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Letcher Deaton  
Upper Buffalo Creek  
Owsley County, Kentucky  
December 15, 1984

Dr. G.: Morris Garrett and Letcher Deaton are sitting on the left hand fork of Upper Buffalo here on the 15th of December, 1984. You said your name was originally Fletch. It was changed to Letch. Letch or Letcher?

L.D.: Letcher

Dr. G.: Letcher after Governor Letcher maybe?

L.D.: I don't know.

Dr. G.: Now Letcher, tell me starting down here at Bee Branch, tell me the name of these creeks in the forks, will you?

L.D.: Well, starting at Bee Branch coming up on the left, the first branch is the Little Twin. The second branch on the left is the Big Twin.

Dr. G.: Where did they get their name?

L.D.: I wouldn't know. Then you come on up to the next one on the left is Rafe's Holler they call it, and the next one on above that is the Guy Kemp Branch. That's this one right here. Then the next one on the left is the Appletree and the one on the right of the creek called Appletree is called Lee Holler. Then you come on up and the next 'un on the right is the Mid Branch and then that's up to the forks of the Laurel and Lucky.

Dr. G.: And then where do we go from there on around? Let's get on up there clear up to.....

L.D.: Lucky Fork. Well, Lucky Fork, the first one on the left is the Matt Branch, and that's named after old Richard Rices daughter and she heired that. That was her heirs part, I've been told of that old Richard Rice's estate. Her name was Matt and she married a Stamper. He was laywayed and killed up in the Trace Bank, John Stamper was. He was from Bullitt County on Long Creek.

Dr. G.: Who killed him?

L.D.: I don't know.

Dr. G.: All right, go on up above that branch.

L.D.: Well, the next one above there is Low Allen Branch

( .D.: (Cont'd) on the left and then the next 'un above there is Upper Allen Branch which is called the Horn Hill because the cemetery is up in there. Then the next 'un above there is the Steeltrap on the left AND THEY'S JUST LITTLE BRANCHES RUNS OUT ON THE OTHER SIDE. They's a Schoolhouse Holler on the right. It's a big holler. Then the next 'un above there is George Sizemore Holler. It runs on the right and then the next 'un above there on the right is the Jeff McIntosh Holler. Then the rest of it is the head of Lucky. Just little branches. Getting way up in there you know. Then on the Laurel Fork, start up here on the right. The first 'un is the Wheatfield and the next 'un is the Trace Branch. The next 'un above that is the Muldy Holler and above that on the right is Guess's Branch. Then on the left, the next 'un on the left up there, the first 'un on the left is the Bear Bin Holler. The next 'un above it is the Cabin Holler and then the (can't hear) is one on the right. Then the other fork is the Courtland and the Laurel Fork. Come on the Courtland Fork, first 'un on the left is the Joyce Fork and then on up there to the foot of the hill is the Black Bob Holler on the right and the Falls on the left.

Dr. G.: Let's see now. Prewitt owned the hollow and he was killed and his body was hidden up there wasn't it? His body was hidden before it was found?

( .D.: Yeah

Dr. G.: Do you know anything about the.....you say you didn't know much about Boston Baker?

L.D.: Nothing any more than just what I've heard about him.

DR. G.: Were there any Indians on this creek when the white man first come in here?

L.D.: I don't know. I never did hear.....

Dr. G.: Fred Gabbard told me at one time that there were three families living at the mouth of the creek and that an Abner and a Baker come in here. Now later on I knew an Abner Baker. I didn't know if that was the same faction or not, but Fred said they killed the Indians, however, Robertson over there at Teges, do you know Mr. Robertson, lives over at Teges? I can't remember his first name right off hand, but he said that his great-great-grandmother was one of them. That he's one eighth Indian...and that they didn't kill them all off and so I've been trying to gather lots of information on Owsley County. Now how many brothers did Doc Gabbard have? Who were they?

L.D.: Sid Gabbard was one. Lige Gabbard, Big Lige they called Jim and Bill, and Ben, and Bud.

Dr. G.: Now Grover wasn't one of his brothers. Now how many sisters did he have?

L.D.: He didn't have none.

Dr. G.: No sisters. Now who was their dad?

L.D.: Lige Gabbard.

Dr. G.: Elijah or Lige Gabbard?

L.D.: They always just called him Lige.

Dr. G.: Now who was his wife, do you know?

L.D.: She was a Peters.

Dr. G.: A Peters? Now you said the Peters then was maybe the first people up there?

