

INTERVIEW WITH EUGENE DZIKOWSKI
2142 E. Palmer
Detroit, Michigan

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Tool Salter

INTERVIEWER: PAT PILLING
DATE: October 20, 1982

PP: Today is October 20, 1982. This is Pat Pilling and I'm talking with
Mr. Eugene Dzikowski, 2142 E. Palmer, Detroit, Michigan. Mr. Dzikowski is a job
^{er} setting at Chevy Gear and Axle and a member of Local 235. #1

Mr. Dzikowski, can you tell me where you were born and when you
were born?

ED: I was born at the address 2142 Palmer.

PP: You were born at home?

ED: Well, in Grace Hospital, August 17, 1948.

PP: Do you have any brothers or sisters?

ED: I have two brothers and one sister.

PP: Are they all living?

ED: All living, all married.

PP: Are they all in this area.

ED: No, my oldest brother living in Stirling Heights. My sister, ^{who} ~~which~~
is the oldest of the family, lives in Warren. My youngest brother lives in East
Detroit.

PP: Is your mother Polish, or part Polish?

ED: My mother is Polish.

PP: What about your father?

ED: My father is deceased. He was Polish.

PP: Did they come from Poland?

ED: No, they were second-generation.

PP: And where were they born?

ED: My mother was born in Detroit. My ^{Father} ~~mother~~ was born in Detroit.

PP: You mentioned before we started talking that your wife was from Vietnam, I believe.

ED: Yes.

PP: How many children do you have?

ED: Three children.

PP: Could you give me their names and ages?

ED: Robert Dzikowski is the oldest son; he'll be fourteen, February 24th. Mary, my daughter, will be eleven the 28th of this month, October. The youngest. . .

mother VOICE: Mary is twelve, she'll be thirteen. . . .

ED: That's right. Okay, and my son Thomas Paul, the youngest, is nine years old.

PP: How do you feel about any of the children working in one of the plants when they grow up? Do you have any feelings about that?

ED: All my ideas, at least my children ideas are, they all have ideas about going to college, pursuing a different career, bettering. . . . I can't say bettering themselves better than me, because it's not to be down-graded to work in a factory, never! If they can achieve these goals, either through my payment of their college education or grants, pursuing a different type of environment they feel they're comfortable in, I see fit. (But to work in a factory and make something out of something, I can't see no problems at all working in ^a ~~the~~ factory.)

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PP: You mentioned about the children being interested in college; well they're very, very young now. Is this something that you're trying to impress upon them or is it something they've heard about and are interested in? Because they're so young to be thinking in those terms.

ED: They are, right now, I believe most of the schools, Jr. High, High School and even some of the intermediate schools, are stressing now education, going into different fields, taking up different languages, eliminating some of the. . . (which I considered when I went to high school) non-essential studies, gym, teaching them mechanically-inclined drafting; get to a point where now that you don't go back and do a draft that I done when I was in high school with the same type of draft. It was taught for the last fifteen years. (Right now I cannot stress to my children the importance of an education.) Not only hand-writing, English, history. Right now those subjects can be really more or less put on a side, getting to a point biology, electronics, science, because, to me these are the new jobs of the future that are going to be required for anybody that wants to get into any type of job classification.

PP: As their mother is Vietnamese, do you know if they've had any problem with discrimination at all?

ED: The children?

PP: The children.

ED: Oh yes. Oh, they had, when they were younger, yes they did.

PP: How did they handle that?

ED: I sent my oldest boy to a karate school and he was on ^{Kelly and} KelLife Company (P2) in fact, four years ago. They made fun of him because of his oriental background. I didn't want to get involved with it, because I grew up in this neighborhood and if I couldn't handle myself there was nobody else going to handle me. My father wasn't going to fight my fights and I wasn't going to go out there and grab a six-year-old kid, because that wouldn't prove nothing. I could not keep my kid locked up just because he was half oriental and half American. He had to go out and show that he was himself. I never encouraged him to fight and the karate school never encouraged him to fight. It was all protection. He made a name for himself; he

played on the Babe Ruth team this year in Mt. Clemens for Lanse ^{Crews} Crews North. He led the league in home runs. He's playing freshman football right now at Lanse Crews. He's got an American girlfriend. I can't see nothing wrong with him now. The same goes for my daughter and my youngest son.

PP: Tell me, do you identify at all with Poland? I mean, do you feel American or Polish-American? If someone asks you, what would you . . . how would you answer that question?

ED: I'd have to go the old way, like we used to be called Pollack. I'm a Pollack. I'm hard-headed; I can get mean; I can stress a viewpoint and if I'm right, I'm going to stick to it until I die, until somebody proves me wrong. If I'm Polish, I'm proud of it and I always will be.

PP: Is there any particular area of Poland?

ED: Oh, God, that would be a hard one. You'd have to get me back. . . to identify with it, you'd have to put me down as. . . not so much as an aristocrat, but more as a soldier of fortune. I like the title 'soldier of fortune.' (I've always loved the unknown, the conquest, the battles. I kind of feel that there's something else you can do. If you're stop you, you know, you'll try to do it.)

