

RL00170-CS-0958_01 / Sydney Gilmore, Jr. (primary interviewee) and James Eaves interview recording, 1995 July 26 / Duke Digital Repository

Alex Byrd: Mr. Eaves, when we get down to stuff about the mine, you just to help me out because you know I don't know all the right questions.

James T. "Red" Eaves: Okay.

Alex Byrd: Okay. Thanks a lot for talking to us today. If you'd start off just by saying your whole name?

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Sidney, S-I-D-N-E-Y, Gilmore.

Alex Byrd: Gilmore.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Junior.

Alex Byrd: Junior. Okay. Where were you born, Mr. Gilmore?

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Wheatcroft.

Alex Byrd: Wheatcroft?

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Yeah.

Alex Byrd: Wheatcroft, Kentucky.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Kentucky.

Alex Byrd: What county is that?

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: In Webster.

Alex Byrd: Webster.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Mm-hmm.

Alex Byrd: What's your birthday?

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Six.

Alex Byrd: Six.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: 26.

Alex Byrd: 26.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: 31.

Alex Byrd: 31. You know what I noticed, Mr. Eaves?

James T. "Red" Eaves: What?

Alex Byrd: All the men that I ask their birthday, they give me the numbers and all the women I ask, they give me the whole date. (Eaves laughs) I don't know if it's [indistinct 00:00:54] I don't know why that is.

Alex Byrd: Well, Mr. Gilmore, can you tell me, I'm real interested in your growing up in Wheatcroft and how you ended up from Wheatcroft into the Army.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Well, I went to school in Wheatcroft, and when I finished the eighth grade, we moved to Earlington.

Alex Byrd: Okay. What did you do in Earlington?

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Well, I went to high school there?

Alex Byrd: At Million?

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Yeah, J.W. Million.

Alex Byrd: Okay. Where did you go after Million?

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Well, after Million, I went to work in the coal mine.

Alex Byrd: Okay.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Started in the coal mine in 1950.

Alex Byrd: Did you graduate from Million?

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Yeah. Graduated from Million in 1950.

Alex Byrd: Okay.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: I got a girl pregnant, (laughs) so I had to get a job in the coal mine.

Alex Byrd: (all laughing) I was just about to ask you why'd you have to get that job?

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Yeah. I got a girl pregnant, go in the coal mine.

Alex Byrd: Which mine did you go into?

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Pleasant View.

Alex Byrd: Pleasant View? All right. That's the same as—How'd you get that job?

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Well, my dad-in-law and daddy got the job for me out there.

Alex Byrd: They had already been working?

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Yeah. They was working here.

Alex Byrd: Had your father been working in the mines while you were coming up?

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Yeah. Father worked in mine all my life. Only place I known to work.

Alex Byrd: Okay. What did you know before the mines before you got in them?

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Nothing. Just see people going. Well, I used to go around the mine when I was little and small, and when the guy would get off work and bring their horses and things in, we used to ride them to the stable.

Alex Byrd: Okay.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: So they could feed them.

Alex Byrd: Okay. About time you got out of high school, went over there to Pleasant View—

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: I delivered papers when I was going through high school.

Alex Byrd: Okay.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Used to deliver Courier Journal.

Alex Byrd: Okay. The Louisville paper.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Mm-hmm.

Alex Byrd: What was it like? You had never—I mean, you knew your father worked in the mine, then you show up in the mines at 18.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: See, I always wanted to go in the mine. When I was little, I used to get there run in the house, play mines all the time. I had my own little mines I had done built under my house.

Alex Byrd: Okay.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Had my little, line it out like a coal mine. (laughs) I'd get off from school out there, I'd get out there and work all day in the mine, supposed to been, and come in and eat in the night. My mother used to have to bathe me. (laughs)

Alex Byrd: Okay.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Yeah. About all of that.

Alex Byrd: Was it anything like you imagined once you showed up there?

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Yeah.

Alex Byrd: What was your first job in the mine?

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: I was a timber man.

Alex Byrd: Okay. For those of us who—I know what a timber man was now, but only because I just spoke to a man.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: I'm going to tell you something about that. The first day I worked in the mine, we had a big fall. I didn't even know the way how to get out the mine, but I got scared and I left the mine. I asked a man named Uncle Bud Cox. He'd been working in the mine, he's a timber man. He had a mule he used to haul timber. I didn't know how to get out, so I asked him how to get out. He told me to follow him, because they told me to ride a belt. I didn't know what a belt was and I hadn't been in the mine I guess it was about four hours. I quit, and I went home. I stayed home about two days, wouldn't go back. Finally, my dad and them talked me into going back. I went back, and I said, "I got to do something better than this." I timbered I guess for about five months.

Alex Byrd: Okay.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: I learned how to drive a shuttle car.

Alex Byrd: After that?

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Mm-hmm. Once I started driving that shuttle car, everything was all right then.

James T. "Red" Eaves: Yeah. Hauling coal.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Shuttle car, you transfer coal to the belt so they can—

Alex Byrd: Okay. The belt takes it up to the top?

