BB: Okay. So, the key objective of this interview is to serve as a research tool to document memories of the American chestnut in the southern Appalachian region.

HGT: Uh-huh.

BB: Information obtained in these interviews will be retained and made available for further use in an effort to promote a better understanding of the role of the American chestnut in Appalachian culture.

So then, I have to ask you: Have you signed the participant identification and release agreements?

HGT: I have.

BB: All right. Great. We’re ready to roll now.

So, the first thing I like to start out with is if you could just tell me your name, when you were born, and tell me where you’re from as if I’ve never been to Tennessee.

HGT: Oh yeah. Well, I’m from Chestnut Ridge, Tennessee. So, I was born here August the tenth, nineteen and thirty.

BB: And what’s your name?

HGT: Harold G. Thomas.

BB: All right. So tell me where Chestnut Ridge is if I’d never been here, if I don’t know much about this area.

HGT: Okay, Chestnut ridge is half way between Shelbyville and Fayetteville on 231. You are half way between Shelbyville and Fayetteville right now. Twelve miles each way. Okay, we’re twelve miles from Shelbyville, twelve miles from Fayetteville, twelve miles from Lynchburg, nine miles from Petersburg. [laughs]

BB: You guys are right in the thick of it.

HGT: We’re right in the middle. [laughs]

BB: Well, the first question I like to ask people is: Do you have any first hand memories of the American chestnut?

HGT: When it first came?

BB: Yeah. What do you--
HGT: Now of course, I don’t remember back that far, but I can tell you my father give me a lot of information. The chestnuts was in here from ’24 to ’34, fifteen years there. The blight hit them in ’31, and it took them out. I can remember a few of the trees right here where we’re at now. I can remember a few of the trees here, but as far as the value, I mean the crop of the chestnuts they was going out when I was born. Of course, I remember a lot of it, and I was told a lot of it. That’s what I’m going by.

BB: So, what do you remember about the chestnuts that you saw?

HGT: I remember ’35.

BB: What did they look like or did you use them at all?

HGT: Oh yeah, we picked them. We picked them, picked them. Of course, they fell off of the tree in this burr, and it was sort of like a porcupine. [laughs] We picked them up off of the ground. There was little nut just about as big as my thumb, some of them was bigger. According to how the fertilized unit grows, you know. That’s what it was. It was sort of like— you know what a grain of corn looks like? It was sort of in the shape of a grain of corn, but it was a lot bigger. You just take and peel it. It had a hard hull on it. You peel that hull off, and then you take it and cleaned it, and it had a little black coat on it, and you took and cleaned that coat off, and you eat it.

BB: How did you eat it? Did you eat it raw?

HGT: Just like—yeah. Just like you do a hickory nut. You’ve eat hickory nuts, haven’t you? English walnuts?

BB: Maybe. Maybe I’ve eaten a hickory nut, but not--

HGT: [laughs] You buy the hickory nuts and English walnuts all in the grocery store, you know.

BB: So, you remember eating the chestnuts. Did you guys ever store them up, or collect enough to store, or did you just--

HGT: Oh yeah, dad and mother they picked them up and kept them just like you do hickory nuts. So, they put them up, and I just go out and I just get up me a handful and eat them though.

BB: So, why did they call this ridge Chestnut Ridge?

HGT: The chestnuts was up here. It was an orchard from the end of chestnut ridge out here to Bedford County, the end of the ridge on the other end. It was complete orchard. Right here where we’re at right now was a chestnut orchard. It was about ten trees right here.

BB: So, what does that mean? Does that mean it was planted by people, or it was just a natural orchard, or what do you mean by orchard?
HGT: No, the chestnuts was just natural. It just come up natural. Of course, all that blight hit them, and it took them out.

BB: Did you ever use any chestnut wood for anything?

HGT: Uh-huh, oh yeah. We took after the blight hit it the tree was still standing, you know, but it was dead. We would cut it and make rails out of it to make a fence, and we’d all sow what we had left. We raised tobacco, and we burned a tobacco bed, and we took the limbs and everything of these chestnuts and burned us a tobacco bed, sowed a tobacco bed.

BB: What does that mean?

HGT: Of course, you don’t-- [laughs]

BB: It’s like you’re speaking a foreign language. I don’t even know what that means.

