape of Bumpass Cove and the area before the landfill and before the damages had been done? Can you just say a little bit about what it looks like?

MLR: Oh, it looks wonderful now since they stopped it. Before it was—. It used to be a booming place up there because it was mines and all that. Well, the mines shut down and a lot of the houses got torn down. Then when they moved the landfill in, see, that gave a lot of the men around here a good job and we thought it was household garbage. Well, we just really didn't think much about it period. But there was no houses up there really at that time, I mean not many, just one or two here and there, and they tore that whole hillside up and down the road. They tore all that up and it was a mess, but now they've got it fixed back nice. It's all grassy and you wouldn't know there was a landfill there if there was not a sign, but there's not hardly any houses up there now. Like she said, my son-in-law built a new house up there, straight across from the landfill, but that's where he was born and raised. But I've seen the flood that caused us to do that, to start that. There was that big flood that came here. The river was up in that road right there, and there was big barrels of that stuff washing down the river. So when that dried up we put a stop to that, them bringing those trucks back in here.

JW: Can you describe what happened that first time that you all decided to stop the trucks?

MLR: Well a few of the men were—. My husband and his uncle, well two or three of his uncles, two of them anyway, Gail's husband and his uncle, Hobart, and my dad, a few men got

together and said, we're going to stop this. We'll do something about it, you know. So the next morning they just said, get up; we're going to go stop those trucks. And I'm telling you, in a matter of an hour there was a hundred and fifty people in that road and they parked the cars so that—. An emergency vehicle, an ambulance could have gotten through, but those trucks couldn't get through. We made a human barricade up there, and boy, there was a lot of excitement that day and for months after. We set up a tent, you know, and cooked and ate and made coffee and everything right there.

JW: And was that right up the road that that happened?

MLR: Yeah, right up not even a block.

JW: So how did they spread the word that this decision was made? How did people learn?

MLR: They probably called people. I don't really know. I know Russell came home, and he said we're going to stop the trucks in the morning, so be ready, and we just got the kids up the next morning and went down there, took 'em with us. We lived on up the road back in the hollow some, and we just took the kids with us. And I'd say, well, this area right here, and our families, by the time we let all our family know—me and Russell—that was a bunch of people, and then a few others. Now, some of the families didn't take part at all in it, but a few others—and then they'd get on the phone. Well then when the health department heard and when the company heard, you know, Gary Phillips told them, go on; go on through that barricade. He didn't care; just go on through. But he didn't. I mean that man knew he was going to kill somebody or tear up somebody's car. So I'd say we just called people, because they didn't decide 'til way up in the night that night, I don't think, and then the next morning we—. I don't know; just word of mouth, a lot of it, you know.

JW: And do you remember what was happening with the flood? How did people know there was something wrong about the chemicals or the—?

MLR: Russell's uncle had tried for three or four year to tell us: "They're not hauling household waste up there." He even got drunk and laid down across the road and tried to stop the trucks, by himself. He built a fire in the middle of the road [Laughs] to try to stop the trucks by himself because nobody would listen to him, and the reason nobody would listen to him, he was drunk. But when the river flooded and people could see those barrels and they could see how they'd been eaten around, the stuff had eat around those barrels and all of that, they could tell that there was something in there more potent than household garbage, and that's the day they decided to stop it.

JW: Now had you or your family experienced health problems? I know that some people had experienced—.

MLR: Well, I've had asthma. Our main problem was our children had to walk down to the road and stand at the edge of the road to catch the school bus, and those trucks would come up that road. If it was rainy they wouldn't slow down. They'd splash water all over them, mud. I've had Tammy come home many times, mad, wouldn't go to school because she was splattered all over. But we didn't have—. We wasn't sickly then much, I mean, but later after all that stuff started washing out and everything a lot of people in this community got sick. A lot of people's had cancer, and I can't say for sure that's what did it, but I sure can't say it's not either.

JW: Do you remember being out there for that first protest and what that felt like?

MLR: Yes. I guess—. Well it was scary, it really was scary, but basically it was just fun. After the initial scare and knowing that they were going to stop, and we put our children out there too, you know, hoping that they would see that. Of course now we didn't let the children

stay there long, but I mean the trucks would see it and would have respect for the children anyway. But that was kind of scary because you really didn't know what was going to happen, but we had some really good times. One time they were going up over the graveyard. We had stopped them, and I don't know what happened but they had allowed them to come back in someway. I don't know what happened. Me and Gail—. I don't know what those trucks were doing up there, I can't remember, but they were open-bed trucks. Me and Gail and my two sisters, Ida and Dorothy, and Linda Walls—I lived up in that holler—we went up on the top of that bank and piled up rocks and when those trucks started coming out of there we threw rocks and busted their windshields, off of that cliff, broke one man's shoulder where a rock went in there and hit him. I don't know if it broke it, but it messed it up bad. He went back and he said I'm not going back. Don't even ask me to go back up in there; I'm not. That was fun. We had a good time that day.

JW: [Laughs]

MLR: Then we got a—. One man took a piece of plywood, and he put nails that close together all in that and buried it so, guess what? They had lots and lots and lots of flats. I mean we did what we had to, but we stopped them. The men didn't know we was going up on top of that bank to—well it's a mountain really, a cliff—and they didn't know we were going up there to do that to those trucks because we didn't want them to be able to find out anything, so I guess that's one of the times Angie was watching the children, you know, or Tammy was probably with them at that time. No, she was probably with us. But anyway, we just did what we had to, and it was exciting and it was scary, but I'm so thankful that we did that. Let me tell you something else: It helped our children. It let our children know that you do not have to put up with that kind of thing. You got a say, and do it. That's what I always taught 'em. I was never

taught that. I was a child: Sit down, shut up, you know? But I didn't do my children that way. They had their say no matter what. Even if they got in trouble. Afterward they had their say because many a time I didn't have my say, and I got in trouble for things I hadn't done.

JW: So at what point did you get more involved with the citizens group, or were you there from the start?

MLR: Oh, I was with the citizens group from the start. I guess we started that.

JW: Can you explain how you all decided that you were going to do more than just—? You could have just protested, but you decided to start this organization.

MLR: Well, it was probably during the next day of the protest, or maybe even later that afternoon, I don't know. Some of the people from—. Of course we had news people in there, you know, reporters and all that, and some of the people from the Highlander Center came in, and Melinda Morton, she was a lawyer, she was there, and I don't think we organized that soon but that's what got us started thinking about it. Then when we organized we kept that citizens group going for probably eight or nine year.

JW: And where was that building where you met?

