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Interview

with

VICKIE JACOBS

December 11, 1993

by Joyce Blackwell-Johhson

Transcribed by Jackie Gorman

The Southern Oral History Program
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

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START OF TAPE 1, SIDE A

VICKIE JACOBS
DECEMBER 11, 1993

[Blank spaces enclosed in parenthesis denote inaudible portions of the tape.]

JOYCE BLACKWELL-JOHNSON: I'm interviewing Vickie Jacobs on December 11, 1993. She was employed at Hickory White Furniture Company. We are located at the Mebane Public Library in Mebane, North Carolina.

First of all, Vickie, I would like for you to tell me a little bit about yourself, where you are from, where you were born, where did you go to school? Those kinds of things first of all.

VICKIE JACOBS: O.K. I'm originally from Hillsborough. I was born in Chapel Hill in a hospital. I went to school at Orange High School. I love sports--softball. I just like activity because I love outdoors--fishing.

JB: O.K. Did you play sports in high school?

VJ: Yeah, softball.

JB: Oh, really? Okay. Who are your parents?

VJ: My parents () Watkins, and my father is deceased. He's been deceased now for it seems like twenty-seven years.

JB: O.K. Did anyone in your family work at White's Furniture Factory prior to you going in and prior to you being hired there?

VJ: Not really.

JB: So you are the first family member?

VJ: Yeah.

JB: First of all, I think what I would like to do is just to focus on White's Furniture Factory before the take-over, before 1985. We're going to focus on that first of

all and then move from there to 1985 and thereafter when it became White Hickory Furniture factory.

VJ: O.K.

JB: So any questions I ask you they will pertain to the years that you spent at White's before the take-over.

Can you tell me when you were first hired at White's, and how you got your job and what position you were hired to do at that time?

VJ: O.K. Back in, I think, 1986--that's when I was first hired--I was working in a restaurant named William's Barbecue. The plant manager in Hillsborough named Glenn Farabee came there and we started talking so I asked him did he have any openings. He said yes and told me to come down and put in an application. I had done that. And when I put in the application I got hired the next week. So I started. When I got hired I started in what they called the rub room--rub and pack. I'd rub chairs or sand drawers. Then maybe a couple months later I got promoted to final inspections. I stayed there until about two years, maybe two years and a half..

JB: Was there any particular reason why you wanted to go to White's as opposed to staying, let's say, where you were?

VJ: Yes, the job I was doing at the restaurant, you know, they didn't have no promotion. That's the reason why I left. I had stayed with William's Barbecue for like two years. Same thing, no raise, no nothing so that's why I left.

JB: Was William's Barbecue your first job?

VJ: No. I was with all different kinds of restaurants before. This is the first mill I worked in. I had worked in a fabric mill, but (), but after that strictly restaurant work.

JB: All in Mebane?

VJ: No. Chapel Hill, Hillsborough, I have worked in Durham.

JB: You said when you were first hired at White's you were hired to work in the rubbing department. Did you work in any other departments while you were there?

VJ: Yes, I have worked in the cabinet room, I have worked in the machine room, I have worked all over.

JB: When you go back and consider all the departments that you've worked in at White's which one did you like the most?

VJ: The rub and pack area.

JB: Why is that? Any particular reason?

VJ: The money. [laughter]

JB: What was the salary like?

VJ: Their salary was pretty good. I made like \$8, closer to \$9.

JB: Was that \$8 an hour?

VJ: \$8 or \$9 an hour.

JB: O.K., that's good. When you were first hired there, let's say, when you first approached Glenn Farabee about the job, did anyone tell you about the work there?

VJ: Yes, and his name was Roy McAdoo, Jr. He was saying that they were hiring. And he said, too, that he was going to talk to the man for me. That was during the time, too, I had already met him and we had already talked. I don't know whether he had to put a little word in for me or not. After we had talked, like I said, that's when I first met him.

JB: Was there any other place in Mebane that you were interested in working? The reason I'm asking is because as I told you before we started the interview I grew up in Roxboro. Roxboro is primarily a textile town. For a long time most people wanted to always work at (). That was one of our biggest textile mills. Since that, of course, we have had several others.

One reason a lot of people wanted to work there even when you were in high school was because of the pay because you had so many other people tell you about

working there and all of that. So I was just wondering if that was the same kind of thing that was going on in Mebane at the time that you were interested in working at White's?

