

Letcher Deaton
Upper Buffalo Creek
Owsley County, Kentucky
September 19, 1984

Dr. Garrett: What in the world started all this trouble that ended up getting all those people killed down there at the Gabbard group?

L.D.: I would have no idea.

Dr. G.: Just nothing huh?

L.D.: Well, you mean the Gabbards and things?

Dr. G.: Yeah.

L.D.: Doc Gabbard was abuying, he had a store, and the Rices had a store. Well, Doc Gabbard was abuying railroad ties and he was abuying logs and he was selling goods. Well, the Rices was doing the same thing so he was apaying 10¢ on the tie more than the Rices was and he was paying more for the logs and he was floating them out for some company and he was selling his stuff cheaper and I've been told that they just wanted to get shed of him. I don't know whether it was true or not.

Dr. G.: Now you were telling me about the names of the creeks. We got up to Lucky Fork...into the Lucky Fork and Stamper place. Now finish up telling me the names of the places up the creek.

L.D.: Now hold on. There.....

Dr. G.: Stillhouse and Stamper Branch.....

L.D.: The next 'un above there is the Miracle Branch on the left. Then the next 'un above that on the left is the Horn Branch. That's where them old Horns settled in there. The Horn Hill Cemetery is there. Then you go up, the next 'un above that 'un is the Steeltrap on the left. Just below there on the right is the one they call the Hungry John Baker Holler. Then you come on up there to the end of Steeltrap, on the right is the Schoolhouse holler. Then you go on up to the next 'un is, I called it....as far back as I can know an old man owned that by the name of George Sizemore. I call it the Sizemore holler on the right. Then you go on up to the next 'un above there on the right is the Jeff McIntosh holler. Old man Will Baker's people live there now. Then you go on up to the head of the creek next to Breathitt County. Just little drains run out.

(Dr. G.: Now on Laurel Fork, what are the branches?

L.D.: Well start in down here on the fork. First of all on the left is the Graveyard holler, they call it. That's on the left. Next 'un on the right is the Wheatfield holler. Then the next holler above it on the right is the Trace Branch. Then you come on up to the next holler above there is the Muley Branch. Next 'un is Jessie's Branch. A lot of little drains on the left there that ain't got no names for 'em. Then you come on up and the big holler on the left is the Cabin and then the next 'un above the Cabin is the Bear Den holler, on the left. Then the next 'un is the Laurel Fork on the right. And going up the Laurel Fork first holler up there is, well Doyle Barrett was raised up there, Stable Branch and the next 'un above that on the left is, no on the right is the Poplar holler and the next 'un on the left is the Mike Branch and the next 'un on the right is Baldhead and then you go on up about a mile and the one on the left is Billoak. Then the next 'un above that on the right is the Sang Coal and the next 'un on the left is (Can't hear) and the next 'un above that is the Bar Branch, and the next 'un above that is the Meadow Fork on the right and Groundhog on the left and the rest of it down the creek is the Frog Pond.

Dr. G.: The Frog Pond, well I'll be darned. What kind of yield did they get on their crops up here. What would a man make an acre of corn here back in your younger days?

L.D.: Well, when I was growing up my daddy tended very rich land and took care of it the best he could and we'd tend about I'd say we'd tend around 20 acres and he'd generally get about 400 bushel of corn.

Dr. G.: That's about 20 bushels an acre.

L. D.: Yeah, most of the people would run about 15 bushel.

Dr. G.: Now they make a lot more. What was the main crop they grew besides the corn? Wheat? Did you grow any wheat up here, or barley or rye, oats?

L.D.: They'd grow oats because they cradled oats.

Dr. G.: That cradling was hard work wasn't it?

L. D.: Yeah. Corn was about all they had to rely on you see. They'd save the fodder for their animals. There wasn't no hay, you know. Now some people had hay, but we'd shock the corn and pull the fodder, and topped and pulled blades and had it to feed our mules on. They done good on it.

Dr. G.: You bundled it.

L.D.: Yeah, they had to have corn you know.

Dr. G.: You used corn yourself and for your animals and made a little liquor out of it and for everything else didn't you?

