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Interview

with

KAY A. FAULKNER

July 1, 1995

by Patrick Huber

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The Southern Oral History Program  
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START OF TAPE 1, SIDE A

KAY A. FAULKNER  
JULY 1, 1995

PATRICK HUBER: The following is an interview by Patrick Huber with Kay Faulkner at the Haw River Municipal Park in Haw River, North Carolina, on July 1, 1995. This interview is being conducted for The Southern Oral History Program and is part of its Oral History of the White Furniture Company of Mebane Project.

I thought we'd start the interview today, Kay, by having you tell us when and where you were born and a little bit about what your folks did for a living and any brothers and sisters if you had them.

KAY FAULKNER: Okay. I was born here in Alamance County many years ago. [laughter] I have two brothers, and my parents were both basically textile workers.

PH: Where did they work?

KF: My father worked up until the last ten years, I guess-- Well, I've forgotten the name of the company because it happened back when the textile--everything in textiles started closing down in North Carolina. He had been in textiles just about practically all of his working life so he had to do a change and started working with A.O. Smith. So it was out of textiles into motor parts.

And my mother, until she became disabled, she did hosiery type work with companies.

PH: So you born in or near Haw River?

KF: At Burlington.

PH: Burlington, okay.

KF: Yeah.

PH: And how was it that you came to work at White's?

KF: My aunt, which is Sue Isley, called me and told me there was an opening. I was in the middle of a job at the moment so I went an applied and after three interviews I was hired.

PH: Who did you speak to there when you went?

KF: Donna Wilson and Mike-- I've forgotten his last name. He was the controller over Hickory-White at Mebane at the time.

PH: And he's the one that hired you?

KF: Uh, huh.

PH: Where had you been working?

KF: I was working with a temporary agency at the time. I was just between jobs looking for a full-time job when they called. I had been mostly mill work up until then and had started just branching out into secretarial fields.

PH: Do you remember what your first day was like there?

KF: The first few weeks I remember. [laughter] Very tense, a whole lot going on, very active. It was very frustrating. If it hadn't been for a few of the people I don't know if I would have lasted six months. But it turned out to be a pretty good company considering the people that I worked for. The people I worked for was great. I loved those people at White. It was like a family atmosphere, really.

PH: What was frustrating about the job?

KF: Well, you know, I was just starting out in clerical work so it was very frustrating when-- Well, okay, you said I could be completely honest.

PH: Uh, huh.

KF: My boss was a perfectionist so when you made that mistake that's what made it very frustrating. She was just constantly on your back which when I look at it now she had every right to be, but I didn't understand that at the time.

PH: So she would come down hard on you if something wasn't done to her--?

KF: Yeah, if it wasn't done to her specifications it had to be redone and redone and redone. She was like that the whole time I was there. And she is a perfectionist so, you know, you get that from people that are.

I'm not a perfectionist. [laughter] I think life should be enjoyed. I don't think you should worry about minor details, but she was one to worry about minor details. She was an accountant.

PH: I see.

KF: So you get down to the penny or half penny when you are in that position.

PH: They're like that, aren't they?

KF: Uh, huh.

PH: So could you describe a little bit about like what your job was there, what you did?

KF: I started out as receptionist, accounts payable clerk, and I ended up assistant purchasing working with Fletcher Holmes. That's basically it. I paid the bills and ended up purchasing the parts.

PH: When did you start there?

KF: In '87, August of '87.

PH: August of '87?

KF: Uh, huh.

PH: And then when did you start working directly for--?

KF: For Fletcher?

PH: Working for Fletcher.

KF: About a year and a half later.

PH: And how was that?

KF: I loved Fletcher. When I switched to Fletcher it was like a big relief because he's so easy-going. He was real easy-going. And, you know, you did your job and that's

all you were supposed to do as far as Fletcher was concerned. We got it done and that's, you know, that was good.

PH: So you went from working for this perfectionist to working for Fletcher?

KF: Uh, huh.

PH: I see.

KF: I don't know if you've talked to him or not.

PH: I think that we've tried to. I don't think that he wanted to do an interview.

KF: Oh, really?

PH: For whatever reason.

KF: He's a good man. He really was a good boss, too.

PH: You mentioned earlier that you didn't think you would have lasted six months if it hadn't been for the people there. What sort of things did they do that helped to ease you into the job?

KF: Just coming by and giving you a pat on the back. Now, these were people out in the plant or people that did not work for this person, you know, they would say, "Just hang in there." That's what got you through the day a lot of times. [laughter]

PH: What were some of the names of the other people who worked there in the office when you were there?

