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(SNP106) Zenith Shifflett Sampson interviewed by Chris Brasted, transcribed by Tiffany Cole

Zenith Sampson

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Interview with Zenith Shifflett Sampson
Part of the Shenandoah National Park Oral History Collection, SdArch SNP-106
(formerly SC# 4030)

Interview conducted at Interviewee's Home, Ruckersville, Virginia
By Chris Brasted on March 11, 1993

Transcribed by Tiffany Cole, August 2010

Key

[CB:] Interviewer, Chris Brasted

[ZS:] Interviewee, Zenith Sampson

[Notes regarding transcription technique]

[unintelligible] Unable to understand more than one word

_____ (??) Transcriber's best guess

— Speaker makes abrupt change in sentence

Refer to the Baylor University Style Guide for consistency in transcription

Interviewer speaks with a slight lisp.

Total interview length: 01:02:01 min.

[Begin audio file, 00:00:01 min.]

Chris Brasted: Now what I'm trying to figure out, all the spellings of Shifflett. There's some Shifflett's with two F's and two T's. Those are one F and two T's, there. Which nowadays—

Zenith Sampson: Okay. Now I'm gonna tell you why some of the things changed. A lot of the kids didn't have birth certificates. They were born by midwives. And a lot of them went to Richmond to get their birth certificates. And the different spellings came in down there. And there's a possibility, a lot of them was born and their midwife didn't even know how to spell their name.

CB: I guess that makes sense.

ZS: I think we always spelled ours S-h-i-f-f-l-e-t-t. I don't think there's a one on here spelled like that.

CB: Of course that coulda been the fault of whoever typed it up too and just seen one like that and did them all that way.

ZS: Well the only difference between this Bessie and Earman Shiflett is just one F instead of two.

CB: You said you think maybe it was sort of a good thing moving off the mountain though for some of the younger kids as far as the education.

ZS: I think it was a wonderful thing. I think it was a wonderful thing. Because what would have happened? Me and all the rest, we woulda married in there on the mountain, in the mountains and we would have raised our families and rebuilt in the mountains. And I reckon the mountains woulda been run out of land by now. There probably wouldn't have been any land left. And there wouldn't have been any way up until just maybe say in the last twenty or twenty-five years of things getting much better up there on the mountain for people because there was never any electricity or anything like that ever run through and things like that you know. Now I have a brother that is eighty-eight years old and I try to get at him at times things that I don't remember, but he can't remember nothing. Then I've got a sister that is eighty-six years old and she remembers a lot, but when she was a young girl she went down into the Valley and started living with this family and helping and working for them, you know. And she knows all about the mountain, but so many things she don't know because she left the mountain young.

CB: Right.

ZS: And she just doesn't know. Now I had this nephew. Now my aunt was the first woman to ever teach school on Lewis Mountain. They didn't have a school that was on Lewis Mountain and the kids didn't get to go to school. So they came to Standardsville and had a contract brought up to where my aunt, Icie Roach could teach school on Lewis Mountain. And they up a little place there for her to teach. Well I got a letter there—. Now if John Stoneberger was living, he would be the greatest help in this world you could ever get because I mean he searched everything and I mean he was really good with that. But anyway he had talked with Mrs. Parrot and Mrs. Parrot somehow or someway he had the contract and he sent me one of the contracts where my aunt had taught on Lewis Mountain. But I don't know what I did with it. I got it her someplace, but I don't know exactly where it is. But John could have told you anything you wanted to know because he was the one told me that my great granddaddy, well in fact he was my step-granddaddy, because my mother and Aunt Myrtle was born in Wardensville, West Virginia and their father died and Scott Roach was there in the logging mountains logging. And he met my grandmother and he married my grandmother and brought her back to Virginia when my mother and Aunt Myrtle, I believe one of them was two and the other was three years old. And then they went on to have seven kids of their own. And he had also been married and his wife was dead and she lived on, they had lived on what you call Saddleback on Pocosin. So they had been back in the mountains back on the Skyline Drive there, but when he bought timber, he bought it in large amounts. And up until he died that's what he did.

CB: I've talked to several people who remember peeled bark as a way to make money.

ZS: Well I guess my grandfather did well because they lived back in the mountains, but they had a huge home back in the mountains. And the first ash cakes, have you ever heard of ash cakes?

CB: Yeah. I learned about that last week. I never heard of it before.

ZS: (laughs) The first kind, I never will forget it, my sister and I went over to my aunt's house on the Skyline Drive after they had done had the Skyline Drive built back past where they lived at. We went back there one day with a guy that was a watchman back there. And we spent the night we spent the night with my aunt and the next day then we walked over to my grandmother's house. She was making bread and her kitchen had a big fireplace in it and she was raking the ashes back on that fireplace and had this cornmeal made up and she was putting in the ashes. And I asked her I said, "Why are you putting cornmeal in ashes?" And she said, "Zenie, hasn't your mother ever made you a hoe cake?" And I said, "No, we don't have a fireplace." (laughs) And she said, "Well today you gonna get a piece of hoe cake." And I said, "Well, I'll be glad to try it" because I had heard of it. But anyway she was a wonderful cook and she made ash cake.

CB: Now is ash cake and hoe cake, are they the same thing?

ZS: That's the same thing. Hoe cake and ash cake, it's the same thing. The only thing, a hoe cake you make it on top of the stove and the ash cake you make it down in the ashes on the hearth of the fireplace. And she could make the best homemade bread that you've ever eat in your life. And you never went there that the table wasn't just sitting full of food.

