Jim Douras Interview
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1207 Candlestick Lane (Mr. Douras's home)
Rochester Hills, Michigan
Transcribed by Daniel Clark

DC: . . . I start out with very simple questions, such as "where were you born?"

JD: I was born in Birmingham, England, which is a big industrial city—or used to be.

DC: Right.

JD: Before the downturn. And my father was in—it was a place like Fisher Body, but it was called Fisher and Ludlow.

DC: Fisher and Ludlow.

JD: But there's no relationship between the two, but they were body shops, and they had big die rooms. And my father worked there, and so it was natural for me to start an apprenticeship, and I left school when I was 16.

DC: When were you born?

JD: 1936.

DC: OK.

JD: Yeah.

DC: How long had your father been working at Fisher and Ludlow?

JD: Oh, maybe 10, 15 years, back then. Yeah. Yeah. They eventually fizzled out. You know they went down the tubes. So you walked away with no pension, you know.

DC: When was that? When did they fizzle?

JD: Well, I left in 1958, so probably 5 years after that.

DC: OK, so they lingered on.

JD: Yeah. Not because I left, but . . . [wry sense of humor]

DC: [laughs] OK.

JD: But up until then, we'd never known a layoff in England. You know. [??] It was lifetime jobs.

DC: Let's see. Do you remember what it was like growing up in England? You would have been a young child during the war and all.

JD: I was 9 when it finished. I remember the bombs coming down.

DC: What was that like?

JD: Pretty horrifying. Had to go to school carrying gas masks. And we had to leave classes to walk about 20 or 30 yards to the bomb shelter, you know, often. But we had a bomb probably from here to those cars [out the window of his kitchen—maybe 20 yards] behind our air raid shelter at home. So, you know, it was quite terrifying as a young kid. My father used to sit me on his lap when he was home, and we used to look out over the city because we were on a hill. We could see the incendiaries coming down. And we could always hear the German planes droning too, because they had a different sound. I remember that too.

DC: So you could tell the difference between the planes?

JD: Oh yeah. Oh yeah. So it was pretty shaky, you know.

DC: Did your father stay on working the plant during the war?

JD: No actually, he got shipped out to a RAF base as a mechanic. He was a jack of all trades. He was very [??] in his way. But he was a mechanic at that time on an air force base, or aerodrome, as they call them. So he was away from home in Chester for most of the war.

DC: Did you see him at all?

JD: Yeah, he did come back every so often, every few months I guess. That part is pretty vague, but the bombings left an impression.

DC: What was your mother doing in these years?

JD: She'd go out and, like most of them, just housekeepers, or homemakers, as we call them now. And she was extremely claustrophobic, so when that bomb hit, and the bomb shelter was hot, way down there in the ground, covered in dirt, oh she just went crazy. Yeah.

DC: What would she do?

JD: Well fortunately, the door did open. You know, she tried to get out and, you know, after the bomb dropped, is all. She opened the door and I heard some—well the air raid wardens, you know, the civilians who help patrol, they said, "Get back in you silly

bugger," you know, which is mild profanity in Britain. It's not like a dictionary expression. So, you know, she got back in, but she was terrified. And naturally, that upset us too as well. I remember that vividly. Yeah.

DC: Did you have siblings?

JD: Yeah, I had four sisters and two brothers who are still over there. I'm the only rebel! The only smart one, yeah.

DC: Came across the ocean.

JD: Yeah.

DC: Where did you fit in?

JD: I'm the second oldest. My older sister—the oldest one was a sister. Four sisters and two brothers. One of them's an architect, and the other one is in a machine shop, my brother. The one sister is a secretary. My little sister is a secretary and became a magistrate, and her husband was a personnel manager for Rover Motor in Britain. So the older one's retired, naturally, now. And they did OK. Some of them are as doing as well as I am, but some of them are not. But they have to work much harder for their money.

DC: In England?

JD: Yeah. Put more hours in, you know, and everything costs more naturally. So the United States is just the greatest place. It's a very consumer-oriented place. They do take care—I know we have our faults, but it's [the U.S.] still the best place.

DC: So you've been in the United States since 1958? Is that right?

JD: I spent two years in Canada. I crossed the border in 1960.

DC: '60, OK. I'm going to just tap your memory a little bit more about England in the 1950s. I've talked to a number of your fellow retirees who were growing up, you know, around this area in the 1950s, but maybe as a point of comparison, what do you remember about the postwar years in Birmingham?

JD: Oh, it was—everything was broke. I remember when sugar came off rationing in 1950. So up until then, there was no good candy around, and everything else. A lot of goods were rationed. As far as the labor unions go too, I didn't particularly like the labor unions there because they were all Communistic, you know. Very Communistic. And they disrupted everything.

DC: They disrupted everything?

JD: Oh yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Like if any man had a complaint, then the shop steward would blow his whistle, and everybody would stop right there and then, and the whole plant would close down, and meet with management. And when it was resolved, and everybody would start work again. And in a way that's a good system because no one got tossed away. But it also put all the work behind, so we lost a lot of contracts by not meeting the deadline, and eventually that was the downfall of the British industry, you know. Yeah.

DC: Was your father in the union?

JD: Oh yeah, everyone was. It was a closed shop. Yeah.

DC: OK. All right. Yeah. What were his thoughts about the union?

JD: Oh, he was all for it, but he wasn't a Communist by any means. But it was a necessary thing, you know, with the people you had for management. Like anywhere else, you know, it's—you have good people and bad people.

DC: Sure.

JD: But power goes to a lot of people's heads, on both sides, you know.

DC: I guess I was wondering if—I understand your interpretation of these strikes and the stewards closing down the plants. Were those his thoughts as well? Or did he have . . .

JD: I don't know. He was never exposed to anything else. Probably just a way of life for him.

DC: Oh, I see. So your point of comparison is coming from here.

JD: Yeah. Yeah, right. Here. Yeah.

DC: Sure. Well, what about your continued schooling in England. How was that?

JD: Oh, you mean for the war years, or . . .

DC: Oh, I guess afterwards.

JD: Oh, when I started my apprenticeship at 16 . . .

DC: At 16.

JD: Yeah. You had to start between 16 and 17. Otherwise you were considered too old to start an apprenticeship. And you're finished when you're 21, no matter what—how many years you'd served. And so, it was supposed to be a 5-year apprenticeship. And management would let you off one day a week to go to school, with pay. And if you

flunked your tests, then you had to go to 3 night classes a week. So that was on your own time. So it was to your advantage not to flunk, you know.

DC: So you were working and then going, doing the school—working was part of your apprentice, and then doing schoolwork in addition?

JD: Oh yeah. Yeah. Yeah, the company did let you off one full day.

DC: One full day.

JD: Yeah.

DC: How did you get into the apprenticeship?

JD: Well, by the time you're 15, when—most people leave school—you're expected to know what you were going to do. You know, way back then, believe it or not, you were a man at 15. You know, you weren't a young kid at school. So everybody left school at 15, unless you went to a technical school, or a high school. And I went to a technical school. So I left when I was 16. And the grammar schools, or the high schools, just strictly academic. So when I left school, I decided eventually to try to get into my father's place of work, and there were 25 openings for apprentices. And there were—no, there were 25 *applicants*, and 5 openings. I came fifth, equal with another applicant. And because my father worked there, I had preference.

DC: Oh I see. OK.

JD: So I just squeaked in. Now some years later when my other brother took the test, there was 400 applicants and 25 openings, and he didn't make it. And just aftert that, the company folded up.

DC: So it was all for naught anyway.

JD: Yeah, yes. But they were very, very strict about, you know there were so few openings, that—I'm not saying, but maybe they did get some top-notch people, you know. Now I compare our apprenticeship to the Ford Trade School, because you come to another country and you see the way the tradesmen are. And some of them I saw were very mediocre. I've never met a poor man from Ford Trade School. They were really good craftsmen, you know.

DC: Well, what was your apprenticeship like? Tell me how that was organized.

JD: Oh, we spent about a year in the machine shop, you know, in an apprentice section, where you received pretty good instruction on machining. Then you graduated to the die room if you were in the die room section of the apprentice shop—if you were going to be a die maker. Or—yeah, a die maker. And the streets—well, the difficult thing was, we had a foreman, and if anybody made a mistake, he would blow a whistle, and call

everybody around to this one individual's machine, and he'd say, "Now Jim here made a mistake," and explain to everybody what the mistake was. So you'd try and avoid it yourself, you know. But it was a very humiliating thing, you know. [DC mumbles] Yeah, yeah, yeah. Usually his parting words, especially with me, was, "OK now Jim, forget this. It's gone. Go right on." He was an animal. [laughs]

DC: Wow, that's harsh. So were you involved in actual production, or were you just off in your own little section making practice parts?

JD: Yeah, well, we actually made proper parts. In the die section, for the second-year apprentices, they made small, simple dies, you know, like blank dies, or maybe a few form dies.

DC: Now what's the difference between a blank die and a form die?

