Don Hester Interview
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Local 653 Union Hall
Pontiac, Michigan
Transcribed by Daniel Clark

DC: . . . um, I'll be combining, you know, kind of a life history approach with your work with the union, because obviously you're still really active with the union.

DH: Oh yeah.

DC: I mean every time I've talked with you, you've been either on your way here or here. But just for starters, where were you born?

DH: I was born in Pontiac, Michigan.

DC: Really, OK.

DH: March 1, 1933. At that time, my folks lived in—we did—we lived at 101 Osceola. That's over a block east of Telegraph Road, in Pontiac. At Telegraph and Huron there. And of course, I don't remember too much about that particular time.

DC: Sure, not the immediate time, but maybe you talked with your parents a bit about, uh, their lives. How long had they been in Pontiac?

DH: Well, as best as I can remember, my mother and father came up in, from Kentucky, from Louisville, Kentucky sometime, I'd say, in 1919, 1920 era. Because I'm one of fourteen kids, and some of my sisters and brothers were born in the '10s.

DC: OK. So you must along down the line then.

DH: Well, I was the third from the youngest.

DC: OK, yeah. All right.

DH: There are only three of us left. There were ten boys and four girls, and today I have one sister and one brother living besides myself. My sister being older, she's 74, and my brother being younger, he's 68.

DC: OK. A number of your brothers, especially, but your siblings would have been considerably older than . . .

DH: Oh yeah, yeah, the majority of them, yeah.

DC: Fifteen, sixteen years older than you. OK. Where in Kentucky were your parents from?

DH: My mother was born in Louisville, and my father was born someplace in Tennessee. Now they met during the first World War. He was a sergeant in the Army, and my mother—of course she lived at home with her parents—and my grandfather owned a General Store of some type in Louisville. And I do know that—I've been told that at one time he run for Lieutenant Governor of the state of Kentucky on the Republican ticket. But I've never confirmed that to my own satisfaction.

DC: What was his name?

DH: Yeah, his name was Franz Robert Markert.

DC: OK, and then, you said your father was born in Tennessee.

DH: He was born in Tennessee. The best I know he was born—he was born out of wedlock. He never met his father. His mother died sometime within the first year.

DC: Really?

DH: Yeah. So some lady raised him. And I've heard the name, but in the meantime I've forgotten it. But from what my Dad says, he was more or less on his own from the time he was age seven.

DC: Wow.

DH: Back then, and Dad was born in 1898. But you see my mother died when I was only eleven. And my father put me and the two younger brothers in a juvenile home, for home, we were there for home. And from there we went on—I went to a couple different foster homes and my younger brothers, they went to a couple foster homes. We were separated at that point. And then after the Second World War, when it was finally over, I went to live with one of my sisters, and my brother Dick, he went to live with our oldest brother, Jim. And our youngest brother, Ferd, he went to live with our oldest sister.

DC: OK, so you got a little bit reunited.

DH: Yeah, we got back, you know, back together with family.

DC: Let me back up a little bit. You were born in Pontiac, so your parents had made that move, but what were your parents doing in Pontiac?

DH: Well my father, he worked for Borden's Milk Company.

DC: OK.

DH: And when I was born in '33, he was a night manager at Borden's here in Pontiac, over, at the time it was over on the corner of Norton and Johnson. And then later, he went out

and bought his own truck and he was an independent milkman. And he done that for years. He was still doing that in '44, when my mother passed.

DC: Had he done anything like that back in Kentucky?

DH: No, that I'm aware of, the only thing I ever heard him talk about doing in Kentucky was, he was in service.

DC: OK. Uh huh. So he joined the military, during World War I.

DH: Yeah, yeah, during World War I, yeah.

DC: OK, hmm. So he came up and became a Borden's employee. I remember drinking Borden's milk when I was growing up.

DH: Well, "Elsie the Cow," yeah.

DC: Absolutely [laughs]. Um, again, we'll work up towards, towards your mother's death and all—it must have been quite a big event in your family. But what do you remember about growing up in Pontiac before your mother died?

DH: Oh, things that I remember—in fact, it's ironic we talk about this because yesterday we were talking about it, myself and somebody here at the hall. During the Second World War, living in Pontiac, I remember the war. I remember the air raids, you know, practices. Everybody had to have their lights out and everything. But back in the '40s, we never locked our doors in the house. In fact, I don't even—I don't even remember anybody having a key to lock them. Nobody locked their doors. You were just safe in the city of Pontiac. You know, Saturday night, Friday night and Saturday night, downtown Pontiac, it was very busy. People went and done their shopping on Friday night and Saturday. Saturday night, most of the people, you know, they probably—the parents would go out, for those that wanted to go out, you know. And as a kid, I know I used to go Sunday afternoon, me and my two brothers, we'd walk downtown to one of the cowboy shows, and normally we'd go to the State Theater—there or the Orpheum [closed and torn down in 1955], because they had all the cowboys, you know—Roy Rogers and Gene Autry and Tom Mix and them. And uh, I know my parents, my father moved away from the house for whatever reason.

DC: When was that?

DH: Oh, that had to have been early '40s.

DC: Before your mother died.

DH: Oh, before she passed, yeah.

DC: He moved out of the house.

DH: Yeah. [pause]

DC: How did the household function after that?

DH: Oh he always provided. I mean, they lived apart, but the money, he always brought the money home. And of course he was our milkman, so we had milk. And he knew so many people, being in the independent—being an independent milkman, he delivered to many homes, but he also delivered to a lot of businesses. And we really—we didn't want for things.

DC: OK. Even with fourteen kids?

DH: Even with fourteen kids, yeah.

DC: Wow.

DH: The old man, he was a hustler. He was a go-getter.

DC: Of course a number of your siblings would have been older.

DH: Oh yeah, yeah, well the best I can remember—as far back as I can remember, my oldest sister, she was married as long as I ever knew. Of course she's dead now. Cathy [sp?] was born—I'd have to guess that Catherine was born in—let me see. I was born in '33, and she—Cathy was [pause] I would guess 60 or 61 in '75. So '75 and whatever we are. That's twenty-eight years ago, twenty-nine? So she'd be close to 90, I'd say, today. Pretty close.

DC: 1913, 1914, in there.

DH: Let me see. She may not be that—she may not be that old. My mother was born in—she was 40, 42 in 44. So she was born in '02. So she'd be 101. And Cathy was born when my mother was sixteen.

DC: OK, so about 1918. Hmm. What was the neighborhood like where you grew up?

DH: Well we moved around quite a bit. We lived over on North Saginaw Street. 258 North Saginaw. It was—we had a big house over there. I was just a kid now. I do remember that next door to us a guy run a blind pig. You know, he was a, you had to—what the heck did they call them? A blind pig, but they had another name for them. I can remember the police, even the Pontiac Police would go there, and get a glass of beer or a shot of whiskey. But the neighborhood? I don't ever remember troubles in the neighborhood.

DC: Were there other kids?

DH: Oh yeah, there was other kids. The McGillicuddys [sp?], they was some relation to [Cloonan's?] Drug Store downtown. And I know they had one son, he was fifteen, and he had had polio, I believe, because he was crippled. He couldn't get out of bed. He was bedridden. He died sometime before he turned twenty, I know that. But you see, you got to remember that I—my mother died, I was only eleven, so at that point we went to the juvenile home, and then we went to a home in Port Hope.

DC: We'll sneak up there in just a second. Do you remember the school you went to?

DH: Yeah, I started school in 1938 at Baldwin. Baldwin Elementary School. It's since been torn down. It was over on Howard Street. Then we moved. You know, after the war started in '41, we moved, '42 or '43, we moved over on Short Street, in back of Wisner School. And at that point I transferred over to Wisner Elementary.

DC: How was that?

DH: That was all right. I didn't have no trouble over there.

DC: Yeah, yeah.

DH: That's over there by Wisner Stadium.

DC: Did you have any reason why you moved so much?

DH: Well, they rented the home on Saginaw Street, see, and the one on Short Street, they bought that, see. And I know they paid $2600 for it. $2600. I mean $26 a month was the house payment, because I'd have to walk downtown, even at that young age I'd walk downtown—today you couldn't send a kid, eight, nine, ten years old downtown.

DC: So you'd go down and make the payment?

DH: I'd go down to Berkeley Voss [sp?], that was the loan company, and make payment.

DC: Well tell me what it as like then—your mother died, and tell me exactly what happened again.

DH: Well, my mother died June the 22nd, 1944. The war was still going on, and my oldest brother was over in France and Germany, or—I guess you'd say, he was probably in Belgium. And he didn't make it home for the funeral, and there was me and my two younger brothers—we had two sisters, just older than us, but one of them was living with, with an aunt. The other one was at home. And [pause] . . .

DC: Had your mother been sick?

DH: Oh yeah, my mother was sick as long as I could remember.

DC: Really.

DH: Yeah, she had heart trouble. Today, today, she would have lived much longer today, with the gains they've made, the progress they've made in medicine. We all know that of course. But . . .

DC: Had she been able to be active at all?

DH: No, no, no, uh uh. I do remember some Christmases, and a couple Christmases, a couple Thanksgivings where she cooked dinner for everybody. It was a huge turkey. Of course at that age, hell, if you had a two-pound chicken it looked big, you know, to a kid that's eight or nine years old. But I do remember them talking to get a twenty-four or twenty-five turkey, and she'd fix that. And I remember her making all kinds of different pies and cakes and whatnot, because we had to get that many around the Thanksgiving day dinner table—you know, all of us, all the kids didn't live. Some of the brothers died in childbirth and whatnot.

DC: OK. So some of . . .

DH: But I do remember, I remember some of the meals, and I do remember Christmases.

DC: So some of your brothers died in infancy?

DH: Oh yeah?

DC: How many?

DH: Five of them.

DC: Oh really.

DH: Five of them died—well one of them, a couple of them—one was stillborn, one lived a few days, five days, and one lived seven months, and one lived a year and a half, and then one lived to age seven, but they got flu or pneumonia, or something like that got to him, you know. And again, medicine, they didn't have [DC talks over him]

DC: Now did you know any of these brothers?

DH: No, no.

DC: OK.

DH: No, they were older than me.

DC: Yeah. Still, that must have had quite an impact on your, on your parents and on the rest of . . .

DH: Oh yeah, I'm sure it did, yeah. I remember one of the—my brothers dying, because I remember my mother and dad both crying. But that, that was just—I was too young to realize what was going on.

DC: How did, how did the household chores get done if your mother was in poor health?

DH: The older sisters and my two older brothers . . .

DC: Ok, so they pitched in?

DH: They pitched in, yeah, you know. You had to have your—my oldest brother, Bud, when I was real young, you know, he'd go [??], and he'd go down and banking the furnace at night and keep the fire going because it was cold, you know. Him and Bob, they'd have to go out and shovel the sidewalk or shovel the driveway, or whatever, you know. And the sisters, they—my oldest sister, she was married, and she had two or three kids, and she would—they lived at home because my brother-in-law at the time, he couldn't—work was hard to get, hard to find. And he was on that CCC camp. You probably had people talk about that.

DC: Sure, uh hum.

DH: And I know that he worked—he eventually got into Pontiac, and he retired from Pontiac Motor Division, too.

DC: But they all lived in your family house?

DH: They lived at the house, yeah. That was the only one that was married, you see. And later on, my next-to-the-oldest sister, Nancy, she married, and of course that was during the war. Her husband, he was in the service, and they had no children. She didn't have any kids until after the war was over.

DC: Well tell me about what happened then—where exactly did you go after your mother died? You told me once already.

DH: To the juvenile home.

DC: Juvenile home. Yeah, OK.

DH: County Juvenile home.

DC: Yeah, what was that like?

DH: Well it was [pause] we were on the third floor. Me and my brother, my oldest—my next-oldest brother. He's younger than me, but he's—we shared one bedroom together, because we were of that age. I was eleven and he was nine. Our youngest brother was

seven, so he had to be in with the younger kids. And he was in a ward, but we were all on the same floor. We had—we would see each other—we'd be together every day, during the day, you know, but him being seven, he had to go to bed at eight o'clock, and we could stay up 'til nine. And we ate three square meals a day. Our father had to pay a dollar a day for each one of us. That's what—back then that's what the county charged. And they furnished the clothes and whatnot. Our Dad, at the time, it was during the War again—it was in '44—and he come out to see us. They had visiting hours on Wednesday and Sunday, if I'm not mistaken. And Dad would come and visit us. For a long time, he done it every Wednesday and Friday—or Sunday, every Wednesday and Sunday.

DC: Did you have any other relatives around the area?

DH: No, no. Our sisters—I can't even remember where they could have gone to. We had—our youngest sister, she went to live in Detroit with an aunt and uncle. That would have been the closest. I remember the first Christmas that—after my mother passed away, we went, we spent Christmas with an aunt or an uncle in Detroit. And our sister, she came there, because another aunt and uncle had her.

DC: OK, so there were a few aunts and uncles around.

DH: Yeah.

DC: Yeah.

DH: We had two aunts and uncles that lived in Detroit. The rest of the relatives on my mother's side all lived in Kentucky.

DC: Did you ever go visit them?

DH: Never that I know of. I may have, but I was too young to know it.

