

Mr. Burasinski
(Assembler)

This is Pat Pilling. The date is September
the 30th, 1982. I'm talking with Mr. Michael
B^rasinski, who lives at 12889 Buffalo, in Detroit.
Mr. Burasinski is an assembler at Chevy Gear and
Axle, and a member of Local 235.

Interview with Michaël Burasinski, Interview 1

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Interviewer: Pat Pilling

Transcriber : Diane Roth

Begin Tape 1, Side 1

PP: Would you begin by telling me when you were born and where you were born?

Buras: I was born in Detroit, Michigan on July 11th, 1953.

PP: When you said Detroit, do you mean Detroit proper or do you mean in Hamtramck?

Buras: Detroit.

PP: Do you have any brothers or sisters?

Buras: I have one brother and one sister.

PP: Do they live in this area?

Buras: My brother does and my sister's stationed in the Army in Maryland.

PP: Is your brother in the auto industry?

Buras: No, he works as a custodian in a bank.

PP: Is your mother Polish or part Polish?

Buras: She's German.

PP: Has she any Polish in her at all?

Buras: None that I know of.

PP: What about your father? Is he completely Polish?

Buras: Full-blooded.

PP: Did your father come from Poland or was it

PP: his parents?

Buras: His parents.

PP: Did they come straight from Poland to Detroit
or did they stop somewhere on the way?

Buras: I believe they came straight from Poland to
Detroit.

PP: Do you know the part of Poland they might
have come from?

Buras: Warsaw.

PP: Very unusual in as much most people don't
know where their grandparents came from.

Buras: Yeah well, I remember asking them at a very
early age. They told me it was Warsaw, Poland.

PP: Did they talk to you a lot about Poland?

Buras: Well, they talked mostly Polish tongue so
it's hard for me to understand.

PP: You don't speak Polish at all?

Buras: None.

PP: Do you know any words, phrases?

Buras: Oh yeah, I know a few words. (15) ,
I mean potatoes. If you're 15 with
, stuff like that. Not too much.
Basically just English.

PP: Did your father speak Polish at all when

PP: he was married? Of course, he was married to someone who didn't speak Polish.

Buras: Right, well, my mother knew a lot of Polish because she grew up in Hamtramck also. So, they communicated in Polish. Every now and then I'd hear them speaking Polish but that would be the reason they would talk in Polish so us kids wouldn't understand what they were talking about.

PP: I'm surprised you didn't pick some of it up. Self-defense. Is your wife Polish or part Polish?

Buras: No.

PP: How many children do you have?

Buras: Two.

PP: You have what, one little boy aged . . .

Buras: Two and another one almost three months.

PP: Have you ever thought about, in years to come, when they're grown up, whether you would want them to work in an auto plant?

Buras: Preferably not, if they can help it.

PP: Why do you say that?

Buras: I'd like for them to better themselves than what I am. ^{Because} I know the hardships that I have to put up with day in and day out in an

Buras: auto plant, and I don't want to see *my* children have to go through the same thing I do.

PP: What kind of hardships?

Buras: Heavy work, steady work, dirty work, *basically*

PP: When you were growing up, did your father *(clanging sound)* or any other relative work in the auto plant?

Buras: My father worked for Chevrolet Gear and Axle for thirty-seven years.

PP: What kind of work did he do?

Buras: He was a production worker too.

PP: What did he do?

Buras: He worked on a machine they call a *gleasance*. *(sp.)*
It had something to do with ring gears they make there.

PP: So, did you sort of get your job because he was in?

Buras: Right, exactly.

PP: Now, you don't feel that your children should go there, but apparently he was willing for you to go there. Why do you think that is?

Buras: He warned me about the factory work. I was working at a supermarket before I started working at Chevrolet. The money

Buras: was better at Chevrolet, so beside the added responsibility I was getting at the store, I figured maybe I'd be better off working at Chevrolet. Maybe I could better myself moneywise.

PP: When you think about yourself, do you consider yourself as an American or as a Polish-American?

Buras: Polish-American.

PP: Is there any particular area of Poland that you identify with? (sounds of baby) You mentioned your grandparents coming from Warsaw. I just wondered if you were interested, say, in that particular area.

