

FLO WOLFE
Family Member - Carter Family Fold – Hiltons, VA

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Interviewer: Amy C. Evans, SFA Oral Historian
Transcription: Shelley Chance, ProDocs
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Project: Carter Family Fold

[Begin Flo Wolfe-1 Interview]

00:00:02

Amy Evans: This is Amy Evans for the Southern Foodways Alliance on Saturday, February 21, 2009. And I am at the Carter Family Fold in Hiltons, Virginia, in the music room with Flo Wolfe. And Flo, if you wouldn't mind saying your name and how you fit into the Carter Family for me, please?

00:00:19

Flo Wolfe: Okay. My full name—my full name is Nancy Flo Miller Wolfe. I'm Gladys Carter Miller's daughter. I'm A.P. and Sara Carter's oldest grandchild.

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AE: And would you mind sharing your birth date also?

00:00:36

FW: I was born August 30, 1938.

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AE: And I have—you made an entry in this cookbook also, *Grazing Along the Crooked Road*, and I read a little bit in there, I think an interview with you about talking about that your Uncle Joe [Carter, son of A. P. and Sara Carter] lived with y'all for a long time.

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FW: Yes. After A. P. and Sara separated, well, when Mother [Gladys Carter Millard] and Daddy [Milan Millard] first got married, we lived in Mendota [Virginia], and when I was about two years old, we moved back to the home place. A. P. wanted Mother to move back so she could help tend to him and [her younger brother] Joe. So I lived in the house with Joe until he went into the Navy, and then when he come back from the Navy, he lived in the house with us until—well he went—he went to California for about three months, and then he lived back with us until he got married. So I grew up with Joe, and it was quite an adventure. I'll tell you. He—he liked to—he liked to aggravate you.

00:01:35

AE: Yeah, I understand y'all got into some trouble together.

00:01:38

FW: Lots of it. Lots of trouble. He—he—or are you talking about the hog killing? Oh, yes. Of course we killed hogs every year, and I don't know if you're familiar with it or not, but you got a lot of the fat off of the intestines to go into the lard. So when you first kill a hog, for a long time after it's dead these intestines sort of wiggle and move around for quite a while. So Joe got the idea to get some little sharp sticks and punch holds in the intestines. Of course I was right in there with him. Now Mother really got onto us because it ruined her lard. And we punctured the intestines and let that get out in the meat.

00:02:19

AE: I imagine y'all only did that once.

00:02:20

FW: We never did that again. And he loved—loved to aggravate my cats. I know one time he caught two of my cats, tied their tails together and hung them up across the clothesline, and they fit and fit and fit. And then one time he got a big old wharf rat and tied it to my cat's tail—about scared the life out of that cat. It would run and run and look back and see that rat and take off again. And then he got a man's handkerchief and tied strings on all the corners sort of like a little parachute and tied that to the cat's tail. When the cat started running, that handkerchief would open up like a parachute. That scared the cat too. He—he was—he was very mischievous.

00:03:06

AE: A little troublemaker?

00:03:07

FW: Yeah.

00:03:06

AE: So if we could back up and talk about your grandparents, A.P. and Sara, and what you remember about them?

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FW: Well when I was born, I had nine grandparents. I had four regular grandparents and five great-grandparents. I do not remember Grandpa Dougherty, Sara's father. I have no memory of him. But I remember the others. And all four of the regular grandparents have given me

spankings over the years. I deserved them, I guess, but they were very strict. But I distinctly remember them spanking me for different occasions.

00:03:41

AE: And what do you remember about the music growing up?

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FW: Well I didn't pay a bit of attention to it; I really didn't. And I didn't think of them as being well known or famous or anything until after Janette started having music, and people got to coming from all over the world, and then it finally dawned on me how important they were. Of course A. P. was done gone then and Sara was still around for a while, but I'm really not a music person. I can't carry a tune; I can't sing, and I don't even know if anybody else is in tune. All I go by is the words; if I can understand the words, I enjoy the songs.

00:04:20

AE: So can you describe to me the personalities that were—of Sara and A. P.?

00:04:26

FW: Well they were—they were very—very likeable and A. P. was a very religious guy. You didn't eat a bite of food unless somebody blessed the table, and he read a lot, even though he only went to the third grade in school. He loved to read. He'd get me on his lap and read the Bible to me when I was very little. And he liked—he loved animals; he had cows. He had Muscovy ducks; he had some horses. You know he—he liked things like that. He liked the farmland. He raised some tobacco and, as a matter of fact, when—when A. P. died, he left his

little farm over the Little Valley to my mother, and then we she passed on. We inherited it and my husband [John] is still farming A. P.'s little farm.

00:05:19

AE: Yeah, I understood that A. P. acquired quite a lot of acreage over the years.

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FW: Yeah, he—he liked to buy land. I know when he passed away he left land to—to Janette and Joe and all of them. He really did; he had different little spots of land around.

00:05:35

AE: And what does your husband farm on that land today?

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FW: Well all we do now is we've got cows over there, and we have the hay, and once in a while he'll put corn out over there. We used to raise tobacco but we—we've given that up now that we're older.

00:05:53

AE: So what does—what—did your mother talk about her growing up years at all—about A. P. and Sara?

