

Eddie Street Belcher Bostic

Where: Glen Ferris Inn

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Date: May 7, 2018

Location: Glen Ferris, WV

Interviewer: Emily Hilliard

Transcription: Emily Hilliard

Length: 40:12

## **Eddie Street Belcher Bostic**

Boomer, West Virginia

Eddie Street Belcher Bostic was born in Jodie, West Virginia in 1929. Her family moved to Boomer, West Virginia when she was 8 months old. Her father worked in the Hawk's Nest Tunnel and died of silicosis in 1932 when Eddie was 3. Her mother died two years later, and Eddie was raised by a neighbor, Quindora "Quinny" Burdette. Eddie worked at Sam Dalporto's Italian grocery store, the College Drug Store, and G.C. Murphy's. She is also a self-taught pianist. In this interview, Eddie shares stories of her father and memories of her childhood, family, and life in Boomer.

EB: Edie Street Belcher Bostic

EH: Emily Hilliard

WK: Wanda King (Edie's daughter)

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00:00

EH: So why don't you tell me your name and introduce yourself, tell me when you were born, where you were born.

EB: My name...

00:12

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EB: ...is Edie Street Belcher Bostic. I was born in Jodie, West Virginia and we moved to Boomer when I was 8 months old.

EH: Why don't you tell me about your parents?

EB: My father worked in the tunnel above Gauley Bridge, building that tunnel that they had, Hawk's Nest Tunnel. He died very early in the age, in 19 and 32 [1932]. I was born in 1929. After that, my mother, she died in 1934 so I was raised by a guardian in Boomer.

EH: What memories do you have of your parents?

EB: I don't have any memory of my mother or my daddy, but they said when my daddy was in the casket that I got on a little stool and stayed right there with him. So I undoubtedly loved my daddy.

EH: I'm sure.

EB: Mmhm.

EH: What are the stories that people told you about him?

EB: About my daddy? They said that well back when it was was the Depression, Depression was in the 1929 and '28 probably, '30, before Roosevelt took office, I don't know what year that was. But in the Depression everybody was hungry but we never went hungry that I can remember. We lived in a company house when my daddy moved from Jodie to Boomer but wherever he was working, which probably was the starting of the tunnel. But whenever he passed away, we had to move because it was a company house.

EH: I'm sorry...

Edie's daughter: Is that okay (referring to background noise)

EH: It's okay. I think it'll be okay. (whispers) Just because they're being loud over there...

EB: Huh?

EH: They're being loud over there.

EB: Am I talking to loud?

EH: No, you're great, you're great! (laughs)

EB: (to daughter) Give me one of them...one of them thing-a-majigs.

EH: Notebooks?

EB: Yeah, this.

02:25

I'll need this one. My father before he met my mother was married also to a lady by the name of Effie Walkup. He had two boys by her but the second boy when he was born, my daddy's wife died in childbirth. So left my daddy and two boys. He married my mother 19 and 25 [1925] and things were hard back then so they tell me. But we always had food on the table. He wasn't a college educated man, neither was my mother, but then when both of 'em died, I was taken care of all my life, good.

EH: And what was her name?

EB: Quinny Burdette. Quindora Burdette. She was a woman that had never been married but she used to keep borders and she was friends with my mother and daddy. Matter of fact when they moved to Boomer, her brothers was the 'cause of her coming toward Boomer as well. And they, we were all just a close family. I had an older sister and I had the 2 boys that belonged to my daddy, and then when my daddy married my mother, there was 2 more children born, my sister Ruth and me. And I'm Edie, we have two of us left now.

EH: So you said that the woman who raised you told you stories about your dad--do you remember some of those? Could you tell us?

04:19

EB: Well, other than when he was in the casket, but at first let me tell ya, the casket that they were gonna put him in was just like a pasteboard box. Now Quinny who raised me, she says huh-uh, that won't work. And her brothers came, they were from Nicholas County, they came and they paid for my father's casket, buried him nice. He's buried at Victor in Fayette County out on Saturday Road. But what it was, when he died, my mother buried him beside his first wife, which was the boys' mother. So he's buried there and then when my mother passed away two years later, they buried her with her parents in Poe in Nicholas County, back up in the mountains.

