

## History United: Memory Initiative

### Interview with Bill Yates (BY)

Interviewer: Evelyn Riley (ER), Amelia Grabowski (AG), Kathryn Bennett (KB)

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**BY:** I don't know what you might ask me, but I'm going to give you an honest answer, the truth as I know it. If I don't know, I'm going to say I don't know because I would rather to say that I don't know than just to be saying something or other if that makes any sense to you. A lot of memories coming back in here, I actually worked out of this building. I didn't stay here all that much, but I worked with the Dibrell Brothers for 37 years, so this was home office for me about two months out of the year--traveled for the other 10--for 37 years. I said 37, I should say 5 of those years was down [unintelligible] when we merged with Diamond and everything, but anyway it's a pleasure to be here and y'all can get started.

**KB:** Alright, well just to start off we're going to pretend like I've never met you so some of these questions might seem a little silly.

**BY:** [unintelligible] -laughs-

**KB:** We're just going to pretend like we just met and then just don't pay attention to the camera, focus on us and this will be easy. Can I just get you to spell your name as you would want it to be printed online.

**BY:** I call myself, my mother called me Billy, I call myself Bill Yates.

**KB:** And the Yates is Y-A-T-E-S?

**BY:** Y-A-T-E-S

**KB:** Ok, and what's your date of birth?

**BY:** 11/19/38...74 [Note: Referring to his current age]

**KB:** And what was your occupation here at Dibrell Brothers?

**BY:** Well, I started off doing everything. I actually started off at C&B Walters in South Boston which was a [unintelligible] of Dibrell Brothers. I actually when I was [unintelligible] up on the farm, my mother and my sisters and everything we grew up on a tobacco farm, I worked there

seasonally and I started as a pull-boy, working on the warehouse floors [*unintelligible*] tobacco was wet, damaged, et cetera. And did that for two years until my youngest sister graduated from school--my mother wanted me to stay on the farm until she graduated. After that they offered me...I was going to Canada, they offered me a job in the tobacco industry, which by that time I liked. And I started to not only work in South Boston but in South Carolina and started to go into Canada. Went to Canada in the tobacco industry and sold tobacco there for 17 seasons. So then in 1963, I was transferred to this payroll here in 1963...and you want me to continue?

**KB:** Sure, yeah.

**BY:** Do you want me to just tell you all everything I did in the tobacco business, is that what you want me to do?

**KB:** Yeah, let's just talk about your experiences working for Dibrell Brothers...

**BY:** Sometimes I just get carried away you know and I do admit to going and rambling to much you have to tell me and change the subject. I don't mind any of the three of you interrupting and changing me little bit off and whatever and everything else. But actually I started and went to [*unintelligible*] like I said, I worked on a ranch farm, running the hanging line. When I was a pull boy I worked on the warehouse floors, I got to see tobacco sold, I was fascinated with the auction dealers. They sold a pile of tobacco every 6-8 seconds, they'll sell that pile, you rake 'em, go onto the next pile right on down the row. After you buy it, they'll mark it at the price he sold it at, ticket marker puts the grade on it, you gotta call that your internal grade mark, it'd be big on the next pile if you rest it [?] all at the same time--I was fascinated with all of this. So I wasn't on the hanging line but actually one year and they was gunna make a relief [?] out of me. I relief bought at Mullins for two days, which something happened to the relief buyer in Fairmont, North Carolina so they sent me there to relief. So, they sent me back to Mullins that weekend. That Sunday they told me Sunday night, late, that I had to go back to Fairmont. I said, "Oh, that's no sweat." Because I figured I'd be doing the same thing. It so happened that they wanted me to follow up a regular sale, well I was a plum rookie and it takes--I was about 22 years old at this time, most time you don't even get a chance to be a relief buyer at 30--back in those days until you were in your 30s. Here I was 22 years old and going out on regular sale on a great big market of course, at market. But anyway, I followed sale for four years at Fairmont and I went to...transferred me to Whiteville, North Carolina, followed sale with that for three years. After they made a supervisor out of me. Supervisor is somebody that is in charge of certain markets, they give you a call, the company gives you a call, and you ride different markets. That time I was still going to Canada also, I went to Canada for 17 seasons I might've said that, but I went there for 17 years. Uh, I was worked South Carolina mainly, then I started going to Georgia and working and supervising and then coming back to the East. And the man that was in charge of the East at that time, the big East that sells, is the biggest belt of them all. He would tell me he

