

Uncorrected Transcript of

Interview

with

JOHNNY CREWS
1995

by James Eddie McCoy, Jr.

Transcribed by Hester Kast

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

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[START OF SIDE A]

Johnny Crews
??/12/95

James Eddie McCoy: ??? twelve, nineteen ninety-five. I'm at five oh three nine ????
Road. I'm visiting Mr. Johnny Crews today. Mr. Crews, will you preach your name,
your date, and the month and the year you was born?

Johnny Crews: I'm born nineteen eighteen, April the fourth.

EM: What year?

JC: I was born nineteen eighteen. April the fourth.

EM: What's your whole name?

JC: Johnny Crews.

EM: Where was you raised up at, Mr. Crews?

JC: I was born on Raleigh Road near ????. That's where me and my brother was born.

EM: With your parents or with your—

JC: With my parents.

EM: It was just two of y'all?

JC: And my sisters was born on Fifteenth up at Brunt Hill.

EM: Uh-huh. What did your parents do? Your father and your mother, was they
sharecroppers? Or what.

JC: Yeah. Sharecroppers.

EM: Do you know who you were sharecropping for when you got old enough to know
about farming and sharecropping?

JC: Daddy died when I was nine months old, he were killed ...

EM: How?

JC: Turned the buggy over in the yard, them old ??? lights. And the girl turned it on
when her friend come up and then the mule bucked and turned the buggy over and broke
his neck and knock a hole in the back.

EM: Mm-hmm.

JC: He died in January.

EM: How old were you?

JC: Nine months old.

EM: Well who carried on things until y'all got—or what did your mother do? What kind of plans did she do then?

JC: Mother worked wheat ?????? people. And she cooked.

EM: Cooked for who?

JC: Ms. Annie Harris in Oxford.

EM: How did she get back and forth to Ms. Annie Harris?

JC: She'd pick her up and bring her home.

EM: On what?

JC: On a car.

EM: They had cars that come out then?

JC: Mm-hmm.

EM: And she had to take care of three of y'all?

JC: Yeah, she took care of all four of us.

EM: Uh-huh. And what—

JC: Two girls and two boys.

EM: What was their names?

JC: William Crews was the oldest boy, and Johnny Crews was the baby boy. [name] Crews was the oldest girl, and Lizzy Crews was the youngest girl.

EM: What was your mother's maiden name?

JC: Mary Anne Robertson.

EM: She was a Robertson? What family did she come out of?

JC: Robertson was ???

EM: Mm-hmm. Did she come from—

JC: Robertson.

EM: Was it a plantation farm, her parents was in slavery? Or—

JC: No.

EM: Did you ever—

JC: Part of them was in slavery.

EM: Did you know your mother's brothers, uncles, or did you know you granddaddy?

JC: I knew my brothers—No. I knew my granddaddy's oldest children, Tim Crews, was a hundred and fifteen years old when he died.

EM: A hundred and fifteen!

JC: Yeah.

EM: Where was he living at?

JC: In Virginia.

EM: What part?

JC: Nursing home.

EM: Uh-huh. So y'all remained on that farm as you were growing up, or y'all had to go somewhere else?

JC: No. No, I lived in—Mother started to work out. I went to school until I got in the seventh grades. My sister went to...

EM: Mary Potter?

JC: Mary Potter.

EM: What elementary school did you go to? What was the name of your school?

JC: Branch Hill in Bell Town and ????. Everybody went around here.

EM: Tell me about Bell Town school, did you walk to it?

JC: Yeah.

EM: How many miles?

JC: About a mile and a half.

EM: Did that school have Sunday school in it on Sunday—

JC: Yeah.

EM: Or did they have church in it?

JC: Sunday school.

EM: And what happened? Why did they stop having Sunday school there?

JC: They changed the school. Children stopped going to the old schools, I mean the schools in the country, and went to town.

EM: Ok, but didn't out of that school, Bell Town Creek came out of it?

JC: Mm-mm. Bell Town Creek didn't come out of it. I forget what that school down there...Blackwell.

EM: Uh-huh. Which school closed first? Branch Hill or Bell Town School?

JC: You mean when they ended ??????

EM: Were you still living in that area then? Did all your brothers and sisters went to the same school as you went to?

JC: We all started there.

EM: At Branch Hill.

JC: Yeah.

EM: And then you went to Bell Town.

JC: Yeah I went to Bell Town and I shifted from Bell Town to Huntsboro.

EM: What, y'all moved to Huntsboro?

JC: No.

EM: What.

JC: We went to my aunt's. Went to my aunt's in Huntsboro.

EM: Ok, now—

JC: Carrie Robinson—I mean Carrie Reemie.

EM: Now, let me explain to you the way I was told. Huntsboro is after you cross the railroad tracks out of Selma. You go from Selma, Salem Township to Huntsboro when you cross the railroad tracks.

JC: Mm-mm. You go to Wright Funeral Home.

EM: Uh-huh.

JC: Right on up by it.

EM: Mm-hmm.

JC: School on Rainsack.

EM: Ok, that's the one you went to.

JC: Yeah I went there for a while and they stopped. I went to Ms. Parham, Irene Parham's mother. Nineteen twenty-six.

EM: You went with your aunt to live with her, just you? Or a brother or sister went?

JC: Just me.

EM: Could you name any—What year was you, you have any idea what year you went to Huntsboro School out there?

JC: In nineteen twenty-six.

EM: Nineteen twenty-six.

JC: Mm-hmm.

EM: Was that a wooden school?

JC: Yeah.

EM: Plank. Frame or log? Was it a log school or what?

JC: I wouldn't know. I think it was a frame. I mean it was log.

EM: Didn't that church—the school catch on fire?

JC: I don't know. Could've.

EM: Uh-huh.

JC: Yeah I believe it did and they built a brick block and tore down that one.

EM: Ms. Parham was the only teacher you had out there?

JC: Two teachers out there. I didn't know the other one.

EM: Uh-huh. Now where did you go after that?

JC: Went to Gila.

EM: How you end up by Gila?

JC: I went about in nineteen, that in, I believe that's in twenty-eight.

EM: Nineteen twenty-eight. Ok now I want to ask you a question. When you turn down Gila's road, is Gila School on that left-hand side as you go down that road?

JC: It's back ???? You know where Short Pettiford is?

EM: Uh-huh.

JC: Right straight up there. That's where that old school was.

EM: And that was Gila School.

JC: Gila School.

EM: What was the next school named out there?

JC: Was Lewis.

EM: Lewis?

JC: Yeah. ?????

EM: Was the school in the church or was the school in a log—

JC: The school was a frame school then.

EM: On the road or down in there?

JC: It was back from the road.

EM: Uh-huh.

JC: About a half mile, quarter of a mile from the road.

EM: What road was Young Zion on?

JC: That was on Whetstone, I think. Young Zion—I mean, yeah. That's down there below ???. You said Young Zion?

EM: Uh-huh.

JC: I can tell you where Young Zion is. Even today. Cause that's down below Stovall.

EM: Right beside Mr. Short Pettifer's house.

JC: Yeah, that's where it is. Yeah.

EM: How many of y'all went to Mary Potter, went further to school? Did you have any—

JC: My baby sister.

EM: She finished Mary Potter?

JC: Mm-mm. No.

EM: Now what did your mother do after y'all got up grown?

JC: She did anything. She was hooked.

EM: Ok. Now, did you know how far your father family went back? Was they in slavery or was they free black?

JC: Yeah.

EM: They was in slavery?

JC: My granddaddy was a slave.

EM: What was his name?

JC: Tim Crews.

EM: What plantation he was on?

JC: He was on... That's where the name come from. William Crews, up here in Bell Town. But that wasn't his daddy name. I don't know his daddy name.

EM: Uh-huh. And—

JC: My granddaddy make wagons.

EM: He was a wagon maker?

JC: Yeah.

EM: Who taught him? He learn himself?

JC: I don't know.

EM: He made wagons for that plantation or for anybody?

