

ABSON "MAC" McDANIEL

YOU'VE BEEN LIVING HERE HOW LONG? 27 years. AND HOW COME YOU MOVED FROM FLINT? Well, that's a long story. WE'VE GOT SOME TIME. Probably it's a long story, a lot of it effects on me and I lost my job see is one reason. WHAT KIND OF JOB DID YOU HAVE UP THERE? Worked Buick Motor Division. So I got a little problem there at the plant. WHAT KIND OF PROBLEMS? Me and the supervisors got into it. Course I didn't stick around for it because I lost mine I was out worked there for a year and where I can understand both of them lost their jobs. But I found out later he got called back to a different plant, same people--General Motors. BUT YOU HAD TO LEAVE TOWN TO FIND A JOB That's right. [missing tape]

Now I ___ talking it'd be really ___ tell you from Flint. Really that's where I grew up at. See. And this is where my young life started. In fact, I went to Flint when I was around 17 years old. WHERE DO YOU COME FROM? West Memphis, Arkansas. So from there I was married in W. Memphis Arkansas to my first wife. And to tell you the truth the how these things really happen, due to my marriage... see me and my marriage started to get along bad then I couldn't work right. Lot see what I'm telling you now it starts from home when you, a lot of times you don't know peoples don't know how peoples feel when they leave home and go to work see. This is the main problem. I know how I lost my job you know from breaking it down from the facts. Because... BUT FOLKS'LL SAY IT'S THE OTHER WAY, TOO. That's right, a

lot of times people'll say well he didn't do it but facts really started from home. It didn't really start from me just me and you talking. Some mornings you get up maybe you're bitter from home and you go in there and probably take it out on somebody else and yell and then first/last somethings's going to explode, you know. So that's the way that really happened. You know since I got married again I hate to even, I don't even like to talk about it. HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN MARRIED TO YOUR PRESENT WIFE? Oh just 14 years. So but we've been knowing one another all our lives. OH, SHE'S ALSO FROM ARKANSAS? Oh yeah. YOU WERE BORN IN WHAT YEAR? 10th, 18th, 22, 1922. AND WHAT KIND OF TOWN WAS MEMPHIS, WHAT WAS IT LIKE? Well, I remember West Memphis good. Just a little town all mud streets no pavement. Only pavement you had there in that little town was Broadway. And of course stand there my little school, I worked the service station_____ job you could get around in there. Service station or grocery store, something like that. And fact getting about \$11 a week and that was a lot of money. YOUR RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN BLACK & WHITES? Bad. Bad. You live one side of town and the white live on the other. They clould come to your side of town and raise hell but you couldn't go to their side and raise hell. You know, a little place. Everybody know everybody. DO YOU HAVE MUCH FAMILY DOWN THERE NOW? Now I have two cousins. ARE THEY STILL THERE? Yeah. Oh everything's changed. Youngsters come up there now they wouldn't know it. You know. WHAT DO

YOU MEAN EVERYTHING'S CHANGED? Well, all mixed up now. The races mixed. They got better jobs. There was a time, you know, black people didn't get no jobs. The only job you could get then was cutting somebody's yard or the women work in the kitchen, or wash and iron or scrub the floors-- something like that. And the men, they went out in the field. The farmers, I always said they had it made better, I don't know if better but it seemed to me because I never did do any farming see but I used to see them come to town they'd come to town weekends something like that. Then they chas3d the ___ well I said well they had better clothes than we did because they'd have them some new khakis on and sometimes we couldn't get some for months. So that's the way that thing went. The only time I could get some clothes my parents didn't have it. Of course my father died when I was five years old so I came down put that in. My mother-in-law's the one who took care of me. HOW MANY PEOPLE? Three of us. AND ARE THEY UP NORTH, ARE THEY STILL ALIVE? Yeah, my brother died. But I got a younger sister. There were still three of us. I'm the oldest brother cause my brother died in '34. AND YOU MOVED UP NORTH? Yeah, well funny thing, my mother passed and my sister got married her husband and her kids they went north oh in fact they went in May of '42. DURING THE WAR? Uh huh, and I left July '42. My sister wanted me there but see I'd got married, young, got married, so I stayed with my sister about a month and then I got this, well I got this job at Buick Motor Division

then.

Q During the war that's when the auto industry opened up?

A Right for blacks, but during the war you know, well when I was working they were making airplanes heads and had to clean the plant for-----but now I sent to get my wife, oh I think I stayed there about a month and I sent and got her from her mother. She was living with her mother at the time. So we got a little apartment. I worked right along and finally we got a chance to buy a place. When VJ day come the plant closed down and all blacks went to the foundry. All those who didn't get laid off had to go to the foundry. They didn't have a job in Flint for the black people. You could count them there was probably two or three scattered around. They were at Buick Motor Division. You could just imagine where all the blacks were.

Q Did you have to get a job in the foundry then?

A Oh yeah I had to work in the foundry. I didn't have a job. I put fourteen years in the foundry. You couldn't see in the morning time when you'd go in.

Q Why is that?

A There is so much dust, dust, dust, dust and smoke. You see now I was a furnace operator. You let the metal out the front and you had to plug it with a steel stick with mud/clay on it. I don't know if you ever watched it.

