

# **NOTICE**

**Materials in our digital Oral History collections are the products of research projects by several individuals. USF Libraries assume no responsibility for the views expressed by interviewers or interviewees. Some interviews include material that may be viewed as offensive or objectionable. Parents of minors are encouraged to supervise use of USF Libraries Oral Histories and Digital Collections. Additional oral histories may be available in Special Collections for use in the reading room. See individual collection descriptions for more information.**

**This oral history is provided for research and education within the bounds of U.S. Copyright Law (Title 17, U.S.C.). Copyright over Oral Histories hosted by the USF Libraries rests with the interviewee unless transferred to the interviewer in the course of the project. Interviewee views and information may also be protected by privacy and publicity laws. All patrons making use of it and other library content are individually accountable for their responsible and legal use of copyrighted material.**

Carlton-Anthony Tampa Oral History Project  
Oral History Program  
Florida Studies Center  
University of South Florida, Tampa Library

Digital Object Identifier: U11-00033  
Interviewee: Edgar Joseph Chattin (EC)  
Interviewer: Andrew T. Huse (AH)  
Interview date: November 10, 2004  
Interview location: Woodville, Florida  
Transcribed by: Christine Toth  
Transcription date: October 13, 2009  
Audit Edit by: Kimberly Nordon  
Audit Edit date: November 13, 2009  
Final Edit by: Mary Beth Isaacson, MLS  
Final Edit date: November 17, 2009

[Transcriber's Note: There is no formal introduction or start to this oral history interview. The interview was digitized from a video presentation. The Interviewer's questions have been edited out.]

**Edgar Chattin:** —and my grandpa, he wore a hat almost identical to mine with a hawk feather stuck in it. Only difference in his hat when he took it off like that—couple of Derringer pistols stuck in it. And rarely did it seem he wasn't sitting on his front step cleaning one of his rifles; he loved his guns and stuff. He was a great craftsman with his hands; he [was] always whittling out a knife, for me, a wooden knife. I guess he might've been the one that really and truly go back far enough that encouraged me to be a knife-maker.

My grandpa would make me these wooden knives and hide 'em behind my ol' grandma's old ringer washing machine. And he'd call me, "Sprout! Come here, Sprout! I got something for ya!" And he'd reach behind there and pull out that old wooden knife; he'd call it a dagger. He says, "Here's ya a dagger!" And I looked at it, and the workmanship was phenomenal! And I'd go down the road a little ways, and it really ticked me off, because it wasn't real, and I'd throw it away. And to this very day, I still beat myself for throwing away them wooden knives; I'd love to have me one of 'em. Just to look at the craftsman ship, okay?

I was born and raised south of Tampa [Florida], southeast of Tampa. Not too far from Brandon, not too far from Riverview, in an area called Palm River. A lot of people think Palm River's a river, but it's not. It's an area, but the Palm River—the river does actually runs through Palm River. It started getting a lot of growth explosion back in the, I'd say, early sixties [1960s] when Adamo Acres was built, and then later on a man and a woman named Claire and Mel built Clair-Mel City. I knew both of them. I worked for them for a while, and they really exploded the area. And then they built a place called Evergreen Estates Manor Homes and then Progress Village was built, and the whole area got

exploded.

And the reason I'm up here is because I remember the area as country and woods. My heyday growing up was all country, woods, palm trees, oak trees, swamps and hammocks, coon [raccoon] huntin' and quail huntin'; and great, great quail huntin' territory at the time. Dove fields—we went opossum huntin' every night. We didn't live like normal people lived at all. Chattin people just weren't like normal people. Was an entirely different breed of people from what we seen everyday around the area. But people loved our personality, and the way we lived, and the way we acted, and the things we done. We just didn't do things like ordinary people done.

Huntin, and fishin', and even knife-makin', was a way of life to me. I was born and raised around a—my daddy turned an old hand-cranked Ford. I'd have to turn the Ford for him, maybe beatin' out an axe blade or somethin' like that. And I was fortunate to learn temperance steel, because I'm a knife-maker now, and a knife's not a knife until it's tempered. Before that, it's just a piece of iron, or a piece of steel.

But anyway, as I got older, I put in fifteen years at IMC Phosphate Company, at Port Sutton [Florida]. I was a master mechanic, and I was a heavy equipment operator and locomotive engineer for a while. My first wife passed away. I was married seventeen years, had two children. And when she passed away, I wanted to change my lifestyle—my life, because I didn't—me and growth does not get along. I do not get along with growth. But a lot of people call it “growth;” I call it “greed.” And because greed is what creates most growth—I can live with just ordinary, common growth, but when it's encouraged, I can't hardly live with it or even breathe around it.

I like people just fine, I just don't like 'em butted up next to me. If I get ready to shoot a rifle, I won't be able to shoot a rifle. I don't want to tie up my dogs. I don't want nobody's dogs turnin' over my garbage can, and I don't want my dogs turnin' over nobody else's garbage can. If you live beside somebody, might be the best folks in the world— 'cause you live beside them long enough, you're gonna have words with 'em sooner or later. But where I live now, there's no problem like that 'cause I don't live by anybody. But I still get along with people just fine.

But anyway, I just got fed up with the consequences of growth after my wife passed away. I decided to move. I decided to move to Wakulla County. And the reason I picked Wakulla County—I'd been driving up to north Florida huntin' for about thirty years. And I'd been huntin' in St. Vincent (inaudible) and I'd drive through this area. And I told my friends that I worked with, I said, “One day, I'm gonna live right in this area. This is real Florida. It's true Florida. What it used to be. This is old Palm River to me. I'm gonna live right here.”

