

GERRY CONRAD

Q I figured that I'm sort of at the low number next time the next recession comes. You don't think so?

A 15 years.

Q Trucks are selling pretty well. The other idea that came up was one guy suggested that I should interview the wives of the guys in the plant. I use the questions just as a guideline for me to remember. When did you hire in the plant?

A November, 1966.

Q What was your first day like?

A Terrible.

Q I want to share with folks that whatever is written it is going to be totally written in the most respectable way of our folks. I'm not looking to point out anything that is not real respectful of folks. I'm not looking for people to agree with me in any form or fashion. Why don't you share a little about your first day? If you can remember who you met and what you did.

A ~~The guys I met on my first day they aren't even there any~~ more. They are all gone. It was a mad house. They were running something like eighteen jobs an hour. People were running and falling on top of each other and I was very nervous and scared to death the first day. I almost got fired the first day. They were hiring and firing and people were quitting. There were about 30 guys hired in the same day I did and I don't see any of them anymore. I'm about the only one left out of the group that was even there. That's wierd.

Q You hired into trim?

2

A Yeah.

Q So you have been in trim for almost 21 years now? What were they making then when they were making eighteen jobs an hour?

A Same thing. The bronco and the pick up. The run the line the same way like they do now.

Q How long have you been up north?

A 20 years.

Q Why don't you share a little about how you came up here?

A I got a divorce. I lived in Florida, got a divorce and I had an uncle that lived here in Southgate. He was my mother's brother so she called and said why don't you see if you can get Gerry a job up here. So he did. He had been in Great Lakes Steel. I went down to take an interview for Great Lakes and some guy came by and said you would rather work for Ford. I said yeah, who pays the most. He said Ford Motor Company. I said where do I sign. So I was up here three days and I took the little test they gave you back then over at Southgate at the unemployment office at the truck plant and went to work that night. I told the guy I got on my good clothes and he said you hired into work didn't you. He was a real smart ass you know. Yes sir.

Q Was Woody Clark there then?

A No. Some red headed guy, he's not there anymore.

Q Let's take a step back a little. You were in Florida. Were you born and raised in Florida?

A No I was born and raised in West Virginia.

Q What part?

A Charleston.

Q There are a lot of chemicals. There were no jobs in Charleston?

A No. Not back then. See I joined the Navy when I was seventeen and got out and my parents had moved to Florida. So I moved down there. I got married and had a couple kids. I got a divorce and moved to Michigan. There really wasn't no work in Florida for unskilled laborer. I worked three jobs while in Florida. I came up here and made the same money while working one job. I couldn't believe it. Twenty years ago I got \$150 take home pay and that was fantastic.

Q Was that for forty hours?

A Yeah for forty hours. No, no no that was about eleven hours a day and sometimes eleven and one half hours, but it was big money then. I wasn't even making \$100 a week when I came up here. I'm talking about gross. It was hard.

Q What kind of work did your folks do?

A Construction and coal miner. He did not work that many years in the coal mines. He didn't want to die in the coal mines. He got a construction business.

Q Are your folks still alive?

A Oh yeah. They are both 70 years old. He still works.

Q He works in Florida?

A No, no they go to Florida in the winter time and then come back to the farm in West Virginia in the summer time and grow their garden, plant and they can stuff. We go down and get it in the summer. We get all the stuff we can. They can't eat it all. I guess that is why they do it I think.

Q How many brothers and sisters do you have?

A Two brothers and a sister. The two brothers are younger and an older sister. My brothers are in Florida and they don't make no money. They subexist.

4

Q What do you mean they subexist?

A They are in debt head over heels. They don't make any money. My brother has been with the state for eighteen years and he said last year he made \$18,000 and I said wow you really did eh? Big money you know. He has a home though. My parents gave him a home on land contract and his payments are \$92.00 a month. He says that is ridiculous. Two bedrooms, central air.

Q So when he hears about what you made does he say why didn't I come to the auto industry?

A No. They don't want nothing to do with it. They don't want to leave Florida. I tell them the auto industry isn't a bowl of cherries. It is a mad house as you know.

Q What do you think the biggest benefit is working in the auto plant?

A Money and benefits. Our medical and eye glass stuff I think it is fantastic. We got the best benefits in the world I think except for Iaccoca or Henry or somebody.

Q I went for a job interview for this service employees union. I sort of looking to get out of the plant and they told me they pay \$16,000 a year and they told me the health care benefits I would have to pay. They give you some health care benefits, but it wouldn't cover any physical therapy or anything for the kid which would end up costing \$150.00 a week. They are international leader unionship only makes \$25,000 a year. It is a whole different world from what we are getting paid now.

A Down there on line 3, he is a recall, he got called back to

work. His name is Al.

Q Red head?

A Yeah. He went to college for four years. So now he is going to move upstairs and I told him you're going to take a pay cut when you go up there. He will. Because if you're not production they don't pay you nothing.

Q They get about the same I thought.

A No. Foremen make twice as much as those guys.

Q Because they work the overtime?

A Right. My foreman made \$54,000 last year. Bill Major.

Q That's about what you made. What did you make?

A I made \$44,000.

Q Is your house paid off?

A No I got eight more years of payments. I got a deal with this. I bought this and gave the guy \$5,000 and assumed his mortgage. He is a friend of mine. He was a foreman at the truck plant years ago. Bob Dixon, do you remember him?

Q Oh sure. He was my foreman. He used to be sealer line foreman. His brother also worked there.

A No his dad, Gene. Gene died of cancer. He was pretty bad off.

Q I heard that. So let's talk a little about the plant. When you hired in twenty years ago...twenty years ago I was fifteen...how old were you?

A I was 27.

Q You were 27. So you were already a grown up person and I was still a kid. What was the union like then?

A It wasn't much.

6

Q Was the coal mine union pretty important down there in West Virginia at that time?

A As far as I remember. I was young myself when I left there. It was very big for the miners. To me a union was just a union because in Florida there were no unions. It is a scab state mostly. There are unions but they are not big. They got the right to work law now so they are not that big. I didn't even know what it was until I came here. I liked it. I got a little support anyway.

Q Did they ever do anything particular for you or for some of your buddies?