DC: OK, it wasn't something you did regularly when you were eight, nine, ten or something like that.

DH: No, no.

DC: Yeah, OK. So how long were you in the juvenile home?

DH: Uh, probably six, eight months.

DC: OK.

DH: Part of the year, and then they put us in a foster home up in Port Hope.

DC: Port Hope, OK. Where exactly is Port Hope?

DH: It's on Lake Huron.

DC: Yeah, that's right.

DH: The tip of the thumb—not the very tip. It'd be just north of Harbor Beach.

DC: I know where that is. Yeah. So that's quite a change, I mean, did you go with your brother, or just you?

DH: Three of us went together. We went to live with some people that their last name was Hester, the same as ours.

DC: Really?

DH: They were from Tennessee, originally, but he had been—he had moved to Detroit and he worked for the DSR, Detroit—that was the bus, you know.

DC: OK.

DH: Detroit Bus.

DC: DSR, OK.

DH: Yeah, and they had a son that was killed on a bicycle when he was fourteen. And he had retired off of the DSR, medically. Now they rented a home up there in Port Hope for year-around residence, and they were looking to possibly adopt one child, preferable a boy, to take the place of their son that they had lost in this accident. And when they run across these three boys and their name was Hester, which is me and my two brothers, and they thought, you know, this is really unique. So they agreed that they would take us. We went up there and lived for probably six months, and they had a chance to get a nice home over on Main Street in Port Hope, but the owners had moved to Florida or Texas, but they kept that place. They owned it. They didn't want any kids. They didn't want no children there. So they wanted that house more than they wanted to, the boys, you know. So they sent us back. They were going to send us back to the juvenile home. Well then they found, the County, Oakland County Juvenile Division at the time, found a farm up in Bad Axe that we went to. So we went to Bad Axe, and we were there, well, from the time I was twelve, something, twelve years old plus, 'til I was fourteen. And then we came back to Pontiac, and eventually we all wound up with relatives.

DC: What as it like up in Bad Axe?

DH: Oh, that was great. That was good. It was a good experience. That's where I learned—really, I got my work ethics living on the farm.

DC: How so? What did you do?

DH: Well, going there as a city kid, I knew nothing about a farm, other than, shucks, that's where Old McDonald was, you know. When we got there, they had fourteen cows. And they would have, like, 500 to 1,000 chickens. So they taught me, being I was twelve years old, I had to learn how to milk, had to learn how to milk cows. They didn't have a milking machine. So I learned how to milk cows. And they had a hired man, so he taught me how to milk a cow, and I learned how to milk and I milked one cow, he had milked thirteen. Well, eventually I got to where I was getting pretty good. I could milk two cows and he had milked twelve. And eventually—I remember the time in the summer, in the spring, when we were really busy in the fields and whatnot, after I *learned* how to milk, I'm milking all the cows. He's working in the fields.

DC: All right. That's a big accomplishment.

DH: Oh yeah. And then you'd do that twice a day, you see. And then every spring they would buy 500 chickens. So my brothers, what they had to do, they had to help clean the house. And then they had to feed the chickens and gather the eggs. So we would have like two or three chicken coops. Now these little chicks, we would keep them down in the field until they got to where they were big enough they'd start laying eggs, then we'd move them up here to this bigger chicken coop. But twice a day—somebody had to carry water. Heck, it was a long ways. It was probably a quarter of a mile.

DC: To carry the water for the chickens?

DH: We'd carry that water—two five-gallon buckets, each one of us, you know. We'd carry, like I'd carry two and my next brother, the oldest brother, he'd carry two.

DC: That would build you up.

DH: Yeah. Then, of course, along with milking them cows, they had to have feed when they were inside. They had to have water. We had a milk house there that, you know, I'd milk a cow, then go out and dump it in the top of this tank, that it would drizzle down—it would be filled two or three times [pause for overhead announcement]—running through—it would run across these cooler lines, because we had, to cool it, we had run this water through this cooler line. It was like a radiator. Everything was stainless steel, of course, because Borden's came—every day, Borden's came every morning and picked up the milk. They'd come around ten o'clock. And the water that would run through there, that's what we'd run outside, and it went into the trough to water the horses or the cows, you know. And then along with learning how to milk, I had to learn how to do everything on the farm. How to harness up the horses, and go down in the field, hook them up to the wagon, and go down there in the field and do whatever. I never plowed with horses, but I would harrow, I'd have to harrow the fields, or use the springtooth harrow or spiketeeth harrow.

DC: Was that with a tractor or was it with horses?

DH: No, it was horses. It was horses. We had a tractor—brand-new tractor back in '45, but the old man, he drove that tractor. That's what he used. He used that to plow. We had a hundred—them people had, they owned a hundred and five acres, and then they rented twenty-five. So we were farming a hundred and—approximately a hundred and thirty acres, lacking the portion we used for grazing for the cattle. I'd say thirty acres. And when we would plant corn—now they planted everything was—if he planted twenty acres of corn for himself, he planted twenty acres for her. If he planted twenty acres of beans, he planted twenty acres for her.

DC: For her? Who was . . .

DH: His wife. They were husband and wife, but I know they had two different banking accounts, saving accounts, and whatnot. She went, took out hers in '45. She bought him a brand-new Ford Ferguson tractor, cost a thousand bucks—tremendous amount of money. She bought him that new tractor, and it had a double-bottom plow, and it had a scoop on the back. Of course it has a hydraulic lift and whatnot, and extras on it. She had headlights put on it, front, and she had one put on the back.

DC: She put a lot of thought into that.

DH: Oh yeah, yeah. But she paid cash for that. Them farmers, they didn't buy—nothing was ever bought on time. And we—like I said, we'd raise our own corn and whatnot, and threshing time was a big time of the year.

DC: Did you raise hay and stuff too?

DH: Yeah, we raised hay. We would bale hay. We would thresh the wheat, the oats, we would go pick corn, and then we'd shell corn. Now a lot of it we would just bring up—we had a corn crib. The machine would take it off the stalks, and it would shuck it. Most of it, you know, we'd put in the corn crib. But a lot of it we had to do by hand. And especially for the chickens, me and my brothers, we had a hand-cranked corn sheller. You'd get that [??] going, just cranking and somebody would just stand there and feed these ears of corn in—it's field corn. It's hard, you know. And it'd take all the kernels off and then chuck the kernel—the corn would go in one five-gallon bucket and the cob would come out. And then, like on Saturday, we would—when we would have the machine, we'd have a machine that, you know, we'd throw shovelfuls of corncobs in there, and it would shell that corn and put it, we'd put it in bags. Well, once a month we'd go on Saturday morning, we would go to town with the wagon, and the tractor, and we would take corn, and we would get [chop??] made up for the livestock, you know, for the cows. Or we would get stuff ground up for the chickens.

DC: OK, so you had it processed.

DH: Yeah, we'd go to the elevator, and they would do that. That'd take four hours. It'd take Saturday morning. We'd go like nine o'clock Saturday morning, we'd get back about one. Then living on that farm, normally we got to go to the theater every Saturday night.

DC: Really, OK.

DH: Yep, they would take us to town, and we'd go to the show, and we always had money for a pop and a popcorn. You know, when you'd get out of the show, we'd go to this bar. Some friends of theirs owned a bar downtown Bad Axe, and they would buy their beer from him. He had cooking facilities in there, and them farmers, they'd always—this weekend it'd be our turn to take the hamburger meat, see? Or the hot dogs, or sausages. And he would have his cook, they'd fix them hamburgers—boy they were good too. Hot dogs, and when we'd get out of the show, we'd go there and we'd eat a hamburger or a cheeseburger, and have our pop and whatnot, stay 'til, say, midnight, because they're farmers again. We only lived three and a half miles west of town, so we would go over and—we'd get home, say twelve, twelve-thirty, because you'd have to be up at five.

DC: I was going to say, what time did you have to . . .

DH: To go out there, we had to be up at five o'clock, go out and milk them cows. And there's no sleeping in.

DC: No, you must have been pretty tired.

DH: Yeah, and of course we had to go to church every Sunday.

DC: OK.

DH: Yeah, and the church was right across the church from where we lived. The church was across the street, and then the Grange was next door to the church. So I did—I had a job up there. I'd get two dollars a month to keep the church clean. And in the wintertime, I had to go over Saturday night and light the fire, so that the church would be warm Sunday morning. And I had to make sure that there was fuel oil there, because that had to fill the—I had to go outside and underneath the church in the back and get the fuel oil by five-gallon buckets, bring it inside, and they had two furnaces, two fuel-oil stoves in there, one up to the front, and one way in the back. And I'd do that, and if I had too—always where the preacher parked in the wintertime, I had to shovel that snow so he could get in and out. And I'd shovel the driveway, so that the parishioners could get in and out.

DC: What kind of church was it?

DH: It was a Methodist Church. Yep. And I couldn't tell you its first name, but the Reverend Roberts was the preacher.

DC: Did anything ever go on at the Grange Hall?

DH: Oh yeah, yeah, yeah. All of us belonged to the Grange, and it was a farmer-type group deal up there. We would have Saturday night, a lot of times, especially in the fall of the

year—I remember more going on in the fall of the year, when all the farmers would get together Saturday night. And they'd always have—everything was potluck. The women would bring all kinds of good food, them farmers, you know. They'd come—it seemed like they'd come from miles around. And it's probably only three or four miles, but it seemed like it was miles around. But what we done at that Grange, I couldn't tell you. We just had a good time. I remember the eating, and playing with the other neighbor kids and whatnot.

DC: And it was just across the street from your place.

DH: It was just across the street from us, yeah.

DC: So everybody was coming to you. That's nice.

DH: Yeah. And we went to a one-room school up there. Had grades kindergarten through seventh, through the seventh grade. Eighth grade on we went into Bad Axe, town, to the high school. Of course I never got that far because I wasn't—you know I hadn't progressed that far in school yet. So we went consequently to the one-room school up there.

DC: How did you get along with the kids there?

DH: Oh got along great, yeah, we got along great! Of course we were typical kids, you know. We always—we played a lot of soccer back then.

DC: Really.

DH: And nobody had no shin pads. Do you know what happens when two young guys, two young kids try to kick the same ball? You're kicking one direction; I'm kicking the opposite. So we got a lot of skinned-up shins and legs and whatnot, and if you kicked me too hard, I'm subject to get mad and lose it, and want to whip you, or you want to whip me. And then the teacher made us—she'd correct us, make us come in. I remember many times I'd have to write a hundred times at first: "I will not fight. I will not fight." And I got in so damn many fights, I remember that one time she made me write five hundred times! So I figured out a way. I hooked me three or four pencils together and I'd write once, but I'm writing three or four of them, you know.

DC: Now do you think you were getting in any more fights than the other kids.

DH: No, no, no, all the kids were getting in fights, you know.

DC: It was just a fighting kind of town.

DH: Wildes. I remember the Wildes, Ross and Carl, and let me see, it was Ross and Carl—there was one other boy. What the heck was his name? [pause] Wilson! And they had a

big family—farm kids, you know. We'd get in fights with each other, or they'd get in fights with, amongst themselves. We all went to that one-room school, you know.

DC: Had your family gone to church back in Pontiac?

DH: Yeah, my mother, my mother was a Catholic. I was, I was baptized Catholic, and—but my mother was too sick, my mother was too sick to go to church. But me and my brothers, we had been baptized Catholic. And I remember walking to St. Mike's a few times myself, and I did—we would go to St. Mike's when we were in the Juvenile Home.

DC: Oh, OK.

DH: Yeah, they would let us walk. We had to walk

DC: But you could go to church.

DH: We could go, yeah. Or we could go to church right there at the Juvenile Home. But they didn't have a Catholic service come in, you know.

DC: Did your father ever come visit you up in Bad Axe?

DH: No, no, never. Uh uh. No, Bad Axe, if you know where it's at, it's probably a hundred miles from here.

DC: Yeah, it's quite a ways. How about in Port Hope? Did he ever . . .

DH: No.

DC: No. So you really didn't see your Dad for a couple of years.

DH: Yeah, I never saw him. No, I didn't see Dad for a couple years there.

DC: How was that?

DH: [short pause] I survived. You know, I saw him after, you know, in later years. Dad and I always got along. I bought him a car. He never owned a car.

DC: Had a milk truck?

DH: Well he did, originally, you know, but then he didn't even have that. He lived in town, so anything Dad wanted to do, he was close. If he had to go to the grocery store, you could walk.

DC: Well then, it sounds like, uh, you spent until you were about fourteen up in Bad Axe. Then you moved back to Pontiac?

DH: Yeah.

DC: OK, and did I hear right that you lived with relatives at that point?

DH: I lived with my sister.

DC: Your sister.

DH: Yeah.

DC: This is your sister who was married?

DH: Yeah.

DC: Your oldest?

DH: No, she was second to the other one

DC: Second. Second, OK. All right.

DH: I went to Eastern Junior High School.

DC: What was it like moving back to Pontiac at that point?

DH: Well I was amongst family, you know. We had a good time. We didn't have a lot of money. Nobody did back then. Lived over in Perry Park. That's where I met the Curry boys. Become fast friends, and we grew up together, from teenagers on up.

DC: So you lived with your sister. She was married.

DH: Yeah.