Q I have seen it in movies.

A I've done that. If you didn't open that whole up right that steel would come over that trough and burn you. You just had to be on your toes.

Q So you had to be pretty skilled and know what you were doing?

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A You had to know what you were doing or don't you go up there.

Q You did that for fourteen years?

A Fourteen years. I had taken sick and my health went bad. I had to go to the TB sanitarium.

Q You had TB?

A I stayed in there for thirteen months. I was in and out. I had a clouded lung. So with good doctors they brought me through and no operations. Just rest. Bed rest. Then me and my family got along bad after that. Naturally, I didn't go back to the foundry.

Q This was already in the mid '50's or '60's?

A This was in 1955. Blacks began to move out anyway. Well in 1946 we had this big strike over there. We used to have just union...we used to pay 50¢ a month and you go pay it to the window you know.

Q To the union representative?

A Right. We had a lot of scab working in there and they didn't belong to the union. They was getting the better job in there than we were getting, you see. This is why we closed down. So they had to be all union in order to work. So this is how we got changed and moved the people around. When I say the people, the majority was the black. They got chased and moved around and get different jobs in different plants. From then on they got to move up in different places.

Q So the union really meant something at that point?

A The union meant a lot. I didn't talk to Ruether, the president, myself, but he was at the IMA and he said we would keep it down until we got some of the things. We didn't get much of a raise that first strike. We was out for quite a while. I

don't know, for one hundred and some days. We finally got back. I think we gained about 14-15¢.

Q That wasn't the issue, the issue was...

A To get the majority moving around.

Q To have some dignity and some power over the....

A Right and to get a union shop or get a place where we could have people not working in there and getting better jobs and not paying a quarter for the union dues. This is really how the union began. They deducted money out of the checks. Your union dues were taken out. Then insurance and different stuff was taken out and they used to take that out a long time. Then we were paying more for insurance. It come a long ways. But coming back to the wife part...when I come out of the hospital well, my wife wasn't nice to me. Heh what's going wrong there? I got out in May, 1956 for good. I just went back as an outpatient. I had to go back out there once every two weeks or something. I went back to work. I'd say about two months later after I was out of the hospital smooth moving around. I guess at that particular moment me and my boss just didn't get a long. too good. I imagine he could have been having a hard way to go or something. You never know. I thought about that. I hated to lose my job.

Q You would have been retired now?

A Oh yeah. So far my seniority at the end was froze. So I can get some money from General Motors now. I already had my papers here. When I'm 65 I know they got it for that time, see, you wasn't get much. They pay you by your rates, you see. When I left there in 1963 and the rates wasn't up like they is now. So now they pay me for ther service I had in.

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Q So you're 64 years old now?

A I'll be 64 in October.

Q You've got fourteen years in in GM?

A No twenty-one years in GM.

Q How many did you have at Ford's?

A It would be twenty in November.

Q So that's forty-one years of working in the auto industry. We got some stories to tell. Forty-one years, half of America isn't even that old.

A I put twenty-one in General Motors. I put four in Warren, Michigan while I was staying with my aunt. In the meantime me and my wife were separated. I told you twenty-seven years here, but it was back and forth. I really thought of staying here after 1964. I told you I stayed over there for a year and I was out of a job so I spent all my little money. The wife and I weren't doing much and I thought it would be best for me to leave anyway. So I didn't press it for the job back then. I come over here and worked for four years at a machine shop in Warren. That's the only job I could get back then and I was getting \$1.75 an hour.

Q \$1.75 an hour and this was back in 1965?

A Right.

Q Then you hired in at the truck plant?

A I went out there in 1967. I found out they was giving out applications out there so I said I got to try and better my conditions better than this, you know. I couldn't go back to General Motors. I put it on my statement at Ford's that I had worked at General Motors and they had a question there...why?...and I said for a better job, you know. So

they give me a job. I needed a job because I had no benefits working at the machine shop.

Q Was it a non-union shop?

A Yes.

Q That place in Warren?

A Yes it was a small place. There were about thirty-five people.

Q You hired in 1967, do you remember what it was like?

A In the truck plant? I was in underbody.

Q My job. It wasn't much different from the foundry was it?

A It wasn't. That's what I thought. When I first went in there I thought about going to another job, but then I said no it's got to get better sooner or later. When you come out of there you couldn't breath. That stuff would cut your breath off. So I stuck in out and finally I went in the prime booth. I think I worked in underbody for about two months. So they finally said well you come out of there and we got another man who was going to work there. Every man they bring in you know, would stay there. Soemtimes I get out on Monday and the next few minutes that man was gone. I had to go back again. That's the only way I could stick it out. I finally got in prime. I liked the job a lot better and then from there to the paint.

Q Painting underbody, did you get any masks or any ventillation under there?

A When I was there they didn't have it there, but I think they got it later on. The only thing I had there was that old paper cap. Underbody would always drop on top of your head and right through that damn thing.

Q Did you have hair then?

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A I had some. I think that helped burn it out.

Q You ain't got none now.