KF: Ellen Bowman, she worked closely with me. The two of us were in the same office. Cindy Cook, which she lasted--. When they moved the corporate office to High Point she was still there. And that was basically the office except for Janet and, let's see, there was Debbie Culberson that worked there until about a year before they closed down. Then there was Patricia. I've forgotten her last name, too. And Sue and Shirley, and Millie and Becky worked upstairs in sales--marketing--until--. They all switched to corporate office.

PH: What sort of relationship did you have with those people who worked in the office?

KF: Basically, a pretty good one. I think Ellen and I were more alike, you know. The rest of them were there when Mr. White came, so Ellen and I were really the only two that were hired after the fact except for there was one other girl, Carol, but I can't remember what her last name is. And that was basically it. People that got in at White's stayed there for a long time up until Hickory took over, from what I understood.

PH: And do you know why that was?

KF: Not really, except for maybe the fact that Mr. White did treat them better. I don't know. Margaret, I think, made the comment one time that Mr. White chose-- It was like he hand-picked. He did a very thorough background check on anyone that came in, and I think that Hickory was maybe not quite as hand-picking as Mr. White was. That might have made the difference.

PH: Did some of the older office workers who had been there under White's did they say something to that effect to you?

KF: Um, not really, you know, Becky, Millie and Shirley--they're all about the same age--and they had been there forever, and my aunt Sue, she came straight out of business college into Mr. White's. And that just seemed like that was the way it was there, you know, and the older office hands that had been there retired with White. It just seemed like it was a common thing. But that might be, too, because times are changing so much, also. You don't see people staying with companies until retirement. It might have been the way the times were.

PH: Did the older office help who had worked under White's did they made comparisons between working for Mr. White and working for Hickory?

KF: Yeah, they didn't talk a whole lot about it, but, you know, you think whenever another company steps in like that I think you have job security problems, also, especially when they went in and--now, I wasn't here when this went on either so I might be talking about something I don't really know about--but from what I understood they did a lot of cleaning up when Hickory-White took over.

PH: Cleaning up meaning?

KF: Getting rid of a lot of personnel that had been there for a long time.

PH: You mean, in the office and in the--?

KF: Well, basically, out in the plant; supervisors and, yeah, in the office, come to think about it. Yeah.

PH: And that left a bad impression on some of the ones who made the cuts?

KF: Uh, huh, yeah. And, you know, I think there was a lot of--what I understood was Hickory made a lot of promises that they didn't keep to begin with.

PH: Uh, huh. Do you have any examples of that?

KF: Um, not really, and like I say, you know, I'm just repeating what I've heard. I don't know for a fact. I'd be a bad person to quote on that, I think.

PH: What did you think about Hickory, about the company? How were you treated?

KF: I was treated fine. [pause] I was treated fine, you know, I had a problem with, and I know this was none of my business or anything, but I thought it was lousy that they gave the supervisors a bonus at Christmas or whenever, and the people that really did the work didn't. You know, the people out in the plant did not get a bonus which from what I understood [from] Mr. White [they] got a bonus. I thought that was a lousy deal, you know, because some of the supervisors--. Well, there were a few of the supervisors that did share their bonus with their employees.

PH: When was that going on?

KF: That was during the whole time that I was there. I know that the supervisors once a year got a big bonus. Now, I don't know whether it was at Christmas, but it seems like it was probably sometime after Christmas they got a bonus. If things were going good they got a good hefty bonus. And, you know, I know there was one, maybe two, that shared their bonus with their employees.

PH: Do you know who they were?

KF: Not off hand. I can't remember, but I thought that was very nice that they did that considering that they were the ones that did the work.

PH: Did the office staff get bonuses?

KF: No, just the supervisors.

PH: From the time that you came there to the end you never--?

KF: No, I never got a bonus, yeah. And, you know, I wasn't saying that because I didn't, because to me if you could go out there in that plant even on a day like today and today's a nice day, and sweat was rolling off of those people and they were standing in there working. I remember days that it was a hundred degrees outside in the shade and they were out there working which they made allowances for, come in early and get off early on days like that. I remember them doing that. I think things kind of improved a little bit when Robin Hart took over as president of the Mebane plant.

PH: From Richard Hinkle?

KF: Yeah, but, and from what I understand a lot of people respected Richard, and Richard did make the company grow.

PH: What sort of improvements did you see when Robin Hart took over?

