James Franklin Interview
September 22, 2000
Mr. Franklin's Home
Ypsilanti, Michigan
Transcribed by Daniel Clark

DC: [explaining the volume meter on the tape recorder]

JF: Volume control, right?

DC: That's right. Yeah. I don't have any professional technician to make it work. Anyway, I start out with a lot of really basic questions, and we can work from there. And the most basic one is, where were you born?

JF: Oh, OK. Where was I born? Ypsilanti, Michigan.

DC: You were born in Ypsilanti, Michigan. You're a native. All right.

JF: Right. That was 19, what, '25.

DC: Is that right, 1925.

JF: Seventy-five years plus a couple of months.

DC: And how about your parents?

JF: My parents are all deceased now. My Mother passed in '97. She was ninety years old. My Dad passed in '66. He was sixty years old.

DC: And where were they from?

JF: They were from Canada.

DC: From Canada? Oh. Interesting. OK.

JF: My Mother was born in Dover, Ontario, and my Dad was born in Maidstone. Maidstone is right on Lake Erie, across from over Ohio area. That's the southern part of—northern part of Ontario. Come out pretty good.

DC: When did they come to Ypsilanti?

JF: They came to Ypsilanti in 1924.

DC: OK. Just before you were born.

JF: My older brother—he's deceased too, but he was born in 1924. Then I'm the second. My Mother and Father had seven children—five boys and two girls. And I have two brothers deceased, and one sister. So, pretty good life here in Ypsi.

DC: Do you know what brought them to Ypsi?

JF: Work. Work. Over—you take in Canada, you still have the problem today, underpopulated because of, the industrialized—the State of Michigan you have a lot of work, and we as black people, you have to go where work is at. You see, there's farming. Everybody did farming back in those days, but as families grew, and worked, become productive, people moved close to work.

DC: Sure.

JF: That's what they did.

DC: What job were they seeking here?

JF: My Dad worked at Ford Motor Company.

DC: He did. OK.

JF: Right.

DC: Was that here at the Ypsi plant?

JF: No, in the Rouge. In the Rouge. The Ypsi plant wasn't even here then. The Ypsi plant was built in '32, I think.

DC: Of course. I should have been thinking about that.

JF: Right. It wasn't here then. I think it was in '32 that Ford built that plant. And the city of Ypsilanti didn't want a plant in Ypsi. They wanted Ypsilanti to be a college town. We had what they call—we had two little colleges then, Cleary College and Normal College, which is Eastern Michigan now. So the big dignitaries of Ypsilanti wanted to leave it as is, you know. But they found out over here, it wasn't so, because everything was progress, see? Because any town that you live in, if it doesn't get bigger, it'll die. So that's what happened to the City of Ypsilanti. That's why you don't—Ford Motor Company had to go to Rawsonville, out in Ypsi Township. That's why the City of Ypsilanti's arranged today. You can't move. They've got nowhere to go, because of bottling themselves in. You see, they found out over the years, this don't work. It doesn't work at all, because people—progress brings [people??] things. You take when I was a kid here in Ypsilanti, the population was about 7,000 people, 6 to 7,000 people. But under the circumstance, the war came on in 1940, '41, they built the bomber plant. I went to work at the bomber plant when I was seventeen years old.

DC: That's one of my questions.

JF: I dropped out of school. You see the thing about that is money, because even a guy in my science class, the science teacher, he went to Ford's too. And him and I worked side by side riveting on the planes. See, he was making more money there than he was teaching. So this made things move. But like I said, everybody that migrated to Ypsilanti during that time moved out into the suburban area, which is now called Ypsi Township. That's why the Township's got 70,000 people; City of Ypsilanti's got 30[,000]. You see, because they bottled in. They didn't want to be part of—they didn't want to do this, and to take care of the people in these areas there. So the Township took over. Now everything belongs to the Township, which is good. Which is very good. The only thing I disagree with the City of Ypsilanti, they grumble about working and doing different things—they don't do anything because they've got no money. If you don't have any capital coming in, you got nothing to do nothing with. You see, if I could run my house off of zero money, I'll be OK, but it's impossible to do that. So that's what happened. I think their gross in Ypsilanti, say 14, $13-14 million. That you take this money and give it to the Township and tell the Township to take over. You see, notice our streets—raggedy. They haven't touched them streets in thirty years. Other than patch here, patch there. And it's a complete disgrace. If you watch the Ypsi-Ann Arbor Press, people even talk about it. Prospect Street. River Street. Those streets on either side of town, it's all the same thing. There's no discrimination in their work, what side of town that they work on. Ninety percent of your blacks live on the south side of town. I remember when I was a kid, no blacks lived in this neighborhood.

DC: Which part of town did you live in?

JF: I lived about five blocks from here, on what they call Monroe Street. I was born on Monroe Street. None of our children were born in a hospital. We were all born at home. The old address during that time was 314 Monroe. See, and we lived there until I was about ten years old, and my Dad built another house on Madison.

DC: How many African Americans lived here—you're African Canadian!

JF: Pardon me?

DC: How many blacks lived in Ypsilanti at that time?

JF: During that time, I can almost name you every family in the city of Ypsilanti, back in the early '30s, see. Plus the whites, up on Jefferson Street, Hawkins Street, part of Second Avenue, First and Second Avenue, were integrated white and black. But after the war, what happened after the war came, people moved, because of progress and overpopulated. I can understand anyone who would want a better life for their own self, or a better home for themselves. Say if I was making $30,000, right today, say a year from now I was making $100,000, but I'm living in a $20,000 home, and I'm making more money, I'll buy a bigger home, irregardless of where I go. And that's what people did. So they didn't move because of discrimination, I don't believe, because these were

old-time Ypsilanti people. And during that time, there were very, very few southerners—people that migrated from the South—in the city of Ypsilanti. Ninety-nine percent of your blacks at that time were all from Canada.

DC: OK. This is in the '20s.

JF: Right. Everybody knew everybody, it was down through the years. It was—one of the oldest families in the city of Ypsilanti is the [Kirby? Kersey?] family. Their big nest of people was on First Avenue. In fact, I think a whole city block was nothing but [K's] at one time. You see, so this is the way things were. Blacks didn't have any problem with labor, because they were all intelligent, in the skilled trades—electricians, bricklayers, carpenters, and things like that. They were all very intelligent people.

DC: What job did your Father have at the Rouge?

JF: He worked in the core room.

DC: OK.

JF: He worked in the core room, and what they called—he built the water jackets for the head of the engine. See, the cylinder block, you take and [drop?] coils in, that when they pour the iron, knock the coil out, and you got a complete water jacket head. During them old days, you had a head on your engine, different than you have today, see?

DC: I believe that.

JF: A lot of changes have been made over the years. But Ford Motor Company, as far as the black man was concerned, was one of the best companies, and still today *is* the best company for a black man to work for. He's the first one that had black supervisors, foremen, general foremen, superintendents. General Motors didn't get into that until the early '60s. So it made a difference of what people worked in the city of Flint. I would say 80 percent of Flint were black people, in General Motors, but they all worked in one great big building, which was the Buick plant. That was the foundry section, and what not. And it was the same way down at the Rouge, but discrimination was not there as much as it was at General Motors.

DC: So you say that most blacks were in the foundry at the Rouge?

JF: Right. In Ypsilanti. I've worked in the foundry down at the Rouge too. See, then I went there to the frame building. I was an arc welder, so I worked in the frame building for three or four years. Then I got laid off, so I came—I was living in Ypsi, so anyway, I went down to put in for my—what you call—SUB pay. They pay you when you're laid off. You build up the balance of 80 percent of whatever your take-home pay. So I got hired at the Ypsi Plant. This was February in '60.

DC: We're going to have to slow down and go through all of this step by step.

JF: Right. Right.

DC: I can tell that you've been through a lot of different positions.

JF: I started in what they call the "new building" down there. And they had a little starter line starting up over there. So I worked over there, then they moved—the contract got big for us, that particular starter. They moved it over into the Old Building. That's where I ended up at. We built starters for General Motors and every different corporation—they needed starters, you know. Then I ended up being a repairman. I had a good job the last ten years of my work at Ford's

DC: Let's go back and catch up a little bit more about what it was like growing up here in Ypsilanti, when you were a child.