HGT: Okay, what it is we’d take and clean off a spot of ground nine feet wide and about fifty to seventy-five feet long. We took and worked it up. Then we’d taken piles of chestnut limbs and all on there or whatever we could get, pile it on there, set it afire and let it burn. Sometimes it’d take two days to get it to burn a tobacco bed. We’d let it burn, and then we’d take and rake it off the coals off, let it cool off, and then we’d sow the seed, the tobacco seed sowed that down and planted the--it would grow up and make a tobacco plant, and we’d plant it then, set it out.

BB: That’s interesting. Why did you use chestnut? Just because it was readily--

HGT: There wasn’t no value, health value to chestnut. It was just like a hickory nut, it had that nut in there, and you just eat it. It was good, it was good. If you’ve never eat a hickory nut, you don’t know what I’m talking about. [laughs]

BB: Did you ever eat chestnuts any other way than just--

HGT: Unh-uh, no. No, that’s the only way.

BB: When your parents gathered them up, how did they store them?

HGT: They just put them in a box or something or other and put them in the house or if we had a basement, they’d put them in the basement.

BB: So, do you remember ever getting pricked by a chestnut burr or anything like that?

HGT: Ever get stuck with them? Oh, many-a-time. [laughs]

BB: What happened? Did you--

HGT: It just--did you ever step on a prickly pear or anything like that? A briar? Okay, it’s just like that. It had a burr on it just about that long just like a needle. You’ve seen the cactuses?
Okay, that’s what it’s like only it was in a burr, and it had four sections in that burr, and it would open up and the chestnut would fall out, and you pick it up.

BB: Do you remember when you were young or when you would walk to school or anything did you ever play any games with chestnuts or did people throw them at each other?

HGT: No, we never did have no games with the chestnut or anything. What chestnut was for was to eat. It was a--I don’t know what the word I need to say. But anyway, it was the same as the hickory nut.

BB: Okay. Were there more chestnuts than hickory nuts, or did you prefer one to the other?

HGT: You mean the different kind of chestnuts?

BB: No, like would you prefer a hickory nut or a chestnut?

HGT: I wouldn’t turn around for the difference. They’re both just about alike. The only thing is you don’t have to work as hard to get a chestnut as you did a hickory nut. [laughs]

BB: So, were there more chestnuts on Chestnut ridge than anywhere else around?

HGT: Uh-huh, yeah.

BB: Did you guys ever collect or did you ever hear of anybody collecting chestnuts to sell or trade?

HGT: Oh yeah. Yeah, there’s some people picked them up and carried them to these stores, you know. You can buy them in the store. Yeah, people picked up chestnuts here and carried them put them in the store to sell, you know. They’d sell them to the grocery store or back then, what you done is you traded them. Money was short, so we would take those--or they did, we didn’t. They would take those chestnuts and trade them just like you do eggs. Trade them for groceries, you know. A grocery man he would allow you so much for, say a five pound bag of chestnuts, you know. So, what you done, there’s no money transferred back and forth, you traded it for groceries. Back then though, a box of soda was a nickel. [laughs]

BB: So, would people on Chestnut Ridge, would they be the ones to trade them, or would people come up here who didn’t live here?

HGT: No, no. The people up here would take and trade them to the grocery store.

BB: But it’s not like people would come from Fayetteville?

HGT: Oh, yeah they’d some people would come from Fayetteville and Shelbyville too, and get it because they would ask the farmers could they gather chestnuts. Of course, didn’t nobody care for them gathering chestnuts, so they did. As far as really knowing, I don’t know whether they eat them or whether they trade them or what they done. But anyway, the people up here gave
them their chestnuts, because man, we had oodles and gobs of them. [laughs] If you know what oodles and gobs are.

BB: I think I know.

HGT: It’s a bunch, a whole bunch. It’s so many that we didn’t have to use them all, so we could share them with people.

BB: So, did you guys have livestock up here?

HGT: Uh-huh.