KF: Human, human-wise, you know, I think that's what it is. I hadn't even thought about this until you started, [laughter] but I think human-wise Robin Hart was a more human, more people person than Richard was. While Richard was a driving, you know, let's get it done type person.

PH: Was Robin Hart, you think, friendlier?

KF: Uh, huh. He was just more down to earth and more able to get his point across with the people. More likable, yeah, he was just more human.

PH: Did that have a big effect on like the way that you did your work or the way that the office, the atmosphere in the office?

KF: No, Richard never bothered any of us either. It was just that, you know, Richard would come in and you wouldn't even hardly know he was there because he was

busy giving his orders somewhere else, where Robin Hart would come in and set down and talk to you and ask how you and your family were doing or whatever. That's just a basic personality difference.

PH: Do you know where he came from?

KF: Robin?

PH: Yeah.

KF: He came from--if I'm not mistaken--a plant in Tennessee, and I have forgotten the name of it. Silver something. Don McCall has probably told you because I know that Bill interviewed him.

PH: Uh, huh, he did. Do you know what time that Robin Hart came in?

KF: [pause] Was it the last two years? Not really, I can't remember.

PH: Do you think it was sometime in the 90s?

KF: Uh, huh, yeah. Definitely.

PH: What was he like as a person?

KF: Robin?

PH: Uh, huh.

KF: Like a granddaddy.

PH: Was he that old?

KF: Basically, he was probably in his late fifties. But he was like everybody's daddy or granddaddy. That type of person.

PH: And Richard Hinkle, what was he like?

KF: Very business.

PH: Uh, huh.

KF: You know, just the exact opposite of what Robin was. It was like the difference of I think of Richard as Mr. Hinkle and Robin as Robin, you know, no Mr. Hart behind that. You felt very comfortable calling him by his first name or I did, anyway.

PH: Did people seem to get along with both of those men?

KF: Yeah, I think there was a lot of people that didn't think he knew as much about what he was doing as Richard did, because Richard was just one of those to push you to get you going. And there's even some that think that he [Robin] might have been placed there to bring the place down anyway, you know, he was brought in just for that purpose and, he could have been. Who knows what goes on at corporate and above.

PH: Those were rumors or speculations that came up after the plant closed everywhere?

KF: Well, the last two years, once they brought Robin in a lot of people speculated from that moment on of White's future was going to be. And a lot of people that had come there from other plants that had been through shut-downs and stuff just kept comparing, "This place is going to go." That's the way it was for the last two years, I know, of being there. Because if you look back now all the signs were there. And all the talk was there. It was just nobody ever said anything until that last sixty or ninety days or whatever, you know.

PH: So in the last two years are you talking about supervisors who had come in who had been at plants that had closed down?

KF: Uh, huh, yeah. Supervisors, also some of the men out on the floor. So, you know, you can look back and tell.

PH: What did you think of the speculations or the rumors? Did you have an opinion at the time?

KF: Well, yeah, I thought the same thing, too. I don't know why. They started paying their bills late, but from what I understand Hickory has always done that, but still, you know, White had the reputation of paying their bills ahead of time. You know, if they didn't pay them on time they paid them ahead. That was White's way of doing things and whenever they switched from White's way of doing things to Hickory's way, you know, it kind of makes you think.

There was a lot of-- Well, they did spend a lot of money there toward the end.

PH: On?

KF: Renovation type things. Brand new set of kilns sitting out there. That type of thing that makes you think, you know, you got to improve these to make this place sellable even though it didn't make it.

PH: Did you see any other signs there that might have started rumors?

KF: I don't know whether out in the plant they got any word from Hickory or not. You know, that might have started some of the rumors. I know when I'd go out in the plant for some reason or another one of the guys or somebody would stop me and say they'd heard, but there was nothing ever definite. I think the bills being paid was the only thing that made me question whether or not we were going to be there for a while, but I went ahead and bought my car anyway so evidently I didn't think it was to sure of a deal.  
[laughter]

PH: [laughter] Were there, I guess, older office staff who where there under White's that told you that that's the way that White's had always paid their bills ahead of time?

KF: Yeah. Donna, she kept saying and it infuriated her because she's the accountant and she could not stand, she said, "You know, if these were our bills at home we wouldn't pay them like this. I don't know what makes them think that they can get by with it," but they did. Companies aren't going to tell them they can't have something. There were a few that got bold enough, but they paid them and that was it.

PH: Who would that word come down from?

KF: We always had to get in touch with Mike to make sure that we could pay out something. Well, there at the end, too, all the checks were printed from corporate office anyway. It's just that Ellen did all the balancing of the White's, is what it came down to.