A What the underbody really did was mess my shoulder up. I went to the doctor now and there is calcium into the shoulder. So they wanted to operate on it to put a space between and my doctor said no, there's just a 50-50 chance. If I do it I'd probably have to do it all over again so I didn't let them mess with my arm. I just got a restriction. Right now I can't do too much elevating with this right arm. I can get it up, but if I do it all day long I can't hardly get it down or I can't turn over the next morning in the bed. It is something I have to live with so I figure another year and it won't bother me. I think after this year I'm going to quit anyway.

Q So you'll be 65?

A I'll be 65 next year. I can draw some money from General Motors now, but I can get my full benefits from then at 65.

Q How much will you be getting? Do you know?

A According to my papers I'll be getting \$250 from them.

Q How much would you be getting from Ford's?

A I never figured it out. I can't tell you that.

Q How many years at Ford's?

A It'll just be twenty years.

Q Twenty years at Ford's plus your social security.

A Oh yeah.

Q Do you feel you'll be pretty secure going out at 65?

A Oh yeah. I believe so. My wife is already drawing some.

Q What was the union like when you hired in at the plant?

A At the truck plant? Well I'll tell you, to my idea, it was

better then than it is now. I'm just speaking. It looked like the committee was trying to work together and trying to pull the union up some. Some work hard in the union and some ain't. Some ain't going to do nothing. I never believed in this union. I could be wrong, but when it come to paying the man I don't think they do a good job. At the time when we were bringing the union up the company didn't pay you. We were paid by the union. When they go on vacation the company time stops and the union takes over. When they get through with vacation and they come back the company starts paying and the union stops. That's the way that was. We had a committee man and a steward. Any time a committee man was called off his job he had a job.

Q He worked on the line.

A He worked just like I did. When he get a vacation they have to call him and when they called him his time stopped from the company. If he be gone for two days off he had to take it over to the union hall. When he get through vacation and he come back to work the company starts paying him.

Q So he wasn't walking around in a nice pair of threads?

A When he left his job he was over another job. I think we had some good committee men. I'm not kidding with you. Latelyd everything has changed you know. Now the company is paying them and they walk around all day. Some of them you don't see. To tell the truth about it. Then you can't go down to labor relation because they only can say so much. Then they get their time off. You see what the difference it makes. I can't blame the committee men because he got a job. He got to try and hold a job.

Q If that's what clearly is taking place why do you think the folks on the line and the auto workers allow that to happen?

A That's our bad representatives. I don't know what kind of contract they sign. That should have never been out you know. They say who is me, well, me would be a lot if I had somebody to back it up. Maybe someday some of the people will see it because right now, like I say, I'm coming out anyway. I would like to see it for the younger people. They got to make a living and they got to have a job and they have to have somebody represent them. A lot of times people just push over you and you know it is wrong. You know the committee man is going along with them. Like I said I'm not having any problems myself, but I know a lot of people that are having problems.

Q What kind of problems do you see that folks are having in the plant now?

A Like a lot of times the foreman will tell this man I can do what I want to do and I can put you in such, such place. It used to be if you classified for a job that's the job you do. I see them now they take one man from one classification and throw him anywhere. He got to go to work there. They'll send him home if he don't do nothing about it.

Q And that didn't happen when you were working at GM or in the early days?

A No. Ain't anybody going to be pushing nothing up and down that line. The foreman not going to be around you working nowhere, that didn't happen. It would be knocking some old man out of work. If that job has got to be done we always

felt like, heh, let's put a man there. Have a man there for that job and then what you call that to be something like independence man. You could work at a swing man, you know. They had that for that part. Well we could use you, he know that in the first place. He'd go over there for a while, but he didn't have no steady job. Now they grab anybody. We wasn't making no trucks, but we was building motors and transmissions and they had the cleaning room there. They molded, sand and I was classified as a crane operator. Okay now this was my job. Then when I changed my classification I got a furnace operator. I don't care if they didn't have a crane man there I didn't even have to test it. I could have refused it.

Q You could have refused. So you had some power?

A I had somebody to back it up. I don't run that crane. I had my own rights here. If they know you can do that job they'll come up and get you to go do it. Nobody said nothing. That's what I'm trying to say. We got a man we know he can do it, but he's not classified for that and it's not his job. We see to him getting out of there. Even if he went over and volunteered to do it, it's not his job.

Q The union would go over and say you're not going to do it?

A That's right.

Q The union now won't even tell folks to stop working 12-13 hours.

A That's what I'm talking about.

Q I see.

A If a union man wasn't around and we see him over there going and doing that job we go tell the union man your man is going

to called off and stop him.

Q So the union kept dishonest men honest, but now it seems and we all know it that auto workers have sold their souls and their rights for some big pay checks.

A That's right. They're working all this overtime because you get a pat on the back and the union should stop that shit. This is what I'm talking about. You coming off from a different department, you go over there to do a different classification and that's not your classification and you ain't suppose to do it. And that man don't want to do that job they ain't got no more mens working that job until that other shift comes on the next morning. That's the way that thing goes.

Q Would they hire some more people to make sure,,,,?

A Yes that's right. That's what I'm talking about.

Q Has it been disappointing, sad or hurt you to see this happen?