JD: Well, a blank die is just a one-plane thing, like you might punch out a shape. And a form die, you make—punch out something exaggerated, like part of a fender [sharp noise], that had shape to it.

DC: Shape to it.

JD: Yeah. But no, it's just very simple things. Very simple form dies. And then you went on to progressive dies, which is like—it's one die, but it does different operations, and as the material progresses along inside this one die, as the press comes up, the part moves forward and it does another operation. And you might eventually finish up the formed part at the end, and then you'd cut it off. And as part of our apprenticeship too, we were expected to go in the design office for six months. And the plans/layouts office for three months.

DC: What was in the plan/layout office?

JD: Oh, just like putting machines in certain places, where they'd function for the—most efficiently. And this was mostly for die makers, and machinists could elect to go, if they wanted to, and I elected to go.

DC: That seems like an element of training that here would be more under management, management's realm.

JD: Yeah, yeah.

DC: Is that right?

JD: Well, we worked 44 hours, as hourly, and when I went into the design office for this 9 months total, you were down to 37 ½ hours, because that's what "salary" worked. And they came around with the tea wagon, which was free. A lot of perks to being on salary in Britain—a lot of class distinction, you know. Oh, also as an apprentice, you are

expected, just before the break, you'd go around and you'd probably collect, probably 8 or 10 tea cans, and you had to go out to the cafeteria area, and you'd make the journeymen's tea for them, and bring it back, you know.

DC: That was part of your job as an apprentice?

JD: Yes, [??] if you want to be first.

DC: [laughs] Now was your father in the same plant at that point?

JD: Yeah, he was in the same plant, yeah.

DC: OK, and what exactly was he doing?

JD: Well he'd run a machine. He was a [??] operator.

DC: I don't know what a [teller?] is?

JD: Oh, it was a machine, a three-dimensional machine. It actually—it was a milling machine, and he cut a part to a model. He had a model on top and a part underneath, and he had to trace around the model, and they worked in conjunction, you know. It was all electrical, make and break. So, that was his job, and he was on an American machine, a [Keller?]. That's a U.S. machine. Some of those were left over from the war. I imagine it was Americans that sent the machines over to aid the war effort, you know.

DC: This is a belated, backtracked question—what was the transition like for your father after the war. You would have been quite young, but he was up at that air force base, you said.

JD: Yeah.

DC: And then, do you remember anything about the transition?

JD: No, I really don't know.

DC: Yeah, you were really young at that point. OK, well anyways, there were five apprentices, you said, in your year, in your class?

JD: Yes.

DC: OK. Then did you all have pretty much the same training, or did you go off in different directions?

JD: No—well, I was fifth. I was the last one in you know, so I was relegated to a lower class job, which was a machinist. For the brilliant people, you know, you were a die-maker. I had die-maker training too. If you wanted to, they'd expose the machinists to it. And I

couldn't stand being a second-class citizen even there, so I opted to take the training too. Not as extensive as the die-makers.

DC: And then the tracking was all based on an entrance examination? Is that right?

JD: Oh yeah, yeah.

DC: And did you think that that was an accurate measure of people's ability?

JD: Yeah, I do! Yeah.

DC: You do, OK.

JD: Although we do have some people who are absolutely brilliant academically, but useless with their hands, you know. You did come across that occasionally. But generally I think it was a good system.

DC: All right, yeah.

JD: Yeah.

DC: Were you interested in this kind of work?

JD: No, it was just that, uh, it paid well. And your father did it before you. There are a lot worse jobs, you know.

DC: Sure.

JD: Yeah. And then in an industrial environment, [mumbles a bit], that was the way to go if you could, in industry. And of course, our shop, being a union shop, they paid about, eh, maybe a tenth more than the other shops, which were non-union.

DC: There were non-union shops?

JD: Oh yeah, yeah. But they didn't pay as much as what we had.

DC: Do you have any recollection at all about employment levels in Birmingham in those years? They're dismal now, but . . .

JD: No, that was in the period before, because it was going like crazy because we had a lot of American contracts too. But as an apprenticeship, as an apprentice, I started off—it was a five-year program—I started off an eighth of a man's wage. So you needed your parents to subsidize you. You couldn't possibly do it yourself. In your fifth and final year, you made a third of a man's wage.

DC: That's all?

JD: Yeah. Then when you graduated, you went up to the top, which was a lot of money, you know, for me.

DC: So let me get it straight, let me get my years right here. So, did you, did you graduate in 1958 then, from the . . .

JD: Yes. ’53 to ’58.

DC: ’53 to ’58. All right, yeah. Hmm. So where were you living during those years?

JD: In one of the little suburbs in Birmingham.

DC: Were you living with your parents or on your own?

JD: Oh yeah, yeah. You had to. You had to. Economically, there’s no way you could do it serving your apprenticeship. And if by any chance you got a young lady pregnant, then you were fired.

DC: Oh really.

JD: Yeah, yeah. Because you couldn’t possibly support another person on apprentice pay.

DC: So you were actually fired from the apprenticeship?

JD: Yep. Yeah.

DC: Wow.

JD: They were pretty harsh.

DC: I guess so. Were there many women working in those plants in those years?

JD: What?

DC: Were there women working in the plants?

JD: Oh yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

DC: What was the ratio?

JD: Uh, not too many. Let me see. Probably a quarter on the production lines.

DC: What about in the apprentices?

JD: No, no. No, no. But the apprentices, the die-makers—that was part of the program, you know—it was the regular die-makers too, they had to go out on the floor to service the dies when they were running and maintain them. And there was one area, which was full of women, and they called it the "Virgin's Row," you know. And they used to really [rag?] on the apprentices when they got ahold of them, you know. So a lot of the decent guys were pretty apprehensive about working there, because they were pretty cruel, some of the shopwomen.

DC: Was it verbal, or were they physically aggressive as well?

JD: Oh physically too, yeah.

DC: Oh really. OK. Hmm. Did you observe any of the interactions that they had with the men on the production line as well?

JD: No, not too much, because I wasn't out there very much.

DC: Right.

JD: Just that this one area was notorious for being tough on apprentices, you know. They just gave them the business, gave them the business—the apprentices the business.

DC: Well did you have any time for anything besides your apprenticeship back in those years?

JD: Yeah, I was, I was—I was in the—it was a paramilitary church organization, called the Boy's Brigade. And they had drums and bugles and all that stuff. So that attracts all the kids, and it attracted me too. So I joined the church myself. It was a Methodist church. And when I was 15, I joined the ATC, which was the Air Training Corps. It's a youth training program for the Royal Air Force.

DC: Did you have any commitment to the Air Force at that time?

JD: No, no. You were just guaranteed to get in the Air Force if you wanted to, and that was the service where they treated gentlemen like gentlemen, that was the saying you know. But when I finished my apprenticeship, I emigrated anyway, so I never did go in the Air Force. I just had a good time in the Air Training Corps.

DC: What did you do for the Air Training Corps?

JD: Well, mostly it was a foot drill, you know. And I took navigation and air crew—I went that way. They had a gliding program, which they phased out just after—toward the end of my time—because the government was trying to cut back, and naturally, because Britain never has been a, or wasn't a prosperous country after the war. So I never managed to take that, but I took the navigation and all the aircraft recognition, and [??] to fly and all that stuff.

DC: Did you fly much?

JD: Oh yeah. They used to take you out probably once a week down to the local air force base. Some of that was really good.

DC: Did you like it?

JD: Oh yeah, yeah. And there were bi-planes, you know, trainers. Yeah, one of them was a "chipmunk," which was a [??] wing, and the other was a [tiger moth?], and they were training aircraft. So they let you take over when you were up there. Pilots—pilots were getting there time in, keeping their time up, to keep their license.

DC: Right.

JD: So that was interesting too.

DC: For a teenager, sure.

JD: Oh yeah, yeah. So I used to go down there probably twice a week, and Sunday.

DC: What about the day off from work when you attended classes? Where were those classes?

JD: In the city center, at the [??] College, which was more like a community college.

DC: And how did you like that?

JD: I didn't. I wasn't keen on academics at all. It wasn't until I was about 23 that I was really receptive to learning, you know. I did well after that.

DC: Did you have more classes after age 23?

JD: Oh yeah, General Motors—when I finally got to General Motors, it's constant training.

DC: Oh, OK. We're leading up to that I guess. So it sounds like when you were slotted into these programs at age 15 or 16, you weren't ready for that part of it anyway.

JD: Yes.

DC: You were for the other part.

JD: Yeah. [??]., who came at about the same time as me—well one of the fellows, he came at 17, just over 17, and that was unheard of. So everybody said, "How'd he manage it? Who did he know?" And he said, "No," he said, "I just pick up things quickly," you know. So we thought he had a swelled head. But we eventually called him "Einstein." He was brilliant. And he got to be the director of the company.

DC: Really.

JD: Yeah.

DC: But people thought that he was over the hill, apparently, when he came on.

