

Interview with J.B. Day at his Riverbend Racing Museum in Easley, South Carolina on 25 July 2005 by Dan Pierce

PIERCE: And I'm at Mr. J.B. Day's museum in, I guess we're in Easley, South Carolina.

DAYS: [inaudible mumbling]

PIERCE: Why don't you go back and tell us about the first race you went to?

DAYS: Well, the first race I went to was at Lakewood Speedway in 1941 and that was the year Lloyd Seay got killed. I was sweeping the floor in the shop the next week and the boys popped in and they said, "The guy that won that race down there" said "got killed over some sugar, you know got shot and killed." So that was when that happened. That was my first race in 1941. Then you know they didn't do much no racing for a long time around the time of the war, and when they got bored they could start back racing. We've got this racetrack over in Raymond Thickets (?) and I was twelve years old and it was nothing but a swamp, so I carried the surveyor stick for two old gentlemen to lay that racetrack off and they give me some boots, and I got into the swamp carried the stick around for them to lay the track off, because it wasn't nothing but a swamp. So I'm the oldest man living to go, that went to Raymond Thickets.

PIERCE: Tell me about Bob Willaman (?) and what do you know about him. I know the name, but I don't know anything about him or anything.

DAYS: Bob was a good guy, he was in grading business, you know.

PIERCE: The what business?

DAYS: The grading business. He built roads and he built the racetrack, him and Buddy built it.

PIERCE: So Buddy was in on it at the start?

DAYS: Oh yeah, Buddy was in on at the start. But Bob got into a little bit of trouble, and he had to go to the 'big house' for a little while. So that's kind of what happened to him. But he was—

PIERCE: What was it for?

DAYS: Well, what I understand is that he bought a bunch of equipment and got tight with money and sold the equipment, you know. That's what I hear, you know, but I think it's pretty much [inaudible] getting on him and he had to go to the 'big house' for a little while. But Buddy Davenport was a good guy, but he had

a gambling problem and that's what happened to the racetrack—he lost it in a poker game, you know?

PIERCE: When? What year was that?

DAYS: That was probably '47, '48 maybe. But he also built the Columbia Speedway, Buddy did. So I went down there with him and help build that racetrack. I just kind of worked for Buddy, you know.

PIERCE: What did he do before he got in the racetrack business?

DAYS: Well, over on next to the bus station in Greenville, he had a office supply place, where he sold office supplies. He had his daddy-in-law over and his name King (?), he was the fire chief in Greenville, and I was just a little ole boy, you know—twelve and thirteen years old. Me and Mr. King would clean up the racetrack after every race. But we had a pretty good little job, cleaning up all that mess.

PIERCE: Probably found some money in the process [chuckles].

DAYS: Oh yeah, that old grandstand up there we just had boards on it. Me and my daddy put them boards on that. Like I said, I was just little ole boy, but I was big enough to poke the boards, you know. So, we had to get down and clean out the

blocks, [mumbling] putting them boards on the blocks. I'm the one who had to get under there and clean up, you had to kind of crawl under it, you know? Man, I found a bunch of money, you know. [quiet chuckling] But the first race I had, they had a bicycle race and I'd already been riding them bicycles, you know, and at a bicycle race, in a mule race, [indiscernible] pole climbing [mumbling]. So, they start off with the bicycle race and I had an old friend of mine, he's still living, come out here and build a race cart about three years ago. He was 84 years old then, he's about 86, 87 now. Wiley Bell (?). He uh—he, Wiley'd go around, he's the son of a engineer, and he'd figure out ways to make people lose their jobs in the cotton mills, you know [chuckles]. So he knew how to do stuff, you know, to cut out help. So he made me a pocket (?) for my bicycle. And, I'd been doing some races. So, I painted it up, he had it chromed, you couldn't fool with it (?). So we run two laps bicycle race, so whenever they was on the back stretch, I was getting checkered flag on the front stretch, you know [quiet chuckling]. Every time I'd peddle around, you know, every time you'd peddle six rounds, you'd been around to the half point, (?) you know, so. It wasn't no problem to win the race, you know [laughing]. Cheated a little bit, but won the race. So, I won that race, and so they told us in the [inaudible] in the mule riders' meeting, you know, I was gonna ride one of the mules. And a little black guy was there; his name was Big Head Tally; he was on the black mule. So, they told us that if you kick the mule, or beat on the mule you'd be disqualified, but the bicycle race paid five dollars; I'd already won it. So, we got, had the mule race. I rode a mule, and so going down

the back stretch, Big Head Tally he went to kicking and beating on the mule trying to get him to go faster, well they disqualified him, so they had six mules in the race, I'd run second in the mule race, and so I'd won the mule race then, because they disqualified him. Well, they got out there and people'd been trying to climb tree as a pole, but my Daddy, he'd took a drawing knife and chipped all the bark off of it, put ten pound of lard on it. They'd been trying to climb that pole for hours, you know. So, they finally announced over the speaker that they had a 50 dollar bill on top of it, if anybody who could get it without a ladder, or backed a truck up to it, any way you could get it would be good. We'd already thrown sand on us, you know [PIERCE laughs], dug up that red dirt and had that lard on our shirts, [PIERCE laughs softly] and man you know it was pretty [PIERCE laughs]. So, one ole big guy, this old big guy I seen him probably ten years ago, and he was still hanging around [inaudible] over here, I seen him on the street, and I said I'm gonna kick myself for not stopping, saying something to him, but I didn't, you know. He stood down at the bottom of the pole, and then this big tall guy, about as tall as you are, he came up and got on his shoulders, and so he climbed him, and I climbed the rest of all of them, and I got to get the dollars off the top of the pole, which I had to split with them – there were five of us, I was the fifth one, you know. That still sums up to two hundred dollars now, you know, and to a twelve year-old-boy, that's big money.

PIERCE: That's big money [chuckles].

