

Interview

with

ANDY FOLEY

May 18, 1994

by Jeff Cowie

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START OF TAPE 1, SIDE A

ANDY FOLEY  
MAY 18, 1994

JEFF COWIE: This is an interview with Andy Foley on May 18, 1994, in Mebane, North Carolina, regarding his work at the Hickory-White Furniture Plant and its subsequent closure.

Please tell me a little bit about your background; where you born, what year?

ANDY FOLEY: I was born in Green Spring, West Virginia, in 1967. My father was in the military so I have lived in Florida, California, Virginia, West Virginia, Mississippi, South Carolina. When I lived in South Carolina I come up here and visit my cousin in Roxboro. I just liked it, and I moved up here. My cousin's wife, she used to work at White's. So I come up here one day, you know, and put an application in. I was fixing to go back to South Carolina because I was only up here for the weekend. They called me and told me they needed me to come for a physical and a drug test Monday.

JC: What year was that, do you remember?

AF: I believe it was '88 or '89. It's been about a year since I worked at White's. Yes, it was about '88 or '89.

JC: Why didn't you choose to follow your dad's path in a military career?

AF: I don't like moving around a lot because I would make friends and then we would have to move. I'm settling down. [laughter]

JC: [laughter] I can understand that.

AF: It just wasn't for me.

JC: Was there something in particular about Hickory-White or were you just looking for a job?

AF: I was looking for a job and my cousin's wife, Betty, she liked it and everything. Then her sister got on up there shortly after I did so I already know somebody

there so it wouldn't be so bad. I got lucky and got in her department in the cabinet room, and everything worked out all right.

JC: What do you remember about you first walking into the plant? Your first impressions?

AF: It looked like it had been there awhile.

JC: [laughter]

AF: I got hired for another department, and the fellow in there, his name was Carlton, I didn't even know him and he was talking junk to me because I had a West Virginia hat on. He was from West Virginia and I said, "Yeah, I came to work in his department just because I had the hat on." That's what I remember, "Who's this fellow?" [laughter]

JC: [laughter]

AF: That's basically how everybody was up in there, you know, wide open, whether they know you or not they'll talk junk to you. That made you feel comfortable.

JC: That's interesting. Through your cousin's connection that got you the job or did you just go and apply because she had the job?

AF: I went and applied, but I don't really know if it was because of her or because they were hiring or needed somebody. I really couldn't say.

JC: I'm sorry, you told me where you started, which department you started in, but I have forgotten?

AF: The cabinet room, yeah, they hired me for finishing, but when I went there to work the following week or whatever they said they had changed their mind and that I was going to the cabinet room. I was like, "Okay."

JC: What did you do?

AF: I built drawers.

JC: Like blocking the drawers?

AF: I had to do that a lot, too. I was basically the drawer builder. I had to build them. When somebody laid out or it got to where I could build faster than the blocker could block I'd have to go help on other things.

JC: Can you explain how a drawer is built?

AF: Okay. You got like two sides and you got to line up each side to the left or right. Then you got the bottom. You stick the back in the clamp first. Then you have to stick glue on the sides. Then you stick it in there and you close the clamp. Then you would open it back up and stick the bottom in. Then you would put the top of the drawer in and close the clamp once again, and it's real easy. That would close it.

JC: You learned that pretty quickly?

AF: Yeah. It wasn't nothing to that.

JC: Is that where you stayed?

AF: Yep. Every once in a while, like when I would run out of drawers, I'd have to move around and like go work with Ivey Jones. [laughter]

JC: [laughter]

AF: But basically, naw, I stayed right there.

JC: You said you were moving faster than the blockers could block?

AF: Yeah.

JC: So I guess there wasn't a lot of pressure on you to produce faster and faster?

AF: It depends, like if I'd laid out a day or something we would get behind, boy, I'd catch it. I'd come back in the next day and Harvey Thompson, he was my supervisor, but I called him "Homer" and, boy, he didn't like that much, and he would tell me that I laid out so now I got to double-time. It was all right though. It kept me busy.

JC: What does that expression "laid out mean"?

AF: Like sometimes it would be a nice day and I'd go fishing. [laughter]

JC: [laughter] Oh, I see. Okay. But actually when you're in the shop you kept up fine? It wasn't a problem?

AF: I got behind like maybe one time in the three and a half years that I was there. No, they never really got on me about being behind or nothing.

JC: Were the conditions pretty good in the factory?

AF: It got a little hot in there sometimes during the summer. Dust blowing around like when you clean up and everything, but, no, I don't really have any complaints with that.

JC: Did it always smell like wood in there?

AF: Yeah, you could smell wood, big time.

JC: Yeah, I bet.

AF: I mean, you know, after you've worked there a little bit you get used to it. You don't even notice it, really.

JC: How many people were you working with in the cabinet room? Were you pretty much working alone when you built the drawers or were you working as a team?

AF: It was like I was a team. I had to keep up with how many drawers I built, how many was bad. Every hour I had a little chart I had to keep up with; how many I built that hour; if they got them out that hour. I worked with--let me see-- me, Linda Dodson, and some Mexican that we just called "Mexico." [laughter] No, his name was Marcelino or something. It was basically us three most of the time. But like if we get behind, you know, he would bring somebody else over there to help Linda block or something, but basically it was just us three.

JC: And blocking is just like setting up the . . .

AF: Yes, she'd stick--after I built the drawer--she had a little desk there, and she would lay it up on the desk and stick it in the corner to make sure it was squared, and then she would staple the four corners and put the little glide in there to make sure it stays on straight, and then she would add the hot glue and the wood blocks.

JC: And then it got put on a line?

AF: It got handed to Marcelino, and he would sand the ends where the dovetails went to make sure that they were smooth. Then he would blow it off with the duster and spray it, then it was put on the line to be put in the cases.

JC: Were there a lot of Mexicans working there?

AF: There weren't a whole lot, but there was like maybe ten or twelve or so. The ones that worked there they were friendly. You got along with them. They were just as crazy as everybody else was. [laughter]

JC: [laughter] Were they pretty integrated into the rest of the group?

AF: Yeah, they weren't all in one department or nothing. We had Marcelino and then this other one--he quit--was in our department. Some were down in rough mill that I used to go talk to all the time. No, they were basically scattered out.

JC: And they got along pretty well with other workers?

AF: Yeah.

JC: That's interesting, you called him "Mexico."

AF: I mean, that's . . .

JC: That's what people called him.

AF: That's what we called him.

JC: Were there a lot of women and men in the cabinet shop?

AF: I mean, there might have been a few more men than there was women, but it wasn't like a big difference.

JC: How many people total in the cabinet, more or less?

AF: Twenty, I would guess. The men would operate the clamps. The women would do sanding or wiping out the drawers, you know, little things. They really wouldn't put the pressure on the women to operate the big old clamps.

JC: Were there other Mexicans or blacks in the room?

AF: When I got to the cabinet room it was everybody.

JC: Everybody was there, huh?

AF: Young, old, black, white, Mexican. We'd all thrown in there. I mean, I believe it was basically distributed pretty much evenly throughout the whole plant. They didn't just put all the Mexicans in one corner or the blacks or the whites.

