GEORGE PLUHAR
SIDE I

Q: Okay, we are just going to start with a short history of George Pluhar's period of growing up.

P: Okay, the parents came here in 1909 when my Dad was six months old. They settled and they bought a farm in Nowhy(?) Michigan. They were buying a farm. My grandfather was a railroad engineer and because of the language barrier he went to work in the Ford Motor Company in the foundry. During that time in the foundry there was an explosion and he got blinded, in the explosion.

Q: He was in the production foundry?

P: He was in the production foundry, yeah. At that time my grandmother went to work at the Ford Motor Company with my Uncle Bill. No, excuse me. My grandma went to work at the Ford Motor Company to go to work and my father ran the farm at twelve years old and took care of his brother and sister in Nowhy.

Q: Where did she go to work?

P: She went to work, I believe, in the Norfolk plant. And during that time he was taking care of his father who was also blind. He was very helpless. During the Depression they traded the farm for a house on Dunphrey(?) Street in Detroit. Traded the farm to a man who then took the farm and they took the house over and they were working in the Rouge. Working in Rouge my grandmother and my Uncle Bill both contracted T.B.

Q: Um. Do you know which plant they were working at ---?

P: I'm not sure which plant they were working at but they worked in the Rouge. My father was working there at the time then too. Still taking care of the father at home and everything.

Q: Wasn't it hard for women to get employed at that early date?

P: Yes it was hard. But I think that the reason that she got employed was the fact that probably the accident that happened to my grandfather. Sort of like, you know, what you want to call it.

Q: Did the Ford Motor Company make any attempts to help your father's family.

P: No, there was no restitution or anything at all, period. At that time they had no restitution. My grandma died and my uncle died the same year of T.B. His sister Emma got killed in a car accident. This was all in the same year. My grandfather who was blind became a very heavy drinker and died of kidney failure. After trying, after trying to commit suicide a few times too. Three deaths in the family--that was the first year my mother and dad were married. That was 1935. They had three deaths in the family. My father just then got into organize--to organize the Rouge plant, was working at the Rouge plant and got to organizing, and that had to be in 1938, I believe, and he was fired for organizing activities at that time. He was assigned an FBI agent by the name of George McKay from Chicago, Illinois, and at that time he went around with my father and helped organizing the different areas, the gathering areas, of the Ford workers, which he was with my dad for a year. Became And a close friend of the family after that too. My dad then was reinstated, I think, in 1939 I believe it was with a full year's restitution in pay.

Q: So that was a National Labor Relations Board case that he got reinstated?

P: Yes it was.

Q: McKay, he was sort of like a bodyguard-type thing?

P: Yeah, George McKay, he was a bodyguard so that he wasn't harassed while he was organizing the workers or helping to organize the workers. They had a sign up, a sign up type of thing where they--I'm not sure what they call it now, I forgot, I knew. But anyway they signed that they were for the union, in other words. And that's how they organized these guys, little by little, you know, place by place. And then he went back to work and was still active in the union and I think probably about 1942 or '43 became a committeeman. And that was in the tire plant, the old tire plant.

Q: And that's where he had started out, in the tire plant?

P: I believe that's where he was at the time. I'm not sure where he started off now. It might have been the motor building he started off in. But he started off in the motor building and he went from there and when the entire plant became a plastics plant, he became president of the plastics plant which you have the dates of there. And was president there I think for four or five years. It was then turned into the steering gear axle building and he then was active there. He had a heart attack in 1954, was off work for six months. Lost the election in 1954 and at that time was supposed to get a job at the Local which he never got. He went back as an inspector on the line in I believe it was 1955-56. Then at that time he worked until his retirement which he had forty-four years at Ford's. And that had to be

in '70, 1970 or was it '72, I'm not sure when it was. Retired to St. Helen, Michigan with his second wife and the property up there. And he had his own little place up north which has three-quarters of an acre of land back in the woods with a trailer home or motor home permanently made. He stayed there for two years and then died of cancer at that time there.