Buras: I would, ^{like to,} probably, one day, take a trip to Poland just to see the culture, how the people live, how the country is. The difference compared to America.

PP: Where were you actually raised? In Detroit the whole time?

Buras: Yes. I lived in Hamtramck for a short time, though, on my own.

PP: But that's after you grew up.

Buras: After I left home.

PP: What kind of a community would you call the one that you're living in now?

Buras: As far as ethnic, you mean? I don't know. That's hard to explain. Probably most predominantly Black. Some Polish still. Basically, Polish, Black, and I don't know what else, really. Probably a few Irish.

PP: So, in other words, most of the non-Black are Polish.

Buras: Either Polish, Irish. Maybe a few Southerners in there.

PP: Do you go to a Polish church?

Buras: I don't attend church.

PP: What about when you were growing up?

Buras: I went to St. Bartholomew's over here.

PP: Is that a Polish church?

Buras: I would say it would be, yeah. It's mostly Polish. Because they had Polish mass and all.

PP: In Polish?

Buras: Right.

PP: Do you belong to any Polish organizations?

Buras: Yeah, I belong to *Kosciuszko* Club.

PP: What is that?

Buras: It's a club for members only. You don't have to really be Polish to be in it, but mostly there's Polish people in the club. It's a regular lounge, bar that you have to ring a buzzer to get in. They only allow certain people in there. You have to have a card. Your drinks are cheaper than a regular, ordinary bar.

PP: Do you pay so much a year to belong?

Buras: Yeah, it's a five dollar membership for all year. I like it because it's a peaceful place to go.

PP: Is it men only?

Buras: There's women there too.

PP: In other words, it's a place where people can't come in off the street.

Buras: Right.

PP: When you were raised, did your parents own their own home?

Buras: Yes.

PP: This is your home now?

Buras: I'm renting.

PP: You haven't bought a house?

Buras: Not yet.

PP: When you do eventually get a house, which
I'm sure you hope to do, where do you want
to settle?

Buras: East Detroit.

PP: In the City of East Detroit.

Buras: Right.

PP: Any particular reason there, rather than, say,
Warren?

Buras: There's a house for sale there that's going
to be available ^{within} about a year, year and
a half, that we're considering because
of the size. The area's nice. It's through
a friend. (Voice from background: Schools
are close to the house.) Right. Shopping's
close.

PP: Do you have a boat or a cottage or anything
like that?

Buras: No.

PP: Do you hope to one day?

Buras: I'd like to have both of them.

PP: What kind of car do you drive?

Buras: I have a '74 Ford Grand Torino and also
own a Chevrolet van.

PP: So you have one Chevrolet.

Buras: Right.

PP: Have you ever had a parent or a parent-in-law live with you? I don't mean just to visit for a week or so.

Buras: No, not to my knowledge.

PP: Let me hear a little bit about your work. First of all, did you graduate from high school?

Buras: Yes.

PP: And then, you were working in a supermarket at that time?

Buras: Yes, I was working at the supermarket while I was going to high school. But before I graduated from high school, I started working at Chevy's, about three months before I graduated.

PP: As what? As an assembler there, then?

Buras: I started out as an assembler. I've been through better positions and got back down to assembler again because of the economy. The lay-offs and all these higher seniority people are getting treated like new hires, practically again.

PP: But at least you had a job.

Buras: Right. That's one advantage, so far. They

Wash Buras: *shy* make us work harder now than we ever did,
but we still *got* a job. /

PP: You have, what, about ten years seniority then.

Buras: Yes.

PP: So are you in danger of being laid off?

Buras: Not at the moment, no.

PP: I mean, are there people with less seniority
still working?

Buras: Yes.

PP: So that your job is pretty safe?

Buras: So far, yeah.

PP: Can you tell me just what you assemble?
You mentioned one thing before, but what
other jobs have you had?

Buras: Beside the one I have now? I ran a ring and
bore machine, I worked on grinders, I've
worked on lathes. I drove a scrubber. I
don't know if you're aware of what that is.
I've had various ^{automatic} welding jobs.

PP: Have you ever considered going to ~~go to~~ be an
apprentice to get training in one of the
trades?