MLR: Right up the road—well, is it a block? Maybe a block. It's an old church building.

JW: Is it still there?

MLR: Yeah. It's a residential thing now. Somebody bought it and fixed it up and it's a dwelling place now.

JW: Can you describe how often you met and the sorts of things you did when you met?

MLR: Well, we met once a month, I'd say. Well, we met once a week and talked about things that was happening and we had a meeting, I'll say, once a month. They kept saying that there was nothing in there that was harmful, so Russell and me and Moira went to Nashville to

the health department, and we told them we wanted to see all the records from Bumpass Cove. Let me tell you what they did. They didn't have them in order, nothing. They took us in a room, sat us down at a big long table, and brought boxes of paperwork and poured them out on the table. We sat there and went through all that. We was there about three days, and we went through all of that and we compiled a little book, a little leaflet, that absolutely did tell what was up there and that they was going to have to do something about it, you know. So that's the kind of things we'd do at the meeting. We'd decide who would do what, you know.

JW: Who was saying there wasn't anything bad in the landfill, the health department?

MLR: The health department, Gary Phillips, the owner of the company. It was Wasteplex then, wasn't it? It was Wasteplex first and then it was Waste Resources. I don't know what it is now.

JW: So did you show them that booklet of stuff when you—?

MLR: Well we had—. I told you I can't remember nothing. The guy from the health department, what was his name, the young guy? He came up to do a meeting to prove to us that there was nothing there, and we hadn't told them anything, so we just handed him the little booklet and he looked through it and he said, "Where'd this come from?" We told him and he didn't say anything else. He didn't try to convince us anything after that 'cause we knew the difference. The health department, they still say there's nothing wrong with it, it didn't hurt us.

Tina Rogers: Wasn't he actually one of the truck drivers?

MLR: Hmm?

TR: Wasn't he actually one of the truck drivers?

MLR: From the health department?

TR: No, from—. Remember on that video over there they showed and he was telling all about what's up there.

MLR: Oh, yeah, but he—. Well, yeah, he's one of them. The truck driver said there wasn't nothing in there that would hurt you, you know, but the man at the health department—. What was his name? Anyway, they would never ever give us anything that said that there was something there that would hurt us, that would give us a reason and make them move us all out of here or whatever, if it came to it. They never ever gave us that leg to stand on, the health department didn't.

JW: And they never ever did?

MLR: Never ever. Now we did have a lawsuit and all that and a few of us settled out of court but it wasn't nothing. It wasn't nothing. Now Tina and Travis and Frankie and all the younger ones could still do something now if they want to. We didn't put their names on it.

JW: Why do you think the health department—? It sounds like they were lying to you because they weren't saying that—. You saw that stuff had been dumped in there. Why do you think that was allowed? Why were they doing that? Why were they allowed to do that?

MLR: I don't know why that they're allowed to do it. I know that they want business in a place, and they don't have any place to dump hazardous waste, so if they acknowledged then we could have sued everybody. If they had one time said yes, then look what all we could have done. Well, the health department's not ever going to say it right out anyway, about anything. I learned that. That's one lesson I did learn.

JW: What about the local officials and local politicians? How did they respond to all this?

MLR: Oh, we had some that helped. Our commissioners helped us out some. They'd come around and get their picture taken and all that for votes, but really they didn't help too

much. They would be seen around with us, but they would never ever stand their ground and say anything. I mean they was there but just the commissioners and stuff. They'd never say yes this or no that. Who was it told the—?

TR: We rocked the police cars.

MLR: Huh?

TR: We rocked the police cars.

MLR: Police cars?

TR: Yeah.

MLR: Oh yeah, we rocked the police cars. They come to get us and put us in jail one time,—

JW: For standing out—?

MLR: —brought a bus. We was up at the graveyard at that time. They was going to take those trucks across the graveyard and we wouldn't let them. That was long after we'd stopped them here. They was going to go across the graveyard and we told them no, they wasn't. They sent a bus down here to load us up on and take us to jail. Oh, they got in trouble there. They didn't take nobody to jail. We rocked them out of here, didn't we?

JW: What do you mean you rocked them? You threw rocks at them?

TR: Yeah. [Laughs] Me and my brother, where we lived we had a—we called it a rock cut and it cut between the roads—.

MLR: I just told her about that. They know where it's at because we throwed them down on that truck. Do you remember them trucks?

TR: Yeah. We did it on them cop cars too, throwing them boulders down.

JW: And the police just fled?

MLR: They just left, because they knew—. And most of them were our people anyway. I mean they're from right here, and they didn't want that up there any more than we did.

TR: But they had to do their job.

MLR: They had to make an appearance but they sure didn't take us, and Tina wound up marrying one of them, didn't you, [Laughs] one of the policemen.

TR: Actually one that was—. A big boulder went into the car.

JW: [Laughs] Were there other episodes like that, or are the two that you've told about—
?

MLR: I know there was—. No, I don't think we ever—.

TR: We done that quite a bit.

MLR: We did things that made people afraid to come in here and start anything. Now I know one time the constable kept riding up and down the road and he came over, and I had some bricks here because if they brought a truck up here we threw it at it, broke the window out, whatever we had to do. I had some laying piled up right there beside me and this constable, it was Robert—I'm not going to say his name. But anyway, he kept coming up and down through there and he pulled over and I just got up, you know, and moved over to my side of where the bricks was, and he just said, "Mary Lee, I'm not going to do anything. Don't throw rocks at me." So he knew. They all knew that we would do it if it come to it, you know. Me, Gail, Tina, Linda Walls, we'd all do it. We'd do it one at a time or we'd gang up; we didn't care. And you know that was a good time. That was one good year, not counting the stuff that's up there. That was bad, but as far as grouping together, and we had good times. We cooked and eat all the time in that tent and had music. It was unreal, the music we'd have, and dances out in the road. We had a good time.

JW: Did the men ever get involved in throwing stuff like that or was that mostly the women?

MLR: That's mostly the women. The men did their part but not that kind of thing. We can't talk about what the men did.

JW: [Laughs]

MLR: But we did our part.

JW: Were there other women in the community who didn't like what was going on or didn't like the throwing stuff? Was their conflict ever?

MLR: Yeah. There's some of them still here that wouldn't do that, no matter what, but you've got those in every community. They're not going to do anything anyway. But they didn't try to stop us, but they didn't put forth any effort either.

JW: So what motivated you to get more involved in the citizens group as it continued? I know that you became one of the main people.