VJ: During that time White's had two plants. One was in Hillsborough and one was in Mebane. During that time I was in Hillsborough and that's before they had turned into Hickory White. I stayed there maybe three months before they had the changeover. I stayed there for like 2 1/2 years before they closed down then I got transferred to Mebane. To tell you the truth I didn't honestly know that much about Mebane plant.

JB: So you worked at White's in Hillsborough first?

VJ: Yeah.

JB: What years are we talking about?

VJ: It seems like '86.

JB: For a couple of years, '86 to '88?

VJ: Yeah.

JB: So you were in Hillsborough at the time of the takeover in Mebane?

VJ: Yeah.

JB: So you were not working at the one in Mebane.

VJ: Right.

JB: So the one in Hillsborough closed down first?

VJ: Right.

JB: That was in 1988?

VJ: '88. '89-'90 in Mebane.

JB: Then you transferred here?

VJ: Yes.

JB: When you talk about working, let's say, in the rubbing department, can you tell me more specifically what you did on that job? Can you kind of describe that?

VJ: O.K. like rubbing. We had to sand drawers to get it smooth and wrap some. I'd have to steel wool like the tables or chairs. Then you'd have to buff them up to get

them shined. Touch them up or if they need to be wrapped wrap them and send it to the people that fix them and () during that time it came to final inspection. A special person would have to inspect it and make sure it is good enough to go to wrap, and then it was sent to the warehouse.

JB: Were you on some kind of production quota at that time?

VJ: Well, we weren't getting no type of production pay but the company was on production.

JB: Oh, I see.

VJ: Yes, so we had to get so much out a day.

JB: So indirectly you were on production? You say the company was.

VJ: The company.

JB: Get so much out of the day. Did you see where that had some kind of impact on your work? Did you feel kind of pressured to meet the particular quota?

VJ: Right.

JB: So in terms of pay, no, you were not on production.

VJ: No.

JB: Okay, but you did have some kind of quota there?

VJ: Right.

JB: Do you know why the company had to meet a certain quota?

VJ: No, I don't.

JB: When you first went to White's in Hillsborough did you have someone to teach you your job or was it on the job training?

VJ: Well, when I would say teach, they'd say, "Take a piece of steel wool and just steel wool this chair all over." That was mostly it. Then, as it went on, I'm a fast learner and I'd just watch how things going and so I would say I helped boost myself to moving on up, too, because I would try anything. That's how I learned. Mostly I learned on my own.

JBj: Did you think the quality of your work had a lot to do with your being moved from one department to the other?

VJ: Yeah.

JBj: Were those moves considered as promotions?

VJ: I think so.

JBj: Can you describe in any more detail some of the other kinds of work that you did at White's?

VJ: O.K., let's start in the cabinet room. That's just the white wood before any type of finish goes on it. You'd have to sand it smooth, putty up any holes or anything that needed to be puttied up. Sometimes we spray like a yellow stain on it to help the finishing stuff stay on there.

JBj: Did you all have supervisors?

VJ: Yeah, we sure did.

JBj: Did you ever serve in that particular position as supervisor? Did you have to train someone?

VJ: No, well, yes, they had me at the (). That's the very final inspection. (). Yeah, I trained.

JBj: Did you like that?

VJ: Yeah.

JBj: A lot of jobs that we have after we really learn the job we have a tendency to take shortcuts. We say, "I know how to do this." And say, "I'm going to take a shortcut here. Maybe instead of doing this I can maybe go and maybe do this instead." Did you find yourself taking shortcuts?

VJ: Oh, yeah.

JBj: More specifically, what kinds of shortcuts did you have a tendency to take?

VJ: Well, I wouldn't say much as shortcut because after I got used to the job I done it faster.

JBj: Oh, O.K. Speed up the process. Can you describe for me the working conditions at White's in Hillsborough and then compare that to the working conditions at Hickory White in Mebane in terms of like the environment, the noise?

VJ: The worst part where we was working was I was right there with the lady where she sprayed lacquer. This was probably the worst part because you could smell it. Plus to the fixers that fix on the furniture they was right there. They was right there and I was there just like we are talking now. They would spray lacquer and no air vents behind. That was about the worst part of it all is smelling that junk.

JBj: Did they give you some kind of mask?

VJ: You could get a mask if you wanted.

JBj: Did most people chose to wear those?

VJ: No, but during the times when I got pregnant I had to wear one (). I had to be transferred out of there.

JBj: But you remained there through your entire pregnancy or did you leave, take maternity leave?

