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Interview

with

DONALD R. McCALL

January 23, 1995

by Bill Bamberger

Transcribed by Jackie Gorman

The Southern Oral History Program
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START OF TAPE 1, SIDE A

DON McCALL
JANUARY 23, 1995

BILL BAMBERGER: Today is January 23, 1995, and this interview is taking place at Don's sister Lynn's house in Brevard, North Carolina. Alice Boyle is here with me, and my name is Bill Bamberger.

Why don't you begin, Don, by just telling us where you were born and a little bit about where you are from and growing up.

DON McCALL: I was born in Brevard where we are at, and grew up more in Murphy, North Carolina, which is in the western part of the state. I had a really large family. We were really poor. I learned a lot about sharing and loving and having to do without. I think it was probably one of the better things I ever learned in my life. Makes you a lot more self-reliant.

I love Brevard to death. The scenery is just breathtaking year around. And the people here, you get such a diverse influx of people in the summer that you can find somebody to talk anytime you want to. I really like that. It's nice.

BB: Tell us a little bit about your parents, who they were, what their names were, and what kind of work they did.

DM: Okay. My father's name was Robert McCall. He was a night watchman at Brevard College until he died. He was born in Brevard. Lived here until they moved to Murphy which was in 1952, a year after I was born. We stayed down there until 1966 and then moved back because of my father's mother's health or my grandmother. I stayed here until I went into the Army, then I came back to Brevard, got married, and moved back to Tennessee.

but it is still in her family. We came, like I said, back to Brevard because of my grandmother's health. We stayed here every since. It's just a lot of family ties and bonds to this right here.

BB: How did you come to work in the furniture industry? Tell us about that.

DM: I answered an ad in the newspaper. A blind box ad which is probably the worst kind of thing you can ever do. They wanted a furniture repairman. I never repaired furniture in my life, but I had repaired machinery. I went and talked to them, and they put me to work at Silver Furniture in Knoxville, working fifty and sixty and seventy hours a week. That's how I got started in it, and then they promoted me to a supervisor over a grandfather clock line. I had to reorganize it, and I stayed there until the factory burnt down in 1976.

BB: What was the year that you went to work?

DM: 1975 in furniture.

BB: How old were you at that time?

DM: Twenty-four. The people are, I think, the biggest draw to any industry. It is not just the work. I stayed in woodworking because of the people that surround it. There were more family oriented people. None of them were rich. You can't get rich making furniture unless you are the owner or something like that. They were all tight knit. It was a family type atmosphere all the time. You got to know the people. You worked around them. They knew you and they cared. And that kind of stuck with me, and it's stuck with me all these twenty years later. That's probably the biggest reason I stayed in it and really didn't want to get out.

BB: Why would it be different? Why would an industry like furniture making or woodworking be different in that way?

DM: I've been in textile mills and a lot of other kinds of factories that I went in and looked at--the machinery and stuff--it's just the people. You don't get that sense of family in those other places. You get more a self-centered individual that wants to work and not be bothered. Woodworking is not that way. I never have been in a woodworking plant that the people didn't really bond close. None of them.

I think it's the character of the people. It's more or less a trade than a job. It's something that most of 'em have learned over a period of time not just going to a foundry or an automobile plant, you don't find that. The only different place that I've seen was a Saturn plant in Tennessee, and those people are bonded together just like the woodworkers. That's the only exception that I've ever seen.

They take the time to know each other as people rather than as a number or as somebody doing their jobs. It rolls from the top of the organization all the way down.

Most woodworking plants--the guys--all of them are right out on the floor talking to you and seeing how you are doing. No other manufacturing facility I've ever been in does that. They are too involved in production and textiles are definitely involved in production. It's piece rate this. If you don't get this, you don't get that. Most of the working plants are not a relaxed atmosphere.

I guess that's one of the reasons that the people in North Carolina do so good at it. They are more homey type people. The people up North-- You've been up North and even out West is the same thing, they don't present themselves as outgoing people. People in woodworking do. It's just a strange occupation.

BB: You mentioned going to work for the Silver.

DM: Silver, S I L V E R, Furniture Company.

BB: In?

DM: Knoxville, Tennessee.

BB: Shortly thereafter, you were promoted to a supervisor of the--?

DM: Grandfather clock line, yeah.

BB: How long were you there before you were promoted?

DM: I was there three months, and I stayed on the grandfather clock line three months, and I was promoted to the frame assembly and sanding department which was going from twelve people to forty-four people on two different floors. I had been there--run it--for about six months when the plant burnt completely to the ground. There was four hundred and ten people in the plant when it burnt down and not one person got hurt, not a one. It went to the ground in forty-five minutes. I was the only one, I guess, that got hurt. I fell and busted my butt. [laughter]

BB: [laughter]

DM: Fell on the metal catwalk. I guess that was it, my pride was hurt. That was about it.

BB: Everyone got out?

DM: Everybody got out. Silver Furniture when I first went there was a lot like White's. The building was a wooden structure like the back of White's, part of it was. Wooden floors, same old buggies that you had to push and bust your back to roll.

Made occasional tables, that's all they made. There was no high end furniture. They were low to middle occasional manufacturer's. They are still in business. They are still doing good. The place is still growing, and basically the same people I worked with are still there. They have been there eighteen, nineteen years, but they are still a tight knit group from management all the

way to the people that sweep the floor. Everybody knows everybody. They've never gotten too big.

BB: Is it a family owned business?

DM: Yes, it is. Carl Silver owns the whole thing.

BB: How does production there as you remember it or did production there resemble production and work at the White Furniture Company?

DM: It didn't. It was a higher paced production there. We had-- Well, any company has got to make so many pieces to pay the bills. That's a hard point to get across to any employee when you say that you've got to make so many pieces of this--piece rate--or something like that, but you have to make so much to pay the bills.

We had a hundred and forty employees at Silver, and we produced anywhere from six to eight hundred pieces of furniture a day. The dollar value is nowhere close to what White was, nowhere close because you're talking a forty and fifty dollar table versus a two and three thousand dollar armoire, étagère, or dining room table.

The people were more city--city type people--than they were at White. White were more country. The people at White were a lot more open than the people at Silver. I think the people in east Tennessee are kind of clannish anyway, and they don't like strangers as well as they do down in Mebane. I can attest to that real well.

They didn't associate with a lot of people that were out of their area of work. If you worked there they talked to you and you became friends with them, but other than that they didn't go out and hunt friends like they do down in Mebane. That's the biggest one difference I know in the two companies.

BB: We might come back to this in a little bit and compare that, but I would like to move on to the chronology of your life and what you were doing from the time you went to work there. So tell us a little bit about the-- Tell us the year you left Silver and to where you went next.

DM: Okay. I left Silver in August, August 25, 1986. I went to work for Home Crest Kitchen Cabinets out of Goshen, Indiana. They started up a plant in Clinton, Tennessee, to make all varieties of kitchen cabinets. Their production goal was like fifteen hundred a day. I helped start that plant up. Set the machines and do the whole bit. Lay it out, train the people.

