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### Oral History Interview: Lowell E. Long

Lowell E. Long

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Abbreviations will appear within this transcription as follows:

I = Interviewer, Ms. Rosa May Guinn

L = Interviewee, Mr. Lowell Long

Begin Tape, Side "A":

I: Interview with Mr. Lowell Long, November 26, 1998. The interview will be conducted with the interviewee responding to the categories of Appalachian ethnicity. These include: land identification, historical experiences, religious identification, musical and artistic experience, common voice, shared necessities of life, definitions of family and shared social expectations of behavior.

Mr. Long, could you please give me a background of your past?

L: I'd be glad to May. I was born in War, West Virginia down in McDowell County in April of 1941. My dad was an apprentice electrician in the deep mines and my mother was a homemaker. They moved from there at the start of the second world war, or right after the second world war started, and moved to East Liverpool, Ohio where my dad worked in the steel mills. He worked there until we moved to Huntington, West Virginia in January of 1945 and we've been here ever since, here in Huntington.

My dad's family was originally from down in Kentucky and my grandfather Long migrated in the early 1900's to Midkiff Nine Mile, Lincoln County in West Virginia. He met his wife there. I don't know much of her background but they were from in Boone County I do believe.

On my mother's side of the family, they migrated here in the late 1800's from over in Virginia. It's my understanding that the Hager's came into Virginia in 1742 or somewhere along in there, and later, moved west as

L: as they needed to I guess.

We moved to Huntington in January of '45. It was right below Lincoln Junior High School and Lincoln Elementary at that time. That's one of the reasons my parents bought there. There was schools right there with- in walking distance, within a block of home. I went to school there through first through sixth grades at Lincoln Elementary and 6 through 9 at Lincoln Junior High School and, then, at Huntington East from 9 through 12. I had a year at Marshall, later went to Chicago to DeVry Technical Institute. Was gone up there about three years and came back here in 1963. I did graduate from high school in 1959. I didn't finish college and I did not finish vocational school.

I came back here in 1963 and ended up with a job as a purchasing clerk for American Car and Foundry. Stayed there for 6 years. It was a marvelous education in business and in the economics of the purchasing and accounting field. I left there and went to another corporation over in Kentucky and was there as the plant buyer for four years. I was re- sponsible for all their maintenance, repair and operating supplies. I later left there after four years and went to a corporation here in Huntington and was the administrative assistant of purchasing for that corporation until they closed their doors. I've travelled on the road and sold insurance. I've sold cars. Just whatever it takes. As the in- dustries here in Huntington left and the need for purchasing managers declined, it was either relocate or take what you could get. So I've worked a little bit of everything since then. I've built houses, sold houses, uh, worked in gas..just whatever needed to be done.

I was married in 1965. I married a woman with three boys and what- ever it could take. She worked for the railroad and we just did our

L: thing and what it took. We managed to get the kids raised. We were divorced after 15 years of marriage and I've been single ever since, which is about 19 years now.

What else do you need to know there May?

I: Well, seeing as how you've travelled a lot, how would you say, or how do you feel about West Virginia as compared to the rest of the places that you've seen?

L: You can take the boy out of the mountains but you can't take the mountains out of the boy. My heritage is here. I'm never more comfortable than when I'm in the hills of West Virginia. It is a direct part of my being. Being raised by my father, who was as good a "woodsman" as anyone I've ever seen and I've did quite a bit of hunting over the years, and watched them, and he said he learned it from his father. And, of course, one of Dad's earliest jobs as soon as he could carry a shotgun without it knocking him down, was that he hunted for the pot. About the second thing the Long's did when they moved up to Midkiff, up Nine Mile, was after they got their home built, they started building the church and it's still there now.

I: What is the name of that church, do you know?

L: It's the Pine Grove, well, it's been a Methodist and a Pentecostal, been Baptist and this and that, but it's the Pine Grove Church on Nine Mile.

My grandfather, which of course makes me as a direct descendant of Jenny Wiley, where the Jenny Wiley State Park wore her namesake, we're direct descendants of that group. The Long's in Lincoln County are known as the "Singing Long Family". If there's a revival over many, many years, or a funeral, generally the Long's will be there singing. I've

L: often wondered. At one time I knida thought that maybe those people were rather poor and my uncles explained to me, it wasn't that they were poor, that there just wasn't anything left over. When they got through eating their meal my grandmother would pack that stuff up and it was taken to somebody up and down Nine Mile that didn't have as much as they had.

That sense of belonging and family, I don't find it anywhere else. I've travelled a great deal over the past ten years and I've never found friendlier people, or more open or honest people, on first contact, than you'll find in Appalachia which is eastern Kentucky, and in West Virginia, and all throughout Virginia and southern Pennsylvania and Ohio. There seems to be a bond among these people and I guess it's the bond that they were born here, raised here and their mom and dad was born here and raised here and that's their bond.

It's not just my heritage or my feeling of West Virginia or Appalachia. It's, I hate to say, a regional thing, cuz' I'm sure it's the same thing through Arkansas and the hills of Georgia and Tennessee. They seem to be a strong people and I've always felt they were a strong people. Being able to accomplish what they have with some of the lowest standards of education an everything that I can imagine, they've overcome great hardships. And, they all seem to be very interested in getting ahead some way or another, that it just seems like the knowledge never filters to them with how to go about this. Po' folks have po' ways. Maybe that's what I mean by Appalachia.

I: To back up just a little bit, you were saying that your father was a good "woodsman". What would you say denotes a good "woodsman"? How would you define that? What sorts of behaviors and stuff?

L: My dad could track. He could almost tell by looking at an animal's tracks what it was doing, whether it was hunting a place to nest, whether it was travelling for food. He just intuitively knew these things. He knew the name by looking at the bark of every tree, every shrub. I mean he really knew it. He knew it. He could take.. If he couldn't identify it by the bark, he would take and cut a small piece of the limb off and could look at the wood, the inside of that limb and tell you what the tree was. And it would be accurate.