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Yeah.

Alex Byrd: Okay. What's a loader than, Mr. Eaves?

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: That's what you load the shuttle car with. They shoot the coal, drill it, and shoot, it then the shuttle car pick it up and put it on my car and I take it to the belt, and the belt on out.

Alex Byrd: Belt takes it out. Okay. How many men? Did you work with folks that you knew when you were down there?

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Oh, yeah. Yeah, just about everybody you knew, all but the boss man.

Alex Byrd: Okay.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Later on, got to knew them.

Alex Byrd: I mean, were there Blacks and Whites in the mine?

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Yeah. Yeah.

Alex Byrd: What were there?

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: The first man I started working with was a Black, name was Claiborne Woodridge. You remember him?

James T. "Red" Eaves: Who's that?

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Claiborne Woodridge from over there, Pistol daddy.

James T. "Red" Eaves: Oh, okay.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: You probably don't remember.

James T. "Red" Eaves: [indistinct 00:05:39]

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Claiborne Woodridge. That was Pistol's daddy. Pistol's a mine inspector now. You know him.

James T. "Red" Eaves: Yeah. We worked together.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Yeah. I worked with him and an old man, Cotton. He was a White fellow. We all got along good.

Alex Byrd: Folks tend to get along?

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Yeah. I never had no trouble, at least when I was there, coal mine.

Alex Byrd: Was it any different in the mines than it was in the town?

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Yeah. Yeah.

Alex Byrd: what was?

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: In the mines, take the White fellows, you get along better. You catch them out in the store, where we used to go get our groceries at, they'd be with their wives and would hardly say anything to you. You get in the mine, you got along good. I guess they was afraid you'd talk to their old lady or what, but White fellow wouldn't say nothing to you at the company store.

Alex Byrd: What did y'all say about that? Did you talk amongst yourselves?

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: No, we didn't. We just go on, and if they didn't speak to us, we didn't speak to them. Just keep on going.

Alex Byrd: You just noticed.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Yeah. Keep on going.

Alex Byrd: Did everyone do every kind of job down underneath, Whites and Blacks did all kinds of jobs?

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Oh, yeah.

Alex Byrd: Okay.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: You work with Blacks, I mean with White and some job White work by themself.

Alex Byrd: What kind of job would that have been?

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: A loader, if you're a White man be running the loader, you got the hoist man on the loader or pull your cable, the machine man.

Alex Byrd: Okay.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: My daddy was a machine man, he'd run machine, but he had a White guy hustling for him.

Alex Byrd: Okay. How long did you stay in the mine when you first?

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Well now, I worked in the mine for about a year and a half the first time. I got tired and moved to Detroit.

Alex Byrd: Okay.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: I was working at a frozen food factory up there in Detroit, Michigan.

Alex Byrd: Okay.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Okay. My mother was passed away. We decided to bring her back to Hopkinsville to bury her.

Alex Byrd: Okay.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: After we brought her back to Hopkinsville, I didn't have any people up in Detroit, so I went back in the coal mine.

Alex Byrd: Okay. You moved back. How'd you end up in Detroit the first place?

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: I just got tired of working the mine, so I go up there with my mother.

Alex Byrd: You had people up there, that's how you—

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: My mother. Mm-hmm. I moved up there with her. After she passed away, I moved back and went back in the mine.

Alex Byrd: Any difference between living in the big old city of Detroit and Muhlenberg County?

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Yeah. Yeah. Detroit was too fast for me. Yeah. You could get in trouble easy up there in

Michigan.

Alex Byrd: A lot of folks in Detroit.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Yeah. I worked most of the time, so I didn't get a chance to go and I wasn't there long enough.

Alex Byrd: Okay.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: No. No.

Alex Byrd: Were there other folks up there from—

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Yeah.

Alex Byrd: Anyone you knew from around?

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Well, yeah, but I can't think of the name. The other lady up there we knew, but I don't know her name. She was—Let me see if I can think her name. She had business up there. She had a dry cleaner business, but I can't think of her name. Been so long.

Alex Byrd: It wasn't like y'all just go up there and get started. There was other people you knew from around here that had gone.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Yeah.

Alex Byrd: Okay. You worked for a year and a half, then you went up to the frozen food, and then you came back down?

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Came back here.

Alex Byrd: Same mine?

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: No, I went to a mine called, what they call it, Slap House. What's Slap House name? We call it Slap House.

James T. "Red" Eaves: Yeah. That wasn't the name though.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: That wasn't the name of it. Can't think of it myself now.

Alex Byrd: Do you know why they called it Slap House?

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: No, that's just a nickname.

Alex Byrd: Just a nickname?

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Yeah. It wasn't Slap House. That's what we all called it, Slap House. That was a good mine too.

Alex Byrd: Better than—you said good mine?

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Yeah, better than Pleasant View. Pleasant View had a lot of bad top. Out there, we didn't have much bad top.

Alex Byrd: Okay. So, safer?

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Yeah. The mules, haul more coal.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Atkinson.