PP: So you were brought up in this same house then, here.

ED: In this house, yes.

PP: In Detroit. Do you attend a Polish parish church?

ED: To be honestly truthful, I guess I'll be truthful with you, when I was married I did attend church quite a bit with my family. I stress it to my children, to this day I still. . . . but myself I miss masses.

PP: But when you do attend church, if you do, do you go to a Polish church?

ED: Oh, yes. St. Stanislaw right here.

PP: St. Stanislaw. Do you belong to any Polish organizations of any kind?

ED: I used to belong to PRCU--Polish Roman Catholic Organization, but nothing now, no.

PP: Did your father or uncle or any other close relative work in one of the plants in this area?

ED: Well, my father worked at L.E. Young Spring, I believe it was for thirty-six or thirty-seven years till they closed it down. Right now, Chevrolet Gear and Axle, that's plant 7 for ^{her} right here. It was a non-union organization at that time and they closed down. I had an uncle that worked at Chrysler's and I've got a brother-in-law and I've got a brother that works at Gear and Axle.

PP: Oh, you do have a brother that works there.

ED: He's a foreman. . . .

PP: Is that the one that lives in ~~St~~ Sterling Heights?

ED: That's the one that lives in Roseville.

(East Del. area)

PP: Oh, in Roseville.

ED: He's a foreman, across the street from me.

PP: What kind of work did he start out as?

ED: My youngest brother, he started off as a welder, relief man, then they put him on supervision. I guess he's been on supervision now about five, six years.

PP: Did your parents own this house when you were being raised?

ED: Yes, they did, I would say. At one time this was a two-family house.

PP: Oh, it was?

ED: Years ago.

PP: Did you live upstairs or downstairs?

ED: By the time I was born it was back to one-family. My oldest brother and my sister's time, they lived downstairs. I guess it was my ma's sister that lived upstairs.

PP: So it was still the same family, though.

ED: Yes.

PP: When you were married, then you lived here for awhile and then you moved out to Warren. Did you own your own home?

ED: I bought a house, yes.

PP: You bought a house, ~~um-hm~~. Do you have anything like a boat or a cottage?

ED: No.

PP: What kind of car do you drive?

ED: I've got that '74 Riviera out there, customized. I bought that, because I liked it. I had actually three cars when I got divorced and I gave her two.

PP: Well, then, your children don't live with you. They just visit you on weekends.

ED: They visit me, or I go visit them.

PP: Oh, you go visit them?

ED: Yes. No trouble.

PP: So you just live here with your mother? How long have you actually worked at Gear and Axle?

ED: Twelve years November 24th. ('82)

PP: Did you work at another plant before that?

ED: I worked at Chrysler, Elden Gear and Axle, for about six months prior to that.

PP: What about when you were in high school, did you . . . ?

ED: I moonlighted a few times, at different jobs, small factories, went in there after work.

PP: Did you finish high school?

ED: Yes.

PP: You did. So that actually you've worked at more than one plant.

Would you say you like your work?

ED: I enjoy it, yes.

PP: Can you describe it to me a little bit, what exactly you do do?

ED: My primary function as a tool setter is to come in, set up the machinery, make sure that the machinery is running to what inspection would call 'a qualified part.' If the parts aren't qualified after a check, I investigate and check out any trouble I can see. If I cannot set it up or adjust its trouble, I turn this over to an ME, Machinery repairs, hydraulic, electrician, and we try to find out exactly what is the problem, how come we cannot get a qualified part off this grinder.

PP: Before you got into this particular kind of work, what were you doing? When you were in ~~New Hier~~ ^{a New Hire}

ED: When I was in ~~New Hier~~ ^{New Hire} I was a machine operator at Plant 6. Then I was transferred to Plant 2 as a machine operator again. I worked on a grinder for two years and the senior tool setters in that department thought, and requested that I had enough knowledge to be qualified as a tool setter working with an on-the-job basis trainee. I picked up all the knowledge and experience by these senior tool setters and then I was qualified as a tool setter.

PP: Well now, you mentioned about being a tool setter and yet you

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ED: Well, tool setter jobs are the same thing, same thing, yes, yes.

PP: Well now, are you considered in the trades or are you considered in production?

ED: No, still production. We're higher paid than production, but we're not in the same category as the tradesmen, see? We're in the middle.

PP: In the middle, kind of in a limbo situation.

ED: Right, yes.

PP: Well, how does that affect you, say, in friendships. Are you friends with both people in both groups, then, if you're right in the middle there.

ED: A lot of arguments. A lot of arguments, like today, there's a lot of arguments, a lot of things that tradespeople do not like to get involved with; there's a lot of things I will not get involved with, because there's a classification distinction. If they're going to get paid two dollars and some cents more an hour than me to pull this part out, or adjust this part of the machine, I figure, well, if they're going to get the two dollars, let them do it. Then, again, with these layoffs, cutbacks on personnel, they should be happy to have a job, that I do put an order in so they do come down. Because I can figure this way, and I've heard it already mentioned that if there's no orders in for these skilled tradespeople, we don't need as many. But all in all, we get along good. I've been invited to parties at the local with them. We get along; we argue a lot, we always do. It's going to come down like every day, your job, my job, your job. But all in all, I got a pretty good group of people working with me and we get along. Basically, it's a no-nonsense deal. If I've got a problem, I ask for help; if I don't have a problem, I don't. There's no penny-ante stuff. We work together.