JD: Yeah, yeah. On paper, you weren't allowed to have started an apprenticeship after 17. But in learning see, he was just a genius. In fact, we're going to see him in August when we go back to Britain.

DC: OK.

JD: Yeah. We're going to stay with him for the weekend.

DC: OK.

JD: So we kept in touch for 44 years, you know.

DC: So he managed to overcome that late start at age 17.

JD: Oh, he was a genius, yeah. Another one of those fellows, he started his own job shop after the company folded. And then he managed several job shops, [??] of my apprentice friends. And he came to Jamaica to manage shops, and after three years his contract was up, and inflation had gone so fast in Jamaica, that his money was worth nothing, so he went back England to start again. So he was pretty [??]. So you can do very well if you have the know-how and the drive. But I just chose to leave. Another one of our apprentice friends went to Australia, you know.

DC: Was your mother still at home during those years?

JD: Oh yes, yes, the whole time.

DC: And your father continued down working the machine?

JD: Yeah, until he retired, yeah.

DC: So why did you decide to leave?

JD: Oh, bad home life for one.

DC: Hmm.

JD: Yeah, and I just did not like the way of life there. I didn't like the class distinction. I still hate it to this day, you know. And, you know, the royalty nonsense. That used to, used to bug me. It still does. I don't know that it should. And I think they're responsible for the class distinction, you know, which is, well, discrimination, you can put it whichever

way you like. So I couldn't wait to get out of here. In fact, when I was 15 I wrote to the American embassy and the Canadian embassy to try and get in the service. At 15 in Britain you could join the services as an apprentice [loud ringing] . . .

DC: Do you want to stop and get that?

JD: No, that's you—that's your appointment.

DC: Oh! I don't think so.

JD: That's my calendar singing.

DC: Oh, I got you. OK. All right.

JD: Yeah, so at 15 you can start your apprenticeship in the service in Britain, so I was hoping they had the same thing in the United States, because I was determined not to leave—not to stay in Britain, even back then.

DC: What were some of the examples of the class distinction that bothered you? Can you give me some concrete examples?

JD: Oh certainly. When I was on full pay, which—I don't know, probably you can relate it in present-day times to about a thousand a week, you know, pay. I think that's what a tradesman would get now. Probably about a thousand dollars a week—I used to go to the bank, and I was emigrating so I saved most of my money. So I used to save half of my money. So I put like $500 in the bank, and the bank clerk—he went to a grammar school—they were very strict with who they hired, so he was an academic, wore a white shirt and tie. I mean actually he was a tradesman, but he had the affected accent. And when I went in, sometimes my coveralls over my white tie—white shirt and tie—he would talk or look down his nose at me and talk down to me, you know. And that infuriated me, because I was putting more in that bank than he was making in a week.

DC: And how old was he?

JD: About the same age as myself, yeah, yeah. But because he was an academic, he used to [??] that stuff. You know, it was really infuriating. And the way he spoke too, if you didn't have an affected accent—I had a working-class accent, so people labeled you as to the way you spoke. So I didn't like that either.

DC: Did your parents ever talk about that?

JD: Oh no, they were just working-class people. My father used to go into the store and he'd say, "Good morning Squire." So he automatically put himself in a subservient position, and that used to infuriate me too, because he was a brilliant man. He couldn't do fractions, but he could take a television apart, way back then, and engine apart. Yeah. Radios, watches.

DC: So were there other examples that you can think of that prompted you to want to leave?

JD: Well like I said, my home life too wasn't good, so I was just determined to get out, to start fresh. I had a bad attitude, you know, with everything that went on—with the rest of the society. So I wanted to get out and start again, start fresh.

DC: What kind of response did you get at age 15 when you applied to the American embassy and the Canadian embassy?

JD: Oh, they said we don't have that system, but come over when you're 18 and we'll be glad to take you.

DC: OK.

JD: Yeah, yeah.

DC: And so [hesitates], when you ended trade school, when you graduated, it sounds like you emigrated shortly after that.

JD: Yes.

DC: How did that process take place?

JD: Oh, I just finished my apprenticeship and just started the paperwork to emigrate.

DC: So did you owe any service to that company for the apprenticeship? Or were you a free agent to do . . .

JD: No, you were a free agent, yeah. They gave you tools every year, in lieu of—because you need tools. Like [???] and things. And some of the bosses were pretty resentful that I took advantage, supposedly, you know. But you worked for slave labor, too, you know, for five years. So probably after a couple of years, wee, you are productive, and they're making out pretty good, you know. And you're learning, so it's a two-way street. But it is starvation pay, they pay you during your apprenticeship.

DC: So that's the risk they take?

JD: Yeah.

DC: They can train you, then you can leave.

JD: Right, yeah. But there were some places, I understand, in years gone by, when you started an apprenticeship, they would automatically fire you when your apprenticeship was over. And they expected you to go somewhere else, and put your training to work and come back with experience.

DC: Oh really.

JD: Yeah.

DC: They really thought you would come back?

JD: Yeah, yeah. You'd be a more valuable person then.

DC: Sure.

JD: Because, believe it or not, after five years you only get to know the basics.

DC: Hmm, OK, yeah. So you still have lots more seasoning . . .

JD: Oh gosh, yeah. Yeah. But when I first came over and I hit the Canadian job shops, figured I was a tradesman, you know. No way!

DC: OK.

JD: No.

DC: Well, tell me about that. What was it like?

JD: Oh, in Britain, they're very cost-conscious for tools, and labor doesn't mean too much, you know. As long as you do a good job—probably too good a job. But when you come across the pond, the expensive thing is tools. No, the expensive thing is *labor*, in the U.S.-North American market. So they'll buy as many tools as you want, but they wanted to keep labor costs down. So naturally, you have to work twice as fast as I was used to in Britain. So, [???] some of the people who had served some of their apprenticeship in the job shop in Britain would automatically be faster, you know. We were quite slow [??] in Britain. So I really got kicked around when I went to Canada, to get my speed up to par, and accuracy, you know.

DC: And who were you working for in Canada?

JD: Oh, different job shops.

DC: OK.

JD: Yeah.

DC: Were they large? Small?

JD: Oh very small. Small shops, yeah. And from 1958, my experience to 1962 was a recession time in Canada and the United States. So I had many, many 89-day jobs, so they didn't have to pay benefits.

DC: 89 days and then you're out.

JD: Yeah, yeah. On the street. And it was tough. I was down to a dollar twice. It was pretty tough going. But I could see the light at the end of the tunnel, and this was the place to be, eventually, you know.

DC: What light could you see?

JD: Oh, just, just the creature comforts different people had. And even back then, the way the society was consumer-oriented. In Britain it wasn't, you know. If you didn't like it in Britain, they'd tell you to go next door, if you wanted to buy something, you know. They had no qualms about it. Now in the United States and Canada, it was just the opposite. They want to please. They want to sell.

DC: Where were you in Canada?

JD: I worked around Hamilton, Ontario, for six weeks. And the steel company was on strike, so no job shops were open. So my money was running low. I left England with a hundred pounds. That's all I was allowed to take out. So it wasn't very much to start a new life.

DC: Did you have more in the bank back home?

JD: No.

DC: That was it.

JD: That was it, yeah. Well I started spending it, actually, see, because I was having a good time. I was [crazy?] enough to come over, and I knew I could only take a hundred pounds out. And I was a young person, not very wise.

DC: How did you end up in Hamilton?

JD: Oh, uh, you never told anyone your business. Everyone was very cagey, but somehow this one clerk in the office found out I was going to Canada, and he pulled me aside and said, "I here you're going to Canada." I said, "Who told you that?" He said, "Oh, word gets around." Must have been my father. So he said, "I'm going in three month's time," and said, "I'm going to Hamilton." So he said, "If you want me to, I'll find a place where we can both live, and you just come to Hamilton." But before that, I didn't know a soul. You know, I was just immigrating cold turkey. So I went to Hamilton, and he was a clerk, so he found work. And I walked all over the place for six weeks and I couldn't find any work, because the whole town was down.

DC: Exactly when was this that you arrived?

JD: 1958. July 1958.

DC: Did you take a plane, or a ship?

JD: Ship. Ship.

DC: And where did you land?

JD: Montreal. We stopped off in Quebec, and unloaded, and I went to Montreal. Everybody had to get off. I got the train to Hamilton, Ontario. So I met some friends, some people on the boat who were from England, coming across. And they'd been here before. So they said, anytime you're in Toronto, give us a call. So I was getting quite depressed you know. Six weeks, no work, and money running out.

DC: Did you find this contact in Hamilton? The guy from your shop?

JD: Oh yeah. I lived with him for six weeks.

DC: All right, yeah. And then you had the connections in Toronto.

JD: Yeah, so one weekend I was so depressed that I called this one fellow and said, "I'd like to come out and visit." He said, "Come on up this afternoon." So, uh, we went out on the town, in Toronto, and stayed until Monday morning. And when I got up Monday morning, they were up for work, and I picked up the newspaper, and there was a job for me in Toronto, you know, in the want ads.

