

PRESERVE THE AREA'S RURAL QUALITIES  
(PARQ)

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW  
WITH  
KATHY AND ALF SHARP

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WOODBURY, TENNESSEE

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UNDER THE DIRECTION OF  
DR. MARTHA NORKUNAS



## THE SHARPS

Kathy and Alf Sharp have been married since 1968. They have three children together. Kathy was born in Morristown, Tennessee on February 27, 1948. Her father was in the military, so she lived in several different states before coming back to Tennessee. She attended Vanderbilt University, where she met Alf. Alf was born in Nashville, Tennessee on June 27, 1948, and lived there until he and Kathy decided to move to the country. Kathy and Alf became part of the hippie movement in the 1960s and 1970s and decided to go “back to the land.” They moved to Readyville, Tennessee and worked at the Readyville Mill shortly before settling down in Woodbury, Tennessee in the mid-1970s. They have since left much of the hippie lifestyle behind, but certain tenets of the movement remain important to them. They still love living in a small country town. They both work from their home, a 1930s farmhouse back in a “holler”. Kathy runs a medical billing company called Keystone Professional Solutions, and Alf has his own woodworking shop where he makes furniture.

## INTERVIEW ABSTRACT

Kathy and Alf Sharp detail how they grew up in other parts of Tennessee and, for Kathy, other states, but moved to Readyville to work at the Readyville Mill in 1973. They had visited the mill several times before to visit with the owner Joe Flipse. Alf learned many things about how a mill functioned during his visits with Joe. When the new owners, Bill and Marie Carignan, offered to let Alf and Kathy work at the mill, they took the opportunity to go “back to the land” and live a simpler existence than the one they then had in Nashville. They were a part of the hippie movement of the 1960s and 1970s, as were many of the other mill workers and people who visited the mill at that time. Kathy and Alf discuss the social and political changes of the late 1960s and 1970s. They also discuss what life was like in Nashville at that time. Kathy taught at an inner city school after she graduated from Vanderbilt University in 1970 before they moved to Readyville. Equality and civil rights are values that remain important to Kathy and Alf, and this is evident in their discussion of Readyville and Woodbury’s minorities.

Once Kathy and Alf moved to Readyville, they did not stay too long at the mill due to differences that they had with the mill owners. They moved to Woodbury, Tennessee, a small town close to Readyville, and they have lived there ever since. They discuss many experiences that they had with neighbors and with being accepted as hippies by the locals, which was not difficult in most cases. They also discuss the local artisans and how Cannon County is full of people who are very creative. While farming used to be the main source of income for many people in the Woodbury and Readyville area, many now rely on their crafts for income, and Alf derives income from furniture making. Most people in the area remain self-sufficient.

Kathy and Alf discuss local characters and how these people have affected their lives or the life of the town in one way or another over the years. Moonshiners and hippie related businesses have their place in Kathy and Alf’s story. Many people owned small businesses that no longer exist, and the town of Woodbury has changed since the couple first moved there. The couple also discusses Readyville’s own Russell’s Market and Tilford’s Lumber and what those businesses were like in the 1970s. Despite the many changes over the years, the Sharp’s continue to find the people of Readyville and Woodbury quirky and charming. They love living and working in the area.

## INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

Lauren Baud: This is Lauren Baud. I'm here with Kathy and Alf Sharp in their home in Woodbury, Tennessee. It is January 11, 2012. This interview is for Preserve the Area's Rural Qualities, a non-profit organization that is interested in preserving the history of Readyville, Tennessee and the Readyville Mill. Kathy and Alf, do I have your permission to record this interview?

Kathy Sharp: Yes.

Alf Sharp: You do.

LB: All right. Thank you. All right Kathy. Well, where are you originally from?

KS: I was born in East Tennessee, in Morristown. We moved around a lot when I was kid, and I graduated from high school in Ohio and then came back to Tennessee to go to Vanderbilt. Been back in Tennessee ever since.

LB: Did you graduate from Vanderbilt?

KS: Yes.

LB: What is your degree in?

KS: English Literature. Very useful. (laughs)

LB: Yeah. Well, I have a degree in History. (both laugh)

KS: That is right. Similar. Yeah. (laughs)

LB: All right.

AS: You're using it.

LB: Yeah. Um-hmm. Where are you from, Alf?

AS: I'm from Nashville, all my life.

LB: Um-hmm. All right. And so when did you move here to the Readyville/Woodbury area?

AS: We moved here in the very late—1973. Probably December of '73. I also went to Vanderbilt. Kathy—that's where we met. We became interested in the back-to-the-land movement that was part of the hippie culture. Back then we wanted to

get to the country. An offer came from the new owners of the Readyville Mill for us to come work there. It's what caused us to actually move down here.

KS: The couple years before that, we had come to the mill as an outing. When Joe Flipse owned it, he had it restored. Really, it was perfectly restored. It had the old—it was stone ground. The mill run was running it. It was water-powered. It was really a cool place. We would come here to the mill and hang out. I don't know how many kids he had. There were kids everywhere, and they were, you know.

AS: Several different ethnicities.

KS: Well he had been in Vietnam, and he married a Vietnamese lady. They had children, but along the way they had adopted a bunch of children for some, you know, for whatever reasons. So they had all these different children running around, and we had a small child. We'd come and we'd buy flour and meal and whatever. I used it to cook. I made bread with it. It was a pretty drive, and it was a nice day out. They were very interesting people. Joe's mother was a librarian and had researched grist mills at the Library of Congress and had done huge amounts of research on what this mill should be like. They had actually restored the mill to what it originally would have been like.

Then also we would come here occasionally to go geode hunting and caving. That was what drew us to Cannon County.

AS: Joe fascinated me. He was the most brilliant, intuitive mechanic, carpenter. You could give him a crowbar, and in fifteen minutes, he'd have it running. He single-handedly resurrected the mill up out of the slump toward the creek. He—he jacked the building back up—which is an incredible feat—reattached the turbine wheel, got everything running. He made boats for his children to play on the mill pond. He could do anything. He could just do anything. He could—anything with nothing. That just fascinated me. I just loved listening to him learning, learning his mechanical techniques.

KS: I don't remember why they sold the mill. I don't remember why they decided to sell it. They sold it then to Carignans, who were looking for somebody to help them. Joe Flipse recommended Alf as somebody because he knew how fascinated Alf was with it. So that's when the Carignans hired us.

AS: Joe had even taught me how to sharpen a mill stone.

LB: How do you do that?

AS: You got a certain kind of a hammer that—it's an odd-looking—it's a hammer, but it looks sort of like an ax twisted ninety degrees. It's not as sharp as an ax. The mill stones have angular teeth ground on them. You chop right at the apex of each of the teeth with this hammer, and it breaks away the dull stone and exposes new sharp stone at the edge of each of the teeth. It's a fairly arcane talent. I was really happy to have been able to learn it.

KS: I think that that mill stone is lost.

AS: That's what I understand. (talking over Kathy) Certainly the mill stone is not working.

KS: Well I don't think they have it.

AS: Wow.

KS: Along the way, the mill stone is gone. I don't know what's happened to Joe Flipse. I know where he lived after that on Jefferson Pike.

AS: I think he's passed away.

KS: His mother had that house there. There's still a bunch of junk in the yard, so I'm assuming that the Flipses still own it. (laughs) They had a tendency for dead—

AS: Picturesque junk.

KS: Yeah. Dead cool implements. Farm implements and stuff. They would just—

AS: Well, and machine—

KS: Machinery.

AS: Machine shop machinery.

KS: They'd just leave it in the yard. (laughs) Irritating the neighbors to no end. I know where they lived, and I'm sure his mother is dead by now. Joe was only a little older than we are, so I don't know.

As I understand that, that mill stone has disappeared along the way. The mill went down very badly starting with the Carignans. They got it put on the Historic Registry thinking that that would give them all sorts of possibilities for money I think. Anyway, they were a very strange pair.

AS: Very ill-suited to run a grist mill in the country.

KS: Oh yeah. Oh yeah.

LB: What were they like?

KS: She was a German Jew and he was a flunked-out Jesuit priest. (laughs)  
That's—

AS: I don't think he was Jesuit. I think he was, what's the?

KS: Benedictine?

AS: Doesn't really matter. It starts with an "F." The—

KS: Franciscan.

AS: Franciscan monk, yes. (Kathy talks over him.) As a child, she had been in the concentration camps.

KS: Her parents died.

AS: Yes. Right.

KS: Yeah. She'd actually had a very tragic life.

AS: She did. Was marked by it permanently.

KS: Her husband and two children or three children burned up in a fire that was set by one of the other children by accident. It was very tragic.

She was very old world. She still had a very strong German accent. How on earth they ever got together, I don't know. He was at the verge of taking his final vows as a monk or whatever and left. Instead they met, they bought this mill.

Later, after they sold the mill, she opened a bakery in Woodbury [Tennessee] where the Chilangos [Mexican restaurant] is in town now. It was a cute little building there. She made really good bread.

They divorced. She moved out. I talked to her several years ago but don't have any idea what was happening. She wasn't well at the time. She was a good deal older than we were. They were very odd. They were not people that the local people fell in love with. (laughs) So—

AS: No. We didn't click. Kathy and I didn't click with them. So—

KS: Particularly her.

AS: When we moved down there in December, they gave us a trailer behind the mill to live in. We stayed there for three or four months I guess. During that time, we just couldn't see eye to eye on virtually anything about how to run the mill or how much time we were going to spend or just virtually anything. So after no more than four months, we left the mill and just moved on into Woodbury.

During the time when we'd come down to visit Joe, and during those four months I got to know a great deal about the mill.

LB: Um-hmm. So what year did you leave the mill?

AS: It'd be [19]74.

KS: Spring of '74. Late winter something like that.

LB: So before then when you were working with the Flipses, you said got to know a lot about how a mill runs and everything. So did you all produce flour and everything there too and cornmeal?

AS: Yeah. Yeah. He produced wheat flour, corn flour, buckwheats, buckwheat flour—

KS: He even did a white flour.

AS: Yeah.

KS: He did some and then sold the brand separately. Yeah, they had a wide range of milled products that they did right there. They liked to run corn, and then they would run a different grain. It was always freshly done. It was always for sale at the mill. I don't think they every marketed it anywhere else except the mill though. I don't remember.

AS: I think they did. Like the Sunshine Grocery in Nashville [Tennessee]. You know, and things like that. They had local honey and local jams and that sort of thing.

They made use of each of the kernels. You'd go all the way from cracked corn where each of the pieces was about the size of a BB all the way down to corn flour. Each of those was a refinement process that took place in another machine up on the second and third floors of the mill. There were all of these wonderful

old wooden chutes and wooden—combination of chutes and wooden augers that would move the material up and down from floor to floor depending on which machine it was going to and which lever you pulled to move it from one chute to another. I loved them particularly because they were made of great long straight pieces of deep, dark green heart poplar from trees that were probably nearly two hundred years old. From trees that had been probably cut a hundred and fifty years ago. They were just beautiful. They were simple, but they were beautifully done. They had a nice little hand-planed bead on each edge of every board that made these chutes. Whoever built that mill took a great deal of pride in their simple country craftsmanship when they first put it together. It was very nice.

LB: Do you know anything about Charles Ready, the man who first built it in 1812?

