Charles Curry Interview
May 19, 2003
Local 653 Union Hall
Also present was Mr. Curry's wife, Norma
Transcribed by Marie O'Brien
Edited by Daniel Clark

DC: . . . in advance, you know, exactly which way a conversation will go, but I always start out with really basic information like where were you born?

CC: I was born here in Pontiac, Michigan.

DC: Pontiac, OK. That's actually rare. Most of the people I've talked to have been born everywhere else but Pontiac.

CC: My dad was born in Tennessee. He come up here right after the Depression.

DC: Did he? OK.

CC: Right.

DC: Where in Tennessee?

CC: Over on the northwest corner. Union City.

DC: And what did your family do there?

CC: Farm.

DC: OK. Do you remember—did you ever go back there to the farm?

CC: Oh, [?], I go back there every year.

DC: You do? OK.

CC: Sure.

DC: Well tell me about the land down in Tennessee. Let's go back there.

CC: Well, it's kind of rolling country. Used to be small farms back years ago when they had mules and horses they farmed with. When he left the farm—well, even when I was young, we went back there and saw mules and horses they farmed with.

DC: When you went back when you were very young?

CC: Yeah, when I was young we'd go back about—quite regular.

DC: Mm-hmm. OK. And what did your family grow down there?

CC: Cotton, tobacco, usually.

DC: How long had that land been in the family?

CC: Um, I'd have to say probably—well, it's—I hadn't been there really too long. My, my great-grandfather was a doctor down there. So his son went into the farm. Or, my grandfather went on to the farm. So it hadn't been there just that one generation.

DC: OK—um, and then, um, your father, you said, moved up to the Detroit area?

CC: Right, come here to Pontiac. Hired in Pontiac Motor.

DC: To Pontiac, OK. OK, and when was that?

CC: Well, he was a teenager, so that had to be probably back in the '20's.

DC: In the '20's, OK. All right. And let's see, was he married at the time?

CC: No.

DC: No, OK. Yeah.

CC: Mother come up here from Illinois. Southern, middle-southern Illinois.

DC: OK. Tell me more about where she came from.

CC: She came from around south of Decatur. They all come up here to work right along about the Depression time.

DC: Did her family farm, as well, down there?

CC: No. He was a laborer. Her grandfather was—or a skilled trades laborer, I should say. So work got kind of bad and they all, everybody come up here.

DC: I had grandparents from Effingham down in that area. Not too far away.

CC: Oh, uh-huh. Yeah, right. That would be just north of Effingham. Up [I-]57 a little bit.

DC: Mm-hmm. What now is [I-]57, anyway.

CC: Right. Yeah. Back then when we traveled, there was no, wasn't any freeways.

DC: Yeah. OK. So do you know when she moved to this area? Is this where your parents

met?

CC: Right, my parents met here at Pontiac Motor. Both of them worked there.

DC: Oh, OK. All right. So tell me how your mom ended up in Pontiac.

CC: Work.

DC: Did she come on her own?

CC: Well I guess I'd say she come up here—best I can remember, she come up here to work, and Dad did, too. Only she come up by herself and he come up with—or later, a brother and a sister come with him. But he come up here with a bunch of teenage kids looking for work here in this plant.

DC: So a bunch of kids from the area down in Tennessee moved on up.

CC: Right, right.

DC: Do you remember how either your mother or your father, you know, centered on Pontiac? Why would they choose Pontiac out of all the different places where you could go to find work?

CC: Oh, that I couldn't answer. Other than there was—you had Truck and Bus, Pontiac, Fisher Body, so then they ended up at Pontiac.

DC: Did they have any other relatives who had gone earlier by any chance?

CC: No, he was the first one.

DC: First one, OK.

CC: Right, he was the first one. There was twelve kids in his family and Granddad passed away about, oh, just before he left. So that—along with, along with the hardships in the South. He, he probably—well, I imagine probably all, ended up, up here or wherever, too. . .

DC: Where did he fit in with the twelve kids?

CC: I'd say he was probably somewhere around seventh or. . .

DC: Middle.

CC: Yeah, he'd be just—yeah, just below the middle of them.

DC: OK. Wow. It always amazes me how people have ended up in Pontiac. It's a fine place to

be, but you think about all the different possible locations, so that's why I asked that question. Do you remember when your mom moved to Pontiac? You said your dad came in the '20s sometime.

CC: I don't, I'd say—well, she had to have come up in the '20s, also. But I was born in '32.

DC: OK. All right. That was one of my questions.

CC: So they had—just when they started going together, I'm not sure.

DC: OK, but they met at Pontiac Motor?

CC: They met here, yeah, here in the Pontiac area. Whether they met at the plant or not, I don't know.

DC: OK, right, but they both worked at Pontiac Motor and met somewhere around . . .

CC: Probably around the Pontiac area here somewhere.

DC: Yeah. What were their jobs back at that point when they hired in? What were they doing?

CC: She worked over in Plant 5, working on machines. He worked over in the nickel plate—buffer and polisher.

DC: OK, right. And boy, they would have come over in the '20s, and then if you were born in '32, the Depression would have been hitting at that point in time.

CC: Right.

DC: I know you were too young as a baby to remember what it was like, but did you talk to them at all about what it was like? Or when did they get married, how about that?

CC: Well, let's see. I think they got married, what, in around '30, I believe it was. Some time in '30. December of '30, I believe it was.

DC: Did they ever tell you what it was like in Pontiac in 1930, '31?

CC: It was rough.

DC: Yeah.

CC: Yeah. They had to go place like Salvation Army and all different kind of things, because the plant wasn't a steady place to work back in them days. Matter of fact, his early days, he talked about having to hire in every day. Yeah, you didn't go over there to hire in and get a job and go to work. They had to go to that front gate every day and they'd to hire them right off that street every day.

DC: Was that true when he first arrived in the ‘20's, as well?

CC: Well, that’s just what I hear him talk about. I’m not sure if it’s first or in the—but somewhere along the line, he had to hire in that place every day.

DC: I didn’t know if that was always the case or maybe if it was the case during the Depression years, you know, when there’d be fewer jobs.

CC: Well, I’m sure that had some bearing on it. You know, if they didn’t have work and things slowed down, they made them go home. There were no benefits much back in them days.

DC: Did your mother work at the plant until you born?

CC: Well, she worked at the plant, boy, up until probably—I was in, probably high school, I’d say. Maybe higher part of middle school.

DC: So she carried on.

CC: Yeah.

DC: OK.

CC: Then she got sick and she had to retire. Disability.

DC: OK. Well we’ll learn more about that. Let’s see, were you the firstborn?

CC: Yes.

DC: OK. All right. Well tell me what you can remember—it’s going way back, I know—but what you do remember growing up in Pontiac when you were young.

CC: Well, we always lived around the plant. We lived over there off Joslyn in a couple places. Lived down here off Perry Street over in what they call Perry Park. Back in the early—well, we moved from there when I got out of high school.

DC: OK, so you were there a long time.

CC: Right. We was around this plant all the time till I graduated from high school. Then they moved out to Waterford.

DC: What was the neighborhood like around the plant?

CC: It’s a—it was a factory neighborhood. Good share of people lived in there worked in the factory.

DC: Mm-hmm. Did you have the same neighbors over time? Were there a lot of people moving in and out?

CC: No, I'd say we pretty well had the same neighbors for long periods of time back in them days.

DC: Do you remember where these people had come from?

CC: All over. Pontiac probably is a very diverse town. People come from all over back in the early days to work here at these factories.

DC: Mm-hm. What about, you know, going to school and stuff like that? Where, do you remember where you went to school?

CC: Yeah, I went to school here at Lebaron, right up the street here on Joslyn. And Emerson over in Perry Park. Willis and Eastern Junior High School and Pontiac High. And she did, too.

DC: And Pontiac High, all right. OK. Was it—did you. . .

CC: We graduated together.

DC: Oh, you did? OK. All right. I'll have to interview you as well [to Mrs. Curry].

CC: We went through middle school and high school together.

DC: OK. So were you in the same neighborhood or did you just get funneled into the same schools?

CC: No. We funneled—we started—I met her when we went to middle school, Eastern Junior High School.

DC: OK. Yeah. So what do you remember about your family getting by in those Depression years? I know you were born in '32 so, I mean, I'm stretching it, you know, thinking back, but. . .

CC: Uh-huh. Well, Dad rented places up until—I guess I was probably, maybe about second grade, I'd say. And then he had rented a place and the guy sold it to him for the back rent he had into it, because he wanted to get rid of it. It was, all it was just a little—boy, I'd say it couldn't be much more than about seven hundred square feet, that house. It was a little bitty house with a—well, I've always called it two rooms and a path. It had a little old, little, round, hot wood stove in the middle of that living room. Yeah, and then no ice box. Winter time, they put food on their tub to keep it.

DC: OK. Keep it cold.

CC: Yeah, I can remember some of them, some of them hard days.

DC: Did you move around from apartment to apartment, then, or house to house? You said he rented.

CC: No. Yeah, he rented. In my remembrance, I can remember living on Westbrook, and then we moved around on Madison. And we moved out on Emerson Street, there in Perry Park. And we stayed there up until, in that place, till probably I was in middle school, probably. Then we moved up farther into the subdivision, up on the other end of it till I was out of high school. So we stayed in the same location all the way through.

DC: It sounds like you moved a little bit early on and then stayed longer.

CC: Right, till he finally bought that house. Then we stayed there for—well, we stayed in them two houses up until I got out of school.

DC: What kinds of things did you do as a family when you were growing up?

CC: Uh, well, Mother and Dad both worked, so my brother and I, I guess we more was out in the street with the neighbors. Neighbor kids. Played ball, hockey. And all them kids, their dads all worked at the plant, too, most of them.

DC: How about their moms?

CC: Some of them worked, I guess, and some of them didn't. A lot of them stayed home.

DC: So did your parents work the same shift or different shifts?

CC: Different shifts.

DC: Different shifts, OK.

CC: Yeah. He'd work one shift, she'd work the other one.

DC: Yeah. So they must not have seen each other very much.

CC: Yeah, not probably too much.

DC: Yeah. Was there generally a parent around, then?

CC: Right.

DC: OK. So what did they—did any of them work nights, or was it like days and afternoons?

CC: Days and afternoons.

DC: Yeah. So who worked days?

CC: Dad usually worked days and Mother worked second shift.

DC: OK. All right. So she might—let's see, I'm trying to figure it out here. She'd be there when you took off for school, but when you got back your dad would be getting back from work or whatever.

CC: Right. Or be close to it.

DC: Yeah. In that range. OK.

CC: As long as I can remember, we pretty well took care of ourself anyway. Well there was nothing much around there, anyway, to get too far into.

DC: Well, it sounds like there were a lot of kids around, so there'd be things to do.

CC: Right, there was. I don't recall a lot of kids getting in too much problems back in them days, like they do nowadays. It's—things is fast and different.

DC: Yeah. Did you have any jobs when you were a kid?

CC: No. Deliverng papers. That would be about it. Yeah.

DC: OK, delivering papers. Yeah. Well let's see now. What do you remember about the war years? You would have been really young starting out, but. . .

CC: Well, the war years, I was probably about thirteen, I'd say.

DC: By the time it ended, yeah.

CC: My uncle, he was in the Second World War. Dad wasn't. He was too young for the First World War and too old for the Second. But that uncle lived with me, Mother's youngest brother, and he's about ten years older than I am. But he was—he lived with us for a lot of time during my growing up years. So he went and I was a little too young to go.

DC: Yeah, I guess so.

CC: So I—but I can remember all the way through them war years.

DC: What do you remember?

CC: Using stamps to buy gas, tires. Everything was tough to get a hold of back in them days. If you wanted to—if we wanted to go back to Tennessee, you had to kind of wiggle around to get stamps to get enough gas to do it.

DC: Mm-hmm. That would be hard.

CC: Yeah, and tires. You had a—you had a hard time getting tires. Good tires, anyway.

DC: How about your parents' work situation?

CC: Well, back then, working wasn't too bad because they were building war products. They were building guns and whatever else over here across the street.

DC: Yeah. My hunch would be that there would have been a lot more work and a lot more steady work during those times.

CC: It was. Right. They was fairly steady back during the war years.

DC: Yeah. So let's see, you would have been just thirteen when that ended.

CC: Well, let's see, that war started in, what, '39, '41?

DC: Yeah.

CC: So in '39, '41, I guess I'd have been—I guess I'd have been, what, about eight, nine years old when it started.

DC: When it started, yeah. Right. Yeah, that's real young.

CC: So five—what did it last? About five years, I guess, '45?

DC: '45.

CC: So, yeah, I'd have probably been maybe about sixteen or seventeen when it got over with.

DC: What can you remember, then, about your family life, you know, your parents or you or whatever in those years right after the war? Can you remember—did you have any brothers or sisters?

CC: One brother.

DC: One brother, OK. Yeah, you mentioned one brother.

CC: Yeah, one brother. That's—just two of us.

DC: OK. And how much younger is he?

CC: He's two years younger than I am. He worked over here in the plant, also.

DC: He did, too?

CC: Yeah. Both of us did.

DC: Yeah. But anyways, back to what I was asking, I was wondering what you could remember about those early years after the war. You would have been a teenager.

CC: Right.

DC: Can you remember anything that happened around Pontiac then?

CC: I can't think of anything that'd be outstanding, other than just going to school and playing ball and playing hockey.

DC: Did you ever talk to your parents about their work?

CC: No, not too much. Dad—of course, he was pretty active in the organizing and the starting of the union when that started.

DC: Well tell me about that. Yeah.

CC: And I can remember him having a lot of guys over to the plant, or over to the house, *from* the plant, and they'd be having meetings and talking over the problems and the things that needed to be done over here in the factories.

DC: Well let's talk a little bit more about that. So he was active, you say, in organizing?

CC: Oh yeah. That was back before we had a union.

DC: Yeah, back in the '30s.

CC: Yeah, he was in the early organizing of the UAW. The AFL-CIO, back in them days. Before it went on to be what they call the UAW today.

DC: Did he ever tell you why he got involved in organizing the union?

CC: Well, he'd tell you a lot of stories about over here in the plant. You know, they kept pretty tight hold on them workers over there. Kind of abusive situations, back in the early days. There's no wasting of no time. I mean, they kept track of them people full. They was all working, nothing else. And I guess they was pretty abusive, the way he talked, back in the early days, so . . .

DC: Did he ever talk about his bosses?

CC: Ah, not too much about individual bosses. Just the treatment they got overall from the company.

DC: So you said that there were some meetings at your house?

CC: Yeah. I can remember a lot of meetings that my house had, down in the basement. Yeah, the early ones I can remember. That's when we lived over on Mansfield. A bunch of the guys would come over and they'd sit down and talk. That's, you know, when they first started the union. So I can remember him talking about the union right straight from before there was a union. Right.

DC: Yeah. Did he ever later tell you about that time? Did he ever feel like there was any risk in trying to organize the union?

CC: Finally he got discharged over trying to organize the union. He got back to work. I'm not sure just how that come about, but when the union come in and he went back to work –I don't recall just how long he was off—but he went back to work and worked here at the plant for forty-two years, I would say.

