Chestnut Memories

Oral History Transcript

Bethany BAXTER

Interviewer:  Bethany Baxter
Interviewee:  Sara & Clarence Ison
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SI: ... pretty much come in. And you had good neighbors, and everybody helped, and if anybody got sick neighbors would go, you know, there wasn’t any hospitals set up and helped take care of them, and then they’d ...

BB: You would have loved this, at Seedtime this past week, they did a thing… Some women off of Cowan, at the community center did a little play, where they were talking about, they told stories about the god old days… how midwifes would come, and games they would play, and it was a really sweet play. Carol Ann Ison was in it, and Nell Fields.

SI: And I had your great grandma I guess, Sillar, she was a midwife, and I had her with both of my children.

BB: Wow, that’s amazing. Yeah, I’ve seen her picture she seemed like a sweet little woman.

SI: She was. She knowed what she was doing.

BB: That’s great, gosh.

SI: Everybody loved Sillar.

BB: Yeah, their house is beautiful.

SI: And she was so good around sickness, you know if anybody got sick, she’d go and help out you know. People helped each other back them. You know we didn’t have any hospitals, you didn’t get a doctor unless it was life and death, and most of the time they died, before you got one. She, you know, knowed how to do things.

BB: yeah, I know, I love hearing those stories. Alright. Well, the first things I have to do is read you this statement telling you about my project. So I’ll say the key objective of this interview is to serve as a research tool to document memories of the American chestnut in southern Appalachia. Information obtained in these interviews will be retained and made available for further use in efforts to promote a better understanding of the role of the American chestnut tree in the culture. So then I have to ask, have you signed the participant identification and release agreements? Those are those things you just signed. So, yes.

SI: I signed it I reckon.

BB: Perfect. Alright, what I like to start off with, will you just tell me your name, when you were born, where you grew up, like your describing to someone you’ve never met who doesn’t know the area.
SI: well, I was borned August 16th, 1920, on Cotton Patch Branch, a little branch that emptied into the Kingdom Come, up in, you know, the holler, they all emptied out into the main creek. Then too many people grew up on the creek. Then when, I grew up there and went to that little two room schoolhouse. When I got out of school … I was a fast learned. I loved to read. I got my first 8th grade diploma when I was there … when I was 10 years old, I was so little, I couldn’t even comb my hair or nothing. And I went two more year, I went ‘til I was 13, over there, and then I went to Whitesburg and walked across that big hill. And they gave us ticket books to ride the train, didn’t have buses. And when they put the buses on I rode the bus. But I walked across that hill, and most of the time, the way they run, they just had 2 or 3 I’d have to leave home before daylight, and I’d bring me a light, and when I’d go back it’d be so late I’d have to get my light to cross the hill going back, and had that big hill to cross.

BB: Wow. So you got your high school diploma up there?

SI: uh – huh.

BB: god that’s great. I know granny wished she could have gone but she didn’t get to go, so she went to the 8th grade twice. Since she couldn’t go to high school.

SI: I went 3 year before I got to go because I got my first diploma when I was 10. Because I got my first diploma when I was 10. They let you go then just as long, you know, ‘til you learned it and then you could maybe go ... Well, in 4 year I had my first diploma. I started when I was 7 and at 11 I got my first diploma, and when I was 12 and one when I was 13, and when I was 13 I started high school, and I got my high school diploma when I was 17. And I finished out my education with that, I married when I was 18. That was the best school I ever went to. (laughs)

BB: that’s great (laughs). So my first question is do you remember the chestnut tree yourself, and what do you remember about the chestnut tree.

SI: well, we had chestnut trees, before the blight come in. When my daddy cleared the ground, you know to farm, it was covered with chestnut trees, and he sifted out about an acre of chestnut trees for our use, and, when they would get ready and start falling we we would get our sacks and buckets and stuff, and the men would get up in the trees with big poles and they’d thrash them out and we’d pick them up you know, and we’d get them in it them sacks and take them and hang them in an empty, it had been a chicken house, but just an empty house. You hardly ever, at that time, would find a chestnut with a worm in it, you know, they hadn’t come in so bad. And we would get all of our chestnuts, and then when the hickory nuts come in, pap had lefy big hickory nut trees, and he’d thrash them and we’d get sacks of hickory nuts, you know, and sack them up and hang them out there in that empty chicken house. That’s the way we lived. It was simple, but it was a good life.
BB: I believe that, I believe that. When your parents were growing up, did your parents ever

SI: well, there wasn’t nothing wrong as they growed up, the blight hadn’t come in there. It didn’t come in here I guess until after we married, and then when it come in the chestnut trees all died. But them that he ordered, them big ones, they didn’t take that blight, they was still there, and they’d fall of the night, that tree was right …. Our kitchen was off from the main house, and them chestnuts would fall and we’d pick them up while they got breakfast we’d put a hole in them and put them on the stove and let them bake.

