

Oral History Interview

Ralph Sanford

By
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Restrictions: Open with restrictions

Interview with Ralph Sanford

The Samford University Five Mile Creek Oral History project began as a service learning project for the Five Mile Creek Greenway Partnership, conducted by students in Dr. Ken Kirby's Communication Arts 101 class fall semester of 2004. Partnership members needed information about the communities along Five Mile Creek in Jefferson County, Alabama—Center Point, Tarrant, Fultondale, Coalburg, Republic, Brookside, Cardiff, Graysville, and Linn Crossing—for grant applications, interpretive signage, and other uses as they developed a master plan for parks and greenways along the entire length of the creek. A group of six entering freshmen conducted the initial interviews and research for this oral history. During 2005 Dr. Kirby conducted another 25 interviews and periodically made reports to the Partnership coordinators. Portions of some interviews have been published in the Partnership's newsletter, *Five Mile Currents*.

Ralph Sanford (b. 1932) has lived all his life in Republic. He tells of school, chores, wagon mines, moonshine stills, the "Alley Cat" swimming hole in Five Mile Creek, and of being a bicycle runner for the Civil Defense effort during WWII. His family moved to the farm he now lives on, which borders Five Mile Creek, in about 1943. During mild floods, his cows seek high ground and are safe, but during the 2003 flood they were all washed down the creek. He ultimately recovered all but one. The interview was conducted at his farm on June 8, 2005.

KIRBY When did you start living in this neighborhood?

SANFORD Oh, I was born in this neighborhood about a mile from here in a little community. Republic was made up of about three sections. One was called Early Town, because Early had a lot of property there. My dad bought one, and that's where I was born, over by the church. You just about went by it as you came here. Across the creek we called New Town, and then right across the creek just before you crossed the new bridge, you turn to the right there, that little community which is 10 or 12 houses is called East Warner. East Warner, I've got a picture here of where my dad was baptized in that creek in East Warner. I've also got a picture of the creek here that tells about when the underwater bridge was built. So I was raised over there, but my dad built this house from right here on back—this was a screen porch—when I was, and I can't really remember exactly, but I was about 10 to 12 years old when we built this house. My mother used to bring me over here and make me sand walls and all like that.

KIRBY Did you live in the same house in Early Town until you were about 12?

SANFORD Yes.

KIRBY Who were your neighbors? Who did you play with?

SANFORD This community was very, very small at that time. I went to high school at Minor High School, and there were only I think seven boys in this whole community. So that's all. But I had neighbors up there, and of course all the neighbors there are about gone. Actually Billy Moore still lives in that community. He built the house right down from where I used to live. My old house is burned and gone; it's no longer there, been gone a lot of years. Joe Messina, Joe and Irene, they've both passed away. They were my dad's age. Billy Moore and his family, he and his son still live there. Will Moore was Billy's daddy, and he lived in that community too. I don't know whether Billy was born there or not. He might have moved there when he was eight or nine years old. Estes lived in that Early Town community, so there was only about five or six houses there. In fact, my dad rented the saw mill, and we sawed lumber to build two houses, and those two houses are still standing there. Billy Moore's son actually lives in one of them, and Billy Moore's daddy bought this property from my dad when we moved over here.

KIRBY Where was the saw mill?

SANFORD Back down next to the creek.

KIRBY Did it have water power?

SANFORD No, no, he actually rented the sawmill and moved it down there. It ran on gasoline. It was just on the edge of the creek where the trees were. We sawed them down or had them sawed down with a crosscut saw. They didn't have any chain saws. That down here was a crosscut saw, and we hauled them down with, I believe we did have a small tractor, and we logged them off down there and they sawed them up and had enough to build two houses.

KIRBY But you were working a crosscut saw when you were 10 or 11 years old?

SANFORD Oh, gosh, yes. Yeah, sure was. That's no problem. Then we moved here and he bought cattle and everything. We used to farm this, now, on the creek. And every spring, and I don't know who these were, and I never was interested, which I was later—Indian arrowheads. And there was a preacher, and I don't know, he's probably dead and gone now—he used to come out here every spring when Daddy would till the land and get it ready to plant it. He would find a lot of arrowheads. Apparently at one time or another this was an Indian camp, because he used to find a lot of them, and I never did and never was interested. We farmed this—corn here, corn across the creek, across the road. One year he had cotton, but that didn't turn out too good, so he just did away with cotton.

