Caroline Gilbert Interview
July 10, 2002
Ms. Gilbert's home
Clarkston, Michigan
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DC: . . . in whatever direction, but usually I start by asking people when they were born.

CG: Oh, OK.

DC: Or where were you born? How about that?

CG: I was born right here in Clarkston on Main Street.

DC: You were?

CG: Yeah.

DC: OK.

CG: I never got very far in the world.

DC: [laughs] Were your parents both from Clarkston as well?

CG: My Mother, I think, was born in Ortonville. Or Hadley, up that way. But my Father was born right over here on Walter [Walters?] Road—his name was Walter—where that big high school is. The Walter, it was my grandfather's farm, and the Fleming was my great-grandparents. And my great-grandfather owned about twenty acres over in Pine Knob, where that golf course is now—and the lake, Fleming Lake, was named after—was at his property.

DC: OK. So they were farmers in this area.

CG: Oh yeah. There's quite a few Walters.

DC: Do you have any idea when they moved to this area originally?

CG: Oh, my gosh. It was long before my time.

DC: OK. And, let's see, when were you born, if you don't mind me asking?

CG: No. March the 25th, 1919.

DC: 1919, my goodness. OK. Let's see. So at that point your family had already—or your

mother's family and your father's family had already been farmers here for some time.

CG: Yes. Yes. And my Mother's father, he had to move from Hadley and he bought the north half of Waterford Hill, and the Moon Valley Farm. The man's name that owned the land was named Moon, so they always called it Moon Valley. So they lived there for awhile, then they sold that part and moved—built a little house in Clarkston on Miller Road.

DC: Do you know what your parents were doing when you were born?

CG: Well my Father, at that time I think he had a implement store in Clarkston, with another person. And then when his Father passed away, then he had to more or less take over the farm. So we always lived in town but he farmed out about two miles.

DC: So you remember when he went and did the farming then?

CG: Oh yeah. I'd walk out there to drive the team on the hay wagon, and pick potatoes after school. We'd walk from school and go up and pick potatoes and things.

DC: So how far was it out to the farm?

CG: About two miles from town.

DC: OK. Let's see. Well let's talk more about that. What do you remember about growing up here in Clarkston?

CG: Well it was good. Everyone was in the—during the Depression time, you know, everyone was on the same level, more or less. And we had a lot of lakes to play in. We didn't have many toys or anything, but we always was entertained. We could entertain ourselves more then. And so we lived out right on the Mill Pond. And there was Park Lake you could swim in, and then there was Deer Lake.

DC: Did you have brothers and sisters?

CG: I had three sisters. No brothers.

DC: Where did you fit in?

CG: I was the third. And my youngest sister is six years younger than myself. I'm the third. And she's the only one living, my sister—she lives in Maryland.

DC: In Maryland?

CG: Uh-huh.

DC: So you said that you used to go help dig potatoes and all that. . .

CG: Yeah, they would pick them, they'd dig them. And when we kids get out of school we go up and pick them and put them in crates, like that, see, to get them in before the frost.

DC: How old were you when you started doing that?

CG: Oh, I was probably in the sixth grade doing that.

DC: Do you remember any other work you did out there on the farm?

CG: Well, I—when they put the wheat up in the barn, I'd be up there and put the stacks of wheat where it should it be up in there. And we would cut seed potatoes. Sit on crates and cut the potatoes for seed potatoes—by the hour. And there's always things like that to do, you know.

DC: What all did you grow on the farm?

CG: Oh, mostly potatoes.

DC: Oh, mostly potatoes. OK.

CG: Yeah. And they had a big orchard.

DC: Apples?

CG: Yeah, apples.

DC: OK. So did you do cider and stuff like that?

CG: No. But my Father had a truck and he would take the potatoes into the Eastern Market. He'd have to leave here about 2:30, 3:00 in the morning to get down there to get his stall. At that time it was mostly all farmers that would come in. It wasn't people from other states bringing oranges and stuff like that in by the bushel, you know. More local things.

DC: Did you go with him down to the market?

CG: Oh yeah. Yeah.

DC: What was that like?

CG: Oh, that was interesting. Down there—before we'd leave Dad would cook, make me a hot egg sandwich to eat on the road. Before I got to Waterford Hill it was gone.

DC: And this would be at two or three in the morning, right?

CG: Yeah. Yeah.

DC: Did you sleep on the way down?

CG: No, but he had me wrapped up in a horse blanket to keep me—because there's no heaters to keep me warm. So he—and he would sing nursery rhymes on the way down. So it was fun.

DC: And what did you do when you were down at the market?

CG: Oh, I'd sit on the tailgate some of the time and watch them—and, like that, you know.

DC: Did you help sell the potatoes?

CG: Well, I was really too young, yeah, to do that, you know, but he would cart potatoes from all the other farmers down to the Eastern Market.

DC: OK. Were there many other farmers from around here who made that trip?

CG: Oh yeah. That he would take potatoes for.

DC: Oh, he hauled them down to the market, too.

CG: Yeah. Because he had the truck.

DC: Oh, they all didn't have trucks. OK.

CG: He had the truck to take them. And when he got back, then he'd go to a different farmer and pick up the potatoes then and keep them, and then take them down the next morning, see?

DC: Oh, I see. OK. How many days a week would he go down there?

CG: Oh, I think it was about three or four.

DC: That's busy.

CG: Yeah, it was busy.

DC: Yeah. And then, was that—you said he had the implement store until his father died . . .

CG: Until about that time, I think.

DC: Yeah. Do you remember when that was?

CG: Well see, when my grandfather died I was only about two years old. So, see, I don't remember quite all that.

DC: You wouldn't really remember that transition. Right.

CG: No. Uh-uh.

DC: Do you remember your neighborhood here in town? Or, I mean, you said the farm was about two miles away from where you were living.

CG: Yeah.

DC: What about the neighborhood where you were living? What was that like?

CG: Well, everyone knew your business. You know, because they all know each other and like that, you know. And—but there was people we could play with and things like that. Dad was on the school board for fifteen years and superintendent of the Sunday school in the church, the Methodist church. He did a lot of work in the Methodist church. So that was good, you know.

DC: Were many of your friends in the church as well?

CG: Yeah, some. Of course it was limited. There wasn't—the town wasn't as big as it is now.

DC: Right. How many were around here?

CG: Oh gee, I don't know, Dan. But they—at one time our church didn't have enough older people for a choir, so the junior children would have to take over for the choir. I mean now look at the church, how big it is now!

DC: How big is it now?

CG: Oh, they got this they built this new one down here. They got a real big congregation.

DC: Well that's just the other side of . . .

CG: This is right down here off Waldron [Waldon?].

DC: OK. What about school? What do you remember about going to school?

CG: Well, I went to school—it's where the township hall is now. And in the wintertime I'd, about time school closed, I'd always go to the windows in the winter to count how many farmers came in with sleighs. Those long sleds, like, you know, where bales of hay would be on it. To take the kids back in that area, the [?] of the town, of the country, you know. And there was sometimes four or five, come in from different directions and pick up the kids from that area. It was from first grade through twelve. And then when I was in—1930, '35, or something like that, is when they built the new high school. I know it must have been about 1930.

DC: You would've been in—in 1930? In 1935 you would have been in high school, right?

CG: No, that would've been about 1930 that the new school they called—at that time, the new school, and that's from kindergarten until the twelfth grade. And my Father—the superintendent of the school board—and he always gave out the diplomas. He did for fifteen years. And when he was going to give them out to us girls, well he was taken with heart problems and he was bedridden. But he signed Ruth's diploma. But he couldn't go to graduation. He gave out the diplomas every year to the students. But he couldn't give one out to any one of his children. Three of us graduated—one every three—every one every year.