A Oh yeah. I got fired in 1969 or 1970. I took a radio from line one and took it back to the box line. That was in 1968 when the Tigers won the world series and I took it back to the box line and that when stereos just came out in the trucks in 68'. It was mostly AM radios so they was watching it and I didn't know it and they fired me.

Q But you didn't take it out of the plant?

A No. I was off for five months and the union got me back. It took me five months to get back. During that time there was a strike. It was in '67 I'm sorry. So they wasn't negotiating during strike and that was about two months.

Q It was a 100 day strike. They fired you....

A Attempted theft.

Q For moving the radio from part of the plant to another.

A They called it attempted theft.

Q Attempted theft?

A Yeah.

Q You were out for five months with no pay or benefits.

7

A All through Christmas, nothing. I was married. See this is my third wife. At the time I had two children. She was working so it helped some. It was rough. We had a very small Christmas that year.

Q Who got you back?

A At the time who was the president?

Q Jimmy Coleman.

A Pete Gate was our plant chairman at the time so he got me back.

Q Did you think you were going to get back after being out for five months?

A I started having my doubts after about three months you know. I went and got another job. I finally found a job with a trucking company, Miesel. They got a place out here on Haggerty Road. It is entirely different than in Detroit. I was making good money, but I didn't want that because I wanted to keep my seniority here. I didn't want to lose all that.

Q We started talking about a lot of folks in the plant and I was wondering...people were telling a lot of stories about Al Brown, now I'm not going to use names and put people down.

A Al was great. I think he was the best plant chairman we ever had.

Q How come?

A He had a lot of balls. He has had plenty balls. He hated authority. He hated the company and he would put out bulletins saying watch that big fat ass guard up there he is watching you. He was great. He was a thief. He didn't drink.

8

Q What was his job?

A Plant chairman. He got over a half million dollars in stolen stuff.

Q He stole over a half million dollars of stuff?

A \$500,000, it was in the paper.

Q Oh yeah, but he never got that money.

A Sure he did.

Q I thought that is how much stuff they caught...

A No that's what he sold before they caught him. They sued him and he beat them in conservative court. When he got out of the plant he got this insulating company. They do aluminum siding and go through your aluminum siding with insulating through your wall. I told all the guys give him six months or a year and he won't last. He owns that place now. He started working for the company and now he owns it.

Q I remember when I was working in the sealer line we would hear the story about _____ in trim. He'd go up there and if an assembler was pushing the broom he'd go up and just break the broom because it wasn't a classification. Now people do any kind of job, which has broken down all classifications.

A Sure he would. He also carried a gun. He hated blacks. He would call a nigger a nigger. He's all you goddam niggers stay away from me. He never drank neither which was great. He always wanted to remember what he said. He would go in a bar and sit there and drink a pop. I never seen him drink.

Q Do you think you respected him for hating blacks?

A No I respected him for having some balls against the company. I'm not a company man obviously. I don't give a damn about this company and they don't give a damn about me. I'm just surviving like everybody else. I got ten more years to go and I hope and pray to God I get out of here which I intend to do. I'm buying property in Florida now so I'm going back to Florida. I'm buying an acre of land down there.

Q What part of Florida?

A Around Cape Canaveral. Pikesville, that's where I lived before I came up here.

Q I want to finish the story with Al because I think it is a fantastic story. As far as I remember in 1974 he got fired for taking alternators, right? In a big truck?

A Right a bunch of guys got fired. A couple of guards were fired.

Q He had worked it out that they would just take a whole truck load of alternators out of the plant.

A He would take a pallet. He would pay a guy here's \$200, give the guard \$100 but he would make \$500 or \$1000.

Q Bill Humphrey got fired.

A Bill Humphrey took a voluntary retirement. He had 32 years. He was a black guy. He was a committee man, but he was making bucks too. He got out real quick. They allowed him to retire.

Q Do you think there is as much stealing going on as there used to?

A No. They know they got fired you know. I don't think so.

Q Was that stealing, part besides making money, was that an act of hostility against the company?

A No. It was just greed.

Q There are guys who were fired for taking windshield wipers blades. You know they wanted a little part for their car and it's just a convenience they don't have to go to the store. They aren't even saving much money. Plastic for garbage you know.

A One guy got fired for a damn squirt can, oil can you can buy for \$1.98 and he tried to take it out under his coveralls and I said why for \$1.98 can would a guy get fired? He had it rolled in his coverall and the guard said unroll your coverall and there it was. You know Cecil ? I watched him get a guy fired once. I didn't know what he was doing. It was quitting time and he took something. I didn't know what the object was. The guy who stoled it was a kid, no more than 19 and he threw it under his coveralls and Cecil was watching him. I saw Cecil get on the phone, but I didn't think nothing about it. Cecil had called the guard. I walked behind the guy and the guard said whoa I want to talk to you. Cecil got that kid dired. I said the next day does that make you a big man now? He was my foreman at the time. I said I thought you were more of a man than that. It was really none of his business. What the hell was a small object to him, but it made him look good. That guy is still a damn lying foreman and that's all he'll ever be, a production foreman.

Q I remember when Pearl got fired for plastic bags. The union was able to get folks back for stealing things. You can go down the list and he's been fired three times for stealing.

A Yeah he's got almost 30 years.

Q And the union was able to get them back. It is almost one of their major jobs.

A Well he is a union man so he is in the union click. You have got to be in with that union click you know. Back then when I got fired I was in the union click.

Q You were friends with Stu?

A Right, but now I'm not see. I'm not in that union click anymore. I got tired of politics and it's all a bunch of bullshit anyway. You have got to be a liar in order to be a good politician, obviously.

Q If you're out of the union click you can't expect to me helped.

A Hell no. I'm not going to use any names, but...

Q We aren't going to use names anyway.

A I noticed by committee man's, his friends, you see we used the production of our bronco's so obviously they had to speed the line up. So they added more people and hired some people that had been laid off so the committee man's buddies were complaining that their jobs were overloaded. Hell same day they were taking off guys. I'm a relief man I give guys their breaks. So I said I got a job I'd appreciate you'd look at. He's a black guy and he wouldn't say shit if he had a mouthful and he went and looked at it and said I can't see any reason you're having a problem and he keeps it up. Here the guy stays all day long but he won't say nothing. Big dummy, just a big dummy. I screamed and raised hell. I get the time center man, the company man and he looks at me and laughs, heh those dumb

assholes. But the committee man's friends can take off work just like this. See I'm not in his click. He thinks I voted against him which I didn't. I always voted for the fool, but I got mad at him the other day and I said I'd never vote for you again. If election were tomorrow you'd have a hard time getting back in anyway. He would.