DC: And . . .

DH: She was eighteen. In fact, let me see, Judy was seventeen, and I was fourteen. But she was married. She'd have just gotten married, or—she was married. I know they had a brand-new baby. The baby was a month old. Judy may have been eighteen by then. She just turned 74, and I just turned 71, or 70, excuse me. So there's almost four year's difference—lacking three months.

DC: So around eighteen, give or take a little bit. What was her husband doing?

DH: He worked for a restaurant. He worked for [?? Gables?]. He was a waiter, and he done yard work, outside work.

DC: And how about your sister? She had a newborn, so . . .

DH: She stayed home. She was a housewife.

DC: Did you have any jobs at that point?

DH: Oh yeah. It didn't take me too long. I got me a job. In the wintertime, I'd go shovel snow. In the summertime, I'd rake somebody—at fourteen, I'd rake somebody's yard. Or I got me a paper route. Had ninety-two customers on that paper route. And then I got me a job when I got—I was fourteen years old and I applied for my working papers, working permit, and I hired in at Packer's Outlet.

DC: Oh really.

DH: Yeah. I remember going to work—as soon as I'd get out of school on Friday, I'd beat it over to Packer's Outlet on Perry Street.

DC: What was Packer's Outlet?

DH: It was a grocery store. It was—I think it was a predecessor of Farmer Jack's.

DC: OK, uh huh. And what was your job?

DH: And I was a carry-out boy and packer. You know, pack the groceries up, and carry them out to the car. Or when times were really slow, they may have me stocking the shelves, you know, putting the prices on everything, and putting it up. And I'd make nine dollars and a penny a week.

DC: And a penny.

DH: Yeah. But I'd work from 3:00 or 3:30 Saturday afternoon till 10—or Friday from 3:00 or 3:30 until 10:00 Friday night. Then I'd have to be back in there 7:00 Saturday morning and work 'til 9:00. But that's the only hours that I could work, for a week, you know.

DC: Because of your age?

DH: Because of age, yeah. But I made—I cleared $9.00 in pay, that's a lot of money. Gee, that was a lot of money

DC: Now did you keep that money or did you contribute it to the household, or how did that work?

DH: I kept the money, but I tell you what I did—I went out and visited my two brothers every Sunday. And every Friday when I'd get my paycheck, I'd go buy a box of Wrigley's Spearmint and a box of Wrigley's Doublemint gum, and I'd buy a box of Hershey almonds, and a box of Hershey plains. Every Sunday I took them—I'd hitchhike out to Ortonville to see my two younger brothers, and I'd take that to them.

DC: OK, you have to pardon me, but they were in Ortonville. Were they living with other relatives?

DH: No, no. At that time they were living on the farm with Mrs. [Port?].

DC: OK, so they went to a farm.

DH: They went to a farm when I got to go to my sister's. They were like that for approximately a year after me, because the other family members weren't in a position just yet to take them.

DC: Uh huh.

DH: You know, they weren't settled in. My brother—my oldest brother, we had to give him time to get home from the Second War and get—he hired in on the railroad in '46, I believe. And the sister up in Flint that took the youngest brother, her husband, he finally, he got into Buick up there in Flint. And when they got a little more stable, then they took the other two boys.

DC: So why did you leave Bad Axe when you left there? Was your sister asking you to come down?

DH: No, no, no, no, no. [Is boys?] Them people had gone away. They had gone to American Legion, or VFW, and they came to Detroit for a convention.

DC: Was this the family you lived with in Bad Axe?

DH: [softly] The family we lived with [hard to understand]. And while they were down here, me being thirteen, close to fourteen probably, I decided I'm going to learn how to drive.

DC: Oh my.

DH: See and I messed up—I tore up the transmission on the—they had a '37 Ford, and I tore the transmission out. I wound up—I had to pay for it, because I made money up there, you know, saving. And it cost me, I don't know, thirty-some dollars to get that transmission fixed. And the youngest brother, he had tore up a whole bunch of hand tools, because he's going to learn how to drive the tractor, see. And we got in trouble, so they were afraid we would do some serious damage, and rather than take a chance, they sent us back to the juvenile home.

DC: OK, all right.

DH: That's the reason we left there. Yeah.

DC: So you were curious, wanted to do some things that you knew you probably weren't supposed to do, but . . .

DH: Now the way I tore up that transmission, I know how I done it. Because I had no idea where the gearshift—I'd seen them drive, and I knew you had to push the pedal on the floor and move this thing, but I had no idea where. And what I believe I had done, was I had that thing in reverse, and when I got it stuck in that rock pile, and I pulled it forward, I had it in reverse and I'm pulling it backwards—that's where I believe I tore up the trans.

DC: Uh huh. Uh huh. Well you were pretty daring at fourteen.

DH: Oh yeah, yeah.

DC: Well, that could have happened to anyone, actually.

DH: Oh yeah.

DC: Yeah. All right. So your brothers were up in Ortonville. Um, and you're working at Packer's Outlet and shoveling snow and raking leaves and all that kind of stuff. Um . . .

DH: Had a paper route.

DC: Had a paper route. That's right. So you were hustling too.

DH: Oh yeah.

DC: Yeah, OK.

DH: But I always worked. I always worked hard. Seemed like I worked all my life.

DC: OK, yeah. Well what came next then? Did you finish high school?

DH: Nope. No, I quit high school.

DC: When did you quit high school?

DH: When?

DC: Yeah.

DH: Oh, it must have been '51. 1951.

DC: So you would have been close to graduating, it seems like.

DH: Yeah. Well I would have graduated in '53, in January of '53 if I'd have stayed in school.

DC: OK.

DH: I was in the 11th grade, and I just—I wanted to go to work in the plant. So sometime—I couldn't tell you exactly when, I just had [Maryann?] working up in there—it doesn't list that I hired into GM Truck and Bus in '51. But then I couldn't get up in the mornings. I had a problem getting up in the morning. So . . .

DC: You needed those cows to get you moving, or something.

DH: Well no, see, living down here, things, living in the city was a whole bunch different from living in the country.

DC: But your recollection is that you hired into Truck and Bus then?

DH: Oh I know I did.

DC: You did.

DH: Yeah.

DC: OK.

DH: And I didn't work there—I didn't get ninety days in because I couldn't get up in the morning, and they let me go. They fired me, or I voluntary quit back then.

DC: What was your job?

DH: All I had to do over at GM Truck was stock this assembly line—nuts and bolts and parts that they were using to build trucks, you know. And . . .

DC: Had you been working at Packer's Outlet until then? [talking over each other]

DH: Yeah, yeah. I couldn't tell you how long. You don't keep track of stuff like that at that age.

DC: Fair enough. But why did you choose to apply at Truck and Bus?

DH: I had no idea. Just seemed like that was the thing to do at the time.

DC: Did you have any relatives working there?

DH: No. No.

DC: It sounds like—where were you living at the time?

DH: In the meantime I left my sister's and I went to live with my oldest brother. And he lived over by GM Truck. That's probably why I went there.

DC: OK. All right. So you're living with your oldest brother, and you said you had a hard time getting up in the morning.

DH: Yeah.

DC: Yeah.

DH: I was trying to burn the candle at both ends.

End of Tape I, Side A

Begin Tape I, Side B

DC: Doing what? Just . . .

DH: Just running around, you know. I was hanging out with the guys. That's all.

DC: Yeah. So when you couldn't get up in the morning, it was just because you stayed up too late at night.

DH: Because I stayed up too late, yeah. As a kid, you need that rest, you know. I know that today. I didn't realize that then.

DC: Yeah. So you lost that first . . .

DH: Yeah, I lost that first job. And I was out of work. I would do whatever I could pick up, a buck here and there, or a quarter. It didn't take that much money back then, you know.

DC: Was your brother working at that point?

DH: Oh yeah, yeah.

DC: Where was he working?

DH: He was working at Grand Trunk.

DC: Grand—oh yeah, the railroad. That's right, you told me that. Yeah.

DH: The railroad. Yeah.

DC: Yeah. And what was his job on the railroad?

DH: He was a clerk.

DC: OK. So he wasn't out on the trains. He was . . .

DH: He worked in the yards, you know.

DC: Right, right, right.

DH: He was a shoe clerk. They called them shoe clerks, because he had to walk the track and write down the numbers of the cars, you know.

DC: Yeah, yeah. Get them distributed correctly.

DH: He worked there thirty-seven years. He was still working there when he died.

DC: Oh really. OK, he made a career of the Grand Trunk.

DH: The railroad.

DC: Yeah, OK, yeah. So anyway, you said you did some odd jobs, picked up a buck here, a buck there.

DH: Yeah, I'd pick up a buck here and a buck there, and I done that up until—well I hired in the railroad one time, but that there's another thing. I wound up down in Detroit, down on Jefferson Avenue.

DC: Working down there?

DH: Working down there. Well, again, I'd have to commute. I didn't have no car.

DC: How did you get there?

DH: Catch—I'd take the commuter train. See I could ride that commuter train, working for the company, and then when I'd get downtown at Jefferson Avenue, I worked in that—I couldn't tell you the name of that station. It was a big train station at the time. And that's where I worked, upstairs. Well that didn't last long because again, I couldn't get up in the morning, you know.

DC: Couldn't get there.

DH: Yeah, I couldn't get there, yeah. So from there, back in—I messed around here until April of '53. I'm going to have to come up probably that far, because that's when I hired into Pontiac.

DC: You were just about twenty years old then?

DH: Yeah I was. Yeah I was.

DC: So you hired into Pontiac Motors then?

DH: Then I hired into Pontiac Motor. And I stayed there—I used to get laid off every year. Every year I'd get laid off. I might work three months and get laid off for six. Or work three months and get laid off for *nine* months.

DC: Really. Long layoffs.

DH: Yeah, a long time. Of course I'm still single, you know. And I lived with my brother and my sister.

DC: What was your first job at Pontiac Motor?

DH: Oh, I worked in Retail Bay. My first job at Pontiac Motor when I went in there, because I had a hernia, and the doctor let me go to work anyhow, I worked in—328042 was my first badge number there.

DC: Three twenty-eight, oh, four, two.

DH: Yeah. So that was in the back of Plant 10, that was what they called Retail Bay.

DC: OK.

DH: And what we would do is get these cars ready—I think they were employees' cars, that were buying them, you know. An employee could buy a car, and then he'd take delivery on it at Pontiac Retail Store. We had to put the carpets, the front carpets in them, and hand-polish the car, you know, clean it up, and put the hubcaps on, and stuff like that. Get it ready, and they'd send it downtown to the Retail Store. But it was what they called Retail Bay.

DC: Retail Bay.

DH: Retail Bay. And there, I couldn't tell you how many people worked in there.

DC: Were they mostly younger people like you, or were there older people?

DH: The one's that's cleaning up the cars, yeah, most of them were, you know, pretty close to my age. So I only done that for two months and—two months—I'll say two months and three weeks. And see, I was in Naval Reserves.

DC: Oh. OK, we've got to sneak up on that.

DH: Joined the Naval Reserves in 1950. April the 17th, 1950

DC: And what did that involve? What did you have to do?

DH: I had to go to the reserve meeting once a week.

DC: Were you ever on active duty? Did you ever have to go to camp or anything?

DH: No, no, no.

DC: Why did you join the Reserves?

DH: It was the thing to do, because the Korean War had started someplace along in there, and I joined the Naval Reserves, and I'd have to go on a cruise once a year. Well the way then it worked out, I—my first cruise would have been in '53—I can't say that was the first one. That was the first one I can remember. So I hired in to there April, May, June—in July [pause] . . .

DC: Of '53?

DH: . . . '53, I remember, I went on a cruise for the reserves.

DC: Where did you cruise?

DH: We would go to—that year I went to Great Lakes, Illinois. And I stayed there for basic training, because Charlie Curry was in the service. He was done there. And we were buddies, you know. But he was over on Main side, and I'm over on this Camp Moffatt [sp?], and he come over and see me.

DC: Was it coincidence that you were both in the same general area?

DH: Yeah, yeah, that's just coincidence. But anyhow, if you check the records, back in '53, there was a big steel strike, and I'm on this cruise for two weeks. The company had to let me go, and they had to make up—they had to pay me the difference between what Uncle Sam paid me and what I would have normally made. And they had this big steel strike, which was going on before I went on this cruise. Now I hadn't acquired seniority yet. I didn't have ninety days in. Now I go on this cruise, I had to leave on a Sunday. Well come Monday or Tuesday of the next week, when I left, they had a layoff over her—anybody that didn't have ninety days got laid off. I didn't get laid off because I'm on this cruise for the government.

DC: That gave you protection, huh?

DH: Right. Now I acquired seniority while I'm gone. I had ninety days by the time I got back—had over, ninety-two or ninety-three days by the time I get back, so then they don't lay me off. But they transferred me from Retail Bay up to the Body Line in Plant 8.

DC: OK, and what was that like?

DH: Well, what I was doing then, at the time we only run one shift a day, and they run twenty-six cars an hour, eight hours a day, five days a week. And my job was to install the radio on the '53 Pontiac.

DC: And what was that like?