They said, “Aww, you're full of it! You ain't movin' nowhere! You gonna stay right here and work ya'self to death rebuilding these locomotives and payloaders and all this stuff.” I said, “No. You just wait and see. One day, I'm gonna move.” So anyway, after my wife passed away, I moved up here in 1985. I've been here nearly nineteen years now.

So anyway, I met this other woman, got married four years after my wife had passed away, and was still raisin' my daughter and my son [who] was about eighteen, I think, when we moved here. My daughter came up here with us; she was about eleven. And she, my new wife, had a son that was about fourteen, and we bought this place right here that you see right around here.

First of all, let me go back a bit a little bit. I wanted a place that I could really feel free. And I paid my way completely out of debt. It took me four years' work, and all the overtime I could work. I knew I couldn't move up here and owe anybody any money. So it took me four years to pay my way outta debt, but I was still payin' on this property here. But anyway, to find this property, I went to Tallahassee [Florida] because I knew Tallahassee run Wakulla County, basically. And I got me a motel room, and got the phone book, and turned to the yellow pages, and took the biggest Century 21 [real estate franchise] ad in the yellow pages, and I called them.

I said, "Look, I want a piece of property in Wakulla County. I want an acre, two acres, five acres, ten acres, whatever. I want a well on it, electricity if I can get it, an old house or somethin'. I want to be able to climb up on the tallest tree on my property, fire thirty aught-six rifle in any direction and not worry about hittin' nobody, or nobody callin' the law on me for shootin' a gun. I want to be able to walk out of my house with a twelve-gauge shotgun over my shoulder and shoot me a mess of quail, or whatever I wanted, and nobody say, 'Hey, what are you doin'?' I want to be able to walk out of the house with a cane pole on my shoulder and catch me a string of fish. I want to go to a place where I see opossums runned over on the road again—coons and stuff like that."

Well, anyway, I told that to the realtor. He fed it all in the computer and it spit out this piece of property. I've never been lookin' at land in Perry [Florida] and Chiefland [Florida] a little bit, and they must not know that I was an original Florida Cracker. They just tryin' to sell pieces of land that had watermarks on the trees fifteen foot up in the air, and I knew better.

So when I finally got here, and got a hold of this realtor—this dirt road's real wind-y and rutted, and pot-holes and stuff in it. That realtor didn't even know if he's coming in the right direction or not. When we come off the hard road in here, about thirty-five, forty turkeys got in front of the car runnin' down the road. I said, "This is lookin' pretty good." 'Bout three or four deer jumped across the vehicle before we got here. I got here in this old house sittin' right over here, was built all growed up with dog kennels, and there was little buildings and fences and stuff everywhere. And I could see that there was some pretty flowers in all these weeds, and it was real rustic and rugged.

I walked out in front of the house and there's a big mud puddle there, and there had a bunch of bear tracks around it where this bear's been catching some frogs. I walked down a dirt road and there's a lot of hog trails, stuff like that, and big hawks and eagles flyin' overhead. Part of Florida that a lot of people's never witnessed or seen, and I seen it when I was a child, a kid growin' up, but I haven't seen it like that since, ya know? So anyway,

the realtor didn't know it, but I had a little tear in my eye when I seen this property. I knew this was Edgar. I knew this was me. I knew I was fixin' to make a big, big change in my life.

It's hard to move where you got a job that you're secure at, and you got some benefits, and you got retirement programs and stuff like that. It takes a lot of courage to pick up and leave and not knowin' really what you're gonna do for a livin'. And I told people, [they] says, "Well, what are you gonna do, Edgar, when you move up there to north Florida?" 'cause I done been payin' on the land for about two years 'fore I moved. I said, "Well, I'm gonna open an archery shop, if I can," because I've been into archery a long time. I'm twelve time Florida state champ, two time Southern United States champ, and was one error out of first place in the world. I took second in the world with a bow.

And so I had a lot of expertise in 'bout work, and I'm super craftsman with my hands. I've had people from all over the world come fill me [with] work. They just couldn't believe what I can do with my hands. I get that from my grandpa and my pa, my daddy. They were the same way. That side of my family, I believe, is where I got most of my talent from as far as using my hands—and I got my big heart from my mama.

But anyway, I got up and I told 'em I was gonna make knives. They said, "You gonna starve to death making knives." Well, I knew a little bit about knife-making, because I built them as a kid. If I want a good knife, as a young un', I'd built it myself. And I built two or three knives around there at the shop on my lunch break and stuff, and I never could really build myself one. I want to build me a knife that I can tote everyday and not use a pocket knife. I want a sheath knife. A mechanic is always usin' his knife; cut some wires, cut a piece of rope, scrape gaskets or somethin'. He uses his knife more than any tool.

My daddy told me when I was comin' up, "You gonna use a knife more than you will a pair of pliers, or crescent wrench, or any wrech. You gonna use a knife everyday for somethin'. It's the most valuable tool you got. The number one tool in the world's a knife. Every man that uses his hands, uses a knife." And he says, too, "You might not realize it, but most women uses a knife for somethin'." And it is—it's the number one tool. The first tool ever made was a knife.

But anyway, out there at the plant, I'd beat a knife out on the anvil there using a cuttin' torch to heat up a piece of file. I'd normally use a file. I'd do it all by hand and everything. By the time I got it finished one of my co-workers say, "Hey, I want that knife!" And I said, "Well, I'm buildin' it for myself." He said, "You don't understand. I want that knife."

[I said] "Well, it ain't for sale."

He said, "You don't understand—everything's for sale."