EH: I see. (laughs) and that's where she was from?

EB: She was from, yes, uh-huh.

EH: Yeah, so what do you have in this notebook?

EB: Well, I have dates. (leafs through pages) If you're interested in my daddy, okay. Edie's parents, my father was Louis Walter Street of whom we're talking about. He was born 10/6/1886. He died 10/12/1932.

That would make him 46 years old if my calculations is right. But he died from the--his lungs was just crystal. When these guys would come out of where they were working, building the tunnel, they would be like zombies. They'd be real white. And you know, you can say what you want to, but I feel like that silica dust is still being used at the Alloy plant. Because when the sun is out real good of a morning, on my front porch, it's glossy. I'm just thinking--they're still using the silica.

But talking about my daddy, my foster mother, I'll call her my foster mother because she raised me even though she took guardianship papers and it cost her 3 dollars and something to take 4 of us in and keep us. Of course back then, everybody was hard up I guess. Nobody wanted you. I did have a couple of aunts who were very good to me and would bring groceries out of the garden--not groceries--but food out of the garden in the summertime. But we were always, whatever was needed for us was supplied. No checks--you had to work for what you had. So as my brother was 16 at the time when my daddy died, then he took over paying some of the bills. We didn't go hungry, but we've never had anything real fancy. But I was raised good. Raised good in a Christian home--not so much as what she professed, but how she lived. She was stern. I wrote a poem about her too, about being so stern and this and that (laughs). But my daddy, as he was dying, everybody of course was crying because he couldn't get a speck of breath in or out because his lungs was just solid. But Quinny, the lady that raised me, she stayed with him right up to the end and held his hand. Everybody else left the room. That told me what kind of woman she was too, you know? But anyway, he was buried nice and had a good casket--her brothers paid for that.

EH: How long did he work in building the tunnel?

EB: I don't know, it was probably 1929 or '30 to '32. Two years, maybe.

EH: Yeah.

08:48

EB: Because a lot of the younger things, I don't remember because they haven't been told. But the details that I do know I know the way that they said this one guy by the name of Reinhart, and the bosses and all--they didn't help the men and they had things that they could've saved the men, you know like masks that you could've worn? The poor men didn't have those, though.

EH: Or watered down...

EB: Watered down the thing, they were in too of a hurry to get all that built. There was a lot of people that came from the South, a lot of colored people came from the South and I have been told that they died so fast like flies. Like you'd swat a fly, you would die.

EH: Wow.

EB: But anyway, they had a lot of those that have mass graves. They just put 'em all in the graves together, especially there's one at Summersville I've been told.

EH: Yeah. I've seen that one.

EB: Uh-huh. I haven't seen it, but I know it's true from the stories that I have heard. Like I say, I was too small to know these things, but the people that told me, my family, they don't lie about it.

EH: Right.

EB: And they treated you like you were dirt. Okay? What else you want to know?

EH: Yeah, so were there other men that you remember who had worked in the tunnel?

10:21

EB: I don't--there was a Matheny man from over at Deep Water. I knew him and his children. I graduated with one of his daughters. But he got out. But he didn't go, he wasn't inside the tunnel building. He was doing something that I think that was outside. So he didn't get as bad as some of 'em did.

EH: Right.

EB: But they didn't live no time once they got that, and, uh-huh.

EH: So probably not too many left. Did you know other families who were affected?

EB: I was too little to know these things.

EH: Yeah, yeah. Right.

EB: But I know what happened and the stories that I've been told about my family--as what I could say.

EH: Yeah, yeah. Why don't you tell me a little bit more about your life growing up and then working?

EB: Okay. (laughs)

EH: What you told me at lunch.

EB: Okay, well growing up, like I say, when something was needed, I know when I went to the first 3 grades of school at Boomer School, then my sister, she was 3 years older than me. She got to go to Falls View School and play in the band. Well I cried to go to Falls View School and Quinny had to go to Fayetteville, get special permission for me to go to school at Falls View and ride the school bus so I could be in the band also! My sister played a clarinet and I played a trumpet.

