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Interview

with

ANNETTE FAUST PATTERSON

December 18, 1994

by Bill Bamberger

Transcribed by Jackie Gorman

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

ANNETTE PATTERSON
DECEMBER 18, 1994

BILL BAMBERGER: Today is December 18, 1994. This interview is taking place in my studio at 500 North 3rd Street, Mebane, North Carolina. I am Bill Bamberger conducting the interview.

Annette, why don't you begin by telling me where you were born and in what year.

ANNETTE PATTERSON: Okay, I was born in Mebane, North Carolina, right here in Mebane. I believe it was the Mebane Clinic at the time in 1951. There were two of us. I had a twin brother, Andy and Annette.

BB: What was your brother's name?

AP: Andy, it's Andy Arthur.

BB: Andy was your twin?

AP: Uh, huh.

BB: And Sandy Arthur?

AP: No, Andy, Andy Arthur.

BB: Andy Arthur.

AP: Yeah.

BB: Just one brother?

AP: Yeah, just that one brother and then Annette. We are twins.

BB: Is Andy still--?

AP: No, he got killed in a car accident. I guess we had just turned twenty, nineteen or twenty, and he got killed in a car accident.

BB: What year was that? In the 70s?

AP: Yeah. I don't remember what year it was. I think it was '72. It sure was.

BB: I'm sorry to hear that.

AP: Yeah, and I was, too. I wonder a lot of times how it would have been if he had grown, you know, if he could, you know, if both of us would have made it up to get to, what, forty-three years old which I am today. I wonder what it would have been if my twin brother would have lived.

BB: Were you close?

AP: Well, you know, as kids growing up we weren't close, but I wanted to be close to him, but that's a boy. He didn't want to be close. My brother didn't want to be close at the time. You know, it's not like it is now, kids growing up, you see. Back then we chopped gardens. When we got out of school for summer we chopped gardens, we took care of pigs, we did all this. This here in time they didn't do it. They don't have to.

BB: Did you live on a farm growing up?

AP: No, stayed right there at home.

BB: Right there on Foust in your same home place as you're in now?

AP: Right there on Foust Road. Same old place. You wouldn't believe it, but it used to be gardens, pig pens. All this used to be there. In fact, my daddy used to rent some land up the road from this man. That was a big garden spot. Raised corn, tomatoes, all this being the whole nine yards. We used to work in it taking care of it keeping it weeded. We used to have a horse and wagon. We used to hook the horse up and go up there like in the fall to cut the corn down and shock it up in shocks. This was part of our job while daddy was at work. The kids done it. You got up and worked.

BB: Tell me your father's name.

AP: Arthur.

BB: Was he Andy Arthur as well or just Arthur?

AP: Uh, huh. Well, he was Arthur, Arthur Edward.

BB: Arthur Edward. And your mother?

AP: Was Zonnie, Zonnie Gail.

BB: What was her maiden name?

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AP: Emmerson.

BB: Tell me a little more about them.

AP: Well, as much as I can tell you about, what, my mother?

BB: Un, huh.

AP: Well, my mother is from Chatham County. I've got one uncle living there from Chatham. He was [inaudible] Emerson. That's the only one, you know, I really got to know. I didn't know too much about Chatham, my mother's people because we very seldom got to go down and visit.

BB: Are either of your parents still alive?

AP: No, both of my parents are dead, deceased.

BB: When did you lose them?

AP: Oh, now it's been--. My father, he was right at seventy when my father passed if I'm not mistaken. Then my mother--. About five or six years ago now. I guess something like that.

BB: You talked a little bit about your father's garden and whatnot. What kind of work did he do for a living?

AP: Well, it was logging, pulp wood logging.

BB: Logging?

AP: Yeah, he used to work for Sykes' Logging Company.

BB: Was that any relationship to White Furniture?

AP: No.

BB: Are they still in business?

AP: I think so. I think they still have sons. Mr. Everett and Miss Ellen are still living. They still got their company going. The sons got it going. Still got the log company going if I'm not mistaken.

BB: Where is it located?

AP: Well, it out in Mebane Oaks. You've got to go down there and turn--. I can show you because I don't know the roads to know how to get there, but I know where it is.

BB: Let's talk a little bit more about you now for just a bit.

AP: Okay.

BB: I'd like to know when you started your work at White Furniture, and what brought you to White Furniture.

AP: Well, I had been trying to get at White's for a long time. This friend of mine-- this girlfriend--said they were hiring at White's. I was working at Graham and I said, "Okay," because I had been trying to get there. She said they were hiring so I walks down to White's and filled out an application. Hopefully, went through my drug screening and everything and got a job. I was there for about two years and six months before the closing started on me.

BB: So you were there two years and six months. So you came to work in 1990 or something like that?

AP: Yeah, it was '90 or '91.

BB: '91 maybe?

AP: Somewhere, yeah. It sure is.

BB: Tell me about that, and tell me about your interview, what you can remember and sort of how you were hired.

AP: Okay. Jim Murray, that's the bunt-headed man, right? [laughter]

BB: Right.

AP: Okay. When I first went up to fill out the application they said, "Well, we do need somebody in the rough mills." That's where I was. They said, "We've already got one girl back here. Maybe you can inspire her to stay." So he took me back and showed me the job. He walked me around and showed me the job. I went through, and I seen a lot of people that I knew, you know. He showed me the job, and then they send me for

my drug screening. So I passed the drug screening so, you know, they hired me and told me when to come to work.

BB: That simple!

AP: Yep, [laughter] mostly. Just getting in there I guess.

BB: Did you interview with anybody else other than Jim Murray?

AP: No, just him I think it was. Just him.

BB: Did you have friends at the time working there who were references for you or helped you get in to get the job?

AP: Well, just that one girl, and me and her weren't that close because she has told me, we'd be talking on the weekend and she'd say, "When they start hiring I will let you know," and she did.

BB: Who was that?

AP: Wait a minute. I'm going to try to think of her name. See we call her "Cabbage." [laughter] Okay, we call her "Cabbage". She was in and out then. She ended up getting fired before the plant closed down.

BB: You said she had left before the plant closed?