DC: He got his job back.

CC: Yeah.

DC: Was your mother involved in trying to organize the union?

CC: No. I don't remember her being deeply involved in it. She might be in, setting there in the meetings or whatever. She followed him around most of the time. Even when, you know, when he run for offices here in the local union. She would make all the membership meetings and stuff like that, and campaigned quite a bit.

DC: Well, she let them hold meetings in your house, so that's, you know, a sign of support, it seems to me. Or at least not—not opposition.

CC: Yeah. Right, right. Right, and then when he got to be an officer here in the local union, of course, they had their regular meetings at the union hall, which used to be right here on Glenwood. Little bitty store building. Was long and very narrow. When they started out.

DC: I guess you take what you can get.

CC: Right. So I—I don't, I'm not—I don't remember just what all offices, committeemen or otherwise, he held for how long back, back in his earlier days. But . . .

DC: Did he ever talk about the difference that the union made?

CC: Oh, definitely, all the time.

DC: Tell me about some of the things he'd tell you.

CC: Well, him and—I used to go hunting with him and there used to be the regional, assistant

regional director down at Region 1, back in the early days before it, they broke up with the Detroit area. It used to be, McCauley used to be the regional director. And Jim Morgan was the assistant director, and we—he hunted with us a lot. And he was always saying that, you know, you get out there and the roads would be full of cars or whatever, and that's—they said that's because of all of the gains and the vacation gains, and whatever gains. It put a lot of the people out being able to do a lot more things than they did back when he was younger.

DC: Yeah. Able to have some time. OK.

CC: Right, so. I, you know, when I hired in, even there in '50, they didn't have retirements the day I hired in. So a lot of SUB-pays and retirements and all that come in even after I hired in. So they didn't have too much before, before I hired in.

DC: You said that one thing that your father complained about when he wanted to organize the union, help organize it, was that the bosses were riding them, you know, making them . . .

CC: Right. They was very abusive. Most of them were. The demands were fairly heavy, like working in slave shop.

DC: Did that change then?

CC: Yeah, slowly.

DC: Slowly, OK.

CC: Slowly that changed. Even after organizing, it's slow change.

DC: Why do you think it was slow?

CC: Hard telling. I imagine it took a few strikes and a few adjustments to get things—I think maybe that's what they need over here is to get back and really understand what, what went on in the early, early years with them guys. Why they had to do what they had to do. I think it'd be a whole lot different today if they had a lot of them memories what happened back when.

DC: Well, that's one reason why I'm talking to you.

CC: Yeah. Yeah.

DC: I don't know if anyone else will read them, but yeah. Tell me a little bit more about hunting. You said you—did you go hunting with your father?

CC: Yes.

DC: How old were you when you first went out?

CC: Oh, boy. Probably eleven, twelve, I imagine. I hunted with him all the way through the rest of his life.

DC: Where would you go?

CC: We'd go up north a lot. Like up in the—years ago, we'd go up in the thumb area for pheasants hunting and we'd go up around Mio area and hunt partridge and squirrels and rabbits. And then fish, too. We fished a lot. Hunt and fished.

DC: Did you go deer hunting, as well?

CC: I didn't deer hunt until after I got, I left home. Dad didn't deer hunt. I got him started deer hunting.

DC: OK. That's interesting.

CC: Right. Naw, he didn't hunt deer. You know, back where he come from was all birds and rabbits and squirrels.

DC: OK, that's what he was used to in Tennessee.

CC: Right. They, you know, they used that a lot to live on back in them days. And he did that, too, when I was young.

DC: Oh, during the '30s?

CC: Oh yeah. I can remember him going out and back then he might take two or three shells, and when he'd take two or three shells, he'd have come back with two or three pieces of game. He didn't waste anything back then.

DC: He was a good shot!

CC: Yeah. He had—well he did it because he needed food. And it wasn't easy sometimes. And then I can remember him having credit stores. They let him have food for the store up until the week when, you know, the week when they get paid.

DC: Mm-hm. Run a little credit line.

CC: Yeah, right. So it wasn't easy years. I can remember him doing different things like going down and getting shoes and things from the Salvation Army back when they'd have layoff periods. So it wasn't, wasn't easy back in them days. Very difficult. Only fortunate part of back then, you could get by, I think, a little easier than you can now. We could burn whatever in that little old pot-bellied stove. And that small house wasn't much to keep warm. But nowadays you gotta have gas and electricity and whatever else. Back then, you didn't have to have all that stuff.

DC: Yeah, that's a good point. Yeah, requirements were different.

CC: Yeah. Requirements was minimal about what they are today.

DC: Did your mom go on any of these hunting trips?

CC: No.

DC: No, OK. So it was just you. And then did your brother go eventually?

CC: No, he never did hunt.

DC: He never did?

CC: He never did.

DC: Was that his choice?

CC: That was his choice.

DC: OK. Interesting. Well it sounds like that was one of the times when you did get away, anyways, when . . .

CC: Oh yeah. Yeah, we used to hunt and fish a lot.

DC: Did you go on any other vacations or anything like that?

CC: Just going back home, back to Tennessee. And we'd go to Illinois, also. Maybe stop there, where my mother come from, and go on to Tennessee.

DC: That's kind of a big loop.

CC: Yeah, that was all our vacation all the time I was growing up.

DC: So did you always have relatives back then in Illinois and Tennessee?

CC: Sure. Sure, yeah. Right. In Illinois, I'd stay with—we'd stay with my grandmother. And then I had some uncles, they was all out on farms back when I was younger. Dad's brothers and sisters. All of them were pretty well farmers.

DC: Did you like those trips?

CC: Oh yeah. I enjoyed them. Yeah, that's, that was the only trips we made, was doing that.

DC: Did you have cousins that you would look forward to see?

CC: Yeah, we had cousins. I'd usually stay with one uncle of mine and his boy was about my age. So we had a couple places where the kids was about our age. We stayed.

DC: Mm-hmm. Well let's move on here to when you hired in. Is that around the same time that your Mom had to quit work? I'm trying to figure this out. You mentioned earlier that your Mom had to. . .

CC: Yeah, she left before that.

DC: OK.

CC: Yeah. I can't remember just what year it was. She had to retire under disability.

DC: But it was before you hired in.

CC: Right.

DC: OK. So that gives us a pretty close estimate.

CC: Right.

DC: What happened to her?

CC: She just had a multiple amount of problems, so she had to retire. She couldn't work, work heavy anymore. So she retired.

DC: Did something happen at work or was it something else?

CC: No, it's just growing older. Hardening of the arteries and she was a heavy smoker. Well, he was, too. They were both heavy smokers. So she had lung problems. Emphysema. Hardening of the arteries.

DC: Yeah, that would definitely make it hard to try to work.

CC: Right, so.

DC: Had she had different jobs over the years?

CC: No, she worked two areas over there. One of them was in the old Plant 5. It was a machining plant. And then she worked in the warehouse before it split off and moved over here, when it was part of Pontiac Motor itself. All the—each plant had their own warehousing and their own foundries and assemblies and everything was all in one location. Now they do it by little groups. They do it all over. Yeah, her last job was working in the warehouse, which is a lot lighter, easier work.

DC: What specifically did she do in the warehouse?

CC: They packaged parts for shipment. Right.

DC: Get it all set and then send them out. OK. And when she was doing the machining, what machines was she working on?

CC: Oh, goodness, I'm not sure what that—I'm trying to think of what they machined over in old Plant 5. Small parts, most of them were.

DC: OK. I think that sounds right based on what some other people have told me. But sometimes they switch from year to year.

CC: Yeah.

DC: And then your father, was he still doing nickel plate, or was he. . .

CC: He worked over in the plating plant. He was a buffer and polisher. And he had all the scars to show for it.

DC: Oh yeah? Tell me about that.

CC: When you, when you—you got them old bumper guards, I don't know if you can remember them, them chrome ones?

DC: I saw them when I was a kid, yeah.

CC: Right. Well when you start buffing them on one of them big wheels and they get caught in that wheel and throw it right at you. You know, come right around that wheel. He had marks all down his arms where them things get away from him.

DC: Did he ever have any serious injuries from that?

CC: No, just—probably wouldn't take much to get hurt over in that spot. But right—and then mother's younger brother, he did the same thing. Buffed and polished over there in that nickel plate. He quit. He didn't like that, so he quit; he went to be a salesman outside, the rest of his life.

DC: A little cleaner job there.

CC: Right. Right.

DC: So you would have hired in then right around the time you were eighteen years old, it sounds like?

CC: Yeah, I just—well I turned eighteen about one week and then went in the plant the next.

DC: OK. Did you go to high school? Did you graduate high school?

CC: Yes. Mm-hmm.

DC: OK. And the—so you went straight into the plant. Tell me about your first job.

CC: I worked over in car assembly. I worked over in car assembly and in ’51, I was in the naval reserve here in Pontiac. So I went in—they put me on active duty for a short period of time. And when I come back in ‘51, then I moved out to the Pontiac Retail Store, which is a car dealership that Pontiac owned, down here on Wide Track. Which is Wide Track now, and University. I think Truck and Bus uses it for engineering now. But I worked down there for twenty-three years.

DC: OK. Well let’s go back here to the first job. When you first hired in you said you were on car assembly.

CC: Car assembly.

DC: Tell me what that job was like.

CC: It was rough. You had to be fast. That line moved and it didn’t stop for nobody. So you had to, you had to do them jobs. You had to get in one and quickly and get out and get to the next one.

DC: What was your particular job?

CC: I put in vent cables and I stayed on that for quite awhile. That’s back when they had the little vent cables in the middle and it went to each side. You had to pull them, back in ‘50.

DC: OK. So would you have to reach underneath there and. . .

CC: Yeah. There was—well, the two cables come to the middle of the dash. They had two cables, one side by side. Put them in and then I worked upstairs on the front end where they put the hood ornaments on and moldings and built the front end up before they put it on the car. Right.

DC: OK. So did you do that after you did the vent wiring then?

CC: Yeah. Right.

DC: OK. Yeah. And how did you move from one job to another on that assembly line?

CC: Well, yeah, right. Well when, there in 1950, when I went in there and worked on the line and I went back to school for, to get, to finish graduating, and when I come back they put me—what I say? They put me back on the line. I can’t remember—what job was I putting

on back then? Two of the main ones I can remember is working up on the—building up hoods and fenders and grilles, and the vent cables.

DC: Of those two jobs, which did you like better?

CC: Well, to me they was all bad. Working on assembly line, they can say—you know, I keep hearing people out here telling me how they got it made in that plant, but they never worked on one of them lines or worked on one of them moving—or getting in them presses or machines where they keep right on a-going. It's—it may look easy, but it's not. It's difficult work, unless you're really made to go do it.

DC: So how did you feel? You're eighteen years old—I mean, how long did it take you to learn how to do these jobs?

CC: Not too bad, you know, you can get into it. But after, you know, over a period of time and eight hours a day, it gets kind of on the boring side. You're, you know, you're just repetitious. You get to where you're fairly decent at it.

DC: Uh-huh. When you first started, who were you working with? I mean, were they young kids like you? Were there older people there?

CC: There was a mixture. There was a lot of older people. There was young ones. Most of the older people would be on off-line jobs. You know, they'd done put in a long time, and a job opened up over there on the bench, building parts up for the line.

DC: OK, so they're building parts to the. . .

CC: Yeah. Or maybe even truck drivers, or—so they'd work their way off the line, the older people did.

DC: So the ones doing the assembly line work right on the line. . .

CC: Yeah, it was—yeah, mostly younger, faster guys. But that's all changed, too, because all these people in the plants now has all got probably twenty-five, thirty-five years in there now. They haven't did much hiring here the last few years. So them people that are working them lines over here has got to be older people. I don't know how they function now, how it works. I haven't been in there in a long time. But it's got to be difficult on older people.

DC: Yeah, I would think so.

CC: Hey, Dave! [someone passing through the hall]

Dave: What's happening?

CC: Not too much.

DC: What about the makeup—were there, was it mostly guys? Were there any women on the line? Were there any blacks on the line? I mean, how did—who all worked on that?

CC: Back when I hired in, I'd say probably most of the blacks would be over in the foundry. There's a few through the plant, but most of them been in that foundry. Women, they would be scattered through the plant, but there wouldn't be near as many as they was back during the war. Lot of the gals, for whatever reason, I don't know why, ended up out of the plants. But they had a few of them working there in the plant.

DC: OK. Did your mother notice any difference in the number of women in the plant? When she started, you know, she kinda crossed over that whole era where—she was there before the war, then she was there during the war, and was there for a few years after.

CC: Right. They—I'd say there's probably fewer women after the war when I hired in. I think the war was over in '45 and I went in there in '50. So there was, there was fewer women by that time than there was—my aunt worked in there, also. Dad's older sister.

DC: What was her job?

CC: She worked over there in Plant 5, also, in that machine, little machines. She worked there longer than mother did, because she retired. Mother, I think she only had about fifteen years, maybe.

DC: OK. Were there a number of women in that Plant 5, then? It sounds like that might be one place where women worked.

CC: I'd say there's women was pretty well across the plant, best I can remember.

DC: OK. Just in varying numbers.

CC: Yeah. Depending on, you know, on how heavy the jobs were. Of course, heavier jobs—assembly line, there was women in there on them.

DC: OK. All right. So then you said you were in the naval reserve for a year.

CC: Mm-hmm.

DC: Tell me about that. That would have been, what, during the Korean War, I guess.

CC: Right, Korean War. Right.

DC: All right. So did you get drafted or did you just sign—did you enlist?

CC: I was, I belonged to reserves here in town. So they activated us, so I—I was only in, I was only in active duty, I think, for, oh, I don't know, maybe about six months is all.

DC: Where did you go for active duty?

CC: I went to Chicago. Naval station down there in Chicago on the Great Lakes.

DC: Yeah. And what did you do? What was your job?

CC: I was mainly in basic training.

DC: Oh, OK. All right. Was there any—let's see, if you were only there for six months or so, was there any talk of you going overseas or shipping you out?

CC: No. No, they found a spot on my lung and discharged me.

DC: Oh, really? OK.

CC: Mm-hm. I think I'd been in the naval reserves maybe a couple years, total, maybe three.

DC: So you would've been medically discharged then at that point, or. . .

CC: No, they just give me an honorable discharge.

DC: OK. I guess that's what I meant. Yeah.

CC: Right.

DC: But for medical reasons.

CC: Right. And when I come back, I hired in to Retail Store instead of going back in the plant. I didn't care for that assembly line. [laughs]

DC: [laughs] So how did you manage to get the job in the Retail Store? It sounds like that might have been a popular job. You were still pretty young. How did you get that job?

CC: There was a opening down there and I went in as—and started out on trim repair. And then I moved from there. . .

DC: In the plant or at the Retail Store?

CC: At the Retail Store. And then I moved into the body shop as a bumper painter.

DC: Well tell me exactly what this Retail Store is then. I mean, what. . .

CC: It's a Pontiac dealership. They sold automobiles, right.

DC: Owned by Pontiac Motor itself.