PH: You talked about seeing or going out in the plant occasionally, is that something that you would do on a regular basis, say, your job would take you out in the plant?

KF: Yeah, because I worked with Fletcher, and I would have to go out there for one reason or other. I got to the stock room quite a bit. And John Richards, you know, he would always say something about how much difference it was, him and Robert Riley. They were always talking about how much difference there was between White and Hickory, you know, because they had worked for Mr. White for years.

PH: Did you meet other people or did you know people by name when you walked through?

KF: I knew a lot of them just by face. I knew a lot of them by name.

PH: But were those two sort of different groups in terms of when people socialized together the plant employees, the people in different departments and then the office?

KF: Well, I never socialized a whole lot either way. At the time my kids were young, and I had a whole lot going on anyway. Yeah, I guess it was a whole lot, but I don't guess that's any different than any other place from what I see now, you know, it's basically that same way everywhere. I don't know how it was when Mr. White was there.

PH: The people in the office would they socialize together inside or outside of work?

KF: Yeah. The people in the office, they occasionally just during special times they would go out and eat like Christmas or we tried to go to lunch on someone's birthday. That kind of thing, but as far as going out after work, I think probably Cindy and Patricia were the only two that did that because they had been working at White's and they were about the same age. And they were very good friends. That's the only reason I think they would have.

PH: So what other sort of things? You would celebrate birthdays in the office?

KF: Uh, huh. Christmas. That's basically it. Showers, but that was very occasional.

PH: Did any women have children while you were there in the office?

KF: Patricia. She was the only one.

PH: What was your job like on a day-to-day basis? What would you do say in a regular day?

KF: Which one, the purchasing or the--?

PH: The purchasing.

KF: I would be on the phone about half the day and try to track down stuff that was suppose to come in, if it didn't come in. Gosh, that's been a while. What else?

PH: You mean like lumber that didn't come in on time?

KF: I didn't handle the lumber. Most of what I handled was like little parts. I handled the office supplies and if Fletcher wasn't there then I would track down the bigger parts, but Fletcher was just about always there. I did a lot of running for him, you know, like if he needed something from Blue Ridge or something then I would get the truck and go or the van and go there and pick something up. Or I did take stuff to some of our carvers occasionally.

PH: Where were they at, the carvers?

KF: Commercial Carving in--? Is it Thomasville?

PH: Is it Thomasville?

KF: On the other side of High Point. I can't remember. I told you my memory is bad. I would help Ellen balance the sheets and help her with the phones at times. Ellen and I worked a lot together once everyone else moved out. We worked a whole lot together.

PH: What do you mean once everybody else moved out?

KF: Well, there was Don and Karen were there. It was like--. That department was kind of--even though we were in the same office--that department was kind of split. Like I was over here to the corner, but once Don and Karen left and Ellen and I were the only ones in that office then we tried to help each other get our work done.

PH: Were those others transferred up to Hickory?

KF: Uh, huh, they sure were.

PH: And how many did that leave then there at Mebane office?

KF: Cindy and Janet and Ellen and I. That's basically it. And there was Debbie Culberson. She worked with Janet. That was it for the office staff.

PH: Was that a big change over when--?

KF: Not really because the other girls were sales related.

PH: I see.

KF: Cindy was but then she switched to another job. So she stayed at White instead of moving to High Point which was better for her with the kids anyway.

PH: You described your job a little bit. What sort of skills do you think it took to do your job or be good at your job?

KF: I guess people oriented, you know, because I had to deal with the vendors quite a bit and the people out in the plant I was involved with them a little bit more than what I was when I was accounts payable. That's basically all the skills you really had to have, I think.

PH: Did you like your job?

KF: Oh, yeah. I really did.

PH: What was it about it that you enjoyed?

KF: Well, like I said, you know, Fletcher was so easy-going. It was just so much less tension working for him than it was working in the accounting department. Even though I see now that I really learned more from the accounting department because the purchasing department was so easy-going. You basically had to be a people person which is more-- I sound like I'm rambling.

PH: Were there aspects of the job that were frustrating or that you didn't like?

KF: [pause] I know there's something, but I just can't think of anything right now.

[pause] Maybe I wanted to learn more, but I couldn't.

PH: Why was that?

KF: I think because Fletcher knew the job so well, and he was there all the time that you didn't have the opportunity to learn more about the lumber or the veneer or whatever that he really handled a lot of. You know, that basically that was his. I think that was probably the most frustrating.