EH: Oh, okay!

EB: And I wasn't real good probably but still...

EH: Was this a marching band?

EB: Uh-huh. Grade school. A lot of the kids at Boomer went to Gauley Bridge School by the time they went to high school, but my sister had gone to Montgomery, which was 3 miles away from me and that's where I wanted to go, which I did! I graduated from high school in 1947, went straight to work. Worked 5 years in a little grocery store for Italians, which taught me well. You did everything. You did all the ordering, you did all the putting the stock up in the shelves, and you didn't have fast things. But you did everything yourself and then they'd, they'd come and they'd have their bills, they'd run a charge account 'til payday. I did all the figuring up for the charge account and then when payday come, they'd come and pay their bill off, which most of 'em was every 2 weeks or once a month. Of course, we had some that would be trustworthy, some wouldn't. Some didn't want to pay and this man that I worked for, Sam Dalporto, he wouldn't pursue it, you know. But if he thought that someone didn't come in the store 'cause

they was mad at him, he would go and see what was the matter. He took it personal with 'em. But there was dishonest people way back when. (laughs)

EH: Always!

EB: Yeah, always, yes. But one man particular I remember, he, when he'd get his saving's plan at Alloy Plant, which was, I don't know how, maybe every 2 or 2 years, I'm not sure when they paid the savings off? But when he'd get his savings plan paid off, first thing he did was come to the store and pay off his bill. We had another lady that I think about. She'd run up a bill and her husband worked in the mines. But she'd run up a bill and she would come, and then she came and she said, "We'll let's just start over again." And she said just put this and I'll pay on it. And of course, she never did pay on it. But he never did anything about it. But things like that I remember and one lady used to come in close to supertime and want me to plan her meals for her before her husband got home from work! (laughs) But I have experiences of working. But I made a lot of friends, especially the Italian people, because my boss was Italian, and then so many people, I remember at Christmas time, they'd get these great old big barrels of fish in ice, because back then they'd have special occasions at Christmas time, they would eat the fish! Different kinds. There was eels, smelts, octopus, all kinds of fish, anyway.

EH: Is this the Feast of the Seven Fishes?

EB: Huh?

EH: The Feast of the Seven Fishes?

EB: I don't know 'cause I wasn't Catholic, but they were Italians and probably Catholics. Yeah, I don't know.

EH: I know they still celebrate that in Clarksburg.

EB: Oh do they?

EH: Yeah, around Christmas.

EB: Uh-huh, yeah, well we'd have to dig in them barrels and freeze our hands to death getting them fish out to sell 'em, but we always had plenty, and you made lots of good friends. And they've still carried to this day. The same friends that I knew in Boomer are still my friends. Once you have an Italian for a friend, you've got 'em all the time.

EH: (laughs)

EB: No kidding! (laughs) Okay, that's a story of that first job I had. Then I got pregnant and had to quit, but I lost that little boy when I had appendicitis. You wanted to know about me!

EH: Yeah, this is great! I love it.

EB: (laughs) Okay! I had appendicitis and had to have surgery, well I was 4 and a half months with him still inside me. But I kept him for about a week after that I had my surgery, but they finally let me get up and go to the bathroom and then I lost him that evening.

EH: Wow.

EB: But they brought him and showed him to me. He looked just like his daddy--such a handsome man, my husband was. My daughter looks like him (laughs) but anyway, it was maybe 3 or 4 more years later, she was born in 70...

WK: When I was born?

EB: uh-huh

WK: '56, but thank you! (laughs)

EH: (laughs)

EB: 1956 she was born. I was married in '51, she came in '56. Okay, we got it now! (laughs) But I've had a good life, two good marriages. My first husband had too much to drink which it took his body, which he died. He barely turned 45 and passed away. But I've had two good marriages, and I'm living in my second husband's house right now, still in Boomer! But since then I've worked at the College Drug Store two years, 1960-62. I worked at G.C. Murphy's '62-'93 and then retired from G.C. Murphy's. I worked two years before that at Christmastime at G.C. Murphy's and stayed a couple years there. So then I got married again and it was a life of leisure with camping and enjoying life and my husband's family said he married me just to get a driver, 'cause he didn't like to drive! (laughs) But we really...