JC: He made it for anybody. He made children's wagons and wagons for, you know, wheels.

EM: So that was his job—

JC: Yeah.

EM: As a slave.

JC: That's what he did. He did that as a slave.

EM: So he built barns and anything that needed to be done on the plantation he did it.

JC: Yeah, mm-hmm.

EM: So he had it easy then, didn't he?

JC: That's where we come from. Yeah.

EM: Could he read and write?

JC: I don't know.

EM: And that's what your father did?

JC: Mm-hmm. My granddaddy.

EM: Yeah your graddaddy.

JC: Yeah.

EM: That was good.

JC: Yeah.

EM: He was that good, make anything you want he could—

JC: Yeah he made—

EM: Wagons for children, any toys and stuff.

JC: Yeah. I don't know about toys, but he made wagons.

EM: How many years did he live?

JC: I don't know. That I don't know.

EM: Did you ever see him?

JC: Uh-uh.

EM: Well did you—Oh, you weren't old enough to know if your father had skills cause he died when you was a baby.

JC: No. Daddy was a farmer.

EM: Mm-hmm.

JC: That's what he was, he was a farmer.

EM: Now what about your mother's side of the family?

JC: I don't know much about Grandpa Tim, I mean Grandpa Howard.

EM: Mm-hmm. He was a Howard?

JC: Yeah.

EM: Where did he come from? What part of town did he come from?

JC: He come from up here at Huntsville.

EM: Huntsboro?

JC: Huntsville.

EM: Oh, Huntsville Church?

CJ: Yeah.

EM: Up at ??? Fall?

JC: Mm-hmm.

EM: Where about up that way?

JC: I don't know.

EM: What was his name?

JC: Tim—Arthur Crews—You talking about the—

EM: I'm talking about the Howard.

JC: Oh, the Howard, he's...Tim? No, it wasn't Tim Howard. It's...I forget my granddaddies' names.

EM: Did he have anymore relatives that lived up there that was Howards? Cause I never ran into any Howards since I been working in that area.

JC: Well they dead.

EM: Uh-huh.

JC: They all dead.

EM: Did you ever see him?

JC: Mm-mm.

EM: Ok.

JC: Yeah, I see him when I was little. I was about two years old.

EM: Ok what happened after you stopped going to school in the seventh grade?

JC: I went to work to help my mother.

EM: What kind of work was you doing?

JC: Farm work. From that I started carpenter work.

EM: What kind of farm work were you doing?

JC: I was doing tobacco farming.

EM: How old were you, twelve years old when you started working?

JC: I was about, yeah about thirteen, twelve.

EM: Uh-huh. And from that, what, you worked out for somebody. Is that right?

JC: Yeah.

EM: And they paid you by the day or by the week?

JC: They paid us by the month.

EM: How much did they pay you?

JC: Five dollars a month and a acre of tobacco.

EM: Five dollars a month. Y'all were rich, weren't you?

JC: Yeah.

EM: [Chuckle]

JC: Acre of tobacco.

EM: And a acre of tobacco.

JC: Mm-hmm.

EM: Ok. Tobacco would carry you over, you made enough off the tobacco for to help your mother.

JC: I made about two-fifty, three hundred.

EM: Was that a lot of money, five dollars a week?

JC: Yeah, if you could take five dollars a week and buy a month's supplies.

EM: That's what I've always heard people say.

JC: Yeah.

EM: And so you and your mother, who stayed there besides you and your mother?

JC: Nobody but me and my brother.

EM: Was he older too where he could help work, or he was young?

JC: Yeah. He was older.

EM: Did he work with you?

JC: No. For wages.

EM: What did he do?

JC: He worked on the farm. Waging.

EM: For somebody else.

JC: Mm.

EM: What you call he was doing? Wedges?

JC: Yeah.

EM: What is that?

JC: That's laboring for whites. That's what we were doing.

EM: And you called it ledging? Wedging?

JC: Uh-uh. Laboring. See it's working for wages.

EM: Wages.

JC: Mm-hmm.

EM: Oh, ok. Wages is working for—Ok.

JC: Mm-hmm.

EM: How many years did you do it? What age were you when you stopped?

JC: I worked until I was seventeen years old. Then I started the carpenter work.

EM: Ok, you worked on that farm? Or you just went out—

JC: Uh-uh. I went out. Went into move to town—

EM: Who did you start with doing carpenter work?

JC: I took it up ????

EM: You taught yourself.

JC: First thing I did was chop down a wood house and build it back, build a new one.

EM: Uh-huh.

JC: That's what I did.

EM: And after you tore that down and built it back, you didn't ever stop.

JC: Mm-mm.

EM: Ok, so where did you go after working for—Were you living with these people?

JC: Living down here in Dickerson.

EM: Tell me about the Dickerson community. Was it ever any blacks lived down in that area? Cause most I ever known was white. Was it black farmers or any—

JC: Yeah. Hugh Peace. Williams...Merlin Williams.

EM: Mm-hmm.

JC: Ed Williams. He worked down there.

EM: What was their last name?

JC: Merlin Williams.

EM: Williams.

JC: Yeah.

EM: It was the Williams family.

JC: Yeah.

EM: Did they own their own land or they were farmers, sharecroppers?

JC: Uh-uh. Sharecroppers.

EM: Did any blacks have land down in Dickerson when you was coming along?

JC: Mm-mm.

EM: All of them was white.

JC: Yeah, they didn't own no land down there. None of them own their own land down there now.

EM: Was you coming up this area too?

JC: Yeah.

EM: Alright now, how many people was from Dickerson, how many blacks was on this road when you was—

JC: [name] Parham, Johnny Parham, Claude Parham, there was Ms. Irene's daddy.

EM: Uh-huh.

JC: And then there Ed Kennedy, and then Merlin Williams and them.

EM: Who is Merlin Williams?

JC: That's Ed Williams and [name] Williams' brother.

EM: Alright was there any Howards living there? Where did they live?

JC: Right next door here.

EM: What was their names?

JC: I forget his. Mr. Howard.

EM: Was it Ron Howard's daddy?

JC: Yeay.

EM: Or granddaddy?

JC: Yeah, his daddy.

EM: Did he have brothers and sisters?

JC: I don't know.

EM: Did Mr. Howard own his own farm too?

JC: Yeah. Next door.

EM: Ok now, after him the Kennedys, who else going down the road was here? Was Charlie Harris here too?

JC: Hmm-mm.

EM: He hadn't come in here.

JC: Mm-mm.

EM: Was the McGees in here?

JC: No, the McGees on the other end, on the other side of the creek.

EM: Mm-hmm.

JC: [name] Howard and them, ????? down here, a little bit before you get to...you just come in here. Build a house beside...on this side of the creek.

EM: Ok, what about, as we go on down the road to where Mr. Grant Peace and them lived, was it any blacks in that area? Who lived—Peaces, or—

JC: Yeah there was blacks in that area. James Howard and them.

EM: Uh-huh. Who—

JC: They lived in there. James Howard and them owned that land up in there.

EM: Name some of them other than James.

JC: I don't know anybody but James name.

EM: Was he the daddy? Or he was one of the sons.

JC: One of the sons.

EM: Ok and—

JC: And then there's...I forget that old man name. He used to live right up the road, look before you get into 58.

EM: That's what I want to know. You don't know what his name was?

JC: I can't think of his name right now. ??? James Howard daddy. I don't know him.

EM: Now, how did whites manage to get the church piece of land, ??? Creek Church, when all of that was black? Or that little piece of land was white and didn't belong to the blacks?

JC: Let me give you straight. Down here, Ricky Harris, about a mile from here ????, all that with old man Ed Harris land from here to the orphanage.

EM: Ed Harris?

JC: Yeah. White.

EM: Ed Harris was a white man.

JC: Yeah.

EM: And he owned how much land?

JC: From down there where they live now, his son Richard Harris, Little Richard, well they own that land, then they bought this land from—I mean he bought this land from here to the orphanage.

