Tom Agorgianitis Interview
January 21, 2003
Local 653 Union Hall
Pontiac, Michigan
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Copyedited by Daniel Clark

DC: I'm sorry for the long delay in getting to you.

TA: That's all right. That's all right.

DC: Yeah. I start with pretty basic questions, like where were you born?

TA: I was born in 1923 in Pontiac, Michigan.

DC: OK. So you were born right here.

TA: I was born right here. Raised here and lived here all my life.

DC: I haven't talked to very many people who were actually born in Pontiac. Most of them have come from all points around. So were your parents from Pontiac, as well?

TA: No, my parents were born in Greece and they came across here in 1917. They landed at Ellis Island, and from there they came to Pontiac through Canada in Windsor.

DC: OK. Do you know why they ended up in Pontiac?

TA: Well, well—and they had a friend from their home town that was like a sponsor. And he helped them come across here, yeah.

DC: What had your parents been doing in Greece? What did they do?

TA: Well, in Greece they were just like everybody else. They either had a goat or two, you know, or a vineyard or, you know, olive groves and nothing else.

DC: Where in Greece did they live?

TA: The town?

DC: Yeah.

TA: Arahova, Levadias. And that's near Mount Parnassus.

DC: OK. I'll look that up on a map. [northwest of Athens]

TA: Well, it's close to the Corinth Canal in Delphi.

DC: Have you been back there?

TA: No, no.

DC: Never have. OK.

TA: Never.

DC: Did your parents ever go back?

TA: No, they never did. He came here from Greece and he was pleased, you know. It was a country that, you know, it gave you hope. And so he stayed and got a job and raised six kids.

DC: Did your parents come over together? Were they married at the time?

TA: Yeah. Together. Yeah.

DC: OK. They came together.

TA: Yeah, they both came over together.

DC: And so they ended up in Pontiac.

TA: In Pontiac, yeah.

DC: Wow. Were there many other Greeks in Pontiac at the time?

TA: Oh, yeah. A few, but not a lot. But there was a few here.

DC: And then what did your parents do when they arrived?

TA: My Dad, when he first came here—exactly right off the bat, I don't know—but anyway, he ended up working for Fisher Body. And he worked there till he was sixty-five years old.

DC: So he stayed right on.

TA: Yeah. Yeah.

DC: Wow, OK. So do you have any idea how long it was before he got that job at Fisher Body?

TA: No. I don't recall.

DC: OK. So the little time that . . .

TA: But as I can recall, like when I was about nine or eight, he was working at Fisher Body.

DC: OK. He was set there. And then what about your Mother? What did she do when she got to Pontiac?

TA: My Mother was just a typical housewife. Yeah. Raised eight kids. Two boys and four sisters, you know.

DC: So where do you fit in in the order of children?

TA: I'm [pauses] I'm the fourth.

DC: The fourth, OK.

TA: The fourth from the top.

DC: OK. So did your parents have any children when they moved to Pontiac?

TA: No.

DC: No. OK, they started the family.

TA: No, we were all born here.

DC: So your Mother was very busy.

TA: Oh yeah. Yeah, yeah.

DC: OK. What was it like growing up in Pontiac?

TA: Pontiac was a nice town. Oh yeah. Beautiful and to see it go, you know, the way it is now, but I guess everything changes with time. You know, progressing you know, and all that.

DC: Where did you live when you were a child?

TA: Well, the first home—and my sister was on Fisher Street in Pontiac [near the Truck and Bus Plant]. That's where my oldest sister was born. I was born on Beaudette Street in Pontiac. And that's near Orchard Lake, Chapman Hill, and Waterford. I mean, Walnut Street. [very near downtown Pontiac]

DC: Walnut.

TA: Yeah.

DC: How often did your family move when you were young?

TA: Well, from Fisher to Beaudette, and from Beaudette to Pike, and from Pike to [pauses] Menominee Street. Yeah. I think it was. . .

DC: Do you have any—oh, go ahead.

TA: I think it was that street.

DC: Do you have any idea why your family moved so much when you were young?

TA: I don't think we did, because we were all raised, I mean actually raised, in Beaudette Street. When we moved to Pike Street, my oldest sister got married. And the rest were there and then we moved to Menominee Street.

DC: Did you move to bigger houses with. . .

TA: Oh yeah. Yeah, yeah.

DC: With more kids you'd need more room.

TA: Yeah.

DC: What was your neighborhood like in these various places? You said you spent most of your childhood on Beaudette Street.

TA: On Beaudette, yeah.

DC: What was that neighborhood like?

TA: Well, it was nice. I mean, it was a nice street and a nice place to raise kids. And it was a mixture of culture there. There was Scottish people, English, Armenians, and Greek like myself, and Irish and German. Yeah. It was just a mix. And we had one or two Afro-Americans in there, you know? Yeah. Which was a nice . . .

DC: Did the kids play together on the street?

TA: Oh yeah. Yeah. They played. There wasn't nothing else to do. There wasn't like everybody had a car, you know. And things were better because there were—they mostly stuck together. The families, the kids, you know. And they all grew up together.

DC: Do you remember at all whether or not people moved very often in and out of your neighborhood?

TA: No. Not then. Back then when you moved in a place and you bought a house and you got a job, you know, you raised your kids there. Yeah. Now it's—and you have to go with your job, you know? If you're level four in the job, or eight or nine, then they move you around. But then you just, you know—and the ones that I was raised with, some of them I

still see.

DC: Do you really?

TA: And there's one here that comes to the dinner every month: Nate White. He's a Afro-American. And I went to school with him, I played ball with him, all the way through. And he's still there and we're still good friends. Yeah.

DC: Is he likely to be here on Thursday?

TA: Generally he does come. Nate White. Yeah.

DC: Well if you're here on Thursday, maybe you could introduce him to me.

TA: OK. A wonderful—yeah.

DC: I'd really love to talk with him.

TA: Even from kids, he was just fun to be with. Yeah.

DC: It's amazing to be in touch with someone you grew up with.

TA: Yeah.

DC: That's not common these days.

TA: No. No. Not at our age, you know?

DC: Well when is your birthday? You'll be eighty!

TA: December 1923. The 23rd.

DC: OK. The end of the year anyway.

TA: Yeah. This last year I turned seventy-nine.

DC: OK. All right. Well congratulations.

TA: Thank you.

DC: Where did you go to school?

TA: Pontiac Central.

DC: OK, Pontiac Central. How about elementary school?

TA: Oh, elementary. I went, the first school was Crofoot School and it was on Huron Street right next to the Pontiac Central High School. And then I went to Washington Junior High and then Pontiac High School. At that time it was called Pontiac High.

DC: Yeah, there weren't any others to . . .

TA: The orange and the black.

DC: OK. Do you have any memories of going to school?

TA: Oh yeah. Yeah.

DC: Like what?

TA: It was fun. At that time in the fifth and sixth grade, all the elementary schools had soccer, which they don't have now. Well—but it's coming back, you know. But it was fun, you know? Yeah.

DC: Did you have any favorite subjects?

TA: Well, I didn't care much for English. History, that I know it. I know all the countries, all the capitals, almost everything. Yeah.

DC: Did your parents speak English?

TA: Yes.

DC: Did they speak English when they came over?

TA: They both did. When we were at home, we had to speak Greek and they spoke English so we could learn the language. And it worked out.

DC: So you spoke Greek to them and they spoke English back to you.

TA: Yeah. Yeah.

DC: Wow. OK.

TA: And it worked out that way.

DC: Do you still speak Greek?

TA: Oh, I've been away from it, you know, for a long time. I can understand it and I can read some print, you know, but I can't read the writing because everybody writes, you know, different. But if somebody talks to me in Greek, I can understand it. Yeah.

DC: That's impressive. What sorts of things do you remember doing when you were a kid? You mentioned you played with your neighbor friends and you went to school. Do you remember anything else about growing up in Pontiac that stands out?

TA: Well [pauses] well, every—well, at the end of the week, every Saturday, it was like a ritual. My Dad and I had to go down to the city community market, which was in town, you know? And that was a place—everybody was there. You know, and they had—just like you have the stuff now from gardens, you know, farmers come in. They had cats for sale, dogs for sale at that time, eggs, you know. Anything you needed.

DC: So you and your Dad went.

TA: Yeah. I had to go. I had to pull the wagon. Yeah.

DC: And what kinds of things did you buy?

TA: Oh, we bought—every once in awhile he bought a live chicken there, you know and that, and the stuff you needed. Apples or potatoes, you know.

DC: That was here in Pontiac?

TA: Yeah. In Pontiac.

DC: A farmer's market?

TA: Yeah. Yeah.

DC: OK. Did your other siblings go with you?

TA: Huh? No. Sometimes, you know, but it was mostly my dad and I.

DC: Did you look forward to that?

TA: Oh, no. Oh, no. No. Going through town, pulling the wagon.

DC: Not cool.

TA: I thought I was bigger than that.

DC: Do you remember what your dad's job was at Fisher Body?

TA: He was a painter. A sprayer.

DC: OK. So he sprayed the bodies.

TA: At that time, most of the paint, I think, was Duco paint [a Dupont product of the 1920s].

