

Interview

with

JANE NEWCOMB

March 6, 1994

by Valerie Pawlewicz

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

JANE NEWCOMB
MARCH 6, 1994

VALERIE PAWLEWICZ: Today is March 6, 1994. I am Valerie Pawlewicz interviewing Jane Newcomb. It is five of eleven. I will start by asking you very basic questions. To begin with, how did you start working at White's Furniture Company?

JANE NEWCOMB: I was working in Roxboro on the 3rd shift and I very much disliked it. I had a friend that had gone to work at White's. I ran across her one day and she told me they were hiring. So I went there and I was hired.

VP: Hired to do what?

JN: I was hired in the cabinet room. I worked in there three months and then several people quit in the rub and pack department and I was transferred there, and that's where I stayed until I was laid off.

VP: What were the approximate dates of your employment at White's?

JN: I was laid off March 19th of '93 and I guess I went there in '87 in the fall, I believe.

VP: You started working at White's after it had been sold?

JN: Yes.

VP: Just to clarify, you said you worked at Roxboro on the 3rd shift. What or where?

JN: Collings and Aikman here in town.

VP: What did you do there?

JN: Worked in the beaming department running a warper.

VP: What's that?

JN: It's a machine that you run yarn on and then they are run together to weave cloth.

VP: That's a different kind of job than what you retired with. My first question is that it must have required new skills so how did you make that transition from working with cloth to working with wood?

JN: I just believe I can do anything if you show me how.

VP: Was it hard making that transition?

JN: Yes, in some ways because I had never worked with wood. I really didn't like the cabinet room. You did a lot of sanding and things like that, but when I went to rub and pack I loved it over there.

VP: What didn't you like about the cabinet room and what did you like about rub and pack?

JN: In the cabinet room it's just the raw wood and the dust from sanding. It was hard on me adjusting. The assembly part didn't bother me, but when I went to rub and pack I just liked everything, whatever I did.

VP: When you worked in the cabinet room did you work by yourself or did you work with others?

JN: With others.

VP: One of my impressions of the rub and pack room from the photos that I have seen of Bill's is that people worked together and perhaps even talked. It seemed more social and for me that would be easier because I could chat as I worked or talk about what's going on around or whatever.

JN: It makes the day go by faster when you can talk and cut-up.

VP: Who did you work with in the cabinet room?

JN: People-wise?

VP: Yes.

JN: Linda (?), Richard Poole, Jimmy Wynn. Jim and I worked together a whole lot making drawers. Linda Dodson, Ivey Jones, Bill Hicks, that's part of them anyway.

VP: Did you work with people as a pair often or would there be a number of people working on one project in the cabinet room?

JN: Yeah, well you would go from. . . . You might be sub assembly or you may be assembly or just whatever. It was usually two or three people working together.

VP: When you moved to rubbing and packing was it also the same working group together or did you work with different people?

JN: Different people. It just depended on what I was doing at the time. We sort of rotated and the job you were being classified in and paid for it didn't mean that you would go in and do that all day. Sometimes you may be waxing or could be packing or maybe inspecting or putting on hardware. Just whatever.

VP: So you didn't do the same thing everyday with the same people, maybe you did different jobs.

JN: My job was to put on hardware. If I was doing that I worked with the same person. Anything else I was just . . .

VP: What does it mean to 'put on hardware'?

JN: Handles, which screws in to the panel it's on. Some we had to put in bags and pack inside. It just depended on what we were running.

VP: I really curious. I'm still thinking about your movement from one place to another. What was your first day like? Where do you use skills? Did you have one person to show you around or did they just throw you out there?

JN: No, the supervisor showed me what to do. That first day I basically worked by myself, but a lot of people would come by and make sure I was O.K. and if I had any problems.

VP: They were being helpful to you?

JN: Oh, yeah, very friendly.

VP: Were they any more friendly than your last job? Was it the general atmosphere you were expecting?

JN: In a lot of ways I guess they were friendlier. On my previous job we just--it wasn't that they weren't friendly--we just didn't see each other much. You had to be right there at that machine. At White's we just mingled more.

VP: Then you went to rubbing and packing. Who did you work with in rubbing and packing?