00:06:01

FW: Well she's—you know, she—or I guess, you know, everybody had a pretty hard time, but she talks about, you know, she was the oldest of them and—and she tried to tend to all of them. Of course, you know, A. P. and Joe lived in the house with her, and it seemed like she always had a lot of company, a lot of music people, you know, to drop in and stay and spend the night and—. But and Mother, she helped with the farm work. She was—you know, she'd get out and work in the fields like everybody else and—and Mother sewed a lot. She would—she's a good seamstress and she was a good cook, and she'd can and freeze and put up stuff and—but she never pursued the music. She could—Mother could sing and she could play the guitar a little bit and the Autoharp. As a matter of fact, I've got her Autoharp up at the house but she never did—she—she mostly tended to the kids and kept the home front a-going.

00:07:04

AE: Did she tell—like telling the story about going up to New York with A. P. and Sara and—and—?

00:07:12

FW: Yeah, I remember talking about that, and that was quite an experience for her and—and she said she earned some money. I think—what did she do? Going get somebody's cows is the reason I reckon. She had a little money to spend, but I think they had car trouble and had to spend all their money the time they got there and—and said Mrs. [Monique] Peer [wife of Victor talent scout and record producer Ralph Peer], while they was doing the music, she took Mother around to show her everything you know. And Mother said she was—really wish she had bought her something to eat but **[Laughs]**—but she didn't and she said no sooner than they got paid and got ready to leave New York, no sooner than they got out of that town they found them a

hamburger joint and all of them got them something to eat. And she said one time when she was up there, I don't know if it's the same time or not, they left her in the motel room to watch Helen. Helen was the baby. And while the rest of them was doing music and—and Mother said she had never been around a colored person before, and this colored maid come into clean up the room and Mother said she was really scared. She was afraid they'd steal that baby or something. She was left there to watch the baby while they did their thing.

00:08:25

AE: So growing up—I mean all the people that I've talked to today, you know, you just kind of—and you said even earlier that, you know, when the music is in your family you just kind of take it for granted, but this area—I mean in addition—in addition to the Carter Family and the importance of the Carter Family, it's just a way of life here and—and can you talk a little bit about how food and—and music are so intertwined in—in just daily life here in the mountains?

00:08:49

FW: Well there's nearly everybody in this area is very good cooks, and when I was a kid growing up, nearly every woman that went to church would cook a—extra thinking maybe somebody would come home with them from church, you know. They didn't know—nobody knew where the preacher was going to go to eat, but they always had plenty of food on the table just in case somebody dropped in. And—and they—like I said, they all canned and put up—made jellies, canned, and put up food and everybody killed hogs and things like that. You didn't have to go buy much at the store except maybe some coffee and flour and sugar and salt. Nearly everything else you raised.

00:09:34

AE: Tell me what you said earlier about Janette’s macaroni and cheese.

00:09:38

FW: Oh, I said Janette could make the best macaroni and cheese. And my son-in-law, Bruce, that’s the ones I’ve been helping today down with the propane; he said he could—he could recognize Janette’s macaroni and cheese anywhere in the world. He—he’d know it anywhere he saw it and—and my family, a lot of us said well we remember Janette for her cooking instead of her music. That—you know, that’s what impressed them most about it.

00:10:03

AE: Do you have an idea of what makes her macaroni and cheese so special? Do you know the recipe?

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FW: No, I never asked for the recipe. I always just ate it and enjoyed it, but now she could really put it together. She really could.

00:10:14

AE: I understand all the—I mean so many women in your family have to be good cooks, being the women in the family, but they also just sound like they’re amazing homemakers.

00:10:24

FW: Yeah, they—they are. They usually improvised. They just used what they had. Yeah, they were—now Janette used to—my birthday was August 30th, and Rita’s was September 5th, and she used to, every year for mine and Rita’s birthday, she would fix cabbage rolls. That’s what we wanted, and somewhere there about she’d fix a dinner and me and her cabbage rolls, and they were really great too. Of course I don’t have no recipe either. But she would do that for years; she would do that for our birthday—fix us—.

00:10:59

AE: Did she fix a special dessert for your birthday?

00:11:01

FW: No, I can't remember her fixing any special dessert. I guess she did for Rita, but she didn't for me. But she did the cabbage rolls for us.

00:11:15

AE: Now you said you're a better eater than you are a cook.

00:11:17

FW: Yeah, I love to eat. If it can be digested, I can eat it. I can eat about anything. I like all foods.

00:11:27

AE: And you also started telling me, too, that every Sunday you could cook a big Sunday dinner for sixteen—?

00:11:32

FW: Yeah, I cook for my family every Sunday because they usually, after church they all end up at my house to eat. It's nothing special or fancy, but I always fix them stuff. I just—just multiply—instead of opening one can of green beans, I open three, you know. That's how you do it when you're cooking for sixteen. Just get out a bigger pot.

00:11:54

AE: And what all do you make usually? What are some staples for that Sunday dinner?

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FW: Oh, it's usually always macaroni and cheese for the little grandson; the youngest one, she wants carrots. The oldest, she wants baked squash—just yellow squash, put butter and sugar over it—and they always like the corn and they always want corn, and we usually have green beans and just some sort of a meat or something. And I usually have tea and lemonade, and I don't do much on dessert. Sometimes I'll make a dessert, but usually I'll just pick up a boxed cake or something for them.