Q The elections are always hard for me to tell who wins because they are based on who polling it through the night before.

A See if you're not in his click then you're out and that's not right. He was elected to represent the people not just his friends which put a guy in.

Q Do you think that is changing much over the last twenty years?

A No, not a bit. It'll be the same old bullshit until I'll be there.

Q Do you think the union works with the company more now than they did?

A Yes. When I hired in the union was anticompany. They were really anticompany. They have really mellowed on that now. It's just more of this E.I. bullshit.

Q You're not involved with the E.I. program?

A No because I think it is all psych and bullshit. The employees work with the company and have meetings once a week with top management and we have one representative from each line. They say here's our problem on this line and so forth and it is working to some extent, but still it is a bunch of psychology. It is still more company than it is the hourly guy. I think it is a bunch of bullshit.

Q Why do you think some of the guys are working with the pro-

gram?

A I have no idea. Some of the guys do it just to get out of work.

Q Yeah they get an extra break.

A Get an hour off the line, really. I even thought about it one time. I'm a relief man so I don't work the first hour. I take two hours for lunch. I'm done an hour before quitting time so I can't bitch. They don't say nothing so I do my job. They don't say nothing to me and I don't say nothing to them. That's why I don't get involved in this employee involvement bullshit. Just leave me over on the side and I'll do my thing and good-bye. And when I leave the plant I leave the plant. She always says how was your work today and I might have got into a fight with the foreman today but I'll say I never talk about work. She likes to talk about work a lot where she works, but I don't. I leave the plant there. I close the door.

Q Do you mentally close it too?

A I don't think about it no more.

Q You don't dream about it?

A No.

Q Did you used to dream about it?

A Once in a while.

Q What kind of dreams do you remember? The reason I ask is I used to paint underbody and I used to dream of the paint dripping in my eyes you know where they have the sealer now with the sealer underbody. That's where I hired in and I used to dream about it. I would wake up in cold sweats that the paint was dripping in my eyeballs.

A I remember a year ago I was asked to run to keep up with the job. I mean abolish the union, the union runner and I said this isn't nice. So the next day I went to work and told my foreman I said I want double time today because I worked last night and he said what. I want double time boy.

Q How long have you been on days?

A Probably 15 years. See in the winter time I used to work the night shift and in the spring I was put back on days. I used to have a guy drop classifications all the time, you know relief man, the younger guys but when I was brought back to days they get bumped nights. So they started bumping their classifications so I couldn't bump them. But would keep his.

Q Why do you like working nights during the winter?

A Well you don't have to get up and work your butt off in the morning, four o'clock in the morning. It is a lot nicer and the roads are clearer in the evenings and it is much more convenient. You don't have to warm your car up at four in the afternoon but at five in the morning your car is awfully cold.

Q It would be hard to start. I'm putting the tape on now, now that I promised your wife uh...

A That's what I told Pete from my speech you can tell I'm not the stereotyped hillbilly with the slow talking you all's stuff. When I was younger I stuttered a lot so apparently I just started talking faster and faster to get over the stuttering. I know I talk very fast.

Q Not too fast that you can't understand.

A Yeah.

Q Being a northerner from the east coast I have more trouble with much slower talking out of your southern black or white guy from Kentucky than I do the real fast I don't care where it is from. In New York everybody talks fast.

A See I got a buddy from West Virginia also, Danny Cisco, and his and my speech is no comparison.

Q That's right.

A He talks slower. He's more typical the hillbilly talk.

Q Well I worked with his brother. You want to talk about two guys who are totally different. His brother....

A Don't say six words a day.

Q And works five people's jobs. When I transferred to trim and had to work with the other Cisco I said oh no he is going to work my butt off. The first thing he said is look just do this amount of work, make sure you take a break here, don't ruin the job and he is great. I said this guy is from a different family if you ask me. I didn't know they were both from West Virginia. Back to the plant...we'll talk about the plant a little and then come out here on weekends what you do on the weekends.

How do you think folks get along in the plant and do you think it has changed much than when you hired in? Do you spend much time with folks outside the plant?

A No I don't. It's like the blacks and the whites...I heard one guy say we tolerate one another. I think we do. I'm the typical hillbilly I'm not in love with the blacks. I call them niggers you know, of course. They call us honkies of course, behind their backs. It is the same old thing. We tolerate one another. Some of them I don't like and

some of them I do, like a few of them. We have to coexist with them so.

Q Do you think it has gotten better over the years? Do you think it has changed with more...now the union...there's what two or three blacks on the union, there used to be more. Do you think it has changed, the relationship for having black foreman?

A I don't think so. I haven't noticed that much change.

Q What about with the women in the plant?

A I was always against that and I still am.

Q How come?

A Because they don't want to do a damn man's job. They want a man's money, but they don't want to do a man's job. That's why so many of them were fired and quit. They were over here from the IP line, you know what I'm talking about, took her to line one and she couldn't do the job. She sat there and cried. They had her on the job for five working days.

Q I'll give you an example, you're on line one and when I came over I had to the third job on putting the door locks and now there is a very heavy set black woman, Cheryl is doing the job. You don't relieve her I think. She is a big woman. She must be up to 200 lbs. or more than that. Now I couldn't do that job. Things would slide right off my hand and she's doing it. Now do you think there is that much difference between the men and the women doing, looking for men's jobs and easier jobs?

A Sure. Like you see them sitting there and crying. That old bullshit crying. That just turns me right off. If I was

the foreman I would say heh you can't do it hit the street.

Q You think it is that way with the women than with the guys?

A Sure.

Q Is that because they lack strength or coordination or because of their attitude?

A Well I say it is a little bit of everything there. They have got the coordination obviously, but they see a job and say this is too much work and I don't want to do it. They won't make them do it. For a guy they will send him to the office for poor and careless workmanship or refusing a job.

Q They just started bringing back the women. For a long time there was just three women in the plant.