JC: People got along pretty well?

AF: Yeah, cause I mean like I played. . . . We got up a softball team. It was like half blacks, half whites. We would hangout after work. I spent the night with some of them, and we'd go fishing. Yeah, everybody got along.

JC: Great.

AF: We'd have parties together, big parties! [laughter]

JC: [laughter] Did you hangout with mostly the younger workers when you went fishing and partying?

AF: Some of them were a little bit older. No, everybody partied there. Grandma was there. [laughter]

JC: [laughter] Everybody was there, huh?

AF: It was basically mixed, I mean, most of the young ones played on the ball team. There weren't no real old ones. They all come out and supported us and everything. But, like if something happened in one department you could not run up fast enough to tell someone in the other department before they already knew.

JC: [laughter]

AF: It was a lot of gossip going on.

JC: It was a real system of communication in the plant?

AF: Yeah.

JC: How did the word go from department to another?

AF: I ain't figured that out yet. [laughter]

JC: [laughter]



AF: People just passed through and before you know it you knew somebody got hurt down on this end or somebody was pregnant on the other end. You just knew. It amazed me.

JC: Cause it's a big place.

AF: Yeah, but you knew what was going on. You knew if that girl was fixing to get off early or you weren't going to have to work tomorrow. You could always count on somebody telling you something. You might not be able to believe it half the time, but they're going to tell you. [laughter]

JC: How was supervision and management? Were they really on top of the department or did they pretty much let you have your own space?

AF: It really depended on what day of the week it was. [laughter] Naw, basically, our supervisor he. . . . I wouldn't say he stayed in the department the whole time, but he would be there if you had a problem. If you had a problem you knew where he would be. He would always ask you if you needed anything and if everything was all right.

JC: But, they weren't riding you hard?

AF: Naw. Every once in a while he might get on you if you. . . . He'd get on me. I'd go in the other department and talk to a few girls or something and he'd go over there, "What are you doing?" And like we had to get rags from the other department so I always took my rag box with me and act like I was doing something. [laughter] But, no, it wasn't, I mean, he kept on you enough to where you knew that you needed to do your job and as long as you've done you job there wasn't much said.

JC: Now, you came to work after the buy out? No. What year did Hickory buy White's?

AF: I'm not sure. I believe I came there after the buy out.

JC: Yeah, right, so you never knew what it was like before?



AF: Naw. Bill Hicks, he worked in our department too, and he used to talk junk about it being bought out. He would say that Hickory messed it up by buying it out. I don't know if that's eventually what happened. I just know that was his opinion.

JC: He was complaining about that a lot, huh?

AF: He'd get in his moods where he'd go to cussing, boy. [laughter]

JC: [laughter]

AF: And it didn't matter who was around. If they would listen he would tell them. They had an article on him in the paper when it closed, you know, that he expressed his opinions about how he thought, when Hickory bought it from the Whites' family, that it would eventually go down hill. And it did.

JC: It did. In your department there were, it sounds like, like you said, you had young, old, black, white. Do you know if pay was equal for equal work there or was that pretty much kept quiet who made what?

AF: Naw, I mean, like supervisors they ain't going to go wanting everybody to talk, but you know the employees they are going to talk. I believe if you did the same job as the other and you were there the same amount of time I believe you get the same amount of pay. But like ones that were there longer, had bigger jobs, they are going to get more pay than the ones that just got started, and if they was on the sanding line, they wasn't going to make as much as somebody operating the clamp or something. I believe the pay was according to how long you've been there and what job you had.

JC: Do you remember what you were making when you left?

AF: \$7.62.

JC: Did more of your family come on? You mentioned your cousin and then somebody else.

AF: Yeah, my mother and father eventually moved up here.

JC: After your father retired?

AF: Yeah. He's working for Person County now. He come up here. I reckoned he liked it, too.

JC: Did anybody else go to work for White's?

AF: In my family?

JC: Yeah.

AF: No. It seemed like Betty and Brenda, I believe their whole family worked there at one time. They got like eight kids, and everyone of them worked there at one time or another. I think Brenda, Betty and Crystal and Joe all worked there at the same time and Teresa. It was like five or six of them, and they all worked there at one time. It's a good thing they weren't all in the same department.

JC: Did you hope to stay at the plant?

AF: Yeah, I mean, I really wasn't looking for another job when I was there. I mean, I knew that eventually, you know, I would make a little more money, and I also know I wasn't going to get rich there, but, I mean, I was comfortable with my job. I liked it. I knew if I went somewhere else there weren't no guarantees, well, there weren't no guarantee there either. [laughter]

JC: [laughter]

AF: Naw, I was comfortable with it.

JC: What other alternative at the time when you were hired at White's or during the time you were working there did you think about other jobs or the possibility of taking other jobs? I'm just wondering how you saw the job market for yourself.

AF: I never looked.

JC: You just never looked?

AF: No. I mean, when I come up here that's the first job and only job I applied for. I guess I got lucky and found it.

JC: Had you worked before in other towns?

AF: In North Carolina?

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JC: Yeah, or anywhere.

AF: I worked in South Carolina for a construction company then I come up here.

JC: Did you interact with management much there? Did you meet many folks?

AF: A few of them like the newer ones that was there before they closed I didn't really. . . . I feel like they didn't associate with us as much as the other ones did. The other ones, when we had the ball tournament, the picnics and stuff the other supervisors they'd come out there, and they'd get out there and goof-off with you and everything. Where the newer ones, I didn't feel like they really interacted with the employees much. I mean, maybe that's why there weren't liked as much as the other ones. I feel like that if you don't talk to somebody, you just walk by and stick your nose up, they're not going to think much of you no way.

JC: Did you ever face a period of being laid off?

AF: Yeah. Every once in a while they'd like, we'd work a week, be off a week, something like that when either something was messed up or. . . . There was a time when it seemed like a couple months in a row we would work a week, get off a week. Then we would get off half a day because something messed up in another department--whether it was our fault or not--we got sent home for it.

JC: Was there some kind of compensation? Would you get unemployment?

AF: If you worked some hours a week you did not get unemployment, but if you worked under--it might have been twenty-four hours or something--then you received it, yeah.

JC: You've mentioned softball several times. You currently play for the G.E. team. Who do you play? Do you play other companies or did you play . . .

AF: With G.E. we do, but we played in the open league in Burlington. See White's didn't. . . . We weren't called White's. We made up our own name, but most of the players was from White's.

JC: I see. So it wasn't like organized by managers, you guys just did it?

AF: Naw, they wouldn't give us nothing. We tried to get up a basketball team there one time and they wouldn't sponsor us.

JC: They wouldn't give you any jerseys . . .

AF: No, they were tight. [laughter]

JC: [laughter]

AF: So we just went through our own ways and went about it. Most of the players were employees of White's.

JC: And so you played like at the park district league or something like that?

AF: We played in Burlington.

JC: So you were playing just other groups?

AF: Anybody. It was a open league. If White's would've sponsored us we could have gotten industrial league or something. And they weren't sponsoring us so we sure weren't going to put their name on a shirt.

