

Interview of Mrs. Walter Balloon
Interviewed by R. Vernon Boyd
April 12, 1983
Two Audio cassettes
Tape 1 - 10 minutes
Tape 2 – 57 minutes
Transcribed by Mary Lee Bartlett
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Tape 1

V. Boyd: Testing one, two. Would you clip that onto your lapel? [*Mrs. Balloon: Okay*] And it will pick up much better? I've discovered if my microphone is too far away, it doesn't sound good. [*Mrs. Balloon: Uh-huh. Where? Right here?*] That's fine. Now I want to repeat that. First of all this is April 12, 1983 and I'm visiting with Brother and Sister Walter Balloon. And you are telling me about your mother and she was living in the Silver Point area? [*Mrs. Balloon: Yes*] She was born and raised there?

Mrs. Balloon: My mother was living in Silver Point when Brother Bowser moved the school from Nashville to Silver Point. And, of course, my father, as Brother Bowser went about gathering up students why my father was one of those that he brought to Silver Point and that's how they met.

V. Boyd: So he came as a bachelor? I knew he came....

Mrs. Balloon: He had been married before, but he had unfortunately lost all his family, I think, his wife and two children in some sort of epidemic or fever or something. [*V. Boyd: I hadn't heard that.*] Uh-huh. And so he came as a young widow, widower.

V. Boyd: Well, I knew that he came as an older student. He wasn't preschool or junior high or something like that. [*Mrs. Balloon: No.*] And I knew he helped with [*tape skips*] the music.

Mrs. Balloon: Yes, uh-huh, he was their first musical director. And what I was going to do, I was going to...she had me to write this outShe mentioned ...

V. Boyd: Excuse [*tape skips*] ask you what?

Mrs. Balloon: Well, I just wanted to, I thought this might clear up, you know, clear up a lot of things, maybe some questions you were going to ask about the school. [*V. Boyd: Good.*] She had me to write this out for her. In a way she dictated it to me and I wrote it. She was going to present this at one of their school reunions, I think. I don't know if she got the chance to or not, but this is how it went.

[*Begins reading.*] A lot of people have tried to explain the beginning of Brother Bowser's school at Silver Point, but they don't do it correctly. I was about ten years old and as I remember, it was at first called Silver Point Normal Industrial School. [*Voices in background*] Want me to start over?

V. Boyd: Whatever you want to do.

Mrs. Balloon: Let me start over then. A lot of people have tried to explain the beginning of Brother Bowser's school at Silver Point, but they don't do it correctly. I was about ten years old and as I remember, it was at first called Silver Point Normal Industrial School. It began in 1908 and its beginning was strongly influenced by Brother Sam Womack. There was already a Church of Christ in Silver Point. A preacher would come every summer and hold a meeting. They would have large crowds, dinner on the grounds, and so forth. Brother Womack would always hold our Gospel Meetings. The church was in area called Laurel Hill and located in the cemetery [*Tape skips*]...a large Negro population. There was a Baptist Church and also a Methodist Church in the area. Brother Womack influenced other preachers to come around. Some, I remember, were Brother John T. Ramsey, T. Campbell, M. Keeble, Tom Harris McGee, and G. P. Bowser. The first time Brother Bowser came, he came with Brother Womack who was holding the meeting at the time. The elders there were Brother H. Clay, J. Beasley, J. Anderson, D. Johnson got carried away with Brother Bowser's preaching. They called him a "warhorse." His preaching was so positive, electrifying that they wanted him for their preacher there at Silver Point. It was decided that the school now located in Nashville be moved to Silver Point. Brother Bowser would head or operate it as usual. At that time the Church building there at Laurel Hill served a two-fold purpose. It served as a church meeting house and also housed the public schools for three months of summer for the county. (No, I'm sorry.) It also served the public school for the three months of summer provided by the county. Brother Bowser agreed to move his school there and in the meantime went about holding his summer Gospel Meetings in various places. While he was away, the brethren tore down the wooden school house there at Laurel Hill and moved it up on the ridge to Silver Point and erected a large two-story weather-boarded building and had it ready for him to conduct his classes. When he saw that there were an awful lot of children that would gather from out of these hills and valleys, he felt that they should have a chance for an education, more than the four months of schooling from August to December that the county provided. Since he had already started a small Christian school in Nashville conducted in the Jackson Street Church of Christ building, he went to the county seat and secured the contract to teach the public school there at Silver Point. There provisions were made for the Christian school in Nashville to be moved to Silver Point to the building that had been erected there.

Now the school began in this big old two-story weather-boarded building with the living quarters upstairs for boys and Brother and Sister Bowser's family. Classes were conducted in the downstairs part. A potbellied stove and long hard benches made our furnishings and there were oil lanterns on the wall for light. These were necessary because there were many activities that must be held at night, such as, programs, debates, preaching and so forth. Brother Bowser was the teacher for the public schools, which would begin in August and go through December 25. Then his Industrial School would pick up in January and go through April. This school required a fee for attendance for those who could afford it – a small fee and some could work their way through. He never turned anyone away. They never got too big or too little for him to try to help them. I was one of those who worked my way through. Work consisted of setting type by hand for the *Christian Echo* and the song book, *Choice Selections*. I assisted in mailing the *Echo* to different churches all over the country. In this way, he allowed me to work out my tuition after school from 3PM to , I would work in the office in this way. Brother Harrison Ramsey was like an assistant director of the printing shop. The printing press was an old one operated by foot. I helped set type and run the press. Brother Bowser would submit materials unto us to be printed and we would take it from there. Brother Bowser would take the summer off after school closed and go about preaching all over the country and gather in students for the school. Sister Annie Tuggle was my school mate. She would travel all summer in the interest of the school. Brother Bowser was a teacher for the public school at Silver Point also. Many times he could not be back in time to open the school when it started in July or August so Annie and I would open the school for him. He would bring many students from different places, both large and small, those that did not have the money and some that did. I attended school there until I was 18 years old. I had married and moved away when the school there closed to open again in

Nashville, then Louisville, Kentucky, Ft. Smith, Arkansas, Detroit, and finally the great Southwestern Christian College in Terrill, Texas.

So that's her version of how it started.