EM: How did he—A white man don't usually sell that many acres. You talking about two thousand acres of land.

JC: That's right, he sold every bit.

EM: What happened, he got—

JC: No, he just nice people, they're the nicest white people I ever met.

EM: And what was their last name?

JC: Richard Harris daddy was called Ed Harris.

EM: Ok they were Harrises.

JC: Mm-hmm.

EM: Do you know something about them? Did you ever work for them or anything?

JC: Yeah, and Mr. Harris was just as nice as he could be. That's where I made the first thousand dollars.

EM: Back then!

JC: Yeah.

EM: Doing what?

JC: Farming.

EM: What was you doing?

JC: Working half share.

EM: Is half a good way to work? Or a fourth a good way? What you mean half, he get half of what you get on tobacco?

JC: Yeah. No, it's not no good way to work. That's the reason I quit.

EM: How long did you work for him?

JC: One year.

EM: But didn't some blacks own land? Did the Parhams own this, or they got this from Ed Harris too?

JC: Parham owned this.

EM: They didn't buy land from Ed Harris.

JC: I don't think this plot here come off from that. See, let me tell you this. This land in here, come across that big house down there, go straight across over there, and come back, and come right straight down by the house over here next to the highway.

EM: Mm-hmm.

JC: That was the Parhams' land. Ms. ...she used to teach school...Lena Smith?

EM: Mm-hmm.

JC: That was her land across there.

EM: Mm-hmm.

JC: All that land, that's Lena Smith land.

EM: Mm-hmm.

JC: You know the house right cross there, toward, that was in thirty-four.

EM: Mm-hmm.

JC: We farmed here. That's where we was farming. On that land and Richard Harris and them land.

EM: Richard Harris is Ed Harris son? Or—

JC: Yeah.

EM: Brothers.

JC: His son.

EM: They still white.

JC: Mm-hmm.

EM: Ok. Did they have other people, a lot of blacks farming on their land?

JC: Mostly white. ????

EM: Uh-huh. Now, you think the Howards' piece was not in that same plot because this piece wasn't?

JC: No, I think he owned that land through there. I think he owned that land. This land here has been in their family for a hundred and seventeen years.

EM: Mm-hmm.

JC: This place here.

EM: Uh-huh.

JC: I think a hundred and seventeen years they owned it.

EM: Uh-huh.

JC: All right. Ms. Irene granddaddy—

EM: Uh-huh.

JC: I don't know where her granddaddy, whether he buried over here on the farm, or where he buried.

EM: Uh-huh.

JC: But I know that's—I was real young then at that time.

EM: So you always knew these people in this community.

JC: Yeah.

EM: Cause it wasn't but about four or five houses.

JC: Well let me see. It was Mr. John Parham, then Claude Parham, and then Ms. [name] and them, and Wilbert Morton, Mr. Morton. Where Estes lived.

EM: They owned that farm? That was their farm?

JC: Yeah.

EM: What about Mr. Chavis and them?

JC: Where, back over in there?

EM: Uh-huh.

JC: Yeah I don't know how they got there, how he got there. I don't know where they're—how they got there.

EM: So Wilbert Morton and them owned the farm where Estes on .

JC: Yeah.

EM: He went to college. He lost it.

JC: Yeah.

EM: Mm-hmm. So, where did you start carpentering at after you left the farm and got into carpentry? Who did you start out with, giving you a chance?

JC: Professor Hicks.

EM: How did you meet Professor Hicks?

JC: I met him by being in the city.

EM: Uh-huh.

JC: I lived in the city and I learned here.

EM: He was a well-known man?

JC: Yeah. He's a professor.

EM: He finished college in that field.

JC: Yeah, he's a professor in college. Gene ?????

EM: Ok so Mr. Hicks was a master carpenter.

JC: Yeah.

EM: Blueprint, everything you know.

JC: Yeah.

EM: He finished college for that.

JC: Yeah, Professor Hicks.

EM: Ok, now Gene ??? was working for him.

JC: Gene ??? were working for himself.

EM: Ok.

JC: And he worked with Professor Hicks out there some, see but Gene ??? finally—He's older, way older than I was.

EM: Uh-huh.

JC: I don't know too much. All I know—And George Lassiter, see.

EM: Who is George Lassiter, that—he used to run Lassiter Stone?

JC: Yeah, that's exactly right. I worked for George Lassiter, [name], Professor Hicks, John Rogers. That's where I got my carpenter work.

EM: Was Mr. Lassiter a professional carpenter?

JC: Yes sir.

EM: He could read and write?

JC: Number one.

EM: He was a professional carpenter.

JC: Yeah, he was a good carpenter, I don't know how much professor he was.

EM: But he was good.

JC: Yeah.

EM: Could build anything.

JC: Yeah.

EM: Where did he come from? Did you ever know?

JC: I don't know where he come from.

EM: Uh-huh.

JC: I know where he living on Granville Street.

EM: Mm-hmm.

JC: I got my learning from him. He the one turned me loose on Ruby Barns' house.

EM: Mm-hmm.

JC: You can put that down. I made Ruby Barns'.

EM: Ok.

JC: On—

EM: Pine Street?

JC: Jesse—There you go.

EM: That was on Pine and Orange Street.

JC: Yeah.

EM: They own that whole block there.

JC: Yeah. That's exactly right.

EM: She hired y'all to build a house for her?

JC: And Mr. Lassiter got sick and I finished.

EM: Uh-huh.

JC: I started from there.

EM: And that's when you got started.

JC: Yeah I started back when I was...in nineteen forty-eight.

EM: Nineteen forty-eight.

JC: Yeah. I started on my own.

EM: Uh-huh. And who did you get—who was you working—you were getting people to work for you, work with you.

JC: Yeah, mm-hmm.

EM: Who were some of the people that worked with you?

JC: [name]

EM: Who is that?

JC: He don't live here now, he ????

EM: Where is he living at?

JC: He living now on Eighth Street.

EM: Uh-huh. Now, Professor Hicks was—Did you remember was Mary Potter was a frame building—it wasn't brick?

JC: I'm the one that put the beams up in it when they caught on fire. I'm the one made the beams put in that school by Professor Hicks.

EM: Mm-hmm.

JC: I'm the one did that.

EM: You had to remodel—the building burnt real bad?

JC: Yeah. Burnt real bad. I made them beams. Put back in there.

EM: And that was where the police station—That was Pittsburgh Hall? I don't know which one.

JC: Yeah, where the students used to room in.

EM: Mm-hmm, yeah. Uh-huh.

JC: Yeah, it's right—and the school's right down from there on the right side. Me and Professor Hicks, we went there and remodeled it.

EM: Mm-hmm.

JC: I had three men working under me.

EM: Mm-hmm.

JC: For Professor Hicks.

EM: Mm-hmm.

JC: And that's where I got my training from—him.

EM: Mm-hmm.

JC: ??????????????????

EM: Do you think he built most of the houses around town? Him and Lassiter and all, and Professor Hicks and that—

JC: Professor Hicks had a hand in the most of it.

EM: Because he knew how to manage, he knew how to square foot, he knew how to ??? the job.

JC: Professor Hicks, what we did, we built houses, Professor Hicks was why I learned so good.

EM: Mm-hmm.

JC: Professor Hicks, when he built a room, and then I put up the timbers.

EM: Mm-hmm.

JC: He didn't measure. He'd know what the wood.

EM: He did?

JC: Yes sir. He know what the wood. Like a room right here, and a room right up here, and a room over here, that man could sit right here and cut the boards and get them in and I put them in. They fit.

EM: For each room.

JC: Yeah.

EM: And didn't have to measure.

JC: It fit. It fit. ...See, my daddy had lived, I'da been a wheel boy.

EM: Anything you see people do, you could do.

JC: Yeah. I used to build chairs.

EM: For who?

JC: Anybody. When I was about fifteen years old, I built chairs.

EM: And could put the seat—

JC: Seat in them, yeah.

EM: What kind of seats, poplar? What kind of wood you use for seats?