MLR: I don't know. Russell was just real involved in it and—I don't know. We were just there and it was just the right thing, the natural thing to do, you know? I think at one time—Gail was president one time. I was never president; I didn't want to be. Linda Walls was. And whoever, when we was at a meeting they'd just appoint somebody and that's what we did.

JW: Did it start with men as the officers?

MLR: No, it started out with women. Well it started out with men as the president, Jerry Walls, Linda's husband, and Skip Foss, right? No, Skip Foss was the first president, right? I don't know. Anyway, men, you know, I mean they—. But we was secretary and treasurer, and I don't know what all you go through, but anyway the women played as big a part in that as the men did.

JW: And was that okay? Did it cause any problems between husbands and wives or was it—

MLR: No.

JW: —a pretty equal place?

MLR: No, that was a united thing. I never heard one man complain about that, and that's really kind of weird, too, because in this community the men think they're dominant, you know. That's the truth. They just think they rule in this community, don't they?

TR: Yeah.

MLR: But now when it came to that they didn't. We all stuck right together. I guess they was glad to have us. That's one time they saw they needed to have women. [Laughs]

JW: Did having that group where everyone was united, did it change things in either your marriage or did you see it changing other people's marriages and making things a little more equal, or maybe men a little more respectful of the power that women could have?

MLR: Yeah, I'd say that it made men understand that women could do things too, you know, could get their point across and that they was as valuable as the men if they wanted to be, if they was turned loose and left alone, that they could do—. Yeah, I'd say that. That worked with a lot of men and women. Of course Russell never did really care what I did like that anyway, about standing up for my rights, because I'd go to school and fight for them and do all that. I've never been a real quiet little person.

JW: [Laughs] Can you recall any other stories from the citizens group or any meetings that stand out in your mind? And Tina [Mary Lee and Russell Rogers' daughter], you jump in too if you remember any.

TR: Just that one where that guy quit waste management and he come to 'em and told 'em that he would tell them all that was up there, and he sat down and just laid it out, really what was there, and it's on video.

MLR: Yeah.

TR: On video, what's there.

MLR: I don't know if we could get you a copy of that.

TR: I've got a guy trying to put 'em on disk.

JW: Mm hmm.

[Break in recording]

JW: —bad things were being dumped in the landfill. Do you remember when that happened too?

TR: Yeah. I guess they had fired him or something from there. He come and he said he wanted to tell 'em, you know, the people, what was there. I mean he just laid it all out, everything that was there.

JW: How old were you? Do you remember seeing that, seeing him there?

TR: I do. I was probably eleven, twelve.

JW: And how did that make you feel, Ms. Rogers, when you saw this man come and said that, yes, they were dumping all these things?

MLR: It made us feel wonderful because we knew, we'd already said it anyway and had already compiled a little book and proved it, but nobody would say it. But then he came and said it but, you know, it really didn't—.

TR: My daddy's uncle actually is the one that laid in the road and built fires in the road and nobody listened to. Once it was all—.

MLR: He was a good man. He really was a good man.

TR: Once it was all said and done and everybody was into it, probably right around that time, he went to the landfill with some of 'em.

MLR: They went to get samples of the water up there.

TR: And he died. He went up there that day and he died that night, or—

MLR: No, he died—

TR: —the next day.

MLR: —like the next day or the next—. They had to carry him out of there. He was up around that creek around that landfill, that little branch that runs down, and he died. They said it was strokes, but we know better. He broke out in hives and, you know.

JW: My gosh.

MLR: And my husband and his other uncle was with him, but they didn't go around to that branch where Hobart was.

TR: We don't know what, you know, if something splashed on him or—.

MLR: No, or we don't know what he walked through.

JW: Do you recall that funeral?

MLR: Oh, yeah.

JW: What was that like, since he had been this person who had been speaking out for a long time?

MLR: There was a lot of people there, wasn't it?

TR: Yeah.

MLR: Yeah, it was a lot of—.

TR: But he was a well-liked person, Hobart was.

MLR: Yeah. And after we all got involved in that and everything he quit drinking and everything. He was aggravated with us, with the community, because they wouldn't do anything, but because he drank all the time they just thought he was a troublemaker and nobody would listen to him. We were mad anyway at the trucks and the landfill and everything, but not for the same reasons he was. We were mad because they were [making] these big holes in the road. There were like ten, fifteen, twenty trucks, big semis, up and down this road every day, all during the night, and that's what got Hobart started. Hobart got to watching them in the night, and he said that he had seen them go up that road and they glowed, and I believe him, you know. At that point I didn't believe him but after we got into it then I believed what he said, and we had a man come from the NRC and he went and did some testing and we never heard from that man again. He don't have a job with the Nuclear Regulatory service or nothing anymore. We never heard from him again, and I bet you Russell remembers his name, if he was here.

TR: We actually—. I have a friend of mine, I work with a guy, and it was my friend's husband at the time, but they were up at just the gate. They killed a rattlesnake, and he said it was the color of a Mountain Dew bottle.

JW: Ooh!

MLR: That thing would be poison, wouldn't it? [Laughs]

TR: I mean not that a rattlesnake isn't bad enough, you know, but--.

JW: It's probably not supposed to be that color.

TR: No.

MLR: No, they're supposed to be yellow and black.

TR: Or brown. Well, ours are brown.

MLR: Yeah. Not ours. We don't have any. [Laughs]

TR: Well, I mean in this part of the country.

JW: So can you tell me about the first time you visited the Highlander Center?

MLR: They were doing a workshop about women, I mean about people's rights and what they could do, and helping us—. Now they didn't tell us what to do, but they made it possible for us to educate ourselves as to what to do. They had a workshop and there was a bunch of us went, I mean there must have been twelve, fifteen, wasn't there? And we took our kids and they camped out and, you know, and that was fun and it was a real learning experience. There was people there from all over the place, other states and everything.

TR: Kentucky. Kentucky had about as bad a time, probably, as we did.

MLR: Yeah. And then we went quite often after that. We'd go anytime they was going to have a workshop on anything that they thought—. They'd call us and we'd just all get together and go.

JW: What are some of the things that you felt like you learned while you were there?

MLR: Well, looking at it from a woman's point of view, I learned that we can speak out and that we can do—. If we want to get into something we can make it work, too. We can get in there, and we can dig for information just the same as anybody else can. And we can make it work, and that there's help out there for us if we know where to look for it. A lot of women at that point didn't know that, I mean especially in this community. I'm not saying we were ignorant, I'm just saying that we just didn't know, hadn't been taught. We went to workshops on different things too; women's rights and all kinds of things down there, and the men go with us. They didn't care. That's how we learned how to go about going to the health department in Nashville and doing the book, was at the Highlander Center. We got in there and they had a workshop and we learned to do that there, so we went.