And they had a booth, but they didn't have vents in there at that time, you know, to take out the fumes. And he painted all those years and at the end he got emphysema, like. But now, you know, the shop's got booths with vents and air to take it out, you know. But they didn't have it then, no.

DC: Not at that time. And you said he worked a good long time, right?

TA: Oh yeah. Yeah.

DC: Now did he ever talk about his job much?

TA: Huh?

DC: Did he ever talk to you much about his job?

TA: No. But he didn't want to miss time. He'd always go to work. He wouldn't miss time. And the last year or two of his time there, you know, he got ill. And he wanted to go to work and we sat on him to keep him home. Because he never missed time. He never missed a day in his life as far as he worked. And he stayed there and he was mad. He could've wringed our necks, you know. But then the plant superintendent called and wanted to know what was wrong with Stephen Agorgianitis. Never had missed time, you know. And he said, "If he's sick, let him stay home. We want to know why he missed time," because he never did.

DC: Did he ever work much overtime, do you know?

TA: At that time, I doubt if they had it then. It was rough. It was—Depression time after that. And then you had, like, '58 or, you know, like that . . .

DC: We'll talk about that a little bit later on. But what was it like during the Depression? How did your family do during the Depression?

TA: Well, it was rough, you know, but he kept the house. He kept us fed, you know, as best he could. And clothed as best we, you know, we could. But it was rough. I don't think that us kids nowadays could do that. I doubt it. Yeah. Because we demand a lot, you know. But he did it.

DC: How about your Mother? How did she manage during the Depression?

TA: Oh, and she helped. My Dad always had a garden, you know, and pumpkins. She—my Dad built a bin down in the basement and kept the squash in there. Would last a long time. And she'd peel those and cook them and make pie, you know, and stuff like that.

DC: Did you have to work in the garden?

TA: Oh, I dug it by hand.

DC: How big was it?

TA: It was big, yeah. Every day, I'd get out of school in the spring, I did a little bit until it was done. Yeah.

DC: Did you have to keep it up all summer long?

TA: Well, yeah. Myself and my Dad did.

DC: OK. So he helped out.

TA: Yeah.

DC: I know that's a lot of work.

TA: Oh, sure is. [knowing chuckle]

DC: Was religion a part of your family's life?

TA: Oh yeah. Yeah.

DC: Tell me about that. What church did you belong to?

TA: Well, like, my Mother and Dad was Greek. We went to St. George Greek Orthodox Church in Pontiac. And at that time it was on Mirava Street, but now it's on Woodward, you know, the new church. And we went to church. We all went to church. Now my Dad may—missed some of the Sundays. He stayed home and put the lamb roast on, you know, a Greek—you know, Sundays always lamb roast, lamb roast. I don't care for it now [laughs]. You know, when you eat it all the time.

DC: So as a child did you look forward to that Sunday ritual? As a child?

TA: Church was good. And the same thing now with the wife and the kids, you know. We went to church as a family. We didn't send them to church and we stay home, no. We went to church with them. As a group.

DC: OK. Yeah, we'll get to that. Did you have any jobs as a kid, as you were growing up? As you became a teenager and all, did you have any jobs?

TA: Well, most of the work I did—I worked at the golf course. A caddy. Orchard Lake Golf Course. I went there and I had to walk from Beaudette Street, and that is on Orchard Lake Trail out there.

DC: So how far is that, then?

TA: Oh, that was—I'd say about ten miles or twelve. Yeah.

DC: So you had to give yourself a fair amount of time.

TA: You walked and at that time, people would stop with you at times and pick you up, you know.

DC: And then you're walking carrying golf clubs.

TA: No, no. I walked there and I worked there, you know. I was a caddy. Yeah.

DC: When did you start doing that?

TA: Oh, I had to have been about fourteen, I think. Around there. Guessing at it, you know, I don't know.

DC: Did any of your friends do that, as well?

TA: Oh yeah.

DC: Did you like it?

TA: Oh, yeah. It was nice. I had one person that always would ask for me and that was Dr. Burke's wife. And she'd always want me and the golf pro there, I think, was Mr. Graham, I think was his name. I'm not sure, but I think—and he'd always, if she was there, he'd wait to see if I'd come and kept me for her. And she was a better golfer than the doctor. Yeah. And a better tipper. Yeah. Yeah, yeah!

DC: Did your family ever go on any vacations when you were growing up?

TA: Well, no. You didn't have the money then, you know, with six kids, you know. Didn't have money. And the only vacation I got is—and there was a lot of Greeks in Detroit at that time, and I'd go there and spend a week or two, and they would come and spend a week or two at our house, you know?

DC: Would these be relatives, or. . .

TA: No. Well, no. Friends. Real close friends. The one that we spent a lot of time—it was my sister's godparents. And we'd go there and spend a week or two and they'd come over to our house.

DC: And you said they lived in Detroit?

TA: Yeah. Yeah.

DC: Do you remember where in Detroit?

TA: Oh gee. It's gone now. Detroit was a wonderful town, you know? And people don't know that the Detroit school system was the best in the country at one time. And that's what I recall, you know. But it was on, oh, Hastings and Macomb Street. And Hastings is gone because they put the expressway in there. You could go there from Hastings and you go down and then you run into Italian section, you go east, you run into Polish—no, German. You go east, you run into the Polish—you know, it just, yeah. It was nice there, yeah.

DC: So was it like a big adventure for you to go visit?

TA: Oh yeah. For me it was. And even had—at that time, it was a big town. You know, when you walked in Detroit at like 1:00 or 2:00 at night, it was packed. They had buses, streetcars then. Yeah, it was a nice town.

DC: A lot has changed.

TA: Oh, gee. Change is good. If the change is made for, you know, for the good. But if you change just to change . . .

DC: So, did you graduate from high school?

TA: No, no. No. I had an incomplete and I didn't go back to get it, and my sisters were after me. "Go back and get your"—and you know, it was an incomplete in English.

DC: OK. Your least favorite subject.

TA: Yeah. Oh gee.

DC: So what did you do then? You had an incomplete—what did you do when you were, say like in your last year of high school? What did you do next at that point?

TA: The last year of high school.

DC: Well you didn't graduate because of the incomplete, but what did you do?

TA: Yeah. Oh, what did I do? [pauses] I took off for some time and I went to a Greek friend of ours we had in Chicago. I remember that. Then I got a job at a small factory named Jig Bushing [as of 1940, represented by UAW Local 540, in Pontiac]. It made parts for the war effort. It was the Allison airplane engine part that they made.

DC: Where was that factory?

TA: Oh, that was on [pauses] Cass Road. It run in between Oakland Avenue and North Johnson Street. [just northwest of downtown]

DC: So here in Pontiac.

TA: Yeah. Yeah. It was a small, like a small job shop, at that time. At the war—and they had those, you know.

DC: How long did you spend in Chicago?

TA: Oh, I was just there for about a month or less, you know. I can't recall it. I just went there for a week and a half or something.

DC: Did you always intend to come back to Pontiac?

TA: Oh yeah, yeah. Oh yeah.

DC: OK. So what was that job like at the job shop?

TA: You made parts for the airplane engine that they had at that time. They had other stuff, small stuff, you know. Yeah.

DC: Did you like it?

TA: It was all right but it was a plant that was—it was good, but you know. Everything was crammed in there, you know, oil in there. You know, in the air.

DC: How many people worked there?

TA: It was a few. I think they had about fifty in there.

DC: Were they mostly young guys like you or were there older guys, as well?

TA: Well no, but they were young. There was a lot of mothers in there. They worked.

DC: Mothers, too? OK.

TA: Yeah. Girls were in there. Young men like me.

DC: OK, so there were men and women.

TA: It was mixed.

DC: OK. How long did you stay there?

TA: Oh, I don't know. About eight months or a year at the most or less. Then I came and worked at Pontiac Motor.

DC: Pontiac Motor, OK.

TA: Yeah.

DC: So how did you land the job at Pontiac Motor?

TA: I just applied, you know.

DC: What prompted you to apply at Pontiac Motor?

TA: Well, I thought it's a better place to work, you know. It's big, you know, a corporation. Where all these other plants were just, like, war plants, you know. The government gets a job they got to have for a certain truck or something. They get this plant and do this here, this plant to do that, they bring them together in a certain area and put them together.

DC: Yeah. How was your boss at the Jig Bushing plant?

TA: Nice guy. Yeah.

DC: Yeah?

TA: Yeah, he was nice. He was from Pittsburgh, I think. He's from that area there. A nice guy. Italian guy.

DC: Did you have men and women working the same jobs? Boys and girls working the same kinds of jobs?

TA: Oh yeah, you know, a man may work on this job at night—in the daytime on that job, they may have a woman. It was, you know . . .

DC: Was there a union at that shop?

TA: No, no. No.

DC: So when you went to Pontiac Motor, what job did you get there?

TA: Crankshafts.

DC: Crankshafts. And what exactly was your job?

TA: At that time I think I drilled the oil holes in the crankshafts. And at that time, it was the old eight and the old six—the straight eight and straight six. Yeah.

DC: Had you had any experience at all working with cars and machines?

