Leonard Sienkowski 40717 Ryan Sterling Heights, MI 48077

Interview: June 10, 1982  $\omega_{1} \mathcal{P} P_{1} / (\epsilon_{1})$ 

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PP: Mr. Sienkowski is a member of Local 235. Mr. Sienkowski
I wonder if you would tell me where you were born and when
you were born.

LS: January 1, 1936 in M Carnel? Pennsylvania.

PP: So you are how old now?

LS: I would be 46, I believe.

PP: You were born in Pennsylvania. Was your father working in Pennsylvania at the time?

LS: At the time, Mo...well, it was right after the Depression,
I was living with my grandmother. She was from Detroit.

My mother was from Pennsylvania. After they got married,
they moved to Detroit. My father was working there and he
was laid off during the Depression and because of that they
had to go back to Pennsylvania.

PP: What was he laid off from?

LS: The Dulantive endustry

PP: Do you have any brothers or sisters?

LS: Yes. I have one brother living and one sister living, And one brother deceased.

PP: Did any of them ever work in the auto industry?

LS: No, I think I'm the only one.

PP: Is your mother Polish or part Polish?

LS: Yes. 100%.

PP: Was she born in Poland?

LS: No. She was born in Pennsylvania.



- PP: Oh, I see.
- LS: Her parents, I believe, were both born in Poland. But my father was born in Poland.
- PP: He was? He was what you call first generation.
- LS: First generation.
- PP: When did your parents meet, do you know?
- LS: I believe through a third party, I'm not sure, I believe that's where it was.
- PP:
- Is your wife Polish or part Polish?

  She pared away

  My first wife was. We separated maybe 10 years ago. LS: second wife, no.
- PP: How many children do you have?
- Nine by the first wife and two by the second. (cruft of buy) LS: Eleven. Six boys and the rest are girls.
- PP: Would you ever want any of them to work in a plant when they grow up as a regular job?
- LS: I wouldn't discourage it but I wouldn't encourage it.
- PP: Now you mentioned one son working in the plant during summer vacation. Which plant did he work in. Did he work in Gear & Axle.
- LS: Yes.
- PP: And you got him his job?
- LS: No, not really. He just went down and applied. Got my oldest son some work there too, one or two years while he was in college.
- PP: Did they work on the line.
- LS: Yes, both of them.
- PP: Did any other of the children work there.
- LS: No.

- Did anyone else, you mentioned your father, were there any PP: other relatives, anyone else who worked in the plant?
- LS: My first father-in-law did for awhile and I believe Connie's father, my wife now, worked there for awhile. But neither one ended up working there.
- PP: Which plant did your father work in?
- The Rouge Plant (Find Moter) LS:
- PP: Let's talk a little bit about your family in Poland. mentioned that your father actually grew up in Poland. Would you say that you identify with Poland, with Polish history?
- Yes, definitely LS:
- PP: Would you consider yourself Polish-American, or just American?
- Mo. Polish-American.
- How do you feel about the recent movement, the Solidarity PP: Yes I do, it's a real problem the Solidarity thing.
- LS:
- PP: Is there any particular part of Poland that you feel close to? Russian, or German or Austrian areas?
- LS: No, not really. All of Poland.
- PP: Have you ever been to Poland?
- No, I haven't.

  Do you plan to go? LS: PP:
- Yes I do if I can ever afford it. LS:
- PP: Did your father ever go back?
- LS: No, he nver did. He came here when he was 17 or 18 and he was here all his life, up until his death.

Did you ever live in a Polish community like Hamtramck?

LS: The west side of Detroit, a little place there that was very ethnic. & Polish neighborhood in the area of St. Lawrence and McGraw, Or more specifically. Wyoming and Lonyo, in that area.

PP: Is there much of a Polish community in this area?

LS: Yes and no. There is such a migration of Polish from Detroit to the Warren area and then from the Warren area to the Sterling Heights area. Incidentally, there's a Polish missionary priest right behind me on 18 Mile Road. Souly Polish missionary priests from Poland.

