

Mississippi Oral History Program

Simpson County Historical and Genealogical
Oral History Project

An Oral History

with

James J. Smith

Interviewer: Joe White

Volume 1217, Part 27
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Biography

James J. Smith was to Rosie Washington and William Smith born in Natchez, MS in February 1907. Smith had one brother and one sister. Smith moved to Simpson County at the age of nineteen. He worked for the Finkbine Lumber Company until it closed in early 1928. There he handled lumber, transporting it, separating it, and stacking it. Smith married Lena Hays in October 1927 and together they lived in Mendenhall. James and Lena had ten children, six girls and four boys. After the Finkbine Lumber Co. shut down, Smith was unemployed for a couple of years until finding work for the railroad industry, where he would work for the next thirty-five years. Smith started out as a shovel man and eventually moved up to being a supervisor. He worked primarily in Mendenhall, but also worked in Laurel for a brief period. During the early 1940s Smith worked for the highway department, helping to build the road from Prentiss to Mendenhall. He retired from the railroad industry in 1972.

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AN ORAL HISTORY
with
JAMES J. SMITH

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

White: Today is Saturday, June 28, 2003. This interview is conducted under a grant from the Mississippi Humanities Council as a part of the oral history project directed by The University of Southern Mississippi. Today we're interviewing Mr. James Smith at his home in Mendenhall, Mississippi. Mr. Smith, what's your full name, please, sir?

Smith: James J. Smith.

White: J. Smith?

Smith: James J. Smith.

White: Does the J stand for anything?

Smith: Jim. Everybody called me Jim for years and years and years.

White: Is that right?

Smith: And when I left Natchez and came to Simpson County, a man by the name of Old Man B. King(?)—did you ever know him?

White: I remember reading about him. He wrote newspaper columns (inaudible).

Smith: He was a lawyer. And I dealt with him for quite a while. And he said, "I tell you what we're going to do. Everybody calling here, want to know where is Jim Smith. Let's put that James J. and say we're having (inaudible)."

White: James J.

Smith: And from then on, when the own thing come on it, years ago, when they was making too much cotton, had us to plow up some cotton, and the man got my check. The government paying for us and plow up so much.

White: Plow under the cotton, I think is what they called it.

Smith: Got so many acres of it up here, and so when the checks come, this man took my check because his name was James Smith, and mine was James Smith, but he

didn't think about having that J in there. When the check come out, Old Man B. King said, "Don't worry. I'll get it. I'll get it. Don't worry about it." So the county agent—I can't think of that county agent. What is his name? (Inaudible) the county agent. He come around with a gang (inaudible), said, "James, did you get a check from the government for plowing?" (Inaudible) said, "No. I sure didn't." Say, "Well, there's a check in here for a man by the name of James J. Smith." I said, "Well, that's who it is." (laughter)

White: Wanted to make sure you got what was coming to you (inaudible) then, huh? You were born in Natchez, I believe you said.

Smith: Oh, yeah. Yeah. Right in the heart of Natchez.

White: When were you born?

Smith: Nineteen seven, February 23.

White: February 23, 1907.

Smith: Um-hm.

White: What were your parents' names?

Smith: My mother was named Rosie Washington.

White: Rosie Washington.

Smith: My daddy named William Smith. (Inaudible).

White: William Smith. Were they both from Natchez, originally?

Smith: Yeah, both of them from Natchez.

White: And you were born downtown, huh?

Smith: Right in the middle of town, near about. You ever been to Natchez?

White: I sure have.

Smith: Well, you know where Main Street (inaudible) big city clock at?

White: Yes, uh-huh.

Smith: Well, right in Main Street, you go the next street, is Pine Street. And Pine Street had a alley on it by the name of Metcalf Alley, and I was up there in that alley.

White: Is that right?

Smith: Right there, (laughter) heart of town.

White: Well, you were downtown.

Smith: Yeah, right there in town.

White: What did your father do?

Smith: He was a distributor for the Coca-Cola people, back in the years when they didn't have no trucks. (Inaudible) carry wagons, mule wagons.

White: Well, that was the first few years of Coca-Cola, then. Wasn't it?

Smith: It was way back—

White: I'd say it would have to be.

Smith: —yonder.

White: Oh, that's right. Vicksburg, I think, was one of the first places that they bottled Coca-Cola.

Smith: I didn't never know where it come from. But I can't give you nothing on my daddy because my daddy was delivering them Coca-Colas on that wagon, and he come up missing, and we haven't been able to hear from him from that day. And that was way back yonder in, that was either in [19]10 or [19]11.

White: You were just three or four years old then.

Smith: Yeah. I can't give you nothing on him. And we never was able to find him. He come up missing.

White: Did you have brothers and sisters?

Smith: They all gone. One brother and one sister.

White: What were their names?

Smith: My brother was named after his daddy, William Smith.

White: He was older than you?

Smith: Oh, yeah. He was the first child. And my sister was named after Mother, Rosie, Rosie Lucille(?).

White: Did your mother work?

Smith: Oh, yeah. She was a maid until after a factory opened up there in Natchez by the name of broom, making broom, kitchen broom, like you see (inaudible).

White: Right.

Smith: And she changed jobs, went to that broom factory.

White: What was it like, growing up in Natchez then?

Smith: What was what?

White: Did you grow up there?

Smith: Yeah. I grew up in Natchez until I got to nineteen. I came to this country at nineteen.

White: Well, what got you over here to Mendenhall?

Smith: Things got tough. Well, I was living with my grandmother at the time, and she (inaudible).

White: What was her name?

Smith: Her name was Lucy.

White: Was that your mother's mother?

Smith: Mother's mother. That was my mother's mother, and her husband was named William Washington, and he worked for some people there in Natchez by the name of Augen(?).

White: Augen?

Smith: Augen.

White: You know how to spell that?

Smith: How you spell that Augen, hon?

Unknown Voice: Augen?

White: Was that Augen? Was that what it was? I'm just trying to hear what name it is. Augen?

Smith: Augen.

White: Augen, OK, Augen. Like I say, I'm a little bit hard of hearing, and I didn't pick up the name there. Well, you remember some Natchez history then, don't you?

Smith: Oh, yeah. I (inaudible).

White: But we're talking about Simpson County history today, so I guess we better get you on over into Simpson County. You were eighteen, nineteen years old—

Smith: Nineteen years old I came to Simpson County.

White: You came over here because times got tough, and your grandmother had died, you said.

Smith: She died. After Grandmother died, my mother had done married another man, and she moved from Natchez to Ora.

White: Ora, yes.

Smith: Uh-huh. Then when Ora Sawmill cut out, he moved to D'Lo.

White: What was his name?

Smith: He was a sawmill man. F.W. Reed(?).

White: F.W. Reed?

Smith: Um-hm. He was a preacher. And so he started to working there at that sawmill, and when it got tough down in Natchez, my brother came over here and found out me and him, both, could get a job. So he come back to Natchez and told me what was going on.

White: That's when Finkbine Lumber Company—

Smith: Was running.

White: —was at D'Lo. Right? Is that who you worked for.

Smith: Uh-huh, Finkbine Lumber Company. I worked at Finkbine Lumber Company till it cut out, from 1927. Well, I worked part of [19]27 and part of [19]28, and it cut out.

White: And that was some tough times to not have a job, wasn't it, 1928? That was right at the first of the Depression, wasn't it?

Smith: Man, that was beginning. And [19]28, Finkbine Sawmill cut out. They turned us all loose.

White: What were you doing?

Smith: Handling lumber from the carriage. That lumber come down a roadbed. We went out, and we had to put it in different places where they go into the kiln, separate that lumber and put it—

White: Separate it and stack it up and (inaudible).

Smith: And stack it on it, and it went into a kiln to be dried.

White: Would it have to be stacked just so, leaving air between—

Smith: Oh, it had a stick between it.

White: A stick between it?

Smith: Yeah, just like you see these over here?

White: Just a small, little, small, little—

Smith: Little, old, small stick, look like about half inch.

White: Was it cut lumber, or was it just little scraps of lumber?

Smith: Oh, no. It was cut for that purpose.

White: They knew exactly how big to make it and everything, then, huh?

Smith: Half a inch, and they'd run anywhere from six to eight, because that stack was about eight feet, anywhere from eight to ten feet.

White: Well, how big was the lumber that you stacked up?

Smith: It run from a inch to two inches.

White: It was one-by-sixes, two-by-sixes?

Smith: Stretched out, it was one-by-four.

White: One-by-four?

Smith: It went on to one-by-six. One-by-six, one—well, it went on to one-by-twelve.

White: Just depending on what y'all were processing right then.

Smith: (Inaudible) what type of logs you had that get your lumber out of.

White: What time did you start to work every day?

Smith: We started at 6:20 every morning.

White: Six, twenty?

Smith: Six, twenty. And where that come in at, 6:20, we could get off at twelve noon on a Saturday, at one o'clock on a Saturday.

White: Didn't have to work all day, Saturday.

Smith: Didn't have to work after one o'clock on Saturday. Worked five days up until one o'clock on Saturday.

White: How much money did you make a week? Do you remember?

Smith: We was making fifteen cents, and we was working ten hours.

White: Ten hours a day, fifteen cents an hour.

Smith: Um-hm.

White: They didn't pay overtime back then, either, did they? (laughter)

Smith: No, no! Wasn't no such thing as overtime.

White: There wasn't a lot of income tax either, though, was there?

Smith: Wasn't no income tax at all. No, sure wasn't.

White: Well, what was a jitney, the Finkbine jitney?

Smith: Jitney? What was (inaudible) jitney?

White: Wasn't it run by a jitney, a steam engine or something like that over there?

Smith: No.

White: The sawmill?

Smith: The sawmill had its own power, steam; run by steam.

