

Joe Woods Interview
June 28, 2002
Local 653 Union Hall
Pontiac, Michigan
Transcribed by Daniel Clark

DC: [discussing gardening] . . . I don't have room on my property, but we have a community garden site, so I like to grow—tomatoes are the best, though.

JW: Oh man, I like them tomatoes. [??], Beefsteaks. Good.

DC: I like those Better Boys too.

JW: Yeah, Better Boys, they are good.

DC: Beefsteaks, when they come in . . .

JW: Um hmm.

DC: We have a lot of bugs down there. We always seem to have a lot of battles with the bugs.

JW: They tell me to put some Epsom salts in the ground with them when you plant the stuff. [??] you put some Epsom salts in there, and that'll grow.

DC: Really? I'll give it a try. Tomatoes especially?

JW: Any of them

DC: Any of them.

JW: I've tried it. (laughs)

DC: All right. Well anyways, I know you have a busy schedule, so I'll . . .

JW: [??]

DC: Slowing down for a moment?

JW: Yeah, yeah. Lord, I'll get through that. I want the man to be through when I get there. I don't want to be there, because he slows around when I'm there. [someone was working at his home]

DC: You want him to be done?

JW: Yeah.

DC: Well I'll keep you busy.

JW: OK.

DC: I'll try anyway.

JW: OK, what do you want to know? Where I was born? What year I was born?

DC: Yeah.

JW: Oooh, you don't want to know that.

DC: Yeah we do. So where were you born.

JW: I was born on October 7.

DC: That was my Grandfather's birthday.

JW: 1927. 7 o'clock in the afternoon. I told—you know what I told my Mother?

DC: What's that?

JW: After I got grown, I said, "I know what we had for supper?" She said, "What?" I said, "Fish." She said, "How'd you know?" "Because I could smell it!" (Laughs) Oh yeah. That's what I told her.

DC: You remember that the moment you came out! (Laughs)

JW: Yeah, I know what we had for dinner. (Laughs) Now you know I'm kidding! Don't never—you didn't get that, did you? (Laughs)

DC: I'm OK with this! Well where was it?

JW: In Alabama. Hale County. Hale County, Alabama. The nearest town was Greensboro.

DC: OK. [outside noise] Do you mind if I close the door.

JW: Absolutely.

DC: OK, some days people come walking in and out of there every couple of minutes. When I listen to the tape afterwards, all I hear is the door opening and closing and the beep beep beep.

JW: Yeah, Hale County, Alabama.

DC: And how long had your parents been there?

JW: My Dad and Mother, they was born there, down there. They were living with my Grandmother. Why we had a little house, off from my Grandmother's house. And let's see, I was about 7 years old, I believe, when we moved from Hale County and we went, moved over in Greene County, Alabama. And we had to cross the river now, see. And I can remember what I carried. I had my Daddy's shotgun across my shoulder. See, when we moved over there . . .

DC: Why did you move?

JW: Well, my Mother and her Mother-in-law wasn't getting along too good. And my Dad, it was that summer, her people—his people and another lady come in and just told my Dad that your wife say you leave. You go along. And he taken her advice. And we moved on out. We was renting. We moved all the place into that, and we rented that land. We farmed it. Yeah, you could plow—I learned how to plow a mule.

DC: How old were you when you learned how to plow?

JW: Let's see, my Granddaddy learned me how to plow when I was about eleven years old. Cause then I learned how to plow. I couldn't pick that cotton. I tried to pick cotton but I couldn't.

DC: Why?

JW: I don't know. I just couldn't pick cotton. I figured one time I was going to pick 100 pounds of cotton if it killed me. And the man had to cut, man, I could not pick—I did get 100 pounds of cotton that day.

DC: You did?

JW: Yeah, 100 pounds I picked. And he had it. He had cotton too. And I tried my best and I—shoo—I ain't picked no cotton since. No, we had a pecan orchard, two pecan orchards on our place. And we raised cotton, and we raised corn, and my Mother and Dad, we never had to buy nothing but some flour and sugar. Because we raised our own hogs, chickens. We raised our own cows, and I walked to school, five miles to school, we did.

DC: When did you start school?

JW: I started school when I was five.

DC: You walked five miles then?

JW: During that time I didn't.

DC: OK.

JW: But after we moved, see, and went across the river, we moved, that means I had to walk five miles to school. Because that was a different—we crossed the river a couple of times when I was smaller. My Mother and Dad used—my Mother used to push across the river and go to school then. Well that was about two miles then, see. And, man we would have a lot of fun. Because we used to swim cows across the river.

DC: Oh yeah?

JW: Yeah. We had a cow swimming, but the cow wouldn't swim, and we had to pull it until she seen the bank. When the cow see the bank, we didn't have to paddle the boat no more. She pulled the boat in for us, see. Yes.

DC: About how wide was this river?

JW: Oh, shoot, that river was wide. Boats and things were running up and down it.

DC: Oh yeah.

JW: Yeah. Boats and things would run up and down that river, and when it rained, you know, the water come up, you could see a lot of [??], you know, they would go in there, didn't have, the boat would come down and they was trying to dredge the water, to dig out the bottom of the river.

DC: Oh, dredge it out?

JW: Yeah, shoot. [??] We'd set out and watch the river. The water used to come all the way up on the side of the house. We were that close on the river.

DC: Was that after any rain, or just in the spring?

JW: When the water come up. See, it rain, you know, and the river would rise, and the water would come up. And we had to put our cows up on the—way out on the hills, where the water wouldn't get them. We'd put our chickens in the crib where the corn was. We'd put our hogs on the back porch! (Laughs)

DC: OK, keep them as dry as you can, huh?

JW: Yeah, indeed all right. We did that until, oh, I wanted to get me a job. My Dad, you see he come in '44, I think it was. '44 or '45, and he was sending my Mother money for us. [??And I'm telling you how to keep—you give a boy some money. Well, Momma would give us money, you know, and she'd come here. And I'd sneak and get her a job. Because then we won't have to work.??]

DC: Why didn't they want you to work?

- JW: My Dad didn't. Because he was working. So I told my Mother, [??] I talked to my Mother, I said, "We're going to be grown." I said, "You all ain't going to be all living with us always, see. I need to learn how to work, so we can make a living." And she kept talking to Dad, writing and telling him that she'd come up here, until finally my Dad, he got mad, he told us, "He's so grown!" He sent me fifty bucks to come up here and work.
- DC: Was he in Pontiac?
- JW: Yeah, here in Pontiac. You see the reason I wanted to do that, when they'd leave, I would go get a job, you know, with some older peoples. And we'd be in the woods cutting logs, sawing logs. And when the man would pay us, he wouldn't give me as much as he paid the men I was working with.
- DC: Is that because you were younger.
- JW: He said it was because I was a boy, and he was a man—I wasn't worth as much as him. But I was doing the same thing. I'm on one side of the tree, pulling the saw, and he's on the other side, sawing logs. See, we're doing the same work. But he couldn't pay me as much as he was paying him.
- DC: Did you say anything to him?
- JW: Yeah!
- DC: What did you say?
- JW: Told him, he says, "When I was a boy, I didn't work so much as he did." I says, "OK," and I didn't work no more for him. I left. See, so then I went to work with—the man was named, older guy, [??] name was Hinds's [sp?] place. They was cutting grass—hay. Now I'm a kid, now, I'm about seventeen years old, and the guy was loading hay—see what they would do, we was supposed to rotate. See, one would get up on the wagon, and throw the hay up on the wagon, and the other one on the wagon, see he would place it where it wouldn't fall off, you know. And they'd have me on the ground, and they rotated with me. And I'm down there throwing the hay up, throwing that hay up, you know, and finally, late that afternoon, the guy told me, said, "Joe, get up on the wagon," he say, "You're a good man!" (laughs) He said, "We wanted to try you, see could you handle it. You did all right, so get up here." He said, "Now we ain't going to put you on the ground no more."
- DC: You were throwing the bales up from the morning until late in the afternoon?
- JW: Yeah! Yeah! Yeah. So, I got up there in the end, see, and they told me what happened, why they didn't do that.

DC: Testing you.

JW: Yeah. They did a good job too! (laughs) Yeah, so then I did that for awhile. We rented that place. We rented our land, see. We had to pay a 500-pound bale of cotton a year.

DC: That was the rent?

JW: That was the rent.

DC: OK. And who owned the land?

JW: Uh, let's see now. Old man [???]—he was a lawyer from here, bought it. I can't think of his name now. One of these days I'll think of his name, let you know.

DC: He was a lawyer from town, somewhere.

JW: Yeah, he went to here. From here. From Utica.

DC: Oh really, this was when you were up in Pontiac?

JW: No! See, he come and got to be a lawyer here. Then he come to Alabama. He said it was better for him to come to Alabama, to practice law, than to do here. And he told my Mother, said that it was better for us to come here, see? Than there, see? And he wasn't prejudiced or nothing.

DC: Was he a white guy?

JW: Um huh.

DC: Was he born here?

JW: He was from here.

DC: So you ran into someone from Pontiac?

JW: Yeah, because he bought the land.

DC: Down in Alabama?

JW: Yeah, he bought the land, and he come down.

DC: He was from up here. That's wild.

JW: We were renting the land from him, see, when he bought it. And he once sold it to us. When we left from down there, we bought it from him. And I was nineteen years old when I left Alabama. I come here, I put [???]—I'll think about it. My Dad, when he sent

me my fare, I was plowing the mule, and my Mother come to the field and called me and told me, said "Your Daddy sent you fare." I said "Whoo." (laughs) Just like that. In the middle of the field! And I took that mule right in the middle of the field, she said, "go on over to the other field." I said, "I'm going with my Daddy." I left there on Friday, and caught the bus, and got to Bessemer with my sister and her husband, and they come up with me.

DC: From Bessemer?

JW: Yeah, on the bus from Alabama. They come up here with me, my brother-in-law and my sister.

DC: So did he send you \$50 cash?

JW: Yeah! He said—yeah, it had to be cash, see. But I come on here. I caught the train in Bessemer, and we come here, and my Dad had taken off work that day, and carried me to the employment office. I filled out an application there, and I filled out an application at Baldwin Rubber.

