Elsie Garrish Outer Banks Nurse

Interview with ELSIE BALLANCE GARRISH Ocracoke, North Carolina July 22, 1988

By Amy Giass

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START OF TAPE 1, SIDE A

AMY GLASS : This is Tape 1 of an interview with Elsie Ballance Garrish. We're in her home in Ocracoke, North Carolina. Today is July 22, 1988, and my name is Amy Glass. Mrs. Garrish, I'd like to start out by asking you when you were born.

ELSIE GARRISH: I was born January 4, 1915 in Ocracoke.

AG: Where was your homeplace, where you were born?

EG: It was next door to Kenny Ballance. You've just visited there in his home. My mother's home was next door to that one. There's no streets so I can't tell you exactly.

AG: It was next door. Was it behind it or next door, like if you're facing it, to the left?

EG: It'd be to the left. If you're sitting on this porch, it'd be to the left.

AG: Oh, yes, that house is still standing.

EG: Yes.

AG: What were your parents' names?

EG: Elijah and Emma Gaskins Ballance.

AG: I wonder if you can think back to any memories that you have of your grandparents?

EG: I remember my grandmother, Lois Ballance. In fact, I was a teenager when she died, in fact, older than that because it was the year I went in nurses' training.

AG: What do you remember doing with her?

EG: Well, there wasn't a whole lot of things to do. She was a very tiny lady. It always amazed me mornings, the first thing I would notice about her, I can remember that she washed her hair every morning. It was straight and parted in the middle and fixed on the back of her head. She was a cute little lady. In fact, I have a picture in there I can show you. My grandfather, Mark Gaskins, I remember him. But my other grandparents were dead before I can remember.

AG: If your grandmother washed her hair everyday, that wasn't easy back then. You didn't just hop in the shower, did you?

EG: No, she washed it in a basin. That was one of the things I remember about her. She was a very neat and very attractive lady. She loved church work and visited—people visited more than because they didn't have TV, radio, or anything—and I remember seeing her going around to visit the neighbors early mornings because she always got up real early.

AG: What kind of memories do you have of your grandfather?

EG: Well, he was a tall, ruddy sort of a fellow who worked on the water most of his life and went on seagoing vessels.

AG: So he wasn't around a lot. He was traveling.

EG: Traveling, yes, until his later—he had like many bad years toward the end of his life. He was sick right much. Of course, I don't remember my grandmother. I had a step-grandmother. They had a little garden and had chickens and ducks and geese and things that most people here had then. I remember going there with my mother most every day. Course they just lived in a house just a few doors back of us. They were very precious to me, both of them, my grandparents.

AG: Did he ever tell you stories about being out at sea or being in a storm?

EG: Well, I can say that with my father 'cause I heard more of that from my father than I did my grandfather.

AG: Okay, can you tell me about what your father was like?

EG: Well, his first wife died after he'd been married about six years, and he married my mother. He didn't have any children by the first wife. But before he married, he also went to sea. He went to the West India Islands; he fished off the Jersey coast; and he went up into Maine on vessels, but I don't know what they went up there for, probably lumber. Huh?

IG: ( )

EG: Lumber. They would bring, they would take things like—I think sometimes I've heard him say they would take things they had in the South, like molasses and different things on cargo ships. He worked on the water (at different times) until he and my mother was married, and then he decided that he would stay. They had nine children. Two died. I was the oldest one. I have this one sister and five brothers that lived.

AG: Let me ask, do you know how your parents met one another?

EG: Well, they were neighbors/

AG: Next door?

EG: Well, not exactly next door but just close neighbors. I remember he told me is first wife was a tiny little girl when he married her. She lived on the other side of the lake, and apparently they had never met her. Didn't know who she was. Well, he didn't know, my grandfather. And he said, "Lois, they's a little girl out in the back yard." And she said, "That little girl is your daughter-in-law." He said, "Well, ask her in for breakfast." So that's how he met her. [Laughter]

But my mother, he knew real well 'cause she's in the neighborhood. She was just a wonderful lady, my mother. When you have as many in-laws as she had

that was, they were all just crazy about her, including my husband. She was a fine lady. And my father worked hard, worked on the water and stayed home with us.

We didn't have it easy during the Depression but other than that, we fared all right. We owned our own home, and he always had a garden and his chickens. What they did then, across that Swan Quarter and that area, they had a lot of corn and beans and peas and beets that we didn't have over here. My father would trade fish and clams and oysters for some of the things they had over there, like cornmeal. That's how they survived on what they had. And you also had sheep. Where the park is now, they used to have cattle, sheep, horses. At one time I remember, he had eighty head of sheep. So we really lost lots of land.

AG: You did? You're the first person who has said that. Not too many people had sheep.

EG: Well, a lot of them did at that time but they just haven't told you about it. They also had cattle down there. In fact, as far back as when Irving and I were married, we bought a cow, and she had a calf, but we never did see her anymore. [Laughter] We never did know what happened to her. Probably the winter time got her or something.