EH: Do you like to drive?

EB: I like to. Uh-huh. But we'd go camping, we'd go camping mostly at these, what is it Wanda? We didn't go out of West Virginia, just...

EH: Like state parks?

EB: State parks, state parks. My favorite was

WK: Pipestem.

EB: Pipestem. Pipestem.

EH: Pipestem is beautiful, yeah.

EB: Yeah. I loved that. But we've had a good life and then after 14 years, he passed away. So now I'm still living in his house.

EH: Wow.

EB: He left...

EH: When you camped, would you camp in cabins or tents or...

EB: No, we camped in a pulled camper. He would hook it up for me and I'd do all the driving! (laughs)

EH: Sounds like a good deal!

18:42



EB: But he was one of 10 children, which now there's three of 'em left. No, two of 'em left. His youngest sister and his younger brother are left. His sister lives at a place called Marie up close to Talcott. He was raised in Talcott, and then his other, his brother lives in Kentucky.

EH: Okay.

EB: Pipestem. Like I say, and you know, when I married him, they all accepted me, because his wife had been dead a couple years before we started courtin'. We were "courting" back then! (laughs)

EH: (laughs) Right!

EB: I don't know what they call it now, but we were courtin'!

EH: Dating.

EB: But I've had a...no, we were courtin' (laughs). But I've had a good life, I've always been in church, I've always tried to treat people the way I would like to be treated, being kind and smiling. Sometimes you don't have to say anything, just give 'em a smile and a wave. Especially the little babies!

EH: (laughs)

EB: There were so many you know, friends, that I've made through the years, and still yet when people will see me out, they'll see "Well where did I see you before?" I'll say, "G.C. Murphy's," 'cause I worked there longest. They said, "Oh yes," and even the last job I had, people will still say, "Oh I miss you at Rite Aid." So you know, it's been. I don't have the big hat, big head, but I appreciate life. Always been peaceful.

EH: You were working up until last year?

EB: September the 8th I think it was of this last year. I was 88 in May, May 26th of this past year, which would have been 2017.

EH: 2018?

EB: No, 2017.

EH: Oh yeah, 2017.

EB: I worked until September, but I really wasn't able to really work all that much since the first of June, which the doctor put me on some medicine and it almost killed me. It took something out of me and it has taken this long to put it back in! (laughs)

EH: And...oh go ahead.

EB: No, that's all.

EH: What have you done in your retirement? What do you do during your days?

EB: During my day, I go to church two times a week. I visit my daughter when she's home. Go and have a cup of coffee with one of my neighbors, and I relax. My body tells me when to sit down and when I can move.

EH: Do you read books?

EB: No, I don't...

EH: ...or watch TV?

EB: No, I don't do much of either. I watch TV a little bit but not that much. But I enjoy sitting on the front porch. Oh, except the neighbors' cats come over and they want me to let them inside, but I don't.

EH: And you said you taught yourself to play the organ or the piano?

EB: The organ and the piano. I taught myself to play. What it was--we'd visit Poe in Nicholas County and my foster mother had a niece that lived there. And I'd go and pick it just a note or two on one hand and a note or two on the left hand. I didn't ever know the notes on the left hand but I could figure it out to play. And then she had told her husband, she says, "Well when I die, Edie needs to have my organ." Which she gave it to me. He gave it to me when she died. And now that organ is at my daughter's house and I have the piano that my daughter and I both bought. But I'm not real good, but I can play if I can chose my own songs (laughs) especially if they have flats in 'em! (laughs) And if they have sharps in 'em I turn 'em to flats.

EH: (laughs)

EB: So that's about the story of my life!

EH: Nice! Well is there anything that you want to show me that you brought?

EB: You gonna have that on or off?

EH: I was thinking I'd have it on, but...