V. Boyd: Well, that is very good. I have just been reading some of the old *Gospel Advocates* because Brother Bowser and Brother Womack used to put notices in to the *Gospel Advocate* at that time and I'm familiar with some of the stuff she says. You can just see it reflected in what those reports said back then which is different from what some people have been saying about the school.

Mrs. Balloon: Yes, that's right.

V. Boyd: Yes, I can tell your mother was there from the very beginning. She knew it from the fact.

Mrs. Balloon: Uh-huh. So now if you want to ask me some questions, but if it's not in here, I may not know.

V. Boyd: Yes, I do, except I am just[*Tape ends*]

Tape 2

V. Boyd: Yeah, right, I want to ask some questions, some about that and then some other things that occurred to me. What, uh, your mother has written there about the beginning of the school indicates that the brothers tore down the old school building to build that two-story building. Sister Thelma Holt told me that they started the school in that old building until the other one was being built. Now, do you know what... can you give any insight on that?

Mrs. Balloon: There's a discrepancy there then. I don't really know. But from the way my mother talked this old building, you know, a big old building was located in a cemetery. I remember the cemetery because some of the people were buried there after I was old enough, but I don't remember the building, of course, and as I understand it they tore it town and moved it out to Silver Point. And that's, oh, I don't know [*V. Boyd:* Well...] I'm not quite sure.

V. Boyd: Now I'm trying to think this through. Sister Thelma was a child.

Mrs. Balloon: Yes, I believe, I believe my mother was older, somewhat older.

V. Boyd: ...Yeah and so. It may be that Sister Thelma is recording what people used to say about that old building. She talked about cracks in it and wind would blow through. And could hardly keep it heated because it was really just a ramshackle old building.

Mrs. Balloon: Uh-huh. I imagine when they built it again out of those boards it wasn't all that good and what she remembers is probably about the one that they rebuilt. [*Laughs*]

V. Boyd: Well,

Mrs. Balloon: ...now as I remember, it was a brick building. Just one big long room, but it was brick. That's how I remember it.

V. Boyd: Okay, when...

Mrs. Balloon: I must have been about ten years old when...

V. Boyd: About what year would that be?

Mrs. Balloon: [After a pause] Well, it must have been about ...

V. Boyd: '16

Mrs. Balloon: About '26, [*V. Boyd:* 1926.] maybe younger, maybe younger when I remember. But it was a brick building.

V. Boyd: Uh-huh. Well, I knew that Brother A. M. Burton and some others came out there to help to build. Yeah, they helped to build that brick building, but that was during the days when the school was in session that they built that.

Mrs. Balloon: Yes.

V. Boyd: What was your mother's maiden name?

Mrs. Balloon: Garrett

V. Boyd: G-A-R-R-E-T-T

Mrs. Balloon: Uh-huh.

V. Boyd: And her mother and father lived in that community.

Mrs. Balloon: Yes. Uh-huh. And she had, must have been 11, Grandma had 13 children. She had 11 brothers and sisters. She just had one sister. That's the one you're going to talk to later on. [*V. Boyd:* Oh] She probably knows much, much more. She really can go back to the old times and talk. Aunt Evelyn. Yeah. Uh-huh.

V. Boyd: And that's your mother's sister.

Mrs. Balloon: Uh-huh. That's the only sister. The rest were boys.

V. Boyd: Did she also go to school there?

Mrs. Balloon: Well, when she went there, I think when she went there, she went there while Brother Bowser was teaching. When I went to school there, it was after he had gone and the county had taken over the whole school.

V. Boyd: Did the county take over that building?

Mrs. Balloon: That building. They had the church, the church there for years or they were supposed to. I remember I heard a lot of gripping about that they didn't ...

V. Boyd: Well a question occurred to me. Of course, I'm a product of this new age, but when Brother Bowser came in there, as a public school teacher, how could he get away with teaching the Bible as much as he did?

Mrs. Balloon: Well, as I understand it, he started it first as a Bible school or whatever you call it. Industrial, I think he said that was what the name was - Industrial School

V. Boyd: He would get paid by the county to teach from July until December, is that right?

Mrs. Balloon: Something like that, uh-huh.

V. Boyd: Or August to December, [*Mrs. Balloon: Uh-huh.*] whatever that was. And then he, but he'd teach the Bible wouldn't he?

Mrs. Balloon: I don't know. I imagine so. I don't think there was much of an argument there. They didn't care that much.

V. Boyd: Right. Back in the old days. Right. I can't imagine Brother Bowser not teaching the Bible.

Mrs. Balloon: No, I can't either. [*Both laugh.*] I'm sure he did. And he had all of his students there from wherever and some of them, I guess, at least stayed over the summer. [*V. Boyd: Uh-huh.*] Some of them didn't have any place to go, but there.

V. Boyd: When a...Thinking of something else that occurred to me. When Brother Bowser left there, did your mother ever talk about that? When he resigned the school?

Mrs. Balloon: She did. And my grandfather did. And he just thought Brother Bowser was, I don't know, he just thought so much of him. He just thought he was the greatest man on earth and he just talked, you know, that way about him. He talked about how... he thought the white people had something to do with him leaving there. They thought he was too smart.

V. Boyd: They thought he was too smart?

Mrs. Balloon: The white people. They didn't want him there or something like that. But, I don't remember. That's the only thing that I got from it. And then there were some other things too with the black folks there.

V. Boyd: Can you talk about it?

Mrs. Balloon: No, Brother, I can't talk about it because I don't understand what it was, but I just did remember that there was something, but ...[*V. Boyd: In other words...*] I'm not clear on it, criticism one way or another. So I don't really know why they left, but I'm pretty sure Sister Holt would know that, what caused him to leave Silver Point.

V. Boyd: Well, I talked to her fairly extensively, been, a few years ago, but I've got a pretty thorough..

Mrs. Balloon: My aunt may know something about this. She knows just about everything. If she can remember, she's getting kind of, I think, senile now. [*V. Boyd: Oh.*].....She may be able to go back. You know some people can go back and remember more than they can recent...

V. Boyd: ...the present. Sure, yeah. When was the first time you met Brother Bowser?

Mrs. Balloon: It must have been when I was a child. Now, after my Mother and Father, they married and moved away. They moved away and married whichever. From time to time, my mother would take me back and visit and I would go to Brother Bowser's school and I'd be there with whoever was in my grade and my friends and what not. [*V. Boyd; Now wait a minute, where?*] At Silver Point. To Silver Point.