TA: No, no. It was all new.

DC: How did you learn the job?

TA: Well—and you train there, you know. They had somebody else there to tell you, you know, what to do. And after you're on it for awhile, you just do it, you know? You know how you do it.

DC: OK. How long did it take you to figure out how to do it?

TA: It didn't take long.

DC: Not long, OK. So who were you working with on the crankshaft job?

TA: The guys?

DC: Yeah.

TA: Oh, there's a lot of them. [pauses]

DC: I don't know if you have to remember names, but. . .

TA: There's a guy they call Frank Hicks, I think. Older guy, he was older than me. And then there was another guy that worked, I think, in back of me, and his name was Harry Karagosian. And he owns the Karagosian Jewelry. Have you ever heard of that?

DC: I've heard it by name, yeah.

TA: Yeah. Yeah. And. . .

DC: So he got his start in crankshafts.

TA: Yeah, yeah. Yeah.

DC: Did you like the job?

TA: [affect says "no"] Ehh, well, you know, and when you're young you want to get a better job or apply. But we did have a good boss there.

DC: What made him a good boss?

TA: Huh?

DC: What made him a good boss?

TA: Well, he listened. And he understood and he had compassion. He was good. Which, at those days, foremens didn't have that in the shop. And they were pushed by higher management, you know. Get the work out, they do that. He got the work out, but he got it

out his way.

DC: OK. So what was the age range of that department when you first went in?

TA: Oh, it was mostly middle-aged. I'd say about forty-five, you know. Because then they were bringing in some young kids, see.

DC: So you were one of the younger people.

TA: Yeah. Yeah. At the time.

DC: OK. Did you ever talk with any of those people about what the job had been like in the past?

TA: No, no, no, no.

DC: OK. Yeah. Because this would've been, what, the early 1940s?

TA: Yeah. Yeah.

DC: So they would've had a union at that point, but it would've been a pretty new one.

TA: Yeah.

DC: Did you join the union?

TA: Oh yeah. Yeah.

DC: And why did you join?

TA: Well, first place, a lot of people don't believe in the union, you know. And I believe it—what my Dad had told me, because when he worked there, they didn't have a union. This is his words, what he told me, that someone would bring in their nephew from the South, and the guy that's worked there and was doing the job, they would release him. But I had found why it's good—because you got a check and balance. It does work. People doesn't think, you know, that a big corporation can't run without a union.

DC: Did your Father ever talk about the difference between working before a union and working with the union?

TA: Oh yeah. Yeah.

DC: Yeah? What did he say?

TA: Well, the changes he seen, you know. Like he sprayed in the booth with no fans, you know.

DC: Was your Father involved at all in the organizing campaign at Fisher Body?

TA: No, but when they first joined, you know. I mean, you know, and he joined. Because—and for him to join, you know, or help to work it, his English wasn't that broad.

DC: Yeah. But he joined.

TA: He joined, yeah.

DC: Now when you were working at Pontiac Motor in your first job there in crankshaft, were you still living at home?

TA: Yeah.

DC: OK.

TA: I was at first, yeah.

DC: Were you in control of your paycheck or did that go into the family pot? How did that work?

TA: The check was mine. Yeah. But at times, you know, if I was out I'd go buy something for the lunches. Fruit, you know, or groceries at times. But they never asked for my check, no.

DC: So how long did you stay on that crankshaft job?

TA: I was there until I applied for skilled trades. And I went into skilled trades in 1940 [pauses]—'43, I think. I went in at that time. I forgot what it's called, you know, what it was called. But now it's called employees in training, you know. But then, I forgot.

DC: Some kind of apprenticeship or training program?

TA: Yeah. To me, you know, I think the base pay at that time was a dollar twenty-nine. Skilled trade.

DC: Did you go straight from crankshaft then into the trades program, the skilled trades program?

TA: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. And they had a list on the wall that if you think you can pass a test, you know, and go there, apply for it. And I did. Yeah. I wasn't the only one. There was about four guys from the crankshaft applied and we all got the job. Yeah.

DC: And so you went directly into the training program?

TA: Yeah. Yeah.

DC: What was the training program like?

TA: Well, it wasn't like it was in the later years when they needed a lot of employees in training, you know, that they brought in. It was different then. But when I went in, you know, they had you go—assigned to a guy, we'll say like a lathe operator. And you worked with him until you learn the job, and then you go to a bench work. A surface grinder. And you work with him, you know?

DC: And so you'd work one-on-one with someone . . .

TA: Yeah, Yeah. Yeah. Like that. And at time, if you're stuck and you need help reading the blueprint because you're new then, you know, you go and talk to your boss.

DC: OK. So why did you decide to apply for the skilled trades program?

TA: Well, it's better, you know. It's not the money part, but when you work on production, it's not like you're working upstairs.

DC: Tell me about the differences.

TA: Oh gee. You work on the line, they rush you or they—at that time, every once in awhile they'll speed the line up, you know. You know, and then all of a sudden you're *wise* to it. Hey, it's faster!

DC: Did that happen on your crankshaft job?

TA: No, the cranks came around in a conveyor, like. And when you finish one, like I was doing, drilling the oil holes, I put it back in the rack as it went around. I think it held four crankshafts. Then I'd take one off the rack and put it in and drill the holes and put it back up. But the assembly line and all that, they just, you know . . .

DC: Did you know many people who worked on the assembly line?

TA: At then, no. No. But after that I knew a few that I, you know, met. You know, you see. Even in here at dinner, you know, I'll see some that I seen working on production or at a different plant. But I don't recall their names or anything.

DC: Sure. But I guess what I meant is, you have some strong feelings about working production.

TA: [firmly] Production is, if you ask anybody, production is harder than skilled trades.

DC: And what I was getting at is whether or not you had talked with people to know that for sure when you applied for the skilled trades?

TA: No, when you worked on production—I worked on production, too, and you can tell the difference.

DC: OK. Yeah. But you kind of liked your production job compared to some of the others.

TA: Oh, oh yeah. It's better than working on the assembly line. Yeah. But still you had some bosses that would like to get more, you know, and they come and back you and bring in what they call at that time a time-study man. He'd time you, how much you did an hour, and what they want, you know.

DC: Was your job ever time studied?

TA: Oh sure. Sure.

DC: Tell me what that was like.

TA: Oh gee. Well, it's just like you're having somebody over your back watching you.

DC: OK. How did you—how did that affect your work?

TA: I didn't mind. I just did my work. Yeah.

DC: Did anyone speed up or slow down or anything?

TA: Nope. No. In fact, if anything at that time, most of them—I wouldn't say stalled, but they didn't rush it because they knew, you know—if they ask for eighty crankshafts, then they want ninety, you give them that, and then they want a hundred.

DC: Yeah. Right, just keep speeding up.

TA: Yeah, yeah. So with me, I just did what I thought I could do.

DC: Did anyone there ever talk to you about what to do in case you were time studied?

TA: Oh yeah. And they talked, you know, because I was new there. You know, "Don't let them get you all riled up."

DC: What did you think of their advice?

TA: Huh?

DC: What did you think of their advice?

TA: Well, yeah, well it was the same advice that I had in my mind. You know, just come in there on time, punch the clock, and do a day's work and leave. Yeah.

DC: Were there any African Americans on that crankshaft line?

TA: [pauses] Oh man, if there was, I don't recall.

DC: How about any—oh, I'm sorry, go ahead.

TA: No, but *that* is a good question to ask. But as far as I recall, I don't think there was.

DC: OK. How about any women? It was during the war.

TA: [pauses] Women on cranks, I don't think I seen one.

DC: OK. Because it would've been a time when a lot of workers, you can assume at least, might've been heading off into the military, and there would be those openings.

TA: And that time, you had to take a crank and lift it in, you know?

DC: How much did a crank weigh?

TA: Oh, it—and you had the eight [cylinder], you know, it was the long eight, and then you had the six. It's weight. And a certain job where you had to put it down and you had a little hook, like, and you got it and put it down, but still you had to control it.

DC: OK. I've never held one, so I don't know how much they weigh.

TA: Oh, it's heavy. When I was young, I could hold it out straight on my arm. But I couldn't do it now.

DC: Yeah, my job doesn't do much for lifting. Did you ever have any need for the union when you were working on the crankshaft job?

TA: Oh yeah. And you do, you know—I don't know how it is now. I left in 1985, you know. But in the '50s, you know, and '60s and that, sure you needed the union.

DC: I was thinking about the crankshaft job in the '40s before you entered the skilled trades. In your first couple years on the job, did you ever need a union at that point in time?

TA: Oh yeah. Sure you did.

DC: OK. I mean in your own job. Did you ever file a grievance? Did you ever call in a committeeman or anything like that? In your first job?

TA: [pause] Well, I must've. Yeah, I think I did. But boy, we had one general boss there that, you know, would ride our foremens and they had to come, you know, and jump us. But like I said, I had one good boss. Well, there was one or two on the afternoon shift.

DC: What shift did you work?

TA: I worked on afternoons and then days a lot.

DC: OK. Before you went into the skilled trades.

TA: Yeah, yeah. Yeah.