EB: Well let's see. My father's name, when he died, he married Effie Walkup, she was born in 19 and 13 [1913] and she died in 1921 in childbirth like I say. They had 2 boys. My brother's name was Walter Francis Street, which really took care of me. When he got old enough, he was 16 when my mother died and he took care of us and he went to work in the Alloy Plant and then he thought that he could make more money in the mines, so he quit Alloy Plant and went in the mines, when he did that we had to move out of our company house, again. But these were the new company houses in Boomer. And when my brother Bill was born, his mother died in childbirth. Like I say, her name was Effie Walkup, Effie Walkup Street. Street, I've always been so proud of that Street name.

EH: That's a neat name.

EB: Uh-huh. And so then after my father married my mother in 1925 and she was born April the 23rd, 1895 but she died in December the 14th, 1934. So they were married from 1925-'34. 9 years. That's when Quinny, our good neighbor, took 4 of us in and cared for us. My older sister was 20 years old, my oldest brother was 16, my other brother was 13 and now the second brother, his mother died whenever he was born, his grandmother raised him in Victor out on a farm. She raised him, but he'd always come. He wasn't a real educated boy. Back then it didn't matter that much! You know, really. But he loved us and we loved him. When I was little, he would take a walk down through Boomer all the time, and I'd hold his hand. We enjoyed life. I've always enjoyed life.

Now from my daddy's being born, was my sister Ruth, she was born in June of '26. 1926. And I was born May '26, 1929. Okay? My mother had a daughter that was born before they married my mother and daddy. Okay, her name was Marcie May Williams and she was married then to Frank Beckner. My brother's children is Walter Francis Street II after his daddy, which is my daddy. We called him Frankie. He passed away in 9/3/92. My other nephew, my brother's boy, James Randall Street, he was born...when was he born? March maybe? I don't know, but he lives in Virginia, but he comes to see me when he can. They had 1 daughter, her name was Sue and she was a lawyer. She lives in Tennessee.

26:58

My brother's wife was named Donna Persinger Street. She was born in 1927 and died in 1992. Very good lady. And the one that raised me, Quindora Burdette, she was born in 1886-1/9/78.

EH: Nice.

WK: Can you tell her a little bit about whenever your daddy got sick?

EB: I did already.

EH: Yeah.

EB: I did already. He didn't live no time. (shuffles through papers) My grandson says he wants me to write the story of my life so I had started it maybe 10 years ago. (Reading) Story of Edie. But that's too long to even think about on here.

EH: That's okay. You gave me most of it, but if there's anything here that you haven't...

EB: Well let's see.

EH: ...talked about.

EB: The day of my birth, okay. We had a midwife that delivered me. My father had gone to decorate graves because it was the end of May. They called it Armistice Day back then. And someone had told him "You better come home, your wife's about to deliver!" Sure enough, it was me!

EH: (laughs)

EB: A midwife was who I had. Bertha Backus was her name. I remember being told when I had whooping cough, that I had lost my breath, and the next door neighbor, my mother passed me over to her, across the fence, and she got me back alive.

EH: Wow.

EB: From whooping cough. Her name was Amy Neil (sp?) which she moved to Boomer as well.

EH: What did she do, CPR?

EB: I don't know. Just maybe shook me or something, I don't know! I was about 8 months old then.

29:14

We lived on Riverfront Rd. in Jodie, I know that, but I don't know what house. There was a water pump close by but it wasn't in our yard. Everybody got their water from this water pump. Now back in Jodie, they didn't have a road across the river. You had to ford the river, but it wasn't that deep.

EH: Just drive through it?

EB: Just drive through it, which we got stuck one time. But we finally got it started! (laughs) I don't know if I've told you this or not. I was almost 1-year-old when we moved to Boomer when they were building a tunnel through the mountains, above Gauley Bridge and my dad got a job there. (reading) As was told to me, men came from all over for work, especially from the South. But none knew of the danger that lay ahead for them. The men worked very long hours in the rock dust of the tunnel and some soon came down with silicosis. Most died terrible deaths and their lungs becoming solid like marble--I think I've told you that also.

EH: Mmhm.

EB: Including my father's. Okay I did put this in here. This is hearsay, but the big wheels, I called 'em, the big wheels would come to our house wanting us to move for we could not pay the rent. I don't know how much rent we paid, but probably it was just a little bit of nothing, but you didn't have anything after your parents died!