L.D.: Well, she was raised on the Pea Ridge back here.

Dr. G.: Any evidence of where they lived up there any more on Pea Ridge?

L.D.: Yeah. Well, they're building a road back through there alogging through them woods and flat country and they run into sinks you know and they hauled them old chimbley rocks, most of 'em, and put 'em in mud holes. Yeah, they was three. Well, there were more, they didn't get up to them. It's in the mid of the head holler out yonder, there's an old chimbley place up there.

Dr. G.: Why did they settle that high? Why didn't they settle on the creeks?

L.D.: Well, old man Kenny Abner told me when he was a boy, he was raised down there at Cedar Valley down here about the mouth of Buffalo. He lived there with his uncle, he must have raised him and he said he would go to mill and ride a jenny to Lafe Abners. That was his uncle, and said that hit would take them all day to beat that meal. They had a big white oak tree cut and a log off of it and a scaffold built over it and a spring fold across to two saplings and one come down and had the log with three holes mortised in it. They would put that corn in one of them and they would put it down and beat it and it would spring back and they would move it to another hole and get that out with their hands. He said it would take them all day to get you a bushel of meal.

( r. G.: They beat it in a hollow log?

L. D.: No, no. They just had this hole mortised out in the top of the log and this pole went up through the roof and was tied up there till the spring pole come across so when they pulled it down it would jerk it back up you know.

Dr. G.: That's how they would make their meal?

L.D.: That's what he said. This here end of this was sorta like a maul, the way he described it to me and it would have little notches cut in it to feed the corn down. They'd just feed it and crack it up on the first run. He said, they moved on this other the same thing to it and get it finer and then put it in the other hole and finish it.

Dr. G.: It would take them all day to do five bushels then, wouldn't it?

L.D.: He said he'd go a morning and get there and said he'd have to stay all night with his uncle, and couldn't but have to stay there.

Dr. G.: Where was that?

L.D.: It was on the Pea Ridge.

( Dr. G.: On top of the hill and they didn't have any water power in that time. They didn't use water power then. Now later on then, they made these other mills you showed me.

L.D.: Now they was one, when we was alogging. I was a foreman for Genette Lumber Company in this virgin timber. I worked 11 years for them as a foreman. I was over the roads, and whenever they needed or wherever and we had a road in the back of Laurel Fork back here. Right in the creek, and you know the truck drivers reported that they's some rocks that got naked up there in the gravel bar and that was right at the mouth of Sang Coal, they called it, and said they had to something be done about it. Well, the superintendent sent me up thar with a crew of men and we went up thar and it was a log. Well, I didn't know what kind of log it was. I didn't pay that much attention. It was scored and hewed and they had been a water mill in thar. That was the sill. We chopped it out.....

SANG COAL  
(ginseng)

Dr. G.: That's not one of 'em you and I looked at.....

L.D.: No

Dr. G.: This was at the mouth of Sang Holler?

L.D.: Yeah, that's right up this right hand holler.

Dr. G.: Up there at Courtland?

L. D.: No, you know where the forks is down here. It's up that right hand fork. The Laurel Fork. That's the Laurel Fork.

Dr. G.: I mean up the Laurel Fork, yeah.

L.D.: I'd say it's 2 or 3 mile up there.

Dr. G.: Was it toward the Courtland Cemetery?

L.D.: No, it's up this other fork.

Dr. G.: Yeah, I know where it is now.

L. D.: You know, I never could find out whoever knowed anything about a mill being there.

Dr. G.: I often wonder why they settled on top of the hills in those days?

L.D.: Well, I went to tell you a while ago. I asked about that and old man Kenny Abner told me that back when he was a boy, these people said that lived here, that was some of his uncles and things that lived in here, cousins. He said that they settled in thar on account of the timber. He said that the timber was so big down in these valleys they couldn't handle and they settled where the ground was poor and the timber was small and said they'd just clear out 2 or 3 acres you know and build fences to raise a little stuff in. Didn't keep nothing, he said, but a jenny or jack to pack on. That was all the horse stock he said that they had then. He said the women done the most of the work and he said the men hunted and done little jobs and built.

Dr. G.: How did they cook in those early days?

L.D.: They cooked on this old iron ware where they had it and where they didn't have it, they cooked on the fire or on the hearth rock. Make ash cakes and stuff for their bread. Briled their meat.

Dr. G.: Just broiled their meat right on the fires? It was hard to get heavy stuff in here, wasn't it, like iron?

