

**Interview with
Lorraine K. Seay
by Matt Moore,
June 21, 1997**

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Released Form signed by Lorraine K. Seay
June 2, 1997, at Camp Washington Carver, West Virginia

Transcriber not identified.
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Lorraine K. Seay Interview

Matt Moore:...Seay?

Lorraine Seay: Yes

MM: Lorraine Seay on July 20th, oh, June 21st, 1997, at Camp Washington Carver. Okay, if you'd like, we can start with some background, like basic information, such as your birth date.

LS: My birthday is June-, I had just a birthday, which is June the 20th, and I was born 1926.

MM: And

LS: Of course, where—in McDowell County, Switchback, West Virginia.

MM: And where did you uh...are you still living in McDowell County?

LS: No, no, we just lived there a short time. We moved to Simmons, which is in Brammel, West Virginia. And of course, Simmons, Bramling all together is actually Simmons. But at that- it's in Bramling. But we moved to Beckley. Beckley, well, I've been in Beckley since 1936.

MM: Oh, so you still live in Beckley now?

LS: Yes.

MM: And where-, did you have a big family?

LS: No, very small family, I was an only child of [inaudible] My mother died when I was very young, very young, and of course, my father's still living. But I have two children, and my daughter teaches school. Her name is Yvonne Denise Seay, and my son is in the Air Force in Texas. And, of course, my husband is deceased. He's been deceased going on three years now.

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MM: What year did you get married?

LS: 19 and 51. June 16th, 1951. We were married almost 44 years before he passed.

MM: Really? That's a long time. And what, what did your dad do? Like, what was his occupation when you were...?

LS: My father uh, well, I'd rather not talk too much about that, because he and I didn't communicate too much. I was reared by my aunt and uncle. So uh, I have him now with me, because he's 97 years old. But I had never lived with him.

MM: You lived with your aunt when you were growing up?

LS: Yes, mmm-hmm, yes.

MM: And what about your education? Where did you go?

LS: Well, I finished ... most of my education was done in Beckley, West Virginia, where I finished Stratton High School. I was there, I finished there in 19 and 45, and came back, I finished Bluefield State College, and started teaching there in 19 and 50.

MM: Oh, you taught at Bluefield State College?

LS: No, I went to Bluefield State College. I got my college degree from-, in business education and physical education from Bluefield. And of course, I came back to Stratton and taught. Oh and you taught at the high school.

LS: Yes, uh-huh.

MM: And this-, it was in Beckley?

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LS: Yes.

MM: Okay, the high school was in Beckley.

LS: And of course, the change-over was, it changed to junior high, and I still taught there. So, I taught there for 35 years.

MM: Mmmh. So you taught there a long time.

LS: Right, right.

MM: Now, let's ... see.... You, okay, do you remember how old you were when you first started attending the camp?

LS: Well, I came-, I don't remember how old I was. But uh, it was close to either I was either 18--somewhere along there--I'm not for sure. But I came as a junior counselor.

MM: Oh, so you were a counselor at the camp?

LS: Yeah, at the camp. And I remember when we didn't have all these rooms, naturally. But there were open, open bedrooms and downstairs in the dining room they had long tables, just like camp, long tables and long benches. And of course, you straddled the bench to get over to sit down. And of course, when they, everybody did start eating until they were full. Everybody had to get there on time. You didn't straggle in. No, nothing like that. You were saying your blessing, "God is great, God is good," it was beautiful. Everybody was in harmony. And uh, I remember, oh, yes, I forgot about that. I remember Reverend Williams, who- because he was deceased now. And he would ask the question, "Is everybody happy?" And he kept everybody alive, with his vigor and everything. He was a minister. But he, you just loved for him to be around. He was one of the-, might have been one of the instructors at the time. But I just remember, it's been a long time. But I remember he was here.

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MM: Did he come to camp when it first opened? When it first started?

LS: No, I wasn't here at that time. Evidently it had been opened about three or four years before I came. (**MM:** Oh, okay) So it had to be around '45, 46 when I came.

MM: So you were one of the earlier ones?