PP: Oh, from Poland.

LS: Oh yes, they're missionary priests. Been here since the 1800's, maybe even before that. There's a little chapel, you can't see it now with the overgrowth. But in the winter time.

PP: Does it havea name.

Oh yes, Our Lady of Gechen - ( fout and a picture )

Did anybody in the family go to the seminary? of Lady

articlardhake? LS:

PP:

LS: Oh yes I have, I had a brother-in-law who graduated from there.

Do you go to a Polish parish right now? PP:

Not really. There are quite a few families in the LS: parish, but I wouldn't consider it a Pol/sih parish.

PP: When they go and build a chapel here, will these priests have a Polish parish?

I don't think so, per se, because these are missionary priests. They go out to parishes per se to help, talk to LS: people, whatever.

PP: How many are there? Do you have any idea?

LS: I can't really tell you. I don't think there are that many.

I don't think there are more than half a dozen.

PP: Do they hold mass for the local people?

LS: Yes they do.

PP: Do any of your family go?

LS: Not really. My family is not...no one speaks Polish besides myself. Because they're not Polish speaking, it would be difficult for them to understand what's going on.

PP: Do you speak fluent Polish?

LS: No, not fluent. Broken. I'd be able to speak it if my father were still living, because we used to speak it in the home because he was from Poland. All the time.

PP: Have you taught your children any Polish?

LS: Yes I have. Words, phrases, things of that nature.

PP: Do you belong to any Polish organizations?

LS: Yes.

PP: Which ones?

LS: The Polish Roman Catholic Inen of America

PP: Now what does that mean. Do you go down to Hamtramck...

LS: Well, no I haven't been active in the last probably 20 years, but I was one of the original officers out of the brances of it.

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

LS: Yes.

PP: Is this your first home?

LS: Now, this is my second home. I used to live in Dearborn
Heights. About 12 years ago.

- PP: So how many years have you had this house?
- LS: Approximately 12. It was around 1969 when I bought this place.
- PP: Do you have a boat or a cottage?
- LS: No, neither. Not an executive with a beautiful living.
- PP: How many children are living with you right now.
- LS: They're all living with me since they got out of college with the exception of Tom who's living in Ann Arbor.

  He just graduated from U of M. But only temporarily for the fact that he has a lease that's extended until August. September, sorry.
- PP: How many children are actually adults, over 18?
- LS: Over 18. Well, Christa will be 18 (I'll be 19!) Oh, 19, I'm sorry (laughter). In July. So that will be five.
- PP: Have you ever had a parent or parent-in-law living with you?
- LS: No.
- PP: Let's talk a little bit about your work. When you were in high school...first of all, where did you go to high school?
- LS: St. Andrew's High school in Detroit.
- PP: Did you have any education after that?
- LS: One year of college, well almost one year of college.
- PP: Where?
- LS: Henry Ford Community College. And then continued on for my apprenticeship in a related training program at Henry Ford Community College Cano Tech HS.
- PP: What kind of work did you do when you were in high school?
- LS: In high school? I was a janitor, well an assistant to the janitor over on Third Street in Detroit.

PP: When you left high school, what did you do?

LS: I went right into the apprenticeship program. At the Cadillac plant on Clark Street.

PP: At the Fisher Plant.

LS: No. Cadillac.

PP: What union were you in?

LS: I believe it's been so long ago now I'm not sure what it was.

PP: What did you actually do there in this program?

LS: Electrician apprentice.

PP: How did you decide to become an electrician?

LS: My older brother was in the process of becoming an electrician. In fact, he had just completed his apprenticeship program when he was killed in an automobile accident.

He had a lot of books and such on the program, and I read the books which interested me and applied myself to different places and Cadillac called.

PP: How long were you there?

LS: Four years.

PP: Was that enough to get your journeyman's card?