AP: Yeah, she was out a whole bunch of stuff, and they terminated her. I believe it was Kathy Stokes. Was it Kathy Stokes? I never learned her real name. I always know her--Kathy--as "Cabbage." She was the one that told me they was hiring. I went in first to fill out an application for the interview.

BB: Did you ever have any family members who worked at the factory over the years?

AP: Oh, yes, but--. Not really because I don't think my father never worked in there. People that I know worked in there, but, you know, not exactly family members that I can--which they probably were--but I didn't know at the time.

BB: Tell me a little bit more about your job in the rough mill. What exactly you did there.

AP: Okay, [laughter] that was a job. I tailed the rip saw. Now the rip saw is something that you cut a certain length of wood to make furniture. I tailed the rip saw. Then mostly worked on the panel flow, worked on the edger, worked on the planner, just whatever, just anything. I loaded the line with lumber. Just anything that the men done, I done. Mostly worked in the molding department. All this was back in the rough mill.

BB: What was the--? You mentioned the panel flow, what was that machine?

AP: That was the--. That's where you glue the wood together and send it through there slow. Where Tonie used to work at. You know, you had to glue it. Put glue on both sides and then got to send it through. It goes through one end and come out on the other where heat went through it and made it stick together. [inaudible] till it get out the other end. All of it was one great big sheet of wood. When it got out the other end a saw would come and press the release and it would come through and cut it a certain length. So it really was just gluing wood together.

BB: Yeah, and that's what some of us call the glue machine.

AP: Yeah, it was three there, two or three of them there and all of them had different names.

BB: Of all those different jobs in the rough mill that you did--you talked about several--which did you like the most?

AP: Tailing the rip saw. [laughter]

BB: Why is that?

AP: I don't know. It's just that, you know, you had to use your wits, your speed, and keep your eyes, you know, you had to be ready at all times. This is the job that I was hired for, and this is what I first started out to do. But, you know, I loved it.

BB: Okay, tell me exactly--. Now I saw you do it and I know what it was about to some extent, but for purposes of the interview tell me as best you can exactly what you did when you were working the rip saw.

AP: Okay, tailing the rip saw. What I was doing was grading wood. You know, you cutting it at a certain length and you have to make sure, you know, if it's good wood or bad wood, worm holes, splits or whatever, rough wood, not rough, you know, you had a certain grade that you had so many trucks sitting around that you would grade this wood by. If something wasn't no good how you'd throw it over your head and let it go down into the hog, but something that was good you had to write first grade, second grade, third grade, and that's what I was doing. I was really grading the wood as they cut it.

BB: I know what the hog is, and you know that I--

AP: [laughter]

BB: Tell the world what the hog is.

AP: Okay. The hog is where you throw away wood that is no good. It goes up on a belt, it goes over, goes into a grinder that chips it up, makes it out of chips which is bad wood. A lot of people wouldn't know what it was. It's a very noisy machine. That's basically as I know it.

BB: You would grind it up. You could use that. Wouldn't that be used to heat the clamp? Wouldn't it eventually go to the furnace?

AP: I guess. I don't know. You know, the next time I seen that wood it was sawdust, you know, a fine sawdust. This the way it would be the next time I seen it. I know where it was going in and how it was going through the saw, but, you know, when it grinded up--

BB: Sawdust.

AP: Sawdust, yep.

BB: My recollection was that folks said that it went up and it went into this huge dust collecting tower and then they actually burned it to feed the furnace.

AP: But you know what? They also used some of that going on a truck to make chip core. Do you know what chip core is?

BB: Un, huh.

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AP: Yeah, they take it and somehow press it all together and mash it in a mold to make furniture with. Some of it was being used as chip core, if I'm not mistaken.

BB: That makes sense. Was the chip core made at the plant or was it made elsewhere?

AP: No, it wasn't made there. I don't know where they take it, you know, to get it made. I used to have a friend that drives a truck from Mebane Lumber Company that would take these chips to this place. They would dump them off--I watched--they'd dump them off in the great big old thing. You know, they was actually buying this to make chip core with. See, when we got chip core in over there it was already plastered together. It was just great big sheets. Some of it sometimes would be, you know, twelve foot long, so many inches wide when we got it. They usually take em and shape it out to make a piece for the furniture, top for a table, the bottom for a chair.

BB: Okay. Let's go back to the rip saw. We diverted a little bit when you told me about sorting and grading the wood. But let's get back to after you graded the wood.

AP: Okay. After I graded the wood we had a certain bill on the wood. Okay, because we had a bill on everything we cut. We had a bill on it. If they needed so many pieces of it you'd make sure they had enough to for the bill--this is suppose to be A-1 wood--we'd take it and put a bill on it, put a tag on it and let them know what it was, push it over to a certain spot. That's when it would go to the panel flow to be glued together. Which like I say it would come out the other end, they cut it a certain length, certain wide, you know, length, because it was already cut. When it come down to us it was cut a certain length, width, you know, wideness, and then we had to cut it down especially chipping the edges of it to get the rough wood off the edges of the wood.

My grading this that's tailing the rip saw-- I had to make sure there were no worm holes or rough wood or busted places in it. If you seen all this, just grading the wood.

Then they would turn around and put it on a truck. Got enough of the bill, then it goes to the panel flow where they would glue it together.

BB: When you were tending the rip saw how much wood would you go through on a day?

AP: Oh.

BB: Let's go through in an hour.

AP: In an hour! Ah, you know, that was hard to say. Sometimes I had so much wood on that table-- We had really went through some wood. We usually averaged-- Well, let's go by day because we kept our wood by footage on what we run, you know, me and this guy running the rip saw, and me telling them what we would a cut a day. They cut us so much on our table a day. It would like to be about twelve, fifteen feet a day. This is in eight hours.

BB: Twelve or fifteen feet a day.

AP: Yeah, I think that was what it was.

BB: That doesn't mean much to me. You have to help me a little more.

AP: Well, wait a minute. Let me see. Let me make sure I gave you the right amount. Was it more than that? [pause] Yeah, it was footage. It was just how much lumber was cut through your saw that day. That way, you know, they'd know how much you had done that day. So that's what it was.

BB: But what does in terms of volume-in terms of the wood piled high on the furniture trucks--I mean, you would rip it and you would pile it on the trucks. Correct?