Buras: I considered it at one time but with the
lay-offs now and all, they're pretty shaky
too. It's a lot harder to try and get in it

Buras: and do it now.

PP: Looking towards the future, of course you're 29 now, have you ever considered, perhaps, going into any other kind of work?

Buras: I'm pretty well established right now where I'm at with the seniority. So, I really don't know of any other area that I could start from scratch and make the type of money I'm making now.

PP: It seems to me that this is what most of the men have told me. Once they've got, ^{with} certainly at least ten years in, benefits and such, that it's very hard to move. Unless you moved within the plant itself. Have you ever thought of going to get any more schooling?

Buras: I once considered going into broadcasting school and being a disc jockey. But at the time when I was thinking about it, they wanted a sum of money that I really couldn't come up with and no guarantee of a job. So I kind of put that thought out of my mind. It still gnaws on me that maybe I should have and seen what happened. But I really didn't have the money at the time to invest.

job change

Buras: in it. But I was curious to find out how much it cost and what you had to do.

PP: I realize you must be saving for a house, but had you ever thought of maybe putting money aside so one day you could do that, perhaps as well.

Buras: No, I've more or less given up on that thought. It's pretty hard to save any money nowadays.

PP: It certainly is. Have you ever considered any kind of a job change later on. When you have twenty more years in, you'll only be forty-eight or nine. You can retire with a full pension. Have you any idea just what you might do?

Buras: I was considering working part time back in a store again. ^{Back in the supermarket} business, I would like to go. And if I was laid off for any length of time and I knew I wasn't going to be called back, I would definitely pursue that career again.

PP: What, the supermarket rather than the d.j.

Buras: Cause I, pretty much for sure that I could

Buras: make a go of that better than a disc jockey job. That's a pretty hard field to go in.

PP: At 49, what would you want to do in the supermarket?

Buras: I'd like to work maybe as a department manager.

PP: If you were laid off would you ever consider relocating to another state?

Buras: Yes.

PP: Like what?

Buras: Alabama.

PP: Why Alabama?

Buras: That's her home state ^(wife) (background voice: that's where I'm from.), I've been there quite a few times. Even before I met her, I know people from Chevrolet ~~that, that was~~ ^{it} they're home state and I visited. And I like what I see. It's a whole different thing over there. The people are friendlier. (sounds of baby) You don't have the crime they do in the smaller towns. It's more peaceful. It's hectic in a big city like this.

PP: What would you miss most if you did move to another state?

Buras: Probably my folks, family, relatives, friends.

PP: Does your wife work?

Buras: Yes.

PP: Even with the two little ones. (laughter from background)

Buras: Yeah, shé's on call. (Wife: Part time)

PP: What kind of work?

Wife: Nursing aide at St. Joseph Nursing Home down here on (114) ^{Le Mex}. (Southern voice)

PP: For the record this is Mrs. Burasinski that's speaking. May I ask your first name?

Wife: Theresa.

PP: I should have asked the names of your little ones, too. What's the name of the baby who's making a few welcome noises.

Wife: Leon Allen.

PP: What's the name of your other little boy?

Wife: Charles Michael. We call him Chuck.

PP: Do you know of any Polish automobile workers who have gone to find work in another state?

Buras: Not really. I can't think of any.

PP: Have you any idea why some of the Polish workers haven't gone and other people have?

Buras: Polish people, by nature, that I know of, are pretty hard working people. There's a

*Polish
clan*

Buras: few bad apples in Polish people too, just like in any other ethnic group. I think once they get established where they work, they more or less hang on to that until they retire.

PP: Do you think there will be any other kind of job when conditions improve in the economy? Do you think there might be another kind of job that you would do ^{within} _A the plant?

Buras: I would probably get my scrubbing job back.

PP: Exactly what is a scrubbing?

Buras: It's a Ford tractor.

PP: A Ford tractor in a Chevrolet plant?

Buras: It's a Ford tractor in a Chevrolet plant.

(laughing) That's what I thought, too.

Anyways, you got your aisleways that you walk in between your jobs. It's got four set of brushes, six brushes on each plate. And you got your squeegee sucking system behind it. You scrub the floor. You got ^{one} _A water tank on each side and a clean out tank in the back. You lay out the water ^{with} the soap, and the brushes turn. And you're scrubbing the floor and it sucks up the dirty water into the back tank. You drive this. Maintain it.