- KIRBY Can we go back to Early Town. What sort of memories, for instance, where did you go to school? Could you walk to school?
- SANFORD Well, where this trailer park is now, right next to Early Town now, and it's a bad trailer park—I hate to say it—there was a school there. Republic School. And I don't know whether I have a picture of that or not, but it went to high school when my Dad was here. He was born in Tuscaloosa County but came up here and went to school at Republic School, and he went to school there in the 11th grade. But when I was starting school, they had cut it down to three grades. So I went 1, 2, and 3 there, and then I went to Mineral Springs, about two miles from here. And one year that school was to the 7th grade, so I went to the 8th grade in Brookside, right, and that year they put the 9th grade back at Mineral Springs, so I went back to Mineral Springs in the 9th, and then went to Minor. (laughs) So, it's kind of confusing.
- KIRBY So you could walk to Republic School, but was there a bus up to Mineral Springs?
- SANFORD Yeah, Republic School was in my yard those first three years. No, the school as I remember it, Brookside in the 8th grade I did have a bus, but here you had to live over two miles from the school before a bus would pick you up, and I think this house just under two miles, so the bus wouldn't pick you up. So we had to ride bicycles or walk to the school, which wasn't too bad I guess. But I think Daddy and Mother, after a couple of years, I think they finally got the bus to pick us up. That was going to Mineral Springs. Of course, at Minor my dad and two or three people over here, we built a swinging bridge to walk across to catch the bus on the other side of the creek to go to Minor.
- KIRBY Just kind of like a rope to hold on to and a rope to walk on?
- SANFORD No, they floored it. It was a swinging bridge, but it was floored, and two cables on either side to hold on to when you walked across. I believe the cable is gone now, but for years and years the cables were still standing.
- KIRBY How far from the creek were you in Early Town?
- SANFORD Oh, it was, from the creek, it was probably a quarter of a mile.
- KIRBY So as a boy you would walk down there. What would you do?
- SANFORD You couldn't do anything at that point. It was all creosote. There wasn't anything living. A snake wouldn't even live in that creosote. But we swam in it, swam in it. But I don't remember—I remember during the war

I was riding a bicycle when World War II was declared, riding from the church to my house. I can remember that very well.

KIRBY Did somebody tell you?

SANFORD I believe somebody heard it on the radio. My mother when I got to the house heard that war was declared. And then I remember at that time and everybody picked up iron and sold it to a scrap iron dealer that came around once a week or once a month, and sold it to him to make munitions and whatever. Gosh, I think, you'd work all week picking up iron and stuff, and you'd probably make fifty cents. (laughs) But that's about all I remember from that era.

KIRBY Working the crosscut saw—did you have any other projects like that? Was life more work than it was play?

SANFORD Well, yeah, in a way. It was half and half; I didn't think anything about it then. It was just a way of life. No, I didn't, it didn't kill me. (laughs) But you know, you had to do your chores. When we moved over here, we still had to do chores, because when Daddy moved us into this house, they had milk cows, and pigs—we used to slaughter our own hogs—and cows, and chickens. We had this little smokehouse out here, smoke our own meat, make kraut and everything else. I remember over there when I was a kid, and another thing I hated, every Monday was wash day. You had a big iron pot, and you boiled clothes in it. They didn't have washing detergent as we do now, so you boiled the clothes. Every Monday now, and my job was to get fire wood to put under that pot. I don't care where you had to go to get it, go to the woods, or planks or whatever you could find to build a fire in that pot to make it boil so they could boil the clothes. I think we used lye to boil those clothes in.

KIRBY Yes, my understanding is that there was "lye soap." You could do something and make a cake of soap, mix lard or something in with it. I don't know the process. I guess your Mother made the soap.

SANFORD Yes, she made the soap. But every Monday, I don't care, you had to wash clothes, boil clothes you know. No washing machine. But it wasn't bad, you know, just the way of life. Everybody was doing it. And Dad, I think during the Depression when I was born, he worked at US Steel—in fact he retired from US Steel—he got down to one day a week. And he always raised a garden and all, so we never went hungry. Never went hungry.

KIRBY You had enough land where you were living in Early Town where you had a garden?

SANFORD Yes, he had about 20-something acres.

- KIRBY Oh, wow. Okay. Did all the houses have plenty of land?
- SANFORD Yes, for gardens and all they did, but Daddy had more land from that. He bought it from a man named Early. In fact, I've got the abstract deeds for that place—no, I've just got them for this place. Abstract deeds are nothing but a history of what happened way back when.
- KIRBY You said there are no deer now, but was there any hunting even then?
- SANFORD Squirrel hunting. Squirrel hunting was all that was around here, up the hollows and everything. Wasn't any deer then, and people have seen them as close as Lassiter Mountain, which is right over the hill here now, but I've never seen a deer in these fields. We did have some turkeys in this field. I saw a big gobbler and 12 hens, so I hope they're going to get started now.
- KIRBY Somebody told me not too long ago that North Jefferson County is some of the best turkey hunting in the state now, because it had been neglected for a while, just hadn't been hunted that much, and now there is a pretty good population of them in here.
- SANFORD Yeah, above Mt. Olive and Corner area, Warrior River, there's still quite a bit of land undeveloped, but it's quickly being developed, isn't it? Everywhere.
- KIRBY Yes, and as this Corridor X comes through, the concern about the creek is that they are going to clean up the industrial pollution in Tarrant going into the creek, and then all of a sudden all this development comes in and then there will be car antifreeze flowing into it and other kinds of pollution. So they are concerned about getting things set up so that, because it's really a beautiful area and beautiful place, and it needs to be preserved.
- SANFORD While you are on that creek subject, one of them, Sloss, is putting cyanide in it. When was the Clean Water Act initiated federally?
- KIRBY Well, it's been long enough for them to have cleaned it up.
- SANFORD 1967 I believe, wasn't it?! (both laugh) And all they do is get fined \$50,000 and keep on trucking.
- KIRBY But aren't there fish out there now?
- SANFORD Now there are fish out there, but I wouldn't eat one of them. I'll catch some and let you eat them if you want!