He knew a lot of the medicinal purposes for the herbs and stuff that grow in West Virginia. He was one of the few people who could take and walk you up on the "jack of the pulpit" and some of the rarest flowers that we have here. He knew where they were and where they were suppose to be. And that was handed down to him by his dad. It was the only way that he had to know was following his dad.

I: And, do you still practice herbal healing?

L: Yes, I do.

I: In what form?

L: Pill form. I'm not quite sophisticated enough to go into the woods and I don't think, and get my own herbs and spices. But my grandmother did and made her own medicines to a great extent. I don't know that much about my mother's side of the family. I know that they, what is St. Cloud's Commons here in town, during the Depression was my Grandfather Hager's garden, and they later moved up to Lincoln/Logan County up on Big Ugly and he had a big farm up there through the Depression. My grandmother on the Hager side was a cook in the schools and my grandfather worked for C.N. McCoach which I guess was the first city market and icehouse here in town.

L: They were both large families. On my dad's side, I think there was 6 boys, 7 boys and 3 girls. On my mother's side, there was 7 girls and two boys. I guess they didn't know much about birth control in them days.

I: You were mentioning the singing in the church. Did you ever take part in any of that?

L: Mom and Dad gave us a choice early on, I guess, probably 5 or 6 years old. I remember them discussing it and mom and dad thought that it would be an advantage to us in some way to go to church. Of course, we were right close to several churches right there on 10th Avenue and I do have an 11 year pin around here somewhere for Sunday School. We did go to church.

My dad took spell of he was either in the church singing in the choir or he was mad at them and wasn't going. Mom didn't go to church much, but after she later retired she went to Marshall University and took a course in the Old Testament. I asked her about that and she said that "Well, if I ever get religion, I want to know what I'm talking about."

I: Well, do you remember what types of songs, what the songs were?

L: They were all gospel songs and I called my uncles the "boys". And then Dad and the "boys" they'd all gather and they'd use the instrument that God gave them. They only used their voices. They used no other instruments. They had a pitch pipe and I know especially there at the Pine Grove Church you could open that hymnal and just name a page and they could sing the song. They all knew those songs. It was part of their work. When they worked in the fields, they were subsistence farmers, trying to scratch a living off of the top or the side of a hill

L: and they learned those songs and sang those songs when they were working in the fields.

It was as much a part of them as any other thing that they had in their life and it seems to have been the strongest thing. That faith has been the strongest thing that has held them through sometimes a lot of calamity in their life. That that (faith) was always there, to the songs of God and the worship of God was always there with them. It was a given. They were born that way, raised that way, stayed that way. I would like to say that I've been that way but that's not so. I go to church some, I do have some spiritual practices through a God of my understanding that have been quite helpful to me over many, many years.

I: Well, Mr. Long, it seems like you have a strong sense of the past. Was there a lot of storytelling in your family? Was that how you learned about a lot of this?

L: I suppose it was just acquired knowledge over the years. There wasn't that much of a sit down history of the Longs or the Hagers, it was just, I guess, given to me as they thought of these things. They just kind of spit 'em out and I soaked them up as it came by. I don't know that they had that strong a sense of heritage. It was just a given with them, you know? That it was there. It was always there. It was one of those things that just always was. The hills and valleys were just in their blood.

They were humble people too. They didn't brag or talk much of their exploits or what they'd done. My Grandfather Long was president of the Lincoln County Board of Education, and had to walk 9 miles from where he lived or 10 miles from where he lived. It was either that or ride a horse to get to the meetings to take care of the school. I didn't know that until I was a grown man, that he had anything to do with the Board of Ed-



L: ucation. The children had a hell of a time getting to school but at least he tried. He tried to make some difference in what was being taught to his children. They were pulled out during the harvest season. They were pulled out of school. My dad went away when he was 16 and went to the CCC camps to help support and to help bring in money for the family. But, none of those things were ever exaggerated or exploited or anything. It was just the way things were with them as they came through their lives.

I: I see. Well, what was it like going to school? What were the schools like when you went?

L: I would think that the schools should have been adequate for the needs of the community. I don't know whether it was me or not. I was a mediocre student at best. Most of my teachers that I had in grade school and in junior high school and in high school, my mother had had them in school, here in town. So, the teachers that I had were a lot of them rather elderly and I didn't know until much later on in life when I started working that I really didn't have that good of an education. The only thing that I do find that I have out of my education, is a fairly good concept of the English language. I've been given a gift of words. I might not sing praises but I talk a pretty good bit. And it's a gift.

It was noticed by a couple of teachers who made sure that I did a lot of extra reading and they made sure that I knew the grammar, pronunciation and everything that they could teach me. But, out of all the teachers I ever had there were only two who took any special interest in me, in any of my abilities.

I had a lot of mathematics through junior high school and high school. Trigonometry, solid geometry, plane geometry, 2 years of algebra and when

L: I got to college, I didn't know nothing about any of those courses. I later found out that I, well, I was told, that I just didn't have a teacher that could teach those classes. At our 30th Reunion, I asked a couple of people how they managed when they got to college with their mathematics and, uhh, they were both of the opinion that I was that it took a good year in college to catch up with what they should have learned in junior high and high school. So, maybe they gave us the basics of an education, but the education that I got was in the 40's and the 50's where there wasn't that much technology. You know, basically about all you needed to know was your ABC's and how to count and you was going to go to work in one of the factories as a mule anyway so it didn't make any difference if you had much education. That's my opinion.

I: I see. Were the schools racially mixed or how was that?