See, we had no refrigeration. What ice that we ever had came over on the freight boat from Washington. And meats, what you had to cook right away. I remember they would raise pigs—maybe a couple a year, my father used to have maybe two—and salt the meat for the winter, the hams and the pork and what have you. Well, there was mostly chickens and what animals that was raised here on the island. What they did with the pork a lot of times, if they killed their pigs, they divided with the neighbors, and the same thing happened the day they killed theirs. So that gave them different days that they'd have. And the neighbors all came in and helped make the sausage and the lard.

AG: I was going to ask about that. I wonder if you could—I've never done that, and I don't know too much about it—I wonder if you could describe what that scene would have been like. I mean, if we could just walk right into that room right now where everybody was. . . .

EG: Well there'd be an iron cook stove to start with and a big pot. They'd possibly have two or three pots. I remember the neighbors would bring in theirs. And they would cut up the fat out of the pigs, hogs, whatever they had. And we have bay trees here, and I remember as a child going with my father to cut a bay stick. That's what they stirred the lard with. As it cooked, they stirred it with the bay sticks, and they gave it some kind of flavor that they all liked. That was one of the reasons they used it. Then it was poured into what they called tin lard cane. Maybe they would hold five gallons, and that's how they preserved it for the winter time.

Now they say cholesterol is bad for you, which I, you know, being a nurse, I know you're not supposed to have high cholesterol. We were speaking about it the other day. There was all those old people lived to be eighty, ninety, a hundred, hundred and one, hundred and seventeen, hundred and four. We've had them live that long here, and they used pure lard. That's all they had. But I think what the problem, the difference, was they were more active. Because they had to scrub their clothes on a board. They had to do everything with a broom, sweeping. They were just more active than the modern day lady.

AG: Well, getting back to the making sausages, you'd take the lard and put that. . .

EG: Well, the sausage was made with the scrapes of lean meat and some fat.

AG: Who actually cut up the hogs?

EG: My mother and father, whoever was doing the hog killing that day. And the neighbors helped with it. It was according to how much they had. But you know, they make sausage out of some fat and some lean. They grind it. We had a hand grinder that we used to put on the table, and my mother and father would grind the meat, and then stuff the intestines of a pig. They washed those and cleaned them real good and scrubbed them. They went to a lot of process, different things, to make them sanitary.

AG: Was there any seasoning that went into the sausage?

EG: Yes, they had some seasoning, sage, some used sage. I don't think my parents like sage very well. They just used hot peppers and malt. I don't recall any other kind. They probably didn't have much different kinds of seasoning at that time.

AG: Was that a time that people looked forward to, kind of an event where lots of people would come together and help out? You said some neighbors helped?

EG: Yes, and sometimes they would cook. Some of them would have lunch. The ladies would fix lunch. Because the men, I think mostly, after the men cut the meat up and took care of that part, the ladies did the rest. The men went on about their work, whatever they were doing.

AG: It would have been cold then. It would have been winter time?

EG: Well, it was usually by November. It would be cool weather anyway. It had to be cold enough so the meat wouldn't spoil.

AG: I was going to back up a little bit and ask about your Dad. He was a fisherman?

EG: On Ocracoke he was. He had worked on boats, freight boats, and what, I guess you would call them steamers.

AG: In the sound?

EG: Well, they would go to different localities, like, as I told you, the West India Islands. I asked him one time why they didn't go south more. He said because of the fever. It was malaria. Later I understood what it was. They had a lot of malaria at that time. They didn't have a lot of medication for it, and he said the men he knew went north to work in preference to going to the south where it would have been more comfortable, probably, for them. But that was the reason.

AG: Did he tell you any stories about the West Indies?

EG: Well, he had a bad accident on one of the boats one night. The boom, something broke, and a block hit him in the head. He always talked about the block that hit him in the head. He thought he was still having trouble from it but he never really did. He never was sick much. But that was an accident he had somewhere in ( ), I don't know. He was very sick for a while.

He also, as a teenage boy, was in the hurricane of 1899. They were down somewhere near where the campground is. There was two older men and two younger boys, I believe. He was one of the younger boys. And they stayed three days and nights on the top of a hill in a small boat 'cause they couldn't get to the village. When the wind subsided and the water, of course, started to ebb away, he walked home. He said sometimes that the water was so deep that he'd have to swim across gullies and places that water was deep. When he got home—his mother; the house that you were visiting today, Kenny's, that's where her older home was—he walked in the kitchen, which was built away from the house, to get something to eat because he was so hungry. The mud from the lake at that time—it's clean now but then it was muddy, it's been dredged since—was no deep on the floor that he slipped and fainted, and there was nobody home. When he got himself together, he went over to a neighbors. And that's where they all were. It was on a hill. They had all gone over there. They said there wasn't hardly any home on Ocracoke that wasn't submerged in water. But he was telling me how good the ladies' biscuits were that morning and her hot coffee that she had for him when he got there. But they didn't have anything like we have now, like lights, or anything. They just had the wood stove to cook on. So that wasn't much of a hardship at that time for them.

AG: After he came back from his travels on fishing boats, he married your mother and raised a family. When he was raising a family, he worked mostly as a. . . . .

