

Mississippi Oral History Program

Simpson County Historical and Genealogical
Oral History Project

An Oral History

with

M.L. Shorter

Interviewer: Joe White

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An Oral History with M.L. Shorter, Volume 1217, Part 26

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Biography

M. L. Shorter was born to Melissa Lee and Charles Thomas Shorter in the Touchstone-New Zion community in June 1923. He is one of seven children, all boys. Shorter's mother died when he was six weeks old. Because he worked as a telegrapher on railroads, Shorter's father was unable to raise his sons; Shorter was raised by his grandparents, Thad and Permelia Lee. Both of his grandparents had died by the time Shorter was twelve years old, and so he was raised by his aunts and uncles. He attended New Zion School through 2nd grade, and then Harrisville through the 9th grade. Though he dropped out of school to work, Shorter went back to get a GED in his late 30s. M.L. picked cotton during the Great Depression. He entered the cattle trade during the end of the Depression. Shorter was drafted into the armed forces in 1943, was stationed in Italy during World War II, and served until 1945 – he received the Purple Heart. M.L. married Willie Jean Bush in June 1947. Together they had five children. M.L. started working for the highway department in September 1946, and stayed until retiring in February 1984. His job included counting cars, making traffic surveys, etc. Shorter has fifteen grandchildren and eleven great-grandchildren.

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
Siblings.....	2
Parents' biography.....	3, 5
Extended family.....	4, 10
Marriage and children.....	6, 24, 29
Military experience.....	6, 35
Work experience/highway department.....	8, 25, 27, 32
Farming.....	11, 18, 29
Food.....	15, 20
Cattle business.....	18
Hattiesburg and Highway 49.....	26
Education.....	31

AN ORAL HISTORY
with
M.L. SHORTER

This is an interview for the Mississippi Oral History Program of The University of Southern Mississippi Simpson County Project. The interview is with M.L. Shorter and is taking place on June 28, 2003. The interviewer is Joe White.

White: My name is Joe White. Today is Saturday, June 28, 2003. This interview is conducted under a grant from the Mississippi Humanities Council as part of the oral history project directed by The University of Southern Mississippi. Today we're interviewing Mr. M.L. Shorter at his home near Harrisville(?) and near Braxton. He's not sure exactly where he lives. I believe you said you got—

Shorter: Between.

White: —you got our mail from Braxton. Is that right?

Shorter: Yeah.

White: But your kids went to school in Harrisville.

Shorter: Yeah.

White: Well, that's kind of like a lot of Simpson County folks.

Shorter: And go to church at New Zion. (laughter)

White: Built a little bit between everything. Mr. Shorter, could you tell us your full name, please, sir? And you have a very full name, I understand.

Shorter: Well, it's kind of short. M, then a L, and then Shorter.

White: That's it, huh?

Shorter: Yeah.

White: M.L. Shorter. How did you end up with no name? Do you know? And just initials. I hit you with these hard questions right at first, now.

Shorter: Well, he had a thing in the other day, and I think my mother, she died when I was six weeks old. And she named me. She had seven boys and no girls, and she named me after her, which her name was Melissa Lee.

White: OK. The initials for that.

Shorter: That's where I get the M.L. at, I guess.

White: Well, did the other boys have full names?

Shorter: Yeah, every one of my other brothers had full names.

White: Well, while we're talking about it, when were you born?

Shorter: June the seventeenth, 1923.

White: Seventeenth or the sixteenth?

Shorter: Seventeenth.

White: Well, I'm going to correct that on this biographical sheet then. It's written down—

Shorter: Well, don't make no difference. The health department has eighteen.
(laughter)

White: Oh, did they? (laughter) And you mentioned you had several brothers there. Could you name them?

Shorter: Six brothers.

White: Could you name them, please, sir?

Shorter: Buford was the oldest, then Jesse Lee(?), and he got killed. A tree fell on him and another little cousin when they was about twelve or thirteen years old.

White: Were they cutting trees down, or did it just—

Shorter: No. It just a windy day, and they were riding horses, going down the road, and a tree, big, old, long, like we used to have longleaf pine trees (inaudible) killed him and a cousin. Buford just barely did get out of the way, and then there was Lyle(?), and then there was Lusef(?), and then Charles and then (inaudible).

White: Thad?

Shorter: Yeah. He was after—he was just before Lyle.

White: Did your folks live right around here? Were you born anywhere close to here?

Shorter: Well, up until all of us were born, I guess Pinola was the furthestest they ever lived. Wasn't it? I think Pinola was the furthestest Dad—he was a railroad worker at the telegraph office or something in the railroad, and he used to work in Pinola.

White: Um-hm. I remember they still had that old telegraph office in the depot at Pinola when I was coming up around (inaudible).

Shorter: (Inaudible) I don't know whether any of was born down there, or they was all born over here, back across the creek over here, about a mile over.

White: A mile from where we are now. And your father's name was what?

Shorter: Charles Shorter.

White: Charles Thomas Shorter, is that right?

Shorter: Yeah, um-hm.

White: And where was he born?

Shorter: I guess he was born at the old place, which is just across the creek where you make that sharp curve back that a way. That's (inaudible).

White: Around New Zion?

Shorter: Right next to where I was born at.

White: And you said your mother's name was Melissa Lee.

Shorter: Yeah.

White: What were her folks' names? Do you remember? Did you know them? I told you I was going to test your memory. (laughter) You don't have a family Bible around here that might have it in it, do you? If you do, maybe we could dig that up. Let's see. You dad was a telegraph operator. Is that right? Basically with the railroad?

Shorter: Well, for a long time.

White: Let's see what we got here. Thad and Permelia(?) Lee.

Shorter: (Inaudible) Lee, that was my Grandpa Lee, my mother's daddy.

White: Is that P-E-R-M-E-L-I-A?

Shorter: I guess, yeah.

White: That's an unusual name, isn't it? Did your dad farm any, or did—

Shorter: Yeah.

White: —he work just for the railroad?

Shorter: He had a little place where he'd farm some at times.

White: It's pretty unusual for people not to have farming and some other job.

Shorter: Yeah. When my mother died, my grandparents taken me, which they lived like from here to the top of the hill up there in (inaudible), you know. And they raised me. My grandparents raised me, Grandpa and Grandma Shorter, my daddy's mama and daddy. And then twenty—

White: Yeah, having a newborn baby would be kind of rough for a fellow to try to raise by himself back then and go work at the railroad, too.

Shorter: And he moved away from here in [19]27, I believe it was. It was after, I believe it was after the flood in the Delta because he moved to Indianola, and he lived there, and he rented land from a cousin of ours up there, had a farm, for several years. I don't remember—

White: Was he still working for the railroad then, too?

Shorter: No. No, he wasn't working. He got his leg cut off in the meantime. He had a leg cut off right there catching the train. His foot slipped.

White: Well, I'll be.

Shorter: And he went under the (inaudible) and cut his leg off. And he lived at Indianola for several years and farmed. Then he moved out from Oxford, a little, old place they called Delay(?). And he farmed there for several years. And then he went to Tupelo. And he was in Tupelo in 1936 when that bad storm. I don't know whether you ever read about it. (Inaudible).

White: I have read about that, yeah.

Shorter: It was a bunch of people got killed. He, on East Main Street, he had a service station and sold a little groceries in it, you know. And he stayed up there till about [19]39, I guess, [19]38, and he moved back down here.

White: Close to the old home place?

Shorter: Well, actually he moved in the house where my granddad's old house was. Me and my aunt, there wasn't nobody left but me and an old-maid aunt, then. All my grandparents was dead, and my two uncles that was there when I bought it, grewed up, and they got married.

White: Yeah. You were living with a aunt. What was her name?

Shorter: Mary Shorter.

White: Mary Shorter.

Shorter: We lived there until I got married, and I bought this place over here. And Daddy, you know, where Bill Crout's(?) old store was down there at D'Lo?

White: Oh, yes, uh-huh.

Shorter: Daddy run that for several years, and then he moved to Magee and run a place down at Magee for a year or two. And his health got bad to where he couldn't handle the one in Magee, so he moved back to D'Lo and run that one for another two or three years, and he just got to where he couldn't. But at that time, when he moved back out here, one of my uncles had his place rented and farmed; lived in the house. My uncles moved out of the house, and Daddy moved in his house.

