

U.S.

Separated From Brother, Left to Toil Far From Home

DEC. 6, 2014

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THIS LAND

NEWBERRY, S.C. — A shabby bunkhouse sits just beyond the shadows of this small city's colossal Kraft meatpacking plant. Inside live a few older men with nowhere else to go, and several younger men who pay to throw down a mattress.

There is also Leon Jones.

Mr. Jones, 64, has an intellectual disability and a swollen right hand that aches from 40 years of hanging live turkeys on shackles that swing them to their slaughter. His wallet contains no photos or identification, as if, officially, he does not exist.

And yet he is more than just another anonymous grunt in a meat factory. Mr. Jones may be the last working member of the so-called Henry's Boys — men recruited from Texas institutions decades ago to eviscerate turkeys, only to wind up living in virtual servitude, without many basic rights.

This may sound familiar. In 2009, a sister of one of the men complained to *The Des Moines Register* about exploitation in a bunkhouse in Iowa, prompting investigations, reforms and a momentous court verdict concerning the workplace abuse of people with disabilities. This year, *The New York Times* published an examination of the case and its aftermath.

That seemed to be the end to an outrageous but isolated Iowa story: men

abused, rescued and reintegrated into the community. But a few lingering clues suggested that at least one other Henry's "boy" was out there: a Leon Jones, living beside a South Carolina turkey plant.

So, on a recent autumn morning, I knocked on the door of this bunkhouse, sitting beside a mobile home with its door open in abandonment, not welcome.

"Hi," said Leon Jones.

Tall and with an easy smile, Mr. Jones has been working turkey ever since he left a state institution in 1969. For decades, he hung live birds from shackles; now he works an evening shift, sweeping up and disposing of turkeys that arrive by truck already dead. D.O.A.s., they are called.

He led me to the slapdash dormitory he shares with men who come and go. His small bed was in a corner, a few feet from a young man wearing a black-knit "Jesus" cap and watching Spanish-language television at a loud volume, and not far from a bathroom with open stalls and a wet floor.

Mr. Jones's locker contained clothes, cowboy boots and a plastic envelope of old cards and letters, the last one from 1992. He also nodded to a small radio on a night stand.

"I got a radio and everything," he said.

Mr. Jones may have his radio, but what he does not have are most amenities, any connection to government services for people with disabilities — and the company of another Henry's "boy," his older brother, Carl Wayne.

Carl Wayne Jones, 65, lives now in a suburban Iowa home with three other men and 24-hour staff supervision. Leon Jones has not seen him in decades because their Texas bosses decided long ago that Carl Wayne would work for a client in Iowa, while Leon would work for one here in South Carolina.

"He was nice to me," Leon Jones said of his brother.

Here is how Mr. Jones came to live in a beaten-down bunkhouse many hundreds of miles from his brother and from his home state. Working turkey, still.

The Jones brothers were the sons of a Texas oil worker and his wife,

whose name Leon Jones could not recall. “A long time ago,” he said. As boys, they were sent to the Abilene State School, an institution for people with developmental disabilities.

Did he like the state school?

“No-o-o-o-o,” he quickly said.

When he was 18, Mr. Jones was selected to live and learn basic skills at a ranch in Texas’ Hill Country. The operation, Henry’s Turkey Service, trained Mr. Jones and dozens of other young men like him — including his brother — in the artificial insemination of turkeys: namely, to catch and milk the toms, and rush the semen to the henhouse.

The men became proficient in this dirty job, and a demand developed for their services. Gradually, the company dispatched crews to work at turkey plants in Iowa, Missouri, Illinois and South Carolina, moving employees around like chess pawns to meet the needs of clients.

Most of the operations eventually closed, leaving only a bunkhouse in Atalissa, Iowa, where Carl Wayne Jones wound up, and one here in Newberry, where Leon Jones landed.

The owners of Henry’s Turkey Service maintained that they had taken in men whom no one else wanted. They paid them a subminimum wage under a federal law — one they abused — that permits lower wages for people with disabilities, based on productivity. They deducted most of the men’s earnings to cover room, board and other expenses. And they allowed their Atalissa bunkhouse to descend into squalor, neglect and abuse.