EG: Anything he could get. He did some carpenter work. He worked on the water. When they built some of the first motels, he helped build some of those, helped the carpenters. Just any kind of job that came available at that time.

AG: Would you say his work was based on seasonal kinds of things? In the winter time he would do certain work and in spring or summer he would do other kinds?

EG: Well, it's according to the weather and what jobs there is available at the time. In the spring, it'd be crabbing maybe. In the winter time, it'd be oysters. In the summertime, it'd be clamming and fishing. He fished a lot at night. They used to do what they called mud fishing, and he would go fishing at night. So we always had plenty of seafood. That's one of the things we had plenty of, and now, a lot of times we can't even hardly get it here, oysters.

AG: ( )

EG: I said the oysters would be this year—you know, the red tide, it spoiled our oysters. I can remember we always had oysters in the winter unless the weather was real bad.

AG: I was going to ask you about some of the foods that your mother prepared, maybe you helped her prepare? How would you fix, let's say, oysters? How did you eat those?

EG: Well. I'll start with breakfast. She usually fixed us a pot of hot oatmeal and maybe scrambled some eggs, or boil or fry eggs. And, as I said, sometimes we would have some kind of meat with it for breakfast, but not always. For lunch, she cooked a lot of clams because the boys all particularly liked clam chowder.

AG: How would she fix clam chowder?

EG: Well, you would probably call it soup. I call it a chowder but she'd chop the clams and save the broth and put them on and cook them with the broth, after you strain that. Potatoes and onions, and some people use a little bit of cornmeal to thicken the chowder just a little bit. I remember my mother used to use just a little bit of salt pork and fried it out like, and added that to it. It keeps it from being so bland. You cook it for about an hour and a half or two hours. Actually, if you let it simmer, it's better.

Oysters, most of us liked ours raw better than any other way. But we would have them fried and steamed, and oyster stew was fixed just about like the clams except you didn't put potatoes in it.

We had scallops. I remember one year that they were so plentiful that my grandmother and my aunt and the neighbors would open scallops through the day as the men would catch them. They were so plentiful. They come in different seasons, I think, different years. Some years you may not see them, and next year they'll be plenty of them. I think last year or year before last; they had lots of them, year before last. They were cooked, just fried in batter cakes or fried single if they were large enough.

My mother always cooked her own bread. She would have hot bread for breakfast, biscuits, and then for lunch, she would fix cornbread 'cause most of the time we would have seafood with that. She made rolls most days. She had to cook a lot of bread 'cause there was a lot of boys, you know. They'd be working hard too. She made bread, cooked bread about three times a day, really.

AG: When she made her biscuits, did she have a rolling pin that she used?

EG: Well, she usually mixed hers up with a spoon or something, or with her hands. She didn't roll hers out. She just made hers out with her hands.

AG: So she even formed them. . . .

EG: Formed her own rolls, yeah, that way. Instead of making it with a rolling pin. And my mother was crazy about sweets. She'd always have something. She'd try to make something if it was a rice pudding or custard or something. Whenever she could, she'd fix us a dessert, too. She didn't have it all the time but whenever she could, she'd. . . . My brothers always talk about nobody could make a rice pudding like my mother could.

AG: Now, how did she make rice pudding? Do you know?

EG: I can't tell you. I'm not sure. I know she would just add some sugar and raisins and. . . .

IG: You make yours as good, though.

EG: Well, just boil the rice and add the sugar and the milk and the eggs and the flavorings, whatever kind. Some people put pineapple in it. She just made hers mostly, she liked lemon flavor.

AG: What about fruit? Did you have much fruit here?

EG: We didn't have a lot of fruit because see, as I told you, it had to come over on a freight boat. In the winter time we would get oranges and apples. In the summer, there was a few people had, there was a few apple trees and a few peach trees. My father had some right nice peach trees at one time. But the storms would come along and destroy them. And then he had grapevines, Scuppernong grapes. But fruit was sort of a scarce item here. It had to be imported.

AG: Did he ever do anything with the grapes? Did your Mom can those or put those up?

EG: No, we just ate those because we wouldn't have that many of them. Now, we had lots of blackberries that grew here, and my mother made blackberry preserves.

AG: Oh, she did?

EG: Or jelly. That was one of the desserts that they had, blackberry dumplings or blackberry pie. I know my father always liked to go to the woods blackberrying. There was lots of them at that time.

AG: Where could you get blackberries?

EG: They just grew wild here.

AG: I mean, was there a wooded area?

EG: Yes, honey, before it was wooded.

AG: Was that back behind the house?

EG: Back behind the house, yeah. There's some back of my house, up until last year. I gave my grandson this land. They cleared it out. They grow real good here.

AG: Do you remember any special things that were prepared during holidays?

EG: Well, they'd use a lot of sweet potato here on the island. They'd make a lot of sweet potato pies. There was one little boy they said went to Ocracoke one time. They asked him what pie he wanted. He said, well, he didn't know there was any kind except 'tater pie. Real cute. [Laughter] But anyway, they made lemon pies. They made different kinds according to what you had, coconut, or whatever you had, they made them. There was a few people who made fruitcakes. In fact, I made fruitcakes up until two or three years ago, every year since I've been married. I made my own.