LS: Yes. Fact it was just about 1 or 2 months after I had finished that I was laid off.

PP: What year was that?

LS: 1958. As a matter of fact, I think it was about November of 1958. And I started at Chevrolet in January of 1959 and I've been there ever since.

PP: What plant is that?

LS: At Chevrolet. On the assembly line at Gear and Axle on Holbrook.

PP: So you started there as a journeyman electrician.

LS: Yes.

PP: And then how did you progress from there?

LS: I believe it was about '62, and I became a a leader,

I was on the afternoon shift.

Because of thereigh ( llnows?)

Came on days and gave it up. Back to being an electrician.

Shortly after that, about 6 months, I became a supervisor.

Temporary, for about 3 months, I think in the summer. And then after that I came back to being an electrician.

Let's see for about 2 months. Then I became a leader again

PP: Do you like your work, like being an electrician?

LS: Yes, I do. I don't think I would be there if I didn't like what I was doing.

PP: Have you ever thought about changing jobs?

and I've been a leader ever since.

LS: Yes, I have.

PP: What kidn of jobs?

LS: One time, in my forties, I applied for a sales job. But they didn't think, or I should say my qualifications were such that they didn't want me. There was only one place I applied, probably on a whim. Then, the other time was as another job as a process engineer because working at our place with an engineer, he left, and went to another company and recommended me for the job. I would have had to move out of state and I wasn't too keen about it. I was just applying out of curiosity.

PP: Have you ever considered moving out of state?

LS: At that time, des.

PP: But not since?

LS: No.

- PP: How many years seniority do you have?
- LS: At General Motors? I think it would be about 27. At the Gear, it would be 22 or 23.

PP: Your Semant date?

- LS: It would probably be October of '54.
- PP: You don't know the exact date?
- LS: No, not the exact date, but it's either October or November of 1954.
- PP: If you did happen to move to another state, what do you think you would miss the most?
- LS: Missed most in Michigan?
- PP: Yes.
- LS: Oh, probably the family. Because all of our relations are here.
- PP: Does your wife work at all?
- LS: Resembly no.
- PP: Do you know of any Polish auto workers who have gone to work in another state?
- LS: No, can't think of any.
- PP: Nothing about anyone moving to Houston or anything like that (lots of dog barking in background).
- LS: I've heard of other nationalities, but I haven't heard of any Polish workers, no.
- PP: What age did you actually learn your parents (phone rings)...

  How old were you?
- LS: Seventeen. (More phone ringing and dog barking...)
- PP: So actually how many years have you been an electrician?
- LS: 27.
- PP: So you've been an electrician all the time.

- LS: Yes.
- PP: What age do you plan to retire?
- LS: I could retire now.
- PP: Could you really?
- LS: I'm only kidding. I imagine probably in the area, if everything goes as planned, probably in the area of age 60. Fifty-nine, 60, thereabouts.
- PP: You'd work longer than thirty and out.
- LS: I'd have to. My youngest is only four years old. Consequently, at least another 14 years.
- PP: And your oldest is how old?
- LS: 23, 24, thereabouts.
- PP: Now, the 27 years that you mentioned, that's part of the 30 and out, isn't it?
- LS: Of course.
- PP: How many times have you actually been laid off?
- LS: I think...well, there was that period I was laid off from Cadillac. That was for about 2 months. And I was laid off for about 2 weeks from Gear and Axle, other than that I have worked constantly.
- PP: And you're working a lot of overtime now?
- LS: I wouldn't say a lot. Probably six days a week...used to work a lot of overtime, 7 days a week, but not since we've been cut back.
- PP: You must have a long drive to Gear and Axle from here.
- LS: Not really, it's only about a 25 minute drive. On the expressway.
- PP: If you were laid off for any extended period of time, would you consider any kind of retraining or would you

stay with your own job?

- LS: I would stay in my own field unless the job prospects were such that I couldn't get a job in my own field, then I would definitely consider retraining.
- PP: You're how old now?
- LS: 46.
- PP: 46. Well you have a lot of job years ahead of you.
- LS: I hope so.

