

PRESERVE THE AREA'S RURAL QUALITIES

(PARQ)

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

WITH

Joe Flipse

March 1, 2012

Readyville, Tennessee

INTERVIEWER, TRANSCRIBER, AND EDITOR:

Jaryn Abdallah

UNDER THE DIRECTION OF

Dr. Martha Norkunas

Joe Flipse Biographical Sketch



Joe Flipse was born on June 12, 1935 near Patterson, New Jersey. He has lived and worked in various states including New Jersey, Florida and Tennessee. After working in Southeast Asia (Laos) for eight years in the 1960s, Mr. Flipse returned to the United States and settled with his wife and children in Florida. In 1970, his father purchased the Readyville Mill, and Mr. Flipse relocated his family to a trailer on the Mill's property in order to help his father run the Mill.

The three years that he ran the Mill were very difficult for Mr. Flipse and his family. The Mill required constant upkeep and repair, and the business did not generate enough income to support the necessary care. The Mill was stuck in the past at a time when the local area was racing toward the future. As women transitioned from the home to the workplace, the convenience of ready-made products overtook homemade products, which severely cut into the Mill's customer base.

After selling the Mill in 1973, Mr. Flipse moved around the Middle Tennessee area. He raised honeybees, farmed and taught at a vocational school. Mr. Flipse currently lives in Lascassas, Tennessee with his wife Susie. He continues to enjoy gardening.

Joe Flipse Interview Abstract

Joe Flipse's experience operating the Readyville Mill provides valuable information about the Mill and life in the surrounding area. He also briefly touches on the eight years that he spent working in Southeast Asia. He described how his father came to own the Mill. Throughout the interview, he is very clear about the difficulties that his family faced. Due to its age, the Mill was in constant need of repairs, which were costly and physically demanding. He mentions numerous repair projects that he undertook. Another major difficulty that he discussed in his family's experience operating the Mill was the frequent flooding of the Stones River.

Mr. Flipse discussed many facets of the Mill. He gave the information that he knew about the Leffel turbine, which served as the power source for the mechanical operations, and was obtained from another mill near Dahlonega, Georgia. He also described the stones, which came from France. He described the difference between long and short process milling as well as the difference between hard and soft wheat.

The Mill was never very profitable for the Flipses. They attempted numerous different projects to supplement the sales of meal and flour. He discusses the various products that they sold, including a five-grain cereal. Mr. Flipse remembers raising honeybees as well as an organic garden. He also remembers a short-lived partnership with The Farm, a hippie community that developed in Summertown, Tennessee. He had little interaction with the local community in Cannon County. He admits that he could have done more, but he does recall reaching out to local schools and garden clubs. Ultimately, the Mill's most reliable source of income was people from the surrounding area buying supplies to make moonshine.

Cannon County was undergoing many changes during the 1970s that drastically reduced the demand for the Mill's products. Mr. Flipse observed that women were beginning to transition from the home to the workplace, and as a result were more interested in the convenience of store-bought baked goods as opposed to homemade. Other changes that he observed were the increase in availability of health food and Oriental food.

Mr. Flipse has long been interested in natural foods. While operating the Mill he also raised a garden, and following his tenure at the Mill, he continued to farm. He discussed his frustrations with the current organic food industry.

The interview concludes with Mr. Flipse's recollection of advising Al Gore, Sr. who sought his advice on a mill that Gore owned in Smithville, Tennessee.

Joe Flipse Interview
March 1, 2012
Lightly Edited Transcript

Jaryn Abdallah: Alright, so we're recording now. This is Jaryn Abdallah and today is March 1, 2012, and I'm here with Mr. Joe Flipse. Mr. Flipse, do I have your permission to record this interview?

Joe Flipse: Yeah, sure, go ahead.

JA: Okay, great, thank you.

JF: Hopefully somebody will listen to it sometime.

JA: (laughs) I'm sure they will. I was wondering if we could start today with your family background. How did your family come to Tennessee? Where did they live?

JF: Okay, well my dad was a Dutch immigrant and, as usual, they ended up in northern New Jersey. That's where all the Dutch immigrants ended up, either there or in Michigan and that part of the country. So he moved around, moved around and tried and changed employers trying to increase, improve himself economically. And we ended up in Florida, and then by way of Maryland, and then back up to Tennessee where, if my dad had, I think forty hours of professional schooling at the university, that he could get a professional rating with the Soil Conservation Service. Well, by the time he got his forty hours, which he did, the budget got cut and it was the end of the program. Now he went right across the street in Nashville and with the Army Engineers and got hired immediately. So it's, I guess Reservoir Manager Assistant or I don't know what the title was. He worked at Old Hickory til he retired. And one nice fall day he went out to Readyville to advertise the auction, and bought that damn Mill. And that was the beginning of our problems.

Now I had come back from Southeast Asia. I was in the festivities in Laos, and I had just come back. I had been over there for eight years with the federal government, and my family was in Florida because I went back to Florida. That's where we knew best. And I bought a nice little place in St. Pete [St. Petersburg, Florida]. Believe it or not, I'm going to digress a little. I paid \$9,000 for that house. And I sold it for, oh, I don't know, eleven or twelve. I thought, "Boy, I really made out." And now it's probably worth a hundred and a half. But anyway, I moved the family up to Readyville, we bought a trailer and

moved up there, and started to work on the Mill, and rearranging things and, am I getting ahead of yourself, of the program?

JA: No, no, not at all.

JF: Okay, am I heading in the direction we're supposed to be?

JA: Yeah, no, it's fine.

JF: Okay, well, what I found out real fast, I still had a GI Bill coming. My mother was a professional librarian. She had finished her degree while my dad was getting his forty hours. And she investigated, talked to Martha White about the GI Bill and training program, and serving an apprenticeship with them. And in the process, we found out that nobody was producing cornmeal the old way, and there really wasn't no market for it. It was actually, it was more, more white flour than anything else. And Martha White told Ma that they didn't have, there weren't any millers, they didn't mill even though they held control of this whole area, economically. They didn't mill any wheat, or make any flour at all. They bought it by the carload from up north. So there was no, as you might say, learning program or whatever in this area. It was just consumer business. Which, you know, was no help whatsoever to me trying to run the mill, and thinking.

We had always been interested in natural foods and that kind of stuff. So in the process of this, by finding out what the awareness was, in the area, and all the ladies in the area, in the vicinity, that had made homemade business, we lost a whole generation there. It seemed to me, they were interested in impressing their neighbors. "Hell, I use frozen biscuits, I don't make biscuits from scratch anymore." Because that was a timely process, etcetera, etcetera, etcetera. A lot easier just to pop a can and have some biscuits for breakfast. So anyway, that Mill, it existed on white patent flour. And they call it patent flour, that was a process by, a long process; it's a long process and a short process. Readyville was a long process mill. And –

JA: What does that mean?

JF: Long process is just, it goes up and down; it goes through the mill many, many times. And it gets finer and finer and more refined as it goes. Short process is a small mill, it's no bigger than this table, maybe four foot long by four foot high. And it does the same thing in that short process mill, but it doesn't have the capacity or etcetera, etcetera, etcetera to do what a big outfit would do. It would be a hand-held comparable to a hand-held electronic outfit, compared to a big fancy stereo outfit at a radio station,

a difference in the quality of the product. But for in the country, and for energy-wise, etcetera, etcetera, etcetera, I was in an old mill. At that time, in the early seventies, there were, these old mills were junk. That's all they were. They weren't running anymore. And it was possible to go around and look at things that had been, and accumulate stones, and accumulate mills, and there had been in this whole area, because people had.