JC: [laughter] The industrial league, I'm not familiar with that.

AF: That's plants, like the one I play with now, G.E. GKM has got like two or three teams, Coke, Finishing, Park Avenue. It's plants.

JC: That's interesting. From mostly this area?

AF: Yeah.

JC: So getting back to the work process, what is it you liked about working there?

AF: I like that it was comfortable. Going to work I knew what my job would be for that day basically. Because like the day before I would have to keep up with what I needed and how many they was running per hour. So I would basically know the next day, you know, what I needed going in. If everybody was there then I'd know that I really would have no problem keeping up. I just knew what was going on basically. I reckon that's what made me comfortable.

JC: On the other hand, what was it you didn't like about working at White's?

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AF: I didn't like when I would happen to get behind or if I didn't have it seemed like eight million drawers ready Homer would come over there, "You ain't got enough." And then it's like, "I know what I'm doing. You see that chart? I got enough." But it's like, he wouldn't say too much about it. What was that other supervisor's name? I'll remember his name. He was bald-headed, and we called him "Chrome Dome" when he wasn't around.

JC: [laughter]

AF: But, Marshall Murdock, that was his name, but when he would come through it was like you could never have enough for him. He's the one that I can honestly say that nobody I spoke to really thought much of because of his attitude. There might have been a few people here and there that he got along with, but he really wouldn't associate with none of us. He wasn't there too long before it closed.

JC: So he was a part of the new. . . .

AF: Yeah, he was a new generation or whatever you want to call it. He just never really interacted with us employees so, none of us really thought much of him. My guess you've got that kind everywhere you go.

JC: What was Harvey Thompson's nickname? You called him Homey?

AF: Homer.

JC: Homer?

AF: Homer. Yeah, he looked like Homer Simpson.

JC: [laughter]

AF: Yeah, when he first got hired there he come up there and he told us somebody's name. Then about two weeks later he called everybody in the plant up there and he said, "My name is not Homer." Everybody was asking what his name was and I went, "That's Homer, that's Homer." [laughter]

Naw, when he first come there I didn't think nobody would like him because it seemed like he had an attitude, but afterwards I believe he got along with just about

everybody. As long as you've done your work he didn't have no problem with you. You could talk and goof-off, but as long as you got your job done he really didn't say much.

JC: The folks that had been there longer than you, did they often talk about the difference between before the buy out and after?

AF: Yeah, Ivey did. He told me that before it wasn't as much pressure on you to get as many out, and before it was more quality than quantity. He would tell you that it used to be that quality was the top thing that they worried about, but when the new management come in they wanted quantity.

JC: Did that pressure, quantity over quality, increase while you were there or did it pretty much stay the same?

AF: They would come and tell you, they'd say. . . . We'd have meetings and they would always tell you quality, but then when they would look at your sheet or something and you didn't have enough done then you knew it was quantity they wanted. We just didn't feel like it was right for them to be up there telling us about our quality when, it seemed like to me, they would let more and more slide by that they wouldn't let slide by before. Because like you have a little crack you just have to close it up, and it seemed like when certain new supervisors or whatever would let that go. I believe honestly that there is eventually what led to it closing is the quality dropped. Like when I didn't have nothing to do I would have to go down and I worked downstairs sometime when they'd bring all kind of stuff back. I mean, it's like we'd tell them before that we didn't think it would go, and "Naw, it'll go, it'll go." Like before if there was little cracks in my drawer bottoms. . . . When I first started working there if there was a crack at all - throw the bottom out. Well, by the time I left, boy, if there was a crack there just throw some putty in it and it would be all right.

JC: When you first started did you have trouble keeping up or did it take you awhile to get a hang of it?



AF: When I first started I was on like the sanding line for maybe a week or so. I just didn't. . . . That wasn't me. And the girl got hurt doing the joint clamps. She pinched her finger, and she said she wasn't doing that no more. We just kind of like switched. At the time I was building small drawers so it really wasn't too bad. You get some here about this big and the bottoms are bowed and it's hard to build. It gets a little aggravating if you don't get a big head start on the line or something. He's let us work over some if he thought we needed it in order to keep up.

JC: Was there any kind of formal grievance procedure if you had a problem with the line or management or something?

AF: You could go to talk to Homer personally. I mean, I believe he would sit down and. . . . I still got to have a talk, and I don't care. [laughter]

JC: [laughter]

AF: I seen him not too long ago, "Homer." You could go talk to him about it. He did his best to try to make things right if you didn't like it or he would see what he could do about it. He's the only one if I had problem I would go to. He was my supervisor so I didn't see no sense going anywhere else.

JC: Did you ever own any of the furniture that came out of that plant?

AF: Yeah, I got a stool at the house. One of my friends gave it to me. But, naw, I never really purchased none of it or nothing. It's too expensive for me.

JC: You're not married are you?

AF: Naw, thank God. [laughter]

JC: So you are living alone?

AF: Yeah.

JC: I wonder if you could tell me how you heard that the plant was going to close?

AF: It just happened on the day that they called a meeting and told everybody, I laid out and went fishing.



JC: You weren't there?

AF: Naw. [laughter]

JC: [laughter]

AF: My friend, Joe, he worked down in rough mill he called me. He always jokes with me, and I thought he was joking because he would call up and he'd say something stupid. I thought he was joking, you know, and he said, "Naw, man, I'm serious."

JC: He just called you on the phone?

AF: Yeah. But, then I went to work the next day and it was like. . . . You could tell something was wrong because everybody was like they was at a funeral or something. It was just real quiet in there, I mean, and nobody had the inspiration to really get their job done. Homer had to come out and tell us, you know, he said, "I know you ain't got no job no more, but I at least need you to give your best while you're here." Some of them did and some of them didn't.

JC: How did you feel?

AF: I felt that I was going to do my job there, but I wasn't going to break my neck because no matter how hard you worked your job was gone anyway. I mean, why should we bust our tails to make them look good when I don't feel like they really helped us out a lot before anyway and somebody else is going to have our jobs so why not let them have it?

JC: There wasn't any rumors ahead of time that you picked up on?

AF: You'd always hear. . . . Bill Hicks, he'd come in every Friday, "We're closing it, dude." [laughter] Bill would always say something about it, but the more we got laid off a week or two the more you would hear gossip or something about, you know, something wasn't right. They would call a meeting, and they'd tell you that work's just a little slow and everything's going to be all right and stuff like that. But, yeah, you'd hear little rumors, but you really wouldn't know what to believe or not.

JC: How long did you work before you lost your job?

AF: It was a couple of months. It was like, you know, they'd close down one department and then when that department would run out of their materials it would work the way up. I was on one of them. I was third from the last department to go so I stayed there a while longer than other people.

JC: So seniority had nothing to do with it?

AF: Naw.

JC: It was just what department you happened to be in?

AF: Yep. Yeah, when you worked in your department, like when I was done building drawers it was, "See ya." You was gone, you know. I believe some departments seniority if they needed somebody to stay behind and help clean up or something they left the older ones there. The ones that have been there a long time they stay behind a little longer, as long as they could. Where some of the younger people they gave you a choice, you know, if you want to leave you can go now. I believe if you worked there so long you got severance pay or something anyway. Some of them worked there like they tell you you're suppose to leave in two weeks, but you could go now and still get your severance pay. Some people done that.