DC: OK. So with the skilled trades training program, it sounds like you worked with different people on different jobs.

TA: Yeah, yeah. Yeah.

DC: Were there any particular jobs you liked better than others? For the skilled trades program?

TA: No, because at first, you know, when you're in there you're just glad to learn and get away from production—get to learn.

DC: So how long did that program last?

TA: Well [pauses], until you got to know the job. You know, as long as you could feel yourself around and know what to do, or if the foreman came and gave you a job, you know, you knew where to go and what to do and what machine to do it on.

DC: So how long did you spend in that training program?

TA: I don't know how long. Because later, like I said, when they brought in a lot of the employees in training, the workers like me that were journeymen could not bump anybody. And at that time I was on afternoons and I wanted to bump on days and I couldn't bump them for, I think it was four or five years because they're an employee in training. So I had another four years or five years to wait before I could get on days, and I was. . .

DC: That was when you first started out as a journeyman?

TA: No, no. The *last* time.

DC: The last time. Oh, OK. All right. So I got my decades mixed up.

TA: Well OK. Well, the first time, you know, after your foreman thought you knew the job, he gave you a job and you're supposed to know what machine to do it on and read the print. And if you're still green at it, you know, you're not sure, you go with the foreman.

DC: So when did you come out of the program and take your first job like that as a skilled tradesman?

TA: It wasn't long, no.

DC: OK, it wasn't long. All right.

TA: There they push you, you know, to learn.

DC: There was a great need, I would think.

TA: Well, and they had one—I don't know if it's, if they had it enforced or not, but it was like if you couldn't do the job in two or three months, you know, that they could send you back to your old job. Yeah.

DC: So it was an incentive to learn.

TA: Yeah. Well sure.

DC: What was your first job, then, as a skilled tradesman?

TA: I don't recall. But I'm quite sure they didn't give me a difficult job.

DC: OK. But you don't remember what it was.

TA: No, no. No. It could've been a lathe, a bench work, I don't know. Or a drill job. See, at that time we did a lot of drills, we got drills for all type, and we had to put the point on them and all that. Sharpen them. Yeah.

DC: Did you like any of those jobs?

TA: They're all right. The only part I didn't like is roughing in these lathe bits they had. At that time they had a lot of lathe bits, you know, on production, you know? That they went in and cut in, you know. In the part or how far to go in, they cut the side walls, you know. And you had to rough those down because some of those tools, they left them in too long up on production. And they were bad shape, you know, and so you had to rough them down and re-form them, you know, the size.

DC: The bits themselves?

TA: Yeah. Yeah.

DC: OK. And that was . . .

TA: That was the dust, you know, I didn't like that.

DC: So it was the dust and all that . . .

TA: Yeah, the grit. Yeah.

DC: Did you have a mask or anything?

TA: Well, you had one if you, you know, if you wanted to wear it. But you had to wear, at that time, lenses, you know, for your eyes.

DC: Was it hard to do properly?

TA: No, it was just rough and dirty, you know. A lot of those bits were like that. You had to hold them, you know, and then you had to put the angle on them. Half of them are like on an angle. And some would be pointed and some had a round, a radius, you know.

DC: So you had to reshape them.

TA: Yeah. And there's other ones, they had, you know, angles in it and like that. It depended on the job they did.

DC: So your job was to keep the tools in shape so the other people could use them properly.

TA: Yeah.

DC: This is a bit on the side from that . . .

TA: Well if you want to get the name, the name of the skilled trade was cutter grinders, at that time. See, you have your tool room, your die room, and cutter grinders. Now the cutter [pauses] grinders, I'd say it's like preparing the tools for production. The tools that they use, you know. Cutters, you know, and there's all kinds. There's some big, look like a saw, you know? And broaches, you had to do that.

DC: So that's a lot of responsibility.

TA: Well, yes, it is if you want to—I mean, if you do anything wrong, you know? But then we had tool inspection. They would inspect our tools.

DC: OK. After you did your job?

TA: Yeah, after you did the job you turn it in and the tool inspector would check the tools. If it's all right, they go on production. He put it in the one side, you know, and where the trucker comes up and takes these tools and put them to the department that they belong. And if it was a reject, he'd put them over here and tag them as a reject.

DC: Were there any problems if they tagged your work?

TA: Huh? Reject, if it's wrong, you know, you have to correct it.

DC: Would you get in trouble or would you just correct it?

TA: No, no. No. And we never got in trouble—the company did. Because sometimes, if it's a reject and production has to have it and they think it's not that bad, you know. The foreman would come up there and OK it. Have you ever heard of that? They—you know, and they do it, so what they do, I guess, is they call the guys in the tool room to set the line to fit the tools, or something like that. And half the time they say it's all right and they run through and they run—they run a lot of scrap or some that's not that good.

DC: So would that be just trying to get production out whether or not the parts would work?

TA: Oh yeah. Yeah. It's not that the tool inspectors didn't do their job. They did do it. Yeah.

DC: But the company would run them.

TA: Yeah, and you think now, "Why have tool inspectors if you're not going to. . . ." Yeah.

DC: So the foreman could override the tool inspectors.

TA: Yeah. And the foreman from production—sometimes our boss up there would say, "Nope, he's not going to sign it." But then the production boss would come up there or his general boss would come up there and sign it and take it.

DC: So you'd be running tools that you knew weren't right.

TA: Yeah. Yeah.

DC: Oh wow.

TA: It's not new. It's not new.

DC: How did you feel about that?

TA: Huh?

DC: How did you feel about that?

TA: I didn't have anything involved in it. I know they came around one year and they came—we're going to do zero defects.

End of Tape I, Side A

Begin Tape I, Side B

TA: It was called zero defects, you know, where you do things right the first time. So it worked

good for about a week or two, and then they went back to their old way.

DC: Do you remember when that was? When they went to zero defects?

TA: No, no. No.

DC: No, OK. But it was a short-lived program, anyway.

TA: Yeah. And I'm sure after that—and they had other ones with a different name, you know.

DC: Did you ever get drafted?

TA: Yeah. Korea.

DC: Oh, Korea. OK, we're heading up in that direction.

TA: See, I went in first at the end, and I didn't have the points to go overseas. And [pauses] how was it? That if I list in the active reserves, you know, I could come home, see? I was in Fort Benning.

DC: Was that during World War II?

TA: Yeah.

DC: Yeah. OK.

TA: At the end, almost.

DC: The very end. All right.

TA: Yeah. Almost. And I was at Fort Benning and he said, "If you want out, you'll have to sign in the active reserve." I said, "OK." I didn't know there was going to be a war. So I did and I came home. And then in 1950 I married my wife. We went on our honeymoon in Chicago and then we heard that Korea, you know, invaded South Korea. So after our honeymoon I got home, I said, "Boy, I hope I don't have to go." I got home, after about a week I was called. Yeah.

DC: OK. Wow. So short honeymoon.

TA: Yeah. Oh yeah. Yeah.

DC: Let's back up a second—we'll catch up to that again. When you were first drafted, you were still working at Pontiac Motor?

TA: The first time I didn't pass the first draft. Yeah, the first time. Then the second time they had me in and they passed me.

DC: Why didn't you pass the first time?

TA: Huh? I don't know.

DC: Oh, OK. But they didn't take you.

TA: No. It's my health. Well, my eyes weren't that good, but I'm quite sure they can find a job, you know, for my eyes.

DC: Right. But in the second time, which would've been right near the end of World War II, they took you.

TA: Yeah. Yeah.

DC: OK, and so how did you feel about that?

TA: Well, it was all right, you know. I mean, you wouldn't feel bad. All the guys went ahead of you and didn't come back, so. . . yeah.

DC: So you took off for Fort Benning?

TA: Yeah. Well, at first I went to Camp Breckenridge, Kentucky. And that's where I did my boot training.

DC: How was that?

TA: Huh?

DC: How was your boot camp?

TA: [Very unconvincingly] It was all right. I did that all my life when you're a kid—jumping around.

DC: So then you went on to . . .

TA: And then after that, they give you a IQ test. You know, on—and where they're going to place you after boot training, you know. So, I don't know [pauses], but I think I had a—I think it was a hundred, a hundred and eighteen IQ, and I didn't try for anything. You know, when you're in there, you get test—I just, I'm fast. And so with that they put me in field artillery. Yeah. And the ones that were low, I'm sure they put them in infantry or, you know.

DC: So did you go on for training then in field artillery?

TA: Yeah. In Fort Benning.

DC: That was Fort Benning. What was that like?

TA: Huh?

DC: What was the training like?

TA: Oh, it was nice. You know, I mean you learn—well, me, I ended up as a corporal in the wire section.

DC: In the wire section, OK.

TA: Yeah. I had, I think, about six guys under me, you know? And you learn wiring and how to string a wire overhead and how to go underground because of tanks, you know, and all that. And your different knots and all that, you know.

DC: Did you like it?

TA: [Low to moderate enthusiasm] Yeah, it was all right. Yeah.

DC: What was it like with people coming in from all over, I assume?

TA: Oh yeah.

DC: Did you meet people from all over the country?