We had two hundred forty-seven employees and out of those two hundred and forty-seven we had ten actually trained before they came to work which was saying something for the supervisors and management of that company. Plant manager had never been in woodworking, he was a salesman. Production inventory control person was doing it in a sewing plant. Nobody other than four supervisors and four or five hourly employees actually had any experience in woodworking. So we started the whole thing up and virtually trained everybody.

We had a lot of training to do ourself. I took hours and hours and hours of MRP training, human relations training. I had to learn their whole computer system which was completely different than MRP to run a company which meant everything had to be done on computer. Everything had to be accounted for. Everything had to be done so so. We started the whole thing up at the same time. It took-- The plant in Indiana--they had two plants up there that employed eleven hundred people. It took them a year and a half to get to ninety-eight percent accuracy. We reached it in less than a year and maintained it which meant that we didn't have to take an inventory.

The regimentation and the things that had to be done were taught from the start. It wasn't started halfway through. It was the easiest probably start-up of any plant I have ever seen. The people were basically the same as people in Knoxville, you're talking twenty miles away. Little bit more country, a little bit more open and willing to help the company and anybody that was there. There's a lot of good people in both Silver and Home Crest.

I worked there until December of '89 when they laid the whole second shift off and half the first. I was one of the one's that got laid off because the kitchen cabinet business just went to nothing. I was sitting at the house drawing unemployment when Robin Hart called me and told me he wanted me to go back to work. He had heard I was sitting on my butt and he didn't enjoy that. He called me to come down to Mebane.

BB: Now does that mean that Robin was at--?

DM: Robin was the plant manager at Silver.

BB: At Silver?

DM: Uh, huh. That's where I met Robin. I worked for Robin for nine years before I ever came to Mebane. We've been good friends ever since. I met Robin in '78, 1978. Through the whole time I worked at Home Crest I would go down and visit or he would come up. Just anything that happened we stayed in touch. Everybody down there did. It was like a family deal. You didn't want to get lost from the people, and I guess that's where I learned part of the way I am. I like to stay in touch with the people I like and become friends with.

BB: Were you--. I want to back up just a little bit. Prior to joining Silver, were you trained in any way or did you receive much of your training there in the Silver Furniture Company?

DM: I was completely ignorant of furniture when I went in the door at Silver. I had worked at a textile plant, drove a tractor trailer in the service and that was it. I had no training whatsoever, none. I know what furniture looked like, but I sure didn't know how to make it or repair it or do anything with it, nothing. I couldn't have told you the color of wood or the kinds of wood if you'd hit me in the head with it. [laughter]

BB: And then prior going to Home Crest you did receive some formal training, and I assume that Home Crest sent you to--.

ALICE BOYLE: Home Crest, Home Press?

DM: Home Crest, C R E S T.

BB: H O M E C R E S T?

DM: Uh, huh. The only formal training I had was State Tech came out and give us a human relations course at Silver. I was going to college and working while I was at Silver at night. I went to school at night on the GI Bill and got my associate degree while working fifty and sixty hours a week. So that's the formal training I got was in school plus work.

Probably the most formal and significant training I got as far as at any company was at Home Crest because I went to Dell Carnegie Management Course at Home Crest plus we had to structure courses in MRP. Structured courses in human relations that I had to go to every week, two and three times a week for an hour or two hours a day. That was ongoing through the whole three years. It didn't stop.

AB: What was MRP? What is MRP?

DM: Management Resource Planning or Manufacture and Resource Planning. You can call it either way. One is MRP 1 and MRP 2. It is more or less total resource planning when it's

MRP 2. You plan the people, you plan the stuff, the materials, the flow, everything is done by the computer. It takes a lot of time to lay it out and set it up but once it gets set up the supervisors job is just to talk to the people and check. You don't have to go set things up for people. You don't have to run parts down there. It is already there. They know what they are running. You don't tell them, they'll tell you. It makes it easy. That's the easiest supervising job I ever had. I didn't have to chase parts. Didn't have to hunt nothing. They had a list generated by the computer, parts in order that they needed to run. My main job was the human relations side of it and taking care of the little troublesome parts that popped up every once in a while; somebody special ordered something and we had to have it, had everything else, just getting it around that was it.

The main thing they wanted their supervisors to do was to communicate with the people which is what they should do. I guess the one thing that I learnt from that and probably the biggest thing I learnt from Dell Carnegie was about me. You've got to be willing to talk to people the way you want to be talked to, not just what the company wants them to hear, but you've got to treat them like a person. They are a person. They are not a number, they are not a piece of wood. You can't go beat them over the head or throw them through the plant, you've got to treat them like people. You've got to get their respect. If you do that they'll work for you. You don't have to do much to make a person work. Just ask his name, talk to him everyday or every time you see him, and every time you see him whether it's at work or away from work you say something to him. That's just good human kindness. That gets work done.

BB: There's a lot I would like to ask you about, but I want to move on and get to White Furniture. I do have one quick question, sir, with the Silver to Home Crest connection. You didn't tell us why you left Silver.

DM: Well, let's see. Three thousand, well, let's put it in terms of weekly income supporting a family--one kid and one on the way--at the time. Well, Amanda was born then, but two kids. I went from making four hundred and fifty-five dollars a week to making five hundred and eighty dollars a week. That's the reason I left Silver. It wasn't because of the people. The money was good. The benefits were good or better.

It was the hardest one decision to leave that company that I have ever made in my life. That's no joke. I cried when I left that place because of the ties I had. It was not something--I thought I was bettering myself. I had a chance to go on and increase my knowledge of woodworking and increase my education--they were paying for it--and increase my earning potential for my family. You know, for all the right reasons, and it was the one thing I can truthfully say.

The day I left--they gave me a farewell dinner--I had been there like eight years and nine months. They gave me a silver dollar for every year that I had been there. They gave me Seiko wristwatch. Robin was suppose to give me the wristwatch and couldn't do it. He was sitting in the back crying. He had somebody else bring it up to give it to me. He was that kind of person.

That's the reason I like Robin Hart as a person. I like Robin Hart as a boss. You have to earn his respect. I was just as damn bull-headed and as stubborn as he was. That's why he liked me, and that's no joke. I bucked him probably more than anybody in his life. He was a good man. He seen through my rough and crude exterior and seen something he liked somewhere. That was

the biggest thing I think it was that he seen somebody that liked people. That's what it takes. If you had seen him then you wouldn't have knowed him.

BB: Do you remember the day you went to him and told him you were leaving Silver which was the first time ya'll left () to the plant?

DM: Yeah, I do. I went to him and told him and he didn't say a word. He said, "You made up your mind?" I said, "Yes." He said, "Okay, I'll talk to you later." I left, and I told him I was giving them two weeks notice, and he said, "I'll talk to you next week." This was like on Monday. The next Thursday he called me in and he said, "Don, I'm not going to slap you in the face and offer you more money. If I can do that now why couldn't I have done it months or weeks ago or a year ago. You are good worker, we hate to lose you, and I think you are doing better for yourself."