said he'd been through Georgia [unintelligible] I was going to have to look after the east because he was just trying to push me to get more experience faster and everything else. He was really trying to make me make decisions and some of my own things like that. So, I did this for about seven years and in 1977 they put me in charge of the Old Belt and Middle Belt, which means I had markets all the way from Petersburg all down through the sandhills, all down around Clemson, Oxford, Roxboro, all the way up to Winston-Salem, Yadkinville, Martinsville, Brookneal, everywhere. I was in charge of the whole belt. I was still just a young man. So I did, I was in charge of that and by 1983 as my own, I decided that I wanted to do a little something different, I wanted to stay into the leaf end of it, which I did, I stayed in the leaf end of it, but I kind of went into the sales also. Our biggest client at that time, by far, was Phillip-Morris. When I first came here we were doing less than 1 billion dollars in gross sales a year. Before I retired from them we had gotten up, with some merging and everything else we did over two billion dollars in gross sales and that's big for Danville. That is real big for Danville. So we came a long ways. My international travelling, I really thoroughly enjoyed. Most time in life we all--just about all of us--have to work for a living and if you can find something you enjoy doing you're a lucky person. If you have to go punch a timecard 40 hours a week, 32 hours a week, whatever and be miserable that whole time you work...you might as well have a good working career, you've got to enjoy and you're going to get out what you put into your work. But I became, I became first, as I said, I started off at CW Walters and I became a Senior Vice President at CW Walters and became also the Board of the Directors which was just a buying name really. I became a Dibrell Brothers International, excuse me, Dibrell Brothers leaf department, I became a senior Vice President on the board. Which that wasn't that big of a group. Later on they made me a Vice President of the whole cooperation. We had operations in 40 different countries. The countries that I spent most time, as I said, Canada 17 years, I worked in markets from Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, Virginia, worked Maryland, all of Kentucky, Tennessee, into Ohio, Indiana, all through the [unintelligible] I went to Brazil, Argentina for 23 years. Loved Brazil. I had the chance to go to Africa like you went [Note: Talking to interviewer Kathryn Bennett] I was in Africa for, I went to Africa for 17 years also. Italy, 17 years. And when I was doing all of this traveling that's when I was staying at home for about two months out of the year. Every good side has a bad side. I enjoyed the work, I met lots of friends, tobacco people were just like a family, you might be competitors but there wasn't very many of us in a lot of the places we went. You were competitors in the daytimes but at nighttime you were friends, you had to be. And we didn't discuss our business or nothing like that at night, that was a no-no. But, if I wish, back in my day, that I could've gotten more education. I was lucky to have gotten the education that I got, but at the same token I couldn't have picked a better profession to have chosen than I did. If I had it all over to go again I would try to hit the books a little bit harder like my sisters did -laughs- but as far as what I did in my career and everything else I was well pleased, I think in my career as well as in y'all's career I think that we all need to set our goal high, work towards that goal, be prepared for that goal when it comes. You going to have some opportunities that's going to knock, but be prepared when those time come. And you don't, if

you don't, if they offer you something or other--you take it. Because if you don't take it, they might not offer it to you no more. So you be prepared and you can't get enough education, you read the books, you hit the books, you study...have some nightlife too--I'm not saying that. Not much to do in Danville, go to Greensboro, go to Raleigh, go to somewhere *-laughs-* but anyway. Hit the books, be prepared, when opportunities come go for it. And don't ever to get to the place saying, "If I get to be so-and-so I'm going to be satisfied," because if you set the bar too low when you hit that goal that's where you're gunna stop at. You set your goal high, you might not reach it but you're still reaching to broaden yourself and find the light.

[Timestamp -11:40] **KB:** What was the highest level of education you received?

**BY:** I was lucky to get 12 years. All of my education came from [*unintelligible*] I think and I'll be honest with you, my weakest subjects, my weakest subject was English and spelling. I was good in math, I didn't have these computers, this electronic world. When we came back with a calculator we thought we had something but you better not take it into the classroom. You've got to understand, I'm back in the 50s now, so you know. *-laughs-* we're talking in [*unintelligible*]. I was the only boy growing up that...I had to...when on the farm I had...I was planting the crop tobacco when I was 10 years old. We lost, me and my poor sisters, we lost our father when I was 25 months old. And the one that caught it hard was my mother. My mother was the glue that kept my family together. She was a hardworking woman, she loved her faith, she loved her children, she loved flowers, she loved friends, she loved everything. But she was a hardworking person. We didn't have no such thing as a child's law back in those days *-laughs-* you had to work. She wanted you to work. We were called sharecroppers. Do you know what a sharecropper is?

[Timestamp - 13:07] **AG:** Could you define it for us, just to...

**BY:** A sharecropper is, ok, you got to understand that when I'm talking back the Depression was going on, ok. Also, World War II was going on. Nobody to speak of had money. Some few had more than others. We were living in a rural tobacco growing areas, a farm, you didn't have all these 100,000 dollar tractors and everything you see now. All these 100,000 dollar machine rigs, stuff like that. The man, a sharecropper was somebody owned the land, which it weren't us, somebody else owned the home. We didn't own this house. We owned what was in the house. We tended the land. Most time it was three or four families, actually four families that worked the farm that I grew up on. A sharecropper name come because you shared in the crop. He got, more or less, he got 50 percent because he owned the land, he owned...if he had a tractor he'd use his tractor to break the land. Once you got the land broken into a settlement [?] you did it with mules and wagons you didn't...you did it with manual labor. And here I was planting a crop of tobacco and 10 years old and trying to run to school. I was lucky to get the education part that you got to that I got. I did have one fault, and it was my own fault. My sisters were a lot smarter than me and they proved it. Two of them graduated with honors, one of them she knew what she

wanted to do. When she went to, when they consolidated our schools and stuff like that, she didn't pick the easiest subject to make the highest grade. She picked subjects to take that were going to help her in her other, going far. I was talking about a while ago. She probably did more planning and whatever than any of us did. She was the only sister, other of us got the honors and stuff like that, but she was the only sister that finished with a degree. And really, truly to this day it's the closer sister I have--I'm not going to call any names or anything like that. My sisters worked hard too. My mother really worked hard. It hurt me, it hurt me worst growing up on a farm to see my mother have to work so hard but she, after my father died, actually my youngest sister was born three and a half months after my dad died on April 1, 1941. Was born three months after that. My, some of uncles on my dad's side, some of them were little bit better off than others. They told her that she would never be able to keep us together and she said, "With the help of the good Lord, and everything else, I'm going to keep them together as long as I can." And she worked herself to death, but she kept us together. We didn't wear the best clothes, but our clothes looked clean. We didn't go to bed hungry, we had plenty of food. We had love. I enjoyed my growing up on the farm. I'm sorry that my mother had to work as hard as she did. My sisters it hurt their feelings like it hurt mine sometimes, but it didn't hurt them. *-laughs-* It didn't hurt them. My career, part of my education, most of my knowledge about what goes on in this world is seeing other cultures and everything else. Probably as much of it came from traveling and common sense as much as anything else.