TR: [Let's] ask her if they've been to the Highlander Center.

JW: Yeah. It's a beautiful place.

TR: It is.

Liz Tapp: I went to a wedding there last fall.

TR: Oh, really?

Liz: It was beautiful.

MLR: I bet it was. Most of the people we knew when we were going there are gone or passed away. Frankie—what was Frankie's title? It was an elderly lady and she came here. She had a title at the Highlander Center. But anyway she came and visited us quite often. They'd come spend the night, you know, and all that. When I got pregnant with Frankie [her son]—now this was long after the landfill stuff—she said, "Now, Mary Lee, I need a namesake up in that part of the country." Well Travis, our middle son, he started right then. When he'd start to work of a morning he'd say, "Bye, Mama, bye, Frank," and of a night he'd come and he'd say, "Goodnight, Mama, goodnight, Frank." Of course we knew he was going to be a boy because I was older and they wanted me to do the amniocentesis so, back then you didn't know what it was unless you went through all that, you know. But we knew he was a boy, but anyway I didn't want him named Franklin, I didn't—. I don't know—. His name is Jonathan Trent, but if you was to holler Jonathan at him he wouldn't answer you. We call him Frankie, and he signs his name Frankie. But she is the one [58:26]. She played a big part and she was such a nice lady but she passed away. I can't—. She was with the SALT program too, wasn't she?

TR: Mm hmm.

JW: Frankie Adams?

MLR: I believe that's who it was, Frankie Adams, and Buck somebody.

JW: Hmm. I don't know.

MLR: Buck, Buck, Buck—. Anyway, he was with them too, and that's how we got to know Frankie. She got to be just like family. She'd come and go and stay all night.

JW: Are there any moments or stories that you recall about these workshops at Highlander where you were learning things or thinking about things that you hadn't thought about before?

MLR: Oh, many times. I remember we were at one and Lucie was there—and I don't remember the particular workshop—but I know we were doing a role play thing. I don't even know the question, but anyway, the guy sitting right beside of me, when he spoke it was exactly what I was thinking. I mean, you know, I just—he was saying my words. When he finished and it got to me I said, “I don't have anything to say. He just said it,” and Lucie said, “That's not fair. You gotta say something,” and I remember that, things like that. Now, Lucie was here a lot. Lucie still comes.

JW: Mm hmm. Can you talk about that? Can you talk about getting involved in that documentary and what that was like to have this attention and have people interested in what was happening here?

MLR: Well, we were happy to have them interested in what was happening. Now about the documentary, being filmed and all that, I wasn't too eager about that. [Laughs]

JW: [Laughs]

MLR: But to get it out in the world and let people see that they don't have to put up with that kind of junk, I was all for that. I was happy about that. And Lucie and her friends, they were good. We had a good time with them. Of course, Lucie called it a movie, you know. They'd come and set up just big cameras and everything. It was fun. We had fun.

JW: Do you remember the first time you watched the film? [Pause] Or do you remember, Tina?

MLR: I think we were all—. Do you remember? Where were we, in the building?

TR: Yeah.

MLR: I thought we were.

TR: Up here.

MLR: Yeah, in the community center, and Lucie brought it and we all watched it. Is that the time Lucie brought it? That's when—. There comes the old man from the mountains.

JW: [Laughs] Hi!

RR: Hello.

MLR: That's Russell Rogers, and this is Jessie, and—I forgot.

Liz Tapp: Liz.

JW: Hi, Russell. Nice to meet you.

RR: This is who?

Liz: Liz. Nice to meet you.

JW: We're talking about all the Bumpus Cove stuff. You should join in, if you feel like it.

RR: [1:01:58] [Laughter] Oh, I've got work to do. I'm a hard worker.

MLR: Oh, Lord.

RR: I've got things to do. You go right ahead.

JW: Well, do you remember how people felt about the film when they watched it?

MLR: We went to the Highlander Center one time and there was a bunch of people there from—. That was from Kentucky, wasn't it? And they showed the film, and it really got those people excited. They really got information, listening to us and seeing us and knowing that we're

the same people they are down there fighting that, you know. It really got them excited and they got on with it. I think they got most of their—. What was the name of—? Berea.

TR: Yeah.

MLR: Berea.

TR: It seems like that was it.

JW: Mm hmm.

MLR: I think they—. I mean one of the times—. We didn't show it too many times, just to our family and things. Now I don't know where all Lucie's shown it. There's no telling.

JW: Lots of places. [Laughs]

MLR: I don't know. She don't even tell us about that. It just gets shown. Lucie just does what she wants to. [Laughs]

JW: [Laughs] Well, it's a beautiful film too.

MLR: It's got a lot of good information on it, it really does, and I'm proud of the film for the fact that it will help other people. And I'm glad she did it. And I don't guess anybody in the world could have got everybody to talk like Lucie did.

JW: Do you remember that part in the movie when you and Gail and maybe Linda are sitting at a kitchen table? Can you describe that? Do you remember that day when you all did that?

MLR: Was it Linda or Erma Turner?

JW: I'm not sure. I know you and Gail for sure were there.

TR: I believe it's Erma.

JW: Okay.

MLR: Well, it don't matter anyway. Anyway, I don't know exactly what we talked about or anything; I just know that Gail was all excited, and I was excited about doing—. I don't like my picture taken. I really don't and I never did, and Gail's excited. She don't care. She's a ham.

TR: Gail's like, we're going to be in the movies. [Laughs]

MLR: That's what she was saying, "Come on, Mary Lee. Hurry! Come on, come on!" I just know we was excited about it, you know, and Lucie was telling us about how much good it was going to do, and I'm sure it did. Of course, Linda was in the movie quite a bit and Linda was a lot of help. She was. Me and Gail and Linda, we were right out front all the time.

JW: Can you talk a little bit about kind of the rough stuff, like when the red baiting started and—what was his name? Was it Skip Foss—

MLR: Skip Foss.

JW: —who spread the rumors?

MLR: Yeah. Well you know there was this guy called me, and I didn't even know he was a reporter until after I'd talked to him. But anyway, Russell woke me up one Sunday morning, said, "Get up, Mary Lee. Show you something," and had a newspaper, and a whole page of that newspaper, this half page, was me and Frankie, eight months old or something. No, he was just a baby, this little. And it was stating that I had said or that I was a communist.

JW: As a quote?