JN: Billy Smith, Moriah Whitfield, Tim Chavis, Elton Murdock, Reggie Evans, Barbara Paints(sp.), Tammy Shortridge, Robert Hodgeson. It's been so long I can't remember their names.

VP: That's O.K. Sounds like a large group of people.

JN: Yeah, it was.

VP: How many would you think?

JN: Closer to twenty. Ernie Dobby. I can't even think of his name because we called him Julio so much. [laughter]

VP: Why did you call him Julio?

JN: He was of Mexican descent and we were just cutting-up, being ourselves.

VP: I'm interested in nicknames too, because it seems like there are a lot of nicknames. I talked with Cindy Cook who worked at White's and she said, "Everybody had nicknames." I just think that's very curious and fun. Did you have a nickname?

JN: I got called Janie Baby quite a lot. [laughter]

VP: By anybody in particular or by everybody?

JN: Everybody.

VP: Did that happen the first day you moved into rubbing and packing or did you acquire it?

JN: No, it took awhile. [laughter]

VP: [laughter] They had to figure you out probably.

JN: Yeah, to get to know each other.

VP: It sounds like you got to know them very well. You worked with them '87 to '93. Who were you closest to?

JN: People in rub and pack.

VP: Speaking of 'who you were closest to' and what kind of time you spent - what were your hours? Did you spend the same amount of time, did you always come together to eat lunch?

JN: We took our breaks together.

VP: What were the hours that you worked?

JN: 7:00 till 3:25.

VP: 3:25?

JN: Uh, huh.

VP: Why's that?

JN: Because we only took one break so they gave us the extra five minutes at the end of the day. Well, I don't know - We were suppose to get three breaks and took two or something like that. We took longer breaks because it so far to get to the canteen and back. We took about two fifteen-minute breaks instead of about three ten-minutes.

VP: What would a typical day have been? Did a bell ring or a whistle blow?

JN: Yeah, a whistle.

VP: I've heard talk about the whistle blowing.

JN: Yeah.

VP: If they punch in at 7:00. . . . Did you live in Mebane at the time?

JN: No, Roxboro.

VP: You lived in Roxboro. How far is it from Roxboro to Mebane?

JN: From my house to the parking lot was thirty-four miles one way. I would leave home about 6:00 and that gave me plenty of time. I'd always stop at the store and get a drink or whatever.

VP: At 7:00 you clocked in. All twenty of you came in at the same time and (?). What did you do?

JN: We started to work. [laughter]

VP: You said your job changed depending on what was needed.

JN: Yeah, what was needed or somebody was out. The supervisor would tell us if he needed something else. You may have been working at a particular thing one day and you'd just know you fall right back in there to it the next.

VP: You knew where your job left off and you knew what would happen next unless the supervisor came and said, "Tomorrow we are going to begin this." Did twenty of you have twenty different jobs that would sometimes (?) and sometimes together? This is a very convoluted way of saying, "Did you all have twenty different jobs or did some of you share jobs?"

JN: We shared jobs.

VP: You mentioned that you were at the hardware ()?

JN: Yeah.

VP: What other kinds of positions were there?

JN: It all started when it came down our line. It just depended on what we were running. It may have to be machines to make the top slick to be able to put the finish on it. It had to be cleaned up, waxed, hardware went on, inspected. There were repair people. Packed. I guess I have done everything back there but repair.

VP: Sometimes you had to take on different jobs.

JN: Yeah.

VP: (?).

JN: All of us did. We would just go wherever.

VP: Sounded pretty flexible.

JN: I liked that. It gets boring when you do the same thing over and over all day.

VP: So you came in at 7:00 and when you got to work you knew what was needed or what was to be done. They would tell you what was different.

JN: Yeah.

VP: And you would do whatever was needed and it might be other than hardware--or what you were officially suppose to do. When was your first break?

JN: It was about 9:30 or something like that. I'm not exactly sure.

VP: Did you just walk over to the canteen or did you just sit by a window?

JN: Well, actually I had a fellow who--a friend not a fellow--usually got my drink and we would all sit upstairs together.

VP: All twenty of you would just . . .

JN: Well, some went down there and stayed and some of us stayed upstairs.

VP: And had coffee.

JN: Eat.

VP: Just rested.