00:12:31

AE: Now the recipe that you contributed to this *Grazing Along the Crooked Road* book was cabbage au-gratin.

00:12:40

FW: Oh, I could tell you about that, but there's some four-letter words in it. **[Laughs]**

00:12:44

AE: How do you mean?

00:12:47

FW: Well, I like it. Part of my family likes it. My husband will not taste it. It's just—he don't like it. But one Sunday I fixed two of them; you know, there's sixteen to feed. Well we ate one, and the other one hadn't been touched, and on Monday I said, well, June [Carter Cash] and John [Cash] were up, and I usually would take a dish or something when they were in the area. I said, "John, I'm going to take this up to June and John to eat." He says, "Flo, don't take it up there. It will give every one of them"—I'll use another word—"diarrhea." I said, "I'm going to take it anyhow." So I never go in the front door when I went up there; I'd always go to the back door. And John met me at the door, and he says, "Flo, what have you brought me?" And I says, "Well, my Johnny said not to bring this up here; it will give all of you diarrhea. But I brought it anyhow." He said, "Here, let me have it. Everybody up here needs to go to the bathroom anyhow." So they took it and ate it, and he said he liked it. But when I fixed it, that's what we—we call it Johnny Cash Casserole; that's not what it is. **[Laughs]** But, as a matter of fact, I—I had it last Sunday. It's real easy to fix, but then my husband won't eat it. He likes—he's so fussy. He don't even like potato salad if it's in chunks. He wants it like his mother made it out of mashed potatoes. He don't like the chunk potato salad. He wants—he likes the old-timey stuff. He don't like trying new dishes and new casseroles, but I love to get to try something new. **[Laughs]**

00:14:12

AE: So how do you make the Johnny Cash Casserole cabbage?

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FW: I'd have to drag my recipe out. You just cook the cabbage so long, and you put some cream of celery soup over it and some cheese, and you put some cracker crumbs and butter on the top and stick it in the oven. It's real easy. It's tasty. It's very tasty.

00:14:29

AE: Now did you come up with that or is that something—?

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FW: No, honey. I don't have an original recipe at all. Somebody give it to me. I can't remember who gave it to me.

00:14:38

AE: Is there a lot of trading of recipes up around here?

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FW: Well not as much as there used to be. When I was a kid, it seemed like people were swapping them around, but I don't hear of it that much anymore. I guess they get them on the Internet or something.

00:14:55

AE: Are there some things from your childhood that you wish that you could recreate now?

00:15:00

FW: Well, Mother used to make chocolate gravy for breakfast, and that's something else me and Joe would fight over if it was about gone, and it's good on a hot-buttered biscuit. It's just about like chocolate pudding, only it's thinner and more gravy like. Have you ever ate chocolate gravy? It's—she used to do that a lot for breakfast, and I don't have a clue how she did it. That's one thing I remember that she used to do. Now Mommy Jake—now that's Sara. I called her Mommy Jake. I was the oldest [grandchild], and I gave her that name and all the grandkids call her Mommy Jake. She could fix the best bowl of cabbage I ever put in my mouth. I don't know what she done. And something else Sara done—I've tried and I cannot do it—is she would make her cornbread on top of the stove on the stove—just maybe an eight-inch skillet. She'd put it in there and get it real good and brown, and she'd stick an egg turner under it and flip that all over and brown the other side, and you'd think it come out of the oven. I cannot do that; mine goes all over the stove. I don't know how she did it, but she would do that. You would think it had been baked in the oven. That's—but she could get a meal on the table quick, Mommy Jake could, and she didn't make a big—didn't mess up a lot of dishes doing it.

00:16:25

One thing I ate, and the only time I've ever ate it, we went to visit her in, let's see, about 1960, I guess, and took the two oldest grandkids. We went out there for just a few days, and she raised peacocks. And she cooked us a peacock. Did you ever eat a baked peacock like you bake a turkey? And now that was good eating. She really did.

00:16:49

AE: I've never heard of eating peacock before.

00:16:51

FW: Yeah, she—she did. She baked us one. It was very good. She had a whole bunch of them running around out there. And she—that’s what she fixed us.

00:17:01

AE: And I remember a lot of—so much we’ve been talking about your family I’ve gotten from that great book *Will You Miss Me When I’m Gone*, and I remember a thing in there talking about A. P., your grandfather, coming and eating breakfast at your house for decades.

00:17:15

FW: Yeah, he would. See, in the summer, when it was warm, he had a bed in what was the store—it’s the museum now—and he liked to go to bed early and get up early. And I do, too. I like to go to bed early and get up early. But Mother and Daddy would have company, and they’d stay up late and—but in the summer he’d walk down to the store, and then he’d come back up to the house for breakfast. And if he come up there and Mother and Daddy were sleeping late, and he was hungry—we had the old coal stove. He’d walk by it and pick the eye up and let it clank down [*Gestures*] you know, make a noise, and he’d go through and come back and do the same thing again. [*Laughs*] That’s how he woke everybody up. He was wanting his breakfast.

00:17:53

AE: What did he like to have for breakfast?