DAY: Yeah, that's big money, especially in '46. So they had them two pigs, had them greased and they turned them loose. Well, ole feller was standing there and they told me before they turned them loose to get you two handfuls of dirt so you can hold them pigs, catch one of them, you know. So I did, I got me two handfuls of dirt, set after one of them pigs, and I caught one of them [chuckles]. So, the boy that caught the other pig, he lived in town, and he couldn't have a pig in town, you know, so he gave me that pig. I left the race that there day with two pigs, 200 dollars at twelve years old. So that was biggest day I've had at the race track [both laugh].

PIERCE: (?) probably thought he was a big winner that day [laughs].

DAY: Yeah, he thought he was a big winner [laughs]. I'd done real good that day.
Yes sir.

PIERCE: Talk about some of those drivers back then that you remember and you looked up to when you were a kid.

DAY: Yeah, there was a lot of them, you know, that was real friendly. Like I said, I was just a kid in them days, you know.

PIERCE: Did they let you into the (?) ?

DAY: Oh yeah, well, I worked there, you know.

PIERCE: Yeah.

DAY: So I'd go wherever I wanted to. So, one day we had a race, you know we didn't have no telephone over there, they were gonna get a telephone but it was gonna be a twelve-party line [PIERCE chuckles]. So, there wasn't no telephone. So Bill France, had a little ole office, which is still there but the one that was there was wood and burnt, and they built this one out of block, but you know that little ole place where you sit, where you go in?

PIERCE: Yes.

DAY: Now, Bill France he'd been he the office, he'd beating (?) all the drivers, and he had to give them show money, and most of them wanted their show money before their race, you know.

PIERCE: How much were they paying back then for show money usually?

DAY: Twenty-five dollars.

PIERCE: Twenty-five? Doesn't matter who you are?

DAY: No.

PIERCE: Bob White (?) didn't get any more?

DAY: No, he didn't get any, but if he did, it was behind the—

PIERCE: [chuckles] Yeah it was behind the—

DAY: Behind the scenes, you know. But he would be over in that little ole office, and Buddy Davenport would be up in the little judges' stand they had there. He'd be announcing the race, talking you know, he'd start talking at 7 o'clock in the morning, you know. And my job was to get up by Buddy Davenport when he wanted to tell Bill France something, I'd get up on the bicycle, go to that little ole office, and Bill France would write him a little note and send it back [PIERCE chuckles]. So I was riding back and forth all day on that bicycle, you know.

PIERCE: Do you know how France got hooked up in Willaman and Davenport in the first place?

DAY: Well, see France—

PIERCE: Did they just sort of show up?

DAY: France had begun to promote a good many races, you know, he was promoting races before the war, since Daytona. But a lot of people don't know this, but that first race we're talking about, France come up here, he was over at the concession stand, he got up here on Thursday or Friday, I was a little boy, but he told me how he wanted me to work for him, so that was the first time I'd ever met France, and had little short Cokes. My daddy had built some big ole boxes out of 2 x 12s, and they was about this deep. My job was to put all them little Cokes in there, and you couldn't buy no ice that was crushed in them days, it was all in big ole blocks, and I had to pick it up, you know and put it on them drinks. One of my jobs was, I had start carrying that load out back you know, but anyway, he come up here and you know the drivers was coming in on Saturday, lot of drivers and he asked a lot of drivers to come in and it was more drivers than he really wanted, you know, and he done promised them this and that to get them to come to this first race [PIERCE chuckles]. So they were staying in the Poinsett Hotel over there in Greenville, and it was (?) for us. So, got up on Sunday morning day of the— Saturday morning, day of the race, and I ain't sure about that. It was on July the 4th, it could've Saturday or Sunday, but I'm not sure about which it was. I don't think it was on Sunday, because the sheriff wouldn't let them run over there on Sunday, you know. So, he told his wife said, "We'll fixing to go back to go to

Daytona.” She said, “You ain’t gonna back out of your deal, are you?” He said, “Yep.” Said, “There ain’t gonna be enough people out there to pay what I’ve already promised them drivers.” Said, “We’re going back to Daytona. Forget about this race.” This was the first race. And she said, “Oh, don’t do that.” But anyway, they got up and got in the car and you had to go, well, there wasn’t no interstate in them days, so they got to Greenwood going back to Daytona. That morning she kept pleading with him to come back, to face up to what he said, you know. She talked him into to coming back, you know. Nobody didn’t know that for a long time, but he came on back up here, and he run the race. They had 17,000 people and there never been a bigger crowd there since, you know, that was the biggest crowd that ever been, you know. I remember— I got some pictures of the grandstand where you couldn’t put another person on it, you know. And they was round, all the way around on the racetrack, where they could stand, six and eight deep, you know, and so whenever the race was over, Bob Willaman and Buddy got their part. He left for \$3,600 of his part, what he was fixing to drive off and leave, and that was a bunch of money in ’46 and he always said that that was the beginning of NASCAR right there – that \$3,600, to promote more races.

PIERCE: Yeah, because they had like what? Three or four races at Greenville that year.

DAY: Yeah. Mmhmm. Mmhmm.

PIERCE: And [inaudible] that day. [Inaudible] up to 10,000.

DAY: Yeah. Oh yeah. But I got acquainted with him, then when I was thirteen years old, I bought me a '34 Clemmon car, took the backseat out of it, put these old (?) signs you put on telephone poles, take a little clamp and sew up one side of it, then when we got to pole, we'd sew up the other side, then we stuck it around the pole, slide it up the pole, and I was going everywhere doing that, you know.

PIERCE: So wherever France was promoting—

DAY: Yeah, wherever he was promoting, that's where'd I'd go.

PIERCE: You were driving at that time?

DAY: Yeah, I was driving when I was thirteen years old, didn't have no license, but I was as big as I am now, so I got away with driving. I knew a lot of stops (?). Man, I'd go through North Wilkesboro, you know, and everywhere else. Spartanburg, went to Lake City, all around wherever France would send me, you know. And he would give me a nickel for every big sign, and three cents for bumper strips. That's a bumper strip right there. I don't know if you ever seen any of them or not.