CB: Now who's this, your grandmother?

ZS: It was my grandmother. And that's where my mother got, I reckon knowing how to save and do and had all kind of food. But they were trained to, like when you butchered. My mother canned sausage. She made pudding and she canned pudding and of course in the spring we would raise a bunch of young chickens and she'd can chicken. And she would can beef. I mean we canned our meat.

CB: Canned everything.

ZS: Canned everything. We had everything to eat. There was no problem eating. But there were some of them, I can remember plenty of times when there'd be snow on the ground that people would come to our door and knock on the door and say, "Ms. Bessie, could you just please let us have a half a gallon of meal or a little bucket of sauerkraut or anything." Said Mama said, "Just anything that you've got, you can let her have." Well don't put this in the book or nothing please. "Anything that you've got because we haven't eaten in two or three days." And my mother would never turn nobody away. My mother would help, but then in the fall and in the spring when my brothers would need help so bad and they couldn't get anybody to work a day for them or help them, then there were times that they got terribly disturbed because they'd say, "Well if they would help us work, we wouldn't mind to help them in the

winter. But they won't work; they won't do nothing." It was a lot of mountain people that were lazy. But it was hard work and if you didn't like to work you wasn't gonna get up and do the kind of work you had to do up there.

CB: Sounds like a lot of work, you—

ZS: That's right. I don't know as much about the hard work, me and my younger brother which is Josh, Harold's father. We don't really know as much because see we got out of the mountains younger and earlier than what the rest of them did. And we don't really know that much, but I know enough. But never minded it; I always thought it was fun. And my mother had a saying is: "The dread is worse than the work." Just get up and do the work and get it over with.

CB: (laughs) A lot of truth to that. A lot of truth to that.

ZS: But never for a minute am I ashamed that I was born in the Blue Ridge Mountains. And when the hotel was built there on the mountain and there was two service stations built there. One was built by Ed Mundy and one was built by John Haney. So we got to be quite a little village up on top of that mountain there for a while.

CB: Yeah I guess you were exposed to people from different areas of the state, maybe even the country. Did ya'll you know fraternize or associate with the people visiting and passing through.

ZS: Oh yeah, oh yeah. Sure, sure. And then another thing too you know, when those service stations opened up they had other things too. Well Mr. Haney's store was more like a grocery store and a service station. And the mountain people were poor and he was so good-hearted that he broke himself up letting people have credit and could never pay. He really did and a lot of them probably could have paid and wouldn't pay. My mother had things fixed to the point where she knew exactly how she would be getting our winter shoes and our winter clothes and things. Now take like in the fall of the year when we killed hogs, well she would sell all the hams except one that she would keep to bake for Christmas. Well we used all the other meat; we had all the other meat to eat, but the hams she would sell because that was a better price. And she could get money where she could buy shoes and clothes and things for us to go to school. And like when the cows would have calves, well she'd sell the calves. And then in the fall we would cut a couple big loads and then you probably don't know what shumake is.

CB: Hm-mm.

ZS: Okay. It was a wild bush bout this tall and about this big around.

CB: And it's called shumake?

ZS: Shumake. It grows out in fields. And we'd cut a couple truck loads of that and haul it over here to Fray's Mill. It's used in paint; it's used to make paint out of. And when she'd go over there, well she'd get enough outta that that she would buy enough flour that it would last us

through the complete winter. And then of course she would buy material to make dresses for us to wear to school. And buy other stuff you know that we would need to have through the winter months. And like if we needed new boots, she'd buy boots with that shumake. She always planned ahead and knew. The mountain people were poor, but there were plenty ways to live good if you worked and you didn't mind to work.

CB: I was talking to Willie Collier, the Collier's Auction House.

ZS: I went to school with him.

CB: Okay.

ZS: I'm a lot older than Willie, but I went to school with him. He was just a little tiny tot, but two of his sisters about my age, Margaret and Minnie.

CB: Okay. Well he's got a few memories. He remembers. He remembers, he says, "We didn't have much money, but we had enough food. And there was lots of love to go around."

ZS: That's right. That's exactly right.

CB: He remembers that.

ZS: There wasn't no money up there. It's as easy to come by five dollars now as it was five cents then. But you know we always figured out way, now what we would do, my mother made some of the best fried apple pies you've ever eat in your life. And what we used to do, we used to peel apples and our brothers made scapples (??). And we would put white sheets over top of the big long wide scapples and put the apples out to dry for dried apples. Occasionally you can buy them in the store now. And of course we'd sell those. And then in the mountains there were chestnut trees. And we'd go out and pick up chestnuts. Well we could take them down to the foot of the mountain. I have never been able to know what they ever did with the chestnuts. Now I don't know what, I'm sure nobody in the mountains would buy them to eat because you could go to the mountains and get them and eat them. But I don't know what Mr. Meadows did with his chestnuts. Well we sold chestnuts by the pound too. This year at our family reunion I was talking to, of course John was buried yesterday. But I was talking to John about the mountains and he said how he used to enjoy, now they lived down in the Valley, down at Number Two Furnace right at the foot of the mountain. But of course now his mother was raised up on Lewis Mountain. And he was talking bout how he used to enjoy coming to our house and what a good cook my mother was and how nice they were always treated. And I said, "John, we were poor as church rats, but we were happy." And I said, "We had a lot of love for the family, ourselves, and for friends when they came." And he said, "Yes." He said, "I think that's what made the mountain people happy was the friendship that they had." And we usually got two pair of shoes a year. We'd get pair in the spring and one pair in the fall. And that was about, now you go to the store and you buy a pair of shoes every week if you wanted to. But then you got two pair a year. And you had to save those cause the pair we'd get in the spring would be to wear to church, to go to Sunday school. And

the ones that we'd get in the fall would be what we had to wear to school. And most of my clothes all my life were hand-me-downs. Because I had three sisters that were still at home and as something would get too little for them of course I'd have to get that. And I told myself when I was a little girl and I got old enough to get out and work, I would never wear another piece of hand-me-down as long as I lived. I would buy my own clothes and have new clothes, wouldn't wear nobody else's. And that sure happened.