That meant a lot to me. He didn't try to buy me back. He seen that I was doing better for myself and better than he could give me. I guess that's when I gained a lot of respect for that man right there. He explained why, and he went into detail. He said, "I could have gave you the money. Fifty dollars a week wouldn't make any difference now." I said, "No, I've done made the decision." He said, "I knew that." He said, "You made the decision before you ever come and told me." I said, "Yes, and I'm not backing out, I'm not changing my mind even for fifty more dollars or even a hundred more dollars a week, because I've got a lot more to gain than that." And I did have.

Robin was a many faceted person. At work he was one person and away from work he was another. A lot of the managers have to be that way, me included. You have to maintain a presence on the job and a stature that the company requires and truthfully, anybody should require

of theirself if they are going to take responsibility. But away from work he was one of the best kind-hearted men I have ever seen. One of the most fun to be around, camping, hunting, fishing. He was just a lot of fun. Two completely different sides to the same person.

That's the reason I guess that it hurt me so much to leave Robin. Everybody there was the same way. It was a friendship that was built over nine years that I don't want to break yet, and I'm not going to break yet. I still go back down there, and I still see those people. A lot of the same people are still there. The supervisor staff has had one change and that was Robin left. That's it. The rest of them are still there. Most of the hourly employees are still there and will be there.

White a hundred years later. I guess that's the easiest way to put it, White's a hundred years later. The people built the bonds, and they stayed together, and they built the friendships that was built over probably the same period of time as White's. That was Atkins Furniture started in 1895, basically the same time which turned out to be over a period of years Silver after it had been bought and sold a couple of times. The same people, the same general background.

BB: Let's move forward now back to the time where you had been at Home Crest and you get word that they are closing down the kitchen cabinet line that you are on and you are out of work for the first time. Do you remember that closing, the closing of your line and being laid off and what that was like for you?

DM: It was probably more hurt than anything else. It kind of felt like I had been violated myself, to a point because I didn't know it was coming. I had to lay the whole second shift off, and I laid part of the first shift off. It was something I expected and something I didn't expect if you can understand that. You know, deep down inside I knew it was coming and had to, dollar

wise. You don't really get the jolt until it happens. When they called me in the office and said, "We're going to give you a lay off slip, and you can draw your unemployment. It will be just like everybody else's, uncontested. Go up file and draw." Just what I done, but it was a jolt.

After putting so much work into that place, getting it started, getting everybody trained, and then seeing it go out the door. But the thing about it was a lay off you don't get the feeling that it's permanent. You've got that hope way out in left field somewhere that you are going to get called back. You don't really know when it was.

Most of the people that got laid off before me or that I laid off are back at work, because the woodworking industry in general has picked back up. They expanded their product line and got into different things rather than just totally kitchen cabinets. They put most of them back to work within two years.

BB: I've heard from a lot of workers on the various lines just like furniture about what it was like to find out they were unemployed. Is it different for someone who's in a supervisory position?

DM: Not in the least bit. It's more so--. I think it's a little bit harder on them. I'm going to tell you why you're seeing people go out the door and you know basically their family, their life, their lifestyle, what they counted on for income and you know that they've been doing this for so long. You know they got laid off, but they got fired at the same time. It was permanent. You don't have any hope. It's gone. You know you have to get out and find a job which probably in all reality is better than the lay off if there is no plan on ever being called back and you don't know that when you are laid off.

To see those people just feather out of there-- You could see them the last time they hit that clock it's just like, you know, their feet dropped on the floor and their hearts. You could just see the worry. Up until that day it would build up, and when they hit that clock for the last time you could just see it. It would just come out.

I seen it probably more than I wanted to because we were out there clocking. Every time two or three more would go and two or three more would go and you say good-bye and it hurts, and you do it over and over and over and over. It's not just to the people in your department it's the people in the whole plant because you know everybody. You know some of them will never be able to do anything else. Some of them are too old to go anywhere else. They're working because they had to. They couldn't afford to live on social security or didn't have enough income to live without that job. You know there is no other way they are going to get another one unless it is a night watchman or sweeping the floor somewhere. That's the part that really hurts.

You have to understand what it means to be a supervisor number one. You have a responsibility and a company has a responsibility to each and every person that works for you, to show them that you're going to do the best thing that you can do for them. You're going to keep them trained. You're going to keep them employed. You're not going to pull their feet out from under them. You know that job is what supports their family, pays their bills, puts their kids through school, buys their house, pays for taxes, buys the food they eat. You have to understand that.

When you understand that you can be a good supervisor, but when you understand that and you have something happen like shutting down that plant everyone of them that goes out the door you know that their whole life is changed completely. You know that the company you

worked for pulled the rug out from under them. It's not a good feeling, not by a long shot. I mean I felt it.

BB: What did you do when you got that word? What was it like for you? Tell us a little bit about maybe the very first day, if you told your family and that sort of thing, and then take us forward a little bit to that time period until you hear from Robin Hart again.

DM: Well, the very first day I didn't tell anybody other than the people that already knew it. They told us thirty or so minutes before they told everybody else. That's from middle management all the way down which was Marshall, Jackie, all the way down. They told us all at the same time which was thirty minutes before they told hourly employees.

I guess the one thing about that day that I will remember more than anything else is I went up in the front office and Kay was sitting there on the steps going down into Robin's office crying. I picked her up and hugged her. I said, "Just hold on." And she sat there and cried, and she looked up at me with those big old brown eyes and said, "What am I going to do about my two kids?" I will never forget that.

I know that I have enough self-confidence to know I will work doing something to support myself. That didn't really scare me as much as it did a lot of other people. I can do other things, and I have enough confidence in myself to do it. You know, it don't take a whole lot of money for a family of one. It does for a bigger family.

It didn't surprise me though. Shutting down Hillsborough didn't surprise me. I knew that Hillsborough was coming I just didn't figure that the Mebane plant would be as close as it was. As a matter of fact, I told Bill () which was a engineer at the time. And I got called to Robin's office for telling her because nobody was suppose to know it. I said, "You mark my

words, within three months it will be shutting down the doors at the Hillsborough plant." It was two months and two weeks. They hadn't even told the people. Nobody even knew it except for Robin and Bill.

AB: Who were you telling this to?

DM: Bill ().

BB: (To Alice) Don has jumped back to the White Furniture.

DM: I got called in Robin's office, and Robin asked me where I had heard it. I just told him it was BS off the floor. It was just a feeling I had. I knew that it did not make money sense to run it the way they were running it and run two plants that close together with as many people as they had and not produce any more product than they did. It was just common business knowledge, I guess. I seen the door open before it actually opened on that one. I figured it would.

BB: It is not clear when you just said that you suspected this and told folks or that there was just talk on the floor that everyone--.

DM: It was just--. Well, let's put it this way, if you want fish to bite you feed them a worm.

BB: Take that away from him. Don McCall is clanging on his coffee cup and we're taking it away from him. [laughter]

DM: Yes, beating me over the head with it.

I did, it was just--. What I said to Bill was a way of fishing. I done it to get a reaction which is kind of sneaky, but that's what I done. It got a reaction and one that I didn't count on. I knew it had to come.

AB: What was his position at the plant?

DM: Robin Hart was president of White's.

AB: Oh, that's the Robin. It was Bill I guess I was thinking about.

DM: Bill was head of engineering.

AB: Head of engineering.