AS: No. I don't.

LB: You don't.

KS: I remember Mamie Ready.

AS: However, that—

KS: Mamie and her sister—there were two of them. They lived right down there in the big Ready—not in the fancy Ready house, but in—down there in Readyville. An old pair of sisters.

AS: The last man who ran it before the Flipses bought it, and it had been moribund for quite a while. The last man who ran it that we heard anything about was Mr. Justice.

KS: Yes.

AS: I believe that the mill that was built in 1812 was not this mill.

LB: Yeah. It burned in the Civil War, and it was rebuilt.

AS: So those—the poplar chutes that I was talking about would not, unfortunately, have come from 1812.

LB: Yeah.

AS: I mean, goodness. Every one of those boards would be worth a king's ransom today.

KS: Are they still there?

AS: Very few of them.

KS: I haven't been upstairs.

AS: Just like everything else, they've been let go.

KS: Yeah. Our daughter was in interior design school at O'More [O'More College of Design] in Franklin, and they had to do a senior project. She chose the mill. It's a fantasy project, but you have to plan the whole thing. In her plan, she turned the mill into a restaurant with the mill actually functioning but like behind Plexiglas or something so that you wouldn't get the dust everywhere.

AS: And a little inn.

KS: Yeah. One of the side buildings she was figuring would be a bed and breakfast. Her husband went and looked at the building at that time—this was before Tomm Brady bought it—and said that building was sliding so bad it would take so much money to jack it up and get it square again. So it's really remarkable that Tomm Brady has done what he's done. He rescued it from falling in. Of course the mill run doesn't work anymore. They haven't restored that yet. They don't have the mill stones. So he's just using some sort of makeshift thing—we've been by there—

LB: Yeah. I went and saw it too.

KS: Yeah. It's cute what they've done, but it's a shadow of what it was under Joe Flipse.

AS: When it was all running, there were what are called great shafts all over the building, which were very large metal shafts that hang from the ceiling with big pulleys on them. There were big long, wide leather belts that went from one pulley on the great shaft down to each machine. Then there would be a master pulley and a master belt that would go from floor to floor—to each floor's great shaft. Then up at the very final top little cupel of that building was the final great shaft. It was sitting up there distributing power back down to all these different places. The first three floors had nice solid floors. That fourth place up there just had this little spider web of boards with lots of big holes between them that you had to walk across to service those great shafts. It was way, way, way up in the air, and it was always a little bit intimidating to climb up in there and oil the great shafts or switch the belts. If you can imagine, when the mill is running, you're inside, and there are belts. You know, sometimes the distance between the pulley on the great shaft and the machine might be thirty or forty feet. So there's

this big belt—eight inches wide—that’s going flap, flap, flap, flap, flap, flap as it runs from the great shaft down to the machine. A lot of times there’ll be several running because the augers are also running off of the great shaft. So there are these big leather belts that’s stretching out in every direction—not particularly organized looking—flapping in the air in this mill as it’s running. (laughs) It was quite a sight. I think back and realize how few people ever get to see such a thing today.

KS: Yeah. You know, Brown’s Mill floated away.

AS: Yeah. There’s Falls Mill down there in—outside Winchester [Tennessee].

KS: Um-hmm. Is it run—I don’t know if—

AS: I don’t know if it’s running either.

KS: They have a restaurant there. I don’t think they run the mill. I just think they have the restaurant now.

LB: Yeah, I’ve heard that. I don’t know—

KS: It’s a very nice restaurant, you know. We’ve eaten there, but I think—

AS: Oh no, no, no. You’re thinking of the one outside Tullahoma [Tennessee]. I forget the name of it. I mean, it’s a great restaurant. No—there at Falls Mill. It’s between Winchester and Fayetteville [Tennessee].

KS: Oh okay.

AS: Down on sixty-four [Interstate 64].

KS: And I don’t know about that one.

AS: We’ve been there.

KS: Yeah. I just don’t know anything—

AS: It was a long, long time ago. It was running when we were there, but it was a much later mill. So rather than looking like a Rube Goldberg [machines that are intentionally overdone to achieve a task in the most involved way] made by local folks, it looked like a more efficient factory. It was still stone ground. Or maybe it wasn’t. No, as a matter of fact, I don’t think—the Falls Mill was metal ground right from the start.

KS: Well there was some flour mill in Manchester [Tennessee], but it was metal all from the beginning.

AS: Right, right.

KS: Yeah. So this was an oddity, I mean, in the mid-[19]70's when we first—you know, early to mid-70's when we first started going. It was quite a sight, and it was right at the peak of all of that interest in natural foods. The Sunshine Grocery in Nashville had opened up as a natural food store.

AS: That was a new thing.

KS: It was very new. (laughs)

AS: The whole Mother Earth new—

KS: And Organic Gardening magazine—all of that was brand new. So they were right on the cutting edge of that. So a lot of people were interested in it because they were interested in more natural things and the calmer way of life. It was also right on the end of Vietnam War, and people were just worn out with that sort of thing. So they were looking for that idyllic spot, you know. The mill was beautifully kept. It was busy all the time. It was a fun place to go.

After we didn't work for the Carignans, I don't think I went back to the mill for a long time. I did go when she—she made good bread. Then the next people that bought it from the Carignans—

LB: Epperly?

KS: Yeah.

AS: Yeah.

KS: Yeah. Just let it go down, and were asking an outrageous amount of money for it. It was totally not worth it because of how much you were going to have to put into it. It had gone downhill pretty badly with the Carignans because they really did not know what they were doing. Really and truly, I think the wake-up call in a lot of ways was when the Brown's Mill floated away because the Readyville Mill wasn't far behind. It was this group, the PARQ group that really spurred an interest in it because they could envision it being completely gone. Epperly did not have any desire to sell it to them. Then he died, heirs got it, there was still some bargaining, and I don't how Mr. Brady finally convinced them to get it, but he's done a good job restoring the property. It would be really cool if

he could actually restore the mill because the mill run isn't working, and it would take a lot of effort and I think a lot of money to—

AS: I think the shaft, the main shaft that goes from the turbine to the mill stone, is bent now too.

KS: Oh, oh.

AS: Not that it couldn't be repaired, but, I mean, that would be a big deal.

KS: Major project, yeah.

AS: If the mill stone's not there, it's not that you can't obtain mill stones today, but they're not common.

KS: Nope. Nope. So—

LB: Well you said that you were interested in the back-to-the-land movement, and what originally got you interested in that in the [19]70s?

AS: Well, Kathy really liked gardening, and I became interested—

KS: I didn't garden until after we moved here. I never gardened in Nashville.

AS: You sure? (Kathy laughs) Well, didn't we have a garden on Brighton [Brighton Road in Nashville, Tennessee]?

KS: No.

AS: Okay. (all laugh) Well, I was probably the one that was the most infatuated with the whole idea. I had gotten interested in the Whole Earth catalog, which was a phenomenon in itself. It was primarily books—the catalog featured books, but it was a whole essay in itself about self-sufficient living and rediscovering old methods. Along with that was the fascination with Buckminster Fuller and his geodesic domes and the possibility of making low cost, low impact housing out of geodesic domes, you know, with rogue hippie carpenters. So I got involved in that. Again, a whole big part of that was this idea of—what does it say in “Woodstock,” in the song “Woodstock” that Joni Mitchell wrote, we've—or no, Stephen Stills—either one of the two—said, “We've got to get back to the land and set our souls free.”

KS: That's—that's—

AS: That's one of the lines of the song “Woodstock.”

KS: That's—I thought that was not Stills but the other—yeah, Neil Young.

AS: May have been. (Kathy laughs) Anyway, it was the song “Woodstock.” It's what a whole lot of countercultural people were doing at the time.

KS: You realize it was on the tail of the protest movement against the war. There's always these swings in society. What it was was that there was a rejection of the military industrial—

AS: Middle class, suburban, bourgeoisie—

KS: Yeah. Just, you know, that the *Babbitt* [*Babbitt, Run*], John Updike novels. That kind of mindless, walking forward lifestyle that a lot of young people were rejecting because they thought, “There has to be something more, something better, something richer,” in a sense. Interestingly though, that movement was not very successful. A good many of us are still back in the country for various reasons, but almost all of those that were involved in the movement were middle and upper middle class people with education. It was hard to live like that. It's hard to live that poor. So most of them—just all of us went back to real jobs, went back to some way to, you know. I mean, people still kept gardens maybe, or they kept of piece of that, but it's just that was not an easy lifestyle.

AS: I still work in a one-man shop in a little holler [hollow] in a small town, but, yeah.

KS: We had a vegetable garden for years here until I just couldn't keep up with it anymore. We have a number of friends in this area in a similar way. This place is very good for cottage industries, which is basically what we are, both of us. That's about all you can do here because there's really no other jobs, so you have to be able to support yourself or be willing to drive fifty miles or more to get to work. So the people who lasted here, they still have gardens. They still have an interest in more natural, you know, eating natural foods. We have a very good food cooperative here where we can get really good natural foods, and we have access to a lot of the valuable stuff that came out. Everybody, mostly they had to find some way—they started selling their pottery and they did really well at it. Or like Alf builds furniture. Lot of other—

AS: Jewelry, yeah.

KS: The cool thing is that Cannon County's always had a craft ethic, and we have the oak baskets and the greenwood chairs that were being made here. Those baskets are stunning, and they were getting virtually nothing for them. When a lot of the back-to-the-landers, hippies, moved in, this county was very interesting

because the move-ins and the old craftspeople got along. It elevated the prices that the older people got, and more recognition came their way as a result of this community becoming so cottage industry, craft-oriented. And—

AS: That's the main reason that we have the Arts Center—

KS: Yes.

AS: Out there on the highway, which is an incredible thing for a town ten times Woodbury's size to have.

KS: Yep. That was a lot Richard Northcutt coming back from UT [University of Tennessee]. He'd done theater at—

AS: Well, it was, but it was also Arlyn Ende. She—

KS: Yep.

AS: She was a weaver, and—

KS: And her husband—

AS: And her husband was an artist in various mediums—steel and concrete and same way. They were back-to-the-landers as well. And—

KS: They were so old they'd been beatniks.

AS: Yeah. That's right.

KS: (laughs) They were a generation older than we are. They'd always been counterculture. Yeah, they had been real involved with it too.

It's been an interesting thing because a lot of communities that didn't blend as well as this one did. A lot of it I think was because the people that moved in were really trying to get what a lot of these local people already had, which was a self-sufficiency and a sustainability that was valuable. It was going. I mean, everybody's moving to Michigan or driving to Nashville or whatever for work. Small farms are almost impossible to keep anymore.

The crafts group, after that, they—the Smithsonian took several of the—they have a big crafts fair on the July the Fourth—and they took various Cannon County—these older ladies that were doing the baskets, and they went to Washington, D.C. One of them had never left the county. She had never been out of Cannon County in her whole life.

LB: Wow.

KS: She went and demonstrated in Washington, D.C. So it brought a whole lot of focus on some of these local crafts that are now still being taught and still being practiced here. So those baskets might have gone by the wayside—they're so hard to make—if that interest hadn't happened.

So that was part of what was going on. We were amongst the early ones to move in. There were a few—but around 1970, '72 people started moving in here. Land was cheap.