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FW: Well he just—whatever was—was on the table. It was usually biscuits and gravy and meat and some kind of scrambled eggs, and once in a while they’d have some baked apples or

something like that. And now A. P., he liked to make jellies and things. He'd make—get the watermelon rind and make watermelon preserves. He'd gather all these little tunnel ground cherries, I'd reckon, and he'd make little cherry preserves. Now he—he'd cook over in the old—what's the museum [now]. He had an old warming stove over there, but he liked to make his jellies and things. Yeah, he—he would cook them his self.

00:18:28

AE: Do you know why—where he decided that he liked to do that or he just liked eating it so much that he made it?

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FW: Yeah, just something that he picked up. I don't know how he come about doing that. He would. He would—you know, he'd make the jellies and the jams.

00:18:43

AE: Did he ever sell any of that stuff that he put up at his store [A. P.'s Country Store]?

00:18:46

FW: No, he just made—we just made it and we all ate it.

00:18:48

AE: And I also remember a story in there about you delivering A. P.'s royalty checks to—walking them down to his store.

00:18:55

FW: Yeah, I remember once Mother had come, and Mother said take it to A. P. and it—it was less than \$100—either \$98 or \$96. I got my mouth full of ice. But he said—I remember saying, “Very well.” He says, “Well that’s not much for six months work.” Back then, until they died, their royalties wasn’t much you know. I mean they were respectable but they wasn’t—they weren’t in demand. I don’t guess anybody gets much honor until they’re gone, do they?

00:19:28

AE: No, unfortunately that seems to be the way it goes.

00:19:31

FW: Yeah. I tell you, the—the maddest I ever saw A. P. in my life—I told you he liked ducks. He had these big old Muscovy ducks. Have you—a great big duck. And they’d fly around, bigger than ordinary ducks, and it was the day after Halloween. And on Halloween night the kids used to be very mischievous. I don’t know who done it; somebody caught one of his ducks and put it in the mailbox and shut the lid. Well up in the morning A. P. went to put a letter in the mailbox or check the mail or something and that duck was in there, and it was just about dead. It didn’t die; he got it out, but now he was one mad man. I—it’s a good thing he didn’t know who done it, I guess. I guess that was about the maddest I ever saw A. P. in my life.

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AE: Did he raise the ducks for eating, or he just liked having them around?

00:20:21

FW: He just liked to have them fly around. No, we didn't eat the ducks, the Muscovy ducks.

No, we didn't eat them.

00:20:30

AE: Tell me about hunting for frogs. You were talking about that earlier.

00:20:32

FW: Well now I haven't been frog hunting too many times, but my husband used to go and they'd gig them, you know, frog—kill the bullfrogs and cut the legs off and skin them out and—and cook them. They're good eating. They really are.

00:20:51

AE: You say you've gotten too old for the frog hunting anymore?

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FW: Yeah, it's—a seventy-year-old woman don't feel like walking in the woods and going to the ponds and gigging a frog. *[Laughs]* We sort of let that go by the wayside.

00:21:03

AE: Do people still do that around here? Is that something just from the old days?

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FW: I'm sure some of the younger people might do it. But—but we give—we give it up. Well, the pond—we had to go over in the river where my husband was raised and then go up a big old

hill and there's a big old pond and it belonged—I can't remember who it belonged to, but since then the property has changed hands and I guess that's the reason—one reason we quit going. We didn't know the person that owns the property now. That's where we used to go to get the frogs.

00:21:37

AE: Is all this land that A. P. acquired over the years, was he farming it, too, himself or he—or y'all just started farming it when it came down to you?

00:21:44

FW: Oh, no, he would raise it. He would—he would, you know, he would put out the tobacco. He put out a little bit of tobacco, and he always kept old Hereford cows, the red ones with the white faces. That's the kind of cows he kept and—and the hay, I think maybe he hired somebody to cut and bale the hay. I don't know how—I can't remember how he dealt with that. No, he—he farmed some. Everybody in this area farmed some to bring in some—some extra money.

00:22:12

AE: And he—he opened his store in the [nineteen] '40s after the war sometime?

00:22:17

FW: Yeah, let me see. I was—I was in the fourth grade of school when he opened it, and I can't remember what year it was. Yeah, but he—he opened the store and he run it for quite a while and then I can't think—Aunt Bangie's sister. She was a Laughlin—Etta [Laughlin Reynolds]. No, some Laughlin woman wanted it for a while—run it for a while and Cecil and Lois Hensley

that's a—one of A. P.'s nieces and her husband run it a while, and my mother and daddy run the little grocery store for a while. I didn't much like staying in the grocery store. They always—they had the—they just had the beans—the beans in barrels. I—they had pintos in one metal barrel and Octobers in another one, and I'd get them beans confused. I don't know why they didn't put a label on them. They had loose lard; you had to weigh it out and wrap it up in waxed paper—somebody bought it. And somebody come and brung eggs and swapped it for food; you had to deal with that. So I—in the summer Mother and Daddy raised tobacco and stuff and they had to go tend to the tobacco, and they'd put me down there in the store. And I simply didn't like running that store, but I done it. You did what you were told back then, and I was in the fourth grade, I guess—fourth and fifth grade when they had—when they run the store.

00:23:38

AE: Now what was it that made A. P. want to open a store, just something to do?