BB: I really would like to talk a good deal about the closing of White Furniture, but I want to back up a little bit and hold off some and sort of get you into White Furniture and your job there. So I'm going to ask you a couple of the early questions, and then we will be into the factory and talk about it.

After you left Home Crest you were out of work for some time.

DM: About five weeks.

BB: Five weeks.

DM: I didn't even get a decent vacation. [laughter]

BB: [laughter] Then you get a call from Robin Hart. Tell us about that.

DM: He called me. As a matter of fact I don't even know how he come to find out that I was unemployed unless he got a hold of one of the guys at Silver and talked to them. But he called me and asked me to come down there. He said he had a job he wanted to give me. I asked him about it. He said, "Come down here and spend two or three days. We'll put you up in a hotel, and you can look around and check the plant out and do the whole thing. If you don't like it you can go back to Tennessee and stay."

I went down there. Went through the Hillsborough plant first and then went through the Mebane plant. I met Jackie Hodges and Richard Pickford. I talked to them. They both liked me.

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Talked to Robin and we talked about money. Everybody basically said "We want him," and I said, "I will be happy to go to work for you." It was probably the biggest move I had made in my life since the Army, and I think probably one of the best moves I've made in my life, as far as being a person it was.

BB: What did Robin tell you about the situation at the plant? The history? The purchase?

DM: Well, he told me that White was bought by Hickory Manufacturing which is what it was at that time. There wasn't a whole lot said about it then. I was more concerned with-- The questions I asked were about Hickory Manufacturing. I knew they owned it. I done a little bit of research. I knew they made period furniture. I'd done that before I ever went up there. You know; you walk in a door of a company that has been running almost continuously for a hundred years, and your job security kind of feels fairly certain, you know, you don't think it's going to shut down in three years.

The questions I had to ask were about the people, about the supervisors, what Robin expected of me and which plant I was going to be at cause I had been at both of them. He said, "I've got three or four openings, and you can fill any of them." He said, "You've done everything that I need done."

But I guess when I first went to White I spent two weeks in Hillsborough just more or less learning what they made and seeing how they made it. I kind of got the feeling at that time something was going to happen because of what Robin told me one day on the floor, because Robin is pretty straightforward. I seen a person setting up a fixture in the cabinet room that was probably one of the worst setups I had ever seen in my life; worst run, worst setup material- wise,

walking-wise, the whole bit. I said, "Robin, do you want me to go help him?" He said, "No, you're going up to the Mebane plant. They'll get it worked out or I'll get it worked out for them. Just leave them alone." That wasn't like the Robin Hart that I knew. He knew that I knew how to do the setup bit because I had done it in the cabinet room at Silver because I had run it.

When he told me that I kind of had a sneaky feeling that something was going on that he didn't want me to stay down there for. I never figured it out until after they shut the doors. I hadn't really figured it out until I sat and thought about it and had time to reflect. You know hind sight is twenty/twenty and mine sometimes is fifteen/fifteen. It kind of made me think then, but it just kind of stuck in the back of my mind why, you know, why not stop and help, I guess. He meant for me to be in Mebane and go in and do a little straightening out there which I don't know whether I did or not, but I tried.

I about got fired at White.

BB: When this incident happened about correcting the setup you were in your second or third week there?

DM: Yeah, second week.

BB: Then you go on to the Mebane plant where you would begin to work. Tell us about those early days there.

DM: The early days there I think everybody thought that I was Robin's nephew. That's no joke. I got accused of that more than anything. I don't know who it was. I guess it was Jackie or somebody told them I was kin to Robin, but I wasn't.

But I started out in the lumber yard. I had never been around dry kiln operations. That's where he started me out learning it. We'd load the kilns and unload the kilns. I learned how to

run the kilns enough to get by. That was about it. Not real good but enough to have a working knowledge.

Then we went into the machine room or rough mill which I had a pretty good knowledge of, you know, cut off saws, rip saws and glue them. I done that, part of it anyway, at least at Silver's the molders, tenon the machines. All the machinery that they had at some stage in my career been around or worked on. I stayed there about two or three weeks in the rough mill, and two or three weeks up in finish mill which is where John Fuquay was and Zeb and all them. Then they took me back and put me over their molders, two tenon machines, C & C rooters, table saws, and boring machine or something.

I had a clash with Pickford in the plant, and he wanted to fire me and Robin wouldn't let him. And then the one thing I respected about that--the whole thing--was that he come back and apologized to me. Robin didn't tell him to, he didn't have to, he said, "It was my mistake." We were both under a little stress when we had the altercation and it got resulted to words.

BB: In those early days did you have Robin's ear?

DM: No. I never did have Robin's ear as far as running that plant, and I didn't want to.

BB: Why?

DM: Because that's what everybody thought. That's what everybody expected. And that's no joke. I got accused of it a whole lot more than it ever happened. Robin, if he asked me a straightforward question I would give him a straightforward answer. I wouldn't lie to him. But I didn't run to Robin. I didn't have any reason to. I had to concern myself with running my department and making it do what it needed to do instead of running to Robin and ratting on anybody. I didn't need to do that.

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If he asked me something straightforward I didn't back up from him, and I wasn't going to lie to him about anything. It just wasn't worth it because he knew. When he asked you a question he knew the answer before he asked it. I knowed him too well.

[there is a dog barking in the background]

Outside of work did you ever socialize with him and keep that friendship going in that way?

DM: No. Not until actually the plant the was closing down, when they found out we were actually shutting the doors. I went over there a couple of times with Bill (), and we would sit and talk. More or less it's a farewell type deal with Robin. I didn't even socialize with him away from work. I did at Silver. We would go hunting and fishing, but we never did at White's. But everybody did down there so it wasn't just me, it was the whole supervisory staff. As far as that I think at one time I got blamed for Hillsborough shutting down by some people, and I didn't like that. I read between the lines pretty good in Hillsborough and that's basically what it was just an educated guess-timation.

BB: Don, I really want to talk more about you and less about Robin, but I have one detailed question about Robin.

DM: Do it.

BB: He came from the Silver plant. Did he go directly to White Furniture?

DM: Yes.

BB: Do you know what year that was?

DM: 1987, August 25, 1987, because I had left Silver one year to the day when he left Silver. I went to his farewell dinner at Silver. It was one year to the week. I guess that's one of the reasons I remember it.

I want to say something about Robin. A lot of people didn't understand the man, but a lot of people the day he left Silver-- He went down to an old loading dock behind the finishing room that had water in it about that deep--[Don shows measurement with his hand]--and he sat down there and cried like a big baby. In the morning he asked me he said, "You gone already. Do you think I'm doing right?" I said, "If you think you are doing right, you're doing right." He said, "It hurts." There's only three people seen him do that, me and two other supervisors at Silver.

He had a genuine care for the people at Silver, and he had a genuine care for the people at White's. You're going to be told otherwise by a lot of people, but I tell you right now, I know better. It wasn't something that he wanted to do. He was told-- He was told a couple of months in advance of everybody else he had to be. He had to lay the ground work, but he also had a responsibility to the man he worked for and to the company he worked for and that he had to perform--.