Q: Was that a tough thing on the family life, him being an organizer? Did it take a lot of time away? He being gone a lot doing the activities that are necessary to start a union.

P: Yes it did because it actually probably created a lot of problems for my father and my mother because they ended up getting divorced. She's not a widow of his right now. But yeah because a lot of the activities took a lot of time, there was a lot of time that he spent of his own time out in the field. He went to conventions which were the negotiating conventions. To Atlantic City for the annual conventions. He spent a lot of time away from home. A lot of time away from home. And he was very set in his ways and he was, you know, a very dedicated man to the fact that he felt that the union was the greatest thing that ever happened. Well it was the workers way to organize and to be able to compete against the company, you know. Which it did disturb his family life somewhat. He was whole-heartedly into it. You know that was really his only activity. My father never did anything but that was his activities.

Q: So you remember a lot of your father's friends and events that you did were mostly connected with union people?

P: Yeah. Your entertainments and your picnics and your dances and your activities were, you know, where you got together during the bad times of negotiations and picket lines. And we all, the families gathered, you know. And we had a kind of a lot of men, people coming to our house, you know, there were all kinds of people coming to our house at all times.

Q: You mentioned that you walked the picket lines with your father during demonstrations or strikes. Was that common? Did a lot of the men and women working in the plants bring their children to the lines?

P: Not really, I don't think. I think that my father spent time with me a lot of times because he wasn't home took me with him, you know. And he introduced me into the--so I got to know all of the guys that were connected with the Local in the different plants because they all--got to know them as a kid as I grew up, you know. It wasn't a very common thing. I think wives coming down supporting their husbands was very common. They came down to bring them food and things, you know. And that was just an accepted thing that that was the way to go. That was the way to do it.

Q: Do you remember the 1949 strike?

P: I ---

Q: When they had a strike over speed up in the motor building?

P: Yeah, yeah.

Q: Was there a lot of activities around? ---

P: There was a lot of picketing going down, a lot of demonstrating going on, yeah. Yeah they did.

Q: And did you attend Labor Day parades?

P: Yes I did.

Q: Get big turnouts in downtown Detroit?

P: Big turnouts. Everybody wore their union hats. They had to have their union hats on. And they had to have their uniform-type thing and they marched together and it was, you know, yeah it was a big celebration for them. They really honored the day, you know. That was when G. Mennen Williams was active with them which is very ---

Q: When who was?

P: G. Mennen Williams, the governor. He came out of a Republican family and was a Democrat.

Q: Oh yeah.

P: (Chuckling) Yeah. A rich family, a very rich, wealthy family.

Q: Do you remember Stanley Nowak who was elected to the State Senate?

P: I remember the man but I don't remember that much about him. I don't remember that much about him. In fact, I'm trying to think of some of the political people that my dad supported or would have supported. I know Williams is one that he supported very much and Blair Moody too. There are a group of attorneys that know a lot about the union activities. Harry Philo and I believe apparently Dave Robb, he's another fellow, there's a group of the attorneys down in Detroit--where they handled all of the union members' legal problems and things.

Q: These are men that were working at what time period?

P: That would have to be in the mid-forties and on. From that time on until the time of his retirement. You know they were always--these guys helped him with his grievances and things too. I know they did.

Q: Do you remember a Lebron Simmons or something like that? Lebron I think was the first name. Or George Crockett?

P: George Crockett I know, yeah. George Crockett, okay, was a very good friend of my dad's. That's the original George Crockett. There's a George Crockett, Jr., now too.

Q: So which one is now the Congressman?

P: George Crockett, Jr.

Q: Oh the son.

P: The son is now a ---

Q: The father is dead?

P: The father is retired. I'm not sure whether he's alive or dead right now. But Blair Moody was very active in the union movement too. But Crockett was really a well respected judge. Or was a well respected attorney and then became a judge, and when he was a judge he was really good for the black(?) movement in Detroit, for the black movement in Detroit.