JC: I put cane bottom in them.

EM: Cane, what is that?

JC: It's like these bottoms, you ain't never seen chairs with them--look.

EM: Yeah.

JC: Look at that ???.

EM: What kind of tree did you get the cane out of?

JC: It wasn't on a tree, it was some kind of wood. I mean some kind of ???.

EM: Did you have to soak it?

JC: Yeah, you soaked it. Soaked it and—put it in. Just like you gonna make a chair.

EM: Mm-hmm.

JC: Put it in about, like this week, and you take it out now and you do what you want to do with it.

EM: Water makes it soft and make it bend.

JC: Mm-hmm.

EM: That's what I heard too.

JC: Yeah.

EM: And you soak it and then when you take it out you can weave any way you want to.

JC: Mm-hmm.

EM: And then when it dry back out it'll dry back hard and it's back together.

JC: You take a clamp and put it over here.

EM: Mm-hmm.

JC: Put it over here, and then you clamp it. And you put it through here and you take that clamp off. Put it over here. And then you put it on back over here.

EM: Mm-hmm.

JC: And you clamp it.

EM: Did you see somebody make one, or you just—

JC: Yeah.

EM: Oh.

JC: I seen it done, and I knew how to do it.

EM: Was it black ladies making them?

JC: White.

EM: Huh?

JC: White.

EM: Oh.

JC: ?????????.

EM: Uh-huh.

JC: By being quiet and easy, I learned.

EM: That's right. Keep your mouth shut.

JC: I tell you exactly—

EM: And didn't know everything.

JC: I tell you what I did for the city what the city didn't know. Oxford.

EM: Mm-hmm.

JC: Mr. McCoomb. I went there—you know where the wall is, the one I told you the ?????? at?

EM: Mm-hmm.

JC: Against the cemetery?

EM: Mm-hmm.

JC: Well you go by that wall, you look in there and you'll see a spot in that wall that's ??? in front of that back door, back to here. Well the inspector told me he wanted this wall built with wet cement.

EM: Mm-hmm.

JC: Twelve inches thick and six feet wide. I mean thirty-six inches wide. Three feet.

EM: Mm-hmm.

JC: And I said, "It won't stand up." And he didn't know how to build it. He just ???????.

EM: Mm-hmm.

JC: And I tell you what I do. He fired me.

EM: Why?

JC: Cause the block wouldn't sit there.

EM: Mm-hmm.

JC: Go this way or that way. So I told them, I said, "When you get somebody to build it, tell you what I'm gonna do." I said, "I'm gonna pay for them myself, pay for all these blocks being late." And I went back and got my book where I had ????? It tell you how to build anything.

EM: Mm-hmm.

JC: And I told him, I said, "If you dig you a foot to where you got to stub it up..."

EM: Mm-hmm.

JC: "And then pour your concrete in there for a foot—I mean, no you don't have to pour your concrete," I said, "You put your blocks in there. Your foot."

EM: Mm-hmm.

JC: "Where your footing is. And then turn right around and put you two ??? of blocks. And that'll give you twelve inches and leave four inches over."

EM: Oh, ok.

JC: And what he did, he put some block beds at sixteen inches.

EM: Mm-hmm.

JC: When you get to sixteen inches up there and you lay them two blocks, you got four inches left.

EM: Mm-hmm.

JC: And that was for to put his rods in there so the blocks.

EM: Oh!

JC: See what I'm talking about?

EM: Yeah, ok reinforcing.

JC: Uh-huh, and then he poured concrete down there and that'll give him twelve inches.

EM: And they can't move cause the rods reinforce the blocks.

JC: No. The cement gonna keep them there.

EM: Ok.

JC: And then see, and then when I showed him in the city, I made more than five hundred dollars that week building that wall. And I tell you who I worked for. He just retired from the city...what's his name? You know who I'm talking about.

EM: Tom Rags?

JC: Tom Rags. And he told me, he said, "I paid you more money that I've paid my whole bunch." I said, "I did more than your whole bunch. They didn't do that."

EM: You must have had good teachers when you were in school because your—

JC: Ms. Lena Smith was one of the best I ever went to.

EM: What grade was that?

JC: Huh? In the sixth.

EM: And you done real good reading and writing and stuff like that.

JC: Yeah.

EM: You had good background.

JC: What you talking about? And see it come from the family. Granddaddy and them.

EM: Ok.

JC: That blood in him. Nick Crews.

EM: Mm-hmm. Who is Nick Crews?

JC: That's my first cousin.

EM: Mm-hmm.

JC: And he could build, he built all around down ????.

EM: Uh-huh.

JC: He built down there in ???.

EM: Uh-huh.

JC: And built him a home down there and went to Vance County.

EM: Ok.

JC: Before he died.

EM: Did you know the man that ran the brickyard at the orphanage? Did you know they made bricks?

JC: I seen him, but I didn't know him.

EM: Did y'all ever use any bricks from over there, you know anybody ever use them?

JC: The only bricks I know of is—that were made at the orphanage—I can tell you where they is. Do you know where Frank Lewis has a store?

EM: Uh-huh.

JC: And you know you turn and go down that street there.

EM: Uh-huh.

JC: The first house on the right is brick.

EM: Ok.

JC: That come from the orphanage.

EM: Uh-huh.

JC: I forget that man name. He used to work at the orphanage. He built that out of them bricks. Tore down the building and built it out of them bricks.

EM: Uh-huh.

JC: It's still there.

EM: Uh-huh.

JC: It's a hundred and some years old. Them bricks old.

EM: Tell me about when you met up with Ransom Cousin and that carpenters...him and—who is he carpentering with?

JC: Ransom Cousin?

EM: Uh-huh.

JC: I never worked for him.

EM: You never did?

JC: So he didn't know nothing.

EM: Uh-huh.

JC: I didn't work with nobody but Professor Hicks, Gene ??? and them, George Lassiter, and John Rogers.

EM: What about the other Hicks guys? The Hicks that live on Raleigh Road, that was blind, his father?

JC: Uh-uh. He's a brick layer. I ain't never work with him.

EM: You didn't ever work with him.

JC: Mm-mm.

EM: You work with any brick layers in Oxford?

JC: I worked with the Tylers. They worked for me.

EM: Ok, was they good?

JC: Yeah. They worked for me. I hired them to lay bricks.

EM: Melvin Tyler too?

JC: Yeah. I tell you who you can ask and find out. You know Rose Chester? Lived there at—I built that room on there where you see that water, it weren't going to be a mud hole.

EM: Where?

JC: You know where—Don't you know the road ???

EM: Mm-hmm.

JC: Well used to be until she married a Chester

EM: Yeah.

JC: Right there.

EM: On ??? Avenue.

JC: Yeah. Well I built that.

EM: The foundation?

JC: I put that whole thing in there. ???????. And they said it wouldn't be nothing but a mud hole.

EM: Mm-hmm.

JC: It's a spring in the basement.

EM: Oh!

JC: Alright. What I did, I turned around. Lenny Parker—I had one person with me.

EM: Who is Lenny Parker? He was a carpenter too?

JC: Uh-uh, he just helped.

EM: Ok.

JC: I had two or three men work with me. What we do, that thing come here.

EM: Mm-hmm. And a spring was in there.

JC: And a spring right here in this corner.

EM: Mm-hmm.

JC: Right here. Well, the water was spewing up about that high. And they said, "You can't put no basement there." So what I did, made me a trench down on back here.

EM: A trench.

JC: Yeah.

EM: Mm-hmm.

JC: Just about three inches deep, about four inches. And I wound up with it about three.

EM: Mm-hmm.

JC: Or two and a half.

EM: Mm-hmm.

JC: And put me a pipe in there with holes in it. And run it over here to this corner.

EM: Mm-hmm.

JC: And then Sam Robin knows about it. Whole lot of them, they come down here and say, "You won't make nothing but a mess." Yes they did.

EM: That's what they said you were doing.

JC: Yeah, gonna make a mess.