L.D.: That's right. And about everybody relied on their garden and all they could raise. Irish potatoes, sweet potatoes, turnips and.....

Dr. G.: Late winter got pretty hard for food didn't it? How did you get through early spring before gardens came in when the garden was gone?

L.D.: They had it took care of.

Dr. G.: Cellars and so forth?

L.D.: You know they had...dried their beans. They'd dry their apples, and them turnips, they'd hole them turnips up you know just like Irish taters. They'd hole Irish taters up and make use of them next year.

Dr. G.: What's the name of that church at the end of Lucky Fork, up on Lucky Fork? I've forgotten the name of it, that log church building.

L.D.: Yeah. Faith Hill Community

Dr. G.: Faith Hill, yeah. Now who were the Horns? I hear a lot about the Horns. There's a Horn Hill and all. Who were they?

L.D.: I don't know where they come from. They was grandparents and parents of these old set of Wilders.

Dr. G.: Oh, the Wilders come from the Horns?

L.D.: Yeah. Old man Tice Wilder and Joe Wilder and you knowed Ike didn't you?

Dr. G.: Yeah, I knew Ike Wilder.

L.D.: They was brothers and then they was a John Wilder that got killed in Hazard. A colored man killed him. He was, JOHN was a big old heavy feller and he was a....when the head law come in up here at Hazard, they had a cow warden and every time a cow was out you know, he'd bring the cow in and he had a stray pen to put her in. He had a colored man's cow and he charged a dollar for his trouble taking care of the

(L.D.: (Cont'd) cow till they come and got her and that colored man wouldn't pay him the dollar and he told him, I'll just go down here to town and I'll get a warrent and it'll cost ye \$3.00. That colored man just pulled out a pistol and shot him and killed him.

Dr. G.: Did he last long, the colored man?

L. D.: I don't know.

Dr. G.: You didn't have any colored people along this creek did you?

L.D.: No. We've had one since I've come...yeah, they was...the only colored man I've heard of, I didn't know him, was one that some of the Moores and Rices raised, a colored boy and they was another one come in here. He was a half, but he was black. He was Adron Duff's aunt was his mother. Cadger was his name. Cadger Laurel.

Dr. G.: Heres an Andrew Baker, May Baker.

L.D.: Here's Martha Baker oldest daughter of John H... and Lucinda Baker, born January 21, 1826 died in 1890.

Dr. G.: Here's another, a Sizemore down here, first time...

(L. D.: A lot of these are Sizemores..

Dr. G.: They lived on Buffalo?

L. D. : Yeah

Dr. G.: Hugh Sizemore. I remember that name from somewhere but he died before I was born I guess.....Bowling

L.D.: Jane Bowling, December 26, 1820

Dr. G.: 1931, 1844, that's 1844 yeah, died in 1931, pretty old woman.

L. D.: She was an old woman. She was a mother to old Aunt Martha Fields. Jane Bowling, yeah. I don't know who she was before she....

Dr. G.: Elijah Baker. I knew old man Elijah Baker. There 1940 he died. 1854 so he'd have been 85 years old. Where is Greeley Baker. Do you know where he is? Is he dead?

L.D.: Greeley Baker, he'd buried back down here.

Dr. G.: Yeah, he was in a lot of trouble. What did he kill, two or three himself?

L.D.: I don't know. He was tried for killing Trice Turner but they ended and didn't do nothing with him.

Dr. G. Greeley was always mean as hell. Always as long as I knew him. He'd have been pretty much around my age I guess. Yep, I can't figure that name. Letcher, tell me how people lived. How did they cook when they first come in here. Did they use cranes and hooks and stuff like that or did they cook on the hearth?

L. D.: Yeah, they had to you know. All they had was this old cast iron. What they had and the one that didn't have that, they'd cook on the fire. They'd bile their meat you know and make them ash cakes on the hearth.

Dr. G.: Tell me how you made an ash cake. Did you ever make one?

L. D.: No, but I've seed 'em made.

Dr. G.: How? How was it made?