DC: Did you get it?

JD: Oh yeah, I got the job, yeah. It was an 89-day job, but at least it was work. So I went back to Hamilton, packed my stuff in my suitcase, and went off to Toronto and found a place in a boarding house with a bunch of guys. So that was very good. So that paid relatively well. And then I got laid off from there, and I found a place in a smaller job shop—a job in a smaller job shop. Like I say, the pay was pretty bad.

DC: Who were they doing jobs for?

JD: The Big 3, and the aircraft companies too. I think it was A. V. Rowe, at the time, in Canada.

DC: A. V. Rowe?

JD: Yeah.

DC: And what exactly were your jobs?

JD: Machining.

DC: OK, yeah.

JD: All-around machinist.

DC: Were there unions in these plants?

JD: Noo [softly]. Noo.

DC: And you said the pace was different from what you were used to?

JD: Oh yeah, it was very full-steam-ahead-like, you know.

DC: Did you think—one thing you said was that in England you were slow but you were thorough.

JD: Yeah.

DC: Did you find yourself being as thorough with these jobs in Canada?

JD: Not to start with, no, no.

DC: And how did you feel about that?

JD: I needed the work, so, you know—in fact, there was a better philosophy, really, this side of the Atlantic, because they made the parts that were needed to be made, to size. To size. And the areas where they didn't—that didn't count—they didn't bother too much. No in Britain it had to look good, you know. And that's a real waste. In looking back, that was a waste.

DC: So which parts would not have to be so precise?

JD: Oh, like the—a ways from the cutting edge, you know, on a blank die, it wouldn't have to be precise. But in Britain, they'd probably grind it all around, you know, to make it look good. But it really wasn't necessary, and it was a waste of time.

DC: So on the die itself, and there were certain parts that had to be absolutely precise, and others that weren't so critical.

JD: Right. So it was a different philosophy there, which was good, yeah, over here.

DC: So, oh, go ahead. . . .

JD: Well, that went on for nine months in Toronto. Then Ford in Windsor advertised. They had interviews in Toronto. So I went for an interview and got the job. So I packed up everything and moved down to Windsor.

DC: And that was for Ford?

JD: Yes. And I worked there on and off for the rest of the two years, so that was fifteen months. Yeah, fifteen months at Ford.

DC: Tell me about that job.

JD: Oh, that was three months of 7 days a week. Then you were laid off for three months.

DC: For three months?

JD: Yeah, then they called you back for another three months—two or three months really. Finished up—the last time they laid me off, I thought that was it, so I—one of the fellows that worked in the shop, he had a contact in the United States, [??], which was part of my training, and what my father did. So he put me in touch with the contact in the United States, and I told him I want to come over to the States, and I'm going to need someone to guarantee me a job. That was part of the thing—I needed a thousand dollars and a job to come to at any rate, so I wouldn't be a burden on society.

DC: So you had to show that you had a thousand dollars?

JD: Oh yeah, yeah. And in the meantime I got married in Toronto, too.

DC: You got married?

JD: Yeah, big mistake. Yeah. At Ford, like I said, we worked for three months, 7 days a week, then off for a little while, but . . .

DC: Was that because, just you had a job, and didn't have a job—why the radical change?

JD: Well, back then, when the United States got busy, then they'd ship work to Canada. And when it slowed down, they'd start pulling work from Canada. So Canada was like the distant relative. And this wasn't really satisfactory. Also, at Ford, in the bathrooms, they had no doors. Very, very primitive. And it was unionized.

DC: It was?

JD: Yes.

DC: So no doors?

JD: Yeah. So I wasn't used to that, you know. I like privacy, naturally. They wanted the people back on the job, so there were no doors.

DC: So you couldn't dawdle?

JD: Couldn't dawdle, yeah. So it was very uncomfortable. Anyway, at least it put money in my pocket, so that worked well. So I came across the river to the United States.

DC: And so when was that?

JD: That was 1960.

DC: OK.

JD: So I had two years in Canada, '58 to 1960.

DC: And where did you live when you were in Windsor?

JD: Uh, Riverside, in downtown Windsor, yeah.

DC: And did you have an apartment, or a boarding house?

JD: Apartment, yeah. Apartment. And when I emigrated to the United States, you have to register for the draft in six months. And at the time, I was a prospective father, so I registered and went down to Fort Wayne, and took my physical and everything else. And because I was a prospective father, I wasn't accepted at that time, you know. So I hit this job shop, and I managed to get in Ford Motor Company. [pause] It was a difficult thing, because I tried to get in some of the union job shops, and they wouldn't accept my apprenticeship. Now the apprenticeship in the United States was only four years, and it's laid out how many hours on each machine and everything else. So if you were born in Germany or in Poland, or in another country, you'd take it to the University and get it translated. So it was understood. But if you were smart, you went to the union to find out what the qualifications were, and you'd get an interpretation to conform to the U.S. standards, you know. Mine was in English, and I didn't have the exact hour for hour on different sheets. Plus I went into the design office, which wasn't in the American system. So that took away from machining time. So I couldn't get [a journeyman's card??]. And I finally managed to get a job in either Ford or Chrysler. I think it was Ford, [B-1?], B-1 engine plant. And I got in on the strength of my apprenticeship.

DC: Now why did they accept it?

JD: Because they weren't interested in the journeyman's card. They only trusted an apprenticeship.

DC: Oh, OK.

JD: So the shop steward came around, and I had to show my apprenticeship, and I explained I applied, you know, I couldn't get a journeyman's card. And he looked at my papers and he said, "This is nonsense," you know. "You're well qualified," he said. "This is better than ours." So he said, "I'll bring you some papers." So I signed the papers, application, and within six weeks I had my journeyman's card. I went down to Solidarity House with my papers earlier, myself, and they wouldn't even listen to me. Well it turned out this man was in the service in Britain, and they treated him very well.

DC: This is the man who told you that you . . . [talk over each other] Did he actually go down to Solidarity House too?

JD: No, no, I didn't have the [??] Ford. I got my apprenticeship card, and I really didn't need it from then on, because I mostly worked in the big shops anyway. I went from Ford to Chrysler.

DC: Why would you not need it in the big shops?

JD: Because they mostly went on the strength of your apprenticeship. But the job shops generally paid more money back then.

DC: Really?

JD: Yeah.

DC: These were unaffiliated with . . .

JD: They were unionized . . .

DC: Unionized, but were they directly affiliated with Ford, Chrysler or GM or . . .

JD: No, no. Just part of the UAW.

DC: Right, OK.

JD: Yeah.

DC: So, let's back up for a second. You said you were at the Dearborn Engine Plant. That was when you kind of got your feet on the ground, it sounds like?

JD: Yeah, right.

DC: And what were you doing there?

JD: I was a machinist.

DC: OK.

JD: And again, there was a constant layoff. I worked there for three months and I was laid off.

DC: Was it 89 days again?

JD: No, it was just a work situation, excuse me [distraction]

DC: Sure, yeah. [tape shut off for a few moments, then resumes] Let's see, yeah, I was asking you about the Dearborn . . .

JD: So I got laid off from there because I got finished with the work for that particular employer for that time. And I went back to a job shop, and I worked there for probably a couple of years, because it was steady.

DC: Do you remember the name of the job shop?

JD: Haggerty Die and Engineering.

DC: Haggerty Die and Engineering.

JD: And that was a non-union shop.

DC: OK. Did you notice any difference between the union and non-union shops?

JD: Oh yeah, yeah, yeah.

DC: Tell me about the differences.

JD: Well, you got fired for any reason at all.

DC: And did you see people getting fired?

JD: Oh yeah, yeah. The owner was an Englishman, actually.

DC: At Haggerty?

JD: Yeah.

DC: OK.

JD: And I [didn't have a card??]. And I used to run all the machines, and I got paid less than most of the others, because he kept me all around.

DC: So I don't understand the connection. You got paid less because he kept you? Was that a trade-off, you get some security but you get less money?

JD: Uh hum. Yeah.

DC: Was that spelled out? Did you have some . . .

JD: No, oh no, no, there wasn't any agreement. I went over to his house, and he invited me to parties and stuff like that, you know. So he was really somebody who really took care of me. So eventually I could see this wasn't a good situation, so I got a job at Chrysler Engineering.

DC: OK. Where was that?

JD: In Highland Park. And there was a prototype shop, which was really interesting.

DC: So you were working on, what, experimental or . . .

JD: Engines, yeah. Engine parts. Like the hemi-engine. That was in that era.

DC: Tell me about that engine. What was that?

JD: Oh, fantastic. It was really, it had a domed piston, domed cylinder head. So the piston used to go up really all the way in, and get squeezed there. The compression rate was fantastic, you know. And they had the hottest car in the stock car circuit for a few years. Richard Petty used to drive for them. And we used to get their cars in the garage . . .