EM: Mm-hmm.

JC: And I tell you who, Floyd, Floyd would lend out money, he had put up ten thousand dollars or eleven thousand dollars for that house. Put that onto it.

EM: J. P. Floyd?

JC: Yeah.

EM: Mm-hmm. He was a lender.

JC: Yeah.

EM: Mm-hmm.

JC: Yeah he thought we weren't gonna do it. [name] dead and gone but he stuck to it. He said he gonna do it, he gonna do it.

EM: Uh-huh.

JC: And I put it in there and took my people and dug me a ditch from there on around to the ??? of the street and popped the pipe from up there down there.

EM: That's the main hole now.

JC: Yeah—Huh?

EM: That's the main hole, for the city.

JC: Yeah. No, I didn't put it in the main hole. I put it in the street.

EM: Ok.

JC: And that water, that's where that water go.

EM: Mm-hmm.

JC: Go out there in that main, in that street.

EM: Mm-hmm. So what they say after you completed your job?

JC: They ain't said nothing then. You don't know them, they'll forget you in a second.

EM: Not today? I ain't never known none of them.

JC: You don't get no credit. I was too smart for them. I was too smart for a [name]. I was too smart for him.

EM: How did you figure out—Now this day and time they do that. You see, they run drain pipes but they do have holes as all the way through. Separate tanks and everything. How did you come up with an idea back then—that was in the sixties—that you knew the pipe had to have holes in it going—

JC: Well you see, what I did, see when I come here as I said, and coming back here, that's the wall.

EM: Mm-hmm.

JC: Well out here I had pipe all the way around here.

EM: Mm-hmm.

JC: Come all they way around here, and on back around here.

EM: Mm-hmm.

JC: And I had it just about on a level.

EM: Mm-hmm.

JC: Well then I put gravel over it, and then put paper over it, and then I plastered my wall. And then I put my—See I learned that. I went to school for that. I was up in Washington. And put my paper on there and put my tar on there, and then put my paper on there.

EM: That keep the dampness out of the basement?

JC: Keep the water out.

EM: Mm-hmm.

JC: And then I put more out there. And see I put that tar on there that I plastered where I ??? that wall.

EM: Mm-hmm.

JC: Up to about that high, to the top of the ground. And then put that paper on there.

EM: Did Sam and them know you knew that? You knew how to do that cause they had never seen it? They didn't know you—

JC: Yeah, see Sam went home. He didn't want to give me nothing. See Sam stole everything from me but whatever, he can catch himself in hell now. Sam, these people worked the shit out of them for nothing.

EM: And so Mr. [name] still stuck with you.

JC: Yeah.

EM: What did the guys say on the job that were working for you? They had confidence in you?

JC: Yeah, it didn't have nothing to do with them. I paid them more money than Sam was.

EM: And you finished the job.

JC: Yeah.

EM: And ain't never been no water problems there.

JC: Mm-mm. Ain't been no water problems.

EM: How old are you now?

JC: Huh?

EM: What age are you now?

JC: Seventy-seven.

EM: How did you remember so much?

JC: Who me?

EM: As you come along. You seventy-seven, you know stuff that people eighty-five know.

JC: Yeah I do, see I learned by listening. You want to learn, listen. And then if you want to know how to do it, be concerned. If I'm here and you trying to teach me something, let me be concerned in what you trying to teach me.

EM: What happened to pride with people after they got in their fifties and sixties and as they start taking pride in their work, and what happened to all of that training?

JC: Well what happened to it, we got too good for our own, and God took it away from us. See let me tell you one thing, when you get to the place that you get so much better than anybody else, and you don't want to take time and "I'm better than you, I got a few dollars more than you, I know more than you do," and people didn't want to give me no credit cause I know more than Sam ever know. And all his people worked, I know that. Mr. McCoy, see that building right there?

EM: Mm-hmm.

JC: You see where it goes all back there

EM: Mm-hmm.

JC: If you can look around, don't you see a little ??? look like right yonder? Right on that, where they, look like a house top?

EM: Yeah.

JC: Well, I took that top off. There was two of us and Lenny Parker there. And Ms. Irene'll tell you. And come the rain. I put that top on, put them shingles back ????? metal shingles, that's what came on the house there, on the back side, and run it on up to where you see it look in there, I run in on up to there where the top that goes into it. And used them same shingles there. And the only thing she got on there is shingles where I put them on this side and ???????.

EM: Did you know Sam Robinson daddy?

JC: Yeah.

EM: Where did he learn his carpentry from?

JC: He got his just like I got mine.

EM: Was he a good carpenter?

JC: Yeah. He was a good carpenter.

EM: Well pride is just gone in everything out of us now. We just don't take pride—

JC: Well you see what it is, we're not concerned. Any time you concerned, you got to be concerned for religion, you got to be concerned for home, you got to be concerned for anything you really want. You got to be concerned.

EM: Well what happened to dedication? Y'all was dedicated to things.

JC: Well you see—

EM: Y'all used to finishing things.

JC: Yeah.

EM: How did people lose dedication—"Oh I'll finish tomorrow, or I'll finish the next day"—Where did—How—

JC: Not concerned. That's it.

EM: We're not dedicated.

JC: No. If you concerned—

EM: You think technology started in the sixties? Or you don't blame that? That's individuals.

JC: That's individuals that's come from. Well you'll go back here and you'll find some children, it's hard to find now, but you'll find some children sixteen, seventeen years old. Got the same stuff in them that I had. ??????. Take you, if you been whipped around here and pushed around here, but see you had faith.

EM: Yeah. I've always had faith.

JC: You had faith, and you had determination.

EM: I always take on things that people said I couldn't do. That's what I like.

JC: That's right.

EM: When you tell me something I can't do—

JC: Well I can show you a house over here I built. Or Clifton ????. He was a carpenter in town too and said he couldn't put no ????. And the top is wide from here to the garage.

[END OF SIDE A]

[START OF SIDE B]

JC: You got to learn to fight for yourself. If you can live, see you can get your learning by the best of the people. When I say the best of the people, you got to find quality white people, quality colored people. Then you'll get something out of it. But if you get up there just somebody who don't care where I want it and what I want, you don't care what happen to you, you ain't never gonna have nothing. And you won't never learn nothing. Now, where did this young man die, out here on Huntsville Road? ????? He's a Taylor.

EM: Ed Taylor?

JC: Yeah.

EM: Mm-hmm. He's a brick mason.

JC: Yeah. I learned him. I learned him how to make bricks.

EM: He came from Stovall

JC: Yeah. I learned him. He worked for the Tylers, they wouldn't learn him nothing. I learned him how to lay bricks.

EM: He turned out to be one of the best brick masons in town.

JC: Yeah, now why did I learn him that? I learn him right there, I don't know if you're old enough to know when they had that right there by that cemetery right there where—

EM: Uh-huh. The hotel used to be.

JC: Yeah, you know where the paper, where used newspaper.

EM: Mm-hmm. Oxford ?????.

JC: Yeah. Well right down there I'm the one that built that ??? market down there.

EM: Mm-hmm. I remember when I was a kid.

JC: Yeah. I built that—

EM: Cause they had a hotel there or something, the Busy Bee or something, and they tore it down or something.

JC: Yeah, that was the ????

EM: Ridley owned it. Did you know William Ridley?

JC: Yeah I knowed him, but it was a long time.

EM: Would you go get your haircuts from him?

JC: Yeah. I went to Ridley. But see yeah, I cut hair with Ridley.

EM: You did what?!

JC: I cut hair there.

EM: Where you learn to cut hair at?

JC: I learned.

EM: In the neighborhood.

JC: Yeah.

EM: When you was growing up.

JC: Yeah. I just learned. I just learned, took it up. Whole lot of things I took up myself.

EM: And you walked in there and told the man you could cut hair.

JC: Yeah I did, and he put me at cutting.

EM: He did?

JC: Yeah. ?????? didn't like it.

EM: There wasn't no challenge. It was something you do as a routine ever day.