AG: Did you ever have a goose for Christmas?

EG: Yes, wildfowl was plentiful at that time. My mother cooked a lot of wildfowl because my father would go hunting and the boys would. They were in a lot better shape than they are nowadays. I guess, it's because what feed they get is probably, some of it may be contaminated now or something. But we had a lot of good wildfowl at that time.

AG: And how did you mother prepare the fowl?

EG: She either baked it or stewed it.

AG: Was it stewed with other vegetables?

EG: No, she just usually made hers with potatoes and sometimes she'd add pastry.

AG: Sounds good. Did you ever have wine for special occasions?

EG: Some people made it out of blackberry wine and grapes. We had a lot of, at times we'd have wild grapes, and some people made wine out of that. I know the neighbor that lived back of us was an older lady, and whenever we were sick—we were small, we didn't have medicines, very little medicine was on Ocracoke at that time—she would always have a little blackberry wine that she would bring over for certain things. I remember that.

AG: And she would make it?

EG: Yes, they would make it.

AG: Were you, as the oldest in your family, did you take care of your younger brothers and sisters as they were coming along?

EG: Yes, and another thing as I grew older, when the children were born, I would have to stay home from school and help my mother. Cause back then they didn't let you get out of bed like they do now. They kept you in bed nine days, or eight, nine days. They were not allowed to much of anything. My mother did more than she should have done, I'm sure. But I remember having to take care of the younger ones and helping her.

AG: What was it like around the house when you had a new brother or sister?

EG: Well, we had midwives. I was the only one that was delivered by the doctor. There was one here visiting at a summer cottage or something, and he was with the midwife that delivered me. But the rest of them. . . . My mother didn't want him. My father went after him anyway. But she didn't want a doctor, she wanted a midwife. Anyway, we had the best one that was ever born. I reckon that lady, she was a really good one.

AG: Who was that?

EG: She was Mrs. Charlotte O'Neal. I know she delivered many, many babies. I don't think she ever lost but two mothers, and that was complication from pneumonia or something. 'Course, there was other midwives. I don't remember them.

AG: How did Miss Charlotte O'Neal get her training? Did she learn from her mother?

EG: Yes, I think, it was either her mother or her aunt. Somebody in the family was a midwife before her. It used to amaze me, we would have like a ( ), you know what I'm talking about, that burns wood. You've never seen those. They had those to heat the house with. She would take a little piece of the cloth and scorch it and use a big raisin to put on the navel, the chord.

[Interruption]

And scorch it on the stove, and she'd use this big seedless raisin to put on the navel cord where it was supposed to drop off, you know, after so many days. I often wondered what it was for. When I was in nurses' training, I wanted many times to ask somebody but I was embarrassed because I didn't know what they might. . . . what answer I would get. But then it dawned on me that it was for sanitary purposes. The scorched cloth was the same thing used in an autoclave. It was scorched clean, and the raisin had the drying effect. As the raisin dried, the cord dried along with it. But that's what she used, and she never had any infections. The babies all were real healthy and many ( ). There's a lot in Ocracoke that she delivered. Now, she's the one I knew the best. Then, of course, there was others. There was a graduate nurse that came here, a local girl, that delivered babies after that.

AG: Were you curious about midwife training when you were a young girl?

EG: I wanted to be a nurse but I never particularly thought about being a midwife. I did, after I came back to Ocracoke, sometimes I would get caught here and I would deliver babies but I didn't do it as a profession. I don't think I would want to have done that for an everyday thing. Now, this other nurse that came out delivered right many babies.

AG: Who was she?

EG: Well, I guess I can give her a name, Kathleen Bragge.

AG: And so she had gone off and gotten some. . . .

EG: Training.

AG: She was a local person who had gone off to get training?

EG: That's right. She was an R.N. She graduated from a hospital out here in Rocky Mount, I believe is where she trained. I'm not positive but I think that's where it was. Of course, when I came back home to stay, she was getting older then. I would help her with things and she would help me. But she did a good job here. She really did. I think the island was blessed in having her.

AG: Going back to Miss O'Neal and her work as a midwife, what other kinds of things did she do when a baby was about to be born? What was that like? Was the labor difficult, and how'd she help?

EG: It was sort of like a Lamaze that they have nowadays, natural childbirth. I never did see one born that my mother had because I was never allowed in. You know, I was young. My mother was a very private person.

AG: Was the midwife the only person in the room with your mother?

EG: Unless my grandmother or somebody might have been at that time.

AG: Your mother's mother?

EG: No, my father's mother. Her mother died when she was only six.

AG: It's interesting to me because it seems like that being on an island and not having any of the technology that we have that seems to be so important now, that so many babies were born and they were born successfully.

EG: A lady came by not two or three years ago and said to me, she said, "Can I ask you a question?" And I said, "Yes, if I can answer it, I will." And she said, "Was babies ever born on this island?" I said, "Lady, we had only sailboats that was in here at the time, little boats, sailboats. There was no way in the world you could get 'em hardly to the mainland to have a baby born. It would have to be born at Ocracoke." And I said, "We had children that died years before I could remember. That was like from diphtheria and things of that kind. But that was all over the country because they didn't have innoculations and things to give to children that we have now, vaccines."