VJ: I had to take maternity leave.

JBj: But, they were willing to move you to another department?

VJ: Oh, yeah, they did move me, but I was having complications so I had to leave.

JBj: What did you have?

VJ: A girl.

JBj: How old is she?

VJ: She's five now.

JBj: Was the work kind of dangerous? Was there any particular department that seemed to be more dangerous to work in than others?

VJ: Yeah. In our area it wasn't too bad. They had to work with some type of oil. When you're using oil with a machine they splattered it all on the floor. As a matter of

fact, I had slipped and fell myself. I happen to know where another girl slipped and fell. In my area, the rub and pack, that's the most dangerous spot in the mill I'm telling you. Finishing, you just have to look and watch where you step. Sanding room, just have to watch the machines you have to run, but the most dangerous part to me in the furniture factory is really dangerous is the machine room with the saws. If you're not paying attention a girl can get her clothes snagged in this machine and just pull her and lacquer her.

JB: When they are injured on the job I would assume they would receive from the company some kind of compensation?

VJ: Yes, if they out for a while, let's say a week or two, they will get compensation.

JB: How often did you all take breaks?

VJ: In there we took breaks twice, I think. First in the morning and lunch. We took a break maybe about 9:00 and it would be like ten minutes or for me it would be like fifteen because I had to walk so far to the break room. Then probably break like quarter to twelve or twelve o'clock and come back thirty minutes after they left.

JB: What about lunch?

VJ: There was lunch about 12:00. Mostly about thirty minutes.

JB: Did you have an afternoon break?

VJ: No.

JB: What were your work hours?

VJ: 7:00 to 3:25.

JB: When you did take your time off for breaks and for lunch how did you usually spend your time? When I say that it's not well, I guess the first thing that would come to your mind would be lunch I spent my time eating, but I guess what I'm talking about here is with whom did you socialize at that time or did you feel that you have time to socialize or talk to someone else?

VJ: Well, me, I would talk to anybody. [laughter]

JBj: [laughter]

VJ: I would socialize with anybody that comes around. Sometimes if it's pretty outside we'd go outside to the picnic table and set around there and jive and wait for the bell to go off. Same thing about first break or if it's, let's say, Friday, payday, we'd all run to the bank. By the time we'd get back it would be time to go back to work anyway.

JBj: Seems like fun.

VJ: Yeah, it's O.K., it just wasn't long enough.

JBj: We always complained about that. I've even had jobs where the breaks are thirty minutes, and I had jobs where we've had an hour. So regardless of the length of time it's always like that, "It's time to go back now, already." It's just that way, I guess.

What kind of rules did the company have for the employees?

VJ: First, no smoking and especially in the bathrooms. Smoking only in the smoking area. They had a rule that if you are not there--. They have a point system and if you're not there, let's say, five minutes after, well, maybe one minute after seven you're going to get like a quarter of a point. Or if you didn't call in at all you'd get two points. They were, to me, they weren't that strict. They were strict but not that strict. Most of White's--I'm talking about Hillsborough now--there is no smoking especially in the bathrooms especially ().

[laughter]

JBj: [laughter]

VJ: Absenteeism.

JBj: Talk to me a little bit more about this point system. How did that work?

VJ: If you get eight points. O.K. if you get five or six points you get written up. If you get seven or eight points you'd be terminated. You have twenty days to work off your points. ().

JB: O.K. for that twenty days you have to work off the points what are some of the things you have to do in that twenty day period?

VJ: Well, you got to make sure you don't be out anymore or be late. You just have to work a whole month without being late or not coming in at all or anything. You have to be there to work off that one point or either a half a point or whatever to keep from getting written up or either terminated.

JB: So regardless of how many points you've gotten--. Let's say, you've gotten two points as oppose to eight points, you would still have a twenty day period, would still apply regardless?

VJ: Regardless. If you only have like a half a point in the whole time you've still got that twenty days to work off that half a point. You know, they won't go against you like if you were closer to eight points, but you still have twenty days to work off that half.

JB: How did you feel about that system?

VJ: It was O.K. I guess ().

JB: When I first asked you about the two points I was thinking in the back of my own mind that it wasn't really fair. But then again, it gives you the opportunity not to accumulate enough points to be terminated.

VJ: Right.

JB: So in many ways they were really helping you out.

VJ: Yeah.

JB: Now I understand--interesting. Any rules on talking while doing your work or dressing or anything kind of other ()?