PP: Well, when you say you work together, do you work as part of a team?

ED: As a team, yes.

PP: How many people are on the team?

ED: Well, when it comes down to it, a skilled tradesman might come out. I'd be on the job, he's going to ask me what the problem is; I'm going to show him. I'm going to show him how the machine is supposed to run, what's its

function ~~is~~, what's going wrong with it. Then, if he can pinpoint the problem, he'd tear it apart. Now, I've seen cases and incidences where a machine repairer, electrician or hydrogman would come up to a job and the job setter would say, "It's not running," and just leave the man flat. You know, nothing to look for. To me, the man comes out there, I like to show him what's my problem right to start with, or what's close to the problem. Then, from there, that's at least thirty percent of the job, right there, thirty percent, he knows where the problem is. We work from there. That's about as close as I can get. If you don't have teamship, companionship, you're not only able to work together, even though you got different class distinctions, that's, you know, out the door. I don't look at it this way. I look at it as my job security. You got to work together. If you don't, you're in trouble.

PP: Have you ever considered changing jobs at all? Either within the plant or. . . .?

ED: They've asked me to go on supervision a few times.

PP: What did you say?

ED: I came close when they had a layoff back in '74 and then another time. They know I've got a college degree background; I've got a good military record, very good military record; I know the job, I work as a leader sometimes in my department. Sure, anybody would like to get in supervision, if you want another ulcer! I would like to go up ahead, everybody does. You/have to be foolish. . . there's always one step higher. You should never think about going one step lower.

PP: Tell me something about your college work. You said you've been to college.

ED: When I got out of the service. . . . I can't even think of the name now. . . . Weekend college! Okay. At first, I have to admit

PP: At Wayne State.

ED: I have to admit my buddies were in first and they were telling me about the great benefits they were getting. They said, "You know, you're getting outrageous money, which. . . ." It wasn't outrageous; it was due to us anyway. Once I did get involved with it I really enjoyed the program. I started learning things. I've got books. I took psychology, biology, math, English, literature, different subjects that really I didn't touch in high school. It became really a source of education and something to really brag about. When you came back to work, you know, you said you couldn't work overtime. You told the foreman you had a test that night and you had to leave. He'd look at you like you were crazy!

PP: How long did you study for?

ED: I studied. . . . I think I have twelve more credit hours. But my divorce interfered with that. I completely lost track of schooling. I was going for a divorce. I was on my thesis; I was writing a thesis about immigration similar to what you're doing, but I was writing a thesis about the "new immigrant" the orientals, the Vietnamese orientals, compared to the German, Polish, Italian. I had tapes, I had manuscripts written, but I just couldn't concentrate; there was too much pressure on me. The job was affecting me, the divorce was affecting me; I couldn't keep up my studies no more.

PP: Have you ever thought of going back?

ED: Going back? Yes. Even my ex-wife even hounds me about getting the degree. I thought. . . I don't know, sometimes I want to, sometimes I don't. It's not much when you come down to it, twelve credit hours.

PP: I was going to say, twelve credit hours is either four courses at three hours apiece or three courses of four hours apiece.

ED: It's the book I got to write, that's what I hate. That's why I'm nervous, about the book. Something like that, you know, about the immigration, you don't find too much about the orientals. You can't use everything like. . . ~~all right, you copy something from the book, you got to put that down, okay?~~

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PP: You have to footnote it, yes.

ED: Footnote everything, all the way down.

PP: But it sounds as if you've done a tremendous amount of work.

ED: Yes. I got straight "A's"! For almost three years. I had a very good report card. Like I said, the money was helpful, helped me buy a car. Then it became interesting, very much. The teachers, we would meet every quarter. They were out to teach; they knew we were a bunch of hard-headed G.I.'s or whatever. They knew we were no college kids. They, at least, thought of something, made us think.

PP: Have you ever considered any kind of job change? I mean have you ever had an interest, say, in changing into a different line of work.

ED: Go back to the service.

PP: Really?

ED: Yes, a couple of times I was almost tempted to go back to the service.

PP: Well, now if you get your thirty years in, would you consider going back to the service.

ED: *With* thirty years? No, I'd be too old.

PP: Too old then. Well, with the seniority you have now, which is about twelve years, would you ever consider going back into the service?

ED: This may sound stupid, but its realistic. It's coming from what the Army taught me. I think if there was ever another involvement, where there is a war going on again, I would go back. Because that's what I was trained for in the Army, to fight. I was a weapons specialist, Special Forces, U.S. Army Ranger. I would think about going back again, definitely.