L: When I came through school the schools were segregated. There was Douglass High School and I guess a junior high school and a grade school for the black people here in Huntington and when I was growing up the line was at 20th Street East. No blacks moved above 20th Street and they didn't move much below 13th Street. They stayed between about 8th Avenue and 12th Avenue. I didn't really pay that much attention to the segregation. There wasn't any noise made about it in those days. It was just a fact of life.

When I went to high school, there was two black children up there, a brother and sister, and that was the only two black people that I was ever in school with and that was when I was a junior and senior in high school.

I: Do you remember their names?

L: Yes. They were John Lane and Patricia Lane. I remember them both. Good people. I still see John from time to time. He's still here too. I understand that his dad was a farmer up on Route 2 and that's why he was going to Huntington East, because his dad had a farm up there. It worked. I don't know of her or him either one having any problems at school.

I: Was there much interaction or anything as far as play went?when you were younger?

L: Oh, that's all we had to do was play once we'd get off of school the children would all play. My sister and I were counting here a while back. Between 23rd and 24th Street, there on 10th Avenue on both sides of the street, when we were growing up in grade school, there was 37 children that lived in that one block. That's a lot. But in the houses where we lived, the Curtis's had 5, the Payton's (?) had 1, Anderson's had 3, we had two, and then the Ramsey's next door to us had 2. It was like that up and down. Most of the people had 3, 4, or 5 children. We did play. There was a lot of play through all of the neighborhoods. But it was a little clicky thing, you played in your block and then the next kids over in the other block, they had their deal over there and the ones up 25th Street they all played together, the Marcum Terrace kids they all played together. It was a real clicky sort of deal back then in them days. You

You had this one little sector or group that you stayed with and you were basically raised with them, went to school with them and they were your friends throughout your school years. Most of those people that are still in this area are still friends of mine. I see them and get to speak to them from time to time.

I: So, you wouldn't say that there was a lot of interaction within the

I: town as a whole?

L: No, not really. You have to look at it this way, in the 40's and 50's a lot of the people around here didn't own automobiles. Travel was limited to the buses. They can say what they want to about rapid transit now, but there was a bus that went by our house every 15 minutes the whole time that I was growing up there on 10th Avenue. So, you could go about anywhere that you needed to go.

The pools here in town, the swimming pools, didn't open until 1957 or something like that. So, really there was no way for interaction among the children here in town unless you were at the YMCA, or at a church function, or at a football game or a basketball game. That was basically the only time you saw other kids.

Basically, all of the interaction that I had with kids that went to other schools came through the YMCA. They had different dances and swimming and diving and everything that they tried to do. Great organization at that time. I don't know how it is know how it is now but it was great for children in this area at that time. Sure kept us off the street and out of meanness. We spent a great deal of time at the YMCA in the winters and, of course, in the summers, we were always at the pools.

I: After it opened?

L: After it opened.

I: About '57 or '58 you said?

L: Yeah.

I: So, you would say that most of the community gatherings were church, or the Y or ballgames?

L: That was it.

I: What were the ballgames like?

- L: Well, they was chewin' tobacco, and drinkin' whiskey and watchin' the boys play football! (Laughter) I'm sure not everybody did that but it seemed to me that a lot of the folks that was watching the football games on cold snowy days was doin' their thing pretty good.
- I: What was their behavior? Did they get rowdy?
- L: Well, this was West Virginia and it was Friday night, a football game, get drunk, get in a fight and go home. I mean, that's just the way West Virginia was. And it might not have been that bad here in town, but it was real tough in some of the outside games. I mean, you were the "fureners" comin' in and that was the name of that tune. If you beat 'em then you had to fight your way out a lot of times.
- I: So, it was the city kids that were considered "fureners"? i.e. foreigners.
- L: Yeah, we was the "fureners" if we went back in there. We had no business back in there.
- I: Did you go back to visit very much?
- L: I spent a lot of time when I was a kid up on Nine Mile. I don't remember much about it, because mainly it was just play. You know, I didn't have that many tasks to do. I'm sure I tried to help cut some wood and stuff, but nothing any big deal. I didn't do any of the farming or anything up there. It was just a good place for them to take a little boy and just let him run, run, run,run until he could sleep nights, and plenty of fresh air and good food.
- I: So, by the time that you moved here to Huntington with your immediate family, were your grandparents still living then?
- L: Yes, all my grandparents were living then. I think my Grandfather Long died in 1946 and I can remember my Grandfather Hager dying but I

L: don't know exactly how old I was, maybe 7 or 8 years old, maybe 9.

My Grandmother Long lived to be 99 years old and I don't really remember much about my mother's mother. She must have died about the the time I was 4 or 5. I know we was here in town, I think.

I: Do you know if they were taken care of by other family members?

L: Oh yeah. That's all they had. In the 20's I think a lot of the rural people thought that the only reason that you went to the hospital was to die. So they didn't go. They stayed home and were cared for by family members. Seems to me like maybe for the first 10 or 12 years that we lived up there I slept in the floor beside the bed. It was a typical thing.

Dad had come to the city and got a job and as his brothers got older and as my mother's sisters and her brother started coming of some age, they came to town and they stayed with us until they found a job and were able to get out on their own. Seems like there was somebody living with us about all the time, either one of dad's brothers or one of mom's sisters. Somebody came to stay and they'd stay until they could get on their feet. Then they'd go on and they've all been successful.

I: What type of employment did they end up getting into?

L: Well, my oldest uncle came and stayed with mom and dad while he was going to Marshall after the war and he became a teacher. He taught in Lincoln County, God, I don't know, maybe, 30 or 40 years.

I: So he went back home to his roots?

L: He went back to Lincoln County and taught up there for years and years. The rest of the boys seemed to get on with the railroad in one job or another. They all worked for the railroad. One uncle worked the river

L: for years and years for 30 days on and 30 days off until he retired. My other uncle, \_\_\_?\_\_\_ retired from the Ford Motor Company with 40 years of service with them. Dad retired from the railroad right before he died when he was 60 years old. He had worked for the railroad after he came back to Huntington here.