PIERCE: No, I haven't.

DAY: See, that thing's got a back on it, and you just hung it over a bumper, sewed up the inside of it and then you went down to the road. But see, you can't put none on these cars now because the bumpers ain't made where you could do it. You had a bumper to wear you could hang it over it – those old '39 Fords and all. So I'd get three cents for them and I got where I'd be kind of straight up with him, I was afraid to throw any of them away, afraid he would caught me and I would lose my job. But I got to go into football games, you know, I could put out four or 500 [mumbling and laughing]. So he'd pull around, make \$15 dollars a night putting them things up with the little thirteen-year-old boy, that's a lot of money, you know. He had an old guy help his name get out in Asheville, that's where the signs were going on the bumper strips, I'd have to go there and pick them up. He was keeping a pretty close eye on the (?), he told me to work certain highways, he'd write down number of a highway, and then he'd go see if I put them up, you know. There wasn't much way you could do it, you know.

PIERCE: Yeah, I don't think any people did that [he and DAY laugh]. Well, what about drivers that you remember the most from the races?

DAY: Well, I remember about all of them that drove back then—

PIERCE: Who did you like especially, and why did you like them the most?

DAY: Well, Ed Simple (?), that— I really liked him because he was real good to me. A lot of drivers didn't pay that much attention to a kid, you know. Bob Flock. You know, Tim he came along a little later than them two. Bob Flock was a real nice feller. He'd even buy me a Coca-Cola and a candy (?), you know. But, honey, he spent all of his time with women [laughs].

PIERCE: [chuckles] He looked like a ladies' man with that mustache and all that.

DAY: Yeah, he was a ladies' man. Funny. When Bob had that restaurant with that woman he was living with, I don't know if they were married or not, but they were living together, and they had a restaurant down there on Peachtree St. in Atlanta, and I'd ride down there on my bicycle to Atlanta, that girlfriend— she'd feed me. She'd cook me a big ole steak, you know. Me and Bob was good buddies. He called me little man. He said, "Little man, you come in here and hold this. And you feed him. I don't care whether I'm here or not." And most times he wouldn't be there, you know, but she would, she'd take good care of me, you know.

PIERCE: I was just reading today in the old Atlanta paper about him sneaking in '47, I guess, trying to raise the Lakewood after they banned on it.

DAY: Mmhmm. Oh yeah.

PIERCE: What about Ed Sample? I've never heard anything about him.

DAY: Ed— he was a good ole boy. He was quiet, you know, and I'd always go to him to find out who was the fastest and who was gonna win the race. "Who's gonna win, Ed?" And he tell you, he'd say, "Bob Flock's got it covered." Just about every time Bob Flock would win. They had about five or six they didn't want on the races, you know. Try to weed them out, you know [laughs].

PIERCE: Yeah. Sample wasn't racing at Lakewood. Did that mean he was, had been caught for pot legging?

DAY: Yeah, yep.

PIERCE: That's what I figured. Because I mean, he's from Atlanta, and he wasn't racing at Lakewood? That's why I figured he had to have a record, because I hadn't read that anywhere.

DAY: But he, he'd tell me who'd— I remember one day we went to Columbia Speedway down there one Saturday night, and I went up and asked him, "Who's gonna win tonight, Ed?" And he said, "I got them covered." Then he left the field. He could tell you about who was going to win the race, you know.

PIERCE: Who was doing his cars? Was he doing his own thing?

DAY: He was doing them himself, pretty much, you know. Doing them himself. You know, [inaudible] several of them, and Jack Smith was another and they didn't really get the credit (?) with NASCAR because there'd be some guy building a new racetrack and he'd tell them, he'd say, "Let me hear you." Back in them days, he'd say, "You come up here and race, well me I'd give you \$500." And they'd go to France, and they'd say, "Will you give us \$250?" And I don't know why they'd race for \$250, when they could get \$500 somewhere else. (?) "No I won't do that." [country music plays in the background and mumbling] Jack Smith, you know, drove (?) for \$500 [somewhat inaudible due to music].

PIERCE: Because that was the, uh, wasn't it the San Annas (?) and (?) Smith, and they had that ness, that NSCR—?

DAY: Yeah.

PIERCE: And there was a pretty good competitor [can't hear what he says because DAY starts talking].

DAY: Oh yeah. He was. Mmhmm. And ole Jack Smith he'd go to Richmond, you know, it'd make no difference if was running somewhere else, he went to

Richmond, you know, [inaudible] and Jack were buddies, you know, they were real good friends, you know.

PIERCE: How did that happen, I wonder.

DAY: Well, I don't know but he'd always go, go to Richmond, you know.

(unintelligible) he looked out for Jack though. Jack he'd want me to go to Richmond with him all the time. He'd say "I got an air conditioned seat and they bring a steak and we don't have to do nothing but just go up there, you know."

Something always happened. He tried to get me four or five times with him but it seemed like something would always happen. When me and Raymond Parks would go up there (unintelligible). But old Jack, he come to everything I ever had here. We'd have a New Year's party too, you know, here, he'd be at that New Year's party.

PIERCE: Jack seemed like a tough guy. I don't know —

DAY: Yeah, he was back then too, yeah —

PIERCE: Just the look of him, there was something about him. I mean just looked at him and you'd go, I wouldn't wanna cross that guy.

DAY: No, he was that way when he was young too. He sure was.

PIERCE: I guess that's what makes a good racer.

DAY: Yeah, that's right. He wouldn't take no junk, you know.

(Unintelligible name) would a been a good race car driver but he won two or three big races and he just –

PIERCE: He was a Greenville guy, wasn't he?

DAY: Yeah, he was a Greenville guy and he just got to drinking and fooling with the women and (unintelligible name) would drive and he'd furnished him with a real nice car and had a shop over there and told Fred said "If you wanna race, you keep the car up" and he said "You can work on other people's cars to make a living, in my shop" (unintelligible). He won two or three big races and he didn't wanna work on no cars. That's all he wanted to do was race and get drunk, you know, and so they just got somebody to drive that car. Leonard Tippet drove some for him you know. But he could have really went places cause he had the talent you know? We was at the little race track Stamey (misspelled/misunderstood??) Valley, it was probably in about '47, Traveler's Rest, right there.