CC: Owned by Pontiac Motor division.

DC: How big was it?

CC: I'd say we probably had a hundred, a hundred and twenty-five people work there. Yeah.

DC: Wow. OK, that's bigger than your normal dealership.

CC: They had a big sales—we did a lot of work, warranty work, for the plant over here, too. Different dealers, maybe something they couldn't fix. They'd send it down there and we did a lot of work for the plant. We serviced a lot of cars from the plant.

DC: OK, from the plant, and then how about—it sounds like warranty work, those could be cars coming from a lot of different dealers around the area then. Am I right?

CC: Well, yeah. Like if some—we had cars that somebody, some dealers couldn't fix. They'd send them down there and we'd take care of them. Right.

DC: Yeah. Wow. So you're technically a Pontiac Motors employee, but you're working at the Retail Store.

CC: Right. We had a regular shop committee in our unit and we dealt with the main labor relation group from Pontiac Motor division.

DC: OK. So you're just a part of that whole unit.

CC: Right. Right.

DC: OK. Well tell me more about this place. I only have talked to one other person who mentioned the Retail Store, so this is new to me. You said that there were maybe a hundred twenty or so people working there; once again, was there a spectrum of people? Were they—you know, were there some who had been there for awhile, or were they mostly young people?

CC: Oh yeah. Some of them been there—most of them hired in there stayed. I don't remember too many of them that ever left. They stayed there till they retired. Or they closed the Retail Store up in '74. They shut all of the dealers down, General Motors did.

DC: So I'm still curious as to how you managed to get in there at nineteen years old, or eighteen or nineteen, you know? It seems like that would have been a place where people with more seniority would have wanted to go.

CC: Yeah, seniority, I mean, that was separate. It was just a dealership.

DC: Could you bid on jobs if they came open there, or not?

CC: No. No, they hired—all their hiring was off the street.

DC: Gotcha. OK, that makes sense now.

CC: Yeah, there was no moving back and forth. Them people didn't never worked at the plant and vice versa.

DC: All right. That's what I was getting at. I wasn't sure if . . .

CC: It was just like a regular dealership, yeah. We had our own seniority group. No—if you did happen to come from the plant, you went down there, you started out brand new. And reverse, the same thing applied.

DC: OK. I see. So anyone would have to give up their previous seniority.

CC: Right. You'd have to—what I had over here, I give up and started out down there brand new.

DC: OK, all right. Well how did it occur to you to apply there for a job?

CC: Dad told me that they had an opening down there.

DC: OK, so he was aware of it.

CC: Yeah. So I went down there and hired in. That's when old Harry Clinger was boss down there, and his dad used to be a big shot up here at the plant, also.

DC: OK, so tell me more about—I don't know anything about Harry Clinger.

CC: Well Harry Clinger owned a dealer—well he moved from Retail Store over to Ann Arbor. He had a dealership over there. I don't know—he had a Pontiac dealership. Clinger Pontiac, was it? This ring a bell with you?

DC: No, it doesn't. Probably before my time in Ann Arbor.

CC: I know when he left the Pontiac Retail Store, he asked me to go over there with him.

DC: Oh really?

CC: Yeah. I stayed here because we had a contract. We had the benefits. You know, and the long term looked far better than it would be in a regular dealership.

DC: Yeah, how many dealerships are unionized?

CC: Not very many.

DC: Yeah, I wouldn't . . .

CC: Right. Very few.

DC: Yeah, that's definitely. . .

CC: So we had the same benefit package that they got here at the plant. The same holidays, Blue Cross Blue Shield, and all the other things that come with it. We had the same thing.

DC: Where were you living at the time?

CC: We was living out in Waterford.

DC: Were you [to Charles and his wife, who was at the interview] together then at that point, or no?

CC: No. When I went down there we weren't.

DC: OK. All right. So you were still with your family then.

CC: Right. Yeah. Right, I was—I'd come back and I'd lived with my parents out in Waterford.

DC: OK. And then why did they choose to move to Waterford?

CC: I don't know. They just—when I graduated, they sold the house and moved to Waterford. And right about that time, I left for the service. So I didn't live there very—up until I left the Navy and come back to, come back home.

DC: OK. Yeah, so you took off for Chicago right at that time.

CC: Right. Right.

DC: What about your brother? What was it like for him to suddenly move to Waterford? He would have still been in high school.

CC: Right. He quit school and went to the Air Force. He spent four years in the Air Force. And then—well, he went to the plant before, so he was on military leave and I was on military leave, too, so all the time we was gone, we got credited service for that.

DC: OK. But when your family moved out there, you both were pretty much out of the coop.

CC: Right. Yeah, well, yeah we was both. And then we wasn't there very long. And then of course he stayed four years and come back, and by that time I was married and gone. So when he come back, he was by himself until he got married.

DC: All right. Well so where, or when did you two meet then? It was in middle school or someplace?

CC: Middle school, right.

DC: But, I mean, did you stay in touch with each other? Were you dating at that point?

CC: No.

DC: No, OK. All right. So you just knew who each other was. OK.

CC: Yeah. We didn't date till after I got out of the Navy.

DC: OK. All right. That's what I was heading up to. So when did you two connect again?

CC: When I got out of the Navy. I guess it would be probably '51. We got married in '53.

DC: OK. And so how did you link up again when you came back from the Navy? I mean, where did you see each other again?

NC: He called me.

DC: He called you. OK, all right. Yeah. And what were you doing at the time, if you don't mind me asking?

NC: Oh. Where was I? I'm not sure.

DC: Not sure.

CC: You could have been working at Simm's, or with that lawyer.

NC: Oh, I was working at Simm's in the office.

DC: At Simms. What is Simm's?

CC: Simm's was a—boy, everybody. . .

NC: Department store.

CC: Anybody who lived in Pontiac knows about Simm's.

DC: I didn't live in Pontiac, I'm sorry.

NC: The only one with hardwood floors.

DC: Oh, OK.

CC: You know, these Simms sold about everything.

DC: I probably have a picture of it in here somewhere. I don't know if you. . .

CC: Simm's was one of the old main stores in Pontiac.

DC: Do you have this book? [pictures from old Pontiac]

CC: No.

NC: No.

DC: I don't know if I can find it quickly in here or not.

CC: Simm's is a—I did a lot of shopping in Simm's. The Retail Store was right there close. I bought tons.

DC: I didn't—it didn't show in the index, but there are a lot of pictures of the places that you've mentioned. I don't know if they have the Retail Store. Let me see. I'll give it to you, you can thumb through it.

CC: Used to be on South Saginaw, but as soon as they moved there on University, which was Mount Clemens in them days, I hired in there then. They just opened up the new dealership.

DC: OK. All right. So when you came back from the Naval reserve, you got the job at the Retail Store. And what—I don't know if you told me exactly what you started out doing at the Retail Store.

CC: Trim. Trim repair.

DC: Trim, OK. Trim repair. You did tell me that. That's right.

CC: Replace the headlining, seat trim, door trims, all the trim. Moldings, windows, glass, windshields, back windows.

DC: How did you like that?

CC: Good. I liked that.

DC: Yeah?

CC: I worked my own speed. I worked for me. There was no clock on me and I could work at my pace. We were on piecework then. I got paid for what I did. Over here [in the plant] we got paid by the hour. From then on, I worked, I worked piecework, I guess, or by the

job, for twenty-three years.

DC: So you preferred the piecework?

CC: Sure.

DC: Yeah, OK. Were you busy enough?

CC: Oh, plenty busy enough.

DC: OK, yeah.

CC: Had a good twenty-three years.

DC: Because I could see a problem if there just wasn't that much work on a particular day.

CC: Well, you could get, you could get some slower days, but then we negotiated in what we called a guaranteed wage, weekly wage.

DC: OK, all right.

CC: Which, well but I never did, I never did draw much of that. I don't think anybody else did, either.

DC: You guys were busy enough, didn't have to worry about that.

CC: Yeah. No. Yeah, I can't remember of us—you might have had a little bit of slowdown here and there, but we worked pretty steady through my whole work life there. We did a lot of work for the plant and a lot of work come from other places that they couldn't seem to get fixed.

DC: So that's when—I can see that, you have work coming from a lot of different directions, you know, from the plant. But also I assume that customers actually bought cars at your dealership and would bring them in for service, as well.

CC: Yeah. They sold a lot of cars. Sold a lot of cars.

DC: Yeah. So you'd have far more potential business than your average. . .

CC: Than the normal dealer would be. Sure.

DC: How did you learn all those different jobs? You just mentioned a whole bunch of different things that would be pretty complicated.

CC: Well, I imagine a lot of it's things, you know, I was familiar with from up here in the plant when I worked there. But you just learn them. And the longer you're there, the more

you've learned and the more you're able to do.

DC: Did you learn from the people who were already working there?

CC: Working there, sure.

DC: Would show you.

CC: Right.

DC: You said that you worked at your own pace and all; was there a supervisor looking over you?

CC: We—no, we had a shop foreman. But he never looked over you. Because if you went over and set down and didn't do nothing, you didn't get paid. So he wasn't worried about what you was doing.

DC: So he was working, as well.

CC: Well, sure. No, he—you know, he worked by the hour.

DC: I hear what you're saying: that if you weren't working you wouldn't get paid.

CC: If I wasn't working, I didn't get breaks.

DC: So he wasn't going to stand over you to make sure you're working.

CC: Right. Right, they didn't stand over us. If you didn't work, you didn't get paid. So we worked pretty steady. I used to work pretty hard.

DC: What about times when there was more work than you could get done in a reasonable amount of time? What would you do then?

CC: Well, the work would just have to wait till we got to it.

DC: OK, all right. There wasn't pressure, then, to go faster or harder or anything.

CC: No. Well sometimes, when they wanted it out real fast, they'd, you know, get on you once in awhile. But trying to get that particular job out, I never had any pressure on me for much of anything.

End of Tape I, Side A

Begin Tape I, Side B

CC: . . . on paint. Me and another guy that worked there in trim with us, him and I went up and did—we started out doing all the used car repairs for, you know, body work, paint, trim. We did a lot of used car work for awhile. And then we started doing a lot of work for damaged vehicles come out of Truck and Bus from shipping them from different dealers.

DC: Oh, they were damaged on delivery?

CC: Sure. Right. Damaged on—and they'd bring them up to us and we'd fix them. And him and I did that for awhile. And then he went in the paint shop, solely on the paint, and I went in the body shop and worked bumping, and painted, too.

DC: So you guys stayed together for awhile and then went slightly different ways, it sounds like.

CC: Right, yeah. Then he went back to the paint shop full time and I went back to the body shop.

DC: Do you remember when any of these switches took place? I mean, when did you go into the body shop?

CC: What years? Well, I'd say probably back about '66 probably.

DC: OK. So you were in trim for quite some time then.

CC: Right. Yeah.

DC: OK. How did you like the body work?

CC: I like the body work.

DC: What was it about the body work that you liked?

CC: I kind of liked it all. Back then we did mostly lead. Now they use a lot of plastic—Bondo and whatever. A lot of jobs they wouldn't let us use no Bondo, back when it first come out. We still had to use lead back then. So we didn't—we didn't start using a lot of that plastic and Bondo out until the later years.

DC: So you like the lead?

CC: Yeah, I like the lead.

DC: What was the advantage of that?

CC: Well, with lead you could put it where you wanted it. You could do whatever you want to do with it. With Bondo, once you mix it, if you ain't very quick at it, it gets hard. With lead, you could—I like lead a lot better. Plus it didn't—you know, if it had a rusty place

the water and that and the moisture wouldn't come through. The lead didn't bubble and blister the paint. Where plastic does—Bondo does. It—the water'll go right through it and blister that paint you put on it.

DC: Hm, OK. I can see that would be frustrating.

CC: Yeah. So I like the lead a lot better, a hell of a lot better. You could hit it again and it'd stay about where you put it. Plastic don't do that, so.

DC: Was the shift to plastic and Bondo because of concerns about lead?

CC: [answers immediately] Cost. Cost.

DC: Cost, OK. It was cost.

CC: Lead's a whole lot—boy, I don't know what it cost for a stick of lead nowadays, but I hear it's very expensive. So cost was where it was at. Plus now they make this sheet metal a lot thinner. I'm not sure they could lead on these cars, newer cars, like they did back when I was into it.

DC: OK. Yeah, a lot has changed.

CC: A lot of changes. Yup.

DC: I've talked to a number of other folks about working in the '50s. It seemed like there was, there were always periods of layoff.

CC: A lot of them.

DC: Yeah. Did you experience that?

CC: We didn't—no, we didn't have that. The plant did. The factories had—'57 was about a year, year-and-a-half layoff period. During that period, we did a lot of service work for the plant. We was doing a lot during that bad period. We was doing a lot of work for Pontiac Motors.

DC: What kind of service work were you doing?

CC: We were servicing new cars off the line and getting them ready to go to the dealers.

DC: OK. So they were producing some cars during those years.

CC: Right. And a lot of them—a lot of them come—they bring down to us and we'd service them, and then they'd deliver them to wherever they was going. To whatever dealer they was going to.

DC: Was that a different kind of service than you would be doing under normal circumstances?

CC: I would say it was. I'm thinking, as I remember, probably it's an area where the dealers might've been doing some, but all of a sudden—they call them Jim Wilson deliveries. Evidently, Jim Wilson was the guy that was over making sure the car was right when it left the factory and went to the different dealers. So then we started servicing all the new cars before they got delivered, which give us a lot of work for a period of time.

DC: I guess so. Now did you normally—I mean, you couldn't normally have serviced all the cars that came out of Pontiac Motors. That would've been impossible.

CC: We was doing a good share of them.

DC: But I mean, before the recession, I guess is what I'm saying. When they were running full capacity.

CC: Yeah. We was doing what they called all the Jim Wilson deliveries, which was a lot of cars.

DC: Did he just demand better quality out of the plant? Or what was it about Jim Wilson?

CC: I don't—I'm not sure what, you know, what got all that started from the plant. But they were Jim Wilson deliveries and we serviced them all.

DC: OK. So you were busy while other people were getting laid off.

CC: We were extremely busy during that period of time. In the '50s, back when the plants was having a hard time keeping things going. That's what caused them SUB-agreements [Supplemental Unemployment Benefit] was back in the '50s in them long layoff periods.

DC: Right. But they didn't affect you personally.

CC: No. I put in forty years and I didn't draw one SUB check. Or one unemployment check, either.

DC: Wow. You might be the first person I've talked to in that category.

CC: Yeah, I was extremely fortunate. I never drew one unemployment check. Didn't draw one sick leave check or one SUB check.

DC: Well tell me, you must've known some other people who were still working in the plant who were on layoff.

CC: Oh, sure.

DC: Yeah. How were they getting by? What was going on?

CC: Well, I—during that period of time, a lot of them was having it rough, because a lot of them was laid off about a year and a half. That brother of mine was laid off thirteen months.

DC: That was in '57- '58? He was, wow. What did he do during [?]?

CC: He went—he got a job on the outside.

DC: OK. What kind of job did he get?