JC: You said for a few more months you worked?

AF: I believe so.

JC: Did the spirit at the place continue to be . . .

AF: It's like, it got better. The first week after I came back when I laid out it was like everybody was still down and everything. After that, I mean, I believe everybody realized that their life ain't over, I mean, it felt like a part of you, you know, you're not going to be able to see a lot of people and you're going to miss that everything, but no matter what you've got to go on. I think eventually everybody finally realized that. Nobody still broke their neck to get nothing done, but they kept busy and kept everything going until it was closed.

JC: What do you remember about your last day? Was it anything special? How did you feel?

AF: It was kind of sad because I knew that a lot of them people there that I had grown accustom to, I had grown to like and everything, I would never see again. I can't speak for anybody else, but I know on my last day I didn't do nothing but walk around and tell everybody good-bye and stuff. I mean, I didn't see no sense in me working the last day when I was gone whether I got production or not. Homer, he let up on us there toward the end. As long as we looked a little busy he wasn't going to come and push us because, you know, it ain't no use.

JC: So that last day was just kind of a long series of good-byes. Did you wander around the plant?

AF: Yeah, I did, I mean, everybody didn't. I wandered around the plant all the time anyway. [laughter]

JC: [laughter]

AF: Homer would always come looking for me. When I'd get ahead of my job, I was gone. Yeah, I basically went around and told everybody, "If I don't see you no more, I hope you have a good life." I still keep in contact with some of them. It made you feel a little empty on the inside leaving. Like a lot of the old men they'd walk outside and they'd all have tears in their eyes and everything. That's because some men had been there thirty or forty years. I mean, I know it was hard on them because that was their life, where I'm still young and I've still got, hopefully, a long life to look forward to and still got a lot of opportunities, but them old men, I mean, that's the ones I basically felt sorry for because that's all they knew how to do.

JC: Yeah. And have you seen many of those people since the closing?

AF: I haven't seen too many to tell you the truth. I've seen more up here that day when Bill [Bamberger] had this here [Interview took place in exhibit space.] than I'd seen. One lady lives in Roxboro. She works at GKN and I don't even see her no more. She

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lives in Roxboro. I see Linda Dodson down here down the road. I still play basketball with a few of my friends here and there and go fishing, but, naw, it ain't nothing like it was. It's kind of like, you know, when you are in high school and you graduate, you see a few here and there, but the rest is gone.

JC: Right. What did you do your last day after work? Did you just go home or did you go out with friends?

AF: I believe I went fishing.

JC: That seems to be your solution. [laughter]

AF: [laughter] About everything. That's me. If I get in a fight with my girlfriend I'm going fishing.

JC: [laughter]

AF: Sometimes that's what we fight over, too.

JC: [laughter]

AF: But, naw, I mean, I felt kind of sad, but I know, I mean, what good is it going to do to sit around and worry and think about things? I mean, I've never been one that dwells on something. I mean, I know that no matter what happens around you, if you are living, your life's got to go on and you've got to make the best of it. That's what I'm trying to do.

JC: How long were you without a job or did you have this other one lined up?

AF: I got all the unemployment I could.

JC: A lot of fishing?

AF: [laughter] A lot of fishing. I did a lot of traveling. I went to South Carolina, West Virginia, Mississippi, yeah.

JC: Just traveling or were you looking for work?

AF: Nope. I was in a school a lot, too.

JC: Doing what?

AF: Majoring in criminal justice. I'm trying to become a state trooper.

JC: Even while you're . . .

AF: Naw, see, they paid for my first two quarters.

JC: Who?

AF: White's.

JC: Oh, really?

AF: I reckon they did. Somebody did. I know I didn't. It might have been Burlington Unemployment Office. I don't know.

JC: Right, I think it was the unemployment folks. It's part of retraining . . .

AF: Yeah. I took advantage of that and went to school.

JC: Where did you go?

AF: Alamance Community College. I'm still going there. Feels like forever. [laughter] Still got forever to go. I just seen the opportunity there, and I believe, you know, if something like that comes up you need to take advantage of it.

JC: While you were working at White's did you want to be a state trooper or did this idea just come up after the shut down?

AF: I don't know how I thought of it or wanted to become one. Just once that White's was gone and I have to go to school I went down to the school and looked at all the courses I could take and criminal justice was just something I thought I would be interested in.

JC: How many years does it take?

AF: It really depends on how many courses you take per quarter but around two. I've still got about a year left. That's one good thing that came out of, you know, White's leaving is that I believe it led me in a direction of a career that I can broaden my horizon.

JC: So you traveled around. Were you just seeing friends in these other states?

AF: Yeah.

JC: Friends from all the places you'd lived?

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AF: Yeah. Relatives in West Virginia and everything. I mean, I figured you never know if I going to have this opportunity to do this again, you know, get paid and go do whatever you want. [laughter]

JC: [laughter]

AF: I'm gone.

JC: And then you came back here?

AF: Yeah, and I looked for a few jobs here and there, and I really didn't have much luck. I've been working at G.E. about three or four months now. I like it there. It's nice, but it ain't like White's. It's a lot bigger than White's maybe the reason that everybody is not as close and everything.

JC: What are the differences? Can you offer some comparisons?

AF: All the facilities at G.E. is newer. The lady that works in the cafeteria at White's she works down there at G.E.

JC: In the cafeteria?

AF: Yep. It's like, I think the facilities are newer. At White's it's more like a family where G.E. is more like a business. Like down there, they could care less what you do, what's going on as long as you get your job done and don't wander off. Where at White's you don't suppose to wander off, but don't turn your back Homer. [laughter]

JC: [laughter] When you did all this wandering were you. . . . Did you build up a

AF: Yeah, I would get way ahead and then I was gone. I would just get way ahead. If I like ran out . . .

JC: You knew how long you could be away?

AF: Yeah. I would keep up with how many I needed per hour, and I would see how many I got ahead. If Homer turned his back. . . .

JC: [laughter]

AF: He come looking for me sometimes, too. He kept up with it, but he knew that as long as I got my job done. . . . I give him credit he let me slide with a few things that he didn't let nobody else, I reckon. I shouldn't be saying that. He would go over there and we'd be talking to the girls, and he'd talk junk to them, too. [laughter]

JC: [laughter]

AF: He'd tell me, "Get away from those girls, boy."

JC: Sounds like you were without a job for quite awhile.

AF: Yeah, about a year I reckon.

JC: How much of that did unemployment cover?

AF: They paid, I think, like sixty percent or something. I'm not sure.

JC: For the whole year?

AF: Yeah. I got extended because I was going to school.

JC: Oh, I see.

AF: Most people they didn't, but since I was enrolled in school they extended it. I had to pay taxes because of it, too. [laughter]

JC: What do you do at G.E.?

AF: Operate a clamp. [laughter]

JC: [laughter]

AF: I work in the plastics department.

JC: Is that on the line?