White: That's what I'm talking about. I've just heard several folks refer to that steam engine as a jitney. You never did hear it called that?

Smith: Unh-uh. I hadn't ever heard of that jitney.

White: They had electric, too. How many people worked over there?

Smith: Oh, man, I don't know. Way on up in the hundreds because it had so many different parts. It had the sawmill and the planer mill and loading lumber, sheds where they load the lumber out on the train. See, that lumber went out, at that time, on trains. You didn't have no trucks, so (inaudible) train—

White: The railroad truck was right there by, huh? How did they get the lumber in there? Did they bring it in on trucks or wagons?

Smith: No. That lumber was transferred from the dry kiln to a machine where the machine manufactured it. If it was beaded lumber—I (inaudible) see, show you. But like that's a planed piece there. But you could take that same piece right there and put a groove in it.

White: A little groove down the side of it.

Smith: Down the side of it.

White: Beaded lumber, yeah.

Smith: And they could put a bead on top of it, to dress it, you know?

White: Right. I remember that. They're making some of this modern paneling that looks like that (inaudible), too.

Smith: Look like, look just like that. That's the reason why you see this here?

White: Right. The grooves in the paneling.

Smith: I bought that when I built this house. When I wanted to remodel this house, I bought that panel because it is designed what I used to do.

White: Is that right?

Smith: What I used to have. That's how come I got it.

White: Kind of reminded you of that lumber, huh?

Smith: Yeah, remind me of that lumber.

White: Where did you live then? You live in D'Lo?

Smith: No. I never did live in (inaudible). I lived in Mendenhall. My daddy and them bought a place down here and built him a house, and I lived with them till I got married.

White: Where was that? Where was the house? Was it somewhere close to here?

Smith: Over there on Main Street, over there on Dixie Avenue.

White: On Dixie Avenue. I had forgotten that was the name of that street that runs (inaudible) close to the house (inaudible).

Smith: That was where it was, Dixie Avenue, still Dixie.

White: Said you lived there until you got married. When did you get married?

Smith: Nineteen twenty-seven.

White: Nineteen twenty-seven.

Smith: October the twenty-fifth.

White: October 25. Well, you got a better memory than I have. My wife says I can't ever remember our anniversary. What was your wife's name before you married.

Smith: She was Lena Hays.

White: Lena Hays. Was she from here in Mendenhall?

Smith: Yeah. Well, she from Mendenhall, but she lived out in the country. Her daddy lived on the Martinville(?) Road.

White: Between Mendenhall and Martinville.

Smith: Uh-huh.

White: What were her parents' names? You remember?

Smith: Barry Hays and Jalion(?) Hays.

White: Barry Hays and Caroline Hays?

Smith: Her daddy was named Barry Hays, and her mama was named Jalion Hays.

White: Did they have other children? She have brothers and sisters?

Smith: Oh, yeah. Did my wife have them?

White: Right.

Smith: Yeah, it was—how many of them girls were there? My wife and Marie and Irene is three. Rosie, four. It was four sisters and five brothers.

White: No wonder you have trouble remembering, four sisters and five brothers. (laughter) You remember some of the brothers' names?

Smith: Yeah. The oldest brother was named Jim, and the second brother was named Lindsey Washington Hays, and the third brother was named John. L. Hays. The fourth brother was named F.M. Hays, F for Frank. We give initial for Frank. His full name was Frank Washington Hays. But all them boys is gone now, but one.

White: All of them but one.

Smith: All of them but one.

White: When you and your wife married, you lived in Mendenhall here. Where'd you move?

Smith: Yeah, we lived in Mendenhall. We got married in October, sixteenth day of October of 1927.

White: Did you rent a house?

Smith: Yeah. We rented.

White: Where was it?

Smith: On Dixie Avenue.

White: On Dixie Avenue. What did you pay a month in rent?

Smith: A dollar and a half.

White: A dollar and a half? (laughter) Who owned the house?

Smith: Somebody, the neighbors right there side of me. He was—I'm trying to think now what that man name. Davis, Theo Davis.

White: What was his first name?

Smith: Theo.

White: Theo Davis?

Smith: It was Theo Davis.

White: Well, we getting some real history of Mendenhall, here, with some folks that I didn't know. You got a good memory. You know that? (laughter) I can't remember who my neighbor is now, half the time. (laughter) I know you and your wife had at least one daughter because one of them's sitting across from me right here. (laughter)

Smith: We had six little girls.

White: Six girls.

Smith: Six girls and four boys.

White: Six girls and four boys.

Smith: And we lost two our boys. One of them grewed up and finished school here and went into the Navy; finished his time in the [Navy], (inaudible) twenty years in the Navy. Come out of the Navy and going to make his home in California. Bought him a motorcycle; went up on the mountains and went around one of them curves, and a man come into him with a old (inaudible) truck. Just burned him up.

White: What was your son's name?

Smith: James, he was named after me.

White: Named after you. When did that happen? When did the accident happen?

Smith: That happened back, nineteen and what?

Daughter: Seventy-seven.

White: Nineteen seventy-seven?

Smith: Yeah. That's right. That was January 1. I was trying to (inaudible) it was 1977.

White: Well, what were the names of all of your children, now? Want to start with the girls or the boys?

Smith: Start with the girls, (inaudible). (laughter)

White: We're going to put you on the spot, here.

Smith: The first girl was named Carrie(?).

White: OK, Carrie.

Smith: That was the first girl, named Carrie. The second girl was named Ruth.

White: Ruth.

Smith: And the third girl was named Rachel.

White: Rachel, and that's the lady who's sitting across, right at the table here now.

Smith: That's (inaudible). And the fourth girl was named Melinda. The fifth girl was named Dorothy.

White: Dorothy.

Smith: And the sixth girl was named Edith.

White: Edith.

Smith: That's all of them.

White: OK. And the boys now.

Smith: Boys named James Jr. And the next boy was named Samuel. And the next boy was named John Frederick(?), and the fourth boy was named Frank Jr.

White: Do any of them live right around here now?

Smith: All of them gone, nothing but one.

White: All gone but one.

Smith: No. Two of my boys, Sammy and John, both of them in California.

White: They found the opportunities a little bit better in California.

Smith: Yeah.

White: Is that how they got out there?

Smith: One of them is a conductor on the railroad, Pacific Railroad, and the other one is a principal at one of them schools in California.

White: Well, that's good. I believe you had a connection with the railroad before you retired, didn't you?

Smith: Oh, thirty-five years. (laughter)

White: Thirty-five years.

Smith: Worked thirty-five years.

White: Your career didn't end when Finkbine Lumber Company closed down, then, huh? What did you do (inaudible)?

Smith: I started from a shovel man to a supervisor.

White: I meant right after Finkbine Lumber Company closed down. Were you able to find work pretty soon?

Smith: No. I didn't find work pretty soon.

White: Twenty-eight, twenty-nine, something—

Smith: I worked (inaudible) for people on their farm, day work, for maybe six or eight months before I got a chance to get—and when I did get a job, I got a job on the railroad, and they was paying ten cents an hour, ten hours a day.

White: Well, you took a nickel a hour less than you were making over at Finkbine, then, didn't you? (laughter)

Smith: Had to. Wasn't much going (laughter) on. Had to.

White: You were glad to get it, though, wasn't you?

Smith: I was glad to get that. One of such a good thing about it, they paid off twice a month. One half had thirteen days, and one half had fourteen days in it. And that fourteen-day half, that one dollar looked like a (inaudible). (laughter)

White: Made a lot of difference, didn't it?

Smith: Whole lot of difference. Sure did.

White: Well, I'm sure your salary increased a little bit, but that dollar would still made a lot of difference after you had ten children, I'm sure.

Smith: Yeah, what you talking? Yeah, Lord. (laughter)

White: What did you start off doing for the railroad? What was your first job with them?

Smith: First job was to shovel grass in the track, cutting that grass between the ties and the rails so that rail was sitting up and clear, wasn't no weeds or dirt growing up beside it. (Inaudible) rail all the time.

White: Well, that probably was to help prevent fires as much as anything else, wasn't it?

Smith: Oh, yeah?

White: What caused some of the grass fires? I remember they used to have them up and down the railroad track.

Smith: Grass fire? The grass fire would come from that, sometime the coal fall out the engine because they were coal engines. And that fireman opened that firebox, sometimes the coal—

White: Shoveling some more coal in there.

Smith: Putting more coal in, and when that engineer move his throttle up to get more power, that engine go to coughing, it pumped that coal out of there, out of the stacks.

White: Blow it out of the stacks, sparks.

Smith: Yeah. And that would cause fire. The engine go through lot of times and set the track afire, if it wasn't cleaned.

White: Well, I know you've probably seen a lot of changes in trains over the years, obviously, because they don't make coal trains anymore. What else was different about those early trains? They weren't as long as today's trains, were they?

Smith: Unh-uh.

White: About how many cars would they have on them?

Smith: Back in them days, if they were going to use a single engine, and wasn't going to double the engine, anywhere from twenty to thirty cars about as much as they put on there because he couldn't get over them hills with a load because they didn't run as many empties then as they do now. They pull a lot of empty cars now.

White: They'd just leave them on the side?

Smith: Leave them on the side and pick them up when they need them, you see.

White: What stretch of railroad did you work mostly when you first started?

Smith: I worked from, well, I did practically all my work in Mendenhall until (inaudible) got (inaudible), and we went from Mendenhall, my first move was to Pinola. I got bumped at Pinola. I came back and went to Laurel, and I stayed over in Laurel till my family, my wife was in (inaudible) and come back to Mendenhall.

White: Family was here, and you were in Laurel, right?

Smith: I was in Laurel; I was boarding in Laurel, coming home every weekend.