CC: I think he worked down there at Farmer's, a gas company—I don't know if you can remember that or not—down there in the south side of Pontiac. He worked at different places trying to make it, to get back to work.

DC: Yeah. Yeah. Did he eventually get back in?

CC: Right. He finally ended up over there in the foundry, skilled trades, and was a foreman up until he retired.

DC: Oh, OK, so he got into the skilled trades.

CC: Yeah, he went management way and I went the union way.

DC: OK. Interesting.

CC: He'll be here Thursday.

DC: He will?

CC: Yeah.

DC: Well maybe you can introduce me to him.

CC: He'll be here—we got him to join the chapter. He used to be a trustee here at the local. Back before I even got into the local. I was committeeman and chairman shop committee down there for—on and off for years.

DC: Over at Pontiac, or at the Retail Store?

CC: Right. Right.

DC: OK.

CC: So we sent a lot of negotiations down there.

DC: Yeah. Well I'll be here Thursday. If you introduce me to him, I'll see if I can talk to him.

CC: Yeah, he'll be here. And Don, the guy that's recording secretary. Yeah, he used to work here in car assembly.

DC: Really?

CC: Yeah, we grew up together from kids. And he worked in car assembly and I got to help get him in down there at the Retail Store, and spent the rest of his time down there.

DC: Well, if you'd . . .

CC: That's the guy right here on the end with the sunglasses.

DC: OK. I think I have seen him, but I don't think I've met him.

CC: Yeah. He worked there with me.

DC: All right. I might bug you to see if you'll introduce me on Thursday.

CC: He was also on the bargaining committee down there on and off for years, too.

DC: OK. Well that gives us some more to talk about, as well, with those subjects. I wanted to talk a little bit about what was going on with your parents at this point. When did your father become a union officer? I just saw it on there but I can't remember.

CC: He was elected President, I believe it was '49 to '57.

DC: OK. Did you . . .

CC: And then he went on staff. He was an international rep till he retired.

DC: Let's see. So that would've been just before you hired in until . . .

CC: Yeah, he got elected president and the following year I hired in the plant.

DC: OK. Yeah. Did you follow his job as local president much? Did you talk to him about it?

CC: No. Well, other than just conversation. Yeah. Back then they had to get elected every year. Well, when I got elected, my first term here was on a year, year at a time. Then we went to two, and then went to three.

DC: OK. Yeah, one year is—I mean, you'd almost be perpetually running for office, it seems.

CC: Well yeah, that's all you're doing. Right. That wasn't really any good.

DC: Well what inspired your father to run for local officer? Or to be local president?

CC: Well, he'd been involved right from the start. And I suppose it'd be the things you might be a little unhappy about. And you've heard that the only way you're going to make change is go get in there and do it yourself.

DC: What kinds of changes did he try to accomplish when he was local president?

CC: Well, back when he went in, there was no sub-pay, there was--there wasn't even any pension back when he was president of the local. So a good share of the things they got today--we paid half our insurance. Many things that they've got today started out when he started out.

DC: So those are things that he was pushing for.

CC: Sure. Yeah. Pensions and things for retirees, and to do better benefit-wise and work-wise and work standards in that plant. So they was always working on them things.

DC: Yeah, that's an interesting thing because where you were over at the Retail Store, it doesn't sound like you had any time study engineers or anything like that. People coming in to study your work. You got paid by what you did, so. . .

CC: Well, but really you did. Because, like say I wanted to put a windshield in. They allowed you so much time. So we was arguing time standards with them all the time.

DC: You were? At the Retail Store. OK.

CC: Well, sure. Yeah, maybe they give me two and a half hours to put a windshield in. Now if I did it in a half hour, then I made money. If I did it in three hours, I lost. I didn't do so good.

DC: OK, I see.

CC: Sure. So we was always fighting standards. But we got paid so much for what we did, but it was timed.

DC: OK. All right. So you had to negotiate exactly what the rate was.

CC: Well, that was difficult because the rates were all set for every dealer in the United States.

DC: Oh, my goodness.

CC: See, the factory set the rates for *everybody*. So that was a chore.

DC: OK. Well tell me how that process worked out. We'll jump back to the Retail Store here. That's really interesting. So the factory set the rates for all the dealerships around the whole country.

CC: Sure.

DC: So everyone's the same as far as they're concerned.

CC: Exactly. When you go into the dealership today and you get that [?] book out and you say you want to put in a ball joint, they look in the book and it'll tell you how much time it takes to put that ball joint in. Now, it might be, say, an hour, and maybe that guy'll do it in thirty minutes. So he made twice the pay. And I'm not sure how these dealers do it today, but that's how we did it.

DC: Well what kind of negotiating leverage could you have as the Pontiac Retail Store when they're setting rates for the whole country?

CC: Well, we dealt with labor relations over here. The same labor relation people that deals with the people in the plant.

DC: So could you cut separate deals, then?

CC: Sure.

DC: You could?

CC: Yeah, sure. We'd negotiate. We didn't have no effect on the rest of them . . .

DC: Right, the rest of the . . .

CC: But we could—yeah, we could have an effect on ours.

DC: Oh, OK. So you could negotiate [?].

CC: Sure. And we did that.

DC: OK. All right. And you said that you got involved in those negotiations?

CC: Oh, sure.

DC: Yeah. When did you start getting involved in those negotiations?

CC: I think first time I got elected on the committee was in '53.

DC: OK.

CC: Right.

DC: Well tell me how those negotiations went. That sounds pretty important.

CC: Our—I've got to believe our negotiations weren't quite as hefty as a plant . . .

DC: Sure, but I mean, what was it like for you?

CC: I enjoyed the negotiations. I never had too much problem with—there's a—to me, you take a labor relations, you know, goes over here to college and learns how to deal labor-wise with people, but they don't know the work. So I always felt we had an advantage on them. I knew how to do the work, and they didn't.

DC: So the Pontiac Motor representatives were mostly college-trained, then?

CC: Sure. They were all labor relation people. We dealt with all labor relation. And all that is, labor relation—of course, I'm sure they got tp go through time study to be a labor relation rep, and they got to do all these things, but they didn't know the work.

DC: Did they actually have engineers come in and watch you do your jobs?

CC: They had time-study people.

DC: Yeah, I guess I meant time-study people.

CC: Sure. I don't think they call them engineers. But sure.

DC: No, I overstated that.

CC: Yeah, they had people do that. Sure.

DC: OK. And what was it like when they would come and study you?

CC: I never had a problem with them.

DC: Well tell me how it was. I mean, they're watching you. How long would they watch you?

CC: Sure. They'd watch you from start to finish on a job.

DC: They would, OK. All right.

CC: Right. So we'd had some disagreements with them, because sometimes—like they'd stop the watch as soon as you took a tool off the whatever he's working on. And we always classified that as part of the work. Putting the tool down, maybe go and get another one. But they were timing actual—actual on the job. But there's a lot of parts of the job that, to me, was part of the job that they didn't classify as part of the job. So we . . .

DC: So you'd put a wrench down and reach for a screwdriver, you're resting in the meantime?

CC: Right. And they'd stop the watch. So we had some interesting times.

DC: Wow, I guess so. How much variation could there be—this is just a for instance. I don't know the work, so I'm pumping you for information. But how much variation could there be on a windshield replacement? Were some easy and some hard and some medium?

CC: Well, they're—so you mean to the—to replacing them?

DC: Yeah.

CC: Well, per model, there wasn't any variation to replace them. Really, the variation come in the guy that's doing the work. I might be able to put a windshield in in half the time. And you might have a hard time getting to put it in in all the time.

DC: I might put it in backwards, yeah.

CC: Why, sure. Well that's, you know, different people have different speeds. I always like to think that most of the guys down there were fairly well trained and probably had a lot more work than a lot of people in a lot of dealerships. So I always thought, service-wise, that we probably had about as good a crew as there was in any dealership. So the people who worked down there were pretty good. They did pretty good at it.

DC: So when you went to negotiate rates . . .

CC: Right.

DC: You would have to try to link up your rate with a certain speed.

CC: Sure.

DC: A certain quality of worker, or efficiency of worker, whatever.

CC: Right.

DC: And how would you do that? I mean . . .

CC: Well, we'd have to get them people to understand that, you know, we might have four people on there putting in windshields. You got one can beat the rate in half and the other one's fighting like heck to just try to make it. So you had to—you had to kind of work out a mean to where everybody on that job could make a limit or make the time.

DC: What would the company negotiators say when you'd tell them that?

CC: Well, they understood.

DC: They did understand. OK.

CC: Oh, sure. Yeah. We had a lot of conversations in that way.

DC: OK. But would they try to come up with—I mean, would they aim towards the fastest or would they aim towards the middle?

CC: Well, they'd always aim for the fastest. We always aimed for the slowest, the one that had more problem. Our argument was, especially in replacing windshields, if you got a guy that was a little slow and you tried to push him too fast, he could cost you a lot of money because he's going to break a lot of them.

DC: Sure. That's a good point. Yeah.

CC: Well yeah. They're not cheap, either. I think we had some pretty fair arguments. And over all them years, I think we got treated pretty fair.

DC: How many people would negotiate for your local, or for your division over at Retail Store?

CC: We had three. We had one out of the body shop, one out of the main store, and then a chairman.

DC: And I'm curious to know how you got on that committee in '53 because you would've been pretty young. You know, twenty-one years old or something like that.

CC: Right. Right.

DC: Tell me, I mean, how you got on that committee.

CC: We're elected.

DC: You're elected.

CC: Yeah.

DC: Well, people had a lot of respect for you then.

CC: Well, we were all elected.

DC: Well, my guess, my hunch (whether it's right or wrong) would've been that some of the people who had been there a lot longer might've, you know . . .

CC: I never—didn't have any problem with them, though. I know that was—age-wise, they didn't—that wasn't a factor too much down there.

DC: It wasn't? OK.

CC: No, I didn't think it was.

DC: OK. Yeah.

CC: There was some old people that's getting ready to retire and then there was guys like me. But I didn't find that to be a factor. I don't know whether—Dad might've had some help in that, being he's the President at that time. Could be. Because he serviced the plant, too, the Retail Store. He was—the President of the local union was the head negotiator for the union side. And then they always had an international rep that sat in on the negotiations, also. So not only are three-man committee, then we have the president of the local and the international rep. When I was Finance Secretary here, I was probably the first Finance Secretary to set negotiations for the President, because I knew the work. I knew the contract.

DC: Yeah. Yeah, you had a lot of experience at that point.

CC: Right. So when I was here, I set in as the local union representative. Other than that, there's always the president.

DC: OK. When you did your negotiations for Pontiac Retail Store, did you do them in conjunction with the larger local union?

CC: No.

DC: That was separate, OK.

CC: That was separate. We didn't have. . .

DC: You didn't have your Dad and other people sitting in.

CC: Well, when he was President they set in. Sure.

DC: Well that's what I meant. Yeah. Yeah.

CC: Yeah. Well the President always sat in on our negotiations of the local.

DC: OK. All right. All right. Did you have an international rep, as well?

CC: Yes. We had an international rep. The guy setting down there, Charlie Oswald. He used to be chairman shop committee here at the plant. Then he went—he went on staff and I think he retired in '62. So he was our international rep for years, and then a guy from Fisher Body, Larry Heartwood. I don't know if you heard that name before. He used to be Assistant Regional Director under Ken Morris in region 1-B.

DC: OK. How much did you rely on the international reps for help in these negotiations?

CC: I don't think, really, too much. Because we knew the work and they didn't. They had the same problem the labor relation guys did. Labor relation was all taught and went to school for the type problems they got across the street. Ours was just totally, totally different. We had a totally different situation. So I always felt we had a advantage over everybody because we knew the work and nobody else did. So I think we was set in pretty good position. Their whole—the international rep's—thing was to listen to us, and follow our lead. We got paid, like I say, on piecework. So we had an average, an average—every one of us had a different hourly rate. And our holiday pay, vacation pay, everything was hemmed in on what our average rate was. So at times, they wanted to change them things. We'd have to tell them, "No, you don't want to do that."

DC: So this is one of those odd cases where the workers were actually, it sounds like, committed to the piece rate.

CC: Oh, sure.

DC: Because there are a lot of contexts where piece rates were [?].

CC: Oh, yeah. Yeah, they tried to get us off piece—we went on strike one time when they tried to get us off our percentages in piecework. But it didn't last but five minutes and then they let us go back on our old system [?].

DC: So you may have just told me this, as well, but did the international union push for you to go to a straight hourly wage, as well?

CC: Well, they was wanting to make some changes in there. They thought it'd be better for us. But it definitely wouldn't have been.

DC: OK. It wasn't from your perspective, anyway.

CC: No. The guys down there wouldn't a went for that at all. So yeah, they was trying to change, I think, holiday pays, vacation pays. They was trying to change the system a little bit and we had to let them know that that wouldn't work.

DC: Was there ever any friction between the faster workers and the slower workers?

CC: Not really, no.

DC: No? OK. They accepted those differences?

CC: Right.

DC: OK.

CC: It was just all on each individual's ability.

DC: Would anybody ever lose a job because they ended up just being too slow? Did anyone [?]?

CC: I don't remember of anybody doing that, no. No. I can't recall anybody because most all of them, they come from someplace else. So I would say the ones that weren't apt to be able to keep up with making a living, they didn't stay in the business long. They went somewhere else. Did something they were. . .

DC: [??]

CC: Right. Most . . .

DC: So they would just leave of their own accord because they weren't making enough money or whatever.

CC: Right, right. They, yeah, they couldn't make enough money, so they'd just go somewhere else. But I don't ever remember them letting anybody go because they wasn't making the rate.

DC: OK. And you would've had union members selling the cars, too, right?

CC: No.

DC: No? OK.

CC: They had car salespeople up on the front [?], sure.

DC: But they were management or whatever?

CC: They were management. Yeah, they were salary. Car sales was salary. They had a used car department and it was all salary.

DC: Because the people selling the cars are salary.

CC: Right. And like you go in on the service floor, they were all salary.

DC: You say service floor. . .

CC: When you go in a dealership and they write up an order for you. They're [?] salesmen.

DC: The ones—OK, the ones who actually do the clerical work and all that?

CC: Right. Yeah, they were salary.

DC: OK. But the people doing the actual repairs. . .

CC: Actual repairs was, yeah, we were piecework. Car washers was paid by the hour. Lube rack, they worked by the job. Back in them days, they had undercoaters that sprayed that undercoat on them; they were by the job.

DC: So you—but you were not negotiating for the actual salesmen, you know. They were separate.

CC: No, we only negotiated for service people.

DC: That would be a tougher one to negotiate, wouldn't it?

CC: Right, yeah. No, we had nothing to do with the sales or the service floor.

DC: Right, right. At least the administrative part of it.

CC: Right.

DC: Yeah. Wow. OK. Let's see now. You said that you got married in '53? Is that right?

CC: Mm-hm. January of '53.

DC: OK. So where did you live at that point?

CC: We lived on Marshall, down here on the south side of Pontiac.

DC: OK. [To NC] You can feel free to chip in any time.

CC: There off Opdyke. There right by the old Naval Reserve. It's over by local 594 now.