White: What was your uncle's name?

Shorter: Oh, George, George Shorter. And Daddy moved back in his old house.

White: You dad never did marry again?

Shorter: Oh, yeah.

White: Did he?

Shorter: Yeah. He married, must not have been what? About maybe two or three years after Mama died. He married a woman. That's one reason he went back towards Oxford. She was from back up there. And he met her and married her.

White: You remember what her name was before they married?

Shorter: Lula Heard.

White: Lula Heard, H-E-A-R-D?

Shorter: Yeah.

White: Did they have any children?

Shorter: No. No, they never did have any children. But I never did live with my daddy.

White: Yeah. Well, you had talked about—I'm going to get ahead here a little bit, and then we'll come back. You had talked about you lived with your aunt there on the home place and everything until you got married. What was the lady's name that you married?

Shorter: Willie Jean Bush.

White: Willie Jean Bush. Where was she from?

Shorter: She lived in Laurel.

White: And I believe according to this biographical record, y'all got married on June 6, 1947.

Shorter: Yeah.

White: Well, how'd you meet a young lady from Laurel? What were you doing (inaudible)?

Shorter: Well, I was in service [19]43 to [19]45.

White: Were you drafted or joined?

Shorter: Drafted. And when I come out of service, for about three or four, five months, I drewed that, we called it the fifty-two, twenty club.

White: Fifty-two, twenty club.

Shorter: You could draw twenty dollars a week for fifty-two weeks. (laughter) It was the same thing as unemployment I guess.

White: Yeah. They gave you an adjustment (inaudible) to civilian life, huh?

Shorter: Yeah. And I put in my application with the highway department, the traffic planning division. And on Thursday, they sent me word. I got word on Saturday for me to come. They wanted to interview me, and I went to work for them. And the job that I did, I traveled statewide, all over the state. Well, I had a cousin that lived in Laurel, and he told me, says, "If you ever get in Laurel, now, don't go to a hotel. Just come stay with us while you're down there."

White: What was your cousin's name? I'm asking everybody's names today.

Shorter: Wallace Neely(?).

White: Wallace Neely, OK.

Shorter: And his wife was Mayzie(?), and his mother-in-law was—I can't think of her name, right now.

White: That's all right. If you think of it, we can add it.

Shorter: I spent the night with them, and they used to be in the same apartment in a house—not in the same apartment, but in a house, had two apartments, and they lived on one side, and (inaudible) the other side. And Mayzie wanted to go to a movie. And she didn't want to just go with me and Wallace. So she wanted to get me a date. And that's where I got in trouble then. (laughter)

White: What was the name of the movie? (laughter)

Shorter: Tell you the truth, I don't know. (laughter)

White: You didn't pay too much attention to it, obviously. (laughter) Well, how long did y'all court before you got married?

Shorter: Not very long. (laughter)

White: I pry right into people's private lives here.

Shorter: We didn't court too long. We got married, and we was going to keep it a secret for a while, and that didn't last, though.

White: Why were you going to keep it a secret?

Shorter: Well, I don't know. We were just going to keep it a secret, get married—

White: Just seemed like the thing to do, huh?

Shorter: Yeah. And that didn't last. I brought her on up here to home, and we lived over there where me and my aunt lived for, I guess pretty close to a year. Meantime I had bought this.

White: Bought the place where you live here now?

Shorter: This place.

White: How many acres is this?

Shorter: Fifty acres.

White: Were you going to farm over here, or did you just kind of back into that?

Shorter: No. I patched, but see, I worked with the highway department, and most of the time I was gone five days a week. Had to stay out on the road a lot. Sometimes I'd get to come home at night, but after I bought this place, well, my dad-in-law, it wasn't much but just a little, old house. Ain't much now, but I mean, then it wasn't nothing much but just a hull of a house. And he helped me put a house, another floor. The floor under this one is one-by-sixes, one-by-eights, and one-by-twelves and no set pattern.

White: There's some good, old lumber in there, I'm sure.

Shorter: Yeah, the heart lumber.

White: Who'd you buy the place from?

Shorter: Jim Louis(?).

White: Was he living here then?

Shorter: Well, he hadn't lived here. He had built him another house in Braxton, and he had a job as night watchman. He had to be where—he didn't own a car or anything. He had to be where he could go back and forth to his work.

White: So he moved into Braxton. Where was he a night watchman? I just ask all kinds of questions.

Shorter: I don't even have no idea. I don't even—that's been so long ago, I don't even know.

White: Somewhere around Braxton.

Shorter: Yeah. Somewhere around Braxton, someplace or another around Braxton he was a night watchman.

White: But you and your father-in-law did the work here, basically.

Shorter: Well, we did a lots of work in here.

White: Well, we mentioned your mother-in-law and everything, but I don't believe we got your father-in-law's first name. What was—

Shorter: John Louis.

White: John Bush.

Shorter: Her mother was Lura Bush.

White: Lura.

Shorter: And we just did it as we could. They had a (inaudible) up here, and they had a sawmill up there then. And that was hard labor, and they didn't pay the labor what they was supposed to, and then the government turned around and made them sell that lumber that them workers sawed and (inaudible) and planed, and everything, made them sell it at the same rate, and it wasn't but about five or ten dollars a (inaudible).

White: Government caught them for underpaying people then, huh?

Shorter: Yeah. And they made them sell that lumber according to what they paid the workers. My daddy-in-law said, "You better get it while you can." (laughter)

White: Well, this was not long after the war, anyway, too, though, I imagine. They were going great guns with lumber.

Shorter: It was in the late [19]40s, early [19]50s. We added onto the back some.

White: Was the lumber cured, or did you have to stack it?

Shorter: Oh, yeah, it was kiln dried.

White: Oh, it was? They had a pretty big operation up there, then—

Shorter: Oh, yeah.

White: —if they kiln-dried lumber.

Shorter: Big sawmill.

White: Where was it located?

Shorter: Mill Pine(?). Kindly across the road over, you know where Piney Woods School is?

White: Right, on Highway 49.

Shorter: It was kindly across the road from where Piney Woods School is, over on the railroad.

White: A little bit south of Piney Woods School?

Shorter: Yeah, just a little bit.

White: Because that would be in Simpson County.

Shorter: Yeah.

White: If you crossed just into Rankin County, just before (inaudible).

Shorter: Well, I guess it would be. I don't even know. I know there's a road that went into the sawmill. The sawmill was over on the railroad track, naturally, on account of shipping by rail.

White: Did Highway 49 run right where it runs today in front of Piney Woods, right under where the four-lane runs today?

Shorter: Yeah.

White: I know the road, when you get down towards Braxton, it turns (inaudible).

Shorter: Yeah, turn in (inaudible) Braxton. That was rechanged up in, I guess, the late [19]50s or early [19]60s. They moved it out (inaudible).

White: Well, now that we got you up and got you married and got you located over here, I'm going to move back, back in time here because I got some more questions I thought about asking you about when you were growing up and living with your grandparents over there and everything. Did they have any more children in the home while you were there, or were you the only child?

Shorter: Yeah. They was Grandpa and Grandma. Grandpa died when I was about four years old, I guess, maybe five, six. I don't know. I was born in [19]23. He died in [19]26, [19]27, somewhere along in there. And Grandma died when I was twelve years old and left Uncle George, me and Uncle George and Uncle Doc(?) (inaudible).

White: Doc?

Shorter: Yeah. We lived—when Uncle George and Uncle Doc got married, they lived there with their wives, some, till they got them a (inaudible) move in.

White: Was that what they had? Three children? Was that their only children?

Shorter: No, no. They were a big family. Grandpa and Grandma had a big family.

White: The others had just grown up and moved out, huh?

Shorter: Yeah. I mean, that was the two youngest boys, and my aunt that was there was a old maid. She was older than either one of them. She was a good bit older than

either one of them, but she just never did marry and stayed there with Grandma and Grandpa. I stayed there. Of course back then everybody worked when you got big enough. I can remember I didn't have to plow, but when they wanted some water about ten o'clock, I carried them a bucket of fresh water. (laughter)

White: I bet you did.

