

PRESERVE THE AREA'S RURAL QUALITIES  
(PARQ)

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

WITH

Randle Branch

April 11, 2012

Murfreesboro, Tennessee

INTERVIEWER, TRANSCRIBER, AND EDITOR:

Jaryn Abdallah

UNDER THE DIRECTION OF

Dr. Martha Norkunas

## Randle Branch Biographical Note



Randle Branch was born and raised in rural West Tennessee. He moved to Nashville, Tennessee, after graduating from high school to attend David Lipscomb College, now David Lipscomb University. His undergraduate education was interrupted by his draft into the Army during the Vietnam War, during which he was stationed in Hawaii. After his discharge from the Army, Mr. Branch returned to Nashville to attend Lipscomb, UT Nashville, and Middle Tennessee State University in pursuit of his undergraduate degree. He holds a bachelor's degree from MTSU and a master's degree from Argosy University.

Mr. Branch oversaw operations at the Readyville Mill from 1979 to 1980, while the Epperly family owned the Mill. Mr. Branch participated in numerous major repairs to the mill's equipment, with the intent of maintain historical accuracy while also increasing productivity. He developed close relationships with the Readyville and Cannon County communities. During his time at the mill he also developed a deep appreciation for the Stones River, which is still an important part of his life.

After the Readyville Mill closed, Mr. Branch moved into Murfreesboro. He currently continues to reside in Murfreesboro and works as a Licensed Professional Counselor at Cedars Counseling. He is also actively involved as a past president and current board member of the Stones River Watershed Association, where he promotes the maintenance of the Stones River as well as enjoyment of the recreational opportunities that it provides.

## Randle Branch Interview Abstract

Randle Branch began the interview by discussing his experiences growing up in rural West Tennessee, which included school letting out for about a month in the fall to allow students to assist in the cotton harvest. After high school he moved to Nashville to attend David Lipscomb College. He was drafted into the Vietnam War and was stationed in Hawaii. After his discharge he returned to Tennessee to attend Lipscomb, UT Nashville, and Middle Tennessee State University. He also spent time traveling the United States in a red Volkswagen bus.

Mr. Branch ran the Readyville Mill from 1979 to 1980. He detailed numerous renovation projects that he oversaw, including reconstruction of the mill's gates and repairs to the stream bank. During Mr. Branch's time at the mill, both the mill and the dam area served as recreational centers for the community. He recalled parties and weddings held there. Under Mr. Branch, the mill produced cornmeal, grits, whole wheat flour, and mash for moonshine. He also discussed his interactions with previous mill owners Ray Justice, Joe Flipse, the Carignans, and Wayne Epperly, as well as the current owner Tomm Brady. He also discussed the decision to close the mill and his subsequent efforts to act as a go-between between the Readyville community through PARQ, and the Epperly family as the mill fell into disrepair. During the 1970s, Mr. Branch saw the Cannon County population grow with an influx of new residents, many of them "hippies" establishing homesteads and intentional communities. He discussed The Sanctuary, located on Short Mountain, and The Farm, located in Summertown, Tennessee. Landmarks in Readyville at the time were the Readyville Mill, Tilford's Sawmill, and the post office.

Much of the interview focuses on Mr. Branch's activities as a board member of the Stones River Watershed Association. He discussed the goals and history of the organization as well as the numerous recreation activities that he participates in including the annual Stones River Relay and First Saturday Paddles. This organization works actively to various government agencies and community organizations to preserve the Stones River Watershed. He also explained the system of dams along the Stones River, the issues that these dams create, and the possibility of removing some of these dams.

Current issues that are covered include the opening of the Short Mountain Distillery on nearby Short Mountain, as well as issues related to Tomm Brady's restoration of the mill. Currently the Readyville Mill Dam is in disrepair. Mr. Branch discussed the political, economic, and environmental considerations in repairing it. He also described the experience of having breakfast at the Readyville Mill.

Randle Branch  
Lightly Edited Transcript

Jaryn Abdallah: Alright, this is Jaryn Abdallah, and I am here with Mr. Randle Branch, and we are at his counseling office in Murfreesboro [Tennessee]. Mr. Branch, do I have your permission to record this interview?

Randle Branch: Yes you do.

JA: Alright, thank you. I thought maybe we could start with some of your family history. Is your family from this area?

RB: My family is from West Tennessee. My father taught agriculture in high school. My mother's father had a feed mill as well. Not a grain mill, it was feed and seed. Most of my family history has been in education and agriculture.

JA: When did your family come to this area?

RB: I escaped from the cotton fields of West Tennessee after leaving high school. When I was in high school, school turned out to pick cotton. And that gave me extra incentive to get somewhere where cotton didn't grow. And so I came to Nashville immediately after high school to begin college.

JA: Can you explain a little more about school getting out to pick cotton? Because growing up in New York, that's just totally not something that I'm familiar with.

RB: Well I'm sixty-four years old, and you're—

JA: Twenty-six.

RB: Twenty-six. When I was in high school, it was during that period of time that cotton harvest became mechanized, cotton-picking machines. So before that time, it was done manually. And you either hired people to do it, or you had family to do it. And everyone was needed. So school turned out so kids could go out in the field and pick cotton. Whole families would be out there. If you had a three year old with you, you'd take a fifty-pound cotton flour sack, and tie a sash around it, and the kids would play in the field and pick a little bit of cotton.

JA: So when is that season?

RB: Generally around September or October.

JA: So you would start school.

RB: You'd start school, stay in school about a month, six weeks, and then turn out for cotton-picking season, cotton harvest.

JA: And then go back?

RB: And then go back.

JA: Oh. Did you have a summer vacation?

RB: A little bit, yeah.

JA: That's so interesting to me. It's very different from anything that I experienced growing up. So you said you came to Nashville after high school?

RB: Yes.

JA: And what did you do in Nashville?

RB: I went to David Lipscomb, which was college at the time, to study pre-engineering curriculum.

JA: And then what did you do?

RB: Well that didn't go very well (JA laughs). I went from a small high school with a graduating class of about twenty four, with an academic scholarship, to a private college of over-achievers where I had to learn to study and compete, plus having the additional distraction of the big city, which didn't help my grade point average. So at the time there was also a draft, Vietnam War. And I was drafted out of college. Didn't qualify for the exemption. I had to go fight in the Hawaiian Wars. Essentially I had to go, I was assigned to headquarters company in Hawaii, and I was there for a couple of years before I came back to go into college again. It took me quite a while to get through my undergraduate.

JA: So when you came back, did you go back to Lipscomb?

RB: I went back to Lipscomb for one semester, and after my Army experience, the private college wasn't what I could tolerate any longer.

JA: So you were one semester at Lipscomb, and then where did you go from there?

RB: I got a red Volkswagen bus and hit the road, and just traveled around the country.

JA: To where?

RB: Let's see, I went to, first I went to a, a friend's wedding in Florida. And then I went from there to New Orleans for Mardi Gras. Spent a couple of months there, just enjoying the city. I would drive up and down the Mississippi River, pick up driftwood and sell it in Jefferson Square at the market. Did charcoal rubbings of historical markers and sold those. Just whatever to pay a little rent, and a little food.