He worked for International Nickel for about a year. They had a big lay-off and he got on with the railroad in, I guess, probably about '47 or '48 and worked there until he died.

My mother's brother came back here and worked for Ligon Manufacturing for a while and then went to work for the post office. He was a letter carrier until he retired with probably close to 30 years.

My mother's sisters are scattered: California, Texas, Florida, New York. And all managed to get a family raised in one way or another. Seemed like on the Hager side of the family they had some good strong women. They had a problem picking men, every one of them ended up divorced. On the Long side seemed to me like when they got married, they stayed married. That's just the difference in two deals, of course the difference between all boys and all girls. So, I don't know what the deal is.

The Hager women had a problem picking men. Not too many of them were worth a shit. (Laughter)

I: Not very good luck. So, were they divorced rather early as far as the 50's or 60's?

L: Generally by the second child there was a divorce in the offing. They divorced and stayed divorced, they didn't remarry. Once they tried it and that didn't work, they just never did go about it again.

I: So, most of them were just married once?

L: They were married once and that was it.

I: Were they expected not to remarry?

L: I don't know whether maybe they were just a little gun-shy. You know, their track record wasn't too good so they just didn't try it again.

I: Just didn't try it?

L: No, they just, they had jobs and managed to raise the family and they just didn't think... The Hager women was a strong bunch of red-heads and I don't really think they thought they needed much to do with a man. Not after they'd done tried one. (Laughter) That took care of that.

I: So, who would you say was the head of the family? The female or male?

L: I'd say the ladies ruled the roost. I really do. The way things were at my house, my dad worked and, of course, mom worked too. By the time we were in the third grade, mom went to work downtown in the stores. She went to work for Bradshaw-Deal and worked for them until they closed and was over the lingerie department and notions, whatever that is. When they closed, she went to the Smart Shop downtown and stayed there until she retired as their buyer over the lingerie department, handbags and stuff like that. So, she worked but dad worked, and would come home and give his check to mom and she saw to it that all of the bills was paid.

She had a list of stuff for him to do about painting the house, and plumbing and this and that and the other. Seems to me like they didn't hire much done to the house. Through their brothers or neighbors or some relative or another, there was a good carpenter, there was a good electrician, there was a good plumber that would come by. Of course,



L: it would be reciprocated. Dad would go with them for whatever they needed done and help them.

I: Would you say the men were expected to work?

L: They either worked or they got run off.

I: So that was an expectation...(Laughter.

L: Yeah, it was an expectation. You either worked and supported your family or they run you off. What would they need with a man that wouldn't work? They had enough mouths to feed without another one sitting there surly and pissed-off because he didn't have enough spending money.

I: Did the women do most of the caretaking as far as the children went?

L: Yeah. 80 or 90%. When I was in the Scouts, my dad was a big help to me and to the other boy scouts. I was in the Scouts for years. I'd have to sit and think about that. But I went through the ranks of the Scouts and my dad was a big help in his knowledge of wood lore and just everything that he knew about nature. He was one of those that will go out at night and sniff the breeze and know how to dress the next morning, whether it will be cold or warm. I asked him about that. I said, how do you know that? He said, you just know it after you've done it all your life. It was just something that they knew. They'd know whether it'd be cold and frosty the next morning and they'd need their long underwear or whatever.

Dad worked outside all of his life. I guess he had to know those things. It was another one of those things that were intuitive to Appalachian people. You know, they just knew what the weather could be. They could feel it in their bones.

I: What would you say the Boy Scouts were like for you?

L: The Boy Scouts was a real education. It was a real education. In be-

L: ing able to work with other people, being able to work with other boys of your own age and do it in a way that was constructive. We had several projects that I can remember, building bridges and stuff like that where it was all hand done and no nails or anything like that. Everything was roped and tied together. It was a real fun experience for me. The scout camp , Camp Arrowhead up here, was a real good place for me where I could get plenty of exercise and learn a little something. I learned to swim at Camp Arrowhead. That was one of the first things that they had us do.

Later I got into the Red Cross. Part of the deal was that I became a leader examiner. I taught lifeguards to be lifeguards. The scouting started something there with me that would last me clear up into a young man. Not only as a hobby, but as a way of helping others and helping myself at the same time.

I: Were the scouting packs...Are they called packs?

L: Troops. Cub scouts are packs.

I: I see. Were those set up along community lines.

L: Yeah, gosh, there was I don't know how many scout troops in Huntington then. I was in Troop #42 there at the Baptist Temple there on 21st and 10th. Seems to me like they had one up at 26th Street Baptist for a while there. There was just scout troops everywhere. There was a bunch of scout troops. Scouting was big in Huntington at that time. I think Anderson-Newcomb had one floor there that sold a lot of the scout uniforms, shoes, the whole nine yards. It was a pretty good enterprise here. It was available to everyone.

I: Did they generally all meet at churches?

L: That was the name of the tune. Churches sponsored the scout troops,

L: I think, somebody had to, the money had to come from somewhere. I think the churches at that time for their own boys that were there, for their own members, they wanted the troop. If they could bring another youngster in, that was great too. There was a lot of boys, well, maybe not a lot of boys, that were in the troop that didn't go to Sunday School or church there but they were good scouts.

I: I see, so to what extent for you would you say that, basically, religion, would mix in with this land identification: an appreciation of the land that you would get as a result of the boy scouts and the church experience?

L: If you understood and knew everything, what would there be left to believe in? I think the scouting and our parents decision to let us choose our own way of whether we wanted to go or not, instead of forcing us to go to church or something like that, they let us choose and we decided to go there. I think it's a kindred spirit among a lot of Appalachian people that the church has been the stronghold of the community and has been the stronghold of the family. Even though my mother professed not to be a religious person, there's been many times that she said that the only way that she got through some situation was through her own faith.