PP: If you ever did change jobs, say, for some reason, something happened, say Gear and Axle closed or something like that--we don't know, we hope not--but with things as they are today, you never know what plant is going

to close next. Would you ever consider relocating in another state?

ED: Yes, if I had to, I think I would.

PP: You would?

ED: Yes, if I had to, because I've got children to support yet.

That's my main thing.

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

ED: I guess my family. My family and children have to be on the same line, because they're family, all the way I look at it. Probably just Michigan, too. I love it down here. I love the whole state.

PP: When you were married, did your wife work at all?

*Wife
AA work*
ED: Not for about the first six years; then she went to work. That's where our marriage broke down, when she went to work.

PP: Do you know any Polish autoworkers who have gone to find work in another state? C

ED: Let's see. . . . it's hard to say. I don't know if I can put this on record or not. I've got one that went to Florida.

PP: Who was Polish?

ED: Yes. But he's got about \$20,000 ^{back} child support.

PP: Well, I have no idea. . . .

ED: He did go to Florida.

PP: Did he stay there?

ED: He's staying there now. He's been there for the last two years, yes.

PP: So he went for a reason then.

ED: Yes, he worked for Chrysler. He never got called back. And then another one I know is. . . okay. . this guy is legal. He was named Raiph Ichoric. He worked at Chrysler at the Uber Foundry. I've got his phone number

if you need anything else, probably his address. He had eleven years here as a skilled tradesman. He was laid off for three years. He's working at the Stroh's Brewery Company right now as a skilled tradesman.

PP: ^{But}
~~That's~~ here?

ED: In Detroit.

PP: In Detroit.

ED: Yes, he hasn't relocated.

PP: In other words he didn't relocate.

ED: No.

PP: No, I know, there seem to be very few people of Polish background who have actually relocated in another state.

ED: It's hard.

PP: It is hard to pick up and move. So actually how many years of school did you have then? You had your high school and then above that. . . .?

ED: Almost fifteen years.

PP: Almost fifteen years?

ED: Fifteen years of education.

PP: So actually how old were you when you learned your current job skill?

ED: Let's see, I hired in when I was twenty. I'd say about twenty-three or twenty-four I was into tool setting, job setting.

PP: Then you went in the Army, did you?

ED: No, I got out of the Army when I was twenty.

PP: Twenty? Oh, I see you were in the Army first.

ED: I joined the Army when I was eighteen.

PP: So actually what were the years when you were in the Army?

ED: 1966 to 1970. Three and a half years I was over in Vietnam.

PP: How did you get your first job at Gear and Axle?

ED: When I got out of the Army Gear and Axle was on strike, in the seventies. All right? I knew I had a chance to get in there because of my brother-in-law being a supervisor down there. At that time, if you look back in the late sixties, early seventies, there was a monopoly. You could work at three plants. You could go and get another job; it was easy to get hired in.

PP: Now, let me ask you this: Your brother-in-law is a supervisor, you said? In which department?

ED: Well, now he's working over here. He worked at Gear and Axle for about sixteen years. Then he transferred out. My brother is a foreman.

PP: He's a foreman, yes.

ED: Okay. So I worked at Elding Gear and Axle and I was laid off down there. Then the strike ended here at the Gear and I put in my application, and used my brother-in-law as a reference, which anybody would do, because it helps. And I was hired in on the second shift and I worked from there.

PP: What shift are you on now?

ED: First shift now.

PP: That was your choice, was it?

ED: I wanted to transfer over after about three, four years, I think. No, excuse me, about five years, I transferred to the first shift.

PP: At what age do you plan on retiring?

ED: I'll get my thirty-and-out . . . at fifty-two.

PP: You'll only be fifty-two when you get your thirty years in.

So what do you plan on doing then?

Retirement
ED: Well, I think I would like to travel. I always loved to travel. I love up north in Michigan. I'd like to buy a place up north and retire up there--hunt, fish. I'm hoping my kids, by that time, the economy would stabilize

Retirement *that they would be able to*
 enough to self-support themselves. I've seen many a man at work right now who has over thirty years and he can't retire because he's got children--not children but men and women at home without no work forcing *him* them to stay at that department and work. I want to see my children go to college, but I want to see my children be self-supporting, too, at the same time.

PP: How many times have you been laid off?

ED: One big lay-off was in 1974, when I was laid off a total of four weeks. Then I'd get these little mini lay-offs that I'd volunteer for--a week, total of maybe three times out of going on twelve years.

PP: Why do you volunteer?

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ED: We've got a nice policy. Come June or the first week of July, they want to go down for one-week inventory. And it's a beautiful time to have a vacation and you're going to get paid for it. You won't get your full pay, but it's better coming in. . .

PP: In other words you get benefits.

ED: Right. You get compensation and sub. And you've got a week off. So why not take it?

PP: What do you do during that week off?

ED: I have my youngest son with me for that whole week. Then we went up north. Then I had the rest of the children, my oldest boy and my daughter joined us and we went up to Mackinaw, which I love to go up to. And we spent some time up there. But normally I just have my youngest son and we went out and played baseball, went to the ball games, went to the movies, just enjoyed myself, relax, let my hair down, take it easy.