TA: Oh yeah, yeah. Yeah. It's just like at the plant, you know? When you work, you hire in, and you meet all different kinds of people from all walks of life. In the Army, too, you know?

DC: Did you like Georgia?

TA: Georgia's, uh, nice. I was there in—and when you still had to sit in the back of the bus, the blacks.

DC: Yeah?

TA: Yeah. I headed home on leave that one time and I took the bus. And I didn't think. I started to walk to the back of the bus and I sat down. The bus driver came up, he told me to come up there. And it didn't hit me then. I said, "Why?" He said, "Up in front." And then I said, "Oh." Yeah.

DC: Was he stern with you?

TA: Oh yeah. Yeah.

DC: So what did you think about that?

TA: It's not right.

DC: Was he afraid that you were some rabble rouser?

TA: No, no. He knew that, you know, I was from up North. I didn't know, or I forgot about it, or what.

DC: OK. So where were you when the war ended? When World War II ended?

TA: [pause] I think I was out on active reserve, yeah.

DC: OK. And where were you stationed on active reserve? Were you back here?

TA: Benning. No, no. I was home—no, it was *inactive* reserve.

DC: Inactive reserve.

TA: Yeah. Inactive reserve. I came home and they gave me a card that if they need me any time, you know, I could be called up. And I think I was in it—I had to be in it for, I think it was six years or five years. I'm not sure.

DC: Enough to last until 1950, anyway.

TA: But I knew that they knew that a war was coming on. I knew that. I mean, not then, but now I see it. And they must've known, to send us all back home.

DC: So did you get your old job as a cutter grinder back when you came back here?

TA: Yeah. Yeah.

DC: And how was it returning from military training?

TA: The same, you know. Nice to you. Yeah, yeah.

DC: Were there any new people that you worked with?

TA: Well, there may have been a few, but all the old people were there.

DC: So what were you doing at that time? You worked, you're back in Pontiac. You must've been, what, twenty-two years old, right? What were you interested in and stuff? What kinds of things did you like to do besides work?

TA: Oh, when I was young I liked jazz.

DC: Yeah?

TA: Oh, I liked jazz, yeah.

DC: And where would you go to listen to jazz?

TA: Oh gee, we went to—in Flint it was the old IMA building. In Detroit on Brush Street it was the—one, a bar like, was called the Flame. The other one's called, I think then was called El Cino. You know, and there were mixed—there was whites in there, blacks, you know.

DC: Did you have many friends around Pontiac who liked jazz, as well?

TA: Oh yeah. Yeah.

DC: Yeah, OK. So would you go together then to the clubs?

TA: Oh yeah. A few of us went together. It beats rap! [laughs]

DC: When did you get interested in jazz?

TA: Oh gee. I always liked music.

DC: So what else did you do?

TA: Well, work, I guess, you know.

DC: Did you stay in that cutter grinder job, then, for all the way through?

TA: Yeah. I was in there, and then I married my wife in 1950.

DC: Where did you meet her?

TA: Huh?

DC: Where did you meet your wife?

TA: Well, her brother was in boot camp with me, you know. And I didn't know him, you know. But anyway, I was in the first platoon and he was in the fourth platoon. And so when we ended there and we got, and we took our IQ tests and we were assigned, he went a different way and I went a different way. So I was trying to get my, some of my stuff packed to send home because I was going to leave. You know, he was there and he says, you know, we got talking. And he's from the area here, too.

DC: So you didn't even know he was from Pontiac?

TA: In Pontiac, no. And I said—he didn't have a box, or what? Well anyway, which way it was, put them in one box and then we mailed it home and my brother took *his* stuff that was in the box over to his place, you know? And after that when I got home, you know, I met her. But the funny part how I met my wife, my friend that I used to chum around with when we were young—and we liked jazz and stuff—he called me up and he didn't have a car, you know? I had a car. And he says, "I have a date." He says, "You want to go?" I said, "No." And I didn't want to go. I said, "No, I'm going to stay home. You know, I got other things to do." "Oh," he said, "please. I haven't got a car," you know, this and that. I says, "OK, but I'm not staying out late." And he said, "Remember," you know, "this one is mine!" I forgot how he had her described. "And the other one's yours." I said, "I'm just trying to do you a favor." I said, "I'm not worried about a date."

DC: So did that date turn out to be your wife?

TA: That's right. That's right. And it's the best thing I ever done in my life. Yeah. Yeah. The greatest woman on earth.

DC: What was she doing at the time?

TA: At that time—and she worked at—and they didn't know because they didn't have her age, and I didn't know how old she was, either. But she told me that she's been working for two years, you know, almost. I thought, "She's out of school. Eighteen. In two years is twenty." Didn't lie, but she said she's been working. And she worked at the Oakland County Infirmary. It's the Old Home, I guess they call it. And she worked there. And met her, yeah. Nice, the wonderful person. If you ever met her, you'd like her.

DC: Well, I talked to her in the hallway out here.

TA: Oh, did you?

DC: Yeah.

TA: She's really nice.

DC: I talked to her on the phone.

TA: Raised three kids. We lost three—we lost the two boys.

DC: Did you?

TA: Yeah.

DC: I'm sorry. How did that happen?

TA: Well, the one was injured at birth. And he could talk and stand up. He walked on, well, you know, crutches. But he lost his balance, you know? Smart as a whip. He was about

twelve and he was helping kids across the street in high school. Oh, he was smart as a whip. Nice. And the other we lost—he was a hockey coach and he was on the ice and his heart, you know . . .

DC: So he was an adult.

TA: Yeah.

DC: Oh, OK.

TA: But my wife's been nice. Any other woman, you know, with all that work and worry—some would, I won't say all of them, but a lot of them would just quit. Leave. She's . . .

DC: Now the younger son, or the son who had the problems at birth . . .

TA: Yeah.

DC: How old was he when he died? I'm sorry . . .

TA: Fifteen. Fifteen. He had no control for germs. Yeah. You know, anybody had a cold or something like that, and we had to stay . . .

DC: So he died of an infection or something?

TA: No, his heart.

DC: Oh, his heart, OK. And then also . . .

TA: Yeah. Edema, they said. Well, how it began, he was sick and we took him at the hospital. And they put on the IV. No, no potassium or iodine or—I don't know what it was. The wife knows. And the doctor was off for the weekend. And they gave him that, and that was it. But the doctor came in, boy, and he gave that nurses there hell.

DC: When was he born?

TA: He was born in May the 4th of 1950.

DC: OK. [pauses] So . . .

TA: No, 1951. I was married in '50. He was legitimate. I don't want you to think that. No, he was.

DC: OK. Boy, there's so much to think about there. Were you home when he was born or were you in the service?

TA: No.

DC: You were in the service.

TA: Korea. Yeah.

DC: Yeah. So. . . [someone enters room] Hi.

XX: Sorry, didn't know you were in here.

DC: Oh, that's OK. Can we help you?

XX: I got some supplies I got to drop off.

DC: Oh, OK. [interview resumes] So you were in the service when the son was born, and he had the health problems right from the start, it sounds like.

TA: Yeah. Yeah, yeah.

DC: Yeah. So did your wife have any support at that point in time? Who helped her?

TA: Well, her mother was there. And we had a two-bedroom flat. So when I was gone, her mother stayed with her until I got back. And then when I got back, and we had her there for awhile. You know, six, eight months or so.

DC: Yeah. So, there was so much going on in your life right then. You had just gotten married, then you had to go off to the war. Your wife's expecting.

TA: Yeah. Yeah, yeah.

DC: When did you come back from Korea?

TA: [pauses] I think it was October—it was in 1951, I think.

DC: OK, so you were gone for a little over a year then?

TA: Yeah. I was there a year and some months. Yeah.

DC: Did you actually go to Korea?

TA: Yeah, yeah. Yeah, direct there.

DC: Yeah. And so were you . . .

TA: The reason I got out early is, is they went by points. Who was there first, you know, and all that. And I was there—I think I was there before Halloween, I think, of 1950. And the war started in . . .

DC: Say June?

TA: June, yeah. July, yeah.

DC: OK, so were you . . .

TA: About there, you know, I don't know.

DC: Were you doing field artillery then?

TA: Oh yeah. Yeah, yeah.

DC: Were you in combat?

TA: Yeah, yeah.

DC: What was that like?

TA: Huh?

DC: What was it like?

TA: Well, they—you don't want to ask me that. Ask the ones that are in the infantry.

DC: OK, yeah. So were you behind the lines then?

TA: Yeah, but at times—see, our outfit was a hundred and five self-propelled—they were on a tank chassis, see. At Fort Benning, I trained on the trail pieces. They're pulled by a truck, you know? But then when I got called up, you know, before the war started, I got called earlier and they sent me to Camp Carson, Colorado, and I trained on the tank, on the chassis.

DC: Some quick training under the new technology.

TA: Yeah. Well it's the same, only thing, it's on a tank. And you can move in position and move out faster. But you can't get the elevation because of the base of the, you know, that tank chassis.

DC: OK. So some differences you had to get used to.

TA: Yeah. Yeah.

DC: Yeah. Wow. So do you have any other recollections from your time in Korea?