The church allowed me and the scouting and my experience as a young man allowed me to develop my own faith and to identify with the heritage that I had coming all the way back far as I know to Jenny Wiley and it's all strong church people. It may be a shame that I didn't pursue that, but that's neither here nor there at this point.

I: For you, is there a strong relationship between God and the land?

L: God is the land. See, the creation was the beginning but the creation as it unfolds for us. And, as the creation matures, that brings every and

L: and each day as a new creation. As new species are formed and new species dying out, the creation continues to expand. Watching them really strip West Virginia of the woods and stuff like that, from what I can remember as a young man, sometimes to me is heartbreaking. I do think that through a sense of land and through a sense of faith, maybe they will just really stop raping this beautiful country that we have here. And that's what I think it is. Some of the most beautiful tracts of timber going up and down on Route 10 and now all you see is bare rock cliff face. I don't think we have to worry about the land. The land will protect itself far after we're gone. The Mother Earth, the Father Spirit has always been here. I don't really know how to explain it any further than that.

I: What kind of music do you like Mr. Long?

L: Well, there's a diversity of music. I like gospel. I like bluegrass. But, you got to remember I grew up when Elvis first started and got out of high school about '59 when all the rock and roll got started so there's still a lot of rock music that I enjoy and I enjoy some classical. I was fortunate. My mom started tutoring me on the trumpet when I was in about the 4th grade and then by the time I was in about the 6th grade, I was playing with the junior high school band. By the time I was in the 9th grade, they already had me playing with the high school band so I'd be ready when I got there in the 10th grade and be able to take right off doing the ballgames, pep rallies and all that stuff.

I stayed in the band for two years, my sophomore and junior year in high school. I was drum major my senior year. So, that's opened up a lot of music for me that maybe a lot of people didn't get. I like just a little bit of all of it.

I: Would you say then that music was important to your family?

L: Music has always been important. Someone's always hummin' and whistlin' around me, you know, about as long as I can remember, unless they was mad about something. Most of the time they were singing something, about all the time. I often that maybe when mom and dad was back in War, West Virginia that they were quite secluded and didn't really get the message you know about the wars and stuff like that and she said, "Oh no, everybody had a radio." She said there was lots and lots of news and lots and lots of country music.

I: Lot of country music.

L: Lots and lots of country music. A lot of the radio stations here that I can remember as a youngster was lots and lots of country music. You wasn't going to escape it. Then the 60's came along and that opened up another field of music. Of course, the classicals have always been there. I enjoy a lot of music. I guess you can tell.

I: What would you say about artwork and things like that along the lines of, for example, quilting or anything of that nature?

L: I don't know anything about it.

I: Woodworking, did your family do any of that?

L: When I was in junior high they had a woodworking and a sheetmetal class and everyone had to take woodwork and sheet metal and my teacher informed me that I'd starve to death working with my hands. (Laughter)

I: You mentioned something about your grandfather having a garden. Has gardening been important on through, I know you also mentioned the subsistence farming?

L: I know with my grandparents, gardening was a way of life. They gardened for subsistence. They gardened for their food. They canned and I'd

L: never heard of it until I was listening to my mom talk and she said in the fall, you know, rather than feed the chickens, they'd start butchering chickens and might can 200 chickens. Rather than feed them all winter, they had them all winter anyway. Then in the spring my grandpa would go buy 100 or 200 biddies and they'd raise chickens and they'd have plenty of eggs.

Of course, they always kept a couple head of dairy cattle. They made their own butter. I mean, there was a lot to be said for the way they lived.

I: What kind of canned foods do you remember that they had?

L: All of it..

I: All of it?

L: Yep. Beans. Corn. Pickled beans. Shuck beans. How many kinds of beans do you want? They had 'em. Corn. Of course, in season they had their tomatoes and their carrots and their cabbages but they were able to what you call "hole up" a lot of vegetables. They buried them or kept them back in a room or in a cave that was dug back into the side of a hill. They kept good. They kept good, there was a way.

I: There was a way to do it.

L: Yep, there was a way to do it. Well, I can remember seeing barrels of kraut. I mean like a 50 gallon barrel and they'd salted it down and made kraut out of their cabbages. They had their turnips stored, potatoes stored, peaches stored, apples, pears. They did alright. They didn't go hungry. There just wasn't nothing left over.

I: I know you mentioned that your grandmother, I believe it was your grandmother, would share food with other people in the neighborhood, was that a common thing?

L: Yes, it was common, especially in the rural areas. If someone was ill, they were bringing food in from lots of different directions. It wasn't just my grandmother, I'm sure when she was having a baby or something like that there was food brought in for them too. Like I said, they did these things without any thought of it. You know, there was no motive for them doing them things other than that they were helping someone. So, these things were done and they were done quietly. You didn't really hear a whole lot about it or you might think that they were bragging and they wouldn't want that. So, alot of those things that were done were just done out of the goodness of their heart and they were kept quiet.

I: People didn't really talk about it?

L: No. It was just the way they were.

I: Do you remember any funerals when you were growing up?

L: Not very many except I remember my Grandfather Long's funeral and he was buried way back on a mountain. I was just a little boy and one of his sons, Gwen (?) I guess, maybe he was 12 or 13, and I remember they had to take the casket back on the hill with a sled pulled by 4 mules. Just almost straight up a hill back up toward that old cemetery there.

I: Do you know the name of the cemetery?

L: Don't have a clue. I'm not even really sure that I could find it, cuz' it's out in the woods set way up on top of the hill. I been meaning to get one of my uncles before they die to take me back in there and I just haven't.

I: So, they took him up there with 4 mules?

L: 4 mules and carried the casket on a sled, drug it back up on the hill. You couldn't get the hearse back up in there.

I: Did they have a funeral procession?