PIERCE: Traveler's Rest, huh? Stamey Valley.

DAY: Stamey Valley was the name of it. A little 5/8 mile I believe it was. He raced Bondi Flocks (misspelled/misunderstood??) and Fred was out there, they was a racing and when they dropped the (unintelligible) they run the whole race side by side, you know, both of them sideways. So the guy when he throwed the checker flag they come down there and come into that turn and he throwed the checker flag and they were just side by side so everybody else pulled in but they

didn't stop they just kept racing, you know, and the race was over, you know. So I looked up there and directly the old flagmen threw the green back out. There wasn't nobody out there but them two you see.

DAY and PIERCE laugh

DAY: He threw the green back out and Fred finally got around Bondi Flocks and then when he did they had throw the checkered one again.

DAY and PIERCE laugh

PIERCE: That's one thing I've wondered too, cause you know you read about Greenville in '46 but it seemed like pretty quickly right after that, I guess maybe cause they've got so many people here that there were race tracks popping all over the place.

DAY: Oh yeah there were.

PIERCE: But where else like around here were there tracks?

DAY: Well they built one over here in Brer Linden (misspelled/misunderstood??) it was uphill and downhill, you know.

PIERCE: Like North Wilksborough.

DAY: Yeah, the back deck was bad downhill and the up front set was uphill. Jack Smith drove his first race there. He went from last to first, he told me five times in his first race.

PIERCE: What year would that have been in? '46?

DAY: No, this would have been about '47. Now all of them popped up there to this one cause seen what a big deal this was and they had another one out

there Textile Speedway, it was at the (unintelligible), it was a half mile track. It was a good little old race track out there.

PIERCE: Well evidently it didn't cost a whole lot, I guess, to build a track back then.

DAY: No, nothing like it would now.

PIERCE: I guess especially if you're like Bob (unintelligible) and you had the equipment already.

DAY: Oh yeah. Yeah Bob he really had the equipment at one time, you know, to really build anything he wanted to.

PIERCE: You've got some interesting lay outs too I guess, with uphill and downhill.

DAY: That's right, that's right.

PIERCE: Weird turns and stuff like that you know.

DAY: Yeah they'd just build it on what was there kinda, you know. And they had a couple of track down in Augusta, Georgia, you know. And then Buddy built the Columbia Speedway (unintelligible), he just had to gamble. He'd get him a brand new baby blue Cadillac every year. He got into that racing. And they built the (unintelligible) and had horse races there too. At the same Fourth of July and a big bar-b-cue. Nichols he was a friend of Buddy Davenport so they built (unintelligible). In the first race he drove an old '37 flat back Ford, number 34, black car. It was his family car. They built him a nice race car, a real nice race car. His wife, she was a red headed woman, she was hot tempered and she wouldn't let

him do no racing so he kept his stuff over here in one of them stalls in the barn at the race track. Somebody stole one of them seven hundred and something dollar motors which is a lot of motor, you know, out of that barn. So he went home and got mad and told her "I'm building a shop and I'm gonna race some." He built a shop right there in his yard over on the (unintelligible) road. Winn-Dixie store used to be there. But I know they'd put all that high priced stuff in the hay barn, on account of she wouldn't let him bring it home. But he could spend a lot of money racing. Did you ever hear of him?

PIERCE: No, uh-uh.

DAY: (unintelligible) and they run them beach races for five or six years, you know. (Unintelligible name) drove the car for him one time down there and Leonard Tippet, Fred Mayon (misunderstood/misspelled??). He really liked that racing.

PIERCE: It seemed like it was addictive.

DAY: Oh, yeah, it is. It's addictive, yeah.

PIERCE: Well, tell me about your getting into driving. How did that happen?

DAY: Well I just, first race car I bought I was thirteen years old, that old (unintelligible) Plymouth I was talking to you about putting signs up on board up in Asheville, NC. They's a picture of it back there on the wall, one of Speedy Thompson over there.

PIERCE: Who had it in Asheville?

DAY: I don't remember some guy out there in Black Mountain. He had it

on the side of the road and I was putting up signs and I see it, you know, so I borrowed me a tow bar and went up there and got it for, I don't remember exactly what I paid for it, couldn't have been much, cause hell I didn't have much, you know.

PIERCE: Well about could you buy a half way decent car –

DAY: Car for... uh, well, Donald (unintelligible) at Darlington and this was in '55 and he had won 28 races out of 30 with a '37 Coupe, course the family wanted to get rid of it cause they thought he was gonna die, so I bought everything he had for 3,500 dollars and there was a extra motor –

PIERCE: And that was a good –

DAY: Oh it was a front running car, yeah. In fact I won with it, I let Joe Cox (misunderstood/misspelled??) drive it one night and Joe won with it and they was gonna race at Darlington and then they was gonna come from Darlington to Greenville-Pickins and race at night so they had the car dead ready, tool box and all was in it and the gas, they had twenty five gallons of gas in it. I got the gas and all and you know I was running out front but when that gas runs out, I was running about fifth. I went back to the guys, these mechanics, you know, they all got real up set they thought he was gonna die. But he lived but he never (unintelligible) to ride. (Unintelligible) down in Florida. So that's, yeah you could buy a upfront car for less than 4, 000 dollars you know. Can't even buy the tires with that money now, but...

DAY and PIERCE laugh

PIERCE: Nope. Well, so you raced here and where all did you race?

DAY: Yeah, I raced at East Park Speedway and I run over in Greenville, you know, some and I'd race there at the fair grounds in Spartanburg and (unintelligible) I raced some. I never did get on a big track, it was always small dirt tracks.

PIERCE: Did they call them Sportsman (misunderstood/misspelled??) back then?

