

March 16, 2018

I recently had the pleasure of speaking with Mrs. Stokes on the phone. She told me of the plans for the factory and asked if I would be willing to write about my experience while I worked there and if any of the things I learned helped me in my life on the "outside". I told her that I would love to share my progress with you all because honestly there is nothing I would not do for Mrs. Stokes.

I am thankful I had the opportunity to work under her during my time at Julia Tutwiler. I learned so much from her in so many areas. I started out sewing boxers, which I was pretty dang good at if I do say so myself. Before I came to the factory, I had never even sat at a sewing machine, much less sewn on one. I remember I was not very good at first, but Mrs. Stokes was always patient with me. She never got frustrated or upset with me. She just kept encouraging me until I got it. After sewing for about 4 years, I moved to shipping. I was able to learn how to operate a forklift and the day to day operations of shipping, such as loading and unloading trucks and taking inventory. It was those very skills that landed me my job after being home for only five days after 17 years of incarceration. I have been going to my job for 3 years now and have recently been promoted to team leader of my shift.

Being in a position of authority over other people is not always easy, but I know if Mrs. Stokes could do it with dignity and grace, especially in a prison environment, then so can I. I always admired her for the way she never acted like she was better than the rest of us. I loved how she would get on a machine or wherever she was needed and work with us even though she did not have to. I hope that the people I work over feel the same way about me. I have a great example to follow.

I know a lot of people think its modern day slavery to work inmates, but it never felt that way to me. I was grateful to get away from that prison every day. It also was great for getting used to a routine like I have now. It gave me structure, taught me skills, and let me earn money for myself. So to sum it up: The experience was definitely beneficial for me. Thank you all for taking the time to read this and a BIG thank you to Mrs. Stokes for being such a wonderful woman and for helping me so much! I am so thankful for you.

Amber Hart

Former inmate worker

ACI Clothing Plant