JF: It was good. It was good. You had to walk to school. If you lived within the city limits of Ypsilanti, you walked to school. We walked from—I walked from Monroe Street to Ypsilanti High School, which is one mile. At lunch time, I walked back home, then walked back to school. Now everybody did this. The only ones that rode the bus—they had busses—but you had to live on the outskirts of the city limits of the city. So going to school, and the activities that we had, was just as great as you have today. Our involvement was safer. There was very little dope. There was very little rape. There was very little respect for the people [mis-spoke?]. This was—I think everywhere you had that. We never had a house key. Who needed it? If you wanted to sleep on your front porch in the summertime, sleep out there. Nobody's going to bother you. Very little people stole. The police station was at one time, in the City of Ypsilanti, was no bigger than a phone booth, right on the corner of Washington and Michigan Avenue. And they stayed there up until the City began to grow when the bomber plant came. And I think you didn't have more than four or five policemen. And one of the greatest cops that they had in Ypsi was a guy named Joe [Sackman?]. Everybody knew Joe. He rode the motorcycle, see. And he was one of the best cops that you can come in contact with. So that's the way Ypsi was. It was a friendly city. We had two theaters. Everybody that had a dime, or eleven cents, or twelve cents, went to the show on Saturday night. That was it. That was the relaxation that you had within the town. The children, as far as fighting and violence, what killed them, you had very little of that, between even black and white. I think the relationship was ideal, under the circumstances. Now the war brought on a change, because everybody brought their tradition with them. You see, if you lived in the south as a white man, your ideals of the black man, you are over and he is down. And this came about, and it brought a great problem to the City of Ypsilanti. At one time, in 1941, somewhere around through there, we had a little race riot, at the theater. At what's called the [??] theater. That's where 99 percent of the people went, because they had a balcony up, and of course a downstairs. Now they started migrating the black upstairs. We had no discrimination where you wanted to sit up until this time. And here it come. Upstairs, and people began to notice: how come all the blacks go upstairs? And that's what tradition did. Even our restaurants that we used to go in, went to not serving blacks. So then we went to having trouble. But it only lasted for about a

week, because the blacks did not partake of what they were doing, and they let the city know it, and things got back to normal again.

DC: Now was there an influx of southern blacks as well at this point in time?

JF: Any what?

DC: Were there southern blacks coming to Ypsi as well?

JF: Oh yeah! They brought their traditions with them too. Their tradition was completely opposed to what the blacks were living in the City of Ypsilanti, because we in Ypsi were not used to this discrimination, living all in a huddle by yourself, you know. Like you say, one happy family—that's a no-no, because people have the right to live where they want to live. Like I said, now the south side of Ypsi is the best side of town to live in because you have more land, open fields and everything. The north side was building up, and we had what they called [???] at that time—Motor Wheels now I think they call it. It was one of the big producing plants. And we had a black minister here, named [?? Roberson?]. He's got two sons that are still preachers in the City of Ypsilanti—Baptist preachers. And Motor Wheels [gives the former name], had him to bring blacks up here in the boxcars, because of work. War brought on work, see. And these people had to live somewhere. Though everywhere they lived, no matter what vacancies you had, here they dropped them. So it brought it on. And like I said, this town is a clean town. We never had too much trouble, other than this one incident I remember, and that was years ago, and it cleaned itself up right quick.

DC: You said that blacks here wouldn't stand for the segregation in the restaurants . . .

JF: No, no, no, no, no.

DC: Was that mostly blacks who had been living here in Ypsilanti.

JF: Blacks who were living here. These were the ones, like I say—the blacks like myself, the [names several families], and a few other families, the [name another family], all of these old-times from Ypsilanti, the young children coming up, we never run into segregation, or blacks eat here and whites don't eat here, you can't do this, you can't do that. If it was there, it wasn't noticeable as it was from the South. The first time I really run into it, when I was in the Army. Down in Louisiana, a place called Alexander, Louisiana. Now they had a—in the PX, you'd go in the PX, they had a white line drawed right down the middle. White on one side, black on the other side. And I said, "Well this is it. I'm not coming back here no more." So my first wife—I'm on my second wife now—my first wife died—she was from a place called Springfield, Tennessee. And I didn't take her back home until 1977, because I wasn't going down there. But now after your Civil Rights Movement came, and things got better, and they realized that everybody should work and live on the same basis, they have no discrimination in your churches. There was no discrimination in your schools. Everybody rode the same bus.

DC: You're talking about here in Ypsilanti?

JF: Right, in Ypsilanti. We never run into that. One time—we have black small business now on the south side of town. It was all downtown Ypsilanti. They had a pool room. They had a little restaurant. Odds and ends. A barber shop. But like I say, this being the greater side of town, the more land, well people moved and things to produce a little bit more on this side of town. Ypsilanti's a good place to live. I would say right today, to raise your children, you've got less violence here. Same as in Belleville, Ann Arbor. Ann Arbor's completely different, because we didn't get along with the Ann Arbor people because they lived in a big college town and they thought 'ooh ooh,' you know. See, so we were the foundry workers, and they were the people that took care of the oopdy doopdy people, you know. But we got along, over the years, but we had a little trouble with them. There wasn't no big problem with that, wee, other than, say, how you feel about each other, you know. Like if you come from a family that's got a decent job—my family don't have this or don't have that—by us being from—my parents being from Canada, there was no such thing as welfare for us. We never were on welfare. They had no welfare. But we were unable to get it, because my parents were not citizens. And they never became citizens here. They didn't want to become citizens here. All they wanted to do was to make a living here. Which they did. My Mother never worked a day in her life.

DC: I was going to ask you about that.

JF: She never worked. No. She raised her seven children. My Dad was opposed to her working, so she didn't work. So we had no problem coming home and finding her. It was not children coming home to an empty house. She was always there for us, and she was a very good woman, see. But like I said, as far as during the '30s, that was a rough time.

DC: I was going to ask you about that.

JF: That was a very, very rough time, because there was many a night that we didn't have food or different things. In 1933, or somewhere thereabouts, where they come up with this WPA situation, and Roosevelt got into the office, and things went to turning. But I know of many a family that would work three days a week. Like my Dad would work Monday and Tuesday, and another family would work Wednesday and Thursday. They split it up, so many days a week. And they had a thing called scrip. That was money that you got. You didn't get no cash money for your work. Like even people today, these ADC people, they get money. See, other than food stamps. But after they got it, they'd take the scrip, go to the grocery stores, get what they want, and we lived. We survived, see. But we didn't survive comfortably. You know, like a lot of people we had decent clothes. Maybe they were raggedy, but they were clean. So we didn't have any problem with that. And we were all proud children, see, so we came up doing good, my five brothers and myself. We all worked. We all owned our own homes. We raised our family. And we did very good.

DC: Did you have any jobs as a child?

JF: Oh yeah. When I was going to high school, and I got about, let's see, fifteen, sixteen years old there—sixteen—during that time you had to get a work permit, sixteen years old. And there's a restaurant down there called Avon Restaurant. I worked in there, $2 a day, after school. I had to walk by it anyway to get home. So that's right on Michigan Avenue. After school I'd stop there and I'd work from, say, four o'clock up to eleven o'clock. Closed the place down. $2 a day. Then when I got a few dollars on me, there was a service station here in Ypsi, a used car lot, service station. I bought a '31 Model A. $10 down, and $3 a week. And go to school. That was living!

DC: I guess so.

JF: That was really—that was good living then, see! So then things progressed, and moved along. My older brother, we had a trucking company. My Dad took an old car, an old Ford, cut it down and made a pickup truck. And as things progressed with it, and there were two other boys—the boys was oldest, so as the boys grew older, he got another truck, and we had what we called The Franklin Hauling Company.

DC: OK.

JF: We hauled trash. But what happened to every situation—then the war got bigger. My oldest brother went to service, I went to service, my brother next to me went to the Army too. And the fourth brother, he went to the Navy.

DC: Let's slow down for a second. Was your father still working at the Rouge while you were in the hauling business too?

JF: Right. Oh yeah.

DC: So he was working at the Rouge and then doing hauling on the side.

JF: Right.

DC: You guys were busy.