JC: Well I didn't like being in the house.

EM: Closed in, you like outside.

JC: Yeah, I like outside. That's why I come to be a carpenter. Now Ms. Irene, all them houses on Raleigh Road, I built. I been in so many houses, ????, the first house when he married, I built his first house. Out of old stuff. I built about a hundred houses right in here out of old stuff. And they find out taking old houses ??? now.

EM: No, they sure don't.

JC: Won't let me in there now ??? know I know what to do with them. ??????. See, and I'll tell you something else, Mr. McCoy. I may be dead and gone, but I believe this. I believe that man was in glory one time. Just think about it. I believe he was in heaven.

EM: Uh-huh.

JC: And he went to father.

EM : Uh-huh.

JC: And he got so beautiful, he's so beautiful, prettiest thing there was there, and he just thought he would just take over.

EM: Uh-huh.

JC: And he was taking over God's business.

EM: Uh-huh.

JC: ??? the Lord just got there and kicked him out.

EM: Mm-hmm.

JC: When he fell down here on this earth, now I want to ask you a question. You seen a human on earth that don't care how much he get, he never satisfied.

EM: That's true.

JC: You know that's the devil in him. That's the devil in him and see Christ knows that. And when he did that, he looked down and put him down. He felt sorry for him [*dog barks*] but he knew he didn't know why it was and didn't know where he was when he got in here. And then he looked on in that room, and he said, "Thou shalt have no other God before me." And then when he got things squared away on this planet here, he said a prayer. He said, "Our father which art in heaven, thy will be thy name." Christ showed me this. I was on my sick bed. He said, "Thy kingdom come, and thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." And you see how folks have turned around from nineteen—when I learned, if I hadn't have learned then, I never would have learned. Ain't no whites gonna take time to learn you, ain't no blacks gonna take time to learn you, no

other kind gonna take time to learn you nothing. But one day's coming, they gonna need it. ??? they gonna need it. It's like a heavy load. You take these mountains they have out in West Virginia [*dog barks*] and that western coast coming down there, they didn't have the locomotives like you got now. They had the steam motor.

EM: How many years you lived in West Virginia?

JC: Well, about four.

EM: How'd you get there?

JC: Traveling.

EM: With who?

JC: Myself. I traveled through thirty-seven states.

EM: Thirty-seven states!

JC: Yeah.

EM: What age did you start out?

JC: When I was about twenty. Eighteen, twenty.

EM: Which way did you go? West Virginia first?

JC: I went in West Virginia. I married my first wife coming to West Virginia. Shirley Temple.

EM: How many kids did you have?

JC: I had six. I had six kids.

EM: Mm-hmm. How many girls, how many boys?

JC: I had two sets of girls, that was four. Twins. And Johnny Junior, he was the only one ??? So I two sets—I mean three sets of twins.

EM: And then you moved on and left them? Or what.

JC: No. My wife died from the birth of my last son. He's a doctor in San Diego, California.

EM: Your son's a doctor in San Diego.

JC: He was in San Diego, San Diego, California.

EM: His mother died having birth.

JC: Yeah. And he got a home in West Virginia now.

EM: Did they have midwives then?

JC: Yeah.

EM: Who was the lady?

JC: But you see, it wasn't no midwife, she went to the hospital ???.

EM: Uh-huh.

JC: And the doctor said she had work to do. Her body was too weak to birth. But she and I got on her so bad about being that way and she kept on wanting children. And so Johnny Junior was born and she passed. He learned to be a doctor.

EM: Who helped you raise those kids?

JC: His aunt. Kept them in Washington, D.C.

EM: What, you moved to Washington from West Virginia?

JC: No, my son—my wife's aunt went there. No, I never left Granville County. I went up there.

EM: What kind of work did you do when you was in Washington, D.C.?

JC: I did construction work.

EM: What kind?

JC: Building. Building houses. A hundred and eight houses a year.

EM: With a contractor?

JC: Yeah.

EM: In Washington, y'all been remodeling, doing old houses?

JC: No, brand new ones.

EM: Ok.

JC: And I made, at that time I made about twelve thousand dollars a year.

EM: Was that a lot of money?

JC: Yeah. It was a whole lot of money. Yeah, a whole lot of money. I worked at ??? for two years. Sure did, I did a little of everything.

EM: Did you help send your kids to college?

JC: Huh?

EM: Did you help send your kids to school when you was in D.C.?

JC: No, no.

EM: They're aunt did it?

JC: No, where, in D.C.? Oh yeah, I give my children money, I mean Johnny Junior, I used to give him money. The rest of them ain't have nothing, but him. Cause the rest of them died.

EM: Uh-huh.

JC: Young.

EM: Mm-hmm.

JC: Babies. ... Yeah, Johnny Junior, I spent a bunch of money on him.

EM: Now what state you worked in other than Washington and West Virginia?

JC: I worked in ??? in New Jersey.

EM: What were you doing there?

JC: Carpentry.

EM: You had a skill, didn't you?

JC: Yeah.

EM: And by moving around working for different people you learned something new all the time.

JC: Yeah, and I worked in South Carolina.

EM: What kind of work was y'all doing down there?

JC: In South Carolina? I was doing construction work. Building.

EM: Buildings?

JC: Yeah.

EM: Schools and big jobs—

JC: Uh-uh, houses.

EM: Big houses.

JC: Yeah, I work for a man in there, doing it so neat and so fast, he told me, he said, "If you'll stay here" — this was a white guy running the warehouse—he said, "If you'll stay here with me and work in the warehouse and help me and if you want a home, I'll build you a home, give you a home. Either one you want." And I told him I had to see my wife. I don't frequently go down there.

EM: How'd you get down there?

JC: I learned about being on the tobacco market, about going in there and doing...

EM: Yeah, people travel with the tobacco money.

JC: Yeah. And about going in there and putting in septic tanks and manholes.

EM: Septic tanks?

JC: Yeah.

EM: In South Carolina?

JC: Georgia.

EM: How you get to Georgia?!

JC: Jim Wheeler. Jim Wheeler, used to be in town here, used to do plumbing work. Jimbo Wheeler, you hear talk to him.

EM: What he had, a brother down there?

JC: No, he had people down there and he'd go down there. I went up in the mountains.

EM: And you packed up and went on with him.

JC: Yeah, I go down there and work with him here. And went on down there.

EM: And y'all put in manholes and stuff?

JC: Yeah, and bathrooms. Me and Mr. Borg used to dig all the septic tanks. And them people in town, you know when they had them putting oil in, I buried many tanks in Oxford.

EM: Have you ever seen anybody dig a well by hand?

JC: Uh-uh. Yeah, I seen it done, but I ain't never, you know, seen it started, but ain't never, you know, did it.

EM: Did you ever ask anybody why they put rocks in a well?

JC: Well they tied in.

EM: You had to be good at that, don't you?

JC: Yeah, I did it. I was ????, I put pipes in them. I went in wells in South Carolina where you couldn't get no water and I learned how to get water out the well.

EM: How did you get it out?

JC: You take it and dig it, get you a porthole digger and go down in the middle of that well, and dig it just as far as you can get that porthole digger to go, and bring it out, take it out, until you struck water.

EM: What you gotta have rock or—when you hit that rock it let you know there's more water?

JC: Wasn't no rock ??? gravel ???. And it wasn't no rock wall. It was pipe. I wouldn't go in no rock well. Ain't never seen them in South Carolina. In Georgia. But just kind of up on the hill like. And I dig it out and get me a four foot pipe and go build a hole through this way, hole through this way, hole through this way, and keep on crossing them up, all the way down to the bottom. And then put me a ????? in the bottom and push it back down in that hole I dug. put it in deep. And give it about three or four minutes and that water'll be covering the top of that thing.

EM: How could you tell that you had enough water and you was deep enough? You had to know that, because if you won't it'll give you water but it'll stop, because you got to get a certain amount of water.