LS: Right, I was one of the early ones. I came at the time when they had the New River Camp, and also, the Eastern Gas and Coal Company Camp. A lot of the miners children would come. And it was a joyous time.

MM: Do you remember how you uh, like the reasons why you came to the camp? Like, was it through church-, cause I know....

LS: I think our Mr. Smith, Earl Smith, was in, was recruiting from around through the churches. And I think he uh, asked some of the members of Central Baptist Church by trying to get some workers over in I was one of them. There were about three of us. [Inaudible] who is deceased, and her brother, Norman and myself, came from Second Baptist. So, I think that was a recruiting situation through Mr. Smith.

MM: So they asked you to come?

LS: Yes, uh-huh.

MM: Okay. Do you remember the activities that? I know a lot of people talked about the swimming pool....

LS: Yes. That's the first time I got in a swimming pool was right up here. (**MM:** Really?) Uh-huh. It was a lovely swimming pool, it was nice. And which I hope they try to rebuild.

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MM: I know, somebody told me it hadn't been opened for like 18 years now.

LS: Yes, I'm quite sure. So, it's old. So, they need to build one. That is one of the fitness program I'd say that a person needed, is a swimming.

MM: Mmm-hmm. As uh, like what were your jobs?

LS: At that time, my first time up here I was on the assistant staff for the manager's office, business office or whatever you want to call it, at that time. And it was in the, you know you, where the uh, they have the cafeteria part, see where the window sets back, that's where we had our little office, because we didn't have an office. Everything was open. So, that's where we set up a table, had a typewriter and everything and we typed right there. Right in the dining room. So uh, I worked as junior counselor, but I was working in the office at the time. And then I came back maybe, I think it was during the 50's somewhere, in the late 50's. I worked up here at assistant counselor, I mean, assistant director to recreation. Mr. Crawford was the director, so I worked....

MM: So, what was Mr. Crawford's first name?

LS: I think his name was Everett. He was from Hinton. I think his name was Everett, I'm not for sure. But anyway, I worked with him. And that's when we started, you could see the beginning of the recreational program-, equipment. So I was kind of new and I had just finished school myself, and was teaching physical education at Stratton at that time.

MM: Ah, and so then you came up here and then you helped with the program?

LS: Mmm-hmm, yes, that's right.

MM: What people do you best remember from the camp?

LS: As I mentioned, Reverend Earl Smith, Reverend Williams, not Reverend Smith, Earl Smith

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and Reverend Williams, and uh...Mrs. Mildred Jones, I remember her. (**MM**: I met her) Yes. I remember her very well.

MM: Are you all still friends or...?

LS: Yes, yes, uh-huh. And I remember one of the cooks name... [Inaudible] I believe. I can't think of.... she was from Huntington or somewhere in that area. She was a very good cook. And I remember Maxine Howard. Maxine Howard was working up here at that time. I'm trying to figure ... oh, yes, James Warren from Fayette County. He was in the music, and also, well, I don't think he was in the music at that time. But he played that horn, and I think it was saxophone or trumpet, one. I can't remember. But Mrs. Chiles was the director of all the music, camp music. And oh, she was very, very good. [Inaudible] Chiles. I can remember some of them. But uh, not all of them.

MM: Were there a lot? Like, did a lot of people come to the camp each year?

LS: Yes, it was at that time. They didn't have anything else for the children to do, and they enjoyed camp. And of course, in the later years, my husband worked up here during camp. And that was in the '60's. Maybe I'll say maybe '59, '58, '59, '60, something like that.

MM: So you've been connected with the camp....?

LS: A pretty good while.

MM: Yeah. And, okay, you mentioned, do you stay-, because you mentioned that you're still friends with Mildred Jones. (**LS**: Yes) Do you stay in touch with any other-, any of the other people that you met?

LS: Maxine Howard, she sent my name in, because she remembered I was up here. So, I keep in touch with her quite a bit.

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MM: Did she come today?

LS: I didn't see her, no.

MM: Okay.