PP: You talked about staying where you were and you may have gone back into the military, but what do your friends feel about that? How do they feel about a person, let's say, switching jobs in mid-stream, especially if you have got ~~ten or~~ twelve years seniority?

ED: Most of my friends around this neighborhood are unemployed so they have no say-so. I know one guy right now that was going through a divorce problem with fourteen years at Chevrolet Gear and Axle. He took off to Florida. He quit, threw fourteen years away. By changing a job, there would have to be one hell of an offer and a signed guarantee, a life-time guarantee before I could ever even consider (leaving) a job. They could give me one of the greatest jobs in the world sitting behind a desk instead of climbing up and down machines, getting dirty, but there would have to be some type of guarantee before I could even think about changing jobs.

PP: What do you think about a man taking earlier retirement because of continued lay-offs? Say a man's only got about ten years in. . . .

ED: I don't think he can do it with ten years. There's no way you can be able. . . there's no Social Security until sixty-two. His benefits would be reduced considerably. Medically might be the only feasible way I could see a man taking early retirement.

PP: You mean if he needed medical. . . .

ED: Medically, but if he takes an early retirement any other way, unless he has one hell of a bank account. . . .

PP: What happens if his wife works and is earning a fairly decent salary, what do you think about a man retiring early? Say he gets laid off, I mean he wouldn't possibly do it if he was working, just for the sake of vacationing, but say he gets laid off and his wife is working and there's enough money to get by. What do you think about this man saying, "Well, I'm going to retire."

ED: Well, if he can go that way, more power to him. But what if his wife dies? How's he going back to work? If he just went to work because he wanted to work and if he feels like retirement, you know, it suits him, he should do it. Why should you go in that plant every morning, you know?

PP: Do you feel that affirmative action has anything to do with job layoffs or is it strictly based on seniority?

ED: Are you talking about women being in the plants?

PP: No, not women. I'm talking . . . I don't think there are that many women in Gear and Axle, are there?

ED: Oh, you've got quite a few more than you've had when I first hired in. Are you talking about affirmative action or . . . ?

PP: Yes, I was talking about affirmative action.

ED: . . . or pleasing the government? Which way does it work?

PP: Well, I just wondered how the presence of blacks and women. . . .

ED: We've always had blacks!

PP: . . . in Gear and Axle affect job lay-offs. Does it affect job lay-offs?

ED: No, it doesn't affect job lay-offs, no. **C** But if you want to go by affirmative action, do you want to please the government or do you want the best person working your job. I don't care if it's male, female, white, black, green. If they can do the job, do it! If they can't do the job, get it out! And if they're going to scream discrimination, even though they can't do the job, they have no business being there. If I mess up I get my butt chewed out. **)** I'm expected to get my butt chewed out. And I accept it because I know I done wrong. But if I go chew somebody else out and they're going to sit there and cry because . . . "you're saying that because of my color, or my race, or what. . ." "No, I'm not doing that. You screwed up, period! I don't care what you are. You

PP: Affirmative Action

PP Action

just screwed up, buddy." Okay, if you're good, you're good; if you're going to learn, you're going to learn. If you're going to come on, you've got a monkey on your shoulder and you think you're going to walk on this job and nobody is going to touch you, you're in the wrong department. You're not in my department, because I'll let you know. And I do let a lot of people know, including supervisors. I will not back down if I'm right, and I have the backing from a lot of my supervisors including general foremen and superintendents. If I'm right, I'm going to stick on my case. If that person doesn't belong here, he's not going to be long on my job. I don't need a freeloader. That's what wrong with the corporation, a lot of these corporations, you've got too many of them.

PP: Have you played a role in ^{your} the union local at all?

ED: I vote! I have never called a committeeman in twelve years. I figure if I can't settle with my foreman face to face, then I really screwed up.

PP: Do you attend union meetings at all?

ED: A couple of them, yes.

PP: But you haven't actually taken any kind of a

ED: No, no. Nothing drastic.

PP: Have you ever taken any of the education classes that they hold at the local?

ED: No.

PP: Do you think the union should offer classes? How do you feel about that? Do you think that's a good idea?

ED: All depends on what they want to teach.

PP: Well, now they have certain things ^{like} Grievance Procedure, I believe, and Collective Bargaining, specifically union classes, but I think they also have classes in things like, I believe, in Assertiveness or Stress Management or Pre-Retirement, this sort of thing. These are the kind of classes that I was wondering if you. . . .

ED: Most of those classes right now are brought to people that are supposed to be bred to be the future committee people, committeemen, committee-person, whatever. / ^{They are} very selective, if you want to get down to it on who they ask to come to these classes. You see, a lot of this stuff is not publicized, about these classes, and who goes to these classes. Like I don't know if you're familiar with Black Lake?

PP: Yes, I've been to Black Lake.

ED: Okay. You'd been surprised how many people don't know that they can go there, really.

PP: Have you been to Black Lake?