L.D.: Well, they had these old hearth rocks you know and wood fires and they'd just rake 'em out. Use some fire and build their fire, had it built right on the edge of that hearth and them old flat rocks, They'd have them heated good with fire and they'd make up a pone of bread, use flour or corn meal and just put it right on that fire. The way they'd have that fire right here, it would bake the top part of it and hot under the bottom and then they'd turn it over.

Dr. G.: Just baked it right on the hearth.

L.D.: They just baked it on the fire or put more on it. They had that hearth rock cleaned off you know. But first they had a hot fire built up there so that rock'd be hot.

Dr. G.: They got to raising hogs pretty early didn't they? A hog was an important part of the food wasn't it, and chickens?

L.D.: Uh huh, no doubt, yeah. Old aunt Jane Sizemore, she married old Big Jim Deaton and raised her family right where I was raised, before my time. My grandfather built or bought old Big Hog Andy Baker out where we was raised and Jim Deaton and Jane rented from Big Hog Andy Baker and he went to Jackson County.

Dr. G.: Where'd he get Big Hog, where'd he get that name?

L.D.: I've asked that question to my granddaddy. My granddaddy ~~said~~ he raised the biggest hog of all men that was in that count^ry and lived and ate it 100 years.

Dr. G.: Everybody had a nickname didn't they?

L.D.: Oh, they did. You know Hugh Berry Sizemore was Jane Sizemores, he was a brother to Jane, Hugh was and George Sizemore, you know, he owned about 150 acres up here on the Lucky Fork, the George Sizemore holler you know. It laid back 50 acres a tract of land on it, just like that where you drive up that bank but it's got a fine growth, second growth of timber on it. The same kind of soil this is and he only wouldn't pay his taxes. He didn't make enough corn. He'd come to our house AND GET HIM turns of corn all through the summertime. Helped daddy plow, plant corn or hoe corn for a turn of corn. Had a big family. Them was the best fiddlers, banjo pickers, them young men, they was in the county. They'd pull out no matter how hot a time it was. They'd walk for miles and pick music for a square dance, but they wouldn't work. They was starved out up there, and they left Hobart Morris, he married old man Jerry Baker's girl over here, and he went to Booneville and paid the taxes off and the court made him a deed for it. Well then that farm program come in here, you know, for lime and stuff and in about 3 years, he was raising the finest tobacco up there you ever grown and now that's where they're getting this big coal coming out of there. There's 2 or 3 big veins of coal. One of them, they said was 47 inches and it's just a flat country up there...

Dr. G.: That's a lot of coal.

L.D.: Hobart died back here 2 or 3 years ago and give it to his boy.

Dr. G.: Letcher, let's sit down here a minute. Tell me about the gunsmiths you knew. You're a gunsmith yourself. Tell me your history about making guns and so forth will you? You were telling me there were some other gunsmiths up on this creek. Can you tell me about that?

L. D.: Old man Bob Baker was a gunsmith.

Dr. G.: Was that the one buried up here?

L. D.: Yeah, and uncle Dan Morris, they worked together.

Dr. G.: Mars or Morris and where did he live?

(L.D.: Morris, and he lived in Breathitt just across the hill over here.

Dr. G.: What kind of guns did they make?

L.D.: They just made them old cap and ball rifles.

Dr. G.: How long ago were they working? In your lifetime or.....

L.D.: Oh yeah, law I used to come up here and visit him and shoot his old rifles and stuff he'd have over here and he got to where he couldn't see good, you know to shoot 'em. When he'd be asighting them in, he'd want me to shoot 'em. Yeah, I'd come over here and spend sometimes 4 or 5 hours with him.

Dr. G.: Did he make a lot of them?

L.D.: Well yes, he didn't farm to amount to nothing. This was his farm right in here. That feller he worked at, he was a deputy sheriff different times but he didn't have nothing much to do. Why he just had old simple hand tools that he'd make 'em with.

Dr. G.: How did he rifle them?

(L.D.: He rifled them with a stick.

Dr. G.: Just like you do.

L.D.: Yeah

Dr. G.: Do you have any idea where that stick rifling type came from? That's pretty unusual.

