

Joseph Kowalski - Electrician¹

Interview with: Joseph Kowalski
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Side 1

This is Pat Pilling. The date is July 20th 1982. I am talking with Mr. Joseph Kowalski of 29225 Beste, St Clair Shores, Michigan. Mr. Kowalski is an electrician and *Chery Gear* and a member of local 235. *PP*

PP: Can you first tell me where you were born and when you were born ?

KOW: I was born in Hammtramck, Michigan, September 16, 1946.

PP: Do you have any brothers or sisters ?

KOW: Yes, I have two brothers and a sister: an older brother, Jim, who is two years older than me and a younger brother, Gregory, who is four years younger than me and a sister, Kathy, who is thirteen years younger.

PP: Are any of them living in this area ?

KOW: They all are.

PP: How many of them work in any of the auto plants ?

KOW: No, most of them would rather die than work in the auto plants.

PP: Why do you say that ?

KOW: Well, I do not think that anyone chooses to work in an auto plant as a vocation, *its a matter* ~~it is out~~ of necessity.

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PP: Is your mother Polish or part Polish ?

KOW: She is Polish.

PP: Was she born in this country ?

KOW: Her mother was born in Poland but she was born here.

PP: Whereabouts was she born ?

KOW: In Detroit - I am not exactly sure where in Detroit.

PP: What about your father ?

KOW: He is second generation American, he was born in Detroit.

PP: Do you know how they met ?

KOW: Yes. My uncle is Stanley Dober. He was a labor organizer.

~~It is~~ ^{He was} kind like a "bon vivant" of the 1930s. He was a parachutist and all this kind of stuff and my father used to hang around with him and my other uncle, Uncle Tony, and they came around and visited the house and met Stanley's younger sister who is my mother.

PP: Do you know where they got married ?

KOW: No I don't - I think they got married in St. Florian's ~~though I am~~ ^{but I'm} not sure.

PP: So of your grandparents how many of them actually migrated from Poland ?

KOW: I think all four of them did.

PP: Do you have any idea what part of Poland ?

KOW: No, I don't. I have no idea where from Poland.

PP: Do you consider yourself American or Polish-American ?

KOW: American.

PP: So you don't have quite as much identity with Polish-Americans?

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Think ID

KOW: I kind of subscribe to the melting pot theory. I thought it was a really good idea. I know that Henry Ford is taking a lot of criticism for Americanizing people and putting them in company towns but I think that was the whole idea of America, that was a very good idea, was to amalgamate everybody to make your country, otherwise you end up with two million basic ethnic groups and everybody is at everybody else's ^{throats.} ~~thoughts.~~

PP: How many children do you have ?

KOW: I have three: a daughter Susan who is fifteen, son *Joey* who is thirteen and my youngest, Jeff, who is nine.

PP: Is your wife Polish ?

KOW: She is three quarters Polish one quarter German.

PP: I see. How would you feel about your ~~children~~ ^{children} working in a plant when they grow up ?

Ch. in Plant

KOW: Well, (they will make their own choices. I wouldn't be thrilled but everybody makes their own choices. I would much rather prefer they go out to something a little bit better paying and more rewarding.)

PP: How do you mean more rewarding ?

KOW: Well, (there are better things in life than watching thousands of pinions run ~~off the end~~ ^{off the end} of the assembly line.) This is not necessarily the end result, I mean, I went to Florida on my vacation and the Disney Corporation invested millions of dollars in perfecting a robot that looks and sounds as you would imagine Abraham Lincoln to sound. And this is a lot of money they have invested and they are working on a Benjamin Franklin that is going to stand up and walk up and down stairs and talk at the same time. This is nothing but

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amusement and they have spent all that money, all that manpower, and I think that they've got a lot more to show for it than General Motors and Ford and Chrysler, all put together.

PP: Did your father, or uncle, or any other relatives ever work in plants ?

KOW: My father retired from Chrysler Corp.

PP: What kind of work did he do ?

KOW: He was a supervisor, a general superintendent.

PP: What did he do before he was a general superintendent ?

KOW: He organized labor

PP: What was his name ?

KOW: Joseph Kowalski, I am a junior, yes.

PP: Did he organize union locals for the UAW ?

KOW: He organized for other people. He was a, you know, rustabank labor organizer and he also worked for Midland Steel Corporation before they moved out of state in '58.

PP: So actually you had a sort of baptism into labor organizing.

KOW: Oh yes, my uncle was one of Michigan's sixteen labor mediators, Stanley Dobson

PP: I see, so you are very much interested in what is going on in the labor movement

KOW: No, I am just aware, not particularly interested

PP: So, given the fact that you've absorbed it by osmosis ...

how do you feel about the Solidarity movement in Poland, I mean, are you interested in what is going on and the way they were trying to do things ?

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Polish ID

KOW: You know, the first labor union in the United States was Polish craftsmen. They were silversmiths. They were imported by Great Britain, I'm not really sure. I know that the first union was Polish. About twenty of them and they were expected to produce X number of pieces at so much money and they refused. The work that they were doing deserved X number of dollars more and they went on the first strike in America and they won.