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FW: I don't have a clue why he decided to do that, but I'll tell you what me, and I guess Joe was—I don't know if Joe was in on this or not. Before he opened the store, he got to collecting his merchandise. You know, he'd order stuff to stock the store with and put it upstairs in Mother's house. Of course he got some good candy and, of course, you know who got in it and ate up a lot of it. *[Laughs]* I got in trouble over that. It was up there—these boxes of candy that he was to sell at the store, but Flo ate some of it. *[Laughs]*

00:24:16

AE: Do you remember what kind of candy it was?

00:24:17

FW: I can't remember, but I got into it and ate it. [*Laughs*] I don't know. Joe might have been in on that. I think maybe Joe was in the service at that point. I know when A. P. built his store, he put—he did the sub-floor and the floor, and the next thing he put up was the front door and then he built around that. Most people save that for last, but he stuck his door up first and then built around it. [*Laughs*] I remember that. It looked a little odd.

00:24:47

AE: Do you remember hearing stories about when A. P. was selling fruit trees and when he met Sara?

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FW: Yeah, I've heard those stories numerous of times and—and most people thinks he just went up Clinch Mountain and down the other side, but if you go over there and look back, he went up the mountain, down the mountain, up another ridge, and down the ridge. It was a long ways over there, a lot further than you would think by reading about it.

00:25:13

AE: Well and I understand he liked to keep moving. He liked to travel on—by foot.

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FW: Yeah, he would—and he would walk a lot, you know. He—he liked to go from place to place. He did a lot of traveling to collect his songs, you know. He'd go hear what somebody

knew or something different, so they say. Now I don't—I don't remember that. That's before my memory. I just heard about that.

00:25:42

AE: Do you know—and this seems like a kind of far-fetched question—but you know—do you have any idea of when he was out collecting songs, did he ever collect recipes or brought back ideas or cans of food or anything?

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FW: Well I—let me think. I don't remember him doing that. I was just trying to think. I don't remember it, honey, if he did. He might have, but I honestly don't know.

00:26:10

AE: Well now you work here at the Fold every Saturday, is that right?

00:26:13

FW: I used to take up tickets, and then my mother did the souvenirs, and when she passed away, I had to leave the tickets and start doing the souvenirs. And then Daddy sold ice cream here, so now I do the souvenirs and the ice cream. And it—it's not easy. I mean all them souvenirs, I think there's about sixty-two things I sell that belong to other people. They're not mine, and I have to keep up with it, you know. I've got some—some of them is the Fold stuff and some different musicians, like Will Clifton has got stuff here; Dr. Schmidt has got stuff here; Tom T. Hall has got stuff here. Another cousin that lives down at Nashville, she's got a CD here to sell;

and Jerry Hensley, he's got something down here. I mean it just keeps on coming in—a lot of different stuff to try to have to keep up with. *[Laughs]*

00:27:08

AE: You've been working here ever since it opened in the [nineteen]'70s [1974]?

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FW: Well I didn't start for the—I guess it had been going for two years before she got me to help with the—take up the tickets. There was another girl doing it, and it got to be too much for one person, and then I got to helping.

00:27:27

AE: And now I know this was a labor of love for Janette, but what did the rest of the family think about starting the Carter Family Fold?

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FW: Well I think—I think they were glad that they did it; they have respect for it. They did, you know, keep the—the music alive or try to, but now it's not easy. It's a full-time job. Sometimes it's almost too much.

00:27:53

AE: And what about all the food y'all serve, keeping some of the Carter Family recipes alive like that egg salad sandwich you just had?

00:28:01

FW: No, Rita is in charge of that. Yeah, Janette used to fix those every—every Saturday night, the egg salad, yeah. So now Rita is in charge of the—the concession. I don't contribute anything to that. I eat quite a bit out of there, but I don't [*Laughs*] contribute into it.

00:28:17

AE: What about the—the tradition here of soup beans and cornbread? Do you make that at home?

00:28:20

FW: Oh, yeah. I do soup beans and cornbread occasionally. That's a good standby.

00:28:29

AE: What's your cornbread recipe? Is it something of your own or something that's in the family?

00:28:32

FW: No, I use—I use the same one that Rita and Bob use. It's [my cousin] Fern's [Fern Carter Salyer]. That's—that's the one I use, or sometimes I just dump it in there you know. But I think hers is pretty good.

00:28:44

AE: Do you make it in the big muffins like they have here at the Fold or you make it—?

00:28:48

FW: No, I use either—I've got a skillet—got an iron skillet that got these little dividers in it and it looks like the wedges, and then I've got two more iron skillets that makes little muffins that looks like corn on the cob. You've seen them, haven't you? Sometimes I put it in that. And sometimes I'll just fry the little fritters, you know, but I don't do them that much anymore because it's too much grease involved, and my husband has had open heart surgery, so he's not supposed to have that much grease, so I've about given up on the fritters.

00:29:21

AE: And is your soup bean recipe the same?

00:29:23

FW: Well there's no recipe to it. You just put them in there and cook them until their done and throw some meat in there and a little salt. Or sometimes, if I don't have the meat, I'll throw a stick of butter in them.

00:29:36

AE: Sounds good.

00:29:38

FW: Yeah, the soup beans are good eating.

00:29:41

AE: Now do you have any other memories of, you know, the—the food that came out of Janette's house or family get-togethers when there would be a table full of food?