A Another thing I am very disturbed about is this skilled trades. Now they are going to put these women on skilled trades. I don't think that is right. They are going to hire some of these apprentices within the plant as a pipefitter. Anyone over 45 can't apply. Well I'm 46 and that pisses me off. I got 20 years and I can't apply for the skilled trades job. That's not right. That's age discrimination to me. But it is per contract, it plainly states per contract so there is nothing you can do about it. It is right in the contract and I'm one of the guys that ratified the contract, right? I can't do nothing about it, but it makes me mad. I got twenty years and I'm going to get some girl with ten years to get the apprenticeship and stuff.

Q I know they are putting the program in for classes after work for people who are interested in applying for an

apprenticeship job. You have to be between 18 and 45 and they encourage women to sign up.

A 90% are going to be women, they already told us that.

Q They said 90% are going to be women?

A Yeah. Brian told me that in one of our classes we went to on Saturday.

Q Computer classes?

A Yeah that there's going to be women. That ain't right. Because there's no woman who has more than ten years in the place and they are giving her an apprenticeship job over me with 20. It ain't right. But I said it says per contract and I'm the one that ratified the contract way back when we had our last strike.

Q Which class are you taking now?

A No, no, no I'm talking about the classes we had to take like the right to know.

Q Oh the health class.

A Yeah.

Q You're not taking the computer class on Saturday?

A No.

Q They started computer classes for people to sign up to get familiar with the computers. I know I didn't have enough seniority to sign up for one, fifteen years.

A Is that right?

Q Yeah. So many people are just interested in how the machines run. Do you think women get much hassle from the foreman? Take a step back, I know that being on the sealer line there were about four or five women on the line there,

but I heard some stories in chasis of some harassment by the foreman and some of the guys.

A When I first hired in I think like our general foreman he got into trouble for hassling the wmen you know.

Q Who was that?

A Smitty.

Q Smitty the same guy we still got.

A Yeah. He says date my brother and we'll fire you. Honest To God and he'd give her a hard time. So she went to the plant manager the next day and almost got him fired.

Q I remember that. Is it his brother-in-law?

A Brother. His brother got fired out of there.

Q What did they end up firing him for?

A He was on medical and he was over doing work for the union when he couldn't do no lifting. He was a skilled tradesman. They took pictures of him using the back hoe and shoveling with the shovel and the labor representative over there took pictures of him and fired him.

Q I remember that.

A Dave used to be my foreman as a matter of fact.

Q He used to be my foreman too.

A He was an all right guy.

Q I think so. He just got two more years and he just went down to Louisville. He's pretty excited about getting out.

A He's head labor representative.

Q He's head labor representative? I didn't know that I just thought he was getting closer to home.

A No. Head labor representative. More retirement money.

Q He's been there what 28 years I think. Okay let's move out here on weekends. Working those eleven days, before 1973 they could work as much as they wanted.

A Right.

Q So how many hours were you working?

A Sometimes 11-11½ and eight hours on Saturday. Every week, week in and week out. Absenteeism was ridiculous. It was just terrible and they were firing guys for this. I was one of them. I never got fired for absenteeism, because I was getting covered. I took my time off. It was too much. I was single also and it was too much on anybody. It has always been an overtime plant and it still is as you know.

Q You got a short ride so it's not as bad as some folks.

A No I lived in Detroit then.

Q So what time did your day start?

A I think we started about six o'clock then. We got off at four or five o'clock in the morning or about 5:30 in the morning. Long time. Some guys would go out for lunch and not come back at all.

Q So a lot of the absenteeisms were just using the schedule?

A Right, a lot of guys were just rebelling against this. I was one of them too. Like hell I wasn't made to work like this. I mean the checks were fantastic. We were bringing home then \$300 a week. That was 20 years ago and man that was a lot of money. That was big money. We got paid on Thursday night. We was all single. The plant was 90% single people. We'd make bets, like four, five or six of us guys would get together on Thursday evening before the

line started, on who had the most money in their pocket and the one who had the less had to buy. Sometimes I had three checks I hadn't cashed yet, three checks, four payroll checks I didn't cash yet. That's what kind of money that was rolling in. Now I run home and put the money in the bank to cover the check I wrote last week.

Q You're making good money still.

A But the dollar isn't what it is now. It definitely isn't what it used to be twenty years ago, obviously. I have more now than I did of course. All I had then was a muscle car, a big 396 four speed. I lost my driver's license for racing.

Q Do you use the A plan now for cars?

A Yeah, I bought the bird and Mustang.

Q Did you pay \$20,000 for the Thunderbird?

A No, \$15,000 and I got it for \$12,000 through the A plan.

Q I remember working the night shift I would start at 4:30 and get off at 3:48 or something like that and then we'd go out for breakfast for a couple hours.

A We'd always say one guy on break, last breaks, before two o'clock, he'd get a couple cases of beer and we'd all sit in the parking lot of the union hall and sit and drink beer until the wee hours of the morning. That's all you did back then. You ate, slept and worked. That was it. That's all you did.

Q What are you doing now?

A Same. It's not quite as bad you know.

Q How has it changed?

A Well the work load hasn't changed any. I don't think so.

They say it has, but I don't think so. I come home and we usually have dinner about seven. Sometimes we eat at the bar. She works also and so I'll meet her at the bar and we'll have a couple of drinks and come home and have dinner. I always eat about seven o'clock. So at eight, nine, ten off to bed and get up at 4:30 and do it all over again.

Q What are you doing today after the interview?

A I'll be working on my eaves there. I have to take them down and recaulk them. You know where you can't get back there and I got to redo that. We put in new shrubs and things and we've been working around here. Go get some gas for the lawn mower. Typical weekend. Tomorrow I'll go golfing. I'm on two golf leagues, Thursday league and a Sunday league which I enjoy that. I got trophies for golfing.

Q Do you play with Ray and the folks?

A Yeah. So I love the game of golf. Sunday league I love because it is a traveling league. We got to a different course every week. I really like it.

Q Guys from the plant?

A Yeah. Sunday league is Moose members, but they are all guys from the plant. 90% are guys from the plant are Moose members because right across the street that's where they got most of their members from these two plants. We are not church goers. I was raised as a church goer. My mother was very religious. My father isn't. They stayed together fifty years though. I call that compatibility, but I was raised to go to church and prayer meetings and all that you know. I kind of resented it because I was made to go. I believe in God and all that of course. Now that I don't

have to do it no more I don't do it. When I go home now to West Virginia I still go to church with my mother. I'm still a boy you know. I do it out of respect because I love her. She is a great lady.