DC: Oh, the first three were pretty close in age?

CG: Yeah. Yeah. My oldest sister is three years older than myself, and my second sister's one year older than myself. Then Phyllis is six years between. Yeah.

DC: So in that three- or four-year span, then, he couldn't give out the diplomas.

CG: That's right. And he never did. Because the second year—before the second year, when Betty would graduate, he had died in March.

DC: Oh he did. So his problems worsened.

CG: Oh yeah.

CG: Uh-huh.

DC: What was your Mother doing during those years when you were back in school and your Father was working on the farm and all? What was your Mother doing?

CG: Well she was a housekeeper.

DC: All right. Did she help on the farm as well?

CG: Not too much. But she did a lot of canning, which you always have to do. And of course, my grandmother lived on the farm for a long time and then after it got too much for her to live out there she built a little house in Clarkston. Then they—other people would live in the farmhouse and help farm, but they'd get their housing and everything, you know. So that's how they could carry on.

DC: Did you grow the vegetables that your mother canned?

CG: Oh some, like green beans and tomatoes.

DC: So you grew some of your own food on the farm as well?

CG: Oh yeah. And we'd go to the huckleberry swamp and get berries and like that, and go pick

our peaches from different orchards.

DC: Did you enjoy doing that?

CG: Oh, I didn't mind doing that, you know. Of course, you just do it. Back in those days, you don't rebel. You know, you just go ahead and that's just part of your—you're pulling your own weight, they say.

DC: But did you help with the canning, too?

CG: Yeah, some, with cherries and peaches and like that. And then we always—with house cleaning we always had to take the carpets up and take them outdoors and beat them with the rug beater, and put them over the line if you can and beat them some more.

DC: OK. So that was part of your responsibility as well.

CG: Yeah. Oh yeah, we girls did that. We helped Mother paper the walls.

DC: What about laundry and things like that? How did you . . .

CG: Oh we had—I can remember the first washing machine Mother had. It was called Sunny Suds.

DC: Sunny Suds, OK.

CG: Uh-huh.

DC: And when was that? Do you remember?

CG: Oh, I must have been about six or seven.

DC: OK. And what difference did that make in your lives? Do you remember at all?

CG: Well, it helped a lot. But we had to heat our water, because we didn't have hot water, you know. And so we'd have to heat that on the stove and carry it down the stairs to put it in the washing machine.

DC: Oh OK. So it was in the basement then?

CG: Yeah.

DC: OK. Yeah. So it sounds like your Mother would have been pretty busy with trying to keep that house clean and . . .

CG: Oh yeah, and she sewed—made a lot of our dresses. And we'd get into Pontiac at that time maybe twice a year.

DC: OK. And what would you do when you went to Pontiac?

CG: Well, Mother would go and look at dresses in the store windows—children's dresses and make a picture of them. She always had her pad and pencil, and she'd draw it to see what the styles were, so when she come home she could make dresses to fit us. To kind of be up to date in things.

DC: Would you pick up fabric there, as well?

CG: I think she could have. Although in town we had a dry goods store that had fabric in it, too.

DC: Here in Clarkston?

DC: So was it exciting to go to Pontiac? Was that a big deal?

CG: Oh yeah.

DC: Yeah, that was the big town?

CG: Oh then, yeah.

DC: Did your family travel anywhere else when you were growing up?

CG: Well, we went up north to Lewiston. We went there and Dad always saw to it we got to the county—the State Fair. And a few times we got to the Shrine Circus.

DC: What did you do in Lewiston?

CG: Well, a friend of ours let us use their cabin. And we'd go swimming. And that's when we picked a lot of huckleberries—that's only about a foot off the ground. So that time, we had to pick berries, and Dad went to town, got some cans, and Mother canned the berries. And we'd go driving through the—the roads is just like a lane, you know. And go driving through in the evening and sometimes in the morning, to see—count the deer we could see. And we always went swimming.

DC: So it sounds like you did a lot of swimming down here and you went swimming up there as well.

CG: Oh yeah. Uh-huh.

DC: How often did you head up to Lewiston?

CG: Oh, maybe four or five times before my Father passed away. He had bought two lots on that Westwind Lake. And after Mother died, I mean, after my Father died, why, the man that owned that subdivision and developed it, he told Mother to take her pick of the lots.

And she said, "Well I'll take the one on the lagoon." And he says, "No, you're going to take the better lot, and we'll call it even." So she got the lot. And later on, why, she had to—she sold it.

DC: This was up north? [I think it was in Bloomfield Township, in Oakland County]

CG: Uh-huh.

DC: Yeah. So she wasn't ever able to do anything with that lot?

CG: No. Not after Dad died, because we didn't have the means, you know with the Depression and all that just getting over with, you know.

DC: Yeah, I was wondering how you got by when your Father died.

CG: Well it was hard. Mother finally got work in the foundry at the plant. See, she was forty-four and they weren't going to hire because of her age. But her brother-in-law was the purchasing agent at the time, and he got her in. She worked there about four years. And then the year after Dad died, she got to be township treasurer. And we took taxes in the house. There wasn't a township hall, like, for taking taxes.

DC: So when did she start to work in the foundry?

CG: About 1937, or '36. Dad died in March of '36. But she could only take it four years.

DC: Was that at Pontiac Motor then?

CG: Yeah! Right here, uh-huh.

DC: Yeah, at the foundry here. OK. And did she ever talk about her job there?

CG: Oh yes. In the—in the wintertime they always put the women in the—out by the windows because it was colder. And the men worked in the center. And in the summer the men got by the windows and the women got in the center!

DC: Is that right?

CG: Yeah.

DC: Why do you suppose that was?

CG: Well, discrimination, I guess.

DC: I guess. Wow. And so how many women were working there?

CG: Oh, I have no idea. It was quite a big foundry, you know. And it was dirty. It was a dirty

job. She'd be so dirty when she'd get home, I'd have to take Ajax to scrub her back to get her clean. You know, that's when they didn't have the protection they do now.

DC: Right. Now what about your older sisters—what were they doing?

CG: Well, my—Ruth went on, that year when she graduated—the next year, she and Betty both went to Ann Arbor for—take up nursing. And Betty had to quit, although she was a good student and everything, but it was too much for her. And Ruth, in the end of her second year, she had to work in the TB section, and she got TB when she went back to start her third year. They had to have an examination and she was TB. And they said the reason she got it, because we always lived in a small place with just the same children. If we lived in a city you'd get exposed to it and throw it off, see.

DC: Oh, I see. Build up some immunity.

CG: Uh-huh. So after that, she was in the TB san[atorium] for two years.

DC: For two years.

CG: Uh-huh. And seeing that she was to Ann Arbor, they took care of it.

DC: OK. Did you see her in that time?

CG: Oh yeah. She was—went to the TB san[atorium] right in Oakland County. They sent her there because it'd be closer to home.

DC: What happened to the farm at that point?

CG: Well, after Dad died, the farm was left to my Mother. But they—my grandmother—and she was still living—and my aunt—my Father's sister—thought the farm would be going to us girls. And see, we weren't of age. You had to be twenty-one at that time. And—but they didn't know that Dad had a will leaving his estate to my Mother, see, which was the right thing. So she just let it ride like that until after my grandmother died.

DC: When did your grandmother die?

CG: Oh she died in '47.