JN: [laughter]

VP: Sounds fair. That's all you did during your ten minutes?

JN: Oh, yeah. At lunchtime if it was pretty I would go outside.

VP: When was lunch?

JN: Quarter to twelve until quarter after. (?) stay inside. Sometimes I didn't take lunch. I would go over to Byrd's. I would just go outside and sit. Picnic tables out there.

VP: At a quarter after twelve, did a whistle blow again?

JN: Yup.

VP: The people you worked with have most of them or, any of them, worked for White's Furniture Factory when it was sold?

JN: Most of them.

VP: What did they say about that time in the company?

JN: Gee, I really don't know. Of course it had already been taken over when I came to work there. I'm not that familiar with that time.

VP: Did they ever make comparisons between?

JN: Oh, of course. That's human nature.

VP: [laughter] Are there any comparisons that you remember? Like, "I just which it was still White's?"

JN: Oh, yes!

VP: [laughter]

JN: Of course, 'it'll never work'.

[Phone rings. Tape paused]

VP: I was asking you about a comparison of the other people in rubbing and packing--or the company in general--would make about the time then, and the time before. They speak about it as a better time or a worse time?

JN: Most people thought it was better before. Anytime there is a take-over, you know, you're just insecure even if things get better you're still going to sort of think they were better before.

VP: Did it feel fine at the factory?

JN: Yeah.

VP: Sometime I had heard that there was a beginning of a worry that people could sense that something was wrong and that they worried about their future in the factory. They were right. I suppose at the same time it might have been because as you said people would automatically worry because it happened once.

JN: But I think a lot of the closing was just the economy. Furniture sales were down terribly. I can't blame a person, if they had to buy furniture at the time, to find the cheapest one you could find instead of top quality. That's what I would have had to do. So, finally they just closed it down.

I think after the closing of Hillsborough, I guess, you know, started more or less looking for it thinking we would be next.

VP: When people began understanding that it probably would happen--after the closing of Hillsborough--did they start looking for other jobs or did they decide to hang on?

JN: A few did. Most stayed.

VP: You stayed.

JN: (?).

VP: Instead of talking about the end, let's talk about during. In general, the basic question, were the conditions good at the factory?

JN: No. Well, I guess sometimes. Something you think was wrong and they would let go anyway. You know, it would make you angry. I guess I just liked it. I didn't find a whole lot wrong with it. [laughter]

VP: When something went wrong or not the way you wanted it to, did you feel that you could tell supervisors and the complaint would be registered? Or did you feel like (?)?

JN: Oh, no he was real good about that, but if somebody over him would override him what can you do?

VP: Who was your supervisor?

JN: Paul Atkinson. The main thing I disliked about White's--which is in most factory type jobs: things went wrong, we got sent home. I'm by myself and I need to depend on a forty-hour job.

VP: Did that happen often, that the factory would close down?

JN: Certain times of the year (?). Sometimes it would be bad wood or something. I mean, I understand why they did it but that was really the only thing I didn't like about it.

VP: That you couldn't depend on . . .

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JN: Forty hours.

VP: To be paid for forty hours.

JN: Yeah. Of course, now, you know, a lot of times I got overtime.

VP: So you didn't always go home at three twenty-five. Sometimes you might stay longer? Did you have to work longer or did you choose to work longer?

JN: Occasionally it would be mandatory, most of the time it was volunteer.

VP: Was overtime done on the weekends or would you just continue working during the day?

JN: Both.

VP: Why did you work overtime?

JN: It may be an order to get something out. It may be a sample. We would be running samples quite a few times a week to High Point to set up for the furniture market.

VP: (?)?

JN: Yeah, it does.

VP: So you went to High Point? Did you help set-up for sales or showing?

JN: Showing, the furniture show. There is one in the spring and one in the fall.

VP: And how is that you were asked to go?

JN: My supervisor sent me the first time and after that I was asked to go. Richard Pickford--I'm not sure what is position was--he was over my supervisor. He requested that I go the first time.

VP: Was that a job that you liked to do?

JN: Oh, yeah.

VP: It would be fun to me to represent my company and to talk about my product. Is that what you were asked to do? What exactly were your responsibilities?

