

Narrator's Name: Marjorie Brown
Date of Interview: August 20, 1980
Place of Interview: Waterloo, Iowa
Tape Number: 12-A
Interviewer's Name: Joe Hraba
For: Buxton Project, ISU

A. My goodness, these pictures here... at 75 of that same lady.

Q. Okay, we have some photographs, Marjorie, but first of all what is this information, the address ... you wanted to clarify a number of things.

A. Well, East 3rd Street.

Q. That's where you lived in Buxton?

A. Yes.

Q. What else?

A. And these dates that I was giving you, when I began to think about them, I got them mixed up. If I left you with the impression that I graduated from Washington High, I didn't. I was this rebellious child, I got out at the 11th grade. And married this college graduate because I was smart-alecky. But I shall say that I've spent all the years since then learning. So I married in, I was born in 1904. I married in 1920. I came to Waterloo in 1922, and then went on to Fort Dodge in 1926, lived there for eight years. Back to Cedar Rapids in '34, lived there until '51, and I've been here ever since '51. Now those dates are accurate. My birth, the year that I married, the year that I left, an 11th grade student, I was 16 years old in 1920. I came here in 1922, lived here until 1926, went to Fort Dodge, lived there until '34....

Q. How old was he when he left Buxton? Do you know?

A. 12, 1916.

Q. Well, bringing up up to date on our trip to Waterloo, we talked to Harold yesterday.

A. Did you get any good information?

Q. Yeah, he is a good informant. And then we talked to Clyde this morning, Clyde Wright. Also a good informant. I think this series of interviews has been about as good as we've had so far. This has been a good trip....

A. Some more Buxton people I wanted to show you. The pictures were not taken in Buxton, but we were born there.

Q. Are these of people who are now living in Waterloo?

A. No, Mr. Baker lived in Cedar Rapids. He was among those of us that ...

Q. What was his first name?

A. Lawrence Baker.

Q. Okay, Lawrence Baker. Lived in Cedar Rapids. Now dead?

A. He died two years ago. There's a cousin of mine, a brilliant cousin who was born in Buxton and died in California.

Q. What was his name?

A. Adolph Wilson.

Q. Adolph Wilson.

A. Now then here is Mr. Baker. He and I were born in the same year in the same town. Now I've told you about this husband of mine. There's my little brother.

Q. Does Mr. Baker's family still live in Cedar Rapids?

A. Ah, well his wife she wouldn't know nothing. He didn't marry this woman until thirty years ago. I told you about this husband of mine. Well, there is a picture of Mr. Brown when he was in his ... oh, his fifties. Then here's one that is just a little older. Portly, very dignified gentleman.

Q. This man here?

A. Yes. And then I have pictures of my cousins. As I say, I don't know whether I appreciate having me do this or not. Really and truly I don't. Because I'm having to face some terrible, utterly terrible things that happened. And I've had to put them in the back of my mind. This, ... I grew up in a family of beautiful women. I was the plain one. And that is one of them.

Q. Who is that?

A. That is my cousin Gail. She was born in Buxton.

Q. Nice looking woman.

A. She was a beautiful woman. The thing that I don't like that you're making me do is that she finally ... her husband died. She wasn't able to handle that ... she lost her health, she had rheumatoid arthritis. She began taking the arthritis pills and drinking. And I'll show you what that lady became. I'm so sorry for that, but things happen. She has died, and I'm glad because living was no longer easy for her. No longer an easy thing for her. She wasn't equipped to fight. She'd always been beautiful. She was the only girl of eight children. She'd always been petted. She married quite early and that marriage didn't work and she got out of it. And then that man handled her like she was a precious jewel. And one morning she went up to call him for breakfast and he was dead and she couldn't handle it. Well, somewhere in here there is ... while we're talking I'll find this picture. Because you have reminded me of so many things, so many plateaus and I don't know how to answer.

- Q. Why don't you pull these pictures out? And as you pass them to Marjorie, put a little number in the corner. Would you please?
- A. This is my Aunt Eva who was my music teacher. That I told you she used to play for the shows. The movie shows. And you were asking me about the social life there. And I remembered that we had the roller skating. Did Mr. Reasby tell you about that at the Y?
- Q. Ah, yes.
- A. Yeah, they had the roller skating and there were public dances. And then the young men had a social club that you went to their balls by invitation. And everybody that was anybody went to that ball. With a tailor made suit and some of the most beautiful gowns I ever saw. I just knew I would never live to get there. And I didn't, because it was all over by the time I grew up. I was in Buxton, I mean in Cedar Rapids.
- Q. That occurred ... that heyday, let's call it, around 1910?
- A. Oh, yes. That was a beautiful time, a beautiful time to be alive in Buxton. A beautiful time. Now let's see you have some pictures there?
- Q. Yes, well just
- A. Now this is my last year, you can see how I have gone. That was my last year working at _____ Hospital.
- Q. How long ago was this?
- A. '67. And then when I saw this picture. That was a plateau in my life. I still don't know what to do about it.
- Q. What was that?
- A. That's the first time I ever knew what a homosexual was. That boy I grew up with. One of the nicest people I ever knew in my life. The tall one. He was living in Cedar Rapids. And he gave me that picture because he said that he thought he could say things to me and I wouldn't say mean things back. I didn't. Because I didn't know what to say, and I still don't know what to say.
- Q. Who is the other person? Is it ...?
- A. It's another one of them.
- Q. Another transexual?
- A. Wallace Reed. The tall ones is
- Q. That's really interesting.