JF: Yeah, oh yeah. He was a very progressive man. Now as far as work was concerned, he would work seven days a week, even if he wasn't doing it for his own self—around the house, he always found something to do. He was the type of man who didn't sit. He didn't worry about putting on a suit and looking clean, and nothing like that. He would much rather—he was more contented working, and he was that type of guy. So he taught us all that, you know. We always do things like that.

DC: Did he change jobs at the Rouge over time.

JF: No. Well, one time he quit the Rouge, when Kaiser came here in 1946. Took over the bomber plant, and Kaiser came here. And I went to work in Kaiser's when I came out of the Army. And my Dad went there. He quit Ford and he went there in '47 or '48, somewhere around there. And my oldest brother went there. There was three of us working at Kaiser's during that time—four of us at Kaiser's at that time. And what happened, Kaiser closed down, you see, and I had a good job at Kaiser's.

DC: When did Kaiser's close down?

JF: Kaiser—the bottom started falling out of it, I think, in '51, somewhere around there. And they completed itself by '53, because they left the automotive section—it was half and half—and went to building the C-119 plane. So what happened with the situation there, General Motors had a transmission plant in Livonia. Kaiser wasn't doing too much of nothing anyway. We wasn't producing the plane because people didn't want Kaiser to have the contract in the beginning. So what happened, over in Livonia they had a big fire—or at least General Motors burned the building down. 'Now, where are we going to put the transmission plant?' So they bought Kaiser, because he was going under anyway. So they got a deal, see. And over where the automotive section was, where the planes—where the planes were at—they cut the plane contract out. General Motors was on this side, where the planes were at. Kaiser was still phasing himself out in his automotive there, and eventually in 1953 or '54, General Motors completely had the whole situation. So that's why they're a big monster today. As much as they're good aspects to the Township too—because it was a good paying thing, see. They built the Chevrolet plant there, see. They built another plant, the big Chevrolet plant. But they buckled under about four or five years ago, ten years ago, there. And they went to Texas there. That was a big one. And they closed up too. Because my daughter and my son-in-law worked for Chevrolet. My daughter took the buy-out, and my son continued to work. They sent him to—what's that place in Texas? . . .

DC: Arlington, was it?

JF: Arlington, right. Arlington, Texas. They bought a home down there. They was doing halfway decent, then they closed it down. Then they sent him to Flint. Then he worked in Flint for a little while. Now he's working out here in Romulus. Now they live in an apartment, because they say they're not going to buy a home.

DC: They don't know where they're going to stay.

JF: See, there's no future. He's got his thirty years in, but he's only forty-nine years old. See, so he's active, young, and skilled, doing whatever, so he's going to keep right on working. But they're not going to buy a home. See, because they don't know what General Motors is going to do. Now they've done pretty well, settle down and moving their people now, but during that time—I don't know, thousands of people—that had no security as far as homes or jobs, or where they had the seniority. They could go, but all over the world, but how are you going to raise your children, see? You can't say, "Well

honey, let's go buy a house over here," and six months later you've got to move. See, so that's what happened with them, see.

DC: That must be hard for you as well as your children.

JF: Right. Right.

DC: They move so far away.

JF: That was my oldest daughter. Things are going very good. She's the mother of four children, two boys and two girls. And my second girl—I've got three daughters—my second girl lives in California. She's got one daughter. And my third girl—that's the only one that I had went to college—she's a chemist over in Maryland now. She's got a very good job. She's got one son. So they're all doing very good. This wife I've got now, she's got seven. They're all very good now. They're doing very good, and they're very respectable children. She's got five boys and two girls, the same as my Mother had, but the girls are older, and the boys are younger. She has one daughter who's a supervisor down at the assembly plant in Dearborn; one that works for General Motors, been there a long time. She's in the engineering section there. And she's got a son-in-law who's a General Foreman at General Motors there. She has one with a business in Belleville there, called Derek Thomas [??]. Doing very good. Then her other son is a plumber. And another one works for General Motors, and one is the management of a drug store. They're all doing good; doing very good. Yeah. And the baby boy, he works at the Livonia Transmission plant—that's a Ford plant now. That's where Ford transmissions—so they're all doing very good.

DC: Doing great.

JF: They get along really good, and money-wise, there's no problem with them. We don't have any problem, coming and hollering, "Hi Dad. I need this!" or anything like that. They never got in trouble, and never had to go to the jailhouse and get them out. But I think, years ago, we didn't have the dope, the prostitution, and bad management that you have today. And I think this comes about by the prosperity of man and wife both working. See, they don't have enough time with their children. They don't even take them to church no more. See, the children stay home. Some parents don't go themselves. So if you don't have the right background for raising your children like that, and spending good time with them—it takes a lot of time with children. If you're a father, you would now. You have to spend time with your children. And then you have to show these children respect. But then you lay the law of the house down. Not that's like I tell my wife, I'm the head of the house, see. But that don't mean I abuse her. And rules and regulations are set up in the house—when you go, when you—when I was a kid, being home in the house at 7:00, it meant 7:00. It didn't mean no 7:30. And that was it. And you'd be there. We didn't have no television. We had a telephone, which was good. And I think I was about twelve years old before we got a phone. No big problem, but like I say, today children are raising themselves. And parents don't have the time. They just don't have the time. You can ask any of them right now, at 8:30 or 9:00

in the evening, "Where's your boy at?" "Oh, he went out with John." "But where'd he go? What time is he due in?" "He'll be in, sometime." You see, this is a no-no. Like I said, if you're the head of the house, you'd say, "OK, John." I never will forget my Dad told me—I had a date one time. He said, "Well Jim, I'll tell you what you do." He says, "You leave as a man, and you come back as a man." And he meant it. In other words, don't fool with this girl. And that was it. And he really meant it. So I had no problem with it, see. But like I said, he laid the law down. And Juanita tells me her husband—his name was Robert—he did the same thing. He laid the law down with his children, and I'd do the same thing raising my children. What I inherited from the knowledge from him, I applied it to my children. And I never had a bit of problem. He didn't have to worry about going to jail, getting them out of jail, or a girl getting pregnant, and no one knows what happened, or who the dad is.

DC: It sounds like the church has been a big part of your life.

JF: Church—automatically, my grandfather was a preacher over in Canada—my Mother's Dad. And her grandfather—he's the one who started what they call the Browning Family. He was a slave. He was born in 1829. He left the South in the Underground Railroad in 1859, and went to Canada in 1859. His name was Peter Grant Browning [sp?]. Then from there he met and married a French Canadian called Nancy LeBeau. And from there, they raised eight children. So, it's always been discipline there, but as far as how you treat each other, is what you—and you can't survive without God. You can live, but you won't survive. You'll go under, because you lose respect for everything. Without respect there's nothing. So I see—like, I know a lot of people have people that get their, what you call them, "mother's check," ADC, go around with four or five children, four or five different dads. That's a no-no. I know when I was a kid, if you got somebody's daughter pregnant, you had a wife. That was it. There isn't no, say, I'll give you five bucks a week, or I might do this, or I don't want to marry you, you know. That's a no-no. If you got pregnant, you just had yourself a wife. That all changed over the years. Now it don't make no difference what you do. There's no respect for each other. So when you get people without respect for each other, the bottom falls out. Even the society itself will separate itself from you. So without church—and I've been in church all my life.

DC: What church did your family belong to?

JF: My other and them were Baptists. I got into the Church of Christ in 1960, see, and I found out—now you spoke with Bob Bowen—it is a [??]. When I married this lady here, she was a widow and I was a widower, so I told her, "OK, I'll live in your house one year"—sold my house out in Superior Township. Sold it, and I stayed here with my Mother for about six months, and I met Mary here, about a year and a half after my wife died. So we moved South, moved to Alabama. Oh, and I liked it too. But the purpose of that—people say, "Well, why'd you do that?" Simple. If you want to establish the thing that you need within your home life—see my goal was to establish a new life. If I could have lived in her home, which I could have—she could have lived in my home—but each one of us has got children. And there's going to be a conflict between my Mama this, my

Dad's that. Now we have the same thing going on now with one of her children. One of her sons has got a divorce. He won the case because of a bad mother, and whatever. Now his children—he remarried again—they live in the same house that he had his wife in. Now there's a conflict. See, the one's about fourteen, and one's about sixteen—two of his kids. And they're rebelling against the Mother. Naturally, because that is their Mother's home, you see. I could not go into her house and tell her kids, "Don't do this!" or "Don't do that!" in their Dad's house. And according to the Bible, man is head of the house. But he is the head of *his* house. I'm not the head of your house. What you do in your house is your business. So that was not my house. I was just staying there, see. So I get one of my own. And that's what I did. I explained all that to her.