Q: In '48, were you old enough to remember the campaign for Wallace, Henry Wallace, on the Progressive ticket?

P: Oh yeah, yeah.

Q: How much activity was going on around?

P: Wallace, they wore the badges. They got badges for Wallace.

Q: Oh yeah.

P: Adlai Stevenson they supported too, very strongly too, when Adlai Stevenson was running. But Wallace, Henry Wallace, they really supported very well.

Q: Did a lot of people in the plant, you think, go for Wallace?

P: Yeah they did and I think, if I remember correctly, wasn't Wallace supposed to have Communistic leanings?

Q: Yeah he was tagged because some of the unions that were kicked out of CIO had supported him. And I think there was a lot of support at Local 600 for him too.

P: But I don't really think that these people were really active in the Communist Party, I don't believe. They may have had socialistic leanings and feelings towards the government as far as socialized government I think. But I don't think they were really that active in the Communist Party ----.

Q: You were living in Detroit at the time--or in Dearborn at the time near the Rouge plant or pretty close to it.

P: No not that close to it. We were living in the middle of Dearborn. Well I was born and raised--or was originally born right next to the the Rouge plant. The section my mother is from which is Oakwood, Michigan, which is right adjacent to the Rouge plant.

Q: Do you remember how some of the people in the neighborhood responded to the Wallace campaign?

P: How they responded to the Wallace campaign?

Q: Yes. Were they for Wallace or were they Ford workers mostly, or were they ----

P: Well no because you had a mixture of people that were in our neighborhood and the people that weren't Ford workers didn't like Wallace at all, period, you know.

Q: Oh really?

P: Yeah, but the Ford workers naturally were stuck to stand behind Wallace. There were sort of mixed emotions on that I think you know.

Q: What other kind of people were in the neighborhood besides Ford workers?

P: In our neighborhood? I would say it was fifty-fifty in the workers. We had people that worked for the gas company. Some of them worked for Mobil Gas, that's out in Trenton. I'm trying to think of--one guy worked for a grocery store. There was quite a few Ford workers come to think of. There was quite a few Ford workers.

Q: Did they have carpools going into the plant?

P: Yes they did at one time. Yeah they did at one time. They had the Victory Gardens. Do you remember the Victory Gardens?

Q: The gardens that Ford had set aside for people who were unemployed was it?

P: No, just for the workers to raise their own food.

Q: Yeah, the Victory Gardens.

P: Yeah, they took cabbages ---

Q: Raised sauerkraut.

P: Yeah. They had the Gardens right down the Center of Dearborn right off of Michigan Avenue, yeah.

Q: So the kids went down or the workers?

P: The kids went down and the workers went down too. They maintained a garden.

Q: Hum. Did that, you think, get sentiment in the community of Dearborn behind Ford as opposed to the union. Or is that part of the attempt?

P: It was part of the attempt of Ford, to lean, to help people, or try to pull people his way. It was, you know. Of course Ford tried to break the union pretty strongly. Of course you've got the history of Harry Bennett.

Q: Do you have any stories to tell about some of the Ford methods of trying to keep the union out?

P: Well they had what they--they had the goon squads that came in and to go through the picket line-- you had the Dearborn police force that really went after the workers too a lot of times breaking up the picket lines. They had the Dearborn police force behind him, of course, which was, you know because of the heavy, heavy taxation that he paid in the city of Dearborn. And I think he had the police force with him very heavy. Probably a lot of times that they tried to organize the white collar workers they would always give the white collar workers benefits that were better than the workers had in the plants. That's how he broke the union in the white collar workers. I mean that part I know there. Just generally, I think, trying to get these squealers and the goons that were in the plant to go his way. Making men that were union men into foremens.

Q: Did that work a lot? Did some of the men that were strong union men go ahead and become foremen?

