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### U.20. The Long Civil Rights Movement: African American Credit Unions

Interview U-1099

Timothy Bazemore

13 September 2012

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**ABSTRACT – TIMOTHY BAZEMORE SR.**

Interviewee: Mr. Timothy Bazemore Sr.

Interviewer Rob Shapard

Interview date: Sept. 13, 2012

Location: Mr. Bazemore’s home in Bertie County, N.C., just north of Windsor.

Length: Three hours and 19 minutes

This interview was the first “pilot interview” conducted by the SOHP for a possible project on the history of minority credit unions in North Carolina. The interview centered on Mr. Bazemore’s experiences growing up in Bertie County, N.C. in a farming family, and his adult life as a farmer and businessperson. He discussed key topics such as growing up with eight siblings in rural Bertie County, where his family sharecropped on a white family’s land but also owned a separate piece of farmland on which the Bazemores raised crops. He talked about his father Henry’s death in the early 1930s from pneumonia, his mother Arie’s strong religious faith and connection to the Holiness Church, and the strict discipline she insisted on for the family. Mr. Bazemore remembered once having his mother brush out his mouth with a mixture of soap, salt, pepper, turpentine and kerosene, after catching him smoking a pretend cigarette. He attended segregated schools in the Jim Crow era, graduating from high school in 1941, and was drafted into the U.S. Army a few months later. Mr. Bazemore served in a transportation unit in the Pacific Theater during World War Two and reaching the rank of staff sergeant, and returned to Bertie County from Japan in 1946, marrying his wife, Hannah, and working in farming and the pulpwood business in the post-war period. Mr. Bazemore also worked one year in the 1960s for the anti-poverty North Carolina Fund, before helping to run Bertie Industries, a textile manufacturer, in the 1970s, and then starting and managing the Workers Owned Sewing Company. He received loans from St. Luke Credit Union and the Self-Help Credit Union over the years. He recalled his activism in the civil rights era on matters such as school integration, experiencing economic reprisals from some whites for his activism, and his relationships today with his children and grandchildren. Before this interview, the interviewer reviewed the transcript from an interview Bazemore gave in 1992 (http://www.american.coop/node/195), which provided valuable background information, and gave a sense of how Bazemore at times remembered events differently.

**FIELD NOTES – TIMOTHY BAZEMORE SR.**

Interviewee: Mr. Timothy Bazemore Sr.

Interviewer Rob Shapard

Interview date: Sept. 13, 2012

Location: Mr. Bazemore’s home in Bertie County, N.C., just north of Windsor off Governors Road.

Length: Three hours and 19 minutes

THE INTERVIEWEE. Mr. Timothy Bazemore, born in Bertie County in 1923, is a longtime farmer, business entrepreneur, and grandfather of twelve. He also served several years on the board of the St. Luke Credit Union, established in 1944 by black leaders in Bertie.

THE INTERVIEWER. Robert P. Shapard is a doctoral student in U.S. history at UNC Chapel Hill and a field scholar for the Southern Oral History Program. He interviewed Mr. Bazemore as a “pilot interview” for a possible SOHP project on the history of minority credit unions in North Carolina.

DESCRIPTION OF THE INTERVIEW. The interview took place in Mr. Bazemore’s home off Governors Road, north of the Bertie County seat of Windsor. The interviewer received contact information for Mr. Bazemore through the Self-Help Credit Union in Durham, N.C., which is interested in learning more about the history of the early credit unions established in the state by black community leaders. Mr. Bazemore was very welcoming and talked for more than three hours. He described serving on the board of the St. Luke Credit Union, founded in Bertie in 1944 and merged into the Generations Community Credit Union in 2002. Mr. Bazemore also received a small-business loan from St. Luke in the 1970s, and he received loans from Self-Help as well for business ventures, which have included developing manufactured-home parks, and establishing and managing the Workers Owned Sewing Company in Windsor. He talked about growing up in rural North Carolina in an African-American family that sharecropped on a white landowner’s farm, but also owned land and raised crops. The family built a tradition of property ownership and an entrepreneurial spirit that Mr. Bazemore continued. He described the difficulty that black citizens could face in getting fair access to credit, and noted the importance of institutions like St. Luke and Self-Help as alternatives to traditional banks. He said that, at 89, he thinks about passing away, and feels it’s important to be able to pass property down to his children and grandchildren. Before this interview, the interviewer read the transcript from an interview Mr. Bazemore gave in 1992 (http://www.american.coop/node/195), which provided valuable background information and gave a sense of how Mr. Bazemore at times remembered events differently in 2012.

**Transcript – TIMOTHY BAZEMORE SR.**

Interviewee: Timothy Bazemore

Interviewer: Rob Shapard

Interview date: September 13, 2012

Location: Windsor, North Carolina

Length: 3:18:59.0

ROB SHAPARD: Okay, so we are recording. And my name is Rob Shapard. I am from the Southern Oral History Program at UNC-Chapel Hill, and today is September 13th, 2012. And I am in Bertie County, just north of Windsor, the city of Windsor. I am very pleased to be in the home of Mr. Timothy Bazemore Sr. We are in Mr. Bazemore’s home within the Bazemore housing neighborhood just off Tony’s Lane. And one thing I wanted to say is that I want to talk to you today a little bit about, about a lot of things in the history of Bertie County, but one of them relates to the Saint Luke Credit Union and some of the involvement that you had with the credit union over the years. And this is part of an oral history project that the Southern Oral History Program is considering, looking into some of the history of credit unions that served, especially in rural areas that served, communities in rural areas.

And I want to ask you as part of that, I want to maybe start with just learning a little bit about some of your background before we launch into the credit union questions. Tell me a little bit, just a little bit about what year you were born and where you were born and kind of the some of the story of your life. Then we can maybe jump into credit union.

TIMOTHY BAZEMORE: Could you recommend how many minutes, three, five, eight?

RS: Maybe something like five minutes. But I think I’ve learned a little bit about your personal history, but I have a lot to ask you about. So maybe we’ll just start with about five minutes and go from there.

TB: Well, I was born here in Bertie County about less than five miles from here a place called Pocosin. I visit sometime. My dad [was] buried the same place that I, same area where I was born. I was born there. We were sharecroppers and landowners. My daddy was a landowner, and he moved down in the southern part of the county called the “Neck,” called the “Neck,” N-E-C-K.

RS: The “Neck”. Okay. And Woodard, what did the Woodard name [apply] to?

TB: Woodard was a post office, rural post office, and it was the name of the community, Woodard. I lived there for years in that area. We sold, my parents sold the little land they had up here and bought land down in Woodard. And we farmed, sharecrop-farmed our land, other land. Had lot of, family of nine siblings, and we farmed, and they just tried to educate us as best as they could. And my father passed when I was about seven years old. He had double pneumonia, and they didn’t have the facilities that they have now. And I would say that the black community didn’t get full medical service in those days. You just didn’t have enough for them, for everybody. So we just couldn’t get it. You relied on people coming and help you, people bringing different kind of medicines. The doctor would come by once in a while if you had the money to pay him.

RS: Were all the doctors white or—

TB: Yeah. Oh no, there wasn’t no black doctor in the area at that time. We farmed, I helped farm, and I went to school. I went to school at Woodard, Saint Paul’s Elementary School. It was Woodard area, community. And I finished grammar school there, seventh grade at the time. Then I went to school, high school in Rich Square.

RS: Rich Square, okay.

TB: We did not have buses when I was down there. The white people had buses, but we had no buses. So we had to try to go somewhere and live with somebody and go to school. It wasn’t good, but we made the best of it. So I graduated in 1941, in W.S. Creecy High. I was at that time, became an entrepreneur. I came right out of school and hauling pulpwood, logs and pulpwood, eighteen years old, but it was hard work. We didn’t have the mechanization that they have now. So we had to do it all everything with our hands, an old crosscut saw. And we did it, but I did it until I went into the Army. I went to the Army. [phone rings] You want me to--

RS: I can pause it.

TB: No I can—

RS: Tell me the name of the high school again.

TB: W.S. Creecy.

RS: W.S. Creecy.

TB: And that’s in Rich Square.

RS: And that’s C-R-E-E-C-Y?

TB: Right, C-R-E-E-C-Y.

RS: And then let me clarify one other thing. What year, what was your birth date?

TB: April 23rd, 1923.

RS: Okay.

TB: Now my birth date now is April 23rd, 1924. I had this incident. I worked on through and when we had to register for the Army, and if you didn’t register more than likely, you had to pull some time. So I didn’t register; I forgot it. And I didn’t have a record in the courthouse so I waited until the next year before I registered. So my age has been 1924, driver’s license and everything. But I was actually born in 1923.

RS: Okay. So you were actually born in 1923, and when you, when it came time to register for the military—

TB: I failed to remember to go register that day.

RS: Right. Okay.

TB: I worked my birthday. I was working on my birthday and didn’t think about going to register.

RS: Okay. So you basically changed it by one year so that you would still be within the requirement rather than kind of basically, basically getting in trouble for being a year late.

TB: Right. Yeah, I didn’t tell it and I didn’t have credentials in the courthouse at that time.

RS: And I was going to ask you, what about your, what were your parents’ names, your father and your mother?

TB: My father was Henry Bazemore, Henry Norman Bazemore.

RS: Okay. Henry Norman Bazemore.

TB: Yeah.

RS: Okay.

TB: My mother was Arie Victoria Williams Bazemore. She was a Williams.

RS: Will you spell her first name?

TB: A-R-I-E.

RS: A-R-I-E. Okay. Do you know, off the top of your head do you know the years when they were born and when they passed?

TB: I might be a little off, rough now because my mother was born, she was younger than my father. My father was born in 1890-something. I’ve got it. It’s written somewhere. I can put my hand on it if I need to. My age now don’t let me remember, I can’t remember it like I used to. My father was older, a little older than my mother, and they were born in, both of them were born in 1800s. They were not slaves. My grandmother was born in slavery time. Charlotte Bazemore, she was a slave. She was born during the slavery times.

RS: Her name was Charlotte.

TB: Charlotte Bazemore.

RS: Okay. And how about, how about the years when your father and your mother passed?

TB: My mother lived up until [19]73. My father passed back in [19]35. [19]36.

RS: Okay. When you were—

TB: I was about seven or eight years old when he--.

RS: Seven or eight. Okay. Gotcha. Okay. And then tell me a little bit about, so after you graduated from high school, that’s when you went into pulp-wooding.

TB: Yeah.

RS: And logging. Tell me a little bit more because I know in the military, World War Two, you became involved in that. Tell me a little bit, take me a little bit forward through the history.

TB: Well, after graduation from high school, it wasn’t long that I was drafted in the Army, and I stayed out about a year, almost a year when I didn’t register.

RS: Right.

TB: When I did register, right on [the next birthday].

RS: Because that would’ve been like [19]41.

TB: Yeah, [19]41. So I went into the Army, and I was trained basically in Fort Bragg and then went to Indian Town Gap, Pennsylvania for my technical training. From there to California and overseas, South Pacific.

RS: To the Pacific.

TB: It wasn’t long. Within a year.

RS: To the Pacific.

TB: Some incident that happened that I often talk about. My parents were religious, real religious. There was a denomination of Holiness, and much of this I tell of an incident that happened when I was probably ten years old. I was, the older people used to come help work sometimes. Families helped each other work back then. Farm work, cut wood up, tobacco wood or whatever, get a little house wood. The families would help each other. And I would watch these people, and they didn’t have, well they had them I reckon, but most of the poor people, black people had to roll their own cigarettes, had to roll their own, two minutes to roll their own [13:40]. It impressed me. I’m a little boy, but I was watching. Of course, by my parents being spiritually restrictive to smoking...

RS: They didn’t allow smoking.

TB: No. They didn’t allow smoking around the house. They had to go down in the woods to smoke. And as they’re going down there to smoke, I’m looking for them and I watch them. As I watched them I wanted to do it too. I wanted to smoke so bad. We raised corn and all then and we pulled the leaves off the corn for the mules. We would strip the leaves off in the fields so it left the corn there with the ear on it, but you could see it long way through that field. And I got me some brown paper and struck my own match, and I watched them strike the match on their hip. I went through that field and propped back against the corn stalk like it was a tree, rolled my own, I rolled one, and lit it and it smoked. That corn silk would smoke. And I smoked, and I thought I was a man. My mother stood back way back and saw me through there, saw everything I did. She came through that before I got through smoking and caught me. Timothy and I broke to run, come back. You know to come back. If they catch you in bed that night and beat you like you ought to be beat. But she got me and then she got, really spanked me, I mean, with a switch off a tree. Back then they were, parents would really, I still think it was good for us. Some parents didn’t do it as much as others, and you’ll see a lot of it. Now got soap, turpentine, kerosene, pepper and salt, mixed it together and [a dogwood] toothbrush and brushed my mouth off. Called this cleaning this sin out of my body.

RS: What would cause her to do that? What was it you did that caused her to—.

TB: Smoked that cigarette. That’s wrong. You don’t need to smoke. That’s wrong. It’s not healthy for your body, and the Lord don’t want you to do that. And I don’t smoke to this day, never smoked. But many did, and I’ve been around cigarettes. But I said it to say this, it lingered with me up ‘til this day. The strict raising has lasted around to right now. I never used the Lord’s name in vain. Some people curse, “Goddamn this” and “God damn”, I do it like I’m talking to you, but I do not do it. I don’t care how mad I get. I don’t do that. I don’t use the Lord’s name in vain. I just don’t do it. I was raised and that’s part of my raising.

It carried me to another quick incident. I tell it everywhere I go. When I was going overseas and was on a ship, a lot of the boys, we were not integrated then. We were blacks, all blacks. So we were going overseas, and those boys would get down in those ships and get some blankets and they rolled dice, shoot dice, cursed, all kinds of language, sinful language too. Ain’t even got to the war zone yet, but the Japanese fired a torpedo at this ship, and we could feel the little bit of concussion from it, but the captain said, “Everybody get on deck and get ready to jump.” These guys, they had more nerve than I had because they were down there cursing. But now when the captain told everybody hurry up and put their lifejackets on and get ready to jump, those guys prayed, you talking about prayer. You wouldn’t believe it. Prayed like I don’t know what. Trembling, couldn’t put their jackets on. We had to go help them get their jackets on. That’s a story I couldn’t hardly believe it. I thought those guys had more armored fighting [nerve] than I had. I always tried to train, as I was training, I tried to listen and tried to figure out how to survive. And I had some fear but not a whole lot of fear. I trained myself, if I’ve got to go, I’ve got to go. They trained, they teach you that in real training. You’ve got to be [fearless] in fighting a war. But anyway, those guys taught me a lesson. They did not have the real nerve to put that jacket on. They fell all to pieces. I often thought about that on up to now. They were wicked but they straightened up then. So I, now I get back to where we were.