Shorter: I mean, that was something that I had to do. And then when I got on up about eight years old, I began to learn how to plow some. And when I was eleven or twelve years old, me and Uncle Doc more or less worked together, and I had me a cotton patch; made a bale of cotton.

White: Did you?

Shorter: That was mine. I ain't talking about just helping.

White: Where'd you carry your cotton to get it ginned then?

Shorter: Here to Star.

White: Star.

Shorter: Zeke Odom's(?) gin, the Star.

White: Zeke Odom. How'd you carry it up there? Did y'all have a mule and wagon?

Shorter: Mule and wagon.

White: What'd you plow with? Was it a tractor or a mule?

Shorter: We plowed mostly with a mule. Now, we had a ox that we could plow if we got in a tight. I plowed a ox some. You could hook him to a (inaudible) buster, and he'd walk down that road with a (inaudible) buster like he didn't have nothing behind him.

White: You didn't have to worry about running over a rock or anything like that, huh?

Shorter: No.

White: What's the difference in plowing with a mule and plowing with a ox?

Shorter: Well, it's kind of—back then, people turned their cows on the outside. Well, they all come down through, up here on top of the hill, back that a way was what they called Big Woods. And they'd run wild. I mean, just run loose out there. And I could be plowing out there, and he'd see the cows going down the road, he'd low, and

sometimes be kind of hard to keep him on the row. He wanted to go to the woods. He knewed where they was going. (laughter) Be kind of hard to keep him on the row sometimes.

White: Was the ox as stubborn as a mule?

Shorter: They can be, yeah, but usually they pretty good. I mean, they can throw you, too.

White: Throw you?

Shorter: I was riding one out at dinnertime one day and went through the gate, and a little, old (inaudible) was sticking out the gate, touched (inaudible) in the side and looked like I was going to join the bluebird gang.

White: It spooked him a little bit, huh?

Shorter: He jumped and threw me.

White: You had one ox. How many mules did you have?

Shorter: Oh, we had a bunch of oxen, but, well, I have to go back to before this and tell you. During the Depression when everything was so—and lots of the colored people, they had worked over there on Grandpa's place. He used to have a bunch of sharecroppers. They didn't even have a mule to plow or nothing, and they come, and they got, I think it was six or eight yokes for ox. Grandpa had a bunch of cows just running loose up there in the woods, big, old steers that weigh 14[00], 1600 pounds. They lived back down between here and Prentiss and New Hebron, back down that a way.

White: Pretty good ways away.

Shorter: Yeah. They come and yoked them up and walked them down there, and they kept them for, I guess, four or five years, or six. And then here they come, bringing them back.

White: You just loaned them out for a while, huh?

Shorter: And well, they was broke when they come back. They was oxens then. I mean, they was broke oxens. You could pick out whichever one you want to plow. We had certain ones that were gentler and plowed single. Now, the ones I plowed, we put a harness on him just like a mule, instead of a single-bow ox yoke, bow. You just turn the collar upside-down.

White: Well, he must have been pretty gentle if you could control him with that.

Shorter: Yeah.

White: Y'all never pulled a wagon with oxen?

Shorter: Well, we never did hook one to the wagon. Now, they would have worked with the wagon, but he hooked to ground-slides, like I say. I mean, that one's all I ever plowed, big, old, black-and-white, spotted one. We just had a—you know what a ground-slide is.

White: Right.

Shorter: We'd hook him to the ground-slide. If we want to haul fertilize, well, put the fertilize or your plows on the slide.

White: Well, did you use a rope on your ground-slide or rawhide? My grandpa had a long piece of rawhide he had tied to his, with his old mule to pull stuff on.

Shorter: To pull, pull it with.

White: Right.

Shorter: We fixed where we could hook a singletree to it and just hooked it to a singletree to it, just like you'd hook a mule to a singletree.

White: Right. It's kind of like having a hitch on a tractor and a wagon or something, then.

Shorter: (Inaudible) just same thing as hooking a mule to a plow or even to a wagon. Of course you got a doubletree if you got a two-horse wagon. You got a doubletree with a singletree on each side of it, your tongue.

White: One of my history teachers gave us an extra ten points back when I was in school if we knew the difference—the question was, “Can you tell the difference between a doubletree and a singletree? And a lot of people who are going to be listening to this tape may not know what either one of those is. Can you tell us what the difference is between a doubletree and a singletree and what they're for? You've kind of hinted around about it there, but just describe it, if you will.

Shorter: Well, where you're going to use a pair of mules to this thing, you had to have a doubletree. Your doubletree would be hooked to your wagon, and then of course you got a tongue in the wagon, and one mule on one side, and one on the other. Well, on each side, that doubletree come out here, and hook the singletree to it, which had two places to hook its traces to, you see, and (inaudible) on each side.

White: That way, with the traces you could control the animal, moving to the right or to the left.

Shorter: The traces is to pull with. I mean, the chains.

White: Right. I'm sorry.

Shorter: The chains that you pull with, you hook them to that.

White: Then you got the bits in their mouths.

Shorter: Yeah, and lines.

White: And the lines.

Shorter: The plow lines.

White: Yeah. I got confused on my terminology, confusing the traces and the lines for a minute there. So you might be teaching me as well as teaching some of these people who are listening. I've forgotten a lot of that, too. What kind of crops did you raise?

Shorter: We growed cotton, corn, of course all kinds of vegetables.

White: You probably ate a lot of those vegetables.

Shorter: Well, you didn't go to the store every day to get what you wanted. You couldn't freeze it. If you didn't can it, you didn't have it. Now, you eat a lots of dried peas, though, now, and butterbeans. Usually it was always canned tomatoes and snap beans, and that was the two biggest things that we canned besides jellies and jam and stuff like that. So we eat a lots of dried peas.

White: Did y'all go out and pick blackberries, huckleberries, and stuff like that?

Shorter: Yeah, and canned huckleberries and blackberries. And we usually always had strawberries in the garden, and we made strawberry preserves.

White: Ate pretty well, huh?

Shorter: Oh, we had plenty to eat. I mean, it might not have been what you'd want every morning. (laughter)

White: What did you have every morning?

Shorter: Well, we always had plenty meat, hog meat, pork. So we killed plenty of hogs and cured their meat and then put in a box and sealed it up after it got cured, so worms couldn't get in it. And then they'd (inaudible).

White: Did you have a smokehouse?

Shorter: Yeah. We had a smokehouse and cured all the meat.

White: About how long did it take, hanging up in there, to smoke it? Do you remember?

Shorter: Oh, usually ten days to two weeks would cure it, but we didn't cut it down. You could let it stay there, and it'd dry out more. That's what you're doing, is drying it out, drying the water out of it. And we had plenty cows, and sometimes we milked four or five cows, and had plenty milk. Skimmed the cream off so when Grandma got ready to churn, she skimmed the cream off and then put it in that old churn and churn it, well, the milk, it had clabbered.

White: Uh-huh. Well, you probably had plenty of buttermilk and plenty of butter, then, didn't you?

Shorter: Raised on buttermilk. Buttermilk and cornbread.

White: Not much wrong with that, is there?

Shorter: Nothing wrong with that. I still eat it. I could eat it every night, but I know it ain't good for me.

White: Do you put sugar in your cornbread or not?

Shorter: No. (laughter)

White: Well, there are two types of people, one that puts sugar in cornbread and one that doesn't.

Shorter: I got to buying little, old packs of cornmeal that's sweet, but I don't particularly like it.

White: You don't like the sweet cornbread at all, huh?

Shorter: No. Makes it taste more like cake.

White: All right. We're running close to the end of this tape, so I'm going to stop in a minute, and we'll take a break and start again. (End of digital file named tape one, side one. Beginning of digital file named tape one, side two.)—used to churn and make butter.

Shorter: Yeah.

White: What did the butter taste like?

Shorter: That was fine, too.

White: Sweet butter, huh?

Shorter: Yeah. That's fine eating, them hot biscuits. And when the Depression was on, though, they lots of times we just had biscuits on Sunday morning.

White: That was it.

Shorter: And cornbread flitters and stuff like that during the week. But we had hot biscuits on Sunday morning, and your ham.

White: Yeah. You had to go buy that flour, didn't you?