A It hurt me when I see this starting and it has been started, but it is just going farther and farther. I talked to Al and stand there and shake my head and said that's a shame. He's not suppose to do that, but I can't go over there and tell him he can't do it. Your employee you're working with you go and say man that's not your job, don't do that. You know what you're going to get.

Q That's been happening to me for years.

A I just stand there and shake my head. Your representative come along and look at it and they keep going. They don't say anything. They're the ones wo are suppose to be your leaders. So what the heck? Sometimes it boils me and I just be smoking inside, but not saying anything. There is so much

going on. I just say there has to be a change and it got to stop someday.

Q It seems it has gone the other way now. Now we have the E.I. program. What do you think that means to the union?

A Like I said who am I? I have a lot of feelings.

Q I know that's what I want to hear your feelings on what the E.I. program...what you have seen the union go from one place to another and now the E.I. program.

A That's what I'm saying. You see the company just didn't get smarter, they got a lot of weak people in there. They get them to walk around the door and this is what they are looking for and then they are trying to influence everybody else with the E.I. thing. They just get a few of them. You know what I mean and heh man they are making a big thing out of the E.I. Now it's my idea, I could be wrong, they aren't doing nothing but hurt themselves.

Q Why do you say that?

A The company is going to get what they want out of them and then they are going to dump them. Now I might be wrong and dead and gone and it might take a little time if they keep it up we ain't going to have no union. That's my belief. I could be wrong. You ain't got no representatives now. They take you down there and they'll tell you well you got to do this so I can look over the papers and I'll get back with labor relations and talk with you later.

Q Hasn't the E.I. program made it better for the guys in the plant? They have music in their paint booths now. They got green carpeting on the lines.

A What do you think?

Q You know what I think. I think it's sugar coated cancer. It's like the fiddler playing while they're dancing. They got the guys in the line dancing.

A They got them. They got them going.

Q They got to jump it. It's like the master at the old plantation giving a little sugar to folks and getting them to get the cotton in faster.

A That's right and then they're going to end up in the hole.

Q Why don't you people see it? We know these guys twenty years already. Why don't they see it?

A I don't know. I think now peoples always not looking ahead. They are looking for the easy money to come. A little easy money for themselves. Then they are going to make it rough for you and maybe they don't realize it they're doing it.

Q You think they don't realize it?

A I don't think some of them do. I think they think they got a good thing going. Really. You know you never get nothing for nothing. You've been around and I've been around. I heard Frank tell the fellas, look you see me and I put you on this job and he's talking to me I'll tell you that. I said you know we have to go by seniority. I said damn the seniority. Do you see what I mean? Damn the seniority. Oh I wanted to know if you wanted that job. I'll get that job for you. Now that's a helluva thing. Yeah I wanted that job. I got that job, but I think you were suppose to went by what we went by seniority. We didn't go by just because you the big man I can do it. That's not right.

Q Why isn't it right?

A I think every man has the right if he got the seniority. I

think if he put his time in and put all those years in I think he got the first choice. I could be wrong. I lost my job and I know it wasn't nobody's fault but me. I put all my time in in the plant. I know I waked some mornings and we couldn't see each other because of the dust and smoke. Now if I get over for a different job and here come some old youngster come in and I'm qualified for this job and I can't get this job because the big boss say I'm going to let him have that job. My seniority that I put in don't mean nothing. You work where I tell you to work. I've seen Foley tell them you work where I tell you to work. Then there is a blow up right there. Honest to God, you don't talk to another man like that.

Q It is a big insult.

A That's it. Now he wasn't really talking to me. I probably would have lost my job or something. I treat a man as I want to be treated and sometimes you can do the wrong thing and like I said people can be feeling bad like having some difficulties that don't have to be in the shop and they can fly off. That's one of the mishaps I had. I always did try to treat people as I wanted to be treated. I don't want to dish out no more than I can take. You talk to me and I don't care what color you are. I don't pick the color, just you and me be men and we talk. You got something to tell me, tell me. If I got something to tell you, I'm going to tell you. Because I feel I'm a man like you is. Regardless of what position you hold and I feel like let's talk. We'll talk this thing over if it's wrong.

Q Do you think relations in the plant, between the folks in the line, folks working, between black and white has gotten better or stayed the same or changed?

A Black and white gets along good. Just average, you know. It has gotten better in the truck plant, than it was when I come there. They had a lot of hillbillies that were looking out for one another. They'd get better jobs. Now I think a lot of that is broke up. For instance I don't pay that any attention. That's life. If a man treats me right, like I said, I can treat him right. We can get along. A lot of people think of the color. Color is only skin deep. I really don't pay that any attention. When I was a kid I always wondered what was the difference in the white and the black. Just because the white is white and the black is black, what difference did it make. We was all trying to make a living. I used to have to get off the streets. Like when a white man and a white woman was coming down the street you had to get off and let them walk by and then you could get back on it. I always wondered about myself.

Q Did you get angry?

A I don't know if I was angry. Mostly I was hurt. I couldn't figure it out. My parents were always teaching me well that's the white man, that's the white woman and you can't do this and you can't do that. I growed up and I never could figure out why. I know what is going on now, but then I couldn't. Of course, if I had to live that life all over again I don't think I could have made it. Of course, I couldn't have hardly made it had I'd grown up there. If I stayed there somebody probably would have killed me or I would have killed some-

body. Naturally, they would have got the best of me because it's too many of them. Your own people would stand up and look at them whoop you. You didn't have no help.