DC: '47, OK. So what happened? Was anyone working the farm during those years?

CG: They rented—well, yeah, see Dad was still renting it up until the time—I mean still working it up until he got sick that year. But he had livestock on there. And we always had milk because he always had a milking cow and chickens and like that to tide us over. But then after he died, well then Mother and my aunt, they divided the farm up and sold it. In lots—ten acres and five acres.

DC: Uh huh. OK. And so they sold it off then. Would that have been while she was working at the foundry, she sold off the farm?

CG: Yeah, it could have been.

DC: Could have been.

CG: Uh-huh. No, no! It was—Dad died in '36 and my grandmother died in '47. '46 or '47, see.

DC: So they kept the . . .

CG: They rented it out.

DC: Rented it out until your grandmother died?

CG: Yeah.

DC: OK, I'm with you now.

CG: Yeah.

DC: OK. I follow that. All right, so what were you doing, then, when your Mom, your Mother went to work in the foundry shortly after your Father died? What were you doing?

CG: I was still in school. And I baby-sitted almost every night of the week. I didn't get to many basketball games or anything because I could baby-sit. So that's what—my youngest sister was a little too young, you see. She was six years younger than myself.

DC: Were you babysitting her or . . .

CG: No, no, for the people in town.

DC: What shift did your Mother work at the foundry?

CG: She worked the first shift.

DC: OK, so she was gone during the day.

CG: Uh-huh.

DC: And so your sister would have been—your younger sister would have been, what, eleven or twelve?

CG: She was ten when Dad died.

DC: Yeah.

CG: And I turned sixteen that month that he died.

DC: So you were—you were making money by babysitting.

CG: Yeah, well that all helped. Of course then when I baby-sit for my aunt and uncle, they had the dairy. Well, I'd have them take two quarts of milk or something off the bill, off our bill and things like that.

DC: Ok. So your aunt and uncle ran a dairy?

CG: My uncle did by—my mother's youngest sister. They had a dairy and a route right there in Clarkston.

DC: Did you ever ship milk to that dairy from your father's farm?

CG: No, because we didn't—what cattle we had were beef cattle. Steers.

DC: Beef cattle. OK. Gotcha. Yeah. All right. So what did you do when you graduated from high school?

CG: I went to business institute.

DC: All right. Where was that?

CG: Right in Pontiac.

DC: OK. And what was your plan there?

CG: Well I took up comptometer work, and then after that I worked in Fisher Body for nine years in the hourly payroll, making out the clock cards and all like that, getting them figured out there for their paychecks.

DC: OK. Well let's back up a little bit here. How long did you go to the business institute?

CG: I think it was three months.

DC: Oh, three months, OK. And did you get the job at Fisher Body right straight out of there?

CG: No, I had to wait six months because there was a strike and things up there at the Flint—when they were having that big strike, and like that, see, so it was kind of slow. I waited six months. But I'd keep going back and taking tests to keep my speed up.

DC: OK. So what year would this have been then? What year did you graduate from high school?

CG: I graduated in ‘37 and I got work in ‘39.

DC: In ‘39, OK. All right. So you graduated and went for three months to the business institute. Did you go right straight to the business institute or was there a . . .

CG: Yeah I went—well, it might’ve been a few months before I. . .

DC: Right, in the fall maybe?

CG: Yeah. Mm-hmm.

DC: All right. And then you waited six months and you got the job at Fisher Body in 1939.

CG: Uh-huh.

DC: Did you look at any other jobs, too, or was that the one that . . .

CG: Well I put my application in places, but that’s the one I got. Yeah.

DC: OK. And tell me more about what you did there at the Fisher Body job.

CG: Well, I had to check out the payroll—the clock cards come every day and you have to get them posted for each person. And each job had a number and a letter, and you had to post down what it cost that job for the day, for the hours and the price, see. And then at the end, why, then you figure out what the paycheck would be for the workers.

DC: OK. Were you using some of the training that you got at the business institute?

CG: Oh yeah. Uh-huh.

DC: OK. And so, let’s see, you would have been doing that at the same time your Mother was still working at the foundry, it sounds like.

CG: Uh, yeah. I think she quit soon after that. She worked there four years, because her health was getting the best of her, you know.

DC: Was she healthy when she started working in the foundry?

CG: I would say so. But she would get congestion in the lungs and things, breathing in all that dust and everything else. And so she just had to quit.

DC: So were you still living at home when you worked at Fisher Body?

CG: Yeah. Mm-hmm.

DC: All right. And one of your sisters would have been, what, still with TB at that point? Is that right?

CG: Yeah, she could have been.

DC: Could have been, OK.

CG: She never finished up her nursing because she wouldn't be able to work the full-time to begin with, you know, at the school. But she always worked in hospitals.

DC: So how were you getting by here, keeping up the house and everything?

CG: Well, it was touch and go. Well Mother was able to get—before Dad died, he applied for that federal fund for housing or something. And about a few days after he died, it went through that Mother could—and they put a new roof on the house and got it all fixed up, and then Mother would have to pay them. And it was quite—it was much less, that we made it that way. Federal Savings and Loan—no, is that what it was called then? No, not Federal Savings and Loan.

DC: Homeowners Loan Corporation, perhaps?

CG: No, it was from the government.

DC: Yeah, that was a government agency, but, well anyway . . .

CG: Something about homeowners or something.

DC: Yeah.

CG: Mm-hmm. So she was able to keep the place.

DC: So it sounds like you needed the new roof pretty badly then.

CG: Oh yeah.

DC: Yeah. OK. Let's see. Was the church still a big part of your life at that point?

CG: Oh yeah. Mm-hmm.

DC: Let's see. Were there certain activities there or anything that you recall?

CG: In the church?

DC: Yeah.

CG: There was the Epworth League that we always went to. [a Methodist youth organization]

DC: What was that?

CG: Well, it's for the young folks. And they'd meet Sunday nights and like that, you know. So that's what . . .

DC: What kinds of things would you do there?

CG: Well, and then I sang in the junior choir all that time.

DC: OK. So you were very busy as well.

CG: Yeah, tried to be.

DC: Yeah, I guess so! All right, so how long then—you probably told me already, but how long did you work at Fisher Body?

CG: Nine years.

DC: Nine years, OK. Was it the same job all the way through?

CG: Uh-huh.

DC: OK. So that would have been, like 1939 through . . .

CG: '48.

DC: '48. OK. All right. Did anything change at all during those years with your job?

CG: Well, when I went there we didn't have electric machines. Those comptometers. And then they got the electric ones in. So that was a big help.

DC: All right. How did that change your work?

CG: Well, it was easier because it was the—you wouldn't have to keep pumping the—every time you put numbers in, you know, this would just keep going with that.

DC: OK, and before you had what?

CG: Well, it would still add up but you'd always have to—it wasn't automatic, in other ways, you know. It was—whatever it was—manual. But this was more automatic. And then you get a figure in and if you want to save that figure, there's another place you could throw it up into. If you have to subtract from it or add to it, and like that. It was updated.

DC: But it sounds like you had to make the decision to update it and all that.

CG: Yeah. Yeah.

DC: OK. Well what was it like working there during the war?

CG: Well, of course a lot of the fellows had gone, you know, to war. And somehow about every three months I'd get this big sheet of things with, to figure out big, long numbers to multiply. And you have to—there'd be more letters, or more figures than what you could do. So you have to take part of it and go across, then pick up the rest and go across to get your figure. I seemed to get that every three months to do. Now why, I don't know. It had something to do with the fellows in the military.