00:29:50

FW: So let me think a minute. I mentioned the cabbage rolls and the—. I tell you, once she used to make good tomato dumplings, and I don't know how she done it. But my son was just a little fellow; we went up there one evening to eat, me and—I was baby-sitting, me and mother and my—my son, Mark, and she had tomato dumplings, and when we got through, oh, my son ate and ate, and he was just about three or four years old. He got thru and Janette said, "Mark, you can take these home with you and have the rest of them." So I warmed them up for supper, and he ate the rest. He wouldn't let none of us have a bite. He said, "Aunt Net gave them to me, and you are not getting them." *[Laughs]* But they were really good, the tomato dumplings.

00:30:31

AE: And has this area changed a lot that's—that's influencing the way people eat. I mean imagine it has to have but the people aren't—.

00:30:40

FW: Well, yeah. Everybody—everybody is eating too much fast-food or TV dinners, and I'm—I'm guilty too. Sometimes I'll pop a pizza in for the kids or corndogs or chicken tenders—something quick and easy is the way it is now. Just easy—quickest and easiest way you can get people fed. That's about the way it goes.

00:30:58

AE: Do you not tend a garden anymore?

00:31:00

FW: Oh, yes, we put out a garden. I can and freeze and—and do all of that—do it every year.

00:31:06

AE: How big a garden do you put out?

00:31:11

FW: Well I—I don't know in acreage. It's I don't know whether it's—I honestly don't know.

It's not as big as it used to be but we—we put out the taters and beans and corn and carrots and cucumbers and all that stuff—radish and lettuce. You name it, we just raise some of all of it.

00:31:31

AE: Do you save any seeds or use heirloom seeds at all?

00:31:34

FW: No, I usually just go buy the seeds. To me the seeds are hybrid anymore. You can't—you can't save them. Some of them you can, but usually if it's hybrid it won't come back up. The seed salesman told me down at the nursery once that these foreign countries won't accept hybrid seeds. They want some where they can save their own. And that makes sense, really. They have—I bet there's 150 different kinds of tomatoes in the seed book, and I don't know how they mix them all up and come up with this.

00:32:07

AE: Do you remember your parents and grandparents saving seeds?

00:32:08

FW: Oh, yes, they—they always saved their seeds. My Grandma Miller always said, “Now, when you save your seed, you don’t wait until the end of the season. You save your seeds at the first of the year when the—when the vegetables are the best. That’s—that’s when you save them.” And I know the farmers used to always save their tobacco seeds and sow their own tobacco beds. They’d go out and find the great big stalks—two or three of them and put a—I think they put some canvass over it or something, you know, that they’d save that seed, so they’d have it to—for next year.

00:32:43

AE: Have you heard of anybody in the area who has held onto some of those old heirloom seeds?

00:32:48

FW: No, not really. I don’t know. There was—I can’t think of their name now—somebody that lives in Ohio that come down here and he sent me some—mailed me some unusual gourd seeds, these real scalloped fancy ones. He’s a truck farmer up there. And I put them out one year to raise me a few; I saved the seeds, and the next year I was cleaning out the smokehouse and there was one in there that was—they’re pretty to keep, but it was all mashed up and I just give that thing a pitch out in the garden, and there was little gourds that come up everywhere. So in the front of the yard, out front I’ve got a great big round flowerbed. Oh it’s a great old big one. I thought, “Well I’ll put gourd seeds all on the edge of that, you know, for the edge.” Them gourds took all over; there was gourds everywhere. I’ve never seen so many gourds. I gathered them; I

took them to church and give them to anybody that wanted them. I brought them down here and give them to people. I took them to my daughter's nursery. She sold some of them. I never seen so many gourds in my life. They were everywhere, and then I just pitched that one out in the garden. I didn't even plant them, but they come up everywhere. **[Laughs]** But now I know those seeds will come back. But no, I don't—I don't really save seeds anymore. I guess I should.

00:34:15

AE: Yeah, I think there's a lot of varieties that people are—are rediscovering and bringing back and some that are totally lost anymore.

00:34:22

FW: Well I know the corn we raised for several years, How Sweet It Is. It's really sweet good corn. Last year there wasn't a seed nowhere to be found. These seed companies, what they sell the least of one year, they drop the next year. And a lot of the old beans like you used to get the—well I can't think of it—some of the old varieties. Maybe I'll think of it in a minute. You can't find them no more, unless somebody has saved the seeds. I can't think of the names of them, but there's two or three kinds that people are asking for, and the seed companies don't provide them anymore.

00:35:02

AE: And you mentioned the smokehouse a minute ago. Are you still smoking meat on your property?

00:35:04

FW: No. Well once I—we used to kill hogs every year until my husband had to have open heart surgery, and they don't want you to eat much hog meat; so we let the hogs go, and we've not killed hogs here in several years.

00:35:19

AE: About how long ago was it that your husband had that surgery?

00:35:21

FW: I think it was about seven or eight years ago.

00:35:25

AE: Not that long.

00:35:26

FW: Yeah, but we—we quit doing the hog meat. That was quite a job. It would take you a week to get all that meat worked up. It really would. But it was good eating.

00:35:39

AE: And a lot of it.

00:35:42

FW: Oh, yeah.

00:35:42

AE: Are there many people around here that—around Hiltons and Scott County who still do hog killing?