PP: What do you think your family would feel about your retraining. Well, it used to be that if the man was in a field, in a trade, he would stay in it. But times have changed. Economy has changed.

- LS; I think they would support whatever area I went in.
- PP: What do you think about people who take early retirement, people who retire at say 50 to spend a few years with the family?
- LS: If they can do it, more power to them. They can enjoy life.
- PP: Do you think someone, a man who retires would just sit and fish or what?

LS: Oh no, There's a lot they can do. There's charitable work and all kinds of stuff like that.

- PP: Do you do any charitable work now?
- LS: Yes.
- PP: What kind?
- LS: St. Vincent de Paul Douty
- PP: Do you think that affirmative action has anything to do with layoffs in terms of seniority?
- LS: I don't know...definitely an effect, maybe not direct but indirect effect on layoffs. Because sometimes they're forced

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to hire someone, whatever, and they hire so many that they have to layoff someone. Definitely has an effect, but it's something you can't give up.

- PP: Do you have any notions about overtime, some like it and some don't. But do you feel that by doing overtime, they're taking jobs away from some ef the laid off workers. How do you feel about that?
- LS: There may be some truth to that, but it would be very difficult for some, myself, to live on a five-day rate.

  At one time I used to be able to do. I had a smaller family.

  But with the economy the way it is now, I m trapped.

  I used to make \$1.50 an hour when I started my apprenticeship and I think I used to put more in the bank than I do today.
- PP: Of course, you have many mouths to feed, with 11 children...
- LS: The circumstances aren't the same.
- PP: Let's talk a little bit about the union now. Are you active at all in the union?
- apprenticeship coordinator, representative to the union,

  where the for a couple of years. But nothing over the past 10 years.
- PP: Do you have any contact with the union hall, go over there?
- LS: Not really. I know a lot of union representatives, and the vice president of our local. ... skilled trades representatives mostly.
- PP: Did you go or have you gone to any of the education classes at the local?
- LS: Conducted by Charley Raus. No I haven't.
- PP: I know they have classes on all sorts of things such as

retirement, collective bargaining and the like.

- LS: No, I haven't.
- PP: Would you plan on going say to the class on retirement, as you get close to retiring.
- LS: Yes, I would seriously consider it. Can't say that I would definitely go, but I would seriously consider it.
- PP: If you knew a few years ago what you know now about economic conditions, do you tyhink you would have gone into a different kind of work?
- LS: Well, depending on how long ago you're talking about.

  A couple of years ago?
- PP: No, probably longer than that. About when you first went into the apprentice program.
- LS: Well, my initial objective was to become an electrical engineer.
- PP: I see.
- LS: But-because- That's what I started on in college. But because of my family conditions, and the financing was not there...that's why I had to go to work. My second choice

was as an electrician apprentice IAPE SIOEQ

PP: Well, if you decide to retire and you're still a very young man, do you think that you would go back to school and try to become an electrical engineer?

LS: I doubt it. Possibly I could further my education in what

I'm already in, possibly extending into the area of electronics or computer technology, but I don't think I'd go

to the expense to earn a degree. Possibly an associates only if it was a necessity.

Future

- PP: I wanted to ask you about education...you spoke of sales and other ideas, have you ever thought about night school? Or too much overtime, extra hours? In terms of computers, actually...there's so much computer work now.
- LS: Well, I'm involved with computers at work. I've thought about possibly taking some computer courses and looking for programs for myself to help and to help me on my job.
- PP: Why don't you describe your job a little bit...describe what you do and how.
- LS: The last...well, it started about '63 or '64 I started actually doing the job of a process engineer. I am in charge of several power tool repairs for all of Gear and Axle. And in about '64 I had the assignment of electric hard cycle recycling, tooling, which is 180 cycles per second tooling, which was the prominent tooling at that time to convert to more up-to-date tooling or more operative tooling. And consequently I've been in that area ever since. But it's becoming more and more sophisticated, computerized,; I've kept up with it, but I'll probably want to go and take some courses to stay with it.
- PP: What do you mean computerized? How do they computerize that kind of work?
- LS: You can compute error of it. We had some drilling that
  does mathematical calculations in what they call the
  algorithmic rate method, a tool that was built by Rockwell
  International. It uses mathematical calculations to predetermine the hardness of a bolt. Consequently, you have