P: I think if they were really strong union men, if they were really active in the unions and then they did have a really--probably, the workers looked down on them. Really looked down on them.

Q: I wonder what kind of foremen those men made if they were once in the labor movement. Do you think they made a total turnaround and become a

strict foreman or would they still have the sympathies with the workers?

P: I--that's hard to say. That's hard to say that there because I remember my Dad picking on the guys that became foremens and there was a total lack of respect for management. I think they swung the other way just as hard as they did one way probably, I don't know. You'd have to, I think, Ford demanded that. Ford demanded it all, you know. Old Henry wasn't an easy guy to work with.

Q: Yeah.

P: He was tough.

Q: Do you think there was much of a change when Henry Ford II came in?

P: Yeah I think there was more communication with the workers and I think there was more of a--I think Henry Ford II was a little easier to deal with than the old man was. Of course, Henry Ford II was surrounded by a bunch of men too that were--at that time he had built a staff up, you know. I think the original Henry Ford didn't trust people as well as the younger Henry Ford did, you know.

Q: He got rid of Bennett and hired in Bugas ---

P: Yeah.

Q: As the Labor Relations head.

P: Yeah, Bugas, according to my father, Bugas wasn't a bad man.

Q: Oh yeah.

P: You know, Bugas was a hell of a lot more fair man than they had at any place. Was that Harry, Henry Bugas?

Q: I can't remember his first name right now.

P: Well you know, your not interested in salary workers, because Ford had, there was a lot of politics played in the salaried workers.

Q: Oh yeah. At the Ford.

P: Yeah, I remember my dad telling me that when Henry Ford came into the leadership of the company, he was a kid turned Catholic for his wife and I think all of the Masons took off their rings. (LAUGHTER) Now then there were no more Masons then in the company, you know.

Q: You mean among the white collared workers?

P: Yeah, they all became--or management. Plant managers and things like that. All of a sudden they became no Masons.

Q: They became Knights of Columbus huh?

P: Yeah ---.

Q: I remember you telling me a story or you were reading about every worker having a picture of Henry in his house or something like that.

Q: Yeah that was in the early period. In the early period there's a--the Ford Company had what they called the Sociology Department. They went out into the homes and investigated and made sure that the homes were tidy and workers got into the practice of putting Henry Ford's picture up in the house in order to make sure that the Company thought that they were loyal to the Ford Motor Company when they came and investigated.

P: Did you ever bring up the point of did they check the kind of cars they were driving?

Q: No.

P: Yeah, if they didn't have a Ford car it was really a sin, you know.

Q: . . . frustrated with the way the union local itself changed from becoming a center of active political life to one that was more subdued and the left wing was pretty much pushed out.

P: Yeah, very, very much. It really disappointed He got very disappointed, I don't think he cared for Stillato that much. I don't think Stellato cared too much for my dad, either, from what I remember. And he became, thought that politics was being played too much in the organization. The workers were being sold off to these guys that were in there.

Q: Did he have much competition with the rightwing in the Plastic unit when he ran for election? He ran on the Progressive slate, right?

P: Yeah, they had competition. They had a certain number of men that were in the right wing. But e had a good solid bunch of guys behind him, too, there were a lot of left wing guys in there.

Q: Do you remember some of the different groups that made up the different caucuses? I don't know if you were in contact enough with the goings on with the caucuses but in the other buildings and in the Rouge as a whole, you had, for example, right wing sometimes associated with the ACTV, the Association of Catholic Trade Union. Are you familiar with that group?

P: No.

Q: And the left wing caucus sometimes had people associated with the Communist Party or the Socialist Workers Party.

P: The Socialist Workers Party, they were not that well known(?). You know the unions stuck together too, you are aware of that. They had a lot of union members that were on strike in another type of business.

They would never have taken, cross their picket lines, or never, you know, they'd resepct a guy or told a guy never to shop at the places that were on, you know, grocery stores, on strike, or . . .