Buras: If anything goes wrong, you fix it.

PP: Do you think you definitely will retire when you're forty-nine and you've had your thirty years in.

Buras: At the moment I'm about 95% sure ^{that} I will. The only thing that would change my mind is if I'm so far into debt I can't afford to. Hopefully, I don't plan to be.

PP: Except that, of course, you will get full pension after thirty years.

Buras: Right. It's just the idea of how much I can save between now and then. And if I can live on the pension that they give me ^{with} the standards at that time.

PP: By the way, how many times have you been laid off?

Buras: Since I've been there? Two or three times, at least, that I can think of. Two for sure, possibly three.

PP: If you were laid off in the near future, once your benefits would run out, would you go to one of these supermarket jobs?

Buras: Right.

PP: What happens if you couldn't get a super-market job? Simply because the economy was so bad.

Buras: I would probably scan the want ads to see what is available and what I could probably do, myself. What I was cut out to do. I know what I can do. Certain positions I probably don't have the knowledge of. But if there was something I was knowledgeable of, I would probably more or less try to check that out.

PP: Does your family have any feelings, do you think, about whether or not you'd change jobs? Do they feel that you should try and stay with your same kind of job? Does it make any difference? How does your father feel, for example?

Buras: Well, his thing is your best bet is to stay at Chevrolet. You're not going to find anything that pays what they do. And with your seniority, you're best off. The benefits are good. That's basically it. He thinks I should stay right where I'm at, cause there's nothing else out there.

Work

Buras: With a wife and two kids, there's not too much you can do.

PP: How about your mother? How does she feel?

Buras: More or less the same way.

PP: What about your wife? How does she feel?

Buras: She'd probably like ^{for} me to find a job that I'd be happier with. But, as far as the money part of it, she probably thinks I'm better off right where I'm at, too.

PP: What ^d do you think about some people taking earlier retirement because they get laid off quite a bit? I shouldn't call it early retirement. Even if they've worked a number of years, their job is such that they get laid off or maybe some kind of technology, some kind of robot ^{or something} has taken their work. So, they have a chance of going to a less important job and they choose instead to take early retirement. How do you feel about that? Do you think they should stay and get their full retirement.

Buras: I would probably stay, personally. I'm just the type of person that I just can't stand sitting around anyway. I'll be honest with you.

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PP: How do you feel about inflation today?

Buras: It's got to the point where you get paid on Friday and if you got any money by Monday, you're lucky.

PP: Do you feel that Affirmative Action has had anything to do with job lay-offs or is it strictly based on seniority?

Buras: If you could elaborate on Affirmative Action.

PP: Elaborate, I don't know. There certainly have been in all professions, all types of work, sometimes, shall we say, a certain number of position slots, ^{if you will,} put aside for members, of particularly the Black group. And they've been hired in. And I just wondered whether this Affirmative Action, that is, having so many Black people working, ^{within,} say, in your ^{particular} division, had anything to do with who was laid off or who wasn't.

Buras: It is strictly seniority. They don't really have too much choice in that because the Union more or less sticks with that.

(Kitchen noises) As far as lay-offs go, it's strictly seniority.

PP: Have you played any kind of an active role in the Union, at all?

Buras: Nothing except just pay my dues and vote.

PP: Oh, you do vote?

Buras: Yeah, I vote on their chairmans and elections they have within the Local.

PP: Do you go to meetings?

Buras: No, I've talked to various peoples that ~~has~~ attended the meetings and all that is, is a shouting match and a free-for-all. It takes up your Sunday, that is practically, sometimes the only day you have off. So, if I want to go down there, I want to go down for some constructive things and not to have to listen to a bunch of people yelling and screaming half drunk.

PP: Have you ever taken any education classes or any kind of classes at the Union? Local?

Buras: No.

PP: Nothing at all? Cause they give classes not based on Union things, like collective bargaining. I guess they give classes on assertiveness training and things like that. I just wondered if you'd taken any classes.

Buras: No.

PP: How do you feel about classes at the Union?

Do you think that they should have them?

Buras: Oh, I imagine it's a good thing if enough people are interested in it.