- KIRBY That's true, no, you're right. But at least it's progress. It's a lot cleaner than it was, though it's not as clean as it should be in order to have good recreation and fishing and things like that.
- SANFORD And some times, like last Sunday—see, if it rains up above here it gets up and over those little posts at the bridge down there, it was black, not muddy, but black. So somewhere above here something, I don't know how polluted it was, but you didn't have to measure it for anything else. You could look at it and tell it was black, and that shouldn't be. I noticed it Sunday. I don't go look every time it rains. And I've noticed, they come down there so often and take samples and see how much pollution is going in there and how much cyanide Sloss is putting in. They've been fined, and we went to meetings. I went to one meeting up here, and this government board was up there wanting everybody to talk. I'm not much of a speaker, but I said, my question to them is, "What are we doing up here? It's a law. It's been passed. STOP IT. Why are you asking me what I want to do? It's a law on the federal books. STOP IT. But they turned it back up to ADEM, and one of our senators, Jack Biddle of Gardendale, put a stop to something that they were going to get Sloss to do. I'm not familiar with all of it. But he stopped it, said they were going to lose a lot of jobs. Well, they will, but here's my take on that. The people who lose their jobs are going to be mad at the people who made them clean it up. But my take on that is, they ought to be mad at the company for having 20 to 30 years to do it, and they haven't done it yet. They had all this time to spend a little money all along and to do it. All these years and didn't do it.
- KIRBY Yes. Well, back to squirrel hunting. Do you have any stories?
- SANFORD (laughs) No, we just squirrel hunted. We had a little dog named Bouncer. She was a little fyce, and she was a squirrel hunter, and possums too. She was a good possum dog, and we used to catch possums and go sell them into the black community down here. I never would eat one, but they'd feed them corn, and they'd eat them. We squirrel hunted in what we call the hollow up here. We squirrel hunted as kids.
- KIRBY Where was the black community?
- SANFORD Did you come to a stop sign coming up Cherry Ave. coming to a little convenience store on the left? When you turn right there, you look off to the left, and there's a group of houses down there. But I asked a boy if there was anybody still down there that could talk, and he said no, all the people like that were gone. There are some young people down there, but I don't think there's but about five or six families living there now.
- KIRBY But that's always been the black neighborhood in Republic.

- SANFORD Yes. And those black people, we were friends with them. We never mistreated them anywhere. In fact, my mother and dad were real active in this church, they helped build this church over here, Republic Baptist. And we went to Christmas Eve at their church down there one time. We went down there and visited one time.
- KIRBY Did you have gifts or something like that, or was it just kind of a joint social?
- SANFORD Yeah, we just went in to them, and I think they were having a little program or something.
- KIRBY This was when you were what age?
- SANFORD Oh, nine or ten, early on. One bad memory I have, and you can turn that off (story of the loss of his eye, not race related—just a childhood accident)
- KIRBY At your church, did you have Sunday night youth group? What do you remember about it?
- SANFORD Back then, what did they have on Sunday evening before church? It was kind of like a youth program.
- KIRBY Like Baptist Training Union?
- SANFORD Baptist Training Union, that's exactly what it was. But this church here, gosh, up until recently—and all my aunts and uncles are passed away—but I had five or six or seven still active in it. It's a pretty active church now.
- KIRBY Was that the norm, a lot of people stayed here their entire lives? With the agriculture, well, did anybody work in a mine anywhere?
- SANFORD Yes. Oh, yeah, my uncle, my daddy's brother—of course this was before I was even born—my daddy worked the mines. He was in a mine somewhere in this area, I don't know where, in what we called wagon mines, and he got killed in a wagon mine, and my dad rode out on a car with him, rode outside with a mule pulling it. He never went back into the mines after that. He quit the mines that day and went to US Steel.
- KIRBY Do you remember what year that was?
- SANFORD If it wasn't before I was born it was when I was an infant, 1932 or '33.
- KIRBY What were your parents' names? I haven't asked you that yet.