Q: Boycott.

P: Boycott . They'd boycott, they were very strong on that, boycott. And also the Union name came up. Okay. You take the label and if it doesn't say Union Made you don't buy it. You know, one of the greatest things, there was some tobacco companies, American Tobacco Company was not unionized, they would not smoke their cigarettes.

P: Yeah, it sure was. If you smoked, you know, . . . they really stuck together.

Q: Do you remember the Local 600 people going out to help picket at other union strikes too?

P: Yeah, we did . . . We also went out and helped union familes . . .

. . . The Union activities, they had a way to help the guy out. So, it was, you know, they stuck together. They were organizers, they stuck together.

Q: You're probably too young to know about or to have had experiences, but in the 1930's they had the Unemployment Councils. Did you ever hear about those?

P: Yeah.

Q: About some of the activities that they did in the community of Detroit.

P: Wasn't that kind of, the camps that they had during the Depression?

Q: The Unemployment Councils got the unemployed workers organized together. And sometimes when people would get evicted from their homes they would get together, the people in the neighborhood would carry the furniture back into their homes.

P: I wasn't familiar with that. But I know my Dad, during the Depression our house that he trade in for, they lost the house during the Depression. It was one of the tragedies . . . I'm trying to think of what I can come up with. What you were talking about there.

Q: Do you remember that Ford Hungar March?

P: Yeah, I remember, I don't remember it thoroughly but I remember that it happened.

Q: That's in '34.

P: That's '34. I remember hearing about it. Yeah I remember hearing about it. I remember my Dad talking about it.

Q: Was he inovlved in it do you know?

P: I'm not sure about that. Grievances were really . . . (?) contract . . . And sometimes I really think that sometimes these grievances that they did get through, some these guys were really in the wrong.

Q: But they'd fight for them anyway.

P: They had to fight for them. They had to fight for them, right. They'd fight, _____ wrong or indifferent, whatever _____ they were. It's like being an _____ attorney.

Q: Do you have any knowledge of how your father became a Progressive as opposed to a right winger. Any experiences in his life that could have given him the feeling that he should work with the Progressives rather than the conservatives?

P: Oh, I think that probably, it was going through into a Depression, okay. Living in Chicago where the reds, or the pinks, whatever they were, living in in Chicago had something to do with it too. I think it was the--probably because seeing the things that happened in the plant before the union came along. He worked in the plant before the union came along. He could see what happened to the workers in the plant, that was really, this was the only way he, probably, could fight the wrongs he saw.

Q: Your mother and uncle worked too .

P: And my grandfather. And also the other workers too. Seeing workers get injured, and all that . . .

It took a lot of courage to become an organizer and get fired from his job, he had a family, a young family. It took a lot of courage for him to do this. And knowing what the result would be, my mother was high strung, and we did--at that time there was a death in the family. My brother died, I had two brothers that died and right after that she had two pregnancies and two lost children. It was quite--you know, they shifted shifts on him, they did everything to him, he had to work midnight shifts sometimes, they messed with him there. Seniority had nothing to do with it, in the plant, you were just shoved around. Just being shoved around, I think, had a lot to do with him becoming a right-wing, excuse me, left-wing.

Q: Did he go to war, during WWII?

P: No, he was given a deferment because of the fact that he worked in the making of products for the war. That's where his deferment came from.

Q: How common was the problem of divorce in families with union activists: Were there a lot of strained relation because the husbands were so involved in the union?