PP: Do any of your friends take classes, that you know of?

Buras: Not to my knowledge.

PP: Have you taken any kind of classes for interest sake, if not necessarily for job improvement? Anything at all, since you left high school?

Buras: Not since I left high school. I haven't been to any school at all since I've been out of school. I've strictly been working.

PP: I thought maybe at one point you might have taken a class in broadcasting. Cause I know they do give them at the Community College.

Buras: I have considered it but I never really pursued it.

PP: Because some of those classes are not too expensive. I mean, that program ^{maybe} you were going to go into was very expensive, I'm ^(Speers Howard) sure. But there are classes ^{I know} at Macomb Community College, which are not too expensive, that **do** give you an introduction to broadcasting or something like that.

Buras: It would be something I might consider in the future. I don't know how far in the future.

PP: How do you feel about Japanese and other foreign cars? Do you have any feelings one way or the other?

Buras: I think that there's far too many imports. And I know how many reason whys. It's simple because they can build a car cheaper than we can, and better.

PP: Why do you think they can build a car cheaper than we can?

Buras: They go by, from what I understand, a yen. Or something is their money. The Equivalent to our dollar, our dollar is inflationary and their yen can go a lot further than our dollar. Probably, they have better working conditions and maybe better bosses in the plants, that workers don't mind working for. But you get certain bosses with chips on their shoulders, and pushers, and this and that.

PP: You're talking about over here or over there?

Buras: Over here. You just have a different attitude as far as how good you want to make

Buras: your parts. Or how fast you want to do your job or whatever.

PP: When you say about how good you want to make your parts, I heard some people say that you should do everything to make a part as well as possible. Other people say, well, what difference does it make, they could be deviant anyway. And who cares. I've heard both viewpoints. What do you think? Do you think that people should perhaps try harder to make better parts and this would improve things?

Wah

Buras: Yeah, it's a lot to do with the workers, themselves. A lot to do with management, the way they run things. The workers see the way management run things and then they get their ideas. As far as, well, if he don't care, all they care about is how many they can get out. They don't care how good they build them. They preach quality and they preach safety but those are the two things that they don't practice.

PP: You're talking about quality control.

Buras: Right. That's a farce.

PP: So often I hear this term 'the magic number'.

PP: What does that mean to you?

Buras: To me, that's how many they need for today, production.

PP: So really, what it sounds as if you're saying, I don't know, correct me if I'm wrong, is that really some of the workers, maybe a lot of the workers feel that they've got to get the number of parts out. Therefore, it doesn't matter how they get them out as long as they get them out.

Buras: Right. The goal is not quality, it's how many you can get out.

PP: All right, so you get alot of parts out. And I've been through plants. Not for a long time. But I went through, about two years ago, the Fleetwood plant, I guess it was. And, as I came to the end of the line, there were cars upon cars upon cars. And I said, ^{''} they went through inspection supposedly, _{'' (I was told)} what's wrong with those? Well, there's something wrong with each one of these cars. Now, these are very expensive cars.

End Side 1, Begin Side 2

PP: We were talking about quality and such, and

PP: I was talking about cars coming off the line with serious defects. How do you feel about this waste of time or waste of effort when a car goes through the line and has all these inspections and yet, comes off and has to be repaired? How does this fit in with quality control?

Buras: They have a quality standard that they try to pursue in a plant. A quota of 145 is supposed to be perfect. They say they strive for that. But usually the line speeds are so geared up . . .

PP: Well, let's hold on a minute. What do you mean by 145?

Buras: 145 isn't the amount, it's just a number. It's some sort of quality index, they say. If you hit 145, as far as how many parts you ran that day and how many were good and how many were bad. 145 is perfect. If you get a 138, it means it's not perfect, but it's not bad. If you get under 100, you're doing pretty bad.

PP: Would you feel differently about imported cars if they were assembled in the United States?

Buras: Yes, as long as the plants were in the United States.

PP: What do you think about the Luv truck? I understand that the engine was built in Japan and then imported over here and put in to the truck. There's many a Luv truck on the road, that people might say: that's an American truck. And yet, ^{basically,} the engine was put together in Japan. So, you might say it's half American, half Japanese.