PP: Do you know what year that was ?

? KOW: No... I'm sure it was in the 1600s, I don't know exactly when. And the way that ties in with the 'Solidarity areas', it's a genetic fault or a genetic trait, take your pick.

PP: Well I suppose that the Poles have always been very active; I imagine they were very active in the coal mines in Pennsylvania. Because a lot of the second generation of the Polish people who later moved to Detroit certainly worked in the coal mines in Pennsylvania in the 1920s, and certainly there were certain unions here, for example, Local 3 which has been very active and very vocal. There have been strikes that 235 has been connected with, not for quite a while but there have been. You said that you lived as a young person in Hammtramck, what street ?

KOW: Wyandotte Street.

PP: And what school did you go to ?

KOW: St. Florian.

PP: Oh, where they have the Strawberry Festival. Did you go this year ?

KOW: Yes, I did as a matter of fact.

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PP: Do you attend a Polish parish ?

KOW: Now ? No I don't.

PP: Do you belong to any Polish organizations ?

KOW: No, I don't.

PP: Have you ever belonged ?

KOW: No, I never.

PP: When you were growing up, did your parents own their own home or did they rent an apartment ?

(
Home
KOW: Well, when we were growing up my grandfather lived with us and it was actually his house, OK ? and my mother was the youngest daughter and my father and my grandfather used to kind of work together, doing jobs of masonry and stuff like that. It was kind like my father's house but it was really my grandfather's house and I think he dedeed it to my father eventually for one dollar or something like that.

PP: Which is quite common, of course, for relatives to do. So that really it was your granfatehr's house but later it was your father's house. Is this your first home ?

KOW: No, this is my second home.

PP: Where was your first home ?

KOW: In Detroit, Seven and *Havea*.

PP: I see. How many years have you been out here ?

KOW: Eight and a half years.

PP: Would you call this a Polish neighborhood ?

KOW: Oh, definitely not.

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PP: Why do you say that ?

KOW: Because it is an Italian neighborhood.

PP: Oh, that's fair enough. So that the ^{closest} Catholic church here is basically Italian.

KOW: Yest, even though the name is St. Germaine, it is basically ^{an} Italian Church.

PP: I see. Tell me, what kind of car do you have ?

KOW: I have a Chrysler Volare.

PP: You have a Chrysler Volare, not a Chevrolet ?

KOW: No, I don't think your loyalty extends necessarily to the company you work for.

PP: Do you just have one car ?

KOW: No, I have a Volkswagen bus

PP: Oh, does that seem a little incongruous with the big campaign on ...

KOW: Not necessarily because you have to remember that Scranton, Pennsylvania, houses a Volkswagen plant.

PP: True.

KOW: And you also have to remember that my Volkswagen but was built in 1974 and the energy crisis that we had started in 1974 late and the car crisis started in 1979 actually. So we are in about the third year of the car crunch.

PP: What year is your Volare ?

KOW: It's 1980.

PP: Do you have a boat or a cottage ?

KOW: No.

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PP: So you have three children living with you. Have you ever had a parent or a parent-in-law living with you ?

KOW: No, I haven't.

PP: Well, let's talke a little bit about some of your relatives. Do you have any relatives working at Gear and Axle ?

KOW: A brother-in-law. My wife's brother.

PP: What does he do ?

KOW: He works in production. ^{in Plant 1} That's a gear-producing plant.

And I may add incidentally that it's the largest gear-producing plant in the ^{entire} world.

PP: Is it ? I haven't been through it yet. I hope to go through.

KOW: You will be very disappointed. Because it just sounds good.

PP: Well, having spoken to so many people from Gear & Axle, it will be very interesting to see what people do. I have been through other plants, you might say the tourist assembly plants like the Ford.

KOW: Sterling plant, they take you in there too.

PP: I haven't been in the Sterling plant. Well let me ask you this, where did you graduate from high school ?

KOW: When ?

PP: Yes, when and where ?

KOW: St Florian High, 1964.

PP: What kind ^{of} / jobs did you have in high school ?

KOW: I worked in a jewel/ery store for a while, Nexu~~s~~ Jewellery in Hammtramck. I used to work with a surveyor, I was the guy

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with the rod you always try to run over on the freeway it was me, and I started working part-time in Dabney - Jones Paint Co., It was on Carpenter Avenue, bordering Hamtramck in Detroit and I carried that ^{until} after high school - started working there full-time after high school. Quit there to go to Chevrolet Gear & Axle.

PP: Why did you decide to go to Gear & Axle ?

KOW: A dollar an hour difference. *(Chime clock track)*

PP: So when you started at Gear & Axle what kind of work did you do ?

KOW: I worked production.

PP: Doing what ?

KOW: Just about everything they wanted me to do or told me to do. Basically I ~~run~~ a lot of lathes. ... I'm good at that kind of stuff, I pick up real easy, so I was like a floater, if someone did not show I would take that job and I could do just about anything they wanted me to do, except grind and weld, I never did ^{any of} those. I never did work too much assembly I think they figured it was a waste to put me on assembly because I could run too many machines without too much training.