AP: Right.

BB: Now, how many of those furniture trucks would you fill?

AP: In a day or an hour?

BB: In an hour.

AP: Okay. But that still is going back to how big your bill was for that order, right?

BB: Uh, huh.

AP: So some trucks, some bills would call you for-- You know grading it and getting out good grades I have two or three trucks. But in an hour's time I would fill up one truck or one truck and a half of this is good wood. See, I also had bad wood that was coming through, too, that I had to keep up with. So sometimes I had, what, four or five trucks sitting around me which is good grade, A grade, B grade, C grade or whatever. Then you had the stuff that they was going--which really you just tried to make something out of. Sometimes I'd have three or four trucks sitting around me at times. At other times I had six trucks.

BB: So you had to make a lot of decisions right there as the wood was coming down the line.

AP: And you really didn't have time to stop and think about what to do with the wood. In other words, when this wood come down you had to know what you want to do with it then because it was coming one right after another so I had to know where, in order words, I had to look this way-- Okay, when we first started running it he would run it and he would edge the wood. He would run it down one side and I was suppose to look at that wood then for the first time. When I shoved it back up the table he was going to edge the other side. So I'm suppose to know what side is bad wood. I'm suppose to caught on to where it was bad at. What side was bad and what side was not, where it was going to go to right from the start when he first run that through the first time. So when he'd run it so many times--he would run it twice--and if there was a bad place on it I should have knowed-- I know where it goes, what truck it should go on when it come back down to me. Sure did.

BB: Who taught you how to evaluate wood? How to tell what was good and what was not good?

AP: Well, I guess my ripsaw runner, the guy running the ripsaw. When they put you in there they don't give you no training, right? Like they take you and put you on here so you learn this and this is what you are looking for, and nobody stayed with you. So

really you learnt-- They might have run it a little slower when you first started to learn, but you gradually picked up your speed to you where you know what was good and what was bad.

BB: What happens when you'd make mistakes? I know you rarely did. [laughter]

AP: Well, a lot was made. I wasn't the only one. Once you made a mistake, like I say, you've got a what, twelve or fifteen in a stack of wood on this truck, and when they go through to put it in the panel flow if they see some bad they would throw it out. Either they would go through and look through your truck and see bad pieces of wood and you could mark it where you need to get them out. Who's ever running the panel floor would take them out if they see marks on them--orange markings--they would know it was a bad piece of wood.

BB: So there was a check before it went into the panel flow. Did you ever have instances where someone might miss it at the rip saw, someone might miss it at the panel flow and it would go on down the line?

AP: Uh, huh, and it went right on through.

BB: What would happen then?

AP: If people done like the are supposed to--which they got on us a lot about this--somebody was supposed to caught it before it went--. See, we have had wood that makes it, it had been molded, and made it all the way upstairs and got made into furniture before anybody caught it. That was a mistake. Everybody got to go home. [laughter] Everybody paid for one person's mistake. Like they said it wasn't supposed to got that far because everybody--. The system they had everybody is supposed to check behind everybody else because nobody's perfect.

BB: Right.

AP: Actually, everybody is supposed to check behind everybody else.

BB: What happened when this occurred?

AP: Oh, the whole plant went home.

BB: Really?

AP: Everybody, yeah, I mean, if we was working steady back there in the rough mill and they found a mistake upstairs and they let it get that far to get on that line they would shut everything down. Everybody went. They cut everybody's hours because everybody went.

BB: So you would go home without pay?

AP: Without pay.

BB: And that was basically a kind of punishment for messing up?

AP: That was it, that was it for one person missing what another, you know, somebody had. That was our punishment. It sure was.

BB: How would folks--? Did they know whose fault it was? Was anyone ever blamed?

AP: Well, you know, different one's trying to blame different one's, but how can you--because everybody is going to make a mistake. And then maybe you got to molding and somebody had seen it and said it would be all right and let it go on through. So everybody paid for their mistakes.

BB: I've heard some stories from some of the old timers in the old days that quality really, really mattered and they didn't let anything go through like that, but when the Hickory Company came in, when they were bought up there was a lot of pressure to keep production moving at a much higher pace, and they let some of these mistakes go on through. In fact, they encouraged them by upping production speed and forcing people to work at a really fast pace. How would you react to that?

AP: You know, all this was before my time, you know, they was building on quality. That's one reason I wanted to get in White's because I had always heard it was a good place to work at. You know, it was a nice place to work, it had good benefits and all this. I said, "Well, I can get in here." Didn't know I was going to get in there two years and six months and it was going to close on me.

But they did, they did try to push us at a pace to where you couldn't put quality--. How you going to put quality and quantity together? See, you can't do that. I believe this was our problem, you know, a lot of times we got sent home because they were trying to put quality and quantity all in one.

BB: Let's go back to the rip saw machine.

[Annette coughs and Bill asks her if she needs to take a break]

BB: We'll take a break about mid-way through and fix ourselves some tea or coffee or something if you want that. Anytime you want to stop to take a break just let me know.

You were talking about the wood coming down the conveyor to you.

AP: Yeah.

BB: How fast would it come to you, and what would happen if you would get behind, I mean, how would you deal with that?

AP: Okay. You talking about--?

BB: I'm trying to get a sense of how fast the pace was and whether or not you had any control over the pace that you had to work there.

AP: Are you talking about coming through the rip saw? Like I say, it's coming through the saw straight out. But see they want you to work at a speed, in fact, they walk through and they pile your table up with wood, right? And then they'd come through and look to see how much wood you had got on the table at a certain time. If your saw runner is running the wood so fast that you was really trying to keep up all you could do is step back and let it hit the floor, and when you got a chance you picked it up. But I did that, because you can't catch every piece of wood. Either you are going to get hurt--. The way they'd be running the wood you're going to get hurt if you didn't watch out. So you have take safety in there with that, too. This wood running down this line through the saw and once that conveyor started to coming it didn't stop, you know, it's going to come out the other end. You just had to be careful.

[Annette coughs and she announces that she had a little cold. Bill stops the tape and gets her a little water, and then he turns the tape back on.]

BB: When you tended the rip saw you worked with a partner.

AP: Right.

BB: Tell me about that.