RS: Where were you, where were you sent in the Pacific and where was your, what was your assignment?

TB: Well, I was sent to Manila first.

RS: Manila, okay.

TB: Manila. I was there, and I saw a lot of Americans and a lot of Japanese laying dead, but I didn’t, I didn’t get shot at while I was there. But I could get hear the shooting and what not. We stayed on our ship probably three or four months, on the ship. And finally we got on land, and I went to school for a mechanic while I was there. It was about a four-month course, and I already knew some mechanic, just everyday. But I did well, and when I went to Tokyo, we were shipped from there to Tokyo. We were supposed to go, we were bombing Tokyo every day. But we were supposed to, on the day of Hiroshima bombing, the next day we were supposed to invade Tokyo. We were supposed to go. I had made already made the motor pool sergeant. I was a good mechanic, and I was in charge of fifty-five trucks and jeeps and whatnot. I had to be there to be ready for the landing. But when they surrendered, then we took our time. We didn’t have to do anything. But we had no TV available to us, but we had the news, and a lot of people had died from this bomb, the A-bomb at Hiroshima, so called Hiroshima [HERE-**AH**-SHIMA] but we called it Hiroshima [**HERE**-OH-SHE-MA] at that time. Went on to Tokyo and I made a rating every month. I got up to, would’ve, if I could’ve stayed I would’ve been tech sergeant, but I was staff sergeant. That’s my rank now, staff sergeant. Tech sergeant was next rating. If I’d stayed one month, and I’d have been tech sergeant. That’s as high as you can get in the motor pool. I did well and had offered to come home and go back and be a motor pool sergeant, still be the same position I had.

RS: To stay in the Army.

TB: Stay in the Army. I didn’t want to, I wanted to be home, and I came home. An incident that registered then and now coming home in Maryland, coming home on the bus and riding the bus, and I got to Maryland and the blacks had to get up and go to the back of the bus. And a sixteen-year-old boy got on, I was sitting about the middle of the bus, and they told me to get up and move back. I had to stand up. I told them, “Uh uh, I can’t do that now.” Told Them I couldn’t do it. That isn’t right. Can’t do it. And the sixteen-year-old white boy stood up, and I sat down. I didn’t, they didn’t make me. They didn’t do nothing to me though. But it was bad back in those times. Kind of rough for us. But things like that, it registers, it registers in your mind. And it has, some of that. Now that I’m older I think about the change even though a lot of change needed to make still. But there’s a lot of changes been made since I was young, a lot of changes.

RS: Tell me a little bit more about the bus in Maryland and kind of, what happened there and the feelings it left you with.

TB: Well, I knew that I could’ve been dead because I had a lot of things, we had a lot of incidents [in the war] that were dangerous. Even after we got in Tokyo, snipers were still there. We lost some of my comrades. They’ll shoot you dead. But our boys will shoot them too. I tried to be, I never been like that. I tried to be really fair. We had the advantage when they surrendered. America had the advantage, and I treated them like the advantage was ours and respected them. But a lot of times our boys would kick them, fight them. And if you think about what they were doing, maybe some justification, but I couldn’t do that. I just treated them like human beings. But the guys would, had, the alcohol called sake.

RS: Right.

TB: And our boys would go out and get drunk with that sake, and they would do everything. But I didn’t. I didn’t, I never tasted the sake. I never got drunk. I never drank. I was a leader in the army in this truck division. I had to do everything.

RS: And you never drank in your life.

TB: In my life, never to this day, never drank. I don’t know what it tastes like really. I used to go out, we used to go out with my brothers. We’d go out together and they would get sodas. Some of them drank beer, would have a beer and then, some of them drank wine, liquor, anything. I didn’t. My brother would get beer and pour in my soda, and then they’d stand back while I taste the soda, and they would stand back and laugh. Just fun but that’s the nearest thing I've been to drinking. I just never drank.

RS: Why do you think your brothers did, but you did not since you both were raised in the same family?

TB: Well, this brother close to my age didn’t drink either. He might taste it, but my older two brothers, and I was little, they would get drunk, and they called it “bush liquor.” They’d go find, go to the liquor stand and get liquor and get stone drunk, couldn’t, had to crawl home. I’m little. They were probably seventeen or eighteen, and I’m eight, six or eight. And I looked at them, and I said I never, I don’t want to do that. They about couldn’t walk. They were so drunk they couldn’t walk. Had to drag them home. But I just, I frowned on it then and it lasted me all my life. I just never did. I wouldn’t do it. That’s why I got the resentment from, my brothers, older brothers.

RS: And remind me, you have how many brothers and how many sisters?

TB: Six of us including me. Three sisters.

RS: And take me, tell me a little bit more about, so you came home in 1945, and then tell me a little bit about what you did over the next decades after that.

TB: I continued, I mean all of my life I’ve been self-employed. I continued. I farmed and cut pulpwood and farmed on a small farm and cut pulpwood and bought an old [farm] truck. And we would, in the farm season hauling peanuts to the market. You take the same truck and put a flat bed on the pulpwood truck, and we would, I was physically in shape. I could load a hundred bags of peanuts that weighed a hundred pounds to the bag. A hundred bags on that flatbed truck by myself. I had to stack them far too high and then bring them down. But I threw them good and take my time, and I’d load a load and it was a good living. Then I’d take the old truck and haul two, three loads a day.

RS: And what were you, when you were doing your own farming, what were you raising?

TB: I raised cotton, corn and peanuts, a little soybeans. About the same as I do now.

RS: Okay.

TB: Much of the time I was operating the family farm, and I’d rent some land of my own. This is the story that lingers with me up to this day. I was farming and had a combine, and I guess, I guess I was the only black in Bertie County who had a combine [for] peanuts. I elected—. Well, we were asking for a school. That was in the [19]70s, I believe. I elected to help the school, trying to get a school for our area. The Woodard [area] had a little three-room school with a potbelly stove in it for heat. That’s all we had. So I elected to try to do something about it and went to the superintendent and got a group. There were three schools just like the one I was involved with, [school names 30:40]. So we found the leaders in those little schools, went to the superintendent and asked about the schools. This day and time we don’t need this kind of situation. Been out there a long time. So he told us to go, where to go look in our area and pick out a site. Now, *he’s* picking out the site, and we’re supposed to be site-finding. But as we went out and looked at this site between here and this area, the [19]54 Civil Rights Act had long been the school should be integrated. In [19]64 they enforced it. Every child can go to the school of their own choice. And when that came on the TV we, I’m the spokesman—.

RS: This was in the [19]60s

TB: Yeah. Yeah. We’re in the [19]60s. I go back to the superintendent and tell him that we decided, that I did some research and the black school [school name 32:57], they had thirty-two people for student. That was the school average. Thirty-two, they had thirty-two students to the teacher. Right across from that in the white school they had sixteen students to the teacher. So we told him this isn’t go to school by choice and one school had thirty-two the other school had sixteen. I’m the spokesman. And I told him we were going to carry them over there for the sixteen students and [32:33]. We don’t need no [new] school. That man run me right out. Get out. Get out of the office and told them to stay.

RS: This is the white superintendent.

TB: White superintendent, ran me out and told them they could stay and talk, telling them to come back another time, but don’t bring him. So they came back. We had a meeting. They said, “Well you’re the spokesman then, you’ll be the spokesman now. We’re not going to do that. Go back to him and tell him again.” And we managed to get them, I’m the leader, and carried sixty-some students into the white school. This was the first county in North Carolina that was totally integrated.

All right. I was farming. I was farming FHA and cutting logs too. They took my land. This FHA says, “You’re not eligible for no loan.” I had farmed and had peanuts and just starting, and they dried them up one day and if come a freeze that night, you ruin your crops. If they separated from the hull, they’d be all right. But if there come a freeze that night and plowed them up. I lost most of my peanuts, had to sell the oil. Didn’t quite pay off but I’m having my other little business. When time came to farm again, I had paid [the loan]. But when I got ready to get my loan they said I wasn’t eligible and—

RS: Was this the local, the local board that decided for the FHA. Right? This was the local people—

TB: Yeah, the FHA, local people had a supervisor. He made the loan. He made all the loans.

RS: Okay.

TB: Those people are telling him what to do. They had a board back then, but they told him don’t make me no loan. So—

RS: These were, they were all white.

TB: Yeah, all white. They didn’t hardly have blacks on the board back then, but I’ll never forget it. I had one farm, leased it for five years, and I had leased it for two years and they took it, the lease and all. They took and said supposedly said I was too large to be a family farm. I wasn’t too large the year before that. The next year I’m too large. But and they said that you’re too large for a family farm. Okay. I let my brother take my family farm and reduce my size of operation. I go back and reapply. They said I wasn’t industrious; I was lazy. And I was going to cut a load of pulp by myself and load it on the truck, and I’d be out about eleven [having done] a day’s work and every man be trying to get a load to the man, but they’d let me haul my load first and I would cut it and load it. I may not come out. I had to try to find wood, logs and scrap of wood and pulpwood to cut. And during the time that the school thing happened, I had, one of my workers had a truck, his truck, and then if they find my truck, they run us out, wouldn’t let us cut the wood. They really fought me. And I went to school, stopped and went to school for a brick mason. I saw the handwriting on the wall. School in Greenville—

RS: Greenville.

TB: Greenville. Pitt Technical Institute.

RS: Okay.

TB: You might know George Esser, George Esser, he was the sponsor of the North Carolina Fund.

RS: Yes.

TB: And folks were reading about me and the school situation all over the country, all over America, that we were integrating the school, but he asked me and another person to come up and talk to some people at the University of North Carolina. Talk to them about injustices and what we were going through and we did. We told [our story]. But it wasn’t long before they come up with an idea of Mobility, finding people jobs in North Carolina. A lot of people back then was going into the cities, New York and New Jersey getting welfare back then. But they said, instead of that if you could find a way to get them in North Carolina, they could get jobs in North Carolina. And a lot of people still benefit from it. Statesville, Charlotte, all those places up there, they needed people in furniture places. You’ve got a lot of people going from down here all around in eastern North Carolina and some of those people still living there and still going there. People just going to North Carolina still from New York. So it was a good program.

RS: That was the Mobility Program.

TB: Yeah, and I was a recruiter and I worked about, I reckon about nearly a year and a ruling, they came out and you had to have two years of college and work experience or be a college graduate to be doing what I was doing. I never will forget, Charles Davis was the director, he’s a black man. He was a black director of the program. He called me and said they won’t let me work, he was going to give it up because he said I was really good at it. And I was. They would get all those recruiters from everywhere, all over the state, and let them come down here to me, and I would show them what I did. I didn’t try to work during the regular hours. I would wait until the evening, when folks started coming home.

RS: And what was it you were recruiting people to do?

TB: I would find people here that were being displaced with mechanized equipment, didn’t have a job, and find them and get them and ride them up there, and they had people there who received them.

RS: To where?

TB: High Point, Statesville—

RS: Okay. Where they could work in manufacturing jobs.

TB: Right. Mobility had staff there and I was the staff down here. I was the recruiter.

RS: And would they have to, would they be like moving there?

TB: Oh yeah. Yeah they moved them. It was strange and hard for them to get adjusted if they didn’t have nobody help them get the job and help them live until they got the job. So they had staff up there to keep them doing that until they got the job and got going.

RS: Okay.

TB: Find them a house. But in the recruiting area, I was doing so good recruiting they wanted all the recruiters get together and come down and watch me do some recruiting. Some of the things I showed them down here, and it was unbelievable. You go to a house looked like nobody was staying in it. And one of the white recruiters would go to the door and knock to the door, and I’m telling them, you see the axe they cut the wood with out in the yard, you know somebody’s staying there. So I’m telling you, somebody’s staying there. And usually the candy man, see the candy man goes to sell candy and they’ll spend the money and then they won’t go out, they’ll see the candy man come and they’re ducking the candy man. So after they would go, I’d go. They’d go and wouldn’t anybody come out. And I’d get out and go after they’d gone and knocked on the door. I’d go out and I knocked to the door, and I’d say, “Is there anybody here that need a job? Come on out. We know you’re here. Come on out.” First thing when you drive up, if you see the window shaking, you know somebody’s there. I’m telling them, teaching them all my comrades how to observe. And I said somebody’s there know and you see the window shaking and say duh, duh, duh, duh. So I go there, “Anybody here need a job? We’ve got jobs out there for you.” After a while, somebody comes to the door. The white recruiter, I’ve already gone there; they wouldn’t come. But it was so many things that we did just from knowing, just everyday observations because we lived in it, and they wanted these recruiters to have the exposure. Another thing—

RS: Was that strictly in Bertie?

TB: Oh no, I had about ten counties. Halifax. But they moved around place-to-place and find people that were displaced by machinery. Another incident that we had in the center, we had a center. We had people, family coming down and they had these children and wondered how they could live off, I can’t remember the dollars, I don’t recollect, such a small amount of money. And they said can’t be done. And it *can* be done. I told them you look at those people, those children, look how clean they were, look how healthy-looking they were, but they know how to buy cheap. They would buy beans and meat and make a good dinner, bread, and without paying so much for it. And our staff just couldn’t believe it. So we talked about that in some of the meetings and we gained a lot. So I was a, I was a stand out person in Mobility.

RS: You had knowledge of the experiences that they just couldn’t relate to.

TB: That’s right. But I came up with it. Finally I wrote up a proposal while I was working. I wrote a proposal for homegrown food project, growing food at home and it worked so perfectly. And it worked good. [But] food stamps came out. When food stamps came out they didn’t need it. Everything we had in mind, food stamps replaced it. But it wasn’t, it was a project that we said that one hen per member of the family. Five in the family, five hens. Nobody ever had to ask for aid if you give them the proper feed and water and they’ll lay year around. They put a little thing in a warm place beside the barn, and it was working. People, we had one row tractor that would go to five communities and it plowed the garden. People came out and it worked. It worked so good until food stamps came out. We raised hogs and whatnot. I was leaving there. I left Mobility. [People] would come down and look at the project and it was good until food stamps come. That’s probably the most of me. Now we get back to the credit union, I reckon, because—.

RS: Now what about let me ask you one more thing and this will connect us to it. You know briefly for now anyway tell me a little bit about Bertie Industries and then the Workers Owned Sewing Company. Just tell me a little bit about how you got involved and then the basics of how that proceeded.

TB: Bertie Industries, the manager of the credit union, he was near-about the leader to get, trying to find jobs, and I was, I was active in the credit union at that time. It was a small—they finally kept trying and got the government to put a sewing factory here in Bertie, called Bertie Industries. And they had to bring in a manager because nobody here, the blacks, knew anything about sewing. And during that time Blue Bell came and it was competitive because the blacks had a good thing going. They built a nice building and had it going. They built, they made different kinds of [clothing] wear. Uniform coats and a lot of things they made at Bertie Industries. But they had a program called 8(a) program where they paid a lot of money to supplement what they were doing.