[Timestamp – 16:52] **KB:** So, you mentioned how you were out planting the tobacco when you were 10 years old, what were your other responsibilities as far as the farming of tobacco went, I don't know that much about that process.

**BY:** Well, as I said I was a little sharecropper. It was the man that owned the farm, he had a little small crop. His son-in-law, because his daughter lived on the farm also, it was a black family. His name was Willy Harris. And he was just as good and solid as gold. Every morning during the plowing time, the work time, if I to plow my mother would get me up at four o'clock in the morning now this was before daylight savings time, so really it would be five, ok. And I would go get the mule out of the stable, I would harness, I would go get the plow, I would go to the field. It would still be too dark to go plowing. I would wait until the sun came up enough so I could see down that first row. And I would go plow tobacco, corn, whatever needed to be done. I would do enough rows for my mother, of course she couldn't be keeping up with that, but she would come along then, she would come with her hoe and once I had enough rows I would run along to school and at that time they had the little country school, I call it a country school just within, less than a half a mile, about a quarter of a mile from where we lived at. I would run to school. When school was out I would run home, take those clothes off, put work clothes on, go get the mule and plow to dark. It was something to do on a farm all the time. You raised... we raised about everything, we had big gardens, we raised wheat which we did sell the wheat. We had to share that just like you had with the tobacco. We had a corn crop, which I plowed every

row of that with that old mule. And the corn and everything was more for the hogs and the cows, things of that nature and everything else, for use and everything else, but it was something...and people back then had a way of planning things. Just like for rainy days or something like that. You go out to the barn and you clean out the pack house, or you clean out the barns where you cured the tobacco in. It wasn't these nice [*unintelligible*] barns you see in this state and time, it was just these old stick barns and log barns that you see a lot of fallen down and things like that. It was just a different way of life. You just to put it in perspective, back about the time that my father passed away, if you could find the work you made about a dollar a day. Ok. As, even in the 50s if you could pull tobacco all day long, you got paid five dollars. If you was a stringer, which looped it, put it on the stick, then you hoisted it in the barn, cured it, all that kind of stuff you got four dollars. If you were the leaf hander that handed to the stringer, you got three dollars. It was...I was [*unintelligible*]...they was from sun up to sun down, it won't...that was the pay. It was just a different way of life you have to witness it but the big thing about it, I think, was back then I enjoyed farming. I really did. Like I said I was sorry my people had to work so hard and everything else. I had the best memories of my life growing up on that farm. Particularly when I didn't have to plow tobacco, gotten too big to plow you didn't have to do that you were topping the tobacco. Those blooms that you see come in tobacco, you were breaking them out, or you were suckling it, the little suckles that come up between the leaves. Work inside by side with my mother and talking to her and things like that, we would get to the end of the row and then we would help one of the other sisters come and the two [*unintelligible*] that were just talking and dragging along although we would get them to the end of the row. Think we would get them all turned around and go back the other way that they would go as fast but some did, and some didn't. I have great memories of the farm, matter of fact I have such great memories of the farm in 1987 the farm that we moved on when I was 10 years old, grew up on, learned how to work, learned how to play, learned how to know what kind of soil it was, [*unintelligible*] soil for tobacco, different trees, what kind of trees, even though I didn't have a father, the man that owned the farm he tried to teach me hanging the board, feet was in the tree, made the forest team and everything else. I bought, me and my wife, bought that farm in 1987...the memories I have of that farm. I took my oldest sister down and she was visiting, I took her down to visit some of the community and neighbors and everything. They said she was going to sell the farm. I had no intention of buying that farm. The farm is not that big. Its 103 acres, but they were going to cut it up in three different tracts. I couldn't see them cutting up that farm in three different tracks. So I come home and told my wife, I want you to go look at that sale. I kept talking about that sale. I said, "I want you to go with me," I said [*unintelligible*]...I like to have it because I have good memories of that farm. She said, "You can go, and you can buy it if you want to. I'm not going with you." So I bought that farm, we bought that farm, let me say we, we bought that farm in 1987. I still own that farm. Some of my greatest memories are still down there. I can carry you down to that farm right now, all three of you and show you where I plowed the mule the first time, where I drove the tractor the first time, where I drove the truck the first time, where I done get the tractor stuck -laughs- I did a little bit of everything growing up. But I had a wonderful

time growing up on a farm and I've had a wonderful time working for the tobacco industry because I've seen people, met people, around this world that I never would have gotten to see. I've seen different cultures of life and everything else, and I'm going to tell you and it's an old saying, y'all are the brightest. We didn't have, as I said, we didn't have all these electronic things when I come along and stuff like that, but if you read and you should read, if you read and you read enough, and you ought to, you probably won't remember, oh 60 percent of what you read over time. You don't believe me, wait till you get to be my age and go back. *-laughs-* [unintelligible] But if you go and see something and you see it, you're gonna remember 75 to 80 percent of what you saw in different parts of this world and things like that. Traveling is a wonderful thing, I know it's expensive, but it's a wonderful thing. And things have changed so much, you know, I feel sorry for a lot of people trying to go to school and college now and everything else what with the college being so expensive and things like that but you realize in... I come along in hard times when we bought that farm, interest rates were 12 percent. That's how tough times were in 1987. And what would college be today if, with these college loans and everything else if students had to pay 12 percent? It wouldn't be all that many people going to college unfortunately. But I think tobacco, farming, Dan River Fabrics did more for this city right here Danville--whether you like it, don't like it, it's ours we got it. They did more for it than anything that I know of. They really did. And its one downside to it, and you can quote me on this or not don't make any difference I'm going to speak freely. I think if one thing I don't... this has nothing to do with Danville Regency [*Note: Referring to the Danville Regional Foundation*], but I think the old Memorial Hospital, people that worked, Dan River back in its heyday, Dan River Mills, it employed full-time about 14,000 people. I don't know what... [unintelligible] and they used a lot of seasonal help. Probably it was around 20,000 at different times that worked at Dan River Fabrics. Tobacco industry all around you is the old tobacco factories, you go out on the Kentucky road across from the airport they were laying a building down that road and everything. I always thought it would be a Dan River Fabrics building here in Danville. I always thought it would be a processing facility. It wasn't for a few years... I think that JTI has come back, but farming will never be what it did. It used to be just like it used to be, I used to when I was a seller go to Canada. In April Canadians take a vacation. I said, "Take a vacation in April, what are you talking about?" They go to Myrtle Beach. They have Canadian weeks at Myrtle Beach. They even take Canadian dollars at Myrtle Beach. Probably still do, I don't know. But what I'm trying to say, those employees that went making anything to speak of at Dan River Fabrics, lot of people in the tobacco industry whatever, but it was mandatory at Dan River Mills. You had to pay so much to that memorial hospital before you ever got the check. That came out first. And I know we have to consolidate. I know we sometimes have to make changes. I'm not saying its Danville Regency [*Note: Referring to the Danville Regional Foundation*] or Danville Memorial Board and probably some our politics and everything else should have given Dan River employees a more thank you by far than they received. They gave too much to not get anymore recognition than they got. Tobacco industry is a little bit of the same way because of the hospital. And it was done by the Dan River... Memorial Hospital Board and the city council and I

