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*Joe*  
*audited*

Buxton Project: 424-2104  
 Narrator's Name: Oliver Burkett  
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 Interviewer's Name: Joseph Hraba

- Q. The 17<sup>th</sup> of November<sup>1980</sup> and this is Waterloo, Iowa. Oliver now I want to ask you some questions about your background. First of all, what is the date of your birth?
- A. 26th of April 1917.
- Q. 1917, where were you born? *b*
- A. In Buxton, Iowa.
- Q. Okay. Give me the names of your mother and father. *mother*
- A. My father ~~is~~ Henry Phillip and my ~~is~~ <sup>mother</sup> Mary Elizabeth.
- Q. Mary Elizabeth. Where'd they come from Oliver?
- A. My father came from Virginia, Charoletteville, Virginia. He left there when he was nine years old.
- Q. Did he come directly to Buxton?
- A. Not to Buxton. Buxton wasn't started at that time. That was in 1889 when he came, 1888 when he came to Iowa.
- Q. When did he leave Virginia?
- A. In 1888.
- Q. In 1888 and got to Iowa in 1889, the following year?
- A. Yeah.
- Q. Where did he go in interim there?
- A. That I don't remember.
- Q. You didn't talk about that huh?
- A. No.
- Q. How old was he when he left Virginia?
- A. 8
- Q. He was 8?
- A. Yeah.
- Q. So he was with his family.

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A. He was with his grandmother.

Q. His grandmother. Okay, did his grandmother come to Buxton?

A. Yeah. She didn't come to Buxton. She come to Iowa see Buxton still wasn't Buxton

Q. Where at in Iowa?

A. A place called <sup>Mutchakinok</sup> Mutchakinok.

Q. Mutchakinok. We've heard a lot about Mutchakinok.

A. That's where my two oldest brothers were born there, in Mutchakinok.

Q. With your grandmother and not his immediate parents that brought your father out?

A. No, his grandmother. He had some uncles that were already out here and his grandparents came out to live \_\_\_\_\_

Q. I understand. What about your mother, where did she come from?

A. She was born in Illinois.

Q. Where at in Illinois?

A. Metropolis.

Q. Were they coal miners her family then?

A. No.

Q. No. Okay then how did she come to <sup>Mutchakinok</sup> Mutchakinok?

A. She was born in like I say in Metropolis and raised in Chicago. Her mother and father had separated and her mother brought her here, brought her to Iowa and she finished school in Mutchakinok. ~~That's~~ as far as she went. ~~that is~~.

Q. Now they married in Mutchakinok?

A. They got married in Oskaloosa.

Q. In Oskaloosa, but they had been living in Mutchakinok?

A. Yeah, when they were kids there.

Q. What year was that Oliver.

A. They got married in 1900.

Q. In 1900?

A. Yeah.

Q. Your brothers and sisters, can you tell me their names and if you know, when they were born, birth order.

- A. First there was John, born in 1900, Lewis was born in 1904, Josephine born in 1906, Ruth born 1908, Clifford born in 1910 and Mary born in 1912, Phillip born in 1915, no Phillip was born in 1914 and William was born in 1916 and I was born in 17, just fourteen months between William and myself in age.
- Q. Are you the youngest, Oliver?
- A. No, I left my sister out. Doris was born in 1920 and Margie was born in 23. There was 11 kids 2 or 3 years span between the first and the last.
- Q. How many families left
- A. Very few. I remember my oldest brother, well he was married before I really remembered him. He was 17 years older than me.
- Q. How many of the brothers and sisters are still alive today?
- A. 1 brother and 4 sisters.
- Q. How long did the family live in Buxton, you say they, when did they move to Buxton from Mutchakinok, do you remember?
- A. 1903 undersend
- Q. 1903, how long did they stay, Oliver?
- A. Until 1923 they left Buxton.
- Q. What was the reason for leaving?
- A. The coal mine, coal ran out and they moved to another coal camp.
- Q. Which one?
- A. e dock Haydah.
- Q. How long did you stay in Haydah, e dock
- A. About 1929
- Q. Then where?
- A. Waterloo.
- Q. Okay, parents, did all the children come to Waterloo?
- A. No, my oldest brother he went to another coal camp. In 1927 they had a coal strike and the mine never did go back to work. My oldest brother he went to Waukee. That's in Dallas county. There was a coal camp there and so he went there to work. My brother Lewis went into the Army, and the rest of us come here.
- Q. Your father came here to work in Waterloo, I suspect?

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A. Yes.