In other words, bread, in this area, was cornbread. White bread was wheat bread. So when somebody said "bread," "we ate bread," or "we went to the mill and had a turn ground," a turn, you ground a turn, waited your turn at the mill. And the kids, it had a special sack for the, for the meal. And the kids went with the, usually was younger person or whoever could control the mule or whatever, [unclear]. Even if they walked if they lived close enough to the mill, and they went to the mill once a week, once a month, ground a turn, and put it in that meal sack, and then back home.

So, everything has changed. But at that time, there were still old mills in this area. Everywhere there was a good source of water or power there was a mill. Evidently, it was a lucrative type thing. Now with this, there wasn't anybody left running. Brown's Mill over here, it ran. And Keele McElroy ran that mill. And it banged up in a few years, and the water department I think here took it over. I bought white flour from the mill in Columbia, a big mill, and sold that, because it didn't pay me. And what I'm getting at is, I made the decision to strip that mill down and just grind the old way. No more long process patent flour, we just grind meal. We ground wheat, but it was course. Seventh Day Adventists were by best customers. It was course, really course, like I know one book we read, Upstate New York, he called it "rocket fuel." It was really rocket fuel. With that bran in it, people did not have any problem with constipation, believe me. So, for that problem, it worked out pretty good. We made cornmeal, buckwheat, flour, all types of things. We made, I think, what was it, five-grain cereal, which was soybeans and buckwheat and other stuff, wheat and corn and I guess rye. I don't remember, it's been a long time ago, but it was about a five-grain cereal, something like that. It was a good tasting cereal, too. Most of the stuff was sold in two-pound bags.

We had to get our bags designed, redesigned, the whole thing was a matter of going back to the old way. Everybody'd say, "Oh, we don't do that anymore." We had to redo a lot of things. I know in the design of the mill sacks, even a simple little thing like that. Let me get this straight in my head. What happened is, we had a picture of the Mill on there, and we wanted, they wanted to make a new style, and we wanted it old style. And we'd send it back, the drawings back and forth to the artist. And I guess he really got insulted, because we'd get these fancy drawings and I'd end up with a piece of see-through stuff over the top, and I'd get a marking pen and mark all over the thing, and

say, "That's the way I want it." And it took a while to get it back, but they insisted the water had to be blue. I said, "I want that thing black, completely black." I called him on the phone and I said, "Stop the presses. You know you're doing." "Oh, we shipped them already. Don't worry about it." So, I let my dad work it out with the salesman, and he made an adjustment. This was only one place in Tennessee we could get those sacks made, somewhere over in Bristol, and I don't know if they're still in business or not. But there was a problem.

JA: What was the name?

JF: You know, having the sacks made and this, and this, and this, and that, everything else.

JA: What was the name of the brand that you sold?

JF: Just Readyville Mill.

JA: Okay.

JF: We had a picture of the Mill on there, and before now, it was King of Patents. The white flour was King of Patents before. But I didn't sell any more white flour. Everything just went out under Readyville Mill, you know.

See, what happened, my dad and my mother were more or less, I'd call, educated people. They weren't practical people. The first time we went to the Mill, Dad had told me all this stuff. I was in St. Pete, and I came up in an old Volkswagen, blew the engine on the way up. I had just come back from Southeast Asia, moved to Florida. But, about half way out, between, I guess it was in Kittrell, that's where it was. It was back this side of Kittrell, it used to be a grocery store there called, and it later burned. I said, "Dad, stop here a minute." I went in there, I said, "Tell me about this King of Patents flour." I said, "Do you carry that?" He said, "Yeah, and that guy give me a lot of bologna. He said he'd be around and he wouldn't be." Well I found out Old Man Justice had slipped it through somebody else. Now Old Man Justice was pretty slick. He was the owner of the Mill; he inherited it from, from his brother's estate, back in the thirties. But oh man, he'd sell him the Mill but he wouldn't show him the books. He'd tell him all about his hot, his red hot business. And anyway, that was the end of that. When we got to the Mill the same day, and there on the wall was the feed license, and it expired two years ago. That was from the State of Tennessee, was a license to sell feed. So, I proceed there, you know, to run [the] mill and Ray, one of Justice's sons was still there. He knew how

to run [the] mill. And I didn't know anything about milling. I'm an Ag Engineer, but I didn't know anything about milling flour.

So we did thirty dollars the first month. I told Dad, I said, "We ain't going to make it." So, we got to do something. We changed the thing gradually. But I thought, "Boy, these Tennessee women are the most impolite I have ever had anything to do with. They just drive up there and blow the horn. They don't get out of the car." Later on I got my mother out there at the Mill, but I just found out, just in the last couple years, talking to my neighbors here in Lascassas, that was the moonshine headquarters of the whole county.

JA: The Mill?

JF: The Mill, right. (JA laughs) That's how they made it in the Mill.

JA: Oh!

JF: Was with whiskey. Cannon County was is known, in fact, I just saw on channel 2 or one of the more popular channels, that they had just legalized moonshine whiskey again. So, the Mill used to grind all, all the corn. I used to grind the corn for all the liquor made in the county, the good stuff. Now, the other stuff that wasn't good, the floor sweeping stuff, that they just, floor sweepings, anything they could get, cheap is what went. What I ground for was high quality neighborhood medicinal stuff, you might call it. It really wasn't medicinal, but, in fact this was a big problem for my mother. We were making untaxable, you know, stuff for untaxed whiskey. It was illegal and, you know, etcetera, etcetera, etcetera, blah, blah this and blah, blah that. And I said, "Ma, look. We're selling, whether we sell it by the 50 pound sack or the 5 pound sack, we got no control over what they do with it when they leave here. Whether they throw it away, or whether they let it spoil, or put it under the sink to feed the damn weevils, I, you know, we got no control over that. So as long as we're making good stuff, at a good price, then we'll sell it and we'll see what happens."

Before we sold the Mill, we'd gotten it up to about \$2,000 a month, which was pretty good. We sold honey and all kind of stuff. Things were different in Tennessee then. I guess this was the only health food store, if you could call it that, anywhere around. But, at that time, I know there were, Mom and Dad were going to really have my wife and I, she being from Southeast Asia native, was going to take us out to a real meal. And we went to Omni Hut in Smyrna. That was the only Oriental place, period, in Nashville or anywhere else around, was Omni Hut. And hell, that was, I talked to the guy, later I got to know him, and that was Uncle Ben's Rice. So he just wanted

something quick and easy. But anyway, that shows you. Now there's [an] Oriental restaurant on every street corner, where there weren't any at all. You couldn't even buy soy sauce other than Chung King Special. There wasn't an Oriental store in Murfreesboro or Middle Tennessee, and the same thing goes pretty much for health food stores. So, we were, actually ahead of our time. And growing organic vegetables in the garden there, which sold pretty good. A Sunshine Market in Nashville finally opened up. And I sold them celery and things like that. But, here again, you can't drive that many miles and buy five, ten pounds of celery. So that didn't work out either. And we tried a lot of different things there at the Mill.

But, as far as the mechanics of running the Mill, and the product, whiskey meal had to be ground a certain way. Table meal had to be ground a different way. Whiskey meal, let's see, you want it – there's a thing called the "Miller's Finger." I used to ask the girl that, from rubbing the grain across, trying to get the size of the mix between your thumb and your forefinger by rubbing it like that, you gauged the fineness or the coarseness of the meal. Now, whiskey meal has to be, if it's too fine it makes a cake in the bottom. If it's too coarse it works too much and you don't get the alcohol out of it. So, it's a lot of little tricks, like it's no different than any other business. There's just little tricks you learn as you go along. And me doing the Mill and taking all the spouts – see, the long process would grind the meal, grind the grain, and there was a roller process, send it on up. You go up through the sifter, and then back down. And what didn't get sifted good, down to grade, would go back through that first machine again. It kept going through the process, and there were four stands, you call them stands, of different quality of, what do I want to say? In other words, different fineness, grades of fineness, and they'd go up through the sifter, I'm going to say. I'm saying sifter, it's called a bolter. It'd go up through the bolter again, which is, I took it apart, the bolter, and put it up in the old icehouse.