L: Oh yeah. They was all walking back up on that hill. I don't know how many there was. Seems to me like there must have been 50 or 60 people there. It was noted that he had died.

I: So, that was a good portion of the community?

L: Up through there I'd say so. Probably just about all of them. Because at one point or another they had all touched each other's lives up there because it was just a select group that lived up there up Nine Mile. Of course, there wasn't any paving up there. Most of the way up through there the creek was the roadway because it was the only solid bedrock that they had was the creek bottom. So, you didn't go in there much and you didn't come out much unless it was just a necessity that you leave there for some reason or another. You stayed home. The church was within a mile or so of the house and was in walking distance and you didn't need to be anywhere else. I'm sure they travelled all over, but you know the travel then was Shank's mare, you walked.

I: So, this was still true in the 40's and 50's?

L: Sure. It sure was.

I: Was this before, I'm not clear on this myself, was this before some of the damming of the Ohio River?

L: Well, after the '37 Flood I think that they had it pretty well under control because the floodwalls were built by the time that we moved here in '45.

I: So, could they only travel when the creeks were dry?

L: Well, the way those creeks run out of there and drained, it'd run out in an hour so it's not like you were trapped. You know, Nine Mile is, I guess you go back up that creek and it comes out of there pretty quick.



L: I'm sure there was some time when there was some damage, but you don't hear much about that. I know that they had their own coal seam back just a little ways from the back of the house back on the side of the hill and they dug some coal right out of the side of the hill and used it to burn in their stoves. Of course, they used a lot of wood for their fires too. That seemed to be one of the major jobs for a couple of kids was keeping the wood cut, both for cooking and heating. What coal they dug out of there they used for heating in the fireplace in the big front room.

I: Did you use coal here in town?

L: No. We were always on city gas, water and electric as far as I can remember since we moved to town.

I: Back to the funeral. Do you remember if everybody brought any sort of food over or if there was any sort of social gathering?

L: It was after the funeral was over they all went back to the Long home there and there was regular like, picnic tables, big long tables set-up and everybody there. Of course, they sang. A few people showed up that had some instruments and some guitars, banjos and stuff. They played some.

Not only was it a sorrowful occasion, it was a joyous occasion because a lot of times the only time you got to see a lot of your relatives was at a death, which I think that's the way it is today too.

I: Would you say that was true for any other types of occasions?

L: I would say so.

I: What types?

L: Births and deaths. That's about the only thing that'll bring 'em out of the woods.

I: Would everybody tend to gather at the elder kinsman's home or just what was most convenient?

L: I would think it would be the one that was the most convenient location for all to get to.

I: Mr. Long, would you say that loyalty to family was important for you? And going on back?

L: It allows me to have a sense of belonging. I can go start up Route 10. I've got an uncle that lives right up above Branchland. I've got one up on Crooked Creek in Logan. I have a sense of belonging. I've never been there that I wasn't welcome with open arms. The sense of family is .. I started to say a part of me. It's not a part of me, it surrounds me. I have relatives here. My mother's brother and sister live here in town. I see them quite a bit and my aunts and uncles up and down Route 10, I go to them too. It's just a sense of the familiar. Or, maybe it is the sense of a love that always was. I was the first grandchild so I don't know where that put me in their hearts, but I was first. They all have children but Lowell Long has always been loved by them and I've always, always loved them.

I think that's where the key to the family thing is. Knowing that you're loved, maybe in spite of your transgressions. Your good deeds or your bad. You're loved anyway. I think that's what family is, you're loved for being just there and for being who you are, and that's a part of the family.

I: So, you would say that differences were well tolerated within the family?

L: Differences have always been well tolerated within the family. They know that each has their own mind and their own path to seek in this

L: life. They do it their way, you'll have to do it yours. They don't interfere or tell you that you may be doing it wrong, or that you're doing good or not.. It's what you think that counts with them.

If you think you're doing good, you're doing good.

I: Would you say that's a value that has been passed down?

L: It's valuable to me.

I: When you go there to see your family, or just to drive by, do you feel a sense of belonging to that area as well? Not just to the people but to the area?

L: It's been a part of my life since I can remember. You know, that trip up Route 10 has been there since I was just a little tiny boy. Back in... I don't know if they had to hand-crank it or not to get it started, but I can remember several trips up there in cars that didn't have heaters. That's how long ago it was, so it's been with me as long as I can remember.

Once they moved into their homes, they stayed there. My Aunt Betty and Uncle Ray just had their 50th wedding anniversary and they moved in to their little house on Route 10 up there right after they married.

Maybe it's not my sense of family or my sense of belonging, it's borrowing and feeling theirs. It's important. Maybe my ends aren't as tight as they should be, but I can go to them and the stability of family is there and has been there, and has been there and has been there.

End Of Side A. Turn Over Tape To Side B. Rewind.

Begin Side B.

I: Thinking about historical experiences Mr. Long, were you in the area (Huntington) during the Civil Rights Movement in the 60's?

L: In the early 60's, 61, 2, and 3, I was in Chicago. I then returned here in 1963. When it was happening, it didn't seem like I was all that much involved. It didn't create that big a fervor around here. I'm sure there was some marching, this, that and the other in the late 60's, but I know that when I went to work for the Calgon Corporation out on Route 23 in 1968 I lived there in South Point (Ohio) and I went from door-to-door passing out applications trying to get black people to come to work for us. Other than that I don't know that I had any dealings with the Civil Rights Movement.

I was, during that time there of course with me living so close to the black community there in Burlington (Ohio), I developed a great many friends in the late 60's that are still my friends today. I don't know how I missed being prejudiced, but it wasn't practiced in our home. I don't think that it ever really came up that much.

I was so busy working those jobs that I had, a lot of them double shifts that I don't think I ever paid much attention.

I: Did it seem to you that any of your neighbors, perhaps, were prejudiced?