CB: (laughs)

ZS: But you know when you had a lot of kids in the family, well now people hands clothes down from one child to another naturally because when things were good you don't. But I never, I can go to a yard sale and I can see clothes there that are practically new and they just give them away, but I don't buy them cause I wore hand-me-downs when I was young and I don't wear hand-me-downs anymore. (laughs)

CB: That's funny—

ZS: And it's not because I'm that wealthy, but if I'm gonna get something, I'm gonna get something new. I'm not gonna buy something that's second hand.

CB: The decisions we make you know.

ZS: That's exactly right.

CB: (laughs) When we're little, we're not going to do. And you stick by them.

ZS: That's the way it happens.

CB: What kind of school did you go to? Were there a lot of kids who went there?

ZS: Oh yes. There's lots of kids. The kids from, okay. Let's say the kids from right on top of the mountain down till about half way between the top of the mountain and Lydia came to that school, Fern Hill. There was a school at Temple Hill too, but I don't know where that, I did know at one time, but I've forgotten now where the school at Temple Hill was. But anyway, now Willie and his family, they lived on over on the ridge from where we lived at. We was mainly right up on top. We were mainly right on top of the mountain. And then Willie and them, you'd go on down the road about a mile and then there was a dirt road that you'd go to the left and you'd go back in there, way back in there maybe two miles and they called it "back on the ridge." And that's where Willie lived. And we all went to that school and it was the first grade through the seventh grade.

CB: How many rooms were there?

ZS: One room. One room. There was one little room when you went in that you took your coat off and hung it up. And they had the water bucket there with the water where like you wanted a drink of water. (laughs) You went out there and got water, but of course you wasn't

allowed to drink out the dipper, you had to have your own cup. And the boys kept wood in there so they could have dry wood at all times. And then right in the middle of the floor they had great big round wood stove, big pot-bellied stove bout this big around. And the boys kept the wood in the stove all the time. And then over on this side they had from the sixth to the seventh, bout half way down. And then the rest of it would be, starting over on this side would be from the first grade right on through up until the sixth grade.

CB: How many kids would you say were in there at any given time?

ZS: Well I'm gonna tell you what's the truth, I don't really know, but I'd say at least thirty-five or forty. Because now the Collier kids, let me see, there was Jesse, and Margaret, and Minnie, and Fred, and Willie, and then there was a couple more of them. There was about seven of them. Well from my family, there was about five of us going at the same time. It was at least thirty-five or forty kids. At least thirty-five or forty kids.

CB: One teacher?

ZS: One teacher. One teacher. And it was hard to keep teachers up there too because the kids drove them crazy. And another thing too, it was hard to keep them because there was nobody in the mountains that had room enough to room and board them. And they had to either board so far away or drive and the mountains was bad and most of the teachers didn't have automobiles and it was very hard. And I'm gonna tell you something. Now Mrs. Rhody Haney taught. She's the one that had the switchboard at the post office right on top of the mountain and her husband worked at the highway department. But I would say that probably she was not even qualified. I don't want you to write this down. Are you getting the recording of this too?

CB: Yeah, but I'm not gonna go by that word for word.

ZS: Okay, but I would think maybe she probably wasn't really wasn't a college graduate. I think maybe she just finished, and back then you didn't even have twelve years of schooling, you had eleven years because the twelfth year was brought in, I don't know when probably back in 19 and 50 something, wasn't it? Late forties or fifties when they put the twelfth grade on.

CB: Okay.

ZS: And now I know my aunt that taught on Lewis Mountain, she was not college graduate. She only had a seventh grade education, but anyway they said she would definitely qualify to teach kids their ABCs and how to read and write and spell and things like that, you know.

CB: Right.

ZS: And they had never had a school in Lewis Mountain and they couldn't get a teacher to come there so that's why they let her.

CB: I'm sure they had to go with whoever knew—

ZS: Whoever could teach your kid to read and write his ABCs, multiplication tables they had to go with it. They had no other alternative. And the counties was so poor they just didn't have the money you know to do it. And we'd go to school with our lunch boxes. They would be little half a gallon buckets or any kind of little bucket you could put a biscuit or two in and there was something with apple butter and meat or something. That's what we'd take off to school with. Of course it was probably far better for us than the meat and stuff that you buy today to make sandwiches out of.

CB: (laughs) Would you say the families still stayed close together even after they moved off the mountain?