DC: Oh, OK.

CG: And then at end of the year, we'd have the plant auditors and the state auditors come in, and then your federal auditors would all come in.

DC: And would they look at those numbers?

CG: Yeah. It must be—they did.

DC: And you're not sure what those were about?

CG: What those auditors . . .

DC: Do you remember what the numbers were for?

CG: Well they're checking to see how the—if they were paid right and things. See, the regular auditors.

DC: Oh, so these *were* for employees. I thought they were numbers referring to the veterans.

CG: No, no, this was for the whole plant.

DC: Gotcha. OK.

CG: For the whole payroll.

DC: OK. And so they would come in and check the payroll. OK. And how did that work? What did they think about your work?

CG: Well I didn't get any complaints. So I think I made out all right. [laughs]

DC: I guess so, yeah. It might've been that, you know, they had all kinds of regulations on wages and all that, and so they might have been trying to monitor that.

CG: Yeah.

DC: What did you like most about that particular job?

CG: Well, I liked the money. I need that! I started out eighty-four dollars a month.

DC: Were you on salary?

CG: Uh-huh.

DC: Well what was the part you liked least about the job?

CG: Well, I couldn't complain about it. It was all good. They had good people working there, you know.

DC: Did they have anybody else doing your type of work?

CG: Yeah, there was some that would take over some of the other departments. See, I had maybe four or five departments, like cut and sew and tool and die and pattern and like that, and somebody would have plant protection and others, see.

DC: OK. So you weren't doing the whole—that would be an awful lot . . .

CG: Oh no. There had to be several of us.

DC: Right, OK. Did you work closely with them?

CG: Oh yeah. Because if you had your work done, got it caught up, well then you could help them. You know, we worked back and forth helping each other.

DC: Oh, OK. Was that common to do?

CG: Yeah. Oh yes.

DC: OK. Were there just women in that job?

CG: There was some men, but they did different parts of that. They didn't do what I was doing.

DC: What did they do?

CG: I really couldn't tell you.

DC: OK. But as for recording the hours and calculating the pay and stuff, were there women just doing that?

CG: I would say so.

DC: OK. All right. Did you notice a shift in employment patterns during the war? Were there more women on the payroll during World War II?

CG: You mean in the factory?

DC: In the factory, yeah.

CG: Yes, they had to be.

DC: But that would have been about the time that your Mom decided—your Mother decided to leave the foundry, right?

CG: Yeah, she had to. Uh-huh.

DC: Yeah, yeah. OK. Did you know any of the—any women who went in to take jobs in the plant?

CG: From here? My girlfriend, but she got into Pontiac Motor at the ad building.

DC: OK, at the ad building.

CG: Yeah, she got in there.

DC: OK. So she wasn't in the plant, or production . . .

CG: She wasn't in my section. Yeah.

DC: OkK Did you know anybody else . . .

CG: I didn't know when I got there, but I got acquainted with quite a few.

DC: Sure. I just wondered if anybody that you knew took advantage of the opportunity during the war to take a job in the plant that might have been for a man before.

CG: No, but there was some men that worked in the office there that we had to—in order to get gas, we had to get—each one had to get three people to ride, you know, to get stamps to ride.

DC: To carpool?

CG: Yeah. And so about every third week, I would drive. And then the next week, somebody—I was the only woman and the other two men would take turns.

DC: Were they all coming from this general area?

CG: Yeah.

DC: So did you have a car?

CG: Yeah, an old car. The seat was jacked up on a two-by-four. No gas gauge.

DC: No gas gauge, OK. Did you keep it running throughout the whole war?

CG: No, no, I turned it in. I got hit in the parking lot. You know, and the car was so old, why, I was able to get a good deal on a car down at Hamtramck. They told me to go down to Hamtramck. So I went down there.

DC: Was that during the war?

CG: Uh-huh. And got a car and that held up until—till the war was over.

DC: OK. So what was it like with rationing and all during the war?

CG: Oh yes, we did—there was sugar and you couldn't get stockings. And there was coffee, meat—they had rations for meat. And, of course, your gas. And we had to save our grease—cooking grease—had to save it and turn it in to the government. And there was a lot of different things. It made a big change.

DC: And then what was your Mother doing at that point?

CG: Oh she's Township Treasurer.

DC: Oh, she was the treasurer. OK. Now did you tell me that she got that treasurer's job while she was still working at the foundry?

CG: Yeah, but she quit right after. She got in the foundry, then she had to—then she quit. No, I guess it—yeah, she did. She had to quit. Because, see, the Township Treasury would start in and you had to get—in the fall. So they get the statements out—we had to do all that at home. And I helped Mother nights with all that. And being in our home, people would come in nine, ten o'clock to pay their taxes, because there was no set time or anything, you know. And so I helped Mother balance out all that every night.

DC: What did you do with the money?

CG: Well, next day Mother had to take it down to the bank. And she was so glad when the Township Hall got that place and had the Township Treasurer in there. And then she was right next door to the bank. Because that did worry us.

DC: Yeah, to have the money around your house.

CG: That's right, it worried us. We had to take in dog license, too.

DC: Oh, you did that, too.

CG: Yeah.

DC: Now was that an elected position, the Treasurer?

CG: Oh yeah. Had to be voted in.

DC: OK. So what made her decide to run?

CG: Well, the people come and ask her after Dad died. But that first year, she said she would run, but she wouldn't campaign, because she wasn't up to it, you know? And so she didn't make it. But the next year, the next election, she got it. And she had it for about sixteen years.

DC: That's a good long run.

CG: Yeah. So that tided her over.

DC: How did that affect her health?

CG: Well, she held up pretty good. She died when she was eighty-six. She died in '75.

DC: Oh really? OK. But it sounds like she was getting very unhealthy in the foundry.

CG: Oh yeah. That's why she had to quit.

DC: But then it sounds like she rebounded after.

CG: Yeah.

DC: Very interesting. So the treasurer's job was much more healthy.

CG: Yeah, but it didn't pay all that much. I think she got fifty dollars a month on that, you know. So you had to really—of course now, back then that looked pretty good to you. You could kind of, more or less manage, you know.

DC: Now how much had she been making in the foundry? Do you have any idea?

CG: I think she was making around thirty-five cents an hour.

DC: OK.

CG: And that would be less than the men.

DC: Yeah, less than the men but for a full month's work it would be more than she would

make—but not by much, it sounds like—than as the Treasurer.

CG: Yeah.

DC: OK. Well you say you stayed with the job at Fisher Body until 1948. What did you do at that point?

CG: I got married.

DC: Oh, OK.

CG: And moved into Pontiac.

DC: OK. And where did you meet your husband?

CG: At his home. One of the girls I met in school—I mean, at work—she was his neighbor. And she said that Mrs. Williams wasn't feeling too good. She said, "Let's stop and see her before going to church." And that's where I met Vern. He had gotten out of the Coast Guard.

DC: All right. Had he served there at all during the war?

CG: Yeah, in the Coast Guard.

DC: In the Coast Guard, OK. And had he just recently gotten out, or what was he doing right at the time that you met him?

CG: A barber. He was a barber before he went in.

DC: Went in the Coast Guard?

CG: Mm-hmm.

DC: OK. And did he have a shop?

CG: Yeah, he had a shop after that. No, first he worked with this other man on Going Street in Pontiac. And then he worked there and then we—he got a shop of his own. He rented from Pool's Lumber Company. They had several—there was a barber shop in there the man was selling out. So he got in there.

DC: So you got married. When did you get married?