- SANFORD J. T. Sanford. “J. T.” Sanford—that’s the only name he had—and my mother’s name was Oma Black Sanford. She was from a place on the way to Brookside called Daisy City. I think she was born there. I don’t have any brothers and sisters.
- KIRBY Did your mother, when you were young, just do canning and stuff like that?
- SANFORD She was a housewife, and when the war started, like a lot of the ladies, women, around here worked at DuPont powder mill plant.
- KIRBY Where was that?
- SANFORD You go towards Mineral Springs and there’s a caution light. Go straight across that caution light about two or three miles. The plant gate and everything is still there, but it’s been out of business for years. They made munitions during the war.
- KIRBY Do you know when it was built?
- SANFORD No. It was there ever since—and all, a lot of the people from around here worked there and retired from there.
- KIRBY Because there was what was called a “powder mill” over near Lewisburg, but all the people your age say it was already in ruins when they were boys in the 1930s and ‘40s, so I’m wondering if that was the same place that moved over here, or just a different business.
- SANFORD I don’t know anything about that. When I was like a teenager, when I’d already moved over here, during the war—I must have moved over here—well, 1946 I was here—there’s a plaque out here on the back porch—the plant was going strong. I never smoked in my life, but the few boys who were around here, when the people who worked at the plant got to the gate, you couldn’t carry a cigarette in there naturally. It was a powder plant! You couldn’t even carry a pack in there, so they’d throw all their cigarettes away, some with just a couple of puffs smoked off them. Well, all these kids who smoked, they’d pick them up off the road and smoke them. So when I was a kid it was going strong. Several people did have some explosions. Pete and Paul Burr worked there. I remember Paul Burr. He was older than I was, but he got killed when something blew up. My mother worked there, and a lot of other people worked there during the war. My dad didn’t ever have to go to the war. Of course, I guess he was at the right age, old enough where he didn’t get drafted. Civil Defense—we had Civil Defense, and I remember I was a runner. I had an arm band and hat and all that, and I remember we met at the church. At that time, you know, we didn’t know whether we were going to get invaded or not

by the Japanese. You never knew, so every community had Civil Defenses, and they met ever so often over here at the church and prepared—I was a runner on a bicycle. But luckily it didn't happen.

KIRBY Did someone from the Army come in and organize that?

SANFORD Yes, somebody from the Army came in and organized it, organized the Civil Defense, and as I remember they would come to some of the meetings after they got it organized to direct it so to speak.

KIRBY What kind of errands did you “run” as a runner?

SANFORD Well, anything that had to be done in the community. You know, I just practiced running some things. . . .

KIRBY . . . that would have been your duties if there had been an emergency. I see.

SANFORD That would have been a big deal back then if the Japanese had invaded. We would have had to have some sort of plan, and it was organized over the whole United States, I'm sure it was.

KIRBY Were there many bad accidents at the powder plant when your mother was there? Did you hear her tell?

SANFORD No, I don't remember. But there were several people over the course of the years. The one I remember is Paul Burr. Pete is still living; they were twins. But he was working at the powder plant and something blew up, and he was killed. Over the years there were, I don't know how many, but several people who got killed.

KIRBY Was your mother forced out of her job when the war was over, or could she have stayed on and worked if she wanted to?

SANFORD I don't remember. I would assume that, when the war was over, they hired the people, the men back that left there to start with.

KIRBY So they had the right to come back to their jobs, and if there wasn't a place for her, she would have been laid off.

SANFORD Yes. Gosh, all the men that left, there was a place for just about all the women to work, because there weren't any men around here. Almost everybody went to the war.

- KIRBY So far I haven't come across anybody who had one of those jobs, you know, a woman. And I believe I've interviewed about as many women as men, but nobody had a "Rosie the riveter" type job during the war.
- SANFORD I don't remember anybody—everybody is dead. Now Joe Country's wife, I don't know if she ever worked up there or not. She's still living. (phone rings) That was Elvin. He told me he's going down to the creek to fish this evening. But he doesn't eat them either.
- KIRBY Does he catch them and put them back?
- SANFORD Yeah.
- KIRBY I interviewed a man who grew up in Lower Coalburg, and he fishes—as you leave Upper Coalburg there's kind of a main road, and you turn off to go down to Lower Coalburg, and where you cross over the creek, and he fishes right along in there somewhere. There's some pretty good sized fish in there, but I didn't ask him if he ate them or not.
- SANFORD I've heard—I haven't see this before, but I heard that the Mexicans are coming and putting in where this new bridge is, and they are going with nets and catching them. And they eat them, I know. I haven't seen them, but I've heard in the past week or two that there would be a group of Mexicans come in there and take a big seine, which I guess is against the law, and seine everything and catch anything, no matter what it was, and keep them and eat them.
- KIRBY No, I don't know what the laws are about that. But that's not "sport fishing" for sure.
- SANFORD No, it sure isn't, and I would assume you'd have to have some kind of special commercial license if you did that. I would have thought somebody would have come down the creek and stop them, but I wouldn't have let them do it if I had seen them come down here.
- KIRBY Well, back to squirrel hunting, did you ever run across a still or anything when you were in the woods?
- SANFORD Oh, yeah, yeah. This house I was telling you about, I built that house 42 years ago.
- KIRBY What's the current address of that?
- SANFORD 1730 Bracket Loop Road. Right up from it, where my son has built a house now, is what we call the hollow. I can remember—well, where that house is there used to be a log cabin house, and the Brocks lived there.

And the Brocks, that all they—they made a lot of whiskey. And up that hollow there's a big hole still up there. I don't know whether I could find it now or not, it's been so many years, but one of the Brock boys got blown up in there, killed him. It was some kind of burner or something, and it blew up and killed him. There are some strip mines up there. After they got through mining they'd strip some, and I found the remains of some stills up there.