PH: So were you salaried?

KF: No.

PH: Or were you--?

KF: I was what they called salaried, but I still got paid overtime, and I got paid weekly instead of monthly even though I was considered salaried. I think they called it salaried exempt.

PH: Salaried exempt?

KF: I've forgotten what the word is for it. That might be the wrong phrase. But it was a special category, I guess.

PH: Was there some type of--? Was there like a pecking order in the office among the staff who had been there the longest?

KF: I don't think so. I think pretty much it was--. I don't see a pecking order. I don't.

PH: How old was the oldest person who worked in the office and how young was the youngest?

KF: I think Becky was the oldest, and she retired about the time they made the change. No, she retired after they made the change to corporate office in High Point because she rode up there with them for a few months or so; six months. And Patricia was the youngest. And she was in her early twenties, I think, when I started there.

PH: I was going to ask you about how you all got along there in the office.

KF: We got along fine. But like I said, you know, it was really not much socializing. So it was business, you know. I don't know what to say about that.

PH: Would you have rather that it had been a little less business-like and maybe more socializing?

KF: Well, that was the first place I had worked at that the girls didn't go out, but yet, when they went out I couldn't go so, you know, that's kind of saying no, but yes. I don't know.

PH: All the places that you had worked at before you had always--

KF: Yeah, there was always a big gang of us that went out. I don't know, maybe because this was the first clerical job I had had maybe I kind of felt out of place, and maybe because I was the first one that was not a chosen White--

PH: Oh, you were the first one?

KF: Uh, huh, well, I think there was a girl before me and well, as a matter of fact, there was two there. The girl that I took her place she was not, and then the girl that I worked with when I first come there, Roxanne, she was not. But I think, you know-- Well, I think, even Roxanne felt that way, that we were not so much of a group as the what?

PH: As the White's.

KF: As the originals, you know.

PH: So that made--

KF: So if anybody hears this interview they'll know who I am. [laughter]

PH: So that made you feel self-conscious, huh, that they were sort of, they were just different?

KF: Yeah, or I was different. Maybe that was-- That's a better word, I was different.

PH: Did you feel like excluded or not part of the gang or--?

KF: Maybe not part, and that could be my fault, also.

PH: Did they give you any reason to--?

KF: No, no, no, not at all. I had a lot of stuff going on in my life about that time, too, you know, there was a lot going on with me so, you know, I see it now as it could have been as much me as them. I felt more at home with the people out in the plant.

PH: Oh, did you?

KF: Yeah. I very much did.

PH: Why was that?

KF: I felt more [pause] what's the word for it? I just felt more at home with those people. I very much did because I came from that background and maybe that was the thing is that I really came from that background and the others didn't, because it looked like basically they came straight to office from business college or whatever. And they had been with Mr. White so long, and the new supervisors that were being brought in I think there was a bond there between, you know, because I have remained friends with a few of those. That might be the difference.

PH: Did you go to business school or did you not?

KF: I had taken one year of computer science over at ACC [Alamance Community College], but that was the extent of my background on that. Since then I've gone back and gotten my business computer applied science degree when I left White's.

PH: But all the other office staff--?

KF: Uh, huh, they pretty much had a background, yeah, so maybe that's the reason I felt inferior to them.

PH: Uh, huh. Did you all have any rules within the office or--?

KF: By rules?

PH: Couldn't smoke in there or--?

KF: No, everybody smoked in there. At the time I was a smoker and I was told I could smoke in there, but that was just not my, you know--. I just didn't like to smoke at my desk.

PH: People ate at their desk and that sort of thing?

KF: Yeah, it was very relaxed as far as stuff like that, yeah, it was relaxed. I think they would come down on the receptionists harder as far as her sitting there eating because I think I remember them getting on to Ellen a couple of times about having food or something at her desk, but other than that it wasn't that way.

PH: You all were back behind the receptionist in a different part of the office?

KF: Ellen and I sort of sat side by side, but she was directly in front of the door in front of the window so that made her more seeable.

PH: Oh, I see. In the final months that the plant was running you talked earlier about those rumors that it was going to close down did those sort of pick up or increase?

KF: Uh, huh, a whole lot, a whole lot. And, you know, I guess the people in the plant saw it more clearly. I can't remember if there was a change that, you know, maybe they switched something. It seems like they did, but I can't remember what it was, but it seems like there was a big change as far as they took something away from us and took it to the Hickory plant and that really caused a lot of stir. And from there it just, you know-- . Which when we went into that meeting that morning it was a shock to all of us. I guess, you know, you've been speculating all these times but you don't want to say it's absolutely true until they drop the bomb.