DAY: Yeah, Sportsman, yeah that's what I was running.

PIERCE: You mentioned the fair grounds at Spartanburg. Did you know Joe Littlejohn?

DAY: Oh, yeah. I rode a bicycle over there to go race when I was twelve years old.

PIERCE: That was in '46?

DAY: Yeah, '46, and Bill (unintelligible) was in that race too. I got over there and slid under the fence. I locked my bicycle to a pole, I always carried me a little chain and a lock and I'd lock my bicycle if I had to leave it. I got in and I was walking out through there and I thought I had it made, you know, when these two big old guys come and got me, they said "We're gonna have to throw you out." I said "Let me go here, this is where my bicycle is." They said "Naw, we're gonna have to throw you out over here by the gate." So I was walking along there with them two guys to go get throwed out and Joe Littlejohn he said, "Where're you going with him?" They said "We're gonna put him out, he just crawled under the

fence.” He said “Come here boy. I’ve got something for you to do.” So he must have found out I’d been putting drinks in boxes and passing them down for Bill France cause that’s what he put me to doing.

PIERCE: So you had experience?

DAY: Yeah. So I done that till about time for the race to start and all of them had a little old building, a little old house at the edge of the racetrack. All the racetracks had it cause it’s the judges stands and that’s where bouncer was at and the scoring people. So when the race started he come down there and got me and carried me up in the judge’s stand and give me three dollars and I watched the race. So from then on, I just rode my bicycle over there and rode in the gate and went to work. So I got me a job out of that deal.

PIERCE: What do you know about Joe Littlejohn? He goes way back, I think he drove at the beach in ‘38.

DAY: Yeah, he goes way back.

PIERCE: How did he get started in racing? Do you know?

DAY: I really don’t know but in him and Raymond Parks were real good friends, they were real good friends. Well we was talking about them boards on that old grandstand over here. I can say me and my Daddy, he (unintelligible) them down and I carried them over to him. I was just a little old boy, about as big as two of them boards. So when the (unintelligible name) bought it I went over there and tore them old boards we’d put on, I guess that was probably in ‘56, when they bought it. They owned it a year before anybody knowed they owned it, they

had another guy trying to run it, you know. So I went over there and tore them old boards off and filled in that block with dirt and I done poured concrete in and got the concrete finished and skimmed a little old layer of concrete over that dirt and it all cracked up over the years but it stayed there till five years ago. There's some pictures of it right over yonder in that corner. But I went over there and I tore every bit of that out. Do you see what I'm talking about?

PIERCE: Yeah.

DAY: Right behind that lamp –

PIERCE: Yes, yeah.

DAY: I tore every bit of that out and I built him a real nice model grandstand and I got him two more rows than it did have. That's what I was doing, you know, after I quit hanging around race tracks all the time was I got in the concrete business.

PIERCE: Was that when you got married and had to go to work and stuff?

DAY: Yeah, I had to go to work then, that's right.

PIERCE laughing

DAY: It happens every time, don't it?

PIERCE: Yeah, these wives don't understand why... It looks like you've got a good patient wife though, I tell you.

DAY: Yeah, she's a good girl. So they (unintelligible). So we built this new grandstand for them. I told them, I said "Well, I'll get it tore out and put in one row of seats and I'll you how much roughly it's gonna cost." "Ok, ok." And that's

what I done. So I told them about what each seat was gonna cost and they said “No problem, no problem.” And they never did ever Jew me or nothing. And I’d go sometimes and (unintelligible) for fifty thousand dollars and it’s nice doing business with you, nicest you ever seen. And I found out pretty much later that Winston built it. He was picking up the tab. (Unintelligible: both PIERCE and DAY are speaking at once) That’s what I hear, that the money was already there before they started.

PIERCE: As long as they the checks cleared, I guess...

DAY: Yeah, that’s right.

PIERCE: Well, let ask you and see if you now something. I read something about, I guess it would have probably been about ‘48, that Buddy Davenport and Joe Littlejohn started their own South Carolina series or...

DAY: Yeah, yeah.

PIERCE: What was that? Did they have a falling out with Bill France or...?

DAY: Yeah, more or less. You know it was a state thing. That big old trophy I showed you down there on top, that big one, that’s the trophy for it.

PIERCE: Was it like the state championship?

DAY: Yeah, the state championship, that was that series you was talking about, you know. That’s the trophy for it down there. Yeah, they was trying to pull out on their own, you know. And then Tim Flock and them they tried it and it didn’t work out to good for them. They let Turner back you know, but I’m sure you’ve heard that story.

PIERCE: Yeah. I wrote an article about that, yeah.

PIERCE laughing

DAY: They all was gonna do that (unintelligible) they wanted 40 % of the gate. And France he wouldn't hear of that. So they all just kept backing down, backing down. (Unintelligible) now Tim held out you know... Curtis Turner, you know, he was some kind of race driver and they'd holler "We want Turner, we want Turner!" So he let him back in. Tim and Turner was the two big leaders of it. Tim was a good friend of mine. (Unintelligible) he had cancer and (unintelligible) in his bedroom for three days before he died. He said "I want you to do a few things for me." And I said, "I'd be glad to." He said, "First of all, I want you to look out for Frances." That's his wife. I said, "You know I'll do that." I got (unintelligible) # 91 the '39 Coupe that he started racing in. I don't know if I showed it to you or not?

PIERCE: Yeah.

DAY: You ever seen my cars?

PIERCE: I have.

DAY: He said, "I want that car to lead my funeral procession." He knew he was gonna die in a few days. And I said, "Ok, I'll be glad to do that then." And where his funeral was at, the cemetery was five miles and in the busy part of Charlotte. I drove that old '39 Coupe I was even in front of the police.

DAY and Pierce laugh

PIERCE: Well that kinda car should have been in front of the police. They were in front of the police most of the time so...