It was an icehouse also at the Mill, an electric generator there to generate the electricity, until the TVA came in. Justice, the old man, senior Justice told me that he told the folks that talked to TVA that that was the end of the juice from the Mill. They used to run it from, I don't know, about sundown [meant to say sunrise] to, oh, seven or eight o'clock at night, something like that. Readyville was a commercial little center. There was a bank there and everything else. And it was a tollgate there, for the road to Murfreesboro, was a toll road. And everybody was so proud that they knew the route to come through the Mill and ford the river and go that way, and get around the toll station. And then come back up on the toll road on the other side of the river. And that was all horse and wagons I guess. I've heard old-timers tell me about that. But anyway, it worked for a while there. And then I finally told Dad that, "This thing may be fascinating for you, but for me, to stand here the rest of my life and watch it go in one

hole and out another hole, that ain't getting it for me." It's not my idea of a lifestyle is what you would call it now. We didn't have a word for it then. So that's pretty much it. And I'll think of forty million things to tell you after you leave.

JA: Well we've definitely got a lot of time left where, if you can think of anything. But you said you were interested in natural foods.

JF: At that time we were, right.

JA: I'm just interested to know where that came from. Is that something that your parents?

JF: My mother, yeah, my mother was big on that stuff. I was thinking today, I had a sign up in the Mill, honey was \$15, and listen, believe this or not, \$15 for a five gallon tin. And she paid 15 gallons [meant to say dollars] for a 5-gallon tin before the second World War. So I was thinking this morning that, as a kid, hell, I didn't pay any attention to what I was eating. But I know about that honey business because I remember her talking about the price of that honey. And that was pretty expensive at that time, I guess. But still –

JA: Where did she get the honey?

JF: At seventies, this was in New Jersey, and she probably had ordered that honey from, through the mail somehow, somewhere. Either Upstate New York or New Jersey local, I don't know. When we were at Readyville, I was selling honey for \$15 still, \$15. And, you know, just local honey, just out of the comb, out of the extractor and in the bucket for fifteen bucks. Not fancy stuff, but good table grade honey.

JA: Did you make that honey?

JF: Beg your pardon?

JA: Did you make that honey?

JF: No, uh-uh. There was one old man who's still in the honey business. There was some old guy still in the honey business, believe it or not. Now I guess there still are around here. I've gotten away from everything. If you get down to the real nitty gritty, honey is sugar. And that's, that's it. And according to the experts, we eat too much sugar. Does it make any difference whether it's honey or whether it's sugar?

JA: I don't know.

JF: So, anyway, that's the honey story. I had bees. I had a lot of bees. I had bees, I had to move them because there at the Mill, my folks quit their government jobs in Nashville and retired, etcetera, put a doublewide trailer, bought a used trailer and put it out at the Mill, in addition to the one I was living in. And I had to move the bees a couple of times for different reasons. I finally sold them to a fellow that was a retired preacher up in McMinnville. He was making honey. And that was the end of the bees. Later, after we sold the Mill, then I moved up to McMinnville and had a little farm. And the fellow had some bees on the side of a house and wanted me to get them out. So I got them out. And then later we moved down here, and boy, they got mean. Somehow, they crossed up with black bees and Dad got one of the local guys here, Johnson, I guess he's passed on now, too. And they really ate him up, boy. You know, they had all the equipment on and everything else. And boy, they'd make honey, though. Usually the meaner they are, the better they make the honey. And then, that, I told him, I said, "Just take those bees, and you run the hive." And then he went and got a lot more stuff, and he ran up to about ten hives, I guess he had ten, fifteen hives. And then we started this dwindling problem, disease in bees, and they just – he passed on, and I just sold the whole mess for almost nothing, gave it away. So that was the end of the bee business, and the organic foods and all the rest of it.

I was just ahead of my time. With organic foods there was no, you know, we were selling rock phosphate and hybritite, which is a source of potash and things that, natural fertilizers, trying to get them started in this area. We were hauling, going into Murfreesboro off the siding and get a railroad care of hybritite or rock phosphate, haul it back to the Mill and selling it for just about nothing. And Gaston's guys came in, and I thought, "Well, here's a good market for natural foods and things, these California people." Are you aware of Gaston?

JA: Uh-uh.

JF: He was a big guru that came in here in the seventies. They traveled around the United States in busses and etcetera, and then finally decided on buying a place over there, near you actually, around Summertown.

JA: Oh, oh! The Farm?

JF: Yeah, right, right.

JA: Okay.

JF: And I guess it didn't work out, because last I heard they, you know, they had split it all up, and –

JA: I don't know much about it.

JF: Anyway.

JA: So they came in and?

JF: Yeah, my dad – see here again, he was with the Army Engineers, and campgrounds and etcetera. And he saw Gaston and said, “Hey, we got some stuff. We got a mill,” etcetera, you know. He thought he'd be a good customer. Well they brought stuff down from – they worked up in Nebraska and Kansas, up in the wheat country, hard wheat. Now I'd never ground any hard wheat. Boy that was tough stuff. And, and I told him, “No more of, no more hard wheat, guys. We grind soft wheat in this area.” Hard wheat, it's hard. And it hit that, those little stones were for, you know, soft wheat, not for hard wheat. There's different varieties of wheat, but soft wheat is a lower protein for in, what you might call cake flour. The things with lower protein are -- see, when it rises, it'll get lumpy in a cake. But in pizza, you want something up about twenty percent or higher for protein wise, so you get that stretch and all the rest of that on the thin crust, where cake flour would just fall apart. Cakes or biscuits, you don't want any lumps in those. But you want that strength in it for pizza or bread, bread flour etcetera, etcetera. As you go up the line you get, protein changes quite a bit. Now where was I?

JA: We were talking about natural foods.

JF: Oh, okay. So –

JA: Oh, you were talking about the people at The Farm.

JF: Yeah, they had (laughs) kind of funny. These were California people, and people that, the ones that weren't from California were on food stamps and etcetera. That's why they were there. And then I later found out that little old ladies in California were supporting this outfit. So that was part of the big mystique, making it off the land. Because the first thing I found out was they got a couple hives of bees, they were going to go into the bee business, and they got stung. So they decided that, that they better not exploit the bees. You were exploiting the bees. By then, they decided they'd farm. And they'd grow vegetables. They talked to me about growing vegetables, you know. I'd worked in commercial stuff in Florida at summer times, weekends and out of school. In

Sandford, where I lived in Sanford, out from Sanford, Florida, what used to be the celery capital of the world. But that kind of went down. Taxes went up, and property values went up, and it's more lucrative to plant a house instead of a celery plant. But anyway, after two loads of manure and sore backs, they decided that they weren't interested in the vegetable business either. They weren't going to exploit the vegetables. So (laughs) I don't know. That was about where I left it. Because they started making molasses, and they made really good molasses. It was thick, it was double thick. And boy it sold good. But they (laughs) they decided to quit making molasses too. And we quit doing business with them, because of some financial problems. And they quit messing with us. And they decided to buy everything from, like Robert Orr was a big industrial supplier in Nashville. So one thing led to another, and on, and on, and on.

JA: It's funny that you mentioned celery, because in a previous interview that I did with Ms. Tate, who we talked about earlier, her dad was the mailman. She mentioned specifically that you were growing celery out at the Mill. And for some reason the soil in that area isn't good for celery, but that somehow you had gotten celery to grow. Is that something that you had to work to do?

