Paul Ish Interview
June 18, 2002
Local 653 Union Hall
Pontiac, Michigan
Transcribed by Marie O'Brien
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DC: . . . basic questions, like where were you born?

PI: Pontiac.

DC: Pontiac, really? A Pontiac native. How about your parents?

PI: My Dad was born in Fremont, Michigan and my mother was born in Newaygo, as far as I know.

DC: OK. So the western side of the state.

PI: Yeah. But they didn't know one another until they come to Pontiac.

DC: OK. When did they come to Pontiac? Do you have any idea?

PI: Uhh. When they—I really don't know. I think my Dad—I don't—I guess my Mother come first, but when, I have no idea.

DC: Do you know what their families did over in Fremont and Newaygo?

PI: They were farmers. My Dad was born on a farm and my Mother was, too.

DC: And what drew them to Pontiac?

PI: I—I think friends, probably, but I have—that's, well, just a guess, they never talked about it.

DC: Oh, they didn't talk about it. Do you know what they—well, what did they do when they were here?

PI: My Dad had a dozen jobs, I guess. When he first come here, I really don't know. It was after—I think it was after the World War I that he come here. But my mother was a bookkeeper most of her life for different—I think she worked at Eames and Brown, probably the first time. But she worked at Louis [sp?] Furniture for years.

DC: And then, when were you born?

PI: August 20, 1930.

DC: OK. So do you remember what it was like growing up in Pontiac?

PI: Well actually, when I was born—let's see, I think—well, it was during the Depression or just shortly after. And at one time, my Dad went back to Fremont and my Mother stayed. And I stayed here with my mother for a few years, but I don't—the dates, I really don't know. My earliest memories was—we lived on a house, lived in a house on Dwight Street [west of downtown Pontiac]. When I started school, I went to—I think I went to kindergarten in Newaygo. And then I—I don't know whether it was a whole year or not, but I went to Crofoot School, which used to be right next to where Pontiac High—well Crofoot was on the grounds where Pontiac High is now. But it was next to Pontiac High. And I also went to Webster School, which was on—further out down Huron Street. And then in the second grade, I started in Waterford village.

DC: Did your family move?

PI: Yeah, we lived in—we moved to Waterford at some time during then. We lived there for, um, quite a few years.

DC: So it sounds like your Father at least went back to, what, Newaygo?

PI: He went to Fremont.

DC: To *Fremont*. Excuse me.

PI: That's where he was. But he come back. He was here, I know, when we moved. Well, even when we lived on Dwight Street. I think they just rented a house at that time. And I remember—I guess it was before we lived on Dwight Street, we lived on Steinbaugh Court. We rented a house, which is off of State Street. Because I remember learning to ride a two-wheel bike just by going up to State Street and coasting down the hill—a bike with one of these tires about ten inches in diameter. But then when we moved to Waterford, I think my Dad was—I really—he was on the WPA for awhile I know, and he also worked at Louis Furniture and he worked at the airport. He had a restaurant there at one time and he was kind of a manager. That was when it was just dirt runways.

DC: Pontiac airport?

PI: Yeah. And he had a plane there at one time.

DC: Really? Did you ever fly in the plane?

PI: Not with him, no. But he—him and another fellow flew it back to Fremont and they were going to land on the farm. Because I don't know if there was an airport in Fremont at that time or not. But he flew from here to Lansing, and then the other fellow—they did it backwards because they crashed the plane when they landed. Neither one of them was hurt, but they had to haul it back to Pontiac. And that's the last time I remember him

flying.

DC: I can understand.

PI: But he did work at the airport. I used to, when he was working there, I used to—because we lived just north of the airport a couple miles—and I used to go down there and I'd get rides with different pilots and stuff, so it was interesting.

DC: How old were you then, when you were getting those rides?

PI: Oh, I was probably ten, twelve, someplace in that area. Because I took lessons when I was—probably sixteen. I worked during the summer at Louis Furniture. My Mother was a bookkeeper, my Dad was charge of the warehouse for deliveries and that. And I started out running the elevator, an old freight elevator that takes all the customers, I'd take them up to the second floor, the third floor.

DC: Was that your first job?

PI: No, before that I picked cherries. I used to spend the summers with my grandparents and—over around Fremont is a great fruit producing—peaches and cherries and apples. And that's where Gerber's baby food company is. So they—when they were still on the farm, my grandparents were still on the farm, well I'd usually spend the summer. I remember—well, during the war we'd drive up to Portage and my grandparents would drive down and I'd go back with them and spend the summer until it's time to go back to school. So I—thrashing and playing, fishing and just being a kid.

DC: Did you have any siblings with you on that trip?

PI: No.

DC: Did you have any brothers and sisters?

PI: I have a brother.

DC: You have a brother, OK. Was he older or younger?

PI: Four years younger. And I had a brother four years older that died before I was born. He got into a paint cup with paint brushes in it and he drank the turpentine and that was it.

DC: Oh, I'm sorry. [softly] Was it mostly a fruit farm then?

PI: Well, not my grandparents' farm. It was just strictly a farm—wheat, corn, they had pigs and sheep and cows, and horses.

DC: So did you do all those sorts of things?

PI: Yeah, I used to—they had two, just plow horses. They weren't riding horses. But I'd ride on one. I'd get one of them and ride it once in awhile. But I—just a kid. I'd go down to the creek and go swimming and fishing and I'd catch these little fish like this and my grandmother would fry them for me. They didn't—they had the old-time crank telephone. And it was an interesting—I really had a good life as a kid.

DC: So how long did they keep that farm?

PI: Well, they had it—my Dad was born there and, let's see, probably late '40s. They were old enough so they retired and moved into town, in Fremont. But I'd still go up and spend the summer. And I'd take my bicycle and I'd ride out to this farm, or this orchard where I worked. I'd start—the first thing would be picking cherries and then I'd pick in the morning and then I'd help the man load them on the truck in the afternoon. He had, I don't know, a couple dozen pickers. And then I'd put my bike on the truck and we'd go into Gerber's to take the fruit into Gerber's. And then I'd get on my bike and ride to my grandparents' house.

DC: So who picked with you? Who were the other pickers?

PI: Oh, I don't know. A lot of older—I mean, not old but they were old to *me* because I was young. But they had a lot of Mexican labor that come up during the summer, because they had cucumbers and—oh, I can't think what else they had, but they had a lot of imported labor that—you know, transit labor I guess you'd call it. They were just there during the summer. Then before they moved into town, well they'd, you know, they had thrashers and they'd go from—they had one farm that the guy had a thrashing machine and he'd go around to all the other farms and the farmers would—they'd know where they were going and the women would come and they'd cook and get dinner ready and then the farmers, they thrashed the wheat or oats, whichever, and the straw would go in the barn. And they'd eat and then the next day they'd go to a different farm and it was just a—all the whole area was—a lot of neighbors, you know, working. I—like I say, I really enjoyed my younger days. Well, I enjoyed all my days, but [laughs] . . .

DC: Where were your grandparents from?

PI: My, let's see—not my Grandpa but my Great-grandpa was from Germany. Well, actually he was from Switzerland but right on the border with. They always said Germany, but when he died and we got to looking in the Bible, it was a little town in Switzerland. And my Mother's, my Grandmother on my Mother's side, she was English. But my Grandfather on my Mother's side was from Scotland. And he died when—I never did know him. He died when my Mother was only six years old, so, but she had three brothers—three brothers and two or three, about three sisters, I think. But my Dad was an only child.

DC: Oh he was, OK. I was wondering if there were any other grandchildren working with you on the—your grandparents' farm.

PI: No, no. No. I think they sent me to the farm to get—well, so I could see my Grandparents but also to give my parents a little rest, too. [laughs] But my brother—now I don't ever remember my brother spending the summer on the farm with me. I don't know why, but he never did.

DC: How old were you when you started spending summers?

PI: Probably six. Five, six, seven, someplace in that area, as far as I know. I had a dog—well they called it my dog. It was there all the time.

DC: Waiting for you.

PI: Yeah. A nice collie.

DC: I'll bet your productivity increased over the years.

PI: Yeah. I guess. I guess when I was in high school is when I stopped going to—but I had a job in Pontiac during the summer so I . . .

DC: What job was that?

PI: Well, I worked at Louis Furniture. That was the first job here and then after that I worked at Waite's Gift Shop, which was—they had dishes and knickknacks and all that sort of stuff.

DC: Did you work during the school year, too?

PI: Yeah, on the weekends and after school.

DC: Let's see. What do you remember about school?

PI: [laughs] Not much because it took me quite awhile to get through. I was kind of wild, I guess. I didn't spend too much time in school for awhile.

DC: Oh, OK. Was that in high school?

PI: Yeah, high school. Well, it started in—yeah, it started in high school. I went to Wash—in Waterford they didn't have a high school at the time, so I went to Washington Jr., which is on the west side of Pontiac, in junior high, which they don't even have junior high now. I don't know how they talk—it's intermediate and—but it was junior high. Let's see, I think junior high was from the seventh grade through half of the tenth grade. And then you went to high school. And I went—when I went to high school, one of my buddies still had to take a class at junior high. So we'd goof off and he'd get his folks' car and we might go to Detroit or one time we ended up in Fort Wayne in jail. We were running away from home. But we didn't get too far. That was before there was any freeways.

DC: Fort Wayne is quite a ways.

PI: Yeah.

DC: Where were you going?

PI: We were headed to Nebraska. His uncle had a ranch. Well he had—his uncle was high up—I think at the time he was president of Chrysler, division of Chrysler Motors. And he had these two ranches out there. Well, he was from out there but he had cousins and stuff that run the ranches, but they were more for a tax write-off than anything else. And this buddy of mine, he used to go out there every summer and work on the ranch. Well, the first year I went out there was '40—eh, '47.

DC: That you went—did you go out to Nebraska?

PI: Yeah.

DC: Oh, you did. OK.

PI: We, my folks took a trip to Glacier National Park and then when they come back, they come down— they went through northern Michigan, North Dakota, Montana. And when they come back, well they come down and went across northern Nebraska and I got off at, in Sioux City, Nebraska and hitchhiked to Burwell, that's the name of the town.

DC: Was your friend there at the time?

PI: Yeah, he was there. And I worked all summer mowing hay, driving a tractor for about fourteen hours a day.

DC: How was that?

PI: It was fun.

DC: Yeah. It's hard work.