End of Side A

Begin Side B

DC: [in the midst of a story] I was opening the door, and the intercom goes off, you know, "Joe Woods, please call . . . " [laughs]

Anyways, how did you find out about the job at Chrysler Engineering?

JD: Uh, the landlord I worked with. He was supposedly an engineer there. It turned out he was an inspector, but he told me he was an engineer. So, actually, he got me the application to work there, and I finally got in. Well not finally, I got in there. But—about the Hemi engine, oh it was funny. The Highland Park Police had [problems?] with the Hemi engine.

DC: How do you spell that engine?

JD: It was hemispheric.

DC: Hemi, hemi, OK.

JD: H-E-M-I

DC: Got you. All right.

JD: And it was ironic that Highland Park is so small, they wouldn't need all that power in every [??].

DC: Get from one end to the other in a few seconds.

JD: Yeah, yeah. Anyway, that worked out very well. And it was strictly forty hours. And I was trying to raise a family, and buy a house, or pay for a house, raise a family. Pay for two cars, and forty hours didn't cut it, you know. So I got a part-time job. And I worked a part-time job for a couple of years.

DC: Where was that?

JD: In one of the job shops on Six-Mile Road. So I was—I left for work, I left the house at 6 in the morning, and probably got back at 11 at night.

DC: So you'd work your shift at Chrysler and then go off to the other job shop?

JD: Yeah.

DC: Was the other job shop a union shop?

JD: No.

DC: So, but Chrysler—was Chrysler?

JD: Oh yeah.

DC: So you had a union shop during the day, and a non-union shop in the evening?

JD: Yeah, yeah. Several of us did that from Chrysler. One of the Chrysler fellows come to the job in the job shop where he worked, you know.

DC: Can you compare the two jobs?

JD: Well, one was tools, tool work, which was precise and fine. And the other was experimental work, and that was—it was all about [??], the engineer would tell you what he wanted and he gave you a sketch. Totally different work, [??] prints. And some of the Chrysler workers took prints, in fact, but a lot of it was Rube Goldberg stuff, you know.

DC: Just figure it out, huh?

JD: Yeah. The engineer would tell you what he wanted, and he wanted you to try and figure it out, so it was very interesting.

DC: Did you like that.

JD: Oh yeah! It was great. It was great. So I realized I couldn't keep on working two jobs. It was just wearing me down. At that time I moved up to Pontiac—Auburn Hills, actually—just before then. One of my neighbors up there worked for Pontiac Motors, as a process engineer.

DC: So why did you move to Auburn Hills?

JD: Oh, just to get out of Detroit. Actually, to get out of Palmer Park. I moved from Detroit to Palmer Park, which is still Detroit actually. I wanted to move into a nice little area.

DC: OK, what was the area like?

JD: In Auburn Hills?

DC: Well no. I hear you wanted to move out—were you in Highland Park when you were trying to buy the house? Did you ever move in Highland Park?

JD: No, no.

DC: But you lived in Palmer Park.

JD: Yeah.

DC: OK. And what was that neighborhood like?

JD: Oh, it was just a lot of rental houses, and duplexes. So the owner of the duplex—he was the one who worked at Chrysler [door squeaks], with me at Chrysler—but he eventually—I did buy this house out in Auburn Hills.

DC: How did you get your sights set on Auburn Hills?

JD: Oh, we just drove around, looked in the paper for houses, you know, and tried to find something in a range we thought we could afford. And naturally when you buy a house, it takes four or five years before the payment is comfortable. You just really have to scrimp, so we did that. At that time, the Detroit riots broke out, so I had to drive down into Highland Park. We had the helicopters overhead, you know. And on top of the Chrysler building, they had the Army snipers. So it was sort of hairy driving down there [faint].

DC: Oh really. We'll sneak up on that. But you were still working at Chrysler Engineering then all through the riot period, '67, about then. And so how many years in all did you end up working there?

JD: Almost five. About four and a half years.

DC: OK, yeah, all right. We can talk more about that if we have time. I know you have to go in just a little bit here.

JD: There's other days too, if you have the time.

DC: That's right. Absolutely. So anyways, uh, uh, so it sounds like you—were you commuting down from Auburn Hills then to Chrysler?

JD: To Chrysler.

DC: OK, all right. What was that commute like in those days?

JD: That wasn't bad because I-75 was in place. I used to hit I-75 all the time. You know it was sort of hairy. In fact I stopped driving I-75 in the winter after an incident where some lady went down into the ditch while driving her kid to school—probably around Troy. So I stopped, and I managed to get her out because she was really down. So we got her out, but she was facing the wrong way, so we had to wait for the traffic to clear. And while we were waiting for the traffic to clear, a big flatbed came down, with a trailer behind, and the back end broke loose, and the back end swung all the way around, and it stopped about 20-30 feet away from us, you know? So that shook me up. [mumbles a bit] So I hit Woodward all the way down—it was slower, but safer—from then on. So anyway, I didn't have that problem when I got the job at Pontiac Motors.

DC: Well we're sneaking up on that, but it sounds like driving down during the riot period made a big impact on you.

JD: Oh yeah. It was [squeaky door] a very [??].

DC: Can you tell me more about that period? Because it sounds like—let me back up for a second. When did you start at Pontiac Motors?

JD: 195—let me see. I started at Chrysler in 1953 [sic] I think.

DC: Was that '63?

JD: Yes, '63. And about 4 and a ½ years later I left and started at Pontiac Motors.

DC: So that would have been right in '67

JD: '67.

DC: So it sounds like—if my hunch is right, if I weren't here talking to you, you know, my hunch would be that the riots probably had a big impact on your decision to find a different job. Is that true?

JD: Well, it was working two jobs too. That was the main thing.

DC: All right . . .

JD: I wanted . . .

DC: How long did you work the two jobs?

JD: About two years.

DC: All right. And were you working the two jobs in 1967?

JD: Uh huh. Yeah. Part of it, yeah. Also, that was a good time too, though, because on our way back from the job shop, I drove up Woodward Avenue, and that's when the kids used to use the hot rod cars, you know. So that was an exciting period, too, in the '60s.

DC: So did you do that as well?

JD: No, no. I just had an [Old?] [Citroen?] I couldn't afford a hot rod

DC: But you'd watch them?

JD: Oh yeah, yeah. I'd drive by.

DC: Huh. Well, do you remember much about, let's see, was there production going on as well in Highland Park, for Chrysler?

JD: Well, in a limited way, because it was all prototype. I think they did have a stamping plant next door, but we weren't involved with that at all.

DC: OK, so you were just with the experimental engineers.

JD: Yeah, experimental, yeah.

DC: All right, yeah. But tell me what it was like when you were driving down there during the riots.

JD: It was OK, until you got down to Highland Park—took Palmer Park to 6-Mile Rd., then I had probably half a mile to drive to work, to the plant. So really, we never saw any riots per se, except on television, because the cops and the Army were everywhere.

DC: Were you expected just to report to work.

JD: Oh yes, they expected us to go. Yeah.

DC: And how did you feel?

JD: [Laughs] I didn't feel too good. I didn't like it one bit, actually. Of course my philosophy's changed, too, about why the riots started, you know.

DC: What did you think at the time about why the riots started?

JD: Well I was probably as big a racist as anyone, you know. I think a lot of us [pauses] changed our minds. [pause]

DC: Had you seen any changes in the neighborhoods in Highland Park or Palmer Park, in terms of the racial composition, of people living there?

JD: No, not particularly, no. But, uh, in 1960, when I used to walk in downtown Detroit, it was a great shopping area. You couldn't walk on the sidewalk, it was so busy, you know. And then the riots started, and after that, it was empty. And I noticed when I did drive through Detroit to go to Canada or some other place where I wanted to go, if you stopped off to fill up with gas, there were only black stations you know. So they'd make you wait while they served the black customers, you know. So it wasn't a good feeling, you know.

DC: Was that after the riot, or before?

JD: After the riot, yeah. So you can understand the way they felt, you know.

DC: You said that your feelings about why the riot started changed from, you know, when it happened to now . . .

JD: Yeah, yeah, a lot of it was justified, but you know, as a white person, you never really thought about it too much, you know. You may have thought, "Well I've got a job," or you didn't think about that, or they weren't making the same money as you, or they were discriminated against. It was just a way of life, I guess, and you accepted it.

DC: What was it like coming from Birmingham and then being in this environment with racial differences and all?

JD: Well, in Birmingham, we had a lot of Indians and Pakistanis and Jamaicans in Birmingham. But the United States was probably 20 or 30 years ahead of us as far as race relations [phone ringing] went, because the immigrants, when they came to Britain, they were very subservient, you know. Now the blacks in Detroit were not subservient, and they had no intention of being subservient. [loud message on answering machine] Across the street there. She used to rent, and then she bought a house, but she has no pool, so she likes to come to us. [laughs]

DC: When its 95 degrees I can't blame her! But you were saying that you noticed a difference, that blacks here were not subservient in the way that Jamaicans or Indians or Pakistanis were in Birmingham.