JN: We would go in and set it up. Clean it up and if repair work had to be done, maybe a touch-up or cleaning mirrors and just making sure everything looked as best as it possibly could.

VP: Was that a weekend job?

JN: Yes, I helped down there on weekends. Sometimes we were taken off the job during the day to go. You wouldn't necessarily be back at three-thirty so I would usually know a day ahead of time to make sure. . . . I lived so far away and several of us would ride together. I'd make sure I'd have a ride to get back home. We'd go a lot on weekends too.

VP: That would be a nice change of pace.

JN: Oh, yeah.

VP: How many of you would go to help set-up for the show?

JN: Most of the time it would be like about four.

VP: Were they the same four employees the times that you went?

JN: It varied. Mostly the same. Like the repairman, the inspectors, two extras to make sure everything got done.

VP: What sorts of furniture would you take with you to show?

JN: Everything we make. Of course, this was a collection of Hickory White. Hickory Chair Craft so everything would be in the same room. It was amazing to see a lot of stuff.

VP: And to make sure all of it was ready.

JN: Only our products. Each company would send in their people.

VP: It's an honor to be sent. Giving a half day off to go and make sure the furniture looks its best. Trust you and the responsibility to fix it, or clean it.

JN: Yeah.

VP: Those people that you worked with, did you see many of them outside the factory?

JN: Outside and still do.

VP: Who do you see?

JN: Penny, Moriah, Reggie, Elton, Tim, Brenda, Betty, Bristol, Joan, Dorothy, Joe Handy.

VP: [laughter] Who don't you see?

JN: These people are spread from Oxford to Burlington.

VP: My gosh. How do you see each other? How do you keep up?

JN: We just call each other and say, "Hey, I'm coming over today."

VP: That's really good. Do you still keep up with people from the Roxboro company?

JN: I see a few Occasionally. It's not like it was. At White's they were like my family. It didn't matter whether you were white, black, Mexican, we were all close. We got invited to everybody's kids birthday party. As a matter of fact, one guy in our department got married and everybody in there including women were invited to the Bachelor Party.

VP: [laughter] That's great. Did you go?

JN: Yes, I was told I had to go because I was one of the boys.

VP: [laughter]

JN: I went by for maybe an hour at the beginning.

VP: You snuck away before it got too wild.

JN: Yeah. [laughter]

VP: It sounds like you moved in pretty quickly, learned your responsibility, got to know the people, became a part of the community. How was it that you didn't live in Mebane? It was kind of a long drive. You were close to people so it sounds like you worked at seeing them even though you weren't from the same town.

JN: Yeah, it was like four to six of us at different times would ride together so it didn't make it so hard on anybody to drive. You weren't riding by yourself so it didn't seem so far.

VP: Did you ever consider moving to Mebane?

JN: Yeah. If they had stayed open I probably would have.

VP: Are you from Roxboro?

JN: I'm originally from Virginia.

VP: Where do you work now?

JN: G.K.N. Automotive.

VP: Where is that located?

JN: Roxboro.

VP: I think I passed it.

JN: 501, yeah.

VP: It's a very slick new building.

JN: On the left.

VP: My gosh, that's very modern looking. What's it like to work there?

JN: I like it alright. I enjoy it. It's nice to be five miles away.

VP: What do you do there?

JN: I'm an assembly technician. We assemble C.V. joints.

VP: What are C.V. joints?

JN: It's a half shaft that goes in four-wheel drive and front-wheel drive vehicles.

VP: Again, you are in something that you didn't know how to do and then were just shown and learned?

JN: I had never heard of one. [laughter]

VP: Good, because I was embarrassed to ask. [laughter] You just went in and figured it out?

JN: Well, I went to three weeks of school of pre-employment. There were like five stages to go through. I put in an application. I was called for an interview. I was sent to pre-employment schooling for three weeks and we were tested. They called me to go through a drug test and when they got the results back from that they called and offered me a job. Then I had five more weeks of school.

VP: G-T-N?

JN: G-K-N.

VP: G-K-N, and they provided all of this?

JN: Yeah.

VP: That's a far different experience than having a friend call you up and say there is a job in Mebane and going over and getting a job.

JN: Definitely.

VP: Very different. What did you think about this new process of getting a job?