Shorter: That's about the only thing. Sometimes you'd have to buy, well, we called it lard back then. When you killed your hog, you got all the lard you could out of them, but you might run out before you had time to kill hogs again. And sugar.

White: I'm going to get sidetracked on hogs, then.

Shorter: Sugar you had to buy, sugar.

White: We will come back to this. Yeah. Where did you go to buy the—

Shorter: They had stores at Braxton. They had three or four stores at Braxton at that time.

White: Pretty busy town.

Shorter: They'd stop by the Star. And in Harrisville they used to have, along that time, they had about two or three stores at Harrisville.

White: You remember the name of any of those merchants there?

Shorter: Oscar Seedman(?) was at Harrisville, O.N. Seedman, Peck Harris, and T.N. Neely.

White: Well, the Neelys and the Harrises are still around over there. What about the merchants in Braxton?

Shorter: Braxton, D.B. Mehaffey(?), which we knew him as Boots, Boots Mehaffey. And there was a Lem Byrd(?) that had a grocery there one time. Whit Kopps(?) he had a grocery there. Will McKay(?).

White: When you were ten, eleven years old and stuff like that, what did you buy when you went into town? Anything?

Shorter: You mean in the grocery line?

White: Yourself, yeah. Did you have any money to buy any candy or anything with when you—

Shorter: A little bit. Not much. But if I'd get a nickel, you could buy silver bells; was my favorite.

White: That's what I was going to ask you. Is that those Hershey's silver—

Shorter: You could get one of them little, old, paper sacks, the small paper sack. You could get about five for a penny. And a nickel, you got a whole lots of them.

White: Just about make yourself sick on that, couldn't you?

Shorter: You couldn't eat all of them.

White: What did a Coca-Cola cost then?

Shorter: A nickel, it cost a nickel.

White: See, I'm a little younger than you. The cheapest I remember them being, six cents. They went to that six-cent thing, and it was a problem to try to make change for them.

Shorter: Cokes was a nickel and all kinds of penny candy you get, most of it you'd get several pieces for a penny.

White: Well, while we're talking about money and Depression and all that, you had mentioned that you raised your first bale of cotton. Tell me a little bit about that. You said you—

Shorter: Well, now that was in [19]36 or [19]37, I believe.

White: That was a little later than the Depression, then.

Shorter: Yeah.

White: But times were still—

Shorter: The price of cotton had gone back up. I remember when it was about three cents a pound.

White: How much was it a pound when you sold it? You remember?

Shorter: Well, my bale brought forty-five dollars. I don't remember what it weighed.

White: And you carried it to Star to have it ginned? Is that right?

Shorter: I carried it to Star and had it ginned and sold it up there. Old Man Z. Odom(?) would buy it, too, if you wanted to sell it. And I sold it to him, forty-five dollars and bought me a cow and a calf.

White: A cow and a calf.

Shorter: For thirty-seven dollars and a half. So I didn't have much left out of my bale of cotton.

White: You were what? Twelve years old, you said, then? Somewhere along in there.

Shorter: About eleven or twelve, somewhere along eleven or twelve years old. I think I was—

White: Well, you started in the cattle business a little early there, didn't you?

Shorter: Well, we had my grandpa's cows, but I mean, that was mine. I mean, my own. And I sold my last one—I don't know—something like two months ago.

White: So you been off and on raising cattle since then.

Shorter: Never been without a cow till about two months ago. I sold my last one.

White: Is that right? That's never been a main occupation. That's just been one of your sidelines, huh?

Shorter: Just a (inaudible). I have had as high as twenty-five or thirty, but it was hard to keep that many because I didn't have enough open pasture. I had to feed them a lot. (Inaudible) cows, calves and all.

White: I had been told by your grandson to ask you about the geese in the fields. What would that mean to you? About the geese getting in the fields when you were growing up.

Shorter: Geese?

White: Yes, sir.

Shorter: That was hoe hens.

White: Oh, is that right? Is that what that is?

Shorter: That's hoe hens.

White: Well, that's all he had said, was, "Ask him about the geese in the field." That's hoe hens? Is that what you call geese? Where'd that name come from? You know?

Shorter: I don't have no idea because it was here whenever I learned it. He had to fix either a picket fence or a net-wire fence around the cotton patch that you going to have them in, and they keep that grass eat down, and keep from—you didn't have to hoe; mighty little hoeing you ever had to do. (laughter) And we liked that. I mean—

White: Oh, hoe hens. I heard that as hoe hands. I told you I didn't hear real well. That's what you calling your geese, then?

Shorter: That's hoe hens.

White: So they'd keep all that grass down.

Shorter: Yeah, eat down.

White: They didn't eat the plants?

Shorter: No, not cotton. They wouldn't eat. Now, you couldn't put them in the cornfield. They'd crop your cornfield.

White: I bet they'd have worked on that corn. I bet, wouldn't they?

Shorter: Yeah, they'd crop the leaves off. They love—a goose will live off of grass. All you got to give are some water and grass, and she'll live. We'd have to have a little goose pond or dig a little hole out where it'll hold water. Then we had to draw water and pour it in a container where they could get to it to have plenty water.

White: Did y'all have a well connected to the house, or was it away from the house?

Shorter: It was always right at the house. I mean, where I was raised at was like, maybe, as far as from out there where you parked at, maybe a little bit out to the road, or something like that.

White: Did y'all use the old, deep-well bucket?

Shorter: No. Ours was a dug well. We used like a water bucket, tied a rope or chain, whatever we had, on it for a pulley, on the pulley. Just let that bucket down there, and it sank. Then draw it back up. Come out at dinnertime, you drawed that first bucket

up. Set it on the curb. You could taken a drink out of it. And then you poured your horses cool water then, watered them. But I always got that first drink.

White: What'd that water taste like? You remember what it tasted like?

Shorter: It was good. Man, it was good water. (laughter)

White: Everybody I've ever talked to who worked on a farm said they remember the taste of that cool—

Shorter: Yeah. It was a satisfying taste. I mean, you was thirsty. It was a satisfying taste, and they was about three or four sharecroppers, ten or eleven mules, plus they all washed out of that one well.

White: Had a lot of water to draw out.

Shorter: Out of that one well. When we killed hogs, well, you had to fill up all them—that was one of my jobs, was to, before I got big enough to do too much, was, I got all the pine knots and stuff to build a fire with, drew the water up the evening before, filled up all the wash pots. If we had any containers that I could draw water and fill them up, where we'd already have it—

White: Big, old, cast-iron wash pots probably what you used for scalding, huh?

Shorter: Yeah. We had about three of them. We'd have to get them rolling hot, put them in the drums to stick the old hog down in there and turn him over and reach down there and see if that hair was turning loose. If it was, you pulled that end out and stuck the other end down in there.

White: And then once the hog got soft and parboiled enough, all that hair and lard would turn loose, did you scrape them?

Shorter: Yeah. We got all the hair off, but usually it'd be some short hairs that wouldn't pull out, and you'd take a knife and have to scrape all that off. You had to have a sharp knife to shave it off. And then (inaudible) off (inaudible).

White: Didn't have any kind of special tool or anything to scrape the hide off?

Shorter: No. Just regular, old, just knives, like butcher knives on down to just old kitchen knives.

White: Well, who killed the hog? And how did they kill it?

Shorter: Most of the time we just shot them right in the forehead there with a twenty-two. When he'd fall, if we didn't have him on the outside, we jumped the pen and

turn him over, and my uncle cut him right in there, that jugular vein, we called it. And when you cut that jugular vein, I mean, blood would squirt out, that far out.

White: Did you ever hoist them up in the tree or anything like that to let the blood drain out?

Shorter: Yeah. We had a place with a singletree; we fixed it—

White: How'd you pull them over to the tree? Did you use a mule?

Shorter: We would catch them by the hind legs, four legs, ever how many it take to pull him. Sometimes it'd take three or four people to pull him; get him over there. And we had a thing with a rope that you pull and pull it over to the side and hold him ever how high you wanted him. Wash him down good and what we called gutting him. We'd have a tub down under there to catch them chitterlings.

White: Well, that was going to be my next question. I'm sure there were some chitterlings involved in there.

Shorter: Yeah.