PI: Yeah, but you know, at seventeen hard work doesn't mean anything. It's just, you can—we'd work all day and sometimes we'd go into town. Burwell was twenty-seven miles from the ranch where we were at. When I first got there, we cut sod. They had the hill ranch and the river ranch. Well the river ranch had a—his uncle had put in a landing strip and he had a great big house where he'd entertain people. Well, around the other part of it we'd cut sod along the river bottom and he was building a yard around where—he had a nephew that was a manager of that ranch. We'd dehorn cattle and haul sod and eventually we got up to the hill ranch and drove a tractor up there most of the time.

DC: How did that work compare to the farm work you did in Fremont?

PI: Well, it was more work out there because they had a regular crew. We had a bunkhouse and that's where we stayed. And we'd get up 5:00 in the morning, and have breakfast, and go out, start mowing hay or—at the hill ranch that's all they did was mow hay, the first year I was out there.

DC: How many bales did you put up in a summer?

PI: Well, they didn't bale it. They stacked it. They had—let's see, there was five, no, about four tractors that were mowing hay. They had one tractor raking it—they'd put it up—they had, you know what a dump rake?

DC: Let's see, I've baled hay before, but I don't know.

PI: Well a dump rake is where—it's the wheels, you know, and you have the tines that are curved and you go across and put the hay like in a windrow and then dump it. Well they had one tractor with three dump rakes on it. They had like a trailer with arms out and they'd have two out here and then they'd have one behind. So you'd drive that, you'd pull the rope to trip two of them and then right after that, then you'd have to pull another rope to trip the third one so your rows, your windrows, were in line. And they had what they called sweeps. They were—one was an old '29 Buick, I think. And they'd take the body off and you'd turn the steering around, so actually you're facing the back. And they had hinged forks on the front of it. And they'd drive that down the windrow and then they could—they had a lever they could pull it up. And they'd go to what they had called a stacker, where you'd pull up to the stacker and drop the hay off and back out and go back and they had a truck on this stacker that they—with a rope on it—they'd pull that out and it would flip the hay up into stacks about—they said they were about three to four ton stacks of hay. And in the wintertime they had what they called an underslung, which was a big—five beams—on a frame with a big platform that was hinged on one side. And they'd pull up to the butt of a haystack and tip that down then put a cable around the haystack, hook it onto a tractor and pull it onto this underslung. And then they could go out into different pastures to take the hay out to the cattle.

DC: Do you remember how big this ranch was?

PI: Uh, I would say probably three or four thousand acres, something like that. It was good. And that was cattle country. And it was Garfield County, and they raised a lot of cattle.

DC: Who were the other ranch hands? There was you and your buddy, who were the others?

PI: I—they had one guy that was Ernie, they called Ernie. He was an old cow—I mean he was a cowboy. He used to ride broncos and he was—his insides were kind of churned up. You'd take him into town and he'd head for the bar and they'd go get him when they went back home. But he was up at 5:00 the next morn—5:30 the next morning. He was the only permanent hand. Then they'd have local people around that they'd hire during the summer when they were haying.

DC: And so how big was the crew, then, at the peak of the season?

PI: Well, they probably had seven or eight, plus the owner. There were two brothers, one run the river ranch and the other one run the hill ranch. And, come to find out, they were old to us, but they were only about less than ten years older than what we were. But they seemed older for some reason. I didn't know that until this buddy of mine, his Dad—when his dad died, I went to the funeral home and saw Jerry and he said that they were only about ten years—and I hadn't seen Jerry in—well, this was probably ten years ago and I hadn't seen him since probably '49, '48, something like that. He went in the service and I went back to school. I was supposed to graduate in June of '48 and I didn't graduate until January of '50 because I missed so much school. I went out—the first time was when we come back from that trip, from Glacier. Well I spent the summer out there and then we—when it was time to go back to school, we started back. We hitchhiked back from Nebraska. But we got sidetracked and went to Lincoln, to the State Fair and we rode in dump trucks, in tankers, in all sorts of vehicles, hitchhiking. Hitchhiking was a lot easier then. But we got back and my mother was—oh she was mad because I missed three, the first three days of school. And the teacher—my teacher ended up telling her I probably learned more in those three days out there then I did in school, so she kind of quieted down then.

DC: Do you think your teacher was right?

PI: Yeah. We—it didn't do any good because I still didn't go to school all that much after that.

DC: What did you do?

PI: Skipped school. Go to Detroit to the ball game or burlesque show or just party someplace. Go swimming.

DC: Did you save up some money in the summer?

PI: No. [laughs] Well we were—let's see, we were only getting about sixty dollars a month. Plus room and board, when we worked out there. But then we—I run away again and we made it out there that time. We had a—three of us had a car.

DC: When was this now?

PI: Oh this was in the spring of '48. April.

DC: Must've been when you were supposed to be graduating.

PI: Yeah, I was supposed to graduate in '48. And we went out there. And I stayed. The other two come back and I stayed out there till—oh, May, I guess. The end of May. I was going with a girl at the time and she was graduating so I come back home and then we broke up after I got here, so—then—out there then, I rode for twelve, fourteen hours a day, horseback, because it was in the calving season. And you'd go out and just ride around seeing if a calf—if a cow was having a calf, if they were doing all right. Otherwise you'd

help them along.

DC: Did you have any experience riding horses?

PI: No, not that much. I know for a long time I couldn't sit down. But it, you know, it wasn't hard riding or anything like that. It was just moving around through the cattle. I can remember they had one that, the head come out first. They're supposed to come out with their feet and their head, but the head come out and it strangled. So they took the cow in the barn and tied her up, put a halter on her, tied her to a post, and a guy went in and cut her head off. And then reached in and got a hold of the feet and pulled the calf out. It was dead. But they'd had a couple cows out there that the vet had come out and cut the calf up inside and didn't get all the pieces up, out, and the cow died. And you'd hook it onto it with a tractor and take it out in a gully someplace and just leave it there.

DC: What did your parents think of you skipping school out on the ranch?

PI: They didn't! They didn't like it at all! But when I got back that time my Dad says, "Well, you're either going back to school or . . ."—I was seventeen. He would sign for me. I'd be seventeen in August and he said he'd sign for me to go in the service. Well, I decided I'd go back to school, so I went back to school and finally graduated. But that was the last time I was in Nebraska.

DC: OK. You didn't go back?

PI: No.

DC: So you stayed in school, then, at that point?

PI: I stayed until I graduated in January of '50, and then I started at Pontiac Motor in February of '50.

DC: So when did you graduate? Did you graduate in June of '50?

PI: January.

DC: Oh, January of '50. I'm sorry, I missed that. OK. And then you started right out at Pontiac Motor.

PI: February 6, 1950.

DC: Wow, OK. How'd you get that job?

PI: I guess my Dad talked to the employment manager or something. He was on plant protection at the time.

DC: Your Dad was? When did he move—was he doing that as well as working at Louis

Furniture?

PI: No, that, Louis Furniture was—God, I don't know when he left there, but after he left Louis Furniture he went—for awhile I guess he worked at. . . Willmont [sp?]. They installed curtain—Venetian blinds and drapes—or not drapes, but Venetian blinds and shades. He did that for awhile but then he was a fireman for Waterford Township. He was—they only had two firemen at the time and the rest were volunteers. He went and got the first fire truck for Waterford Township in '41 or '42, something like that. He was a fireman there. He'd work—they'd work twenty-four on, twenty-four off.

DC: So it sounds like he was a fireman during the war then?

PI: No, that was before. Well, it started—but in, I don't know, '43 or something like that he went to plant protection at Pontiac Motor. And he retired from there.

DC: So he stayed on at Pontiac Motor.

PI: Mm-hmm.

DC: OK. So why do you think you had this wild streak?

PI: I don't know. I just got off on the wrong foot, I guess. [laughs] But I got it out of my system and I settled down after that.

DC: It sounds like pretty valuable work experience, anyway.

PI: Yeah. It—you see a lot of—saw a lot of different things.

DC: What struck you the most?

PI: I don't know. It was just—the whole ball game, I guess. I enjoyed it. My Mother was dead set on me going to college and I—college just didn't appeal to me at all. I'd rather do something with my hands than to go to college. So that was the big [?] that, I guess, started me on my wild wooly ways. Actually they were tame compared to today, but back then they . . .

DC: Why do you think she wanted you to go to college?

PI: Well, because she didn't and neither did my Dad. I don't know if my Dad even finished high school. I don't think he did. But she was the driving force in the family. I mean, you know, she worked and when I was younger we had—she'd hire a girl to stay at the house. Well, she lived there all week and she'd do the laundry and clean the house and keep track of my brother and I.

DC: What kind of hours did your parents put in at work?

PI: Regular eight hour day.

DC: Same shifts?

PI: Yeah. Except, well, when my Dad started on the fire department he'd be gone for twenty-four hours. But then when he started at Pontiac Motor they changed every month. They rotated three shifts every month. Or every month they'd rotate—start out days, and then afternoons, and then midnights. But they were both there.

DC: So what was your first job at Pontiac Motors?

PI: I worked on Plant 9 on the straight six block line.

DC: So what exactly was your responsibility?

PI: Well, the blocks would come down the line and they'd have to stick a boring bar in the block to—for the camshaft, to bore the camshaft line. That was—I only had that for probably a week. And then I got bumped to nights.

DC: What shift were you on?

PI: I started out on days.

DC: Oh really?

PI: Yeah, the first week. And then right away somebody bumped me to nights. Well, the first night I come in, they asked me if I wanted to go to Plant 8, which was the assembly plant. They were always short of help over there. And I though, "I don't care." So I went over there and I worked up on second floor of Plant 8 putting brackets on horns before they went on the car. And then at the end of the shift I went back to Plant 9, punched out. Well the next night I come in, they says, "Would you like to transfer to Plant 8?" "I don't care." Well that—so they—I went over to Plant 8 and they put me in a pit. The car come down the line and the rocker molding along the bottom, it had clips on the body but when it got to the front fender, after they put the front end on it, it had two T nuts that were in this molding. And I had to put these little pressed nuts on, two on each side, in this pit. And I worked down there for, oh, probably, I don't know, a month or so. And then they—finally I ended up—up above, loading—putting hoods on the car as they come down the line. Well that about killed me, because you had to make up your stock. The hood come down on a conveyor and two of you picked it up, walked over, and set it on the car. And then propped it up and had to put two bolts, with a washer and a lock washer—flat washer and a lock washer. Just put them in and then they'd close the hood and then they had to—somebody else had to put two bolts on the inside. Well then they'd open them up, put the springs on them. And I did that till it got to be easy. I mean, you had a lot of time. Everybody was waiting for the line to shut down, you know—every once in awhile they'd have a problem. Well they'd have to shut the line down. Everybody would hoot and holler.