KIRBY But back to the Brock man, the still blew up? I never heard of that before, but I guess it could happen.

SANFORD Oh, there's another one as I recall now, right on this same road. Pete Doubleman got killed in a still blown up, but it was on top of the ground. This other one was in a mine, the Brocks, and Pete Doubleman's was outside. They used to have what they call "trombone" burners. They burn it with propane gas, and they would blow up some time. I don't know exactly.

KIRBY What period—we're on into the 1950s now?

SANFORD Yeah, that would have been—I got married in 1953, so that would have been—when Pete Doubleman got killed it was just before that, in the early 1950s. When Brock got that it was much earlier than that. I don't even remember that; they just tell about it. It was earlier, in the 1940s probably, when he got killed. Several wagon mines are up there, up that hollow. There are holes in there. In fact, when we built this house, the furnace is still downstairs. It's an old coal furnace, and that's how we heated this house. We'd go up there, and I'd go in those mines. Now we wouldn't go in there very far, but we'd go far enough in to dig coal for the winter to heat the house.

KIRBY It was just public property?

SANFORD No, it was dad's property. I don't guess he had the mineral rights, but who cared, you know? When I was a kid, you know, we used to go up in that same hollow, and I've dug coal, not very much, but we'd dig coal, and daddy would put it on the tractor and a wagon, and we'd haul it across the creek and sell it to people. That was after the war, and prior to that there were people who made their livings up there going in those mines under the hills up here. But all that was called "outcropping," because all those hills up in here were undermined by big mines way back in the Depression, and that's another story. I don't know anything about that; I've heard what happened, but I don't really know.

KIRBY What do you mean "undermined"?

- SANFORD Well, the big mine so to speak went down this big hill up here and went through the middle of it, and all these little mines that we'd dig in the side we called "outcropping"; they couldn't get to it because it was too close to the surface. So they left that coal, and that's what we called "wagon mines" that sprung up all over everywhere. People would go in there and dig and sell the coal.
- KIRBY And just have residential customers—they weren't loading it on the train. Just kind of a private business.
- SANFORD Some of them were loading on the train. There was a tippie at one time behind this house I built up in there, and that hole was covered up. There was a tippie there, back when the Brocks were there, and they had trucks. They dug coal and hauled it out of there on trucks.
- KIRBY When did electric power come into this area?
- SANFORD Oh, gosh, it was—
- KIRBY Pretty early?
- SANFORD Oh, yes. I think we had electric power since I can remember. I was born in 1932, and I guess we had it then. But when I got big enough that I can remember, we had power. I think we had the first television around here. That came in after I was a kid.
- KIRBY That would have been 1952 or '53 maybe?
- SANFORD Oh, no, we had it before '50s I believe. I got married in 1953, and we had televisions then. I remember the first hot water heater we had. It wasn't electric. It was a coal stove, and a boiler setting behind the coal stove. In fact, the flue was here, and I think we had the same thing right here (points to kitchen). Pack it through the stove, and as the stove got hot—of course you cooked on the stove in the summertime too, so it didn't make any difference—it got hot, and that's how you got your hot water. And for the world I don't know how it didn't blow up. I don't know whether they had some pop-off valves or not. I can't remember that. But hot water makes steam, and I don't know why, but we never did blow up.
- KIRBY The creek itself, because it was so polluted, really didn't play that much of a part in your lives, right? But you would go swim you said. Where was your favorite swimming hole?
- SANFORD A place right down here called Alley Cat. The Alleys lived across the creek, and in fact some of those boys and grandkids still live over there. It was called Alley Cat swimming hole. And when I first got out of high

school in 1949, for about two years I made a crop here, because I didn't have a job and didn't go to college, like a fool. We had a tractor, and you could plow the corn between here and that other house until it got about that high, maybe 15 inches, and then daddy—we had a mule too—so when it got that high, you couldn't plow with the tractor any more, because it would knock down some of the corn. So you had to plow with a mule. It was silly, but that's the way it was. And that old mule, he would go just as slow going up to that house, just as slow as he could. Now this was summertime, plowing the corn. And when he got turned around and come back toward the barn, he would run. I mean, he thought he was going to the barn. I can remember so many times I'd get back down here and I'd turn him around, and boy he'd start moping, and I'd whip him and make him run the other way. Of course, I was in shape then, a kid. And then after one o'clock or so we'd go in swimming down here in Alley Cat swimming hole. It was a bunch of boys, and what few girls there were, they'd holler at us, because we didn't have bathing suits. They'd holler at us on the way down there, so we'd put our clothes on before they came. (laughs) Yeah, we went swimming every day in summer time.

KIRBY This is like when you were high school age.

SANFORD Yes, well high school and the year I finished high school, '46, '47, '48, around in there.

KIRBY Right, because you finished high school and worked here for those two years. So you would have been a young man then, 18, 19, 20 years old, and still swimming in the swimming hole. So you had to shower, or wash off?