TA: You learn a lot. And you see, you know, a lot.

DC: What kinds of things did you learn?

TA: Huh?

DC: What kinds of things did you learn?

TA: The way they eat, you know? And [pauses] I met a young boy there and he stuck with me like glue. Yeah.

DC: A Korean boy?

TA: Yeah, a Korean boy. Yeah.

DC: Do you know what became of him?

TA: No, I don't. He wanted to come home with me, but at that time they wouldn't let him.

DC: Yeah. So were you eager to leave?

TA: Huh?

DC: When your time was up?

TA: Oh yeah, yeah. I was there during the early part—in the wintertime it was cold, and when we went over there, all we had is summer clothes and stuff. Yeah. I don't know if you heard it in the news at that time. Yeah. And we didn't get our stuff for winter until spring or summer, almost.

DC: So how did you survive?

TA: Oh, man. You had to sleep with your clothes, your coat on. Yeah. It's cold there. I never thought, you know, I always thought Asia out there is warm. But Korea, the mountains up there can be awful cold. Damp cold.

DC: Sounds awful. Sounds worse than this.

TA: Oh, gee. It's bad. I always thought, you know, Asia, you know.

DC: Well when you came back to Pontiac, let's see, your son would've been like half a year old or so, or five months old or something like that?

TA: Yeah. He—yeah, he was—yeah, yeah.

DC: Had you been—I'm assuming that you were writing. Were you able to get mail from Pontiac there?

TA: Oh yeah. Yeah, yeah. I was getting mail. Yeah. The mail was good.

DC: So tell me what it was like when you finally got back to Pontiac.

TA: Well, good to be back, you know. You know, and then you gotta get back into the same old, you know, work. The routine. Other than having a wife, I had a wife and a child. You know, to raise, and then I had to get to work because, you know, you didn't have money then, you know.

DC: Was your military pay enough for your wife and child to survive on?

TA: Well, no. I don't think it was that much. But everything I made I sent home. I don't know, my pay must've been like, at that time, corporal, I think, was like ninety dollars a month was it, or what? I'm guessing at it.

DC: Enough to keep your flat, anyway, it sounds like.

TA: Yeah. Yeah.

DC: So did you go back to your cutter grinder job?

TA: Yep. I went back there and they took me back, which they said they would, because the law said, you know. I went back and that's where I worked until I left in 1985.

DC: So you stayed as a cutter grinder.

TA: Oh yeah. All the way through. Yeah.

DC: OK. Were you affected at all by any of the recessions in the 1950s? I know there were some times . . .

TA: Oh, there was—1958 was bad and '57 and eight, I think. And I think it ran into '59, too, a little bit, where the [pauses] production didn't work every day. But at times, when they did work, cutter grinders, you know, they didn't work us all. They'd take the oldest guys, you know, and work them. You know? And at that time I'd work three days a week and sometimes four days and three days. And for, you know, a long time. And at that time, I worked on the—then they had me over on the gun job. The [?] gun, you know? And most of the guys in Plant 9 didn't know much about the gun, you know, and the work over there. But they could run the machine and, you know, and read the print. And they could do it, but it wouldn't be as fast, you know. And so when we was going to work three days and they'd make sure we get all the work out so those guys wouldn't be rushed up or, you know—and delay. We'll have all the work—and that I didn't like. But you know.

DC: So they worked you guys harder so they could be less efficient.

TA: Yeah. Yeah, yeah.

DC: Well getting back to when you first got back from Korea, you went to the cutter grinder job. Had anything changed on that job when you came back from Korea?

TA: No, well—well, a little new work. You had newer tools and stuff, you know, and changes on the car. When you change a car on the engine or even on the frame and that, you have different tooling, you know. With changes and different tooling they had different tools that you have to grind, you know.

DC: And how did you learn about the different kinds of grinding you'd have to do? I mean, how would you learn about that?

TA: Well, you learn it. After you're in awhile and you know, you know how to do it.

DC: You figure it out. OK.

TA: Yeah. What do you do? Teach?

DC: Yup.

TA: And you know how to teach, and after you're gone—the first thing is know how to handle people's—you know, what do you call it?—the personalities, you know. After that . . .

DC: Sure. One of the reasons I ask questions like that is because there are an awful lot of people who have never been inside a factory like that, including me, and so . . .

TA: Yeah. Well, in fact, during that time we had two open houses here. And I brought the kids in and the wife. Yeah. It was nice to see.

DC: Yeah. What did they think of it?

TA: Oh nice, yeah. It's nice, you know? But they don't put you in the area, you know, and where it's bad, you know. Well, they do, but they run you through fast. Yeah, you know. But it's nice. And she seen the assembly line where they run the cars through. Production lines, yeah.

DC: So your first son was born in, what, May of '51.

TA: One, yeah.

DC: And then you had several more children.

TA: Yeah.

DC: And when were they born?

TA: Let's see [pauses] Pat was born—I was telling the wife to hold out for St. Patrick's Day, and she was born the day before. The sixteenth, isn't it?

DC: Yup.

TA: Yeah, March the 16th. [pauses] Oh man, I should remember this. She's forty-eight.

DC: OK. So that'd be 1954?

TA: Yeah, yeah. That's right. Yeah. And our other son, [pauses] August the 1st, [pauses] '57, I think. Yeah. He'd be thirty-seven—he'd be forty-two or three. If I'd known all this, I would've had a . . .

DC: Well that's OK. I'm not trying to put you on the spot.

TA: I know them. Yeah.

DC: Yeah. I'm just trying to get a sense for . . .

TA: I can remember phone numbers, but the one time I was in Detroit at the airport and I was going to call in the wife. And I got in there, started dialing my number, and I forgot it.

DC: Your own phone number.

TA: I had to hang it up. I said 673-9710. Has that ever happened to you?

DC: Oh yeah, sure. I know other people's numbers but sometimes I blank out on my own.

TA: Oh man, I just blanked out almost.

DC: Sure. But anyways, you had a growing family.

TA: Oh yeah. Yeah.

DC: Did your wife stay at home with the kids or did she have a job outside the home?

TA: No, she stayed home. Oh, she went out the end of the week when I was home. She'd help at General Hospital there. And she worked there for nothing.

DC: Oh, she was volunteering?

TA: Yeah. Volunteering.

DC: OK. Yeah. Because she had that experience working in the infirmary.

TA: Yeah. Yeah. And she worked up—and she had a good job, and they gave her a job that, I mean, you had to—I mean *know*, you know, how to talk or write and spell right. She worked up in the OR room, you know? If a doctor has a operation tomorrow and she'd put that on the board: the time, the doctor, and the patient on the board. Answered the phone and all that.

DC: That's a lot of valuable work.

TA: Yeah. Yeah. She did there and she met a lot of doctors and they liked her. Yeah.

DC: And who would be with the kids on the weekends when she did that?

TA: It was me.

DC: That was you. OK. What kinds of things did you do with the kids?

TA: I don't know. You know, we'd go for a ride or play around the house, you know.

DC: You mentioned that your family went to church.

TA: Yeah. Yeah, we did. Even after when I got married—my wife is not a Greek and she didn't know Greek. And the church that I used to go to—after I got like—well, before teenage, about twelve or around there, I went to All Saints Episcopal Church. So I went there and then when I married—and the wife—and we went to the Episcopal church.

DC: Was that a big change for you?

TA: No, no. No. Because I'd *been* there. Yeah.

DC: OK.

TA: In fact, when we were small that—I don't recall, but my Dad, you know—there wasn't very many Greeks here and to go to a Greek church my Dad had to go to Detroit. That was the only Greek church. And he couldn't go, you know. And so the bishop of the Orthodox church says, "The next church to go to that's like Greek is All Saints Episcopal Church." So he called them up and—I won't say all of them, but a few of the Greeks went there until they had their own church.

DC: Now did you see your family much at that time? Your parents?

TA: Oh yeah. Yeah.

DC: OK. And then your mother-in-law stayed with your wife for a crucial time. Did she live in the area, as well?

TA: Oh yeah. Yeah, yeah.

DC: OK. So you had extended family.

TA: Now her mother was raised outside of Pittsburgh.

DC: But had she moved to this area?

TA: Yeah, yeah. Yeah. Her and my wife's Dad moved here. I don't recall when, but they moved there. But her Dad died when she was about eight years old. Young, yeah. And so her Mother had to get out work and she got a job at Truck and Coach. And she worked there until she was sixty-five and she raised the three girls and the boy, and the boy on her own. Yeah. She did a good job.

DC: Yeah. So she started working, what, in the '30s or '40s? Or when did she start working?

TA: Yeah. I don't know. Well, her Dad was fifteen years older than her Mother, I think. But anyway, when her Dad died, her mother was young, you know.

DC: So she—wow, she had to . . .

TA: At that time—well, especially her Mother wouldn't tell us nothing about her life. Isn't that odd? Yeah. And some are like that, you know. Where, you know, like me, I like to tell my kids, you know. But her mother, you know . . .

DC: She wouldn't say anything.

TA: No. Because I asked the wife. She said, "I know as much as you know."

DC: Really?

TA: Yeah.

DC: Wow, OK. She was very quiet about that.