JD: They were interviewed on TV in Birmingham—well in England—and they said, "We have the jobs the whites don't want, and we have the women the whites don't want." And that was a fact. And that was them starting to—try and find—get back on their own feet. They lived in apartment complexes—they'd live in a house . . .

DC: In Birmingham?

JD: In Birmingham, England. And there might be 7, 8, 9, 10 Jamaicans, Indians, Pakistanis, and maybe two or three white women [voice grows faint].

DC: Hmm.

JD: Because you know, human nature being what it is [faint]. Probably there families were still back in India or Pakistan. But it really wasn't a good situation. It was a pretty bad situation actually.

DC: Back in Birmingham, what were the relations like between white workers and these non-English workers, the Jamaicans . . .

JD: Well, really cordial, because the English were a cocky bunch, very arrogant, and they always consider the Indians and the Pakistanis [with a?] very senior attitude. They were subservient people, you know.

DC: So cordial, but subservient?

JD: Yeah, right, yeah.

DC: Let's see, back here, you were trying to raise a family at this point too. Did you say you had kids, you had kids as well?

JD: Yeah [flat affect], I had one child—well, I eventually had two children while we were living in Auburn Hills.

DC: OK, and what was your wife doing during these years?

JD: She was a housekeeper. In the earlier days, she had to get a part-time job when I was laid off to try and subsidize [talk over each other]

DC: What did she do?

JD: Oh, well the only one I can remember, she worked in a cigar stand in the [Layland?] Hotel, in Detroit, and then she got pregnant. So we talked the boss into letting me work in her place.

DC: At the cigar store?

JD: At the cigar stand, yeah. And he let me work, yeah.

DC: And that was during one of the layoffs, you say?

JD: Yeah, which were numerous, yeah. So it would be like that, you know.

DC: Did you have many layoffs when you were at Chrysler Engineering?

JD: No, no.

DC: That was more steady work?

JD: Yeah, very steady.

DC: Until you latched on there, it sounds like things were . . .

JD: . . . more up and down, yeah.

DC: So what other kinds of odd jobs did you do to try to make ends meet during these layoffs?

JD: Well, when I lived in Detroit, I used to get the bus up Woodward Avenue—I didn't have a car—used to take the bus up Woodward Avenue to 6-Mile Road. Then I'd walk down to Van Dyke—there was a lot of job shops there. And I walked back. The next day I'd get the bus to 7-Mile Road, and I got up to 10-Mile Rd. walking back and forth, you know. And eventually, I got the bus up to 10-Mile Rd., and I walked down to Van Dyke, and nothing there, you know. It's a far ways down there, but I had nothing better to do than look for work. Then I walked up a few miles, up Van Dyke, I ran across Chrysler Missile. It was Chrysler Missile, or Chrysler Tank Plant back then. And I walked up the long drive, and went to the employment office. I said, "Do you have a job for machinists?" They said, "Yes, we do." I thought, "Oh, thank the Lord," you know. They said, "Are you a citizen?" I said, "No." So no job.

DC: Oh, because it was military?

JD: Yes, yeah.

DC: Ahh.

JD: So that was one of the few jobs I found, and that was really, really disappointing.

DC: And you didn't have a car back then either [mumbles]. So you were ineligible for that.

JD: Yeah, but the 6-, 7-, 8-, 9-, 10-Mile Roads, they were full of job shops. But there were signs on the lawns at some of the job shops, and they said "Die Makers Wanted. Machinists and young hopefuls need not apply." I mean they were advertising for die makers, but they said machinists, and young hopefuls, don't apply.

DC: So you were both.

JD: Yeah [laughs]. I was a qualified machinist.

DC: Right, I understand. But you were young and you were hopeful, and you were also qualified as a machinist.

JD: So it was pretty nasty.

DC: That sounds harsh. And that would have been through the early '60s.

JD: Yes, yeah.

DC: Tough times. And you were a skilled worker here.

JD: Yeah, yeah.

DC: Tough to get full-time work.

JD: It was, yeah.

DC: When did you get your first car?

JD: Oh, gosh [pause], I was in one of the job shops in Detroit. I was living in Palmer Park.

DC: OK, so it would have been in the mid-'60s, it sounds like.

JD: Yeah, yeah, before I went to work for Chrysler.

DC: OK.

JD: Early '60s.

DC: Early '60s, yeah. OK. Were there many others like you wandering around these job shops?

JD: Oh yeah, yes, yeah, yeah. I've got this, I've got this big Mercury, has a 400 cc engine, you know, 400 cubic engine. Did about eight miles to the gallon. It took me—it was eight miles to the job shop where I worked at, to home. And one Friday, I was just

heading home. I didn't know why. Hardly anyone at all. I needed to get to work Friday to get my paycheck. So I went down to the local gas station on fumes, and I pulled up to the pump—and they pumped gas for you then—and I said, well, a gallon of gas, which was 25 cents. I said, "One." He said, "One dollar?" I said, "No, one gallon." And that would get me to work just fine, so that's what I did.

DC: And then you got your paycheck.

JD: Yeah, then I had my paycheck, so it was OK. 25 cents. Just enough to get to work.

DC: And hope that you didn't have to idle too long.

JD: Right, exactly, yeah.

DC: 8 miles a gallon. Oh boy.

JD: So, you know, but they were bad times; at times you look back on them and appreciate what you have.

DC: Sure. At any of those times did you ever think about going back to England?

JD: No. If I'd have gone anyplace, I would have gone elsewhere, but never back to England.

DC: Did you think about going back to Canada?

JD: No, no, no. That wasn't [??]

DC: So what, what . . .

JD: The only other alternative . . .

DC: . . . what made you feel that—you were going to mention the only other alternative. What was that?

JD: Australia.

DC: Oh, OK.

JD: And that wasn't a very good choice either. That was way too far away, and in my mind, quite primitive too. Not as good as the United States could be.

DC: Did you ever think about going other places in the United States?

JD: Uh, no, not really. Because I figure this was the center of industry, especially the auto industry. So this was the place I had to stay.

DC: Would your skills have transferred to any other industry?

JD: Yeah, maybe into some machine building place. And this sounds sort of stupid, but machine building, that didn't pay the money that the auto industry paid. So it wasn't really a consideration, unless it was a machine building shop around.

DC: Machine—building machines for the auto industry.

JD: Yeah, in this area.

DC: In this area.

JD: Yeah. I don't think I would have left the state. I did go to Toledo one time, looking for work. Yeah. Because there was a lot of auto industry there. But there was nothing down there either.

DC: Ok, you didn't find anything.

JD: No.

DC: Did you ever have any need to use the union while you were working at Chrysler Engineering?

JD: Not at Chrysler, no. No, it went pretty smooth. And like I say, we were sort of prima donnas, being that we were in the prototype area. So were treated quite well.

DC: Were you one of the younger workers there at Chrysler?

JD: At that time, yeah.

DC: At that time. Can you describe your co-workers at all?

JD: Well they were older and slower. And they weren't as smart. Yeah.

DC: And where had they been trained?

JD: Probably in the job shops. And they didn't have the academics that I had. Like I was a wizard. I used to know all the formulas by heart. And that came up pretty often in the machine shop. So, [hard to understand] to use trigonometry.

DC: So you had that all, all solid. How did you get along with these older, slower workers?

JD: Oh great! They, they—I never said too much, you know. So they assumed a lot more than I was, you know, assumed I was a lot more than I was. I wasn't a dummy. I knew what I was doing. But they added to it, see? I didn't correct them.

DC: How long had they been there?

JD: Oh, 30 years in some cases.

DC: OK, a long time.

JD: Yeah, yeah. And there were some young men, my own age too. And some that were quite [??].

DC: How many in all were working there in your type of position?

JD: About twelve in the machine shop.

DC: OK, yeah, so fairly small.

JD: Yeah, yeah. I was on second shift, and the fellow on days, he was sharp. So he told me, you know, he said, "Hey," he said, you know, he said, "You're the first person I've worked with who can keep up with me." So we got along real well.

DC: Now you said before that, uh, when you came out of the trade school you think you know a lot but you have a lot to learn. Were you learning a lot in these years?

JD: Oh yes, very much, yes. The job shops was a tremendous experience, one I would have preferred to do without.

DC: Because?

JD: Oh it was rough, you know, money-wise, and condition-wise. One place, the boss fired me twice, and I quit three times.

DC: The same place?

JD: Yeah. Same place. That was in Toronto, actually.

DC: Oh, OK.

JD: Yeah, but, it was rough, you know. So I was full of pee and vinegar, and I wouldn't take any crap, even though I was desperate. And he fired me for making a mistake.

DC: Did he rehire you?

JD: Well, I just walked toward the door, and he called me back.

DC: OK, so he would just blow off steam.

JD: Yeah, yeah.

DC: Could you compare the job shops in Canada with the job shops here in Detroit?