Q. For whom did he work?

A. ~~Ralph~~  
Ralph Packing.

Q. Ralph Packing. Okay, so you spent a good part of your life down there, didn't you?

A. I was 12 years old when I come to Waterloo.

Okay, I'll see you Paul.

Q. Take it easy Paul. Okay, let's see, where were we? I think we got all the back-ground, Oliver let's go ahead, I want to ask you some questions now about work there in Buxton. Your dad I suppose was a miner?

A. Oh yes.

Q. Did your mother work outside the home?

A. No.

Q. Did she take in any boarders?

A. No. She had a house full of kids.

Q. That's right.

A. No room for nobody.

Q. What did your dad do in the mines?

A. He was a mule skinner

Q. He was?

A. Yeah.

Q. What was his wages, do you recall? Did he make pretty good money there?

A. Well I imagine you did call it good money at that time, \$5 a day I think.

Q. \$5 a day or so.

A. I remember they used to, papa would always have his gold money. He was paid off in gold. When I was young, we wouldn't nothing but kids always \$20 gold piece always go in his watch chain. That's what he would be paid.

Q. What was the work day there in the mines, how many hours they spent?

A. I don't know, really I don't.

Q. How many days a week?

A. 6

Q. They worked all day Sat. then off Sun.

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A. Yeah.

Q. Oliver, you remember any slack seasons there in the mine \_\_\_\_\_ the miners might work only a few hours a day or be off altogether?

*Strike* A. Off altogether, I remember that strike. That wasn't in Buxton though, that was in this next camp we moved to. That was in Haydah. *Haydah*

Q. There was a strike?

A. A strike yeah.

Q. And that was

A. In 1927.

Q. 1927.

*Path* A. And they never did go back to work. Papa fooled around there a year, he came to Waterloo in 1928 and got a job at ~~Ralph's~~ and we stayed down there another year before we moved here, before he sent and got us.

Q. Okay, so he stayed up here along? The rest of the family was down there, I see. What were the names of the mines in which your dad worked?

A. The last one he worked in would be #19. They just called them numbers.

Q. That's right.

A. That was the last one, would be 19. I don't know what that one they call in Buxton.

Q. But he did work in the mine out of Buxton?

A. Oh yeah.

Q. And then in Haydah? *Haydah*

A. Uh huh.

Q. Did any of the kids work there in the mines?

A. *Oh yea*

Q. Which ones?

A. John and Lewis.

Q. John and Lewis, what type, how old were they when they started?

*age* A. 16.

Q. Had to be 16.

A. They did but my old man started he was 12 when he went into the mines.

Q. Was your grandfather a union member?

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*yes*  
A. He knew John L. Lewis well.

Q. He did? Tell me about that, that's really *interesting*

A. I don't know nothing about it but he always was talking about John L. Lewis. He knew him well when he was in Mutchakinok in Mahaskie County, John L. Lewis was from Mahaskie County. Papa knew him well. He used to work in the pits John L. did.

Q. They spent \_\_\_\_\_ ~~what~~ boys and some young men together.

A. Yeah.

Q. About the same age, would they be about the same?

A. About the same yeah. Papa would have been 100 years old if he was living today. Yeah they were about the same age.

Q. I wonder if John L. would be that old. But they did know one another?

A. Yeah.

*how well did they know one another*  
Q. Did your father give you any indication, were they close to one another, ~~how close,~~ \_\_\_\_\_ for how long?

A. The way he started knowing him was see John L. was organizing those unions down there. He was a big union man. He was doing. I know my old man used to talk about how John L. was doing thing in the union.

Q. Was your dad ever an officer of the union?

A. No.

Q. Just

A. Just a member.

Q. Was he ever injured or taken ill because of mine?

A. No, but my 2 oldest brothers that worked in the mines, they both died of lung cancer. I don't know whether that was from black lung or not but they both died from lung cancer.

Q. Those men, the men of the family who did work in the mine, Oliver, what were their feelings, were they satisfied with the job or \_\_\_\_\_?

*that's all they knew*  
A. There ~~wouldn't~~ <sup>wasn't</sup> nothing ~~to say~~ <sup>else there</sup>. No other jobs you know, If I can recall it, you couldn't wait until they got 16 so they could quit school and go in the mines,

Q. Well tell me a little bit about \_\_\_\_\_ Let's go about it this way, you walk into, did you come through the front door most of the time?