BB: Did any of the livestock--

HGT: Cows, we milked cows. My dad when I was at home, he milked a hundred and twenty cows. Sold milk, raised tobacco, wheat, oats, oats we traded it for feed for the horses and the cows, you know. And some of it, we kept some of it and fed them the grain, you know. The wheat we put in and stored it in the foundry where they made flour, flour meal. And we’d take and trade--they’d put down how many bushels of wheat we’d put in so that way we could go in and gather that much flour, and that way we had out flour and our meal, our corn. And our corn, we raised corn here, and we took in corn and raised corn and we would shell corn and make a meal, grind it up and make meal out of it for cornbread. And we also fed corn to the chickens and horses and animals and all.

BB: Did any of your livestock eat chestnuts?

HGT: No, unh-uh.

BB: Ya’ll didn’t have any hogs up here?

HGT: Uh-huh, yeah. We had hogs. Now hog’s would eat them. Yeah, the hogs would eat them. A hog will eat anything. [laughs]

BB: But nothing else would eat those chestnuts?

HGT: No.

BB: Since ya’ll had so many chestnuts up here, did you just let the hogs mostly eat just chestnuts?

HGT: Just let them get what they wanted.

BB: Did you feed them other stuff too, or did they--

HGT: Oh, yeah. We fed them corn and such as that. We had our own meat. We killed hogs, cured out the meat. We had our own meat, and we killed the beef, had our own beef. So, we’d
take three or four hogs and put them in a pen confined them to a small pen where they couldn’t walk the fat off, you know. We’d take and fatten them. Then we’d kill them, and scald them, scraped the hair off them, and then quartered them up.

BB: I’ve seen that done; it’s pretty amazing.

HGT: Uh-huh. Of course, now you can’t do it. The government won’t let you do it.

BB: Um, was there anybody who lived up here on Chestnut Ridge that made their living off of the chestnuts here?

HGT: No.

BB: Was there much logging of the chestnuts up here?

HGT: Yeah, but like I said though, people loved the chestnuts, but what they done, they split the logs up and made rails. You’ve seen an old rail fence, haven’t you? Okay, that’s a chestnut tree split up in little rails.

BB: Why did ya’ll make them out of chestnut?

HGT: Because it was easier to split. A chestnut you can hit it, and it just split all the way. And nine times out of ten, it’ll quarter out in the shape of a rail, you know. It’s no big deal to that. That there, that’s a very easy job to do. [laughs]

BB: Did you ever do--

HGT: Oh yeah. Uh-huh. I was little, but I’d take a hatchet and sort of trim those burrs off, you know, with those rails.

Chestnut’s got a lot of splinters on it. It’d splinter out, you know. And that’s what I’d do, I’d take a hatched and just trim it.

BB: Um, what about your barns and houses and stuff? What were they made out of?

HGT: They were made out of oak lumber and poplar.

BB: Not chestnut?

HGT: No, chestnut wasn’t no good for lumber. Because after it cured out, you couldn’t drive a nail in it. [laughs]

BB: So, none of your houses or tools were made of chestnut?

HGT: Unh-uh.
BB: Okay. Do you remember anybody telling you what it would look like to see all these--what Chestnut Ridge looks like?

HGT: Well, what I remember of it is just--a chestnut tree was a great big tree. I'll show you the leaves of the chestnut tree when we get out yonder. But now, this tree that you’re looking at, it’s a bushy tree. It’s not like the real old chestnut tree. I can tell you that.

BB: But is it an American?

HGT: Huh?

BB: Is the one you’re going to show me an American chestnut?

HGT: Uh-huh, yeah. It’s a sprout off of the old chestnut tree.

BB: So, what’s the story with that tree over there?

HGT: What’s what?

BB: Is there some kind of story behind the tree you’re going to show me?

HGT: No, I tell you what, it was several years that people didn’t know what it was. And now, you take younger people, see I’m the oldest person on Chestnut Ridge, or oldest man rather. There’s and old woman out yonder that’s eighty years old, but I’m the oldest man here now. You take a kid, now my kids don’t have no idea what a chestnut looks like. The chestnut is hard to describe what a chestnut burr looks like, but I call it a porcupine because it had the burrs on it, you know.

BB: So, how did you figure out that it was an American chestnut?

HGT: Well, it had a few little burrs on it. They never did mature. So, that Neil boy he come up here, and he ask me did I know of any chestnut trees, and I said, “Yeah, I know of one.” So, I carried him out there, and he took a picture of it, and they pollinated it and put socks on it. I don’t know--I never did ask Neil how it come out or nothing. In fact, I haven’t talked to him since then. He told me that he found another one out yonder on the far end of the ridge, but I don’t know nothing about it. I don’t know where it’s at or nothing.