MLR: As a quote. Or I don't know if it was as a quote. I know the only thing that I—. When the reporter called me back, that wasn't good, but I did tell him, I said, "Sir, I don't know how to prove you're a communist or if you're not. The only thing I know to say is if I say I'm a communist then I am. If I live in this country and if I say I'm not then I'm not. So what right did you have to say that? I didn't say I was or I wasn't." He said, "Well are you or are you not?" and

I said, "It's none of your business." I mean I wasn't going to give him any—. Russell said, [Whispering] "Mary Lee, say no, that you're not," but I didn't. I mean he didn't have no right. I shoulda had his job for that. But that got the word out, too. That got us—. Then we got people—. Even people we knew started saying bad things, threatening to get my daughter, threatening to burn our house down. Skip did all that, for a little bit of power, I guess. I don't know.

JW: Did you ever talk to him about it after—?

MLR: Oh, yeah, we talked, but not after it was all said and done. It got bad after that. I don't even like to remember those days because you don't like to remember your friends and your neighbors red baiting you, you know, you just don't like to hear that. But they did. But they wanted jobs and they wanted this and they wanted—.

JW: So they felt like by you and the other people stopping the trucks you were taking away—.

MLR: They were right in on it, and I don't know—. Well, what was it that started Skip? What happened when—?

TR: Well, I think most of that started when you all were the ones going up to the Highlander Center.

MLR: And we got involved with the SALT program and then—.

TR: And then, you know, when everybody, when they needed to speak to somebody it was always you and Daddy or Richard and Gail.

MLR: Or Jerry and Linda.

TR: Or Jerry and Linda, so it kind of just—.

MLR: I don't know—.

TR: And Mama wore red faithfully.

MLR: I wear red all the time. It's my favorite color.

TR: Mama loves red, so trust me, she fitted the part. [Laughs]

MLR: I still wear red all the time.

TR: Whether she was or not. [Laughs] She would, she would wear red. I got to thinking about that later. I thought, you know, because every movie, every video, everything Mama's there in a big, bright red shirt or a full red dress, you know.

MLR: I thought of—I don't know where that picture is. Have you seen it, the newspaper, with me and Frankie?

JW: No, I haven't seen that one.

MLR: [Whispers] I don't know where it is. I don't have a clue where that's at, but it's huge. I mean when you—. Russell said, "Get up, Mary Lee," and he had the paper laying there and I said, [Gasps].

Liz: Well, what do you know though, that they must have perceived you as a person of power if they felt like they needed to tear you down.

MLR: Tear you down like that, yes. And then they started saying that Myles Horton was a communist and all that, but that was just because that they couldn't—. They couldn't be the boss and they couldn't run the community, you know, or have the power. And nobody wanted—we didn't want power. We just wanted things to go smooth. If we'd wanted power we'd still be a-doing it, wouldn't we? Once we got the landfill stopped—.

TR: Well it was actually they were—. Some of the top people that couldn't take criticism on them, so if they did something wrong and you said no, you know.

MLR: Oh, yeah, later down the road when it got to where we was in the meetings and having the meetings, if they didn't get every vote they'd get mad.

JW: So were you a part of the trial that—? Did you go to the courts with Gail? Were you a part of that?

MLR: For what?

JW: I guess it was Gail, and maybe a group of people, took this to the courts to say—

MLR: Oh, yeah.

JW: —that you weren't—that it was libel, that you had been slandered.

MLR: What was it, Russell, that made Skip call us communists?

RR: Huh?

MLR: What was it that got Skip so mad he called us communists?

RR: Oh, it was just a tactic, just some of the politicians—.

MLR: The main thing, they wanted the Highlander Center to not be involved anymore.

RR: Yeah. They just wanted to downgrade people to where they could just go ahead and do what they wanted to without anybody saying anything.

MLR: But I can't remember about the trial. I don't even know what happened at that trial.

RR: Nothing. Just a bunch of baloney. I don't know who paid the court costs. [Laughs]

MLR: No, we never paid any court costs or anything. I mean—. But the judge did tell Skip to leave us alone, right? I think that's basically--. He slapped his hand, you know. But it was kinda scary now to have to go to court and you're going to get up there and maybe have to say some of this stuff you've done that you shouldn't have done.

TR: Whew! I'm glad I wasn't there.

MLR: But I'll tell you they threatened to get our daughter, kill her.

JW: Who threatened?

MLR: Some of our neighbors. We never could put our finger on it. That come from Bob Whaley, didn't it?

RR: [1:13:06 And some of the younger.]

MLR: It's just stuff that we'd hear. People would call and say things, threaten to burn our house down.

RR: Try to scare people.

MLR: Threatened Gail's children, just things like that.

JW: So how did you all learn about the SALT program?

RR: We was there when it originated.

MLR: Yeah, we were. We was the first bunch in that.

RR: You know what I done?

MLR: What?

RR: Forgot to take my medicine.

MLR: [Sighs] Now I don't know—. [Pause]

RR: Where were we at?

MLR: We was at the Highlander Center.

RR: Was we, or was we at Vanderbilt?

MLR: We was at the Highlander Center.

RR: I don't remember. That's one of the benefits of getting old.

JW: [Laughs]

MLR: Yeah. I can't remember. I told them; I don't remember half of the stuff.

RR: You can look forward to it.

JW: [Laughs]

MLR: We was at the Highlander Center, I remember, when—what was the woman's name? What was her name, Tina?

TR: Frankie?

MLR: No.

TR: [1:14:26]

MLR: No. [1:14:27] didn't have anything to do with the SALT program.

RR: You mean the woman from the Highlander Center or from down in west Tennessee?

MLR: West Tennessee, the one over the SALT program.

RR: It wasn't Sharon?

MLR: Sharon and—.

JW: Jim?

MLR: Who?

JW: Jim? Was it Jim? Branscome?

RR: That's who it was.

MLR: That's who it was, Jim Branscome, and Sharon. We was at the Highlander Center when all that took place.

RR: I don't remember.

MLR: I'm pretty sure. They started that up and we were some of the very—. I guess we was the very first bunch, wasn't we?

RR: Yeah. Yeah, I remember she come up with the Tennesseans Against Chemical Hazards, or some sort, that girl from down in west Tennessee, in the south. What was her name?

MLR: Smyrna.

RR: Huh?

MLR: Smyrna.

RR: What was the name of the chemical [1:15:39]? Where was it at? Was it Smyrna?

MLR: Smyrna, Tennessee, yeah. It's a bad time to try to ask us questions. [Laughs]

JW: [Laughs]

RR: [1:15:53]

JW: Well, I do have your daily logs from the SALT program.