BB: so, how did you eat the chestnuts would you just eat them raw, or?

SI: raw yeah. We don’t buy chestnuts much, we don’t care that much about them. And we had walnuts, and, we call them ‘hazenuts’, them hazelnuts, and hickory nuts. Had all kinds of nuts.

BB: were there more chestnuts than the other kinds of nuts, or did you prefer one to the other?

SI: no, we just gathered ever what we had and eat what we wanted when we wanted them.

BB: Did you ever cook chestnuts into any food, or did you just eat them raw?

SI: Just ate them, or we would boil them, you know, we boiled a lot of them. They had them old heavy cast iron tea kettles, then old black ones, we’d just fill one of them nearly full, and put water in it and set it on the grate you know, and let them boil.

BB: did you eat them in the morning or the evening?

SI: just whenever we wanted them.

BB: so it was kind of like a snack that you’d supplement your diet with?

SI: yeah, yeah. Generally you know, after … in the evening was most the time when you’d eat stuff like that. And we always had big orchards, and he made him a big apple house, he was a big farmer and we’d put up about 225 bushels of apples in that apple house, eat on all winter, we’d have them sometimes, when the june apples would come in we’d still have apples. We never did have apples, you know when we canned, and if we emptied our jars we’d fill them back with apples. They didn’t waste nothing. We lived by peddling. Mommy peddled to the coal camps up at Marlow and Bellcraft on mule, and she’d sell milk and butter and all of the garden stuff, and apples. Just ever what you had, you could have sold anything.

BB: did she ever peddle chestnuts?
SI: No, not that. We just gathered them in, sack them up, and put them out there in that empty building and when we wanted some we’d go out there and get a couple you know, and eat them.

BB: what did, what did… describe to me what the chestnut looked like when it was growing out in the wild like that.

SI: It was just like the others only it was smaller, and they was sweeter. They didn’t taste like these you buy. They was a real sweet nut. But they didn’t grow too big, those wild ones.

BB: some people used to sell of trade chestnuts at the store for things, or put them on a train, send them places. Did anyone ever do that around here?

SI: no, don’t remember something like that.

BB: were there any spots where the chestnuts would grow more than other spots?

SI: Now, I don’t know about that, but they was all over the place, up at our place. But now, up here in this holler where Clarence lived they didn’t have too many chestnut trees. There was one or two that out from where we lived out here that were wild, you know.

BB: Can you describe what they looked like, or how they smelled, the trees themselves. Not just the nuts.

SI: what?

BB: Can you describe for me what the trees looked like, in the forest, were they bigger than other trees?

SI: No they were smaller, most of them. But, then, now sometimes if they was kindly out by themselves they were big trees, but if they’re just out in the woods, you know, they didn’t get too big. And then, when they went to logging they went to logging the chestnut trees and pretty soon there weren’t many left.

BB: why did they like to log the chestnut trees?

SI: what:

BB: Did they log more chestnut than other trees?

SI: well they just logged anything, that was ready, everything. Well, when he cleared his ground up in Cotton Patch, he sifted out maybe an acre of more just for his chestnut trees, and we always had plenty of chestnut, and then he ordered some of those big ones and set them out down there around the house where we could get them.
BB: Did he do that just with chestnuts, or with other trees too, or did he mostly just set them out, or save the chestnut trees?

SI: he… I guess that he must have bought them, I don’t know, but you could plant them and they’d come up.

BB: so those might have been the foreign kind?

SI: those big ones, yeah.

BB: Those are the Chinese I think.

SI: yeah, those were great big chestnuts. We just had one tree of them and he bought that big tree.

BB: was that after the blight?

SI: no, it was before the blight. But then the blight hurt it, but last time we was up in there there were part limbs on it living, it was down right close to the house. But all the rest of them were gone, you know, they died out.

BB: Do you remember ever getting, or anybody ever getting pricked by those burrs?

SI: ever what?