PP: When did you actually become an electrician, did you become an apprentice ?

KOW: Yes I became an apprentice.

PP: When did you decide to ...

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KOW: See after I was ~~in~~ Chevrolet about ninety days I got drafted and I spent two years in the service.

PP: Where were you ?

KOW: I spent a year in Georgia and a year in Germany.

PP: And then ?

KOW: When I came back I went back to work and I worked long enough to get back on day shift and I applied for an apprenticeship.

PP: Was electrician your first choice ?

KOW: You know I don't even remember what my first choice was, to be very honest with you, I applied for everything they had open. I could have been a clerk, a supervisor, an electrician and God knows what else. It was just a matter of who called me first.

PP: I see. Now when you were actually received into the apprenticeship where did you actually take your class work ?

KOW: Macomb County Community College.

PP: Did you take any other classes besides the strictly apprentice ?

KOW: No I just took the apprentice classes. About four or five years ago they were offering some deal where you could go for a sociology degree ^{at WSU} if you were a veteran and I went for one semester and ran out of veteran's money and dropped out.

PP: Was this a ~~weekend~~ College class of ~~life-long~~ learning, is that what it was ?

KOW: Yes, it was.

PP: But you decided not to go on ?

Edna

KOWALSKY

KOW: Well, as long as the Veterans' Administration was going to pay for it, I wanted to go. I don't have that kind of money where I can just invested in something that is not going to be productive to me, you know, in the long run.

PP: Sure. So, anyway, you became an apprentice. How long were you an apprentice ?

KOW: Three years and four months.

PP: How many hours did you have to put in before you got your journeyman's card ?

KOW: Well they had eight periods of 916 hours, so you can take it from there. You can finish that at whatever speed you desire. It is just a matter of how much overtime you accept. The apprentice is given credit for the actual hours worked so that you can finish in less time than the program is set up to take.

PP: Now when you were an apprentice were there a number of people in the E.I.T. program ?

KOW: Sure were.

PP: Could you see any difference between yourself as an apprentice and those who were going through the E.I.T. program ?

B/T
KOW: Well you've got to understand that [the E.I.T. program is set up a little bit different. The concept of the E.I.T. program was to give a mature adult individual ^{with} /not necessarily a real good educational background a chance to better himself and if he took

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this option he would have to fit a lot more time into it because he would have to spend eight years before he would get to be a journeyman whereas I would spend roughly four years. They did have the advantage that they started slightly under the average rate and got their money a lot faster than we did because the concept was that they were supposed to be older, they were supposed to have children and the apprentices were supposed to be younger. As far as training goes, the apprentices were treated like students and the E.I.T.s were treated as functioning journeymen, you know.]

PP: So actually, Gear & Axle then is the only auto plant you have ever worked at or have you

KOW: Yeah

PP: How many times have you been laid off ?

KOW: I was laid off for a week one time and they called me back in two days ... (∴ 3 days)

PP: Why would you think that was ?

KOW: (Because it was the geographic location of Gear & Axle and a lot of other things. Gear & Axle always has been a big money-maker, was always involved in truck producing and stuff like this; it was always a good money-maker for Chevrolet. We never had any downtime to speak of and not only that assembly plants go down a lot more than manufacturing plants do; we're basically a manufacturing operation. Assembly

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plants, you know, you can be laid off two or three times a year, it depends on what's happening in the market place, but we just build X number of vehicles, specially when you're dealing with trucks, because you have that market, it's always there.

PP: Are you doing mostly trucks ?

KOW: At that time we were doing mostly trucks

PP: What about now ?

KOW: We are doing a lot of J cars, some truck, some Chevette T car and we are going to start on K truck pretty soon.

A little bit ~~more~~ diversified now but I think it is more desperation diversification than anything else. We are looking for something to ~~launch~~ ^{catch} onto, get a job in the building.

PP: Would you say you like your work ?

KOW: It's all right. I could think of things I'd rather do.

PP: Such as what ?

KOW: Steal, kill, no, no.

PP: What kind of things would you like to do ?

KOW: I always wanted to be an archaeologist, that's what I wanted to do.

PP: You did ? You really really did ?

KOW: (Yes an archaeologist, ^{or} historian and I guess with a greater sense of reality I guess I would like to own a motel in some area where there was a lot of tourist traffic and I would do a lot of reading and have nine or ten units to take care off.

PP: Have you some time thought of taking courses in archaeology or actually volunteering to go on a dig ?

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KOW: I can't afford to do that.

PP: How many weeks vacation do you have ?

KOW: Threë. But you've got to understand that it's not like it used to be, you know, ~~the~~ the money isn't here any more. Everybody says you guys make so much money, money is always coming in, well we always were a dollar above production, OK? But nobody figured in the loss because of inflation. When we were a dollar above production we were making ~~4~~ 4.75 and they were making ~~3~~ 3.75. That was a dollar, that was real money. Now we're making ~~12~~ 12.75 and they're making 11.75 or 10.75 and the difference is minuscule, there's nothing there. Your buying power hasn't really ...