DC: Down—oh yeah, I've talked to some people from that local.

CC: And we rented an apartment upstairs.

DC: All right. What was that like?

CC: Well, we just starting out, I guess.

NC: Borrowed furniture. [laughs]

DC: Uh-huh. Yeah. Yeah.

NC: Whatever anybody could give us, you know.

DC: So was it the top floor of a house or was it an apartment building?

CC: Was it—no, it's just a house.

NC: Upstairs.

DC: Upstairs of a house, OK.

CC: Yeah, the second floor. Yeah. Then we bought a house over here by the plant on Lowell Street.

DC: When did you buy that house?

CC: We bought that, I'd say, probably—had to be probably, maybe it was the latter part of '53. '54?

NC: '54. It was then. Yeah.

CC: Maybe, might've been '54. Yeah.

DC: OK. So you really weren't in that apartment for long, then.

CC: No. We bought a house here on Lowell Street. We lived there about a year and then I got drafted. So I had to—we sold it.

DC: Hmm. So you went back in the service in the mid- '50s?

CC: I was drafted in the Army then. Back in '55, yeah.

DC: Oh. Oh, we haven't talked about that. That's pretty important. OK, so wait a minute. You were living in that house, then you got drafted in '55. Well what was going on here? OK. You were drafted in the Army. Did you have to report for boot camp and stuff?

CC: Oh, sure did. Yeah, I went all the way through boot camp. And then they sent me to Aberdeen, Maryland to be a wheel vehicle mechanic. But instead, they—when I got there, they put me in as a ammo records clerk. [laughs] But I guess that was normal.

DC: Well let's step back for a second. How was it you—you found out you were drafted in '55?

CC: Mm-hmm.

DC: OK. And then how long did they give you to report to wherever you had to go?

CC: Boy, not very long. At that point we had our daughter, the one that's working in here as the bookkeeper. She was—we—she was here.

DC: OK. All right. How old was she?

NC: She was a year.

CC: About a year, maybe. A year and a half.

NC: Well, she was about a year old, I'd say.

DC: That sounds, yeah, about right.

CC: And she was pregnant for the twins.

NC: The twins.

DC: Oh, my goodness.

CC: If you had more than one, then they didn't take you. But she went for a test and the test was negative, so they drafted me anyway. But as soon as the twins was born—there was three of us was in my outfit there in Maryland, and they discharged all three of us, because we had all got into our second, third child.

DC: OK. So in other words, before the twins were born you only had one child.

CC: Right.

DC: And that wasn't enough to qualify.

NC: Yeah.

DC: Wow. So where did you go to boot camp then? Or where did you report first after you were drafted?

CC: Fort Leonard Wood—well, I reported down to Fort Knox, Kentucky. And from Fort Knox, then we went to Fort Leonard Wood for basic training. [Leonard Wood is in Missouri, about ninety miles northeast of Springfield.]

DC: OK. [to Norma] And did you go along on this?

CC: No.

DC: You stayed in Pontiac?

CC: Yeah, right. She stayed here.

NC: I stayed. I moved back in with my parents.

DC: OK. All right. So did you sell your house at that point?

CC: Yeah. Sold the house.

DC: Sold the house. Because you had no idea how long you'd be gone, is that right?

CC: Right. Wasn't sure.

DC: How did you feel at that point in time? I'm going to ask Norma that question.

NC: [laughs] I felt—well, I just took what came, you know? It wasn't easy.

DC: Sure. You have a one-year-old and you have twins, or . . .

NC: Well, a year and a half between them.

DC: Right. And then you're moving back in with your parents and your husband is gone for who knows how long.

CC: Don't know. There's a farmer—well, two farmers, one from up around Vassar and the other one up in Traverse City—that they was in with me. And we all had them and they all come at the same time. And they discharged all three of us about the same time.

DC: When was that? How long was it before you?

CC: Oh, I was in there about a year.

DC: All right. A year.

CC: Yeah, I was there a year. Yeah. Then they discharged us, yeah.

DC: And so when were the twins born?

NC: September.

CC: They were born September.

DC: September '55?

NC: After they were born, we put in for him to discharge.

CC: Yeah, September '55.

DC: OK. You got your discharge shortly after that.

CC: Right. Right after that. I think it was probably four or five months after that.

DC: Did you get some help with your . . .

NC: Well, it's a good thing I was living with Mom, because I didn't—she did help a lot.

CC: Didn't get much help. Whatever money I made, they sent it to her and I think they left me with fifteen dollars a month.

DC: Keep you out of trouble.

CC: You didn't get enough money to do nothing with. Dang, I don't know what they do now. But when you was in the service back then, you better [?] been single.

DC: Yeah. So that sounds like a pretty rough time. Oh, you didn't get laid off, but that's a huge disruption.

CC: Right. Big disruption.

DC: Yeah. And so that's the bigger story, but I want to ask a question about your wheel vehicle mechanic job. They must've figured out that you had some experience in the auto industry or something.

CC: Right.

DC: And so did you do that at Leonard Wood, or was that at Aberdeen?

CC: That was going to be at Aberdeen.

DC: Oh, going to be.

CC: They sent me to Aberdeen after basic training to take up wheel vehicle mechanic. But when I got there, they changed me to a ammo records clerk.

DC: Oh, that's right. Ammo records clerk. And so what would that have involved?

CC: All that would've been would be just like warehousing.

DC: OK. Just keeping track of what comes in and what goes out?

CC: Right, keeping track of what comes in and getting things ready to ship out to whatever outfit needed the whatever. And it's all in ammunition.

DC: And did you ever get started doing that before you were discharged?

CC: I went through the school.

DC: You did? OK.

CC: Sure. I completed the school and then after that, then they just left me setting off to the side because I was getting ready to get discharged then.

DC: Was the school right there at Aberdeen?

CC: Right. I stayed right at the school at Aberdeen till I got discharged.

DC: OK. Wow. And so—my goodness. So then you headed back to Pontiac, I take it.

CC: Right.

DC: By hightailing it. And then the twins were already born, right?

NC: Yeah, they were born in September of '55.

DC: And what month did you get back?

CC: I come back, it must've been right about the end of the year.

NC: What was it—first part of the year, I think.

CC: First of '56, maybe.

DC: Wow. So had you seen your twins yet?

NC: Yeah. He came.

CC: Yeah, I'd seen them.

DC: OK, you were able to get back.

CC: Yeah.

DC: On a leave?

CC: Well, there was times when I was even in Aberdeen, I'd hitchhike home on Friday night and have to be back for roll call Sunday night!

NC: I think he came in the . . .

CC: I wouldn't do it today but I did it then.

NC: The day after they were born.

DC: Oh, you were out here the day after they were born? OK.

CC: Yeah, then I—you know, and I took my car down there right after that, too. So I've hitchhiked all the way back from Maryland, home for just a weekend.

DC: How many times did you do that?

NC: [can't hear]

CC: Oh, boy. There's me and the guy that was on the water department for Waterford Township. We would go back and forth together and hitchhike. I've hitchhiked home just on the weekend.

DC: So you had to be back Sunday night for roll call.

CC: And I can't even believe I did that, but we did. I don't know how many times, but quite a few.

DC: That would've been a longer trip in those days, too.

CC: Oh, yeah. Well you had the, you had the old toll road. It went up through Pennsylvania, but it stopped when it hit Ohio. So you used to have to go down in through the old truck routes down through Youngstown. And then we'd pick up the toll road, and from Pennsylvania, then it was toll road all the way you got into Maryland. And then just head south into Aberdeen. I can't—boy, you know, for just two days and a Friday night, I can't believe we did that, but we did.

DC: Did you always get rides?

CC: I always got back in time. But all we really got out of the whole thing was Saturday. That's all we got. Travel [?].

DC: Right. You probably had to take off early Sunday morning.

CC: We'd get off Friday, after we get off duty, and then hitchhike all night long. Get in the next morning, spend that day here, and the next Sunday morning we'd have to head back.

DC: So did you get a ride with trucks, or how . . .

CC: I, well, mostly with cars.

DC: Cars, OK. Yeah.

CC: I don't know whether it was the uniform or what back in them days, but I never had no trouble getting a ride.

DC: Good idea to wear the uniform.

CC: Yeah.

NC: Plus and it's dangerous back there, too.

CC: I didn't—yeah, I wouldn't do it today, but back then I never had a problem.

DC: OK. But then you said you took your car back.

CC: Yeah, I took the car back there later. Later part of before I got discharged.

DC: Wow. That sounds like a wild time. I don't think I can keep up that pace.

CC: Yeah, it was a wild time.

DC: All right. So when you finally got back it would've been near the end of the year, you know, '55, early '56.

CC: '56.

DC: What happened?

CC: Went right back to work.

DC: You went right back to work, OK. At the Retail Store?

CC: Sure. Yup.

DC: They had your position waiting for you?

CC: Yup.

DC: OK. And then what did you do as far as where you lived and stuff?

CC: Well, we bought a house out in Waterford. It was a new house. We stayed there, boy, I don't know. Probably about five years, I guess. Then we moved to Clarkston. We stayed there till I retired.

DC: OK. But still, it would've been a little. . .

NC: No. Not in Waterford, we lived in Clarkston.

CC: No, I said we moved to Waterford on [?] Street. We bought a house in Waterford. [?] Street.

DC: And then you moved to Clarkston?

CC: Then we moved to Clarkston, ‘62.

DC: OK. All right.

CC: Where do you get “no”?

DC: She might not have heard you say that you moved to Clarkston.

NC: I didn’t hear you say that we moved to Clarkston.

DC: Yeah. She just missed one of your—anyways, there must have been a little gap between the time that you moved back and you actually gained possession of the house in Waterford. Where did you live at that point?

CC: Well, I guess we stayed with. . .

NC: We stayed with Mom and Dad. It didn’t take long.

CC: Yeah, stayed with her folks. It wasn’t very long, because as soon as I got back, we bought that house.

DC: OK. All right. So there was a short period and then you moved out.

CC: The fact is, that subdivision was all brand new houses back them days. We had two car salesmen living in there and me. And then one of the tune-up guys lived—my yard went right to his. So there’s four of us from the store live right there.

DC: OK. So all the folks were there.

CC: Yeah, right there close.

DC: OK. Was it appealing to you to live in a new house in a new subdivision like that?

CC: Well, most of them were GI homes. So we got it under the GI loan. But it was a small, three-bedroom ranch, brick house. But that was our first new house.

DC: So did the neighborhood fill pretty quickly?

CC: Yes.

DC: OK. Yeah. And how did that neighborhood compare, say, to the neighborhood you grew up in next to Pontiac Motors?

CC: Well, it was a lot—the neighborhood that I grew up into was an old neighborhood. Older houses. All pre-war. A lot of folks that was in there had a lot of hardships back during them days. So it was quite an upgrade.

DC: Let's see now. What was it like, then, with—you had three very young kids at that point. And what shift were you working over at the Retail Store?

CC: Well, in them days we only had one shift.

DC: Just all days?

CC: It did go to two days, two shifts. But all my work life down there, I worked on the day shift.

DC: OK, on days. All right. I mean, how could you—how was it getting by at that point, you know, '56, '57? You're working and you've got three young kids. How did you all manage this?

NC: I didn't work. I was a stay-at-home mom.

DC: OK. You were home. All right. That would've been a handful.

NC: [laughs] It was. It was a job.

DC: Yeah. Yeah. So were there other moms around the neighborhood?

NC: Oh, yes. Mm-hmm.

DC: So did you do things together or look after each other's kids or anything like that?

NC: [pauses] Well . . .

CC: I don't recall much of that.

NC: I didn't do a lot of running.

CC: Most of the ladies that—well, the guy next door, he worked over there in the foundry. The guy across the street worked with me in the Retail Store. [?] So, you know, all the wives were stay-at-home. They didn't work.

DC: OK. The '50s have a reputation for being, you know, kind of a time where everyone was doing well and, you know, had lots of money and stuff like that. I mean, what . . .

CC: Factory people weren't, but the—all of us there was around as close—quite a few of them worked the Retail Store living in there. They was doing—'50s was good for us. We didn't have them hardships like they had in the plant. We were—we had a good amount of work. So we worked good through the whole '50s.

DC: So with your income did you live comfortably?

CC: Mm-hmm.

NC: Yeah.

DC: [??] OK. Yeah.

CC: Yeah, we didn't have any problems.

NC: No problems.

DC: OK, yeah.

CC: The fact is, we—all my work life, I worked every week. So I never was out of work, except when I went in the service. We were fairly fortunate.

DC: Sounds like the steadiness—how did your pay in the service compare to your pay at the Retail Store?

CC: Oh, boy. We didn't get paid in the service.

DC: OK, yeah.

CC: That was bad. That was a bad period of time, because they sent my check home to her and kept fifteen dollars. I can't remember just what hers was, but I know it wasn't very much. Extremely low [?]. Well in the '50s—well, let me think, '55. Boy, that factory could've only been paying maybe, what, a couple dollars, maybe two and a half an hour? I'd say—because when I went back in the plant in '74. Or no, '76. We was making less than five dollars an hour in the plant. In '76. The store went down in '74, and they all went back in the plant in '76. Or half of them went down to the Tech Center. But we was making less than five dollars an hour then. So oh boy, '55, '56, that'd be almost—couldn't a been more than probably a couple dollars an hour then. So you know the Army wasn't paying anything.

DC: Right, right. But on the other hand, I guess you got the GI support out of it for your house and stuff like that.

CC: Yeah, we bought the house with GI Bill. So we got low interest. So that helped, I suppose.

DC: I'm just looking for silver linings, I guess.

CC: Yeah. I know when I hired in the store, boy that first year or two, I think I only made about two thousand a year for the first year or two. That was what wages was. But everybody else about the same. But it wasn't a lot of money. I mean, we paid ten thousand for that first house.

NC: Prices weren't as high, either.

DC: Yeah, the cost of a house would've been a lot less.

CC: I bought a new truck and a new car and paid less than two thousand for both them. Around eighteen hundred.

DC: OK. So what other things did you two like to do in the '50s? We've talked about work, we've talked about the service—I know you had three young kids, which doesn't leave a lot of time—but what sorts of things did you enjoy doing?

CC: One of the guys I work with, which lives down there close to where we are in Florida now, we used to do a lot of boating. He had three little kids, too, so we used to go out to the lake and boat.

DC: What kind of boat?

CC: He had a—we water-skied and boated and hunted. And then when the kid—my kids, my boys, got old enough, they hunted with me. So they started out. Then we used to snowmobile and camp. We had campers. We was out at the campgrounds a lot of the summers. Snowmobiled in the winter. Hunted.

DC: Where all did you go camping?

CC: A lot of it was out to the county park. You know, and around the area. Sometimes we'd go down to the Smoky Mountains. I've taken trips with them up to Canada and go all the way around Lake Huron and back. Take two weeks to do that. Yeah, so we did a lot of camping, hunting, fishing.

DC: Did you get a fair amount of vacation time to do that?

CC: Yeah. And as we got—I got more years in, and we got more. I built up to, what, we had five weeks vacation time. After, what, twenty years.