TA: And she always said, "If I want you to know things, I'll tell you." [laughs]

DC: She was very private.

TA: Yeah, she was [short pause] Austrian and the country right next to it. Slovine, is it? Slovakia.

DC: Slovakia. Yeah, OK.

TA: Yeah. Yeah.

DC: So did you—you said when you were growing up in the Depression, your family wasn't

able to afford any vacations or anything like that.

TA: Well, no.

DC: But how about with your family in the ‘50s? Did you do anything, like, would you go off on vacations or fish or . . .

TA: No, no, we didn’t. No.

DC: Did you stay interested in jazz throughout the decade?

TA: Well, yes. But then after that, you know—you know, your work, and turns you to other areas, you know?

DC: What kinds of things did your kids get involved in?

TA: Oh, they were in scouts. And sports. In fact, our son that we just lost, he played ball with Kirk Gibson. [Michigan State University football star and Detroit Tigers baseball player]

DC: He did? Wow.

TA: Yeah, yeah. Yeah. In fact, when he was raised, about—our street is here and then there’s like a little field in the street here, and Gibson was born there and raised. Yeah. Right, very close. And they went to school together. Yeah. Yeah.

DC: So when did your family move out from Pontiac?

TA: Oh gee. Let’s see, I moved there [pause] ‘53.

DC: In ‘53, OK.

TA: Yeah. And so my daughter was born then, in March. So it was ’53, she was born. Yeah, 1953.

DC: That’s how we can figure it out.

TA: Yeah.

DC: And so was that Walled Lake or somewhere out there? Or where did you move to?

TA: Waterford.

DC: *Waterford*, OK. I’m sorry, I got mixed up there. And why did you move to Waterford? Why did you choose Waterford?

TA: Well, I didn’t want to get too far away from work, you know, where you have to spend

time, like Lapeer, a lot of guys from Lapeer would drive—I said, "I want a place where it's open," you know, "and where the kids could have room to play and it'd be open." It wasn't like I'm trying to get away from the conditions here in town. No. Back then, conditions weren't bad. It was nice, you know. But I just left for better and I told the wife, "Hey, it's open out here." And it's open at that time. The guy—if you wanted to hunt in that area, you could hunt. But he could hunt with a shotgun or anything like that. Yeah.

DC: Yeah. So it was almost the country.

TA: It was nice, yeah. It was nice. But now—well, it's nice now, but it's packed. And at that time you had room and across from our house in the field the kids played ball. Gibson and our kids. Yeah. It was nice there. And our place was right at the end of the hatchery. You know where the hatchery is? You know the hatchery there. And at that time, they had the fish farms, you know. They run them. And in the wintertime the kids would skate there.

DC: So is that how your son got interested in hockey?

TA: Yeah. I was out there with them.

DC: You were skating, too.

TA: I was skating, yeah.

DC: OK. Well you could teach me a thing or two about skating.

TA: Yeah.

DC: So it sounds like family was really important to you.

TA: Well sure.

DC: Which shift were you working at that point?

TA: Geez, I worked everything and I think the worst one that almost did me in was the third shift. And I don't know why—well, I know why they'd want it, because you get that extra money. But to me it wasn't worth it.

DC: How long did you work on the third shift?

TA: Oh gee—I don't recall. But it was about a year or two or three.

DC: Were your kids young then?

TA: Oh yeah. In the afternoons was—you know, I'd be heading to work and the kids are there, you know, and I'm going to work. Get back and they're in bed. And the work falls all on

the wife, you know.

DC: How did she hold up during that time?

TA: Good. Just like I said. If you knew my wife, she is real nice. I can't say she's perfect. If I did, I'd say she's Christ, but she—you know, but she's close to it. Real nice. Real nice gal. Yeah, clean, too. Her mind's clean, too. Clean house. Oh, man.

DC: Sounds like you're very fortunate.

TA: We fight over that because I don't want her—she mops with her hands and knees still.

DC: Really?

TA: Yeah.

DC: That's hard on my knees.

TA: [chuckles]

DC: So were there any major changes in your job, then, over the course of all those years?

TA: Well, well the jobs at that time, after awhile they got more hard and comp—compl—help me. . .

DC: Complicated.

TA: Yeah. Yeah. Because, you know, they change in here and they change in that. And then you got these employees in training, you know. They want this and they want that, you know. It was hard, I mean, it was hard there to be a foreman. And they asked me to be one, three or four times. And I said, "I'm not raising anybody else's kids." It was rough. The grief that you have to go through.

DC: As a foreman, you mean?

TA: Yeah. Then, you know. So I just—change, and then after awhile—for the last job I had, the next to the last, they had me on the broach job, because no one would go there.

DC: Really? Why would no one go there?

TA: Well, it was work. It was hard. You had to do a lot of miking and set it up because it was a tunnel broach. And when the connecting rod went through, it cuts the step in the whole thing. And if you're off . . .

DC: So would people not want to take the chance of . . .

TA: No, a lot of—well, they're young, you know. If it was me, I'd a been the same. They want an easy job where they can get it done quicker and read the paper, you know. You know, you know what I mean.

DC: Yeah, sure.

TA: I was young once. I know.

DC: Now when you started out as a cutter grinder, were there any African Americans in that job?

TA: At the start, I don't recall one. But at—but at the end when they brought in—the last time they brought in employees in training, and they brought in one, two [pauses] about four, I think, or five in there. And in fact, one turned out to be my foreman. They made him a foreman, after he was there.

DC: Did he start out as a foreman or did he work his way up?

TA: No, no. Yeah, yeah.

DC: So when was that big transition? Do you remember?

TA: [pause] Didn't know you was going to ask me this kind of question, so I don't know.

DC: That's OK. I'm not trying to put you on the spot. That's not what I . . .

TA: No. I don't know when the—when they had that surge in sales and buying all those cars. And then they built a new 8 here. It was called the 301 V-8. And our place where we worked was upstairs, and you go downstairs to the men's room, and you could see them, you know, putting in the new lines and all that. And they had it in for about a year and a half. After they had it on for a year and a half, they tore the line down. Yeah. But it was right about then, you know. [looks like mid-to-late 1970s]

DC: OK. That was the time. I can probably place that. I'm not trying to put you on the spot. I don't mean it that way at all.

TA: Oh no, no.

DC: What kinds of questions am I not asking that you had hoped that I would ask you?

TA: [pauses] What—well, how you put it. Well, you know, everything you hear, if anything goes wrong, they blame the blue-collar workers.

DC: Yeah. Have you always felt that way?

TA: Huh?

DC: Has it always felt that way to you?

TA: No, I mean, it never affected me. But why do they do that? I know the answer.

DC: What is the answer?

TA: Huh? Because we're doing the work and you're bound to make mistakes! If you're sitting in an office and you're trying to kill time, you go outside and say, "Well, I'm going to get my hair cut now." And come back and, "Well, I don't know, I'll go out and play golf." But the ones that are making mistakes must be doing the work, right? Yeah. Because if you don't work, you can't, you know, you can't make a mistake. But they all say it, you know—like friends of ours, you know, they're like professional. Now I got—my daughter teaches special ed. My son's wife—that died—teaches special ed, too, you know. My sister teaches school, and she did.

DC: A lot of teachers in your family.

TA: And so, so it's not that—they look down at the blue-collar worker.

DC: Even your relatives, your family members?

TA: No, no. No, but I don't mean—you know, I mean as a whole. They emphasize education. Education is good. But you're going to have to admit if somebody isn't capable or—how would I put it?—doesn't have the knowledge to do that but has a knowledge to be a good carpenter, hey. Right?

DC: Absolutely. My life is lost without people who have those skills.

TA: Yeah, see? See?

DC: My grandfather was a sharpener and welder and he was excellent at what he did.

TA: See, I can't cry and say, "Well I didn't go because, because I didn't have the money and my Dad didn't, you know, he didn't have the money." I could work myself through. You know? If there's anything to blame that I didn't go, it's my fault.

DC: How do you feel about the work that you did?

TA: Well, you know, a doctor asked me—we're friends with two doctors, and one's in Bonn. And he came here twice. The first time he came alone. He stayed at our house. And the last time was about '99. He brought his son and he stayed over. And he asked me a question before he left: "Are you happy with what you did with your life?" I said, "Yeah." I said, "I think I did the best I could with what I know, in the law, you know, and what I can understand." Sure I'm happy. A wonderful wife—hey, you know, I must have some brains to pick a wonderful wife. Kids, perfect.

DC: How did—when you think back on the role of the union in your life . . .

TA: Yeah.

DC: You started to talk about it a bit earlier and I made you go back. How do you reflect on the role of the union in your life?

TA: The union—you know, some say what's wrong is the union. Or you hear the phrase, you know, "Bust the union." And it's the worst thing to do. It's just like everything else. Like a banker in the bank, you have to check and balance. You know, one has to watch the other one. You know, if you didn't—because I remember when they first worked in the crankshafts. I had a boss and I thought that he was the rottenest one. He was the rottenest one I ever had. And I thought that I just knew. Everybody else in the plant knew him the same way that I did, you know. Brought his nephew from Tennessee to work in the crankshafts when they were timing us to get more. And he came and he ran them in a hurry, you know, stayed on the job. Because he was going to leave in a month, you know. So he broke the quota and he went down South. So the union has its faults, yes. The company has their faults, too. You have Enron, WorldCom, you know? And there's thieves among everybody. But they can't live without each other, I don't think.