V. Boyd: Brother Bowser would come back there for a class reunion or something?

Mrs. Balloon: Oh I'm sorry. Now I've got this all mixed up. When my mother married, married and went away, the school was still going on. And then we lived, I think we lived in Tullahoma, Tennessee. You know my daddy was a preacher. And from time to time, she would come back and visit her home, her parents there in Silver Point and she would bring me. And I would go to the school wherever the children were around there and Brother Bowser was the teacher. I remember him then.

V. Boyd: He was there then?

Mrs. Balloon: Yes.

V. Boyd: It closed... He left...he resigned in 1918.

Mrs. Balloon: He did. I was born in 1916. What did she say, she gave a date here at first....

V. Boyd: Well, I know when the school closed. He resigned in 1918, the spring session. He shocked everybody. [*Mrs. Balloon: Yeah.*] Nobody was prepared for it. [*Mrs. Balloon: Uh-huh.*] But in the spring session, the closing session, when all the parents came to pick up their kids or whatever, he announced his resignation in 1918. The school went on for another year without him.

Mrs. Balloon: Uh-huh. Without him?

V. Boyd: Without him.

Mrs. Balloon: Uh-huh. Well I remember now. I must have been more than two years old, but maybe not. [*V. Boyd: Yeah.*] If you were at home there and you were a child, I guess they just took you on to school with them. My Aunt Evelyn and whoever was there. I remember being there and Brother Bowser at that school and I remember there was a lot of marching. We had to march from this place to that place and that's all that I can remember was just the marching and Brother Bowser

V. Boyd: Well. He might have come back for some visits to the school. [*Mrs. Balloon: Uh-huh.*] When he resigned in the spring in 1918, he had that invitation to Louisville and he went up there to live.

Mrs. Balloon: ... first to Louisville.

V. Boyd: Yes, in 1918 and that's why I'm trying to figure out when he would have come back to Silver Point and you would have been old enough to remember him.

Mrs. Balloon: Well, that's when I remember him first and then the next time I remember him, I was married living here in Detroit in 1942 or '3, something like that. You know, he lived here, he was living here when he died and I remember him preaching here. I have a, my oldest daughter, she would always go up on, she was a kid then, three or four years old, maybe five, and she would go always go up on the

pulpit and ask him what had happened to his other arm. And he would tell her that he laid on a railroad track and a train ran over it. [*Laughs.*] And that's about the most I remember. Of course, I remember his preaching a lot. He came to our house a time or two. Phillip brought him by. He lived in Highland Park.

V. Boyd: That was in the early forties.

Mrs. Balloon: Uh-huh. He died, do you remember what year?

V. Boyd: Fifty.

Mrs. Balloon: He died in '50. Oh, then it must have been in the later forties then. Yeah. But my mother was really a fan of his. She thought he could do no wrong and so did my grandfather. They were in the community, see, where they knew what good that he had done. Everybody respected him – the white and all. [*V. Boyd: Uh hmm.*] And he was, I guess, he was kind of a genius or something. He was very smart, the smartest man that I had contact with.

V. Boyd: He was very well educated.

Mrs. Balloon: Uh hmm. Well-educated and a sharp, a sharp mind.

V. Boyd: You mentioned..., you pardon me, I've just been over with Ray Jennings and he and his wife were telling me something about Bowser and my mind is kind of full with some of their comments, but I thought you mentioned in the school there, they had some debates. Do you know about the debates?

Mrs. Balloon: No, I don't.

V. Boyd: I guess it was your mother that mentioned the debates.

Mrs. Balloon: Yes, she did. Debates. Well, that happens a lot. I remember debates even when I was going to school there. See when I was about 11 or 12, I had to go, my sister and I were sent there to live with my grandmother. We were reared up. I was seventeen when I left there. So at that time they were still carrying on some of the old customs there, I guess, that Brother Bowser had debates there in the school, the children, the classes, the upper classes. We went up to the eighth grade and they would have debates. And, I think, they would have debates between the preachers of the Church of Christ and maybe other denominations. I remember vaguely something about that, who would come there and have debates. You know, they knew a lot about debating and the rules and what not. I remember when I first went to college they had a course in argumentation and debating and it wasn't strange to me at all because I had been exposed to it. I don't remember exactly what they were about, but I remember that my dad would do some debating and some of the others.

V. Boyd: When Brother Bowser came here to Detroit, do you remember anything about his preaching, his style of preaching and impressions?

Mrs. Balloon: Impressions. Now my mother had in herI copied this. Probably came from notes that I had here. That I think that she thought was very interesting about Brother Bowser's preaching. And she told me this several times and I finally wrote it down. She said," Brother Bowser used to hold up his hand before his face and preach for a time, no, and preach. For a time, I thought that he was reading his sermon, from his hand, but learning later that was just his method. "You know, holding his hand up in front of his face. I remember, seems like I remember him doing that too. He was just preaching, I mean,

outright preaching, and he would hold his hand up like he was giving this message from hand or something like that. And you know it seemed kind of odd, but he would do that.

V. Boyd: Was he pretending he was reading the Bible, is that it?

Mrs. Balloon: No, no, he was preaching. He would [*makes sounds*] and just going right on like that. He was just preaching. That was just one of his mannerisms.

V. Boyd: His mannerisms. Yes. Anything else you remember about him? Some other people have said...

Mrs. Balloon: He was very humorous. He was what? [*V. Boy: He was ugly.*] He always talked about that. [*Laughs*] He wasn't ashamed of being ugly, but I don't think that he was ugly. A very interesting face. What did I start to say?

V. Boyd: Humor.

Mrs. Balloon: Humor, oh yeah. He could really tell some things and he would tell it on mostly on his family. [*Laughs.*] It was like my daddy would. He would come here and preach. We would just be so embarrassed when he would get up and tell all of these things about us. [*Laughs.*] Oh me. And I notice that the old preachers do that. They bring in their families quite a bit, good and bad. He would preach a lot about his family. So I...there's not a lot that I remember about Brother Bowser. I remember more what people said about Brother Bowser than I do from actual experience.