ZS: No, I don't think so because they scattered out and they went in so many different directions. Because you know a lot of them went way back up there in Dyke and Geer at that settlement you call it. Some of them went over around Wolftown. They had sort of like a little settlement over around Wolftown. And then like most of my people on my mother's side well they went down in around Rhoadesville and Locust Grove and on down in there. No it was, and a lot of the people right off the top of the mountain went to Barboursville. You see there was so many families coming out. They were having such a hard time finding homes for them and that is why they had to go and do those resettlements and things to put people in there if they wanted to get them out of the mountains because that's the only way people could go. They had nowhere to go. And now like for the ones that didn't have money enough to buy a home, well then the government bought them. And you had a lifetime right in it and then if you didn't, now that is one good thing that they did. For the ones that didn't get enough money out of their homes to buy a home, the government bought the homes and then they give the tenants a lifetime right without they chose in later years to buy. Now they bought twenty-four acres with a house for my mother. Then in later years I bought that and bought it and fixed it up just the way I wanted it fixed up for her. And we would get to see each other. In the home tract of land it was a little farm like. I think all of it together was about fifty-five acres. Well they cut their half in two and my brother had married Luella Morris' daughter and so they divided it and built a new house for Luella Morris. And then my mother had the old house. And of course my brother in later years and his wife, they bought Luella's place and I bought my mother's place.

CB: Okay, it was passed down generations too.

ZS: That's right. But that's the way they went. And people just went wherever they could find a house, find a home to go to because when you take and start pulling that many people out of a mountain I mean it's just not that many homes. Because back then it was the end of a depression and people were not building. There was no vacant houses hardly.

CB: Yeah, I guess the real building started after World War Two.

ZS: Yeah.

CB: Then they started popping up everywhere.

ZS: That's right and now they still popping up everywhere. Everyplace you see a little piece of land, there's a house going up on it.

CB: Have you ever been up to the National Park since?

ZS: Oh yes. We go there for our family reunion, South River Picnic Grounds every year. If you're around on August the 2nd and if you wanna good meal, just come on down.

CB: (laughs)

ZS: Just ask anybody where the Shifflett reunion is at. (laughs)

CB: How do you pick August the 2nd?

ZS: How do you do what?

CB: How did you pick that date?

ZS: Well that's usually the date that everybody can have a Sunday free to come.

CB: Okay.

ZS: And we just decided to make it one special date, well I tell you another reason why too. When people were on the mountain, the only big thing that ever happened that people really enjoyed was the Fireman's Fair and Carnival in Elkton, Virginia every year. And they always had that the second week in August. And so what we'd do, we'd have our reunion on the second Sunday in August so when people came to that fair on Saturday then they can come to the reunion on Sunday. But really my family is really thinning down now. We don't have as many as it used to be a huge bunch of us, but now it's not as many because a lot of them have fallen out and a lot of them have passed away and different things. But we still have nice large crowd.

CB: I guess people don't have as many kids nowadays too.

ZS: No they don't have as many, but we still have right many kids— (laughs)

CB: Yeah. (laughs)

ZS: And they enjoy it too. They really enjoy it. Do you know Pat Peyton that has Pat Peyton's Grocery up on—

CB: Yeah.

ZS: Well that's my niece.

CB: Okay.

ZS: That's my brother's daughter. And she and her family's all there and see Tishie has three kids and they've all got kids and grandkids and I've got kids and grandkids and great grandkids. It's still a large family and we try to hold the tradition together.

CB: Some people, a lot of people who still hold a lot of anger when they look at the Park, at the National Park.

ZS: I don't think any of my family has ever had any anger about it at all. I think that it was a wonderful thing in a way. I mean it, as I say, when I go, my fondest memories are of my childhood and I think I enjoyed my life there even though after we got out from up there things were a lot better for us. I guess I've had just about as much as any average person could have ever asked for, as much as the good Lord would want me to have since I got out from up there. Because I've always worked and my husband was a good worker and I've owned three new brick homes in my time and I've had as nice a home as anybody could ever want for. But I can't remember anymore happier a moments in those homes than I ever had in the log house up on top of the Blue Ridge Mountains. I really can't.

CB: I didn't realize it was a log house up there.

ZS: Absolutely.

CB: Was it, what one floor?

ZS: No, two floors.

CB: Two floors.

ZS: And we had this huge milam apple tree. You've never heard of a milam apple tree cause I've never seen one since I ever left the mountain. But that was the best apple you ever tasted and the little apple's about this big. They were so good for frying and they would keep so well in the wintertime. You know apples don't keep anymore. You can't keep apples during the winter anymore. If you'll keep them in your vegetable bin or fruit bin in the refrigerator you can keep them a little while, but they rot so fast. But my mother had two great big barrels this big. And we had like a little hallway when you went up the steps to the second floor. And she had a great big barrel right back in that corner. And she'd fill that barrel full of milam apples in the late fall and we'd eat and she would bury apples too and we would eat on those apples till spring of the year. That's the truth. And everybody knew that my mother always had those apples. And they always knew she had buried apples and a lot of the neighbors would come and say, would send the kids and say, "Mama said to ask you if you would send her a mess of those milam apples to fry with our supper tonight." And she'd always send them. She'd always give them a mess of apples to take for their supper. And at Christmastimes as I told you a while ago, she always had her own special kind of sugar cookies that she made. And any kid that ever came in, it always left with a bag of those sugar cookies for she kept a great big tin this tall full of sugar cookies. And I don't know if you like sauerkraut or not, but we always had such large cabbage and she would always make a huge barrel of sauerkraut. And then she would make

another ten gallon jar of sauerkraut that she would can. And then she'd have the big barrel of sauerkraut where she would go in anytime in the winter that she wanted and get out the fresh sauerkraut and cook it. And she would give it to the neighbors too and the neighbors would come and ask for sauerkraut too.