*Co house*

A. No, we used the kitchen mostly.

Q. Okay, the kitchen was on the back <sup>or</sup> of the side

- 1360
- A. On the back.
- Q. What else on the house, was there a dining room?
- A. Yeah, there was a dining room. *Co. Linn*
- Q. And a living room?
- A. There was a living room and a kitchen downstairs.
- Q. Was there a bedroom downstairs, Oliver?
- A. No.
- Q. No bedroom downstairs at all?
- A. No.
- Q. Okay, what was upstairs?
- A. Two bedrooms.
- Q. Two bedrooms. Were there ever all 11 of you living in that one house?
- A. No, because when the last two were born my oldest brother had got married and left.
- Q. And so there were about 10 of you? What were the arrangements, how did you sleep?
- A. Very close, very close.
- Q. How was it done, did your mother and father take one bedroom?
- A. Yeah.
- Q. They did, were you kids in the other bedroom?
- A. Yeah, We had two beds in the other bedroom, the girls slept together and the boys slept together. I don't know, we did it, I don't know how but somehow we did it.
- Q. That'd be about 3 or 4 to a bed?
- A. Yeah at least that. I guess mama kept the youngest in the bed with her.
- Q. Downstairs, what about plumbing, was there any running water in the house?
- A. No.
- Q. No running water? *util*
- A. No, when I come to Waterloo I didn't know how to turn a faucet on, I didn't know what it was. 12 years old, I had never seen no plumbing.

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Q. So you had what, an outhouse out back?

A. Uh huh,

Q. Where'd you get your water?

A. We had pumps and wells located in different sections of the town. They never ~~lived~~ <sup>were</sup> too far from a ~~hole~~ <sup>home</sup>.

Q. Do you remember much about the house, how was it furnished Oliver, do you remember much about it?

A. You mean how was it furnished?

Q. Yeah, furniture, like we have here. Was there a dining room table and chairs?

A. We had a dining room table but we ~~didn't~~ <sup>had</sup> have no big round dining room table I remember.

Q. a wooden? <sup>one</sup>

A. Wooden, yeah. We had a leaves in it and we had every one in there that we had so all of us could get around it. I remember it, there wasn't no one <sup>one</sup> ~~eat~~ <sup>this time</sup> at this time or at that time we all sat down together. If we didn't sit down together we didn't eat. If we were late it was too bad we should have been there. They knew what time we were gonna eat and it was the same time every day.

Q. What were those times?

A. 5:00 ~~at~~ night, in the evening and 7:00 in the morning. if you over slept you just didn't eat that morning. Mama was that way, she was awfully strict. She never spared the rod at all. Thank God that she didn't.

Q. Were you and the other kids disciplined a lot by your mother and father?

A. Disappointed?

Q. No, disciplined,

A. Oh yes, my God yes. Not only by her, if we were at another person's house like the Beaman, we were awfully close together all our lives and if we were over there playing and done wrong, Ms. Beaman would whip us, send us home. And she told us to tell mama what she whipped us for, we told her, we'd get another whipping.

Q. Doesn't seem fair  
I bet she \_\_\_\_\_

A. That's the way it was and my mother would whip them if they were over to our house.

Q. Not much of that happens these days, does it Oliver?

A. Too bad it don't. It would stop a lot of what's going on. Let me tell you about my best friend down there in Haydah, it was a white boy.

Q. What's his name?

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- A. Robert Cooper. He was the best friend I had. Mama would be wondering where I was and if it got after 8:00 she didn't worry, she knew where I was. I was up there in that bed. His mother was the same way about him. He'd be down to my house. She wouldn't worry after 8:00 cause she knew he was in bed.
- Q. How far distance were you two homes?
- A. We lived across the street.
- Q. You were close neighbors Did you keep in touch with this Swede boy after?
- A. I did for a few years and then, up until the war. Then it changed a lot of things. He was on a farm then down I'd say about 4 or 5 miles outside of Haydah.
- Q. He was a farmer?
- A. Yeah. After the mines closed, his dad moved to the farm see and started farming.
- Q. How was the house heated there?
- A. Big pot bellied stove. stove
- Q. Where was it located? Dining room, living room?
- A. I think it was in the dining room.
- Q. Dining room?
- A. I think it was.
- Q. This was a company house, was it Oliver?
- A. Yes.
- Q. Okay, in the dining room. What kind of cook stove did you have?
- A. It was steel, iron cook stove, we burned coal in it.
- Q. Did you stoke from underneath and flame come up or just
- A. No.
- Q. How was it operated?
- A. It had lids on it. You take the lids off ~~and take the~~ off and start the fire and as the day go on you just keep adding coal, keep it going, it never did go out.
- Q. Where was the over located on the stove, on the side?
- A. Down on the side.
- Q. How about water. Was there a water tank connected to it
- A. Yeah there was a water tank on it too.

