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Buxton Project: 424-2104  
Narrator's Name: Valetta Fields  
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Place of Interview: Waterloo, Iowa  
Interviewers' Names: Elmer and Dorothy Schwieder

*audited  
2/15/82  
JH*

Q. \*Principal

A. Is that so?

Q. \*And if I come across that again I'll make a xerox copy of that and send that to you. I'm just sure I did in one it listed her as a teacher the first time around and I'm just certain it listed her as a principal the second time around.

A. Well I have found and I think I showed it to Elnora a copy of a negro newspaper where I said they sure blow you up you know some of them in their articles you know some of it they make it sound a little different from what it really was but it's alright with me if she was a principal but of course I know I never heard it at home but she taught there for a long time.

Q. \*One questinn I wanted to ask you about your mother. How did she manage back in those days when women had so much housework to do, when women had to keep a garden, they had to can, they had to fix chickens, can chickens or whatever and housekeeping was so hard, how did your mother manage to work full-time outside the home, raise two children and get all the work done at home. Did she have a hired girl or did she do it all herself?

A. I never remembered any regular hired girl but I remembered people helping us at different times but you know it's amazing I can't explain how she did it but I can show you some of her linen they starched all their linen.

Q. \*And they had tablecloths and napkins, dresser scarfs.

A. Yes, a lot of crochet work they did themselves, hand work they did and she even took in sewing for a while and she made *MADE*

Q. \*Your clothes, when she was teaching she also took in

A. Well she didn't go to, she didn't start teaching right away, not till we went over in Buxton and so I don't remember.

Q. \*But it seems like she must have been a very busy person.

A. Well and they did things the hard way. They had to heat the iron on the stove, they didn't have electric irons.

Q. \*You know what they call those irons?

A. What?

Q. *sub iron*

A. *sub iron* iron and we had that and I don't know how she did it all and she had outside activities you know she'd go places and I know a lots of times I'd want to go and I couldn't go and we were always glad though when dad stayed home with us he always

*mother  
work*

A. had a game or something he'd play with us you know, he took more time with us than she did.

Q. \*Was she active in lodge activities?

A. Yeah, we had the Eastern Star wasn't born then it was called the Court, she went to lodge and she was active in church work and Sunday School and you know we never missed any kind of a meeting at church you know and revival or whatever and we'd go through the snow to practice for Christmas programs and to go to Christmas programs, and think nothing of it you know.

Q. \*How would you get through the snow, would somebody scoop the snow off the streets or would you just have to walk, you walked through?

A. You piled through it and made your own path for the most part.

Q. \*No matter how deep it was?

A. Yes and thought nothing of it.

Q. \*I suppose that was the only way to get there.

A. It brings back a lot of memories you know that I had really kind of forgotten and so we were into it and of course I remember my mother went away to a grand lodge meeting one time, she had somebody stay with us you know. I forget where they met and I think it was one of those meetings that she overheard somebody being called Valetta and she had never heard of anybody else by that name at that time.

Q. \*Oh yeah I'm fine

A. Can't think of anything else interesting.

Q. \*You made the comment last week when we were talking that you felt that your parents somehow wanted things to be better for you, they had I can't remember the exact term that you used but they hoped that you would do well and to really succeed and do you think that that was

A. Motivating force or something.

Q. Yeah.

A. The atmosphere I lived in, that was the atmosphere I lived in, it was expected of you.

Q. \*But just in your own home or do you think, I guess what I'm really wondering is do you think that motivation or that atmosphere was in every home in Buxton or do you think your home was something of an exception?

A. Well I guess that's the way it is every place, every home is not the same and doesn't have the same model. I just don't know that, I don't know hardly how to say it, hardly know how to say it that I suppose they all didn't go on through school and you know they didn't all go ahead and do something but we just felt like it was expected of us and thought nothing of it you know, made no bones of it. What we did