AG: Were there epidemics that you can remember in your lifetime?

EG: Nothing more than just the flu epidemic and a few children died of different things, like colitis. That was very prevalent when I went in nurses' training. A lot of babies died of that. My second year of nursing, I believe, we had an epidemic in North Carolina and it was very bad. The doctors would try to give them I.V. solutions, I know the doctors in Raleigh that I would help. Some of them were saved but a lot of them died. It was the year about 1936 or '37.

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A

START OF TAPE 2, SIDE 2

AMY GLASS : This is Tape 2. Could you explain to me how you got into the nursing profession?

ELSIE GARRISH: We didn't have a high school here when I first grew up. I went to school in Hatteras, stayed with my uncle. Then I went to Washington at a boarding school for one year, Washington, North Carolina. I really wanted to go to college but I graduated in 1932. That was right at the height of the Depression. I had always thought that I would like to be a nurse, and I had lots of material that I had ordered from places.

AG: Books?

EG: Like from Chicago School of Nursing. And I would read about it. But anyway, I had to work three years after I got out of high school before I could raise enough money to go. It didn't cost much but dollars were very few at that time. But anyway, I went to Raleigh. My mother said, "Ride the train." She thought that was safer. So there was a train that went over water in Beaufort, that goes to Morehead. I thought never again will I get on a train. I had never been on anything like that.

AG: What was it like?

EG: Well, it was scary because it was over water. You know, how trains. . . . ( ) I think of it right now. But anyway, we had to go into Goldsboro. I believe we changed there. I believe we did. But I met a boy on the bus or the train that was going to Raleigh to State College. Later his sister, who lives in Beaufort now, turned out to be one of my best friends. She was in nurses' training with me as a younger student. But anyway, I got into Raleigh late at night, and his aunt met me and took me to her house until the next morning.

AG: Who was that?

EG: My husband's aunt. She lived in Raleigh.

AG: You weren't married at that time?

EG: No. Of course, that was an experience too. So many things that those girls took for granted, I didn't know about. Because I hadn't been used to electrical things. We didn't have electricity at that time.

AG: So that was the first time you had seen that?

EG: No, when I went to boarding school at Washington, they had electricity over there but that's the only. . . . But anyway, I don't think anybody ever enjoyed anything more than I did my three years of nursing. It was a little hard at that time because of twelve hour duty. We didn't have maids to do the scrubbing or things that you have nowadays. They have hired help. But I enjoyed it very much. After I finished training, I didn't get home at Christmas time but once during the whole three years. I did have a two week vacation a year. That was nice, being able to come home in the summertime.

AG: Did anyone from your family here visit you in Raleigh?

EG: They came for my graduation, my aunt and my brother. And Thurston Gaskill, they had a girl that they took as a child, and she'd been in nurses' training with me but she left and got married before she finished her school. But she was a real good nurse. She's died recently. She helped out a lot on Ocracoke. Really did a lot of work in the community.

AG: Who was she?

EG: She was Elizabeth Gaskins Howard.

AG: I wonder if you could describe a little bit for me what it was like to be in a new place like Raleigh which I imagine was more of a city. You said it was very different, and you weren't used to the things that took for granted? What, besides electricity, did they have there that you felt like you didn't have here?

EG: Well, paved roads, theatres, movie theatres. We had silent ones, you know, when I first grew up but we didn't have any sound. The worst thing that I encountered was the first winter that I was there, we had about seven snow storms. We had to go from a nurse's home through hospital, mornings. We were always having to be rushed, and I would slip down because I had never been used to ice and snow. My knees stayed more virtually the whole winter.

AG: Did you have enough clothing to be prepared for that kind of cold?

EG: Yes, it wasn't really that bad. We had winter coats. I know we had a nurses' home across the street. It was ( ) right across ( ) Street. I'd get off duty at night—we had a night nurses' home across there that we used for sleeping in the daytime—and we would get dressed, get our shower, and put on our pajamas, and go put our coat on and cross the street to go to this house that wasn't heated. They said we would sleep better if it was cold, which we did, I'm sure. We would sleep 'till one or two o'clock. Then we'd have to get up and go to class.

AG: It sounds pretty. . . .

EG: Rough.

AG: Rough. Did you ever go home with any of the girls at school, to their homes in other parts of the state?

EG: Yes, I went to Salisbury or Lexington, and I had Christmas dinner with one of my friends. I believe it was the Coble Dairy Home. I remember they had frozen Santa Clauses for dessert, and I had never seen anything like that. They had pheasant which was plentiful for that area, I guess. Then another time, I would go like near Raleigh, the nurses that lived nearby. I'd go home for a day or something. They were always real nice about asking me to go.

AG: Did you correspond with letters to your family here?

EG: Every week. ( ) put the telephone in. We didn't have any telephones at Ocracoke except the Coast Guard Station and the Lighthouse, I believe.