Q They never wanted to move up north?

A No. I can't even get them to come up here on vacation. They have been here once the twenty years I have been here, my mom and dad.

Q Are these your two boys?

A No the shortest one that is my boy and that is his buddy who stayed all night. I got a daughter here somewhere, she's upstairs sleeping. She don't seem no 12. I don't know if you met her. I have two by another marriage, a boy and a girl.

Q Do they like to go down south?

A Oh yeah, they love it down there. He's learning to drive. He's sixteen and the girl is 14. I have one 23 and a daughter 20 by my first marriage.

Q What are they all doing?

A He's in the marines and my daughter is still in North Carolina with her mother. She lives with her grandma. She can't get a long with her mother. It is like two blocks away.

Q You aren't a grandparent yet?

A Pretty soon. My daughter called me and said he got married to a little Spanish girl right across the border there in Arizona. They got married and are going to have a kid. I said that is great.

Q Are you going to go out there and see your grand kid?

A I'd like to yeah.

Q Your youngest one is how old?

A Fourteen. A daughter.

Q What do you think you will be doing when she gets out of high school? What do you think she'll be doing when she gets out of high school?

A I have no idea. She doesn't show any aptitude in school here. We have to stay on her constantly about her grades. Right now she is grounded all damn spring. I had to ground her to her room this last report and now she is coming around. She brought home an A yesterday and I said ho ho. See I'm getting the weekly report now. They give you a weekly report if you ask for it. I told her if you want to go to summer school that'll be just fine, but you'll be grounded the whole summer. So she kind of turned around now. The boy does good and he is in high school. He goes to Wayne High. He's not an A student or anything. He's no genius, but heh he is passing and that's all I care. The other two graduated without my guidance, thank goodness. They was very young when I got divorced, but their mother she did a good job with the first two. They both graduated in the spring. I told these two they are going to graduate if they have to go until they are 25.

Q Do you think they will be able to find decent jobs?

A I doubt it.

Q The way things are going?

A Like I tried to tell him I said look at me I never finished high school which it would have mattered probably anyway, but look at me I'm a damn factory rat and I'll always be a factory rat. I only got ten more to go so you know, but I don't know if I would have found anything better with a

high school diploma. Maybe I could have, but I doubt it. I'm happy that I took this job. It's done good for me. It got me this, it got me a car. It is everybody's dream, right? A house and a car, and money in the bank which I don't have.

Q You mean you haven't saved your \$20,000 in IRA's?

A No not yet. We are starting on that now. They say you have to start ten years before you retire so we are starting our IRA's next year.

Q Are you thinking about getting out?

A Oh yeah.

Q You see over the mountain top now.

A I keep seeing some of these guys you know they retire and have no money and I say how could a man have worked 30 years and not have any money in the bank, but I really understand raising kids. See these two I didn't have them. I just got them a year ago. My wife just gave them up and said I don't want them anymore so I took custody of the kids. I'm glad I did. I love them. They are good kids. That has made a big change in her and my life you know with kids you know. It's more strain on her and me too.

Q It is a big shock.

A It was. A whole new life here for us.

Q It takes a while for you to adjust. Me and my wife just had...

A But we got it where it is home you know.

Q Now you have to figure out what to do on the weekends when you have kids around.

A Yeah right. It used to be we would go camping for the weekend. Let's go to Ohio, we'd just take off and go to Ohio.

Q I have an eighteen month old son so I know what you are

talking about. One question I have been asking folks is what do you think the plant will look like fifteen years from now, five years after you are out?

A Automation.

Q Yeah, paint a picture for me.

A It's all going to be big arms. Big arms going around and guys standing there and pushing buttons. We are a dying breed. It is obvious. Production workers are a dying art. My sister is from West Virginia and still lives there and she says you're a professional and I say what do you mean and she says well Jack Nichol couldn't go out there and make a truck couldn't he. I said well maybe. She said you're being paid to do a job aren't you? Well maybe I am a professional.

Q Well they couldn't get people to work in the auto plant in the 60's.

A When I was a kid I remember there was this guy I looked up to he was a booze hound and played the guitar and he was my big hero right? He was running with the women. I remember he got a bus ticket from Ford Motor Company, this is probably about in the early 50's, he got this bus ticket to come to Michigan. Ford Motor Company went to the south, Kentucky, West Virginia and Tennessee and hired all these guys. They had a big thing about it. That's who brought all the company people up here is Ford Motor Company. So he got that bus ticket and he cashed it in and got drunk on it. I couldn't believe it. Here that guy could be retired now. This guy is dead. He drank himself to death.

Q Does that happen a lot more in the plant, drinking and stuff?

A No, I think drinking is a lot less. I drink in the plant, but not everyday. Somebody will get those little half pints, three guys you know and you might get a drink out of it and coke and it is gone. It is something to joke around with you know. Hell you can't have none. You try to hide it on you and go and look for it. I have a black guy Washington and he is my buddy. I hide the bottle from him. He knows all my hiding spots. Look what I got Bubba. He does the same thing to me and I go and find his bottle. As far as drinking, no, there isn't as much. I remember when I used to go into work drunk and leave work drunk. Even the foremen would go into work and leave work drunk, but no more especially one shift.

Q How about drugs, is that more of a problem than before?
The drugs have never been that high in our plant. There is much more drinking. It is a suburban factory much more than a city factory.

A We had three pushers and two of them were fired. The other one was too slick.

Q The one from my line? He was selling grass.

A Yeah. Mike and Joe got fired, one from the body shop and one from chasis. Union got them back. They tried to get the third one, but he is too slick.

Q Say I was to get caught selling drugs, would the union automatically take up their cause or is it a matter whether these guys are in the click? Are there any violations where the union won't touch? Or is it a matter of us against them?

A It is us against them period. Sure they'll go to bat for you. They have to that's their thing.

Q From my point, I think that is one of the saddest things... mostly what happens is people get fired for stealing, drugs and drinking. They don't get fired for drinking anymore they immediately go to an AA program because it is no longer considered an offense. It is considered a problem, but not for drugs or stealing. That's not a problem, that's an illegal act, but what has always amazed me is I bet more folks have been fired for those things and what is happening is the union gets them back by trading grievances that might have been for legitimate kinds of violations at work is put against the company.