That goes with the job, whether you want to do it or not, you do it hopefully in the easiest way possible. You have to understand the responsibility, and you have to have been through it. You know, anybody could have walked in there and shut the plant down and said, "You are all fired or you're gone this day, and this day, and this day," and not cared and not thought, and kept people on as long as did. A lot of people were kept there longer than they were needed. I think if you ask anybody they will tell you the same thing.

The ones that worked for him he worked for them and that was everybody there. I think probably the one reason that Randy Austin was brought in to do a job that somebody else wouldn't do which Richard Hinkle fought to keep that plant open, and when he didn't succumb to the big man in Chicago he was said bye to, and the man that would do the job was brought in to do it. That's basically to me what happened.

BB: Do you think when Robin was hired he had any sense--I realize this is a subjective question I am asking, you know what I'm asking, and you're nodding your head already so go ahead and answer. [laughter]

DM: I'm going to tell you, Robin did not know when he was hired that the plant was going to be shut down. When he left Silver the one thing he said, he says, "I've got five and a half years until I retire, and I'm going to make it right there at White's." That was his last words.

A man's not going to say that and then go shut down a plant. Robin has shut down a Singer plant. That's where he got one of the reputations, I guess, for shutting down plants. He told it as a joke, and it hurt him to tell it, but he had shut down a Singer plant and another plant for somebody else. I don't know who the other was.

AB: That was before he went to Silver?

DM: Yes. He did not shut down the Silver plant. It's still up and running good. [laughter] But he did shut down a Singer plant, because Singer Furniture sold off about half their woodworking at one time. They had a bunch of it, and they sold a bunch of it off to Kincaid and Broyhill and Bassett and everybody else. He did shut down two plants. He shut down the () plant and shut down one other. But if you will look and, Bill, you were there, the way it was shut down and the way it was handled do you think--? I'm going to ask you a question. Do

you think it could have been done any different or anymore humanely? I don't. It's a lot of hurt for a lot of people. You have to stop and look at the way he done it, and you have to think about that really hard, you know, the law required sixty days, but most of the people got three, four months. Some of them got four and a half, five months. Some of them didn't leave there until, Lord, June from when we found out in December, I guess, or November. So they were still there in June of the next year. He drug it as long as he could drag it and keep people working. He done that.

You know, they were losing money by keeping people there. They were making money in a way and losing money in a way because they really didn't have that much product going out the door. The repairs were there and shipping stuff out and stripping machinery and stuff doing like that, but he kept everybody there as long as he could. He tried to give them a good, decent chance, and I mean, everybody has found a job. I've never talked to him about this, but I know him well enough to know that. I understand him well enough to know that. I know who's going to get the bum rap for the whole thing and it's going to be a lot of it and it's going to be him.

BB: How long do you reckon he had to--? Let me ask this a different way. Did he know in advance of the announcement that the plant was going to close?

DM: Yes.

BB: And if so, how long?

DM: He knew--.

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A

START OF TAPE 1, SIDE B

DON McCall
JANUARY 23, 1995

AB: you knew for a fact that he knew in advance or you're assuming just how things worked that he knew that much?

DM: Well, I knew that he had to know. That's just part of management. He knew--. He had went to a meeting in High Point three months before and that's when they told him. He told me later that he knew a good three months but he couldn't say nothing. That was part of it.

I don't know completely how long they had announced it to him before, but I knew it had been over three months and they'd talked about it because things had started coming together. The one bad thing about it was we were making money, good money, for a furniture company.

BB: How do you know that? How did you know that?

DM: We had to go over the monthly statement and be accountable for everything that went through our departments. They went over it with us whether we made money or lost money because we had an incentive plan for the supervisors so we would get a monthly statement showing what we either made or lost for the whole place. You know, if we made good we got a bonus. I got a bonus once in three years, but we made money. We had to do like ten percent above what was expected to get that bonus.

The first year I was there I got a three thousand dollar bonus, for a yearly bonus, plus a raise. I had been there a year and got a check for thirty-three hundred dollars just bonus from White's. You don't get that kind of a bonus if you're losing money. Not at all.

The daily routine was we had to know how much production went out the door-- which was "X" dollars--and you knew basically what the payroll was, and you knew what the overhead was. We went over that in meetings. We knew what the cost--what it

actually cost us to make it. It wasn't something they tried to hide from us. They did keep us informed dollar-wise where we were at the whole time I was there.

That's how you know to gage your work if you're making money and shipping products you know what you're making. We knew every day how many thousands of dollars we shipped out the door. That was part of the morning meeting.

BB: Why do you reckon the decision was made to close the plant that's making money?

DM: Do you want the truth or do you want a bunch of bull?

BB: I want to know what you really think happened, and I want to know after that what the bull is that someone would say. [laughter] We'll start with the truth and then the bull.

DM: The truth was that place was bought to be sold. When they bought White-- all of White--which was both plants, there was enough material stocked and/or piece parts to make material to ship. They paid for the plant with what was in it in both plants. And you stop and look at the length of time they'd run and it was only like four years.

They made money on the sell of the machinery. They made money on the sell of the land down in Hillsborough. They'll make money on the sale of the land up at Mebane. Somebody will buy it. They will pay big money for a lot that big inside the city limits. It was a money making proposition from the start. They seen how much was in there, what the property value was, what they could get out of it. What they didn't really-- I don't think they expected to make money. I think the first couple of years basically it was a tax write off or it was suppose to be, but it didn't happen that way.

You can actually make money by losing money. You take a sixty plus million dollar corporation which is what Hickory Manufacturing and White together was, you can afford to write off one, two, three, four, five million dollars a year on your taxes and make money by doing it because of depreciation for five years. They got everything they could

bleed out of that thing and depreciation from the time they bought it till the time they shut the door.

1994 would have been-- Well, '93, actually, because they bought it five years prior was the last year they could depreciate the value on the property, the land, and the machinery.

BB: Is that a standard depreciation schedule on industrial property?

DM: Five years, yeah. It's what they call, accelerated depreciation. You can depreciate it over five years. Most companies do that and then they turn right back around and buy a new piece of equipment to start all over again or property or whatever, but it's an accelerated depreciation. You have to know a little bit about accounting to know about that. A lot of people don't.

They seen what they had. They knew that they could write that depreciation off twenty percent per year for a total value, I mean, for the total purchase price twenty percent per year. If they paid five million for it you're talking a million bucks a year to just write it off.

If they make money on top of that that's a write off plus the money. So there's no way the man could have lost, no way. When the depreciation stopped he could have lost, but the plant was shut down when it actually stopped.

AB: Why sell it if it's making money?

DM: He was making more money by losing money. The depreciation--twenty percent--well, let's say White was thirteen million dollars a year, thirteen to fourteen million the first three or four years. Okay, you take--twenty percent of that was profit--that's two and a half million dollars and another million dollars on top of that for depreciation, you made three and a half million dollars.

Okay, now you come to the end of the five years you're only going to get two and a half million dollars. You can take and invest what money you've got in that in another place and get the twenty percent to make that other million dollars right on and on and on.

Plus you got to sell the machinery, they stripped the wiring and everything in that building and sold it, everything. So they got their money back from the land. I don't even know whether they sold it yet or not, but when they sell it they'll get their money back on the land which is right back in the pot. The expenditure, the main expenditure is gone.