AP: [laughter] Well, see, when I first started working there they had me with a guy. There were two females in there from the start. Once I had been there for about a month, you know, the lady that was already there when I come quit. So they left me by myself. They had me working with this guy. I want to call him a sexual-ist, what you call a guy when he wants to make plays on you. Me and him had a little conflict because he wanted to play and I said, "I don't do that." In other words we got our stuff together because I just told him straight up that I don't play like that. That's not me. He really tried to show out on me. I thought I was going to have to go to personnel with it, which I didn't. You know, he straightened it out his self. I talked to the assistant supervisor and told him what was going on. I said, "Will you ask him, you know, to stop, you know, trying to () play and stuff because I'm not like that. They talked to him, and they straightened him out right there. It wasn't too much longer I put in that he ended up quitting or getting fired.

So they put me working with another guy. We had a good relationship with the work. Sometimes I'd get to run the saw and he'd get to tail it. See, they had me actually running the saw and tailing--. Sometimes I would get to run the saw. But, I did, I really--. Guess I had to get in there and put my feet down, be one of the guys and that's what I did. [laughter]

BB: Did they start you off tailing the saw?

AP: Right.

BB: But running the saw was a job that had a little bit more status or was it a harder job?

AP: Yeah, I think it wasn't as hard as tailing. Tailing the saw is really a hard job. It really was. And running it, you know, you got to set the saw up for certain length of stuff which I learned to do all of this. They gave me a chance to learn, and I did, trying to learn everything I could about the place.

BB: Tell me a little more about how you learned these things, I mean, who acted--
. Did the supervisor work with you or did you have--?

AP: No, just co-workers. The supervisor really didn't--. He didn't stand over you and work with you. Ever who you was working with that's how you learned. That's how you learnt your job. Then, like I said, I got to know Leon and, what's his name, worked on the panel flow?

BB: Leon Ruffin?

AP: Yeah, Leon and Maylo.

BB: Maylo.

AP: Yeah, you see, you know, they taught me a lot. They taught me a lot. Manuel--.

BB: Were they your closest friends there?

AP: Yeah. I used to go back and talk to them. You know, me and Tonie was close, too, once she got there. Leon Ruffin. Kirk Worth was the one I worked with. He would run the saw, you know, and I would tail it for him. Who was Terry's last name?

BB: Villines.

AP: Yeah, Terry Villines. Working on the saw like that. You know, most of them just taught me. You know, Melvin Chrisp. They taught me things that I need to know working back there and what to do and how to do it. It was always somebody there.

BB: Were you the first woman--I knew Connie was there--but were you there before Connie?

AP: No, see there was another lady there when I came. When they hired me there was another lady back in there. She was there before I was. In fact, when he took and showed me the job he said we got one lady back here so maybe you can encourage her to stay. I think they were having problems with her from the start. So when I went in she wasn't there much longer. After I went in she left. She got fired or quit or whatever.

BB: Other than this one person who was obviously flirting with you or whatever--that's putting it mildly--how were you treated by your other co-workers there being the only woman or one of two women working in the rough mill? What was that like?

AP: [laughter] Well, they really accepted me because you see I was brought up with a lot of brothers and I was a hard worker. Like I said, Leon Ruffin has known my family. Melvin Chrisp knows a lot about my family. You see, my family and my brothers have always been in puck wood. You know, you used to cut puck wood and logs. So when you've got a girl like that my dad--. See I was kind of a tomboy, so I'm here to do the job that you do. They accepted. They didn't expect me to stay I found out later. They didn't expect me to stay there as long as I did, because they didn't think I was going to be able to make it.

BB: Who's that?

AP: Who was that? Was it Kirk Worth or the guy I was telling you that was flirting with me? [laughter] They thought they actually could run me away.

BB: You mean some of your co-workers thought they could run you off?

AP: Yeah, they could run me off by putting work on me that they was doing. They tried to run me off.

BB: Why do you think they tried to do that?

AP: I don't know. I guess because I was a woman, and they didn't think I could handle it. [laughter] That's the way I felt about it. I had to get in there and show them I'm just as--. Really, because I worked--. Like I say, I was brought up to do hard work all my life. That was me. I was brought up to work hard.

A lot of kids never did have to work for their money. My mom and dad put us out there, don't steal, make your money. We always have since we were little bitty something. I have been taught to work for what we want. That's the way I was raised up. No job is never to hard really if you really want to work you can do it, and that's the attitude I go in. I go into anything because I can do it.

BB: Did you have that attitude when you started?

AP: Yeah, I was going to stay. See, I had got the impression-- I already felt like it was the way co-workers some of them was treating me and doing that I knowed they were trying to run me off. They wanted me to quit, and that I was going to quit and couldn't handle them.

BB: But that didn't make you doubt that you could do it?

AP: No, no. In fact, you see, lot of people don't know it, that's why I rode my bike to work. See, a lot of them was going right by my door, right by the road I stayed on and wouldn't give me a ride to work. They wouldn't let me ride with them, you know, and I said, "well, I'm going to get there."

BB: They knew you didn't have a car, and they wouldn't give you a ride.

AP: Right, right, right. They wouldn't let me ride with them. You know, I had them even go out the side door and stuff, get somebody to punch them out and go out the side door to stop from giving me [a ride] home, because they knowed I was going to ask for a ride home. I have walked home until I got my bike, and then I started riding my bike.

BB: Even on the coldest winter days?

AP: Oh, I have got wet, cold. Wet, I have got soaking wet and had to stop at a friend's house in the apartments and change clothes to finish coming to work. So I could come to work, I sure did. I got wet coming to work one morning. But just the idea was-- You know what I was thinking, I said, well, maybe they are married and their wives

don't trust me riding with them. [Annette coughs] I thought maybe that's what it was, you know, but you just accept everything.

BB: Just a little bit more with this. What other things did they do to make life tough on you?

AP: Well, [laughter] nothing really, nothing really as I can think of, you know, besides trying to run the saw real fast, you know, to get me behind.

BB: Talk a little about the folks that made things rough on you. Who were the ones who came to your defense? Who were the ones who looked out for you?

AP: Oh.

BB: Were there? Maybe I should re-ask. Were there folks who looked out for you?