NC: We'd go out to Paradise Beach when it was Paradise Beach. It's [?] Oaks, now.

CC: Yeah, before the county bought it.

DC: Did anyone that you knew have, you know, lakefront property—how would you get the boat in the water to ski and stuff?

CC: Public access.

DC: Public access, OK.

CC: Mm-hmm. Yeah. No, we didn't know anybody. Just public access.

DC: Yeah. What lakes would you boat on?

CC: Oh, gosh, as I recall we did some Cass Lake. My gosh, I can't remember where all the lakes were. I think Pontiac Lake, maybe. Just wherever they had—Orchard Lake—wherever they had public access places.

DC: Were those lakes crowded?

CC: Not back in them days, they didn't seem to be crowded, no. No. I think we did that back in the early '50s and the latter '50s—after the kids was born, we bought a RV and then we started doing a lot of RV-ing. And hunting and fishing. So we was doing something out there all the time with the kids. [?]. Well, of course, we worked a half day Saturday. And then they got to where they quit that, too, so—we had worked five days. We didn't work a lot of overtime down there like the factories did at times. We was strictly pretty well forty hour weeks.

DC: So if you worked half days on Saturdays, would that be overtime, or would you not work a different half day?

CC: No. Yeah, we had no overtime. We worked out of that flat rate book and they didn't care if you was Monday or Saturday. Didn't care when you did it, because the pay was all the same.

DC: Would you be there five and a half days, then?

CC: Yes.

DC: Oh, you would. OK.

CC: Oh yeah.

DC: Well that would cut into the amount of time you could go off and do things. You know, leaving at noon or 1:00 on Saturdays . . .

CC: Well, if we did that, I might take the—after the kids get out of school—take a rig out to the park and not go to work for my half day and they'd stay out there till I got back.

DC: Sure, that makes sense. Yeah. Get them all set up.

CC: We did a lot of that. And some guys that I work with, Frank and them, they had them, too, so they would be out to the park, too. So we did a lot of things with the kids that way.

DC: It sounds like a lot of outdoor stuff. That's good.

CC: Yeah, we was always outdoors. Yeah.

DC: Did you mention fishing, as well? I think you might've.

CC: Sure, we did a lot of fishing.

DC: A lot of fishing, OK.

NC: Oh yeah. All the kids liked fish.

DC: Did you like to fish, too?

NC: No.

DC: No, OK.

CC: We had a community campfire and I had a skillet about that big around and about that high with a handle on it—cooked them fish and stuff right there over that wood fire.

DC: That sounds good.

CC: We had a lot—I think we had a lot of fun with the kids when they were growing up.

DC: That sounds wonderful. I like to get a little sense of what people were doing outside of work because work's not everything, you know?

CC: Right. No, we, I think we did—fortunately, I didn't have to work six, seven days a week. So we did a lot that way with the kids.

DC: It sounds like your hours were pretty regular whether you were extremely busy or [?].

CC: My hours were steady. Yeah.

DC: I haven't talked to very many people who were in that category.

CC: No, we was lucky. Back in the '50s and '60s, there was a lot of up and down time in that plant. That's why they went to . . .

NC: I could plan my meals, you know. I knew he'd come walking through the door. I could have dinner on the table when he got there.

DC: Did you have friends who couldn't be that sure?

NC: Yes.

DC: Oh. Yeah. That's a whole different style of living, isn't it?

NC: Yeah. Yeah, it is.

DC: Yeah. Have everything on a hot tray. [laughs]

NC: [laughs]

DC: Oh boy. Did you pay much attention to national union politics at this point in time?

CC: Sure.

DC: Yeah?

CC: Yeah.

DC: OK. Maybe what Walter Reuther was doing and what the international officers were doing?

CC: Oh, yeah. Sure.

DC: How exactly did you follow them and what were you following?

CC: Well, I think—when did I run for my first convention? What year was that? Hmm. [pauses] Boy, I can't think of when that was. I was on the—I was a trustee for quite awhile, and then I run for conventions. I think when I run for the first, I only missed one after that till I retired.

DC: Hmm. So you went to a lot of the big conventions.

CC: Yeah. Right. I went to a lot of conventions.

DC: How many delegates would your local send?

CC: Oh, goodness. Boy, this local here would send quite a few.

DC: It's a big local.

CC: Oh, back then it was running about eighteen thousand people. So yeah, this local here sent a lot of delegates. I don't believe they send too many now because it's really so much smaller. But yeah, we sent a big delegation.

DC: And where would the conventions be? Where all did you go?

CC: Anaheim. L.A. New Jersey. I guess that's where most, about most of them was. Anaheim. Los Angeles, and New Jersey. Atlantic City.

DC: And how did you feel about the relations between your local union and the international union officers?

CC: We were pretty good. We had a good relationship. Buick had a bad one, but we had—this local here has always got along with the international pretty well.

DC: What was up with Buick?

CC: Buick had lots of problems. They was fighting with the international all the time.

DC: Hmm. About what?

CC: They was—to me, they was just a rambling kind of group. That's just the way they were.

DC: Where was the Buick plant you're talking about? In Flint?

CC: Flint.

DC: Yeah, OK. Yeah.

CC: Flint.

DC: OK. So they were always fighting, it seemed?

CC: Yeah, Local 599. Yeah.

DC: But you don't really know exactly what they were fighting about?

CC: Just opposition to whatever was going on.

DC: OK.

CC: They was—I always figured it was opposition to be opposition. To me, I figured you better get together and fight this guy across the street collectively. Going out there and doing what they was doing, to me, wasn't helping. I couldn't see too much in that way. But evidently they did. That's the way they did it.

DC: And when did you start going to these conventions, again? I think you were trying to figure it out [?] remember.

CC: Oh, I can't recall just when the heck did I go to my first one? '66, I believe it was. When Joy was born.

DC: OK. So you had another child in '66.

CC: In '66, yeah. And we took her with us.

DC: OK. Wow.

CC: She was born in March, and it was probably the latter part of May or June when the convention was. So she was just a baby.

DC: So at that point you began . . .

End of Tape I, Side B

Begin Tape II, Side A

DC: I'm just trying to put it all together here because you talked about how in the '50s you didn't have pensions, didn't have good health plans. . .

CC: SUB.

DC: SUB or anything like that.

CC: Well, health plan, we had to pay half our health plan.

DC: Yeah, exactly.

CC: Plus they didn't have as much—we really didn't have that many holidays, either. Christmas we got off. We had to work a half day Christmas Eve and New Year's Eve, and we got off Christmas, New Year's. Now they got a world of holidays off what we had when I started out.

DC: If my reading is right—I didn't live through it, you know—but if my reading is right, a lot of those changes started to take place in the '50s.

CC: Right, that's where they started. Pensions come in in 1950, in the fall of '50 after I hired in in the spring. Yeah.

DC: OK. All right. And so. . .

CC: '55's when I think SUB pay come in.

DC: Sounds about right, yeah. And did you notice any difference in your life with those things? The SUB pay, you didn't—you never drew it.

CC: Yeah. Well, SUB pay, none of us down there at the Retail Store drew SUB pay, but . . .

DC: Yeah. Were you thinking about your pension at that point in time?

CC: No. Not really.

DC: You were young.

CC: The fact is, I didn't probably figure I'd stay there and retire. But when I hired in, nobody thought about retiring with no pension, because there wasn't one.

DC: So if I heard you right—I might've just misunderstood what you just said—but you said when you hired in, you weren't even sure you'd be there for your whole career?

CC: Right, I wasn't. When I hired in there, I didn't figure I'd stay there to retire. Well, really, I guess I didn't, because I hired in in '50 over here and in '51 I went to the service. When I come back I went to the Retail Store. I'm not sure. If it wouldn't a been for the Retail Store, I might not have stayed. I don't know. I didn't like that plant.

DC: Yeah. Yeah, you said that assembly wasn't really your cup of tea here.

CC: I could do it, but it was . . .

DC: If you had done something else, what might you have done? Do you have any ideas?

CC: Gosh, I don't know. I enjoyed, when I got down there working on cars, I enjoyed that.

DC: OK. I didn't know if you had any dreams. You know, I've talked to some people who had certain ideas about other things that they would do, and then lo and behold, once you have the little stake invested in the job . . .

CC: Yeah. Well once I went down there, I figured I'd—no matter whether it was where, I was gonna stay in probably auto repair. And I did. And if it would've been, you know, when they closed up in '74, some of the guys, they went out to different dealers. Till '76—It was '76 before they could get back into General Motors.

DC: Oh, really? OK, they weren't hiring at that point?

CC: Yeah. Yeah, right, they was—General Motors was down. There wasn't nobody hiring.

DC: So where did you go at that point?

CC: Well I—In '73 before the store went down, I was elected as finance secretary here.

DC: So that became a full-time position.

CC: Yeah. So all I did is I left the bump shop in '73 and that was, I think, around June. I think it was June. And I come here. And when the store went down, I went down there and helped negotiate the closing of it. And the guys was out on the street for two years before

this plant opened up and they took about half of them in here. And the other half went down to the tech center down Warren.

DC: Yeah. What did they do down there?

CC: They were all mechanics.

DC: OK.

CC: Right. Skilled tradespeople. And they went over here on the car assembly line. Of course, Don and I, we'd worked on that line. So I went in there with them in '73. Or I mean in '76. Him and I went on the line, but we'd both worked lines so we knew what it was. But them other guys had never worked line. Some of them people was later forties and fifties. Them old guys had a hard time.

DC: OK. But you said you did it for awhile, then, at that point?

CC: Yeah, thirty days. Because I had to—I had to go in for thirty days in order to obtain seniority. Yeah, I had to go in there and work thirty days to get my seniority that I worked here. Otherwise, I'd a been here from no place.

DC: Right. Right, OK. You couldn't represent them if you didn't have seniority.

CC: Well, it'd been a little hard. So when I went over there and worked thirty days, then I come back here to my job here. And I stayed till they put me on staff down in Region 1-B.

DC: OK. All right. What was it like working—I guess you would've been still at the Retail Store, so the stories might be a bit different from the factory—but I was wondering what it was like during the '60s.

CC: At the Retail Store?

DC: Yeah, well I mean, that's where you were. Yeah. I've heard some people talk about how things got a little tense in the plant and stuff like that. I don't know if you would've been following that.

CC: Yeah. We never, yeah, it had got—they had strikes and they had a lot of tension in that plant. We never did have it down here. Even when I dealt with the labor relations—same people over here they was dealing with—we never had that tense relationship with management over here that the guys did in the plant. We had a pretty decent relationship with the corporation over my twenty-three years.

DC: Yeah. Well maybe you can tell me a little bit about what it was like being a financial secretary. I mean, what all did you have to do?

CC: I did all of the unemployment—people that had trouble collecting their unemployment, I

did all that. I did all the worker's comp for the local. And along with being the financial secretary—but them was probably my duty. I did a lot of benefit—we had a guy here at the hall that did the benefits for the retirees. And if a guy had an insurance problem, a SUB problem, or most near any other problem, I took care of it.

DC: That's a lot more complicated than just handling the union's finances, then, it sounds like.

CC: Oh. Yeah. Most, I'm going to say eighty percent of my work, was in servicing the people from the plant. Nowadays, they got a—benefits rep here does it all. So Ivan don't have to do that. He—I did all the unemployment, all of the benefits, and worker's comp. Now Ivan—them's things that Ivan don't have to do today, which is good because it was too much. I couldn't hardly do it. It's a good thing I had a good staff of office people. Because my office was filled up from the time I got here till I went home.

DC: I can only imagine.

CC: I had somebody waiting in line all the time.

DC: Yeah. How did you like that work?

CC: I enjoyed it.

DC: You did. OK.

CC: Yeah, I, you know, it made you feel good when you get somebody's problems taken care of.

DC: OK. It seems like a world away from the kind of work you were doing at the Retail Store.

CC: Right. Well it's one nice thing about that part of the work—all I could do was help somebody. You get into the grievance work, you could help somebody, you could hurt somebody, too. So I didn't, I didn't get all the flak the guys did that was doing the other kind of work, like shop committees and that.

DC: On the other hand—yeah, that's true, but I mean, I can't imagine that every single one of these benefit or worker's comp or unemployment claims worked out for the worker.

CC: It didn't, but it was a different, it was a different atmosphere working for, say, a benefit problem that you couldn't get collected. But you was out there trying to do it. You didn't, you know, it wasn't like a grievance, see. You got to—grievance, you got to negotiate. I might do something wrong and you might write me a grievance. But I may not really have a grievance. And you're out there doing the best you can, but you're trying to cut—with benefits there ain't no cut. It tells you right in the book what it is or what it ain't. So I'm not going to get some blame on me like you'd get from grievance. So it was a whole lot different program for me than it would be, like say for chairman shop committee or president. Well you can tell that, but you look—you see the wall over there? How many

pictures on that wall? How many's over there on that president's wall? See? They didn't last as long. There's what to—what is there over there? There's one, two, three, four, there's five presidents setting over there that I was the finance secretary under.

DC: OK. So many fewer financial secretaries than president.

CC: Financial secretaries lasted a lot longer than the president. Ivan's been here under one, two, three, four, probably five presidents, too.

DC: Hmm. So that's the job to go for, it sounds like.

CC: Well it's the longest one. You're going to have to stay the longest of any officer in the local union.

DC: Did you miss any of the work that you used to do at the Retail Store?

CC: Oh yeah. I enjoyed my work down there. Yeah, I really—they had to talk to me a little bit. I really wasn't wanting to come over here and run. But Preston Harris, the guy that was just ahead of me, he was finance secretary. And he come down here, him and Joe Murphy, the president at that time, and talked me into running for that job. I was chairman over in trustees at that time.

DC: What's that position?

CC: Well, that—trustees, they're the ones that audit the books. Make sure the—right, and I was chairman of the trustees, so they asked me to run for, for that job.

DC: OK. So you got some experience overlooking the finances.

CC: Sure. Right. Yeah, we had to give a trustees' report to the membership. We had to audit the books.

DC: OK. So, I mean, you had some pretty good credentials, then. You'd done this bargaining for a long time, you'd . . .

CC: Right, and I'd been chairman shop committee down there for years at the Retail Store.

DC: Yeah. So you're not an unknown plucked out from the blue here.

CC: Right. Right.

DC: Yeah.

CC: Right. Plus I'd run for a number of elections. Yeah, I'm from a little group down there and I had to run with the guys here in the plant. If I wanted to go to convention, I had to run against all them. And we all got just a few. But I, I got to go to every convention when

I run except one. And I barely lost it.

DC: OK, yeah.

CC: So yeah, we—I only lost just that one election all them years here at this local.

DC: What were the local elections like?

CC: Oh, rough.

DC: Yeah?

CC: Back when.

DC: Tell me about it.

CC: They're not—they're not as bad now.

DC: Well tell me about back then.

CC: Oh, they get—yeah, they get playing some hard politics.

DC: How so? Give me some for instances. You don't have to name names or anything.

CC: Oh, they would work on you very firmly and put some of the most vicious stuff out on handbills you ever saw. Oh yeah.