White: Who was in charge of washing the chitterlings?

Shorter: My aunt that raised me. That was her (inaudible), one of the sharecroppers' women would always be there to—

White: I'm afraid I'd have to get upwind from that. (laughter) You remember eating chitterlings? You like chitterlings?

Shorter: Oh, man. (laughter) I love them.

White: You like them fried or boiled?

Shorter: I'd rather have them boiled than have them fried. But when they got the liver cut out, that's when they—and the tenderloin, take it in the kitchen, my grandma. They'd let Grandma have it, and by the time we got that hog where we could leave and go eat, she'd have liver and some tenderloin cooked (inaudible).

White: Good, fresh, tender food, huh?

Shorter: Yeah.

White: Well, did you ever call in any neighbors or anything to help? Or the sharecroppers, was that enough people to help?

Shorter: Well, we usually had enough there on the place; didn't have to call no neighbors. Oh, you had to give your neighbors a mess of meat, now.

White: Oh, yeah.

Shorter: Then when they killed hogs, they brought you a mess. Lots of time it was like killing beef. You'd kill a little yearling or something. You'd divide it up. This one take a quarter, and that one a quarter, and that one a quarter, and you keep a quarter.

White: That's because nobody much had a place to keep them. Isn't that right? Couldn't freeze them.

Shorter: You had to salt that down to keep it from ruining.

White: Well, did y'all have an icebox?

Shorter: Didn't have nothing but an old, tin tub and an old quilt to wrap the ice up in for a long time. We finally got an old, wooden icebox, but it was years and years before we ever had one.

White: So you felt uptown when you got a icebox.

Shorter: Didn't have no use for it. We didn't have no iceman to come by. We got to where there was a iceman coming by, when it first started off, we'd just get us a fifty-pound block, and put it in a tub, and wrap it up good with that old quilt. It'd keep it for two or three days. Have ice tea. That was rare.

White: I bet it was. What'd y'all do with watermelons to keep them cool?

Shorter: Most of the time we'd go get us one early in the morning while it's cool; bring it and put it in the shade, keep it in the shade so it wouldn't get hot.

White: That was cool enough, huh?

Shorter: Yeah. That's cool enough like that. You wasn't used to all these fancy doings like you are today. (laughter)

White: Yeah. But I bet at least once a year, you probably made ice cream, though, didn't you?

Shorter: Oh, yeah. (laughter) Yeah. We made ice cream a good bit, but—

White: With all that milk.

Shorter: Now, Old Doc, he was bad about—he public-worked a lots, too. He run a road grader, and he'd buy like fifty pound of ice and bring it home when he come in from work. He'd say, "Get them old cows up and get them milked, now." And I'd get them cows milked, and we'd have ice cream that night; I guarantee you.

White: What kind of ice cream did you make?

Shorter: Vanilla, just whatever flavor you wanted. Strawberry flavor. They had something they called, some kind of a custard they fixed. They had to put it on the stove, cook it, though, so—

White: My grandma and my mother used to make that kind of ice [cream]. We called it vanilla ice. Vanilla custard is what they called it.

Shorter: (Inaudible)

White: Was your grandma a good cook?

Shorter: Oh, man, yeah.

White: What kind of pies and cakes did she fix?

Shorter: Oh, she could cook anything. Even cornbread was good.

White: Did you have a favorite cake?

Shorter: Yeah, coconut cake was always (laughter) my favorite cake (inaudible).

White: I think we're running ahead on the survey with coconut cake. A lot of people liked that.

Shorter: Back then, I mean, coconut or chocolate, either one. It didn't make any difference because you didn't get it every day.

White: You had to go to the store to buy the coconut, though, didn't you?

Shorter: No. Well, you could buy a coconut and grind it up to make fresh coconut cake.

White: Well, as much as I like food, we probably better get back up to our earlier part of the conversation here and continue it. I believe you got married. We were talking (laughter) about that a little earlier. You and your wife, I know, had one child because I'm sitting here, looking at your grandson across the room. How many children did you have?

Shorter: Five. We had five kids.

White: Five children. Could you name them, please, sir?

Shorter: Charles, Thomas, Lena, Jean(?).

White: Do you remember about when they were born? I'm not putting you on the spot here, now. I can't remember my wife's birthday half the time, but if you remember it, just say it.

Shorter: Chuck was born in [19]47 or [19]48, and Kevin's mama was born about twenty or twenty-one months, something like that, later.

White: What's her name?

Shorter: Lena Jean.

White: Lena Jean, OK.

Shorter: And then it was about five or six years before Vic(?) was born, and then about two years before Debra(?) was born. And then Deb started to school the day that my baby, the last one was born, Johnny(?). She started school. I carried Willie Jean to the hospital that morning. She had to catch the school bus.

White: Were all of them born in the hospital?

Shorter: Well, might as well say a hospital, clinic. You remember what Dr. Miller's clinic looked like?

White: Dr. A.C. Miller.

Shorter: Yeah. They was born either in the hospital or in the clinic, one.

White: We had interviewed a nurse who worked for him and said he had one clinic, down close to where Dr. Walker had his drugstore, and that might have been earlier. I don't know. But they had a little room up in the Coke(?) building or somewhere there next door that was a clinic where they delivered a lot of babies.

Shorter: That was there before the old *Simpson County News*.

White: OK. Well, that's when Dr. Miller moved his clinic up to where it was then on Maude(?) Avenue. That's what I was trying to figure out. He had two separate, two different clinics there at different times.

Shorter: It finally got in bad shape, and they tore it down.

White: But during that time when you had the children and everything, what kind of work were you doing then?

Shorter: I was still working with the highway department.

White: When did you start working with the highway department?

Shorter: September of [19]46.

White: And you worked with them until you retired?

Shorter: In February of [19]84.

White: February of [19]84. During all of that time, what all did you do, and where did you work? Don't leave anything out. (laughter) I'm picking at you.

Shorter: Well, counting cars, making traffic surveys where you stop the cars and interview the people, lots of stuff was kind of on the sly. I mean, if the commissioners want or something. At one time down on the Coast, when they had the toll bridges, money could disappear, and we were supposed to be down there checking traffic, but actually we was watching. When they'd punch that thing up there, we knew what he was supposed to punch.

White: Double checking, making sure they were recording all tolls.

Shorter: They didn't know it, but that's what we was there for.

White: Well, what was Highway 49 like when you first starting working with the highway department.

Shorter: There wasn't too much to it, just an old, blacktop road.

White: They had it blacktopped all the way to the Coast by [19]46.

Shorter: As far as I can remember back, it was. It was blacktopped. Now, you had to go down through Hattiesburg. You couldn't go down by the college like that. You had to go down through Hattiesburg.

White: Through old downtown Hattiesburg.

Shorter: (Inaudible) when Paul Johnson was elected governor, that's when they fixed that four-lane from the upper edge of Hattiesburg to the lower edge of Hattiesburg. I can remember. It stayed gravel for a good, long while before they ever had the money to pave it.

White: Well, I believe it was the mid-1960s when they put in the four-lane back out from Braxton on to Jackson, wasn't it? Around [19]64, [19]65? Somewhere along in there? Highway 49, before Paul Johnson put the four-lane in down there, must have followed Front Street, down by the railroad track, right?

Shorter: Yeah. You had to go down through town, wind around and come back out down at the lower edge of Hattiesburg, down there. Well, actually down there where Paul Johnson lived at. He lived back out there.

White: Were you home almost every night, or you worked all—

Shorter: Oh, no. I stayed on the road for years, I stayed on the road, I'd say, near about all the time. I mean four nights a week. Sometimes I'd have to be out five nights a week.

White: What time would you leave the house on Monday morning, and when would you get back?

Shorter: Well, sometime I left on Sunday evening about two or three o'clock, and sometimes I'd leave out at two o'clock in the morning, Monday morning.

White: Did y'all work out of Jackson?

Shorter: Yes. My office was in Jackson. It was just wherever we had to go to. See, for many years they wouldn't let you come home in your vehicle. If you wanted to come home, that was your problem. Like if I was working in the northeast corner of the state, I'd have to leave out Sunday afternoon at three or four o'clock from Jackson, go to Memphis; catch a bus from Memphis to Tupelo, and then catch something from Tupelo back to (inaudible), kind of a zigzag thing. And then I'd just get there in time just to go to work. (laughter) I'd be traveling all night.