L.D.: Oh yeah, They didn't have no use for it nohow I guess. They didn't have no, didn't have enough stuff to fool with. They just went along as they could, you see.

Dr. G.: Each meal was just kinda made up in it's own way. Whatever they got.

L. D.: Yeah, well, now after they got...old man Bill Riley owned this whole thing in here. This whole country in here. I lived up the branch up here, right across from the branch where I built my house. He volunteered during the Civil War. Well he didn't, him and his wife didn't raise no children but when he come back, he was gone 5 year and when he come back, his old woman had him a baby boy. A great big boy, named him Jimmy. She'd had another man while he's gone, but he thought high of that boy and raised him and he set out before the Civil War now, he set out a big orchard. This whole bottom in here was fruit trees. He grafted his own trees. When I moved in here in 1930, all all through the Gabbard times they's apples enough for everybody. They had a big kiln over there to dry apples on. A big wood kettle.

Dr. G.: What was the kiln like?

L.D.: It was a flat rock, queer rock that come out of the bed of of this creek right out here. It was about this thick and...

Dr. G.: 4 or 5 inches thick.

L.D.: Yeah, and you can't hardly break it. Just kind of rocky grains in there, though. Hard to break and they had a wall built up here you see and that rock laying level on that, a big long rock and a smoke stack, chimley at the end of it.

Dr. G.: Have a fire under the rock....

L.D.: They just...It'd hold about 4, I guess it would hold 4 bushel of cut-up apples at a time and they just poured them on that rock in under there you know and built a slow fire under it. The next day them apples was dry, and the women all over this creek would come and dry their own apples. They wasn't no charge for the apples. They was from early June apples till the latest of apples.

Dr. G.: Did they dry pumpkin or anything like that?

L. D.: Oh yeah, they dried punkin.

Dr. G.: How did they dry pumpkin?

L. D.: I believe they was just an old time fireplace there. Now when they had a pole across, hang a pole, then just cut that punkin like wagon tires and they'd just hang it on that pole thar.

Dr. G.: And just let it dry.

L.D.: And when it was dry, they'd take it and hang it up in the kitchen on a nail.

Dr. G.: How did they cook it?

L.D.: Just put it in and cook it with a piece of fat meat in it.

Dr. G.: Did they skin the peel off of it?

L. D.: Oh you cut it up and then you'd peel it.

Dr. G.: Peel it before you dried it?

L.D.: Oh yeah.

Dr. G.: Just hang it up to dry and then chop it up and fry it up with.....

L.D.: Just cook it. Just string it up on a string and hang big bundles of it in the store.....

Dr. G.: When did the Gabbards come into this country?

L.D.: When did they come?

Dr. G.: Early or late?

L.D.: I guess they come pretty early. They settled this...these Gabbards.

Dr. G.: Who would have been the first one in here, actually the first Gabbards?

L. D.: Well, I don't know that.

Dr. G.: Now I talked to Vires down here. He kind of appears to be kind of an upset guy. Had they been in here all the time? The Vires have they been in here long?

L.D.: The Vires? I don't know.

Dr. G.: Yeah. Had the Rices been in here long? The Duffs? Have they been in here a very long time?

L. D.: Well, the Duffs originated and come from slavery.

Dr. G.: The Duffs come from slavery?

L. D.: That's where they started from.

Dr. G.: You mean they were slaves or had slaves?

L. D.: No, the Duffs, they went by the name of Slaywalter.

Dr. G.: Oh, Oh. They were owned by somebody.

L. D.: The old ones of 'em, now, did you ever know of these Duffs over here on Grapevine and Chavies, old big Arelius Duff?

Dr. G.: Yeah, yeah, I've heard of 'em.

L.D.: That's the same outfit That Slaywalter was one of them old Duffs that owned Grapevine and that whole country. Owned slaves. I guess he was a pretty bad old tom cat and that's where.....

Dr. G.: His children.

L. D.: That's where most of these Duffs.....

Dr. G.: In other words, they are part black?

L. D.: Now, you know Adron Duff has got well, two of his boys...I think two of 'em married Joe Helton's girls over here and one of 'em is going to college or something or other and they wouldn't let him come in till he had to get some paper saying he wasn't a colored man. He's, oh he was a heavy man. He's got a girl. A big tall girl, a twin sister to Harry that crippled one they got around there. She's dark. She's plumb brown.

Dr. G.: Adron doesn't look that brown does he?

