

Forrest Bates: Old School at Elkton

FB: When I first came to Elkton, I was a kid, I was nine years old. That was in 1946. I started to school up here in Elkton in the fourth grade. Course we went to school in the old school building that was an old frame building. The old building, had old pot bellied heaters in there. We had to tote the coal in to fire up the heaters. In the summertime we would just raise the windows—didn't have no air conditioning. Wasn't any indoor plumbing—had old outdoor privies that we used, so there wasn't any inside plumbing at all.

Forrest Bates: Old Water System

FB: What little water we had was furnished by the old water system here in Elkton. We had water fountains, but the water came from the old water system here in Elkton and all, and of course it was, the old system pumped it out of a spring down there into a concrete tank up here on the top of the hill, and it just gravity flowed to everybody. Old tank had an old homemade tin top on top of it. I remember one time, the men here in Elkton wanted to clean the tank out and check on it. They did and they said the mud was waist deep in the old tank, just nothing but mud, it was a wonder we hadn't all just died from the water you know here in Elkton. I've seen a lot of time you'd pull a glass of water—you couldn't see through the water, it would be so muddy in there, you'd see hair, from cows and stuff like that, it would come on through the lines and all. And of course we had that kind of water here up until '67, whenever the new system was put in and got it installed and all. But we used to put water on a stove and boil it you know, before we'd drink it and all, a lot of times, and all. Water was just terrible, you know.

Forrest Bates: Cotton Gin

FB: My daddy got killed in '58 in a truck wreck. And the gin went on and operated probably another, maybe '62 or '63, I don't remember exactly when they closed it down. Then it sat there for several years after that, maybe ten or fifteen years before they actually tore the machinery and all out and done away with the gin and all, you know, but of course, back then, we ginned about three bales an hour. We thought we was just doing fine, you know. I have seen Daddy gin cotton all night long, you know, and crank that, be going the next morning you know, cotton would be lined up all the way across here, you know, people just a bale at a time, you know. Sometimes might have a big truck that would have two bales on it, but cotton would be all the way down yonder, turned down the main street, you know. Just waiting to get up and get ginned off, you know. And, it's, times have really changed, of course.

Forrest Bates: Changes in Farming and Growing Cotton

FB: Cotton is just like everything else in the farming business, farming has got just a few big farmers. In other words, it used to, back then, everybody had a few acres of cotton. In other words, well just like us, we had a, Daddy'd always raise a hog or two and kill for meat, we'd have a few old chickens, you know, for eggs, we'd usually have a cow or two to milk to have milk and then we'd always raise a garden you know. We had to raise and grow stuff, you know, and all, and everybody would have a few acres of cotton--might be three acres, four acres, 10 acres, 15, on up. But now, you know, you've got your cotton pickers and everything, and all machinery, you know, you don't, you don't do, this whole

farming thing has completely changed. Back then you had to chop your cotton, you had to pick your cotton, had to turn the land, till it, plant it and everything. Now they go in there and just plant this cotton and don't never chop it, you pick it with machinery, you know and everything. Used to, they'd bring ton and a half trucks up here in Elkton from Alabama. Their cotton would open just a little bit quicker than ours would, and these boys down in Alabama would come up here and get one or two people, you know, and get them up some cotton pickers, you know. And they'd come and get them, they'd usually pay 50 cents or 75 cents more per hundred to get their cotton picked down there. So they could get cotton pickers pretty good to go back to Alabama with them, you know, and pick the cotton down there. And that's the way it was all done back then, you know. I remember when they first come out with cotton pickers, I thought, man they ain't getting half the cotton out of the fields, you know, but got a whole lot more than what we thought. Couldn't get by without them now.

Forrest Bates: Family Responsibilities

FB: My daddy would run the gin out here, but we worked about 15-20 acres of cotton down here on Mr. Brandon Witt's farm, down here in the bend of the river. And I tell them my daddy was a sharecropper, you know. Of course, Mr. Witt owned the farm down there and all, and he had the mules. My daddy didn't have a team, but we'd go down there and chop the cotton, put it in, you know, and then pick it that fall. And, yes, we sure did. Of course, we didn't have a place over there at our house to have any cotton or anything, but Daddy would rent a little crop down there off of Mr. Brandon. Done that for several years, sure did, and all, so yes, whenever I went to high school up here in Elkton, and all, we'd always had, when we come in from school we had work to do. In other words, just like, me and my brother, we had sometimes we had two or three cows, sometimes we'd might not have but one or something or other, whatever, but that milking was our job. Getting in the wood was our job, you know. Or, if we had a coal heater, we had to get the coal in for the night, you know. That was our job. Daddy was working, you know, and we had to do our little chores around the house, you know, and take care of whatever, you know and all, at the house. You know, you look back and you wonder how they made it sometimes, you really do.