DC: OK. [??]

CC: Oh sure. They worked that plant hard over on you. Yeah, and there I am out of a little old place down there and not out of this main group.

DC: So what would they say about you?

CC: I hadn't had too much on me. Because they, you know—fortunately, when I got here in '73 and I did get—got elected first time by twenty-eight votes.

DC: Hmm. Out of how many?

CC: Well, it was on a—I had replaced—Preston went on staff, so I replaced him. So we had the election here at the hall. I can't remember just how many people did vote. But it was at a Sunday membership meeting. And fortunately, I won that one by twenty-eight votes and I run across a committeeman in the plant. And once I won that election, from then on I—I spent me lots of time in that plant. After that, I had no trouble more elections.

DC: OK. So you got to know people, they got to know you.

CC: Yeah. Then I set up my base in that plant.

DC: So was that a big part of local elections, then? To get out there and meet people?

CC: Oh yes. Definitely. Oh, in a minute. If you didn't, you wasn't here. I can sit there and look at that wall over there and some of them guys that didn't do that, they lasted one term.

DC: Mm-hmm. OK. So face-to-face retail politics here.

CC: Sure. Oh, politics in the local union's heavy. This one was really heavy up until, oh I'd say, well until the plant went, really went down. Closed up the foundry and the engine plant and the assembly plant, the plating plant, all that closed up. They were down to just a minor group. Now you got two warehouses, you got the proving ground, you got this unit here. And then you got that engine over here. So you got really five units in here. And not—they're not any of them that's really heavy over another one. So it's a little harder for a guy to move in here on these guys here.

DC: Were there any serious disagreements over policy and stuff?

CC: Oh yeah.

DC: I mean, was it, you know, who liked who, or were there really serious questions about the direction of the local union?

CC: Well, I would have to say, yeah, I'd say a little bit of both.

DC: OK.

CC: Yeah. We had some that liked to go to bars a lot and not much work but a lot of—spend all their time somewhere else.

DC: You're talking about committeemen or. . .

CC: Committeemen, officers of the local union, yeah. Shop committee. Yeah, we—I never did drink, so I had, always had a big situation with people that did a lot of drinking and not much working. So we had some . . .

DC: Mm-hmm. Would that be an issue in, say, a finance secretary election? I mean, who was actually there on the job and who was spending too much time at the bar? Or would that . . .

CC: Oh, well any of them were, sure. Any of the jobs, sure.

DC: OK. All right. Wow.

CC: Yeah. The, you know, some of the guys ahead of us—in that one shop committee John had—man alive! That whole shop committee, to me, was alcoholics. *Bad* situation.

DC: So how did it affect their work?

CC: Well I think it had a—had to have an effect on the work. Yeah. Sure.

DC: Yeah, but I mean, can you pinpoint exactly what they did or didn't do?

CC: Well, they'd settle grievances. Then they might be down at that bar all day instead of trying to settle somebody's grievance.

DC: OK. So they weren't doing the nuts and bolts work.

CC: Yeah. Correct. And we made issues of that.

DC: OK. Yeah.

CC: Yeah, heavy.

DC: And did you succeed in getting a new shop committee?

CC: Oh, sure. Yeah. Took work, but we got it.

DC: OK. So in other words, you had to really scramble to try to get the right people.

CC: Yeah. [?], they've had pretty well peace over that kind of goings-on since '78.

DC: Oh, OK.

CC: This local's been pretty, pretty good shape since '78.

DC: Were there complaints about how the shop committee was handling grievances? It seems like . . .

CC: Yeah, you always, you always got that here and there along the way. Sure.

DC: Yeah. But I mean specifically this group of people that you say were spending more time at the bar than doing their work.

CC: Yeah. Right, right.

DC: Was there an increase in complaints about. . .

CC: Oh, I got to believe there was.

DC: OK.

CC: While they would run to the bar, I'd run to the plant. Run that plant a world of [?] boy, I'll say that. Yeah. A lot of politics.

DC: Yeah, I guess so.

CC: Heavy.

DC: So did you like that part of it?

CC: Not really. Nope. I liked the work, but that's the only part I really didn't like was the politicking part of it. You set there and it's—well, it's the same way as government is. I don't care what kind of job you're running for elections, there's a lot of bad parts to that when you got to get election process. But I guess that's where it's at.

DC: Part of the job, I guess.

CC: Right.

DC: So you'd go in and make your rounds, but you really would've preferred to be doing your work. Is that what you're saying?

CC: Oh sure. Yeah. Even though I didn't mind going—I think the guys in the plant enjoyed you coming by. I had my little places I went in there all the time, and different key people I'd keep up with all the time.

DC: One thing that's interesting—I'm trying to think—you were involved with the union, obviously, when you were at the Retail Store. Doing, negotiating the piece rates and all that.

CC: Mm-hmm.

DC: But it sounds like at the Retail Store a lot of the workers did not have to rely on what a lot of other workers had to use the union for, which was job protections and protection against foremen, stuff like that.

CC: Right. Right. I'd say that's right.

DC: Yeah. And so I was wondering, you know, why you remain so involved with the union. What was your sense of what the union was about that led you to [?]?

CC: Well, I moved from the retail store union bit and I spent a lot more time in the one up here. When we run for trustee and started running for conventions. And then they'd talk me into running for the financial secretary spot, and I really didn't want to do that. But good thing I did, because a year later, they closed!

DC: Yeah, exactly. That turned out to be a nice lifeline for you.

CC: Right. Right.

DC: But I guess what I'm getting at—and I don't know if there's an answer to this—I've talked to some people who were really grateful for the union but didn't really feel any need to get involved, you know, with the functioning of the local.

CC: Oh, it's that way today.

DC: Yeah. And I wondered what motivated you to actually take that step and become more involved.

CC: Well, most of the guys down there I work with had no experience with what a union really was. Most of them, you know, they were within their trades and they never worked around where there was an organized group—only a very few of us.

DC: But you hadn't much, either. Now did some of that come from your dad?

CC: Oh, I'm sure it did. Sure. You know, setting, being around him, growing up and doing what they're doing. I'm sure that had to have some kind of an effect. And so when I got down here, the first time somebody asked me to run for the committee down there, I did. That was, oh, probably two to three years after I hired in the place. Well, it'd be less than that, really; it'd be two years, I guess. Sure.

DC: OK. But somehow or other you sensed that that was something that was worthwhile.

CC: Well, I got on the committee. Most rest of them didn't have any experience of any kind. I'd been around it more than they had. So I run Don there. He [?] with us. He worked over here and he was involved in union a lot. And when he come—we got him hired in there in '57. He was on that committee all the rest of the time he was there, too.

DC: That's interesting how some people just feel the need to step up and carry that share of the load and others shy away from it.

CC: Yeah. Right. But it was important. Even though we really probably didn't need it like you would maybe across the street, we still—you still had different things like when they started going close down, you really need to hedge into that SUB agreement, because it looked like they was going to be off awhile. So a lot of the guys down there used them benefits after, you know, the sub pay and the Blue Cross and all the other things. So yeah, we had to—it was important to keep up with that stuff, too, and it finally was. They got a heavy benefit out of that. And then when—and we weren't under the national agreement, either, so they didn't have a real right to hire in the plant. We had to negotiate that after it went down and they opened up in '76. To let them all get back in the plant.

DC: Oh, so it wasn't clear whether or not the Retail Store workers would get back in.

CC: Yeah. They worked. We had to get that negotiated right there when the plant opened up, so we could—the first jobs to open up, that we had rights to get them first ones first. And so they took all of us in before they hired off the street.

DC: OK. Yeah. But that would've been a tense time, I'm sure, for the [?].

CC: Right. Yeah, it was. Because yeah—you know, a lot of them guys, some of them didn't even go to the plant. You know, they were skilled trades and [?] with other dealers.

DC: Sure. Yeah, but still that would've been a huge period of uncertainty.

CC: Sure. And then, well, a lot of them did because they had all them years down there and they didn't need many more to retire.

DC: Mm-hmm. Right, OK.

CC: So, right. So we got—so we got them all in here and they've all retired now, since.

DC: OK. Yeah, that's a key part of it, isn't it?

CC: Yeah. We had a couple of them go in there, older guys that got discharged. So we had to go up to labor relation and I got them transferred over in the foundry into off-line jobs that they could handle. And I didn't have any problem there, either, because the labor relation people I was dealing with knew them all, and knew what kind of people they were, and they had all that, probably twenty-five years or better.

DC: So they tried to place them appropriately.

CC: Sure. Right. So, yeah, we got them placed back in there and not on the [?]. Now they're all retired. So that helped.

DC: Yeah. Thinking back to the '50s again, again when you were really young, did you pay any attention to state or national politics? I don't mean union politics, but I mean, you know, national politics?

CC: Not too much.

DC: Not too much? Yeah.

CC: No. Later on we did get into the local parts of it, and then we got out in the county, too. because I got on the CAP committee at one time here. Back in my earlier days. Which they were the political group of the local.

DC: Right. You were trying to work on local elections and county elections.

CC: Yeah, we was working on county and local, yeah. Yeah.

DC: OK. But you don't recall much involvement with national politics.

CC: No. I mean, I didn't get too much involved in national. Mostly local stuff.

DC: OK. Yeah. That's reasonable.

CC: Right. So as you get involved in this union business, you get involved in a little bit of everything. Sooner or later.

DC: Yeah. I guess so, if you follow it through to all its conclusions there. Can you think of questions that I haven't asked you that you thought I was going to ask or that I should've asked? I'm not sure.

CC: [pauses] Oh, I can't, I can't think of anything offhand. Other—to me, the guy you really need to talk to is old Bob Glen. He had a memory with this stuff that you couldn't believe.

DC: Do you think he'll be here on Thursday? Does he come to these?

CC: Oh, no. No, he's—he's out of Chrysler.

DC: Oh, OK. Sorry. Yeah.

CC: He, I think he come out of [Local] 213, was it? But he's over on—he's over on the East side. I know Ivan probably might have his phone number. I don't know.

DC: I might be able to get in touch with him. But the thing that's really interesting, you know, certainly there are some people who have risen to higher levels and they see all these events from a different angle, but talking to people who were just working their way through the '50s is really revealing to me. Like when you suddenly mention that, oh yeah, I went in the service. It's like, whoa! I mean, that's a huge thing! It may not—you know, it's your life and you already know it and everything, but if you start to think about what it was like to be an autoworker in the '50s, to be jerked away from your family, to have twins born, those are huge events!

CC: It was a frustrating time at that time. Yeah, because it was—you know, you didn't have any money and they didn't give you much, either. So it was—that was a frustrating year.

DC: Well I can only imagine what you would've done without your parents nearby.

NC: Oh yeah.

DC: Now had they moved from Illinois?

CC: No. Her parents . . .

NC: No, my parents lived here. They lived on Marshall Street. So I moved in with them.

DC: OK. I don't know why; I was blanking out on his mother all of a sudden. I got . . .

NC: They lived in Pontiac.

DC: Yeah, they lived in Pontiac. Yeah.

CC: Her parents come from Hillsdale and Marshall. That's where they was raised.

DC: All right. And when did they move over to this area?

CC: Right after they was married, I guess, they moved. Because he worked for Parke-Davis out here in Rochester. He's a pharmaceutical guy. He worked on making medicines.

NC: Ex—well, experiments are out there at Parke-Davis in Rochester.

DC: OK. Sorry about blurring the stories for a moment, but when . . .

CC: He was more into the management type thing.

DC: Uh-huh. But at least they were here for you at that time of need.

NC: Oh, yes!

DC: Yeah. Without that kind of support . . .

NC: Oh, I had to go back home. I couldn't have made it. Not on what he was sending home.

DC: Sure. Yeah.

CC: During my tenure there when I was on staff, I was . . .

NC: And formula for two is not cheap.

DC: No. No. And then . . .

NC: With the twins.

DC: I can't imagine if you had to try to work, carrying twins with a one-year-old. I don't even want to think about that! But you were saying when you were on staff. . .

CC: Yeah. I was [?] organizing when I was on the region 1-B staff.

DC: Mm-hmm. So how did that go?

CC: Good. I enjoyed that. A lot of folks out there in a world of trouble in them little plants.

DC: Mm-hmm. So what kinds of plants . . .

CC: A lot of abuse. All kinds of plants. I think the worst plants I can think of was one over in Romeo and there's one up, I think, in Brown City. Was little foundries, two little foundries. They really abused them people bad.

DC: Now how did it work out? Would they contact you?

CC: Yeah.

DC: OK. Yeah. And then what would be the next step? How would you try to help them organize?

CC: Well, then I'd set up meetings with them. And then we'd start to figure out how to best organize them plants. Then when I thought it was ready, then we'd put cards in there and I'd get them signed up. When I got my percentage, then I'd turn them in to National Labor Relation[s Board].

DC: Now would you actually go to the plant or would you have an organizer on staff who would go?

CC: Oh, you'd have to have—no, you'd have to—yeah, you'd have to have somebody inside. Them, that company ain't about to let you inside there.

DC: Well tell me about how the company would respond to those kinds of organizing campaigns.

CC: Well, I been out there to some of them plants when we'd, like, go [?]. And they'd send young husky guys out there to encourage you not to do that. Yeah.

DC: How far would that encouragement go?

CC: I was fairly fortunate. I never had a problem. The one guy's with me one time, one of the guys pushed him. But I was fortunate. I—I'd just tell them to do whatever they thought they had to do and then I had a turn afterwards. I never, I—I was fortunate. I never had a problem.

DC: So if you offered to return in kind, they backed off.

CC: Yeah. Well, I guess they did. Why they did or didn't, I don't know. But—because I'd tell them when it was over, it wasn't over. I—not I—but them companies would do some of the craziest thing to get you away from trying to organize their plant.

DC: How would you compare—you'd have to do this through the memory of your Father, I think—but how would you compare the conditions at these little plants with the conditions that your Father faced in the '30s when he was trying to organize?

CC: I'd say, I'd say a lot of them just as bad. Some of them. Yeah. Well, the only ones I got that wanted to be organized was the bad ones. The good ones never called me. Even though I did have a couple of good ones; the skilled trades plants, too, that to call me. And it was basically that nobody'd listen to them. They—the benefits, the wages and everything, the place was good. But the verbal abuse and the—the way the guy confronted his workers wasn't too good. And that's the reason we organized the plant and did. We did organize the plant.

DC: OK. And all of these were in, what, 1-B, you said?

CC: It was all the whole thumb area. All the way from Detroit all the way around the whole thumb area and up toward Flint and all the way back down.

DC: And what years were you doing this?

CC: Hmm. Well I did that from '85 to '90.

DC: OK. All right. So that's pretty recent.

CC: Yeah.

DC: Yeah. Did you have some success?

CC: Oh, yeah. I'd say—I'd say I was probably fifty percent successful, I'd say. Yeah. I thought we had some good successes. Yeah.

DC: In the cases that you weren't successful, what do you think happened?