V. Boyd: Do you know anything about his early background, family? Way he was raised in Nashville.

Mrs. Balloon: No, maybe what I have read in that book. My mother's book or something. I've read several accounts, but right now I can't recall. I understood that he went to a Methodist school and I can't remember anything right off hand now.

V. Boyd: Well, if we've exhausted your, what you can recall kind of off the top of your head about Brother Bowser, I'd like to shift gears.

Mrs. Balloon: What's that?

V. Boyd: Your father. [*Mrs. Balloon: My father?*] Yeah, I became interested in the history of the Church among blacks a number of years ago and I've interviewed, educated myself with a number of key leaders and your father was alive, but I never did get a chance to talk with him. I'd like you to talk....

Mrs. Balloon: And you heard of him while he was alive?

V. Boyd: Yes.

Mrs. Balloon: [*Phone rings.*] Excuse me.

V. Boyd: I've got you wired up, don't we. I'll get that off of your head. [*Break in tape while she goes to answer the phone.*] Your father and whatever you talk, I'd be glad to listen.

Mrs. Balloon: Well, I hope I don't get too boring.

V. Boyd: No, you can't do that to me.

Mrs. Balloon: [Laughs] I thought I was writing, I was trying to write this about my father, but it turned out to be more of my autobiography. That's the only way I could get it together.

V. Boyd: That's the way you experienced it.

Mrs. Balloon: The way I saw it. My father, Thomas Henry Busby, in [unclear] Tennessee in November 6, 19... I'm sorry, 1878. He was the fifth of 14 children born to George and Harriett Busby. He would have been 92 years old if had he lived to see his next, birthday November 6th when he passed September 14th, 1970 in Detroit Michigan. He was the oldest living active evangelist of the Church of Christ and the brotherhood. In the very early years of his life, his family relocated in Blackton, Arkansas where Grandfather Busby was known as one of the great Baptist preachers of his day. My father was one of the oldest children of grandfather's second marriage. A tragedy occurred in the family when my father was still a young man. It seems that the family was in possession of some meat that had been poisoned. Some say the poison was in the well water also. Anyway both grandfather, grandmother and several of the children died after a short time as a result of the poison. Papa, at this young age, took over the responsibility of the remaining children that were left alive. Some were farmed out to different people to do farm work and some just ran away. Pop kept track of them as best he could. And when he married and was able to provide a home for them and he would go and get them one-by-one as he could find them. And sometimes he would have to steal them away from their keepers and some of them were lost to him for many years. Even after he, even after I was born, the search continued. I remember when he located his sister, Mary, I was a young woman. And when he found his brother, Johnny in Charleston, Missouri, he brought him to my home in Detroit then to visit with his son and daughter who also live in this area. (I didn't get that right.)

Uncle Johnny was younger than Pop and he looked up to him and respected him and Pop was able to convert him to the gospel of Christ and baptized him. In fact, all the children, at this point, there were only three girls and one boy, they looked upon him as a father.

I guess the second tragedy in Pop's life was the death of his first wife and family, his wife and two children. I am told that an epidemic of some sort was responsible for their deaths. His wife was the sister of Brother R. N. Hogan's mother. When he came to Brother Bowser's school at Silver Point, Tennessee, in 1914 and he was a widower of some years. He was one of the first students to enroll there in the college. He said Brother Bowser made an agreement with him to teach church music in the school and he would teach him the Bible and how to preach. This brought about a bond between them, which lasted until Brother Bowser's death in 19... (I don't have that) He said he helped to print some of the very first issues of the *Christian Echo* and continued his support as a staff writer and agent until his death.

There at the school in Silver Point he met my mother, Winnie Garrett. She was one of eleven children, the oldest girl of Thomas and [Cammy?] Garrett, who owned a farm very near the school. She was enrolled in the school and paying her way by working in the printing office when the *Christian Echo* was being printed. She was an alert and conscientious woman and I don't know how long my father was there before he persuaded her to run away with him and get married. They were married in Lebanon, Tennessee, I am told at the home of Brother and Sister Crutchfield. Not long after, not long thereafter, they were settled in Tullahoma, Tennessee, where I was born, August 15, 1916. My father was the minister of the church there. My mother says I was born in a log cabin, however, my first recollection is of living in a house, a nice white house with a wide porch and a swing and I was being scolded for leaving my toy piano outside over night. It had been raining and the keys wouldn't work. I must have been about three years old. It seemed that Pop was away a lot of the time, out of town, traveling around preaching. I don't remember what his status was there in Tullahoma for the church, that is, whether he was the preacher or not, since he traveled so much. And too, I remember a period when he was a clerk in

a store. And I recall coming to meet him when he came home in the afternoon when I saw him coming. I knew that he had something for me like candy or Cracker Jacks and so forth. There seemed to be quite a lot of activity about our house. We were visited quite often by people of the church, preachers who were prominent then or students from the school. I recall operated a beauty shop in our home for awhile. I'm not quite sure when the trouble between my parents began. Perhaps it was always there menacing and threatening and sometimes during this period when I was about four years old, my little sister, Tanya Elizabeth was born. She lived only a few months and died of pneumonia. I don't recall too much about it, but I clearly remember my mother looking through thing in an old trunk where her baby clothes were, and crying. About a year later, my sister Olivia was born. From then on, it was me and Olivia, Olivia and I. We were inseparable. The first time we were apart was when I left Silver Point to go to [shuffles papers] Nashville. I left Silver Point to go to Nashville to enter high school. Even one time when Mother had us with her at the Union Depot in Nashville, I don't know where we were going, but Papa came and snatched me away and my mother immediately brought him Olivia also. She did not want us separated. And even as a small child, I considered my little sister, my responsibility. I was five years older. Olivia was about two years old, not walking, and when my parents separated, there was just the two of us. I felt like her mother always trying to take care of her and protect her. My parents were separated about nine years before my dad got a divorce. There were several attempts at reconciliation and they communicated frequently. We were with my father for several years. I don't know if he had custody or what, but he wanted us with him. It was quite a struggle for him getting places for us to stay and finding people to look after us. I remember us being in different people's homes.