DC: And you went to Alabama to do this?

JF: Right. And this is *our* home now. Not just my home. But it's ours. And it worked out good. It worked out real good, until she got sick in '80?—'94. Somewhere thereabouts. She had triple bypass. So I promised her if things got crazy, why we'd move back to Michigan. So what happened, my Mother came up with Alzheimer's Disease, and was sick for five years with it. And they had this home here. Incidentally, she lived out in the country—her and my Dad lived out in the country. Then when my Dad died, we brought her back to Ypsi, because she didn't drive and wanted something convenient. That is why this house is here, because she owned it here, because she could walk to the drug store, she could walk to the bank, post office, things convenient for her. Because in your family life, you take, like, all of my brothers would go out, "We're going to Ma's." "We're going to Ma's." And you got a wife. What about your wife? You spend more time with your Ma than you do your wife. But now you're obligated to take care of your Mother because she's a widow, and she can't drive. She's ten miles from the closest store. So she's got to have groceries and things like that. So me and my brother just sat down with her and talked. Sold the farm. They had a beautiful ten-acre farm out there. Sold it and bought this place for her. So she did very good. My Dad left her in pretty good shape. She didn't have to worry about a thing. So she lived a good, clean life, up until, whatever, death—Alzheimer's, that's a bad one. Don't want no part of him! That's a very bad way, because your children, you look at them, you don't even recognize them, you see. And that's a hurting thing for anybody. But when we moved South, we liked it down there. We got into the church, and I became an elder in one of the Churches of Christ down there. And did a lot of good work, very good work. And I enjoyed it very much. We came back to Michigan four or five times a year. People used to say, "I thought you guys moved," you know. But everything that we had, after our children, were right here. So we were right at home coming here. It's only a thousand miles one way. Buy a car, get in it, and drive. We didn't have no problem with it. We didn't have no problem financially, or anything, because Ford has a good pension plan. We got a good Social Security plan. And I did volunteer work for a place called Indian Spring down there. So one of the teachers asked, said, "Why don't you just go ahead and substitute? And get paid for it." So I said, "OK. Good." So that's what I did. I substituted. So when we moved back here—we bought this place and moved back here. And everything was running good. We spent a lot of money, put a new roof on it. Guess I must have put $20,000 on it since I've been here. Overhauled the kitchen. All new

plumbing system into the house. And things like that. Now I got me a part-time job out to Meijer's.

DC: Oh, OK. You like to be busy too.

JF: See when you're sitting around retired, you just can't I'm going to sit. It don't work. You can sit and do this. You can travel here, because we did a lot of travel in the South. I had an '85 Town Car. I bought it on my 60th birthday. And I put 205,000 miles on that thing in no time. Because we went everywhere. Down through Florida, Mississippi, Alabama, Louisiana, over into Texas. You name it, we went there, see. I've been deep-sea fishing, and I enjoyed fishing, but I'm not a fisherman, but I enjoyed just going fishing, you know. It's relaxing. That's the best relaxation that anybody can get, is looking at the water. Right down in the Mobile Bay—perfect. And we lived in an all black-and-white neighborhood. It wasn't one-sided. It was a very nice neighborhood, because the Civil Rights Movement had changed a lot of things within the South's system there. And it was nice. We had a beautiful home, and taking good care of it, had no problem selling it.

DC: Well, let's jump back again and look at some of the experiences you had at the time of the war, because it sounds like you went to work in the bomber plant?

JF: Bomber plant, right.

DC: And you also went into the service at some point, but . . .

JF: I went to service in '43.

DC: OK, so you started out in the bomber plant, worked there for a year or two, and then . . .

JF: Yeah. I went to—see transportation at that time was goofy. Wasn't none. Like cars—they didn't make cars no more. And then people had to have gas stamps to drive back and forth to work. And they had a bus system—looked like an old cattle car, but made out of a bus. Rode it to work. I would walk from where I lived, right in Ypsi—I lived on Hamilton Street—and walk to the bus system, go to work, come back, was . . .

DC: A big old vehicle?

JF: Yeah, a big old cattle-looking thing.

DC: How many people would be in there with you.

JF: Oh, there must have been at least fifty or so people. Because there wasn't no transportation getting back and forth. Now they got a pass—they even wrote about that pass a couple years ago in the press—from a place called [??]. Not [??]—Willow Run area out there. They had it from the Swansea area, I think it was, off of Holmes Road, I think it was. No, Clark Road. Walked all the way to the plant. They walked to work.

DC: So what was your job when you started?

JF: Oh, I was a riveter.

DC: A riveter.

JF: Yeah, a riveter, and I did pretty good there. I've always been fortunate in getting decent jobs. Even if it was a hard—starting out a hard job or a bad job or a dirty job—but if there was one there better, I could get it.

DC: How did you learn how to be a riveter?

JF: Um, they taught you that. They had a class for you, before you—I think, maybe, a month, you'd go to a class on how to drill, to carry your tools, how to buck a rivet, how to drive a rivet, how much pressure to put on it—everything that it needed, you know. So it was a schooling class, you know. So then the same thing when I went to work, but they closed up. Instead of going back to Ford's, I went to Kaiser's. Working at Kaiser's was very good.

DC: Let's stick with the bomber plant for a minute here. Um, who all was in your department? Who all were the riveters that you worked with?

JF: Uh, oh, there's one that is still working today down at Ford's. A girl named Earthaline. She's got about fifty-some-odd years right now working at Ford's.

DC: Is that right?

JF: Oh yeah. And she's still working. I don't know what her last name—Green! Her last name is Earthaline Green. Yeah, her name used to be Foley [?]. That was her family name. Yeah, Earthaline—there were three of them. Three girls, and one, no boys.

DC: I wonder if she'd be willing to talk to me sometime.

JF: Four girls, huh?

DC: I wonder if she'd be willing to talk to me sometime.

JF: Probably so. You see, Bob, he knows her very well.

DC: OK.

JF: Oh yeah. She can take you way, way back. She's older than I am. She went to school at Cleary College there. Then she went into the bomber plant.

DC: Were you going to high school while you were in the bomber plant?

JF: No I quit. I quit school. I never graduated from high school. I didn't go back. You ever?—it's a bad thing, you say, "Well I'll go back," you know. I'll work here and do what I have to do, and then I'll go back. And here come the war. The war was on, and money was good, and you're qualifications were just as equal to anybody else, as far as making the money, because there was plenty of what you call "common labor" work. You didn't have to be into the skilled trades to make a decent living.

DC: Did blacks and whites work together at the bomber plant?

JF: Right together.

DC: How about men and women?

JF: Same thing. No difference. Everybody—the only thing was separated was the bathroom. Everybody was right in there building what we had to do. And they did a good job too, very good job.

DC: How did you end up in the service then?

JF: I got drafted. I got drafted in '43 and I went in in '43, and I came out in '45. I went in September the 6th, I think it was, or 7th. 7th! I came out in December of '45. A little bit better than two years.

DC: So you told me that you ended up in Louisiana at least part of the time.

JF: Oh, Louisiana. Yeah, that's where I got discharged.

DC: Where all did you go while you were in the service?

JF: I went to Europe.

DC: You did, OK.

JF: Went to Europe, and I spent a little better than eighteen months over there. Went to England, France, Holland, Luxembourg, Germany, all up through there. And I was in what you call [??] engineers. We built railroad bridges and different things that were bombed out, tore up. We was hooked up with Patton's army. A lot of times people would call it, well it was General Services, or whatever, it was an all-black outfit. But our work was very valuable, because we built a floating Bailey bridge across the Rhine River. And Patton and them drove their tanks across it. Now it took knowledgeable people to do that. I got eighteen bar marks. I also . . .

DC: What would it take to get a bar mark?