DH: Uh, that was hard. Aw man, there was a lot of work on that. I had to put that radio on there complete. The radio, hell, that radio would be like that [makes gesture as to size], you know. Put it in there, and reach up and hold it, and get them nuts and starting to tighten them up, and then put a bolt on the back, and put these felt washer and a metal wave washer on, and put the [tone?] and the knobs on the back, and then put the knobs on the front, and then go down underneath the dash again and run that wire. It had to be run a certain way, and go to the fuse block. And back then they were screwed in.

DC: Oh, OK. Not plugged, but screwed in.

DH: Yeah, they weren't plugged in. You had two of them to put in there. And I had to put this rubber bellows in around, for the gas tank, or the gas pedal.

DC: What was that?

DH: Rubber bellows.

DC: Oh bellows [appears to say bells].

DH: You know, that the rod went through for the gas pedal.

DC: Right.

DH: And they had to put that in on the floor pan, and get it started inside, and then I'd have to go outside and finish putting that in. And then I had to put one or two fuses in. And I had to put a seven and a half amp fuse in on the outside because the fuse block was on the outside of them cars. On the firewall. And man, that was a lot of work. Boy, I was on the steady run.

DC: Did you have to do all twenty-six cars per hour?

DH: Well, no, no. Every car didn't take a radio.

DC: Oh, OK.

DH: That's why there was so much work. You know, I might be doing, probably twenty-six cars an hour, I'd say fifteen of them took radios anyhow, maybe a little more. Some hours more, some hours less.

DC: But were you the only one . . .

DH: I was the only one doing it, yeah.

DC: OK, so if there were fifteen an hour, you were doing all . . .

DH: I was doing all fifteen, yeah. And you know, sometime it would get so overwhelming I couldn't keep up. In fact, I had, back in '53, we wildcatted up there one time.

DC: What was that about?

DH: They had these time study guys—the company had time-study men come, and they would time-study people on various jobs. But they would hide to do it. We knew what they were doing, but we didn't know who they were really time-studying. And we kept complaining about it, because the only time that counted was when you were actually doing the operation. If you had to stop to go out and get a screwdriver, that time didn't count. That wasn't in on the time study. When you got the screwdriver back in there and you started turning it, that time counted. So as workers we got upset, so a bunch of us, we decided we're going to wildcat. You know, we couldn't beat them, so we wildcatted. We walked out, and I remember I was the furthest guy to the time clock. Of course I'm single, and I had about, close to a year's seniority probably. I can't remember what time of the year it was. But Stan Savage was the General Foreman, and he stopped me and he said—I had my time card in my hand, and he grabbed that out of my hand. He wouldn't let me punch out. But there were so many of them, he couldn't take it from everybody. They'd start punching. Some of them just walked out. But we walked out of Pontiac Motor and we walked across the street to the Union Hall, and Charlie Curry, Sr. was the President of the Local. And he looked and he seen this whole group of people. He knew something was wrong. He didn't know what it was, but oh man, he told us, "You're wrong. You people got to get back in that plant. There going to fire every one of yous." Well at that time I could have cared less, you know. Regardless, what happened, he finally, we had a meeting in the Union Hall, and about thirty minutes into this meeting, everybody listened to the President of the Local. We went back to work. Well, of course the powers that be at the plant, they got everybody's name that had walked out, and they had whatever, however they worked it out at the time, they discovered there, they come to the conclusion that anybody that participated is going to be penalized three days. Well in the meantime—going back to what I was telling you about the twenty-six an hour, one shift—things had picked up. Now they got two shifts on, but I still had enough time to stay on days. They had two shifts going, and they're hiring anybody that come along. So how they did this, how they penalized everybody, this three days back then, they went alphabetically. Your name, all the "A"s today, we're going to give you three days off, and here's—take your badge. We'll give you this pass to get back in. When you come back in three days, we'll give you your badge back. It's your penalty. So they went alphabetically. Well when they got to the "H"s, and Stan and Frank [Kakel?]—he was my foreman, and Stan Savage was the General Foreman—they come to me and they said, "Don, we got to take your badge from you today, and we're going to give you this pass so

that you can come back to work in three days. That's your penalty." They'd get three people—every three people they'd give three new people three days off. I said to them, "Aw heck, here. You can have my badge, and you can keep that pass. I don't even want that pass," I said. "You're not going to penalize me. I quit." At the end of the shift, I quit. So I went in and checked out with the tool department, everything I had to do. Turned in whatever tools I had. Oh, they tried to keep me there. They didn't want me to quit. So back then, we were only working eight hours a day, but they had two shifts see. So we'd get off—we started at 6:00, and we must have get off at 2:30. So when it come time, we got off work. I punched out, and I went downstairs, went outside, went right up to the employment office. "You're hiring?" "Yes sir, yeah, sure we're hiring." "Yeah, I'd like to get me a job." "OK." Signed right back in. Next morning I go back to work, same place, ten cents an hour less.

DC: [Chuckles] All right.

DH: That actually happened.

DC: I can't believe that. That's amazing.

DH: Believe it! That's true.

DC: I do believe it. I'm just saying . . .

DH: So what else do you want to know, Dan?

DC: Oh no, there's plenty. First of all, with the wildcat, did you ever consider just talking to your committeeman at that point?

DH: Why I'm sure we did. I can't say that I did, because that was a long time ago. Hell it's fifty years ago.

DC: Yeah, yeah.

DH: But I know some of the older guys did. I would—at my young, tender age, you know, I'm just—somebody's egging me on: "Let's walk out. Let's walk out." And hell, I was easily persuaded back then.

DC: Sure. What about some of the older guys?

DH: Oh I'm sure they talked, they talked to the union people, but they weren't getting satisfaction, you know.

DC: Had many of those guys been working before the union came in, do you know?

DH: Oh, yeah, hell yeah, I know they were.

DC: And what did they say about . . .

DH: Well, they loved the union. Yeah, oh yeah, yeah. They loved the union.

DC: What did they have to say about working before the union.

DH: I can't remember.

DC: OK.

DH: I didn't talk to them that much. I talked to Mr. Curry, because we were neighbors, you know. But I remember some of the stories, you know. Hell, if you didn't go out to the boss's house and work on his yard, or something like that, you maybe'd not have a job come Monday, you know.

DC: Yeah, yeah.

DH: But that didn't—when I hired in over there, we already, we had the union.

DC: Right, right. Um, you know, you grew up next to the Currys and all, but did you have any idea what the union was about when you first hired in?

DH: Oh yeah, yeah. The day I hired in—April the 26th in '53, when I hired into Pontiac Motor, I worked that day, and when I put in eight hours, you know, when I got out of work that afternoon at 2:30, I went right across the street to the union hall and I joined the union. Now I didn't have to join until ninety days. And at that time they had a closed shop; they had just gotten it. And that's when they had check-off, about that time, check-off union days. But I went over because I believed in that union. I signed up on my own.

DC: Where did that idea come from, that you believed in the union?

DH: Oh you did—in talking with Mr. Curry and these big shooters, you know, the Vice President. I marveled at them guys, the memory they had for remembering the contract—Paragraph 63B was this and this and this, and they could recite that thing word for word. And I just knew that things were better, if you belonged to that union than they were without the union. I knew that. I learned that just as a kid, listening.

DC: Just listening to them, OK. How were you able to get up for work then? You had a lot of troubles earlier.

DH: Oh yeah, well I still had trouble, but I managed to keep my job.

DC: Yeah. Were you still burning the candle at both ends?

DH: Yeah, probably, yeah.

DC: OK, yeah. When you hired back in at ten cents an hour less, OK, apparently that didn't bother you.

DH: No, that didn't bother me, because in ninety days—well, thirty days I got a nickel, and sixty days I got another nickel, so I'm back up there.

DC: What was your job when you hired back in?

DH: Same thing.

DC: Same job.

DH: Putting on—same job, yeah.

DC: That's hilarious, yeah. How long did you do that job.

DH: Oh, until I got laid off, that'd be sometime during the summertime.

DC: In '54?

DH: Yeah, it had to have been in '54, and then . . .

DC: How long was that layoff? Do you have any idea?

DH: No.

DC: I know it was a long time ago, but you said that there were some that were several months long.

DH: Some of them were six, eight months, yeah.

DC: Yeah, that's a long time.

DH: Yeah.

DC: OK. What did you do when you got laid off?

DH: Drew unemployment—$26 a week.

DC: They had unemployment in '54?

DH: Oh yeah.

DC: OK. All right. Did you find any other jobs in the meantime?

DH: Oh, back—I can't remember in '54. I know in '55 I did. I found—got me a job.

DC: What did you do then?

DH: I was helping an insurance guy, you know, insurance repair, windstorm damage. Earl Klein [sp?], Earl Klein. He had Earl Klein's insurance repairs. He'd go out, we'd have us, there'd be a storm that'd blow off shingles. I'd go out and get on a roof and nail shingles on, replace them.

DC: OK, you did the actual repair work.

DH: Yeah, right. He done fire insurance. I remember we worked on a place down on Fishers Street down in Pontiac that had had a fire in the house. You had to go in there, and he had carpenters go in and replace the walls and the wallboard. And I'd go in and I'd paint.

DC: OK. How did you get that job, anyway?

DH: Through one of the guys I met in the shop. He was working for him. He had—he was dating the guy's daughter is what it was. They finally—they're married today.

DC: OK, so that helped you pick up the slack during the layoff.

DH: Oh yeah, yeah, yeah. He—I got a buck an hour. A dollar an hour.

DC: How did that compare to what you were getting at Pontiac Motor.

DH: Well I was getting a dollar, probably at that time I was getting about a buck forty-five, maybe a buck fifty and hour at the plant, maybe a buck fifty-three or something.

DC: So it was significantly less.

DH: Yeah, oh yeah. But he's paying me cash money, see. That way I could draw my unemployment. Because that went on until '56. I got married, and I had to have that extra income, because in the meantime, you know, you get married, you move away from—I moved from my sister's or brother's, and got me a house, you know, I got me an apartment for me and my wife.

DC: So you lived in an apartment to start with?

DH: Yeah, we lived in an apartment.

DC: So were you working at Pontiac Motor and for Mr. Klein at the same time?

DH: No not really. I was working for Pontiac Motor but I'm laid off.

DC: Yeah, right, right, yeah.

DH: So I worked for Earl Klein, but I'm working part-time. If he didn't have anything, I didn't make anything. And if I would put in eight hours, I got eight dollars. If I put in three and a half hours, I got three fifty. Eventually he did give me a quarter raise. Got me up to a buck and a quarter an hour, but probably by then I was making a buck sixty-five at Pontiac, if I could work.

DC: Right, right. So um, did you always come back to the same radio installation job when you got called back?

DH: Oh no, no, no, no, no, no. Someplace in '55 or '56, when I went back to work at one time, the Superintendent, he was there. A bunch of people had hired in, and we all go to this one time clock. Everybody's got a time card—you go to this time clock. And there'd be five or six foremens [sic] there. And they would say—the one foreman seen me, and he knew, I'd worked there. He had known my work ethics. I was a good worker when I was there. I might be late, or I may miss a day, but when I'm there, I was putting out, you know. And if he liked me: "Hey Don! I want you. I want you to come on back here. I want you. I got a job for you, Don." Well this Superintendent, one day, I'm in that line, and he said, he come up and he said, "Hey, any of you people got any experience at repairs on cars?" I said, "I do." You know, "What did you do?" I go, "I can change my own tires if I have a flat. I put in . . . " "I want you." Well Gene Coethe [sp?], my foreman, boy, he didn't want me to say anything. He wanted me, you know. But anyhow, I went with the Superintendent, because I knew it was a better job. It wasn't on production, but it was in Plant 8. It's the end of the line. You know, you go along and you look at this thing: "Align the left front door," or "Repair the right rear door handle," or "Fit the grille on the left front corner," whatever.

DC: Would these be repairs at the final stage?

DH: Final, final repair, yeah.

DC: Someone else would inspect, find something . . .

DH: They had inspectors, and then we had repairmen, which I was that. And another thing, hell, I'm working seven days a week. One week there, thirteen and a half hours a day, five days a week, twelve hours on Saturday and ten hours on Sunday.

DC: Did you like that overtime?

DH: Oh I loved that overtime. Why hell, yes! So that's how I got into, I got into repairing cars. You know I got to learn something, you know. And it paid ten cents an hour more than the assembly line. And back at that time I'd do every fifth car, repair every fifth car that come down that line. That was my job. If I couldn't get it all done in this length of time, then the driver would drive it around and put it back in the line again. And I might get the same car; somebody else might get it, you know.

DC: But it was less pressure, it sounds like, than . . .

DH: Oh yeah, less pressure, easier you know.

DC: More variation too.

DH: Right. So anyhow, I got laid off in—let me see. Let me think here. I got laid off February the 28th, in fifty, '57. Yeah, 1957. [long pause] I went down to the Retail Store, and that was on Friday. It was my last day at work. I went down to the Retail Store March the 1st—let me stop. Let me—I got to get my dates straight here.

DC: Sure, take your time. It's amazing you have that much recall.