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- Q. You could heat water?
- A. Yeah. Kept that tank full of water. *until*
- Q. Did your mother use that as bath water?
- A. No. We used to keep our water on the stove, on top of the stove for baths.
- Q. When did she give you kids baths?
- A. Every Saturday night.
- Q. Every Saturday night huh?
- A. Yeah.
- Q. Once a week?
- A. Once a week.
- Q. Where, in the tub?
- A. Yeah, in the old steel tub.
- Q. That was in the kitchen I suppose?
- A. Yeah, right close to the fire. Those houses were awfully cold.
- Q. Do you remember it being cold in winter times in those homes? How did you keep warm?
- A. A lot of cover. A lot of cover and like I say we were awful close in the bed so body heat.
- Q. You'd go bed probably what about 8:30 or 9:00 at night or what?
- A. Yeah when we were kids we had to come in at <sup>8:30</sup> 9:00.
- Q. Did people wear sweaters while they were up and?
- A. Yeah
- Q. Well some of them, we might be going back a ways. How about lighting in the house, how was it illuminated in the house?
- A. Oil lamps.
- Q. Oil lamps?
- A. Yeah.
- Q. They were sat on tables?
- A. Yeah, you sat them on the tables and move them from place to place.
- Q. Do you remember any of the homes, including your own having telephones, Oliver?

- 1364
- ben*
- A. Oh yes, my grandmother, she had a telephone in <sup>place</sup>. We didn't have one.
- Q. Was it one of the crank kinds?
- A. Yeah, crank. *util*
- Q. Did any of the houses have electricity.
- A. I never seen no electricity.
- Q. But you do remember telephones?
- A. Yeah.
- Q. Okay, at your grandmother's house. Did any of those houses have basements, Oliver?
- A. No. They built a foundation and just sat it on top of that. *co house*
- Q. not bothering out ~~for~~ a basement huh? *to deg*
- A. No.
- Q. Is there anything else that comes to mind Oliver about the physical nature of the house? Did you have a garden?
- A. Oh yes, there was always
- Q. What sort of things did your parents put in the garden? *gardens*
- A. Well mostly vegesable, that's about it.
- Q. Were there any tuber crops <sup>like</sup> and potatoes?
- A. Oh yes, potatoes, beans, corn.
- Q. Squash?
- A. Squash.
- Q. Tomatoes?
- A. Yeah we had <sup>lot</sup> of tomatoes.
- Q. How big an area did you have in the garden Oliver, can you describe it in terms of square footage?
- A. I imagine they sat just about on an acre of land. Each one had about an acre.
- Q. Would it be what remained after the house would a lot of that be put into a garden by people?
- A. Yes.
- Q. So a good size garden?
- A. A good size garden. I know we all had to water, you know I mean all the kids and the old man. We used to have chickens. Sometimes we had a few hogs. *work in it*

Q. Did they have chickens and hogs right on the land there? Did you have any cattle, dairy farm?

A. No cows.

Q. No cows. Didn't do your own milk.

A. Well I tell you about the milk. I was so small when I started to school in Haydah. I think it was from malnutrition. I can't remember, there was hardly no milk in the house as a kid.

Q. Oh really.

A. And my school teacher, she was a white woman and she lived on a farm. She saw how small I was and every day she would bring me a quart of milk. Every morning she had a quart of milk for me, every day. I never will forget her.

Q. What was her name Oliver?

A. Mrs. Grimes, I don't know her first name.

Q. Mrs. Grimes?

A. Yeah.

Q. Ester Beaman had the same teacher?

A. Yeah.

Q. How about the churches there in Buxton. Do you remember the names of the churches and where they were located? In other words, do you remember your address? What street did you live on in Buxton, can't remember it?