DC: You liked it when the line shut down?

PI: Yeah, it was—well it give you a break. But that was interesting. I was on nights then . . .

DC: When you were putting the hoods on?

PI: Yeah. Well, all of my time in Plant 8 was.

DC: Let's see. You just mentioned a bunch of different jobs and I want to try to, if I can, learn a little bit more about each one. Maybe we can start with the one you just mentioned, the hoods: were they heavy?

PI: They were the first two or three weeks, but after that you got your muscles developed so that it was more automatic. You know, you just—the hood come down, you pick it up, go put it on, and go back and get—you had—wore gloves and you cut the fingers, the ends of the fingers out. Well you take your—when you had a chance, you'd make up your stock and put the washer, lock washer and a flat washer on the bolt. Well then when you'd get ready to pick the hood up, you'd stick two bolts in your finger like that, pick the hood up, set it on there, and then you'd take and had an air gun you'd grab, and you wouldn't tighten the bolts up but you'd start them.

DC: OK. Who would tighten them?

PI: [thinks about it] I don't know. Somebody on down the line. Because they'd close the hood and then they'd—some guy would get in there and reach up under the dash. That was a hellish job. Because you couldn't, you know—you had the steering column in at that time. And then they'd open it up and they had—they had a guy there that—the springs on the hood, they had a machine and you'd hook them on there and hit an air button, I think. And that would stretch the spring. Then you'd put a—they had a piece that would, you'd put on there that would hold the spring stretched. Well you could put—you'd take it over and hook it onto the car and open the hood up more or something. And you'd take that piece out. Well that person had to go back and get the next spring. I think he tightened them up, too. Tightened the two bolts up that I put in.

DC: How many of these hoods would you have to put on?

PI: Well, they were running fifty-two an hour at that time. But then finally I got off that job and I was more or less an extra man in my department. Well I—a couple times, three or four times they'd send me upstairs to what they called the merry-go-round, where they built the front end. The sheet metal, radiator, and the front fenders and the inner panels of the front fenders were all put on. And then they'd get on the conveyor and they'd come down the conveyor, and they'd meet the car that they were supposed—the colors matched and everything so—and somebody put that on them. Well I had worked on that merry-go-round several times.

DC: Why did they call it the merry-go-round?

PI: Well, it was actually an area that, where—once you started, I think, you put the radiator in the sheet metal bracket. Well then that, they'd take and you'd hang that on a couple of hooks, and that would move around. And they'd put the fenders and the grille and that stuff on them. And when it got from the first position all the way around to the last, it would go onto the conveyor to go downstairs to meet the car that was coming down the line.

DC: All right. Would that be the frame and all that?

PI: Well, the frame and the body. They had a body drop where the frame—the frames would start out—well it was towards the front of Plant 8 at the time, but they were upside-down. And they'd put the rear axle and the springs, and they'd go around and come down and they'd flip them over then. Then they'd start putting the wheels and the body would drop and then they'd put the tires and they put gas tanks and all, everything on them.

DC: And then your parts would converge with that?

PI: And then at the end of the line they—the last thing after they put the hood on, they had, I don't know, three or four guys on each side that would fit the hoods. They'd slam the hood down and if it didn't fit right they'd open it up and hit it with a hammer. And then after that they'd start them up, when they reached the end of the line, and they'd drive them down over a pit where they'd align the front end. I worked in that for—at different times.

DC: Back in another pit.

PI: Yeah. It was just a small pit. There was two—the first pit I was in there was two of us in there. The other guy had to tighten about two nuts up on the bottom of the radiator. And he had a big wooden, like a two-by-four, that he'd have to stick in there and try to center the radiator and the bracket so he could tighten the bolts up. But I worked in the pit for awhile, and then one time they were having problems with trunks were leaking. So another guy and I, we'd go, went over into another plant where they had like a car wash area. And they'd pull in there, pull the car in there, and you'd—one of us would get in the trunk and the other guy would stand outside with a hose to see if it was leaking. We did that—I did that a couple times.

DC: Would you do that only when there was a report of a certain leak?

PI: Well, when they—yeah, I guess when they would have problems in there, they start checking them, but . . .

DC: Would you check every car, then, like that?

PI: No, you—you'd get one car, or they'd drive—I don't remember whether—I don't think we drove them over there because I can't remember driving in the plant. But somebody would bring them over there and we'd check them and then they'd take them someplace else if

they was leaking. I don't know what they did to them, but they had a big repair area in the back.

DC: Let's see. I'm going to back up a little and we can jump around a fair amount, too. But I'm thinking back to the hood job when you were pulling those down. Who were you working with at that point? I mean, were the people your age, were they older, where were they from?

PI: Some were older and some were—one was—the one I remember, his name was Chuck Gosh. I went to high school with him, I remember him from high school. And then—most of them were older than what I was at that time.

DC: And who taught you the job?

PI: They had a utility man and a relief man. Well the utility man is the one that showed you how to do it.

DC: How long did it take to learn what to do?

PI: Well, I mean, to get proficient at it, probably a couple days. But you didn't have much time to—I mean he told you what to do and then he'd stand there and watch you and holler at you if you didn't—weren't doing it right. But, you know, grabbing that hood, you grab it down at the bottom enough—because the hood was like this when it come down the line. And you had to pick it off the line and then there was a guy on the other side and he had to walk around the car. I was—I happened to be on the driver's side of it. Or no, he didn't. He—the guy—I picked it up and another guy picked it up and he'd walk to the front of the car and the guy on the other side would take it then and the guy that was on the opposite side I was, he stayed at the front of the car and held the hood up till you got your bolts in it. And then he'd close it. And he had to get the spring—or did he? I really don't remember. That's been a long time. I don't remember. But there were—each department had probably fifteen—well the foreman, my foreman had the hood and [short pause] rocker molding and the fenders—I mean, the guys that fit the hoods, and the pit where they align the front end.

DC: How did you get along with your fellow workers?

PI: After awhile, you know, you get horsing around and they had one guy—I don't know if you want to put this on the tape or not, but he, they called him Goosey. And he was one of these guys that had a hammer that fit the hood. Well every once in awhile somebody would goose him and, man, he'd whack a hood, you know, or whatever it was. You didn't want to be next to him because if he had a hammer he'd probably hit you with it. But there was a lot of joking around. Every once in awhile somebody's lunch bucket would come down on the hood line, all painted up fourteen different colors or something. You got along pretty good.

DC: Did the older workers accept the younger guys like you OK?

PI: They had to. [laughs] Because it—well you know, you were there so it . . .

DC: Had those folks been working there a long time?

PI: Most of them had been there awhile. I don't really know how long they'd been there before I got there. But there were there a long—because I—well I got married in October.

DC: OK—of 1950?

PI: Of '50. I took three days off and my general foreman threatened to fire me because I took three days off after I got married. But he just threatened me—but that was all. He didn't . . .

DC: How did you get along with your supervisor?

PI: I got along fine. You know, I was the type that if he wanted me to do this, I'd do it. When I, when I actually left—I enlisted in the service—and before I left I was sitting there on one side where the molding come down the side the car. I had a little fiber block and a hammer and I'd just, was tapping on that molding to get it, front fender and the body—if the molding's like that I'd tap it till it lined up. Because I was an extra man. If they were short in another department, well they'd send—that's like when I'd go up to the merry-go-round.

DC: OK. And this is after you were done with the hood job, or is this before that?

PI: Yeah, after I got off the hoods.

DC: OK, all right. Then you were an extra person.

PI: If somebody wasn't there that day, well then I'd do their job.

DC: How did you like that?

PI: Well, it was all right. I mean, you know, it was—sometimes they'd be gone the whole shift, other times they might just be late. So you'd start on their job. Well if they come in then you'd go do something else. [overhead speaker announcement] But I enjoyed it. It wasn't something that I would want to do all my life, but . . .

DC: Why is that?

PI: Well, it just—I don't know. It wasn't challenging enough, I guess, is the best way to put it. You know, it's like you could do it in your sleep after awhile, you do it for so long. And a lot of those people, that's all they did. They had—I remember one fellow up on the merry-go-round, he didn't talk. He'd been a veteran and he'd been in the jungle for—at least that's the story I got. And he wouldn't talk to anybody. He'd just do his job and he was there every day, but he didn't talk to anybody.

DC: A veteran of World War II?

PI: Mm-hmm. It—you know, you meet a lot of different people that way.

DC: So were you aware at all of the union in the plant at that point when you first started out?

PI: I knew there was a union, but I never—I didn't join the union at that time.

DC: OK. Why is that?

PI: I guess because nobody asked me to. Now, you know, that's the first thing when you get a job, you join the union right away. But back then, I guess it wasn't mandatory at that time. I don't know. But nobody ever asked me to and I—so I never did.

DC: Were you aware that there was a committeeman or anything like that?

PI: Yeah, yeah. I knew that there were, but . . .

DC: Did you ever have any reason to use a committeeman?

PI: No, never did. I probably could've, but I wasn't a union member at that time, so I just did what they told me and let it go at that.

DC: Were you aware of whether or not your fellow workers were in the union?

PI: I'm sure they were, but I—because they were there, they had been there for I don't know how long. As far as anybody asking me whether I wanted to join the union, I don't recall. See, I left in December.

DC: December of '50?

PI: Mm-hmm. I joined the service the 28th of December so I—that's when I went on a mil—I didn't even know that you could have a military leave, I guess, at that time. But I did get a military leave.

DC: Why did you join the service?

PI: Well, let's see. At the time, I was trying to get into trade school. And the big thing then was if you were eligible for the draft, which I was, they didn't want to get you started in trade school and then have you go in the service—get drafted—so another buddy of mine, he worked—he was an inspector in the final . . .

End of Tape I, Side A

BeginTape I, Side B

PI: . . . from, he was from high school. I knew him in high school. And my wife and his—I don't know if he was married. I guess it—well, his girlfriend or his wife, they worked together in Pontiac. And so we used to hang around together and we—he wanted to go in the service and so we—at the time I was in the Naval Reserve. I had joined the Naval Reserve when I was probably, I don't know if I'd been—I had a uniform and everything and the Naval Reserve Armory was over on East Boulevard.

DC: So you were in the Naval Reserve while you were working?