JF: Well, I'd been raised in the celery business, or around it, in Florida. Well that was an unheard of crop here, I imagine. The thing with celery is getting the plants up. Once you get them up, it's just a matter of water and fertilizer like anything else, and plenty of water. Yeah, we had an old friend there, old guy that lived up on the hill there, Tennyson Urie, and he had about every kind of piece of junk you could think of, priced right. And I bought this, and I bought that, and I bought a pump from him, and I could pump, run that mill and pump two-inch stream of water out of that mill race at the same time I was running the mill, a little water running the edge. A squirt of oil is all it cost. So I just ran irrigation to the celery. Actually, that was a very, very good garden spot, because they had never used any fertilizer on it. I flooded every three or four years, four or five years.

In fact, on the side of the Mill, in the door between the office and the mill, there was a little hooch on the side of the mill. It's gone now, but on that door was 1937, 1942, all the flood levels were written, marked on that door. And it flooded about every four of five years. In fact, that was part of our disenchantment was we got flooded three times in two months, something like that. I think, in about '73. And that was just, not even going to fight that river. And Dad wasn't going to put out the money to jack the Mill up, so that was that. It was going to be there and do that. I couldn't hack it anymore. Didn't make sense to me, it still doesn't make sense. Cannon County was getting some gravel or doing some kind of business upstream to straighten the creek out, or improve the channel or whatever. I don't know what they were doing. I wasn't plugged in well

enough at that time to find out. But, anyway, it really came down. And we had a heavy rainfall that year, so that was part of the problem. Any time you got water power anywhere, you're limited by the creek level and the power level and the size of the turbine.

Now that's one thing needing to straighten out while I'm talking here. That's a Leffel turbine in that mill. We wrote a letter to Leffel, and I tried to get from Leffel the power curve for that turbine. In other words, at what RPM did it, really, so I could cut down on the water I was using rather than run the mill. See, before the, it had to run at a certain speed. It had a speedometer inside, and it's still there I'm sure. But the speedometer tells you how fast the mill is running, and you got to run it that fast. So I wrote to Leffel and they wrote me back and they told me it'd cost me fifty bucks a day. Fifty dollars was a hell of a lot of money at that time, and they didn't give me any information. But I did find out that they think that that's the original turbine in that mill, and it's not. That mill, that turbine in that mill came from Dahlonega, Georgia, the power unit in there. They went down there with the truck and got it from the old, I believe, now I don't know if they got it from there or if it was just another mill in the area. But Dahlonega at one time was the premier gold producer in the United States, long before California. Now I'm not sure, Ray knew all the story, because Ray went down there when the mill was [unclear]. I think the turbine was put in in '47, that turbine at the Mill. And I just can't remember where that – Dahlonega didn't mean much to me, and the history of that mill. There was the first government mint, I believe, was down there. There was a government mint there. There was enough gold to mint gold under government, whether they had a contract or whether it was officially a mint, I don't know all the details.

But then the next fellow that bought that mill, you had to go down, if you got a stick or something, caught, catch in the mill. If you got a stick or something caught you couldn't shut it off, because all the gates, they call them gates on there, all the veins that opened up around the edge of the turbine. If one stuck open, the others stuck open, and you couldn't shut it off. It'd get down low, idle, and it'd just sit there and keep idling. So, you had to replace – and the kids, course they, you know, they broke it, and instead of welding it up, he had another piece made. As far as that, whoever runs that mill, if it runs again, I told the fellow, I didn't tell him, I told the fellow before him, that they need to go under there and check the bearing on that turbine. Because that turbine bearing is made out of lignum vitae and it's a wooden piece in the bottom, there's big cross arms under there, that hold that support that go out to the outside shell. And that bearing in the middle, the shaft sits right on it. It's conical. And that's lignum vitae, and they need to check that and make sure and see whether it's survived or whether it

needs replacing or what. But Justice redid that whole, what you call it, a pen around the turbine, which is the power for that outfit.

And then of course, when the dam went out, that's another problem, big problem. You see that – Dad said, and he knew more about erosion stuff than I did, but there's one poplar tree right up above that, that creates turbulence when it floods. It used to flood right over smooth, but it creates turbulence and eat, one side of the, really eat out of the dam. And we discussed fixing that thing many times. There were just so many problems. That, I tell you, that thing, it, it just is a mean old bitch, that's all. And it just eat money like you could spend money on – this fellow that bought the thing, he's really done a nice job on it. He put new roofs on all the buildings and new siding and on, and on, and on. I don't know how much money he spent there, but he's got it looking good.

JA: Have you been there for breakfast?

JF: Uh-uh, no I haven't. Some of my neighbors have been there. Are they running a breakfast?

JA: Yeah, on Saturday mornings, yep.

JF: Oh it's a regular scheduled deal now?

JA: I think so, yeah. So why did your dad buy the Mill? He didn't have any experience with mills.

JF: Why did he buy it? He only paid \$5,000 for it.

JA: And what was he hoping to?

JF: Hell, I don't know. He was looking at retirement, in the Army Engineers, and I never asked him, "Why'd you buy that mill?" Even my mother used to say, "Oh, hell. I've cried myself to sleep so many times over that Mill." Every damn time there'd be something tore up. And fortunately I was enough up a piddler that I, you know, could translate, and I'd just done this kind of stuff in Southeast Asia to keep going. Running Babbitt bearings and all that kind of stuff, which is a lost art here. All that was just normal stuff to me. But I don't know if that mill will ever run again. One of my oldest boys, he went, he went in the Army. He says it'll never run again. I don't know. All the belts are off the mill, underneath.

JA: I'm not really sure what state the original stuff – I mean, I know they mill there, but they don't use the original equipment.

JF: Yeah. They couldn't

JA: That's in there, all the stones and stuff that you would have used, because the dam is –

JF: Right, everything fell apart. Well, it just hasn't worked out, you know. That fellow that bought it, his son-in-law was going to run it for him.

JA: Are you talking about Mr. Epperly?

JF: Yeah, Epperly. Epperly's son-in-law was going to run it. No, that didn't work out. And before that, Bill Carignan ran it, Bill and Marie. And hell, he ran up bills all over the place. I guess I'll get sued with all this, but Freedom of Information Act. And this fellow here, he'll never get a return on his money. I think I made [a] big mistake trying to run the Mill. I should have just made a junk store out of it. I mean, there was three floors in the mill, there was a big warehouse, an old ice plant, a lot of room. And you could have just kept patching it, patching the leaks. I was either behind my time or ahead of my time, one or the other. (both laugh) I haven't figured out which one it was, but I got to go drain my radiator.

JA: Okay.

JF: Okay, I don't know if I got anything more to say.

JA: Well, what was it like moving to Readyville? Did you live in Readyville when you were working at the Mill?

JF: I bought a trailer and lived, kicked myself in the rear end. Boy, every morning I would get up and something else had fell off the damn thing. Paid cash for it, \$4,000 at that time for a trailer. See, part of the problem was, I came back from overseas with about \$30,000 cash money in my pocket. And \$30,000, at that time, my folks had just built a three-bedroom brick house in Hendersonville [Tennessee] for fifteen or sixteen thousand. So that was two houses. I was banking a house a year. Inflation was good to me. But then the effects of the war and all the rest of that hit this country, and that was the end of that. So I bought an old place up in McMinnville and I doubled my money on that. I wasn't rich, but I survived. But I never had to work for anybody else again. Except I did work for about a year. I went to vocational school, I still had GI Bill coming

after we sold the Mill. I was thinking, "Oh boy." I don't know who took bankruptcy. Yeah, I guess Epperly took bankruptcy, and Ma, I told her, I said, "Hell, you got it made now. You got the judge in Nashville making sure you get the payments while it's in bankruptcy." I said, "And he's got some assets." Because he had, you know – of course two of them burned shortly thereafter.

JA: I don't –

JF: Anyway –

JA: What burned?

JF: Epperly's assets.

JA: Oh.

JF: Real estate holdings. But anyway, I went to work for a vocational school. I was a student there first, and then one of the instructors left. He went to Nashville to get an annual check-up, and I was taking care of his class temporarily and I ended up there permanently in the refrigeration class. So I had a little farm there, and I still wanted to farm. I had that thing in my – I've about, I've have about enough of it now. Had enough.

JA: I have a great-uncle who owns a dairy farm in New York. He's out there, all day every day.

JF: Yeah, all day every day, and he can't get out. That's the thing. And that's the nice thing about farming. They never tell you that. It's easy to get in, but you can't get out. It's like getting married I guess. All these back to the land deals and all the rest of this stuff. How I made it, and nobody talks about their back. If you don't have a good back, forget it. That, that is the most important thing about, it's not money. I used to think, "Geesh, you know, they never talk about the [unclear] etcetera, etcetera, some of these back to the land people, they never talk about the budget." Now somehow they were making money, you know, but the back is the problem. If you don't have a good back, everything is heavy on a farm. Ain't nothing light.

JA: When did your family buy the Mill and then when did you sell it?

JF: They bought it in 1970, in the fall of '70. See it was a day like today, a beautiful day in the fall. I was in Florida. I said, "The hell with government, and you know, all the rest

of it." After that deal in Southeast Asia I was just disgusted. And come home, the American people weren't behind it. It's just a mess. "Where you been? What do you do?" "Oh, I was over in Southeast Asia." "Oh, kind of hot over there, ain't it?" "Yeah." And that was that. Not, you know – so anyway, I guess we shouldn't have been there, because we left eventually anyway. But anyway that was that part. And Dad just, oh hell, he went and he bought the thing, and then he was stuck with it. So he asked me to come up. I wasn't doing anything. I was going to – I had heard – I had signed up for a computer program. I didn't know what the hell a computer was, but that sounded like something new that was a coming thing in 1970. But somebody advertised in the St. Pete Times, that was a good paper. They were going to, you know, start a class and etcetera, etcetera, come over and sign up. So I went over and signed up.

JA: It seems like 180 degrees from a computer class in Florida to running a mill in Readyville (laughs).

JF: Right, absolutely, because it, you know, the word in the English language, mettle, M-E-T-T-L-E, or however the hell you spell it, it's mettle in your hands. And your hands turn black. When you pick those stones, little chips fly off the hammer. You use a hammer and just, getting the right temper in that hammer, where it's hard and not too soft, or it's soft it'll batter and if it's too hard it chips off. If you get it right, you're never going to get it right, but the metal has to be, and draw it down on the stove. I never could get those exactly the way I wanted them, but they're pretty good. What happens is, you either wear glasses or goggles or I used just a pane of glass. I held it up with one hand and chipped them. But that's the way you sharpen the stones is to chip them. And it brings up a fresh surface. And pick them all day, and pick them all night. That's what Ray used to say, Ray Justice. All night long you hear that bang, bang, boing, boing. You hear it all night long.

JA: So was that something you had to do often, to sharpen the stones?

JF: The journeyman millwright would go from mill to mill to mill and sharpen stones. And then he'd get, traditionally, he'd get so many runs off the stone, or turns, or whatever you want to call it. He'd get so much meal, in other words, if he did a good job, the stones were sharp, it cut good, according to the power available to the stone. And there were all kind of mills, you know, all kind of half-assed rigs all over the place. As these mills became antiquated as new developments, one of the problems was, in the milling business, there was never, like a computer business, there was never a lot of money available for improvements. For computers, you know, there was just all kind of money available. (coughs) Excuse me. But with mills, and the milling business went down, down, down every year. And there's just so many big guys started the home

delivery and the fresh bread and things like that. And the milling business went down, down, down.

Then see the stones, where those stones at Readyville came from originally who knew. You know, they might have been in Nashville, they might have been ordered direct from France. Those are French burrs. And there's another set of stones there. But there's a deposit in France, well documented, that it's like flint. And it is hard. And you hit it, and it, stuff comes off that's damn steel. But even the Romans used that same deposit in France. And it's, it just, people there that, that make those up, I guess, because those stones are in pieces. There'll be a piece this big, and one this big, and then they're all fitted in. They're cut and they're fitted in to the stone. And you just sharpen them, sharpen them, sharpen them. And then they finally wear out and they're gone. And it takes – it'd take me – because I was by myself, and just picking the stones, it'd take a couple of weeks, would take me two – I'd have to stop and take care of a customer, and then go up to the house and eat. And there's this and there's that, I had.

JA: How many stones were there in the Mill?

JF: There's just one run of stones, that's all.

JA: Okay.

JF: So I had to stop. The Mill had originally had two runs of stones in there. I got another run out of an old mill up, hell, I don't even, Burke's Mill, Pike's Mill, Burke's Mill I believe, up, further up the creek. Ask me that again, will you? I forgot already. Do you remember what you asked me?

JA: Oh, I was asking how many stones were in the Mill.

JF: So anyway, I got a couple extra stones and I put those underneath the porch, and somebody stole those. That's another thing that happened too, a lot of thievery at the Mill after we shut down, or Epperly shut down. Now I don't know if that mill ever had those stones in there, or that was just an old frame that they made it originally for, there were two. In other words, it had a round hole and it set down in the frame. And there's another hole in that frame.

When we went there my dad said, "Look at that timber up there, boy that's beautiful timber under there." I thumped that thing, and took a nail and drove it in there, and hell it just about fell in there. It's just hard on the outside. Even if all the timbers under, that were holding the end of the mill up, the mill was like that [indicates that the floors

were sagging]. And I thought I was hitting nails. I had never cut that hard timber like that with a chainsaw before. And it was sparking when I was cutting it. I thought, "Damn, I'm hitting nails." It wasn't nails, it was just that hard wood. But it was just on the outside, that's all that was left. The inside was just pure rot. That whole end of the mill was. A boy that came up from Florida with me, I'd known, I met him overseas and he stayed with us. I was running the mill and he came back inside, he said, "Hey!" He said, "Come out here and look at the side of the mill." Because the meal, when you made meal, it came down through the sifter upstairs, it'd catch anything. See that's a big problem.

JA: So the side of the mill was shaking?

JF: Yeah! The whole side of the mill was going in and out when I was – so I got that fixed. That took a long time. I just pieced those pieces up with steel because I didn't dare take them out. And chased that snake all the way up, and he ended up in my chicken house. And I put rat bait in there and damn, every time I cut one of them hollow pieces out, it was full of rat bait. I thought I was getting rats and hell, all I was doing was putting that grain, they were putting it back. That whole end of that mill, that was over the race, and Justice said he had just, it had a twelve by twelve white oak in there, and it rotted out, and he just put another one underneath it. Or somebody did, I don't know who did, I never asked about that. There were two there and then over the, over the race, hell, that damn mill was like that [Mr. Flipse indicated with his hands that the floors were sagging]. The big problem was, when you're running those shafts the length of the mill, and the damn mill is like this [sagging] – Keele, over here, McElroy, at Brown's Mill, he busted his shaft two times. Just, when the mill is sagging, and the shaft is bent and finally breaks. But it's just all kinds of problems. All the time, every damn time.

My hearing isn't good anyway, and I'd run that mill and I'd hear a noise. "What's that? What's that?" So I was uptight all the time I was running that damn mill. It wasn't a pleasurable thing. You know, go down to the old millstream and blah, blah, blah. That was hell running that mill. Because then I'd have to run upstairs two or three flights to see what happened. And all you could tell was from the sound. And all of some pipe is come down up there and a big pile on the floor, and it ain't going down back where it belongs to go. Then you run back downstairs and shut the mill down and patch for two days, and patch it up some more.

JA: So you did a lot of fixing stuff when you ran the Mill?

JF: That's all that was, is steady fixing and patching.

JA: Well it's so old.

JF: Right.

JA: It's quite an old building.

JF: It's old alright. According to what my boy said when he was in there, the floor is all warped up inside the mill. And, you know, I looked underneath along where I put a new beam on the husk. You call that the husk, the stone foundation. But I put a new beam on the side, and where these two by twelves or whatever that held the floor up, the mill floor. Where they hit, I had to cut them off because they were rotting on the ends. And I just put a piece of steel underneath them, and I put another angle on over here, and I just landed them on that angle there. It ain't much, last time I was over there. It's been at least five years.

I used to stop and see Russell. Russell runs the grocery store out there. Russell was a little kid when I ran the Mill. But he used to go up McMinnville and get nursery stuff for the plants, and I've got a little greenhouse here. And I grew plants in the spring, and I, and later I switched to hot pepper and I, I sold them to these Oriental markets in Nashville if I could get enough volume to where it was worth hauling down there. I used to stop and see Russell, you know, pick up on the gossip, who shot who, (JA laughs) what was what. Yep.

JA: Did you have a lot of people working there with you?

JF: No, uh-uh, I worked by myself. I couldn't – there wasn't any money to hire anybody. Oh, the guy worked up the store and lived at house up front there, he, he was a student at school. He used to, you know, he'd piddle around the store and then he'd come down and help me once in a while, just recreation.

JA: And who was that?

JF: Gary, Gary was his name. He ended up being a – I bought that house from him up there, out front, \$2,000 to buy a house back then. Because it flooded, see, I bought it just after it flooded. \$10,000 would bought, buy any house in Readyville, I believe at that time. I was going to be smart. I bought a trailer, see. By the time Cannon County got done swatting me with taxes, and other stuff, you know, "New guy come into town, we'll take care of him."

JA: I'm kind of wondering about that, actually. Because sometimes it is hard to come into a small town as an outsider. So I guess I'm wondering what your interaction was with the community, if that was difficult, or?

JF: I didn't have any interaction with the community, which is probably part of the problem. I was a hot shot, man. You know I had a college degree and etcetera, and I knew how to run this damn thing. And I did, I fixed that Mill up. Where the old stones used to go like that, at an angle, and the whole side of the mill would go in and out too, in conjunction with that other piece up there, because the piece in the center of the stone, the driver, wasn't in the center. It was off center just a little bit, and it put a good kick in it every time. See, then there were, like this table is about the size of that, that stone was four foot. And it had buckets in there, about where these doilies or whatever you call them are. You moved those up and down and then changed the weight in those to balance out the stone. Because it wasn't perfectly balanced, those stones were irregular size underneath. And then they'd smooth the top off with plaster of paris, or modeling plaster's a lot cheaper, we found out.

JA: So you didn't have much interaction with the community.

JF: No, I should have interacted more. There wasn't much reason to interact other than the bank. I went up to the bank and put a thousand dollars in the bank, boy, and I got to meet the President of the Bank. It was – that was really impressive. We didn't borrow money from anybody.

JA: So community members weren't your customers?

JF: They didn't do – no! There weren't any customers. Whiskey, whiskey customers. And, now I guess they quit coming. There weren't any customers. That was the big problem, no customers. That's why, you figure twenty dollars a month, that's about, I guess about a sack of cornmeal ground up was about five dollars, something like that.

JA: And how many pounds was that?

JF: I don't remember, probably about maybe fifty or a hundred pounds. Bad back all over again. Tell you a little story, my uncle, my uncle ran a gas station. I'd run a gas station up north too, and had a big fight with Shell Oil about the price of the rent. And he was down here visiting, he came down on vacation. And this guy backed in, backed his pick-up truck in here and I drug a sack of meal to it on a handcart and wheeled it out there. My uncle threw the tarp back and hell, it was full of antifreeze jugs, which was empty jugs which everybody used for shine was antifreeze. (laughs) I heard him

tell that story I don't know how many times. Even when he got back up in New Jersey, he's all about a truckload of moonshine. That was the real thing. Anyway, he threw that damn tarp back. It was all just a tarp, tarp down in the back of that truck. He threw the tarp back so we'd have some place to land the meal.

JA: That's so interesting. So your main customers were coming through to buy for, to make whiskey.

JF: Right.

JA: You also mentioned –

JF: And see, it's not supposed to be for public consumption, see. You know, I could tell you a bunch, but that's the truth. I could tell you a bunch of stories about –

JA: Don't tell me anything that's going to get you in trouble (laughs).

JF: Oh, hell, that's all happened a long time ago.

JA: But –

JF: I could talk about the celery and this and that, but that was –

JA: But the moonshine's where the real story is.

JF: Right. Well we gradually got away from that. I could tell from the way they walked when they come in whether they wanted, "I'm going to need some rye." "What are you going to do with that rye, boy?" I made them tell me. Said, "I'm going to make a paste." I said, "Okay." I said, "Well here's a hundred pounds over there. Take what you want. The rest feed the hogs. You got any hogs?" "No." I said, "Well, I got, you know, that there left over from some other stuff. Won't cost you nothing." "Okay, I'll take it." I said, "Hell, throw it away when you want, after you get done making a paste." They used that rye, see, it's good and sticky. It's a higher protein, and it's good and sticky to plaster up that still after you get it all together.

JA: I know nothing about making moonshine, so.

JF: It really is a half-ass rig. Nothing really fits good. I mean, this one goes in the other, and it leaks steam, and now it's leaking whiskey. So you just take a little paste there and plaster it all up before you run it. And it gets, if it's got heat, see and all that cakes up

and dries hard, and it's alright then. And you thought you were going to find out about running a flourmill.

JA: (laughs) This is much more interesting.

JF: Yeah, well, that's the way it was. Turned out, the women here ain't any different than anywhere else. They were just blowing the horn to see if anybody staggered to the door, you know, if anybody. Because Ray, hell, he'd be passed out in there half the time, you know. He'd hurt his leg somewhere, somehow, so when he walked, and the floors in the mill, hell they were like that. So when Ray walked he kind of jerked around. He had an irregular step. People thought he was loaded half the time and he wasn't. He smoked a little cigar. Now see, guys, even like Ray, people don't understand. There's, up in these hollows and hills, "What's your daughter doing?" "Oh, she's in Chicago. What's your daughter doing?" "Oh she's, she's an attorney up." In thinking of Ray, Ray was in the Army. Ray, I don't know, got a gal in trouble and they had a shotgun wedding and he hauled ass out of here. And he was working up in Detroit. Everybody went to Detroit, Detroit city. And he went in the Army, I don't know whether it was then or later. But he was, he was with the Army Engineers and he was, what the hell, not Stuttgart, but where they had the big trial in Germany. He shot one of them boys that was guarding the jet plane there. And he, you know, from Readyville, Tennessee.

JA: This was Mr. Justice?

JF: Huh?

JA: Mr. Justice?

JF: Yeah, Justice's boy, Ray. He worked in the mill for a while. And we didn't pay Ray but thirty to thirty five dollars a week, something like that. And hell, we couldn't afford that. There's some more ammunition for Mama to stay awake and cry at night. But we finally got out of that damn thing.

JA: And when was that?

JF: It was after, when we were here. They were still holding the papers, see. They sold, sold that on a note. And they were carrying the note. They finally got paid off. That, you know, that was for a lot of money at that time. That was fifty some thousand dollars.

JA: And your family sold to Mr. Epperly?

JF: No, we sold to –

JA: The Carignans?

JF: Carignans.

JA: Oh, okay.

JF: And then they sold it to Epperly. Yep.

JA: So was that kind of a relief for your family?

JF: It was for me. I don't know about Dad. You know, I never was close to my father. And now that he's gone, there's a lot of things I wish I had asked him about that. Things like that we never talked about, you know, "Was this a relief?" or "Why did you buy that Mill?" or, you know, "What did you think about this? Or that?" I think mostly I was young and dumb and I never considered his feelings. I think that's most of the problem. I probably didn't think, didn't ever think he had any feelings, everything that was going on. A lot of water over the dam, I'll tell you that. What do you need to know?

JA: Well you mentioned that Seventh Day Adventists were some of your best customers.

JF: Uh-huh.

JA: What do you mean by that?

JF: They believe in you know, whole foods and stuff like that, you know, natural type of things. They stay away from the sugar and this and that.

JA: So they would buy cornmeal from you, as well as?

JF: Flour.

JA: Okay, flour.

JF: Flour, flour, flour and meal is right.

JA: And vegetables from your garden?

JF: No, I didn't – I slacked off on the gardening at that time, after we got flooded a couple times. Oh, I had lots of ideas. Well, you know, eight years in Southeast Asia and couldn't do things that I wanted to do and wanted to try. Boy, here's a damn ready-made sandbox. Got a damn power source and a garden and, you know, really get her going. I got her going (laughs).

JA: And so what did you do then, after your family sold the Mill?

JF: I went to McMinnville, because I had that farm up there, then I went to the vocational school to make some money of it. Hell, I got four hundred bucks a month. That was big money back then. That's hard to believe. Four hundred bucks a month under GI Bill. As I had four kids at the time, two of them. I've got the last one still in school. He's waited to be forty something years old before he finally ended up in dental school. He –

JA: How many kids do you have?

JF: Four.

JA: Four.

JF: I have one daughter, she's an attorney. And then the other boy, he just retired out of the Army. And the other one, other girl, she's snippy snippy hair deal in Florida. I don't know. Susie, where is [unclear] now? Is she in Miami?

Susie Flipse: Yeah. She moved to Miami, she's a hairdresser.

JF: She was in – she, she married a couple of times, has a kid.

SF: She moved to Hawaii.

JF: [unclear] Oh, hell, that's a whole damn mess of people, divorces. All our kids have got divorced except my daughter that's a lawyer. She just moved down here from New Jersey. She had a house up there, she can't get rid of it. You know, the same old deal. Well she makes good money. I gave her this house next door, my folks' house. But it's a pretty good haul every day over there to Franklin.

JA: Well I guess I was going to ask, are you still interested in natural foods? And is that still something that is important to you?

JF: Ehh, well, not really. Boy it is to my, to my daughter. And, and that irritates me, it really does, because half of this stuff she's paying premium prices for from Whole Foods. There, that's an example right there (shakes a jar of nuts). Like wheat, let's take wheat for example. Oh, nobody sprays wheat. It's organic already. And this and that. Where all the problems mostly happen, just like your uncle, when that cow milk comes out of those cows, there's nothing un-organic about it. But by the time they get done piddling with it, you know, heat it, or pasteurize it and etcetera, etcetera, etcetera, who knows what he's got? I've tried. Yeah, I don't use anything, you know. I use Round-Up around the buildings to keep the grass down and that kind of stuff. But I don't use any pesticides or stuff that I don't have to. People don't understand. Homeowners are the worst violators of all this stuff. A farmer, he's got to get a return. Your uncle ain't going to spend a damn nickel on anything, he'd better not. He's been in business a long time, hasn't he?

JA: Uh-huh.

JF: Alright, then he already knows.

JA: Yeah, that's a farm that was passed down, you know, my great-grandfather, so now my great-uncle runs it.

JF: Where, where'd you say you were from?

JA: Upstate New York, Rochester area.

JF: Where?

JA: Rochester.

JF: Yeah, I know that area. Not that particular area. My grandfather had a place in Catskill.

JA: Okay.

JF: My grandfather, oh, Grandpa. He, he came to this country, he had a letter from the Mayor of Hague to the Mayor of Patterson. And he got four dollars, or three or four dollars an hour, and this is in 1920, '20, '21, early '20, working in the gas generating plant for public service there. They made gas. He, he got screwed up in everything he touched. He bought chickens, and he sold them all because they wouldn't lay eggs.

Well he found out later that if he'd waited another two weeks they'd have lay eggs. They were a different kind of chicken. All kinds of things like that happened to him. He was always about two steps ahead of the sheriff. When they came out from the city – all these farmers in Northern Jersey.

If you look at your uncle's farm if you're ever up there. You may see some patches in the roof. I guess they're all gone now. That's where the pipes came out for the stills. Anybody that had a farm during prohibition, particularly around New York City, there was a still put up in the barn. Now you could ride around and see all the tin patches on the roof. Grandpa, the deputy sheriff, the sheriff, no he wasn't called the sheriff, what the hell was he called, prosecutor? Anyway, he was the local law. He ran a store and he supplied all the tins for the booths. The guys from the city set up and run the still in Grandpa's chicken house. He was to get the third run. They ran two runs, and he'd get the third run. He'd a get a third all the time. Why, hell, as soon as they got two runs, it got raided. Always got raided, every time. Grandpa never got a nickel out of the moonshine business. But that was something. He couldn't stand success. If he would have stayed with the power company at three or four dollars an hour, man, that was unheard of at that time.

JA: Well I'd be interested to hear any more stories that you have of about when you ran the Mill. You mentioned some stories that you had heard from other people. I would love to hear those. Just anything you can think of. Even just about the community or Cannon County.

JF: Well, I think, Cannon County was in a changing time when I first moved there. They – women were becoming secretaries. They worked for the insurance company. Chromalox had moved in town, G.E. had moved in here. Samsonite was out there. They're all gone now. They came in here in the sixties, sometime in the sixties, moving south for the cheaper labor and all the other stuff. And up there in Cannon County, I don't think there was a damn thing. Shirt factory, yeah, shirt factory. See, shirt factories had been the women's first escape from the farm. The men stayed back on the farm and piddled, I mean made enough to maybe pay the mortgage or whatever it was, and raise a few cattle. And this was great sheep country until the dogs got in here, and then that ruined the sheep business and they went to cattle. That was going on, you know, it was a big transition. The women were driving cars, you know, hell, they had to go back and forth to work. And as far as baked goods, forget it. There wasn't any home baking going on. It was what you could grab at the store on the way back home. I'd say it was a big transition.

I didn't have any interaction with the local community, that's for sure. I think that probably, I wasn't attracted to it. There wasn't any money in it. It wasn't like we could develop customers. Any of this old time stuff, everybody wanted to get away from that. I found that out real fast. Hell with that, you know. Why take all that time to make biscuits? When my mother was here, still with us, the state had a [nursing] program, pretty good program you know, come to wash them up and nurses and all this kind of stuff. But one of those girls saw, I talked to her, said, "My grandmother can make the finest biscuits I've ever seen. They're just so light." And I asked her, I said, "Are you sifting your flour?" She said, "I don't know." I said, "Is she?" "I don't know." I said, "Well, ask her." I said, "She's doing something. Find out what kind of flour she's using. Watch her make them." That was the end of that. I never heard any feedback or anything to say, "Yeah, I ran home real quick and asked Granny what." I guess I'll give her credit for them being light. I know damn well she is using frozen biscuits. She ain't beating them, ain't sifting them, ain't doing nothing. There it is kids. But I don't blame her. See, thing is, she's got a job and she's got to go to work. And she's got kids, and hell, her husband works, she works. There ain't many people that can sit around and bat the breeze like this, you know.

JA: That's interesting because I think, you know, one of the main goals, at least from my understanding of this project to save the Mill is to have it be available for educational purposes. I was talking to Ms. Tate, who we talked about earlier, and she would bring her classes there when the Carignan's owned it, and they would show the kids how the mill ran and they would give them each, I think she said, like a two pound bag of cornmeal. And they're making a little bit of cornmeal now that you can buy. And she told me that, "If you go buy some of the cornmeal from the Mill and make your cornbread with that," she said, "You'll never go back to regular, store-bought cornmeal." But I, I don't eat a lot of cornbread. You know, it's not something I grew up eating.

JF: Well, see, the big problem. I did call the teachers, and I had the kids come down. I called the ladies garden club in Murfreesboro and had them come down, because I was trying to sell hybritite, which I was. But damn those kids, I'm telling you. I'd say, "Everybody has got pockets. Everybody's got pockets. You got pockets?" I said, "Hold your hands up. Everybody hold your hands up." I said, "Now take your hands and put them in your pockets." But damn, I swear it, they have to go over there and pull that damn belt, and there it'd go all over the floor. (laughs) I said, "The hell with this. There ain't no progress in this." So I didn't really interact with the community anymore. And the old ladies, they wanted, you know, the garden club, hell they wanted service right then. They didn't (grumbles). They didn't – that was my interaction with the community.

But like, the year when I grew vegetables, I tried selling stuff locally. I've sold stuff locally in the market. I mean, I'm not a complete idiot. But, I tell people, hell, I says, "I can go to the airport and ship it to Chicago, it's all over with in fifteen minutes." I said, "Or maybe an hour if you count time back and forth." I said, "And I ain't got time to piddle with somebody and argue with them, and tell them that this is better and this, and that, and blah, blah, blah." I can go to Chicago. I used to ship to Chicago, Oklahoma City, Seattle, Washington, everywhere, right out of here, right off our front porch.

JA: So this isn't when you ran the Mill.

JF: No, uh-uh. This is where you're at now.

JA: With your vegetables?

JF: Yeah.

JA: Did you ship anything when you ran the Mill?

JF: Uh-uh, no, uh-uh.

JA: Just the moonshine.

JF: I was afraid to ship anything, because the legal stuff, flour, if you ship out of state, you're subject to the Fed. And how the hell you can ever sanitize one of those mills, it's impossible. Hell you're sucking this air in there. When the stones are running, there's a hole that big in the middle of them. You're feeding it in, there ain't no way you can. So I would have been subject to that kind of stuff. Now, used to be an old guy used to come out one day a week, Wednesday or Tuesday, something like that. Once a month his old lady would go to bridge game or something, some kind of card game. And he's an old miller from up North. See, this is the thing, I know all this stuff, and I know these guys, and my daughter is paying premium prices for this garbage. But this guy, he took his regular old white flour and stuff and cut it back, or he pulled it off of some spot. And he ran it over a carborundum stone, which is, you know, grinding stone you grind sharpened tools on. And so he had a stone in there somewhere and he ran the stuff, he poured it over the stone, and it went in the top and came out the bottom, and he called it stone ground. It wasn't no more stone ground than I am. But anyway, he sold it for stone ground. And he sold the hell out of it. And sometimes it just seems like the bigger crook you are, the better you do.

There was a guy when I still had a gas station up in New Jersey. I had just come back from Germany, and I was waiting for a car to come off the boat. And the guy down the road, he had this, '58 Chevy is I guess the first time they had put the coil springs under the rear end. And he had the reputation of being the best rear end man in the county. I asked around about him, and what I found out, he'd get these customers' cars in there for a lube job, grease job, something like that, and he'd swat a big old weight on the inside of one of the rear wheels. And people would come back and say, "Boy, something's wrong with that car since you worked on it. It goes up and bounces and makes all kind of noise." And so he'd say, "Oh, I'm sorry, you just got another one. Chevy, General Motors has had a lot of problems with those things." He'd put them back on the rack, take that weight off, and it was just like brand new, man. I'm telling you, there wasn't a one that he didn't fix right. He fixed them all. It seems like those are the kind of people that got the good reputation. And you couldn't tell anybody. What are you going to do? Say, "Look, lady, you got took down there." You can't say that. And that's the same thing that's going on in this whole foods business. What they've done is, they've got a organic rule. You have to have organic that's got a government inspection. The regulation says something like "according to generally accepted procedures." What the hell is that? Spray, spray, spray. I'm telling you something, everybody ought to have to work for the government. They really should.

JA: Why is that?

JF: To find out how incompetent they are. Really, I mean, I'm telling you. This business you're doing right now is government funded some way or another. Somebody's writing it off on taxes.

JA: I really don't, I'm not sure.

JF: You're one of the, I can't use the "N-word" anymore, but you're one of them, out at the end of the line, just doing the work. Up at the other end of the line is the guy getting the tax write-off.

JA: Yeah, I couldn't really tell you.

JF: My problem was I knew too much about it. So, it doesn't make any difference. You go ahead and get your degree and everything will be alright. You see, now this is the Gore Foundation, right?

JA: Well, I'm doing this project for PARQ, Preserve the Area's Rural Qualities, which is a group of people in Readyville. But they are going to send a copy of it to the Gore

Center. But it's not funded through them or anything like that. It's just, they are going to send a copy of it to them so they can keep that on file. And if someone wants to research the history of the Mill, then they will be able to find this interview and learn all about the moonshine (laughs).

JF: Well I never told Daddy Gore about the moonshine. He used to have a helper, you know, kind of a, what do you call them, a page I guess, who stopped in to see me.

JA: Who's this?

JF: He stopped to see me. Senator, Congressman Gore. And he had a mill up there at Cookeville, not Cookeville, Smithville. It had been, they changed it to a kind of more breakfast type deal, I guess. It's a meeting place now. They asked me to go up there and look at it. It had a dam and a this, and a that, and the pipe was busted. It was a later model, it was made with concrete blocks, and they used steel sash in the windows, and every one of them was knocked out, of course. And I told them, I said, "Congressman," I said, "It's going to take you two years to get the rat stink out of that place." "Oh, don't worry about that." He says, "Look." He said, "I'll get the contract for the state for cornmeal." I said, "Hell." I said, "You can crank more cornmeal out than they can possibly eat." He said, "That don't make any difference." He said, "I'll just get the contract." That, that's the way they looked at things. It didn't have a dam thing to do with anything except money. And I said, "Well." I said, "You can, you can stop, come by and look and see what we're doing down there, and see if there's anything that's any good to you." I said, "But I ain't got time to come up here." I said, "Every one of those sashes there has got to be sandblasted, you know, to get the rust off of them. And repaint them with something. It'll take a lot of doing." I said, "And there's a stink in there where the mice have been having, you know, a midnight balls or something like that."

JA: And how did you get to know him or come into association with him?

JF: He had a, a page I guess you'd call him, some kind of flunky that used to be back here. And he was from Murfreesboro. I don't remember that boy's name. But he worked in, in Gore's office up there in Washington. And he stopped. First time he stopped, I had just gotten flooded. I didn't want anything to do with him. And I talked to Ma about it the second time, and I decided to go up there and talk to him. But I'll tell you, when you've been around these guys – turn that thing off here a minute.

JA: Well thank you so much for sitting down with me today and talking about this. Before we close, I just want to ask you on tape, do I have permission to donate this recording to the public domain?

JF: Yeah, okay, you have my permission.

JA: Alright, thank you so much.