JN: It was different. It had been a while since I had been, you know, looking for a job, and I had never had to provide a resume. It used to be you could just walk into a place. I've even been in to just talk to them and got the job. Of course, with a new plant they have so many people.

VP: Was it competitive?

JN: Yeah. I was very fortunate. I was on the first hiring. And well, they are still hiring.

VP: When did you start working for them?

JN: June of '93.

VP: So you were only out of work for . . .

JN: Three months. March 19 to June 21.

VP: That's very good. All of those weeks of training to get a job. What did they train you, what were they testing you for?

JN: We had a lot of math, shop math. We had to learn how to read, like blueprints. We had to learn how to fill out charts. We've gone through a course on. . . . A lot just learning to work in teams. We don't have supervisors. And, well, we'll still learning. Real good benefits. It's not White's, but I like it. [laughter]

VP: What is "not White's" about it? There are lots of things that are not like White's, like not having a supervisor, working as a team. How does that work?

JN: Well, the line I'm on--Chrysler line--we've been together long enough that we've worked out our problems. There are so many different personalities coming from different places. We've worked out all our problems. Things are going real well. The newer lines are still going through their's.

VP: What?

JN: It's such a change for everybody. There are problems, but I think it will work good once we get everything together.

VP: Was one of the hardest problems getting to know the differences in people?

JN: Yeah. It was for us. By not having a supervisor we make our own decisions. We have to do it as a team. You have to vote on it and the majority wins.

VP: Wow!

JN: When you are used to a supervisor telling you everything, "you do so-and-so, you go over there", or whatever it's a big switch.

VP: Do you think it will work out for the other team as well?

JN: I think every group that comes in will have the same difficulties. It's just something that will take time.

VP: Do you like it as a system?

JN: Yeah. Well, we're pretty close too.

VP: Do you miss anything about having a supervisor?

JN: Not really. I can't think of anything at the moment. Having a supervisor is good, but you fall into a rut of not thinking, you know, as to making decisions you are on your own. This way you have to.

VP: That's true. You have to confront people instead of going to the supervisor and saying, "He's not doing his job."

JN: Yeah.

VP: You have to figure out a way to say that to the person and still work with him.

JN: True.

VP: That seems a real challenge.

JN: Do it without hurting their feelings.

VP: I admire people who have those skills; I think that's pretty impressive.

I want to talk about leaving White's or having White's leave. What happened at the very end?

JN: In my department--well, the whole plant for that matter--were not laid off at the same time. They started at the first department and worked on back. I was in the next-to-last department.

In February they had one big lay-off in rub and pack. There was a lot of hugging and some little crying and a lot of exchanging addresses. Most of them every week when they would come back to get their check would come up and see what was left. I was one of the last ones up there (office). I was on for a good month after the big lay-off.

VP: How was it that you were not laid off?

JN: The supervisor wanted me to stay. "Would it be a problem?" I told him no.

VP: You started with about twenty, then there was the big layoff, how many were left?

JN: Probably ten or twelve.

VP: More than half?

JN: Yeah.

VP: And then, did you lose one week or did everyone stay, did the last ten stay until the end?

JN: No. The week before I got laid off everybody got laid off except: the repairman, the inspector and myself was what was left. (?). Three of us got laid off that day so that all was left was the repairman, inspector, and they were laid off the next week.

VP: What could five people do the last week?

JN: Well, any repairs we would clean up and get out. Packing up stuff to be shipped to Hickory. Trash to be taken to the dumpster. Cleaning up basically.

VP: It's hard for me to imagine five people doing the work of twenty. (?).

JN: Yeah, but we weren't still in production so what you did was just slower.

VP: When did production stop?

JN: I guess it was in February. Probably in February. So, the last month--or the last few weeks--was a cleaning up time, a finishing up project time.

VP: Did you know your lay-off was coming? Did you know when it was going to be?

JN: Well, we knew it would happen from the time we were told which, I think, was in November. No, I really didn't know the date until the date I was laid off. I could have worked another week, but it really didn't matter, I guess. I knew I would have to find something else anyway so date-wise it didn't matter.

VP: How did you receive notice of being laid off?