PI: Mm-hmm.

DC: OK. Did you have any obligations?

PI: Well, you had to go to a meeting once a month, I think, for four hours or something like that. But that's the extent of . . .

DC: Did you ever have any training camp, boot camp or anything?

PI: No. One time we were doing a publicity thing for the Naval Reserve and they had a DUKW [pronounced Duck, referring to an amphibious vehicle manufactured in Pontiac during WWII] You know what a DUKW . . .

DC: A DUKW is a vehicle . . .

PI: Yeah, but it's an amphibian vehicle and on the road. Well we went out—there was, I don't know, three or four of us went out and they were going to take pictures. Went out to Lake Orion and went in the lake and got stuck. Got the DUKW high-centered on a sandbar. Couldn't go either way on it. They finally had to get a boat and a wrecker and pull the DUKW off.

DC: So the DUKW couldn't handle the sandbar?

PI: Well, it got high-centered so that—and I guess the propeller wasn't enough to get it off. But I was just along for the ride, so I—[laughs]–but I remember that. That was exciting for awhile.

DC: Now when was this? Was this before you graduated from high school?

PI: Yeah. I was, see I was—well, '50—I was nineteen when I graduated from high school because I was behind. So I think it was seventeen when I went in the Naval Reserve.

DC: And why did you do that?

PI: I don't know. Just a whim, I guess. Liked the uniform at the time.

DC: Could you get any pay or any benefits?

PI: Yeah, you got, I don't know, two hours a month or something like that pay. It wasn't anything to write home about.

DC: But anyways you were already in the Naval Reserve when you decided to . . .

PI: Go in the service. But I—you had to attend the meetings. Well I got to the point where I was skipping the meetings and finally they told me, "Well, hand in your uniform. You're still in the reserves but you're in the *inactive* reserves so you don't . . ."—your name's on the list but that's . . .

DC: You would be subject to being drafted, then, I imagine at that point.

PI: Yeah. So I wanted to go in the Navy and he wanted to go in the Air Force. Well, we flipped and I lost. So we went in the Air Force.

DC: The Air Force, all right. So how did that go? What did you do?

PI: Well, we enlisted the 28th of December and got a five-day leave. So we left the day after New Year's. And that was a trying time. Well, I'd been married two months and my wife went back to live with her folks and the day after New Year's we got on a bus in Pontiac and went down to Fort Wayne. And we were down there—we didn't leave there till—well it was at night. We had a troop train, and from there we went to Texas, to San Antonio. We got into San Antonio. It seems like every place we went, we got there at the middle of the night or something. And at that time they were getting in probably fifty to seventy thousand recruits a day in San Antonio. They didn't have barracks for them. The first night we slept on the floor of a gymnasium after we got there. We didn't have any blankets or anything, you just—all you had—I had a duffel bag with a change of clothes in it and that was it. But then we got—they opened tarpaper shacks and they heated them with wood stoves. They were like a Quonset hut, only they were all tarpaper, just tarpaper shacks. I don't know how long they'd had them. And they put us in that. Well I was only in Texas three weeks. They had so many people they couldn't—didn't know what to do with them. I had KP duty and I remember one Friday I spent the whole day prying frozen fish apart. That was back when fish was—when it was mandatory for, especially for Catholics, but everybody had fish. So you'd just pry fish apart. And that's about all I remember of Texas.

DC: And then after three weeks, what did they do with you?

PI: I got on another troop train and went to Spokane, Washington.

DC: What happened up there?

PI: That's where I had my—we went to an old Army fort, Fort George Wright in Spokane, Washington. And that's where we had our basic, which amounted to attending classes and movies and marching and that sort of stuff for six—six or seven weeks, something like that.

DC: How was that?

PI: It was—they didn't give you time to think, you know? They kept you busy. I remember at that time my Grandfather on my Dad's side died and I was in the class for something and they come and got me and told me I had a phone call. Well, like here's the barracks where we stayed—they were—looked like great big old houses, but they opened them up and they had bunks in a row and the classes was over here. Well I come out of class and walked across the parade ground. Well when I got over there the AP's were there to pick me up—wanted to know what I was doing out on the parade grounds. Come to find out, you don't walk across the parade ground, so they took me in and took me back where I was and I had to walk around the road before I could get my phone call. And but—that—we had a lot of fun. We'd play cards at night and stuff like that.

DC: Were you still with your friend at that point?

PI: No. I never, never saw him again after—the guy I enlisted with, he went someplace else and when I got out of the service he was—he got out. He was working in Flint at one of the auto plants up there and he was killed on Dixie Highway. Riding a motorcycle home. He was working second shift and a car hit him or something. I never saw him again after I enlisted. In fact I didn't see him—probably out of the three weeks that I was in San Antonio, I only saw him once or twice. He wasn't in the same barracks that I was in, so.

DC: Lots of people there. And then what was your wife doing when you got married?

PI: She was working at Abstract and Title in Pontiac. Secretary work or something. I don't know just what her job was, but . . .

DC: Did she continue on doing that?

PI: Yes, until—after I—from Washington, or from Spokane after I got out of basic training, I went to Fairchild Air Force base, which was probably twenty miles from Fort George Wright. And I got assigned to a maintenance squadron, but all I was doing was firing furnaces at night. You go around—they had coal burning stoves and furnaces in different buildings. You had to keep the fires going.

DC: So you just kept loading the coal in?

PI: Yeah. Go from one building to another, and then you sleep during the day. Well then, about that time—oh, I had a cyst that ruptured on my tail bone. And so I went on sick, or went to sick call and the doctor looked at and he said, "Well, we have to operate. But if we operate, you're going to be out. You won't stay with the group that you're with." So I just—he give me a bunch of gauzes and I put—fastened a piece of gauze on my shorts and

it kept draining all the time. But—so I kept firing furnaces. I don't recall—that must have been two or three weeks. But they fill you with these horror stories, you know, that if—how guys had gone to sleep when they were firing the furnace and the water got so hot, the coal water got hot, and some woman went to the toilet and flushed the toilet and scalded herself because the water burned, you know. I don't know whether that—it's just stories they told you, or what. But eventually then I—from Fort George, or from Fairchild they sent us to Topeka, Kansas. And I was in Topeka for two and a half years or something like that.

DC: Really? A long time.

PI: Yeah. I stayed there till I got out.

DC: And what did you do there?

PI: Well, I started out firing furnaces there. They assigned me to the—but that was a base where they were, it was a World War II base, Forbes Air Force base. And they were reactivating it. And they would begin training B-29 crews that were going to Korea. They'd form up someplace and then they'd get the airplane and they were stationed there. And then from there they'd go to Colorado for survival course and they'd fly missions, bombing missions and stuff out of, out of Forbes. So they assigned me to the maintenance squadron. Well I ended up in the machine shop.

DC: Oh, OK. And what did you do there?

PI: Worked on airplanes. If—most of the time we were—we'd make parts and—most of the time it was repair work on airplanes. We'd go out—a lot of times—everything was a Phillips, flathead Phillips screw. Well they'd stick an air gun in there and hit it and round the hole out. Well then we'd have to go out and take the, get the bolt out, or screw, or whatever it was. Zerk fittings. [A nipple-like lubrication fitting through which grease is applied to a chassis or suspension joint with a grease gun.] They. . .

DC: Zerk? [called zirc, if made of zirconium]

PI: Yeah, grease fitting. Pressed in fitting—they'd put a grease gun on there and squirt it, and instead of pulling it up, they'd just yank it. Well if they break that zerk fitting then we'd have to go out and get that little piece out of there so they put another zerk fitting in. Spark plugs—they'd break spark plugs on the engine. We'd have to go out and get the spark plugs out. The torque tubes, or the flat tubes—they had aluminum tubes with U joints and they'd go from one wingtip to the other, pretty near. Right through the bomb bay and everything. And these tubes at different joints, they'd have to be changed every hundred hours or something. It started where you'd—you'd have to maybe change one tube. Well you'd have to line the holes up. So they had a fixture you had to put over it and line the holes up. And then you'd stick a new tube in there and drill the hole through so that it would line up. Then towards the—that went on for awhile, and then towards the end of it you'd change the whole—two of us would work twenty-four hours straight. We got to take

the tubes out, make new tubes, and put them, the whole thing in, in twenty-four hours.

DC: How did you like that work?

PI: I liked it. Except, you know, typical service. The master sergeant who was in charge of the shop, he always said if the weight of the paperwork didn't equal the weight of the airplane, it would never fly. Because they had tech orders for every conceivable thing on the plane, you know. Fact, there was one place where the torque, the tube, and the U joint was so close that you couldn't put a nut and a bolt on it. So they had what they called icebox rivets. You'd take these rivets and stick them in the deep freeze. Then you had so long to pound them in and cut them off and peen them over. So that you had to make sure they had enough room so that they wouldn't hit part of the frame when they raised and lowered the flaps.

DC: Pardon my ignorance, but why would they have to be frozen?

PI: It shrunk them. When they froze them it shrunk them and then when they . . .

DC: So they could fit in that space?

PI: . . . they made them soft, well then when you put them in and peened them over and they got warm, they expand a little bit and it got hard so you couldn't peen them. They had to be peened when they were cold. But we'd work twenty-four hours and then we'd get the next day off, which was—every once in awhile you'd have to pull CQ in the shop, in the machine shop . . .

DC: CQ is what now?

PI: Charge of quarters for all night long in case they had an emergency or something. But in the shop there was a section that was a machine shop—it had lathes, mills, saws, drill presses and that sort of thing. Then another section was a sheet metal shop. Then they had a paint shop and a wood shop. And then off in another building they had a welding shop. That was all the maintenance squadron.

DC: How many worked there?

PI: Oh, well I don't know how many was in our squadron. Well it was a maintenance—90th maintenance squadron. There were probably a hundred. There was in our—in the machine shop there were three civilians. Well, they were civil service, but they were civilians. I think the sheet metal shop had a couple. Paint shop didn't have any. Wood shop might've had one. Welding shop didn't have any. But they all had different parts of the airplanes that they worked on.

DC: Where were these workers from?

PI: All over the United States. The civil servants were from around Kansas, but we had guys

from New York, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, North Carolina, Georgia, North Dakota, Minnesota, Texas—we had one guy that was, he was a paratrooper during World War II. And he went in before World War II started, in the cavalry. He was from Texas so he rode horses. He said he rode horses all through the swamps of Louisiana. And the only way you could get out of the cavalry was to join the—volunteer for the paratroopers. I think he said he made five jumps during World War II. But he was a career—he was going to be in it for twenty or thirty years.