ED: No. I was never asked to go. I was never asked to go there for a week and get paid by the company, plus the union! Certain people have been asked to go. And a lot of people know about that.

PP: That's a shame you haven't been to Black Lake. I think they have. . . .

ED: I would be interested. Like I say. . . .

PP: . . the best food around here. Wonderful place to learn. . .

ED: I've talked to a lot of people that brag about how they went to Black Lake, say they don't learn nothing. I said, "Well, you were going down there for a union business. How come you didn't learn nothing?" "Oh, we're too busy doing this and that, you know."

PP: If you had known a few years ago what you know now about the economic conditions, ~~you know~~, our problems with inflation and so on, would you possibly have tried a different kind of work when you came out of the service?

ED: If I knew I was coming ^{down} ~~out~~ now and I would have the opportunity to get into college early enough, I would have been plant superintendent of Plant Two. I tell you truthfully. Because there's a way to find out what was

Black Lake
Ed

going on, what's a mistake, and how to correct the mistake early enough. That's my. . . I would not change GM, no way. I would have been plant superintendent. One of the youngest, but I would have been plant superintendent.

PP: And yet you haven't gone into supervision. Do you think if you'd gone into supervision when they first asked you, you could have worked your way on up?

ED: I think I could have, yes. I could have. There's nothing I can't do right that a supervisor can't do. A supervisor right now watches people. I watch machines. I make sure machines run--the people run. ^{my} The people on my job respect me. They know I won't give them no raw deal. Then again, my supervisors all the way to the plant superintendents know I won't give them a bum answer. If there's something wrong with the machine they know I turned that machine off for a reason. And my people know the same way. If my operator comes up to me and tells me that his machine's not running right, I'll look at it, I'll see it, and if it's not running right, I'll turn it off. I'm not going to put the blame on the man. But then, on the same principle, if I know an operator is messing around, or trying to break a machine, he will catch me at the wrong time! So I think supervision, it's a nice thing to have, but you've got to be qualified to have it at the same time. And I think I was qualified and I still am qualified ^{to be} as a supervisor.

PP: How do you feel about Japanese and other foreign cars?

ED: I think it's got out of hand. It's got completely out of hand. It's pathetic, because every second commercial that you see during a football game, or baseball game, every second commercial is Japanese. And yet they tell you "buy American." If their quality is so good and their cars got such good gas mileage, why can't our cars be the same way?

PP: Why?

*Jap
import*

ED: Why? It's not the money scale. It's not the absenteeism. It's the mass production over quality. They love to have the dictate, dictate, and dictate, run a good part, we want a good part. Okay. We'll run a good part. The next thing you know they're pulling their hairs out. "How come you cut us down by thirty parts an hour?" I said, "You wanted a good part." "We can't run this way! Speed 'em up!" Speed them up, there goes your good part.

PP: In other words, they're running defective parts.

ED: Not always, no, no, no. You're going to have defective parts, no matter what.

PP: Yes, sure you are.

ED: Well, you've got defective parts. You're going to have defective parts no matter what you see, what you've run up. There's never going to be a part that comes off the machine the same way, no matter what. It's just that mass production cannot keep up with the quality that supposedly is initiated into a job. We're supposed to run a 142 audit is max. Now we ran 141, we went down as far as 136 on an audit, which is pretty bad. But to get a perfect part every time, you cannot; I don't think the Japanese can do it either.

PP: What do you mean by mass audit? What is that? I never heard that term before, when you say you go down from 142 to 136.

ED: An audit?

PP: Yes.

ED: Well, every couple months you have an auditor, who comes in from the plant, and then you have the main auditor, who comes in from General Motors, from the main plant. They run a quality check, what you're supposed to. See, 142 is the maximum perfection on your part, your whole part.

PP: Oh, I see. I understand that. In other words it went down. . . .

ED: It can go down. They don't come up there and wait for you to run a part. They'll go through the job and randomly select a part from any place

in the job and check it out.

PP: I see. Now I understand. Would you feel differently about Japanese or foreign cars if they were assembled in the U.S.? Would you have any feeling?

ED: Nope! Nope! I want my cars built here.

PP: You want your cars built here.

ED: If it would save my job or something like that, I'll tell you I got a lot of Polish blood in me, and I still can't see me working under nobody else except GM.)

PP: By the way, as you mentioned being Polish again, have you any feelings about what's going on now in Poland? The Solidarity movement and now the government banning the movement. Do you feel close to it? Do you have an interest in that?

ED: You get mad when you read the papers. But there's nothing to be done, because if they riot they're going to get killed. Nobody's going to back them. Poland's had a bad history about always getting in trouble. They'd like to fight everybody in the whole world, but they lack the leadership. They never were united. Poland is such an independent country that even the peasants they didn't want to listen to their own kings, they were so independent. I mean that was their biggest problem and that's the same way they feel now. They're going to be oppressed and probably going to be quite a few hundreds of people killed there, but they're still going to have, but they're still going to have their same feeling in their heart that they're still Polish and they're still free not matter what they say. That's the only way I can look at it; that's the way I feel.