BB: the burrs around the actual nuts, the prickly burrs?

SI: yeah, those old burrs

BB: Do you remember anybody ever getting pricked by one, or you getting pricked by them?

SI: no. I’ve… but if you stepped on one of them boy, they stuck in your feet, you couldn’t never hardly get all the, you know, spines out. You were awful careful about that.

BB: Did you ever feed them to any of your animals?

SI: no we didn’t have that many.

BB: Did, were there any animals that liked to eat them?

SI: Oh the hogs, they would eat everyone that they could get to, they was crazy about over chestnuts. And we’d have to …When we was getting them in the little chestnut orchard, you’d have to go at daylight to beat the hogs, (laughs) or they’d get there and get them, or if you went to thrash them out with something to pick them up some of us would
have to keep the hogs, you know, shooed off or they would go in and get them, they loved them.

BB: Did your hogs around run wild?

SI: No. You could let them run wild, but we owned a lot of land, and it was fenced, and he’d just turn them loose in the pasture.

BB: Did any other kind of livestock eat chestnuts too?

SI: I don’t know that anything other thing would eat a chestnut besides hogs.

BB: do you remember any buildings being built with chestnut lumber, or was your house made of chestnut or anything like that?

SI: No. I don’t know what. It was an old house, it was one room log house to start with, pap was married twice, and they lived in that little one room house and cooked on the fire. That was all anybody did at that time. And then when she died, why, when Mommy come up there, pap built 2 more rooms, a great big one on one end, a little room on the other, and then he built a kitchen off from the house, over there. We had plenty room that a way, built a big cellar in under the kitchen for the canned stuff, and had him a big apple house, he hauled saw dust and put a wall in it about that wide to keep the apples, you know, from freezing.

BB: Did you ever can chestnuts?

SI: no, we just eat them or boiled they you know. We had plenty of them though.

BB: Did you ever, do you remember ever burning chestnut wood in the fire. Anything like that?

SI: yeah. It’d pop and crackle. It was good to start a fire, you know, it burnt quick and soft, for kindling.

BB: What about any fencing, or anything like that, was it ever made out of chestnut, any fences or tools, do you remember anything like that?

SI: no

BB: Ok. Do you ever remember seeing a chestnut tree cut down?

SI: I don’t know whether they ever did or not, I probably saw them up there and don’t remember it.

BB: Do you think … was chestnut a more desirable wood than other kinds of wood?
SI: No, But it was a soft wood you know. And it was easy to split, it’d just split real easy. They just mostly used it for kindling, and to start their fires, cooked with oak or something you know, locust, coal or whatever they’d get a hold of.

BB: Do you think that the chestnut was important to your community, and to your culture growing up?

SI: Well it was good about the hogs and stuff eat them you know, helped feed them, and we would gather them in and eat them as snacks, you know, during the winter months. And everybody loved chestnuts but they didn’t many people have chestnut trees but pap let his’n grow and we always had plenty of chestnuts.

BB: do you think your dad liked chestnuts more than other people?

SI: Well I don’t know but we just had all that land and Pap would just put things like that out, you know, for our own use. We had chestnuts, and plenty paw paws, and hickory nuts, and walnuts, you know stuff like that.

BB: Wow. So when you would gather the chestnuts up in the fall was that like…Would everybody get together in a big group?

SI: No, just families. Well, nearly everybody had a big family, you didn’t need no help. And Pap would get up in the trees with a big old pole, and he’d thrash them out and us children would pick them up and hang them up in sacks and hang them out there in that building.

BB: Would it still have that burr on it, that prickly burr?

SI: no, we didn’t get that. We just got the chestnuts out of them burrs. We didn’t put no burrs up.

BB: How did you get the nuts out of the burrs?

SI: Well, when they got ready to fall they would fall out of them, there wasn’t no problem. And if you thrashed them out of the trees a burr hardly ever fell, just the nuts would fall. (laughs)

BB: Ok, well were there any holiday meals or holiday traditions that involved chestnuts?

SI: No, we never did have them. Back then people, if they had them, they’d just eat them like snacks.

BB: Ok. Were there any songs or saying about chestnuts or that incorporated chestnuts?