A. I was 5 when we left there I'm sure.

Q. What about the churches.

A. I don't know nothing about the churches in Buxton.

Q. Did your parents, did they go to church regularly?

A. Oh yes.

Q. In Haydah?

A. Yeah.

Q. What was the name of the church there in Haydah they went to?

A. I don't know the name of it but it was a methodist church.

Q. It was a methodist church?

A. Yeah.

Q. How often did your parents go to church?

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- A. Every Sunday and we went to Sunday School every Sunday.
- Q. Did they go once or twice on Sundays?
- A. Once, mostly.
- Q. Did they do anything else, any other church activities in the course of the week?
- A. Well my old man was a good singer.
- Q. He was in the choir?
- A. Yeah, he was in the choir and a lot of times he would solo you know church. He was a good singer and when he came up here he used to.— As I say when we come here him and a lady from Buxton name Mrs. Hackett and her brother name Ulysses Price and a man name Leroy Sykes, they started an apt. they used to be on WLT radio, every Sunday morning.
- Q. Every Sunday morning, singing what, gospel songs?
- A. Gospel songs.
- Q. That's interesting. How long did that go on?
- A. It must have went on about 5 years.
- Q. I see. Did your folks belong to any lodges down there in Buxton and Haydah?
- A. I remember my old man talking about the Knights of Pythias and he was a Masonic.
- Q. What about your mother?
- A. Mama, she didn't have time to do nothing but raise us.
- Q. Bet she was a busy woman.
- A. She died an early death.
- Q. You remember the stores there in Buxton?
- A. I can vaguely remember going into the old company store but just vaguely. Like I said I was 5 years old.
- Q. What do you remember about it Oliver?
- A. I guess everything look large to you when you're a kid. I know it was the biggest thing I ever been in.
- Q. Did your mother do a lot of canning, preparing of foods in fall
- A. Every fall, you know after
- Q. How did she put it up, in glass jars or what?
- A. Glass jars.

Q. What things did she buy at the store that she didn't do at home? She make her own soap or did she buy it at the store?

A. She bought her soap.

Q. She bought her soap?

A. Soap and meat. Most of the food we ate she had canned.

Q. She canned vegetables, fruits?

A. Yeah.

Q. Did she can meats?

A. No, no meat.

Q. No meats?

A. No.

Q. How did you cure pork for instance, salt it down? Remember?

A. You mean the

Q. The hogs you slaughtered.

A. I don't know how they did it.

Q. Did you say she didn't buy meat at the store?

A. She bought meat at the store.

Q. Oh she bought meat at the store?

A. Uh huh.

Q. How about bread?

A. No she baked the bread all the time.

Q. From what you remember, could you tell me a typical day for your mom. You know I mean typical, something other than Sunday. What did she do? What time would get up and what did she start doing when she got up?

A. She got up about 5 in the morning and start getting my old man ready to go to work.

Q. By doing what?

A. Well cooking for him.

Q. She'd put breakfast on for all of you, the whole family, right?

A. The whole family, uh huh.

*handwritten mark*

*handwritten signature*

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Q. From 5 and you ate at 7?

A. We ate at 7.

Q. What was breakfast like, what was a normal breakfast?

A. Well I know we had biscuits every morning.

Q. fresh biscuits every morning?

A. Biscuits every morning and ~~b~~acon and eggs most of the time. Sometimes she would just fry a big skillet of potatoes and some eggs on the side. We never went hungry a day, I don't remember a hungry day in my life. Always had plenty food.

Q. Always had plenty of food down there?

A. Yeah.

Q. After she got breakfast on, what'd she do then?

A. Clean up.

Q. Clean up from that, obviously.

A. Clean up and start getting the kids ready for school. I remember a many times, there was just bare floors, bare wooden floors and she on her knee a many times scrubbing those floors with a brush.

Q. Did the house kind of get dirty a lot with the dust blowing in?

A. Yeah. Those houses

Q. So women must have had to work pretty hard to keep them clean?

A. ~~slave~~ slave ~~for~~ for a woman.

Q. Now the kids at school Oliver, would they eat lunch at school or come home for lunch?

A. No, we had to come home.

Q. Okay, so she put on lunch?

A. Yeah.

Q. What do you remember lunches being?

A. Mostly jelly and butter sandwiches

Q. And butter sandwich huh?

A. Yeah, and back to school.

Q. And back to school. And then you'd come home about what, a little after 3:00 in the afternoons.

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A. It'd be about 3:30.

Q. Did you have chores to do then at that time?

A. Uh huh. Like I say the stoves we had to bring in enough coal from the coal house for night to keep the fire **running**, burning through the night. We had to bring in kindling, that's what we called it, to start a fire in the kitchen stove. We let the kitchen stove go out at night but in the morning one of the oldest boys would get up and start that fire and have it hot when mama got up.

Q. What was supper? Suppers were at 5:00? What sort of foods they had for suppers?

A. Well I remember we just about had some potatoes in some form everyday.

Q. How would potatoes be fixed, fried most of the time?

A. No, boiled, sometimes mashed. We had potatoes at least once a day. She'd open some green beans that she'd canned and corn. A pretty balanced diet.