White: How much did you pay a week? I sound like I'm a money grubber, but I (inaudible). (laughter)

Smith: At that boarding house, it could run me somewhere around, must have been around about three dollars or four dollars a week, something like that.

White: That included the food and everything, too?

Smith: Um-hm, three and four dollars a week.

White: Did several of you board at the same place?

Smith: No. I got (inaudible). They wanted me to stay with the other boys, but I got a chance to become acquainted with some of the people, and I moved to them people because they would give me a better deal anyway.

White: Better food, too, probably.

Smith: Better food, better house, and everything, yeah.

White: Well, you eat in a family, you usually eat a little better than you do some places.

Smith: They wouldn't put out any plate, what they want you to have. They had the bowls on the table, and you get what you want.

White: Kind of like eating at home, then.

Smith: Man, yeah. That really just like eating at home. I gained some weight, too, while I was (inaudible). (laughter)

White: Did you? Well, how long did you travel back and forth from (inaudible)?

Smith: Oh, around a year or more. Sure did, before I got transferred back to Mendenhall. And when I got transferred back to Mendenhall, I never did have to go no further.

White: You just stayed here after that, then, huh?

Smith: Stayed here because I got promoted. When I got back to Mendenhall, I got promoted from one position to another one, from one position to another one and kept on till I got in a high position. I got to be supervisor.

White: That's good. And you decided to stay here then, huh?

Smith: I stayed here. (laughter) I built this house in 1942.

White: Just before the war. Well, it was the first year of the war.

Smith: I'm telling you, 1942, and wasn't but four rooms at that time. It's a big house, now. But anyway, when I first built this house, me and my wife, I worked on the railroad in the daytime, and she held a coal-oil lamp for me, working night till I got it, (inaudible) up these rooms and things.

White: How many children did you have by then?

Smith: Wasn't but two of them then.

White: Were you still living in that dollar-and-a-half place down there?

Smith: Yeah.

White: How big was that house?

Smith: Two rooms.

White: Two rooms.

Smith: A bedroom and a kitchen, dining room, all, everything together. (laughter) Wasn't nobody but me there and two children.

White: Yeah. But you built four rooms here, huh?

Smith: No. I moved to this house after I (inaudible), I come here.

White: When you were building this one—

Smith: I built four rooms here, um-hm.

White: What'd you do? Buy the lumber and the nails—

Smith: Yeah.

White: —as you got a little money together?

Smith: Yeah, I bought the lumber. At that time, way back in that time, the union— and I don' know whether you-all can remember the name John. L. Lewis?

White: Oh, yes. I remember that name.

Smith: Was over the union.

White: AFL-CIO [American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations].

Smith: AFL and the CIO. All right. John Edwards as the AF and L [American Federal of Labor].

White: Before they merged.

Smith: And so he asked for a raise for the employees, (inaudible) a year or better before they ever considered. And what the railroad did, the railroad knewed that this was going to be a long and a hard fight. They stockpiled coal to operate the train.

White: Oh, they stockpiled the coal so just in case y'all went on strike or something, they'd have (inaudible).

Smith: They'd have enough to take care of it. All right. That coal become it's getting low, and railroad company wasn't making no effort to give no satisfaction, and come to no agreement to give us a raise. So on over in the month of April—

White: Let's stop this tape right now and take a little break. I hate to do that. It's about to run out. And we'll start it again in just a minute. (End of digital file named tape one, side one. Beginning of digital file named tape one, side two.) We're talking about the early days of the strike when the railroad stockpiled the coal.

Smith: They stockpiling coal on the railroad. Well, when that coal begin to get low, then they got, the railroad company got interested in trying to get us to go back to work and pay more. Well, they come up then with agreement from ten cents a hour to \$3.36 an hour.

White: That's a pretty big jump.

Smith: That was a jump. And when they settled, they agreed on that, and when they settled it, and come payday, time for either the thirteen-day or the fourteen-day,

whichever one it was, but it was in April. And when I got my first check, from the back-time—

White: Retroactive.

Smith: —they paid us from the time they put it in strike until they settled it, and then when they sent the employees their payment out, they didn't put that check in with the main payroll. The back-time check was different from your main check.

White: Separate checks.

Smith: So I got two checks the same day, and I told my wife, I said, "Now, this money that we got for strike, I'm going to buy me some lumber and build me a house.

White: Well, that was good to have it right then, too, then, wasn't it?

Smith: And it was a little, old sawmill down here on the hill, going up the Sanatorium hill.

White: Between Mendenhall and Magee.

Smith: And Magee, a little, old sawmill down there right on the railroad, what we called Groundhog Mill.

White: Groundhog Mill. (laughter)

Smith: And that sawmill was cutting lumber. They wouldn't dress it or nothing (inaudible) rough log. It was rough lumber. So I went down there and bought me all my floor joists, my overhead joists, my two-by-fours for my studs and everything and brought it back to the house. I was living over there on Dixie. I brought it back and stacked that lumber in my backyard until that lumber dried out.

White: Oh, you cured it yourself, then, huh?

Smith: Cured it. I stacked it because I knew how, what to do with the lumber. And I let that lumber stay there from April of one year until May of the next year.

White: Do you remember what year it was?

Smith: Forty-two.

White: Forty-two.

Smith: Um-hm, forty-two. So I—

White: (Inaudible) while the war was going on, you were building a house then, weren't you?

Smith: Man, what you talking about? And it got down so low, I had to cut in there on it because I had myself lying there when I was getting ready to build my house, I went to Natchez. My brother was a carpenter. He had done left from over here, going back to Natchez. He was a contractor, and he was building a house. I went over there and told him, said, "Brother, I want you to come over home and build my house. Done got the lumber. Ain't nothing to do but just bring it up." And me and him both knowed carpentry work. I said, "If you frame it up, I'll take it from there. All I want you to do is frame it up." And I was still working on the railroad. All right. He agreed to come over, and he come over on a Sunday evening. We had passenger trains running then. I met that train, got him off the train, and came to my house. And that (inaudible) night we was sitting in there (inaudible). He said, "Brother, ain't nothing I want you to do but give me a (inaudible)." We had a (inaudible) about that big. Said, "You give me a plug of tobacco and a can of Prince Albert Tobacco. I'm going to smoke, and I'm going to chew." (laughter) And I said, "That won't be no problem." (laughter) So we got everything lined up for Monday morning, and I got up and went on (inaudible). We come over here that Monday morning, way before day, lined up, showing him where I wanted my house built on it. Wasn't nothing around here then but just timber, trees. Gravel road, wasn't no such thing as concrete. So I showed him where I wanted it, how far I wanted it back from the street (inaudible). And I had to go to work at seven o'clock. I didn't do nothing but come, go from here, back across the branch to my house and get my bucket with dinner in it. And my wife was (inaudible) enough to fix enough in that bucket for my breakfast and dinner because I stayed over here all the time, trying to show him where I wanted everything to go. All right. I got my bucket; went on to the (inaudible) route. And when I came back that evening off the railroad, brother had the foundation of the house done laid, and had the (inaudible) on it. He was putting the joists on it. Nobody but just him.

White: Fast worker, wasn't he? (laughter)

Smith: That boy was working. He was a worker. So he said, "Tomorrow when you come back, I'm going to try to have this thing floored, put a floor down." Then he went from there, putting the studs up. In a week's time, that's what I'm going to tell you; in a week's time from Monday morning to Saturday evening, he had this house framed up with the top on it, the roof on it, the windows in it, and wasn't nothing to do but come in and go to work. (laughter) And he (inaudible).

White: You must have bought him a lot of tobacco. (laughter)

Smith: I (inaudible) all the time. He never did run out of tobacco.

White: You made sure he didn't if he worked like that, didn't you? This is a different subject, and I don't mean to sidetrack you here, but they didn't attempt to draft you or anything during the war?

Smith: Oh, yeah. Yes, indeed, man. I'll come on up to that. I'll get to that. When we got that house framed up, and that Saturday evening he said, "I'm going to catch the train in the morning, now. I'm going back to Natchez." We had four trains, four passenger trains, going each way.

White: Four trains a day, each way.

Smith: Four going that way, and four going this way. You could catch one in the morning, or you could catch one at noon, or you could catch one this evening, or catch one at ten o'clock, whichever one you want to go. So he decided to go on back and leave it with me, and he went on back, and that next Monday morning, coming up, me and my wife decided. She said, "Now, when you come in this evening"—see, we had to work till five o'clock. We had to make ten hours a day. Said, "When you come in this evening, I'm going to have to be ready. We'll eat supper and go over there and work till time to go to bed, and then we'd get up and come back home."

White: And she'd hold that coal-oil lamp for you, huh?

Smith: Yeah, coal-oil lamp. So I did that till I got the house cut up in rooms. That room over there was (inaudible). We used to have a flue.

White: Stove flue?

Smith: Stove flue. Cook on this side and warm, heat on the other side, in the other room. And that was our living room, that room what you came through (inaudible).

White: Right.

Smith: And this room here was the dining room and the kitchen, all together, this room we sitting in, right here.

White: You used a wood stove to cook at and heat with, (inaudible).

Smith: That's right. So we got that (inaudible). And winter was approaching us. Winter was getting close by. Any way you look, you could look over at (inaudible), any room you go in, you could see the rafters in the room because we didn't have no ceiling.

White: It was going to be cold, too, wasn't it?

Smith: And my sister was living in New Orleans, and her and her husband came up here to visit us somewhere during the month, it must have been September or October.

I can't remember what month that was, but anyhow, they came up here and see. And my sister work at the Roosevelt Hotel, and my brother-in-law, he was a taxi driver for the City. All right. They come here. They stayed a whole week, and before they decided to go back, she said to me, said, "Brother, I'm going to give you enough money to go buy enough (inaudible) to overhead your bedroom and your kitchen and your living room.

White: That's pretty good family members, (inaudible). (laughter)

Smith: That's what she told me.

White: I need a couple of them. (laughter)

Smith: All right. I took that money and got my daddy to go. I was still working (inaudible). I had my daddy go and buy the lumber and bring it to the house and put it in the house. We didn't have but two children at the time. And the children could play all over. We wouldn't worry about it. (Inaudible)

White: What kind of vehicle did you have to haul the lumber? Did your dad have a truck or something, or did you have a truck?

Smith: No. I had a wagon, a mule wagon.

White: Mule wagon.

Smith: Hauled that stuff on it. When I first got the lumber—the second time I went to haul it, a man had a old Ford, Model truck, the old Ford truck, them old Model Ford truck, and we loaded that lumber on that truck and brought it and put it in his house.

White: Flat-bed Model-T?

Smith: That's what, a Model-T. So I got this house all cut up and overhead. She hold that light for me to nail it. Man, I put it up. And when it got real cold, I had enough fuel, cut off somewhere, saved from my house, building the house—

White: Scraps.

Smith: Scraps, to keep my house warm while me and her work, you see. And the children, they'd go to sleep. She'd make a pad for them to lay down. (laughter) Then when we'd get up, she'd tote one, and I'd (laughter) tote the other back.

White: Back to the other house.

Smith: The other house. Sure did.

White: It made for some long days, didn't it?

Smith: Man, them was some doings. And I kept that up. I never did stop. After I got this house built, I wanted to have something extra coming in. I got me some little, old jobs, mowing yards.

White: I remember you doing that.

Smith: Mowing the yard, and my daddy went and bought me a mule and a wagon, and I plowed a garden. When I come in in the evening, she'd have that mule hooked up to that wagon and ready to go.

White: How many hours did you have in your day? Thirty? (laughter)

Smith: Wasn't no such hours to it. You see, when I got (inaudible), when that strike was ended, they cut us from ten hours back to eight hours, and the sun was way up here when I got eight hours a day. (laughter) I had time to do a whole—sometime I'd plow two gardens in the evening for a dollar and a half a garden. If I plowed a big garden made three dollars, it was near about a farm. (laughter)

White: I bet it was.

Smith: Near about a farm. But I plowed a many a garden for a dollar and a half, and many of them for a dollar, and many of them for two dollars. Plowed, covered them off, and get them rows in shape to plant. Take that same mule to plow it, open that thing and plant my seed in it. Take that mule and cover them back up.

White: Well, how long did you have a mule? When did you finally get rid of the—

Smith: Mule and wagon?

White: Mule and wagon?

Smith: Oh, way on down. Way on down. I didn't get rid of that mule and wagon till, oh, way on up.

White: In the 1950s maybe?

Smith: Oh, man, longer than that. Can you remember when the strike was on here in Mendenhall, the civil rights movement?

White: Oh, that's up in [19]70s, 1978.

Smith: Well, John Perkins, you ever read of him?

White: Yes, I know him.

Smith: Well, John Perkins, I was, my children got up big enough, I had two of my boys on the—when I was working with it, going to plow a garden, come right down between where they parking, right behind McGuffey's(?) Drug Store down here, now. That used to be a parking lot for mule wagons.

White: Is that right?

Smith: In between the—

White: Between McGuffey's Drugstore and where the Coke—the library—

Smith: And Old Man Thames(?) had a farm, had a big enough place to put that parking lot in there, and then had a farm between that street and the next street. And he growed his garden and corn patch and things in there.

White: Right down in what's the middle of town now.

Smith: Middle of town, right there in the middle of town. And when he got the library in there, that's where Old Man Thames' barn, right there where that library, right now.

White: Well, his house is the one where city hall is now.

Smith: Where city hall at, right there, Old Man Thames (inaudible).

White: I believe they moved that house here from Old Westville. Somebody told me that years ago.

Smith: I don't know where it come from, but—

White: Well, that'd been way before your time that they moved that house. They moved it on wagons up here from Old Westville, I hear.

Smith: That's where, they tell me that's where the county seat used to be, out at Old Westville.

White: I think that's right.

Smith: That's what they tell me.

White: That was sometime around 1900, I think. (Inaudible)

Smith: And they say they moved the county seat up here on account of the railroad going through here, and there wasn't no railroad down there where they had it.

White: The railroad made a lot of changes in its days, didn't it?

Smith: Oh, it sure did, a lot of changes.

White: At some point during the middle of your work history—I don't know whether you did it after you retired from the railroad or what—you worked on the highway, too, on Highway 13, didn't you?

Smith: That's when the railroad—yes, I helped build the highway from Prentiss to Mendenhall, every culvert and bridges. It was two bridges on the road from Prentiss to Mendenhall. I know where every culvert and cow trail there is under that highway, going from here to Prentiss.

White: Well, what years was that? Was that after you retired from the railroad?

Smith: No. That was cut off.

White: When y'all were working—

Smith: They cut the employees down. Every year in September, the railroad cut forces. They said they paid taxes.

White: Oh, you didn't work all year, then, (inaudible).

Smith: No. Sometimes, if you had age enough, you could work, but if you didn't have age to go somewhere (inaudible), you couldn't work. You just had to take work, whatever come. You'd take whatever come.

White: And that's when you'd work for the highway department sometimes.

Smith: On the highway. I didn't put in but four or five months on that highway, but we built that highway from Prentiss to Mendenhall. Well, I didn't come all the way into Mendenhall. I stopped over here, just on this side of Rise(?) Creek.

White: Right. I know where that is.

Smith: In that flat. Put a (inaudible) in there where Old Man Fred Grantham lived. Them two brick houses over there, that's where I stopped at. And another contractor got it from there and come on into [Highway] 49.

White: That's not far out of Mendenhall, here, about a mile out on [Highway] 13, where y'all stopped, a mile and a half, something like that.

Smith: It's something like that (inaudible).

White: What kind of work did you do?

Smith: I worked with the culvert-building, building bridges and culverts. That bridge over on Rise Creek, we started off there, digging out the foundation for that bridge, and I never had seed nothing (inaudible). They got over them old gum trees, green, gum trees and drove them down in that hole to start with, anywhere from twenty to thirty feet tall and deep, drove them down in that hole and then put the foundation of that bridge on top of them.

White: That gave them foundation to pour the concrete in on?

Smith: Pour the concrete in there on it. If the bridge, if the earth would ever settle, that bridge would never give way. It'd be right there.

White: Those old trees are still driven in the ground, down under it (inaudible).

Smith: I don't know what happened because we didn't see them no more. But you know what, Mr. White? Back in them days, that's when you couldn't get a job. The people begging for jobs. And people were sitting, men were sitting out there on the bank. They could tell just as well when you was giving out as you could, yourself. You'd see them begin to get up, say, "Well, he going to be gone in the next few minutes." Get too hard, (inaudible), say, "I get his place."

White: Waiting on a job.

Smith: Waiting on a job.

White: What year was that? You remember?

Smith: That was in nineteen what? I'm trying to think what year was that?

White: Just roughly will do.

Smith: That was in [19]40.

White: In [19]40?

Smith: In [19]40, sure was, back in 1940. But anyway, when that man get too hot, you see him go to staggering, pulling off his gloves, (inaudible). You see the foreman go around and say, "Hey." (laughter) (Inaudible)

White: Signal somebody else to come in when that one got too tired to work, huh?

Smith: Yeah, Lord. But you know, and then when we got to building that bridge, I got my brother-in-law, two brothers on it. And I had the wheelbarrow a rolling in sand, and that gravel we brought, you had to put two loads of rock to one load of sand. And my brothers and brother-in-law, they got the job, but they didn't know how to pick it. They thought anything would do on them wheelbarrows, you know. They

grabbed one of them, grabbed a wheelbarrow, and they was making two trips to my one. So I see one of the boys was giving out. I say, "You fixing to lose your job." Said, "Boy, take my sand barrow, and I'll roll this gravel for you for a while." And he did that, and that's the only thing saved him. He didn't lose his job.

White: He had to know how to pace himself, huh?

Smith: That it. He didn't know how to pace himself.

White: Well, you obviously figured out how to pace yourself (inaudible) because you had a whole lot of jobs.

Smith: (Inaudible) I don't know where did I get that from, but I was always smart enough to watch, see what I'm going to do. I never jumped into nothing till I found out. And did you not know we'd roll around that stuff, was being rolled on a plank that the foreman built to put that concrete in that form, to build that wall for that bridge, you know? And we had a two-by-twelve for you to roll that wheelbarrow on, and that wheelbarrow, whenever it filled, you got to (inaudible) that foreman, (inaudible) that man would cock that wheel up.

White: Dump it over in (inaudible).

Smith: Dump it over in that form, you see.

White: Pretty hard to push that up that thing, wasn't it?

Smith: After you got used to it, it wasn't no problem.

White: Is that right?

Smith: Because when you went up and you give it a shake, right on with you.

White: Anybody ever fall off that plank?

Smith: A many a time. (laughter) Many a man never did learn how to roll on that plank.

White: You had to know just about how fast to get going to make it up there.

Smith: Up there. It was a pretty good elevation going up there. Sure was.

White: What year did you retire from the railroad?

Smith: Seventy-two.

White: Nineteen seventy-two.

Smith: Um-hm.

White: Now, tell me a little bit about—you mentioned some of what you've done since [19]72. You didn't really go to the house and set down, did you?

Smith: No. Since I got through—

White: Once you retired from the railroad.

Smith: I work harder since I got off the railroad than even when I worked on the railroad. (laughter)

White: I sort of suspected that. (laughter)

Smith: I had done already built myself up on cleaning yards and (inaudible). Had that already done built up, so I didn't have nothing to do but just go to it.

White: You just started doing it more, huh?

Smith: More. See, instead of doing it in the evening, I'd get up in the morning and go mow a yard or two. Then I had my little, old farm on the side. Me and my wife had them little, old three acres of cotton, little corn patch.

White: Did you raise a lot of food to cook and eat at home?

Smith: I raised it all. I had two good milk cows, and back in them days, you could have hogs in your backyard, and chickens, milk cows. I trailed my cows from here to where you see that schoolhouse built over there. That used to be my pasture.

White: The junior high school here, now?

Smith: Right there where you see the high school. I trailed them from, right from this yard here, carried them up there, that street, every morning, and go up there every evening and bring them back. They stayed here in my yard, backyard, every evening, every night. Get up and milk them, evening and morning and carry them back to they pasture in the daytime.

White: Did you ever make butter, or anything like that?

Smith: Man, what you talking about? (laughter) My wife churned. She churned every day, and she'd get anywhere from a pound, to two pounds of butter a day, and she sold milk and butter, helped me to buy feed for the cows and what she need in the kitchen. Them cows taken care of it.

White: What did that butter taste like?

Smith: Oh, man. We don't have nothing now. (laughter) We ain't got *nothing* now.

White: Well, you bound to had buttermilk, too, didn't you?

Smith: Man, that butter, I had that—at the beginning of it, I didn't have no refrigerator.

White: Uh-huh. Go ahead.

Smith: So we had a old man. I don't know if you ever knowed him or not, a man by the name of (inaudible), run a store down on Main Street. I'm trying to think of that man's name.

White: Mr. Bowen(?)?

Smith: No. I'm talking about the man that had, come in with the first refrigerators.

White: Oh.

Smith: And the first refrigerator that I bought wasn't electric. It was ice—

White: Icebox, huh?

Smith: Keep it cold with a piece of ice, and that's the reason why I asked you did you know Sullivan(?). He used to put ice in my refrigerator for me.

White: Yeah, and Mr. French ran the ice place.

Smith: He run the icehouse. He'd go down every morning. (Inaudible) would get the ice every morning, and he'd go around, and he knew what refrigerators to put the ice in. And people would tell him how much to bring every morning. And had a big, old thing up on top of that refrigerator that they set that ice in, and then covered it over, and that coolness would come down into where your stuff was (inaudible).

White: Did you have to empty the pan fairly often underneath it? You remember that pan that used to go up under the icebox?

Smith: To catch that water?

White: Yeah.

Smith: And my wife knowed just how long to let that pan set under there before she empty water out of it.

White: Well, it made a difference having some place to put that milk and everything.

Smith: So I'm trying to think that man that come in with the electric refrigerator. And I got a piece out yonder on the back porch, now, that I bought in 1950, my deep freeze. I bought a deep freeze from (inaudible), a electric deep freeze in 1950, to put my first garden in that deep freeze for 1950. And it's out there now, full, right now.

White: You're still using the same deep freeze, then, huh?

Smith: Same deep freeze.

White: Well, no wonder you're trying to remember that man's name. You're trying to find another good deep freeze, then, aren't you?

Smith: I try. I try to stay up with the names. (Inaudible), but his son, he had one girl, and his son married the girl, and they stayed on that street, go up from the filling station there.

White: Where was his store? Maybe I'll be able to—

Smith: His store was right there where—I'm trying to think now where that—it was right in (inaudible). What's in that space in there? It's right there on Main Street where the barber shop and Old Man Coats(?) run that—

White: Right by the old Coke building.

Smith: —red brick building. Well, the second building and the third building.

White: I know the building you're talking about, but I—

Smith: Yeah, right in there. Who was in that building?

White: I can't think of who used to be in there. That's a little before my time.

Smith: Anyway, he the one that come up with the electric refrigerator. And I got rid of that ice refrigerator and got me a electric refrigerator, and at the same time I got me a refrigerator and a deep freeze.

White: You were uptown, then, weren't you?

Smith: Electric deep freeze.

White: Did you raise a garden every year?

Smith: Man, yeah, all the year and all the winter. Any time of year you come, you could get vegetables here. In the wintertime I had collards, mustards, and turnips, and onions. And in the summertime, I had butterbeans, peas, okra, squash, tomatoes, and

all that kind of stuff. Anything you need. And I had a little, old patch up here, Dixie corn patch. I had my peanuts. I had my sweet potatoes. (laughter) I raised peanuts and boiled them. My wife bagged them peanuts up, and I'd sell them.

White: Well, your wife's bound to have been a good cook, too. Did she do the—

Smith: Oh, man!

White: She do most of the cooking, or you?

Smith: She did all the cooking. I never had time for no cooking. She can make biscuits that melt in your mouth. Man, (laughter) she could cook them biscuits and take a knife and split it open and put a piece of that butter in it. And don't say nothing because you eating. (laughter)

White: What kind of syrup did you like?

Smith: That old, good cane syrup. Made it, homemade syrup.

White: I somehow thought you might like that. You didn't make any of it, yourself?

Smith: Made a many, many gallons, myself.

White: Did you?

Smith: Yeah. Well, we had the cane mill. Original cane came through the mill, and they'd make it for me. And we started off with, we put them in half-a-gallon buckets and gallon buckets. And in the spring of the year, until the sugar cane got made, we grewed what you called sorghum.

White: Sorghum.

Smith: And we made sorghum syrup. (laughter) It tickles me every time I think about that. We had a friend of mine lived here, and he had a bunch of children just like I did. And so the daddy and the mama, the daddy was a preacher, and the mama, she was a maid somewhere, some of these houses here.

White: Let me stop this tape just a minute, and we'll change it. I want to hear this story. (End of digital file named tape one, side two. Beginning of digital file named tape two, side one.)

Smith: —family just like I did. Well, the daddy was a preacher, and the mother, she was a maid somewhere. But anyhow, one of the girls was old enough to take care of the family while the parents go out and work. All right. This girl got up and fixed some breakfast that morning, and back in them days, you fixed your breakfast. You didn't get often a bowl what you want. You fixed your plate like what they want you

to have. So two boys, there was two boys at that time, was older. So one of the boys—one of the girls was named Marie Levy(?), and she was fixing this boy a plate. And his name was named James Levy(?). So she put his bread on the table or biscuit, whichever. But they was eating syrup, biscuit, and butter for breakfast, glass or milk or something like that. So when she got to this boy's plate, she put his bread on the plate, and she got the cup over there and put his syrup in. And so she went to pouring (inaudible), the boy said to her, said, "Marie, that's enough of that syrup. That stuff hard to eat." (laughter)

White: Hard to eat, huh?

Smith: That syrup?

White: Yeah.

Smith: After you make that syrup in the last of June, first of July, by September, it done got strong, then. (laughter) Then October, it'll blow the top off of that bucket. (laughter) Man, I mean. And if you had it in a jug, they didn't have no cork stoppers. We'd go out there and get a corn cob, shell that corn off of that cob, and cut that cob off of there, and put it down in that jug. And you'd hear that stuff. It said, "Boom!" (laughter) It done (inaudible). It's going up. And you pour that syrup out and boil that for a *long* time, boil that acid goop done blowed off of it. But it was *hard* to eat. (laughter)

White: Pretty strong, huh?

Smith: Strong.

White: That Blackstrap Molasses was pretty strong, too.

Smith: That's right. But now, sugar cane didn't do that. Sugar cane went to sugar. When it got old, it went to sugar. It didn't do like sorghum syrup.

White: You were talking about, a while ago, you mentioned carrying that bucket that your wife would fix for you every day, carry on the railroad, sometimes breakfast and lunch, for two meals. What all did you put in it? What all did she put in that bucket?

Smith: Well, we ate (inaudible). I can remember, and I don't eat it today. You couldn't pay me to eat a piece of it. (laughter) You remember a man that lived over here that was a one-armed man by the name of May, Sam May(??)?

White: I remember that name.

Smith: May, he lived over there where the hospital at now.

White: Right.

Smith: Well, anyhow, he'd come through every Friday evening, selling goats. He'd kill goats and bring them down. He'd sell you a half a goat or a whole goat, but he be done dressed it. You wouldn't have nothing to do but just take the whole half or whatever you want to take. So my wife, she bought a quarter of a goat, and she fixed dinner for us that Sunday, and she had a pretty good piece of the goat left. Oh, for (inaudible). And so she put that piece that she had left in my bucket for my dinner for Monday. And I never will forget where it was at. On that road what goes out to the airport, between Sanatorium, was right there on that crossway, that road across the railroad. And the foreman called, said, "Let's stop and eat dinner. It's dinnertime." Oh, I went out there, big man, going to eat my goat. I'm so glad to have my goat. I told the boys, right at twenty of us out there. I told my boys, said, "Man, I got myself a dinner today. I got me, my wife put me a big piece of goat in there." "Give me a piece of it." "Give me a piece of it." Everybody wanted a piece of goat. So I eat mine, and I hadn't eat that goat, I reckon ten minutes, till I was sick as a dog. (laughter)

White: Oh, no. (laughter)

Smith: So instead of the foreman putting the car on the track and it bring me back to the doctor, I came home myself. He said, "The nearest way is go out to the highway." Come out there (inaudible) highway. I come out. It wasn't no highway like it is now.

White: It was a gravel road, probably, wasn't it?

Smith: So I come out there to that highway, and two white men—I never will forget it. They come along in an old Model car. I don't know what kind of car it was. I flagged them down. They said, "What's your problem?" I said, "I'm so sick. I'm trying to get to Mendenhall to get to a doctor." They said, "Do you know where the doctor is?" Said, "Yeah. I know exactly where he is if I can ever get there." He said, "Well, get up here. We'll make room and carry you to the doctor." I never will forget them people. So them two men brought me here, and they carried me to Dr. Giles(?). You might remember that name.

White: I knew of Dr. Giles, yeah. He came up here from Pinola.

Smith: I don't know where he come from. But anyway, they carried me in, and they said, "Doctor, this is a man that we picked up on the highway, and he is sick." The doctor look. He said, "I know that boy. James, what's the matter with you?" I said, "Doctor, I eat some goat meat." (Inaudible) (laughter) So he went to doctoring. What had happened: I don't know whether she kept it cold overnight, or what happened, but it had done got ptomaine. That what made me so sick.

White: Well, did it make any of the rest of them sick out there?

Smith: I don't know about them because I come on in.

White: You were home, sick, huh?

Smith: Home sick. I didn't go back to work in a week. That stuff kept me out, off of the job a week.

White: And you say you still remember it and won't eat goat meat?

Smith: I won't eat a piece of goat meat. I wouldn't eat a piece of goat meat now for nothing. And that been way back then, back yonder in the [19]60s. I wouldn't eat a piece of goat.

White: I remember hearing him selling those. I like barbecued goat, but that's the only way I've ever—

Smith: I don't eat deer meat. I tasted it, but I don't eat it. I treat that deer like that goat. (laughter)

White: Afraid it's a little bit wild, huh?

Smith: Yeah, (inaudible).

White: What's the best kind of dessert that your wife made? Did she ever fix a cake or pies?

Smith: Oh, that was her hobby. Man, she cooked some of the best cakes you could eat. And she trained all them girls how to cook them. (Inaudible)

White: What was your favorite kind of cake?

Smith: It's coconut.

White: I think that's mine.

Smith: Stacked coconut.

White: I think that's mine, too.

Smith: Yeah. You know how to stack it? Sometimes she'd stack it. Sometimes she'd just cover it over with icing and coconut. It was good, though. Sure was.

White: I bet it was. When did your wife die?

Smith: She been dead twelve years now. (Inaudible)

White: Twelve years.

Smith: She been dead already, twelve years.

White: What church do you belong to?

Smith: I belong to the Church of God in Christ, Mount Mariah Church of God in Christ.

White: You been going there a while?

Smith: Been there a while.

White: I say, you been going to that church a while?

Smith: Ever since I been in Mendenhall.

White: Is that right?

Smith: Um-hm. I joined that church in April of 1927, and been belonged to it ever since.

White: You remember who the pastor was when you joined?

Smith: Yeah. I (inaudible) him. Man by the name of F.W. Reed(?).

White: Elder Reed.

Smith: Elder Reed.

White: I remember Elder Reed.

Smith: Say you do?

White: I sure do.

Smith: Well, his wife was my mother. And he was the pastor, Pinola, D'Lo, Mendenhall, and Weathersby, and Magee.

White: He was a busy man. I remember—

Smith: Yeah, he was a busy man. He sure was.

White: His wife ran a beauty shop here, I believe. Didn't she?

Smith: You sure enough know her. She sure did. But this his second wife. That wasn't my mother. That's his second [wife].

White: You say that was your mother. She kind of helped raise you here, huh? You say his first wife was your mother?

Smith: Yes, sir. My first wife?

White: No. Elder Reed's first wife.

Smith: Yeah. His second wife. His first wife died, and he moved to D'Lo and married. Well, he married her before he moved to D'Lo, and he moved her down [Highway] 49, up to D'Lo, either at Ora or Collins, one of them places. It was a little, old town in between Collins and Sumrall. Is it between (inaudible)?

White: Right.

Smith: Right in there, by the name of Ora, big sawmill (inaudible).

White: I didn't know he was from down there.

Smith: Yeah. That's where he come from, down there. And he built right there on Dixie Avenue, sure did.

White: Well, he was your preacher a long time.

Smith: Yeah.

White: He was still minister here up till, what? Nineteen sixty, somewhere along in there.

Smith: Oh, he died in [19]62.

White: Sixty-two.

Smith: Yeah, he was minister there for years.

White: He's the (inaudible).

Smith: Since you know him, you ought to know a man, Louis Coleman(?)?

White: Louis Coleman.

Smith: Louis Coleman and Flo(?) Coleman?

White: Oh, yeah.

Smith: Alvin McAdore(?)?

White: Yes, uh-huh.

Smith: R.V. McAdore.

White: R.V., right. Elder Reed drove a green Chrysler Imperial.

Smith: You're just as right as you can be. (laughter)

White: I think that's the only Imperial I ever saw till I got way off and in college and everything. That car was about a city block long. (laughter) I do remember that.

Smith: I mean, it was old car, buddy. (laughter) He learned how to drive that old car. I drove it a many, many day, myself.

White: Is that right?

Smith: Sure did. I first driving an old T-Model. He come up with a T-Model, 1927 Model-T. He started off with a Roadster. You know they used to have a T-Model by the name of Roadster. Well, they went from a Roadster to a four-door.

White: Kind of an open car, a Roadster was.

Smith: No, he didn't get that. That Roadster was open door with a cut-off top. And when they come out with that metal-body, they made glasses in them.

White: Right. Windows would let up and down on those, wouldn't they?

Smith: Yeah.

White: What's the first car you owned? The first vehicle you owned?

Smith: T-Model. I driving me a T-Model just like my daddy, driving in that T-Model. And my family done started then. I had two children, Carrie(?) and James.

White: That's right about the time you built a house over here, then, wasn't it?

Smith: That's right. And we had that. I was downtown and met a man from down there at Bushtown. And I never did learn that man's name, but anyhow, he was in town right at the Ford place, where them Fords used have a shop there where the ten-cent store at now. It used to be a Ford place there. And that old man drove up there with that T-Model, and it was the (inaudible) Roadster you wanted to look at. And I said to him, said, "Mister, you wouldn't want to get rid of that car, would you?" He said, "Well, yeah, I'd get rid of it. I ain't got nothing. I ain't married to but one machine. That's the onliest one I'd get rid of." (laughter) "(Inaudible) get rid of it. I ain't married to that Roadster. Yeah, I'd let you have it." I said, "How much you

want for it?" Said, "I'll take fifty dollars for it." I said, "Oh, man, fifty dollars." I said, "Where you live at?" He said, "I live down at Bushtown." I hadn't ever heard tell of it (inaudible) name of a town right there, named Bushtown.

White: Oh, you hadn't heard of Bushtown then, huh?

Smith: Bushtown.

White: That's where some of my folks are from.

Smith: From Bushtown.

White: Out from Pinola.

Smith: So I said, "If I come down there, would you let me have it?" He said, "Yeah, I'll let you have it." That man carried that car down there, and he said he made a mistake, telling me that he would sell it. He put that car—back in them days they built a house for to put the cars in, you remember?

White: Shed, uh-huh.

Smith: Shed, a car shed. And he put that car in there and shut the door and locked the door. So I don't know who it was, but I got somebody to carry me down there. We got down there to the place where that man was. I think we blowed the horn, sitting there, because they had a fence around their house. See, if you go to a house with a fence around it, you better not go in there, because got some biting dogs in there. So went up there, hollered. So he come to the door, "Yeah, there he is. Boy, you done, you hunting that car?" I said, "Yes, sir. I sure is." He said, "I sure do hate to get rid of that car." Said, "I'll give you fifty dollars for that car," and drove it back to Mendenhall. But that was the sweetest, old car.

White: You get pretty good service out of it?

Smith: Man, what you talking about? I took that thing, and after I kept it so long, I tore all the top of it off and made a little truck out of it. Put a body back there where that trunk was, and built me a body on it and moved from Mendenhall out on the Martinville Road, went out there. And every time we got ready to come to church, instead of coming in my buggy and wagon, I'd come in my car. I was a big shot then, man, driving that car. (laughter)

White: It didn't have a starter on it, either, did it? Didn't you have to get out and crank it?

Smith: Get out there and crank it.

White: Did it ever kick back with you?

Smith: Man, yeah. You better know it; didn't, it'd break your arm. (laughter)

White: That's what I heard people tell.

Smith: Yeah. If you went to turn that turner down there—

White: Crank.

Smith: —and it locked, that crank. And it locked, you better not put power on it because when you got it halfway over, it's going to kick back.

White: Didn't you have to set a spark or something on it to get it to fire right? Was that one of those you had to set a little (inaudible)?

Smith: You had your sparkers. See, you had all your gas up here on your steering wheel. You had three things up there. You had reverse. You had your forward, and you had your choker, up here on this steering wheel. And if you choked it too much, it wouldn't crank. You had to wait and let that choke burn off, blow off before you—

White: Burn the gas off.

Smith: —got it cranked. Sure was.

White: Was it hard to crank in cold weather?

Smith: Oh, you know how they cranked it in cold weather?

White: No, I don't.

Smith: Jack up the back wheels.

White: That would keep the pressure off of it, huh?

Smith: Let that back wheel turn. If you had it down there where that back wheel couldn't turn, you had all the pressure on it. But if you jacked up that back wheel, that back wheel turn (inaudible). If you got that back wheel to turn over two or three times, it be easy to crank because the power from that wheel turning would turn that motor.

White: Help keep it going, huh?

Smith: Help keep it going.

White: I never heard of that. It makes sense, though.

Smith: Yeah, man! That was the easiest way. We wouldn't be no time cranking it, but cold weather, you have a hard time cranking when it was sure enough cold. You had to get some hot water and pour in that motor.

White: Well, I remember you driving a gold pickup truck when you were still cutting yards and (inaudible).

Smith: Oh, yeah.

White: You still got that pickup?

Smith: I got (inaudible) brown, but I—

White: Yeah, I think that's it, kind of a goldish brown.

Smith: What is this? This about the fourth one or fifth one, ain't it?

Unknown voice: Um-hm.

White: You still—

Smith: I started off with a Chevrolet, and from the Chevrolet to a GMC [General Motor Cars].

White: But you still got a pickup, huh?

Smith: Yeah. It's out there in the yard now.

White: You ever drive it?

Smith: Every day, not every day, but some days. (laughter) That's the only one I'm driving now. They done took my everything but that truck. (laughter)

White: Well, at least you not still having to get out there and crank a T-Model, though.

Smith: I get out there, and I go to town or go to the church and back. That's all.

White: That'd be tough if you had to get out there and jack that T-Model up and crank it (inaudible).

Smith: Man, what you talking about? Sure would.

White: Still going to the same church, and still going strong.

Smith: Same church, and the church been rebuilt three times.

White: Is that right?

Smith: Three times.

White: Who's the minister up there now?

Smith: What's his name?

Unknown voice: McLaurin(?).

Smith: McLaurin. (Inaudible) You ought to know him. He really from Magee, but he moved (inaudible).

White: I know who that is. And there are some McLaurins who've been living in Pinola for a long time, between Pinola and Magee, out toward—

Smith: He out there on that (inaudible).

White: Right, out on [Highway] 28. One other thing I was going to ask you about was the schools here. When you first came here, Harper School was (inaudible).

Smith: No. Harper wasn't here when we first—it was one school, just one room. Wasn't no two rooms. Was just one room. A man by the name of Buckhalter(?) from D'Lo.

White: Buckhalter?

Smith: Buckhalter, Buchanan(?). Which one is it Buchanan or Buckhalter? But anyhow, that was the first school.

White: That's before the Harper School.

Smith: All right. And his wife was named Rosie. She was a midwife. You know the women deliver babies? And she was a midwife, and he was a schoolteacher. He'd teach school, and one time when he had to teach school, and she'd go out at nights and deliver babies. Anyway, Old Man Buchanan, he got old, and he decided that he was going to give it up; he done got too old (inaudible) to teach. They had two brothers here. I don't know what them brothers was named. It's two brothers that were schoolteachers. Can you remember them?

White: I don't remember them.

Smith: I liked to called his name, but that name got away. But it was two brothers. But anyhow, they taught a couple of years, and one of them died, and the other one said, "I'm going to quit, too." So he went and got Old Man Harper from down in New

Hymn to agree to come to Mendenhall. So when Old Man Harper agreed to come to Mendenhall, then he decided after he got up here that he was going to enlarge it and make it, instead of being just a—he was going to make a high school.

White: Made a boarding school, too, didn't he? A boarding school, a high school.

Smith: Well, I was trying to get to that boarding. And he said [that] the only way it could get to be a boarding school, he had to get up enough of children. Wasn't enough of children coming here to make a boarding high school out here. So he built that (inaudible) building, when he got (inaudible) downtown. And he got the children coming in and took them in, and their parent's function was (inaudible). And so we got that building started, and he got the people to agree to send their children up there and made a boarding school out of it, and he got that school moved from a grammar school to a high school. And then—

White: You remember about what year that was?

Smith: I can't remember what year was that. I ain't thought about what year we started it. But anyhow I was working on the railroad, and the railroad had done agreed to give a week vacation to the employees. Everybody that had been working a year, they could get a week vacation. But I let that slip by me.

White: That must have been the early 1940s.

Smith: It bound to been the early [19]40s, late [19]39.

White: Because you were working for the railroad (inaudible).

Smith: Yeah. I'd done built up time enough to get my week vacation.

White: And Reverend John Perkins' wife, Ms. Vera Mae, had told me in a previous interview that she boarded up there and went to school. She lived out and grew up (inaudible).

Smith: Out in the—uh-huh. All right. Old Man Harper come, and he taught two or three years, and I got to be a trustee, one of the trustees. Back in them days they had trustees of the school, five men, trustees. So we had a man here by the name of John Rankin(?) was a preacher. Can you remember him?

White: No.

Smith: Stayed down here in the (inaudible) quarters. He was a preacher and also worked on the [sawmill]. So when Old Man Harper, come election time, Old Man Harper said—the election for the trustees. What was that? The month of April or the month of March, the trustees?

White: I don't remember.

Smith: You don't remember. Either the month of March or April. So they elected me for one of the trustees, and Old Man Rankin was the chairman of the trustee board.

White: You remember who the other trustees were?

Smith: Well, yeah. I can remember back. James Simmons(?), worked for Dan McInterry(?). You remember Dan McInterry?

White: That comes around (inaudible) place, I believe.

Smith: Yeah. James Simmons, myself, and Hugh Davis(?), and Sam Walker, down at Dry Ridge. Let me stop before we get to them because they didn't come in till (inaudible) it got to be high school. Local (inaudible) was local (inaudible) trustee (inaudible). James Simmons, John Henry Robertson, Hugh Davis, and man up here by the name of Gardner(?), stayed up at D'Lo.

White: We pulling on your memory strings, here, aren't we, now?

Smith: Yeah. (laughter) Gardner. All right.

White: L.C. Gardner, was that his name?

Smith: He wasn't L.C. Gardner. It was Old Man Gardner. (Inaudible)

White: That's all right. We can get back to that if you remember it, just tell us then.

Smith: So we come on the high school from the grammar school then and got Old Man Harper up here for the principal of the high school.

White: Go ahead.

Smith: Got him principal up here for the high school. And Old Man Gardner was Son. We called him Son Gardner. That's what we called him, Son Gardner.

White: Son Gardner. That's the same man as L.C.

Smith: Yeah.

White: He was known as Son.

Smith: All right, Son Gardner. Come uptown for election, teachers had to have a principal for the high school, and he said to us—well, Old Man Buchanan the one that recommend (inaudible) Harper from New Hymn up here. And Gardner said, "Now, man, if we get Old Man Harper up here, you talking about something. We have

something! That's the best school man in this country." So we got him to come up here. Well, after Old Man Harper—I'm cutting in now. After Old Man Harper health got bad, he resigned, and Ms. Harper was—what they call that at that time? She was the county (inaudible). She went out and went to all the schools.

White: I know what you're talking about, but I can't think of the title.

Smith: She had a special name. She was something of the schools. But anyhow, (inaudible) old man from (inaudible) was superintendent, and come election time, they elected a woman here by the name of Brown, from (inaudible), Mississippi, and she was county superintendent.

White: Effie Brown. Alma or Alfa Brown (inaudible).

Smith: She some kind of a Brown, but you know who I'm talking about.

White: Right.

Smith: Well, and that's where I made my mistake at, right there. Come up, Old Lady Brown wanted to build a school out there on [Highway] 13, on that big hill out there, going out [Highway] 13. And I kicked against it. I was one of the first (inaudible). Said, "No, ma'am. We ain't going to carry no school out there. Why we going to move out of town, going out there, with a school out there?" I didn't know nothing no better. If I'd have knowed what was now, that's where the school would have been (inaudible) being down here. We set up and set up and set up, and we got in here, and (inaudible). Y'all might remember him.

White: Right.

Smith: He got right in there with me and James Simmons and Son Gardner, and we going to build a school down here where it's at now.

White: Where the junior high is now.

Smith: That's where the junior high is now; just a grammar school. Well, what they did, Old Lady Brown and her bunch of men, cut out the grammar school and going to make one school out of it. Going to have all the country schools come into Mendenhall, and when they did that, we had to get somewhere for the people to stay. We didn't have nowhere to stay.

White: All right. Let's stop this tape right here. (End of digital file named tape two, side one. Beginning of digital file named tape two, side two.)

Smith: Let me get through this Son Gardner while it's on my mind.

White: All right.

Smith: But anyway Son Gardner and Dr. Weathersby(?) was whipping at one another, and one of them said he was going to buy him a—

White: Now, this is Dr. Weathersby the veterinarian from up at D'Lo.

Smith: The old doctor, not the (inaudible), the old, old.

White: Oh, his daddy.

Smith: His daddy. His daddy was a veterinarian. Then the doctor, their son come up and made a doctor.

White: Right.

Smith: But this is the old doctor. The old doctor said to his son, (inaudible), said, "I'm going to buy me a gold fence and put around my place, my whole place." And Son Gardner said, "If you get it, I'll buy the fence." (laughter) So they wolfing off with them, with they money, you know? (laughter) So they settled down on it, said, "Well, whichever one want it, you go ahead on buy it. You put up the fence, and I'll buy it, or you let me buy it." Said, (inaudible). So now we going back to the first (inaudible).

White: We were talking about—you said where you made your mistake was not—

Smith: Not letting them build the school right yonder because if they'd have built a school out there, we'd have had a much better place. Wouldn't have had all that oil flowing and all that kind of stuff down. And you'd have had somewhere for the people to park and everything. But Old Man Tim(?), not the old man but the younger man Tim, he wouldn't sell but just two acres of that land and got us up out of that swamp up there where the school at. And then when they got up there, they go to build the school, he got the contractor to come in there and level off the (inaudible). It was a high, out there where they put that new part in, all of it was high, just like that; went way back on the other side where the back of the building at, dug it all down and carried it out there and then leveled, when he could have built it up on top of that hill. But that's where they made they mistake at.

White: The land's just too low and wet in there.

Smith: Yeah. But if I'd agreed to let them build out there, we'd have been up on high ground to start with, and no doubt when they got a chance to broaden Mendenhall out, Mendenhall in the (inaudible), no doubt that they'd carry that corporation out there where the school at, (inaudible). But you know we're running to a lawsuit on that? They're running the lawsuit, and we got a lawyer out of Jackson. And you know the man, if I could call it. But anyhow, it's this big lawyer that got to mayor of Jackson.

White: Dale Danks?

Smith: No, it wasn't Dale Danks. It way back there.

White: Oh, that's right. It would be a lot earlier than Danks.