JA: That's so interesting.

RB: Decompress after being in the Army.

JA: Mmm-hmm.

RB: In search of America.

JA: (both laugh) So how did you end up back in Tennessee after being in all these different, interesting places?

RB: Well I still had friends in Nashville. And I couldn't stay on unemployment forever. You did get, at that time you did get unemployment after having been released from the Army. So I came back to Nashville, UT Nashville is where I next went to school. I got a job working in a frame shop, art gallery. Did that for a while. Then moved toward Rutherford County, moved and went to MTSU [Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro, Tennessee]. And at that time I was drawn toward alternative energies, solar energy, passive solar construction, still pursuing an undergraduate degree in engineering. It was at that time I think that I hit calculus. And calculus encouraged me to change my major to psychology.

JA: (laughs) I understand that. So you're still at MTSU, and you switched your major to psychology.

RB: Yes.

JA: Okay. So when did you become involved with the mill?

RB: A friend of mine, from Lipscomb, had married into this family of Wayne Epperly, who was a realtor in Nashville. And he'd married into that family. His father-in-law was interested in buying the mill, needed someone to run it. I lived close by, so I agreed to go run the mill.

JA: And you had some knowledge of mills from growing up?

RB: Just from growing up with my grandfather having a mill, my father teaching agriculture, having a pre-engineering curriculum, studied industrial studies at MTSU. I had some mechanical abilities, and some knowledge of agriculture. I also, you know, contracted with the local farmers to grow the corn and wheat to, to be ground there.

JA: So had you been to like Readyville, Cannon County area before you started running the mill?

RB: I'd been to the mill before. I had been there when the Carignans owned it. But I knew very little about the turbine and how the mechanics all ran.

JA: Well if you would like to just take me through your experiences when you first started the mill, you know, I'd love to hear about that.

RB: At the time that I started, there were, there were some people at MTSU, I think Dr. Huhta, was brought in to gather information about the mill, a historical study, document the equipment that was there. Mr. Epperly had got a grant to, to restore the mill. So the MTSU students came in to kind of document the process, what was there already, what was there before, and then how we were going to restore it, get it back working again. One of the first things we did is built a set of gates at the head of the millrace, which is up by the millpond. The way the mill got its power was from a turbine. It's my understanding that that turbine, undershot turbine, was brought from a gold mine in Georgia, where I believe it was used as a pump previously. The East Fork of the Stones there makes about a half-mile loop and the millrace cuts across that, giving the turbine about seven feet of head. And the gates that we built at the head of the millrace allowed us to close off the millrace, service the turbine, control the water. And also there was an additional set of gates at the turbine that allowed us to fill the mill stock with water. There was a series of smaller gates in the turbine itself. These were panels of steel about a foot square that rotated, and you could open and close those to regulate the amount of water that went through the turbine. One of those was



broken and we had to have one of those cast. I think it was a James Leffel and Company that was the manufacturer of that turbine, and they still had those parts or could still cast those parts. So we did that.

We got a man named Adrien Gonsalen, from Falls Mill, close to Winchester, to come up. And he stayed there. I lived on the property, and he stayed with us there for several weeks off and on. He taught us to pour the lead bearings for the equipment shafts, showed me how to sharpen the stones, and how to clean the stones, how to make most of the products that we made there, the cornmeal, whole wheat flour, grits. Grits was the hardest thing to make because you had to separate it.

JA: I don't know how to make grits, so (laughs).

RB: Well you grind the corn a little bit more course than you would for cornmeal and, and then with a series of sifters and blowers you just sift out the particles, small particles of corn that are called grits. And then the rest of it you use for cornmeal.

JA: Oh.

RB: Tomm Brady still has got that process going again now.

JA: So you made cornmeal, whole wheat flour, grits. What else?

RB: That's about it. The custom grindings sometimes, people would bring in their own wheat and corn to have it ground. Some folks would bring it in for livestock feed. Sometimes folks would bring it in and, you know, have it ground into mash for moonshine. That was one of my first custom milling jobs. And he didn't tell me exactly what he wanted to use the rye and the corn for. He just stood there beside the, the mill, and I would adjust the stones and he would tell me if it was too fine or too course. And, and it was too course for cornmeal, and it was too fine for chicken feed. So I had a suspicion that it was for some other purpose. I, I suspected moonshine. So after I got through doing my work and he asked how much I charged for that, I said, "Well just, you know, whenever you're finished with your process, if you could just bring a sample of it, that would be fine (JA laughs)." So, so about a month later he, he brought back a gallon jug, and I put it under the stairwell at the, in the mill, where I'd been told in years previous there was a, a jug kept there. So that, that carried on that tradition.

JA: Huh. Can you explain to me the process of making moonshine? Because I'm not really familiar with that.

RB: Well I was trying to find out more about that myself. And, and I only worked there two years. And I had gotten the trust of the moonshiner to the point where I'd been to his house, but he hadn't taken me out to the woods to show me the still. I was hoping to learn that process. But as I understand it, you take the ground corn and rye, and you put it in water and you let it soak, and you add sugar and yeast. They're doing it legally in Cannon County now. That's recent. And the fellow that's running that, Billy Kaufman, you know, has hired several of the old-time moonshiners to turn over their recipes and work for him legally for the first time.

JA: Oh. I wonder if that takes some of the fun out of it.

RB: I'm sure it does, the, the sense of the chase.

JA: In my interview with Joe Flipse, he told me that, really, his customer base was moonshiners. Did you find that to be the case?

RB: No. My customer base was, I guess, mostly the, the buying clubs. There were several buying clubs. And Sunshine Grocery in Nashville, a health food store.

JA: What's a buying club?

RB: A buying club is where a group of consumers get together and pool their food orders and, you know, twenty people may be able to get together and buy a hundred pounds of flour and get it at a better price than if, you know, each one went out and bought five pounds.

JA: And you said Sunshine Market?

RB: Sunshine Health Food Store.

JA: Okay.

RB: And, and we would sell them fifty pound bags of flour that they would sell to the public.

JA: What about from within the community? Did you have a lot of interaction with the community?

RB: A lot of people would stop by the mill store and buy small quantities of flour, two pound, five pound bags. We had honey that we bought and resold. We kept it in five-

gallon containers. It was cold in the mill. We didn't have much heat there. And I kept it in a refrigerator with a light bulb inside of it that kept the honey warm where you could pour it. And we had sourwood honey and clover honey. And then we also had orange blossom honey that we sometimes mixed with the moonshine, and made what we called orange blossom special. There were craft items at the store. People would bring their eggs by there to have us sell the eggs for them. It got to be kind of a community center where folks would just stop and hang out.

JA: Can you tell me a little more about that? Like did they just kind of gather there?

RB: They would gather there, meet one another. During that time there were a lot of people moving into Cannon County, Short Mountain area, from places all over the country, people going back to the land and establishing small homesteads. And Readyville was kind of between Short Mountain and Murfreesboro. A lot of these folks were still students too. So it was just kind of a place to stop in between.