PP: When you say you're making 12.75 on top of that you have your fringes, right ?

KOW: Yeah, but fringes don't exist, fringes are a creation of the media, because you don't see your fringes.

PP: You have medical, don't you ?

KOW: We have medical but my boy has asthma. If I take him in to certain hospitals they will tell me that's an ongoing situation and I will have to pick up the bill myself. I mean that's one of my pet peeves, is "fringes" in quotes, that you see in the newspapers and you see on T.V. because that's a misnomer. It isn't what they think it is. And I'm not carping about what we have because we have it good, we have

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it better than any other labor union, or any other working group in the country, I think, except perhaps the teamsters who have it much better than we do, but, I don't know, I kind of resent the implication, not from you, but that we get from the media, that we are riding high on the hog and not producing, etc., it bothers me.

PP: Well, actually how old are you in years ?

KOW: 35

PP: Have you ever considered a job change? How many years seniority do you have ?

KOW: About 14 1/2, 15 1/2

PP: Have you ever thought about the age of 35 of changing to another line of work ?

KOW: I'm a little young for my middle age crisis but I have thought about —

PP: Well, let's forget the word crisis, let's call it mid-life career transition.

KOW: OK. Sonya would not be happy with you.

PP: Sonya is ?

KOW: Sonya Friedman. No, (I have given it a lot of thought and I do a lot of research on it and the grass is always greener, that's what it amounts to. When you start looking at what your standard of living is here and what it would be somewhere else and how much vested interest you have in this place, reality rears its ugly head.)

Changing
Careers
Future
educ

KOWALSKI

PP: Does your wife work ?

KOW: Yeah. She does part time and some time.

PP: What kind of work ?

KOW: She is helping a girl friend right now. The girl friend ^{works for} ~~is~~ a pizza wholesaler. So she'll go in and fill in on occasion.

PP: Have you ever considered re-locating to another state ?

Relocating
KOW: Oh, certainly. I thought about going to Arizona, to Florida, but when you have fifteen years or so it's a drastic change and I don't think that I would really do it. I have thought about it and I have written to Chambers of Commerce.

PP: But if you were laid off say something happened to Gear & Axle or even that they closed the plant, would you consider moving to another state ?

KOW: Not until I get every penny in sub-pay and everything else that I could get out of this place.

PP: What would you miss most if you did move ?

KOW: What I would miss about Michigan ?

PP: Yes.

KOW: My family, my parents.

PP: Do you know of any Polish auto workers who have gone to another state ?

KOW: I have friends that aren't Polish that have ^{gone to dta} ~~moved out~~ of state.

PP: But what about Polish ?

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KOW: No, I can't think of any.

PP: Any idea why? Because I have asked this question to other people and they frequently think of non-Polish people who have moved but not of — —

KOW: *(* I guess you don't think of your friends of being Polish or non-Polish. You just think of your friends as just being your friends and you don't necessarily make friendships on ethnic lines any more, especially in a plant that is really, I hate to use the word "melting pot" because it's getting redundant you know, but that's what it is in there. My partner, the guy I've been working with for the last two years is Mexican, and the guy I had before him was a black guy. *- that was my partner)*

*Workplace
Ethnic
Polish
IQ
friendship*

PP: Do you work in all the different plants?

KOW: Yes I do, I'm on construction which means I float from plant to plant.

PP: Do you like that?

KOW: Oh yes very much, that's about the best thing about my job.

PP: That you are working all over; you keep the same partner but you are sort of sent where there are problems that need to be fixed.

KOW: Right.

PP: What age do you plan on retiring?

KOW: I haven't given it any concrete... I don't have anything

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written in stone.

PP: But I mean have you ever thought, considering the fact that you now have fifteen years in and many people retire at thirty years

KOW: I think that's a real nice dream but the way the country is going right now I don't think anybody who works as a blue-collar worker will be able to afford to retire after thirty years.

PP: Really ?

KOW: Yeah, I don't think it's going to happen.

PP: Well how old will you be when you have your thirty years in ?

KOW: I'll be 49 years old

PP: So that you actually will have a lot more productive years ~~to~~ work if you wish to do so.

KOW: But the way they have it structured now is that you can't leave here and go and work for anybody else without losing some of your retirement benefits. Now I don't understand why General Motors has control over your life once you leave General Motors.

Henry But that's the way it's structured and unless that changes I can't see anybody leaving here at age 49 the way things are going now and I don't see things getting much better.

PP: But can you, say, go into business for yourself. Say you wanted to open a little electrician's business yourself which is, you know, certainly a possibility, I suppose, could you collect your benefits ?

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KOW: No you couldn't because you'd have reportable income. Any reportable income would mean you'd lose ^{so much} ~~some~~ of your pension.

PP: I see. So that probably, the way it looks now, you're going to stay beyond the thirty years

KOW: Beyond the thirty years, at what point I'd get out I don't know.

PP: How do you feel about the fact that there are a number of people in your same position who will be retiring after thirty years when they are less than fifty and yet there are a lot of people who don't have jobs ~~and some people say~~

KOW: Well those people would never have jobs unless ~~some~~ people who retire early can retire early, you know, unless they do retire early.