Smith: His son come up to be a lawyer. Field, some kind of Field or something. But anyway, when we come to that lawsuit and had the lawsuit, we named a man was living out at, (inaudible) side of Braxton, back in there. I liked to thought of his name. He was the chairman of the board.

White: Chairman of the board of trustees (inaudible).

Smith: Of the county. Of the county. He was the chairman of the trustee board of the county. All right. When they got the case settled, Old Man Bryant(?)—was his name Bryant? Yeah, that was his name, Bryant said, "James, y'all didn't win the case. Well, I'm sorry because that'd been the ideal place to put the school." We didn't have no blacktop going; just a gravel road. I said, "Well, Ms. Brown questioned me about putting the school out there, I said, 'Ms. Brown, you are the superintendent of the school, and many times that you would have to have some urgent business to attend to, you up there in your office in the courthouse, you wouldn't have nothing but to get in your car and run down here to the schoolhouse, straighten it out. What you want to go way out yonder in the country for, with the school, it's a town school?'" See, I'm a town boy. I come out of the city. I didn't come out of no country. I come out of the city. And I was trying to keep the school in the city.

White: And didn't realize the city limit would grow out there, anyway.

Smith: Didn't have no dream it would go. And it went way out further than I ever thought it would go out (inaudible). So that's how come the school down there. Me and James Simmons and Hugh Davis, Son Gardner is the cause the school be down in there, right there where it at. And all them men is dead and gone but me.

White: Well, both of my kids went there. It didn't hurt them. (laughter) It's a little bit low, but they didn't pay any attention to it. What do you remember about the time during which the schools integrated here and everything? Is that when you quit being a trustee down there?

Smith: Yeah. Right in the time when the school was integrated here. We didn't have nowhere to put the children. Had a one-classroom school, and we had that little, old building there, where, Professor Harper had built. He was going to have so many classes in that block building. We had to get the churches, Nazarene Church and Mount Mariah Church. So many children over in that, Mount Mariah, so many children over at Nazarene, and so many children down there in that block building, and so many children in that one-room school.

White: Scattered all over.

Smith: Scattered all over. So come up then, Professor Harper said, “We’re going to build us a new school. We’re going to get a grant. The government give us so much money, and we come up with the rest of it.” Did you not know? We got that school all framed up, and we didn’t have enough money to do nothing. That was the ending of it.

White: Couldn’t finish it.

Smith: Couldn’t finish it. I’m working on the railroad, and Professor Harper come up with a thought, if we could get the men to work so many days, just give the labor to the school, the government would match it with so much money. Whatever we would give for our pay, the government would pay that much for us, and that would double the money to come in to help build that school. And so we built, I reckon about maybe eight or ten school classrooms for the school. Well, when the thing go along, (inaudible) bigger, they going to cut that school out, and build a brick school. Then they had that big building there that we done built for school, (inaudible). They going to bid it off and tear it down, sell the land back to somebody else.

White: Still not finished, huh?

Smith: It wasn’t finished.

White: That was a lot of community effort and a lot of work that went into that.

Smith: That’s right. All right. I’m on the trustee board, and knowing what was going on. Wasn’t no secret kept back from the trustees. We always knowing what going on. So the white trustees told us, said, “Now, we going to put that school in the paper for a bid, bid on such and such a day of the month. Whichever one of y’all know it, I’ll keep you close on the bid, what’s going on. And if one of y’all want to get it and work it out, that’s your business.” And I got to thinking about it. I said, “I believe I’ll bid on that school.” I bidded on that school and got that school for one dollar, that big building for one dollar. (laughter)

White: You the only bid, huh?

Smith: No. Others bid, but they was under me, and my bid was one dollar, and I got that whole big building for one dollar. Got that building. I built a church over at D’Lo. I built a church in Collins, and I built a church in Laurel out of the material that we got out of that building.

White: Well, you got your money and time back out of it.

Smith: Got my money and all my time (laughter) back out of that church. Sure did.

White: Well, the Lord must have been looking for (inaudible).

Smith: And (inaudible), I built me a little storage shop, right there, out there. My little storage out there right now.

White: You still got some of it right here.

Smith: The house is (inaudible) right now. Right now. (laughter) The Lord blessed me.

White: Well, you invested in education, and it paid you back that way, didn't it?

Smith: Every bit of it in education. And so my family just got a big (inaudible) going to school, working and everything, and my oldest boy was living there. This Adam Farm come out here. Red Adam(?) Farm come.

White: Right across the street from you here.

Smith: Right across the street, and we had a bunch of young men, Adams and Dixon(?). Them boys all quit and got jobs after they went to driving them trucks, hauling chickens and hauling them eggs and feed for them. And my boy come to me and said to me, he said, "Daddy, we up against (inaudible). You ain't able to do for us like you could do or would do, if you had it. I'm going to quit school, and I'm going to get me a job, driving a truck." I said, "No, you ain't. You ain't going to do that. Son, if you go ahead on and get your education, instead of you being looking for them, they be looking for you. Now, those boys, what you trying to follow, I know what you're doing. You're trying to follow your classmates, but if they ever cut that chicken house out, you going to have to hunt you something else, and you ain't going to be able to take care of it. If you get your education, you'll have a job because they'll be looking for you."

White: And sure enough, twenty years or so later, that Adam Farm is not (inaudible).

Smith: All that stuff went.

White: What are they doing in that building over there right now? I noticed—

Smith: They give it to some company. (Inaudible)

Unknown voice: That's a part of the Mendenhall Ministries.

Smith: Oh, it is a part of the Mendenhall Ministries now?

Unknown voice: Yes.

White: Now, I noticed a lot of children out there a few weeks ago, and I wondered what that was.

Smith: So they got that all settled down, and my boy, both of my boys that was living, now, both of them, both of them wanted to work there, and I wouldn't let them work. That, if one word was told to me, is a conductor on the railroad, and he just about put up all these years. He ain't got but another year.

White: Ready to retire.

Smith: He'll have his thirty-five years of railroad, and the other boy is a principal of one of them big schools out there.

White: Well, you know, education, the money and time and effort you've put in as trustee and working with your hands and everything else, education has kind of come back and blessed your family. I know your daughter, sitting over here across from me is teaching first grade, up here. Education is a good investment.

Smith: That's what I think it is. But at the time when I was talking this, I didn't see this. I didn't see all this, but the Lord just reveal it in my heart and say that to me. And every one, I got six girls, and every one of them—well, all of them got their education, every last one of them.

White: That's good. That's a good legacy to leave.

Smith: What I think of, I said, "Lord, I got some of everything in the family, but I didn't get a preacher." (laughter) But what is in my mind, my boy, bigger boy what got drowned, from the way that boy was acting before he got drowned, he was going to be a great leader of some kind, and I just settled down in my mind, "That was the one was going to make a preacher."

White: Well, you got another generation, coming up now. You know?

Smith: Yeah.

White: Maybe the Lord will lead one of them in that direction.

Smith: Could be. You can't ever tell. You can't ever tell. But all of the girls, all the girls has got their educations. They got their first through grammar school and college. Then they went on and got their master's. And I got one doctor in the family.

White: That's good.

Smith: One doctor. (Inaudible) four girl schoolteachers, hadn't I?

Unknown voice: Three.

Smith: Three?

Unknown voice: Um-hm.

Smith: Three school teachers and one doctor. She started off a nurse. She was a registered nurse. She worked from that to a doctor. And the other one going to make a nurse, she went out and made a broker.

White: I believe you passed on a little work ethics to some (inaudible).

Smith: I don't know what happened. (laughter)

White: Well, I thank you for talking to us today. I've really enjoyed it. Appreciate it. You've just been a wealth of information. Thank you, sir.

Smith: Yes, sir. (brief interruption)—working on the railroad and got bumped at Mendenhall; had to go to Pinola to work, and I walked from Mendenhall every morning and worked and walked back to D'Lo.

White: You walked from Mendenhall to Pinola.

Smith: (Inaudible) and worked, and the people found out what I was doing. Even watched the train, that train was going down there. The foreman of that job down at Pinola, fixed it in a way that he get me back to Pinola, catch that train, and come back to Mendenhall. And when that train come into Mendenhall, I get off up there and wouldn't let nobody know I done got into Mendenhall.

White: Wasn't supposed to do that.

Smith: No, I wasn't. He wouldn't admit it that he brought me up as far as (inaudible) on his motor car and put me off. Say, "Now, you walk on back into Mendenhall." I—

White: Well, that beat walking to Pinola.

Smith: I got my wife, would get up and get my bucket fixed and get me up at two o'clock, and I leave Mendenhall at two o'clock and get to Pinola before work time and get in that depot down there and get me a nap of sleep, and then get up and go on down and do (inaudible).

White: I would have needed more than that if I'd walked from Pinola, from Mendenhall to Pinola.

Smith: I did it (inaudible).

White: I think the highway department says it's nine miles, but it's farther than that, I believe.

Smith: I (inaudible). It was gravel then. It wasn't no blacktop like it is now. My longest pull was going up that Miller's(?) Hill.

White: I know exactly what hill you talking about. (laughter)

Smith: That was my hardest pull. I could go from here to Miller's Hill, but when I got to Miller's Hill, that was a hard hill to go up. Sure was. I definitely want that (inaudible). Walked from Mendenhall, not no one day, but a many a day.

White: Well, you know, that's somebody that really wanted to work, that'll walk nine miles (inaudible).

Smith: Had to do it to take care of my family.

White: I've heard of people talking about walking two miles to school. Walking nine miles to work! (laughter)

Smith: I walked nine miles.

White: That takes the cake.

Smith: That's right. I walked that nine miles. And if the people were living, I could (inaudible) each one of them. They'll tell you that, but practically all them folks are dead and gone. All of them.

White: Well, I appreciate you talking to us. Thank you, sir. Glad you got that in, too.

Smith: Yeah.

(end of interview)