Once a preacher and his wife took care of us in a house that Papa had rented. Then he took us Brother and Sister Keeble, Brother Keeble's first wife. We stayed there for awhile. Then there was a couple of times when Papa would send for his sister, Aunt Edna, to come from Arkansas with her son and take care of us. Pop would rent a house for these times. I remember living on School? Street and also Jefferson Street in Nashville. And there were times, when we couldn't find, when he couldn't find anyone to take care of us. So his last resort would be to take us up in the country to Silver Point to my grandmother's house. There, on my grandfather's farm, we would be quite happy for awhile, but my grandmother was the mother of fourteen children, some of them still young, I have an uncle two years younger than I am. She didn't relish the idea of raising more children at her age, but we were her flesh and blood and she couldn't turn us away. Then my mother's sister, Aunt Evelyn, who was only eight years older than I, was still at home. She took us under her wing and was like a mother to us. Dressed us in cute dresses and hair ribbons and would take us with her often when she left, when she went out. Pop, as Pop could find a place for us or when he could persuade Aunt Edna to come back and take care of us, he would come to Silver Point and come get us and we would go to Nashville and I would go to school. Olivia was too young. The last time he sent us at our grandmother's, he couldn't take us himself and he put us on the train and told the conductor where... [shuffles paper] - Oh my goodness, better turn that off until I find this - and told the conductor where to put us off. In the meantime, he had written to grandmother and told her to meet us or have someone meet us, meet the train, however, we beat the letter there and we were waiting in the station and some recognized us and hitched us a ride on a wagon to grandmother's house.

I think Pop lived in Nashville for a few years after this. This was his headquarters as he did his evangelistic work in Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, and some other states. He would write to us every week in the summer. The letters would have the postmark of all these different places where he would work out from, you know, where he would be. He would work out, I don't know. [Mr. Boyd: Work out from Nashville?] Yes, he would work out from Nashville, like in the Murfreesboro area, Pulaski and Dixon and other nearby towns. He would come to see us two or three times a year and sometimes when he was preaching at Cookeville he would have us there with him for a week. He was always kind and considerate to us and he sent my grandmother two dollars every week for keeping us. She could depend on it. I know it seems like a mere pittance now, but then during the Depression in a farming community where the men worked for fifty cents a day, when they could get it, it was like a godsent. He would

usually send us a box at Christmas time – toys and clothing – and would include a toy for my Uncle Otis who was a child there. Once I wrote for a storybook to read. He didn't send one. He wrote back that if I wanted to read something, I should read the Bible [*chuckles*].

Let me see, I don't think....

V. Boyd: He was a consistent preacher, wasn't he?

Mrs. Balloon: Yes. [*unclear*] Let's see. I don't know [*shuffles papers*] Some of this is just....I was going back to the time that he was going to Brother Bowser's school. [*starts to read*] He had enrolled Brother Bowser's Christian School in Silver Point, Tennessee in 1914, he said that there was an agreement between he and Brother Bowser to the effect that if Brother Bowser would teach him how to preach and he would teach music at the school in exchange. He became the school's first musical director. I don't know where he received his musical training, but he had a natural talent for singing and a voice that was loud and clear and resonant. This was also evident in his preaching. If you were anywhere in the vicinity, you would know who was preaching long before you entered the building. He believed in lifting up his voice. To emphasize a word, he would clap his hands. Sometimes it would sound like a pistol shot. [*both laugh*] Let me see. I don't think I'll read this. [*Pause in tape*] One of my father's main contentions was that "popularity is sapping the life out of the church." Many times, preachers fail to declare the whole counsel of God because they fear the reaction of the people. If people like you, then you are popular with them and preach to suit them. My father often said the people do not know what they need and would go on to say what their needs were, namely to do what the Lord said do. "In all thy ways, acknowledge him and he will direct thy path," That was one of his main, favorite scriptures. [*Tape skips*] That's probably all of it.

In later years, he felt he was not welcome in young liberal preachers' pulpits in congregations that had been his old stomping grounds and where he had baptized or converted many of the members, usually because of some stand he had taken in regards to their social and religious practices. If he saw something going on that he considered unscripture or was drawing the people away, he did not hesitate to let them know both publicly and privately. He had a lot of friends, but he made enemies too, as will anyone who dares to stand up for what they believe. I'm not trying to cover up any faults or problems that he might have had because I know that there was a lot going on that I didn't understand, I was not even aware of. He was definitely against the practice of ministers making specific charities for their services and refusing to go unless they weren't assured of a certain amount of money. This was against the grain of his character and he fought for the discontinuance of this practice. He felt that the leaders were in most cases, would in most cases deal fairly with the preachers and I also believe that he received more money by the freewill of offering than if he had said a price, but he was willing to take a chance, trusting in the Lord to take care of him. Quoting, "My Father tells me what to do. He did not tell me to go preach the Gospel after I find out what they are going to pay me." He would go wherever he was called. He would let them know that he had his fare in his pocket and didn't have to preach to please them. Some folks thought that he was pompous and boastful, but most loved him for his frankness and realized he preached the truth, in season and out, as Paul instructed Timothy to be and was not dependent upon the people for his maintenance, but on his Heavenly Father. Perhaps he was not in tune with or in sympathy with the socioeconomic aspects of the matter, but in such cases believed wholly upon what the scriptures taught feeling that all things worked for good to them that loved the Lord and are called according to his purpose. That's about all.

V. Boyd: That's good. That's good.

Mrs. Balloon: I'm afraid I didn't read it very well.

V. Boyd: You did fine.

Mrs. Balloon: But you can understand it. It just gives you a kind of a background of some of his characteristics. That's his picture there.

V. Boyd: Really?

Mrs. Balloon: Uh-huh. That's me and my mother

V. Boyd: And who's that in the middle?

Mrs. Balloon: That's me when I was a baby.

V. Boyd: Ah. Well, both your mother and your father were handsome people.

Mrs. Balloon: Well, I think so. I don't know how they came up with such a child. [*laughs*]

V. Boyd: Ah. Well, that's an honored portrait.

Mrs. Balloon: My sister has always felt bad about these pictures. There are several of them, of my standing up in a chair and what not. I was the first one, you see, and by the time she came along they were having trouble and, you know, weren't having pictures made like that anymore. She didn't know why they didn't take any pictures of her. [*Both laugh.*]

V. Boyd: I have got this term paper that I'm doing for school and I'm doing it on Brother Bowser [*Mrs. Balloon: Oh, is that right?*] and that's why I was branching around for information about Brother Bowser especially, but I knew that I had information about Brother Busby that I didn't know and I wanted to know and I appreciate the opportunity. One of the things that I wanted to do was to put an expanded obituary of Brother Cole in the church publications, especially white churches. They don't know anything. I feel like I've got to educate them a little bit. [*Mrs. Balloon: Uh-huh*] They're missing out on a lot. I know that when Brother Cole came to Montgomery, Alabama, your father was preaching there. Do you know anything about that?