Q During the 1920's the KKK was pretty powerful, in the south.

A During the 1920's I remember I was too young to remember that.

I can kind of remember from about 1933-34 on up. I was in Memphis, Tennessee then. I started school in south Memphis. As I grow up my mother was teaching me about these white people and the black people. You know what the black people had to do to get along with the white people. I tried to get me a part-time job, working at the fish market for a little while. I cleaned and delivered fish and you would make \$2-3 some-times. Sometimes \$2.50. You would make enough to buy you a shirt and then you would buy a pair of pants or go to the show once a week. That was about the best you could get out of there. But what the heck we thought we was making a good living then. Which I imagine it was at that time.

Q Working in the plant all these years and seeing all these changes, there is a lot of changes coming from a small town in the south, making a dollar or two dollars a day, doing odd jobs here and there. Now working full-time in an auto plant you must have made \$35,000-\$40,000 last year, right?

A Right.

Q What does it all mean? What's it worth?

A Well, let's put it this way, money always means something when you are making some money. You spend more money. You make money because everything is so high. It takes money to try and make a living. You are talking about lately making this money. You ain't talking about when we wasn't making no money.

This is when you got your first start and wasn't making no money, just a little bit, so well a dollar a day wouldn't get you nothing. I worked a dollar a day for ten hours. A lot of people may not believe that. At the end of the week you had five dollars. You could take a dollar of that and go to the store and buy groceries.

Q What could you buy? Groceries for a whole week, huh?

A You could buy a loaf of bread for a nickel. You could buy a nickel worth of beans, nickel worth of rice, nickel worth of sour pork. You could buy a piece of pork steak for 15-20¢. It would get you a pound of it. Me and my mother and my baby sister would get milk. We had a stack of groceries. Now you just figure that out now from and you go and try to buy a nickel of that stuff now.

Q You can't even get a penny bubble gum.

A That's right. We'd get two for a penny. You could buy a nickel worth of candy. I'll never forget my favorite was banana kisses. I believe it was. I would take a nickel worth of candy and I'd get ten pieces. I would get two pieces for a penny.

Q Did you finish them all in one day?

A Oh yeah. See you was talking about the big money and now yeah I make \$500-\$600 a week. The car loan is \$250 a month or \$300 a month and you buy your groceries and I spend maybe some weeks \$100 for groceries. Sometimes it was more than that, but it is just me and the wife now and we don't go to the grocery store every week now. I'm just saying the average family doing this. You pay high gas bill and high light bill, telephone bill. Of course, when I was jumping from one place

to another then I didn't have that to pay. Because I didn't have no telephone. I didn't have no gas bill. I didn't have no light bill. Only thing I had to buy was some kerosene to go in the lamp. That is all the light we had in there. If the wood man didn't come buy you would go across the lake and get your wood and you would want to get somebody to bring it back for you. That's the way they would cooperate down south. Little money went a long ways down south because they hadn't had nothing and they way they felt then was like they were living good. Now you couldn't live a half a day now with a whole weeks pay check. Because by time your light gets down burning that's going to eat you up. You say it comes from a long way, Rick and naturally we making money now but I wish I could have making money when I was a younger man and had a little more knowledge with it, know how to use it wisely and probably I could have been doing alright.

Q Where do you think it is going now? Do you think the auto workers will be making the big bucks for the next ten years? You're getting out, but take a look at me or take a look at the other folks on the line. What do you think will be happening in the next ten to fifteen years in the truck plant?

A Well that's kind of hard for me to say.

Q Most Americans think we get way too much pay right? They think it is our fault that people are driving Toyotas and Hondas and stuff.

Q I really haven't looked that far ahead and I don't really want to predict something than what I really think. Like I told you another ten years from Michigan Truck Plant ain't

going to be no union there. If they keep things going like that there aren't going to be too many working there.

Q Why do you say that?

A The keep getting automation and they going to cut a lot of men out of work. That I don't know what would happen to them. I imagine they would be transferred around or maybe they would still have jobs, but that is soon going to run out. You know you got a lot of youngsters coming up and they need jobs.

Q You live on the east side of Detroit and unemployment must be for the young people 70%? You came here with jobs. What are they going to do?

A That's right. That's what I wonder where is they going to get a job. We got them growing up now and there just ain't going to be no jobs. A lot of them are going to move out of town. Look at the Satellite they are building in Tennessee, General Motors, well okay they are taking the big job away from here. I heard they are going to try and hire as many employees as they could there. When I was young I had to leave that town to get a job.

Q But when you left you knew there were jobs here. So you had hope. The generation coming up doesn't have hope.

A That's right. When I was coming up I had my sister already here and they told me they had the application there for me to get a job as soon as I get there. I got here on the 6th and got hired on the 7th. No I got here on the 5th and started work here on the 6th. That's right. In Buick Motors in Flint Michigan. So I went right to work and it just took a day for me to get hired in. I went to work the next morning. I was

working right ahead and that was the big buck for me. I was getting \$.79 an hour and that job was a long way from \$.10 an hour. I hired in at \$.79 an hour at that time and that was the big buck. I'll never forget \$51.00 and something every week and then I got a raise. I went on nights and I got a nickel more for the night shift during the war time. Then I got transferred to a different job and I got a raise. I had been there about a year and I got a raise to \$1.14 an hour. I was on top back then. I was a young man. I wasn't twenty years old then. I could look forward to something.