SANFORD No, I got married when I was 19. Well, yeah, we had a little shower out here. I tell you one thing, that was creosote in it then, when they called it "Creosote Creek." You never had trouble with sores—it would cure them up. But I've seen the time when it would rain, and those ponds that they were using to make creosote telephone poles or cross ties or whatever they were doing up there, and it would just about burn you. And some people did—they would go in after a rain, and it would burn their skin. It never bothered me, and I guess I never went in until it cleared up a little.

KIRBY Were there other creeks around where you could fish? Some people talk about Black Creek being pretty clean, and it flows in over near Coalburg.

SANFORD That thing, it stays red all the time. I think I know the one you're talking about.

KIRBY I have heard there is some kind of dye going into that. (note 6/10/05—this may be acid runoff from a mine/brownfield near Coalburg according to H.

Aten) The only place we went is Newfound Creek, which was above the power mill plant. It comes out of Bains Lake in Fieldstown and goes down in through there. And then on over there was one we called Crooked Creek, and it ran into the Warrior River. We used to go over there on Saturdays on bicycles and stay all night over there. We'd put little lines out and catch little old catfish about like that (indicates 12-14 inches), but that was the closest place here you could fish that I can remember.

KIRBY Was there a fish camp?

SANFORD No, you just went over in the woods on the side of the bank. Nobody would care back then. In Newfound Creek, it's still there. Have you been across it?

KIRBY I have not really explored the neighborhoods that much. But I do want to paddle Five Mile Creek. The water is up a little bit now; I wish I could get to it this week before it dries up again.

SANFORD Do you do canoeing a lot?

KIRBY Not a lot. I do have a canoe. I did more when I was younger.

SANFORD Yeah, it would be good. But a lot of places you'd have to pull it across. It goes down quick. See, I've been living here a long time, and the creek gets all over the fields when it floods. The basement door outside, I can remember when I left and got married, my mother and dad were still here, and it got up in the front yard going into the basement, and all at once it quit raining, and it started going down. That's the highest I've ever seen it. It had to be in the '50s or '60s. But on May 7, 2003, it flooded and got two feet in this house. I was in Gulf Shores coming back, and my son and daughter said—I had a truck, a 2002—and they said, “Do you want me to get the truck out? It looks like it's raining.” And I said, “No, leave that truck out there. It hasn't ever gotten that high.” Well, when I got home about dark, standing in this house over here, it was over the hood. It was up to the roof of my garage. I had a fairly new tractor down there, and it was over the tractor, and two feet deep in this house. The call it the 100 year, or the 500 year high, and of course it ruined everything. I had to go in four feet up all through the house and take all the sheet rock and padding and what's in here and redo the whole thing. And didn't have flood insurance! Home owners, but that didn't cover it. The only thing it covered was I had insurance on my truck and a four-wheeler. It ruined a four-wheeler. I traded tractors, because the electrical was all messed up, and they said, “We aren't guaranteeing the electric.” So rather than pay \$2500 to repair it, I just traded tractors. It used to not bother me. I'd go in here and go to bed, and it didn't bother me; now when it rains it worries

me. (laughs) And it's gotten up again to the top of the bank, over my mailbox. It does that all the time. But I believe why this is doing it, and Corridor X may have something to do with it, but it's all the development that is going on above this creek. They're building houses and shopping centers and everything, and paving it. The water isn't going through that pavement; it's got to run off, and it's going to run off into this creek. But what can you do about it?

KIRBY I don't know. There is more attention being paid to it, but as far as what can be done about the runoff, that I don't know. Those poor people who live in Midfield and Brighton where Village Creek floods all the time, it's a shame.

SANFORD They bought out a lot of houses in Brookside. It was flooded badly. Between here and this little place called East Warner it flooded a lot of those houses.

KIRBY Well, let's come back—you married when you were 19, so that would have been 1948. When did you build the colonial-looking house?

SANFORD I lived up here until the boys—Kevin, my youngest son, is 41, and he was 18 months old when I built that house.

KIRBY So that was about 40 years ago, mid-1960s. When you were a parent and had your children and your wife, what was it like being a parent here with young children? Were you still active in your church?

SANFORD Yeah, my wife was, and my dad was. Daddy died in 1987, and in later years of life he didn't go to church much because of his health. My wife worked for the telephone company, and I worked at Hayes Aircraft. Then when my first two children were born, I had moved from this rental house to Hillview and bought a house and lived there for five and a half years. And then when I moved back down here 40-something years ago, she quit work—well, she took some leaves of absence, and then she finally just quit. Then I went to another place called Plate Makers, and Alabama Engraving, and then I started my printing business in Homewood, Alabama Press.

KIRBY Oh, yeah, and that's how you knew Bill Nunnelley.

SANFORD I worked that about 22 years. I had a partner, and I sold out to him in 1998.

KIRBY So then when you built that house your kids were on up in age.