Mrs. Balloon: Well I've heard them talk about it quite a bit. Even when my father lived, he would always, we would always come up here from Arkansas around Christmas every year. And usually Brother Cole would come and take him to his house and take him out or whatnot and they would talk about the old times. Let me see, I don't seem to be able to recall all that much about it. I know Brother Cole used to talk about the times when debating was very popular and I don't know if Brother Cole had just come into the church or [*V. Boyd: He had.*] he was just a young man aspiring to the ministry. Anyway he got tied up with somebody in a debate. I don't think he knew too much about what he was doing, but anyway he said he got tired ofI don't know what denomination it was or what. My dad was the one that, you know, that [*V. Boyd: To his rescue*] uh-huh, came to his rescue. He just said, "He just never could forget that." He would always go to him and study and they would study books together and they would make charts. My daddy was a chart preacher. He, oh he had dozens and dozens of them. I used to see him make them. But he would, the outline of the letter he would put there, just ink over it on this cloth, you know, and sometimes he would have to have pictures to illustrate what he meant. I would...

V. Boyd: And you would help him?

Mrs. Balloon: Well, I wasn't very good at the pictures, but I could help him with the charts. He would get somebody that could draw very well. There was a picture of a train or angels, whatever he would want to demonstrate. He always used charts when he'd preach. He said that he was known as the "Rag Preacher." He could make it so simple. He could really make it simple. That's the reason that he could appeal to so many of the common folk, you know, and the educated people could see it too and they liked him too. He could really appeal to those people, who were not educated, poor people, and on those farms, in Mississippi. He was the only preacher that would go to Mississippi. And he would get up in the pulpit and make comments about it. And you know everybody would just laugh. And he'd say, "I'll go to Mississippi." And he would, he would go out there. Go out there every summer to preach and sometimes. [*V. Boyd: Mississippi was considered the pits?*] Yeah. Mississippi was considered. No preacher wanted to go there. [*V. Boyd: Why?*] Well, it's so far south, and the black preachers, it was so segregated. Your life might be in danger there. And he said he came in there once on the ...

A man enters and asks: Is that machine on?

V. Boyd: Yes sir, I'll let you talk.

Man: No, no, I'm fixing to [*unclear*]...

V. Boyd: Oh, I can flip it off. [*Turns tape machine off.*] But he didn't mind going to Mississippi then?

Mrs. Balloon: He didn't mind going into Mississippi. He talked about once he went in there on the tail of a hanging, What do they call those hangings?

V. Boyd: Lynching.

Mrs. Balloon: Lynching. Yeah. They didn't, they were...I don't know what they were doing – looking for another one to lynch or what. But he said he prayed and he really did some praying before he got out of that situation. He didn't know until he got there, I guess, and maybe he heard them talking or something, but he really was in terror, I would say. This was in Mississippi. [*V. Boyd: A stranger.*] A stranger...they didn't know him and ...

V. Boyd: Do you know the places that he went?

Mrs. Balloon: Well no, the places that he went mostly was ones called Biloxi and Jackson and several places that he went to in Mississippi, places that were not big cities, you know. Even now they're not big, I guess. Jackson.....

V. Boyd: I wonder how he got contacts down there or why would he know to go, what would drive him to go to some of these places?

Mrs. Balloon: Well now, let me see. He went about preaching in other states. Sometimes people would come from other states to where ever he was preaching. You know, from the southern states, they would come. I remember there were times when my mother and my step-father and sister would go from Nashville out to these places where he was holding meetings. There would be people there bus loads, wagonloads and all this picnic stuff and what not around there for that meeting. And there would be something really great that would happen [*V. Boyd: Where?*] Well, this was out in Tennessee, but I'm just talking about the manner in which people would gather and some of them would come, you know the state was not near the border, some of them would come. That's how he got in contact with them.

Now I don't know, now Brother Bowser, he knew about a lot of these places most of these places and his *Echo* went out to most places like that. I guess that's how. A lot of times he was sent there, I think, by Brother Bowser or somebody that knew about it of a church that was struggling along. And sometimes he would [*side ends*]...the most states and Brother Bowser was in one place mostly. Well he went a lot places carrying these boys, you know, beginning preachers, training them to preach and what not. That's how we first saw Phillip, I think, my sister and I. He was with Brother Bowser. Brother Bowser had several boys with him and they came to a church that was called Green Street Church. That's where we attended, see, and that's where my sister met Phillip.

V. Boyd: I thought it was here in Detroit.

Mrs. Balloon: She met him first in Nashville and then it must have been a year, or maybe less, that when we moved to Detroit.

V. Boyd: Green Street?

Mrs. Balloon: Yeah, in Nashville.

V. Boyd: I thought Green Street....

Mrs. Balloon: It was called Green Street then. I think it's called something else now, maybe 12th. It was on 12th, but it was called Green Street.

V. Boyd: Well I'm thinking of a white church and I didn't know if this was an integrated situation back then [*Mrs. Boyd: No.*] There wasn't too much of that going on.

Mrs. Balloon: No it wasn't integrated. There was a Church of Christ right down from where we lived on Belmont. What was the name of that church? I hear it mentioned sometime on...

V. Boyd: Yeah, there is a Belmont Church on 16th. [*Mrs. Balloon: Uh-huh.*] When I think of Green Street, that was kind of East Nashville.

Mrs. Balloon: No, this is still North Nashville. Now let me see. [*V. Boyd: North Nashville?*] Do you know Nashville? [*V. Boyd: A little bit.*] Do you know where the, it's called Edge Hill and the Belmont car. I know because I rode it to school. Belmont streetcar. This church was right on the corner. I'd stand right across from it to catch the car. [*V. Boyd: Yellow brick?*] Was it yellow?

V. Boyd: The Belmont Church is a yellow brick and has columns up in the front.

Mrs. Balloon: It might have been called something else. It might have been called Edge Hill. Have you ever heard of that?