VJ: Dressing, no hot pants, you'd have to have shorts down to your knees. Talking, they should never say that because we like talking. [laughter]

JB: [laughter]

VJ: Dressing in shorts--. Some departments now it depends what kind of tops you wear (ladies). If they are showing your belly they don't let you do that. You've got

to have on your underclothes especially your brassiere. (

). [laughter]

JB: That's funny.

VJ: Yeah, that's funny.

JB: So in some ways dress codes didn't always apply to men. You're saying there was a different dress code for women than men?

VJ: Yeah, mostly.

JB: Any complainants about that from women?

VJ: No.

JB: Really?

VJ: No complainants.

JB: With you in particular, did you ever accumulate points for any particular reason? Or were you one of those--.

VJ: The most points I probably accumulated--I did good if I did three. I worked hard.

JB: (). You didn't get into trouble.

VJ: Let me tell you another thing about this point system. Let's say, if I had to go to the doctor today you only get one point for that. But if I had to go back like that following week for the same thing they won't give you a point. Let me think. If you stay out for every time you would get a point. You know, if I had to go back to the doctor everyday I would accumulate just that one point. If you stay out for like unnecessary stuff then you'll get a point for each day. Like when you have jury duty you'll get one point for that and to me that's the part I think you shouldn't get no point because you have to go.

JB: I would have a problem with that one because that's something that's really out of your control.

VJ: Yeah.

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JBJ: And even if you have to go back to the doctor for some reason or a follow check up or whatever, that seems to me unfair. I don't know how others may feel about that. Seems like you are penalized for something that is beyond your control.

Did you have people complain about that the point system?

VJ: Some.

JBJ: O.K. What was usually the response?

VJ: No more than maybe just like what you said that some things are unfair when, let's say, you've already seven points and you get called for jury duty. (

) then you've got to go jury duty. If you don't go to jury duty they would probably come and fine you, but then you also lose your job. (

)?

JBJ: What about the people in management, what was their response?

VJ: Some () and they just don't come out straight forward and just tell you what the deal is. I guess if you are a good worker that they probably figure () if you've got seven points already.
[laughter]

JBJ: [laughter]

VJ: You know, some of them they let them go.

JBJ: The same system applied, they had the same system in Mebane as in Hillsborough?

VJ: It seemed like.

JBJ: Did you decide on your particular job--I understand that you worked in so many different departments, actually you say every department there--did you decide how the work was going to be done, when it was going to be done, or how much you would be expected to complete on that job each day or did the company decide?

VJ: A little bit of both because some things. . . . If I didn't feel like working much I ain't going to do it. Little bit of both. (

). Sometimes they'll say this. Mostly we all know what needs to be done and when it needs to be out. But sometimes we don't always (). Sometimes the finishing material might be messed up or sometimes the furniture itself might be messed up.

JB: O.K. If one department is behind in doing its work then it could hold another department up?

VJ: Right.

JB: So they are very, very connected.

VJ: The first part of the () then they are rushed from the sanding room, then they are rushed from () room, then they are rushed to the finish, and then to the rub and pack. We were the last ones to be finished completely and all they do really is just look at it and be ready to be put in a box. All that coming from one department to another it would get banged up and beat and stuff like that.

JB: That's interesting looking at that process of how it evolves over time with the furniture from one step to another and moving from one department to another. If I was a person who, let's say, went to White's Furniture Factory and went on a tour there, and I went through each of these departments beginning with the first department and then moving on up to rubbing, would that give me any idea of, let's say, the kind of pay that these people are receiving, how dangerous the job is, the working conditions and all of that?

VJ: Uh, huh.

JB: Does that kind of determine, let's say, promotions? Would someone who's starting out, let's say, in the first department with the furniture just being made?

VJ: No. Are you saying that like if you work down into another department that means a demotion. No, no, no.

JB: O.K.

VJ: You can get a promotion in the machine room or a promotion in the sanding room or you can just get a promotion. If I've been in the rub and pack, let's say, that was my main area, you can get a promotion from like rubbing drawers to buffing on the buffer, you know it pays a little bit more or maybe washing the furniture down. Listen, you are on a job where you can be paid a little bit more.

JBj: So there are promotions within each department?

VJ: Yeah.

JBj: That's just one question that I hadn't thought about so thanks for answering that. But is there a promotion from one department to another? When you move from one department to another is that usually considered a promotion or a demotion depending upon which department you're moving into?

VJ: It depends. It can go either way.