Buras: Right. It's getting to the point now where, not just cars but everything else, it's pretty hard to get American built. Because it seems at least a component or a part of a car or something is always built ^{either} in Japan or Taiwan with the U.S. name on it. Like Zenith, for instance.

PP: ^{and} Well, Sony tape recorders ~~and so forth.~~

Buras: So, I guess it's just something we have to accept unless the government regulates it somehow.

PP: If you knew now, 1982, ten, fifteen years ago, that the inflation would be very high, that it would be difficult to pay bills, make ends meet, do you think you would have

PP: gone in to Gear and Axle?

Buras: Probably not. Because I figure if I would have stayed in the grocery industry, I probably would have had a higher position now and made more money than I do now and had less aggravation.

PP: But would you have had the same benefits?

Buras: Basically, the benefits are about the same. The supermarket pay scale is almost the same. They make a little less. They might not have quite as many or as good ~~as~~ benefits, but it's close.

PP: Were you working for a big chain?

Buras: Yes, I was working for Borman's. Farmer Jack.

PP: So, in other words, you could have been, possibly, assistant manager or manager by now.

Buras: I'd have had about thirteen, fourteen years in there.

PP: But then we never know do we, what life is going to bring around the corner.

Buras: They always say, what a mistake.

PP: Somebody makes a mistake and it turns out well, somebody ^(may?) makes a mistake and it doesn't,

PP: And maybe on the other hand, you are working for a big company. Who knows but what Borman's could go out of business.

Buras: Right. Supermarkets are having a rough time.

PP: Wrigley's went out of business. And certainly they were a big chain. And look at Federal Department stores. You just never know.

Buras: It might have been the best thing in disguise.

PP: It may have been. Who knows. One never knows these things really. How do you feel about young people, possibly now, being trained for more than one job in high school, for example?

Buras: I think it's a real good idea. High school, that's a good start. But people go to college and they get degrees in certain fields that there's too many already in that field. And they end up working in the factory with me. I got a high school diploma and they got a degree, and they're working in the same line with me!

PP: Do you know anyone that's doing that now?

*Comment
Educ*

Buras: I don't know any ~~body~~ personally. But I've heard of incidents where there ~~have~~ been college people in. Right in the plant. You would think they'd have an office job at least. But they're working on a production line.

PP: Maybe they're getting more money.

Buras: Could be. I don't know what it is. But it happens.

PP: I realize no one can start now at Gear and Axle or any other plant because there're so many laid off, they would be called back. What would a new hire get now?

Buras: As far as wagewise? Well, they get less than us but it's roughly, probably around \$9.00 an hour. Maybe a little more, \$9.50.

PP: It comes to what a year?

Buras: Probably roughly, right around twenty-two, twenty-three thousand a year.

PP: And benefits are on top of that?

Buras: Right.

PP: Do you get dental benefits?

Buras: Right.

PP: And pension.

Buras: Right. Your eye care, Blue Cross-Blue Shield.

PP: So, that's nothing to sneeze at.

Buras: No, your benefits are probably better off than your wages, really. For instance, when my wife had the baby, that's two thousand dollars right there. I could never pay that. I could if I had to, but it would take me forever.

PP: Where did she have the baby?

Buras: William Beaumont.

PP: Are you on one of these health plans through General Motors?

Buras: Well, it's Blue Cross-Blue Shield.

PP: Do you participate ^{at all} in these Quality of Work Life circles?

Buras: Yes.

PP: Can ~~you~~ comment?

QWL
Buras: It's better than not having a circle at all, for one thing. A lot of things get discussed, as far as problems, different things that are wrong within the job. They try to correct them. Sometimes it seems like it takes forever for them to do it. But, eventually, some things do get done and

Buras: accomplished. Let's say, if we have a list
this long of things that need to be done,
QWL and they only do four or five things, that's
better than not doing none at all.)

PP: Do you think they have a long range value?
to the worker?

Buras: Well, that's the whole point that we've
been arguing, more or less. They try to
make it seem as though it's to our benefit.
(background coughing) A lot of it might
be to our benefit or is to our benefit.
QWL But in the long run, it probably benefits
the company too. They didn't really start
that plan strictly for our own benefit. I
know there was something in there for them
too. That's for sure.) (sound of child
talking)

PP: How do you rate the importance of a man's
job to his feelings about himself? Do you
think it's important to a man that he work
hard, have a job? How do you feel about
that?