White: So would you drive from here to Memphis and catch a bus or something like that?

Shorter: No. I had to ride the bus. Years later, it got to where I could use my vehicle. Well, I used my own car a lot, and the State vehicle they got where they'd let us—when they got to paying us actual expense. Back then they wasn't giving us five, six, seven dollars a day for expense, but when it got to where it was actual expense, you go to paying two nights, like Friday night, Saturday night, maybe Sunday night in a motel, they wised up and said, "Well, it's cheaper for you to just come home in the vehicle." (laughter)

White: But at one point they were just paying you so much a day, and you'd have to figure out how to—

Shorter: Yeah. You'd just do the best you could. Of course when I started it was three dollars a day for expense.

White: Who was head of the highway department when you started working? Do you remember?

Shorter: Yeah. Larry Bush.

White: Bush?

Shorter: Mondell Bush(?) I believe was his name.

White: Mondell Bush. (laughter)

Shorter: He was from Laurel.

White: Is he kin to the Bush lady that you married from down there around Laurel?

Shorter: Well, if it was, it was way off. He was kin to the one had the dairy.

White: Oh, Bush Dairy. Sure.

Shorter: He was kin to them.

White: Do you remember when Bush Dairy came up through here with trucks, selling milk and ice cream?

Shorter: Yeah.

White: Did you ever buy anything from them?

Shorter: Yeah.

White: They sold, I believe, up until the early [19]60s, maybe, or late [19]50s, something like that.

Shorter: But John Smith from Mendenhall run against Bush and beat him.

White: John B. Smith.

Shorter: He was my boss then. Well, he was our commissioner from the southern district for twenty years. He stayed in there twenty years, and Shag Pyron(?) run against him and beat him. And of course Shag got sent up, and somebody else got it, and he got sent up. (laughter)

White: There was a lot of sending up going there a while, wasn't it?

Shorter: Yeah.

White: I think the word prison might be mentioned there somewhere (laughter) in the middle of that. Who was commissioner when you retired?

Shorter: Who was commissioner when I retired?

White: You wasn't too worried about them by then, were you? (laughter)

Shorter: No. (Inaudible)

White: You weren't making any plans for the future with them then, were you?

Shorter: About the last month or two, I was more or less my own boss. If I wanted to go, I'd go. If I didn't, I said, "I'm sick today. I don't want to go."

White: Well, it sort of sounds like they might have been in prison about that time anyway, your boss. I don't know. (laughter) Highway department a better place to work now, do you think, than it used to be?

Shorter: Well, moneywise it would be a lot better. I don't know about the—see, I been retired nineteen years. About all of them that I know who was working has done retired, mostly. Might be a few of them left, but—

White: Well, did your wife have to tend to those cattle and stuff around here while you were off, roaming around the state with the highway department?

Shorter: Well, they wasn't too much to tend to. I mean, I had it, after the boys got big enough, they could—I'd have corn and stuff ground up, and it was in sacks. And they could put it in the trough for the cows.

White: Are you raising a garden this year?

Shorter: You wouldn't call it a garden, I don't think. I got—

White: Well, doggone. I was going to try to beat you out of some vegetables. (laughter)

Shorter: I got about four or five hills of tomatoes, two or three hills of cucumbers. I set out two or three hills okra, but it ain't going to do nothing. And I got flowers.

White: But no more cattle you have to tend to, huh?

Shorter: No. I got three horses out there in my pasture, but they're not mine. I just let them put them in there (inaudible).

White: Just got them on loan, then, huh?

Shorter: Just to keep it eat down some.

White: How many grandchildren do you have? Have you counted them?

Shorter: Well, the last count, I think I had fifteen grandchildren and about ten, eleven great-grandkids.

White: Can you keep track of all of them, now? I can't keep track of two children.
(laughter)

Shorter: Kevin comes to see me just about every Sunday if he ain't gone somewhere else. He'll bring his down to see me.

White: When did your wife die?

Shorter: She's (inaudible).

White: OK. She's just not here. Well, I'm sorry.

Shorter: She just took off and left me.

White: She just ran off and left you, huh?

Shorter: Yeah. (laughter) She's into—you probably don't know what I'm talking about—some kind of stamping they do and making cards and this, that, and the other.

White: Well, I'm sorry I had her buried there. (laughter) I knew I hadn't seen her since I was out here. (laughter)

Shorter: I said, "You not going to stay here?" "Well, we had planned to go to Pearl, to the library at Pearl." Says, "They can't interview both of us no how." Says, "I'd have to just sit there and keep my mouth shut."

White: Well, please don't tell her I tried to kill her off when she gets back. Will you?
(laughter)

Shorter: So I told her, I said, "Go ahead because you can't do nothing." I said, "Something could happen. They might not would get to come."

White: Well, we were a little bit late getting here. I do thank you very, very much for taking this time to talk with us. Is there anything else or anybody else you want to mention while we here doing this interview? That's putting you on the spot.

Shorter: Well, it's been a long, pretty hard, long, rough life through life. I mean, I've had good times and bad times.

White: Simpson County been a pretty good place to live?

Shorter: Well, yeah. There'd be no other place that seemed like home, except here, to me. I was raised just across the creek over there, so.

White: Is the old home place still over there? Somebody in the family have it?

Shorter: Well, I got ten acres of it. A cousin of mine got the rest of it.

White: Well, that's good to keep it in the family.

Shorter: I think Kevin wants it. My oldest boy wanted it.

White: But it's very, very good to keep land in the family.

Shorter: Well, they just ain't making no more.

White: That's the truth.

Shorter: Somebody was asking me about some the other day, how much was land. Some people think, "Well, I can buy it." I give eleven hundred and fifty dollars for this fifty acres here. There's a man, and his wife says, "Well, there's a fifty-acre oil lease check, would be fifty dollars. (Inaudible) I think we should have it." And I said, "I do, too."

White: You let them have the mineral rights out of it, huh?

Shorter: No. That was just that one check.

White: That one check, that's what I meant, that check that was coming.

Shorter: Then from then on, it's mine. And I expect I've got sixty or maybe seventy-five thousand dollars out of mineral rights (inaudible).

White: You're very lucky they would sell you the mineral rights because a lot of people just won't turn loose of them.

Shorter: Yeah.

White: Well, I do appreciate your talking to us very much. Thank you. (End of digital file named tape one, side two. Beginning of digital file named tape two, side one.)

Shorter: I went to school up there—

White: How many grades did they have?

Shorter: —the first and second grade.

White: Was that all they had then?

Shorter: They consolidated then with Harrisville, and I started third grade at Harrisville.

White: You remember who your first grade teacher was?

Shorter: Miss Guster Owens(?) that lived right up here on top of the hill.

White: What was her first name?

Shorter: Guster.

White: Guster.

Shorter: Guster Owens. And she was—well, that wasn't but one teacher for one (inaudible) twelve.

White: She taught both grades, huh?

Shorter: All twelve.

White: She taught in a one-room schoolhouse, literally, then.

Shorter: That's what it was, a one-room schoolhouse. And then when they consolidated then, we had walked up here. When they consolidated it, we had a school bus that picked us up, carried us to Harrisville, if it didn't break down. We had to walk then.

White: How many miles is it from here to Harrisville?

Shorter: About three and a half, four miles.

White: And you started the third grade under (inaudible).

Shorter: Started third grade.

White: Remember your teacher's name there?

Shorter: Miss Margie Kelly(?).

White: You got a better memory than I have. I remember my fourth grade teacher's name, but not my third grade teacher.

Shorter: Miss Margie, I can pretty well remember Miss Margie Kelly. And then fourth grade was Gladys Tatum(?), which she was a Allen before she married Tatum. Then Grace Dale(?) was my fifth grade, and Ralph Tatum was my sixth grade. Of course after I got (inaudible) that, I can remember a lots of them, but had different teachers in high school, and I quit in the ninth grade. Had to help make a living. And I got my high school diploma; I think I was thirty-six, thirty-eight years old.

White: How'd you get it? Through the military?