JBj: O.K.

VJ: We can get a promotion or you can get a demotion.

JBj: Now what's the first department there when the furniture first starts out? What's the name of that department?

VJ: Machine room.

JBj: O.K. so that's the machine room. And you are in rubbing and that's the last department?

VJ: That's the last department.

JBj: So, let's say, if I worked in the machine room when I was first hired and then eventually they said, "O.K. Joyce, we're going to send you over to the rubbing room," and this is after a period of time, would that be considered as a promotion for me or just a move into another department?

VJ: Sometimes maybe the moving into another department or it depends on what they want you to do.

JB: O.K. So there are some positions, let's say, in the machine room that actually pay more and are considered more prestigious than some positions in the rubbing room?

VJ: Right.

JB: O.K. That's what I was getting out, and I apologize for that. I'm still trying to understand the system and drawing really from my own experiences at home in textiles, but I don't that much about furniture.

VJ: Right.

JB: I want to go back for a minute about these benefits. When you talk about the point system, you talked about being out and had to go back for a check-up and all of that. You would get a point if you were going to be out. But what kind of benefits did White's offer its employees?

VJ: They offered your life insurance. They had no health. Like, if you get hurt on the job they would cover it. I'm trying to think. [pauses] It wasn't that good. I mean it was good, but it wasn't that good. ().

JB: Did you get vacations?

VJ: Yeah, paid vacations.

JB: Did everyone take their vacations at about the same time?

VJ: Yeah, everybody took their same time. Of course, you'd have to be there a year before you get one week. I think after you'd been there () you'd get two weeks. They'd be good. (). Number one they like to sell you a little life insurance to have. ().

JB: So you did get sick leave?

VJ: Yeah.

JB: And health insurance is not part of the benefit package?

VJ: If it was I can't remember right now.

JBJ: You would probably know especially with a child.

VJ: Well, when I had my baby my husband insures me for that. They just paid for me just by being out of work. During that time I still paid for my life insurance.

JBJ: Oh, really?

VJ: Uh, huh.

JBJ: So that applied at not only Hillsborough but Mebane as well. ()

VJ: Yeah, the same.

JBJ: Let's talk about races. You know the different races () How did the different races at White's get along?

VJ: Well, to be honest they did fine, but to me they had the blacks doing the most dirtiest work than whites. They had a few blacks in the machine room. Very few blacks in the cabinet room. Most of the blacks were in the finishing. () they were the fanciest jobs.

JBJ: What about pay? Was there a difference in pay?

VJ: No. Each individual maybe sometimes had different pay. Like I said, they paid pretty good.

JBJ: O.K. So there was not really a difference in pay based on color or race?

VJ: Not that much.

JBJ: O.K.

VJ: Although some maybe, let's say some did get paid just a little bit more than the other. ()

JBJ: But in terms of the kinds of jobs that blacks had they were usually not considered "as good" as those given to whites?

VJ: Yeah.

JBJ: You had also whites and blacks, any other ethnic groups working at White's?

VJ: In Hillsborough maybe one or two Mexicans. ()

JB: Mebane.

VJ: ().

JB: What jobs did Mexicans usually have?

VJ: They usually put them--. The only one around us was--. She was (). [laughter] When she spoke she spoke Spanish. She worked in finishing, too. In Hillsborough they mostly worked in the finishing. ().

JB: What about between men and women, any difference in treatment or where they were hired or pay or anything like that?

VJ: I have heard that it was. Some would say (). I had done it myself. I proved to them that a woman can. But that didn't make any difference. (). We didn't make no big deal out of that. Some of our work was just a little bit heavy. But I proved to them that a woman could do it.

JB: O.K. When you say you proved to men you could do it were you hired in a particular department?

VJ: No.

JB: You just went there and did the work without being assigned to that department to make a point.

VJ: Right.

JB: How did you feel afterwards?

VJ: I just done it and this was better than (). [laughter]

JB: Some feminist in you. Were you ever laid off while working at White's?

VJ: Before it closed down?

JB: Yes, before it closed down.

VJ: No. I mean if it was something like a lay off maybe something was messed up. No more than that.

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JBj: Any seasons or any times during the year where you would have what we call the "peak season" or "low season"--. I'm thinking now like at home a certain time a year the plants will usually place people on fewer hours. I'm thinking about (

) worked twenty-four hours because if they worked twenty-four hours they can't get unemployment compensation, but then there are times when they have to work seven days a week for a stretch of time. Did that happen at White's?