I said, "Well, if you get that knife, you gonna pay me about a hundred bucks for it"—at

that time, was a lot of money. He said, “If that’s what it takes!”

I said, “Mm hm [yes].” So, I built about three or four of them there; and all my co-workers, they wore ’em. I finally built myself one that was a little ugly and wasn’t nearly as good as edge or as sharp as the rest of ’em—was the only way I could keep one.

So, I said, “I’m gonna either open an archery shop or make knives. One or the other.” Well, I moved up in deer huntin’ country to start with. Everybody up here’s a deer hunter: doctors, lawyers, the nurses, and everybody. Everybody up here hunts. It’s not people that’s not raised around huntin’, city-folks like people in Tampa nowadays; they don’t know much about huntin’. They might; some of them do. But up here in this area, nearly everyone hunts. And a good skinnin’ knife—a man put as much emphasis on his skinnin’ knife as he did his rifle. And so, I didn’t know how it was gonna go up here at all. I had no idea if it was gonna work out or didn’t work out.

Anyway, I had come down when I moved up here, I had ulcerative colitis and I had it before I moved up, but once I moved up it got worse. And I got real down, bad sick when I moved up here and my wife and I was living in the old house. And I got terribly bad sick. As a matter of fact, my mama come up here and helped nurse me and she chopped firewood for us—we had a wood stove in the old house. My wife got a job at the IGA [Independent Grocers Alliance supermarket] in Woodville [Florida] and earned just enough money.

We was broke because we put all the mon—I still was bound and determined not to owe nobody one red cent. So, I paid off my property, twenty-three thousand dollars took to pay it off. My wife’s money, took her money to build the house with. I had a nice, nearly brand-new pickup truck paid for. I had to sell it to buy the—put the floorin’ in my house and to buy refrigerators and stoves and all that to move into the house.

But anyway, I got sicker and sicker and sicker. And when I was a kid, I trapped [animals] to buy my school clothes every year, opossums and coons and rabbits, and I knew about trapping. So I taught my stepson how to build a box-trap, mustered up enough energy to teach him how to build a box-trap. And I says, “Now, you can go down here in these swamps and stuff, and you can catch enough animals that we can bring in enough money around here. We can live.” And he was just young, teenager, and just no enthusiam about doing that type of stuff. Anyway, it didn’t work out. He never set a trap at all, never did work out. So, when you’re down and out like that, your brain starts racin’ whatcha going do—how ya gonna make a livin’?

Well, I come out here and I didn’t have a—got all the way down, got all the money I had was fourteen dollars, and I had a 1976 Dodge truck I’d bought when I sold my new truck to furnish the house. I bought a 1976 Dodge truck that needed a valve job on it; I got it pretty cheap. I put it in the yard, and I was getting real weak, I was down then to about 150 pounds. And on Thanksgiving Day, Jeannie [his wife] still nearly gets a tear in her eye seeing me climbing the hood of that truck, pullin’ the heads off and doin’ a valve job on it sick as a dog; and weak. Colitis makes you real weak. I was using the bathroom

fifty, sixty, eighty times a day passin' blood. Actually thought I was dyin'; and I was. I was actually dyin'.

But anyway, I took the fourteen dollars I had, and I went to a fella I knew and asked him where he bought coal at, 'cause I needed some coal to make the knives with. He told me I could get some in Havana, which is about fifteen miles north of Tallahassee, a town called Havana; it's a little antique town now. They had a Planters Exchange Hardware there. I went there and bought [a] hundred pounds of coal, and I had that Dodge truck and I filled up the tank with gas. And I come home and I took the backside of a vacuum cleaner and a brake drum, and made me a forge, and I made me a vise outta a piece of—I had a bunch of junk up here that I brought with me; some all thread [rod]. The Chattin men, they can't live without a junkpile. We all work out of a junkpile. Our junkpiles are treasures to us. Every day, if you see me out here workin, I'll work to my junkpile two or three times because I'm gonna get something outta there I need. And, we keep buildin' it up and buildin' it up all we can, because that's our Wal-Mart.

And so, anyway, I took and built me a forge, and I built me a vise out of 2x4s [lumber] and some all thread and I had a five gallon can of files, I had a piece of leather, and I had about a three-by-four foot sheet of quarter-inch thick Micarta, which Micarta is a manmade fiber made out of cloth and resin stacked up. It gets real hard and it doesn't shrink and swell with weather, and makes a real good knife handle. And I had some brass here, and I had a drill press, and some of my tools that I brought up from Tampa, and hacksaws and hand hacksaws, and I took in a—come out here and I beat out three knife blades. I hand-drew 'em down with a file, other file, and put 'em in the bath and took the temper out, and I took the teeth off the other files with a file. And I beat some pretty blades out; I still got pictures of the first three knives I built. I was real sick and getting sicker, but I was broke.

So I walked over to my new house was being built at the time; I done paid for it to get built. And one of the carpenters over there, I showed him one of them knives, and the old man over there didn't have but one ear on one side of his head. The other one got cut off by a plow; he dove between a plow when he was a kid and a plow come by and sheared off one of his ears.

But anyway, old man told me, "Look here, Mr. Chattin"—he called me Mr. Chattin. He said, "I don't know a thing in the world about knives, but I do know this, that's the prettiest knife I've ever seen in my life. I don't believe—I've been watchin' you out there workin' on them knives." It took me two weeks to make them three knives. He says, "There's—"

I said, "Well, I want to sell 'em."

He said, "Well, I know a man in Tallahassee that's a knife nut. He's got plenty of money."

I says, "Well, you just tell me how to get to him."