Shorter: No. Through State education, what you call it? GED? [General Educational Development]

White: GED equivalent?

Shorter: I went to the board of education in Jackson, and he set me out at Millsaps, and I went up there and taken the test. I had to take it three times. I passed everything but the English the first time. The next time I didn't even make as good as I did the first time. (laughter)

White: That happens with tests sometimes, doesn't it?

Shorter: I just went over to Harrisville and got all kind of old literature books and English books and studied up on it. I didn't even make as good as I did the first time. (laughter)

White: I've been there. (laughter)

Shorter: But then the last time, I says, "Aw, to heck with it. If I get it, all right. And if I don't, all right." And I made just a few points over what it taken to get my diploma.

White: Well, that's good. That's all it takes.

Shorter: Well, my boss man where I worked at with the highway department, he told me, he says, "Maybe (inaudible) because you supposed to have a high school education or two years of junior college when they hired you." (Inaudible), "Well, Old Shorter, he hadn't got but just a ninth-grade education. We'll hold him back on that." And give somebody else what I'd ordinarily get. And he says, "I want you to get you a GED test." The day I got it, I carried it up there to give it to him, he said, "This'll be on your records down at the main office building this evening." And the first year it meant probably right at \$300 to me.

White: Good investment for you then, wasn't it?

Shorter: Yeah.

White: Education just about always is.

Shorter: When I got up to where I (inaudible) retire, in the last few years before I retired, I don't know, long (inaudible) or something they called it. They just give me a thousand dollars a year raise. That's the way it was worked. They would just give you a thousand dollars a year or twelve hundred. I don't remember; something like that.

White: That sure worked then, didn't it? So you quit in the ninth grade basically, and you worked basically on the farm there then, and then—

Shorter: Yeah. (Inaudible) me and my aunt, by that time, there was nobody left much to help make a living but me and her.

White: Yeah. Did y'all have to walk into Harrisville or Braxton, or did you get a ride?

Shorter: Oh, yeah. She used to walk and go to Braxton and quilt and walk back. Might somebody come along and picked her up.

White: What kind of quilting did they do? Was that just friends who got together and made quilts?

Shorter: No. It was like the WPA [Works Progress Administration].

White: Works Progress Administration.

Shorter: They just worked like maybe three days a week, and maybe one or two days she might work. In the summertime when the vegetables was on, go in Harrisville and help can for the lunchroom, for food for the lunchroom.

White: That was part of the WPA also, huh?

Shorter: Yeah, I guess it was because she got a little bit of pay. Oh, it wasn't nothing but maybe three dollars a week, something like that.

White: That three dollars came in handy, I imagine, though, didn't it?

Shorter: It did help. And the onliest way I could make money was to plow for somebody, fifty cents a day.

White: Then after you started to work with the highway department and everything, and got off down at Laurel and met that lady that you married (laughter) (inaudible) working for the highway department. Tell me about your wedding.

Shorter: We drove up to the preacher's house. He come out; told us to get out and come on in. Told him, "Well, we want you to marry us." And he says, "Well, you don't have to get out and go in to do that." He called his wife, and she come out there to witness it. And he married us, setting out there in the car.

White: You didn't get out of the car, huh?

Shorter: Didn't get out of the car.

White: Well, his house must not have been clean or something. You reckon?

Shorter: I don't know. (laughter) He was a cousin to my wife.

White: Is that right?

Shorter: Distant cousin.

White: That sounds like these modern-day, drive-through wedding ceremonies they have. They had that back in Mississippi then.

Shorter: I guess they had it back in my time. (laughter)

White: We had also not talked much about your military service, trying to encapsulate everything and round it up here before we end the interview.

Shorter: I believe I told you I was drafted.

White: Right. And where'd you go for boot training?

Shorter: I was in the infantry and went to Italy.

White: Where'd you go for training?

Shorter: Oh, down at Camp Blanding, Florida.

White: Camp Blanding.

Shorter: Florida. The camp was built out in a swamp from Jacksonville. Wasn't nothing but sand and alligators and creeks out there.

White: And then you were shipped to Italy?

Shorter: And then we left there when I got through with my training. We went to Italy. We went to Fort Meade, Maryland, and then from there to Italy.

White: You remember when it was when you shipped out?

Shorter: Well, I was kind of sick the first day. We unloaded the boat and started up the hill in Naples, Italy, it didn't smell too good. (laughter) The bathrooms is out on the sidewalk, and it runs right back down.

White: Open sewer lines.

Shorter: I thought, "What kind of countries I'm going to?" Little, old kids'd run up there, (inaudible) like that and get your cigarette. We'd usually tote cigarettes in our gun belts (inaudible) ammunition (inaudible).

White: What kind of cigarettes did you smoke?

Shorter: Chesterfield mostly.

White: Chesterfield.

Shorter: And Camels. They give us those. They was free. (Inaudible)

White: Yeah. The military handed out cigarettes—

Shorter: They'd sell it for you.

White: —at that time.

Shorter: A pack a day. I went out there. Old Mussolini's son-in-law had a big dairy. Of course, they'd done taken that part of Italy, and I stayed out there for about three days. Not all of us, but part of us went back and loaded back on the boat and went up the coast of Italy in the Mediterranean Sea; went up to Leghorn, and they unloaded us off the boat there and carried us across to Florence. And Florence, that's getting in the foothills of the Alps Mountains. That's where I joined my division at.

White: What month did you go overseas? What month and what year? And was there anybody from Harrisville in your unit?

Shorter: No, there wasn't anybody—there were boys from around that went overseas with me, but you see, you don't never know; when you get over there, they liable to send you one place and them another place.

White: And all got scattered, huh?

Shorter: I was and joined the Ninety-first Division, one of the first days in combat. They carried us around. They had dropped a mess of boys up there at (inaudible) for several days without any water or anything to eat. They couldn't get nothing to them, and they had to drop it off in no man's land, and we had to go around to no man's land to get it and then bring it back up the mountain. There's a pass up there that you go through, top of the mountain.

White: Bring them supplies in.

Shorter: Yeah. And I toted a mattress of light bread. That's what I carried. Some carried water, and some carried canned stuff. And I was lucky enough; I had to go back after the second load. But when we walked through that pass, we had three men wounded just like that (snaps fingers). They was zeroed in on that pass, and you couldn't even see the valley. It was clouds, low clouds, fog or something. You couldn't even see the valley, but they were zeroed in. They knowed where they was shooting. And I went back and got the second load, and when we got back to where we was going to be at that night, there was a German boy, sounded like he was hollering and begging for his mama. Of course, that gets on your nerves if you ain't used to hearing something like that. He was wounded over in a hole, foxhole.

White: And you can hear him from the foxhole.

Shorter: You could hear him. And during the night that night, we heard a gunshot. Somebody said something the next morning, said, "I wonder what happened to that boy was doing all that hollering and begging." They said, "The old sergeant went over there and put him out of his misery." Well, you wonder how you get that hardhearted, but you can. When they get to shooting at you, you can.

White: Wartime does stuff like that to folks. How long did you serve?

Shorter: Well, we spent that fall going up the mountains. We taken a good bit of mileage going up through there, like when we went up Highway 65, we was on the right-hand side of Highway 65. And it got so bad in the wintertime where it snowed so and deep snow, you couldn't do nothing. We'd do a little bit of fixing up, fortifying ourself or something like that, but it began to thaw out. The next spring it began to thaw out, so we were getting ready to make another big push. We'd have to go out on reconnaissance patrols and ambush patrols, just whatever they needed us to do. We was staying in an old place where a house was bombed out, but there was kind of like a cellar up beside of the mountain. We had some outposts out, but I mean, my squad had got down where they wasn't but five or six of us. They'd all got killed or wounded, and that night we had the old sergeant told me he wanted me to go on reconnaissance patrol. And Poteet(?) was his name. He was from the Carolinas. I said, "Well, Poteet, I don't feel like running tonight." I said, "Let me go on that ambush patrol." That's just go out there and lay down, and (inaudible) place in line, just don't let nobody slip through. He said, "OK. That's no problem." And so the reconnaissance patrol, they went out and come back through where we was at, and

they told us, said, “At one o’clock,” said, “everything on the Fifth Army’s rump’s going to open up except for .50-caliber machine guns, up.” Well, you ain’t never heard such shooting, and we lay there on that little, old hill. Wasn’t no (inaudible) where the Germans was at. Watched all them white phosphorous shells. You ain’t never seen nothing like it in all your life. I don’t see how there could have been a rat over there alive. About the time they slacked up, they told us it’d last for a hour, and then would be over. And just as they began to slack up, they began to throw it on us. That’s when I got wounded. Well, made it back to a dugout. (Inaudible) My knee began to get to hurting me then.