- A. ... I grew up with that boy and out of the family there were three other brothers that were utter outlaws, but because they were heterosexual they were accepted. And he was the one who took care of the mother, took care of the father, he was a perfect gentleman. But he was a homosexual. So if he were to ask me today, I wouldn't know what to say. Just that he was one of the nicest people I ever met.
- Q. Well, here, Marjorie, here is picture number one. Do you know who that is?
- A. No, is it a Gaines?
- Q. Well, we don't know. And if you're not sure, Marjorie, don't worry about it.
- A. I'm not going to say
- Q. And Jeri will just pass them on to you, and you can give them to me.
- A. I don't see as well as I used to. The strange thing about it is all of these faces all look sort of familiar. Sort of, shall we say familiar to me. Now if it's because of the way people used to dress and I'm acquainted with this type of dressing.... If I had to take a guess, and that's all I'm doing, I'd say that was a Wheels. But I don't know.
- Q. Is the second from the right on picture number three Wheels? What would be the first name?
- A. Oh, dear! I don't know. Dorothy, I think could tell you that. This all looks familiar. We had five room houses and six room houses. The five room houses were what we had. Two bedrooms upstairs and a living room, dining room, and kitchen downstairs. The people with larger families had the six room houses. And there were four rooms downstairs and two up. This is Buxton but I don't know where. Now that might be the water tower, but I can't tell you.
- Q. That's picture number four.
- A. It's Buxton. I mean I wouldn't think of it was being any other place. You wouldn't never have to tell me that this is a picture of Buxton. Because it would never occur to me that it was any other ... I, that's the only place I've ever seen that looked like that. Well, isn't this the Mount Zion Baptist Church?
- Q. Number five.
- A. Now the Fifth Street school, the last school I went to wasn't too far from there. I don't know.
- Q. Don't worry if you don't recognize
- A. I don't know what this is, what's this with the tile? _____ But I wasn't paying any attention to roofs at twelve years old. This one looks again like that Wheels. You know the second one you showed me. That still looks like as I remember a Wheels.

Q. W-H-E-E-L-S?

A. Just like a wheel on a ...

Q. Where did they relocate, Marjorie?

A. Des Moines, I think. I think Dorothy ought to be able to tell you....

Q. Okay.

A. Now do you notice in going through here... now we had the "Coal Miner's Daughter," the movie that's being made now, how those people lived so ... lived poorly, have you noticed how well dressed and all...

Q. Yes.

A. That these people are?

Q. You have no idea who this woman is in the picture?

A. No, no, I don't.

Q. Okay. That's number eight, might be a Wheels.

A. And every Sunday when you went to church, they dressed like that. That was no ... that was Sunday dress.

Q. Handsome.

A. And you see the mental caliber that shows through their expressions?

Q. Yeah.

A. How all of those people of that kind got together in that place, what caused it to be, I don't know. The fathers and mothers of school teachers and lawyers and politicians. How it happened in that place. It was just like magic, like they were picked up (laughs) and set there.

Q. That's a picture of the mines.

A. This is one of those weedy yards that you had such a hard time keeping the grass cut. You took that long scythe and put it through it. Trying to pull it through. I don't know _____ I just don't know. 70 years ago I probably would have recognized them.

Q. Uh-huh.

A. Oh, this is down in the mines. This is one of the drivers. These little creatures, when they retired them from service and brought thime out of the mine, they were blind.

Q. They were what?

A. Blind.

Q. Oh, that's right.

A. They were blind. But nobody killed them, like they kill things now.

Q. What did they do when they retired them?

A. Took them out to pasture. And that's another thing in making this remark that I made. People didn't kill things there was no abortion, they didn't kill animals. Nobody ... now then they did do one thing. If a female dog had a whole bunch of puppies, if a cat had a whole bunch of kittens, somebody would go and drown them. But you kept it to yourself, because people thought it was a horrible thing. There was such a high regard for life. (pause) A bird's eye view of Buxton from the south. And you see the great distance that's between houses. There was no such things as fire departments. Houses sat in hundred feet ... let's see, what did they tell me? It was a square thing, and I think going each way it was a hundred or a hundred and twenty feet. As a means of keeping a fire from spreading into the...