DC: How did you get along with these workers from all over the place?

PI: Good. You know, you're going to have to make up your mind you're going to get along, because you're stuck with them. That's . . .

DC: You were only what, twenty, twenty-two years old, something like that?

PI: I was twenty. Twenty, twenty-one.

DC: So how old were these other people?

PI: Well, thirty, forty. Probably the civilians—the civil service were fifties or something, I don't—one was an old farmer. Or not old, but he was a lot older than me. You know, age didn't mean that much at that time. We had, there was one—one guy from Puerto Rico. Well, actually he was Puerto Rican but he was from New York. And he—a lot of them had been ex—at that time they were extending you for a year because of Korea. He'd been extended. He had, I don't know, a couple months to go on this extension and he went AWOL. And they finally caught up with him and he come back. They had to put him in the brig and a couple other guys were—at that time pot was coming on and they got caught smoking pot or something, but it—you know, they—a lot of different things happened, but as far as I can remember, I had a good—of course, I lived off base at the time. When I got there, probably, oh, within a month my wife come down. So her and her girlfriend—at the time I had an old '40 Chevy coupe. And her Dad got a bunch of oil because it burned oil. And her and her—she was eighteen, and yeah, this was in April of '50.

DC: '51?

PI: Yeah, '51. She's two years younger than I am, approximately. And she—her and her girlfriend—her girlfriend had a brother that was in the Navy in Olathe, Kansas [just outside of Kansas City], so they drove down. At the time—when she got there I was asleep, because I was still firing furnaces then. And they called me in, said my wife was there. So we got an apartment right away. I think I got a three-day pass or something and we got an apartment. It was—actually it was a kitchen and a porch with a pullout day bed, and we shared the bath. This older couple in Topeka had a house. It must've been ten or twelve rooms, and they had every room rented. And we stayed there for I don't know how long.

DC: Now you said your wife had gone to live with her folks?

PI: Mm-hmm.

DC: Did she do that between the time that you went in the service and she moved out to Topeka?

PI: Yeah. Yeah, she just moved—we had an apartment on Dwight Street until we went in the service, till I went in the service.

DC: You might've told me, but where did her folks live?

PI: They lived in Pontiac. Her Dad was a General Foreman at Pontiac Motor, and her mother worked in the sheet metal plant at Pontiac Motor.

DC: OK. So what did she do when she was in Topeka?

PI: She got a job—right across from Forbes Air Force base was a supply depot for all the western part of the United States. And she got a job working in the procurement section for a lieutenant colonel, as his secretary. And she worked there all the time that, well, for two and a half—we got there in, I don't know, March? March, April—probably March, yeah, probably March. And she got—it was just before Easter, I think, as I recall, when she got there. Well she got a job right away and she worked there all the time until I left in November of '53, I got out. Actually I didn't get out, I got—I enlisted for four years, but that was—they were cutting back on the service and I could—by going in the reserves I could get out, but I had to go in the reserves for six years. That's another thing, while I was in the service I got—they sent a discharge from the Naval Reserve to—one time when I come home on leave. I don't know if my folks had it or my in-laws had it, but—so I got a discharge from the Navy and I got—then I finally got one from the Air Force.

DC: But you had to be in the reserves then?

PI: Yeah, for six years.

DC: So that was in November of '53. What did you do then?

PI: I went back to Pontiac Motor. I wanted to stay in the service, but my father-in-law said, "come on." My wife had never been away from home. Well I'd been away from home, you know, off and on so it didn't bother me. But she was homesick, so my father-in-law said, "Come on, I'll get you a job."

DC: He was the General Foreman at Pontiac Motor?

PI: Yeah, he worked in the gun plant at the time. They were making a sixty-twenty. So I come home. . .

DC: A particular kind of gun?

PI: Pardon me?

DC: A particular kind of gun?

PI: Yeah, it was a—well, it was one of these rapid fire—sixty mils—sixty-twenty millimeter, or something like that they called.

DC: All right. Anyway, he was the General Foreman there.

PI: In one of the departments. There were a couple of departments. So he got me a job and I went to work in Plant 15.

DC: OK. And what did you do there?

PI: I run a grinder. O.D. grinder, I.D. grinder. [O.D means outside diameter, and I.D. means inside diameter]

DC: An I.D. grinder, OK.

PI: And an O.D. grinder. [interrupted by overhead announcement]

DC: And an O.D. grinder. What's the difference between an I.D. grinder and an O.D. grinder?

PI: Well, the O.D. grinds the outside of a part and the I.D. grinder grinds the inside. Of different parts. And I worked there from '53 till—maybe it was August of '54. And by then I got into trade school.

DC: Oh, OK. Let's stay with the Plant 15 job just a little bit longer, then we'll get you into trade school here.

PI: OK.

DC: How did you like that job?

PI: I liked it all right. It—making better money then: $2.06 an hour.

DC: Better than before you went in the service?

PI: In the service, well, and while I was in the service. I made—while I was in the service we bought a new '51 Chevy. And I had that till June of '53. We decided we wanted a convertible. So we come home and I got a Ford convertible. And the payments on that convertible were $136 a month. My wife had an allotment check for $136.10.

DC: Allotment meaning . . .

PI: Well, because she was married to a serviceman she got an allotment. So that $136.00 that

she got went for the car payments. My—I got something like ninety-five dollars a month. That went for the apartment. We had moved into a different apartment at the time. And her pay is what we lived on from working at—in the civil service at the supply depot. We, you know, we didn't have a lot of money but we were young and we still—this second apartment we went—was a house and the man and woman were both ex-alcoholics. We didn't know that at the time, but they were renting the house or, actually, I don't know—there was a—they said a colonel owned the house but he was in Korea. He was a dentist. And they kept track of the house for him. I guess they got the rent. And there was a big porch all the way across the back on the second floor, and then a bedroom, and we rented that area and we shared the bath again. But it was plenty big enough for us. We'd go to the drive-ins and play miniature golf and go to a show downtown once in awhile. So we—while we were there, the first year was when they had, '51, they had the big flood. All up and down the Mississippi and the Missouri, you couldn't even get out at Topeka because of the flood. [see pictures at http://ks.water.usgs.gov/Kansas/waterwatch/flood/fld51.photos.html] Well everybody that lived on base were confined to the base. I wasn't because I lived off base, so I could go home at night. But I'd go back, go to work the next day and probably get on a truck or something and go someplace and sandbag all day long. Because north Topeka—which is on the north side of the Kansas River—that was completely underwater. And all around—well Kansas City was under water, most of it. We come home in June—yeah we come home in June to get the new car, and we couldn't take the train from Topeka to Kansas City. We had to take a bus and take the back roads because we got to the train station in Kansas City and they'd only had it open, like, a couple weeks, or a week, because it was completely flooded out at the time. We come home and then we got the car, and by the time we went back—I had fifteen days or something like that—everything was back to normal. But that was an exciting time when, you know. All you could read about was flooded—this was flooded and that was flooded, north, south, all around was a flood.

DC: Did you ever think you'd be sent to Korea?

PI: I—no, because we were training. We trained flight—I mean we had flight crews that come in there that was going to Kor—B-29 crews. In fact, a buddy of mine that I used to run around with in Pontiac was a gunner. And he come in on a—they called them fox crews at the time, for training. And he used to stay with us at night. He'd sleep on the couch at our place every once in awhile. And then he went to Korea but when he come back—he come back from Korea and come home and got married and they sent him to Roswell, New Mexico. Well he stopped—him and his wife stopped there on the way to Roswell and stayed with us for a couple days. So we, you know, we had friends that—a lot of southerners in the service at that time.

DC: Were they mostly whites?

PI: Well, yeah. They—I don't remember—I think we had two or three blacks, was all, in the squadron. It was in that transition period where they—and some of them were dead set against it. They didn't want anything to do with them. But I'd been around them all my life in Pontiac, so it—in high school, so I never had any problems with them.

DC: So you grew up—or there were blacks at your high school in Pontiac.

PI: Yeah. Yeah, at the time. Not the high school they have now. That place looks like a prison to me now.

DC: Yeah, it's different, isn't it?

PI: Yeah. Entirely different. Of course, when I went there it was just Pontiac High. Now it's Pontiac Central and Pontiac Northern. There wasn't any Northern at the time I went to school.

DC: Well then how about when you came back to the grinder job again there. You said you liked that job OK and were making more money.

PI: Yeah.

DC: Let's see—what about your supervisor at that point? How did you get along with your . . .

PI: I got along fine. Fact, I used to go hunting on the—he had forty acres up at Millington. North up past Lapeer. No, up past Goodrich—went up [Route M-]15. We used to go up there and go bird hunting on his property. Of course, my father-in-law—I don't know whether he made a difference or not but I got along—there was two foremen and then my father-in-law was over the two foremen. And I used to see—fact, my wife volunteers at Pontiac General one day a week and one of the foremen who had retired was a volunteer there. Seems like he died here just a year or so ago.

DC: Anyways you'd go hunting with this guy. Were you a member of the union when you came back?

PI: No. I had—see now I got back in November of '53 and probably in April I got into trade school. And in trade school you didn't—at that time, you didn't belong to the union. So, you know, I spent four years in trade school.

DC: So how did you decide to go to trade school?

PI: Well I wanted to get into trade school as either a toolmaker or die maker or machine repairman. I just liked working with my hands.

DC: That was one reason why you went in the service, I think, wasn't it?

PI: Well, because I *couldn't* get into trade school and, you know, they told you when you, when I enlisted, that they had four hundred schools you could go to. But they didn't tell you that all but two of them are filled up. The two that weren't filled up was the Air Force police or food service, the cooks. So I—I was more on the job training as a machinist in—when I was in the service. Yeah. I went to—they had like a trade school in the old high

school building in Topeka where they had high school kids—they had welding shop and machine shop, and I don't know what else during the morning. And then in the afternoon they had veterans. They were training a lot of veterans that had got out of the service that didn't have a trade. They could go there. And then at night, a couple nights a week—one or two nights a week, people that worked in the—like I was in the machine shop in the service, I could go there, just more like a hobby shop. The instructor had different castings, and I bought the castings for a drill press and then I machined the drill press castings and assembled it. I still have the drill press today.

DC: You do?

PI: Yeah.

DC: It's like a mini trade school.