DC: Were there specific times in your career when you needed the union to come to your defense?

TA: Oh yeah, yeah.

DC: Can you think of some? Can you give me some examples?

TA: I don't know what, but once I was on the crankshaft and the boss was always on my back. And I went down to the superintendent's office. You know, I was a young kid. And I told him and he said, "I'll get back with you. I'm going to check your record." So he checked and then he, you know, I get called in. I went in there and we talked and he says, "As long as you're here on time, you do your work, you don't cause trouble, you don't have to be afraid of anybody." Now he was the superintendent that—but some there, they make foremens, and I don't see how they make them. [pauses] Well, I know why, yeah. Because they work and they couldn't get anything out of them, and they made him a foreman.

DC: Odd way to get promoted.

TA: Yeah. Yeah.

DC: Were there any times when you had to file a grievance?

TA: Oh yeah, sure I have.

DC: Can you remember any specific cases?

TA: [pauses] Oh, it didn't have anything to do . . .

End of Tape I, Side B

Begin Tape II, Side A

DC: . . . saying it didn't have anything to do with your machinery.

TA: No, no. Or what I work—it was like something that wasn't right or they wanted you to work on a machine that was locked out, you know, you're not supposed to run. Or something there or oil on the floor, you know. Stuff, you know.

DC: And how did the union respond when you filed those grievances?

TA: Oh, and they did come, you know.

DC: Did you ever become a committeeman or anything like that?

TA: Oh no, no.

DC: No. Did you ever pay attention to those elections and all that?

TA: I'd always vote.

DC: Yeah?

TA: Always did. My Dad, and my Dad—when we were young and old enough to vote and I was home at election time, I come home from work and he'd be standing right there. He said, "Vote." I said, "I am." He said, "Vote." I said, "I'm going to wash up first before I go to vote." He demanded that we vote, and we did. I always vote. The wife votes. We always vote.

DC: When I asked you if you ever became a committeeman, you gave me a smile that made me think like you'd never in the world want that job. Was I right?

TA: Well, it's a job, it's a hard job. And it's unthankful. Just like a doctor. If he helps you, oh he's a great doctor. If he doesn't, hey, he's a horse's butt. Yeah. Just like that, there's some times that they win a case and sometimes they don't have a chance to win it. I remember one time that the guy was in there all the time and late, and he had a drinking habit. Always late. Now how is a committeeman going to handle that? He did his best to protect a brother, yeah. But . . .

DC: It's a tough defense.

TA: I got all the worry I had at home. You know, kids, to raise kids, send them to school.

DC: What was it like with the son who had the health problems all the way through?

TA: Well, at the end, the last year he was on—we had to have air in the house. You know, oxygen. And he was a proud kid. When we went to church, when we got out of the car he didn't want any help. He got his crutches and he walked in. And when I'd go to open the door to help him, no.

DC: He sounds like a very strong person.

TA: Oh, he was. Just like the wife. My wife's got a strong personality. She doesn't lie. I don't lie. I like to, you know, stretch it for fun, you know. But lie, no. And my wife will never—I mean, if you don't want to hear what she has to say about you or anything, don't ask her.

DC: Don't ask, OK. She'll tell it to you straight.

TA: Yeah. Yeah. She comes off straight. You know which way she's coming from.

DC: Was your first son able to go to school regularly all the way through?

TA: Yeah, he went to school, yeah. He went to school and the end of the first grade, I think, you know, he had a hard time in there. You know, to get to school in and out. And they told us it's best to have him homebound. So we did.

DC: So he had to stay home after that?

TA: Yeah. Yeah.

DC: So he wasn't able to go to school after first grade.

TA: No, no.

DC: How did that affect him?

TA: He learned. He's smart. Well, we were lucky. Fortunate we had good teacher. I don't know how they are with the homebound now. Her name was Mrs. Phelps. And boy, was she good.

DC: Would she come into your house?

TA: Yup. In the house, yeah.

DC: Every day?

TA: Yeah. No, I don't know if it was every day. It could've been two times a week, or three times. But she gave him homework and all that. Yeah.

DC: And then what was his social life like?

TA: Huh? And we had friends out there and kids out in the yard.

DC: Well for a lot of kids . . .

TA: My aunt, in fact, bought him a go-cart. And had him in the back yard with the governor on it. He run up our shrubs, up the fence. And the one time, I had him out on the other side of the field, you know, and the governor didn't work. And he hollered and we had to stop him. I got in front of it and stopped it. It flipped me, but it stopped it.

DC: How fast was it going?

TA: I don't know how fast, but you know, he's making a pretty good speed.

DC: Yeah. You put yourself at risk.

TA: Yeah. But our kids never were neglected. I had the best food. I did, you know. When we skimped, it wasn't on food or health. Health and food we didn't skimp.

DC: It must've been difficult for your wife to run the house with a child who had to be there at all times, as well.

TA: Oh gee. I always say the wife could answer the phone, stir the pot, change the diaper on the kid, and everything else at one time. Yeah. She's really good. She's a smart little gal.

DC: That's a lot of work.

TA: She's real smart. Boy, she knows a lot of medical—as much as the doctors know. Because in her spare time, she read medical stuff and all that. Books. We got medical books and Bibles by the dozen.

DC: So she really reads up on these things.

TA: She didn't go to college or anything like that, but she is educated.

DC: Yeah.

TA: Yeah.

DC: Now you mentioned . . .

TA: Manner—oh . . .

DC: You mentioned earlier that at least one of your daughters teaches special ed.

TA: Yeah.

DC: And what do the others do? You might have told me but I've forgotten. Your other children.

TA: Our son, the one, was sick. And the other one went to—his first school, when he got out there he was—oh, there was three or four in his high school class that was doing math they'd do in college. What is that called?

DC: Advanced or something.

TA: Calculus and all that. Boy, he was a whiz. And he was accepted at Briggs College at State. [Lyman Briggs School of Science, Michigan State University] He wanted to go into medical. But then a religious school offered him, you know, to go there free, you know, if he'd play basketball. So he went there for a year. And then the school's going to close anyway or something. It was in Owosso. I don't know if you've heard of that school.

DC: Owosso. Hmm, OK.

TA: The one there, but it isn't there now. So he came back and went to Oakland. And he took math and he took chemical engineer. And so when he applied for a job, he went near Beaver Road and there's a place where you apply or where you give them your, you know. . .

DC: Your resume or. . .

TA: Resume and all that. And he did and he got called within a week or less. And he got the job. And the company worked and was owned by a family deal, you know. He worked for them and the company was going downhill. Now, I'm going to brag about him. And he built it up, money—oh, man, and the company was big and huge. He was the type of guy that his checkbook—numbers in his head. Now, I don't do mine like that. You know? And—what was I going to say? Well anyway, he built up the company, you know, and the year before he died he says, "Next year," he said, "I'll be in the money". He said things were coming in. He'd get orders—well, he worked in the lab and he didn't like the lab work. Sickening and fumes, so he went into sales and that's what he did. And he just built that up, the company. He said, "Next year, I'll have the money." He said they're getting in. So he did, and . . .

DC: Had he had any health problems before then?

TA: No, no. In fact, before he died, a month or two, he went to the doctor. And he said, "Is

everything all right?" Once in awhile he had high blood pressure. But it wasn't—he said it was all right. He went there, said, "No, everything's all right". But they explained it was like that skater that died over here about a year—no, it wasn't a year ago. How many years ago? About three years ago? And they said it's something that the machines can't detect. Yeah.

DC: Yeah. That's really, really sad.

TA: But oh, he was smart. He just built that company up. And at the end, you know, after he left, they wanted all his books and all that. His wife said, "Here's his [?]". The company was lost. And anyway, she went through some stuff to—here's a book, you know, just numbers. And she handed it to him. He says, "Boy," he says, "we're lost without him." And in fact, he called us up twice, the boss, the one that owns the place, and told the wife and I, he said, "He built this up". Yeah.

DC: What was his name?

TA: Mark. Yeah. Mark. A wonderful guy, you know? The wife would tell him things, you know. Even if he disagreed with her, he says, "OK, Mom". Yeah, and he'd say nothing. And then we'd go over to their house [?] or something like that. But never talked to us—both of the kids, three of them, no. The girl, well, was nice. Didn't talk back. But once in awhile she'd give you a look that could kill you, you know? But all of them were nice. Yeah.

DC: Yeah. Well, OK.

TA: I'm getting hoarse. I don't know about you.

DC: Yeah, I think it's probably a good idea to . . .

TA: I got up today, I felt all right, but it felt like a head cold like, you know? Yeah, that was . . .

DC: Oh, there's a lot of that going around.

TA: Yeah.

DC: I really appreciate you spending time with me.

TA: I'm all done, huh.

DC: That's fine, yeah.

TA: I mean, I'm done.

End of Interview