RR: Oh? [1:16:02]

MLR: Let me read mine.

JW: [Laughs]

RR: [1:16:04]

JW: So I typed it up. So it's your applications—Mr. Rogers, yours is in here, too—your applications and then some of the daily logs that you kept, and you kept a lot, so it's quite a few pages.

RR: Does it exist yet?

JW: What?

RR: The TEACH [Tennesseans Against Chemical Hazards] program.

JW: It doesn't.

MLR: That was a good program. We learned a lot through that.

TR: But the SALT program does.

MLR: Huh?

TR: The SALT program does.

MLR: What?

TR: Still exist.

JW: I'm not sure. I know it did for a long time but I haven't—.

TR: I just went through it, but like I said, it's probably been ten years or—

MLR: Yeah, it's been awhile.

TR: —fifteen, maybe. Phew! Time flies when you're having fun, don't it?

MLR: If you'd let me read this before you got here I coulda told you a lot of stuff about
this.

JW: [Laughs]

MLR: [Laughs]

JW: That would be cheating.

RR: [1:17:14]

MLR: Linda Sanders. I forgot half of these people.

JW: She was the reporter that I was asking you about.

MLR: Yeah. Russell liked her a lot. She did good.

JW: Do you know if she's still around?

TR: Who is it?

MLR: I don't know—. Linda Sanders.

JW: Linda Sanders.

MLR: Do you know if Linda Sanders is still around?

RR: Last I heard she was working at the university as a guard or some sort of—.

JW: At ETSU?

RR: Huh?

JW: At ETSU?

RR: Yeah. She was a guard.

MLR: What about Penny? What role did Penny play in all this?

RR: [She was not in the] SALT program.

MLR: Well, I know not in the SALT program.

RR: They just come and helped us. They done some writing articles and such for the newspaper, her and Marge, assisted what they could. Let me look at that.

MLR: You can look at it.

RR: What was you looking for?

MLR: I wasn't looking for anything. I just wanted to see what it said.

RR: [1:18:35 Let's see what's in it.]

MLR: It's been many years since we wrote that.

JW: I can send you a copy that I haven't written on.

MLR: Okay.

JW: I'll do that.

MLR: That'd be good memories. [Pause] We went to a lot of places through that program.

JW: Where are some of the places that you traveled?

MLR: We went to Nashville quite a few times through that program. We went to Smyrna, didn't we, Russell?

RR: Yeah, and Wilsonville, in Illinois.

MLR: Yep, Wilsonville. I remember that night, to drive through a—.

RR: Then we also went to Kingsport over there, where they was going to put in a landfill, to try to do something [1:19:37]. Here's Moira. She was there with us.

[Break in Recording]

JW: [Laughs] So, Mr. Rogers, how did it change you to be involved in all of that community work?

RR: Well I don't mind community work. I like it pretty good. It was to benefit the community [1:27:23]. First of all, let me say that this was a mining community, absentee ownership, in other words. So people never did own their houses, or a lot of people didn't, in the cove. They just lived in company houses and they'd want somebody to move and somebody'd move in because there was a better house and this and that you know and the company just kept people at odds; strategy. The oldest strategy in the world, and people are simple enough to fall for it, is divide and conquer. So if they kept people divided they could keep them conquered, you see. [There's] manganese and lead and zinc and iron pulled out of these mountains until this was going to be a rich community, marble streets, but it's not. They just took it all out and left with it. They even had a rail system in here at one time. So, you know, companies dominated about everybody. Of course it's been going a long time, and then their offspring and then the people would marry other people and bring them in. That was Skip Foss's situation. One of the girls originally from here married Skip Foss, and I don't even know where he's from. A Yankee from somewhere, I guess, I don't know, you know, [that started bringing trouble].

JW: And you grew up in this community?

RR: Yeah. Never did live over fifty-five miles from here. About a year or two we lived down Jefferson City way when I was a boy, but I was born here and brought up here and Mary Lee was born and raised right here. This was her place.

JW: Did you have family who worked in the mines?

RR: Yeah.

JW: Do y'all remember stories about those days, the mining days?

RR: Yeah. I can remember when they was just putting lights in. We had oil lamps at first and then they run the power lines. Everybody had a bulb if they was to pull a chain switch. [It was great, boy.] And somebody had a radio. Between the static and the [little bit of voice] you could hear the Grand Ole Opry. [Laughs] I can remember the first TV, too. We lived up at Erwin at that time, went to my Uncle Clint's.

MLR: I remember the first one I ever saw.

RR: It was Joe—let's see. Rocky Marciano, I believe it was, and Joe Louis or—. No, Walcott, Jersey Joe Walcott, it was their bout. You know Rocky, don't you? [Laughs] 'Cause he's the all-time great.

MLR: That's [Alzheimers].

RR: In fact that's the fight I think—. We watched it on TV. That's the fight that he blinded Jersey Joe Walcott. Rocky Marciano [1:31:02] and Daddy took us over to Uncle Clint's. Did I answer your question or—?

MLR: We hadn't ever been involved in anything much 'til that happened, other than just the children's school and stuff.

RR: But something had to be done. This place would've been ruined. It would've been ruined forever. It just about is anyway. Let me tell you a little more history about this.

JW: Yeah.

MLR: Excuse me again. [Leaves room.]

RR: Right here where we are at one time was set the biggest iron furnace in the world. Did you know that?

JW: I didn't know that.

RR: It's true. Just over there was a smokestack and the way they melted the iron—[1:31:59 there's pieces]—the way they melted the iron was they had some sort of trolleys or wheel barrows that they'd roll the charcoal out from the hillside over and dump it down into the big furnace and then they'd put the iron all in there on top of it and light it. And as it went up it'd melt that iron, and as it melted the iron it run out the bottom into trenches they had dug in the sink, and I've got some of it. They called it pig iron. You've heard of that, I know.

JW: I've heard of pig iron, yeah.

RR: It was cast iron from raw ore, and they'd just break it off to a man-handling size, a hundred pound or something, but I can show you some of that. They said it was at that time the biggest iron furnace in the world. They disassembled it all and sent it to Japan at some time.

JW: So did families move here to work in the mines?

RR: Yeah. Yeah, and the companies just built the houses. I'm talking about they was a bunch of houses. I don't know how many. I'd say a hundred, maybe even more, back through this holler on both sides.

JW: Was that mine ever unionized?

