

Northwest Arkansas Oral History Project
 Billie Sue Graham Hankins Interview Abstract
 October 24, 2019

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| Interviewee | Billie Sue Graham Hankins |
| Year of birth | 1947 |
| Place of birth | Bentonville, Benton County, Arkansas |
| Interviewer | Barbara Knotts |
| Interview date | 2019-10-24 |
| Interview location | Rogers Historical Museum; Rogers, Benton County, Arkansas |
| Keywords | <p>Hankins, Billie Sue Graham Hankins, Mitchell Hough, Beth Hough, Cass Lockhart, Tracy Pitts, Tommy Swearingen, David Avoca, Benton County, Arkansas Pea Ridge, Benton County, Arkansas Rogers, Benton County, Arkansas Daisy Company; Rogers, Benton County, Arkansas Devil's Den State Park; West Fork, Washington County, Arkansas Lake Atalanta; Rogers, Benton County, Arkansas Rogers Athletic Hall of Fame; Rogers, Benton County, Arkansas Beaver Lake Business Cherokee Nation Dawes Rolls Education Medical care Native Americans Recreation Schools Small town life Southwestern Electric Power Company (SWEPCO) Sports Water supply World War II</p> |
| Description | <p>This interview with Billie Sue Graham Hankins pays tribute to members of her family, life-long friends, and hometown of Rogers. Her stories capture the impact and spirit of each. Hankins credits her family with helping her become the person she is today. Several family members, including her beloved Granny, have Cherokee blood and are listed on Dawes and Miller Rolls. Granny shared stories of her life in the Elkhorn Tavern area and taught Hankins the values of kindness and appreciation. Hankins shares stories of the ways both parents influenced her: father with his strength to make life-style</p> |

changes for his family; mother for her work ethic, artistic talents, and being named a 'smartie'. Stories of two other family members are: of Uncle Tommy's contributions to the development of Devil's Den State Park, along with his service and death in World War II; and of her paternal grandmother, Uncle Tommy's mother, who had to cope with the loss of one son while preparing to send another to war.

Hankins attended school in Rogers and later worked as staff to principals throughout the Rogers School District. The school buildings have increased and educational techniques changed, but the spirit continues. Hankins remembers taking her sister with her to class at Central Ward School, the support of teachers, playing sports, homecoming activities, and participating in a work-study program at the Daisy Company when she was a high school senior. Several stories talk of fun during her school years: trading baseball cards with friend, David Swearingen; hanging out at the Jan-Lin Drive-In or Lake Atalanta; and driving her GTO over the White River bridge (yes, the authorities knew about this).

Hankins loves the Rogers she grew up in, calling it 'magic'. The family moved to Rogers when she was around three. Those were the days of Dr. Pepper from the drug store fountain; hearing the trains approaching; the demolition of the depot; walking by the dairies, potato chip, and coca cola plants; waiting for the brown paper to be taken off the car dealership's window to reveal the new models; and sleeping at Granny's.

Hankins is proud of the heritage and growth of Rogers and surrounding Northwest Arkansas communities. When Hankins, a premature baby, was born in 1947, the hospital in Bentonville was the nearest one to Avoca where her family lived. Since that time the area has become the home to good local medical care. She shares the story of Tracy Lockhart, the Avoca resident who sold vegetables in Rogers. When Rogers was building a new hospital, he was one of the first to make a donation. As Hankins says, "proving you are never too poor to make a difference".

Times changed as the community grew. Following high school graduation, Hankins worked five years for the Daisy Company. It had recently moved to Rogers from Michigan. She worked in the stenographer pool, on the switchboard and telegraph, and participated on their shooting team. Hankins saw first-hand how the company became an important part of the community. Then there was the creation of Beaver Lake. Hankins watched as the waters of Beaver Lake covered up land where she and the family camped. But she recognizes the gains it brought to Northwest Arkansas with increased access to a quality water supply.

Long interested in sports, Hankins and her husband, Mitchell, are Rogers Athletic Hall of Fame inductees. They have a special interest in, and have extensively researched, the 1936 Rogers High School football team. It was a team that 'taught each other', played in leather helmets, and went on to 'do a lot with

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| | <p>their lives.’ Another family story tells that her husband’s aunt while a child designed the logo for the Rogers’s Mountaineers (Mounties), pipe and gun included.</p> <p>Married for fifty-two years, Mitchell and Billie Sue went to high school together. Today they live on a farm. Mitchel retired from the Southwestern Electric Power Company (SWEPCO). They have one daughter and two granddaughters. Not surprising, all call the Rogers/Northwest Arkansas area home.</p> |
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| Interview sidebar | <p>Hankins remembers working at the Daisy Company, “The Houghs [Daisy president and wife] were Republican, friends of Rockefeller. So when we went to work we had pins...if caught not wearing them, Mr. Hough would say ‘did you forget your pin’...But my grandmother was a Democrat. So when I went home for lunch she’d say ‘you need to take that Republican pin off until we get done eating.’” [00:30:02]</p> |