RS: Small, a federal small business program.

TB: Small business, um hmm. So they were, they did it for three years, and they said now we want somebody from Bertie to kind of learn and stop using this 8(a) program. But we were, they were trying to get back in the 8(a) program one more time. And I wasn’t working. I worked for myself. They asked me to sit in and just try to be there to observe and learn what I could. And they had to move from making all government items to some civilian, commercial. And as they did they had a manager, Jewish. He cursed and called every word he, all day long, cursed and called, and I’m sitting there and they tell me to learn and I can’t learn but he wouldn’t let me learn. He wouldn’t show me anything. So finally one day he had a whole plan laid out when you’re starting operations, so many starting this and so many started that and laid out and over the plant and he told the people in New York he had a lot of the stuff made. He had almost made, but it wasn’t finished. Now he wouldn’t let me call or tell me about these checks coming in even though the local people wanted me to learn, so I could get in the 8(a) program and I would know something. And he wouldn’t let me in, but finally at last they sent a truck to get what he had made, and he didn’t have the numbers that he said. So they sent the truck right back. He said the only thing they needed, they needed paper put on them and they went and put the plastic covers on them and he’d have some more ready any time. But he hadn’t had them made. He wasn’t finished. They sent the truck back the next day, and he didn’t have nothing. He got up and walked out and nobody seen him since. That left me, now I’m saying didn’t know anything, but one of the things I had learned and I had gotten involved that I started a training program at the community college in Williamston. They let us have a person who knew something about working a sewing factory, supervisor, he was white. I had learned that much by observing. In the chart, I look on the charts. They had to put everybody’s sewing percentage, and some were sewing one hundred-ten, -fifteen percent, some were sewing thirty-three percent or twenty-five.

RS: Of the goal they were expected to be.

TB: They were supposed to sew that much of an operation. You hem this they would say twenty-some dozen hem that. Now some of them are hemming at 120 percent, and some of the same ones hemming at twenty-five percent. Doesn’t make sense. As I’m in there watching I see them slowing, talking. But I couldn’t say nothing. I’m just in there looking. Now when he walked out, what I did, I called a meeting all of them. They had used the money from Southern Bank, and they had foreclosed on them. The bank had foreclosed on [them] and they couldn’t get any government work. But when I, the little time I was there, I said everybody sewing less than seventy percent efficient. They take seventy percent to pay yourself, pay for the thread and pay the machine and repair and whatnot. It estimated that seventy percent of the money would pay everything. I said we’ve got to lay off everybody that can’t sew seventy percent. Only seventy percent left. Now, you wouldn’t believe it, those thirty-three, twenty-five and thirty percent jumped right on up to hundred because nobody had to lay them off. That taught me something too. People can do if they want to do. And I learned a lot from that. But the bank closed them, had the machines they were financing and we tried to say that I was raising a lot of hogs and had put together some money. I was raising a whole lot of hogs. I had about 17,000 dollars. That was money back then. But I carried that in the plant and gold, I can’t remember my recollection of that, but gold was cheap and started going up. And I was going to take that money and buy gold. If I had I would’ve made me some money, I don’t remember what it was now but you can remember. It was so much an ounce then, but it went on up ten times what it was when I should’ve bought. But I put my money in that plant trying to make it work. So I had, they didn’t have any credit.

RS: Who, what was the ownership situation of Bertie Industries at that point?

TB: It was owned by a board, owned by the stockholders. We had to buy, everybody buy shares and had a board. But it went defunct. All of that had no value because it was sold off, building and all. I took six or seven people went up the street to the old Blue Bell place, and I asked the guy that was supposed to been could run that plant, to run Bertie Industries, he was an electrician. He said it would cost six or seven thousand dollars to do it. I didn’t have any six or seven thousand dollars to get it wired up. But I went in there in Martin County and he showed me what to do and come on and showed me. He wouldn’t charge me. I gave him about fifty dollars. He showed us what to do and we put it together.

RS: This was the, you said, what’s the name you’re saying, this used to be the Blue Bell—

TB: Blue Bell, Blue Bell came in after the, after Bertie Industries was doing so good, Blue Bell came in and big, white.

RS: That’s a private textile industry.

TB: Yeah.

RS: Right. And Blue Bell is one word?

TB: Blue Bell, two words.

RS: Blue Bell. Okay.

TB: They made Wrangler Jeans—they made the Wrangler jeans. They made a lot of jeans, too. They were good at it. But our people working and they let us have people there.

RS: But then and then after Bertie Industries was closed down, the building you’re looking at now that used to be the Blue Bell plant—

TB: Right, used to be Blue Bell. They built them another place. And we went to the place that they left, Charles S. Jenkins Company.

RS: And about what time, what time period are we talking about now? Is this into the [19]70s?

TB: Yeah, we were, it was in the [19]70s. It was in the [19]70s, actually probably about [19]75. Somewhere along about that. Because I know I had, I bought a truck in [19]75, [19]76 truck and I drove to work. We took those six people and Martin Eakes, he was right out of law school. He came down there, and what they had over in Blue Bell, they had me responsible for all the taxes. The taxes we were withholding. We withheld it, but they closed us down and the money that I had withheld in the bank. And I’ll be dogged if they liked to put me in jail because I couldn’t produce that money. It was in the bank, but it wasn’t registering with the Department of Revenue. So they, when I started working with Workers Owned, they charged me, I tried to start it with everybody work and we divide the money. Everybody own it and we work and divide the money. We make something, get out of there that we could do good with it. We didn’t pay ourselves much until we sell it and then the state revenue department came in there and said, uh uh, you can’t do it. Said Tim Bazemore can work with no money. Everybody else has got to be paid. Minimum wage, whatever it was then. So that was pretty hard on me, but anyhow we managed to get involved with the credit union, and Martin Eakes had what they called the Self-Help Credit Union he had organized up there.

RS: In Durham?

TB: Durham.

RS: Right.

TB: Called the Self-Help Credit Union in Durham. So they came down and started helping to get financing.

RS: Oh wow. Okay.

TB: Helping to get some financing. We started with six people and in a year-and–a-half, we had fifty people, going right on. But we had, we used that chart and the percentage. We’ve got to have that so folks know what they’re sewing because they won’t do anything with you if you don’t have any way of checking the production level. They won’t work; a lot of them won’t. So we got them working and we grew. We managed to make that thing, made it work. And the Self-Help Credit Union let us have what money we needed. We, the only thing they did was okay, we’ll let you have money but Tim Bazemore had to put up everything he got. I’m responsible for this. If you believe in yourself, they tell me, if you believe in yourself, we’ll let you have the money. But if you get scared of your own self, we can’t let you have the money. It made sense. If I want to borrow some money and feel that I might not be able to pay, I might not want to borrow the money. So I had to make myself believe.

RS: So what, at that point, what property did you have to put up? What of your personal—

TB: I had started a mobile home, I had bought some land, and I had some mobile homes. I mean I had borrowed from Self-Help, $20,000. I was making it work too. I was doing pretty good too. I grew it from two or three homes to about twenty-five. And I guess I told you I—

RS: That’s not this one where we are here though? Right, that was a different mobile home.

TB: No, another park. I sold it. As a matter of fact they were going to foreclose on me. This crack cocaine came out, and I guess half my [tenants] were on crack cocaine. And they wouldn’t pay anything. All of a sudden I couldn’t collect.

RS: These are the people who are renting the little homes from you.

TB: Renting the mobile homes, right. And I couldn’t pay my bills, I couldn’t pay it. I anticipated wrongly. I thought that they would pay, everybody’d pay. But they just couldn’t pay because they got on that stuff and their mind got wrapped up. They were going to foreclose on me and somebody came along [and] said they would love to buy that place. I had it neat. The money-making potential was there. He paid me $250,000 for it. And I bought me some land. I paid off my note. I paid off everything I owed and bought this land. And I was going to just develop this and sell lots and make a little money. I got to looking into it I said no, I had people getting some of my tenants up there, bring them out here and help them buy the lot. I’ve got eight out here right now I brought with me from somewhere else. They wouldn’t—

RS: How many mobile home lots are out here?

TB: It’s forty-two, but eight of them belong to individuals. Eight of them belong to individuals. About thirty-three I think right here that I own. So I borrowed a line of credit for myself for $75,000, another line of credit for $75,000 in another name and borrowed in my wife’s name another $50,000. So I had probably $225,000 loan. But I knew what I was doing then. I’d buy houses and I’d get somebody in them, and I could pay my loan back. But they did these lines of credit unsecured. They didn’t even do them right. So I think it was, it probably was, it wasn’t Martin Eakes that caused it. But the government come, said you’ve got to change that. I had to, they had to pay that line of credit off. I paid both lines of credit off $1,500 a month, $1,500 a month, paid them off.

RS: And were those from Self-Help Credit Union?

TB: Self-Help, yeah they were Self-Help. That was Self-Help there. But they had taken over Bertie, I mean Saint Luke went defunct. They didn’t have reserves, didn’t have reserves that they were supposed to have. And they were going to close them so Martin just came in and took over and that’s what it is now, Generations. It’s become Generations but he came in and took over as Saint Luke-Generations. But I paid mine off. I had a good income, and I had planned it and I watched those people who were on drugs too. I learned how to watch for that. So I made the pay off and I paid everybody. I put in three units less; I’ve got two more lots left and I’ll be through.

But a school building up there, they said it couldn’t be done. I got it. I was going to do it for the community, maybe one part of it for the community building. The community, they had it and didn’t do anything with it. I come right in and divided it out and worked it out and made four apartments out of it. One apartment and then one block, they were going to make it one block. So it cost me a lot of the money to frame it so that it had no partition wall. But I partitioned it off after, and I made it work. Even the board of Saint Luke Credit Union said that’s a waste of money. I was, when I was doing it for the community. But after I got into it I got behind in my payments, same problem. We had gotten in some crack people, got behind in just that project. It wasn’t paying for itself. They said it was a bad loan. But I had to take my money, personal money and paid the payments for a little bit, but I caught it right on up. And it’s a real good loan. It’s good. It stays full all the time and it’s $325. I don’t try to get rich off it. But it pays, hardly ever sits empty. It’s doing well.

RS: Okay. Let’s see here. Now you’ve, you’ve got us right where we need to be talking about credit and things like that. Let me backtrack a little bit. I’m thinking about Saint Luke Credit Union, the little bit that I've learned about it, it was established in 1944. You were away in the army at that time. But the first thing I want to ask is thinking about late 1930s, early 1940s before you were drafted, what do you remember about the availability of credit in Bertie County for people, [phone ringing] especially for black folks in Bertie County in a rural county? What did, what access did they have? If black folks needed to borrow money, could they? Where could they go? Who would they try to, who would help them?

TB: Very little chance of borrowing. Very little chance of borrowing. FHA was the leading thing for blacks in agricultural [enterprises]. But building a house, something else, just wasn’t anything. The credit union wasn’t strong enough towards the early part of it. They loaned me probably $20,000 to buy, to buy the lots on this road right here, long in the [19]70s. And that was woods; all this was woods. I cleaned it up and some of it was lots —. That’s a story to be told. I’ll say a quick one. When I started back here and you had to have land perc-tested, and they were passing it. Now out on the road they were passing my lots. I was going to sell the lots and make some money. And the person that was in charge of testing land, he was making a transfer to some other county, but he wouldn’t pass my lots up there. He wouldn’t pass them. I had somebody had bought a lot, start building a house and he condemned it. They had to stop.

RS: Because it wouldn’t perc.

TB: Perk. It wouldn’t perc. Now a new person came in and the same test, and passed it. He passed the same house that he had condemned, the other one had condemned. But anyhow, back here the new person had passed some of these lots over there, too. But when they had found out that I had gotten over in a sense, that I was lucky, the same lot—and I got houses that are sitting on them right now, the two houses out to the road, same lot that they told him no, I have houses there right now. Isn’t anything wrong with them. But they didn’t pass anymore. I can’t put any houses anywhere else further than right here. But I had plenty, I had bought this land then. That second piece of land and I just kept on getting it. I was reasonably successful, I don’t have any money but I have a lot of assets, but they worked against it. The credit union, I have to say, they were the reason that I’m successful.

Now I tell you this, CRA, Community Reinvestment Act, the banks, the credit union Generation came in. No it wasn’t Generations, it was still Saint Luke’s, but Martin Eakes who had money, I forgot. So the banks were didn’t want the credit union to make these loans. They were doing pretty good making loans. So the bank would make folks loans to keep the credit union from doing it since they—.

RS: Right, they tried, they didn’t like the competition.

TB: Right. It opened the door for the black folks. Because they felt if they didn’t make the loan, the credit union would make it. It helped a lot of black folks get started. Helped them get houses, get a little more home.

RS: You mean the banks, once the banks saw that competition from the credit union, they became more willing to make loans to black—

TB: Right.

RS: —folks for houses and things like that.

TB: Right, they certainly did. It helped a lot of black folks, sure did. They didn’t turn the black folks down any kind of way. First they just turn you right down. They can’t do it. They studied that, and if it was a good potential, they made that loan. Black or white, they started making the loans on them.

RS: Now I’m still thinking a little bit more about the 1930s before the credit union was created, and I’m wondering about with your parents for examples, they were sharecropping someone else’s land, but you said they were able to buy some of their own land.

TB: They had a big farm.

RS: Now tell me how much acreage did they have and how did they do that? How did they get the money to make that purchase?

TB: All right. They had a little farm here up here [north of Windsor]. They sold that farm and that was an agency away from here, Southern Land Bank. And they, that particular farm wasn’t a popular farm. It was not drained good. The black folks could buy bad land. [Both laughing] But you couldn’t buy good land. I’m just going to tell you like it is. So that was considered bad land because it had a big [conduit] running through it to pull the water out of it. It needed cleaning out. So this land bank sold that to my parents, sold that farm 227 acres. But a lot of the cultivated land wasn’t drained was laid out. And we took mule and had an old tractor and cleared up a lot of that land and then we moved down to a white man’s farm and farmed his farm and this land. And after while we kind of got, back then, self-sustaining. We could make ends meet.

RS: They still needed, it sounds like your family, they needed to do the sharecropping. So it was a combination of sharecropping and working that other land that made the money work.

TB: Right. That’s right. Both, we made the money work. Paid for that land until we had paid the note, made a payment every year. Mother paid it. And we grew, financed the land, improved the land. And now the later years we had it ditched and that helped a lot, it made the farm better and just kept on then. After a while I took over the land and ditched it out like it ought to be ditched. The same man that ditched mine here, he had got him to come ditch that down there. He knew what to do with the excavator and ditched it out good, and it’s one of the better farms now because it doesn’t have any water problems. It’s solid land, not too sandy. Sandy land leaches a lot of fertilizer through this but stiffer land with a clay bottom holds the fertilizer up. That land now it’s good farming, less leaching.