SI: I don’t know about that now.
BB: Ok, well, as far and the blight goes, do you remember the chestnut blight?
SI: yeah
BB: what do you remember about it.
SI: They just all died, the trees did. I don’t know what caused it, but they just died out.
BB: what did people … what did your Dad think. What did people say?
SI: Well, after they died they just cut them, made wood out of them or something, nobody said nothing they’d just say it died with the blight. We didn’t know what caused the blight, nor nothing.
BB: Did you know the blight was coming?
SI: No. Just ‘til they started dying off, and nearly all of them died. All of ours that survived it nearly were them that he’d ordered. They lived, but all the others died.
BB: How long did it take them to die on your Dads place?
SI: I sure don’t know but they died, like in a season.
BB: So it was pretty quick. Wow.
SI: yeah, when it hit them.
BB: how could you tell they were dying, what did they look like?
SI: Well, the leaves turned brown, and yellow, and fall off and stuff, and they wouldn’t bear nothing.
BB: Do you remember how people felt. Was it scary, or just sad to see them go.
SI: I don’t know, they just … then when something happened like that, the people just accepted it. They didn’t know whether, well, I guess there would have been something you could a got to spray them and save them, but they didn’t know about that.
BB: were people at all superstitious about it, did they think it was…?
SI: No, they just thought there was a blight come through and killed them.
BB: Had that ever happened with any trees before?
SI: No. Not in my lifetime, but I remember when them died because we had a big one there beside of the house. It all died, but once we were up there after that and there were still sprouts on it, I don’t know whether they’ve all died or not.
CI: Herbie work up there yet? Herbie Smith?

BB: yeah, he works up there at the Appalshop.

CI: He’s a big wheel up there ain’t he?

BB: Yeah, he’s somewhat of a big wheel up there, he’s a character. He’s a good friend.

CI: Well there’s a whole lot of you mixed up there, you and that Dollarhide girl she work there?

BB: yeah, Katie, Kay she’s up there for a while

CI: and Herbie

BB: yeah, it’s a fun place to be, it’s a great place to work, I love what they do, and I feel lucky that I got to work there for a while.

SI: where do you originally live, Somerset or something?

BB: No, my mom moved to Lexington. So I grew up in Lexington and then I went to school in Tennessee, and then I came up to Whitesburg and lived and worked up here for a while, and now I moved back to Tennessee to go to more school. (laughs)

CI: you married?

BB: No, not married, no.

CI: you’ll be up there long, you’ll get one of them dudes. (laughs) Yeah, there’s a bunch of them that work up there.

BB: There are some good folks up there.

CI: One of them will hook you up.

BB: Yeah, I need to get hooked up.

CI: Better be careful.

SI: But that happens all the time, don’t it?

BB: What’s that?

SI: Marriage.

BB: yeah, it tends to happen. A lot of my friends are getting married right now.

SI: you don’t expect it, and sometimes it will hit you.
CI: They used to come in here, a bunch of them, works at the Mountain Eagle. We know all of them, they come here all the time.

SI: to eat mostly.

BB: Yeah, granny said you used to write for the Mountain Eagle?

SI: yeah. I do now sometimes, if I hear anything I want people to know.

CI: What about that Craft boy, was he working at the Appalshop or Mountain Eagle?

SI: I don’t know where he worked, I believe it was at the Appalshop

CI: He was a fine boy.

BB: Craft, I don’t know?

CI: He lives over there is Drew’s House, Drew Frasier’s house.

SI: what was his name?

CI: was it Clyde?

SI: No, Clyde was his Daddy.

CI: I don’t know

SI: Oh, we knowed all of them.

CI: Herbie used to come down here when we were raising cane, he’d make pictures, and take it back to that Appalshop

BB: I just saw Herbie, I was at Granny’s house and Herbie was riding up the road, coming back from Carrols House.

CI: You stay with Geneva?

BB: yeah

CI: She’s a good one.

BB: She is, she really is.

SI: I haven’t seen her in a long time.

BB: I know, she wanted to come over here, but since I have to run up to the Appalshop at 3 o’clock, we were worried we’d run out of time. I’ll have to bring her over here sometime, in the next week or so. But you just made me think of something, do you
remember ever reading anything in the Eagle paper about the blight or about chestnuts or anything like that.

SI: no, I don’t reckon I did. Everybody just accepted it.

CI: You been up there a long time.

BB: Just a couple of years, I worked there for a couple of years, and I moved back to Tennessee about a year ago. But it’s sure good to be back and see everybody, I missed them all.

SI: Does a whole lot work up there?

BB: there’s maybe 20 or 30.