Q And that lasted up until 1970 folks coming into the plant, 1972-73. There are now people in the plant now with less than ten years seniority. There are a few.

A Yes, just a few.

Q Did you have any children?

A Yes, my kids are all grown. We got a daughter. My story is kind of....and you asked me how long we been married and I said we only been married for about fourteen years, but we know one another a long time.

Q What is your daughter doing?

A She is working at a bubble gum factory. She is in Memphis, Tennessee. She has got two sons and one of them is a lawyer. I had one of them up here with me once. He worked at Michigan Truck Plant.

Q I don't think I met him.

A I don't think you did. He worked there for about 3-4 months and that's when they cut the night shift. So he was one of them who got laid off.

Q What's he doing now?

A He is working for some company and she works for the government, but I don't know what company it is. I don't want to say. He is doing pretty good so far down there. He said he is making a living out of it. It don't pay the buck that he's been working. That's what going to show you about these youngsters they don't have too much to look forward for. Unless they can finish school and get themselves a diploma for something. You take the other grandson, he is an attorney. He is doing great. He called up last Sunday and bought another place. He is having a place built in west Memphis. West Memphis has got to be a little city there now. I haven't seen it yet, but I'm looking forward to seeing it. He's got a nice home there. When I was coming up there there wasn't nothing there, but you see now if he didn't get this education he probably, I don't know, would be like the other grandson be going from job to job. Since the time he left here he be working three to four different jobs. He then gets laid off from them. So that's why I said it is going to make it hard for the youngsters, if they don't get them some kind of trade or some kind of computer test because this is all what is taking over now.

Q Do you think there will be enough computer or trade jobs or education jobs for everybody?

A That's another thing a lot of them got out and can't get a job. I don't know Rick. I can't predict what is really going to happen. Someone is going to have to give somewhere. For the youngsters you know.

Q Besides working long hours in the plant what kind of things

do you do on the weekend and what are you doing this vacation? I know you do a lot of work around the house. The outside is really kept up.

A You can't do too much because it tires you. During the vacation time I expect to get a little bit done around here, but I'm going to take a vacation. I figure if I live another year I have all the time I need. I am going to New Orleans. That's my wife's family reunion. I have never been to New Orleans before. In fact, they sent the invitation the other week and she put it up somewhere. We are going to go there. Then I'm going to take a week in August.

Q How many weeks vacation do you have?

A I had four weeks. When they shut down everybody don't want a vacation at that time. The plant overrules that you shut down for vacation that other two weeks. That other two weeks really I hadn't planned for nothing. That's why I have to take off in August. I'm going to take a couple weeks in August.

Q So they tell us when to take our vacation?

A That's right. This is something that don't work. They just shut down the whole plant and say you're on vacation once a year. You know your vacation is going to come up in July. You know that's not right. You know I'm just thinking about the younger people. You know maybe it's your son or your daughter, my grandkids come in. There won't be no jobs. You mentioned that everybody is getting an education and there isn't going to be jobs for them. Well that's something I don't know. Now the youngsters are trying to finish their education. They are getting education right along. Here in

Detroit my niece she finished college. She come here and tried to get a job over here in 1953 and they wouldn't hire blacks. I went down to Cadillac Square, they put in applications and they hired all white girls. She couldn't get a job here. She went to Washington and got a job. That's how our family got all split up. There wasn't no jobs here for her. That was a hurting thing. This wasn't in the south, this was right here in Detroit. They was picking the color they were hiring there. I don't think that was right.

Q So it broke up the family?

A Oh yeah it broke up the family. I got a nephew in Chicago. He's a counselor and he couldn't get a job around here. He wind up there in Chicago.

Q It's been that way for 300 years, breaking up the family, first they were selling them and then they wouldn't hire them.

A That's right. They first tell you if you qualify for the job you can get it. You can go in and you can pass your test and then they look up and see you're black and you don't get that job. No. You come back later and we'll call you.

Q What have you done with all the anger?

A It don't leave you, you just try to forgive it. People say you forget it. You don't forget it. You just try to forgive it. There is a difference for forgiving and forgetting it. You try to forgive it because every time you look and see something and this is why I didn't watch Roots, the anger brought my pressure up. I couldn't watch it. I watched some of it and cut it off. I said there is no way.

Q How did you feel then when Martin Luther King had to march here in 1963? There were a quarter of a million people

marching up Woodward here. How do you feel about that?

A I felt that he just feared his life, but he was a brave man. Not only here it's all over here. He did a job well done as far as I can see. About this bus ride with Rosa that is no lie. All these things that you see I've been through it. You get on the bus and all you have to see is three sitting up there in the front and you can't sit down there. You got to go back in the back and stand. That's enough to burn your blood up. You telling me I'm watching Roots now, I've seen this and this was enough.

Q This is life.