So he told me, “It’s James Harrison on Tallahassee Furniture.”

I said, “Okay.” So, I had enough gas to get to town; didn’t know if I had enough to get back. And I took a ball-peen hammer just before I left, and I beat out a little hatchet out of—we used to make when we was kids—and beat out a pretty, little tomahawk-lookin’ hatchet and put a new handle in it. And I carried them three knives, and I walked into Tallahassee Furniture. I found the place—I didn’t even know how to get around Tallahassee very good.

I walked in there, and I said, “I need to see Mr. James Harrison.” About that time, a fella that weighed about four hundred pounds walked out from around the counter and said, “Yeah, what do you need to see him for?”

I says, “I’m the new knife-maker in town.”

He says, “Oh, yeah?”

I said, “Yes, sir. I hear you like knives.”

He says, “Yeah, that’s right. Whatcha got?”

I laid down three knives on the counter and that little hatchet. He looked at ’em, took ’em out of the leather—I made some beautiful hand sewn sheaths, and he pulled the knives out, looked ’em, seen if they’d shave and everything. He checked them out. He slid one to the side. He said, “How much is that one?”

I didn’t know quite what to charge per knife up here, you know? I said, “That one there is a hundred dollars.” He just reached in his pocket and pulled out a wad of money like that, and flipped me a hundred dollar bill.

He said, “How about that little ol’ hatchet right there?”

I said, “Twenty-five dollars.” He gave me twenty-five dollars. And to a man that’s totally broke, I thought I’d won the lottery! You know, here I was 100 percent broke, even though I was sick, and I wasn’t allowed to eat hardly nothin’. I done been seeing doctors—now, I had, when I built my house and paid this land off, I had six thousand dollars left, and in a sight of two or three months to doctors in the area, had my six thousand dollars. I had no insurance or nothin’. They took every red cent I had. But anyway, now I had \$125, and I stopped on the way home and bought me a Wendy’s [restaurant] hamburger, and I thought I’d died and gone to heaven. I knew I was gonna suffer, but I didn’t care, I was celebratin’. And so, I headed home.

So anyway, when I come home, I still had two more knives left. The man I bought this property from, I went over to him and showed him them knives. I said, “You interested in one?”



He said, “Yeah, I like that one right there! How much is it?”

I said, “A hundred dollars.” He give me a hundred dollars. So, we went out to eat [at a] restaurant called Kojaks—it’s not here no more; barbecue place, and people there was from Tampa, originally. We went over there to eat, and [the] old fella at Kojaks, I showed him that last knife I had; it was a little, small knife. He says, “I got to have this. How much is it?”

I says, “Sixty-five dollars.” So he gimme sixty-five dollars. So, here’s these three knives. I made nearly 300 dollars, and I knew right then I was making pure gold, as far as I was concerned. I was making gold. All I had to do was go out there and produce gold! And I was makin’ it. I seen right then there wasn’t no problem about getting rid of knives. People wanted ’em when they seen ’em, they had to have ’em!

So anyway, time went on and I got sicker and sicker and get to get put in the hospital. I got down to 139 pounds. And so, I had to go the Department of Labor and to vocational rehab [rehabilitation]. First of all, I went to go check myself in the hospital, ’cause I was dyin’. I knew I was dyin’. I got down to a real high fever and weak. I couldn’t walk. My wife had to help me walk. And I went to the two hospitals in the area and tried to check myself in, and they says, “You can’t check yourself into a hospital. You gotta have a doctor check you in.”

So I said, “You mean to tell me you turnin’ me away to go home to die?”

They said, “Yeah, that’s right.”

I said, “Okay.”

I told Jean, I said, “Take me back home. Let me die in peace out there in them woods.” She said no, and she carried me back to Dr. Baggs, one of the doctors that took my money, but he was a likeable fella and a good doctor. He checked me out, he says, “You turn around and you go straight back to the hospital,” told Jeannie that.

[Jeannie] says, “Well, we don’t have no room there.”

He says, “There’ll be one there when you get there. If you don’t get him there within the next day or two, he’ll be dead.”

So anyway, they took me to the hospital and then the other doctors started checking me out and finally got a hold of a nurse told me about this vocation rehab. I didn’t know what I was gonna do about—thought I was gonna lose my land, my house, everything, you know. So anyway, they—the doctors—took my colon out. And when I woke up outta anesthesia, I knew from the feeling I had that I wasn’t well, or I was in the process of getting well. And they had people come in that’s had ileostomy operations that could talk to me, you know? They told me the people, the movie stars that had ’em, those operations, and that most people don’t even know that they had ’em, you know?

So I started moving knives right and left, but when I got well, I said, “Man, I’m gonna go to work. I’m gonna start buildin’ me some stuff!” So, I took—made a knife and I done sold most of my guns and everything to pay doctor bills, and I made knife—swap shops, loan, what do you call ’em?

**Andrew T. Huse:** Pawn Shop.

EC: Pawn shop! Become real good friends with the owner at the pawn swap, and swapped a knife for a good .22 rifle. If I got me a .22 rifle, so I knew if I had a .22 rifle paid, boy, then I can eat good! So I ate, you know, I killed a deer. You’re not supposed to kill a deer with a .22 rifle. I didn’t have no choice. But anyway, I swapped him for a weldin’ machine, and I started getting’ tools together.