DAY: He said, "Whenever you get out there to the cemetery now, I want you to pull that '91 up as close as you can get it to the grave. While they're pouring the dirt on there you crank it up and give it out. And that's what I done. That's what he wanted and exactly what I done. I raced it as hard as it run, you know. That's a racer, isn't it?"

PIERCE: Yeah, he was one.

DAY: Yeah, he was a racer now. Yeah Tim was my buddy, you know. We went (unintelligible)'s funeral. You know who that is?

PIERCE: Yeah. I've told to (unintelligible name) his son.

DAY: Yeah. You know he (Tim) was working at the Charlotte Motor Speedway and I think they sent him to the funeral and he wanted me to go with him. I was just wearing clothes like this and so Frances, his wife, she worked down at the K-Mart and she said "I'll go down there and get you some clothes if you'll go with him." So she went down to that K-Mart and got me a pair of pants and a shirt you know and brought it up there and give it to me. So me and him went on up there to the funeral and so we was back there in the back before we went down to where the body was at. So they said "Mr. Flock, you come on down. We're gonna let you sit in the front down here." Tim turned around and he said, "Come on J.B." and they said "No, we just want you Mr. Flock." He said, "You don't want him, you don't want me." That's just the kind of guy he was, you

know. So they brought us down there and had us sit between Bill France and (unintelligible name), there with my K-Mart outfit on.

PIERCE and DAY laughing

PIERCE: With millionaires.

DAY: With my K-Mart clothes on.

PIERCE: I don't know if I'd wanna sit between those two, I mean... sparks might start flying.

DAY: Yeah, right.

PIERCE: Did you ever know (unintelligible name)?

DAY: Well I knew him back then but I never knew him real well.

PIERCE: But he was pretty young when he started promoting.

DAY: Oh, yeah (unintelligible)

PIERCE: Yeah, I saw that one (unintelligible)- Smith Enterprises.

DAY: And these little things they was probably, I don't know –

PIERCE: And he worked with Noonis (misspelled/misunderstood??), I think they were in that NOCRA.

DAY: Yeah.

PIERCE: They gave him a run there. Gave Bill France a run there for awhile.

Most people don't know that rivalry between the Smiths and the Frances goes way back.

DAY: Oh, yeah, it does, it does. Well, old Bill he wouldn't back down now on nothing, you know.

PIERCE: What do you remember about him. I mean, you met him when you were young and I guess you were around him a good bit. What do you remember?

DAY: I liked him, you know. Yeah, I liked him. And I used to see him a lot at Talladega in the five years before he died and we were still friends. I liked Bill France.

PIERCE: What do you think it was that made him so successful?

DAY: Well, just everybody loved stock car racing is what made him successful. People did have any money and they could get in a tree, they'd climb a tree to watch the race, if there was a tree somewhere where they could see it.

PIERCE: Let me ask you about that. Why do you think 17,000 people, I mean that's a lot a huge amount –

DAY: That's a lot of people.

PIERCE: I think I read that the only sporting event that has more people that year was Winston, S.C. football.

DAY: Yeah.

PIERCE: It was close to that. Why do you think so many people liked it?

DAY: Well there's people –

PIERCE: What was it about it that –

DAY: These people they had never –

PIERCE: The dust and everything...

DAY: They never had seen nothing like that you know. It was new, or it was to me. I just went crazy over that kind of stuff. And that's kind of the way all

these old farmers and everybody they come out of the cotton field to go to the race, you know, just like they do today.

PIERCE: It seemed like it really kinda, I don't know, some people I guess, you know, although it seemed like it was kinda looked down on in some circles but –

DAY: Oh, yeah, it was. I first started driving and went to church one time and they didn't call my name but they was talking about me, about driving race cars. I started driving then, started driving when I was about 16 years old. Course I owned a beer joint too.

PIERCE: At 16?

DAY: Yeah.

PIERCE and DAY laugh

DAY: I had a little money and I poured concrete and I got to making me quite a little bit of money –

PIERCE: So you started the concrete at sixteen?

DAY: Yeah, I was doing concrete work at 16 years old. I was helping my brother some but I done bought me a couple machines, I'd go out and do some big jobs you know, and make good money, you know. I went down to Anderson, S.C. when I was 16 years old and (unintelligible) Easley was G.B. (unintelligible) you might a heard of him? Him and Curtis Turner was big buddies.

PIERCE: Yeah, he was the one that Curtis landed the plane in the street, wasn't it?

DAY: Yeah that was him. So I went down there and I can tell you a little bit about that plane to directly here in a minute. Went down there and poured, I was working for him by the hour, but people was getting poured all over the yard full of concrete back then. So he furnished me some help but if he didn't furnish me no help he'd pay to pour all over the yard. So he sent me to Anderson one morning to pour a big old (unintelligible). So I told him, I says, "Well, last one of these things we done you didn't send no help. You just paid me by the hour." I said, "Now look if I go down there and pour it and you don't send no help, now whatever concrete I've poured I want four dollars a yard for it." The general superintendent was J.P. Lester he was over all the jobs you know. And J.P. is sitting over there in the corner. So I went on down there that morning and he never did send no help. I poured concrete all day long, wasn't but a six yard truck then, now they've got these big old ten twelve yard ones. At nine o'clock that night I poured out my last concrete, it was a little earlier in the year I had about fifteen hours of daylight. And I had poured a hundred and twenty three yards by myself and sixteen years old, this was years and years ago. So I went in there the next morning and I'd done scratched me up a little bill and I went in the office the next morning and I said, "You didn't send no help. There's what you owe me. Nearly five hundred dollars." A carpenter was making about a dollar an hour, you know. He'd make about forty dollars for a week's work. He looked at it and he cussed and said, "They ain't no way that that I'll pay a kid no five hundred dollars for no day's work. A kid!" he said. And so old J.P. is sitting over there in that corner in

that same seat and he said, “I heard what you told him. You’ll pay him or you’ll get you another superintendent.” Now Freddie gonna look a hole in that bill. Eudora Rankins was the secretary and he said “Give it to Eudora.” So I get to Eudora, you know, and stuff like that is kind what learnt me cause I seen I could make money. And it wasn’t long till I had two or three race cars. By doing that, you know. I had my little beer joint, it was making a hundred, hundred and fifty dollars a week. And I was pouring that concrete and most of the time I’d do a hundred yards or so a week and make four or five hundred dollars out of that. And I had a liquor route that I’d go up to the bar and pick up forty gallons of liquor and I had eight houses, black people and I’d haul that five gallon of liquor, I’d make a couple hundred dollars a week on that. So there I was a little old boy making seven, eight hundred dollars a week when a man working in the mill was making about thirty eight or forty.