VJ: Well, we were on thirty-two hours for a couple of months. I think that was during the time that they were slowly beginning to close before anybody knew it anything about it. We stayed on that, I think, about a couple of months.

JBj: How many days per week did you all work?

VJ: Four days with thirty-two hours but mostly five.

JBj: Monday through Friday and sometimes on Saturday?

VJ: Right.

JBj: Do you remember any unions organizing at White's?

VJ: No.

JBj: Do you know anyone else who's talked about unions?

VJ: No.

JBj: (). Did you have workers to complain in large numbers and actually go beyond complaining to go on strike or anything like that?

VJ: No.

JBj: The products that you were making, how did you feel about those?

VJ: O.K.

JBj: Did you purchase any of them?

VJ: No, it was too expensive.

JBj: You all didn't get a discount?

VJ: Yeah, we had a discount. But after the little bit of a discount to me it was still expensive. [laughter]

JBj: Did you see a difference in the quality of the furniture in Hillsborough as opposed to Mebane?

VJ: Hillsborough ran a little bit slower than Mebane. Mebane ran, to me, too fast. They wanted to get the work out. I believe right to the day that if they had slowed down the pace and get the quality better, I think they'd still be working.

JBj: So the demand for the furniture dropped. You think the demand dropped because the furniture was not of good quality?

VJ: Too bad. You know, they didn't give you time enough really to work on the furniture like it should be.

JBj: (). What about the factory in Hillsborough? Is that one as large as the one in Mebane?

VJ: No.

JBj: Do you know why that particular plant closed?

VJ: No.

JBj: Did they give you any kind of notice?

VJ: Yeah, they gave us some notice. () which we already had heard rumors. (), but they gave us--I can't think of it right now--just to save their check, where you can stay until--.

JBj: Called severance pay--.

VJ: Severance pay, right. White's pretty good. (). Make you feel like they appreciated you. They gave us dinner. Sometimes they even give us like free breaks. Sometimes they give you (). They was pretty good like that.

JBj: Any special things during holiday seasons?

VJ: Yeah, they always gave us a dinner. They usually, before I had came, had a dance. But they quit all that. They always have gave us a dinner.

JBj: Did they have the dances prior to Hickory White's take over or prior to the company becoming Hickory White or did those dances continue even after the takeover at any time?

VJ: No, they didn't.

JBj: Those were some of the changes going on?

VJ: Yeah.

JBj: How about socializing with people? Did you socialize with any of the people you worked with after work or did you kind of after meetings go home?

VJ: Some of them. I didn't socialize that much. The first thing I usually do if I don't have to go and pay no bill I always go home first and check, and then I (

), I guess, because I had kids. I go home first. That used to be number one on my list unless I have to pay a bill or something. I would go straight home. (

). Socializing like after work, very seldom.

JBj: So you all didn't visit with one another after work hours?

VJ: No.

JBj: Let's move on to your experiences in Mebane. Let's talk about that just a little bit. I guess I was under the impression that you worked at White's in Mebane. You had been employed there but had been working at the factory here a while before it was taken over, a while before White's was takeover and then worked some time after that. What I'm getting from you now is that you never really worked here before the takeover rather you were in Hillsborough after the takeover.

VJ: Right.

JBj: Then after Hillsborough closed you moved here when you were transferred here to Mebane. When you transferred, let's say, from Hillsborough to Mebane, what did you think of the new company that you were moving to? In many ways it was still Hickory, I mean, still White's furniture, but in what ways did it differ from the one in Hillsborough?

VJ: The only difference to me it was a longer drive, and they cut my pay. I had heard that Mebane worked faster. I said, "Well, maybe I can do it. Well, let me work around it."

JB: O.K.

VJ: It's something when you get old you need people. Sometimes you meet nice people. That's the most important. Well, when that we know we're going to be transferred we came up here, and they gave us a tour to see what we're going to be doing from now on and see what type of people we're going to be working around. They helped out a lot. But mostly my concern was with the people. I can work around anybody, but sometimes ().

JB: There is always, I think in many ways, the fear of going into a new place and having to meet people. So at that time you were living in Hillsborough and you just commuted back and forth?

VJ: Yeah.

JB: So you didn't really know that many people in Mebane?

VJ: No.

JB: It does make a difference.

VJ: Yeah.

JB: Was there any particular reason to be cut in pay? Did you get another job? Was the job--?