- A. which was nothing extra but anyhow it was just the way it was.
- Q. \*Well you certainly did well as far as finishing your education and everything.
- A. Yeah it was, and a funny thing, this high school principal with whom I lived with, a woman of course, and it was Mae Goodlow and there were two or three other women there, a Latin teacher you know we used to call them old maids and then Sister Ella who was a grade school teacher and then there was
- Q. \*Was she a Catholic sister or did you just call her sister?
- A. No, it was Ms. Goodlow's sister.
- Q. \*Oh uh huh.
- A. And then there was a ~~sister-in-law~~, a widowed sister-in-law that lived there who wore her ~~widowed~~ <sup>widow's</sup> weeds forever you know as long as I could remember.
- Q. \*You call these widows
- A. Widow's weeds. The mourning, the clothing then they call them weeds.
- Q. \*Oh I never heard that term.
- A. Yeah, and she went most of the days that I can remember she went to the cemetery you know to visit that husband's grave and so Ms. Goodlow was quite a girl and she \_\_\_\_\_ and she wanted me to go to take kindergarden training you know and I felt like I wanted to get from out from under her supervision so I didn't do that but I don't know whether it was Ames, whether they had kindergarden training in Ames or not but it seems like it was, someplace she had in mind for me but she was quite a person, quite a person and I appreciate it and I know she had a boy, Rufus Jackson who did chores for her, a negro boy and I was to get Rufus to kill a chicken. She raised some chickens out there in the back, right across from where the courthouse is now. There's no residence there now, something else is there now and I went through the courthouse many times, the capital I mean, the Capital many times to go, the old East High was down on 12th and Court then, part of the time and then it moved up on Walker street and so the school board wouldn't move us so she undertook to get the students to move furniture and we went to a new school on Walker Street see. But anyway Rufus was to kill this chicken that day and I let Rufus get away without killing the chicken and I killed my first chicken that day cause I didnt want her to come back and that chicken not be nicely killed.
- Q. \*How did you do, did you have a terrible time?
- A. I had a time ringing that neck and then of course I had to pick it too, that was gonna be my job picking it but not killing it.
- Q. \*That's the store in <sup>Mutch</sup> Muteha.
- A. That's <sup>Mutchak</sup> Mutchakonak.
- Q. \*Yeah, I better. Let's see now these we've got so I'll make sure, put these over here so we don't get them. Do you remember, is that the company store?
- A. Yeah that was the company store and some of those same fellows were when they transferred to <sup>Mutchak</sup> Mutchakonak worked in the store too and I think I told you my father was manager of the hardware department but I think he just worked in there if he was manager I didn't know it.

Q. \*Oh you think he just, he worked in the hardware?

A. Yeah hardware department, I was telling Elnora he was a great of, as mama says great fixer of sewing machines and things like that too that he could do most any time.

Q. \*Oh and you were going to tell me too about when you went to work in the Y.

A. Oh yeah, uh huh that was here at, my mother lived with us 16 years all told and five of those years were after my husband passed away and when she died why I went, of course I was already on the board.

Q. \*On the YWCA Board?

A. YWCA Board uh huh and I had worked on committees and so I knew the director of the office, she had been secretary to the Dean and Women at Iowa City, Dean \_\_\_\_\_ and she said to me

Q. \*Quite a name isn't it?

A. Yeah, she said to me one day Valetta you might as well come on and work in the office and they knew I was beginning to need some work and I have credited some of that to Carl Newbower who had a confectionary down here in the neighborhood not too far down were we used to pay our gas bill and after my husband died and I \_\_\_\_\_ to be paying the bills and I'd go and one day I went I said Carl I got to have a job and it wasn't too long before this came up you know. Ms. Kirkpatrick had me to and she said it's contrary to the rule if you're on the board you know you don't work for the Y but they evidently broke the rule then and it was agreeable with even the board or it wouldn't have been done you know because they could have disagreed and I stayed there 20 years and so come 76, February 76 until I mean 56 until 76 and when I got all of a sudden the feeling that I had enough and didn't know what I was gonna do. Still I knew I would have to earn something and this program with Action, Government program Action, spearheaded by Hawkeye Tech administered by Hawkeye Tech why I went right into training for that and they paid you even though you're being trained. Forty-eight hours of training.

Q. \*And you say this was in 76?

A. Early in 76. And that was the end of my Y career see and so and they paid, of course it paid a little less than the minimum wage but they paid you even while you're being trained and I did that about 3 years until about a year and a half or two years ago see and my supervisor still has a keen interest in me. I had known her as a Y Director for a while and so we had been to Boxton together on a national meetings and I rode in her car with her and her husband and she sees to it that you see everything on the way you know, even anywhere around coming back and \_\_\_\_\_ good sport. And so she's the one that has this program for Hawkeye Tech. She's a supervisor I guess that's the word. And we're still in touch. She has a keen interest in me even now and I told her that I was gonna if I got myself together I was gonna try to get work with this committee for senior employment for people over 60 at the office downtown. It's run by school teachers too and I find it's government connected too but I mentioned it to Barbara and she said well we'd hoped that you could come back to the program see so I may get back in that. It isn't strenuous you know it's just getting up and getting to it everyday and keeping somebody company and doing little things for them and the biggest part is getting up and getting ready and I still find myself kind of getting ready when I get up in mornings and