AF: Naw, I don't even have production. It's different, I mean, I felt more comfortable at White's than I do at G.E. because at G.E. they fire people everyday. So you don't really have job security that I thought I had at White's. People come and go there everyday where at White's until they closed you knew basically that you had a good job.

JC: Do they fire people at G.E. for . . .

AF: Laying out, falling asleep, . . .



JC: Just whatever.

AF: Yeah.

JC: Do they have a union in there?

AF: I don't believe so. No matter how long I will work there I don't think I'll feel comfortable as I did at White's.

JC: Is it just more impersonal?

AF: Yeah, it's more personal, I mean, more people there I had things in common with. At G.E. everybody's like, I don't know, boy, zombies or something except for the ones I play on a ball team for. The ones on the ball team ain't none of them in my department. The ones in my department are [makes noise with mouth]. They don't really associate with each other or nothing. They just go there and do their little job and they're gone. Where at White's you go there and do a little bit of your job. [laughter]

JC: [laughter]

AF: Maybe that's what closed the place. [laughter]

JC: [laughter] That's an interesting comparison. Okay, so you've compared the work life, what about the pay and benefits? Is all that better at G.E.?

AF: Yep, they are.

JC: Do you think it is worth it? Is better pay worth the environment you don't like as much?

AF: Sometimes when you go shopping or something, but I feel like after work or something I felt more comfortable at White's because I knew that even though I live in Roxboro I hung out down here more than I did in Roxboro because all my friends and everything lived in Mebane or Swepsonville or Saxapahaw or something so I spent a lot of my time down here. Whereas where I'm working with G.E., unless I'm playing ball or going to school at ACC, I'm back in Roxboro. I don't know I just along with everybody more. They were more relaxed where I think G.E. they are more uptight over. . . . They know if they don't fulfill their job that they're gone.

JC: Right.

AF: Where at White's you could goof-off one day and get by with it. [laughter] I did not say that. [laughter]

JC: [laughter] What about the whole, I mean, having not worked in either type of job, I'm wondering whether just the whole idea of building something out of wood is more rewarding than . . .

AF: Yeah, it is because you know that's something that nature's given you, and you've taken, you know, like my drawers I've built it with my hands. Whereas G.E. is like here's a little piece of plastic, stick it in the thing, and it does itself. Plus you get more satisfaction out of, you know, like nowadays when I go in a furniture store or something I look at their furniture to see if they done it the way we done it. I notice things like on tables or at my cousin's house we are always talking junk about her tables. They're made different and we say cheap and everything. I believe at White's you notice or I personally notice more now on other furniture and how it stands up to, you know, what White's had and everything. At G.E. I don't know what half the stuff I make goes on. Plus it gives you satisfaction when you're out somewhere and you see somebody that has a piece of White's furniture because you never know you might have had a hand in making that.

JC: Yeah, I can see how that would work. You said they make. . . . What did you say they make at G.E.?

AF: Switchboards.

JC: Switchboards?

AF: Yeah.

JC: But you're just. . . .

AF: Yeah, I make a little piece on a switchboard. It's like they might could do without it for all I know. [laughter]

JC: [laughter]

AF: Where at White's I knew that drawer had to be in that chest.

JC: So you were never really involved in the community of Mebane much in terms of . . .

AF: I'm not from Mebane. My girlfriend's sister, Linda, lives down here, and I come here and I'd go like to the festival at the park, but as far as . . . I really don't know a lot about Mebane, I mean, I see people in the streets and the taxidermist over there he mounts my fish for me, but other than that I'm not really familiar with, you know, a lot about Mebane. I know it's little. It is like it's been here forever, but I like it, I feel comfortable, you know, seeings I got another job in Mebane. I like it, I mean, we used to go over there to the drug store and get ice creams, to the deli and get subs. Martino, he used to work at White's.

JC: Oh, really, I didn't know that.

AF: Yeah, he worked there when I first come there, and I reckon he left a few months after I got there. Yeah, he used to work there.

JC: The reason I was asking this is just to get a sense of how the community feels about the plant closing down.

AF: Oh, them people at Byrd's I thought they was going to cry when we told them that we was closing. Because, like at break, Byrd's was packed.

JC: Byrd's is . . .

AF: Byrd's grocery store. We all went over there at break and lunch, I mean, we got to know them, you know, pretty well, too, where we's basically on a first name basis with them seeings how often we was over there. If a train would happen to come by we would stay over there longer than we'd suppose to. We was late all the time, boy. Don't let that train come over the tracks. [laughter]

JC: [laughter] One of the photographs shows you guys--I'm not sure whether it's displayed or not--waiting for the train.

AF: A lot of days we'd be hoping for that train to come. [laughter]

JC: [laughter]

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AF: Everybody I've talked to seems like they worked at White's one time or another. You go around Mebane and it's like, "Yeah, I worked there twenty-eight years ago and forty years ago." It's just like when they closed everybody around here that I talked to, especially the older people at Byrd's, they were like "How is this going to affect Mebane?" I'm not sure if it's the first biggest employer or the second biggest employer.

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A

START OF TAPE 1, SIDE B

ANDY FOLEY  
MAY 18, 1994

JC: Is Byrd's Grocery still doing all right?

AF: I go over there and they tell me that, you know, it ain't the same without us going in there because, I mean, I haven't actually been there at lunchtime like I did at White's, but I know at lunchtime when we went over there they couldn't keep no food in, man, cause we'd get something last us all day. [laughter]

JC: [laughter]

AF: Naw, I believe that it hurt them. It had to hurt them because without, I mean, that's just about everybody over there went to Byrd's one time during the day or they got somebody to go for them. I believe it hurt them. I believe that drug store there had to feel some of it, too, because everybody went there.

JC: White's just ran one shift, is that correct?

AF: Yeah. You might work over a few hours, but, yeah, it was just one shift.

JC: When to when, do you remember?

AF: Seven to three-thirty.

JC: That's pretty early.

AF: Yeah, they wanted to get you rolling out in the morning. They knew by afternoon everybody would be ready to go anyway.

JC: You said it got hot, too.

AF: Yeah, it got hot in the summer. They don't change it sometimes where you come in at six and get off at two-thirty which really wasn't that much difference to me.  
[laughter]

JC: [laughter]

AF: Yeah, it got hot in there, but we had fans and everything. But, I think, just because the building is so old and dusty from all the wood that, that heat just sat in there unless you go in Homer's office it's air-conditioned. [laughter]

JC: [laughter] That's a good reason to go talk to him.

AF: I did. Sometimes not by choice. [laughter]

JC: Have you heard any rumors about what's going to happen to the building?

AF: I heard one time they was going to make a flea market out of it.

JC: A flea market?

AF: I think it was somebody just talking bull. I've heard they ain't sold it yet, I believe, or something like that. Just that flea market that's all I basically heard. I think somebody was lying about it. It ain't no telling.

JC: Did you have other friends. . . . You said you haven't kept track of many people.

AF: I have basically the ones on the ball team or the ones that live with me in Roxboro.

JC: Did they have an easy time finding new jobs?