AS: Dirt cheap.

KS: Real cheap.

AS: Lots of old, abandoned farm houses that people could just rent just for fixing them up. Actually they were the kind of houses that most people at the time wouldn't have wanted to live in anyway. It was a lot like camping out, and for us middle class kids from the suburbs, it was like camping out for a year or two before like Kathy said, it really got to be hard work to just keep doing the same thing.

KS: Staying warm in the winter. One of the funniest stories is every—because people would buy a house like this one, right? When we bought this house, it was all wallpapered. This house is a little sturdier than some of them. One of the first things people would do is they'd come in and they'd peel all of that old wallpaper off the wall because it was ugly and find out the reason it was there is that's all that was keeping the wind out of the house. (laughs) Then all of a sudden, you're like, "Oh my goodness. What are we going to do?" Partition little spaces, just enough to keep warm. I'm sure a lot of the old folks around here got a big laugh out of some of that.

AS: It was fun. It was great. It's still great. I love having done it, and I love being here now. We wouldn't be here if we hadn't been invited to come work at the mill. I'm still just thrilled that, you know, the course that our life has taken.

KS: We bought this house in—

AS: [19]76.

KS: Was Emily born in [19]77?

AS: I know we bought this house in [19]76.

KS: Okay. In August of [19]76 we moved in here, and it wasn't as bad as a lot of them were. It was hard to keep it warm. (laughs) You'll find that almost everybody at the same time bought these older places, and they're very different than what they started out, as you were able to do that. The ones that lasted—others moved on, you know—

AS: At the peak, I would say, if you took into account Smith County and Dekalb County and Cannon County, there were maybe six hundred people who have moved in in this way, as back-to-the-landers. To one extent or another, most of them would identify themselves as hippies. There were an interesting few that really didn't have any real identification with the hippie movement as such. They just had a lot of identification with the back-to-the-land movement. You remember the old couple from New York?

KS: Um-hmm.

AS: They had a dairy farm.

KS: Wayva.

AS: Nelson and Wayva. Oh they were like our grandparents, you know.

KS: Yeah. They were.

AS: Whenever we'd have a get-together, they'd be there. We'd have a co-op meeting and distribute food, and they'd be there. It was a lot of fun.

LB: Did you identify yourselves as hippies?

AS: Oh yes.

LB: Yeah.

AS: We certainly did.

LB: You said you already had a child at that time too when you worked at the mill? And you worked at the mill as well, right?

KS: Well, sort of. Yeah. (laughs) Marie Carignan had this very European view. I think she thought she was hiring a servant. That's part of the reason it didn't work out. So anyway, no. I would do sales and stuff at the mill, but I didn't do any of the physical stuff like he was talking about. I didn't get to do any of the

climbing. I wouldn't have climbed up into the top there anyway, but—don't like heights. But, you know, we did—

AS: Honestly, they ended up running the mill very little because—

KS: Yeah.

AS: Because what's his name—what was his name?

KS: Bill.

AS: Bill. Bill was intimidated by the thing. It's intimidating to someone who is not really fascinated by machinery and doesn't have a slightly crazy bent to them, you know. After a few weeks—(coughs)—he ran it very little. He ran very, very little of the machinery. They ended up buying their product from somebody else.

KS: Um-hmm. Oh yeah.

AS: And repackaging it in Readyville Mill bags.

KS: I don't remember that. I hadn't remembered that. Yeah.

AS: Between being willing to walk around these flapping belts and sort of jump under one and over another one to get here or—

KS: That was not his style.

AS: No. You know, checking on all the bearings for grease and being willing to crawl out here or under here, it just—the whole thing intimidated him, really.

KS: People didn't much like dealing with her. So when she would be in making sales and stuff, they—that was one of the reasons I didn't work there—because when we would all be there, people would automatically talk to me. It would make her very angry because she owned it, and they always preferred to talk to me. She just had, I mean, because we said, she had a tragic life, but she just had this very Germanic view. It just didn't sit well with people who came to the mill not just to buy something—they came to see it, you know.

AS: It was an experience. Yeah.

KS: Yes. So it didn't last long under them. Then it just kept going down. So it's really nice to see what's happened since then. It would be really cool if they could actually restore it, but I just don't know how much money that would take.

AS: A combination of money and ingenuity. The kind of ingenuity that Joe Flipse had. He was really one in a million.

KS: Yeah.

AS: He's probably one in ten million as far as his range of skills and his energy and range of skills and willing to just figure out a way. How one man could lift a whole building up out of the river and back up onto the hillside—(laughs).

KS: Yeah. It was a rare combination, and he liked the community. After they left there, like I said, they just moved into Rutherford County, not that far from here really. I think maybe his mother already lived there. They fit in with the community. Even with all those motley children. (laughs)

AS: I think the motley children contributed a great deal. Like Kathy said, they had several of their own. They had adopted at least one Vietnamese child. They had adopted an African American child, and they were always running around—

KS: Yeah. They never stood still long enough to actually have any idea how many there were, you know. (laughs) I never did have any idea how many children they actually had there. Because they could have had others visiting, and, you know.

AS: You wouldn't call Joe a hippie by any means, but he was definitely countercultural. His vision of life—he marched to a different drummer. He was perfectly simpatico with all of the hippie-dippy Aquarians who were fond of his place.

KS: Yeah. His mother was an interesting person. She was fascinating—very bright woman. His father was around then too, and he was also engineering-minded.

AS: He was. He was an aviation engineer.

KS: That's right. That's right. They were interesting people.

AS: Joe had been a machinist mate in the Navy. So he really did know machinery.

KS: I knew he had been in the military, but I didn't know that's what he did.

LB: So did he serve in Vietnam?

KS: Yes.

AS: Yes.

LB: Um-hmm. Is that how he met his wife?

KS: It must have been, yeah.

LB: Yeah.

AS: He was very early in Vietnam, too.

LB: Do you know his wife's name?

KS: Don't remember it.

AS: It's right out there. It's right in there.

KS: I don't remember it at all. It's too long ago, and she was very in the background. She didn't—

AS: She was pleasant.

KS: She was very pleasant, oh yeah. Oh yeah, but—

AS: She was not squelched.

KS: No.

AS: She was just quiet.

KS: She was kind of shy, and it was a strange culture for her. All these people there around, you know. She was always very pleasant to be around. I don't know how good her English was either. She might have been a little intimidated by crowds of people in a foreign—what to be a second language. She worked there. She was always hanging around there. So she was definitely part of it. She just wasn't in the mix as much. Joe basically just sat on the porch and waited for everybody to come to him. (laughs)

(cell phone rings) Oh, that's my phone. I got a new phone, and it makes these funny new noises.

LB: Did you ever serve in Vietnam?

AS: No.

LB: No?

AS: No, I didn't.

LB: Were you anti-war?

AS: Yes. Pretty strongly. Hindsight is sort of a little corrupted, but I suspect that I would have gone to Canada if I'd been called on. I don't suspect that I would have been able to go.

KS: Well, you did everything in your power. He never got called. He never got called in from the draft. His number—first he had a child, then—

AS: Stayed in college, had a child, got married—

KS: Then when they started the numbers—the lottery numbers—your number wasn't close enough.

AS: Right.

KS: You never got—that number came up. So it never was an issue.

AS: I had to go down and register and do a whole physical, that sort of stuff.

KS: I'm not sure that he would have gone to Canada. I think that that would have been a real hard—given his family, I'm not sure that they would have—that that would have been something. I mean, I think your father would have killed you before he'd let you do that. His father was ex-Navy and had been in World War II. I just don't think that would have been—although it might have been tempting. That was a pretty serious decision that—I just heard an interview with Jesse Winchester over that—the singer. He went to Canada, and it was interesting to hear him talk about what impact that had on his life. Not necessarily all positive, you know. So anyway, I don't know. Everybody we hung out with was anti-war. I mean, seriously anti-war. Mostly still are. (laughs)

AS: Yeah. That's right.

KS: Mostly still feel the same way.

AS: I saw a bumper sticker the other day. I loved it. It said, "I'm against the next war, too." (all laugh)

KS: So, yeah. That was all part of the same thing. I think it was just that people were so burned out by all of that happening at that time too. Really and truly, the late [19]60s were extremely chaotic. You realize how many people were assassinated in 1968?

AS: Yeah.

KS: It's a pivotal year. [19]68 is just an amazingly pivotal year. How it affected you, I think really did set your life course. Those of us that were around—we were at college that—

AS: A certain age. An age bracket of about four years in there.

LB: How old were you two in 1968?

KS: Twenty.

AS: Twenty.

KS: Still in college. Vanderbilt [Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee] being a very, very conservative school, it was interesting. When Martin Luther King was assassinated, all of the psychology professors put black arm bands on and, you know, but there were a lot of people at Vanderbilt who were happy he was gone. He was not viewed by a lot of White conservatives, which Vanderbilt was mostly made up of, as a positive force in the world. There were people that I heard were actually happy that he was assassinated.

AS: Yeah, yeah.

KS: I think that was also pivotal for some of us too—to encounter those dichotomy reactions.

AS: Well, I think some of it was to one extent or another, we had all been partially just compliant to that southern bigoted way of life, you know. You somewhat less, but—

KS: Because I lived up in places, yeah.

AS: Growing up in Nashville, you know, that was just part of the culture—it was part of the fabric of the culture.

KS: You didn't think about what went on outside of town.

AS: I think at any time if you had pointed out a lot of the injustices that became more apparent, I would have reacted poorly. I would have reacted against them, but at that point, you had to make a choice. You could no longer just sort of rock along and realize that really, yeah, the Black people had been getting a terribly raw deal for a hundred and fifty years. You had to either decide that you were for segregation or that you were completely against it. Young people are still idealistic about—thank heavens that, you know, most of us just recognized. That's just the one thing—I mean, that's segregation. That was one issue, you know. Then there was the Vietnamese War. Those two huge things.

KS: Well see, my experience is different than his because we moved so much. When I was in Massachusetts at a base school, it was already integrated because the military had integrated.

Then I was in Charlottesville, Virginia, and they closed our schools rather than let Black kids in when I was in the fifth grade. We went to school in the basement of somebody's home for a semester. They opened it back up, and they integrated it. That school had a terrible problem. I remember being in the fourth grade and seeing all these little Black kids outside our playground fence and looking for Black faces in school, and I couldn't find any in school. I couldn't figure out why there were no Black faces in school, and they were all standing on the outside. Then the next year the school closed. The history of that school is very interesting because they had a lot of trouble. Almost all the people there were at the University of Virginia—their kids were going to school there, and it was a fairly elitist school academically. They resisted for a long time.

Then when I got to Ohio, we were outside the military base, and the school was not very integrated because the community was not—there were very few Black people in that community. It was basically a farming community.

Then when we got to Vanderbilt, in our freshman class was the first Black basketball player in the SEC [Southeastern Conference]. Then I taught in Nashville through the segregation generation.

AS: I don't know how much you're aware of Nashville's history, but Nashville, especially for a southern town, was rather forward in accepting desegregation. I mean, there were a few hard nights of near riot early on, that sort of thing, you know. There were lunch room sit-ins. There was never any gross violence, and the city accommodated the change pretty quickly and pretty willingly. Was it Beverly Browning that they called him on the steps? Who was it?

KS: Ben West.