JF: Bar marks is—one bar is, what you call, three months of service—overseas service, see. Different from in the states. Separate the overseas guy from the guy in the states. So you get these little bars that you put on there, say, "Well I've been over there." I've got three battle stars, and that don't mean I was in battle, but I was in the battle zone, you see. Because I've set down even in the battle of Bastogne. You've probably heard of that. We were right in the middle of it. That was the reason why were in the middle, because we were doing work on different sections in there. We didn't shoot up nobody, but we had our things—if it were necessary to come to do, we could do it. But we did our work. Did our work real good. And we got great honor out of what we did.

DC: How did you end up in that unit?

JF: Uh, they automatically put you—draft you, whatever—in—I think they take it from your standard—your app, what you put in, like when you to, when you volunteer, and they question you this, that, and the other, you know. The only difference—option—that they give you, "Do you want to go in the Army or the Navy?" I had a choice. That was the only choice you had. So I took the Army. Other guys would take the Navy. So that was your choice. I took the Army because I always thought it was too much water to drink [laughs]. So that was the philosophy behind that. But I did have one of my younger brothers—he did go to the Navy. And he enjoyed it there. But I run into my oldest brother overseas.

DC: You did?

JF: I met him in England there. I stayed in England eleven months. Then D-Day came. We built it up over there. We built what they call a "tent city." We were putting up tents, me and the engineers, what they call General Service. As far as the eyeball could see—tents. Then here come D-Day. But what it was, the buildup getting ready for D-Day. D-Day 4, after that, we went.

DC: Ok, you went.

JF: Went over into France. Right behind them. Wasn't no, say, twenty years later, you do this, or cleaning up. Our job was to take care of anything—then we had what you call a Red Ball Express. I drove a truck over in Belgium there. We were in Belgium. And go back to France, pick up supplies, and bring them back up, bringing all the materials, supplies, and food up. And on the Red Ball express, you worked from 12:00 to 12:00. My job was 6:00 in the evening to 6:00 in the morning. You pull that truck in, the guy's standing there waiting on you. He'd gas it up, you'd check it over, and you'd give it to him. That evening when he comes in, I'm sitting there waiting, pick my truck, and away we go again. You had two drivers. And that worked good. But like I said, we did very good work, see. A lot of times people say, "Well, common labor . . . " I say, "Common labor? That's a no-no." How could you survive in a restaurant if you didn't have a dishwasher? Look at the germs you would end up with. See? So everything works together. Rather, it's a lower echelon, or a higher echelon. The only thing is how

management is able to move you. It's the way, in the service, how your commanding officers are able to do things.

DC: What were your relations like with your commanding officers?

JF: Very good. Very good. He was a Jewish guy too. Yeah, he was Jewish, and he was very good. We didn't have any problems with him whatsoever. He wasn't a discriminating type of guy. Then you take in—just before D-Day, about a month—D-Day came in June—then what we did, the outfits started interracial, moving. We had guys in our outfit went into the infantry and other different outfits. We had whites come into ours. It wasn't black no more. It became a salt and pepper situation. So that was a good thing. Our relationship was very good with him. We didn't have any problems. You take people, whether black, white, or northern, or southerners, under certain situations, if things have to be done, they've got common sense to use it and do what has to be done. You will have some, a diehard like George Wallace. You're going to find some like him. Plus you're going to find some blacks that's the same way—this Malcolm X . . .

End of Side A

Begin Side B

JF: . . . if you're talking about Black Power, I wouldn't want to never live in any place where it's all black. Never. See, because it doesn't make good sense. Although you can be all United States citizens, but if you're going to pull yourself apart from people, it's no good. You see, sometimes in the church you have the same problems in the church. But they teach in the Church of Christ there's no such thing as a black church. No such thing as a white church, see. There's only one church under Christ, see, and we're all going the same way. Paul tells us in First Corinthians there that you all speak the same thing. But we don't have any problem with that. In our church system, you see. In some churches they do.

DC: Was that similar to the church you grew up in, or is that different?

JF: Well you take and 99% of your Baptists—they have black Baptists—they've got their own group of, what you call, general assembly, with their own president, or head of the Catholic Church—or *Baptist* church, rather. You've got the whole thing where they're the head of the Southern Baptist Church, which is white. And I don't know what they call this Baptist Church—they got a big name for this Baptist—it's the same system. You've got the Southern Baptists, and maybe the Northern Baptists, whatever, but they've got their own president, and their own situation, and all the Baptist churches answer to these people, you know, their counsel. But we don't have that in Church of Christ, see. Every Church of Christ stands on its own foundation, see. We've got elders, we've got a minister, we've got deacons, all run the church. The minister doesn't run our church, see. The church is run by the elders. The elders are the oversight of the church.

Elders are bishops, they're the same word—interchangeable. You can be an elder, you can be a bishop, but you're the same person. Denomination churches puts a bishop over an elder. But this all started from the Catholic Church, but we'd have to . . . [laughs] That's where all that started from, the Catholic Church, but the Catholic Church didn't come into existence until—started in 300-something up until 605 before they got themselves a Pope.

DC: You've done a lot of studying.

JF: Right. Oh yeah. Well you have to. You have to study in the Churches of Christ or you're not learning anything. The Bible says you're to grow. If you got a baby—are you a father?

DC: Yes I am.

JF: When you had a baby, what'd you feed him? Pork chops? Cornbread? [laughs] That makes a difference, see? So you have to give—you learn and you give him milk. We call it milk. So you learn from the word of God, and as you grow you get more and more. See like when I growed up, when your children grows up, now they eat a regular meal, see. And that's the same way you do with the church, because you don't say, what the preacher's telling us, this is it. It don't have to be it. So you study [??]. So we all study. Every member of the Church of Christ studies. It don't mean that we're any better than anybody else, but if you're going to go to church, you might as well go to the one that the book is talking about, see? Don't be going, wasting your money going somewhere else. You're going to go—you're going to be lost out anyway. So God had a plan for man. Look at your trees and everything you've got. Look at the City of Ypsilanti. Ypsilanti was a beautiful city once. Still is a beautiful city. But what happened, population growth destroyed it. Really destroyed this place. It's a bad thing when you say that, but Ann Arbor had better sense than Ypsi did. They moved. Ann Arbor bought a line—now it comes almost to Ypsilanti, see. But Ypsi didn't have that sense. So that's a bad situation.

DC: Well let's go back to when you got out of the service.

JF: OK.

DC: Tell me, do you remember anything else about Louisiana before you got discharged?

JF: Never been in the South before. Never been South before. The only thing I knew about the South is what I heard from people in the service—when people knew people that came up here during the war, before the war. Because a lot of blacks were moving up here in the early '30s up to the '40s. And numerous of them come here during the '40s because of the work force. Because I remember, there was a place on—oh—back on Worden Street. That's where the American Legion Post used to be, back there. And they built this place for people working, and one bed, three people. You alternate the one bad due to the fact that there wasn't no place for nobody to go. And that's the way these

people had to do, and that's the way they lived. This was before I went to the Army, see. But when I came back from service, I married, we started raising children, went to work, and really didn't have no problem.

DC: So you got married shortly after you got out of the service then?

JF: Right. Yeah, I got married in—while I was still in service when I married her—it was—when was that? No no. That was in September! Yes! September in '45. September in '45. What it was, how I happened to get home at that time, the war had ended up over in Germany, so we left Germany and we came back to France, a place called Marseilles, France. That's a beautiful place. That was nice. That's the port of embarkation to where they were shipping soldiers out, going to the Pacific, see, because the war was still going on there. So I had a good friend called Bill [?]—he's deceased now—so we were talking, because he was an Ypsilanti boy. And I met him there—we were talking. So he left about a day before I did. Before I shipped they shipped him out. So the next day we were shipped out. And we came around the Cape of Good Hope down through Africa down there—the Rock of Gibraltar—then they dropped the atomic bomb.

DC: Ah.

JF: Ah hah. Now we was out on the water. So what happened, every thing that was X number of miles away had to go. For us, we came to New York.

DC: Ah, so you were just . . .

JF: That's how we got back here. But they were discharging them with eighty points. They had a point system. So many months here, so many months there. Think you got two points for every month overseas. One point for every month in the service. Something like that. So I had seventy-nine points, see. So I've got thirty days to go, before I can get discharged. So they sent—I came home for the thirty days, and I went back to Camp Grant, Illinois. And they shipped me to Louisiana for thirty days.

DC: For thirty days.