PP: So, in other words, if supposedly ten people who could retire early after thirty years don't retire because of the economic situation that presumably will mean that ten young people will not be able to come in and start working because the other people are still there. And yet on the other hand those people who are still there have all the expertise and the experience to do a very very good job.

KOW: Expertise and experience are vastly overrated.

PP: You think so ?

KOW: Yes I do. (If you give somebody a book, they should be able to read that book, they should be able to implement)

Workplace

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Workplace
 whatever information is in that book and that should be the end of it. I don't think that expertise should even enter into it. It's just a matter of keeping good records. You could take a monkey, put an electrician's tool pouch on ^{him} and in six months he'd be working the floor somewhere, doing a half decent job; I really believe it. It's not that difficult, there is nothing in life that difficult that you can't do. it

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PP: It's lovely to be able to do electrical work, I can't believe that

KOW: It's an over statement but the point I'm trying to make is, especially with the new technology today.

PP: Well alright. Let's talk about the new technology and the use of the computer terminals for the electricians, because they do use it, right, at Gear & Axle ?

KOW: Yes

PP: What do you do when there is a problem somewhere, in one of the plants ?

KOW: OK First of all you have to determine what kind of control there is. There might be - - ?

The reason you have to determine what kind it is is because they use different kind of screens, they have several different varieties that have to be married up together, you know, to get access to the computer. After you find out what it is, say it's a - - 484, you'd have to go get yourself a CRT which is a cathode ray tube of a

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television set with a keyboard on it and you'd bring it up there and you'd interface to the machine & processor which gives you access to the brain and allows you to control the functions of the machine. Now what you have on this cathode ray tube once you interface is you get a mock-up of the electrical diagram line by line and you'll be able to see whether or not a contact is enhanced or not enhanced, whether or not you have power flow through a logic _____ you know, in other words what you're trying to do is, say, latch up a coil or turn a switch on; you'll be able to see all the steps necessary to turn that switch on, what hasn't been done and what hasn't been done will lead you to another line and you'll have to find out why it wasn't done on that line. Do you follow ?

PP: Somewhat

KOW: Well, that's basically what you have

PP: Tell me, does it save a lot of time ?

KOW: I tell you what it does, it doesn't necessarily save a lot of time but it eliminates a lot of potential problems because you used to have a lot of mechanical problems with the hardware really or with the hardware in general ^{panels} - you don't have that any more because everything is inside this processor. There are no moving parts. So everything you see is what's there. You don't have to worry about, yeah this really is in ~~there~~ ^{there} but there is a piece of wood stuck in the back contact or there is a piece of paper. You can

NewTech

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go sometimes for two days and have metal filings and two contacts shorting them out, well you can't have that any more. What you got is what you got.

PP: If you were laid off would you consider any kind of re-training in case there are no other jobs in your field ?

KOW: Oh yeah, sure.

PP: What kind of thing would you re-train in ?

KOW: It would depend entirely in what they would offer me. I am very very flexible.

PP: Do you have any special interests ?

KOW: Yeah, I wish that CETA would come into making archaeologists.

PP: Back to the archaeology again . How do you think your wife, your parents, your friends would feel about your going into some other ^{different} kind of work ?

KOW: Oh, I don't think they would be upset. The only consideration that we'd have on a family level would be whether we could make it financially. Other than that, what's the difference what you do for a living ? It's just a way to earn bread, you know.

PP: What do you think about a man taking ^{earlier} retirement because of continued lay-offs ? Some people keep getting laid off all the time. Do you think it would be better for them to take early retirement instead of going back to work and then getting laid off again ...

KOW: It depends entirely on the man's ^{Personal} economic and physical condition.

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PP: How do you feel about the importance of a man's job to himself ?

*3rd of
Main
job*

KOW: I think it can be very important to some people and less important to others. It depends entirely on what's inside that person. If you were very much involved in your work or are very much into your job, it could be very important ~~to you~~ ~~how~~ ~~that~~ ~~the~~ ~~job~~ goes, on the other hand to some people a job is just a job, you know.

PP: Do you think that job lay-offs have been affected by affirmative action or do you think that they are based solely ~~upon~~ seniority ?

KOW: You mean at Local 235 ?

PP: At Local 235, right.

KOW: I have to stop for a minute and analyze this. On the hourly level, I believe that the lay-offs are solely on the ~~sen~~ seniority basis. I'm not so sure on the salary level if that's the case. I do believe they are because if you've been reading the papers somebody sued Chrysler or Ford last month because he was terminated because of his age. He was terminated out of rotation and the guy ended up with a good suit against the corporation. I don't think that General Motors is willing to make any waves or take any chances and eliminate anybody out of their proper rotation. Now I haven't noticed any loss of personnel out of our salaried group so that I don't think that they're doing anything illegal, I mean, not illegal but other than going by seniority.

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PP: Have you played any kind of an active role in local 235 ?

KOW: No, not really.

PP: Have you ever run for anything ?

KOW: No.