JA: So when you say, you know, back to the land type stuff, did you have a lot of, I guess, well I'm thinking of like the, The Farm in Summertown. Did you have any interaction with groups like that?

RB: I had interactions with the folks from The Farm at Summertown from the time they came to Tennessee. I was in Nashville at the time, and introduced some of them to places where they could get health care services. And later on I worked with Vanderbilt University at their Center for Health Services, and we established farmers markets in Nashville, direct producer to consumer sales. And I worked with The Farm and them bringing their produce in to sell to the public. And then my first child was born at The Farm.

JA: Oh!

RB: My wife was with me at some of these markets, and they invited us just to come to The Farm to, for the delivery. So I went and stayed there for a month and my oldest child was born there.

JA: That's really interesting. Did you have any connections with them with the mill? Like, did they buy anything from the mill?

RB: No, no.

JA: Mr. Flipse had mentioned that when they first came to Tennessee that they had kind of had some arrangements going on, but that that didn't last very long. So I was just wondering if you had.

RB: Yeah, I think that, that, yeah, when Mr. Flipse had the mill, that was when they first arrived in Tennessee. Later on I think The Farm was able to set up their own milling operations.

JA: So what about maybe some of the repairs and stuff that you did? I know you talked about the raceway and the gates and stuff. Were there any other major repairs that you had to do?

RB: We did have to, or tried to repair the stream bank. On one side of the dam the stream was trying to find its way around the dam and had on one side washed away part of the bank. And we moved a lot of rock in to try to stabilize that. But it didn't, it didn't work very well. It worked for the time that I was, the two years that I was there in 1979, 1980, but it didn't take long for it to wash that rock away. And now the dam doesn't work at all. It doesn't hold enough water back.

JA: So is that the same side now that's washed away that you had tried to?

RB: Yes.

JA: Any other major repairs?

RB: That was the major work. There was, you know, always repairing belts and grain shoots and elevators.

JA: And while you ran the mill, you lived on the property.

RB: Yeah, there was like a doublewide mobile home that was back behind the mill. A small septic system, we built a public bathroom there as well.

JA: What was it like living there? It just, it seems very secluded.

RB: It's not as secluded as being out in the middle of the woods. Readyville is a small community, and, you know, where the mobile home was that I was living, Russell's Market was fifty feet in one direction, and a hundred yards in the other direction was Tilford's Sawmill and Hardware Store. And a quarter mile down the road was the post office. So it was just small community. There were people around.

JA: Well what can you tell me about the community? What were some of the major, I guess, aspects of the community as far as like, I know you mentioned Russell's Market and the post office. Can you just describe what the community was like at the time?

RB: Small (laughs), very small. Russell's Market, everybody knew everybody, and if you went in for the first time, you would get yourself known there. The biggest business operation was Tilford's Sawmill and trucking company and hardware store. I think that's where you'd see the most people.

JA: Was it difficult to kind of get established there? I'm just thinking about, you know, just in general when you move to a new place, and especially when it's a small town like that, was it hard for you to make connections in the community?

RB: It's fairly easy. I knew some people, and those people knew everybody else.

JA: How did you get to know those people?

RB: People would stop in at the mill. They wanted to know who was there and what we were up to, and find out about us. So I didn't have to go out introducing myself to the community. The community came in and introduced themselves to me.

JA: Oh, okay. I know that, or I was told that, when the Carignans owned the mill, they had kind of like craft fairs and community events there. Did you do any of that?

RB: No, we didn't do that.

JA: Well are there any other stories that you can think of?

RB: I was just trying to think of the research that I had to do to try to do some of the repair work. Specifically I was thinking about the, the gates. I'm trying to think of the name of the individual that ran the mill before the Carignans.

JA: Mr. Flipse?

RB: I mean before the Flipses.

JA: Okay, Justice?

RB: Yeah, Ray Justice came up one day and I was asking him about how the gates were operated, the gates on the millrace. And he agreed to go over there with me. And I started to walk over there, and he got in his car. And I said, "It's just across the street. Are you going to drive your car over there?" He says, "Hell yeah I'm going to drive my car over there! I'm too drunk to walk."

JA: Wow.

RB: I think millers were noted at the time for hitting that moonshine jug under the steps.

JA: Could be. I was told that the mill was kind of the center of moonshine activity in Cannon County, which was kind of the center moonshine making. Have you heard that, that the mill was really well known in the moonshine community?

RB: Well I learned that, like I said, the first time somebody brought in the corn and rye for me to grind into mash. And yes, and then people did come, you know, wanting to know where they could get moonshine.

JA: So how much of your business was moonshine related?

RB: There was just that one individual—

JA: Oh, okay.

RB: That I got to know.

JA: Uh-huh, that's interesting. So what, you were talking about the research that you had to do for the repairs. If you want to share any of the history that you found out about the mill or about the various parts about it.

RB: At the base of the dam there's about a two-foot square plug that you can pull out, and essentially drain the reservoir behind the mill pond, drain the mill pond. And when we, when we drained the mill pond, I was able to find the remnants of, I guess it's a diversion ditch. It looked like about a four foot by four foot wooden flume that took. I suppose they had to build the dam in the dry season. So they were able to move all of the water through this area that would eventually become the plug or the drain for the mill while they built the dam around it. And it was made of wood driven into the ground. It was some kind of wood that wouldn't rot, because there was a good bit of it still remaining when we did that.

JA: So what, what would that have been for?

RB: To channel the water from the river, what little water there was in the dry season, to this one area at the base of the dam, so the water could keep running through while they built the dam around it.

JA: Okay, so this is something that would have been built probably when they built the mill.

RB: Right, prior to.

JA: Okay.

RB: Well, actually the mill was already there. The original dam was downstream of the mill about fifty feet. And I'm not sure what kind of overshot wheel or undershot wheel they had to run it, but when they increased the size of the mill, rebuilt it, they built the dam further upstream around the bend and got a higher head of water to do more work.

JA: And this was about Civil War era when the original mill burnt and then they had to reconstruct?

RB: Right.

JA: Okay. So the building that stands now was built 1860s, 1870s?

RB: That sounds about right.

JA: Any other interesting research about the mill that you came across?

RB: There's an interesting set of notches in the doorway with dates of floods and there are times when the water was as high as four, five feet inside the mill.

JA: Did you experience any floods like that while you were running it?

RB: Not while I was running it, but there was a time two years before I came there that there was a big flood event. There was at least four feet of water according to the notch.

JA: Uh-huh. Is that still there?

RB: Yes. It is, as you face the mill, the doorway on the left. It's covered with paint, several layers, but if you look real closely, you can see the notch, and you can read the dates.

JA: Oh. I'll have to check that out. So you worked at the mill from 1979 to 1980?

RB: Right.

JA: Were you there when it closed?

RB: Yes.

JA: So can you maybe explain how, how or why that happened? Why did it close?

RB: We weren't getting enough revenue from sales there locally. We weren't able to produce the quality of flour that, like Sunshine Grocery, for example, wanted. I think that they'd run out of money that they'd gotten for the restoration. We didn't have enough money to pay staff to stay there all the time, and I was really working there just part-time, and in school part-time. So it just wasn't profitable to stay open.