I’d sell a knife. I’d take the money outta that knife and go buy me some tools. I still got some of the first tools I’ve made. I made my first grinder out of a skill saw. Took and just started growin’ and started getting’ more and more popular, and I started makin’ some knives out of railroad spikes. I started making some oyster knives, and then later on I started making some skinner knives out of railroad spikes, because the most famous railroad in the state of Florida goes through Wakulla County; St. Marks Railroad.<sup>1</sup> It was the first railroad in the state; it was the third railroad in the state of Florida. It was put in 1832, finished in 1834. And they was tearin’ it out—gonna make a bike trail out of it, and I was walkin’ up and down side the railroad pickin’ them [the spikes] up from here and there. I went to the contractor—he’s gonna junk ’em, all them railroad spikes; and I gave him \$150 for two pickup truckloads.

So anyway, I come back home. I started beatin’ out railroad spike knives right and left, and they got pretty famous. And after a while, *Florida Wildlife Magazine* had found out about me, and they wanted to do an article on me. So they come and done a big article on me and I didn’t know it had that big of a publication all over the world: Switzerland, Germany, Japan, and everywhere. I started sending knives all over the world: Africa, South America, and Germany and Switzerland and everywhere. I got to the point everytime I looked at a railroad spike, I got an upset stomach. I got [to] where I didn’t like railroad spikes, because to be truthful with ya, it doesn’t make a superior knife. I could make superior knives. I could make real good knives, but still, I was makin’ skinnin’ knives outta saw blades.

Anyway, all these files I done run out of; all these files, was the best deal I had around for making knives, and I told the feller that lives across the woods over here; he had a saw mill. And I swapped him a knife for all the lumber in this shop right here. He brought the lumber to me; had an old circular saw mill blade leanin’ against the fence, there, and I swapped him a little knife for that saw blade. And that saw blade, I made about, I guess, two or three hundred knives out of it; you know, at a hundred dollars a piece. There’s

---

<sup>1</sup> Prior to the Civil War, the railroad was a vital link connecting Florida’s capital of Tallahassee with the port of St. Marks on the Gulf Coast. It was later abandoned by the Seaboard Coast Line in 1983. The historic Tallahassee-St. Marks Railroad is now a state park.

about ten thousand dollars in knives in that saw blade. And so I started making knives right and left; everything just started growing, and growing. I got more and more popular, and people got to wantin' my stuff more and more.

They still seek after my knives, but I'm not able to make 'em many anymore because I'm down and—in my leg, and hip, and back and all that right now. I've worked myself to death, is what I've done. I never had an easy job; every job I've always had, you had to work. And that's what my daddy instilled in me at a young age, was the work ethic. I got to where I'm at right now, made enough knives in the last eighteen years—I figured out I made right around ten thousand knives in eighteen years. And I've got them scattered all over the world. I've got knives in every state in the United States and in sixteen different countries, and that's where I'm at right today.

Made a good livin' at it. Made a good livin'. I never got rich in that knife-making at all, but I never wanted for nothin'. And when I wanted a new truck, I could make enough knives to earn enough money to go pay cash for a brand new truck. While I didn't pay cash for a new truck, exactly, I paid cash in about ten knives; because all the car dealerships in Tallahassee, the owners of 'em, everyone of 'em collects my knives. And Lawton Chiles, the governor of the state of Florida, he bought a knife from me at the store down here turkey huntin'.<sup>2</sup> I laid 'em out on the asphalt—he picked out one them knives. And then, Allen Boyd, his big Lincoln [automobile] pulled up here last year; big ol' black Lincoln—there was people who worked for Allen Boyd, a Congressman in this area, that's buyin' him one of my knives for his birthday present 'bout two years ago.<sup>3</sup> So, Allen Boyd has one of my knives. By the way, he got my vote this year. (laughs)

Well, it takes a lot of craftsmanship, you've got to master about seven or eight trades to build one knife. You can't be good at it, you've got to master [it]. You've got to be a master. First of all, you've got to be an artist; if you're not an artist, you're not gonna be a knife-maker, period. You might can copy other people's work, but if you want to be an individualist, an individual knife-maker, your own style, your own work—there's people that's collected my knives long enough they can look at my knife right quick without ever seeing my initials on it and tell ya that, that I made it. But to make a knife, you gotta master 'bout ten trades.

I love working with steel; that's what I've worked with most of my life, 'round steel. And I was good at workin' around steel, being that I knew the knowledge of knife-making, and had the craftsman in my hands, and the artistry. You gotta be a metallurgist. Like I said, ou gotta be an artist, you gotta be a metallurgist, you gotta to be a carpenter, a rigger, a fitter, you got to know leatherwork, you got to be a salesman, you got to know how to take the temper out of steel, put temper into steel. You got to know what the function of a knife and make different knives for different things; all kinds of things that goes into knives.

---

<sup>2</sup> Lawton Chiles (1930-1998) was governor of Florida from 1991 to 1998. He also served in the U.S. Senate, the Florida Senate, and the Florida House of Representatives.

<sup>3</sup> Allen Boyd is a Democratic member of the U.S. House of Representatives from Florida's Second Congressional District, which consists of most of the eastern Panhandle, including Wakulla County and Tallahassee. He was first elected in 1997 and, as of 2009, is still in office.

And you'd be surprised the number of people that you'd never even dream collected knives. I've got a lot of women that collect my knives. I got people that collect my miniatures; little bitty knives 'bout the size of a quarter. I even got to makin' them for a while, and women likes to collect them. I've made earring knives and things like that.

Tomahawks is some of my big business. I've really gotten into tomahawks because I like the—here's the thing about a tomahawk: If a person's an outdoorsman, a woodsman, and he ever gets accustomed to a tomahawk, he'll never go nowhere without one. He'll find it's the most versatile tool he's ever owned. It'll out-chop a knife. You can skin animals with 'em, scrape hides with 'em, they'll chop as well as a double-bladed axe, and they're fun to throw. A tomahawk is a big part of my business, now; you'd be surprised that the people loves and collects tomahawks. I had a website on my tomahawks, but I've since done away with it because I'm semi-retired now, and they was workin' me to death.