L.D.: My guess is that's one of the first. It had to be because I don't know where, old man Kenny Abner, he used to work on guns before he got so old and he was the one that told me that you had to rifle them with a stick. Well I said, Kenny how do you do it? And he showed and told me. I come up and seed Black Bob and he had the same instruments over here. You see, them old men back then, they wanted as small a bore as they could get and they went from a twenty five on up to you know, and they'd get them there small bores and then when their rifles would get affected they'd call dressing them out. They'd cut their lines down deep you know and then they'd dress them down with another set. Rerifle 'em. Well, they'd get bigger all the time. When a man had a rifle and had it sighted in the way he wanted it, he'd keep that gun

(L.D.: (CONT'D) and that's what he used. He'd keep it and the kind of oil to use was groundhog oil.

Dr. G.: Groundhog oil?

L. D.: Grease. That's what they used on them. He'd keep it greased and they'd rub it on the wood of 'em. Well they'd keep 'em. They'd get bigger all the time, you see. You see ever time they'd rifle 'em out, they'd get bigger for years to come, and then they'd wouldn't use that. It took too much powder and lead you know and they didn't want to shoot small game with a big old bore rifle.

Dr. G.: Why did you start making rifles and when?

(L.D.: My daddy used to, daddy use to go squirrel hunting when I was a boy in mulberry time. Big mulberry tree and squirrels'd eat them and he'd take a hog rifle and kill 7 or 8 squirrels or maybe 8 or 10 for a good mess of squirrels. That's all he'd fool with; and then through the fall of the year he generally go squirrel hunting 2 or 3 times. Not over three times, with a hog rifle. Well that's the first kind of gun I ever shot. He let me use it and it made a long fire. Well, I got to shooting. Well, Ab Allen and his old woman, they never would raise anything or have a hog or nothing. I don't know who made these guns but through the summer time and the fall of the year, Ab would come to our house and his old woman. They'd both go barefoot all the time till it got cold weather, well packing a new cap and ball rifle..shot, powder, bullet mold, it was good, handmade to fit it, powder horn and everything. He wanted to swap it for a piece of meat. That's what he wanted. Well, daddy wouldn't weigh the meat or nothing. He would just go and cut down a chunk of meat and give him and he'd leave the hog rifle and everything. Well, I was a boy and my mother would raise cain with my daddy. "You go out and take these old guns out of here, out of the way". She'd be sweeping and they'd be setting in the corner. Well, daddy if he was going squirrel hunting, he only had one ste of rifles he would take whichever he got ahold of. Whichever he got ahold of that shot good. Well, I got to looking them all over and fooling with them and I seed there wasn't too much to it. But there's a right smart agin you mortise them plates and everything in there. I got to fooling with them. I used to, Sears and Roebuck, sold them there barrels at \$2.00 apiece. That's what them old fellers told me. Old Black Bob told me you could buy....sold for 45¢ if you bought one of the plates. 65¢ bought that 'un with the lock on it. Yeah, now what are they?

Dr. G.: Now they'd be \$50.00 probably.

L.D.: The cheapest one you can buy but they ain't worth nothing subject to break you know. The cheapest one costs you \$28.00. That's got the lock on it and run up if you get one of them fancy kind that's case hardened and all. Fancy one will cost you about \$80.00.

Dr. G.: Now the man that brought these rifles down, had he made those rifles?

L.D.: I don't know. I don't know who made them. The wood would be new. Some of them would be curly maple, some black walnut stock and some just plain.

Dr. G.: A rifle and a pistol was an important part of life wasn't it.

L.D.: Oh, that was the main thing they could depend on you know. And another thing, that I see. That I think. I believe that education stopped a lot of trouble in this country. Now there was Hobe Rice, Judge had a good education. Fred Gabbard had a good education. Harve Rice wouldn't ever have nothing to do with it. I asked Fred. I said, "Fred", it's been over 20 years since I talked to him. I said, "Fred, how come this". Fred was electioneering for Hobe. He was running for Judge and I said, "Fred I wouldn't have thought you'd have electioneered for one of them Rices." He said, "Letch, people can't go along all the time with feuding behind them. The greatest thing is we'd had in all the trouble that people has is an education. People if they've got any sense, they ain't agoing to kill one another uncaused for. A little dispute comes up why not settle it with talk instead of powder and lead?" I believe he was right.

