

Avondale Mills Project

Interviewer: Edward Akin

Interviewees: R.L. and Grace Bowles

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A: So, where—where—Mr. Bowles said that you graduated from FSU.

GB: Florida State College.

A: Or back when it was a women's school.

GB: That's right.

A: Did you finish there before you came to Sylacauga?

GB: Yes.

A: So, what year had you...?

LB: Must have finished in '28 sometime.

GB: Must have been about that.

LB: 'Cause you were there in '29 when I got to Sylacauga. You hadn't been there long. It was her first—

GB: Well, it was the first time they had had a teacher teach kindergarten that had been to get a degree.

A: So your maiden name was—

GB: Grace Bowles—Warmbrod. [Laughs]

LB: It's Swiss.

GB: Yeah.

LB: She come out of a Swiss settlement over here in, out of Winchester, Tennessee, a place called Belvedere. And they all Swiss.

A: Now, what was your last name?

GB: Warmbrod.

LB: W-A-R-M-B-R-O-D.

GB: Just "warm bread." That's what it means in Swiss.

A: Yeah, yeah, yeah. So, what, did a whole group of Swiss move over?

GB: Swiss and German people.

LB: Her mother was a Gruever.

GB: And my great uncle was in the Civil War. And when we... when we beat them [laughs] he bought a horse, and went through the country to go back to see where he—because he was from Ohio.

LB: He had fought down here.

GB: Yeah. He had fought.

LB: Union Army.

GB: And he got a horse and everything and went horseback. Then, through the country to see where he wanted to stay. He was tired of the cold weather. So he fixed him—he bought him some land and all his brothers and cousins and aunts and uncles did the same thing.

A: So he was originally from Switzerland, had come to Ohio?

GB: Yeah.

A: In probably...the 1850s?

GB: Well, our—our forefathers had come from Switzerland.

A: So the whole group was in Ohio.

GB: The whole group was either Swiss or German.

A: Yeah.

LB: Well, that's all there is over here in Belvidere now.

GB: Just about.

LB: There's Lappers and Ruths and Walpoles and Finkleiteins.

A: That kind of—

GB: He started then on diversified—

A: Agriculture?

GB: Agriculture and what not. Before that, they had, you know, you just...

A: Plant cotton or corn.

GB: Cotton or corn. And so, they—

LB: They in the cattle business now, in a big way.

GB: They had some corn, ground—

A: Well, what had they—do they primarily truck gardening type things then?

GB: No, no.

A: Or what did they raise?

GB: Well, it was, well—like my daddy would sow wheat and then they—

LB: Yeah, they grew a lot of wheat.

GB: And then they harvested it and you had to run it through something to get all the chaff out and then you sold it. And corn, same thing, all of us. You know, that was your living.

A: And, so you were—were born...

GB: At Belvedere.

A: What year, about?

GB: Well.

LB: 1903.

GB: I'm seventy-seven years old.

LB: I can tell you: January 4, 1903.

A: And were most of the people in the community then related to you in some way?

GB: Yeah. Uh-huh.

A: First cousins, extended.

GB: Cousins.

LB: Tell you what happened to me: the first time I ever went to her home—see, I met her in Sylacauga.

A: Yeah.

LB: So, when summer came, she went home. I went up there to see her one weekend. I was courting pretty heavy with her.

A: Yeah.

LB: So, we got ready to go to church on Sunday morning. And I went with her and her mother and father. And we got in the church so we just went to our seats and sat down. Well, when the church

service was over, her mother says, “Now, I want you to meet some of the folks—relatives.” I said, “Fine.” I shook hands with everybody in the church. And it was full.

A: Now...

GB: Well, now the Nappers were not kin to us. But we married some of our folks. Married into—

LB: They intermarried.

GB: So, might near ways kin to everybody else around there.

A: Yeah.

GB: And we still are. We still get together once a year.

LB: That’s the best country ham in the world over there, I’ll tell you that.

GB: And all eat together.