L. D.: Well, Adron when he was back in the '30 and '40 and they worked a right smart in the sun, he was awfully dark.

Dr. G.: Did you know anything about the Davidsons over in Redbird?

L.D.: No, I don't.

Dr. G.: They are quite a clan over there. Well, I'll tell

Dr. G.: (Cont'd) you what I'd better do. I'd better leave you alone and let you get something else done. I do appreciate it. I'll probably be back down to see you in the first pretty spring weather. I want to bring a pickup truck. Can we get into the Pea Ridge country? Could we get up there and look around?'

L. D.: Well, I don't know how good that road is. They've got a road that goes in around on that right hand fork up there about a, well it's about a mile; no, it's about a half a mile from Adron Duffs on up there that turns left and goes along out that ridge country, but if you come and could get up at the weekend and let me know, that boy of mine has been through there. It wouldn't do to start through there in a pickup truck unless, he's got a four wheel drive, unless we take the chains off. We might run into a tree across or something. He's got them hoists and winch and everything.

Dr. G.: Before I leave, let me ask you one other thing, how's the rattlesnake business this fall?

L. D.: It's been very rough around here.

Dr. G.: How many did you get this year?

L.D.: I think, let's see, I killed one out here, and one up on the hill. That's two. Cap killed one up there. We just killed four around here but they was a lot killed in the late fall, up and down the creek.

Dr. G.: Would copperheads be out in this kind of weather in December?

L. D.: No, I don't think so.

Dr. G.: Because I want to go around an old log cabin on the way back toward Irvine tomorrow and I don't want to get copperhead bit and I was just wondering if those daRN THINGS Would be out in this kind of weather.

L.D.: Well, Now, I'll tell you. As long as those honey bees are astirring just like in the summertime, I think they might be alaying out in the sun.

Dr. G.: I saw a centipede that long up on the road today. I had spider webs blowing in my face today and it makes me wonder. I am going to be careful because I have a sneaking idea that the snakes may be out. Well, thank you very much Letcher.

Dr. G.: Well, this is the most gorgeous summery fall or spring day you've ever seen in your life. It's much like a fall day, 75°, only it's the 15th of December, 1984. One week before the days start getting long again on the 21st. I am driving right by the mouth of Cow Creek now having just left Upper Buffalo where I interviewed Letcher Deaton and right by where the chained rock was Pa Moyers had at one time. I'm looking off to the left to a place I'd love to own a piece of land across the river one day maybe, but more importantly is I've seen shirt sleeve weather at Christmas but I've never seen a much prettier day in my life than today. I got in Booneville last night. We drove up the Redbird River country. Today we went out, Nancy Sue and Leila and I and we watched Clora build the major part of a basket. I am dying to get Nancy Sue to do these to make a little bit of money.

I am going to go home and try if I can find a proper little tree to make myself my first one but I'm definitely going to come down several days in the spring when we can set outside which is much more fun and work for 2 or 3 days with Clora and start making some baskets for the hell of it. It's just that I want to know how to do it.

It's fun here tonight. I'm sort of the guest of honor of the wagon club, the saddle club group. There's a lot of people coming down here from Clay County and there are going to be '00 people crowded into my dad's old store building which appears so damn little now. As you've heard me say a thousand times, I thought it was the biggest building in the world when I was a kid, and they're wanting me to go horseback riding tomorrow. The prediction is for another day just like today. I haven't quite made up my mind. I'm supposed to go by and move some of David's stuff back to home since he's finishing school and I would like to say that David has his first interview. He has his final class Monday. Monday night he's going to Vanwort, Ohio near Dayton to interview with Chrysler Powdered Metals Division. They told him on the phone that he was in the top four out of 60 applicants for a job which I think they said was 6 months of management. And I kind of hope that David get this job because I see a great future in it and even if nothing else happens all this interest in Trane Air Conditioning, 6 months training in management would sure as hell not hurt him so I'm wishing him the best of luck.

I just cannot get over what gorgeous bright sunshine we have right now, and I'm looking forward to the evening. Hell, I won't remember any of the names but I'm right down in the country that I know best of anywhere in the world right back to Booneville and I'm looking forward to seeing all of the family again Stu, Mark, everybody. I did drive last night to Redbird but did I say that earlier? Once I put it on here it didn't take. I didn't have it quite down so we went looking up the Davidsons. They've moved back over to their farm. I couldn't get over there. Over and out, I guess.