The expenditure for the machinery, they got it for nothing almost as far as what was in that plant because it was shut down, it wasn't running. The total cash outlay, they probably paid five and a half million dollars for the whole thing and made twenty. That's the part that you have to understand a little bit about accounting to do.

BB: What did they sale the property for in Hillsborough? Do you know?

DM: Actual cash, I don't. I know it wasn't near what they thought they was going to get out of it.

BB: I've heard a lot of stories about the value of the inventory when they purchased the plant as well. Do you have any sense of what the value of the inventory might have been at the time of purchase based on what it was when you went there?

DM: It was--. They had a warehouse full. They had enough parts inside the plant already machined setting there to make several million dollars worth of furniture. I mean, they had--. The wood yard was full of mahogany and cherry, oak or whatever they were making at the time. It was full. The plant was full. They had enough in there to run three months for nothing, I mean nothing. That's from the people that I worked with that worked there for years supervisors, hourly employees said all they had to do was walk in the door and start it up. The inventory was there. The warehouse was there. It was full. It wasn't empty. It wasn't depleted. I'm saying it closed with everything completely totaled up you're looking at five million dollars. Their purchase price was there.

BB: You're talking about in inventory of assembled furniture--.

DM: Assembled furniture, piece parts, raw lumber, not counting the machinery and all that stuff. They got their money the day they bought the plant which is--. Plus

twenty percent depreciation for the first year. The day they bought that plant they made money by just buying it. It's a smart business move, a very smart business move.

BB: Given our time frame here, where we're headed and with your family here I want to talk a little bit more about the closing and the final time with you. I hope that my next trip to Mebane we can have a visit and maybe catch up and fill in some of the blanks. We haven't talked at all about your early work in the factory, your relationship with the workers there and your relationship with other managers and all that. I would really like to spend some time on that.

DM: Okay.

BB: We've been talking about the closing, and I sort of want to move back to that and then we'll sort of work towards completion today, this interview done and we'll pick it up next time.

DM: Okay.

BB: Why don't you tell me when and how you heard for the first time that the factory was going to close.

DM: It was ten o'clock in the morning. They called every supervisor, manager into the conference room. Randy Austin came in, Robin Hart came in and two or three others from corporate came in. They locked the doors, shut everything off, and he told us then that the plant was closing and that we would be given two months severance pay if we stayed until closing. Some of us would be offered other jobs at Hickory, and that it would be effective sixty days from that day, that people would start leaving. The supervisors wouldn't leave then, but the people would start leaving in sixty days or as they feathered out, the parts feathered out through the plant and run down. That's the way I heard it, and thirty minutes later they told us to go get our employees, take them to the warehouse, and they addressed them the same way.

BB: Who did the talking in this meeting? Was it Robin or Randy?

DM: Randy Austin completely.

BB: Was the response--?

DM: Shock, basically, by everybody including me. Jim Murray had known about it. He did the paperwork that they had to hand out, it had to be ready so he had to be told in advance of us being told, and Robin. Basically, that's the only two other than Randy Austin and everybody at corporate knew.

BB: Do you remember anything that was said or was there any protest or anything like that?

DM: There's nobody--.

BB: Questions or--?

DM: No, nobody asked question one. Nobody asked one.

AB: It was shock?

DM: It was more or less a state of shock. We didn't have time really to react before we had to go back and start taking people to the warehouse and everybody knew. By the time I got back out to my department and--.

BB: Tell us about that.

DM: That was a weird feeling. You're in shock yourself and then you know what it's going to do to everybody that works for you, and you know that the day's completely gone, literally, nobody, not even me wanted to do anything. But you go out there and you know for like thirty minutes and it's like somebody taking an anvil and setting it on top of your head and just pressing down on it, it's not the anvil () up but pressing on it.

You can anticipate a lot of things, but you can't anticipate how a person that's sixty years old is going to react. You don't know if somebody's going to have a heart attack or die. That kind of shock will do it.

BB: Did you say anything to the employees other than--? What did you say to them?

DM: I told them we had a meeting in the warehouse because truthfully I didn't want to tell them anymore. That news I didn't like. Some of them asked me what it was about, and I said, "You just have to wait and find out."

BB: Did you stay in the department for that thirty minutes?

DM: Yeah. I stayed in there and thought, you know, you think about yourself, what you are going to do, and your mind kind of goes wild. You know, your first and foremost thoughts, what's going to happen to me? That's just basically being human, but when you know that everybody out there is going to tell you kind of, I don't know, you get a cold feeling deep down in your soul. You know what's going to happen and you know that you don't want it to happen and you know everybody's going to be told and everybody's going to go, oh, and their faces are going to drop, and they are going to wonder and think the same things that I did. What am I going to do next? How am I going to support myself? Where am I going to live? How am I going to buy food? And basic necessities, I guess, come to mind first.

BB: Did you call anyone during that period? Did you call home or anything like that?

DM: No.

BB: So then the meeting thirty minutes later, tell us about that and what happened there.

DM: Okay. Randy got everybody in the warehouse and we were talking. They all come in and he announced it, and when he announced it there was just not any remorse in his voice, not to us or not to the employees. It was more to me like an act. I think he knew the day he was hired that that was part of his job, and he had prepared for it, and he prepared for it well.

I looked at his face, and I watched his movements for that whole thirty minutes because I wanted to see how he reacted. I looked for signs of weakness, I mean, you can see it, you can see when you are genuine and somebody is really hurting to do something.

I didn't feel it. I didn't see it. It may have been there, but I didn't feel it, and I didn't see it, and I looked for it. I hunted for it as a matter of fact. I turned around and I kind of thought how I would have acted to had to do the same thing, and it would have killed me. I could have done it, but I couldn't have left that stage without tears in my eyes, there's no way. And a man that cares about the people that works for him, no longer than he had been there, about people in general, he couldn't have done it.

You know, I didn't buy his act basically is what it boils down to.

BB: Did anyone else speak publicly?

DM: Robin said a few words about, you know, us passing out papers and the paperwork tiger was following more or less. Everybody would be talked to, everybody would be consoled. They talked about going to a tech school down there and training and they went into just a few minor details, but that was basically Jim Murray and Robin. It wasn't Randy Austin. It was just people that they knew, and I don't think anybody really listened including me.

BB: Do you remember who you were standing or sitting next to during that meeting?

DM: I was standing next to Tonie Lane.

BB: Were you all talking during this?

DM: Yeah.

BB: Tell us about that.

DM: Yeah, we were and it was--. We went out there and she looked at me and she said, "What is wrong?" I said, "You'll find out." She started to say something else and she said, "You going to tell me?" I said, "No, you'll find out."

It was her and a couple of people that worked for me asked me the same. What's it about? What's going on? This was before the meeting ever started or before Randy got out there. She sensed that I knew--. She knew something was coming that wasn't good by just looking at me or talking to me. I didn't say a word to her about what it was. I

don't know, she's one of them people that's just got feelings about other people and can sense when things are wrong. She knew it was coming.

BB: Who was it? I didn't hear the name of the person you said you were--.

DM: Tonie Lane. Big mouth that worked in rough mill. If you ever tell her that I'll kill you. [laughter]

BB: Oh, okay.

AB: Where did she work?

DM: She worked on the glue press.

BB: Yeah, I call her by a different last name.

DM: Gifford.

BB: Gifford, yeah.

DM: Her name before she was married was Lane. Then she married Dennis Gifford. I was talking to her.

BB: How about after the word was out and it had been announced and everyone knew or was in shock. Were people saying stuff?

DM: They were mad. They were really mad. And it wasn't just one or two it was just basically everybody. They were doing what a person does when they fear something they were striking out. It is just like I did they felt the betrayal and they felt-- I don't think you can--. It's like old Abraham Lincoln said, "You can't fool all the people all the time."

Those people in that plant, when they got the message they looked for the same thing I did only I had anticipated or had prior knowledge and I looked for it. They didn't see the caring or the hurt or nothing in Randy Austin's eyes when he done that. I think they looked for it. The biggest thing was how can they do this and that's what everybody was saying or why did they do this or what am I going to do?

BB: What time of day did this meeting take place?

DM: About eleven o'clock or eleven thirty, right before dinner. To tell you the truth I didn't know how many people come back from dinner.

BB: That's what I was going to ask you about. What happened at dinner? What did people do?

DM: Talked.

BB: What did you do, do you remember?

DM: Went upstairs and sat down. Didn't eat. Didn't do nothing. Just thought. It took me by surprise, too.

I want to compare this with something, and it's not a good comparison, but basically I felt the same way both times. I was in the room when my Dad died and I didn't realize it. I seen the monitors go straight line. I had enough sense to know that he was dead, and I walked back to the room where my wife was at and it took the doctor coming in and saying it for me to realize it.

And the plant closing was the same thing, I mean, you knew it was happening but until somebody said this is the final blow you didn't really want to accept it. It was out there and you knew it was lurking, but you didn't want to accept it because you always had that little glimmer of faith that maybe they will change or maybe somebody will buy it. You know, there's always that little glimmer of hope in the distance. To me it hit me the same way.

It was a death, a death of a family of people, of a company. That's what I thought about at dinner, and it was permanent. You knew what was coming was going to be final and ninety-nine percent sure, and you couldn't really understand why. The people didn't, and I didn't because I'd seen more of the money statements than they did. That's what made it even harder I guess for me to understand than it was them.

You know, they'd seen the lay-offs come from four hundred down to three hundred down to two hundred or whatever it was when we shut down. You would have think you would have walked through a funeral home that morning or were in a funeral

home, the same feeling, the same cold. The only difference is there's usually more warmth in a funeral home because people are hugging each other and trying to be a little supportive. You just sit back and realize, you know--

Imagine a guy working forty years in one place and then going into work one morning and seeing the plant burnt down. You can accept that because there's nothing there to go back to, but when you go in and you say we're shutting the doors and the building is going to be here and everything else is going to be here, but you're not going to have a job. The plant burning down is a whole lot easier to accept because you have nothing physical to look at, nothing physical to go to, and you know right then and there that there's no hope, there's no nothing, you've got to go somewhere else to go to work. But of those situations I went through and believe me the plant burning down was easier. That's no joke. It was easier on me.

BB: What percentage of the crew in the sanding group came back after lunch?

DM: Every one of them. Every last one of them. They didn't want to do much, but they wanted to get questions answered, and I think that's the biggest reason they came back. I didn't blame them, I didn't want to do much either. I had to stop and think and, you know, trying to make work go on in the state of mind I was in, the state of mind they were in was just foolish to even have worked the rest of that day was foolish, but I guess it gave the people something to kind of take their mind off it and maybe look for tomorrow rather than just saying go home and come back in the morning. You know, the production line was gone.

BB: As the supervisor in that department they must have come to you for answers.

DM: They did.

BB: What was that like?

DM: I didn't have them. I said, "Well, I'll have to find out, and then I'll have to let you know," because I didn't have the answers then. Nobody other than Robin and Randy

Austin had the details worked out, and it was days and days in coming with all the details for any of the questions. You know, we didn't even get our questions answered.

BB: That's what I was going to ask next. When and how did you get your questions answered?

DM: Basically the same time the employees did. When we went and asked--. If somebody asked us something and we didn't know or hadn't already been told we'd go and ask, and that's the way we found out.

There were meetings telling you about this opportunity and that opportunity, and there were letters sent us there were going to be jobs here and jobs here, but a lot of those just flat didn't work out with the people I talked to, you know. They wanted people, but they only wanted this type of people and this type people and this type people. That part of it, I think, was not--.

Well, you can't answer everybody's question. There's no physical way you can take two hundred and forty-six people you're going to have two hundred and forty-six different questions. You can't anticipate it. And some of them we just had to wait until somebody else found out from somebody else and they come back down the line, but the biggest question was, if I stay here until you tell me I do no longer have a job do I get that two weeks severance pay? That was the biggest question. They were worried more about dollars and they had to. Or will you give me a good reference? Or when can I start drawing unemployment, before or after I get the severance pay? Questions like that.

The Employment Security Commission come out there and answered a lot of those questions. That was the type of questions that we couldn't answer, basically, and the insurance questions. How long can I pay and how long does the co-rates go on? More of the self-essential needs, your five basic needs, your money, your house, your food, clothes--.

BB: Don, who in your department were you closest to?

DM: Coy. Coy would have made a helluva good supervisor a long time ago. He knew more about that department than I did. He run anything in there, do anything in there, and he was a good person.

BB: What did he tell--? Did you inquire--? Did you have any special conversations with the folks you were closet to, Coy or someone else?

DM: I done that everyday. We pretty much said or asked--Coy in particular--I could talk to Coy and say anything I wanted to whether I should have said it or not. You know, there are some things you're not suppose to say and some things you can say, but it didn't make any difference with him. Whatever I thought I said, and he was pretty much the same way.

You have people that you relate to real well, and Coy was one of those people. A lot of people related to him, not just me, a lot of people. Coy was an outgoing, foolhardy, crazy fool sometimes [laughter] and as full of meanness as I am which I guess is probably why we got along so good because we would sneak around and do stuff to each other and make a little fun out of a hard day's work. And you have to do that. He was that kind of person, and I loved him for it, too.

AB: This just goes back. I had sort of a question about something you were talking about before of a sense of just what a shock this was for you to be called into the meeting where the announcement was made about the plant closing and for the employees and a sense of shock you all felt that day. You also said something about sort of seeing it coming. But before you also talked about the fact that they were making good money.

DM: They were making money.

AB: So did you suspect that it was going to happen and if so, why since you could see that they were actually making money.

DM: Well, you have to have sometimes like a sixth sense. When they shut down Hillsborough I knew the day they shut it down that Mebane would be right behind it. I knew it that day. I felt it that day. You know, you don't--. When they pulled everything

back they got everything under one roof and that was a move that was made to get everything ready for a good sell, more or less. One property, all the machines and everything, and all the stock, warehouse and all the manufacturing technology under one roof.

It was just a feeling I had that day. When they announced it to the people at Hillsborough and I was down there and they went through that twice and God, I feel sorry for them for that. I knew it. I don't know why, but I did. It was just a feeling I had. It's not a good one either time, but I did expect it. It was a big shock to me, but I did expect it because me and some of the other people had talked during the shut down at Hillsborough and I said, "You know, I can understand why they are making the moves. It is more cost effective to do it under one roof, but it's just the way they done it." I don't know, I just knew it. Just a feeling.

I'm going to tell you something else that was said and it may never happen. God, I hope it don't because of the people that work there. But I give it three years from the time they shut down White's till they shut down Hickory Manufacturing and start selling out.

You don't--. The man that owns that company or companies does not care about the people that works for him, does not care about their families, does not care whether they live or die. All he cares about is the dollar bill. He didn't see the people. As far as I know he never toured the plant. I never met him. I never seen him. Robin Hart met him up in Chicago. He come to High Point a couple of times, but he never come down there and seen the people that were actually in that plant. He never had to look at their faces. He never had to answer their questions. All he seen was a dollar bill going by, and he has been known for buying places and shutting them down. If a person can do that he is a heartless son-of-a-bitch. That's no joke. That's the one thing that should have happened. He should have had to walk through that place and look at those people going out. He will when he walks through the gates of hell because you don't go to heaven and do people that way. That's no joke.

BB: What went through your mind for Robin Hart for what he must have been going through at that time? What were you thinking about him and what was ahead for him after this announcement had been made?

DM: Robin had an opportunity to stay on as an advisor to Hickory Manufacturing for a pretty substantial cut in pay, but it was still a job. He refused it. Robin made, I guess, White's his last stand. When he had done one of the jobs that he didn't want to do--he felt it more at White's than at Singer because he had grown and matured. He got to feeling people more as people. He changed a lot from the time I knew him at Silver. He mellowed out a whole lot and how that he couldn't--I guess in ways a lot like me--he didn't want to go back and have to do it again. That's why he retired.

He could have stayed on at the Hickory Manufacturing for a year probably another year and a half and finally got full retirement. He just didn't do it. He didn't want to do it. He didn't have it in him to do it.

I was offered a job at Hickory Manufacturing. I turned it down. I did not like the person that offered me the job which he is no longer with Hickory Manufacturing. He was a plant manager. He is no longer there. I didn't trust him, I didn't trust them. I did not trust that company at all. Hickory is still running. They've still got four companies besides Hickory, but I wasn't going to put any kind of part of me into a company that just said, "Hey, we're shutting the doors on everybody here, we don't care." I think that's basically the feeling that he had, because basically they shut the door on him, too. It wasn't just the people that worked there was going, he was losing his job, too, and he knew that.

That was why Robin left in my opinion. Robin didn't go up to Hickory. He lost his job, too. He knew what that company had done to him. You know, from making a hundred--I don't know--I know he made over a hundred thousand dollars a year, I don't know how much more over that, but would you want to go somewhere else and work for

a company that had just done that? That's a question you have to ask yourself, and I did. They offered me a job up there, and I laughed in their face. I told them, "No way."

BB: How much blame do you think Robin received for the closing?

DM: By the people?

BB: Yeah.

DM: Sixty to seventy percent. All actuality, none. Another man shut the doors on that plant and he's in Chicago and his insurance company. That's who shut the doors to that plant. It wasn't Randy Austin, truthfully. It wasn't nobody else. It was the guy that controlled the money that owned the place. He shut it down.

Everybody else carries the blame on their shoulders, but in all actuality it falls to one person and that one person alone, the man that owned it, the man that never did come and see anybody.

BB: I have just one more question and we're going to wrap up. You sort of taken us through the sequence of that day which was a real emotional day. I can feel it now going through it with you.

DM: It was a real emotional drunk that night, too.

BB: [laughter]

AB: [laughter]

DM: [laughter]

BB: I was going to ask you what did you do after closing that day?

DM: Me?

BB: Even after everyone left. I know often you stayed later. The supervisor would stay and spend some time in the office. Did you do that that day? What happened?

DM: No. I left there and went down to Papa Joe's. You know where Papa Joe's is at.

AB: No, where is Papa Joe's?

DM: Down on the right, right past-- You know where you cut back to go to the interstate below Mebane. The next road.

BB: Is it called Nancy's now?

DM: Yep.

AB: Yeah.

DM: Yep. That's what used to be Papa Joe's. Coy's brother is the one that opened that place by the way.

BB: Now I know where to get free beer.

DM: Donnie runs it now. I know Donnie. I got to know him quite well when I was down there. But a big bunch of us went down there and just sat and talked and drunk a couple of beers and tried to figure out what we had done.

BB: Who was down there with you?

DM: Tommy went down there, Larry, Harvey.

BB: Larry Williams?

DM: No, Larry Henderson. Harvey was down there. About all the supervisors were down there. Several hourly employees were down there. I guess everybody had this big disbelief and they were trying to cope with what they just received. Of course, a couple of us didn't have to cope too much to go down there everyday, you know. Like the A & M Grill--we done that. That was regimentation that we got used to.

BB: That's a different kind of coping. [laughter]

DM: Definitely. Stress release. Just the feeling of being numb. Nowhere to go and nothing to do. Not really wanting to go anywhere or do anything. It's just, I don't know, like somebody took your head and pulled your brain out and you're just walking around with nothing up there. It's just total numbness.

You want to strike out, but you have nothing to strike out at. Nobody to strike out at so you basically abuse yourself a little bit by drinking and trying to get some of the

stress out by talking, listening. Try to get a little understanding for yourself as well as everybody around you.

The only people that understood are the people that's doing the same thing that you do. The only person who could really help you and understand what you are going through is the same person just sitting beside you that went through the same thing you did. You didn't really want to stop and talk to them because you know they were hurting like you were.

There was no understanding. There was no place to go to get understanding. Being laid off and being told the plant was shutting down are two different feelings. Laid off hurt, but this was completely different. I was mad when I got laid off, I didn't get mad at the shut down. There was nobody to get mad at. Nobody to really comprehend, I guess, what everybody was told that day.

The one thing I didn't have to do that a lot of did is to go home and tell kids, wife, mom, dad, "Hey, I won't have a job in two months." And then, you know, when you stop and think-- I knew just damn near everybody in there, and I knew their families. I knew the wife and the kids. You'd met them at one place or another.

Mebane is a small town, you meet everybody, and you get introduced to everybody. I don't know, the feeling was there, you know, I felt so bad for those people. Not as much for myself as for them. You know, probably the hardest thing that anybody has ever done in their life is to go home and tell them off hand, "Kids, you know, I don't have a job in two months. How am I going to feed you and pay the bills?" They had more of the worry than I did and more of the shock and the pain.

BB: Well, Don, I want to thank you very, very much for taking this time. I'd like to go on, but I think it is probably time to wrap up today.

DM: Yeah, before my sister shoots me. [laughter]

BB: Anyway, just let me say thank you.

DM: Your welcome.

BB: I would like to do part II sometime maybe in Mebane.

DM: Well, set a date and I'll try to be down there.

BB: Okay.

AB: Thanks.

DM: Your welcome.

END OF INTERVIEW