- SANFORD Well, they're four years apart, so one of them was one, one was five, one was nine, something like that. But the oldest one, he stayed down here most of the time and helped my dad farm. He really liked this place. Dad used to raise watermelons, and in the summertime, every day he'd put watermelons in my basement, and every day he'd come up there and eat watermelon with the kids. But they started to Hillview School and Bottenfield, but we got rezoned to Gardendale, and they all graduated from Gardendale school. I tell you one thing they did that my grandkids don't do, they cut the grass. Do you have any children?
- KIRBY I have a daughter, but she doesn't cut grass yet. I still do that. She vacuums and helps with supper.
- SANFORD I don't know about these young people. Momma and daddy will be out there cutting grass, and the kids will be in the swimming pool.
- KIRBY That's right. Were there any floods when you were a boy?
- SANFORD Every year practically. Not in this house, but it would get out into the fields. It was regular in the spring mostly.
- KIRBY Were there any drownings?
- SANFORD No, not that I can remember. But it would tear the pasture fences down, and when I was a kid we'd have to repair them. I still do, because the creek gets over the banks and tears the fences up, and I have to keep them repaired.
- KIRBY And if you had animals out in the fields, the water wasn't high enough to wash them away.
- SANFORD This spot over here on this side, it's got a high spot, and they stay out of the water. But when it got up to here in the house, I had 21 head of cattle, and every one of them got washed away. That was the saddest thing I've ever had to do was stand up there at that house and hear mooing going down that creek. They were right here at this corner by the house. It was high, normally it wouldn't be that high, but they were going down the creek. And that night six of them got washed around this house, and it was about that deep, and they got out.
- KIRBY And they survived it.
- SANFORD Six of them did, and I found the big bull and some in Early Town, and one nearly to Brookside, and one—seven months later I got the last one. I got all of them back but three. Seven months later I got the last one back. It was on kind of an island down here. Did you go by the junk yard? Right

behind the junk yard is the creek, and the creek makes an island there, and that cow was in there for seven months—seven months!—and finally Billy Moore, a friend, was walking across there looking for something, and he saw some manure where the cow had been. So we started looking for it, and I carried some hay across there. I could get across the creek in the summertime on my tractor, because it's about that deep, and I carried some hay over there. But I finally found her. We got all of them back by tranquilizing them. I've got a friend who has a tranquilizer gun, and we finally tranquilized her and got her back over here. She had a calf the next week. Sure did, pretty little old calf. One week. So she must have just gotten bred before she washed away. But that was sad hearing that, but there was nothing I could do about it—all that mooing going down the creek.

KIRBY Did some of your neighbors and friends lose more than that, the three you lost?

SANFORD No, I don't believe anybody did. Now there's a boy at my aunt's place—up there at the barricade was my aunt's place, and she sold it to a man named Jay Bostick, nice guy—he's got some cows in there now. But nobody had cows back in here then. I'm the only one who had them, that I know of. Maybe some down in Brookside.

KIRBY Well, that's okay. But that's a great story. I'm trying to jog your memory for some more good stories like that from back in the “old days”

SANFORD That was in 2003.

KIRBY Really, it was that flood, where all the houses in Brookside were destroyed, and that trailer park up in Tarrant was destroyed—it was that flood that really initiated this whole effort that I'm involved in. Chief Billy Hewitt was one of the prime movers to get some money to convert—there was a FEMA buyout of that trailer park, and he wanted to convert that to a park, something that even if it flooded once a year, it would dry out and a week later people could go back and walk in the park and play in the ball fields, and not something that would constantly cost money and people's houses would be ruined. And then that connected with Tom Maxwell and the Birmingham Regional Planning Commission's notion of wanting to connect greenways all around. But yes, that flood was the one that got people to saying, “We've got to fix something here.” Well, long the creek, are there places where, to your knowledge, there ought to be some kind of marker? Something like that can be really helpful to us.

SANFORD I can take you down on this side of the creek and show you where the baptizing would go on. You'd come in from the other side, but you can see

it from this side. But let me ask you about this greenway. Are they going to do that just in the city limits, or they going to, like this place here, are they going to try to buy this place, or buy a place to walk?

KIRBY I don't know how that's going to work. When there's private property that goes right up to the creek, then I don't know what sort of negotiations and so forth there's going to be for that. I suspect there will be land owners who will not want some kind of public thoroughfare with joggers and ladies with strollers and stuff coming right through their property. There are parts of the county that look pretty remote to me, and I don't think I'd want to jog or ride a bicycle through it. (both laugh) So I really don't know what's going to happen with that.

SANFORD Well, I'll be reluctant to let somebody do it. This day and time you don't know whose going to walk along there on private property.

KIRBY Well, I don't know how that's going to play out. The concept is a network of trails that would connect with each other and all along the creek. I think they are going to start with places that are within the city or where there's not going to be any controversy and see how it's going to play out. But I don't think anybody's going to come in and try to strong-arm you to sell, or put eminent domain or anything like that. I don't think that's going to happen, because the whole idea is to improve your neighborhood and the creek. So it's not just a bunch of "city folks" and environmental wackos coming out and trying to tell you what to do.