VJ: No, it was mostly . . . Well, I went to final inspect there. I was inspector, but I wasn't the final inspector. (). I worked on the line called the assembly line. I worked on that more, but the final inspection person was out and that's when I came in. I gradually, you know, got regular and they gave me raises. ().

JB: Did you all get a raise every so often?

VJ: Every six months.

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JBJ: Well, that's better than most people.

VJ: Yeah. [laughter]

JBJ: Some people have to wait for years. [laughter] When the factory closed in Hillsborough did they give everybody the opportunity to come to Mebane?

VJ: No.

JBJ: How did they go about deciding that?

VJ: They weigh, I guess, your record. To me the ones they call in the office, especially the ones that they let go to Mebane. If you didn't go to Mebane, you know, they would kind of like mess up your employment, but get unemployment. I would say out of that whole plant, I guess, maybe if they had a hundred fifty people, maybe fifty, maybe seventy-five went to Mebane.

JBJ: So if you didn't go then they would not--. They would make sure that you didn't get unemployment?

VJ: No, what I'm saying is like, let's say, if I came to your office asking if you want to go to Mebane, and you turn it down they could mess you up for your unemployment, but they didn't. That's what I was saying.

JBJ: Because I could see where that would happen because in some ways you are really turning down a job.

VJ: Right.

JBJ: It's not that I'm laying you off or terminating you because I don't have anything, I do have something for you. Well, what happened to the other people who didn't come to Mebane?

VJ: Some of them was mad. Some of them just said, "Well, I don't want to go back into furniture no way." So find another job. Here today I know a girl that never found a job. That's frightening! Some have been down there ever since they was eighteen years old. Some have been down there for years. That hurt them. Like we was talking to () today, that people have been around most of their lives. They

don't have no other type skill to go and look for another job. That hurts them. They hurt them even worst when they didn't get transferred.

JBJ: Now White Furniture just closed this year, the beginning of this year, were there any rumors prior to its closing that the plant could possibly close for good?

VJ: Yeah.

JBJ: Did you think there was anything to those rumors?

VJ: Yeah, because sometime I'd go ask the main man. [laughter]

JBJ: What was his response?

VJ: Well, he didn't really come out and say it was going to close down. He'd just say, "Well, for right now things just don't look good." So when he said that then I said it was going to close.

JBJ: Who was considered the main man?

VJ: Well, I'm not going to say that. [laughter]

JBJ: Okay. That's fine. When you heard that when you went and asked him—the main man—and you asked him about that and he said, "Well, things don't look too good," that was his response. Did you begin preparing yourself for what was to come?

VJ: No:

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A

START OF TAPE 1, SIDE B

VICKIE JACOBS
DECEMBER 11, 1993

JOYCE BLACKWELL-JOHNSON: There was a letter that appeared in the local paper here from Steve White to the employees, and it more of a letter in many ways and an apology of the plant closing. Do you remember reading that letter?

VICKIE JACOBS: I was trying to think if I read that letter or not. I think we had a meeting about that for the employees, and I think ().

JB: When it was time for the-- When the final decision was made to go ahead and close the factory did they call all the people together and say, "Okay, we're going to be closing eventually?" Just how was that done.

VJ: Well, Yeah. They went in and said that it was going to close down. They called everybody together, you know, different departments because that place was not that big to hold all those people. So they just came in saying when it was going to close a certain date and I forget what date that was. Then the last day and you know people are going to mess around so we told them to (). [laughter]

JB: [laughter] O.K.

VJ: (). Some cried.

JB: I was wondering about the mood.

VJ: Yeah, some cried. Some were happy that it was being closed because some didn't want to be there no ways.

JB: But some had been terminated before the last day?. I'm assuming you were one of the last people to leave?

VJ: Yeah, besides the shipping.

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JB: So you remained there a couple of months after the announcement was made?

VJ: Yeah.

JB: Were there any workers who quit before the plant closed down?

VJ: If it was I didn't know about it.

JB: O.K. So on your last day you said that you all had a party, do you remember anything else particular about that day?

VJ: I know I didn't work none. I was all over. We just had this like a little moonlight sale where (). We all sat around and said, "Well, we're all () with each other. Said, enjoyed working with you and stuff like that. It was very emotional. I hated White's had to be closed down. We had all gotten used to working with each other. We all would just kid around, you know, just like a big family. Some get along and some didn't.

JB: That's normal.

VJ: Uh, huh.