CB: Well with sugar cookies, I bet ya'll were popular with the other kids. (laughs)

ZS: Oh yes. Oh yeah. A child never come in that they didn't leave with sugar cookies that they wanted to take some home with them too. I know it hadn't been too long ago that Harold ask his mama over here, said, "Mama, you remember those sugar cookies my grandma used to make?" She said, "Yeah." He said, "Do you think you could make some of them?"

[tape break, 00:30:59]

CB: I didn't realize there was a post office up there. Is this Hightop Mountain?

ZS: No, when I talk about Hightop, I'm talking about right on top the Blue Ridge.

CB: Right on top of the Blue Ridge.

ZS: You know where the Skyline Drive goes over 33, right on top of the Blue Ridge?

CB: Right.

ZS: Well maybe as far as in here, halfway between here and the mailboxes would have been about that far. There was a big house going up the mountain that set up on the right hand side. It was owned by Mr. Alec Haney. And Mr. Alec Haney took care of the highway department. He had this scraper that was pulled by two horses that scraped the road and kept the road in good order. And his wife, Mrs. Rhody Haney, she had the post office and the switchboard. And she's got two daughters; they have two daughters that lives in Standardsville. And its Nelly Haney and Virginia Fadley (??). And they were wonderful people; they really were. And I can remember when they built 33. Thirty-three was just an old dirt road. That was the one that Mr. Haney took care of. I can remember when they built 33. They built that mainly with convicts. And then I can remember when the built the Skyline Drive.

CB: It wasn't paved right away then was it?

ZS: Thirty-three was. As soon as they built 33, the new 33. But now 33 used to just be an old dirt road that came all the way across the mountain into Standardsville.

CB: Was it in about the same place it is now?

ZS: Well not really. As you go up 33 now, if you look up you will see some difference in the mountains the way they slope down and I'll say that maybe the old one was about a quarter of a mile up further up the mountain. Like if this is 33 going this way, it would be about a quarter of a mile above it up into the mountains.

CB: Okay, all right. Sometimes you can see places where that road used to be. The old road, where it used to be.

ZS: That's exactly right. And as you get right at the foot of the Blue Ridge, before you start going up the Blue Ridge after you pass Lydia, you will notice there's a dirt road. I think the road has been blocked off to keep people from going up into there now, because I think it's gotten real bad in there. But that was part of the old 33.

CB: And they started working on Skyline Drive, do you remember that?

ZS: Oh yes. I remember when they built Skyline Drive all the way through.

CB: When did they start that?

ZS: Where did they start it?

CB: When?

ZS: Now, '22 and ten is '32 so it was thirty—. I'm gonna say about '32 or '33. Cause I think maybe I was, I'm seventy years old now. And I think I was probably about ten or twelve years old when they did that. So I'm gonna say about '32 or '34. And that's about the same time that that hotel was built right on top of the Blue Ridge Mountain there. Marvin Mundy and his wife Margaret, they built the hotel there.

CB: Mundy?

ZS: Mm-hm. They had four children. Joann, Eleanor, Bud, and what was the other one's name? They called him Booty (??). I don't know, but anyway he married some girl down in the Valley and he was killed in a car wreck. But so far as I know Bud and Eleanor and Joann are all still living. And Mr. and Mrs. Mundy are both dead now.

CB: And what kind of hotel was it? Was it several rooms?

ZS: It was a huge—

CB: Really?

ZS: Yeah. It was a huge hotel right on top of the mountain there. And they had cabins of course for people when they were going across the mountain if they wanted to stop and spend the night. And they also had rooms in the hotel for people too.

CB: Did many people come by there?

ZS: Oh mercy, yes.

CB: Oh really?

ZS: Oh yes.

CB: After the Skyline was put up?

ZS: After the Skyline was put through there and opened up well they turned away people every night. They had to. They just, they couldn't even keep them all.

CB: So ya'll saw a lot more people coming through then from different areas than you would have seen before when you were growing up.

ZS: Oh yeah. When the Skyline Drive opened up going through there we saw lots of people. And even when 33 opened up going through there we saw lots of people because see the roads was good then.

CB: I guess people could travel more easily.

ZS: And then more people, see this back in the late '20s and early '30s that was the ending of the Depression. I can remember the end of the Depression years. And people, there's no way you could afford an automobile. Now you could live in the mountains and you could live good. You could have clothes and plenty to eat, but there was never very much money. And if you wanted to work, you had to leave the mountains and go someplace else to work. Of course now we were farmers and of course most of our land, a lot of our land was just rocky mountain land. And but you could raise up a rock and drop a couple grains of corn or something down underneath of it and it would come up. You wouldn't believe it, but it would. And a lot of times, now my mother was really a provider. Now we always had plenty to eat. There was never a time that we ever got hungry or anything, but we knew a lot of the mountain people that did. But it's just because they wouldn't work. Because if you worked and we were never on welfare I can tell you that. But my mother raised us all to work and none of us has ever minded working really.

CB: That's why you're still working today.

ZS: That's right. We were raised that if you wanted something you could work for it, you could get it. And if you wanted to do something bad enough you can certainly do it. And like in the fall well we had apple trees and we had cherry trees and we had pear trees so we had our own fruits and we grew our own vegetables and we went out in the fields and picked blackberries. We went to the mountains and picked huckleberries. So we had everything and then in the fall after we had canned the whole summer through, and there was no such thing as freezers then; you didn't freeze anything, but you canned. We canned. And my mother would bury turnips, she'd bury potatoes, she'd bury apples, and she'd bury carrots. And then all of other vegetables why we would can.

CB: Sounds like ya'll ate better than most people do today.