JF: So I had to do thirty days in Louisiana. I didn't have to do nothing—go, come when I want. The only thing I had to do was spend the time. So that was very good. But that's how I got hooked up with all of the discrimination, with seeing how the world itself was. Because we were never discriminated against overseas—with the Germans—even with the Germans. You take the Belgian people, or even the English people there. Glasgow, Ireland, I was up around—I've been to all them different places. But there wasn't no great discrimination, other than the white soldiers would tell the people that the black soldiers had tails—monkeys with tails. I don't know if you ever heard that one or not. But that's a fact. We had tails. But they found out what kind of tails we had, and we socialized with the people, we came out good, you know. So never got into a big [?] over there too much with them, with the whites. But like I said, after Roosevelt made these

rules, and Truman followed through with it, things got better. But then after I married, I went back to Ford's.

DC: OK. All right.

JF: I went back to Ford's in July? January.

DC: Which plant was this now?

JF: January '46. In January '46 I went back to Ford's, and I worked there up until September of '46, and I believe it was six of us in the car, riding, going to work, and what they did is they said, "Kaiser's over there is hiring." So all six of us stopped on the way to work and got a job.

DC: Over at Kaiser.

JF: Got a job at Kaiser.

DC: First, tell me what your job was at Ford. Was that the Rouge?

JF: The Rouge. That was down at the Rouge. Very good. I worked in the foundry there.

DC: At the foundry.

JF: I had a good job there too.

DC: Tell me about that job. What was it like?

JF: Oh, the job, what you call, I was like a utility man, a relief guy, you know, relieving the guys and took care of the stock. And during that time the union was not as strong as it is today. You still did numerous different things. Even the foreman worked then, see. So we were doing numerous different things. And I was young, progressive, and I had the ability to move, to learn, catch on quick to different things. So I got a job, what you call, on the [?] ladle, to where you would take your cup, catch some of the iron when you was pouring it, pour it into your mold. Then when it settled, crack it, and see how much difference between the temper of the steel, from the top to the bottom.

DC: OK.

JF: That was a god job. That's all I had to do. But then, like I say, these guys—they'd been there a lot of years at Ford's too. As a matter of fact, one of my brother-in-laws now, he's eighty-seven years old. And we all stopped and got a job. Kaiser hired the whole car. So we went on down to the Rouge that day; instead of reporting for work, we went there and checked out.

DC: Was the foundry all black when you went back in '46?

JF: No no. No no. Ford never did believe in all-black, but 98, I would say 80 percent of Ford's—Ford's—the white man as far as working for Ford's during those days, the white southerners it was, actually. Ford wasn't too particular about him, because he called him lazy. Due to the fact, see, years back, work was seasonal for these people, even when my Dad was working there. You would work all summer and off all winter. See, when he made up so many cars, and that, though they didn't work like they do now, year round, see. So these people would go farm, do their farming. Ninety percent of the people were farmers. But we had what you call the Italian people, the Polish people, and Romanian people—Ford hired all of them, and the blacks, right together. He could—they were—I don't know. They were better workers, for some odd reason. Ninety-nine percent of what you had in the foundry was Polish people, Italians, or whatever like that. And no big problem with them. Good people to work with.

DC: One thing I forgot to ask you about—your Dad would have been at Ford while it was being organized, right? Was your Dad working at the Rouge when it was going through the organizing campaign?

JF: The union? Oh yeah! My Dad started at Ford's in 1923 I think. No, '25, when I was born.

DC: So what did your Dad think about the unionizing campaign?

JF: Ideal. Ideal for him. Yeah. Because they realized that you get more voice, see. And actually, one of his—one of the union men there, the stewards, they call them, was his brother in law. You see. Oh yeah, they was 100 percent for the union. You see, General Motors had the big union up in Flint first. I think they started in '37, somewhere around there. Then came Ford's in the early—'39 or '40s, back in there. Oh yeah, they wanted the union. But again, it didn't make a big of a difference other than you had somebody to represent you in troubles, whatever, like that. But now as time went, with Reuther and his system, which was very good, got to where you could move up the ladder. If a job's available, whether you're black, white, it didn't make any difference. Or in the workforce, you take children, young men coming in, General Motors had the greatest discrimination, as far as black and white. I know that for a fact because I was laid off at Rouge there, and I had a brother who lived up in Flint. So I went up there and got me a job. I got a job at Chevrolet. That was in '53. So I stayed up there, and I came back home on the weekend. And I stayed up with him the whole week. Then I had problems on the job, due to the fact of the relief. Now to get the job . . .

DC: Which job are you talking about right now?

JF: The one in Flint.

DC: In Flint, OK.

JF: Oh yeah. When I was laid off from Ford's. I went back to Ford's after Kaiser went down. I didn't have no problem getting back. Then I got laid off, and I went up to General Motors in '53, and I worked at General Motors, and I was having problems because of the work situation. So I called—told the foreman I need a steward. Never did see him.

DC: What was the problem?

JF: Uh, the problem was overwork. You see, a black man at General Motors got the dirt. That was a fact. Now that was completely fact. So I told him I was going to quit. Now on this job, in order for me to get the job from the beginning, I had to take a test. Whites came up from the South, walk right in. Older than I am. Now the blacks, it was thirty-five—if you were thirty-five or older, you didn't get a job. And I was right at the border line during that time. So I got the job anyway, working afternoons. And there were times when they would have so many men, for relief, that you couldn't get to all of them, see. So I went a lot of times without any relief. And I walked off the job and went to the rest room. And what happened, I got chewed out. So I told the foreman, hey I need a steward, call a steward here, because I'm entitled to my relief time. So I see him call a committee man or the steward—he would come up, sometime through the day, and relieve me. Four or five minutes, you go and come back. I said this is a no-no. So I told him I was going to quit if things didn't get better. It didn't get better, so I quit. First job I ever quit in my life.

DC: How long had you been there when you quit?

JF: I worked there—when did I start there? '53. I worked there about a year.

DC: OK, about a year.

JF: About a year, and I left there and went back to Ford's. And I got my job back at Ford's. In '55, I went back to Ford's.

DC: '55. Let's sneak back for a second, and let's talk about your work at Kaiser—last we heard you . . .

JF: Oh, Kaiser's was a—that was a jewel. Yeah. I started out as a material handler.

DC: OK. And what did a material handler do?

JF: Material handler is unloading them big eighteen-wheelers when they back in there, on the dock. In fact I have a very good friend I met there—that was in '46—he was over yesterday. He'll be eighty-eight next month. We turned out to be real good friends. So what it was, he was a material handler, and I was a material handler. So after a year or so, material handling, I applied for a job called stock chaser.

DC: OK.

JF: See, became a stock chaser.

DC: What did a stock chaser do?

JF: That's where you run stock all over where it's needed at, you know. So like on the line, X number of jobs, or whatever. You take a certain amount of material. Then I became a production checker. That's a couple nickels more. That means I was checking everything that comes off the truck, and make sure it was right, and the invoice. I was working with the invoice.

DC: Now how did you get these different jobs? How did you move from material handler to stock chaser?

JF: They'd apply them on the board. Put them out on the board, and just go bid on it. Put your name in for it, whatever like that. And from there I went to what you call an inventory checker. That's a better job. Now that was a job where you can go to work clean. Now, you can wear a tie if you want to. You see, so it was a good-paying job, and that way you controlled—my job was controlling all the stock on the assembly line, from where the body was dropped to where the finish line—where it come out a finished product. All that material was my responsibility to keep it in flow or banked. In other words, say if the batteries run low—they had to keep a certain amount of supply, for three days' supply. Then I would talk to the guy in what they call the byproducts, upstairs there, see. The fellow—the guy that buys the material, the buyer: "Hey. We're in trouble on this situation." So then he would let me know when he could get it in, and I'd have to keep up with how my supply is running. So it run pretty good there. And it was pretty good. It was a high degree of responsibility.

DC: And that was a union job, huh?

JF: Oh yeah. That was a union job.

DC: It sounds like almost a management function.

JF: Right. It went—like I said, though, Kaiser was very liberal. Then when they switched over, things weren't running too good for Kaiser in automotive, and they split the building in two, like I said.

DC: You said that was . . .