SI: well that’s a pretty good batch.

BB: it is, yeah. it’s a good crew of folks.

SI: That Phil Premack, do you know him?

BB: Field?

SI: Phil Premack, did you know him?

BB: I don’t think so.

SI: Whew. He worked up at the Eagle, long time.

CI: Kathleen’s out in New Mexico isn’t she?

SI: I don’t know, she’s out there somewhere with some of them Indians, she married one of them. Kathleen Stanton, she worked up there.

CI: Married one of the big Indians on the Indian sheep ranch.

SI: Indian Reservation, he had a sheep ranch or something. Now that’s what she wrote, I never did see it. (laughs) She was something else. They all of them come here I know, I couldn’t tell you where they all come from, but Phil would bring them here. I know once he come, or called first, and there was some people from the Singer Sewing Machine company, up here for some kind of business, and he wanted me to cook breakfast for them.

BB: You must be a good cook.

SI: They eat, honey. If they go in there and find a piece of cornbread they’ll stand there and eat it like it was chocolate cake. But I don’t pay no attention to it, they know where I
keep my bread and they’ll go over and get it and eat it, heat the coffee up of something. But they’ll eat now, any of them will.

BB: No who are these folks? Appalshoppers?

SI: what?

BB: The folks up at Appalshop, or who are you talking about?

SI: well they’d work at that… Phil Premack, he worked at the Appalshop, and the Eagle paper, I don’t know where all he worked but he’s back up in Massachusetts now.

CI: There’s a lot of employees at Appalshop ain’t there?

BB: about 20 or 30.

CI: I knowed there was. Had to be.

BB: yeah, there’s a lot of people really. So you said you’d remember there being a big chestnut being beside you house. Do you remember what they did with it, did they just let it die or did they cut it?

SI: I guess they finally cut it for wood.

BB: How big?

SI: I don’t know honey, but it was a big one. He’d ordered it, it was a brought on tree. (laughs) they’d say brought on trees. But he got everything he could, you know, strange. He had little orange trees, he planted orange seeds, and the season wasn’t long enough, but they’d get just about like a Lemon. They made the best drink you ever drunk. And then we had a big cider mill, he would grind his apples up and he made vinegar, you know, you could put it in those jars and it’d make you drunk when you drank it, 3 or 4 days. (laughs) But he made his own vinegar, and had that cider mill, and when me and George, that was my younger brother, wanted apple cider of something, we’d just go out to one of the apple trees and get us a sack full and come in and make a kettle of cider. It would foam when it would go out in the kettle. He had all of that, but after we married and Mommy married and left and then Henry, brother Henry married into a bad family, and they destroyed everything like that that was up there, Pap had a pretty wagon, he bought a new wagon, and he had any kind of plow he wanted and mowings, and all of that.

BB: What were your parent’s names?

SI: Huh

BB: what were your parent’s names?
SI: Jesse Caudill and Mary Caudill. Mommy was a Miller, Jesse Caudill and Mary Miller. And then after Pap died she married Alimander Caudill and I never did go around them no more. And then when he died, we had this little house built up here in our garden, little 2 room house and Mommy moved her stuff into that house and I took care of her til she died.

CI: You’re still hooked up there

SI: Huh?

CI: I said you’re still hooked up there, you better be careful what you say.

SI: who?

CI: you. I said you’re still hooked up there, she’s getting all that.

BB: I’m recording, yeah

SI: Well, I ain’t saying noting. I don’t say nothing that isn’t right. I just never did fool with her after she married, of course she would come to our house, then when he, the train killed him and when that happened we moved her in with us over in the holler, and then we come over here, and she come… let’s see now, I believe she went to mother’s sister’s then, and then we had that little house built up there, and she put enough of her stuff up there, she lived up there

CI: when’s the Seedtime up at the Appalshop?

BB: It was last weekend! You just missed it. Comis was down there, Comis Ison was down there, dancing at the square dance, dancing up a storm. You know Comis yeah?

SI: yeah.

CI: They have a lot of programs there, don’t they?

BB: Yeah, they do. Y’all listen to the radio station, ever? WMMT?

SI: no, we don’t

BB: they’ve got a pretty good radio station, play a lot of bluegrass and all kinds of stuff.

SI: We don’t play the radio much, we just mostly watch the TV. We play it in the morning to get the funerals, and stuff like that.