Dr. G.: I talked to Fred Gabbard about it, about his dad getting killed and all because my uncle Gene was involved somewhere in that thing and, were the Duffs involved in that shooting too? No? Well, anyhow Fred and I talked about it and he's right. Education makes a big difference. Makes a great big difference. Breathitt was pretty bad, wasn't it. God, Breathitt was rough country. All this and Breathitt County.....

L.D.: You know people back then they didn't rely upon the law like they do now. They didn't abide by it and if somebody done something say killed your brother, well then in order for them to get revenge, they was satisfied if they could kill whoever done it.

Dr. G.: It went right on and on.

L.D.: Well, there wasn't no education. There was Dan Gabbard..
He never had nothing to do with none of them others. What happened to Dan, Elijah didn't but Bud did and Bill. Bill Gabbard he never would go to the bushes, he would just walk out face to face and that was another thing. He was laywayed and shot offen his horse or mule twice and they never killed him and he still never went to the bushes.

Dr. G.: How many people did Bill kill?

L.D.: I don't know. He killed that Ansel Vires, that Reynolds Vires daddy and his mother.

Dr. G.: Did he kill any others besides them?

L.D.: I imagine he has but I don't know. You see what they believed in back then was if somebody did something to them, now Bill was a pretty fair man, he sent ever one of them others word to leave this country and not let him meet them or get up with them. Well a bunch of them left when they got out of the penitentiary. They didn't come back here but old man Rice, old Bill Rice, but this 'un that was in that trouble he went to Kings Mill. Well Bill was satisfied. My daddy was working at Kings Mill and Sid was working out there and Bill got up there and talked to somebody and blowing about what happened here...

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L.D.: He come back home. Well Ansel Vires got out. He told old man Doc Wilson he was a friend and neighbor to 'em all. He said, Doc, go tell old Ansel we can't hardly live in this country, for him to leave it. I don't want to hurt him or be hurt by him. Tell him I said to leave. Doc come back and told Bill. He said, Bill, he said that he wasn't agoing. That he got one of you fellers and that he had enough ammunition and shells left in the same box to get the rest of you and he wasn't agoing. Bill told him, he said Well he ain't got no sense has he. Bill and Rob Beard had been over on Lucky on Sunday going across down the Guy Branch. Ansel lived back there on the top of the hill and they's agoing down the hill and they heared him acalling the the hogs. Bill listened and he said, that's Ansel acalling hogs. Yeah, Rob Beard said it is. They's ariding two stallions, 4 year old stallions. Horses. I don't hear my brother acalling hissun. He said I just as well to kill him. Rob Beard said I'm not agoing. Bill was in front ariding the trail. Bill said now Rob you don't want to fly up on me, I said I don't want to start with you. He said come along, and they rode right through the fields and they got right up there and there Ansel was and his old woman said I see...Bill heared what she said as they

(.D.: (CONT'D) rode up. It's steep. Bill had his pistol in under his belly just in his saddle bent over and had a big blue suit on and Stetson hat and Bud Smith was the sheriff. Ansel said, yonder comes Bud Smith. Ansel said, by God, let him come, he's a good friend of mine and Ansel came to meet him and just as Bill raised his head up there, he said Ansel this is not Bud Smith. Ansel said well now I don't want no trouble with you. He said there won't be none. Ansel went to jerk his pistol out of his shoulder top holder, Bill already had his sun out and he shot him three times. His old woman jumped under the fence. She said, Bill, she called him bad names. I'll see you go to the penitentiary for the rest of your life over this. He said dead witnesses tell no tales so that was the last of her. Then he was tried at Hyden. They had the case moved to Hyden to try to get fairness on the jury..... You know once they get this coal this will be setting on a high knob.

Dr. G.: Just a knob, yeah.

L. D.:you'll be shot stone dead off a bulldozer or something...

Dr. G.: Yeah. You say the mill set right here? Now who had the mill?

(.D.: Old man Ken Gilbert was the one that built it.

Dr. G.: When did he build it, do you have any idea?

L. D.: No, I don't. It was built when I was a very small boy big enough to ride a mule and come over here with my daddy when he come to the mill.