an locking in conjunction with a computer to do this

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- PP: Consequently, it makes it very precise, doesn't it?
- LS: Yes. It's a matter of...
- PP:
- Doesn't allow for much deviance, does it?

  (words have)

  No. It's pretty exacting. One company now has a LS: base electric tool which is computer controlled. We're going back to electric.
- What about robotics? Do you have any in your work?
- LS: Not at present, but I anticipate that it will be in the future. I can see that it's coming and there's no way of stop it. We had one of the assembly robotics, well-no, They didn't have much success with it, but I do anticipate it coming in. It's inevitable.
- PP: This would be a tremendous change, I suppose, for the apprentice program.
- LS: It is right now.
- PP: Is it?
- All the steps of the apprentice program, there's much more LS: electronics. Probably take some computer courses too.
- How do you feel about Japanese and other foreign cars PP: coming into the U  $\hat{L}$  .
- LS: Feel very strongly... when the free come very going the tribene carries middle class...our products don't come back. In terms of the money market, or the people who control the money, I don't doubt that there are a number of companies here who have invested overseas because of the cheap labor.
  - Would you feel differently if the cars were assembled

Yes, if they were made by the same set of rules. When company works by one set of rules and another by and set...tempesseble & um,

- PP: What kind of cars do you have?
- LS: I have a GMC Ram and my son has a Dodge Ram.
- PP: What year are they?
- LS: The Dodge is a '75 and the GMC is a '79.
- PP: Have you ever thought about how you would feel if you were going to be permanently laid off? Like people are today. Would you try for that retraining, or would you try to find a job in your own field? If there were no Clause promise that you would ever be hired back.
- LS: I would probably try, because all my training is in that field, I would try my utmost to find another job in my field. Because I enjoy it, I wouldn't have spent 28 years in it if I didn't enjoy it. But if I couldn't find another job in the field, I would probably go for some type of retraining.
- PP: What kind of schools would you go to, trade schools, community colleges?
- LS: Whatever the job market would take; I really don't know at this time.
- PP: What do you think of the idea that some people have suggested that young people should be trained for more than one job?
- LS: I've never heard that myself, but I think it's a good idea.

  As long as they're proficient at whatever they do...I can't

Dan thenhy of a person Dhappen to know.

- PP: This person was not only a schoolteacher but he was a licensed skills preacher. He went to both schools.
- LS: Nothing wrong with that.
- PP: Some people say now that all young people, because of

problems with jobs seems redundant

LS: No, I don't agree with that.

PP: You don't agree with that? What do you feel about the quality of work life circles that are in the plants.

Have you participated in that?

LS: Yes. They have some good effect. But they're still in their infancy so you probably won't see the results of the program for a number of years. By that I mean four even five years. Whether they're good or bad, depending on the attitude, they can be good, but there are a lot of people who don't have the attitude they should have to make them work.

PP: What attitude should they have?

LS: I think some are using it selfishly, using it only for their immediate...making improvements for their own gain.

They're not using it for the whole, which is the way it should be in my estimation.

PP: Do you think this idea hs a long-range place?

LS: I don't quite understand the question.

PP: Well, do you think this will improve work conditions and work attitudes in thelong run? Several years down the line, with the cooperation of labor and management.

LS: As long as there are some results, yes. As long as it isn't abused on either side, eithermanagement or employees.

But it's a new thing and it can be a good tool. It helps to initiate self-motivation. It helps to encourage job interest. It has some good points. Revisled it was traped.