JN: Everybody in the plant was called together and I guess it was the company president that told us. We were told it was because of the economy and sales were down - which they were. It was just really bad. A lot of furniture companies closed up. Well, according to the news and companies closing up, I guess, we were one of the last ones in a line.

VP: How did people react?

JN: They were sad. They knew there was going to be a change in their life. There was people there, I guess, probably it was the only place they ever worked. Some people had been there like thirty or forty some years. It was easier on the younger ones than it was the older ones. Of course, you'd be insecure thinking, "Well, you know, will I find anything else? Will I make anywhere near the pay I'm making now?" Life goes on. We had to deal with it and keep on going.

VP: Was that announcement the one made in November or was that an announcement made in February?

JN: In November.

VP: So what did you do? How did they go on?

JN: We did a lot of joking, and talked. I guess we had to laugh to keep from crying. [long pause] It was a sad time, it really was in November and more so in February. When they started laying off people it became more a reality. You think that this really is happening. You are uncertain about when you'd be laid off. When it happened you would have to go somewhere else.

VP: I think it would be odd wondering if everyday was your last day because you didn't know when you would get your notice. You said you didn't know until the day you got your notice that you had lost your job.

JN: Yup.

VP: So, did you walk in at seven as usual and were handed a note?

JN: No. I think the first bunch that was laid off they were told sometime that day. Then, of course, you had to go to the office to collect your papers. They had a big meeting for that. After that I think it was a couple of weeks before they laid off some more. He didn't say anything to me when he made the lay-offs so the next week I knew it was like a matter of maybe working another week. So I just told him I would go ahead take mine unless he really needed me. Well, word was it was like three out of what was left had to go.

VP: What an awful decision to have to make.

JN: Yeah, well that's when some of us volunteered. It made it easier on them.

VP: Did you receive a note? How did you know that you were laid off?

JN: I don't think I got a note. He came by and told me to go on to the office and do my paperwork.

VP: In the middle of the day?

JN: Yeah. He walked up and said. . . . Well, if it had been like, if we had been running full force and he had done that I would have been highly upset. But it didn't bother me because I knew it was coming.

VP: I think even though you know it's coming it's always hard. It's a horrible shock even if I knew I didn't even want to work there.

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A

START OF TAPE 1, SIDE B

JANE NEWCOMB
MARCH 6, 1994

VP: . . . when you done filling paperwork?

JN: No, we worked all day.

VP: You finished the day?

JN: Yeah. We were told in November when they said that it would shut down. We were given like extra vacation time and Christmas. We were told until our lay-off date we would get forty hours a week. We were promised a certain amount of time and we got that.

VP: You only worked four days a week after you got . . . ?

JN: I can't remember if it was four or five. I believe it was four.

VP: At three twenty-five you would have clocked out and did you do any last things?

JN: You had to hug everybody that was left.

VP: [laughter]

JN: We've probably never done as much hugging in our whole life as we did up there. Every time somebody would come through, you know. A lot of days we definitely didn't work for our money. [laughter]

VP: [laughter] Is there any one act that you did on that last day that really felt like the end, like turning in a key or a locker, or a badge that had your identification on it, or maybe a tool that you had to use and had to return to your supervisor?

JN: I don't remember anything. I think by then it had just been going on for so long. I was really glad to go to say, "Alright, it's final. I can do something else now."

[pause]

VP: What did you do when you went home?

[pause]

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JN: I probably called my family.

[pause]

VP: What did you do the next day?

[pause]

JN: Typical things, I guess, cleaning and whatever I had to do. It was sad especially like Sunday afternoon knowing that you wouldn't have to get up and go to work Monday morning and just knowing you're going to have to do something different now. It really was. You think, "Well, a lot of these people I will never see again."

[pause]

VP: How did you find out about the G.K.N. job?

JN: There was a new plant coming into the area. I had maybe about February, yeah, end of January or the first of February before the lay-off in rub and pack I had jokingly told everyone at work that with my luck the first place I put in an application I would get a job, and I did.

VP: Oh, my!

JN: This was a new plant that came in. There's one in Mebane and one in Sanford in North Carolina. They had a notice in the paper and I went to. . . . Employment Security Commission and put in an application. You had to take your resume and diploma with you. I really didn't have any idea I would ever hear from them, but I did.