Forrest Bates: South Giles Water System

FB: When they first put the water system in, we had 320 customers. We started off, we had a little plant over here on the creek, and pumping water. We were the only ones out of the whole county that had a little pump station out of the creek, you know, a filter plant and all. And of course we run that, I believe, up until about '91 or '92. And of course we shut it down, it was costing so much money to run it. We could buy water cheaper than what we could actually run it, and that's the reason we made the effort to shut it down. But with the water system, we started off, we didn't even have an office or nothing. Patsy Griffith used to do all the bills and everything by hand. She'd do them out of her house over there, and just do them by hand. And I guess, done that probably 12-15 years, and I got after Mr. Carter and Joe one day, when we was having a board meeting, and I told them, I said, "Listen, looks to me like South Giles needs an office." And we went along, and Lib had a little old place right down here next to the store, and we rented off her, seems like, seems like we paid her about \$40 a month, it wasn't that much. But

we moved the office into there and of course it was very very small but it served the purpose, in other words, we had a place for the office and had an office. And we stayed down there until we built where we're at now and all, and of course that turned out to be a good effort at building our own office there.

Forrest Bates: Straw Taylor and Old Elkton Water

FB: Straw Taylor, Virgil Taylor was his name, we all called him Straw. Straw was a very unique man, he was kind of a moody fellow, and all. He knew where all the lines was in Elkton, he had put them all in by hand, of course, back then they didn't have no backhoe to dig no ditches or nothing with you, just dug it by hand. Of course it was the same way when you dug a grave. When somebody died in the community, several men would just pitch in and dig the grave, you know, back then, there wasn't no backhoe. So, Straw would put in line, do whatever, but he wouldn't tell nobody where the lines was at all. Now if you had a problem, he'd go out there and show you where the lines was, where it was and all, but he didn't have no map or nothing, he just knew where they was at. And that was just the way the thing operated, and he was really the only man I ever remember running the water system here in Elkton, really, because it was just him, you know and all. And he took care of it for years and years that way, you know, and.

NT: And the spring itself was on the property that is now the city park?

FB: It was on the Mr. George Whitfield's property. And of course the city, after Mr. Whitfield passed away, they bought the land from his estate, and the spring is down there now. Then it went across the other farm, pumped up here on top of the hill up here behind where Jimmy Thompson did live there. And in an old concrete tank was what it was, with an old homemade top on top of the tank.

Forrest Bates: Business in Old Elkton

FB: Well, back, back then, the first building right on the corner, which is torn completely down, it's not even there at all, was Mr. Dave Taylor's grocery store. And up over it was the Masonic Lodge. And right behind it, Mr. Henry McFarland, that was Bud McFarland's dad, Mr. Henry and them had a bus station, he had the little building for a bus station, he had a little light grocery line and all in there. And back whenever I was a kid, well on Saturday morning the bus would stop in here and just about fill the whole bus up with people going to town, you know, everybody would go to Pulaski and ride the bus back that afternoon, you know and all. And then the building standing out there now, I remember one time they had a furniture store in that building. One time, well it was Harold Taylor and his wife lived inside of it there for a while, they had an apartment in there and they lived in it. Then they had a barber shop in there, and just different things. And right beside of that building was a small white building there that Mrs. Ruth Birdsong was postmaster, they had the post office in it right there beside it. Then later on, they sold that little building and moved it down here on the side of the road, I think, and it burnt where that trailer down there is burned now. And then right beside where the bank building is now, they had another real big building in there, and that was where the Farm and Home Store started at right there. That's Richard and Charles Henry Harwell. Richard Bondurant and Charles Henry Harwell put the Farm and Home Store together and all, and had a very good business, in fact things were going so good and all, that's when they brought Andy in to help them, they just needed some extra help and all. And

of course Andy was selling, he was a distributor for Ford Tractor Company, he was selling Ford tractors at the time, and they brought him in as a partner to the store with them and all, and business I reckon, was very good for all of them. Later on, Charles sold out to Richard and Andy, then later on Richard sold out to Andy. Then, after the building burned and all, Andy moved over here and built a new building, then later on he sold out to Casey who's got it now, you know, and all. So the Farm and Home Store has been around for a good long while and all. I guess it's a, they started it sometimes in the '50's, because that old building started the Farm and Home Store in it, it was an old store building there, but it was, they had converted the thing into a skating rink. At one time it had skating rink in it and all. And I know it was in the 50's whenever they started the Farm and Home Store, I don't know what year it was, but it was in the '50's and all. So back then it was a pretty booming little place, you know, had a right smart business in this little old town and all.

Forrest Bates: Woodmen of the World

FB: And then this old block building here that I own now was built in '47 and the Woodmen of the World had it, had the upstairs of it, and they used to have some big crowds up there in the late '40's and the '50's. I've seen that thing just full of people and cars parked all up and down the road and up here on the city square and all, just parked everywhere people. They'd have a big supper out there or something and have just all kind of people there you know and all. Of course back then, you didn't have the television, you didn't have entertainment at home and all, like you've got this day and time, and people just wanted to get out you know, and go do something, I guess. And now people gets home from work and you sit down in front of that television, can't hardly drive a person out of the house, you know.