ZS: We ate plenty. We had plenty. There was never a time, and we never got out of the bed in the mornings before going to school that there wasn't a table with hot biscuits and there would be cereal, oatmeal. Mostly oatmeal, mostly Quaker Oatmeal. And I work for a research company. We do research in foods and this Quaker oat came out, Quaker Oats came out with a new type of oats. And I was in a store and I had bought this space in this store for our relay and for our set up. And I was there with the girl that had it on display and was giving out samples. And this man come up and she asked him if he'd like a sample and he said, "Don't stick ol' Quaker Oats out to me." He said, "I had to eat those when I was a kid," and said, "I hate the looks of them."

CB: (laughs)

ZS: And I said, "Now wait a minute. Just let's don't knock it." I said, "I had to eat them when I was a kid too," but I said, "I still got all my teeth too." And I said, "You know there's a lot of good in Quaker Oats if you take the time to think about it." But my mother, she was a wonderful cook. And she made homemade bread and in the morning she'd make big hot biscuits and we always had meat and biscuits and gravy and stuff for our breakfast. There was no limit to the food you could have if you wanted to work and make it. And we didn't only, my mother canned beans, she dried beans. And of course we would let some stay on the vines and dry and then we would hull those for our dry beans, you know. And plenty times we have, when we would plant a cornfield when we would drop the corn in the ground we'd drop in beans in with the corn. And then the beans would run up the cornstalks.

CB: That was clever.

ZS: It would be just like a picture, all those beans hanging down the cornstalk. But of course there has been times when I have been in the cornfield and it would be so hot I'd wished there wasn't any. (laughs) But they were there. And we had to pick them too. And we would bring maybe five or six big bags of beans from the cornfield home and put a cloth down and pour all those beans out. And then of course we would string beans. Some of those beans would be canned and others would be dried. And we would have canned beans and dried beans the winter through. And I mean it was good food. You don't have good food like that now. And I don't understand it because people were not fat back then like they are now.

CB: Well they worked hard I imagine.

ZS: Well they did.

CB: Probably didn't have as much leisure time.

ZS: And just like a lot of our ground that we can, it was new ground, would be ground that my brothers would clean up and all you know. And we'd plant it and a lot of times you couldn't put a horse in there to plow, it was too rocky. You had to go in there with a hoe and hoe it out. You worked it out with a hoe. Well the younger ones of us, they'd put us in front and we'd pull the weeds. And then the rest would come behind us and work it you know. And that's right.

And you worked and there was no such a thing as a tractor or a mower for a yard or nothing like that then. I couldn't now that I'm older, I wouldn't like to go back into it, but if I was a young person I wouldn't mind to have those days to live over again. Not a bit.

CB: Where did ya'll get Quaker Oats and that type of thing? Come down into town to the store?

ZS: Okay. There was a store called Lester Meadows' Store right at the foot of the mountain at Swift Run. And that's where we would go and get our, and sometimes we'd go all the way down into the Valley, down at Elkton to McGuire's Store. There was a store called McGuire's and we'd go down there and get our—. There wasn't a lot of, there's no such thing as saying, "Well I gotta go get my groceries." There was no such thing as that. You went to the store; you went for kerosene because there's no such thing as electricity. There was no such thing as indoor plumbing. In fact I'm gonna be honest with you. I don't know a home on that Blue Ridge nowhere until that hotel came there and they had plumbing. I do not know of any home that had plumbing in it. Now I won't sit here and tell you that they didn't, but if they did I don't know whose home it was cause I was never one that had it. And we had no electricity. There was no such a thing as refrigerators. There was no such a thing as washing machines. You rubbed on a rub board. My mother made all of her own soap, lye soap we called it. And she had a great big wash pot outside and you washed those clothes through one, put them over in that wash pot and boil' em till they looked like they was nice and white. And then you'd put them over into another water and wash them and rinse them and hang them up. And that's the way you did your laundry, winter and summer. And then of course, we always had hogs. We always had chickens. And like now when you went to the store you bought coffee and sugar and of course you bought spices. My mother was a big, she loved to bake. She did a lot of baking. And when I was young I didn't like sweets, but now I love them. Now I crave it. And she always had her own special type of cookie. She called them sugar cookies. And she kept those cookies baked all the time and when we got home from school there was always warm sugar cookies or something ready for us to have a snack until dinner was ready. Of course we didn't call it dinner then up in the mountains. We called it supper.

CB: Where did you go to school?

ZS: Well there's a little school called Big Ben.

CB: Okay. You mentioned that on the phone.

ZS: Big Ben. And that was just on top of the mountain coming down 33. That woulda been about a mile down below where we lived at on the side of the road, but then after the Park land took over the county wouldn't send anymore school buses up there. And we walked all the way to the foot of the mountain the first year afterwards and it was so far and so cold. And so then my baby brother, Harold's father Josh, the first one you talked to. He went over into Hensley Hollow they called it, Mount Pleasant, and he went to school and lived with my sister

and went to school through the first and the second grade. And then I went to Rhoadesville with my grandmother and stayed there until we moved down into Greene County.

CB: Okay. So ya'll never had to fool with the resettlement camps or anything?

ZS: No, no. But I knew about those. I knew about those.

CB: What were those like? How did the people who lived there? How were they set up? I don't even know.