DH: All right, I got laid off March the 31st, March 31st, '57. April 1st I was down at Pontiac Retail Store [pause] to see Charlie. I wanted to find out something—Charlie Curry, and we were talking. I said, "I got laid off last night." "How long you going to be laid off?" "Hell, I don't know. Things are bad out there." We were in a recession, as I recall. Or we had—we had one coming. Anyhow, I get laid off, so I see him April the 1st, and he says to me, "You ought to go up and see Ed [Rossman?]. He said, "I think he's going to hire somebody, because Ralph [Valair?] quit." So I went up and I seen Ed, and I said, "Hey Mr. Rossman, I understand you're going to hire somebody to take Ralph's place." He said, "Well I'm thinking about it but I haven't made up my mind." That's all I needed. I was there every day that that place was open, from then on. Every day. Every morning I'd be in there, when Charlie went to work at 7:30 . . .

DC: Every day working, or every day asking?

DH: I was there every day asking. I wanted that job. That was a good job. And I wanted that job. So I went there every day. And I knew enough—I knew how to work on cars by then. I'd be in there and I'd help Charlie, or I'd help Bob Bush. Whoever needed some help, I'd help them, at work, you know. Today a guy couldn't do that. Because you can't get in the back end of a dealership. But I [??], so anyhow, every day I went up and asked Rossman, "Have you made up your mind? Are you going to hire anybody?" Well you know, a guy's only going to take so much of that, and he's either going to say, "No, don't ask me no more," or "Get the hell out of here." But he didn't. He never got upset. And finally he said to me—it got into May—we got into May and I would say, probably pretty close to May the 1st, something like that, he says to me, "Well, this is Tuesday," he said. "If you want to come in the rest of the week," he said, "and you call in, get a job, and you do that job," he said, "I won't pay you anything. I won't put you on the payroll until next Monday." But this was Tuesday. So he said, "If you want to come in," he said, "I'll put you on the payroll Monday, and we'll start there." I said, "OK." So I hired in May the 6th in '57 at Pontiac Retail Store. Now I'm laid off from Pontiac Motor. Hire in—this is another GM facility, belonged to [Local] 653 Union. Well when you're laid off from one GM facility, and you hire into another, it only takes you thirty days to acquire seniority. OK? Instead of ninety.

DC: Do you lose your department seniority?

DH: No, no, no, no. No I had that.

DC: OK.

DH: So go to—I hired in there May the 6th of '57, so May the 30th, you know, was a holiday. OK?

DC: Yeah.

DH: Yeah. Now if you're laid off from a GM facility, and you hire into another GM facility, you're entitled to holiday pay. Even though you don't have seniority.

DC: OK.

DH: So May the 30th, I didn't have seniority, but I casually mentioned to Ed Rossman, the service manager, that, I said, "You know, I should be paid for this holiday." "No, no, no, no, you don't get paid. You're not seniority yet." "OK." See I don't argue with him. Uh, I'm trying to think. In the meantime, Mr. Curry had lost the presidency here to Charlie Beach, but he's staying at the hall to break Beach in. I keep working. I pass May the 30th, and we come up June, and July the 4th is another holiday. At that time I don't have ninety days in at the Retail Store, but I'm over thirty. Now I'm legally represented by the UAW. I knew this. Their management didn't know. So I—I said—I went to [??] service manager, and I said, "I want pay for May the 30th." He said, "I don't have to pay you." So I write a grievance. Now we come to July the 4th, and he wouldn't pay me for that either. So now he's gonna—I know for a fact that he would like to at that point have got rid of me. Now he can't get rid of me because I'm a seniority employee. Now legally the UAW represents me. He didn't have no leg to stand on. He was wrong, definitely. He was wrong. But he was ignorant of the contract. That was a small outfit, a small splinter group deal, and they didn't, they didn't have labor problems there. And the only thing that management, upper management here finally wound up telling him—and they paid me. They did pay me, because Beach had to go and battle for me then. But they said, "Just don't hire anybody that comes out of this home plant up here, because they're sharper than what you are. They know that agreement. You don't know it. So they wound up—they paid me.

DC: Did that affect your working relationship with him?

DH: No. Uh uh. He forgot it eventually. No, I was a good worker.

DC: Was that—before then, you mentioned that wildcat strike in '53. Did you have any other need to use the union between that wildcat and, you know, your grievance at the Retail Store?

DH: Uh, yeah, yeah, I sure did one time.

DC: What was that?

DH: Back, uh, in '56, I was working down in Final Repair, and they had a cutback. They laid some new hires off on the assembly line. Well they had to bring people from these other jobs, because they cut production—bring people from these other jobs, repair, and put them back on the assembly line where they came from. Well hell, you don't want to go from a "cush" job to working your ass off. And what they did, they put me back on the assembly line, out of line of seniority. I knew a guy had less time than what I had.

DC: Who was doing Final Repair?

DH: Yep.

DC: Yeah.

DH: So, but Shorty Moore was the foreman, and him and the committee—oop, there's somebody here. [interruption at the door] But anyhow—let me see, where was I?

DC: You were talking about how Shorty Moore . . .

DH: Oh yeah. Shorty Moore, he—him and the committeeman were in cahoots, see? They had a friend that they wanted—they were protecting that friend. And they put me back on the assembly line.

DC: So they knew what they were doing?

DH: Oh they knew what they were doing. They did. Out of line of seniority. But hell, I wasn't born at night, you know. But I knew this, so when I—I couldn't do nothing about it down there. I couldn't—that committeeman I had at that end wasn't looking out for me. He was looking out for his friend. So I get up to the other end, I get on the assembly line—the next day I get on the assembly line—now I get a new committeeman. I'm in a different district. So I put in a call for this committeeman, and it happened to be Johnny May. John B. May, who eventually went on to be President of the Local, this Local. And I told John what had happened, and John said, "Well let me check on that." So he goes and checks on that, and a half hour or so later he come back, "By God, you're right." He said, "I'll have to get into this a little further, Don," he said, "but I'll take care of you." He said, "I don't give a damn who it is. They're not transferring somebody out of line of seniority." So he done some checking, and an hour or so later he come back, he said, "Don," he said, "I'm going to ask you to do me a favor." I said, "What's that?" And he said, "We're working eight hours here on this assembly line." He said, "Back there in Back End they're working ten." He said, "If you—will you work—will you finish this shift up?" We've got five hours, something like that. He said, "You know, you can do the job." He said, "We've got, what five hours to go," he said, "will you stay here and do this?" He said, "When the line shuts down at one o'clock or two o'clock this afternoon, then you go back to your job down in Final Repair." And he said, "Whatever overtime they're working, you do that, and then tomorrow when you come in, you go

back to Final Repair and the other guy will come up here." So yeah, I used the Union then.

DC: So that worked out as well then?

DH: Oh yeah, that worked out. It was good.

DC: Yeah, yeah. Well it's interesting that the one committeeman was not your friend.

DH: Yeah, yeah. Well I didn't know him, you know. I was just a young kid.

DC: I meant he wasn't looking out for the contract.

DH: Right, right.

DC: He was looking out for his buddy.

DH: He was looking out for *his* friend.

DC: Yeah, yeah. You said you got married in 1956.

DH: Six, yeah.

DC: Where did you meet your wife?

DH: Running up and down Woodward Avenue on Saturday night.

DC: Yeah?

DH: Yeah.

DC: And what was she doing at the time?

DH: Running up and down there, her and her girlfriends.

DC: Yeah.

DH: Yeah, she was from Clawson, and she was—there was three or four gals in this car. And back then, that was the thing, you know, cruising! Go from Ted's to the Totem Pole, from the Totem Pole to Ted's.

DC: Just back and forth, huh?

DH: That's it, yeah. It's what they're going to do this weekend.

DC: That's right. That's coming up. Are you gonna do it?

DH: No.

DC: [laughs] So, how did that go? You met her on the cruise, or as you were cruising along.

DH: Yeah, yeah. I met her girlfriend. I started dating her girlfriend. And I dated her, Marilyn, for, I don't know how long. Anyhow, I had met Pat, and I liked Pat. So I broke up with Marilyn, started dating Pat.

DC: What was Pat doing at the time?

DH: She was—she was already out of high school, and she was secretary to Sherman McDonald. He was an attorney downtown in Royal Oak, in the Washington Building, on Washington Street. And she was a private secretary to him.

DC: OK. How long did you know her before you got married?

DH: Six, eight months. Maybe, could have been a year. I doubt if it was. Met her folks—well her Dad, her Dad was very sick. He died before her and I got married.

DC: Really, OK.

DH: He had cancer.

DC: And so you got married, and then you said you moved into your own apartment.

DH: Yep. We rented an apartment over on Paddock Street, in town.

DC: OK. Did she stay at work for Sherman McDonald, the lawyer?

DH: No, because she—that was in Royal Oak, see. She quit. Yeah, she quit.

DC: Then what did she do at that point?

DH: Well, she started to hire in to—later on, we was married maybe a month and she tried to hire in over at GM Truck, and found out that she was already pregnant.

DC: Oh, OK.

DH: They, they wouldn't let her go to work. And she had quit Mr. McDonald. And I got laid off. I was still laid off. I would draw $26 a week.

DC: So you were laid off when you got married?

DH: Yeah. I got laid off a week or so before we got married.

DC: Did that concern you?

DH: Oh yeah! Sure, hell yes it did. Again, I went back to work for Mr. Klein, get a buck and a quarter an hour, and draw unemployment. He paid me under the table.

DC: So anyways, your child was born . . .

DH: August. The baby was born in August.

DC: OK.

DH: And . . .

DC: Was it a boy or a girl?

DH: Boy.

DC: OK.

DH: Yeah, Don, Jr.

DC: Don, Jr.

DH: We changed from that apartment to an apartment in a private home over in Mariva Street.

DC: Mariva?

DH: Mariva. [just east of downtown Pontiac]

DC: OK. All right. And how was that neighborhood?

DH: It was a nice, nice neighborhood. We had a nice landlord there. We lived upstairs in the house, and that landlord and his wife lived down. Got along good with them.

DC: Did Pat stay home with Don, Jr. then?

DH: Yeah, she stayed home with the baby.

DC: Yeah, yeah. And then, um—I don't know if that was this door or not. [checks door]

DH: I don't know. Let me check the back door. Home with the baby, and then I worked, made the money.

DC: OK, so there was that big recession, like you say, it was starting in '57. How long was that layoff for you? You went down to the Retail Store . . .

DH: Yeah, I went down to the Retail Store in May of '57.

DC: And did you work all the way through there?

DH: Yeah, well, let me see. I got laid off, that layoff started March the 31st. I hired into the Retail Store May the—five six five seven. May the 6th, '57. And I get called back to Pontiac Motor Division in November.

DC: OK.

DH: In '57. Now not knowing what is going to happen, because I had four or five years of seniority at the plant, and I had from May until November at Pontiac Retail store—I can see this recession coming. A whole lot of people could. '58 was a terrible year. So what happened was, I tell Charlie Curry, you know, "Call me back to the plant. I gotta go back there." I said, "If I don't do nothing but go back and quit." I said, "You know, I don't know what's going to happen here, whether I should quit up there and stay here, or leave here and go back to the plant." "Hes," he says, "I don't know what." [???] bullshit. [pause] I worked from 7:30 in the morning at the Retail Store—we'd get off at 5:00—the starting time over here, when they called me back to work was 5:18.

DC: Second shift?

DH: Second shift, yep. So I said, "The hell with this. I'm not going to quit either place. I'm gonna . . . " Because I don't know what's gonna happen. I don't know which one I want yet. So I, I go, I went over there and I hired in. I'm working both places.

DC: How did you do that?

DH: It was tough. I hired in in May—or November. And I'd have to be here at 5:18. Now they're working ten hours a day, ten hours a night. I'm working eight and a half hours at the Retail Store. So I start doing it. I worked five and a half days a week at Pontiac Retail Store, and I'm working six days a week at the plant. And I lived in Clawson.

DC: You lived in Clawson?

DH: I lived in Clawson, at 14 and Main.

DC: So you moved out of Pontiac and moved to Clawson?

DH: Yeah, yeah. Well we were living with my mother-in-law.

DC: Oh. Why was that? Why did you move?

DH: Well my sister-in-law and brother-in-law had moved out, my mother-in-law was alone—my brother-in-law lived there, but he's single, and he was gone all the time. He worked,

but he was gone all the time. So we moved in with my mother-in-law—twenty bucks a week for three of us. What the hell. I couldn't afford not to, you know?

DC: OK, yeah. Even though it's further from your work.

DH: Right.

DC: Yeah.

DH: So—well she *asked* us to move in.

DC: OK.

DH: My mother-in-law did. So anyhow, I worked—I done both of them jobs for two weeks, and then oh, my ass was getting wore out.

DC: Did you ever go home?

DH: Yeah, went home every night!

DC: For about three hours or so.

DH: Yeah, well, what the hell, it's the clock. I'd go in at 5:00, and I was working ten hours. Yeah, I'd get off about 3:00 or 3:30.

DC: Be back at work at 7:30.

DH: Be back to work at 7:30 at the Retail Store, sure would. And then Saturday, I'd only work a half a day Saturday, at the Retail Store. Got home on Saturday, and go right to bed. Get up at, like 4:00, get dressed, so I could be at work at the plant at 5:18, and work ten hours. Get off—now I didn't work *Sunday*. Hell I'd sleep Sunday. I done that—I only done that two weeks. But then it wore me out, you know.