Buras: I think that if any man is capable, health-
wise, of working and providing, he should.
Images of job to man There's really no excuse unless you're in

Buras: bad health, that you shouldn't work and provide for your family or for yourself, if you're not married.)

*Image of
job to man*

PP: If a person's laid off, they get a certain number of months of benefits, right? Some people, as I understand it, get little part time jobs to help.

Buras: A little bit under the table.

PP: Yeah, occasional, ~~bit~~ here and there. But, some people let their benefits run out and then they just sort of sit around or (background coughing; loud) or something like that. How do you feel about that? Of course, they still hope to get called back.

Buras: Right. Depending on the situation, if it was a temporary lay-off or a permanent lay-off. If it's temporary, you have a pretty much 95% chance, almost 100%, you're going to be called back within a short period of time. Let's say two weeks to six months. Now, your benefits are good for a year. If it's a permanent lay-off, depending on what your seniority is, you more or less can tell if you're going to be called back.

Buras: Not always but most of the time. If it's permanent, probably your best bet would be, to go out and start looking for work as soon as you can. Because it might take you twelve months to find a job.

PP: You have very strong feelings about work. Where do you think you got those?

Buras: From my dad. (background laughing) He's 70 years old and he's still going strong. (child laughing) He was working part time

PP: *work* for about two years after he retired. He retired when he was 65. He worked for a couple years as a custodian for New Sash Window Replacement on 8 Mile there. He's completely retired now. He doesn't work anymore. But, he works like hell around the house. And helps Ma out alot. He's still going good. He helps my granddad because my grandmother passed away a little over a year ago. And he's by himself so he goes over there and tries to help him out as best as he can too.

PP: Now, your granddad is Polish. And he is how old?

Buras: He's, I believe, around 94 now.

PP: Now was he first generation? He was the one that came over from Warsaw.

Buras: Right.

PP: Did he work at all when he came over?

Buras: He had different jobs. I don't think he held a steady job for so many years like my dad did. But he was working different places. He's collecting a pension from somewhere.

PP: He lives by himself, does he?

Buras: Now he's by himself, yeah. Since my grandmother passed away.

PP: Does he do his own cooking and everything?

Buras: Well, he does some. And then, of course, my dad come from a big family - there were six of them, five including my dad - they all more or less take turns. ^{one of them} They go there every other day and they kind of cook him enough for a couple days. They look out for him.

PP: How many grandchildren does he have?

Buras: I don't really know. It's quite a few. It's got to be over fifty.

PP: Ever had a family reunion?

Buras: We never have. And that is one thing I would definitely like to have. But families are so far apart. Everybody's doing their own thing, in their own corner. I don't think even if there was one officially announced, everybody could make it. Because they'd be tied up in their own little thing.

PP: Maybe if it was announced far enough ahead, like July 4th, or something like that when everybody is off.

Buras: Maybe, yeah. It would take a lot of people to get involved to make it work right.

PP: Let me ask you this one final question. This is a question of the future of the ^{American} automobile industry. Given the fact that new technology is coming in; computers, robotics, you name it. You can think about this for a minute. It's a big question. We're sitting here, in Detroit, which is the center of the American auto industry, although, of course, there are plants all over the country. Are we going to have more small cars? If the gasoline shortage changes, gasoline prices come down, maybe there'll be more big cars

PP: again. Maybe they'll stop importing as many foreign cars so that more people will buy American cars. Maybe American workers will decide that maybe they should do a little better in ~~the~~ quality because the company realizes suddenly that better quality cars will sell. It's better to make less cars and sell them than to make more cars and not sell any.

Buras: That, right there, would be the best thing to put. They should cut their quota. I know it's hard to cut the quota because there's a customer demand for the product. What I can't understand though, is now the economy is in such bad shape and they still have these orders for thousands of trucks a week. I can't understand where they're shipping them. They must be shipping them out of this country or something because they sure can't be selling them over here. They keep pressing for the magic number. Which they should want to emphasize the quality part.