White: You were wounded in the leg, huh?

Shorter: And we stayed there a little bit. Finally, made it; before daylight we made it on back in to where we were staying in that old cellar thing. And I didn’t go report to the captain. I didn’t think it was all that bad. You couldn’t tell at night. And of course, inflammation done setting up in it by morning time. And the old captain, he got all over me.

White: Because you hadn’t reported it.

Shorter: Had to wait, though. You supposed to report it. Had to wait till that night before I could go back. Well, they helped me get back to where I could get a jeep, and they put me in a trailer behind a jeep. Well, I didn’t think we was going to make it out. You could hear them. They began to shell us. You could hear that shrapnel, hitting the side of that body on that trailer. I didn’t think we was going to make it, but we did. Well, I got wounded about the same hour that Roosevelt died.

White: Is that right?

Shorter: And I didn’t know nothing about it. I got back that night, and they operated and taken the shrapnel out, part of it out. They still left a little piece in there.

White: You still got it?

Shorter: Yeah. And next evening I was still asleep. Man, I was dead asleep; been up. And when they put you to sleep, you just can’t wake up. This nurse was washing my face and slapping me, shaking me. I can remember it was an old field hospital, and the curtains was popping, too. And that made you get scared, listening to them sometimes. She told me about, said, “Did you know President Roosevelt died?” And I said, “No.” Of course, I didn’t. And then you just felt like, “We done lost the war.” Then. We didn’t have no president. And stayed on. Then I went on back to my outfit. We wound up around in Yugoslavia. We stayed over there as occupational forces for about five or six months.

White: I’ve heard that’s pretty country.

Shorter: Yugoslavia. Right where we was at, they got mountains, but it's kind of rolling, like. I mean, it's not like going through them jagged things in northern Italy, the Alpine Mountains. They rough. They'd tell us, "Oh, when you get over that mountain right yonder, you can see the Po Valley." When you get over that mountain right yonder, there's another one on the other side of it, (laughter) higher than it was. (laughter) I thought we never would—

White: It didn't ever end, huh? (laughter)

Shorter: But after they went over in the Po Valley, I didn't get to be with them when they went through the Po Valley.

White: But you were in the forces of occupation.

Shorter: They walked right on through it, just like they did over yonder. Wasn't nothing to hold them back after they got in there.

White: Well, did you stay in the service through the end of the war?

Shorter: Till we come back from over there, back to Naples, the same place out there where we went to when we first landed, and stayed there about thirty days. When the war ended in Japan, they dropped the atomic bomb, while we was there. They was talking about sending us the other way, just down around like that into Japan. The war ended. The propeller was tore up on the boat we was coming back on. It was a big boat. There was probably twelve or fifteen thousand of us on the boat. Our division and a whole bunch of people on it. Big boat.

White: What division were you?

Shorter: Eighteen tons of food a day.

White: What division were you with?

Shorter: Ninety-first.

White: Ninety-first. Eighteen tons of food a day. That's a lot of food, isn't it? (phone rings) You were headed back to the States on the boat, then, huh?

Shorter: They had put us on the boat headed back to the States and then taken us ten days. We left out over there on the first day of September and got to—

White: What year was that?

Shorter: —Newport News on the tenth.

White: What year was that?

Shorter: Forty-five.

White: Forty-five.

Shorter: I forget how many days. Thirty-something days they was going to give us at home. When we got home, they sent us a letter, said, "Take fifteen more," or something. It wound up about forty-eight days, and then we had to go back to Camp Shelby. We got down there, and I stayed about three or four days, and they sent me to Camp Rucker, Alabama. We stayed down there till they was fixing to discharge us where I could come home, and they busted it up as a separation center about three days before I got my discharge. Had to send me to Fort Benning, Georgia, down—

White: Got moved again.

Shorter: Had to move again, to Fort Benning, Georgia. And of course, your records and everything has got to get there before they can discharge you. Finally got a discharge. I never will forget.

White: You were counting the minutes by then, weren't you?

Shorter: Yeah. On Sunday, it was on Sunday afternoon. They carried us down to this theater, this colonel, and give you a pep talk about how good it was to stay in service. (laughter) Well, everybody booed him. He said, "I don't give a damn if you do boo me. I got to tell you this, and you going to set here and listen at it." (laughter) We set there and listened at it, and oh, it lasted about probably twenty, twenty-five minutes.

White: Did some of them re-up? Did they reenlist?

Shorter: Boy in my outfit from Arkansas, he upped. He was younger than I was, and he reenlisted for another term. But there wasn't too many of them at the time. You could come home and still reenlist. They give you—I believe it was—three hundred dollars or something like that to reenlist.

White: Reenlistment bonus, huh?

Shorter: And now they give you a thousand dollars to reenlist.

White: Well, when were you discharged? What was the date of your discharge?

Shorter: You know, I can't remember that. It's in December, though.

White: Yeah. But you finally made it out there, then.

Shorter: And old boy from Texas, his wife had come across in a car; had a [19]39 Chevrolet car. And I asked him; I said, "Are you going back through Jackson, Mississippi." And he said, "Yeah." I said, "Well, can I ride to Jackson with you?" And he said, "Yeah, but ain't nobody but me and my wife." And rode back to Jackson with him and caught the bus from Jackson back down here.

White: What bus was it? It wasn't Continental Trailways then, was it?

Shorter: Trailways was it.

White: It was Trailways?

Shorter: Yeah.

White: Well, you got some medals, I understand, when you were overseas.

Shorter: Well, I got the Purple Heart when I got wounded. I got the Purple Heart.

White: And what was it like to get home?

Shorter: Make you want to get down and kiss the ground. (laughter)

White: I bet it did. I bet it did.

Shorter: Especially when it was so many times you didn't ever think you going to ever come back home. Yeah, it's hard to believe you'd ever make it back. Well, that night I got hit, I done shut my eyes and said my prayer because I didn't think I was ever going to get out of there.

White: Well, a lot of folks didn't, you know?

Shorter: (Inaudible)

White: They sure didn't.

Shorter: I had a lots of buddies that—

White: A number of people around this area didn't make it back. You remember any of them who died overseas and didn't make it back?

Shorter: Oh, yeah. I had a good buddy from Meridian, and I met him. Well, he lived up in Lauderdale, just above Meridian. I had met him in Fort Meade, Maryland. He jumped off the bus to help a lady off the bus, camp bus. Somebody said something about Southern hospitality. "Yeah, I'm from Meridian, Mississippi." I says, "Well, I'm from over south of Jackson." And we got to talking. We went to Washington, DC, together that night. We could go anywhere we wanted to as long as we were

there, weren't under alert. And he had my home address; I had his home address. (Inaudible) I mailed him a letter, and it come back, deceased. And some of my buddies that went to the front lines got killed the first day, you know?

White: Yeah. Well, who are some of the people you remember growing up with around here that made an impression on you? Was there anybody over at Harrisville School other than the teachers that you've kind of been lifelong friends with?

Shorter: Well—

White: Or just too many of them to name?

Shorter: Well, yeah. Oscar Seiebers(?), run the (inaudible); he was a merchant. He was a good man. Well, Peck Harris(?), he was supervisor; his last few years, he was supervisor. T.N. Neely(?), he was curious, but if he liked you, he liked you. And Millard Neely(?), he had a store out at Braxton. And I could have borrowed any amount of money I wanted to from him. I mean, he just trusted me that much.

White: If you had been a borrowing man, you would have, huh? (laughter) Well, I do thank you for talking with us. Is there anything else you can think of you'd like to mention on this tape while we're interviewing you?

Shorter: No. That's about all, I guess. I probably think of plenty things after you leave. (laughter)

White: Well, thank you very much. I do appreciate it.

(end of interview)