VP: Were you applying to other places at the same time or just that one?

JN: That was the first application I put in. Then I only put in like two or three other applications because the time I was in school by being laid off from a job with a plant shut-down I qualified for. . . . It was possible I would get this other job so I didn't have to look for a job. Like a week after I finished schooling, G.K.N. called and offered me a position. It was maybe a month before I went to work, but because I had been promised a job I didn't have to look.

VP: Wow! Who promised you a job?

JN: G.K.N.. They offered me the job. I didn't know when I would go, but I knew I would go so I could still draw unemployment, but I didn't have to look for a job.

VP: O.K. So for about a month you drew unemployment, but knew you had a job waiting for you.

JN: Yeah, whenever they set a date.

VP: Were other people as fortunate as you or did it take longer for others?

JN: Some it took a long time. One woman I worked with was, let's see, just a second. One woman I was working with, Dorothy (Erikson ?), she was laid off several weeks before I was. It took her a long time to find something else, and she went to work for (Big Lots ?) in Durham.

Sometime in the later part of last year, well, it was in January or February of this year they closed down. So she's out looking again now. I think I was really fortunate.

Some took the opportunity to go back to school which I think would have been very nice, but I have a son in college. So that wouldn't work.

VP: [laughter] Did White's help laid off workers find new jobs?

JN: Yeah, they were very good. They had people from Employment Security Commission to come in and talk to us. They set up interviews. You were offered the opportunity to go to school. They said they would do anything in the world they could to help us find another job.

VP: What did that include, bringing people in to be interviewed? Did they put up notices of jobs?

JN: Yeah. Well, I guess, it was all sort of local: Burlington, Mebane. Every week they would post something. Anything that had anything available.

VP: So, some workers may have found a job that way.

JN: Yeah, I'm sure they did.

VP: You heard about G.K.N. through another source, is that correct?

JN: They put an advertisement in the paper.

VP: O.K. I was wondering (?). Did anybody else from White's get a job at G.K.N.?

JN: There are some coming in that I had worked with before at White's, but they weren't there at the lay off.

VP: They had left before the lay off?

JN: Yeah.

VP: What did your family think when you called them and told them?

JN: "Oh, no! What are you going to do now?"

VP: Are they in Virginia still?

JN: Yeah, except for one sister down here. My son goes to school in Virginia.

But, our mother always told us that you may not understand why but things happen for the best. In the long run maybe it did.

VP: Are you making the same amount of money at G.K.N.?

JN: At the moment I'm making fifty cents an hour less, but when I get to top pay I'll be making more.

VP: When do you get to top pay?

JN: I come up for a raise every three months. I've gotten two so far. At the end of this month I'll come up for another one.

VP: So conceivably within a year?

JN: Yeah, a year or eighteen months.

VP: Do you get the sense that G.K.N. will stay in the area?

JN: Yeah.

VP: Does it seem like it's doing well?

JN: Yeah. This is a British based company and the business was started by Monks in 1151 A.D. They had a forge and the company has built up from there.

VP: Well, it sounds like they are going to be around for awhile.

JN: Yeah, they have companies in seven countries. I think they'll definitely be there.

VP: That must give you a sense of security.

JN: Yeah, it does.

VP: I think that's why it was so shocking for people in Mebane because the company had been there for so long. Cindy Cook's grandfather worked there. When you expect something to be there and it can't, it's going to be very shocking.

JN: Yeah, especially something that's been there all of your life. It just gives you a sense of security. You think it always will be.

VP: It might be harder for someone from Mebane to lose a job from White's than someone like yourself. . . . You had said yourself that it would be difficult because it's not in your area, you don't live there.

JN: That's true, but if it had been hometown it would have been worse. I'm sure it would.

VP: Even though I said that, I can see the flip side that you were immediately taken in so it was almost. . . . cause you said you were like a family. So you shared in some of those very strong feelings about the importance of that factory.

JN: Yeah.

[pause]

VP: Do you think you will stay with G.K.N. indefinitely?

JN: I like my job. Yeah, I'll say I'll be there to retirement. I have to work, and I like it well enough to want to stay. It has good benefits too, and that's worth a whole lot.