CC: Management would concede some things to them. Sure. And I had a couple places that—they would call you just for that purpose. I had one over here on the west side that I think the Teamsters had tried to organize. And then when they got whatever they wanted, then they just kind of turned the guy loose. Well then they got a hold of me, and when I went through it, and they did the same thing. I made them go through the election and I wouldn't—that's the end of that. I wouldn't go back over there.

DC: OK. So you were just leverage?

CC: Yeah. Right. Yeah. They was just using you as a negotiating tool.

DC: So they didn't really want any long-term gains.

CC: Yeah, they wasn't interested. They was just interested in themselves. And that ain't the way it works.

DC: No. I'd be resentful.

CC: Not with me, it don't work that way, anyway. To me, we're all in this whole fight together. And you start using one part of it against another one. I didn't care too much for that. So we didn't work that route.

DC: So when did you retire finally?

CC: '90.

DC: '90, OK. So that was the last stint you had.

CC: Yeah. Yup, that was the end of it.

DC: Well when you reflect on those years, like 1950 through 1990, what do you see as the biggest changes, the biggest differences?

CC: Oh, boy, there's a world of difference when I hired in that plant and what they got over there today. They're in much better shape to be able to confront problems. I don't think they got the heavy problems on the job that they used to have. There's—and I think that's why you find a lot of drifting away, maybe, from the labor movement. Because they made it fairly decent and given people a different attitude. But sooner or later, they're going to come back. I ain't sure whether it'll be in my day, but one of these days you'll see a different attitude again. But the bad part is, they're going to have to fight all over again for the same things these guys have been fighting for for the last fifty years. Yeah.

DC: What do you think about the—I mean, one of the things happened in your, or that did happen in your work life was the loss of so many jobs around the area, [?].

CC: Oh, right. A lot of lost jobs. I used to set over here with labor relation director out in the front parking lot and really get with him. They moved this engine job down to Mexico for pennies for what, you know, what we'd get paid here. And benefits was terrible and the work conditions were just as bad. And I told him, doing that to people down there don't sell cars. They don't buy. *We* buy cars. When you fix this where we quit buying cars, you're in trouble. You got to, you know—not only do you need to be successful, but we do, too. If the whole wheel isn't successful, every phase of it—the suppliers, everybody involved in that automobile. I always argued with him that the basis wasn't really the automobile, it was the people involved. The purchaser, the guy that made it, all the folks involved in that thing. You got to make sure that everybody is getting their just due of that thing. But sometimes greed got in a lot of these folks' way, and I used to tell them they waving a green flag instead of one they should be waving. They waving the wrong flag and it's going to get them all in trouble. [?] it's showing today. Look at what some of these companies, corporations, big CEO's are doing today. They're getting so greedy, they ain't

even worried about the company no more! It's, "Can I fill my pocket quicker than you?" They don't worry about nothing, nobody. And that'll change—and all that has an effect on these people, these laborers, too. They've got rid of a world of labor jobs in this country and sent them off somewhere else. But I don't care what school you go through, even over there where you're at. You know, everybody can't be a A, B—student. There's a whole lot of D's, C's, and E's that's out there that don't have the capability, maybe, of doing better, that might do a good job with some of these jobs they're getting rid of.

DC: Well I think that you're absolutely right. It doesn't matter, they might even be A students, but just not be interested in doing that kind of stuff, you know?

CC: Yeah, well. Yeah. My argument with them guys is well, what are you going to do with all these people? You going to line them up over there and shoot them and bury them? You going to have to do something to them, because they're going to come to get you some day, if you ain't—that's what them Arabs doing over there now. They're getting treated like dogs and they care less what you think or what you are. They don't mind getting rid of you. Even if it meant getting rid of themselves. People got to have a certain standard of living, or they get kind of ruthless. And that's what happened back in the Depression. They treated people very badly, and they come to fight. One day they'll all be back and come to fight again. It's coming, it's just like old Joe always said: "What goes around, comes around." And as you put out all these bad, harsh things, it's going to come back to get them. So these, these guys that's doing their greed today, it's the same thing back in the '20s. Same thing applied.

DC: It's almost like your life coming full circle.

CC: Sure.

DC: Born in '32.

CC: Yeah. Right. I come right back from where they got greedy. Now I'm right back to where they're greedy again. How long it'll last before we hit the bottom, I don't know. But it's coming. Hopefully it don't get hit as bad as it was back when we were born. But it's no question in my mind that it ain't coming. They're going to get back where these labor guys—I got across the street—attitude's over there is much different it was when I hired in for labor, you know, work, whatever. They don't really realize what it took to get them where they are today. But somewhere, if they don't, their kids will. Somebody going to understand what's going on. Somebody have to come back to get with it again. I don't know where it'll end up, but somewhere it'll have to full circle again. Labor guys will get back where they belong.

DC: So it sounds like there must not be a lot of communication between the people working right now and the retirees.

CC: I doubt where there is, no. And I'm not sure they'd pay attention to them if there was. It's just like my grandkids or anybody else around, these young people. They don't know.

They say it ain't that way anymore. You know, we're all more automated, we're a different place today than it was back when you was. I said, "Well, really you're not. You're exactly the same thing. Only thing of it is, you don't realize it."

DC: What are your kids doing?

CC: I got one that's in the plant, is electrician. I got one works over there on the line. I got one in here as a bookkeeper.

DC: That's right, the bookkeeper.

CC: And I got one that teaches school down to Dearborn.

DC: [?]. Yeah, right. We talked about that.

CC: So I got four of them. Two work in the plant, one works here, and one works down in Dearborn.

DC: Sounds like they're doing all right.

CC: Yeah, so far. So I don't know. It's—and this one here, electrician, he'll do some complaining, but he don't get active.

DC: Oh, really?

CC: No. He'll sit and [?], I said, 'Well, you know, if you're not happy, if things ain't going right, you should probably be out there running."

DC: So he's not running for the committee or anything.

CC: No. No.

DC: He doesn't want to do that, OK.

NC: No interest.

CC: He's got a mechanical engineering degree. He spent a lot of classes over there at Oakland University. I think they tried to get him to teach some over there, too, but he never did.

DC: Yeah. I'm sure they could use him. Yeah.

CC: Yeah. So he's got a degree, but he's got a lot of electrical experience over there, too.

DC: Well we've had a lot of electrical outages over there. Maybe he can come help us out.

CC: Yeah, he might do that kind or not. He works over here on a lot of this automated,

computerized equipment they got. Yeah, I guess they have to take care of the computers and the equipment and the electrical part of it, too.

DC: There's a big change from when you first hired in.

CC: Oh yeah. When I hired in over there, they had the old [?] and all that was pretty well manual. They didn't have all them automation they got today. There was—people down that engine line was like that. When your last engine, they run over there, there wasn't—he looked down through there, he didn't see anybody.

DC: So people were crowded together when you first started that?

CC: Oh sure. Down that engine line, I mean, they was thick. Right. Now that whole plant, there was, they was thick all over the place. As I worked along, it got to be fewer and fewer and fewer.

DC: So automation was. . .

CC: Oh sure. Automation. Right. Automation moved off and then they moved a lot of work from here down to Mexico, that eng—a lot of engine work. They moved the whole foundry over to—and finally that little L-4, four cylinder engine, they moved it over to China. So these guys, to me, I don't know. They—they worried about their own little thirty days and they don't figure out what's going to happen on the long term. I think that's the problem we're in today, is—too many short term, make everything I can today and forget tomorrow. They got families coming up and I don't think, I don't think a lot of them big people understand that. That they got grandkids and their grandkids' grand-kids. I don't think they see the whole picture. Too much greed today, I think.

DC: Yeah. Certainly the folks who worked at minimum wage at Wal-Mart aren't going to be able to buy cars.

CC: For sure. [?] Wal-Mart, I know from what I see in the paper, it's probably one of the worst employers in the whole area. They treat them very bad. It's amazing they get anybody to work there.

DC: I think they have high turnover.

CC: But—well, but you set and figure, you know, they can't get over here no more, them kind of people. So the only thing they got left is K-Mart, Wal-Mart, and places like that. Sad to say, but at least was at one time, these kind of jobs was probably made of middle-class people. Well, eventually they went from there to be middle-class people. But now they've eliminated a good share of all that stuff.

DC: What other options did you have when you were first looking for a job, when you were eighteen?

CC: I don't know as I ever looked another option. I figured when I come out of school, I was going to that plant. That brother of mine figured the same thing, and that's where both of us went.

DC: That was the [?].

CC: Eventually—yeah, that's where I knew I was going. Yup, I knew I was going to start out in that plant. And I did. As soon as I could hire in, I did. And he did the same thing.

DC: It's hard to know what a comparable dream would be today for . . .

CC: Yeah. Now see—yeah, person coming out of school today don't have the same—and I come out of school and I could be a skilled tradesman and do whatever I want to do. But you don't have that option no more, either. You got to have education. You got to have education to do what him and I did. Today.

NC: Everybody didn't go to college back then.

DC: Yeah.

CC: Well, the parents couldn't afford to go to college.

NC: Couldn't afford to send them.

CC: For sure. You know, both mine—both mine worked and I couldn't go to college.

NC: You know, it wasn't that expensive, really.

DC: But there were plenty of things you could do without a college degree.

CC: Right. I figured I was going to get in a trade somewhere. I was going to do something other than production. And I learned that quick because I went in that plant. That I was going to do something other than being on that production line.

DC: Did you know many people who stayed on production their entire careers?

CC: Oh, sure. A world of them. Yup. Lots of them. And when they closed up Pontiac Motor and then we opened up, we had to fight hard to get that Orion plant out here. We was—we had formed a committee, labor guys. I was the treasurer of it. We had most of the committee come out of this local union right here. And then we got Ken Morrison [Morris?] down at the region. And we fought the government and the people out here in Orion township to get that plant built out there so these people have a place to go. Had to work hard at it, too. Lansing and otherwise. And we did have some help from the corporation, because they wanted to go out there, too. But, boy, we had to really fight them local political group out there to get out there.

DC: They didn't want a plant?

CC: No, they didn't want that plant there. Mm-mm.

DC: That's interesting.

CC: And you had a lot of their neighbors and whatever worked to needed that place out there. Yeah, we had a hard fight with that. So we . . .

DC: You would think that most people would want an employer in their community, but not there, huh?

CC: Yeah, there's a—yeah, a lot of people don't want them plants. Even though it makes a whole lot of middle-class people in their area. Get good wages, good taxes. But they—yeah, they didn't want that plant to go there.

DC: What did they not want?

CC: They didn't want the plant there, period.

DC: But I mean, did they talk about what—congestion or pollution or . . .

CC: Could be. I'm not sure. They just, they just plain didn't want it. So we had some hard fights with them folks.

DC: I can see people wanting, you know, their rural way of life or something like that.

CC: Yeah.

DC: But most places are so depressed that they would jump at the chance to have it.

CC: But we finally got it there, and then a lot of the people that transferred out there—I was surprised at how many of them, like, had come out of the South and different places. They brought a lot of people out of the South up here in the '60s, because they couldn't get enough workers from the north to work in these plants. So they hired a lot of them. A lot of them guys on that board over there come up here out of the South to work here in this plant. And they—a lot of the guys that was working there and went out there, couldn't read or write and scared to death because they had heard everything's computerized, automated, and whatever else. I don't know how many people I talked to that was scared to transfer out there.

DC: So there were a lot of folks who couldn't read and write in your local?

CC: Sure. Yeah. Right, there was quite a few.

DC: You would've found that out, I guess, when you were dealing with all the different. . .

CC: Yeah, when they started to make a move over there. Yeah. That's when a lot of them come talk to me about it. I told them don't worry about it. They ain't going to bother you. They could do the work.

DC: Did the local union ever work on helping to teach people to read and write?

CC: Well, the international got involved with a lot more of that. They do a lot more of that. More so today than they did, you know, back in the earlier—well, even then. But yeah, that's really growed quite a bit since them days. So they do a lot with that now.

DC: OK. And when did the Orion plant open?

CC: Hmm. Gosh, I'm trying to think what it had to be. I'd say it probably had to be—would it be back in the early '80s, probably? I would think. Maybe the middle '80s. I'd say it might've been more maybe toward the middle '80s, I think, or early '80s.

DC: I can look that up. But that sounds about right.

CC: Yeah. [?] was the chairman of the committee. I was treasurer. And had a hard fight getting that plant put out there.

DC: Well for those kinds of jobs now, I would think communities would line up.

CC: Oh, they don't.

DC: They don't. Hmm.

CC: They don't all line up like that. And you'd think they would because this is their people. Pontiac's going down, Fisher Body's going down, and their people's going somewhere else. You'd think they would've really jumped up and down to got that plant out there. And all that was, was an old air—Pontiac Airport. Boy, and nothing around it. And, you know, they got dumps and everything else around it, but—you got the—that didn't want to put a factory over there where you could make a living.

DC: Were they worried about people from Pontiac moving to Lake Orion?

CC: I don't think so. Nobody's going to move, because the drive wouldn't be that much different. So it wouldn't a made any difference. They, for whatever reason they—probably just figured it was going to deteriorate the area. Well, to me, the reason they was there—because of all these to begin with! Wouldn't be for these plants, this place would be probably like Oxford or Leonard or Lakeville. Just small little communities, wouldn't a been for these factories. Sure. So I don't know. Sometimes it's—people's vision gets awful blurred. Really don't get a good reading of what's going on.

DC: Well it sounds like you got yourself out there in the thick of a lot of these important

debates.

CC: We had a few of them over the years, I guess. There's been a world of changes since I hired in and I retired, that forty years. In this area there is. It's changed quite a bit. Well the whole function of these factories has changed in the way that GM runs their business. Nowadays, GM don't care about—to me, they don't care nothing about nothing except themselves. They get—it's like I argue with them all the time. They talk about we all got to collectively be sitting down here and we got to be supportive of buying their product, getting people to buy the product. And I can understand that. But yet they don't do the same thing back to the people that work for them. That was my argument with them. I got a deal on a thing the other day. Here, give a slip to your neighbors to buy a car at discount. You know, they're trying to make salespeople out of us. But they don't try to make an employee out of it, either! They try to get rid of me. Move to Mexico, China, or wherever else they go.

DC: Strange definition of loyalty.

NC: Yeah. [laughs]

CC: Yeah. They want—yeah, oh boy, I mean—this labor relation director, he was hardcore, boy, right to the bitter end about this corporation. You know, he was hollering about why we should be loyal and get all upset if we wasn't. And yet he's never loyal back. Move that work like you was a nothing. Didn't even set and try to set and figure ways out to do whatever. Yeah. Something else.

NC: We're still buying their cars. [laughs]

CC: Well I do, because I got a—I got more of that—I got more of that than General Motors does. But yeah, I get my pension, I'll always buy a GM car.

DC: Sure. I understand that. Yeah.

CC: They just don't do it for me. They don't—don't return. And then they wonder why people got attitudes. That's one of the reasons they got attitudes. I like me but, heck, I don't care nothing about you.

DC: They don't want you to think about it.

CC: Yeah, right. They better start getting where, you know—we better find ways that we can function this thing and make it work for us. Until they do that, it's just going to be nothing but troubles. And it's going to get worse, because, you know, somewhere along the line . . .

End of Interview