CG: In March, 25th.

DC: Of '48?

CG: Yeah.

DC: OK. And then why did you decide to stop working at Fisher Body at that point?

CG: I got tired.

DC: What were you tired of?

CG: I got tired of the work. Because I worked a lot of overtime there, as much as I could, to make more money. And I guess I just wanted a change.

DC: How long had you been able to work all that overtime?

CG: Oh, most all of the time.

DC: All the time you were there?

CG: We'd share the time.

DC: Oh, OK. So how many hours of overtime would you work?

CG: Well, I'd work Saturday mornings and quite often two hours on Friday and like that. More so at the end of the month.

DC: OK. So you'd stay late some days and then you'd come in Saturdays as well.

CG: Yeah. Mm-hmm.

DC: Were you tired of the work itself, or just the number of hours?

CG: Yeah. You know.

DC: So anyways, you were tired of it and you got married and then what did you do?

CG: I kept house. We tried to remodel a home that his Mother left him, and we did a lot of work there. And then we moved out here in Drayton Plains, at that time—it would be Waterford now.

DC: OK. So how long did you stay at the house in Pontiac?

CG: I was there seven years.

DC: Oh, OK. So you didn't move out to, well Drayton Plains, now Waterford, till what, 1955 or so?

CG: 1953, I think it was. He built his own shop in '55.

DC: OK. So when you were working on, kind of rehabbing that old house in Pontiac, did you do a lot of that work?

CG: Yeah. Patched up the holes in the wall and painted and helped take the wallpaper off.

DC: OK. And at this point your husband was a barber. Did you ever think about getting another job at that point?

CG: No. I can't say I did.

DC: All right. And why was that?

CG: I don't know. Well then when we moved out here—well before we moved out here—see Mother sold her place in Clarkston. Then she moved down close to me in a house with a rented old place up above.

DC: In Pontiac?

CG: Yeah. On Marshall Street. And so I was more or less taking care of her, because she didn't have a car. And then when we moved out here, she moved out in apartments right here on—well, walking distance, where I could go.

DC: When you moved back out here.

CG: Yeah.

DC: That was in '53 you said?

CG: Uh, '50-—yeah, '53. Soon after that—maybe a couple years—she was able to sell her place and she moved out.

DC: OK. And so it sounds like you spent a lot of time looking after her.

CG: I did.

DC: OK. And then—let's see—well why did you decide to move back out here?

CG: Well, because he wanted his own shop. Well, of course he wanted a shop where he'd be close to home. Because there on Oakland Avenue, he's right across from that Majestic Bar and it was getting kind of scary. So that he was able to get out here and build his own building—have his own building.

DC: What was scary about it down there?

CG: Well, holdups and things like that, you know.

DC: So crime was becoming a problem?

CG: Yeah. Or fear of, you know. And so we come out here and he built a shop right next door to the house. There was a lot in between.

DC: And here was that?

CG: Right on Sashabaw.

DC: On Sashabaw. OK. All right. What was it like out here at that point in time?

CG: It was nice.

DC: Were there many people?

CG: Yeah. Well, not like it is now, you know. But we had neighbors in back and across the street.

DC: OK. Were there any other barbers around?

CG: There was one on Walton Boulevard. And then there was one on Midland, down Midland, next to Dixie.

DC: Was there enough business for all three barbers?

CG: Oh yeah.

DC: OK. Now did he just cut men's hair or did he do women's hair?

CG: No, no. Just women. I mean, just men, I mean.

DC: OK. And then when you were back here, your Mother came within a year or two. What else were you doing at that point in time?

CG: Well I was still taking care of her.

DC: Taking care of her, OK. Did you have to go back into Pontiac for awhile then?

CG: I did, yeah.

DC: Did you go every day?

CG: Well, not quite every day. I'd take her to get groceries and to the doctor's. I tried to get in, well, maybe about four times a week or so, you know. But it worked out much better with her right up close.

DC: Yeah. OK. Let's see. Well how did you get involved with Local 653 then?

CG: Through my second husband.

DC: Oh, OK. All right. Let's see, I need to figure out more about all that. Let's see. When did you remarry? When did you get married the second time?

CG: In '86. Vern died in '83.

DC: Oh, OK. In '83. And then your second husband, what, he had apparently worked . . .

CG: He worked at the Retail Store in Pontiac. Mechanic, electrical mechanic for the . . .

DC: Hmm. And so was that a union job? Or how did he get involved with . . .

CG: Well yeah. It was hourly.

DC: Oh, OK. The retail store was hourly. Thinking back—I'm going to think way back to when you were working at Fisher Body from '39 to '48. Were you aware at all of the presence of the union at the plant in those days?

CG: Oh yeah, because there would be strikes.

DC: OK. What do you remember about those strikes?

CG: Well, I was never out of work because of them, but there was times I didn't have work to do. So you just go in and sit, like, you know. Take a book and try to read it—put it under your drawer like you're doing something.

DC: What did you think about that?

CG: Well, I was glad when it was over, because you felt more secure.

DC: It sounds like they didn't lay you off during the strikes.

CG: No, uh-uh. No, I never got laid off.

DC: Did you know what the strikes were about?

CG: Well, for higher wages and better conditions, you know.

DC: And what did you think about those demands?

CG: Well I thought they were all right. Because see, when Mother worked in there, there wasn't the union like it was, you know.

DC: Right.

CG: And so they cleaned up a lot.

DC: So you were working in the administration there, but you were sensitive to what the workers were asking for. It sounds like your Mother's experience had a big impact on you.

CG: Yeah. Yeah.

DC: Did you know many of the production workers at that point in time?

CG: You mean where I worked?

DC: Well, when you were working on the payroll and stuff, did you know many of the people who were working in the plant, or were they just names and numbers?

CG: They were—well, I went mostly by clock card numbers and not the name.

DC: OK. All right. So you would just see their information and stuff.

CG: Yeah. Of course, the name is right there, but you weren't connected with the name. You always went by the clock card number.

DC: Oh, OK. That was how you calculated out the pay and stuff like that. OK. Well tell me what it was like, then, working out here during the '50s. I've talked to a number of people who were working in the plants in the '50's. What was it like living out here in the '50s and all? What was that like?

CG: Well it—we didn't have the protection of a union, you know, being a barber. They had a barber association. But that wasn't—they tried to stick together on that, but then when they built these malls and going to have barber shops and stuff like that in the mall, they wanted to break the tie, and they wanted to—at that time they wanted women to cut men's hair. But before, it wasn't. And there's a big change.

DC: Do you remember when some of those changes took place?

CG: Well, it was during—from '57 on until quite awhile, you know. And then when the hippie movement went through and all these fellows didn't get their hair cut, there was another big change.

DC: So how did that affect your family?

CG: Yeah, but he still always had good business.

DC: He did, OK. And so was it an older clientele then, at that point?

CG: Well a lot of it was, and then a lot of people bring in their little children.

DC: Oh right, OK. So could your husband make a decent living as a barber then?

CG: Oh yeah.

DC: OK. And did you ever get another job?

CG: No.

DC: You never did, OK. So did you just continue on taking care of your Mother? Is that what happened?

CG: Yeah.

DC: Well what was it like running a house here in the '50s?

CG: Well it was all right.

DC: I'm thinking about the '50s now. Did you have—what kinds of appliances did you have and stuff like that?

CG: Well, I didn't have an automatic washer and dryer.

DC: OK.

CG: Because we had septic tanks. And our septic tank wasn't the best.

End of Side A

Begin Side B

DC: . . . because of the septic tank.