A Like a health and safety grievance. They'll say we'll forget about this \$10,000 item we got to do with you if you bring this guy back. It is plea bargaining just like in court. Give a little, get a little they say. Sometimes it is ridiculous what you have to give. I have a friend next door and he is an alcoholic and this guy will do a fifth a day. He got caught drunk driving four times, twice within two months. The never forced it. He has very good attorney's as a matter of fact, she is a judge in Wayne now, Archibauld, and she got him a halfway house. He went to Brighton and was there for two months. No they took him to St. somebody down here in Detroit and you can't get visitors. He was there two months in the halfway house doing great, eight months no boozing and now he said the hell with it and started drinking again and got caught again drunk driving a few times. He's got twenty-two years at Ford's and he is going to chuck it all away.

Q They just caught my foreman right?

A Bernie?

Q Bernie didn't get fired because it was outside, but he just crashed up his car and he went down to court and he said they didn't give me a breath analyzer and they didn't tell me to walk a straight line. Low and behold he was wiped out and ended up in the hospital. So he didn't even know he went to court, how they were going to catch him.

A It was a Lincoln Towncar. Black guy, foreman, yeah. He totaled it out.

Q When Ford Motor Company was riding around the south giving people bus tickets...

A Well they sent representatives down there and get a little bulletin in the paper or something, if you want a good paying job with company benefits and things like that.

Q This was what in the 50's?

A Yeah. In the middle 50's.

Q Coal mines were closing up.

A No coal mines were really booming. They were doing good in the 50's. They used to call us the billion dollar coal state because it was the biggest coal mine state in the world. Now Kentucky has taken number one, but there was plenty of work then. Anybody could get work back then. They couldn't get anybody to work up here. So they said let's go to the south and get the hillbillies, these country boys. That is why they call Ypsilanti Ypsitucky because there are so many Kentuckians living in this plant. They all migrated over the years.

Q And they couldn't get the workers up here?

A Nobody wanted to work.

Q Were the conditions that crummy?

A I don't know. I have no idea.

Q The industry was booming so much in the early 50's before the recession of '58. The industry was booming right after the war still, right after Korea.

A All the guys that came up made it. Their families came up. They would bring a nephew up or a brother or whatever and the next thing you know half of Michigan is hillbillies.

Q Not that many folks from Michigan?

A Country boys, yeah.

Q When you were coming up were you born and raised right in Charleston?

A No, no.

Q I've been to Beckley.

A I'm from the central part of West Virginia, it is called Western Springs. You never heard of it. It is a little bitty coal mining town. There are probably 1000-2000 people in our little home town, with a little high school and filling station, whatever.

Q How far is it from Beckley?

A I'm about eight miles from Beckley. They were one of our biggest rivals in high school. That is where Cisco is from.

Q He's from Beckley, I didn't know that. Beckley is the county. What do most folks do in Western Springs?

A Watch the A&P truck unload. They're mostly retirees Rick. Old people and old farmers. When a kid gets 18 years old he's gone. There is nothing to do unless he wants to work in the coal mine and nobody wants to. That coal mining stuff is out. These younger generations don't want to work.

Q It is automated too, right?

A There is a lot of automation plus most of them join the service. That's what I did.

Q You joined the service?

A I hated the farm. Now I'd love to go back you know. I never really had a boyhood because I worked all my life. I had to work in the hay fields all summer long. I hated it. I hated it. My dad worked me like a dog. My aunt still talks about it to my sisters he used to work you like a dog. I love him. Then I didn't. I didn't like my dad because of the way he worked me and I was a kid. He really worked me hard. I might have weighed 90-95 lbs. and he would put a 100 lb. sack of feed on my shoulder and make me carry it from here to across the street up to the feed house. I didn't dare fall down with it because it would fall down on top of me.

Q Could your son carry it?

A Yeah oh he could sure. He is into weight lifting. Hell he probably weighs more than I did. I only weighed 106 lbs. when I joined the Navy.

Q What year?

A 1956. I was suppose to weigh 112 lbs. for my height and one of the chief petty officers kicked me in the ass and said I'd gain it in boot camp, but I didn't gain an ounce in boot camp.

Q You got it now.

A Yeah boy you tell me. I'm 165 lbs. now. I quit smoking and I gained 20 lbs. right away. I quit fourteen months ago. I smoked for thirty years. I still want one even

after a year. Not every day, but I'll get done eating or have a beer and boy. Sometimes I still do this I'll look in my pocket, but it will pass.

Q When you were in the service were you stationed overseas?

A I was aboard a ship. I was the ship mascot, they'd call me.

Q You weighed 100 lbs. and the nop was bigger than you.

A No kidding and that's what I did too. I swabbed and that's what everybody does. They call you a swab jockey. You swab the decks. It was fun and I enjoyed the experience. Then I was in the signal corp. You know you get a good job out here in the states you know with being a signal man.

Q What kind of ship were you on?

A Destroyer. A couple of guys tried to get me into electronics and I said oh that's stupid. I don't need that stuff.

Q Do you think it was a mistake?

A Sure I think so. Because I know for a fact when I got out of the Navy I moved to Florida and I could have got a job on Cape Canaveral in electronics, but I was forced to get a job on the cape as a laborer, construction worker. My dad was a foreman there so he got me as a common laborer. It was good money. It paid something like \$4-5 dollars an hour which 20 years ago it was more than they was making here in the auto plants.

Q When you were on the destroyer did you go around the different ports?

A Oh yeah. We went all over the world. That's all you did. You were out to sea more than you were in port. I really enjoyed that. I was in France and Italy. Paris, France and Sicily...all the big ports. Fantastic. Paris was

really beautiful, I liked that. It is something you never forget. Jamaica was nothing, it was filthy. We all lost our dress whites there. You got to keep your nice whites you know. So we washed our whites, we gave them to these black people to wash our dress whites and press them and we don't see them no more.

Q They were selling them back to the Navy?

A Sure they were selling them back to the natives. They probably got 10,000 sailors like that. We put the word out to the other ships don't get your whites cleaned in Kingston. Things like that is a growing up experience.

Q Do you think your son will go into the Navy now? Do you want him to?