PP: Given your background, as you mentioned about your uncle, father and so on, have you ever had any interest in running for anything in connection with local.

KOW: No, you give up too much. Financial rewards are really great you know, but you give up too much of your time. My time is too valuable to me, I'd rather have the time than the money.

PP: I just thought that maybe with two relatives so active in the union local and obviously you getting somewhat influenced about _____ you couldn't help knowing what was going on in unions generally.

KOW: I tell you being close to the unions has done nothing but breed cynicism in me.

PP: Oh, I see.

KOW: I've seen my father work both sides of the table, OK ? My uncle worked one side of the table but I know what goes on.

PP: You say he was in arbitration, right ?

KOW: Well, he started off as an organizer, now he is in mediation

PP: He is in mediation for whom, ^{Kow.} for the state of Michigan.

^{PP:} In other words right now he is in a neutral position

KOW: Yes, he started off as a labor organizer for the UAW, I believe it was the UAW, I might be wrong. You know, we

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have this stuff take place, they put up these notices, I can't even give you a specific on this, and I'll be working with my partner and I'll tell him this is what they're going to do, they're going to do this and then they're going to do this and we'll end up with this and usually, not all the time, usually like 75% of the time, I'm right. That's the way it comes out. It's a game, you know. They do what they have to do and the company does what they have to do and then the ~~media~~^{Union} responds the way you know they're going to respond to please the membership and then they're going to do what everybody knew they were going to do to begin with.

PP: So that you really have sort of stayed away then.

KOW: Sure.

PP: Have you taken any education classes at the union ?

KOW: No

PP: Have you any intention of taking any ?

KOW: No.

PP: Not even the retirement class that they give. I think they give a class on assertive^{ness} training. You're not interested in that. Do you think they should give classes ?

(KOW: Oh, sure. (If people want to take classes and our union is financially able to offer these classes, people should have the option to take them.)

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PP: If you knew a few years ago what you know now about economic conditions would you possibly have tried a different kind of work ?

KOW: Oh, definitely not. Especially knowing what I know now.

PP: In other words you feel that you've made a good choice ^{at the time} ^

KOW: Yes, I came very close four years ago to saying goodbye to this place, you know. I did a lot of writing around the country looking for work.

PP: When you said, and you mentioned before, doing a lot of writing to Chambers of Commerce and so forth, writing, what was your purpose in this, to go as an electrician some place else, stay in the same trade but go somewhere else.

KOW: Right. And I would be starving now. One of the places I was ^{almost} assured of a job was City Service, this is copper mining, ~~well~~, City service they were just involved in this take-over bid and everything like that, and they're going down the tube.

I would have gone into the copper mining opening up, around Globe, Arizona and they were going to open up a mine there and I doubt very much, because copper has crunched since then, that they ever opened the mine and if they did I know that they're not operating on full capacity. And I would have gone down the tube. And this way it worked out very nicely because I have enough seniority to keep me on even after a 50% lay-off.

PP: How many people are there below you as far as seniority is concerned ?

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KOW: I can give you estimates. There's about 60 above me and about 60 below me.

PP: Oh, so you're right in the middle? You don't ^{really} have to do too much worrying then. And the people at the bottom of that 60 list, I imagine might be a bit scared.

KOW: Then you've got nothing to lose.

PP: You're right in the middle. How do you feel about the Japanese and other foreign cars, let's talk about that for a while.

KOW: Well, I tell you, I don't want to drop the clichés, you know. Several years ago they opened up the East Coast shoe industry to competition, you know, they ended protection and the Taiwanese took over everything.

PP: When you said several years ago, about when do you mean?

KOW: I don't know when. Before they used to make a lot of shoes ...

PP: They ~~made~~ a lot of shoes in Massachusetts.

KOW: They don't make nearly as much any more. And the people who own those factories that closed own the factories that are now making the shoes that are coming from other countries.

Tom MacMann still owns the shoe stores. But he doesn't own them in his company any more.

PP: Oh you mean that the shoes that are sold ...

? } KOW: Those that are in direct competition with the shoes that are made in this country are owned by the same company who made the shoes in this country.

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PP: So now the shoes come from where ?

KOW: From Taiwan, from Europe, from Roumania. Poland makes a lot of shoes now. And it's still the same basic money, the same monied people are controlling it, but now they're paying less for the labor costs. And that's exactly what's going to happen to car companies. We're going to end up in another ten or fifteen years in a nation of assembly plants and everything worth while in this country is going to be built somewhere else and shipped over here.

PP: I've heard, I don't know how true it is, that many of the components including engine of the *LUV* truck are made in Japan.

KOW: Yeah, that's true.

PP: And so that when you get a *LUV* truck, some people buy one, that basically you get a non-American car, although

KOW: They're not dumb the Japanese, you know. Wait till you get to the Brazilians; those people work for nothing. We've a plant in Mexico that they make almost nothing. I don't know the figure per ~~day~~ *day*. It would be interesting for you to look into *it*. I think you'd be amazed to find out how little they make down there. I think they only make fifteen dollars a day or something like that. And they're going to be competing with us.

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PP: How do you feel about components coming over here and then being assembled in the U.S. ?