VP: You've mentioned that and I agree. What kind of benefits do you get?

JN: Paid medical insurance, dental, life insurance. When I had been there three months I got three days of vacation. A day a month for the rest of the year. January you start all over again, and I get two weeks. That will add up and eventually I think I will get four weeks. They have a 401-K savings plan, pension, holidays. We set our hours. I

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work four tens. I work 5:30 to 4:00 Monday thru Thursday. Anything after that is overtime. I can work overtime and still have some days off. I like the people I'm working with.

VP: What were the benefits like at White's?

JN: We had holidays and paid vacations. They had a pension but as far as 401-K or things like that. They paid your insurance, I was used to that. It didn't bother me. I have better now.

VP: Sounds like that there are plusses and negatives at both companies. Perhaps White didn't have benefits, but it had other things to make the job tolerable.

JN: If they hadn't of closed down I would probably never have applied at G.K.N.. I liked it that much.

VP: I just find it interesting that a job is more than how much you get paid and what bonuses come. Those are wonderful things and they may make a difference. Sometimes you will take a job for what it gives you versus whether you like it or not, and have too. It is also interesting to know that there are jobs that you take and keep because you enjoy them. And that is something I would like to get at.

JN: Yeah. If you're not happy you're fighting a losing battle anyway. You're miserable, you make everybody else miserable. We all hung together and in '90 I had surgery twice in three months. When I came back to work and if I got tired the guys would say, "Sit down, sit down, we'll do your job." Not everywhere they would do anything like that.

Course we've been through, you know . . . Some of the girls having babies and men having little ones. Watching them grow. Weddings and things like that. I saw more of them than I did my family. They were my family.

VP: I bet they still are but just (?).

JN: Yeah.

VP: Is GKN not like a family?

JN: Yeah, but it's sort of confined to your own line. It's sort of in your hiring too. They hire like twenty or twenty-five at the time. You spend five weeks in class together so you're going to kind of get close. But basically it just the ones on the line. Ten of us went out to dinner together one night this week. We said we wanted to do something besides see each other here on the job - just get out and have a good time.

VP: How did it work out?

JN: We had a ball. [laughter] One woman said, "I've never been run out of a restaurant before."

VP: [laughter] What did she do?

JN: Oh, just laughed at her and said, "We won't get run out of this one." I'm sure we were loud, but they had us in a private room.

VP: What did you do?

JN: Just talking and laughing. We talked and laughed and said. . . . As a matter of fact, one of the women there said she had been asked by a guy on another line, said, "What's the matter with them people up there?" She said, "Who?" He said, "Them up there on that first line." She said, "He didn't realize that I was a part of the Chrysler team." She said, "What you mean what's the matter with them?" He said, "They work like crazy. What's the matter with them?" [laughter]

VP: [laughter]

JN: We talk and laugh and it makes it go better. That's the way it was at White's, you know, even if something is hard it makes it go easier.

[pause]

VP: Is there any one moment or event at White's that you always remember, always think back too - good or bad?

JN: I really didn't have a lot of bad news just a bad day. I didn't do anything serious to get in trouble. I had so many good times that it would be hard to separate one from another.

[pause]

VP: Were (?)?

JN: Yeah, we did some of that. We'd usually sing "Happy Birthday" or something like that.

VP: I understand. I was thinking of my own job. The ones I liked. It was a job. It was not like a parade was going to go through the office. There were a lot of little things, there were a lot of people going out of their way rather than any one big event.

JN: Going that extra mile to do something makes a difference.

VP: I'm surprised that you, the care someone took toward you knowing that you had been ill and that they would help you or do your work because that's the time you needed someone. You expect a card on your birthday; you don't always expect someone to help you.

JN: Quite a few of them came to the hospital to see me. I threatened to kill them all when I got better because they were making me laugh and it hurt so bad.

VP: [laughter] Sounds like they did care.

JN: Oh, yeah. I know they did and they still do, and I care about them.

[pause]

VP: These are all of my questions. Is there anything that you would want to have recorded forever?

JN: I don't know. I just loved my job, the people I worked with, and I wish I was still there. If it was still there Mebane would have me, I guess. I would certainly be living there by now. It was a long drive, but still I miss it.

END OF INTERVIEW