Forrest Bates: Changes in City Government

FB: Well, I don't know as it's changed a whole lot over the years, but I guess it has. Used to, we had a city recorder that just took care of the office. I mean, we didn't have no, whenever I was elected mayor, I got some grant money to hire the first secretary that we ever had here in Elkton. We got a grant and hired us a secretary to take care of the books and all. And up until then, the city recorder just done it. And it's just like back then, we had a police, you know, of course, he wouldn't catch that many people or nothing, but if you got a police you have to have a city judge. Well, we just appointed different ones in the community to be the judge, instead of having a lawyer like you've got now, and all. And of course you can't do that now. You've got to have an attorney to be city judge you know, and same way with, you know, when you have your city council meetings and all, you just very near got to have an attorney there to represent the city you know, if some conflict of interest comes up, or whatever, you know. And way back, you know, you just didn't have that to happen much. You just done what needed to be done to kind of keep the little town together and have police protection and have a few street lights scattered around over the town.

Forrest Bates: I-65

FB: Well, if it hadn't been for the interstate coming through, there'd be no way to go to Nashville now. Used to, we went to Nashville, it was just an all day thing, just to go to

Nashville. And back then, we didn't have no traffic at all, compared to what we have today. Alabama first come up to Athens, come up to the state line down here. This was long about '54 or '55. They just stopped down there at the state line, they come down to the state line and just stopped. And later, later on, a lot of them would take their cars and go down there, of course from the exit down, well where you went across it back then they didn't have a bridge to go across or nothing, just run out there, go down that hollow there and race back up the hill, you know, there wouldn't be no traffic you know, just two of the pull up beside each other and drag race you know, out of that thing, and wonder some of them didn't get killed, you know, doing it. But I remember back whenever I worked Monsanto down in Decatur, and I went to work down there in '56 to '69 there. But back in the late '50's, every time we went to work, somebody was going to have a race. Didn't care nothing about gas, 20 cents a gallon, didn't care nothing about the gas mileage, all we wanted was to trade cars for one with a bigger motor, one that would go faster, you know, and all. And it's just changed. Now, you know, a four cylinder goes too fast for me. I just get that better gas mileage now, you know. But, it's just change, it just changed a lot. But that interstate, yeah when it come through, it was just amazing, you know, when it finally opened up. Of course Alabama had to go back, what they put in back in '54 or '55, they had to go back and completely redo it, because it would not meet the Federal standards for the interstate. They just had to go back and completely rework it. But, yes, you know, I can get out there on the interstate, and I can be right downtown Nashville in an hour and 15 or 20 minutes, you know, it just makes it so good you know, and all.

Forrest Bates: Walking and Hitchhiking

FB: We didn't think nothing about, if we got ready to go to Ardmore or something, just get out here and start to walking. Head toward Ardmore, and if a car come by try to hitch hike us a ride with them, you know. Didn't think nothing about getting in and riding with whoever would stop you know, and let you ride, you know, and everything. Lot of times you'd be to Ardmore before a car would ever come by, you know, and all. And traffic wasn't like it is, I won't ever forget one day we was going to have a little harvest festival up here at the school house. And Mr. John Tucker was, I guess, in charge of it, or something or other. And Jim Newman, we was all supposed to bring a sheet to school to put between little booths we were going to booth off in the gym and all. And he didn't bring his. And Mr. Tucker said, "Daggone old boy, you just got two feet ain't ya? You just head on back home and get yours." So he sent Jim back home walking, and he lives over in Newman Hollow over there on the other side of y'all and everything. So he just sent him home to get it and come back. But you know, we didn't think nothing about it back then. We just, we were just used to walking and doing about anything.

Forrest Bates: The Refrigerator

FB: Won't never forget, Nancy, we moved to Elkton we had electricity. Went on there, of course that was right after World War II, and Daddy had put in for a refrigerator. And I don't know how long, it seemed like about a year or something, year and a half or something, finally got a refrigerator. And I thought that was the most wonderful thing I had ever seen in my life. Just go over there and open up that refrigerator and have ice. We wasn't used to having ice. Oh, we'd have company coming in the summer time and

we might stop the ice man. See, you'd have an ice truck run, haul ice, and he'd maybe run two days a week down here, or something or other, and you'd get a 25 lb block of ice, or 50 lb or whatever. You'd have an old ice chest you'd put that ice in and all, and have a little iced tea or something to drink. But whenever we got that refrigerator, just, that thing would just freeze ice you know. Put a little milk and sugar up there and just have ice cream. Man you just thought that was something. I thought that was the most outstanding thing I had ever seen in my life was that refrigerator.

Forrest Bates: The Best of Times

FB: But I could tell them, you know, I remember when times were really rough, I don't never remember going to bed hungry. We always had food on the table to eat. It might not be very much, but we always had enough to eat at night, in other words, daytime, Mama moved, first come to Elkton, of course down there where we was, we didn't have no electricity, no running water, nothing, down there neither you know. Had an old wood cook stove, and how Mama would do it I don't know, but she'd cook three meals a day on that old wood cook stove. And we'd have wash day once a week, she'd wash clothes on the wash day and take bath in an old No. 2 washtub, you know, and just, you know, a lot of times, and I realized it's hard on people this day and time, but I tell them we're living in the best times I ever lived in right now. In other words, anybody that, any young people that wants to get ahead, you know, I don't know of any better time to live in than right now ,if they'll just apply themselves. You know, I think the times are just great.