JF: Airplanes on one side, and—so the General Foreman that I was working for, he went over in the airplane section. So then he sent for me, asked me would I come and work for him over there, you know. I said, "Yeah. No big problem." So I went over there and started over there. Then after about two or three months over there, they put in what they call, oh, it's a grade between a foreman and a general foreman. In other words, my job was to [?] all material from certain areas to another certain area. And I had four stock

chasers working under me. And I had, I think it was ten cribs, where there were two people in the crib—and I kept a lot of material through this situation. So that was a salary job. I was on a salary there until they closed down—what they called a Grade A.

DC: So were you out of the union then?

JF: No, it was still a union job.

DC: Still a union job.

JF: Yeah. It was still under—no big problems. Only different thing it cost you more money because you had to wear a tie and shirt and all of that stuff there. And you know. But it was a good job. I enjoyed it. But the crazy thing about it was, I didn't graduate from high school. So the qualifications for this job was two years of college or equal experience. That's what it was. Now in material, I was A1, see. I knew my material from top to the bottom, so I applied for it. Then I took the test. And I passed it. I had no problem, because I worked in material from the time it hit the dock, over in automotive, to the time it went on the car. So I knew material in and out. Then I knew the purchasing people in and out.

DC: So they trusted your experience.

JF: Right. So even though I did not graduate, I still was able to qualify through experience, see. And it worked good. It worked very good there. It's just like—when they closed down, I went back to Ford's.

DC: How much notice did you have about them closing down? Do you remember?

JF: Oh, I worked right there until the last dribble.

DC: But did you know it was going to close for some time before they finally shut it down?

JF: Oh yeah! Yeah. The story was out. Wasn't no big problem. The only thing that was a big splash, is what day it was going to be, because they were having the troubles with it. General Motors had the big fire.

DC: Oh.

JF: Ahh! It ain't no problem no more, see. A lot of people say that was a suspicious looking thing, you know. But that actually happened. You see, because Kaiser's going to phase out, who's going to buy them, and nobody knows what we're going to do. We've still got the people. And they were in the part of phasing out, because all material—we were moving material out. Over in the one area, cleaning the area out, there was no more planes in there. Now quite a few people were getting laid off too, see, in the course of one year's time. So as things went to narrowing down and narrowing down, then all at once—boom! There comes General Motors' fire. So then General Motors moved in. In

a matter of thirty days, they was operating. Yeah. After one of my brothers—he was over in automotive, my oldest brother—he went across the fence over there, and got him a job at General Motors.

DC: But that's when you went up to Flint, right? [Interviewer is confused]

JF: Yeah, right, NO! I went back to the Rouge then. Went back to the Rouge, and I got laid off. See, down at the Rouge, in the union, you had a lot of buildings at Rouge. So you could have eight, nine years seniority, and in your building, and a layoff is coming, but if you don't have ten years, you can't bump the man in another building.

DC: Ten years is the magic cutoff?

JF: Yeah, right, see. So it takes you ten years. But a guy with ten years getting laid off over here, he can come over in your building and bump you. See? Although they would still be hiring out front. See, I'd been laid off, out of one building, go check out in the Employment Office, and get hired back, and go back into another building.

DC: OK. All right.

JF: Because every building had its own representatives and everything. They had their own committeemen. They had their own president. Because Local 600 was a big place see. And every building was it, and that was the seniority cutoff time, see.

DC: Now did you lose your seniority when you went to . . .

JF: No, no. Never lost nothing.

DC: From Rouge to Kaiser, you kept your seniority?

JF: Yeah, they give it back to me. When I retired, with the time that I had, all the time that I had at Ford's, I got. It was only good for retirement. You couldn't use it to bump a man, or say I can do this, or I can do that. But now, this time that I had there—five or six years, or whatever it was—I could use that, put it on my retirement, and say, "I quit."

DC: But it wouldn't help you keep your job then.

JF: Right. Right. As far as taking this time back, add it to your seniority, that was a no-no.

DC: OK, so when you went back to the Rouge—Kaiser closed and you went back to the Rouge—what job did you have then?

JF: Back at the Rouge, I was a checker. [they talk over each other] Right. I met one of the guys, a guy named Bob Rogers—he was a Superintendent down at the Rouge, because he went to the Rouge. He was from Kaiser. And I worked with him at Kaiser. So he found

out I was there. I run into him, or something that he was doing. So I went to working for him.

DC: So a similar job to what you left at Kaiser.

JF: Right. I was a checker in what you call "frame and co-heading [?]". Now, it was a section of the frames, then I was in there with the bolts and nuts, where they made bolts and nuts and packed them and shipped them. All my job was to keep track of this here.

DC: Make sure the bolts and nuts . . .

JF: Bolts and nuts and everything was in shape. So in other words, now here comes a layoff. And I never welded a job in my life—never even put my hand on an arc welder. So the only available job coming up for me now is arc welder. Now, I go to the library, and I got me a book on welding. So I read that book, oh, that Sunday night. Monday, I went back to Ford's for my interview as a welder. Then I went to welding. Oh, I caught it! Oh boy. If I didn't have a good foreman, I never would have made it. For three days, I was burnt—I'm telling you, I was in bad shape.

DC: Oh my.

JF: So what happened, he said, "Franklin, you know what I'm going to do for you?" He said, "I'm going to send you down in repair," where it's stationary see. Your lines on your frame move.

DC: Oh, so you're welding on the move.

JF: It was moving, and you had to walk with it see. And by being inexperienced, I was unable to perform properly. So he said, "I'm going to send you down there and you start repairing." So I met some nice guys down there. And I told them about my background, and what I did, you know, and what kind of welder I was. They said, "Don't worry about it. We'll fix you up." And they did. In three days I could do it either hands, no big problem. Oh yeah, and I really moved right along.

DC: So someone could have just given you the heave ho.

JF: Right! He could have kicked me right on out, say here's the next first man. But Ford don't operate that way. See, you get an opportunity—I guess General Motors is that way now, because the union got stronger, and they're more flexible now. Like I said, I have a step-son, a son-in-law, he's a general foreman see. He never worked in a plant before. He was going to college, and went to service, and come back out and married my wife's oldest daughter. And she was already there, and he went in there as a foreman. See, that was new history. See that was complete history.

DC: Took him right in. So did you like welding?

JF: Oh yeah. I got along with it very well. Along with it very well. Well, my time is about up. I'm going to have to leave here in about fifteen minutes. Yeah, I've got to pick up—my niece has got, what you call [tape is turned off for a few moments]

DC: [resumes] way back in the '50s, which is where I want to be.

JF: Everything runs smooth.

DC: You just let me know when you need to take off, and I'll—I can tell when we have the five-minute warning coming up soon.

JF: [laughs]

DC: [laughs]

JF: I just happened to be looking at the clock. I enjoy talking anyway.

DC: Well, this is great. I'm learning a lot. But anyways, if I've got this straight—you've got to keep me posted on this chronology here—you went back to the Rouge, and you did the welding, but you got laid off from that job then?

JF: Right. Right. I got laid off . . .

DC: Would that have been the '54 recession, or something? When was that.

JF: No, in 1960.

DC: Oh, in '60.

JF: That's when I went to the Ypsilanti plant.

DC: I've lost you then. We have to get back on track here. You went from Kaiser back to the Rouge.

JF: And from Rouge I went to General Motors. Then I went back to Rouge.

DC: OK, back to Rouge.

JF: Yeah. After I quit up there, I went back to the Rouge.

DC: I'm sorry. My brain just isn't following fast enough here.

JF: [laughs] So then I worked for [?] until 1960.

DC: So you did that until '60.

JF: Then the layoff come—how I got in the Ypsilanti plant, I went there putting in, applying, for my SUB pay. See, we were getting SUB pay. So I went there applying for it, and the man in the Employment Office said, "Franklin, you want to go to work?" I told him, "Why of course!" He said, "OK, fill out the form and everything. Report to work tomorrow." Tomorrow I was there. That's how I got there.

DC: That's excellent. Were you a welder then, from . . .

JF: No. When I left Rouge I was a welder.

DC: The whole time you were at the Rouge—that last stint at the Rouge—you were a welder the whole time through?

JF: Yeah, I was a welder. Right.

DC: OK. All right.

JF: Then I did assembly work at Ypsilanti plant. See, I worked on the line, building starters, and whatever.