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mont*
KOW: (I'm not particularly thrilled about any of this, you know the Japanese are very stringent about what can come into their country, the French are very stringent about it, the Italians are very strict about it, everybody is very strict about it, the only people in the whole world that seem to believe in free trade are the U.S. and I think it's because a lot of money is controlled out of this country. So I'm not very happy about any of this. /

PP: If you thought you might get permanently laid off, ^{do} you think that you'd go ahead and get some new training ahead of time ?

KOW: No, I'd driven right down the tube right down to the last minute.

PP: You would ?

KOW: Yeah.

PP: And then get all your benefits and so forth

KOW: Sure

PP: And then at the end of that you would look around for something. But then would you try to stay in your own trade?

KOW: This is not the end of the life for me. This is a nice interesting job, but I'm sure there's a lot of other things just as interesting and even more so.

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PP: Well if you got re-training where would you go ? Would you go to the university or would you go to trade school, community college, or what

KOW: I would assume that if ~~it~~ got to the point where it was so bad that they were laying me off that would mean that there would be another 3000, well not 3000, another 2000 at least out of work at 235. If 2000 people were out of work at 235 that would mean the that Hydramatic was ^{probably} going down the tube too. We'd be in the middle of a major depression and the government would either be supplying massive training or we would all be armed and running a rebellion, right ?

PP: Sounds pretty drastic. What do you think about the idea of young people growing up, such as yours for example, training not for just one job but for more than one job ?

KOW: I don't know if I understand that question.

PP: Well, I mean, you know yourself that there are a lot of people at Gear[&]Axle right now who are laid off maybe not just at Gear & Axle but at other plants in the U.S. production workers normally people in the skilled trades don't seem to be laid off quite the same; so here you have ~~perhaps~~ a group of people who perhaps have been trained in some particular skill whatever skill they need to work at some job on the assembly line in whichever plant they happen to have been working in, and suddenly they're laid off and yet, perhaps, if they had

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had a training in something else they could have fallen back on that sort of thing.

KOW: Who is to supply the training ?

PP: Well this is what I'm talking about, the high school now. I'm talking about the young person in high school who is getting some kind of training. As you know in certain counties they have vocational schools, the high schools themselves have shop courses, usually somebody opts for some particular type of training, alright ? whether it's a boy for the shops and usually girls opt, say, for secretarial training or they take courses to eventually go into nurses' training, legal training or whatever they happen to go into. But what I am trying to get at is what would happen if there was some re-structuring in the high school, they said to everybody, well now look your job may become redundant, we don't know, nobody knows, we think everybody in this high school should take training in two different kinds of careers, that was my point so that if one did become redundant that you could fall back on another one, and I just wondered how you felt about that.

KOW: (I think that anybody in high school is too young to make a decision one way or another on ^{moves.} ~~careers~~ / I think that they've escalated the rate in which you become an adult in this country to the point that it's ridiculous now. I can't

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understand why they expect a sixteen-year old to be savvy enough to know what's going to happen ten years down the line when the economists in the country don't know what's going to be a hot market or what's going to be a soft market. And I think that what they ought to do in this country is get a universal military training, pick everybody up at 18 years old when you leave high school and train you for two years in various things, give you a feel for life, because ~~that's~~ very important, and teach you how to be an adult. That's it. PP:

PP: Are you involved in any of these Quality Work Life circles ?

KOW: I dropped out.

PP: Did you ? Why ?

KOW: There was no committment there in supervision.

PP: First of all, how many persons were in your group ?

KOW: Twelve. I was the facilitator.

PP: And how many people dropped out ?

KOW: Me - when I left as facilitator, my partner took over.

He was voted in and he was facilitator for three months, I told him, Joe I'm quitting and he says, yeah, I think so, and he and I quit. That group may still meet, I don't know.

PP: When you say facilitator, you mean ...

KOW: That's a group leader.

PP: Do they normally use one of the workers or use somebody in supervision ?

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KOW: No, this is a purely voluntary group and you're supposed to meet and if possible with the supervisor in your group, and elect a member of the group, not necessarily the supervisor, in fact it shouldn't be the supervisor, as your facilitator. The facilitator's job is nothing more than to maintain order and try to give some kind of direction to the meeting. That's about it.

PP: Well did you see any long range use to it?

KOW: No, I didn't.

PP: What ^{use} did you see then?

KOW: Initially when they were starting up I was willing to give it a shot because they said they were going to involve the worker in the decisions of management, which is for the good of the company, I felt. When they buy a machine and something isn't going right you should be able to say, this isn't going right, drop everything. Or if you get a bad order, a bad instruction you should be able to say, no, this isn't right and this is why it isn't right and have the guy ^{nod his head +} say I'll take it under advisement. You can't do that. They don't buy that.

PP: I realize that but I thought on the other hand that they were sort of set up with this in mind - the idea was that there would be some kind of give and take, that supervision would take some ideas under advisement.

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KOW: All the EPC is right now is in my opinion in any event

PP: What is EPC ?