PIERCE: If he was lucky.

DAY: Oh, yeah if he was lucky. I got no education, didn’t go to school much , just got a second grade education.

PIERCE: Did pretty good though, I guess.

DAY: But I’ve always knowed how to make money. I can’t read the best in the world but I can count that money.

DAY and PIERCE laugh

PIERCE: What about that, was there a lot of connections with the liquor business and the racers, that just kinda went hand in hand?

DAY: Oh, yeah. Just about everybody in the old days hauled liquor (unintelligible) all the good drivers hauled liquor. Junior Johnson come on up that way, you know. Junior still even, I've got some liquor back there in the cabinet that Junior made, he's still making a little bit of booze.

PIERCE: Billy Cardan (misspelled/misunderstood??) was he a liquor driver too, seems like I read something about that.

DAY: Yeah, just about all of them did, that's the way this racing finally got started, you know. They built them a little old race track and they got the liquor car for that one and the other one you know. This thing, you know, they made this big deal about Curtis Turner landing that airplane and go in his office and get a bottle of liquor you know?

PIERCE: Right, yeah.

DAY: Well, they built a great big old factory up there and then they built another thing on out there, they had just graded all this land for that. So we had a place, a half a mile long, three hundred foot wide to land that airplane on. So it wasn't no big deal, you know, but they were gonna make a big deal out of it.

PIERCE: Right, everybody made a big deal out of it.

DAY: I can go over there today and show you how much space they had to land that airplane. And they did they flew it under the telephone wires but it was down on the ground when they done it. But I road with them some cause I –

PIERCE: You flew with them?

DAY: Oh, yeah, Curtis and G.B. you know and they'd, if they had a job they were gonna do I done 108 A&P stores for G.B., I'd do the floors in them. So if they wanted me somewhere or another some times on a Saturday afternoon we'd all get us a bottle or get one big one and if he wanted to be up in Virginia somewhere we'd go look at what he wanted me to do (unintelligible).

PIERCE: You lived to tell about it, so...

DAY: That's good, I lived to tell about it.

PIERCE: Talk about Curtis a little bit, about what you saw from him.

DAY: He I guess, you know, was about a good a race car driver as I ever seen. I know down there in 1957 Bobby Myers got killed at (unintelligible) and that first part of

PIERCE: Was that (unintelligible) or Bobby that –

DAY: (Unintelligible name)

PIERCE: That's right.

DAY: That first part of that race Owens and Curtis they changed the lead twice in one lap and they (unintelligible). And he was a good race car driver; he was a real good race car driver. Curtis he was good, he was real good.

PIERCE: (Unintelligible) just about. Although I hear more and more people talking about, the closer I read, that Bob Flock was one of the best.

DAY: He was, yeah. Bob Flock.

PIERCE: He was out of it, he got hurt bad didn't he?

DAY: Yeah. Well he got his back broke in Spartanburg and then he was in another wreck, you know. I was over there one evening, got his back broke in Spartanburg, in fact I rode a bicycle from here to Black Hawk and went and spent the night with him when he got his back broke. But he was my buddy you know.

PIERCE: Well was Joe Littlejohn in the liquor business?

DAY: I couldn't honestly say, you know. Evidently he was.

PIERCE: Well, I kinda got the hints like that but you know I can't know for sure. Reddy owned a tavern and you like some of those early guys, you know that's one thing I really want, how those guys, there was this guy named Sam Rice, I don't know if you ever heard of him?

DAY: That name sounds familiar.

PIERCE: He was from Martinsville but he may have won in '38 or, he won a race on the beach, like in '38, he was a big liquor runner and then Joe Littlejohn and I'm trying to think who else, of course Lloyd C. and Roy Hall I think they came down in maybe '39, and started racing—

DAY: Yeah, Raymond bought his first car in '38. A little '34 Ford convertible.

PIERCE: That was the Lakewood, it think its—

DAY: Yeah, Lakewood.

PIERCE: Remember when it was the Labor Day race and Lloyd C. won that race. Yeah, Lloyd C. won it.

DAY: Um-hum, yeah. Bill France Sr. said that, he was talking about the (unintelligible) race car driver he is (unintelligible), you know. He said Dale Earnhardt was the best since Lloyd C., you know. Lloyd C. he always was the best.

PIERCE: Well you know the funny thing about that? I heard and I said that cannot be true. I think it was actually Bill France said something about him going to the turn at Daytona on two wheels. I said that can't be true and then I saw a picture of it.

DAY: Yeah, there's several pictures of it here.

PIERCE: Oh, you've got some pictures of it here?

DAY: Yeah, I don't know whether you noticed that big thing on the front as you come in the door, Raymond Parks—

PIERCE: Yeah, yeah.

DAY: There's a picture of it on that thing you know. See what he'd do is he'd win the race, never did see him do it but I've heard he done it and Raymond said he done it so I guess he did, you know, cause Raymond owned the car. He said instead of like looked like a burnout he said he just come off the fourth turn, put it up on two wheels and go all the way down in front of the grandstand on two wheels. But when he wanted to race, you know. That might have been what Bill France seen and liked.

PIERCE: No, I think it was just going through like the north turn on the (unintelligible), cause there is a picture in one of Greg Fielding's books of him going through. I couldn't believe it. That's got to be incredible I think.

DAY: Yeah, Raymond owned them cars. He said he had got a deal on them, he buy them brand new for \$585.