think it was some politics playing in it too just like it is everyday up there, politics and things. But I don't think we really...I don't think particularly Dan River got the credit that they...what would it have hurt really to have had...you don't hear the criticism right now of Danville Regency that we did when Danville Regency started up because I think this was [*Note: Referring to the Danville Regional Foundation*],...some of it has improved right now the way they are taking it over and doing this, its probably one of the higher...most bring in new employees and everything that we got going right at the present time. But I just don't feel like they got the credit that they really was due.

[Timestamp – 28:45] **KB:** So, you mentioned you know all the traveling that you did with your job. Did your wife get to travel with you or was that strictly...

**BY:** She had an option of going anywhere that I went. Anywhere. But I don't know why, she loved going to Brazil. And she went to Brazil and she made herself well at home in Brazil. She would walk, the streets were safe. There's a certain amount of discrimination in any country, but Brazil has very little. I would say 95 percent of the people in Brazil are about on the same level. No discrimination. Five percent, and when I say that, money is always going to marry money so it's going to stay in that kind of...[*unintelligible*] and everything else. But if you could've seen-- I'm going to get back to your question in a minute--if you could've seen Santa Cruz, Brazil, which is now they call tobacco capitol of Brazil. And if you could've seen that back in the mid 70s and see it today you wouldn't realize it is the same city. That's what tobacco has did for that place down there. But, getting back to my wife, yeah she could have went, she could go to Argentina, I meant to Brazil. I tried...I traveled into Argentina I tried to get her to go to Argentina, she didn't want to go to Argentina because she had been in Brazil long enough she wanted to come back. I went to Italy as I said and she loved to go to Italy, she loved to stay in her hometown. They had in the countryside where I worked down around [*unintelligible*] and places like that she didn't like it down there now. And one of the secretaries from Dibrell Brothers, not Joelle, Shirley-Jo went with her one time and not only after they were there they went all over Europe and then to France and England and just anywhere they wanted to go so she was...I tried my best to get her to go to with me Africa because I wanted her to see cultures the other kind of way. But no, I couldn't get her to do that. She kind of picked the places she wanted to go.

[Timestamp – 31:00] **KB:** So what were your other responsibilities as a, when you got up to the Vice President levels...what else did you have to do?

**BY:** Well, when you and I guess you tried to be the leader to a certain extant if you in charge of the Old Belt, or you in charge of the [*unintelligible*], or in charge here or there, you're no better than the group of people you work with. You've got to have leadership, true. But you gotta have people that will work together. It's kind of like I asked you...if we don't agree, y'all have two

ways...say if all of you were in the same unit. Y'all would have two ways of doing things. Y'all could go by the majority, two against one and that works. Or you can go with the compromising part. The compromising part everybody give up a little bit and make both feel like you're a winner. So when you're into leadership roles and everything in tobacco industry and everything you can try to work with your people. You give a little, you take some and you put what you have to say, this is the way it's going to be done you've got to have the experience, the backbone and be man enough to stand behind your decision. Because this office you're in right now was our CEOs office. But that door was open to me to come in here anytime that I wanted to. The day that he told me he was going to turn in his resignation, he came by my office at 10:30 in the morning--hadn't did it--but told me he was going to resign that day. I tried my best to talk him out of it, but I didn't. But it's leadership I think, being able to work with people, get your ideas, and you don't always have all the ideas, it's getting the best ideas that will work together as a team. It takes teamwork. No one person can do it all and no one person should take all the credit.

[Timestamp – 33:14] **KB:** So what was the transition like from the company going from Dibrell Brothers to Diamond?

**BY:** That was a very...that wasn't a big change. That was...Dibrell Brothers originally...I had two books I was going to try, and I'll keep looking for them, it was a history of Dibrell Brothers it goes back...just like some of your reading, maybe not what y'all are doing now, but just for some of your reading. Dibrell Brothers was started as a family thing. And it had the greatest employees that I have ever worked with. If you didn't know the answer, and no one of us know the answer to everything that comes up, if I was lucky enough to be in this building the two months I might be here, the three months or whatever it was, I didn't know the answer I knew who to go see that would give me the answer. And I didn't feel like an idiot to go and ask them and they didn't feel like an idiot because I came and asked because if they want a favor and if I could they came and I did the same thing back. It was more like a family working together. I think you could tell way me and Shirley-Jo was carrying on out there a while ago I hadn't seen Shirley-Jo in 12 years! *-laughs-* But that's the way it was. To get back to your question, Diamond Monk-Austin is who merged with Dibrell Brothers. It was a family company also. Austin was a family company. Monks was a family company, they had already merged together. So when this merge came along and everything else it wasn't that big of a change. One of the bigger change was, and everything else, we had too much processing facilities. We should have kept the plant out on 7 and 29. Steve Daniels fought hard to keep that plant open. He fought hard. But, he lost. They kept the one in Wilson and the one in Farmville [?] building, but I had an opportunity and I never asked Claude, that was the CEO of this company, I never asked him. He wanted me--I was 56 when the merge come along, and I had enough years then for retirement. I had 40 years in, plus they gave me some years. I had enough years in to take retirement. And also, I knew that they wanted to have me back if I took retirement. At the same token he didn't want me to take retirement. He offered me a position to go with the new company, Diamond. I

never asked him what that position was. Because I felt like, and I told him, I said, "Look, it's kind of like you got a bird in your hand, are you going to go with one bird in your hand or two in the bush? The two in the bush are gunna fly away and you have that one in your hand." I said, "Look, I have worked and I know what I got." And I said, "I got this. I'm going into something all together new. And there's two sides to that. I might not like this new company or this new company might not like me." I said, "That's where it stands." I said, "You said you're going to hire me back anyway, because he did say [unintelligible] or anything along that line, he said it could be one year, maybe two years something to that effect. But it wound up being five years. And I retired at 56 from Dibrell Brothers. I worked on--they call it consulting. Doing the same thing, the same secretary, same office, everything, looking after working with the Phillip-Morris account, traveling solely with Phillip-Morris into foreign countries, same countries that I called off before [unintelligible] and things like that, and after that, did that for five years and I had really did all the traveling I wanted to do. I wanted to slow down. And then, Phillip-Morris, I had two retirement parties, they gave a retirement party to all the retirees of Dibrell Brothers at the Danville Golf Club. When I retired from Diamond, Phillip-Morris gave me a retirement party at Danville Golf Club, the same place, very big room filled up with Phillip-Morris people as well as Diamond, Dibrell people and they...one of the speakers and everything else they offered me a life-time job with Phillip-Morris. So, I wound up then working for Phillip-Morris for seven years. So, tobacco, I have worked in tobacco all my life. And I tell you, we have, my mother never told me that smoking...she didn't want me to smoke. She said, "Smoking is not good for you. But if you're gunna smoke, wait till you get grown," because me and one of my sisters, I'm not going to name which one...we were talking not too long ago and this came up and I told her mother said she wanted me to be grown and she said "Yeah, but if she's was alive she probably still wouldn't think you were grown!" -laughs- But anyway, I don't think, I don't think smoking is good for you. I would discourage people from smoking. Smoking has did a lot for Bill Yates, it's did a lot for Southside Virginia, it has did a lot for a whole...just like the textile mills. It did a lot for all of your southern states, it did a lot for a whole other things. I do think this, I don't think smoking is good for you but it's like everything else. A lot of stuff on tobacco you have to spray it with heavy pesticides to keep it from being eat up by worms and pesticides just like you do your vegetables, your apples, your oranges, et cetera. Do you think, even though we've had tremendous rain this year as all three of us know and everything else, do we think that all that stuff we sprayed on them oranges and apples and this string beans and gardens and stuff getting washed off? No. So, but we got to eat, right? I think...I think some of the laws are real good. I think there ought to be places that you don't smoke. But I don't think that a smoker should be treated like a third-class citizen. I think now we even have some states that say okaying smoking marijuana. Now you tell me that smoking a cigarette is more harmful than me going to marijuana, which I've never smoked. And then that's going to maybe lead to something else and everything else. That don't add up quite to me. I think we're a little...been a little too hard on tobacco. We won our independence from the Revolutionary War with the tax dollars off of tobacco, but do you ever hear that. You might have read it in a book. But...

[Timestamp – 40:49] **KB:** So, you mentioned before the auctions and you were interested in the auctioneering. Did you spend a lot of time working in the tobacco auctions?

**BY:** Uh, 2000 was about the last year of the auction sales. And that's about...the buyout...they finally bought out the quota...of the producer's quotas. Now you can raise all the tobacco that you want because it's best to have a contract with it. I was still able to visit the warehouse floors and things like that whether a live auction was going on, even though I was in another capacity, even though that I had salesmen with me, customers with me as we called them, it took quite a bit of entertaining at night and things like that but I was still around the auctioneers, the buyers, and people like that on up to about 2000.

[Timestamp – 41:45] **KB:** What were the auctions like? Can you kind of paint us a picture of what a tobacco auction would be like?

**BY:** Well, I got some tapes that was taken during the [*unintelligible*] Harvest Jubilee. And they are big tapes, you know what I'm talking about?

**KB:** Mmhmm

**BY:** I got one for each year, they did for nine years right here, down in that park right there and I was the buyer in it for Dibrell Brothers and I wrote the script for all the [*unintelligible*] auctions and sales and things. The chant, you had a warehouseman, because the farmers would bring the tobacco. They would lay it out in long rows, crops. And you go one farmer to the next farmer because you didn't stop; it was all lined up in rows. And of course the farmers would be there, but on one side you would have anywhere from 8-12 buyers from different companies on one side of the row. On the other row, you would have a starter. He would start the pile of tobacco, it weren't that high then, but say he started it at a dollar and a half, dollar and a half. Well the auctioneer would go crying the bid for a dollar and a half. If nobody...if you came and bid, "I got a \$1.51, \$1.52, \$1.53, 54, 55," and on up the line, get up to \$1.60 and there weren't no other bids, \$1.60 Dibrell [*unintelligible*], Virginia, or whoever it was. After he did that he had a guy behind him that was backing up the sale for the warehouse, he would pass the ticket to the ticket marker, you had a ticket marker, that would write who he marked it to and the company. And then you would have to call out the grade that you wanted to go on that ticket, and then, after that you had to be looking ahead and be betting on the next pile at the same time. Then any time that you are selling something or another as quick as 6-8 seconds as I said earlier, or something like that, you don't have time, it's a snap judgment. It's just like, you know...there again, I'm going back to cigarette smoking one more time. Being harmful. And I know y'all do, and I don't blame you. Cell phone--a wonderful thing. But this driving, texting, and things like that...This advertising I think now makes a lot of sense, it comes on television that says if you were going 55 miles an hour, if you text for 4.6 seconds you have traveled a 120 feet, the length of a football

field like being blindfolded. Now what is the most dangerous? Texting for 4.6 seconds or me smoking that cigarette and you going to meet somebody head on or whatever. So, sometimes I don't think. This is something y'all have to do. I can't do it. Its y'all's turn. Its y'all's parents' time now and y'all are coming right on, but a lot of stuff that goes on is gotta be changed. Y'all got to get your education and stuff like that, you gotta have your dreams, you gotta work towards your goals and things like that. But some of this stuff, and this Congress that we got, I don't care and I don't care if you're Democrat or Republican, I'm not going into politics, I'm not going there. But we got to vote. If you don't vote, we shouldn't complain. But for us to have a Congress that is working together no more than they are...sure there has got to be some disagreement, but if they can't come to some type of working understanding and do it for the best of the country, something is wrong. I really believe that. It's getting to be y'all's time and one more thing. I know that...where are you from?

**ER:** Lexington, Virginia

**BY:** Lexington, Virginia...and you?

**AG:** Baltimore, Maryland

**BY:** Baltimore, Maryland. Been there; used to watch the Orioles play baseball. Used to spend time up in Marlboro, you know where Marlboro's at?

**AG:** I know where it is.

**BY:** Ok. It's...now what was I going to say. [Break in transcription as per request of interviewee.]

[Timestamp – 46:26] **BY:** Ask me a question.

**KB:** Alright. Well, we've touched on how the tobacco industry, it's not as present here as it used to be obviously. Where do you see the tobacco industry in these parts going in the future?

**BY:** Well, you know, its...price can kill anything. I never thought that cigarettes would be selling for what they are selling for. I think it is a future in tobacco, the farmers right now are making money. The domestic sales, when I say domestic sales is sales in this country, are declining but declining slowly. So that's coming down. But as the economy goes, now if you can tell me how the economy will go I can answer this question a little bit better. But the...if the economy is strong and the way the economy is going, particularly into Asia, the tobacco demand is growing and it's...as we all know it's a world of people in Asia. And a lot of these foreign countries, they raise tobacco also and by law they have to use so much of their local tobacco but

as they say that no tobacco has the flavor and the aroma that US flue-cured has. And of course they like to burn it too. And so as these countries get stronger and everything and more tobacco is being exported. So long as the economy is good and everything I think it will be good for the people that already have the farm, already set up. But now if you gotta go out and buy the land, you got to buy these \$40,000 book barns [?] a piece, these \$100,000 plus tractors [*unintelligible*], \$100,000 plus equipment [*unintelligible*]...no. But if it's a passed down generation thing, or something like that, I think it's a future there for quite a while.

[Timestamp - 48:32] **KB:** Well now we have some different types of questions for you, they're kind of more fun. [Pause in transcription for interviewee to get a drink of water.]

**KB:** If you could pick a local historical event that had the most effect on you, which one would you choose? Whether that was your life, or your career, up to you.

**BY:** Ask me that again?

**KB:** If you could pick, like, a local historical event that had the most effect on you or your career, which one would you choose?

**BY:** Well the person that had the biggest effect on me, was by far my mother. My mother meant everything to me. She...her number one desire--and she did it--was to keep all of us together and as a teenager and what I tried my best to make her...I didn't have money, only way that I could try to make her happy was to do what she asked me to, and advance and try to make myself a better person. My mother was the greatest influence of all for me. My wife, yes, me and my wife been married 48 years. I wouldn't take nothing for her, I...would I give you two cents for her? No! -*laughs*- But, I think she's been a great wife. Tobacco industry has been, like I said, I could have went to any university it was if I could have afforded to, if my grades had been good enough or whatever. I couldn't have picked a better profession than I picked. I've been very, very lucky person. And I can't really, if you go back and just want to name one person, I would have to say my mother.

[Timestamp - 50:31] **KB:** Alright. Let's see...[Pause in transcription for interviewee to get a drink of water.]

**KB:** If you could choose an artifact to represent yourself, what would you choose and why?

**BY:** Run that by me again. If I could pick a what?

**KB:** An artifact, like an object...

**ER:** Physical object...

**KB:** Yeah...something that you could be remembered by.

**ER:** Some people would say a book or some people would say...

**BY:** I want to be remembered as being honest, truthful, and I want to be remembered by being able to say that I told the truth because if I tell the truth I can remember what I say. If I go to telling tales, I forget most of what, and I don't know what I've done said. But I like to be honest, truthful, and I don't know if that's what you're looking for or not.

**KB:** We'll take it *-laughs-*

**BY:** Ok. [Pause in transcription for non-related discussion.]

[Timestamp – 52:22] **KB:** If you could give a piece of advice to future Danvillians and people like that, what would you say to them?

**BY:** Well, you know, it's unfortunate as I said, I spoke highly of the tobacco industry. I spoke highly of Dan River Mills and the *[unintelligible]*. I'd like to say this, both of these people, because there was so much seasonal help and so many people here that they used, they even didn't like it when Goodyear came to Danville, y'all might have heard this. But they didn't like it. Dan River particularly didn't like it because they paid so much more money than Dan River employees is getting. Tobacco industry has did a lot for all of these farming, farmers out there, sharecroppers, people, they used to have the fair when you went to selling tobacco like I said about Myrtle Beach they'd have up this sign, "Welcome Farmers of *[unintelligible]*" We were the heroes for about three months of the year, we'd come to town *[unintelligible]* this, that, and the other. *[unintelligible]* But on the other hand, Dan River and tobacco industry probably done the most harm to Danville at the same token in a different light because it kept industry, other industries, from coming to Danville. Industries that we need badly today. We all, whether we come in from Baltimore, Lexington, wherever we may be coming from, whatever your place is like and everything else, we need to have, and Danville needs to have a long time ago, it needed to have a tremendous big place here, like say in Charlottesville, Raleigh, that our kids grow up, your kids especially, grow up wanted to get an education and work in that building and know that you're gonna make a decent salary. This thing of going to school and everything else and then our kids have to go all way out of the...way away from where they were raised at, make new friends and everything else to make a living like that. Travel is good, but not always good to get away when you have to get away from your family so much to find what you're looking for. We need more of the right kind of industries in this city.

[Timestamp – 55:09] **KB:** That's great, I like that answer. So, as I've kind of talked to you about before our goal with our project is to create an honest and collective history of the region, you know, touching on all the different aspects, so are there any other memories that you would like to share that you think are important to share the history of the region? Anything we've left out?

**BY:** No. I think that you covered it well and I think when you get through with it, y'all have your own ideas that you're going to put to this right here I guess you're going to put something together and present to somebody. I know if y'all work together on it, give it your best thought, give or take a little bit on some issues or whatever, that you will put a good article together. It's, as I said, it's an honor for y'all to be here, it's an honor for us to have you and I like to thank all three of y'all for inviting me to come in here today. I hope I don't...don't tell my sister I made too big a fool of myself, ok? *-all laugh-* But, I think, I think that y'all will touch it up and do great. I think, you know, Danville is...I don't know whether sometimes we do any wrong in Danville but I'm partial to the tobacco district ok, because I come from tobacco. But are we trying to do too much now to build up the tobacco district part of it and not enough other parts from the city now, from the tax payers and everything else, are we not trying to do enough to fix some of that instead of just going hogwild on the tobacco district. Should it be distributed out a little bit more than just in one area? I think that's something we need to look at. Just like the parking facilities here at the old Downtowner. I know that y'all bound to read a little something about tearing that down, you think, how many cars are going to be able to park there. You think that people that don't work there have most of those parking places, where are the people coming to spend money going to park at? You know? It's just different things that I think, I don't always agree with what city council does and I don't have but one way of doing anything about it and that's when time comes to vote, to vote. To make the change of it. You take...one more thing I would like to say about the tobacco industry, one thing tobacco industry don't get enough credit. You take the most everything new that has come to Danville, you being from Danville will know more about this, but everything just about starts up in Danville to date it has a tobacco commission money involved in it. If it weren't for that tobacco commission money it would be very little bit improvement going on in this city. And I think they forget a lot of times where that money originally had came. I don't always agree. I always don't agree with the way they spend this money, some things yes, some things no. We...Danville is...the location of Danville is not good. You go to south, you go far as, you go any farther you're in North Carolina. Ain't going to be no Bristol, Virginia like Bristol, Tennessee...it's going to always be a Danville, Virginia. We split right in the middle with the Dan River. Which I like, I've gotten used to it after this many years. But, I'm just going use the example with the tobacco money. You take the North Theater, tobacco commission gave, donated a lot of money to get that fixed back up. It, as long as tobacco money was going into that thing, Virgil Goode was the Congressman from here at that given time it was going good. But after tobacco money quit going, it sold out. And I haven't seen a whole lot going on at north theater since then. Now, I agree that side of the building looks better.

But I think that some of that stuff could be used in other places better than some of the places that we choose. Do you know Milton? You know Milton, North Carolina.

**KB:** Mmhmm.

**BY:** Do y'all know Milton? Y'all don't know Milton?

**ER:** I've heard of it.

**BY:** Ok, sometimes you should ride to Milton. It's pretty interesting to see. You go down about six miles, you go off on 62 you go down that road about eight or nine miles, you cross over the Dan River again and you're into North Carolina. Milton has an old church, Thomas Day--the famous black [*unintelligible*] that got his...he was from Milton, he built a lot of furniture and stuff of this nature. It's very historical. It's a great long old building that's like built under one roof but many, many little stores. You almost look like you would see John Wayne come walking through there anytime or drive up with their horses and everything else. But to make a long story short, there was a choice when Dan River Fabrics came here there was a choice, and y'all probably heard this. There was a choice, it was going to be Milton or it was going to be Danville. So Dan River picked Danville instead of Milton. Well if they had picked Milton, it would have been built up as Danville is today except it would be in North Carolina. So, location has a lot to do with it and things like this. But it's, I think it's...it fascinates me that I know that everything that Dan River Mills and the industry and everything has done so much good for this city, but at the same time I know we helped back stuff that we need badly today and how are we going to go about getting it is going to take a lot of planning, it won't be in my generation but it something or other that needs to be worked on and get started on.

**KB:** Do y'all have any questions? [*Note: Directed to other interviewers.*]

**AG:** One of my only other questions is where is the farm that you grew up? Is it in Pittsylvania County? Sorry, where is the farm that you grew up on? [*Note: Spoken louder*]

**BY:** My farm is...do you, are you familiar with this area at all.

**AG:** A little bit.

**BY:** Do you know where Halifax is at?

**AG:** Mmhmm

**BY:** Ok do you know old 360 like, old 360 way. Ok, I can tell you exactly how far. My farm is 25 miles from here. Go down old 360 till you get to an old post office called Vernon Hill. And right across the road there is Mt. Vernon Baptist Church. The road off to the right, 683 go down that road to the fifth house, fifth house it's on the right, and you'll see my one house there and lucky enough it's the house that we were, the oldest building, probably the sorriest building on the farm but its sentimental, I think the most of it, that's where me and my family was raised. There's another home that was built on it in 1960. My old wood barns and everything, still in decent shape and everything else is [unintelligible] over there, [unintelligible] still there, the old stable is still there. But its about 25-30 miles from here. It's in Halifax County. As I said, it's school was real close to there that I went to, before they consolidated the school I went to [unintelligible] to the new high school. It was quite different going from a country school with no more that probably had 125 people from the first grade to the twelfth grade to go to a place that had 1200. But that's how you meet new people, that's how you find new friends. I was very fortunate as I said to been able to get the education that I did get. Had some wonderful teachers. You have another question.

**AG:** I think that's it for me, what about you Evelyn?

**ER:** What are you planning on doing with the farm in the future?

**BY:** Well, it's...you know, the farm, even though with the 12 percent interest as I talked to you earlier, it was tremendous, I did refinance it at, back around...it came down, it was 10 percent! And you think that it was tremendous, but it's nothing like today. I actually, I bought the farm because when interest rates was that high what you are buying a lot of times is not that expensive. Even though a lot of people in my community told me that I had renewed the farming industry, renewed the hope of people in that area because I paid so much for it, well...if you want to buy something, it's not going to come up for sale probably one time in your life. You ain't going to have another shot at it. As for the memory part of it, me growing up, my mother, my sisters, everything else, getting back to your question, for years it was sort of a break even proposition because I was raising tobacco on it and selling it. The value of the land, the value of the farm has gone up quite a bit. It's long been paid for. It's right now...we actually lose money on it because we tried to keep it bushhogged and keep it clean and this thing because I can't keep it up I don't want to see it grow up and down want to see the building fall down and things like that. But, thanks to a good wife--I'll give her a plug again--thanks to a good wife, and everything else, everything is paid for and we are able to go down there and spend the night when we want to and we enjoy the farm and we unfortunately we don't have any children but I'm not planning on selling it. Now, what I do with it later after I'm gone on, now that's another story but...I'm not planning on selling it. It...don't get me wrong, if me or my wife got desperately ill or something or other and our insurance coverage wouldn't take care of it, I was forced to sell it or something like this, then the health part of it would come first. But, no, I'm not...You know you

can...it's...I don't know, it's kind of a whirlwind world we live in. Every once in a while we need to relax or whatever and just to be able to go around and it's not a spot on it I didn't do something at sometime whether it was good or bad or whatever. And as I said, it's my best memories are working there side by side with my mother and whatever and talking to her and I just don't forget those. They...it's memories I cherish. Now, I can't say what's going to happen to the farm after I've gone on, but I can't take nothing else with me...-laughs-

**AG:** Thank you! And you said the house you live at now was the house you grew up in?

**BY:** It was...10 years old when we moved there. My dad, as I said, it was during the Depression we lived in Solon, Virginia at the time he passed away. He was...we tried to...he was a farm manager of a big farm and one of my uncles lived on that farm, my daddy was kind of in charge but I don't guess he showed that because when your 25 months old when your daddy died you don't remember what you did, you know. You remember some stories they tell, but...he ran the farm and then after a couple years as we grew older my uncle had a big family and everything else he needed the space, he needed this, so we moved to another place. We actually moved to another one of my daddy's uncle that was [unintelligible] We didn't stay there but 10 months, when he asked us, he told us that he needed his house, he needed somebody bigger than we were to do the work. Well, we were 10 months older than we were when he told us to come there. Is the way I look at it, but anyway. My mother caught it rough, but she kept us together as I said. She had food on the table, we had clean clothes. My sisters were smart, they did well. Never, but you might think that me being the only boy and having four sisters that I would be spoiled, it don't work that way. I believe if they had four brothers and one daughter we would have spoiled her, but they didn't spoil me. Now I had one sister, she...we got along just fine. She didn't cross over trying to tell me what to do, and I didn't cross over trying to tell her what to do and still don't to this day. We get along just fine. But we all had a wonderful mother and I just...I'm sorry that she had to work so hard as I said earlier. I know I hurt my sisters' sometimes feelings, made [unintelligible] sometimes, but the work didn't hurt us. They...all of my sisters are still married to the same...they never got married or still married to the same man they married and everything else and seem to be doing ok. So I think that, I know that my mother did a terrific job on what she had to work with.

**AG:** Would you say she is your childhood hero? I'm so soft-spoken. Would you say that your mom is your childhood hero?

**BY:** Yeah, that's what I said a while ago, she was my best friend, yeah. Yeah, yeah. I don't hear as well as I used to.

**AG:** And I whisper, so we're quite a team. That's my last question.

**BY:** Now you keep on, I like you talking and stuff like that, you keep on talking just talk a little louder.

**AG:** I think that's my best--my last—question, I think we can't find a better note to end on with your mom.

**BY:** Well, you know, I think that's the sad part about not having what you're really looking for when you graduate from college and things like that is having to move away from your parents and your friends and things like that. I think that is not only hard on the person but I think it's hard on your parents and everything else and it's unfortunate but a lot of these places in whatever way it's going I don't know how we're going to get...it's I know that y'all keep up with it and everything else, but this mining uranium up in Chatham...They say how many new jobs that will create and this that and the other and everything else I don't mind telling you that until they do a lot, lots more study of it of what harm it's going to do, what it's going to get into the water, what it's going to do to the surrounding land, what it's going to do to do the water flow all the way to ocean and stuff like that. I'm not for getting the economy booming as a gold town, California until we do more study into something like that, but that's my personal opinion.

**KB:** Alright, well I think that's all we've got.