RS: Is that land, the 227 acres, is that, is that still in your family or—

TB: Yes. Still in the family. It’s owned by, my mother willed it to the nine of us and we would own it the rest of our lives. Then it goes to the grandchildren. And it’s willed so that it’s got to stay in the family. By staying in one of the family solid [1:13:40].

RS: Is it still split up that way or has somebody consolidated it?

TB: As one of us passed it goes to the ones left. All of us are gone now but four.

RS: Okay.

TB: I’m the next to youngest. I’ve got a sister younger than me. And as we pass, all of us getting in eighties and nineties, and we die in age, the oldest one dies first, and the next one, on down the line. So I’ve got a sister that lives in Philadelphia. She has Alzheimer’s, but she is still one of us, and a brother who is a county agent for years in North Carolina and Tarboro, I can’t call the name but somewhere out from Charlotte, the next county up to Charlotte. I know it. I’ll say it in a minute. But I’m saying my recollections [escaping] me now.

RS: Davie or Cabarrus.

TB: No. It’s what county is he in. Right at Charlotte—.

RS: Rowan County. Rowan County.

TB: All those kind of right in together but there’s one more county there. Person, what is the name of the county. He was—

RS: He was a county agent.

TB: County agent. He did well there, too. He was active in a lot of city stuff too up there. He was real active.

RS: Okay. And then, so before you went away to in World War Two there was no credit union. When you came back the Saint Luke had been established in Bertie County and—

TB: It was small.

RS: It was small, yeah.

TB: But I got a loan from it. I got a loan from it.

RS: When was, when did you first get a loan or become involved?

TB: That loan probably was in it ought to have been somewhere [19]70, early [19]70s they made me a loan.

RS: What were you, what was that, remind me what was that loan for? Tell me again what that was for.

TB: To buy lots and sell them, buy lots and sell them, develop the land I bought, not this land here but on the road I bought altogether seven acres on the road, and the man gave me probably ten acres over here, no woods. But I could cut stumps up and got a bulldozer and cut stumps and bulldoze. Did it nice and cleared it up and this land right over there, now I’ve got soybeans, farm, farmland, good farmland. So I developed and made something out of it.

RS: And between 1945 and the 1970s when you first got a loan from Saint Luke, where did you, if you needed to borrow money, how did you do it? Between, in the [19]40s and 50s and the 60s.

TB: There was a man running a station, service station, and I did a lot of business. I had seven or eight men working for me. We traded there, my truck gas and all of the men, we ate there—

RS: For the pulpwood.

TB: Yeah, pulpwood, we did a lot of business, and my recollection says I did a three or four hundred dollars business sometimes a week to pay him the money. All my men got whatever they wanted from that station and I was responsible, I paid it. So one day he got it wrong. He gave me all the money back, gave me all the money back. So when I paid my men off, I had too much money. Then I looked and studied, I’m pretty mathematically—

RS: Sharp.

TB: He had made a mistake. And I gave him that money back. Normally he would’ve never known, and I hadn’t done anything wrong. But my conscience kept me—

RS: This was a white man.

TB: White man.

RS: What was his name?

TB: A.J. Yates.

RS: A.J. Yates, okay.

TB: So he had, that was a 1954 Ford he had. He was going to sell it. He said I’ll sell it to you, told me I’ll see it to you. You didn’t need to sell it. There wasn’t anything wrong with it, but he just wanted to help me get a nice car. It was nice. A Ford. He sold it to me on time, and I paid him for it. Later on I wanted to build a house. “Yeah, I’ll help you build it.” Het let me have money; whatever I needed he let me have. So my source of loans rise from that, I was doing a lot of business and I did pretty with good logging. So he just, I did him—.

RS: Was he, were you, was he, what was his role again in the logging? Like he buy the pulpwood from you or—

TB: No, he had none of that. But he sold gas, fixed the tires on the truck, washed your car, washed your truck. Had a service station and right then they used a lot of water, clean folks’ cars and grease the car back. Everybody had to grease car every month to keep it going. But now they’ve got it so you don’t have to grease it. But he had a service station that was needed. Back then you had these big companies that bring their log trucks, he’d service them too. Washing the trucks and people buying gas, stuff like that. So I was big enough to run one or two trucks all day long. So I used a lot of gas, too.

RS: So you had an account there and—

TB: Yeah, all of my men go there, that’s where they ate at right there, buy their dinner, everything buy a can of pork and beans whatever it is, crackers and carry it in the woods every day, and then each week each man he’d take the money out of my check. I’d give my logging check to him and he’d take it all these men plus my gas, plus what I owe him, all they owe him, he takes it out. I’ll be standing right there with him to get it right. But one time he had gave me all the money back. He didn’t take out nothing. And then when I paid my men, I had a lot of money left and didn’t look, and I looked and he had not taken his money, his part. I took it back to him. He couldn’t hardly believe it. I didn’t have to take it back. He probably wouldn't have ever caught it, no he wouldn’t have caught it, but I didn’t want that money. That’s the way I lived. I just didn’t want it and I gave it back to him.

RS: The reason with your logging check, the reason that you took it to him rather than, tell me if this is right. One of the things he was doing for you he was able, he was in effect, in a way he was cashing that check and then taking out all of those expenses rather than you taking that to a bank. Right? You could’ve, if you—

TB: I could take it to the bank. The bank would’ve cashed it.

RS: The bank would have—

TB: Yeah they would have cashed it.

RS: Could.

TB: Yeah, I could have cashed it, but it’s a lot of inconveniences. I had to pay each man’s account, he didn’t trust those men because some would work one week and the next week didn’t work. But he knew he could just take my, I’m responsible for all those men.

RS: Okay. I see what you’re saying.

TB: He was taking pretty good money back then, every month. Each man say buy forty or fifty dollars worth of groceries.

RS: Who was the, who were you selling the pulpwood to.

TB: We were working for, it was North Carolina Pulp Company then in Plymouth. They bought a lot of land in this area so the barge could come right in [to our area]. Go sometimes on train cars and sometimes on barges. It would load in different places.

RS: Was that, was it all pine trees?

TB: Most time it was all pine, but hardwood would sometimes come in and buy hard wood. They would buy hard wood. And we’d cut it. We’d find our own timber, and sometimes cut [the company’s land]. They didn’t have big logging crews like they’ve got now. We could, see some of the loggers, white, had little [mechanical] crawlers. We could take about eight or ten men and get a whole lot more than they could with the crawlers. Folks still don’t know how we could do it. We were just hard workers, really, really hard workers, and we could get it out and how we were so successful, we didn’t pay men by the hour. You were paid by the load. All right. Sometimes we knew it was too wet to work, but they wanted some money. Okay, let’s go. So go out there and get four men to get two loads and they just made a half a day. But they worked and they were glad to get the half a day. Many times we had to take those trucks in places like the woods out there. We’d go out there and we’d have to take the limbs out in the truck and make a bed for that truck. Take two trucks and bring a half a load on each truck and bring one truck and throw it on the other one and go on the way with it. A lot of extra work but we did it. We managed to make it. We knew how to do it too and we had men who would work. Because they were working by the load. That’s how we beat everybody. Everybody worked by the hour and [you had] ten men [wanting those hours]. But we worked by the load, and if you don’t get any load, you don’t get anything. So they couldn’t understand why we got so much wood. We did. But that was my start. Self-Help helped me, give me two lines of credit about $200,000, about a quarter of a million dollars.

RS: And then I think you said, you were, when were you on the Saint Luke board. Do you remember that?

TB: Most of the time. Most of the time. When it was small after I came out of the army, I was one of the ones that helped do it, and I was on the board then. But when they got ready to be a Bertie Industries, when they got money for Bertie Industries, I didn’t have quite the income as another guy had and they needed to get all the assets they could from the board, and I just stepped down. I didn’t have a house; and I didn’t—another guy he had a farm, a tractor and all that. So I just stepped down, just a short while though. It wasn’t long here they called me back. But they recognized me, but that was when they were trying to get that government program to start the factory. I stepped down then, so we could get all the assets we could to show to the government that we had assets. So I stepped down but as soon as they got it going, I’m right back on.

RS: What about the, was there a time when, maybe this was when you were creating the Workers Owned Sewing Company, was there a time when you had to go around to the churches and seek some loans?

TB: The time we went to the churches was to let them know that we needed some experienced operators to grow. We had, we were training people in our program and then Blue Bell hired them right out of it.

RS: Right. Right.

TB: We were paying them; they were hiring them. See they, we learned how to sew so fast and as soon as they want to leave us, Blue Bell’s a bigger company, they leave us, Blue Bell grab them. Know they were good because they had the ones we trained. That’s some good workers because we had trained them to work hard. So Blue Bell was getting a lot of people so we’d go around to churches and said we wished they would help us maintain help when we get them because we’re training. Folks know we trained them, and Blue Bell wouldn’t hire them in the beginning, but after we get them hired, trained then Blue Bell would hire them. So we would lose a lot of help, a lot of money too. So that’s the only time we went to churches that I know.

One of the important things that I can remember, we were trying to become manufacturers. We wanted to go into a Wal-Mart, a Kmart at the time, and manufacture for them and get a contract and make it. And we did. Went up there, went out there, and I always joke a lot. So I went up to Wal-Mart and we didn’t have enough skills, enough money to justify them to give us a big contract because we might not could make it.

RS: Wal-Mart or Kmart?

TB: Kmart, I’m sorry. Kmart. Kmart. So Kmart knew a man in Pennsylvania, asked him would he come down and help us. Now we had got the state to let us have some money, zero interest. Eva Clayton wrote a proposal for us.

RS: Eva Clayton

TB: Yeah, she was a congressman. And she, yeah, I believe she was a congressman when we wrote it. But anyhow we had to have enough money to do this contract, and that’s where Self-Help came in and they bailed us out, let us have enough money to go up there and make that contract. But the first time we didn’t have enough money. I came back to all the people in my sewing factory. I told them I believed in root doctors, root doctors. I don’t know if you know what a root doctor is. The hoodoo doctor, they call it.

RS: I don’t know. Keep telling me. Keep talking and let me see.

TB: Call the hoodoo doctor.

RS: Okay, yeah.

TB: This is just a psychological thing. I didn’t even believe in it then, don’t now. But most black folks believe in it. They believe that the root doctor, uh uh uh don’t mess with me with no root doctor. You tell them you’re putting roots on them, they’re pretty frightened. So I told them I went up the first time and the folks in the Kmart wouldn’t listen. I told them I went to a Dr. Jordan in Belhaven and got my hand, root hand, I got a root doctor, and I told all the folks that were working there. They kind of believed me but they knew I joked a lot. And I told them when I went back up there, all the buyers were hovering around me to give me a contract. But they did. They did. So happened that I had come back and gotten Martin Eakes to help put together some money, and when I go back up there, I had those buyers listening to me. I wasn’t educated, but I was pretty keen at doing business. I knew what I was doing, pretty much knew what I was doing. So I did, got a lot of, got $500,000 one time. Come back here and making seat cushions on fourths [1:32:10] I believe, if I remember right. One-fourth and ship, make another half [of the order] and ship and get money.

RS: This was with—

TB: Kmart. Now struggling, couldn’t hardly get by that first contract and got a check. I’ll never forget it. It was like $103,000. Went to the bank in Windsor, they said you’ve got to wait fourteen days. Now, we’ve got to have the money now. We just managed to—. Went right on to Wachovia showed, them that check. [snapping] Let us have what we needed. They kept the check until the check came through. They said in Windsor that we had to wait fourteen days. They didn’t want to help us. We had to wait fourteen days before we could and we couldn’t wait any fourteen days. We barely could get the order out in time to get the check, and we didn’t have any money. We needed money to make payroll. Couldn’t get that much in loans. They keep the check and couldn’t get that kind of money. But they didn’t try to help us, but the bank in Williamston did. I said, I knew [1:33:30] all right. Took that check.

RS: Yeah.

TB: Fourteen days were too long anyhow. Didn’t have to wait any fourteen days. We knew that. We went through some hassles, but after a while we got so we could make that, doing orders for Kmart every year. When I, and I stayed there for many years too. I ran the place twenty-five years. So finally I’m old, I’m seventy-something by the time I came out from there. I worked for myself because I worked mostly, the workers came out of there and I got my trailer park going.

RS: Yeah. Yeah.

TB: And we had, they would give us specifications for each size, children’s waist fourteen, relax, stretch, twenty-three, I’m just making up. Now they changed that. The first year I came out, every measurement was the same but one. Then they decide to make that garment so they could put a diaper inside of it. But the measurement relaxed was the same, but stretched, it’s got to stretch way out to put the diaper in there but when you turn loose, it came back the same. Now I didn’t, I wasn’t there when, I had to go in and out. And they made that item and didn’t meet the specifications, and they turned it down. Just as soon as I come out. Now what to do I don’t know. I still had to help them get the money. I had to be responsible for the money. So what we did, I went up to Troy, Michigan, told them—. They condemned the first one-fourth. That’s a lot of money, that was a lot of money probably $150,000. So I told them, would they consider us making another according to spec. They said make me a sample and bring it back. I came on, and I made, I know how to do it. I made them a sample and came back and relaxed the sample. Carried it up there and they said, we’ll take the rest of the order. And we took the rest of the order and made it break even. Made it break even. I told them how. So they didn’t do much more work for Kmart then, though. I was out and started sewing for different little companies and they didn’t, they couldn’t make money.

RS: What were, what were you all, tell me a little bit more about what you all were making over those twenty-five years that you were with Workers Owned.

TB: Sometimes we were sewing for other companies like a company in Rich Square maybe. They would let us help them make their orders. And we weren’t making for Kmart at that time. We didn’t have the money until, so we did a lot of sewing for different companies.

RS: Was it, what was the finished product usually? Was it a finished product or a piece of a product?

TB: Finished product but different things. We made shirts. We made a shirt that’s the nicest shirt you can buy, I think it was made something, some Asian company. We made pants; we made aprons. What a company make, we would make it for them. We had to make it according to their spec, and see, we helped them make their orders. It was good money for them, started, they didn’t pay us what they got. So we were sewing on contract. We had to price it to get enough where we could make it and make a little money. But we did some orders; that’s why we started making for Kmart. Then we did well. We made sometimes two-hundred fifty, three hundred thousand dollar order. We made a frayed leg pants. My favorite pants, make the leg ragged. We had a machine that turned that leg around and around. That was the style then. We made a whole lot of jeans. We made just a whole lot of different things for different people. Kept plant the going and we did all right too. One of the things we did that I need to mention that, we couldn’t quite pay, we didn’t as much as Blue Bell, but we would give all our people a bonus, what we take the money and divide it up at the end of the year, and sometimes they had three thousand dollars. And I be dogged some of those people that were working for Blue Bell tried to get with us then because they loved to get that—we paid—

RS: Oh yeah.