I beat out so many tomahawks that I've worked my right out beatin' them out with a forge, took my arms two years to heal. Since my arm was tore up, I made a machine to do the work that my arm would do. I'm an inventor as well as a knife-maker. All my tools in my shop, saws and stuff, all's been modified or invented; all my machines I've invented and made myself. I could never buy the machines I want. Even my forges are all handmade. I've built everything.

That's another thing. When I moved up here in this particular area, wasn't but six thousand people in this whole county. Another reason I picked this county: it was the only county at the time in the state of Florida that didn't have no traffic lights in it. They had more miles of dirt road than hard road. And they had no fast food chains in it like Kentucky Fried Chicken, or McDonald's nowhere in this county. It's the only county in the state that was like that. Since then, this is one of the largest counties, fastest growing counties in the state. But I'm fortunate that I live right in the middle of Wakulla State Forest; it was all my huntin' club for years. So they're not gonna crowd me in too bad here. If I move one more time, the only way people's gonna get to me is by parachute, or mule, or walk. They're not gonna be able to drive up to my house.

AH: Mm-hm.

EC: But anyway, I just like it like that. But, I've got a real nice place out here and I love it. And I love my lifestyle now. I just can't think of anything that I like better than living where I live, 'cause I've made this my home. Now, I know as many people here as I did when I lived in Tampa. But like I started to say, when I first moved here, six thousand people in this county, nearly all of them kin to each other, and they're real clannish. Very clannish.

As a matter of fact, a feller come over here my first year here, handed me a newspaper and marked down for who to vote for. "You don't know nobody here. You can vote for this person, or that person, or whatever. If you need some asphalt poured here, there, concrete patch, you come and see me. We'll see to it, it gets done." You know?

But people was real clannish, and I was kinda like an outsider. They didn't know if they could chum up to me or not, you know, they kinda looked at you, slanted their eyes to look over there at you or somethin'. "What? I already talked to you." But once they found out I could fix a fire pin in a gun, or straighen out a bent barrel or make a gunstock, or something like that, they'd be coon huntin' way in the middle of the night out there and in the middle of nowhere, and I'd walk up next to their campfire in the middle of the night and they'd wonder where I'd come from. I didn't have a flashlight, headlight, or nothin'. And they'd say, "How in the world did you get here?"

I says, "Well, I thought I'd might walk over here and drink a cup of coffee with y'all boys."

"Did you come out here in the middle of these woods with no light?"

I said, "I don't need no light. I was born and raised in the woods."

"Man, I can't believe you got way out here with no light."

You know? But them people start chummin' up to me, and they needed me. I sharpened all their knives and axes and everything for 'em, and after a while they thought I was born and raised here!

When I was raised, I knew we wasn't like everybody else, like I said before. We wasn't quite like other people. I knew there was something big differs. My daddy never talked—he always told us, he said, "Y'all do know y'all got some [American] Indian blood in you?" And the way we was raised, we wasn't raised white-man lifestyle. We was raised half-white and half-Indian.

My daddy, he had a way with animals. He hunted, too. He wasn't against huntin'. Huntin' to him—he was a Christian man—was the same way I feel—I'm a Christian man, myself: to reap off the fruit of the land. It's a way of life. I have a lot better feelin' in my heart to set down and eat a piece of deer meat than to go and eat at McDonald's. That beef had no means of escape, you know? But anyway, huntin' was a way of life, and I was raised that way—a little bit of Indian blood in us. We didn't know how much or anything.

And then my cousins was the only neighbors comin' up, lived across the woods from us, and they was Indians, too! And they knew that they were Indians. Come to find out, we was half-Indians, me and my sisters and all. That's the reason why we didn't think like white people thought. Indians, they do actually think different. They got different way of lookin' at things, a different way of lookin' at life, different way to—Indian lookin' at white people. We look at white people the way I look at white people.

A white person never gets full. They never—rich man never gets enough money where he says, "Well, this is enough." They always want a little bit more, always want—they never

get full. They continuously after another dollar. You know? To them, it's a dollar game. Indians, it didn't matter to them if they had enough food to fill their belly that night, [or a] place to sleep.

If you got enough food—if you could eat the type foods you love to eat, to eat till you get full—I said this on that other documentary I done one time. I tell you all this: if you eat the type of foods you like to eat, and eat till you get full, you can sleep in an warm place at night when it's cool, or a cool place when it's warm. You're able to go huntin' and fishin' when huntin' season comes in and not owed by nobody a pile of money. To me, that's bein' filthy rich. You can't get any richer than that in my mind. That's the richest anybody needs to be. Man don't need cabin cruisers, airplanes, and all that stuff. You just need a good runnin' pickup truck to be able to go huntin' when huntin' season comes 'round, that's the main thing. But that's being rich in my mind.

But anyway, like I said, once I got grown and found out that I was half Indian, that explained a lot to me and I why I felt the way I felt in life. Those were the reasons I thought the things that I thought. Then I started doin' a lot of research on my family and different things, and my other cousins got involved in doing research and we joined Indian tribes, different Indian tribes, so on and so forth. So, we realized that the lineage that we were from, was the chief lineage from the Cherokee tribe.<sup>4</sup> The chief's—their stronghold was at Dahlonega, Georgia. So, everytime I go up there in Dahlonega, that's the only other place in the world where I get an inner-feelin' like I'm at home. It's got a lot to do with my heritage. And I can go up there—that's where our family's cemetery's at.