DC: I can imagine. So what did you decide at the end of the two weeks?

DH: So at the end of the two weeks I told my foreman—Bill Roberts was the foreman. In the meantime I'd gotten him instead of Gene. And I told Bill, I said, "Bill," I said, "I have to give you notice here. I give you two weeks notice. I'm going to quit in two weeks." And I told him what was going on. He said, "You know," he said, "You look like you're tired." And he said, "I wondered what happened." He said, "You know," he said, "I didn't know you were working both jobs."

DC: Were you even allowed to do that? You're allowed to work two jobs if . . .

DH: If you're allowed to or no, eventually it would have caught up to me. Eventually that caught up to me. But I done it, regardless. Finally he said to me, "Don," he said, "you

know you've been a good worker." He said, "I hate to lose you. But," he says, "I think you're making the right choice," he said, "by going to that Retail Store." He said, "Because chances are," he said, "there's no—no, you're not going to get no chance for advancement or make any big money." He said, "Down there, you probably can." He said, "You've been a good worker." He said, "If you ever need a job," he said, "come to me." He said, "I'll see that—if I can help you, I damn sure will." And he said, "I'll put in, put in a good word that you give me plenty of notice." Which he did, you know. So I left. I quit the plant, and I stayed at the Retail Store.

DC: OK, yeah. That was a big decision.

DH: Oh yeah. Oh sure that was. But it was—it turned out to be a good decision, you know. Hell, we were making more money down there, twice as much as the highest-paid skilled tradesman was up here.

DC: Really?

DH: Sure, hell yes. We worked on commission. Well as an example, in 19—when the retail store closed, January One of '75, for the year of '74, 1974, and that's a long time ago, I made $42,000.

DC: That's a lot of money.

DH: That was a lot of money. Today it's not a lot of money.

End of Tape I, Side B

Begin Tape II, Side A

DH: . . . Fleetwood on the assembly line, at four dollars and thirty cents an hour or something like that—I'm guessing at that figure. It's four something. So if you figure, if you multiply four dollars and something an hour by—four eights is thirty-two—three hundred twenty bucks a week times, you know, fifty-two weeks, how much would that be? That was in '74, '75's wages, and I don't know—I've never, I've not really taken the time to figure it, but I'm going to . . .

DC: Is it $16,000, $17,000 dollars or something like that?

DH: Pardon?

DC: Is it sixteen, seventeen thousand dollars, something like that?

DH: I made three—let's just say I made five dollars an hour—five eights, that's forty—that's four hundred dollars [sic] a week. It wasn't that much, times fifty.

DC: So twenty thousand there.

DH: All right. Now I made forty two [thousand dollars] in ’74, so that was the difference, you know.

DC: Yeah, a big cut.

DH: Yeah.

DC: So was employment steadier at the Retail Store?

DH: Oh yeah, yeah, yeah. I never got laid off down there. Never. I was never laid off until they closed, from ’57 to ’75, never got laid off.

DC: Well that’s huge. That’s a big difference.

DH: Oh yeah. Absolutely, yeah. And they had many, many layoffs up here. I’ve got friends today that in ’58, when they got laid off, they lost—they was laid off so damn long that they lost credit to service.

DC: OK.

DH: Yeah.

DC: Yeah, uh, do any of these people come to the retiree luncheons? Or are they . . .

DH: Oh yeah, yeah. There’s people that come.

DC: I need to talk to some more of these people. I’ve talked to some who had long layoffs.

DH: [??] Liz May [??] she lost time. The president’s wife, you know, she lost time back in ’58. Anybody that was working—anybody that was working in ’58 for Pontiac Motor, G.M. period, they got laid off. They were laid off long enough where they lost accredited service for that year, a portion of it anyhow.

DC: Yeah, yeah. That’s serious business.

DH: Yep.

DC: Yeah. So the Retail Store, what exactly was your job then at the Retail Store?

DH: I was trim repair.

DC: OK, and you said you were on commission?

DH: On a commission.

DC: How does that work? Or how did that work?

DH: With guaranteed wage—we were guaranteed like a hundred and two dollars a week, guaranteed. And it was a dealership owned by the corporation. You go buy a new car there, and if you bring it back for a repair, if you bring it back for a grease job or an oil change, we had guys that that's all they done. You bring it in and you had a rattle in the door, I would fix that rattle.

DC: OK.

DH: And there was a time, a designated time to take the trim pad off, and go inside and tighten up this nut or whatever was loose, and pick out something that was in there, remove it, put that trim back on. It's like you go get your car repaired today.

DC: Sure. Yeah, they have a set list for all these various services.

DH: Right. Yeah.

DC: And so you'd get, what, a percentage?

DH: Fifty percent.

DC: OK.

DH: I worked fifty percent.

DC: Fifty percent of whatever the set . . .

DH: Yep. Whatever the labor charge was, we got fifty percent.

DC: How many guys did they have doing trim repair?

DH: At the time, there were three of us. I was the third one.

DC: How did you divvy up the work?

DH: There was enough to go around. If we had eight customers come in, the first guy that called in in the morning, if you got there in the morning and at eight, seven-thirty we started work, you'd punch a button and you'd call in your number. My number was 57. Charlie Curry's number 15. Bob Bush was number 50. We was the three guys that done the trim. So Charlie would be there: "15, coming down." So maybe Bob Bush would be next: "50, coming down." "57, Don I haven't got anything right this minute. I'll put you up on the board." So you'd take the number 57 and hang it up there.

DC: So the next job that comes down . . .

DH: The next job that come in the front door, that was mine.

DC: All right.

DH: Now if Bob Bush got a job to replace a light bulb and Charlie got to replace a windshield, Bob's gonna be done before Chuck. Now Chuck got the first job, Bob got the second. My number's up there. So Bob, he would replace that bulb, and that was $2.70, say. He'd write up that ticket, punch a button: "50." "Well, I'll put you down. Hey Hester, here comes your job. You're in." Bob, move him up to the top, send me a job.

DC: So did that system work out OK?

DH: Oh yeah, yeah. They do that today at dealerships.

DC: So you all, you thought the distribution of work was reasonable.

DH: The distribution of work was fair, you know. Normally speaking, you get that guy in the tower, if you got him pissed at you, he knew the jobs. He knew what was a good job and what was a bad job. Like a windshield, you know. A windshield, we considered them gravy. Back in '58, there was windshield glasses that would take five and a half hours to replace. Hell, I could replace one of them in forty-five minutes.

DC: But get paid for the . . .

DH: But get paid five point five, you know. Back then we used to, if things were a little slow, we'd have to replace shocks. Well, to replace a shock paid a half hour, was a buck and a quarter. And I'd only get half of that, to crawl around underneath that car and reach up there and get the two top bolts and get that one on the bottom. It was a pain in the neck, and dirty. So he could hustle them around. He could shuffle them orders sometimes and maybe if he got mad at me today, he'd give all the gravy to Charlie. And tomorrow, he might be mad at Charlie and give it all to Bush, you know. But for the most part, yeah it worked.

DC: Yeah. Were you still living in Clawson at that time?

DH: No, no, no. In the meantime, in '58 I bought a new home.

DC: Where was that?

DH: Out in Waterford?

DC: Hmm, OK.

DH: Yeah, Highland Estates.

DC: How did you like it out there?

DH: I liked it.

DC: Yeah.

DH: Yeah.

DC: Did you stay in touch with your brothers and sisters?

DH: Oh yeah, yeah, sure we stayed in touch. Today, I'm close to them, you know, just the three of us that's left.

DC: Yeah, yeah. And so . . .

DH: I had a sister that died, that one died in Texas. I went down there. I've been down to visit her a week before she died. And she died the next week, and I went back down for the funeral, and she's buried down there in Fort Sam Houston.

DC: When was that? When did she die?

DH: When?

DC: Yeah.

DH: '75.

DC: OK, so it was a while back.

DH: Yeah.

DC: Um, so, it sounds like you had pretty stable employment at the Retail Store.

DH: Oh yeah, very stable.

DC: Yeah, things improved there. What did your family—what did you all do for fun, you know, at that point, when you had your work and all . . .

DH: Me and my wife and kids, you mean?

DC: Yeah, yeah. How many kids did you have?

DH: Four.

DC: Four, OK. All right.

DH: One boy and three girls.

DC: OK, and what was the range? The first one was born shortly after you were married.

DH: ’76, and then we had a daughter ’78—er *’56, ’58*. Then we had another daughter in ’61.

DC: OK.

DH: And then another one in ‘64

DC: OK, so you’ve got four kids, and your job is steady, and you have your house out in Waterford. It sounds like things stabilized . . .

DH: Oh yeah.

DC: . . . a little bit for you there. Yeah, so what was family life like in the late ‘50s, and ‘60s?

DH: We had a good family life. We’d go on vacation every year.

DC: Where would you go?

DH: Oh, I went to Florida, went to [pause] St. Louis, Missouri one year.

DC: Was there a particular thing in St. Louis you wanted to see?

DH: Just to visit friends.

DC: Uh huh.

DH: Went to Madison, Wisconsin one year to visit friends. Go up north in the Upper Peninsula, just to, to be traveling, you know. ’58 we went up to Copper Harbor.

DC: Yeah. Was this . . .

DH: With the family.

DC: Was this—how much vacation time did you get?

DH: Well, most vacations I’d take a week. If I went to Florida one year, I know I took three weeks. One year I took two weeks.

DC: But you could take three weeks if you needed to?

DH: Yeah, uh huh. Because I had accumulated time, you know, from, from the plant as well as from the Retail Store.

DC: OK. Well I know folks who have worked in the plant have told me that they'd have model changeover, you know, so you had some time built in.

DH: Well, we didn't get that. We didn't get no model changeover. But they were lenient. If I wanted—say I was only entitled to two weeks' vacation, and I, I wanted to take three, I could, I could get three weeks. I would kind of go along with their plan, you know. They'd say, you know, "Geez Don, instead of taking it in August, can you take it the last two weeks of July? We can give you three weeks if you take the first week of August too," you know. So I'd—six of one half dozen—one hand wash the other.

DC: Yeah. You work with them, they'll work with you.

DH: Right, that's true. And it worked out that way. And I never wanted to go on vacation where I had to count my money, you know. I wanted to go—and if I [voice soft]—if my kids wanted a steak dinner, they had a steak. If Dad had a steak, they had a steak.

DC: OK. Did you have the means to do that then?

DH: Oh yeah! Sure. Yeah.

DC: All right. It sounds like that wouldn't have been the case in the mid-'50s.

DH: No it wouldn't have been. No, uh uh. Well, the kids—no babies would be eating a steak.

DC: Fair enough. But you know what I'm saying. You know, that—it sounds like financially it was a lot dicier . . .

DH: Oh yeah!

DC: . . . in the mid-'50s.

DH: I made big money at that Retail Store compared to—when I bought that brand-new home, I bought it brand-new, three bedroom brick home with a full basement and a corner lot, that house cost me $14,310, total, everything. Well, it worked out that the payment was going to be $94 a month, because I put a minimum down. The payment's going to be $94 a month for thirty months [did he mean years?]. So the boss of the finance company said, "Why don't we make it, instead of ninety-four, let's make it a hundred, and we'll make it an even hundred, and then that way, we won't have to raise your payment as we're going along. You put more money in this, which we did, and consequently, for six years I never had a house payment raise. I had neighbors that did, because theirs was ninety-four bucks. But, yeah, things were pretty stable.

DC: So um, let's see, do you have—what kind of car were you driving?

DH: Oh, let me see [pause]—a ’55 Pontiac, when I bought that house. Nice car. But I had to buy a refrigerator, I had to buy all the furniture for a new home. It’s lacking the bedroom outfit, and the—for my wife and I, and the crib for the baby. But by then, I had to buy a bedroom outfit for my son. And I had to buy everything for the living room. Had to buy everything for the kitchen—kitchen table and chairs. The stove and the oven were built in. I had to buy a refrigerator. My mother-in-law worked for J.L. Hudson’s at the time, and the refrigerator I wanted was a Cold Pantry. It was twenty-one cubic foot. I remember a lot of this stuff. And at the time, it was about eight hundred dollars.

DC: That’s expensive.

DH: Yeah, so they had—Frigidaire put them on sale for—if you were a GM employee, you could get them for just over five hundred. So my mother-in-law got a twenty percent discount, working at J.L. Hudson’s, on anything, whether it was on sale or not.

DC: OK, so twenty percent off of the five hundred.

DH: Right. So I sold the car that I had, that ’55 Pontiac. Now I had driven that car for twenty-three months, and I paid fourteen ninety-five for that car. And I drove it twenty-three months, but [??] the car looked like brand-new. I took care of it, and I worked in the dealership, and had it all dolled up, you know. And I sold that car for fourteen hundred and fifty dollars.

DC: Hmm, that’s good.

DH: Yeah, I got my money back.

DC: You sure did.