DC: Let me just ask you a few more questions about the welding, and then we'll get up to the assembly job at Ypsi. You said that you were shaky at the start with your welding, then you got pretty good at it. Um, how did that job go over the years? You had it for several years. How did that . . .

JF: Very good, because the only thing about welding is—the fundamental thing about it—is when you hit your arc, you run your bead. And if you're timing and that—you have as the arc—if you hold it too long, you'll blow it. In other words, you'll burn a hole. See, so when you hit your arc, and it moves, you move it—you have the skill to move it, right, left, or whichever way you have to go, whatever you're trying to put together. And the heat, you get used to the heat. You know your timing, for your shield to jump up and down. Or during that time—you could smoke in the plant during that time, and I was a smoker during that time—I couldn't even hold a cigarette and work, you know. And when I got through, a few months later, I could weld with either hand, smoke, and do anything I wanted to do. But it's a job, the skill of it is, how much heat you're using, how long you hold it, and where you're pulling your bead. Your bead has got to follow your arc. See, because it's running hot metal. That's what it is. Just like you pour a mold out of a [?]. So you run it, and you have to run it and not sit. Because if you sit, you blow. That's the whole thing behind it. Then you can take a hammer and hit it, then the [??]. That means you got a good one. So when you learn these things when you're reading—but anybody can learn from a book, but experience is better, see. And I caught it. My eyes were so bad, that when I came home at night I had to put an Irish potato on it to pull the heat out—and it would.

DC: So, who set the pace of the welding? Did you have a certain number . . .

JF: Oh no. This was a regular production line. In other words, you would start at your starting time—say your starting time was 3:00. I worked afternoons. Say 3:00—you would automatically work up until 12 o'clock. That was automatically. You get your lunch break, you get your regular relief break, and that's it. But the line only stopped for a matter of changing shifts. When you move out, another man moves in.

DC: Did you feel like you had enough time to do the welding you had to do?

JF: No. No. I had no problems after I—when I went over in repair, in the stationary situation, and these fellows who worked these jobs were teaching me—and in a couple days I had grasped it and I was able to do what I had to do.

DC: So were you able to keep up OK with the stationary . . .

JF: Then I was able to move with the move. But before, I couldn't follow the move, because my timing wasn't in there. My skill level . . .

DC: So did you go back to the moving line?

JF: I went back to it, yeah. I went back to it. See that was only temporarily. He just sent me over there so I would pick it up and get it. No, I went back. Yeah, I went back, and I didn't have no problem. Like I said, no problem after I went back.

DC: So you could keep up. You could do it left-handed, right-handed . . .

JF: I could do it left- and right-handed, no problem.

DC: All right.

JF: I did that all the way up until 1960. Then I got laid off. Like I said, you need 10 years to stay in that building. My seniority couldn't take me over into another building.

DC: Right.

JF: So I had automatically to take the layoff. And I went to Ypsi plant in '60. That was February, I think. Yeah, February in '60. Applied for my SUB pay, and went to work.

DC: Why were you applying for SUB pay in Ypsi?

JF: That was the closest one. Instead of going down to the Rouge?

DC: They'd allow you to go to any local?

JF: Yeah. Any Ford plant, see? This was right close there. So I just went right on down to the bottom of the hill, and applied for it there. And I got the job. And I worked for one old-timer there, a guy named Ed Horn, that I knew for years, because his family lived

right around on Washington Street, and I lived on [?], right around the corner from each other. So I knew his whole family. So I worked for him. And luckily—I've always been lucky—I had a good opportunity doing that. And I moved from one job to another job, to where it wasn't too bad for me. So then they had a cutback coming.

DC: When was this?

JF: That was in '60. So I had the opportunity either to take a layoff, temporary layoff, or go back to the Rouge. But I could only do it for thirty days. If it was longer than thirty days, I would lose the option of going back to the Rouge. So then there was a lot of people that came to Ypsi plant the same way I did, so we run our mouth about it, and chit-chatted about it. So we just took the option. We said, "Well, we'll stay here." And luckily, two weeks, back to work.

DC: Oh really.

JF: Two weeks, back to work, and what they did, they moved the line out of the new building over into the old building. Then that was—worked around there with Ed Horn until the Mustang came out in '63, '64. And then I went over into the big starter line now. That was the big one. What they call "starter buildup." And I was the production checker, would check the jobs that come down. Would check them out over the gauge, and make sure that the circumference was right into it. I did that for about a year, then they had an opening for a repair man now.

DC: OK.

JF: So I applied for the repair job, and I got it. And I did it until I retired.

DC: So you were a repair man for along time.

JF: Right. I repaired for at least eighteen years there. Right. And a good job. And I was the best!

DC: Yeah, I believe that [laughs].

JF: I had to be the best because I'm black. Now that's one thing about I'll tell people. The world that we live in today, if you are black—there's no disgrace of being black. But for some odd reason, you've got to exceed over and above the white man. That's it. I don't care—you just say your football players, and your sports, or whatever it is—you've got to exceed. If you are in the bottom echelon, you will never stay there. In football, it matters not how a guy is, if he can creep a little bit, but he can't exceed over what's coming, he's gone. So that's almost standard procedure. So, you got to be the best. So I was the best! In fact, it wasn't no problem, doesn't bother me, because I can tell a lot of guys right here in the City of Ypsilanti that I worked with, on the line, as repairman, I was the best.

DC: You have to go real soon, don't you?

JF: I got to go in a few minutes.

DC: The questions I want to ask might take more than a couple minutes to answer, so maybe we ought to just knock it off . . .

JF: Go ahead.

DC: I was just going to ask you, you know, what it was like during the 1960s, working in that plant. What relations were like between blacks and whites.

JF: Relationship was good. It was a good plant, and still is a good plant to work in. Your discrimination there between black and white was almost non-existent. You may work with some fellow—like I call him a "George Wallace"—attitude, you know. You may find one. But as time wears off, and you and him are working together and doing things together, his attitude leaves him. See, because you don't confront him to hurt him, or downtrod him. See, you never—the union has the right attitude, anyway you go, you don't downtrod a person. See, I wouldn't ever downtrod George Wallace, although I didn't care for him.

DC: Sure.

JF: You see, but I could still live with him. So that's the whole situation on the job where you were at. So—We ran into a guy who was a Ku Klux Klanner. A young kid, just came up from the South. And he didn't realize what he was doing. So on his job, there, he was pulling out [?] and talking to other people, black and white, says, "I belong to the Ku Klux Klan." "Oh, what'd he do that for? Now he's in trouble!" So the belt line is running. So somebody wrote on it, "We got a KKK on the job." You know he quit? About three days, that was the end of him. But the attitude—now I could have said, "Hoo hoo," and which I did—I told him, "Man, you never should have did that." I said, "You are asking for trouble," I said, "because people do not go for the KKK on this job or anywhere else in Michigan." See? So he said, "Well, what's wrong with it?" Like I said, he'd just come up, so where he's from, during that particular time, wasn't no big problem, see. Because they paraded across the street where we used to live at in Alabama, in the big park, that was their parade ground. Because where we lived at there, didn't no blacks live in that neighborhood during that time. That was a little town called [8-Mile?] Alabama. So that was it. But anyway, he quit, but that's the only incidence I know where anything really got blowed over, you know. And if he hadn't ever pulled it out, if he just talked about it, and whatever, people wouldn't have—they probably would have snubbed him a little bit. But the relationship between he and she there was good, between black and white was good. I was drinking off and on during that time. We partied together. No big problem. If someone got sick, or death in the family, the whole department would be there for them. So like I said, no big problem there. The collection taken up—when my Dad died I got a big chunk of money, see. They do it today. It's a good place. The Ypsilanti plant's the best plant I ever worked in. Clean. Supervision is clean. And the people are good. He and she. You can't beat it. I got to go now.

DC: OK.

[a little bit more, after all]

JF: . . . yeah, that was in, what was it, ’61. ’61, yeah, because I had a ’61 convertible Ford. We stopped in a little town in North Carolina, early in the morning. We was going to get a ham sandwich, or whatever, to go. We didn’t ask to eat in the place. And we needed gas, see, one of them little restaurants there. So the lady told me, “I’m sorry, but you have to go to the back.” I said, “I’m sorry, but you keep it.” So I walked on out, and paid for the gas, and kept right on going. Now that was the only time I actually ever run into that. [signs the release form]

End of Interview