PP: And yet, people are getting laid off, though.

Buras: Right. And they're still running like crazy. *(the Company)* They'll work ten hours a day with people

Buras: laid off. Which I don't think is right.

I mean, sure it's to my advantage if I'm working. That's money I can always use. But it's not really fair to the guy on the street. Probably a lot of people would just say, well, I don't care about him. As long as I get my money, what do I care about him being laid off. I don't think it's fair to him really. I'm much happier if everybody works, than people being laid off.

And the people that are working, are killing them. Which is the way they ^{are} working ~~hard~~.

PP: I'm sure you know there are a number of men at Gear and Axle who are working, not just Saturdays, but Sundays as well. Fifty-six hours a week.

Buras: Oh yeah. I've done them before. I'm not crazy about working Sundays but I work just about every Saturday they ask me or tell me to. And overtime during the week. I'll put in ten hours a day and maybe eight hours or ten hours on Saturday, if I have to. Just so I can have a little extra money for myself and my wife. So, we can go out to a play or to a show. To dinner or whatever.

Buras: Where on a forty hour paycheck, we more or less just got enough to barely cover bills. And sometimes put them off. Get a few groceries and that's it. It's just the same vicious circle every week trying to figure out what we're going to do with our money.

PP: Well, I wonder what will happen with the auto industry. ^{Certainly} ~~Especially~~ in Michigan.

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Buras: They need more incentives to keep the plants here. Instead of them moving down South or wherever. A lot of plants have been moving out of this city or just closing all together. Like the Chrysler plant.

PP: But basically, doesn't it come back all the time to (coughing) the fact that they're building so many cars and it is this number of cars that have to be produced rather than the quality of the car?

Buras: Right. That's got to change first.

PP: But how do you think it can change? Can it come from the workers??

Buras: It's got to come from management. From the top and work down. Because really, we don't have any control over our own destiny, so to speak. We come in there, they give us a

Buras: schedule. This is what you got to run, this is how many you got to run, run them. You look at whatever you got to do, you gauge whatever you got to do.

PP: Have you seen any glimmer of hope? Have you read anything or heard anything?

Buras: They're ststarting to realize but it's a slow change because they've been so used to this thing for so many years of doing it this way that it's going to take awhile. It's a gradual change coming. But I see it's going to be a while before it gets to where it's supposed to. At least to be competitive with Japan and hopefully, it won't be too late where Japan will end up taking half the market from them. But see, another thing besides the quality is the price. You can have a damn good car but if you're going to ^{charge} twenty-five thousand for it, there's not going to be a lot of people can afford to buy it. So, you're really not going to sell many that way either.

PP: Except some people can afford expensive cars.

Buras: Except for the ones that are making a lot of

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Buras: money. Fifty to a hundred thousand a year.

PP: But even the other cars that were not that expensive, are now.

Buras: Like the Chevette? That's one of the cars that are going downhill at Gear and Axle. They more or less had a life expectancy to '85 on that car. And now, it's getting to the point where the orders have quite diminished because of it being a rear wheel drive and front wheel drive's coming in more. It's going to be obsolete quicker than they expected.

PP: Do you think there'll be a big shift in the orders for American cars when front wheel drive comes in.

Buras: I think so. I think that will have a lot to do with more people buying American cars with front wheel drive. And maybe the stabilizing of the prices. Instead of maybe going up every year two or three hundred dollars, keep a lid on it of forty-five, fifty dollars. You have to expect a price increase because that's the way the American way is. Constantly, prices will go up. You have to accept that fact. There's nothing

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Buras: you can do to change that. Buying a car ain't going to help change it either. I talk to my co-workers every day. We have discussions while we're working if we have the time to talk. I can't hardly talk to a single person that admits they can afford to buy a new car. That's pretty bad. Especially if you're making them. So I can understand the poor soul out there that doesn't even know anything about the auto industry and can't afford to buy it. And the people like us that build them, can't afford to buy it. It's pretty sad.

PP: Well, let's hope things are better in the future.

Buras: Yeah, they got to get better. Like the guy was saying today, they can only get better, they can't get no worse.

PP: Well, I think that's a pretty good note ^{on which} to stop. Thank you very much.

End of Interview