TB: See we paid close to what they were paying, what Blue Bell was paying through the year. But when we started giving folks two or three thousand dollar end of the year bonus, and then we started doing all right. Because Blue Bell folks were trying to get in with us then.

RS: And that was, that relates to the fact that this was, it was a worker-owned plant.

TB: Right.

RS: Tell me how that worked. Tell me a little bit more about how that worked.

TB: The Workers Owned plant, it was membership. You had to be a member to work there. I think the membership was maybe a hundred dollars. It worked just like any other plant, but if we were to divide the proceeds, the profits I’ll say, at the end of the year. We don’t have any profit, you don’t get any profit. The state made us pay minimum wage anyhow. Workers get paid, and we had to, we had to calculate that into a process of percentages. You got paid minimum wage, but you take that minimum wage and sew enough to make twice minimum wage. Some of them could sew enough to make twice the minimum wage all through the year, and that percentage of profit was good because they had, we had to calculate what you earned for the company. See if you were a good sewer, you were making money for the company. Then we, and we had calculated that at the end of the year into the bonus. The bonus wasn’t all the same. They got based on the average percentage of work. See, I have to consider you work for seventy percent, you broke even. You made, you paid for yourself and you don’t owe the company anything and the company owed doesn’t owe you anything. Now suppose you average 120% that means you made a whole lot of money for the company and yourself. And we would break that down at the end of the year and give it out. And that was an incentive to make them work during in the year. They know that the high percentage started, and we had figured how to make, get people to want to work. We did a lot of things like that trying to make them want to work, make them want to have to work longer. We had some people want to come there and work.

RS: You guys provided I think maybe insurance, is that right or how did that?

TB: Yeah, we, let me see, workman’s comp required us to have insurance. They required us to get insurance in came somebody stuck a needle in their hand they can draw workman’s compensation. So that was, I think that was our basic for insurance. We had it so that each person was guaranteed insurance. If they got sick, we didn’t have to insure that. But we did insure if they got sick the company would pay probably half salary for two or three weeks. We just did it voluntarily; it was just something we did. We’d call a meeting and say everybody want, and some of them we’d give more than others. Some people deserved more than others, too. If somebody was a good operator and they got sick based on coming to work and car’s broke down and had pneumonia, we would make sure they did good until they came back to work. The insurance was mostly company time. We’d call a meeting. We wouldn’t try to say Tim Bazemore. We would call a meeting. I would be there to lead it and making the suggestion, sort of round it out. But they have the option of, and they’d vote on the options. It was really, it really pulled things together.

We had to do a lot of things. Now sometimes we had to load a truck on a Sunday. I had to load a truck every Sunday. Many times had to get my family to help me load the truck on Sunday. Sometimes I didn’t have enough help. But after a while, I got so I had enough help to come on Sunday. So Joe Fox I believe was his name, he was an accountant and he helped us to our bookwork and helped train the office girl, and he’s a white guy, but he wasn’t prejudiced. He’s just a regular guy. And he helped us do a lot. I remember Martin Eakes came down, and we were trying, we were trying to get the state to let us work and pay ourselves [1:44:50] but they wouldn’t do it. Then they got me for that money that hadn’t been sent in and the federal carried me to Elizabeth City. I had to go to court in Elizabeth City and even the money, every nickel was in the bank. But I hadn’t sent it in, and they started to put me in jail. But Martin, he came down and he worked on it and worked on it. But he said that, he said I did it. He said I did it. I told him, I told them when I went, I said, unless you all put yourself in my position that the money is there somewhere. What are you going to put me in jail for? What are you going to get out of it if you put me in jail? The money’s in the bank. What are you going to put me in jail for? What are you going to gain? But they wanted me to be frightened over it. They really, they wanted me—.

RS: Was this the federal IRS or the state revenue department?

TB: It was federal according to I had to go to federal court in Elizabeth City. They had me jammed up too. But it didn’t matter. I talked to them. I talked to a lawyer. Showed them where nothing that I could have done because I took the money out—. See they wouldn’t let me send it in, it used to be annually, but quarterly they got it down to quarterly. You didn’t have to send it in every month. And it was annually then so we had a whole lot of money tied up in there.

RS: This is the federal withholding.

TB: That’s right.

RS: Federal withholding that you withheld out of paychecks in order to pay as federal tax.

TB: Hold it out, yeah. Had not been sent in.

RS: Why not? What was your process for that?

TB: Because we only sent it in, but when the bank foreclosed, they had the money and we couldn’t get it. See it’s tied up and we couldn’t send it in. Tied up in the foreclosure.

RS: Was it Bertie Industries then?

TB: Yeah.

RS: Or was it, okay.

TB: It was Bertie Industries. Bertie Industries. I was responsible.

RS: I see.

TB: And then I tried to come down to the new place, and they fought me right on down there and had me, already had me jammed up. So I tried to get them to let us work and pay and divide the money. Nope, you could work, only somebody in the plant that could work free. You’ve got to pay everybody minimum wage. You’ve got to take their taxes out every week, and you don’t have to pay yourself anything. You can work all you want.

RS: Well, what do you think, I’m just, what do you think about, just thinking about yourself. Like you said you graduated high school, you had to kind of fight pretty hard to get that education all the way through high school. What do you think, why do you think you have that business sense? Why do you think that because a lot of people who have, if they’re in that, growing up in the sharecropper situation, it’s just a dead-end for people. How do you think you were able to have a different life and have that strong business sense and do these things?

TB: Well, my parents were entrepreneurs. They had a peanut picker even though they were sharecropping and owned. They had a, the only kind of [1:49:00] and a tractor. I helped out there. Helped them, I helped work in the fields and harvesting crops and bring them in. And I guess I was exposed to entrepreneurship. I think, coming up in life, and I know that my brother next older than me, we would get up on top of this pea picker and we’d talk innovative things. I remember talking about, and we would, the word was “suppose” and I would say “spoon” and that means suppose. We’d get there and I’m ten years old, twelve, and we had saucers in the air flying. Just imagining things, just imagining things, my airplane and I flew this one and we flew down, didn’t know about the Kitty Hawk situation and that thing, listening to talk, and we would get up on top of these machines and barns and talk hours at the time. We had mulberry trees out there in the pasture and we’d go out there and pick mulberries, get up in the mulberry tree and talk. Things that I can remember we talked about that are happening now. And just imagining, and just talking about imagination a whole lot different things, flying. We’d say flying saucer but we didn’t call them saucers and we’d call them something. And we had, and s’pose mine outran yours, and I did this and that, just imaginary things and I bet I wasn’t ten years old. We’d just sit up and talk.

So my parents, getting back to what pushed us, I think our parents came up having their own machines and having their own farm. I know we had an old tractor, Farmall tractor, and bought it new. In 1928 my daddy bought a brand new Dodge, near about unreasonable for a black man. He farmed and bought it too, farmed and cut logs in the winter and bought it a ’28 Dodge. It was pretty—.

RS: A ’28 Dodge.

TB: 1928 model Dodge, the year 19—.

RS: Okay, a pick-up truck or—.

TB: That’s a car.

RS: Okay, oh wow.

TB: See I've got a 1930 Ford out there in my garage there. I’ve got a 1930. Well, the reason I wanted a 1930 because it reminded me of when I was little boy, and we would go in the field sometimes with that Model A three of us on each running board. About two in front seat, three in the back seat inside, probably ten or twelve of us riding on that car right in the field back in those days. Go around the field with it. I remember when we had to go to school sometimes when it was raining, they’d try to go to school to pick us up, they had to jack that wheel up and turn the wheel to start it. Just crank start, take your hand, turn the wheel, jack it up and turn the wheel and that’s why it catch it up. Had to burn, really had to burn it, dry it off on a rainy day to make it start. Life was harder than it is now. But people enjoyed it. We enjoyed it; we worked. But I’ll be, things were much different but motivational aspects, you were used to trying to own something, all my life trying to own something. That’s where you go on up through the years.

RS: And that came from your parents.

TB: Yeah—.

RS: That example of your parents.

TB: Yeah, they tried to have something, and we tried to do the same thing. We try to race to beat the other one, tried to beat everybody, just race, try to be good at what you do. Not that you’re going to be the best, but try to be the best, and I know we’d go in the woods and get those loads out. We tried to get those loads out and all the men that helped me work. They’d send them too. We would get these loads out before they do. And we did beat most everybody. We tried. But we come from a long way though. I come from a long way, there are a lot of changes over the years. So we were walking home, going to school I had to walk three and a half miles to school every day. So the white children had the bus. They’d come by shoot spitballs and throw out and hit us with spitballs. So one day I said, “Look y’all—.” There’s a red clay that you can make a marble out of. Red clay, there’s a place along there, we stopped and everybody made a clay marble. It wasn’t hard, but it would’ve gotten hard in two or three days if you let it sit. So we said now when they raise that thing, the window to throw the spitballs out, everybody got a clay ball. Some of those clay balls going in there. We threw that clay ball and no more spitballs come. We didn’t have no more trouble with spitballs. I’ll never forget it. I said, "Let’s everybody make a marble.” We needed to make marbles anyhow. Roll and make the marble. I said when they raise that, put the window down to hit us with the spitball, we’re going to throw these marbles in there. And that ended the spitballs. They didn’t have any more trouble.

RS: Why do you think the bus driver, was the bus driver white?

TB: Oh yeah.

RS: Why do you think the bus driver didn’t come after you for that? Maybe the bus driver was glad you stood up for yourself, or what do you think?

TB: Well, I think all of us saw it as a play, a play thing. Our football team, the black boys had a football team, we wanted them to win, they wanted us to win, that kind of attitude, but I think they knew we just outfoxed them. They’d been getting by throwing spitballs at us. We just got them. They didn’t do it no more. They didn’t know when we might have because ours hurt a little bit because they were clay. Might have gotten somebody. But it wouldn’t have hurt you seriously but one of those pieces of clay, it was going to hurt. And I think we must’ve got somebody. Because we didn’t have no more trouble. But I remember the white, the man owned, we were a tenant, I will never forget this. He was a good man. He’s just a good white man. I mean he didn’t believe in integration, but I mean, he was just a nice man.

RS: Do you remember his name?

TB: Aubrey Tarkington, A-U-B-R-E-Y T-A-R-K-I-N-T-O-N, Tarkington, T-O-N. Tarkington, T-A-R-K-I-N-G-T-O-N, Tarkington. I remember him well. One night I went up there to get some kerosene. We had [lamps] and our kerosene was out. He had a whole lot of hunting dogs. He loved to hunt. I go down and I know those dogs are going to get me, gonna get at me now. So there’s a cart round there, each cart has gotten a big heavy oak stick in the—. When you see carts on TV now, like Westerns. They were carts that got spokes. I got a spoke and go there to get this kerosene because I know those dogs are going to get after me. Those dogs, one of them, they get closer and closer to you and you holler, “Hey, Mr. Aubrey! [Laughs] Hey!” Nobody, they’re sitting there eating. They aren’t paying any no mind. Dogs about to get you. After a while the dogs went and go so close to me that the cart spoke about like this. I hit one of those dogs and he fell. All of them started on me. Sat right there. He came out, said, “Um hmm, um hmm. You did the right thing. You did the right thing. You got him. They won’t bother you anymore, no more.” He didn’t. Some white boys would curse you out and try to get mad, but he didn’t. He didn’t say anything to me.

RS: Did it kill the dog?

TB: No, he got up, knocked him out. He got up and went on but he didn’t bark. All of them, I was probably ten years old, young boy walking, going over there to get kerosene.

RS: So you knew, I mean so that was a moment where it could’ve gone either way, right. He could’ve been really mad or he could’ve—

TB: Yeah, right, he was the kind of man, just a good decent man. He knew the dog wasn’t going to bother me but they were sitting there eating. They could’ve come out there and got that dog off of me, all them dogs, all around me. When they got too close to me and I bust him. Back then we would go to the store. The store was probably two and a half miles. I wanted to be hero. I’d go to the store by myself to get a half dozen eggs or whatever and kerosene. I was going to the store and a tree limb in the country, swinging, maple tree swinging like that. And looked like a ghost. It looked like a ghost, looked just like a ghost. I walked and get a little closer and closer and don’t want to go back home without bringing the oil back, kerosene back. I want to be a hero and don’t want to go by that ghost. Looked just like what we called a haint but it was—I walked up and got closer and closer until finally at last I said I’m going by it. [Rob laughs] I closed my eyes and ran just as fast as I could run until I got past it.

Now I’m going to the store, got to come back. I come back and see the same thing, swinging out in the road. The wind blowing it just swinging, a maple tree limb. It was like a big sheet right in the road. And as hard as I could make myself go by, too. [Both laugh] But finally at last, I said I’m going by and just be and you’re running so fast you feel yourself cool. Just running. Wondering if you’re dead, I don’t know what. But I come on in and when I come in I’m bragging. I was bragging about how I saw a haint; I saw a haint and I run by it. Somebody tell me no, that wasn’t a haint. What we did it was checking these limbs in the tree. I can tell you just this last one. My sister who was younger than me, we’d [take] a peanut and we would get some of the peanut, take them into the house and cook them, boil them, good. So my brother, doctor brother-in-law, he’s going to come to the graveyard, a white man field, but a graveyard up in the field. He comes out there, by the time we get through picking up peanuts and come out of the graveyard with a sheet. Now I know he was coming. And when he came, “Here a haint, haint, haint,” and we ran. My sister hollered and I’m hollering too. I thought I could out run her but I couldn’t out run her. She stayed right with me and hollering and we were hollering. But I know something like that we did. We ride the bull, ride the man’s bull. I’ll tell you just—.We had to walk back to the field to where we go. White man, he had it fenced, cows in the fence, had a fence it was leaning over so the cows couldn’t get out. It was leaning over like that. Now I come home. I’m probably fourteen years old, I was going to high school then, summertime. Cows sitting out there chewing. Sitting out under the tree [but] you get that cow’s tail and put it in a bow and pull it, she’ll get up. And I caught that cow’s tail and put it in a bow and pulled it. That cow got up and the fence now was leaning over like this and that’s where they [deposited their manure], right under that fence. I ran right down the fence. Because they’d grazed out in the pasture. But they’d [deposited manure] right beside that fence. Now here I got on this cow’s back. And the cow’s running. The cow’s got speed, too.

RS: They can move, they can move.