JD: Oh just the same. Just the same. Yeah. Very fast—and you had some very good workers too. And a lot of them were alcoholics because of the nature of the business, you know. You work seven to eight days a week, you know, long hours, and then you get laid off. And a lot of guys used to hit the bar after work, you know. So you did get a lot of alcoholism in the job shops.

DC: Did people work while drinking?

JD: No, not generally, no.

DC: OK, they'd drink afterwards.

JD: Yeah. You might get the odd one, but, uh—one guy, he was a brilliant grinder, and he'd work until he had quite a bit of money, and then he'd disappear. And he'd come back when he ran out of money. And he was a young man, and he looked like an alcoholic too, with his complexion, you know. But a brilliant grinder, so the boss would hire him every time, because he was an asset, yeah.

DC: All right, oh. So he had his own 90-day plan or whatever?

JD: Yeah, yeah.

DC: Were most of your co-workers married as well?

JD: Just a cross-section, you know. I'd say most were, yeah. Most were.

DC: Now when you were working these two jobs, you must have had very little time to see your family.

JD: Oh yeah, it was tough. It was tough, yeah. And—I'd stay out and come home at night and I'd probably have to go down to the Laundromat and do the diapers, you know, because I'd have all the diapers, the big pillow diaper diapers, new baby. So I'd go down and do that. I was wiped out, you know [very softly].

DC: You couldn't have been getting much sleep at all.

JD: No, no. I used to thrive on four or five hours' sleep, yeah. And [if I got?] five, I'd feel very good, actually. But you do what you have to do at that time.

DC: Would you have time to eat anything between jobs?

JD: Yeah, I took packed lunches, you know. And then between job shops I'd probably stop off and buy a sandwich.

DC: So, you might have already gone through this once, but it hasn't stuck in my brain. Why exactly did you decide to leave Chrysler Engineering?

JD: To get the job—oh yeah, I really wasn't very specific there. Pontiac Motors was hiring, and they worked a lot of overtime.

DC: Oh.

JD: And my next door neighbor, he was a process engineer for Pontiac Motors. And he said, "We're hiring like crazy," you know, "you don't have to work two jobs." He said, "We're working six, seven days a week." So I'd rather work one job. And so eventually—not eventually—as soon as I knew there were openings, I applied. And I gave them my notice at Chrysler. So [??] said "We'll rehire you."

DC: He did.

JD: Yeah.

DC: Positive review, exit review. So how long did it take to get the job at Pontiac Motors?

JD: Three or four weeks. Because they have to check your background and everything else.

DC: And so, tell me about the new job. What was it like at Pontiac Motors?

JD: It was dirty. It was in the die room, which I was glad to out of, you know. Prototypes are nice and clean, and interesting. But I wanted the security of a job, of a job, like a die-room job. And all the overtime I worked, it was fantastic. And I was just picking up on programs.

DC: What kind of programs?

JD: You know, new cars. New car styles, [??] styles. And actually, they made the engines there at the Pontiac Motors complex, so it was—they did the whole car there, one complex. So that worked out really well, except that I didn't like the job conditions. I was back to the grease and the grime, you know.

DC: So you had to trade off the security and the overtime for the dirty conditions.

JD: Yeah, yeah.

DC: Now was there any way to have a die room without the grease and grime?

JD: No, no. Just the nature of the beast, yeah, yeah.

DC: How many people worked in that room?

JD: Oh, probably 500.

DC: Oh, a lot.

JD: On several shifts, three shifts.

DC: So this was a huge difference from Chrysler Engineering.

JD: Yeah. This was rather what I was used to.

DC: And where had you been in a die room like that?

JD: Oh, it was part of my apprenticeship. So there was a comfort zone there too.

DC: OK.

JD: But once you're exposed to prototype work, you don't want it to go the other way.

DC: Hmm. Did you ever think about going back to Chrysler Engineering?

JD: No, no. Couldn't afford to.

DC: OK, so were you getting consistent overtime?

JD: Yes, yes, seven days a week.

DC: So how much were you working?

JD: Oh . . .

DC: Seven days, but how many hours?

JD: . . . you could work forty hours, eight on Saturday, eight on Sunday. Yeah.

DC: OK, so your overtime was in eight-hour shifts on weekends.

JD: Right.

DC: Would you stay later than the eight-hour shift on weekdays?

JD: No, no. Because there were three shifts.

DC: Three shifts. OK, got you.

JD: And ironically, the die room, you'd never seen so many divorces and broken homes, because of the work situation.

DC: Because of the overtime, or just . . .

JD: Well you're shift work, and you're never home, you know. You're just home evenings, or when you're—depending on what shift you work.

DC: Right.

JD: So there were a lot of divorces in that die room.

DC: How did that affect your family?

JD: I got divorced eventually.

DC: Yeah, yeah.

JD: Yeah, yeah. But it served its purpose at the time. At that time, you had to work Sundays if management required you to.

DC: Youdid?

JD: You had no choice at all. The company owned you. That was the price you paid.

DC: Now did the union ever try to change that?

JD: Oh certainly, certainly. In fact, some of them took General Motors to court, and the outcome of that, after a while, was that you didn't have to—they couldn't make you work Sunday. Well they could make you work so many Sundays, I guess, out of the month. And eventually, they could not make you work Sunday. So that was tough. General Motors, if you were late—I was a good employee—I was late one time in two years, and the foreman came up and he said, "Why are you late today?" After two years of not being late, you know. I just looked at the guy and I just turned my back on him and just ignored him. And he said, "I have to write something down." I said, "Write down what you want," you know. I just wouldn't dignify it with a [trails off].

DC: After two years. And how late were you?

JD: About five, ten minutes.

DC: So did you ever take that to a committeeman or anything?

JD: No, no, that was just the thing, you know. If they penalize you, then you go to the committeeman, but I never did. One fellow, he, he was a Vietnam veteran, you know. So he was a free spirit. He was a helicopter pilot, so he had seen a lot of crap. But he

came in late one day and the boss said, "How come you're late?" He said, "Well," he said, "I woke up [hard to decipher]." The boss said, "I can't put that down." He said, "You asked me why I'm late," he said, "I'm telling you." But he was a rebel.

DC: What was it like being from England, and thrown into this 1960s culture in America?

JD: It was great. I enjoyed it. It as just what I wanted.

DC: What about it did you like?

JD: Uh, probably the material things that were available. It took awhile to get there. And the attitude of the people—you know, I was different, so I was respected, you know.

DC: How so? You were different, meaning?

JD: I spoke differently.

DC: Oh, OK.

JD: So people treated me with respect, which is what I liked, you know. [??] background.

DC: So you think your accent actually gave you, or gained you some respect?

JD: Well yeah, probably the difference, yeah, probably. But many of them couldn't understand me, because I was—I don't know, my wife still doesn't understand me. [short pause] What was I going to say? Oh yeah, Pontiac Motors, we had a union, which was 653, but they fought an uphill battle to get us where we are. When I first started, you were allowed a ten-minute break in the morning, and one in the afternoon, and thirty minutes for lunch. Actually, back then it was a six-minute break. And you were allowed to go to the coffee machine, and bring your coffee back to your machine, eat your sandwich, but you couldn't sit down. You had to stand by your machine. You couldn't talk to your neighbor.

DC: Was that considered your lunch break, or was that one of your morning breaks?

JD: No, just a coffee break.

DC: OK, coffee break.

JD: Yeah.

DC: So your break was just standing next to your machine?

JD: Yeah, and you could eat a sandwich, drink your coffee.

DC: Could you eat a sandwich in the grease and grime?

JD: Yeah, you'd just have to make sure you didn't touch it, you know. But that's just a way of life. And eventually that got to be a ten-minute break, and they gave us, eventually we got seats so you could sit down by your machine too, while you were running your machine. Otherwise you had to stand all day. So things have improved a little bit. And then they got cafeteria areas, where the machines were—well, there were seats in them, in the machine area, refreshment machine areas, there were seats there. But that was just for lunch. You couldn't use it for your ten-minute break. Six-minute break.

DC: You had to be back at your machine?

JD: You had to get to—go back to your machine. So that got to be a lot more liberal, so you could go there for your ten-minute, or twelve-minute now, or sixteen minutes, or whatever it is now. You can have your break there in the seating area, and you can wash your hands.

DC: So even in the late '60s, with a union, they could require you to work Sundays, and they could make you go get your sandwich and rush back to your machine and all.

JD: Yeah.

DC: So how involved were you with this union.

JD: Oh, I just used to vote, you know. Support the candidates, because it takes a special person, I guess, to be a union rep. I think everyone used to complain back then about the bad points of the union, as well as the good points. And the bad points were you'd protect a guy who was screwing off, and they'd protect the drunks. And you used to get guys who would slip out—punch in, slip out, come back, just to clock out, you know. Mostly production workers or janitors. And the union would get them back in again, when they were caught. So a lot of people didn't like the—even if they were drunks, you know, they'd go on a binge, and management—they'd come in drunk, and management would send them home. And the union would get them their pay for when they were gone, and get it struck off the record, or whatever. And eventually, they managed to negotiate a treatment program. Because it is a sickness, you know. So that's one of the good things, and I think now the union and management both will tolerate some infractions, then after that I think you are out. The way I understand it. You know, because there are treatment programs for that thing now. But at one time, the union would protect them, and many of us didn't agree with that.