Q. Okay, bread for supper?

A. She made that,

Q. What kind of meat did you usually eat at suppertime?

A. Well be either pork or beef.

Q. Pork or beef?

A. Uh huh.

Q. A lots of chicken?

A. Quite a little chicken then.

Q. How about on holidays, what was food like on holidays for example, Thanksgiving, Christmas?

A. About the same as it is now, turkeys, fruits.

Q. Remember much about school there? Well you went to school in Haydah?

A. Yeah.

Q. What was school like?

A. School was real good. I know when I come here I was in the 7th grade and the things they were teaching here, I'd already had. I knew everything that they taught here. I mean it was that much further advanced than it was here.

Q. What do you remember, what are some of the things that you were taught there, what was it, Haydah School?

A. Yeah.

Q. Arithmetic?

A. Yeah.

Q. History?

Village Blacksmith

A. History, Geography, English, and remember we had to memorize a lot of things in those days in English, poems you know like the                      I memorized those poems, I still know them. They never left my mind.

Q. I remember those days too Oliver. Not much of that stuff is going on.

A. I remember too, we had to go to a blank map of the United States and point, not blank, it was a blank map. It was just the United States and the states

Q. You had to outline those states?

A. Yeah outline the states and we had to point the states out and tell the capitol of each one. That's another thing I never have forgotten. And the foreign countries then we had to memorize those just like we did the United States and capitols of those. They don't teach geography like that no more.

Q. I suspect you're right. What about classes there, Oliver. What was about the balance of the races? Were there more blacks than whites or more whites than blacks?

A. No, more blacks than whites.

Q. More blacks than whites? Both in Buxton and Haydah?

A. Yeah.

Q. Was that true of the communities? Were there more blacks than whites?

A. More blacks than whites.

Q. What percentage do you sort of remember there?

A. I would say maybe white was about 35 or 30 percent.

Q. In your classes there was about a third of the kids were white kids, Oliver something like that?

A. A third was white, huh huh.

Q. I know we talked about this but let me ask you again this. How did black and white kids get along together at school?

A. Real well. There wasn't a lot of friction at all. When I come here it was just like going to a foreign country.

Q. Really, tell me about it.

A. Like I say, the black was dominant there, I mean in population and we come here. I went to Grant School, it's right up here on mobile Street and many times I was the only black one in my room. Yeah, see that's been 51 years ago and there wasn't very many black people here.

Q. When did most of the black people move to Waterloo, when was that?

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A. Most of them come right after the war.

Q. After World War II?

A. Uh huh. I remember <sup>when I went into army</sup> in 1941, I knew every black person in Waterloo, by name, you know just knew everybody.

Q. How many people would that have been Oliver that were \_\_\_\_\_ time, a few hundred black people?

A. When I come here?

Q. From that time, when you came till World War II, just a few hundred here?

A. Yeah.

Q. Most of them had come from where?

A. Most of them came from Mississippi.

Q. There were a lot of Mississippi blacks at that time here?

A. There still is. The black part, they dominate the population, most of them are from the south.

Q. Did you find a difference between yourself and the other people from Mississippi?

A. \_\_\_\_\_

Q. What were the differences, Oliver?

A. I don't know, they just act different than we did, I don't know.

Q. What were some of the differences? Can you give me an example?

A. Well back then they would act like they were scared of white people. Most people from down there would. They act like they were scared of white people \_\_\_\_\_ just like I said stayed at that kid's house and he stayed at mine's and I've been doing that all my life. Then when I started to school here a lot of times I was the only black in my room in Waterloo, especially in high school after I got out of grade school. It was just that few of us going to school, black kids. <sup>always hated</sup> It was a good school district. <sub>good here in school</sub>

Q. How far did you go in school here in Waterloo, Oliver?

A. I went through the 11th grade.

Q. 11th grade.

A. I was in the 12th grade when I quit. \_\_\_\_\_

Q. Did you quit to go to work or what?

A. To go to work.

Q. Back down to <sup>o ock</sup> Haydah and Buxton, do you remember the races being segregated? Were

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Q. they segregated in housing, for example was houses segregated?

A. No.

Q. That wasn't the case there?

A. No you find a black one here or maybe two blacks in a row and two whites right next to them and just so on and so forth. They lived together.

Q. Did black and white people mix socially down there?

A. Yeah. There were a lot of interracial marriages down there.

Q. There were?

A. Yeah.

Q. Remember the people involved in those?

A. I remember some of them.

Q. Remember their names?

A. Well there was Charlie King, he was a black man, he married a white woman. Hope Armstrong, he was a black man and he married a white woman. George Morrison, he was married to a white woman. There were a lot of others that I don't remember their names but those I do remember.