00:35:47

FW: Not me. Right now I personally can't think of a one, but I'm sure some of them do. But you know the winters, like this year the weather is just like a yo-yo; it's up and down. These warm days, your meat would probably spoil. It's not the right—right weather for hog killing. I mean you don't want it so cold that it won't take the salt; it won't keep if it gets that cold. But if it gets hot, your meat is going to spoil what you've got salted down in the smokehouse, so the weather is not right.

00:36:17

AE: Do you remember the winters being a whole lot different when you were a kid?

00:36:22

FW: Oh, yeah, honey. They were a lot colder. I remember them well. It used to we'd have a snow, and it would be snow all winter long. You know it would just keep on adding on.

00:36:29

AE: Yeah, I was talking to somebody last night, actually, who said that y'all don't barely get any snow at all anymore.

00:36:33

FW: No, we do well. We get enough for the kids to sleigh ride, you know. We don't get over two or three inches at a time hardly. So I don't know. It's just all a changing.

00:36:46

AE: Do you remember when—or maybe your mother still kept her house this way—but without having a refrigerator and icebox and sink, a box in the spring or having the spring house?

00:36:57

FW: No, we always, as far back as I can remember, had a—a refrigerator. It was really small, but our neighbor across the street, they didn't have electricity for years and years after we did, and she would put her Jell-O out in the—the little creek that come out of the mountain. That's how she'd set her Jell-O, and she'd keep her butter out there in the creek and—and her milk and it kept it cool enough because it was cool mountain water. But we always, as far back as I can remember, had the refrigerator. But I remember we used to have the old woodstoves. I remember before we got the electric stove.

00:37:36

AE: Has the water changed around here very much?

00:37:40

FW: Yeah, we used to always get the water out of the mountain stream. It's a big reservoir, and it provided water for about thirteen families. And then the city water come through, and people got to getting on it; and then some of the older people that maintained the water, they died off and the youngins didn't have no interest, and there'd be a leak that come and nobody would fix it

so finally the mountain water just—we—it just—everybody just got lazy and we lost it. And this city water, I can't hardly stand to drink it. It don't taste like the mountain water. I don't like it. I use it, but I don't like it. But we used to have a well over at the house, and we'd, you know, put the bucket down in it and pull the water out, and the neighbors would come and get water and—and I've often wondered, I say there's still water in that well. We should just have it tested and see how—if it's still good. But it's just—before the well laws, the back of the house, they built a garage and now the well is in the back corner of the garage covered over with a bunch of other stuff. But the well always provided us with plenty of water. That was at Mother's house—A. P.'s house.

00:38:53

AE: Well is there any one thing about your growing up years here in—in Hiltons that—that stands out, whether it's food or music or—or family or a combination of the three?

00:39:06

FW: Well it—it seemed like, you know, we've always had really, really good neighbors. Any of them would do anything for you, and it's still that a-way today. I don't care. Ask anybody I know for anything, and they'll come to your assistance and, thus, we always had playmates, cousins and kids to play with. We'd entertain ourselves. I mean we'd go play in the creek and catch crawdads, or we'd climb up in the mountain and—and—or walk up and down the railroad track over the river swimming. We entertained ourselves and that's—I guess that's about it.

00:39:42

AE: And what about the Fold here? What do you think the future of the Carter Family Fold is?

00:39:45

FW: Well I—the way the economy is, I don't know. I hope it holds on, but we'll just have to wait and see. So far, it's been holding up, you know, fairly well. But nobody knows what the future holds.

00:40:00

AE: Do you have some—in the years that you've been working here, do you have some favorite moments of—of musicians that played or happenings that happened here?

00:40:06

FW: Well, honey, like I said earlier, if—I don't pay much attention to the music. If—if I know the words—I listen at the words. But no, I can't—I always enjoyed June and John and—and Helen and them when they come, you know, the family and—and Sara and Maybelle, what few times they were here I—you know, enjoyed having them, but I can't tell that I like one any better than the other.

00:40:39

AE: Now when June and John would come to town, was it the feeling of—of famous you know—?

00:40:46

FW: No, I think that's the reason why they liked to come. They just—I mean people didn't bother them. They didn't run up there and flash pictures in their face, and they could walk up and

down the road if they wanted to. They could go over to the river, and they just accepted them as another neighbor. They didn't hound them to death. I think that's why they liked to come up here. As a matter of fact, I know my daughter-in-law, Angie, she—they were living over at Mother and Daddy's house at the time and something—I had to go up to June's for one morning. I don't know whether it was something I had to take her or something she called she needed or something. I said, "Angie—," it's real early one morning, and I says, "Come and go with me. You've never met June and John, and I'll take you up there." And she said, "Lord, I'm not cleaned up, I don't have my makeup on." I says, "It don't matter. They don't care." So we went in the back door, and John was sitting there at the table, and he got to talking to her and my daughter was a nurse. And June come through. She had on a flannel gown, and she had some kind of rash on her stomach. She took her gown up and had Angie looking at her rash. I mean they were just so down to earth. She says, "I can't believe that." She says, "They don't—they just act like everybody else." And but that's how they did here. They didn't, you know, when people come they didn't—they just come up here, I think, to get away from the public.

00:42:05

AE: Did they stay here for long spells at a time?

00:42:08

FW: Yeah, sometimes they stayed two or three weeks. Just whenever they got the notion to come and they—they liked to go out to the old antique stores and—and John would go sometimes to the pawnshops. And June, we'd go to yard sales sometimes and go out and eat, but, you know, they didn't—to see them, you wouldn't even think that—they was just like everybody else. They didn't act any differently.