PP: If you thought you might be permanently laid off, that is to say if Gear and Axle happens to close or something like that, because of, say, increasing imports or lack of cars being sold, would you try and get some new training or would you go into the service, at this point in your life?

ED: At this point right now, see, thirty-four years old. . .

PP: I mean you told me you have twelve hours left to go for a college degree.

ED: My degree would be useless in any field that I would pick up, because, first of all, there's an overabundance of teachers walking around. Mechanically I'm qualified to do other jobs, very qualified, but you have a lack right now, in your shops, lack of work. My job would be obsolete. I probably could go out of state, ^{or} Texas. Even out of the country. Somewhere in Europe maybe. Basically, I don't know, I'm in a situation where I'm inclined to do machinery work, inclined probably to teach a first or second grade class, but all these positions are full.

PP: Would you possibly go back to vocation^s school and take up something like robotics or computer work, in which there is. . . .

ED: I've got two grinders(?) right now I know how to program. I've got Warner-S^hazy grinders, I do the programming. I've got the sheets; I've got the keys for the computer. I can program, read a program, set programming.

PP: So would you possibly go in for some kind of computer science work?

ED: If anything I would have to go into would be electronics.

PP: Oh. Where would you go to study it do you think?

ED: DIT. Detroit Institute of Technology, I think, would be one of the best, unless I knew something else. But electronics, because everything is solid-state. There's no fuses, you know, most of the machinery coming in is computerized cards. You change your settings, you change your cards. I would have to say electronics would be my best bet. That's the only thing I could look at.

PP: What do you think about the idea of young people being perhaps trained to do more than one kind of job?

re training

ED: How young?

PP: Well, say in high school or after. The reason I ask this question is [that] so many people ~~who~~ have been laid off from their jobs and then have to get some kind of retraining.

ED: Cross-training. Okay, well, it's good if you train them in both skills. Don't half train a person. Don't make them good in one and then half good in the other, because you never succeed at all. Because in case he ever does get that second job, he's going to be a failure at it. And it's just a waste of time. If you're going to cross-train a person in skills, you have to train them all the way down, maximum.)

PP: I like that term "cross-training", I have never heard that before.

ED: Oh, yes, it happens. ~~Most of the people~~. . . . Chrysler made a big mistake when they ~~did~~ that, when they had the skilled trades people, they made them a machine repairs and a hydraulic man at the same time, see. Where at GM you have machine repair, dash, and then you have the hydraulic man. And I think that's one of the biggest problems that they cross-trained them too fast. They gave them a little bit on machine repair, a little bit of hydraulics, got them through the course. Basically they were unqualified in both fields.

PP: In other words, as you say, they were half trained.

How do you feel about the quality of work-life circles ? .

ED: I belong to it and I quit.

PP: Why?

ED: I was a facilitator; I was the leader of my group. Yes, I was. The people ~~liked~~ ^{elected} me. First of all, it got out of hand because the people got the wrong perception of it. They thought it was a squealing circle. They thought they were going to come over there and say, "Well, this guy don't do this." That's not the idea. You don't come in and talk about Joe Blow didn't

do this and Mary SoSo has to do twice the work. Let's find out what happened. Let's break it down. It never worked out. Then it got to it was always ^{at hand} mentioned 'quality scrap'. Quality scrap, quality scrap, see? Every meeting was quality scrap. People don't want to hear that. They want to know how come the air-conditioner ain't working. That's true. You'd come in there summer sometimes, "How come the fans ain't hooked up? In the winter, "How come we ain't got a roof yet over the plant when it rains you drown?" Then you had a main mediator who would say, "We'll get that later. Let's talk about scrap again." I've got guys been on grinders twenty-two years; they don't want to hear about scrap. They know about scrap; they've been seeing scrap for twenty-two years. They want to know how come the fan ain't working? How come the janitors don't clean the floor? The whole idea was good. It was good to get the people in there. It was good to sit down and talk, but they lost the whole concept. They made it too company-oriented. It got to a perception where every meeting was quality and scrap. First thing the guy would come up there would say, "You know how much scrap we ran this week?" Those guys don't want to hear that. If those guys were on those grinders in the middle of February and it was cold and someone forgot to close the windows the night before, the plant is freezing, they don't want to hear about no scrap; they want to know how come there's no heat in that goldarn plant.

PP: Do you think these circles have any long-range use?

ED: Oh, it would be effective. . . . people like the thirty-minute break time.

PP: What about in other parts of the plant? Do you think some of the circles there are working perhaps better?

ED: Some of the newer jobs, maybe, yes. Some of the older jobs, no. Don't get me wrong! There are a lot of people that get involved in this. I

PWL
was a facilitator. People elected me out of my whole department. They wanted me, because they know I talk up. They know I don't double-standard. I don't stick up for management and I don't stick up for them. I come straight forward on a problem. That's the way, you know, it should be. But then again, I don't like going to a meeting and have a man hand me a slip what to talk about at the meeting.

PP: You seem to be a person that likes to deal with problems and analyze problems. Am I right in that?