L: Probably. I don't know of any outstanding incidences. It seems to me like the black community was segregated and stayed segregated because they wished to be that way. Those that wanted to get away from this, I guess they went north. That's the only explanation that I have for it.

I know that the young men that went to school with my step-sons all came out and went to work at the nickel plant, for the railroad or somewhere and they all seemed to stay here. The majority of them are doing what they can.

I: So, is that Burlington, Ohio?

L: Yeah, Burlington, Ohio. It's one of the first places that crossed through up here in the underground railroad during the Civil War. It was right over here at Burlington. There's still a lot of strong heritage there in that community among the black people. I am aware of that by my being there with them since 1968. I still go see some of my friends over there frequently.

I: Would you say that you were readily accepted?

L: I would think so. It seems to me like I haven't had any problem in or around the black community at all. I guess I could have if that's what I'd went looking for. I didn't go to the black clubs and stuff like that you know and socialize. I don't know whether I thought that would be inviting trouble or not. I just didn't go.

I: What types of things would you share back in the 60's when you would go there? Would you eat together or what?

L: Well, right in Burlington, if you come out Macedonia Road and go straight out to the river, there's a little area there called "The Commons". I don't know whether that's the legal term for it or not, but the black community calls it "The Commons". In the late 60's, I was able to, with some other guys down there, was able to get enough material that we put in the blacktop basketball court there and the picnic tables. It was a good place for the community to come. We'd go there on week-ends and holidays if the weather would permit. We played cards and shot basketball, horseshoes, had a beer. You know, it was just a good place to be. It was relatively quiet and I have never seen any trouble there in "The Commons". It just wasn't there. I'm sure they had their problems, but if they did they kept it to themselves. It was a mix of probably 50/50, black and white. There are a lot of interracial marriages in Burlington.

L: So maybe it was that community that allowed me to be accepted more readily, say, than blacks in an urban or big city.

I: I see, you say you're still friends with some of them to this day?

L: Oh yeah, quite a few.

I: What are some of their family names, if you don't mind?

L: Sensabaugh.

I: How do you spell that?

L: s-e-n-s-a-b-a-u-g-h. The Martins. Johnsons. Blackburns. I don't know, I could probably go on. Burt Johnson. Just one right after the other.

I: Are these families that have lived in the area for many, many years?

L: Probably born there. They were there and their families been there for years and years and years. A lot of the properties over there have been handed down from generation to generation to generation. A lot of them are living in houses that are on piece of land that their great-great grandfather had. It's the same way here in Huntington. A lot of the black community here on Hal Greer Boulevard and around there are living in homes that their grandparents or their great-grandparents had bought and paid for many, many years ago. They have a sense of worth and a sense of community and a sense of family that I sometimes think is a lot stronger. Their heritage is a lot stronger than the white community. Personal opinion.

I: Would you say that you were treated any different?

L: No. Not really. I hadn't been over to the Martin's in a couple of years one time and I came up and knocked on the door. Bernice came to the door and said "What are you doing knocking, you're home?"

That seems to be the feeling through the community there. Once you've

L: been there, when you come back, you're home.

I: What about Vietnam as far as another major external force? What type of effect did you see that to have?

L: It didn't have any effect on me that I know of. I know there was some fear when my two step-sons joined the service in 1969 that they would go to Vietnam, but they ended up at Homestead Air Force Base in Florida for their tour of duty so that wasn't any big drag. Some of the men that they were in the service with when they came back, came to South Point. I know Gus and his wife stayed with us after he came back from 'Nam for about 6 months and lived with us there in South Point.

We lived right on the river and I watched that young man sit for days and just sit by himself on the riverbank, I guess, sorting out peace for himself and for his wife. They stayed with us there, I think I said, 6 months, and they later moved to Chicago where he was from and have been there ever since to my knowledge.

I know that it did have an impact on the community. The boys coming back, I saw them and was able to talk with them a lot. It did impact their lives. As far as impacting my life or the life of my children or my wife, I don't think that it did at all. We were too busy working and raising a family to be caught up in the Vietnam thing. None of us had any relatives, my wife nor I either one, who were in the service over there. We neither had brothers or sisters over there. Cousins or anybody who was over there. I was another one of those things, you know, it happened but it didn't happen to me.

I: Is there any history of military service in your family?

L: My mother's brother was in the service during the second world war. I think 4 or 5 of dad's brothers were in the service during the second

L: world war and spent the whole three years over there.

I know J.D., the oldest one, said at one time that he'd had 9 boats shot out from under him. He was in the navy. My uncle Ray was over there 3 years as a highly decorated soldier. He'll just look at you and say "I don't know nothing about it." None of those men talk anything about the war. I challenged Ray about it one time and he said, "Look, I fought that war once, I don't want to do it again."

So, their war history or war experiences are just that. They're theirs. They kept them to themselves. I know that my Uncle Gwen (?), my mother's brother, after he came back stayed with us for about 6 months. It would come up a thunderstorm and he'd go out and get under his car. He did that for over a year before he finally got away from the noise, you know? Just really panicky. Other than that, that's about it.

I: Has there been any history in your family of migration out of state in order to find work?

L: Readin', writin' and Route 23. At one point in time all of our family has left town to work for a year or 2 or 3 and, then, made it back this way. Cleveland. Spokane, Washington. The west coast. They all headed north. I don't know of any of them heading south. But, they all came back here, settled here and were able to get jobs, like I said, with the railroad and the state.. They returned to their roots.

Now, the women on my mother's side, when they left they never came back.

I: On a slightly different line, how do you feel about the changes that have taken place in West Virginia over the course of your lifetime?

L: What changes?

I: Changes, for instance, economically?