AG: When you were there, did you feel, did you know that you were going to return to Ocracoke? Did you ever feel like you wanted to stay in Raleigh, or move somewhere else, now that you were in the big world?

EG: I liked Raleigh as well as any place I've ever lived, really. I never really thought about coming back. I never gave it much thought. I had lost a brother, a little brother, with this colitis epidemic that we were talking about, ( ) in the storm of 1933. I think that encouraged me more to go into nurses training because I wanted to know more about medicine and things.

AG: So you were here for that storm?

EG: Yes, I've been here several storms.

AG: Then you went off to nurses' college. What year was that?

EG: 1935, and I graduated in 1938. Fifty years, this year, we'll have our nurses' reunion in Raleigh. We have it every year, and this is the fiftieth year for my class. I believe all my class's living except three. I think there was twenty-three of us, and I think all are living except three.

AG: So, when you graduated, did you have a B.S.N?

EG: Well, a nursing diploma. It's a three year course. It's an R.N.

AG: You said you didn't think much about coming back here. But what made you come back after you graduated?

EG: Well, I didn't. I moved away after Irvin and I were married that year in 1938. He was in service, and I worked at Norfolk General. I worked a lot of different hospitals. The last place I worked was in Wilmington, Delaware. I worked recovery room for seven years. Then he came here as captain of the Cedar Island Ferry, on the boats. I worked over at Sea Level for a couple of weeks when he was tied up over there. And then I came back here the other two weeks in the month. Every other week I worked at Sea Level. But I just did that because the girls were married, and I was alone here.

AG: So you met your husband in school?

EG: No, his mother died when he was two and a half. His mother was from Raleigh. His grandmother reared him in this house after she died. So we went to school together all the many years. And then he was working near Raleigh at the time that I was in nurses' training 'cause his grandparents lived there, grandmother. That's how we knew each other all our lives, really.

AG: Getting back to Ocracoke when you were a young person, we talked about childbirth, but I was wondering about what would happen if someone got sick. What kind of options were available to take care of you, say, if you had something fairly mild, like a cold?

EG: The mothers took care of the children and sometimes the grandparents would come in with some kind of little remedy. But I don't recall ever seeing, very few medicines of any kind in our home. My mother never did give us much patent medicine.

AG: What did she use?

EG: Well, she would use aspirin if they had aspirin. That's about all. She didn't give us a lot of drugs of any kind. A lot of people tried out different things, you know, for flu and different stuff. But she never did give us much of that. I guess, too, it was a problem of getting money to buy stuff with then. We had no drugstore. We had a doctor that came here, and he had one kind of pill that he dished out, little pink pulls. They'd make us all sick.

AG: What were they for?

EG: I don't know. He gave them for anything, didn't he?

IG: For everything.

AG: One pill for everything.

EG: All I remember seeing is his pink pill. It was flavored with ( ) in it. I think it had a little calomel in it. That's a very dangerous drug, you know.

AG: What was that?

EG: Calomel.

AG: Calomel?

EG: C-A-L-O-M-E-L. I've never see that given anywhere in the hospitals that I ever worked. I've heard that was what was in it.

AG: if you mother didn't have patent medicine, what kinds of things did she used to treat illnesses?

EG: Well, she'd bathe us if we had a high fever, in cool water, put ice if she had it. But as I said, I don't remember her giving us any medicines.

AG: Did she have any kind of preparations that she made or anything?

EG: No, she didn't. Some of the older people, older than she was, might have made things, but I've never seen any of it.

AG: Was there much in the way of preventive medicine? Did she ever talk about, you know, if you ate certain foods then you wouldn't get sick?

EG: That's right. Particularly the older people, they thought oysters and sweets would make you sick. Some people wouldn't drink milk with their fish, if they had fish. But when I went in nurses' training, I learned different. They said any food that was fresh wouldn't hurt you if you were eating it together. So I learned that much, anyway.

AG: It must have been hard to keep things fresh, particularly without refrigeration?

EG: Well, it was, but they cooked fresh foods every day. I once worked with a girl from Iran, and she told me that that's what it was. She said she couldn't get used to refrigerating anything because where she lived, they cooked their food fresh every day. I said that's ( ) where I lived too. It's the same situation, I guess.

AG: Okay, I wanted to ask you about, you mentioned the 1933 storm, and I wonder if you could tell me a little bit about storms here on the island. I'm sure you've lived through your share of them.

EG: Well, the '33, the '99, 1899 was supposed to be the worst one. Then they said the '44 storm came along. But I wasn't living here then. I was living in New Bern. But that was the one that did an awful lot of damage at Ocracoke. The '1933 storm followed one that we'd had the week before. We had two right together. They both came right together. And I remember, we had large, right good size oak trees in our yard that was uprooted in that. The water would come in the houses because, seems like then they didn't build the houses like they do now, high. They were built mostly low on account of the winds. The old people thought that they would get wind damage if the houses were built too high. In fact, this house that I'm living in now is a hundred years old this year. I think his grandmother told me the water had only been in this house twice.

IG: Once, '44.

EG: '44 storm.