TB: Yeah, they can move. I’m on this cow’s back and running through this fence leaning over on my head like that. And I had to slide off. And I hit a [cow] pie and I just, I bet I flew from here, a whole lot further from here to the window on the cow [manure]. They had [deposited manure] all down here and had dried up on there and all my sister and brother laughing, they’re laughing at me and I’m sliding. Sloop [Makes a sliding sound], hit a pie, slide, hit another one. I slide, I slide. We tried everything; we could do everything in the book. Children, just clean play. Had one old horse, fight you just like a man. Said it had killed three cowboys. We didn’t care. We would plow him. I remember one day I’m plowing and he kicked. I walked further from here to that thing and around to get—. Can’t walk by or he’ll kick you. I walked all the way around but she jumped down and kicked my hand. There’s a place on my hand right now. Kicked my hand. Looked and jumped right back there [like she] hadn’t ever moved, jumped right back where she was standing, kicked me. Hit my leg and my hand and messed my hand up.

RS: This was a horse, not a mule. Okay.

TB: Horse. Bought the horse for hardly nothing, maybe twenty-five dollars and they said the horse had killed three cowboys. I believe she [did] because I saw her run my doctor brother, that same horse, it was a male. Run into the fence and he holler and throwing. He crawled up there and she right there to the fence by the time he got there pawing at him and everything. He just fell over the fence hollering. But we would keep on going. We made things work.

RS: Was this before there was electricity? Was there any electricity around at that point?

TB: No, that was before electricity. That was before we had, I know we had a pump sitting out there we had running in the house. We had a pump running in the house. That was something else then. Had running water in the house. We just carried the pipe over, [pumped it] into the house. That was a big thing then.

RS: Sure, I believe it.

TB: Sure. It was good. It was good. I remember my sister loved fish. Now fish, molasses, we raised cane and had the mule go round and round grinding and then cooked and made molasses. Fish was plenty; herring was plentiful. Hog, we raised plenty of hogs. Then your garden, that’s what we had. That’s what you had. We had good eating. So the stuff that you had plenty of you didn’t, you want it much, the herring and my sister, she couldn’t eat any herring. They would give her peaches and give her kind of a makeshift thing. So I got so I don’t know, where I learned it from, learned to put my hand down my throat and vomit. So I ate some fish, and then I couldn’t eat none. I got sick. I put, I remember as good as my name, throw my hand in my mouth and vomit and then my mother and sister and everything they said no, ooh. Now I’m getting on that list where I’m getting the goodies, goodies too. My sister kept the goodies. Now--

RS: Yeah. I see. I see.

TB: I loved myself some fish. I loved the fish, but I wanted to get the goodies too. Probably ten, eight or ten years old. So we had a warmer on the stove, had a warmer, had a warmer that keep [leftovers,] put it up in the warmer. And they had fish up in the warmer and everybody going in the field and I go in there and get up in a chair and get up in the warmer and get me fish. Sitting there eating fish . My brother came back for some reason and peeked through the window. There, I’m eating, I wasn’t eating anymore fish. I wasn’t supposed to be eating any more fish. I’m goodie-goodie. I’m getting my goodie-goodie. I’m up there eating that fish and he caught me. Told, hurried up and told everybody. I cried like a—

RS: I’m sure he did.

TB: Yeah, he told it and I cried. I cried a long time. I didn’t want to get caught, but I got caught. Those things stick with you, that makes you better, makes you better. Those whose parents raised them, family. Some raised them, get drunk, do—. They come up like a drunk. But my family we were raised.

RS: Now what about the church? It was the Holiness church that your parents were members of?

TB: Yeah.

RS: Where did y’all go to church?

TB: We had country churches. We had one Baptist church. My parents wouldn’t let me go to the Baptist church. They said they did too many bad things. I heard my parents talk. So we had to go to the Holiness church.

RS: So even the Baptist church wasn’t strict enough.

TB: No, no, no.

RS: Your parents wanted more. Okay.

TB: You could smoke cigarettes at the Baptist church.

RS: Yeah, okay.

TB: At the Holiness church you couldn’t smoke no cigarettes now. At the Holiness church you’ve got to live right if you think you’re going to heaven. So my parents went to Holiness church. So I went on by the, we had a Baptist church right in the schoolyard. I couldn’t go to that. I’d go by that and go up another mile to the Holiness church. I never will forget it. But I was a regular guy. I wasn’t a saint. Certain things I stayed away from, I respect up to this day. And my parents, they would help the neighbors. Always, there’s some handicapped neighbors, some healthy people, couldn’t make a living, just some of them would be farming and the landowner would take the money. They’d settle up and whatever the landowner give them they had to accept it. They couldn’t say, “You cheated me.” But my parents would stand up. When I was coming up they would stand up for the right. They had [some paper] and what they got they wrote it down. So they would settle up. But they would help those unfortunate families that we were raised to do that, to help each other. We’d help and a lot of times be real destitute, some people in the community, didn’t know how to make a living. My family would help.

RS: When you read about history in North Carolina or in the South and you read about how like you were saying people who were sharecroppers or tenants of some kind, when it came settling time, they just had to take what the white landowner said. Well, looks like we just broke even or actually, or hey, guess what you owe me, you actually owe me a little money. And kind of the implication in history is that if they tried to argue, then that could be dangerous.

TB: Was dangerous. Some of them—.

RS: How about for, how do you think your, think for your parents, how do you think they were different? In other words how did they, why were they able to do that or what kept them safe or, you know what I mean?

TB: Yeah, I know exactly what you mean. I’ll explain some of it. Lot of it, the landowner knows who would stand up. They know, you’ve got a tenant that is going to fight them, they knew it. So they would respect that. They tried to do right. Or don’t use them. Don’t let them farm. See, because my daddy, and I was just little, but he was farming for a white man, the game warden, and the game warden’s son, we had to cut that hay, had a thing with the mule and do like that and cut that hay and load it on the wagon, way up there. That little old white boy got up there and called him a liar. [My daddy] slapped him, he slid all the way off. But they didn’t do anything to my daddy. And if I tell you this, the same man that my daddy slapped off, he was a game warden and owned the land [near] where we had, and I’m already out of the army and probably twenty-five years old. That man, he fenced his land in, had about a hundred cows. And when he turned his cows out and opened the gate and ran them on my side I had to pick my corn up to get ready to carry it in the barn, haul it in the barn. He ran all his cows in on my side. I told his tenant to tell him to run those cows back, don’t bring them over there anymore. Now, the next day I had about fifteen cows. The next day, my cows went over to his [field]. But he had one field that wasn’t fenced in, and my cows went over in that field that wasn’t fenced in the next day. So he opened his gate and run my cows in his pasture. Now he done it, his cows ate all the corn they wanted out of my fields. Mine couldn’t eat nothing but oats, green grass [in his field].

But anyhow, I’d been in the Army now and had some nerve, always had nerve, got some nerve now. I could make myself have nerve. I could make myself have nerve. I could make myself not be stupid, but have nerves if I need them. And that man shut the gate and said, “You’re going to pay me.” Now he had a hundred head of cows, probably at least, a whole flock of cows in my field the day before that, and my little few went in his, couldn’t get any of his real corn where the stubble, just rye grass, and he’s going to make me pay. I told him, “I’m not paying you nothing.” And I had enough nerve to tell him, and his son was running for sheriff, his adopted son. Wasn’t his real son. But his son was running for sheriff, and his son, I tried to help him get sheriff. I was trying to help his son get it. His son liked me and I liked his son. But his son said, “Tim, don’t—. Just, just let it go.” He thought I was scared, I think. [The father] told me he would put his fist in my mouth. [2:14:14] “Now, see, you watch me.” He had done pulled his rifle out. You’ve got your rifle. “Here, I’m going to get my cows, and now you do it.” I’m going to open that gate and get my cows. I wasn’t scared. I made myself not be scared because I knew I was right . I knew I was right. But his son, he didn’t like, his son wanted—.I was doing civil rights, and got stuck with my combine. His son came out there and pulled my combine out [with a tractor], pulled it out. That’s how close we were, his son. He was just, he was right. He told me, his son would tell me, “Go give ‘em hell.”But his daddy wasn’t like that. His daddy finally died.

RS: What was their last name? Do you remember?

TB: Smallwoods. He was a [family name 2:15:25]. He was the son-in-law, but mentally he wasn’t sharp. This A.J. Yates, he married this A.J. Yates’ daughter. He married A.J. Yates’ daughter, same man that helped me, A.J. Yates, I mean, he respected me and I respected him. But because I was in civil rights he respected that and told me, you’re doing the right thing. He said folks need to treat me all right. He knew what I was doing wasn’t bad. But those are the days that I guess, it won’t be long, but I remember those. But some of these new incidents happened right now.

I had a pistol. I had a pump shotgun, .22 rifle with a scope, and a .30-30. And I had a girl that came to clean my house up, wash dishes for me, cook if I need it, but I always cook me a little something [to eat]. But this one, in a period of two months, four guns walked out of this house. Pistol walked out first. I always keep it in my drawer on the side, it walked out. Then a little later on I had the .22 sitting right beside the freezer, it walked out. Each time when the girl came and cleaned up I leave the door open. Now, my nephew come and I’ve got fish going down there where I can fish. A hawk came down there and ate the fish. Got my shotgun and shot it. So I caught him going up to the house and brought my gun, pump gun and brought my gun and put it in the closet. And I always killed me some meat, country meat. I’m old-fashioned. I got a smoke house full of meat right now, country meat, ham, smoked ham. So I had a guy that helped me smoke ham, and I’m working. And while he was smoking the ham he went home, and my house worker left long before he did. But when he went home he let my worker come back here again. Now, therefore I suspected but I don’t like to accuse anybody. Suppose I’m wrong? Then I am, suppose I’m wrong? So I just laid low. I was working on getting some more guns, try to get it back. I don’t have a gun in the house right now. I don’t have anything to shoot but my b-b gun. But I told my son, I told him if anybody break in, I’m sure going to put that b-b gun in his face.

RS: Oh yeah.

TB: You have to do the best you can. But let me see if we miss anything in the credit union [story]. One of the things that I wish to tell that I [remember]. I sent somebody to the bank to buy a car. And it was one of the workers that used to work at the sewing factory. They viewed the application and said income wasn’t enough to justify buying the car. But she bought cars before that and always paid and never missed a payment, right from the same bank. So I go by the bank, don’t know anything about this loan denial and ask them what were they doing, if anything, [with] the CRA [Community Reinvestment Act], tell them we’re trying to find out if banks are really honoring CRA. And they explained it, try to do best as they can. It wasn’t an argument. It wasn’t anything controversial.

RS: Was this, when was this would you say?

TB: This would be [19]90, in the [19]90s.

RS: Okay.

TB: She goes back and re-applies, and they had one or two black workers then. And they passed that loan. But I always hear about, talking about the CRA, and were they honoring it now. They might not be, it might be out of existence now. I don’t know what they—. But usually it has changed president here [2:20:40]. Because when I got a grant, Nixon, Republican. Eva Clayton went [and] got a grant. He passed it. Add to the bill, the loan, couldn’t do it for an individual but could do it for a corporation. So a lot of things happened and a lot of things changed.

Now last year by myself I farmed me two hundred acres of land. This year I just farmed a hundred. Next year I plan not to farm but four-and-a-half acres of garden. Just doing something, but I got to get some help, gardening, it’s a lot of work in the garden. So I’ve got to have some help. I’m thinking about trying to build a greenhouse because I can grow some things in the winter. I know it’s time for me to stop, but I just love to move. It still makes sense. I get tired too. I give out. I can work and give out, have to come home and rest up. I wouldn’t give up. It’s a good feeling when you get tired and resting up. It’s still a good feeling to me.

I’ve got some ailments now. I’ve had prostate cancer, but they found that I’ve got low sugar and blood pressure’s a little high at times, but I take blood pressure pills, but not a full strength, just give me half strength. And I go to doctor and just check me and they say I do well to be my age. Doing real well. So I’m going to try my garden. I think that’s what keeps me going. I just do something all the time and I believe in doing something all the time. And I believe that’s why I can go.

RS: Well, when did you get married and when were, tell me about your wife and your kids, like what years did y’all have kids?

TB: After I came out of the army in [19]46 I got married and it was about three years before we had any children. We farmed, I farmed a little farm, cut logs and pulpwood and that’s why we had children, we had right in a year-and-a-half, two years apart. We had seven children.

RS: Okay. Starting in [19]49.

TB: About yeah, [19]49 yeah. So they got big enough to help us doing farm, some of them did, they help us on the farm and a son he went in the army. He was in the Air Force; he parachuted. He’s competitive mind, too. He tried to beat me. He managed three stripes. He got sergeant. He still try to beat me farming, and I try to beat him farming. We compete.

RS: What about, tell me your wife’s name.

TB: Hannah Evelyn Bazemore. Hannah E. Bazemore. She was a Bond Bazemore.

RS: Does she, her last name have an H? I’m sorry, Hannah with an H?

TB: Yeah.

RS: Hannah Evelyn

TB: Bond Bazemore.

RS: Bond, B-O-N-D?

TB: Um hmm. She passed January three years ago.

RS: Okay in 2009. Okay. What year was she born?

TB: She was born 1926.

RS: Okay. Was she from Bertie as well?

TB: Yeah, she was from the Merryhill section— .

RS: Okay.

TB: —in the west part of Bertie. But she, I used to go over there. I used to haul pulpwood over there, had a boy [who helped me] haul. And I met her through, I think her sister, she had a sister that would come over there sometimes. Her sister’s husband was, he farmed and they came to hunt, they came hunting. I wasn’t a hunter. I wasn’t hunting, but one of them they had a sharp shooter they called it, a sharp shooter. So sharp shooter and I, everybody had gotten a rabbit but the sharp shooter and me. Everybody had a rabbit. So the sharp shooter calls and says, “Look, I see one in the bed. What must I do?” Somebody said, “How many you got?” “I don’t have any.” “Get him, in the bed.” Now I, I can’t, I ain’t supposed to be able to shoot. He shot that rabbit in the bed. I think he tried to shoot him through the head of him to keep from tearing him up, and that rabbit came by me like he ought to come. Now I just [shot], bam, roll, roll, roll. Here’s the sharp shooter shoot him in the bed.

RS: Not even moving.

TB: Didn’t even touched him, and I got him. So you know I talked about this sharp shooter. I had to tell [about that]. But then I met, then I met my wife. Things have happened over the years, some happened. I am thinking about passing. I’m right, just better be practical. You get my age you’re going to think about passing, you’re going to pass. You can’t stay here forever. So as I prepare, I try to now stay healthy as long as I can, help people that can’t help themselves. I try to do my part right now. And I’m highly rewarded [when] I try to help somebody. It just makes me feel a lot better inside. And especially when I help somebody I know needs the help. Sometimes folks don’t need it. They throw their money away and need it but I don’t feel good about that.

RS: How do you, what are some of the things you do to help people when they need it?