AP: But see, Robert, you know, a supervisor, I could go to him, you know, which I didn't like to bring things to him because I liked to solve things myself. So I would go to Melvin, Leon, Terry, and especially Terry, see, I could talk to him and him and Stacey was this guy's name I was tellin' you was trying to do the flirting. They was close, and he would go and talk to him.

Do you remember Keith Howard? I could talk to him. Somebody actually called him to the side and told him that this one day we got into a real disagreement right before lunch time. I said, "Look, I don't want to go to personnel, take him to personnel, but if I have to I will." I said, "I'm not going to put up with him." Somebody called him to the side and told him that I would go to personnel with what he was doing.

BB: What was that about?

AP: It was the idea--. You know, we could wear shorts back there, and he would take his ruler and was trying to raise my short leg up or wanted to touch and stuff. I don't believe in that, see. That's just not me, I don't go like that. He was just going to do it anyway. I actually got loud and just faced him, I said, "Look, I don't play, and I would appreciate it if you would leave me alone." Oh, he don't get upset. "I was just trying to

kill time." This is what he said back to me. "I was just trying to kill time, but if you want it like that you can have it like that." Yeah, yes sir, we went through it. This was at lunchtime so I thought, oh, well, I'm going to catch it now when I go back to work. You know, he's really going to try to make it hard on me by shooting the wood through there real fast. He's really going to try to make it hard on me. But evidently, when we back somebody had talked to him because I could tell by the way he was running the wood. He'd look at me, but he wouldn't have nothing to say. He wasn't trying to dog the saw up because he know I was right.

You know, I think the lady before me, you know, before I come she, you know, let them pit, pat and play and do. I think that's what the deal was, and they wanted to see if I was like that, and I had to straighten him out. [laughter] But I was thinking, I believe that's what the deal was. She let him pit, pat and play because he act like--when we first got there--he act like he was actually jealous because I would try to talk to her. He acted like he was jealous because I'd try, you know, to have a conversation with her or stuff. So I believe that's what it were. I believe, you know, she was letting him have his way or whatever. He wanted to see if I was like that.

That's what all the harassment was about on the job. Nobody never knowed that we never did take it to personnel. But I just told him, "I really don't want to take it to personnel."

BB: You said at one point he came back and that it was clear that someone had talked to him.

AP: Yeah, right after lunch. Right after this had happened.

BB: Do you think it was one of your co-worker's or do you think it was a personnel person?

AP: No, this was a co-worker because, see, we never let it go to the personnel.

BB: So it wasn't management, it was somebody--.

AP: It was somebody on the floor.

BB: Who do you think that was?

AP: I don't know.

BB: You never knew.

AP: I never knew who talked to him. I talked to two or three of them before lunch and told them what was going on. By the time we went to lunch and come back he had a whole entirely different attitude about it. It was somebody on the floor. It was somebody back there where we was.

BB: Was there a point where you really felt like you turned the corner, where you were really truly accepted?

AP: Yeah. Well, yeah, I did because I would get in there and do most that they did, you know. You had the long lumbers on that last saw towards the hog, you know that's where stuff was about twenty-five feet long or whatever, and I would lift it right along with them. I was up there lifting and doing right along with them. Just like if the conveyor belt got stopped up I would get over there and unstop it with everybody else. But I think they finally seen that, "Hey, she's going to stay."

We had a break room and somebody had told me, "We didn't think you were going to stay. We didn't think you were going to be able to hang with us." That was back in the rough mill. I guess because I was a woman and they just said, "She ain't going to be able to hang." But I made a comment, "You don't know me very well, but see, if you know me and my family, anything about my family, you know--."

People used to have a saying about us--they called us the Faust girls, I was a Faust before I got married--"they can throw a log and turn a hog." [laughter] Ain't that a saying to have about somebody? But they used to say that. They made up that--.

BB: Throw a log and turn a hog.

AP: Right. That's because my daddy used to kill hogs, you know, dress hogs out. You know, he actually made a business out of this. Sometime we would be right there with him, be right there with my daddy.

BB: How do you think he would have felt about you working at White Furniture?

AP: Oh, see, I had--. Well, I believe I had family already there. He probably talked about it or whatever, but daddy--. My daddy was something. [laughter] He probably would have accepted it.

BB: Were the jobs you did the same as the jobs--? I know you did the same jobs as the men did. We talked about that a little bit, but were you given the chance to do the same jobs right up front or were you given a different job when you first went there. Were you given only certain jobs and then sort of had to earn the right to do other jobs?

AP: Yeah, well, see, that's the way it was. You see, I had to earn the right, you know, to run it. You would say, "Let me do it." But, you know, I had to be there awhile to learn, you know, to get the opportunity to do them. By the time I got ready to leave they had gave me a lot of jobs. A lot of jobs they would let me do. The supervisor would come and get me and let me run the planner. "Will you run this out for me, you know, you've got to plane it down so many inches?" Yeah, before I left there they started coming to get me to do jobs that they would usually have got a man to do. He got something he wanted to do he would get me to help him.

BB: You told me what your favorite job was which was working with the tailing saw. What was your least favorite?

AP: What was that work? [pause] You know, actually, I guess it was laying wood up. Okay, before the wood even get cut it has to be laid up on the--. It comes out from the yard and you take it and lay it over on the belt so it would go down, you know, so they could cut it. I guess that was the only one. There were no jobs back there that I didn't mind doing. I do all of them. I'd do anything. I didn't mind.

BB: How long a day did you work at White Furniture?

AP: How long?

BB: Seven hours?

AP: No, usually eight. Usually eight hours, and I'm the one that wanted some overtime and never could get it. I'd be the one who wanted to work on Saturdays and very seldom I got to work overtime.

BB: Why is that?

AP: Another one of them--. I think it was favoritism because I would ask.

BB: Who usually got that work?

AP: Tonie most of the time, and then she would come in or she would lay out and stuff. I was saying, "Why can't I come? I would be here." But you know, I never did get no answer.

BB: Do you think white folks and black folks were treated differently? Was there any kind of favoritism regarding race?