But anyway, my cousin, he's really got in debt with the Indian people and Indian tribes and to the government. And we were under the 1819 Treaty,<sup>5</sup> our particular people in North Carolina.<sup>6</sup> It was before the Trail of Tears, and we're our own tribe now.<sup>7</sup> Everyone in our tribe is kin to me or kin to my sisters. And my cousin's a chief now, and he's the—I think he's the attorney general of the Indian tribes in Georgia. Matter of fact, Johnny has a hard time keepin' up with the money part of it and takes a lot. He's in courts and stuff all the time.

We're still fightin' for land. We're still fightin' for tribal land; it's supposed to be acre for acre of land when our people was moved off. I don't really get down on the white people, because I'm half white myself. Indians, they were in the stone age when white man came here, and they had everything at their fingertips to live. They didn't need things like white people needed; they didn't have that greed in 'em.

---

<sup>4</sup> The Cherokee are a Native American people historically from the southeastern United States.

<sup>5</sup> The 1819 Treaty of Washington, also known as the Treaty with the Cherokee, ceded certain lands to the United States. The Cherokee were permitted to remain on the ceded lands with the option of becoming U.S. citizens, but were encouraged to emigrate to the reservations.

<sup>6</sup> EC is referring to the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, a federally recognized tribe living in North Carolina.

<sup>7</sup> The Trail of Tears (1831-1838) was the relocation and movement of Native Americans in the United States from their homelands to Indian Territory (present day Oklahoma) in the Western United States.

But what I got out of it, more than anything else, was finally realizing, like I said earlier, why I thought the way I thought, believed the things that I believed in. And nobody taught me that stuff; it was an inner thing in me. And it made me feel the way I felt.

When I was a kid, people come over to spend the night with us, they were totally amazed and enthused about the Chattins and how they lived. They'd go back to school and they'd talk for weeks! "Man, we spent the night with the Chattins, you won't believe what we've done! You just had no idea what we went through and what we done!" They'd talk about it for years, some of them! They never forgot the experience we just livin' our regular life. We didn't eat what other people eat, we just lived there for—but my childhood, I wouldn't trade for nobody's.

AH: Mm-hm.

EC: I guess me findin' this piece of property up here was a big time in my life. Made me very proud and fixed up, basically, the way I want it. I didn't have the money build big-time fancy home or nothin', but just light, nice, quaint old place in the woods. I'm just so proud every day. Sometimes I walk out of my house in the mornin', walk out in the yard, and I just scream like a month-old child.

AH: (laughs)

EC: Just enjoy. Says in the Bible, "Make a joyful noise to the Lord." Well, I can't sing or talk, but I can make a joyful noise out of my heart. And that to me, I make a joyful noise to the Lord, me just bein' plum thankful that I've got this little piece of property paid for and I'm just thankful what I've got in life. I don't have much, but I'm very thankful.

*pause in recording*

[Transcriber's note: During this portion of the interview, EC demonstrates how he makes knives. There are frequent pauses while he works, and there is some background noise from his workshop.]

EC: All right, what I'm gonna attempt to do, I'm gonna transform this railroad spike right here into a knife, a good, skinnin' knife. And this is a railroad spike. It's from the St. Marks railroad track, first railroad in the state of Florida, the third railroad in the United States, and we're gonna make a knife outta it.

Puttin' it in my forge! Take that a few minutes to heat up. I'm gonna kick back over here while it's heatin' up so I can watch it. When a forge gets real good and bright hot, you don't really want to look straight into one. It's kinda like lookin' at a welder. But this, here, we're not gonna get this one that hot. We'll get it about—oh, I'd say about 1400 degrees.

All the forges here I've built myself. All my tools I've built. Ya just about have to, to modify things to the way you work. Most knife-makers modifies their equipment. These

railroad spike knives put me on the map pretty good as a knife-maker, but it's not really that high quality of a knife. I would never use one myself; it's more of a ornamental-style knife than it is practical. But some people do use 'em. I can temper 'em up to about forty-five on a Rockwell scale, maybe fifty, which it will hold a fairly decent edge, but it's not that good of a knife.<sup>8</sup> But they're pretty, pretty knives.

Knife-making is not really that easy of a job. It's a gratifying job, but sometimes I think you're better off layin' brick or hangin' sheet rock!

Had a fella ask me one time, "Say, how do you get these things twisted?" I told him, I says, "Well, I normally get my wife good and mad and hand 'em to her. She thinks it's my neck!" But if you'll notice now, that's a pretty nice twist to the neck of it. That's gonna be the handle.

Now we're gonna beat the blade out. Steel! (hammering sounds)

If you really got your act together with a hammer, you can eliminate a lot of grindin', an awful lot of grindin'. Most people that are bladesmiths are good with a hammer, can do a majority of the work on the knife in a few minutes with a hammer. People that generally makes the knives by just stalk removal are called knife-makers. The ones that uses the forge and hammer are called bladesmiths. That's the difference between the two.

Now, you'll notice I just beat on it with a hammer just a little bit. It's already startin' to take shape of a knife. (hammering sounds)

[Transcriber's Note: One minute of hammering goes by until EC continues speaking.]

EC: I used to use coal forge for all this work, and I love workin' with coal. But I'm allergic to sulfur, and coal has sulfur in it. I had to quit usin' coal and go strictly to gas. I can do things on a coal forge I can't do with gas, and I can do things on a gas forge [that] I can't do with coal! Well, it's just a give-or-take situation.