ZS: Well it was just a little, they bought out a piece of land and it was just like a little subdivision now and they just built homes all over it. And I think in later years the ones that wanted to could buy their homes if they wanted to. I'm gonna be honest with you, I knew where it was and I knew about it, but I never was up there. And I worked with every one of them. And I tell you how I worked with them because they set up a project there in Standardsville that everybody lived in country homes that didn't have mattresses, you know back in those days there were very few mattresses in any homes. They had big white ticks that they built up with straw and put on their beds. That's what they slept on. And so, and I don't know that this is true, but they said when President Roosevelt made a tour through the state of Virginia back across the Skyline Drive at Big Meadows, you know there was a CC camp back there too. And he was back there once. And that he saw these two ladies out in the hay stack cramming straw in this big white bag and he asked what they were doing. And they said, "Well they're filling up their bed ticks." And they said that he went back and he appropriated so much cotton and so much ticking and stuff for people to have mattresses made. And they set up a sewing room in Standardsville and they hired ladies to make the ticks, the mattress ticks. And then they hired myself and Frances Shifflett and Ottie Dean and Elma Dean to train the people, show them how to make the bed mattresses. So we did. We were working for Virginia Swink (??). At that time, she married a Powell later on, but at that time she was our home-ec teacher. She was Virginia Swink. And she showed us how to do it and all.

CB: About when was that? (laughs)

ZS: Well, (pause) I'll say that was around about '38. About '38.

CB: It'd be after Roosevelt.

ZS: That was about '38 because I know we were really glad you know when they did that because so many people had never had a bed mattress in their life. And when we got them made, they way they was set up, we had instructions exactly how to make them and everything. And they were nice mattresses. They really were.

CB: The things we take for granted now. It's amazing.

ZS: I know. That's right. That's exactly right. But that gave some of us younger people work and it gave some of the older women work in the sewing rooms. And they also set up sewing

rooms where they made clothes for the people and children that didn't have a lot of clothes. They would make them and then if you qualified why you could go there and you could get clothes for yourself and your children. And I'm gonna be honest with you, just as honest as I can be. I don't ever remember in my life us ever having to have any welfare of any kind. My mother worked right with my brothers and showed them how to do and all. And we raised and had the things that we neededm you know. No luxuries, no. There was no such a thing as luxuries in the mountain. The only thing that ever came into the mountains in the way of luxury when they started making these ol' grind up Victrolas. And people could wind those up and buy records and play those. But that's the only kind of music I ever know or ever heard of.

CB: Did many people get those?

ZS: Well yeah, quite a few along. And the ones that got them and the other people didn't get them, well people would gang up and go to their house and sit down and listen to them.
(laughs)

CB: Like music records?

ZS: That's right. Just all kinds of records and to tell you the truth we had one and I'm so sorry. My mother once when I was away working, she had moved ours out on the back porch. And she told my kids that they could take it outside if they wanted to and play with it. And then when they got through with it they could haul it to the dumpster, to the trash. And they did so they just really, it was a nice one. It was about the same color as that there, but it had buttons across the bottom where you could number your records that you put in there. Each number would tell you what records you had and you could push the records out and all. And I don't know why she ever did that, but she—. After she got older I guess she didn't want to hear it and she didn't want it in her way, so she just got it out. It's a pleasant memory to think about, to go back to. And if anybody was sick, people would walk for miles and miles to help in any way that they could. And back then you know you didn't have undertakers, *[unintelligible]* and things like you do now, funeral homes. The body was laid out in the home. Well when the body was laid out in the home the people would just go and the neighbors would gather in, fix food and stuff and take food into the family and sit with the family until after the funeral. They'd take turns. Some would come and some would go, you know. The family was never left alone until after the funeral was over with.

CB: That's interesting. So it wasn't one family just looking after itself, the other families in the area—

ZS: That's exactly right. It was just like everybody was just one big family. And if you were making apple butter for people in the mountains, I guess I'm going from one thing to the other, but I'm just telling to you as I remember it. Like if you were making apple butter, well the women would get together and go and help peel the apples you know. And then the younger generation would get together and go help stir it. They would rather do that than to peel the apples. Like if there's lots of beans to be strung or something like that, people would have bean

stringings. The ladies would have quilting parties, get together and make quilts. It was just one big family.

CB: I can see why you have such wonderful memories from that time.

ZS: It really is. And I can remember a lot of times like when we would be coming home from school and we would have to come around a little bend. And just as soon as we'd get around that bend, we could smell the stuff at the house a cooking. My mother always used Eight O'Clock Coffee and you could smell that for the half a mile over that mountain and that's the truth. (laughs) And she would always when we would get there, she would have our dinner ready for us or have something ready that we could have a snack until she got it ready. And it was very pleasant, pleasant memories to even think about.

CB: Would you say that most of the families were Christians? Went to church?

ZS: Well yes, I would say. That is the one thing that I just love to do. And we had Bible school every summer. I think that is one thing that made the mountain people better because there was lots of going to church and lots of different things in a religious way that people could get into and all, you know. Of course there was lots of bad things that went on there too. There was lots of people there in the mountain that drank and things, but I would say on an average if they drank they didn't bother you. Most people didn't lock their doors before they went to bed. They wasn't scared of anybody that lived in the mountains. They knew nobody was going to bother them. And now you have to live like a caged up animal. I will take the people in my life back then way ahead of the way we have to live today. And you never heard of a young girl being raped or anything like that now in the mountains. That was just something that was unheard of. Or at least something I never heard of.

CB: When did you first hear about the Park coming in?