Q. Did your family have friends in on occasions? Can you describe that to me, how did that go?

A. That's the reason I say when I first come here it was so strange to me because this kid's mother that I grew up with, well she'd come to our house, her and her husband and eat with my people and our people would go to their house. I was just use to that and I come here and these people act like they were afraid of white people.

Q. Some of the people that were close family friends were white people?

A. Yeah.

Q. What were their names?

A. Well this special one, Cooper.

Q. Cooper you you mentioned.

A. My oldest brother, I remember him, he didn't run with nobody but, like my oldest brother quite a bit older than me, he run with just kid, but I stayed with all kind. He run with his uncle all the time. My oldest brother very seldom run with another black man, he was always with this white boy,

Q. What was the boy's name?

A. He was a Cooper too.

Q. Cooper too.

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- A. Jess Cooper. And they were both good ball players, my brother and Jess. His name was Jess Cooper. That's where the rivalry came in. They did have a big rivalry for baseball down there. The white had a good team and we had a good team.
- Q. What was the name of the white team?
- A. They called them the Ready Roll~~er~~
- Q. The Red Rose?
- A. The Ready Roll~~er~~.
- Q. Red Rose?
- A. The Ready Roll~~er~~, like ready roll cigarette. I think that's where they got the name.
- Q. There was a cigarette by the name of Ready Rose<sup>lls</sup>?
- A. When the cigarette first got popular they started calling them Ready Rose<sup>lls</sup> you know. Everybody used to roll their own.
- Q. Called Ready Rolls, yeah.
- A. Yeah, that's what they called them, the white team and we were called the Buxton Wonders. They had a rivalry there. They were two good ball teams.
- Q. The Ready Rolls, huh. When they would play the Buxton Wonders, would the Wonders more often win than the Ready Rolls?
- A. Oh yes.
- Q. They were better, they were a better team?
- A. They had some awfully good ball players. Then sometimes when these big traveling black teams from a city would come through there and play our boys, our team and the white team would get together you know to play this traveling team. The best from each team you know would get together to play those traveling teams.
- Q. What else do you remember of the fun times there in Buxton? Did you ever go to the YMCA?
- A. No.
- Q. You don't remember that? How about dances or picnics and other social gatherings or celebrations. What do you remember about those?
- A. ~~Together mix~~ in that, white and black together.

*there was a lot of togetherness*

## Side Two

- Q. Okay, let's see. You say that, how about your own family now Oliver, how did they entertain themselves? Did they have people in or did they go with other people to someplace like a dance?
- A. Yeah the oldest ones they always went out you know. Ain't no telling when they would come home. My father just \_\_\_\_\_
- Q. What did you do as a boy down there fun at Haydah and Buxton?
- A. Go swimming, <sup>when we</sup> ~~shouldn't~~ get beat when we got home but we still went. We had quite a way to go too. We had to go through a pasture and they had a bull out in that pasture. A bull run us one day and we just did make it to the fence, to get over that fence. From then on we started to walking right on the edge of the fence so we could, wouldn't have far to go. Well most of it was just kid games, you know how kids are.
- Q. What games did you play that stands out?
- A. Well it wouldn't too many different games going on in them days, Marbles was about the biggest thing I guess.
- Q. I remember that.
- A. We used to fly kites together and all that.
- Q. Did you play hide and seek?
- A. Oh yes.
- Q. How about kick the can or something like that? You know what I'm talking about?
- A. No I don't.
- Q. Where you had to run in and kick something over that was a base and then everybody was free again?
- A. No.
- Q. Don't even remember anything like that?
- A. No. Hide and seek like that.
- Q. We were talking when Paul was here a little bit about this. How were black people treated in the towns that surrounded the coal camps, like in Albia. Were they treated well or poor. Do you have any remembrance about that?
- A. I don't have no remembrance of that.
- Q. Did you often go to the ball games there in Buxton?
- A. Oh yeah. In <sup>the</sup> Haydah I mean. I used to travel with the team, well part of the team cause it was from all the towns surrounding, we used to go to.
- Q. When your dad would come home from work, did he do much in the house to help your mom? What would he do when he got home from work at night?