AP: Well, as for the job, no. You see, when it come down to us two women, you know, one black and one white, I think there was favoritism. That's the only part I seen, because I would be willing to work on Saturdays, you know, going to work Saturdays and they wouldn't let me work. Certain one, they would let her work, probably every Saturday. I didn't get to work, and I was asking to work. That's the only favoritism I seen between the black and white. Everybody was treated, you know, about equal.

BB: Did any of your colleagues who were black as well sort of complain that had some of the some problems that they didn't get to do things?

AP: No.

BB: No.

What was the dress code at White Furniture? Was there one?

AP: Not really, what, as long as your shorts weren't too short. You know, you could wear shorts just as long as they weren't too short. That's the only one I can remember. [laughter] Only thing I can remember.

BB: What about policies about smoking and tobacco and that sort of thing?

AP: No, everybody there, they chewed tobacco on the line, but you couldn't smoke in there because you were around so much dry wood. They couldn't smoke in there, you know, you either had to go outside on the dock or break room or whatever, but you couldn't smoke in there. It was the only thing.

BB: But, you could chew tobacco in there?

AP: Uh, huh. Yeah, I seen a lot of them chewing tobacco. Yep.

BB: How about like telephone policies and things like that? What if you got a phone call at work? How would they deal with that?

AP: Okay. I had got a phone call. I had some people--friends--you know, a long distance truck driver, and this girl just wanted to speak to me because they were just passing through and when they come through town-- Oh, I was getting ready to get off. It was about thirty minutes before I got off, and I found out that they said, "Well, can't you wait thirty more minutes, and she will be off work?" They wouldn't let him see me. Not even to speak to them. They wouldn't let me talk to them on the phone.

If you get a phone message you'd get it that evening or whatever or the next day.

BB: They wouldn't bring it to you while you were there so you call up at your next break?

AP: No, you go to punch down and be a step pinned onto your time card. But I had two or three incidents like that like I said I have a friend come through and they wouldn't let her talk to me. She had called or something. She might have come by there. I didn't get to see them.

BB: How about talking with people in other departments. Were the departments really separated? Were you ever allowed to wander into another department if you had a friend? If you were on break could you wander up to the finishing, for instance, if you had a different break schedule, and say, hey to someone up there?

AP: Yeah, if you was back in your department on time. You know, they wanted you back in your department on time, you know, but if you had time to go up there and

Speak to somebody you could, you know, like upstairs, but just as long as you got back to your department when that buzzer blew. Now, you see, from where we had to take a break at it would take us two to three minutes to walk to the break area. We had a ten minute break. Two to three minutes to walk up there, to get you something to eat--waiting in line--and to walk back. They wanted you back by the last the buzzer blew.

BB: Did you have any place or space in your work area where you could keep special things--anything you brought to work--little things that, you know, sort of your own little locker or space like that where you keep things?

AP: No. We had a place, you know--. Okay, where I worked there was a little station up on the saw. They had a thirteen dollar ruler--tape measurer--and we had been off work for two or three days and somebody actually stole it. You couldn't bring nothing of value to work because somebody would get it, and nobody had seen it, and it wasn't nothing they could do about it.

BB: There was no place to lock things up?

AP: Wasn't no place, no.

BB: Where would you hang your jacket, your Red Skins jacket.

AP: Well, right there around me. I could hang it right here on the corner of this table. Just somewhere right there. If you brought something that you didn't want to get dusty, maybe there was a nail in the office--in Robin's office--you could hang it in there. You know, you could find somewhere over against the wall or something.

BB: When you were working the ripsaw it seems to me like I often saw you at the same machine day after day.

AP: Right, right.

BB: Is that right?

AP: Yeah, un, huh. I had a certain saw that I worked on, you know, me and my partner. Okay, you got two people on the saw so we were first sawing and then Terry and them worked on the second saw. They had about four saws. Ain't nobody working on

the third saw and then the fourth saw. The same people work on the same saw not unless they had something for somebody to do that they would place you, you know, you go up there and work with him.

BB: So could you leave things around that saw like it was your own and no one would mess with it?

AP: Yeah.

BB: Like hang your jacket on?

AP: Uh, huh. Nobody messed with it.

BB: Did you have a favorite ripsaw?

AP: Yeah, the one I was on. [laughter]

BB: Was it?

AP: Yeah, that was my favorite. Yep, that was my favorite saw.

BB: Annette, you talked a little bit how rough it was when you started working on the ripsaw with your partner.

AP: Right.

BB: Who was your partner in the end when I came in and--?

AP: Kirk Worth.

BB: Tell me about Kirk.

AP: Kirk was okay. He was a young boy, you know, young [inaudible]. [laughter] But he was young, you know. Me and him could work together because he had been trying to get on the ripsaw and then when my other partner got fired, you know, they let him have a chance at the saw. Me and him worked together good. We had an understanding. Sometime we talked junk to each other. Sometime we'd grab each other. Well, he'd do something to me and I'd grab him. He thought one of the men had grabbed him. [laughter] He said, "You can handle yourself, can't you?" [laughter] He was okay.

BB: Were you two especially close because you worked together?

AP: Yeah. I think it's because we worked together. He'd look out for me or tell me something or whatever.

BB: Was he the person, or was there a person that you would talk to if there was something at home that was bothering you or something personal you wanted to talk about? Who would you share that with?

AP: Let's see. I don't think I had nobody at work. I think there's nobody there I talked to. There weren't nobody there that I talked to, you know, if there was something bothering me at home or whatever.

BB: Did you keep that to yourself then?

AP: Yeah. I had a girlfriend, you know, I had this girl away from home, you know, I would go and talk to her if something was bothering me.

BB: How about during the breaks? Who would you spend your breaks with, your lunch break and your morning break?

AP: With people back there in the rough mill. Like the guy I worked with and Terry. You know, if I get a biscuit or sandwich, you know, we sit at the break table and I would sit with them. There really weren't no women for me to sit with. So I would sit with the guys that run the ripsaws or whatever. Leon or them, or Manuel or Jose, and people like that.

BB: Did black folks tend to sit together and white folks sit separately? Was there much of that?

AP: No, it was all together. Everybody sit together. Terry didn't smoke, Kirk didn't smoke and I didn't smoke. You know, James Clark he smokes so he would sit up here on the end with people work in the machine room. Most all the smokers sit together.