BB: So, do you remember your dad saying anything about tanning leather with chestnut? Have you ever heard anything about that?

HGT: Canning them?

BB: Tanning leather? Ever heard of using chestnut to tan leather for the tanning?

HGT: Well now, there was a tannery up here in Shelbyville, yeah. I think they used, cooked those bark off of a chestnut tree and tanned the leather with it up there. There was a tannery up
here in Shelbyville, but as far as knowing, all I know is what I hearsay about that. I do know, I remember the tannery being up there. They’d have deer hides, horse hides, cow hides, everything hanging out after they put in a solution of chestnut juice, you know. So, that’s all I know about that.

BB: Well, let’s see. Do you remember what your dad said about the blight, or do you remember the blight yourself? What do you remember about the chestnut blight?

HGT: Well, I remember a part of it, and like I say, I remember part of it. And what it would do, it would just go down to the roots of the chestnut tree, and it just work itself up, and it would die.

BB: Do you remember seeing chestnut trees die?

HGT: Uh-huh. They just died just like trees out in the woods died, you know a worm or something or other gets in it. In fact, that tree right over yonder, right across the road you can look at it whenever you get on. Year before last we had that awful freeze. That tree was just in a buoy. Water had just buoyed to make leaf, you know. And it hit it, and it killed it. So, when it got two or three little limbs on it that’s green, it got leaves on it the rest of it is dead. I’ve got to cut it.

BB: How did people feel—did your dad or do you remember did your dad tell you anything about how people felt when the chestnut started dying?

HGT: No, of course they hated to see the chestnut go, you know. But as far as—it was just one of nature’s things. It happened there.

BB: Did they know why it was happening?

HGT: No, it was a blight. Because they took and cut the chestnut and tried to see if it was a worm or something or other it in, but it wasn’t. It was just a blight that hit the tree, and it spread just like wildfire.

BB: Yeah, was there anything that they tried to do to stop the blight?

HGT: Yeah, they called some of these people, these farmers--I mean agricultural people. There wasn’t nothing they could do about it.

She’s feeding the humming birds.

BB: Oh, wow. I see the feeder.

How did it change people’s lives on Chestnut Ridge?

HGT: Well, as far as changing their lives, it didn’t change their lives none, because we still had tobacco, corn, wheat, barley, and oats such as that. Chestnuts really wasn’t their producing crop.
We had it, and we’d eat it, and some people would take it and trade it, you know. But it actually wasn’t no productive crop like tobacco was.

BB: Well, if it wasn’t the main crop, why do you think people hated to see it go?

HGT: Well, they just hated to see it go because they liked the chestnuts, you know. They’d eat them just like I said. The animals as far as the hogs would eat them, but nothing else would eat it, eat a chestnut.

BB: Do you think people--was the chestnut a symbol of this area?

HGT: Uh-huh.

BB: Is there anything you can think of that is an example of--

HGT: What, you see, is Chestnut Ridge got its name from the chestnut because the chestnut orchard was up here, and that’s what it is. Now, I couldn’t tell you what year it gave that name Chestnut Ridge, but I’ve been aiming to go down to the archives down in Fayetteville and see what I could find out about it in which I’m going in a day or two.

BB: Do you think people were proud to be from Chestnut Ridge?

HGT: Oh, yeah.

BB: Because of the chestnuts?

HGT: Uh-huh.

BB: Why?

HGT: [laughs] They just loved Chestnut Ridge.

BB: It was just kind of--

HGT: The air was just thinner than it is down below here, you know. You can breathe a lot better up here. Did you notice the difference in the breathing when you come up here?

BB: Yeah, I think I did, yeah.

HGT: Okay, as you was coming up the ridge down here, did your ears pop?

BB: I think they did, yeah.

HGT: They do. They have to.

BB: So, do you think chestnut trees--do they typically grow up on ridges?

HGT: Do what?
BB: Do chestnut trees usually grow up on ridges?

HGT: Uh-huh, yeah. The chestnut is mostly a ridge, hill tree.

BB: Did you ever hear anybody talk about what it would look like—what Chestnut Ridge originally looked like when the chestnuts were in bloom?