V. Boyd: Well, I don't know where Edge Hill is.

Mrs. Balloon: You don't. We lived on the corner of Edge Hill. And we lived on 15th.

V. Boyd: And this is North Nashville?

Mrs. Balloon: This is considered East Nashville, but it wasn't really, maybe south. I think it may have been South Nashville. Yeah, that's it.

V. Boyd: South Nashville.

Mrs. Balloon: Yeah, that's it, South Nashville. Also I rode the Belmont car to school. I had to go downtown to get to the transfer station and get the [*Ghelson?*] Street bus and go to school, but this same Belmont car going the other way crossed Edge Hill go out to the big white folks section where we all would work and what not and I would take it out there - day work after school and on Saturday. So this was South Nashville where we lived, not East Nashville.

V. Boyd: Okay, near that the hill where Ft. Nealey is and there's a Carver School on 12 Street or something like that?

Mrs. Balloon: Oh no, I thought you meant to say where there was some sort of battle, famous battle was fought at this place and it's not too far...

V. Boyd: [*Name unclear*] Avenue, we used to take it from town and go out to Lipscomb.

Mrs. Balloon: Sure, uh-huh. Only way out where we could get the Belmont and go out there to it. Belmeade and that area.

V. Boyd: Belmeade, that's out toward the west, but the buses may have ..

Mrs. Balloon: Belmont and Belmeade, they weren't too far apart. That may have been the Bel... I'm mixed up. It was a long time ago.

V. Boyd: The Belmont section is South Nashville.

Mrs. Balloon: That's where we lived. Belmont I think is 13th, 14th, and 15th and then Belmont I believe.

V. Boyd: Sixteenth becomes Belmont, I think

Mrs. Balloon: Oh is that it, but I know we were not a block fromand we lived on 15th.

V. Boyd: You weren't living with your father. [*Mrs. Balloon: This was my stepfather.*] No, I was going back to Brother Cole's contact with your father in Montgomery, Alabama, but this may have been before he married your mother or something because this is pretty far back.

Mrs. Balloon: Before he married my mother? Oh no, no, no.

V. Boyd: What I'm talking about him, Brother Cole because that's pretty far back when Brother Cole knew him.

Mrs. Balloon: I was born, we were probably in our teens when he know Brother Cole.

V. Boyd: In Montgomery?

Mrs. Balloon: Uh-huh, when he was in Montgomery. I was I was at least twelve years old, I guess. I was seventeen when I left Silver Point to go Nashville. You see, they didn't have a high school in Silver Point. So my father got me a place to stay in Nashville.

V. Boyd: Who'd you stay with?

Mrs. Balloon: Brother and Sister Bragg. I think they're have both passed on now. But they both, or at least she was, a faithful member of the church. [*V. Boyd: Where?*] Jefferson Street. Yes, uh, Jefferson Street and I don't know whether her husband was or not. And then my mother married again within the same year or two years and she set up housekeeping and then she had my sister to come from Silver Point and then we grew up there.

V. Boyd: It's kind of interesting. You're talking about your mother and stepfather and you children going out to hear Brother Busby preach.

Mrs. Balloon: Yeah, they did. My dad would come there and they just seemed to love each other. Make sure he would have his dinner and he would just go places and take us places. And it was like this when my dad used to come here and my mother lived in Toledo with my stepfather. He would go there before he would go home. It made that one of his rounds. He would stay here a week and then go to Toledo and down south and around. You know his first wife's sister was still there, not Brother Hogan's mother, but Brother Hogan's mother's sister. She still lived at that time and he'd go there to see her. Let's see what was her name. Sister Hall. They were the Halls in Toledo. [*V. Boyd: H-a-l-l*] Yeah. They were the Halls. He would go there too. He would go over there and spend the night in my mother and stepfather's house. And she would cook him a big meal. She was a wonderful cook and people just came and people just loved to go there. She loved to cook for 'em and she was a person that could really talk and entertain you. [*Both laugh*] Yes, wonderful person. I think both of my parents were.

V. Boyd: Well, I've certainly heard so many fine things about your dad and his preaching.

Mrs. Balloon: Well, he would go there and preach there one night and then would get going on back home.

V. Boyd: It is unusual.

Mrs. Balloon: And he would stay there until spring and then go out on his meetings and he would have a schedule that he would keep to, where different places he would be. Usually he would write his schedule for me, where he'd be all through the summer, but mostly he would write to when he would go to these places every week or two, some of them two week meetings, some of them one. All planned out. And even the year that he died he was trying to go and preach and he was ninety something then – ninety-two or ninety-one. He was, people were kind of confused about his age. Because one year he said he was this and the next year he would say that. But I think he was about 93 when he died. Once his birthday, his ninetieth birthday was written up in the *Echo*. But then and after that he put it up another year and then he would put it back. He would forget himself how old he was. [*V. Boyd laughs.*] Those of us, you know, who knew would try to keep up with what he said when he was more lucrative.

Mr. Boyd: He never did re-marry?

Mrs. Balloon: I think that he re-married, but it was annulled. He said he was, something like he said he was "hoodhooded," tricked into marrying [*laughs*] so it was annulled. I think Brother Bowser and them got together and they annulled the marriage.

V. Boyd: The fact that your mother and father didn't get along. Today, divorce is everywhere, but back then that was really a scandalous thing.

Mrs. Balloon: Yes, it was.

V. Boyd: At least in the church they must have had some resistance.

Mrs. Balloon: They did.

V. Boyd: Maybe some unjust resistance. I know that attitudes back in the old days was pretty rough on that.

Mrs. Balloon: They were very bitter at each other at that time. One would say this and one would say that. My mother would say, "You're not fit to be a preacher and you did this and you did that." And he would say something to her. It was kind of a difficult childhood to come through because [*V. Boyd: Yes, yes.*] it left us feeling insecure. Very insecure. Olivia wasn't old enough, at that time, to realize it, but I was. I'm five years older than she is. I was just so sensitive. I still am very sensitive

V. Boyd: Something that close to you is bound to ... [*Mrs. Balloon: Yes, that's right.*] At one point, then you said that Nashville was kind of like a headquarters for him and later on Arkansas was kind of a headquarters for him.

Mrs. Balloon. Oh yeah...