IG: We raised it since.

EG: The lot is low, and we've raised it up where we don't think it'll come in again, hopefully.

AG: Well, what was that '33 storm like for you? Did your family all stay together in one room?

EG: No, my aunt had a new house, the one that you were just visiting over to Kenny's. That was her new house. And of course, that's a little house. It's sort of a bungalow. Our house was tall, taller than that. My father and mother would take the children and go over there because my grandmother and my aunt, they lived there alone. In case, you know, something, a window broke or something in a storm. And I used to dread it for that reason. I didn't like to leave home and go anywhere and spend the night. But anyway, that's one of the bad ones, in '44.

Then there was one summer, I was here, and I lived in this house next door. That was ours. Still is ours. The tide came up to my door sill three different times but it never did come inside. It just came to the door. But things were not as bad as some of the others. We've had several since we've been back to Ocracoke in twenty years, but they've not been bad ones.

AG: Did you leave the island for any of those storms?

EG: Only one time, the one time, that was about three years ago, four years ago.

AG: Gloria.

EG: The one that they said was going to be so bad. We went to Greenville. We were on the last boat that went out of here and the first one that came back. We all went and took our cats. My daughters, they all went. I didn't want to go, but they wanted me to go so I went. But I'm not afraid to stay in a storm because I've weathered them before.

AG: Did you take any special precautions before the storm? Was there anything you did, like out in the yard or in the house?

EG: Well, we secure everything as best we can. If you have lawn mowers or anything that you might get salt water into, you put those somewhere in a safe place. Some people have shutters that they put on, but we don't have any, not that close. We just put our storm windows down and secure things, like any flying objects that might be on the porch or anything that might blow in that hard wind.

AG: After the storm, what would happen? What would you do after the storm?

EG: Well, it's always a mess to clean up the tree branches. I think this one that we had that was so bad since we've been home, we had about fifteen or twenty truckloads of stuff we had to haul out. When the limbs broke, see, I'm under a lot of trees here. We had a lot of debris that washed up from the lake. That came up, see, this hill over here, high tide doesn't come over that. But it brought the debris up to the edge of that, and I had it all to clean up.

AG: Where do you haul things to?

EG: We had a place in it we could put branches. We have a sanitary district here. We also have a garbage truck that take out the stuff to, I think they take it up to East Lake, or somewhere there, is where ours is taken. It's off the island anyway.

AG: That's another thing I have meant to ask about in the old days. What would people do about garbage?

EG: They burned it and gave it to the chickens. All the scraps and food you had left was given to the chickens or the pigs if they had those. They buried the cans and burned the paper. Didn't have a lot of paper like we have now. Didn't have the advertisements that we get every day.

AG: They'd just burn it out in the open or did they. . .

EG: They'd had a barrel or something in the back where they'd burn it.

IG: ( )

AG: You also mentioned a little earlier that the Depression had a very bad effect on the village. I wonder if you could tell me what that was like. What kinds of things were affected?

EG: Well, Ocracoke was one of the last places to feel the Depression. It had hit every place else before it hit us. Most everybody on the island owned their own home. As I said, you could get food sometime of way here. You could get it from the water, or you could get vegetables, raise your own vegetables and things here. As I said, there was not much money made on Ocracoke at that time anyway. There was a Coast Guard had some employees, and the lighthouse keeper, and some stores. But the majority of the people had to go off the island to work. Now that was bad because a lot of them that had work on the mainland had to come back home because they'd lose their jobs. And it was actually the last place to come out of the Depression. It hit us last, and we were about the last to leave. They started the WPA, you know. That helped out, and different projects that our good President Roosevelt had. That helped the people here a lot. But I don't, there was nobody I don't think went hungry here. I don't think that. It was just, you had the staples, groceries to buy, but the rest of the things you could get from the land and the water.

AG: You were very fortunate in that sense because you had the natural resources.

EG: And had lots of wood here then. See, had a lot of land that wasn't cleared. Nobody said a word if you went to get your wood. The freight boats brought in wood, too, if you could afford to buy it. I remember going to school—we had a potbelly stove in the room that I was in, and a lot of mornings we would have to go out and get brush and things to make the fire. At one time, the county ran out of money to buy the coal, so we just used wood or whatever we could get to heat with. But we always had real nice teachers that would let us sit around the stove. That was during the Depression and some years before that.

AG: I haven't heard too many stories about going to school. I know there was a school in the area. I wonder if you could describe what your classes were like in school here on Ocracoke?

EG: Well, I started school when I was five. I would have been five the fourth day of January. So I started a year earlier. I could go early because my birthday was on the fourth. I remember having a teacher that taught me that hadn't even been—I don't know that she even had a high school education, the first lady that taught me. But my mother had already taught me my numbers and my ABC's and those things before I ever went to school. We went a full six, seven hours of class. The second year I had a teacher that had been to college, the second grade.

We always could go home for lunch. You didn't have to worry about buying lunches or anything. We could go home. We always had nice teachers. We had a good school for it to be a small school.

We got the first high school in 1931. That was the first year that we had a high school at Ocracoke.