HGT: Well, it was a little—it looked sort of like a sock. It was a white bloom, and it got to be about that big around and just budded out, and that’s where the chestnut come in, and that’s where Neil put that bag, sock over that bloom and pollinated it. So, I don’t know whether there’s any blooms out there or not. I hope they are, so you can see that.

BB: So, when you would gather chestnuts or maybe your dad told you about when they would gather chestnuts would they usually do it—would it be an outing like going hunting or something? Would you go chestnut hunting the same as you’d go deer hunting with a couple of your good friends?

HGT: No. [laughs]

BB: Was it an all day affair, or would they just pick a few here, pick a few there?

HGT: There wasn’t no such thing as chestnut hunting. You’d just go out and pick them up. I mean sometimes that road—of course, when I was a kid that road wasn’t there. It’s this road out here, the old pike. It runs from Florida to Canada, the old dirt road. Then they changed it, and they put this road through here. But the chestnuts was still here, and I’ve seen that highway be covered in chestnut burrs. And we got a lot of our chestnuts there after cars. There wasn’t many cars, but there’s a few run over those chestnuts, and we’d go get them. [laughs]

BB: That’s great.

Do you remember any specific times when you went to gather chestnuts, or do you have any specific memories of eating chestnuts or gathering them? Stories like that?

HGT: No, we never did—like I said we just—if you wanted some chestnuts, you’d come up here and pick you up some, you know. And the same—now right out yonder at that church out here—you haven’t been out that way, but anyway there’s a Church of Christ right out yonder and there’s hickory nut trees. There’s about twelve hickory nut trees out there in that church yard, and people come from everywhere and pick up those hickory nuts, and some done the same with those chestnuts. They’d come up here and pick up a few chestnuts. Just pick up enough to eat. Sort of like a squirrel was picking up nuts to eat during the winter time. [laughs]

BB: Did you guys store up some nuts for the winter?

HGT: Uh-huh, oh yeah. We stored them up.
BB: Where would you store them?

HGT: We put them in something like a barrel or a large tin. You know what a large tin is. Okay, we’d put them there and keep them, you know. They wouldn’t rot like anything else. They’d keep.

BB: Do you remember hearing any sayings about Chestnut Ridge or about chestnuts?

HGT: No.

BB: Or any stories?

HGT: Nothing, the only thing I know about is that they always called this old Chestnut Ridge.

BB: You don’t know how it got its name?

HGT: No, I don’t. I don’t, but I’m going to find out.

BB: Were there ever any festivals up here on Chestnut Ridge or any community gatherings or parties that you would have?

HGT: Yeah, we have down here at Belville at the community center. We gather down there every Saturday, one Saturday out of the month. I think it’s the last Saturday of the month we gather down there and we have food, take food, we have a band that goes down there.

BB: Does anybody ever mention chestnuts anymore? Do people ever talk about it?

HGT: No, I can mention chestnut, and they say, What’s that? [laughs]

BB: Why don’t people know about it?

HGT: They died out, and people just forgot about them. Except people my age and older.

BB: Do you remember reading anything about the chestnut blight or hearing people talk about it?

HGT: My dad is the only one I’ve ever heard talk about the blight. It’s like I said, it was a disease it wasn’t no bug or anything, worm, it was just a disease that hit it. The agriculture they come out here, and they checked them, but there wasn’t nothing they could do about it.

BB: How do you think your dad felt about the loss of the chestnut?

HGT: What did people say about it?

BB: How did your dad feel about it?
HGT: Well, he hated to see them go, but still he got another thing out of them, rails. You know, fencing rails. So it wasn’t a complete loss, but it is now because the chestnut tree is completely gone.

BB: Why don’t you think the young people--do you think young people would like to see the chestnut come back?

HGT: Oh, yeah. I’m sure they’d be just like me. They’d like the chestnuts, but the only thing about that, you can’t go barefooed. [laughs] Country, country folks like to go barefooed, but up here when the chestnuts was up here, barefooed was a no-no.

BB: Would there be burrs on the ground year round?

HGT: No, no.

BB: Just in the fall?

HGT: They’d decay, but they’s some of them--you know, I tell you what though that reminds me of anything is a pine burr. You’ve seen pine burrs, haven’t you?