LS: And of course, there's Mr. Chiles, too. I remember him when my husband was in camp. He worked up here. And of course, a lot of them are deceased, that used to work up here. Bernice Henry, and there's was another one that worked when I was up here in the '50's. She was here. And she's deceased. Margaret Hill, who's downstairs, you'll be interviewing her, too. (**MM:** Oh, I met her) Yes, uh-huh. She was in the camp in the '40's, too, with me. She was working. And uh...Norma Johnson Stevens, of course, she's deceased. She was a young lady, young lady, very nice, but she's deceased now. So, I did know quite a few at the time. And if I could see some of the faces probably I would know more. [laughing] But I did have some pictures. And I don't know what happened to my pictures of a lot of the camp workers. (**MM:** Oh, really?) I don't know what happened to them. So, I'm going to look again, and if I find them, I will get in touch with the gentleman in Charleston, between Karen and him...(**MM:** Oh, yeah, because he's working with all the ...) Right, right, I will let them know.

MM: Do you remember like, like in the '40's and '50's uh, like what the adult activities that they held here?

LS: The adult activities, I don't remember too many adult activities.

MM: You were just here when it was the, you just remember the 4-H.

LS: Mmm-hmm, right. They, as I said, the different coal companies, the children were here. And of course, New River was here.

MM: Did the coal companies pay for that? For the kids to come?

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LS: Yes, they paid for the kids. And of course, that was, in a case they couldn't afford it. But some of the parents paid. But it was through the coal company. I think Mrs. Jones could enlighten you there a little more, how that was done.

MM: What was it-, how was it different from like when you came to the camp, and like, what was the atmosphere like, because you know, it was just, it was an all-black camp and you were all, you know, together. And did you like celebrate your heritage, and did you, did you learn stuff about your ancestors or...?

LS: Not at that time, we didn't. We, most of the camp activities were handicraft, recreation and maybe some music, and teaching them how to get along with each other. Hiking and things like that. They didn't teach anything but.... well, the heritage probably was in the arts and craft, you know. See, that was in that, and with, there was some educational programs at that time, too. But when you're in charge of one thing, you really don't know what's going on

MM: [inaudible--both speaking simultaneously]

LS: Yeah, you don't know what's going on in the other. Yes, but it was.... They had quite a few children. And in later years, there was music camps. (**MM:** Oh, really?) Yes, there were music camps. They had music camps up here.

MM: Do you remember when that-, like the time period?

LS: Oh, that had to be around ... let's see, in the '70's. Because I know one or two of the students did come up for music camp from different areas. Band, the bands come up.

MM: Did that change a lot when they integrated it, when they integrated the camp (**LS:** Yes), and brought the whites...?

LS: Well, I think I lost connection after integration, because I really didn't know what was going on too much. Just like I wasn't interested in coming too much after that. But uh, I think the

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program they're having now seemed to be very, very good.

MM: Oh, that they had today?

LS: Yes, it was lovely.

MM: Did you see the program?

LS: Mmm-hmm. And I still keep up with a lot of it on T.V. They advertise on the T.V. quite a bit. We came up here...my husband and I, in '46 before he took sick. I'm trying to figure when that was. But it was in August when they had this musical festival. You remember the name of it? But uh I can't remember the name. But it had all the-, some of the well-known singers here and, and the campground was full. It was lovely. You couldn't see any of the buildings hardly for all the people, yes. It was beautiful. And that was around, it had to be 1991 I came up here that whole day. And that's when I found so much change. And I hadn't been up here for years. Didn't know how to get up here, because I thought you had to come around the old way, like I used to. But we came around the new way, like I did today. And after I looked and we couldn't come up in here to park, we had to park down in the parking area, down below-, outside of the gate. (**MM:** Oh, really? And you had to walk?) Oh, yes, we had to walk in. Because with all the number of people we couldn't. It was lovely, really lovely. So, that, that's a new addition to what we're used to seeing. So, it's a very, very nice program.

MM: So, you think so, that you did lose interest in the camp after it, it, you know, became integrated and...?