AF: Nobody I actually talked to actually I can say had an easy time finding a job that they were as comfortable with as they were at White's. White's wasn't the best paying job in the world, but compared to once you go out now you got to start all over, and you've just been there your whole life working with wood. There's not a whole lot of wood places here and there that's going to pay up to their par and everything. I don't believe that there's too many people out there that actually had an easy time finding another job.

JC: It sounds like you got around a lot in the plant. Do you remember what sorts of like horseplay or kidding around?

AF: We used to lock people in the bathrooms. [laughter]

JC: [laughter]

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AF: I did, yeah. There were some old pipes over the top of the bathroom and they had dust on them. Old Darren, he used to work on the line. He'd go up in the bathroom and we'd get a stick, and we'd beat on that pipe, and he'd come out with dust all over him. [laughter]

JC: [laughter]

AF: We had glue bottles there, too. In the summertime we would put water in them glue bottles. Don't go into the bathrooms! We used to run through the plant and squirt people. Homer would get mad at us. He caught me one time mooning some people, boy.

JC: He caught you what?

AF: Mooning somebody.

JC: Oh, mooning. [laughter]

AF: [laughter] Yeah, he'd say, "I don't want to see you doing that." I'm like, "Close your eyes and you won't see." There was a lot of horseplay. We'd throw things at each other. We had little pin guns with little pins, I mean, if it hit someone in the eye it might could have hurt, but we would shoot people in the butt. They'd be having a drink over there and you'd shot right through it, and it would have a little hole in and the drink would be draining out.

JC: [laughter]

AF: Oh, yeah, we used to glue, Linda--she used to be my blocker--I would glue her old cup down, boy, her soda cup. It would glue down. She'd go to lunch, leave it, and she'd come back and . . .

JC: Try to get that thing free.

AF: Yeah. Or if you put thinner outside the cup it would eat right through it. And, boy, we'd thump little drops of thinner on it and it would eat right through it. Coke would be all over the place.

JC: [laughter]



AF: She'd go to cussing. She shot me in the neck one day with a nail gun, not no pin gun, a nail gun. [laughter]

JC: [laughter]

AF: That think started bleeding. Not bad, just little drops of blood. Naw, there was a lot of carrying on there. There would be big old bugs in there, and we'd all have pin guns trying to shoot them things.

JC: [laughter]

AF: Naw, there was more horseplay going on there than was suppose to be. Every time you'd turn around somebody. . . . Nobody would go in the bathroom. They were scared to go in our bathroom.

JC: [laughter]

AF: Dan, the first few times we got him he went over to rub and pack and finish and went to the bathroom. He wouldn't go to the bathroom in the cabinet room no more. And like new people, there was no sign on the door that says Men's or Women's and there was two Men's and one Women and there wasn't no sign there. Somebody new come in you always knowed they was going into the girls. [laughter]

JC: [laughter]

AF: Don't nobody say anything. I remember one fellow who come in, he worked there like twenty or thirty years ago or something. They got an hour for lunch when he worked there. So he got hired again and he took him an hour for lunch, and we only got thirty minutes, see? So he'd come back an hour later and they were like, "What are you doing?" He didn't last long. He walked around there with socks on, he took his shoes off. They could hire some crazy people up . . .

JC: [laughter]

AF: I was like, "How did ya'll get hired? Ya'll must have known somebody." It was a lot of fun working there.

JC: It sounds like it. It sounds like . . .

AF: You never knew what was going to happen. You knew somebody was going to get you. Well, me and Joe--the one that lives in Roxboro--we used to pass notes all the way down.

JC: Who's that, Jody?

AF: Joe.

JC: Joe?

AF: Yeah, me and him we used to get in trouble with each other. We'd go down there and you know you'd have these trucks with stuff on them and he would throw all my stuff on the floor or just to slow production down. It was fun. Homer, when he first come, was real uptight, but after awhile, boy, he'd see you do something he'd look at you and he'd go, "You squirt somebody again. . . ." [laughter] But, basically I liked him.

JC: You said you and Joe passed notes?

AF: Dirty notes.

JC: Oh, dirty notes? [laughter]

AF: Yeah. [laughter]

AF: Him and this girl named Tony down there, she'd be writing them, too. Well, it's just. . . . I don't want to cuss. [laughter]

JC: [laughter]

AF: Junk talking notes, you know.

JC: About other employees?

AF: Anybody. Who ever you felt like it. You write and call your own self a name. Just stupid things. Joe would run up there and tell me I could have his wife for five dollars and all kind of stuff.

JC: [laughter]

AF: You'd go in that morning, you knew something was going on, boy. There was only a few glue bottles and most of the time they all had glue in them. Boy, come summertime there wouldn't hardly be no glue in no glue bottles.

JC: Yeah, when it's hot the squirt fights would be a good . . .

AF: Yeah, and we used to get people right there where it looked like they peed on themselves. [laughter]

JC: [laughter]

AF: You'd run up behind them and (squirt sound) all over their butt. I know we got Linda right there one day and, boy, she didn't like that too much.

JC: Right on her chest?

AF: Yeah. It looked like them things were leaking.

[laughter]

JC: [laughter]

AF: There was a good bit of horseplay. It was like basically our department and then the people who worked right there in finishing. Tracy Burnett--he's one of my black friends--he worked with me and played on the ball team. He was just as crazy as I was, boy. He come over and go in our bathroom. He'd close the door and he would wave at me. He'd jerk it open to see if anybody was coming to get him.

JC: [laughter] Sounds like going to the bathroom in that place was a dangerous activity?

AF: You don't want to go to the bathroom in our department. [laughter]

JC: [laughter]

AF: I locked Homer in there before.

JC: You locked your boss in?

AF: Yeah, you just get a hold of the door knobs right there and you'd get a board that was laying right there and you prop the board up beside there. You couldn't get out.

JC: What did he do?

AF: He'd come out cussing. [laughter]

JC: [laughter]

AF: He'd look right at me, "I know you done it." Yeah, there were a lot of pranks going on up in there and everything. That's why I think it felt so comfortable. You knew that if you got the job done and it was right before break or right after break you could carry on a little bit. Not as to where anybody would actually get hurt or something. Just to liven up the place to make the time go by faster.

JC: Sure.

AF: I mean, I think I helped a lot.

JC: I bet.

AF: Where like somebody would die or somebody would get hurt they would pass around donations and a card and everybody would sign it. It just wouldn't be in your department, I mean, it would be like in upstairs departments and everything. Everybody knew what everybody else was doing, what happened to them. We all pitched in if something would go wrong.

JC: Were many people dating or getting involved?

AF: There was rumors.

JC: Always rumors.

AF: Rumors, mad people, other people's babies, everything. Most of the women in there were married, but I shouldn't say this, but some of them it didn't matter.  
[laughter]

JC: [laughter]

AF: Not no names being mentioned.

JC: No, it's better that way.

AF: Now, them parties, ain't no telling what was going on.

JC: These parties, were they pretty big?

AF: It's basically like the people that worked there and a few of their friends.

Half the time you don't remember what happened. [laughter]

JC: [laughter]

AF: You'd hear though.

JC: Right. So, all this horseplay, was it pretty much everybody involved or just like younger workers?