L: Well, it looks to me like West Virginia is still sucking hind teat. It ain't much different than it ever was. It seems to me that a lot of the coal interests and the timber interests, the gas and oil explorations here are all owned by out of state companies. They drain our resources and our funds. Even when they come in here to build a mine, they bring their own labor with them so we don't even get to work the people that we have here.

I can get a little hot about that. Maybe it's the same in other states too, but I can't see that there's been much improvement. It's pretty much run by the same people that's been running it as long as I can remember.

I: Do you see any changes politically?

L: Not really. The only thing wrong with the politicians in this area, in West Virginia and in Huntington, is that their the only people we can get that'll take the damn job. You know, anybody else that was worth a shit would be out somewhere making some money.

Personal opinion there, too.

I: Well, you noted earlier that as you travelled down Route 10 that it looked a lot different. In what ways would you say that it looks different?

L: Well, from an uncut forest to a bare cliff face... There shouldn't be much explanation to that. I know it was wooded all the way to Logan County. Of course, now, it's extremed to bulldozers. See, it used to be done with horses and mules and by hand. A lot of it they couldn't get to and now they just take a bulldozer and grade a road up the side of a cliff face for one tree, but they'll get him.

I: Do you feel like this is a personal affront?

L: Yeah. I really do. They're in the process of really destroying something that was God given and they can go ahead and plant a few trees here and there, or whatever they want to do as reclamation, but there's nothing that's going to stand for the primeval forest that was here, I guess up until the late 30's.

Of course, when they first hit the east coast and started towards the west coast, they cut trees down all of the way. Just one forest after another. I'd kinda hopes that West Virginia and its' rugged beauty would be here and stay forever, but it doesn't look like that. The way they're cutting tops off these mountains, this place oughta be flat as Kansas in another 50 years.

I: So, you've noted a major change even in your lifetime?

L: Oh yeah. Oh yeah. None of it good.

I: Well, Mr. Long , at the beginning of this interview you stated that you had travelled quite a bit when you were giving me your family background, or your personal history rather. Have you ever related to any other areas of the country in the same manner that you have with Appalachia?

L: No, not really. I spent quite a bit of time in Florida and it just wasn't for me. I've often thought that I'd like to move over in around Charlottesville, Virginia but the scenery there is the same as it is here. After I boiled it down a little bit, maybe I was reaching out for a part of history that we didn't have, but then I was forgetting the historical part of Guyandotte right here in town, of Point Pleasant which is real close to us. There's a lot of history here. It seems to me like it's a well kept secret. They are coming out with more now in their tourism and in efforts to bring tourists in here, to bring the

L: history of West Virginia and Appalachians more into the common knowledge of other people.

It was my opinion when I was in Chicago, or St. Louis, or even Texas or Florida, that we were considered quite backward and quite ignorant. No one wanted to visit here. It seems as though that is changing now and people do want to come to Appalachians, to the mountains, if, for nothing else, for their friendliness and for their really majestic beauty.

I: Mr. Long, as far as an entirely different line of questioning goes, have you ever had the chance to see the movie, "Matewan"?

L: Yes, I have. I've seen "Matewan".

I: How did you feel about its' portrayal of Appalachians?

L: I think somebody made a pretty good guess of what Appalachia was like in that time. It doesn't seem to me that "Matewan" was researched all that good. Maybe, maybe not. I've seen it twice. Once on public television and , well, maybe twice on public television. I don't know if it was portrayed correctly or not. I doubt it. I don't know what makes me to think that because I don't have that much of a history background on Matewan. Maybe I got that from news reports of what other people thought of the movie. I didn't think it was quite accurate.

I: I know that you mentioned the stereotypes that people seem to have in your view of Appalachians. What to you would that stereotype be?

L: I think they probably just look at the majority of us like we're just hillbillies. Backwoods. Rural. Ignorant. I don't know what makes me fee that other than when I was up north they'd say what part of the south are you from and when I'd get down south they'd say how

L: far up north do you come from? So, I guess we're kind of stuck right in the middle here. The majority of the people that I've talked to, you know, are kind of looking down their nose at me when I said I was from West Virginia. Like I was a little less than in some way or another. I'm sure that probably my upbringing and my education is as good as any of theirs.

I: If you had to explain to somebody what an Appalachian was, what would you tell them?

L: People that are willing to work and survive and stay where their heart has always been in the mountains and valleys of the Appalachians. I know a lot of people that have left here, but they all come back. I've had friends that left here right out of high school in 1959 and 1960 and when they retired, they came home. Just wherever they lived, Baton Rouge, Louisiana was one that just came back. He was a retired police officer down there and he'd been gone 30 years, but when he came back he said "I've come home". I said "weren't you at home down there?" and he said, "I've never been home since I've been away from Huntington". A lot of them that left here, as soon as they were able, as soon as it was economically feasible for them to return here and stay here, they came back here. Whether their parents lived here now or not, they returned because it was where their heart was. That is the openness and the friendliness that it is hidden through some of the Matewan movies, the Blair Mountain ordeal that they had there...all the people looked at was the ignorance and the violence. It's not only here in West Virginia and the Appalachians, in the inner cities the ignorance and the violence is much worse. It's a stereotype that was put on us many, many, many years ago and it's just seemed to stick.

L: Maybe it's the way that we talk. I know that you can get away from Huntington and get back into Lincoln, Logan, Mingo and Boone County and they have a distinct dialect that is all their own. Even though their grammar and all of everything might be correct, it's the nasal intonation and the way that they say their words that would lead people, I believe, to believe that their ignorant when they're not. I don't know what causes it. Everybody has their own prejudices.

I: Well, Mr. Long, I believe that our time is about up. I want to thank you very much for this interview. Is there anything else that you would like to add?

L: I'm glad that I've had this opportunity to talk with you and maybe talk to others. I would say that these are my impressions and my opinions. That doesn't make them right or wrong, it just means that they belong to me.

I: Well, thank you again.

End Of Interview.