A: Well, that’s like my family. Seems like when—when the my generation of my grandparents passed from the scene, most of them—the younger ones just are not continuing it. And my mother is—has helped keep the reunions going.

GB: Has she?

LB: Well, they have a reunion—

GB: We have one every year.

A: But, I tell you: this American mobility has taken its toll.

GB: It started out with the three brothers. My daddy and his two other brothers started having Christmas dinners together. Well, then, we got too many of us. And they married and so, we have to have it once a year out in the summer, so everybody could come and be outdoors.

LB: We were over there in August, this month, wasn’t we?

GB: Yes.

LB: To the family reunion. I reckon it was three or four hundred, I’m sure.

A: Yeah.

GB: Well, not quite that many. But there is a block of them.

A: If they all came, it probably would be.

GB: No, we did go. Don’t you know it rained us out and we had to go down in the school house?

A: Now, how did a Tennessean end up at Florida, in Tallahassee?

GB: How did I? Well, I had—I wanted to teach Kindergarten. And I had a friend that was a friend of my older cousin. She was not—I knew her—she wasn't a friend. And she had come from Sylacauga and she said, "Grace, do you have a place to teach yet?" I said, "No, got my degree. Don't have. Don't know where..." Because there weren't any kindergartens, you know, around. And she had been at Sylacauga, supervisor of students.

A: Now who—what was her name? Do you recall?

GB: I can't think of her name, but she's from Winchester, Tennessee. So, I said, "Well." She asked if I had some place to go. And I said, "No." Well, she said, "I can tell you where to go to find a mighty good kindergarten, or they need a teacher mighty bad." So she told me—told me what his name was (Mr. Creel). And to go see him, says, "Maybe you can go down there and talk to him. Don't write him, you go talk to him." And says, "I'll call him and tell him you're coming and that you're a mighty fine person." So, I went down and had an interview. My brother and his wife took me. So, we had had in—in our practice teaching, you know, about twelve or fourteen or sixteen children to work on. And that first day, when kindergarten opened, there was ninety-nine children.

A: Whew.

GB: I didn't know what to do.

A: What, these were four and five-year-olds? Or what ages?

GB: Uh-huh. Three, four, and five.

A: Three, four.

GB: Now, with the mill there, the parents would come and bring their children there. And they would have their breakfast there and then they would stay there until time for them to go to school, too. And the Comers did that.

A: Yeah, yeah.

GB: Get them to have a good meal.

LB: All the Comers were crazy about children.

GB: So that first day, I was lost. The girl that was—had been helping—

A: Now, did you have ninety-nine under you?

GB: Ninety-nine children for two of us.

A: Whew.

GB: So, we divided.

A: They did need teachers, then.

GB: They did need teachers. And we divided, then, into groups, the four-year-olds and the five-year-olds. And then, we grouped them in what they could do. And the two of us—she would take the story hour. I'd take the music hour. And we got along pretty good after I got orientated and knew what to do with them.

A: Now, was—

GB: And, of course, they were crying that first day because they didn't want to come. They didn't want to leave their mothers.

A: Now, was this the beginning of the programs or had it already been run before that?

GB: Yeah, they had—they had had that before. Uh-huh. .But they hadn't had anybody that had had any training, just people that loved children.

LB: She's the one that told me that Hugh Comer would come to their programs.

GB: He came.

A: Oh, yes.

GB: See, I played. The other girl couldn't do that. So, we would have rhythms and they would trot the horsie and sing with it. And I thoroughly enjoyed it; I love children anyway.

A: Just, of course I know there's no accurate way to gauge it, but having had a degree in early childhood or kindergarten, or—

GB: Well, it wasn't early childhood.

A: Oh, I knew they weren't that specialized back then.

GB: No. Un-huh. It was the first they had had a trained teacher that had had some ideas given them, what to do, what the children...

A: How much—

GB: And I could teach up through the third grade on the certificate I had.

A: How much...

GB: It was the two-year.

A: How much of an educational value do you think that they were able to get—

GB: A lot.