AF: It was basically younger workers. Me and Tracy and Dan and Marcelino and a couple of others would get in on it, but it was basically me and Tracy. He was suppose to be in another department, and I was suppose to be in mine, boy. Wrong! Come summer time we were getting somebody.

JC: What department was Tracy in?

AF: He worked in finishing. Like right there beside ours. There used to be a wall there and they tore the wall down and ran a line through there. And like I would have to go past Tracy to go get my rags or go downstairs to check on my drawer (

). Don't turn your back!

JC: To check on your drawer what?

AF: Okay, they started repairing my drawer bottoms if they have big cracks in them. The lady downstairs she did a lot of repairs, and if I didn't have time to repair them and I had a lot I would send down to her so as I could keep up with production.

JC: I see.

AF: I miss them bathrooms because at G.E. they ain't like that. [laughter]

JC: [laughter]

AF: I will never forget Dan's face because he had on a white shirt and everything and he come out of the bathroom and it was just like it was dots all over him. He come out of there and boom, boy. And old Marcelino, I remember me and him used to carry on all the time. One day he came in a bad mood or something. He done something, and I took the belt off the sander. He went and told Homer and I got wrote up for it. [laughter]

JC: [laughter] Really?

AF: Yeah, I didn't sign it, but I got wrote up for it. Naw, other than that it was all right.

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JC: Management tolerated it pretty much, more or less?

AF: Yeah.

JC: I can stop this.

AF: Naw, I don't care. I don't work there no more. [laughter]

JC: [laughter]

AF: What can they do?

JC: Nobody works there anymore.

AF: Naw, I mean, he would fuss at you, but he was more. . . . I liked him better than I did a lot of other supervisors that when I passed through they'd look at me like, "What are you doing here?" even though they had a right to do that because I was in their department. Naw, they started calling me his son and everything saying I get by with more and started calling me Bart Simpson, boy, and I was like, "He ain't my daddy." I can honestly say that I got by with quite a bit as long as I kept my job up. If I didn't keep my job up he say, "You need to quit horseplaying a little while and get the job up." "All right, no problem." He would go downstairs and boy, I was gone.

JC: What was it you keep talking about going to get rags and stuff? What was with the rags?

AF: For some reason I had to keep all the rags for our department that people used. They was there at my desk in a big old box. When you get excess glue on there you've got to wipe it off. Half the time we just wet them and threw them at people. I don't actually know what all they were for. But, yeah, like if I wanted to go in another department--I had to get clean rags over in finishing or rub and pack because they both had them--so I would grab all my rags and my box and I wander over there for an hour or so. Yeah, we'd go over there. I still don't know what all them rags were for. Somehow nobody would put them back in the box. I would have to pick them up at the end of the day. I suppose to recycle. Some of them were just so nasty, boy, you'd throw away. Going in there from day to day you knew somebody was going to get somebody.



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JC: [laughter] Did you guys ever like deliberately slow down production or anything as a group?

AF: I don't know about slowing down production. I know before like they'd want me to change my clamp back and forth. It wasn't easy. The thing was old and you got to hand turn it and do it up and down for two or three different kinds of drawers at once. They never gave me an opportunity to get ahead. I cut the hose once.

JC: You cut the hose?

AF: The air hose. It made it slow down for awhile. I was fixing to get behind anyway. I said I need an excuse to get behind.

JC: The hose was like for a compressor?

AF: Yeah. I mean, it didn't hurt nobody. It just shot air everywhere and closed me down for awhile so I could catch up.

JC: Did a lot of people do stuff like that? I mean, it's pretty common in other situations I've come across.

AF: They may have, I don't know. Somehow if something got broken there--a pin gun--Homer would come to me. "What did you do to my pin gun? What did you do to it?" Sometimes I would have to pin drawers. I wasn't suppose to be pinning no drawers, somebody else's job. I'd do something to the pin and half the time I didn't even do it, it would jam up with something. I'd say, "I ain't got time to fix this, Homer. Here." He'd say, "You're doing this on purpose, boy." On the other side of the room, "Andy, what are doing over there breaking their stuff?"

JC: What did the pin gun do? It was like a small nail gun or something?

AF: Yeah, we had different sizes like quarter inch, half inch, inch. You used them for. . . . If the dovetails was a little big and I might have to add putty to them, I would pin them and then hold them to the glue dries. Then you had to get the little nail set and make sure it's down below. Like if old Marcelino, he'd get mad at me, or I would want to get him, boy, I would leave one of them old pins poking out. When he'd go to



sand it, it would rip his whole belt on his belt sander. It would take him about fifteen or twenty minutes to change that so there was a lot of going on where you help me, I help you; if you don't I'm going to get you. It was cool. I hope Homer don't never read this book. [laughter]

JC: [laughter] I suspect if he does he'll be laughing.

AF: He knows the word Homer, he knows who said it.

JC: Do you know what happened to him?

AF: He went to work for a furniture factory in Greensboro, I believe Tracy told me. I'm not positive, but I believe he did. He lives in Snow Camp. He lives not too far from Tracy. I ain't went by to see him, and I told him I was going to come by and egg his house. I ain't made it that far yet.

JC: [laughter] Sounds like you guys had an interesting relationship.

AF: Yeah, we had fun. As long as we kept the job up everything was all right. He'd let you get by with some. Oh, Lord, I better run.

JC: Another thing we haven't talked about is do you remember all the talk about Mercedes-Benz plant that was going to come here last year?

AF: Yeah.

JC: How did you feel about that or did that raise your hopes about jobs?

AF: Yeah, because at that time I was unemployed, and I thought with a new plant opening and with me working in Mebane before, you know, that I might have a shot at it. But, also, where I'm from in South Carolina they were suppose to get it too, see, Summerville.

JC: Right.

AF: Neither one of them got it. Alabama got it, I believe. When I went down there it was a lot of talk down there by all my friends about how they'd like to get on it. And then up here, thinking the same thing. It was kind of weird both of them talking about the same thing. I think that it upset a lot of people when they didn't get it because a

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few of the people I did talk to, you know, their hopes were kind of high, you know, "big old plant's opening, make decent money" they could get back on the right track again. That's the way it goes.

JC: How is the employment situation down there in Summerville?

AF: It's getting bad down there because Summerville's like seven miles from Charleston, and they are closing the Naval base down there. Once that closes, I mean, Charleston, that's all there is a Naval base. It's pretty bad. A lot of my friends, I mean, they work, but it's like they don't know how much longer they are going to have. A lot of them work at the Navy base.

JC: Do you know how many people they've got over at G.E.?

AF: [Makes noise with mouth] A bunch. Lot more than White's, yeah, because they went three shifts over there. Plus the plant itself is bigger.

JC: Do they do production at night shift or is it just . . .

AF: We don't have production. I'm not sure about first or second.

JC: When you look back on the closing of the factory, you know, it sounds like it launched you on a different track. You're thinking about law enforcement now. Do you think it could have been a good thing for you personally?