CG: Yeah. And then we got water put in, and then a couple years later then they put—come through with the sewer. Then I got an automatic washer and dryer. And that's the first time.

DC: And maybe I asked you, I can't remember, but when was that, when you got the water and the automatic washer and dryer?

CG: About 1980.

DC: OK, it was quite late then. OK.

CG: Yeah. See, he died in '83, you know. He had a . . .

DC: What about television? Did you get a television back in the '50s?

CG: Well I had the television. [Mundt's?] television, was it called [?], when they first came out and we lived in Pontiac.

DC: Oh, you had that. OK.

CG: Yeah, a little one, you know. And my sister and them would come down, too, to watch the TV. But at first, before we bought it, we could go down through the stores and they had one in the window running. And people would look in the window to see what they're all about, you know. And then you had to adjust your picture so much—the people would be tall or thin or short and wide, you know. You had to get a mirror and work in the back to see what—get the picture adjusted. That was always a trick to do. Now you don't have to do that.

DC: Right. What about shopping for food and stuff like that? What kinds of stores did you . . .

CG: Well, there was always [Tenudi's?] right down here. And then there was—on Dixie there was a supermarket. So there was always places to go like that.

DC: Did you have friends out here then?

CG: Oh yeah. Uh-huh.

DC: Were they—were any of them friends that you had grown up with?

CG: With that one. She went to school with me till she moved to Holly when she was a child—went to school. But I soon got acquainted with a lot of them, you know.

DC: Did you have any children?

CG: I never did.

DC: Never did, OK.

CG: But my sisters all did. My oldest sister had TB. She adopted a daughter.

DC: Did she get healthy again?

CG: Yeah. Well, she always had to be checked, you know, but she always worked at the hospitals and everything, you know. She died here last January.

DC: Oh really. OK.

CG: And she was eighty-six.

DC: Did you feel any pressure at all about not having children in the '50s? It's always considered a time of big families . . .

CG: Yeah, it did. It bothered me. But just one of those things you can't—I don't know why, but it's just one of those things. I just—I was never blessed. We'll put it that way. But my sisters of ours, they would come stay weekends, the little kids would. I had four nephews and two nieces, and especially the nephews would take turns coming. Every weekend I'd have one of them, it seemed like.

DC: Oh, OK. They'd come and stay with you.

CG: Yeah.

DC: And how did you like that?

CG: Oh, I loved it. Yeah, it worked out good.

DC: What sorts of things would you do with them?

CG: Well, I took one on the Ferris wheel. He was begging—he wanted to go on the Ferris wheel. The only one that never been on a Ferris wheel. Well there was one down by the little shop in there, where K-Mart is now. And I said, "Dennis, we'll just go and come home because I got to get dinner going." Got down, we were the only ones that got on, and it went around so fast the first time it scared me almost to death and that little kid was petrified! He was only about four. And so I tell him to stop, so we got off and he never got on one again, I don't think. Maybe now that he's got older, but that took care of that. I got home—my knees were just shaking. You know how you first get on, it kind of builds up? Well this, you got on, it just shot right around.

DC: Oh it started out fast.

CG: Yeah! We were the only ones that got on—the only ones that was on!

DC: Was that part of a fair or was it always there?

CG: Well they had different rides in the parking lot there. And we went by and there he saw that and that's what he had to have, a ride on the Ferris wheel. We had a lot of fun with them.

DC: Um, let's see.

CG: And they keep in touch with me. Yesterday my nephew Terry from Boston called me, and

we had quite a long talk.

DC: That's good.

CG: And I got one—a nephew in Maryland—Columbia. And I got one—Wayne is up in Flint—I mean, up in Lapeer. And Dale's in Columbiaville. So I keep in touch with all of them.

DC: So you started to talk about some of the pressures on barbers back in the '50s. You mentioned something about 1957.

CG: That's when we built the shop.

DC: When you built the shop, OK. And I remember you mentioned that with the hippies in the '60s, there wasn't as much business. But can you remember any of the other positives and negatives of being a barber back in the '50s and '60s?

CG: Oh, well now, he had a lot of customers he's had for years. He barbered for fifty years all told. And a lot of them followed him through. He knew a lot of people. And we got invited to a lot of—their children that graduated from school and things like that, you know. No it was—it was good. But whenever they voted to raise the price of haircuts, he never would vote, because he had to take so much dirt from the customers. And even I got told about it!

DC: Now would all the barbers in the area get together and decide on the prices?

CG: Yeah, with that association they had, see. And the hours—they'd all agree on the hours, until the shopping malls would come in and the women started cutting hair and they changed the prices to what they want and the time what they want. They wanted to open nights—and before we had regular hours.

DC: Oh, so you tried to regulate the hours so that you could not have to work nights.

CG: Yeah.

DC: Did your husband have to work weekends?

CG: Well, Saturdays. He always worked Saturdays. And Wednesdays he had a day off. But then quite often he'd have some of his customers that's bedridden or in the hospital or nursing home, so he'd have to go and he would cut their hair.

DC: He would go to them.

CG: Mm-hmm.

DC: He would take Wednesday off, you said?

CG: Yeah.

DC: Would you do anything special on Wednesdays?

CG: Well, get the bills paid and would—when he had to go cut people's hair. And then we had the house to take care of. Or sometimes we'd go away for the day on picnics and different things, you know. And at that time, my Mother was still living and she'd go with us. And so—every other year for awhile we made trips to California, to Berkeley.

DC: Oh really.

CG: That's where his sister lived. And she was his youngest sister and she was sixteen years old when Vern was born. And so they were always so close. She took care of him a lot, you know. And so every other year we went there and they would try and come here.

DC: OK. How would you get out to California?

CG: Well we drove. Until finally he made up his mind, he was going to try to fly. He was afraid to fly. But we'd go down to the airport and watch the planes come in and out, try and get him built up. But then after the first time, we had no trouble.

DC: OK. When was the first time you flew out there?

CG: It must've been about '38, no maybe '39, something like that.

DC: '58 or '59 do you mean? Or wait a minute.

CG: No, '60.

DC: '68 or '69, somewhere in there?

CG: Yeah.

DC: You said '38. . .

CG: No, no, '38, I mean '58, I meant.

DC: '58, OK.

CG: But we drove out all the other times. And then they could begin to get the expressways in. But I liked to go, before, the other way. Because you go through the little western towns. And we'd stop and get something for lunch and like that. And this one time we went and got some sliced meat and you had to slice it with the—crank the wheel yourself to cut the meat, you know, put the—yeah things—it's just interesting to see them, you know. And then when we'd stay off at night in one of those little towns, we'd walk the streets there and

look into the windows and things, you know.

DC: Were there many other travelers in those towns at that time?

CG: Yeah, there would be. You'd pass one, and if they stopped to eat here, you'd pass them again or something—or they'd pass you. Sometimes you kept passing each other. But at that time they had a lot of cattle trucks and things on the road, and if you get passed them—if you stopped, then they'd go ahead of you. Then you could end up, you have to catch up to them again, you have to pass them all over again. But it was—then the expressways came in. But soon after that is when we started flying.

DC: OK. What was your sister-in-law doing out in Berkeley?

CG: Well, see my first husband was born in Coram, California. Up on Sacramento River—be about ten miles from Redding. And it ended up being a ghost town. His father had a hotel for the miners. And the ranchers complained about the smelter plant was—it was bad for the cattle. So the town folded up. And his Father was about the last one to leave. And that's the first time—he left there when he was five years old. And, my gosh, he was in his thirties when he went back the second—the first time after he left.