00:42:33

AE: Are there some restaurants around here close by that y'all go to or used to go to?

00:42:38

FW: Well there used to be a tearoom in Gate City. Of course it's out of business. And June used to like to go down there and eat and—and I never did really go out and eat with John. I don't know—and we'd go over, I think, over at Teddy's at Nickelsville [Virginia] sometime and eat. Of course Teddy is a relative. I can't get in my mind how he is; he's a cousin on Mommy Jake's [Sara Carter's] side, and of course Mommy Jake and Maybelle are first cousins. Everybody that's kin to one of them is kin to all of them. We'd go to the Golden Corral sometimes. My family—as a matter of fact, the—if the weather is right and we've got a cow having problems, and if she don't decide to calf in the morning, we're going to take my family and go over there and eat for John's birthday. So the cow is going to call the shots tomorrow.

00:43:31

AE: Now and June did that cookbook, *Mother Maybelle's Cookbook*.

00:43:34

FW: Yeah.

00:43:35

AE: Do you remember when she had that idea and what—what it was like when it came out?

00:43:40

FW: I've got the book, but I can't remember that much about it.

00:43:44

AE: Do you ever cook from it?

00:43:45

FW: Why, Lordy, no. I've got a shelf full of cookbooks and hardly ever open any of them, honey. I really don't. I did cut something out of the paper last Sunday and tried it. Let me see if I can think of what it was. I can't even remember—something and they didn't like it that well. No, I usually just do the same old thing, just I don't try too many new recipes. My little old granddaughters seemed to like—they like to cook. They're always—the fourteen-year-old and one of the twelve-year-olds, they'll get something new and try it.

00:44:23

AE: Is it surprising to think that, you know, that your family is known as being the First Family of Country Music, but then they're also getting, you know, with June's cookbook and the cookbook that is sold here at the Fold, that the food is getting, you know, just as much recognition anymore?

00:44:39

FW: I'll tell you somebody that loves to cook and is an excellent cook is nobody but John Carter Cash [June carter and Johnny Cash's son]. He—he told me that growing up he wanted to be a—a chef. He said June and John, they'd take him out to eat at these nice restaurants in

Nashville and said he'd wander off and end up back in the kitchen every time watching them.

But he's up here about a—I guess it's two years ago. I went up there one morning, and they was eating breakfast, and he said, "Here, Flo. Try this sausage." He had killed a wild boar hog and made sausage. That was some of the best sausage I ever put in my mouth. Now he is a good cook. He really is, and he likes to cook.

00:45:21

AE: What about Roseanne? Do you know anything about her cooking?

00:45:24

FW: No, I haven't been around them that much, honey. I don't know if they can cook or not.

00:45:32

AE: All right.

00:45:32

FW: But June—June could cook good and Helen could cook, and I presume that Anita could but they—they could cook. And Maybelle could cook. They all could.

00:45:48

AE: Did you like Janette's chow-chow? I know she was real well known for that.

00:45:51

FW: Yeah. Yes, her chow-chow is good, and I use that same recipe and her chow-chow recipe was her mother-in-law's recipe, I believe, Ocie Jett, and I used to make chow-chow every year and my son loved it. When he got married, I gave my daughter-in-law the recipe, and I said, "Angie, you can start making it now. I've had it with chow-chow." I've not made it since **[Laughs]**—since they got married. I passed it onto her. But Angie's mother cans and cooks a lot of stuff, and if I need a jar of chow-chow, I call my daughter-in-law's mother and—and she'll send me a jar. **[Laughs]** So she provides me with it.

00:46:31

AE: Well is there anything that we haven't talked about that I wouldn't know to ask or something that you want to make sure to ask?

00:46:38

FW: I don't know, honey. I'm tired and my mind is dull. I can't—can't even think right now hardly.

00:46:45

AE: Well you've had a long day I know, and I've kept you here long, so—.

00:46:47

FW: Well that's okay.

00:46:48

AE: But I appreciate you sitting with me, Flo. I've enjoyed it.

00:46:52

FW: Well I'm glad you have.

00:46:53

AE: Thank you.

00:46:54

FW: I did. I don't know if you wanted to know—.

00:46:56

[End Flo Wolfe-1 Interview]

[Begin Flo Wolfe-2 Interview]

00:00:01

Flo Wolfe: And I've not made it since she died, and you might already have it. I guess you can read this: Ribbon Salad? It's a Jell-O salad, and it's three colors; it's red, white in the middle, and green. It's pretty. I don't know if—I think it's all there. Are you using recipes or anything? But this—this was—we called—Gladys, my oldest daughter started calling her Gi-Gi, so we all call her Gi-Gi, like I called Sara “Mommy Jake.” So Gi-Gi is Gladys, but that's one of her recipes.

00:00:35

Amy Evans: Is that her handwriting?

00:00:36

FW: No, that's mine. No, that's my handwriting, but I reckon it's pretty well all there. But, like I said, she made that every Christmas because it was pretty. But you don't have to use it if you don't want to.

00:00:50

AE: Oh, yeah, no, I'd love to have it as part of the—the project. Thank you so much for bringing it.

00:00:54

[End Flo Wolfe-2 Interview]