PIERCE: Would he go to the Ford factory and get them there in Atlanta or ...?

DAY: Yeah, he'd get them there probably so. He had a deal on getting them, you know. I had a set of fenders for a '39 standard, that's what they were driving, course I put them on one of my cars but they were brand new fenders come out of the old Ford place in Greenville. They still had the numbers and all on them and the primer on them but I bought them for 2500 for two front fenders, but I put them on one of my cars. But that's a big difference (unintelligible) just for two fenders.

PIERCE: Yeah, but for original ones like them, there aren't too many of those laying around.

DAY: Not too many lying around but I've got them on one of my cars.

PIERCE: How did you get interested in all this redoing the cars and stuff like that?

DAY: Well, I went down to Dawsonville Georgia about sixteen, seventeen years ago for the Moonshine Festival and I hadn't seen Gopher Sosbey in twenty or thirty years and he'd restored one of his old cars, like that one I showed you down there when you first come in but that was '51, and he restored the '50 car.

And I went by there and of course the Moonshine Festival was nothing hardly then you couldn't hardly tell there was nothing going on. But I run up on him and I hadn't talked to him in years and years so when he had that one restored I thought, I believe I'll go fix one like that. So I hunted around for about a year and I finally found me a body, there was this guy that lived right up he had this house where you turned to come in here, names Bill Licker he done all my cars and he didn't have no job he was sheet metal man and his daddy was a sheet metal man and they got a big sheet metal shop, his daddy has and two of his brothers runs it over there in Greenville and he's just a sheet metal genius. So I got him and he done my car for me. So he didn't have no job and nothing to do so I said "Well, you wanna do another one?" and he said "Yeah. I'd be glad to do another one." So he'd done moved into one of my houses over there so he come down here one day and said "Well, I ain't got no retirement with you. I think I'll go back down there to my daddy's shop and work." But he stayed here eleven years restoring cars. We done twelve cars in eleven years. It takes about a year to do a car. So every time we'd get one done then I found David Pearson's old '37 Ford that he'd won the championship with over in Greenville-Pickens. A guy had it in an old building down there in Piedmont, South Carolina. I bought it. I had to pay a pretty penny for it but it was in decent shape but we had to spend a lot of money on it to make it look good. I'll show it to you.

PIERCE: I heard David had done his own car and was driving it up at that Riverside. Is he doing that again this year? I know he did last year.

DAY: Well he was gonna go up there and I think the guys on the track told him, you know David, I sold him that old car. He was driving for me but I sold him that old car and pitched it just real light, you know (unintelligible).

PIERCE: That helps.

DAY: So they told him that direction, you know, to come up there they got on the track for him (unintelligible) you can go up, he won't never go back to (unintelligible) no more.

PIERCE: I wanna go see him race.

DAY: Yeah, oh yeah. I got a little old car out there that he did drive for me you know, a little '37 Coupe. He decided he wanted to build his own, said mine was too heavy, you know. So I said ok, you know. So he built his own and I think since he built it they've run fourteen races. You know how many he's won?

PIERCE: No, how many?

DAY: Fourteen.

PIERCE: Fourteen!!

DAY and PIERCE laugh

PIERCE: Are they doing anything at the old fairgrounds? I know they worked on, I think I saw a picture of you working on that track.

DAY: Yeah, we went over there and fixed that track, you know, they was gonna build that museum or (unintelligible) going to Spartanburg, which some of the people didn't come through with the money like they were supposed to.

PIERCE: I wondered what was happening with that.

DAY: So that things dead, you know, it's history. But we went over there and redone that race track and they was gonna give us all the money that we made out of it to go on to the museum where the fairground was. Well, see the fairground rents this building on the fairground from the city and we had the first race and we made good money. We sold a lot of ticket, fifteen dollars a piece. (Unintelligible) what we made they said we're gonna have (unintelligible) the next race. Thurston and Bud Moore and I got knowing and we thought about it and decided we'd just do that, you know. So went on and done another one and they wanted us to pay the ambulance and the police and the fire department. If I'd a done that there wouldn't have been none left, you know. Well we bought seventeen thousand dollars worth of them old concrete barriers to go around it, you know. They're still sitting over there, you know. We fixed the race track back in the back ridge the trees are almost that big, you know. But we put it right back to where it was at, nobody didn't know where the back stretch was and so we got to cutting trees and pushing trees and there was a steel rail all the way down there in the woods you know. So that old track it's race-able now.

PIERCE: Yeah, it's a shame they're not using it.

DAY: You could put on some good shows over there now. If I was the fairground people I'd be running it, you know.

PIERCE: What do they got going on there?

DAY: They ain't got a whole lot. I think they tried to run a race through but you know there's a little more to it than just getting a roll of tickets.

PIERCE: It helps a while lot to have David Pierce involved.

DAY: Oh, yeah, that's right.

PIERCE: (Unintelligible) driving in the race, you know.

DAY: Yes sir. You get David Pierce coming around (unintelligible). It sure is.

PIERCE: Well, let's see ... let me ask you one more. We haven't talked any about Louis Smith (misspelled/misunderstood??). I know you lived there in their junk yard and—

DAY: Well there's that whole (unintelligible). Louis and I come in from a race one night, I was just a little old boy you know, and I'd done worked (unintelligible). It was three o'clock in the morning I guess when we got in. Louis told me, he said, "There's a old guy named Homer Coker that lived in an old house there in the junk yard and he had a bunch of old sow hogs". Louis told me, "Well, it ain't gonna be long till daylight. You just go out there and see if sleep in that old sow (misunderstood??)." And I though the said, "Go out there and sleep with that old sow."

DAY and PIERCE laugh

DAY: So I stood around there a few minutes and he says, "Something wrong with that?" I said, "Boss," I called him Boss, "I ain't sleeping with no hogs." He got me by the arm and led me out there and opened the door on that old Cadillac and I come up in that thing and he throwed a quilt in there with me.

End of tape