James T. "Red" Eaves: Atkinson.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: That's the name, Atkinson. After I think of it a minute, that's the name of it, Atkinson Coal Company.

James T. "Red" Eaves: [indistinct 00:09:47]

Alex Byrd: Safer mine.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: I left from Pleasant View there, used to be the superintendent at Pleasant View picked me to go with him to help open up Agatha.

Alex Byrd: Okay. Is that still in the county? Still Hopkins County?

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Yeah. Yeah.

Alex Byrd: How long did you work out there?

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: I worked there from 1955. That's when I was drafted in the Army.

Alex Byrd: Any difference besides it being safer and just a better place to work? Was the coal mining still about the same?

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: No, it about the same.

Alex Byrd: Where'd you go after you got drafted?

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Let me see, when I went drafted I took basic training in Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri. Ford Leonard Wood, finished basic, I came to Fort Knox.

Alex Byrd: Okay. Back to Kentucky.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Yeah.

Alex Byrd: What was the Army like in the beginning?

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Oh, it was rough. It was rough in the beginning, but I made sergeant as a US. I called back here and see about how this working, they wasn't working but one or two days. Well shit, I'm sergeant. I had two kids, I said well, "Since I'm a sergeant, got two kids, they got allotment going." I just stayed in because I liked to travel a lot. I just stayed in the Army.

Alex Byrd: Okay. When you say they had allotment, they'd take part of your check and send it to your kids?

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Yeah. They take part of my check and send it to my kids so I didn't have no. Had me a place to sleep, clothes, three meals a day, hospital and everything paid for. I said, "I'm going to stay in," so I stayed in.

Alex Byrd: Was the Army any different than what you're, I'm sure the discipline was a little different.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. Army, after I made sergeant, it alright for me then.

Alex Byrd: It's got to be all right when you got some stripes.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Mm-hmm. Yeah. Got better.

Alex Byrd: What kind of work did you do in the Army?

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Well, when I first went in, I was a tank mechanic.

Alex Byrd: Okay. Would you characterize the kind of race relations in the Army any different than working in the coal mine?

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Well, yeah. A lot different. Got guys come from big city, you had a little rank, they didn't want you to tell them anything, the White guys. As you go along, you being in the Army, they couldn't be too hard on you because they would get punished.

Alex Byrd: How'd you deal with that? Did you ever have to deal with folks on trying to buck you because?

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Yeah. I had to deal with it. Well, sometime I come in and the guys didn't make up the beds. I mean, they make up the beds, and the one that give me a lot of trouble when they come in at lunch time and eat because I'd go in and tear the bed up. Then when lunchtime's over, they want to go and take a 15 minute break, they'd have to go in there and make the bed.

Alex Byrd: Okay.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: They'd come to me and want to know why I tore up. I wouldn't tell them, but they finally found out.

Alex Byrd: Okay.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: They said, "Well, we better quit picking on sarge."

Alex Byrd: These be like, you're talking about privates and folks just out of basic?

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Yeah. Yeah, just out of basic.

Alex Byrd: Okay. How about your ranked superiors? How were relationships?

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: I didn't have any trouble with them.

Alex Byrd: Okay.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: No.

Alex Byrd: How many places did you see? You said you like to travel?

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Well, when I left Fort Knox, I went to Germany.

Alex Byrd: Okay.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: I stayed in Germany I guess about three years. Then I come back to Aberdeen Proving Ground, Maryland.

Alex Byrd: Okay.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: I was stationed in Manheim, Germany.

Alex Byrd: Okay.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Got that? I was playing on a German baseball team, and they had baseball just about in every country over there. Belgium, all those places, but they didn't have baseball in Germany.

Alex Byrd: Okay.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: They had two German guys come to America to play baseball, and they came back to Germany and started baseball. They come around to each unit to get a couple guys to help them that know baseball. I was picked, me and another guy. They asked me did I want to play for them. I told them yeah. Reason I got to play for them is because my battalion commander married one of the German guys' sister.

Alex Byrd: Okay.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: He give me a break to play with them. I played with them for three years when I was in Germany, and I came back, that's when I came back to Aberdeen Proving Ground.

Alex Byrd: Okay. You don't have to, I just use this as [indistinct 00:14:57]

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: I was in Aberdeen Proving Ground for I guess about six months.

Alex Byrd: Okay.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: I got orders to go back to Germany, right back at Manheim, right back on the same baseball team, and I played three more years with them. Same team.

Alex Byrd: I have a feeling they was moving you around for baseball.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Yeah, but the only reason all this happened is because the battalion commander was married to these two brothers' sister, the last name was Helmut. That's all I know. It's a German name. I played with them for three more years. Then when I come back this time from over there, I came to Fort Riley, Kansas.

Alex Byrd: Okay. Big Red One. No?

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Fort Riley, Kansas. I stayed at Fort Riley, and then I was transferred to Washington.

Alex Byrd: That's your whole?

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: No, Washington, and then I went back to Germany. After I came back from Germany this time, I came to Utah.

Alex Byrd: Okay.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Tooele, Utah. I didn't like it there, and I volunteered for Vietnam.

Alex Byrd: What year did you go over?

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: 19, I think it was, I believe it was '68.

Alex Byrd: About '68. How many tours did you do?

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Well, I stayed in Vietnam two and a half years. I came back to Fort Campbell, I was a drill sergeant in Fort Campbell in 1971 and stopped drills, you know, they cut their basic training out in Fort Campbell. Then I left there and went to Fort Benning, Georgia.

Alex Byrd: Okay.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: When I got to Fort Benning, Georgia, I was in charge of project transition. That's when they started a school and started putting GIs out the Army, they call themselves setting up a school to teach them some kind of training that they could do when they get out.

Alex Byrd: Okay. That was for when they start downsizing?

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Yeah. When started time for them to get out the Army, they started letting them go to school so they could teach some kind of trade they could do when they get out the Army. It didn't last for about two and a half year, so they stopped it.

Alex Byrd: Okay.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Then I went back to my old outfit as a supply sergeant, and that's where I retired at as a supply sergeant. Came back to Madisonville in 1975.

Alex Byrd: From there you went back to?

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Back in the coal mine. 1975 went back to the coal mine.

Alex Byrd: I'm going to try and take you back to Wheatcroft for a little while more and try and figure out, just have you tell me what kind of place that was to grow up.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Man, I was so young, it was all right.

Alex Byrd: Didn't spend much time? How much?

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: We had a lot of playing, stuff to do. I remember when we were small, used to steal apples

and watermelon, swim.

Alex Byrd: Did you have to work around the house when you were a youngster?

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Oh, no. I didn't have much work. No, not that I know. I wasn't doing no work. Most of the time, I was playing.

Alex Byrd: Playing. How long did you stay in Wheatcroft?

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: I was born in Wheatcroft?

Alex Byrd: You were born there.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Yeah. I left Wheatcroft in the eighth grade. I don't know. I finished in '50s, so I went to school four years in Earlington. Say '50 by the time I left Wheatcroft.

Alex Byrd: Okay.

James T. "Red" Eaves: Wheatcroft was a mining town.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Yeah. It was a mining town.

Alex Byrd: Mining town?

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Yeah.

Alex Byrd: Okay.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Usually, when the mines close down, people—

Alex Byrd: People just take off.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Take off, and then it got so that the companies, that's when they started selling the houses. That's where they kept people in these mining towns.

Alex Byrd: Okay.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Back then, when a mining town go down, they just moved them.

Alex Byrd: Okay.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Now, up in the years, they started selling the people that work for the coal mine the

houses.

Alex Byrd: They'd sell the mining house?

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Sell them out really cheap, didn't they, Mr. Eaves?

James T. "Red" Eaves: Real cheap. [Indistinct 00:20:12] leaving because there wasn't no work.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Wasn't no work, so they just—now they got to start selling the houses, [indistinct 00:20:22].

Alex Byrd: Okay.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: You see that town going down, sold it to the man working the mine the houses. You take about a three room house and get it for 11 or 1200 dollars.

Alex Byrd: Wow.

James T. "Red" Eaves: Most of them were box houses.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Shotgun houses.

James T. "Red" Eaves: Yeah. Box, shotgun, whatever you want to call it. Three rooms, had a road. Most of them are coal miners.

Alex Byrd: Would the folks pretty much leave the folks living in the mining houses, would they leave the houses as they were or did they improve upon them or they were just living in them?

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: No, they probably didn't for lack of wood.

James T. "Red" Eaves: I tell you, some of the houses, [indistinct 00:21:22] See, now you must remember, a company got to make money. Them houses running down, [indistinct 00:21:22] people would get wood off of the houses for burning. If they caught you, you pay for it. They might tell you for the whole house.

Alex Byrd: If no one was living in this house and it was going down, sometimes folks would come and get wood off of it?

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Mm-hmm.

Alex Byrd: But you better not get caught. (laughs)

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Nope. They make you pay for the whole house.

James T. "Red" Eaves: That's [indistinct 00:21:50] not much you could do about it.

Alex Byrd: Did the company always have to come out ahead or on top, or were there really times where the coal miners or the folks living in the mining town made a little leeway against the company?

James T. "Red" Eaves: Well, I'll tell you. If you's fighting the man and they got a double wide shotgun and you ain't got nothing, you know who's going to come out ahead.

Alex Byrd: 19 times out of 20, but sometimes don't the shotgun jam or something?

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Yeah.

James T. "Red" Eaves: You know what kind of chance you got, slim or none.

Alex Byrd: You just got to say something to get to that.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: I'm going to say about the same thing.

Alex Byrd: Y'all didn't much come out on top too much, not against the company.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: No. Only way you come out against the company, you didn't come out then. You'd get hurt you might gain a little but you still don't come out. That's what happened to me. See now, I got hurt in the mine '79, and I didn't have work since then. Took me from '79 to '82.

James T. "Red" Eaves: Get your compensation.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: To get my compensation and everything. But now, I'm living a good life. By me retiring from the Army, see I got an Army check retirement. By me being hurt in the mine, I'm living me a good life now.

James T. "Red" Eaves: [indistinct 00:23:22]

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: I still have trouble with my back.

Alex Byrd: Right.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: I'm living a good life now.

Alex Byrd: Back then, if you got hurt in the mines, if you got hurt in the mines in '51 or '52.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: You wouldn't have got much then.

Alex Byrd: Okay.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: You do now.

Alex Byrd: Okay.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Back when I started in '50, it was a non-union mine. Now, it's a union. That's a lot of different in the mine. Back when I was working, it was non-union. Things was different when the mines become union. A man could take your job back in them days.

Alex Byrd: That was one of the differences?

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Yeah. I run the shuttle car, a man come in the mine back in them days, he was a better shuttle car driver than I was, he could take my job. Now union, only way he get your job is you getting ready to get off of it and you need that to bid for your job.

Alex Byrd: Okay.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Back them days, they could take your job.

Alex Byrd: Did you always have to be a better shuttle car driver?

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Yeah. Back in them days.

Alex Byrd: Or you could be a worse shuttle car driver?

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: That's back in the union.

Alex Byrd: Okay.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Now since the union, they can't take your job. Back then, we'd take a man like Mr. Eaves was for the loader runner, and if I want to, that's back in the non-union.

Alex Byrd: Non-union.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: If I wanted to help him, wouldn't be nothing said. But now, since it's gone union, if Mr. Eaves is the loader runner and I get off—and I'm driving the shuttle car and I get off my shuttle car to go help Mr. Eaves on his loader, they'll call you a scab. They think, now, union man now, all he do is drive a shuttle car. He ain't supposed to do nothing else. You ain't got no what you call buddy-buddy system like when I come up.

Alex Byrd: Y'all would help each other.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Yeah. When I come up in the mine, we'd help each other. If I see Mr. Eaves doing something and he be strained, I go on and help him. Buddy-buddy system. Nowadays, them guys see you doing something like that, they over there in corner "Ha ha, look at them." Instead of getting off and helping, if you get of and help him, they'll call you a scab, won't they, Mr. Eaves?

James T. "Red" Eaves: Yeah, they will.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Call you a scab in a minute.

James T. "Red" Eaves: A lot of them will do something to you.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Yeah. They do something to you. Sure do. If you get off and go help you buddy now, man, they call you a scab and get to fighting now because he get on with his buddy and get out in the bath house, and guy talking about you're nothing but a scab. You're down there helping your other buddy. That's just the way the old guys was.

Alex Byrd: Changed.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: These young guys, they don't.

Alex Byrd: Do one job.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Yeah.

Alex Byrd: All the way though.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Yeah. They think one job now.

James T. "Red" Eaves: I might add, non-union was pretty powerful back in those days. Why it wasn't union, a union [indistinct 00:26:44] bought every mine down in [indistinct 00:26:44] When they bought the mines, it wasn't union. Everything in West Kentucky wasn't union. That time the union come into effect in West Kentucky, had a few scattered mines, but most everything in Webster County all up to Butler County, that's up on other side of Muhlenberg. Most all of it was private. Now of course Muhlenberg was a pretty strong union. They had union mines up there.

Alex Byrd: Right.

James T. "Red" Eaves: Say down in here, law enforcement was against organized labor. You couldn't get fined. Of course, if you picket, the county judge and sheriff would stop you. You wouldn't be allowed but two men to picket. Two men around there, they're liable to beat the hell out of you doing anything. I remember

the turning point was about I guess 2000 people out of West Virginia, Muhlenberg, [indistinct 00:27:38] down there and picket the mine West Virginia on. They stopped the whole production. Of course, when everybody went back home, they started right back up. You remember that, don't you?

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: No, I was in the Army then. Yeah. Yeah. I don't remember that because I was in the Army at that time. When I left and went to coal mine—When I left, when I was here, it wasn't but usually one man around here out of West Kentucky Coal Company. They went union a year before I went in the Army. I believe it was 1954.

James T. "Red" Eaves: '54-'55.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Yeah. '54-'55 when they went, because I went in the Army in '55 and they were just beginning to go union.

James T. "Red" Eaves: Yeah.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: I stayed in the Army 20 years and six months, so when I come back, everything was organized as a union mine.

James T. "Red" Eaves: All the old miners that worked West Kentucky, they put them in unions, some of them [indistinct 00:28:39] They had never worked in a union mine. They wanted them in the union, so they [indistinct 00:28:51] rough on them too.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Union mine was better than scab because your benefits were better. You got more benefits. Your wife.

James T. "Red" Eaves: That hospitalization means a whole lot.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Oh, sure did.

James T. "Red" Eaves: That hospitalization now, I go I pay five dollars because of the prescriptions up to \$50. When I pay \$50, then all my medicine is free. If you go to the hospital, as many times I been to the hospital, I never paid a thing.

Alex Byrd: That's union benefits?

James T. "Red" Eaves: That's union.

Alex Byrd: Well, when you were first coming up into the mines, how did you do all of those things that Mr. Eaves just talked about that nowadays the union helps take care of? You said your wife was pregnant. How would you? Would you just pay cash for all of that? How'd you get by?

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: When I come up, my wife had two kids and I ain't never know here to go to the hospital. The doctors always come to the house.

James T. "Red" Eaves: Yeah.

Alex Byrd: Okay. Was this a company doctor?

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Yeah. Yeah. Had a company doctor used to come. What's that doctor's name? It wasn't Earl. I forget his name now. [Indistinct 00:30:15] it was Dr. Cleveland used to come, Black doctor and people's working in the mine, he used to come. I guess he just come and cut the baby's naval string or something because you had the babies at home.

James T. "Red" Eaves: You see, back in those days, they had always some women in the neighborhood delivered babies. I forget what did they call them. What did they call them?

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Midwife or something like this?

James T. "Red" Eaves: Yeah. Midwife.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Yeah.

James T. "Red" Eaves: Yeah. Yeah.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: They'd come help others have babies. You take some of them people at 13 and 14 babies, and mostly when I come up, that was common to me. Yeah. One family have 12-13 kids. I just lucky my mother just had two, but she wasn't around a coal mining town all her life.

Alex Byrd: The doctor, the company had a doctor and that's how you did your healthcare.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Yeah. Back in them days, people didn't go to the hospital.

Alex Byrd: You said the company doctor was a Black doctor.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Well, sometime Black. I think Doctor Cleveland was about the only Black doctor around that time. Rest of them was White. Doc Collins was our doctor down in Wheatcroft. He's a White doctor.

Alex Byrd: Okay.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: That's his name, Doctor Collins.

James T. "Red" Eaves: Now, a lot of wives would go to Hopkinsville, and they had two Black doctors. Doctor Moore and Doctor Brooks.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Because my mother got sick in Wheatcroft, and we took her all the way to Hopkinsville so Doctor Booth could take care of her.

Alex Byrd: Okay. Folks knew where the doctor.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: She was from up around that way.

Alex Byrd: Okay.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: We took her up there.

Alex Byrd: What things did the company either provide or pretend to provide before the days that the union came that took care of?

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Well, back in them days, they had a company store. I guess you heard that record, how it go, you know—

Alex Byrd: Owe my soul—

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Owe my soul to the company store, and that was true.

Alex Byrd: Worked 16 hours—

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: That was true. I worked in the coal mine back then, I guess I had about four years in the coal mine altogether. I didn't know when payday comes, and I'm going to tell it to, I didn't know when payday comes. Everyday was payday to me because we could go to the company store. You might think I'm telling a tale, but it's true. Ned probably told you the same thing. But you could go to the company store and get a \$10 book or whatever you could get. If you a good worker, you could get you a \$10 book every day. I was a good worker. We was working one or two days, but I'd get about three days, four days a week because I work overtime.

Alex Byrd: Okay.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: I work my job, come out in the evening and somebody didn't show up, I'd go on and work again. I could get money. We used to get \$10 or \$20 every day. You could get a \$10 book and sell it for \$8.50.

Alex Byrd: Okay.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Got a guy behind the store buying them from you. I never was broke. Then, my first car, a White guy needed a washing machine, so I bought him a brand new washing machine and he paid me the

car for the washing machine. I bought it through the company store. You could get anything you wanted back.

Alex Byrd: He wasn't a miner.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: No, he wasn't a miner. That's the way to do it. Buy them books and people that wasn't working in the mine, them guys was buying them books and they'd make some money off of it. We'd sell them for \$8.50 which we lose about \$2 and a half. They sell them to make a little more money.

Alex Byrd: If you didn't sell the books, they were for use in the store?

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Yeah. That's what I said. You could go to the company store and get anything you want. They took care of their men. Go to the store and get your food, your house.

James T. "Red" Eaves: You could always tell a guy from West Kentucky the clothes he wore. They had some of the best clothes in there in [indistinct 00:34:36]

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Them dogs, they got them shoes. Yeah, boy.

James T. "Red" Eaves: Military suit, or any kind of suit you want. If they didn't have it—

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: They'd get it for you.

Alex Byrd: They'd get it.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: If you didn't go up to the store and see a washing machine or something the didn't have, they'd tell you to come around and they'd get it for you. Car, they'd get you a car. I remember—

James T. "Red" Eaves: I'd like to add one thing too. I built my garage to put my car in, you saw my garage. I went over and talked to Chris, "I want to build a garage," he said "Well, you go [indistinct 00:35:17] and get anything you want and have them send me the bill."

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Send them the bill.

James T. "Red" Eaves: I ordered all the materials I wanted to build my garage.

Alex Byrd: There was a convenience to it.

James T. "Red" Eaves: It was convenient.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: See, back in them days, Earlington was dry. You couldn't drink nothing in Earlington, and we used to go to a little old town called Mannington or Dawson Springs and get drunk and be heading

back home and the police would pick us up and put us in jail for drunk. Or transporting, if we go get us some beer and bring it back up, they'd get you for transporting beer from a wet county to a dry county. Police put you in jail, and all you had to do was get up the next morning and call the company store, "Tell Mr. Chris I'm in jail." (Byrd laughs)

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: He'd call up there and tell the men let you out. You'd come out, you'd go to work and pay your fine. You know what, you could go up there and get anything you want, but take payment out by how you work. They didn't set no \$50 to \$100 a month. If you work, they take out \$5, \$10 just so you make some kind of payment.

Alex Byrd: Okay.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: They pretty good to you. Now, if you didn't work, you couldn't get nothing. Had a woman up there, we call her Joe Black.

James T. "Red" Eaves: What was her name?

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Oh, shoot. Ms. Victor?

James T. "Red" Eaves: Victor. Yeah.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: She kept that down. That was her job, she kept that down. She see you coming, if you didn't work, you start shaking her head. When a man named Chris, you can get anything that you want from him.

James T. "Red" Eaves: He didn't care if you worked or not.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: We used to go up there after lunchtime if we couldn't get nothing. As long as Mr. Joe, we called her Joe Black, Victor, as long as she was in there, them guys would stand over there and talk. As soon as she go to lunch, here they come. Mr. Chris would laugh, but he'd let you have anything. He didn't care because he know they going to get to work. They going to get it anyway.

James T. "Red" Eaves: Yeah. He'd let you have it.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: He'd let you have anything. Let me tell you what got me started, I was married. I was living in a little old house, little small house, but it was a fellow that came to Earlington and he got married to Ms. Essie. You remember Ms. Essie, Eaves? I never do remember that man's name. He married her and worked in the mine?

James T. "Red" Eaves: I may remember the name, but I can't—

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: I can't think of the name, but Ms. Essie and he got ready to leave. He had a car, a house,

and a house full of furniture. He decided he was going to leave so he went up to the store and told Chris he was getting ready to leave, get rid of his house. I was a good worker, and Mr. Chris called me and asked me, know I had got married asked me did I want a house. I bought the house, the car, the furniture, didn't pay nothing down. Just Mr. Chris called up asking me did I want a house.

Alex Byrd: Did you want it.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Did I want a house, car, and furniture and I told him yeah. I signed my name on a piece of paper, the next day I moved in. Bought the house and all of that, car. Sure did.

Alex Byrd: Did you know by the time you went to the Army all that was taken care of? How'd you know when you were finished?

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: When I went in the Army, I turned mostly everything over to my brother-in-law.

Alex Byrd: Okay.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: I let him have the house, car, and I don't know what he done with it now.

Alex Byrd: You didn't have to worry about anything.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: No. I just did it because he was working in the mine and Mr. Chris know that I just let him have it.

James T. "Red" Eaves: [indistinct 00:38:43]

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Yeah.

James T. "Red" Eaves: Did it together, you know what I mean.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: When I went in the Army, I couldn't pay for nothing. I wasn't getting but seven, eight dollars a month.

Alex Byrd: Okay.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: I mean, that seven or eight dollars, by the time I took some out to make allotment out for my kids, I was drawing \$35-40 a month. I was smoking, I'd go smoke, buy me some cigarettes that the Army didn't give you that and go buy me some beer, I was broke. Clothes, food, and a place to sleep, by me being in the Army, I had that. That's one reason I stayed in. All my medical and everything was taken care of, my wife, my kid. When I was in the Army, if my kid got sick—

Alex Byrd: Just take them to base.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Yeah. Take them to Army base. You could take them over here to the medical center and the Army would take care of it.

Alex Byrd: Okay.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Yeah. That's one reason I stayed in. I was having trouble with my wife too. I'm trying to go up there and get me some money so we going to separate, I'm trying to get me some money to have ball, she trying to get money for the kids clothes. I was in between.

James T. "Red" Eaves: Those women can get that money.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Yeah.

Alex Byrd: They could get it all.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Yeah. We be working, you come in, them women went up there and got what they want. They let them have it too. Whole life. Then you go up there and got to get something, "Well, your wife got this and that." Well, you're in trouble then. You better make sure your buddy got some money. Back in them days, good to have a buddy that wasn't married. Yeah.

Alex Byrd: You was in the Army, you needed a friend that was single.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Oh, yes. I mean, in the coal mine, man single, you could get a little money, you was tight.

Alex Byrd: You was talking about the coal mines that the wife could come up and get your money from the coal mine?

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Oh, yeah.

Alex Byrd: Oh, I thought he was talking about the Army.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: No. They didn't get your money in the Army.

Alex Byrd: Oh, in the coal mines.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: No, you make out your money to them in the Army.

Alex Byrd: Okay.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: You make an allotment and the Army takes so much from you, your money, and they put so much in the allotment.

Alex Byrd: Okay. In the coal mine.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: In the coal mine, you'd be at work and your wife go to that company store and get whatever she want. They let her have it.

James T. "Red" Eaves: Especially if they know she had kids.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Yeah.

James T. "Red" Eaves: Better have money [indistinct 00:41:06]

Alex Byrd: You said especially you had kids?

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Yeah.

Alex Byrd: Wow.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: They going to make sure you take care of them kids or go to jail, one.

Alex Byrd: They kept an eye one—

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Back then, I mean, we wasn't making much money. These laws and things stickier on you back then than they is now. These people right now got kids, they don't do nothing to them. Back then, we had to pay or we went to jail. All right.

Alex Byrd: Someone was telling me, this was in Muhlenberg County, about what they call, I don't know if they call them Possum Hunters? Something.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Oh, yeah.

Alex Byrd: Explain that to me so I can see if it was the same thing.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Well, I guess you's talking about when you're hunting.

Alex Byrd: No, I'm not talking about hunting possum.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Uh, oh.

James T. "Red" Eaves: We had that word, it was something—

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: I don't know about that.

James T. "Red" Eaves: Something similar to the Klan—

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Oh, okay. I don't know about that.

James T. "Red" Eaves: They had a guy mistreated his family, this is a White man.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Okay. Okay.

James T. "Red" Eaves: And some Black guys in the area.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Oh.

James T. "Red" Eaves: A guy mistreated his family, or what, they'd find him, take him out in the woods and beat the shit out of him.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Beat the shit out of them, okay. Okay.

Alex Byrd: Tell him to stop.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Okay. Yeah. I don't know about that.

James T. "Red" Eaves: I used to remember. Yeah.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: I didn't know about.

James T. "Red" Eaves: [indistinct 00:42:29] live in the community, participating.

James T. "Red" Eaves: If he go home, and damage his kid, his old lady, something like that, shit, they'll lay in wait on him, and they'd get his ass too, man. It didn't take a lot of time up. They'd whoop his ass like they whooping a baby.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: I ain't remember that.

James T. "Red" Eaves: Yeah. I remember. See, I'm a bit older.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Yeah. Yeah. I don't remember that.

Alex Byrd: The company then, if there are any domestic troubles like what Mr. Eaves was talking about, if there were men who were mistreating their wives and stuff, would the company get involved?

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: No. No. No.

James T. "Red" Eaves: Like I said, she goes to the sheriff, something that serious they go to the sheriff. [indistinct 00:43:16] ain't nobody. Unless they whoop them extra hard where he couldn't work.

Alex Byrd: Okay.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: When I come over, if I done something wrong my wife or kids, my daddy would call me and talk to me.

James T. "Red" Eaves: Back in those days, the community was pretty close together. If somebody died in the neighborhood, the men would get together that morning, take some shovels, and dig the grave and bury them.

Alex Byrd: Okay.

James T. "Red" Eaves: That's one thing about a coal mining town. Just about everybody knew everybody.

Alex Byrd: It was a tight community.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Yeah. Yeah. We did it.

James T. "Red" Eaves: We'd help each other.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Help each other.

Alex Byrd: Was it ever dangerous in the coal mining town being in that tight community?

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Yeah. Danger.

James T. "Red" Eaves: Man got killed, everybody there [indistinct 00:44:17]

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Danger.

James T. "Red" Eaves: Looked like one guy got killed back then, seemed like it was one out of your own family people were so close together. [indistinct 00:44:34] biggest killer in the coal mines back then.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Yeah.

Alex Byrd: It was dangerous most in the mines, but I'm wondering whether the coal mining town itself? Was that?

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Yeah. Yeah. Down in the Wheatcroft.

Alex Byrd: What you have to watch for in coal mining?

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Down there in Wheatcroft, somebody get killed down there just about every week, weekend. You got them guys that wasn't working, they get to gambling, and they wasn't working that's all they doing is at the gambling table. They gamble all week, some little guy would get broke and they'd be trying to take a coal miner man, take his money. Coal mine will kill you.

James T. "Red" Eaves: All of them [indistinct 00:45:18] They'd shoot them too.

Alex Byrd: They shoot the coal miner?

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: No, shoot the man.

Alex Byrd: Oh.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Shoot, somebody said all they had was a knife or gun on them, and they'd shoot you and didn't care. The police back in them days, the police scare of them guys. Them guys get killed down, that's Wheatcroft now. You get guys, somebody get killed just about every—Somebody didn't get killed in a week it's a good day.

Alex Byrd: Crazy.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Somebody get shot and you go get the police, first thing he'd ask you, "Is he dead?" Because he'd be scared to go out there.

James T. "Red" Eaves: He wouldn't go.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: No, he wouldn't go.

James T. "Red" Eaves: He wasn't going.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: Sure wasn't. Wouldn't do nothing to it.

James T. "Red" Eaves: If he made it back to the, in other words, he killed a man in town and he made it back to the camp where he lived, nine times out of ten, police won't go in there.

Alex Byrd: They're not going to go in the coal mining camp.

Sidney Gilmore Jr.: You had a lot of guys round there wasn't working, and them coal miners working, them guys would lay out there fool with them coal miners' wives. Taking their money, take—