RR: I doubt it. No, not that I know of. People never could get—. Two people couldn't get that [Laughs] that well agreed to unionize. I don't know but I don't think so. People was too divided. That's what I said, that the companies always kept different opinions, you know, in people. And they was afraid. They was afraid they'd have to move, and as a matter of fact we had to one time. We lived in a company house and Daddy got laid off in the mines and went to Erwin and got a job at the railroad, so we had to give up our house so one of the miners could have it.

MLR: [Whispering]

RR: [Seems like that 1:34:39] What's she after?

JW: If we want something to drink.

MLR: I asked her if she wanted something to drink.

JW: Well—.

RR: There's a lot of history about the ironworks up at Jonesboro at the courthouse, I imagine.

JW: Yeah. I've seen a little bit written up, but it's better to hear it from a person who's from here. [Laughs]

RR: I can remember actually the railroad tracks. I don't remember the train, but the road run beside of the railroad tracks. Then, you know, when they took—. [Break in recording]

MLR: —like a poor family. If you was on food stamps and free lunches then you could get on Title I, no problem, and get help. But a child that couldn't read good, if its parents made a lot of money it wasn't easy to get in Title I, you know, so that's why I went to bat for that. But now I remember when Tina was—I guess she was in third grade. Tina never took an interest in school, ever, but they was putting her in reading lab—now this is all through Title I—and keeping her out of math. They're telling me all the time now that she is not missing anything. Well when her grades in math started going down her grades in reading started coming up a little bit and I went back to them and I said, why? Well, she's missing thirty minutes here. Now they'd already told me that she wasn't. And Tina, she got free lunch. My children always got free lunch. Well, not—half- paid, you know. But I can't remember the man's name that was over it but anyway he was awful good to help us with it. We got into the Freedom of Information Act, the Sunshine Law, and got a lot of information from him.

JW: There's one place that you wrote about—. [Pause]

RR: It wasn't where I thought it was.

JW: One time you went to see Robert McCoy, superintendent of schools, and you wrote: "I was flatly refused a copy of the school budget. He said he wouldn't give copies of the budget to anyone," and you said that under the Freedom of Information Act you could get access. He said that even if you were to obtain the budget you wouldn't be able to understand it.

MLR: Yeah.

JW: And then my favorite part is you said: "I told Mr. McCoy that my purpose in coming to his office wasn't to be evaluated as to my mental capabilities." [Laughs] He had you go out of the office and said that you could write a request and ask for the budget.

MLR: And I did and we got it, didn't we?

RR: Yes. We got a lot of stuff through the Freedom of Information [Act].

MLR: See, I forgot all about all that. I need a copy of that.

JW: I'm going to send you a copy. I love that you didn't back down.

MLR: Oh, I wouldn't back down ever. I mean other than a snake or a gun. I'll back down from one of those. [Laughs]

RR: [1:38:54 and I've got both]

MLR: [Laughs]

RR: I've got the gun, but I don't got a snake. [Laughs]

MLR: I'm not scared of him.

JW: [Laughs]

MLR: One time his uncle brought a rattlesnake in a cooler, and I knew for sure when he pulled up in our yard with that cooler he had a rattlesnake in there. I told Russell when he went out, I said, "Richard's got that snake. You better just leave it in the car. Don't get it out." Well, I

seen them back there fooling with that. I seen Russell in there and I seen that cooler go in the smokehouse. I got my pocketbook and my clothes to wear to work the next morning and when Russell come in I said, "Where's the snake?" "Now, Mary Lee, it's okay. It's in the cooler." I said, "Toodle-oo, see you when the snake's gone," and I left and went to Mama's. The next morning Frank called me at work and he said, "Mama you can come home now. We killed the rattlesnake." [Laughs]

RR: Frank, yeah. [1:39:58 That's his]

MLR: I ain't staying around to where they throwed a rattlesnake if I know it.

Liz: How does one get a rattlesnake into a cooler?

MLR: I don't how he did it. Richard was crazy. That's Gail's husband. [Laughs]

RR: [I don't know how] we got it out.

JW: Why did he bring the snake here?

RR: I don't know.

MLR: Male ego.

Liz: To show it off.

MLR: I don't care. I didn't stay around. I mean I'm sure there was—.

RR: When we opened up the lid that old snake would come up there and kind of curl over, you know, looking around, and Frankie, he hit it so hard with a stick until it's rattles jumped off. He did.

MLR: [Laughs]

RR: I mean you know when it—.

MLR: The shock.

RR: Yeah, knocked it's rattles off. That's what he was wanting anyway, the rattles.

MLR: I wasn't going to stay all night knowing it was there. I'm sure there's snakes around but I don't know about 'em.

RR: Yeah, they's under the floor and everywhere [1:40:55]. But you didn't know about them.

MLR: I didn't know about them.

JW: So you said it will be forty-nine years that you two—.

MLR: In September, forty-nine year.

JW: Do you remember very well your wedding day? What do you remember about it?

MLR: We got married up the road, right up from the landfill, under a big oak tree.

RR: Right down there, where the landfill's at, right above the entrance.

JW: Can you describe that wedding day?

MLR: Well, he's forgot all about that.

RR: I forgot the date maybe. I didn't forget the day, just the date. [Laughs]

MLR: It wasn't a fancy wedding. We just had witnesses and the preacher, under that tree, you know.

RR: Well, actually we had to go to Unicoi County because we had a Unicoi County license.

MLR: So that's why we went up there. We didn't plan a big wedding or anything like that.

Liz: Did all your family come?

MLR: No. Nobody but his brother and his wife. That's all that was there.

RR: No, Robert and Mary was there, wasn't they?

MLR: If they was I don't remember it. Well I'm the one don't remember the wedding day.

JW: [Laughs]

RR: Forty-nine years.

MLR: I don't remember no one but [1:42:31] being there.

RR: [1:42:32]

MLR: Oh. Hmm. I really am losing it today, ain't I?

JW: [Laughs] Well are there any stories that—?

RR: She was pretty well spooked, I guess. [Laughs]

JW: [Laughs]

MLR: Nah, I've stuck it out all these years, boy.

JW: Are there any stories that you all tell or that your family or your kids tell about the Rogers family?

RR: The Rogers is hunters and fisherman. I out-fished him today.

MLR: Did you? Good for you. [Laughs] They just go hunting and fishing and that kind of stuff, you know?

JW: Mm hmm.

MLR: It's a big deal about who can out-fish the other, who gets the most the fastest. Oh, there is one story. They hunt, and Russell killed this deer, and Frankie—some old Indian man, right?

RR: Yeah.

MLR: Gave Frankie a turquoise ring.

RR: It's silver. It's a silver ring.

MLR: But it's turquoise.