ZS: Well I tell you the truth, I don't really—. I think when they first started talking about it I was maybe so young that I didn't pay much attention to it or didn't know anything much about it because they had talked about it and a lot of people had fought against it you know for a long time before they just said, "This is it. We're gonna take it whether you like it or whether you don't." And you see it wasn't only Greene County that they took land and things from. It was Page County, it was Rockingham County.

CB: On down to Madison.

ZS: Now my grandparents, yeah, my grandparents—. I talked to my daughter last night. And I said, "Linda, you worked with the author that wrote the book on Madison County." I said, "Did ya'll pick up anything in Greene County?" She said, "No Mom." She said, "We was supposed to do a book on Greene County," but she said, "We never did get to that." I don't know why. Some author last name was Davis, it was a lady. And my daughter worked with her and they went all over Madison County picking up all they could. Well they wrote a book on Madison County. And they had a lot of our people in that book because see my granddaddy was a

timberman. He was a logger. But what he did with the timber, he bought timber by the hundreds of acres, but then he would skin the bark off of it and haul it into the tannery down in to Elkton, Virginia. Scott Roach was his name, that's the one. If you were from Orange County you probably know some of my people that are down in there now because when they had to move and get out from up in there a lot of them went to Locust Grove and to Rhoadesville. Now my grandmother was named Cora Virginia Roach. And my aunt and her daughter lived with my grandmother, Anna Marie. And Anna married Buddy Chambers at Rhoadesville. Did you ever know any of the Chambers?

CB: I know the name. I don't know anyone specific.

ZS: Well now every one of my cousins has worked with the telephone company. Every one after they got out of high school they went right into DC and went to work for the telephone company. And now one of my first cousins which did you ever of the Lams, any Lams down around?

CB: Oh yes. In fact our ad person is a Brenda Lam and she's married into that, but her husband is from the Lams from off of the mountain.

ZS: Really?

CB: Mm-hm.

ZS: Really. Well now—

CB: I don't know the line of it, you know who his parents or grandparents were.

ZS: Okay. Well now Jesse Lam and Loanie Lam, they moved from back on the Skyline Drive, but I believe, and I could be wrong, but I believe they were from Page County. And they moved to Rhoadesville. And they had a daughter, a daughter named Maxine and Geraldine. In fact they were triplets, but Christine died. It was Maxine and Geraldine and Montana and Polly and Elizabeth and they all have retired from the telephone company now. But now Gerry, she didn't go away to work. She married an Appelton (??) boy and they have that trailer thing down there with those Winnebagos and those—

CB: Right. Okay, I know exactly where that is. Okay.

ZS: And then on up the road this side of there is where my cousin, is where my grandmother's place was and where I went and stayed and went to school for a while till we moved back down into Standardville. And Anna married Buddy Chambers. And if I'm not barely mistaken, Buddy's father was a minister. I believe Mr. Chambers was a minister.

CB: What was your parents, what was their name?

ZS: Well my mother's name was Mandy Elizabeth Shifflett and they called her Bessie. Her nickname all the time was Aunt Bessie.

CB: And your father's name?

ZS: Jerry.

CB: Jerry. The master list of everyone who, what they were paid for their land. (CB and ZS proceed to look at aforementioned list from Darwin Lambert's *The Undying Past of Shenandoah National Park*.)¹ Let's see here. Was he J.J. Shifflett? Would that be him? I've got a list of all the names of the people and how much—

ZS: No, J.H. Shifflett.

CB: J.H. Okay, they have an L.H. and a J.D. It could be a typographical error too. But they've got all those names there and how many acres it was and—

ZS: Well none of them got nothing, I can tell you that.

CB: Some of it, I was doing the math on some of it it was five dollars an acre.

ZS: Well now see my granddaddy's name was Scott Roach and he had more land. Myrtle Reynolds [pronounces the surname as Rendalls] and Andrew Roach, Cora Roach. Myrtle Reynolds, now that was my aunt. That was Anna Marie's mother. (reads from list) Cora V. Roach, 244 acres. She was paid \$3800 for 244 acres.² I told you they, I think it went something like they paid them at twenty-five dollars an acre.

CB: And some places it would be down to five dollars an acre. I don't know how they figured it or if they looked at you know if it was mostly timber or how they looked at that.

ZS: Well now listen to this. (reads from list) G.W. Shiflett estate, 424 acres, \$248.³ And you know that's highway robbery. That's highway robbery. And you know the poor people up there, they had never had nothing in their life. And it was just a sin, a shame that they took everything away from them the way that they did and gave them nothing for it. Where'd you pick this up at, in the clerk's office?

CB: No, I couldn't dig it up in the clerk's office.

ZS: No, I guess that was destroyed back when they had the fire.

CB: That was a real disappointment. I got that from a book written by a Darwin Lambert over in Luray. And I've talked to several people who have looked and investigated, they say he's fairly accurate. You know I won't swear by my everything there.

¹ There are significant inconsistencies as to what ZS reads from the book and what is actually written in the book.

² According to Lambert's *The Undying Past of Shenandoah National Park*, Cora V. Roach was paid \$3008 for 244 acres.

³ According to Lambert's *The Undying Past of Shenandoah National Park*, the G.W. Shiflett estate was paid \$248 for 24 acres.

ZS: My father had been dead for so long till I'm sure, but now this place was bought by my father and his brother who had been Earman Shifflett and J.H. Shifflett, but I don't see their names on here at all. In fact I'm gonna look. I did see some Shifflett's over here. Let me see. And they could have been paid off you know to one of them and then the amount split, I don't know.

[End audio file, 01:02:01 min.]

End of Interview