BB: I think so.

HGT: Uh-huh. Well, that’s the pine burr that reminds me of that of a chestnut only it’s not as sticky as a chestnut burr.

BB: So, did you ever roast chestnuts?

HGT: No, we didn’t have to because they was nature, you know. We would peel that little bark off of them after we took them out of the hull, we’d peel that bark off of them and that brown-looking coat, very thin coat, and you just peel that off. It was just as white as your shirt there.

BB: If you could tell your great great grandchild about chestnuts, what would you tell him or her?

HGT: Well, the only thing I’d do is I’d just have to tell him how they was, how they growed, what they done, how they looked, and that’s all you can do about a chestnut because it’s gone now. Just like I told you, it’s a burr and it’s a nut, and a chestnut is a rail. We made rails out of them and made fences. So that’s about all I can tell my grandkids.

BB: Did you ever burn any chestnut?
HGT: Oh, yeah I’ve buried some chestnut nuts hoping that they’d come up, but they never did. Never did come up.

BB: Well, have you heard about the restoration effort that people who are trying to bring the chestnut back?

HGT: Oh, yeah. Neil, that’s what his problem was—thing. To bring the chestnut back.

BB: What do you think about that? Do you think that’s a good idea?

HGT: I think it’s a good idea, perfect.

BB: Why do you think Neil wants to bring it back?

HGT: Well, he’s interested just like you are, interested in the chestnuts. He wants to get them back like they was, you know. And I do too, I want ya’ll to get it back.

BB: Do you think people will use the chestnuts in the same way they used them when you were growing back up or before your time?

HGT: That’s about the only way you can use chestnut just eat the chestnut.

BB: How do you think people will use the nuts, and how do you think people will use the wood?

HGT: Well, if they come back, the only way you do is use it like the way we did, just use it as a nut, and let it dry out just like a hickory nut now a days. That’s the only way you can do a chestnut is let it dry out, cure out, put it up in a large stand or whatever you’ve got to put them in, store them in over the winter time, and you can eat them, eat them during the winter, so that would make a meal.

BB: How do you think the people will bring it back?

HGT: Well, that I don’t know. You can answer that better than I can what you’re doing to bring it back, you know.

BB: Has there been any other restoration projects that you can think of that would be similar that would have been successful?

HGT: No.

BB: Do you think that this restoration effort will be successful?

HGT: If what?

BB: Do you think they’ll be able to bring the tree back?

HGT: I don’t believe they will.
BB: Why not?

HGT: Because the blight is in the ground, and what they’ll have to do is they’ll have to let the chestnut tree die, but there ain’t nothing they can put on the ground to kill the blight. They’ll just have to let nature take its course and dry out the blight that’s in the ground from the chestnut, and then maybe it will grow back. I don’t know whether I’ll see it in my lifetime or not, and you may not yourself.

BB: Yeah. Do you have any advice or concerns or hopes or fears about bringing the chestnut back?

HGT: Oh yeah. I tell you what, I got two grandsons that’s grown, and that’s their picture right back yonder in those the third picture from the left. Those two boys they’re interested in it. One of them, that little blonde-headed one, he works for the government, and that little black-headed one, he drives a milk truck, but they’re both interested in the ridge up here.

BB: How are they interested in it?

HGT: Well, they’re just interested in what they can do for it, you know. There ain’t nothing they can do for the chestnuts right now.

BB: Do you think young people will be interested in helping bring the chestnut back?

HGT: Sure, uh-huh.

BB: What would make them interested in bringing it back?

HGT: Well, they would get the chestnut burr, and they’d get the chestnut nut, and they’d also get if they grow enough and the tree quit producing they could cut it down and make rails out of it, different things you can make out of it.

BB: Do you think that people today when you think about your neighbors who live up here do you think they know very much about chestnuts? Do they know that they can eat the nuts, or that they can cut it in rails?

HGT: No, they don’t know a thing in the world about it. The people up here is a lot younger than I am that’s left up here, and they don’t know a think in the world about chestnuts. I can mention chestnuts, and they’ll say, What is that?

BB: How will they get interested in chestnuts?

HGT: Well, they just--people, people like me go to talking to them what it looks like and all, and that gets your curiosity stirred up what a chestnut looks like. I can tell you what it looks like, but actually you can’t get it in your mind what it looks like. Can you?