SANFORD It's going to be a problem, but they've got a long way to go to get the cities and get it all improved. It will be many, many years; I probably won't even be here. (discussion of Corridor X planning—first proposal was for his neighborhood) (shows a 1958 article about the underwater bridge, which was built in 1948) Convicts built that bridge, and my daddy would sell watermelons to those deputies for 10 cents apiece. (outside, at the underwater bridge) (shows the site of the swinging bridge, though no posts or cables are left) The creek gets a little lower than this in the summertime, but it runs all the time. Another thing these prisoners used to do, they must not have fed them too well back then in the prisons, because I saw those guards with shotguns kill rabbits over there, and even rats. And those prisoners would cook them and eat them right there on the bank while they were building the bridge. So it was pretty rough I guess. But I saw that, and I used to sell them watermelons I think for a dime apiece.

KIRBY These were both black and white?

SANFORD Yes. I got to come down here and repair some of my fences now. Here's the swimming hole. It's about this deep (indicated ribcage high). It never

was over your head. We used to run out and jump off those rocks right there and dive in that creek—it's a wonder we never got killed.

KIRBY (right along his pasture maybe 75-100 yards down from the underwater bridge is the Alley Cat swimming hole) Some of the local kids who live here still come down here to swim, huh?

SANFORD It could be a wonderful place if they get all the pollution out of it.

KIRBY Show me the baptizing hole. (we drive farther down, he tells about his dove shoots each opening day) Did you have anything like that when you were young, any community activities like that?

SANFORD No, no. Anything like that was with the church. It had stuff like that—singings and stuff like that. It was a country church, so we had service and country singings. I do remember at the old church that might be amusing to you. We had revival, and some guy had come in. And that's when the first nuclear bomb was exploded, where, New Mexico? And he came to that service and he preached, and said when that nuclear bomb went off, he said the cows that were so close to it, it turned them white. And he had everybody scared, and everybody here joined the church. All the drunks joined the church.

KIRBY They all got religion fast, huh?

SANFORD Oh, fast! He was preaching that the end was near. (farther down we are across the creek from the East Warner area) My understanding is that a long time ago the whole community used to be called Warner, and I don't know the history of that. Let's see if I can find the exact place where they baptized. There's not a road going down to it now. See that old house? It was right beside this house. Tom Brock used to live there. My dad never drank, never smoked, and never made whiskey. But probably about eight out of ten people around here made whiskey during the Depression. They had to, and not because they were bad people, just because they had to live. You know, that's a beautiful creek. I sit there on the front porch some time at night and hear it running, and I think, people in Gatlinburg pay good money to sit on the side of the creek up there, and I sit here and don't even pay any attention to it. There have been people who float this in canoes, because they put in up at my house and float down, but they don't do it very often. (back up at the underwater bridge) When I was a kid, people used to wash cars. When I got my first car, you could cross the creek and could pass on it, barely. People used to wash cars, and kids used to play and everything. It was a wonderful place to do it. And then all at once you started getting people out here who didn't take care of it. This is before my dad passed away. You'd get people down here, and then they started having dope parties—beer parties and dope parties. It

got so bad, they'd drive up the creek in four wheel drives, and this boy over here got in a confrontation with them and shot one of them. He didn't kill him, but then all of us on Bracket Loop Road got a petition up and closed the road. That's why the barricade is there. We went to the County Commission, and the Commissioners said, "We'll close it right past your driveway" (which is 20 feet from the creek). I said, "No, wait a minute now. If you close it right there, they'll park and walk down there. You're within 20 steps of the creek, so you can't do that." I said, "I own all that land all the way up to the old house." They said, "We'll close it there." So they closed it and deeded it back to me. We have a little problem every now and then. He's got a gate on it over here (other side of the creek), and he keeps them off that other side. See, it gets a little bit lower than this, but not much.

KIRBY This would float a canoe with no trouble.

SANFORD He keeps that gate open some of the time. The other day two cars pulled up here side by side. The boys were fishing, and there were four or five girls down here, and they were having a good time playing--Gardendale High School seniors. And I said, you know, "Can I help you?" He said, "I was fishing. The people who used to live on the property up here, they told me it would be okay for me to come down here and fish." I said, "They don't have anything to do with this property any more." And I told him in a nice way, "Y'all go ahead and play if you want to, but I can't let you do it again, because tomorrow or the next day there would be 50 people down here." Before you know it, there would be dope dealings and everything else going on like there used to be. My dad used to pick up needles along this road where they'd be down here needling up. At the County Commissioner's office up there, some boy got up and said, "I don't like it being closed. We've washed our cars, and it's a place we don't want to forget." I said, "That's fine." I couldn't stand it, so I said, "I don't want it closed either. But what you will have to do is assign a deputy down there 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Put a county deputy there, and I'll furnish the little house up there, and he can stay there 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. That's the only way you're going to control it." Are they going to do that? Of course not. So they closed it up. When people come down here, I say, "Can you read? Didn't you see that sign on that barricade up there?" But I haven't had any real problems I guess.