AG: And did you go to high school?

EG: Yes, I graduated from here in 1932.

AG: So you had gone, you said you went off and boarded. . . .

EG: See, they only had to the eighth grade. So from the eighth and the ninth, and the tenth, and we only had eleven grades.

AG: So did your brothers and sisters go off at the same time to board and attend school?

EG: No, some of them dropped out and went back when they got the high school. Several finished in my class that had gone back to school that was older than me, three or four years older. But we just didn't have many students at that time to start with. We had maybe fifty or sixty students. In the class I graduated in, I think there was eleven, and Irvin's class, I think there was ten. So there wasn't many students, and yet we had a good school. We'd have three or four high school teachers.

AG: Were there school games or sports or anything of that nature?

EG: They played baseball, and sometimes they had, I think, volleyball. I've seen them have volleyball. We would have maybe a fifteen minutes recess. But most of the time what exercise we got was after we were out of school. We didn't have a playground like they have now, swings and things that the children have now, playing.

AG: What sort of recreational activities did you have when you were younger because here weren't as many store-bought toys around? What sort of toys did you have to play with?

EG: Well, we would have dolls, and my father would usually make us a cart of some kind to play with, sort of like a wagon. He'd make that for us. He'd make the boys crossbows and arrows to shoot birds. And we had, as teenagers, two ice cream shops, one for each church. And we had two dance halls. We had lots of square dancing at that time. That's what the teenagers did if the parents would let you go. Sometimes we'd have a hard time convincing them to let us go.

AG: Did you get to go to some square dances?

EG: Oh yes, I used to go.

AG: Were those mostly local musicians who played at the square dances?

EG: Yes, most of the time. Sometime in the summer months—Thurston Gaskill's father had a place down near the water—he used to have a couple of men from Washington that came over and played, saxophone and guitars, I think. But we had local musicians too, like Maurice [Ballance] and Edgar [Howard].

AG: Did you ever learn any new dances there when you would go to the dance halls?

EG: No, but when I went in nurses' training, there were several dances that we used to go to that they would have different kinds of dances, the jitterbug. There's one they call the blackbottom. I don't remember just how it went but that was one of them. Back then, when they gave us a dance at the hospital, they'd have an orchestra most of the time. That would be music like the Guy Lombardo music and that type of music. But that wasn't what we had at Ocracoke or anything like it.

AG: Did people dress up for square dances?

EG: Well, we wore good clothes when we went, but didn't wear costumes like you see in pictures of square dancing. We just wore whatever kind of summer dress we had.

AG: Well, you've lived here most of your life and moved away for a while, but then you eventually came back. I just wonder if you could tell me, in your eyes, what are some of the biggest changes in the area that you've seen over the years?

EG: I think it's in the people. Used to be we were closer because we didn't have the confusion that we have now. I call it confusion because that's what it is really when it gets crowded like it is now. You don't visit like you did before. Even families don't visit each other like they used to. I think I miss that, the congeniality among the people, more than anything else.

AG: When the tourists aren't here, during the off-season, do people visit more?

EG: Well, we have more local activities going on, like through the church and the school. That's one thing that we have in the winter months that we don't have in the summer. A lot of people complain about the tourists. They don't bother me because I enjoy people to stop and talk. But sometimes if you live at the beach, you know, sometimes you do have more company than you have any other place you live.

AG: When you were growing up, I wonder would you ever have anticipated that this would have been a popular kind of resort, sort of a resort area that it's becoming?

EG: Well, it always was a resort as far back as I can remember. Because in the summertime, we had lots of people that, quite a few that had summer cottages here. We always had tourists that come in on freight boats or passenger boats or what have you. But you see when they put the roads in, that made it more accessible to the rest of the world, and more people came in because they had a way to get in here. Just think of the ferries. I heard my son-in-law say one day last week they hauled on one ferry, all the ferries hauled nineteen hundred cars that day. That was coming from Hatteras. So you can see what an influx of people we have now compared to what it used to be. On the Fourth of July we would have a dance, and there would be right many people. But there's more cars go by this road any day now, than would probably be on the island as visitors at that time. I believe that. We had a few grocery stores, and they sold dress material, and the mothers made the clothes. We had two churches. Actually, it ended up at one time we only had one church, until the Assembly of God came in here, because the two the Methodist Church united. So we just had that. I don't know, as far as the activity now, there's not as much, really, for the young people for recreation, other than the beach, as we had when I grew up.

AG: There certainly aren't any dance halls left.

EG: Not anything. No movie theatre, we did have a theatre. Later on we had a theatre. They had movies maybe twice a week or something like that. But there's nothing here now, absolutely nothing, except the kids all work. They all have jobs which they didn't have when I grew up. So it's one thing or the other.

AG: Well, I don't have any more questions right now. Is there anything else that you wanted, that you feel is important to say, or that you feel. . . .

EG: Well, it's still one of the best places to visit. The beach, we have one of the nicest beaches anywhere. Even though the lake is getting built up with motels and what have you, it's still one of the prettiest harbors anywhere.

END OF TAPE 2, SIDE A

END OF INTERVIEW