JA: How many staff members?

RB: It was just myself and one other person.

JA: Okay. And was Mr. Epperly's son-in-law involved in the operations?

RB: Kip Reel, George Reel, is, is his name, and he would come by and sometimes stay a day or two on the weekends. For the most part he stayed out of the day-to-day work.

JA: You mentioned the restoration, when the grant that the Epperlys had gotten. What can you tell me about that? What kind of work did that entail?

RB: Well it paid for building the gates at the head of the millrace. We got Tilford's Sawmill to saw the timbers for that. It paid for the gates at the mill stock. It paid for the repair for the turbine. It paid for hiring Mr. Gonsalen to come in and help us with sharpening the stones, and re-pouring bearings, and fixing belts.

JA: So it sounds like you did quite a bit of work on the mill.



RB: We stayed busy for a couple of years.

JA: Uh-huh. What was the goal of the restoration? Just to keep the mill operating, or was there like a historical aspect of that?

RB: Well, we wanted to keep it as close to being historically accurate as we could. But at the same time we had hoped to produce enough product, have enough business to keep it financially viable.

JA: Uh-huh. Let's see, I've got some questions here, just kind of some topics that PARQ [Preserve the Area's Rural Qualities] wanted to make sure, but I think we've touched on almost all of them. You said that you had visited the mill before you started working there.

RB: Mmm-hmm.

JA: What, I guess, were your first thoughts about the mill, and about what you would be doing?

RB: When I agreed to take the job?

JA: Uh-huh.

RB: I was aware of what needed to be done, and I knew that, you know, that the turbine couldn't be controlled with part of one of the gates missing. And that we really couldn't maintain the mill stock and millrace without the additional set of gates being rebuilt. I knew it was going to take a lot of work, but I felt up to it. I looked forward to being out there.

JA: So your experience then at the mill, I mean all, overall, do you think of that as a positive?

RB: Oh, absolutely. I got to know a lot of people from that, from Cannon County. People that I still know today. I still am in touch with Tomm Brady, still stop by there occasionally.

JA: So when you left the mill, or, so the mill closed, did you continue to live there on the grounds?

RB: No, I bought a house in Murfreesboro.

JA: Okay. But you maintained your connections in Cannon County?

RB: Yes.

JA: Okay. Do you want to talk a little bit about that? About I guess, through the years, what your connections have been. Did you have any part in the restoration projects?

RB: When Tomm bought it?

JA: Well, I guess before then is what I'm thinking of, when the community members, you know, putting the plastic up on the windows. Did you have any knowledge of any of those activities, or even that the mill had kind of fallen into disrepair?

RB: I knew that PARQ was trying to get the mill restored. And I had gone out there at times and helped put up plastic. And I went to the PARQ meetings and tried to act as a go-between whenever possible with the Epperly family and the heirs, to do something to keep the mill at least stable until permanent work could be done.

JA: From what I read from previous interviews, there was some tension there between the community and the Epperlys, is that true?

RB: I think there was some frustration in that the Epperlys had run out of money, were not able to continue with the work, that they had abandoned. I think the community felt that they had abandoned the mill. And I think that there was some difficulty with the Epperly family, given the amount of money that they had put into it, and that, that they were reluctant to sell at a loss.

JA: Uh-huh.

RB: Which eventually they did have to do. But because of that, I guess impasse, there was frustration on the part of the community, that the mill was going to be lost and that there was nothing that they could do about it.

JA: That's an interesting point that you make about how much money the Epperlys did put into it. Because I don't think that perspective is often, I guess, put forward, when talking about the mill and how it fell into disrepair. So I just, I think that was, that was a good point that I hadn't considered in the whole situation, that they had put a lot of money and a lot of effort, obviously, into it.

RB: They may have paid too much money initially.

JA: Uh-huh. Do you know how much they paid for it?

RB: I think it was \$75,000.

JA: Uh-huh. And they bought that from the Carignans?

RB: They bought it from the Carignans. The Carignans had done a good job of fixing up the store, the retail end of it, and bringing in things. They were not as skillful as the Flipses were at the mechanical end of things, being able to keep the equipment in running order, and doing the repairs, continuing with that part of the restoration. So the appearance on the outside when the Carignans owned it was that everything was running smooth and good, and it was viable. And I think a lot of that just had to do with the Carignans' ability to market and organize and sell.

JA: So was most of their focus then not necessarily on the milling?

RB: I think most of their focus was on the shop.

JA: Okay. Well, so what can you tell me then about, I guess, more in-depth about your involvement with the preservation and with the PARQ organization? I think that is such an interesting part of this whole story of the mill's history, is the community's efforts to save it however they could, given that they didn't own it. And then with Mr. Brady coming in. I think that's such an interesting part of the story. How did you first become involved with that?

RB: I just learned that PARQ had formed and was just trying to do this work. When I left the mill I was frustrated as well, that I didn't have, or that monies were not available to pay people to continue the work. I had just graduated from MTSU with a degree in industrial, or psychology at the time, but I'd also started on an undergraduate, a minor in industrial studies, and was considering a master's in industrial studies, and had become more involved in alternative energies, solar energy. So I left the mill to go to Murfreesboro to start a solar energy business. And in my next several years were involved in building and running that business.

JA: And so how did you hear about PARQ?

RB: I just got a notice in the mail that there was a meeting.

JA: And had they sent that to you because of your previous connection? Or was it something they just had sent around Murfreesboro?

RB: They sent it to me because, you know, I had run the mill before. And so I came to the meeting and brought a few mementos, things that I had had from the mill, old flour sacks.

JA: Well what was the meeting like?

RB: It was more or less a brainstorming session, you know, "What can we do? How can we get the owners to become involved themselves in at least keeping the mill stable?"

JA: Did the Epperlys live in the area?

RB: No, they lived in Nashville.

JA: Oh, okay. So what were some of the steps then that PARQ took to. I mean, I've heard various aspects of it from different people. So, I know there was, you know, they put the plastic on the windows and stuff. Anything else that you can recall that they were doing?

RB: I wasn't that much involved with PARQ at the time.

JA: Okay. Fundraisers? I think they, well they did some fundraisers to try and raise money to buy the mill, which then Mr. Brady bought.

RB: Uh-huh.

JA: And you said you know him?

RB: Yes.

JA: So what's been your interaction with him?

RB: I just stopped in one day and I had heard that he had, he had bought it, so I stopped in and introduced myself. He had a few questions about some pieces of equipment and how things worked. I would stop in about probably once a month and see how he was doing.

JA: So what kind of things was he curious about?

RB: Various pieces of equipment, the sifters, elevators, the equipment that was used to make the grits, and how it worked.

JA: Had he had any previous experience milling?

RB: I don't think so.

JA: Okay. So did you kind of then walk him through that process of how the mill had worked? Or where, I mean where did he learn?

RB: I don't know. He's a quick learner. And, and endless energy.

JA: Uh-huh.

RB: I think I may have done more to try to help him get the dam fixed, which is still an ongoing, I guess it's both an economic and a political process. We've had several meetings there with representatives from Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation, Tennessee Wildlife Resources, Department of Agriculture, and all of these State legislators. All of these come into play when you try to essentially rebuild a stream. And there's, there, there's some case to be made for taking out all the dams and returning the streams to their natural course, and allowing fish to migrate. There's, you know, another case to be made of preserving history. You know, are there ways that you can have both? Allowing fish migration and species diversification and retain the mill, the dam. The way its left now with the river washing around one side of the dam, it's eating into and eroding away a field, taking sediment downstream and degrading the stream. So there are people still discussing what to do about that, or can anything be done.

JA: Do you think anything can be done?

RB: I think anything can be done if you have enough time and money to do it.

JA: That's probably true. So what would it take, then, to fix that, given all the time and money that you needed. What would it require?

RB: A whole bunch of truck loads of rock and concrete and dirt. And then that would just be temporary.

JA: Uh-huh.

RB: Rivers have minds of their own, and you put up a dam, it'll find its way around it, even the big ones. Look at Center Hill Dam, and Wolf Creek. Especially this part of the country where there's such a system of carsk, underground caverns, sinkholes. The river will find its way around. It's amazing that that dam has stayed there as long as it has.

JA: Yeah. So if they could repair the dam, then would the mill, as it is now, be able to run off of the original equipment that's in there?

RB: Yes, yes. The turbine, the turbine is still intact.

JA: Uh-huh.

RB: And there would have to be, the mill gates would have to be rebuilt again. And that's what Tomm would really like to do. Tomm Brady really would like to have it again powered by water, rather than the electric motors that he's put in there to run the little stones.

JA: So the way things stand now, with the efforts to get the dam rebuilt, does it look like something that's likely to happen? Or likely to happen in the near future?

RB: It doesn't look like there's something that's going to happen in the near future. It's not going to be economically viable to do it on a business standpoint, to put two million dollars into rebuilding a stream bank, and rebuilding gates and then expect to recover that revenue from either sales of produce or tourism dollars. It might be economically viable from a state or county viewpoint to rebuild it for tourism dollars that would come years later. And I don't know, you can't put a dollar value on history.

JA: Right. So do you think that's about what it would take, is two million dollars to, to fix it, or was that just a number that you?

RB: That's just a number that I just pulled out of an orifice.

JA: Uh-huh. That would be really, really neat if they could get the dam and the raceway set up so that the mill could.

RB: I'm sure it would tickle Tomm Brady's heart, and, and make the, the members of PARQ happy to see everything running like it did in the early 1900s. Complete with a hydroelectric plant.

JA: And a jug under the stairwell.

RB: And a jug under the (JA laughs), except we could have legal moonshine under the stairwell now.

JA: There's not, there's not as much of a story to that.

RB: Well there's a pretty good story behind that too.

JA: Well, but once it's legal. But that, yeah, I think that is one of the most interesting aspects of the mill's history, is the moonshine. So if you have any more stories about moonshine and the mill, I'd love to hear them.

RB: Well everybody liked the moonshine. Even the folks from up on Short Mountain that had their marijuana patches. They liked the moonshine too. And sometimes they would come down with their crops and, and want to trade their crops for moonshine.

JA: Man, that's such an interesting place, that mill.

RB: Well it's an interesting part of the country.

JA: Please expound on that.

RB: Short Mountain's a unique place, both the community around it, and the counties that surround it. There are three watersheds that flow out of Short Mountain, the Stones River Watershed on one side, the Collins River, which eventually joins the Caney and the major part of the Caney all flow from the top of Short Mountain. Short Mountain's a geological outlier of the Cumberland Plateau. It has the same rock strata and those three watersheds that flow from it have washed the land surrounding it away, just leaving the mountain. It's a rugged area, so for years the land was cheap. And that's what brought a lot of people in. You know, hippies of the day, going back to the land, carving out their little homesteads. People starting intentional communities, small communes. The Sanctuary is one that's still working there. It began with a few people who were able to pool their money and get a piece of land, and it eventually evolved into a gay community that still exists there.

JA: That's really interesting. Yeah, if you want to talk more about that area, I don't have any working knowledge of that, of just that area in general, so I'd love to hear anything that you have to say about that.

RB: Well, it's still, I guess, one of the closest, really rural areas to Murfreesboro, Rutherford County. I almost feel myself pushed that way. In other words, I first came from rural West Tennessee to Nashville to go to college, and then found my way, myself moving more toward Murfreesboro and, and then more toward Readyville. And, and now as Rutherford County moves its way on out, I find myself moving with it, trying to stay ahead of the urbanization. There's still small pockets of Cannon County where you don't see your neighbor.

JA: So do you live in a more rural area?

RB: I live, currently, five miles east of Murfreesboro, east of MTSU, toward Readyville.

JA: Okay.

RB: That area. And, and I have lots of friends that have property out there. For the last two years, I was the President of Stones River Watershed Association, and have been on the board for about seven years. And our current President lives in Cannon County and is now President of the Chamber of Commerce there. He's done a lot of work toward bringing in more entrepreneurs into the area. Billy Kaufman, that's started the Short Mountain Distillery –

JA: Which is the legal moonshine operation.

RB: Which is the legal moonshine place.

JA: Okay.

RB: Neal has worked with Billy in helping him find land.

JA: If you want to talk about the Stones River Watershed—

RB: Stones River Watershed Association?

JA: Yeah, please, I'd love to hear about that.

RB: That started about ten years ago as the Blackfox Wetlands Association, when a developer was building a subdivision and starting to encroach upon a historical spring. In that area monies were collected and that property was purchased and preserved. And after that was done it was, "Okay, now what do we do with ourselves? Let's



preserve a greater area. Let's preserve the whole watershed." So the Stones River Watershed Association was formed. And the mission of the Stones River Watershed Association is to protect, preserve, enhance, and restore the natural resources within the Stones River Watershed. We provide water testing equipment to schools. We provide training for the teachers for outdoor classrooms, to bring the kids out to the streams to identify wildlife, macroinvertebrates, do testing for coliform bacteria, pH, that sort of thing. We try to encourage the community to accept ownership of the river, to become more familiar with the river, so we do canoeing, kayaking events. We have an event next weekend that will be the Third Annual Stones River Relay, which is a four mile run from the top of Short Mountain, to Short Mountain Elementary School, a nine and a half mile bike ride from Short Mountain Elementary School to the Arts Center of Cannon County, then an eight and a half mile paddle on the East Fork of the Stones River from the Arts Center to Readyville Mill. And last year we started what we call First Saturday Paddles. So the first Saturday of every month we'll take another section of river, beginning where we just left off the previous month. So the first Saturday in April would have been the Stones River Relay, bringing us from the top of the mountain to Readyville Mill. The first Saturday in May, we'll start at Readyville Mill, and go to Brown's Mill. The first Saturday in June we'll go from Brown's Mill to Walter Hill. The first Saturday in July we'll go from Walter Hill to Mona. August from Mona to Jefferson Springs. September from Jefferson Springs to Long Hunter State Park. October from Long Hunter State Park to Percy Priest Dam. And in November the final leg is going from Percy Priest Dam to the Cumberland. So throughout the season, the paddling season, we will have gone from the top of Short Mountain, at the cusp of the watershed, to its mouth where it empties into the Cumberland. And that's almost exactly one hundred miles.

JA: Wow! That's really interesting. That sounds like a lot of fun. And it sounds like such a great way to get to know the area, and the river. That's really, really neat.

RB: And, and it helps people to connect with the river, that it's not, it doesn't belong to Cannon County, nor to Rutherford County, nor to Davidson County, nor to Murfreesboro or Woodbury. That it's water that passes through all of these, and all of us owe it to the river to keep it clean and viable.

JA: So how did you become interested in this?

RB: I guess I first became interested in it when I was working at the mill, and my daughter that was three at the time, that loves to be in the water, I have done canoeing and kayaking before that time as well. And we would like to go swimming in the millpond. And, you know, there's glass. People go out there and leave their cola bottles

and beer bottles, and I didn't like that. I wanted to keep that away from it and keep the river clean. So I've always had that interest.

JA: Was the millpond a big recreation area when you were there?

RB: Oh yeah, folks would come out and fish and swim and picnic and drink.

JA: So that was just another, I guess, community gathering spot.

RB: Yeah, and that went back from the time that the dam was first built.

JA: That's nice. Tennessee, I mean, it's landlocked, so it's nice that there are these places that have been created, you know, either naturally or manmade that you can go and enjoy the water. What other things, I guess, has the Stones River Watershed Association done?

RB: Well, a lot of the times when we paddle, and sometimes it's intentional that we paddled a stretch of river just for the purpose of cleaning it up. We'll carry trash bags and fill them up, and drag tires out of the water. And, and some of the things that we do is trying to preserve stream banks. We've done that at the mill as well, where the river comes up close to the mill's foundations. There's areas of stream bank that, where there's not sufficient vegetation or trees to hold the bank in place. We'll plant trees.

JA: Have you, through the Stones River Watershed Association, do they work with other organizations like PARQ that are in the area, or largely on their own?

RB: We could fill up a t-shirt with different groups. We, we work with the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation. We work with Tennessee Wildlife Resources. We work with the City of Murfreesboro Storm Water Department, our neighboring watersheds, Harpeth River Watershed Association, the Cumberland River Compact, City of Smyrna Water Department, school systems, Children's Discovery Center, MTSU, all kinds of groups.

JA: It really strikes me in just thinking about this area, it really strikes me just the sense of community activism to preserve resources like the river, and with the mill through PARQ. It's really, it's really nice to see those things happening. And, you know, I think that can really be an example for other communities who might be interested in preserving different aspects of their history or their natural resources. And it's not something that you would know about unless you came here and had a reason to ask questions about it. So I really am enjoying hearing about that. So.

RB: There are organizations like this all over the country.

JA: Yeah.

RB: When we set about to promote river activities, getting people out on the water, some of my inspiration came from Pete Seeger, who upon seeing the damage that was done to the Hudson River, built a boat, I forget the name of the boat, "Clearwater," I think that's the name of it. And it was a sailing sloop. And he built that with the intent of getting people on the boat and sailing them up and down the river so that they would see the condition that the river was in and would thus be motivated to do something about it. And so that's the same thing that we've done here. And it's the same thing that people are doing on the Harpeth River, and on the French Broad in East Tennessee, and the Hatchie River in West Tennessee. Last year I went to River Rally in Charleston, South Carolina, where groups from all over the nation came. And I met a fellow there named Wansoo Im. His last name is Im, I-M. He's Korean, and now we're working with him. He has a program called IMRivers. And he does public participatory, what he calls public participatory GIS. And the way he's going to help us with that program here is you can take the, the IMRivers program, which is a computer program, with apps for iPhones and Androids. And if you're on the river and you see pollution, you see water pollution flowing into the river or something being dumped there, you can take a picture of that with this application, and it will immediately go to our website with the location, and the date, and the time, and a picture. And you can select who needs to be notified to get it fixed. This is something that's not in place now, but it is in place in other communities. And it's coming into, into place here. So there's people all over the country doing this sort of thing.

JA: Wow. That's neat. That's, that's really great. What do you think are the biggest needs right now with regards to preserving the watershed? Is it mostly just kind of human activity, you know, with leaving your picnic stuff out? What are the biggest needs?

RB: Awareness, yeah, education, public awareness that what they do, what I do in my backyard, wherever my backyard is, that there's something downstream from that. And that what I do effects other people, and what people do upstream from me effects me. And, and the notion of taking sides, that we have to choose between clean water and jobs, that when we do something to preserve an endangered species and the river, that we're not making human sacrifice to do that, in terms of loss of money, loss of jobs. That eventually whatever makes the river more healthy is going to make the community more healthy, both physically and economically. The quality of life that

clean water brings to a community brings people to the community, brings wealth to the community.

JA: So you serve on the board of this organization?

RB: I was President for the last two years, and I'm currently returning as a board member. My primary work that I enjoy doing is river activities, the canoeing and kayaking. The Watershed Association buying more canoes, kayaks, introducing more people to river activities.

JA: Do you know much about the Duck River in Columbia?

RB: The Duck River is the most biodiverse, there's more biodiversity in the Duck River than there is in all of Europe.

JA: Huh, wow.

RB: It's a long river. It's relatively free flowing. It has lots of access, in other words, it's easy to find a place to put a boat in and get a boat out. And there's a fairly active Duck River Watershed Association. And one of our local attorneys, Frank Fly, was instrumental in preventing TVA from putting an additional dam on the Duck.

JA: So how many dams are on the East Fork of the Stones River? Because I've been told that at one point there were many, many mills in the area. So are there a lot of existing dams?

RB: They're really more on the Middle Fork.

JA: Oh, okay.

RB: The Stones River has East, West and Middle Forks. The only existing dams on the East Fork are, beginning upstream, there's a dam in Woodbury at the water supply, Woodbury Water Treatment Plant. The next one downstream is Readyville Mill, which the river has washed around to one side. The Brown's Mill Dam has been removed. There's just rubble there. And then Walter Hill, which is owned by the City of Murfreesboro. And then on the main stem is Percy Priest Dam. On the West Fork going upstream from the lake is Nice's Mill, that's on the West Fork. There's a small cofferdam at the Murfreesboro Sewer Treatment Plant. And then there's several on the Middle Fork. Well there's a small farm dam close to Barfield Crescent Park, and then on the Middle Fork there's Farmer Lake. Also on the West Fork in Murfreesboro is Ransom

Mill Dam, and a bunch of, maybe a half a dozen others that were built for just to have water for irrigation for farms and livestock.

JA: Are a lot of them still in use?

RB: It depends on the definition of use. None of them are running mills or producing power. Many of them have been breached or part of the dam is removed and the water can go through it. I don't know that any are used for irrigation. There's several residences that have, you know, put a pipe in the water to pull water out for irrigation of their lawns. There are monies available from U.S. Fish and Wildlife to remove the dams, to bring back species diversification, to prevent the water from pooling, overheating, becoming stagnant. And, and there's several in Murfreesboro that are under consideration for removal. Not only for species diversification, but also for recreational use, the dams are hazardous in high water, when there's water coming over the dams, they have hydraulics below the dams that trap people, and people drown.

JA: So as far as the Watershed Association is concerned, would they like to see a lot of these dams removed then?

RB: For the most part, yes. The Harpeth River Watershed Association for example has been working for about three years to get a dam removed and the planning is all done, and it will happen this summer.

JA: It is interesting, you know, what happens when you put in a dam on a river, and then the river's natural attempts to get around that and then the issues of taking the dam out again. In one of my classes we watched a documentary about the Klamath River, which is, I think, in Oregon. And I think there was a Native American group that lived along the river and had used it for fishing, and it was really just a central aspect of their culture. Then with a series of dams that came in, just really destroyed that.

RB: Uh-huh, prevented the salmon run.

JA: Yes, yes, exactly. And it's something that I personally have never given a lot of thought to, so this is a really interesting conversation for me.

RB: Well you'll have to get your husband and come out and paddle with us sometime.

JA: Yeah, absolutely.

RB: We've got a trailer load of boats, all you have to do is just give me a call.

JA: Okay, yeah. I will definitely do that. He'd probably be good at it. I don't know that I would so much. I can think of a couple of times in my life where I've been, you know, canoeing or things like that. And I just, I don't have a lot of arm strength. Is it something that beginners can just kind of come out and be a part of?

RB: Well, yeah, if, it depends on the water level.

JA: Uh-huh.

RB: If you get everything just right, the right water flow that will carry you downstream without having to do a lot of paddling (JA laughs), but not so much that it will, you know, wash you into, into the rocks and the strainers, you can do fine. Or you can let your husband paddle in the front of the boat, and you can paddle in the back, or at least lead him to believe that you're back there paddling. Of course the two place boats are sometimes called divorce boats.

JA: Oh (laughs)!

RB: So you might want to have your own individual canoe or kayak.

JA: Uh-huh. I grew up near a lake and, you know, I spent a lot of time just kind of at the lake swimming. And family members had boats that they would go out in, but not really a lot of time on rivers, I guess.

RB: A lot of the Stones River, especially in the summer time, it's more like a series of lakes.

JA: Uh-huh.

RB: In the lower reaches of the Stones, there are pools and shoals. You paddle a pool and sometimes there's enough water that you can paddle over the shoals. Sometimes you have to get out and drag the boat over the shoal to the next pool.

JA: But there's no rapids or anything, right?

RB: No real rapids. (JA laughs) At some water levels there are two or three places that you might could consider a rapid.

JA: Uh-huh.

RB: There's one by the golf course here in town where kids put in their inner tubes and go about thirty feet through a few rocks, and they'll get out and go back to the top again, and do that time after time.

JA: Well we'll definitely have to do that. It sounds like a really nice time.

RB: It sounds like you've got the Duck River in your front yard or backyard.

JA: Yeah.

RB: No, you're in, or you're closer to the Elk River.

JA: No, the Duck River, I live in Columbia.

RB: Okay.

JA: I've never been on the Duck River. But I just, I just did see that there's like a, there's a rental company that you can rent boats and stuff to go out there, or canoes and kayaks. Is it, for some reason I, I'm thinking that whenever I mention the Duck River, that people kind of imply that it's a dirty river, that it's not a good place to, to go recreating, I guess. Is that a false assumption?

RB: Well it depends on your definition of dirty.

JA: Uh-huh.

RB: The number one pollutant in almost all of our streams is suspended solids, and you can read into that, "dirt." And, you know, that's part of just what happens when you have rivers and agriculture and development. Dirt gets washed into the river.

JA: Uh-huh.

RB: Dirty, dirty, in terms of, you know, industrial pollutants, poisons, not so much.

JA: Oh, okay.

RB: There is a lot of biodiversity in the Duck. There was a National Geographic article about the Duck not too long ago.

JA: Well that's good to know. Well I guess maybe if we want to bring it around back to the mill for a little bit. Have you thought of any more stories or anything about your experiences there at the mill that you would like to share?

RB: There have been a few hoedowns there.

JA: Please (laughs) explain to me what a hoedown is.

RB: Well, when Mr. Epperly asked me to run the mill, and I had to find other folks to help me with it. I knew a number of people at MTSU, you know, one immediately came up and said he wanted to be a part of this. I don't know much about the history of the parties at the mill before the time that I took over there. But apparently there were a number of people in the community that liked to gather there, bring their musical instruments, guitars, banjos. So to celebrate the mill opening back up again, word passed around and there was a large, large gathering there. I don't know if it was a three-kegger or a five-kegger. (JA laughs) But, but cars were parked along the highway all the way to the post office.

JA: Uh-huh. So this was something was planned, or people just kind of showed up?

RB: It wasn't something that was formally planned. I think, as far as I knew, some friends came to me and said, you know, "Do you mind if we bring a few folks over and have a band and let the public know about it?" And apparently these folks were good at planning (JA laughs) because it, it got real big real quick.

JA: Yeah!

RB: And that was before the internet.

JA: Uh-huh, yeah. So what happens at a hoedown?

RB: Well there's just a lot of music, and a good bit of drinking, and a lot of dancing.

JA: Uh-huh.

RB: And nobody got hurt.

JA: Well that's good. And did those happen, you said just a few times?



RB: There were a few smaller gatherings, an impromptu wedding or two.

JA: I was just going to ask about weddings. I know now they've got it set up where there's a nice little gazebo.

RB: Yeah, it's more organized now.

JA: Yeah (laughs).

RB: More structured.

JA: Yeah. So there were weddings there. Huh. Did you attend the weddings? Or did they ask permission?

RB: I attended one.

JA: Uh-huh. And where did they have the ceremony and everything?

RB: It was on the porch of the mill.

JA: Oh, okay. Why did they want to get married there? Did they have a connection to it?

RB: Just a connection to the community around MTSU, Readyville, Short Mountain.

JA: And this was while you ran the mill?

RB: That was while I ran the mill.

JA: Did they have their reception there?

RB: Mmm-hmm, yeah, they pulled out tables and tablecloths, got real fancy with it.

JA: Well that's nice. What else happened? Any other special events you can think of?

RB: Not right off hand.

JA: Okay. Any crazy experiences? It's not haunted is it?

RB: I have, I haven't seen anything.

JA: That's not come up in any of the other interviews.

RB: No. I remember one time when we were building the gates to the mill stock, there were maybe six people down in the millrace. And there was a thunder storm up around Short Mountain. And I had known from previous experience, and just from people in the community that, that when it stormed up on Short Mountain, that you had like maybe an hour before you know the water would be coming down the river. I warned them, you know, that they had maybe thirty minutes before they were going to need to get out of there. And at about thirty minutes they were still in there, and I saw the first part of the water coming down the millrace. And I said, you know, "The time to get out is now." I said, "The water's here." And it wasn't five minutes from the time the first trickle came out until it was six feet deep.

JA: Did they get out?

RB: They got out. They lost a few tools.

JA: Huh.

RB: So the water comes up fast.

JA: Yeah. Yeah, anything else just about the community in general while you were there at the mill?

RB: Pretty small community. Russell still has the store. He's got a little older. And he's got another store. The, the community has got really more isolated when John Bragg Highway was built. Now John Bragg Highway was in place at the time that I ran the mill, but it's more off the beaten path. At one time, that highway was the highway between Memphis and Bristol.

JA: And there was, there were tolls along that highway at one point, right?

RB: You're the historian.

JA: Okay (RB laughs), well that's, that's what I've been told.

RB: You've been told that there were tolls?

JA: Yes, there were tolls, which I mean –

RB: That would be a whole another interview wouldn't it?

JA: Tolls?

RB: Who ran the tolls?

JA: Oh, yeah, I know, I – but I think this was a long time back, not –

RB: That's when roads were private.

JA: Yeah, not in recent times, but I was, I was told that there was a tollgate in Readyville, and that –

RB: Maybe to cross the bridge.

JA: Yeah, people had figured out how to cut through the mill somewhere and get around.

RB: To get around the tollbooth?

JA: Yeah. And then they'd just get back on the road and get to Murfreesboro.

RB: You have done some digging, haven't you?

JA: Well, yeah, we did some research before we started the project, and then of course you just learn new things every time you talk to somebody. And it's really been an enjoyable project. Yeah, we've got time left if you can think of any other stories. Any interactions you've had with previous owners of the mill, anything, you know, more recent or current that's going on that you want to share, so any of your involvement in that.

RB: Well my most current involvement was with Tomm, and helping him to interface with all the agencies that might come into play should we be able to get the dam replaced. I think politically it's possible to do it. I think from a wildlife diversification aspect, it could be done in such a way that you could still have fish passage. Along with the fish passage comes the movement of mussel species.

JA: And you've been there for breakfast.

RB: Been there for breakfast, and, and the band.

JA: Yeah. What is it like there now with the breakfast? I've not been, so maybe you can describe what they've got going on.

RB: I can't describe the taste of sausage (both laugh).

JA: Is it good?

RB: It's great.

JA: Okay.

RB: Or, you know, the feeling of community.

JA: Uh-huh.

RB: It's not like going to a Cracker Barrel. Because there, people know each other. And when I went to breakfast there I saw several people there that I knew.

JA: I definitely plan to have breakfast there soon. I thought about when, when I was there, before we started the project, we had a tour, and I just had this idea in my mind that I wanted to buy a bag of grits, which I didn't because I didn't have any cash on me at the time. But I've never cooked grits. I don't know, I just, the idea of buying a bag of grits to take home and cook. But I've never cooked grits. I didn't grow up eating grits.

RB: Well it's, yeah, it's a local specialty.

JA: Yeah. I recently ventured into the world of grits. And I, I enjoy it. I enjoy it. But, I don't know, I just, wanted to buy a bag of grits.

RB: Just to say that you had?

JA: Yeah, uh-huh. But I didn't have any money on me at the time.

RB: So you can write home to your relatives in New York and say, "Okay, you know, I've, I've got my citizenship papers, I've got, I've got my bag of grits."

JA: I'm a real southerner now. Yeah.

RB: Well you're going to have to go get you some moonshine too.

JA: Well, of course. Especially now that I don't have to worry about getting arrested.

RB: I think the grand opening is in another weekend.

JA: Oh!

RB: They had a soft opening for friends and neighbors, and it's still, and it's currently open on weekends.

JA: What's it called?

RB: Short Mountain Distillery.

JA: Short Mountain Distillery. And whereabouts is this exactly in relation to Murfreesboro?

RB: Well, I'm not sure you can get there from Murfreesboro.

JA: Oh, okay.

RB: You can get there from Woodbury.

JA: Okay.

RB: So you go from Murfreesboro on John Bragg Highway, to Woodbury, and you can keep, keep going on the, on Highway 70, that's the easiest way is to go through Woodbury about five miles. There'll be signs that say "Short Mountain," I'm not sure it has "Short Mountain Distillery," but if you just stay on that road, it will carry you right by the distillery. It has a sign on the highway.

JA: Sounds like it would be a nice little –

RB: There's a little hill, I say a little hill. There's Short Mountain and then right next to Short Mountain is a place called Little Short Mountain, and it has about the same profile, it's just a little shorter. And it's on Little Short Mountain, is where the distillery is.

JA: Okay.

RB: And it has its own spring where they have the water for the still.

JA: So do they talk about the history of moonshine in the area?

RB: Well, three of the local, formerly illegal moonshiners are now under contract with Short Mountain Distillery, and have brought their recipes, and that's stuff for a whole another –

JA: That would be an interesting interview.

RB: History class.

JA: Yeah. Well definitely – so could I have breakfast in the morning at the mill and then go for a tour at the distillery?

RB: Yep.

JA: That settles it. That's my Saturday.

RB: Well you, you don't need to go to the distillery with an empty stomach.

JA: Right, that's – do they give samples?

RB: Yes, they do give samples. All that the law allows.

JA: Uh-huh.

RB: Oddly enough, it's about the size of a little plastic communion cup.

JA: Well I guess, yeah, I was thinking, I've been to the Jack Daniels Distillery, but they can't give samples because it's a dry county, right?

RB: Well Cannon County is a dry county too.

JA: Is it? Oh. Really, I had not heard that.

RB: For some reason they're able, and I think there's a State law that was changed. Billy Kaufman runs and owns the distillery. He was able to get legislation passed in Cannon County to allow him to build the distillery, and I think that they're allowed both at Jack Daniels Distillery and at the Short Mountain Distillery to sell it on the premises.

JA: Yeah.

RB: Small quantities.

JA: Got you. Well that's really interesting, I will definitely have to go visit there.

RB: Broaden your experiential base.

JA: Yes, yes. I will be so much more qualified to discuss moonshine with the next people that I interview. Well, yeah, if there is anything else that you can think of, that you can remember about your time at the mill. We have a little more time where, or if you think you've got nothing else right at the forefront of your brain, that's fine too. But this has been, this has been a really interesting conversation. I'm really glad that you could take the time to sit down with me today.

RB: Okay. I hope this makes the, adds a little more color to the picture.

JA: Absolutely, absolutely. If you can't think of anything else off the top of your head, I just want to make sure that before we turn to recorder off, I had you sign the release form earlier, but I just want to make sure that on tape I ask you, do I have your permission to donate this interview and the materials to the public domain?

RB: Yes, yes.

JA: Okay, and you will get copies of all of this. And one last chance, any other good stories?

RB: None that wouldn't embarrass my children and maybe great-grandchildren.

JA: Well that, that is a consideration. It's an important consideration (both laugh). We can, we can talk in terms of, you know, your "friends." (RB laughs) Alright, well, again, thank you so much. This has been really interesting.

RB: Okay, thank you.