AF: Yeah. I think everything happens for a reason. That there, I think it just happened so that I could, you know, it gave me an opportunity to go to school which is something I would have and should have done when I first got out of high school. It just led me on the right track and hopefully I can make better of myself. I don't regret working at White's or nothing. It wasn't the greatest job in the world, but it was far from the worst, too.

JC: During that time that you were unemployed I realized you traveled a lot and stuff, but was there a sense while you were looking for work that made you feel kind of useless?

AF: Yeah, it got me down every once in a while I'd think, you know, that I wish I was still back there, and I wonder if I'll have a job, and wonder what my next job will be and things like that. Will the people be as nice as they were at White's and if I get along with them and stuff like that?

JC: But there was never. . . . It doesn't sound like you were ever in despair that you would never find another job?

AF: Naw, I mean, I'm an optimist.

JC: You're young.

AF: Yeah, I like to think that somewhere there is always something out there for somebody. I mean, nothing is going to come easy. You've got to come work for no matter what you want in life. The first month when I got laid off or closed down, whatever you want to call it, it was like, "What am I going to do now," because I hadn't started school or nothing so it was like fishing got old for a little while, not long. [laughter]

JC: [laughter]

AF: Yeah, it got me. I would sit down and write to some of my friends in South Carolina or Mississippi or something. I would tell them about it. Wasn't sure what I was going to do now. Didn't know if I'd be working in another furniture factory and if it'd be the same. I really wasn't sure what I was going to be doing, you know, while I was in school, until I finished school, and stuff like that.

JC: It sounds like you kept your spirits up.

AF: Yeah, I was trying not to, I mean, I don't let things bother me, I try not to because even bad things something good got to come out of them sooner or later.

JC: What about fishing? Where do you fish?

AF: Everywhere. Ponds, lakes, anywhere. That's something, like between my girlfriend, my work, my job, fishing is something I get out there if I go by myself it's where I can think about, you know, my life, my past. Just relax and enjoy myself. I think

everybody needs time to be alone sometimes. That's just my way of getting away to get my thoughts together, and hopefully, most of the time I catch something. If I don't, I don't stay long. [laughter]

JC: [laughter] Yeah, it's a little more fun if you. . . . So you take off every once in a while from work to fish?

AF: I haven't at G.E. working third, you know. I don't fish a lot at night. [laughter] But at White's, I did more than I was suppose too. Not all the time, but like if there's me and Joe, boy, we think, "You want to go fishing tomorrow? You couldn't miss but so many days at White's, you know, and points would count against and you'd get fired eventually so we always kept track of ours. And you work so long and they'd take points away, so we always. . . . We got on the borderline a few times.

JC: You knew the system?

AF: Yeah, we kept track. I remember one time where Homer got me bad. "I'm taking off tomorrow." "No, you ain't." Yeah, I did.

JC: What did he do that pissed you off?

AF: It was something about. . . . He got on me about something that wasn't my fault. I was way ahead and I had two blockers. He thought I was suppose to go over there and help the blockers. I got two blockers, and I'm one builder. There is only suppose to be one and one. I didn't feel like it was my fault that they was behind.

JC: No, they were double-teaming you basically?

AF: Yeah, they was the ones behind. We had like three different size drawers, and he was getting on me telling me I needed to tell them which ones to do. Well, I mean, I was like, "They got a brain. There's two of them. Let them figure it out." I mean, I build them case by case, and they would mix them all up, and he would come to me, and I'm like, "I'm not the one mixing them up." I didn't get aggravated a whole lot, but I just remember that one day. I was pissed, boy, "I ain't coming in tomorrow." [laughter] I didn't come in tomorrow either!

JC: You went fishing?

AF: Yeah. He caught me one time, boy. It was the ACC basketball tournament. I brought my little T.V. I went in the bathroom and watched basketball. [laughter]

JC: [laughter]

AF: He come beating on the door, "I know what you are doing. Come out of there." It was all right. All I got to say, I mean, I wish my supervisor at G.E. was like him. The one at G.E. is more strict. He's an old man, and he just ain't into it. Naw, Homer's all right. When he first come there he was like, "I'm ya'll's supervisor, I don't need no friends, and ya'lls just going to work under me and that's it." That didn't last long. [laughter]

JC: [laughter]

AF: He finally realized that it's best if you want your employees to work, you've got to get along with them personally as well as professionally. It didn't take him long to figure that out neither. Cause, I mean, you've got to have cooperation on both ends to make something go. I think that's what eventually, you know, led to White's downfall. Just them new, bigger people coming there acting like they were God's gift. They pushed a lot of people too hard towards the end before it was known they're closing. They were wanting so much of this out and so much of that out. They cut the line up, and then the line was running so fast, you know, that it was hard for you to keep up. And then they would fuss at certain people because of the quality. It ain't like everybody there were machines, I mean, everybody gets tired. You get off at three-thirty and about one-thirty or two o'clock you tired if you are busting your tail all day. Old "Crome Dome" he didn't believe in that.

JC: What did you mean they "cut the line up?"

AF: The lines is run by computer, I reckon, and the speed on the line, they would cut the speed up as to where the people on the line their furniture would go by faster, and

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they would have less time to do it. Every once in a while, boy, if they weren't looking you'd go cut the line down. [laughter]

JC: [laughter] Really?

AF: Yeah.

JC: How would you do that?

AF: You'd push a button, a couple of buttons with numbers. You could tell how many seconds the space would run by. You would just lower it a little. You weren't suppose to.

JC: Of course not.

AF: Homer ain't listening, who cares? [laughter]

JC: [laughter]

AF: He don't sign my check.

JC: Well, I don't think I have any more questions. Do you have anything . . .

AF: Naw, I just want to say that I enjoyed working there. Thanks for giving me the opportunity to tell my side of the story. I hope it helps you out.

JC: We really appreciate you taking the time out to share your views. It was very, very interesting.

AF: [laughter]

JC: [laughter]

AF: I'm just glad I could help out. I hope it enlightens a situation that wasn't too funny.

JC: Actually, I do have one more question. What did the employees understand about what was going on, like who owned the factory now, and what happened to the White's?

AF: They knew that it was--from what I know--that they was up in Hickory. See, they closed the Hillsborough plant first. When they done that they transferred a few of them down here. Old Bill Hicks, Mr. Know-It-All, he knew something was wrong then.



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He kept telling everybody that it ain't going to be long before they close this one because they closed the one in Hillsborough.

JC: I see.

AF: Eventually, it was the truth, but everybody that I know and heard they blamed it on Hickory. Whether it's Hickory's fault or not they blamed it that when Hickory bought it out that led to the downfall.

JC: So you never knew the White's?

AF: Naw. I come there, you know, I didn't work there but for like three and a half years or something, and I believe they was already sold out. But like I heard Ivey and them talk about how it used to be. It used to be a more comfortable place where there wasn't much pressure on you to get things out. They was more worried about quality than quantity. Where with Hickory it was the other way around whether they admit to it or not, I worked there and I know.

JC: [laughter] All right, Andy, well, this was a great interview. I really appreciate your time.

AF: I appreciate, you know, you calling me up and giving me an opportunity, and I hope it works out well for you.

JC: I'm sure it will.

END OF INTERVIEW