BB: Sat together.

AP: Then Leon and Manuel smoked.

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A

START OF TAPE 1, SIDE B

ANNETTE PATTERSON
DECEMBER 18, 1994

BB: How noisy was it in the rough mill?

AP: Oh, it was real noisy especially when the wood would come down to you. You know, they had these doors and it was so noisy that you nearly needed ear plugs. You had a door that went, slam, slam, slam. This is all down the line all day. Your saw was making a loud and grinding noise. The wood was coming on the table was hitting the table. That was making noise. Like I said, things started running. It was a real noisy place.

BB: So were you able to talk to folks when you were running, I mean, during the working hours. Could you really hear people to talk to them?

AP: We had to talk a little loud, but we could hear. You know, you had to talk loud.

BB: Did you ever wear earplugs?

AP: Yeah, uh, huh.

BB: You have to wear your earplugs everyday.

AP: Yeah.

BB: That was required?

AP: Yeah, it was required.

BB: Any other things that were required in terms of safety?

AP: No, just your earplugs. They had safety goggles. In the summertime we'd be so hot, you know, you'd be sweating and you couldn't--. You know how they fog up when they get too hot and then you can't half see. You're suppose to wear your safety goggles along with--. They were required, too, but, you know, we didn't wear them like we're supposed to and the earplugs.

BB: Did you wear them in the wintertime when it wasn't so hot?

AP: Yeah, supposed to. Then we had these aprons, you know, somebody running the saw--. It had some kind of backing on it especially for a man. If you run the saw sometimes the wood would kick back, you know, that could really hurt you, so they had these aprons they had to wear. If somebody was running the saw they had to wear them.

BB: Is there anything else about it that was dangerous in there that you felt was sort of a dangerous condition that you were on the look-out for when you were working?

AP: You know what, you had to look over your head because the wood coming down--. See, if a piece of that wood had fell off that conveyor belt up over your head, see, that could kill you. So you had to watch out for that. You had to make sure you didn't get your hand in that conveyor belt coming down that chain to that saw. You had to kind of keep your eyes open and watch out for a lot of things. You know you had to be really safe and watch safety all over. It really was--. It was a dangerous place back there.

BB: Did you ever get hurt on the job?

AP: I had a piece of wood to kick back on my end. When I told you the reason the men wear the belt and it kicked back, but evidently it just kicked back, but it didn't kick but so hard. Sometimes that saw, that blade, will catch a piece of wood and make it kick back, and the piece of wood kicked back and hit me. I didn't have to go to the doctor with it. We put a ice pack on it, and I watched it for awhile. It didn't bother me no more so I didn't have to go.

BB: Did you ever have any suggestions about what would improve either working conditions or production or anything like that? Did you have any ideas, and if you had those who would you share those with?

AP: Most of the co-workers, in fact, I talked to the supervisors and said, "Robin, why don't we do so and so, or why don't ya'll do this or do that?" He'd come up with, "They don't want to, you know, it's not in the plans or something."

BB: Do you remember any specific suggestions that you thought would improve working conditions or work productions?

AP: I guess we were talking about, you know, just getting more quality out of the wood. You know, if they slowed it down some, you know, you'd have more time to get better quality. But, you're trying to run so fast and trying to get stuff, you can't get good quality when you're trying to move at a certain pace, quantity. Both of them ain't going to fit. Both of them are not going to fit, quantity and quality is not going to fit in the same because you've got to take time to get good quality.

BB: And you told this to Robert?

AP: Yeah. And you know they are going to come up with some kind of excuse.

BB: How did people feel then when they would suggest this and then Robert would come back with the same answer or excuse?

AP: They would just shake it off. They would shake their head. Just make a comment, "That's why we're not getting no good quality out." You know, they said something about it, but once you had this little meeting and he'd come back to you with the same thing.

BB: Do you mind me asking you what your starting pay was?

AP: What was my starting pay? I don't mind if I can remember what it was.

[laughter]

BB: [laughter]

AP: [hesitation] I believe it was \$5.50 if I ain't mistaken.

BB: \$5.50 an hour?

AP: Uh, huh.

BB: How did that compare to pay for other folks working in the rough mill? How did they determine who was paid what, and how did your pay compare?

AP: Well, it all depends on how your job performance went and how fast you learned the job and whatever. Yep.

BB: Were many women paid the same?

AP: Well, what you mean?

BB: Starters for the same job, were you paid--?

AP: Well, let's see. I was the only one that tailed the rip saw, but evidently I was paid the same as the other tailers on the rip saws. See, I was paid the same. When I got up to stop pay, you know, I had been paid the same. But, you know, they keep you for so long to see how you are doing and then they give you a raise in so many months.

BB: How did you know what other folks were paid? Did people talk about this?

AP: Yeah, yeah. You know they going to talk about their pay. [laughter]

BB: Yeah.

AP: Then like I said, a man doing the same job I was--in the saw in front of me-- James Clark, you know, he thought he should get more. You know, if you don't reach this level in your pay, the highest paid on this job, you know, you didn't get no raise. So long as you were working your way up there, you know, you'd get a raise when it come around to you, but if you don't make it that far that was it, you ain't going to get no raise.

BB: Why did he think he should get more pay than you?

AP: I don't know. Because he had been there longer. Yeah, because he had been there longer.

BB: Did you ever ask for a pay raise or did you--?

AP: I just let them give it to me. Well, I have asked, and then I just let them give it to me, you know, as mandatory.

BB: Did they have any--? Well, first, let me ask, how do you think White Furniture pay compared to other jobs in the area?

AP: Oh, man. Since I started working, you know--I'm at Craftique now--White's was a whole lot of better pay even though they work you like we was working, you know, at a faster speed and the line up there-- The line at Craftique is just barely moving. At White's it was-- They paid you, they paid you good. I consider that good pay at White's.

BB: What was your pay when you finished working there, your final paycheck?

AP: I got \$7.25 or something like that.

BB: What did they start you at Craftique at?

AP: \$6.00. Well, see now, I've been there three months, four months, and they finally gave me a quarter raise so I'm making \$6.25. And I mean getting paid every week. I don't understand that. Getting paid every week like you did there, but it is still not--

BB: Did they have other benefits at White Furniture; insurance or pension plans?