V. Boyd: Kind of give me a kind of running where his home base was.

Mrs. Balloon: Well now, for a while there while we were growing up, Nashville was his headquarters. And when I was old enough to come to Nashville to go to school, when I was seventeen, he was, at that time, was in Montgomery, Alabama. When I was seventeen, on up to the time, oh several years later, he was in Wichita, Kansas. He was there for 20 years. I think they said twenty years on his obituary, something like that. Well, you know how they do with the old preachers when they get where they want them to retire. He said that he wasn't ever going to retire, but he had to retire from that church. They wanted to get some young preacher and so after that he went back to where his sister lived in Arkansas, North Little Rock and built him a little house. And he lived there until he died so he would preach out from there. He would go out from Little Rock there. He didn't have a church of his own then. He would go out from Little Rock to different places. Still out to Mississippi, and Tennessee, Alabama, Kentucky. He went to Kentucky a lot. Olivia and I visited once in Kentucky, [*V. Boyd: Which...*] Thompsonville, I think, or Hopkinsville, both of them are right there together. He used to go to Indianapolis too when they had a meeting, but this was a long time ago. Let me see. So he worked out from Little Rock, North Little Rock. And he would go back in the winter and attend the churches around in that area just as a member.

V. Boyd: Did he ever go much back to Blackton?

Mrs. Balloon: Blackton, he went back there for a meeting. I have a...let me see what I have here. [*V. Boyd: Your wired up.*] What did you say?

V. Boyd: You're wired. I didn't want you to get too far away. [*V. Boyd: Oh, okay.*] Less you trip.

Mrs. Balloon: Oh, I have one of those circulars. You may have seen it. When he was in Blackton. [*Shuffles papers*] Wonder what year it was. I guess I can't find it. [*Man in background: What are you looking for?*] Something of my dad's. [*V. Boyd: A circular*] A circular, there's that's right.

V. Boyd: Her dad preaching in Blackton, Arkansas.

Other man: That was before my day.

Mrs. Balloon: Oh my goodness. Before your day, this was just before he died, not too long before he died.

Other man: Before my day. [*V. Boyd laughs.*]

Mrs. Balloon: [*shuffling papers*] Not before your day either. Oh yeah, have you seen that one?

V. Boyd: No.

Mrs. Balloon: Now I don't remember what year it was. I was going to write it on ...

Other man: Fifty-five years.

V. Boyd: Fifty-five. Oh, just a kid. [*All laugh.*] Hmm.

Mrs. Balloon: And that was within two or three years before he died, I think.

V. Boyd: And he was strong enough to give a good meeting.

Mrs. Balloon: Oh yeah, he was doing good, doing well on up until the year he died. I think that summer, he died in September. I think it was that summer or that spring, he had gotten on a bus and gone to Mississippi I think or was it, I don't know, I think it was Mississippi because I think some people there in the church so he couldn't take care of his money and what not. I think they took some of his money. My sister was complaining about some people. She said, "I'm going to get after them. They stole my daddy's money." He was on the bus, you know, and half sick and what not and still trying to go. And I went down there and my sister went down there sometime before that, some two or three months before that, and had begged him not to go. And one of the brethren, this brother got killed not too long after Pop, was one of his main students. He was in Indianapolis. But anyway he had gone by there, he and his family, and they had begged and pleaded with him not to go out to preach like that anymore. Not to take a chance riding the buses and trying to hold meetings. And he wouldn't agree and they had to leave and so when they were gone and time rolled around he just went on. He had his money and he had his bus ticket, his bus booklet that he carried around all the time, where he could get reduced rates. He packed his clothes just so nicely. He would keep a bag packed mostly. He believed in going, believed in going. That's one of the first impressions I had of my daddy was in connection with trains. The buses weren't in then like they are now or were later. Trains, he went everywhere on the train. I remember when we would go up to Silver Point or anywhere, it was just trains so I just got my daddy, I just thought about him in that light connected with trains in some way. A train would come at a certain time, you could hear that old whistle. My grandmother would say, "It's twelve o'clock. There's that old train going up the hill." And when my mother would come, she was stuck here in Detroit working. My grandmother had to raise us, you know, at that time, and different others. When they would come and visit us, they would come on the train and they would leave on the train when ever they'd come and they'd leave. That whistle, hat was the lonest sounding whistle. They were gone and I would be so depressed. That train whistle. And there was another one that came through at night. I usually heard it.

V. Boyd: So the train did pass through Silver Point, there was a stop iat Silver Point.

Mrs. Balloon: Oh yeah. But you see there were no buses or nothing coming through or anything else. Now I think there's a bus that goes through there now. My aunt wants me to go with her there now. She has some brothers down there. She doesn't feel like traveling by herself.

V. Boyd: A couple of other things then I've got to get out of here and let you get on with your business, but I wanted to ask, did you know anything about the Nashville school after the Silver Point school closed. The one that Burton tried to start in 1920.

Mrs. Balloon: No, I don't. [*V. Boyd: That's too early for you.*] I know Brother Keeble's school was there at the time I was in Nashville.

V. Boyd: Do you know anything about the work of Brother Bowser in Ft. Smith?

Mrs. Balloon: That's when Olivia and Phillip went down there after they had married. No, I don't know anything about it, only that they were there.

V. Boyd: They just went down there to visit?

Mrs. Balloon: No, they were living down there when they first married. They went down there, that's where they... and stayed there with Brother and Sister Bowser and worked there in the school with him, I guess. I've got a picture here of them taken down there. I don't know how long they stayed whether it was a year or two. I don't know. I'm trying to think of when Phyllis was born before they went down there or after. I think Phyllis was born here and then they went down there. They didn't go down there when they first married, but they did go down there. No. You know, they went before. Because they went before I married, I think. I got married three months...they were married in August and I was married in September. I was married about a month and a half after they were married. And then they went and I remember we went to the bus station with them. So they left. They must have gone back because when they were here, Phyllis was born while they were here. So they went there, came back and then went again because I have a picture of Phyllis and Olivia and Phillip when Phyllis was a little girl and was taken down there. They must have gone down there twice. But I'm sure, I don't know if they remember or not.

V. Boyd: They were probably so much in love that they couldn't remember. [*Both laugh*] Well, I've got to close this off. I really appreciate the....*Tape ends.*