KOW: This is the quality work-life, ~~E~~mployee ~~P~~articipation Circle. In my opinion all that this is right now is a gossamer^{in a way}, just something to show the chairman of the board, Look what we're doing to try and improve life. I think all the ⁱⁿconcern^{ed} right now on any level is getting numbers. ~~They~~ have 70% involvement in EPC, ~~we've~~ ~~got~~ 80% involvement in EPC. They don't care, as far as I can see, about results at all and not only that I think that they can use it as a weapon against the worker.

PP: How do you mean, use it ?

KOW: What they try to do is to say, we can deal together as a unit one ~~on~~ one, we don't need a union.

PP: Oh, I see.

KOW: Or they can say, Joe Blow hasn't been to work all week why don't we get together and talk to Joe and see if we can get him to ^{consent} work, OK, it's nobody's business but Joe Blow's and his supervisor that Joe Blow hasn't been to work. It's not peer pressure or anything else that is supposed to be exercised, as far as I'm concerned. That's the solution of management to the ~~that~~ —

PP: You really feel then that the union still has a ^{very} definite role in helping the worker.

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KOW: Yeah, I think if the union could clean house it would be alright.

PP: What do you mean, clean house ?

KOW: The union has too many problems right now. The union has - if you got a ^{guy} worker next to you he gets the same amount of money you do, if the guy comes to work drunk three days out of five, supervision takes him in the office, they can't fire the man, because he has a disease, alright, so they have to take him, they have to enroll him in a program. He may come to work the next month drunk every day. ~~Now~~ the supervisor is no longer going to bother with this ~~man~~ ^{guy} because the last time he bothered with this guy all he did was get in trouble because he was harassing this man who's got a problem, you see. And it's the union that built the situation.

PP: Then how would you suggest that things could change ? You're working with this guy and he comes in and the first time he's helped maybe a bit and then he falls back into this drunken situation and he's not doing the work and you're really carrying his load, the work has to be done, and he's someone you work with, what can the union do ?

KOW: The union is going to have to set up committees and they're going to have to study situations, and they're going to have to deny representation to people who don't deserve it. And that's it, period.

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PP: Has the union ever done that ?

KOW: No, they have never done that and that's where they have to change.

PP: Has any one ever suggested it ?

KOW: To whom would you suggest something like that ?

PP: I don't know. I mean one could suggest it through your committee ~~man~~, I suppose

KOW: Your committee man is powerless, sure he is.

PP: Then who has the power in the local ?

KOW: Nobody has the power in the local. Absolutely nobody. And if you believe that somebody has the power in the local you're deluding yourself - because if your local doesn't have *you the right way*

~~PP: Then who has the power ?~~

KOW: The international who comes in and puts your local in receivership

PP: Like this happened to certain locals?

KOW: That's right. And if you go against the grain, they are going to come in and they're going to take you over. When this poor skilled tradesman went against the grain, he voted against that contract they voted against ...

PP: That was fairly recently

KOW: That was last contract ago, not this one but the one before that. They voted again and everything was again

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miraculously all right. Don't kid yourself, the UAW is concerned with their dues and they're concerned with providing basic protection for their membership but they're not going to rock the boat too much. I have never ever picked up that contract and read anything in that contract that couldn't be interpreted to the advantage of the corporation as well as to the union, but also to the corporation, there is nothing in that contract that will give you absolute protection; every paragraph, every article, every by-line can be interpreted for the benefit of the corporation.

PP: What do you see as the future of the automobile industry in the U.S., as of now, looking with the problems that we have, with the imports coming in, with the oil crisis, with unemployment problems, ~~you know,~~ and here you are sitting with fifteen years seniority, how does it look down the line?

KOW: I don't think it's going to get a whole lot worse. I think that with this thing that happened now and this thing that I was afraid of ten years ago has happened was that the Japanese would come in, got a first generation of buyers and the first generation of buyers was satisfied ~~and~~ I was afraid of that - because now the first generation has become the second generation and now they captured a definite 30% of the market. But I don't think that their market is going to get much bigger

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than that for the Japanese, and so, I think we're going to stay about the same, we're going to rise and fall slightly, we're going to come up and go down a little bit but I think that we've contracted as far as we're going to go.

PP: What's going to happen with the production worker now with more robotics ..

KOW: He's going to be automated out of the door, that's what I would do if I was running the company. Sure.

PP: So what's going to happen to these people ?

KOW: They're going to go into other lines of work. Just like the shoemakers did over in Massachusetts.)

PP: So, in other words, basically then do you see that the automobile plants will be running primarily by skilled trades men who are keeping the robots in order

KOW: (You won't have just robots, there'll be assembly plants, but I think that the percentage of skilled trades to production workers is going to get higher and higher, you're going to have more and more skilled trades.)

PP: What's the percentage now, say at Gear & Axle ?

KOW: I'll have to stop and think about it for a moment. I think you have about 480 or 500 in skilled trades. So it's about 5 to 1, something like that, maybe 6 to 1.

PP: *Do you have, many, more production. Bent*
 In actual fact though, I imagine that the skilled trades has a very high percentage of Polish workers, don't they ?