PH: What do you remember about the meeting?

KF: I remember Cindy getting up and starting to cry, that she just couldn't handle it. She was one--. And I remember seeing a lot of mouths just drop open. And I remember Robin looking like it was the hardest thing he had ever had to do. That's basically it.

PH: Was he the one that made the announcement?

KF: I can't remember if he made the announcement or if--what's his name from corporate office--Randy--.

PH: Austin?

KF: Yeah, I think he was the one that made the announcement.

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PH: And so office, supervisors, and everybody that worked in the entire plant were called together?

KF: They called so many of us in at one time. I think the office and the supervisors were called in on the meeting that I was in, and I think they did part of the department and then the other part. I think that's how they--. That's kind of blurry, too.

PH: So it was a much smaller group?

KF: Yeah, it was like a conference room full.

PH: Do you remember anything else about the announcement? What was your response to it?

KF: I was sad because there were so many people there that I knew I'd miss, and I knew there was basically a whole lot of them that I would never see again.

PH: Uh, huh.

KF: And, you know, cause you usually only make just a few friends that you keep in contact with in something like that. I was sad because of all those men and women that had been there for years and years and knowing how it is around in this area for people that after they hit up in their ages to get a job. But Cindy, in our little area, took it harder than anyone else, because she had been there so much longer. She was the White gang once.

PH: Were you angry or upset or mad?

KF: No, because I always feel like everything happens for the best. It hurt, you know, and I was sad, but I'd made it through a lot worse, I think. You know, I knew everything was going to be all right, but, you know, you wonder about some of those other people out in the plant. And then you had to go in every morning after that and look at those faces and some of them wondering, "Well, where am I going to go?" The older employees is what bothered me the most, the ones that weren't quite old enough for retirement.

PH: Like Robert Riley?

KF: Like Robert, but Robert, see, he is so outgoing and outspoken and everything and I didn't worry so much about him as some of them on the sanding line. There's one that I don't his name but I would go and you could just tell he was so sad. He'd just sit there, and he'd talk about, you know, how things were going to change. I mean, he'd been coming there for what, thirty or forty years, coming in there everyday, day after day. I don't guess the guy probably even missed a handful of days the whole time he was there. And then he came back after they laid him off, and he was talking about how he was cleaning the house while his wife worked. But he seemed to be settling in, you know, to a new routine.

PH: Do you remember how you told members of your family or people that you were close to?

KF: Not, really. I remember--. That's been, what, two years ago. I think I told Ashley and Blake that we'd just have to be tighter with our money for a while. And I had tried to find a job, and it was--at that time--it was difficult to find a job especially making the money that I made even though I didn't make a whole lot, but they still don't want to start you off at that much. I couldn't afford to take a pay cut at the time. That was my biggest problem.

PH: Uh, huh. When did you start looking for a job?

KF: As soon as they told us that the plant was closing down I started getting my resume together and started sending out feelers for jobs. Fletcher was real good about it. He would talk to different one's and put you on--. He helped Ellen and I a whole lot as far as filling out--oh, shoot, I can't even think of what I want to say--giving us references and helping us find something. He did a really good job. I think he did as much as he could on that. He let us go anytime we needed to go on an interview or--.

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A

START OF TAPE 1, SIDE B

KAY A. FAULKNER

JULY 1, 1995

PH: You were saying about Fletcher that he let you go on--.

KF: Yeah, he just--. Anytime that we felt like we needed to go on an interview or anything he was, "Go on." And that's all we had to do was say, "We got."

PH: Did you have any luck early on?

KF: I had--. Early on, not a whole lot. You know, I think things were a little down in this area anyway at that time. What I did get didn't pay but five dollars an hour or five-fifty an hour. I just couldn't afford to take that much of a cut, and I felt like I could get something better if I just kept on.

PH: Did you remember the places that you were applying at?

KF: Uh, huh, some of them. I went to quite a few.

PH: What kind of places were they?

KF: Basically the same type of clerical work that I was doing. I tried, at first, to get assistant purchasing and there was nothing out there or they wanted someone with more experience or someone who did more in the purchasing area. I tried data entry but that pay was way too low because I did have an interest in the computer. Everything I looked at just didn't pay enough to make it worth my while to change so I decided to go back to school.

PH: What area were you looking in? Around what towns?

KF: I went as far as Greensboro on one interview. Went to Durham. So I was willing to travel if I had to, but it is just like nothing paid that well.