AS: Ben West—that's right. It was Ben West, the—

KS: He was the mayor.

AS: He was the mayor. He was standing on the steps talking about some of the things that had happened, and somebody just pointed out something that had just recently happened. They said, "Mr. West, is that right or is that wrong?" He just stopped for a minute. He said, "You know, that's wrong." Pretty good for a southern town in the mid- to late-[19]60s. So that sort of helped some of us who were brought up with being bigoted. I was proud of Nashville.

KS: Now after I graduated from Vanderbilt, I taught in Nashville for a while. And it was still the bussing—

AS: In a Black school.

KS: Yeah. In an inner city Black school during the bussing time. It was a very interesting period. I started in 1970.

AS: By that time, we were pretty hardcore hippies.

KS: Or transitioning.

AS: Yeah. You had to keep a certain demeanor, but I mean, you were still—  
(laughs)

KS: Yeah. Well, I was definitely counterculture to most of the other teachers.

AS: As a result—

KS: The kids liked me. (laughs)

AS: You especially, but both of us were kind of welcomed into the Black community—

KS: Well I know I was very well protected. I was—

AS: As sympathizers, you know.

KS: The kids liked me.

AS: The whole community took care of Kathy. They loved her to death.

KS: Well, I was active in the football stuff and basketball, and I did stuff with the kids. I got the job I think because the interviewer recognized that I wouldn't have

problems being in a Black school. He knew that the only jobs he had open were going to be in a rough neighborhood. I was two weeks out of college when I got the job. Boy, I was young. (laughs) I was White, and I was naïve. (laughs) I started in the middle of the year, and the previous teacher—they had driven her to a nervous breakdown. It was a very valuable experience for me.

Alot of that that got me very involved in the whole—I mean, I'd witnessed so much of it through the course of my life already, but that also got me very much more interested in the whole civil rights—and in a larger sense, in civil rights, not just for Black people but for all people, to have, you know—really radical ideas like everybody should earn a living wage. (laughs) That sort of really counter—you know.

I used to have a little health foods store in town, and we used to have shirt factories here. It was the only industry that ever really was here, and it was largely because northern companies moved their stuff down here where there were no labor unions, and where they could get away with paying—basically paying virtually nothing. Their work tactics were abominable—their methods. The president of it used to come by and buy stuff from me, and we would argue over economics and how you should run a business. (laughs) He would, you know. I said, “How can you get away with—Oh, how can you do this? This is unconscionable that you treat these people this way.” He said, “It's business.” So all of those things were sort of a part of what we were reacting to. It was the inequities that we saw in the whole socioeconomic system. Not that we've made any dent in it. (laughs) Not that we've changed the world like we thought we might—that hasn't happened.

LB: So did you two ever take place in any sit-ins or protests or anything like that?

AS: I took part in several in Nashville.

KS: Some marchings, yeah.

LB: What was that like?

KS: Peaceful. (laughs)

AS: Yeah. We never got into the—

KS: We never had—

AS: The Chicago sort of things.

KS: No.

AS: In fact, one instance is one of the greater things I regret in my life. It was a very hurtful thing that I did. My father was a fairly prominent businessman in Nashville, and a bunch of us went down in front of his bank downtown and marched. We had signs and all that sort of stuff. A bunch of his different friends were coming out of the bank, you know, and they all knew me and would come up and ask what I was doing. They were all upset, you know. I didn't need to rub it in my father's eye that way. It was a pointlessly harmful thing to do, which I wish I had never done, but in the heat of the moment when you're—

KS: When you're idealistic, and you're convinced you're right. Yeah.

AS: When you're that young, you know.

KS: It's interesting to watch some of the idealism change too. I recently—this is rather political—was just shocked to find out that somebody that was a died-in-the-wool hippie with us all those years ago stood in line for two hours to get Sarah Palin's [2008 vice-presidential nominee for the Republican party] autograph.

AS: Who was that?

KS: Laura [unclear].

AS: Oh my—that's right.

KS: (laughs) I went (loud gasp). It's like, "You traitor!" After all that—(laughs)

AS: Not only traitor, but how could you abandon your mental faculties to that extent? Oh my goodness. (all laugh)

KS: It's like, "Oh, okay." You know, that's really funny. Her husband was one of the hardest core—

AS: Yeah. He was a real radical.

KS: A lot of them went back to much more comfortable, you know. And the—

AS: Back to the country clubs.

KS: They went back to the country clubs. It was an easier life, and they knew the rules. They knew how to, you know. They had central heat and air, and things were a lot better. The people that came here in the [19]70s and stuck it out are all a pretty interesting bunch of people. They've made their lives easier than that.

They all have incomes, but they've kept the parts of it that are valuable to them. They like the sense of community.

AS: There are some that are still quite, I mean, when you think about William Cahuenga—he lives off the grid. He lives back in a hollow. He generates his own electricity. He—

KS: The only thing he eats he kills.

AS: Yeah. He built his own log cabin. He's a fine sculptor. His little valley is beautiful. He's filled his little valley with pieces of sculpture. They live very simply. They really do. They still live successfully by most of the tenets of the strong back-to-the-land movement of forty years ago. David Zibriskie—

KS: Oh they have jobs.

AS: Oh I know they have jobs. (Kathy and Lauren laugh) It's true they have jobs, but—

KS: She and her mother own a business together.

AS: Oh I didn't know that. They still very much pursue that.

KS: I mean, yeah. They've upscaled their lives a whole lot, but Bernie and Nancy Coomes here have done similarly. They have nice lives, and they still grow vegetables. They work every day. He's a chiropractor in town. She's a massage therapist. They have a sort of counterculture sensibility still. I don't think I have much anymore. Not that I don't have certain things that—and I still have very strong feelings about fairness and equality. I've always felt that way. I think I had that before I was a hippie though. (laughs) I think that's just part of me.

It was a good community to raise kids and to have all this land around us. They had acres and acres of woods that they would run through. It's a safe community. I know there's all the stories about—and there has been some really brutal stuff that's happened in this community, but it doesn't happen—

AS: It's never random.

KS: It's not random. Only those guys that know each other. They only kill each other. (Kathy and Lauren laugh)

AS: Family. Yeah. That's right. Grudges and family and—yeah.

KS: Yeah, or drug deals gone bad amongst people that know each other. It would be just totally over the top to believe that there would ever be a drive-by shooting in Cannon County although there are plenty of guns here. It's not random that way. So you don't really worry about that. I mean, to this day a lot of people never lock their doors. There is theft, but once again, it's people who know what you have in your house. It's who you run with that, you know. Drugs have been a big issue here. Methamphetamines, and that's changed the community a lot over the—the drug culture has. That really hardcore drug stuff. If you take care of yourself and mind your own business, it's a nice place to live.

AS: Yes it is.

LB: When you first moved out here and started working at the mill and everything, did you live in a house that had electricity or—

KS: Always had electricity and a flush toilet. (laughs)

LB: Okay. That's good. Did you know people that didn't?

KS: Yes. (laughs)

AS: Oh yes. Plenty.

KS: Especially the flush toilet part. A lot of people had outhouses. They thought that was very romantic and cool, but I never did. The thing is that this community has always been on the hardscrabble farm poor side, so that wasn't much different than—everybody was living out here, you know.

AS: I made tight friends with an old-timer here who was probably born around the turn of the century, and he said he could remember when airlines were regularly flying over Woodbury. Not special planes, but regular American Airline, Pan Am [Pan American World Airways], TWA [Trans World Airlines] flying over Woodbury before Woodbury got its first radio.

KS: Rural electrification made a huge difference here because—and that's why you see houses so close to the road is so they could get services, you know. It was the [19]40s—

AS: No. No. No. It was passed in 1954. Woodbury had electricity before that.

KS: In town, but not—

AS: Because Mr. Hoover's mill—this was another mill. Mr. Hoover's mill—

KS: Generated it.

AS: Generated it.

KS: The Readyville Mill generated electricity for a while too.

AS: Yeah.

KS: Woodbury proper had electricity, but this house—this was built in the [19]30s.

AS: It was electrified in [19]57 or '58 or '59 though, so—

KS: This house did not have—when it was built—did not have a bathroom.

AS: Or a kitchen.

KS: Or a kitchen. The kitchen was added first. When we bought this house, there was a doorway. There were three rooms back here, and there was a doorway right there. They cut this hallway, and they made that into the bathroom. So that's how this house ended up with a bathroom. They put a septic tank in just for the bathroom, and they didn't hook the kitchen water to it, so it's still greywater going out. We're grandfathered in on that one too. They did things like the toilet was uphill —no—downhill from the septic tank, and they cut a floor joist to put the toilet in. (laughs) It's just like, oh my goodness, but the house was sturdy from the beginning, which is also unusual. The people that owned this place were prosperous farmers. They farmed these hills. Probably around—

AS: Three hundred acres.

KS: Two hundred to three hundred acres. There's a field up at the top that they would have—

AS: All of this. I mean, they (Kathy and Alf talking over each other).

KS: They did corn. There was an orchard right behind the house that's all died away. It was bad by the time we got here. It had been a farm before that because the Roaches had owned it before that. So you can see the county's history right here in this house pretty much with the—

AS: Just starting in the [19]30s. It was built in '38.

KS: The other house that they had over there has burned down. They went to church one night and came home and their house was gone.

LB: Wow.

KS: They built this one, and that wouldn't have had—

AS: Electricity.

KS: Or water probably.

AS: This house didn't have electricity until—because the Rural Electrification Act was 1954, but the rural counties weren't effectively all gotten out to until 1960 or '61 or [196]2, you know. So I'm guessing being only three miles from town, this would have been '57.

KS: Yeah. I think that's right.

AS: For most places, all that meant was a single light bulb hanging from a cord on the ceiling.

KS: And one outlet in the room.

AS: And a refrigerator. Most people didn't even have enough current to use a range and stove. They still had to cook over a—

KS: Wood stove.

AS: Wood stove because of the amount of electricity that those take. They just couldn't supply that much electricity to the houses for years after the REA.

LB: Yeah. So do you know the name of the people who owned this house before you?

KS: Um-hmm. His name was Ott Mingle. Otis Mingle—Oti—Ott. He just went by O-T-T. Ott Mingle. Miss Bessie, his wife, was still alive when we bought this house. She had her grandson bring her by one time—

AS: Because there was somebody between them.

KS: Oh yeah.

AS: There were actually two couples.

KS: There were two—there was the drunk couple—

AS: The old drunk couple.

KS: That were local—

AS: Locals, yeah.

KS: That painted everything turquoise. And—

AS: Turquoise and lavender. We just threw all the bottles out in the hedges.

KS: We found moonshine bottles. Every spring, you'd find more of them as they'd heave up through the ground.

AS: It's amazing how many beer cans and bottles had been—

KS: They were clearly moonshine bottles because of the, you know. Then a couple from Florida bought it because the land was so cheap. This was part of the back-to-the-land thing, and they lived here—

AS: They crashed and burned real quick.

KS: Oh they did. They bought cattle. They were going to run cattle on it. They couldn't afford to feed the cattle. All the cattle died. Up all in there, when we moved here, there was carcasses. I mean, dead, you know—the dogs would drag down bones like crazy. We bought this house from O.N. Pettigo, who was an old guy realtor.

AS: Old real estate.

KS: And horse trader. It was the first time he'd ever repossessed a house was on these people from Florida. He had I think bought it from—who were the names of those people? I remember who it was that owned it. Then he bought it from them. They were both drunks, and they just [didn't] take care of it. So he bought it, he sold it to the people from Florida, he repossessed it, and then he divvied up the farm. We got the house and fifty acres.

AS: The last family that had lived here successfully were the Mingles.

KS: Were the Mingles. When he died, she—

AS: The Mingles built this house, didn't they?

KS: Yes. Yes. The Mingles built this house. When he died, she moved into town and sold it to that drunk couple. She was quite old. She lived to be well into her nineties. Her grandson brought her out to see the house. By then, we'd changed a lot of it, so you know, there was no porch when we bought it, so all of that's been added. I was concerned that she would be upset, but she actually was very happy because somebody was living in it that took care of it, you know. It was her home. It was a solidly built home that somebody had cared enough to put rockwool insulation in the walls and put stone in the foundation, you know, which was—around here, it's nothing to see a house sitting on top of several rocks on each corner.

AS: Not much anymore.

KS: No, but back then—

AS: When we moved here, it was very common.

KS: Yes, and chickens running under the house eating the bugs that, you know, that yeah. It was very common. You'll still see it some. Mostly those houses have either fallen over or people built themselves a little brick box. That was the next thing—the next step was—

AS: That or a trailer. Just, you know.

KS: This was a house that was built by prosperous people. They hired a contractor actually to do it. Joe Davenport. Joe—His father built this house. It's only three miles out of town, so it's convenient. For a long time after we lived here, there was a guy up at the top of the hill that about once a month he'd take his mules and hook them up to the buggy and go into town. He didn't even have a car.

AS: Once a month. That's it. The rest of the time he was just right up on the—

KS: (laughs) Supply run —I mean, this was still very, really rural, really.

AS: Until the four-lane [highway] came in. You came in on the four-lane, no doubt?

LB: Yeah. (laughs)

AS: Whereas it takes twenty minutes to get to Murfreesboro now, it [was] more like forty-five before.

KS: Yeah.

AS: We went a lot less often.

KS: Yeah. We used to plan trips to Murfreesboro like it was a big deal, you know. (laughs) It would never be more than once a week. Sometimes not that often. Now sometimes we do it two times in a day. It's just pitiful. (laughs)

AS: I think I prefer the four lane.

KS: Well, all these people thought, "Well the four lane is going to be so nice," because it would bring stuff into town, but all it did was take people out. Makes it easier to go out. So they shop in Murfreesboro now.

AS: Well I know that. I'm just thinking. You know, we've got all the antique stores now. The town hasn't died in a way that the uniqueness—the hillbilly uniqueness of the town has definitely died. There were a lot of amazing backwoods characters living here when we first moved here.

KS: Oh yeah.

AS: Real unique people with real unique outlooks on life and way of living. That whole thing is gone, but the town hasn't died or even really gone—

KS: It's very different because when we moved here—when we first moved here, there were two hardware stores in town. There was a grocery store on the square and another one just off the square. We had two furniture stores. We had a small appliance knick-knack store. No, we had two grocery stores on the square. We had Lennings and the one down—

AS: Right.

KS: Duke's—what is it? Duke's Place. We had a fabric store and three dress shops, you know, clothing shops.

AS: Um-hmm. A shoe store.

KS: A shoe store and shoe repair. They did shoes—sold shoes and shoe repair.

AS: No fast food. No—

KS: Well, there was a Dairy Queen.

AS: Dairy Queen. That's right.

KS: That's the only—and the Woodbury cafeteria.

AS: Yeah.

KS: It was the only way you could eat out. Then the one hardware store went. Then the other hardware store. Then the clothing stores went and the cloth shop went. One of the furniture guys died, and that left us with, you know, we still have the one furniture store, but, I mean, it's like the—

AS: Yeah. The point I'm making is that we now have more businesses than you were describing there. They're not as wide a spectrum.

KS: When we were here, the whole square was filled. It's not filled anymore.

AS: No, but none of the businesses on either 53 [Highway 53] going out or—all those buildings have been built so—

KS: Yeah. We also had two or three car dealers in Woodbury when we moved here. Three, and—

AS: That's right. There are none of those.

KS: It's different. I miss all of a lot of that—that old stuff. One of the local stores told me one time that only the move-ins shopped at her store. That all of the local people wanted to go to Nashville and pay more because they wanted to be able to say they had gone shopping Nashville. I said it's funny because everybody in Nashville wanted to shop in Atlanta. Everybody in Atlanta wants to shop in New York, and everybody in New York wants to shop in Paris. Everybody in Paris packs suitcases and goes to Walmart. (laughs) It's true.

AS: Yeah. Whenever they come over they bring empty suitcases.

KS: And go to Walmart.

AS: They'll buy them at Walmart.

KS: That's right. We have British friends who do that. They just come over, and they go back with—

AS: Everyday they go to Walmart. Every day.

KS: Every day. (laughs) It's a twenty minute shot from here to Walmart. So we get up and Anne would be gone and come back and have gone to Walmart already. (laughs)

So that's a lot of what happened. It's like, you know, you grew up on homemade bread, and you wanted to buy store bought bread. Then people's jobs took them other places, and so they shopped on their way home, you know. The antique store draws people in. We've got a few more places to eat now so that people could come and have lunch and stuff. That's not a bad direction for the town to go. It beats having major industry polluting everything, which would then—

AS: I think it beats having sweat shops like the shirt factory.

KS: Oh, the shirt factory was terrible. It changed the life here so much.

AS: We had several shirt factories when we first moved here. There was one great big one and several smaller ones. But they all operated pretty much the same way. While they gave a certain sense of vitality to the town, the fact is that they were exploiting those people horribly. Paying them minimum wage and working out ways to never pay them more than minimum wage.

KS: It changed—

AS: Whereas it seemed like people were working in town—and they were—now people go out to the big factories around.

KS: They're doing better on those jobs. Those are decent jobs. It was mostly women who worked at these shirt factories, and then that changed the whole home scene. It made it possible for those farmers to keep farming to a certain extent. The small family farm is pretty well done in. People grow—

AS: Ball corn.

KS: Ball corn. Some soybeans, you know. We have a really, really good vibrant organic movement here that the farmer's market and people—you can buy really good local produce in this area now. Rutherford County too really. The farmer's market thing is fantastic. The local extension agents—the USDA [United States Department of Agriculture] people have fostered that. That's been a real positive too. Made it possible for some of these guys to have been farming forever. They actually can sell stuff. I don't know how much money they make. People are doing truck farms now. So sort of back to the back-to-the-land.

LB: So did your children remember like your back-to-the-land living or where they—

KS: The oldest one does. Yeah.

AS: And Emily to a small—no?

KS: No. I don't think so.

LB: How many children do you have?

KS: They do remember gardening. We have three. They're very wide ages. They're thirteen years from number one to number three. So—we still gardened. Emily remembers gardening when she was a kid. Growing vegetables and stuff.

AS: Yeah. It's true. We had abandoned a lot of—almost all of the overtly hippie parts of our—

KS: By the time Emily was born.

AS: Yeah.

KS: See Taylor's eight years older than Emily. So he was four when we moved here. Yep. He was four when we moved here, so he remembers those earlier times. Not fondly I don't think though. He went to school here for a while too.

AS: We pulled him out when he was starting—the schools here still are not good. They're terrible really, and he started regressing. So we pulled him out and started teaching him at home. Then by the time our daughter was ready to go school, she was reading on a fourth grade level, so what are you going to do with somebody like that? Put them back and have them spend on all day on “the”? (laughs) So we homeschooled all of our children.

KS: That was very common here too though. That was very common. They were all the old back-to-the-lander hippies that weren't really hippies anymore, but they still had that kind of sense of independence. That “We can do this ourselves, you know. We don't have to have—”

AS: Then have you noticed that a couple of the presidential candidates are—and a lot of politicians are now proudly pointing out that they were homeschooled.

KS: No. (laughs) For years the kid who won the national spelling bee every year was a homeschooler.

AS: The science fairs too.

KS: That's interesting. I hadn't paid any attention to that. It's actually much more widespread now. When we started it, it was pretty, really radically new. Now it's, I mean, they have whole groups of homeschoolers that get together and

have—well Patterson Park down here has homeschool P.E. [Physical Education]. You can sign your kids up for homeschool P.E. down there.

AS: Is that your phone?

KS: That's my phone. It's telling me I have a notification. A message or something. So anyway, that's how far it's come. Very different.

AS: Oh I know. Scott Thompson's boys are in a sports league that's all homeschool—

KS: All homeschoolers.

AS: All homeschooler sports league.

KS: They travel, and they play each other. (Alf laughs) Yeah. That had changed a lot. It's very different. Much more mainstream now.

LB: You were telling me a little bit ago how you would find moonshine bottles around here. Was moonshine ever made at Readyville Mill?

KS: I'm sure they ground corn for moonshine. (laughs)

AS: Don't you remember? There was a guy who bought corn from us who just said that he was going to. He bought like six hundred pounds a week.

KS: Yep.

AS: He just basically told us that he was going to make—

KS: Well there was an old guy years and years ago that told me one time that he used to grow corn. I got the implication of that of what he used the corn for, but there's a lot more money in marijuana.

AS: That's what he said. An old farmer—local—not a hippie, but a local--

KS: Yeah. That's what he said. An old guy. Because if you're willing to make illegal whiskey, then you're willing to grow illegal marijuana, you know. Most of the guys around here were, "You can't tell us what to do anyway." They really didn't trust government or like government, which is probably the reason they lived here because it's off the grid so much.

AS: Part of the reason that they were so amenable to having a bunch of hippies move into their environs too because they were already real independence-minded. Like Kathy said, this was a moonshine haven. There was a still—

KS: Yeah. We had a still on our property.

LB: Oh wow.

KS: They got really sophisticated with it after a while. They were—

AS: Operating with remote controls.

KS: Remote controls. It looked like it was a hog barn, but it was all moonshine. They would—

AS: They had a cave.

KS: They did caves so that when they flew over the heat wouldn't show. If you're in a cave, then the infrared wouldn't find you. A pig barn would show hot anyway, so they had all these ways of avoiding the revenuers as such. Almost all those guys that got caught when they got sophisticated were told on. Somebody turned them in. One of the ex-sheriffs of the county got arrested for hauling moonshine not that long ago. (laughs)

AS: No. It was always hand-in-hand. The sheriff—it was just—with everybody—common knowledge. The sheriff was always paid off by the moonshiners. When I first moved here—when I first set up my little shop in town, I was just right down the street from the sheriff's department. The new sheriff came into office, and the next day one of his deputies came down to my shop. He says, "You know, you're a great big old guy. Why don't you come be a deputy with us?" I said, "You know, I don't think I'd be interested in that. What does it pay?" He told me. I think it was like four hundred and thirty dollars a month or something like that. I said, "Oh my goodness. That's terrible. I make more than that in this little woodworking shop." He said, "Well that ain't all you get." (all laugh)

KS: Somebody said one time how corrupt this town was. I said, "This town is no more corrupt than Mayor Daley's [Richard Daley, the mayor of Chicago, Illinois] Chicago." It's just that you know everybody. (laughs)

AS: Everybody knows about it.

KS: Yeah. It's actually much more honest in a lot of ways because it's right out there. It makes for great stories, you know. We've got legions of stories that, you know, over the years because we've been here so long that. Then we had the—

that everybody's making fun of us—we had the sheriff that got arrested, that got convicted as a felon. Yeah.

AS: Junior.

KS: Junior. Yep. (laughs) My brother called me from East Tennessee one day and said, "In think Junior's going to prison. What do you think?" I said, "What are you talking about? How do you know?" He says, "Oh, it's on the news over here too." He said, "I think Junior's going to jail." I said, "Well, it looks that way." He got out of going to jail, but he got convicted. It turns out it wasn't against the law to be a sheriff if you're a convicted felon, but it was against the law to carry a gun if you're a convicted felon. He wasn't going to resign. He was going to stay sheriff because that's the most money he'd ever made in his life. He wasn't real bright. The way he got out of going to jail was he had to admit guilt, and he had to resign. Then he didn't have to go to jail. So they hired him at the highway department. (laughs) He was a good ole boy. Everybody liked him except the people that he did wrong. It's an entertaining place to live. (laughs)

LB: So did any of the back-to-the-landers at the mill—did they ever grow marijuana?

KS: Oh yeah.

LB: Yeah. (laughs)

AS: Oh yeah.

KS: Oh yeah. We were just talking about that the other day—about somebody—I was talking to somebody. They said—

AS: The better question would be, "Who didn't?"

KS: Yeah. (Lauren laughs) Some of them grew big amounts because—

AS: Right over the hill there was—early on there was this guy. He's been busted so many times now because he just goes right back to it every time.

KS: There's a lot of money in it. (Lauren laughs)

AS: He was growing so much that he had three trash compactors going.

KS: He was selling it in trash compactor bags.

LB: Wow.

AS: Yeah. They were compacting it into tight bales, and they—

KS: Well, several people that we knew that were early hippies with us got arrested. Then they changed the law, and they confiscated your property after that. That one couple—started with a “B”—anyway, they lost their property.

AS: Over at Gassaway? Oh yeah. Yeah.

KS: They lost their property. Some of them are still around here that they were busted that, you know, most of them didn’t go to jail. That guy over the ridge went two or three times. At least one of the time[s] they just kept [him] in town in the jail, and they made him a trustee. He and some other guys went out and did the landscaping around the public buildings. He had to go back every night, but he was out during the day. Oh my goodness, there was a lot of marijuana grown here.

AS: Yeah. Still is.

KS: Huge amounts. There was a helicopter pilot that flew over—worked for the TBI [Tennessee Bureau of Investigation] I guess. Anyway, we’d hear him sometimes fly over here. He could spot the different color of green from the air. He could tell the marijuana—because people would plant it in with corn, you know, so that they would try to mask it. He could spot it from the air. He was really good. [He] got sick and couldn’t do it anymore or something. I’m sure there’s still a lot around here. I used to worry that somebody would grow it on our property, and we’d get in trouble. I think it’s all too overgrown up there now. We’d know. There’s still no telling. Well, yeah. We just had that huge bust.

AS: I was going to say.

KS: Yeah. Jeff what’s-his-name.

AS: Jeff Young.

KS: Oh my goodness. He was huge.

AS: Yeah. He was, and he was buying it from elsewhere too. A lot of what he was selling was being grown here.

KS: Then before that, Joe Cook.

AS: Here being into Dekalb County, into Warren County, somewhat into Rutherford County and Coffee [County] too. It’s just—

KS: Joe Cook before that was—he got busted. He had a seven state marijuana ring. Huge deal.

AS: He was mostly bringing it up from Mexico.

KS: He was selling. Yeah. He was a distributor.

AS: Yeah.

KS: He had a big business. He owned property in Mexico, and he—

AS: He owned property everywhere.

KS: Yeah. He lost a lot of it here.

AS: Yeah.

KS: They ended up finally catching him. He skipped to Mexico. They did a sting operation and drew him back because he [had] property over in the Manchester [Tennessee] area. They pretended they were going to buy it, and he had to come in to sign the papers. They caught him, and he went to jail for a long time. He runs a half-way house now. (laughs) So, you know. Like I said, that old guy said there was more money in growing marijuana. It's no different to him, and it's really is no different to be—the laws are stiffer now for marijuana—but especially a while back, if you're willing to do one illegal thing, what's the difference in doing another one? Like he said, there was more money in the marijuana. He probably just grew a nice plot of it and sold it to somebody like Joe Cook and pocketed the money. It's a lot less work than making moonshine too. There's still moonshine being made here too. It's all small batch. It's—

AS: Craftsmen. They're all very proud of their product. They distinguish the taste. It used to just be a commodity for getting drunk. Now the guys that are still making it are artisans. They consider themselves artisans.

KS: Of course we're going to have legal moonshine here soon, but there's still lots of it, you know. It's all small batch, and you have to know somebody who knows somebody who knows somebody, you know, to get any. You can get it. It doesn't take much trouble. It's ten dollars a half gallon. (laughs)

AS: Some of it's pretty good.

KS: So, and nobody here minds buying it.

LB: I've never had moonshine before. (laughs)

KS: It burns the all the way down. (laughs)

LB: Yeah.

KS: You feel every inch of it all the way down until it hits the bottom of your stomach. It's not for the faint of heart.

LB: Well when you said that when you and fellow hippies moved in, the locals were really accepting of you. Did you ever have locals who didn't want you here?

KS: There were a few. It happened sometimes. Jeff and Nancy had that bad experience.

AS: They did. We had an interesting experience very, very early on. The first house we moved into when we moved into Woodbury was just right down this road. We hadn't moved there a week—maybe just two or three days. It was nighttime, and there was a knock on the door. I went to the door, and there were two local good ole boys. I won't name them for this, but they were from just right around this area, right here.

KS: We still know them.

AS: Yeah, yeah. Both of them had beers hanging, you know, [they] were hanging their fingers through the hoops of partially drunk six packs. They were pretty raw good ole boys. You could just sort of see in their eyes that they were clearly checking us out. Maybe had a little mayhem in mind, you know.

KS: They kind of admitted it later, didn't they?

AS: Yeah.

KS: One of them told you later that they were thinking about stirring up some trouble. They were three sheets to the wind.

AS: Yeah. I just invited them in. We said, "Come on. Sit down." They said, "You want a beer?" We said, "Sure," which to them was shocking.

KS: Because—

AS: Because no decent people ever admitted to drinking beer in Cannon County.

KS: Certainly not a woman.

AS: For a woman to, you know. Especially with them because they were what they used to call rogues. A rogue was a—not exactly a criminal, but the bad element. That is a local term. They were rogues. For anyone to drink a beer with a rogue, that made you a rogue too. So they said, “You want a beer?” We said, “Sure.” We actually drank a couple of beers with them, and we sat there and talked with them.

KS: We talked about how many children we had and oh yeah—it was—

AS: Just, you know, where they lived, what they liked to do and stuff like that. By the time they left, we were all patting one another on the back and smiling. They became what I wouldn’t say good friends, but very good neighbors. In fact, have ever since then, have acted as protectors of us up in this hollow from other rogues.

KS: One time—

AS: Sort of, “We’re they’re gatekeepers. You leave them alone,” you know.

KS: One time our daughter had been attacked by a dog in Davidson County. It was bad. One of these guys drove into the driveway to check on how she was. We were talking about it, and he said, “What happened to the dog?” I said, “Well, it’s in Rabies Control in Davidson County.” He said, “You want me to take—” I won’t imitate his accent because it’s rude, but he said, “You want me to take care of it?” I said, “I think we’ve got it under control.” (laughs) This violated his sense of order. His dogs were always extremely well-behaved. I used to run past his house, and his dogs always knew to stop. They didn’t ever bother me. When he’d see me, he’d call them back. So they knew. So this dog had violated what was the natural order—a person is higher up than a dog. In his mind, that dog should be shot.

AS: He was going to go into Nashville and take care of it.

KS: He was going to go in and shoot the dog for me. (laughs)

AS: Right in Rabies Control. He’s going to burst in.

KS: Well, I don’t know. If those people had taken that dog home after that and kept it, I might have taken him up on it. (laughs)

AS: Yeah. Right.

KS: We did manage to get the dog put down. I just had this whole vision of this, him driving up in a—you know. There are other stories like that over the years that, particularly that guy. He's quite an interesting guy. We prefer people not to hunt on our property, but a lot of these guys had been doing it for a long time. They've hunted this property—their families have before we ever owned it. We just never made a big deal out of it, but they started to respect our feelings about it because we were good neighbors too. It's kept peace. If you respect each other, it makes a big difference.

One of the things that people in the South in particular, but in rural communities like this especially, really resent is people moving in from outside and then telling them how it is supposed to be done. It's happened so often. "Well, you know, that's not how we did it back home." Or, "Back home it would go this way or that way." Then, you know, finally [unclear] said, "Well then move back home. You don't like it here? Move back home." Because—

AS: "If you're so smart, how come you're not doing it yourself?"

KS: That's right.

AS: "Why'd you get me to do it?"

KS: So there were bumper stickers for a while on the backs of work trucks saying, "We don't care how you did it back home." That's really the issue is the arrogance of people who move in often lording it over people. That's what did not happen with the hippies. They did not come in with this "lording it over" attitude. They came in—

AS: They wanted to know how these people were living.

KS: That's right. They came in wanting a sense of community. That was the reason it was so successful here, and then the people here were open to it.

Since then, we've had so many more move ins because land is cheap here. You can get to Murfreesboro real easily. You can buy five acres and put a pretty big house on it for half what it would cost you in Murfreesboro and stuff like that. So those people a lot of times have come in, and they expect services. They've moved in from places where you had running water. People buy land and don't know if there's water on it because it never crosses their mind that city water doesn't run right by there. People bought property down here—bought like a hundred acres down here. They were going to subdivide it. I asked the lady, I said, "What are you going to do for water?" "Oh there's plenty of water." I said, "I don't know. Where do you think you're going to get the water?" She said, "Well, there's this big spring." I said, "Well, that's not on your property is it?"

And, “No.” I said, “Well, nobody can really drill wells on this road. It’s one of the—if you don’t have a spring, you’re in trouble for water on this road.” Next week the land was up for sale. They bought this property and it never crossed their minds.

AS: To check the water.

KS: That they would have water. A lot of times they’ll come in and start making demands of the utilities, the locals, whatever. They end up having feuds with people because they set up bad feelings, and then their dogs end up dead.

AS: We had a neighbor down the road like that. Yeah. Just alienated everybody.

KS: Yep. They moved in from—well actually, their family’s from here, but—

AS: These are people that were never hippies. They just—

KS: No. They’re just arrogant. Yeah. They’re smarter than everybody here, you know, is what it came down to. Boy, they got mad on the—it was really funny because they had those little sheepy looking cows. The red ones with the long fur.

AS: You’re talking about another, but—

KS: Oh okay. The cows kept getting out and getting out. It really irritated people. Finally, all the local guys down the road—they’re real big buddies with each other that we know well too. A cow poked a hole in his radiator trying to—and that was it. That was the last straw. So I came home one day, and the police were down there looking in that because they were out. Then one time one of those guys’ dogs was up here. He came to pick it up because he knew where it was going to come. It was a nice dog. He said, “Cows are out. Call the sheriff.” (laughs) So our son came in and called the sheriff. We just got to the point where after a while—

AS: See nobody would used to ever do that.

KS: No.

AS: You would never call the sheriff on somebody’s cows out.

KS: You’d call each other.

AS: Yeah. Most likely, what you would do was—you knew whose cow it was, and you would herd them back into their pasture. Then call the people and tell them that they have a problem with—

KS: Well, we kept some guys three horses one time for days and days. They'd come up over the ridge, and they showed up here. We had a fence here.

AS: To sick the sheriff on somebody for cows being out—it shows a real animosity.

KS: Yes. We all did it every time it happened because they were out so often. I drove a little bitty car, and one of those cows would have taken me, you know, would—but. All of us—it was just sort of an unspoken pact that at a certain point, that was it. They were not good neighbors because they didn't keep their cows up and because they were so arrogant.

AS: Yeah, yeah.

KS: They don't keep anything on that property anymore. I think they still own it, but yeah. You'll still hear people talk about them. It happened the other day. I don't like them. So—

LB: Well, are you still friends with anybody that was a fellow hippie at the time?

KS: Oh yeah.

AS: Yes.

KS: Oh yeah. Lots of them.

AS: Yes. Several very good friends.

KS: Yeah.

LB: Did they work at the mill too? Like your friends? No?

KS: Mm-mmm.

AS: One guy who's dead now—a guy who was affected by Agent Orange [noxious gas used as a weapon] in Vietnam and has since died from complications of that—lived in that house in front of the mill when we first—here, that's all right [speaking to woman who wants to come into kitchen to use microwave]—when we first moved there and lived there for at least the length of time that we—

KS: That we were there. Yeah.

AS: That we were there. He and his family. Then they moved on out to a neat place out in Bradyville [Tennessee]. Well actually it was Burt [Tennessee].

KS: Well, yeah. They split up, and he moved out there.

AS: No. They were still together when they moved out there.

KS: Okay. Then they split up, and he stayed there. Yeah.

LB: So did anyone live on the mill's property?

AS: We did.

KS: We did.

LB: You did? Um-hmm.

KS: Terry did. I can't remember where they—oh the Carignans lived way out—

AS: They lived in Centertown.

KS: In Centertown. Between here and McMinnville. Yeah. There was a trailer and that old house. The trailer's been moved out long ago. Did the house finally flood out?

AS: No. I think the house is all fixed up.

KS: Oh that's right. They fixed the house all up. Somebody fixed it all up. Russell's Market was still there. That was a market when we were there and still is, and the post office.

AS: Tilford's [lumber company] was a lot more active in going concern at the time.

KS: Yeah. Lumber yard was going a lot more—

AS: Saw mill actually. It was—

KS: He has a trucking business. I don't even think that's running anymore, but that was it. That was the community.

AS: That was it for Readyville.

KS: That was Readyville. The big old Ready house was empty a lot of that time. Recently went up for auction, and I don't think it sold.

LB: Yeah. I think it didn't.

KS: It didn't make—yeah. It was like a hundred thousand dollars is what it was. But that's not reasonable for that house because you know how much money you'd have to take to fix it again? I wouldn't pay a bunch of money for that house to then have to sink hundreds of thousands in it to bring it up to snuff.

So anyway, that was Readyville, and it pretty much still is just Readyville. That's it. What it is now is pretty much what it was then.

AS: Well, Tilford's got a lot more moribund.

KS: Yeah. The mill was a lot more lively back then too.

AS: That's what I mean. The mill and the little store.

KS: Tilford's and the mill.

AS: Yeah.

KS: The little store's about the same.

AS: No. It's less.

KS: Is it?

AS: Yeah, it is.

KS: I haven't been in there in years.

AS: He made some pretense of having groceries and hardware there for many years. Now he doesn't.

KS: Oh, I don't know. I haven't been in there in a long time. So I don't know what he has in there, but he's still there.

AS: Randy is.

KS: Russell—market.

AS: Oh, oh. I'm sorry. No. I'm sorry. I was talking about Tilford's little store.

KS: Oh. Oh no.

AS: Now Russell's Market—yeah. Yeah. That's still there. Mostly sells beer and chips and—

KS: Yeah. Probably some milk. It's just gotten so easy to get anywhere else to buy stuff. Used to be those little markets were really—they had them all over the county. You could go in and have lunch. They'd make sandwiches. Some of them even cooked hot meals in the middle of the day. They're almost all gone now.

AS: Well there's still some.

KS: Not all. They're few and far between.

AS: There's one out where Robert Julie lived. They still do that.

KS: It stays closed. It stays open a month, and it's gone again. There's one out by Short Mountain. That one still seems to—

AS: Ed Parsley's market does.

KS: Yeah. Parsley's does. It's mostly because they're the first gas stop coming into town, but Parsley's is bigger really than all these others. Yeah. There used to be all these little markets that you could stop in, pick up some Twinkies, something.

LB: Was Russell's Market like the main place where people shopped in Readyville then?

KS: I don't know that anybody ever did their real shopping there because there were grocery stores in Woodbury.

AS: Yeah, but that's by the time we got here. From now you go back sixty years, which is—even just fifty or sixty years ago, stuff was still measured according to the reasonable distance you could ride a horse buggy. Not drive a car.

Uncle Dave Macon, the country music star, made his living until he got famous as an artist—made his living driving a horse-drawn cart back and forth between Woodbury and sometimes all the way to Murfreesboro but usually just down to Kittrell and back.

There were little general stores in every tiny little community. Every one of them separated by no more than six to ten miles. So there was one in Sycamore Creek. There was one in Gassaway. There may have even been one half way between those two. There was one in Rock—Hardscrabble—no Rockhouse is the—that's on [Highway] 53 isn't it? Hardscrabble is on Harbertown Road. Just lots of little tiny communities like that.

KS: Well, the other thing is is that people grew their own food and canned their own food. You had your own milk cow. You slaughtered your own hog. You grew your own vegetables. So all you needed from a grocery store was coffee and flour, and there was the mill there to get the flour. So you got the coffee at the grocery store and maybe some sugar if you could afford sugar.

AS: Sugar, and there's candy, and, you know.

KS: Yeah. There were treats that you could get, but basically—

AS: Get horseshoes.

KS: A small store like that didn't have to be a grocery store like we have because people took care of their most basic needs themselves. When people stopped growing gardens—serious gardens—then they needed to shop in—

My great-grandfather owned what they call a jobbing company in East Tennessee, and they serviced all those little stores. They had basically salesmen that went out—of course by this time it was cars by the time I knew anything about it—I don't know if it had ever been horse and buggies that owned it. Maybe, but they went to all these little country stores and sold them chewing gum, the canned goods, all that kind of stuff. They were suppliers for all these little stores. They just serviced small markets. The business went out by the time—I was an adult before it closed. My great-aunts were running it by then. It closed because of Kroger. Kroger was the first that really did have the distribution idea, and once Kroger started putting stores in all these places, and you had more stuff, then the small stores started dying. It almost happened here. It still may happen here because the Piggly Wiggly was threatened really badly by the Walmart and all those down there. They did a good job of stocking the store with stuff that even the people like me would want to find. I mean, I found capers in there one day. I was so excited, you know. (laughs) That means somebody had said, "You know, I wish you had capers." Then they bought them. They don't go bad. They carried all the basics that country people—basic things that all of us would need. They had it so interesting that you could get fresh mixed greens and stuff like that—lettuce and fancy lettuces. They did a good job of sort of keeping up so that we didn't have to go to Murfreesboro. I

could run in, and I could get what I needed. So I shopped there quite a bit over the years. It's now going to be a Save-A-Lot. We're not happy about that.

AS: You're certain of that?

KS: Yes. I'm sure about that.

AS: Oh dear.

KS: It's going to be a Save-A-Lot, but they said they're going to keep the meat and the produce—I don't know. Everything in the store was twenty-five percent off except meat and produce and milk. The register stub says "Save-A-Lot" now. They're going to redo the entire store. It's just—[unclear] withstood that for a long time because the guy wanted to put a Save-A-Lot in Woodbury. He told—a friend of ours is a real estate agent—not to sell property to this guy so he couldn't bring a Save-A-Lot in town. (laughs) Yeah. So finally he sold his own business out. The guy is turning it into a Save-A-Lot. We're going to miss that grocery store. They did a nice job. Local people. Sixty years they've been in the grocery store business. So his father and his grandfather had been—his grandfather had one of those little bitty markets that we were talking about, and they moved it into town and opened the store—a bigger store. That's how they got started.

LB: So you said you went to college too, right?

AS: I went to Vanderbilt.

LB: Yeah. What did you get your degree in?

AS: English, French, and Philosophy. (Kathy laughs)

LB: So is that how you two met?

AS: Highly useful.

KS: Yeah. We met at college.

AS: Yeah. We met in college.

KS: We were in the same class at Vanderbilt.

LB: Oh okay. What year did you get married?

KS: [19]68.

AS: No. It was '68. Yeah.

KS: We were twenty.

AS: Yeah. Okay.

KS: We both graduated in [19]70. I graduated in January, and he graduated in June of '70.

LB: So where did you learn your woodworking skills?

AS: Just sort of picked them up here and there.

KS: There was a cool old guy here that mentored him when we first moved here. His name was Henry Hoover, and he built furniture. He built other stuff. He built buildings. He built the old hospital that's now the school board down there, and he—houses—

AS: Built the library.

KS: The library. The card catalog that was in the library. Alf became friends with him. He thought that his skills were going to go away. That nobody was going to do this ever again until Alf came and started bugging him with questions and started teaching him. So he was an influence. Alf surpassed his capacity at some point, but not before his—maybe by the time Mr. Hoover—Mr. Hoover knew how good you'd gotten by the time he'd died. That was one thing that happened here. This guy was terrific. I mean, he was a curmudgeon-y old guy, you know—

AS: A lot of people in town were afraid of him. They couldn't believe that I was friends with him.

KS: (laughs) They thought for sure he would hate this hippie kid, but he saw in Alf the potential to pass on something. He'd been a teacher. He taught industrial arts at the high school, so he knew the state of the art at that point. So—but Alf's mother was the one that was good at—his father didn't know which end of a hammer to hold. His mother might knock down furniture and put it together. She hung her own curtains and all that kind of stuff. So that's—

AS: We did crafty things as kids.

KS: His family's architects. A lot of architects in his mother's side. So that's where the direction came from.

LB: When did you start making furniture? Was that after you left the mill or did you—?

AS: Yes. Actually I had started doing woodworking in Nashville before we moved down here. One of the conditions under which we moved to the mill was that they were going to let me set up a woodworking shop in one of the buildings, and work part time in the mill and part time in my woodworking shop. It became quickly apparent it was going to be a long time before that happened. It was my intention primarily even before, like I said, when we moved here, I had already decided that what I really wanted to be was a woodworker. I didn't have many skills, but I had the desire. So we moved on into town, and for several more months I worked at one of the shirt factories here. Then I got a job with a cabinet maker here in town—a small kitchen cabinet maker. I worked with him for several months—six, eight months. Then at that point, I had accumulated enough tools and found a little building where I could just open my own shop. Actually at that point, I still wasn't capable of making furniture. I was making kitchen cabinets and just basically whatever came along. I made a miserable slide for the playground.

KS: (laughs) Yeah. That slide was terrible. He made it go up at the end. Our daughter's age kids still laugh about—they'd get on that slide. They'd slide down, and at the end it went up, so it threw you into the air and dropped you down on the dirt. (laughs)

AS: Well see, that's what I had in mind—I had in mind to give them a little thrill at the end. If you had enough weight, that's what happened. If you were smaller, you just came down—you sort of hit that thing.

KS: And fell off the end. (laughs)

AS: No. You didn't fall off the end.

KS: That's what the girls said. (laughs)

AS: Oh well, but anyway, the whole time I'm reading books. I'm haunting furniture factories and just trying to do everything I can to hone my skills. There was not nearly the resources that we have today for—there were no magazines about it.

KS: It was really almost a dead business.

AS: Almost a dead craft, yeah.

KS: Yeah. At that point. Still to this day in the furniture world—the studio furniture world—Alf’s one of the old guys that—there are others that are in a similar age bracket that are also mostly self-taught because there were no schools to speak of. There are a few other guys that are in the age bracket that were self-taught, but there’s so many more—he teaches all summer long at various schools around the country because they have them now. You can go learn the basics. There are different emphasises. Some of them are people that want to do it when they retire. Some of them are people that really want to do it as a business, you know, try to get into it. There’s guilds and, you know—

AS: Lots of magazines.

KS: Yeah. Lots of magazines. We take tons of them. *Fine Woodworking* is one of them that started the whole that thing. Anyway, it’s very different now. You can really get in—even for people who have been doing it a long time—you can hone your skills because you can go to meetings and sharpen yourself against other people.

AS: That’s one of the great things about the—even as a full-time occupation—there’s always more to learn. There’s always more to learn. As if, you can keep making progress. I can do things today that I couldn’t do ten years ago. As far as skills and techniques and knowledge. There are things that I yearn to be able to do that I can’t do now. Particular fine skills and techniques.

LB: So when you worked at the mill with Joe Flipse, he kind of taught you a lot about how to work with wood with the—I guess with the mechanics and stuff—

KS: Mostly metal.

LB: Or mostly metal in the mill or?

AS: Well, no. Neither really. What Joe taught me was ingenuity. Just how to take a minimum of materials and to put them together in a strong but simple way to accomplish a job, and just not to be afraid of the process of doing it. Don’t be afraid to imagine it and then do it. If something breaks, you don’t have to necessarily go out and buy a new one. You can fix the thing that’s broken. What can you do you fix it, you know? Together, he and I, we every now and then used some simple woodworking tools or some simpler metal working tools. Mostly it was just going around the mill and tightening up this bolt or greasing this bearing. Just learning which of the levers operated which of the—and what were the idiosyncrasies of the—some levers you had to quickly push in, all the way in. Others you had to kind of ease them up to point and watch that belt just start to move and start to slip, and then you eased it on into place. (laughs) All

those quirky little things. I didn't actually learn much specific woodworking from Joe Flipse. What I learned was the value of native ingenuity.

LB: So through the things you learned with him, did you eventually get into a place where you were sort of in charge at the mill?

AS: No.

LB: No? Okay.

AS: No. They wouldn't have it. I should have been. (Lauren laughs) I should have been. If I had been, we would've stayed.

KS: The mill would've been more successful because they didn't know anything about running it—the Carignans.

AS: No. Not the Flipses.

KS: The Flipses he never actually worked for. He just went down and hung out with him. Under the Carignans, they didn't hire a manager. They hired a worker. In that regard that was one of their mistakes was if they had let somebody who had more skill in—because Bill had no skill whatsoever. I mean, he was not. Then the mill might have been able to continue running. It was always going to be such a close margin for profit that being able to pay somebody to do that was an issue as well. There's just not a lot of profit in that business.

AS: No.

KS: They were trying to live off of it. There wasn't enough for two families. So there was no question that that was just—once they were on their own, then they couldn't keep it up. So just the realities.

I have to get back to work.

LB: Okay.

KS: Do you have any more questions?

LB: Oh yeah. Just one more thing I wanted to ask about there. At the mill, did African Americans work there too? Or was it—?

AS: I never saw any.

KS: There were very few African Americans in this community. Very few. There were basically virtually no slaves. One or two over the history. This was a poor community.

AS: This has always been a hillbilly dirt farmer community.

KS: Right.

AS: There's no railroad. There's never been a landed gentry. So consequently, like Kathy said, there were never any slaves.

KS: I think that somebody had a house slave. That house that's next to Regions [bank] that Roy Frieze had—

AS: The Hancocks.

KS: The Fustons. Yeah. Hancocks. Before whoever built that house there, and I always heard that they had a house slave.

AS: Right.

KS: Other than that—

AS: I think out there—the plantation out at Hard—I mean at Rockhouse—I think they had one or two.

KS: Yeah. It was a beautiful old house. Burned down, but that's it. Somebody was asking one time, "That house over there—you suppose that was a slave house?" I said, "No. That was a poor white people house," you know.

AS: Well, actually I think probably the plantation that was around the Ready mansion probably had—

KS: May have. It's flatter there, and they may have had bigger fields. In order to have slaves, you had to have fields big enough to work them. That's not what was—this was hill farms. It was basically poor.

I mean, to this day the African American community in Cannon County is tiny.

AS: Yeah.

KS: Just tiny. So—

AS: It's well integrated. He's not presently, but for a very long time, the mayor of Woodbury was a Black man.

KS: When we moved into town itself in the mid-[19]70s, there was a Black cheerleader at the high school.

AS: Yeah. Then very shortly after that, the president of the Lion's Club was a Black man, which is sort of the same kind of tolerance that we've been talking about. The people around here are just—what they admire is strong self-sufficiency. So whatever else there is about you is not so important.

KS: There was a lot of bigotry here.

AS: Yeah, yeah. There still is.

KS: I think if the community had been larger, there might have been more strife because one old guy years ago, years and years ago, said, "You know, the good thing about the Blacks here is they know their place." So they didn't stir up trouble, but they worked. There was a Miss Annie Cox [who] was teaching. She taught forever at the West Side School and was hugely, dearly loved by everybody who was ever in her class. She taught three or four generations of kids.

AS: Yeah. That's the Readyville community there.

KS: Yeah. The Black people in this community were not mistreated by in large.

AS: You're right that there was bigotry, and consequently, there was some mistreatment. I always hated the way the—you remember Buck Wheat? Now he was not mistreated in a really malicious way—

KS: No, but he was—

AS: He was very, very much mistreated in a—

KS: He was limited. He was limited. He used to go around and sweep up shops, and I took Taylor to get his hair cut in one of the local barbershops and never went back because the barber was so—it was awful.

AS: They would make jests at his, you know.

KS: He just kept his business and swept up and then left. That guy was supposed to be—the barber was super religious, you know. Big church guy. I remember thinking, I never went back in that shop, and I'm never having any dealings with

him ever again because he offended me so badly at the way he treated this guy who was powerless to return.

AS: Right.

KS: For several reasons.

AS: The thing like kids, you know, pick on somebody your own size is what—so, I mean, certainly there was that. There remains a residual racism in the hearts of a lot of the local people. Certainly in the hearts of people who've moved in too. It's always been less of an issue here than in a lot of other places.

KS: It's a very tight community. A very small African American community is also very tight. They're all related to each other. They have their own church, and they all go. They want to go to church there.

AS: There's no gangs to ghettos thing happening. So like I said, I think it's quite a testimony that with the—in Woodbury—when did—Ronnie was first elected mayor, what? Probably about [19]78?

KS: Not Ronnie.

AS: What's his name?

KS: Oh I can see him. He runs the EMS [Emergency Medical Service]. Cope. Ricky. Ricky Cope.

AS: Yeah. Ricky. He was elected mayor in '78, and—

KS: No. Nuh-uh. No. It was way after that. He was mayor in the early [19]90s.

AS: He was mayor for a long time.

KS: He was mayor for quite a while, but it was long after that.

AS: Well, in any case, like Kathy said, it's not because there were a lot of Black people to cast their vote for him. He was elected mayor by White people.

KS: Yeah. That's right.

AS: It was not too bad here.

KS: Charlie Brown was probably president of the Lion's Club, which is the major club like that here, in the [19]80s. He came back from the military.

AS: He was president of the Lion's Club in the [19]70s because he and I—

KS: He can't have been Alf. It had to be the [19]80s. We can look. He didn't even come back. He wasn't even back until the late [19]70s. He joined the Lion's Club maybe in the late 70s, but he wasn't president right away. He didn't come back from the military until shortly after or sometime after we moved here.

AS: Yeah. That's what I'm saying. We moved here in [19]74. So we lived here in '74.

KS: We weren't in Woodbury until '75, '76 really.

AS: No. We were in Woodbury in '74.

KS: All right, what I'm trying to explain to you is he came in at that point. He wasn't even in the Lion's Club right away.

AS: I'll tell you when I met Charlie.

KS: Okay.

AS: When he was back in Woodbury. When I was working for the old cabinet maker. So that was still '74.

KS: Nuh-uh.

AS: Yes it was.

KS: [19]75?

AS: No it was not. It was '74.

KS: Okay. Because—

AS: Charlie was already back in '74.

KS: Okay. He wasn't a member of the Lion's Club right way. Then he got into the Lion's Club, and he wasn't president right away.

AS: I know all that.

KS: So he wasn't president of the Lion's Club until into the [19]80s sometime. The time scan, it wasn't that compacted because he was in the community. He was

real active and everything, but he didn't get elected president until he'd been around for a while.

AS: Yeah.

KS: So—it was into the [19]80s.

AS: Well, I don't know, I'm not convinced yet, but—

KS: I bet I can look it up.

AS: I bet you can.

KS: (laughs) So yeah. What happened in this community was really interesting. They used to have a Black elementary school, and then they bussed the Black highschoolers into Murfreesboro to the Black high school during segregation. At some point they looked up and said, "You know, this is really expensive," having to bus those five, six kids is all they were sending at a time because the community wasn't that large. They said, "This is stupid. Why don't we just let them go to school here?" I don't know if they closed the Black elementary school right away, but the high school got integrated way before it was—

AS: Integration.

KS: Integration. Because it was just economically feasible to do that. So by the time we were here—because I taught through the bussing in Nashville, the school was already well integrated. Like I said, one of the most popular kids in school was this Black football player. He was Charlie Brown's nephew, Dillard. He was really good, and the cheerleader and, you know. The high school as a well-integrated community because I substituted there. Like I said, Black people in the community are just a very small percentage of the population. It was not a very big community even then. The whole community's not that big, so the population's stayed fairly steady the whole time we've been here. It hasn't really grown, but it hasn't gone away either, so—

LB: All right. Well, I know you're busy. Is there anything else that you wanted to add about the mill or the community or anything like that?

AS: Oh. We could tell you stories for hours.

KS: We could tell you funny stories about the community for a long time, but none of us have that kind of time. (laughs)

LB: Okay. Well I just have one more thing to ask. Okay. Do you consent to donate this interview to the public domain so that we can share it with others?

KS: Yes.

AS: We do.

LB: Okay. All right. Thank you.