A: Before the first grade?

GB: A lot. Now, they were, as I say... they were poor people.

A: Yes.

GB: And in—and they put in bath tubs for them, for the winter. They would put coal in the bath tub, 'cause they would have to go out and get the coal.

A: Right.

GB: They were very, very backward parents.

LB: Those kids'd never gone to kindergarten if it hadn't been for the Comers.

A: So—so, you would say the kindergarten program got them up to, say, an urban Southern standard by the first grade.

GB: I think so.

A: That sort of thing was what you were trying to accomplish.

GB: That's what we were trying to do was, well, really—was to take care of them.

A: Yes.

GB: 'Cause they had to be taken care of. And so, we—so, we went ahead. And the girl that—that helped me had helped the other one. So, she knew kind of what to do for them.

A: Yeah, well.

GB: And she would take this story and she would tell them this story. She and I did the music and the rhythms and those things. So, every time we had anybody come to the mill to see the mill, they had to come to the kindergarten to see the kindergarten.

A: Yeah.

LB: Hugh Comer—Hugh Comer would make them go to see that.

GB: Hugh Comer, he came might near every day.

LB: Visitors, you know, that come to go through the mill.

A: Yeah.

GB: He came down there and went through the kindergarten.

A: Well, I know Donald Comer was doing the same thing in Birmingham.

LB: Yeah. That's right.

A: I, like I was telling Mr. Bowles, I had already been through the *Avondale Sun* for Birmingham—not for Sylacauga, yet. And I would say the average of twice a week. They probably didn't print every time he went by—but, he was a steady visitor.

GB: Uh-huh.

LB: I remember—

GB: Yes, they always loved children.

LB: I remember going down to Birmingham and Mr. Donald would take me to the kindergarten before we went to the mill.

A: That's right.

LB: He's done that.

GB: Yeah, they all loved the children. So it was—it really was a joy to work with the children and with them. Because anything that they could get me to do, they got for me.

A: Did—did you have any major problems or did you try to work with the parents on things like hygiene?

GB: Well, I was supposed—yeah, in the afternoon. I was supposed to go out and visit and talk to the mothers and maybe help them on their food and... I noticed they had twins Claudy and Hardy. I'll never forget them because they were as much like peas in a pod. And I went to see the mother and they were all dipping snuff. The two little—the two little twins.

A: What, four or five years old?

GB: Kindergarten age, dipping snuff.

A: Yeah.

GB: I tell you, I didn't know what to do then.

A: Yeah.

GB: But, I went and told them they couldn't bring it to school.

A: Yeah. Now, did most of these families just come straight off the farm into the mill?

GB: Into the mill. They didn't have much education.

A: Yeah.

GB: And that was what the Comers were interested in was to bring up people to and...at that time, they had... or had you told him about the farm?

A: No. We spent most of our time on Stevenson.

GB: Well, they had the farm and they had—they had chickens. The people had—

LB: A hatchery.

GB: Hatchery.

LB: Hatched eggs in there.

GB: They had a dairy. And you could get the milk, everybody that worked there could get it cheaper, you see.

A: Yeah, probably—

GB: They—they had a big farm and a farmer in charge of that. And a man in charge of the chickens. They had a man in charge of the cows, and everything.

A: Would you have the same group of children the whole year or this type of turn over—

GB: Well, see, they would be there two—some of them would come three. We just met the problems as they came up.

A: Yeah. Now—

GB: Now, we tried not to get the ones that were too young.

A: Right. But you weren't always successful.

GB: But, some of them didn't have a place to go. So, they came. I took them. But it wasn't much. They had a nursery. In fact, they had—the parents would get ready and go to work in the mill and then they—Avondale would have a place where they could eat breakfast.

A: Now—now, the kindergarten program, I guess, was only a few hours a day.

GB: Ah, it was all morning from the time children went to school until noon. And then in the afternoon, I visit—visited.

A: Okay. Would most of the children just go back home in the afternoon at that age?

GB: No, they'd go—it was—if their parents were on a shift that was at night, why they would have to go...

LB: To the nursery.

GB: To the nursery.

A: Right.

GB: 'Course, I didn't have anything to do with that. Mine was just the kindergarten.

A: Now, the—

GB: Now, we did take some of the younger because they—Well, all they could do is come and go if they wanted to do it and we had room for them.

A: Now, the welfare program as a whole, what all did it consist of? I know about the kindergarten and the athletic program. I guess at Sylacauga, the—the schools would have also been under the company.

GB: Yeah, they were under the mill, too.

A: Now was Mr. Creel in charge of all this?

GB: In charge of it. He was in charge of me. I was under him.

A: And hadn't you said earlier, also the housing? Or was that something else?

LB: No, that was a different man over the housing, named Albright.

A: Yeah. I was wondering because, you probably knew her, and I want to ask you about her later. Catherine Malone, who was in the Birmingham Mill. Did you have any dealings with her?

GB: No, no. Just had with Sylacauga.

A: But she was the welfare director and she was in charge of everything. Of course, it was much smaller.

LB: Yeah, I remember her.

GB: Well, no, now. Mr. Creel was the head—was the one I worked under—and he was the principal of the school. Grand High I guess. Well, he had, no, he had that tiny little man that everybody liked to tease him.

LB: Yeah. Uh-huh, but I can't think of his name. But Avondale spent a lot of money on welfare, social work.

GB: Oh, yeah. But I didn't have that part of it. But we had a social worker.

LB: Tell you what—

A: Now, what—

GB: Uh, I'm trying to tell you. I can't think of her name.

A: What did the social worker, what was her—

GB: Well, she went out—similar to mine—to go and talk to the mothers and try to teach them how to prepare their food or talk to them about it, how it should be done. And how they should have diversified meals and not have peas and corn every day.

A: Yeah, yeah.

GB: And she did that. And now, she went to the homes. I went to the homes for the children and talked to the mothers about my part. And she then, took the older children.

A: Now—

LB: Now, I can recall when I went to Sylacauga, they had a googaloo—

GB: The people were awfully ignorant.

LB: That was mill checks, made for a dime, quarter, fifty cents, a dollar—that was as high as it went. And those checks were good anywhere in town.

A: Yeah.

LB: And at that time, Avondale, Sylacauga had a very big grocery store. And the people called that—those checks—called it “Googaloo.”

A: Googaloo.

LB: That was the name for t. And they’d go and get ten dollars’ worth of googaloo, go to the office, and be charged to them, and then taken out of their paychecks.

A: Yeah.

LB: That googaloo was some business for a while.

GB: The parents—a lot of the parents were awfully ignorant.

A: Now, now. I think a friend of mine who, you may remember, I think Mrs. L.H. House. House was his mother-in-law’s mother, I guess is how it was. But she was talking about googaloo one time, and he got the mistaken impression that that’s what they were paid in. But that wasn’t the case.

LB: That wasn’t it. No, no.

A: That was just against—

LB: You were, you went to the office. There was one man that handled it. And you went and said, “I want ten dollars’ worth of googaloo.” Well, they look over there and see if you owed any prior googaloo. And they give you ten dollars in these checks.

A: So, it was, in a way, a way of credit type situation that didn’t get too complicated.

LB: Right, that’s right. And they accepted that googaloo in ay store in Sylacauga. ‘Cause Avondale was—would redeem them.

A: Yeah. Now, you were talking about the problems you saw with some of the ignorance of the parents. And you'd already talked about the snuff dipping at an early age. What were some of the other problems that you encountered that they—

GB: Well, food was one. I had one little girl, I don't know how many there were in the family, but she came to kindergarten and she said, "I had—I had egg gravy for my breakfast." And I said, "Egg gravy?" I didn't know what egg gravy was, so I talked to the girl that had been there and I said, "What is egg gravy?" And she said, "I'll tell you what it is. They had one egg and there's...I don't know how many children—at least five. And the father had the egg. And then the mother took the skillet and poured water in on what he didn't eat. And they cooked their egg gravy." And they had—she didn't have clothes to wear. And the girl that worked with me took odds and ends and made her a patched work coat, a little coat. And she was the proudest thing. If she had given her one that you bought out of a store, the little girl wouldn't have enjoyed it any more.

A: Now, with these families, until they were in the cotton textiles for awhile, say just fresh off the farm—what would you say about the family orientation? Did the father pretty much do as he wanted, and—

GB: I think so.

A: And the rest of the family just had to survive?

GB: Do what he said. Well the, some of them, the mothers had to go ahead and took care of when the fathers just didn't want to—lazy.

A: Yeah, yeah. Now, I know that—that this sort of thing around 1900. And I'm trying to figure out if it was still prevalent by the late '20s. This thing that you had just mentioned. That many times, a father came in and he didn't do anything. And the children and the mother had to work in the mill. Was this—

GB: Out there in the cotton fields all day. Well, now, I don't remember—I don't know too much about that part. I didn't go looking to see what they were doing. Now, I went in the homes, but it was usually a—the fathers were very seldom there. And if I did go and they were sitting down, the got up and left.

A: Right.

LB: Well, I remember in my early years here in Stevenson, I was on the school board. And we had a system here in this county of stopping schools in the summer to pick cotton.

A: Oh, yes. My—my first two years, see I was at Stevenson for my first three years. We lived in Wanville. And I started out in 1955, cotton picking vacation. You'd start in mid-July, work.

LB: That's right.

A: ... Go to school to the end of August, take six weeks off.

LB: Closes school for six weeks.

GB: Well, our oldest girl and her friends, they went cotton picking. And the colored woman that worked for me, she went cotton picking. And the little boy Buddy was, oh, I guess four or five. So, she told him to go way down. She showed him to go way in front of her, so she could pick what he didn't pick. And then told him to go way down there and she would come up to him. When she got there, he had laid down on his sack and went to sleep.

A: Oh, yes.

GB: He had gotten hot and tired. Oh, it sure did tickle her. [She] came in and told me that he sure didn't pick cotton. But he had to try it because the older girls did.

A: Now, you had mentioned that while you were teaching kindergarten and still single that there was a—what would you call it? A dormitory?

GB: A dormitory.

A: About how large was it?

GB: The teachers all had to stay—well, it was a pretty big one.

LB: The Walker Hotel.

GB: Yeah, the Walker Hotel. Um, the girls were upstairs—

LB: ... Single boys.

GB: And they weren't supposed to come up. In fact, they had a door. You had to unlock the door to get outward and inward where the men were. Uh, how many teachers were there?

LB: Thirty or forty.

GB: Yeah.

A: So the teachers were all on one wing or one side, and—

LB: Naw, they were on one floor.

A: One floor.

GB: We were all—we were upstairs.

LB: Building didn't have any wings. What was it—two stories?

GB: Mm-hmm. Two stories.

A: And most of the men were like foreman...?

GB: As I was saying that there was some others, some men up on the second floor, too. But that was locked, so that they couldn't come through onus.

A: Now, were—now, oh yeah—the school... so y'all did have quite a few teachers.

GB: Yeah, we had the teacher— you were required to live there. And you couldn't get married. Now, if you did marry, they did keep some of them—to begin with, they wanted single teachers. And old. We had several old maids and they kind of herded us.

A: Were most of the teachers in their twenties?

GB: No, we had some that was pretty old.

A: Uh, how would you compare the amount of study the teachers at the Avondale schools had with—say Sylacauga public schools? In other words, did the Comers actively recruit or just hope for the best each year?

GB: No, they went on in to schools with the proper interest in Sylacauga.

A: Yeah.

GB: See, we didn't have—we just had grammar school. Didn't we?

A: Through the eighth?

LB: That's right.

GB: Yeah, we just had that.

LB: They later on built a high school.

A: Yeah. B.B. Comer was built in '34, I think. Yeah, I think Francis Perkins came—

GB: But what we were trying to do was get 'em some education before they got in the cotton fields. And that's what they were doing. See, the parents were taking them to work; they needed them to get that money. And so it was up to the teachers to try and get them. And they did let out for cotton picking. Which they did benefit from around where I lived, too. It was just kind of a way of doing—country people had to have help. Well, as far as we were concerned we also had to have help My daddy would have to keep my brothers out some from public school. But they would keep up with their lessons. And, uh, then they'd study them and he'd to go take a test on them. Now, they didn't have to stay out of school but a day or two, so it wasn't a continuous thing.

A: Then you were, let me get this straight, you were saying that y'all were trying to train them as much as possible.

GB: To take care of their bodies, and to be friends, and to love one another, and help each other out. That was more what I did, was trying to put that in them that you loved one each other, 'cause then some of the kids hated their brothers, say. Mathew no, you don't hate your brothers. They take care of you. Well, no they'd don't take care of you.

LB: They would be prepared for school late on, you see, much better.

GB: But it gave them a foundation regarding the other person and these little twins that I was talking about. Mr. Hugh used to bring somebody over; invariably, he wanted them 'cause they could sing and they could dance. They could do anything. And they would just walk in front of him, so he'd be sure to see them. But they just loved him.

A: Now, was the fear of the people who worked with them in the Comer family that they might not stay in Sylacauga that long and that you hoped to prepare them as much as you could.

GB: As much as I could, as much education as was possible. Well, really, he said he didn't care if I didn't teach them anything except to sing and to love each other. But I kind of went by the schedule, that was to know other things, rhythm and those things that—they had no idea what rhythm was. They didn't call them. They were galloping horses; that wasn't a rhythm. And we'd play them you see, so that they had some idea what a galloping horse was. And I'd ask 'em, "Did you ever see a horse gallop?" Well, some of 'em hadn't. And I'd say, "We're going to be horses and we're going to be galloping." And I'd gallop with them.

A: Did there seem to be some of the people in the village who really wanted to see their kids achieve and others who could care less?

GB: ...That didn't. That's right. It was required that they went to kindergarten, but they had, in fact... most of it was to have them a place to be. But the other teacher had tried the rhythms and he same thing that I did.

A: Did you notice any difference between the parents who seemed to want their children to achieve and those who do [not]?

GB: Oh, yeah. You would find that.

A: Well.

GB: Some cared and some didn't. Some slapped them down if they didn't do what they said, and no pity. I guess they were slapped down when they were children.

LB: By the way, do you know Velma Price?

A: No, I don't.

LB: She writes an article every *Sun* issue. I guess she knows more people out at Avondale than anybody

A: Okay. Well, I'll make sure to see her.

LB: She does a lot of articles last year.

A: Okay. I also want Martha to put me on the mailing list so I can keep up when I not around, but say she's one of the people I should definitely to contact.

LB: She remembers people back sixty, seventy years.

GB: And they didn't like for their teachers to be married. Now we did get married and I taught on. We didn't—so they had to cut that out. You didn't have to be a single person.

A: Did either—okay, you said you had those ninety-nine kids the first year. Did that decrease, or did the number of people helping you increase?

GB: No, we managed it out, but uh...

LB: You didn't teach one more year after we got engaged?

GB: Uh, I taught one year after we were married.

LB: I don't remember that. It's been so long ago.

GB: Yeah, I taught the year afterwards. They were letting the married teachers teach.

LB: I know one thing. When we were both working back then, we had an income over \$200 a month. And we had a lot better time and more money than you do today with \$2000 a month income. That's the truth.

GB: Well we did. The Depression hit right after we got married.

LB: Oh, boy. I got a salary cut twice during the Depression.

A: Really?

LB: Ten percent.

A: Each time?

GB: Yeah, I did too.

LB: She got it, too.

GB: And then I got pregnant and had to stop.

A: What years were those? Were those two straight years that that occurred? Or do you...

GB: Mm-mmm.

LB: '31 and '32, I believe.

GB: But it got so bad, now I made my own dresses. I think I bought one or two dresses. And we—I had played bridge with some girls and we always [bought] refreshments and we cut that down to a Coke Cola. And we went on and we had a good time, but we didn't have much money. But everybody was in the same pile. In fact, the old negro girl that came to me, came and asked me—she came from the country, if she could work for me just for her meals, and enough money for her to find a place to sleep.

A: Just survival.

GB: Just survived. "If you will just let me have my food." And, there she worked for us. And she didn't want me she didn't want me to give her things. And she just loved us.

LB: I worked at Fairfax Mill in the summer time, at ten cents an hour. Fifty five hours' a week.

GB: But we had, I believe we had the best time we ever had. 'Cause everybody, you went and made your own.

LB: I get a little envelope the end of every week. Be a five dollar bill and gave me the fifty cent piece. I'd go home and give me father the five dollar bill and keep the fifty cent piece. And it looked like a lot of money.

GB: Girls had to marry boys coming here to work and teach school and things. The boys in the —

A: Now, that's another... First of all, I want to ask you about the Sylacauga situation. I think it might be similar to the Birmingham I that, now beyond the supervisory, people and dealing with the workers themselves. Most of them married people there in the village, or people that they—

LB: To a great degree.

A: Yeah, okay now. Now does that hold true in Stevenson?

GB: We had a good many children that were illegitimate.

LB: No, it doesn't. It really doesn't because these people are not concentrated; they're scattered.

A: That's right. That's what I—

GB: Yeah, some from out in the country.

LB: Got some marriages, yeah. Where it's a girl and a boy been working in the plant. But not many. They were just from everywhere around here.

A: Now, Mr. Bowles and I have been talking earlier about how in Stevenson there didn't seem to be friction between the town folk and the mill folk.

GB: No.

A: But there was, wasn't there, in Sylacauga?

LB: Oh, yeah.

GB: Yeah, there's a difference here in this town. Well, that was the housing. See, they had the little houses that had put up or rented and their housing there and housing here were similar. People that came to work were—

LB: People in Sylacauga—that was a tremendous mill village.

GB: Yeah, they had a big one.

LB: I guess, 85% of the people.

GB: But, uh, now they were more uneducated, you know.

LB: Oh, yeah.

A: Now, of course.

GB: Students had better education.

A: Now, of course, you didn't get a chance to be in Sylacauga long enough to see a long term transition. I'm wondering if, say, during the 30s, if the mill folk improved their station in life. For instance, I know back in the early 20s, that the turnover was just unreal.

LB: Oh, boy.

GB: Mm-hmm.

A: And [that], of course, was probably was one of your major problems.

GB: Yeah, well of course there, our friends were mostly boys and girls that had come there to do work, or men and women, and married. The school teachers married the men who were supervisors at the mill and people like that. So, those were our friends.

A: Right.

GB: And we had a good time. I liked living in Sylacauga.

A: But you know, I was wondering if once the depression hit, if people didn't try to hang onto a job, once they got it, more than they had before.

GB: That's right. There were a lot of men come in from Sylacauga [who had] been out in the country too, just like they'd been here. See, Stevenson's just a little town and—

LB: More than six hundred population downtown. Stevenson's population today is 3300.

A: Yeah, well of course, there've been a lot of things in the northern part of the county. There's Meed, and...

GB: Yeah. We've gotten a lot of things. So it's easier for them to get a diploma, and they're making more. And of course, the boys and girls have agriculture and the sewing and those kinds of things in school that they didn't used to have.

A: Now, back to your Sylacauga experience once again. Um, these people who were coming into the mill village. What type of life styles did they have? Were they church goers or didn't go to church, or...

GB: They didn't, or if they did, they went to a little church out in the country.

LB: In Sylacauga, they had a little church in the back of the village [that a] lot of the village people went to and we had a Methodist church back there in the general office.

GB: You see, you'll find it, I think, anywhere that a person that can't have the clothes that other people have, they don't want them to come to your church. Now that was one thing my mother always said now if I had a new dress: "No, you can't bring it to church, not the first time you wear it, 'cause there'll be people who'll be coming and they can't have a new dress." So I wasn't allowed except on Easter. You could have an Easter dress. But my mother was sympathetic to poor people. In fact, she was a doctor and a nurse, and anybody got sick, she went to see them. Anybody had a baby, she went to help them. And they'd call her in the middle of the night. In fact, the doctor in those days had the horse and buggy and he would call—must have had a telephone, 'cause he would call for Mother to be there and help him deliver the baby.

A: A midwife?

GB: And she would go and see the negroes. If negroes were sick, she'd go see negroes. And—but we did have nice negroes, and negroes that wanted an education. 'Course they had their little schools—'course not as good as white schools, but they had them.

A: That was another thing that hit me once I started working on this project, is one doesn't tend to associate blacks working in textile mills. And it's true. They don't work in it, but like Sylacauga with those three big mills, there were a number of blacks working in the yard to where it made a fairly sizable community.

LB: We've got blacks up here now running the machinery.

A: Yeah.

LB: And they have sewed carpet, too.

A: Uh, is there anything else you can think of during the years that you were a kindergarten teacher that we haven't touched on?

GB: Well, I always felt like that I could see a little improvement as the days went on, as the years went on, with the people. And they got so where they would talk to you a little bit more and you could try. I would try to suggest what they'd get to eat. Um, 'course meats, that was the first thing they wanted to buy was meat. And leave the other things go. We tried—we wanted to get vegetables, have gardens, so they'd have vegetables too.

A: Now, did you teach kindergarten in the Community House, or...

GB: No, we had a—

A: You had a separate building.

GB: Separate place. But it was right in the heart of town.

A: And you would basically have kindergarten during the period of the school year?

GB: Yeah, of the school year.

A: How long did it run at that time, do you recall?

LB: You mean day or night?

A: No, the school year. Was it a whole nine months or was it a shorter school year?

GB: No, I don't guess it was when we first went to...

LB: I don't remember.

GB: I can't remember, either.

A: Probably the *Avondale Sun* will tell.

GB: But now I didn't—I taught year round. I had most of the time. I didn't get too much time off. 'Cause mine was more of a kindergarten/nursery connection. They had to have somewhere to go while their parents were at work.

A: We'd earlier mentioned the spring inspection thing and I know that the children played an important role.

GB: Oh, yes.

LB: Oh, yes.

A: What were some of the things that you recall that your children did—your kindergarten children...

GB: Oh, they could say little poems and they could sing and do their little dances and they like little horses.

LB: I know we used to go, too. They didn't start having spring inspections 'til we got Stevenson Mill. I don't know. That was several years. But we was—

GB: I had to be ready at night if Mr. Comer wanted somebody to see them at night, those children. They were—they knew what to do enough that we could have night ones too. And we had to go at night with them, pick out the good ones. 'Course the others didn't get in, on the night some of them couldn't come. But there were sometimes at night were he would want also. He liked to show off his children. Mr. Hugh loved children better than any man I've seen

A: Now you mentioned earlier something about night. Now did they also have a night nursery for the night shift, or how did that work?

GB: Now, actually I don't know how that worked.

LB: I don't think they did.

GB: I don't think they did, either.

A: Probably most mothers worked on day shift or stayed at home.

GB: That's right. They worked during the day mostly, I think.

LB: Well, I believe at Sylacauga, we didn't work many women.

A: No, I never... yeah.

LB: that had children.

A: In fact, I recall some of the Comers' letters—Mr. Donald's, that he was all for. In fact, he encouraged the Avondale operations not to hire women for night work if they could avoid that. And he was trying to push for an across the board code in the textile industry not to have...

GB: The Comers were some of the nicest people you work for.

LB: Well, I'll tell you another thing, Mr. Donald wouldn't allow—

GB: Very, very.

LB: ...was to operate on Sunday. We would just—

[TAPE ENDS]