PH: And so you went back to school?

KF: Uh, huh. I left on the third of February and I think ACC's spring quarter started on the fourth and I was out of doing anything for one day and I said I can't handle this. So I went on back to school.

PH: And did you like that?

KF: Yeah, well, I worked with the school. I worked in the business chair's office part-time. And then I went into the computer lab and worked until I got my degree, so all the experience helped.

PH: How long did that take then?

KF: Two years.

PH: Did Hickory pay for any of your schooling?

KF: They said they paid for one quarter, but I'm not too sure that they paid for one quarter [laughter] because it seems like to me the Employment Security Commission picked up all my quarters.

PH: All of them, huh? That was one thing that Hickory was at least saying whenever the plant was closing that they were going to--?

KF: There was a few of us that took the opportunity, and I know of one other guy that the two of us graduated at the same time, got our degree at the same time. And from what I understand he had a good bite at a job, too, when he left. You know, I've heard of a lot of improvements in situations since, so good comes out of everything.

PH: And that's the way you look at it?

KF: That's the way I look at it. There's always something good come out of everything. There's a reason for it. You might not see it right then but there is. [laughter]

PH: What sort of work are you doing now?

KF: I am a data processing assistant at Tex-Fi, Kingstree.

PH: Tex-File?

KF: Tex-Fi.

PH: I see, and how do you like that?

KF: I like it. I hadn't been there but a little over a month now so I'm still learning my job, and I'm making more money so that makes a big difference and better benefits.

PH: Is it closer?

KF: I can get out of my bed at quarter till seven and be at work at eight o'clock.

[laughter]

PH: Oh, wow!

KF: [laughter] So that makes a big difference, too, even though White's wasn't far away either.

PH: What was Hickory's benefits like?

KF: They had pretty good benefits. [pause] As far as vacation time and holidays they had good benefits, but their insurance was nothing more than any of the others. From what I understand they've changed since there are at corporate now, you know, since White's closed down they've done quite a bit of re-figuring on their benefits. But, you know, there was a lot of room for improvement, but it was okay.

PH: Did you all get a paid vacation?

KF: Uh, huh.

PH: Did you?

KF: Uh, huh.

PH: How long?

KF: After a year, two weeks, you know, so that wasn't bad.

PH: Oh, okay. But how else does the new job compare to working at Hickory?

KF: How does it compare?

PH: Uh, huh.

KF: Everything is different.

PH: Is it?

KF: Yeah. I guess you could say basically, you know, everything is different. I can't see any comparison.

PH: You sound like you like your new job maybe better.

KF: I probably will after I learn because basically this is--. Even before I came to White's this is what I wanted to do but because of reasons beyond my control I couldn't do it at the time.

PH: Do you still see any of the other women who worked in the office?

KF: The only one--woman--that I see is Sue and that's because she's my aunt. No. I still keep in touch with Don McCall and Bill Oxley, but that's it. You know, there's a couple that stop by my house once in a while to see how I'm doing. And when I worked at the Car Shop in Mebane there was a few that would ride through to check and see how I was doing that I enjoyed seeing.

PH: This was after the plant closed, the Car Shop?

KF: Uh, huh, yeah.

PH: What sort of place is that?

KF: It's a drive-thru.

PH: Is it a car wash?

KF: No, convenience store.

PH: Oh, okay.

KF: Drive-thru convenience store. So I had quite a few of them to come in there. But, basically, Bill and Don are the two that I keep in touch with.

PH: Did you have any other relatives who worked at White's?

KF: No.

PH: Just your aunt?

KF: Just Sue, yeah.

PH: A lot of people from--. Are there people from Haw River who also worked there?

KF: There was a few out in the plant. There's one little guy that he doesn't live too far away from me and every time I run into him at the grocery store he said, "I saw

that such and such was over at your house," or something like that, but I can never remember his name. [laughter] I'm good with faces. I'm horrible with names.

PH: Do you remember any other people like that?

KF: Like what?

PH: People who just stick out in your mind who you might have met in the plant or things that they said to you.

KF: Yeah, there's quite a few. [laughter] There was a lot of nuts out there.

PH: What do you mean by that?

KF: Just, you know, they would just like to have a good time. They were always cutting up or they always had a smile on their face. You knew they enjoyed what they were doing. And then there was the ones that didn't do anything but gripe all the time and you wondered, "If you don't like it why don't you just go on?" But then some of those were the ones that had been there for years and years and years, and they saw all the changes.