- A. getting the dishes washed and getting the bed made and stuff like that.
- Q. \*Getting ready to go.
- A. So she scheduled a complete physical for me last week. Which you have to have every week, every year in that program and I don't know how it came out.
- Q. \*Oh have you had it yet then?
- A. Yeah I've had it and then they told me I should see my eye doctor which I did and that was \$32 and I still got to go to the dentist, I don't know what that'll be but anyway I don't have glaucoma but I knew I had the CATARACTS and you know they develop slowly and so I was concerned about glaucoma and he said if I wanted new lenses, he couldn't change my lenses but if I wanted different style glasses he could give me a prescription see but I wasn't going into that you know. That aint my long snit. My husband always wanted to keep up with fads in glasses but I reminded him we couldn't afford it but he did it anyway. So it's a long story and sometimes it kind of surprises me when I get to talking about it.
- Q. \*Could you enlarge a little more on what you did at the Y.
- A. Well I was not a bookkeeper and I was not a stenographer, I was there selling memberships and enrolling them for classes. They had classes for teenagers and classes for children and classes for women. Women classes and different classes like that and taking membership fees and keeping that cash register straight.
- Q. \*Was that a full time job then that you had or a part time?
- A. Well I guess it was called kind of a full-time job but it got to part-time toward and the hours got sort of ridiculous toward the last and I had to go in seem like nine in the evening and work till 11 and then things go kind of dangerous around here you know and then there were times when I went in late, Elnora used to take me to work on some Sunday afternoons about 2:00 and I worked until about 9 see and that kind of thing. And well it was getting a little bothersome to me and my age and all of that but I never had any trouble coming home or coming in the house or anybody to bother me and my nephew got me a German Shepherd and he said Aunt Va I don't know whether to get you a gun or a dog and he knew how things were getting for people living alone see and then they're worst now. So he called me one day and said he was sending this German Shepherd by air express and he was the cutest thing and I raised him of course and he had everything a child would have. Bill financed it, he sent me money every month.
- Q. \*To take care of the dog?
- A. To take care of the dog and for Vet bills and everything.
- Q. \*This would be your brother's son?
- A. My brother's son yeah.
- Q. \*That lives in Chicago?
- A. Yeah the doc, that's his picture over there.

- Q. \*I remember you telling us about him last week.
- A. He's graying now you know you hate to see them getting older but it's happening to them too. Him and his sister is a Social Worker and she said Aunt Va I'm tired of working, I'm gonna quit, I'm gonna quit I said why not retire. The last time I talked with her long distance she said I'm working on it you know and I said one thing when you quit working your little money goes awful fast and nothing coming in and I realize that you know even from the senior companion work. But I have been blessed to get along and Bill he wouldn't see me suffer but you don't want \_\_\_\_\_ like you want to cope you know how that is.
- Q. \*Yeah, take care of your own if you can.
- A. Yeah. He and my cousin have even sent me money to do some repair on my roof and the times and different things like that. But when I had the dog, I guess I called him snoopy. He should have had a real name you know a fancy name but he didn't get it. And I said he's not gonna stay, I gotta have a dog fence and I got a dog run fence at Cedar Falls fence and they put it up and I was gonna keep gravel on the ground and I called Bill I said he's not gonna stay in there, he's gonna dig his way out and I gotta have that cemented and he sent me money to have that - and he has never gripped about any of it, I think about it and I feel real guilty sometimes you know and how he's given in to my wants.
- Q. \*Well but I'm sure he looked at it in a very different way, those were ways he could help you.
- A. I'm sure and he was interested or he wouldn't have mentioned the gun and the dog. He knew that I needed something here and I had roomers at different times.
- Q. \*How long did you have your dog then?
- A. Well I don't know, I think I had him about 4 or 5 years. I was beginning to feel I had to go to the hospital, I was thinking I had colitis or something I still have problems but anyway I knew I had to get him out while I could help get him out. He was a watch dog.
- Q. \*He really was a watch dog?
- A. Yeah, he was a watchdog. And when I come home from work at 9:00 he was waiting for me to take him walking you know and I thought nothing about walking.
- Q. \*I'll bet you didn't worry at all about going out with him.
- A. No, I didn't and I think now I would leave the garage door open and the kitchen door open when he got a loose one time. I kept him in the basement and I had that open. I've got a door from the basement into the garage and then I had a hole made in the garage wall for him to go out and to run, so he had a freedom of space to run and so I would even leave the door open and everything so when he came in he could come on in and I wouldn't do that now for anything. He'd just come on in and go on downstairs, never say anything. But I wasn't afraid with him, things weren't even that bad now but Bill's wife said that she could hardly get along with him after I got rid of that dog. He liked the dog and snoopy never resented Bill at all see, he never resented him and he loved to take him walking when he would come and he felt