LS: Yes, I did. I really did. I didn't know what was going on. I didn't keep in touch with it. As I said, my husband was working up here. And a number of people I know from Beckley used to come up. John Jones, I don't know whether they got in touch with him or not. But he used to be camp director at that time.

MM: Oh, he's here today. (**LS:** John Jones?) Or he was here yesterday.

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LS: Maybe he was here yesterday.

MM: I saw ...I saw his name on the registration.

LS: Oh, really?

MM: Mmm-hmm.

LS: Ohhhh. Well, yes, he used to be one of the camp directors at the time my husband came.

MM: And your husband came in the '60's?

LS: Mmm-hmm, yeah, there was, either late '50's or early '60's. See, we built our house in '60, yeah, it was '59, '58, and '60, because we built a home in '60. And he was up here when I moved in.

MM: Do you remember like the differences that like, were boys and girls treated differently? Did they have different activities in the camp, or did they just all do the same things? Or...

LS: No, the boys usually had their own activity, unless it was class work. Usually the boys had their own activities. We had 'em together probably in recreation, in some instance. And of course, swimming they, they were together. But usually, I think it was just the idea of keeping the boys busy. And they would do a lot of hiking, outside activity work. I think it was just a little different for the girls.

MM: What did the girls do?

LS: Well, they did, as I say, arts and crafts.

MM: Oh, they did the arts and crafts.

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LS: Mmm-hmm. Mrs. Glassim (sp?) was in charge of that. And of course, different other things. Now, music they were together, you know, something like that. But outside work they...

MM: Boys generally did the outside work. How long was the camp? Like how long did they-, did you stay?

LS: We stayed a week.

MM: Oh, it was a week? (**LS:** Mmm-hmm) And it was just once a summer, or...?

LS: It's according to what programs were going on. See, you had a 4-H camp, you had your coal camp, coal companies camp.

MM: Oh, so those were different camps?

LS: They were different camps, yes. (**MM:** Oh, okay, okay) Yes, see they weren't all together. So, you had something going on practically all the summer.

MM: Oh, and the 4-H camp was just one summer, or one week of...

LS: One week of that.

MM: Okay. Uhm...and what, like what do you, what do you feel like the importance of the camp was to, you know, to...? Like how do you feel that the camp was important to you?

LS: Well, I think the camping, the social activities means a lot. Getting along with one another and working together means a lot to a child.

MM: Did the camp emphasize that?

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LS: Yes, that's, that's very important. And when you can get them to understand that, I think it means a lot to a child. When they can get along with one another and work together. If they don't get along, well, they can't work together. [chuckles] That's the-, that's very important. And of course, working with the hands, that teaches how to work with hands and everything, the arts and craft. And so many different little things. And of course, as time go along, the years go along, the camp is supposed to increase. And I think that it has now. I was looking at what they were doing today, it's so different, a different today. Teaching arts in dancing. I think it's really wonderful.

MM: It was really good.

LS: Yes.

MM: And let's see if I have anything else in here. Is there anything that you want to-, that you want to say?

LS: No. Just as I said, I've forgot a lot of thingsfrom those days. I think in your, when you're 18 or 19 years old, you know you're, you go to this place and you really don't have your mind focused on anything particular, and you say, "Oh," you know. You know how that is. You're going through probably you're going through that now. [laughing]

MM: Yeah, I'm only 20, so....

LS: So, you really say, "Oh.... I forgot all about that. Did I do that?"

MM: And sometimes you just don't realize how important....

LS: Well, you don't, you don't realize. And uh, it's like I was saying, we as adults used to go out and swim in the swimming pool. I had a picture of that in our bathing suits. And we were acting kiddish. So, but it was a lot of fun. I had a lot of fun. I mean, us teaching the children that we can be children with them, you know. I think that's the next thing that the children enjoy you.

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And I think this is, when they're away from home, they want to feel comfortable to being away from home. So, you enjoy them and they enjoy you.

MM: Mmm-hmm. And any other memories? (**LS:** No) No, all right, well thank you a lot.

LS: I hope I gave you some [fading out]

END OF INTERVIEW