TB: One of the things that’s unheard of, I never charge anybody a deposit when they move them out of one of my houses. I know they’re going to stick me with the last month when they move out of here. I am not stupid. I know they’re not going to pay the last month because you don’t have anything to make them pay. So I don’t charge anything. It’s not a year that, right now that I don’t let people owe me a thousand dollars. Right now, twenty to fifty thousand dollars right now. This year I stopped them. I had a guy that was working. He was working, but he, I used to [wait for] income tax. He didn’t give me my money at income tax. Income tax, he showed me his papers where he’s carrying somebody’s child and had a problem. When he got his money, he left. But I served papers on him and got a judgment. But now I don’t let anybody go but a thousand dollars. When they get to a thousand dollars I put them out because I’m old and I know something’s going to happen to me soon. I don’t need it to do too much. That’s some of the things I do.

Other things I do, I pay a lot of money in church. And try to suggest to them that they try to help the disadvantaged. They should know the disadvantaged more than we Now one of the things my, the black people do, we try to give the pastors a lot of appreciation, show appreciation, and I just I’ve got something to give him I ought to give it to him. [But] the church ought to pay him a salary and that’s all he ought to want because he got so many people in there they’ll try to give him donations, appreciation day, pastor appreciation day, and they only get six hundred dollars a month. Got to pay the light bill, everything. They don’t have that money. They ought not be giving anything. They ought not be giving anything, tithe, that’s all. That bothers me. When you can afford it, do it. Those who can’t afford it, don’t need to be penalized. That’s one of the things that I tried, this is something I did when I was thirty. People coming, white, coming through from Florida, had a flat tire on the road. And credit cards weren’t prevalent then like they are now. So they didn’t have money, maybe they spend it, blowed it up. But anyhow the same AJ Yates, I took the tire off, I jacked it up and carried the tire. They were two women. I carried them up to AJ Yates and put a tire on it. Put a tire on it for them. They was going to fix the tire but it wasn’t fixable. I bought them a tire. You know those folks sent me two or three hundred dollars.

RS: Did they?

TB: They sure did. They sure did. They certainly did. I never forget it. And I couldn’t, if they had been some people, I wouldn’t have ever gotten that. But they sent me some money. They sure did. A whole lot of money. And I think even now, the reason I enjoy my health what I got is because I enjoyed doing for others too. I enjoy it. I know people, a lot of people are just rotten. They aren’t any good. They get all they can out of you and think nothing of it. I know them. I know that kind. I watch them. But if I see somebody I think they need it, I try to help.

RS: How about, how do you work with your kids on that kind of thing? In other words, I think you told me on the phone that you have a goal of leaving a certain amount of money to each of your children.

TB: But I want to leave each of them $100,000 worth of property. That’s been my aim. And the tax folks [will] charge me about two million. So I can’t leave it to them. But my grandchildren, they’ll come. And whoo, they’re so smart. The mother, one of them, the mother, that boy will get right in that room, and lay down, something he don’t like, and lay down and won’t move. Lay right down on the floor, face straight down. Won’t move. She says, “Get up.” Won’t move. He sit right there. I said, “Hold it. Let me handle it.” I said, “Zion [2:32:55], get up off that floor.” He lay right there. Okay, you lay there. I’ll go to him and I’ll pinch him just as hard as I can. Boop, boop, boop. Hurt him. Then he cries and hops up. “Don’t cry. Don’t cry.” I teach them to be Boy Scouts. I tell them that. I said, and he’s done jumped up mad now. I say tent-hut (attention), right hand salute. He’s mad now, but he’s respecting me because he knows I’m going to get him. But I think and I always said this, I wish I didn’t believe it. We integrated schools, no more paddling. No more paddling, no more paddling the hand or anything. No more, these black teachers aren’t going to paddle the white child. They won’t allow that now. But when I was going to the black schools, the man had a [2:34:00] in the cloak room that tall, but he didn’t, it was just something to psych you, you didn’t want to get into it. And he every now and then he’d get one. And I think it did a lot of good. I honestly believe that. You know they say it doesn’t help a child, but I believe children need to be disciplined. If you give a child to follow instructions without doing anything, that’s what you ought to do.

But some of these children, you’ve just got to put your foot down, and I think you need to do it while they’re young. That’s my belief. I don’t know the psychological part of it, I don’t know see because I’m not educated to that, but I honestly believe that that’s why we have so many black boys going to jail, killing and ganging and doing that stuff because the parents don’t raise them. See, we blacks can’t stay with our children all day or don’t have somebody to stay with them all day to tell them don’t do this and do that. We leave them unattended and then they get to doing things on their own and gets too far. I’m thinking now, and I honestly believe that if they had the kind of training that I had when I was coming along, I don’t believe all this gang and stuff would be out there now. I don’t believe it, drug dealing and selling those drugs and getting in jail. I believe it’s a lack of raising. I tell my children look, tighten up on those children. Don’t let them get too far. I try to tell them, the motivation I try to tell all my grandchildren, the ones that do real good, I’m going to take you to Wal-Mart. And when you go to Wal-Mart, I’ll let you buy what you wanted to buy, if you be good. And I do it every now and then, leave one home. Leave home so know what I’m doing, but don’t you think they don’t try to remember that. And they do good. They do better. One of my grandchildren can read better than me. But don’t remember what he reads. Now I get him and I sit down and say, “Look, what you need to do is hear granddaddy’s stories, granddaddy will tell a story about himself and see how well you can remember what I tell you.” I tell a story, granddaddy was a boy playing, playing ball, and I tell about the time that he got in a fight with [someone] and the teacher beat him. I tell little things and then ask him to repeat what I said. First they won’t do it. They miss. But the second time, I said you can’t go to Wal-Mart like that. He can’t get to Wal-Mart. They love to go to Wal-Mart. So I say, “Now if you do better this time I’m going to tell another one about granddaddy.” I said granddaddy loves to go in the woods and go fishing first and then go in the woods and try and kill a rabbit, and then he’ll make a little tent and take the little stick and make that rabbit and cook that rabbit right here in the wood, stick it in the wood and cook that rabbit. I’ll be making another little story so he can remember what I said. And don’t you think the second time, he’ll repeat every word I said. I said yeah, you’re a boy scout now. I said, yeah, you can go to Wal-Mart. But these are the kind of things that we are lacking now. We don’t, when I was going to school I would sit and read by the lamp light. But somebody older was always helping you read, and they asked me what you read too. Yes, the raising part has changed, and legally the law has changed. I don’t know if it’s good or bad. I’m not that smart. But I do believe that a lot of these children that and I can see it. I’ve seen them that parents don’t have time and don’t try to chastise them when they’re doing wrong while they’re little. They come up being bad. Most of them, [not all]. So I wish that was something we could work on. When I find out, you don’t have to beat them but one time. But you’ve got to let them know you think you’ll beat them. After you get on them they’re just as nice and you want them to be relaxed and not be nervous. But they need respect.

RS: Sometimes I think that it has gone from one extreme too far to the other extreme. I think it may have been, maybe it was too much corporal punishment in the past. I really don’t know. Now I do have a feeling that people, parents my age, I’m forty-five, I have two girls. When I look around I feel like we’ve gone too far the other way where, me, not just me so much, well, myself, my wife and other parents that I see, sometimes we’re a little bit, we’re babying them too much it seems like. They are getting away with certain disrespectful things that we should not be letting them get away with.

TB: I think a little too much of that too. I really think, I think we need to do—. People are bad now. These children, these young folks are really bad now. They are getting bad and worse off all the time.

RS: I think that even if I don’t think I could ever really do the capital, I’m sorry, corporal punishment. But I think that working, I think another piece of it is working. And whenever I meet somebody like you, one of the reasons I love it is because I like to learn about growing up in a rural past when y’all didn’t have time for all this stuff because you’re trying to earn enough just to eat and to complete all the tasks that you have. So I think working is another piece of it that would really make a difference.

TB: If it’s a requirement, it’s still good. If you are helping your daddy farm the land, it’s still good. If he can’t afford to pay a whole lot, it’s still better than being idle because you develop yourself into work habits. And I think we don’t get to the place you don’t mind working. But we’ve got a lot of folks now that don’t work. Just don’t want to work, I think it’s because we don’t have, never had to work. I tried to find some, my grandchildren. I hurry up and find them something to do. It got to be something they don’t want to do. I’ll find something I know they don’t want to do. [Rob laughs] Okay. You don’t want to help me do this now. You want to go to Wal-Mart, you’re going to a have to help me work. And I make sure they do it. And then I tell them the little stories, and I take them to Wal-Mart. They come all the way from Virginia just to go to Wal-Mart with me because they know I’ll take them, but don’t you think I put something in their head before you get to Wal-Mart you’ve got to do this. You’ve got to do so and so. One child here they give him green and red is trouble. You’re a bad boy at school or girl, you get the red. But they give you a color every day, which is good. I say, “All right. You bring me the color every month, a whole month, green every morning I’m going to give you a dollar, a whole month, I’ll give you a dollar every day. But if you get one red one, I won’t give you anything. Yellow one, get nothing.” Get another color but he got green. And the little boy over there, right now, so far he’s making, he made it every day green. They say he used to get colors all the time, different colors, all the time, but I give him something to work for. You do that—

RS: Now how many grandchildren are there?

TB: Well, I’ll say it in two answers. I’ve got, before marriage I had a child, I was in the army and had a child. But I got biological, I’ve got twelve grandchildren. Two before marriage. They’re still grandchildren though. But my children recognize them; I was a young guy coming in the army. But I never have refused to take care of them. If you went to college, you want to go to college, I helped and send you. All my children didn’t go to college. But I help them. I try to do what’s right. I work hard and trying to do, couldn’t do all that I wanted to do but do what I can. I still do for my children. If they need me I’m around the corner. But they don’t use me much, most of them. They’re trained to work, every one of them. They’ve got jobs, make a decent living. I don’t have, they don’t beg me for anything, I just give what I’m going to give them. It’s just fortunate that they don’t, they make enough. So—

RS: I do have one more thing, one more thing I wanted to ask about a little bit more is in the 1960s and the [19]70s you told me a little bit about the school integration. And I’d like to know a little bit more about that time period, the civil rights era and the kind of things that you were involved with here and what that was like.

TB: I was real active in civil rights now. I was active. We had, I can’t think of her name now. My recollection is not good now. I’m old. But we had an instructor from University of North Carolina come down. She rode all over the county with me, and I showed her some things going on. They sent a lot of SNCC [Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee] students down here—.

RS: SNCC, yeah.

TB: To be exposed to poverty, and they asked me to place them in the worst situations. And they really went there and stayed with these people. And they came, it was threatening to storm. It did snow but like a blizzard, and I had to get all these students SNCC students and take them up to Lewiston to a big building and buy food and help them be comfortable while they were here, taken from their home. But while I was taking one of them we went up to the grocery store in Lewiston. It was kind of a little food store and the sleet and rain, the sidewalk had ice. She couldn’t step, hard step now. So I caught her that lady’s hand and pulled her up. Here comes a racist with the gun in a truck and he stopped and looked at me and rolled his eyes and reached back and got his gun and pulled back and made faces at me, and I didn’t do a thing. I looked at him and smiled at him and caught her hand and walked on in that store. Now the sheriff came to me the next day. He said, “Tim, you know it’s a lot of Ku Klux in this county.” I said, “Yeah, I know about it.” He said, “Now I can’t protect you doing the stuff you’re doing.” See, I had to carry all of them around and do this and carry them to meetings and do everything, whatever they need. I was—

RS: So they were, some of them were, were they white and black students.

TB: A few of them black. Back then about two of them black and about ten whites, two blacks, I’d say. We had a tutorial program going, and they helped with the tutorial program and I was the coordinator. But this sheriff, he wanted to stay on a little while longer and he’d get retirement. He wasn’t quite ready for retirement like he wanted it. Now we would have meetings and we would decide who we were going to support and the whole county, the blacks would support them. And this same man that came when I was farming, I paid all of my bills except a little bit of an oil bill. And I looked on the books where a lot of white farmers had big dollars they didn’t pay and mine was little. They were going to try to foreclose, and they did. Took my tractor. I had a tractor that I had paid ahead of schedule, and they took it. They took that tractor and sold it in August. Nobody buys a tractor in August; you sell it in the spring when somebody’s buying them. Sold it at a loss, and I was paying for it ahead of time. But the same sheriff, I never will forget him, they had him already near about approved him getting that [support]. I went to this meeting in a black home, and. I told them about what he did to me. And they changed on him right then and got this other Joyner, I mean Perry, got him elected because he had done me so bad. I told them what he did. He did it because I was in civil rights. He didn’t do it because I was that bad. He tried, just tried to get rid of me. I did a lot of that. I was disliked for many years but after a while they grew out of it. Some of the same folks hated me so bad, now we get along good. I don’t believe in hating. But they did hate me. But I don’t think they hate me now. Some of them are old, like I am, but I can’t see no kind of hostility in their mind. They’re decent people and I get along good with them.

RS: What were they so, one of the things that I’m always curious about and I know you can’t get into their head, but what were some of the folks so worried about that was going to happen? I mean people who opposed civil rights what was it they were they so worried about that was going to happen if change took place?

TB: One of the things that they don’t, they didn’t believe that equality was right. They thought we were the underdog. We supposed to be underdogs, because they were raised that way. And they couldn’t get their minds set that everybody should have a fair opportunity. And some of them resented it to the last, if you’re trying to be not— . I laugh at myself sometimes. Of course, blacks didn’t own much land, still don’t. They had it but it got away from them, much of it got away, that when your family had land and the siblings, one sibling could sell their rights to their heir’s land to a white until he could put—. The state had a law that he could put the whole thing up and sell it if you give him a part of it. And he’s the one that bought it. None of the heirs bought it. That’s how we lost our land. A bunch of our land was lost just like that. So now they, when I would cut that timber, I had to go around to these white farmers and go around the edge of the woods for them and clean up around the edge of the woods which was good for the land. Good for me, too. But if I didn’t call them “mister”—look, they would be a whole lot younger than me—but if I didn’t call them “mister” I wouldn’t be cutting their trees. I don’t care how good I was doing it. But I could say “Mister this and that”, “yes, Sir,” “how do you do, Sir,” and I’m older than them. Much older, but I had to do it to keep them trucks going. I thought it was so bad. It didn’t make any sense. This little boy and I got to say “yes, sir” to him. He was a lot younger than I am. But he’s in charge. I know you do what you’ve got to do. But sometimes when he wouldn’t sell, then I start talking like I ought to talk. Yeah. No. I’m not going to do that now. You don’t have to sell to me. No I’m not going to do that. Call them by their name, but some of them resent you calling them by their name. They want you to call them “mister.”

RS: Wanted to have that ego boost.