JC: Uh-uh. When I dug it, digging down there, when I hear it say, "Ffshhhhhhh." And I brought that porthole digger out, and I had it a little bit bigger at the top cause I had to have it where I could ??? it up ????. And I look down there and see that water shooting. ????? and looked down there and I had a light down there, looked down there and I had to cut the lane in two. Had to cut the lane in two, but that much below that drain, just push that pipe down and there the water ???.

EM: That's a lot of work cause you gotta let people know that's listening to this tape. You got to have a ???, and you were sending dirt back from the bottom up to somebody on the top.

JC: Only thing I was doing was that porthole digger, I would dig down in there, and take a five gallon buggy and put it about two thirds full and let them take it out of there. That's the way I did it.

EM: And see how much water was shooting as you—

JC: Yeah.

EM: Put pressure.

JC: But when I got that dirt out, I kept the dirt out as I was going down.

EM: And they send you the bucket back.

JC: Yeah. And when I got down there where they would put the drain into, where I put the drain into, and then dig down there quick and I could see the water shooting both ways. Had about three inches on each side. It was shooting up. One was shooting back and the other was shooting up. And one would be lower. The one that was going out would be lower and the one that was...it would go down. But the one that was coming in there was shooting up high. That's what I did, I put it right in that drain.

EM: And you wrote that on your arm?

JC: Yeah, just like Grandpa Tim. We ain't never talk. See, I got a brother ??? down there broke his ankle, fell forty feet and tore his ankle up in a well by using a old rope. And see it broke with him. And see just like I said, if you concerned you would protect yourself and take care of yourself. Ain't nothing going to hurt you if you concerned because you got to be concerned in this life because we don't-- it's not your life. You ain't got no life. You ain't nothing on earth. Christ say he made every living thing under

the sun. He said he did it. I know he did it. And when he made it, he breathed in order to become a living soul. Everything lives through by the father.

EM: I want to ask you another question. As I travel across this county and talk to people like you that raised four or five children, started off sharecropping, buying a little land, bought the team of mules, and bought a little land, and bought a little land, and work and send their children to school, buying forty, fifty; where did the determination and the will power come from? Because you start off at zero.

JC: Well you see—

EM: Your wife didn't have nothing, you didn't have nothing.

JC: Well it come from being so abused and scarred and pushed so hard. Now I'll tell you about my uncle, Sydney Robinson. Owned a farm up here and I think it been in the family about ninety years. Close to it. It been ninety. It been ninety years. Over ninety years. Back of Bruns hill. Well what it is—

EM: Hal Robinson.

JC: Yeah. What it is...

EM: Is he related to you?

JC: That's my first cousin. My mama's brother's son.

EM: Uh-huh.

JC: And he's well known. Still well known. And he'll still tell you. Uncle Sydney said, when he was working up there, when Grandpa Tim, I mean Grandpa Howard died, up there on that road, right there as you turned, just above where you turned to go to ???, that's where my granddaddy died. Grandpa Tim. I mean Howard. Mr. [name], he was living on Mr. [name] place. And he used to drive a buggy out there.

EM: What is Mr. [name]'s last name?

JC: I can't think of his last name.

EM: Ok.

JC: He was a preacher, or they always called him Preacher.

EM: White guy?

JC: Yeah.

EM: Mm-hmm.

JC: And he said when the ??? Uncle Sydney, he said, "Well, Uncle Howard is ?????? his work, he can't do no more." Grandpa had a stroke. He said, "I'ma build him a little log cabin in the woods down there so he can live there," and said, "We've got to have the house for the farm. We've got to go on." You see what I'm talking about?

EM: Uh-huh.

JC: Alright. And Uncle Sydney kept that in him. He said he was going to save everything he could get until he buy him a place of his own. And that's what he done. You know how they got that place up there.

EM: Where, Colonel?

JC: Yeah, Colonel Robinson bought that hisself. ??????. But the home place just side of him. You see, that was his determination.

EM: Do you think it come from slavery, from one generation to another generation and just makes you strong or give you strength or determination?

JC: Well you see, his determination come good. And then back there then, if a man looked at you then and saw you was something good, he tried to pull you off. But if he couldn't pull you off, he'd join you. If he didn't want to join you, he didn't bother with you.

EM: But we're talking about people just couldn't hardly read and write had that determination.

JC: That's what I'm talking about.

EM: And they're sharecropping man, you never say what people said he was getting.

JC: Well now I'll tell you what turned the people around.

EM: What.

JC: Cause the black race, when in nineteen forty-eight, colored people started buying cars. White people was buying the real good ones for their children. And those who had a little money and was able just started to buy them for their children. You see, now that's in my category. And most of the people in my age right now, most of—half of what they have their daddy left them.

EM: Why?

JC: Because they didn't have no determination in them. They ain't looking at the world.

EM: Ok.

JC: That's what hurt them.

EM: Does determination grow in those people, blacks, that been out there in the trenches? Wives and their husbands?

JC: Well, determination, these people ain't never find nothing because they'll never find—black or white, they'll never find. Because they ain't got that close. When you close enough to the almighty God, he'll direct you. I know what I'm talking about. I'm here with Ms. Irene Parham, and somebody tried to break in on her, and when they didn't know nobody, Ms. Judian Cleveland and Ms. McGee on Raleigh Road there on Peace Street, and they jumped on me ??????. And said "Johnny Crews, we know you stayed on that man's farm, kept her house for her. And you's a nice person and we want you to go down there with Irene cause somebody's about to break in on her." ??????. Well that's why I'm here. And the people knew me. I always kept myself the same before the whites, same before the blacks. So I don't see no difference in them.

EM: Respect is what you want.

JC: Yeah.

EM: You respect them and they respect you.

JC: And if I find them where they don't respect me, I don't care what color they is, I don't bother with them. I leave them alone. Because that's God's will. You got to keep God's will to find the way to glory. And if you don't do that, you won't never find a way cause he ain't gonna lead you.

EM: But you know, I talked to a lady, said a lady told me her and her husband got married in thirty-two. Well when they married times was hard then but it was time hard get by then to. And she said they didn't have nothing. Had to stay with the daddy and help him on the farm and then they moved on. And weren't making nothing but sharecropping, but they could save fifty cent, they could save a dollar—determination. Now they got two hundred and something acres of land. Started with nothing. Why these kids can't do it now?

JC: Well let me tell you what set me up. [name] is eight years older than I am. And Lizzy is six years older than I am. And William is three years older than I am. And when [name], my baby sister, my older sister, not my baby sister, but when my older sister was taking company, and Carrie my little sister and the other one named Tempe, they were taking company, people give me a dime, give me a nickel—I want you to hear this. And

I put that in a jar. I didn't go to no store and buy candy like these people nowadays, they get a dollar and they don't know how to keep it. It burn in their hand and they got to run and put it in a store somewhere else. Do something with it. Or buy drink or dope or something like that. I didn't. Didn't buy no candy or nothing. I put that money in a can and I'll tell you when I started doing that. In nineteen twenty-three. Before I took a tin bucket and go to the spring and get a tin bucket of water, sometimes I'd bring two. I was ???, I could bring two tin buckets. I just couldn't carry the water buckets, not unless I carry two and two is too much, my mama wouldn't let me, you know, carry but so much. And I'd carry them buckets full and them boys ????. ??? the girls ???, some of them wanted to be big shots give me a quarter. I know he wanted that quarter after I growed up, ????. [laughs] Well you see, but the thing is, I stayed there where Colonel down below this side, and we lived in a old log house down there in a frame and you had to go across the platform into the kitchen. And you eat one part of that down the stairs and you go up the stairs, live in the other room. That's where you lived, in there.

EM: Was that school a log cabin school out there?

JC: No—where? At Bell Town?

EM: Uh-huh.

JC: Uh-uh.

EM: What about the one at Bruns Hill?

JC: No.

EM: They were frames?

JC: Yeah. Far as I know they were frames. And so what happened, when we moved down there in nineteen thirty-four to Mr. Jones down here with Richard Harris, Mr. Richard Harris, I had that quart jar full of money. I want you to hear this good. Now I was—you know where ??? Creek is?