DC: So when he went back to that town?

CG: Well, the town isn't there. That's where Shasta Dam is.

DC: Oh it is.

CG: The big dam that's built there, Shasta Dam. And you can stay on one side—you can look over and see where the town used to be. They had—you can see where the line of where the road used to be. And of course the railroad went through there, too. And it was quite a nice little place in there.

DC: So you said he left that town for the mine when he was five. Where did he go at that point?

CG: To Pontiac.

DC: Oh, OK. Now how did he end up in Pontiac?

CG: Well that's where his Father's mother lived, in Pontiac. And I think his Father, and maybe he, was born in Marine City. And his Mother came from Sherbrooke, Quebec.

DC: Oh right, yeah. So how did they end up in California?

CG: See she was married three times. The first time, she had three girls, and he died of TB. And that was up by Standish—Pine Grove is where he died [maybe Pine River, as Pine Grove is on the west side of the Michigan]. And her brother worked on the Great Lakes, and had a farm and worked on the Great Lakes on the boats, you know—was gone. And

then—and his Mother was up in that area, too, see. So when he died, then she remarried again and she had two more girls. She had five girls. And Irene was the youngest and her Father was killed by cutting down a tree. So it left Vern's Mother a widow again. Well his Father's brother lived up around there, and he wrote to George and told him, "Vicki is single again." So he started writing to her. Evidently he knew her, you know. And asked her to come out and get married. So that's what they did, and that's why Vern was born out there. He's the only boy. And so that's how come it ended up out there.

DC: Then they ended up back in Pontiac.

CG: Yeah. Uh-huh.

DC: That's the first time I've heard of someone moving from California out to Pontiac.

CG: Yeah. [laughs] We do when things go under for you.

DC: Right. So it sounds like then, in a way, I guess, going back out to California was going back home for him, too.

CG: Yeah. He liked to—he liked to pan gold as a hobby and like that, you know. He was also homesteading up beyond Susanville, on the other side of Mt. Lassen.

DC: So did he have much luck prospecting?

CG: Well, I think he did pretty good. He got a piano with the gold he got, with the money and stuff, so I think they—it was just like a hobby to him, you know.

DC: Sure. That's a valuable hobby.

CG: [laughs]

DC: So did you ever consider getting another job, then, after you left Fisher Body?

CG: No.

DC: Never even occurred to you.

CG: No, I didn't.

DC: OK. You were done with that.

CG: Yeah. I had enough figures.

DC: Enough figures, OK. Well did your second husband ever talk about his job way back in the '50s? Did he ever talk about his life back in the '50s or '60s?

CG: See he came over from Canada. And he was up in Flint most—some of the time then, because he had two sisters living there, two older sisters. And he shoveled coal to people's houses, you know. And that was hard work. He come over to get work in the plants. Well see that's about when all that striking stuff—way back in the beginning.

DC: Back in the '30s then, is that when he moved there?

CG: Yeah. And so then he got married to a girl from Flint, and he got a job down here in Pontiac at the Retail Store.

DC: And what exactly did he do there?

CG: Well was the—did more on the electrical part of the cars. He was a mechanic. He got a lot of—he only had like an eighth-grade education, but they'd send him up to General Motors Tech to get training on that every so often. He's got a lot of certificates like. I've got this one here.

DC: Oh, you have one here.

CG: From the—from the plant.

DC: Oh, look at that!

CG: Yeah. He was a very good mechanic. Excellent mechanic.

DC: How did he get his mechanic skills?

CG: It just came to him.

DC: OK. Boy, he got this—he'd already been . . .

CG: He's got several of those certificates. I think it was. . .

DC: This is from 1959.

CG: He had about seven or eight of them.

DC: Wow. Do you remember what the requirements were for getting this kind of award? This is—I mean he obviously was very good.

CG: Yeah. I don't know. It's just that he passed the test and everything, I guess, you know.

DC: OK. And he worked on the electrical parts of the car?

CG: A lot of it, yeah. Uh-huh. Of course it's different now with all the computer stuff, you know.

DC: Yeah. But as far as you know, then, he didn't have any formal training beyond going up to General Motors Tech?

CG: No. No, but he was—well he, I think a lot of it came to him, because he could do everything around here, too, you know. That's—boy, that's what I miss. I had this on the wall one time and it got warped.

DC: Oh, I see. Yeah, it's a little bit bent.

CG: Yeah, so I put it like that.

DC: Well that was for ten years of service.

CG: Yeah but that's—but see he's gotten about four or five of those.

DC: Now why do they call it the Retail Store?

CG: Because people from out of state, like that, would buy cars here and they'd either come up and drive them back, or they'd pay someone to drive the car back to California for them. And maybe they'd sell their old car down—and out of state they'd get a better price. Yeah. And then they'd fly up here maybe, or come up by train or something and drive the car back or have somebody drive it back. And it all had to be checked out. Well a lot of people could buy cars through there from around here, and there's so many that would come back and want Grant to work on their car, because he was—he was excellent at it, you know.

DC: So was this, like, a dealership that's owned by Pontiac then?

CG: Yeah.

DC: OK. The corporate dealership.

CG: Mm-hmm.

DC: OK. And people would come from all around the country, it sounds like.

CG: Yeah, because you could get them cheaper at the Retail Store.

DC: Oh, OK. Why would anyone go to a regular dealer if they could get them cheaper at the Retail Store?

CG: I don't know, but see, they put a stop to it, you know. They phased that out. But it was still going when he had to quit because of a disability.

DC: Oh, when was that?

CG: Gosh, I don't know what year. It was some time back. He had to take an early retirement because of his back.

DC: OK. What happened to his back?

CG: He had to have six discs repaired in his back, and it left nerve damage in one leg like that, so he got on retirement.

DC: Was there a particular incident that caused it?

CG: Well he thinks it was—see, during the war he had to work on the Jeeps and the ambulances and stuff that went overseas. And at that time he was sent down to Fort Wayne to work out of there. And so he thinks a lot of it was from jumping off of these. That's what he thinks.

DC: OK. Jumping off there during the war. OK. So he would work in them, then jump off and do the next one and jump off?

CG: Yup. Yup.

DC: Oh, yeah. That could be hard on all kinds of parts of your body.

CG: Yeah.

DC: So then did he come back to the Retail Store after the war work down in Fort Wayne?

CG: Yeah. Mm-hmm. Yeah, because that's when he got—that's when he was on disability, after he got back. After he had these surgeries.

DC: OK. And when was that?

CG: Oh, I don't know what day—when he retired. I really don't know. I should know, because I seen his card.

DC: So I take it he was a member of the union then?

CG: Yeah, oh yeah.

DC: Do you remember him talking at all about his experience with the union?

CG: Well he was always pleased with it. And he got to know a lot of people through the union and through work there that he—they still talked about him even yet, you know. There's Don Hester. Do you know Don Hester?

DC: No, I don't.

CG: Well he's the secretary of the union right now. He knew him real well. He worked with him. And Chuck Curry—he used to be up in the union lodge, you know, one of the officers or something.

DC: OK. Are these folks retired now or are they active?

CG: They're retired. Chuck Curry and another fellow and Grant each had two acres of land up north where they hunt.

DC: Oh, OK. Did you ever go up there with them?

CG: No, because that was before I met him.

DC: Before you met him, of course. What am I thinking?

CG: Because we were married in '86.

DC: Right, I'm sorry. I just got lost there for a second. Did he continue to hunt later on?