PI: Yeah. It was a trade school for the high school kids and the veterans for the people that worked in it, in the trade. It was more like a hobby shop or something, you know, where you go in and make—they made lawn mowers and they made bikes and all different kinds of tools.

DC: So what was the process for getting into trade school?

PI: Well, you just kept hounding them until you . . .

DC: Who did you hound?

PI: Well, Mr. Volker [sp?] was the—I didn't actually hound him. I think my father-in-law hounded him more, trying to get me in. You know, it's who you know, not what you know a lot of the times. But after you got in, then it was up to you to cut the mustard while you were there.

DC: How many trade school applicants got in, in a particular year?

PI: I—I don't know. Depending—I mean, they only had room for so many and as you—as they graduated then they start more. But in the trade school they had machine repair, they had electrical apprentices, and tool and die apprentices. Yeah.

DC: Did you have to take any tests or anything to get in?

PI: [softly] I don't remember. Well, they had your high school—after I settled down I took a lot of machine shop classes in high school and they had—they got your record from high school. That was another thing—my record wasn't all that swift, so they took me longer, but . . .

DC: Did your service experience count for anything?

PI: Yeah. As I recall, it did. I know I had to talk to Mr. Volker. He interviewed you and asked you a bunch of questions.

DC: What was your wife doing at this time?

PI: She—after we got home, she went to work as a secretary at Consumer's Power. And she worked there for—well, I think she worked there till my first child was born.

DC: When was that?

PI: In—hmm. August of '56. Well, until she got pregnant. She quit. She had one miscarriage before that and then my daughter was born August 17th of '56. And we had bought a house in the meantime, over on East Boulevard. Actually, it was just about across from the Naval Reserve Armory, which wasn't there at the time. They had torn it down, I guess, while we were gone.

DC: You couldn't miss any more meetings.

PI: No. Well, I'd been discharged, so I didn't . . .

DC: That's right. So tell me what trade school was like.

PI: I enjoyed trade school. I, you know, it—I was in the machine repair end, so I—we'd cut gears and about the first thing that we got started, there was a man that—I don't know, he'd had some connection with Pontiac Motor somehow. And he used to be a great golfer around Pontiac. But he had got arthritis and he was confined to a bed. He couldn't get out of bed. Well he had some pull someplace, and anyway we made a bed for him in trade school. It was narrow. The head end was about six inches higher than the foot. It had a framework that come up from the side, front and back, and then it had a shaft the full length of the bed up here. And he was on a frame, just a tubular frame that had webbing. And we made a motor, or had a motor, that his wife could raise this up so she could give him a bath and change the linen and stuff. And we made all that in trade school and then got everything chrome plated. All the different parts had casters on it. And went over to his house, which was over—well, it was behind Pontiac High School on Washington Street, which isn't even there anymore now. And every, you know—I had to fine tune it after we—we'd go over there sometimes a couple times a week and make changes on different things. But he run a business and never got out of bed. He sold magazines and he was like an answering service for doctors. And he had a voice-activated telephone, so he—you know, because he couldn't dial. That was the first experience and then we—well we overhauled production machines and we scraped in surface plates.

DC: Were you attracted to the machine repair portion of trade school right from the start?

PI: Yeah. Mm-hmm.

DC: Did you ever experiment with tool making or die making or anything?

PI: Well, we had, you had to put so many hours on all the machines: the jig borer and the planer and the shapers and that sort of thing. We had one shaper, I think, in the machine repair end. But most of us—you had so many hours on each machine that you had to put in.

DC: Did you like machine repair best?

PI: I liked it, yeah.

DC: Well how did you end up . . .

PI: Well, that was the opening that was available to me, so that's [chuckle] what I took. But I never—after I graduated I never worked at machine repair.

DC: You didn't?

PI: No. Never did. When I graduated in '58—yeah, '54 to '58, a little less than four years—I was all set to go to the foundry as machine repair because they'd never had any trade school—one trade school man had gone to the foundry. He was the general foreman of machine repair in the foundry. And he figured he couldn't go up any higher until he got somebody under him. Well, I didn't have enough seniority at the time to hold me, and so I ended up at product engineering. They took me over there with the agreement that I would stay on nights. There was this one man that had been saying he was going to retire, going to retire, and going to retire. And he's told me that five—that they would take me. They interviewed me and showed me around the machine shop at engineering, product engineering. That they would take me if I would guarantee, if I would volunteer to stay on nights for a year or until this fellow retired. Well I—hell, nights was fine. I didn't mind nights. In fact, I liked it because you didn't start till 5:00. And then you worked till 1:30. Well that give me all day. I could get enough sleep, wake up at 7:00 in the morning and I'd have enough sleep. So I had all day to monkey around with the—and we bought a new house out in Waterford at the time. Or no, we hadn't moved out there. No, we still lived in Pontiac, but we bought—we moved into a house in '58, in the fall of '58. And I enjoyed it. Well my wife was—got pregnant again. My son was born 28th of May in '59. And I had never told her that I could go on days after I'd been there a year. Well she found out about it somehow and either I went on days or I could leave. That was the ultimatum. So I went on days. But we didn't start till 8:00. And we had an hour for lunch at that time. Yeah, we worked till 4:30 or 5:00, something like that.

DC: Was your wife working at that point, or just with the kids?

PI: No, she—after my daughter was born she didn't go back to work until after the kids were both in school. Then she worked part-time at Sears for ten or fifteen years, something like that.

DC: So do you remember anything else about trade school? We jumped past that pretty fast.

What did you like about it?

PI: I just liked the work. Tearing something apart, putting it back together. Not having any parts left over.

DC: Were there any parts you didn't like about trade school?

PI: Well—I liked my boss that was there when I started. He was one of these guys, you know, if you did something wrong he'd say, "Well, do you know what you did wrong?" And you'd better know what you did wrong. He wouldn't say—if you said, "Yeah, I know what I did wrong," that was the end of it. But if you didn't know what you did wrong, then he'd chew you out for not knowing. But as far as got along with everybody and had a good time, joked around a lot, you know, pull different shenanigans on people. But then before I got out of there, they got a young boss in there. He was all right, but, you know, just a different personality than what Hank had.

DC: Had Hank—what was Hank's background?

PI: I don't know. He'd been in trade school—he'd been at Pontiac Motor for a long time, but I don't know how long he'd been in trade school as a machine repair foreman.

DC: And where did this young person come from?

PI: He was a toolmaker. I don't remember whether he went through trade school. He must've. He either went through trade school or up to Flint to MI—what is it? General Motors—GMI. But he was a go-getter and Hank was more laid back. He'd let you work at your own pace where the other one wanted you to hup, hup, hup all the time. But I got along with him all right. I had a good time in trade school. [quietly, and slowly] I enjoyed it the whole time I was there.

DC: And so then you got out and you thought you were going to the foundry but you ended up. . .

PI: In product engineering.

DC: Product engineering. And you weren't doing machine repair.

PI: No. But I was running machines. At the time, in the machine shop and product engineering, you were a metalworking machine operator.

DC: And so what is that?

PI: It was the only place that I know of in Pontiac, or in General Motors, that had metal work. I think they said in Lansing they had metalworking machine operators. But Pontiac Motor was the only place that had—the main place that had metalworking machine operators. You were a machinist. I mean, you made pre-production parts and the new cars. They

were about a year or two ahead of the car parts. And I machined banjo housings, which used to be that old rear end, that was. . .

DC: What was that called?

PI: Banjo, they called them banjo housings. You know, you had the axle and then you had the big round part. Well you'd have to—they'd weld them up, then you'd have to set them up and machine the ends of them and bore them out for the oil seals and the bearings. Ring gears and pinions, machine the castings. Flywheels, castings. Pistons. The old—in '63, '62 when they had the transmission—you know, the Tempest had the transmission in the rear. And they had a big long tube, and the drive shaft wasn't much bigger than your thumb—or, like this. And it had a bow in it. Well you had the machine's spots on it. Machined the ends. . .

DC: How did you like that work?

PI: [convincingly] I enjoyed it. Plus all the transmission parts. Every—I mean, you know, there was a dozen parts and you have to machine them and cut threads. We used to cut thread, O.D. and I.D. threads for days on end.

DC: What did you like about it?

PI: I just, just like running—I run a lathe. Well, actually I was on everything, you know, the mills and the blacksmith, making brackets. But most of the time I was there I run a lathe. For thirty years.

DC: Thirty years, OK. So was it all skilled tradesmen in there?

PI: Mm-hmm.

DC: OK. And you said you were working on pre-production models. So these would be ones that are going to be coming out in the future?

PI: Yeah.

DC: How closely, I mean—or how did you figure out what you were supposed to be working on? How did the jobs get to you?

PI: Well they, the boss give them to you.

DC: OK, yeah. And then. . .

PI: He'd give you a blueprint. And then you'd make the part and it went through inspection. And if it didn't pass inspection then you got it back and got a black mark against you or something, you know, but—a lot of the stuff was brackets, you know, the engineers would—they'd design something and they'd want a bracket. Well, you'd make one off—

you might just take pieces . . .

End of Tape I, Side B

Begin Tape II, Side A

DC: . . . so you said a lot of it was brackets.

PI: Brackets and, well, they used to make exhaust systems. They'd bend the pipes, you know. They'd make up, take a big piece of plywood and put stake-up, what they called stake-ups. Where, at this point it had to be so high and over from the other point so far. And then you'd bend the tail pipes and ring gear—connecting rods, they used to make connecting rods by the bushel. And heads, machine heads. And blocks.

DC: Now would they oversee you closely while you were doing this, or would they give you the blueprint and you'd be off on your own?

PI: Well, you know, if you got it done they didn't come out, naturally, to check on you. Depending on the foreman. Some foremen would bug you and others would let you—you know, if you goofed off, then they were on you. If you did your job, then . . .

DC: Now did you have some sort of group leader?

PI: No. Well, they had leaders but they worked right along with everybody else. I ended up, like I say, running a lathe for thirty, about thirty years, or a little better.

DC: Now, did you ever join the union at that point in time?

PI: Yeah. Yeah, I . . .

DC: OK. When was that?

PI: Well, I think when I first went over there. Because I went on nights and they had just started a second shift shortly before I went over there. Well, the first night I was there they had the union over there because I got my seniority from trade school. So consequently I had enough seniority to go on days right away. I could bump on days. And they were all up in arms because these guys on nights wanted to go on days. A lot of them were from the outside. They had—they started the night shift so they'd hired guys that worked outside of General Motors. And they were all upset because I could—they didn't know the situation that I went over there under, but they, right away they wanted to find out.