ED: Well, I'll give you a fast background: I was captain of my football team for two years. When I went to the Army I was one of the youngest staff sargeants in the United States Army. I was twenty years old and I was promoted to Staff Sargeant, E-6 in Vietnam. I've handled people older than me almost all my life. Twenty years old and I handled the guys with thirty-two years military service and they were under me. I'm not afraid to face a project, you know, or take a situation in hand.

PP: Now, something that's coming out very clear in this tape, the amount of leadership and leadership potential that you have. I have not met you before, but it's coming out loud and clear. And you mentioned, of course, about being asked about supervision and so forth. Have you ever thought of going into some kind of leadership development within GM?

ED: There's nothing open, really, that I know of. You mean like run for. . .

PP: Well, I don't know, you mentioned about the fact that if you'd gone to college and done various things that you might have been plant superintendent.

ED: I think I could have.

PP: And you're very young, right now! So that I was just wondering if you had thought about something along those lines, because you obviously are able to analyze situations and work with both groups on both sides of the spectrum, in this case management and labor, and apparently have the respect of both groups. So that you have a potential there and I wondered if you'd thought about it enough, because there are jobs coming up. There are openings in various, probably within GM, itself. And I just wondered if you'd ever thought about that.

Supervisor

ED: Yes, I did. In fact, the last time I was supposed to go on supervision I threatened to leave my plant. I came right up to my general foreman, at that time the plant manager, and I told him I wanted an AVO--I wanted to transfer to another plant. He said, "Why?" I said, "Hell, I'll never go on supervision here. You'd keep me fixing your machines. Everytime they're down, you'd call 'Gene, come on, fix the machine!' I can't get nowhere over here." So, they called me in the office and they said, "We're going to put you on supervision." Then they called me back and says,--which they did have a pretty heavy cutback on supervisors again. But I threatened them, I'm not scared to. If I've got to ^{advance} / , I'll advance someplace else, within the GM system.

PP: What is this AVO? What does that stand for?

AVO

ED: Avoid Verbal Orders. You go through the superintendent. It's a request that something's got to be done or you want a change of classification or change plants and it comes to his notice right away. The clerk, you know, files a TMA?. He went bananas! He called my general foreman, Charlie Jones, "Charlie, Gene wants to go for, what do you do? Gene wants to go on supervision." Which they told me I could go on. Then they call me back in and he says, "We're going to cut back again," which they did ~~cut~~ back. Well,

see, I know I'm established at Plant 2. I'm not bragging, I'm not trying to carry no flag. I'm good at my job, and proud to be good at my job, but it gets to a point where you get too good on your job. I've got a foreman in my plant right now, Jack Sanna, the guy knows every department, every job in Plant 2 and Plant 4. That man's been passed over for general foreman so many times for one reason: they can use him anytime a foreman is on vacation, somebody's sick or they have a problem, they put that man in that department and he can work it. And the man is more than qualified to be a general foreman right now. And it hurts him. Sometimes you can be too good. But then, again, when I know things are getting better again, I'll put a note down there saying "I'm going to get out of Plant 2."

PP: How do you rate the importance of a man's job to, say, the image of himself? It's a big question, I know.

ED: Well, okay. Let's see, the importance of the job. Years ago it might have been something, how a man would work, how he had pride, but he ran. Then, you got to the point, I don't know, it became so slack that people just didn't give a damn no more what they ran, because they were going to pass it anyway. They don't need the parts, they're laying-off. "Why should I do it; let somebody else do it." I think right now that's the worse thing going on in the appliances. "Why should I give a damn, nobody else does." They stress it, oh, damn they stress it! Even at those EPC meetings, they'll stress it until they turn blue, but it doesn't get done. I've seen machinery that should have been shut down that they'll let it run because they need the parts, the schedule went up. When the schedule is down, they'll shut the machine down. But once that schedule builds up again, they got to get those parts out, some way or another. Or somebody's bacon's going to fry. And that one's usually go on a white shirt and a tie, and he doesn't want his frying. He's going to pass it on to somebody else.)

*Imp. of job
to man.
Pride
of man
caring*

PP: What do you think of the future of the auto industry?

ED: Oh, well, I believe the workforce is going to be eliminated a little bit more. It's sort of scary, when you come down to it, really. Something in the near future has to break and that break is, I believe, a war. I believe a war, eventually, a war again. Somewhere along, I don't know where, maybe America won't be involved in it, but there will be a major war where the auto companies will again be able to produce military parts. If not, because nobody's going to buy a car. They can't afford a car. But they're charging interest on what you buy a car now, ten years ago you could have bought three houses in ^{Hamden} ~~Antrim~~ ([?])

PP: So you don't seem very optimistic?

ED: Not for at least another five years or something, I would say. I don't see how it can break. There's too many people out now; there's not enough jobs. With the new engineering technology, the new. . . they've got a job in plant 4, they've got robots that eliminate about five or six people off the job. This machine changes it's own tools. When the tools wear out it changes it's own tool stops; before a man used to do it, a job setter yet!

END OF INTERVIEW