CG: Not after his back got bad.

DC: Right. Was it deer hunting?

CG: Yeah, deer hunting and bird hunting.

DC: So what was it like for you to be introduced to the—the union and the retiree crowd and all that?

CG: Well good! I can see the benefit that they had that a lot of people don't have.

DC: What were those benefits that you could see?

CG: Well, I got health insurance like that, where Vern and I had to buy our own. And that cost a lot of money, you know. And you didn't get the protection with your prescriptions, things like that. How long this is going to go on, I don't know, you know, way things look. But anyway, no, there was a big difference.

DC: OK. So you could notice that just in . . .

CG: Yeah.

DC: . . . your own life, OK, with medical coverage and all. How long did Grant live?

CG: Oh we were married for thirteen years, and I was married thirty-five years the first time. He died when he was eighty-six. December the 20th, at eighty-six.

DC: Just a few years ago.

CG: Yeah.

DC: So it sounds like even though you weren't part of the . . .

CG: No, I mean he died in '98, he died. He was sixty-eight—no, how was that? No, because he was—he would be almost a hundred now. He died—we were married in '86. He died in '98.

DC: How old was he when you got married?

CG: He was about seventy-nine. No, must be—no. I was sixty-eight and he was seven years older than I.

DC: So he was seventy-five then, so he would've been eighty-seven when he died. He'd be about ninety years old now.

CG: Yeah, I turned that . . .

DC: That's a good long life.

CG: Yeah, yeah. He did.

DC: So anyways, even though you weren't really involved with the UAW back in the '50s and '60s, it sounds like you can still see some of the benefits that these people had.

CG: Oh yeah. Yeah. And of course when I worked on the payroll, they weren't connected with the union, you know. The plant had the union but the salary didn't.

DC: The salary didn't, yeah. What kinds of benefits did you get when you were working on the payroll?

CG: Uh, there wasn't any! See, I quit before there was any pension plan or anything.

DC: So there was no pension. Was there any medical insurance when you were working on payroll?

CG: You know, I can't remember if there was or not. There might have been, but I think you might have to pay some of it or something.

DC: Had to pay some of it, OK. Well, can you think of other questions that I should be asking you that I haven't touched on yet?

CG: Darn, I don't know. Trying to think.

DC: You mentioned a few names of people who your second husband knew who are retirees. Can you think of any other retirees who I might want to contact? I know that your table was pretty helpful for me at the last luncheon.

CG: Yeah. Well you got some of the—Agorgianitis's—and you got their names. Now they were neighbor—neighbors of Grant's and I. And those other two I really didn't know. But Grant probably would have known them. But I personally didn't know them until I started sitting at their table after he died. But he knew a lot of people. And see, Chuck Curry worked at the Retail Store, too. Some of them had worked at the Retail Store.

DC: Do you have any idea how many people worked there?

CG: Gosh, I couldn't tell you. He had a picture—it showed all of them in front of the Retail Store. Except one, and he had to stay back in case there was any phone calls. And he—his neighbor made the frame. It would be about that long, about like that, where they're all lined up. And he gave it to General Motors, and they put it in the personnel—you know over on, what street would be? Joslyn, where they built that for engineers, for the office instead of the—instead of the ad building down on Oakland Avenue. And they're putting it—they had it there in the showcase. Now where it is now—because they don't use that for that, for the administration building anymore—now where it's gone, I don't know. But they had a lot of things. And they were thrilled to death to get that, because a lot of people, even then—and Mr. Harris that took it. He was a black fellow, very nice. I think his last name was Harris—they didn't even know there *was* a Retail Store at one time.

DC: Oh really, they didn't know that. OK.

CG: And that Indian head up there, they were giving them out for a dollar and—was it a dollar? It wasn't even—it wasn't more than a dollar. And he finished—he varnished it. And they would like to have had that, but he didn't want to part with that yet. Yeah, I don't blame him.

DC: Sure, that's the Pontiac emblem there.

CG: Yeah. And he bought several of them—gave one to his son. And that was down in the basement and got all warped and everything, you know. He varnished his.

DC: It sounds like in that picture there might have been a few dozen people easily.

CG: Oh, oh yes. There was a lot of people.

DC: Maybe even a hundred. OK.

CG: Because see there was some that worked in the offices there, too, you know. They had to when people come about cars and everything, besides the mechanics and everything, you know.

DC: Well I really appreciate you spending some time with me.

CG: Well I'm glad to.

DC: Yeah, it's very interesting. It's interesting to hear about someone who, I mean—you're kind of on the periphery of the whole time, but your mother was very deeply involved in the foundry . . .

CG: Yeah. Oh yes!

DC: . . . early in your life, and then you were in the auto industry in Fisher Body, but in an administrative capacity. And then you linked up with—well, the barber's association, it sounds like, was pretty important to your life.

CG: Oh that was! That was! You know, at that one time it was good. But then when they started . . .

DC: How many members were in the barber's association?

CG: Oh golly, I wouldn't know.

DC: Oh OK.

CG: The main office was at Lansing, I think.

DC: Oh, so it was, like, almost regional or statewide.

CG: Yeah. Just about, I do think. Uh-huh. But of course, they couldn't hold together like the union they got here now.

DC: Right, too much competition, I guess, from these . . .

CG: Yeah. Well, when women took over—because then women never cut men's hair in the shop, you know. But now they took over on that. And see, the men had to have a lot more training than the women. They had more apprenticeship than the women.

DC: Who cut your hair?

CG: Beauty shop—oh, well Vern did when I wasn't getting any permanents. But my hair's gotten so fine now, that—he used to cut it. But when I got permanents, see, of course he didn't . . .

DC: He was out of his league then.

CG: [laughs] Yeah, that's right.

DC: All right. Well I really appreciate it. [tape turned off for awhile]

CG: . . . Yeah, because she talked like broken, you know. And that was it or not, I don't know. But see, she was so much older. See she was about forty-six, or something like that, when Vern was born.

DC: Oh really?

CG: Yeah.

DC: OK. And she didn't get out much.

CG: No. And she's buried at Oakwood there in Pontiac, and so is Vern's father.

DC: So how did she end up in Pontiac again? Did you tell me?

CG: Well, her husband, when they left Coram, California—he came out because his Mother lived on Perry Street.

DC: But how did she ever, how did she meet him in the first place if she was from Sherbrooke?

CG: Well they came over—the family came over to Michigan, see, and she had a brother—she had a brother in New York State.

DC: She came along with. OK.

CG: Yeah, younger. Uh-huh.

DC: Yeah. And then he started shoveling coal and stuff, you said.

CG: Yeah, that's what Grant did when he came over. That would be Grant.

DC: Oh, that was Grant. I'm getting them all confused! Oh, I better stop while I'm behind.

CG: [laughs] You'll have to listen to the tape over.

DC: I will, then I'll figure it all out. It's hard to know that the first time through. My mind races around trying to think of all the . . .

CG: Yeah, see, Grant I think was about twenty-two or something like that when he came over. He came over for a nickel. Cost him a nickel to come over in the boat.

DC: Um, OK. I'm glad you can keep it all straight.

CG: People ask him how old he—this would be Grant—they ask him how old he is. He says, "Well I was born before the Titanic sunk." Boy, that's a long time. But it was only about

four or five days that he—was born in 1912, and what was it, 1914 or something, the Titanic. . .

DC: Might've been 1912. I can't remember exactly.

CG: Yeah. So he was a few days old before the Titanic sunk.

DC: Way before!

CG: [laughs]

End of Interview