DC: Did you have seniority dating back to 1950 when you went in?

PI: Well, as far—I don't know how—I don't remember how that works. See, I . . .

DC: Do you have new seniority plus trade school? How does that work?

PI: Well, I had—seems like after two years at that time, you got your seniority from two years until the end of when you got out of trade school. There's skilled trade seniority and then there's plant seniority. I had plant seniority, but my skilled trade seniority was still more than, it was over a year or some—a year, pretty near two years. So I had that. They used to say it was half of your trade school time, but actually it was—if you got out, depending, because in trade school sometimes they'd work Saturdays. So you'd get more seniority. Or you'd get out in less than four years. They said it was a four-year course. So it—I had a little over, pretty near two years seniority where these other fellows coming from the outside, all they had was what they worked there.

DC: Right. But they were seeing it as this guy just out of trade school getting days. So the union was brought over then?

PI: Well they called—the union was in there. They called the committeeman and they had a big meeting and called me in, wanted to know what the deal was. And I told them. Well, after that I got, you know, they—when I told them that I come over there with the agreement that I would stay on nights for at least a year or until this Ed finally retired. Well it was over a year. Not much, but—I enjoyed it, but my wife wanted me home.

DC: Now how did she find out that you could go on days?

PI: I don't know. [laughs] Somebody told her. But it—in '58 we moved in, in August or the fall of '58. Well that winter, '58 and '59 was when they had a big ice storm. She was pregnant at the time when we moved. And then I was gone every night and her folks would come over. Well her Dad had a Pontiac. That was when they had the Wide Track. Well everybody else had the narrow track. Well the ruts were like this on our street. And he could only get in one track, the other one was up like this. So she just didn't like being home—because I'd get home 1:30, quarter to two, something like—well it was more like 2:00, if we were only working eight hours. But we worked a lot of nine hours, so that was 2:30 before I'd get out of work. She just wanted me home at night, because she had my daughter and was pregnant with my son.

DC: How were you doing financially at that point in time?

PI: Well, we were doing all right. I bought that house—it was—what was it?—$13,750. It was $500 more because I got a corner lot. We used to drive out there every day and watch them build it. And when we moved—we didn't have a garage. It was just strictly a ranch house. A little over a thousand square foot. But we were doing all right. My house payment was $104 a month, I think. By then I—yeah, by then I had sold the convertible. I had that for, well—'55 I think I got a new car. But we didn't have a lot of money to spend, but we—I was working every day so it—that's one thing, the whole time I—forty-some, forty-one years I put in at Pontiac Motor, I think I was laid off—well, yeah '55 or '56 I was laid off for a week or something like that. But that was when you had to wait, had to have a

week's waiting in before you could get unemployment. And I never did get any. I never drew any employment all the time I worked there.

DC: You weren't gone long enough—just a week.

PI: Yeah, I went back to work before the week was, or just about the time the week was up.

DC: I've talked to a lot of people who were laid off for a long time in '58.

PI: Yeah. I—that's why I say, I've been very fortunate. Because when—well, we were out, you know, contract time, couple times, maybe a week or two. But that was just a vacation as far—you go pull your union duty and get your thirty dollars or forty—I don't remember now what it paid—but as far as cutting back, they never cut back in any part of my career.

DC: Thinking back to that meeting when they pulled you in so you could explain your seniority, were you a union member at that point in time, when they pulled you in?

PI: You know, I don't know. I don't remember. I think it was automatic at that time. By the time I got out of trade school. Because when I was in trade school, you didn't have any union representation. But since then, the union has got—they set up a board or something for—but as far as the dates, I—it seems like I *was* at that time, but . . .

DC: OK. So it sounds like when you get out of trade school, then . . .

PI: Yeah, I think it was automatic that you went in the union.

DC: Did you ever have any need for the union at all when you were . . .

PI: No. I never called a committeeman in all the time I worked there. In fact, I've had more to do with the union since I retired than I did all the time I was working.

DC: Why do you suppose that is?

PI: I don't know. I guess I went along with what I had to do. Well now, wait a minute. I take that back. Seems like when I went to engineering, I didn't start out at the top wages. And usually after thirty days or sixty days or something like that, you automatically got a raise. At that time the foreman said I wasn't qualified for top wages. Or, no, he said that he put me in for it but they turned it down upstairs. His boss had turned it down. Well, we had a union meeting for something, and at that time the union rep said that that's not true. If your boss puts you in for a raise, it's automatic. They don't turn it down. You know, the engineers upstairs, they didn't have that much—they didn't know what I was capable of. So if the boss said I was, he put me in—well, come to find out, he told me that but he hadn't put me in for it. But I eventually got it. It just took me a little longer.

DC: Union backed you up on that one.

PI: Yeah.

DC: When did you switch to engineering?

PI: Well, when I got out of trade school.

DC: Oh, that was product engineering.

PI: Yeah.

DC: OK. Gotcha, all right. Yeah. I'm sorry. I thought there was a different switch in there. I got lost for a second.

PI: No, no. [laughs]

DC: Well, let me jump back. I had a question down here. Before you went to trade school, when you were a grinder, I don't know if I asked you questions about, you know, who your fellow workers were there. I was wondering if at that point there were black workers in there as well as white workers, in that grinding job? Do you remember when you . . .

PI: Now, this department wasn't—it had more than just grinding. But as far—I don't recall any blacks in there at that time.

DC: How about in trade school?

PI: No, at the time I was in there. Since then, they've had blacks in there, but while I was there, there wasn't any blacks at all.

DC: OK. I'm guessing there were no women in there, either, in trade school.

PI: No. No. In fact, the first women—they brought some women trainees in at engineering, but I don't remember when that was.

DC: Do you remember any particular projects that you worked on in this production engineering that stood out in your mind?

PI: No. Just routine—routine stuff is all. Well, you know, they used to—these engineers would come out of GMI and they'd have ideas. Well, this one engineer wanted the rear axle, which was so long, about that big around and had a flange that your wheel bolted on. Your gear down—splines down on this end to go into your rear end. This engineer got the idea of having an axle probably four inches in diameter, the full length of it. So, you know, we turned a—take a block of steel and turned that up. But whatever happened to it, I don't know.

DC: What was your sense of a four-inch diameter axle?

PI: I couldn't figure it out, but you know, it added more weight. But it was supposed to eliminate bearings or something. I never did, they just said, "This is what we want," so that's what I give them.

DC: How closely did you work with these engineers?

PI: Well [short pause] not all that close. If, as far as—you know, I'd get a blueprint—I might not know the engineer from—to make, to turn something. Turn the axles or ring gears or pinions, camshafts. Every once in awhile they'd have to turn out the camshaft out of a solid piece. I wouldn't put the lobes on, but I'd, you know, all the lobes, it was all one diameter but I'd machine it in between down the different sides. Maybe put a hole, all—the whole camshafts have—and put a hole all the way through it. A lot of different—they'd want me to do something and then I'd make—do this. Well they'd draw up a sketch and I'd—but normally it was blueprint, until the last three or four years. Then we got to the point where if I didn't have anything to do, I'd do whatever I wanted. I'd make—I made steam engines and, you know, just little steam engines and messed around like that. Do government—I did more government work in the last three or four years than—by government work I mean stuff for—for anybody that wanted something made.

DC: Not necessarily the government, but. . .

PI: That's what they called it, you know, just—work for yourself. Or for somebody else—wanted a piece turned up or bent a certain way or . . .

DC: And you could get away with that? You could just do what you wanted?

PI: Yeah. As long as I was there, the boss would give me a job. I'd do it, turn it in. And he said, "Well, you got something to do, go ahead and do it. If I get something for you, I'll give it to you."

DC: Now you worked production earlier on in your career—how do you compare the production work you did with the skilled trades work you did later?

PI: Skilled trades is a lot better. As far as I'm concerned, you know, I had—that's one reason why I—I could of got out eleven years before I did, but I enjoyed it. I like working with my hands. When I retired they were closing product engineering down. They were going out to Brown Road or down to the Tech Center. Well, I drove six miles one way for thirty years, and I wasn't ready to start driving down to the Tech Center or going someplace else. And I didn't retire because I was too young. I had to have something to do. If I'd retired and gone out and got another job, I'd a been at the bottom of the totem pole. And this way, where I was at, I had it made.

DC: So when you went back on days, let's see, you would've been working—you said you started at 8:00, right? Roughly.

PI: Yeah. I think . . .

DC: Did you work much overtime?

PI: Yeah. Yeah, they—it seemed that at certain points during the year they'd get a rush if they were having, you know, the models were coming out and they were behind schedule or something. But a lot of the different people, like the people that worked on heads—I never worked on heads—machining heads—they were always working overtime. They worked Saturdays and Sundays and—I worked a few Sundays and towards the last, if you worked overtime, you might be—they combined the sheet metal shop and the machine shop and made them metal model makers. That's what my classification was by the time I retired. Well, you might be over making fenders or pounding metal doing—making—running the press, making parts out of the press or something like that, which I really didn't care for. I liked the machining part of it.

DC: Back to the overtime—did you have a choice whether or not you would work the overtime?

PI: Oh, you could always refuse it. For the last two or three years I didn't work any overtime at all.

DC: Earlier on did you want the overtime?

PI: I took it if it was offered to me because, you know, that gave me an extra day and a half or three days' pay, which I could—I wasn't at the point where I *needed* it, but I could do something extra with it, so. I always seemed to manage my money enough so that I wasn't living from payday to payday, which a lot of people do. And a lot of people in engineering.

DC: So you mentioned that you used to go hunting. What else did you do for fun in those years?

PI: Well . . .

DC: Either yourself or with your family.

PI: We used to take—we'd take the kids. We went to—on vacation. We'd go to—we went to Maine. We went to Washington, D.C. and Gettysburg and we'd go up the U.P. [Upper Peninsula of Michigan] and—let's see, before—way back, I guess before I even got into trade school. We went—yeah, because my daughter was still in diapers. That was one of the times when I, when I was laid off, I guess, for that week. We went out west to Denver and back to Topeka to see the people where we stayed. But I never—we used to pile the kids in the station wagon and go to the drive-in. They'd get their pajamas on and we'd pop popcorn and take some pop, and they'd be asleep in the back by the time the movie started, usually. As far as going dancing or going to a bar, I never—we used to, our subdivision was real active. We had Fourth of July and Christmas parties and Easter egg hunts and Fourth of July they'd have a big tent and kid games for the kids. I had a—got a boat and started water skiing and snow skiing.