BB: Well, I just have a few more questions about chestnuts. I’m wondering, so after the chestnut was blighted… well first, do does anyone ever talk about the chestnut anymore? Do you ever hear people mention it or..?
SI: Hardly ever, what we get now we buy them out of the store, you know, we buy them sometimes.

BB: how do you fix them?

SI: well we generally just eat them raw or boil them or something.

BB: do they taste as good as?

SI: yeah they’re good.

BB: Do they taste like the ones you had growing up?

SI: No, they’re different a little. I guess they’re more tame of something. The ones that just growed up now, they wasn’t too big but they was awful sweet, they had a real sweet taste. But we picked them things up by the sack full’s, and hang them up in the buildings, and just eat on them all winter.

BB: So After the chestnut was gone was there any other --

SI: nuts?

BB: yeah nuts, or trees, lumber that replaced it, or what did you use instead. What did you feed your hogs on?

SI: Well we always bought feed for ours, and when we lived up in Cotton Patch we fed a lot of apples to them, we had so many apples. But me and Clarence now, always just bought feed and corn for out hogs. We haven’t killed any in a while, but gee we used to kill big ones.

BB: I bet.

CI: You got any brothers and sisters?

BB: Two little sisters.

CI: your mother still live in Lexington?

BB: she does, yeah, she does, they’re still there. Did people just leave all those dead chestnut timbers to rot in the woods or?

SI: Yeah, or get them out for wood, you know, they made good wood to start fires. They caught fire so quick, they used them mostly to start their fires.

CI: Donny Gay have any kids home now?

BB: No, they’re all in South Carolina.
SI: Who’s that?

BB: Donald Gay, my uncle.

SI: Oh yeah. Does he live on Kingdom Come?

BB: He does, right up from granny. Right below her, yeah, right below her.

CI: Donny Gay’s wife’s a nurse up at the hospital ain’t she?

BB: yeah, Leanna, she’s a head nurse or something, she’s kind of up in the nurse

CI: I haven’t seen Donny Gay in a long time. He’s busy.

BB: yeah he is real busy.

CI: He’s a money-maker.

BB: yeah, he stays real busy.

SI: Well, if anyone wants to work, there’s plenty of work if they want to get out and get it. They can’t blame no work, because anybody who wants to work, most of them’s got a job. Of course, Clarence worked 42 year in the coal mines and he retired.

BB: wow.

CI: Donny Gay used to keep all of his machinery up here beside of the road, where did he move it to?

BB: I don’t know he’s got some out by his house…

CI: Made him get out of there did they, the state?

BB: I don’t know, I don’t quite know.

CI: I don’t know, I though he owned that…

SI: He used to keep it up yonder the other side of Farmer’s Supply.

BB: I don’t know where he keeps it now, I don’t know if he owned that land or rented it out or what. Well, there’s a group of folks trying to restore the chestnut tree, back to the wild, do you know anything about that?

SI: about what?

BB: There’s a group of folks, the Chestnut Foundation, and they’re trying to restore the American chestnut tree back into the wild and make it blight resistant.
SI: I never heard nothing about that.

BB: well, they’re trying to do that, and they’ve actually got a tree, its an American chestnut, but they’ve got it to where its blight resistant, and they’re ready to start trying to re-introduce it back into the wild, into the mountains. So I’ve been asking people what they think about that, do you think that’s a good idea?

SI: Well, I guess it would be alright. Nobody would get out and hunt them. (laughs)

BB: yeah, that’s my next question. Do you think people would use it the same way people did when you were young?

SI: No. You know, all of that back then was used for wood and stuff, that a way, and now you don’t hardly see a wood burning stove. We’ve got electric stove but we’ve got a wood burning stove in our kitchen too, so when the power goes off we can eat. And then we use this one in here, but we’ve got a heat pump out there in the back when it isn’t too cold. We’ve got plenty heat. And when the power’s off, you see, we could heat these up.

BB: So why do you think these people would want to restore the tree?

SI: I don’t know honey, people’s funny. I hate to see stuff destroyed, if it was used for something useful now, that would be different, but now just to do something to destroy it, I don’t believe in that.

BB: What do you mean do something to destroy it?

SI: Oh you know, just cut it down for wood, or some that will just destroy it you know, and not use it for no useful purpose.

BB: Was there ever anything … have you ever heard of anyone trying to bring any other kind of species back like that?

SI: No.

BB: So, say that there were chestnut trees back in the woods like there were when you were growing up, do you think people would do anything with them?