- A. As a rule he didn't do too much of anything because when I got up to the age when I could remember anything they had so many disabilities it was the two oldest girls that I seen. *family robot*
- Q. That helped your mom?
- A. Yeah. He was pretty tired I imagine too. I remember how hard it was for us to get that coal dirt off him. They didn't have no showers in the mines. He'd have to bathe in that tub every night.
- Q. You kids would scrub him down?
- A. Scrub him down. *Ranther*
- Q. With what?
- A. <sup>Strong</sup> Soap, I don't know exactly what kind.
- Q. With a scrub brush?
- A. No just with a cloth. But it took a lot of rubbing to get him clean.
- Q. What time would he get home, Oliver?
- A. He usually got home about 4:30 I guess.
- Q. 4:30. Would he wash before dinner or after?
- A. Oh yea, before.
- Q. Okay, so that was one of your chores to wash him down before dinner?
- A. Yeah, we thought we were doing something great. Us boys thought <sup>he</sup> it was the greatest thing in the world anyway. Yeah me and my brother would squabble to see which one would do it.
- Q. I think we've already talked about the food that was served at the house. How about, did your parents had conversations with you kids about the ways they thought you should live? Teaching you things that you might call values of life, what to do in life and the meaning of life?
- A. They didn't give me any of that kind of talk. I guess I wasn't old enough to have it, not down there.
- Q. Not down there?
- A. No.
- Q. ~~But~~ what about when you were up here, when you got older? What were some of the things that they told you, Oliver?
- A. Told me who I shouldn't associate with and you know what I should stay away from. Always a bad element in a town.
- Q. Remember there being kind of bad parts of Buxton and Haydah? Don't remember it?
- A. I've heard papa talk about Buxton so many times about it seems like every pay day somebody got killed. In that little book there they said it was the toughest town

- A. east of Dodge City. That little book tell you that. They say it was awful, I mean you know on pay day night, people get drunk. About every pay day somebody got killed. That was every two weeks they got paid.
- Q. Your dad remembers<sup>ed</sup> that?
- A. Oh yeah.
- Q. Did he ever say anything about, like some homes down at Sharp. End the people went in there and drank. We've heard stories about gambling. We also heard stories about prostitutes. Have you heard anything about?
- A. I've heard talk about it. Certain sections there they say it was really a red light district. They'd bring women in from Chicago and every place.
- Q. What section is this, Oliver that you remember?
- A. I don't know.
- Q. You don't know?
- A. No, not the section. But it was a lot of that going on.
- Q. But you do that there was some conception<sup>section</sup> of a red light district in Buxton?
- A. Yeah, heard talk of it.
- Q. Do you have any relatives buried in the Buxton cemetery?
- A. My grandmother.
- Q. What's her name, Oliver?
- A. Her name was Maggie Burkett.
- Q. Maggie Burkett, so it's your father's?
- A. Yeah.
- Q. The grandmother who brought your father to Iowa? She's buried down there?
- A. Yeah.
- Q. Do you have any photographs of Buxton, of the family in Buxton and Haydah? No, nothing like that? One last thing Oliver, when the family, especially when your folks were still alive and when some of the brothers who had, who would have had memory of Buxton, they were older, when they talk'd about Buxton was there a fondness for the place?
- A. Just like I said, it was the greatest place in the world the way they described it.
- Q. Why was that, did they ever?
- A. I guess it was just, I don't know. Seems like everything gelled there. It was never no racial tenstion or nothing over there.
- Q. They found that up here for instance?

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A. Yeah, they found that up here bad. 50 years ago is a long time. A lot of things happened in 50 years.

Q. What were things like when they moved here between the races?

A. Well there wasn't no place downtown we could go and eat. We'd go to the theater we had to sit in the balcony.

Q. That was never true in Buxton, was it?

A. Even when I went to East High they didn't allow the black kids to go into  
swimming pools

Q. Really?

A. Uh huh.

Q. You could not swim?

A. We couldn't go to the Y here.

Q. That must have been a shock for you?

A. It was. Like I say it was just like coming to a foreign country. I didn't know anything like that existed you know. Didn't know people were that way.

Q. The people coming from Mississippi, they were exposed to worst conditions?

A. They knew about it you know. Much worst down there. But I guess it was, look like heaven to them when they got here.

Q. Was there anything more about Buxton and <sup>Haydah</sup> Haydah? The story of how those two places. Have I passed over anything that you'd like to talk about, tell me about, Oliver.

A. Covered just about everything pretty well I think.

Q. Was there ever any any offense or incidences that you remember that stand out in your mind of the things that happened down there?

A. Things like when someone would get killed in the mines and things stand out.

Q. What would happen when someone would get killed in the mines?

A. When there was a big accident the whistle would start blowing and the grown ups they knew something had happened at the mines. They didn't know whether it was serious. I can remember my oldest brother took me down and we'd be standing around waiting to see who they were going to bring up you know.

Q. Anything else?

A. No.