BB: Not if I’ve never seen one.
HGT: Uh-huh. Well, I wish I had one to show you, but it’s just like that, and it has four sections and brings out, holds up four sections, and there’s four nuts inside of that burr.

BB: Do you think that there’s a difference in the way that your father told you about this area and the way that younger fathers--do people still tell their children about the places that they’re from in the same way that your father told you about this place?

HGT: No, they’re not.

BB: How has that changed?

HGT: Just the people had grewed up just like the young people. They don’t know nothing about what it used to be like here, you know. Well, there’s an old school house right out road out here. Well, there’s one right down here at Bellville. That’s where I went to school, and the neighbors, our neighbor, had a school bus, a home-made school bus had a bench on each side of it and a bench right down the center of it. The boys sit on the bench and the girls sits on the benches on the side.

BB: Why don’t you think people are telling younger people these stories like they used to?

HGT: They just don’t know them.

BB: Do you think it’s important for them to know the stories about the chestnuts here?

HGT: Uh-huh.

BB: If people had that information, do you think that they would take any action or have a different attitude about the land here?

HGT: I think so. I think they would. I think that if they could hear about it, then people explain it to them. Ya’ll don’t have no picture of chestnut trees or anything do you?

BB: Yeah, we do.

HGT: You do?

BB: Uh-huh.

HGT: See that would give them an idea what it looks like, and me talking to them and telling them what it looks like, that don’t put it in their mind what it looks like. You got to see a picture of anything-- [telephone rings]. You can imagine what it looks like, but actually knowing, you don’t know, do you? Me, I don’t know if I would know what it was if I hadn’t seen one.

BB: What do you think is the best way to try to get young people involved in the chestnut restoration?
HGT: Well, I’ll tell you what I think. I think the agriculture people and you people would take and show those films around. Just have meetings at schools and show them these pictures and explain it to them what they are, and that would get them interested and they’d say, There’s something here that used to be here that we don’t know about. And they would get interested in it because they’d want to get it back where they could see what it does and what it done.

BB: Do you think that we have a responsibility to try to bring back the chestnut?

HGT: Yeah, I do.

BB: Why?

HGT: Because that would give something back that the people don’t know about. And it’d bring my memories back, too. [laughs]

BB: Yeah, I bet there’s some in there that you can’t get too, huh?

Well, do you think that people on Chestnut Ridge could ever make a living off of chestnuts here?

HGT: No, no.

BB: Why not?

HGT: Because they can sell a few of them, but not make a producing crop out of it like they do tobacco, you know dead tobacco. Chestnuts would never make that.

BB: Do you have any more memories about cutting down any chestnuts or eating them or gathering them, any specific memories? Did you have siblings?

HGT: Now what?

BB: Did you have brothers and sisters?

HGT: I had a brother, but he died when he was eighteen years old.

BB: Okay.

Did the two of you guys collect chestnuts together?

HGT: No, he was born in 1940. There was a ten year difference in our age.

BB: Did he ever know about the chestnuts?

HGT: No.

BB: I think that’s about all my questions. So, did anything replace the chestnut once it was gone in terms of what would you eat or what would the hogs eat?
HGT: The only thing we had after the chestnut was gone was apples and hickory nuts. Hickory nuts sort of took--

**Person 3:** They were already here. Hickory nuts were [unintelligible]

HGT: Yeah, I know it, but they took the place of chestnuts.

BB: I think that’s about it. That’s all my questions. I guess one last--maybe if you have any thoughts on this: Do you think that the American chestnut is an important cultural symbol of this region?

HGT: Uh-huh.

BB: Why so? Do you think a chestnut is more of a symbol than an oak tree or a maple tree?

HGT: Well, the chestnut tree had that chestnut burr on it, and that’s what originated the name of Chestnut Ridge, because it had that burr on it. There wasn’t no such thing as going barefooted.

BB: How would the hogs get the chestnuts out of the hull?

HGT: They could nose and root it out. [laughs] Get it out.

BB: Did you ever remember being pricked by a chestnut or having one fall on your head or anything like that?

HGT: Unh-uh, no. I’ve stepped on one or two, but if you step on one, you’ll always remember it.

BB: Well, I think that does it. That was great. That was really great.