A That's life, yeah. You better not sit up there in front because any white man would jump up and whoop you. That's no lie. I've seen it happen on the bus and it didn't happen to me, but I've seen it. It could have happened to me. Like my mother told me they are white and you do this and you do this. I just could never figure it out, but I always did like she did and I followed her advice. I didn't forget what she told me, but I never could figure it out. Why? That's the thing I always wondered. A bus driver got up once and whooped the boy on the bus.

Q This was down in Memphis?

A That is in Memphis, that's right. He stopped the bus and whooped him. There were 30-40 blacks sitting back there and nobody raised a hand to stop him. The boy stopped and sat down in the wrong place, you know. Nigger you get up and out of that seat. The boy didn't move. He stopped the bus, whooped him and throw him back in the back. The boy paid his fare just like anybody else. I really don't want to go through

this I'll be honest with you. Let's not talk about it.

Q Okay, let's talk about 1985-86. I just have a few other questions in a few other areas. Living in Detroit, now you have a black mayor, black school administrator and it is a majority black city now what do you think are the big issues and concerns in the city right now?

A Rick I haven't really been keeping up with this on the mayor issue. I wouldn't want to say the wrong thing about this. He don't do anything about the east side of the town. If you notice the east side of the town is going right down the drain.

Q Everything off the Grand Boulevard is being torn down.

A So probably he'll get that looking pretty good, but from here to Grosse Pointe on the east side now near the river everything is just going down. We got bad streets. You should go look at the alleys. We've got a lot to be done yet. I can't say the man has got to do everything at one time, but he got to split it up a little bit.

Q How come you have decided to stay in Detroit? You could have moved to any of the suburbs and live closer to work. You clearly have made the choice to maintain this is your home and fix it up. I was driving up the street on Crane and it is clearly one of the most kept up homes. It is a nice street this street in general. Your house particularly is really in nice shape.

A This is kind of a quiet neighborhood now. It used to wasn't. Why I made this my home, one way I'll tell you, I would have move out but this place was willed to me. My aunt gave me this house. I put a lot of money into it and had to do a

lot of work. I put this money into this place and I felt like I might as well stay here because I couldn't get no money out of it as far as what I put into it. I figured I'd make this my home. I thought a lot of times about moving out closer to the job, but now I wouldn't move out closer to the job because I'm coming out. Then again I don't know if I'm going to stay here or not. I haven't decided. We have a home down south.

Q Back in Arkansas?

A We got a nice street.

Q You can invite me down there. I've never been there. I've been to New Orleans and I have taken the train down south but I never been.

A That's another thing, I'm going down sometime this year probably. We got it rented out and my daughter seen after this and kept it up. There is a lot more I want to do to it. It is a nice place. We got two bedrooms, a kitchen, bath and a living room. It is bigger enough for just me and her.

Q Sure and for the grand kids to visit.

A Yeah. We have enough room. That's why I say I don't talk too much more money here in this place, but I try to keep it up while we live in it anyway.

Q That's a real shame, because you won't get out of it what you put into it in terms of resources and that's how this city is taking neighborhoods and destroying them because the older folks have made decent livings, but the kids and their grand kids take them over because they can't keep them up. They have no jobs.

A That's right.

Q You can't keep up a house for the gas bill on a Burger King job.

A That's a big issue and this is what I worry about. The younger people is coming up and they can't get a job. I leave this property up for some of the kids...you noticed down the street where these houses are boarded up...something happened to the parents and the young ones they can't keep the place up and the next thing you know is the place is destroyed. The city takes the property over again. If they don't tear it down the city forecloses for taxes. What we are suppose to be doing is leaving a path for the younger people who are coming up. So they can have some security for themselves. There ain't nothing left and they aren't going to have no security. They can't get a job. You ain't got a job they are going to steal and they are going to do something. Then somebody is going to kill them or they will go to the penitentiary and does one to two. Some people who wants the job can't get the job and some don't want one. We know that.

Q When you were little did you have some dreams of what you thought life would be like when you were 35 or 55 or 65?

A Yes I had some dreams. I had a lot of thoughts in different things. I was wondering about it. I know my life couldn't kept like it was. That's why you might have heard me mention before I always wondered when I was little what was the difference in the white man and the black man. It was hard for me to get it together. As I growed up I still haven't been able to figure it out. Why was they treated like they was? This is another thing I haven't been able to figure out. I

could figure that they brought a lot of them, like you said, during slavery time when they was selling them. Okay, but they went on to selling the black people. They were selling the white people to different foreigners and different things like that. Maybe that's the way the world was then, but after they broke it down the black people with the white people slaved here in the United States. Then they jumped up and said we got to free America. We are all citizens. We are all American people. If we are all American people why do some of them have the advantage over the other one. This is what I'm talking about. Put it this way, you can walk on this side of the street, but I can't get on that side of the street. I have got to stay on this side of the street. Why? You asked me what I have dreamed. I am still dreaming. I still don't understand it.

Q Is it that you can't understand it or do you refuse to accept that people could be the way they have been? This is my editorial...how corporations can make choices that can advance them and the people get thrown on garbage heaps and they get thrown overboard.

A Maybe I don't want to make a choice to it, but I don't know.