DC: Baldwin Rubber. Where was that?

JW: They closed that down. It was out there on Univer—I mean on South Boulevard.

DC: What was it called?

JW: Baldwin Rubber.

DC: Oh, Baldwin Rubber—it was Baldwin Rubber. I'm sorry.

JW: Then they called me at—let me see. Uh, this plant there on Franklin Road. I think that was later on. Anyway, they called me, and I didn't go there. Then he drove me out to Pontiac Motors, and they hired me the same day.

DC: The same day you applied?

JW: Yeah. That was on May 7, of '47.

DC: '47.

JW: Um huh.

DC: Well, we're going to catch up to that, but I've got to back up a little bit and learn more about Alabama.

JW: (Laughs)

DC: You put me on fast forward there, for a moment there, but I've got that noted down—we've got to get to that point again. But tell me more about what it was like growing up in Alabama.

JW: Oh shoot, man, it was horrible. That's why I couldn't stay there. If I'd have lived and stayed in Alabama, I would have been gone.

DC: Why's that?

JW: Shoot, I would have either been in prison or been dead.

DC: Because?

JW: Because, see, I couldn't take the stuff that they was doing. See, we didn't bother nobody, and we respected people, see. But they didn't like the way we were doing. Oh, they'd come by the house, oh, [??] he'd come by the house, riding his horse. He'd bought a Ford tractor [??] on the place that he was working, renting.

DC: Who was this guy?

JW: Uh, Hines—one guy that was working for Hines's man, see. He wanted me to marry this girl living on his place. They had [??] working sharecroppers. You heard of that? You ever heard of sharecroppers?

DC: Uh huh.

JW: See most of the people down there were sharecroppers. And they didn't like it because we weren't working as sharecroppers.

DC: Because you were renting.

JW: So he would come down, and he wanted me to live on their place, and work for him—day work, see. I'm going to drive a tractor, and do plowing and stuff, and the girl I'd marry was going to be working for him and his wife, and I'm supposed to be eating out of their kitchen, see. And he's going to tell me what to do. I told him, "No!"

DC: Did you want to stay and work for your family?

JW: Right, I'm staying with my own folk right there. But if I was married, see, he told me if I'd come—if I was going to go with the girl, see, I had to do what he said. I told him, "If I marry a woman," I said, "She'll go where I want to go. I ain't eating out of your kitchen, and nobody else's." I said, now—He said, well I couldn't come to see the girl if I didn't do it like that. I said, "Well, has you got any black kids?" He said, "No." I said, "Well then, I don't know how you're going to tell me," I says, "Now if her Mama and her Daddy tell me I can't come to see her," I said, "fine and dandy." See? But you can't tell me, see? The old man, he got mad with me. He told me what I couldn't do, so I didn't

say it no more. So the girl, when I left there, that girl, she left later on and went to Birmingham.

DC: So did you ever marry her?

JW: Uh uh.

DC: No.

JW: I didn't see her for over thirty years.

DC: Is that right? She went to Birmingham.

JW: I didn't see her for over thirty years, and finally some of her people moved here, and she come here and I heard about it and I saw her. She moved to Cleveland. She lives in Cleveland, Ohio, see. But in Alabama, uh uh.

DC: So did that guy ever do anything to you after that?

JW: No. He'd come by and see me sitting on my own porch and wanted to know did I want to go to work for him. I told him I was looking for somebody to work for me! (laughs) Yeah, see, I need somebody—see, during the time, you know you had to, when you'd turn the soil over, see you plow, then you do all that stuff, then you got to plant your seeds. Then when you plant them, when they come—see, you got to get out there and you do two things. The first one is *chop* the cotton and corn. Then the next thing you do—the next thing, you got to do that twice—then you hoe it the second time. See, but after you hoe it, then you plow it and throw the dirt up around. Well see, he wanted to know did I know somebody that could chop cotton or hoe cotton. I told him, “No.” I said, “I need somebody that can help me.”

DC: How did he respond when you said that?

JW: He didn't like it. He didn't say nothing (laughs), because he knew that we didn't bother him. No. Um um.

DC: Did many black men speak up to him that way?

JW: [slight pause] No. There was one guy—it wasn't him, it was George. This guy, his name was Richard Webb, see. Now he didn't mind it, he'd talk to him just like he—he had his field. He was renting from George Green.

DC: George Green?

JW: Yeah, he lived in Hale County. George Green, he would rent from him. And he would work his cotton. He would take it to town. He'd gin it. He'd take it back home, throw it in his backyard. And when he got through, he'd take it all to town, he'd sell it. And after

he'd sell it, then he would go to George Green's house, Sunday morning he did, to settle up with him, see. And George Green didn't like that, see, because they didn't want you to do that. See? The way they would do you, see if you was working for him, let's say sharecropping, they'd claim—see they would be loaning you money for this, and loaning you that, and at the end of the year, when you—they were supposed to be getting half of what you got. See they get theirs, then they get half of what you've got. And when they'd get through figuring it out, well, we'd just about broke even. See? But then you got to start right back getting money from him again, see? And you never get out of the hole. So then that's when Webb, Richard Webb, kept his like that—and he was going to settle up—and he didn't like that. Because see, once you gin your cotton, they're supposed to take it all, and do all the selling and the handling.

DC: He wanted to sell it?

JW: Yeah, he sold it, see, himself. But George didn't like that. He told him to go home. So he went home, and the next day he sent some guy down there to tell him he had to move. So he didn't move. He turned around and taken the money and bought the place from him.

DC: Really?

JW: (Laughs). And he's still got it!

DC: Is that right?

JW: Yeah, I just sold—I bought—see my Daddy and my brother bought my Grandmother's land, nineteen acres. And here, back—I bought it. He was going to sell it to him down there, and they were going to give him nothing for it. So I—he had sent all the people, he wanted to sign the papers. And somehow or other he sent me for the signing, for my Dad. See my Dad, he had passed. So then I called and told him I'll buy it. I went down there and I bought it.

DC: When was that?

JW: Oh, that was in—let me see—I'd say about six or seven years ago.

DC: OK, pretty recently. So you still have ties down there

JW: Yeah, I saw that place, so I bought it, and I wound up—it had a church on it, and a cemetery on there. So I wound up with a church and a cemetery (laughs) down there. And they didn't know [??] and they didn't like that.

DC: Had your family ever been sharecroppers?

JW: Uh uh!

DC: No. How did they get to be renters?

JW: See my Granddaddy—my Dad—my Granddaddy's brother, see he owned some land, and my Daddy and his brother bought nineteen acres from my Granddaddy's brother-in-law.

DC: How did your Granddaddy . . .

JW: Oh, that brother-in-law—I was glad he got there, see. But see, they had the land down there. They bought the land down there. And they bought—my Dad and him bought nineteen acres. Well that's what my Grandmother and Dad and all of them lived on. On that. You see then they would rent land from other people to work. See they were renting land from other people.

DC: So they'd rent land. They had their own nineteen acres and they'd rent more land.

JW: Uh hmm. To raise cotton, corn and stuff, because see them nineteen acres wasn't enough.

DC: But they had their base?

JW: Yeah. They lived on that, see. You see, [??] they call that the river bend. . . .

DC: Which river was it?

JW: Huh?

DC: Which river was it?

JW: Warrior River. Black Warrior River.

DC: OK. I've got to learn my Alabama geography.

JW: (Laughs) Alabama. Black Warrior River. What we call the Warrior River—that river runs all the way from out of Birmingham, down through Tuscaloosa, down through Demopolis, down into the Tombigbee River. It runs into that, and that one runs into the ocean there in Mobile.

DC: How did the—were there many other renters? Or were you . . .

JW: (coughing) Most of the people—let's see, on the Hale County side, let's see, George Nelson, he had his own land. [??] Nixon, they had their own land. [??] Taylor, they had their own land. Most of the people down there had their own land. There was one man, his name was Clemons [sp?], well see now—that was my Grandmother, on my Mother's side, they worked for him, see. That's the one, Clemons, that's the one that my Mother got into it with (laughs). He said, she was crazy.

DC: He said she was crazy?

JW: Yeah.

DC: Why did he say that?

JW: Because he kept hinting around to my Mother, saying that my Mother was going to go with him. And she told him, oh, he didn't have—he had a wife, see, you don't come in—Mister, you don't play that with me. She didn't bother him. Oh, he said she was crazy. She told me uh uh, she didn't fool with it. My Granddaddy (loud cough), then my Granddaddy got into it. See he was going to get up there and tell my Granddaddy what he had to do. My Granddaddy told him uh uh. He said—see, what they would do, they would get all of the food, groceries and stuff, he would go to town and buy all of the groceries, and bring them there, and he would issue them out to the people living on his place.

DC: Now was that during the Depression? Or was that . . .

JW: Umm, part of it was.

DC: And also during the war?

JW: Um hum. No. My Granddaddy told him, he said, “You don't ration nothing out to me.” And my Granddaddy (loud cough) went and got him a job and bought his own groceries there. So what he did, him and another guy, [??], working and they had some cotton, and they went and sold the cotton. He got mad and had them put in jail.

DC: Oh, for selling their own cotton.

JW: Yeah.

DC: Was it the landowner?

JW: Uh hum. Yeah. See where we was staying at, it was a ferry. You could go across the river in a ferry. See and they would put wagons, and mules, and everything on that ferry and pull it across the river. [??] Back in those days, I couldn't believe it. The stuff that we went through.

DC: Did you actually pull it across, or pull it across, or . . .

JW: Yeah, we had a long [??]. You know, we would stick it in and push it across.

DC: So if you sold your own cotton, then the landlord . . .

JW: See, that way they'd [??] him, because he spoke up to him.

DC: And what did they do to him then?

JW: Oh, he went to jail, and they put him in prison for a couple of years. Another guy they put in there too, for a couple of years. Yeah, for their own land, their own property—not their own land, but their own property. That's the way they done him. Shoot.

DC: So even if you had your own property, you weren't safe.

JW: No. (Laughs). You had your own property. See, now like we did, we even rented some bottomland. See, because we had about, oh, a hundred acres over there.

DC: Between the land you owned and the land you rented?

JW: Oh no, that was—that was what we built when we bought the land over in Greene County.

DC: Oh, OK, when you went to Greene County.

JW: Yeah, we bought the land over there, see. That's where we had two pecan orchards, in Greene County. And we rented land over there. We lived—there was two houses on that other land. And we rented some to the people in the house over there.

DC: So you could rent land to others that way. So how much did you need for your family? How much land did you need for your family?

JW: Oh, we needed us about twenty-five or thirty acres. We did.

DC: OK, so if you had a hundred, you had some extra land.

JW: See, now the government, when they built a dam up the river, well they bought close to fifty acres of our land. See, because they were lowlands, and when they built that dam, see they pushed the water out, cover all the lowlands, so that's what they bought, all that lowland there, see, from us.

DC: Did you want to sell that land?

JW: We ain't had no choice, see, but to sell it.

DC: Did they give you a fair price for it?

JW: Well, considering then, they'd say they did. I know they gave us more than what we paid for the land, they did. I was—during that time I was in Korea.

DC: Oh really. They bought the land way back when you were in Korea.

JW: Yeah, that was back in the '50s.

DC: Oh, OK, I'm getting a little confused. I thought that might have been earlier than it was.

JW: Yeah, bought that back in the '50s. I was in Korea . . .

DC: So they built a dam in the '50s.

JW: Yeah, up the river. Way up almost to Tuscaloosa. See, and all those people down there that had land on the riverside, that's where they were building it, and they had—a lot of them held out, but they still had to buy, or sell it to them.

DC: I know a lot of that happened in the '30s. I didn't realize it was happening in the '50s too. It was.

JW: Um hum. Yeah, I was in the service during that time.

DC: We're going to catch up to that.

JW: Did you have brothers and sisters?

DC: Yeah, I had two sisters and one brother.

JW: And where did you fit in?

DC: I was the third kid. My two sisters were older than me.

JW: OK, all right.

DC: Then I come here, and my brother come here. (loud cough)

JW: Me and my sister. The other one come first. And in '48 my Mother and my brother come here.

DC: They came in '48, OK. So tell me what your Mother did when you were growing up. What all was she doing?

JW: My Mother, she didn't do much. She was sick most of the time.

DC: Was she?

JW: Uh hum.

DC: What was wrong?

JW: Stomach problem. She—sometimes my Mother would get out of bed, she would cook for us, you know, that's all she could do. She had dinner on time. But when she was

sick, see, and she didn't do no working in the fields. But she made up and made sure we did (laughs). Yeah, Lord, but she didn't, she didn't do no working.

DC: What about canning, and stuff like that?

JW: Well she would, you know, do that. She put up peaches, apples, pears. She cooked-like we killed hogs, she'll take that and grind it up and make sausages. And we'd pack that up, and stuff it [??] all that see. Back during that time you could cook stuff and it didn't spoil if you fixed it right. But we killed hogs and smoked that ham and stuff. We didn't have no Frigidaire freezer to put no meat in. Hang it up out there in the smokehouse, and the [??] didn't bother me. We could go out there and cook the meat on there, and it stayed right there.

DC: So did you help with the smoking?

JW: Yeah! Yeah, smoked those hogs, killed them hogs, smoke them. Yeah. (laughs) Um hum.

DC: So you were working hard.

JW: Yeah, oh yeah. But I'm glad, in a way I'm glad, because, hey, if I didn't—knowing a lot of that stuff, see—I wouldn't know nothing about it. So I know how, you know, like now, it followed me. It learned me a lot. See I know how to—the one thing now I should have did, I should have kept my Almanac books. See you get an Almanac, and if you check that Almanac, they can tell you what time and when to plant different stuff. When to plant, according to the moon. See you plant according to that, and if you plant it on the right time of the moon, for stuff in the ground, it'll grow. But if you plant it on the right time, then on the top will grow, see, better. Now I just about hit it. I know one thing—there are ways like Good Friday, Easter, they would plant peanuts—Mom would plant her garden and everything.

DC: Good Friday. That was the day.

JW: Yeah. Everything on Good Friday. And that stuff grows. But here you can't do it.

DC: It's too early.

JW: Yeah, and it's too cold here. So you can't. But now that's what I liked, back when—if he's going to cut a hog—cut a hog—he would look at that Almanac, and that would tell you when the blood's in the head, or when it's in the feet. And he would cut that hog, and it wouldn't bleed.

DC: Really?

JW: That's right. See, so that's why I need the Almanac.

DC: So you don't have one anymore?

JW: No, I don't have one. I'm going to—every time I go to the store to get one, I forget about it. But people—they don't believe in that nowadays, see. See they believe in all of this Miracle Gro and stuff. But I like to plant my stuff out there and let the nature grow it. It tastes better. If you take and get you nice land, fresh land, plant you some stuff in there, and keep it watered like you should, and work it, you'll see the difference in taste. Very seldom do I put any of that stuff on. We used to put fertilizer down, you know, when I grew cotton.

DC: What kind of fertilizer would you use?

JW: They would use regular fertilizer. And then they would put soda, something we called natural soda around the cotton, you know, stuff like that see, for it to grow.

DC: Would you owe a bale of cotton no matter what the price of cotton was? Would it be just one bale of cotton no matter what?

JW: One bale of cotton.

DC: No matter what?

JW: 500 pound bale of cotton.

DC: But I mean, if cotton was thirteen cents a pound, just one bale of cotton.

JW: That was it. That was it. One bale of cotton. As long as it was 500 pounds.

DC: Were there ever any years when the cotton crop didn't come in?

JW: No. See back during the time after we—they got that, and then the government stopped us, stopped the people from planting so much cotton. See, because you had to cut that cotton up. You couldn't plant no more cotton.

DC: Right.

JW: But most of that was done—big farmers, you know, they could do what they wanted. But see, like we couldn't. They would—the government would go around and like if you had cows, they would go through there and check your cows. They would take all that stuff, and if there was something wrong with the cows, they would give you so much money for each cow, and they'd kill the cow and take it to market.

DC: Did they come to your farm and do that?

JW: Yeah!

DC: They did.

JW: Um hum.

DC: How old were you when they did that?

JW: Oh, shoot, right around about twelve. About twelve years old. They come over there and did it. [laughs] So I told my Daddy—we had a bull, see. I told my Daddy, said, “Hide that bull in the woods!” [laughs] And he did.

DC: He did?

JW: Yeah. So they didn’t check it for blood on him. Shoot.

DC: If that was a bull, that could be pretty serious.

JW: Now, we used to fish in the river. My Daddy would go out there—we had a [??] line, we’d call it. I don’t know if you knows what that is.

DC: No, I don’t.

JW: We would take that line, and you’d stretch it, I’d say, from here to that tree out there, you know. Might have been longer than that. Like this here. Then after that you’d put a little line with a little hook on it. Then you’d go from that, on out, put so many hooks on that line. You’d have a hook, with a little old line tied on it about that long. See? And then you’d put baits on it. Then you stretch it out, and about half, part of the way, you’d put a sinker on it. And then you’d go out further, and you’d put another sinker on it. Then when you get to the end, then you put a sinker on that end. And you’d drop it in the river. And about twelve o’clock, we’d go over there, check it, got a fish on it, we’d take the fish out of it. And my Daddy used to make a little old container, you know, he’d put the fish in, and put it in the water—let it stay in the water, you know, under the tree where it was cool. And put the fish in that until Saturday morning, and then Saturday morning, he would get up and get the fish—it would be fresh fish, and they’d still be alive and everything, and take the fish to town and sell it.

DC: Oh, he sold it. OK.

JW: Fresh fish.

DC: Did you eat some too?

JW: Yeah, we would eat some. Catfish—we used to have catfish. That’s all he would serve—catfish. And he didn’t have it long.

DC: He would sell it right out?

JW: Um hum. Yeah. Sure would.

DC: Did you go into town to sell it with him?

JW: Nah, I didn't go into town to sell it with him. I would sure help him catch it. Yeah we would. We had a long way to go—we'd usually go to town, we lived way out in the country, see? We would get the wagon, and my Grandmother or Granddaddy would [??] mules to the wagon, see, and they would go in with the wagon

DC: Did you ever get to go into town?

JW: Yeah. We used to go into town.

DC: Did you like that?

JW: Oh yeah, I thought it was something [laughs]—into town, and after that, somewhere else. See we didn't know what light bread was. [??] when we had light bread, we thought we had something. Because see she made her own cornbread and biscuits. I learned how to make biscuits.

DC: Yeah?

JW: Yeah, I make homemade biscuits, cornbread. I cook!

DC: That's good.

JW: My Mother learned me how to cook. Homemade biscuits. I cook cornbread. Shoot, I make my own peach cobbler if I want to. Make barbecue when I get it ready (laughs).

DC: You're making me hungry.

JW: Yeah, Lordy. I had a ball, shoot.

DC: It sounds like you were still eager to go to Pontiac.

JW: Yeah.

DC: Yeah. All right. Well why was that?

JW: Because I told them, when I get a job I wanted a job that was going to pay me for my labor. See, that's the way I felt. And I wasn't going to find that—there were no jobs in Alabama that I felt like would be qualified for me to do. Because I felt like this—I wouldn't be getting paid for my labor. And I feel like this here: if me and you were working together, you was white and I was black, I should deserved the same amount of money that you get. That's just the way I felt. Now, I was in school in Tuscaloosa, and I would get a job, part-time job when I'd get out of school. I worked at a hotel. And

shoot, they had me busing dishes and all that kind of stuff. And they had a white girl, she was working with me at the time. And that lady, worked over there, kitchen thing, oh she thought she was “Miss Ann.” She grabbed a [frying pan??] and slapped him. And man, I looked at her, and I just shook. I was about eighteen, I believe, seventeen or eighteen, so her husband, he come out there—you know they had a place on the back, you know, where we would go in, you know, and sit down sometime. We had certain things we could eat out of the kitchen there if we wanted—and he come out and “what he did,” and all that stuff. So she wouldn’t let him talk to me. Because she saw how I was, so finally she called me and then told me—I told her, “Look,” I say, “He ain’t got no black kids, so he ain’t got no business pulling an old bald man up, slapping him, and talking to him like that.” I said, “We’re all human beings.” I says, “I deserve the same kind of treatment that he deserves.” I says, “He don’t have to holler at me.” She looked at me, she says, “You know,” she says, “That’s why we won’t never say nothing to you. Because that’s the way you [laughs] . . .” See that’s why I tell you I couldn’t have stayed down there, see, because I told her, I says, “No.” I says, “He couldn’t do that to me. Because if he did that to me,” I says, “I’d drill his butt all over this place out here.” That’s because I’m human just like him. And guess what, he’d be just coughing in his shirt if he’d be doing all that stuff. But he never said nothing to me. And I worked there, and finally when I left—I was at school there, and then I left and went back home to my Mom and Dad’s.

DC: So when did you go to school down in Tuscaloosa?

JW: I went to school in Tuscaloosa in ‘40—let me see, no, ’43.

DC: OK, and what kind of school was it? What was it?

JW: It was just a regular school. I was in the—the school I was at then, we couldn’t get no higher than the 6th grade.

DC: OK.

JW: See, then I had to leave there because I had to go to the—I went to the 7th grade.

DC: How far away was Tuscaloosa?

JW: Oh, Tuscaloosa, ooh man, that was about forty or fifty-some miles. I was staying in Tuscaloosa with my Auntie.

DC: OK. So your parents had you go off to go to school.

JW: Uh huh.

DC: How long were you there?

JW: I was there for two years.

DC: Really?

JW: And then I went back home. And I didn't stay there long, because I left there and I come here.

DC: So they were willing to have you go off and be away from the farm for two years.

JW: Uh huh. Uh huh. Well see, after the school was out, then I would go back. See, go back to the farm. But now, see my Dad, when he left there, he told the peoples, you know our neighborhood thing, to show me what to do, you know—what plow to use, you had [??] plow, see, that you had to put on the mules. Well, he would tell them to show me and tell me what plow to use. And not a person come and told me nothing. The only thing I did, I went by the way I had saw him do it. And I plowed it. And if it wasn't right, you know you've got to sharpen those plows—I've got one of those plows there now, at the house.

DC: Yeah.

JW: [Laughs] Yeah. I've got one. And what we would do, I had a big hammer, and a railroad tie [??], and that's what I used. I'd take that hammer, and I'd beat that sweep out on the end, to sharpen it. See I'd do that during my lunchtime, you know, when we'd—we're going to start at twelve o'clock to eat [??]. And we'd stay until one o'clock, then we'd go back to work. But I'd sharpen up that sweep out, cold now, and put it back on that plow, and use it. And some of them we'd have to take it and put them in heat—my uncle, he had one of those things that you'd put coal in it, and he'd put them on there and heat it up and beat it.

DC: An oven sort of thing?

JW: Yeah. And heat it up, see, and beat it sharp, see like that. But that's the way I would do that. And they didn't come over and show me nothing.

DC: So did you have uncles or any other family that could have showed you?

JW: Yeah!

DC: And they didn't do it.

JW: No.

DC: Why didn't they?

JW: I don't know [laughs].

DC: Maybe they thought you could handle it.

JW: They didn't—and not even—well, let's see, my uncles, let's see who I had—no, my uncle wasn't over around us. I had two uncles, but they was way away from us. But there was a whole lot of old Daddy's friends and things around there, you know. But they wouldn't show me nothing. I know I—as sure as the Devil, see—I plow, and I didn't do no chopping or nothing. I would do most of the plowing, see, with that. Then when I did that, Mama with my sisters—they were going to school in Bessemer—they would come in the summer and help us on the farm, see, until school started again. And they'd go back to Bessemer, see? And so we did all right.

DC: Yeah.

JW: Yeah. Hell, I had—we ate on our farm. We baled enough cotton to pay the rent.

DC: This was after your Dad had gone on to Pontiac.

JW: Yeah, he was here!

DC: You still were able to put in the cotton.

JW: Yeah, we planted cotton. We had corn, and all that stuff. And when we left there, when Mama and Daddy left there, they had a whole crib full of corn—they give it to my cousin, and he's supposed to stay there on the place for us—and he did. He stayed there and he finished up everything. And then he left, and come to find out that people had tore his house down, and rebuilt it—someone had built on it, someone else bought the farmland out. And she made them take that house down and put it back up.

DC: When was that?

JW: Shoot, that was back in the, oh, '50s, '60s, about in the '70s.

End of Tape I, Side A

Begin Tape II, Side B

DC: Not far from Bessemer, and stuff like that, there were steel mills. Did you ever think about taking a job there?

JW: Uh uh.

DC: Why was that?

JW: Nooo. I wouldn't go there. [laughs]

DC: Did you know anybody who did go to work there?

- JW: My brother-in-law, he was working in a coal mine I think, there in Bessemer. And in Tuscaloosa, they had a place out there in what they call Holts [Holt, on the map]. That was steel.
- DC: That was what now?
- JW: I think that was a steel mill there in Holt[s] Alabama. Tuscaloosa. I didn't bother with that either.
- DC: What was your thinking about that?
- JW: Well, when my Dad come here, well after, they wasn't paying the money like they pay here.
- DC: Still there wasn't . . .
- JW: No, they wouldn't—see you couldn't get the money—well here was, it wasn't too much different than . . .
- DC: Than down there.
- JW: Than down there.
- DC: OK. Well tell me about that. What do you mean?
- JW: Here, see you could—when you got hired here, they put all the blacks in Plant 6, in the foundry.
- DC: OK.
- JW: Over there, see. And if you got in the main plant, you got a job on sanitation. [mumbles] And I was blessed that I didn't get in the foundry. See I got in the main plant, and that was as a chipper, as a sweeper.
- DC: A chipper you say? And a sweeper?
- JW: Mm hmm.
- DC: Tell me what your Dad was doing at that point.
- JW: My Dad was working in the foundry.
- DC: He was in the foundry, Plant 6, OK. Was it just blacks in Plant 6, or did they have any whites in there too?

JW: There were very few. Either that, or they were Mexican or something like that. But more in general, when they hired you, they would put you in there. But see, once you got in there, a guy would come out, you didn't know what color he was. [laughs] See. My Dad and my brother worked in Plant 6.

DC: OK, your brother was there too. Did he come at the same time as you?

JW: My brother?

DC: You told me once already, but . . .

JW: He come in '48.

DC: '48, that's right.

JW: But he didn't go in the foundry until, oh, the later years.

DC: OK, so he didn't go in right away.

JW: Uh uh.

DC: All right, but your Dad did.

JW: Yeah, he went.

DC: His first job was in the foundry. So how did you end up in the main plant?

JW: That's what I don't know!

DC: Oh.

JW: [Laughs] The only reason, I think, they had an opening in the main plant, was in Sanitation. Because I went in Plant 5, on Sanitation.

DC: Tell me about that job.

JW: I was chipping. You know . . .

DC: What's chipping?

JW: When you're shaving materials, metal, off of [??] and things. It was going—and I had to take a shovel and a fork, and pick that stuff up and throw it in a . . .

DC: So you're cleaning shards of metal. Shards of metal off the floor.

- JW: Yeah, yeah, that was chipping. Well that was the stuff, everyone called it chipping. They called them the chips, see?
- DC: The chips.
- JW: Yeah, that's what they called them, see. The name of that, what the classification was, was the chipper. Then you had sweeping, see. And I did that until, umm, I'm trying to think of what year, I think in the '50s, I went to Plant 14—no, no, no, no, I went on the second shift, the third shift.
- DC: Third shift?
- JW: Yeah.
- DC: Same plant?
- JW: Yeah, machine cleaning, yeah, machine cleaning, see. See, we had to clean grinders, and all that kind of stuff, see.
- DC: Was that still a job that was reserved for blacks?
- JW: Yeah, yeah, but it was—it paid a little bit more than the other job I had, see. Then I was on the third shift, so we got third-shift premium.
- DC: So would you have made more money in the foundry, or did you make more money as a chipper/sweeper?
- JW: I would have made more money in the foundry, because most generally I would have gotten, you know, more overtime and stuff, see. Each job classification would pay a little more, depending on what classification. See, but over in the main plant, you had, let's see, you had your production workers, then you had your relief man. The relief man paid a nickel more than the guy who worked on production, on the line. And the repairman and the relief man paid the same thing. Then the utility man, they paid him a dime more than the production man. So, now we had—we was making, I believe it was ten cents less than the production man.
- DC: OK, for the sweeper?
- JW: Yeah. The sweeper didn't make as much as the chipper.
- DC: The chipper made more.
- JW: Yeah [laughing]. See the chipper made more than the sweeper. And the machine cleaners, see well the guy in there would be cleaning the machines so they could paint them, all that kind of stuff, see. Well all of that, you didn't see no white doing all of that.

DC: OK.

JW: See, so when I went in the service and come out, that's when Walter Reuther changed and set it up—we were supposed to have been able to put in a general request or something, when a better job come open in your department in there, you should have been able to get it. And you should have been able to go by seniority. See the man that had the more seniority should have been able to get it. But see they wasn't doing that there.

DC: They weren't doing it. If black workers tried to apply for these jobs . . .

JW: Yeah.

DC: . . . then what was happening?

JW: Oh shoot, they'd bypass them. They wouldn't get it.

DC: OK.

JW: So when I come out, then they had seniority rights, see. You had a right to go. So when I went in service, I was a machine cleaner. When I come out, I wound up on production. [laughs]

DC: We're going to figure that out here pretty soon. I want to know if your Dad ever talked much about working in the foundry.

JW: No. He wanted me to work in the foundry.

DC: He did? Why was that?

JW: Because he was in there.

DC: He wanted you to be with him?

JW: Yeah. Because, he wanted—see, the day that they hired in, they was supposed to hold a job for, and he told them to wait and see that they have some in the foundry. He was going to get me in the foundry, see. And I told him no, no, no, no. I hadn't ever been in a foundry. I hadn't ever been in no plant. To tell you the truth, I didn't know nothing about no working like that. I thought, you know, how stupid I was. I figured, you know, a job, you had to be doing something all day long, like that you see, and all that stuff, see. I couldn't see working a while, and then you stop, or break and all that stuff. I never seen that.

DC: You hadn't done that on the farm, huh? You just worked?

JW: Uh uh. No. But after I got in there, and I got to working, I couldn't see, I couldn't hardly see how I was going to do this. And I was going to work two weeks, and see how I liked it.

DC: You were just planning on two weeks?

JW: Yeah, to see how I liked it, see. And I stayed there forty-five years.

DC: Ooh, OK!

JW: I went from the chipper, from the sweeper, and the chipper, to machine cleaning. From machine cleaning to production worker. From production worker to light and heavy repair. Light repair. I went from light repair to heavy repair. And that's where I wound up being a committeeman. I stayed a committeeman for about, oh shoot, I'd say about 27 years or better. Yeah, and then I wound up as a committeeman, I wound up on the Executive Board here. Matter of fact, I was—I was one who helped getting this union hall built out here, see.

DC: OK. The other one was over on Joslyn, is that . . .

JW: Yeah, we had one on Joslyn. Then we had one, the first one was right across the street there from the plant, over there. See, it had a pot-bellied stove and stuff in there. I joined it the third week after I started working.

DC: Why did you join?

JW: Well, I don't know. You know, everybody was talking about the union. And you could at least work, at least two or three months, you could join but you didn't have to. See, so I joined it. And the guys that was in there teased me because I joined the union.

DC: Which guys were teasing you?

JW: Oh, some of the white guys. And they'd tease me about joining the union—and they didn't join the union and they were getting the same thing we was getting, and all that kind of stuff. So I told them, OK, so I just went on in. And when they got in the closed shop, they didn't like that. For closed shop. I said, well, I'm there. Because I felt—I would go to union classes, you know [???], contracts, I would go to that stuff.

DC: Was that right away that you started going to those classes?

JW: Uh uh, no. Not right away, see. But I wanted to know what was happening, you know, on different things, know something about, see. Because I was—oh man, I had a supervisor, he was going to fire me. Oh shoot, I was fired three or four times, and never got any time off.

DC: Is that right? We'll have to talk about those times. Did any of those things happen early on when you were there?

JW: Yeah!

DC: Yeah, well tell me about that.

JW: They was trying to get me—one guy, he was—one foreman, he was going to fire me before I got my 90 days here.

DC: Oh really. Why was that?

JW: [check this whole section] Because I wasn't sweeping. I couldn't keep up with the job. I couldn't sweep and chip too. And he done put me in the office, and he was going to fire me and put another guy on my job. And see, now I don't know why the committeeman come. But the committeeman come in one door and I was in there, and then we set in there talking, and he told the committeeman what I was doing, and what I wasn't. So the committeeman tells me, he said, "Where were you working at? [mumbles] He said, "Did you leave the job like this?" I told him, "No." He said, "This man say he can do the job." He walked over there and asked the guy, he say, "You told the foreman you can do the job?" He told me, "Heck no, I told him I can do this job." He says, "I don't want it." He says, "He's a fool, if he can do it." He says, "No." He says it wasn't like that. He says look at it now. Shh—that man put me back me back to work. He didn't say no more. And put somebody over there to sweep.

DC: Oh really. OK.

JW: Yeah. Put somebody there to sweep, see, to help me out and that.

DC: So he acknowledged that it was too much for one person?

JW: Yeah.

DC: OK.

JW: Oh yeah, see. And now, you know I didn't say I couldn't do it. I didn't say I was going to do it. I just did what I could. And after that I had one supervisor, he told me, said, "I'm going to put you on third shift, because you and the foreman don't get along." [laughs] He said, and he wrote down what we was supposed to do. We didn't have a supervisor on third shift.

DC: You didn't?

JW: Uh uh. [mumbles]

DC: So do you think you would have been fired in that case if it hadn't been for the committeeman?

JW: Yeah!

DC: You would have been done?

JW: Yeah. But see, I didn't know. So we had one general foreman there [mumbles name], he come in there and he stayed there all night trying to catch us, to see what we were doing. And we would—there was five of us on midnights.

DC: Five of these—was this when you were still a chipper?

JW: Yeah, well we was machine cleaners.

DC: You were a machine cleaner at this point.

JW: Yeah. And he would watch us to see what we were doing, see, and he couldn't, he couldn't find out. He didn't know, see he didn't know that the supervisor had to give us a list of what all we had to do. And we made sure that that work was done. And we could be through working in two and a half hours.

DC: Really.

JW: Yeah.

DC: What did you do the rest of the time.

JW: Shoot, we'd go to sleep. [laughs] See, if the machine repairman had something for us to do, they'd tell us and we would do it for them. But see—now, that's a crew. We were just like that. Machine cleaning—we would work together.

DC: How would you work together?

JW: You know, if they needed something done, they would tell us, and we'd do it for them. And if we needed them to do something for us, they'd do it. And we'd let them know where we'd be sleeping at. They'd let us know where they'd be sleeping at. [laughs] If something would come up, we'd go get them and let them know. See, that's the way we were.

DC: Were there any nights when you had to work straight through because there was so much work to do.

JW: Uh uh. Ain't never had that.

DC: Never had that. You were able to do it.

- JW: He didn't give us that much work. See, we had it made then. [laughs] And now, I went to [Plant] 14.
- DC: When was that?
- JW: That was where the gun job was at. There were doing the gun job at 14.
- DC: When did you move to 14?
- JW: Hmm. I think I moved there in '51, or '50.
- DC: So it was before you went in the service?
- JW: Yeah, that was where I went in the service, from there.
- DC: All right. So why did you move to the gun plant?
- JW: Well see, they needed some—they were putting new machines in over there, and they needed somebody over there to clean those machines, you know, pick that stuff up. See, I wasn't skilled trades then.
- DC: You were working with them, but you weren't considered in skilled trades?
- JW: Yeah, uh hum. But I was hooked into them, see. And, as a matter of fact, those guys on skilled trades, they wanted me—you know, each skilled trade had a helper. And they wanted me in to help them more than the man that they had assigned.
- DC: So they asked for you?
- JW: Oh, one skilled tradesman, he went to my supervisor and told him. And he went down to one of the men that was over the machine, you know, getting those machines in there. He didn't have anything to do with the plant, but he told the supervisor, he said, "Y'all [??] that man, that should be on skilled trades," see. "I don't see why y'all want to hold him back. He do just as good a job as the rest of the men." And one skilled tradesmen told him. He said, "I [??] to work with the man for my partner."
- DC: He thought you were better than the other skilled tradesmen?
- JW: Yeah, he told me. Shoot, they'd be working and I'd get in there, and he'd need some help—I just volunteered to help him, you know, just go in there and help him, and do things, and get stuff together. And they would do—if I would tell them, have an idea on something, he'd try it. If it worked out, [snapped fingers], just like that.
- DC: Was that a common response from white workers?

JW: Yeah.

DC: Yeah?

JW: Uh huh. That's who was trying to get me—then I went to school, to Veteran's School, for welding. And I taken welding up.

DC: When did you go to Veteran's School?

JW: Right after I come out of the service. That had to be in, uh, it had to be in the '50s. Because I come out of the service in '55.

DC: '55.

JW: Yeah, I come out. And I went and put in for welding, trying to get welding. I couldn't get it.

DC: Because? Why?

JW: [Shaking his head]

DC: They still wouldn't let you in?

JW: No. They wouldn't let me in.

DC: Who was making that decision?

JW: Somebody in the front office, I guess.

DC: Was it management or the union?

JW: It was management. No, the union wouldn't do it.

DC: The union wouldn't what?

JW: They wouldn't make that—if the union were to do it, they would help you. See, that was management.

DC: OK.

JW: I wound up welding. I could do [type of] welding. I could do arc welding.

DC: That was after your schooling?

JW: Yeah. I learned all that stuff at school.

DC: But you couldn't get a job doing it.

JW: Uh uh. See I was still working there, but I put in for it after I got through with it. And the hardest job for welding I could do was aluminum. And I learned how to do aluminum welding, see, and buddy you got to be careful, I mean, with that stuff. You could be welding nice and that, and all at once a hole come in, see. I knew, I could do it just like that [snaps fingers]. [different types], that's something else. I could get that [??], braid that sucker out, shh [snaps fingers] just like that. [soft tone] But they would not hire me.

DC: They would not hire you?

JW: They wouldn't put me in that. So then I just wound up trying to help people and I wound up with the committeeman job, and stuff . . .

DC: [interrupts] But how did you feel when they wouldn't hire you?

JW: Huh?

DC: How did you feel when they wouldn't hire you?

JW: Well, you know, I didn't feel right. I asked them "what the heck." I went overseas and crawled on my knees and my belly and dodged bullets, and come back here and can't even get nothing. I said, "I ain't got a thing here to protect. The only thing I'm protecting over there is what ya'll got." And which is true! See that was the same way when I was in the service in Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri. Me and about four whites, and me, went to Springfield, Missouri together, from there. And see they was all from Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and all that. Well see, they didn't know nothing about the South, and we went to Springfield and we got out of the bus, you know, and we went in the bathroom, and I come out, I noticed everybody stood there looking—you know how you do when you [mumbles]—and I come on out, we all come on out of the bathroom, I see everybody standing there looking. I come out and look up, there's a big old sign, sitting up there, "White," "Black," see. And I done walk up to get some water [laughs], and I hadn't—and you know you weren't used to it. So then the boy asked me, then, he said, "Joe, what you going to do when you get to town?" First thing I looked for somebody, you know, to stay. Then I want to go out and look the town over. So, OK. So we walked down the street, and I notice it. All of the black guys on the bus with us, they had disappeared. And me and these four guys we walked around there talking, laughing, talking. So we go to the hotel. All of us saw the sign—there was no room. So we didn't pay that no attention. We come on out. We left. Finally we went to another—same thing. So we walked all around, walked all around, kept on going. So we [mumbles—sounds like they talked with a hotel owner] and we finally came up with the answer. He said, "where you all from?" So one told him he was from Pennsylvania, and [Ed?], he said, New Jersey. Asked the other one, he said New York. And he said, where's your brother from, your friend from? He said, "Joe, where are you from?" I said, "I'm from Michigan." He said, "I thought so." He said, "You ever heard about the Mason-Dixon Line?" I told him, I said, "No, what the heck is that Mason-Dixon Line

you talking about?" He said, "Well you all can stay here but he can't." They looked at him and said, "What you mean he can't?" He said, "Well, you're below the Mason-Dixon Line. See, I didn't make the law, but that's the law down here, see. You all can stay, but colored can't." So they looked at him and said, "We're in the service together. We take a train together. We sit down and we eat together. And pretty soon we'll be fighting together overseas," and he said, "Now, you mean to tell me that this man here, going overseas, fighting, well what is he fighting for? Because he ain't got nothing here. I ain't either."

DC: This is a white guy saying that?

JW: Yeah, that was a white guy who was helping. He said, "He ain't got nothing here." He said, "He's just like we are." He said, "This is too good for him to stay in, but it ain't good for him to go over there and fight for what you've got here." Said, "Now what good is him fighting?" Said, "Well if he sleeps in the streets, I'll sleep in the streets." [mumbles] He [hotel keeper] told him then, said, there was a place out in the boondocks, that a lady had something, a place out there, and a cab and stuff and say that I could go out there and stay, and he could call a cab, and I could go out there in the cab, where nobody cares. They said, well if he goes, we go too. So we all got in that cab and went out there, and when we got out there, well, everybody was just jumping. And we went on and got in this room with all four, five of us. And them guys couldn't sleep.

DC: They couldn't.

JW: Uh uh.

DC: Because?

JW: Because the way they treated me there.

DC: Yeah, yeah.

JW: And they told him, said, "Listen, it ain't good enough for you to stay in a hotel out of town. We can come out here. We can stay." And he said, "Look at the women in there. You can't even get to your own women for the whites in there." And they [???]. By God they had all [???]. He said, "Now what kind of mess is this? Ain't no way in the world I'd come back here no more." We left there the next day. We got a cab. We went downtown and we were going to go to the show. I couldn't even get in the show. Se we got to eat together when we got back to the bus station. We wouldn't eat—nobody would eat a thing until we got back to the bus station. Then we all got to the bus station—that's when we ate.

DC: You were able to eat at the bus station?

JW: Uh hum. Yeah. [softly] We ate at the bus station. They could serve them but they couldn't serve me. Now, you know, that's when I said, when you're out there crawling

on your stomach and bullets flying over your head, and you done dodging—you and I, back to back, out there, I'm protecting you and you're protecting me. And then we get back here—it ain't good enough for me but it's OK for you. That's a mess, ain't it. People just don't realize what the person goes through on some things.

DC: Where were you serving during the war?

JW: I was in Korea!

DC: Yeah.

JW: Uh huh.

DC: Did you get drafted?

JW: Yeah. Uh huh.

DC: When was that?

JW: That was in '52.

DC: '52. OK. So was Leavenworth [sic] your first stop, or did you go somewhere else before that?

JW: When I went to—when I got through with my training at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, I went to California, and that's where I left from there and went overseas, from California.

DC: What was it, the Army?

JW: Yeah, I was in the Army. California, went out there—Pittsburg. Now Pittsburg, oh man, shoot, I was jumping out there in California. Shoot, man, we was having a ball. I would go to Oakland, California. We'd go out there and [??]—I didn't drink, but a lot of guys would be following me. I'd go in there and we'd have a nice time. Then we'd leave there, we'd go to 'Frisco. Shh—we'd have a ball out there. And, you didn't know no color.

DC: Not in San Francisco or Oakland?

JW: Uh huh. [??] was Pittsburg. That was when—we left there, got on the ship, went on overseas. And we hit every bar in Pittsburg.

DC: Pittsburg? California?

JW: Yeah! Pittsburg, California. Every bar, and we hit it, in that town. And we'd go in there—shoot, hey, you didn't even know what you was.

DC: Now was that different from Pontiac?

JW: Yep! Because right here in Pontiac, shoot, I couldn't even go in a bar here in Pontiac back in there. Because I was working in a store downtown, a part-time store, and the salesman there, he told me, he said, "Joe," he said, "they will carry you now, but they won't serve you." Right then . . .

DC: So Pontiac was more like Missouri?

JW: Um huh. In some things, yeah.

DC: Where did you live in Pontiac?

JW: I lived on the south side of Pontiac.

DC: And was your neighborhood a black neighborhood, or was it integrated?

JW: Oh shoot, when I come in, the only black people were living on the south side and the west side, see. That was it. Because, I tried to buy a house—I'm trying to think of where it was at—out in Auburn Hills. They wouldn't sell to me there. They told me they didn't sell houses [to blacks] out there.

DC: Was that soon after you got here?

JW: Uh uh.

DC: That was later.

JW: Uh huh.

DC: When was later?

JW: That was in the '60s.

DC: That was in the '60s. OK. All right. But when you first moved to Pontiac, you were on the south side?

JW: Yeah. See, we rented. We didn't rent long, because we bought a house here in Pontiac, see. We didn't rent long. I went out there, and they wouldn't let them sell me one out there in Auburn Hills. And one man, he had a house out here in Waterford, on Williams Lake Road, way out, you know, out [???

DC: Yeah, I've been by there.

JW: Yeah, he told me, well he had a house out there that he was going to sell me. And you know, lakefront, back lake and everything in there. And when he found out what I was,

he come and told me the house was sold, see? [laughs] So, that cut that out. See, oh, I went downtown to the Veteran's, see.

DC: Downtown Pontiac?

JW: Yeah. And I led them to a—I wanted them to, you know, build me a home, get a home, see.

DC: When was this now?

JW: That was in the '50s.

DC: OK, in the '50s. After you came back from the war?

JW: Yeah. After [??] In the '50s, and early '60s. And I asked them about, you know, veterans homes. See, they was putting some up on the south side, but the little things they were throwing up, I told them I didn't want that. I wanted, you know, to build me—I wanted a brick home. See, build me a brick home. They told me they wasn't building no brick homes for black folks, for colored people. I said, "Why?" He said, "Well, ain't nobody been asking, requesting them." I said, "Yes there is." I said, "I'm asking for one!" He said, "Well"—"I'm asking for one!" I said, "Why you can't build one for . . ." "Well see they hadn't built one in Pontiac." I said, "Well, you're building them out in Ann Arbor." Back out in there. "Well then you can move to Ann Arbor." I told him, "I don't live in Ann Arbor. I live here in Pontiac." I said, "I work in Pontiac." Oh man, we had it down there. That's when I blew my top! [laughs]

DC: What did you do?

JW: Whooo, man, I talked about him like a dog down there.

DC: Yeah. Right then? Right there?

JW: Right there in the office!

DC: Yeah? What did you say?

JW: I told him, "Man," I say, "You mean to tell me that you cannot build me a brick home and you're building them for the whites, but you can't build them for the blacks." I said, "And then you're saying that ain't nobody . . ." I says, "Now I asked for one." I said, "What the hell did I go overseas and fought for then!?" I said, "I cannot get nothing here." And then they come up with—you know you had to pay so much for Veteran's. come to find out, oh he had some of the guys [??] that was putting up 200 bucks for Veteran's homes. And they'd live in the sucker for two years, and didn't pay one penny, and saved all that money. And they bought them a home, what they want. See, because some of them told me about it.

DC: So they wouldn't pay anything other than the \$200?

JW: Yeah! So, see now here, I had a lot of nice—I couldn't ask for no better nice, white friends than I had here in Pontiac, you know. And they lived here in Pontiac. They'd live here—some of them would live out in Waterford, you know, and different areas. We all worked together, in there—see we were all working together. And after they found out how I was and everything—see, they were letting me know. The same way with my insurance.

DC: Tell me about that.

JW: One of the guys told me, he said, "If you give them my address," he said, "your car insurance won't be as high as it is in Pontiac."

DC: When was that?

JW: [laughs] That was in the '80s.

DC: That was in the '80s. OK. All right.

JW: That's something, isn't it?

DC: Did you use his address?

JW: No, I wouldn't put him—you know, I wouldn't put him as the address.

DC: Yeah, yeah.

JW: Because you see, a lot of the men, see, they didn't want you living next door to them and all that kind of stuff. So he come and told me, he said, "Joe," he says, "You can live next door to me anytime." He said, "I don't care." I said, "Look man, I got blacks that I don't want to live next door to me." I said, "I know some whites I wouldn't want to live next door to me," I says, so . . . " He says, "Well, it's the same thing with me," see. [mumbles] Well you see, see, you were here long enough here, yesterday [at a retiree meeting], to see how the whites was treating me.

DC: How were they treating you yesterday?

JW: Yeah, yeah.

DC: Well, I saw—I mean, I saw you taking a lot of money [he sold tickets to the lunch].

JW: See, I was over there—you talking about when they was having . . .

DC: Lining up for the food, yeah.

- JW: Yeah, well see, I was over there helping that guy out see, taking the money, see, until he got in there. See, because I—anything that needs to be done, see. When they be asking me, calling me, and all that—do this, do that. They treat me—I can't ask for them to be more nice to me than here, see. The way they are.
- DC: So how do you explain how you had that kind of relationship with white friends from the plant, but then in the larger community you can't, you know . . .
- JW: I don't know.
- DC: . . . get a house.
- JW: See, OK. I'm like this. I watch these things, and depending on how you do—now if I see you [???], I don't bother with you. See, I [mumbles]. See, I don't look out there and find no disturbing, or you know, look for anything out there. If you ain't right, or if you're prejudiced, or all that kind of stuff, I won't have nothing to do with you. See that's the way I do. And eventually, you're going to come in, see. I seen a lot of them.
- DC: When you say “eventually you're going to come in,” what do you mean?
- JW: You're going to lay that prejudice aside. See, because—in the shop, they had it set up, a bunch of whites working together, a bunch of blacks working together, a bunch of Mexicans, and all that kind of stuff, see. And during that time, see, people carried racist stuff and all that mess, you know, in the shop. So when I got to be a committeeman in there, I watched a lot of stuff allowed in there. So finally, I walked up to my General Foreman, I said, “Look, man,” I says, “Let's put some color in the line,” you know. Just like that. He says, “What you mean?” I said, “Put some color in the line.” I says, “Look up and down the line,” I says—me standing there—I says, “Look up and down there.”
- DC: When was this? When did you become a committeeman?
- JW: Oh let's see, I become a committeeman—let me see, what year was that now? [sighs] I believe that was in the '60s.
- DC: The '60s. OK.
- JW: Because I was committeeman for about twenty-seven years or better.
- DC: Before you retired.
- JW: [laughs] Yeah.
- DC: So sometime in the early to mid '60s.
- JW: Um hum.

DC: OK. I interrupted you. Go ahead.

JW: So he looked at me—he said, “I don’t see what you’re talking about.” I said, “Look at here.” I said, “You got a bunch of white, a bunch of blacks, a bunch of Mexicans and all that.” I said, “Mix them.” Like that. He said, “What you mean, mix them?” I said, “I didn’t tell you to take nobody off of their job,” you know, “and do it.” I said, “When you get some new people in, and a job come open in there,” I said, “let some of them go in there, and put the blacks in there.” He said, “Why?” I said, “Look. If you do that,” I said, “They ain’t got time to be thinking racial stuff. I see the blacks over here be talking about the ‘whites this’—and the whites be talking about the ‘blacks this,’ and all that stuff.” I said, “Let them get in there and get together, and talk, and mingle together, and then they can understand one another.” I said, “You’ll see things will be quieted down a whole lot.” Wouldn’t do it.

DC: Wouldn’t do it.

JW: Went home, and he come back the next week, got me in the office and told me, he said, “Joe,” he said, “I’ve thought about it.” He said, “Well, we can try it.” I said, “Look.” I said, “If it don’t work,” I said, “then we just stop.” He said, “I’m going to try it.” And sure enough, he started doing it. Every chance he got, he would fill them in. Shh. Man, the Superintendent called me in wanting to know what was going on down there. I said, “What you mean?” He said, “I don’t hear no racial stuff or nothing going on there. Everybody working.” I said, “Isn’t that what you’re supposed to do?” I said, “Everybody’s supposed to work together.” He said, “You don’t hear nothing about no prejudice or nothing in there.” I said, “No, [name of supervisor] moved them.” He said, “But people are working together.” I said, “They’re supposed to work together. What else can they do?” See, the supervisor wasn’t having no problem, see. They didn’t like that.

DC: They wanted problems?

JW: Yeah! See, the men up front there, the Superintendents and that, sure they wanted problems. Cause they figured if the foreman down there was doing such a good job, and wasn’t having no labor [??] and no problems there, that they’d be looking for their job.

DC: OK.

JW: See? See? That’s why. So that’s why they couldn’t understand what was happening, because the supervisor and everything was working.

DC: So your sense was that things worked a lot better after they started “putting color” on the line.

JW: Yeah, they did! They didn’t know nothing. One night, I’m going out—I didn’t know what would happen. There were two, a white and a black, and they walked right out. And when they got out in the parking lot, man they started fighting. A bunch of whites

was standing here, and the blacks all—they [??] around, and wouldn't nobody help either one, see. Let them two jokers fought themselves out. And a black guy and a white guy. Man, they was duking like the devil. And finally the black guy stopped. He told him—he pulled the white guy up and said, "Man, that's enough!" He said, "I ain't hitting you no more." He said, "Let's quit." And they shook hands, they hugged one another, walked right on by.

DC: So do you think earlier that there would have been . . .

JW: Oh yeah, yeah . . .

DC: other people would have gotten involved?

JW: Yeah! Right! You know how it would have been. See, so they just stood around and made sure nobody got involved. And that's the way it was.

DC: So it was just two guys fighting.

JW: Just those two guys. And they [???] Ain't got no help from anybody. And they—now if we hadn't done that, ain't no telling what else would have happened. You didn't see no fighting or nothing in the shop over there. But Plant 8 was in a different ballgame.

DC: So they didn't do the same thing in Plant 8?

JW: No! [laughs]

DC: So what was it like there?

JW: Oh man, it was some mess going on all the time over there, see. Guys be bucking for one another. Shoot, we said over there, I told them, "Everybody on one line. I don't see no colors. Women and men, no colors. And that's the way it was."

DC: You kept it that way in Plant 8?

JW: Yeah. Plant 9, man, Plant 9—that was nice. We had a ball in there. Shoot.

DC: So it was really different? Significantly different?

JW: Yeah. Yeah. I was getting elected here just about every year now, see. And I was on the Executive Board here longer than anybody has ever been. When I retired, I retired on the Executive—I was on the Executive Board.

DC: When you were a committeeman, were you still working, or . . .

JW: Yeah! See, we was supposed to work the first hour, or first two hours, see. But I didn't do it. Supervisor wouldn't let me do it after things were going. See, the way they

hooked me into it, I couldn't, because I headed Sanitation, see. Then after I worked a while there I had the truck driver. Well see, Sanitation come in there at one time, and a truck driver come, and I had enough people in Sanitation. And then I had enough people in truck driving, see, come here. So when I come to work, see, in the evenings see. I was coming in at 3:30.

DC: Oh, you were afternoons?

JW: Yeah. See, well them guys would be already in it. Some of them would even put in for Committeeman Call. So what I would do, I would check my list, see what I got. All I had to do then was go in there, pick my stuff up, go on and start on the call list. See, those people were already in there.

DC: So you had enough to cover those jobs?

JW: Yeah, I had to cover these jobs for them, see. Or—I haven't even clocked in, see. So I couldn't. I couldn't, see. Then I had Heat Treat. See with the Heat Treat, they started ahead of me, see. So when I got in, if I checked the Heat Treat, and they had a call there, well then I had to go down there and help them, see.

DC: So your first priority was to answer those calls?

JW: Yeah. Uh huh. And that's what I would do.

DC: I'm going to jump back again—I'm going around in circles on you here, but I want to hear a little bit about your experience in Korea.

JW: Korea?

DC: Yeah.

JW: Oh man, I don't know! Korea, when I got over there, shoot, they didn't even have gear for me to eat out of.

DC: Didn't have a what?

JW: You know, you got your mess gear.

DC: Oh, gear. Yeah. Sure.

JW: To eat. I had to eat, borrow some of the guys gear over there to eat out of. Because see, we were replacing peoples over there. That's what I was doing, replacing people. See, we got there, and finally they got something for me to eat out of, and finally I got a tent. See, we were sleeping in tents over there. They got us a tent and stuff. It was a lot of times cold! Whew! Shoot [pauses] I don't know. I know one thing. I didn't see

nothing over there fitting to fight for—but hills, and rice paddies, see. I was attached to the Air Force. We were building the airstrips, see. I built the airstrip there, K-14.

DC: So what was your job?

JW: I wound up in a job there guarding the airstrip. Well I had people I had to take them, at night. I could make two trips a night, carried the guards out there, out on the airstrip. And then, shoot, one time I put canned goods on the manifold so they'd be hot when I got ready to eat! [Laughs] But I was running back and forth, back and forth, from—twice a night, changing guards. And, sometimes I had to haul water and stuff for the—for the mess hall, cook for that. And I couldn't—after, see, after 8 o'clock. I believe it was 8 o'clock—but anyway, you weren't supposed to have no Koreans or nothing in your truck. No! Unless—who was that we had? We had a Captain, or a General—he had a Korean gal in his jeep, and I had a guard on the gate, and he wouldn't let him out.

DC: Really? Was that a Korean gal in there?

JW: Uh huh. “You turn that Jeep around!” And boy, cause he was—he was going to kill him. He thought he had it—he told me, “You might be the boss over this post.” And you are! He wouldn't let him go. So then that man, he went back and wanted to find out who was guarding [laughs] that lone gate. You know he didn't have to pull guard no more.

DC: Is that right? Dismissed, huh?

JW: Yeah, he got dismissed from pulling guard. But Korea, it was cold over there. And—I'll tell you the truth, I didn't care nothing about it. Because we were sleeping in—we had our foxholes. Cemeteries, graves, sometimes. One night I had—they started dropping bombs around over there on us, and we had—foxholes were dug in the graves.

DC: In the cemetery?

JW: Yeah! I said, “Shoot, look out [??] here I come now. I got in that hole. The other guy got hurt, you know, fragmented.

DC: He did?

JW: See, we was in—attached to the Air Force, and we was engineers, see. And that's what we was doing. Building strips, bridges—and I had to help them. And we would watch them—I don't know whether you'd remember when the Korean—they brought a plane in, landed a plane in—a jet. And man, they crowded around that jet in a hurry. And shoot, they brought that jet—I think they brought that jet to Ohio, because they didn't want them to find out how the jets could fly like they was. [??] kerosene.

DC: Kerosene?

JW: That's what they say. I don't know how true it is. But I know one thing. That joker got out of that jet, pulled that jet in, and landed, and I was—we were working on that. I was helping building that strip out there.

DC: OK.

JW: And I used to sit there and I would call down there [???], and I believe it was [thinks about it] 8^{2nd}?. It wasn't too long before they would be on the front line, because, see, we was sitting in a horseshoe.

DC: How far away were you from the enemy?

JW: About eight—seven or eight miles.

DC: OK. Not far.

JW: Yeah. Because we was in a horseshoe. See, that's where we was. And they could close in on us anytime they wanted.

DC: So you said there were bombs dropping around you.

JW: Yeah. Yeah. Bombs there all over the place. We come out of it all right. I was over there when the war—when they, when things quieted down. That was the worst night there was.

DC: Why was that?

JW: Because that was when I almost got shot.

DC: Really. What happened?

JW: Yeah, cause see, I got motor pool. And see, they didn't want us to leave. And I could feel the wind of those bullets above my head and everything. And they didn't want us to leave. I left there, we left there, and went to Guam. And I'd of rather stayed in Korea then went to Guam.

DC: Why? What was up with Guam?

JW: Nothing. Nothing. Hot. [??] Guam was 30 miles long and 8 miles wide. They said we was sitting on a [??]. I know when thing; you could feel the [surface?] heat in Guam. I was there, and, let me see, we had one bar you could go to down there. See, there wasn't nothing on that island, but we was the first soldiers that got on there. See you had Air Forces and—what were they putting something on—they had Marines, was in there.