TB: Yeah, they wanted it. There’s a lot of that. So many things happened as you go, come through life and all these days until, the changes come so gradually that you can’t quite, until you really put thoughts to it, put thought to it. I remember when, certainly there wasn’t any electricity and every now and then you want some homemade ice cream. The iceman comes by with a block of ice. You would take it down there and put it under the tree and dig a deep hole, put it in a bag and put it down in the ground and bury it down in the ground until Sunday. He didn’t come around but once a week. But we were going to eat the ice cream Saturday or Sunday, and we would bury the ice down in the ground and dig it back up and it all would be right there. Dig it up and make ice cream. That was, you can’t tell anybody that now a days because they don’t, they can’t believe it.

But it’s a lot of changes, some good and some bad. I think it’s about, I see it, some Tea Party, I see some racism in the Tea Party. It’s some racism there, but they know how to cover it. But some of them don’t care what Obama do, they don’t like him and they aren’t going to do it right anyhow. But I see it. It ought not be. It ought everybody, I don’t care if you’re black or white, if you’re good, if you’re trying to do the right thing to help. You’re sitting right here, I don’t care as long as you try to do the right thing, I don’t care if you’re white, black, blue or green. It doesn’t make any difference. But it’s a lot of hatred out in there, still is. I didn’t know it but there’s still some hatred out there. But some good white folks. There’s some good folks. Old man Aubrey Tarkington, when I hit his dog, that’s as good a man as you want to meet. And he hate I hit that dog too. I know he hated it. But he respected me. He knew his dog might have bit, might would’ve bit me if I hadn’t have hit him. So he didn’t fuss, didn’t do anything. “Uh huh, you got him didn’t you?” Good man.

RS: And a bird dog too. Right.

TB: Right.

RS: People really like their bird dogs.

TB: Bird dogs, they get together and all of them get at you. And one of them might get you. And one of them came right up on me. I was swinging, turned around swinging and some of them scared when I swing and back off. One got so close, got so close [barking noise] I hit him upside his jaw and he fell. He came out there, “Uh huh. You got him.” I was a little boy. [Laughs] He was a nice man.

RS: One of the things I should’ve written down was the names of your children, just their first names.

TB: All right. Starting with the oldest is Rita.

RS: R-I-T-A.

TB: Right.

RS: Okay, and she was born in [19]49.

TB: Rita was born in [19]49. Next one was Evelyn Loretta. Next one was Tim Junior. Then there was Jeremiah.

RS: Better spell that.

TB: J-E-R-E-M-I-A-H. Jeremiah as in the Bible. Then Ernestine. Gary. Darryl. Darryl was FBI. Gary works in Tarboro.

RS: You better spell the youngest.

TB: Darryl, D-A-R-R-Y-L.

RS: Oh, Darryl, okay. Okay. And you don’t know the year each person was born do you? Off the top of your head.

TB: Normally I would know. But I get so now, as I got older I get ages mixed up. I used to know them. I had all the ages, but now I—

RS: What about Darryl? What about the youngest?

TB: Darryl, he is, Darryl he is, he was born in Darryl was born in thirty-what, I believe [19]33 somewhere, [19]32 or [19]33. Darryl he was, they all was born in a period of probably fifteen years. Darryl was, he’s FBI.

RS: Probably something like early [19]60s. Maybe.

TB: What, born?

RS: Born. Yeah.

TB: Darryl was born in, Jeremiah was born in this is, Darryl born in about [19]62 or [19]63. Oh, but Darryl was, I’ll tell you, give me a second here. I’ve got the ages right here. I can give them to you in a minute. I’ve got them written down in my book somewhere.

RS: Okay. I’ll look at—maybe we’ll do that after we turn off the tape.

TB: Okay, I get the ages. I have, I used to, I’m not good at remembering all of my dates. I thought I had Alzheimer’s, but they say I don’t have Alzheimer’s.

RS: You seem, you’ve been very, you seem very sharp to me.

TB: They say I don’t have Alzheimer’s, but I used to remember everything. I can’t do it now. I’ll tell you what. I can’t remember the names of half of my tenants right now, but I know exactly what they owe me. When I tell folks that, they say you don’t have Alzheimer’s, but I tell my children I’ve got Alzheimer’s, y’all. I’ve got to have it because I just can’t remember now. There’s a whole lot of stuff I can’t remember now. I just can’t remember.

RS: But that’s a lot of people though isn’t it? I mean that would be a lot of people to—how many tenants are there? Thirty-something?

TB: Oh no. Sixty-some.

RS: So you know half of those names. That’s probably more than I would know. [Rob laughs]

TB: But normally you remember a tenant’s name. Now, all of my tenants, they’ve got addresses and they’ve got house numbers. I can give a house number. Now this is your house number. I can tell you the house numbers every one, tell what they do, what they’re like, every one of them. Which one, [a person’s] house on the right, house number twelve, house number eleven, I can tell you, house number seven, I know all them. Know the description of the person too, but I don’t know their name. I know it’s something mentally changed in me since I’ve been in the last six years. A whole lot has changed but I reckon I’ve got some left because I can talk intelligently.

RS: Well, let me, that brings up one thing I want to ask you in terms of a memory because I wanted to go back to that time after World War Two when you were on the bus in Maryland. I was looking at the, there’s this interview with you from 1992, that’s this lady named Kathy Hoke, and I think she must’ve come talk to you about Workers Owned Sewing Company. She must’ve done like a tape recorder or something, a long interview, and on there you mentioned the Maryland bus experience. There was something about, there was an elderly black woman who had to get up because of that young white boy. Do you remember that part of it?

TB: Yeah, that was, I can remember it now. See, I told you a while ago that I sat still. [But] I let that lady take my seat. I let that lady take my seat before I let that boy make that lady get up. That’s what I remember. I didn’t tell it just right. But that’s the incident. I let that lady have my seat and I—.

RS: Because she had to get up because of that white, young white boy came in.

TB: Yeah, she was in front of me.

RS: That makes sense.

TB: Instead of her, I just let him take my seat. I remember it now. But I wasn’t pleased. I know my brother now—. What year was this, we went to New York. That was after I come out of the army. We stopped to get something to eat on the highway, café, it was a café. So you order it right through the front, right through the front and order some whatever you wanted. They said, “You’ve got to go to the back and get it.” [My brother] told them, “You can eat that one. You eat that one. We’re gone.” I won’t do that. I always know what was wrong but I know, if I’m going to pay for it, they’ve got a different window there. It’s so sad. How in the world I’ve got to go way down there to the back to get it, just a psychological thing they put, but no, I don’t have to go all the way down there and do that; y’all can have that one.

RS: Well, good. I don’t blame you one bit on that.

TB: All our lives we stood up some of what was right. We didn’t take just anything. We were raised that way, just don’t take anything. We stood up for what was right. But and still do. A lot of trying to bring about change, you’ll go you can jeopardize your chance of prospering. You can jeopardize it. But it’s worth it inside to know that you’re doing the right thing. Every year I’ll be out there now working to get somebody elected, don’t care whether they’re white, blue or green. If you’re trying to do something for black folks too, I’ll try to help them get elected. We would do that. We did for years and years. We’d try to get the whites that were try to be fair, part fair. We tried to get them elected because they and some of them recognized what you’re doing, and made others change, too. We made a lot of folks change because if you were going to make it you’re going to do something right. It was and it’s still a need but things are so much better than it was. The folks, whites have changed. Blacks have changed. I think the biggest problem we’ve got now in the black community is the gangs, the gangs and drugs, and black leadership is sort of declining. We were stronger twenty years ago than we are now organize-wise. We were more together.

RS: It seems like it’s harder now to know what to do, you know. It’s not like when you had clear segregation. That’s something that’s right in your face that you can go after. But now it seems like it’s hard to get a grip on where to go or what to go after.

TB: Yeah. Jobs now, they just discriminate, and if you think that, and I don’t think I would do it. If I had a logging crew, I wouldn’t hire you over my children, and most of the time the businesses are owned by whites, so they’re going to bring their cousins and friends in first. It’s that normal thing, just a normal thing unless they’re big enough that they’ve got to have a lot of people. But you’ve got a five-person employment situation, and you’ve got nieces and nephews and things, it isn’t much chance of us blacks getting in there. And y’all will have most of the jobs. You’re going to have most of the business. You can get money when I can’t get it. If we’re identical, financially the same, you can get money when I can’t get it most of the time, unless we had some of that Generations [Community Credit Union] come through and bring some. But now I wish your study would include, where do we go from here? Where do we go from here? What kinds of things that we could do to bring blacks and whites closer to do for each other. It’s still, there still is a gap. There’s a gap and how can we close that gap. See I can just cite to you that some guys will get a logging business, and they’ll take blacks for the hard work. But some of them take their family. When I was coming along, a man logging, the black guy know how to log, been doing, coming up in the work and could do it. But they’d make the boss man be white. The black guy could count too but you won’t get that job. Well, that’s changed some now. They’ll make the black man your boss too, now. We can do the job. But I just wonder when the country, if ever, is going to just let everybody be his own, everybody reach his potential. You know, they’re not the same potential. But sometimes you have all the potential you want if you aren’t lucky, you don’t get there. I often think about that and I wish I could help before I pass. But I was real active and I started a tutorial program, and it ended up, well, they said, the superintendent said, “[It’s] the blind leading the blind.” But I’ll tell you what we did. We argued to them that any smart child can help another child. You can help me, you might—

RS: That’s very true.

TB: Yeah. He can help another child. And we got teacher’s aides, one of the first, we had teacher’s aide. Right there, we got teacher’s aide. They said, “Blind leading the blind.” But we had teacher’s aide in every class. Cheapest money you can spend. Teacher got one group and that’s a problem and I’m afraid that’s helping us now. The teachers, you’ve got to carry them all [the students] on the same level. Somebody is being shortchanged. See, some children will go on about their business. Well, if you’ve got an aide, you can tell that aide what to do and she can be doing one thing as slow as you want to be, and you won’t have that hold that whole class. But I’m thinking they hold these classes down now unfairly, unjustly. I’m thinking that they are not letting these children that can learn go on and learn and kind of separate them. I think they ought to do, categorize them. I think when we look at America, and as our education is, we’re not doing as good as other countries, I believe a lot of Mexicans that can’t, just don’t know, some of them are smart, but they’ve got to learn everything, got to learn how to talk and do everything. So if you’ve got all them grouped in together it won’t work. It isn’t going to work. So I wonder what could we do to try to help that situation because—

RS: I know what you mean.

TB: Yeah, they put them all in the same class. They graduate, they graduate at the same time, so I know they can’t, somebody is holding somebody back.

RS: If somebody can barely, they’re still learning how to speak English and the other one is ready to learn how to read, there’s a big difference there.

TB: Sure. There’s a big difference. I haven’t learned yet locally or wherever where they’re really trying to, I think it’s against the law where they’re trying to separate these—.

RS: Yeah, I think it’s tricky. I don’t know either. I have a girl who’s in sixth grade and the other one just started kindergarten. And I know they have certain things they can do, where they can pull your child out for part of the day and to work at a more advanced level on some school topic, certain, for part of, maybe for a couple hours or certain times of the week. They can do things like that, but they can’t separate them like permanently for the whole school year. That’s the way I understand it.

TB: But don’t they graduate the same?

RS: Yeah.

TB: And I can see some like it. There’s no way you can get a real slow child or a real fast child, they both graduate at the same time. Something is wrong. Something, and I think they’ve got some laws that they have to go by.

RS: Yeah, I think you’re right.

TB: “No child left behind”—you can’t leave mine. But they’re already behind. See, everybody doesn’t have the capacity the same. We don’t learn the same. Me, I know if I go to school now I’d be a dummy. So I couldn’t learn. I can’t learn now. Some people age like me sharp as crystal. They get better as they get older, learn better. But I [don’t]. That’s the reason I hate to have this kind of interview because I know so many things that I can’t say the date. I can remember a lot of things, but some things I can’t, I don’t know the year. I used to know everything by date.

RS: Well, why don’t we, we’ll stop here, but let me just say that I think you told me a lot. You told me a lot of very good details and good information. So I want to just tell you that I think you gave me a great interview. So—

TB: Well, I can’t remember half what I did. I don’t remember the years, and so many things we did that was to me of importance. But I can’t remember all those things. I reckon some things just register in my mind, stays with me. I talk about those, but I got one incident that’s happening right now. I wish now you, you’ve been in school. I had a little fish pond down there, a country fish pond. It’s got fish in it. I fish it, and I catch a fish and I eat them.

RS: What kind of fish?

TB: I got a few bass, catfish, bream, one or two perches. A whole lot of bream. Now a month ago, a month and a half ago, I got a lot of fish, little baby fish, swimming with it upright, like a catfish, eating a little feed. And I remember when I was going to school, one or two things when I was going to school that I didn’t forget. The Ag teacher was talking about a hen. One of the guys, he was talking about hen’s vent, hen’s vent. And one student asked, “Well, do a rooster have a vent?” [Laughs] So but to talk about frogs and fish and they, something about it I remember that they can lay the eggs in a long row, and the male comes along and [fertilizes] them and make them. I got situated down to my fish farm where there’s a whole lot of [what] looked like bullfrogs. Half bullfrogs and half fish because it’s got a tail, long fishtail, but got back leg with no front leg and looks like fish and a half frog. I’m just sitting up there watching them, kind of wait until they get a little age and see what’s going on. Is it possible do you think that a bullfrog can—. I know that the male, female fish lay a long row of eggs same as the—. I wonder is that possible. That fish looked like a half bullfrog and a half fish.

RS: That’s a good question. I don’t know. I would, if I had to, I would say probably not only because I’ve never heard it before, but I’m wondering if it’s just a stage of development for that frog. It hasn’t quite reached the fully developed and—

TB: Right. Front legs might come out later.

RS: Yeah, that’s all I could think of.

TB: Yeah but—

RS: That’s interesting.

TB: The front legs come out after a while. I’ll be dogged if it didn’t look just like half and half.

RS: That’s pretty strange.

TB: Had a long tail, not a tadpole, a tadpole’s got a little tiny tail but this thing got a fish. And I’ll be dogged but I’ll find out, just give them enough months.

RS: Just keep watching. Yeah, keep watching. You might have to get the extension agent over there to look at that.

TB: That’s what I’m thinking about. The guy at the [tackle shop], he told bring some over there and he’ll put them on exhibit. So I got some caught down there I’m going to carry them over there. I might take them to see him. Somebody should know. See a bullfrog look like a fish when it’s small, I just didn’t know. But he’s sure got two legs just like a bullfrog. So I was cleaning up in another little pond, digging it out to put bass and perch. But I’m going to take all these bullfrogs and put over there and have a bullfrog pond. And just trying to, some folks love bullfrog legs. I don’t know how I’ll catch them when they get ready but they—.

RS: Oh yeah. Right.

TB: That’s good eats.

RS: I’ll stop this here. Thank you very much. I appreciate it.

TB: Well, don’t mention it, okay.

END OF INTERVIEW

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