SI: They wouldn’t go and pick them up. But the squirrels might could live pretty good (laughs)

BB: Do you think people would use the lumber like they used to?

SI: No, they’d never raise that much, you know, the lumber’s all brought in now, the work’s out of it. If you’ve got the money to buy it, get anything you want. But lumber’s high.
BB: Do you think that because people, when you were growing up, kind of relied on the chestnut as a food and as…

SI: Well they would leave them, it was good feed for hogs and stuff that a way you know, and the hogs would just run out in the pastures, in the chestnut tree you know, just out in the pastures and everywhere and the hogs would eat it. They let them run out you know, until about September or something and they’d bring them in and put them in the pin and fatten them out with corn before they’d kill them.

BB: Were hogs …

(clock chiming)

SI: That’s that clock.

BB: Ok, were hogs fatten with chestnuts, did they taste different than hogs fattened on corn or feed?

SI: I don’t know now, about that. Would there have been any difference Clarence, if hogs eat a lot of chestnuts and stuff, about the meat?

CI: Huh?

SI: If hogs eat a lot of chestnuts and nuts, and stuff, would the meat taste any different than if you fattened them just on corn?

CI: I guess they’re all about the same, those chestnuts were nearly like corn. Solid you know, and acorns. And Joe Roberts seen an old colored feller over there at Pound, Virginia, and he was telling, he said what happened to the meat, you can’t smell it frying out too far away from the house, and he said, why he said that old colored feller was old and he said, ‘why didn’t you now, the chestnuts and stuff is all gone, and …

SI: And that flavor’s not there.

CI: said that flavor went with it’. He knows what he was talking about. But the colley come in then after all these chestnuts.

SI: The hogs took a colley and it killed them all out.

CI: they eat that, and that husks, fuzz and stuff off of them chestnuts, they took this colley, they called it a colley, and they all died out, the hogs would. My Daddy lost, oh, big gangs of them. I think he said he had the awful-est gang of hogs that ever was and they all died out but one. And he though he was going to die, and he poured a bottle of turpentine down his in his throat and he said he got over it. He saved it. He didn’t know if that had anything to do with it or not he saved it, said she didn’t die.
BB: So your saying that the hogs would eat the chestnut spines?

SI: Oh lord, yeah they eat the chestnut. No nothing eat them burrs

CI: No nothing eat them burrs. Man, they eat them. swallow them whole. I killed many a them that had an acorn in his neck where they swallowed them.

SI: Clarence don’t hunt though anymore, he can’t see too good ad he can’t hear too good and he just don’t hunt, he isn’t able to get about. But boy, he used to hunt. Get up like going to work and get out before daylight to get an early start.

CI: You know, there ain’t many people older than us. I’m 92, past. But I still got pretty good sense. (laughs)

BB: yeah!

SI: I hope we keep what little we got until we leave here. (laughs)

CI: Geneva’s in her 80s isn’t she?

BB: Geneva? She’s 84.

SI: I know she had to be up there about George’s age. Her, and George and Harding, all of them’s about the same age. George is my brother, my baby brother.

CI: You know Harding?

BB: Yeah, I’m going to talk to him, he’s out mowing the field.

CI: He’s pretty sharp on this old stuff.

BB: yeah, he said he remembered them pretty well, I’m going to go talk to him. Well, do you have any advice for these people trying to bring back the chestnut? Any concerns, or…?

SI: I wish they could be brought back, if for nothing else just for the enjoyment of the people, that they could go out and hunt them and eat them, and everything. I guess that’s about all they ever done with them, I never knowed of them cooking with them nor nothing but I guess they did. But you see that was back in the early years.

BB: yeah, wow. Ok, that was great. Are there any other things you can remember?

SI: No, honey I can’t I don’t reckon.

BB: That was great you gave me a lot of good stories.

SI: If you think of anything and want to call, if I know I’ll tell you.
BB: Ok, thank you Sara, I’ll remember that. I think my favorite story you told me was about your Dad cutting out that chestnut orchard, that’s pretty neat, I’ve not heard of anybody doing that so far.

SI: It would start fast to burn, that chestnut wood, and they’d use it for little kindling to start their fires before they laid their oak wood and stuff that they cooked on

BB: yeah, that’s really neat. Well I think that’s that.

SI: OK Honey, I might have helped you but I doubt it.

BB: no, you certainly helped.