PH: They would gripe to you when you would walk through. You would stop then?

KF: Or they would come in the office and sit there and say, "This is not the way Mr. White would have done things. I remember years ago," you know.

PH: Do you think that the office--? Was the office group as tight as--? It sounds like you thought that the people out in the plant were closer, had some sort of camaraderie.

KF: I don't know if they had, if they were, if they did any more outside the plant than we did. I know the supervisors would get together after work occasionally, but as far as people out in the plant I don't know if they did any more socializing than the office did.

PH: Uh, huh. Did you have characters like that in the office? Somebody who would like tell jokes or play pranks?

KF: They said that Fletcher was like that until Hickory--. And see, I was not there, but I heard that Fletcher would take wheels off--the casters--of the chairs or, you know, just nail the drawer shut or something like that is what I heard, but he was not like that when I came there. He was still very easy going, but he wasn't the prankster.

PH: [laughter]

KF: If he did anything it was probably to John Richards or Robert Riley or somebody like that out in the plant.

PH: Are there things that you miss about working at White's?

KF: Other than the people, I don't think so. I really don't think so. Like I said, I might be the wrong person to be talking about this because like I said, you know, when I come in I had so much going on outside in my private life that it might have made me react in the way that I did, you know, I might see things a little bit different.

PH: You mean, react to the closing differently?

KF: Yeah, react to the closing and the people, the office staff. You know, everybody was friendly, but like I said, I didn't feel like I fit in.

PH: Ever?

KF: Quite as much--. No, you know, once in a while. And after Ellen came there it was a little more--. It was better for me.

PH: Uh, huh.

KF: But, you basically did your job and you went home.

PH: Was Ellen about your age?

KF: Uh, huh. She was a little bit younger than I am.

PH: And what's she like?

KF: Very quiet. [laughter] She likes to talk a lot. She was very business-like, too. She knew her job. She was very thorough with her job. She was very good at her job. She really was.

PH: And why is it that you two became closer friends?

KF: Well, we had kids about the same age, and we kept in touch for a while after the plant shut down, but, you know, people kind of grow apart, too. I just haven't had a chance to talk to her and vice versa.

PH: Those are pretty much all of the questions that I wanted to ask. I was going to ask you how you thought the plant closing effected Mebane or the workers who were employed there at White's. Do you have any response to either of those two?

KF: I think it hit them really hard. It hit Mebane hard. You know, I mean, White you think of as a historical landmark, basically. And White had the reputation of making fine furniture and it just seemed like--. I know a lot of the guys out in the plant felt like we were using--that Hickory was using inferior quality parts compared to what Mr. White did. Mr. White wasn't scared of spending the money for a good quality versus Hickory said, "Cheaper is better or faster is better." And Mr. White wasn't like that. Quality came first, I think. It hit *hard*.

PH: Did you see or did you know of pieces coming back, being sent back in pieces of furniture that customers didn't want because--?

KF: Yeah, we had some returns, but I didn't have to deal with them, you know, so I didn't see a whole lot. You know, you're always going to no matter how good the quality is you're always going to have some and you're always going to have complaints, but I think probably they had more or at least that's the impression I got.

PH: Would you take your lunch or would you buy your lunch downtown in Mebane or?

KF: I'd usually ride home or something, you know, because it wasn't but ten or fifteen minutes away.

PH: Oh, really.

KF: Or run errands because you always have errands to do when you have kids.

[laughter] Don't you?

k-94

PH: Well, now those are all of my questions. But I wanted to ask you if you wanted to say anything that you didn't get an opportunity to say since this will recorded here forever.

KF: Forever.

PH: Uh, huh.

KF: No, I just think I do miss the people out in the plant, I really do, and I hope that everyone improved their standing or their--. Maybe they have a little less anxiety now. I hope that everyone has come out for the better instead of it making a bad impression for them. I would like to hear what happened to some of them. But that's it.

PH: I was going to ask you, did you go over to the opening over in Mebane with Bill?

KF: No, I didn't get a chance to. I think I had started out one time to go and had got called back for something else, so I didn't get a chance. I think Don told me that he did. I'm pretty sure he did.

PH: Yeah. Were you pretty close friends with Don?

KF: Uh, huh. Still am. Even though he lives in the mountains we kind of keep in touch. He comes down here occasionally. We keep in touch.

PH: Well, I appreciate you taking time out on a hectic Saturday afternoon and coming and doing this interview.

KF: Yeah, I've still got to run errands. [laughter]

PH: Well, thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW