

Avondale Mills Project

Interviewer: Edward Akin

Interviewee: Mr. and Mrs. Boyd Douglas

June 14, 1981

E: This is an interview with Mr. and Mrs. Boyd Douglas at their home in Sylacauga on June 14, 1981. Mr. Douglas and I have just returned from the grand tour of Mignon and Sylacauga, seeing a lot of things that I have not been aware of before like the Avondale cemetery. In order for us to get started what I thought we would do is one of you talk for a while about your start in life and growing up and then we'll switch over to the other one and try to keep them balanced. Then of course after you get married then your lives are pretty much going to go along the same path. So, Mr. Douglass, tell me what you know about your father's and mother's families before you came along---where they were from.

B: My father was from Richmond, Virginia. He came from—his Dad was a judge in Superior Court in Richmond, Virginia. His sisters finished Agnes College. He had about four sisters and he was the only boy. He finished high school and went away and joined the army and went to the Spanish-American war. After the war when he was discharged from the Army he came and wound up in Birmingham, Alabama, where he met my mother and they married. He was an engineer on the Frisco rail line and she worked at the White's Farm laundry at that time. Then she went to work back again at the Avondale Mills in Birmingham.

E: Now where did your mother's folks come from?

B: My mother's folks came from Piedmont Alabama. Her daddy got killed in a furnace there—a cast iron furnace he was loading and fell in. He died instantly. So, my mother's mother took all the children, I think it was about three boys and about four girls, brought them from Piedmont to Birmingham, Alabama, and went to work for Avondale Mills which was around the turn of the century. Then my mother, in the summer times, the governor bought that mill from Cosby. Jazz Chicken Feed I believe it is now. Cosby Livery Company, they owned it. Three or four of them owned the mill. Governor Comer bought them out. That was in 1897. My mother and her sisters and brothers came in there and went to work. After she married she had two boys, three boys and two girls. I was the baby in the family. I was born in the mill village there. At that time they had a nursery. When she went to work in the morning, she left, say for example, she left me at the nursery there. Then say it was time for me to nurse, she left her job and came to the nursery and nursed me and then went back on her job. They had someone to keep

me and she would pick up me when she got off from work late in the evening. They hired a Miss Duart, a well-educated woman in social affairs.

E: This was Florida Duart? You know, was her first name Florida?

B: Yeah, Florida Duart. Where did you get that?

E: From the *Sun*

B: And I was named after her. My name is Boyd Duart Douglas. Boyd was a preacher. Miss Duart, we thought the world of her. She was a social worker. Well, as time went on we left Birmingham and came to Sylacauga and built a four-story living area.

E: Was you father still living then?

B: Yes. He was an overseer in the cloth room there. They were living good. He was pretty well educated, too. He come from a fine family. He came to the farm houses and kind of showed you in the evenings-- that is if you sowed a farm, raised vegetables, and worked in the mill. He usually worked at night and farmed in the daytime except whenever they couldn't.

E: About how big were the farm plots?

B: I believe there were eight houses and there were ten acres to each house—a truck farm. As time moved on, they moved to Washington Avenue. We stayed there a while and then we got house over there on Georgia Avenue which I showed you. We stayed there for many, many years. Time rocked on and on. When I finished high school, they moved to Walco. The houses they were different from what we had been living in—pretty nice. They selected certain groups of people to live there in Walco. My mother didn't like it too well because it was too far to walk to work so we moved back to the original house. I wanted him to pass high school but my brothers and sisters had already left and married and gone away. So anyway I started dating my wife. We had gone to the same high school together and attended the same parties. This was during most of it during the Great Depression that I'm speaking of right now. I went ahead and finished high school because there weren't any jobs and my mother made me finish high school. I went home and wandered around a while but my mother stopped that. Hugh Comer told me one day in passing-- I didn't want to work in the mill. You gonna get out and tell Ed Dunham that I said put you to work. You're going to get into trouble in the streets. I'm not working in the cotton mill. That's all I've ever heard all of my life. What are you going to do? I said, I don't know. He said there's nothing you can do, there's a depression on. When business picks up, you can quit Avondale Mill just as quickly as you want to. I want to see you go to work. I'll think about it. The next week I went down and told the superintendent which was Ed Dunham to put me to work. I want to work. In the meantime this for the fun of it I started

taking an ICS course in textile manufacturing. Wait a minute. I'm getting ahead of myself. I did that after I married. We married and they wanted us to have a beautiful church wedding and we had a church wedding. That was the right thing to do then. Remember I told you about her sister having one, a yard wedding, Stephanie Holmes and a couple went through things like that trying to uplift the quality of their people. So, from then on Mary, do you want her to talk some?

E: I want to back up and get a couple of a little more information on certain things. Back when ya'll were living in the farmhouses do you remember doing any peddling of vegetables?

B: I remember riding in a wagon with my daddy in a seat beside him while he peddled.

E: Yes, and you had mentioned when we were riding around about what was it selling. I can't even recall what it was other than you said that you worked a couple of hours in the morning.

B: Poultry farm

E: Okay, tell me about that.

B: That was after school was out three months for the summer I got a job at the poultry farm working seven days a week. It come nearly around sixteen hours a day the way it worked for \$2 a day. It was real good money. Two times seven is \$14 a week. I got that job with one of the best managers I've ever seen, a Mr. Pollard. The Comers thought the world of him. They got him from Mississippi State. He took poultry raising in college so he knew what it was all about. My job was mostly just helping him sometime. He raised roosters and I fed them bug dip and cornmeal and they fattened and made tender meat. They got a premium price for those roosters on the market. The hens were triple A Hollywood white feathers. Then I packed eggs. I had to count eggs. It was an experience worth getting. I packed eggs in crates and sometimes I would go to the train and meet the 5:30 train and they would put them on a passenger train to take to Birmingham.

E: You mentioned that also they had a dairy of course.

B: Yes, they had a dairy. You bought milk for eight cents a quart. You got a milk book from the company. It was deducted out of your mother's or father's pay. You tore off a coupon which was worth eight cents a quart. You could get butter for... was it twenty cents a pound? Pure cow butter-- that was the best. You could get buttermilk for a nickel a gallon. That's when we got rid of our cow because it was cheaper to buy from the company than it was to have your own cow and feed it.

E: You mentioned when we were riding around that most people in the community to begin with had their own cow. How did that work?

B: Right. Everybody did and you bought...

MD: They had a pasture over there by the cemetery where each one of them had a stall to keep the cows.

E: And you were responsible for your own cow.

S: They had a big pasture where they were let out in.

B: They furnished water for the cows to have, that's all. You paid....

MD: Twenty-five cents a month

B: Twenty-five cents a month for that cow stall.

E: You'd also mentioned that...tell me about how the deal worked for your mother to get back from Walco back into her old house in Mignon.

B: Well, in a way this is true but she told the superintendent that she wanted her house back. Now what's wrong, Mrs. Evelyn? It was just too far to walk. Okay, they had the renters in our house to move and moved her back over there. It was just as simple as that. Just a few words spoken.

E: Now by that time what had become of your father?

B: He was still around. My father worked in the machine shop. He was a machinist. I would go by there sometimes and we'd go over a sheathing that came off a cast iron thing like that. They were very popular to curl your hair—you wanted a curl in your hair there. You was barefooted. They had fixed something. Mostly if they see kids in there they would heat some ball bearings. Some balls, you shot marbles back in them days. They wanted to hold a heavy machine thing. You'd see it and pick it up. (Moans loudly,) Everyone would start laughing see. They'd fix it where you would step on one of those curlers. Boy, you would hop around there and holler. They were hot, too. So, it really didn't pay to go in that machine shop. A lot of horse playing going on in there. I used to be guilty and be in the middle of that, too. They called me in the office one time and said stop horse playing. I stopped. I did I stopped for a couple of months. No one else did so I got back in and picked on some big boys. They didn't want horse playing. They told me once this is the last time and I quit. That's when I started studying the ICS course. The mill paid for it. It was free then. Boy, I was real smart. You know I was just a C average in high school. Never did study. After I married I got to studying and did real well. My books, there out there on the porch. She's got them out there the ICS books. I never will forget one time it was from Scranton, Pennsylvania. They said. Mr. Douglas, it's amazing sometimes you can have the most beautiful handwriting and sometimes it's hardly legible to read there. We

want you to start using this beautiful handwriting from now on. I wrote back I paid for this damn thing and I'll write the way I want to and you grade it. They said no sir you got a bad attitude. Change your attitude and strive to do your best because this beautiful handwriting could come in handy some day. The typewriter wasn't even popular too much back then. See they still use handwriting in recording things in court. Anyway I finished on out. In the meantime the company was promoting me from one department to another. Each time I wondered what the heck is going on? The move to Talladega had given me a general knowledge of the complete cotton manufacturing all the time. I kinda wised up once I married when I was twenty-one. When I was twenty-four, I was a foreman. By the way, as time rocked on, I put in the first confederate system in Alexander City. I was an overseer down there. It was talking about automation coming to cotton mills that was one of them. In other words you carried a lath, forty inches long and about twenty something inches in diameter, to the operator from another department. You'd carry the empty pin back and dump it in a can. ICS got a hold to it and they used me for advertising after a couple of years. ICS did. Avondale tried I think had a patent. Nobody was allowed to use it for six months. They were trying to get some sort of patent on it. Things fell through. I know I'm always an ICS booster. 'Cause you can be better. I was smarter than I even thought I was. You think I cheated on my ICS? I guess you could do it but I didn't do it. I turned it in just exactly like it was.

E: Well, probably you would be found out lacking later on in some area.

B: Boy, I'm telling you the truth they corrected those things, too. I'm not kidding. I looked up some of their members. I understood they used college students paid them to grade my papers. I just understood that. Anyway, there's a lot of people that was helped by ICS.

E: But then now it's your turn, Mrs. Douglas, to catch us up on your life.

S: My daddy was Isaac A. Williams. I was born in Coosa County in Hollins, Alabama. He was from a prominent family. His daddy, S. W. Williams, at one time was mayor of Goodwater, Alabama. He had several sisters and two—three brothers and they all had good educations—what you considered good educations then. My daddy finished the agricultural school in Sylacauga and we now have a representative in Washington that his daddy was the principal of it. Boyd, do you remember his name?

E: Bill Nichols?

S: Bill Nichols. Professor Nichols was over the agricultural school. And where the--it was located where the community civic center is now in Sylacauga.

B: Let me interrupt. That was the result of Governor B. B. Comer. He put a high school in every county in the state of Alabama. They liked to run him out of the state on account of it. It like to

broke the state but it paid off. It started paying off a few years later. He really believed in education.

S: My daddy, I'm not sure what year he came to Sylacauga, and had a grocery store on the next block from Beverly Hall in Mignon. Across from that grocery store was a church which was later moved back behind the German Frazier Hospital which belonged to Avondale Mills and was used for a nursery for the children.

E: Now would that have been what was it the Mount Vernon Nursery? Or was that the main nursery?

S: No, that was the main nursery behind the German Frazier Hospital close to Beverly Hall. Before my daddy started into the store he met my mother, Vandera Tarpley. I think you met Mr. Tarpley this afternoon. That is her nephew. His daddy is the only living one in their generation. He is ninety-four. Now my mother died last year at ninety-one. She worked for Avondale Mills when they bought—she was working for the Lewises when Avondale Mills bought Central Mill. She had worked in Sycamore for the Lewises. Her parents worked there. Then they made them move to Sylacauga and that's how my daddy met her. My daddy was from an influential family and they did not approve of his marriage to a textile mill girl. He was well educated as you could call it then but she did not have an education before the fourth grade. It seems that he sold the store and moved to Mount Olive, Alabama, and started farming. He always liked farming. That's where I was born—Mount Olive, Alabama. My sisters, I have two sisters and a brother who are older. They were born in Sylacauga. I understand that they stayed there until I was about two years old and moved to the brickyard in Sylacauga.

E: Now where is that?

S: The brickyard is down below the swimming pool.

B: It's east of right east of Sylacauga.

S: What's behind where....

E: Highway 20

B: 77, no

S: Goes to Clay County. It goes up by Rocky Mountain.

B: It's a new highway that goes from Sylacauga straight on out to

S: Ashland

E: Ashland?

B: Yeah.

S: He worked in the boiler room at the brickyard. He also worked, the Van Deusens owned Herdcow.

B: It doesn't exist anymore.

S: No, he drove a milk wagon, too, since he did two jobs. He followed the Van Deusens every afternoon to a different mill. It was on a surrey. It had a top to it. I can remember that. And across from the brickyard they had water in huge, wooden barrels and they had a spiket and everybody would stop there and get them a drink of water. When I was about three years old we had a tornado that came through Sylacauga and destroyed our home except the room that we were in and we were all saved in that particular room. As a result of that daddy and then took the lumber and built a house, a house was built down by what is now Busy Corner. That's up behind Beverly Hall.

E: Okay, E. M. Dunn right across there.

S: I don't know. We were in the next block from E. M. Dunn. We built a house there. While they were in the process of building it we moved. We lived in a house that was vacant there after the tornado. Then we moved to an apartment building directly in front of what is now the Sylacauga High School and where the stadium the football stadium is. It was called, uh, well anyway they had a Prater studio in the bottom and everyone in Sylacauga would remember that. Upstairs was an apartment where people could live. We lived in there from four to six weeks. Then, I remember a wagon loading our furniture and we walked beside the wagon down to this new house. Daddy had taken a job with Avondale. He started working in the boiler room for Avondale and continued working until—that was when I was four years old and I was born in 1915. So, that would have been 1919.

B: I showed you their house on Walco there.

E: Yes, right across the street from where you lived.

S: He lived he worked for Avondale until about eight years before he died. He died in 1953. He had to retire early because of a heart condition.

E: Was he in the boiler room?

S: He was in the boiler room the whole time. He was foreman of it. What I can remember so well about this boiler room is that children could go back and forth in the mill, in the yards. We would take his lunch down to him in a tin pail bucket. It had the lid on it where they could hang

it up by the bell and ants and things could not crawl and get in their lunch. The ice house was next door to it. He would take—Mama would mix up ice cream mixtures and put it in his tin bucket. He would throw it down in those vats that made the ice and let it stay just awhile and it would freeze. We children would get that and take it home and we would have ice cream. Also, they had showers in this boiler room where mostly men, not many of the women went by. We did not have a shower in our house or a bathtub at that time. Daddy would stand outside the shower and let me and my friend go in and take a shower. We thought that was something. Then years late the teachers stayed at Beverly Hall and they had showers and they would invite the girls in after the teachers had their showers and tell them to come on up and get a shower.

E: Now was this boiler room shower the same one you were telling me about earlier today? Tell us again about...

S: That boiler room shower—we were not supposed to have been in there.

B: No, it was for the shop and the boiler room only because sometimes they deal in certain chemicals in the boiler water that if it got on them they had to run and take a shower. They had a good many boilers in there. I don't know how many but a big weaving plant had to have steam. They had a lot of boilers. It was a big place.

E: But while I've got my mind on it tell us about your shoe shining experience on Saturday.

B: Well, when I was a kid I lived on Washington Avenue over there between the mill and I'd go to this place on Saturday. There weren't any eight hours a day then. They worked six o'clock to five usually and on Saturday until eleven o'clock. Then they'd blow the whistle and everybody would quit work. But a lot of them folks would come out of the mill and have a white shirt and blue surge pants and a Sunday shoe for Saturday. The company had a lot of huge showers in there boy and they took showers. Bathe—you know you didn't bathe but once a week then. (Laughs)

E: Yeah, I'm familiar with that.

B: Uh, he was always trying to pick up; he bought a small tin of shoe polish for nothing. I don't know where he got a rag made from some old wool pants or something. He picked up a nickel to shine this fellow's shoes there. If he'd let you, sometimes I'd have fifteen cents. Man, I was rich. That's the way it was.

E: Just piecing together

B: Pardon.

E: You would just piece together work to do as a youngster. Things like shining shoes.

B: You didn't ask your mother or father for money because son, I'd give it to you if I had it. I know that. It was I guess you'd call survival. If someone got sick in the mill village, then the neighbors would all share and take in till he got well. You carried food, sometimes a scuttle of coal, whatever their needs were you know. Things like that till he got well or died, he or she.

E: Sorry to interrupt your story but the thing is when I think of it I better get it then or it'll be gone.

S: That's all right. We lived in this area around Busy Corner for a number of years and then we moved to Walco. Before we moved to Walco, though, I had started in school. We knew each other but he was a grade ahead of me. We never did date until I think I was in the ninth grade or I was in the tenth and he was in the eleventh. Is that it? So we started dating then and dated for four years before we married. Mr. and Mrs. Hugh Comer and Miss Kirby was one of the teachers. She was the Phys Ed teacher and she they particularly wanted us to have a church wedding and all. They had not helped promote any before at that time. They were, like you said, trying to benefit the people in the community and let everyone learn about different things of life and how things went. Now when my sister married and had the garden wedding, Mrs. Donald Comer presided over all of it. She came down and Mrs. Hugh Comer and Mrs. Fletcher Comer and Miss Kirby, the teacher, and Miss Chapman, an English teacher, we cut flowers from the yards in the communities and carried them there and they made all the bouquets for the wedding and presided over the tea and all. That was something for high school students then or just out of high school to see and go and be in. The textile people had not been accustomed to that type of living and all the Comers and Mr. and Mrs. Creel at the school, he was the professor of the old Mignon School and of the Comer School after they built the new school across the railroad and stayed there until they sent him to Talladega, Alabama. Now they and Mrs. McGowan, Mrs. Harry McGowan and her husband Mr. Harry McGowan, he was over the band. Those four people had a lot to do with the influence of the young people in that generation and I think they had a definite thing to do with how each one turned out. They say they have kept records and can go back and that there's not any of them that has a criminal record or anything. All of them have turned out to be good students. We can credit this go back to the Comers, Mr. Donald, Governor Comer built, I understand, one of the first schools in Alabama was it, for the textiles?

E: That's those agricultural high schools you were telling me about.

S: Governor Comer started the schools for the textile mills and all in Alabama.

B: Well, according to the Department of Education it's called industrial relations. I even went to night school that the state paid for. I even taught school before I married. I was paid by the State of Alabama. They were always trying to do something to upgrade their employees.

E: Now did Sylacauga have anything like Birmingham's part time student? Any sort of arrangement that would work that way? A half day of work and a half day of going to school?

B: No, sir, they didn't.

S: My sister did that in Sylacauga. She went to school in the mornings and worked in the afternoons for two years and finished high school.

B: Now see what he's talking about is went to textile school and then worked on the job.

E: No, this would have been regular school.

B: Oh, I'm sorry. Yes, they did.

E: Like Ed Morris, you know. I know Ed and a lot of people I've been with.

B: Yes, sir. There were plenty of them.

S: A lot of them did that.

B: Somehow or another they looked like they got others, too. One was going to school and folks after school. Yes, sir, a lot of them.

E: Because I never could, it was never referred to as part time school down here I don't think.

B: No, sir, no.

E: It wasn't that term because up there it was completely separated from the public schools but here it was tied together.

B: Memory is something. Let's cut it off. (Tape is cut off.)

E: Getting back to your growing up what were some of the activities that the mill provided and the community program that you got involved with?

B: Well, they took an active part in all the churches and the youth. They even gave tap dancing lessons and me and her took tap dancing. You had softball programs going on. You had baseball programs going on. You could go out and you had a band. I played in the band for eleven years. Then if we went to Montgomery or Birmingham or some other place to play a concert or to play for some big speaking, if one of the Comers spoke, the band went along, too. You got paid if you worked in the mill your time. We went to the dedication of the B. B. Comer Bridge at Scottsboro and that took two days.

E: I didn't realize we were that far out in the woods.

B: (Laughs) And that was the dustiest, the driest spell Alabama's ever had. They were wading across the Tennessee River there at the bridge.

E: Yeah, I'm sure they would remember that.

B: Ooh, dust was that thick on those roads.

E: Of course, that was back before TVAs so the river could just dry up.

B: That's right. There wasn't back water back then.

E: Another big occasion was playing for President Harding. Weren't you in on that one?

B: I was.

MD: President Roosevelt

B: That was in Birmingham when he come down. I played for the inauguration of President Roosevelt but I was in the Army band then.

E: Oh, really?

B: Our high school won the state championship of Alabama in band at Montgomery. We beat Auburn, Phillips, Woodlawn, Ensley, Sidney Lanier, Mobile. We'd go down and take on contests such like that, state champions.

E: That was during your time?

S: That was at the old Mignon High School.

B: Now what they did. Avondale Mills furnished you a director and during school you were permitted to take music. We had a band. We went in that band room about fifth grade when we'd start playing. When I finished high school, we were the state champions. You think we were good. You better believe we were. Our band director, he could hear a bad note and you would correct it right then.

E: Who was your director at the time?

B: Harry McGowan.

E: Now, was he directing both the high school and the mill band?

B: Yes, that's right. The high school was in the evening and the mill band was at night. I played in both of them. I was pretty good. Some of the others were pretty good.

E: Did ya'll have uniforms and instruments furnished?

B: Yes, we did. The mill furnished them. They looked pretty good, too. We had a winter uniform and a summer uniform. We had swimming pools for recreation and they had lifeguard they paid. They had a recreational director and there was a park down there where you played games—supervised recreation.

E: You said a lot of boys didn't always like to swim at the pool.

B: That's right. You went down right below the pool there. There's a creek called Shotgun. It was always shady around the hot sun. You'd just rather go skinny dipping than to use a bathing suit. I was asked by Mr. Bragg Comer why did you do that for. A bathing suit just hurts. It hurts between the legs there. Oh, you just like the water in that creek down there. Well, you don't have a lifeguard yelling at you when you cut up and all. Sometimes a lifeguard wouldn't let you go swimming. He'd penalize you for two days. Boy, that was a long time.

E: Yeah, out in the middle of the hot sun.

B: You couldn't. He wouldn't let you horseplay. You couldn't run, you'd slide down and hurt yourself. He stopped that. I never heard of nobody during horseplay that couldn't run. We had a swing down there hooked to a big limb and we'd swing out and drop off in that. They didn't have that. They just had a spring board where you could dive off of. We liked to horseplay a lot and they just didn't allow it at the company's pools.

E: Another mill activity that you got involved with another interesting beginning with your career in Boy Scouts.

B: Yes, I started out nine years old. It looked like the mill village kids were getting a little on the rough side there. They had too many light bulbs. They had lights ever so often so people could go home at night. They had a light there so they wouldn't fall in the creek there or the bird hole. You'd bust a mouth, you see. I'm just showing you not to bust it out but to show the accuracy of the arm. You had to be pretty good when I was a kid with your arm in throwing a rock. You had to hit a rabbit running sometimes. You had to be pretty good. They brought in Mr. Simpson, he was from Birmingham, Hal Graves and Mr. Hill. There were four or five troops. It doesn't matter how old you were if you were guilty at the age they thought you were, you had to go into scouts.

END OF TAPE ONE

B: We had regular meeting places had a place furnished for you. Even in the winter time they stem heated the water. You could play a game but first you had to have a scout meeting. After scout meeting they would furnish boxing gloves. They had a gymnasium. It's tore down now.

Whew, it was a huge gymnasium—trapeze, dumbbells to furnish, basketball court. They furnished you everything, boy.

E: So, you got a personal invitation from someone to join all this, didn't you?

B: Yep, that was you had to be twelve years old. I told him I can't join. I ain't but nine years old. Boy, I can look at you and tell you're big enough. You're in scouts. (Laughs) So I decided that ain't gonna do. You were compelled to pass a test each week. Attended second class and then first class and started earning merit badges. I didn't do it. Nobody's going to tell me what to do. They didn't control us anyway. They were brought in from outside to be our scout masters. They had to play professional baseball, too, on the side for the mill. They played pretty good, they weren't the top draft. So, you didn't pass one okay buster how come you didn't pass? I didn't get around to it. Okay, fall out of the line there. You got your butt torn up with a big garrison belt. From ROTC they had a big garrison belt. Boy, he wasn't playing; I'm telling you the truth. He tore he tore us up.

E: You have a rather famous athlete who helped you out with that one time, didn't you? The famous archer?

B: Yeah, Howard Hill, the world's greatest archer and still is. Don't know how many records he still holds.

E: He got to warm the seat of your pants up several times.

B: He wanted to put it on me. He tore me up. I'm gonna tell you, boy, and he loved it. Comer sent us all to Camp Andrews in Birmingham. Boy Scouts went out there for a week paid our way. We went out there on a train. They even fed us free meals. You getting ready to backtalk he played with us all the time and he was rough. Strong, he would grab you up by the nape of the neck sling you in a creek or down a mountain. You'd see him coming I used to walk out of his way.

E: Now, you were talking as we were going around that at one point in your youth you were a pretty roughneck kid but then I noticed in the *Avondale Sun* that you were also president of the Epworth League in the Methodist Church.

B: I was president of the Epworth League. I took an active part. We must have had a pretty good program because that Epworth League that whole room was jam packed full. She was in there, too, I think.

S: That was in the auditorium. That's where we met. I was in there.

E: Right. And you were in there in that group? What were some of your other activities growing up?

S: I was in the Federal Reserve Club. I played basketball, football, baseball, softball.

E: They had girls' football?

S: We played with the boys on the side. It was supposed to be touch.

B: Back then it was touch football.

S: But, when we didn't have an instructor watching, we'd play tackle. Swimming but I'll admit that was one thing I was a coward in swimming and diving. I learned to swim but not dive. I didn't like jumping. And the last year I was in high school the girls reserve club went to Washington, D.C., and we had our picture made with President Hoover back in 1932.

E: Hoover looked like he could already see the handwriting on the wall.

S: That picture is behind the White House in the backyard.

E: Which of these persons is you?

S: This is President Hoover right there. This is the bus driver, Mr. Clomer Gardner. This was our athletic director and teacher in school, Miss Jean Kirby.

E: She's about one of the smallest people in the picture.

S: She married Dr. Robert Winslow from Sylacauga. Then all the girls there. I could name them all for you and some of them are still living in Sylacauga. This is Ruthie Haynes, Edmund Haynes' wife. She was Ruthie White at that time. She was Edmund Haynes' wife and she did a good job. I was with them for a number of years. He died in 1950.

B: What really happened there them Comers they were bad losers. They meant in other words when that scouting business started they were backsliding. They brought in some help, boy. I'm telling you the truth there wasn't not time our you seen some cleaned up boys and some boys walking the chalk line that had to do a good turn daily. By the way, if you didn't do a good turn daily you went through the belt line. Whew!!!

E: That sure helped—a little incentive.

B: You couldn't lie either 'cause darn if they wouldn't check on you sometime, too.

E: Now Simpson went on to the national scouts, didn't he, from Sylacauga?

B: Who?

E: Simpson, wasn't it Simpson?

B: No, Simpson Birmingham was starting him a big scout program there and he hit it big until he retired. He was really a fine person. Hal Graves, I don't know what happened to him really. He taught school in Sylacauga for a little bit I think. What I'm trying to say is as long as them Comers were in there, the originals, they had you didn't have time to get in trouble. In fact during the national textile strike you didn't have time. They kept you so cotton picking busy. They had a camp on Camp Brownie. Did you ever go out to Willow where they had a place?

E: I haven't but I know about it.

B: Go down there and swim...parties. Furnish you a bus, no charge. Furnish you the driver. He had to do what he was told to do. They kept you so busy you didn't think nothing about joining the union.

E: Now, when ya'll were growing up what do you remember about I guess this stayed on even after you were married things like German Frazier Hospital, the community Commissary, things like that? What do you recall about those back then?

B: German Frazier was an accredited hospital. The Comers seen to that.

E: Before I forget it. You had mentioned earlier that your mother was a midwife. Do you recall much about her activities as a midwife?

B: No, because I was the baby of the family. Just only hearing talking family matters. She was in demand a lot. Work all day and might be up all night long never get no rest and go into work the next day.

E: Now what area of the mill was your mother working in?

B: She was at Avondale.

S: Card room

E: What part?

B: Carding

S: Card room

B: Carding. My mother would work for the department that paid the most money. If it was spinning that paid more per side on piece rate than the card room she would quit the card room and go into the next room and get a job. You see each overseer was responsible he did

his own hiring and his own discharging. She spooled. She spinned---speeder operator, moving machine operator. That's about it whichever one paid the best.

E: Now did all of you children work in the mill at one time?

B: At one time when my oldest brother was working at Sycamore, he was a fourth generation working for them.

E: All at the same time? Well, no, his great-grandparents. What about your family? Did all of you?

S: Yes, we all worked for Avondale at one time or another. My mother worked some when I was small but after I was nine or ten years old she didn't work in the mill anymore.

B: When that storm hit Sylacauga their house was one of the many that was tore up. There was a company up town, too, the Chandler River, it blowed it away, too. Killed a lot of people. Her mother miscarried and her health her mother's health was not any good after that. That's meant to be an explanation.

S: But she lived to be ninety-one.

E: Yeah, yeah.

B: I had a date with her, the first date I ever broke with her. It was March 21, 1932? '31, '32. It blowed Sylacauga away. I went to school that morning. It was rough that night about six o'clock or seven. My Dad came out and said get up they're having a storm. I said well let her blow. You'll see, boy. Somebody will pick you up after a while. I went to school the next morning. You know communication wasn't like it is now. Somebody said that Luther Heacock's granddaddy's house blowed away up town. Now Harmon Mims was band director at Sycamore and he was in my class. He was coming back finishing high school. He was a senior. No, he was in your room. He was finishing high school. So me and him jumped in the car and went up town. Oh, man. There was the National Guard and the Red Cross. There was a church yonder with people laying on the front of it with sheets over them. What's going on? There were big trees up there on south Norton and Broadway blown down. Can't be. A friend of mine I fought for two years you know. I forget his name. We always had nine white fighters and one colored fighter and we'd go to different towns and fight. It killed him. A two by four bored right through his chest. Knockout Ron, that's his name. Of course, I sparred with him but you know back then you didn't fight in public.

E: But now you haven't mentioned—go ahead.

B: About fighting?

E: Yeah, but have you finished telling about the storm?

B: The storm, I mean I never was shocked on anything except maybe I was little confused about this. I was in shock. I never seen such a mess. There was twenty-two killed. There was wasn't there a hundred and something that started at Northport, come through Johnson, Thorsby, Fayetteville, Kahatchie, Gantts Quarry, Sylacauga, Hollins, and Ashland. Blowed a cotton mill in Gainesville, Georgia, a big cotton mill, blowed the roof off of it. It was rough.

E: Well, fill me in on your fighting career.

B: Well, at Avondale Mills we had an athletic club, too. You fought and you wrestled and you did trapeze work and all that sort of stuff. The Comers promoted it under supervision. You couldn't have your way. Anyway, the American Legion started sponsoring boxing and during the Depression, too. So, we got a pretty good team. We had a Greek---owned the Silver Moon Café in Greek. You know they love athletic competition—football, baseball, wrestling, fighting—you name it. The Greek, he's for it. So we got a team and he was the manager. We fought teams from Birmingham, Anniston, Gadsden. Where's the preacher from? Where's the preacher from? Lanett?

E: No, Fairfax.

B: Fairfax. I beat the hometown boy down there one night. They didn't have no police back then. He was a popular boy and I didn't much want to go through that crowd back up. I think maybe I might have worked him over. I don't remember too much about it. I do recall he didn't have too much experience and he wore out. Back then they sold coca-colas in the bottle, threw them at you, spewed on you trying to provoke you to make a pass. They would have whipped you, thrown you over. You wouldn't have gotten your clothes either. That was one of them—I made it a point to never play into someone else's hands. You play into mine, on my terms and my way. You needn't to call for the police 'cause they wouldn't have come. Anyway, I've got a newspaper clipping of a fight in Birmingham.

E: Did you fight by weight divisions?

B: You couldn't have but it was against the law to have a decision in amateur except newspaper decision. This is hilarious, it's funny. I fought Dutch Kilgore. I remember his name in a fight. He was the Fighting Barrel. I didn't know it. I fought semifinals one night that might have been six rounds. I don't know. Usually I didn't go but three rounds and four rounds. I got sometimes fifty cents for expense money. So, I go in the ring and my second must have been talking to me sitting on the stool by me. Bang, the bell rang. He walked up and I jumped back. I never seen such a freak in my life—a fellow about that tall and about that big around. I ain't gonna fight that. That's a freak. That fellow bucked up in the seat and said you will fight, too. People back

then you had to fight or they would demand their money back and they'd get it back, too. It took a life out of me. I went over and told my second, Bill Isley, I can't fight nothing like that. He said I ain't never seen nothing like it either. I don't know how to even tell you to. You know we had kind of a game plan. The Greek never let you start off fighting. You feel a fellow around. You watched his eyes and his lips. His eyes will telegraph when he's going to hit you. Anyway, we had a big crowd there that night. I don't know where we got the money during the Depression. A big old gangly referee said I'm going to tell you something. Don't get these fans on me tonight, boys. Ya'll better give me a good fight and I don't want any of this hugging going around here. Do you hear me? About that time the bell rang and we were coming out there and he said fall down. I ain't never fall down in my life. I usually got somebody taller than me like that boy from the University of Tennessee. So, I had some bad fakes around there and he felt one of them. It's illegal to hit anybody with the side of the glove. I pumped him on the head like that right under me there. He was eating my guts up there with them gloves. I hit him on the head and made his feet flew out from under him and hit on his belly there. You never heard such screaming. You can hear the fans. Don't let nobody tell you you can't. You can hear some of them anyway. I could tell by the way he hit the floor that that was my fight. So, I turned and walking back to my corner there. Lord, I looked around there and he hit me. He jumped on the floor and hit me on the jaw. Whew!!! I thought some way or another I had hit him. Have you ever looked down a clean rifle barrel how it spirals going away from you? He was going away from it. In the mean times I ended up in the ropes over there nearly out of the ring. People got to laughing, screaming, hollering. Some of them were going into hysterics. Some of them were falling out of the seats out in the aisle. That's what the paper said. *The best fight of the evening and the most hilarious fight that's ever been staged in Birmingham was between Kid Trouble from Mignon and Dutch Kilgore, the Fighting Barrel. They brought the house down.* I kept that clipping.

E: (Laughing) You wanted to send a note.

S: (Laughing) You asked what I did in school. I was in United Methodist Church and also in the Elk Review. Avondale had a skating rink. Everybody would go over there at night and skate. When they finally decided to shut down the skating rink and all they sold those skates for fifty cents a pair. I was fortunate enough that I had saved a bonus pay. From then on when I had to walk from my house on Anniston to the commissary down on Mignon by the drug store, I would skate and then skate back with two huge bags of groceries. Then when I was in the tenth grade in the summer time I would help the kindergarten teachers with children. We had the children and had kindergarten for a couple of hours and then the bus would take us to Lake Louise and we would take the children swimming. Then we'd go back below Lake Louise and have lunch. They would furnish a picnic lunch for those children every day. That was one of my first paying jobs and I made four dollars a week. That was tenth grade and then in eleventh grade I had the

same job the next summer. Of course the next year I got a regular job in the mill in Central...uh Catherine winding room. Then I was in Central winding room. Then they started me in the office two or three times. Of course if they needed me on the winder I would go back. They needed someone, they decided they would put women in the packing department to see if they could stop the men from some of the foul talk that they did every day. I was one of the first girls to go in the packing department under Mr. Elmer Hyatt. He's still living there at Walco in the house that my mother and daddy lived in by the kindergarten wall. Years later, well, his wife was also a kindergarten teacher. I think I worked along with her in the summer time. No sometimes that was just high school students. We helped the regular teachers. To get back to it, after I finished high school and Bigun and I were married we lived in Sylavon Court just right behind the B. B. Comer School now. Those houses have just recently been torn down. The court was built during the war to help with people who did not have places to live. I'm getting ahead of myself. Bigun and I had bought a house in the country and built a house in 1937. We borrowed \$600 from Avondale Mills to build it for us.

B: And paid four percent interest.

S: In four years, we repaid the six hundred dollars and owned our first house. At six hundred dollars but when we sold it it was in our pocket. We sold because he thought he would be drafted in the army and I would be down in the country with three children and he would be off in service. So, we sold the house and moved to Sylavon Court. While we were there Mrs. McGowan, who was principal of the elementary school at B. B. Comer, and she is still living. She's in our United Methodist Church. I would like for you to talk to her.

E: Yeah, Mr. and Mrs. Bowles mentioned her, too.

S: All right. She came up to the house one morning. Our youngest son was two and a half years old. She said, Sara, I need you to come teach school. I said, Mrs. McGowan, I have a son two and a half years old. I cannot come out and teach school for you. In fact, you know, Mrs. McGowan, I didn't finish college. I do not have a college education. She said that doesn't make any difference. We can get you an emergency certificate. We need you and I expect you out at the school in thirty minutes. She said I can hold them together in thirty minutes. I said what will I do with Mike. She said bring him on. I'll let the first graders go out in the yard and play with him all day. Imagine how shocked and surprised I was. Within thirty minutes I was dressed and had the two and a half year old son with extra change of clothes in my purse for him and left a note on the table for Bigun to find when he came in to find me. I walked into a first grade room of thirty-six children with a two and a half year old child and had never taught school a day in my life. Within an hour I was turned loose with all those children and kept teaching. I thought it would just be for a day but the teacher had resigned and Mr. Creel and Mrs. McGowan kept me. I stayed on another year and then they needed a teacher at Herd's

Gap out in the country and they asked if I would take that and let another teacher have that because I had transportation. I did and while I was at Herd's Gap they promoted Bigun to overseer of Carding and sent him to Alexander City. At that time we thought thirty miles was a great distance so we moved.

E: Well, it was at that time.

S: So we moved into one of the company houses there instead of him commuting back and forth. We couldn't move until I got a substitute to come in and take my place at Herd's Gap 'cause I was under contract. The substitute teacher happened to be a Mrs. Flora McCullough and Mr. McCullough was with Avondale Mills and she was a wonderful piano teacher. She came out and substituted for the rest of the year and they hired her on an emergency certificate. She stayed with them until Mr. McCullough left Avondale I believe. Isn't that right? That was a wonderful experience going in and it seems that if I had finished college and go on I would have been a teacher. Now I am still substituting in school. I substituted some at the Sylacauga High School last year and I told Vivian that when I went to Comer School back as a child in the Avondale textile community I often thought that I'd like to go to that school and I'd like to teach in Sylacauga because at that time Sylacauga people I won't say that they were ashamed of the textile people but anyway there was a barrier between. I often thought I'd like to be in that group and go back there and teach.

B: I told him there was a fence at one time between them but nobody knew where it was. You just stayed in your own backyard.

S: Another place that I worked in Sylacauga was Marble City Dry Goods. As a child growing up I often thought ooh I'd like to go in there and buy some clothes. That was an expensive place. Then to think that the man asked me to come and work for them and I did and Avondale Mills sent up there for me to come work in the tailor department in Avondale. They needed me there. Mr. Buford was over the Avondale department and Mr. Roberts owned Marble City Dry Goods. Mr. Roberts offered me more money to stay and Mr. Buford told him that he needed me and that he had notice from the Comers to get me down there. So, I worked a two weeks' notice for Mr. Roberts. I went to the tailor office and I stayed there until I was transferred somewhere else.

B: Let me tell you a good one about fighting. Up in Gadsden one night we go up there to fight. We had ten men and they had ten. Before the fight on a Friday night you are examined by a state doctor who they appoint usually an old man. Of course you're new and everything. You look your man over there. I go and look mine over there. I'll take him. But in the mean time he looks me over and then we fight. Ooh, here come Gordon Mongal, President, Head of the American Legion. You're man won't fight you. I wish you'd fight this boy over here. Which

boy? He went around there and patted him on the back. I get me up something and I go by and pitch something pitch that at him. Boy, his reflexes are just like that. I told Gordon I ain't fighting him. I ain't about to. I was putting my shirt on and he come up there and stuck four one dollar bills in my pocket to fight him. Then he stuck three more one dollar bills seven in all. That was a lot of money. He said will you fight him? You bet I will as soon as I pass the medical. Anyway it's a law you got to be examined back then before you fight. I got to wondering about that thing happening. That was about four o'clock. They didn't need us to fight it was starting about seven thirty I believe at night. I don't know what. I had six rounds that night with him. That's where that extra three dollars come in there. I was scheduled for three fast rounds. I fought a boy from the University of Tennessee. I thought about it. I never have took a dive but I thought about it. I believe I'll have to take a dive. In the mean time I'll believe I'll kill him the first round. If I don't kill him I'll take a dive. That was my game plan. So, the referee talks to you and you go back to your corner and the bell rings. You go out there and I had a few crazy tricks. He made a mistake and he fell for it. I floored him, boy. You never seen any-- people just screamed. (Imitates screams) It didn't last. He was on me. You ever heard of an inner tube on a bicycle getting in the spokes? Boy, he was fast and he was quick. I did pretty well. I won the first round and the second round. The third round I gave out. You know you start stepping on a fellow's foot in front of and laying your elbow on him enough times. The referee kept cautioning me around. Boy, you're going to get these fans on me. Cut that out. I don't allow this. I tell you the truth.

E: Get one last one in.

B: That ear bone beside your jaw that hurts. It's connected to your brain back up there some way or another. I don't know. Man, I was suffocating. Too hot in there. He'd done budge my throat with bloodshot. Both my eyes were going to close on me. I knew they were. My whole belly was bloodshot. Ribs, and I still wouldn't fall. About the fifth round I guess I was still standing. Low and behold he made another mistake and I floored him. People back then would bet as high as a quarter on you and they didn't like to use that quarter either. In the sixth round I worked him over fairly well. Now, I said that to say this. He went on to Chicago and that was really the beginning of the Golden Gloves. He won there. He was beating a lot of niggers when he went up there. Niggers had special reflexes back then. The Olympics signed him up. He goes to Berlin in front of Adolf Hitler. He wins a gold medal. Jesse Owens won four or five gold medals and Hitler got up and walked out on him you know. I didn't read an article about him but he won a gold medal for boxing. Of course he fought Europeans and they weren't as skilled back then as we were I guess. Good to think what if I had might gone on to Chicago. I would have never won a gold medal. For some reason every fight that I fought apparently people picked me out as popular as a winner. I only won eleven out of twenty-two fights. Newspaper decisions, you know. After the fight they bring you and buy you a big steak

there. The doctor had to pick your lip out from between your teeth done swelled up there and your eyes closing on you. Greek said you're not going to be able to eat all that. I said no I don't think so. He just forks that steak up. They eat, boy, I tell you. They get with other Greeks and they have a brown sack. I think that's where the brown sack and they have wine in it. They love wine and it's prohibition and all. All I wanted to do was go home. I had to ride in the rumble seat of an old Model A Ford. Dusty. My mother came up there to my room about four-thirty. My eyes were closed and she looked me over good then. She said son it ain't worth it, is it? I didn't show her those seven one dollar bills.

E: (Laughs)

B: That boy really worked me over. I'm not kidding you. There's no way to cover up a fellow that fast. I stayed in close and I bumped him with my head. You know the head hurts. If you can bump him on the collar bone there with your head, it's just the same thing with a hammer. If you can bump on the eye right across hear it'll start bleeding (snaps his fingers) just like that. It'll cut a gash in there in no time. I tried everything. They said boy you took a lot. His manager said that, too. I didn't want to take a dive. I wasn't popular with my second. I got the heck beat out of him. He could throw the towel at any time but he wouldn't do it. He enjoyed seeing me get whipped because I pushed people around. There's always somebody else.

E: Yep. Yep. Somebody else...

B: That's a story. I shouldn't have mentioned that. That's two years of fighting and I had a good time. I learned about human nature and I learned about quitting that you just don't quit. You just keep on going. I think that's good in life.

E: Now, you had mentioned earlier that you were in the Army band during Roosevelt's inaugural one year? What was your Army time, what years?

B: Well, they put me out. I answered an ad in the *Billboard* magazine. That's for musicians and actors and all like that. They were advertising. They were going to have a world's greatest band. They were only allowing twenty-two pieces, twenty-eight pieces. They still am. So we were contacted and I went to Mobile on a freight train, me and Loretta Coleman, and we joined up. We had to pay our way to Ft. Monroe, Virginia. That's Norfolk and Hamilton. Anyway, boy, they had a band I'm telling you they had one. They hadn't sworn me in though. This Loretta Coleman was gifted, was talented. No problem. They had a problem with me. Now I could play some classical music as semi-classical, but I was competing against Spanish, Jews, Italians. They're born that way. Captain Cochran gave me music lessons on the side trying to keep me. I made trips with them. The first aircraft carrier ever launched I was I played for our band did. There was an incident happened. I had never been nowhere. We were playing Mrs. Herbert Hoover was christening the ship, the aircraft carrier, the USS Ranger, trying to break a bottle of

champagne on it. We were playing *Anchors Aweigh* and you know what happened? Fifty airplanes, you don't remember these old World War II trainers do you how much noise they made? It was terrific. You've seen those old cotton dusters, hadn't you those old timer ones. They're the same thing. Out of nowhere they come right down on top of me, boy. Ooh, fifty of them. You never heard such racket in your cotton-picking, they were saluting the ship. I didn't know that. They didn't tell me. I took that bass horn and threw I up. I panicked. Jumped off the bandstand. Guess what happened? They didn't do nothing to me. They didn't reprimand me. They thought it was funny, too. That noise broke all of our drums. You know used to they were made of calves' skins, the bass drums, the snare drums. The vibrating busted all of them. That country boy wasn't staying there, boy. I knowed what they couldn't pull themselves up. They did but I didn't believe it. That big ship, I was worried, too, how come it didn't turn over. Oh, that was a tremendous, it was just on a keel about that wide and it was sliding down and wonder if it'd slide off. Why didn't it turn over? There was people all up in there laying over, sailors. Something going on there on that boat. Yeah, I panicked. Being that we were the guest of the Buford News Shipbuilding and Dry Dock Company a lot of dignitaries— congressmen and Vice-President and Mrs. Herbert Hoover was there. It was formal and I've never seen the likes of silverware in all my life. There was a piece of silverware for every dish. They were really, really something else.

TAPE CUTS OFF

B: I mean he was. He's heard me make a blue note. He'd pull his hair out there and stomp on the bandstand. Just throw a fit you know. Darn his time. I could kill him. One time getting ready, I never did have a heavy set beard, I didn't shave going to Washington, D. C., going to the inauguration for President Roosevelt. Going over to take over to take the, what do you call it the grand ride to the parade? The parade was six miles long. We were the Marine band, the Navy band and our band. Naw. A Calvary band from Virginia they set up on their horses there the musicians didn't have no bridles. Couldn't work. I'm a curious fellow. I'm not bashful. I went over and said hey how do you guide this cotton picking horse? He said you guide him with your knees. I don't believe it. Make him turn to your left. Make him turn to your right. Pushed his knees. Turned around. Fellows, I see some like you all the time. Those horses were all black except for a white piece there and they had white legs. Looked like they had on leggings. They were ahead of us so we were marching behind them in the parade there. They had a reviewing stand for the honors. We were dodging horse manure there. I had a bass horn so I was on the outside. People would throw hamburgers ad peanuts in my bass horn and I'd take it off and wind it back out there. It made an awful sound. You know what that cotton picking thing and I ain't said a word about it, nigger band from Fort Benning, Georgia. Whee, man, their buttons were shining. They could play. They'd look. They could march. They put on a show. I saw it. You saw it back on what do you call it Fox Movie tone picture show. I liked

that. That night after the inauguration we were there for over a week. I don't know. We weren't doing nothing. I don't know why they carried us up there get us out of the way. Anyway I go to the Mayflower Hotel. Oh, boy, I want to see what's going on here. They had brass gold spans of it, ropes, silk ropes coming on out and red carpet from the Mayflower Hotel out to the curb. Chauffeurs, there was two of them instead of one. Drive up there. It could rain on them you see. They got up and opened the door. This lady got out, jeweled had pretty clothes on. The man he got out there and he flipped that thing and that silk top popped up there. He escorted her. Hey, boy, I want to see what's going on. I bowled in there. Somebody got me and turned me and said out of here, soldier. I said well what's going on in here. It ain't for you, soldier. Now that's the first time I ever heard of Fred Waring and his Pennsylvanians. They were playing in the streets for the common people. My little cotton mill playing out there in the streets, dancing in the streets. Fireworks, that was something good. You know where I spent most of my time there? Smithsonian Institute. I loved that place.

E: That technology, yeah.

B: I carried a box camera in there. That was when we went before I finished school. A year before I finished school we made a trip to the corporate bowl and rode on the company bus. I loved that Smithsonian Institute. Then I got ripped up pretty bad. Have you ever seen elephant manure? Looked like a large cannonball. So, I go up and kicked one out in the crowd there. Then others took it up there. Here come some uniformed corps attendants and asked me to leave. He was having a bad day there in the cage. I don't know what was wrong with him. I put my hand out and slapped him hard on the face. They didn't like that. He didn't have to get in a bad mood whatever it was screaming and hollering. (Laughs) A. J. Meadows got to teasing the elephants there and that elephant stuck his snout out just as plain as you could see and blowed what we call mucus or when you blow your nose blowed it all over us. Frankly, I decided to kill that elephant. They got excited. I love that Smithsonian Institute. I could stay there days and days and days. I wouldn't bother nobody. Nobody would bother me. Matter of fact I wouldn't even know you were there. I guess I was hungry for information. That is all I can tell you. Then we stayed in a motel there. Wes was cutting up one night there. He had a Brooklyn one of them Brooklyn accents. We found it funny that night at the motel. The police came down there raising cane. It was the same thing. It was just him and his wife and the fifteen of us. We just out lied him and told it was him. He had drunk and he was loud. They carried him off for the night. He quieted down. That was a fun trip.

E: Earlier you started with your teaching experience but we left out the children. When did they come along?

S: The children we married in 1934 and the oldest son, Charles, was born in June of 1936. Then four years later the daughter, Sarah Faye, was born and then four years later the youngest son,

Michael, was born. Now, the oldest boy I'll say this we put all three graduated from college. One has his masters degree and working on the doctorate. The daughter nearly has her master's degree and the other one just has the BA degree.

E: What areas are they?

S: The children said when they were growing up and I was teaching school and they had to be so quiet at night while I graded papers and all that they would never be a school teacher. The youngest son is a professor of English at Spartanburg Methodist College in Spartanburg, South Carolina. The daughter has been a principal of a school and she taught in Montgomery County and in Mobile County for about thirteen or seventeen years. The oldest boy quit college, the University of Alabama, and joined the Air Force. He married finally when he was in the Air Force. Later, after they had two children, he now lives in Harpersville and works at Warner Robbins Air Force Base for civil service. While his daughters were in high school he went back to college and got his degree from Middle Georgia. He can teach but he's staying with civil service. So, all three of them could be a teacher. Now the oldest one I thought he would be a minister but he said he'd never been called to preach but he is a great lay leader. He knows the Bible not only the Bible but he reads everything. He can talk with you on any subject. Like I said, the youngest son is an English major and he married an English major. In Bigun's first letter to them after they married I'll have to let him tell you what he said about the King and Queen's language. What did you say to Mike and Charlotte about being English majors? You said you had heard of murdering the...

B: I told them when I write a letter I actually know how to write a friendly letter or a business letter I really do. It doesn't matter when I start writing. I watch my spelling and my commas but there's no such thing as a paragraph. I use a lot of colloquial expressions this that and the other. They say they just cotton picking enjoy it. They look forward to getting that cotton picking letter. I think writing a letter to me is just like you and I talking. I talk in the same cotton picking way. Just one thing comes to my mind I write it out there.

S: But what you said you murdered the King's...

B: I murder the King's language, yes.

S: You told them you had heard of murdering the King's language but you was going to do something to the Queen's English.

B: (Laughs) I don't know what I said.

S: To get back to the daughter teaches school. Then we have five granddaughters. The older two are married. The other three are teenagers now. The children said they would never be

teachers and all three of them could be teachers if the oldest one decided he wanted to get into education. He said he probably would when he finished his civil service work.

E: Now did after the children started coming along did you ever go back into the mill itself to work?

S: Yes, I worked in the payroll office.

E: But I mean as far as...

S: No, back...

B: She didn't go in production any more in the manufacturing business.

S: Let's see now. I did after Charles was born I went back to laundry room and they put me in the packing department. From the packing department they put me out to the payroll office. Then after the daughter was born that's when I started working in Marble City in Sylacauga and they wanted me back in the payroll department. I went back there and worked in the payroll department until they sent him to Alexander City.

E: When you had mentioned those things I had lost the chronology back then.

S: After the payroll and I went to Alex City I did not work anymore for Avondale. I taught school. I worked for an insurance company.

E: Now we've almost lost track of the mill there for awhile so let's get back in that area. You mentioned that after you got married you started working on the ICS course. What part of the mill were you in when you started?

B: Uh, cloth and finishing. I didn't know at the time that Avondale Mills was getting a copy of my grades. I just thought I got a copy. I was being transferred to another department which was working in beamer. Then I already had experienced some weaving and carding. That's where most of my family had been. Then I went to the dye house, dyeing.

E: You didn't realize these transfers were tied in with your course work?

B: No, not till years after. Then Avondale Mills bought a waste control system from Railway Express in Cleveland, Ohio. They got Wyatt Epperson, a superintendent, and me to install it in all the Avondale Mills.

E: Now what years are we talking about now?

B: 1936...35...35. As time rocked on it took us two years (long pause). Then me and Wendell Morris had already started a local system at our own Avondale Mills. When did that come in?

S: Probably about '40.

E: It had to be '40 or after because Wendell came in '40.

B: Yeah, and he went to war. Okay, I'm getting a little ahead of myself. In the dyeing, the dyeing a new process would come in. All the old style dyeing was going out. They asked my boss man to ask me did I want to go to the general office. He said I hope you don't. I need you down here. I said I'll talk it over with my wife and I'll think it over, which I did. Just like that (snaps fingers) I said I'd go to the general office 'cause when I got there I was told they were buying the local system. They gave a million dollars for that system. Wendell Morris, that's where I met him. We were around putting it in two or three years. Then the war started. World War II started. Hugh Comer asked me one time, Hey, Bigun, how do you like the general office. I said I don't like it. Why? I want to back down yonder. Why do you want down there for? So I can make you some money. He put it on his job that's where you're going. I went down there as production manager of Eva Jane that's where we were turning out tent twills and army twills all like that.

E: I hate to keep sticking around but things keep coming back to me as we travel through Sylacauga. One thing that we almost entirely left out so far is what you remember about members of the Comer family. You had mentioned early on your recollections of the governor.

B: That's when I was a kid.

E: Yes, tell us about it again.

B: I only remember the old governor at special functions. He would come through the mill sometimes. Now, you got to remember us kids played in the mill there after school.

E: Really?

B: Yes. If it was raining you couldn't play in the house. Your mother wouldn't allow it. We went in the mill a lot of the kids and ganged up at the mill and played. They had a lot of places to hide in the mill if it snowed, rained. That governor, he had a sharp eye and he would be at certain functions that went on, speakings, a program that invited speakers in to speak to employees and their families. He moved about in that mill a lot, too. Donald was right behind him. He knew everybody by their cotton picking name, too. I don't know how—all of them done it. How they remembered people's names is beyond me. Meet you one time and they'd know you from then on. I couldn't do it. I tried practicing but it didn't do any good. Now, the old governor he always looked the Douglas's up, my daddy or my mother one and they talked about how things were going, how was the attitude of the people from all over. How are the churches? How are the schools? Have they got a new school teacher? All this, that or the

other. Have ya'll had good preachers around here? They picked information out of my mother. My mother would tell it like it is about the hospital. They'd check on the doctor. If not, they'd run him off. Doing a good job. She wasn't exactly a pimp either. In other words my mother would say this may not be a fact but this is my opinion. This is what I picked up from the employees. A lot of the employees loved my mother and talked to her. She would listen to their problems kind of like Abigail. I don't know. My mother knew everybody, too. She wasn't a gossip. The old governor he liked my mother and my daddy. He talked to them a lot. The newspapers really done him dirty in the papers, the press. They told lies on him, too, but any ways, my mother met the boys in the mill. He made them go to work when they got out of college. Donald was in the Spanish-American War I believe in the Philippines. He came back. He put him in the mill. Learned him to spin. Learned the card room. That's where he met my mother. She learned she taught him to spin. Braxton was an engineer. He built buildings.

TAPE CUTS OFF

When this tape begins, the first minute and forty-four seconds does not pertain to Avondale Mills. Mr. Akin must have recorded over an old tape. After that time lapses, the interview with Mr. Boyd Douglas continues.

B: The governor moved about a lot in Anniston, Birmingham, Montgomery, down to Barbour County and all back. He was moving about all the time. I know the places you usually kept up with him at. He went to other places I'm sure. I don't know how he was invested or anything like that. He impressed me as a shrewd man real shrewd.

E: You had mentioned one time you busted in on a stockholders meeting.

B: Oh, that was Bragg. He was over these mills here. He lived in that house I told you about. Coming from school at times he'd call me come here, come here, Bigun, come here. Let me see your report card. How did you know we got report cards today? Bigun, let me see your report card. I'd reach in the bag and pull it out there. That that report card it's going to come up. You look doggone good on everything except your deportment. See if you can't improve on that, boy. Yes, sir. I got pretty well acquainted with him. They had a pro baseball team and if it fouled all over the grandstand it went out a long way. Sometimes if we wanted the baseball to play with in the mornings we wanted a real baseball, you see. In the evenings you hit a baseball in the weeds you come back and couldn't find it. He'd call me back there and he'd say if you ever want a baseball let me know 'cause you don't have to snitch one. Okay. He always liked me and his wife did, too, Mrs. Vern. I got several baseballs from him and one day I went by there and busted on into the door there. Hello, Mr. Comer. Hello, Bigun. I'd get up on his desk and sit on it. How's your health? He said my health is fine. How is yours? Real good.

How's Mrs. Vern? She's fine, too. What's all these people doing in here? They going to go to work for you? No, they own part of this company. The Comers don't own all of it. We just own we control fifty-one percent of it if you understand. Oh. Well, I'm doing better on my report card now on my conduct. That's good. Hey, Bigun, you wouldn't be wanting a baseball would you? Now that you mentioned it I do. Mr. McWilliam, he had a man sitting there. Mr. McWilliam, give Bigun a baseball. I hauled and slapped him on the shoulder. Much obliged, Mr. Comer. I slammed the door behind me. As I got bigger darn it just killed me to know that I had done things like that. Mr. McWilliam reached down in that old desk here and it was maple. He had a roll top up there. He had to do something before them doors would come open down there. I never did figure out how he'd do that. I don't think with a key you could open them things but he did to get a baseball out for you. I had no manners. It just embarrassed me about it. He'd laugh about it. He thinks about me and I'd think about using him. Them fellows were from Boston, New York, Philadelphia, what you talking about.

S: Didn't know you were going to work for him.

B: Gosh dern. That Mr. Bragg he was a quiet man. He was real intelligent.

E: He looks like he would be a quiet person.

B: He was. He was quiet.

S: He just had one son, didn't he?

B: Yeah.

E: I guess Hugh was probably the most outgoing of the brothers, wasn't he?

B: Mrs. Mallie, yes, she talked all the time.

E: No, of the brothers Hugh.

S: He was the most outgoing.

E: Most outgoing of the boys.

B: Yeah, have you ever heard how he finished college?

E: Yeah.

(Boyd and Edward Laugh)

B: They had a time with him. The old governor had to go over there several times to straighten him out.

S: He has said a number of times that Mrs. Comer had a lot of influence over him.

E: Oh, she must have because he was quite a hellion in college.

B: I saw Mr. and Mrs. Hugh Comer after they married. They looked like movie stars. Man, he was nice looking.

E: Oh, he was handsome.

S: He still is.

E: I don't recall seeing pictures of her.

B: In Washington, D. C., at the inauguration of President Roosevelt, I saw some of those movie stars. I went to the train there. Paramount had a special coach there. Clara Bow, Richard Dix, John Barrymore. I went up to him and said if you don't look just like you do in the picture show. Crazy stuff. They were nice. They said thank you. Clara Bow, she was up on that back platform. I said I'll be dog if you ain't prettier than you are in the show. She said thank you. That's all. Boy, they had on the nicest clothes you've ever seen. They looked pretty, real pretty.

E: Now what about other members of the family?

B: Fletcher Comer, I didn't know him too well. He was in Alex City.

E: What about Donald?

B: Oh, he was in and out of the house. He was over the Birmingham mill but he would come down every once and a while to the Sylacauga mills and make his rounds. He was very intelligent and he was a human being. He would even sympathize with somebody that was sick in the mill. He also I became a foreman pretty good when somebody you had to make so many visits in their home before you turn in that list. You visited and you also went to funerals, too, you know employees. You participated in community activities, too. In other words like at Sycamore I was overseer there for years and boys come up to you. I had a key to the baseball and softball field. All the equipment was locked up. Mr. Comer, you uh, Mr. Douglas, will you go over there and sit awhile with us at the baseball field while we play? Yeah, I'd get the paper and I'd go on over there and everything. I understood it cost ten dollars to turn them flood lights on over there at the baseball field. (Telephone Rings) You get it. Now this is Hugh Comer here. This is Donald Comer. That's Harry McGowan, our band director. Donald Comer is right in here somewhere.

E: Right there.

B: That's him always got his hand in his pocket. That's me right here. I know what we were doing right here. This was a mixed band. That was...

E: Where was that at?

B: That was at Davis Beach.

E: Aw, yes.

B: That was the first start. Them Comers were always wanting some recreation for the employees. I got to thinking over the years since then they really wanted us to have recreation. I think it was I had a suspicion it was a sham to keep the union out. They'd organize the whole textile union to keep it out of Avondale Mills. They kept you so cotton picking busy and so entertained that you was looking to next week for something else big to happen for free.

E: Did ya'll go quite a bit during the 30's?

B: Oh, yes sir. How we did it I don't know but we made it through the 30's and things did pick up.

E: What do you remember about when the NRA first came in?

B: Well, I thought at first it was a political gimmick. I wasn't twenty-one years old. I wasn't voting then. I didn't vote for the repeal of the eighteenth amendment. I kinda liked on the radio President Roosevelt happy days are here again. My daddy said you gotta do something even if it's wrong. Boy, you ain't never heard the Okies, *God's Little Acre*, Tobacco Road. That's the way it was. That ain't fiction. That's the truth. You gonna argue.

E: No, I agree with you.

B: Who wrote *God's Little Acre*? Steinbeck? *Grapes of Wrath*?

E: Steinbeck wrote both. I know he wrote *Grapes of Wrath*.

B: Anyway, they wrote from actual experience. You believe what I tell you. I don't know how they got it.

S: We didn't go through that Depression here in Sylacauga that bad. It was we had jobs.

E: That's what we're getting at. The NRA probably detoured a lot of what you would have felt.

B: Now the Comers I don't know fell in line with it. They liked General Johnson, he was over the NRA and they were Roosevelt a hundred percent.

E: Donald was on that first textile board.

B: Yeah. He went to Japan on a mission to try and keep that cheap stuff out of here. Anyway Avondale business didn't pick up. We were making thirty cents an hour. At pay day we had twelve dollars. We couldn't even spend all of the money. Believe what I'm telling you. We didn't know how to spend it. I don't need to tell this I guess. I made we got paid every two weeks then. I made \$29.34 every two weeks. That was nearly fifteen dollars a week. Somehow or another I got the highest paying job. I don't know why. I was real good on my job. That's when they started that horse playing. I cut it out. I run my job in good shape. They couldn't say nothing to you if I started clowning around or picking on somebody this that or another. I was told that if we didn't cut it out the insurance was going so high on the insurance rates on the premium they had to pay that they weren't going to be able to pay it. They cut it out, too, boy. I mean they stopped it.

S: You're talking about paying for good jobs let me interrupt here and say that we have been married forty-seven years. He has never missed bringing in a payday as long as he worked. He retired and then of course he has been retired.

B: A full payday

S: A full payday. He has never been without a job.

E: That's the thing.

S: Not bring in a payday. Now at one time he was transferred and in the transfer and all he was paid those two or three months in between there.

E: That's what I have noticed that a lot of textile mill folks to bring in a full payday was rare. They tended to always take a day off a week or a few hours.

B: I tried but in my case I was working in the samples room in the dye house there and they short timed everybody. I was working seven days a week. Six times seven, six hours a day, seven days a week, getting samples out, trying to sell the salesman to try and entice somebody to buy it. I was doing it I even asked the boss man to let some of these other boys like that new kid in the house he ain't making. He said to hell with you; you dye your samples. I'm running this dye house. That was old man McFord, the Frenchman. I went in his office one day there and he was on the telephone talking to his sister in Canada. Quebec, Canada?

E: Quebec

B: Is that French. I ain't never heard such talking in all of my life. I hauled off laughing listening at him. He laid the receiver down and he cussed me out for listening to what he was saying. I said old man don't be too ignorant. I don't even know what you was talking about. I was just amused at what the heck you were saying. I never heard no crap like that in my life. I kinda

pushed him on out of the way. I laid my business on his desk there. I went on back to my job and he came on back there and apologized. Man, it's all done now. I accept your apology and everything else but don't mess with me no more, Mr. McFord. Two weeks later he got scalded over there. He drank awful heavy. I asked to give blood to him, a transfusion. Don't put that in there. I'm ashamed of it.

E: Now you said you had become a foreman at twenty-four?

B: Yes.

E: Now what area were you over at that time?

B: Dyeing. See I knew the drug room, the sample room, indigo dyeing, vat dyeing and the splash system, and yarns package. I was a pretty valuable man. Then one Friday night the night watchman come in on 'em, this assistant foreman and all the men done quit work shooting dice for their payday. You got paid your money every Friday evening. They told me to take it and I said I don't know. I haven't been married long and I don't much want to be in fair share. Ed Gowan says tell him we'll give him forty-five cents an hour. That's a little more than fair share. They gave me fifty cents an hour and I took it. Ed Gowan never had any more use for me. I made more I was one of the highest paid supervisors in Avondale Mills.

E: They never did care to spend that much money then.

B: No, and were we living in the country then? Naw. Always wanted to live in the country. Nobody bothered me. I loved the outside. Meditate.

E: You much of a fisherman or a hunter?

B: Yes, I fish a little bit but not lately. I had open heart surgery not long ago and then later on they put in a pacemaker. That's cut my fishing down a little bit.

S: Let me interrupt you. He's supposed to tell everybody he rides with that he's got a pacemaker and you've got a card in your pocket.

B: I forget.

S: Hard to remember, I know.

B: Put a new valve in; the valve's gone bad. Man, I'm telling you the truth about two weeks before Valentine's Day I felt like a million dollars. I think the valve's gone bad. They put in a pig valve. They think my valve was destroyed that it dissolved.

E: Now back to the 30's. You're over dye then what's the next step that you make?

B: General Office. I went from the general office...

E: About what period are we talking about that you were in general office?

B: All right. I married in '34. I was in the dye house. I stayed there and my son was born in '36. In 1937 I was transferred to the general office.

E: What were your duties in general office?

B: It was called engineering department. That was when we me and Wendell put in a local system. They had two stubborn fellows. We were met with resistance you can believe it. They balked in Stephenson. Pell City? No, they didn't want to have it.

E: What were you doing?

B: Changing jobs. Putting a standard job load on every employee. Some didn't have it. So they could come out with a standard cost how they could price their product for a profit. See what I'm talking about?

E: Right.

B: They eliminated a lot of people. They eliminated some overseers, too. Like I told you they had nigger friends of overseers working. They had kin folks, brother-in-law, sister-in-law, girlfriends. It really didn't bother me 'cause I told them I don't care but you really shouldn't have had them on there. Now you're caught so get rid of them. You can't do that. I'll have it done.

E: You had mentioned earlier that you ran into resistance all the way to the top. For instance, Birmingham with Carl...

B: That was in the engineering department before I became I wasn't foreman then. My job was eliminated in the foreman in the dye house. They went off of completely beam dyeing, no raw stuff where you dye bales of cotton you know like that. Then I was transferred to that but I was getting they didn't change my pay. I was still getting foreman pay. Then it rocked on there and we got in the system and, boy, it proved out actually the first year Avondale Mills was making money. You'd be surprised at the things that we've run in to. If I told you you wouldn't believe it. Even the Comers I wouldn't tell some of them some of the things we run in to. You go tell an overseer that you're not doing your job here. Look, boy, you're not going to tell me what to do. If I don't tell you I'm going to tell somebody else. Hey, come back here. He said I'm ready to listen. I'd start spouting out to him. That was also the beginning of quality control, too, 'cause they say a foreman can manipulate his job at a front row speed. That lowers the efficiency of that job there to make that job easier run for this certain type of kin folks or a

nigger friend, a fishing friend, a hunting friend or somebody that you're giving gifts on the side and all like that. I could tell you some horrible and unpleasant things that really happened, too.

E: Can you tell some of them without implicating individuals? What were for instance you mentioned the kinship network. I imagine at times it could be helpful and at other times it was just carrying people.

B: There's one fellow, Edmondson, that I would rather not talk on account of his daddy. His daddy was over the Pell City plant there.

E: Let's put it this way. This part I'll keep confidential but I had wondered about how these things work because...

B: All right, the superintendent at Sycamore, this is confidential. There was a beautiful girl on the job there. What was her name? Vincent Mims was...

S: Still living.

E: Well, we're going to keep this...

B: Vincent Mims was superintendent of that mill there. Sometimes Wendell and I worked odd hours because the mill was running twenty-four hours around the clock. There were things that you had to do. Vincent was we checked a lot of things like time clocks when nobody was looking. You had a stop watch of course he had one there. I didn't hide mine. You can't fool people with what you're doing. This certain girl was out or didn't report that day but at the end of the week when the time come she would mark up eight hours pay. I turned it in to Billy McKemie. I guess you may have known him. This one time I turned it on that good looking girl there. I don't know. The next week Vincent Mims was moved down here to Central. Do you remember that? Whew! I know a lot of them.

E: Okay, time clock would be one way to cheat. What were other ways that were used?

B: At Pell City they had dead people on the payroll.

E: Are you kidding?

B: No, I'm not kidding. Ask someone they'll tell you about it. I had one cow on the payroll.

E: Sounds like voting records I've heard about.

B: Same difference. Same thing. Manipulated the same way. Where did them pay checks go to. The pay was brought to you in the department in trays. You lined up there when they paid off and they'd call your name in order. Those that were left there they was long didn't come

after their pay that day. They didn't come in that day but they'd come in after a while. They weren't working that day. They didn't go. They went home with the overseer and the superintendent split them.

E: So there must have been a rash of changes made during that time. Were people aware well I guess they were aware of what you and Wendell were doing as far as coping?

B: On some of these things I didn't know exactly what Wendell was doing. Sometimes we weren't together all the times. Sometimes we were. I was sent to Sycamore there one day and I walked in about twelve o'clock. All the overseers were gone and the superintendent. Millard Blankenship, he was a one-armed man. He was handicapped but he laid up roping. That was his job duty. John King, Blankenship--Millard Blankenship—and one more. I walked in there and it was a few minutes after twelve o'clock and everybody was gone the superintendent and everybody. They spotted me and they came over there and met and grabbed me and was going to throw me out of the mill. I said I'm going to tell you something, fellows. Before you throw me out of the mill I'm going to tell ya'll something. If you ask me in the right way I'll go out of this mill. Well, what are you doing in here? I'm going to check the scale on this thing. He's paying you by a different half rate according to this here scale this machine. We know what we're doing up here. We don't need you. Okay, you're going to throw me out now. I just don't believe ya'll going to do it. If you ask me nice I'll walk out of here if you're going to throw me out. I laid my clipboard down there and my tachometer and stopwatch. I don't know whether ya'll can do it or not. I said somebody's going to get hurt. Most of the times, fellow, I'll tell you I fight fair but in a case like this when you're going to throw me out I guarantee you I will not fight fair. I know more dirty tricks than you've ever seen in your life. Before you you oughta go home and talk it over with your wives and kids 'cause you're not going to be able to work. One left and then another one left and then another one. I picked up instead of going to get my gear. The next day Edward Dunham's brother was fired. Man, that's called manipulating the rate to get paid. He was getting paid too much money for something he didn't earn.

S: Did you know Edward Dunham's brother? He was older.

B: He'd gone and fired his own brother!! One day I went up there. Now Mr. Dunham called me and said, Ed Dunham, and said come and see me a minute. They're going to have a walkout. I got a tip we're gonna have a walkout in Birmingham this morning. I want you to go up there and check them the battery hand. That's the one that takes his foot and puts it in a magazine and makes cloth.

E: Right. Right.

B: Uh, huh. Okay. She's supposed to put in eleven bobbins of filling full of bobbins a minute. I checked and checked them all. She wasn't putting in but six. That was doubling almost doubling their pay. That was the result of us putting in the local system. We had standard job levels. It didn't matter who you was. There was some beautiful girls doing that work. You know you called me that day in Birmingham. You thought Charles had ruptured himself, didn't you? It was something. Anyway I come on back home. I didn't turn in my report till the next morning. I go by Ed Dunham's office there and lay it down on his desk there. Lord help! Here comes Mr. Mullins. Are you named Boyd Douglas? Yes. Mr. Dunham wants you now. Where? In his office. Okay. Boyd, is this right? Yes, sir. Are you sure it's right? Mr. Dunham, if it's wrong it's a little bit in the favor of the employee not the company. Let's let it go at that. Okay they're going to strike today. I want you to go on over there. Okay.

E: Now was the walkout talk everyone or for people who felt like they were...

B: All of them walked out of the weaving room. Of course that shuts the whole mill down. They didn't do it until I got over there. Ole Moon, Moon was the overseer there.

E: John or Will?

B: Huh?

S: John or Will?

B: John Moon. I believe I'm right. I went up. I was going to the restroom. Ole Moon come in there and said boy, you're going to get it today. I said I'm always getting it, boy. I says who's going to go first, me or you? He said by God I'm not. Strong words!! I said well, I've been saving my money a long time. I've been hunting an equipment place ever since you come ever since I got out of high school and come here to go to work in the mill. I wasn't going to worry about it. Well, I went to the water fountain. I got a drink of water and I was looking around. You can read people. You could read people. There's something going on. I went on by some of my friends in there. They wouldn't look at me. I patted them on the rump as I went by. They might stick up their hand like that, never look around. Something's going on. I made another trip. I went out to went out like I was going to the machine shop and backtracked and come back to the office out there. There was a fellow name Jimmy Cauliflower, Jimmy. He was the office manager out there. Did you ever know him? He was dignified, small fellow. I just plopped down in one of them chairs out there. He said we don't allow any goofing off around here. I said I ain't goofing off. What do you call it then? What are you doing there? You're not working. You're talking to me. You go to work. He said what's going on out there? I don't know. I said something's not right out there. You can feel it. I went on out to my care there and sit in my car just parked on the side. Great day!! You never seen like the people standing out of the mill out there between the office and the bottom end of the wall there beautifully

seated waiting for the super. Was it Bill Williams? Bill Williams? There's been so many I don't know. After a while Henry Holmes, police from Mignon pulled in an Oldsmobile. He had Ed Dunham. That was about an hour later. He must have been somewhere in Birmingham sitting down waiting for somebody to call him and then he rushed on over there. Now Ed Dunham would never make a speech before a crowd. You never he was never an emcee speaker or just give a talk at the textile meetings. He just wouldn't do it. Anyway, I got in the car there and caught up with him some. Dougan, is it pretty rough? I don't know, Mr. Dunham, you a better labor man than I am. They had been very nice to me. Anyway, I'm gonna ask you one more time. Are your is you reports right? I guarantee them a hundred percent. Guarantee them. You can tell them. I'm gonna tell them. I'm going to lay the law down to them. I was sorta dragging behind. He said uh, uh, Dougan, I want you to stand beside me. Okay. He knew there was going to be a fight. I guess it gave him confidence. I don't know. Well, I felt that way. Everybody listen now. Everybody gather around close. That's what he said. I know why you're striking. It's a joke. Here's the goods on it here. You're supposed to be placing eleven bobbins of filling in a magazine a minute. You're not doing but six plus. All right, all of you out here, you're walking out in sympathy and you weavers are walking out in sympathy for these cotton picking cute girls. We'd love to have them if they'll work and carry a full job load like ya'll do. All of ya'll that want to quit now the paymasters are in here ready to pay you. All of you that want to go to work go back in there and go to work. This is I'm not going to tell you but one time. They all turned around and went back in. Now those cute girls I found out later on were paid by the union. They stuck their way in there. They were getting paid by the union all the time. You know they struck in Birmingham one time.

E: Yeah, back in '34.

B: They treated my folks dirty. They stood for the Comers till the last minute there. Boy, they stood with them. The Comers go them and sent them to Florida down there. People throwing rocks at their house chipping their house. Now Ed Dunham and me after the last one walked in there Ed Dunham said well, Dougan, much obliged. I said, Mr. Dunham, I feel a lots better towards you. I believe you're a good mill man. You told them just exactly like it was. You didn't beat around the bush. Thank you, Dougan. He didn't talk too much. One time I went in there to ask him for a four-room house for me and my wife. We were living in two rooms. (Laughs) He says, Dougan, I can cause a scandal around here and give you and your wife a four-room house. I got a fellow up there that wants one and he says he's gonna get it or he's gonna whip some body's butt. Dougan, he's got a friend. Mr. Dunham, it would take a lot of people to whip me and you. Okay, you can have the house. He went in there the next day and said I gave that house to Dougan Douglass. Now if you threaten all this and the other you go ahead and do what you want to do now. Oh, I was just joking. He said I'm not joking. Get your toolbox and get out of here. You didn't think that old man would talk that way. A lot of people

didn't. They thought he was a weakling. He was a leader. You believe it. Now I he'd tell some white lies sometimes, trying to appease help. He had one get into hot water on another but that's before this system went in. Boy, they had a racket going on. Maybe that's why the Comers paid a million dollars to standardize all jobs. It wasn't the employee. It was the job. When you were hired that job paid so much and you got so much production out of it. I was really sold on it. I really believed in that. I didn't have a bit of job a bit of trouble putting it in except some of these fellows some of these foremen, general overseers and some of the superintendents.

E: Now when you say that the Comers paid a million to put it in did the Lopper Company give them the statistics on how it had turned out elsewhere?

B: Yes, sir. Yes, sir.

E: That's what they were buying?

B: Yes, sir, the front row speeds that would give so many pounds per hour for each machine. They allowed so much time for dolphing the machine off and starting it back up again. This woman should this battery hand should put in eleven bobbins of filling a minute. If on certain counts are good this weaver should run on sixty-five looms on chambray. This card room man should run twenty-five cards, not ten, not fifteen. This picker operator should run all these pickers instead of having two left here and boy they got eliminated, too. You'd be surprised but they really absorbed everybody that was laid off because of the turnover.

E: Now, how long did it take ya'll to put the system in? Was it a couple of years?

B: Yea, it was two years. Ole Wendell was pretty smart and I knew the mill pretty well so it didn't meet no resistance. Now he had textile engineering from Georgia Tech and he was familiar because he was a corps sealer. He worked in a knitting mill.

E: A Goodyear Mill, I think it was.

B: Pardon.

E: A Goodyear Mill over near Atlanta. He worked at Goodyear for a while, you know, where they made the stuff. Then he also, you're right, worked at a knitting mill in Dahlonega.

B: He sure did. He got a lot of experience there, too. You know what? He was active. He was active in his thinking.

TAPE CUTS OFF

E: You had just mentioned that Lee Bowles was Ed Dunn's nephew?

B: Yes, that's right.

E: And another of the supervisors was he a supervisor? Kennedy, was related how?

B: His nephew, his sister's boy, Chris Kennedy

E: Which mill was he with at the time?

B: Pell City card room. He didn't fire him. He transferred him.

E: This falls under confidential information, too. This continues our confidences coming from the last tape.

B: They transferred Lee Bowles off of a big job--he was a big shot there in Sylacauga--up there to Stevenson a little old bitty yarn mill.

E: At that same time? Was it at this time?

B: Huh?

E: Was it at that time that they're...

B: He was a rounder and so was Chris Kennedy. Transferred both of them. Now let me tell you this about the Comers. They'd do anything. They wouldn't go in court. You'd never see they'd never be any bad publicity about anything and they didn't have much. This local system there were a lot of things the Comers never did know about. They'd went raving mad about some of the things that I was relating to you.

E: This is what I was fixing to say. Either they didn't know about it or they didn't let for instance the people like Lee Bowles know about it. Because the way that Donald presented it to Lee this was a promotion you know. I'm sending you off there on your own. You're gonna prove it on your own, you know.

B: Make me some money and I hope Grace is satisfied up there with you. I was telling him you have to leave these women alone. They'll get in your way.

S: You want me to make you some coffee or something?

E: Please and by the way I'm keeping it up because I think we're on a roll. If I start interfering with things you need to do..

S: That's okay. I just went and fed the dog.

B: Those Comers were smooth operators. They handled they even handled me with gloves on. Why, I don't know. I'm a plain spoken fellow.

E: And you appreciate people who are.

B: I most certainly do. You can't read minds. You can get some indication that something is wrong sometimes but you really can't tell what's on a fellow's mind. That's my philosophy but really I shouldn't be treated with gloves on. Just come out and say what you want to. I've had employees to storm in my office stomping and raising cane. Hold it, hold it, hold it, hold it. Fellow, you're mad there now. You're damn right, I'm mad. Okay, you've done got me mad now. It ain't gonna work. You go get you a drink of water. I'm gonna go me a drink of water. We're gonna meet back here in thirty minutes. Now I'm gonna sit down and I'm gonna listen at you. Don't come in here storming me. You've done provoked me, doggone it. I'm a human being. You got a problem I'll listen to you. I'm a good listener. Thirty minutes later he'll come back in there. He'd sit down there. He'd start off telling his problems this that and the other. Then he'd shut up. I ain't got no dern problem. I don't know why I was mad. Doggone it. How about forgetting about it? Okay, just with you. You're welcome in here to tell me your problems any time. I'll listen. Sometimes I can do something about it. Sometimes according to Avondale Mills general policy I can't do anything about it. I'm gonna tell you. I'm a batting ram. I'm between top management and employees. I get from the back, the front, below the belt and everywhere else. If there's any good news to tell you I can't tell you. The company's gonna tell you. I tell you I'm gonna tell you the bad news. Don't come in here and call me bad news Douglas. I'll do everything I can to go by seniority and ability. It don't matter. I don't have no kinfolks. I don't have no girlfriends. I don't have no whiskey friends. I don't have no fishing friends. You walk in this door here you are an individual. You are important because you work for Avondale Mills and you work for me. You gotta problem with this? Of course now if you want to fight we'll step outside the mill. I'll fight you. I'd rather not do it. I don't like I really don't like unpleasant things.

E: Now speaking of the unpleasantness not making it to the top during the time that the looper system is being put in was Dunn the general superintendent at the time?

B: Yes, sir, he was over all the mill. Operated out of Sylacauga.

E: So your information went to Dunn?

B: Yea, I wasn't told to but I figured knowing him like I did I could talk to him and he wouldn't talk out of school.

E: Right. Right.

B: You talk out of school and you could get some employees to gang me to get on me.

E: Oh, yes.

B: In other words I always we didn't have no agreement it was just that the confidence I kinda had in him. He was kind of a smooth operator kinda like the Comers. Sometimes he didn't mention things. He worked sometimes in silent ways. I don't know how he done it. I know changes were made there and I didn't mention them. He never mentioned them.

E: But you knew why they were being made mostly?

S: Do you want some coffee?

B: Thank you, no, no.

S: Let's get you some water.

B: But you know you'd think about your friends and their children and this that and the other. It was horrible on the road. It had to be done. If I didn't do it somebody else will. I was in pretty good shape to handle it. Hey, we had a racket going on.

E: Hadn't that been though pretty much how textile mills had always done? You know it had been tradition by then.

B: Yes, sir. It was worst in other places. Maybe so that if they didn't watch the jobs pretty close they'd let them steal 'em broke. Believe it. I wouldn't be surprised if car tags weren't bought on the company's money and the Comer's. Your meter you paid for electricity. It wasn't nothing but some people would jump the meter 'cause that boy that read the meters there he was kin to me. You take if a fellow wanted something to start a fire with he would bust some swallow bobbins which cost fifteen cents apiece. They were given all the broke ones. They were made of birdseye maple.

E: That's difficult to break.

B: Then you'd catch somebody just taking good bobbins and breaking them. Did I report it? Yes, I did. I told them don't break all these bobbins. Who are you to tell me what to do? Well, I ain't got no right to tell you what to do but I'm going to report it. I went and reported it, too. Now I asked them I don't want it in your file. You've got a family and all. Broke bobbins will go to the trash pile. No more will go out of these gates. No more. They saved thousands and thousands of dollars. Everything went to the trash pile. Was that a smart way to handle it or a stupid way or should I have done it. Here's the way it is. If you work for me you work eight hours a day. I buy eight hours of your time. That's four hundred and eighty minutes. Every bit of its mine. Then I will tell you what to do. I'm not bad. I'll give you ten percent fatigue time (that's forty-eight minutes) if you run your job. If you don't run your job I don't know about you but you can have your fatigue time while you're working. I had a great mill at Sycamore.

E: Let's get to there first. Was that your next promotion?

B: No, my next promotion was when I put in the waste system and I went down. Dick Nelson was the superintendent of Alex City. I didn't know it. Somebody went behind my back and I didn't know it back then but I found out years later. Walked in over there and I said Dick, how are you and we shook hands. Dick, we're here to put in a waste control system. But we have a pretty good program here. I know but we're going to put it Avondale's just bought one and we're going to put it in. May I see your waste control system? By the way, Dougan, what are you doing? I'm foreman in the card room now. What are you in the card room for? Well, they got in a tight and they asked me to go up there and start it up for them. They were having trouble. He said how would you like to work for me? I said Dick I'd rather work for you than anybody I know of. He said come to work the first of the month. I found out later that they were wanting to make a change down there in the overseer of the card room there and they had named so and so. Donald Comer gets up and says what's the matter with Ethel Douglas's boy up there? How's he doing? Oh, we hadn't thought about that. Now this come years later.

E: Later on you found out the real story.

B: Well, Dick, do you know Bigun Douglas? Yes sir, fine fellow. What's wrong with hiring him to be the mill overseer? That's what Donald Comer said. Yes, Mr. Comer. Yes, Mr. Comer. That's the way it was.

E: Now that was Alex City.

S: We have some chocolate popsicles. Well, they're Eskimo pies. Would you like one of those?

E: After the coffee.

S: All right. The little girls came and got the ice cream after lunch. I was going to fix him a dish of ice cream with peaches.

B: I worked there three years to the day they changed.

E: Now during that time ya'll remained in Sylacauga. Right? Have I got that right?

B: No I went to Alex City.

E: Did the family...

B: We moved to Alex City. They furnished us a company house and they remodeled it for us and all like that and I lived there exactly three months and they transferred me to Sycamore, Alabama.

S: Three years, honey.

B: I mean three years. I'm so three years to the month. So, Sycamore was in trouble. They cleaned from the card room department. They were working two days a week. People couldn't live like that. They had a warehouse full of them. Yarn sent back on them. Ooh!!

E: Now this was what right after the war about what year?

B: 1950.

E: Oh, yea, this is when things are getting tight in the industry.

B: I went there in April of 1950. The people were hungry then and wanting to work. I called mine together if you want to work there I've got a plan here. It's quality control. I went to Georgia Tech after a minute there one time, me and Aaron Yates. He was an Auburn graduate. It was simple about uniformity. I could apply it to the textile industry. He said I bought five hundred blocks one inch square. They were literally put on my desk here. I take this old ruler here and I measure them. Nearly every one of them was one inch square. Then I take this other this here with thirty sixteenths measure. A lot of them didn't measure up. Then I take this one with thirty-seconds and measure them. A lot of them went out. Then I got the marks down there and all of them went out. He said don't that tell ya'll something about your job down there? You've got to close your gap on your quality. It could be textile. It could be machine shop gear. It could be making pants. It could be making anything. I got me a plan and go down and try to put it in Alex City. Superintendent told me uh, uh.

E: Was this the first attempt within Avondale for quality control?

B: Yea. It would work. I know damn well it will work. With it hadn't it ain't gonna hurt. Three months later he transferred me to Sycamore. I had the same program there that I had. In different counts the uniforms were young. The CD that's the coefficient of variation. That's the deviation between the thick and the thin place. Started over and took a room on. I set the standard there. The darn people who really worked so bad boy, they fell in with it. I can't get these down. Well, I'm sorry if you can't I'll have to get somebody who can. First I want you to try.

E: Now are you still overseer or supervisor?

B: I'm overseer general overseer at Sycamore.

E: Okay.

B: By gosh they did. Okay, they were happy and we started we went to five days a week. First of the year I lowered the standards some more. Oh, you can't do that. Yes I can. I'm boss

man. I can do a lot of things especially when it comes to quality. Your job is secure under me. Ya'll been begging and crying for somebody to put you to work. I'll put you to work. We're going to go further than that. I lowered the quality standards again. In three months time they done met 'em. Now we started up seven days a week, twenty-four hours a day. We were getting two cents a pound above the market price on carding and combed sales yarn. Avondale Mills actually it come out ninety thousand dollars profit every three months or every month. Every quarter.

S: Three months.

B: Every three months. Ninety thousand dollars boy that was a huge. Then I got write up in textile magazines all of them. I just crowed. Don't let me forget Delaney.

E: Now was this not only just Avondale but was this one of the first ones in the textiles?

B: The first one that quality control went into. I had a standard to go by. They were written out. They were posted and job duties were posted on each one that I learned a lot in this here looper system but I made a lot of them my own self because I knew what a operator could do. Some I done by I done a lot of time and studies, time and motion.

E: Right. Right.

B: I learned a lot in all that, too, because some people were doing some foolish things and didn't even know until you called their attention to it. They called your hand I can't take on any more. Yea, you can, too. Anyway, man I'm getting publicity everywhere. I was offered three thousand dollars, I believe, to put in quality control my program in the Standard Coosa Thatcher mill on my vacation. I figured Avondale wouldn't like that.

E: Wouldn't like that very much. (Laughs)

B: They made sewing thread and that's where they really needed it, too. We were the knitting they were demanding Sycamore yarn. There weren't no holes coming in the cloth. You know.

E: Yea, right.

B: You're allowed so many holes ever hundred yards. The uniforms you could hold it up there and there wasn't no windows in it. T-shirts were lasting longer. Avondale goes up on its price again but the cost was down. The operators on the spinning and the winding boy they were having a ball. I told them it ain't going to last. They're going to give you more to do and they did cutting cost. Emmett Warren he and I got along pretty good. A lot of people didn't understand him, didn't like him. He was kinda like me. He was...

E: What position was he?

B: Vice-president and purchasing agent. The Comers depended on him for buying machinery and anything else technical. They consulted him. If I wanted some card clothing, which was expensive, it went across his desk there. He signed everything that I ordered. A lot of requisitions went across there, he'd throw them in the waste basket--everything. He'd come by. He had a slip way of checking to see if you used it. One day I called him up there Mr. Warren, this is Dougan Douglas. Hello, Dougan, what can I do for you? I made a mistake. Oh, well tell me about it. I ordered some gears wrong. There was about eighty dollars worth wrong. How'd you do that? I'd say I was stupid I guess. I measured them wrong. Okay, Dougan, throw them on the truck and tell the walkman I'll buy you some more. Write out a requisition and I'll let it pass through. Is there anything else? I said you ain't gonna ream me out? Dougan, when Avondale hired you did they ask you if you were perfect? No, sir. Okay. Dougan, don't try to repeat the same mistakes too often. Anybody else he would have cussed them out. He was rough. Ooh!! He always treated me with respect. He called me up there one night. Dougan, this here vacuum is making too much noise. My wife can't sleep. Put a muffler on it. Yes, sir. I went down there that night and wrote it up. He called me up the next morning about that muffler. I said it's in the mail to Sylacauga this morning. Thank you. I don't know how he got it but the next day that muffler was down there. I got pulled to get a mechanic to put that thing in there. Then the next day he called and said my wife had one of the best night's sleep she's had in years and years. He lived in the old Comer house.

E: Oh, he did.

B: He said thank you, Dougan.

E: Now about since I may take on Sycamore later. Looks like I will. About what size was the mill by the time you took it over?

B: What size was it?

E: Yea, number of peoples, spindles, that sort of thing.

B: Gall dog! Three hundred.

E: Was it a three shift, three shift operation?

B: Yea.

E: So it hadn't grown a great deal over the years?

B: Oh heavens, no.

E: It hadn't expanded any in capacity? Perfect mill to take on.

B: In that mill I'll show you some timbers that were hand hewn back in 1890 something. They weren't sawed. They were hand hewn.

E: Now you said didn't your folks work at Sycamore?

S: My grandmother, my mother and her people moved there from what part of Georgia was that across the river from Phoenix City?

B: Muscovy County. That's in Columbus, Georgia.

E: Yea.

B: There at Sycamore they used to have a stage run from Huntsville to Talladega to Sycamore. At Sycamore is where they changed horses. The people got off the stagecoach and went in there and eat. They showed me. I don't know whether I could find it now or not where they did all that. There was a spring there they drank water out of and they could...

S: That was a swimming pool.

B: If they had an act of nature, they had toilets. They had horses. Then the train came to Sycamore. There wasn't no Sylacauga then I don't believe. There might have been. From Wellington, Alabama. Do you know where Wellington is above Anniston? It come to Sycamore and it turned around and went back. The road was made of planks the stagecoach road.

E: Yea, one of those toll roads?

B: Yes, and some places where the mountain or the road was good there wasn't no planks you know. Just really the rough but it went all the way to Montgomery. From Huntsville to Montgomery that was something else there. Sycamore's got a long history.

E: By the way you were taking a number of notes while ago. Did you get everything in that you needed to?

S: I think I did. Uh, huh.

B: Then I kept on going. Things were going so good in 1955 I was offered another job in Montgomery. I quit Avondale Mills and took it.

S: By a former superintendent of Avondale Mills.

E: What was that job?

B: That was in 1955.

S: Carding and spinning overseer in Montgomery. We stayed away ten years.

B: Eight.

S: Then Avondale kept calling us to come back.

E: And you came back I guess in '63?

B: Yea, but a year before I came back they called me in Atlanta, Georgia. We met at the Dairy Queen up here in Childersburg and we didn't trade. Anyway a year later on the daytime they called. My wife answered the phone and she come and got me. Says Mr. Evans wants to talk to you. He was plant manager.

S: I said do you know James Evans? I always knew him by Pete Evans.

B: James Evans. Anyway I told him I said tell you what do. Hold it just now. Sara, do you want to go to Pell City? Mr. Evans wants me to trade with him. She was with me at Emory University there in Atlanta. She said yep so I told him I'd be over there tomorrow at two o'clock. Well, I went to the mill. I don't know what he said. I be a son of a gun if we didn't turn around--he was a smoothie anyway—and if we didn't trade. I spent...

S: Eleven years.

B: Eleven years there and retired.

E: At Pell City?

B: Yes.

E: Now when you say you trade what do you mean?

S: You accept it.

E: You were doing horse trading in other words. (Laughs)

S: He didn't know if he'd ever come back with Avondale or not. We left Avondale in good faith thinking it was better for our children to go to a large city. We had been raised in a textile mill in a small town where we thought everybody knew everybody else's business and we thought we were doing great wonders. We might have. We don't know. We still can't say whether we made a mistake.

E: Then your children were educated in Montgomery or most of them?

B: Yes.

S: Well, Charles had already finished high school. He was at the University of Alabama when we went over there.

B: Mike got a football scholarship.

S: From Lee High School.

B: And went to Clemson. He had Florida State and Vanderbilt and he chose Clemson and played for Frank Howard.

E: And was English major.

B: They were I didn't think maybe...

E: What an unusual football player wouldn't you say?

S: Oh, he tutored the football players so they could play football. He made money besides a scholarship, besides playing.

E: I bet he did.

B: Howard had some studs up there but they couldn't they didn't even have...

E: That freshmen English that's getting me, coach.

S: He tutored English.

B: You know he's still in demand as an emcee speaker?

E: Oh, yes, I've heard him. In fact I think he spoke to one of my high school football banquets way back when.

B: Do you know he majored in English at the University of Alabama?

S: Yes, he's English major.

B: Yeah, majored in English.

S: When I carried my son up there the first year and Bigun couldn't get off from work and I carried him and my daughter and the coach came out there to the car. I thought he was just some little punk around there. He had a chew of tobacco, a dip of snuff, and a cigar and was on the hood of our car showing us how to come back.

B: All the football players out there standing up there.

S: Showing us how to a route to come back to Montgomery. We had got lost going over there.

B: They had put an interstate through Atlanta.

S: I turned to somebody and I said who is that man? They said Coach Howard.

B: (Laughs) Boy, I ain't kidding you.

S: Let me tell you this. Of course our oldest boy had been to college and we had him packed with everything six or seven different suits all kinds of clothes. Mike packed the same way and the next year he went and he carried one suitcase and one suit of clothes. We have laughed about that. He had six suits of clothes, his tuxedo. (Laughs) I just with him getting off to South Carolina I said we can't be mailing clothes back and forth so just carry everything on. You live and learn you know.

B: Then he went ahead and got his masters degree in English and they red shirted him the first year I believe. Then after his four years was up he got his masters degree and now he's working on his doctor's degree.

E: What school is he at working on it?

B: He's been accepted at North Carolina to get his masters degree.

E: As we say Carolina.

S: And at the University at Miami the University of Florida and also at Georgia.

B: Georgia kind of accepted him, too. They had to get in line but he wanted North Carolina. He says it's a good school, daddy.

E: It is THE school in the South.

B: Pardon.

E: It is THE school for English.

B: Well he was accepted there.

E: That Tom Wolfe tradition is very strong.

S: He also works on the side as he writes for a paper he did. He's not doing it right now. What was it he was writing for the paper moonlighting?

E: Book reviews or movie reviews?

B: What do you call the independent reporter?

E: Stringer? Feature writer, I guess.

B: Feature writer.

S: So he stopped that when the University of South Carolina had him teaching classes there at night.

B: He's working for two colleges. He's teaching journalism at South Carolina the University of South Carolina.

S: And English major and he's tennis coach.

B: Hey, he's got a photogenic memory.

E: Gets it from her side of the family.

S: He could read when he was two and a half and spell for the oldest boy. Of course, the oldest boy could spell but the daughter never was a good speller. They'd call out how do you spell this or that instead of us telling them to look in the dictionary or something and then they'd say well how I do I look in the dictionary if I don't know how to spell it you know. The two and a half and three year old would spell it for them. See I carried him to school at two and a half. He went on to school with me until he was six years old. He says he's been in school all his life. He's still in school working on his doctorate. He'll be thirty-six I believe, thirty-six or thirty-seven.

E: You said the University of Florida? Well, I can't knock it. That's where I got my degree. It depends on what kind of literature he wants.

B: He's one of them boys that never did have to study. If he heard it, he remembered it.

S: If he reads it one time, he's got it.

B: He goes by and gives one of his teachers a lemon. He clowning in school because...

E: He didn't have to study.

B: Boy, she lowered the boom on him, too. He was telling me about it. I said let me tell you something. You're doing it wrong. Never let anybody know you dislike them. I know you don't like the woman but let me tell you what to do. Here's the way to play it. Some day she's going to come in there real neat and feminine looking and her hair fixed right. She knows it. You go up to her. What was that woman's name? She loved him, too. Call her name and say you know without a doubt you're the loveliest school teacher that's ever been here.

E: Yeah, polish apples instead of giving lemons.

B: He done it, too. Without a doubt you're the loveliest school teacher in Montgomery. She still keeps up with him.

S: She was an English teacher.

B: Yeah, English.

S: He pretended that he didn't like her.

B: He hard timed her let me tell you. I know he did. He had a sharp wit, too. Anyway as that more sunk in that you could say it to a human being and just say it one time and then walk off.

S: I don't know where he got. He made good grades but his deportment was always bad. I don't know where he got it.

E: You were talking about your career. Pat Trammell, I'm named after Pat's daddy. He had a photographic memory. Went through Alabama and pre-med straight A's but you get Bear to talk about him or get folks back at home. He was always into trouble. One of his favorite things was getting the guys to go down to the county park to turn over tables and then him disappear. He never was there when that happened.

B: That's the way it was with me. Just when trouble started I had to leave. I walked off. Pat Trammell, Bear Bryant said he loved him like a son. He said you know he couldn't punt; he couldn't pass; he couldn't do but one thing. The reporter said what's that? Beat you. He could beat you. He could beat you. He couldn't throw; he couldn't kick; he couldn't do anything but...

E: But he was a team leader.

B: He was a leader. If they needed that extra yard or three yards for a first down, he carried it himself. He made that first down. That kind of them old guards and tackles said we ain't quitting now for nothing. We got that.

E: One of the favorite stories his folks tell on him is that it was the beginning of his sophomore and of course back then you didn't play until you were a junior. It was the Liberty Bowl I guess. He showed up at the plane with his suitcase packed and ready to go. Bear said, boy, you aren't going on this trip. Pat said, oh, yes I am and he went. (Laughs) One of the few players to get away with that with Bear Bryant.

B: There's something about mental telepathy going between Pat's mom and Bear Bryant's mom. There is something to that. It must have been coming through clear. But if it's a problem you better watch out. That's the same thing as fighting as mental telepathy there's something you can tell. That boy is sending you a message. If you have sense enough you can

tell where he's scared or had experience or something. You could tell; you could feel it. Did I make myself clear?

E: Yeah. (Tape cuts off for a second.)

S: Teaching at B. B. Comer...

B: I'm going to let the dogs out. If I don't, it'll be bad.

S: Did anyone tell you about the inspection they held every year?

E: I have read it in the *Sun* but I haven't had any folks tell me about you know the reactions or what it was like.

S: Yeah, they were always good and when I was working in Central and Catherine, we had to plan for the inspection every year. Mr. Hugh he would come to me personally and he would say, Sarah, you leave your job and go get flowers. He knew that Mrs. Douglas and my mother and them always had yard flowers. Bring them back and we would arrange them. We had flowers in the cones on the winder and everything there around and then in the windows. He said now you know what your next job is. Your foreman here and your supervisor all know that you are to through the mill with us. A y of them that asks you any question about the mill you tell them. I knew about the mill from beginning to end. Although I didn't work in all of it I just knew it all from being around and hearing my family and Bigun's family talk. So that would be one of the things that I did. When I started teaching and they were having inspection they always went by the school and Mr. Hugh recognized me out there. He said, well, I Mrs. Sarah out here at the school. I didn't know I had taken her out of the mill and put her out at the school. John Paul Creel, who was the principal, said, yes, Mr. Comer, she's the first one of our students who finished at the old Mignon High School or either the B. B. Comer School to come back and teach at our school. Of course they didn't have to say I didn't have my degree or anything like that you know. Of course I still think I was as good a teacher as some was that had their degrees. So, they had me stand out in front and naturally my children there in school were thrilled over that. I had one in the first and the oldest one was in the fourth. The little one was three then still tagging along at school. They were keeping him out in the sand bed. Then in the sixth grade they transferred me to the sixth grade. The students would sit him up in the windows and let him watch the trains come by. Then we got an opening in Sylavon Nursery School that was. Sylavon Court was built during the war for people to have extra living services and had a nursery school there and our name came up so we got him in the nursery school. I was saying that he said he has been in school since he was two and a half years old.

E: He sure has.

S: I left out parts when I was telling about our girl reserves' group going up to Washington and we stopped back by the Unknown Soldier's grave.

E: Well, why don't we just move back and you tell me about the whole trip because these experiences to ya'll...

S: All right. The girl reserves' club and we paid eight dollars to go to Washington and back. All of our expenses were paid out of that. Avondale furnished the bus and we went to the Capitol of course and all the main events and places in Washington, D. C. Then we came back by toured around and came back through Chicago and went through the packing plant. For months after that didn't any of us eat any meat especially after seeing it and smelling it. There was a terrible odor then. I don't know whether it still is or not.

E: I bet. Well, most of the packing houses aren't there anymore. They do them out west.

S: Before I leave Washington one of the girls and she's still here in Sylacauga she was always making people laugh. She was a clown. She did her level best to make this soldier who was marching back and forth at the Unknown Soldier's grave and he was not supposed to look around, smile, or anything. He took so many paces, stopped, and come back. She did everything she could to make him laugh and she never did. From then on we had it on her because always she could do anything she wanted to but that's one thing she didn't get to do. That was Mozell Rape when we went to the Unknown Soldier's grave and she tried to make this soldier who was parading back and forth there laugh and she didn't. Then a couple of years later here, Dougan and I were married then, we had a chance to go to Chicago to the World's Fair and Dougan could not get off from work. He insisted that I go. My sister went and of course all the most of the same high school group. Of course a lot of them were married then. A lot of people from Sycamore I remember one N. C. Franklin, who is, who was, he took Dougan's job as overseer of the carding up there, he went. He was overseer there.

B: You know about going to Chicago to the World's Fair, I couldn't get off. But if we went to Badlands in the Dakota or the Grand Canyon or something like that I'd been out there and gotten off. (Laughs)

S: I bet he could have, too. On this trip we made it for eight dollars. Of course we had to have a little spending money. I looked back and wondered how did they pay our motel bill and buy our food and all. We were gone seven to ten days, weren't we?

E: On your trip to Washington what about the meeting with the President? What year are we talking about?

S: Oh, that was wonderful. He came out and we all met him there at the back. They brought him out the back door and we met him. That's Congressman Lamar Jeffries.

E: That's with the group.

S: That's with the group. Wasn't he from Alabama, Lamar Jeffries? He brought him out and he shook hands with all of us and made the picture. He didn't stay long. The minute the picture was made they went back inside.

E: He had to rush back in?

S: Had to rush back in.

B: I remember I was in Lamar Jeffries's office there looking out the window and seeing Douglas MacArthur on a horse whooping the head of a fellow from the Bonus Army, the Bonus Army. I mean...

E: You saw that? Well, fill me in on it.

B: Yeah, I saw it.

S: Fill him in on it.

E: I never met an eyewitness of it.

B: Well, I'm an eyewitness. Now I wasn't in on it. I didn't know exactly whose side to take but they were raising cane about it. They were throwing things and let's say there were thousands of veterans there. I'd seen on the day before and they were sleeping on the streets and everything else. It started the next day I was Lamar Jeffries I had my picture made with him.

S: Yeah, you had your picture made with him.

B: Me and him hit it off like that.

E: So what do you recall about seeing the...

B: That was my fault. I got that out of the newspaper. I didn't know who he was. Just as soon as I saw that darn picture I said I seen that son of a gun.

E: The guy on the horse.

B: Yeah, riding a hoss. He wasn't the only one. I remember him.

E: Dwight Eisenhower was with him. Dwight Eisenhower was his lieutenant at the time.

B: Boy, you talk about force. They broke that monster up and that was all of it.

TAPE CUTS OFF

B: It was kind of exciting. Now the veteran didn't take it laying down. I seen MacArthur and some of them others got hit with bottles this that and the other. They didn't back up. They're pretty darn good. I tell you another thing them horses didn't back up either. They charged into them.

E: I think though that particular incidence kinda did Douglas MacArthur in with the politicians. From then on they watched him closely.

B: I don't know.

E: He kinda over did it.

B: Yeah, he did but I had to go along with Truman because you know he said MacArthur I'm boss.

E: That's what I mean, yeah.

B: When an employee calls your hand on certain things there you can't freeze up. You've got to make a decision.

E: That's right.

B: It'll have to be company policy, too.

Tape cuts off for a few seconds.

E: The following is a confidential statement.

B: Hugh Comer actually married at Sycamore him and his wife there. They were over the mills. They had a superintendent under them. Nancy Comer was over the mills at Alex City. Bragg Comer was over the mills at Sylacauga. All right.

S: Donald Comer at Birmingham.

B: Donald Comer was over the mill at Birmingham. Sorry. Anyway Hugh Comer didn't like Sadie Ellis speeding from over the mountain, Bull Gap Mountain, through the mill there with her big Buick on Avondale Mills property. He talked to her about it. She told him to go to work and stay put. He goes and builds him a speed breaker. (Laughs) She didn't know it. She came out of there with let's say two to three hundred pints of whiskey. She hit that speed breaker. It broke everyone of them. (Laughs again) She got so angry she went and sat in his desk in the

office there. He laughed and said I see you hit it. Yeah, pay me. I ain't paying you nothing, Sadie. Yes, you will pay me, too, now. He had to write her a check out for that whiskey that broke. (Laughs loudly) Gall, dog, there was more to it.

E: A lots

B: She was a character.

Tape cuts off for a few seconds.

E: One thing that I failed to get Mr. Douglas to comment on again, recollections from our travels earlier in the day, was he told about his I imagine it was his grandmother's boarding house taking in Louis Pizitz back when he was a Jewish peddler with the proverbial backpack and having a rough go of it. Later of course Pizitz created one of the largest dry goods stores in Birmingham. Every Christmas he would send his chauffeur out to the village to get Mr. Dougan's mother and her two sisters, Mrs. Smith and Mrs. Mae Morris, and he would take them down to the Pizitz store. Mr. Pizitz personally would take them throughout the store and they were able to select any merchandise that they wished to get. This practice continued on after his death as his wife, Isadore, also continued the practice and their son, Richard.

Now there are several confidential things that were told me. One of these was that Mr. Douglas had been told this by his older brother that when Avondale kids first tried to go to Cunningham School that they were rocked and forced to leave the school as the other kids taunted them with "lint head" and this had led the Comers to set up not just a kindergarten but a first and second grade for the mill children at least according to Mr. Douglas's recollections. This is when Eva and Sallie Bee and some of the other daughters of the Comers were involved in teaching the mill kids. Of course, the governor complained to city officials and finally when Mr. Glenn became superintendent of city schools, he straightened out the situation. The mill children started going to Cunningham.

Another incident that Mr. Douglas told me about was one time when Donald Comer sent his father to a mill community nearby I think it was Alexander City. I'm not sure. Douglas's father had arranged to as he put it to steal six families from another mill community for Avondale. The local sheriff caught him and arrested him put him in jail. Later on they could laugh about that incident but you know back in that day as Mr. Douglas pointed out mills would pay the transportation of good working families that they found in competing mills to come work at their mill. In this particular case, however, his father had been caught and spent several months in jail.

We were discussing at another point why in the world a non-member of the family, Mr. S. Y. Austin, was elected president of Avondale in 1940. Mr. Douglas smiled and said oh, I know

because he discussed it with my mother. The Comers of course owned fifty-one percent or better of the company so as long as the Comer family kept together no one else could gain control of the company. In 1940 Donald decided Hugh was not mature enough to take over the company recalling Hugh's days at the University of Alabama and so forth. So he was the member of the family who voted with other folks to elect Austin as president during that time.

Tape cuts off for a few seconds.

E: While we were riding around through the farm houses in Walco, Mr. Douglas commented that in 1923 his family had bought their first car which was of course rather early for textile workers to do that sort of thing. One thing that he came back to time and time again throughout the afternoon both at his home before we left and while we were driving around was and he used the term feudalism to draw a general picture of what was going on in textile mills throughout the South during the 20's and 30's. In other words the mill superintendent was the vassal, the lord of the manor. The textile owner would have been his lord and of course the textile workers, the peasants who were giving of their labor and loyalty in exchange for protection from the economic ravages of the time. So, as he said, each mill superintendent throughout the system was a dictator as he put it. He used that term several times during the day in front of other individuals. Like he said the mill at Sycamore the superintendent there was a dictator. Even if you came in representing the Comers they still would tell you that you had to go through them and that you weren't allowed to work directly on a project in the mill without their permission.

A mill that is often compared to Avondale is Russell Mills. Now Saturday afternoon when I was interviewing Mr. and Mrs. Burris down at Alex City, Mrs. Burris had come from the Alex City area the Sasser family what her maiden name was. So, she thought a great deal of Russell Mills and the fact that Russell Mills still even today did a lot for its help for instance, the Russell Foundation that helped retirees during critical times. But earlier in the conversation Mr. Burris had pointed out that Russell Mills still doesn't have a retirement program. Now this was something that Mr. Douglas had told on Sunday which was that Russell Mills came under the management of one of the son-in-laws of one of the Russells and this man had really put it on a business like basis. He had pumped the money into new machinery, modern methods and so forth and had made it a very profitable operation. Of course at the same time that they were still continuing paternalistic methods towards the workers.

Tape cuts off for a few seconds.

E: Several other jottings that I made during my travels on Monday afternoon on June 16th I am recording on Tuesday evening, the 17th. One thing was about what Bigun Douglas called the dictatorship of the mill superintendents. He gave an example as we were traveling through the

village of the dictatorial powers of the superintendent, Ed Dunn. He said that one weekend some of the guys were doing their drinking out in a swamp area near some springs not far from the mill there at Sylacauga. One of the deputies came along and said that he was going to arrest them. They said if you try we'll beat you up and you won't be able to arrest anyone. He said well, I'm going to go ahead and report you anyway. So, on Monday morning Ed Dunn called all the men in and said were you drinking? They said yeah and he said well, just don't let it happen again. As Douglas put it court adjourned. Of course Douglas noted that not all of the Monday morning courts ended up so nicely for the workers. He pointed out that the superintendent was the law, the judge, and the jury in many cases similarly dismissing workers if he felt they had gotten out of line for any reason. On the other hand at one point during the day Douglas mentioned the fact that he himself had been a loan shark loaning folks five dollars till payday and usually collecting about seven dollars the next week for the five. He said this practice began through Ed Dunn himself and Dunn used as his front man the local police chief to both loan the money and collect it. Probably very few of the workers knew that Dunn was the man behind it all.

Douglas also noted that the financial wizard of the company was J. Craig Smith. He was telling me this as he was pointing out Smith's residence there in Mignon, the big house next to the mill. He said Smith played the cotton futures' market for Avondale and there was one particular year in which no other part of the company made any money. In fact all of it lost money except for the cotton futures and Smith made about a million dollars for the company playing the futures' market and the company was able to pay a dividend that year because of it.

The tape cuts off for a few seconds.

E: Showing the power of the mill superintendent Douglas pointed out that one time when he was at Sycamore the mill superintendent came in and said Mr. Douglas, I understand you fired so and so last Friday. He said that's right for good cause. The man said; no it wasn't the superintendent. It was one of the old hands. The old hand said Mr. Douglass, this man has a family and they need to eat. He said you will reinstate him. Douglas said what was I to do? I did. Another point Douglas noted speaking confidentially to me that the Comers would never say this publicly but they didn't care much for blacks. They thought they were stupid and just couldn't do anything. As he noted, the Comers brought a number of blacks up with them from the plantation down in Barbour County. Personally I have the feeling that Comer was playing to his audience knowing how racist the workers themselves were.

Douglas had noted that his mother was one of the workers' confidantes to Donald Comer. Any time Comer needed to find out the feeling of the mill folks he came to her. As Douglas pointed out she wasn't a pimp. She just told him the way it was. She didn't squeal on people. She just let him know what was going on. In turn Comer shared with her his innermost feelings. For

instance Comer was always a sickly person. This from my own reading I'm aware of. After one particularly hard bout during the late 30s, he had said Lord, if you'll just let me get through this. He said I'll try to share with my workers what I'm making. So the profit sharing program came out of this searing experience.

As we were walking around the village I was going to go take a picture of the house that Ed Dunn lived in while he was superintendent. We came upon this lady and asked her if it was okay to take a picture of the house. She said sure. She said I'm just here visiting my father-in-law I believe it was. Anyway it turned out the fellow was Marshall Deason who for many, many years ran the Avondale market which was the local commissary there. Although the man was in he is in his nineties now was frail and probably forgetful, unsolicited by me he came out we'd just mentioned the commissary and he said yeah, a lot of people thought the Comers were making a lot of money off this commissary. He said but I want to tell you we never did. He said in fact Mr. Donald Comer came up to me personally one time and said now, Marshall, I just want you to break even on this. This is here for the workers and we don't expect to make a profit out of it.

One interesting story told as we were waiting for a train to pass was how Wendell Morris first came to Avondale. Wendell had earlier told me about his visit to Avondale. He and a number of other students from Georgia Tech their last semester or quarter there were all invited by Hugh Comer to come to Avondale to visit there at Sylacauga. In the course of the little social conversation that was taking place during the course of the visit Wendell overheard Hugh telling another one of the boys that personally I don't care for co-op students. Wendell said that he went over and tapped Hugh and said I'll have you know, sir, that I'm a co-op student. Hugh kinda graciously tried to back out of the quandary but of course was rather embarrassed. As it ended up Wendell Morris was the only one to go with Avondale and of course he and Hugh got along fabulously after that time.

The tape cuts off for a few seconds.

E: When I was this recollection is on the morning of Wednesday, June 17th, 1981. When I was talking with Marshall Deason he also mentioned an example of the company trying to save money and pass the savings on to the customers, on to the mill workers, and the commissary. He recalled many a time going over to the railroad terminal at Childersburg and unloading a car load of Ballard flour for the commissary.

When we were visiting the cemetery at the Avondale villagers there at Mignon Mr. Douglas's thoughts turned to his mother who he obviously saw rather near sainthood. Two particular things he recalled. One was during a time in his life or probably just typical reflection of mill workers. He was probably talking about niggers as he would have said and his mother

counseled him to always be kind. That colored folks were human, too, and that even when a hobo knocked try to help him because as the Bible said he might be an angel in disguise. As for her charity she always contributed to the Red Cross. That led Dougan to tell her one time Mama, why do you do this? Don't you know that ninety-five cents out of every dollar that you're giving to them doesn't get to help people but just goes to pay people on salaries and so forth. She said that's all right, son. If only a nickel on a dollar gets to some needy individual it's worth it.