DH: And I give the salesman a hundred bucks, so I got thirteen fifty. And I went to the used-car manager and he sold me a ’53 Olds, four-door, that was like new, and I paid, I think I paid $600 for that car. So I took this other money that I got out of the ’55, and I give it to my mother-in-law and I said, “Now, I’m going to pay for that refrigerator, but I don’t want to pay it off, in the event that something goes wrong with it.” If I owed them some money for ninety days, ninety days same as cash, from the time they move it in, that’s when my warranty starts, ninety days. If we pay if off, a third this time, and a third next time, then pay the rest of it off, you know. She says, “Good thinking.” So it wound up costing me four hundred and some dollars for that refrig. And I paid for that. And I went to Lewis Furniture, and I bought a kitchen outfit, and a complete living-room outfit, and a bedroom outfit for our son. And I bought that while they were building this new house, because it took them six months to build the house. And I laid all that stuff away, and I paid on it every week. Every week I paid on it, till I moved into the house. Then it was paid for.

DC: So when you moved in . . .

DH: When I moved in, all I owed was a house payment. I didn't owe no car payment. I owed a house payment of a hundred bucks a month, and we got to buy groceries. But hell, I'm making, at the time I was making a hundred and eight-five bucks a week. That was big money. '58 that was big money.

DC: Sure. Was this a new neighborhood?

DH: Brand new. Yeah, everybody, everybody moving in there has got the same thing, you know.

DC: Were other people there working at Pontiac Motor, or the Retail Store?

DH: Yeah, the guy right in back of me, he was an engineer for Pontiac. And the people across the street, the one in back of them, they both worked for Ford Motor.

DC: For Ford, OK.

DH: And the man on the left side of me, because I was on the corner, the man on the left side of me, one of them was a welder. He worked for Genesee Welding. They guy next to him, Al Beauchamp [sp?], he was a designer, you know, drafting. And the guy next to him, Jack Teets [sp?], he had just started his own tool and die place. He went bankrupt. And Jim [Curd?], the guy next to Jack Teets, he worked for Pontiac Millworks. They made cabinets and fine wood doors, and moldings and whatnot. The guy down further, he owned [K__?] Mirror and Glass. The man on the right-hand side of me, left-hand as you'd be facing the house, his folks owned [Burt's?] Cleaners. He was a route man for them.

DC: Were most of these businesses in Pontiac then? Or, the businesses that these people were working for?

DH: No, no. Jack Teets, his place was over in Sterling Heights someplace.

DC: OK, oh really, way over there.

DH: And now the two guys that worked for Ford across from me, they were both in Sterling Heights down at 17[-Mile Road] and Mound, at the Gear and Axle plant. Bill Webb, his place was here in Pontiac, Genesee Welding. And of course, Lou Burmeister [??] in back of me, he worked for Pontiac. He was an engineer.

DC: Yeah, it's still quite a hike out to Sterling Heights for some of these folks.

DH: Pardon.

DC: It's still quite a hike out to Sterling Heights . . .

DH: Oh yeah, yeah, yeah.

DC: Did you get involved in all with local union affairs?

DH: Oh yeah, hell yes. All the time I was at the Retail Store.

DC: When did your involvement start, really?

DH: When?

DC: Yeah.

DH: Well my involvement with the union started before I ever worked at Pontiac Motor.

DC: How so.

DH: Well, when Mr. Curry, back in . . .

DC: Sure.

DH: . . . '47 . . .

DC: Well we talked about the several times when you needed, you know, the committeeman or to bypass the bad guy, or whatever, but, but did you get involved any more, yourself, as a committeeman, or anything like that?

DH: No, not in the plant here, no. But what I did back when I was in high school, in junior high, when Mr. Curry would have us over there as kids, handing out, handbillling the plant when these guys were coming to, coming out of work.

DC: You would be handbilling?

DH: Handbilling. I was 14, 15 years old. Me and Charlie and Jerry, we'd handbill the guys coming out, or go around and put stuff under their windshield wipers. And then, I didn't get involved, election-wise, or active in the UAW. I always joined. I always, I was always a member, 'til I got to the Retail Store and then I run for committeeman.

DC: OK.

DH: And I couldn't' tell you what year, but I was on there eighteen years, and fourteen of the eighteen I was either committeeman or chairman of the Shop Committee.

DC: Oh really, OK, yeah. And what all do you remember about being a committeeman at the Retail Store? What kinds of cases did you have to deal with?

DH: Ah, what kinds of cases would I deal with? Uh, most of them were in heavy repair. We had more cases of heavy repair, where they would want you to overhaul a rear axle, say,

overhaul a rear axle, and they'd say it pays three hours. Well you'd get a car that's been run through mud and slop and shit, and it'd take you—you know, they'd give you a total of three hours to pull that axle out and overhaul it and everything—some of them'd take an hour and a half to get it out, because it was rusting out so bad.

DC: Yeah.

DH: And I'd have to argue with them on this, on the time study. Time study was just too low on many of those jobs.

DC: How often would they actually study the jobs?

DH: Well, Pontiac Motor done that over here, you know.

DC: In the plant.

DH: In the plant, yeah. And to this day, I disagree with their theory on time study. You know how long you and I have been sitting here. How long have you actually spent writing? How long have you *actually spent* writing? See, and when they do a time study, the only time that is credited to that time study is the time you're actually turning a nut or a bolt. If you have to stop to go over here to pick up that wrench, that clock stops from the time you quit turning over there until you got that.

DC: They think that's not part of the job.

DH: That's not part of the job. But when they get all through, then they're gracious. They add 33 percent of the total, for incidentals. That's going to get the car, getting your tools, filling out the report, the work order, sending it up.

DC: So their assumption is that everything is laid out perfect for you all the time.

DH: That's it. Uh huh. Yep.

DC: But would they ever come to the Retail Store and actually watch you do your jobs?

DH: Oh yes, yes, yeah. We got them, probably—I'll say this, for the company as well as myself, that we got to the point where we trusted each other—not a thousand percent, but pretty much. I know that—I was telling you about that one windshield paid five point five hours. But we learned tricks. You know, you let me do something long enough, and I'm going to find the shortest way from Point A to Point B.

DC: Uh huh.

DH: I'm going to learn the shortcuts. Now I'm going to get very proficient at what I'm doing. I wouldn't give a damn if it's hanging. And they cut the price of the windshield glass on one car to one point two. One point two hours.

DC: Down from five point five?

DH: Down from five point five to an hour and twelve minutes. Well, in the meantime, we went from three of us trimming in to five of us. Now we had one guy that was good. He was good. He done good work. But he wasn't very fast. You know, he would normally beat flat rate, just barely. So we're in negotiations, and I really raise hell about them cutting that flat rate to one point two. And I said, "We got a guy down there that at two point five, he's just barely going to make it. He's just barely going to make it." And John Gibson asked me, "Hester, I'm going to ask you a question." He says, "You promise me you'll be honest with me?" I said, "John, I'm always honest with you. I've never told you—I don't have to lie to you." "OK," he said. "How long—if I give you that job right now, how long would it take you to replace that windshield glass?" I said, "John, I'm going to tell you something. I'll do that son-of-a-bitch in about twenty minutes. That's getting the car in, cutting the glass out, gluing the new glass, and putting it in."

DC: Wow.

DH: He said, "That's one thing I admire about you Hester. You said you're honest with me." I said, "But you're missing my point. I take Bill Sinclair out here. Bill might beat it. Then Bill may not. And you got—I'm asking you for two point five. I'm not asking for that for me. I'm asking it for Bill."

DC: Because there's a range of abilities.

DH: That's right.

DC: A range of speeds.

DH: He said, "We'll give you whatever you want. You just tell me what you want in here." And he did it.

DC: Because you were honest.

DH: Yep.

DC: OK. Yeah.

DH: That was the reason.

DC: Because it seems that if you put three, four, or five trim repair people in there, they're all going to work at different rates.

DH: That's it.

DC: Yeah, yeah. But they have to only have one uniform rate for payment.

DH: Uh huh. Now headliners, back then they were all cloth or leather, you know, the overhead. You had to stretch them, and they had to be tacked in. Well hell, some of them paid twelve hours, to take the material, you know, take everything else and take it out, because you got that tacking strip up there, you got to kind of be careful. It's pay you—some of them would pay you—all of them paid at least eight hours. You know, man, I got to where I could, I could zip one of them in and out in forty-five minutes.

DC: Really.

DH: Yeah. Charlie could too.

DC: Just because of your experience?

DH: Just because of our experience. Yeah. And not have any wrinkles in it, make it look just beautiful, you know. But everybody couldn't do it.

DC: Now would there be problems if you—I mean, because—would you take another job right away? Say for instance you were scheduled for a twelve-hour job . . . .

DH: Oh yeah, yeah, sure, hell yes!

DC: So would anyone look at your paycheck at the end of the period and wonder how it got to be so big? And what would you do then?

DH: The boss.

DC: The boss, yeah.

DH: I could tell him, you know, "Ed, watch the front door. See how many times I get a callback." You know, comeback. "What is my work record? How many jobs do I get back because they're bad jobs?"

DC: Because the customer's paying, that's right.

DH: The customer was paying or General Motors was paying, if it was warranty work.

DC: Right, right. So, huh.

DH: And he would agree. He would agree.

DC: That you were doing quality work?

DH: Doing quality work. Oh yeah, yeah. And later on, later on, he's told me many times, Dan, he said, "You can do some work," he said, "and fast, he said. "You could put out some work in a hurry." And I could too. The boss come to me one day, and in '66 the

General Manager came out. He had a '66 Bonneville convertible. It had every option they could put on it but power windows, because they had deleted that option on that particular model. They had deleted the Brougham option on the convertible, and with the Brougham option you automatically got power windows. If you didn't get the Brougham option, you had to order power windows separate.

DC: OK.

DH: And the salesman, the general sales—new car manager, forgot to order them separately.

DC: So you had to go back and . . .

DH: So here he gets this convertible that's got power *vent* windows, but no power windows. Had a power seat, but no power window. Had air conditioning in the convertible. Rear speaker stereo, AM and FM, had lovely wheels—it's got every toy that they could put on it, but no power windows. Now that son-of-a-bitch would be colder than last year's love, you see. Who would want that? Some big shooter that wanted a convertible, he wanted them power windows. He didn't want to have to climb back here and roll down that rear.

DC: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

DH: So [Gotham?] came out to me, and he said, "Hes, you're pretty sharp," he said. "What can we do with my car," he said. "I love that car," he said, "but," he said—he got it from the Oakland Press. Harold Fitzgerald was going to buy it. "But he wants power windows. Is there anything we can do?" I said, "Hell yeah, Henry." I said, "I'll tell you what you do. Go order a Bonneville convertible with power windows. Don't get it loaded. Get just the basic, Bonneville convertible, with the same color trim, and power windows. And then I'll take all that out, and swap it from one car to the other." Took me ten hours.

DC: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

DH: But I *did* it, you know. And he said, "How much do I owe you?" I said, "You don't owe me nothing." I said, "I'll make up for it on these—on this warranty work." And that's the way we work.

DC: So you could basically handle about anything in a car, it sounds like.

DH: Yeah.

DC: Yeah. You just learned them inside and out, didn't you?

DH: Yep.

DC: Wow. Did you ever work on your own car?

DH: Oh hell yes.

DC: Yeah, yeah.

DH: I'm 70 past, and I'll tell you what I done in January for this President of the Local, ex-President, Johnny May. He's seventy—John will be seventy-five next month, September. Got Alzheimer's.

DC: Oh he does. I'm sorry.

DH: Got a lot of money. But John keeps a lot of money. Now he's got a '96 Buick. And Jon is meticulous about his house, himself, his car, everything. But the engine blew up—blew his head gasket, or intake gasket, and ruined the engine. And John—he liked the car, and he wanted to fix it, but you know, you get fifteen hundred, two thousand dollars, somebody wants to do this. So [??] I said to him, in January of this year—between Christmas and New Year's, John got an engine. I said—he asked me to find somebody to put it in. Well, I put it in. I didn't want to do that. That's too much work, you know. It's too hard, too heavy. But I done it. Took me four days, and then I didn't kill myself. I'm not rushing. I stop every, you know—go and get a bite to eat. Drink a cup of coffee. Do whatever I wanted to, but it took me four days, and I changed that engine.

DC: You did it. Wow, OK.

DH: Yeah, but—I can still do it today. Yesterday my nephew—he's laid off. Don't have no job—and it cost me $16 to put brakes on his car, with a lifetime warranty. Now the labor's not warrantied, but the parts are. So he'll never have to pay for brake pads again, you know. I don't want to do that. I don't like doing it.

DC: You'd rather not be working on cars now.

DH: Right, right. If I'm going to do something—I don't mind doing something, uh, fine or short in a car, where I'm not getting dirty. And hell, let's see, I got that grease on my hands yesterday.

DC: Oh yeah. Look at that, yeah.

DH: But I can still do it. But I don't like it, you know.

DC: OK, you paid your dues.

DH: Right. I paid my—*Hell* yes I did!

DC: Now back in the, you know, early to mid-'50s, when you know, you were still struggling and getting laid off, and you were bouncing around from job to job, did you imagine yourself working at Pontiac Motor for your career? Or did you ever think about . . .

DH: Oh yeah, because of my—yes, I was limited, education.

DC: OK.

DH: Yeah, I knew that with my education, I wasn't going nowhere.

DC: Did you ever think about just doing something else, though? I mean, maybe your options were limited, but there were still other jobs.