Now, I'm going to adjust the handle now. It's a real nice winter-time job, it's not much for the summer. (light hammering sounds) Right there, until I get to grindin' on it, that's about all the hammerin' I'll be doin' to this particular spike. So, anyway, that's about all we can do out here; the rest'll be in the shop grindin'.

Anyway, this machine I'm using is a one-inch belt grinder I built myself out of a bench grinder. This was a timin' chain gear off of a Ford Pinto [automobile], and this was the little roller that tighten the side of the belt. These belts are carborundum belts; a one-inch belt costs nearly as much as a two-inch belt. So, I buy two-inch belts, and I split 'em. (ripping sounds) Now, I've got two one-inch belts for the price of just about a few cents difference, and for what one one-inch belt would cost. I'm gonna start grindin' on it, now. (loud, grinding noise)

---

<sup>8</sup> The Rockwell scale is a hardness scale based on the indentation hardness of a material, commonly used in metallurgy and engineering.



[Transcriber's Note: Thirty seconds of grinding noise until EC resumes speaking.]

EC: Takin' shape! It's all hand-eye coordination.

[Transcriber's Note: Twenty seconds of grinding noise until EC resumes speaking.]

EC: A knife should taper two ways: it should taper from the spine down to this way, and it should taper from this way up to the point. (grinding noise ceases)

I can still use that belt a little more, but I'm gonna change to a new belt because it's startin' to get to more precision work, some closer work, so a new belt's gonna cut a lot better and I can control it a lot better than a used belt. I'm gonna put a new belt on it so I can get a precision. (grinding noise)

[Transcriber's Note: One minute of grinding noise until EC resumes speaking.]

EC: I like to bring one down close to a sixteenth or narrower on the edge, where I'm gonna put the edge before I sharpen one. (grinding noise) About as narrow as I'd like to bring one on the edge. (grinding noise ceases)

This is roughed in. So far, I've got maybe a half hour in a knife, somethin' of that nature, from a railroad spike to this point. Now what we're gonna do is we're gonna just start goin' down, put some designs on it, some finger-notches in the back, finer belt. Then we'll go to temperin', then we'll come back and we'll re-grind and then we'll hand-sand. But right now, I'm gonna put some designs on the back of the handle. (grinding noise)

All I've done there was just kinda scalloped and notched the back of it. Now I'm gonna go to a finer belt, here. Now you lookin' at about another hour's work; another hour of work on this knife. (ripping noise)

(filing noise) What I'm doing right here, I'm puttin' some—they call 'em finger knotches, but I've done some readin' a while back. The first one to do this to a knife years ago was a knife company named Marble's [Outlet Store], and people always thought those knotches on the back of a knife [blade] was where to put your thumb or your finger when you're skinnin' with it. Well, I come to find out that's not the original reason for it. Marble's put it on the back of knife, and it was actually a criss-cross section instead of lyin' straight across, and it was to strike kitchen matches on it. And that's what it was for. But nowadays, everybody does it, and it's for finger grooves, they call it, finger notches. And that's to put your finger right there, but most people do when they're skinnin' to keep their finger from slippin', and you point with a knife.

We're goin' back outside there to the forge. All right, what I'm gonna do now's is temper the knife. But basically, what I'm gonna do is harden it, so it'll hold an edge. Okay, being this blade's been beat out, that means all the molecules are distorted and in different shapes, and different sizes, and different places in the steel. Nothin's equal. So

I'm gonna heat this steel up red-hot and let it cool about four or five times. That's called normalizing, and that's to get the molecules to flow evenly as you keep the blade from crackin'. I'm gonna let it cool. Turn this forge up a bit.

When you bring one up to red-hot, that point's called critical in knife-maker language. What critical means, means the molecules are separated, it means a magnet will not stick to it. And that's about three times [tempered]. When it goes back down to black, to the color black, that means the molecules are together and I can reheat it again. Now, I'm gonna water-quench this knife, because this is not a real high carbon steel. High carbon steel, you can water-quench it. If you temper this in oil, it will not harden. This particular part of the process is called hardenin'. This time I'll quench. The reason I'm doin' it like this instead of slidin' it directly into the forge, 'cause I slide it directly in forge and the middle of that forge is so hot it will melt the tip off of the knife. So this is heatin' it even along the edge.

And now this knife should be hard, and just to check it out— (filing sound) Okay. Might not can hear it, but anyway, this is how I check it to see if that blade's hard. It is hard. That's the way you want it. (grinding sound)

Now, if you'll notice that you can compare the sparks off the knife of this time compared to the last time, the sparks are smaller and finer. That means the knife's hardened. (background noises ceases). All right, I started off with a thrity-six grit [sander], I went to eighty grit, and I'm gonna go to two-twenty grit. (grinding sounds). Gonna wire brush it. By the time you build five of these in one day, you've done a day's work.

Now we're fixin' to hand sand. The time-consuming part of it is doing the handles. When you start puttin' deer antler handles and micarta, and different types of it, exotic hard woods, start doin' inlay with turquoise and malachite, different materials, putting garbs on it out of brass and nickel silver, and even steel guards, you can put a lot of time in one knife. You generally get out of it what you put into it. I've built hundreds and hundreds of these railroad spike knives, and I got to the point where I could build five in one day, from start to finish.

I'm gonna go ahead and put my touch mark on it; it's just my initials, EJC. Okay, now I'm gonna buff it. (grinding sound). Okay, final stage is sharpenin' it.

(grinding sounds ceases) My final test is this right here: see if it'll shave. There it is, finished product. Railroad spike that will shave you, slick as a whistle.

*end of interview*