DC: I didn't ask you if the church had been a part of your life growing up.

PI: It had growing up, but it hasn't been for a good number of years. In fact, I was on the board of Central Methodist for—oh, for awhile. I don't know, it got to the point where they were always after money. And it—of course, they have to, but it . . .

DC: Was that here in Pontiac?

PI: Yeah. I was married in the parsonage. And my folks were charter members, almost, of Central Methodist when it was in Pontiac.

DC: So did you go to Central Methodist as a child, then?

PI: Mm-hmm. Yeah.

DC: What have your kids done?

PI: Well, my daughter works for GM. Right now she works up in Flint. She's on salary. Oh, what the heck is it? I don't even know what her title is now, but she's—accounts payable, I guess. She talks to vendors and I think she's got twenty, twenty-some years. And my son works for—he started out—well, he went to college at Northern, up at Marquette. He started out working for General Dynamics. And he got laid off there and he went to a little shop that does the same thing, only it's a much smaller place. He worked on tanks and he'd write tech manuals and that. He was married and divorced and he had a—my granddaughter is sixteen now. He's a great hockey fan. He had—he got two tickets—he went to last [Detroit Red Wings] game with Denver [the Colorado Avalanche] and he went to the last game where they won the . . .

DC: Won the Stanley Cup?

PI: And then he also got a ticket to the thing Saturday night for the season ticket holders. The guy he bought a ticket from for one of the games had—he's a season ticket holder and he wasn't going. So he took his daughter and himself to that, down to Joe [Louis Arena]. Then yesterday he called us about 6:00 and he was down lined up for the parade.

DC: A big time for him.

PI: Yeah. He's nuts about hockey.

DC: Can you think of other questions that I should have been asking you that I haven't asked you?

PI: No. [laughs] I don't know what they'd be.

DC: I've really enjoyed learning about this stuff. Can you think of any other people that I might be able to contact—any other people who might be willing to talk to me?

PI: Didn't you get any more signed up?

DC: I got some more, but I just wondered if there might be more in your mind. I might've gotten a number from your table, I think, actually.

PI: Did you?

DC: I might have. I'm trying to remember exactly, but it was a long time ago now.

PI: Yeah. I don't know—I see—well, every month we're here for the union dinner and then a bunch of guys from engineering meet out at McDonald's the first Tuesday.

DC: I think Andy told me that. Is that . . .

PI: Andy Wojcik?

DC: Yeah.

PI: Did you talk to him?

DC: I did, yeah.

PI: Well he's a . . .

DC: Well maybe I should come to McDonald's some time.

PI: Yeah! There's quite a few of us. Well, you know, it varies. Sometimes there might be a dozen and sometimes there might be two dozen guys out there.

DC: That's a lot.

PI: Yeah. Well, just from engineering. One guy that worked in the garage got it started and it's been evolving.

DC: Were you that close while you were working with this group of people?

PI: No. Andy I was, because Andy was—he was in the machine shop. And then he went into the sheet metal end of it.

DC: So it sounds like this group really formed after retirement, maybe?

PI: Yeah. Well—it was pretty—it was a—pretty close-knit for a long time. A lot of guys that went through trade school come into the shop. But then—probably '85, maybe a little earlier—they hired a lot in from the outside. A lot of them knew one another, so they were like in a group. But we got along. A lot of people, you know, you get along with them and then you get mad at them and then get—they do something, tick you off. And then it would

evaporate and . . .

DC: You know, you were in that shop for a long time. How did things change from '58 to when you retired? That might be a difficult question to answer, but I mean, did your work stay the same throughout that period?

PI: Well, you used to have more contact—for a long time, if you were making something and the print—you couldn't do what the print wanted you to do, you'd get the boss and he'd call the engineer and right away he's down there. And then towards the last four or five years, you might wait three days. They all got voice mail or they got a pager, and you can call and leave a message and he might be off someplace doing something else. Or by the time he got around to it he might be on a different project, and so then you'd wait around. It used to be a lot closer-knit group, because engineering—they had a picnic every year. They had a bowling league, a shotgun skeet thing out at the sportsman's club every year, trap shoot; and it was like a family, actually. In fact, when I first went over there, they said, "Well, you're going to the old folks' home." Because, you know, everybody—a lot of them in the machine shop were not machinists to begin with. They might've been test drivers or they worked out at the proving ground or tool crib, but they just kinda evolved into—and everybody—this guy'd work on the same thing all the time. And then it got to the point where they wanted you to do everything. And I didn't like it then. I liked running the lathe because, I don't know, I just run it enough that I could do most anything that I wanted to on it.

DC: So were you pretty good at it?

PI: Well, I don't [laughs]. I survived. In fact, I got a lathe at home, a small one. And I got a mill and since I retired I've been into more wood stuff than metal.

DC: So it sounds like you preferred to work on your one machine as opposed to moving all around.

PI: Yeah. I'd do it—used to work on the Bridgeport [a metal cutting machine tool], but that was mostly stuff for myself—when I was making my steam engines and stuff, I . . .

DC: What exactly was the Bridgeport?

PI: That's a mill. It's a vertical mill. It—I don't know how you describe it. It's just—they didn't have automatic table feeds or anything, you had to move your parts around and do different things. I never did get into any—they used to do a lot of fiberglass work.

DC: When was that? When did that start?

PI: Well that was in—they had rubber molds. They used to do a lot—they'd make molds for rubber parts. They had always had that. At least they had it when I went to engineering. It was off in a different section but then eventually they moved it down right next to—well, there was a grinding room where they did all the grinding in the parts. I never—I didn't do

any grinding to speak of after I got over there. I just—it was—and then when they started getting the automatic machines in, that was something I didn't care about. I'd been turning the handles and doing my own figuring too long to . . .

DC: Did it make your job any easier or any better to have the automatic stuff?

PI: Not for me because I stayed on the old stuff.

DC: Oh, OK. You had the choice to stay on the old stuff.

PI: Well, yeah, they left me alone. I guess I'd been there long enough that . . .

DC: Did you see any improvement in the quality of parts on the automatic stuff as opposed to what you were doing?

PI: Well, I never had that much to do with them. You know, they'd program a—and every once in awhile the machines would mess up. Well, then you—what you did was scrap. Where when I messed up, I usually messed up on the plus side, so I still had enough to take off. I tried to, anyway. I just—I like doing my own figuring and I didn't particularly care about sitting at a machine and watching it make this move and that move and do this and that. I wanted to do that myself.

DC: So you would've been there through the '60s and stuff, so were you there as well when there started to be black skilled trades workers and women?

PI: Yeah.

DC: How did that work out in your department?

PI: Worked out all right. We had—we only had—I think in the machine shop we had two, two blacks and a couple of women. And they had—I think they had a couple women on nights. I'm not sure. But it didn't bother me, you know, I—if they did their job or if they couldn't do their job, they'd ask somebody and they'd help them. It didn't bother me at all. I got along with them.

DC: How about the rest of the department? How did that go?

PI: Well, everybody got along. Basically they got along. They'd ride them every once in awhile or, you know, this one [short pause], one black—this buddy of mine, he used to ride him merciful. But it was all in good *fun*, you know. They'd ride him right back and they'd—I don't know if they got mad or if they just, at that point in time they just put up with it.

DC: You say "ride them." What would that mean?

PI: Well they'd, you know—just, well I can't think of anything right now. But they, you know,

they'd joke with them and . . .

DC: Was it different from the way that they would joke with each other?

PI: No. No, it was basically the same. They just—used to have a lot of guys that they'd—well, we had our own coffee, big commercial coffee pots. And the guy that took care of it would buy these pound cans or two pound. Well the plastic lids on them, they would make great Frisbees. And they'd—you know, they'd throw those things—all of a sudden you'd be standing there and *whoosh*! One would go sailing by your head. But it was a good group on the whole. I had—didn't have any problems, to speak of. One time, way back when I was still on nights, the boss—a lot of people didn't like the boss because he was a brown nose, is what they called him anyhow. He didn't know that much, but he had somebody to pull for him. And I remember when I was back in the blacksmith shop, I was looking at a girlie magazine. Well he come back there and he says, "What are you doing back here?" "Well I'm looking. Here, look at this." So he starts looking at it and I took off. Well he stood there looking at the magazine, so that got me—I was back working when he finally come back.

DC: The boss.

PI: The boss, yeah. But he, I got along with him pretty good. A lot of guys didn't like him.

DC: Why didn't they like him? Because he was a brown-noser?

PI: Well, he'd tell you how to do something and he really didn't—one time I remember this guy had made a clip of some kind. Had to make a form to bend it over and stuff. And he had it all done and Lloyd come along and said, "Well, I'd do it this way." So the guy just threw everything away and did it his way. Well he already had it done, but he was that type, you know, "do it my way." Well, if that's the case, he'd do it his way but he already had it done. So it just took twice as long to get the part made, and that kind of stuff.

DC: It sounds like both ways were good enough.

PI: Yeah. But this guy had been a boss at Fisher Body and he'd been a toolmaker for a long time and he probably knew more than what Lloyd did, as far as—because Lloyd was in there—he was operating a boring mill and when they started the night shift they put him on as a boss of the night shift. Well he—for some reason.

DC: Well, can you think of anything else that I should be asking you?

PI: No—how I enjoy retirement!

DC: How do you enjoy retirement?

PI: Terrific! I don't know how I had time to work.

DC: What all do you do?

PI: Well, not too much—I built—I'm finishing up building a shed. The third one. I started out with one, twelve by eight—filled it up. Knocked one end out of it and added another twelve foot to it. And now I filled that up, so I'm building another one. Put it out in back. I decided I'm going to put the winter stuff in the one out in back and then just switch them back and forth. And I got a lot of woodworking stuff in the one, so I—mow the lawn. And I got a motorcycle that I haven't had out this year.

DC: Waiting for some warmer weather?

PI: Well, every time I decide I'm going to ride, it's either raining or something, so I—but I—we used to take quite a few trips, but we got two dogs now so that kind of cuts down on that. Go out to eat a lot. If I don't get it done today, there's always tomorrow. It's weekend seven days a week.

DC: Sounds good!

PI: My neighbor just retired and he says, "Man, do I enjoy it!" He's got a place up north so he's up there most of the time, back and forth.

DC: Well I appreciate you spending some time with me during your retirement. I learned a lot from talking to you. I guess I can probably . . .

End of Interview