Q What dreams do you have for your grandchildren? They are going to live into the 21st century.

A I'm hoping things have changed. I just hoping that everybody could be together. These small countries fighting among one another. There is going to be another war and some of my children's children are going to be in it. Like now we are losing them. What is the fighting for? What is the reason? Why can't we all sit down and get together and be with one

another. We live in a big enough world and we all could live together. This world is big enough for us all. There is food for us all. There is some starving and some got too much. Do you see what I am saying? One nation has got too much food and then there is another nation that ain't got none. If we all joined in together we could all help one another to live. This is the most of the things I think about. Well maybe you didn't see it, but a lot of people see the discrimination. This isn't what really bother me about the color. Colors don't mean a thing. I just want to know we are all human. Say you is a white boy and I'm a black man, okay, now me and you are walking down the street and we are going some place and if I go in one of your houses they are going to be looking at me. They aren't going to look at you. That is the same way if you go in my place that's the first place they're going to look, they are going to look right at you. They aren't going to look at me. Why? Somebody has got a guilty conscience. Why can't we just walk and say heh I wants to be here. If they are talking, keep their conversation, I'm not going to bother them. They ain't got to bother me. Don't stare at me and I'm not going to stare at you. It's different. It is that way right now. Just you and me could walk into a bar...I went into a bar a few years back and I figured I'd go in a get me a beer and wait until she gets through shopping. I walks in the bar and everybody turns around and looks at me. This is during the daytime. I walk to the bar and sit there. He was waiting on somebody else. He come on back, walk right by me and didn't wait on me. Now I'm sitting there thinking maybe he is busy and he'll be back in a minute. He went on

down the bar and started talking. I was just waiting for this girl to get done shopping. So he finally came over and said can I do something for you? I said I'd like to have a beer if you don't mind. You do sell beer here don't you? He said yeah, you ain't going to start anything are you?

Q Where was this?

A I'll never forget it. You go out Van Dyke and it's back out in there somewhere...I think I know where the bar is...

Q In Warren?

A Yeah in Warren. They kind of shocked me, start something, and I'm just alone. Just me.

Q That's an auto worker town too.

A Yeah. I said why would I want to start. I just want a beer. until my lady get done shopping. I said if this is a private club it is okay with me. Oh no you can get a beer and I couldn't drink the beer. I took one swig of beer and set it down and walked out. I paid for it. I said oh well. I don't even like to talk about that shit.

Q I was asking questions and you were talking about nations. What did you think of Reagan's bombing of Libya or the U.S. trying to over throw Nicaragua?

A I'm no politician. My mind is one way. I'm in no position to try and run no country and I can't predict no country. I think the man did the right thing as far as I'm concerned. Maybe a lot of people have different thoughts.

Q Do you think it made things safer?

A Why should you let someone else push you over all the time. You can only take so much and then you have to put a stop it. It's got to end somewhere. I think he did the right

move. People can't get on a plane and go no place now. They got to be looking over their back and scared they are going to get blown out of the air. This is getting terrible. Right now I'm scared to go to one of those big shopping centers and I don't know what is going to happen. We got a lot of these Arabs running around here. Every time you look around one of them is opening up a store. You work here two or three years in the plant and the next thing you know you got big business, two or three stores. Where do you think they are getting all that money?

Q I remember Ali Babba used to work in the plant with his two brothers. They worked overtime and overtime, all three of them, and they saved the money and went. I don't think they owned a lot of oil in the Middle East. I think there is as much distrust of Arab people by folks in the plant as there is just the story you told me about the bar of whites in Warren toward you in the bar. I think it is the same thing eating away at the soul of people. I think there is a lot of hatred toward Arabs that is totally unjustified.

A Well that is true. Like I said some good apples and some bad apples. I don't like to predict to nobody. The way things are going now I don't trust too much either.

Q Last question and I'll let you go outside on this beautiful day out there. Take a minute to think about it. What do you think Detroit will look like in twenty years? What do you think the auto industry will look like in twenty years? You'll be 84 you might still be hanging around.

A I doubt that.

Q You'll never know.

A I don't know but I would like to see.

Q What would you like to see?

A I put it like this Detroit has come a long way from what it used to be. I have always lived around the east side because my aunt was here. You take down in the black bottom... I don't know if you ever heard of it or know anything about it...well, you wouldn't know that place now if you'd go down there. If you'd be gone twenty years and you'd be looking for the black bottom and it wouldn't be there because everything is smarter now. But now who was going to make the money just living in places if they haven't got jobs. They got it nice down there. I used to live down there. They got nice homes and nice caretakers for their graves. So you said in another twenty years...probably this will all be down and I don't know what would be in here. These old homes have got to go and they can't stand forever. This part of town probably will be built up and look pretty nice.

Q So it depends on if people are working and have decent paying jobs?

A That's true. It depends. They used to have a lot of jobs, but everybody went out of business and people were leaving Detroit. Naturally they will leave because the money is gone. There ain't no jobs.

Q What are you going to do the day after you retire? Where is your retirement party going to be? That's what I want to know. I haven't been to anyone's retirement party, but I am going to yours.

A Well I haven't even decided. I imagine it will be in Flint. I probably will have it in the union hall there.