JB: After you left--your last day there at White's--did the company provide in any way for what you were going to do? Did they prepare you in any way? Provide you with anything, any funds or anything, that would help you until, let's say, you got a new job?

VJ: Yeah. I think there were some people that if you wanted to go back to school they'd do that. They even had employment people to come down and talk. Talk to the ones that had openings if you wanted a job. They had something like--. I was trying to think did they give out the chits like they did in Hillsborough, if they did I don't remember them doing it. That's mostly, I think, what they done. They would pay your way through school, I think, for a whole quarter. Your morning cab fare (

). (

). Some of them even helped you

find a job. The personnel manager named--. I can't think of him right now, but he helped a lot of people. I'll think of him in a little bit.

JB: Did you use their services or did you go out on your own?

VJ: No, I went on my own.

JB: How has the closing of White's affected your own life?

VJ: A whole lot because during that time, like I said, we would get paid every week. The money was good. Now, you have to go out and try to find a job. I hate finding a job. The job I did have before you'd get paid every two weeks. I have to get used to being paid every two weeks. That's the lesson I have to learn, and I would say I would have to start back over managing how to get my bills and stuff like that squared away.

JB: Sometimes you get paid once a month.

VJ: Oh, girl, I'm going to be grabbing up a tree!

JB: [laughter] That sounds difficult.

VJ: I don't think I can handle that. The only way I could handle that, you have to be good at handling money if you get paid once a month for me to survive.

JB: O.K. That's very difficult. I moved from once a week to once a month. I will never forget--this has been years ago--my first check. I just assumed, I guess, that I was going to have money coming in the next week or whatever, and I remember spending all of that in the first week.

VJ: Oh, my goodness.

JB: Like three weeks to go in the month, and it was the longest three weeks of my life.

So, have you found work now?

VJ: Yeah, in another furniture company around Pittsboro. I make Craftique.

JB: Still here in Mebane?

VJ: UH, huh.

JB: Oh, O.K. What's the name of it?

VJ: Craftique.

JB: Oh, Craftique. Do you like that better?

VJ: They're slower. They work very slower than White's. They hired like thirty to forty pieces of furniture a day compared to White's and they do like two hundred to fifty a day, yes. That's the difference. The pay is bad, the pay is not good.

JB: It is not as large of a plant?

VJ: No.

JB: Does it have any other branches somewhere else?

VJ: Yeah, they got one or two more branches. I know of one in Virginia.

JB: It seems to me like Craftique. . . . That sounds so familiar even in Roxboro.

VJ: They changed the name to Gillisbee or something like that now. They're from Virginia.

JB: That sounds so familiar because even most of my brothers and sisters are still at home. They have about six plants so they are in one or the other.

VJ: Yeah.

JB: What do you miss most about your other job at White's?

VJ: People.

JB: You had to make friends all over again.

VJ: Yeah.

JB: New friends. So now you are working at this factory. How long did it take you to find work after leaving White's?

VJ: I stayed out one week.

JB: Really?

VJ: And got hired. That was my intention. I got hired at PHE which is Adam and Eve. They made me temporary at first before you get hired full-time. (

). After I heard that Glenn Farabee was that Craftique, well, he called me

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to see if I wanted to come work for him, which I had already worked with him so I know how he was, and I did. I worked for PHE for a couple of months before I even known that he was in Mebane because at one time he was in (). So I have been up there ever since. I've been up there now around five or six months.

JB: So things are not as bad as you thought they would be?

VJ: No, it's not bad at all. I'm just the only lady in my department.

JB: Oh, really?

VJ: Yeah, I work around all men.

JB: Do you still get together with some of your old friends from the plant?

VJ: No, not--. Everybody's done scattered. If they hadn't scattered they're on different shifts now if they working. Sometimes I call some of my friends that was already there. Some I don't even bother.

JB: You eventually moved here from () Fall?

VJ: Yeah.

JB: O.K., but that was while you were working at White's?

VJ: Well, I was--.

JB: Here in Mebane?

VJ: Uh, huh.

JB: Okay. Great. Well, do you have anything else you would like to add here, Vickie?

VJ: No.

JB: If not, it has been pleasant. It's really been nice meeting you and interviewing you. It's been very helpful. I do thank you.

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END OF INTERVIEW

[This is Joyce Blackwell-Johnson. I'm ending the interview with Vickie Jacobs on December 11th at Mebane Public Library. It is now 11:45 and the interview began at 10:30 today.]