AP: Yeah, they had all of that. Oh, yeah, we had pension plan, insurance, dental insurance, you know, for my family if I wanted to put it on them. They didn't have a saving plan, a Christmas saving like Craftique. They didn't have that.

BB: Did they give bonuses?

AP: Yeah. Let's see, Craftique don't give bonuses. See, I wasn't at White's but so many weeks or months and they did give me a Christmas bonus for being there.

BB: Okay, I want to ask you a few more questions about social life in the factory, and then we are going to move to some other topics. Did people ever play pranks on the job? Was that something that happened a good bit?

AP: [laughter] Let's see, let me think about what they did. [pause] Well, I know his name, but, you know, I heard about them, but I never did see them. We had one guy in there, you know, he was really shy of women. I heard about it, but I didn't see it. The guys would get a centerfold, and he was laying the wood up. He was really embarrassed, you know, on women. If you'd go talking about women he would really freeze up. They would take a centerfold and lay it up on the wood where he had to work at, and when he got ready to unload the picture was there. [laughter] So I heard about a lot of things, you know, like that.

Some of them would take someone's jacket or lunch or something and move it. And you know who done got it more than likely. They talk about, "I didn't move it." But somebody kept something going all the time.

BB: How about you, did anyone ever do pranks on you?

AP: No. Just picking. They know I was scared of spiders and one day we sat up there working and they found a spider and sent him down the saw on a piece of wood.

BB: They sent it down to you on a piece of wood?

AP: Right.

BB: What did you do?

AP: And I'm standing here really scared of spiders and I let the wood hit the floor and went to the bathroom. Somebody had to come and see about me. They said they didn't know I was scared of spiders. I've got a fear of spiders. I just walked on away from the saw and went to the bathroom. They had to send someone to see about me. They didn't know what had happened. I believe they were scared that I went to personnel because, see, they didn't know I was scared.

BB: Who did that to you, do you know?

AP: The guy that got fired. The one that I told you was--.

BB: Did you ever retaliate and play a prank on him?

AP: Oh, you know, I had to. We would do something. We would find something. If you done something to me we'd turn around and find something to do to you, you know, to--.

BB: You talked a little bit about how rough it was when you first started going there and how you had to sort of prove yourself. Do you remember when other rookies would come in what it was like for them? Did some folks come in after you?

AP: No, you know what? I can't remember nobody hired after me. If I ain't mistaken I'm the last one.

BB: How about Tonie? Was she hired after you?

AP: Well, see, Tonie moved from Hillsborough plant up there. See they moved them instead of hiring people. When the Hillsborough plant closed they moved those people up to here with us instead of hiring somebody. She was after me, yeah.

BB: But she came to the--.

AP: Mebane plant.

BB: The Mebane plant after you were already working there.

AP: Uh, huh, right.

BB: What was it like for you to finally have another woman there? Well, actually there had been another woman there before you.

AP: Yeah, and I come in with her and she left. I was by myself for a while and then Tonie come.

BB: What was that like for you?

AP: It was entirely different, you know, like I said, it was a different--. I felt like she was getting favoritism, you see, because she would go up in the office. I'd be out there working, and she'd be sitting up in the office with the supervisor with Robin as she said, doing paperwork for Robin. [laughter] You know, find out how much footage we had got out and whatever. That went on for a while.

BB: But what did everyone else say was going on? Were they flirting in there?

AP: They said that she was just trying to get on Robin's good side and whatever. But when she first come there, yeah, she got away with a lot. [laughter] She got () working on the weekend. Like I told you I wanted to work, and they wouldn't let me work. I believe it was favoritism as far as that goes.

BB: Did you ever confront Tonie about this?

AP: No, what was the use?

BB: Yeah.

AP: It just would have been a big hassle between me and her. No, I never did.

BB: Did you have a nickname?

AP: Nope, they didn't give me one. They never did give me one.

BB: Did a lot of folks have nicknames?

AP: Not as I know of.

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BB: Was there any kind of Christmas party or anything like that?

AP: [She is coughing] We made our own Christmas party. No, when I started working there they cut out everything. [coughing]

BB: I'm going to get you a little more water.

AP: Okay.

BB: Tell me what you would do when you weren't at work. What you like to do and how you spend your other time.

AP: Well, sitting at home, watching T.V. I go out and visit somebody or whatever.

BB: Did you ever work a second job while you were at White Furniture?

AP: No. No, I never did. I would just work at White's. I had this girlfriend that I'd go see when I wasn't working or they send me home. I would stop by there and talk to her a little while or whatever and come on home.

BB: Do you have any children?

AP: Yes. I've got three and one grandbaby. She's been around since I left White's. She's six so she was there when I was at White's.

BB: Three children and one grandbaby.

AP: Yeah.

BB: Do you have a spouse? Do you live with a husband?

AP: No, I've been divorced--. When I heard about the death of my brother I was in Liberty then and moved back to Mebane and have been in Mebane ever since. No, never got married no more.

BB: Do you still support your children?

AP: Well, the one's that ain't grown. See my oldest one is twenty-four, and my son is twenty-two, and I've got one fifteen. I've got the fifteen year old and the grandbaby with me. I always have had her. It's just like raising her, you know, myself. Now, I'm

raising the grandbaby with the fifteen year old. I always have worked to take care of my kids.

BB: Let's go back to the factory a little bit and tell me if you can, do you remember when you first heard that the company would be closing?

AP: Yes. They had called all of us over into the, I guess, shipping department. It was really a surprise. It just looked like that everything just hit everybody. See, we was having a bunch of conflict--this is before me and Tonie got close--there was a bunch of tension in the plant back there where we was. [Annette is continuing to cough and so she stops and drinks some water] Nobody really mingled with nobody. To me, Tonie, Joe, Kirk, and Wesley-- [Annette is coughing and the phone is ringing]

BB: It's about three o'clock right now and while we still have a lot of ground to cover on this interview Annette's cough is getting pretty bad and so we are going to wrap up the interview at this point and try to finish out the last parts of the interview at some future date when she is feeling a little bit better.

AP: Okay.

BB: Thank you.

AP: Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW