

KK-CD-012-096

Kent Whitmore

Interviewed by Carrie and Michael Kline on 4-11-08

Born January 1938 to a sharecropping family, Whitmore recalls hearing his mother say that before his birth his father supplemented the family's income by running a moonshine still. Kent Whitmore recalls the misery of attending the Colored School where the children called him a half-breed and the teachers offered no protection and instead seemed to side with the bullies. After dropping out of school he went to work for local farmers, fed outside, never with the family. He recalls working with mules in the tobacco field. Whitmore contemplates the significance of some of his siblings' choices to move away and pass as white. "That's not bad, is it?" A practical man, he encourages his three daughters to move up through their professions, even if employers consider them white. He himself is proud to be Indian and has instilled this pride in his children and grandchildren.

As a boy, his mother canned everything, including sauerkraut. He vaguely recalls her making lye soap. He depicts community gatherings for hog butchering, wood choppings, and making molasses, which was always at night. Whitmore was a textile worker, beginning as a janitor and teaching himself to weave, until he was hired to run 50 looms at a time in a factory of 500. He discusses the current scarcity of jobs since the mills have shut down. Whitmore courted and married a woman who he continues to adore even after her death. Together they spent much of their lives in New Jersey where both had better jobs than were available at home. They were both pleased and relieved to retire early and return to Pleasant Grove. The interview includes discussions of alcohol and local drink houses filled with liquor and live music. Whitmore also recalls the terror of Ku Klux Klan activities in neighboring Caswell County, allowed by the local sheriff who, it was assumed, was in cahoots with the Klan.