Q. Uh-huh.

A. And it was laid out well, can't you see the houses were laid out. Not in a jungle. Not nearly the jungle that Cedar This is a coal chute.

Q. Number 14.

A. Well, number 14 was the last coal mine out here. I was born in number 10. This is where my father was total engineer. Now after we left 14 we came to Buxton and he had charge of the machine shops.

Q. What is ... this is the coal chute where? Marjorie?

A. Well, out at the mines, because the mines, this ...

Q. Which mine?

A. Number 14.

Q. And it's also picture 14, isn't it?

A. This doesn't look so much like 14. And yet here are the tracks. Because the one in Buxton, there were no tracks close to it. The one that was in the center of Buxton, there were no tracks, there were roads. 'Cause we had streets. That's ... that looks like it's at a coal camp. Did Mr. Reasby know any of these pictures?

Q. We didn't show them to him. We're going to leave these photographs...

A. I wish you'd show them to him. Because as I say, he lived there five or six years longer than I, which makes a lot of difference in the growth of a youngster. Because where I left at twelve, possibly he left at seventeen, eighteen years old. Which would make a lot of difference. Because my remembrance has to be tunnel vision, sort of. What happened at my home and my church and my family and my ... because kids didn't wander around like they do now....if your parents let you. But these people are all familiar to me. There's nothing strange. That's Mr. Oliver!

Q. Which one?

A. Mr. Oliver!

Q. The second from the right?

A. Yes, he directed the choirs and choruses... that's Mr. Oliver!

Q. Picture fifteen.

A. Oh, if you had come here just six years ago...

Q. Don't worry about it.

A. My husband would have ... my husband was ... still, he died here five years ago. he was very frail. But even six years ago. He would know all of these people. But that's Mr. Oliver.

Q. The others are not recognizable?

A. No.

A. But that is Mr. Oliver, choir director, music director.

Q. Of what?

A. Of the church choir, the music choir...

Q. What church?

A. Ah, he was in the Methodist church, I think, where my mother was. I grew up a Methodist, I'm a Baptist now, but I grew up a Methodist.

Q. Which Methodist church was it?

A. St. John's. I think of the three churches I remember, there was St. John's Methodist and Mt. Zion.

Q. Baptist?

A. Baptist.

Q. The Swedes had a Methodist church too, didn't they?

A. They had a church and it was across the street from ours. It was a white church. So I assume it was a Swede church because there were mostly Swedes there. Of the white persuasion. And I don't remember it's name. I don't know who this child is, but she could have been _____ . This was one of the most amazing things! My father who was an engineer, was so utterly entranced with that fact there were machines like automobiles. But don't ask me people, because I'm afraid I just can't tell you.

Q. Looks like steam power, looks like they're boiling something.

A. And growing up, being a little girl with people like this...

Q. You were blessed.

A. Yes. And growing up with people like that.

Q. She's beautiful, too.

A. Yes. It was kind of startling to me to see black people let themselves go, because as I tell you, those, the money making gamblers, there were money makers, they weren't lower class people, they were money makers, and that's the way they made money. In starched overalls, starched shirts. And don't think they weren't lower class people there, because there were. But they kept to themselves, they weren't all mixed up like we are now.

Q. You don't remember these?

A. No. How could you possibly be just six or seven years too late. Because the people who knew all of these people were living then.

Q. Uh-huh.

A. They were living then. And Mr. Brown was living five years ago, six years ago he was himself. Remember I told you that people owned cows. They lived on farms. The little boys made their living taking the cows to pasture in the morning before they went to school, and going to get them in the evening. Bring them back.

Q. From the farmers nearby?

A. Well, there were pastures, just pastures. I don't remember it being just farms, it was pasture land. Peg-top pants.

Q. Who's this?

A. I was just looking at the clothes, the peg-top pants. And they almost would have to grease their heels to get them into the pants. Down at the bottom of the pants it was so awful tight.

Q. I used to wear peg-top pants when I was in high school.

A. Now this looks like it could have been what I told you about the social life. Our social life was church, it was lodge, it was family. And then these organized social clubs, like I tell you about the boys would have the ball, and people would come by invitation in long sweeping dresses. That I knew I'd never live to wear. It was true. And you can see that when we see the pretty women now, that's what we saw all our lives, that's the way they were. That's what we saw all our lives, that's the way they were. That's the kind of gowns they wore. And not necessarily photogenic, but what was inside showed out through. _____ I know that boy but I can't think of his name. But I know that ... _____
 Now this is a hard decision. These were the girls who were getting big enough to be getting invitations to the balls. They had passed the little missy stage and became young ladies. I'm not going to give you a name, but I think....