DC: Well back in the '60s, I'm kind of thinking about a sweep of time, from Chrysler Engineering on through Pontiac Motors, because you were in the union in both places . . .

JD: Oh yes, yes.

DC: Could you see anything that the union was doing for you at that time?

JD: Oh yeah!
DC: What sorts of things could you tell at that time?

JD: Well, mostly I think it was a line of demarcation thing. To get right back to the beginning, there was a pay scale. I think it was three stages, beginning, you get a nickel raise, then another nickel raise to get the top rate. And you had to fight tooth and nail to get that last nickel sometimes. It was just a power-trip thing.

DC: You'd have to fight who?

JD: The foreman.

DC: OK.

JD: Yeah. So it was after about three months, and uh, "I'm qualified." I got the nickel after probably three months. And then I was waiting for the time to get the last nickel, and I used to hound the boss everyday. And he said, "I'm working on it. I'm working on it. I'm working on it." So I said, I said, "Do you mind if I go over your head and see the General Foreman." I said, "There's no reason why I shouldn't get full pay." He said, "Well, let me try a bit, do a little bit more." Nothing happened, so I said, "I'm going to see the General Foreman." So I went to see the General Foreman and I got the raise. Now this fellow's name was Jimmy [Wrinkle?], the boss. My foreman. And before he retired, he went back to the shop floor as an hourly person. He was at the retirees' picnic.

DC: [hard to decipher]

JD: Yeah, he gave up his salary job.

DC: Went back to production?

JD: He was at the retirees' picnic I met you at.

DC: That's an amazing transition. I never heard of anyone doing that?

JD: Well, management was starting to get rough on salary, you know, and salary has no protection. So he didn't want this. In fact, after I spoke to you, I went up to him, I said "Jim, would you be interested in an interview." And he said, "NO!" Wouldn't even think about it—didn't even think about it. So he knew which side his bread was buttered on. So he took advantage. Well salary was good. Because they always used to spice salary up after the union negotiations to keep them happy. But when they started to cut back on salary, like the health benefits and things, he decided that was the time he should get back to the union. And he eventually asked—the management stopped them from being able to do that. He couldn't go back [??].

DC: Really?

JD: Yeah.

DC: They can actually prevent you from going back to production?

JD: Oh yeah. Yeah. I guess the health insurance is quite expensive. I think they did compensate salary by giving them a raise to try and cover part of it, but I think they still have bigger co-pays than we do.

DC: And their overtime is uncompensated a lot of times.

JD: That's right, yeah.

DC: One thing that occurred to me—you would have been at Chrysler Engineering until about '67 or so, and then Pontiac Motors, at a time when, as I understand it, there were suddenly blacks entering the skilled trades. Did you see that at Pontiac Motors?

JD: Oh yeah, yes.

DC: How about at Chrysler Engineering? Did that ever happen?

JD: No, no.

DC: At Pontiac Motors, you would have been entering there at a time when, my sense of it is, that the skilled trades would have just been opening up.

JD: Right, yeah. Well, quite a while afterwards, actually.

DC: Quite a while after, so not right away.

JD: Probably about ten years after I got there.

DC: Ten years after!

JD: That was my experience, just off the top of my head, yeah. Unfortunately, a lot of the blacks—we didn't have too many blacks try to come in, but one of the fellows I remember very well. He couldn't read a scale. He just was not qualified. There are certain basics you do need, and—but this is what the company had to do, I guess, to comply with the government, thing.

DC: So this would have been in the late '70s or so.

JD: Yeah, yeah.

DC: So the training and background . . . .

JD: They just couldn't do it, you know. If you didn't know what a sixteenth was on a scale, how could you do trig, you know, and you needed trig.

DC: So it took a while, then for the skilled trades to be diversified.

JD: Yeah, yeah, and to get qualified applicants.

DC: OK, you can't suddenly open up the trades and necessarily have qualified applicants in the pipeline, is that what you're saying?

JD: Right, that's correct, yeah. I mean you just have to know. Like I say, I wouldn't want to go to a doctor who wasn't qualified, and the same with the trades. There are certain criteria you have to know. So eventually we started to get some qualified people coming in, and women too. And some of them were very good, yeah.

DC: It sounds like it took a while.

JD: Oh it did take a long time, yeah.

DC: So were there other—let's see, you would have been at Pontiac Motors in the early '70s, the energy crisis and all of this. Did that affect your employment at Pontiac Motors?

JD: No, I was never laid off from Pontiac Motors.

DC: Never laid off from Pontiac Motors, OK. So you went there for steady employment, and you got it.

JD: Found it, yeah, yeah.

DC: Did your overtime continue?

JD: Pretty much, yeah, pretty much.

DC: Now did you—when was it that you had a choice as to how much overtime you worked?

JD: Do you know, I really don't remember.

DC: OK.

JD: I don't know.

DC: That's fair enough.

JD: But I was in the die room for about 20 years, and they started a project up where they were trying to do away with lines of demarcation in the trades. Because in some areas, it can be quite a hassle, you know. There's a lot of overlap, and a lot of unnecessary delay.

DC: Such as what?

JD: I run a boring mill in the die room—and it was a good machine. And one thing used to rail regularly on the machine was a coolant pump. And you can't allow a fast machine cutting without coolant.

DC: Sure.

JD: So I called the machine repairman. Eventually I got one office that coordinated everything, but one time I went to the boss, said, "My coolant pump's broke." So, he said, "OK, take care of it." So I go to machine repair, and I said, "My coolant pump's broke." So we needed to get an electrician to disconnect the electricity. And if they were tied up, there might be a delay. And then we'd need to get a pipefitter to disconnect the pipes to the pump. And then the machine repairman would take the pump to his department and fix the pump.

DC: And then bring it back and then you'd need the pipefitter . . .

JD: Reverse process, yeah.

DC: . . . the electrician . . .

JD: Yeah, so—to be quite honest, you don't mess around with electricity, so you did need an electrician. But pipefitting and machine repair, there's such a close connection there, you know. I don't know if they should be in a separate trade or not.

DC: Now could you have just repaired it yourself?

JD: Oh no. No.

DC: So you needed the help?

JD: Oh yeah. There was a procedure you had to go through.

DC: Well, I knew you weren't *allowed* to, but did you have the expertise to do it?

JD: Oh yeah. Yeah.

DC: Yeah, so you could have done it yourself. I mean, I knew you weren't allowed to.

JD: Yeah. Absolutely, yeah. Which is what I'm going to lead up to too. Uh, so this new system that was coming into being—they needed people to join this program where there'd be no lines of demarcation, and they'd cross-train you. Because each of the tradesmen—I guess it's like getting your degree—to know what is [?], then they'll train you to what they want. So they only have the thought process going.

DC: That's the main thing

JD: Right. So, I applied for this job, where there were no lines of demarcation, and it was a prototype area, which was great.

DC: Did you want it?

JD: Yeah, it was what I wanted. So eventually I got in there, and the union had to help me get in. Because they chose certain classifications, and my classification wasn't in that category, so I did get all of the union [?]. It's 90% my work. I said, "Why is my job not listed?", and so I could apply. He said, "Next time it comes up, apply, and I'll see what we can do." So I got the job.

DC: You did?

JD: Yeah.

DC: And when was that?

JD: Oh, probably '87. 1987.

DC: OK, after you had twenty years in.

JD: Yeah. So his area—and we developed a reputation for getting things done in probably a third of the time.

DC: Because you eliminated the lines of demarcation?

JD: Yeah, yeah, and everybody was cross-trained, and we generally had somebody in each area who was an expert in that area. So if you had any problems, you know, you could go to this expert and he would straighten you out, you know. Like we had mechanics who came into the machine shop because the machine shop could help them with their problem if they had a problem. And generally you did. After a little bit of training, you'd be able to catch them. So this was—what did he call it—they called it the "Manhattan Project" to start with.

DC: Ooh.

JD: And he developed the Manhattan engine, which didn't take off. It was a flop. But that was with this process. But we had to go outside to try this program—this was a union-management agreement. And we got a really good reputation for getting things done, real fast. Yeah. And that was where I retired from. In fact—it's ironic that I was mentioning the way management treats salary—they were downsizing on salary, so as people retired they wouldn't replace them. So in our design office—we called it Brown

Road—management needed designers, and so they canvassed the hourly area for designers. So I had design experience in my apprenticeship years and years ago. So I was one of two people that got the job, you know, in the design office. And they taught us [Cat-cam?]

DC: I don't know what that is.

JD: Oh, it's computer-aided machining, computer-aided design, on the computer . . .

End of Interview. Mr. Douras had to leave for an appointment