RR: [1:43:43] some turquoise but it's silver.

MLR: And Frankie put it on that deer's antler, because that was the biggest one that had been killed around, in our family. Well then we got this little thing going now. Travis killed one that's a monster. So we had to make a—. We made a satin pillow and put that ring on it and Russell had to take it to Travis and present it to him to go on his deer antler.

JW: [Laughs]

RR: He thought he was—.

MLR: It's so much bigger.

RR: It's eight point, honest, it's horns is—.

MLR: It's huge.

RR: I'm serious. I mean from here to my arm right there, that's how long they are. It's eight point.

JW: So the ring is now on it, on the antlers?

MLR: Yeah.

RR: Yeah. Well that's a eight point, but you could stick that thing down inside of Travis's.

MLR: It'll be many—. I don't know if anybody'll ever outdo Travis's.

RR: Anyhow, Travis got the ring to go on his deer. Then several years later—I mean, you know, we ain't never gonna beat that one, but whoever beats it has got to present the ring. Travis has to present the ring on the pillow.

MLR: Dressed in a tuxedo.

RR: Yeah, and in a limousine. He's got to come up in a limousine too and present the ring.

MLR: [Laughs] That'll be something for them to do all down through life. Even the grandchildren, the grandsons, can deal with that, too.

RR: Yeah it'll be something for them to work at. But Travis got another one. Now it's a twelve point.

MLR: Yeah, but it's still not big as that one.

RR: I don't think it is. He says it is because of the twelve points, you count the inches some way, but that one's still the biggest.

MLR: Now we've got all kinds of fireside stories but they're not—they're just from the young'uns being little and all that. You get 'em together and you can remember.

RR: We go bear hunting. We got some pretty good bear dogs. I've got some little old curs out there. Oh, they're mean. They'll work on a bear too. [1:46:10] got them hounds. I've got some hounds, too, but I like my little curs.

JW: Do any of the girls go hunting?

RR: Yeah.

MLR: Not our girls.

RR: Nah, Tina's the only one that—. Well I guess you know about Tammy that got killed. Becky hunts. She killed a bear. We treed a bear and she killed it.

MLR: Travis's wife.

RR: That's Travis's wife. Does Carolyn go? She goes some.

MLR: Carolyn goes some. She deer hunts some. She don't go bear hunting, I don't think.

RR: Turkeys, maybe.

MLR: I have went a time or two but I sit in the truck and I can't—. I can't eat. The scent of them dogs—. They stay all day and the scent of them dogs and that truck; I can't eat, so I don't go much. They have dog things on the back of the truck, you know, and they keep five or six dogs in there. Russell, he'll just get out and get him a sandwich in a plastic bag over there and just eat and I can't do that.

RR: Well, I give the dogs a bite.

JW: [Laughs]

MLR: I know it. I can't.

RR: I've got the—. Well you got the nastiest old smelliest old dog in the world.

MLR: I know, but I don't eat with her.

RR: She's got an old blood hound, a big old thing [1:47:35].

MLR: [Laughs] Yeah, and I can't do nothing with her. I bought me a halter. I was going to get her out and walk around with her, and then I broke my leg and I've not been able to do anything with that poor dog.

RR: Yeah, you can't do nothing with her. She's too strong.

MLR: And a lot of people wants her and I just don't want to give her away. Of course I could sell her for a lot of money. She's a direct descendant from the bloodhound on *Hee Haw*.

JW: Really?

MLR: Really. Got the papers to prove it.

JW: How did you get her?

MLR: From the sheriff's department. [Laughs] I don't know how they got her.

RR: She's a drug dog. [Laughs]

MLR: She's a drug dog.

JW: So how have y'all seen things change around here over the years? What are some of the biggest changes you've seen?

RR: In the cove it's changed ownership a few times but [1:48:35], what, two or three houses maybe left, ain't they?

MLR: Yeah.

RR: [Martin just built a new one.]

MLR: There's been one new house built in the cove in the last thirty year, forty year. There's been many torn down.

RR: Most all the company houses except maybe one or two.

MLR: [I'm going to smoke while you talk to him.]

RR: [1:48:55] two of the old company houses are left. [1:49:00] some of the newer houses. The people that bought their property has got houses. Company property still exists. There's two houses left and, like I said, different ownerships. But over the years eventually it was like from watershed to watershed, you know, the company property was, and then over the years it was donated to the Nature Conservancy and the Nature Conservancy then donated it to the state, all except just around where the houses were, which was a thousand acres. I mean some of the people bought some of the property [1:50:03, brought the acreage down. Probably company property would be] four hundred and eighteen acres. The last people that bought it traded the left hand side from the head of the cove down to about Unicoi and Washington County for the equal amount of property on the right hand side. Now they're just logging it all, just clear cutting it. I don't know if that's good or bad, if they'll sow it back in grass or, you know, probably sell it off in lots, maybe, for people to build houses maybe. I don't know.

JW: So you've seen the landscape change over the years.

RR: Well, right now they're cutting the timber. The landscape where the landfill is, yeah; it's changed. They just like filled in the holler and took the [mountains] and covered it up, you see.

JW: What have been some of the biggest changes you've seen, in the community or with the people around here?

MLR: There's not been much of a change, has there, that I can think of.

RR: Just what I told her about that.

MLR: I mean most people just—. This is basically an older community, you know, so people have just retired, most of them, and it's just the same people.

JW: What about the young people? Do they leave?

MLR: Well some of them do. Some of them don't. Tina lives right there in that trailer. Some of them get married and stay, you know. It's just like any other community about that. One thing, not many people from this community go to college. I will say—. You know, they don't. Our children didn't go. Now Frankie, he's had all kinds of different schooling, but he's never just went to college four year and got a degree.

Liz: It sounds like it was really united around the time that you were combating the landfill stuff.

MLR: It was, for a little while. About a year, wasn't it?

RR: Yeah.

MLR: Maybe two. Maybe two year, I don't know. Yeah, it was united really, but then when all of this red baiting started, and like we said that came from people that was not born and raised here, you know.

JW: Mm hmm.

MLR: But that tore our citizens group apart and we just—.

RR: Yeah, you just lose [1:52:59].

MLR: We just got out of it. We don't do any of it anymore.

RR: It's hard, though. It's hard to be successful. It is, ain't it, because [1:53:08]. You could help your neighbor, your next door neighbor, you know, but then after awhile there'll be something turn up to discourage you, [1:53:24 in the religion] and everything.

MLR: So it really hasn't changed much.

END OF INTERVIEW

Transcriber: Deborah Mitchum

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