DC: What were the terms when you were drafted? How long did you expect to serve?

JW: We accepted—they let us—accepted us for two years then. When I was in Korea, that was when this Lieutenant kept calling me a boy. I ain't never stopped walking. He wanted that "boy" to come—he told me, I says, I looked around, I said, "What he want?" "You!" I said, "No, he ain't calling me." He said, "What you mean?" I looked on the ground, looked all around. He says, "What you looking for?" I said, "I'm looking for that boy." He said, "What do you mean?" I said, "That's right." So he said something to me, I would look. I said, "I'm not no boy." I said, "If I'm a boy, send me back to the States where the boys is at." I said, "I didn't ask to come in here," I said. "Uncle Sam asked me, drafted me." He [Uncle Sam] said that he didn't want no boys, he wanted me and I could fill a man-sized shoe.

DC: What did the guy say?

JW: He didn't say nothing. I said, "Now if you don't know my name, you call me soldier, GI, Private, or whatever, because I ain't no boy." Now you know he never said that no more. He finally started calling me . . .

End Tape I, Side B

Begin Tape II, Side A

DC: . . . how you got the name Woody, OK.

JW: Yeah.

DC: Because?

JW: My name is Joe Woods, see, but they, for short, they just called me Woody. See, that's all I'd hear—Woody, Woody, Woody.

DC: So did you find—presumably this officer would have insulted other black soldiers by calling them "boy." Did most soldiers take it, or did most of them stand up like you?

JW: I don't know. I know I did. I ain't heard that no more.

DC: Why do you suppose you wouldn't take it?

JW: Cause I figured I wasn't no boy.

DC: Where did that come from? I mean . . .

JW: I don't know where he get that from. I think he must be from the South, or something, where he would call black people "boy."

DC: Yeah, but I wondered what it was about you—you know, why you wouldn't take it, you know.

JW: Well I never did. I just considered, you know, I wasn't no boy. As a matter of fact, they don't even call me that here. I just felt just like this—If I'm a boy, put me where the boys is at. And I felt just like this—if I was a boy, I ain't had no business being overseas. Tell them “No”! I filled a man-sized shoes. If I'm a boy, then I'll go home. I said Uncle Sam didn't ask for no boys.

DC: It sounds like whenever you stood up to these guys, they kind of backed off.

JW: [laughs knowingly]

DC: Is that right?

JW: [Still chuckling a bit] Some of them did. He didn't say it no more—no more to me. You got that.

DC: But they seemed kind of shocked.

JW: Yeah, well it's because they're not used to hearing people saying it, you know. Then they say “You're crazy.” See, that's what they say, “Oh, he's crazy. He don't know—don't pay him no time, he crazy.” See, that's what they said. [laughs]

DC: Were there any black soldiers who thought you were crazy for standing up like that?

JW: No! They never said a word.

DC: How long were you in Guam?

JW: About six months.

DC: Just hanging out, huh?

JW: Well, we built a strip over there. Built an airstrip there. Because when a plane take off there, it take right off on the water. [Mumbled] airstrip right on the water.

DC: So was that an all-black crew doing that kind of work?

JW: Uh-uh. No. Everybody was in there. We was all mixed together in that.

DC: Was that rue when you were in Korea as well?

JW: Yeah. Worked all together there too. White and black all together in there too. Wasn't no different. Wasn't no different.

DC: How did that work out?

JW: Good. We ain't heard nothing. Now, I was with a bunch from Texas, see, and I was the smallest guy in that bunch. So, what tickled me, we all figured we would go into the village. You know, everybody at the same time would go to the village. I wasn't going to go. The guy told me "you're [??] down here. That's what you mean." He said, "You're going." He said, "we all got a [straight line?] to go." But you see, I had been doing like that. [mumbles] These guys from Texas, they fight too. He said, no. They say you ain't got no money. They're going to give me some money. "It's your time to go, Joe, you're going." And you know I had leave like that—they was going to give me the money to go over to that village with anyway.

DC: They were.

JW: Yeah, now that's just the way they dealt with me.

DC: OK.

JW: See, it didn't get like that until—I had been out all day driving. Driving around all day, all night, for two days. And I come in, and they had this record player playing this hillbilly music thing. And I'd gone to bed, you know, and I'm laying, trying to sleep, and one of them says something. And I said something to him. But if they said something about me [mumbles—wicked thing?]. But anyway, I told him, I said, "Anybody from Texas don't show me shit." [laughs] Just like that. They said, "You talking about, it's big for you to say that [??]. I hit the floor. And I had a carbine [Car B?] with fifteen, I think it was fifteen rounds in that thing. I grabbed that sucker like that I and I said, and I grabbed that—with all of this music here and I'm trying—I threw everything on the floor, the record player and all, all on the floor. I said something, I says, that shit hit the ground and I stand on in, just like that. So, nobody said a word. They said oh, he's crazy. [laughs] That's what they said. And I [mumbles], gotta go to bed! And it was just two of us blacks in there. All the rest of them were white, and all of those from Texas.

DC: How many of the others were there?

JW: I think it was eight of them within the ten.

DC: OK, so two blacks, and the rest white guys from Texas.

JW: And they ain't bothered me no more, you know. They sit down, and I didn't care what I said. They went over it, and we all got, we got along together, just like that.

DC: What about the record player?

JW: [Laughs] They got it together too.

DC: It still worked?

JW: Yeah. I guess, see, I had, I don't know, I just had been out and hadn't had no rest, no sleep, no nothing, and I was trying—and you know they were thinking about coming into that tent and waking me up. No. Took no [??]. Leave him alone. And I stayed right there. And after got woked and everything, got rest and everything, man, they was just as nice. And when anything I needed come up, they was just like [snaps fingers] that with me. When I was in my training, I come home to my grandmother's father's funeral. [??] Well then you get transferred to a different group because the group you're with has moved up ahead of you, see? So, they transferred me to another group. And I was in Texas there. Me, and there was two more. Two more of us went down there. And so they had all of us, walked in the barracks. They had all of the guys from Michigan over here on this side of the barracks. You know, if it wasn't from Michigan, from North, see. And all of them guys, we'd call the Yankees. They had all the Yankees on this side. Then they had all of the hillbillies on that side of the barracks. So we walked in there, a guy laying there in the tent, you know. We looked there, and he said, "Where are y'all from," just like that. So one tells him, says "from Philadelphia." And he said, "Where are you from?" He said, "New Jersey." Where are you from Joey? I said, "I'm from Michigan." He said, "Goddamn. I ain't getting nothing but Yankees in here." [laughs] So I said, "What's the matter with the Yankees." He said, "I hate the Yankees." And I said, "Yeah, and I hate the damn hillbillies too." [laughs] Boy he looked at me, he said, "What you mean?" And I said, "Just what I said. You don't like Yankees and I don't like hillbillies."

DC: Did you not like hillbillies?

JW: No. But I just told him that because he said that, see?

DC: Giving it right back to him.

JW: Right, see.

DC: Did you ever tell people you were from Alabama?

JW: Mm hmm. Yeah.

DC: I don't know if you felt you were from Michigan.

JW: So we was out there one night, and we were [???] and everything, and he was going to go out there and tell us all what to do, you know. I told him, I said, "Man, don't do all that. [mumbles] We don't need that, see?" So I'll never forget this guy. His name was "Young." This guy from Texas slapped that man, slapped his glasses off his face. Man, I shook. I couldn't. I just stood there and didn't touch them. So then he come over to me, told me, said, "Joe, don't you think Young's a coward?" I said, "No, he ain't no coward." I said, "Young's a better man than you are." "What you mean, a better man than I am?" I said, "Because he's a better man." I says, "Do you know what?" I said,

“Young could have been called this whole barracks, could have been all living here. Couldn’t nobody could leave out of here, if our Young had of followed through with that mess.” I says, “It took a man to take that, you slap his glasses off his face.” I said, “That’s what you call a man.” Of course he wasn’t looking at that. He was looking at the rest of us in this barracks.

DC: It would have caused hell for all the rest of you.

JW: Right. So I looked at him, “But I’m going to tell you something.” I said, “You bet your [??] fool you. You shove me, I’ll wash your ass all over this barracks.” He looked at me. I said, “That’s right. You better never do that to me.” Do you know, he went after that and he apologized to Young.

DC: He did?

JW: Yeah.

DC: Really.

JW: He apologized to him. See Young was white, but he apologized to Young. And from that day on up, he used tell me, he said, “Joe,” he say, “you don’t mind what you say to a person.” I said, “No.” He said, “You from Michigan?” He and I, like you and I would be talking, bullshitting, you know, carrying on. And I said, “Oh man, you wasn’t bullshitting. I know you’re telling the truth.” See? And we’d all be getting [lively? Loud?], and he’d say, I said, “Yeah, we don’t pay that no time.” He said, “Well, that’s fighting words in Texas if you call a man a liar.” I said, “Well you better stay in Texas then.” He said, “I know it was you. You’d call a man a liar in a minute.” [mumbles] So from that day until we left one another, that man, me and him, got along just like that. I didn’t have no problem. And he would not do anything in that tent unless we all got together with him. But when he slapped that man’s glasses off, boy, [voice tapers off]. Ooh man, I couldn’t see. But shoot, [hard to make out] serving food. And while he would eat all the food, and he kept eating, and [??? sounds like the guy was sampling food and putting the spoon back in the food] put his spoon back in there. I looked at him, I said, “Man, I thought you were a fool like that.” He said, “What?” I said, “We all got to eat. All these people in this barracks have got to be eating, including me.” He said, “That ain’t nothing.” When he said that, boy, I hit him. I knocked him on the floor. And I looked there and then I said, “don’t fall [mumbles].” And all the guys in the mess hall, man they stood up, and you know, they pulled me out back, and then I calmed down, just like that. But he got back, you know he never did that no more. Eating all the food—you got to eat too, and [??] the spoon. Uh uh. I couldn’t see that. {Laughs} I ain’t got [??] no more.

DC: So it sounds like you really could see changes in people.

JW: Yeah! A lot of changes, a lot of things.

End of Interview