A I don't care. Yeah I want him to go in the service. That's a great experience and it is something you never forget. He thought more of the marines, he's a macho man. He is into karate and weight lifting. I hope he does. I like the service.

Q You were in peace time?

A Right.

Q Do you have any concerns with him going in during war time?

A Well I would yeah. Definitely would, but I'm not going to stop him. There is no way you are going to stop him once he gets old enough he'll do what he wants to do. Sure I'll be very concerned.

Q How would you feel about him going into a career in the plant? Imagine if they would be hiring.

A No I don't want him in the damn plants. I don't want him to have nothing to do with it, the auto industry, nothing

at all. It is too uncertain. Especially your salaried, you could lose your job tomorrow. I have a better chance keeping my job more than a salaried guy does. If they close that plant down the damn line will go next door. Where a lot of salaried guys he is out on the street and in the unemployment line so I think it is very uncertain for salaried people. I wouldn't even want to have nothing to do with it.

Q And they surely aren't hiring young people on to the line.

A Right. Oh he'd never get a job off the street, no way.

Q What do you think has caused the crisis, the uncertainty in the auto industry?

A I just think the politicians are letting these Japanese imports in here and they are getting their kickbacks and we're getting shit. That's all it is.

Q I heard on the news last night about a GM Toyota plant in California is now a Nova plant.

A See they are getting smart they're bringing their auto plants over here, but they are still selling a foreign made product. It turns me right off. Of course a guy has to work. A guy has to hire in there right? He has got a family and kids and he's got to work. To me it is just a damn rip off. Your politicians are obviously doing it. They are getting richer and we are busting our butts trying to make the buck.

Q What would you do to stop it?

A Cut down on imports. It was going great when the restrictions were on the imports, right? The economy picked right up. So now they have taken off the restraint and we'll see them

in here again. If I saw someone with a broken down foreign car and it was raining snowballs I wouldn't stop to help them. Not here in the Detroit area, no way in hell. I saw the other day we was at a picnic at her mother's house, she has a beautiful place out here, and her uncle who is her aunt's husband he works here in the United States and he was driving a damn Toyota. He is making American bucks and buys a foreign product and I resented that.

Q I know guys in the plant go around wearing T-shirts buy American, buy what you make and yet I go around the plant and what I am doing for the book is I cut out the sections of the boxes that say assembled in Mexico, China, made in the Phillipines and I asked the guys I said you know I think there is no doubt that some jobs have been lost because of foreign cars coming in. It is also plenty of jobs would be lost if we didn't sell to other countries. What hit me I asked Mike, John over on my line this make a wish program and I said to him why are we spending so much time on buy American, telling us to buy American when we aren't telling the company to buy American. They are buying and producing, if you buy a Toyota you are buying half of General Motors. We'd like the ones at the top to make some bucks. It is sort of funny you know. We are sort of caught. We are almost powerless.

A I got a friend on line one and he went out last week and he bought a General Motors product, but he spent \$18,000 for a truck and I said I hope it blows up on you Dick. I hope it blows up. I couldn't believe that. Here they guy is biting the hand that feeds him actually. He paid \$18,000 at General

Motors when he could the same pick up for a lot cheaper. This truck is loaded apparently and he has got everything for camping and stuff like that.

Q Why didn't he buy a Ford?

A Don't like it.

Q There's not a big difference is there?

A I don't know.

Q Especially with the A plan.

A A couple years ago he worked at Ford's and he didn't have a Ford product and he couldn't park on their lots.

Q I had my VW broken.

A I remember people doing that in the 50's. If you didn't own a Ford product...like some guy was telling me somewhere in Livonia he had to park across the street because he had a Chrysler product. Because if he did he'd go out and find his tires flat and windows busted out.

Q There aren't too many foreign cars out in the parking lot now.

A No.

Q Everybody seems to be riding trucks. I can't believe how many trucks are bought from guys in the plant.

A I heard back here it was a big thing when old Joe in trim hole, Bill Bond's from channel 7 news in about 1980, when we had the big recession, so he was talking about well he says people are talking about foreign orders are killing Detroit you know and he says you're at the Michigan Truck Plant and they were down to one shift and he was backed up against Joe's Toyota pick up. We give Joe hell boy. Here this guy is a repairman and he is driving a Toyota and we

are down to one shift. About a week later he traded the Toyota. He got a Ford pick up.

Q It is a little amazing to me that we have one shift working ten hours, which is about 1,000-1,100 people working now, and the other shift is totally laid off. It has been like that for three or four years now?

A Six years.

Q Six years and I tried to raise the issue like folks shouldn't be working overtime as long as folks are laid off and it is like what will daddy use.

A Well it has been the union's pet peeve since 1980. See the company has the power to do this and the company is making money. The truck plant is making gobs of money now because we're putting out a world class unit and no repairs and they are not paying that second shift.

Q What is the world class unit? What does that actually mean? I never knew what that meant.

A World class unit is under 250 concerns, you know they have people coming in here with your audit, well they say maybe six people come here from division and each one has a certain pet peeve that he'll pick on. They take a truck apart. One guys on rattles and one guy is on squeaks and another guy is on this and another guy is on water tests. So it is 250 concerns and 250 different items which wouldn't hurt the truck running. You would never even know it if a truck blew up you'd never know something was wrong with it. It has nothing to do with the truck running, but they claim they check it so if you get under 250 concerns that's world class.

That's an A-1 truck.

Q Answer me how long do we get under 250 the first week of the month when we have the audit and now they have these teletypes every day they have these teletypes on the machine. They have VCR's all around the plant now and they have Ford Motor Company news. How come we always end up with 500 concerns, 600 concerns except for that week?

A Well now I think we have a problem because now they just went up on this Bronco production so I got a job I can't even do. Heh what are you going to do?

Q They didn't ask the person to do it?

A They did but he'll tell you enough. As I said a while ago my committee man took something off of his buddies, but he didn't take nothing off...well I can't say nothing because I'm a relief man, but I don't have a job. I just relieve the guys job. I tell him once would you look at the job please and he looked at it and said I don't see any problem with it. I said your two buddies down there didn't show you they had any problem with it and they got work taken off of their job. I said is it because I'm not a 180 bowler or what? He got very angry with me you know. I always voted for you and I know you don't think I did, but I won't next election.