DH: No, no, I was—I got to believe in my heart I was satisfied with being a production worker, so to speak, or working for somebody else, which I was doing.

DC: Yeah.

DH: All I wanted to do is, let me make three squares a day, let me go on vacation once a year, and hell, I can be happy with that. Come home, if I wanted to plant a garden, I can plant a garden, and if I wanted to manicure my yard, I done that. Get me a new car periodically, I know I'm happy.

DC: What kinds of things did your kids do growing up?

DH: Oh, the oldest boy and girl, both of them took guitar lessons. The girls all took tap dancing or ballet dancing at one time or another, until they'd get, you know, the shit gets old, the kids do. They all had new bikes. I had a-bought a—from Henry Gotham, I bought one of these little promotional cars. Pontiac Motor, back in '56, they had these little, electric cars that they were selling for $600. And two kids could get in and ride them. Had a forward and reverse, and low lights lit up. They were Pontiac convertible, '56. Well I bought one of them from him for twenty bucks. Fixed it up—in fact he let me set it up in the Body Shop, and they repainted it, redone it, and I brought it home. They had it all fixed up. All the kids belonged to the Scouts at one time or another—Girl Scouts or Boy Scouts, Cub Scouts, you know.

DC: Yeah. That was my era. Those are things I did too. Yeah. So did they do sports as well, in school, and stuff like that.

DH: No, no, no. Donny, he never got into that.

DC: What are they doing now?

DH: Well my son, he quit school. He went back and got his GED, and he went to Oakland University—took a few years there. And he worked for Felice's.

DC: What's Felice's?

DH: Felice's Market.

DC: OK, yeah.

DH: Now it's Farmer Jack's today. Do you recall Felice's?

DC: I don't. But I know Farmer Jack's, yeah.

DH: He worked—he hired in there when he was eighteen, in the produce department, and he worked at produce for three years, four years. And come an opening to be a butcher. So he went into butchering, in the meat department. And he was in there until after he got his journeyman card—four years, five years, whatever. And the owner's brother-in-law left—he was the manager. He left, so Donny had been at Felice's nine years, I guess, at that time. And they called him in, asked him if he wanted to be the manager. So he was managing the meat department. He had eighteen years in, they called him in one day—they hired a guy that was over the whole building, owners and all. Right fresh out of high school, and the first one he let go was the produce manager—let him go. And then they had a cosmetic section there—let that manager go. And they called Donny in, after he'd been working that day-he went home at seven o'clock, called him back and said, "As of this date, your services are no longer required." And he was let go. His work, his work was good, you know. The pay—that happened December the 1st, and the paid him his salary up until April the 1st. They paid his Blue Cross until June the 30th. They give him all his—savings, you know—profit sharing. And he got out of that, and what he did, he went to, he went to [??] Meat Market. He worked there two years. And he just decided he wanted a career change, so today he repairs musical instruments, brass instruments. You bring in a trumpet, and he'll—when you get it back, it'll be brand new. There won't be a ding in it. It'll be all cleaned up, polished, just like the day it was purchased. So that's what he does. And then my oldest daughter, she wanted to go be a designer, so she took drafting in high school, and I was working—in the meantime, I'm working over here in Product Engineering, after the [Retail] Store closed. And Al [Borbeeka?] was in charge of drafting department upstairs—product—and I went up and talked to him. He told me that, "If your daughter wants to get into this, make her go to Macomb Community College. I'll tell you what courses to take, who to see, and when she gets through over there in two years, I'll hire her in here. She went there, done everything she was supposed to do—didn't want to go to work at GM. She wanted to be a [jobby?], go from plant, you know, from company to company, wherever she could get the most money. In the meantime, she met a young man that was an engineer for Chrysler, in-house, and consequently, they're married today. They just moved in a month ago, they just moved into a brand-new one-million-dollar home. He's [interviewer talked over him] with Chrysler. The middle girl, she, she didn't want that. She wanted to be a cosmetologist. She went to cosmetology school. And someplace along the line she met a young guy that worked for a welding company. And he's a welder. And him and his brother decided to—rather than work for somebody else, they could do it better on their own. They went to their Dad, and he—[??] told them you guys, each one of you save up ten grand, and buy a complete set of welding equipment, and I'll save up ten grand, and I'll help pay for the welding equipment, and then we'll go into business. Don't talk to me until you can do that. So that's what they did. They own Response Welding. They have a production shop over in Mt. Clemens, and they have a tool-and-die shop in Sterling

Heights. And between them, they got about forty employees. They live up in Dryden. They got a nice, beautiful home up there. So they're doing good. And the youngest daughter, she has no children. She's a designer. Her husband, he's a builder, and they're doing very good.

DC: Yeah, it sounds like things are working out pretty well here. Yeah.

DH: Their mother and I were married for something, eighteen years over, and we got divorced. We were divorced twenty-six years, and we were re-married six years ago this past December.

DC: The two of you?

DH: Yeah.

DC: Oh really. OK.

DH: So, thought I'd bring you up to speed on that.

DC: Yeah, that's warp speed right there. Wow. OK.

DH: I wanted to help you as much as I can, Dan.

DC: Yes, this has been wonderful. It's been great.

DH: You must hear some phenomenal stories.

DC: I do. Yeah. I really am fortunate. I really feel blessed that people are willing to share . . .

DH: I mean I'm telling you just—let it all hang out brother. Let it all hang out.

DC: Well, it's fascinating stuff, and then, you know, how I'm going to piece all this together, I'm not exactly sure right now. But one thing that's really becoming clear is, is just how difficult it was in the '50s, for most, most of these people.

DH: Do you kind of get the same story from others?

DC: Different details, but a lot of the people who had uncertain . . .

DH: See I could tell you stories that would blow your mind about that Retail Store—personal private stories about various department heads, shit that happened, who's laying who, who's running around here, who's laundry got left at what hotel [laughs].

DC: Yeah, yeah. I imagine most workplaces have their stories, though. I don't know. I don't know what you want to talk about.

DH: I'll talk about anything you can think of to ask me, hell, I can tell you.

DC: Well I guess, I don't know to what extent all those details are on my radar screen, but did it affect your work, your working environment.

DH: No. No.

DC: OK.

DH: I had good work rapport with the General Manager of the Retail Store. I could go ask him—the guy who came out and wanted to know about putting in the power windows in the car, you know, I could go ask him about anything. Like I sold a car one time—what year I can't tell you exactly what year it was. But I used to buy two new cars a year. And I'd buy one and drive it six months and sell it, and go buy, get me a new one. The day I'd sell it, my new one would be there. Sometimes I'd be without a car. I could go to the General Manager, or go to the Used Car Manager and say, "Hey, I need a car." "OK. OK, Don." And they'd, "Take that station wagon out there. Take that two-door [?] sedan, whichever," you know. And I sold a car, and Gotham said to me when I changed that, changed on one of those, I said, "You know, Hank," I said, "Pat might want to go up north," I said, "but I just sold my car to" um, I can't think of his name, that dealer out of Columbus, Ohio. I said, "I sold my car," I said, "I'm going to need a car, then, to go on vacation." "No problem," he said. "You go tell—go see Joe [?] and tell him I said to give you a new car." And I went out and say, "Joe [?]," I said, "Call Hank on the phone if you want, but," I said, "I came out here. I sold my car to Bob Caldwell." I said, "And we're going to North, Pat and I, on vacation, her and I and the kids," and I said, "Hank told me to come out here and get, have you give me a new car." I said, "Have you got something on the used car lot that's a current model?" He said, "Yeah. Go take" such and such, whatever it happened to be. And you know, I got along great with them. But it was, it was a two-way street, you know. Today, we done stuff back then, you couldn't do today.

DC: Like what?

DH: Uh, the average guy couldn't go up today and talk to the Plant Manager here. In the first place, he ain't going to know him. And if he did know him, the Plant Manager ain't going to know him. The General Manager at Pontiac Retail Store, his classification was "unclassified."

DC: What does that mean?

DH: Unclassified? It's so damn far up in the corporation . . . yeah. They mail him a paycheck once a month. He had an unlimited expense account.

DC: This is back then?

DH: Back then, yeah. And talking to him was just like sitting here talking with you, you know.

DC: So you had access to . . .

DH: That's right. Yeah, I could go knock on his door [raps the desk]. He'd go, "Yeah, Hes, what do you want?" It wasn't Mr. Hester or Don, "Hey Hes"—everybody else called me "Hes."

DC: Now would that be the case in the plant here?

DH: No, hell no, it wouldn't be that case. No.

DC: The Retail Store was kind of a different environment, it sounds like.

DH: Yep. Yeah, there was a hundred and forty-two total employees there, seventy-two was hourly rate, and seventy-two was salary. And it was just like one big family.

DC: Yeah.

DH: If you had a death in your family, you could just bet that all seventy—all the people that worked at that store would be at that funeral home. They'd support you—so someway or another, you know you'd take up a flower collection, say, "We're going to send Dan—his mother died. We're going to send some flowers to Dan." What the hell! We'd collect so damn much money, we didn't want to send five hundred dollars worth of flowers, you know. So we'd say, "Well, we'll send him a nice bouquet, and we'll give him the rest of this money," you know. They'll find some use for it.

DC: Sure, yeah. But it sounds like, even though you had the one big family, you were alluding to the fact that behind this one big family, there was a lot of running around and stuff like that too.

DH: Oh, yeah.

DC: So, I mean, if someone were to say

End of Tape II, Side A

Begin Tape II, Side B

DC: . . . about the decline in values, and decline in morality over the years. You know, kind of the notion that things were much better back in the '50s and '60s. You know, you haven't given me a lot of examples . . .

DH: It was the same, only it was hidden. It wasn't out in the open like it is today. You know what I'm saying? I know people—we had the office manager down there, female, and we had the used car manager . . .

DC: At the Retail Store?

DH: Yeah. And I know that they were playing around.

DC: Were they married?

DH: Yep, both of them. But they would sneak, you know. They'd say, uh, he'd say, uh, "I'll meet you over to the Edison Inn," over in Mt. Clemens.

DC: Way far.

DH: Yeah, a long ways away—at a certain time, because you get on the telephone, and he may say to the switchboard operator, "Connect me with Ida." So just plug in Ida, and see it's the car manager talking to the office manager, you know, probably checking on some new car deal. Say, "Yeah, hello. OK, yeah, all right, yeah. OK, I'll be there at six p.m. Get off work at five. I'll be there at six p.m. All right, I'll see you there." I know it was going on. I said to the—to the switchboard operator one day, I said, "If anyone unusual comes in about Hank"—Henry Gotham was the General Manager. He's dead today. So's Joe Wells, the used car manager. They're both dead, so you can't do nothing. But I said, "If you ever see anything unusual come in"—because I was playing hanky-panky too. I'm married and dealing this chick that's on the switchboard. She was single, though.

DC: Uh hum. But you weren't.

DH: But I wasn't.

DC: Yeah.

DH: But we didn't do it out in the open, but I said, "If anything unusual comes up, let me know, will you?" "Sure." So she called me one Saturday morning, "Don Hester, call the switchboard." So I called the switchboard. "Hey Don, I got something here you might be interested in." So I go up there, "What is it?" She'd had to pick up the mail—switchboard operator always had to pick up the mail and distribute it to whoever's going to get it. Now the mail to the General Manager, she would take it and open the letter—didn't take them out, just open the envelopes so he didn't have to do that. Well hell, there's a fucking postcard in there. It come from the Motel Lee out in Dixie—er out on Telegraph and Square Lake Road. And it said—it was addressed, it said:

> Henry Gotham, General Manager
> Pontiac Retail Store

Mr. Gotham:

On your recent visit here with us, you left some garments, some undergarments, yeah. If you would like to get them, they're being held at the desk or please let us know and we'll dispose of them.

DC: It was a postcard?

DH: [laughs] On a fucking postcard. So I got it and hell, I went in and showed the Shop Committee. You know, they said, "Shit, this here's going to be some good shit here. I might need this someday. So I went and just copied, got a copy of it. Front and back, I got a copy of that son-of-a-bitch. And you never know, when push comes to shove, don't mess with me.

DC: Did you ever pull it out?

DH: Nope. No. No, I never used it. No, uh uh. No, I never had to stoop that low, see? My brother, my younger brother, worked there, and he was hotheaded as hell. And Henry called me in one day and said, "You know Don, you going to have to do something with that brother of yours." He said, "He's kind of hotheaded." I said, "Henry," I said, "how's my work?" He said, "Great." He said, "Don, I never had any trouble with you." I said, "No. No. I'd never had any trouble with you." I said, "I got to make a suggestion to you, Hank." He said, "What's that?" I said, "You got a problem with my brother, you go take it up with him. If you got a problem with me, don't go to him. You come to me." "OK, Don." We never had no trouble.

DC: That's good.

DH: Yeah, that's the best way I could answer that.

DC: Well, you're absolutely right there. Yeah. Direct.

DH: Damn, hey it's 1:30.

DC: Yeah, yeah, we should probably knock it off then.

DH: Yeah.

DC: I appreciate it.

DH: If you, if you want anymore, because we didn't get up to where the store closed . . .

DC: I know, exactly, there's still a lot more.

DH: There's a lot more. I wonder if we could shut it off, and then we can . . .

End of Interview