- A. they always had a dog as a child you know and they couldn't have it on the 12th floor in Chicago and he enjoyed a dog. But I have that to live down not yet you know and it kind of worries me and I wonder about Snooky, how he's doing and how many children he's got and everything and he was just like one of the family. Isn't that funny.
- Q. \*I know we had a dog too, we had a beagle dog for many many years and we were just foolish the way we acted over that dog, I mean just foolish.
- A. Well I used to try to take him downstairs and feed him, I quit that of course. I had his food down there one day and walking down there and he jumped out of my hand and hit that paving basement and hit himself back here and weeped and he ate and he weeped, and I had never had any contact with that up until that time and I called Mr. Winegarden and I said my dog had jumped out of my hands and he is fallen on his back sides and hurt himself and I said I may have to bring him in and he said well put hot applications on his backsides and he said I may have to take a picture you know but he didn't have to take a picture and so I went to the Vet I said I didn't know hardly which hip to put it on, he said I'll put it across the whole back sides, of course I did and he was just like a baby you know. She's got one, she brought from Kansas City, it was her sister's dog and she sees what it's all about.
- Q. \*Let's see maybe I better
- A. I wanted to show you my dad and my uncle on here. This was my dad here and my uncle back there. And this was their father and they told me he was a hunchback. My mother told me grandpa was, see how short he is.
- Q. \*Yeah, he's so short isn't he?
- A. Yeah and I found that, mother told that. Some things I wouldn't know \_\_\_\_ unless she told me.
- Q. \*Now did you say these people, now these weren't in employed
- A. No they were just people.
- Q. \*Just people who were there and close to the picture?
- A. Yeah, uh huh that's right.
- Q. \*Do you remember what, now this looks like a blacksmith shop or something next to it.
- A. Yeah it does, I don't remember what that was.
- Q. \*Let's see, this is Mrs. Fields as a young girl, let me get
- A. I don't know what I've got to do to keep this picture but it looks like
- Q. \*Probably if you just even put it in a frame, under glass it would keep it from chipping anymore.
- A. And I remember this fellow, this was Gus Watkins. Do you see him with his legs crossed in the center \_\_\_\_\_

Q. \*That's how he always looked?

A. My uncle told me a story, this is I shouldn't even have it on here, about Gus and they said his wife would follow him and said you got to beat me this night and I guess he usually did it you know. They say that some women have to have that.

Q. Have to get whipped up.

A. This was Gus here see with that cigarette but those were some tales my uncle told, I guess he wouldn't, he became a preacher later and Elisah he was supposed to be a prophet you know.

Q. \*Elisah, that's a pretty good name. Do you remember about how old you were when that was taken?

A. You see that watch up there, isn't that something?

Q. \*Beautiful. On the back, there's something on the back of that.  
1912, 1917

A. 1917

Q. \*It says 1912, 1917.

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

Q. U of Iowa.

A. I finished Iowa in 1917, \_\_\_\_\_ but that

Q. \*So maybe while you were a student at the University of Iowa.

A. Maybe so, I probably was. I think I had got mama had give me that watch when I graduated from high school. Charmine tried to help, my niece tried to help me get some of this stuff organized and that's her writing on that picture.

Q. \*And this is you also, this would be at a younger

A. Yeah that's much younger and you see my mother did made my clothes.

Q. \*Made your dress?

A. She did all my sewing and I look at that dress, I don't think much of it now.

Q. \*I'll bet that was very stylish at the time though?

A. It probably was. I probably was about 12 or 13 I guess.

Q. \*12 or 13, that's a pretty picture.

A. It's too bad we don't label these things isn't it?

Q. \*You know you'll think you'll remember and you never do.

- A. No you don't, it's too much to remember. Will you get me a tissue Elnora, it seems like I'm having trouble with my throat again. Somebody called this morning and wanted to know how I was and I said I feel like I've got a \_\_\_\_ I've got to see about my throat and I feel like. She brought the themometer and took my temperature with it, it wasn't that high and said something, they said well you are sick and I don't even know who it was. I asked them who they were and they never did tell me and I didn't recognize their voice but I had called the center to tell them I wouldn't be there for class.

and