EM: Mm-hmm. Clay Station?

JC: Yeah. I go right through there to Bruns Hill through the woods. I was coming though there one night, dark ???, so I went under the house and dug my money up under that ground and brought it down here in nineteen thirty-four. And I gave my mama enough money out of that jar to live and don't even borrowing a dime from anybody. And that's what learnt me some sense right there. I always kept me some. And I never put my business in the street. Kept it to myself. And I used to keep money here and I found people was hard on me about money, I stopped putting money here. I kept it away from here and I kept it out of other folks' noses. Shouldn't know about it. And that's

how I got back, got on my feet. And when I bought me a place, bought it in my cousin's name. Two houses in town.

EM: In Oxford?

JC: Yeah. And then ??? woman come and take my money all the time and didn't want to pay it, and I turned around and sold it. Sold both of them. I made five hundred dollars on them.

EM: Now, you have lived good.

JC: I've had good—the lord have blessed me.

EM: You had basically what you wanted.

JC: Yeah.

EM: You had talent, you made good money.

JC: Yeah, I made as much as...I have made as much as thirteen hundred dollars a week—

EM: Evidently you wasn't a drunkard because you didn't drink a lot of liquor cause you never said it. You were skilled.

JC: I wouldn't drink it.

EM: Did you smoke?

JC: Mm-mm. I didn't smoke, just very—you know what I used to smoke? William and myself used to buy a pack of cigarettes and Edward was married to Will Cheatham's daughter used to bring us Chesterfields when we was down there. That was a whole lot of—

EM: That was a strong cigarette wasn't it?

JC: Yeah, but do you know what a pack of cigarettes would last us?

EM: What.

JC: A month.

EM: Who was the oldest man, when you was a carpenter, belonged in the community? Do you know Mr. Matt Harris?

JC: Uncle Henry Mathers.

EM: Henry [Mathers.

JC: Yeah.

EM: Where was he living at?

JC: Up there outside Colonel.

EM: Black man?

JC: Black man.

EM: How many years did he live?

JC: Uncle Henry about eighty—I mean about seventy years old when he died. He was a farmer.

EM: Henry Mathers?

JC: Yeah.

EM: Was he a good farmer?

JC: Yeah, man farmed good. He was a good man.

EM: You don't hear talk about many Mathers around here no more.

JC: Nuh-uh.

EM: Why?

JC: Died out. And white Mathers.

EM: The ones who are listening at this tape, Mr. Crews and I are outside. You hear birds and dogs barking. So that's the noise in the background.

JC: Yeah.

EM: What about the church? Did your mother, was she a church worker?

JC: Mother wasn't nothing but a church woman. She loved the church.

EM: Do anything to help the church.

JC: Yeah, and mother, she go to church every fourth Sunday at Tallyho. Up at Stem.

EM: Uh-huh.

JC: And when my mother left this world in nineteen fifty-nine, she had been to church Sunday which was nineteen fifty-nine, that was January the twenty-fifth. She was at Tallyho Church.

EM: Did you ever go to Tallyho Church?

JC: Yeah.

EM: How did you get up there?

JC: I carried her up there on a car.

EM: Where was you living at?

JC: I lived in town then.

EM: Did you ever see Tallyho School?

JC: Yeah.

EM: Was it in a church first, and then—

JC: No. Tallyho Church used to be up on the hill next to Stem.

EM: Was it a log cabin?

JC: I don't know what that church was.

EM: The school.

JC: No it was a frame school.

EM: And where was Tallyho Church at? Where it is now?

JC: No. Tallyho Church come down there after—you know where you pass where Tallyho Church is now?

EM: Uh-huh.

JC: You go up on the hill.

EM: Uh-huh, right hand side.

JC: Yeah on the right hand side right up there, that's where it was.

EM: Nobody never told me that!

JC: That's where it was. You don't believe me, the cemetery's up there.

EM: Oh I've been to that slave grave yard.

JC: Yeah. Cemetery's up there.

EM: But it's a white man house built right at it.

JC: Yeah.

EM: The cemetery's out in the yard.

JC: That's right.

EM: That's where the church was.

JC: Yeah. That's where it was.

EM: And the outgrew it, got big and they moved down...

JC: That's right. Moved down and bought that—

EM: Now you didn't work there, did you work down at Camp Butner when the soldiers came in?

JC: Uh-uh.

EM: You weren't living here then?

JC: I was living here but I didn't work out there. Only thing I did in Camp Butner was when the camp went out. Now see I was called in the army. But when I come back from there I—

EM: Oh you been in the service too?

JC: I was called in there. I didn't stay in service. They sent me back. Mr. Benny Hunt got me out, who I was milking cows for.

EM: Who?

JC: Benny Hunt. Down here in Dickerson. Benny Hunt.

EM: How he do that? He had pull?

JC: When you were back there then if you had—if you was the owner of somebody that had depended on that had milk cows ?????, you could get out of ???. You could get him out.

EM: What about his children?

JC: He ain't had none. Nothing but girls.

EM: Ok.

JC: So that's the way it was. And that's where I made my money right there. I had six thousand ????? seven hundred dollars.

EM: I appreciate you taking up that time, and if I need anymore information, I'll listen to the tape and we'll get back again.

JC: Alright.

EM: Thank you.

JC: And I'll tell you now, when we was talking about Grandpa Tim and Uncle Bernie Crews, now he, he can tell you something, and I tell you he wasn't a Crews until he come in North Carolina.

EM: What were you before you came to North Carolina?

JC: We were Mayhew.

EM: Where, was it Mayhews in Bell Town?

JC: Uh-uh, Mayhews in...we come from Wendell.

EM: Down in Wake County?

JC: Granddaddy come from Wendell. Sold up here as a slave to William Crews' daddy.

EM: What was your granddaddy name down in Wendell? Mayhew?

JC: Yeah.

EM: It's Mayhews buried out there in Bell Town now.

JC: Yeah.

EM: Slave cemetery.

JC: Mm-hmm.

EM: And that's the Mayhews.

JC: Yeah.

EM: You came out of that?

JC: Came out the Mayhews. Come up here and they put us the Crews. So colored people do not know what they is.

EM: Did y'all bring that name with you and then never lose it, passed it down? From one generation to the other generation?

JC: No. When the—

EM: How did you get it passed to you as—

JC: By the Crews. By the white Crews.

EM: They told you—

JC: Whenever they buy a slave, then that slave carry their name.

EM: But your family was smart enough to keep the generation, let you know what you really was?

JC: Yeah.

EM: Was a Mayhew.

JC: Well we found out by going down there in Wendell. We found out we got a lot of people in Wendell.

EM: And they changed your name to Crews but you was Mayhew.

JC: Yeah.

EM: It's a lot of Mayhews that was buried out there.

JC: Mm-hmm.

EM: And slaves. Been ???

JC: Mm-hmm.

EM: And what was his name? That came from Wendell?

JC: Tim Crews. Tim Mayhew.

EM: Was that your father's granddaddy?

JC: My father's father.

EM: Ok.

JC: See Granddaddy, that's John Crews, Arthur Crews, and Robert Crews, and Elijah Crews. Them four boys. Well, see, Grandma was a Avery before she married Grandpa Tim.

EM: She was a Avery.

JC: Avery. She had married an Avery. But see, when Granddaddy died, I mean when Grandma died, she was washing clothes from house to house. They weren't even making a living. See people come a hard way.

EM: They sewed by hand.

JC: Yeah.

EM: Took fertilizer sacks, flour bags.

JC: Mm-hmm.

EM: And made clothes.

JC: I don't know about that—yeah they used to take flour bags.

EM: You ever known anybody make shoes?

JC: I know somebody but I don't remember right now too good. I was real small.

EM: Yeah.

JC: Used to make shoes out of wood. Shoes out of wood and put cloth around them.

EM: Ok. I'll get back with you.

[END OF SIDE B]