When the situation in Atalissa was exposed in early 2009, leading to the men’s rescue and a sizable judgment against the company in a case brought by the federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, few knew of its South Carolina ties. The reason: The company had long since sold its Newberry operation — and, effectively, Leon Jones and a few other men — to a former employee.

But Kim Cronkleton and Natalie Neel-McLaughlin, two social workers for the Iowa Department of Human Services, were nagged by loose ends. They saw Leon Jones’s name on an old company list and remembered that Carl

Wayne Jones, one of the men just rescued, had talked of a brother.

“It was always on my mind that this was still going on,” Ms. Cronkleton said. “But nobody ever laid eyes on Leon.”

Now here was Leon Jones, as well as three other former Henry’s Boys: Claude Wren, 75, who left the Mexia State School in 1969; Johnny Hickman, 71, who left Mexia in 1970; and Carlos Morris, 60, who left the Austin State School in 1973.

But Mr. Jones is the last one still working turkey.

His boss is Paul Byrd, who owns both the bunkhouse and a company that supplies workers to the Kraft plant. He lives in Texas, but when he visits his business here, he stays in a large furnished apartment, behind a door just steps from Mr. Jones’s bed.

Mr. Byrd said the men’s Social Security payments are all deposited directly into an “association” account, from which the costs of their room and board are deducted. None have personal bank accounts, he said, because “I don’t have birth certificates or anything on them to get ID.”

When it was pointed out that they must have had identification if they were receiving federal benefits, Mr. Byrd, who has owned the company since 1985, said: “I don’t know how all this got started. I have absolutely no paperwork on them.”

Mr. Byrd also said Mr. Jones would be retired soon, but for now was working part time. “He washes the floor down on the ramps,” he said. “The dead birds that come out of the trucks, he chucks them.”

Mr. Byrd said Mr. Jones uses his \$8-an-hour earnings and his Social Security benefits to pay for his bed and food, about \$800 a month. The company gives Mr. Jones \$50 for his weekly trips to Walmart, Mr. Byrd said, although he might spend \$1,000 or so on clothes and a mattress come Christmastime. The rest of his money is kept locked away, in an envelope.

“I haven’t counted what he’s got in the envelope,” Mr. Byrd said. “It’s about \$6,000” — the life savings from 40 years’ hard labor.

He said Mr. Jones loves to eat and never goes on vacation. “I’d love to take him to the beach or something,” Mr. Byrd said. “But, man, it’s hard for one

person to keep everything going.”

The boss paused, and then said: “I know it’s a long way from a perfect situation.”

Mr. Jones spends his free time watching sports on television in the worn rec room. He follows three football teams, each a reflection of where he has ties: the Dallas Cowboys of Texas, the University of Iowa Hawkeyes and the Clemson Tigers of South Carolina.

When I asked him what he’d like to say to his brother, Carl Wayne, he said: “Say, ‘How ya doing?’ ”

A few days later, Mr. Jones received a visit from Robert A. Canino, the Dallas-based lawyer for the E.E.O.C. who won a decisive verdict against Henry’s Turkey Service last year. Seeing a connection to the Iowa case, he traveled to Newberry to meet Mr. Jones and to discuss his troubling circumstances with state officials.

One day, Mr. Canino drove Mr. Jones to the public library for a surprise. A computer monitor flickered, and then, through Skype, there appeared a man wearing a Dallas Cowboys cap: his older brother, Carl Wayne, whom he had not seen for so very long.

The elder Mr. Jones explained that he lived in a house in Waterloo, Iowa, with a couple of the Henry’s men, and that he had a girlfriend. He also passed on the news that their mother had died a long time ago.

The two brothers caught up as best they could. They talked about favorite foods, about their Cowboys and about maybe, just maybe, getting together sometime.

A version of this article appears in print on December 7, 2014, on page A23 of the New York edition with the headline: Separated From Brother, Left to Toil Far From Home.