Dr. G.: Did he have big rocks in here now?

L.D.: No this was where the water, see he had ...the building was over here and the water come through the chute here on this wheel, his waterwheel. It'd turn on a spindle.

Dr. G.: And then grind it up there. How long ago was that?

L. D.: Hit must have been.....you mean the last that was sground here?

Dr. G.: Yeah

L.D.: It must have been in the early 40's or late 30's.

Dr. G.: I want to go up here and get a picture down this way.

L. D.: See, look ahere. That must have been where the water come into his wheel here. That wasn't washed but might have washed from in here. You can't feel all the rocks.

Dr. G.: Come up this fall and take a look at it.

L. D.: Old man Billy Fields lived right down yonder. He put him in one. Ken had such a big he'd catch water, that water would back up plumb into that big holler you see there. It weren't filled in then and the old man couldn't get no water to grind. When Ken wanted their corn ground, he'd do the grinding and he'd let the water out. The old man would catch it down there but he didn't have nothing to grind. Well, his old woman would come up, she'd tell Ken. Ken (she was supposed to be a witch), you were supposed to grind me a turn of corn but me and the children ain't got no bread. He'd grind her up half a bushel or bushel and give her. Well, it come a hard year and he wasn't getting much grinding to do. There wasn't much corn, you know. Martha come and wanted him to grind her a bushel of corn and give it. He said, Martha Jane, I hain't got it to spare. Said I've got a big family and I hain't got it. Well, she said, I'll pull my witchcraft on you mill and tear it all to pieces and on you. Old woman, he said, tell your witchcraft. We'll see what it will do. You've told me that all your life and us neighbors. I want to see what it'll do. She grunted around you know and done this and that and nothing didn't work. Well she went on back home. Old man Kenny, before he left, he ground a bushel of corn and put it on his back and took it down there to her. Here's your corn, being as your witchcraft didn't work, from now on don't threaten nobody with your witchcraft.

Dr. G.: Letcher, I got interested in putting some of this stuff you gave me in the University of Kentucky one day and maybe we'll write something on it someday. Something on the county. Is it all right with you if I use some of your stories?

L.D.: Yes sir.

Dr. G.: Well, you got great stories and you got so much history it'd be a shame. It would make you kind of immortal because it would be written there that it's your stories and so forth, and if you ever find anything more about gunsmiths I'd sure like to know anything I could about gunsmiths because I'd love to see photographs of the old tools the gunsmiths used.

L. D.: I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll make one of them there (can't hear). I'll make it and I'll put the saws in it and I'll make one and I'll give it to you. I'll have it on a good stick. I glue saws in there fer ye to show people.

Dr. G.: That's a system I don't know has ever been described before. It had to be an early system, but it sure works.

L. D.: It had to be the first thing.

Dr. G.: Are you much of a cook yourself, Letcher?

L. D.: No, not much. I have....I married, my wife was young and she was an old time cook and she could cook anything they was to cook. I raised a family and I done the work and she tended to the house and the children.

Dr. G.: Who was your wife? What was her maiden name?

L. D. : She was Sid Gabbard's girl.

Dr. G.: What was her first name?

L. D.: Patty

Dr. G. : Patty Gabbard. How many children do you have?

L.D.: We got five. Five grown and three dead.

Dr. G.: What are the name of your living children?

L. D.: Easter was the oldest one. Chaddie and Maggie and Flossie Ann and Gary. Just raised one boy.

Dr. G.: Is he a school teacher?

L. D.: Yeah

Dr. G.: Where does he teach?

L. D.: Teaches down at Booneville, him and his wife.

Dr. G.: What does he teach?

L. D.: I don't know. He...after he had his four years of college, he got his masters and went back and got his professorship. He was wanted for a principal down here at Booneville. He got his professorship. I said, son you aint agoing to be no principal. Why daddy? I said, you better be a game warden and you hain't agoing to be. People, everybody likes you and you've got a good name and you can't please everybody in a school and if you can't get enough money, you and your woman, teaching school, I'll give you what you've got here and you ought to be killed. Both of you.

END OF TAPE