P: I can't remember names or anything. I don't see that as the total reason why they got divorced, but as I said, it strained the relationship. He wasn't home a lot of the time, when there were things to do around the house. To be active with us, the family had to join in union activities, be a part of union activities, because that was his life. The hours he put in, in union activities, even though the hours he put in working, he had to put both the hours in. They had after-hours activities, a lot of them. And I think a lot of that, he wasn't with his family. Because later on in life when he did retire, then he started to get into fishing. . . . I think it had a lot to do with strained relationships I can't name, I don't think. I mean the number of wives that there was a perfect home set up, because they were always, these guys were like on call, you know, in fact even when he was a committeeman in the plant, he wasn't there. They called when they had trouble, they'd call him up. So he'd be getting calls at home all the time. This is what's going on, what should we do? How should we handle it? And he got to be a pretty solid man, in fact, he knew what to say to management, he could handle it. And the used to give him calls.

Q: How did that effect you when he got transferred to different shifts? That must have been before he was elected commiteeman, when he was getting shifted around to the night shift.

P: How did it affect his life?

Q: Well how did it affect his chances of trying to be elected to office? Did it make a difference? Did it affect his base of support?

P: I don't believe so because, you know, you have the President of the plant was was voted for by all shifts and I think he, even the time he came home, he was working the day shift. He would go to campaign at night.

Q: Oh yeah. So working at night might have actually helped him? Getting to know more workers.

P: Yeah, the more well known he was in the plant, with the guys on the different shifts. And he compaigned, he did, at that time, it was on his own. And funds came from the (?) ____ too, he got no support on funds. That created a shortage in the family.

Q: He had to mimeo his own flyers?

P: He had to have his own campaign tickets made up, you know, that they passed out. And he'd get a group of guys to pass out on different shifts. The midnight shift would get out in the early morning and pass out the leaflets. And if you were caught doing union activity at work, you would be fired.

Q: They say your Dad was a good friend of Ed Locks.

P: Yes, a very good friend. That was his best friend.

Q: Was Locks his mentor? He was President of the building before.

P: Yeah, Locks was President, in fact Locks, my dad was constantly, Locks would constantly, after Locks had left, was no longer active as far as the Presidency, my dad . . . they spent a lot of time together.

Q: What happened to Locks after he was taken out by the administrationship?

P: Locks just got to--he was, you know, he got disgusted with it.

Q: Did he leave Ford's?

P: No, no. He stayed with Ford's.

Q: Did he go back on the job?

P: Yeah, put on a different job. But see, they become, Don Wade, Scotty Crocker, Jimmy Simmons, Bill Jackson, Ed Locks, these were all a group of guys that really hung around together. They spent . . . On Sunday they'd go out, and see, Don Wade who lived out on a farm. They spent a lot of time together. . . . Yeah, you can go back all the way into, during the time of the Depression, when Ford boxcars came in . . . that's how my dad met my mother. Her father was real wealthy . . . In the 1930's, my dad during that time, he had quite a reputation, you know, he was pretty heavy with his hands. He tried amateur boxing and the Golden Gloves . . . but the black guys kept on beating him. Then he crossed Danny Bolcavich(?) the gangster and got his nose bled, got punched . . . My dad got stabbed too . . . But he was a pretty rough individual.

Q: Was he ever on the Flying Squad?

P: What's the Flying Squad?

Q: The Flying Squad was a group of union members that was the protector. It would go around especially during a strike and make sure everything was O.K.

P: He was. He was. That's why he took my baseball bat as a child. He carried my baseball bat with him.

Q: I remember reading that one member of the Flying Squad was an ex-boxer.

P: That was my dad.

END OF SIDE 1

BEGINNING SIDE 2

P: It was pretty tough to work there.

Q: Yes, I'm sure the union made it a lot easier though.

P: It made it a lot easier I think but also too I think my Dad got to know a couple of the plant managers who he felt were fair men, he felt there were some fair men who were managers. He talked about them as far as being fair to deal with. And the grievances that they processed. But the health situation was, I already told you about getting the, some workers had to get chest X-rays every six months or every . . . he was really heavy into, contributed to that. All and all it was a group of good dedicated men who stuck together. . . . .

Q: Do you remember the sporting events that Local 600 had?

P: Yeah, they had the softball league, . . . they had an income tax service inside the Local, the Credit Union became . . .