PP: How would you rate the importance of a job to a man's well

being? His self-image?

LS: Very high, very high. He has to have motivation, he has to have a job...without a job it's but a get along the present the property of the

benefits, doesn't follow up after his benefits, run out and batter has benefits, run out and batter have about when is going here.

LS: It's a sorry state.

PP: How do you feel about these people? You must know some of them or have known of some of them. Do you have respect for them or...

LS: Oh yes. Everybody deserves respect. I feel sorry for them that they haven't found a job. You read about them in the paper...skilled trades, education, it's difficult in the formula the constant of the c

PP: Do you think that the man who is laid off, is a good worker, but just has low seniority, do you think that his being laid off, I'm talking about the Polish worker, do you think that his being laid off, with

LS: It's difficult. You were brought up, even if not in Poland, as the head of the family, as the one who put meat and potatoes on the table. You can't do that any more. And whether it's visible or not, it's there (the hurt).

PP: Have you heard of any siekness among men who have been laid off, men who are normall not...

LS: I can't say that I have. Not illness, but it could be very depressing, I would imagine, frobally because I am Islated

PP: Most of your social contacts are with men who are skilled tradesmen and workers I assume? I will you get

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- Yes. Either at work or out here, they are employed or
- Your job is secure, I suppose. If there were layoffs, PP: there are too many people in line below you ( los Som
- LS: Right.
- Is there anything you would like to add to the tape about PP: work at Gear and Axle or work in general? Has your attitude toward work changed at all since you were a young man? How do you feel about the importance of work in general? Is it just to put bread on the table?
- LS: Basically, no. I might have added a few or eliminated some points that were not important along the way, but my attitude no I don't think it has changed along the way It's one of those necessary evils to start with There are ways to occupy your time if you had income.
- PP: How would you occupy your time if you had. ...
- LS: Various enrichment programs. Community programs that you get involved in. Self-enrichment. Let's face it, we work because we have to.
- PP: What type of self-enrichment?
- LS: Whatever interests you. I used to enjoy tinkering with electronics. I enjoy doing things, working around the was worked toward house.
- PP: Have you got any special hobbies?
- LS: Not now. I used to when I was younger. I had a ham operator's license, I used to enjoy painting, I really would like to havetaken an instrument. I would like to be able to play an instrment. My two daughters do. Things like that...

LS: Things like that. Things that seem really nice but incredible now.

PP: Well, I think that's a nice note to leave on.

Pura tage of
You said you were a fatalist.

LS: It's not being a fatalisht. But it's just doing what we have to do. Society makes a lot of decisions for us, like when my father came overfrom Poland. It was out of necessity because of the fact that the country was at war and my family deicded that he was the one to be, out of the family, to leave the country

PP: What year did he come here?

Early 19005 LS: Let's see, Now I was born in 1936 and my brother was 11 years older than I am, so that would be 1925. Probably in If it was he for the early twenties, maybe late teens. I would probably be We don talvayo control a veteran today. Society's comparing our own destiny and it's happening again today. It's happening with foreign Lese in Detroit the deversepp The auto market is drying up. And unless something is done on the surface by the government, I don't see a holding on in Detroit right now. Something's going to have to be done happen again, legislatively. Because society's dictated a normal market by profits. If you don't make a profit, you're out of business. Cheap labor is part of profits.

PP: How do you think the auto worker and self-motivation is going to occur?

LS: Out of necessity. You know how necessity is the mother of invention? If the job market dries up, they're going to have to sit down and they're going to have to find antoher way of making a living. Out of necessity!

- PP: Do you think meducation is a large part of that?
- LS: Definitely. Definitely. I've seen 2 of my children graduate from college. I've got another 3 in college.

  One is going to graduate in December.
- PP: What did the two graduate in?
- PP: So your whole family is very interested in electronics.
- LS: Maybe that's because I subscribed to Popular Science at one time or another (laughs)...