Q. Picture number 30.

A. _____
 I think. But please don't put it down positive. I think ... she was a tiny little black woman, and of course my people would run around with their fists balled up because they were just a day or two out of slavery. And they didn't want other people to discipline their children. And they'd come and tell their parents about them. And she allowed no discipline _____ She was a tiny little woman. Not only would she whip if you disobeyed, she would take you by your hand and take you home to your mother.

Q. Name...?

A. Blackburn. B-l-a-c-k-b-u-r-n.

Q. Where did she come from?

A. I don't know. I always knew her as Miss Blackburn. The principle of the Fifth Street school. Spats. How long has it been? We saw a picture of _____ in one of these groups.

Q. Don't recognize them, huh?

A. No. I just don't... This is just out in the brush somewhere. And this is ... this seems to me as I remember now there was this little stone building. Oh, dear, I don't even know whether I am saying it right. Because there was, had been all that money, gold and silver money, and they had to keep it some place. For paydays. And there seemed like there was a little stone building. Where that was kept. But again, don't quote me. _____ Unless that's the cemetery. If that is the cemetery, it would be a farm now. I have a mother and a father and three sisters Now this is the steps that we went up to get to the ... the sidewalks. If I'm looking in the right direction, that would be the company store, there is the sidewalk. Where did we come from?

- A. (cont'd.) We must have been coming from the post office and the Perkins Hotel and the station, coming up the hill and then coming to the stable. That should have been, if I am remembering. The butcher shop ... because I remember running up steps like that and getting to a complete sidewalk.
- Q. Uh-huh. _____
- A. This house, it has 16, 16 I don't know, but we were at 12 East 3rd Street. You insisted on me digging down and that come up from somewhere.
- A. I showed you my brothers They took pictures at that time ... they called them rompers, since...
- Q. This isn't numbered.
- A. I _____ that has nothing in the world... there's my little brother. He was wearing that romper suit. And when we go to looking for our heritage, there's three friends of mine from Nigeria. That is the kind of people we came from at one time. This boy went to school at UNI. And he was the oldest son of a ruling father and he should have taken over the rulership. But he could delegate it to the second brother who was a politician there, because he wanted to be a doctor. That little girl is a princess. All that jewelry there must be gold. Or precious stones. She cannot wear ornaments. And that was 1956. And I'm sorry that I'm ... _____ There's that depot. There's that Perkins Hotel.
- Q. Picture 43.
- A. Now some of the things that these ladies have on are coming back to me that I have forgotten. That was a _____ watch. It was pinned on there. It was in style like the wrist watches are now.
- Q. (JC) How could you see what time it was?
- A. I think it pulled out. Now this lady was entirely too ... look at her. _____ What is this here? This must have been after Buxton went to pieces, because I remember no foundations that they had superstructures on.
- Q. Let's skip over some of those pictures. Just number them and hand them to me because they're, it's just a waste of time, I think.
- A. This girl looks very familiar to me. In fact this guy looks familiar to me, but I wouldn't dare tell you positively. She looks like a little _____ girl. What was her real name? She had a nickname, everybody used to call her Piggy Wilson. Her face looks so familiar, because she had a beautiful daughter that looked almost exactly like her. Like her mother. Now they came to Cedar Rapids.
- Q. Picture 51. The name again?
- A. Wilson, and I'm trying to think what her real name was. Because we called her Piggy Wilson.

Q. Which one was she in the picture?

A. That one.

Q. Okay, the bottom left.

A. And if it was she, she was a crippled girl. I think she just died last year in Cedar Rapids. These are more recent pictures. These are more like the pictures of the ... these clothes are more like the clothes that the kids were wearing in the twenties. Then back when I was real little. I'm just terribly sorry that I can't _____ But now then, I would really suggest that you take these pictures to Dorothy. There's another lady that I ... I wonder if I can think of her name. It's probably ... The name that just come to my mind right away is Mrs. Ewing. But whether it is Mrs. Ewing or not, that

Q. Second right on the bottom picture 61.

A. I know that face. It seems to me that she _____ It's the first time I remember _____ Dorothy could tell you. She's got _____ still living in Des Moines, I think, _____ And then there was one older than she. But I think she still lives there. I think that is Mrs. Ewing. And if that is, certainly her daughter who is alive in Des Moines would recognize ... It's sort of amusing to notice the difference in styles now. How beautifully corseted the ladies were. Every line was to be smooth. Always great big _____ on the back of the _____. My goodness, to remember the way we were reared and how our children grew up. Running in the house _____ and I came flying into the house to have something to say to my mother. And she would be saying _____.

End of Tape 12-A -- Marjorie Brown