EH: Right.

EB: Quinny chased 'em off and told them not to come back. My dad died sometime soon after with Quinny holding his hands--I already told you that. Back then you could not afford oxygen, so he suffocated until death. He was 46 years old, October the 6th, 1886-October the 12th, 1932. I was 3 years old by that time--I've told you that also. After his death, the state was to give us a casket but when Quinny's brothers saw the cheap almost pasteboard casket, they said, "Take him out of there." And they paid for him a casket. Now this was at B.C. Hooper's Funeral Home in Montgomery. He was buried in Walker Cemetery at Ramsey beside his first wife, Brub and Bill's mom. Wasn't that nice of my mom?

EH: (laughs)

32:45

EB: Okay, Bill then when my daddy's first wife died, my, wasn't mine, it was my brother's grandma, their mother's mother raised Bill. Her name was Jane Kincaid Walkup. When Bill was young, he lost his thumb and forefinger on the right hand in a cane mill accident.

EH: In a what mill?

EB: Cane mill accident.

EH: Oh okay, uh-huh. Like sorghum?

EB: Probably, probably. Uh-huh. He was raised on a farm and was backward about lots of things, but was such a good boy and brother. He was killed in a roof fall in a mine at Tupper's Creek when he was 27. He was engaged to this girl and they were gonna get married after his grandmother who raised him died. But in the meantime, he died too.

EH: Wow.

WK: And she never married.

EB: She never did get married and she passed away 2 or 3 years ago. Probably 1915. No, 2015! Beg your pardon! Her name was Opal Edens. She never did marry. Oh, here's something I want to tell you about, because it's important to me in life. I remember when I was about 19 years old, I had this same dream over and over. And it worried me so. My dream was always the same. I was leaning over Sam Dalporto's delivery truck where I worked, crying so hard and didn't know why and would wake up with so many tears streaming down my face. Then my dream came true for when Brub told me, when Brub called me out front of the store where I worked, Sam Dalporto's grocery store, he told me Bill had been in a mine accident and I leaned over the same truck and cried. My dream came to life and I knew it immediately. Also 2 weeks before, Bill was killed, my 2 brothers, my sister, and I had gone to the country cemetery to decorate my dad's graves and their mother's graves. So as we were climbing the mountain, there was an old dead tree nearby the path and Bill told us to go by real quiet so that the tree wouldn't fall on us. And would you believe, 2 weeks later, when we were carrying him up (turns page) this same hill to bury him, the tree was in the path and we had to step over it with the casket. I picked up a little piece of that tree and still have it.

EH: Wow.

EB: Being killed by a roof fall in the mines, the funeral home wanted a picture of him so they could make it look like him--and they did a fine job, but at the cemetery it looked like a movie star instead of him, for we had a lot of rough roads to go over to the cemetery. He has a new face now in Heaven, right? Right.

36:59

We're just on page 6 and we've got about 20 pages!

EH: Well you don't have to read all of it, but you know if there's some things...

EB: No, no, no.

EH: You can just skim it or just say things you remember.

EB: When my mother was dying in Montgomery hospital, they let us come and see her and she says, and so she called me her little brown-eyed baby. She died soon afterwards. Today they have good medicines but back then the doctors could do nothing. She had bought me a little doll for Christmas and I kept it for years, but it was rubber and fell apart.

Family means so much and we are always there for each other. Thinking of my dad and mother, I didn't remember them, but they tell me I was a daddy's girl. (turns page) Okay I told you about working.

EH: Mmhm.

EB: (turns page) Well that's about all of the old times.

EH: Okay. Is there anything else you'd like to add?

EB: Life has been good. Life has been good all these years. And the Lord has provided for every need. Not just our needs, but extras. Never been rich, but we don't need rich--what is rich? There's rich. (points to daughter, laughs)

EH: (laughs) Thank you so much!

EB: Okay.

EH: You're a good writer!

EB: Not really.

EH: You should write the rest of that story!

40:12

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END OF INTERVIEW