Q Maybe you ought to take up bowling instead of golfing?

A No kidding.

Q Ray wouldn't mind because he is into golfing.

A There you go and I'd be in the click then. It is just the idea these jobs are overloaded and you know that.

Q Is that the problem behind the whole quality issue?

A Sure. It is an overloaded job. One man is asked to do more than his share, right.

Q The jobs in trim, while people work fast, are so much cleaner and so much lighter and better than the jobs in the sealer lines.

A Sure.

Q And they don't run as fast in the trim as they do in sealer.

A Right. Like I said I get mad and I want the foreman to go down there and start screaming at me, heh come and say something to me, and I'm going to tell you what is wrong with this damn job but for the last month nobody has said a word to me. I've been there long enough that I know this foreman. I've known him for twenty years and he knows me for twenty years. He knows I'm going to tell him to go to hell anyway. So him and I feud quite often anyway so it is no big thing, but it still makes you angry. They know the jobs are overloaded. They know that, but the foreman has got a job to do, push you or he'll lose his job.

Q If you were going to change things to get the best quality what would you do?

A Obviously slow the line down in order for people to do their jobs.

Q So you think you have to slow down the lines. We are running what now 45-46 jobs?

A We was running 45, we're running probably...

Q 48.

A Yeah. Put it back to 45 so a guy could at least do his job. They say add more people, but that is no good because there is no room for them. You know a guy has got to have a certain

area to work in so there is no room for more people. Right now it is crowded the way it is. They are bumping elbows. Slow down on production.

Q What I am trying to do is I'm trying to keep in a bunch of different areas so we can look at what different folks have said and get a full picture of folks in the plant. When you were coming up in Western Springs what did you think you would be doing when you were 25?

A I had no idea. I thought I might make a career in the Navy, but after four years let me out of here.

Q What do you think you would do now after when you retire? Ten years from now what are you going to be doing?

A I'll be in Florida. My wife and I will be in Florida. Like I said we have already made plans so I know now what I'm going to do and what I want to do.

Q Will you think about the cars?

A No I'm going to continue golfing until I'm 90 because I love the game that much. That will be my thing. I'll just make her a golf widow.

Q What has been the hardest thing about being a father?

A Discipline, I hate to shout at them. I feel bad because I love them and I feel bad later on.

Q Have you felt the hours that you had to put in have cut you off from your kids more than you...and has it made raising them tougher?

A I think so. Yeah. Also sometimes when I have a bad day I'll come home and take it out on them which is wrong. I'll take it out on her sometimes too. She does the same thing. If she has a bad day she'll take it out on me. I'll take

it out on the kids and as soon as I do it I'll say dumbass why did you do that and then I go and apologize. Heh I love you and I'm sorry. I will do that, I will tell them I am sorry because I love them you know. I want them to know that I love them. My dad never did. He never said I love you. He doesn't today, but I know he does. I don't want my kids to think he must hate me, he never tells me he loves me.

Q This is your third marriage?

A Yes.

Q What do you think you have learned from your first two? to make this one so that Brenda is only a golf widow and not an ex-golf widow?

A Absolutely nothing.

Q How are you going to make this one work? It takes two to tangle. I don't care how difficult the first two situations are or what have you, it takes two to tangle so you had to learn something from the first two.

A One thing is all three of them have been different obviously. This one here showed me, to be personal, we lived together for two years before we got married so we do know one another and she is totally different from the other two. I bowl in the winter time. I'm on a bowling league. This year I'm getting her in the bowling league on my team. So we are going to take up bowling together which is good. She'll learn to bowl. We like to do things together. I get season tickets for every year for MIS up here. I love the car races and you can tell. That's my hero there anyway and we go to the races, just the two of us and things like that.

She is a good lady. She has been good to me. She is an excellent housekeeper, better than the other two. I like that because I'm picky about cleaning. I think she'll work out.

Q Because you are both working full-time jobs do you share much in keeping the house together?

A No she takes care of that. I do the outside and she takes care of the inside. We'll stop and have a few drinks together. Like on Friday we'll go out and blow, okay I'll say \$20 a night that's it and then we spend \$30 but what the hell. We'll take a six pack and be still driving. We'll drive through the back roads down through Monroe and get off and come back out.

WIFE: I think it is just that we do a lot of things together where a lot of his friends you always see them and you never see their wives. They stay home and the guys go out and they do the things that with their buddies on weekends where he does his, he goes off on his golf outings, but me and him do a lot together.

A I didn't do that with my other two wives. Maybe I have learned something.

Q It sounds like you learned something good.

A I have a better sex life with this one than I did with the other two I'd say.

Q Gerry let me ask you this, you mentioned the politicians and their whole policies with the imports and so on, do you find more sympathy with the democrats or republicans or are you just kind of cynical about politics in general?

A Politics in general, yeah. I'm a registered democrat, but I have no sympathies with the son of a guns. I know, well you know they are getting kickbacks for these imports. Like Rick said you know the trade deficit is a hell of a lot higher here than it is over there because we are not sending as much exports as they are putting imports into here obviously, but we have to do it to keep on trading with the foreign countries. I understand that too, but do we have to let them put that many in here? Because we had restrictions and then Reagan took it off.

Q Did you vote for Reagan?

A No.

Q A lot of guys in the plant voted for Reagan wouldn't you say?

A I always vote democrat. West Virginia is a democrat state, but they voted Reagan in this year and I was very surprised. West Virginia has always been a democrat state.

Q They got Rockefeller as governor. Is he still governor?

A I don't think so, he went to the senate.

Q Oh did he?

A Yeah. He was a good governor.

Q Rockefeller? He was putting that big road in from Charleston to uh...

A Yeah, he did a lot for that state.

Q Was he a democrat or a republican?

A He was a democrat. Well that's how he got in see? That is a very strong democratic state. Well most of your south is democratic.

Q I don't know if you think about this much, but if you look

down the road in ten years besides you retiring, what do you think one of the biggest issues will be facing the country?

A Jobs, because of automation man. It is just taking over everywhere. Your stamping plants is all automation now. Your assembly plants, sure they are going to be all automation. It is going to be jobs. There aren't going to be any jobs.

Q What about our foreign policy?

A I was never into politics, vote for who you like and that's it you know once every four years.